Paul Ross Interview
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Local 653 Union Hall
Pontiac, Michigan
Transcribed by Daniel Clark

DC: Anyways, you already answered the first question I was going to ask you, which is where were you born. But it was Ashland, North Carolina?

PR: Asheville, North Carolina.

DC: Ashe*ville*, yeah. And when was that?

PR: 1925.

DC: OK. All right. So tell me, had your parents been down there for some time?

PR: Well, I never knew my Dad. I don't know where he come from, or where he went. My grandmother more or less raised me. I was three years old. I lived in Greensboro, and after that I lived in Eden, North Carolina, which was Leaksville at the time—Eden now.

DC: Where is Eden?

PR: Eden is about thirty miles north of Greensboro.

DC: OK.

PR: And Winston-Salem's about thirty-four miles over there, next to the Virginia border. They have a big Miller's factory there now. Miller's beer. They still make beer in this country.

DC: Yeah [??]

PR: That's about it.

DC: Yeah, I know the area a little bit. I was in Durham.

PR: Yeah, I lived there for eleven, twelve years, and I come north. My Mother married a Yankee, a northerner. And when I come up here, you know, they didn't cotton to hillbillies too well.

DC: Let's slow down a little bit. We'll get up to that point. But tell me, um, you say you moved out of Asheville when you were three?

PR: Yeah. I can't remember when I moved out, but I went over to Greensboro for three years.

DC: Greensboro, for three years

PR: Three years.

DC: Do you remember anything about Greensboro?

PR: Not really. I was only three years old.

DC: How about . . .

PR: I remember that my Mother told me don't take this bell apart on the tricycle. I did it anyhow, and she beat the hell out of me. Yeah.

DC: The bell on your tricycle?

PR: Yeah.

DC: Oh my.

PR: I did it anyhow you know. [Interruption]

DC: Come on in. [chatter with person delivering supplies to the office] All right. We're back in action here. Um, uh, I was trying to figure out what you can remember about growing up in North Carolina. And you were pretty young. But you said you spent three years in Greensboro, then you went up to Eden.

PR: Then I went to Eden, well Leaksville at the time. Leaksville.

DC: Well tell me what you can remember.

PR: Well, I went to school. [mumbles] I got to grade school, first grade, kindergarten. Oh man, first grade didn't happen in grade school, there, that was the first grade. It seemed like I spent about five years in the fifth grade. I even spent two years in the first grade. They didn't learn me enough, so I had to stay back a little bit more. I remember years ago, I used to start in the back of the class, way in the back, and before the year was up, I was sitting next to the teacher and looking at the class, sitting next to her desk. I must have been a son of a gun. But I didn't get much education . . .

DC: OK, yeah.

PR: . . . or the knowledge.

DC: What was the community like?

PR: Just a little, small town. Fieldcrest woolen mills [most likely cotton], stuff like that. They never could get a union going in there.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

PR: I was only ten, eleven, twelve years old.

DC: You were living with your grandmother?

PR: With my grandmother, yeah.

DC: What was she doing?

PR: It was like a boarding house. Well she was—she was strictly just a homemaker. Granddaddy was a brick mason and a revenue man.

DC: OK, what's a revenue man?

PR: A guy that does the stills, you know, for the federal government, for moonshining.

DC: Oh, OK.

PR: You know how the federal government got rid of the moonshiners?

DC: How's that?

PR: They raised the price of sugar. That got rid of it. It made it cost too much to do the moonshining, because [??] was the same money. So they did away with that stuff.

DC: So your grandmother was running the home? Was it a boarding house?

PR: No, well it looked like one. Everybody and his brother lived there.

DC: OK.

PR: Just kidding. I used to sit down at the end of the—far end of the table, and after the prayer, you know—every meal a prayer—when it was in front you better get a good helping of it, because time that chicken got down to me, the only thing left was neck and feet!

DC: Ooh, OK.

PR: And I grew up hungry. I was always hungry. And I wouldn't give you a plug nickel for my childhood. And then when papa [grandfather?] went to get a stitch, you know, switch to whip me, after we—of course I'm an angel, you know [laughs]—he should have

whipped me more often. But the thing was, me and my cousin—my two or three cousins and an uncle, everybody, lived there—but anyway, it was back in the Depression, back in the '30s, and next thing you know, when the, you know, when you'd get in trouble, he'd go get a switch off the tree. My mother was in Greensboro, was a nurse. So anyway, he was out there giving me this and that, and my cousin was sitting in his bedroom with his mother, and she was consoling him, you know. And I'm out there getting a beating. And then of course, I remember in 1938, '39, somewhere in that area, my mother married a northerner, and I come to Michigan.

DC: So your mother was in Greensboro while you were in Eden with your grandmother?

PR: Right, right. Yeah. See my mother every three months, six months or so.

DC: But you never met your Dad?

PR: No, I never knew who that was.

DC: OK, yeah.

PR: And I had that name Ross. It's like that Private Ryan, go save the Private Ryan, go save the only son. I was the only son. There was a lot of us in the World War II that was the only person in there from the family. They never saved me. Of course I come out all right, but nobody said nothing about it.

DC: Did you have any . . .

PR: I didn't have—I didn't have no brothers or sisters.

DC: No brothers or sisters.

PR: No, not during the—well, I had some step, step, I had a stepsister. And then I had a stepbrother and –sister in '44.

DC: Was that when your Mom remarried?

PR: After remarried, yeah.

DC: Yeah. Well, you went to school sometime in Eden. It sounded like it was pretty tough.

PR: Going to school?

DC: Well, living there and not getting enough to eat and stuff like that.

PR: Well, it was back in those days.

DC: Yeah, yeah. So did your grandfather have work during that time?

PR: My grandfather had—he was a brick mason. And he was into the town government, and he was a revenue man and all that stuff, you know. But he did all right. We lived in a very modest house, very [??].

DC: But you said you had a lot of relatives in there as well.

PR: Oh yeah, we all lived there, you know. She had eleven kids. She got married when she was eleven years old.

DC: Your grandmother did?

PR: You know how she got married?

DC: No.

PR: In the back of a Bible. You didn't have to go get a license from the state, getting married. They's the ones that marries you nowadays, the State. The preacher don't do nothing. All he does is say, "I, with the powers invested in me, I marry you." It used to be years ago you got married with the back of the Bible. And divorces was unheard of.

DC: So they would just write it in the back of the Bible, and then you're married?

PR: There are some places down there where they had—you had a broomstick marriage. You built a big fire, put a broomstick out there, and you jumped over the broomstick. You was married. And if you want to get a divorce, you just jump back.

DC: Would that be something that both whites and blacks . . .

PR: That would be mostly, mostly blacks there, yeah.

DC: Were there blacks and whites in Eden then?

PR: Oh yeah, yeah. There's pretty—every time I went to town, there's a black guy would grab a hold of me, give me a few pats on the butt, you know, keeping me straight. That was kind of neat. It was just part of the, you know, they lived in one section of town. And you had that in the North too, in them days, too. I love to [??]. I got some more stuff down the road.

DC: Well tell me. Or are you talking about later on?

PR: Later on.

DC: OK, we'll get to that.

PR: Yeah.

DC: Anyways, you said that, uh, your Mom remarried, then, what, in the late '30s, was it?

PR: Yeah, it was in the '30s. Middle of the '30s, almost '36, '37, something like that. She married, then she moved to South Lyon, Michigan.

DC: South Lyon?

PR: He worked for Pontiac Motor. They had no union then, you know.

DC: Let me back up one second.

PR: OK.

DC: When you were living with your grandmother in Eden, did you have any chores, any jobs around the house or anything like that?

PR: We more or less lived in the city. My uncle had a dairy farm. We used to go out there and work some, milking cows. They had mules. And well, we just more or less lived in the city there. Now I had—what happened was—they had all kinds of—well we had to go out and, you know head lettuce. We didn't have a refrigerated car in them days. In the east, you had no vegetables, you know, because they couldn't—nothing to bring them west, refrigerated cars. So anyway, in the summertime, and she more or less, well you'd go get some beans, and you had two kinds of potatoes, two [??] of tomatoes.

DC: So you had a big garden?

PR: Yeah, oh yeah, a big garden. Even in town, you had a big garden, yeah. And she canned a lot. Oh boy, had a churn. I remember buttermilk used to be ten cents a gallon, but I never had ten cents. Today, buttermilk is five dollars a gallon. But I got the five dollars to buy the buttermilk. Then it was ten cents a gallon. People wonder why it's so expensive today, because people don't drink a lot of buttermilk. And then when they started pasteurizing milk, it went down the tube and everything. Milk don't taste like it used to years ago. You go to a dairy farm, you milk the cow, you run it over the chillers. Now there's some milk. Somebody's sit there in the back porch, that big old cream would come at the top, push a button, go right—you'd heard of that before.

DC: Oh sure. Did you milk the cows then?

PR: Well, nothing much on the farm. I just went over there a lot, my uncle, you know.

DC: So some of your relatives had farms?

PR: Oh yeah, they had tobacco farms. You know they grow no tobacco in Carolina no more.

DC: Not much.

PR: Yeah, it's all in China now. Yeah. Chinese generic cigarettes. They're trying to get names for them, like "One More Nail," "Close the Lid," "Cancer Us," and all that stuff. [laughs]

DC: So tell me, what was it like being reunited with your Mom. You took off from Eden and your grandmother's house.

PR: Yeah, I went to South Lyon, Michigan. South Lyon. We had a lot of pheasants in Michigan in those days. And we'd eat pheasants all year round. Well out in South Lyon there's a country, rural section, and I used to go out there and lay on a fencerow, and I'd shoot a pheasant in the head with one shot, .22, and we'd eat that.

DC: OK.

PR: Whenever we—you know, whenever I got one.

DC: Had you hunted down in North Carolina, too?

PR: Not really, no. No one . . .

DC: So you learned to hunt . . . .

PR: Most of the hunting was up here. Mind it, I just shot that little .22. As I got older, I went out with my stepdad with the shotgun for pheasants. But I'm not much on hunting.

DC: So when did you move to South Lyon?

PR: In '38. Went to school over there. One-house school house.

DC: So you said your stepfather had a job at Pontiac Motor?

PR: Yeah, he worked at Pontiac Motor for ten years.

DC: Did he get the job right when he came up?

PR: No, he lived here.

DC: Oh, he lived here.

PR: That's my stepdad

DC: Your stepdad, that's what I mean.

PR: Yeah, he already had that—how he got down in Carolina, I don't know.

DC: You don't know how your Mom and your stepdad met.

PR: No. Never did find out.

DC: OK, OK. So somehow they met, and then he was already . . .

PR: [??] years here. He was only 55 when he died, and what am I, 75. So anyway, he just up and died, over there at Yellow Truck and Coach, on the line. I don't even know what, what his job—or what work he was doing.

DC: When was that? Do you know?

PR: I was 45 then, about '78.

DC: About 1970 or so?

PR: I was 45.

DC: OK, well I can do the math and figure that out.

PR: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. So, do you remember at all what it was like moving up, because you were, like, a young teenager when you got to Michigan?

PR: Yeah, teenager.

DC: Yeah. What was it like? Thirteen. You were thirteen.

PR: So anyway, we come up here. My grandma was coming on that old New York Central train station, down on Grand River. And we set there overnight. They said they'd come out looking for us, but they couldn't find us. So we slept on the benches all night. Next morning I got out there and hitchhiked down Grand River. My grandmother stayed there waiting for my Mother. And they had some family in Detroit, so they stayed with them. And then the next morning they come over to the train station to see my grandmother. But I had already got on Grand River and hitchhiked to Farmington, which is 10 Mile Road, and goes into South Lyon. And I got on 10 Mile Road and hitchhiking there and I was [eating apples?] all the way into South Lyon. Some woman picked me up in a Model A, or wasn't anything in those days, and took me into South Lyon. Find out where I live, was about three miles this side of South Lyon.

DC: You just took off on your own?

PR: Took off on my own. And this one guy there, I asked him was he going out that way, and he said, "No, no." So anyway, I kept walking, and some guy was coming out of a restaurant, or some business, and I asked him, I said, "You going there?" He said, "You

asked me down the road there didn't you?" I said, "Yeah, yeah, I don't know, I guess," you know. "Yeah, come over here and I'll take you down to Ten Mile, Farmington, down to Ten Mile, or whatever. This woman picked me up, and then we—then we found it, and I was sitting on the steps when they—they built a house down there on about ten acres. And I used to, you know, and—he worked at the foundry. South Lyon's a long way to drive into Pontiac Motor. He done that for years.

DC: Was it a farm? Or was it just a house?

PR: Oh, just a house and ten acres. Not much—farms on both sides, but that's about it.

DC: OK, yeah.

PR: Not much in there otherwise. And then, and then, as time went on—I worked for a farmer down there picking potatoes.

DC: OK, tell me about that.

PR: A dollar a day.

DC: What was that like?

PR: Well, you picked—you know, I don't remember hurting myself. I mowed the yard, and I mowed his farm yard, and I—that was with the push mowers. They didn't have riding. And I picked potatoes out in the field. I remember all that. A dollar a day, and stuff like that. It worked out all right.

DC: How did you like that work?

PR: It was good.

DC: Yeah?

PR: Yeah.

DC: So how old were you then?

PR: God, I must have been fourteen. Well, thirteen, fourteen, something like that.

DC: OK, yeah.

PR: Then I went to school there, the one-house schoolhouse.

DC: In South Lyon?

PR: Yeah. Then one thing led to another—we never got along, you know, me and my stepdad.

DC: OK.

PR: Later on, [?] anyway. See, I find employment in the CC[C?] camp.

DC: Oh did you? OK.

PR: I think I was in the 6th grade.

DC: Hmm.

PR: But I only told people I was graduating the tenth grade, which was a big lie. But anyway, I went to the—I went to the CC camp.

DC: Where was that camp?

PR: I joined at Pontiac Lake—I mean at Crescent Lake. There was a CC camp there, and I joined there in 1940. And I stayed a year in there. But anyway, I joined there and went to East Tawas. And East Tawas—I was only fifteen—I joined East Tawas—and lumberman's monument up there—I was in that. And I become what they call a "latrine sergeant." Nobody wanted that job! Taking care of the latrine, and then take care of the boiler at night.

DC: Uh huh.

PR: So I did that. Well they called me a sergeant, but I didn't carry no stripes. You know, you're just a flunky. But anyway, that was good. I was there for nine, eight months—eight or nine months, ten months.

DC: How old were you supposed to be to be in the CCC?

PR: You were supposed to be eighteen.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

PR: I was big for my age, at sixteen.

DC: Oh, OK. So no one tried to . . .

PR: I was fifteen, yeah, fifteen.

DC: What did your Mom think about you taking off for the CCC?

PR: Who cares? You know, she had a family going [?]. So anyway, so I went up there—I have some pictures of it—but anyway, I got there, and then we got transferred up to Gogebic Lake in Iron Mountain, Ironwood, Michigan. Hurley's across the street, across the railroad tracks from, uh—you all know anything about Hurley.

DC: Hurley?

PR: Hurley, Wisconsin.

DC: Oh, oh, OK. Wisconsin.

PR: It's kind of the cesspool of Wisconsin.

DC: I know Ironwood.

PR: It's a, it's a house of repute. Place is thick with it. I think it cost me a dollar, and beer was a nickel a glass. We got $30 a month, in the CCC. I was taking care of the boiler and stuff—and I did the laundries too. You know, I didn't do their laundry, but I had access to the machines, and I did laundry for the people. And I did that. I charged them a nickel, a dime, a nickel, a dime, stuff like that. And I made money that way.

DC: Did you get to keep that money? Or did they send . . .

PR: No. $24 I think went to my, back home. And there was $6 we kept for yourself, but I made money on the side by doing the laundry. But I did still take care of the latrine and [??] the boiler at night with hot water.

DC: OK, all right.

PR: And they all went to the forest to plant trees, or whatever the hell they did. I stayed home [laughs], stayed in the camp, you know, keep my nails clean.

DC: How busy were you cleaning the latrines?

PR: Not really all that bad. I do that today, you know what I mean? So anyway . . .

DC: It's a job . . .

PR: After we go on home, we'll talk about that . . .

DC: OK. All right. How did you like it up there in . . .

PR: Well, not really that much. You're young, and you're away from home.

DC: Did you feel like you had a home?

PR: Well, well, we got—I didn't get along at home too good. [voice trails off] And then, there's times were down I went to—like I told you, Iron Mountain, up there by Gogebic Lake, CC. And then the next thing you know, my time was up.

DC: How long did they give you in the CCC?

PR: Just a year. You're supposed to take six months, but they can give you an extra six. Then I come back to Michigan—we come through Chicago, around that way. The other way we went up through Marquette—used to take that ferry boat up there, to Mackinac. I've never been to Mackinac Island in my life. I think it's all—they have a mayor there in Mackinac Island. She got in a fight with somebody not too long ago. Threw her off of there and said, "Don't come back!"

DC: Oh my. It sounds like you, uh, had a taste of the wild life up there near Gogebic Lake.

PR: Well we used to stay in Michigan, we used to count deer [other kind of wild life], count deer, and I seen a lot of porcupines, muskrats—a lot of things like that. But we used to count deer every so often. But I never seen a bald eagle in the state of Michigan. But see, the federal government had a bounty on bald eagles years ago. Almost killed them all off. They figure now there's about 40,000 bald eagles, but they're mostly in Alaska. We do have some in the lower states. Washington state, they had a bald eagle nest, and they closed the road off [voice trails off]. But I don't know of any bald eagles in the state of Michigan. We do have buzzards up here now. They come up here about five years ago form down south. I seen a buzzard the other day.

DC: It sounds like you had some wild times in Wisconsin too.

PR: I did. Yeah, we went to that house of repute.

DC: Would that be most of the CCC guys, or was it people . . .

PR: Everybody, yeah.

DC: Everybody?

PR: [voice really low] and all that stuff. They come from all over.

DC: Yeah.

PR: It was a cathouse, is what it was, yeah. A house of repute, yeah. Then I got out of there. That was in the summer of '41, and then October '41, I enlisted in the Navy. So when I enlisted in the Navy, you got $21 a month.

DC: And would that be all yours, or would they send it home?

PR: No, it's all—that's all you got—$21. That was less than the CC camp. There, since, see, the Civil War, they paid their armed forces, Navy—there wasn't much Navy in them days, but the Army, the soldiers, $13 a month, unless you had a promotion, or all that stuff. But that's what recruits got—$13, from Civil War through World War I, right on up to '42, going into the Navy, you got $21. '42 they changed it to 50 [dollars]. But you got a 13 raise, 13, a $8 raise. $8 raise from all them years, from Civil War up to World War II. $8 raise. [mumbles] worth more back in those days.

DC: Why did you choose the Navy?

PR: I always liked the Navy for some reason. I think it was clean. I know one thing, I went—while I went to school, well what we did, we got in the car—one of those little jobs around here and stuff like that, and they was getting ready for, you know, they started beefing up production, doing things. General Motors started calling more people back to work and stuff like—General Motors used to work nine months out of the year. That's why they base everything they earn on nine months. Because they were down four months or something like that—nine, ten, eleven, twelve—they were down three months. Changeover they called it, you know. And everything they base on is nine months worth of profit. The rest of the stuff is—every time they—they always have the three-month layoff around Pontiac here. But as time went on, they started working longer and longer and longer and stuff like that. But why did you—what was the question?

DC: I was wondering, uh, um, why you chose the Navy. Did you consider trying to get a job in one of the plants?

PR: I was only sixteen!

DC: I know, but you lied before.

PR: No, they wouldn't hire—yeah, I don't know. That's a good question too. I tried to get in the Army. They wouldn't take me, but the Navy . . .

DC: The Navy would?

PR: Yeah.

DC: When did you report?

PR: I was—well here's what happened. We was messing around, next thing you know we got in the car and we drove to California.

DC: Who's we? Who was with you?

PR: Me, Joe Durso [sp?], and I can't think of who that other guy.

DC: Were these long-time friends of yours?

PR: Yeah, there was four of us.

DC: Where were they from?

PR: [??]. They were all from the Pontiac area. I don't know. Pontiac area. I don't know if there was a Waterford in them days.

DC: In other words, you guys all drove to California?

PR: Do you know what is the biggest community in Oakland County [Michigan]?

DC: I guess it's still Pontiac.

PR: Troy.

DC: Really? OK. Nowadays.

PR: Back in those days it was Royal Oak, Pontiac, and Waterford. Now it's Troy—I don't know what comes after that. Troy is big.

DC: So anyway, I'm trying to figure out how you got in the Navy.

PR: So anyway, we went to California in this car. So we got to Oklahoma, you know, and blew out some tires. And we'd steal tires at night, and keep going. But then pretty soon we got down to about Texas, New Mexico, we blew a rod. And we got on the bus and went on into L.A. I got to L.A. and I signed up for the Navy.

DC: OK. Did your friends sign up too?

PR: No, let's see—one of them, Jim—I can't think of them other guys' names—I did know them real good. But anyway, two of us went in the service and the other two come back home. When we come back out of the Navy, the one was still going to high school [laughs]. Professional.

DC: What did you think you were going to do . . .

PR: [Loud] So anyway I went in the Navy down there, and we got to—we went to San Diego. I had to do some—not much [??] there. Just [??] running around there loose. And uh, so I got down there and I told them I'd sign up for thirty years. I'm tired of starving, you know. So we went down to San Diego. I signed up on what they call a "minority cruise," but I was only sixteen. I hadn't even turned seventeen yet.

DC: What's a minority cruise?

PR: That's four years. That was it. You got to be seventeen. So anyway, my Mother signed up, you know. I lied.

DC: Now did you send the forms back to South Lyon . . .

PR: They sent a telegram back.

DC: Telegram. OK.

PR: Back here to my Mother. I think at the time she was living in Carolina, at the time, with her Mother.

DC: OK.

PR: I don't know what they were doing there. They were still married, though.

DC: OK.

PR: Back and forth. Who knows? Anyway, he uh, she said OK to do it. They sent me to San Diego. Most of them were California people. And I went down there—I become a seaman, you know. I only spent about two weeks in boot camp.

DC: Really.

PR: What they needed was people on them ships.

DC: OK.

PR: [??] on down, is what I figured. What happened then—the thing is I didn't know beans, but I know when I start feeling bad or feeling this way or that way, I used to go down to Marine basic training next door to the San Diego, next door to the Navy base training station. I'd feel bad I'd go over and watch them Marines [laughs], and believe me, man, when I come out of there, I said, "Whew!", am I glad I didn't go in no Marines. And them Marines is just like that today. Hup two, hup two. So anyway, what happens, they get out there on that [??] you know, and they're doing this—and they got this what they call grind, the little thing you put trash in—hoppers?

DC: Hoppers, OK.

PR: And a Marine would stand on each one of them hoppers with his rifle, [??] up in the air. And I said, "What did he do? Kill somebody?" He said, "No, he got out of step!"

DC: Oh, oh. So that was the punishment.

PR: Whew. I don't know what all he did.

DC: So you only had two weeks . . .

PR: I did two weeks—and most of that was in the dentist's chair. Never shot a gun the whole time I was . . .

DC: What were you doing in the dentist's chair?

PR: Yeah, my teeth.

DC: Fixing up your teeth?

PR: I still have my regular teeth.

DC: OK.

PR: I still do, thanks to the General Motors dental plan, I still got my teeth. But anyway, they, they uh,you know, I spent most of that in the dentist. And then after that I went to destroyer base . . .

DC: What base?

PR: Destroyer base.

DC: OK.

PR: Holding base, mostly.

DC: Was that in San Diego?

PR: San Diego. And I ran into that—I ran into that, that—I can't think of that fool's name—the movie star. He was playing in the—they were trying to make a destroyer [movie?] in late '40, '42 there. I mean, yeah. I think I was there about three months.

DC: OK. What was that like?

PR: Well, it was all right. We was waiting to ship out. See, what happened was we got on a cargo ship, and took some material to Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii at the time. But I didn't know too much about that, you know, in them days. We let off the material, then we come back on the cargo ship—what they needed was a strong back to haul stuff.

DC: Was this . . .

PR: This was after I got out of boot camp.

DC: OK.

PR: Yeah. And I stayed at that [?] base, in San Diego. And then about three days out of there, you come Pearl Harbor. But what kills me is—at the time I didn't know most of that stuff anyhow—as I grew old and heard about a lot of stuff, all the three aircraft carriers—*Yorktown*, *Saratoga* . . .

DC: And the Enterprise?

PR: Yeah, the Enterprise. They all left, and the two battleships, the *Carolina*, or the *Washington*, or somebody said the *South Dakota*—I don't know—they left there. They was out of Pearl Harbor. All the crews and anything that was worth anything, they wasn't in Pearl Harbor. And when the Japs come over, and they bombed these old battleships.

DC: So at that point, were you en route to Pearl Harbor?

PR: No, we just left there.

DC: You had just left. OK.

PR: We was heading on back. We was heading back to San Diego.

DC: OK, you had dropped off your cargo and you were heading back to San Diego.

PR: Yeah, we was heading back. And when we got to San Diego, I got off that ship. But, I don't know why, you know, they would just bomb, come in and bomb that, when all the good stuff was out. Now what was these three aircraft carriers doing around Honolulu? Playing fishing poles or something? Or what were they doing out there? And here come these Japs, and they're supposed to be out there patrolling or something. Chief said they was on maneuvers. But anyway, they come on in and bombed them. And we lost about 2,000 or so men there, 2,100 or something like that. See, the United States at those times, the people didn't want to go to war. They just had this World War I stuff. They had to have something real bad [knocks on table] in order to put the United States in there. Look at World War I. That started in 1914. United States didn't get in there until 1917, and it was over nine months later! 1918. So the people in this country said, "Hey, that's your war. Take care of it," to Adolf, you know. When I was sitting in school years ago, the teacher used to come in there with, uh, newspapers and read to us about things going on in Europe. At the time I was a kid, you know. At the time I didn't think much of it. But I still remember it.

DC: Do you remember hearing the news about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

PR: Yeah.

DC: Were you on the ship when you heard the news?

PR: I was three days out. We were just getting ready to come into San Diego.

DC: OK, yeah. What did you think when you heard that?

PR: Well I didn't—you know I really didn't think too much about it, pre-Pearl Harbor. I didn't think much about that. But yeah, we all—and back in those days, you well pretty well noticed you'd going to get in this war sometime or another. Because they started in '39, '38, '39 something, '39 in there. [?] invaded Russia. Well we knew we was going. But it had to take a drastic move to do it. Whose to say who set that mess up, you know what I mean?

DC: Well tell me what you did then, when you got back to San Diego.

PR: Well I got back, then I went to Long Beach, California..

DC: OK.

PR: And I picked—I got on the *U.S.S. Idaho*.

DC: OK.

PR: And that ship was commissioned in 1919. It was, at that time, it was, god, twenty-some years old. But it couldn't fight their way out of a sack. The two best battleships, that was the *Carolina* and the *Washington*, they had 16-inch—we had 14-inch guns on there. And I went on the U.S.S. Idaho in Long Beach, California. And then, you know, as we left there, we went to the Aleutians. I don't know if we went to—we had to get fitted for war. So we went to Bremerton, Washington to get fitted for war. They put what they call torpedo bumpers around our ship and all that stuff. Well you see, the *Washington, North Carolina*, and the *Mississippi*, they was in the East Coast, Iceland or somewhere over there. They weren't in Pearl Harbor. They didn't want them old wagons. Back in those days, battleships was it. [laughs] So anyway, they come around the West Coast. That's when I go on it. So we went to Bremerton, Washington for three months—I think it rained every day up there.

DC: OK. So you were just . . .

PR: Then we come back to Long Beach there, and then we took off to Alaska. Took Attu and Kiska away from the Japanese. And then we left there and come back to—I think we come back to Long Beach again, and then we went to Hawaii, or Pearl Harbor. It was getting pretty well cleaned up by then. I don't know how they do things like that. So anyway, we went to the Gilbert Islands, that's Makin and Tarawa. Now Makin, I was sent up there—we took Makin Island, Makin and Tarawa, we become a bombardment group, the old battleships, bombardment. You know, we bombed the islands before . . .

DC: Soften them up?

PR: Yeah, before they land, something like that. Then Tarawa is where the Marines lost 1,400 people there.

DC: What was your specific job on the ship?

PR: Well, when I went on board—when I went on the battleship, the guy asked me if I had good eyes. And I said, "Like a hawk," boy, "Like a hawk." So one day, a good friend or whatever it was there, said, "You don't want that. Come on down to the boiler and the black gang." "Wait a minute. I like down below." So I went in the black gang, which is the [plant?] engineering. So I went in there, in the Idaho, and took care of, you know, making salt water, refrigeration, and our boilers would steam the turbine, you know. And we'd make steam to turn that turbine, to turn the shaft, to turn the [??].

DC: So you were in charge of maintaining . . .

PR: No I was just, I was just a seaman, a [?], you know, a fireman. They called us firemen in them days. I was just a third-class fireman, or a first-class fireman.

DC: So what did you have to do?

PR: Well mostly I was in the [?] gang. We took care of [? voice is soft] refrigeration, and evaporators. And I just was down in the [?], watching pumps and do this, do that. In the meantime, you learn a few things, stuff like that. So I did that, all the time. And I was on that old battleship for two and a half years, on the *Idaho*. And that's how I got in the [??], and that's how I got in the [same phrase] at Pontiac Motor. [He's talking about being a machinist, but I'm not quite sure what words he's using. See below.]

DC: So there was a connection between what you did there . . .

PR: Oh yes. So anyway, we'll get into that as we go along. So anyway, as we—what was I—oh, yeah, to get Tarawa, now they lost 1,400 men there, people there, you know. Yeah, that movie star was out there. He was on the History Channel. You can really learn a lot on that History Channel. He was on—he come in a Higgins boats, come back in those days. I think they call them old Higgins boats [he's right].

DC: Higgins Boats?

PR: Yeah, them Higgins Boats come out of Louisiana or something. There was a guy called Higgins, he made up them boats. But anyway, that's why, you know, Germany couldn't invade England too good. They didn't have no way to get them troops over there. They knew how to walk over there, but you couldn't walk on water. So anyway, one thing lead to another, and then we left that and we went to the—I mean we went to Marshall Islands. That's a bunch of [something about a bronze star]. So in the Marshall Islands, we took Kwajalein, and stuff like that, and we only lost nine soldiers at the Marshalls. Nine soldiers.

DC: Off your ship? Or are you talking about . . .

PR: Nine soldiers, the invasion boys. We sat out there in the atolls and bombed them for days in and days out. On the other [mumbles] we had to bomb them to get the hell ashore because we didn't know what was out there. Still you got the Japanese fleet, even though they did cool them down at Midway.

DC: Right.

PR: Down there, but still they had—by that time we had the Ninth Fleet, the Seventh Fleet, the Ninth—you know, [??] between us and the Jap fleet. It was the invasion force you know. So anyway, we got through that, then we would come back to Honolulu for awhile. Then we—no, we went to, we went to New Hebrides. It's in the Coral Sea. And the hottest water, making evaporated water, the hottest sea water I've ever seen—I've been all over the world, you know—the sea water coming into the [vat?, bale? vale?] you know, for making sea water and making fresh water. The hottest was 86 degrees, in the ocean at Coral Sea. [mumbles] But you know, as we made water for the boilers, it had to be pure, but as drinking water we had a .7, 0.7 percent. We let it be salty—you couldn't taste it, for you healthwise. So that's why people go around, and we got a water softener. It don't hurt to have a water softener. You can't live on this Earth without salt. So anyway—we stayed in the Hebrides, and then I went to Australia for a month. I was going to get married down there too.

DC: Oh really? Did you meet someone there?

PR: Yeah. She looked like Lorraine [?], [mumbles]. But I tell you, when I was—you know before all this I was at the canteen, in Hollywood.

DC: In Hollywood?

PR: Yeah, during that early stages of '42 there. I was at that canteen. That was Bette Davis, she helped set that up.

DC: So tell me about that.

PR: Well, before this, I danced with Bette Davis and Ida Lupino. And I went there pretty much as much as I got off ship, we went there.

DC: Now was this when you were on leave?

PR: Yeah, and you know, you're sitting there waiting, Long Beach, on the battleship.

DC: So they were at Long Beach? [pause] So anyways, you were in Australia, you'd almost got married, but you didn't.

PR: Yeah, I didn't get married there either.

DC: OK.

PR: There's another one coming up on that too. We're just getting started.

DC: Well, keep going.

PR: So anyway, so anyway, one thing to another—I was at the canteen there in Hollywood—they had a big write-up in the paper about it—on the History Channel [mumbles]. But Bette Davis, she was pretty nice. And Ida Lupino, I danced with her, and stuff like that. I was just a fireman, you know. Three little stripes. But anyway, I think a first-class fireman is the same as a sergeant—I mean the same—first-class—no, first-class seaman is the same as a PFC, or something, third-class, second-class. But anyway, I won't get into that.

DC: OK.

PR: But anyway, uh, so anyway, we took the Marshall Islands. We only lost nine soldiers, because we bombarded. And then after that I told you we went to the Hebrides, and then I went to Sydney, Australia.

DC: Yeah.

PR: Yeah, that was neat. I think we stayed there, it had to be two months or so.

DC: And so then what happened?

PR: Money down there was, rather—I don't know—I met a nice girl down there too. She was like—what was the name of that woman?—anyway, we were young. That was a pretty nice trip. We had dancing and all that stuff, you know. [??] had always been in there in the '20s. And then somebody come over there with some brochures that they had, and we was there then. Well we went in there, it was '44, in Sydney, Australia, after the Gilberts and the Marshalls. Well there was the Aleutians, Gilberts, Marshalls, we was opening the way to the west. So then we left—after we left Sydney, we come—I don't know, we come back up to the Hebrides—nah, that's north [mumbles]—Coral Sea. So anyway, we went to, we went up to Saipan, went to the Marianas, that's Guam and Saipan. And we sat there in Saipan, bombarding that. And there's Tinian, Guam, and Saipan. And we was bombing that. And I used to go—were semi-secure. We'd sit out there, away from them and just bomb them. We had what they call Kingfishers on our ship. They would go over and spot guns, and we would bombard them—we had 14-inch guns, you know. 14-inch guns on the *Idaho*.

DC: What were the Kingfishers?

PR: They called them little Kingfishers—planes. They'd shoot them off the back of the ship.

DC: How would they land?

PR: Well, they'd just land in the water and you'd pull them up with a crane, on the boat with a crane. Yeah, I got pictures of all that stuff.

DC: [hard to understand, something about helping locate shells]

PR: Yeah, they would—but see what happens, at Saipan, it was very, very hard to take. What we did was land Marines in there at the time. We had to take a lot of the Army off of Guam, bring them up to Saipan, to help take Saipan. At the same time, Saipan was mandated to the Japanese in 1919, after World War I, so they was entrenched there quite big. So they got these mountains—they had the guns embedded in the mountains, and when they'd shoot, they'd go back in the mountains, you couldn't see them—a puff of smoke or whatever. So we're the ones—I don't know if weeks, but finally we took it, stuff like that. Today Saipan is considered American property. They do material there. You know they got sweatshops there. They do things, and they on it: "Made in the USA."

DC: Because it's U.S. property.

PR: But it's still U.S. property, yeah.

DC: OK. All right. Huh.

PR: I think this thing here was made in Banglo-dutch.

DC: Bangladesh, yeah. Not many clothes are made in America. Kind of hard to find them, actually. So what did you think of all this time in the service?

PR: Well, after I got out of there, you know, after I got out of there, I got transferred. I got transferred off the [to?] *Idaho*, after Okinawa and Saipan. Not Okinawa, I mean Saipan, Guam, and Tinian. I got transferred back to the West Coast.

DC: Any idea why?

PR: Huh?

DC: Any idea why?

PR: Yeah, I wanted to get home before the war was over.

DC: So you asked for the transfer?

PR: Yeah, I put in for a transfer. By that time I was second-class machinist's mate. OK. Boiler deck, you know.

DC: So tell me where you went.

PR: Well we was all sitting around that [Merry?? Sounds like he means Treasure Island] Island, in San Francisco. [softly] You want to hear all about that?

DC: Sure.

PR: Anyway, we went to shore one time—I don't know how we got hooked up with that fool, but he passed out, and I was driving his car around—I got it, had to go back to the ship. I just turned in the police station down there, at the foot of Market Street. Used to come ashore there, and that Market Street was just full of white caps, you know. Too many sailors, yeah. So [??] was stationed there. And first time I seen, run into a WAC—it was late '43 or '44, something like that. I think it was early '44, somewhere in there. So anyway, first time I ever seen a WAC. We was marching, struggling along in there, you know, on [??] Island, and here comes this "hup two" crowd, and it was WACs, marching along. They could put us to shame.

DC: Oh really. OK.

PR: Yeah, you know when I was on board ship, on the *Idaho*, there ain't a day didn't go by they didn't have those Marines up on that deck going hup two, hup two, hup two. I said, "Are you crazy?" I'm sitting over there up on the deck with my steaming shoes on, that looked like they should have been thrown overboard, and watching them Marines going hup two, hup two.

DC: So you didn't have to . . .

PR: Oh man, no, I'm below deck. I got a trade. I ain't got time for that garbage. And they was all—I made a friend with a few of them, but still—a corporal in the Marines is like a God. Whew.

DC: How did the Navy guys and the Marines get along?

PR: We hated each other. From day one. Down in San Diego, when I was down there training, down on base, something like that, on shore, they was always fighting on the corner down there. We run into Red Skelton one time on the corner down there. That was pretty neat. But anyway, yeah, they was always fighting, Navy and Marines. And when you got in trouble in the Navy, Marines ran the brigs, and your ass has had it. Look out [?]! I mean you had it bad.

DC: Did you ever get in trouble?

PR: I'm coming to it [laughs]. So anyway, we got to [??] Island [San Francisco]. I got off that old *Idaho*. I should have stayed off it. So we got to [??] Island, and sitting around there, and I said, "Man," so they come up to me, said, "All right now here, you guys, do you want to take your thirty-day"—I ain't [??] got sixty days coming, or maybe ninety.

You get thirty days a year. But they didn't give you nothing. They were fighting a war. They're not worried about your leave. He said, "You want your thirty days now, or do you want to wait and maybe get stationed on the East Coast and you can use your travel time. And you can go there—you won't waste three or four days traveling by train." And believe me, the train was a son of a gun. One thing or another—that's if your traveling. Troop train, if they sent you, you didn't have a bunk. But this way you just sit up like that, and the stiff back things on the train, those stiff-back seats—so anyway, I ain't waiting for no transfer. The guys I come off with, on the ship, well maybe four of us—so I'm going to, I'm going, I'm going on my leave. So I met another guy from somewhere—I don't know no where. We had a good time together. Yeah, he's staying in Chicago, and I'm coming over to Detroit, to come to Pontiac. By that time my Mother lived in Pontiac, I think. So anyway, one thing led to another, so, uh, that was—I come home, you know. Bought me a little '37 Buick car, run around. I think I found about every woman I could find. In them days, it was something—didn't need no Viagra pills in them days. So anyway, I was doing good. And time to go back. So I went back, and I met this guy in Chicago. That's where you pick up your troop ship—I mean your troop, you know, you go to Chicago, and they take you to Frisco, by train. So I run into him, you know, and we got back. Oh, we got back in another two days, whatever it was by train, and . . .

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

DC: Did you need a car?

PR: No, no.

DC: No you didn't. OK.

PR: My grandmother lived in Carolina there. Leaksville, yeah. So I went there, stayed a few days, and then hitchhiked to Pontiac, Michigan. My folks lived in Pontiac by then—in '44. And hitchhiked up here, stayed a few days, and that Buick, I'd just give my daddy-in-law, it'd be a stepdad, he never did sell it yet—now I was riding that around or whatever. And anyway, they had SP over here in Pontiac, and they stopped me.

DC: What was that, I'm sorry?

PR: SP.

DC: OK.

PR: They stopped me to see if, you know, you had your leave papers and stuff like that. I don't know why they had the SP out in Pontiac. But I had all the paperwork, you know.

I didn't have no problem there. You got your ID and your leave papers, and they didn't bother you after that.

DC: So you were OK?

PR: Oh yeah, yeah. So anyway, that was all—that was all legal there. Well, I mean I was shady legal. Shady legal.

DC: Didn't get caught.

PR: I didn't get caught, yeah. No I didn't get caught—I never got caught period. Never got caught, period. But anyway, I went back down there and then we got to ship out to Boston, up at—goddang it, I can't think of that, the Fargo Building, or something like that up there in Boston. I think it's the Fargo Building. We got to put a ship in commission in Quincy, Mass. Port city up there, Boston area. Anyway we put this APD.

DC: What's that?

PR: Attack personnel destroyer. We carried Marine raiders with us, 180 Marines. On board that battleship was 200 Marines. We carried Marine raiders, and you know, we worked with the invasion forces, well that's what they come out of, really. Well anyway, so we stayed there awhile and then went to Boston—called it Silver Dollar, and Scollay Square and all that stuff. And it was kind of neat. I met another girl from Worcester, Mass., and all that stuff. So we stayed there awhile and got the ship in commission. I got pictures of all that, too, [of the bus?]. But anyway, we got, you know, and I stayed there until we got the ship in commission. I was there about a month or something. And took a [shingdown?] cruise to Bermuda.

DC: OK.

PR: And run into a lot of new people, you know, out of Boston. We come out of—they made up the crew out of Norfolk, then we went up there and put the ship in. The ship's company was made up out of the Norfolk crew, and went up there. And the people that come in off the Idaho, I never seen them before. But I had already got back off my leave, which is the one I lied about, and I got pretty good on that one. So after we left there, then we went down through the Panama, and then we went to—I don't know if we went to San Pedro, California. That's a suburb of Los Angeles. San Pedro. We left there and went to Hawaii, Pearl Harbor, and then went to [M__??].

DC: You went back out to the Pacific?

PR: Then we went out—Leyte—yeah, back to the Pacific—we got into Leyte, I mean the Philippines. Got in that invasion. Well we got, well more or less, we got credit for it but we got there more or less at the end of that.

DC: When it was over, OK.

PR: But we was waiting around there, waiting around there for, to go to Okinawa. Now I missed the Iwo Jima. I was home on leave. So anyway, we got to Leyte, and we [??] Manila there and all this stuff, you know. But we was getting ready for Okinawa. That was to be the last campaign. And we got up there three months before the invasion. We went there—I don't know if it was all of three months, but we had this Ernie Pyle with us. He wasn't on our ship. And [mumbles] there's a lot of little islands around Okinawa, called [Ryukyu?] I mean, yeah, little islands around Okinawa. And we had to invade those little islands to see what was there before we took on Okinawa. And in the meantime, we got leShima. I think that's where Ernie Pyle got killed there. They took his plaque and everything over to Okinawa, because that's were—but he got killed on [aro?]shima, yeah. So they took him over there. I didn't know much about it. But he was made a big name over in Europe was the way I got it. The History Channel said that. So anyway, we bombarded that—we was there strictly for Marines to—we landed on—most of them would go on shore and come back—one time they went to shore and come back all shot up. But what happened there, when they'd go ashore they'd come back before they got shot up. They would give them two shots of booze, or gin, you know the little bottles like you get on an airplane. What we would do is trade them in—a half of loaf and a quarter pound of butter, and that loaf of bread for that shot. That two shots—and we got them suckers lined up like that, went on a binge.

DC: So you got two shots, or two of those little bottles for going on . . .

PR: Yeah, they got them.

DC: Yeah, right, and then you traded for them.

PR: And then we traded that half a loaf of bread. But that bread was homemade bread, good. There was a buddy of mine—he was from Charlotte, North Carolina—he was a baker on there. I was a machinist. And we had a guy called a jack o' the dust, took care of the stores. And the buddies I knew there, one was a tinsmith and the other one was a welder—the maintenance, I still did maintenance, machinist.

DC: You were kind of in with all these tradespeople?

PR: Yeah, I was in there.

DC: With the guts and everything.

PR: Yeah, we'd drink coffee and shoot the breeze. They hadn't gotten that—there was one guy on board our ship, he come out of China. He was in that Shanghai—he was on the gunboat that got shot out over there in Shanghai back in '39. And he was in the [??], and he used to like to gamble. One of them drunken sailors, you know. But I remember him. He was a—they all had poker games, and stuff like that. They played big stuff, and I never played that stuff.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

PR: But anyway, he—you ran into some of these people in the Navy. But anyway, that was—where was I at?—yeah, Okinawa. We got up there, we was in, you know, before the invasion. Then they come up. Then they had—then the old ships, the big ships that come over, the old battleships were coming. Meantime, the Seventh Fleet was out there protecting us from whatever the, whatever the Japs had left. I think it was Seventh or Ninth Fleet, or whatever. We was in the bombardment group. But anyway, I know the Idaho was over there bombarding that.

DC: The *Idaho* was there.

PR: Should have stayed on that son of a bitch. I had it easy. Sixteen hours off, and eight-four on. Ice cream everyday. That little ship, eight hours off and four hours on, and you had more work to do.

DC: What was your job on that, that new ship?

PR: Well it was the same thing.

DC: Still [checking?] the water and all that.

PR: The machine is—I was down in the machine—down in the main engines. There we had steam electric. We got steam electric. We'd generate electricity to turn the turbine, while aboard the *Idaho*, it was steam turbine. In other words, steam—generate the steam and it would turn the turbine. Here we generate the electricity and the electricity turned the turbine. So we still had to maintain steam.

DC: Right.

PR: Yeah, one thing or another. [mumbles] you come out there, you never see it.

DC: So where did you go when Okinawa. . .

PR: So anyway, Okinawa, that's the turning point. So anyway, we got on picket duty after they invaded. We were on picket duty for three or four days.

DC: On land?

PR: No no. Out in the ocean. Now what you had then was kamikaze planes . . .

DC: Oh right.

PR: . . . coming in. We had to be out there on the outline to radio when they was coming this way.

DC: So you're picketing for planes . . .

PR: We picketed. The smaller ships—that thing was small. It was like a DE, a destroyer escort. Anyway, inside it was built up for the Marines, but we didn't have no Marines in. They'd already done their job. But anyway, these suicide planes would come. One of them come down there and hit the back of the ship. We got them two . . .

DC: The back of your ship?

PR: . . . two slant-eyes. Huh?

DC: One hit the back of your ship?

PR: Yeah. Well, yeah. It didn't do too much damage, I thought. So anyway, so anyway, what happened there, we just kept picketing duty. And then pretty soon, the kamikaze planes was coming over. They'd come over by the hundreds. Then, it got so bad, we got so bad, or I guess—I don't know that much about it, the ship. We had to go back to the States for repairs. So they was still bombarding. They was still fighting on the beach and all that stuff, you know, at Okinawa. So what happened, we went back to, we went back to L.A., to San Pedro—we had Navy docks there—to get fixed. We stayed there twenty-two days. You talk about getting messed up. With that Hilton Hotel on 6th Street, we had a suite of rooms, and we run like crazy, man. So anyway, next thing you know, uh, twenty-two days was up. We left, went back to China—I mean went back to Hawaii, Guam, Philippines. And then we went from there—oh yeah, wait a minute. Before we got to, before we got to San Pedro, California, three days out of San Pedro, the war was over. That was it!

DC: Yeah, yeah.

PR: I forgot about that. Stayed there twenty-two days. If I was in the regular Navy, them people there counting their points trying to get out and all of that. Well most of that Navy was all Reserves anyhow. Draftees, they called them. So anyway, they all—and we got back to, back to, like I told you, Guam, Hawaii, and Guam, and Philippines. Then we went from there, we went to Haiphong. It's a port city of Hanoi. And we got there, pulled up the—we had a four-stripe, four-stripe captain with us. And our job was to put him on the cargo ship, Japanese—*Chinese* troops. Now the dock was full of Japanese. All they did was take baths and have a stick to beat each other in case somebody got mad. But they was all surrendered then. But it was a bunch of them there. In the meantime I had done stole a couple of .45s off of the Marines. And, or I traded something for it. So anyway, when we got to Haiphong, pulled up to the dock, there was a lot of French in there. That was French Indochina. And the next thing you know, I'm going to shore. You ain't supposed to get off the ship—but I was down that—well see, at night, they retired the officers of the day, put, put some kind of boatswain or a seaman, or something, in charge of the deck, you know. So we'd come up there and, "See you in a few hours!" Down that thing we went.

DC: So you were at the dock, so you could just get off?

PR: At the dock, yeah, you could go on down it. So I had this .45, and it didn't get dark out until late. So at 5:00—if you had any liberty, it'd be up at 5:00 or 6—so anyway, I had this .45. I went ashore there with me and my two buddies, and we got a rickshaw—on one side of the street was French, and the other side was the Nationalist troops. And each one going [makes loud, gargling sort of noise], and that rickshaw guy would freeze, and turn around, go back, or maybe let them go by. And I'm sitting there—and we just wore dungarees, like this. We didn't even wear our white hat. Some of them thought we was—some of them didn't know—thought we was Spanish sailors or something like that. But anyway, we was American. And I know one thing, when I got back aboard ship, I took that .45 and put that thing under the mattress or something. I got rid of that—if I had pulled that thing out they would have shot me full of holes. Whew. And you wasn't even supposed to be on the beach to start with. The Navy would have said, "Good riddance!" [hard to understand] So I got rid of that sucker. So anyway, we stayed there three months, or close to it. The cargo ships would come in and take out—well most of those Nationalist troops coming in from Burma through there. And the Japs was still there when we left. I don't know when they went back. But anyway, they were taking them out of there to go up and fight Chairman Mao, up in Tientsin, Peking, Peking. As they went on up there—come in, load up—I think it was, I don't know how many, six, eight, of those ships. They was regular cargo ships. And then we took off, and went up to Tientsin, which is the port city of Peking. Now what the hell we went up there for, I don't know. I went ashore there, and I spent seventy-two hours in Peking, was it Beijing today? That was kind of neat. And then we stayed out—I don't know how many months we stayed there, one or two.

DC: Did you have any idea when you were going home at that point?

PR: No, I was still signed up for a certain amount of time. Some of them had already gone, who were replacements. And then we went to Tsintao—and that's supposed to be, well, it's supposed to be a resort or something—but it was still, Tsintao. And the Marines were on that one—the Marines was there. And we pulled up to the dock there. I think we was there a month or two, or maybe a month and a half, two months. And then we, we went ashore there at night, which you ain't supposed to do. And then the next thing you know, you go ashore, and then over there, she had three daughters—one I think was thirteen. The other two was a little older. We get over there, we'd pick up a case of Pabst Blue Ribbon. They was unloading shiploads of it over there, putting it in stock there. We did drink a lot of that Japanese beer there too. That was pretty good beer. And we ate raw and boiled eggs. China was a cesspool. It was not nice. Everyone over there was smoking some kind of pot. It was a nightmare. Oh, terrible. From what I see today, China's a lot better today than they was then. But, I'll get back to that. But anyway, we went there to meet these girls, and then—we'd be coming back from where we, you know, over there to see a pretty mama, or whatever, mothers and daughters and all that stuff, you know. They had them little feet—did I see they stopped wrapping them a few years ago. And the next thing you know, we'd grabbed two cases of Pabst together, out of that ship. We taken them over there and put them in our cooler. Of course I took care

of the cooler aboard the ship—refrigeration. And the other boy was the jack o' the dust, and the other was the baker. And during the day, we'd eat pork and beans, or fried potatoes, and hot bread, and drink beer all day—me and my friends.

DC: Yeah. You had a little empire down there.

PR: I was second-class by then. So anyway, every day we went over. Finally got caught one time over there.

DC: What happened?

PR: They started registers. We had to check in every half hour.

DC: [laughs]

PR: Well, they was going to throw us in the brig but we didn't have no brig. They said, "Well, we'll put you—we'll have you to check with the officer of the day for thirty minutes." [mumbles] It was every, so many hours, but then it got where we got bad, so they started checking us every thirty minutes, or hour, or something. They had to stop the movie to go sign in, sign out. Anyway, that all stopped at ten-o'clock at night, you know, this checking with the officer of the day. At night they'd put some boatswain or something, you know, took care of the, you know, the [??].

DC: So that's when you could sneak out?

PR: Down that gangplank we'd go, down into the night [laughs]. We wasn't even supposed to have—down that thing we'd go; come back before daylight. We had those two cases of Pabst. Each one had six cases of Pabst coming aboard. They unloaded shitloads of that stuff over there. Marines ran that place. And then we got into one of them Marine officer's shirt one time. We got a bag of them things. I was selling them all over the place. I don't know how we got into that mess. So anyway, we left there, went to, we went to Shanghai, and the Yangtze River there, and we were sitting in dock, and we were selling oranges, potatoes, eggs, everything off of the back of the ship [mumbles], the stern. And this guy would come over in this, dugout, or whatever it is, you know. He had a roll of money, American money, about like that [thick]. He paid for everything, you know. We'd sell it by the case. That's where the jack o' the dust come in. He was in charge of all the stores. I don't know how we got away with that one. He'd sell all this stuff and then split up the money amongst us. The [Chinks?] would take this stuff by the cart, you know, by the case, by the case, like cases, like that. Then they'd dump our garbage can over into the moat. On the way back, he'd be in the garbage on the way back—there still wasn't nothing to eat. You know, food was something else there. We was selling all this stuff, off the back, which you wasn't supposed to be doing.

DC: Sure. Uh hum.

PR: Meantime, we picked up a captain, four-striper, was a commander. He never did like me. Him and that [??], neither one. But anyway, we picked up a four-striper, went back down to Haiphong, after we stopped in Hong Kong. Hong Kong there. Hong Kong, we stopped there a day or two, and went down there to French Indochina, Haiphong again. We stayed there another three months. LSDs—those are those big cargo ships, you know, let down the front like that—they would come in there ten at a time, haul out Nationalist troops. That's a long time between when we was there before. What they did between then, I don't know. But we went in there, and the LSDs would come in, load up, go out, and another load would come in, taking those Nationalist troops up there to fight this Chairman Mao. And then, as things went on, after that, the ship, you know, after that was over, we went ashore there, had the same deal set up, really. That was pretty neat. We never did get into Haiphong—I mean we never did get into Hanoi. But we got—Haiphong's as far as we went. But that was back in '47, 46, '47.

DC: Is that right? That late?

PR: Yeah.

DC: Yeah.

PR: The war was over. The war was over then. And—'46, '47, but did I know that they'd be out of Vietnam a few years down the road, after the Korean stuff. So the next thing you know, then we come back to, back to, uh, San Diego, Long Beach, San Pedro. That's where I got off the ship. There, and I got discharged there.

DC: You were finally done then?

PR: Yeah, got discharged. Well they give me ninety days—do you want to get discharged or come back and stuff like that.

DC: So where did you go when you were discharged?

PR: Well I just come back to Pontiac.

DC: Yeah.

PR: Caught a ride, thumbed a ride back here. But see, then after awhile you come to find out that Okinawa battle, for the Navy, is the biggest battle that the United States Navy ever had. We lost 5,000 people, plus a lot of ships. No United States Navy ever lost that many ships and that many men. I don't know how many ships it was—could have been forty, but I can't remember them. But we lost over 5,000 Navy.

DC: But you didn't know that until after you got back and read about it?

PR: Yeah—well no, I didn't know all that stuff until I got back. But that was the biggest battle. It wasn't a service-to-service battle, but it was a ship-to-plane, with the kamikaze

planes. And they did a lot of damage. I could see a lot of that stuff. I knew I used to be out to sea, and the worst thing that we had going around out in the sea was having these hospital ships. We didn't want them nowhere around us—they was lit up like a Christmas tree. And then we'd be out there on deck and all—used to go to General Quarters before daybreak, you know, during daybreak—I don't think they had it at night. But during daybreak, you had to go to General Quarters [mumbles]. But anyway, used to sit there and you'd watch a big flame come up at the horizon, out in the ocean, somewhere, I don't know where it was. That was them "Kaiser Coffins," they called them. Kaiser Coffins was those little aircraft carriers they made out of troop ship—cargo ships. They put a flat deck up there for the planes to get on. They held about fifteen, twenty planes maybe. They called them Coffins. They was very thin. That wasn't a big aircraft—but that was, you know, during the war then.

DC: Sure, is that what—you'd see the plume then when they got hit or something?

PR: Oh yeah, just look at them and they'll blow up. Just like a cargo ship. They called them Kaiser Liberty ships. Cargo ships.

DC: [mumbles] on [mumbles]

PR: No, no, that's World War II.

DC: I know, but "Kaiser Ships," that sounds like a term that . . .

PR: Yeah, he did a lot of cargo ships during the war.

DC: Henry Kaiser you mean.

PR: Yeah.

DC: Henry Kaiser. I'm sorry.

PR: I think they put out an automobile.

DC: Yeah, they sure did. I'm sorry. I wasn't with you for a second there. I was thinking about the Kaiser, the German Kaiser, but you meant Henry Kaiser.

PR: Henry Kaiser, yeah.

DC: Well what did you do then in '47? You got mustered out. You said you came back to Pontiac. What did you do?

PR: Come back to Pontiac. I went to Baldwin Rubber for awhile.

DC: Baldwin Rubber?

PR: Yeah. Messed around there a little bit. They went on strike. I read them their rights. And the next thing you know, uh.

DC: You say you read them their rights? What do you mean?

PR: Well I was just shooting—I [wasn't?] a member of the union.

DC: At Baldwin Rubber?

PR: Yeah. But anyway, you couldn't get in there to picket. They'd tell you when to picket and all that stuff. If you didn't do that you had to pay this and pay that and all.

DC: OK, so they wanted to fine you if you didn't . . .

PR: Well back when I [??], and then that was in '47, then when I joined, when I come to Pontiac Motors in '48, you didn't have to join the union, but I always joined the union.

DC: Well, it wouldn't be automatic, it seems, that you'd think about joining the union. You came from North Carolina, and there aren't a lot of unions down there. Uh, you know, what made you join the union?

PR: That's a good question. I don't know. Just wanted to be with the crowd, I guess. And I was a committeeman here for twenty-two years.

DC: We're going to sneak up on that. Tell me what you did at Baldwin Rubber first.

PR: We got—well I worked mostly midnights. The old, the old, the old and the ugly, they all work days. Young kids work at night. What you did was make rubber mats for cars and stuff like that. And they made tires and tubes and all kinds of electric wire, for housing and stuff like that, you know, wrappings. Anything you'd wrap in rubber, or bumpers or [bankers?], all that stuff.

DC: So did you manage to get that job?

PR: You just walk in.

DC: OK.

PR: Years ago you just walk in get a job. That's like a—you see, Texas A&M said they graduated 40,000. They said the University of Michigan got 40,000. Where are they putting all these workers at? They all doing computers? Everything you got is made somewhere else.

DC: What was your specific job at Baldwin Rubber?

PR: Just making mats, stretching rubber over mats, heating them up, and then peel them off when they're done, more or less.

DC: Did you quit that then when you went on strike?

PR: Well I went on strike and then, you know, I got tired of striking, so I went to—I come over and start, went to Fisher Body.

DC: OK, Fisher Body.

PR: Was there for, oh, seven or eight months.

DC: What did you do there?

PR: Just more or less assembly—door assembly.

DC: Door assembly? And how did you like that?

PR: Not too good, no.

DC: Why's that?

PR: A lot of work. I'm above that work stuff.

DC: [Laughs]

PR: Then I come to Pontiac Motor. I went in the nickel plate.

DC: So tell me, why did you leave Fisher Body?

PR: Well I don't know. I just up and left. Didn't worry about it.

DC: Did you get the job at Pontiac Motor first?

PR: No, no. I could have. I was working at Fisher Body and I was going to go over to Pontiac Motor. I got a job at nickel plate, went back to Fisher Body and quit.

DC: OK, so you got the job, then you went back and quit.

PR: Yeah, that's it.

DC: So what did you do at nickel plate, the nickel plate job?

PR: Well, plating—stripping and plating.

DC: OK.

PR: That was pretty neat.

DC: You liked that?

PR: Yeah.

DC: What was good about it?

PR: Well, it wasn't a production. You could take your time. You had a quota and all that stuff. And then—I was there four years.

DC: Four years. OK. So you would have gotten the nickel plate job in, what '48, or '49?

PR: '48.

DC: '48

PR: Yeah.

DC: OK. You said you had a quota. Was it hard to meet that quota?

PR: What do you mean?

DC: At nickel plate.

PR: No. Well, they give you—no. It depended on the stripping. I was mostly in stripping; then I got into the [??], which I didn't like too good.

DC: What was so different about that? Why didn't you like it?

PR: Well, you had to be right there, stuff was coming through, you had to handle it. Plating, you just did it on the time. You hear the gong, you go get the stuff out, put new stuff in.

DC: Like doing French fries?

PR: Yeah, that's what it was [laughs]. So anyway, then I went to racking.

DC: To what now?

PR: Racking. You rack material along the rack there to go into metal plate to be plated. It would be copper first, then nickel, and then chrome.

DC: OK.

PR: Yeah, plating was a pretty big thing back then.

DC: How did you learn all that?

PR: Well you just—that were production. And then pretty soon I got the idea maybe I could go into maintenance.

DC: OK.

PR: Being as I was in the Navy. [??] deck, the seas, and then in the Navy. So I asked the foreman there, if he'd get—finally he said, "Yeah, you can come in the pipe gang." So I went down and got in the pipe gang.

DC: This would have been, what, '52, something like that?

PR: In '52, yeah.

DC: So you were in the pipe gang at that point?

PR: Right. I went in as a trainee. I think it was only eight or nine of us, or something like that—a trainee. And then it was three years training on the job. Big hammer, big wrench.

DC: So the training program was three years?

PR: That's all, to become a journeyman.

DC: OK.

PR: Then after that, the Korean War broke out in '55, or '50.

DC: It was already in place, yeah.

PR: Oh was it?

DC: Yeah, '50, yeah.

PR: Yeah, that come in in '50, didn't it, the Korean War. So anyway, they come out, they needed, they upped production, and they needed more skilled trades. So what they did was take the N.D. men . . .

DC: What's N.D.?

PR: National Emergency something.

DC: National Defense, or something like that?

PR: Well they come into the pipe gang. I was a trainee. Thank God I got in before them. Now, as it got to going down, there's a contract coming due. What they did was, uh, if you had a certain amount of time in, you was going to make journeyman at a certain time, you was OK. Well, out of the eight or nine of us that was trainees at that time, everybody made it—I think it was about two or three that didn't make it because they missed some time or something—we was the last ones to make journeyman, and then they moved them into the N.D.s. They took all the N.D.s and made them into trainees.

DC: Where did the N.D.s come from?

PR: From Pontiac Motors. From production.

DC: Oh, got shifted around.

PR: They come from all over the different divisions.

DC: OK. All right.

PR: And they went—they all went into N.D.s. And then, at that time, they—after those trainees went into the N.D.s, then they come with the apprenticeship. I never would have made that apprenticeship . . .

DC: So you would have had to stick it out in the apprenticeship, but you got accelerated is what it sounds like.

PR: I was a trainee. I made my journeyman before, before the N.D.s, and I made out pretty good. So many N.D.s made it, and then they took some of the N.D.s and put them in the apprentice—but you got to have a certain, credits and this and all that stuff. You go four years as a trainee, four years at O.C., and you come out with an Associate's Degree and become a journeyman. But you're working on the job. I didn't have enough education to be dog beans at that time, you know what I mean?

DC: Did they give you any credit for your work in the service?

PR: No, they didn't give me none. No credit from the service.

DC: OK, yeah.

PR: So anyway, so when they, when the apprentices come in, that's what the [?] throughout General Motors with the Union, cooperation with the Union, all that stuff. And that worked out a lot better, but I—it's lucky I got in as a trainee. I was very lucky, and all that stuff. Not that they wasn't smart enough—stuff like that—but see, a trainee—now I always treated the apprentices with respect, because I had a hell of a time, a rough time being a trainee. Some of them used to get on our back.

DC: Why would they get on your back?

PR: Oh, got to be a good little Nazi. All them [??], they come on you, you know—they did anything to wipe you off. "Hey, you're out of here, boy! Back to production!" So you give them a lot of these—and some of—you were a good little, uh. So I made my journeyman, and after that you could do what you want to. And the Union, by that time we were getting a better Union. Our Union become really good, strong, in 1955.

DC: Oh yeah?

PR: Yeah.

DC: What made it strong in '55?

PR: Oh, we had a closed house.

DC: OK.

PR: You had to be a member of the Union to be a member—you had to be a member of the Union to be a, to work at Pontiac Motor.

DC: You had a closed shop?

PR: A closed shop.

DC: Yeah.

PR: Yeah, that made it a lot nicer.

DC: Did you sense that a lot of folks were not joining the Union before then?

PR: Yeah, there was a lot of them that didn't join.

DC: OK.

PR: Yeah. And some of them said, "Well, I'll, I'll quit before I join." Well in them days, you could walk in and get a job. Nowadays, what are you going to do. We've got 8,000 members here, retirees, in this local. Some of them are living on food stamps—a lot of them. They retired—I retired fourteen years ago. Costs is up here—I'm still down here. It's taking every dime I make today to live. I think—General Motors comes around maybe every four or five years, or maybe five, six, and gives you a boost. Social Security gives you 2% or something, huh? People in here living on food stamps. I know I'm better than a lot of them.

DC: Yeah, yeah. Well you were becoming a skilled tradesman, then, in the mid-'50s there. A number of . . .

PR: Then I had five kids you know. Married with five kids.

DC: When did you get married?

PR: Uh, ’42, ’43, in that area, when I was a . . .

DC: Before you got out of the war?

PR: I mean not ’43, *’52, ’53*,not ’42, shit.

DC: You faked me out there for a second.

PR: Yeah, faked me out too. Anyway . . .

DC: Well tell me about that. Where did you meet your wife?

PR: Well, let’s see, she was a secretary for a lawyer. Yeah, down here at State, Pontiac State, State Bank Building, yeah. She lived in Clarkston.

DC: How did you meet her?

PR: That’s a good question. Oh, I met her at the Oakland County Boat Club.

DC: Boat Club, OK.

PR: I was a trustee out there.

DC: So did you like boating?

PR: Well, we had a sailboat. We took that thing every time we—me and Tom [?], we used to go out there and sail during the week. He had a –we had a –we had a 23-feet, 21-foot or something, little sailboat. It always flopped over.

DC: What lake was that on?

PR: Silver Lake. There’s a Silver Lake Boat Club out there, and I was a member of the Silver Lake Boat Club. I was a trustee with Jeb Zimm [sp?].

DC: Jeb Zimm.

PR: Jeb Zimm, yeah. Me and him was like peas in a pod.

DC: And that’s where you met your wife?

PR: Yeah, at the boat club, yeah.

DC: And then you got married in what, ’52 or ’53, you said?

PR: ’53. ’53, ’54, something like that. ’53 I think it was, yeah.

DC: And where were you living at that time?

PR: Well, where the hell was I living? I think I was living with my Mother for awhile there.

DC: OK. So she was back in Pontiac at that point?

PR: Oh yeah, yeah. Well he was—my stepdad went to work at Truck and Coach then, after the war.

DC: After the war.

PR: Yeah, somewhere in that time. Yeah, after the war—he started driving trucks, and then he went, after ’46, ’47, somewhere in that area he went to work for Truck and Coach. He had his thirty years in, but the thing was, when he retired he was 55; now it’s 45. And the wife, we was married for 27 years. Ehh, the thing fell apart, and she got a divorce. Had five kids.

DC: Five kids. When was your first kid born?

PR: God, ’54, ’55. He’s a Lieutenant down in Grosse Pointe.

DC: Ok, he’s a Lieutenant. Um, did your wife continue to work as a secretary at that point?

PR: Yeah. Well, she worked off and on, and then she would just stay home. I worked a lot of overtime. She told a judge ‘he worked overtime all the time.’ That helped me get a divorce, if you’re working overtime.

DC: So you worked a lot of overtime?

PR: Yeah.

DC: Yeah.

PR: Oh yeah. Maintenance, you know.

DC: Did you think . . .

PR: I thought I was doing right. Because marriage is good. I think if you don’t have—if you ain’t married, don’t have somebody married to you, it’s a useless life, really. I enjoyed it. You know I was married to her for twenty-seven years and another woman for twenty years.

DC: Really.

PR: I've been looking for another wife, but, see, if I had got this $7 million dollars [accident lawsuit] out of this big wreck, I could have bought me a nice wife. But now I got to take me the leftovers, and believe me, the leftovers ain't all that great out there.

DC: Well tell me, what was it like trying to make ends meet with five kids?

PR: It was rough. Rough, yeah. Ended up doing [??] on the marina.

DC: What marina?

PR: Watkins Hill Marina?

DC: Watkins Hill?

PR: Yeah.

DC: OK.

PR: Yeah it was rough. Our biggest, I think—well I was a member of the Elks Lodge too. I joined the Elks in '53.

DC: OK.

PR: I joined the Elks there.

DC: How was that?

PR: That was good. I was very active.

DC: What did you like about the Elks?

PR: Well, friends. Friendship, and all that stuff. Very nice. Very nice. I was on the—I had the drill team for 32 years and I loved that drill team, 32 years. I worked it—I've been an Elk for 48 years. I worked at Pontiac Motor 39 ½ years.

DC: Were many of the folks at the Elks from Pontiac Motors?

PR: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. Thirty-nine years up at Pontiac Motors, and yeah. The UAW—if it wasn't for the UAW, I'd be dog beans, nothing!

DC: Well tell me, early on, like, you know, from '47 on through the'50s, were there times when you needed the union?

PR: Oh, need the union? [chuckles] You better believe I needed it.

DC: Tell me some of . . .

PR: Huh?

DC: Tell me some of the times . . .

PR: Well, there was when I worked in nickel plate, you know—the first time I got to nickel plate, that foreman there—what the hell was his name?—anyway, I can't think of his name. Dang it! You get old, you know, your brain goes out.

DC: That's OK.

PR: First thing he did was spit on my shoe.

DC: Really?

PR: Oh yeah, he chewed tobacco back in them days, and everybody spit. I started chewing tobacco in 1944, on the old *U.S.S. Idaho*. Fifty years I chewed tobacco. Stopped here a few years back. I'm still good and healthy. I must have been involved with—I never smoked in my life.

DC: Anyway, that foreman spit on your shoe?

PR: The foreman.

DC: The foreman spit on your shoe?

PR: Yeah!

DC: And what did you do?

PR: I didn't do nothing. Wipe it off and keep going. And then—what else is there—laid off. Finally, you know, I was laid off and went into the pipe gang.

DC: Well, we were talking about times when you needed the help of the union.

PR: Yeah, well then you had the union. Yeah, there'd be times when, you know, they'd speed up the line, or something like it would be [rocking?] and we'd get behind. They'd get on your back, and all that stuff, you know, and you'd call your committeeman. And he'd straighten things out. If you didn't have that committeeman, you'd be nothing. If I hadn't—if there hadn't been that union, I wouldn't have even lasted at that place. There would have been a lot of us gone.

DC: Oh really?

PR: Oh yeah. They just look at you crossway and you're out of there. Yeah. Then when we got in the pipe gang, we run into a foreman called Dooby [sp?]. And he was a mother's mother. He was all right when he was foreman, but when he made General Foreman he became a nightmare.

DC: Really? What did he do?

PR: Yeah, what he didn't do? Whew!

DC: Give me some 'for instances".

PR: Huh?

DC: Tell me some . . .

PR: First thing, he didn't like me to start with. Boy oh boy. Well, he used to make us stand by the box, you know.

DC: What box was this?

PR: Well, our breakdown box. We used to carry production—out of our box we'd do things out of. Little vices, and all that stuff.

DC: So he made you stand by it.

PR: Yeah, stand there by it until the whistle blows, and then when you got there in the morning you'd better be up there and bring your box—he'd come up there and sneak up there and all that stuff, you know. Make sure you're standing there, at your box, to go to work. Time you left your clock to go to work, you might be way off, you know. Your clock is down in the basement, Maintenance Department—your box might be up in some other department. We did hoses, drains, [?] . . .

DC: So wherever you happened to be working?

PR: Wherever we happened to be working. We had, you know, 8-inch pipes, 6-inch pipes. Used to have them cherry pickers, you know—used to have 40-foot ladders you run up with a big wrench. We lost a lot of people in that pipe gang, falling out of the [??] and all that stuff.

DC: What happened to them?

PR: Well they just fall—you fall and you're dead!

DC: Really. How many people died?

PR: Well, I can't put my hand on it—out of all the maintenance gangs.

DC: But there were some?

PR: Yeah. That's why you use a ladder all the time—40-foot ladder. Stuff like that. Now they got these cherry pickers, take you right up.

DC: Yeah, yeah. I can't imagine the pipes you had to work on. That must have been something.

PR: And then later on, I got in the SUB committeeman—that's Supplemental Unemployment. I become a committeeman.

DC: When did you start that?

PR: What year was that? Back in the '60s.

DC: '60s you became a committeeman?

PR: Yeah, benefit committeeman is what it was.

DC: Right, yeah.

PR: It kind of eased up a little on that. I'd go out on calls, but at the time I was an alternate and [mumbles]. But you had to go check out pink slip, is what it's called. They watch you pretty close. But there's been some cases where people get caught—well like stealing, stuff like that, you know.

DC: When you first started out at Pontiac Motor, in the nickel plate and stuff like that, were most of the workers younger? Were some older? Who were you working with?

PR: Well, I think we was all about the same age.

DC: Pretty young guys?

PR: Yeah.

DC: Yeah.

PR: When I started out. Yeah. Like my foreman—well he wasn't the foreman. He was a journeyman. And I worked with him on the big, heavy, heavy welding pipe—anyway from 4 to 6-inch, 8-inch, 10-inch pipe. You had to [?] for that stuff. You talk about going up a ladder. And I jumped—he hollered. I jumped. I made journeyman. He made a foreman. Even after journeyman, he made a foreman. And when he made foreman, that kind of eased up a little bit. I didn't work for him. I worked for somebody else, which made it a lot nicer. But he used to watch me, and I didn't get in trouble. Then I'd walk up to go and get cleaned up. He'd want me to sit right there by the box—when the

whistle blows, then you go. Yeah, a big deal. But his name was Barton [?]. They called him Black Bart.

DC: Black Bart.

PR: Yeah. When Dooby made General Foreman, he hated Black Bart, but that kind of eased the pain on my back. So that worked out pretty good. Otherwise, Dooby was a son of a bitch. He was of no count. We went to a baseball game one time, down at Tiger Stadium, and we come by White Chapel . Dooby was buried in there. He had a massive stroke or something. He was fairly young too. So we stopped the bus at the cemetery and relieved ourselves on his grave. Whole busload—maintenance people. By that time he had become Assistant Superintendent. He got everybody to hate him.

DC: Did he ever discipline people?

PR: Oh everybody, yeah. Anything that crawled.

DC: Did the Union ever fight back?

PR: Well you got the union. You got to do things by the union. We had to have that union. If we didn't have that union, we'd be nothing. I know we had a black guy come into the pipe gang. First thing Dooby do is fire him.

DC: Really?

PR: Yeah, and he went out and pretty soon he had to bring him back. Then we got more pipe—black guys in there, and they worked out good.

DC: When was that? When did the first black guy come into the pipe gang?

PR: I can't remember the times, you know.

DC: Probably . . .

PR: I was already a journeyman then. Huh?

DC: When you first started . . .

PR: It was all white. There were no black people in the maintenance gang. We had them in the labor gang.

DC: Labor gang?

PR: When I was in the Navy, there was no black people in the Navy. They was—officers' orderlies—we had a few on board that old battleship, officers' orderlies, that was it. The Army has a few, something like that, but we had no black people.

DC: So when you first started at Pontiac Motors, did you see any black people working there?

PR: Yeah, but they was mostly in the foundry.

DC: In the foundry, OK.

PR: There was black people on this side—we'd call the foundry. This side of production on 8. Plant 8, stuff like that. The only black people we had there was the toilet cleaners, back in those days. That was it. That's all you seen.

DC: You mentioned the labor gang. What was that?

PR: That was when they do labor around the inside—the sweeping, cleaning, [??] stuff like that. They work with the building construction, which was journeymen. The labor gang was working with them. They'd do menial jobs.

DC: OK. Menial stuff.

PR: Yeah. But they still was part of Plant Engineering. And they worked in there. We had a lot of black people in the labor gang then. Because some are in that area.

DC: But not in the pipe gang?

PR: No, none in the skilled trades.

DC: How about nickel plate, when you were doing that?

PR: That was partial—no, no. I told you, there was no black people nowhere! Only the cleaners. Only the foundry. And only the ones that come over and did the menial toilet work, or cleaning jobs. Or cleaning up, or maybe come in there and clean or as a washer or something.

DC: What were the relations like between whites and blacks?

PR: Them days?

DC: Yeah.

PR: Oh my [??]. All my life—I come from Carolina, and they always picked on me, you know, being from the South you know.

DC: Who did? Who picked on you?

PR: Anybody that lived up north. They'd say, "What we going to do is send that black guy back to Africa, and we going to put a white guy, a hillbilly under each arm and send him back."

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

PR: When you don't have a purposeful life, it ain't really much use in even living—what the hell. I used to holler because: "I'm nothing but a slave around this house!" I wish I was a slave again. Now my life isn't meaningful, nothing.

DC: You said that your first marriage didn't, you know, lasted twenty-seven years. That's a long time.

PR: Twenty-seven years! Yeah. Well, she, I don't know. Who knows? Who's to blame who, you know what I mean? I married another woman for twenty years. She was—she was—she had a bad marriage too, and she watched me like a hawk. She had her ups and downs. She died five years ago.

DC: Well tell me, what kinds of things did you do as a family in the '50s, you know, back in the '50s. The kids were really young.

PR: Yeah.

DC: What kinds of things did you do?

PR: Waterford School system, you know, you lived in a house, go to work everyday—had one of them [stutters a bit] '57 Chevrolet, big enough for—station wagon

DC: Hold all of them.

PR: '57 station wagon. Wore that thing out. '57 station wagon. Yeah. That was a big year, they had the tail, you know, that back fender, you know. Bought it brand new. Run that thing into—the end of it. And we lived in a house out there in Waterford.

DC: Yeah?

PR: Yeah.

DC: So, um, tell me, did you guys, uh, like—it sounds like you liked to boat, OK . . .

PR: What?

DC: It sounds like you liked to boat. Did you continue on boating even after you had kids and stuff like that?

PR: Oh yeah, well, more or less, yeah. Yeah, well, well, yeah, we did. I'm still a member of the Boat Club. I was a member of the Elks and the Boat Club both. And I got to the point where two's enough, you know. Two's too many, so I give up the Boat Club and stayed with the Elks. And I went through the—I was an officer there for a couple of years, and then I went in the Drill Team—went to a lot of conventions. They got a lot of them. A lot of pictures of all that stuff, you know.

DC: You were working a lot of overtime, you said, as well.

PR: Yeah, overtime at Pontiac Motor.

DC: What did you like best about the pipe gang?

PR: Oh yeah. Good group. Well, we wasn't on production. And, you know, you had to—you had your times and all that stuff. A lot of people were friends.

DC: So friendships?

PR: Oh yeah. Yeah. We used to have a pipefitters [job card?] jamboree. I run that thing for about five, six, seven, maybe nine years, or something like that. We've got one coming up here in Traverse. I'm going to go up for that one.

DC: Oh yeah.

PR: Yeah. But I know pretty well everybody.

DC: Well tell me about . . .

PR: But when I was there, a lot of people left, and I was still there when a lot of apprentices come in, starting to make journeyman. So I knew them all, and today I know them all because we never picked up. As things went on, they cut back on production. Well you used to have 18,000 over here. Now you're lucky if you've got 2,000, out of this local, working at Pontiac Motors. It's all gone. That's why you've got retirees. The local UAW's dying. Same as the Elks is dying—all that stuff. People, they're not interested in this kind of stuff. Everybody's dying off. One day there won't be no UAW, or very limited, but they got good money in the UAW, you know. And the Elks, hey, is only 1,300. We used to be 4,800 members at Pontiac Elks. Now there's, there's 1,300 or something. And most of them are retirees. So that's dying.

DC: Well I want to talk a little bit more about what you actually did on this pipe gang. What were some of the problems that you had to solve?

PR: Well, we, you know, you know, Black Bart, he was the leader, and I, we just done our job. We did mostly pipe work and stuff like that.

DC: What kinds of problems would you have? What would happen that you'd have to fix?

PR: Well, I know we used to go—I was a floor man a long time too—I used to be a floor man [?] over in [Plant] 15.

DC: What's a floor man?

PR: Floor man took care of the—they bring in slips saying that something's broke, had to go fix it.

DC: OK, so you'd fix machinery as well.

PR: We'd go, two of us. What I did is run a check pool over there.

DC: What's that?

PR: Well you get a check—everybody gets a check once a week.

DC: OK.

PR: You know, in them days they paid you by check. And you had a number on it. What I did was run a check pool—everybody that wanted to play, they'd pay a dollar, and whoever got the best poker hand won the money—a hundred and eighty bucks, whatever. We had 300, about 300 and some people in that sucker.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

PR: I'd give them—I took care of the books. That was when I was floor man over on 15. I hadn't too long made journeyman then. We was moving the Straight 8, Pontiac Motors Straight 8, motor over there. And we was putting in the 301 V-8 in Plant 9, setting it up, to put in the cars, little V-8 engine. Now the old Straight 8 was over in 15, and it—and then, we was just getting it ready, to put out Straight [until?] we got the V-8s going. But in the meantime, it was a press room, and I was going around getting people—it took—I had to start on Wednesday to go around and get the check pool up.

DC: [laughs] It took up a bunch of your time, it sounds like.

PR: Yeah! And then what happened there, I'd go around on Wednesday to get the check pool up, and uh, and uh I'd go [?] seven or eight free rides, and all that, but I took care of the books. And I made my car payments and stuff on that. And uh, and uh, you knows, the guys would come up, I'd say, "You get a good score, come up and see me," you know, "but otherwise don't mess man. I ain't got time." So they'd come when they had good scores, and I'd put them together and pay the guy—had a little—you know, I proved who

had the what. Pay them off, and then start next Wednesday, start picking up the check pool again. Worked that way for months, years. I was doing good. Then the boss, General Foreman, come over and said, "We're gonna move your ass." I says, "Wait a minute. Can I buy you? Can I pay protection?" Next thing you know, moved out and that was the end of that.

DC: So you got moved out. You had no control over where you got moved?

PR: No, even—they could move you wherever they want.

DC: When did you get moved?

PR: Oh . . .

DC: When was that when you got moved?

PR: You mean what year?

DC: Yeah.

PR: Who knows?

DC: You don't know.

PR: You see, I made—I went in the pipe gang in '52, '53, and I made journeyman in three years. So that would be . . .

DC: '55, '56 . . .

PR: . . . '56, '57, somewhere in that area, yeah.

DC: Yeah.

PR: But I wanted to make journeyman when I was on the floor there. So I worked there for quite awhile, a year maybe, maybe a year and a half. And then I moved. So it would be a year and a half after—be four and a half years after '52 or '53.

DC: OK, so late '50s.

PR: Yeah, late '50s. '58 . . .

DC: So it sounds like people got pretty involved with that, with that check pool.

PR: Oh yeah. That was doing all right.

DC: So what other kinds of things did . . .

PR: We didn't make much money in them days either, you know what I mean?

DC: Yeah?

PR: Yeah.

DC: Even with the overtime?

PR: Yeah, they'd get overtime.

DC: But I mean, did you make enough to live on OK?

PR: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, we made—yeah, did all right.

DC: OK.

PR: But we'd have nothing extra. I think our biggest day of the weekend was—well we went down South. I went to Niagara Falls with the kids. I think our biggest day was on Friday, going to McDonald's. That was it.

DC: That was a big deal?

PR: Yeah.

DC: OK. Yeah, yeah.

PR: Yeah, staying alive. Look back at the good times. Until I married this other woman, I used to—like I told you—I used to do yard work. Seemed like I was a slave around the house. Then we moved to Vegas for ten years.

DC: Did you?

PR: Oh yeah. So now I ain't got nothing to do but sit around and watch these old people complain. I think I'd rather be back down on the—too much, having a lot of work to do. I miss it.

DC: Yeah.

PR: Yeah, maybe my life would be different if I had, didn't have that slip [accident, not work-related], you know. I can get up and walk, you know, something like that. But you can't walk too much.

DC: That looks pretty bad.

PR: Yeah I know. Well, it's going to be that way.

DC: Is it still infected?

PR: No, three years. They give me antibiotics. And yeah, they just come—took two toes off. Well, you get up in the morning and everything is beautiful, but you get up and stand on it, goes down, it don't come back. You got, you got stuff up here, you know, it seems—stuff up here, you know, that don't let, that don't let the blood come back.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

PR: So, it ought to be lucky—I can walk from the parking into here, I'm all right. But see, where I live, is, you got to park over there, come in and get your wheelchair—which I got to go, into the middle of the building, go up to the fourth floor. It's one of those senior places where everybody's got their nose in your own business.

DC: Yeah, right, right.

PR: And I go down there, read them their rights every once in awhile. Right now they got this [name] Dad died, so I got to go to that funeral at 6:00 tonight. Then I go to the Elks for euchre.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

PR: Tomorrow I got to go to a funeral—I mean, funeral tonight, funeral tomorrow. I got a blazer I can wear.

DC: Tell me, earlier, uh, you said that, uh, that everytime—was it Charlie Melton? . . .

PR: Yeah.

DC: . . . ran for office, you always put someone up against him.

PR: Charlie. Well, not so much putting anybody up, but I was campaigning. It seemed like every time Charlie run for something, I was there campaigning for somebody else. Charlie never did cotton to me too good. But I can't remember, you know, who all we, who all we—I liked Charlie and everything. But he kind of tolerated me, and that was it. I didn't know his wife that much, but he kind of divorced about the same time I did, years ago, thirty years ago. He got—twenty-five or thirty years ago—he got a divorce, and we got into this idea of, if you married a woman for ten years, they get, they can get into your retirement for, after your retirement. And when I got a divorce, he said her retirement is separate, and mine is separate. We got it in a clause. She's the one that screwed up, something like that. But you can't live off—like a buddy of mine, lived on the same street that I did—Irwin—in Waterford, he uh, he uh—I'm talking to him one time and [?] shopping. He had these badges and buttons—he's retired now. He retired after I did, of course. And I told him, I said, "Man, what's this full-time shit?" He said, "Well, see . . . ." They got a divorce, which he thought would never happen. And, he

said, "Well, they take half of everything." Sell the house, and she gets half his retirement. Whatever he gets, she gets, takes half of it. So if you, if you are married to a woman, and you die, she gets half, until she dies. All right. When you get a divorce, they get half of your retirement. So he had to go to work! Unless he, you know—he said, "I had to go to work, or starve to death." Now they sold the house and probably split everything. He had cash, but you know that dwindled after awhile. The cost of living eat all that garbage up. And the next thing you know, he was out there working, steady. I worked a few menial jobs, here and there, but I kept my retirement. That house—if you had to have something done—the government don't do it unless you're the sole owner. I said, hell, I'll just quit being an owner. I don't want that stupid house. In the meantime, the wife I had, she got mad about it. You got—after you've been married, after you get married down the road, what you own is yours, what's mine mine, or whatever. Who gives a shit? Too late for anything. I mean that's the way mostly they set it up, you know. I'm not saying it's right or wrong . . .

DC: Yeah, yeah.

PR: . . . who does what. But anyway, he uh, she—yeah, he—you got to give up half—now what happened was Melton, he was getting a divorce. And she was taking half his retirement, [penalty?]. And in the meantime, you—a few down the road, he married Bonnie. I never did know Bonnie too good, but I know Melton a lot.

DC: But it sounds like you were at least involved with local union politics.

PR: Oh yeah, well I was a twenty-two-year—I was a committeeman here for twenty-two years.

DC: Tell me about your job as committeeman—the benefits committee?

PR: Well, you take, you go, get on cases. And you went to meetings with interplant management. Could be the employment manager, or some other body, you know, that's sent in on our sub-committee meetings, to sign grievances. We would—what we would do is sit there and argue, you know. Of course we was always for the employee, and they was for the management, of course. And when we had a problem, we had to send it to the umpire.

DC: Did you get elected to that position?

PR: No, you're appointed. No election. Appointed by the International. Worked out of region B-1.

DC: Oh you did, OK. All right. So you were out of the plant then.

PR: Didn't have nothing to do with this local.

DC: Yeah, OK.

PR: In the meantime, they moved some—meantime we all used to be over there at the—did all of the benefits over there. Then now they sent the committeeman—they sent the benefit representative over here. And then you still kept in-the-plant representatives.

DC: How do you suppose you got that job?

PR: Appointed.

DC: But how . . .

PR: A friend of mine, Howard Arnold, I think it was, he was in politics, and somebody made governor or something back in those days, and he got, he got, he got to become a Secretary of War—oh, Secretary—Secretary of *State* branch office. So he took one of those over and quit here and everything. I don't know all the particulars on that.

DC: That was the connection that got you appointed . . .

PR: Yeah, he got there, and before he left he appointed me—I mean he got me into the subcommittee, and then I got appointed—Reuther was still working there.

DC: Did you like that work?

PR: Yeah, it was all right [softly]. Get you off the work—out on cases, stuff like that.

DC: Did you miss the [pipe gang?]. [interpreted as being a committeeman]

PR: That was—you'd only do it during the day a few hours a day.

DC: Oh OK, it wasn't a full-time.

PR: Oh no. It's full-time nowadays.

DC: Yeah, but not then?

PR: Not then—you'd have to get a yellow slip. Oh yeah, everybody hated you. But you got a problem, you go out in the field and talk to people, and then you come back and you know, talk this and that. Yeah, you just go on grievance procedures.

DC: OK, so you had your regular job . . .

PR: But you call—somebody'd call a committeeman, I had to go take it. And then you'd have to write a grievance or you'd write something to—you'd have meetings in there with management. And then if we didn't get it there, we had to send it to the umpire.

DC: If I heard you right, you said that these were grievances over benefits.

PR: That's just benefits, that's all. [??] Used to be separate.

DC: Right

PR: Supplementary—I think there was sick benefits, supplemental benefits.

DC: Supplementary unemployment.

PR: Yeah, and something else. Supplement, health—seems like it was three of us. Damn! What would be the third one? Unemployment?

DC: Maybe pension, unemployment, and health, I would think.

PR: That's it—the pensions, pensions separate, SUB was separate, and health was separate.

DC: Yeah.

PR: There was three of us. Now they're all three together.

DC: Sure.

PR: We don't have no separate.

DC: So, were you pretty busy with those cases?

PR: What's that?

DC: Were you pretty busy with those cases? Did you . . .

PR: Not really.

DC: Not really, OK.

PR: Supplemental was more or less—it was fresh and new and stuff like that. At that time I think they paid 85%. Nowadays it's 95—maybe it was 70, 85, I don't know. Now it's 95.

DC: When it came in, it was because there were a whole lot of layoffs and all . . .

PR: Well, when a person was out of work . . .

DC: Did you ever get laid off during the '50s?

PR: Not really.

DC: No?

PR: They offered us a stock plan, General Motors, without the SUB plan. Reuther said no, we want the SUB plan. So he said—we—they took the SUB plan instead of the stock plan.

DC: Did you . . .

PR: We'd have been better with the stock plan.

DC: As it turns out, maybe. Did you pay attention to what Walter Reuther was doing during the '50s and '60s?

PR: Oh yeah, yeah.

DC: Yeah, how so? How did you follow what the International Union was doing?

PR: Well, you know, well you're in the union, you talk about that. I mean, you know, you listen to everything. Everything we got, we owe to the union.

DC: Yeah. So did you think that Reuther and those officers were doing a good job?

PR: Oh yeah. Because that's when the—if it wasn't for that UAW, I would be dog beans.

DC: Yeah.

PR: Nothing.

DC: Yeah.

PR: They saved me a lot, man I'll tell you, you know. Yeah, that Dooby, I would see him over to nickel plate when he was a foreman on the pipe gang, not a journeyman. I'd go up—we'd—when they had a wreck over there, you know, dipping stuff, they was automatic, they'd come through with these racks, dip them—when they had a wreck, we had to get up there and clean that shit up. I'd dive right in there. He'd pat you on the back and everything. It wasn't my job, but I did it anyhow. Then when he made General Motors [meant General Foreman], he'd cut your throat. He didn't need you no more.

DC: Hmm.

PR: He was a good old buddy in them days.

DC: So what do you think got into him?

PR: Who knows. Then you got that [Shelman?]. Shelman brought me in there. He come out of Minnesota. And then [Tangent?], he was just a kid running around there.

DC: What was that name?

PR: That's Tangent. [sp?}

DC: Tangent?

PR: But he—Les was a kind of sneaky behind-the-back boy. Up front he was—behind the back, cut your throat.

DC: Was he a foreman?

PR: Yeah. He become Superintendent.

DC: Superintendent, OK.

PR: Yeah. And then Shelman become Superintendent too.

DC: What was his name now?

PR: Shelman [sp?].

DC: Shelman?

PR: Bob Shelman, yeah. And Dooby, he become Superintendent. But they all come up through the same ranks there. Dooby, he become mean. He used to get on old Black Bart's ass. We used to have a guy down there in the pipe gang—I can't think of what the hell his name was—older foreman, been there years—[Spy?] or something. He used to get on every morning, in front of the people, in front of the. He got [frail?] and elderly, said, "I'm getting out of here." And after he got out, that's after Dooby made General. And after, after Dooby made General, after this guy left, Barton, he got on Barton's ass. That was the best thing that ever happened there. Because that Barton, he really give it to him. I worked for him for three years. Jump every minute.

DC: Um really, [??].

PR: Whew. That was the best thing that ever happened, when Dooby got on his ass. But he—he's on everybody's ass. But anyways, Barton, he finally ended up going to—then Dooby, he was only—God he was only 40-something, 30-something, died, died on the [??]. We all got, went out and got drunk. Good riddance. He was a son of a bitch.

DC: How did you guys on the pipe gang get along with the production workers? Did you guys ever . . .

PR: We all got along, yeah.

DC: Yeah.

PR: Well it was a union, you know.

DC: Yeah.

PR: Yeah.

DC: I've heard that, you know, from some people that there was kind of a division between the skilled workers and the production workers.

PR: Well, I don't know. I, I look at it this day—I say to myself, you know men with skilled trades, this and that, we should have had a better this, or better retirement, better this thing. [??] retirement's the same. In other words, if you're the lowest, or whatever, you still get the same retirement, stuff like that. And hey, they got to live too, you know. Ain't no free lunch out there. And I always say, well, we should this, we should that—the only thing, there wasn't that much difference in the pay, either. Of course then after awhile, they did get a bigger spread in their pay, but yeah, they got a bigger spread. [Aside] I'm just looking to take a pill.

DC: Oh, you've got to take your pill?

PR: I take these Tylenols.

DC: Oh yeah, yeah.

PR: Eat them things like peanuts. Everyone once in awhile, then 9, by 9 o'clock at night, I don't take no more until the next morning. I think it's psychological or something.

DC: Hey, it's got to help some.

PR: Yeah. I'm going to drive out to Vegas here in July. We drove a—flew a plane out there.

DC: Really.

PR: I always take a survey. You go into the airport, they got these buckets over—you remember the little old trays they used to put on there and you put your keys and stuff in there? Now they got these buckets. If you can strip right down, put everything in that bucket to go through that machine, do it. Shoes, eye-teeth, everything. Because if you make a noise, they take you away, go strip you down anyhow.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

PR: So you might as well do it all right there. Shoot, I mean, and then if you go through it, you just go over and pick your stuff up and get ready to go. Because you see I've got

metal in this arm—shoes have all got metal in them. So anyway, you're better off to put everything in that—that's why they've got these buckets, tubs now, to put your stuff in.

DC: Washtub, yeah.

PR: Airport, yeah. These guys—so much for securing the borders down here. There are guys that come over on that trailer—seventeen of them died. What happened to that big security? So anyway, when they had 9-1-1, they tried to stop—the 2000 semis come over here everyday to feed the assembly plants in this country. General Motors has fifty-two plants in Mexico alone, if not more nowadays. They bring these parts over for these assemblies. They tried to stop them, and the government, the people said, "You stop us, and we got to shut our manufacturing down." Because everything's made in Mexico. So you stop those big trucks, look at them, you've got trouble. Two-day supply.

DC: Got a lot coming from Canada too.

PR: Canada. Yeah, every morning, [??], here they come over in them big old semis. They bring in cigarettes, and everything. General Motors can hire a man in Canada $17 an hour cheaper than they can hire a man here. No wonder they're going to Canada. Huh? They just sent our Lifesavers over there.

DC: Yeah, that's right.

PR: They don't even grow—they don't even grow oranges in Florida no more—they're in Brazil! You're not paying that guy coming out of Atlanta, Georgia, $9 an hour to pick an orange [voice rising]. You're—look what you can get down in Brazil for *nothing*? That's where your oranges come from. That's why you go to get an orange in the morning, it ain't fit to eat. Yeah. So they, you know, they're canning stuff there, you know orange juice, squeezing. I was talking to my Aunt who lives in Carolina, a lot of tobacco there. She says very little tobacco anymore. They ain't subsidizing anymore—it all come out of Winston, and you know, Raleigh, R.J. Reynolds said one time, "To hell with American tobacco smokers. We got China. You guys ain't nothing. Them fuckers over there can suck up those cigarettes like there's no tomorrow." And the biggest selling cigarettes in this country are coming from China—generics. I think they got generics coming out of Canada too. If you can save $17 an hour from a man in Canada, look at what you can save in Mexico.

DC: That's true.

PR: Wages.

DC: Yeah, Mexico's complaining about competition from China now, so it just keeps on going.

PR: Now the Chinese, they just had a thing of—I just got a piece—did you read that piece in the paper, the adoption? Five thousand adopted Chinese coming over here every year.

DC: I guess I haven't seen that . . .

End of Interview