

Interviewee: Baldino, Nicholas and Jeanne
Interviewer: Robin Sellers
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Sellers: Nick, if you would tell us first, a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

N. Baldino: I was born in New York City, and at the tender age of two months I was whisked away to a small seashore town in New Jersey, called Elberon, which is part of a larger town called Long Branch, New Jersey. I was moved to Ocean Township, that area, at age seven. So I attended grammar school in a little town called Oakhurst at Ocean Township, and then went on to Asbury Park High School, which today would be called a regional school, but at that time it serviced probably children in a fifteen mile radius. There was only one high school. I graduated in 1941, at age sixteen. The conscription for World War II had started the prior year. We were not in the war, but they were drafting, I guess, twenty-one year olds. They were only drafting them for a year. Those poor fellows that were drafted then ended up serving five to six years because the war started, of course, December 7, 1941. We're often asked the question where we were. Well, I was a sixteen year old college freshmen, and I remember the day vividly because I was at the Polo Grounds in New York City watching my favorite New York Giants play a Brooklyn team. The announcement was made that we were at war and that all of the service people at the game should immediately report back to their units. It didn't mean very much to me because I'm looking at age twenty-one and that's a long four and a half years away. I'm saying that if there is a war, it's going to be over before I'm twenty-one. Little did we know what the future held. I went home after that game.

To give you an idea of where the country was economically, my program cost me ten cents and the ticket to game was seventy-five cents. Today, the programs are \$10 and the tickets to the games are \$70. I just like to reflect on the economic condition of that time.

Sellers: We were just coming out of the Depression.

N. Baldino: Yes, barely. I don't like to look upon World War II as a salvation because of the havoc and what happened, but it really did economically regenerate our country. In going home, and having been out of school young, most of my friends were a year or two older. Patriotic as we all were then, we all ran down and joined the Marine Corps. I went with four other friends and just happened to be the only one who passed a rather rigorous physical.

Sellers: But you were too young.

N. Baldino: So I went home and presented this to my mother because she had to sign for me.

The other four boys couldn't qualify for the Marines. They had to look in other areas. I guess fortunately, my mother refused to sign. Otherwise we probably wouldn't be having this conversation today, having gone to the Pacific and seen what the Marines did for us. When interviews of World War II people take place, some of them did great things. They're always looked upon as heroes and they always say, "I'm not a hero. The heroes didn't come home." I think that's pretty magnanimous. I don't put myself, obviously, in that class, and as we go along, you'll understand why. I was allowed to stay in school.

Sellers: Where were you attending college?

N. Baldino: I had been a year at Upsala College in East Orange and then on to Fordham University in New York. In 1942, when the battles were being fought, the real battles of the Pacific, we hadn't reached Guadalcanal yet – Midway and the Coral Sea were the turning points – I was getting ready to go in the service then, because on November (I don't remember the exact date), but in November of '42, the draft age was dropped to eighteen. It was three weeks after my eighteenth birthday, I do remember that. So I was called in, and as a college person, we were given two very nice options. One was to choose a service that we liked. The other was that I would be allowed to finish my semester and would be called right after Christmas and New Year's. So I went down and enlisted into the Army Air Corps. It was a branch of the Army then. It had not become an independent branch. I went home for my Christmas break and after Christmas I remember staying at home. The Yankees couldn't have spring training in Florida because there were travel restrictions, so the Yankees came to our high school, to work out in the gym. It was cold, of course, in January. I had played some baseball and I was allowed to go out and pitch batting practice out on the Deal Lake stadium we had, because they wouldn't risk any of their players, of course, in that kind of weather throwing baseballs. I was just waiting for the call to the service, which came – I believe it was January 22, 1943.

So again, we had survived the Pearl Harbor attack and we had come back and won the battle of the canal. Media coverage wasn't what it is today, so we'd try to read the newspaper or listen to the radio to find out what was going on over there. I was just starting my training. I went to Biloxi, Mississippi, at Keesler Field. That's where it started for me. It was a tent city with mud practically up to your waist, not very nice place. We went back maybe ten years ago, to revisit. Now they have a hotel, they have a golf course. It looks like a resort, which it didn't look like in World War II.

Sellers: They have casinos there now, don't they?

N. Baldino: Yes. There's gambling there and it's really revived. A very nice Gulf city. It's a pretty city!

Sellers: Are you an only child?

N. Baldino: No. I have a sister.

Sellers: What were your parents' feelings? Obviously, your mother refused to sign when you were sixteen, but once you actually got into the service, was this considered inevitable by you and your family or were there misgivings?

N. Baldino: I think we considered it inevitable. I don't know how much understanding there was of the total scene outside of the family. Now in Iraq, they report the one or two or three deaths every day.

Sellers: Well, I know we weren't getting that.

N. Baldino: Well, the magnitude alone. I mean, we look back. One life is as important as a million. In those days, they didn't really —

Sellers: They didn't announce the deaths. The only way you knew that there was a death was if it was involving you.

N. Baldino: Correct.

Sellers: There was no overall reporting.

N. Baldino: The prior generation — I'm now eighty years old, so on May 6th, my mother — she died only four years ago, so she lived to be ninety-six. I don't think they had much of a concept of the war outside of how it affected the family because I was the only boy. I had one sister and I was in it. They knew friends of mine that were in it from high school and the start of college. So I don't think it had the effect it would have today where people live with it daily.

Sellers: So your mother didn't hang on to your coattails and cry as you left for —

N. Baldino: Well, mothers always cry when you leave to go out on a date.

Sellers: Right, but it was within perspective?

N. Baldino: Yes! And your dad always has to stand there and not cry or not even hug you because that wasn't considered manly in those days. It's much, much better now. I'm much more pleased when I see my children with their children and how we are with our grandchildren. It's a whole different world.

Sellers: Okay, you're off in Biloxi at Keesler Field, which is mud. Is this basic training or pre-flight training or —?

N. Baldino: This is basic training and waiting for assignment to what they call a College Training Detachment. There were two elitist groups for those of us that had started college. One was ASTP and the other was the Air Corps Cadet program or the Naval, which was even better.

It started a year before. I didn't realize that at the time.

Sellers: The Naval was the V-12, wasn't it?

N. Baldino: Yes, it was the V-12. It was on the campuses along with the ROTC people, but I had not belonged to those. I was too young. Otherwise I would have been in one of those programs.

Sellers: Did you end up in ASTP?

N. Baldino: No, I ended up in the Air Corps Cadet program. Every month we'd be shipped out and we didn't know where we were going. I do remember that the rumors would start in your third week. Everybody said we're going to Syracuse University. I said, "Boy, that's great!" because I knew at least twenty people from my prior life in high school that were up in Syracuse. It'd be like old home week for me. We went down to look at the bulletin board in the fourth week. Lo and behold, they were shipping a large contingent to Syracuse, but they cut it off about three names above mine. I ended up going to Lynchburg, Virginia, to Lynchburg, what is now, University. Of course, they were all colleges then.

Sellers: What were you doing while you were waiting?

N. Baldino: The usual marching, on the range, the carbines and whatever, the .45s. We'd go out to the ranges, and basic training.

Sellers: Were they testing you at all, to see what your proficiencies were?

N. Baldino: Oh yes! We took the tests, and the first one was the day after we got off the, I guess it was a four-day train trip from Newark to Biloxi. I think I tested at 158 and they thought that couldn't be possible. So they said, "We'll give you a couple days rest and try again." I think I came up at 165. I could always test well. My grades were never that good, but I must have had some sort of proclivity for —

Sellers: Something that kicked in in a clinch!

N. Baldino: For testing! I don't know whether that could be any good. I still went to Lynchburg College, now University, with maybe 175 others. Many, of course, became my friends because you spend a few months there. We had athletic teams and we bonded in many ways: running the Burma Road, which was a ten mile journey over red hot clay, every morning.

Sellers: In Lynchburg?

N. Baldino: In Lynchburg! You know how the heat comes right up out of the ground. At the time I didn't know where I was going; it was good training for New Guinea. It came out of the

coral there, but here it came out of the clay.

Sellers: How long did you stay in Lynchburg?

N. Baldino: I was there for, I guess, four months. They actually give you some kind of certificate that you could use to apply toward your college credits. Of course, as I say, all of these little colleges that were used prior to World War II ending, became really major universities. You know what happened, the places like Rider in New Jersey used to be – it looked like a two-room grade school. It's now a major university with 11,000-14,000 students.

Sellers: Oh yeah, the colleges and airports grew dramatically. Many of them stayed and just kept growing.

N. Baldino: And as referenced by Tom Brokaw, the GI Bill was the greatest thing that ever happened to us, because I was unique, having graduated from high school and starting college. Most of the level of education probably averaged seventh or eighth grade.

Sellers: Well, so many people that came out of the war had never dreamed of being able to go to college. Even if they didn't go to college, going to trade school and things like that just created a whole economic system in a country that wouldn't have existed. Okay, so you are at Lynchburg for about four months. What kind of training are you getting besides running the Burma Road? Do you know where you are going to be placed, at this point?

N. Baldino: No. They send you to Nashville for assignment, assigned you out of Nashville.

Sellers: What kind of goodies did they have for you every morning when you got up in Lynchburg? What was your routine like on a daily basis?

N. Baldino: Well, after the physical part, the running part, you'd come back to chow and then you'd go to class. You'd go to meteorology classes. They had classes designed around what you might do as an Air Corps person. Actually, book training.

Sellers: Were you heading for a pilot or co-pilot?

N. Baldino: At the time, yes. Again, we got to Nashville, like the ASTP people, they didn't need pilots anymore. They needed radio operators and gunners, bombardiers. It was almost as though you signed up under the pretext of being a glamour boy and all of the sudden they took the silk scarf and the goggles away —

Sellers: And you were a grease monkey!

N. Baldino: They gave you a .50-caliber gun. When I got to Nashville, they sent us to radio school at Scott Field, Illinois, and then gunnery school in Harlingen, Texas, then to bombardier

school in Ellington Field in Houston.

Sellers: You were just all over the map.

N. Baldino: Yes, and no specialization. Finished up the end of '43, the beginning of '44. Again, ready for future assignment, they sent us to Salt Lake City, Camp Kearns in Salt Lake City, Utah. From Camp Kearns to Vancouver Barracks in Washington, the State of Washington, eleven miles from Portland.

Sellers: Are you beginning to get the idea that you're going to be heading to the Pacific?

N. Baldino: Sort of. [Laughs]

Sellers: They keep moving you further and further West.

N. Baldino: I'm going West. That I know. But the great part of it is that you're really a nomad. You're not assigned to anything or anybody. You're just going wherever the troops are moved.

Sellers: Is that hard on you psychologically?

N. Baldino: Not at the time, because when you are eighteen and nineteen —

Sellers: Right, you go with the flow.

N. Baldino: — nothing is stressful.

Sellers: You are being fed and clothed and moved and you don't have to worry about where your next meal is coming from.

N. Baldino: Correct, and you don't have to think for yourself because they're telling you where to go. You just pick up and go. The nicest part about Vancouver Barracks was we could sneak into a place called Janson Beach, which would be the West Coast Coney Island, I guess. There was some activity there. As we prepared to leave, I knew we weren't flying — and then one day they put us on the trucks and they took us to Portland, Oregon.

Sellers: You said you knew you weren't flying?

N. Baldino: We knew we weren't flying overseas. I wasn't going yet because I wasn't even assigned to a crew. I was a replacement. So we got to the Columbia River and there were these series of little boats. They were Kaiser boats. Kaiser was — he made cars, I guess, later on.

Sellers: Henry J.

N. Baldino: Right. So they started putting the troops onto these little boats. I thought maybe they would take us to the end of the Columbia River, then we'd get on a real ship to go overseas. When we got to the end of the Columbia River, we just kept going. Thirty-seven days.

Sellers: How many people did they have on these Kaiser boats?

N. Baldino: Oh, I wouldn't even guess, a few thousand.

Sellers: You were packed in like sardines.

N. Baldino: It was awful! [Laughs]. The bunks were I don't know how high, six or seven high. To me at the time it looked high, I don't know how high it was. But the ships were tossed about. Half of them had never been near the ocean.

Sellers: So far in your story, I've not heard you mention any time on the water. How did you fare?

N. Baldino: Well, I fared pretty well, being brought up on the ocean. I did a lot of swimming. I was near beaches. I was used to the water and used to the – I had friends who had boats, so I used to – I am not a boater, but I took a lot of trips. It didn't bother me. I never once got sick. But with thirty-seven days, they kept telling us they were taking a route whereby we could subvert the submarines. That's why we were taking such a circuitous route.

Sellers: Were there a bunch of these boats together or were you just out there all by yourself?

N. Baldino: I never saw any of the other boats.

Sellers: So for all you knew, you were out there all by yourself.

N. Baldino: Correct. We were alone. The only entertainment we had were boxing matches. One of the crew members (who looked like a small gorilla) had been undefeated in twenty-eight crossings. The purses actually reached \$1,000, which was then a year's wage. They kept looking for someone to defeat this champion. We actually found somebody who had been a professional boxer in his prior life. When we reached port, which was Noumea, New Caledonia, this person was kept in New Caledonia as part of the boxing team. The athletes are always siphoned off and given special assignment so they can perform for whatever Army or Air Force they're part of. So that's where we started. My journey went up through New Guinea, and I guess Rabaul and — the New Georgia Islands were staffed by the Japanese; the Japs were still there. I remember Biak and I remember Finchhaven. New Guinea was a terrible place, having never even seen country in our own country – all I saw was the beach and city. It was quite a different — I now reflect on how primitive — I mean, there are places there that are still unexplored today.

Sellers: Yes, its very tropical.

N. Baldino: There were stories of Japanese prisoners after forty or fifty years being found up in the hills and whatever.

Sellers: What was your duty?

N. Baldino: I was a replacement. Having had the training as a gunner and a bombardier and a radio person, I was sent up to Henderson Field in Guadalcanal, which was then, of course, secure, in our hands, as part of the headquarters. You were sort of like a utility player in baseball. When somebody would either be sick or shot or not up here, they need a crew member, you would replace them, because you were the jack of all trades kind of person.

Sellers: What did you do in the mean time, when you weren't replacing someone?

N. Baldino: Not much of anything.

Sellers: Recreation-wise? How did you entertain yourself?

N. Baldino: Well, there was plenty of swimming there. I remember the ocean there and the coral reefs. The Polynesian girls weren't quite like they're depicted in some of the movies like "South Pacific," except in Noumea. I'm back to Noumea, which was a French penal colony, they mated with the female natives and they produced some very, very, beautiful people. But from that point on, from New Guinea to Guadalcanal to Morotai, you didn't see any of that. Everybody had rings or bones through their noses. They were "natives." I do remember how great the Australians and the New Zealand fighters were, the ground fighters. They didn't have much in the air force, nor did we; I think we were like 35,000 as opposed to the — when I went to London with our friends for their fiftieth anniversary of the Eighth and Ninth air forces, they were over a million. (That's a whole other story, but, my wife and I were privileged to be invited. They let us go as a honorary members of the Eighth and Ninth because I'd never been back to the Pacific Islands, nor do I have any desire to go back).

Sellers: Not the tropical paradise to you that its been billed as, huh? You were with the Thirteenth Air Force. What was the breakdown? What group? What squadron?

N. Baldino: We had two heavy bombardment groups, the 5th and the 11th, I believe. That's where I did most of my duty.

Sellers: You were interchangeable with those two?

N. Baldino: Yes, they'd send you wherever. I mean, it was unbelievable. I don't really know how many fighter groups we had. I remember the 339th Fighter Group. I think we have to reflect on the fact that the Pacific war was so dominated by the Navy and the Marine Corps that other

than the Sixth and Eighth armies, which fought two major combats, we were just an appendage. The Fifth Air Force which was out there was even larger than we, and the air forces didn't get autonomy until, I guess, after I got there. The Thirteenth wasn't formed until '43, and they didn't get autonomy until mid-'44. General Twining, I guess, was there. Our commanding general was Paul B. Wurtsmith, who was in his thirties, which was unheard of. I always remember, he'd come down and drink with us and talk with us, and we'd always ask him what we should call him because now I was nineteen, so I was getting to be a man. He's maybe thirty-six. I said, "What can I call you?" He was an old man. He used to say, "You can call me whatever you want tonight, but remember, tomorrow I'm 'General.'" [Laughs] It went that far. Later on, much to my dismay, after I'd gotten home and been discharged, he died over here in a plane crash. Still not forty years old, but he had survived the war that made him a general. He became a general by being an ace fighter. That's how they moved up in Marine Corps. It was always Joe Foss, whom I had the pleasure of meeting. And Pappy Boyington, who did that television series. I never met Boyington; I did meet Joe Foss. But they were the real kingpins over there. Of course, our New Jersey Admiral, Bull Halsey, was big under Chester Nimitz.

Sellers: Robert Mitchum.

N. Baldino: Robert Mitchum. [Laughs] Yeah, we had a parade in New Guinea. Doug MacArthur (I call him Doug as though I knew him) – he appeared. I'm sure we had 40-50,000 troops.

Sellers: Probably by his command.

N. Baldino: I looked up and he was probably all of fifty-fifty or fifty-six. I'm saying, "How can that old man stand up in this heat." He didn't waver. I didn't realize he'd lived there all his life, practically. He was acclimated.

Sellers: Are there any particular occasions or events that you recall that scared the pants off of you? Or made you see things in a different light?

N. Baldino: Ahh, no. As I say, I was pretty lucky. The flying part was never scary except when you looked down at the Pacific Ocean.

Sellers: Now, how much flying did you do?

N. Baldino: Probably forty missions. There was no anti-aircraft and there was no fighter coverage because the fighter planes couldn't fly as far as the bombers.

Sellers: What type of plane were you flying in?

N. Baldino: B-24s when we went to Balakapapin and bombed the air fields. The Japanese — it wasn't like Polesi [sic] in Europe; the Germans had real anti-aircraft. When you saw the

Japanese equipment after you took islands where we had cut them off and let them starve. MacArthur was a genius. I mean, say what you will, he saved lives like you can't believe. The Marines under Howling "Mad" Smith, they just stormed beachheads at Okinawa, Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, Saipan, Palau, you name those islands and they were buried four and five deep on those beachheads. Not so with MacArthur's troops. MacArthur would go around them, cut them off. I mean, he landed at Leyte and I bet he didn't lose five men.

Sellers: He was effective. He was pompous, but he was effective.

N. Baldino: Oh, unbelievably so. That's why Mark is named Mark Douglas. We named him Douglas for the great MacArthur. Susan always thought that the Bob Hope stories were interesting. I saw him in New Guinea and I saw him on Guadalcanal.

Sellers: Now, this is when he was with the USO? Tell me about those.

N. Baldino: He had great shows. He had Carol Landis, Patty Thomas and Jerry Colonna and his usual staff at that time. His favorite line was every time a show would be interrupted for an air raid and we'd all would have to scatter for the shelter, and he'd say, "Don't anybody go home. We're going to continue the show when the air raid's over. So don't anyone leave." He maintained that sense of humor. Many years later, Jeanne and I were having dinner with friends at the Columbus Club and he walked in, coincidentally with Joe Foss and I think Bert Bachrach, and Lee Iacocca. We were being hosted by the brother of our host, one of the Fugazy brothers, the limousine people from New York. He brought his very important contingent over to our table and introduced them. After that, later, at one of our Giant football luncheons in New York at the Waldorf, he came in late. He was to appear on the dias, and I had been away prior to this dinner and I didn't get my usual two good tables up front. At the last minute, they gave me two near the door. I had twenty friends and customers there and they were all ragging me about "what happened? You've lost your pull here." As this was going on, Bob Hope appeared at the door, and not wanting to interrupt the program, slid into an empty seat at our table and said, "Do you mind if I sit here? I have to get up there, but I don't want to disrupt the program." I told the people at the table, "See what I did for you! Bob is at our table!" But he was always so gracious and had that wonderful personality where he could deal with the common man or with kings and it didn't matter. Susan particularly likes that Bob Hope aspect. So you do remember the good things and not much of the bad.

Being assigned the way it was, I made very few friends. The only total Army friend – by total Army, I mean I knew this person from no other facet of my life – is one Iowa farmer who was our supply sergeant, who's been out to visit me. He's the only link that I have, because I was never a crew member. When we went back to England with the Eighth Army group for the fiftieth anniversary, these men had served together for the entire time. Those that lived, they had a group that every year went back to London, and on the odd years, the people from London come to the United States. This has been passed on to their children and now their grandchildren so that this relationship will continue. Absolutely none of that.

Sellers: What kind of missions did you fly? You would be called in as a replacement for a radioman or —?

N. Baldino: Or bombardier or gunner.

Sellers: How early or how soon before the mission would you know? Would it be last minute call?

N. Baldino: Yes.

Sellers: So you never knew when you woke up in the morning if you were going to be going on a flight or not?

N. Baldino: Right.

Sellers: The B-24s have what, eight men?

N. Baldino: Ten.

Sellers: What kind of missions were you flying? Were they just reconnaissance?

N. Baldino: No, no. They were mostly to bomb targets. Reconnaissance groups were separate, as I remember. The radar and the instruments, you know, were terrible. You would think that you lost some planes because they were shot down or whatever. But if you get separated from the pack, some never found their way back, I guess. Again, age was the great protector, because I noticed that you couldn't train as a pilot if you were over twenty-six. That was the age for pilot training. The old men of these crews were probably – the oldest were in their late twenties. Really, men in their thirties were armament people on the ground, servicing the planes and doing other kinds of things. My age group, we didn't worry very much. It wasn't a matter of courage, it was a matter of maturity. [Laughs]

Sellers: Right, you were invincible at that age, so what was the problem.

N. Baldino: We didn't have a wife or children or any tie to home other than the house from which we came. There was no responsibility left there.

Sellers: What was a typical bombing mission like?

N. Baldino: Like eleven, twelve hours, in planes that probably flew about 200 miles an hour. When you took off in one of those planes, even the DC-3s or the C-47s, which were transports, which would often move us from place to place, you never thought you'd get off the ground. Now we sit in these big jets and we marvel — I look at my watch. They're as big as buildings that are up in seconds. These things vibrated and shook.

Sellers: There was no insulation and no pressurization.

N. Baldino: Oh no. No insulation. You wore the suits and you froze. It was just a totally different thing. They're so small. We've visited, of course, both the -17s and the -24s and we crawl through them now and think, "how did we ever get in these things?"

Sellers: That was all you knew at the time. That was modern.

N. Baldino: Correct. Yes. Then when we saw the fighter planes, the -38s and the -40s. P-38s were, oh we thought they were, oh boy! That was the living end. Now we have jets. We have a grandson who's a senior at the Naval Academy, so we go to the Army-Navy games every year. He graduates next month! I watch that flyover – they're gone before I get my head up. When we used to get bombed on the canal and run for those foxholes, you could actually watch the plane come in. You could see their tracer bullets.

Sellers: Almost had time to dig your foxhole to climb into!

N. Baldino: Or dodge the bullets. You could stand there. I always remember that the younger people (much out of stupidity, like myself) – I'd always sit up on the bunker because it was like better than the movies. The other older guys would say, "Are you crazy? Come down here." Sometimes you would have rats or lizards in those things.

Sellers: It was safer up on top than it was down in the foxhole.

N. Baldino: That's the way I felt, because you'd always be in those khaki undershorts. That's all you'd sleep in, of course, it was so hot. Another diversion we had when we – I mentioned Morotai, which was the springboard to the Philippines, just below Palawan and Mindanao, before we got up into Leyte, to Clark Field – but we used to sit there where the Japs had been cut off at Halmahera. There were probably 60,000 troops there. We had bypassed them and just cut them off. They were just starving over there. Every night they would try to get out on some kind of boats and our PACIFIC THEATER boats would go out. There would be like a shelling that would blow them out of the water. We used to get the binoculars out and we used to tease that they were down eating fish and some rice. That's all there was over there.

But again, back to the MacArthur thing. Ed Eichelberger, who had the Eighth Army, he was also a commandant at West Point at one time and an avid baseball fan. His chief communications officer was a man by the name of John Harris, who came from the same town I did. He was, of course, a full colonel. He worked for the Bell Telephone Company at home. (Jeanne was employed there during the war and he knew my mother and father). So often at times, I'd go visit John and he would – sort of like a corporate thing, if you were down the ladder, you'd want to talk to somebody on the CEO staff to get a little more information of what was happening. But we really never knew. Looking back now, I was the age — we have, I guess, six grandchildren in college – two seniors and four freshmen, finishing their freshman years — so when we reflect and we talk about something that was sixty or more years ago, a lot

of it is perception. Of course, some is reality. When you think about the Australians and the New Zealanders taking Japanese scalps and hanging them on their belts. It was real! But, nothing frightened us.

Sellers: How long did you stay in the Pacific? You were gathering points while you were out there.

N. Baldino: I was there until the war ended.

Sellers: So you learned about the atomic drops while you were there?

N. Baldino: Yes.

Sellers: How did you learn about them and what was the reaction?

N. Baldino: We learned through the headquarters staff. Of course, everybody was happy that the war was over. The topic was how many points do you have and how soon can we get home? That was August of '45. I was there waiting until November. I don't know how they calculated. That's where I fit. I couldn't, again, get a flight. I passed Hawaii on the way out, I think. I passed Hawaii, I know, on the way back. In later life, we did get to go, Jeanne and I together, to Hawaii.

Sellers: I want to know what your trip home was like.

N. Baldino: When I worked for the bank, the city of Honolulu – we had the bond issues for them, so I used to get out quite often to see the mayor, who was a female, who was the wife of a Naval officer. They stayed in Hawaii and she was the head person, government person in Honolulu. So we did get back and make amends for having missed it. I came back on the *Bonhomme Richard*, which was an aircraft carrier. Probably one-fifth the size of the *Forrestal*. Of course, it looked to me like a gigantic ship. I always remembered that I was allowed to stay in the chief's quarters. They treated us very well. We actually played softball up on the deck, it was big enough – although we did hit a lot of balls into the water.

Sellers: The Navy didn't need the balls anymore anyway! [Laughs]

N. Baldino: The trip back was much more enjoyable. We ate very well, we had sheets. I'll never forget coming under the Golden Gate. That's quite a sight. We're coming into Camp Stoneman. I didn't know where we were going to be processed, but it was Stoneman, I guess. We came in under the gate, and at that time you could transmit information back home. There was no more censorship or sensitivity to where you were. So I remember people there meeting. If you were from the area or even people that could afford it who weren't from the area — I neglected to tell my parents exactly what was going on for – just for obvious reasons. I'm getting off this ship and this fellow is about three of four in front of me. There's a lady who was either

his lady friend or his wife or a very close relative. She comes running the length of the pier. Of course, it was November. San Francisco is not warm in November. She's got this fur thing on. As she jumps into his arms, much like that sailor kissing the girl in Times Square, she heaves the coat into the water. Just throws it. I was very impressed with that! Fortunately for me, one of my friends overseas was related to the Jansen Swimsuit Company. He was either a son or a nephew of one of the Jansens. He had got home maybe a month or two prior to my arrival there.

End side A

N. Baldino: At camp we had all kinds of freedom. As a matter of fact, they were trying to get people to reenlist, so they did everything but make your bed. So he said, "When you get there, look me up and call me." So I got in touch with him. They had a corporate apartment at the Top of the Mark —. You have to understand that I had never seen San Francisco. As a little boy, I used to listen to my radio on those Rose Bowl games that they talk about California and the Rose Bowl and things of that nature. I said, "Oh God, this is wonderful." I'm in Northern California, but I'm in California. It was like a foreign land prior to that. Having played baseball where the extremities from New York City were Boston to the north, Washington to the south, and Pittsburgh to the west. That was, and maybe it still is, the whole country for me. Having been to the Pacific islands and then come back into San Francisco was quite a thing. I spent Thanksgiving there. I said, "I just better stay here because I may never get here again." I was now at the ripe old age of twenty-one, so my mind was working much better, a little more mature. I stayed through the holidays and didn't think about coming home. To this day, I never told my mother that I was home before Thanksgiving and didn't come home until after New Year's.

They put us on a train, finally, in January of '46. This was almost three years to the day that I had gone in. Again, it shows how fortunate I was that we had started to win the war before I got overseas. It was much better for me than it had been for many others. I remember the train ride home. We didn't have any of those magic stops where they all came out and fed you and did all that stuff. But it was like four or five days, and I remember sleeping in the baggage rack because you couldn't sleep in those coach seats and I was small enough to crawl up top. They got us into Newark, New Jersey, back from where I started to go to Biloxi, and then through Newark down to the town called Red Bank, near our town. I remember going in for my discharge at Fort Monmouth, which is still local to us, we still live in the same area. I remember taking the two flight suits and putting them in barracks bags and putting them under the barracks so that they wouldn't take them from me. Of course, when I came out, they were gone. Somebody more devious than I had stolen those that I had just been stealing! So they were gone. I really should have kept the check. They asked me where I lived, and I told them Oakhurst, Ocean Township, New Jersey. They calculated that that was four miles away from Fort Monmouth. At a nickel a mile, they cut me a twenty-cent check and told me to go home. It's sort of an illustrious end to a great career.

Sellers: So did you get a cab for twenty cents?

N. Baldino: I probably called my father – if I had a nickel. I guess phone calls were a nickel. That was January, '46.

As to how it affected us – I don't know whether Jeanne wants to take over, but she can tell you about it, how and why we met. We didn't know each other in high school and we had some mutual friends, but of course she was two years behind me in school, being a year and a half younger. We were married by the end of that year.

Sellers: Oh, let's let her tell that! That's a gal thing. Guys never remember weddings right. [Laughter] Okay, Jeanne, why don't you tell me a little bit about — start with you being in high school and where it was and how you two met and take me through your war years.

J. Baldino: I was at Asbury Park High School. I knew my husband then because we traveled with local friends, you know. There were a lot of parties and ball games and different things that I would attend. But we really didn't date.

Sellers: Did you even like him?

J. Baldino: I knew him. He sort of had a girlfriend then.

Sellers: So he was not available at the time?

J. Baldino: Not exactly.

N. Baldino: This is her version.

J. Baldino: That's my version.

Sellers: I don't think I want to get into that!

J. Baldino: When I graduated, I went to work for the telephone company as a telephone operator.

Sellers: In Asbury Park?

J. Baldino: In Asbury Park. I came from a family of four girls and one boy, and I was the one in the middle, or am the one in the middle.

Sellers: Was your brother older?

J. Baldino: No, he's younger.

Sellers: So he wasn't involved with —

J. Baldino: No, and my older sister's husband was in the service. He was killed in – I'm not sure whether it was England or Germany.

Sellers: But in Europe?

J. Baldino: In Europe. My second oldest sister was married at this point.

Sellers: How did his death affect the family? Sure it affected his wife, his widow, but —

J. Baldino: Well, my father had become ill in his late forties; he had several strokes. He was home, but he was also sent to the hospital and different places from time to time. My mother, who had never had to work, had to go out and work because we were still children at home. So a lot of the household chores and things fell to my sisters and myself, mostly to younger sister and me.

Sellers: Was your older sister, while her husband was in Europe, did she come back and live with you all?

J. Baldino: Well, he was at Fort Hancock, which is in the Atlantic Highlands. It was quite a strategic point, I guess. It's almost the entrance to the New York Harbor. There was a lot secrecy there. We didn't know – he would be able to get home occasionally. She was living at home with us then. Then he was sent down to Virginia Beach, I think it was. I know she went for a little while. From there, I guess he went overseas and she came back home to live at that point. She had a little boy, so it was not too easy. But I do remember all the — well, we had to go for food with our food stamps. We had a little tough time getting things sometimes, but we had to make do with what we had. It didn't seem to bother me much. I mean, I never felt as though I wasn't going to get my next meal.

Sellers: Did you or either of your older sisters ever consider — you said you worked for the telephone company. Did either of them ever work in a war industry or did they work at all?

J. Baldino: No, they worked. They started out in the telephone company. I guess that's why I went there, too.

Sellers: Did you work at the telephone company through the whole war?

J. Baldino: One period, I did decide that I maybe should do something worthwhile, so I did try to join – I think it was the Signal Corps had something at Bradley Beach – an Army installation.

N. Baldino: Yes.

J. Baldino: I decided to go there, but I really had had no training for whatever they needed. I

think I probably distributed papers to different people.

Sellers: But you were doing something!

J. Baldino: Well, I thought I was doing something at the time.

N. Baldino: We had no industry in that area.

J. Baldino: No. On the beachfront.

Sellers: Sometimes you just packed up and moved somewhere else, where something was available if the family needed money or something like that. Apparently you all were doing okay.

You had met him. You were friends with him. Did you correspond at all?

J. Baldino: Well, that's the funny part. His sister, who was younger – she's about five years younger — and I would have to take the bus, of course, because we didn't have a car.

Sellers: If you had, you wouldn't have had the gasoline for it anyway.

J. Baldino: No, we wouldn't. But I was taking a bus to work one day. No, I guess I was coming home from Asbury Park, which is about three or four miles from where I lived in Belmar. I sat with his sister and asked about him, how he was doing? She said, "Well, he would love to hear from you. He loves to get mail from home." So I got his address and wrote to him, and that started the whole thing.

Sellers: How often did you correspond?

N. Baldino: I would say, probably weekly.

J. Baldino: Yes.

N. Baldino: For that period of time, Jeanne neglects to say that you sent her beach pictures to me. [Laughs] Those bathing suits! So it just gave me some incentive to make sure I called her when I got home, and she became my first and only date. That's sixty years ago.

Sellers: When you got home, did you see you folks or see Jeanne first?

N. Baldino: That twenty cents wouldn't even get me to Belmar! I had to go home first to get another twenty cents so I could go another four miles south. But we did date right away.

J. Baldino: Yes, we did.

Sellers: You got married, you said, within the year?

N. Baldino: Yes.

J. Baldino: November.

N. Baldino: Yes, November.

Sellers: Had the two of you discussed, now that you had the GI Bill available, had you discussed what you would do after you were married?

N. Baldino: Not, really. I not only had the GI Bill, I had a baseball scholarship. So I was in pretty good shape. Of course, you'll laugh again – tuition at Fordham was \$550.00 a year there. I presume you know what it is now. In total cost we don't match NYU or the ivies — so we're over \$30,000. They're over \$40,000.

Sellers: And you had a baseball scholarship to Fordham?

N. Baldino: Yes.

Sellers: You could have gone back to school as a junior? You finished you sophomore year?

N. Baldino: No, I didn't finish it. I was in mid-year. But I was lucky. I went back in April on a trimester basis, so I did make up that half year. So I graduated at age twenty-three. I was almost normal. I almost caught up to where I would have been if I had not graduated from high school at sixteen. That's a whole other story. If you could imagine what college was at sixteen prior to the war as opposed to coming back – like one of my roommates jumped at the Battle of the Bulge in the 82nd Airborne. He had gone to high school with me. Another friend served on the battleship *Lexington* at Midway. All of us coming back, I really felt sorry for the young men that were coming out of prep school and high school — they were little nerds compared to – some of the fellows who were thirty years old. Fortunately for me, I was still basically young, but it was quite an experience to see the changes.

Sellers: And you were married.

N. Baldino: We married in November.

Sellers: Was there special housing? Did Fordham make arrangements for married veterans?

N. Baldino: No, oh no. We had no females at the school, so I had to move. I had to give up my baseball room, my football roommate.

Sellers: So you actually had to go out into the real world to find an apartment just like everybody else?

N. Baldino: Yes. We lived on Marion Ave, in the Bronx as they say, near Our Lady of Mercy.

Sellers: And you went to work! That sounds so familiar.

N. Baldino: The kids used to say, “Our Lady of Moicy.” That’s where we lived.

J. Baldino: I’ll tell you the one thing that did impact me during the war was we had our little movie theater down on Main Street and next door was the place they called the Sugar Bowl where you would go in afterwards to have a coke or whatever. I knew all the young fellows who were usually the “soda jerks,” they called them. Four of those young men went down on the *Enterprise*. I do remember that the whole town was terribly, terribly upset.

Sellers: That’s a lot, especially for one shop in one community within a town.

J. Baldino: Yes.

N. Baldino: Small town.

J. Baldino: I guess that brought the war home as much as losing my brother-in-law. But otherwise, I think at that age you were still —

Sellers: You’re still optimistic about the future. Do either of you have any final thoughts that you’d like to add or wanted to tell me something?

N. Baldino: Just back to the colleges. They not only educated the World War II people, they embraced them, I found, unlike the poor guys from Vietnam and what goes on now. Of course, the world now moves too fast to be functional – it has to be dysfunctional. The pace just dictates that it was different for us.

Sellers: No, but the G.I. Bill was set up so that the universities, as long as you met their entrance requirements, they had to take you. They paid for your books, they paid for your tuition, they gave you spending money. It was a marvelous opportunity for so many people. Of course, it never made up for the ones that we lost in the war, but it certainly had a bearing on how our country turned out.

N. Baldino: We were also fortunate to be educated by the Jesuits, who are great educators. They’re not business people.

[some general conversation about current educational systems not transcribed]

Sellers: What did you get your degree in?

N. Baldino: Economics.

Sellers: Did you go further than just the BS?

N. Baldino: I went on to law school at Rutgers. But I never practiced law.
[conversation about current market and employment conditions not transcribed]

End Transcription