

EI-408

LOUIS E. SCHINDEL

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COAST GUARD AT ELLIS ISLAND:

1941

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here today, November 8, 1993, at the Ellis Island Oral History Studio. I'm here with Mr. Louis Schindel, who was here, stationed at Ellis Island for one month starting October 7, 1941 when he was a recruit with the United States Coast Guard Reserve. I want to welcome you back, and I'm looking forward to hearing what you remember. And let's start by your saying how it was that, or what were you doing, what was, when you heard that you were coming to Ellis Island, what was your situation?

SCHINDEL: Well, good morning. The, uh, memories, I'm going to apologize. It's 52 years, and things have slipped from my memory. However, I was enlisted in the Coast

Guard, sworn in to serve the country. I don't remember exactly whether the swearing in ceremony was here or over in the Federal Building, but that's perhaps not important. We were transported here, and this was the recruiting, the recruit station.

LEVINE: Maybe just, if you could back up just a little. How was it that you decided, uh, to serve in the Coast Guard?

SCHINDEL: Oh, good question. Thank you, ma'am (he laughs). It turns out that, um, I had, in that period of time I had a private pilot's license, which I got through the cooperation of the U.S. government. Back in 1940, '39 and '40, there was the Civilian Pilot's Training Program, which at the colleges encouraged we college kids to go for our pilot's licenses. Now, we talk, if I may sidetrack a little bit, we talk about preparation for war. Well, someone had some foresight. They sensed that things were getting hotter in Europe with the Nazi mess, and they must of looked at the records and said, "If we go to war, we need more pilots." So at no cost to us, we were put through pilots training, and I was awarded my license in the spring of 1940, I believe it was. When things

got hotter, I went to the navy, to the marines, and to the army, and said, "Hey, I have a pilot's license. I want to enlist and become a pilot." They turned me down. You know why?

LEVINE: No.

SCHINDEL: This will blow you apart. Because I have flat feet. I kid you not. ( he laughs ) Rejected from pilot's training because of flat feet. Then still sensing the need for being in military service because of the pressures from Europe, I enlisted in the Coast Guard. And there I was welcomed, I guess with open arms, because I was a lucky kid, I was brought up playing, working with boats, so I knew something about handling boats. And, uh, as I say, after the, uh, processing, I was invited memory problem of course -- whether I was sworn in in New York or sworn in here in the island, not sure. Anyway, the night of October 7, 1941, I slept here. Memories. Triple decker bunks, that I remember. Uh, a great diversity of people from all over the country. Uh, I did find, and I found this just late last night, I was wondering whether at any time I had kept a record and, by gosh, I did. I have here a 1940 diary, but

it also has a 1941 section in it, so I kept the diary for two years. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Do you have October 7th?

SCHINDEL: October 7th was a Tuesday. Look at that! And, um, something, oh, I must have, it says here I reported into the C.G. office, Coast Guard office. Something was wrong with my papers. I had to take a boat to Ellis Island two hours later than the rest of the gang. Uh, ( he reads ) "Left New York at eleven-thirty, ushered to receiving station, given chow." That's fancy for food, you know that? ( Dr. Levine laughs ) And, uh, "Found a bunk in a room with about three hundred other fellows. Bull sessions, bull sessions. Sat around and did nothing all afternoon. There seems to be a lack of leadership organization. ( they laugh ) Lousy chow in the evening at four thirty." So that was my, the first day at Ellis Island as a member (clears throat) of the Coast Guard, which at that time, by the way, the Coast Guard, I don't think was folded into the navy and became part of the armed forces until perhaps a year or so later. That's something you'd have to check in the history books. So that was the beginning.

LEVINE: Well, uh, do you remember your impressions coming to Ellis Island? I mean, do you remember what it looked like at that time, and how many people were here, roughly, and . . .

SCHINDEL: The, uh, the memories are short. Again, I, you know, beg your indulgence, because just a few years have passed, and a few, shall we say, traumatic years, referring especially to the war years. The, uh, I remember the size of the area where we stayed, and, uh, was impressed with the high, high ceilings. When we returned here recently, and this is how we connected, somehow or other the main hall, whatever the proper name of it is, did not seem like the place where I had been. So I asked one of the rangers, who excused himself for a moment and then, pointing to another building, he identified that as the Coast Guard Receiving Station during World War Two. The other impressions, uh, were that the, uh, the gang, of course, was, hey, we were young, activists, noisy and so forth. While here we were given inoculations, then the uniforms were given out. I have one recollection of uniforms, by the way. Included in uniforms were shoes; black, standard shoes, of

course. And one of the fellows with whom I'd become friendly apparently had extremely wide, wide feet, and they couldn't fit him. So during the time that we went out on drill, and there was a small section that was our drill section. By the way, we drilled with wooden, wooden rifles. This guy, and his name was Bob, I can't remember his last name, drilled in bare feet, and that was great. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: Bare feet and wooden rifles, huh? ( Dr. Levine laughs )

SCHINDEL: Bare feet and wooden rifles. One fellow whose name may appear in this diary that I found was a guitarist, and he kept us amused during the evenings, which was great. We were assigned to certain duties and, again, I must confess, I, something inspired me last evening as I was watching the evening news, and I went into our storage room, and I found this thing, and it slipped my memory completely. So I really haven't read it to pick up the detail, but this fellow did keep us quite amused. We did duty, and I notice here I stood guard duty at the, uh, prison. Apparently there was a military prison here (he laughs) of some sort.

LEVINE: Do you remember at all where that building was, the prison building?

SCHINDEL: I, no. Whether it was in our building, I do not.

LEVINE: So these were Coast Guard . . .

SCHINDEL: Recruits.

LEVINE: Recruits, who were imprisoned for some reason.

SCHINDEL: Well, whether they were recruits or they could have been, they could have been any kind of military personnel that were sent here because it was a lock-up of some sort.

LEVINE: So that was your first duty, to guard that person?

SCHINDEL: Apparently so. I guess I was too sloppy to be permitted to wash dishes. The, uh, one other thought that I've had, and that is since visiting here and since your contact, I've tried to dig back and try and figure out about my grandparents and so forth. And, by gosh, we have nothing so far in our records showing where my father's parents, whether, how they came into this country. And, unfortunately, there are none of the older generation to help us form this

bridge. Somewhere in the paperwork we may find that info. I, um, have no recollection from childhood, or when we were all "grewed up" as they said, as they say, of, uh, my parents, aunts, uncles and so forth, talking about that. Why is that? I could ask you to explain whether there's an evolution in the interest in immigration. I guess the restoration is . . .

SCHINDEL: Well, I think it is clear that people were, at one time, ashamed, and didn't really, weren't that forthcoming. And now, of course, we've come full circle, and we're honoring people, you know, for having immigrated. ( voices garbled )

SCHINDEL: Perhaps, yeah.

LEVINE: But I, I'm curious. Was there talk among your, your, um, cronies, or fellow recruits here, about Ellis Island as an immigration center? I mean, did people talk about their families maybe having come through, or was being here somehow . . .

SCHINDEL: There was some. Yes, Janet, there was some. And detail, of course, I can't remember, but, uh, there's a vague memory of someone saying, for instance, "Yeah, my parents came here from Germany," or from

Ireland, or so forth, and then for a period of time we'd kid one another. "Hey, Irish," you know, or something like that. So, yes, there must have been mention of it, but I don't recall any detailed or in-depth discussions of that nature.

LEVINE: How about . . . Excuse me. How about the fact that you were preparing for war and you were looking at the Statue of Liberty every day. I mean, was having been sent to this particular site, do you think that somehow the patriotism, that the place played into, uh, what were the attitudes of your fellow recruits at that time? Do you remember the kinds of things you talked about?

SCHINDEL: I would say that, well, first, from that other building would the Statue of Liberty have been visible? I'm just wondering. But we can examine that later.

LEVINE: Right.

SCHINDEL: But, um, I would say that deep, deep in the memory is some thought about the mess in Europe. We're going to be in it --I am talking for others --Want to be part of the solution to this mess. I think that was

the general theme. I would say, also, there were threads of being homesick, of being disillusioned about being on a little island with triple-decker bunks and rotten food and so forth. The normal griping, which any group of people would suffer from. Projections outwards as to meaning, I must confess nothing strikes deeply in my memory, and in the book, my old diary here, I wish I had had more time. Uh, to, uh, read it.

LEVINE: Well, I think we should certainly xerox (she laughs) October 7, 1941, and then as you read it afterward if you find that there's more, hopefully we could xerox it and keep it in your file along with your tapes so people could have access to that.

SCHINDEL: Great. Well, on October 8, as an example, I was on the four to six watch, and we saw the movie called Philadelphia Story. ( he laughs ) That kind of stuff is entered here.

LEVINE: Do you remember recreation here during that month? Were there movies often, or were there other things?

SCHINDEL: I think there were movies quite often. I do have some notes here that I read some books. I haven't

read any since, obviously, but there were specific notes as to reading of books. Oh, and one thing that might be of interest. Twice or three times we were sent to Manhattan to participate in parades on, uh, quick, tell me, when is Armistice Day? Oh, I got you there. It's now known as Veteran's Day.

LEVINE: Oh, the 11th.

SCHINDEL: The 11th. Here, from the 11th. Oh, oh, the, uh, I had been, I had been hospitalized here, which I had completely forgotten. But on the 11th, the president gave an address, and I'm celebrating what was then known as Armistice Day, now Veteran's Day. Then on two or three occasions, we were formed into squads, and we marched Fifth Avenue. Once was for . . . I wonder if the celebration is still going on -- gathering of the colors at the church, the flags from all over the place and state flags, some sort of a ceremony.

LEVINE: Hmm. This was all during that month period between October 7th and . . .

SCHINDEL: October 7th, the final date was, uh, I was thrown off of here, oh, on Friday, November 21st. So it was

six, maybe seven weeks. I was transferred to duty on U.S.C.G.C. Boat 429 at the Rockaway Station. So they threw me out of here on the 21st of November.

LEVINE: I think I neglected in the very beginning, would you say your birth date and how old you were when you were stationed here?

SCHINDEL: My birth date? Madam, that's confidential. ( he laughs ) October 30, 1919. So when, uh, I was here, I was twenty-one or twenty-, twenty-one? You're a better mathematician than I am. Tell me.

LEVINE: Yeah, twenty-one.

SCHINDEL: Oh, I must have celebrated my twenty-second birthday here.

LEVINE: That's right, right.

SCHINDEL: Because on the 30th I was here. And, (clears his throat) uh, the, the, uh, again, I must apologize. The years and the events following dim memories. There may be something here in the book.

LEVINE: Well, uh, why don't we, why don't we not deal with the book here on tape, and then, as I say, afterward,

we can include anything in your, in your file, from the book, okay?

SCHINDEL: I'm just thinking in terms of things that might be of interest or highlights that might, uh, embellish this a little bit.

LEVINE: Okay. Um, why don't we talk, and when we get to turning over the tape you can look through there and then we'll continue.

SCHINDEL: All right. Good.

LEVINE: Okay?

SCHINDEL: Sure.

LEVINE: Okay. Um, where did you grow up?

SCHINDEL: I was born in the city of Newark, moved --we stayed in the hospital I think a week at that time, ask my mother --but raised in Orange. I've always lived, until six years ago when we moved from a home to an apartment condo, I had spent all of my life in Essex County, New Jersey.

LEVINE: And was this your first time away from home when you were recruited into the Coast Guard?

SCHINDEL: No. Um, during college years, uh, during childhood, I admit to being raised in a family that was financially stable. We, not traveled extensively but, you know, trips into New England and so forth. But, of course, during college I had greater adventures, traveling to the midwest, traveling various places. You're taxing my memory now. ( he laughs ) So . . .

LEVINE: It wasn't the first.

SCHINDEL: It was a sufficient dose. I was mobile.

LEVINE: Well, now, were you a college graduate when you were recruited?

SCHINDEL: Very complicated (he laughs). I had four years of college, three undergraduate and one of law school, but held no degree because of complications of the times (he laughs), lets say. Later, if you will, I went back to school, and in 1973, thirty years after I was to have gotten my degree, in 1973 I got a degree from Rutgers.

LEVINE: How about the other recruits? What would, just a rough guess of numbers of recruits who were here when

you were here?

SCHINDEL: Again, thanks for the book. My estimate the first night was three hundred. By the way, I'll put a little, shift it back to you. It would be of interest to me to know how many Coast Guard recruits from this naval district, or Coast Guard district, it would have been at that time, were recruited and sent through Ellis Island for our indoctrination. I have no concept of the total numbers, no recollection.

LEVINE: How about the indoctrination? What exactly were you indoctrinated with?

SCHINDEL: Oh, great, great stuff. The, uh, again, thanks, thanks to the quick reading of this book. Uh, we did drill, military drill. You know, hup, two, three, four, in a little hunk of the island somewhere, which maybe we can identify (he laughs) later on. I do recall it was so small that the bosun mate who was in charge had to devise special turns and so forth, because we just couldn't maneuver as a full-fledged squadron. Then, of course, there were periods when we were in a, in a classroom situation, being indoctrinated, telling us our rights and wrongs and

so forth. Uh, beyond that, I have no recollection. There was not much, don't forget, we weren't at war at that time. The formalities of indoctrination, perhaps, hadn't been developed to their full extent. We, uh, as I say, did spend time doing those things. Uh, we did, oh, the uniform thing, in retrospect, was a joke, because I think the first time we got trousers, and the second time we got T-shirts and shirts, and finally we got hats. It was piecemeal, and we finally wound up with full uniforms. The peacoat, remember the short, black? I kept through the war. I remembered giving it to someone after. Beautiful, beautiful quality stuff, fantastic.

Then, uh, other recollections from Ellis Island. The, uh, yeah, somewhere in the back of the memory I do remember standing at the edge of the island looking out, but cannot recall specifically whether we were looking out at the Statue of Liberty or lower Manhattan, or a place known as . . .

LEVINE: Governor's Island.

SCHINDEL: Governor's Island. Or, well, it depends on where you're from. Is it "Joisey City" or is it Jersey

City? ( they laugh ) No, I remember we did stand and smoke and look out and say, "Look at that, look at that," just as we did when we came here this morning. The, uh, no, no improvement in food. Uh, apparently considerable liberty time. Apparently twice or three times a week we were permitted to leave the island.

LEVINE: And then what? You would go by ferry, some kind of a ferry, to . . .

SCHINDEL: Yeah. Here again, it's taxing my memory whether there was direct ferry from here to lower Manhattan to, what's the name of the . . .

LEVINE: Battery Park?

SCHINDEL: To Battery Park. I have no specific memories of the mode of transportation, or the route.

LEVINE: But when you had liberty, you went to New York, as opposed to going to New Jersey, for example.

SCHINDEL: I think we had to go to New York. That is, I don't think, again, let me play it straight. I don't think there was transportation from here to, I think, I think we had to go to New York, and I would, uh, meet

with friends there, or hop a train and go out to, uh, go home to Orange or, more specifically, by that time, my mother had moved to Maplewood. But no record of (he laughs), no memory of the exact mode of transportation.

LEVINE: Well, why did you land in the hospital here?

SCHINDEL: Apparently I had stress in my innards. And, uh, they, I'd had jaundice as a kid, I'd always had a tender stomach, shall (he laughs) we say. And later on I'll tell you a story about, I'll tell you the details of my stomach. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: Okay. So what do you remember of your hospital experience here?

SCHINDEL: Um, A-okay. I believe I stayed on the island here, though later in service, as a matter of fact, while I was a cadet I was sent to the Marine Hospital at Stapleton, Staten Island for surgery. But this time I think I was treated right here, and, uh, my recollections are affirmative, that is, the service was a decent situation. As a matter of fact, the whole thing, except for my recollections in food, it was a decent, human situation here when we were

recruits.

LEVINE: Is there, is there any, uh, how would you characterize the recruits, if you had to, at that period?

SCHINDEL: Oh, uh, again, um, I wish I had more time with the old diary. But I did catch some notes in the diary which said that there was age diversity, geographic diversity, mostly from the East Coast, as I recall, religious diversity. I have no recollection as to whether there was, um, racial. I don't know how many, um, non-Caucasians, shall we say, were indoctrinated in at that time. Nothing on that score. The, uh, I think, my guess is that the age ranges would have been what the minimum age would have been, seventeen or eighteen. I don't know what the law said at that time, through college level. A few older, not many. Um, taking a guess, I would say that perhaps thirty percent were college. And we college guys sort of fell in together. I suppose that's a pretty normal pattern. Um, a clean bunch of American kids, let's call it that. That's all I can remember as far as the past is concerned.

LEVINE: Do you remember getting your orders to ship out?

SCHINDEL: Yeah. As noted, I was sent to that private boat in, um, Rockaway, and that was on the 19th of November 1940, 1941. The seas, it was a Coast Guard Reserve boat, that I was sent to a small, private boat. I think there were only six of us, and we did harbor patrol.

LEVINE: Were you, do you remember your feelings about leaving here and going there?

SCHINDEL: I think affirmative. Um, my recollection is that perhaps it was too confining here. Perhaps there were too many people in a big, big room, but I was delighted to get the hell (laughs) off of Ellis Island, if you will.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, that's a great place. . . We're going to pause now and turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to resume now. This is Side B, and I'm speaking with Louis Schindel, and he has just now looked through his diary, which somehow came to

his mind last night to find; a testimony to the unconscious mind. And, um, so, and not having had the chance to really look through it, he's just done that. So why don't you mention the kinds of things that you had noted in your diary that we haven't already covered.

SCHINDEL: Okay. I did discover in the diary that I had time to read while here on Ellis Island. And, um, there were several movies, thank goodness, I guess. The, uh, the diary did record the fact that I had visitors. Until I found that diary I had no recollection that family members and others had been permitted to visit here with us, or with me. Again I cannot fix the place in which we met, whether there were little family rooms. No, nothing comes directly to mind, except for the fact that there were visitations.

LEVINE: And you had leave, also, when you could, you could go home?

SCHINDEL: Yes. My recollection is, again the diary helps, that we had a fairly liberal leave policy, possibly, there's some notes here, "knocked off at four and we were due back at midnight." Perhaps we had a half

day where we could go home and visit. Good transition from family life to military life, I guess you could call that. The, uh, the mail started to come in regularly, which was helpful, because even though a short distance, it was always great to have mail. Then, uh, I remember standing watch duty a couple of places, anchor watch, and here memories come back that there were slips and boats anchored nearby. We did have some drill, rowing drills, and we used pulling boats, I guess, for that purpose. And someone had to watch them during the night. They'd wake us up and make us stand out there for a couple of hours. That's minor watch duty compared to some of the watches that I stood, both as a seaman and as an officer, sometimes here or sometimes in very quiet places, like during the battle of Okinawa. However, the other items, I'm trying to think now. I did read Wilder's Heaven's My Destination. That's recorded in the book somewhere. And, uh, I'm trying to remember, memory slows down a little bit, you know, trying to remember other reading, but nothing comes to mind quickly at this moment.

LEVINE: And I think you mentioned that there were a group of

recruits that came to Ellis Island?

SCHINDEL: Yeah. The, uh, there's a note again that a hundred recruits came in from New Orleans, which surprises me now as to why they were transferred that great distance when, uh, of course, there is a great deal of Coast Guard activities down in that area. Perhaps this reflects the, uh, decisions by the people in power that, uh, the war in Europe was more, uh, accessible from here than from, uh, from, uh, New Orleans. But that was a hundred guys who came in. The, uh, oh, I have here, for the record, if you want them, I have a picture of me in '41, and that's for the files here, if you want. And then there's a later picture in '43, uh, when I'm all dressed up as an officer. Well, I was commissioned as an officer, so I was in town to wear the uniform, by gosh.

LEVINE: Well, why don't you say for the tape, just kind of a thumbnail of after you left Ellis Island and you were on small boats in Rockaway? Is that what you said?

SCHINDEL: Yeah. The, uh, the first boat came out of Rockaway. We were assigned to harbor patrol duty, spending most of our time between Stapleton, Staten Island, and

there's another name for the Coast Guard base there, right Near Stapleton. And we would cruise back and forth from there to the old fortress. Oh, my goodness, the memory has slipped again. There was an old fortress from the Revolutionary War, which today is the base of the Verazano Bridge. And that was our assignment, to cruise back and forth recruiting, recording, excuse me, vessels entering New York, New York Harbor.

LEVINE: And then what did you do after that? Just, uh, tell about the steps in your military career.

SCHINDEL: That period was from, uh, the harbor patrol was on two different craft. One, I'll go back, one quick story. We were assigned one day to escort the Queen Elizabeth, I believe it was, up New York, from the anchorage outside of Brooklyn, up to the slips, up to the docks in Manhattan. We were assigned to the starboard stern position. I think there were five or six Coast Guard boats. Leading the group was a heavy duty Coast Guard tug, a very rugged piece of equipment. The anchor ball, that's a black ball that's hoisted when a ship is at anchor, was dropped. That was the signal that the Queen Mary was getting

under way. And they gave her the gun, as they say. And because we were nothing more than a pleasure craft without a great deal of power. As a matter of fact, it was a converted sailing vessel, therefore the engines were very small, designed for emergency purposes. Instead of sailing up the river with the Queen Elizabeth, we were pushed down the river by the wake of the ship ( he laughs ) and we never did catch up with her. But that was one of the cooky memories from the war period. After the six or seven months of harbor patrol, I was assigned to an attack transport, and we fitted out and trained here. It was the U.S.S. Samuel Chase. And then we went to . . .

LEVINE: When you say you trained here, where . . .

SCHINDEL: It was in Hoboken. My training, part of the training is, even though the boat is dead at a dock, you learn how to lower and hoist boats. You learn your way around the ship, you learn, uh, safety details and so forth. That was part of the ship's standard training when you joined a ship.

LEVINE: And we were at war at that time, when you were

learning that?

SCHINDEL: Yes. We were then at war. That was from June of '42 to September of '42 that I was aboard the Chase, partially here and partially in Solomon's Island, Chesapeake, where we actually at night learned to lower craft off the ship and men would scramble aboard these, because it was an attack transport. These were small craft designed to hit a beach. You probably have seen this in film strips and movies. Hit a beach, and attack. And that was, uh, that was an exciting period, though short. I was then transferred to the Academy, the Coast Guard Academy, to, uh, pursue a commission. After the Coast Guard event, oh, by the way, I was the only Coast Guard officer ever to take six months to get through the Academy. It was a four month course, during which I spent two months in the hospital on sick leave, because I had surgery during that period, but I finally made it. ( he laughs ) From there to Edgewood Arsenal, where I became a chemical warfare officer, and that caused me to be assigned to, uh, District Coast Guard Officer 17th Naval District, Ketchikan, Alaska, where chemical warfare is

ineffective. But we trained everyone in the use of gas masks, and one of the great memories is we also had control over a thing called "smokeout". There were pots of smoke material. Again I would say five-gallon containers, and on given a signal, these could be lighted off creating smoke so that enemy aircraft would be thrown off their course. Don't forget, at that time, a great deal of the navigation was visual. And we did smoke out Ketchikan Harbor. But that's memory. And then from there several months in the Aleutians aboard a Coast Guard cutter. And, finally, at the last part of the war, I served in a Coast Guard bouy tender. Now, you wonder what a bouy tender was doing in a hot war, and by a hot war, it was one. We were sent to Okinawa, arrived there about two weeks after the invasion, and our purpose being there as a bouy tender, lay buoys to anchor the navy craft in the harbors. We had the equipment and the know-how to do that. And we spent, we were there, I was on aboard until peace and finally released from service to go home for discharge. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: What do you, do you, um, recall of actual combat,

actual, in the heat of the . . .

SCHINDEL: Two areas of actual combat during the Aleutian period, we were not directly active, but we were a support ship during the period when the U.S. Armed Forces threw the Japanese off of the islands of Attu and Kiska. They had, as a diversionary tactic, they had invaded and taken over those two islands, which are the most westerly islands of the Aleutians. And we had to send troops up there to clean them out. And, as I say, our particular vessel was a support vessel. We were not in direct combat. However, the, uh, Okinawa event was certainly very hot. We arrived there, as noted, about two weeks after the invasion was launched. We arrived in a convoy escorting a floating dry dock, a rather long vessel, perhaps two hundred fifty foot long, but a floating dry dock to be used there. On arrival at Nagaokakyo wan, which is the Nagaokakyo Bay on the easterly side of the island, we were welcomed by kamikaze, who headed for that dry dock. And fortunately he missed by perhaps as little as six feet. He broke his wing on the side of the ship and went into the drink, or into the water. Six feet to the left or right, he would have

been in, and the bomb would have destroyed that very, very valuable dry dock. But we spent the whole, every, we were in general quarters every night on standby for the kamikaze. That was rough stuff, believe me.

LEVINE: What was your rank when you, when you left the service?

SCHINDEL: I was a two-striper, a lieutenant. And, uh, trivia on that point, on leaving military, on leaving naval service, one did not get discharged. You were retired to inactive service. During the Korean War, I was re-called, and, uh, here in New York I'm not sure but I think it was the Federal Building, Downtown New York. We were invited to line up for the doctors, and after I was through, the doctors asked me what to define a thing called atrophic gastritis, which my, I had recorded on instructions from my personal physician. Now, this was 1952 or 3, and this relates, by the way, to the fact that during my stay on Ellis Island I was confined at the hospital for about a week or ten days. I guess I've always had a temperamental stomach. But the doctors could not define (he laughs) that which my personal

physician had told me to put on the record. And, uh, P.S., about six weeks later I received official discharge papers. I was no longer in active duty, but received an official discharge. Ten years later I was again in for a review of my temperamental, can I call it gut, or stomach, my innards. And I asked that doctor, who was a very sophisticated gastroenterolog . . .

LEVINE: Entero . . .

SCHINDEL: Something, gastro, who, you know, where the specialty had become a special specialty? And I said, "Well, doctor, what about that?" And he said, "It's an obsolete diagnosis." So, you see, I got out, I was discharged from service under false pretenses. ( they laugh ) But I'm still around.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about feelings, the feelings of, uh, when the country actually went to war, when you were in the service, what happened among the, among your fellow servicemen? Can you give some kind of feeling about that?

SCHINDEL: Excellent. During the period when I was in the New York area from '41 through, uh, the middle of '42,

when we went ashore, and we stopped in a bar, uh, people would turn their backs on us. The minute war was declared, they would come up to us and say, "Hey, can I buy you a drink?" (he laughs) That I remember.

And, yes, the, uh, attitudes were, of course, completely changed. And, um, we, um, I guess my personal thought was, though, I still have a feeling that there were two different wars, the European war and the Asian war, the Pacific war, Atlantic and Pacific. But even though the attack was in the Pacific and within hours the president declared us at war, I guess there was a sense of, well, I did the right thing. I enlisted, and I'm supporting my country. And, um, even today, that continues. I feel that something told me at that time that that's where I should be, and I resolved to follow that instinct, that reaction.

LEVINE: How about when the war was over? Can you recall the feelings that you had and your fellow servicemen had?

SCHINDEL: I was in Okinawa at the time that the bomb was, the bombs were dropped. As a matter of fact, just a couple of weeks ago, I found a newspaper, New York Times. Here I go again with the bad memory.

Recording the Japanese surrender, which was about ten days after the bomb, when the first bomb was dropped. One distinct recollection is that in Okinawa, which was a tremendously busy, busy operation, it was the staging point for the proposed physical invasion of the mainland of Japan, tremendously active, somehow or other before peace was declared there was a false V-J Day. And men in the fleet celebrated by firing guns. In many ships there are 50 mm guns mounted in various positions, and they're small guns. And during that event, it was rumored that six servicemen were killed because the guns were shot at the bridges of various ships and they killed people. That's one recollection. And then, of course, when it was confirmed, the exaltation was fantastic. You know, we were, the, uh, twenty-four hour watch. In a ship, you always have twenty-four . . . , but there was a skeleton crew. We could go out on deck of the ship at night, whereas prior to that we had to be, you could turn lights on. Uh, so that, uh, of course, we were all tremendously relieved when the final peace was declared. The, uh, I don't know, on December 7, 1941 I was on one of the small boats. I'm reading now from the book. I slept until 4:00 PM. I was the

only one, I remember I was the only one there, because we were off on leave. It was a Sunday. Turned on the radio. Heard that the Japanese cut loose. Pearl Harbor, 7:55 AM. Cabinet meeting at 8:30 tonight. Declaration of war tomorrow is my bet. All men in uniform ordered back to --universally anyone in uniform had to get back to his base. That's, that I remember. And there we are. That was the, the day. Oh, um, Monday the, FDR gave a request to the Congress for war in five hundred words, and within a half hour the Congress okayed the declaration of war. Now, the, uh, I must confess that, uh, some time tomorrow, or maybe the next day, I'm going to start to dig out more information on Ellis Island, i.e. family. Um, I know my grandfather was, came from Germany, I believe Frankfurt. He was number seven son. He had a younger sister. I do not know if they came here as a group, but I understand that he did. As a matter of fact, there's a legend within the family that because there were so many kids in the family, when they steamed up into New York Harbor, I think this could have been about 1860, the legend is that his father threw him overboard and said, "Joey, you go it on yourself," and he had to

swim for it (he laughs). Not confirmed. But I don't have that information. His wife, my grandmother, was born and raised in Troy, New York. But we cannot put that together, nor on my father's side is there any specific detail. But this will, I'll send you a memo (he laughs) when it's all put together.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now, is there anything you'd like to say about your civilian life after you left the service, for the record?

SCHINDEL: I would, I do recall that I was pretty much of a mess for about a year-and-a-half or two. I really had trouble settling in after the, uh, routine, plus the trauma. And I had come out of Okinawa, which, of course, was a highly pressurized dramatic event. Um, had trouble settling into a career. Uh, tried several things, reasonably successful. The, uh, at one period of time I opened and operated a retail business which was destroyed, I don't know whether you want to put that in quotes or underline it, by the changing times in retailing. Discounts ruined my toy and juvenile furniture business. But the last twenty years of my career were spent as a housing specialist with the State of New Jersey Division of

Housing, and that was, like I suspect all government operations, we had our good periods and our bad periods depending on leadership and problems. But mostly I felt that that was a creative period of my life when I was part of the society and doing my thing at reasonable pay and reasonable hours, and rewarding. I look back on that with satisfaction, shall we say.

LEVINE: Okay. Let me just, we have just a couple of minutes left, so let's, maybe you could say, um, your wife's name.

SCHINDEL: Right. Uh . . .

LEVINE: And, and any children you have.

SCHINDEL: My wife's name is Lotta. She took her retirement a few years ago after almost forty-five years in nursing. We have three sons, the eldest living in Maryland, father of two bambinos, crazy little guys whom we love tenderly. We see them, about every three months we're able to get together. The second son lives in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. We see them more frequently. They, too, have a couple of little guys that are the joy of our life. Our third son

teaches in the Monmouth County school. The . . .  
( he laughs ) Of course, I, the name, the county  
college. Not the county college, excuse me, the, uh,  
what's the name, quick, of the, Monmouth County  
Junior College. The name slips me. And he's  
unmarried, but his dedication is the world of  
English. Um . . .

LEVINE: Tell me your wife's maiden name and your children's  
names.

SCHINDEL: My wife was Lotta Rosenfeld. She was born in  
Germany. She arrived in England on the day the  
British and the Germans declared war, and went into  
nursing from that point on. The three boys:  
Lawrence, also known as Larry, Paul and Andrew.  
Other trivia, let's see.

LEVINE: Well, you've got one minute. Now, is there anything  
you'd like to say in closing?

SCHINDEL: Yes. I would, this has been a great time. It's, you  
know, obviously a once in a lifetime experience  
getting back here and talking to you all, grateful to  
you and to Peter for your hostessing and hosting the  
event and, uh, be assured of future cooperation if

there's any way I can help you piece this together.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you. It's really been a pleasure, and I thank you very much for these articles that we will keep on file with your tape. I've been talking with Louis Schindel, and this is Janet Levine, it's November 8, 1993, and we're here at the Ellis Island Oral History Studio, and I'm signing off. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW