EI-647
ANTHONY RADOMSKI
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INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 10, 1995
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 78
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INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST
RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

COAST GUARD, 1941
AGE: 24

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, August 10th, 1995, and I'm in Ardsley, New York, which is in Westchester County, with Anthony Radomski. Mr. Radomski was at boot camp at Ellis Island for the Coast Guard beginning in July of 1941, and then sort of bounced back and forth between Ellis Island and the ocean liner the Normandy for about four months before finally going off to serve. I also want to say that Kevin Daley is present in the room, running the recording equipment. And we are in a neighborhood where you may hear cicadas in the trees, and also a low droning sound in the distance. Cars also will maybe be picked up on this, and an occasional dog barking. Anyway, all of that said, Mr. Radomski, thank you for letting us come out, and can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

RADOMSKI: June 11th, 1917.

SIGRIST: And where were your born?

RADOMSKI: New York City.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?

RADOMSKI: My mother and dad came from Poland. They didn't speak too much English. In fact, most of our talking at home was always in Polish.

SIGRIST: Do you know any details about their immigration, like what year they came, and how old they were, that sort of thing?

RADOMSKI: No, that I don't know, no. I had two brothers that were born in Poland, though, and they came over. And I can't say very much. It was very difficult for my Dad to get a job at that time, because he didn't talk English. And when he did work, he worked on the stevedores, on a waterfront.

SIGRIST: Do you know why your parents came to the United States?

RADOMSKI: That I don't know. My older brothers knew all that information. It was just never passed on. I guess like many other people, they came over here for the same reasons: America!

SIGRIST: So you've got two brothers and yourself, right? You said you have two brothers who were born in Poland?

RADOMSKI: I had two brothers that were born in Poland, but there were thirteen children all together.

SIGRIST: There were! Can you name everybody, please?

RADOMSKI: Name them? [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Yes.

RADOMSKI: Oh, boy! Well, three of them I can't tell you about, because they passed away in Poland. However, my oldest brother was Edward. The next one in line was Alex. Then the next one in line was Felix, then a sister, Sophie, and my brother Walter, then myself Anthony, then a pair of twins, Eddie and Jim, and a sister, Jean, and a brother, Frankie. I think I mentioned them all. There was a brother Johnny. He was killed when he was three years old. He fell out the window on Thirteenth Street, New York City. And of course, I still remember the whole thing. My mother was coming from shopping, and she actually saw him going down, and she just didn't know if it was me or him, because we were—we looked alike. And of course, needless to say, it was quite a serious bad scene. And I remember the little white wagon when they were putting him away, you know, when that little chariot, they had that little white horse. And I was sitting on the fire escape. And it was just a tragedy. He lost his balance on one of those low windows. Somebody was—one of the boys, they were playing upstairs. He was handing him a stick, and he toppled right over, and that was it.

SIGRIST: How old were you at that time?

RADOMSKI: I was five. But I was a sickly kid at that time. As a matter of fact, I was sick—they had some kind of a plague they called it. I don't recall what, influenza or something, and people were just dying at that time. In fact, the doctor didn't even get to the house. So my mother got a new apartment, cleaned it all up, and we moved. And evidently, well I guess you see, I did make it.

SIGRIST: What were your parents' names?

RADOMSKI: My mother's name was Lillian.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

RADOMSKI: Lillian Rykowski.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

RADOMSKI: R-Y-K-O-W-S-K-I.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

RADOMSKI: And my father's name, of course, was Alexander Radomski.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like to grow up with immigrant parents in this rather full household?

RADOMSKI: Well, it was—I could us the term hell, if I can use it! I've used it! We lived in Hell's Kitchen, at Thirty-Ninth Street, and Eleventh and Twelfth Avenue. That's where I was born. Across the street was a slaughterhouse. I guess we had free gangway as kids, because what could a parent do with a whole gang of kids like that, you know? And everything was a survival situation. We used to chase the cattle on the streets. People question that! Well, we lived across the street from the slaughterhouse, and they used to have these portable corrals, that the animals were transported by railroad. Of course there was a railroad right on the avenue, there. And they had these portable corrals, and we used to chase them into the corrals, and of course they led them right into the slaughterhouse there.

SIGRIST: What else do you remember about the slaughterhouse situation?

RADOMSKI: It was a terrible odor, and we lived right across the street from it! And they also shipped the cattle in on the trains. I guess you know that. Trains and barges. And we'd be sitting up on them corrals, you know, after we chased them in there, or whatever. And of course, we could get

into—the hardship was in the winter. You didn't bang on the pipes and get steam heat. You had coal burners, and you had a stove that you cooked on, and you had to supply your own fuel. And needless to say, when the trains went by for the coal—I guess they're not going to lock me up now—but we used to hop them trains and kick that coal off! And of course, we would be chased by the detectives when we were little guys, you know. If we got caught, we were just too small to do anything with, I guess. And they would come back if we didn't. Well, needless to say, I didn't get caught too often, anyway. But we'd go back and pick up the coal off the tracks, and take it in the house.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you spoke Polish in the house. Did your parents make any attempt to learn English?

RADOMSKI: I don't believe they made enough attempt, mostly because there was nothing around. There was no work, there was no nothing. My mother scrubbed floors in these office buildings, and I guess they were just too busy. My Dad, it was just too much for them, and it just wasn't realistic that they would go to school. And as a matter of fact, my father, if you had to make a choice—as a kid, you didn't make a choice. Dad ruled the household, you know. And if I said, "I've got to go school," sometimes he would just tell you. He'd say, "Well, school isn't going to give you anything to eat." And needless to say, you had to survive some way. So I shined shoes. I had my own little turf, so to speak. And that's the way we grew up! There was a place called the Burns Brothers on the waterfront, because the waterfront was kind of—well, you could go swimming there, if you had a mind to, but they had more or less little beaches along the Hudson River at the time I was there. And they still had ships coming into some of the piers; some of the piers were still there around Forty-Eighth Street, etcetera, you know, different places. And then there was a place where the Queen of Bermuda used to come in, and they had a, you know, those trips they would take. And I used to shine shoes around there. But of course, right next to that, I used to go coal racking right in there, too, because the barges were not too far from there! The piers were there, and we'd hop on the barges. And we had your street fights with the kids; this was during the Depression years—not Depression. Well, it was depression, but this was during the prohibition days, so there was a lot going on during the prohibition days. And anyway, we didn't go to church very much, but I'll tell you, we had our religion. I learned how to talk—I learned how to pray on Polish, and of course I've forgot a lot of that now. But when I think of, like, Our Father, if I start thinking Polish, because I haven't spoken it in a long time, believe me, the prayers—I can still remember some of the words!

SIGRIST: Would you like to say one for us that you might remember?

RADOMSKI: Let's see, how would it goes out? Oh, I can't really say it out, but—no, I can't say it!

SIGRIST: Well, that's okay. Maybe it will come to you later.

RADOMSKI: I got it in here; it just don't come out.

SIGRIST: It's inside?

RADOMSKI: Not the way it should.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

RADOMSKI: [Polish], like "Our Father, who art in Heaven, [Polish]. I almost said it right, see. But I'd have to be conversing with somebody for a while, and then those words are meaningful, because I haven't spoken the language in a long time.

SIGRIST: This is a good time, then, for me to ask you how you got involved in the Coast Guard, and maybe your parents' reaction to your desire to be in the Coast Guard.

RADOMSKI: Well, we can't omit the Civilian Conservation Corps, see. I got a job out of grammar school; my brother gave me his job. And I was a little guy. My brother went to the C.C. camps. See, that kept us off welfare, 'cause we were a welfare family. But we were off welfare, oh, much longer than the average person, because to me, that was a shame. I had to interpret for my mother! And that was a very embarrassing situation, for me anyhow. So going to the C.C. camp meant that my mother would have a couple of bucks coming in, and—

SIGRIST: We should say for the sake of the tape, for someone who may be listening or reading this not familiar with this particular program: The C.C. camp, as you're talking about, is the Civilian Conservation Corps.

RADOMSKI: That's right!

SIGRIST: And can you just maybe quickly explain to the listener or to the reader what that is?

RADOMSKI: Sure. The Civilian Conservation Corps was what President Roosevelt started for the boys, for the young fellows on the streets. Actually—

SIGRIST: This is during the 1930's.

RADOMSKI: In the thirties, right. In ’33, in fact. And believe me, if it wasn’t for the C.C. camps, I think we’d all be learning how to talk Japanese now, because we had almost two million men ready for the armed forces.

SIGRIST: How did it prepare you to go into the armed forces?

RADOMSKI: Well, I was nineteen years old, and I was working in a defense plant for a while, in Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland. I was a labor foreman there.

SIGRIST: What was this name?

RADOMSKI: Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland. I was a labor foreman, and we were building warehouses for the Chemical Warfare Department. And I got my brothers jobs there, from the C.C.’s; I got other fellows jobs from the C.C. camps from New York. I had room and board ready for these guys. I says, “If you don’t get a job within a week, you had a weed’s vacation!” I never saw the money in my life like I was getting there. I was getting fifty-six dollars a week! In the city, in New York City, I was getting seven dollars a week, and the most I ever made was nine dollars a week! And I got paid in a check, and of course that went right to my mother when I was a youngster. And I had that job for five years. So I quit that job, finally, and went to the C.C. camps. Now what the C.C.’s, did—it was run by the War Department; we were civilians. We had all the discipline, except we did not have guns. We had the same uniforms, practically, except for the buttons and all. I think we had the old World War One vintage. And we went to Fort Dix, were processed. I lucked out—I went to Mount Rainier National Park, and after Mount Rainier National Park, I spent a year in the C.C.’s then, the first time. And then I shipped out again with a brother, and we went to, well, we missed a role—I missed a role-call, and he was only sixteen. I changed his birth certificate and made him seventeen, so he came in with me! He was one of the twins. And we got split up, because he was afraid to say, “Here!” for me when I went to the bathroom! He went to Salt Lake City, and I went to Whitehall, Montana. And let me tell you, it was a—for me, that was a very bad six-month period. I was taking care of all the young kids that were in camp, ‘cause I had already had experience, hoping that somebody was taking care of my kid brother [laughs]. But he learned how to smoke; he learned how to do everything that I had hoped he wouldn’t pick up! But at least he took care of himself, you know. And then we came home. I had a pretty bad incident at home. I won’t get into that, because it was a sort of—I could explain it better without all this.

SIGRIST: We should get you into the Coast Guard. Yeah, tell us how you became interested in the Coast Guard.

RADOMSKI: Anyway, we had boxing matches with the Coast Guard on the West Coast, you know. You win some, and you lose some—it was great! But I didn't have too much respect for the Coast Guard at that time, because I thought it was a sissy outfit! It wasn't 'til later that I found out it wasn't. I found out that the Beachcombers were some of the toughest guys there was, to fight that surf. In fact, I believe that they were the guys that made the surf part of the war safe, you know, where they could come up on the surf with them LST's and all. Because that's a heck of a situation on the surf, to come up on the beaches like that. Anyway, it came to pass, though, when I got finished at Edgewood Arsenal—in fact, my brother got drafted, my older brother. And I sort of had, this whole group was—now it was my responsibility to see everybody was in line. My older brother did at that time. So I decided the wrap it up, and go back home. So we all packed him and we went back home to New York, and now I got hot to trot for the Navy. I went downtown; it was still peacetime, so everybody is—they're pretty strict. You had to have a high school diploma to get into the Navy. So I went to the recruiting place. I didn't know you had to have a high school diploma. There was about fifteen, twenty guys there. And I come in, and come to the educational factor. I says, "No, I didn't go to high school." But the guy looked at me, looked me over. He says, "No, we're going to give you the test anyway." I failed by two points! It was silly things, but I failed, you know? So, in my mind, Coast Guard was not too far away. I says, "Well, I'm going to go try the Coast Guard." They had the same test! You know, it's maybe worded a little differently, but the same test. I passed by four points, and I was in the Coast Guard! And let me tell you, it was the greatest thing in my life! It was because I never knew I was developing what I finally wound up doing with kids. Because I always organized: body-building when I was in the Coast Guard, always boxing, wrestling, everything. I never had no formal education for that, but I took so many beatings when I was a kid, because I was a sickly kid, that I joined the YMCA. And when I joined the Y, that's where I got a lot of know-how, too. Anyway, to wind up, I got in the Coast Guard, reported to Ellis Island—

SIGRIST: How long between when you took the test did you have to report for duty? I mean, what kind of time span was there?

RADOMSKI: Say again?

SIGRIST: When you took the test, you passed the test, how long was it before you had to report for duty?

RADOMSKI: Not too long. As a matter of fact, I guess it was a couple of weeks, because they were drafting people all over; they were getting ready for whatever they were getting ready for. The draft was wide open at the

time, so—as a matter of fact, I think the war started in Europe already. So it didn't take very long. And I was processed, and right in. And when we got into Ellis Island, that was also an area where the immigrants were still coming in. Immigrants were still there, as a matter of fact, our area was a big dorm on our side, and then the immigrants came in. There was a big fence for these people, and they had an area where they walked around, etcetera. You know, they kept exercising them. And I imagine they had their own particular quarters for resting or sleeping or whatever. I don't know that part.

SIGRIST: Did you have any interaction with any of the detained immigrants?

RADOMSKI: Not really, because boot training was boot training, and you had to train. We learned the Manual of Arms. We did the rowing all around the island there with the boats, you know, the rowboats, the big-sized whale boats, rowboats, whatever. And we had our races back there. And everything was knot-tying, and drilling, and drilling and knot-tying, and all. And then the government took over the Normandy, and they had to have a detail go to the Normandy.

SIGRIST: The Normandy was in dock at this time, yes? She was docked?

RADOMSKI: The Normandy was a big ship.

SIGRIST: Right, but she was at one of the piers?

RADOMSKI: She was on Forty-Eighth Street. I think it was Forty-Eighth Street. And strangely enough, I lived a block and a half away from the Normandy in previous years, before I went in the, you know, before I moved to the—well, before I left Manhattan. And I used to—that's where I used to get the coal, right around that area, the whole thing! You know, the big park there, that was our so-called playground.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the first day that you reported for duty at Ellis Island, and what the procedure was to process you?

RADOMSKI: Oh, well, we went to Coney Island. You know, your health was your first thing, so you went in there, you lined up.

SIGRIST: You said Coney Island. You mean Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Yeah, you just said Coney Island. I just wanted to correct you.

RADOMSKI: I said Coney Island? Boy, I don't know how that got there.

SIGRIST: [Laughs]

RADOMSKI: Excuse me on that! Anyway, when we went to Ellis Island, you got in this big area, and you got your second physical, only this was a more meaningful situation. And you got your shots; you got everything you're required. And you went right into—the Boson Mate come, introduced himself, and just laid the law down, and that's the way it is. To me, it was great, because I had three years of C.C. camp! To me, I fell right in. And when it come to the exercise, heck, I just started; it was nothing for me. Because I was Assistant Leader at the C.C. camp, so to me it was just a nice situation.

SIGRIST: Were you taking your orders from the Boson?

RADOMSKI: The Boson's the guy that gives you the orders; that's right. And then you have your Chief. You had your Chief there, and then you had all your subordinates to him. You had your First Class, Second Class, and Third Class. And then you had your Seaman First, and you had Apprentice Seaman. So I was Apprentice Seaman there. As a matter of fact, I found a fire on the Normandy before she was sabotaged. I handed it—now, this is when I'm in boot, now. And I handed it to the guy on the next watch, and he got commended for it! They mentioned my name, but he got commended for it. But that fire was started under a drum of oil, and to me that's still an outstanding thing. I don't give a damn, I made it. I don't care.

SIGRIST: Mr. Radomski, may I ask you to put your paper down, because it's going to make noise in the tape?

RADOMSKI: I'm sorry, it did, I know.

SIGRIST: It wasn't too bad until you got excited, and it started making noise. So, you had your physical first, that was the first thing you did?

RADOMSKI: Right, right.

SIGRIST: Then, were you issued your uniform? I mean, what was the series of--?

RADOMSKI: Oh yes, you went on line. That was all standard. That's standard procedures. They got your sizes, they issue your uniforms, you got your dress blues, undress blues, your denims, and your denims were your general work clothes.

SIGRIST: So I'm to understand you had three separate uniforms that you were issued?

RADOMSKI: That's right, yeah.

SIGRIST: Could you describe each one of them for me, please?

RADOMSKI: Yeah, you had the white uniform without the stripes on it. You had your Coast Guard shield, of course, and you had—we had the same kind of uniform as the Navy, except that the only difference was the insignia, the Coast Guard emblem, the shield.

SIGRIST: And we're talking about a pair of pants--?

RADOMSKI: You had your pants. You had two sets of pants, because you had the ones for dress, and then one for undress. Because if you stood watches—it all depended on where you were standing your watches. If you were standing your watches in a formal place, you wore your dress blues, you know. If you were in a place where there's nobody going to be around too much, undress blues. That was more or less your work clothes, anyway. And you have your sidearms, and whatever.

SIGRIST: What about hat? Did you wear a hat?

RADOMSKI: You had your regular Navy hat. You had a flat-top with the ribbon it, but it had Coast Guard instead of Navy. See, that was the only thing. And of course, you didn't wear—if you were on a vessel, you didn't wear the name of your vessel, because that was for security purposes. You just wore U.S. Navy, or U.S. Coast Guard, period. Before the war, really before the war, before, you didn't have to worry about having the name of your ship. You wore the name of your ship. But when war threatened, they just took all that meaningful stuff off, you know, all that material.

SIGRIST: Now what about things like shoes, socks, underwear? Was all of that supplied?

RADOMSKI: Shoes. You had six sets of—all your clothing was supplied. Your medical was taken care of, your clothing, just like any—it was the military, it really is. As a matter of fact, you know, people just don't realize what the Coast Guard does! The way I understand it, through history, the Coast Guard was our first Navy. It was our first ships. It was the Coast Guard. And then of course they were integrated with these—I forgot what they call them, but they integrated with the—oh, I can't find the word right away, but they were integrated with another organization that was a marine outfit, you know, a sailor outfit.

SIGRIST: The Merchant Marines?

RADOMSKI: The Merchant—not really the Merchant Marine, no, but it was similar, very similar. They were like the rum runners, you know. The rum runners were during prohibition days. It was a force to be dealt with, so they integrated with this particular force, and made the Coast Guard. Then it was—of course, the Coast Guard, if you see, the year it goes back, when you really look into it, through the history, you find that there was a lot of little disciplines around that they finally had to join forces, because it was too much politics involved in it, really.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your experience at Ellis Island.

RADOMSKI: Okay, right.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that medical was all taken care of?

RADOMSKI: Right.

SIGRIST: How?

RADOMSKI: You got your general shots. If you got hurt, you were transferred to any Marine hospital, or any government hospital. In this particular case, because one time I did get hurt, I was sent to the Marine Hospital in Stapleton, Staten Island, New York.

SIGRIST: Did you get hurt on the Normandy, or at Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: No, I got hurt towards the end of the war. I got hurt in an accident. I'll tell you that story; it's not for the record, either, because I'm a believer that when something happens, and it gets somebody in trouble, you just don't—you know, you just don't turn a person in, you know, unless it was—well, I don't know how to explain that. This particular incident required something otherwise.

SIGRIST: Was there some sort of infirmary or something at Ellis Island that you remember?

RADOMSKI: They always have that. They have sick bay. If you don't feel good, you go to sick bay. And they do have, they have the doctor there; they have the nurse, whatever. They have a nice set-up.

SIGRIST: So it was available to you if you needed it?

RADOMSKI: I just never went; I just never had to go, that's all. In fact, very few guys ever had to go. The only times guys went there was the regulars, if they got, got drunk or something, and they didn't feel good, they'd get a shot of castor oil. So they weren't ready for getting sick very often. That was

the biggest medical thing in the C.C. camps and the Coast Guard: if you said you had a headache or something, they could suspect if you don't want to have duty, they give you a shot of—if they've got to give you castor oil, you just got out of it. It seems kind of silly, but it worked, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the dormitory where you stayed?

RADOMSKI: The dormitory was double-deckers, double beds, all the way down the line on two sides. The place was full of beds.

SIGRIST: How many men to a room?

RADOMSKI: There were no rooms, it was a big dorm.

SIGRIST: Big dorm—how many men in that one?

RADOMSKI: Well, I guess there was a few hundred, maybe more, you know. I would say three, four hundred at least.

SIGRIST: And how many of these dorms were there?

RADOMSKI: I only know of the two I was involved in that area, because you didn't—you know, other areas were out of bounds. When you're going through boots, you've got to be in one particular area, and that's your spot. And you already get used to that. And you had enough bathrooms to go around, showers.

SIGRIST: What else in that room? Were there lockers in that--?

RADOMSKI: No, no lockers. Sea bag was your life. You lived out of your sea bag. You rolled your clothes. You had your inspections. You had to be clean! There was no such thing as any dirt around or anything!

SIGRIST: Describe the inspection process for me. How did they inspect you.

RADOMSKI: Inspection? Right on your bunk. You had a sack. You had your own mattress, of course. I guess you know that. You carried that around everywhere, and you had two blankets. Whenever you moved, you got all your clothing all fixed up in your sea bag, all rolled up. You never had to iron anything. Everything was rolled up. You roll it up, and there's a picture in your Blue Jackets Manual, and it's got to look like, [laughs]—it looks like that when you're ready. And when the guy comes by, the Chief comes by with one of the officers, and they go right up and down the line. And if you get any marks against you, that means no liberty

when the time comes, no this. No serious privileges until you pass all your inspections.

SIGRIST: Were they inspecting you, also? Or just the bunk?

RADOMSKI: You're inspected, too, 'cause you're dressed up for that inspection. If it's informal, you're in undress blues, or whatever. If it's formal, again, you're dressed up. You know, you're checked before you go on liberty. You don't have the proper uniform on, you don't go on liberty. You got to have your—whatever the uniform of the day is, that's the uniform you got to have on.

[End of Tape One, Side A/Start of Tape One, Side B]

SIGRIST: How often were you inspected?

RADOMSKI: You'd get inspected [pause] well, serious inspection you'd get once a week, because that's with your glove inspection, you know. But otherwise, you're checked all the time. You know, the Boson Mate don't let you slide with anything, because that first part of your time is very critical. That's where you got to learn your habits. You've got to learn to be able to be fooled around with, you know, if anybody plays a joke on you, you've got to know how to take it there. You already feel if it's a joke, because first impressions usually last. If somebody makes a joker out of you, so to speak, that usually sticks with you. So you got to be very careful. You know, if somebody calls you a name, for instance—if you don't like the name, now's the time to say, "Hey, fellow, what do you say?" you know. "I don't like it." You don't get nasty about it, because you've got to live with each other. However, if you let it ride, that sticks with you. If somebody calls you Joe Blow from Idaho, or something, and you don't like it, now's the time to talk. In other words, you learn many, many special things: how to get along with your peers, etcetera, etcetera, which is very important. You've got to know when to say no. You don't want to be a fall guy for somebody. We had an incident where a fellow was sleeping. We used to wake up the boxing team, so this was a heavy-weight boxer, a Black man. A hell of a nice guy. And he was sleeping, and one of the guys gave him a hot foot.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what that means on the tape, please?

RADOMSKI: A hot foot is when they put matches on your shoes, and they light it up. Only this fellow was with his bare feet. He was sleeping! And this guy come along, and he put a whole pack of matches there, and he lit them up. And it was a terrible scene! When this guy jumped, well, the guy had to go to sick bay. So needless to say, the Chief came in there, and he wanted to know who did it. We know who did it. Well, the guy

wouldn't say nothing; nobody'd say anything. So I said, well—and then they said, "Well, everybody's restricted for the weekend." And we had just—we earned that weekend pass! Guy wouldn't turn himself in. So I guess I was one of the party; I got three or four guys. We went to him and said, "You turn yourself in or we're going to turn you in." I says, "If you make us stool pigeons," if you want to use—we have other names for it. I says, "You turn yourself in or else we do, and you know that's going to put a mark on us for turning you in." So the guy turned himself in. Fortunately, he didn't get hit heavy, but he did get himself—I don't recall the fine, but he did get a restriction. If he got a fine, he deserved it. But you just don't do things like that. I don't care. And because you're not an old timer, you don't know how to take this guy, you know. See, there are things that you sort of let slide because you don't want to be a wise guy either, see. And as bad as the scene was, it's just something that you sometimes have to cope with.

SIGRIST: I'd like you to talk about boxing on Ellis Island specifically, and talk about your involvement in that, and its importance with the Coast Guardsmen there.

RADOMSKI: Well, the boxing—this is quite a story. We were taken from the Normandy to box, because Jack Dempsey was having a Jack Dempsey night. In other words, they were going to have fighters there, so they pulled us out to box.

SIGRIST: You're talking about at Ellis Island? Jack Dempsey's at Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: Yeah, Jack Dempsey was at Ellis Island, and as a matter of fact he taught commando tactics, I think it was in Manhattan Beach, I'm not sure. But he was a guest at Ellis Island, and they were going to have a boxing forum there.

SIGRIST: Was boxing just an entertainment for the Coast Guardsmen, or was this part of the training?

RADOMSKI: Boxing was, at that particular time, I will say it was training. But in the Coast Guard, like all your outfits, all the Army, Navy, Marine, everybody—they had inter-service boxing matches all over the country. They always had that. That was whatever. So you could call it entertainment. It was entertainment.

SIGRIST: But it was very much a part of life at Ellis Island in the Coast Guard? I mean, boxing was very—

RADOMSKI: They did have special events. That was one of the special events. However, to be taken from one station, and taken to the island to box—

well, my question was: who are we boxing? And the fellow says, the Chief says, "The CYO." I says, "That's fine," I says, "But how about our training? How much training are we allowed to have?" Because we were on the Normandy; we didn't have no training there! The only training we had there was once in a while we put the gloves on with each other, 'cause, you know, I organized that type of thing.

SIGRIST: Could you also say what the CYO is for us, on tape.

RADOMSKI: CYO is the Catholic Youth Organization in New York. And the CYO—those fellows were tough! Because that's all these guys—they boxed for watches. I'm not going to get into what that's all about. They didn't want to be professional, so they boxed for watches.

SIGRIST: Watches, like wristwatches?

RADOMSKI: Well, that was the prize! And I won't go into that politics after that. I'll explain that later; it's not for this. And anyway, they were really a tough bunch of boxers! So the guy said, "No, you're boxing day after tomorrow." I said, "Without training?" I says, "I'm sorry." He says, "They're guys just like you." I said, "No they're not!" I says, "I'm familiar with the organization; I know a lot of these people!" So the wind-up came, I was in charge of waking up our boxing team. However, they got a scrub team out, and it was a terrible scene. We lost every match there; it wasn't nice. And I knew the Commodore from the—he was the Captain of the whole New York port. I knew him personally from the New York Athletic Club, because I used to work out there. My brother wrestled there, so I used to work out under his tails, you know. I never went into competition, but I loved to do it, just for my own, for my own usage, you know. And anyway—

SIGRIST: Do you remember where the boxing ring was at Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: It was in one of the—it was right in our parade ground area there. They had it right indoors, in a parade ground area. I can't describe the whole thing, 'cause I'll tell you, I didn't get to really see it, because I was sort of—they weren't talking to me too well, you know. But it was after the fact, that they didn't know what they were going to do with me now, because in fact, see, the whole team quit. It wasn't just myself—the whole team did. We wanted to work out! We said, "Give us two weeks, and we'll fight anybody." Because you know, it's just something, a matter of principle. You don't want to look like a silly whatever, and get you head handed to you for nothing! Because these guys—I don't care! I'm for real, and I boxed a lot of guys, and I was never a problem, but I boxed a lot of guys. I always organized it. I think I was the only guy that

had a punching bag, had it welded on to a gun turret in the Coast Guard on a destroyer escort.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about boot camp specifically at Ellis Island, and what you went through at boot camp.

RADOMSKI: Boot camp was knot-tying.

SIGRIST: What kind of knots? I mean, can you just give some of the names?

RADOMSKI: I'll describe some of them: bolen on a bite.

SIGRIST: Bolen on a bite. Can you spell bolen please?

RADOMSKI: Well, most familiar I can tell you—see, I knew a lot of splicing, splicing lines. You splice lines, you got a back splice, a splice in the middle of a line. You could put two splices on. There's all kinds of splices, which is very important, you know, when you've got broken lines, and you want to splice them together, you just splice them together. That's two back splices. I think I could still remember how to do that stuff.

SIGRIST: Did you have knot-tying class? I mean, how did they teach you to tie knots?

RADOMSKI: Oh, you had a pole that simulated the railing on a vessel, and because you're using a couple of half-hitches to put a fender over the side. You know what a fender is, that keeps the--?

SIGRIST: Like a bumper.

RADOMSKI: A bumper to keep from bumping into the pier, or wherever you're going to moor. So what it's all about is, you've got the—as a matter of fact, you learn how to make some of these bumpers, too. But the splicing is done for that purpose. But one of the main—it's not a knot, it's half-hitches, when you sling it over the bar, over the bulkhead, or not the bulkhead, but the railing, you flip it over twice, then you just let it go, and the fender hangs. And then you learn knots that when you—you see, when they taught you knots, they taught you the basic knots that you would learn from the old sailing days, you know, when they had sailboats, sail ships. These are the knots. I couldn't even go through the whole thing with you. But there are so many knots involved. There's knots that you've got three or four loops, and they tie a different line on each one of them. They all have a specific meaning. And all I know is, we learned how to make these kind of knots. You don't learn them right away, you know. You've got to really figure them out, and then—

SIGRIST: How often did you do this? I mean, was it once a day that you--?

RADOMSKI: They had a whole list. They had a schedule that you had to go by. You had a whole list of different things you had to do. You had the semaphore drills. You had your blinker—not the blinker. Well, you had your blinker. You had your classes for signaling, because don't forget: visual communication was a big thing. You had your blinker lights, your dots and dashes, you know, the Morse Code. You had to know that. And you practiced with somebody, you did good. If you didn't practice with somebody, you didn't do so good. And semaphore, I had a mental blockage for semaphore, because I learned how to send it like heck, but I couldn't receive too well, because I didn't have too many people—well, we didn't have time. Sometimes, we didn't have time to practice. You have so many different—you are so busy through boot training, it must be like the Army, or any outfit. You are so busy learning the business of being a Coast Guardsman, you don't have time to think sometime! Like, if you want to write a letter, you're thinking about—I'm going to pass this. Because the only way you're going to get liberty, and this is what they held over you. Of course, it's good, though. You know, some people might be objection to it. You don't learn this, you don't get time off. You don't get your liberty when the time comes. So you learn; you sit down and you learn. And you sometimes babble to yourself. Like you have to know your General Orders. Yeah, I walk the post in a military manner—the same General Orders you have in any military outfit; you learn them all. And that's it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where the semaphore was taught?

RADOMSKI: Semaphore was taught right on the pier. Right on the pier, there. You know, you had this one area where the boats were on the davits, you know, where they hung. And you learned how to put the boats in the water, and you'd roll them up, bring them back up on the boat falls, on the cleats. Some of these words—the words are coming to my mind, it's like I'm almost in there again! But I'm very fortunate and getting a picture in my mind about what we'd do, you know! And everybody gets a chance on that, how to secure this line on these falls here.

SIGRIST: And what kind of a boat were you learning to secure?

RADOMSKI: This was the boat we rode in. It was a oversized—like a rowboat, but oversized. Like a whale boat. I guess you could call it a whale boat. The surf guys used them a lot, the guys on the surf. Now the guys on the surf, they used to be able to turn them things over, and right side them up, and get back in. That's why I said I never considered myself a real good Coast Guardsman, because I could not perform that. And only

because I didn't have the training. But these guys had—that requires a hell of a lot of stamina and power, to do something like that.

SIGRIST: And so people would row the boats around Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: That's right. We would row them around the island.

SIGRIST: Now, were there classrooms that you can remember?

RADOMSKI: We didn't have—well, these were, you were already in units. You were in units, so when you performed, you weren't in a classroom, per se. You'd have a bunch of fellows over there, a bunch of fellows over there, in different areas, wherever the activity that you were learning about. They had specific areas. You could consider them classrooms, if you want. If you roped them off, it's a classroom. I don't think they had the—

SIGRIST: But you're talking about outside?

RADOMSKI: It was outside. In inclement weather, you had similar areas inside. It was always an activity going on and that you had to learn about.

SIGRIST: Well, and of course you were there during the summer and the early autumn, right, so that--?

RADOMSKI: You could be outside most of the time, that's right. And that's the way that part went.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about the signaling. What kinds of lanterns, or what is it that you're signaling with?

RADOMSKI: We signaled with the—well, first we signaled with the semaphore. That's the flags. You know that. And you're going through the alphabet, A,B,C,D, etcetera, the whole thing. And after that, they had these little cards that you can—a simulated blinker, just like on a ship, except it's, you know, the white background, and then when you press it down, it blackens it out, or whatever.

SIGRIST: But it's made out of paper?

RADOMSKI: It looks like a book of matches, only it's a little bigger.

SIGRIST: I see, and it would simulate the blinking on and off of the light?

RADOMSKI: And when we were on liberty sometime, we'd have these in our pockets. And sometime we'd be sitting on the subway, and we'd be back and

forth. Which is great practice, you know, and you'd read one another, and that's how you learn the codes.

SIGRIST: And would that be done outside also?

RADOMSKI: That's inside or outside, depending on the weather. Everything is, of course, like anything else, is the weather. You didn't stop eating, so you didn't stop working [laughs].

SIGRIST: When you were at Ellis Island, did you ever have a chance to work with the actual lanterns that you would have been using on a ship?

RADOMSKI: They had—in some areas they possibly had one, only I never got to it. I never got to it because I was on the Normandy for a while, and back and forth, you know, and back.

SIGRIST: Going back and forth.

RADOMSKI: And from the Normandy I went back to Ellis Island; they kept me there for a while. I was on gun watch, where the Russians were getting munitions and stuff like that.

SIGRIST: Gun watch at Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: No, not at Ellis Island. They shipped us right over to Hoboken. See, while we were—you know, we performed some watch duties even while we were going through boots.

SIGRIST: Yeah, and you know, we haven't even talked about that. Can you describe for me the process of standing watch, and how often you had to do it?

RADOMSKI: Okay, what we did: because we were boots, I would imagine, and we were going into an installation where they had a lot of munitions—this was before we were in the war, you know that. And we had to go on these piers. They would give us a rifle—no bullets—a rifle, and we would walk our post in a military manner. And of course, we had our own feelings about that. If a stranger came by, we'd have to stop them, and go right through a certain procedure. And God forbid anybody was there to sabotage; we wouldn't have a chance!

SIGRIST: So you were sort of detailed out to other places? Hoboken had the munitions. There were no munitions at Ellis Island.

RADOMSKI: Not at Ellis Island, no.

SIGRIST: But were you trained to do the watch at Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: Well, yes, definitely.

SIGRIST: And where did you learn that, and what was the procedure for being taught how to stand watch?

RADOMSKI: Our procedure was to be able to handle the rifle. Our drilling was there; we'd be marching a little bit here and there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kind of a rifle it was?

RADOMSKI: It was a thirty—the old Springfield, whatever. What the hell was that? The old Army rifles.

SIGRIST: Springfield was the make.

RADOMSKI: I think it was a Springfield. Jeez, I can't even tell you how many shells. I think it had four, a four shell clip. You know, you knock them in, and they're one shot a piece.

SIGRIST: If you had the bullets in them! [Laughs]

RADOMSKI: We didn't have no bullets, no!

SIGRIST: Was there a procedure, a daily procedure, that you followed for learning how to stand watch at Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: Yes, you had your—you had your spats, as we called them. You know, your leggings? Well, you had your leggings on, and when you had your leggings on you were getting ready for a watch, unless you were going to a parade. And you know, if they had parades in the city—I was involved in two parades. I don't know what the special event was, but we had two parades.

SIGRIST: No, did anyone stand watch at Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: Oh, definitely!

SIGRIST: Yes, where? Where did that happen?

RADOMSKI: They had them posted in different areas, around the water area. You had a night patrol, you know, you had guys walking, like, just like any security situation, 'cause that's what they were intended for. That was your Coast Guard, and believe me, that's exactly what they had to do. And your discipline was not easy. You know, you had to do what you

were there for. There was no—you know, they used to call it, for whatever reason, you know, trying to be smart, they used to call it the Jewish Navy. Of course, it was supposedly an easy way out of the war, and stuff like that. That's a crock! Because we did a lot of dirty jobs for the Navy [laughs]! Because they had us doing things like if a ship broke down, we'd have to go rescue, and things like that. And all I know is: if it was a Jewish Navy, we'd have one hell of a tough Navy there, because they really performed, these people.

SIGRIST: Was there a brig, or a jail or something on Ellis Island at that time?

RADOMSKI: If you were out of line, disorderly, you got put in a brig, yeah. It was for minor things, but if you did something serious, you were sent to wherever you—but it was all military—you were sent to wherever they had to send you.

SIGRIST: Did you have any interaction with that particular part of Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: No, no.

SIGRIST: What about eating? Where did you eat on the Island?

RADOMSKI: Eating, we had a big place, a big dining room, and we ate in that dining room. And that's why I said, see, they had no walls to speak of. That was a big, that was a just big open spaces, for the most part, you know. And that's the way we ate. It was clean, again. It was really nice.

SIGRIST: Was it just Coast Guardsmen who were eating there?

RADOMSKI: In our area, just Coast Guard, and possibly some of the people that—well, the officers had their own mess. You know, they had their own area there somewhere. And I guess anybody that had any authority there had their own particular—they had their own set-ups. I wasn't too much involved in that. All I was was Apprentice Seaman, but I could see a lot of happenings there, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you, if you remember, tell me, sort of hour by hour, what you did? Like, what time did you wake up? What time was roll call?

RADOMSKI: You got up, oh God, about 5:30, six o'clock.

SIGRIST: And how were you woken up?

RADOMSKI: It didn't take very much. Sometimes with a bugle, then sometimes with that whistle, the Boson whistle. It'd go: [whistles].

SIGRIST: And is it the Boson who's in charge of waking everybody up?

RADOMSKI: That's right, yes. And if you didn't get up, you got up, you know. You got up. There was no such thing as any babying then, or anything like that. You woke up.

SIGRIST: And what was the first thing that you did?

RADOMSKI: First thing was, you got up, and if you were smart, you got up earlier than the other guys, and you go right into the shower room, take your shower, shave, the whole thing. You do your toiletries, then come out, then you can go to your bunk. You go to your bunk, you fold up your blankets, you roll up your sack. You didn't have to—the Army had everything made up like you could bounce a quarter off it. No, we only had that thin sack, and you put it right over your bunk, and you roll it right up and everything, and you're ready for inspection.

SIGRIST: And there was a type of inspection every morning?

RADOMSKI: Every morning. Because everything—they'd look right down the line, and everything is straight, just like that. And nobody better be off. Whoever's off has got a problem. Anyway, they go on that merits, and demerits, or whatever, you know. They have ways of doing things. And then it comes to the point where everything is okay and all that, then you look at the muster, you know, at the what do you call it? At the order of the day, what you're going to be doing, and you do that by units.

SIGRIST: And every day, a different unit would be doing a different thing?

RADOMSKI: That's right. Every day—every day was a surprise, you know, because it was a stimulating situation. You didn't get time to get lazy, let me put it that way.

SIGRIST: Was there any entertainment provided for the Coast Guardsmen at Ellis Island?

RADOMSKI: During boot training, not too much, not too much. Sometime an entertainment group might come in and entertain, but I don't recall too much of that through boot training. Because I was always busy. If there was a place to work out, I always worked out. If I wasn't working out, I would be pushing up on the bed, you know.

SIGRIST: Was there a place to work out at Ellis Island, a gymnasium of some sort?

RADOMSKI: Not that we could go to. The guys that were stationed there permanently, you know, for their time—I imagine they had their own

situation. Anyway, realistically, if you were a work out bug, you could go to the city and work out. There's all kinds of gyms in the city. But there was a place there on Ellis Island where you could work out. What kind of work out do you really need there? You don't have a weight lifting room, but you can always work out—your calisthenics you had.

SIGRIST: Were there organized calisthenics, for everybody?

RADOMSKI: Everything was organized, that's right. You had that. When you got through with your organized calisthenics it was great, because you felt stimulated. Then you did all these exercises with your rifles and all that. So you didn't need to worry about exercise; you got plenty of it.

SIGRIST: Is there any officer that sticks out in your mind for some reason?

RADOMSKI: Not on Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Not on Ellis Island.

RADOMSKI: On Ellis Island, only the Chief Boson stuck out in my mind, because he was our disciplinarian, and I don't remember his name, but he was a boxing champ for the Coast Guard, so that's why I had a few words with him. Because he wanted us to go get beat up [laughs], and we didn't see eye to eye! But, that's a personal thing.

SIGRIST: We have five minutes left on the tape.

RADOMSKI: Go ahead.

SIGRIST: And I'm going to give you the choice of where you'd like to go. Would you like to talk about the rest of your life in the Coast Guard, or would you like to spend the last five minutes talking about the art work that you've done, and like, the piece that you donated to the Statue of Liberty, to our collection? How would you like to spend your last five minutes.

RADOMSKI: [Pause] Is this thing off?

SIGRIST: No, we're running.

RADOMSKI: Oh, you're still running. I'd like to spend the time with what I made for Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: All right, good. So we'll just, for the sake of the tape, clear up—you got off of Ellis Island later in 1941. Do you remember what month it was?

RADOMSKI: I don't recall the month, but I got transferred to a light ship in Essex, Connecticut. And I had a real rough winter there. You're anchored out on a light ship, and you get twenty-two days of bouncing like a top, and eight days liberty to start walking normal again! I had that for six months.

SIGRIST: Okay, why don't you start telling us about the art work that you do, what it is you do, and how you do it?

RADOMSKI: Well, actually, I learned my leather craft on a destroyer escort. They had ship's leather. So we'll get away from that, but that's how I started.

SIGRIST: And I should say that you're tooling leather into figures, and like creating relief on the—

RADOMSKI: I'll get into that. I was never, you know—I was fascinated to work with leather, and so when I got transferred—oh, let's get away from that part. They had this big celebration when they named the Statue of Liberty, Liberty Island. 'Cause you know, that was Bedloe's Island before it was the Statue of Liberty. And I went to all four days when they had—what was it, the hundred years anniversary?

SIGRIST: Mm-hm, 1986.

RADOMSKI: So I went there for the four days. Now you know, I did duty on the Statue of Liberty when I was on a communications area, and I would go back and forth on that ferry boat, and it was two of us on watch all the time, because during the war, they threatened to blow that place up. So we're on duty there. So when I came back and forth, I saw these circulars all over the streets, all different things, and all that. And I had been in leather craft already; I had been doing a lot of leather all through. And I had this big piece of leather, and I says, "Well, I'm going to start doing something about that anniversary date." And I start working, and I picked up one of the circulars off the street, and as a matter of fact I picked up two. One had the statue, but only this part.

SIGRIST: From the bust up.

RADOMSKI: And the other one was a slightly smaller version, but it had—see, I wanted it with the book. You know how she holds the book there? So I managed to get the big part on first, and then I exaggerated the smaller part with the book, and I got the book in there. And then the rest was, I just adlibbed on there. And the deeper I got, the better it started looking. And the final thing—did you see it?

SIGRIST: Yes, we saw in yesterday.

[End of Tape One, Side B/Start of Tape Two, Side A]

SIGRIST: Can you say for the tape, in two minutes, how you colored it?

RADOMSKI: Oh, now everybody thinks that I used all kinds of Indian mixtures and whatever to color it. All I used is a permanent magic marker colors, and I also blended a little bit, when I wanted a little to differentiate the color a little bit. Of course, there's only five or six real strong colors I could use, and I wanted to have a little different color in it. And that's how I get all these different colors in there. And people seem to be fascinated by all this coloring. Actually, though, if you make a mistake, it's there, see. So I thank God for my—for when I really outlined and put all these marks in there, how I could get away with that!

SIGRIST: Did you make that to donate to our collection, or did you make it for yourself?

RADOMSKI: No, I made that for the Statue of Liberty. I already talked about it with my Director at Children's Village. He got a hold of the Secretary, and she did the corresponding. I says, "Marie, I want to donate that to the statue." I says, "That's why I made it." She says, "We'll do it." And the Director—they had a boat waiting for us, the whole thing! It was unbelievable, how, you know, the reception we got! They took us on a whole tour. You know, I climbed that tower, the arm. It was restricted. We had a storm one night, and we thought somebody was up in there, messing around. We went up there, two of us. I wouldn't go up alone—that's how bad it was! It was spookier than heck! So the two of us went up there that were on watch, inspecting. And somebody had broken the lock on that entrance there. So I says, "Well," I don't remember the guy's name. I says, "I'm here. I'm going up in the arm." So I went up into that cradle. I went up into the torch, and the breeze was so swift, I came right down. I said, "Well, I was up there," and that was it. That's the last thing I remember about the Statue of Liberty. I took some chances! Anyway, the wind up came where things just turned out pretty good that way.

SIGRIST: Yeah. We need to end now. I want to thank you very much for letting us come out here on a day's notice.

RADOMSKI: I hope I gave you some information.

SIGRIST: You did a wonderful job! We're always looking for information about Ellis Island at that time, and I thank you very much.

RADOMSKI: Now, could you please tell--?

SIGRIST: Shall we end first?

RADOMSKI: Yeah.

SIGRIST: All right. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Anthony Radomski on Thursday, August 10th, 1995, here in Ardsley, New York. Thank you.

[End of Interview]