**Paul:** Good afternoon, this is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday August 10th, 1994. I'm in the Ellis Island recording studio with Rudy Burger. Mr. Burger was in the coast guard here at Ellis Island from 1940-1942, anyway welcome to the recording studio.

**Rudy:** Thank you very much.

**Paul:** May we begin by you giving me your birth date please?

**Rudy:** My birthdate the January 6th, 1921.

**Paul:** Can you tell me where you were born?

**Rudy:** I was born and raised in the city of Renton, Washington by my mother Louis Burger. My father's name was Mike Burger.

**Paul:** What was your mother's maiden name?

**Rudy:** Maiden when she came through Ellis Island was Kutner.

**Paul:** Can you spell that please?

**Rudy:** K-U-T-N-E-R.

**Paul:** Can you give me sort of a thumbnail sketch about your parents’ background and where they came from?

**Rudy:**  They came from Ljubljana which was part of Austria before World War 1 and my father came from the same area. I visited their home which is in the town of Lukavitza and Dom Jaga.

**Paul:** Can you spell those please [chuckle]?

**Rudy:** That would be very difficult for me to do is to spell those.

**Paul:** Alright.

**Rudy:** I have been back there on a couple of trips but I have resided in Renton, Washington. I do live at the present time in Enumclaw, Washington which is approximately 25-30 minutes from Renton.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about why your parents came to this country and when they came to this country.

**Rudy:** They came to this country for better living conditions, the war was coming on. Mum told me that they wanted to get out of there before the World War 1 started, it was getting pretty tough on them, living conditions and everything else was real hard on them so they did make arrangements to come to this country both of them.

They did not know one another until after they migrated or what you might say travelled to- they went to Cleveland, Ohio first and from Cleveland they ended up in Montana, Idaho area and then they ended up in the Renton vicinity.

Mum and dad met one another in Montana which is where the copper mines was, my father worked in copper mines, gold mines. Mum was a cook in the different camps there and that’s how they got acquainted and ended up getting married.

**Paul:** That’s interesting, do you know what date or dates obviously because they came in separate times I assume?

**Rudy:** I believe mum said that she came here about 1912 and dad was here about 1913.

**Paul:** I see. Tell me again just briefly what it was like growing up with immigrant parents when you were young.

**Rudy:** It was very difficult because mum and dad spoke the Slovenian, it’s what their native language was, it was not Austrian although they did come from the Austrian country before the war. They spoke Slovenian which they taught us Slovenian, they taught us how to read Slovenian when I was a child.

It was real difficult for me when I first went to school because school was hard the first year and second year I flanked, I did not pass my first year of school and my second year. They kept me back so that made me a little older as I went on but it was tough but everything in our home was the old fashioned, the old country way of living.

**Paul:** Were there a lot of people from that part of the world who resided in your town in Washington when you were growing up?

**Rudy:** Yes, the city of Renton had a colony or a group of Austrians living there, they called themselves Austrians or Slovenians. They had their lodge, they had their ethnic way of living, we had their picnics- the Slovenian picnics, dad played the accordion so he was very popular with people because anytime there was a party to be had dad was always invited. Dad made his own wine bottled their own beer and they did make their own moon shine [laughter].

**Paul:** That’s interesting.

**Rudy:** Which is [unclear 00:04:38] and they made it out of the grape which they called grappa, similar to the Italian way and [unclear 00:04:47] was made from plums.

**Paul:** So they really sort of maintained the kind of old world lifestyle even though they were transplanted here in the new world.

**Rudy:** Definitely, they did. They lived their own old country style of living, cooking the food, a lot of pork, a lot of sausage, a lot of what which we call Kielbasa.

We had our own home where mum and dad had their own garden, big garden and we had our own chicken coup and we had a lot of chickens and as I said we lived the old country style.

**Paul:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**Rudy:** Yes, I did.

**Paul:** Could you name them for me on tape?

**Rudy:** Yes, I had a brother by the name of Elma Burger- retired from the US Navy, I had a half-sister by the name of Josephine Masel- that was her married name and mom was married once before she married my father.

**Paul:** How do you spell Masel?

**Rudy:** Masel, M-A-S-E-L.

**Paul:** Thank you, so just the two Elma and Josephine?

**Rudy:** Hmmm.

**Paul:** And they're older than you are?

**Rudy:** No, my brother was younger than I am.

**Paul:** Oh, your brother was younger.

**Rudy:** Well, she's passed away.

**Paul:** Interesting that both men, both brothers choose the military path.

**Rudy:** Well, the reason for me going into the service when I did, I joined in 1939, things was really tough. My father was in a tuberculosis sanitarium which was in Georgetown just outside of Seattle and what they call it Georgetown sanitarium- Morning side sanitarium in Georgetown. I've repeated that three times but dad was there approximately two and half years to three years and he died with tuberculosis.

This day and age I would say it was probably cancer, it was probably black lung from working in the coal mines and working in the foundries, copper mines and so on but we would visit dad on Wednesdays and Sundays but then mum raised my brother and I by herself.

**Paul:** Did your father's death have some bearing on the fact that you decided to go into --?

**Rudy:** Yes, things were real tough, we were living on you might call welfare. Mum did work in a sewing room at the library for the government to make money, the government did set up a program similar to CCs and she didn't get paid an awful lot and I decided to join the coast guard.

I was half of my eleventh year in high school and things were tough at home, we didn't have the money. In fact after I joined the coast guard I sent my mother home $10 a month because I got $21 a month pay and as I got from apprentice seaman to second class seaman to first class seaman then I could send them more money each month.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about how you went about joining the coast guard and what is the procedure like.

**Rudy:** Procedure like, I was very disgusted with school, school was very tough for me due to the fact that I would say my first two years and then being from parents that didn't speak English in my first two years of school. I was always felt like I was backwards in school a little bit. I had a tough time with English, tough time with arithmetic. School was tough on me.

So, I decided one day I've had enough of school, I hitch hiked to Seattle, went in and asked the coast guard- that’s where I wanted to go because a friend of mine was in the coastguard I thought that would be a great place for me to go. So, I went down to the recruiting office in Seattle, I can't remember what building it was in but I did find it and asked to join and they filled out all my paper work and they sent me to the marine hospital for an examination and I had two teeth that had to be filled and if I got those two teeth filled I could join the coast guard.

So I went back to Renton and I hitch hiked back to Renton from Seattle and the next day I went to Dr. Booth's office which was a dentist and told him my problems and he filled my two teeth and when I got my first pay check I sent him $3 and after I got them filled he made up a note for me and I went back to the coast guard and that’s how I joined.

I went through boot camp in Port Townsend which is on the other side of Puget town which is on the approximately at a good hour and half out of Seattle. Today by the bridge that they have the picture there but I had to go by ferry at that time.

**Paul:** And then how long after you got out boot camp- how long had it elapsed before you were brought to Ellis Island?

**Rudy:** Before that, when I did my boot camp duty at Port Townsend, from Port Townsend I was stationed in Seattle at the coast guard repair base and I put in about approximately four months there at the repair base and I kept asking to be on a ship, I wanted to be on a ship and then the time that I was at the repair base it was sort of the stopping off place to get you oriented with the coast guard.

I was living at home and I was getting subsistence pay for approximately four and half to five months and I would take the Seattle trolley, I took the rainier trolley into Seattle, go to the repair base and I would go home at night.

I was carrying a lunch bucket just like I had a regular job [chuckle] and from there I kept asking to be on the ship and I finally got stationed on the coast guard cutter red wing.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about that experience and where the ship was going and what your duties were on the ship?

**Rudy:** The coast guard cutter red wing was approximately 185 footer, she was the ocean going tag, we took supplies on in Seattle and from Seattle we went to Alaska and delivered supplies to the different coast guards bases up there which were the light houses and on the inside passage.

Wherever there was light houses and they blanked the United States government that’s where we went. We went clear up on Alaska and Dutch harbor and our duties were out of Dutch harbor and Alaska and we took on a group of University of Washington. At that time it was like the- I can't remember what the name of the group was but they would go out to take out sounding of the oceans, to see what was at the bottom of the ocean and stuff like that.

You got to remember now I was only about 17 years of age at that time and it was just a big thing for me just to be on the ship and at my age today it’s hard for me to remember all these things that you're asking me [laughter].

**Paul:** That’s alright, you're doing fine.

**Rudy:** Some of it is coming back little by little.

**Paul:** Tonight when you go home and you're lying in bed it will all come back.

**Rudy:** Right.

**Paul:** What was the route of the ship? Where did the ship go?

**Rudy:** We were on seal patrol up in the [unclear 00:13:08] Island, Saint Laurent Islands in Alaska. We were stationed actually in Dutch harbor and Alaska then we went out from Dutch harbor down to Alaska.

**Paul:** Now you said to me before the interview began that you ended up on a ship that docked in Brooklyn.

**Rudy:** That’s right. It was the US coast guard cutter redwing. Before the war had started they asked us to bring the ship from Alaska to Seattle which we went to [unclear 00:13:50] which used to be a naval base there- repair base and they went through the whole ship then we got orders to take the ship on around through Panama canal on around to the Brooklyn navy yard and that’s where they decommissioned the ship and turned it over to the navy.

**Paul:** You're seeing a lot of world for a young man from Washington State.

**Rudy:** I have to admit that the coast guard was good to me. I can't say anything bad that everything I did was great, was good duty. I was surprised when we brought her all the way around to Brooklyn and then ended up on Ellis Island.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about how that happened, I mean why did you have to go to Ellis Island when the boat docked in Brooklyn?

**Rudy:** From what I understand at that time, I don't know why they brought us to Ellis Island but this was supposed to be like a coast guard base, I don't know if it was a boot camp or what but when we got here there were coast guardsmen here already and they just brought our whole ship here.

Some of our crew and officers were shipped off to other places but all the seamen and everything came right here. I remember that I spent quite a bit of a time here at Ellis Island before they shipped me out of here.

**Paul:** Let’s talk about what you remember about Ellis Island, can you remember the first day you were on the island?

**Rudy:** The first day that I came to Ellis Island I couldn't wait to find a phone to call my mother to tell her where I was. First thing I did, I called home [unclear 00:15:38] to tell mum that I was stationed on Ellis Island.

**Paul:** Of course Ellis Island would have a completely different meaning to her than as a coast guards station.

**Rudy:** Yeah, in fact she was rather surprised that this is where I was. Ellis Island means a lot to me, my parents came from here came through the island and being stationed here during the war, it means a lot.

**Paul:** When you first arrived on the island, was there some kind of orientation extended to you and your fellow coast guardsmen or some kind of tour isn't the right word but I mean how were you introduced to the island and made to feel like this was going to be your home?

**Rudy:** Not much of anything except coming to the island they brought us to- all I can remember from Brooklyn to the ferry landing where the ferry brought us over from the mainland to the island and when we got over here they assigned bunks to us. If I recall correctly we were on the main floor if that’s the main floor that you come in through the big doors downstairs and I remember having my bunks there.

The big doors were not opened when we came in here, for some reasons or other that throws me off a little bit where the big lining that you'd come in on, we didn't have that, that looks new to me. The building itself was not a real great building, it needed a lot of work to be done to it, we had all our eating course, I can't remember what room we ate in or anything like that, it’s been a long time.

It’s been almost 50 years ago, when you ask me these questions [laughter]. At the time that we came in they off limited a lot of the buildings to us fellas, we did not get to go wondering all over the place but we were told to stay right in a certain area and that was it.

**Paul:** Tell me what an average day in the coast guard at Ellis Island was like starting from the time you got up, what time did you have to get up in the morning?

**Rudy:** No, really it wasn't that tough on us. If I recall correctly that we would wake up approximately around 7 O'clock. I was shore patrol man here and I would go at shore at night and I used to pull duty in what I call bow and green over there.

There other names that you people call it over here, I call it bow and green that’s where we pulled most of my duties and we used to patrol around there for the bars and stuff like that and we did work around lower you call it Lower Manhattan and that was about all of our duty that we had but when the war broke out over here I was stationed on the island and the first thing they give me was a 45 and told us to put on our leggings on your legs, they were white and we went ashore.

That was our duties when the war broke out and we worked with the FBI in rounding up- it’s not, I shouldn't say like that but picking up the Japanese.

**Paul:** Oh absolutely, sure. We've heard this on a number of occasions they said of it.

**Rudy:** We picked up the Japanese and we guarded them over at the mainland, we had a building over there where they were bringing them in. A lot of them came in from around Brooklyn navy yard and they were actually spies, it was surprising and they had suitcases of money.

It was surprising to me to this day how much money that they had in their possession at the time that they were picked up and I don't know what else you would like me to say.

**Paul:** I'd like you to talk more about the rounding up of the Japanese. I'd like you to explain to me exactly what the procedure was. How were the people identified and then how did you go and get them?

**Rudy:** The way it was if I could recall correctly, the New York police were working with the FBI, we were guards at the detention center that they brought them to us, brought them to the ferry landing dock on the mainland and then from there they would cuff them, bring them over here and we brought them on the ferry over to the island and turned them over to immigrations officers over here.

That’s all I can remember, there was FBI working with them, we were just guards, that’s all we were, coast guardsmen acting as guards. We worked with the FBI, we worked with the immigration people and that was all I can say on that. It’s pretty hard for me to remember everything.

**Paul:** So the Japanese that were detained here then they were brought to Ellis Island- certain ones probably not everybody but I mean certain ones were brought here.

**Rudy:** They were spies, they were actual spies that had homes set up, apartments set up around the Brooklyn navy yard, those were the ones that they brought in.

**Paul:** Did the FBI have offices out here also, that you can recall?

**Rudy:** That I cannot say but [chuckle] being 17 years old, I think that I cannot tell you if they had offices here, I know that the immigrations people were here and I know the FBI was here but I don't know where their offices were. We didn't get to get into that detail.

**Paul:** In your time in Ellis Island were there any other circumstances where you functioned in some capacity for the FBI?

**Rudy:** No.

**Paul:** For instance if you had to accompany the FBI to pick up one particular person for some reason or something like that.

**Rudy:** No, they handled that themselves.

**Paul:** I see, so you were just detailed on this one--?

**Rudy:** Just detailed, all were was guards.

**Paul:** What interaction if any did you have with the immigration part of the island?

**Rudy:** I can't say that I had anything to do with that part. As I said, they would bring them in to the mainland, we would detain them until they were brought to the island, they did have some of their personal belongings. They had quite a bit of money with them, the Japanese people did and most of them were men. We did not have any women, I don't recall any of the women, if they were they were in a different area. All I can still remember was the men.

**Paul:** Aside from the Japanese, did you ever assist the immigration officials in any capacity?

**Rudy:** No, did not.

**Paul:** Again this was just that one special circumstance.

**Rudy:** Yeah, just when the war broke out and I would say that lasted for approximately only two weeks that I can recall that I pulled duty on that.

**Paul:** Do you remember where you were when you found out the Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

**Rudy:** Yes, I was downtown, I was in Manhattan at the Paramount Theater when the lights came on at the theatre, the manager came out on the stage and he says, "All military personnel are to report back to their basis immediately, Japan has declared on the United States."

And when I got back to Ellis Island they issued me a gun and we were protecting the island. Now, to this day I still want to know what I was going to protect with a 30 odd 6 [laughter]. You know it was quite amazing to me but they didn't know what was going to take place and then within a day or two and then we started rounding up the Japanese.

**Paul:** So the atmosphere changed at that point?

**Rudy:** Everything changed.

**Paul:** Can you tell me a little bit about how your everyday life here on the island changed because of the war? Because you were there during the early years of the war.

**Rudy:** You got to remember when we were stationed here there wasn't much on the island and you were confined to the island and we did have a young man by the name Marty Savo which was a boxer and he was supposed to Sugar Ray. I can't remember the whole story on that but he did come to the island and he did train here.

Now, I can't remember if he was on the coast guard or not, if he was in the military or not but they did bring there. Marty Savo I think he was from the New York area and he [laughter], did use a lot of the different coast guardsmen for training but he did have his own spurring partners here too.

I recall when Jack Dempsey came here, he was on the island, we had a lot of different celebrities come to the island to visit with us but that’s about all I can give you on that.

**Paul:** Was boxing an important recreation activity here for the coast guardsmen?

**Rudy:** I would say yes, we had a ring set up. It was on the main floor, its right where the big double doors are, where the orning is and I can still remember that boxing ring set up down there and I can't remember what other doors we used to come into this building, that throws me on that because those big double doors on that orning throws me because it’s been a long time, 50 years ago is a long time to come back here and reminisce.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about what other coastguardsmen were doing out here, were you aware of being other groups of coastguardsmen who were here for different reasons?

**Rudy:** Other coastguardsmen came here and they went, they would come here until they got their papers, shipping out papers, a lot of them got shipped out of here. I finally got shipped out of here and I was stationed on the French liner Normandie on the harbor here on the Hudson river and long side just over from us was the Queen Mary, was stationed there and I was stationed on the French liner Normandie, I was a guard on that and I don't recall how many men we had on the French liner Normandie but I did pull duty on it until they decided to make a troop ship out of her.

**Paul:** This is after you left, after 1942 when you left here?

**Rudy:** Hmm.

**Paul:** I see. Were you aware of the Signal Masters School for instance here at Ellis Island where coastguardsmen were learning Semaphore?

**Rudy:** Yes, they were teaching us Semaphore when I was here too.

**Paul:** Oh well please. Talk a little bit about that.

**Rudy:** I can't remember anything about [laughter] but they did teach us Semaphore here. Yes, I recall that, yes, yes but all I remember is that they had signal core here and they did teach us that and I don't remember the details on it.

**Paul:** Do you remember any other kind of educational opportunities that you had while you were stationed here, specific classes that you had to attend or something along those lines?

**Rudy:** None, I can't remember any classes that we had to go through, I don't.

**Paul:** What about entertainment? What did you guys do for fun when you had time off?

**Rudy:** To get off the island and go on liberty to Manhattan.

**Paul:** And that was sort of standard?

**Rudy:** That was standard practice for all the men on the island.

**Paul:** How often would you have liberty?

**Rudy:** Just about every night.

**Paul:** Oh really.

**Rudy:** Except if you had duty, if you were a shore patrol you went ashore and you pulled your duty. If not you're on duty here on the island, you had a pulled guard duty on the island.

**Paul:** And if you had to do guard duty on the island, where would you do that?

**Rudy:** Well, just about any place in the perimeter of the island, you'd have to be along the water’s edge, wherever that water’s edge was, that is what you patrolled.

**Paul:** And how does one patrol? What is it that you did?

**Rudy:** You had a 45 and just walked around out there and maybe each guy had a certain area that they patrolled. It maybe the two of walking along but that was your duty on the perimeter of the water of the island.

**Paul:** I should say for the sake of the tape for someone 100 years from now listening to this or a 45 is a type of rifle.

**Rudy:** It’s a pistol. They did give us the 30 odd 6s but they did give us 45 were issued to us too.

**Paul:** And that’s another type of pistol right?

**Rudy:** Yes.

**Paul:** Was there target practice somewhere on the island or?

**Rudy:** No.

**Paul:** You had learned how to use the guns prior to coming.

**Rudy:** I had done all that through boot camp and they just assumed that we had knowledge how to use a gun.

**Paul:** Good, we're going to pause just for a second, Kevin will flip over the tapes and I have some more questions to ask you. Alright, we’re not continuing on side two with Rudy Burger. Mr. Burger can you describe for me your uniform?

**Rudy:** My uniform I had a regular standard coast guard uniform which was blue and it had the white trim on it, black and white if you had first, second and class seamen you had three stripes on your calf and then you had your shoulder patch.

Warrior you did have your neckerchief which I don't know what you would call but that’s what I would call it then you would have the old fashioned coast guard cap or hat and had the name of the ship that you might have been stationed with which mine said US coast guard cutter red wing.

**Paul:** Now were you responsible for cleaning your uniforms or was there a facility on the island that did that?

**Rudy:** Yes, that was one thing that the coast guard was very strict about- the officers were strict about your uniform. It had to be pressed, a lot of fellas they had their uniforms made by a tailor. I had a tailor made uniform, I had my issued uniform.

The issued uniform would have been a wool type uniform, it was heavy, the tailor made uniform was more of a gabardine type cloth, it looked a lot sharper and dressier and that’s what you would wear when you go on liberty.

For dress inspection you always wore the issued uniform, they didn't allow us to wear the tailor made uniform for inspection. Our sea bag had to be a certain way. Our locker had to be stored with your uniform and under clothing t-shirts, underwear had to be stored properly because you had locker inspection.

Your bunk had to be made up a certain way when you got up in the morning. You took your shower and got cleaned up for the day your bunk had to be orderly when you left that for inspection.

**Paul:** Can you remember how many coast guardsmen would share the dormitory room where you were?

**Rudy:** No.

**Paul:** How many bunks they were?

**Rudy:** On board ship we had a regular bunk area. I mean it was cruise quarter.

**Paul:** But here in Ellis Island.

**Rudy:** In Ellis Island I would say the whole dormitory, the whole main floor was men and bunks and it was two tier bunks not three. It was two steer and I was telling my wife today when I was here I can't believe, I said, "Where in the heck those bunks went," but I did see some bunks here but those were the ones that the immigrants used.

Ours were single bunks you slept alone, they furnished you a mattress but you had your own pillow cases and your own sheets but it was clean, your bunk- sleeping area had to be very clean. Excuse me.

**Paul:** Do you have a glass of water.

**Rudy:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Could we just pause for a moment, I'll get you a glass of water. Okay, we're now resuming, you mentioned that one major form of entertainment was going into Manhattan. Was there any kind of entertainment supplied for you here on the island? You mentioned entertainers came out here.

**Rudy:** No, few of them came out here due to the fact of Marty Savo the boxer. Truthfully speaking there was no real entertainment we did and when the war started and the USO started we used to go at the USOs and they used to furnish us with entertainment, dancing and then they did give us tickets to go to different events like at the Madison Square garden and stuff like that.

**Paul:** Do you remember where the USO was in that [unclear 00:33:43].

**Rudy:** You're asking me a question that’s real hard to find. I couldn't even tell you where the USO was but they did a tremendous job for the servicemen. I remember going to the Madison square garden, to different events, I did get to meet Mark Schmeling, different things that came up.

When the hockey was going on, see you got to remember when the war broke out a lot of things got discontinued, a lot of sports got discontinued, boxing didn't for some reason or another it just continued but most of your big events like baseball.

It hurt baseball, it hurt hockey, it hurt basketball, different events because the young men were all going into the service, so really we didn't get that kind of entertainment here on the island.

**Paul:** Were there any kind of sporting opportunities for you here on the island you know like a softball team or something?

**Rudy:** I don't recall that. No, I don't recall of any events like that. This is was a military base, the war was on, they used us for guard duty and you got to remember that Ellis island was a shipping out place just to stopping over place for coast guardsmen and they would only be here a short time and away they would go and they'd be off to a ship, put on a ship or shipped overseas or someplace.

**Paul:** And would you say then that Ellis Island really then was just sort of a keeping place for coast guardsmen who were in between in a way.

**Rudy:** Yes, I say the Ellis Island was just about the same for the coast guardsmen as it was for the immigrants who came here. A stopping off spot.

**Paul:** Do you remember any kind of emergency happening while you were here, aside from the beginning of World War 2? Some kind of something that either happened on the island or perhaps in New York harbor that was a big catastrophe, a big emergency, something that sticks out in your mind.

**Rudy:** No, I do not have any knowledge of that, I really do not unless something came up that somebody would refresh my memory of something but I can't remember any big thing that went on in the harbor. I do know that there was an awful lot of shipping, you know ships going back and forth from all different directions I would say that much.

Due to the fact that I would say that New York harbor was one of your big harbors for shipping at the time of the war, there was a lot ships going and coming, all cargo type ships and that’s about all I can tell you then.

**Paul:** Were you ever allowed to go over to the Statue of Liberty for any reason?

**Rudy:** Yes, I did make liberty out to go over there. I'm very much impressed with the statue then if I could remember I think they closed that off for a while when the war broke out. I think it was closed off to the public. I know I did go over there when I was in the service and I know I went down to Washington DC when I was in the service from here.

I did take the train and go down for that but as far as it goes for the statue, I did go in it and they did have at the time that I went in to the statue, you could only go up into the head of it, the arm had been closed off due to the fact that the deterioration of the rust and corrosion and things that was on the statue.

**Paul:** Tell me about the holidays, for instance at Christmas time, did they do anything for the coast guardsmen out here that you can remember?

**Rudy:** A lot of fellas went home on liberty. They got leave to go home for Christmas. Christmas you spent in the service, on the base or on board ship and Christmas was Christmas. If you were in harbor someplace they'd let you go on liberty and things like that but no Christmas was Christmas wherever you were that’s where it was.

**Paul:** While you were stationed at Ellis Island were you able to see any of your family members for any reason or while they were still in Washington State?

**Rudy:** None of my relatives ever came here, you got to remember that was right after the depression and money was tight and I'm a little surprised that my visit back here in 1994 in this date that I'm here right now after going into Manhattan and the price of food and the price of a glass of beer to what it was when I was here because you could buy a glass of beer and a good pastrami sandwich [chuckle] and a corn beef sandwich for 50 cents and today its eight bucks. So that just goes you to show what has happened to the economy.

**Paul:** Was there a little store for supplies that you could buy stuff here at Ellis Island while you were stationed here?

**Rudy:** They had the bare necessities, I don't remember where the store was on the island here but you could buy for your toothpaste and things like that, to shave, your razor blades and things like that.

**Paul:** So that kind of stuff was not supplied by the government, you were responsible for it?

**Rudy:** No, that was your responsibility to supply your own toothpaste. I don't recall anybody ever giving me, there was plenty of soap and plenty of water but [laughter]--.

**Paul:** Was there a shower room connected to the dormitory room?

**Rudy:** I've been trying to find the showers here and I tried explaining to wife because she asked me where the shower room was, "Where did you guys take a bath while you here?" And really I cannot tell you, I did find the lavatories its down by the theater, I walked down there and I said, "I remember this toilet in here," and that’s about it. Other than that I can't remember where the shower stalls were.

**Paul:** The officers that were on the island at that time, is there one particular officer or perhaps one particular fellow coastguardsmen that sticks out in your mind for some reasons because something that they did or something along those lines?

**Rudy:** The one young man that lived here in the city of New York, he lived in the Queens. His name was Tembranski and that’s the only person that I can remember that I was stationed with.

**Paul:** Why does he stick out in your mind?

**Rudy:** I don't have any idea in my mind why Tembranski does, he does stick out in my mind but that’s the only one and he was just a regular seaman like myself but the officers came and went and I would say as the war went on and they just got pulled out of here, they were just here as the dropping off spot. The officers that was running the Ellis island or in charge of Ellis island, I can't remember all we did was [00:41:00] and chiefs would come on and say, “Burger you got this,” or so and so is got to do that and that was it. They would just call your name out and this is what you had to do, this is the duty roaster and stuff like that but you didn't get to rub elbows with the officers, no.

**Paul:** Well as you say, I mean they're as transiting as the coast guards right and they're going in and out quickly too.

**Rudy:** We were at war when I was here, the United States government was at war and as shipped got commissioned, decommissioned and then I would say all the landing crafts and LSTs that they built, these men went out, they didn't keep us very long.

**Paul:** You mentioned the Normandie and the Queen Mary, were those ships converted for you starting the war and if they were did any of you have anything to do with that?

**Rudy:** The only ship that I was stationed on was the French liner Normandie and that was the one that caught on fire in the harbor, she rolled over on her side and I did get to go see her, I did see her lying on her side and that was fond memory, that was a beautiful ship.

**Paul:** See you do remember an emergency then that happened [laughter].

**Rudy:** Well that might have been an emergency yeah. When the war broke out, the United States government took possession of the French liner Normandie, they did keep the French crew on their which I would say approximately they kept the black gang which was the engine crew, they did not keep anybody on the decks of the crew.

They shipped them all back to France, they only ones that they kept there was the men that could handle the engines because they did turn the engines over every so often in the harbor due to the fact that the river would bring all the silt down and they had to keep their props cleared of silt and I do recall that and I was stationed on her.

I had beautiful quarters on there, we had an officer on there, I don't even know who he was to this day. It was a small crew that we had and we did have a chief on board and you got to remember 50 years is a long time.

**Paul:** Did you ever have any opportunity to go to the medical facilities here on the island or if something happened to one of the coast guardsmen, how and where was it treated?

**Rudy:** Now you asked me a question I can't answer to you. I mean I really cannot answer if we had a medical dispensary here but I'm sure we did. I never had to use it, I never cut my finger or anything or I never got sick. I didn't have time to get sick, I was too busy doing everything else [laughter].

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about how you got off the island?

**Rudy:** How I got off the island?

**Paul:** Yeah, how was it decided that you would then leave this post?

**Rudy:** I put in for duty off the island. The clear blue sky got French liner Normandie.

**Paul:** Why was it that you wanted to get off of the island?

**Rudy:** Well, everybody that’s in the service wants to do something besides sit on an island. I mean the island was great. There was nothing to do here. You'd come here and you spend your days here, guard duty, you go out and you put in your 4 to 6 hours guard duty and then you'd come back then you'd have your dinner or your supper and that was it.

There was like I said we did have card games and stuff like that to your entertainment on the island but that was about as much. We did have movies on the island. I mean in the building here some place. I remember we had movies but no liberty was the greatest thing, you could go on liberty, they gave us good liberty here and it was real close to the mainland.

**Paul:** But really you were just kind of bored and anxious too?

**Rudy:** Yeah and everybody wanted to get off the island, everybody wanted to get on the ship. We were at war, I'd put in for duty beside the island and I did get shipped to French liner Normandy. I lived on the ship, that was my next duty and then from there I went to the cornfield light ship which was outside of new London Connecticut.

I went to new London from here, I was stationed at new London for a short time and then I did get duty on the cornfield light ship and that’s where I finished all my service.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about why you came back to Ellis Island today and what it felt like today?

**Rudy:** The reason I came back to the island, we did come on a vacation my wife and I- Kris is her name.

**Paul:** What’s her maiden name?

**Rudy:** Jorgensen and she wanted to look up her family that came through the island, the Jorgensen family.

**Paul:** That’s J-O-R-G

**Rudy:** J-O-R-S-E-N-S-O-N. She wanted to come to the island just as bad as I did and look up the family tree a little bit, if there was anything, any history on her family coming here. Her which would be her father's mother came here I believe with five children when she came through the island and her father was born in the United States Matt Jorgensen and that’s one of the reasons we came here is she wanted to look up come here history.

**Paul:** And when you came here, when you actually got to the island. What did it feel like for you?

**Rudy:** My friend I will tell you this, I cried. I have a lot of memories here.

**Paul:** You obviously felt some kind of an emotional connection to the island itself.

**Rudy:** Definitely, yes. Just by my parents coming here and then by being stationed here.

**Paul:** So sort of a double connection.

**Rudy:** Yeah, it is.

**Paul:** Do you think you'll visit again sometime?

**Rudy:** If I live long enough I would come back.

**Paul:** Great, Mr. Burger thank you very much I know you took time out from your visit to do this for us. I really appreciate.

**Rudy:** I appreciate it. It’s very awarding to me to be able to do this.

**Paul:** Thank you. This is Paul Seacrest signing off with Rudy Burger on Wednesday august 10th, 1994 at the Ellis Island recording studio.