

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Telephone Interview with

Dr. Israel Reuben Berger

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Telephone Interview in progress.

Ed Metzler: Okay, today is May the 22nd, 2008. This is Ed Metzler and I am interviewing Dr. Israel Rubin Berger. This interview is by telephone; he is located in Dallas, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Let me start out, Israel, by thanking you for spending your time this morning sharing your experiences with us and let me turn it over to you by getting you to introduce yourself and when and where you were born; things like that and we'll take it from there.

Dr. Berger: My name is Israel Reuben Berger; I was born in a very small town in the very middle part of South Carolina the name of which was Elloree on October 12, 1919. I was the fourth of seven children; my parents both came to the U.S. in the interval between 1905 and 1910 or thereabouts. My dad went, initially, to visit and stay with an uncle in Virginia, and a few years after that he worked in my uncle's...what we call a dry goods store. A few years after that he put a pack on his back and he became a peddler, (laughter) and he worked his way

southward and westward and ended up in this little village of Ellore, South Carolina; population probably about eleven hundred to twelve hundred people.

Ed Metzler: Let me interrupt you for a second. Where...what country did he come from?

Dr. Berger: Lithuania.

Ed Metzler: Alright, Lithuania.

Dr. Berger: And he and my mother were both born in Lithuania twelve miles apart, but they didn't meet until they were both in the U.S.

Ed Metzler: What a coincidence!

Dr. Berger: Yes, it is. And my dad opened a dry goods store sometime in 1912, 1913 era. And on one of the business trips to Savannah, by train, because he had to get supplies for the store he joined a synagogue which was being formed in Savannah, Georgia called the Bnai Brith Jacob, and he was one of the founding members. Subsequently to that, believe it not, I had my bar mitzvah in it when I was thirteen years old. He and my mother had seven children the oldest of which was my sister, Dora, who was born in 1914 and she passed away about, oh I guess, twenty odd years ago. The second was a boy named Mordi (sp?) or Mordecai (sp?) and during the hard times of the '20s and early '30s he became a semi-pro boxer; subsequently he enlisted in...when World War II started in the Army and went into the Air Force and got to be a Captain in Supply, and subsequently, much later in this discussion I met him on Saipan and brought him aboard ship and gave him the first warm meal he'd had in months.

Ed Metzler: What another coincidence!

Dr. Berger: Yes.

Ed Metzler: My word!

Dr. Berger: Anyhoo, I went...I think, through about the fifth or sixth...perhaps the seventh grade in a school in Ellore, South Carolina. Subsequently my dad got involved with trying to make a million bucks all in one day in Florida in the boom and bust.

Ed Metzler: Oops!

Dr. Berger: And he and a brother-in-law and another person he met in Savannah invested in building a building in Sarasota, Florida, and about that time the bust began and they lost everything they had.

Ed Metzler: Oh dear!

Dr. Berger: And we had an old wreck of a car and we drove from Sarasota leaving the youngest of the seven children with an aunt in Blackshear, Georgia because he was only two months old and we really didn't have enough money to feed him and my mother didn't have milk in her breast and so she left it with my mother's younger sister, Annie, in Blackshear, Georgia, and then went on up to Sylvania where I went through, I think, about the ninth or tenth grade there. And then he moved back to Ellore, South Carolina carrying me with him and that's where I graduated high school.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Berger: Subsequent to that he moved to Lincolnton, Georgia; no I just made a mistake, I graduated high school in Lincolnton, Georgia and that was another small

town of twelve, fourteen hundred people, and we were the only Jewish family there. And with a name like Israel Reuben, you have to believe that I had some difficulties from time to time.

Ed Metzler: Hmm! So, you felt some of the prejudice, huh?

Dr. Berger: Oh, you bet your sweet patooties!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Berger: And from there...since there was only eleven grades in that school, I was only sixteen and from there I...I graduated in May or June of what...'36, I think it was, and I went to the University Georgia and took up medical training; Pre-Med; graduated from the University of Georgia because I was very economical of my dad's money, and if you got on the Dean's List, you could take four credit courses instead of three. I made it my business to take four credit courses throughout that time and I finished Georgia in three and a quarter years...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...got into medical school at age nineteen; finished up...

Ed Metzler: This is the medical school at Georgia?

Dr. Berger: In Georgia at Augusta, Georgia; it was called...

Ed Metzler: That's not in Athens then, huh?

Dr. Berger: No, it's not in Athens.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Berger: It's in Augusta. (cough)

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: It was a class of forty-two doctors; I think we had three girls in the class.
And from there and during my senior year I took...there was a
correspondence course you could take with the Navy as a...an Ensign HVP
they called it. And I took that correspondence course, and I finished that up.

Ed Metzler: Now what year are we...are we in now?

Dr. Berger: This is May 5th, '42, as I'm looking at my Discharge sheet.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so the war started.

Dr. Berger: The war started for us...what was it, December 7th, '41...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...somewhere along in there, and from there, after graduation from medical
school, I went to Norfolk, Virginia as an Intern in a naval hospital in Norfolk,
and I think I got there in April of that year.

Ed Metzler: Now did you volunteer; did you get drafted; tell me again...?

Dr. Berger: No, no, no, I...I volunteered...

Ed Metzler: Okay, okay.

Dr. Berger: ...and they accepted me as an Intern. And from there, as a JG, a Lieutenant
JG, I...I was supposed to have twelve...one of the reasons I picked the Navy
is, at that time, they were having twelve-month internships.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: But I got in in April, and (unintelligible) but I got in the first week or so of the
following January decided the war needs were such that I would have to be
sent on active duty and I was sent to Rustin, Louisiana...

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: ...to what they called an NT Unit which really was a D-12 training Midshipmen.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, now did you ever actually practice the medical profession before you went into the Navy in between getting out of medical schools?

Dr. Berger: No, no, no, only a couple of courtesy calls when I got back to Lincolnton.

Ed Metzler: Right, right. And...and had you done, I guess, what we call, you know, the Residency and that kind of thing?

Dr. Berger: No, no, no; that came later.

Ed Metzler: Okay, good; I'm just trying to be thorough.

Dr. Berger: And so I was just a general medical officer, and in July of '44, I was shipped out to Oceanside, California for beach battalion training, and I was in the EZ Group which is the fifth group. That was wonderful because group 2 which was Baker went to Iwo Jima.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Dr. Berger: They...they finished up before I did. And so sometime in September of '44, we finished the beach party training; I had eight Corpsmen and one of whom was from New York and his name was Belkin (sp?) and I remember him because he was Jewish, but the other seven I don't remember their names except we had one genuine hillbilly (laughter) from North Carolina who had a guitar and he played it all the time. (laughter) And...we went aboard ship; picked it up in Astoria, Oregon as I remember.

Ed Metzler: Well, tell me a little bit more, if you will, about the beach party training. What did that entail?

Dr. Berger: Well, we went out with the troops usually in the third or fourth wave; set up an aide station on the beach; this was in practice, of course, then.

Ed Metzler: Correct, right.

Dr. Berger: And it was right off Oceanside, California where most of that was done.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: And then when we got aboard ship, we learned shipboard duties, and I was assigned as a third ranking medical officer for the ship's crew.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: And we first went to Hawaii.

Ed Metzler: So which ship was this?

Dr. Berger: It was the USS Drew, APA-162, and that's...unfortunately...

Ed Metzler: So tell me what an APA designation ship is...is what?

Dr. Berger: Well, it...it's actually a personnel carrier.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: It had a five inch cannon on its fantail and some machine guns along the sides, but really it was not a true warship in that effect, and we could carry about twelve hundred troops, and that's what we did. We took troops from the U.S. first to Oahu and then on to Saipan where we dropped them off, and my brother, Mordi, was there. As a matter of fact, my next younger brother, Albert, whose tape I just talked about...DVD, was already in the Air Corps; he'd been through all the pre-flight training; Pensacola and whatever, and he was assigned to a Navy Night Fighter Squadron. And I met him on Hawaii in

Oahu and he took me up in a plane there. So I met, on one trip, I met both brothers...

Ed Metzler: My goodness!

Dr. Berger: ...who, at that time, were in the service.

Ed Metzler: Now was that on your first trip out or was that a subsequent...?

Dr. Berger: That was probably the second or third...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...when I met Albert.

Ed Metzler: So how long were you in training on the...at the beach party...?

Dr. Berger: Well, I got there in July and we picked up the ship in September.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so that's July of...?

Dr. Berger: About three...three months, roughly.

Ed Metzler: Which...which year is that, Israel?

Dr. Berger: That is 1944.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so we're up into 1944 now.

Dr. Berger: Uh hum, then we got on a train. By that time, my wife was pregnant; we had tried for two years...

Ed Metzler: I...I was going to ask you...how...were you married before you went...?

Dr. Berger: I got married to a Social Worker in the Red Cross in Norfolk...

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: ...who had trained at Columbia University.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, now what year was that that you got married?

Dr. Berger: I got married September 29, 1943.

Ed Metzler: Okay, okay.

Dr. Berger: And we didn't get ourselves pregnant until I was ready to go aboard ship.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: And she went back to New York to be with her folks and take care of the ensuing birth of the child.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: I was overseas and I didn't get to see him till he was four months old.

Ed Metzler: Wow.

Dr. Berger: And...first trip was to Hawaii and then we went to Saipan, and went back to Hawaii for more supplies.

Ed Metzler: So let's see, you went...from...where did you leave the west coast (unintelligible)?

Dr. Berger: In San Francisco.

Ed Metzler: San Francisco, okay.

Dr. Berger: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So how did it feel going out underneath the Golden Gate Bridge there on...?

Dr. Berger: It was very startling; it really...

Ed Metzler: Yeah?

Dr. Berger: ...we knew the dangers. Other ships had been bombed...

Ed Metzler: Sure.

Dr. Berger: ...and torpedoed in that area.

Ed Metzler: Right. Now were there other ships going with you?

Dr. Berger: There were five ships the names of which I don't remember; we were not the lead ship.

Ed Metzler: Right, but I mean were they other APAs or were they...?

Dr. Berger: They were APAs and troop transports basically.

Ed Metzler: Right, right.

Dr. Berger: There were always two or three destroyers in the periphery of the...of the flotillas as it was...as you would say.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, just to guard against...

Dr. Berger: Just to guard against.

Ed Metzler: ...submarines and...

Dr. Berger: And then...the...

Ed Metzler: So how long were you in...in Pearl Harbor?

Dr. Berger: Off and on, more...no more than a week or so, I don't suppose.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Berger: Then we stayed aboard ship.

Ed Metzler: Real...yeah.

Dr. Berger: And then from there we went...first I think, to Samar in the Philippines and made an assault landing.

Ed Metzler: So when you sailed from...from Hawaii, you went with other ships as well?

Dr. Berger: Yes.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you're still in a flotilla...if you...

Dr. Berger: Yes.

Ed Metzler: ...and you knew where you were going after you departed, I assume?

Dr. Berger: Yes.

Ed Metzler: And so here was going to be a chance to put into practice the training from the beach party.

Dr. Berger: And we did! (laughter)

Ed Metzler: And you did it, too, huh?!

Dr. Berger: We did!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, okay, well go ahead I...

Dr. Berger: I had, believe it or not, when we got to Hawaii a younger, not as long in the service as I had had been which wasn't a great deal...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...but I had a substitute aboard ship in case I got knocked off on the beach. That was always very gratifying to...to know.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter) To know that you had backup in case you got killed!

Dr. Berger: That's true!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, my word!

Dr. Berger: Well...

Ed Metzler: Now, who was your Commander, if...or your commanding officer or...or...?

Dr. Berger: Well, my...for the beach party was Jim Davis.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: And I've been doing my damnest to try to remember the name of the second in command of the beach party; he was a Full...he was a Commander, two and a half stripes.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: And strangely enough, he wanted to end up being a hotel executive when he got out...

Ed Metzler: My goodness!

Dr. Berger: ...and on one of our trips back to the States, he met and married a girl and they had one child, and that didn't work out, and she divorced him; that was very...he was a very sad kid after that. He was about five years older than I was, and I was a young kid.

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Dr. Berger: When I finished medical school, I was twenty-three...

Ed Metzler: Yep.

Dr. Berger: ...and finished internship; was not quite...well, let's see, I guess, I was twenty-four...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...so I was a young squirt. But anyhow,...

Ed Metzler: Well, so okay, you went to Samar?

Dr. Berger: Yeah, and then from there we went to Leyte to northern top of Leyte, L-e-y-t-e.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I know it...

Dr. Berger: ...and...

Ed Metzler: ...but I want to go back to Samar; tell me what happened at Samar.

Dr. Berger: Well, we went ashore with the troops and I set up an aide station.

Ed Metzler: So was this like the first wave or they'd been in for a day or what?

Dr. Berger: Yeah, well I was in about the third or fourth wave, and thankfully there was very little incoming fire to us.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, so what kind of a vessel were you on when you landed? What...a little Higgins boats or what?

Dr. Berger: It was...it was on one of those PT, not PT boats, but one in which the ramp comes down in front...(unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: Right, kind of a little LST type thing.

Dr. Berger: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, right.

Dr. Berger: LSM...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, you know, I can never keep all of those initials...

Dr. Berger: LST was the thing...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's right.

Dr. Berger: ...because we went from Leyte to Okinawa...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, they were full sized ships; you're right.

Dr. Berger: ...on...yeah. And...

Ed Metzler: So how many were in the beach party, if you will? How many...?

Dr. Berger: Forty-three.

Ed Metzler: Forty-three.

Dr. Berger: And I did know the breakdown of it; there was a number of Signalmen; a couple of Radio...I mean, six or seven Radiomen, and then people that handled the boats as they came ashore...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: ...I don't know what you would call them, but altogether, there were forty-three. We were very fortunate; none of us got injured!

Ed Metzler: That's wonderful!

Dr. Berger: None of us; only fatality we had aboard ship, believe it or not, was in a practice run at one of the island, and I don't remember which, and which one of the idiots aboard the ship...do you know what a welling davit (sp?) is?

Ed Metzler: Uh, yeah.

Dr. Berger: That's the thing-a-ma-jig that drops the boats off the side of the ship into the water.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: And it has two con...two steel stanchions at either end which hold...which supports the cables or whatever that holds the boats.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, and the pulleys and everything, yeah.

Dr. Berger: And...it was just two steel columns with about a foot space between it and this moron stuck his head to watch the boat go down, and of course the thing that came up as the boat went down, the big block of steel, took his head off.

Ed Metzler: Oh, my god; I mean, we're talking guillotine!

Dr. Berger: Yes, effectively, that's what it was.

Ed Metzler: But not as clean a cut.

Dr. Berger: And was the only fatality aboard ship that I know about...

Ed Metzler: Oh my heavens!

Dr. Berger: ...and that was horrifying.

Ed Metzler: Did you see...did you...?

Dr. Berger: I happened to be on deck when that happened, and I could see there was nothing that anyone could do; he was dead!

Ed Metzler: Yep.

Dr. Berger: And so...

Ed Metzler: Heaven's to Betsy!

Dr. Berger: ...it was terrible. And from there we went to Leyte and then, as I said, subsequently we ended up in Manila Harbor.

Ed Metzler: Well, I want to come back to Samar for a moment. So you...so here you are ashore; not a lot of resistance...

Dr. Berger: No.

Ed Metzler: ...and how long...so you set up...

Dr. Berger: We set up there and we...we spent two days or three days...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...and then we were taken back aboard ship.

Ed Metzler: So describe to me what it is you set up on the beach.

Dr. Berger: We had a tent...

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Berger: ...and we had two portable tables as it were; we had literally suitcases full of supplies and we put them out; they were all sterile to begin with.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: And we waited on casualties. And on Samar we didn't have very many.

Ed Metzler: So when...but when you'd get a casualty, you'd treat them as best you could right there...

Dr. Berger: And then get a hold of a ship...a boat to carry them back to the hospital ship which was...was standing by outside.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so did they have a...quote...you know...my mental image of a hospital ship, you know, ex-luxury liner painted white with a big cross on the side.

Dr. Berger: Yes, sort of.

Ed Metzler: That...that kind of thing?

Dr. Berger: Yes.

Ed Metzler: Okay. So did they stay way off shore or...?

Dr. Berger: No, they were within about, I guess, twenty minutes run from one of the little P-boats.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Berger: And actually aboard...later on, this was a horrifying story, after Samar and Manila Bay, which was just replete with sunken ships and burned buildings...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...uh, we got orders to go up to Okinawa and it was called...a group of islands called Kerama Retto...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum!

Dr. Berger: ...and, believe it or not, unfortunately for the Texas Historical Commission or whatever, about a year ago my younger son, my older son, Mike, was telling me his wife has to do with the social work there at Georgia, she said they're forming a WWII Museum in the library that was no longer the library but a museum and they want mementoes of WWII...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: ...and I called Mike back, that's my oldest son, and said, "I've got some of the landing maps we had at Kerama Retto..."

Ed Metzler: Wow!

Dr. Berger: ...and I carried them there, and they just...were exuberant about the receipt of them, so those are the only *real* wartime stuff that I had.

Ed Metzler: Memorabilia, yeah.

Dr. Berger: I gave it away.

Ed Metzler: Well, I tell you what; it's in a good, safe spot though...

Dr. Berger: Yes!

Ed Metzler: ...and...and people can see it...

Dr. Berger: That's true!

Ed Metzler: ...and that's what's important.

Dr. Berger: And I'd like just to tell you that it was interesting that we landed on one of the islands in the Kerama Retto, and you remember someone named Ernie Pyle?

Ed Metzler: Oh, I certainly do!

Dr. Berger: Well, he was with the troops in Italy and up in that area and then he transferred to the Pacific, and he was onboard our ship, and he made the landing with us on Kerama Retto.

Ed Metzler: My goodness!

Dr. Berger: And he and the Colonel commanding the troops, Colonel Chalgren (sp?), I don't know how...why I remember that...this is sixty...sixty plus years ago (laughter), went in a jeep into the area that the U.S. soldiers had secured as it were and they came under machine gun fire.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: And Colonel Chalgren told me when he got back to the beach, "I told him to keep his head down; he had a helmet on, but he looked up to see what was going on and he got shot right through the head."

Ed Metzler: Hmm!

Dr. Berger: Less than a half hour after...I'd found out who he was.

Ed Metzler: My gosh! Well, you know, I have...it's interesting, I have a...a newspaper clipping at home that a gentleman sent me that shows Mr. Pyle laid out after he was...killed.

Dr. Berger: That's the way he was killed.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's a horrible thing.

Dr. Berger: And they...and that...those lands are a little more...rough, because the Japanese had dug in; they were hilly...not quite mountains, but we had mortar fire coming down on us from the top and I could see where one of them was, and I pointed it out to the Colonel and he sent a couple of...what would you call it...mortar groups...

Ed Metzler: Uh huh, sea squads, yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...something about squad...see if he could do something about it. But as I said, none of the beach party personnel that I know of got injured during any of the landing, and for that I'm forever thankful!

Ed Metzler: Absolutely!

Dr. Berger: And...following that, we came back to Puget Sound area and the ship went into dry dock and I...been...it wasn't...Seattle, but north of Seattle, and during the time it was in dry dock, the bomb was dropped.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: And...we made one more trip out to the South Pacific to Nea (sp?), New Guinea, and it was at that time when the Chief Radioman aboard ship came up to me says, "Doc, I heard you were having a baby!" And I said, "Yep!" He said, "What are you going to name it?" I said, "Well, if it's a girl, it's going to be Susan or Ruth," and I named a couple of others; "If it's a boy, it's going to be Michael or Mark or Steve." He said, "Well, it ain't going to be a girl, and I says, "What are you talking about?" He said, "You had a boy!" (laughter) My wife had the child in Brooklyn Naval Hospital. (laughter)

Ed Metzler: So he was playing with you there a little bit!

Dr. Berger: Isn't that something, yeah!

Ed Metzler: (Unintelligible).

Dr. Berger: They had something, yeah, they had something...they had something they called AllNav (sp?) which was all Navy information, and by god, that...I got...that's how I found out I had a son.

Ed Metzler: How about that!

Dr. Berger: And...subsequent to that, after that trip to Nea, New Guinea...and I've been trying to think of the name of the island...Teemore, it comes to mind, but it may not have been Teemore. We dropped a bunch of British troops there, believe it or not, and...

Ed Metzler: Now this is after the war was over?

Dr. Berger: This was after the war; this was...the bomb was dropped when we were in dry dock.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, so where did you pick up the British soldiers?

Dr. Berger: Hmm?

Ed Metzler: Where did you pick up the British soldiers?

Dr. Berger: I don't remember.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Berger: I have to be quite honest and candid with you; I don't remember.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: But since I'd had a child and my section was granted liberty, I went ashore with the group and the British was charging a horrifying price of ten cents a drink! (laughter) I remember buying the first round of forty drinks.

Ed Metzler: Wow!

Dr. Berger: And after that, I don't remember anything!

Ed Metzler: Yeah! (laughter)

Dr. Berger: I know they brought me home; plopped me in my bunk and I got sick and upchucked, and...

Ed Metzler: And you did recover though! (laughter)

Dr. Berger: I did recover. And shortly thereafter, the ship went back to San Francisco and the crew was sent out on one-month leave, and that's when I got to see my son.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: And from there...at the end of the month, I got shipped to Oceanside, California, Camp Perry.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: Uh, not Oceanside, California, but Camp Perry, Virginia. And I was there a couple of months and, believe it or not, the Captain of the group...and I tell this story with...I'm not so sure anybody will believe me, but my son had one cold after another because we were in Navy housing and you could literally see cracks in the floor.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: And so, after about, I guess, a month and a half of...thereabouts...in Camp Perry...and I had to hitchhike because we were living, damned if I remember where we were living! We weren't in Camp Perry area itself, and it wasn't Norfolk; Norfolk is different; I don't remember. I said to the Captain, "I would like to have next weekend off; I've worked the last three weekends," and he said, "You can't have it," and I said to him, believe it or not, this was an old WW...World War I veteran...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...and he was a Full Captain, and I says, "I'm not going to be here Saturday, sir; I'm...you can have a court-martial ready for me on Monday because I've got to keep my baby from having one cold after another." This was dead of winter.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: And he didn't say anything; he kind of gave me a real frown, and well, Monday morning I came back and I had orders to Treasure Island Naval Hospital.

Ed Metzler: Oh ho!

Dr. Berger: He got rid of a malcontent.

Ed Metzler: That's a...that's how he dealt with you!

Dr. Berger: Yeah, (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: He wouldn't let you out.

Dr. Berger: This is much better. I sent my wife back to New York; I took her to Richmond and we caught a train that would carry her to New York and our folks met her with the baby, and I caught a plane first to Chicago, a Navy plane, and then to somewhere out in Kansas and on to...there was a Navy base on the Oakland side of the bay, and I reported in for work at the naval hospital on Treasure Island...in...whatever time it took to get out there. And then during my off...off time, I found a house that some Army guy was giving up to go back home...somewhere mid-western...I bought his furniture for four hundred dollars, and he turned over the rental to me. And I talked to with...a person that owned the house and that's where I moved my wife and baby.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum!

Dr. Berger: And we bought an old '39 Chevrolet as I remember. (laughter) And I used to go to work!

Ed Metzler: Well...

Dr. Berger: She took care of the child, and I'd come home and she...she'd say, "He's yours!" (laughter)

Ed Metzler: So, she turned him over to you, huh?!

Dr. Berger: Yeah, "he's yours," and fortunately or unfortunately, we got ourselves pregnant again when he was...what, six, eight months old...'cause second son was the only one we have and both of them were horrifying deliveries. She wanted to have another one because she wanted a girl, and I said, "No way!"

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: So we never had another child, but...

Ed Metzler: Well, but you got two.

Dr. Berger: We have two; one of them is a lawyer and tax lawyer; worked for the federal government for years down in Miami area; that's Mike and (unintelligible), and Mark is here; he's been here since, I guess, thirty plus years or more now.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: He went to *Harvard*.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Dr. Berger: And Rubin (sp?) Medical School.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's very, very impressive. I'd like...like to...to back up World War II for a couple of moments.

Dr. Berger: Alright, okay.

Ed Metzler: I'd like to hear a little bit more...about what you experienced at the Leyte landing and then the Okinawa area engagement.

Dr. Berger: Well, we had a number of casualties come through the...none of them serious, because real serious ones were *dead!*

Ed Metzler: That's right.

Dr. Berger: And I bandaged up, believe it or not, arms and legs and...and even skull wounds; head wounds with bandages, but that's about all we had...

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: ...and something to stop bleeding;...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...I had the usual forceps and stuff if I could find the bleeding point...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...and I had sutures to suture up insignificant cuts and bruises...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...but, other than that, it wasn't a very exciting thing, and we really didn't have that many casualties come through.

Ed Metzler: Ever have to deal with a Japanese casualty?

Dr. Berger: I had one, a twelve-year-old girl, who stepped on a mine.

Ed Metzler: Oh, my goodness!

Dr. Berger: And...above the ankle...it was literally hanging by...just skin.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Dr. Berger: I put her on a table, and I...we had ether...we got her anesthetized, and I cut off...with my hack saw...a bone a little further up, and then sutured the whole thing and bandaged it.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: And what they did with her...GOK, that's God only knows, I...I have no idea, but that was the only Japanese that I...had any (unintelligible)...

Ed Metzler: I mean, she was a...a resident, if you will, of Okinawa?

Dr. Berger: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Or civilian resident.

Dr. Berger: Yeah, it was a girl; twelve years old.

Ed Metzler: Right, right.

Dr. Berger: And she didn't speak English, and I didn't speak Japanese, and so...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: But that one of the worst things that I experienced, I think, as far as wounds.

Ed Metzler: Uhm! Now what...what did you do for housing and for food when you were on...having your beach party onshore?

Dr. Berger: We dug a (laughter), we dug a foxhole, and we ate canned...whatever we had.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: And we had whatever, but I usually shared it with Jim, that's the commanding guy. He always had his foxhole next to mine. If it rained, we got wet, and no doubt about that! As a matter of fact, the landing at the Kerama Retto was around Easter time as I remember.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: Some of these dates fade away; it's been a long time.

Ed Metzler: Well, I know...Okinawa, they landed on April the 1st,...

Dr. Berger: Well...

Ed Metzler: ...and I think it was...may have even been Easter Day, yeah.

Dr. Berger: It could have been.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: It could have been.

Ed Metzler: Now Kerama Retto was a...a little set of islands what...off...?

Dr. Berger: It was south and slightly east, I believe, of Okinawa proper.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: I never got onto Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Okay, and so Kerama Retto was...that was just the first part of the Okinawa...?

Dr. Berger: It was...it was the first part of the Invasion of Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Okay, and was the resistance fairly...heavy there?

Dr. Berger: It was, as I said, they had the mountain tops...the...the hills pretty well covered, and they littered the beach with quite a bit of mortar fire.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: But there was no, man-on-man at the beach...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...it was rifle fire.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: That went on when, as I said, when Colonel Chalgren went inland.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: And, I did know the name...

(end of tape 1, side A)

Ed Metzler: ...middle of a sentence. Okay, we're...we're rolling again. This is side two; go ahead Israel.

Dr. Berger: Alright, and so, we went aboard ship, and by golly, I...didn't remember this until just now...when we got back to San Francisco, we took a bunch of occupation troops to Kyoto, on Japan itself.

Ed Metzler: Oh really?!

Dr. Berger: Yes, we did.

Ed Metzler: So tell me about that.

Dr. Berger: Well, we were there not too long; just long enough to discharge the soldiers.

Ed Metzler: So roughly how long after the war ended was that?

Dr. Berger: I would say two months or thereabouts.

Ed Metzler: Okay, a couple of months.

Dr. Berger: It was time...since we were occupying the place that we should take care of that end of it.

Ed Metzler: Right. And...and you didn't linger; it was just...

Dr. Berger: No.

Ed Metzler: ...you just delivered...

Dr. Berger: I got ashore to see it so that I could say that I was on Japan, but other than that...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, well tell...what did you see when you were on shore?

Dr. Berger: Bombed out (laughter), bombed out buildings!

Ed Metzler: A few relics, huh?

Dr. Berger: Yeah, well this is Kyoto which, as I remember, is south...southern end of Japan.

Ed Metzler: Correct, yeah.

Dr. Berger: We didn't get up to Hiroshima or Nagasaki or those places.

Ed Metzler: Right, well, so describe to me what you saw.

Dr. Berger: Hmm?

Ed Metzler: Tell me what you saw there at Kyoto; just, you know, give me a...

Dr. Berger: Not a lot really; it was a...sort of a barren island as far as I could tell with two houses...most of which had bombed. I don't...I don't remember seeing a great number of Japanese people themselves.

Ed Metzler: Did you have any interaction with the Japanese?

Dr. Berger: No, I did not.

Ed Metzler: And did they kind of ignore you guys or what?

Dr. Berger: They sort of ignored us, and they were ultra polite...those that did talk.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: And, of course, not many of the people that I was with could speak Japanese.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: And, we weren't there too long. And then we came back to San Francisco. And I don't remember, I'm sure that was before we took the troops to New Guinea area, I mean after, because I don't remember doing very much after we got back except that we all got leave and the ship...supposedly ended up being decommissioned at some place...I don't know.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, now tell...let's go back and talk about the British soldiers for a moment. Now were these guys just good old buddies and they liked you guys, the Yanks, or...tell me...tell me what the relationship was like?

Dr. Berger: The relationship was just more fraternal than anything else; they respected us and we respected them.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: It was...I don't remember how many people were the crew of the ship...the Navy...U.S. Navy people...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...but it was about twelve, fourteen hundred of the British that we took...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...and...I...I'll have to get out a map and look it up, but I keep thinking Teemore, but that might not be correct.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: But it was in the neck of New Guinea...that we got to. And after that we came on back and subsequently, time notwithstanding, I was given a month's leave as I just mentioned before, and I went to New York.

Ed Metzler: Now you mentioned earlier...Leyte; how eventful was that landing?

Dr. Berger: The same as Samar.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Berger: It was no different; we didn't...we had no...beach party casualties, and they went in and they took over the island...is what they did.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum. Okay.

Dr. Berger: And as far as being Jewish aboard a ship with no other Jews...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, tell me about that.

Dr. Berger: ...except...except for the Corpsman that I had, named Belkin, who was from New York...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...uh, life was pretty respectful; they kind of respected my needs and...I couldn't...I grew...I grew up in what we call a kosher home, if you know what that is...

Ed Metzler: Yes sir.

Dr. Berger: ...in which you don't have meat after you had dairy. But there was no way in the world that I could follow that guidance...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...and so, I ate what everybody else ate...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...when it was time to eat.

Ed Metzler: Well, it was a matter of survival, yeah.

Dr. Berger: And, you...you do the best you can at the time; you've got to do it.

Ed Metzler: That's exactly right.

Dr. Berger: I mean, you can't look back, and be unhappy.

Ed Metzler: No.

Dr. Berger: And when I got back to New York, this if interest – I was still Navy until about a month or so later after I was being discharged. My wife said, to me, "Do you want to keep kosher?" And I said, "I've been non-kosher as it were

for the three years I was in service, and as far as I'm concerned we eat what we need and we don't eat forbidden foods which is pork and bacon and stuff...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...but other than that I...this business of two sets of dishes for meat and for...we call it flachiadic (sp?) and milkadica's (sp?) and...it's dairy.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: And then another two sets of dishes for Passover. I...I just didn't see how I could follow that.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: And shortly thereafter I heard about a Residency on Staten Island, and I applied for it, and I got it.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: And that...I...I didn't...I was literally begged to join the Naval Reserve...

Ed Metzler: Yep.

Dr. Berger: ...in the 6th Naval District centered in Charleston, I think, but I had resisted that and I didn't actually like...since I wanted to get out of the Navy at least a year earlier than I did because I thought I ought to get home and take care of my mom.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: She was really critically ill, and she passed on a year or two after I got out, and that's about what my Navy experience was about. It's sort of hum-drum in some ways and exciting in others.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, well that's the...that's often the way it is though, you know? It's long hours of boredom punctuated by a few bouts with adrenalin.

Dr. Berger: Yep! Well, I had an interesting roommate most of the time; he was a Lutheran minister, a Lieutenant, Full Lieutenant, and he held services aboard ship.

Ed Metzler: Hmm! Where was he from?

Dr. Berger: He was from Minnesota. (laughter)

Ed Metzler: So a good old blockhead then, huh?

Dr. Berger: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Probably Swedish or something like that or German.

Dr. Berger: I have no idea what his name was; I really don't.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Berger: And I've often thought, why in the hell didn't I keep a diary?!

Ed Metzler: Oh well, but you know...

Dr. Berger: But you know...

Ed Metzler: ...at the time it didn't seem important.

Dr. Berger: ...hindsight is always twenty-twenty.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's true. Now you mentioned earlier that you saw and met up with two of your brothers when you were in the Pacific; would you give me a little more background on how that happened and how you felt and (unintelligible)?

Dr. Berger: Well, I knew he was in the...Mordi, the older brother, in Saipan...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...I knew when we docked in that area; I got a hold of him; I think I got hold of a jeep and went over to his camp and...and he...

Ed Metzler: How...how did you know he was there?

Dr. Berger: We had written to each other.

Ed Metzler: Okay, and that didn't get censored out of all of the writings...?

Dr. Berger: No, no, no.

Ed Metzler: I'll be darned.

Dr. Berger: And Albert, the same way, in Hawaii on Oahu. And so I spent, I guess, a day and a half or so with Mordi in Saipan; brought him aboard ship as I said and give him a warm meal...

Ed Metzler: Yeah. (Laughter)

Dr. Berger: ...and he said it was the first decent meal he'd had in months.

Ed Metzler: Oh my gosh!

Dr. Berger: And...

Ed Metzler: So how was the food onboard ship; pretty good or...?

Dr. Berger: It was very good...really, really.

Ed Metzler: Huh.

Dr. Berger: Well, we had to feed roughly a thousand, twelve hundred passengers, too, in addition to us...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: So we had specific meal times, and you...you were there in the chow room when you supposed to be or...

Ed Metzler: You were there or you missed a meal!

Dr. Berger: ...you didn't get...you didn't get it.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. (laughter)

Dr. Berger: And another interesting point was...I was a whiz, believe it or not, on aircraft identification. And since, at that time, we then had three doctors besides me on ship and they took care of the sick bay and possible injuries, I was up on the...up on the mast with the...for aircraft recognition. And, by god, I identified the plane that hit the lead ship in our group when we were off the island...off of Okinawa.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, tell me about that.

Dr. Berger: Well, I learned it because Albert, my younger brother, was in the Navy Air Force, and it was one of my recreational doings; I had pictures of all the planes from various points of view and I really got to be a whiz on aircraft identification, and so they thought that that would be helpful.

Ed Metzler: Well, I guess they didn't want you up there doing that because they didn't want to lose a doctor; they were too...(unintelligible).

Dr. Berger: Well, they had three below.

Ed Metzler: But now, you had some back up...so they let you...

Dr. Berger: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So, I have this visual (unintelligible)...

Dr. Berger: I had...I had my substitute...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...and the senior doctor who was a Full Commander and the next one was a Lieutenant just like me; it took me twenty-seven months to get...well, from JG to Lieutenant which is comparable to a Captain in the Army.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: Uh, Navy didn't promote very much during the war. Afterwards when a...a Resident went in the service, subsequent to the war being over, got made a Lieutenant Commander right away, and that used to make me quite angry.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh.

Dr. Berger: 'Cause...well, you take what you get.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, yeah. Uh, hmm, let's see, doggone it, I've lost my train of thought here; I was going to ask you a question. What were we talking about?

(laughter)

Dr. Berger: We were talking about how I met Mordi on Saipan.

Ed Metzler: Ah, yeah, yeah, yeah; oh, yeah, I know, we were talking about identifying aircraft.

Dr. Berger: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So I've got this mental image of you up in the crow's nest...

Dr. Berger: Yeah, (laughter)...

Ed Metzler: ...if there is such a thing on a modern ship...

Dr. Berger: No.

Ed Metzler: ...and...or up very high, and...

Dr. Berger: It's up at the top of the bridge as it were.

Ed Metzler: Right, and you're looking...?

Dr. Berger: Everywhere I can.

Ed Metzler: Scanning the horizon with your binoculars...

Dr. Berger: That's right.

Ed Metzler: ...and you identified an aircraft; tell me what happened then.

Dr. Berger: Well, that aircraft was a...one of the suicide bombers, and what did they call those...I forget already...

Ed Metzler: Kamikaze.

Dr. Berger: ...Kamikaze!

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Dr. Berger: And I saw him coming in from our...what would be our bow, and it would have been the rear-end or the fantail of the ship ahead of us, and I said, "By god, I hope he doesn't come at us!" And he didn't; he hit the mid-part of the ship ahead of us.

Ed Metzler: And the ship ahead of you was what...also a troop carrier or...?

Dr. Berger: Yeah!

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Berger: And how much damage was done, I don't know; we didn't stop to find out. And we just kept on our way and that...that's the only time I saw a...a nav...a Japanese fighter plane that I could identify. I'm glad I didn't see anymore!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's...one's enough, huh?

Dr. Berger: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: My gosh, so...but as far as you know, you don't know what happened to that ship, huh?

Dr. Berger: No, I do not.

Ed Metzler: My word! But it hit it square, huh?

Dr. Berger: It hit it in the...right behind the main bridge.

Ed Metzler: Whoa!

Dr. Berger: And they meant to kill themselves and people, too!

Ed Metzler: Well...and they did...pretty good job of it, too.

Dr. Berger: And they did a good job of it.

Ed Metzler: Or...if you can use the word “good” in that...(unintelligible) adjective.

Dr. Berger: Well, shortly thereafter we came back to the States, and the ship was decommissioned and I got shipped home for...shipped to Yonkers, New York...for...to be with my family for a month and then on to Camp Perry.

Ed Metzler: Now when you were out in the...Pacific, what did you do? Do a lot of letter writing back home I'm sure?

Dr. Berger: We paid a lot of Chess, believe it or not.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Dr. Berger: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: I'm...I have this...

Dr. Berger: Yeah, a couple of the guys were pretty good Chess players; better than I since I learned it while I was aboard ship.

Ed Metzler: Oh, you learned to play while you were aboard ship?

Dr. Berger: Yeah, and other than that, there wasn't a hell of a lot to do; we sat sick call twice a day...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...and we...you can't...you know what Jungle Rot is?

Ed Metzler: Uh yeah; well, I'm...I've heard the term but tell me more.

Dr. Berger: It's more of a fungus disease that infects the feet and the groin.

Ed Metzler: Oh gosh!

Dr. Berger: And...I could spend a half an hour peeling dead skin off of areas of involvement on the sailors and there wasn't a hell of a lot of treatment. Sulfanilamide had just come out but no, no penicillin or anything like that was available, and so we just bandaged them up and tried to clean up the areas as best as we could with what we had to work with which was surgical soap and stuff of that nature.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, and did it help?

Dr. Berger: Yep, it...I suppose it...it kind of slowed it down, but you really didn't get out of that until you got out of that area...and...

Ed Metzler: But, I mean, is it the kind of thing that is curable ultimately?

Dr. Berger: Yes, yes. Uh, it's a fungus!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: And it's not good, and other than that, we had the usual amount; if we had to leave somewhere, the usual boys would come in...shot full of booze and drunk.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: And...but not much in the way of pneumonias or...

Ed Metzler: What about malaria and that kind of stuff? You were pretty far north for that, I guess.

Dr. Berger: We...no, we were on anti-malarial drugs and some others - Dengue Fever was a bad thing there.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I've heard about Dengue Fever, yeah.

Dr. Berger: And...what the names of the others are, I don't remember.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: We're talking, young man, about 1943 to...

Ed Metzler: I understand! (laughter) That's the year...

Dr. Berger: (Unintelligible)...what...fifty...?

Ed Metzler: That's the year I was born, so I...

Dr. Berger: Fifty three or four plus eight – wow!

Ed Metzler: Yeah, so I'm, you know, it...it was a long time ago; I...

Dr. Berger: Yeah, I still got my regular bridge...I got my bridge coat; I've taken the stripes off the sleeves, and I've got my Navy blue officer's jacket still...with the ribbons on it.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, man! (laughter) I bet you look good in it!

Dr. Berger: Yeah, it's a little...it's a little small for me, (laughter) but I damned sure ain't going to give it up! I don't...I don't know what my kids will do with it when I'm gone.

Ed Metzler: No, well, that will be for them to think through. Well...

Dr. Berger: I'm amazed, and this is an aside, it has nothing to do with conversation, I'm amazed at my age which is eighty-eight and a half that I'm still around; able to drive; able to play Bridge two or three times a week; take care of my dog as

many times a day as he gives me “the look” (laughter), and I’m really surprised; I’m the oldest living Berger that I know of...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: ...I have brother, Albert, who has Alzheimer’s in a rehab thing in Atlanta...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Dr. Berger: ...and my brother, Leonard, who is an eyeball doctor up in Baltimore area, and he is ill with...with Diabetes. My son here in...in Dallas has just found out he’s a severe Diabetic...

Ed Metzler: Oh dear!

Dr. Berger: ...which means he has not been, and I didn’t accuse him of this, he has not been taking care of himself in the way of annual physicals or stuff like that because he had prostate surgery and the lab workup for the prostate surgery...they found out his blood sugar was over three hundred.

Ed Metzler: Good heavens! And he hadn’t had any symptoms?!

Dr. Berger: He had symptoms, but they were undiagnosed or...and diagnosed improperly; he had muscle spasms all over; he went to every Neurologist that’s here in Dallas and nobody gave him an answer. But none of them had sense enough to do a...do a general physical and lab work on him.

Ed Metzler: That’s shocking.

Dr. Berger: And if it hadn’t been for that Prostatectomy, he still wouldn’t have known.

Ed Metzler: My god! That’s...

Dr. Berger: Which is crazy!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Berger: But you...

Ed Metzler: Well, let's see, what else can we talk about World War II to get down here on tape? What else comes to mind, Israel, that we've missed? I'm sure, if you're like most of us, you...I'll think of things to ask you after a week...

Dr. Berger: Yes, and I'll think of things I can tell you.

Ed Metzler: ...and you'll think of things you can tell, but...

Dr. Berger: Yeah. I don't know, I think I've given you the general outline of what I did and where I was and that...that's about it as far as I'm concerned.

Ed Metzler: Well, it's a...it's fascinating story; we don't have a lot of tapes of MDs, you know,...

Dr. Berger: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ...who were in the Pacific, so this is a...this is a valuable addition to...

Dr. Berger: Well, if any of this other stuff that I've got here...you wish...I'm going to try to...see if I can get a copy made of that tape of my brother, Albert.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, well I tell you what; let me stop the tape here, and then you and I can talk some more about that, okay?

Dr. Berger: Alright, fine.

Ed Metzler: Now I want to stop the tape here by just thanking you for what did for our country during World War II; I don't think we do enough of that.

Dr. Berger: Oh, no need for that. I...I would have felt bad if I hadn't.

Ed Metzler: I know, but still I just...just a word to...to say thank you and I wanted to end this...

Dr. Berger: By the way, looking at this discharge sheet, I want to give you an amazing sum of money to think about.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Berger: It said, "Total Payment on Discharge - \$375.10."

Ed Metzler: That's a bunch! (laughter) That's a bunch!

Dr. Berger: Oh my!

Ed Metzler: For back then!

Dr. Berger: Yep.

Ed Metzler: Okay, I'm going to stop the tape.

(end of interview)

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