Q: What was your destination?

Saul Gurman: Well, at first we weren't sure but we were told later on that we were going to disembark in Oran, North Africa and that we were going on to India from there.

Q: How long did you stay in Oran?

Saul Gurman: I can't remember that at all. If I was to backtrack, October-- I would say we were there close to a month because we were only aboard the ship, the Rohna, for just about 48 hours and that was November 25th so I think we arrived around close to the end of October in Oran. The day after Thanksgiving we were blown up by a German flying bomb.

Q: What outfit were you attached to?

Saul Gurman: I was in a group of the air force people that were air corps unassigned and we were replacements for other air corps men who had been in India for quite a while.

Q: Did you learn that you were going to India after sailing for Oran?

Saul Gurman: Had no idea as to where we were going to wind up in India and of course with the interruption we still didn't know and after we set sail on the second ship we were told that our port would be Bombay. We landed in Bombay.

Q: What is your immediate memory of the bomb? Did you hear it hit or were you just told that something bad had happened?

Saul Gurman: Oh. I felt the pressure of the explosion, that's all. When it hit we went dead in the water just about instantly but I had no idea what had hit us. I mean it wasn't until perhaps a day or two later from others that I learned what had happened to us.

Q: Where were you located when the bomb hit?

Saul Gurman: I don't remember what deck I was on but I was in one of the forward sections of the ship.

Q: Was the fire very prevalent where you were or was it in another part of the ship?

Saul Gurman: No. It was in the other part of the ship. It seemed to be mostly on the superstructure portion when I came topside but where I was toward the bow there was no fire.

Q: What happened when you realized something had happened?

Saul Gurman: I was pretty cool about the whole thing, just waited in the darkness and then a couple of flashlights shined down and yelled, "Everybody topside!" and I believe somebody yelled out "Everyone for himself" and climbed up the stairs, the ladder…that's what they call it in the navy and got topside. My first sergeant was right there as we came out and he yelled to me, he says "I need help, these guys are panicking" and we sort of formed a line on either side as they came out and we started pushing guys right off the ship who were panicking and then I was asked to launch some of the five-man life rafts that were attached to the railing. When I got through with that, I climbed up and started helping launch some of the large… I believe they were 25-man life rafts. They had barrels on the inside of the framework to keep them afloat, and after a while one of the ship's officers came up to me and said you better get off the ship, she's going down. I don't know whether that was a half hour later or an hour later. I really don't remember exactly how long I was on the ship but she really started listing and I went over on the high side, took off my shoes and just jumped overboard.

Q: Did you have a life preserver?

Saul Gurman: I had a waist life belt that had a couple of CO2 cylinders in it. It also had two hoses so you could inflate it by mouth if you had to. I didn't inflate it at all. Surprisingly, as I was dog-paddling away I came upon another GI. I can't remember whether he had one leg or two legs broken. I don't know how he stayed afloat. He did not have a life belt or anything so I put my life belt on him and then I inflated it manually, blew it up as far as I could and I used him for flotation for the two of us and just kept dog-paddling along and it got real dark and I don't know how long it was but then I saw a red light bobbing up and down in the water. So I started paddling towards that and it turned out to be an overturned lifeboat with a group of GIs hanging on and there was one fellow, I'm still looking' for him, his name was Freeman, he came from Marlton, Massachusetts, and he was sitting' on top of the hull and he was singing "Nothing Can Stop the Army Air Corps." I'll never forget that.

I don't know how long we floated but I think we started getting picked up around 10:30 or 11 or 11:30, around that time. I do remember that Freeman and I helped put a rope under the arms of the fellow who had the broken leg or legs and they hoisted him up but all of us had to try to climb up the side of the ship on our own. A lot of them fell back in the water, a few of them made it up the sides of the ship because nobody was coming down off the Clan Campbell to help us. I wouldn't blame them because it was really rough. So I got topside, they stripped us down, they gave us some hot rum and I got a bundle of clothing in a gunny sack that had a pair of tweed pants, a turtleneck sweater, long johns, slippers and a round can of Capstan cigarettes and that was the first time I smoked.

Q: The Clan Campbell as I understand was not a good rescue ship for the simple reason that it was so high in the water.

Saul Gurman: That's right.

Q: You had a long way to climb.

Saul Gurman: Yeah. I smashed up my left arm. To this day it's not right. As you can see, these two bones are spread wide apart versus these being very close. I wound up in a VA hospital after the war but they decided that if I wasn't going to pitch for the Red Sox I didn't need surgery and I agreed with them so I carry some bone chips but it doesn't bother me.

Q: After you were rescued, where did the rescue ship take you?

Saul Gurman: It took us into Phillipville which was a Canadian and British commando training center. They supplied us with British commando uniforms and a few days later we were put aboard the old World War I 40-and-8 boxcars, they packed C-rations by the doors, gave us a bunch of straw and mattresses… I mean mattress covers, we filled them with the straw and that's what we slept on and I guess it was three days and three nights over the mountains into Bizerti and then they had what I guess they call a muster roll call to identify the living at that point and that's when we learned about approximately how many had either drowned or whatever …

Q: What was that like?

Saul Gurman: It was shocking. I mean it was shocking and I just couldn't get over it, I mean that many, and I didn't know I had two classmates of all things from high school that were on the same ship and I didn't know that either one of them was alive. As a matter of fact, one of them was in the water all night and got picked up by a sub the following morning and he had floated with a dislocated shoulder all night and he was hospitalized.

While he was in the hospital he made the mistake of writing a letter to his sister telling her that he didn't think that I made it. I never told anybody back home what happened and about three or four months later my girlfriend (who is my wife today) was on a bus going into Boston and met my classmate's sister on the same bus. She pipes up with the statement "I guess Saul and Paul (was his name), are inseparable now." She says "well, why do you say that?" And she said "well, you know they were blown up." <laughs>

Backing up, I had written a letter to my wife who was my girlfriend then, saying do me a favor, try and find another camera for me, I need some Schick injector razor blades and a picture of you, I misplaced or I lost all of those things. And she sent me a letter saying you ought to be more careful <laughs> with your personal belongings <laughs> and then she found out about this. I got a letter <laughs> a mile long, you know, apologizing after she found out about the incident… so that was a good laugh.

Q: You went to the China-Burma-India theatre—

Saul Gurman: I was assigned to an outfit in Agra, went by rail to Agra and from Agra I flew to Dinjan and was assigned to a prop shop to work on props. That's when I found out that my arm just wouldn't handle the work. So they sent me down to another air base which was in Montbury near the big base of Chabua and I got assigned to an oxygen unit. From there they sent me to Calcutta and I went to oxygen school to learn how to manufacture it and then came back up to Montbury and got assigned to one of the oxygen plants. I spent the balance of my time overseas manufacturing oxygen for the air force, for the engineers, for the hospitals, anybody that needed oxygen.

Q: You went home after a couple of years I assume. Were you discharged in the States when you got back home?

Saul Gurman: Yes. I was discharged seven days after hitting the States. I had arrived in New York on New Year's Day 1946. What a beautiful sight seeing the Statue of Liberty. We almost got sunk going from New York over to the New Jersey side to Camp Kilmer on a old barge of some sort. It started to tilt over a little bit and I said oh, <laughs> no, I don't need another sinking. It really was a bad barge. From there they put us on a train after a day's processing…January 7th I was discharged, hit the States January 1st and was out January 7th.

Q: One Rohna survivor said that through the years when he would think about the ship in the water he would get cold, he would feel cold. Did you ever have any kind of experience like that?

Saul Gurman: No. The only thing that bothered me from time to time was a noise similar to the old steam railroad engine, a clanking. That scared the heck out of me because I used to ride the trains for a while after the war when I got my first job. And if I wasn't paying attention to a train passing by on a curve where I used to get the train… that thing used to scare the hell out of me 'cause it sounded similar to the sound of the bomb that hit us. That really shook me up every once in a while.