RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HOWARD LEE BALL, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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POMPTON LAKES, NEW JERSEY
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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Howard Lee Ball, Jr., on February 29, 2008, in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

Hanne Ala-Rami: … Hanne Ala-Rami.

SI: Mr. Ball, thank you very much for having us here today.

Howard Lee Ball, Jr.: It's good to be here, good to be anywhere. [laughter]

SI: To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

HB: I was born in Haskell, New Jersey, on July 3, 1929, in the home that we had, which is on Ringwood Avenue, across from what we called the Rock Cut, and Dr. David Shippee delivered me and I was delivered in the bedroom. …

SI: Is that the Ringwood Avenue over here now?

HB: That's the Ringwood Avenue that goes from Pompton Lakes right into Ringwood, yes.

SI: Can you tell us what your parents' names were?

HB: My father's name was Howard Lee Ball, Sr., and my mother was Harriet Virginia Bertis Stephens Ball.

SI: That is quite a name. [laughter]

HB: That's quite a name. She had quite a moniker on her. …

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your father's family background?

HB: My father's family background came from the Massachusetts Ball Family. They arrived in around 1622 and they lived in Townsend, Massachusetts, for about three hundred years, and then, my great, great-grandfather, Hosea Ball, moved up to Monroe, New York, where he was an itinerant preacher for the Presbyterian Church. He founded the Monroe church up there, and then, my great-grandfather, Luther, stayed there, Luther (Halsey?) Ball, who was named for a Princeton professor who was a friend of Hosea. … My grandfather, Charles, moved his family … to Paterson, to Pompton Lakes, to Greenwood Lake, [New York], and back to Pompton Lakes. … Around 1900, when they built this house, they were living in … a part of Pompton called Pompton Junction, which is the coming together of the Susquehanna and Erie Railroads. So, that was them, yes.

SI: What was the reason for the move to this area?

HB: I have no idea why he moved to this area. [laughter] I would say it probably was work, because E. I. DuPont was here in Pompton Lakes and, just a little bit later, after they moved, the Artistic Weaving Company came, and so, there were jobs here. I don't think they liked Paterson,

for some reason. I don't know why, but some of the family, cousins, stayed down there and [are] still down there. … Grandpa went to work at DuPont and, as a matter-of-fact, everybody in the family kind of worked there at one point or another. My father worked at DuPont before he went to World War I. … My dad, his brother, Frank Leslie Ball, and his younger brothers, Isaac and William, all served in the service. … Isaac and William were in the Navy and Frank and my dad were in the Army.

SI: When he worked at DuPont, were they making powder?

HB: They were making blasting caps and powder for the war efforts, for both war efforts, when they came. We were a powder town. We were used to hearing explosions, and we could tell the difference between a test and a mistake, and, occasionally, we heard a mistake and somebody got killed. … In fact, my one cousin died up there, in an explosion. So, that was, essentially, what it was. When my dad came back from World War I, he was a chauffer in Bayonne, [New Jersey], for a little while, and then, came back here and put thirty-five years in Artistic Weaving Company as a weaver, and that was his set-up. It was very interesting, these two houses. The house that you're in, my grandfather built, as I said, around 1900, 1903. The house on the other side there, at 124, my father and mother and my uncle built, and they built it with materials from houses which were razed to install the Wanaque Reservoir. They knocked down these houses and there was all this wood that was going to be just burned up and my father talked to somebody up there and they gave him the wood, if he would get it out of there. … So, he took a little flatbed truck and brought it all down here and my mother's job was to take the nails out of the boards. … She took all the nails [out], and, over at 124, if you take a metal detector out there, you'll find all kinds of metal, … where they threw the nails down, and then, covered it with top soil, but that's where that house was built. That's a beautiful home, and, in 1939, Daddy wanted to come back to the house that he was brought up in and he managed to get this house and … we've been here ever since. So, it's sixty years now, I guess, yes, coming up, seventy years.

SI: That is incredible.

HB: Yes.

HA: Did your father ever talk about his experiences in World War I?

HB: Yes, very briefly, if I asked him something. We have just discovered his diary. We were going through some things and my daughter found his diary, and we've been reading it and it's very interesting, his attitude toward so many different things, the hunger and so forth. The one story that they shared with us, Uncle Frank and my dad, my dad got a pass, and for several days, I don't know, you know, a week, maybe, I don't know, and Uncle Frank was a hundred-and-some miles away in another city and my dad walked that way. … He got to meet Uncle Frank and he laid down on a cot and slept for five hours and Uncle Frank sat by him and held his hand, and then, they had a time together, but the family has always been very, very close. My cousins, Katherine and Carol … and Dorothy, were like my sisters. I'm an only child. … Uncle Frank and Aunt Sophie, during the Depression times, would come down here every Friday night and we'd have a piece of cake … and we would play games. We played a game called "button,

button, who's got the button?" and we played "twenty questions." We played a lot of games. … Later on, when I studied education, I found out that our parents were really preparing us for different things in school, and we thought it was fun, and it was fun. It was a lot of fun. …

SI: How did the Great Depression affect this area?

HB: Well, it was pretty bad, but … Daddy was only out of work about five months, … but he had taken care of everything. I always tell people, "I didn't know we were poor until I got to college." When I started studying sociology and [the] economy, I found, "Hey, I was one of those poor people," but … this whole side of the house was a farm-type garden and he grew every kind of vegetable you could think of, and they preserved them. They canned them. He had five hundred chickens and he not only sold eggs, but … we never wanted for eggs. … I didn't care for chicken, because we had it so much, and then, Daddy would do what he called "table fish." He went down to the lake and he threw illegal drop lines in and would hold a real pole. … So, if the game warden came, they would see [only the pole], but he had these drop lines that had multiple hooks on them, down [in the water], and bring them up and he'd have quite a few fish. … My Grandmother Stephens, who lived with us, would clean those fish and prepare them and, of course, we had no freezers or anything; you had to eat them right away. We had an icebox and Mr. Casaleggio would come, a couple times a week, and put a cake of ice in there. … When I got old enough, I had to empty the pan that was underneath the icebox, and I always forgot it and the water ran all over the back porch. … We got through it, and then, apparently, Artistic Weaving, where my dad eventually worked, managed to get enough contracts that they kept working. … He was one of the older employees, and so, he did work there a lot. He never made more than five thousand dollars in a year, for his whole life. … I imagine, back then, he might have been making a buck a day, five dollars a week, I don't know, but he managed to buy this house and take care of that house and do what he had to do.

SI: Was he in a union?

HB: Yes. He was the vice-president of the Textile Workers Union. … They dreaded him when he went into New York to negotiate. They said, "Oh, my, he's coming. Oh, no, … get somebody else," because he was intransigent. He was going to get what the people wanted, and he was a strange juxtaposition, because he was also a hidebound Republican, and that doesn't really go with the labor movement, but that's what he was. He was a hidebound Republican. I remember, when I was very small, I must have been maybe four, maybe [in] that area, we went to visit our relatives in Upstate New York. … In the outhouse, they had the picture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and my father said to me, "That's the only place he belongs," … but there was a very significant and wonderful thing that happened on December 7, 1941; he never said a bad thing about Roosevelt ever again. When the war came on and Roosevelt was our Commander-in-Chief, Daddy never said another bad word about him. Now, he may not have voted for him or he may not have favored him politically, but, … in this house, there was never a bad word said about him. … That was the kind of guy he was. He was a good guy.

SI: Was he involved in the Republican Party or did he just vote that way?

HB: No. … He never was in the political arena. The arena that he was in was the American Legion. He was an original charter member of the American Legion, from Paris, in 1919, and he was, at one time, the commander of the local post, and Uncle Frank, his brother, Frank Leslie, who was … a police officer in our town here, he was a member of the American Legion and the VFW. One of the very interesting things that went on was that I was involved in a lot of things. When I was tiny, I mean, three and four years old, we went to parades and I had a blue helmet that said, "Sons of the American Legion," or, [rather], "Sons of the Legion." I am a Son of the American Revolution, [a member of the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution], but, anyhow, he took part in all those things. He was part of the Forty and Eight, [*La Societe des Quarante Hommes et Huit Chevaux* (The Society of Forty Men and Eight Horses)], and he and a friend of his took part in building model aircraft, and we thought, "Boy, for older men, what are they doing that for?" Well, they were building them for the government. We never knew it, and didn't know it until after the war. They were building little drones and they were operated by radio, and the two of them put together; I've got three or four of them. … I don't know what branch of the government it was for, but, after the war, Daddy told me that, that it was a government project and … it was secret. So, we had a lot of secret stuff going on here. The first practical liquid fuel rocket was fired here, at Lake Inez, in, I think it was, June of '41, and we didn't know what it was, scared the pants off everybody. … Bill Charles, the police chief then, kind of told the men what it was. [To Hanne] I'm sorry about that, but that's the way things were. You know, actually, it was a patriarchal society and the men were the ones who got [informed], but they had a secret laboratory on Wanaque Avenue in Pompton Lakes. … It was behind what looked like a bicycle shop, and, of course, you couldn't buy bicycles during the war, because they were frozen, and I tried to buy a bike there and the guy said, "We don't sell bikes." I said, "Well, what you got them in the window for?" He said, "That's none of your business." … Then, I found out, … from my teacher, that James Hart Wyld and Lovell Lawrence, [Jr.], were there and they were experimenting to build a liquid fuel rocket, which they did, and it was the one they sold; they sold it to the Navy, and that was the foundation of Reaction Motors Company, and so, all those things were going on. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: When you say that it scared everyone in town, do you remember seeing it fly in the air?

HB: No, no, we didn't see it flying in the air. They had it tethered. It was on a static stand, they called it, I believe, and it just made a horrible noise. … We were used to all different kinds of explosions. At three-thirty in the afternoon here, before, after and during the war, they would test the various things. We'd hear machine guns. You'd hear a machine gun, "Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat." Then, you'd hear, "Ka-boom," and it'd be something else, and then, another big boom, and then, it would be over, but, when this thing went off, and it was about the same time of day that it went off, it … scared the pants off everybody, and, of course, in World War II, secrets were secrets. You just … didn't tell. They had the big signs up all around, "Loose Lips Sink Ships," and … especially here, in a powder town, and, of course, the double side of that was, we were always afraid of saboteurs, that they would blow the plant up, … because a couple of plants had blown and a lot of people got hurt and killed. So, we were very careful about that.

SI: Did they have a lot of military in town to protect the factories?

HB: Not really. … We had antiaircraft posts around, but there weren't any military in town. They were self-policed up there. They had their own people. …

HA: Were there any attempts at sabotage?

HB: There was never an attempt at sabotage, that I know of, but, at the same time, in … the late 1930s, over on Federal Hill, in Riverdale, [New Jersey], there was a German-American *Bund* camp, and that German-American *Bund* camp did have some people who were in the espionage business. [Editor's Note: The German-American *Bund* was an organization comprised of pro-Hitler ethnic Germans residing in the United States. The group was outlawed after the attack on Pearl Harbor.] … As a matter-of-fact, I don't know whether you have the history of the submarine that landed off …

SI: Long Island?

HB: Long Island. Those guys who came off had been there. They were from there, and they used to watch Newark Airport, and so forth, but, no, I can't remember any incidents, and I think we only had two or three blows during that time, … but it was scary.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, do you remember reading about, or even seeing yourself, some of these *Bund* activities?

HB: [laughter] Yes. I worked in my uncle's store in Riverdale and, on Friday night, they came in and they were dressed in Nazi uniforms, with the *swastika* and the whole deal, and they would come into our place and get ice cream and coffee, and then, get together and march up to the camp. Yes, we saw them, we knew who they were. We didn't love them, but we didn't do anything, you know. There wasn't any overt activity toward them. … One of my friends went up there and thought about trashing one of the cabins, at one time, but he didn't do it. … He was Jewish and he was really angry, and so was I, but we kind of reserved ourselves, and then, on December 7th, the FBI raided the place and they arrested some people, and other people got away. … Some of them were just innocent summer people who liked to hike and stuff like that, but there were, among them, the others. They [the German-American *Bund*] tried very hard to get the Ku Klux Klan in New Jersey to be with them, back them up, and the Ku Klux Klan rejected them, said, "No, you know, we don't want to talk to you at all." … It was a very active place. When I was the editor of the newspaper, two boys, two little boys from Bloomingdale, discovered a sealed box up there in the ground and they brought it in to me. … We got the police chief in, we opened it and it was the membership cards from there, and I gave them to the New Jersey Historical Society, on closed reserve, because a lot of the people are still around, in West Bergen, you know. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Before we go any further into World War II, I wanted to also ask about your mother's family background?

HB: Okay. We have a very, very strange situation here. It's not really strange, but it's great genealogy and it makes it easy for me. My grandfather, … her father, was Jonathan Crossman Stephens. He came here in 1850 from England, and he was a miner. He was very well-versed in the English way of mining, which was interesting to American miners, and so, he first worked at the Franklin mines, and then, later, was down in St. Francois County in Missouri, and he worked in lead mines down there. … He was first married to Lizzie Bishop, who passed away at a young age, and then, he married my grandmother, Harriet Leila Ball. So, I had the Ball Family on both sides of my [family tree]. So, she was the daughter of George and Sarah Ball and they were in the area of Franklin, New Jersey, then. My mother was born in a place called Green Spot, which doesn't exist anymore, but it's downtown Franklin. So, that's who they were. … They went down to Missouri, where Grandma packed a six-gun on her side. … She was a wonderful person, like she was out of "central casting," really. I want to tell you, … she had all of these zany little things that she had done. When they had a strike down there, there was a great strike and they burned railroad cars and they did everything, but they also left all the mules down in the mine and they weren't being fed. … So, she went down to the mine, with a gun, with her gun, and took the strikers and put the gun on them and said, "Go down there and get them mules out here right now," and I guess they believed she would shoot them, and they went down and got them out. … The mules were blind from being down there all the time, and they fed them and took care of them. So, that was another person who was a great influence on me when I was growing up. She came and lived with us, and Grandpa Stephens died in 1923 or '24. He was injured several times in the mine and he just didn't have it, you know, and he passed away. Now, Grandma lived until 1947. She was a friend of Joe Louis, the boxer. She would sit on the front porch here, in her rocking chair, and Joe Louis and his group ran every morning. … He would stop and run in place and talk to her, and she called him, "young man." "Are you all right, young man? Are they hitting you? Don't let them hit you." … He really liked her, … and he really made it his business to stop here, and, if she wasn't here, he'd run around the block one more time and make sure she was there. So, we loved him. … I'm going to do a piece on him in another couple of weeks, from the standpoint of how he treated us kids, because … he was a wonderful man and, unfortunately, the government gave him a bad deal in many ways. … [Editor's Note: Joe Louis trained at Dr. Joseph Bier's Health Farm in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey. The borough later built the Joe Louis Memorial Park on the site in his honor.] Anyhow, that was her and they moved from Missouri. They came back in 1903, and they moved to Ringwood, New Jersey, where my grandfather was superintendent of the Ringwood Iron Mines, and they all worked there. My mother was a secretary, my Uncle John was a yard boss and my Uncle Dick was too young to be anything. He just hung around, and they lived in a big house there, with the whole family, and then, when the mines got not productive, they moved down to Haskell, where I was born. …

SI: Did they ever tell you how your parents met?

HB: Yes. My uncle took him up to the house, to Ringwood. They were going somewhere and he saw her on the porch in a rocking chair. … He went over to talk to her and he knocked the chair over and she fell out of it, and that's how they met. [laughter] They did me a great disservice, because I never saw my parents argue or fight or say a harsh word to one another. They never did it. So, when I got married and my first wife called me a bad name, I couldn't believe that women did that. … They spoiled the heck out of me; they were good to me. I think

that's why I didn't know about what the Depression was, I think, you know. It was normal. … I think about it now and I know, like, she would make pork chops and she'd have two. He'd get one, I'd get one and she'd get none, and I often said to her, I said, "Well, don't you want some pork chop?" and she'd say, "No, I just don't favor it tonight." … I mean, later on, I figured it out, what it was all about. So, it was a very, very nice place here. Grandma Stephens, you know, my dad loved Grandma Stephens, and she was here. She did so many things, you know. She knew I was smoking, … and then, she ratted on me, … and that was a good thing. I'm glad that she did. Of course, I didn't stop smoking until I was thirty-five or forty. … That's it. My Uncle Richard, all my uncles and aunts, were very close. … Both sides of the family would come together. We'd have thirty-five, forty people at a party, and never much liquor. … My mother was what we called a teetotaler. … I remember her having maybe two drinks her whole life, and both times, she got buzzed. Unfortunately, for me, I chose to be an alcoholic, and, now, I choose not to be one, but I choose to be a recovering one. … You know, it was a lot of fun and, when I look back on it, these were very, very hard times and we'd all get together and we'd have all this food, but everybody just brought one thing. Everybody was responsible for one thing, and it's funny, I remember my aunts by the food they brought, My Aunt Esther's baked beans, they were the best baked beans in the whole world, and my Aunt Lizzie's potato salad. Aunt Lizzie also taught the kids how to cheat at cards. … It was a lot of laughs, a lot of fun, and there were [also] sad times and there were hard times. Uncle Winfred and my cousin, Lucy, and my Aunt Bid, their house burned in Ringwood and they came down and it was just accepted. They would live with us and Mother made room. I don't know how she made the room, [but] they made room and they came and lived with us and they were there for several months, until they could make the arrangements. … That was accepted. That's the way it worked, no other way. They weren't going to be out on the street. … My uncle, Thomas Meslar, was a very poor man and he had a couple of kids, … but, every Christmas, he would do something and, one Christmas, he made this humongous dollhouse for his daughter. It had electric lights and running water, and it was beautiful. You know, it was not like anything [else]. For me, he took an old electric train set and refurbished it. Then, the next Christmas, he made a chemistry set. He put together all the things and little experiments that he wrote out that I could do, … that weren't going to hurt me, and it just was amazing. … We all thought that was the normal way things went, that's what parents did, you know. So, that was great. … One of our things, in that time, in the '30s, and so forth, was to go for a ride. We'd pack everybody in one of those old cars. My dad had a '29 Chevy and we'd just pack everybody in the car and they would take all the back roads and go somewhere, and they never knew where they were going when they started, and we would travel and go and have a picnic lunch and enjoy ourselves. We spent a lot of time at the Ringwood State Park, at the [Ringwood] Manor House, because my Aunt Lavilla, Aunt Bid, … took care of the house there. She was the person that you paid to get in, and so forth, and so, we could see her. I spent a great deal of time [there]. Like, after I was thirteen or fourteen, I would take the bus up to Ringwood, and then, spend the day on the property there, particularly to go out by [Engineer and Continental Army officer] Robert Erskine's grave and lay down, and think about him and think about the history and think about the chain [*chevaux de frise*] across the Hudson and think about all of those things. It was so inspiring, and so, [I would] think about girls, that was another thing I thought about, and, occasionally, some New York City girls would come by to go picnicking and, "Heh, heh, heh;" that's my bad laugh. [laughter]

SI: What other activities were you involved in as a child and a teenager? Were there any organized activities, such as Scouting?

HB: I was a member of the Boys Scouts of America. … If I talk about me, I have to talk about Joseph Hawtof Feinbloom, who was my best friend, and he's seventy-nine years old on the 15th of this month, and he's still my best friend. We've been friends since we were two years old and we were in the Boy Scouts together, Troop 78, Boy Scouts of America, here in Pompton Lakes. The first time we went to Boy Scouts was a corn roast. … We didn't get home until midnight and my mother was out in the road, just waiting for the cops to come to find her lost son, but the Boy Scouts was very important to me and it was … a growth factor in my life and it fell into place, as you see, because I was of age, Boy Scout age, [in] 1941. So, through the war, [the] Boy Scouts had a great influence. We had drives for everything. We had metal drives, we had paper. This house's basement was filled with paper that we collected, and we would take it to Paterson and sell it. … We collected the milkweed pods, went out into the slanks and collected them, bags of them, because they said they needed them for life vests, and we did everything like that. … Boy Scouts was, I don't know, I think it was paramilitary at the time, but all the boys, and a number of girls, too, knew, we knew, that, if the war wasn't over, that we would be going. As a Boy Scout, we went to the Schiff [Scout] Reservation for camp for two weeks, which is up in Mendham, New Jersey. It's the national headquarters camp of Boy Scouts of America, and they had some displays from the World's Fair of 1939 there. You had some teepees, and so forth, and we took long hikes up there and we studied how to subsist in the jungles, and so forth, and we talked about it, "What are you going to do? Which service are you going to go into?" "I'm not going to get drafted; I'm going to enlist in the Marines," and that was what was very important to us. The war, World War II, was here every day, every moment. It never left. It wasn't like today, when you go to the movies and it's gone. It wasn't that way. … There were posters here, in this house, that my father had up about the Civil Defense business. On December 8, 1941, I was in [the] seventh grade and I was a junior patrolman. Now, we didn't have crossing guards. The kids took care of that duty and I was on the corner of … Ramapo Avenue and Lennox Avenue, with Albert Levy, and I said, "Albert, I am so frightened … about the war. It scares me. I don't know what to do," and I said that to him because I respected Albert. He was athletic and a [good] guy, a takeover guy, was a good guy. God rest him, he'd been my friend for that many years, and so forth, but, anyway, he said, "I'm afraid, too." He said, "I'm scared," he said, "because I'm Jewish, and, if they come over here, I don't know what they'll do to me." So, we went up to our teacher, Mrs. Colfax, Anice Colfax, who was the matriarch of the Colfax Family, which goes back to the [American] Revolution, and we told her. We said, "We're scared," and she said, "Americans are not scared. We're going to win this war and you are going to be part of it, and just be part of it every day," and then, she had an air raid drill and made us all get under our desks, and I can remember that as well today as I did the next day, and it hung in there. It was a tough time. When we went to church, almost every week, they'd announce another name of a kid that had been killed-in-action, and we knew them all. You know, when you're twelve years old, you see this kid who played football, Warren Merish, and you hear his name, he's been killed-in-action, and the red-headed kid named Roetinger, and all of those things, but it was every day. I have to admit, I really hated the Japanese. By the way, we loved the Finns, at the time.

HA: Okay. [Editor's Note: Prior to the interview, Hanne Ala-Rami and Mr. Ball had discussed the fact that she is from Finland and was conducting research into the World War II experiences of Finnish citizens.]

HB: We did, because of their resistance to the Russians, and we had a couple comic books that depicted that and we often talked about that, … but the whole thing was so … overpowering to us kids. … It was a daily participation. … You couldn't walk away from it. You couldn't have Dave Letterman saying stupid things [on a late-night talk show]. Bob Hope made fun of the President, once in awhile, but he didn't make fun of the war. He never … said anything, and so, one of the things that happened was that guys went away, from the war, and I'm twelve years old, thirteen, and the church janitor, we call him "sexton" in the Episcopal Church, he went away to war and somebody had to take his place. So, I did. So, I took the place of this thirty-five-year-old man, cleaning the church, taking care of the furnace, doing everything, getting up at four o'clock in the morning on Sunday to go down and turn the heat on, and I did so for the whole war. … One of the most beautiful moments of my whole life happened there, [at church]. On the night of V-J Night, we were down there cleaning, doing some work, my dad and I. We turned the radio on, we heard the President, and Father Chillson came in and he said, "I want you to come out with me, into the sanctuary. I have something for you to do," and we had not been ringing the church bells for four years. That was the sign for invasion. If the church bells rang, that was the sign that the Germans had invaded, and so, Father Chillson took me over to the rope and he said, "Ring the bell," and he said, "and never forget it." … I rang the bell, and then, we came downtown and we had hats and horns all night long. I remember seeing some lady pushing my father around town in a wheelbarrow, and I had my trumpet and I was playing *Pistol Packin' Mama* and all of the songs, and *God Bless America* and *Oh, Oh, Pompton* and all of those things, and it was a whacky night, a whacky night. … At the very end, Feinbloom and I, and Billy (Hackett?) and a couple of guys, were walking down the street and we were toying with the idea of going to New York City, and we all said, "Nah, let's go to bed," and that's what we did. When I came home, Dad was in bed and he had a six-pack of beer by the bed and he was thoroughly enjoying victory.

HA: What kind of celebration did you have for V-E Day?

HB: … Now, V-E Day, … I'm glad you brought it up, that was very interesting. The diner around town was operated by Fritz Gaiss, and Fritz was a former German national who had been in the American Army during World War I. … He had a bell out in front of his place and, on V-E Day, he rang that bell, and everybody in town came by and they went in and they shared in this victory, but it was more subdued, because the boys were still in [the] South Pacific. Yes, we all celebrated and we all had a joyful time, but it was more subdued, because of the boys in the South Pacific, and most of us, I think we knew a little bit more about the war then. We understood what it would take to invade Japan and that was one of the things that was on everybody's mind, but Mr. Gaiss, he was so happy about that, and there was never, never, ever a bit of discrimination against him. The Artistic Weaving Company, which was … operated by the Kluge Family, was here for years, and, during World War I, they changed their name from the German-American Weaving Company. Just as we had "liberty cabbage," which was sauerkraut, they changed the name, and, more recently, people are eating "American fries," no French fries, you know, a little stupid, but whatever, but that was marvelous. [Editor's Note:

Opponents of France's reticence to join the American-led War in Iraq in 2003 started a short-lived movement to change French fries to "American" or "Freedom" fries.] V-J [Day]; I can remember another specific day, that was June 6th, the D-Day. It was graduation. We had graduation that night and the principal came onboard and said that the operation had started in Europe, "And we want to, before we do anything else, take a moment of silence and think of our boys and girls over there." So, we did, we did, but … those were very high points. Our yearbook was a military kind of thing. All the stuff we did was always aimed at the troops and the war and supporting them. …

SI: Obviously, a lot of the young men, and probably some of the young women, left town to go into the service. Did you notice anybody coming into town, such as people coming to work for DuPont, that sort of thing?

HB: Yes. We had two here in the house.

SI: Really?

HB: Yes, … and I know Pauline Kaakut, from Detroit, and Betty, I can never remember her last name. She [Betty] was from Watertown, New York. They came here to work at DuPont and they rented a room here, and Mother, of course, they didn't have it coming, but she fed them, too. … They worked the night shift at DuPont and I think they were on the cap line. I'm not sure, but they were here at least two to three years, and then, boom, the day that the war was over, they were gone. That's the way it was, and I think that was one of the things that was really unfair to "Rosie the Riveter," that these women had given so much of themselves and they just got separated … without anything else. It wasn't very good.

SI: What was it like to get to know people from other parts of the country?

HB: It was really nice. I enjoyed them, and, of course, I was a kid; I was a teenager. I liked Pauline. … She was a very, very outgoing Polish girl and, when I went to college, I went to college at Western Michigan, I used to go through Detroit and I would call her. She lived in Hamtramck and I used to call her and talk to her and see how she [was]. … She got married and had a family and everything. … Betty was a very quiet, nice, little girl. … I don't know whether they went out and drank, … because they never caused any problem here with us. We were happy to have them. It was nice.

SI: They were young women.

HB: Oh, they were in their twenties at the time, yes.

SI: Were they married at the time?

HB: No, no, they were both single at the time.

SI: Were women coming in from around the country all over town?

HB: All over town, yes. … The rolls of employment at DuPont got very, very big … during the war, because they were working three shifts, putting the stuff out, because they made tracer ammunition, too, besides the caps, and I don't know all the stuff they made. … The fellow who lived across the street, Edwin Allen, he was a supervisor up there, and, [when] he came home, he was orange. His whole body was orange, from whatever material, fulminate of mercury, or whatever it was they were using up there. … It always reminds me, today, of, you know, [that] we didn't know what toxicity was. We had no idea. This little brook down here in the corner, it's called the "Acid Brook," and I played in it. I sailed boats down the "Acid Brook," never thought a thing about it. Now, my daughter, Patty, who's a college professor down at William Paterson, she said, "You had to be stupid to do that." I said, "I didn't know. I didn't have all the education that you have. I had no idea." Feinbloom and I went down there and I'd put a boat on one side, it would come down, he'd pick it up and bring it over. That's the way it was, and the air was heavy with the smell of chemicals, … but DuPont put the stuff out that we needed, and that's what they were looking for.

SI: Were there any other industries in the area, or any that sprung up for the war?

HB: Oh, yes. … Well, you know, of course, the Reaction Motors moved down into Pompton Plains, and then, eventually, … up into Morris County, and they were starting to produce the rocket engines. … We had several places around here where they had static stands, where they tested rockets, and so forth. … There was Mack Molding, down in Wayne. Mack Molding produced plastic, various items. … The American Hard Rubber Company, in Butler, produced … the cases for batteries, not only for automobiles and jeeps, and so forth, but for submarines, and, also, bowling balls and combs. [laughter] … We were into the war effort. There was a lot of it going on here.

SI: Did you have any jobs, aside from your job at church?

HB: Yes, I did. I worked at the local supermarket, as a stock boy, and one of my jobs was to clean up the cheeses and get them presentable for sale. They came in very moldy, and so forth, and we'd take vinegar and clean them up, and to keep track of the coupons, because everybody had ration coupons. … If somebody was particularly cute, or something like that, she might get a couple of extra sugar coupons that we had, you know, on the side. … One of the funniest things that happened in my whole life happened there, at the Stop & Shop [grocery store]. Our butcher was Peter Franco and, at the time, the ladies would save all of the drippings from cooking in a tin can and take it into the store at a certain time, and they used it for glycerin for explosives, and that was one of the things we collected. … One Saturday, we came in and there was this big sign, in red, over the butcher's [counter]. It said, "Ladies, don't bring your fat cans in here on Saturday," and everybody broke up, everybody broke up. [laughter] We said, "Peter, you've got to rephrase that sign some way, because it doesn't read that good." … There you go again; … we actually collected used bacon fat and grease, and so forth, and it was actually used and they actually did it. They actually picked it up.

SI: Who would pick it up?

HB: … I'm sorry, the name of the guy that picked it up, I don't remember. They're called, like, a larder, or something like that. He would come and he had a truck and he had a whole truck full of this stuff, and they would dump it in. They redid motor oil, but they did it in a different place, different way, and, of course, gas was at a premium. We had, you know, gas rationing, and you just got so much. My uncle adjusted his car so [that] it would run on kerosene, [laughter] made an awful lot of smoke, but it ran. … My daddy, in 1939, … he sold his car and Mama asked him why he was selling the car. He says, "Well, wherever we go, Frank goes, and Frank's got a better car and Frank always takes us, so, why do we need a car?" So, that's it, he sold the car, and, wherever we went, Frank took us. It was okay. I thought it was all right. … Later on in life, I might, you know, question it, … but he [Ball's father] also saved a lot of money. … That was one thing that he was very sensitive about. He wasn't going to be homeless and poor. He was going to save money.

SI: Working in the store, could you see people trying to get around the rationing system?

HB: Oh, yes, yes. There were a lot of people who tried to. You know, they would bring in [stamps that were] obviously somebody else's stamps. See, the deal was, you had to tear the stamp out of the book, and they'd bring them loose, and we knew they weren't good. Well, there were some older people that we would take care of, and there were other people who came in and we would say, "We'd rather have it in a book," and they'd get the book and give it to us in the book, but, you know, these things were tight. … I've always confessed this; I was a hoarder, which is what they called it in those days. There was a product that came out, I guess around '39 or '38, called Dinty Moore Beef Stew, and I loved it and it was one of the items that was embargoed. … So, I went up to the store and I put five cans of it in the bag, and my father made me take it back. He said, "That's wrong." He said, "You can have one can, but you can't have five." He said, "That's hoarding." I would have gone back and got them, but I didn't. … Later on, when I was in the National Guard in Michigan, we used to get the C rations and there was, many times, a can of … Dinty Moore beef stew in the C rations, yes.

SI: Was there a stigma against people who were hoarders or used the black market?

HB: Yes. There was a lot of it in the newspaper, you know, the black market, they would talk about the black market, in various things. I think the worst ones were gasoline. That was where it was really [serious]. People would lie about their needs. … Of course, gasoline was only a quarter a gallon, … but that was a hard time. Meat came hard, but we had no problem with meat, again, because we had the chickens. I never really liked chicken until I was thirty-five years old, after you clean up after those suckers and, you know, everything, go … pick up the eggs every day. They're nasty little guys. We didn't have much game. However, some of the upper part of the county, they did. … They shot a lot of deer and butchered it and used it as their meat source. … You did what you could, but there were a lot of different things that you don't think about. … That sucker over there, [Mr. Ball points to his refrigerator], it's just filled with food right now, all right. You couldn't do that with an icebox. … In the mid-'30s, we got a refrigerator which had a little thing that big for ice cubes.

SI: Like a foot-by-foot, or less.

HB: Yes. You couldn't freeze anything, no frozen food. So, whatever you had lasted whatever time forty degrees'll keep, for [about] a week. … So, that was a very difficult situation. … Like, I talk about this cheese; we used to get … a big wheel of Swiss and get it in and I would slice it up and it would be gone by the afternoon, but that was the only one we would get for the whole week, you know. So, it was difficult and it was up to the family to take care of that, you know. I never felt that we … went hungry or anything like that. … If we wanted fresh tomatoes, it was down [in the] cellar; there were forty cans of tomatoes that we'd put up last August. … That was wonderful and that stuff was good, and my mom never used a pressure cooker to can with. … We don't know how we still lived without [it], you know, because that's not right. … She had pole beans and all different things that she made, and we had homemade chili sauce, homemade ketchup, you know, all of those things, and fresh eggs every day. … I remember, I was sick one time and my daddy made me a fresh tomato sandwich with just salt and pepper, because we couldn't afford any mayonnaise, and I can still remember that taste, how good it was. … We got by. Things were okay, yes. World War II was really scary. It was frightening for a kid.

SI: What were some of your fears?

HB: We were afraid of air raids. We were afraid that the Germans would, … somehow, get a flight of airplanes over and come and bomb, and we figured they'd bomb New York and probably be stupid and miss New York and get Pompton Lakes. I have some historic books of the Pompton Lakes Volunteer Fire Department, and December 7, 1941, nine PM, [was the] first air raid of World War II. So, they blew the sirens and had the air raid. My dad was a warden. I was a member of the messenger service, and that was kind of stupid, because they wouldn't let us outside when there was an air raid. So, I don't know, nobody could ever get a message, because we had to stay inside, but Daddy was out there. He had a stick and a light, and we had to turn all the lights out. You had to darken all the lights. … I remember, my [friend and I], we were talking about sight, about night sight, and Feinbloom said that if you eat carrots, there was vitamin A in carrots and that would improve your night vision. So, I just scarfed carrots down like nobody's business, because I was a Civil Defense worker. I was going to beat the Japs and Germans right here on Romain Avenue, you know, and so, … the air raid siren blew and I get up and I walk right out and bang my head right into the door. I couldn't see a thing, and I got Feinbloom the next day; I was going to kill him. [laughter] I said, "That didn't help one bit." He said, "Well, they're good for you anyway." …

HA: Did you have any relatives serve in the war?

HB: Many, many. My cousin, Winfred, went down to Fort Benning and he joined the airborne and he was in the Glider Corps and he was in the second wave at D-Day, went in with a glider. … The gliders all crashed, and he survived the whole thing. … My cousin, Melvin, … spent the war in the [Panama] Canal Zone. They were all out [in service], … and everybody you knew was in, everybody you knew. When you got to be seventeen, you were gone, and some of them when they were sixteen. Some of them were sixteen. They would lie and get in early, but that's the way it went, and the high school was the same way. … They had assumed they were either too young or too old, and that was because there weren't any men left. They were all in the service. I forget how many million people were in the service. …

SI: Sixteen million, I believe.

HB: Yes, it was a considerable amount, and it kills me and it brings tears to my eyes to think that, on D-Day, six thousand of them died. Their average age was nineteen. Their officers' average age was twenty-four. … I have to convince myself that it was worth it, and it was, it was, but it's difficult. … When you look at what's happening now, [with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan], and … the people's attitude toward it, they have no idea what's going on and they shoot off their mouth and they don't know what's going on, … but some of these old guys that were there do know. … My company commander, from the Michigan National Guard, Colonel William Sikkel, was nineteen years old in the South Pacific and he was in a place called Buna Village, in New Guinea. … They told him to go out on a patrol and he put his Bible in his pocket and he gave all of his worldly goods to his friend and to the chaplain and went out. Well, he's eighty-some years old now, and he's got an attitude; he knows. He knows some different things than I do, than you do, … and I love to listen to him. One of the really serious things about World War II was [that] I came away really hating Japanese [people]. I don't know why I didn't hate the Germans as much, but I really hated the Japanese, and we had seen the Bataan Death March, we had seen the guys …

SI: When you say that, do you mean as in the movies?

HB: Well, you see, that was what the Fox Movietone [News was]. This news here [today] bores me, but, when you went to the movies, you had the Fox Movietone News and, every time, they would show something and they showed something about the war. Well, I hesitate to say "propaganda," but it might have been; I don't know. … Anyway, I really, really, really disliked them, [Japanese people], and my father wouldn't have anything in this house that was made in Japan, even after the war. You know, I brought home a lamp that was very, very nice and we looked at it and it said, "Made in Japan." He said, "Take it back. I will not have it in my house." … That lasted a long time and, about three years ago, maybe five years ago, in Rotary, I'm a Rotarian, been a Rotarian a long time, [it] was December 7th and I was going to have the program. … I started the program and I looked over in the corner and there was our Japanese exchange student, a little girl. Well, I'm not going to unload on the Japanese with her standing there, and it started to occur to me that there probably were very young men who were killed and never got home to see their people, just like our own people. I don't know how to handle it yet, but it occurred to me. … Somebody said; one of my editors, I wrote a column about the Japanese and I called them "Japs," and he said, "You can't say that," and I said, "I can; you can't," and he understood, he understood it. I said, "Because that's what my uncle said to me when he said, 'The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor,'" and my father said, "Where the hell is Pearl Harbor?" Well, we had no idea even where it was, you know. …

SI: You told us before about December 8th, but can you tell us more about December 7th?

HB: Yes, sure. I was right in that other room, right there, and I was sitting on the floor, playing with my soldiers. … I don't know what we had on television; … no, there wasn't any television. I don't know what we had on radio and, to tell you the truth, I think maybe we didn't have anything on, because I was just sitting there, playing. … The phone rang and it was my Uncle Richard, and Mama answered and she said, "Oh, my God," and then, she yelled out, she said,

"Dick says the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor," and Daddy said, "Where the hell's Pearl Harbor?" She said, "It's in Hawaii." … He said, "Turn the radio on." So, then, we turned the radio on and we got the various news reports and I sat there and listened to it, and my father said, "This is war." He said, "We are at war," and he was … forty-five or fifty years old at the time, and he said, "I'm going down to enlist tomorrow," and my mother said, "Don't be ridiculous. You'll do something here, that you can be of great service to the community, but you're too old. You can't go down and enlist," and so, he sat there and fumed all afternoon, because he wanted to enlist, but he didn't. … As I said, he became very interested in the Civil Defense movement and was a district warden and did all the stuff he should have done.

SI: Did the war affect Artistic Weaving at all? Did they start producing things for the war effort?

HB: They produced things for the war effort; you'll never believe what they produced. They produced the hatbands for the Navy, the Navy dress hat, that black band that goes around. They got a big contract to produce those, and, before the war, they had made them with the names of the different ships, but, during World War II, they just said, "US Navy," but they did that. … Of course, a lot of garments that the Army used had labels in them and they made those [labels], too. So, they were very, very busy, and he [Ball's father] was on to the war every minute of the day. He knew everything that was going on and, I'll tell you the truth, they're lucky that he didn't enlist, because he'd have cleaned them up. … There were so many things that fell into our way, the things that we had to do. You know, you think about the young men coming home. When the boys came home after World War II, my father, I don't know where he got them, he gave every one [veteran] he saw a pen, a new ballpoint pen, because that was a big deal then, a ballpoint pen, but he gave [one to] everybody he saw. … I don't know where that came from or why he did it, but he did, and guys remember. I have guys today who'll say to me, "I've still got the pen your daddy gave me." … They had a great deal of respect for the community, really. That was interesting. … As I said, you know, we were angry with the Germans, but I never felt that same way about them as I did about the Japanese. … Then, after the war, when I was at Hope College, [in Holland, Michigan], one of my buddies, Yop Uhl, had been a prisoner. He was a missionary, missionary's son, and he had been a prisoner of the Japanese and he sat for hours and told me what they did to him and his sister, and so forth, and so on, and it even made me madder. … Then, one of the guys in our church group was a Japanese-American, and Mike was the best guy I ever knew, and I said, "Again, I'm confused. What's going to happen?" God set me straight, you know.

SI: Was that more recently, or immediately after the war?

HB: Oh, no, that was right after the war. … That was at Western Michigan [University]. … This whole time was [influenced by the war]. The movies, for instance, were all aimed at the war, and they not only informed you, they kept you going. … One of the Movietone News-es that I remember most was well before the war, and it was with the *Hindenburg*. When I saw that movie, for two or three days, I was just scared to death, to see that thing burn up and those people being incinerated, … but it was something. … When I was very small, we'd been up in Upper New York State and we saw the *Los Angeles*, which is a dirigible, [the USS *Los Angeles* (ZR-3)]. We saw it coming up over the mountain and my dad stopped the car and we watched it

for a long time. Oh, I was going back to tell you about, … in '43, I think, it had to be '43, I was fourteen years old, I was … at Asbury Park; actually, Ocean Grove. … I was on the boardwalk, by the Berkeley Carteret Hotel, which was, at the time, an R&R place for wounded veterans. … I was sitting on a bench with two Marines, both wounded, and we were talking about the war. They had been in the South Pacific and they told me about the things that were going on and everything, what I had to look forward to, "Join the Marines," you know, and so forth, and so on. … Of course, it was all dark. There were no lights there. It was a blackout, and then, all of a sudden, out on the horizon, there's a big, orange flash, and then, you counted maybe six or seven, "Boom." A guy says, "Huh, they just torpedoed a ship." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "That's what that was." He said, "Somebody got hit," and then, the next morning, all the stuff came in, the oil and, you know, wreckage from the ship, and they had; a submarine had torpedoed a ship, and we went through that. … Until they developed the dirigible fleet, the blimp fleet, we had quite a few submarines off the Jersey coast, but there are a few of them on the bottom out there now, you know.

SI: The subs.

HB: Yes. … Those guys were terrific, and they were all going to [go] home and see their loved ones, … but they enjoyed a little vacation there, at the Berkeley Carteret. …

SI: Was there any information that they told you that was shocking or different from what you were hearing from the movies?

HB: Yes, they told me a lot of things … about combat. We were talking about combat, because I was kind of interested in combat, because I knew that John Wayne and the guys; I knew a little bit about weaponry and I knew that, you know, you don't handle a machine gun the way John Wayne did. I knew … those things, and we talked about it. … The one thing that the one boy told me [was], he said that … it bothered him that so many guys who got hit called for their mommy. They were calling, "Mama, mama, mama." He said that, "That bothered me," and that bothered me a lot. … When I went home, I thought about it and I said, "Probably, I would, too," you know. … They also talked about the food, and so forth. … Everybody hated cream chipped beef on toast, which they called something else, not very complimentary, and, for some reason, I still love Spam, they all hated Spam, but I survived Spam. In fact, there's a couple cans of it there in the larder, and my grandson eats it. When I was in the National Guard, I was in the National Guard [for] ten years, … I loved the C rations. They used to say I was nuts, because I liked the hash, I liked the ham and lima beans. … You know, whatever they had, it was good, it was tasty, but my friend, MacGeehee, and I used to stand at the front of the line and we'd get cans of hash and open them up, and then, we'd say, "Oh, [did] you know that the Thrivo Dog Food Company makes this?" and then, … the young guys in line would say, "Really?" "Yes, … they close the line down from dog food, then, they make this," and the guy says, "Well, I don't want it." "Well," I'd say, "I'll take it." [laughter]

SI: How were 4-F people, or people who were not in the service, viewed in the community?

HB: It depended on who the 4-F person was and how he acted. There were 4-F people who were very valuable in the community and did as much in the war effort as they would have done

if they had been in the service, maybe more. There were those who were obviously 4-F because they wanted to be 4-F. … You know, the guy in *M*A*S*H*, [a TV program], with the dress [Klinger] is funny, but it wasn't funny, because we were losing our kids and they were dying and some people were escaping it in a cowardly way. … I won't use names, but I can think of a couple of people here who were very, very valuable in the war effort. … Of course, the guys up at DuPont, there were certain ones at DuPont that were key workers and they were very valuable. The guy across the street was not 4-F, but he was deferred and he was invaluable in the plant. … You know, he kept things going. So, there were some people, I imagine, who were prejudiced against those who didn't [serve in the military], you know, I think particularly mothers who had boys in the service, but Daddy wasn't that way. He really wasn't. He could see that some people were doing [a service], and, if somebody … actually, you know, looked like a coward, he called them a coward. … We were too busy fighting a war, and I often say that to people, that *we* were fighting a war. Even though it was our boys and girls who were over there, we were fighting the war and it happened every day. You [would] get up in the morning and it was still there, … but we got chances to do other things. I mean, as a kid, we still had the band, we still played football, … we still did all those things. It was funny, because of the gas shortage, we couldn't get busses to transport the football team, and so, the coach had a friend who had a moving business. … He arranged with this guy to get a moving contract to the town where we had to go every time, and they took the team on the moving van. They all rode on the moving van. … You couldn't do that today, for insurance purposes, but that was the way Coach Benson worked it out, and then, for instance, I guess it was '43, or which one it was, they played Ridgewood twice, because we could get to Ridgewood, and then, we played Bogota, because it was easy to get to Bogota. … You know, you had to plan ahead. You had to do it. We rode on trains, we rode on busses and we did the best we could, you know, but there was still an awful lot of fun. There were a lot of good movies out and I always enjoyed the movies, and I eventually became an usher in the movies, so [that] I could get in free.

SI: Since you later went into radio and newsprint, what role did radio and newspapers play in your life when you were a teenager during the war?

HB: … I don't remember what Christmas it was, my parents gave me this cardboard radio studio and it had scripts with it, it had machines to make sound with it, and, of course, it had no microphone, it had no recorder, because we didn't have those. We didn't have one of those wonderful little things you've got there, [referring to the recorder]. I mean, we had no way to do it. The only way you could make a recording was to make a disc, but I sat in front of that thing for hours and played shows and did shows, and I decided that, someday, I would be on radio, and I listened to radio. One of the things that I was thinking about yesterday, to tell you about, was, right after December 7th, … every network carried this big program and it was about the war. … It was all of the famous actors of the time telling us, you know, what was there and what we could do, and so forth, and so on, and President Roosevelt came on at the end and he encouraged us. So, I'm twelve years old and I wrote to the President and said that I would like to set up a business here in my place, that I can make screws and bolts and nuts for the war effort. … Of course, I couldn't do it, because, you know, it was more than I [could handle], but I got a beautiful letter back and it said, "Thank you very much, but you do what you can in the Boy Scouts and do the things that we need. We need that support and we need your support for our boys in the service." … That was the way it was. … Again, radio, they had two or three

different [programs]; every network carried the shows and the radio was very important. My father listened to the news guys, (Calton Borne?), and so forth, and we'd listen to the reports from London, from the bombing, and all of the famous guys who were on the air. I had a little, white Emerson radio, about yea big, and I had it under the covers in my bed, because I was supposed to be asleep, and I would listen to the different new broadcasts and I would listen to the disc jockeys and to people who talked about the war. … Everybody had something to say about it. Before the war, there was a great pacifist movement. I don't remember any of it after the war started. I don't remember seeing the pacifists again. The pacifists, actually, they went to the *Bund* meeting in Madison Square Garden; didn't see them afterward, didn't see them after the war, after it started.

HA: When FDR died, how did that affect you?

HB: Well, you know my daddy, being the Republican he was and everything, but I came to adore Franklin Delano Roosevelt, really. I really loved him and what he was standing [for], and I want to tell you something; I didn't know that he was as crippled as he was until I was much older. When I was a kid, I had no idea that our President was as crippled as he was, that he couldn't [walk], you know, … but, anyway, I was working at the Stop & Shop and it came on my little radio in the back stockroom and I started to cry. … I ran out to Harold Prewich, the manager, and I said, "The President of the United States is dead." … He said, "Go close the door," and we closed the door and he said, "I don't know how to do it, but I want to pray," and so, we did, probably a stupid prayer, but God liked it, so, that's okay. … It was very difficult, and it was very difficult to hear the reports of the funeral. My old brain is getting dried up and I'm trying; Arthur Godfrey said it so beautifully, and he said, "As the single horse goes by, and the President is gone," you know, it was [moving]. … I became very, very proud of Harry S. Truman. I became very proud of him. I believe that Harry S. Truman may be, when history announces it, maybe he's counted among one of our best Presidents. He was a brave man. Even in Missouri, he fought with the bad elements, even though they supported him financially, and he survived. … He was the guy who, before World War II, went around the country and said, "We are not prepared," and saw to it that we became prepared. My unit of the National Guard, the 126th Infantry, trained at Camp Claiborne, in Louisiana, and there were pictures of them on the Movietone on maneuvers. … They had stovepipes for mortars and they had pickup trucks with a sign on it that said, "Tank." They had no equipment, and it was a brutal shame that these guys were so … ill-equipped. When the war came, that same unit spent more time in combat than any other Army unit in the world, but they were, at that time, already equipped and they fought the first battles at the Owen Stanley Range in New Guinea and the Battle of Buna Village [also referred to as the Battle of Buna-Gona], which was a brutal time, when the Japanese all but dove off the cliff into the water, and they couldn't stop them. The guys were trying to stop them, trying to hold them, and they wouldn't stop. They would just run over and drown themselves. … Yes, [Eleanor] Roosevelt, we used to make a lot of fun of her. … My mother called her "lantern jaw," I forget what she called her, but they all made fun of Eleanor, but Eleanor did well. She did. She traveled around and did a lot of good things, and so forth, but the President, … as I said, after December 7th, my daddy never said another ill word about him. He was the Commander-in-Chief, and so forth, and I think that I don't know of anybody else who … would have gotten us through that war, because he had to appeal to those people in the Midwest, he had to appeal to all those people who had just gone through the "Dust Bowl," and all of the things

that had to be pulled together, and I don't think we could do it today. I mean, we don't have the manufacturing facilities to do what we did then. I mean, they turned Detroit around and stopped making touring cars and made tanks and jeeps, you know. … The first time I ever saw a jeep, I thought that was the greatest thing in the world. I said, "Oh, boy, oh, boy, look at that thing fly over the hill." … I turned over three of them. …

SI: Was that when you were in the National Guard?

HB: Yes, when I was in the Guard, yes. I never got any service in World War II, because I was not old enough.

SI: I was not sure if you saw the jeep during World War II, if someone was driving by.

HB: Oh, no, I saw the jeep on the Movietone News, yes. Those were really, really good days. …

SI: You mentioned that V-J Day was a sudden change, in terms of people being let go from their jobs and leaving. Can you tell us about how this area was affected by the end of the war?

HB: … Well, [at] the end of the war, they had to change gears into a peacetime economy, but there had been so many things that we didn't have during the war that we [now] could. For instance, the car business; there weren't any cars around, because they hadn't manufactured any cars, except military vehicles. My old boss, Ernie Guenter, had purchased twenty-five Pontiacs before World War II and he didn't sell them. He put them in storage, and so, when the Office of Price Administration was closed and … all of the rulings were gone and you could get whatever you wanted for a car, he put them up … for the full price that they were then. … He sold all twenty-five cars in no time and he invested his money, which was quite a bit, in a group that he had seen in magazines, called American Machine and Foundry, AMF Bowling. … When he passed away, he was a major stockholder in AMF and he made a lot of money, and there were other people who did similar things. The automobile companies came out and the cars that they produced first, in '45 and '46, were kind of like the '41s or '42s, whatever they had had on the line, and they sold pretty well. … Then, from … [about] '47, the first Volkswagens came in. Maybe, that year, they imported one, I think, one or two, and then, the economy just kept … moving along. … When we got into '55, it was crazy. I mean, if you're selling cars, why, they just went out the door like nobody's business. We sold more Fords than you could shake a stick at, and then, it died in '57. They had a recession and it died. They had spent all the money. … Around here, it was the beginning of the end, but nobody knew it. One of the things was that Eisenhower wanted to improve the road system, you know. The Pennsylvania Turnpike came into being, and then, it was then only from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh, and all those things happened. When I went to college, in 1947, we drove out. We had to drive Route 22 to Somerset, to the Turnpike, over the mountain into West Virginia, into Ohio, and then, to Michigan; today, straight through on [Interstate Route] 80. … The infrastructure had to be taken care of. It had suffered during the war, because they didn't do much to the infrastructure. So, there was work around. People could [find work], you know. It wasn't like the WPA days. … There was work here. DuPont did okay. All of the "Rosie the Riveters," they all went home, and I don't know whether they got jobs where they were or they just didn't go to work again. I

don't know, but, you know, things weren't bad here. Daddy was working every day and … things started to innovate. I'm trying to put some timelines on this. We didn't have an electric toaster in this house until I was twelve years old, so, that's '42; did everything on the stove. We had a thing that had four sides on it. You put the bread on, turned the gas on, it would toast one side, and then, you'd turn it over and toast the other side. After the war, the electric things came out, and I believe, historically, I really believe this, historically, that 1947 was the year that changed the world. … That's when the guys over at the Bell Labs developed the transistor, because that thing that you have there, recording my voice now, would have weighed fifty-eight pounds and would be giant, with all vacuum tubes, and, certainly, never would have run on batteries, but, today, the radio business and your business, our business, is governed by transistors. I could turn the fan and light on with a little device that has a transistor in it. So, I believe that that had a profound effect on us. I teach the history of television and radio, occasionally, at the college, and one of the other things that changed the whole face of television was tape. I remember the first time I ever saw a tape recorder. The principal of the high school called me in, I think I was a junior, I'm not sure, but he called me in, Mr. Pratt. Yes, I was a junior, because that was Pratt, and he had a Grundig American tape recorder. It was, like, twenty-four-by-twenty-four-by-twelve or fourteen. It weighed about ninety pounds and it was reel-to-reel. It had a little eye up on top that tuned it in; when you had it working right, the eye was closed, and he had a square, little microphone. He gave it to me, pushed the button and I recorded my voice and I was blown away, that my voice was on that little piece of tape. Well, that little piece of tape has changed radio, it changed television. … You know, the problem with television at the time, and in the '40s, '47, '48, was the kinescope, which was terrible. You couldn't see the darn thing. They came now [with videotape], and, now, they have it on tape. They tape them and they send them all over the country, and they use cable. … The computer that's in there, my little laptop, wouldn't be anything without transistors, without printed circuits, without all of these things. … We got into the technical age and to the space age. Back to the guys who had the little shop in Pompton Lakes and developed the rocket; one of them was James Hart Wyld. He's in the museum in Washington, [DC], the [Smithsonian] Aerospace Museum. [Editor's Note: Wyld's rocket engine, the "Wyld Regeneratively-Cooled Rocket Motor, Serial Number 2," is on display there.] James Hart Wyld was a brilliant, brilliant man. He married my teacher, Helen Lindsay, and we got invited to dinner over at her house and he was there. … At the dinner table, he said, "Hey, you guys, I want to show you something I just designed. It's called a 'space tin lizzie.'" A "tin lizzie" is what we used to call the Fords, and he showed us a picture of this machine, with wheels, and so forth, and so on. It was the LEM, the same design that rolled on the Moon twenty years later, and that's the brilliance of this guy. … He told us the possibilities of what was going to happen in space. … At the time, he said, "Man will walk on the Moon." I feel a great privilege that I knew him and listened to him, but he was a wacko; he was a funny guy. He rode around town on a little motor scooter and he had a full-length overcoat that dragged on the ground when he rode on the motor scooter, and people used to laugh at him, say, "There goes the nut," and I said, "There goes the genius." … That's what's happened to us. Some people say, "The good old times;" I don't think they were good old times, when they had a pump in the corner here, with water that I'm not quite sure I'd want to drink today, but it was cold and fresh and nobody died in the house. We had apple trees around this house. There were at least twelve apple trees around the house. They made their own vinegar, they made their own cider, they made their own "Jersey lightning." Every year, in the winter, they would tap these kegs of; "Jersey lightning" is booze, is liquor, apple liquor.

SI: Applejack.

HB: Applejack. … That's what they did, … almost self-contained. I remember the first time we ever went to supermarkets. We went to a supermarket in Paterson called the Big Bear, and we would load the car with all the family, everybody, uncles and aunts and everybody, probably get arrested today with so many people in the car, and get down there. … I don't know where we ever put the bags of stuff, but we bought groceries, and then, they opened the Big Leader in Bloomingdale and we would go there. … Before that, you went into the store and the guy picked everything off the shelf, put it in a bag and wrote the price on the bag and added it up, and that's how you did it. … Now, after World War II, even at the Stop & Shop, where I worked, we got an automatic cash register, that we pushed the buttons and it would send a little piece of paper out with all of it on. It was a wonderful thing. … Of course, at that time, we had trains running through here to New York every day. They actually went to the Susquehanna Transfer, but they got you to New York, eventually. I don't think the "good old days" were "good old;" I really don't. I love air conditioning. I like air conditioning, I like my freezer, I like the water on the [refrigerator] door, I like all of those things that we didn't have. I love my tape recorder, I love my computer. You know, these are all things that we didn't have. I enjoyed typing on my old "mill," my old typewriter, but, sure, that little laptop beats the heck out of that, … because of what I can do with it, … plus, the fact that I've got stuff that I've written ten years ago, or five years ago, and I've still got it. … It's not in a big box of paper, it's on a little disk, you know. So, those are things that helped us. … Also, I'm quite close to the National Guard yet. … I'm an ordained minister and one of the things I do is, I'm chaplain. I'm chaplain to four fire departments, one academy and two police departments, and I act as a quasi-chaplain for the local National Guard. I kind of get in there because I want to see their weapons; I want to see what they've got, and I want to tell you, the stuff that we have today is so [advanced]. I used to fire the M-1 Garand and I fired "Expert" on it, but, I'll tell you, these pieces that they have, they'll fire grenades and fire this and fire that. They're so superior. The "good old days" are not that good. This is a good time, and you guys have the greatest opportunity for education. It's just really, really [great]. … I have so much fun teaching. I love to teach, and I've taught at William Paterson and the local college, at Passaic County Community, and I find that there's so much opportunity out here today. … I wanted to get with your group, because I think that we can't forget, but it [the past] sure as heck isn't the best time, you know. It's another time and it's a historic time and, once in awhile, my daughter gets a little angry with me, because I'll get off on the Japanese, once in awhile. I still do it; I'm sorry. You know what does it? I see it on the television. I see a movie on the television, *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*, [a 1957 film about Allied POWs forced into slave labor by the Japanese in Burma], or whatever, and I see the brutality and it comes up again, and I think of guys I know who went through it. … She said, "You can't do that," and I said, "Yes, I can, because I was there. You can't, because you weren't there, and I'm allowed to forget it; you're not," and that's what I have to do. The World War II experience, and the Depression, I wouldn't want to go through it. My daughter said the other day, "We ought to have another Depression. Then, people were together then." "No, you don't want another Depression. You don't want people dying of hunger. You don't want people, you know, homeless," because we didn't even know they were homeless; we had no word, "homeless." They were bums, and that's horrible, when you say it, "Them bums," and that was not what they were. They were homeless people who needed us. … I'm proud of the things that

happened in this house, of my grandfather and my father. … On both sides of my family, I have Minutemen. Ebenezer Ball, Sr., Ebenezer Ball, Jr., in Townsend, Mass., were at the Battle of Concord, and my other great, great-grandfather, Jacob Ball, was part of the Morris County Militia. … I traced my lineage back to Edward Ball, who was the first sheriff of Newark, Essex County, and I treasure all that stuff. I think that's good. I don't think we should forget our roots, but I'm not going to live back there either. I don't want that crummy old refrigerator anymore. I like this one, … and that dog likes the refrigerator; excuse me.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: How did you come to the decision to go to college? Did you always think you would go on to higher education?

HB: … No, I didn't. I was going to be a refrigerator salesman, and I was at the American Legion parade in New York City. I was sitting on a rock in Central Park, … with my friend, Gene Horn, and Gene Horn said, "You should go to college." I said, "I don't want to go to college," and he said, "If you don't go to college, you're not going to have a good job, you're not going to make any money and it's not going to be good." I said, "Why do you say that?" and he says, "Because it's the truth." I said, "Well, where will I go to college?" He said, "Why don't you go to Hope College? That's where I'm going." So, I said, "Okay," and that's when I made my decision to go to college. …

HA: How did your parents react when you told them that you were going?

HB: I went over and … we used a pay phone in New York City and I called Mom and told her … that I was going to go to college, I wanted to go to Hope College, and she said, "Okay. Yes, I'm very happy about that, very good." … They called Miss (Reiman?), who was the high school guidance counselor and lived in a house right over here. They called her and they said, "Howard wants to go to college." This was a Saturday, and she called Hope College that day and, by Monday, they had sent back, by over air mail, Monday or Tuesday, they got the applications and everything, and I filled it all out, sent it, and I left for college on Friday.

SI: Really?

HB: Yes, and, of course, we didn't take SATs at the time. There were no SATs. … I'm so happy that I made the decision. I loved Hope College and it was a wonderful place and they were very hospitable. … I, again, joined the Michigan National Guard while I was there and I got a lifetime of friends there, but the radio thing and the stage thing was in my craw. In my last two years of high school, I had worked in a summer theater that was right here in Pompton Lakes, and the director and the stage manager encouraged me to follow a career and they said I was pretty good. About the fourth week I was there, I got a small role and I was a pretty good actor, and they thought so, and then, throughout the rest of the seasons, I played [roles]. I'd fall out of closets and, you know, do all the small parts that they had, and so forth. … Then, I got a really good, young role in one play, but I went to Hope College and went to a basketball game at Western Michigan University, and it was Western Michigan College of Education then. … We went to the ballgame and I was bored by the ballgame, so, I left the auditorium [basketball court]

and I went down to the auditorium. … They were having a play and I really, really liked what I saw, and so, I found out about transferring to Western Michigan and I transferred, and I was there. … I got into the speech … program and drama and I worked there. We founded a little college radio station that was the only broadcast on campus, and I had a great time. I enjoyed it. I didn't get great marks, but I had a lot of fun.

HA: What did you major in?

HB: I majored in speech, English and history, and we actually had to carry an education major, too. … We had to take all the education courses, … because that was a rule of the college then, and I came out with a Michigan teaching certificate and I did teach in Michigan, at Comstock, Michigan, … and I continued. I went to different places and … took some graduate work, but I never got my master's, and I'm foolish, foolish, foolish. I could have had my master's for thirty-seven dollars a semester, and I wanted to be a disc jockey, I wanted to be on the air, and the opportunity arose and I did it. So, I became "Jeff Lane, on the Street of Dreams," on WKMI in Kalamazoo, and I was there for four years, and then, came out here and was on WCTC and WTTM, WNNJ, and then, I was the news director, original news director, of WKER, which is now WGHT. … Somewhere along the line, [like] I say, I got into newspapering and, in 1968, I became the editor of *Suburban Trends*, where I was until 1998, thirty years. …

SI: Did you stop working in radio to go into the newspaper, or did you continue both?

HB: No, no, I continued both, at the same time, yes. … I had the early morning shift at the radio station, and then, I'd go into the newspaper, and it was a long time. My daughters then followed in my footsteps. Patty is, as I said, a professor down at William Paterson, … but she teaches television and production, and so forth. … My one son, Mark, is a salesman for Cryovac. He sells the big machines that wrap meats, and so forth. My other son, Guy, is a technical writer. He is with a software company in California. Stephanie is, right now, retired, right now, but she was the vice-president of a company which provides computers for people with poor sight, and my other [daughter], Dianne, is kind of retired down in Florida, working for a Christian bookstore. So, that's them. …

SI: You entered college in 1947, which was at the height of the GI Bill years.

HB: Yes, sir.

SI: What was it like being in school with all those World War II veterans?

HB: It was rough, it was rough. They taught me to drink good, they taught me to drink good. My roommate, Billy, used to come down with a case of malt beer on his shoulder every Friday afternoon. We'd drink beer and play cards. My roommate at Western Michigan, Parnell Tardy, who eventually became a superintendent of schools in Michigan, he had these horrible dreams, and he had been a Graves Registration lieutenant in the South Pacific and he had handled hundreds and hundreds of bodies. … He used to have these really, really horrible dreams and scream all night, and we talked a little bit about it, and so forth, and so on. I let him alone; I got into another situation. … I went out in the other room and slept and let him alone, but he was a

great guy. It was very funny, because he had been at Michigan State University and had been the best-dressed guy on campus, and he only had one suit. He came home and pressed it every day. … There was a great deal of competition, but they added so much to our life. I mean, … with all this drinking and everything, (William Winnie Wolf, III?) also had great philosophies on things that he could talk about, and we talked about, when we had discussions, … *1984* [by George Orwell], about that book, and we would talk about it. … He'd say, "It's going to be different, it's going to be different." … At Hope College, I was very active in the Palette and Mask, which was the [theater] group. We did a lot of good shows and I was in them and I enjoyed it. I played in the band. The trumpet had been something for me for my whole life, from elementary school right on through, and so, when I got to Hope College, they got me in [the band]. I was first chair trumpet as a freshman, but they needed a sousaphone player, and so, I volunteered to play the sousaphone, instead of the trumpet, and it was fun. It was fun. One time, down at Kalamazoo College, we played Kalamazoo College, in a snowstorm, and the band was supposed to turn and move and I forgot it. … They turned and I didn't and they were going that way and I was moving the other way, and the people in the crowd were laughing and laughing, and we left it in the show. [laughter] It was a funny bit, but Hope College, at the time, and still today, was a very, very high-level institution. They were very, very careful with us. … The professors gave you good individual attention and the science guys, really, they really had it [the] best then and, while I was there, they built the first new science building. Now, they've got a couple more, and Western Michigan College, and, again, there were all of the guys [veterans], I mean, they were there; they had been all these different places. We had an aeronautical division which taught guys to fly and guys to take care of airplanes, and so forth, and so on. We had occupational therapy, which, you know, was a wonderful [thing]. I got a job as a janitor and cleaned the buildings. … It was an awful lot of fun and, again, the guys, you know, I can remember the different veterans there. … One of the guys that I knew was a friend of Gian Carlo Menotti and he would talk to me about music and talk to me about plays, and one of my friends was "B-B-B-Byron." … Part of our speech curriculum was speech correction and Byron was a stutterer and we called him "B-B-B-Byron," because he stuttered. … He worked with Dr. Charles Van Riper, who was our teacher, and Dr. Van Riper worked with Byron so much, the last time I saw him, he was doing Shakespeare and he was marvelous. … His diction was perfect, and it wasn't only on the stage; it was wherever he was. … He had conquered it, but he and I went downtown and bought a brassier at a … place, because Dr. Van Riper told him to do it. … Byron had to tell the girl what he wanted and he did, without, "Ba-ba," and it was a marvelous experience. … Those guys brought; I mean, what would a guy from Pompton Lakes know about Hong Kong? but [William Winne] Bill Wolfe told me about it. He told me about the different things that were happening around the world, … and my other friend, Yop Uhl, who had been a prisoner of the Japanese, told me about Indonesia and Java, [an island of Indonesia], and those places. [When] he came out here, he had never seen snow. Well, he saw snow in Michigan, but he had never seen it and he came out here in the great storm of 1947. … He stayed with us and we went out and shoveled snow to get him back to Michigan. He's a physician now, in Amsterdam, Holland, and I haven't heard from him in many, many years, but I know where he is. Yes, I think … they had a profound effect on us. There was fun and games, but there was also a very serious attitude, that they had to get out, and a lot of them were married. They lived in the married barracks, and so forth, and it was very good. Cliff (Haycock?) was another buddy of mine and he came back from the service and he was finishing up and he became my roommate down in Kalamazoo. … I'm trying to think of some other people. Well, there was a guy named [Henry I. Shaw, Jr.], and

I knew him in the National Guard, but he was a senior at Hope College. … Henry became the Marine Corps Historian and he was a very profound and wonderful guy, but he was like a drill sergeant. He was tough, and I needed tough. I needed tough. I had been a little spoiled brat. … My mother, you know, I drop it on the floor, she'd pick it up, you know, whatever. My daughter says it still stays with me, that I don't pick stuff up, but Hank was good, as was … Colonel Sikkel, who was Lieutenant Sikkel at the time. He was another guy who came back from the war and he brought; I say he took me from childhood to manhood. He used to feel my face every time he went by me and say, "I'm waiting for you to learn how to shave. If you don't learn how to shave sometime, you're going to have this horrible beard; learn to shave," and I just kept trying and I never did, and I'm smooth today. [laughter] Well, the last time I saw him was our fiftieth anniversary of our unit and he came over and he did my face and he said, "You finally learned." [laughter] … Most of the guys coming back really cared for us kids. They really cared for us and they understood the pressures that they put on us, because, you know, they'd come in class and they already knew, and we're learning. So, I think it had a very profound effect on education and on the way things were done. Western Michigan was very innovative. They had, I mean, Dr. Van Riper's classes in speech correction and his book are what's used around the world today. People use his book. … They had one classroom that had all large furniture in it, scaled so that we were the same size as kids in elementary school, and, if you get on the chair, your feet wouldn't touch the ground. … We had to work in there and learn what kids went through and try to convince boards of education and other people to buy the proper furniture, and so forth, for schools. … I thought that was very innovative and very interesting. … I always enjoyed teaching. … I did my practice teaching at College High School there, and then, I taught in Comstock, Michigan, I taught at Lyndhurst, New Jersey, and West Milford, New Jersey, … but it was a very interesting time, very interesting.

SI: How did you get involved with the National Guard?

HB: On 11 November, 1947, I walked into the armory and said, "I want to enlist today, in honor of my father," and that was Veteran's Day. Of course, then, it was Decoration Day; … not Decoration Day.

SI: Armistice Day?

HB: Armistice Day, and so, they swore me in and I became a member and I enjoyed every minute of it. I loved the National Guard. We came close to being called up for Korea. We were at Camp Grayling, [Michigan], and they gave us all of our shots. We got all the shots you need and they made our wills out and they did all the things that they do when they're going to ship you out. … The word was that we were going to be shipped to Camp Atterbury, [Indiana], and that we were going to be called up. Of course, that's not the way they do it today, but that's the way they did it then, and then, we entrained. We got on the train to go wherever we were going and our train stopped in the middle of the night, another troop train passed us, on the Michigan Central Tracks, and it was the Pennsylvania National Guard, 28th Division, and they got called up and we didn't. … They went down and they went to Korea and they were there a long time, but we got back to station, Kalamazoo, and I stayed in ten years. I was in ten years and I still go over there in my dress blues and hang out, every once in awhile.

SI: How much time did your National Guard commitment take? You must have gone for basic training. Was that during the summer?

HB: … Yes, during the summer. We had two weeks every summer, two weeks every summer, and we had drill every week. Then, we had weekend drills during the year, too, but I worked full-time at the National Guard for a year.

SI: Okay.

HB: I worked full-time, as an armorer. …

SI: When was that?

HB: 1953 or '4. …

HA: What exactly did your job consist of?

HB: Well, I took care of weapons. That's what an armorer does. They called it an artificer, and weapons would come in and I would take them out of the Cosmoline [a rust preventative] that they were in and clean them up and get them ready, and possibly fire them, to see that they were all right, … but my military occupations, specifically, I was a platoon sergeant and I was in charge of a platoon of soldiers and that's what I ended up doing on the line, but I worked full-time. That was a different deal. I worked on the weapons. On the day that the North Koreans invaded, I went to the armory here and they were taking machine guns out and putting them in tanks and I helped them for two days, until I could get a train to get out to Michigan. Then, when I got out there, … nothing happened. …

SI: Did the Korean War impact the school? Obviously, it was very different from World War II, where there was a total impact.

HB: See, my relationship with the National Guard kind of jaded my view of Korea. So, I don't know why. My other buddies were just worried about getting deferments, to get away from the draft, and I had a built-in one, because I was there already. The only thing I wanted at the time was to get called up and go. I wanted to go and we didn't. We didn't go. The Governor wanted us there in Michigan and we didn't go, and one of my buddies, Billy (Pierre?), he volunteered for active duty and he came back. He stepped on a landmine. He lost a foot, a leg and a hand, and I didn't change my mind about the rightness of it, but I changed my mind about me going there. I wasn't too thrilled about the idea of that, but, last time I saw Billy, he was dancing with a pretty good-looking woman, so, I don't know. … The time of Korea, we knew what was going on, but the country kind of forgot that … those guys were over there, and some of it was handled pretty badly. We brought a lot of the frostbite victims back to Percy Jones Army Hospital in Battle Creek, [Michigan], and they weren't too happy. … They really didn't have the right winter gear. They had not been issued the right winter gear, and they probably wouldn't have gotten frostbitten if they'd had the right clothing. … That was where that all was, and, in the college, well, Western Michigan put together their first ROTC then, and I don't remember exactly what

date that was, but that was just before I graduated in '51. So, it was all interesting. It was an interesting time.

SI: Were international affairs discussed often among your group of friends, not just Korea?

HB: Yes, I think we talked about it. We talked about a lot of things. We talked about a lot of things, and everybody was more scared of the Russians than the Chinese. We were. Everybody said; not everybody. That's a wrong word, Howard; many people said they wished that Patton had had his way at the end of World War II and he'd gone in, cleaned up Russia. … Everybody had an opinion, so, that was what [some thought]. … Some people were, you know, pretty astute at what they knew. We hung out, I hung out, with a lot of people who were much better students than I, much more academically inclined than I was, … but my friends were the children of one of our economics professors, and so, they knew where things were going. I took his class and I slept through it, but that's all right. [laughter]

SI: When we were talking about World War II, you mentioned how afraid you and your friends had been about the possibility of an air raid or a German raid. I was wondering if there was any of that in relation to the threat of Russia and the atomic bomb.

HB: I must have been drunk or something at the time, because I remember about when we were all putting air raid shelters in, and this and that and the other thing, but I wasn't really afraid. I really didn't think anybody would use the bomb. I really didn't think anybody would use it. Was I afraid? No, I don't think … you would call it afraid. I think I was, I don't know, I was wary; I might have been wary. … I don't know; it just didn't occur to me. … I never worried about it. When we had the Nike [antiaircraft missiles] bases around here and all of this stuff, eh, it didn't bother me, and maybe it should have. I don't know.

SI: Aside from Korea, was there any other time when you thought you might be called up for the National Guard?

HB: No, no. Oh, well, we had times when there were civil disturbances when we were called up, when we [were] called up to a strike at the Shakespeare Fishing Rod Company, [in Kalamazoo, Michigan]. We were called up for that and a couple of things. We were called up on searches for lost children and things like that, but, no, we didn't have [any other call-ups]. I was gone by the time Vietnam came along. …

SI: How were the strikes handled? What do you remember about the strikes?

HB: The only thing I remember is, I was part of a group that broke up a bunch of people, that we made a triangle and stamped our feet and held our weapons up, which were empty, and walked through them and they dispersed, that's all, with no fights or anything. … I don't even remember what that maneuver's called, but it's a squad diamond or something like that. … I eventually worked at Shakespeare, making the little knobs for fishing rods. [laughter] …

SI: As a DJ, what type of programs would you have?

HB: Well, I was a late night disc jockey and I played, mostly, the old jazz and Big Band [records], and there wasn't any rock-and-roll. It had not started yet; in fact, it just started. As a matter-of-fact, one of the record hawkers had brought a record in by this guy named Elvis Presley and I played it on the air. I didn't like it, and so, … I took another old record and I broke it over a microphone and said, … "There's Elvis Presley; that's where he'll be," and, of course, I was a great prophet on that, you know. [laugher] I had one of the very funny "almost been;" when I left Michigan in '56, came back here, I went over to New York one day and visited (Eddie Arnowitz?), who was with MCA, and he said, "Where have you been, Jeff?" I said, "I'm over in Jersey." He said, "I've been trying to call Jeff Lane." I said, "Well, no, my name is Howard Ball; that's my stage name." He says, "Oh." He says, "There was a job down in Philadelphia and it was, like, a teenage radio show, *American Bandstand*." He said, "Another guy got it." I said, "Oh, okay," you know, and that's my life, you know. …

SI: Dick Clark was the guy.

HA: Yes.

HB: Dick Clark, yes, … but I had a lot of fun. … I enjoyed radio. I hung out with the Big Band guys. Ray Anthony, [a bandleader], invited me to his wedding. I hung out with his brother, Leroy. Charlie Spivak, [a trumpeter and bandleader]; I announced a network show for Stan Kenton, [a jazz pianist], announced a network [show] for Ray Anthony, too. I became very, very close to a group you probably never heard of, the Four Freshmen, [a vocal band]. … They were very popular at the time, and my friend, Teddy Nowack, had a restaurant, which I had a little show out of, and I went down there for dinner one night and these four guys were there. They sang beautiful, beautiful songs, "Promise me you'll be sweethearts after graduation day." So, they were good friends of mine. I was friends with some guys from Fred Waring, [one of several groups organized by bandleader Fred Waring], and it was an interesting life. I really enjoyed [it]. I was at the last show of; oh, boy, forgot him right now, [Steve Allen]. Well, I'll remember his name, anyway, down in New York City, the late night show that preceded Johnny Carson and everybody, and Jack Paar; Steve Allen, [original host of NBC's *The Tonight Show*]. I was there. I had done [the show?], and that's how I met Hillevi Rombin, [Miss Universe 1955 and an actress], through him. She had been on tour for the motion picture, *The Benny Goodman Story* [(1956)], in which she had a cameo role, a marvelous young lady, by the way. She married G. David Schine, better marriage than she could have got with me, but, anyway, we were at the very last show of *The Steve Allen Show*, in New York City and it was a great pleasure. I feel very good, because a lot of my kids, a lot of people who studied with me, have gone on and done very, very well. … One of my high school students from West Milford, Dale Soules, I got her set up with summer theater, and then, I made an arrangement that she studied with Uta Hagen, and she got the role in, on Broadway; I'm thinking of the show, come on, *Grease*, no, not *Grease*. Anyway, my mind is crumbling here. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

HB: *Hair*, okay, good. Yes, she was Jeanie in *Hair* on Broadway, in the original cast, and she stayed with the show for quite some time, and then, she went to other shows. The one show called *The Magic Show*, with the famous magician, [Doug Henning], she was Cal in that show,

the fast-talking Passaic girl, and then, Dale went to San Francisco and joined the San Francisco Repertory Theater, where she was for about twenty years. … Now, she's back in New York doing kids' shows. So, I'm very proud of her. She did very, very well and she's a good student. My boy, David Brace, came to me as a cub reporter and he ended up as vice-president of Ottaway Newspapers, [a subsidiary of Dow Jones and Co. and News Corp. that publishes local newspapers], in charge of all their newsrooms in the country. So, I feel like, you know, there have been contributions, we've done some things, and I've got a whole bunch of reporters, here and there, that studied with me and I feel good about that, and, right now, I try to retire and I can't do it. I just have too many things to do. There's too much out there to do, there's too much, and I was very interested when I read about your project here. I think it's very valuable, very valuable. … It's the kind of thing that I think the American Indian does well, where they maintain their oral tradition, you know, and that's a wonderful thing.

SI: What are some of the things that you tried to impart to your students or people that you have mentored over the years as they go into their careers, whether on radio or stage or in print?

HB: I like to have my people understand that we deal in the truth. "Is it provable and true?" Whenever you write anything, whenever you put it in the paper, or on the air or on the screen, "Is it provable and true?" and that's the most important thing, and the other thing is, "Does anybody care about it? Do people care, or should they be made to care? Is there a way that you can interest them in something that's important?" You know, we weren't at all importantly interested in AIDS and it was something we should have been very importantly interested in, and it's up to writers and speakers and teachers to make sure that these truths get out. Rotary has a four-way test. "Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendship? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?" and I like that. I like that idea. I wrote a newspaper for thirty years. I prepared a newspaper that was for the people, that was for you and you, and that it had to have something in it for young people, it had to something in it for older people, it had to have something for kids, and that's what I think we should be doing. I think that much of what I see on television now, and I don't see most, that's because I won't look at it, is filth and I just don't care to watch it. I like to watch the History Channel and I like to watch, for heaven's sake, the Court Channel or True Channel, you know, watch the cops knock people around, whatever, but I felt that, with my young people, with Dale; when Dale was thirteen years old, she played a couple of roles for me in high school and I knew that she was somebody who could be a professional actress, actor. … I said to her, "Honey, you're going to be a character woman. You're going to play character parts. You're never going to be an ingénue, you're never going to have the leading role, unless it's a horror show, you're never going to go to your prom, you're never going to play in the band concert; you're never going to do these things. All you're going to do is study drama, all you're going to do is be an actor, and, if that's what you want, that's what you have to do. You have to pass all these other things up," and she did. … Everybody, you know, Uta Hagen and the people that she studied with, said she was a brilliant study. It was good to see. I saw her in a road show of *Hair* and it was marvelous. … David Brace was the same kind of thing. God rest him, he died just recently, very young, but he sought the truth, he looked for it and he taught that. … He'd talk about me every time he talked to a newsroom. He said, "This old gezzer taught me this," and I was proud of that. I felt good about that, and I think of something that's missing from our society--thank you, Mr. Clinton and all you other people who like to lie to us--we need some truth. We need to know the truth and that's the greatest

product that we can produce. I've had a great deal of experience with people lying and it's an unfortunate trait, but I have seen some tremendous writers, some tremendous young people. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

HB: You know, that's stock-and-trade and I think that the present campaigns that I'm watching, and I pay little attention to it, but it aggravates me sometimes; I've learned that, if something's aggravating me, there's no use watching it. There's no use keeping it. This country needs to go back to the truth. We need to deal with what the real problems with it [are] and take care of our people, and I just got a new program here, with my Part D Medicare, and what they're doing is, they're making sure that I have all generic medicines, instead of the ones the doctor prescribed. Well, that's cool, but they told me they were going to help me, and, now, I get letters that say, "You can't buy this anymore. You're going to get this." So, those are the kind of things that disturb me a little bit. Sears and Roebuck, they sent a nice card, … "You're a nice customer and we like you, and so that … you can have these gifts for being a nice customer," but it didn't say you have to pay for the gifts. They're gifts that you give to somebody else and you've got to read all of the little type before, and you [say], "Oh, boy, that's nice. I'll get that, I'll get that, I'll get that," and you think they're free, and then, two weeks later, you get a bill from Sears for those, that, that, that, because you bought a gift for somebody else, and that's what's wrong about America, you know, … bait-and-switch, … you know, six of one, half dozen of [the] other.

SI: What are some of the stories that stand out in your memory about things you covered over the years, work you are particularly proud of or that you found interesting?

HB: I don't know. Let's see; one of my best stories on radio was the Wayne Little League, World Championship … of Little League. That was a lot of fun. That was a good story. I enjoyed that very much. I enjoyed covering Trenton, on occasion. I got a lot of fun out of that, enjoyed seeing them in their work. I covered a couple of big fires, … the Morningstar-Paisley fire in Hawthorne. Eleven people died. It was an interesting challenge in coverage, and I covered that for the *Bergen Record*. Donna Weinbrecht and her championship in [freestyle] skiing in the Olympics, gold medal, I thought … it was very, very much fun to meet her and to see how much she put into being a gold-medal winner. That was a good story. You know, they were all [good]; I was at *Apollo 17*. That was exciting, a big time, [to] see that. Yes, *Apollo 17* was fun, because I got to go up into *Skylab*, in the Vehicle Assembly Building. It was standing up, thirty-two stories up, and I went up there and we took an elevator up and stepped across this gap into *Skylab*, and hung out with Walter Cronkite and people like that and had a marvelous time. I was there with Rand Araskog from IT&T. He's a dear friend, and the president of IT&T at the time couldn't make it, so, I had his accommodations. So, I had a really, really neat time, a really good time. I was still drinking then, and good scotch, yes. I am a recovering alcoholic, as I said. I am twenty-nine years away from the bottle.

SI: Congratulations.

HB: Yes. … I think that *Apollo 17,* because they went down to count seven, I think it was, and they stopped it and there was a problem. … Then, the guy came on, said, "NASA drivers, man your busses," and they had told us, you know, "If the thing blows up, we're gone," … because

we're only two miles from the thing, and so, … it took a little while for them to breadboard it and they found out what was wrong and, eventually, they launched it, but it was fun. … We just had a marvelous time there. I just enjoyed seeing it and got the VIP treatment, got inside to see everything and hear all the stories and talk to different astronauts, and so forth. So, that was a good story. I loved covering high school football. I covered high school football under a pseudonym. I called myself "Ali Hakim," and I covered about ten years; I went to games.

SI: Why were you always using pseudonyms?

HB: Well, the pseudonym, because we worked for different papers.

SI: Okay.

HB: All right. Now, on Saturday, I worked for the *Paterson News*, the *Herald News*, the *Bergen Record* and my own paper, and I got checks from those other three papers under different names, "Ali Hakim," "Ben Dover" [laughter] and "Pete Zeria," and that's … because we couldn't work [for three papers], you know. So, all of us did that. There were about fifteen of us and we all got together in my office and wrote our stories and sent them out to the different papers. So, instead of making fifteen dollars on a Saturday, you made forty-five or fifty. So, that was why we did that, and I think that's all stopped over the ages.

SI: Is that why you also went under a pseudonym on radio?

HB: No, on radio, I went under Jeff Lane because I was teaching school at Comstock and I had beer commercials, and, in Comstock, Michigan, teachers were not allowed to smoke or drink beer anywhere within two miles of Comstock. If you got caught with a cigarette, you were fired; good rule now, that I think about it. …

HA: Within two miles of the school itself.

HB: Two miles of the school, yes.

HA: Okay.

HB: Yes, I smoked like a chimney then, too. [laughter] …

SI: Did you use that throughout your radio career?

HB: I used it only there in Kalamazoo. When I got back here, I went under Howard Ball and I've been under Howard Ball for fifty years. I mean, I did the news on WKER and WGHT for many, many years. … That's about the size of all of that and we had a lot of fun putting a radio station on the air and it's good today and, if they get in trouble, they call me up. [laughter] … Like this; somebody said that [Senator and Presidential Candidate John] McCain can't be President, because he wasn't born in the United States. He was born in Panama, but, [at] the time he was born, it was the Panama Canal Zone, which was a territory of the United States. So, he

was in the United States, and so, they were hemming and hawing about it. So, I called them up and told them, and that's what I do. …

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add?

HB: No, I don't know. … I really appreciate you guys coming here.

SI: We appreciate your participation and great stories.

HB: It's a lot of fun to be here, and some of these memories, I wish I had them all, I wish I could tell you, oh, you know, get them all down there, because it's been a good experience. Grandma Stephens, when I remember her and the character that she was, she's right out of central casting, I mean, really, and I had a good bringing up. … I'm thankful to my parents and to Father Chillson and all these people, and, today, you know, when I go out as a chaplain, I feel good about it. I feel good about what we're doing.

SI: When were you ordained?

HB: … I was ordained on May 2, 2001. I was licensed from 1984, but, then, they ordained me, and I was pastor of a church in Butler for quite a number of years. Now, I just turned that over to a wonderful, young Hispanic guy, who maybe can appeal to the twenty-five percent Mexican population in Butler, you know. So, that's it. …

SI: Thank you very much; we appreciate your time and your participation.

HB: Okay.

HA: Thank you.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/26/09
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 6/28/09
Reviewed by Howard Lee Ball, Jr. 7/10/09