RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER M. BELL, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. Your father was born in Russia?

Alexander M. Bell Jr.: Right. So was my mother.

KP: When did they come over to the United States and why?

AB: About 1904.

KP: Did the pogroms have anything to do with it, that you know of?

AB: No, unless they saw the war [World War I] coming. I don't know.

KP: Did they ever talk much about the war coming?

AB: No, he didn't talk to us so much about the war coming. ... He had two ... pharmacies [and] my mother was a ... pharmacist from Russia. ... They were originally in Newark, and then, they moved to ... East Orange.

KP: So, both your parents were trained in Russia for pharmacy?

AB: No, just my mother.

KP: Just your mother?

AB: My father was trained here in the States.

KP: Were they married when they came over?

AB: No, they got married after they came over.

KP: How old was your father when he came to the United States?

AB: I would say he was [in his] early twenties.

KP: How old was your mother?

AB: About the same.

KP: Where did your father do his training?

AB: Well, he did ... part of it in New York and part of it in Newark, working for the pharmacist. In those days, ... you worked for someone and you got educated that way.

KP: So, your father never went to formal pharmacy school?

AB: No, I don't think he had.

KP: Had your mother gone to formal pharmacy school?

AB: She went to a formal ... schooling in Russia.

KP: For pharmacy?

AB: For pharmacy.

KP: Were both of your parents pharmacists when they met?

AB: I would say, yes.

KP: They owned two pharmacies. How well did their pharmacies do?

AB: Well, the pharmacies did very well. They used to have one in Newark, and then, they moved to East Orange. ... They had one store near ... the high school, and then, the other one down a couple [of] blocks away. My mother ran one and my father ran the other store.

KP: How long were their work hours?

AB: Well, in those days, they used to work ... from eight o'clock in the morning to twelve o'clock at night, seven days a week.

KP: Were you and your brothers expected to help out?

AB: We were expected. We worked in the store.

KP: Did any of your brothers go into pharmacy?

AB: No, I was the only one that went into pharmacy. One went into ... medicine. One went into optometry, because our father was an optometrist, also. I ... became the pharmacist and the youngest brother became a lawyer.

KP: When did you move to East Orange? Did your family have their store, and then, move to East Orange, or did they always live in East Orange?

AB: No, they had a store in ... East Orange, [and] in Newark, they had a store there, [and] then, they moved to East Orange.

KP: That was when they moved to East Orange?

AB: It was East Orange in about 1918.

KP: Your father did not serve in World War I, did he?

AB: No.

Jonathan Diaz: What was it like growing up in East Orange in the "Roaring Twenties," as they call it?

AB: [It was] the bedroom of New York, because a lot of the people used to ... [live] in East Orange, and take the train, and go to New York, and work. But, since then, it has changed quite a bit. The fact is, the family drugstore is still there in East Orange.

KP: It is still a pharmacy?

AB: It's still a pharmacy.

KP: It is now a chain pharmacy?

AB: No, not a chain, it's ... independent.

KP: But, it is no longer in the family, is it?

AB: ... It's no longer in the family.

KP: East Orange was, until the 1950s, one of the most affluent suburbs. Did you live in the affluent part of East Orange?

AB: No, we lived ... off Main Street, [on] South Walnut Street. It was ... convenient in traveling to the pharmacy. We didn't ... live in a house that was further away, we lived where it would be convenient, so we could give service to the people.

JD: How close was the pharmacy to your house?

AB: ... It was shorter than the walk coming over here. [From Hurtado Health Center to Van Dyck Hall] [Laughter]

JD: So, it was only about a block or two away?

AB: [A] couple blocks away, yes, and the high school was just ... about equidistant from the house. Of course, the grade school ... [was] about a mile away.

JD: So, you walked to grade school?

AB: We walked to grade school.

JD: A mile every day, back and forth?

AB: Well, twice a day.

KP: With your parents both being pharmacists, it sounds like your mother had to balance working in the store with raising you and your brothers.

AB: Yeah, she worked ... in the store in her spare time, and then, as we grew older, she worked more, and ... she kept a house for ... the four of us children and one husband, and that's what we did.

KP: Did your family ever hire someone to help out?

AB: Oh, ... we had a live-in maid.

KP: How did your family store do in the Great Depression?

AB: ... Well, it was a little rough, but, we held out. It's just that, maybe, more of us kids worked ... and helped the family, but, ... it was a little rough. We didn't get what we wanted and we had to work for it.

KP: I have interviewed people who had stores in the 1930s and they said they would try all kinds of strategies to save money. For example, only having one light on, and then, when a customer came in, they would turn on all the lights. Another thing they often made note of was that you had to keep large accounts on people, that a lot of people could not pay you right away. Was that the same case in your parents' pharmacy?

AB: Well, ... we always kept the lights on. We never ...

KP: You were never that desperate?

AB: [We] never were that desperate, and, of course, ... you need a light on ... [so that people] know you're open.

KP: Yeah.

AB: ... The people came, but, I don't think ... charge accounts were any more than they are like today. It just depends upon the habit of the person in paying their bills. Course, some of them ... had problems, and they weren't able to pay, and they told us, and some, they paid part ... each week, or each month, or every two months, whichever ... was convenient for them, but, you had to work with people.

KP: Who were your most common customers?

AB: Well, ... the most popular place [most common area of the customers to live] ... was at South Munn Avenue. I don't know what you know about East Orange or not. ... It was South Munn Avenue ... where the people who had money lived. It was the elite area, ... and those people, in turn, ... shopped in our place, we hope they did, and ... we ran charge accounts, and, like I said, they paid when they could.

JD: You said that the high school was close to your house.

AB: Yes, East Orange High School.

JD: Did you participate in any activities or sports?

AB: Well, I was the ... manager of the basketball team. I did play a little football, but, I'm deaf in one ear, and you don't always hear the signals, so, you don't [do the right] play. So, you got to be careful.

KP: Your deafness, was it hereditary?

AB: [It was] due to measles.

KP: Did you contract measles in the Great Epidemic of 1919-20?

AB: No.

KP: Okay. Did your parents assume that you and your brothers were going to go to college? Was that an assumption among the family?

AB: Well, yes. Four of us went to college.

KP: How good was your education in East Orange, your elementary school, and then, later, high school?

AB: Well, ... the schools were good. The education was very good. We had no problem. We had some of the best teachers you could get.

KP: When did you know you wanted to go into pharmacy?

AB: Oh, I guess, ... when I got to about eighth grade, or [as] a freshman in high school, I liked it. The story was that I was supposed to be the lawyer in the family, but, they say lawyers are liars, so, I couldn't be one, so, I ... went after pharmacy.

KP: Your parents came from Russia. Did they maintain contact with any family in Russia, on either side?

AB: Well, most of the family moved here to the States, but, what family was still there, they were in contact, but, weren't that great. ... So, most of the family moved here. They lived ... mostly [in] New York.

KP: So, you really did not have any contact with Russia at all?

AB: No. I'm just sorry that I didn't learn Russian. The folks, in those days, they used to speak the foreign language, so you ... [didn't] know what they were talking about.

KP: So, your parents did not teach you Russian growing up?

AB: No.

KP: Did they have the notion that you and your brothers should learn English as quickly as possible?

AB: That's all we did. ... Everybody spoke ... English very well. They didn't have that heavy accent and such like that.

KP: Do you think their high level of English was because they had learned English before coming to the United States?

AB: Yes.

KP: What did your parents think about Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s?

AB: Oh, they liked him. ... I don't think they were that deep in politics, but, ... I think that most people liked him. Of course, we had ... World War II come along, but, ... they went along. In fact, I'll tell you something ... about the Russian language. We had cousins, ... it was two boys, they went to work for the ... FBI, and then, during the war, their mother and father went to work for the FBI, and it was the ... first time a whole family worked for the FBI.

KP: What did they do?

AB: Well, the two boys were ... investigators and such for the FBI while the mother and father were ... interpreters.

KP: In the neighborhood you grew up in, where did most people work? Did they work in New York City?

AB: Most of them worked in New York.

KP: How many immigrants, children of immigrants or immigrants, were there in your neighborhood? Were there very many?

AB: We never talked about it. Never reckon we thought about it. ... Most of them were ... born, I would say, in the States.

KP: Did your parents ever get a chance to travel?

AB: No. ...

KP: Did you, growing up, get a chance to travel?

AB: No, they didn't travel much. ... The stores, or the pharmacies, ... tied them down. They didn't believe in ... going anywhere. We used to go, maybe once a week, down to Asbury Park during the summer and that was about it. We really didn't travel. I didn't travel till we got into the Army. [laughter]

KP: Did your parents belong to any organizations?

AB: No.

KP: Were they active in any churches?

AB: No.

KP: You mentioned that you played some basketball. Did you join any organizations like the Boy Scouts?

AB: Well, I was in the Boy Scouts.

KP: What rank did you make?

AB: ... Second Class.

KP: Did you join any other organizations, like the YMCA?

AB: No, we went to Boy Scout camp a couple of times.

KP: You knew you wanted to be a pharmacist when you were in the eighth grade. Why did you choose the pharmacy school in Newark?

AB: Well, I would say that, in the Depression years, ... it would cost me less to go to Newark than it would [have] cost to go to Philadelphia.

KP: Had you applied to Philadelphia?

AB: Yes.

KP: Did Rutgers give you any scholarships?

AB: No, I didn't try for it. I didn't even think about it. I hardly even thought about it.

KP: You commuted to the pharmacy school?

AB: [I] commuted to Newark, right.

KP: How difficult was the program at the pharmacy school in Newark?

AB: Well, it was a good program, but, what was difficult, it depends upon, maybe, the subject matter that you were taking at the time. ... Chemistry was very good, another subject was a little harder, ... but, we tried to manage.

KP: What was the most difficult course that you had?

AB: I guess physics.

KP: What came the easiest to you?

AB: Well, let's see, ... I guess, pharmaceutical chemistry.

KP: When you entered pharmacy school, what career did you envision yourself having? Did you think you would just take over the family business at some point, or did you think you would start your own pharmacy, or did you think you would go to a pharmaceutical company?

AB: Well, I thought, maybe, I might go on to medicine, and such like that, like everybody else today. ... Then, I thought about working in the family pharmacy, but, then, like I [said], the war came, and before I could think about anything else, I was in the Army. ...

KP: Your other classmates, what careers did they envision? Did they also think of medicine or did they want to start pharmacies?

AB: You mean my classmates?

KP: Yeah, your classmates.

AB: Well, in those days, ... most of the students, pharmacists, [their] mother, or father, rather, were pharmacists, or they had a drug store. So, everybody figured to go to pharmacy school, then, go work for their father, and then, take over their ... family business. Now, most of the students have never worked in a pharmacy, and they don't know really what it is, but, they're using it, mostly, as a stepping stone to get into medical school, or some other ... profession, MBA, dentistry, such like that.

JD: How was the commute to Newark? Did you commute by yourself or did you always have friends with you?

AB: Well, I commuted wherever I could get a friend to go with me, but, then, sometimes, it depends on what class he has, you know. You may have two classes, say, of English. He may be in A, you may be in B, and what happens is, he goes, say, ... at nine o'clock, and your class is ten o'clock, so, therefore, you can't go together. But, we used to be able to take the trolley car, or a train, and then, my senior year, I bought a car and I used to drive.

JD: How long was the commute by train or trolley?

AB: The commute was, ... I'd say, about an hour. You didn't have the heavy traffic that we have today, so, you could make it. It's like, you want to go from here to Princeton , it used to take you about twenty minutes. Now, it'll take you almost an hour, counting the traffic.

KP: Did you have any thoughts about the approaching war in 1939 or 1940, about America's involvement?

AB: Oh, yeah, we worried about it. ... 'cause. ... you didn't know ... what's going to come, or what's going to happen, or how you're going to ... be involved. ... For example, I got a year's, ... what do you call it? ... grace, so I could finish ... college.

KP: So, in other words, you were drafted as part of the peace-time draft in 1940?

AB: Right. ... Well, I'll tell you something, I tried to get into the Navy, because the Navy, at the time, gave pharmacists ratings, and ... they turned me down, because I'm deaf in one ear. The Army, when the time came, they said I was lying, so, I got taken anyway. [laughter]

KP: Really, so the Army thought you could hear in both ears?

AB: Yes, [they thought] I was faking it.

KP: Was this after Pearl Harbor or before that they thought you were faking?

AB: Oh, this is after Pearl Harbor, though, ... I had applied for ... a place in, like I say, ... the Navy. But, the Army, ... I had to wait until ... they called me, when I finished school.

KP: Before Pearl Harbor, did you think, say in 1939, 1940, or early 1941, that the United States should go to war? Did you think we should assist Great Britain or that we should just stay out of it?

AB: I think I thought that we should go help them. I mean, I couldn't see standing by and let[ting] them [the Germans] take over.

KP: How did your parents feel about the Soviets in Russia, specifically, when the United States, after the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Germans in 1941, became an ally of the Soviet Union? Did your parents ever have any views on what was happening?

AB: Oh, they always had the news on. In those days, you used to listen to the radio. That was on all the time.

KP: Did they have any opinions on what had happened in the Soviet Union?

AB: I don't think they worried so much about the Soviet Union. They were more worried about what was happening in the States.

KP: Did any of your brothers get drafted?

AB: All four of us.

KP: Where did your brothers end up at?

AB: Well, the doctor, he ... became a flight surgeon, and he was in the ... Far East, Philippines area, and my brother, the optometrist, he didn't go overseas. He was ... in the States, doing optometric work, and then, I got in. Well, I was the first one in. I'd graduated May 6 in '42, and then, [in] June, I took my State Boards [Pharmacist Certification Board exams], and July 3, I was in the Army.

KP: Where did you report, initially?

AB: Well, I went to Fort Dix, and then, from Fort Dix, I went to Camp Pickett, Virginia, and got my basic. Then, they sent me to Indianapolis, Fort Benjamin Harrison, to ... become a lab technician, and, from there, I was sent to Memphis, Tennessee. ... I think it was Kennedy General Hospital and ... I got changed back into being a pharmacist.

KP: Eventually, you were sent to the Pacific. When were you sent to the Pacific?

AB: I was sent to the Pacific, let's see, ... in, I would say, ... '42, about '43. ...

KP: Going back a little, I would like to ask you about your experiences with the 760th Medical Hospital Ship platoon. When you initially reported for basic, after being sorted out at Fort Dix, how long did it last and what did you learn?

AB: ... Well, basic ... training was ... about three months, and it was the same training you go through [anywhere], ... climbing walls, and going through ... machine gun fire, and ... more like an athletic course you'd take. ... Of course, ... because I was a medic, I got no ... arms training.

KP: So, you really got the physical toughening part of it?

AB: Right.

KP: But, not the regular arms, pistol and rifle marksmanship?

AB: No, no, I didn't get that.

KP: Were medics separated from the rest of the people in basic?

AB: Well, ...

KP: In other words, did you have completely separate training? Were those men going into the medics trained in a separate unit?

AB: ... Yes, you could say we were separated, because ... I didn't get any of, like, the ... involvement with the guns and such, and, I guess, we got training of ... just the toughening process, and then, when we got done with that, we were sent to different units.

KP: Do you remember anything about your drill instructor at Camp Pickett?

AB: Not really, I didn't have any problems with him. [laughter]

KP: What about the men you were with at Camp Pickett? Do you remember anything about the kind of backgrounds they had?

AB: Well, they were a hill-billy type[s].

KP: What do you mean by that?

AB: They didn't have the ... education in such [things] that most of the ... medics or men had, and some of them ended up in my outfit, and they became ... nurses and such like that.

KP: When you said they were hill-billys, did everyone know how to read in your unit?

AB: ... Not everyone, no, and ... a lot of them had never been away from home.

KP: Did they have any funny habits?

AB: ... Yeah, well, ... they had a more country attitude and such, and I remember, ... the first Christmas, we came into San Francisco, and you [have] never seen, and you can't blame them, the most ... homesick people you ever saw, because we just came to ... San Francisco. They [the Army] put us up in the dormitory and ... these kids had no place to go, and no friends or anything, because we had just formed.

JD: Where did the hill-billys come from?

AB: Well, like Kentucky, and ... Indiana, and ... Ohio.

KP: At Fort Benjamin Harrison, you were given additional training as a lab technician.

AB: Right.

KP: What exactly did that training consist of?

AB: Well, at that time, ... we were being [trained to be] able to tell your blood count, your white [cells] and your red [cells]. Also, ... light urinalysis, and ... bacteriology, and then, your other ... readings, like you would do in a lab today, but, most of it is being done, now, by machine.

JD: So, you had to draw blood?

AB: I had to draw blood. ... We used to draw between ourselves, to get to practice, but, the first ... patient I had to draw it from was a psycho patient in the cell. You know what I mean by a psycho patient?

JD: Yeah.

AB: Some people don't realize what a psycho patient is, but, ... I had to go to the cell and get the blood there, and these psychos, you don't know what they're going to do.

JD: He was not tied down or anything?

AB: No.

KP: How long did it take you to get the blood from him?

AB: Well, it didn't take long. The guy was more nervous than anything else and ... that made it a little difficult.

KP: How much of this training was redundant? How much had you gotten in pharmacy school? Was this all new, what you were learning at Fort Benjamin Harrison?

AB: It was relatively the same that I had in college, but, ... it was more of a practical use, and, of course, it wasn't ... as thorough as the ... training in college. But, the thing is, it was being practical and using what you learned.

KP: You mentioned that the Army, then sent you to Memphis to become a pharmacist. Had they changed their minds?

AB: Well, what happened was, I became friendly with the commander, and he knew I had finished [at] the College of Pharmacy, and he asked me, would I prefer being a lab technician or

working in the pharmacy. I told him, "I would prefer working in the pharmacy," so, he switched me into the pharmacy.

KP: How had you gotten to know the commander?

AB: We traveled ... on the same train and such, and I started speaking to him, because, you know, you're a pharmacist, you start speaking to somebody in your field.

KP: After you finished basic, what was your rank? Were you still a private?

AB: ... I became a corporal when I finished the training, and ... then, I got my sergeant, and then, the thing is, ... this [Hospital] Ship platoon was a fifteen man outfit, and the highest ranking man was me, so, I was also the first sergeant. ... That made it ... easier, and after that, I had a chance for getting a commission, but, because of my ear, they turned me down. So, we had, like I say, a fifteen man outfit ... and we had a doctor and a dentist.

KP: Were the doctor and the dentist officers?

AB: Right, they were officers and we were a unit, like I say, of fifteen and two officers.

KP: When was your unit formed and where was it formed? Was it in Memphis or was it someplace else?

AB: Well, we all came from Memphis, or most of us came from Memphis, and we were all shipped to ... California, and we didn't realize we were becoming a unit until we got there.

KP: To California?

AB: To California.

KP: When was this? Was this around Christmas of 1942?

AB: No, this was 1943, now.

KP: It was Christmas of '43 that you all gathered in San Francisco?

AB: I think it was a little bit after that.

KP: You mentioned that you were a unit of fifteen, plus a doctor and a dentist. What were the various responsibilities of everyone?

AB: ... Well, one was the company's clerk, some were what we call the cadre, you know, they were the ... workers, and then, you had ... a couple of people that were trained to be ... male nurses, and then, of course, you had ... ones that were the aides. ... It was mostly ... like a graduated scale and we had capabilities of what you would do.

KP: What were your responsibilities for these men as sergeant? How much supervision would you give to them on a daily basis?

AB: Well, I guess you were more of a ... leader, and did ... anything to make them happy, and keep them quiet, and have them join into the gang.

KP: Did you ever have any discipline problems?

AB: Oh, a couple times, they had discipline problems, because, you know, you're the leader, and they don't like to be told what to do, so, you ... ran into that problem. ... Sometimes, they were ready to throw you overboard and such like that.

JD: So, after Memphis, you went to California?

AB: Right.

JD: Where in California?

AB: Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco.

KP: Did you get any additional training there in San Francisco or were you just waiting for your unit to form?

AB: ... Well, what we did in training was practice carrying patients on board ships, taking them off ship, and putting them on trains, and such like that.

KP: The hospital ship you served on ...

AB: Well, now, let me explain something to you. We were called a Hospital Ship platoon, but, what we did [was], ... when a ship was going back with sick and wounded, and they needed extra help, our team, if you want to call it [that], would go on that ship and act as nursing personnel, or medical personnel. We didn't go on regular hospital ships. We went on Liberty ships and whatever kind of ship they could supply us with.

KP: So, in other words, you never served on a regular hospital ship?

AB: No.

KP: You served on a variety of ships?

AB: A variety of troop ships. They were troop ships going back [to the United States].

KP: How many different ships were you on?

AB: I made four round trips.

KP: What were your different ports of call?

AB: Well, in New Guinea, we picked up a (trip?), ... and then, it was the Philippines, and ... a couple others. We took the last troops off of Australia, and ... we ended up in LA or San Francisco, and then, a couple of times, we went on hospital trains, and took the wounded to hospitals more in the interior, like Texas, and such like that.

KP: What was the range of casualties that you would have aboard ship?

AB: I would say about two hundred or more, but, when you say casualties, of course, some were sick and wounded, and some were less, parts of the ... body, and such like that. But, ... see, I was in the Pacific, some got what you call jungle rot, but, amazingly, when we got to the States, ... the boats that they'd send us over on took like thirty days to come from ... New Guinea, and such like that, and, by the time we got to the States, you were all cleared up, because the heat brought out that jungle rot, and ... we brought them back, and a lot of them were psychos.

KP: Roughly how many on the hospital ship would be psychos?

AB: ... I would say we had fifty to a hundred.

KP: Out of a group of two hundred?

AB: Out of two hundred or three hundred.

KP: How would you handle those cases and how relatively difficult or easy were they?

AB: Well, I became in charge of them, [laughter] because there was ... not much need for the pharmacy. ...

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KP: You were saying how you had to handle the psycho cases because there was not much need for a pharmacy.

AB: [There was] not much need for the pharmacist, because a lot of this stuff ... we used was not as elaborate as they are today. ... We had to give them a pill at one o'clock, or at five o'clock, or such like that, and then, I had to make sure that they behave, and those that were in a locked cell, and those that were under control by the medication. ... I remember, one ... trip, we had this ... psycho, he wanted to conduct [religious] services aboard ship and another guy tried to jump overboard. I had this one doctor who ... parachuted to a landing, and he sort of lost control of himself, and we were bringing him home. He was in a locked cell and ... we used to keep the officers together. There were a couple other officers with him, and he used to come to me, and he says, "Look, these fellows are annoying me, I want to get well." We used to recite the

alphabet, and then, numbers, together. We brought him back to ... San Francisco, and, of course I left, and we went back out again. ... He had a picture of the most beautiful girl you ever seen, who was to be his wife after the war. One day, I came back, I was on a trolley car going to visit my sister-in-law, who happened to be living in San Francisco, because my brother was assigned there, and this guy comes up to me, and knocks me on my shoulder, and puts his hand out, and says, "I want to thank you." At first, I didn't recognize him. He was the captain and doctor. He says he got well. He was now riding hospital trains, bringing ... patients to the different hospitals. He got married and everything was fine.

KP: When did he do this? Was this still during the war?

AB: This was during the war.

JD: He had recuperated that quickly?

AB: He'd recuperated that [quickly.] ...

KP: Did you have any sense, from the cases you had, the psycho cases, what made people snap?

AB: Well, we got some idea. Some was loneliness, some were, I would say, scared, and, ... I guess, you know, the shooting of the guns and such like that.

KP: Did you ever lose any of the psycho cases? Did anyone ever commit suicide, and, in fact, actually jump overboard?

AB: No, no. They did anything wrong, they came to me. ... [laughter]

KP: In terms of the rest of the wounded you had, did you ever lose any patients on these voyages?

AB: We never lost any patient on the voyage, but, ... I did lose the [ship's] electrician. He came in to me coughing up blood. He died in my arms, and we performed an autopsy on him, and he died from TB.

KP: Had you diagnosed the symptoms before?

AB: No, every time he went to the doctors and such for ... coughing and such, they gave him, if you remember, ... if you've heard [about this], GI gin, elixir turpinhydrate, cough syrup.

JD: So, what about all the people he came in contact with? Were they tested?

AB: Well, he didn't really come in contact with the troops, because he was mostly ... on duty aboard ship, but, true, he was in contact with his fellow employees, or fellow members of the staff. ... But, they may not have been with him long enough to get the bug.

KP: In terms these very sick patients, especially those who had lost limbs, was it ever hard to do your job? Does it ever trouble you what happened to some of these people?

AB: Well, ... who lost their arms were shot, or wounded, or due to infection, and ... we took care of them, and dressed their wounds, and such like that. That's what some of my other cadre did.

KP: What was your relationship with the doctor and dentist in your group?

AB: I had a very good relationship [with them]. In fact, we were in contact with one another for a while after the war. I had one doctor who wanted me to open, he was from Philadelphia, he was a dermatologist, ... a pharmacy near him after the war.

KP: What about your relationship with the rest of the ship's crew, particularly the captain?

AB: I had no problem with them. In fact, what I used to do, when I went aboard ship, you know, leaving ... the States for the trouble zone, I used to ... get my men in the area where they were supposed to be, tell them ... where they go for their food and such like that. I couldn't sit still, so, I would go up ... to the ship's personnel, tell them, "I'm a pharmacist. Could I help the crew?" and they said, "Yes," because it gave them an extra hand, and I went to work with them. Also, by doing that, I didn't have to stay in line for the chow, I could get fresh water to shave and bathe in, and I got free run of the ship.

KP: Having served on these hospital ships, did you ever wish you had, in fact, gotten into the Navy? Did you enjoy being on them at sea?

AB: I think I might have enjoyed the Navy a little bit more and I think I could have done a lot more than what I've done.

KP: Did you ever wish you were just a pharmacist's mate on a ship?

AB: But, that would have been more of the Navy ...

KP: Yeah, if you had been in the Navy, was that something you would have wanted to do?

AB: I think I would have done more ... pharmacy and such.

KP: Did you ever get seasick?

AB: ... In the Pacific, I got seasick when we took the last ... American soldiers from ... Australia. We went through the Red Sea and that's the roughest body of water there is. ... But, the rest of the time ... in the Pacific, I really didn't get seasick. I felt weasy when I moved under the Golden Gate Bridge. You feel weasy. I've gotten seasick traveling. We've [Mr. Bell and his wife] been on, like, eleven cruises since, but, I guess, I got seasick ... here in the States, and traveling in the Caribbean, and such like that.

JD: When you were in the Pacific, did you ever worry about enemy aircraft, or submarines, or surface ships?

AB: Yes, you did, because we zigzagged at night and such, and we were sometimes in ... what do you call it now?

JD: War zone?

AB: Not in a war zone, but, when a group of ships are going ...

KP: Convoy.

AB: Convoy.

KP: Was your ship marked at all as a hospital ship?

AB: No.

KP: So, you had no markings?

AB: It was a troop ship.

KP: And so, you had armaments and so forth?

AB: Oh, there were some armament, yeah.

KP: Yeah. So, in other words, you were a fair target for the enemy?

AB: I didn't tell them I was a fair target. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you liked being aboard ship very much. How did you like, for example, the food? It sounds like you were able to take regular showers, at least in terms of not taking salt water showers. Is there anything else you enjoyed? Overall, how would you rate your experience, admittedly in wartime conditions?

AB: Well, ... you try and make it as convenient as possible, not only for your people, but, for yourself. ... I mean, anybody could have gone and asked to help the ... crew, the permanent crew. But, ... you had a group of men, they don't want to do anything, do any work. ... If they had to go fight, or such like that, they'd go fight, but, ... they usually just sat still.

KP: When you would go to the various places to pick up the wounded, Australia, New Guinea, Philippines, would you go ashore and for how long?

AB: Oh, Hollandia was a place. Well, sometimes, ... a trip to Australia was a fast one. On the way back, we got shipwrecked.

KP: Where did you get shipwrecked?

AB: New Guinea.

KP: By shipwrecked, what do you mean?

AB: We hit a reef.

KP: Was the ship able to recover?

AB: They had to take us off the ship.

KP: Was the ship unsalvageable?

AB: It was unsalvageable.

KP: So, they put you on a new vessel?

AB: That ship was a 110 foot yacht [that] belonged to the owners of the Biltmore Hotel.

KP: So, you were on New Guinea for a while?

AB: Yeah.

KP: How long?

AB: We were there ... several months.

KP: What did you do? What did you and your men do in that time?

AB: Well, we were extra cadre for the ... permanent personnel.

KP: That was in what year, 1944?

AB: That would be 1943 or '44, ... '43.

KP: What kind of work did you do in New Guinea?

AB: Well, it was like a regular hospital routine. ... I worked in the pharmacy. ... My men were male nurses or they worked in the ... office. ... They weren't lab technicians, they were [other] technicians, x-ray and such like that.

KP: Where were your men quartered on New Guinea?

AB: ... In tents. There was a compound-like.

KP: How close, or far away, was your unit from the enemy? How far away was the front?

AB: Some places were quite a ways away and other places we were, ... I'd say, a couple miles away. We were meant for the invasion of Hollandia, but, our ship was a little slow, so, we never got there.

KP: Eventually, you did leave New Guinea, but, before leaving it, did you have any contact with the inhabitants of the island?

AB: We'd seen the inhabitants, the natives, and such. We sometimes talked to them and sometimes swapped things with them, novelties to take home. ... I remember, ... most, or I'd say all, of my men, at the time, had never flew in an airplane, and they sent us to Hollandia [in a plane] to catch a boat to take some soldiers back. ... My men got drunk the night before, because they were scared as anything to go, and, of course, on the way, we developed motor trouble, and we landed, and they were fixing the engine and such, and while they were fixing the engines, a plane was taking off, and the propeller came off, ... and we were here [indicates with hands a position] and came right about there [indicates a position close to the first one], and missed us. So, you can wonder how and why the men were ...

KP: Your men were ...

AB: [They] were scared.

KP: They never flew and they were mostly from Kentucky and Tennessee.

AB: In that area.

KP: Were they superstitious, your men?

AB: I don't think they were superstitious.

KP: Did they ever have any home remedies? I have talked to some people who were struck by people from different parts of the country who had all these crazy home remedies.

AB: No, nope, they didn't have any. If they were sick, you know, they always go on sick call.

JD: You said you were stationed in the Philippines?

AB: Right.

JD: How long were you stationed there?

AB: ... Total of, maybe, a year. Now, in the Philippines, if you want to make it interesting, I had cousins in the Philippines. ... A couple of them are still there today. One used to be the editor of the *Manila Times*, one used to write for ... CBS and *Christian Science Monitor*. They used to write speeches for [Philippine President] Romulo, and MacArthur, and Halsey, and others, too. ... I came in the day after their release from Santo Tomas [a Japanese prison camp].

JD: So, how long were they at Santo Tomas?

AB: Well, they were there during the whole [war], from the time the Japanese came in [1941]. The Japanese had a big cannon in their backyard.

JD: So, basically, you went to the Philippines as the war was winding down?

AB: Well, it was winding down, ... but, it still was heavy in other parts. Then, I worked there, and then, I went out again, back to the States, and came back again.

JD: It was still during the war when you came back?

AB: Oh, yeah.

JD: Around what time was this?

AB: That was about ... 1944 ... it's on there [indicates biography sheet].

KP: Yeah, you were discharged the 29th of December, 1945.

AB: But, on the back there, it tells you about the different trips.

KP: You were at the Philippines liberation, Luzon, Western Pacific, New Guinea.

AB: So, it was about 1944 or ‘43 I was in the Philippines.

JD: Did you ever meet MacArthur?

AB: No.

KP: You were in the Philippines right after the liberation. What did Manila look like? What do you remember of Manila?

AB: Well, [there] was a lot of destruction and such like that. ... The buildings were shot ... to pieces, and the people were living in shacks, and huts, and such like that.

JD: So, when you were in the Philippines, it was during the liberation, pretty much?

AB: Well, the liberation was more towards the end of '44, wasn't it? and I ... got out in '45.

KP: Did you have any contact with any Filipinos because of having cousins in the Philippines?

AB: I was in touch with my cousins, but, ... I met quite a few Filipinos, and they have an excellent ... cardiology ... hospital there in the Philippines, one of the best in the Pacific, and ... [my cousins] ... took me out there to show me everything. ... I met several others, but, since ... these relatives of mine passed away, I've lost contact with them.

KP: What did you learn about the Japanese occupation of the Philippines from your cousins and from the Filipinos you were in touch with?

AB: Well, they told me, ... now, one of my cousins was an invalid from polio. He has ... his initial in his back. His name was Steinberg and ... his spine was shaped like an S, almost. ... He was able to get in and out of Santo Tomas, you know, to his home, because they figured, [since] he was a cripple, he couldn't do much [harm]. ... He got information. He had, I understand, a radio which he sent word to the Filipino and American soldiers. ... The government gave him a rank of, I think, ... lieutenant colonel or colonel, because he helped ... at the Nuremberg Trials and ... he worked with the government.

JD: Did your cousins ever tell you anything about the Santo Tomas internment camps? What were they like?

AB: Yeah, ... of course, I don't remember too much, ... but, ... they told how they were fed, and they ... had their own squares, where they lived and grew their own vegetables, and what vegetable they used to substitute for others, and ... how they heard the Americans were coming.

KP: Another question on the Philippines?

JD: No, not right now, no.

AB: I hope I'm helping.

KP: Oh, yeah, no, definitely, you are. Any other observations about the Philippines and your stay there? Did your unit treat any of the Filipinos, or were you just confined to American military personnel?

AB: ... If some of the [Filipino] kids were sick, we would treat them.

KP: The Philippines was your last ...

AB: That was my last.

KP: Your last ...

AB: ... Stop in the Army.

KP: Did you stop in Hawaii on your way back?

AB: Oh, yeah. ... I got a good story for you, for that one, too. We were coming back from the Pacific and this is when the ... electrician passed away. We were running out of water, so, we decided, we decided ...[laughter], the captain decided to pull into Hawaii, to get ... water, because the ship was taking us over thirty days to get ... back to the States. I knew one of my cousins was in ... Hawaii, one of the FBI men I told you about before. ... When we docked in Hawaii, I called the FBI office and I got in touch with him. He came down to the ship, and we made arrangements to exchange [camera] film, so, we could get new film, and then, he took me off the ship, and took me all around Hawaii, [so], I could see where the ships were sunk and such like that.

KP: What did you think of Hawaii?

AB: Well, I've been there since, ... and I want to go back, but, my wife wants me to go to Turkey this year.

KP: It sounds like you had very good relationships with all the captains of the vessels you were on?

AB: ... We had no problems. ... Now, if you work with them, and help them, you're going to get along with them. Same ... [thing] has happened on this campus here over twenty years [ago]. [A reference to Rutgers College going co-ed in 1972].

KP: Had you thought of staying in the service at all, in the Army?

AB: Yes. ... The fact is, I ... signed up for three years ... in the Reserves, but, the same thing happened, they wouldn't give me a commission, so, I just let it pass.

JD: Where were you when you heard about the atomic bomb being dropped?

AB: I was in the Philippines at that time.

JD: What was the mood there?

AB: Well, everybody was happy. They were going to go home soon.

KP: Did you ever have any contact with black troops on any of your ships or in any of your troop trains?

AB: I had them aboard ship and aboard trains. I never had any problems.

KP: Were they segregated from the rest of the patients?

AB: The only time I came across segregation was in Indiana. They had like a ... officer's USO [entertainment club], a white USO, a black USO, a Catholic USO, a Jewish USO. But, ... I never had trouble with black or any ... denomination.

KP: Were there any cases?

AB: I had ... trouble with a little Jewish fella. Psycho, he ... wanted to hold ... services aboard ship. He gave me more trouble than anybody else.

KP: Did you have any chaplains aboard your ships?

AB: ... I don't remember. ... An officer may have conducted services. Fact is, we even had ... Passover services aboard ship.

KP: How did you meet your wife?

AB: USO.

KP: The USO in Indianapolis?

AB: In Indianapolis. I came to Indianapolis, and I ran into ... a classmate of mine, though he had not graduated yet from pharmacy school, and ... the people ... in Indiana are great. ... This classmate of mine ... got there a month before me, and he was taking lab technician school, too. ... They made contact with this family, a mother, a father, and a son, and, weekends, the family put us up. They gave us breakfast, consisting of eggs, cereal, cake, milk, tea, coffee, anything you wanted. They gave us the keys to the house, so, if they weren't going to be there, we could come in. So, ... I was with my friend. ... [The] first Friday night ... I was there, he said, "C'mon to town with me," so, I went to town with him, and, there, I saw my wife. An hour after I met her, I thought I was gonna marry her, and ... the next day, and every spare time I got, I went into town and met her when she was available, just like that. ... In fact, this classmate of mine, he was over at [my] house this weekend.

KP: So, you stayed in touch all these years?

AB: His son, one of his sons, is a cardiologist. I got him into college here, and he went medical, and, now, he's up in Montana.

JD: Have you kept in contact with that family that put you up?

AB: They passed away, but, I did keep in contact with them.

KP: Did you stay in touch with the men in your unit after the war?

AB: No.

KP: Do you know what happened to them? Did they all go back to Kentucky and Tennessee?

AB: ... I tried to find out what happened to them and I lost track of them. They weren't the type to keep [in contact]. In fact, ... for awhile, I kept in touch with the doctor and the dentist.

KP: After you came back home and you could not stay in the service, what was your first job? Where did you go?

AB: Well, I went back to work for my father.

KP: How long did you stay with your father?

AB: I stayed with him, ... let's see, I took my boards in '46. I stayed with him until 1950, and then, I went on my own.

KP: You started a pharmacy?

AB: Yeah, ... Bell Drug in Edison, that was mine.

KP: How did long you keep your pharmacy?

AB: I had it about twenty-five years.

KP: Why did you leave the business?

AB: Well, as I told you before, my father had two drugstores, so, ... the story was, I was supposed to get one when I came back, and got my license, and all. But, when the ... time came, my father had a different story. ... At first, [he said], "Well, I can't give it to you because of the other boys." "Fine, I'll buy it from you," [I said]. "Well, after I'm dead, you can have it," [said my father]. I didn't want to wait 'til ... then, so, I got an uncle of mine to help and ... I opened up the pharmacy ... [in Edison].

KP: How did being a pharmacist change over the course of your career? Specifically, how did the rise of chain pharmacies affect your store?

AB: Well, the pharmacies changed a great deal by the ... the handling and the sale of drugs. At one time, you [could] only buy certain drugs in pharmacies and a pharmacist used to be able to ... explain to his patient how to take their medication. ... Your chains figured out, "Here's a fast way to make some money." They'll come in, and push their ... own products, and advertise [that] they'll be cheaper, and then, they were able, by ... becoming more powerful, ... to wipe out some drugstores, or, let me put it this way, the pharmacist is not a merchant. ... When the time came, they [the independent pharmacists] did not, say, increase, or do things to make a better contact with the patients, and such. The chains, they use lower prices and they gave less service, but, they ... don't deliver. Your independent [pharmacy] delivers, but, some of these pharmacists got scared, because they were coming in, and did nothing to fight them. Now, you have your third

party prescription program, which you know if you've got your prescription card. Some ... pharmacists got scared. The ... chain stores had a bigger volume, and such like that, so, they were able to come in and push them [the independent pharmacists] around, but, most of them, I think, got scared more than anything else. ...

KP: What led you to come to Hurtado [Student Health Center on the Rutgers College campus in New Brunswick]? Did you want more time off or more structure?

AB: No. What happened was, I was very friendly with one of the doctors, Dr. Helen Davis. She was the director over at Willetts [Student Health Center at] Douglass College. She called me in one day, and told me she wasn't happy [with] the way they were handling drugs on the campus, and what would I do or recommend. So, I explained to her that, first of all, ... wait, see, another thing that happened was, they used to dispense medication, the doctors do it today, in a little white envelope, a little, white ... pill box. ... Say, Saturday night came, your students went into town. They, maybe, got into a brawl, and they get arrested, or picked up by the police, and the police, checking their pockets, bring out these little, white ... envelopes. ... They don't know what it is, there's nothing there telling them what it is, so, the kids used to be in trouble and they had to wait until the following day in order to find out if that was legitimate medicine that they had. So, I explained to her that ... we'll make it as legal as possible, that, when a student came in, we would ... make a record of the name of the drug, directions, and ... how to take the medication, and label it with a number. [When] the police would call, they could call up, and ask what that number is, and ... tell the doctor what kind of medicine they got. So, ... she liked the idea, and I set it up, and I did it on my ... spare time, as a consultant at no fee. ... Gradually, she had me come in, and set it up, and make arrangements [to start a regular pharmacy], and I tried to ... get registered [with the state], but, at that time, you needed to work a full twelve hours to be open, and ... the school didn't have the money to do it. So, we ... went and made it, like I say, as legal as possible. ... For example, it was a law that if a chain ... came in, and the pharmacy department closed [for the night], the whole ... supermarket had to close. So, one of the governors had a bill passed saying that ... the chain store, or the supermarket, could stay open, but, you would have to close off the pharmacy. So, therefore, it meant you could be open [only] a couple hours, [and then, close], and not ... close down the ... mall or the ... shopping center. So, we ... got permission to be ... open a little longer ... without getting into trouble, and we started filling prescriptions, but, we still didn't get permission from the ... administration to ... open a pharmacy, because they had no money to pay a pharmacist. But, ... like I say, I worked there voluntarily, and we ... were taking care of the prescriptions, and that was at Douglass. And then, ... finally, I put in an application for a license for Douglass, and, thanks to Dr. Bloustein and his wife, who I knew very well, I was able to ... go to work there ... [for] more time. ... Then, I sold my pharmacy and went to work there full time. Then, ... Hurtado, we tried to open up a pharmacy there. They wouldn't let us, or the doctor that was there didn't want it, and then, ... the inspector from the Board of Health came in, and, when he saw there was no ... pharmacy, he told me they either had to put a pharmacy in or close the health center. So, they ultimately had me come in as a full time pharmacist, and we've been there, and then, we ... opened one in Livingston, and we opened one in Newark, and the one in Camden, we used, you could say, mail order. We have a courier that takes it down.

----------END TAPE ONE SIDE TWO----------

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Alexander M. Bell, Jr., on April 20, 1995, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, with Kurt Piehler and ...

JD: Jonathan Diaz. You were telling me, when we were walking here, that you traveled around the world.

AB: Yeah, after I sold my pharmacy, I went around the world. What happened was, we were going to, say, from here to Thailand, Bangkok, but, a couple years before that, I had [hosted] an exchange student from Norway, and we became very close, and she invited us to her wedding. So, we would go as far as Thailand and Bangkok, that's half way around [the world]. ... We were originally going to come back the same way, but, instead, we kept on going, and we went to Norway, and we went to the wedding, and, the fact is, there, they spent the first three days of their honeymoon taking us around. ... When we went to visit them this last year, ... they put us up in their home for six days, and we were with their children, and ... we keep in contact.

KP: You mentioned that you knew the doctors at Rutgers very well. How did you initially get to know them?

AB: (Ruth Levin?) is a physician. When I came to Edison and opened up the drugstore, there was no doctor in the area. ... We wrote in one of the medical magazines, "There's an opening here for a physician," and ... he came out, and we talked him into staying.

KP: What year was this?

AB: 1950.

KP: So, you had to go into New Brunswick to go to a doctor?

AB: Go in there, right.

KP: Which ...

AB: Or Highland Park.

KP: Or Highland Park.

AB: And so, ... we met the family and that's how we [know them]. ...

KP: So, you knew the Blousteins way before he became president of Rutgers?

AB: Right.

KP: Did you ever have any contact with the Blousteins when he was college president?

AB: Oh, yeah.

KP: How crucial was the fact that he knew you, and knew the situation of the pharmacy and medical centers, in his pushing to have a full time pharmacist? If he had not pushed, would the coming of a pharmacy have been later?

AB: It may have been later. I gave it ... my pushing, too.

KP: How good is the medical care that Rutgers students get, from your perspective?

AB: ... The medical care that they get is very good. I mean, these doctors and nurses ... take an interest in the patient, and, sometimes, I think they're too ... good to the patient. They baby them too much, they treat them as if they're their own.

KP: Has the care that students have gotten improved in other areas? You mentioned the pharmacy as one area where you have made an improvement. Have there been other changes in the health centers over the course of your career, things that have been improved?

AB: Well, we got computerized and everything like that. He was in the pharmacy today, I presume.

JD: Yeah.

AB: You should have seen it several years ago. It was all makeshift, and, also, the pharmacy is self-sufficient. We don't get anything from the state or the university, though we did get our computers. But, ... it all started in Willetts, but, ... you'd be surprised what it looked like, ... compared to today.

KP: I have talked to people who were in the pharmaceutical industry, and pharmacists, and they often comment that physicians know very little about the drugs they prescribe, that it is really the pharmacist that really knows.

AB: Well, that is true. ... Say the physicians get, maybe, about six months ... training [in] drugs, but, you've got the pharmacists getting from four to six months. These kids coming out today are smart as anything. They know ... the different side effects and everything on these drugs and such.

KP: Which they did not know in an earlier generation of doctors?

AB: Well, they ... didn't emphasize it as much, ... and they learned the names of the drugs and such, and it's for this and that, but, they don't learn side effects, and such like that, what to look for. Some do, some don't.

JD: Do you keep up with the pharmacy program here at Rutgers?

AB: Do I keep up? Yeah.

JD: So, how would you compare the pharmacy program now to how it was when you took it over?

AB: Well, before, when I first came, it was like the old ... handwritten prescription, or else, ... [if] we had a prescription, we'd copy it down and we would fill the prescription by hand. Also, we used to make more medication. ... We used to mix, we used to pour. Today, we don't do that as much. ... Also, the doctors today don't really know how to write a prescription. That's why they have, like, the PDR [a book of cross-referenced drugs to symptoms and illnesses] that tells them what drugs to use for certain ailments. ... Today, they get the PDR, they write it [the prescription] up, they check with us, the pharmacist, and ... then, we [have] a computer [to print out a label for the prescription]. Before that, ... we had to print a label on each medication. Now, we use a computer, [and], inside of five ... minutes, we got all the labels, we got a dozen labels that we needed, and, of course, today, there's a lot more medication, too. See, a lot of the medication is what we call copycats. It's the same thing as this brand, but, this company came out first, so, they used it, or this doctor ... in South River likes this salesman that calls on him there better than he likes the salesman that's up here, so, he may prescribe more of his ... [drugs], or the pharmacist may use more of that particular brand.

JD: So, you are saying that there are a lot more pharmaceutical companies now than there were back then?

AB: Well, we could, but, now, there's a changing. ... The pharmaceutical companies are merging now. We just had a lot of mergers, so, you don't know which way to turn. We had this company, they had fifteen hundred salesmen. Now, they merged, so, they may have, ... by merging, technically, they've got three thousand, but, now, they don't need that many, so, now, they may be down to eight hundred.

KP: You were here at Rutgers during the Vietnam War. What impact did you see it as having on campus?

AB: Well, you still had the ... people fighting against the war and antagonistic against it. It's like my wife said, if my son was forced to go, or he was called up, fortunately, he wasn't called up, she would have given him money to get out of the country.

KP: How did you feel about that?

AB: Well, ... the more I think about it, I was wrong. I was in favor that he [serve]. It's his government, his country, you go. That's the attitude I would take, but, today, when you read about it, and hear about it, especially with McNara finally telling us what we knew. ...

KP: McNamara, yeah.

AB: McNamara, telling us what we knew, I would have been crazy to force him to go.

KP: So, in retrospect, you agree with your wife?

AB: Right.

KP: But, at the time, you did not agree with her?

AB: No.

JD: Did you ever attend any of the teach-ins that were here at Rutgers during the Vietnam War?

AB: No. You stay away politics. You got to watch out if you say the wrong thing.

KP: Did you ever join any veteran's organizations?

AB: Well, I did belong to the American Legion and the ... Veterans of Foreign Wars.

KP: But, you are not currently active?

AB: No. I'm still a member of the American Legion, but, I haven't been to a meeting in, I guess, about thirty years.

KP: You have been back to Hawaii and, I take it, you have also been back to the Philippines.

AB: Right.

KP: Have you ever been back to New Guinea and Australia?

AB: To Australia I've been, but, New Guinea, no. I'll tell you a funny one, we were in Tahiti, and they tell you to be sure to confirm your flight, and, every morning, I went down and I confirmed my flight. When the plane ... came in, you know, he comes in about twice a week, we went down to the airport, and they tell me I didn't confirm my flight, and it's the same gal that I confirmed it with, and she says, "You didn't confirm your flight." Turns out there were five Bells going home on that plane. Who they were, I still don't know to this day, but, they, fortunately, had a ... stewardess who they bounced and they put us on.

KP: Is there anything about World War II, or about your career, or your parents that we have not asked?

AB: ... I rode hospital trains.

KP: How many hospital trains did you ride?

AB: Quite a bit. ... How do you call a snowbound [train], or a wreck, when you go through a snow passage in a train?

KP: Avalanches?

AB: An avalanche or such. ... In Nevada, there, snow came down and hit the [train], broke a window and all. ... We were taking this group of soldiers, I think, to ... Texas, and most of them were on medications, sleeping medication or a tranquilizer, and they couldn't sleep. ... We were supposed to arrive at four o'clock in the morning. That meant, at four o'clock in the morning, we gave them their pill, they would sleep, and that meant we had to carry the patients off the train. So, I took the capsules, and I emptied them, and I gave the soldiers their medication at the time they were supposed to get it. They went back to their beds, they fell asleep, we pulled into the hospital, we woke 'em up, and they walked off.

KP: Was that your first experience with the value of a placebo?

AB: No, I had ... [used] a placebo before that. ...

KP: Where else had you used a placebo?

AB: Well, ... when I was in family practice, I had. Also, I had a customer that was a hemophiliac and ... he was on morphine and such.

JD: What was your most terrifying experience of the war?

AB: ... Maybe when we got shipwrecked.

KP: How close of a call was that?

AB: Well, ... it happened at night, so, that made it [so] we didn't know how bad it was. We lost the ship. It happened to be a big tanker that took us on board.

KP: How quickly were you taken on board? How long did you have to wait on your shipwrecked vessel?

AB: It took us a little while. In fact, ... they took some off during the night and the rest ... got off in the morning. The biggest thrill was to see your relatives in the Philippines.

KP: Had your family had any contact with them during the war?

AB: During the war, we had no contact. We knew they were in Santo Tomas.

KP: But, no Red Cross ...

AB: No.

KP: ... Contact or anything. It sounds like most of the men you treated held up well.

AB: Right.

KP: Is that true?

AB: They did, they held up.

KP: Did any of them feel embittered at all about what had happened to them?

AB: Well, I ran into a couple of them. I think they were naturally bitter anyway, but, you could talk to them and kid with them.

JD: Was there anybody that you did not get along with?

AB: Well, a couple guys I didn't get along with, they were ready to throw me overboard, but, when you're ... first sergeant of the outfit, you know, you tell them to do this, and he doesn't want to do it, they get mad.

JD: So, basically, you got along well with most of your men, considering you were their first sergeant?

AB: Right. I usually had no problem. I just had a couple of arguments. You know, sometimes, you know, you slip up when you're a first sergeant or an officer. You think you know it all.

KP: What mistakes did you make as a sergeant? What things did you learn to do differently?

AB: Well, when you'd give them an order, you'd say, "Let's pitch in and get this done," but, if I'd said an order, "You do this and you do that," then, I'm ... on the outs. You got teamwork. So, is that it? ...

KP: I think so, unless Jonathan can think of something. Thank you very much. We appreciate it a great deal.

AB: I hope it was a help for all this.

KP: Yeah, it is and Jonathan will be doing a transcript of your interview.

[Tape Paused]

KP: Did you talk much about the war when you came home?

AB: We ... talked about our experiences, and such like that, that we had, and where we'd been, and who we saw, and, of course, the war was over, so, everybody was happy and nobody wanted to talk about the war. Like I say, I tried to get a commission, but, ... they turned me down.

JD: Did you have many friends that went into the war, too?

AB: Well, most of them. That's another thing that happened with me. See, I came from East Orange. When I came back, I opened [my pharmacy] here in ... Edison, ... so, therefore, I lost contact, because most of my friends that I went to school with opened up in the Oranges or Essex County and I came down here. Most of the ... GIs down here, or from the college, they ... went to Philadelphia College [of Pharmacy], so, therefore, most of my contact came from Philadelphia and not from ... Rutgers. ... Opening up your own store, or going into business, you had no opportunity to socialize with your old friends again, and, like I said, we lost ... contact.

KP: What brought you to open up a store in Edison?

AB: Well, we were looking for a place and ... we found what we could. It was the first drugstore, or, like, second drugstore here, and we figured it would be a good location. Still in operation today.

KP: Under your name still?

AB: Still under Bell Drug.

KP: Is it still independent?

AB: It's still independent.

JD: Do you still visit that store?

AB: I was there yesterday. I still own the building.

KP: Well, thank you, again.

AB: All right.

KP: We appreciate it.

AB: If you need me you know where to find me.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/3/99
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 10/5/99
Reviewed by Alexander M. Bell, Jr. 8/01