RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT B. BERNSTORF

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND
JUNE 20, 2012

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE
and
HANNAH SPARKS
and
STEVEN ACONE
and
THOMAS ACS

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Robert B. Bernstorf on June 20, 2012, in Annapolis, Maryland, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here. To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

Robert Bernstorf: I was born in the Bronx, New York, at 169th Street, I believe, and I was born at home on March the 8th, 1923.

SI: For the record, what were your parents' names?

RB: My mother's name was Dorothy Adeline Koster Bernstorf, Koster being her maiden name, and my father's name was Bernard Ardler Bernstorf.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, what do you know about the family history, when the family came to this country?

RB: I don't actually know, other than hearsay. Now, my sister did some research and they came in to--what's the island in the Hudson River?

SI: Ellis Island. [Editor's Note: In 1890, the federal government assumed responsibility for regulating immigration from the states and designated Ellis Island as an immigration station. Over twelve million people immigrated to the United States through Ellis Island in New York Harbor between 1892 and 1954.]

RB: Ellis Island, and I believe it would be about 1895, yes. My father was born in 1899 and my mother was also born in 1899, both in the United States. I don't have any information on my mother's family right now. This is one of the things I'm hoping to get started on investigating, but, unfortunately, neither of them went to Rutgers. [laughter]

SI: Do you have any sense of why the families came to this country?

RB: No.

SI: Did your parents ever tell you?

RB: No. I ran across a problem a little later in my life, when I was in the service. I was in Marine boot camp and, in the middle of a day of drilling, I got called to headquarters. … In the Marine Corps, … when you're in boot camp, you don't see officers--everything is with enlisted men--and I got called to headquarters and I was sent to see a lieutenant colonel. His question was, "Do you know the history of your family?" and I said, "No." He said, "Well, in World War I, the ambassador to the United States from Germany, his name was Bernstorff. Do you know anything about that?" I said, "Never heard of it before." [Editor's Note: Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff was the German ambassador to the United States from 1908 to 1917.] He said, "Okay, go back." I was done and never got the question again, but it made me wonder if that … didn't keep me inside the United States during World War II.

SI: Did your parents grow up in the Bronx?

RB: My grandparents on my mother's side lived about a block or two away from where I was born. So, my mother … and my father were living just in that general area. … No, I know my grandfather on my mother's side was a New York City police officer from, I believe, 1895 to 1913. … Then, he retired and I believe he went into the real estate business. My father's father was, I believe, a night watchman … in a bank somewhere downtown. I believe he and his wife lived in--what's that section?--Harlem.

SI: Okay.

RB: I believe they lived in Harlem, but I don't recall ever going to their home.

SI: Do you know how your parents met? Did their families know each other?

RB: That might have been the case; [they might have met] through church. It wasn't through schooling, because I know my father told me he didn't go beyond eighth grade. My mother graduated from a high school and went to a secretarial school and got a job with an importing company. How they met, I don't know.

SI: You were born in the Bronx. Do you have any siblings?

RB: I have a brother and a sister, or I had a brother and a sister. They were born in Teaneck, New Jersey. We moved from the Bronx when I was approximately three years old.

SI: You do not have any memories of growing up in the Bronx.

RB: A little later on, when my grandparents had died, they had owned a house on 169th Street, … which I mentioned before, and my mother inherited the house. My mother had a brother, … but my mother was in that area. Her brother was twelve years younger and her brother went to Brown University, eventually, and lived with us. His parents had died. … What I remember is that there was an apartment upstairs and there was a Chinese laundry, sort of half below ground and half above ground, on the downstairs. … I have a vague recollection of going over there around Christmastime and they always presented us with a box of lychee nuts for Christmas, [laughter] and for a couple of years. … That's my recollection of that area as a child. … I don't know what happened in there, that the house eventually was sold, but we … moved to Teaneck when I was about three years old.

SI: Do you know why your parents decided to move to Teaneck?

RB: No. My father commuted to New York by train and that's my only recollection. … Well, of course, I stayed in Teaneck until I got through high school.

SI: You said your father commuted into New York. Was he a beverage tax commissioner then or did he get that job later in life?

RB: He worked for a brokerage at that point and, somewhere along the line, in those days, to become a lawyer, you read law in a lawyer's office. You didn't go to school. … He read law in somebody's office for a while, but I don't believe that went on too long, because … I had a sister that was two years younger, so, with two kids in the family, I don't believe he had the time for that. … [Regarding] the beverage tax thing, there was a period of time when we first lived in New Jersey and he worked then in New York. … When he lost that job in the Depression of--what was that, the '30s, 1930s?

SI: The 1930s, 1929 through the 1930s.

RB: Yes, in the '30s. He worked for another member of the family who had a butter-and-egg business that delivered things to homes. … He kept going on that until he finally got into the politics thing of working for the Beverage Tax Commission offices and he worked his way up there until he became the Beverage Tax Commissioner for the State of New Jersey.

SI: Was the butter-and-egg business in New York or in New Jersey?

RB: That was in New Jersey; can't think of the name of the town.

SI: Near Teaneck?

RB: Yes, it must have been near Teaneck.

SI: Did your mother continue to work after they started their family?

RB: No. My mother didn't work then until my father died and, when he died, she … went back to work, for something to do. … She sold her house in Teaneck and moved to West Englewood, New Jersey, and had an apartment in West Englewood until that living alone [situation] ceased to be feasible. So, then, she lived with my sister in Cedar Lake, New Jersey, for maybe half a year and she ended up in the hospital, and then, died. I also had a brother who was eight years, nine years younger than I am and he's still alive. My sister has been dead for about three years now, but my brother lives in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. My brother went to Rutgers for one semester, and then, he had problems with the schooling. … They analyzed his education at Rutgers and recommended a smaller university or smaller school and he switched to Gettysburg College. My sister had gone to Gettysburg College before him.

SI: Did your parents ever say anything about what the World War I period was like for them? I know your father was not in the service, but what was it like being on the home front?

RB: I don't know whether he was in the service or not. He mentioned--and it sounded like a joke or something they were making--something about Cox's Army. Now, Cox's Army, I don't think there was a Cox's Army. I think it was a group of disgruntled people that were trying to develop something--I don't know what--but that's my only recollection of that. [Editor's Note: Cox's Army refers to followers of Father James Renshaw Cox. Cox led a group of twenty-five thousand unemployed civilians to Washington, DC, in 1932 to demonstrate in favor of having

Congress initiate public works programs.] … To my knowledge, I was the first in the family to go into the military.

SI: Did they say if they faced any prejudice because they had a German name?

RB: No. I went--this is jumping ahead now. … When the war broke out, I was in Rutgers and I went to a Marine recruiting office down in Wall Street, New York, and tried to sign up in the Marine Corps. … I took the physical and, when I got done with the physical, they said I had high blood pressure and I couldn't get in the service. I would never get in the service. So, they said, "Come back in a week and try again." I did and I didn't pass again, and so, they said that I'd never get in. So, I went back to school and, about six months later, I got drafted and the Marine Corps, at that time, was not drafting, but, when I finished the physical exam--it was in Newark Armory--a doctor sent me over to a table to lie down for a while. … I stretched out on the table and promptly fell asleep, and he came over a little bit later and checked me and said, "You're in." [laughter] So, then, the rigmarole came around, "Do you want to be in the Army or the Navy?" and so, I said I wanted to be in the Navy. "Do you want to be in the Navy or the Marine Corps?" So, I said I wanted to be in the Marine Corps. So, they loaded me in a pick-up truck and sent me to New York, to … the same place I'd been a year before, the same people. All they were there for was to swear me in--no questions, no anything else. They swore me in. They said, "You want to go tonight or next week?" I said, "I'll go next week." So, I went home. Well, they had brought us to New York in a pick-up truck from the armory … in Newark. When they finished with me, they said, "Good-bye, see you in a week." I got downstairs and reached in my pocket and I had ten cents and I had to get from downtown New York to Teaneck, New Jersey, which was about five miles over the George Washington Bridge. So, in those days, subways were a nickel. So, I went down, took the subway to the George Washington Bridge and I found a phone booth. So, I reversed the charges on a call to my mother in New Jersey, finally got a message through to her to come up Route 4, which comes up through New Jersey to the George Washington Bridge, and she'd find me walking down Route 4. So, I got my nickel back, because we reversed the charges. It cost a nickel to walk across the George Washington Bridge then. So, I went across the bridge and she met me and took me home. I killed a week and went back and loaded on … a train down to Parris Island and got there, I think, the next day, and where do you want me to go from here? [Editor's Note: Parris Island, South Carolina, is the Marine Corps' primary enlisted boot camp facility for recruits living east of the Mississippi River.]

SI: Do you mind if we go back?

RB: Go back to Rutgers?

SI: Can we go back to Teaneck?

RB: Yes.

SI: What are your earliest memories of growing up in Teaneck? What were your neighbors like and your daily activities?

RB: It was a residential community, [with] individual houses. I lived on a street called Sherman Avenue. I went to Longfellow Elementary School, which was about a mile away. [Editor's Note: Built in 1910, Longfellow Elementary School is now defunct.] At one part of my life there, my parents had to pay for a bus to pick me up and take me down to the school, and then, after I got a little older, why, we walked. There were no athletic activities in the school, in the elementary school. We played roller-skate hockey on the street. We also played stickball. … When it came time to go to seventh grade, they had the seventh grade, [but it] was being held in the Teaneck High School. They had the high school kids going in the afternoon to school and the seventh and eighth grade came in the morning and went to school and went home at noon, because [it was] while they were building, enlarging, the high school. … When the two years that we were in those two grades [finished], as I recall, we then stepped up to high school and we went full-day schooling, and you want the names of [teachers]? (Helen Hill?) was … in charge of the high school. Charles (Steel?) was the head of the school, all the schools, … the high school things. Mr. Wilson, what was Mr. Wilson?--(Helen Hill?) was a single woman, Mr. Wilson was a single man. They dated, but not publicly. We found out--she told us about that--at a reunion, and I think that was our twenty-fifth reunion. By then, she had retired and he had died. … They were planning to get married when he died. So, that was the rumor from way back, when we were in high school, but, when I was in high school, I went to Worcester Polytech in New York State. They had what they called a Techniquest. You came for ten days and they had you doing different things in the school. [Editor's Note: Worcester Polytechnic Institute, in Worcester, Massachusetts, began offering its Techniquest outreach program to exceptional high school juniors and seniors in 1934.] The school was not in session, but they had classes for us to attend. … We went through this Techniquest and, at the end of the Techniquest, your parents came up and they sat down with you and … they evaluated what you had done--and that would have been when I was in the eleventh grade. … I hadn't had chemistry yet and they recommended that I get into chemistry and try that. They didn't find any particular other field that fascinated me, I guess. So, I did that and, when it came time to go to … see about going to college, we had a guidance teacher who recommended I look at the School of Ceramics in New Brunswick. So, I went down there for a couple of days and looked that over and decided to … study ceramics. [Editor's Note: A ceramics department was established at Rutgers in 1902. The Department of Ceramics became the School of Ceramics when it joined the College of Engineering in 1945.]

SI: You graduated in 1940 from high school.

RB: Yes.

SI: Okay. It sounds like …

RB: I was seventeen by three weeks.

SI: You were younger than most students graduating.

RB: We had a skip of a half a year, [for] some reason, when I was in elementary school, which got us a little further along. … I guess maybe the date of my birthday made a difference in when you started school and that's probably why I got … out of high school so early.

SI: Did you have a high opinion of your teachers and classes in the Teaneck system? What did you think of them?

RB: At that time, … it was much smaller. Well, the high school had gotten larger, but the elementary school was, like, one English class, one math class, one music class. The high school would have maybe two or three classes in each group. I realize now that going through the grades at that earlier age was not great for my attention span and [for] getting good grades. I left … there and went to Rutgers. I also went to Brown to look it over, because my uncle had graduated from Brown. I got an acceptance from Brown and I got an acceptance from Rutgers, but I chose to go to Rutgers. … [Regarding] my grade work at Rutgers, … I was there for two years, … almost two-and-a-half years, before I got in the service, my grade work at Rutgers was not [exemplary]. It took me one semester to get on probation and it took me the next four semesters to get off probation, and that's when I got drafted, right there. [laughter] So, … just getting off [took awhile]--well, engineering had a higher requirement for … grade [point average] than most of the other subjects--but, anyway, I'd just got off probation when I went into the service. So, when I came out of the service, where I spent about twenty months going to school out of thirty-nine months, I came back, my first semester back, my grades went up, everything went up. I was in much better [shape]. … In fact, I had a pretty good grade average at the end of the four years, when I got my degree.

SI: Had you always been interested in the sciences or did this trip to Worcester Polytechnic really inspire you?

RB: This was not anything that I thought of. It was something that one of the teachers must have thought of and they suggested to my parents that I go there. … It was interesting and I didn't understand surveying and chemistry--they had a little chemistry in there, I didn't understand it--and some of the math was over my head. … I think that that type of a course, in today's college market, … is just another expense that you can't really afford.

SI: When you were growing up, the Great Depression was ongoing and cast a large shadow over the nation. How did it affect your family and your neighborhood?

RB: I don't know quite how to answer that question. It seems we were a lot simpler in the way we lived. Clothing would be passed down. You didn't have new bicycles and you didn't have [many new things]. I had an uncle that gave me a bicycle that was a beat-up bicycle, but it was much better than none at all and it was all I had. So, that was fine, but did a lot more things family-wise then. …

SI: Do you mean family get-togethers?

RB: Yes, dinner and Thanksgiving. … My uncle, my mother's brother, lived with us when he was out of school. Now, I don't remember what he did when he lived with us. … We didn't have a lot of industry in Teaneck. Teaneck was a bedroom town. My first job, that I think I got paid for, was, they had a movie theater and I passed out bulletins for the movie theater and delivered them to homes. … Of course, in those days, I also sold [the] *Saturday Evening Post*

and *Collier's* magazines door-to-door, and that was how I … got most of my spending money when I was in the lower grades.

SI: How old were you when you started these jobs?

RB: Well, I'm guessing that I was probably around twelve.

SI: Did you have any other part-time jobs in grammar or high school?

RB: Yes, mowing lawns. At that point, … my other activities included Boy Scouts.

SI: Okay.

RB: We had a Boy Scout Troop 90 and there were several of us of my age on the street I lived on, … and then, on a couple of blocks there, and we went down together to the Boy Scout meetings. … I stayed with the Boy Scouts until--in fact, when I came back from the Marine Corps, I went to see them and I found out they'd carried me on the roster the whole time. [Editor's Note: The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) was first incorporated in 1910 and helps foster a sense of civic duty and personal character. The Boy Scouts help their local and national communities through their service, in addition to teaching basic outdoorsman skills to young boys.]

SI: Really?

RB: And I went on, later in life, to become a Scoutmaster and I spent a good lot of time [doing that]. I started a Scout troop and I started a Cub Scout pack and I made five trips to their--to New Mexico, to …

SI: Piedmont?

RB: No, that's not the name.

SI: Philmont?

RB: Philmont. I made three trips to Philmont. I made a trip to Wisconsin, a trip to Minnesota and a trip to Maine, canoe trips to Maine. [Editor's Note: Philmont Scout Ranch, located in northeastern New Mexico, is one of the largest of the BSA's "High Adventure Bases" and boasts a total of thirty-four full staff camps for the Boy Scouts to use.] I was awarded a Silver Beaver.

SI: Did you ever go to any national jamborees?

RB: I never went to a national jamboree. One of my sons did.

SI: This is jumping ahead, but do you think anything you learned in the Boy Scouts helped you when you were in the service?

RB: Well, I was used to cooking out, but we never cooked out [in the service]. … Really, when I went into the service, I went in Parris Island and finished. Boot camp doesn't include anything like that. We did, of course, … shoot on the rifle range in boot camp, and we had a rifle team in our high school and I shot on the rifle team … before I went into the Marine Corps. … Of course, then, I went into the Marine Corps and shot on their rifle range and that was a horse of another color.

SI: Going back to your youth in Teaneck, your father got involved in politics through the Beverage Tax Commission. Was politics discussed a lot in your home?

RB: I don't really know how he got involved in that. … I don't know how he got into politics. He was in politics. … He was a Mason and it could have been through the Masonic lodge. It could have been through the Lutheran church in Teaneck. I think he started as a tax auditor for the liquor business for the state and worked his way up to where he was head of it. … He had an office in Newark and he had an office in Trenton, and I was just looking … this last week at a photo album--and it's stored away in the garage--and I found these write-ups … from the newspapers where he was at these banquets. … One of the tax commissioner things was the Kentucky Derby. They all went to the [Kentucky Derby], … from a bunch of states, and they all got to be Kentucky colonels. [laughter] … I don't know how he got into that, but he was in it … right up to the time he died. In fact, he'd had a heart attack and he was on sick leave and I went over--I lived in Ohio at that point--and I visited with him for a while. … Just after I visited, he died. [Editor's Note: The title "Kentucky Colonel" is the highest honor awarded by the Commonwealth of Kentucky, given to individuals who have performed an outstanding service to either their community or their nation.]

SI: Coming from a German-American family, were there any German traditions that were carried on in your family?

RB: Well, my mother and my father, at times, would try to communicate at the dinner table in German, so that the kids wouldn't know what they were talking about, and they had a lot of trouble. … Then, when I went into high school, I took German in high school for a year or two. I don't know whether my sister did or not, but they kind of gave up on that German business. [Regarding] my father's parents, German was their home language, in their home, and my mother's, I don't know, because my grandfather on my mother's side died the month after I was born and … my grandmother lived about seven years. She lived with us for … a good part of that seven years and I only recall … when she died, because I was farmed out to a family on the other side of town while they had the funeral. They had the casket in the house and the funeral, I think, at the church, and my sister and I had to stay with friends of the family until that was over with.

SI: Was the church very important to your family growing up, and to you personally?

RB: Yes. My father was on the board and my mother sang in the choir. … One of my best friends, … we were in Confirmation class together. In fact, I found that picture recently, too. … Our high school would be here, I lived over here and the church was over here. So, when we had Confirmation class, we'd go … from high school to church after school, have our class, and then,

we had to walk back [to] the other end of town again to go home. You know, we were very active in the church.

SI: Which church was it?

RB: St. Paul's Lutheran Church, on Church Street in Teaneck. [laughter] In fact, Ginny and I met a … girl when we moved here a few years ago. … I knew about her from her sister; I had met her sister at the church Luther League group, in our church. I met with one from Jersey City and her sister was in the Jersey City one. I met her sister that way and I knew about her.

Virginia Moffett Krenning Bernstorf: Who was that? I don't remember that.

RB: George Fiske's [sister].

VB: Oh.

RB: The one that … lived over here in Sherwood Forest.

SI: George Fiske?

RB: George Fiske is from Rutgers.

SI: Yes, I interviewed him.

RB: He lives down in Williamsburg.

SI: Virginia.

RB: Yes.

SI: I interviewed him a couple of years ago down there.

VB: George Fiske. His brother-in-law died. …

RB: Yes. George Fiske is alive. George is a fraternity brother of mine. Well, his brother-in-law was a fraternity brother of mine, too. In fact, I have a picture, that I know where that is, a picture of about eight fellows and girls in a Model A Ford. [laughter] … George's sister sent me the picture to ask me who the people were in the picture and I could only name about two of them. So, that wasn't any help to them.

SI: As you were nearing the end of your high school career, were your parents encouraging you to think about college? What were your plans at that point?

RB: Yes, … that Worcester Polytech that I went to was one my parents were promoting and, yes, they wanted me to go to college. In fact, I got a scholarship from the State of New Jersey for a hundred dollars my freshman year and it took me a whole semester to lose that, [laughter]

but I didn't have that after the war. … After the war, when I came back, I got money from the government to go to school and I signed up for ROTC, in the Signal Corps, and then, I had to fight them about that, because … they only wanted to take engineering students and I was in the School of Ceramics, although it was in the College of Engineering. So, I pointed out to them that I had more training in the Marine Corps than they were talking about giving me in going to college, and I had twenty months of schooling. … I listed all the schools for them. They said, "Well, that certainly qualifies you." [laughter] So, they took me into the ROTC and they had a big turnout--they had five people sign up for the Signal Corps. … Then, of course, they had an infantry [unit] and … I think it was a tank unit, and they had to have commanding officers. So, I ended up commanding one of the ROTC units in there.

SI: Had you been in the ROTC before World War II?

RB: I was not taken, because I was on probation at that time and they wouldn't take me into the ROTC.

SI: At that time, in 1940, when you graduated, the war had already started in Europe. What did you think was going to happen at that point? Did you think that America was going to get involved in the war?

RB: I don't think I gave it a second thought.

SI: Okay.

RB: Until I remember sitting at my desk on Pearl Harbor Day and doing homework, and I had the radio playing and they announced Pearl Harbor had been bombed.

SI: Were you at Rutgers?

RB: Yes, I was at Rutgers. I was living in 78 College Avenue, right across from Ford Dormitory, the DKE House. [Editor's Note: The Rutgers chapter of the Delta Kappa Epsilon (DKE) fraternity was established in 1861. In 1929, their house was built at 78 College Avenue.]

SI: You hear the news about Pearl Harbor--how do you and your fraternity brothers react?

RB: Well, everybody stopped what they were doing and we all went downstairs and we had a big television in the living room.

SI: A radio?

RB: We had a television at that time and a radio. …

VB: Did you have a television?

RB: In 1940, it seemed to me we had television. [Editor's Note: The television had been invented by 1940 and was the focus of the RCA exhibition at the 1939-1940 World's Fair in New York.]

SI: You all came down and gathered around.

RB: Just sat around and listened to the program. It was a complete blank as far as everything else was concerned. … Since there was ROTC at that time, there wasn't any mass rush to go and sign up or anything like that, because the ones that were going to be in it were in it already. You did ROTC your first two years, as a land-grant college, but you didn't get paid for that. You got a uniform and you had classes, but, then, it was the second two years that had the commission attached to it afterwards.

SI: Did you do that?

RB: I did go. That's when I was talking about going to New York to try to sign up for the Marine Corps. … I think it was in 1942.

SI: Let us talk a little bit about Rutgers before the war. What do you remember about your first few days and weeks on campus?

RB: Well, we had one subject the first year. … I lived in Pell Hall, up by Bishop Campus, and we had one class in ceramics, taught by Professor Brown, who was the head of the Ceramic Department. … When we came into the class the first day, there were maybe twelve students and, there, sitting in the first row, was a girl with her feet up on the chair in front of her, [laughter] right in the front row, in the middle. … Professor Brown was an elderly gentleman and he came in and he turned a little bit red, very upset. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Professor George H. Brown was head of the Ceramics Department at Rutgers from 1917 to 1943.] … She lasted for a while, and then, she dropped out. … That subject was the only ceramic one the first year. Then, we had other ones, and I, of course, … was not thinking in how they tied together. We had drafting we had to take, which was engineering, a course in drafting, and we had, of course, math programs and an English course. Everybody had to take English at Rutgers. … I knew a couple of guys in the fraternity that--you had to pass I think it was English 101 to graduate--and they were seniors and they hadn't passed English 101 yet. … I got by it the first year, fortunately. [laughter]

SI: Do any other professors stand out in your memory, besides Professor Brown?

RB: Yes, there was one that … came in, I think--no, he came in after the war. The woman, … she was a secretary that ran the office in the Ceramics Building, Emma? and I can't think of her last name now, I know she's retired, long retired, but, no, I don't recall any other professors at … the early stages of time. I remember Chuck Logg. He was the crew coach and I went out for crew. [Editor's Note: Chuck Logg served as the crew coach from 1937 to 1958.] Well, I made it as a substitute, but we only had, like, one varsity crew. … At the end of the first year, I progressed from being a substitute on the crew to being a manager and I … worked with the crew manager until I went into the service. … Then, when I came back, I went back to being the

head manager for crew and it had progressed to being a larger organization. They had 150-pound crew and they had the varsity crew and had a freshman crew. … At one point after the war, … we were going to row in the Poughkeepsie Regatta and we had the shells shipped up by bus--by truck, rather--and we didn't have enough money to ship the powerboat for the coach. So, Cliff Kingston, who was a fraternity brother, [who] was also involved in that Model A Ford [photograph], … he had been a … quartermaster in the Navy and he was a fraternity brother and he came as my … assistant manager. … I questioned how we were going to get the boat up there and he said, "Well, we could take it down Kill Van Kull and across New York Harbor and up the Hudson River to Poughkeepsie," and he and I would take the boat and go up there. So, that's what we did. We took the boat and we got into the middle of [the] Hudson River, [New York] Harbor--we could see [the] Statue of Liberty and everything else--and the motor quit and we had no idea. We couldn't get it started. We were drifting in the middle of the harbor and a police boat came along and they hailed us and wanted to see our papers. … When that was okay, so, they towed us to shore and we tied up and Cliff went looking for a man to check the motor and he couldn't find one. … While he was gone, I tried it--it started right up. [laughter] So, when he came back, we took off again and went on up to Nyack, New Jersey, [New York], by the Tappan Zee Bridge, and it quit again in the middle of the river. That time, we were embarrassed--we had to be towed to shore by a sailboat. [laughter] … They towed us to the Nyack Yacht Club and I called my mother, because I lived not too far from there, and we left the boat tied up there and she took us home and fed us and put us to bed and took us back the next day. … The boat ran, so, we went up to … West Point and we bought a five-gallon gas can and an enema hose and we shorted out the gas tank … feed to the engine and hooked in the enema hose and ran the boat on the five-gallon can the rest of the way up to Poughkeepsie.

SI: Wow.

RB: Seems like the kids down around the dock where we kept the boat--we had no cover for it--came down and opened the gas tank and threw stones in it. … The stones rolled around and, when they'd get over the right hole, they shut the gas off to the motor and the motor would die and … the boat wouldn't run, but you couldn't get into the gas tank. So, when we got to Poughkeepsie, … the backseat was where the gas tank was, you had to take the gas tank out of the boat and dump the stones out and put them back in again to make it run, but we got it running and I let Cliff take the boat [back]. He took the boat back to Rutgers, to the Raritan, after the race. I was a senior that year and I was going to get married and the season for crew was just about the end of your school year.

SI: Do any of the crew competitions stand out in your memory?

RB: Yes. When I was a freshman, we went to Marietta, Ohio, and we rowed again in a mixed regatta against--I've forgotten who the crews were--but I went as a substitute. … Each crew had two substitutes, for port and starboard. They took all the substitutes and made a boatload. We had eight in a boat and a coxswain and they put us in one of the races--and I've forgotten what race. … We came in last, of course, [laughter] but we rowed in the race, yes.

SI: You were at Rutgers for two-and-a-half years before joining the service. As the war progressed, did it affect the curriculum and the pace of the classes?

RB: There was no change prior … to me going into the service. … I was having difficulty with calculus and that's the only one, real one, that I had a lot of trouble with, but, no, there didn't seem to be anything. The ROTC was a bigger thing on campus at that point, but I was not in the ROTC up to the time I went in the service. … The change would be, you might come downstairs and be sitting in the living room and talking to some guy and you're saying, "Why aren't you studying?" and he'd say, "Well, I'm leaving tomorrow to go … in the service," or something. People kept dropping out, but I was in the earlier group that dropped out, so, I didn't notice it so much.

SI: How did you get involved with the DKE fraternity?

RB: Well, in those days, I don't know whether this was standard all the time, … I was living in Pell Hall with a roommate from South Jersey. He was a farm boy, and the guys from the fraternity came around early in the year and they'd talk to the freshmen. … If they liked you, why, they invited you to come over to see their house, and then, out of that, they'd select, eventually, ones that they'd ask … if they'd like to join the fraternity. … I got invited to join the DKE fraternity, my roommate got Theta Chi and I don't know who else. The one I eventually roomed with, he also lived in Pell Hall, was John Lawrence. John Lawrence eventually became my brother-in-law.

SI: Oh.

RB: And, of course, John Lawrence goes back a long way. His father was in the Class of '09. Well …

SI: Yes, 1909.

RB: It had to be 1909, yes. I was thinking it was 2009. Yes, it was 1909, but I don't think his father graduated, but he [the son] was a civil engineer, studying to be one.

SI: He was in the Class of 1944, John Lawrence.

RB: John Lawrence. I was in the Class of '44 in the beginning.

SI: Originally, yes.

RB: Yes. John Lawrence and I roomed together for a couple of years, and then, when I was in the service, I corresponded with a sister of his that was going to college in Connecticut. … When I came [home], got leaves, I'd go up and visit her. … That got kind of serious and I said, "Well, one thing for sure, I wasn't going to get engaged or get married until I was discharged from the military." I would not marry somebody and take the chance of having a child without a father. … I did ask her to marry me and … my mother had an idea. My grandfather on the Bernstorf side had died and had a ring with two diamonds on it and a black background. … She'd gotten it from him and she said, … "One diamond goes to you and the other diamond goes to your brother." … I finally got into San Diego, on the West Coast, and I had her send me the

diamond. … I upset the sergeant major of the replacement center [to] no end when I walked into his office and said, "Sergeant, I want to put a diamond in the safe." [laughter] … He made me sign every piece of tape that I could put around that wrapping, so that anybody opening anything was going to make it obvious that it had been stolen, and he kept it for me until I got my fiancée to come out to California from Connecticut and I gave her a diamond ring that I had made up in California, but that's for later.

SI: How quickly did you move into the fraternity house?

RB: I moved into it the sophomore year.

SI: Okay.

RB: They required, in the fraternity house, … the other fraternity brothers, the older ones, tried to make you study every night, so that you got your progression and didn't get kicked out of school. … So, I was in the fraternity house the sophomore year and, from then on, I stayed in the fraternity house. Now, there, … they served meals, and three meals a day, seven days a week, and some of the members got jobs waiting tables and serving the food and doing the dishes. You could only get a job after you'd been there a year. I got, eventually, before the war, … to doing waiting on tables and serving the food and washing the dishes and that paid for my meal. … Other than that, why, … one of the members was a bookkeeper and he collected the fee for the room and board and, in those days, … before the war, we had a houseboy. He made the beds for you. [laughter] You didn't have to make your bed. We had a maid. She cleaned the rooms, and we had a housemother and our housemother, Miss Sleighter, had been in France with the Red Cross, in World War I. … She had an experience of coming out one night from the Red Cross place to … go where she was staying. … The guys were beginning to throw nasty comments and this sergeant came up to her and said, "May I escort you home?" and he escorted her home and he kept everybody from bothering her. … She found out later that he was--what the heck is his name, Diamond, famous gangster?

Shaun Illingworth: Oh, Diamond Jim?

RB: Could have been.

SI: "Legs" Diamond? [Editor's Note: Irish-American gangster Jack "Legs" Diamond served in the US Army during World War I, but was arrested for desertion after the war. He became a major bootlegger in the New York City area during the Prohibition era until he was murdered by his rivals in December 1931.]

RB: Anyway, she found out he was this gangster, [laughter] but she said he was a perfect gentleman

SI: Wow. [laughter]

RB: But, that was our housemother and she was the housemother right through to [graduation?]. She had a separate apartment. The DKE House is the only house on campus that was built as a

fraternity house. … All the rooms were identical. You would walk in the door to the room and there was a closet to the right and a closet to the left. They came right out to the aisle, the width of the aisle that was between them. … Next to your closet was a bed that fitted, that was the same … depth as the closet, the width of the bed, and then, down on the end, you had a window and, under the window, you had a desk, drawers on both sides. … Behind the desk, you had a bureau on each side. So, each member had a bureau, a desk, a closet, a bed and two to a room, and then, the toilet facilities, they were like it would be in the school, more or less. You had one large bathroom with several showers and toilets and sinks on each floor. It was three floors. Well, you didn't have any rooms on the first floor. They had a big living room, where they held their dances, you had a big dining room, you had a kitchen and, in the basement, you had a little apartment where the maid and the houseboy lived. … The housemother lived on the first floor. She had two or three rooms there. She had a back entrance to her place. So, … that fraternity house was particularly good that way and we didn't have any real problems with that fraternity house while I was there. It's only been in the last, I don't know, last ten years or more [that] we've had difficulty. The fraternity got thrown off campus for drinking and whatnot and, fortunately, Gerald Ford, that was the President of the United States, and as was, I believe, one of the Bushes …

VB: George Walker Bush. [Editor's Note: Five US Presidents have been members of DKE, Rutherford B. Hayes, Theodore Roosevelt, Gerald Ford, George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush.]

RB: Walker, yes. She worked for the Bushes at one point; and a little pressure was put on and they let them come back on campus. … Of course, it'd been several years since we'd had anybody there, so, they had to get a local fraternity and incorporate them into the national and those dummies didn't know enough when to keep their mouths shut and follow the rules. So, they got thrown off again and they are gone from the campus. I understand, we own the building and we had to refurbish it twice, because these people didn't take care of the place. Now, … I believe it is rented to a sorority and there's a sorority living in it, [in] 2012, but there's no more effort to start a fraternity.

SI: Tell me a little bit about the social events that the fraternity would have.

RB: Well, whenever there was a big dance on campus, the fraternity always had a [party weekend]. The way they worked it there, at that time, all the fellows moved out of the fraternities and moved in with some friends someplace and the fraternity house was turned over to their dates. Their dates took over the rooms and stayed in the rooms and were fed in the building and all, and there was a dance. … There'd be a dance on Saturday night. The Military Ball was one of them, sponsored by the ROTC program and the ROTC students. Then, there was, like [on] a Friday night, there'd be a dance, a dinner and a dance there, and they'd have breakfast on Sunday morning, and then, the girls would go home and the fellows would move back in. … Once in a while, there'd be a weekend party. We were not supposed to have beer and liquor in the fraternity house, but they all had beer parties, periodically, and it was just when they got the liquor involved in it that they got themselves in trouble.

SI: We can come back to Rutgers at any time, but I want to talk now about your time in the service. You told me how you got on the train down to Parris Island.

RB: Yes.

SI: Tell me about what happened once you arrived and the training there.

RB: Well, when we got in, got off the train, they put us on trucks and they took us onto the base. … You got in line and the quartermaster gave you [your gear]. You got a duffle bag and you got your uniforms and you got all that stuff--and the barber took all your hair. … You reported to a barracks and you got assigned a bunk and a footlocker. … We had a PFC [private first class] and a corporal. The PFC was the drill instructor. I don't know why the corporal was there, but he was there, and there were seventy people to a barracks. I was nineteen years old. There was one fellow there that was, I think, thirty. He had been a pole lineman for the phone company, and so, he was the oldest one there. There was one other fellow that was just about my age. All the rest of them were eighteen and younger and they were all from the New York docks and some of them were a little lacking in education. I used to write letters for one fellow, to send to his church, but he couldn't write. … Out of the seventy people that were there, I went through--I forget how long boot camp was, eight weeks, or something like that--I met the oldest one when I was about to be discharged. He and I were both tech sergeants in the Marine Corps. He got his stripes practically right away, because he had all these years of pole line/telephone work into him. I had to go through schools. I went through one school that was six months of training. It ended up in Corpus Christi. It went from boot camp to Grove City College and we were there for a couple of months. You'd take a test every two weeks. If you passed the test, you went on. If you failed the test, they shipped you out to the infantry. So, I passed Grove City College. We lived in Grove City dormitories, up in Grove City, Pennsylvania. … It was a Navy/Marine class, combined, and then, there was also an Army Air Force class. There was an airstrip near there and the Army Air Force had them [training there] and we used to have dances on Saturday, Friday nights, … or Saturday nights, down at the high school, and the Marines had a drill team. We didn't have any rifles or anything, but we just had a shipboard sergeant, drill sergeant, and he formed a drill team and we just put on demonstrations for Fourth of July, for the town and things like that. This was at Grove City College. What that school was, they gave you a schematic diagram and … it was the construction of a radio. You had the paper diagram. You had to make a list of the parts you needed to build the radio. Then, you went to the quartermaster's office, you drew the parts. You took them back to the workbench. You had to put the radio together and the radio had to work. When your radio worked, you'd passed the course. Then, you took it apart again [laughter] and turned the parts in … and got out of there. So, when you finished that course, you went to either Corpus Christi, Texas, which was aircraft, or to San Francisco, which was shipboard, for radar training. Now, the Corpus Christi, Texas, course was, as I recall, it was six months and, every two weeks, you took an exam down there and the same thing--you get shipped out if you didn't pass. So, when you graduated from that six months, you graduated as a staff sergeant, which was really unusual in the Marine Corps, because most people would go in, served four years and they'd get to be a corporal, if they're lucky, and then, you [have] got to go four years more and you might be a sergeant. … When you got your rifle issued to you--to go back a little bit, when we were in boot camp, we fired an M-1 [Garand] rifle. … The last day that we fired, we qualified for sharpshooter or expert and, as I recall, I qualified as a

sharpshooter. Expert was the next one up. I was one point short. That day, they put you on guard duty with a loaded weapon and my guard duty watch was the last building on the island [laughter] and it was--they said it was--an ammunition building. Well, I walk around the building. There were no windows and no lights, nothing, and there's dunes over here and over the dunes was the ocean. … You could hear the ocean, but you couldn't see it. … I'm going around, I'm going around and I hear talking, and I knew nobody else was supposed to be near me. So, I go around the building until I locate the side where I [can monitor them]. I'm behind the building, around the corner, and they're over there. I could see the tops of their heads moving along, beyond the dunes. There were three people and they just kept on talking, coming down, talking over the waves and all, and they came through an opening. … They're coming right down the chute, right toward me, and I'm standing there and I hollered for them to halt and they didn't stop at all. They didn't hear me, I guess, and I hollered again, and then, when I pulled the bolt back and it slammed shut, they heard that [laughter] and they started throwing their hands up. They had a shore detail that came down the shore and they had a submachine gun and they had a couple of rifles, but they couldn't see me. I could see them. So, they finally came out and identified themselves. … That was my first weird experience in worrying about having to kill somebody, but, anyway.

SI: Before we leave Parris Island, the Marine Corps training there is famous for the strict discipline and intensity. Can you tell me a little more about that in your experience?

RB: Well, … most of your drilling was done in three columns, to make it small enough that the … drill instructor could reach his voice all the way around, over everything. So, he'd go around and … it was all based on size. The tallest ones were in the front and the shortest ones were in the back--I think that's probably backwards, but that seems like it was that way--and we drilled with rifles and that was basically the way that worked. … Well, you couldn't go to the rifle range until--I mean, you couldn't carry or have a loaded weapon--until you qualified on the rifle range and you did your drilling with a rifle, empty. … Then, after you got the basics down, that's when we went to the rifle range and we shot down there. Well, when I came off the rifle range, I went to a one, two, I guess it was two or three-week class, on kindergarten math and kindergarten--I forget what the other part of it was. It was two subjects and you just … studied that. … While we were in that thing, our rifles, usually, were slung under our bunks and, one day, we came back and our rifles were all gone and we were technicians. So, we graduated from that school and went on to the other schools and we never--I never--had a weapon issued to me, as mine, again in my life in the Marine Corps. … When I got done with Corpus Christi, Texas, I got sent to Cherry Point, North Carolina, which was the airbase [Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point], and we were working on radar. The job we had to do there, we had big hangers and B-25 bombers came in. [Editor's Note: North American B-25 Mitchells were medium-sized bombers and 9,816 were produced by the war's end.] In the B-25, we took radar sets from the manufacturer and checked them out on workbenches. We hooked them all up and had the antennas and everything and we checked them out to see that they worked and we kept them in storage. When they bring a B-25 bomber in, they had the internal radar. We'd just bring it out and set it … in the middle of the plane. There was a gun turret on each side. That's where the radio operator … sat. Well, that was where the radome [a protective housing for radar equipment] went. The radome went on the end of one wing. So, we had to put the radome on the end of the wing and the other part in the middle of the plane, and then, the plane had to be

flight checked, to make sure it worked. The catch and the gimmick was, they had a first sergeant and a lieutenant in charge and they went in the plane … and the plane flew and they checked it out and they landed it. The reasoning, of course, was that they got flight pay [laughter] and the guys doing the work of making the things work and putting them in, we didn't get flight pay.

SI: Did you ever go on any of the check rides?

RB: No, never got on a check flight, but it was so boring [that] I asked for a transfer. So, they put me on a transfer list. … The First Sergeant came around and he said, "Hey, suppose you stay here for one year and keep doing this, and then, we'll transfer you and we'll give you another stripe." So, I knew you don't get another stripe very easily. So, I said, "Yes, I'll stay." So, I said I'd stay and, in the middle of that year, an opportunity came to go to Gainesville, Georgia, to go to another radar school. … We were at the Gainesville, Georgia, airbase when President Roosevelt died and the airbase was sitting on a hill and the railroad was down here and the railroad, with the President's body, came up there. [Editor's Note: President Franklin D. Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, in Warm Springs, Georgia.] … We were sitting on the top of the hill, watching the President's body go by to Washington from there, but, three months down there, that was a tough duty. We had a girls' college in town, strictly girls. [Editor's Note: Brenau University was then a women's college in Gainesville, Georgia.] … Somebody loaned them a store, an empty store, and … a number of women would come down on the weekend and talk to you, and then, you'd sit and [they would] play cards with you, or something, for entertainment, but you got to meet the girls from the school, too.

SI: Did you have to get a security clearance to work on radar?

RB: Oh, yes, I had top secret, yes.

SI: Did they come and interview your family and friends?

RB: I asked a couple of times and the guy across the street from me in Teaneck, who is still around, … he worked on Norden bombsites. [Editor's Note: Norden M-9 bombsites, an American secret during the war, utilized a complicated analog motor to aid bombardiers in accurately dropping their payloads.] … I remember my mother telling me that they came around and investigated him. Now, of course, I don't think they would go to my parents and ask them about me, but I didn't ask the people around there. … We had to have a top clearance, yes.

SI: Were the B-25s that you were working on at Cherry Point flying antisubmarine patrols in that area? Were you getting them ready to go overseas?

RB: I don't know. We got Army ones that came in, too. … There were a bunch of the fellows that got shipped to California. At one point, the government decided to mount a seventy-five-millimeter cannon in the bomb bay of a B-25. Now, where the bombardier … could get down in the bomb bay, the guy … had to load the cannon. They put it right down in the nose. So, they set up a bunch of B-25s with seventy-five-millimeter guns and they had them on the West Coast. … They decided to test them out and, when they started testing them out, they found out that, when the cannon fired, the plane stopped going forward. So, they had the guys that'd already

been sent back. They had to send the guys all the way back to California to take … the radar, I think it was called "Henry," out of the bombers, because you couldn't fly and stop it. [laughter] [Editor's Note: The AN/APG-13 gun laying radar, codenamed "Falcon," was used in conjunction with the seventy-five-millimeter gun to provide range information to the gunner (bombardier).] It didn't work, but that was one of the things that happened about B-25s. The trip to Georgia was in the middle of that year that I was waiting out there on that post. … Georgia was an interesting base, because it was about a hundred yards square and it was enclosed with cyclone fence and it had no mess facilities. All it was was sleeping quarters and classrooms. To eat, we had to go to town and go to a restaurant and eat. Well, they shipped us down there and they didn't give us any quarters allowance, so, we didn't have the money to pay to eat. So, what the post commander did was, he took a boarding house in town and guaranteed the pay to them and we would get a bus and go into town to the boarding house, eat our meal at the boarding house, get our butt on the bus and come back. … They supplied all our meals until they could get the paperwork done on us, getting … a subsistence allowance, and then, the third month that you were there, you had to get quarters allowance and you stayed in a private room in town, in--I don't know what you'd call it--a private room. [laughter] So, we'd stay for a month there, in that private room, and then, go to class. … When we finished that, we got shipped out someplace else. Well, I got shipped back to Cherry Point, and then, … got back to Cherry Point and, finally, got shipped to the West Coast. Well, when I got to the West Coast, it didn't seem to be any … rhyme or reason as to where you were going. … [At] Miramar, all you did was physical exercise, and then, they'd call out your names--the lower ranked guys had to clean the base up. They'd pick all the trash up. The five-stripe sergeants, like I was, you didn't have to do that kind of work. So, you didn't do it [laughter] and I got shipped out of there. In Miramar, there was a town called El Cajon, behind San Diego, yes. I went to the school there. That was three months and this was a radar school for radar behind the front lines, on the ground, that would pick up incoming planes, or incoming, if it was a plains, an open country, it would [pick up] incoming enemy, and direct our forces to fight against them. While we went to that school and came back to the replacement center at Miramar, the next place that we got shipped out--I got put on that one--it went back to Cherry Point, North Carolina. … When I got to Cherry Point, North Carolina, I got sent to another school, which was identical to the one I'd just finished at in California. [laughter] … Then, I came back to Cherry Point, North Carolina, again and, when I got back there this time, the war was over and the beer trucks came onto the base, … those big trucks. [Editor's Note: V-J Day was declared on August 14, 1945, in the United States and August 15, 1945, in the Pacific.] … They were flatbeds they put them on and they made pyramids on them and they're full of beer cases. … The truck just drove down the street slowly and the guys'd come out and grab a case of beer. [laughter] I nearly got messed up one time. I went on leave from Cherry Point and I was in a barracks. I went on leave and I came back. I came in before reveille and I went to the barracks and, fortunately, they had a watch person on duty at the door. … It was a woman and she stopped me. They'd converted the barracks to women while I was gone. They'd taken the stuff out of the lockers and put it [elsewhere], but I had no way of finding that out. Fortunately, I got picked up or I'd have been wandering around a women's barracks and probably locked up. …

SI: You were stationed at many places across the nation. What were some of your impressions of the local communities and people?

RB: I didn't have any problems with that, except one time in Texas. I was coming out of Corpus Christi to go back to the base one evening and I got on a bus and the bus was pretty full. So, I went to the back of the bus and sat down on the back of the bus--and the bus sat there and the bus sat there. I said something to one of the guys, "Hey, what the heck's the bus sitting here for?" He says, "He's not going to move until you get out of that seat." I was sitting in a seat for colored people. Of course, they had no--well, the rules said they couldn't discriminate against them, but … blacks sat in the back. … Once, in California, … in Miramar, I was taking a physical for a transfer and I was in a long line of people going into the medical facility and a sergeant came down the street with about eight men. … They were in formation and he was marching, calling cadence. When they got opposite this big, long line going in for physicals, somebody hollered out, "Night fighters." This sergeant halted his eight men, faced our line with the eight men, and he said, "The man that said that want to step out?" and nobody moved, but we had no blacks in the Marine Corps. … These eight were the only ones I saw in the whole time, but it's not that way anymore, of course, but kind of weird. [Editor's Note: President Roosevelt first authorized African-Americans to serve in the Marine Corps in 1942, but they served in segregated units until the US Armed Forces were desegregated in 1948. Over thirteen thousand African-American Marines served overseas in World War II.] … I had a friend that was in another unit. … That unit's job was to, if a pilot was coming in and he couldn't see the ground, he had to be directed. Somebody had to talk him down. Well, this sergeant was in a unit that had the equipment … that you used to talk him down. So, he said they were short a top sergeant, so, … "Was I interested in doing that?" and I said, "Oh, yes, sounds fine." So, he spoke to his officers and they got me transferred to that outfit. So, I no sooner got in it than both the officers got discharged. So, they send me, "You've got to go to the office and sign for all this equipment here. You're responsible for it," and I knew just enough "legaleze" to say, "That's all well and good, but I can't be responsible. I can be accountable, but not responsible." … I refused to sign for the equipment and you couldn't operate the equipment without an officer, except in an emergency. Well, what they did was, they got a woman officer in the control tower and they told her, "You're responsible, you're accountable--you sign." She signed, but she never came and inventoried the equipment. I didn't think she was very bright. I never saw her. The last day, I was told I was leaving to go get discharged, and we had a house in the middle of the runway. … The guys that were in this unit, that operated this blind landing equipment, spent their time in the house. We didn't go to formations or anything. We just stayed out in our house. We had a little vegetable garden in the front. We were growing vegetables. We had to go in to eat, though, [laughter] but, anyway, I was told … I was to go on such-and-such a train to be discharged … and I was to be there at such-and-such a time. The time came that I was to leave to be there--nobody'd come for the equipment. I got in the vehicle and went across the runway and, as I was going across, a truck came the other way with a bunch of guys on it, never stopped, never said a word. I just went on. I got to the train station and they had a railroad strike. So, I went down the line and they says, "Well, train's going to leave, so, we'd better get on." So, we got on the train, no tickets. Nobody came to tell me that I had to go back and account for all that equipment back there. I got up to the next base, which was where I was going to get my discharge, and I couldn't wait to get that paper in my hand and get off the base, so that … when they decided that somebody was going to be responsible, it wasn't going to be me. [laughter] … Then, we got out of there. We got out of the service and, when we got out of the service, they had a thing called the 52/20 Club. [Editor's Note: The "52/20" clause of the GI Bill granted servicemen unemployment benefits of twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks.] Have you run into that?

SI: Yes, part of the GI Bill.

RB: Yes. I collected that for two weeks, and then, I found a job.

SI: You decided to go to work. Did you make plans to come back to Rutgers right away?

RB: Yes. … I got out in May, I think it was. So, I was going to go in the fall. Well, … I kept talking to Rutgers about it and they got me a job in Roselle Park, something [nearby], wasn't too far … from Teaneck. I could take a bus over there. They got me a job in the ceramic lab in this [factory]. It was a sparkplug factory and the sparkplugs were made with ceramics. So, I got this job working for them for the summer and I worked with a ceramic engineer and doing things with him, learning things about it. … They also had an industrial league softball team and I ended up being the catcher on the softball team for the summer and, when the summer ended, why, they treated me fine. I went back to school and stayed in the fraternity house. Oh, I got a job in the Army camp.

SI: Camp Kilmer?

RB: Camp Kilmer. [Editor's Note: Camp Kilmer, established in the New Brunswick area during World War II, was a main staging area for ports of embarkation on the East Coast.]

SI: Okay.

RB: I was in charge of a barracks over there, of freshman.

SI: Like a proctor?

RB: Proctor, yes. I was a proctor, for free quarters, and I did that for one semester and I said, "Either you move me … to a building on the campus or I quit, because I'm the only proctor you've got that goes out there to that thing at seven o'clock in the evening and takes care of his building," and I said, "and I don't care about the whole thing. I can't do anything about the whole thing. If you're not going to do anything about it, that's your problem. … I'll stay if you're going to do it with everybody, but I'm not going to be the only guy there." So, I walked out of it and I lived the rest of the time in the fraternity house.

SI: In that barracks, was it a mix of veterans and men coming right out of high school?

RB: Yes. It's a two-story building and the proctor got a room of his own, but the rest of the guys slept out in the open in the barracks.

SI: What was that like? How did the two groups get along? How did managing them work out?

RB: Well, you know, they didn't all come out there right after supper; they didn't have to. That was one of the things we were told we were supposed to do. If we were going to be proctors

there, we were supposed to be out there to take care of it, see that it kept quiet and help them with studying, if we could. … It wasn't too bad, I didn't think, but it could have been better.

SI: Did you see, particularly among the veterans, anybody having trouble adjusting to Rutgers?

RB: No, no, I didn't get a chance to do that, no.

SI: How would you get back and forth?

RB: They had busses, regular busses, yes. … I suppose it was a good, practical idea, but, at that time, they also had quarters over on the golf course. They had trailers and one of my good friends from high school, Pete Martens, he went to the Ag School at Rutgers, had gotten married as soon as he got out of the service and he brought his wife out there and they had a child. So, I'd go over, once in a while, and babysit for them at their place. …

SI: You said earlier that you came back with greater enthusiasm, or more dedication, for your classes.

RB: I had much better grades when I came back. Of course, … now, thinking back, the courses that I took with the Marine Corps were quite different. They didn't have books. … The guy was teaching the course and you had to study and get it while he was doing it. The only time we got any paperwork was when we got the schematics for the radio that we had to make at the one point. … Since everything was classified, you couldn't take it outside of the school compound. … I think that forced education was good for me.

SI: In the postwar period, did you get interested in a specialty within that course of study?

RB: You mean at Rutgers?

SI: Yes, at Rutgers.

RB: Oh, well, I came back to go to the ceramic program and just took the ceramic program. Now, it bounced around from … the College of Chemistry to the College of Engineering and I think we graduated in the College of Engineering, finally, but it was thoroughly confusing because, … like, chemistry, … you had a lab and you had a class, classroom session--where it was five points before the war, it was only three points after the war. It was different. Instead of a long course, you had a shorter course. One of my chemistry instructors had been an assistant, working at the University before the war, and the old prof would teach and, in his teaching chemistry, there were two hundred in the class. We sat in the engineering building; I don't know if it's still there. The seats were all banked. I had my first experience with a guy that had a stroke; not a stroke. He was sitting next to me. … Well, I guess it was a stroke. He [was] doing all kinds of weird things and, finally, ended up laying on the floor. It was my first experience with that. …

SI: Like a seizure?

RB: Yes. … I can't remember who that professor was, but he wasn't there when I came back. The assistant had taken over, and I didn't have any trouble with the course at that point, but I did in the [beginning]. I failed the first quarter and the first half. … I signed up for the second half and he said to me, "What are you coming to the second half for?" I said, "Well, I got a lot better grades … the last part of the thing and I think I'm making the grade." He said, "You can't pass the second half without passing the first half," and he proved it. So, I had to take the whole course. [laughter] … One of the things I took at the time, which was … calculus, was giving me fits and I … collected copies of the tests from the guys in the fraternity house and took them home with me. … Bergen Junior College was in Teaneck, New Jersey, at that time, or near there. … They had a woman that taught calculus. So, I took my paper, all the papers I'd collected, and I went to see her. … She gave us a course--there were four or five of us--and … I passed that course with, I think, a "B." … I took it back to Rutgers and they refused to accept it at Rutgers, and so, I had to take it again at Rutgers. … Of course, that was my fault. I should have found out in advance if they … wouldn't accept the credit for it from there. …

SI: Tell me about the ROTC training. What was that like for you?

RB: Well, before the war, everybody took it. The upperclassmen … were the officers and the lowerclassmen were the drill people. After the war, it was basically the same thing, but the guys that were up there had had experience in the military, that were in the top thing. Now, I came there and I had had five stripes as a sergeant in the Marines. Other guys … were sergeants in the Army and whatnot. We didn't have any problem. … Our instructor was a major and he was from Georgia Tech. … He was an ROTC [graduate]. … He was a regular lieutenant, first lieutenant, but he was … a Reserve major, and so, he was a Reserve major on active duty and he taught the course while I was there the two years and I checked up on him in an index someplace, not too long ago. He made it up to full colonel. … He wanted to be in the embassy staffs. He had married an English nurse and he and his wife were in Italy somewhere. He's long retired now--as I am. [laughter]

SI: At that time, I think they had started the Air Force ROTC.

RB: At Rutgers?

SI: Yes.

RB: They didn't have it when I was there.

SI: I was curious if you had a choice between the Army or the Air Force.

RB: No, I had a choice between--I didn't have the Marine Corps, either, as a choice. I had an opportunity. I went from Rutgers; I got a job, on graduating, in Mount Vernon, New York. The company I worked for was Commercial Decal, Incorporated, and they were building a new factory in Mount Vernon, and so, my wife and I lived in Mount Vernon and they were too busy building this new factory to teach me what they wanted me to do. So, I just was left to do my own [training]. So, I taught myself, went around and found out how they did all of it, and I spent the better part of six months … learning about the operation, and I forget what I was going to tell

you about it now. Anyway--oh, I know--I went to ROTC, I mean, to Reserve classes. They had a couple of Reserve units around. I went to them and got credit for the time. … Then, when I got sent to Ohio, for--they told me for two weeks--and my wife was teaching school in New Rochelle, so, she had to stay behind, but the two weeks ended and I didn't get sent back to … New York. So, then, they told me I was to stay there, and so, my wife said, well, she was going to stay the year, because she thought teachers got a dirty deal when they walk out all the time, and she'd fill her contract out. … I found a Reserve unit up in Youngstown, Ohio, Signal Corps. … I got with them and in back of our armory, a Marine armory, a Marine engineer unit, Reserve--and they came over and demonstrated pontoon bridges. … I said, "What the heck am I doing in the Army? Why don't I go and get in the Marine Corps and transfer?" and I thought about it and I thought about it and I didn't make any move to do anything. … All of a sudden, they got activated and they got shipped right over to Korea, and I said to myself, "Well, you dummy, now you know why you didn't go over there right away. [laughter] You'd be back in the service right away." So, I stayed in the Army Reserve and went to the correspondence courses and all of that stuff and I finally got promoted up to major, … but I was glad, at that point, that I did not go active. They got to Korea there just in time to get shot up pretty thoroughly.

SI: Did you ever get recalled to active duty?

RB: Summer camp, two weeks. The company I worked for, [at] first, … I used to get three weeks' vacation when I went to work for them, so, I'd take my time out of that. … The president of the company said, "Don't do that. Take the time besides." So, I'd take … two weeks to go to the summer camp with the Army unit and three weeks to go on vacation with my family, and I stayed with that company thirty-three years.

SI: I have one more question about Rutgers. You were there during the GI Bill period with a mix of veterans and high school students. How did that affect the experience in the classroom or the fraternity house?

RB: Well, in our fraternity house, once the war broke out, … we'd have dinner in the evening and it was a fixed time when we'd go to dinner. When we finished dinner and cleared the tables, they sang songs, college songs, <u>every night</u>. Other than that, before the war, the only time they ever did any singing like that was when they'd have dates there, for a dance weekend, but, … before they all got drafted and that, they sang every night now. They did some of it after the war, but not anywhere near the same. Before the war, we had, I think, five tables in the dining room, … one, two, three, four and a middle one. We had waiters--we were waiters--and we served the dinners out of the kitchen. We did it afterwards, too, but, after the war, they put a Ping-Pong table down the middle and they'd put the five tables around it. … We had a heck of a big dining room to feed, [laughter] … but we had a heck of a big fraternity, and it changed. A lot of guys didn't live in the fraternity house then. You got to live in the fraternity house by virtue of seniority, so, guys who were there before the war got first choice.

SI: Did the veterans affect the atmosphere on campus? You said of yourself that you were more mature, more dedicated to your schoolwork.

RB: Yes, the veterans did a lot of things differently. … A lot of the veterans had cars then, and so, they … could leave for the weekend, you know, and it was two cliques, with a lot of the guys. I think it didn't do them any harm. It was interesting, the ones that were killed. I'd never heard of paratroopers being used in the Pacific for the Army and, I remember, the last day, I think, I was on campus, I was playing poker with one guy, and then, after the war, he never came back. [Editor's Note: Elwood H. Hearne, RC '44, was killed in action on Negros in the Philippines while serving with the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment. He was one of fourteen Rutgers DKE fraternity members lost in the war.] I found out he'd gotten in the paratroops and he got killed … overseas. Yes, the trouble with the veterans, what the veterans did that hurt, was the drinking. I mean, there were guys there that just had to drink. I learned to drink a little bit, but I could leave it alone.

SI: Do you think they were using drinking to cope with things they had experienced in the war?

RB: Oh, they just drank to drink. I don't know. I mean, it's hard to judge, when you didn't get in with the shooting and everything, how it affected them. I was just reading a thing that came in today's paper, right there. … That's got experiences of a bunch of guys that got different medals in the military, and I can understand. Yes, you did what you were told, you know. That was the way it was. I remember riding from downtown San Diego out to the Miramar Airbase on a stake body truck. [Editor's Note: A stake body truck is a versatile vehicle that has a front portion similar to a pick-up, but a flatbed in the back similar to a tractor trailer.] … We got on the truck and drove down into San Diego and backed into this place. We had to load the back end of that truck with cases of whiskey and we loaded it right up to the stakes. Then, the guys that rode it down there had to sit up on top of it and ride back. Now, you never would have allowed that in civilian life, and we backed it into the officers' club to unload the whiskey. … The fellows hollered from down inside where they were unloading, "Hey, they got smoked turkey," and smoked this and this kind of thing, "and this hanging here. Anybody got a knife?" and there's a couple of us passed down knives and they passed back chicken. [laughter] … The officers' club had all the whiskey and everything they wanted, but it wasn't there for the rest of us.

SI: Did you ever consider applying for OCS [Officer Candidate School] when you were in the Marine Corps?

RB: While I was in the Marine Corps? No, there was no question of asking. Well, OCS for the Marine Corps is the Naval Academy [at Annapolis].

SI: Were there ever any accidents while working with the air units?

RB: I never saw any, but … they did say that the B-25s were--there was another "B." It was either--the B-24 was a four-engine, wasn't it?

SI: Yes.

RB: There was another two-engine.

SI: The B-26?

RB: Could have been, yes.

SI: The Marauder. [Editor's Note: The Martin B-26 Marauder was a twin-engine bomber that initially earned the nickname "Widow Maker" during the Second World War because of frequent crashes on both takeoff and landing.]

RB: Yes. … Nobody liked that plane. That one cracked up quite often, but the … people that were flying them, … there was a captain and a lieutenant in this outfit on blind landing that I was in for a short time and the captain would fly, like, a Cub, I don't know, nothing bigger than that. [Editor's Note: Piper Cubs were light aircraft built between 1937 and 1947.] … I remember, one day, he'd gone up in one of those planes and the gauge on something was a little bit out of whack and he immediately phoned in an emergency, "Clear the field. My plane, I've got to land." He landed and got out of the plane and got … off the strip in a hurry, and it wasn't anything serious at all. Right after that, they got rid of him, discharged him.

SI: When you were in that unit, did you ever have to talk anybody down?

RB: We went out once, and then, by the time we got out to [the airfield]--you had to drive two-and-a-half-ton trucks, a couple of them. One of them had two diesel generators in it, the other one had the radar in it, and you parked them on pads, concrete pads out on the landing strip, and then, the guys would … go in where the controls were and talk the plane down, when they [could], but we had to have our own power and our own equipment. … We didn't leave it in place; we only put it in place when we needed it. … We went out one time, after the officers had been discharged, and we got set up, finally, but the pilot, in the meantime, made a landing, and so, they didn't worry about it anymore, but they did not … want to do anything without an officer doing the talking the pilots down. … It was only in an emergency that an enlisted man could.

SI: Can you give me an overview of your career at Commercial Decal? What were your jobs? What did you find most interesting? What were the biggest changes that you saw?

RB: Well, when I went to work for Commercial Decal, they were making ceramic decalcomania for decorating dinnerware and glassware. Now, … when I came to work for them, their decals were made with lithograph stones. The stone was twenty-eight by about twenty-two inches and it was sandstone. It was about six inches thick and the etching was done on the stones and they printed off the stones. … As time went by, lithographic printing would develop to where they could print off of an aluminum sheet. The texture of the stone had to be etched technically, like you were cutting out the design. Now, … you took a stone and you cut out the design for--how can I describe it? Well, so, you wanted to do a flag and you got a red stripe, a white stripe and a blue field. You'd have one stone that had nothing but red stripes where they belonged. You'd have another stone where you had a white stripe, if you had to print the white in there on that part. Now, to do that, the rest of the stone had to be etched away. Now, it isn't etched in the sense of raised letters, like this. I mean, I don't think you could feel the etching with your finger if you rubbed it over. … How they made it work was, when you were going to put the red stripe down, you etched everything around the red stripe away. Then, the red stripe was; … black usually was put down on where the red was to go, and that would seal the way the red stripes

[went], seal the stone--the surface of the stone, it was sandstone--where the black was. Then, they'd go over the stone with water. … Water would be repelled by the black and it'd be absorbed by the area around where you had the black. Now, then, … you'd blow the thing lightly dry and the water would stay on the black area; well, … the black area would dry also. You'd roll over the surface with a varnish. The varnish would stick to the black area, but it wouldn't stick to the etched area around it. So, you'd run the stone through the printing press and you'd print a line. … You'd have a line of black that is sticky and the paper was laid on top, so that the paper would pick up the sticky area. Then, you'd take the next stone and put it on the press and you're going to put the white down. Now, the white has to fit that black area and you have to register everything, and then, you do the same with the water and you put the varnish down and you put varnish for the white. Well, when you get the varnish printed for the white, you'd run the stone through a duster, which would dust white on that varnish. Then, you're going to put the blue down. You make a blue stone and you put the varnish on for the blue and you run it through the color and it would stick to where they had the blue varnish. So, you've got blue, red, white here. Now, you run a piece of paper over the whole thing and you transfer the red, white and blue onto the piece of paper. … While the individual color was on the stone, you're putting it down for the white, or the red or whatever color, … you have to put the paper on last over it. So, your sheets have to dry--they pick up the color. … I'm sure I confused you, because I'm getting confused myself. [laughter]

SI: I can understand what you are saying.

BR: Well, have you seen silkscreen printing?

SI: A little bit.

BR: The t-shirts, you know, and the like.

SI: Yes.

BR: Well, later on in my career with them, silkscreen printing started to come in. … I had a building built for them in Ohio, East Liverpool, Ohio, where I lived, and … we did silkscreen printing. I hired a staff and I taught them how to do what I wanted to do and I worked for the same company and I'd sell their designs or I'd sell our designs. … Silkscreen is different, because, there, you paint the design in. You have, like, a window screen and you paint varnish over the place where you don't want color to go through the screen. … You make one screen for the red, one for the white, one for the blue. So, you run the color over it and the color is in a paste form. So, you print that color on the paper, then, you hang the paper up to dry. Then, you take the paper, when it's dry, you take the second color and you print it on it, and then, you hang it up to dry. … Then, you take the next color and you have to let the color dry--otherwise, when you put the pile of papers up, they'll all stick together. … The litho stones weighed in the range of six hundred pounds, so, it was a heck of a job working with those things. … The guys that did all the separating would do it on a small stone for one item. I'm trying to see something I had here that would [illustrate that]. … [Editor's Note: Mr. Bernstorf leaves to retrieve a dinner plate.]

[TAPE PAUSED]

RB: Now, you've got a gray stone, gray, you've got a red stone, you've got a couple of green stones, you've got a yellow stone and on all those things are …

SI: We are looking at a plate that you produced with a picture of a flower on it.

BR: Yes. See, that's (Capra?). I don't know why it says (Capra?). I don't think he was the one that did the painting, but that didn't happen to go into production. … We made proofs, were what you made up to try it out. … If the customer got interested in it, then, they'd go on from there, but … production runs, like Christmas plates and things like that, were big runs, twenty thousand sheets, and a sheet might hold a dozen plates. … So, my reasoning in getting out of the [company], retiring from the Commercial Decal, my father had had a heart attack at fifty-five years old, fifty-six years old, and I was sure I was going to have a heart attack. I had had some problem, since I had trouble getting into the service. So, when … I got to be fifty-four, I was taking my family down to the Outer Banks for a vacation and I went in the water and I felt these pains. … I came out of the water and the pains went away and I went in again and the pains [began] again, so, I came out. I was convinced I was going to die before fifty-six years old; I was fifty-four. I got in the car, took my wife, three kids and my trailer and we went from [the] Outer Banks up to East Liverpool, which is near Pittsburgh, and went to my doctor. … I was in the hospital the next day for a heart attack, [laughter] and, shortly after that, I had open heart surgery, which was new. … I think it ended up costing me two thousand dollars at that time and you can't get it for twenty-five thousand now. [laughter] … Anyway, I had the open heart surgery and I got back to work, but I decided that, as soon as I was eligible to retire, which was when I'd be sixty-two, I was getting out, and I did. So, I have been retired now twenty-some-odd years.

SI: Do you want to tell me for the record a little bit about the family you and your wife started?

BR: Yes, I had two boys and a girl. My wife, my first wife, was a school teacher and the one boy … graduated from Gettysburg. … Well, my daughter is the oldest and she went to Gettysburg and majored in music. … She played the piano and she got a degree in music, teaching degree. … I have a son that's next in line. He went to Gettysburg and he took music and, after the first year, he asked them what kind of job he could get. … They said, "Well, you could be a music teacher or in a traveling band, play the saxophone." He said that's not what he wanted to do. So, he switched to physics--happened that the guy that was running the physics department was a high school classmate of mine. … Anyway, he got graduated. He took three years of physics and got a degree in physics. Penn State offered Gettysburg, if you graduated in physics, you could go to Penn State for one year and get a degree in engineering. So, he signed up with Penn State and he came home for the summer vacation and I got him a job with a friend of mine from up in Wadsworth, Ohio. … They were interviewing for a job that weekend, if he'd show up. He did and he got the job, for the summer. So, he finished the job, summer, and he turned in a resignation and they said, "What are you doing that for?" He said, "Well, I only hired on for a summer job." "Oh, no, we want you to stay on." He says, "Well, I've got it all lined up to get a degree, a master's degree, in physics," I mean, in engineering, "at Penn State," and they said, "Well, we'll pay for you to go to college at Akron University, if you'd stay on. As long as

… you keep the grades up, we'll pay for the whole thing." So, he stayed on and … he's got a master's degree in engineering … at Akron and my daughter got married. … She married a guy that majored in music and he got to be in charge of a county in Pennsylvania, all the music teachers in the county, and so, she couldn't get a job, because it would be [a conflict]--he would be the one hiring her. [laughter] … She's worked at other things, but she's got a master's degree from Penn State in piano and my youngest son, he went to Ohio University--not Ohio State, Ohio University--in Marietta, Ohio, or, yes, I think it's over there, yes. [Editor's Note: Ohio University is located in Athens, Ohio, near Marietta.] … He wanted to be in broadcasting and do ballgames and things like that, but, when he graduated, he couldn't find a job. So, he started in with a friend of his and they were putting in these videotapes for stores and things to …

SI: Security cameras?

BR: … Rent out; no, for entertainment purposes. They sell them and rent them and whatnot. … Then, they realized that this company that's all around the place, where you rent tapes now, would put them out of business in a minute. So, they did that for about two years and they got out of the business. Then, he went looking for a job and he finally … talked to the postmaster, who he knew, and he said, "Yes, you can get a job with the Post Office, but you've got to go where the job is, and you might be in Alaska, it might be who knows where." So, he didn't like that. So, he happened to know the Sheriff and the Sheriff said, "Yes, you can get a job, but you've got to take a course in;" [laughter] oh, I've forgotten what you call it now.

SI: Criminal justice?

BR: Yes, criminal justice, "For six months, and you've got to pay for it yourself." He said, "But, I've got to eat in the meantime." "Well," he says, "we'll give you a job as a 911 operator." So, he worked eight hours a day as a 911 operator, and then, he'd go to school for eight hours a day, for six months. … He finally passed all of that. Then, the Sheriff said, "Yes, but you don't have any experience." [laughter] So, he rode with the deputies for a while, and as well as working in the 911, and then, they hired him. So, he's got twelve, fifteen years in with the sheriff's department in Delaware, Ohio. So, that's where my family is.

SI: You also continued your education at NYU and Pittsburgh. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

BR: Well, the company paid for me to go to NYU and take a course in sales management for one summer. So, I went back, from Ohio to New York. … I stayed with my parents, I guess, then, and I worked at … the factory in New York and I'd go down to the class in the morning. … When I finished the class, I'd take the subway up to the Mount Vernon [area] and go to the factory and work for the afternoon and spend the night somewhere until I finished that course. … That was convenient, because the guy that owned the factory had a sailboat and, a couple of weekends there, he took me on sailing trips from Long Island up to Maine and back and that worked out very well. … I went to the University of Pittsburgh and took another management course and I went to Geneva College and took another course there. This was just good for me, helpful for me. So, that was the end of my experiences. [Editor's Note: Geneva College is a

private Christian college founded by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. It has been located in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, to the northwest of Pittsburgh, since 1880.]

SI: Is there anything else you would like to talk about? Were you involved in any community activities?

RB: No. The only community activities I [was] involved in deeply was Boy Scouts. … It got to the point where my oldest boy … was getting to be twelve years old and … we didn't have a Scout troop near us. So, I started a Scout troop. … We built it up with friends of his and I stayed with that for quite a while and took those trips to Philmont. … I got a scholarship from Sears-Roebuck to go to Philmont for a week. I did that one summer. Then, I took the boys, a dozen boys, to Philmont two years in a row. Then, I took them on the (Anahweh Kenae?) canoe trips. Well, the boys changed somewhat each time, because some of them got older and dropped out, but it was kind of interesting. … When I first started doing it, I was doing it alone. I was the only adult on the trip, but, then, I got a friend of mine, who was … an eye doctor, and he and I took them together. … He's still involved in it and he's ninety, ninety-three, now. [laughter] He's still involved in it in Ohio.

SI: You answered all of my questions. Thank you very much for that.

RB: I can offer you a cup of coffee and a muffin. …

SI: No thank you.

VB: Actually, would you like to have lunch with us or do you have lunch plans?

SI: Thank you, I do not have lunch plans. Thank you for the interview and thank you for your service.

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

Reviewed by Hannah Sparks 11/12/12
Reviewed by Steven Acone 11/12/12
Reviewed by Thomas Acs 11/12/12
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/12/12
Reviewed by Robert Bernstorf 8/8/13