RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HERBERT BILUS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Herbert Bilus on March 20, 1998, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and …

Joseph Varga: Joe Varga.

KP: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. Your father emigrated from the Ukraine and your mother was a native of Hoboken.

Herbert Bilus: Correct.

KP: Why did your father come to this country? How did your parents meet?

HB: My father actually ran away from home because things were tough there, and actually came over at the age of fifteen by himself. He just wanted to get something better than what he had there. He got himself a bed in some kind of furnished place in New York and went from there. He, unfortunately, never had the time to get formal schooling because he had to work. He actually educated himself by reading the *New York Times*. I think he probably taught himself to read syllable by syllable. This is what he did all the time. He loved to read the paper. I remember, as a child, Sunday morning, he would get the *Times*, and I could see him mouthing the syllables. It took him a long time to get the thing through, but he managed through and was able to talk about events that were going on. This was the days before talk radio, and talk TV. He told me that one of the … goals he had set for himself was that he wanted to marry a native American girl. He didn't want to marry a foreigner. Sounds odd, but this is what he wanted and this is what he accomplished. My mother was born in Hoboken, and ultimately, my father had established a business and my mother worked for him. So, she married the boss.

KP: What type of business did he establish?

HB: He was a ladies apparel contractor and after he did that, he opened up a store in conjunction with his manufacturing business. The store survived the manufacturing business and he stayed in it all his life.

KP: Even through the Great Depression?

HB: Even through the Great Depression. I can recall those days very vividly, when he had purchased a piece of property and put his business there and they mortgaged the place. This is just hearing things at the dinner table. They mortgaged it to the hilt, and then the Crash came along and they couldn't make the mortgage payments. … He lost everything he had. He managed to save himself a few hundred, maybe a thousand, two thousand dollars and started in the business all over again and continued it on until he retired, until he was in his seventies.

KP: How many people did he employ?

HB: Not too many. My mother worked with him, and he had maybe three or four people, employees, working in the store.

Joe Varga: Is that the same store that you took over?

HB: No, no. How I got in the business, I'll jump all the way to that point. After the war, I came back and my father wanted to know, "What are you going to do with yourself?" So, I said, "Well, I'm probably going to go to law school." … I had taken a History/Political Science major. He said, "That's good, I'm glad you are going to do that." Then he said, "By the way, I'm going to have to move the store because they are upping the rent and so forth. So, what are you going to do in the meantime, before you get into school?" And I said, "Maybe I'll work around here." So, I worked in his store for a while and I liked it. I went buying in New York. I learned how to do buying. … He said, "Listen, if you decide you want to go into business with us, I'll open up a larger place. If not, I'll open up a smaller place and you go on and do whatever you want to do." I said, "No, I like this," and this is what happened. I stayed with it. I stayed for about two or three years and got married subsequently, and stayed there after I was married. Then I decided I wanted to go into business. So, I said to my father, "Listen, Dad, we have to open up another place, because this is not big enough to produce enough money for another family." So, he said, "Okay." So, we went around looking for locations all over North Jersey and he found fault with every place that we went. The rent was too high [or] the place was too small. … I remember interviewing some landlords in New York City on Fifth Avenue for a store that was supposed to be in Hackensack and when we got out of there I was a little embarrassed because we had gotten down to the point of drawing up a lease, and my father found some fault with the lease. I said, "Listen, what are we doing here? Are you trying to make me happy by going around, are we going to do this or are we going to find fault?" He said, "No, no, we're going to do it." I said, "Well, when?" He says, "You have to have it on your terms, under your conditions, no matter what they say, you have to hang tough." So, he and my mother went away on vacation and while he was away I saw an ad for a store in Bloomfield, as a matter-of-fact. I went out and took a look at it and I liked it, and told the man, "I'm going to take this place." So, the folks came back from vacation and I told them that I found a place. So he says, "Oh, really. Where?" I said, "In Bloomfield, come on, let's go take a look." We go out and take a look. We look at the town, and he says, "I think this is going to be a good place for us." I said, "Dad, wait a minute. This is not going to be for "us", this is going to be for me." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm going to go into business for myself. I'm going to have to use your credit. I'm going to ask you to loan me some money, but I want it to be my place that's going to rise or fall on what I do, and I'll feel better about it and you won't be obligated to support me."

KP: Was he disappointed?

HB: He was disappointed, in a way, and when we went to open the store we didn't have a name for the place. The store that we had in Hoboken was called "Bilus." That's all. It had the name in neon lights on the outside. It looked pretty good. So, he assumed that was going to be the name here. So, I said, "We haven't got a name." He said, "What do you mean you haven't got a name, it's going to be Bilus, isn't it?" I said, "No, it's not going to be Bilus," and for the very reason that you [Piehler] mis-pronounced my name. Originally, when I was going through school, no two teachers pronounced it properly. It was "Bee-lus" from the Latin teacher, "Bill-us" from someone else. Everybody had a different way of saying it. I said, "No, I'm not going to

go through that. The name doesn't mean anything in this town, even though it had a long reputation in Hoboken. So, we have to start with a new name." So, we didn't have a name until about two weeks before the store opening, and I said to my wife, …"We better find a name." … Our first daughter was named Jane, so I said, "You know what, we'll call it Lady Jane," and that's what it was. We had the sign made, put it up there. After a while, my father got used to it and he sort of realized what I had said to him about the mispronunciation and the fact that Lady Jane was a nice, easy name to remember, and he took it pretty well.

KP: How long did you own the store in Bloomfield?

HB: I had the store in Bloomfield, that store, expanded four times, I had it forty-three years. I was there from the beginning until I retired.

KP: Is the store still there?

HB: No, I liquidated it. It was unsellable, as retail stores became, in that era. 1993, I closed it. Started in 1950 and closed it in 1993.

KP: That is quite a long time for a retail store.

HB: Yeah.

KP: Most stores do not survive for more than five years.

HB: I mean, we didn't make a million dollars, but I supported my family, and we were comfortable. We never had to worry about … We had some bad years.

KP: I would have been surprised if you said you had not.

HB: Yeah, we had some bad years, but we overcame them and created a strong bond in the family, although, my kids never wanted to work there. One daughter did, for one summer. She was very good, and it evolved. Today she is a vice-president of a big company in New York, related to ladies apparel, and she says, … "I always remembers working in the store." She worked for many years with Saks 5th Avenue and Bloomingdales and, now, she is in the manufacturing end.

KP: She has continued the family tradition in retail.

HB: No, she is in manufacturing.

KP: Oh, manufacturing.

HB: After Bloomingdales, ten years, she got into manufacturing. She had stayed home awhile with her kids and then she got an offer she couldn't refuse.

KP: You were born in Jersey City, but you are a Hoboken native.

HB: Only legally I was born in Jersey City. My mother went to a doctor who was in Jersey City and that's where she had the baby.

KP: Otherwise, you are a Hoboken native.

HB: Hoboken, through and through. I mean it's still my original place, my town. I go there occasionally for dinner. I still like it, not to live there, but just to drive through and point out, "I used to live there," or "I used to live here."

KP: What was it like to grow up in Hoboken? You mentioned that it was a tough town when you were growing up.

HB: Well, I recall kids having street fights, things of that nature. It wasn't unsafe in that scheme of things.

KP: However, it was tough.

HB: It was tough, and people who were a little more genteel were not accepted readily. You had to go out and you had to fight your way home from school more or less. … Kids were smoking on the street at the age of ten. I remember my first cigarette. In fact, Sy and I, we were walking down the street and we went to a candy store and bought cigarettes. You bought them loose, for a penny a-piece.

KP: This is Sy Silberberg.

HB: Yeah. I can recall it vividly now that I think about it. We walked down and we lit these cigarettes up, and looked around to make sure nobody saw us and I took one puff and almost choked to death on the spot. I couldn't get my breath back.

KP: Did you eventually take up smoking?

HB: Smoking, I'll tell you when I took up smoking. I was a little past seventeen when I came to Rutgers. I had graduated in June. I was seventeen in July. September I came to Rutgers and the first thing I got was a pipe. Everybody had a pipe. … I hadn't smoked after that ten-year old cigarette. I gave it up. One cigarette was enough. So, I smoked a pipe and I came home for a weekend, about a month later, and very casually I took out my collegiate pipe and I put some tobacco in, and my father looks at me, and he said, "So, tell me what you learned in school." I said, "We just started." He said, "Because I see you learned how to smoke a pipe, is that what you went there for?" I said, "No, everybody smokes a pipe". My father had never smoked in his life. He said, "It's a disgusting habit, you ought to give it up." I said, "Well, I really don't smoke, I just carry it around and light it every once in a while." But I smoked, I smoked the pipe for about a year, and then I went into cigarettes. … I smoked cigarettes for about twenty-five years, and gave it up after I was about forty-two or so. Cold turkey.

KP: You were successful.

HB: Yeah, I never went back to it again. Although my wife smoked quite a bit and continued on smoking until she had a heart attack. Then she gave up that day. She is still around, no smoking.

KP: Hoboken was a tough town, but it was a thriving city. It still is thriving, actually.

HB: It's had a re-birth now, but in those days the streets were always crowded with shoppers and there were vibrant stores on the main street. Hoboken was known as a town of saloons. On one street there must have been twenty-nine saloons, between Second and Third on Hudson Street. Every location was a saloon. They had no rules about doing it. I think if you paid enough graft to the politician, you got a license, and the reason for that was the fact that Hoboken was a port and ships came in from Europe. They had the Scandinavian, Holland-America Line, the Cunard Line, the United States Line and they all had ships at the various piers. So, ships would be coming in on a daily basis, and all of these people would be coming in from out-of-town to bring people to the ships, to take them off, and to pick them up. So, you always had new people coming in, and, consequently, you had a lot of saloons for the crews when they came back from their trips. You know, it wasn't a five-day trip in those days. It probably took maybe eight, ten days to cross the Atlantic.

JV: Were those still the days when a fifteen-year-old could walk into a saloon or were there rules?

HB: Oh, no, no, you couldn't. I think you had to be twenty-one at that time and as kids we did not drink.

KP: You started smoking, but not drinking.

HB: No, drinking we didn't get into until I got to Rutgers. That's the second thing I learned. You know, when they had their big weekends at school, someone always managed to get some liquor brought in and we learned how to drink. In fact, I don't want to squeal on him, but one of my friend's father and his wife came down to the fraternity house and volunteered to be chaperons. … He was a traveling salesman and he came down with a suitcase and the suitcase was fitted out like a miniature bar and he mixed the drinks, and he actually introduced us to drinking, in a way. I don't want to blame him for it. … He was a good guy and everybody loved him. He supplied the liquor and showed them how to do it. He was invited back to chaperon many times thereafter.

KP: I have a feeling I know who it is.

HB: I won't mention any names. You do know who it is.

KP: Were you an only child?

HB: No, I had a sister.

KP: You had a sister.

HB: I still do, an older sister, a couple of years older than I. We are very close today, in fact, probably one of the few people, at one of our recent milestone birthday parties I remarked on the fact that we never had an argument in all the years, never had a cross word and always had a friendly relationship. In fact, I spoke to her this morning, spoke to her last night, spoke to her this morning and her children the same way. I feel they are my children. We have a very strong family tie and relationship. We get together on all holidays and think our kids have learned the value of family life, and they have taken it on from there. They host various family get-togethers now. They take turns doing it. Nobody asks them to do it. Among themselves, though, they take turns and we always look forward to it.

KP: It sounds like you had a large extended family.

HB: Well, my father had eight siblings in his family and they lived in the metropolitan area and each one of the siblings had four children, except he, who only had two. So I had, at one time, thirty-one first cousins on one side of the family. … They ranged in age from my mother's age down to my age. I was one of the younger ones. I still maintain contact with those who are alive, and my mother had six siblings, but they were not as prolific and, so, I had on that side of the family, about nine or ten cousins whom I still talk to. I value family.

KP: How observant was your family? Did you keep a kosher household?

HB: No, no.

KP: You mentioned the holidays were important. Did your parents belong to a synagogue?

HB: Yes, they did, and we observed all the holidays, but we were not kosher. We had kosher-style, I would say. In other words, in our house we never had ham, things of that nature, but the food itself wasn't what you would call kosher food necessarily, as far as I know. We didn't mix meat and milk.

KP: You were pretty close.

HB: And I have a kosher home now. My wife always maintained because she came from one and two of my three daughters maintain kosher homes only because they wanted to do it. We never make any demands on them. We eat out. We eat all kinds of ethnic foods out. You name it. We have eaten it.

JV: Was there a large Jewish community in Hoboken?

HB: No, not too big, but it was a strong closely-knit community and I had other friends from school, but they were not as close as the kids I went to religious school with, for some reason or other. That's the way it develops. …

KP: What did you do for fun? Did you go to the movies or play games?

HB: Well, we played all kinds of sports, sandlot sports. When I went to high school, we had no football team and in my senior year they developed a baseball team. The only sport they had was basketball. Basketball was a great sport in Hudson County and this is what we rooted for, but we did play a lot of sandlot games. We played baseball and football and had pick-up teams. We used to advertise in the local paper for teams to play in the surrounding towns. We would challenge them. As a matter-of-fact, my friend Sy was the pitcher on the team and I was the catcher, and this was the way all the teams were formed. They formed around us and we won some. We lost some. … Generally, when we played a game there was a side bet, anywhere between a dime and a quarter a man and this was for real stuff, you know. We had a lot of fun there. In school, we did a lot of crazy things, too. We used to shoot crap in the classroom on lunch hour when the teacher wasn't around. We had a daily game there, right on the teacher's desk. This is in high school. Also, at dances, the proms, it was always customary that there was a crap game going on in the john. We didn't run that. The older guys ran that one. We had baseball pools and football pools, which we sold tickets for, and drove cars when we didn't have a license, when we could get a car. … I recall driving at the age of about fifteen on 9W. I shudder when I think about it, now.

KP: Did you ever get caught?

HB: Well, one time after a dance, we were making some noise and I went home, and a few of my friends continued on the way home and they start kicking over ash-cans. People started to complain and the police came up, and arrested about four of them. Took them into police headquarters, put them in the klink, and, I don't want to mention any names, but his initials were S.S. They put him in the klink and his older brother came down and bailed him out, and he said, "I ought to leave you here overnight," but he bailed him out. I think it cost ten dollars at the time. … He is ninety years old and I see him on occasion, and say, "Ben, remember when you bailed Sy out of jail?" He says, "Yeah, I well remember. He still owes me the ten bucks".

KP: Did you ever go into New York?

HB: Yes, this is one of the main events in school. Once a month, we would cut school in the afternoon and we'd go to the burlesque. As a matter-of-fact, the burlesque was in that building they just moved on 42nd Street. The Empire Theatre I think it was called, or the Gaiety Theatre.

KP: Was it a burlesque house?

HB: It was a burlesque house when I was going to school. We would go over on a bus, or a ferry. We would go up to 42nd Street and there, the oldest one of the group, you had to be seventeen I think to get into the burlesque. You know when your fourteen or fifteen you can't

pass for seventeen. One of the guys, who looked a little older, he would go up and he'd buy five tickets and we would go in. And when I think about it now and the things that we did, our kids and our grandkids don't have that freedom today to go where they want to go because they have to be taken everyplace. … To think of letting a kid go to New York by themselves, well, maybe at fifteen you do today, but I remember going to visit one of my cousins in Brooklyn. It was about an hour trip by tubes (now called PATH) and subway. My mother let me go when I was ten or eleven years old because I knew the way. I would explain how to go, what trains I had to change for and I had to walk ten blocks to the station when I got there because safety was not a problem. I mean, you get over there, ask somebody where you are and how to get there and so forth. So, we did have an advantage of a little bit of freedom.

KP: Did you ever go to summer camp?

HB: No, I didn't. Boy Scout camp I went to one summer. I went to, I think, a couple of over-night camps, not sleep-away. My grandmother lived in Bound Brook. You know were Bound Brook is? Not too far from here. So, we would visit her every other week, so that was country. They had trees and grass. In Hoboken, we never saw trees or grass. So, we had a great time then, and we would go visit somebody who owned a farm across the street and she would show us the chickens and the eggs and the cows, and so forth. So, that was our exposure. Except for vacations, which we went up to the Catskills in the summertime for a two-week vacation and we were Shore lovers. We would go down to the Jersey Shore, or to Coney Island and go on the beach. My father was a sun worshipper. He loved to be out in the sun. So, any time he could get out of the store, he was out in the sun. We didn't know then that it was bad for you, so, I developed a little skin cancer as a result. This here, and a few other spots, but we managed to survive.

KP: Did your family ever go on vacations? You mentioned visiting Bound Brook, but did you ever travel beyond the New Jersey-New York area?

HB: No, as children, no. We went up to the Catskills, which is one hundred miles away.

KP: That was the big outing.

HB: That was the big outing. It was a two-week vacation and we would go every summer, and do that.

KP: Did you stay at a resort hotel?

HB: Yes, we would go to a hotel and stay in the hotel, very much like the hotels they have today, with entertainment and the whole thing, and that was a treat that we looked forward to each year. But our main pleasure in the summertime was going to the beach on Sundays, or, sometimes during the week, when they could sneak away. … We would meet a lot of cousins and stake out an area on the beach, and we'd have a great time. Nothing fancy, just free water, free sand, and the ice-cream man would come around, or the hot-dog man, and we would have a few rides on the boardwalk. It was a great time. We would come home burnt to a crisp.

JV: Were your parents political? Did they support Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal?

HB: No, they were not political, they were Democrats. … In Hoboken, you could not be a Republican. They had a regime in those days called the McFeeleys and one was mayor, one was chief of police. One had the garbage contract, and one became superintendent of schools. You couldn't be much tighter than that and he was, in Hoboken, what Mayor Hague was in Jersey City. He also was a staunch supporter of Hague. In fact, one of my uncles was a truant officer in Hoboken. And I'll never forget, as a side comment, during the war, I had to vote with an absentee ballot when I was away, and I was home on leave, it happened to be election day. So, I went up to visit my uncle, who was at the polls. He said, "Oh, I'm glad you came up, you can vote." I said, " I voted, absentee ballot." He said, "It doesn't make any difference, come on, you can vote again." I said, "Not me." … So I said, "No, not me, but thanks very much for the opportunity." They voted dead people, anything they could. They had names, they went down to the cemetery, picked up names. That's the way things were. If you wanted a job, you wanted to become a teacher, you paid the fee, you got a job. You wanted to become a cop, you paid the fee, no big deal, and that's the way it was.

KP: Was your father required to make contributions?

HB: If he did, I didn't know it. They did have a night security guard that walked up and down the main street, in addition to the police force. … He got a fee from each storekeeper, like a dollar a month. You get a couple hundred guys he was getting two hundred dollars a month. This is extra. He would try every door. He did a [good] job. … Sometimes you would leave a store door open, he would call you up, "Come down and lock your store." You didn't have to worry about the police breaking into your store, as they do today, as you read about in West New York, and other places.

KP: It sounds like you had a good time in high school, socially. How did you fare on the academic side of school?

HB: Unfortunately, I felt I really didn't learn how to study in high school. As a matter-of-fact, another aside, we were, Sy and I, very active in all the after school activities.

KP: What were you involved in?

HB: Oh, the Latin Club, the Chess Club, the Drama Club, whatever they had, we were part of it, and also, we liked to shoot pool. So, in our senior year, we cut school at twelve o'clock, and we would go up to the local pool parlor and shoot pool everyday. And we always had excuses, we would give the teacher an excuse. We were doing an errand, or we were doing a club duty. Somehow, for several months, we got away with it, all during our senior year. It didn't help me at school. Sy was a good student and the knowledge came to him easily. I didn't care too much about it and didn't pay attention, so, for me it was a little more difficult. Anyhow, we both wound up at Rutgers.

KP: Did your parents expect you to go to college?

HB: Oh yeah, that's a given.

KP: That was a given.

HB: That was a given, there is no such thing as … not going to go to college. In our family, all the boys, in that time, went to college and sometimes girls did. …

KP: Did your sister go to college?

HB: She went and didn't stay too long. She went for about six months. She went to NYU for six months. For whatever reason it was, I don't know, she thereafter went to a secretarial school and became a secretary. … Girls didn't necessarily have to go to college as boys were supposed to and expected to. … There was no such thing as "if you go," or "would you like to go," you went.

KP: Why did you choose Rutgers?

HB: Well, I wanted to go away from home for school. Yet, I didn't want to go too far away. I think, at that time, it was the only school I applied to.

KP: You did not consider applying to NYU.

HB: No.

KP: … Or another school in New York.

HB: No. In fact, Stevens was in Hoboken. My brother-in-law was a Stevens grad and the only thing we did at Stevens … was play tennis there in the summertime, everyday. They had beautiful clay courts and they didn't have summer school to the extent that they have now. Sy and I would go up there and walk through the gate. … We got to know the groundskeeper and he let us play on the courts. We played tennis, every morning, a couple of hours. Nobody else was there.

KP: Did you work in your parents' store?

HB: No.

KP: Did you work at all growing up?

HB: Yes, I worked. I played in a band. I had my own band. I played piano from the time I was eight years old and took lessons. I liked it and I practiced everyday, and my sister did. In those days, we talk about it today, my mother made some sort of contact with somebody in New York. … We went to New York, my sister and I, and took lessons from a person named Clarence

Adler. We didn't know he was a famous person at the time, but he happened to be a very well known musician. He is the father of Jerry Adler, who became a producer, or writer on Broadway. … He had an apartment on Central Park West, and my sister and I used to go from Hoboken, and go up to 96th Street, and walk back two blocks and go to his house. … He had a beautiful living room overlooking Central Park with two baby grand pianos back-to-back, very impressive. … We took a half-hour each lesson, charged at five dollars a half-hour. So, in those depression days, ten dollars for lessons for kids, we didn't know it, but it was a lot of money. I don't know what would be the equivalent today, but it has got to be at least one hundred dollars.

JV: Did you think of staying in music as a career?

HB: Did I think of it? I thought of it. I thought of it, and after playing piano for about seven years, my father bought me an accordion when I was fifteen. … I took some lessons on the accordion, and when I was sixteen, between the accordion and the piano, I formed a little band. We played in the gin mills around Hudson County, also a story in itself. We played in the worse dives you ever heard of.

KP: How much did you get paid for a set?

HB: I'll tell you what we got paid, anywhere between three and six dollars a night, not an hour, a night. We played from nine o'clock at night until three in the morning, when they had to close these places. So, if you want to figure out what we got paid per hour, it wasn't too much.

KP: At the same time, you were being paid to play music.

HB: Right, and you know to us it was fun. If my mother ever knew the kind of places we played in, forget about it. When I came home at night and I can recall my sister saying, "You have got to hang your clothes on a line." … When we played on these jobs, most of the time we wore tuxedos. I wore a tuxedo out by the time I was seventeen, and [when] I came home, it reeked from cigarettes and beer. … We had to hang everything out on the line, but it was a great experience. … We had a drummer and he had all his equipment, we would pile that in, and my accordion, and the guy with the saxophone. Hardly room for us, but we all piled into one car, and we went to our job.

KP: Did you continue playing in college?

HB: Yes, I did. I played. Oh, I have to tell you a funny little story. I played in a bar called the Roadhouse, in those days. It was on Route 28. It so happened it was owned by one of my mother's brothers. So, he said, "Listen, you will come over and play over here on Saturday nights, and I'll take you back." You know, I didn't have a car. … I would go over to Middlesex on Route 28. … I would drag my accordion on a bus. … My job was to play. He had a piano player, who played all night long, constantly, and all he got paid was a bottle of gin, and he would play piano and drink gin. He was an excellent pianist, a great musician, and a great gin drinker, and when he took time out, I played the accordion.

KP: What did you get paid?

HB: I got paid cash. My uncle was very generous. He gave me five dollars. He treated me very well. You know, that was good money then, but I had to stay there until he got ready to drive me back. The place closed at three o'clock and he wanted to clean up the bar until four. Then he would say, "Oh, I'll take you home," which was to the dorms in New Brunswick, or the fraternity house. … On the way back, he would say, "I want to stop off and see a friend of mine." So, we would stop off, near where the stadium is there was a place called the Nine O'clock Club, and we would go in there and he would put a twenty-dollar bill on the bar and treat everybody in the bar. We would be there until about five, five-thirty. Then, I would say, "Come on, you know, I'm falling asleep, I want to get back." [He would say], "Okay," and we got in the car and we had to stop. He would say, "I have to have something to eat." So, we would stop off on Albany Street into a restaurant, and he would have a full breakfast, which was like his main course then and he would probably force me to eat. He would say, "You got to eat, you just can't go home without eating, you have to eat." So, I ate. By the time I got home to the dorm, I would walk in, it was seven o'clock in the morning. My clothes reeked again, and my roommate said, (I speak to him once in a while yet,) he said, "For crying out loud, get those clothes outta here. Hang 'em outside," and we went through that. I don't think I did that more than a year, though. One year of that, and that was the end of my professional career of playing, but I always enjoyed it. I still play for my own entertainment. The only time I get paid now is to stop playing.

KP: Before the interview began, you mentioned that "freshmen week" was very significant because you made a lot of friends that week. You entered Rutgers with Sy Silberberg.

HB: Right.

KP: You made new friends.

HB: Well, Sy wasn't my roommate because Sy was going to go to another school. He was going to go to the University of Illinois, and at the last minute he decided to go to Rutgers, for whatever reason. … He couldn't get a room in a dorm, so he took a room in a roominghouse on Hamilton Street. … You know, in those days the entire Rutgers population was, I think, fifteen hundred. That's four classes. I don't think I'm mistaken about that. The freshmen class was about four hundred, then it scaled itself down to seniors. So, you got to know everybody, and freshmen wore "dinks" in those days. I don't know if they do today. I doubt it. So, they banded together. They were forced to be together because of their identity. You couldn't be caught without a dink on campus, and you had to say "Good morning" or "Hello." Was it "Hello?"

KP: I forget, but there was a greeting tradition.

HB: Yeah, you had to say "Hello" to everyone you met, not "Good morning," but "Hello." Well, Sy came along with me from his room on Hamilton Street and the other fellows, who were part of our group, my roommate, Bill Gutter, and Artie Roth, who lived in Ford with another person he roomed with. He became part of the group. So, they all wanted to join the same fraternity, all of us. [We] remained friends, lifetime friends.

KP: You mention the dinks. There was quite a bit of class rivalry, particularly between the sophomores and the freshmen. Can you remember that?

HB: Some of the tricks, I remember. I remember one time, somebody had a car and one Saturday night we lifted the car up and put it on somebody else's porch. I don't know how he ever got it off. Some of the crazy things we did. I know one time after Pearl Harbor, we were at that time seniors, this was not a fun thing, but we decided to go down to Washington and see how Congress would declare war, because, actually, war is declared by Congress.

KP: That was the day after Pearl Harbor.

HB: Right. So we drove down to Washington. One of the fellows, I think Bill had a car and we drove down to Washington D.C.

KP: On December 7th?

HB: No, December 7th was a Sunday. This was on a Monday or a Tuesday. … We wanted to see what would happen and we saw it. Washington was hustling and bustling.

KP: Did you actually get into the hall, in Congress?

HB: I believe we did. I believe we did. I can't swear to it, but you know, we tell a story over and over again, I may have been on the podium by now. You keep exaggerating or embellishing.

KP: But I think you are not embellishing that Washington was really a buzz?

HB: Oh, everybody was running around. By that week, all those who were senior ROTC students were given notice. They were given their commissions and they had orders drummed up. By the end of December, these guys were on their way to, they were given their Second Lieutenant commission and they were on their way to camp. Wherever they were assigned to and the rest of that year, the last half of our senior year, school was just incidental.

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HB: After Pearl Harbor, school was incidental, and those who got their commissions were given their orders and sent on their way. … They were also notified that they were going to get their degrees automatically. They didn't have to finish the rest of their year. The rest of us had to decide what we were going to do. A group of us decided we were going to join the Navy. So, they had a program called the V-7 program. You had to be a college graduate and be physically fit and pass your physical. They would send you into a school and in one hundred and twenty days they would turn you into an ensign. That sounded pretty good. So, four of us went down to New York, where the Naval District Office was and we all went in for our exams. We had our school papers with us. The first exam was an eye exam. Everyone went up there and took their

eye exam, all passed, and I failed the eye exam. I never wore glasses. Some of these other fellows wore glasses for reading. I never wore glasses. I was very depressed and I said to them, "Can't you do something for me?" to the chief. He said, "No, you didn't pass the eye exam. You have to have good eyesight. I'm sorry, you can't go on any further than this." So, the three other guys proceeded to the next room and he said, "Listen, you go around the corner, there is a Coast Guard recruiting office there and they have the same program. They call it by another name, but they don't have the equipment we have to test you. Maybe you will pass their eye exam." So, I walk around the corner and I walk in this room, it's about twice the size of this room. There is a Chief Petty Officer sitting at the desk and he said, "What can I do for you?" Nobody else is there. I said, "… I wanted to apply for officer training school and see what kind of a program you offered." "Okay, you have to take an eye exam," and he never looks up. He said, "Stand against the wall, there." Then he says, "See the eye chart there?" I said, "Yeah, I see it," and he says, "Okay, cover your left eye with that cardboard and read the chart." So, he is reading and writing. So, I take the cardboard and I hold it like this, and I read the chart. I never covered my eye and he never looks up. He said, "That's good, now cover your other eye." … I go like this and I switched the cardboard to the other hand. He said, "Okay, you pass," and that's how I got in the Coast Guard. I tell that story many times and people just roll on the floor.

KP: I know Bill Gutter did serve in the Navy.

HB: They all did. So did Artie Roth. Artie served. Bill served on an aircraft carrier, was awarded some medals for bravery under fire and Artie was on a destroyer in the Pacific. Another fellow, Mortie Weiss, who was on the swim team at Rutgers, he became an ensign, also. I don't know what happened to him and I wound up in the Coast Guard.

KP: Before we talk about the Coast Guard, I want to ask you a few more questions about Rutgers. You mentioned that Hoboken didn't prepare you to study that well. Although, some of that, I get the feeling, was your own doing, in part. You were definitely bending some of the rules.

HB: Right. I was never a good student. Although, I liked to read then and I still do. I was a good reader. … [I was] always reading one book or another, but I didn't know how to study.

KP: How did your first year at Rutgers go?

HB: It was a disaster. As a matter-of-fact, I have a letter some place at home from the Dean of Men, who was called Dean Marvin, way before all of your times. … He sends me a letter and it says that he would suggest I withdraw from school because with the kind of record I have from my first year it was highly unlikely that I would ever get a degree from Rutgers and he really cut me to the quick, but I had flunked. I had taken pre-med courses.

KP: So, you really thought you would like to be a doctor?

HB: Sure, every Jewish boy wanted to be a doctor, except it wasn't for me. I flunked botany, chemistry, algebra. I didn't make a good record at all. So, I went up and spoke to the Dean and I

told him I had gotten his letter and I said, "Look, I want to stay. Apparently, this is not for me, but I will go to summer school and pass what courses are necessary and I will change my curriculum next year." … He said, "You go to summer school. You pass two of these courses and we will not drop you." … I said, "I'll go for history and political science." So, I went to NYU and I took algebra and chemistry at NYU, and I applied myself and I passed the course. Not only did I pass the course, I really learned the subject and algebra became very easy. I attributed it to a better instructor than the one I had here. … I came back and took history and political science and one of my minor courses I always put in from that point on was a music course. Music I knew. Soup Walter was giving the course and I always had a course with him, every year, and I always got an "A," which helped my average.

KP: And Soup Walter is still going strong.

HB: I know, I know. I read about him in the magazine.

KP: So, it sounds like you had a good time at Rutgers.

HB: I did. I had a very good time. I enjoyed all the years. They were very formative years. How I wound up in the dress business after being a history/political science major. Well, I did want to go to law school and one of the fellows I met in the service and served with, he said, "After we get out of this, we will go to law school together." … In fact, on my papers, which I had looked at not too long ago, this was my plan at the time, go to law school and then the other deal presented itself and I had my choice. … I felt at the age of twenty-three that I was too old to start going to school again. I didn't realize I had a long life ahead of me.

KP: But at the time, you didn't want to go back to school?

HB: I didn't want to go back to school and I felt that I had to earn an honest living now. I couldn't still be a schoolboy. My friend went to Cornell Law School. He said there was no problem getting in. In those days, there were no LSATs. You just sign the application and based on what they thought of you they would accept you. He became a prominent attorney in Easton, Pennsylvania, today. And that was the end of my professional career.

KP: You mention that your two favorite professors were Professor George and Professor Burns. Could you talk a little about why they were your favorites?

HB: Well, Professor George gave his lectures in an entertaining way. He was very informal and he made learning and reading seem to be fun and interesting, and the way he brought all the dates out, … he was good. Burns, on the other hand, was very strait-laced, serious man. Naturally, he knew his subject from A to Z and he made sure that you studied it the way he taught it, by the book, no deviation.

KP: He wrote the book.

HB: He wrote the book, so, you might as well do it that way. That was the only book we had, but they stand out in your mind. I can picture him, even today. In those days, everybody wore, I think we wore shirts and ties, when we went to school, and jackets. I'm still doing it.

KP: You also went to a school that had a very elaborate social calendar. My students, Joe and others, have gone back and read the *Targum*, and they are very envious of, for example, the bands that you had and the Soph Hop, and the Junior Prom and the Military Ball.

HB: Oh, yeah, these were the focal points of the year. … It was a weekend affair, most of the people had girlfriends come. Their hometown girlfriends came down for the weekend and they stayed in the fraternity house. All the men, supposedly, got out of the fraternity house, ha, ha, ha, and no drinking, yes.

KP: So, there was some bending of the rules?

HB: Yeah, they bent the rules. They really twisted out of shape. … Fortunately, no harm was done, no babies were born in garages or stuffed down the drains and somehow we managed to escape in one piece and became actual, real human beings. A good part of what we have become was really established at Rutgers. I feel very strongly about that. I know what I am today, for better or worse, they are to blame.

KP: Speaking of rules being bent, one of my standard questions, especially for Class of 1942 people, is Dean Metzger, whose presence seemed to have loomed large.

HB: Well, … he made up the main part of a song that they sang at all festivities, the words of which escape me right now. I don't want to recall them, as a matter-of-fact. It's not polite to do that, but he was liked, in his own way. He was respected. He was the Dean of Men. Dean Marvin, I don't know what his job was?

KP: He might have been the academic dean. I have to look it up.

HB: Okay. Walter Marvin.

KP: But Dean Metzger was a very austere man.

HB: Yes, he was.

KP: And very Calvinist.

HB: I didn't have too much contact with him. I remember hearing him speak a couple of times and being up in his office once or twice, but I had not too much contact with him. You wanted to stay away from him, that was the idea. If you didn't have to have too much contact with him, you were better off.

KP: What about chapel, how did you feel about having to go to chapel?

HB: It didn't bother me too much. I really enjoyed it. I mean, it wasn't a religious observance. I can tell you, I want to digress a bit. Going to public school and we had assembly once a week, I don't know how they do it today, but part of the assembly was you had to say the Lord's Prayer and everybody would bow their heads, and say the Lord's Prayer. I felt very uncomfortable about it, being Jewish, and I also was embarrassed not to say it because all my friends were saying it. All my friends were, I would say ninety-nine percent of them were Catholic. In Hoboken, everybody was Irish and Italian Catholics and I wanted to be the same as them. So, I would bow my head and move my lips. I didn't say the words because I didn't know the words. I know them now, but I didn't know them then. I didn't want to learn them, but I felt that I was made to stand out and be different and I don't think it was a fair position to be put in. … I sympathize with those people who talk about it today. … We have to realize today that there are so many religions out there and so many adjuncts of religions, that it's not fair to do this to children. I mean, religion belongs in the home and in the church of your choosing, not in a public school. There is a movement now, you know, to push a little bit more for religion in the schools. You can study religion, but to practice it in an observant way, I don't approve of that.

KP: I'm curious about your fraternity because we know that fraternities were really the center of the universe for Rutgers students.

HB: Well, you probably heard a lot about "hell week."

KP: Yes, so, we always like to hear more.

HB: Well, in our fraternity and I don't know if it was all fraternities, hell week was one week of hell. You had to get a raw onion and put a cord through it and hang it around your neck and wear it to class all the time. I don't know how the profs stood it. And if you saw one of your upper-classmen and he told you to do something and you didn't do it fast enough, or to his satisfaction you had to take a bite of the onion. A lot of hazing went on, paddling, threats, all in the name of fun. Sometimes it was carried to extreme and all you wanted to do was live through hell week. Most of us did. Every once in a while, they had a casualty, but none of them that I recall were fatal. You read about that in the papers. We didn't have that, but it was a fun time. Also, it led up to initiation, also a scary time. Are you going to make it? Are you going to pass? Will you know all the things you have to remember or memorize? You get through it all.

JV: Phi Epsilon seemed to have won every award every year as the most active fraternity and the most scholarships.

HB: … They had a lot of good students, a lot of "A" students, lot of Phi Beta Kappas. Athletically, in my time, we had some. We had an outstanding football player, two outstanding basketball players, several swimmers, maybe one baseball player, I'm trying to think, but we did a lot of intramural sports. Basically, they were good students, they were really good students. Now, whether, or why, they flocked to that particular fraternity, I'm sure other fraternities had "A" students, also. … The fraternity wouldn't take you on unless you were up in your grades, so, I'm glad my grades were pulled up.

KP: When did you join your fraternity?

HB: I didn't join my fraternity the first year. I joined it later on. Mainly because, one of the main reasons was I didn't have the one hundred dollar dues that was required in those days. So, I joined probably in my junior or senior year, but these were my friends and while they were all members we were treated as members and thought of as members. Most of the people didn't know that we hadn't really pledged. Sy and I joined, both of us joined, probably our junior year.

KP: You had to take mandatory ROTC.

HB: The first two years.

KP: Then you decided not to take the advanced.

HB: Well, in order to get into the advanced, you had to meet certain standards, which I may not have been able to meet. … I also had no desire to go on for two more years. This was before war was imminent, even though war started in Europe in 1939. I had no desire to become a, first of all, I didn't want to be in the Army, under any conditions. I don't like the idea of sleeping on the ground. I'll tell you a story later about certain activities in the Coast Guard and I was glad I joined a naval branch.

KP: But that was very much present, you didn't want to sleep on the ground?

HB: I didn't want to sleep on the ground, no. I like to sleep on a bed, or a cot, indoors.

KP: How did you know in the Army that there was a good chance you would sleep on the ground?

HB: I'm sure they had that in store for me, but not this boy. I also, later on, I had an enormous amount of respect for those people that served in the Army because of the conditions that they had to live under and fight under and we really had it easy. At least, if you got shot or killed, you would drown, it was clean. The Army, there was no end to it. You keep walking and walking and walking. If you are lucky, you get to hitch a ride and sleep on the ground again at night. I couldn't see it. It was a last resort.

KP: You are not the first to say that. Your father was an avid reader of the *New York Times*. Did he also read the *Forward*?

HB: Who, my father?

KP: Yes, did he read any of the Yiddish papers?

HB: I saw it occasionally. Incidentally, I have to tell you one story. Talking about fraternity life. When we were freshmen, or sophomores we had, one of the seniors was a New York fellow and

… he hated everything to do with Judaism. He didn't want to be a part of it. He didn't want to be identified with [Judaism], but he belonged to a Jewish fraternity. In those days, they were stamped more or less as a Jewish fraternity. The other fraternities actually didn't invite you to join and you were happy not to join. You wanted to be with your own types. So, this guy became really obnoxious, he was like an anti-Jew Jew.

KP: He really wanted to assimilate.

HB: Well, he could have, but he was the atypical Jew. So, we said, "What can we do to this guy to endear him to us?" So, we got him a subscription to the *Forward*. Everyday the mailman would come with the paper and we would tip him off, we'd say, "Don't just leave it here, call him, and tell him, 'I got your paper.' … He would come charging down the steps. I can see it now, and he would take the paper and hurl it into the fireplace. He couldn't read it, most of us couldn't read it, but it lasted for about six months until he got it canceled. He was going nuts. They gave it to him, "No, you can't cancel, we are going to give it to you free." My father read it occasionally, but he really read the local papers after he taught himself to read.

KP: Would your parents speak Yiddish in the house?

HB: No, we spoke English, although, I did pick up some Yiddish words from visiting my aunts and uncles, who were older, and from some of their families I picked it up. In fact, my wife, to this day, says, "Where did you learn to speak it because your parents never spoke it." I say, "I don't know, I picked it up someplace here and there." Also, I learned to speak German as a child. My mother went into business. She was in business with my father and we had a German housekeeper and she ran a tight ship. She was the original storm trooper.

KP: How long did she work for you, this German woman?

HB: Oh, she worked until I was in high school. From the time I was in grammar school, she came in everyday before breakfast and cleaned and cooked and left after dinner and you had to eat on time, her time. … If you were not there on time, she would grab you by the ear. "You have to do dishes tonight." She was the housekeeper. I had to do dishes. And you had to straighten up your room. She was very good, an excellent trainer. She would make a good top Sergeant.

KP: Why did she stop working for you?

HB: I guess she retired. … She was not a young person. She was an older person. She was like part of the family. She called the tune. She told you when you ate and you had to be there at certain times. … The only one that she didn't order around was my father, but my mother was glad to have someone there doing the work because my mother hated to do housework. As my wife says, "I take after your mother."

KP: New Jersey had a lot of Bund activity in the '30's.

HB: Yeah, Hoboken particularly, Hoboken, Weehawken, Union City. In fact, they have an old age home right now, right on Kennedy Boulevard, which is a large old age home, which has existed since I was a child. There was a lot of Bund activities in Hoboken.

KP: Do you remember ever witnessing any, or knowing any people in the Bund?

HB: No, no, I never really witnessed any myself, but I heard about it. I heard that they had meetings here and there, you know, little groups. Of course, that all ceased when war broke out.

KP: What about an organization called the Minutemen? Did you ever hear of them?

HB: No, I don't recall hearing that.

KP: When did you have a sense that America might get in the war?

HB: Well, certainly, when war broke out in Europe, in '39, and with Hitler and the Nazis coming into power about the same time Roosevelt came in. They were parallel. I don't know if you were aware of that.

KP: Oh, yeah.

HB: His movement got stronger and stronger and he became more abusive and doing things that nobody ever thought they would do. Little by little, he got away with more and more and people were afraid of him. His own people were afraid of him. So, they all jumped into line.

KP: What did most students think about the coming of World War II, particularly in 1940 and 1941, when Roosevelt was taking all these actions?

HB: We didn't think too much about it. Don't forget, you have to realize that television wasn't here and radio, while we had radio, it wasn't like it is today. We listened to *Uncle Don*, *Little Orphan Annie*, *Myrt and Marge*, those types of programs. These were sitcoms of fifteen-minute durations. I recall *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy*, and *Little Orphan Annie*. These were the things that kids grew up on. What goes on today makes your hair stand up.

KP: Harland Kinzley, from '42, talked about the *War of the Worlds* broadcast and how at his fraternity house, people got a little panicky about it. Do you remember that broadcast?

HB: I remember it, but I don't remember getting panicky about it, but I remember reading about people who got panicky in this area, in New Jersey.

KP: Well, Grovers Mill is not that far.

HB: Right and I'm sure people were ready to take to the hills, but that didn't last too long. Naturally, it made all the headlines and Orson Welles made a name for himself.

KP: Finally, before leaving Rutgers, you mention playing at your uncle's roadhouse, but did you work any other jobs?

HB: I worked at the diner.

KP: That's right, you mentioned that at the beginning, the Silver Meteor.

HB: The Silver Meteor Diner. Sy and I worked there for three years. Lunchtime an hour and supper time two hours and every other day we peeled a one hundred pound bag of potatoes. We sat in the back of the diner and where this table is, there was a big pot and we had aprons on, and he would sit there and I would sit there, and we would peel potatoes and throw them in, and just talk.

KP: And you were just working for your meals.

HB: Just meals, we got no pay, no pay. The meals, what we ate was probably worth about eight dollars a week and we worked at least fifteen hours, did dishes, short-order cook, whatever had to be done, we did. … We were very efficient. We were good workers, and he knew it.

KP: But no other jobs besides that?

HB: No, no other jobs. I had summer jobs.

KP: Where did you work in the summer?

HB: The summer before the war, I worked in Todd's Shipyards in Hoboken as an electrician's helper. … I got the job through my uncle, who was a quasi-politician, and the idea was to put as many people to work on the ships as they could find. The reason being that Todd's Shipyards and all the other shipping companies were paid cost-plus. Whatever it cost them, they would just show their books and they would be entitled to that plus a percentage of the profit. So, as many people as they put on their payroll, they got paid profit on their work. I recall making, this one summer I became a millionaire. I made sixty-four cents an hour. I worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week. Now, anything over forty hours we got paid time-and-a-half. On Saturdays and Sundays we got paid double-time and there were no taxes taken out in those days. The end of the week came. I had a lot of money. I didn't have time to spend it, too tired. … I came home with one hundred fifty, two hundred dollars a week.

KP: Which in the '40s was a fortune.

HB: I was like a millionaire. So, I paid all my expenses the following year for school out of that money, but we worked hard sometimes. We also worked hard at hiding other times. The boss of the particular ship you were on said, "We have no work for you today. Find yourself a place in the hold of the ship and get lost, and when you hear the whistle blow it's time to go home. They didn't tell you to go home. Then we would do nothing. It was harder to do nothing than to work.

KP: Yeah, because the time must have moved incredibly slow.

HB: But when we worked, we had to work hard. We put degaussing systems on ships. Degaussing systems were a series of wires that were placed around the perimeter of ships to ward off mines that were floating in the waters, wherever they might be. Then you had to put pipe on the ship and thread these wires through the pipe. It was laborious work and they called us electrician's helpers. We didn't have anything to do with the electrical work, though. We were just junkies.

JV: So, these were merchant ships?

HB: Right.

KP: And what other summer jobs?

HB: I had one summer job [where] I worked in a mass-scale photo place. We developed pictures. People sent in their film. We did the whole process. I remember dipping the stuff into the solution to the point of chopping the pictures up, putting them in envelopes, putting the advertisements in the envelopes, labeling them. They put you at each station so you learned how to do the whole job. I worked there a whole summer at the going rate, but no overtime there. The summer I learned the most was when my sister got me a job where she worked. It was a company that sold a laxative.

KP: And what did you do?

HB: I worked in the advertising department and I worked in the various things, packing, shipping, whatever it happened to be. The reason I say I learned the most there is after I was there for about five or six weeks … my friends, my good, Rutgers friends were going down to the Shore for the weekend. So, they said, "Why don't you take off and come down?" "Good idea." So, I tell my sister, "When you get to work today tell them I'm not feeling well and I won't be in to work." So, she said, "No, you better call up and tell them you're sick if you want to do that." So, okay, I get on the phone and call in and say, … "I'm sick I won't be in today." As luck would have it, that night we were down at Asbury Park walking on the boardwalk, a bunch of guys and girls and, who do I see coming towards me is my boss, and wanting to show how important I was I went up to him and said, "Hello, Mr. So-and-So, how are you today?" He looked at me and said, "Didn't you call in sick this morning?" I said, "Yes, I did, but I got better later in the day." Anyhow, Monday I came to work, he calls me in and says, "You are going to teach more today than you ever learned in your whole life." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Never lie to your boss because you're fired." He said, "Don't ever do that again as long as you live. It's not a good policy," and that was the end of the story. … I felt badly because my sister worked there and it was a bad reflection on her. So, I never did lie again.

KP: Plus you dug your own hole, instead of trying to slip out.

HB: I could have by-passed him very easily. He wouldn't have known, but in my youthful eagerness I blew it.

JV: Pearl Harbor took everybody on the campus by surprise.

HB: Right. First of all, I don't think any of us knew where Pearl Harbor was. It could have been a girl's name as far as I knew. So, we went to our maps to look where it was. Then we found out what it was and we knew we were in it now. We didn't know the full extent of the damage at the time because it was leaked out little by little, but we suffered a big loss and that pulled the whole country together again. It wasn't a question of … we had a group in the country called "America First" that didn't want to partake in the war. Lindbergh was one of them and some other noteworthy people. They said that we should keep out of it, but it was a different war than subsequent wars like Vietnam and Korea. There people wanted to stay out of the service. In World War II, nobody wanted to stay out. People who had disabilities felt awful that they couldn't serve somehow. I know all of my cousins were in the service except two of them who couldn't. One had a bad kidney. One had other problems and they really felt badly about it. The proof of the pudding was they both died at a young age from their physical disabilities, but everybody wanted to be in and it wasn't a question of being safe. In fact, one of my first duties when I got my commission was that I was assigned to a training station, training "boots" coming into the service. After a couple of months of that I said, "This is not for me, I gotta get out of here," and I went to the commanding officer, who was an Admiral, and I said, "I want to leave here, I want to get some active duty." He said, "Well you got a good spot here. You know you can stay here?" I said, "I don't want to stay here. I want to get active duty. If they get any calls, I want my name to be on the list." I was gone a month later.

KP: So, you could have probably stayed there.

HB: I don't know. I might have been rotated.

KP: But you didn't want to spend the war just …

HB: No, I didn't want to spend the war there. It was a beautiful place. I was familiar with it. It was in Brooklyn.

KP: So, you were even close to home.

HB: Yeah, I was close to home. I lived there. I didn't live home. I lived off the base. I had an apartment, but that was not the place for me to be.

KP: You told us the great story of trying to get into the Navy and then instead the Coast Guard is around the corner. When did you actually formally enlist?

HB: I really don't recall when.

KP: Was it while you were still students?

HB: As soon as the program became available and as soon as we were released. We were released from school a month early. Graduation was on May 10th, instead of some time in June. So, soon thereafter, as we could, we went down. So, it may have been sometime in May or June and we went down there, but they couldn't absorb you that fast. That was the problem. You had to wait until you were called. You were accepted or not accepted, but then you were put on inactive duty pending a call. So, when I finally got notification, it was sometime in September that I would have to report to the Coast Guard Academy, which was the only place the Coast Guard trained their officers, whereas, the Navy people were sent to different stations. I was very fortunate being rejected by the Navy because I got an excellent naval education at the Coast Guard Academy. … The most amazing thing is the fact that they can take a person who knew nothing about the water and nothing about a ship and turn him into some semblance of an officer in one hundred and twenty days. I can never get over that. I thought it always stood me in great stead, and I felt I was trained better than the people who were in the Navy.

KP: Yes, I interviewed from your class, Carl Bosenberg and he said it was a pretty rigorous.

HB: Bosenberg. Paul Rork, did you interview him?

KP. Yes, I interviewed Paul Rork.

HB: Carl Bosenberg and Paul Rork I'm sure went through Coast Guard Academy.

KP: Yes, and I specifically remember Carl talking about how they even took you out onto sailing ships.

HB: Oh, yes. The last month, you went on a sailing ship in the Long Island Sound, and they had Norwegian sailors as your training people. … It so happened that when I went through, by the time it was my turn, it was the winter of '42, and we were on the sailing ship the end of December and part of January, which has got to be the coldest month of the year.

KP: And even colder on the water.

HB: Colder on the water. We were on water rations, no showering or bathing. You had maybe a tumbler full of water to shave in the morning and brush your teeth. You had to figure out in what order you did that. Not too many people shaved. They would not let you wear gloves. I don't want to use the language that he used, but, "No "bleep" gloves around here." He said, "You're going to learn to be men and sailors when I get done with you."

KP: Was this the Norwegian?

HB: This was the Norwegian guy. We sweated through four weeks on this thing. That was your last four weeks. On one of the sailing ships they had yardarms, where you had to spread sails, whatever good that would do. I know one person who wouldn't go up, refused to go up and they flunked him out for being a coward, the last month, he was going to get a commission. He

subsequently got a commission, about two or three months, later through his congressman because they said training is training, but don't be ridiculous about it because the man was good and he is not going to be on any yardarm unfurling sails during this war.

KP: But you, yourself, climbed up?

HB: No, I didn't have to do it. I didn't get called to do that, so, I was lucky. I had another job to do. … I recall swabbing decks. Having man over-board drills. Putting a boat over the side in Long Island Sound in the middle of winter, and picking up a dummy that they threw overboard.

KP: What was a typical day like at New London when you were training?

HB: New London, you got up early in the morning, I mean like five o'clock, straightened up your bunk, and got out for formation. … Left face, and we did left face, and we started to run and we ran. Actually, the first month we were in Groton, at the point there in New London where the river opens up into the Sound, and we would run for two miles in your shorts. One of the things I didn't like to do. There were two things I didn't like to do. One was sleep on the ground. The other was run. But I won one of them. I didn't sleep on the ground. So, I had to run and I was a slow runner, so, I figured out how to keep up with the guys. I would start at the head of the line and did the best I could, and wound up at the end of the line at the end of the two miles. Then we did some hurdles, and climbing up walls, and all kinds of stuff. They put us in pretty good shape.

JV: How long does basic last in the Coast Guard?

HB: Four months, same as the Navy. We also had small boat training, which I don't think the Navy had. They had boats up at the Coast Guard Academy.

KP: So, you had a lot of hands-on experience with boats. I interviewed people who were in the (V-7?) program, they were lucky to see a boat. You did almost everything textbook.

HB: Yeah, we did our textbooks, but we had hands-on boat training, small boat handling, life boats. One of the first things on a boat, I'll never forget this one. In New London, we were there the second month at the Academy and we had gone on small boats and our instructor said, "Okay, now I want you to walk around the side of the small boat." And here we were bundled up with heavy duty clothes in the winter time and carrying a load of books. … You had to walk around the side of the ship, and I didn't look down and I tripped over a cleat. You know what a cleat is? A cleat is a clamp that you tie a line around to secure it to a mooring. I tripped over the cleat and I went to grab the handrail, and the handrail pulled out and I went into the river. That was my first dunking. Of course, a lot of laughter, and so forth, and somebody threw me a life ring and they pulled me out. … I asked if somebody could please get that seamanship book, I'll need it. I got the seamanship book out. I still have it. It's still waterlogged. … I trudged up to the dormitory with water coming out of my shoes and my clothes. What a great day that was.

KP: How spit and polish was it in camp?

HB: They weren't so much spit and polish, but you did have to keep things neatly. You did have to conform to study periods. You had a lot of exercises, physical torture you could call it. You had some small arms training, which we had had in ROTC, so, I was familiar with that part of it.

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO----------

KP: This continues an interview with Herb Bilus on March 20th, 1998 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and Joe Varga.

KP: And you were saying you learned navigation, seamanship …

HB: Navigation, seamanship, communication, gunnery, I'm trying to think of what other subjects we had there. Basically, these are what you needed to function and actually become an officer and be over people who had to do the work, but I always found it amazing that we knew as much as we did and took away as much as we did in that short time. Aside from the discipline, we had to stand watch every night at the Coast Guard Academy. We had, just like you would at an Army camp, they would post you out at the perimeter just for training purposes, but they would keep you on your toes. You had to challenge people in the proper way. Also, we had to parade. I'm just trying to think of what kind of parading we did. As a training officer, we did dress parades every Saturday. That's another story.

KP: What were the dress parades like?

HB: Well, at boot camp, you got these kids in from the streets of the world, or the country. … We knew a little more than they did, put it that way. Here we are, ensigns, with a couple of JGs and a two striper in charge of, well, I had a battalion. A battalion was six hundred and they had, probably, ten battalions at this training station I was at, which was Manhattan Beach, in Brooklyn. So, all we had to do was supervise the petty officers, training them, but every Saturday morning we had a dress parade, which means we were obliged to buy a sword, a dress sword. All the officers had to have it, and put on our dress blues and leggings on a Saturday morning. … Invariably, when we started this thing, we found that we were all out of step. So, the officer who was in charge of this, who was a grade higher than an ensign, he was a JG and very tough. … He treated us like we were dirt, a fellow officer. … Finally, after the second time, I said, "You know, Mr. Brouse, there is a problem here. You're giving the command on the wrong foot. This is why everybody is out of step and tripping over themselves." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I happen to have a little musical background. You invariably give the command out of step, so, we are going off on the wrong foot." … He said, "If you're so damn smart, how would you like to do it?" I said, "That's okay with me. You want me to do it?" He said, "You give the march off command." "Okay." So, I did. To me it was easy. I had no problem. You get off on the left foot at the right time, and, thereafter, every week I was giving the commands and everybody was in step for the parade, the big parade.

KP: I'm curious about where everyone came from?

HB: All over.

KP: You had never thought about the Coast Guard. How did those people wind up in the Coast Guard?

HB: Well, for several reasons. Some people thought that if they went into the Coast Guard they would be safe. I didn't think about it. They said that the Coast Guard in time of war … served under the Navy. In time of peace the Coast Guard serves under the Treasury Department. Now, whether it's still in effect, I don't know. … I wasn't thinking about safety at the time, but I'm sure it entered some people's minds. Nobody gave you a guarantee and you don't know where you would be. You could be in Alaska. You could be in Greenland, in Greenland patrol. You could be anywhere with the Coast Guard. You could be on a buoy tender, up and down the rivers replacing buoys, a lot of tedious type work. You didn't expect any glamour work. Coast Guard did have some airplanes, but that was kept for the select graduates of the four-year Academy. The regulars, we were reservists. … The designation was USCGR after your name. Your rank and USCGR, and everybody knew that you were a reservist. If you had USCG, you were a regular. Mostly you were Academy men. They had their own fraternity.

KP: So, the Academy people in the Coast Guard were the select.

HB. They were the select, absolutely. They had an *esprit de corps*, which came on to us, too, but in a lesser way. … If you were regular Coast Guard, they had a tight clique, and they looked out for each other.

KP: Well, it was the same way in the Navy with the Annapolis people.

HB: I'm sure. I'm sure.

KP: But the Coast Guard isn't a very big service.

HB: No, no.

KP: Even in wartime, it didn't become a huge.

HB: This is what I liked about it. It was small and you knew people. Once you got into the swing of things, you knew people all over. … I'll tell you a very funny story. After we had served in Europe, and we did, my group did three invasions, Sicily, Salerno, and Normandy. It was a Coast Guard flotilla with twenty-four ships manned by the Coast Guard, but they were Navy ships and the Navy had their own groups, but we only had one division, one flotilla. I was not in Salerno and Sicily. I joined the group supposedly as a replacement for a casualty, which didn't occur, thank God, and I joined them in Africa, North Africa. Then we took the ships around up to England and trained for D-Day. Anyhow, I'm going to skip ahead a little bit. After we brought these ships back to the States, these are the smallest ocean-going landing craft. We crossed the Atlantic in an LCI. If you want a thrill, that's the way to do it. That was tougher than D-Day for us. Of course, we happened to go into a hurricane. It was a noted hurricane, in October or November of that year. It took us twenty-one days to cross the ocean and here we are,

twenty ships. We lost four at Normandy. We had twenty ships and we were all in a line. One ship had radar. That was the flotilla commander's flagship. The rest of us had to navigate with a sextant and logarithm books, and so forth. Well, you try to get a reading on a sextant when your bobbing around in the cork and noontime, everyday, each ship had to hoist their positions with signal flags. Well, if you want to get into the hysterics, everyday at noontime these guys would position themselves anywhere from Africa to the South Pacific. One day this hurricane hit. We went right into it in this flotilla. Basically, our usual pattern was to follow the ship in front of you, keep the ships on the side and the one in front because we had no radar, and keep them in sight at all times and stay so far behind. So, we kept a uniform distance and it looked pretty good I'm sure from the sky. … By that time I think the U-boat menace had subsided. There was no U-boat menace in the Atlantic. We go and hit this hurricane, and these ships were just driven apart. You didn't want to hit anybody and they were scattered all over the place and we all had life jackets on. … We just told everybody to hold tight to something so you would not be thrown overboard. If you're overboard, you're gone. And this thing went down this way, from side to side, up and down and we were all huddled together just trying to keep the thing afloat, not to crash into anybody. … We were spread far and wide as far as the horizon could see these twenty ships were spread out. It lasted for as long as a hurricane lasts, maybe twelve hours or so, and the next morning we started to re-group. After that time, I felt that I would go anyplace on this ship. This ship was very seaworthy. It would never overturn. I had a lot of confidence. I would go anyplace.

KP: Did you lose any ships in the flotilla?

HB: Yeah, we lost four.

KP: No, I mean in the hurricane?

HB: In the hurricane, no.

KP: You didn't lose any?

HB: No.

JV: Were the LCIs as slow and ugly as I read about? They were supposed to be slow moving.

HB: Well, we went in convoy at eight knots and we could do twelve knots, but we went at eight. As I said, it took twenty-one days to cross and it was boring after that. Everything was boring after that part.

KP: Backing up, is there anything else about your training at New London?

HB: I came out of there with the highest regard for the training I had received.

KP: You thought they had done a good job.

HB: I did. They did an amazing job.

KP: Did you do any fire fighting?

HB: Oh, yes, we had to go to fire fighting school, too, which is a little scary. But, you know, you have confidence in your instructors. … It was my turn to be at the head of the hose when we went into the burning building, and you follow the instructions the way they teach you. You go in and you do it. Because you're never going to face it most likely, but you may have it happen on a ship, where you have to go into a compartment and put out a fire. So, you weren't afraid of it anymore, and the same thing with the conditions on that sailing ship. We never had to face anything like that. I have to tell you a little anecdote about D-Day. We had decided, among the officers, that if everything went well with us and we got our troops ashore that we would have a steak dinner on a white tablecloth on D-Day. Now, it sounds absurd. We had to wear suits that were inpregnated; it was a cover-all that you put on over whatever else you were wearing to ward off a gas attack, a mustard gas attack. Well, these were clumsy, so, fortunately the weather was cool, so, it wasn't that bad. But as soon as we got into the fray, we took the suits off. We didn't think that we were going to be attacked, but they were cumbersome suits. Anyhow, we got our guys ashore and there was nothing else to do until we were called upon to take another load off a transport and bring them to wherever they told us to bring them. We landed our initial guys on Utah Beach and then we were told we had to take another group of guys off a ship and land them at Omaha Beach. That's another story. We take these people and bring them to a point on the beach and we're … beached right alongside a Navy LCI, a newer version. We had the original version, which is old, square, and ugly. In fact, … our ship was called the "ugly duckling." That was the name of it. As we see this guy beached, the men, the Army guys, were going over, off the ramps, into water over their heads and drowning. I don't know how many of that company drowned, but a lot. They were in too deep water with heavy packs. They couldn't survive. So, the skipper of that ship was senior, and he says through a loudspeaker, he says to our guy, "Get your guys off and get out of here." My skipper said, "The water is too deep. We can't let them off here." He says, "You get them off here now and get out !" He says, "I'm not getting them off." He says, "I'm giving you an order." So, my skipper says, "Bleep you, with your orders!" The senior officer says, "What's your rank and serial number?" My skipper gives it to him and says, "What's yours?" The senior officer says, "You're going to get court-martialed." My skipper says, "So are you. My guys are staying on here. I'm going to get them ashore, not off the boat. I'm going to get them ashore," and we did. We withdrew off the beach and we went up another two hundred feet and got our guys ashore. I hate to think of those people who were drowned. I don't like to think about it.

KP: But what happened to ...

HB: Nothing. Nothing happened. … My guy had enough guts not to follow orders. There are certain things you can't do. I mean, to make these guys drown? You know what, the Army guys were so happy, most of them were seasick. They were so happy to get off the ship and get on the land, where they were being shot at, really, shot at. I said, "Look at these guys." They got the first fight. We got through this okay. We didn't get hit. So, we were very lucky and we unloaded other transports and it came to be dinnertime. Okay. Now, is the time for our steak

dinner. We put out the white tablecloth. We had our steak dinner in the ward room and it was half this size, with two bunks and a table. Two of the officers slept there. It wasn't a classy ward room, like a big ship.

KP: How many officers did you have on your LCI?

HB: We had three officers and a warrant officer, who was a machinist, actually. He took care of the engine part. We had three officers, skipper, an exec, and another officer and we lived in close quarters and got along pretty well. We each took turns doing what we had to do. … Our skipper was young. Our skipper, as a matter-of-fact didn't go to the Coast Guard Academy. He somehow took a test, where he got his background from I don't know, very competent and he got a direct commission. He was also young, probably a year or two older than I was. The exec … was an old man, about twenty-eight.

KP: What were your specific duties on the LCI?

HB: I was a deck officer, a watch officer that was my seagoing function. Then you did whatever you had to do to keep the crew happy and make sure they did what had to be done on the ship, supervise, more or less. Took care of the ship's store, you know with cigarettes and so forth, whatever they needed, whatever we had. Took care of the commissary, made sure we had food. That was my job.

JV: You had about a twenty-man crew on an LCI?

HB: About twenty, yeah. Give or take.

JV: So, I would imagine you were pretty cramped.

HB: Yeah, the crew was cramped. You slept in one of the holds. But there was a lot of camaraderie among them, even though we were not on a first name basis with the crew, as you see today. I don't know if they do that. They called you "sir". What they called you behind your back, you didn't know, but they respected the uniform and the rank and if you had abilities, they respected your ability. … God bless you, if you didn't have the ability.

KP: How formal was it, with first names?

HB: The officers called each other by their first names.

KP: But there was a real sharp separation between officers and crew?

HB: Yes.

KP: And you ate your meals separately?

HB: Yes, we ate in the ward room on a rectangular table. We played cards on that table. We did everything at that table. We did our bookwork on that table. My room, when I came aboard, was like a little stateroom with two bunks, which I shared with another officer. Not even room for a table in there, so, all our work was done in the ward room.

KP: Did you have to pay for your meals?

HB: That's an interesting question. I forget now. We were supposed to pay for the meals. I kept books on the meals, too. So, I guess we did pay. I don't remember.

KP: Did you have a steward?

HB: Yes, we had a steward.

KP: Was he a black steward?

HB: Yes, he was. I'll tell you a story about that. The executive officer, the old man, the twenty-eight year old guy, he was from the South, Charlotte, North Carolina. One day, he had to be awakened for his turn on watch and the steward went in and shook his leg. … He jumped out of bed and screamed at him, "Don't you ever touch me!" It was a little embarrassing. He created a whole big scene. He said, "You wake me, but don't ever touch me, ever." That was the only incident of racial inequality that I ever saw on our ship, but he was the only black guy on our ship.

KP: Where was the black steward from, the South or North?

HB: He was from the South. Not a happy situation. … At that time, he was out of place, the steward, as was the officer out of place making a big issue out of it, but those were the times we were thrown into.

JV: The Coast Guard was supposed to be more integrated than other branches. Did you see that?

HB: I didn't see that. No, I didn't see too many black people, except stewards.

JV: I think that was at the end of the war.

HB: Oh, the end of the war. Possibly, they were taking them in, yes. I recall now, enlisted men were allowed to attain other ranks, which they weren't at the very beginning. You could only be a steward. They couldn't even be a chef.

KP: What about your men, what did they get to eat?

HB: They ate pretty well.

KP: Did they have a special meal on D-Day?

HB: They may have. I don't know. We just did it up with the white tablecloth. They probably had steak, too. They ate the same food we did, but we made an issue that while everything was flying all over the place, we were going to sit down for fifteen minutes and have this steak dinner.

KP: It's such a great story.

HB: I mean, nobody else knew about it, just the four of us. I mean, the crew knew.

KP: Did you have any regular Coast Guard people on the crew?

HB: One of them, the Warrant Officer was a regular.

KP: He was a regular?

HB: Yes, he was a regular, but he came up from the ranks. He was a motor machinist and during the war they needed him, so, they made him a warrant officer and he always felt like an enlisted man. He never felt like an officer.

KP: Even though he was now in the ward room.

HB: He always felt subservient to everybody else.

KP: What about the rest of the crew, were any of them regular?

HB: No, not that I know of, not that I can recall. They were mostly all reservists. Maybe some of the motor machinists were regular and the quarter-master may have been a regular, the chief quarter-master and we leaned on him also for a lot of the work that had to be done because he knew how to do it. …

KP: Just to go back a little bit, after the Coast Guard Academy, you were sent to Brooklyn, or did you go to any advanced schools?

HB: No, I went to the training station in Manhattan Beach and I served there, then asked for a transfer, and I got it.

KP: How long were you at Brooklyn?

HB: About four months.

KP: You mentioned leading the Saturday parades, but what else would you do?

HB: I was in my office, to administer to the needs of the six hundred men, whatever problems they had. I was their chief. You know, they would come to me with their problems, and so forth. At twenty-two, I was a great problem solver. [laughing]

KP: So, a lot of the day-to-day training was done by the chiefs?

HB: The chiefs, the enlisted men did the training. You just oversaw what they did.

KP: And waited for some problem to develop.

HB: Yeah, if they had a problem you would take care of the problem, or they would ask you, "What should we do?" "Okay, what do you think? How can we solve the problem?" "Okay." We solved the problem. Also, you conducted inspection every Saturday. They lived in little cabins on the beach. These were there before. I guess, … they were like little summer homes, cottages. So, I don't know how many, maybe a platoon, to a cottage. So, we went around with inspections, with white gloves on. "Get this cleaned up," you know, put on a big show. "You guys want liberty? Get this place straightened out." And you wouldn't talk to them, you would talk to your immediate enlisted person, the petty officer.

JV: So, when you were at Manhattan Beach, you lived off base in Brooklyn?

HB: Yeah, I lived a couple of blocks away. Another officer and myself shared an apartment, and we were out every night. We had a great time out in New York.

KP: You were in uniform and I've been told that uniforms were a real magnet, especially in bars. People would buy you drinks. Women were interested in you, is that correct?

HB: I don't recall having people buy me drinks. We were in uniform. We went to different places. We went into Manhattan quite a bit. You know, every night you hop on a subway and get into Manhattan. … I didn't like to go to the crummy bars. We went to the nice bars and always found a girlfriend here or there. In fact, … we were walking one day and they were having a bond drive in the lobby of the Loews State Theatre on Times Square, there were some girls selling war bonds. So, I said to my friend, "She is a pretty girl, that girl. Give me a minute." We go inside and I started to talk to her and little by little I found out where she came from. She lived in Brooklyn. I said, "That's funny, I'm stationed at Manhattan Beach." I said, "Can I call you up some time? We'll go to a movie or something." She said, "Sure." She gave me her phone number and became my steady girlfriend. A very nice girl and a girl I would have married, possibly.

KP: But you moved on.

HB: I moved on. I was there long enough to see her several times a week and meet her family and all that, but she wanted a commitment and I wasn't ready to make a commitment because I was going to get out of there. I was just reading over one of my letters that I'm going to give you.

KP: You mentioned earlier that you wanted out of this training routine even though it looked like you would be there a while.

HB: I just didn't like the idea. This was not what I joined the service for. It was not winning the war. It was helping. Somebody had to do it. I believe if I wanted to stay, they wouldn't have let me stay, but if I didn't want to stay, you had to stay.

KP: But they did transfer you out.

HB: They transferred me out and I got orders, you know, as soon as they had a request for an officer, "Well, here's a guy who wants to go."

KP: And they sent you to join this flotilla.

HB: I got orders to travel to Norfolk, Virginia and report to a certain officer there, for duty to be assigned. I went to Norfolk, and I stayed there for about a week or so, maybe two weeks, I don't know, and orders came through. These orders were, "Proceed by best available transportation and join flotilla four in North Africa." Well, where do you get the bus? Proceed by best available transportation? I didn't know what he was talking about. I had to speak to the duty officer. He said, "Well, we will have to find a ship that is going out and you go. You get on a ship and you go, and you'll go to wherever they tell you the flotilla is, but nobody is going to tell you because it's a secret." So, I was assigned to some officer and he found a place for me on a Liberty ship and I went by myself. I didn't go with a group and I joined a bunch of Army guys and some Air Force guys, and some loose Navy guys, and we got on the ship.

KP: Not the most comfortable ship, I've been told.

HB: No, it wasn't. In fact, I made my own quarters on the ship. … They had a hold for officers not to be with the enlisted men. So, instead of being stacked six deep, we were four deep.

KP: So, you got to experience some of the crampedness of the enlisted personnel?

HB: Right, but I didn't do that. I didn't like that. I didn't want to sleep down there in the hold. I found a life raft and I staked out the life raft, and that's were I slept for … twenty-one days going over. … Nobody bothered me and I put my equipment there, and that was my spot. I slept on deck, day and night. You had two meals a day, going over, and the guys played cards and amused themselves, wrote letters, whatever they could do to pass the time.

KP: A lot of people have told me that while you could see a lot of action, mostly you were killing time.

HB: Well, mostly, it's boredom. Service is boredom. You get your action and you want it to stop, but you want to see a little activity going on, but mostly it's waiting and waiting and moving along, polishing, cleaning up, and keeping everything neat and orderly, writing reports, and training. You were always training. I got to Oran and I reported to the naval officers, wherever

they gathered there, and they assigned me to some kind of camp there. I told them that I had to report to this flotilla and I don't know where they are. He said, "Okay, I'll find out where they are." So, I was in Oran. They were in Bizerte, someplace in northwest Africa. So, he said, "They're in Bizerte, how do you want to go?" I said, "How fast can I get there?" He said, "Do you want to go by plane?" I said, "Sure." I had never been in a plane before. Oh, yes I had. I may have been in a plane before.

KP: But you hadn't been in a plane too often.

HB: Not too often. In those days …

KP: Oh, no. I would have been surprised if you would have been in one often.

HB: No, I remember hitchhiking a ride from someplace in the States, another crazy ride. Anyhow, I get a ride. I'm assigned to a plane that has bucket seats along the side, holds about twenty people, and the plane was going to Bizerte. The guy writes out a ticket for me on a piece of paper and I give it to the guy and get on. You had to get a parachute. It was very encouraging. You turn your parachute in when you land. … I get to this place and I find truck transportation and find out where my guys are. They're on Lake Bizerte and I reported there.

KP: And they had already seen a lot of combat.

HB: They had seen two invasions, so, they looked upon me with scorn, "Here is a guy who had a desk job." So, I was always a second class citizen as far as they were concerned. They had their battle ribbons already.

KP: Although you would get yours from Normandy.

HB: Yeah.

KP: But you did feel a sense that you were the outsider coming in?

HB: Sure, definitely. They were part of the crew. I was just an interloper and they treated me as such for a while.

KP: You had gambled quite a bit growing up in high school and one of my images of the Navy and Coast Guard, and the military in general, is that there was a lot of gambling going on. What about when you were in the Navy? How much did you gamble?

HB: Ah, let me see. I never gambled.

KP: Really, in spite of that heritage of Hoboken?

HB: Yeah, well, it was while it lasted. In school we played cards. We played a lot of bridge. We played bridge for money. We played pinochle for money in school.

KP: At Rutgers?

HB: At Rutgers, I didn't tell you about that. We played bridge many times all night long, and the game would stop about ten minutes to eight. I had a psych class and it was right next to the Phi Ep house. That was the last year. I went to the Phi Ep house, and then went to the psych class unprepared.

KP: So, certain things about students haven't changed, but in the military you really didn't gamble.

HB: No. First of all, I wasn't going to sit down and play with the crew. That was *verboten*. So, what we did play was in the ward room. This one fellow couldn't play bridge, so, we played hearts, and we had some great hearts games. Did you ever play hearts?

KP: Oh, yeah.

HB: It's a great game and when we got in, to port, we got a group together and we would be able to play some bridge, but we didn't play too much cards. We did a lot of reading on the ship. … Cartons of books were sent on, paperbacks, so, you read every book you could get your hands on.

KP: How long were you in Africa before moving to England?

HB: Oh, I wasn't there that long. Let's see, probably two months, and we were then awaiting orders to go to England. We didn't know where they were going to go. They didn't know if they were going to attack from the Mediterranean, go up and attack France, from the Mediterranean in the south of France. Our orders came. We went to England. That was still a semi-dangerous trip because we went along the coast of Spain all the way up the Atlantic Ocean. I forget how long that took us. We wound up, some time in December, in England. We were stationed, our flotilla went to Dartmouth, but until we got there we stopped at all the ports on the way. I have to tell you one story. Our first port was Falmouth. Are you familiar with England at all?

KP: A little bit.

HB: Okay. Well, the first port is Falmouth. We pull into Falmouth and we can't come into the docks. We have to anchor in the Bay of Falmouth. So, we drop anchor and for the first time we are going to wear our blues. We had khaki uniforms on since I was on this ship. We never had occasion to wear blues. Oh, yeah we did. We stopped at Gibraltar. But we put on our dress blues and we were going to go ashore. Well, how do you go ashore? You have to row ashore. So, one officer has to stay onboard and the three of us were going to go ashore, and somebody has to row the boat back. So, we had two guys. We had two crewmen and three officers. We get into this row boat and it's not a big thing, this life boat. The last guy to get in says, "Okay," the thing is bobbing up and down, he says, "I can make it," and he jumps, and he hits the side of the thing and turns the boat over. We all go into the water, in our dress blues, including the executive officer, the old man of twenty-eight, who starts screaming, "I can't swim." And the

crew is roaring, they're beside themselves, and this guy can't swim. Somebody throws him a line. All of us were laughing. I swam to the back of the ship and pulled myself out, dripping uniform. There goes our liberty for the day. You can't get your uniforms clean, so, you have saltwater uniforms. That was a great experience.

KP: So, you never got into Falmouth?

HB: Yes, I did. We were there for a few days. I got in the next day, without the blues.

KP: What were your impressions of North Africa?

HB: I remember it was very poor, threadbare, barefoot, certainly looked like the Third World, and we really didn't see the Third World. They were civilized there. They had cars and some electricity, and so forth. But from our standards they were not quite "natives" that you see running around in grass skirts, but they were just a little bit above the starvation level. Whatever we were able to give them, which we did, we gave them food, … some clothes, whatever we didn't need we gave to them. The kids followed you around all the time, looking for money, food, cigarettes. One time, I have to tell you a story, where I'm getting these stories from, I don't know. We were anchored out in the Bay of Bizerte and the Arabs used to row out to the boat and want to sell us stuff, and trade us stuff, and we would like to get some fresh food. Even though we had plenty of food, we wanted fresh oranges, … fresh eggs. They would want the fresh eggs. How was it now? We traded tea bags for fresh eggs. So, what we would do is use the tea bags, dry them out, give them the tea bags, and they would give us fresh eggs. We did that for a couple of days, different groups would come and do that. One day, people came out, and said, "You want some eggs? We'll take tea bags." We gave them the tea bags. We got the eggs. They had put holes in them and sucked the eggs out. We got empty eggs. They caught on. That was the end of that tradeoff. They stayed away from us. We were afraid to eat anything they gave us after that. I'm really not embellishing those stories, but they were funny.

KP: How long were you in England, and when did you arrive there, approximately?

HB: We arrived in England around the end of November, and basically ....

KP: From November of '43.

HB: November of '43 to the end of October, '44, and we trained. At the Dartmouth River (River Dart) was where our flotilla was and the other rivers were used by others. Plymouth, Bournemouth, all the other divisions of our type landing craft were stationed. Plus LSTs were different. LSTs couldn't go up the river. They were too big. The rivers were hard to navigate, so we were able to do it. We went up this river and moored there and came ashore, and they said, "You're going to get this estate as your headquarters, officer's quarters." "Really?" It so happens that this was Agatha Christie's estate. She had given it, for the use of the Americans, for a base during the war. Beautiful, it was walking distance, right up from the dock and high grounds, beautiful building. The skipper of my ship was an artist, a painter, and he said to the flotilla commander, who was a four-striper, he said, "How would you like me to paint a mural depicting

the history of this flotilla from the time the boats were built until we got here?" He said, "Sure, if you want to do it." He asked, "How long we gonna be?" The Admiral said, "We're going to be here for a while." So, the skipper laid it out, sketched it out, and, ultimately, painted around the four walls, say from the top of the doorway, all the way around this huge ballroom, in this estate. I mean, this is this lady's estate. But it was a beautiful work of art. I don't know whatever happened to it.

KP: Did anyone ever take a picture of it?

HB: I don't know.

KP: Did you ever get to meet Agatha Christie?

HB: No. I did get to meet, who was it, Graves?

JV: Robert Graves?

HB: I met him. He had a cabin not too far down the road from her estate. We met him and one of his wives, I don't know which wife he was on, and a bunch of dirty little kids that he had living in the cabin. The fellow, who was the artist, who was the skipper of our ship, was very cultured, much more than we were. He was into art and poetry and literature, and he said, "I heard he is living here. Let's go find him." We went and found him and had a discussion, talked a while. And he is the one who drew the mural, so, he was more or less our guide and he was thrilled to death that he had an opportunity to meet with him. To us, it didn't make too much difference.

JV: Did Graves talk about his World War I experiences?

HB: Yeah.

KP: It sounds like your Captain was having the time of his life, being in England and meeting Robert Graves.

HB: As a matter-of-fact, I know I vowed when I joined the service that I was going to make it the best time of my life. I wasn't going to worry about anybody and I told my folks not to worry about me, just take care of themselves and I'll be okay. I decided I was going to have a good time and I did. I made the best of every situation and I really enjoyed it. He did, too. As a matter-of-fact, after D-Day, now he served also, he made a landing in Africa, the original landing in Africa, so, he already had four.

KP: So, he had seen a lot.

HB: Yeah. So, he said, "It's time for me to get off." He applied for transfer, but he didn't want to go home. He wanted to stay in France. He wanted to paint. He said, "I want to stay in France, and I want to paint in this area, someplace," and he was assigned to the Captain of the Port in Cherbourg and he stayed there. I'll tell you a story about him. I never saw him again after he got

off the ship. Forty years after D-Day, … I was in New York on business, and I said, "You know, I just feel like contacting him." Well, did you ever look up Lee in the New York phone book? Pages, Asians, as well as others, so, I have to narrow it down, first of all, to his name. So, I had the two initials, M.L., which is about this many names. I start dialing. I call the first number. I said, "Marshall?" "Who? What?" Wrong one. I hang up. Call the next one, doesn't know what I'm talking about. Third one I call, I said, "Marshall?" He says, "Who is this?" I said, "Is this Marshall Lee?" He said, "Who is this?" I said, "Is this Marshall Lee, who was on the 96?" That was our ship number. He said, "Who is this?" I said, "It's Herb Bilus." "Oh, my God," he says, "Where are you?" I said, "I'm in the city." I said, "I just thought today was very appropriate. I wanted to say 'hello' to somebody." So, he said, "Gee, I'd like to meet with you, but I'm leaving for Japan tomorrow." I said, "What do you do?" He said, "I'm in the book publishing business." So, it's interesting, you know, to get back to ...

KP: What was his career, was he an editor?

HB: I don't know what he was. He is in the book publishing business. I said, "Well, look, I'm in the phone book, in New Jersey, in Bloomfield and I found you very easily." I knew he would live on the East side of New York, being an artist, or down in the Village area, that's the type he was. So, I said, "When you come back from Japan?" He said, "I'll be back in two weeks." I said, "Call me, we'll go out and have a drink together." That was '84. Okay, I'm still waiting for that drink. I don't know if he is still alive. He never called. But anyhow, I guess he wasn't interested in seeing anybody, which is okay.

KP: Did you stay in touch with anyone else from the crew?

HB: No. They were dispersed. In fact, when we made the trek for the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, my wife and I took the trip back ...

KP: You did go back as part of the fiftieth.

HB: Oh, yeah, didn't I tell you that?

KP: No.

HB: As soon as I heard there was going to be some kind of observance, I said to my wife, "You know, I would really like to go back there, and I'll show you where we were and what we did and so forth." She said, "Okay, if you want to do it." My three friends, that I mentioned before were celebrating their fiftieth anniversary. They were married fifty years in 1994. They got married late in '44. So, they were going to take a barge cruise in France down the river and visit the wine country, or whatever they were going to visit. We figured we were going to go, too. I said, "Listen, you're going to do this. I'm going to go to D-Day. I'm not going to go spending my time …" They were going the same week. I was supposed to be best man at his wedding. He was married on June 4th, D-Day was on June 6th, so, I never got to his wedding, needless to say. I said, "You take the trip down the river. Harriet and I are going to Normandy." He said, "Yeah, but we'll all be together, and so forth." I said, "That's okay, we'll all be together some other time.

This I have to do. I want to do it." So, they went their way and we went our way. … It was a great trip. A wonderful trip. It was historical. It was emotional. It was probably one of the two or three best trips I ever had in my life.

KP: At the reunion, did you run into anyone you had known fifty years ago?

HB: No. I was put together with a group by a travel agency who specializes in historical tours and we had special passes. If you were actual D-Day veterans, you got a special ribbon, which entitled you to 'up front seats' on everything. D-Day means you had to be there in the twenty-four hour period, anywhere in land, sea, or air, on June 6th, and you had to prove it, somehow. So, we got special tickets for that and we got treated royally, all over. It was a great trip. Something you saw about in the papers.

KP: Oh, yeah, I remember the coverage well. This project was just starting in that fiftieth anniversary, so, I followed it even more closely.

HB: We saw all of these celebrities, TV celebrities, and Clinton was there, but we had our front seats on all of these things, which made it nicer. They shut off the roads in Normandy, just to accommodate all the tour busses and so forth. They laid down special parking lots on the fields, great logistics.

KP: How did the English receive you in '44?

HB: We were not exactly most welcome there because we were taking over everything, including the women, and the Americans had a lot more spending money than the British did and they were all over the place. The British were also sent overseas elsewhere. They had to leave their wives and families and girlfriends and so forth. So, I'm sure we were not really welcomed. We were tolerated.

JV: Did you get to travel at all into the country?

HB: In the countryside, yes. We got to London, twice, but where we were stationed, we were along the coast, and this was all resort area. So, all these towns like Bournemouth, Falmouth, Torkay, Plymouth, this is where you go for vacation. I didn't get to the far country and do any visiting. We didn't have time for that. You only got a couple of days off at a time.

KP: What kind of training did you do while in England?

HB: In England, we trained landing on the beaches of England. We went out in flotilla, and we were given orders, you know, practice. Drop the anchor, run full speed up on the beach, drop your ladders over the side, let your guys get off, and put the stakes out so the guys would have guidelines to lead by, and then retract. Do the same thing in reverse. Pull yourself off the beach. Each officer had to take his turn, practicing at command of the ship, so, that he would be proficient in case you needed him. So, we were fairly well-trained to do what we had to do.

KP: In a given week, how often would you do practice landings?

HB: Well, we would go out and do it two days in a row one week, a day next week, two days the following week. … They didn't have that many landing spaces.

KP: When you weren't doing that, what else would you be doing, in terms of duty?

HB: Keeping the ship ship-shape. Keeping the crew on their toes.

KP: Because in a sense, you are waiting around.

HB: We were waiting around. Also, we were tied up in port, so, we would have liberty. The crew would have liberty. As many people as you could give off, you gave them off.

KP: So, you did just let them go off?

HB: Sure, we just maintained a skeleton crew. In fact, one time we were on liberty, and we got orders to move the ships to another port and the officers were gone, I was the only one there. The flotilla commander said, "Can you do it?" I said, "Sure, I can do it." He said, "Okay, get whatever crew you got and let's get out."

KP: Where did you have to move the ship to?

HB: Another port. I don't know where we were, but we had to move back to Dartmouth.

KP: When they came back what did they do?

HB: When they came back, they had to get truck transportation to get back to where the ship was. They had to do it then, for what reason, I don't know why it couldn't wait, but we got it back and I felt pretty good being in command.

KP: Well, that's one of the ways I think the Navy and Coast Guard are unique, in that when you're officer of the deck, in many ways you are commanding the ship until the captain relieves you.

HB: Well, the smaller the ship, the more responsibility you have. When you have three guys and you are splitting up eight hour shifts, four on and four off. This is what we did, four on and four off. You are in charge. In fact, the only time we were directly attacked, I happened to be on duty.

KP: Which time was that?

HB: It wasn't on D-Day. It was after D-Day. We were going back to England and a plane dive-bombs us. Now, whether he dive-bombed our particular ship, or we had a group of ships going back, to me, he was going for us. I had to sound general quarters and the guy came down,

swoops, and drops a bomb. It happened to land between our ship and another ship, and shrapnel came up on the deck, and we got everybody running for general quarters, where we're usually at when we're doing landings. But here we're taking a normal slow ride back to England, and we sounded general quarters and everybody came running, grabbing their equipment, and then you had to go to different stations. When I'm relieved from the deck by the skipper, I went to my station, which is a gun station in the rear and that's where I got my wound.

KP: Where did you get it?

HB: Nothing hit me, but I hit something on the deck that was protruding up, a hatchway, and gashed a piece out of my shins. Didn't even know it until the next day. It was at night.

KP: So, it was a night time attack?

HB: Yeah, and we were running to our quarters. I got back the next morning and my leg is bleeding. I said, "What the hell is that?" I nicked a piece of my shin bone right out. My war scar.

JV: Did you get organized in time to return fire?

HB: Oh, yeah, they were shooting at everything in the moon, all the ships. If you didn't get killed by your own guys you were lucky. It was a chance to get their weapons going.

KP: Did you ever get to London?

HB: Yeah, I got to London on two leaves.

KP: Did you ever experience any of the V-rocket attacks?

HB: Yes, yeah, I got out of London. I didn't stay too long. I was there for a couple of days, I said, "There is no point in hanging around here." They had the V-2 rockets coming over and they would just go "bang." They didn't know where they were landing, but I said, "This is not a safe place to be."

KP: Did any come close to you?

HB: No, no, but I saw them in the sky.

KP: When you did your training exercises, did you train with any Army people?

HB: No, it was a naval operation. We had to do our part and the only time we really saw the troops on board was when they loaded for D-Day.

KP: That was the first time the troops got ...

HB: They got on there.

KP: What was that like, having these troops on?

HB: Well, you knew, I mean first of all, the battle orders were this high, in other words these were eight by eleven sheets.

KP: Stacked several …

HB: About this high off the floor [indicates several feet], and you had signals, "Open this at such and such time," and that's all. "Open this at such and such hour," and that's all, and you read as far as you had to read. The reason being because if the thing were postponed you wouldn't have any more information than you needed to know to do that part of it, and it was postponed. Finally, when we were underway and we finally got to the part, we were searching for the part of what we had to do, and where we had to bring our guys. Naturally, we had to follow a group of people and report here, and so forth. We weren't really on our own, but we wanted to see what we had to do, in case we were separated, and we were all instructed, and so forth. … One of the unusual things I found was, I walked out on the deck and sitting there is a kid from my high school class in the Army. … I got a kick out of that.

KP: Did you say "hello" to him?

HB: Sure! Sure. I gave him whatever I could give him. I had all the hometown papers, whatever food he wanted. He got special treatment this guy.

KP: What about the Army officers, did you give them any special treatment?

HB: No, no, we treated them like, they didn't want any special treatment. They were treated just like the men. They ate the same food, and so forth, but they were so happy to get off.

KP: Really? Because the weather was very rough on D-Day.

HB: Oh, it was awful. They were so happy to get off the ship. They didn't care who was going to shoot at them.

JV: You had about two hundred men aboard?

HB: Yeah, two hundred men, a company of men.

KP: I have heard that those who were in D-Day will never forget the sight. There probably will never be another armada.

HB: That was the most impressive thing. As far as you could see, there were ships of all sizes and shapes. I mean, think about it, getting out in the middle of the ocean, which the English Channel looked like an ocean, there in the middle of it and we didn't cross at the smallest point.

The distance between the two points that we crossed at was about ninety miles. As far as you could see, there were ships. You could almost walk across the channel, and in the sky were planes, groups of planes coming over, before, you know, the bombers, this, that, and the other thing. Tremendous. You had so much confidence that you weren't alone. There was no question, even reading the battle orders. They had it down to, "In the event you sustain casualties, if you're here, you deliver the bodies here. If you're over here, you deliver the bodies there, and these people will be buried in such and such cemetery. Get whatever bodies you can and retrieve them." But it's not going to happen to you. It will never happen to you. You don't think about it that way. I'm sure everybody had the same attitude.

KP: People who I interviewed about D-Day, who were in landing crafts, say that there was an awful lot of carnage, particularly on Omaha Beach.

HB: Oh, yeah. We lost four ships on Omaha Beach. Half of our flotilla landed their first batch on Omaha Beach. Ours landed on Utah Beach, which was really sort of calm, but then we had to go back and unload a transport and we had to go to Omaha Beach. There was really a lot of action over there.

KP: So, you saw two of the beaches on D-Day?

HB: Yeah, more than most people got the opportunity to do. I saw ships capsize. I saw an LST turning over and sinking. What they hit, I don't know, a mine, but everything on there was lost, men, equipment.

KP: You didn't ferry any wounded though?

HB: No, we took prisoners of war back.

KP: Oh, you did?

HB: Yeah.

KP: Which day was that, the first day?

HB: No, maybe the third day. I don't recall what day it was. I didn't like the idea of doing that, but we did it. We put them down in the hole. We had to see that they had food and make sure they weren't armed, or anything like that. They had to be disarmed, which the Army took care of, and they had their guards. Those guys probably were taken back to the States and put into camps.

KP: How long did you stay in the D-Day invasion area?

HB: We stayed there, I would say, well, we made trips back and forth, but we were there for about three weeks.

KP: When you made these trips, were you taking more soldiers in?

HB: Taking soldiers back, bringing soldiers across, but we weren't landing them on a beach. We landed them at an embarkation point where they would get off, walk off. The only time you would land them on a beach is if you could get up close so they don't have to get wet.

KP: How often did you encounter hostile action after the first day?

HB: No, after that incident, I told you about, that lone bomber that came along. I don't know where he came from. We never had any direct action after that.

KP: So, once the beach was secure, you felt it was a pretty secure.

HB: Yeah.

JV: On the first day, the LCIs that went down were numbered right around yours. They were right around 96. Did you guys come close to …

HB: You have my number?

JV: I looked up 96. The ones that went down were 91, 93. So, they were right around you. Were you guys close to being hit or anything?

HB: No, no, we were in divisions. It so happened that they were not in our division, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, were in another division; 95, 96, 119, 120, 125, 126, were the six ships in our division. Just the luck of the draw. That's the way it was. I knew the people on those ships because we were always together in groups.

KP: After you finished your D-Day duty, what did you do, because it sounds like you were quite busy for about a month?

HB: Yeah, we were busy for a month and I don't know how many trips we made across the Channel. I really forget now.

KP: But there were a number?

HB: Yes, and … eventually, we went to do it alone because you wouldn't have to go in convoy. … It was fairly safe from U boats, or anything else there. After that we were just then putting our ship in painting and chipping, the normal things that you do, and awaiting further orders, which came sometime in October, to take these ships back to the States.

KP: You told us earlier about this tremendous voyage, particularly hitting a hurricane.

HB: Right.

KP: A lot of Coast Guard and Navy people said that often they feared the weather more, like a hurricane or typhoon, than the enemy.

HB: Well, that was the only time we really had it bad. In the Pacific they had a lot of naval actions, and they were more prone to be attacked and have to fight, aside from the landings, there were naval engagements, which we didn't have.

KP: You never encountered any U-boats?

HB: No.

KP: Even coming back?

HB: No.

KP: After you got back, what then happened?

HB: I'll just tell you one more funny story.

KP: Oh, go ahead.

HB: They had promised us that those people that came back from Normandy would be relieved and would get new crews on their ships who would take them to the Pacific for the war against Japan. So, we take the ships back and I think we came into Charleston, South Carolina, and then we had to see that everybody got leave. They got a thirty-day leave. Then we had to take the ships up to the Norfolk area, and they got new crews and everybody was discharged and relieved on our ship. They kept skeleton people to train the new people. I, being the last officer on the ship, had to stay. So, okay, we're training these people, and they say, "Don't worry, before these ships take off for the Pacific, you will get off," and every one of the ships had one officer, one old officer. Well, it so happens that the time was coming close and we didn't get any orders. So, the Coast Guard being the small, intimate organization that it was, we had connections. We called up Washington and one of our former division commanders was stationed in Washington. We called him, "Commander, we were told that we were going to be relieved. What is happening? These ships are going out in a week." He said, "Don't worry, you will be taken care of." He said, "Call me in two or three days." We call him in two or three days, no orders. He said, "Listen, they want you to take the ships to Hawaii. When you get to Hawaii, you will be relieved. They will go the rest of the way in, you will come back. They'll fly you back." Doesn't sound too good? You can't call Washington that easily. So, we didn't like that at all. So, finally we get orders to move out on certain date and proceed wherever we had to go. I don't know, through the Canal, or whatever, and go to Hawaii. Looking back, I wish I had taken it, but the day before, we called up. "We're leaving tomorrow, and no orders have come." He said, "I told you, you'll get off in Hawaii." We don't believe it, we're going to go on to the South Pacific after that. I said, "We're really entitled to get a different kind of duty now." "Let me see what I can do." About six hours later we get telegram orders relieving each of us of our duties and … again, I was stationed back to Manhattan Beach. As soon as we got those orders, we had a sea chest of our clothes and

equipment, we took the sea chest and dumped them on the pier in Norfolk, Virginia. We told the guys that we were relieved and we're going, right now, and we wish you the best of luck, and we disappeared. We left our clothes on the dock. We wanted to get away from those ships, so, they wouldn't have any chance to say, "Well, you'll have to go along with them." We're gone. We went out to the movies, another friend and I. We went to the movies in Norfolk and we hid out until the ships left.

JV: That's interesting, because 96 winds up at Okinawa.

HB: It did? I never knew what happened. How did you find that out?

JV: I just looked it up in the Coast Guard book. It's the "History of the Coast Guard in World War II," in our library.

HB: Well, I think the real battle of Okinawa had already been fought. At any rate, I got stationed back at Manhattan Beach again, the training station. Then I had been serving as the communications officer on the LCI, in addition to the other things. They said they were going to send me to communications school to be a real communications officer on a, they had just commissioned a new, … I guess an electronic type ship with all the equipment on it, but you have to go and be trained. I was sent to Harvard. I went there for training courses, three months.

KP: When did you start at Harvard?

HB: Well, it must have been, I don't remember now.

JV: I have it here, I think, May 2, 1945, because that was the *Whittlesworth* J-31.

HB: Did I give you that information?

JV: No, you know where I got it? You had requested the alumni newsletter from Rutgers, and you always sent in the change of address.

HB: Oh, God. Wow, I forgot all about that. Okay, so I was up there for about three months, going to communications school. Now, they're going to make me a communications officer. I finished there and was put on this ship, again, down in Carolina someplace. I think it was called the *Duane*, the Coast Guard cutter *Duane*. They would be fitted. They were in drydock, and I then made a request to be transferred to sea duty out of New York, the Third Naval District, if possible. The war was over, as far as I was concerned, except for the Japanese war. … I liked sea duty. So, … I put in my request that I wanted to get as much time near where I lived to help my parents in their business, which I did. I figured I could use any time off for that. I was transferred to the Third Naval District and made skipper of a Coast Guard cutter out of Staten Island, doing air-sea rescue work … . Four days out, and four days in. Talk about rough duty, that was rough duty. These were the Atlantic waters, off-shore, in the wintertime. I don't know when I was there. You got that?

JV: No, the last thing I had was the *Duane*.

HB: Oh, okay. I forgot the name of this ship.

KP: And you were the skipper?

HB: I was the skipper. By that time I already had two stripes. So, I knew a little more. … I stayed there until they got to me, to relieve me.

KP: But you didn't leave the service until June of '46.

HB: Well, I actually left three months before that and I had terminal leave of ninety days, which is nice, getting full pay for ninety days. I loved it. So, I got off, it must have been some time in March.

KP: Overall, it sounds like you enjoyed the Coast Guard.

HB: I enjoyed it then. I enjoy talking about it. I think we have come to the end. I wanted to give you these letters, to take a look at them.

KP: How did you meet your wife, was it war related?

HB: No. I met a lot of girls, but I didn't meet my wife. No, my wife happened to work with my brother-in-law, and everybody is trying to fix everybody up. Hey, she is a cute girl. I should have brought you a picture of her, and I dated her, and from the first time I took her out, we were engaged in four months, and married four months after that, still going on.

KP: It sounds like, at least in length, you have had a very successful marriage.

HB: We did. A very good marriage. I'm very lucky. I've got a great family.

KP: None of your three daughters served in the military?

HB: No.

KP: You did stay in the reserves?

HB: I stayed in the reserves for ten years, but it was inactive reserves, they didn't have a budget for active reserves that I knew about at the time. I think some people did stay in.

KP: It sounds like you would have liked to have been in active reserve.

HB: I would have. The only problem is I wound up in the retail business. It's not like working for IBM, where you tell them you need two weeks off. You have got to serve reserve duty and

you're off, whether you get paid or don't get paid, at least you can take off. In your own business, you can't take off.

KP: If you take off you're in …

HB: You're in big trouble. You don't have your business when you come back. Even two weeks is dangerous.

KP: Particularly in sales.

HB: In sales and retail, and the fashion business, that has to be moving all the time.

KP: You never joined any veteran's organizations?

HB: I did. I did, briefly. My uncle beat me to join the American Legion because he was a member of the American Legion, so, I joined. … Somebody else had me join the Jewish War Veterans, which I joined that. It just lasted a year or two, I never …

KP: You never became active in a Post?

HB: No, I never did that. My activities are in other areas.

KP: You mention that you had strong ties to Hoboken, but you live and your business is in Bloomfield.

HB: I was active in Bloomfield, too. I was active in the Chamber of Commerce in Bloomfield. I was president of the Chamber of Commerce. I've been active in our temple for as long as I've been living there. I was president of the temple.

KP: Is it reformed or conservative?

HB: The temple that we have now is a merger of two temples, one a conservative, and one a reform temple. It's one of seven in the country. … The merger now is in its eighteenth year, very successful, and I was glad to be part of that.

JV: It says here that you still do real estate.

HB: After I retired, I went to school and became a real estate agent.

KP: So, you still do some real estate?

HB: Yeah. I do commercial real estate, and we just closed one of the biggest deals anyone would ever do.

KP: Congratulations.

HB: Thank you. A fantastic deal, we just finished it up two weeks ago. Most realtors don't do this in a lifetime.

KP: Was it in the Bloomfield area?

HB: No, it was out of the area. We sold a group of nursing homes to another group.

KP: So, you remained active in retirement.

HB: Well, I go into the office three days a week. We have a good relationship. We work in a two- man office and we are old friends, although, he is young enough to be my son. We get along very well. … I could not be inactive as long as I have my health, which I do and lucky enough.

KP: Well, is there anything we forgot to ask?

HB: No, I really don't think so. If I forgot to tell you I don't know. I usually am not a talkative person.

KP: Well, we found that most people have led more interesting lives than they've imagined, and we've really enjoyed it.

HB: Okay, I'm glad you did. I certainly enjoyed coming down here.

KP: We really appreciate the letters.

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

Reviewed by Lauren O'Gara 4/28/02
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 5/13/02
Reviewed by Herbert Bilus 11/02