

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH EUGENE J. BRADFORD

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Eugene J. Bradford on April 2, 2004, in West Caldwell, New Jersey, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak and ...

Lisa-Marie Battelli: Lisa-Marie Battelli. We would like to thank you, Mr. Bradford, for taking time out of your busy schedule to speak with us. To begin, I would like you to please tell me a little bit about your family.

Eugene Bradford: I was formerly married to Nancy Louise Harman in 1942. We have one son, Lewis Seldon Bradford, who now lives in Denver and who was born in 1946. So, he's in his fifties now. He had four children of his own, three boys and one girl. My grandchildren, two of them live in Denver and two of them live in Florida and I'm in contact with them and see them at least once a year. That's my family. My wife passed away in 1993.

SH: Can you tell us when and where you were born?

EB: January 31, 1915, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

SH: Can you tell us a bit about your father?

EB: My father was a World War I veteran, a private in the Maintenance Corps in the Army, and came back to Philadelphia, met my mother. They had two children, myself and my brother, Vincent. Vincent became a football star at Duke University, and then, in Springfield, he was captain on the boxing team. [He] was a councilman in Charlotte, North Carolina, part of the local political group. [He] passed away two years ago of an aneurysm. He was a good athlete.

SH: Please tell us about your mom.

EB: My mother was unique in a way. She was a church singer, a soloist in the choir in [the] Episcopal Church, often went down to Blackwood, where the veterans' hospital was, at least once a month, and would talk to the veterans there and bring them goodies and sing to them. She was just a magnificent person, a beautiful voice and a deep, resonant voice. I was her favorite. She loved me greatly, though. I still feel it. She made me feel as if I could do anything.

SH: Can you tell us about your father's World War I experience? Did he go overseas?

EB: No, he was, I think, in Tennessee, one of the camps there in the Motorcycle Corps and he hurt his knee and he was discharged [in] the next six months or so after that accident. So, he really didn't see much. He didn't see any overseas activity at all. He was just discharged on account of his knee.

SH: Did you live in Philadelphia?

EB: No, I lived in Collingswood, New Jersey, where I grew up. I went there as a three-year-old in 1918 and we lived in an 1885 house until we sold it when my mother died in '68. So, we lived there a long time. It was a beautiful house, a nice old house, nice trees. We had about three-quarters of an acre [of] ground around it, nice.

SH: What did your father do? What was his profession?

EB: He was, at that time, [what] was called an interior decorator. He had one year of, you'd call it trade school now, where he learned how to paint, how to do marble work, how to do mixing of paints, how to do marquetry work. So, if you had a table that had inlaid wood in it, he could do that kind of work. He could also do some plastering and plaster molds and they trained him to do anything around the house that needed doing, as well as the design of it from the beginning, and the paint colors, they mixed by hand then. You didn't have ready mixed paint. Everything was done by hand. He worked out of Philadelphia and he was often away for a week at a time. He would go to places, like, I remember going to Delaware and the DuPont Estate somewhere, there and [he] worked in their big houses, and then, he'd go down with a crew of five or six. He would be gone all day long and all week long and back over the weekend with tales of where he's been and the houses he was in and what his particular work was at that time, whether it was in paint or the marquetry he worked or whatever else it was. He ended up his life as a gilder, doing church altars and stuff, mostly in gold work, not silver, most of it was gold, good man.

SH: How important was education in your parents' view?

EB: Vital. I never remember ever going to school without having my homework done. My parents just insisted on it and it got routine. It became self-disciplinary, used to start at kindergarten doing our homework. You're doing your homework and, pretty soon, it was just automatic. You finished dinner and you do your homework. When you finished eating, you do your homework, because I would come home, even when I was young, from athletics, eat, do homework, go to bed, go to school, come home, you know, it was routine. It was very important.

SH: You went to elementary school and high school in Collingswood?

EB: ... In high school, I was part of the local group. I was president of the class. Hold for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

LB: [Reading:] Eugene Bradford was named All South Jersey guard on the unbeaten Collingswood Football Team of 1931. It was his third year as a regular on the Urban Coast juggernaut of the era. He was a three-year regular in basketball and starred on the powerful Panther track and field squad. He finished second as a discus thrower in the State Meet in 1932. Shows versatility; he played the lead role in the senior play. After graduation, he starred in football at Ursinus, a small college power at the time. During World War II, he achieved the rank of lieutenant commander in the Navy and saw action in the African landing. He became a school administrator in North Jersey and, for many years, earned distinction in the Masters program for track and field veterans. Bradford recalls delivering the first kick off in the new Collingswood concrete stadium in the Athletic Hall of Fame.

SH: Have you stayed involved with your hometown of Collingswood?

EB: I go back every year when they have their Hall of Fame meeting. This is our team. I'm here, kneeling down there somewhere, and I was a guard. You see me? Here I was, in the center.

LB: That one might be you.

EB: Yes. You can take that with you.

SH: I must comment for the tape that Mr. Bradford has one of the best-organized groups of photographs and memorabilia.

EB: When I was in high school, I did this, too. I posed for the picture in the *Saturday Evening Post*. I'm the one here. Show it to Sandra; *Saturday Evening Post*, that was a Dodge.

SH: You were a pin-up.

EB: We had a lot of fun with that.

SH: "Men go for this tough, rugged Dodge," is an advertisement in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

EB: That you could keep.

SH: Oh, great, thank you.

EB: High school, I played in the class play. That's the class picture. Do you see me there?

SH: Did you participate in plays as well as the athletics?

EB: I had the lead in the play in my senior year and, before that, I was mostly a spear-carrier.

SH: You did the classics, in other words.

EB: Yes. You'll need that in a minute, when we get to it; that's college. We're not out of high school yet.

SH: In high school, in Collingswood, how big was the school?

EB: We had a three-year high school and a three-year junior high school, seven, eight and nine and ten, eleven and twelve, three and three. I think our senior class was about three hundred, 290, somewhere in there. I'm not sure of the precise number and I think there were only thirty some of us still alive out of that Class of '32. In the middle of that year, I was president of the class, the banks closed. All our money for [the] Washington trip went down the drain at that point. We had to start over from scratch and raise the money to go to Washington. We did it and it was a tough time. We went to Washington as usual, but it was tough going.

SH: What did you do to raise the money?

EB: The same old thing you do today, where we sold candy, we had some bake sales, enormous number of great bake sales, because that's the way you could raise it easiest and people could help. You could do it at home and didn't cost you a lot to do it and we sold it for fifty cents or a dollar mostly cakes. Anyway, it was a nice time. We had a good time in Washington.

SH: Why did you decide to go to Ursinus? What was that decision based on?

EB: When I finished high school, I had three offers of scholarships. One was to Princeton, one was to Rutgers and one was to Ursinus. Princeton only offered me two or three hundred dollars, Rutgers the same thing and Ursinus offered me a full scholarship. So, I went where the money was. I didn't know enough then to know about prestigious colleges or the influence they would have on your after college life. It was just, "How could I get the money to get to go?" My parents didn't have it. My brother was at Duke and he was draining everything out of my parents and I was really on my own, "Get into college somehow." So, I went there on (an open?) scholarship, where I had to maintain a C average minimum and make the teams. So, I went to college anywhere I had to do things. I had a C average and make the teams, football team, basketball team, track team. I had to make them to keep the scholarship and work. I started off at college as a dishwasher in a dishwashing unit. Get up at six-thirty in the morning, eat, wash dishes, go to class, eat, wash dishes, go to class, go to football practice, eat, wash dishes, do your homework, bed. It was a tough life.

SH: Where is Ursinus located?

EB: Collegeville. It's about thirty miles out of Philadelphia. It's the end of the Mainline; it's the end of the Rapid Transit Line. It's really next to Norristown. Anyway, that's Collinsville.

SH: Had someone else in your family gone to Ursinus?

EB: No. I went there because one of my coaches in junior high school, when I was playing sports in junior high school, went there, Bill (Dimmer?), and he knew the coach, so, I was just screened. I never regretted it. I was there at Ursinus as a pre-med and, somewhere around my junior year, I took the education credits as a safety valve, people still do it, and, when I got out, I didn't have the money to go to med school. My parents just couldn't afford it. So, I went into teaching and my first job was at Salem, where I went down there as a coach/teacher, I still have the telegram they sent my mother, twelve-hundred-dollar a year. Coach, three sports, no extra money for coaching. You just coach three sports and do it and I was glad to get the job. It was a tough time then. Everybody wasn't employed when you graduated from college then.

SH: What do you remember about how tough it was, particularly for you and your family, during the Depression?

EB: It was tough in one sense and, in another, it wasn't. We were never poor in that sense. My dad was always working. He fixed up the house. I remember when we were there in the house he started and I must have been six or seven years old. He rewired the whole house. We went

from gas to electricity, I remember that, and then when, I was maybe eight or ten years old, he put a whole hot water heating system in, because I remember helping him carry the radiators up the steps to get to the second and third floors. I lived in the third floor, in an unheated room under the eaves, with no heat all my life. I grew up that way. There was never any heat in my room. I was under the eaves all the time. There was one window on the other side of me. It wasn't air conditioned and it was hot in the summer and it was cold in the winter and I generally slept under six or seven blankets. It was like you're underneath the roof and the roof isn't insulated. Anyway, dad always had a job and, always, we had food on the table and I wasn't aware personally of the big problems out in the other homes. I remember, some of my classmates tell me how tough it was for them even to get food on their table, because their dads weren't working and they were on welfare, but, by and large, I don't think our class really felt the brunt of it, like the people in the cities did. Collingswood was a commuter town in Philadelphia and I guess ... we sent, I think, close to fifty or fifty-five percent of our kids to college out of that class. So, it wasn't a poor class and we really didn't feel the Depression as such. I didn't, anyway. I had clothes. I had hand-me-downs all the time from my brother. He was two-and-a-half years ahead of me and I always wore his clothes. We grew up that way. It wasn't until I got to college [that] I had clothes of my own.

SH: Did your mom and dad have brothers and sisters?

EB: My mother ... was named D'Anella. She was born in Marseilles. She had a brother who lived in Camden and ... the two, brother, sister, were close. They were the only family I knew on that side of the family. On my father's side, he had a sister who died young and no other relatives that was in that area. He was related to the Whildin Family of New Jersey, who had the first ferry from Cape May to New York and Cape May to Newark. The Whildin family is connected into the original founders of the Plymouth Colony, to [the] Whildin family. My wife, on the other hand, is related through her maternal parents, ... also from the Plymouth Colony to her family down and, through there, to General Grant down into the Plymouth Colony, the Howland Family, but dad had no one close to him there.

SH: You said that your mother was from Marseilles. Are we talking about Marseilles, France?

EB: Yes. She was born there.

SH: How did she travel to this country?

EB: Her father brought her here when she was, I think, six, seven or eight. She was a child, maybe even three, four, five, but she could speak French, she was young enough to be speaking and learned the language and he was a tailor, which was, in that time in the 1880s and '90s, ... a big profession. Anyway they made suits. The tailor was one of the high professions at that time, like the painters were.

SH: You had been a pre-med major, but you took teaching credits as a back up. Were there any scholarship available for someone who wanted to go in med school?

EB: There might have been. I didn't find any. I didn't find any who would help me, particularly for that.

SH: Was your family politically involved at all?

EB: Mother was a Democrat then, for Roosevelt, and I helped her in the '20s. She would come home and I don't remember her title, but she had the job of sending out paper ballots and I would help her stuff the envelopes. I remember doing that, year after year. It was time to stuff the envelopes. I helped Mother do that, but she never held a position of committeeman or any of those things. She's just a worker.

SH: Obviously, then, she supported some of the New Deal programs. Did anyone that you know take advantage of any of the New Deal programs?

EB: I did.

SH: What did you do?

EB: When I was, I guess it was my junior year, maybe it was my sophomore year, one of those years, I worked [on] ... when I came home at Christmastime, building a bridge in ... Southern New Jersey and that was a WPA project and I was glad to get that job. My brother worked in the post office but I couldn't get that. He had a soft job. It was cold that winter and I remember wearing my dad's big Army overcoat to keep warm and my job was [to] pull the nails out of the framing material that was there before they pour the concrete. After the concrete was poured, you took the frames away and you pulled the nails out, so [that] they could use it again and I did that during Christmas vacation. It was cold. I still remember that. We didn't have insulated gloves or fleece wear or any of that stuff then. It was just [that] you wear woolen. That's the best you could do and it was wet and cold. It was a tough job.

SH: When you graduated in 1936...

EB: '32, high school, '36, college.

SH: Did you have any thoughts of going to in the military at that point?

EB: I started [working] when I got out. I went to Washington, New Jersey, as a high school principal. That was my first job. They had a high school principal who, before that, was suspected of some illegal activities, to put it kindly, and they fired him and he'd been on the job for about six months before they finally fired him. I came there in April and they said, "Calm the place down, take charge of it, get some discipline restored," and that's where I went. You asked me a question.

SH: I was trying to figure out where you entered the military. Did you have to take ROTC in college?

EB: No. They didn't have ROTC at Ursinus, but, when I got out to Washington, I started a Naval Reserve unit there from scratch and it lasted only about five or six years, until when I left Washington. When I left Washington to go to Glen Rock, the thing just died on the vine. I couldn't commute back and forth and it only lasted about six or seven years, but I started it from scratch and kept it going. ... I went two summers, I think, to the Brooklyn Navy Yard to do the summer activities to keep my enlistment up, my reserve quality up. I only did that for two summers. That was easy duty in the Navy yard. It wasn't anything tough.

SH: This is after the war, right?

EB: This is after the war.

SH: When you graduated, you went to Salem to teach.

EB: Yes.

SH: What about the draft? Were you old enough that you did not have to worry about it?

EB: When the draft came up, I had a number, but I don't remember that number anymore but I was safe. I remember thinking, "I'm not worried about the draft." So, through the '30s, '36, '7, '8, '9, '10, until I joined in '42, I was never in any danger of being drafted. I had a low number, even though I was single, and then, when I got married, in '42, I volunteered to join the Navy.

SH: Do you remember where you were and what you were doing when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

EB: I was in Norristown, Pennsylvania, on the Line going back to Philadelphia. I just had a date with Nancy and her girlfriend who lived in Norristown and the four of us were there on the platform when we heard about it and we looked at one another and wondered, "Are we next?" you know, because we were cannon fodder at that point and I said, "Well, I'd better get in the service." The thought really went through my mind, "I better get in."

SH: How did that process progress?

EB: I sent a letter into the Navy recruiting [center] in New York City, Church Street, went for an interview. I had two interviews in Church Street in New York and they sent me down to Washington, had interview there in Washington. It was [with] Thomas Hamilton, who was chairman of the V-5 program there. See the two little napkins? There's a book there, a dark book.

SH: Mr. Bradford has a copy of the manual for the V-5 program.

EB: It's a directory. In that directory, there are [the] names of all the people who joined that program. There were ... college coaches from all over. The most famous of those was probably Bear Bryant, who was my junior. He was commissioned after I was commissioned. We were both sent to Africa to be part of the Fleet Air Wing 15 and, because he was junior, he was sent to

Agadir, which was the southern base. I stayed in Port Lyautey, near Casablanca, which was a headquarters base. So, he was my junior and I got to know him a little bit, really not much, because he was pretty far away then. Anyway, I was commissioned as a lieutenant JG, not as an ensign. So I went in as a JG, because, at that time, I think I was one of the few persons who could do almost any sport. I've already played football, basketball. I'd wrestled three years as varsity. ... I'd been an intramural boxing champ. I've done almost all the sports in track and field, from pole-vaulting down to everything else. I was a swimming coach. I tested the instructors in three states when they got their instructor's license to be Red Cross examiners. I did that for three states, so, I could do the swimming part of it. When I was a Boy Scout, I was part of the lifeguard division and was in charge of the swimming part of the program at the Camden County Boy Scout camps on the Delaware River. Often used to swim across the river, do canoeing, row boating, etc, etc., on the river. That camp is still there, incidentally, Camp Minitik Boy Scout Camp. It's right below Frenchtown.

SH: What is it called?

EB: Camp Minitik, and, somewhere in there, I did well at Camp Minitik, particularly when I was a youngster. I had the highest percentage of points gained in one summer.

SH: You went there as a Boy Scout, and then, as a leader.

EB: Two summers as an unpaid counselor, then, became a paid counselor. I got 125 dollars for the summer, a lot of money. It was a lot of money.

SH: I am assuming that you met your wife when you were at Ursinus.

EB: Yes. When she was a freshman, I was a junior and I waited on her.

SH: Really?

EB: I was a waiter in my second year. In my junior year, I became a waiter and got rid of the dishwasher. I had two years as a dishwasher. That was awful. It was a tough life, that dishwashing.

LB: Did you two have the same major?

EB: No. She was an English and math major.

SH: Did you start dating while you were in college?

EB: Yes, as soon as I could. I think I dated her in November. She was pretty and lively. She came [in] September. I think I started dating her in November and we dated for six years, because, at that time, she had two more years to go to graduate and she had to get her teaching certificate, as her mother insisted, who, incidentally, was a widow with four girls to raise and a boy, "Get your teaching certificate made permanent before you get married." So, we had to wait, really, six years until she got that permanent certificate.

SH: Was she older or younger? Where did she fit in in her family?

EB: She was the baby. She was the last one. All the daughters went to college. Some went to Penn State, two went to Gettysburg, one went to Carnegie Mellon, home ec [economics] teacher, and Ruth went to NYU and became a math teacher, married to the head of the math department at Colgate University. They all did well, but the mother, she did well, too. She kept the family together because her father died when Nancy was seven or eight. She was a youngster and the mother raised the whole family. She did a real good job with the children.

SH: You said that you knew you needed to get into the military after Pearl Harbor.

EB: And I got in.

SH: Can you walk us through that process. Where did you go for, your basic training or your Officers Candidate School?

EB: After I got the interview with Tom Hamilton, I waited at home for, I think, a month or two and I got a beautiful letter commissioning me as a JG and I skipped that ensign rank and I was told to report to the University of North Carolina, where we'd get our training as officers, Officer Training School, and I was there for thirty days and we were the thirty-day-wonders. I think ... we only had thirty days; I think that was in August or September. I entered the Navy formally, I think, in November, also, and I was immediately sent to Officer Training School. In thirty days, we were finished there and I was sent then to Fighter 18 at Oceana Field as part of the training officer's work there and that was in November. I was there about a month and a half or so, maybe October, November. Then, I was sent to New York City to wait for transportation [for] the African Invasion then which took place in December, I think, of '42 and I reported to a troopship there. [At] that time, that was a Liberty ship and a little contingent of fifty or sixty of us were Navy, all the rest were Army, and we were on a Liberty ship and took sail for the African invasion in a big convoy, an enormous convoy, ... headed for Casablanca.

SH: When did you know where you were going?

EB: When we were onboard ship. You never knew ahead of time. We knew we were going to Africa. They gave us, ... they called it desert boots, to keep the sand out of your shoes, never needed it, anyway. The first day out on the big convoy, our Liberty ship broke down, something happened to the engines, and the big question, at that time, was, what happens next? So, they left us there and the whole convoy went on and did the African invasion and our little boat was there in the middle of the ocean and we waited for something to come out of New York, with parts, and fix the thing and we were there overnight and, the next day in the middle of the ocean with all the subs around us and [we] came back to New York and I was back in New York at Christmastime, then, and took sail again on January 5th or 6th or 7th, went back to Africa. So, I got there two weeks late and, at that time, the invasion, so-called, was gone and we only had, I think, one or two air raids after that. It was pretty calm and quiet after that and we did our anti-sub work, which was what we were doing. We did the Gibraltar to the Azores to Dakar, did that big sweep for anti-sub work.

SH: What kind of aircraft were you flying?

EB: These were all amphibians, floaters. They were floatplanes with pontoons underneath, PBYS, mostly. In that picture you have there, of course, the caption there, it's in a PBY-2, two engines, and then, later, the four-engine stuff came along, but, initially, it was just two engines and the four-engine stuff came along and the British came down with their planes, too. So, the British were operating too out of the same place, Port Lyautey.

SH: Did you take flight training?

EB: No. I flew a couple of times, all these as a passenger. I was never a pilot. When I joined, I was twenty-six, almost twenty-seven, and the recruiter said, "You're too old to go into flight training. By the time you get out you'd be past twenty-seven and that was the age limit for ... new pilots." You couldn't be twenty-seven; you had to be twenty-six.

SH: What were you trained to do?

EB: I was trained to keep the pilots in good shape, giving them exercise and that kind of stuff in the personnel department. That meant, I think there were three or four thousand of us there, keep track of all the records, the comings and goings of all the people. ... They would fly so many flights, and then, they would be off duty and I'd keep track of all that, sending them back to the station, new pilots coming in, and helping to train the corps. We wanted all the people in the corps, the enlisted men, to take correspondence courses, so that it keeps them upgraded in class. If you were a third class petty officer, we wanted you to become second class and first class and there was always written material for you to do and there was always college programs for those who already had been through high school. So, part of my job was, look after the educational division of the program and I did that there for almost two years, ... nice job. I enjoyed it.

SH: What did you do to keep busy in the convoy? It takes a long time to cross the ocean.

EB: We were there almost two days. I remember, the Captain tells me the evening of the first day we were at sea by ourselves, I was the ranking Navy officer onboard ship then, I was a lieutenant JG, fresh out of thirty days training, and he said, "You're the Navy. You're the ranking Navy officer here. You're in charge now, [run] abandon ship program for us. What do we do next?" and I told him I didn't know what to do. This is my first trip on a Liberty ship and [I] didn't know what to do in an abandon ship drill, but I said, "We'll find out together," and he got out a drill he had written up, I guess every ship had, and I said, "We'll have a practice drill and we'll wait and see what happens," and that's what we did. We had a practice drill and waited to see what happens. I really didn't know what I was doing. I really wasn't well-prepared at all for that, even though I was the ranking Navy officer. There were only forty-five or fifty of us, maybe sixty. None of us were really experienced. We were all green. I was not well prepared.

SH: Had your brother gone into the military as well?

EB: No. At that time, he had been married and had one or two children, so, he was exempt. He ... was at Charlotte, then. He was football coach and director of athletics.

SH: What did the men do to keep entertained while you were en route to Africa? That is a long time at sea.

EB: Most of the time, it was boring as the devil and most of the time you spent just listening to one another, most of the time, just work, work. Everything was organized. It was just sit and talk, really, smoke, smoke a lot. A few of them were adventurous. They may have a crap game going or a card game going or something like that, but there wasn't much of that, because it really was frowned upon.

SH: Were they involved in athletic training at that time? Was there room on the ship to do that?

EB: No. It was jammed. We were sleeping, at that time, I think, at least two deep and, in some instances, three deep in hammocks. All those ships were loaded and it was two or three bunks deep in hammocks, not conducive, not even, to sleeping. I had never slept in a hammock before. That takes some getting used to, too. It's not natural.

LB: Sandra and I went through some of your correspondence yesterday and one of your letters talked about how you encountered many Arabic people in North Africa. Would you mind telling us about them?

EB: This is a letter I sent home to Nancy. It tells of my visit to Arab chiefs at that point and the dinner we had and how we ate dinner and some of the etiquette that's involved in it. That's yours to keep. Make a copy of it and send it back to me. Send the originals back to me. You make a copy, not now, when you get back to Rutgers.

SH: For the tape can you tell us a little bit about what you wrote?

EB: I think there were four or five of us. We had the chiefs, the host. We were all in hoods. You saw a picture; we have a hood on.

SH: Did you wear these hoods out of deference to them?

EB: It was very open, very friendly, and it was not yak, yak, yak, respectful on both sides, and the food was set out and we learned to use the right hand to eat with. The left hand was for other purposes and the food was brought in and I remember [him] offering the eye of the lamb to me and I politely refused, saying I really didn't want it, but that was a delicacy, if you wanted to have it, and it was couscous and I can't remember anything else. We had lamb and couscous and tea, little cups, not big cups, not mugs, little teacups, strong, really strong, needed sugar.

LB: Here, you discuss one of the people you encountered. They wore heavy wool dresses. It must have been really hot.

EB: You can read that into the thing or just refer to it.

LB: It says, "Under this, he had his heavy dress robe of pale brown wool and it was embroidered with thread stripping and it was embroidered with blue, red and gold designs." Then, it speaks of how terribly hot that day was, so, he took off his heavy robes and he left on a thin dress robe. You go on to describe what you ate, the couscous, and the lamb and tea. Were they nice people? Were they friendly?

EB: I'd say there was mutual respect there and they were, I would call it, friendly, but, if you make a copy of that, send me the original back when you get to Rutgers. That was a nice occasion.

SH: How often did you interact with the Arabs?

EB: Not often.

SH: Were you in Morocco or Libya?

EB: No, Morocco. Port Lyautey is a port, Lyautey, [the] name was a French general who was involved in the conquering of Morocco in the 1800s, early. The French went in there and conquered and Lyautey was a general, so, they named the port after him. That port was where the Foreign Legion had a big headquarters and that was about ten or fifteen miles or so from the capital of Morocco, Rabat.

SH: Please, continue.

EB: Where are we?

LB: You mentioned in your pre-interview survey that you had combat experience in Africa.

EB: ... I didn't have any combat experience. Is that what you're asking me? ... No, I did not have any, no, because, when I got there, the invasion was over, only one or two air raids. I got there two weeks late and it moved up. ...

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

LB: Side two, tape one.

EB: The activity had already stopped in [the] Casablanca area and it moved to Tunis and Libya. There was very little action left in ... Morocco at that point.

SH: Were there people coming back to the base who had been in combat?

EB: No. That activity was all up on the Mediterranean Coast, not on the Atlantic side. It was up in the Mediterranean. That was when Rommel was in his heyday. That was all taking place in Libya and Tunis. Morocco was off, in a sense, by itself and isolated down there and, really, except for the anti-submarine patrol, that was the main activity.

SH: We are looking at pictures of tents. Where were you housed? Were you housed in a tent as well?

EB: Quonset huts. ... Probably, we were there three weeks, maybe a month or so, before the Quonset huts were erected. Seabees came in and put the Quonset huts up. So we lived in a Quonset hut, about eight to a hut. Before that, we were tenting.

SH: Did you have an airstrip?

EB: Big airstrips.

SH: What did the base look like? What else was it used for?

EB: It wasn't used for anything else, just anti-sub patrol and there were two big runways, one was essentially north-south, one was sort of, like, east-west, depending on the winds, but it was single purpose anti-sub work, to Gibraltar, Azores, Dakar. That's the bend in Africa, right on that bend.

SH: What would be a normal day for you?

EB: Depending on the day, most of the time, it was get up and inspect the barracks, inspection [of] the barracks for cleanliness. If there's anything special going on that we needed to get ready for, get the men ready for whatever the event was of that day, whether it was to work on the planes or to do something special for incoming planes, new ones coming in from America or some coming ... from Great Britain, get the training program started for the enlisted men. ... Then, you had to find out who was off duty and could do it at that time and who was not on working. There were shifts at that time. You had a duty shift and a sleeping shift, working shift, and then, make my rounds, go back to the desk and do the desk work. ... The days weren't typical. Each day had a little [bit of] different things to it and there were often inspections. There were always men coming in from overseas, like America, or coming down from the Mediterranean, coming in as pilots or relief people. They had to be met, greeted, housed, tended to, papers taken care of, discharges or next duty assignments, and then, always, I was in charge, also, of the enlisted men's compound in the town of Dakar, at Port Lyautey, like the USO division there, and we had native people working in there and they had to be looked after all the time.

SH: What was your relationship with them?

EB: I got along nicely with them. I don't know if I have [it] any more, ... I thought I sent you a list of the people I worked with. I guess I didn't.

SH: Perhaps you did.

EB: I'm taking too much time.

SH: No, that is okay. What were the rules for engaging with the natives in Morocco around the base?

EB: Actually, no one was allowed on the base unless he has some duty to perform and there weren't many duties that the Moroccans did. They really weren't on the base, almost hardly at all. The only place we interacted with them was at, like, a USO in town and the only interaction with them was as, like, cooks, waiters and that kind of stuff, not intellectual or duty work but they really didn't come on base unless they had something to do. We had invited them as guests and you have some pictures of them as guests, when the band would come and play music, or they would help in the 4th of July parade. You would parade with them, but, other than that, there's really little interchange.

SH: You talked about British planes coming down. How much interaction did you have with the other Allied forces?

EB: Not much mingling. The only place you would mingle would be in the officers' quarters. Other than that there was very little interchange. I rarely met my opposite in the British group. We hardly ever communicated with one another, very separate, distinct groups, not a lot of interchange.

SH: What about leaves? Did anyone ever get a pass to go on R&R?

EB: At that point, in the Navy, there were points given for months of service and where the service was. You got more points if you were ... overseas in Africa than you do if you were home based and after so many points, you were eligible, then, to be returned back to the States for relief and subsequent reassignment. You weren't guaranteed, but you were eligible, then, and, when something opened up in the United States, ... I get a message saying there's a spot X for this type of duty and they need somebody with this type of qualification. I have somebody ready; we did the paper exchange and you went then back to the States and the person in the States came over to Africa, but that was all on a point system. I had my points early, but never got sent back until I guess in April of '45. It took a long time to get the points together, because it was a point system that was true for the whole Navy and Army and everybody else.

SH: Did you get weekend passes to go places?

EB: No weekend. Most of the time, it was just overnight and you had to be home by ten.

SH: Where did you go?

EB: Town. One time, I had a weekend pass and three or four of us went to, [I] think it was called Volubilis to see the Roman ruins there on the coast. It's in the Atlas Mountains, anyway. Volubilis, it's in the history books. That was the only time I went, once; went to Casablanca once, went to Fez once. They were all day trips; go there in the morning, be home at night.

SH: What were you warned not to do? Were there guidelines for what you should be wary of?

EB: Not really. You're pretty much on your own when you went to the cities. [If] you had a pass to go to Port Lyautey or Casablanca, you're pretty much on your own there, except, "Mind your manners. Don't get drunk," etc., the usual things that will prevail wherever you were. There weren't many dos or don'ts. You keep your uniform clean, mind your manners and respect everybody.

SH: Were you housed in a hotel or something?

RB: No, Quonset huts.

SH: You said you went on a weekend pass.

EB: In Casablanca, yes, I was in a big hotel. It's still there, the Mouli Eshray, something like that, big, fancy hotel. It's still there. Fez was marvelous, too. They were different. They had all those streets that were narrow and ancient and crowded with shops, one shop after another, and the shops, this would have, maybe, three or four shops this size room. Most of them were eight or ten feet across and that was it and maybe twelve or fourteen feet deep and that was it. Mile after mile there were shops, Fez, Casablanca. Casablanca had a walled city and the shops were in that area inside the wall.

SH: Did you do any shopping?

EB: I brought home a rug. I had it shipped home and I paid for it there. I had a couple of books bound in leather and I have one left now. Somewhere there, I had a book bound, another I had bound up for me, some jewelry for my wife, earrings and stuff, but not a lot. I didn't have that much money. Most of the money was going home to Nancy, which is normal.

SH: Did you have any interaction with the shore patrol?

EB: I was part of the shore patrol. They were always sending officers with the shore patrol. We have an enlisted chief, some enlisted men and an officer and, routinely, it was divided among the officers. You would take your turn at being part of the shore patrol and that would come up every four weeks or every five weeks. So you had your turn with the shore patrol. That was not pleasant duty, because the only times when you're really needed are when somebody was obstructive or had too much to drink or was just plain out of his mind and, sometimes, they get really drunk and you have to bring him home and, sometimes, they would be combative when you go politely. I never liked shore patrol duty, never liked it, not a pleasant duty.

SH: You were over there nearly two years. What is the most vivid memory that you have?

EB: Probably, a couple of times, the planes crashed on landing or taking off. I think, once on taking off and once on landing, they made a mistake of some kind, I don't know the mistake and I saw my first burned up people which is never a pleasant sight when the planes blow up and they burn. I still remember that. It's not a pleasant sight.

SH: Did you have to write to the families of those killed or wounded?

EB: Normally, the Skipper did that. The Captain always sent these and the commanding leader of the division that the man was in, the second in charge, or the third in charge would write letters. So, normally, you, as a parent, would get at least two or three letters. I saw that those letters went out. Part of my job was to see that those letters went out, see that you did your job and you did your job and help sometimes in writing them. Most of us knew how to write a good letter. It is just part of the work.

SH: You were part of the Navy Reserve. Were there any Annapolis men there?

EB: My skipper, Core, was Annapolis. Benton was Annapolis, Seitz was Annapolis and he was the commander. Seitz became skipper of the *Bunker Hill*. I sent you material, *Bunker Hill*. He became skipper of the *Bunker Hill*, which was the most decorated battleship [aircraft carrier], and the most heavily hit ... aircraft carrier in the Pacific, and he died in '63 or '64. I have a nice letter from him. ... Did I give you that letter?

SH: It might be here.

LB: Nancy and you wrote letters back and forth to each other. Was it difficult to keep writing letters to one another? Were they censored?

EB: I started writing to Nancy when I got out of college in '36. She was still a junior in college and I wrote to her and you have some of those letters. I wrote in '36, '37. I started writing [and] it was never a chore. I find it easy to do.

LB: When you were overseas where was Nancy living?

EB: In Hazelton. Her grandfather was the first superintendent of schools in the State of Pennsylvania. Hazelton was the first place to have a superintendent. Before that, there were only principals. He was the first superintendent. They named a playing field after him; it was the Harman Field up there. There's a Harman Elementary School named after him. When she married Harman, Harry Harman, he was part of the local bank. She was well respected there.

SH: You talked about the USO and we have seen pictures of some of the entertainers. Could you talk about some of the shows that you saw there?

EB: I remember Josephine Baker coming. She didn't sing that well. I don't think she had a trained voice to begin with. I think she just had a natural voice but not a trained voice, modest range and unless you saw her in a café, her personality didn't come through. She's in a décolletage uniform, rather than a suit uniform; it doesn't come through either and she's not a humorous person, but she tried, tried some dance steps and that kind of stuff. I remember a man named [Al] Schacht, who was a baseball player, who was a comedian at the baseball games in the '30s and he would clown around before the game and during intermission time or between innings and he had a great big glove that he used to clown around with. That's about all I remember. I don't remember any of the other famous names coming through at least when I was there.

SH: Being stationed on an anti-submarine patrol base as the activities of the war progressed, did your duties change at all?

EB: No.

SH: Were there still German submarines out in the Atlantic and Mediterranean?

EB: In 1943, the Atlantic was pretty much under control. '42 was a big year for anti-sub work. In '43, it was pretty much under control. In '44, it was under control and, in '45, anti-sub work was almost gone, very little left. The Germans weren't patrolling much then.

SH: How did you keep track of what was going on with the war? You were focused mostly on the European Theater.

EB: African Theater, Libya and Tunisia.

SH: Were you aware of other theaters and how the war was progressing?

EB: I thought maybe I would come home and get sent to the Far East and I probably would have been except when I came home I had to have this spinal operation, I went to the Navy hospital in St. George's New York City, I think it's in Brooklyn, maybe Staten Island (Hospital?), St. George. I stayed there and Nancy came up with me. I was there maybe two weeks and I missed the group that was sent to the Pacific.

SH: Was this an injury that you suffered that you needed to be treated for, the spinal injury?

EB: No, it was just [that], for some reason, I had a cyst in my spine. I don't know how it happened. I really don't know how I injured myself, but, anyway, it was there and was painful. The doctor said, "You got to go to New York City and have it done."

SH: Were you sent from Morocco to New York for this?

EB: I came home first. I was in New York City maybe two or three days and went to the hospital and I was there maybe two weeks [at] the most. It wasn't long.

SH: When you were in Morocco, were you aware of things like the D-Day Invasion?

EB: Yes. That kind of news came through nicely. We were kept up-to-date on what was going on. The truth is, ... I mean, Tunis and Libya weren't that far apart or that far away either but most of our attention at that time, in '42, '43, but, then, in '43, '44, ... went to the Far East, what was going on in Japan, because things weren't good in the beginning.

SH: What kind of celebration do you remember on V-E Day? You would have just come home.

EB: I don't remember anything. I came home and went to Rutgers to ... finish my doctorate. In 1941, I got my Master's at Rutgers in management. In 1941, I had finished all my requirements for my doctorate, except my thesis, and, when I went in the service, I had a letter from the commissioner, from the dean, indicating they would hold the position, the examinations, open for me and they're not required to be done until I returned from the service. So, in '46, I went to Rutgers and enrolled in my thesis work and finished my course requirements there and I tutored the mathematics teacher's son in algebra, to earn my keep while I was there, and Nancy was home with our baby at that time, in '46. So, I tutored that [kid] in '46, and then in '63, I finally finished the thesis, finally, after twenty years, took me long [enough] to get it together, a long time, and I did that, then, ... I left Glen Rock and went to Caldwell. I had a house in Glen Rock. I was building a house here in Caldwell. I was doing my thesis. My son was moving from [one] high school to another and it was a busy time. I was building, at that time, nineteen schools. I was completing an addition to the high school in Caldwell, one new elementary school and additions to other buildings.

LB: What was the Rutgers campus like while you were there?

EB: Busy, busy, loaded with veterans.

LB: In 1941, what was it like?

EB: Busy, busy. All the courses were filled up; men were coming home from [the] service. The Veterans' Act was then in force, when you could get free a college education for every year of service. It was one for one. You had a year of service and you had a year of college provided for you. So, the United States Government paid for my tuition cost. [For] my room and board, I tutored the young man here to get my keep and I commuted up to Nancy in Hazelton during the weekend.

LB: What was it like in 1941 the first time you were there, before you went into the service? What was the Rutgers campus like then, compared to how it was when you came back?

EB: There were uniforms all over the place. In fact, it looked almost like it was a recruiting station. Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Rutgers was loaded with them. In fact, they had a big division then in the headquarters division in Rutgers, probably about fifteen or twenty people in it. They were involved in giving out the scholarships, talking to the people that were coming home, trying to get new enrollment into the programs. It was a busy time then. All I remember [is], it was just veterans, veterans.

SH: You earned your Master's at Rutgers in 1941. Did you do this as a commuter or did you live on campus?

EB: No, no. I commuted. Most of it was night work and weekends. I would coach during the day, coach on the weekend and go to class, normally on Friday night or Wednesday night. I would come into Rutgers and do the work. I did most of that as a commuting student. This, incidentally, is my Navy work. You can have a copy of that. When I came back in '46, I was really isolated from the main body. I was then doing my doctorate work and I wasn't too much

[into] interacting with the underclassmen. I was a graduate student then. In '41, there was a tremendous amount of typical undergraduate people around, youngsters, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty. When I came back in '46, it was an adult group. ... Probably, the [average] age of that group [at that] time was, maybe, twenty-five or twenty-six; they were loaded with veterans. The undergraduate group was small in number and overwhelmed by the veterans who were coming back so it was like an adult Army Navy mixture in '46. That was not there in '41. In '41 it was a typical undergraduate college, small. It hadn't grown to the size it was now. The new dorms went up; they're on the river now. The stadium wasn't there and none of that stuff was there then. It was typical nice college. Douglass was big then. It hadn't been incorporated into Rutgers then and, in '46, Douglass was on its way out then, but it hadn't quite finished the transfer under Rutgers, became one school.

LB: When you came back from overseas, did you notice a change in other people's attitude about the war? Had things changed, compared to before you left?

EB: When I came home in '46, it was noticeable at Rutgers, too, people were anxious to do something for you. People were anxious to help. People were willing to help. People would put themselves out to help. I was never aware of that. I felt, as a veteran, I was part of a big group that was being honored and I always felt that they were helping me, because I'd helped them during the service. That was the most conscious thing I was aware of, just an aura of goodwill. Everybody was for you then. Everybody was willing to help you and as I say they would go out of their way. Rutgers had that big unit down there, that was Veterans Affairs, and they would help you, too, and the professors were always pleasant and kindly, because they had been there teaching and we were in the war and they were willing to help you and to look the other way at times, if you needed some assistance. There was a tremendous difference in that acceptance of the war service. By 1950, '52, that had worn off.

SH: Did you stay in the Reserves? Were you still in the Reserves when the Korean Conflict started?

EB: No. Then, I was too old to be called up. I had a family then. No, I was in, really, no danger then. Before the Korean War started, I was discharged from the Navy Reserves, so, I was discharged, in a sense. My commission was cancelled out and that was before the Korean War. That came through in the mail. They got rid of the Navy Reserve people. Your duty was over and they discharged you.

SH: You were an educator when the Vietnam War started. What were your feelings about that and the young men that served there?

EB: The same thing that I feel now, "Why are we in it? What are we doing over there? What do we gain from it?" and I read two newspapers a day, sometimes three, and I'm still not convinced that we did the right thing then and I think we got scared into it.

SH: Was your son ever in the military?

EB: No. He was head of the family, which exempted you. It got you exempt from the war.

SH: Lisa, do you have any other questions?

LB: I do not think so.

SH: How do you think your experience in World War II affected you? You were a little older than the typical person who was in the service but did that experience impact the man you are today.

EB: Commodore Seitz, when I first met him, and I don't remember what was the occasion ... was; normally, you don't get to meet the commander of the base and I was there for some reason, he wanted to see me and there was some duty I was to perform and I forget what it was now. I can't remember it. Anyway I said to him, "I don't think I know how to do that," and he said, "You're a Navy officer. You're a line officer. This means that you can do it," which means we expect you to do it and he says, "and you will do it," which meant, in a sense, that you carried with you, with the Navy officership, ... a sense of command. You carried with you a sense of, "This is what you're expected to do." If there's a duty to be done, do it. Don't tell me you can't do it. Don't tell me you're not ready to do it, do it. That general attitude stuck with me and I still think that I can do most anything. I was in the middle of [the] V-5 program and I met all these coaches like Bear Bryant, the coach of Yale, the coach of University of Miami, the coach of Texas A&M, the coach of Arizona, UCLA. I ended up first in that group in athletic tests (See attached letter) and I convinced myself I can do anything. When I came home I was twice nominated for commissioner of education, I thought I could do that. I never had any doubt that I could do it and the same way when I was coaching. I never had any doubts that we would be successful. When I was building schools, I knew how to do that. When I was in charge of school construction for the State of New Jersey, I knew I could do that even though I was still interim, I only had that job a year. I filled in for a man who was discharged and I held that job for a year. I never had any question in my mind. I can do it. It gives you an enormous amount, at least it gave me an enormous amount, of self-confidence and ability to say, "I can do these things. Whatever is in front of me, I can do it." I still feel that way. Like, all of a sudden, ... I picked up, in 1980, the whole matter of Senior Olympics again.

SH: Please, tell us about that.

EB: I can do it and have done it and I have the record. Somewhere I have books here of, everybody who I have a letter of recommendation from, not only Seitz, but (Core?) and the rest of them.

SH: I think that is marvelous advice to pass on. Thank you very much.

EB: Great to be here. It's fun talking about yourself.

SH: Well with that, we will turn off the tape.

[TAPE PAUSED]

EB: I talk to myself at night. I was a member of the football team, freshman, freshman basketball team and a pole-vaulter on the track team and ran the hurdles and threw the discus, etc. At the end of my basketball season, when I was a freshman, ... the 155-pound wrestler became ill and couldn't wrestle. So, I wrestled as a freshman against Rutgers on the varsity team, without any preparation, without any training and that was a bad occasion. I ran out of gas. When you're in shape for basketball, you're not in shape for wrestling, an entirely new set of muscles, a different training is necessary, a different lung capacity is needed and more muscles are needed. Anyway, I wasn't in shape for wrestling. I did the best I could, but I didn't do well. I left ... basketball and became a wrestler, varsity, and wrestled for three years, beat such teams as University of Pennsylvania and Temple. We had victories there. [I] was a silver medallist in the Middle States athletic competition, competed in the Nationals, it was then at Lehigh, against Oklahoma State. I wrestled a man from Oklahoma State, who became a champion there. Then, in track in high school, I was a discus man, second in the state. At college, I became a varsity pole-vaulter, but I also did the discus and I did the low hurdles. I did the broad jump and at one meet in Drexel, I placed in three different events which is unusual. Anyway I had a good time there and I kept that now until the (weight pentathlon?), which I do as a senior weight man and I now hold the record for my age group in the weight pentathlon. That's five events all in one day, one after the other, shot, discus, javelin, weight throw, hammer, all in the same day, tough event. I've had that record now for my age group, this is the tenth year I've had that record. Someone will beat it someday, I know. It always happens.

SH: Where do you compete? Where did these take place?

EB: I set the record, [what] now is the record, in Japan and I competed in the Nationals in Utah and I went to England in 1993. In England, I took a course at the University of Durham after I finished competing and I competed in Toronto. That's all I think. The rest were local meets, state and national meets.

LB: Both you and your brother were very athletic. Did your father promote athletics?

EB: No.

LB: How did you both become so athletic and so involved in all these different sports?

EB: When I was young, ten, twelve, fourteen, we used to play with the big boys on the sandlot and we would play, for example, touch football, I mean, football, and we would play tackle, football when I was twelve, with the big boys, who were in high school then. I just had a good time. I had a lot of fun. I would skate on the pond when it froze up, so, I knew how to skate and do hockey. I learned to swim in the river. It's just natural. In the '30s, people did those things rather than go to the movies, rather than listen to the TV. There was always activity to be done. I skated all over ... Collingswood on roller skates. I delivered groceries in a wagon, pulled the wagon and did groceries. I would get a nickel for each one I delivered. If it was a big load and I had two packages on the cart, so, I'd get ten cents and I envied the boys that had a bicycle that could do it quickly. That's enough. When I came back from Morocco, I went to the Staten Island, St. George's Hospital, had a spinal operation. When I finished there, I was sent for officer training to the University of Georgia where I was, I think, six months or seven months

before I was finally discharged at [the] Naval air station in Jacksonville, Florida, and, while there, University of Georgia, I trained a group of cadets. You have the picture of those cadets I trained. That was my little group. My job was to keep them in shape for when they became pilots, most of them went to Oklahoma for pilot training. We got them in good shape to do that. At Jacksonville, I was there for a month and a half. I got there in November and they told me I was in charge of the PX, which was a store, for the Christmas vacation, and I was ordering all the stuff for Christmas. I go down to Miami and order all the materials, all the gifts that were going to be given out by all the enlisted men on the base. That was a big base and I was also in charge of the newspaper that was put out daily. So, I learned quickly how to put out a newspaper, how to edit it. ... I went to Miami for two days and ordered the materials from wholesalers there and got it delivered in time and I was discharged in March. It was a learning experience there. I enjoyed that, though, and it was the end of the line. You knew you're being discharged and it was fun.

SH: Was your wife also able to be there with you?

EB: She was there until January, and then, she went home, had the baby. Thank you.

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

Reviewed by Michael Tietjen 10/17/04
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/19/04
Reviewed by Eugene Bradford 3/25/05