RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH W. SCOTT BUIST

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. W. Scott Buist on September 27, 1995, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and …

Tara Kraenzlin: Tara Kraenzlin

KP: As a New Brunswick native, what are your earliest memories of growing up in New Brunswick in the 1920s and 1930s?

W. Scott Buist: Well, … growing up, as a kid, New Brunswick was a great town, I thought, the Rivoli, the Strand, the various theaters, the movies for a dime, and even vaudeville shows. … Downtown was great, things like, [when I] got into junior high and took a girl, for the first time, to a movie, you'd go to Thode's and, for twenty-five cents, you'd get two big sodas. … Walking downtown, for a long while, it was Thursday nights. New Brunswick was a great town. I enjoyed the closeness of the river, the canal. I had an uncle who lived out along the canal, used to both fish and boat … in the [Raritan] Canal. That was [in] the days that there were actually yachts going up and down the canal. It was open for a lot of rich [people]. Thirty-five, forty-foot pleasure yachts used to go through there, and you'd watch the crowd, and hoisting a drink, and jollying along, and all that kind of stuff, the trolley cars. … I lived not too far from … fire headquarters, near what was then Codwise Avenue, now Joyce Kilmer. It wasn't too far from the freight yards, where the circus trains used to come in. I loved to watch those huge steam engines, always interested in mechanical things. I guess that's why I was a mechanical engineer. … You could watch those huge steam engines, with wheels as tall as I, and, once in awhile, you'd get a friendly guy [who would] call you up in the cab, let you go, "Toot," on the whistle. [laughter] [You] used to make a pest of yourself, sort of, but, it was fun, and my dad's business was here, got involved with the construction of a lot of the plants, you know, the Squibbs, the personal products, the Delco Batteries, the Triangle Cables, … J&J, of course, and its subsidiaries, and Permacel Tape were a lot of my dad's industrial piping business, and I got into most all of those plants. That was New Brunswick to me, as a … growing up kid.

KP: Your father originally came from Bernardsville. Why did he choose to build his business in New Brunswick?

WB: My feeling was, … he was doing these big estates with his dad, up there in Bernardsville, (O&T Thread?) people, … all of those big people from New York that built big estates out around that part of the country, and the place was pretty-well saturated. A lot of the plumbing and so forth was still, but, it was new for that time, white lead bends and so forth, you know, and all of the old plumbing fixtures and so forth, and Dad felt that he wanted to get into some more industrial work, into chemical process piping, heat, steam, heat exchange, and so forth, and he thought New Brunswick was a center where they were beginning to develop quite a lot of industry which was chemically and medically oriented, with J&J, and with a lot of plumbing, from glass lined pipe, to stainless steel, to all kinds of pumps, and vessels, and heaters, and he said, "This would be fun to do." So, I think that's why he came down here and opened up a shop with his dad.

KP: Your father and your …

WB: My granddad.

KP: They were in business together.

WB: It was Buist & Sons, yes.

KP: How long did your grandfather live?

WB: Granddad lived to about, … I think it was, ninety-three or ninety-four. During his final years, just before World War II, they moved down to the shore, above Asbury Park, at Loch Arbor, and one of my remembrances down there, as a kid in [the] lower grades of high school, [at] the very beginning of the war, is going down to his place, which was on the beach, and the war had started, and some of our first ships were being sunk, right off of there, and it was the thing to do, for a kid, to sit on the front porch and stare out there until you saw a ship being torpedoed, and you'd actually see the blast, and the glare, and so forth, right out toward the horizon, ships being sunk, right off the coast, by German submarines, and one of the kids from high school, New Brunswick High I went to, went to the Merchant Marines early in the war. In fact, he quit high school and went in it when he was seventeen. He wasn't, maybe, the swiftest guy in school, but, he was a great guy. … About a year later, he got blown up, right off the coast here, and died, and I began to think about this, and then, I had some kids that I was in high school with that went in the Navy, and one of them, in particular, was at Pearl Harbor and got it there. That's what kind of got me interested, "I've got to get in this thing. We've got to clean this thing up. We've got to work on this." …

KP: The war felt very close for you.

WB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. I never did graduate from high school. I left in November of my senior year. In fact, [as] soon as I was seventeen, in August, that summer between junior and senior year, my mom signed the papers, and I was called, in October, to report November 1st or 2nd.

KP: You could have easily sat out for another year.

WB: Oh, yes, but, I was … also very, very interested in model airplanes, I mean, talk[ing] about New Brunswick, and Hadley Airport was a big part of my life, too, and building model airplanes. One of the ladies, most unassuming or unlikely lady, that taught algebra in high school let us start a model airplane club, and we got well into building the early model airplanes that were, then, gas powered and so forth, before they had radio control, and some of these things on wires, and so forth. They were all free flight and I learned a lot about that. We earned enough money, back in freshman year of high school, for all of us to go out to Chicago to the nationals and we took a couple of second, third place [positions at] national meets in Chicago. So, I was well into airplanes. About the end of my freshman year, I started the aircraft spotters group at the high school, right out where Caldor's is, … the North Brunswick Shopping Center. We had an observation tower there and you were on, usually, every other day, for a two-hour stint. Many times, I rode my bike out there from four to six in the morning, or two to four in the morning.

You learned to call out, the best you could, what you [saw]. I could remember … a number of airplanes, three aircraft, "One, bi, high, west," which way it was going, and so forth. You kept track of all the air [traffic] going up above, because it didn't have the sophisticated radar set ups and so forth. This was an early, pre-warning system, [in] the early part of the war, before I actually got in the war. …

KP: This was part of Civil Defense.

WB: Yes, yes. So, we had quite a group, after awhile, from high school that did this, along with, mainly, senior citizens. We had some old grandmotherly and grandfatherly people that came on, sometimes, with us. We would stand up and freeze our tush off upstairs and call down on the intercom. They'd phone in, to New York, to the command center, just what we had and they'd keep track of all the aircraft that were in the neighborhood. All those kind of things are part of my growing up here.

KP: How did your parents meet?

WB: When Dad came back from the war, World War I, and started work in New Brunswick, he met my mom at a dance of some sort downtown. She used to work quite a bit, during World War I, with the Salvation Army and the Red Cross, and they were still keeping some of those things going. He's back from the service, he's new in town, he visited this place, he met Mom down there, and they ended up hitting it off.

KP: Did your father ever talk about his service in World War I?

WB: Yes, quite a bit. He and a very close uncle of ours that lived up in Paterson, and then, over toward Morristown, Uncle Charlie and he, went into the … Fourth Division, Ambulance Company 33. Together, they enlisted, and they rode two ambulances all over the main battlefields of France, and they would talk about [it], and … there were stories of it.

KP: Did he give you a sense of how bloody war was?

WB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Being an ambulance driver, a medic, sort of a litter bearer, going into the trenches right after, you know, a shell landed in there, and the guys with arms blown off, and feet, and legs, and blood all over the place, and picking up whatever they could [to] put [them] back together again, throw [them] in the meat wagon, get to a first aid station, or do whatever they could, lots of stories. You'd sit around, sometimes, and hear them talk about, and I can't remember the various battles, but, the famous battles of … World War I, and the trench-to-trench fighting, and that stuff, we heard a lot about it. They had maps of where they had driven all over France.

KP: Did your father join the American Legion?

WB: Yes, yes, he did. He wanted me to get involved. I've never got involved in any of these veterans' organizations. … I went to his Legion meetings many times with him.

KP: When you were growing up?

WB: Yes, and even after I came back from the service, but, I never got active, afterwards; the same with some of the organizations that they have from different squadrons from the Air Force. The 445th Bomb Group has quite an active group, and the Eighth Air Force itself, as a bigger unit, has quite an active group, but, I've never gotten too involved. I'm interested, but, not involved.

TK: Since you entered the service while in high school, what did your classmates think of that? Did your friends and classmates also go off to the service early on?

WB: … It was sort of a thing [to do], you know. World War II, after Japan did the job on Pearl Harbor, and I remember coming from St. John's Church, as a junior leader in … Sunday school, over to my grandpa's place, across the street, and sitting on his bed, he was ill that day, and hearing that announcement come over, and, immediately, my dad, my granddad, my family, and I, or I was influenced, I guess, felt the ire of that, and then, as I saw kids, or knew of kids, that had gotten into the Merchant Marines or the Navy, two particular guys, and got blown away, the madder I got, and I said, "Man, we've got to [get involved]." … Then, you saw everybody getting involved in the war effort, [the] big Mack Truck factory, turning out castings, the stuff that was rolling out of industry, the Rosie the Riveter stuff, Camp Kilmer, with all of the flood of people here. My mom, again, back to her Salvation Army, Red Cross thing, she brought more strays home, kids from Kansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, [laughter] that she met down there. It was just one big family, trying to get this job done, and there was just no way that Hitler or Tokyo, Tojo, had any chance. We were going to wipe them up, sooner or later, we were bound [to], and we did.

KP: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

WB: … Very, very bad. I mean we, as kids, probably didn't know as much. I happened to have an aunt, up in North Jersey, who worked with the welfare system, and I think most of the socks, and blue jeans, and shoes that I was wearing came through that kind of thing. We lost the house. We had no car. We had a little, red truck. We, as kids, two sisters and myself, many times, when it's ten or fifteen degrees out, we're bundled up in the back of the little, red truck [to] any place we wanted to go in the winter. Dad was working his butt off, trying to hold things together, with bills all over the place, and we did have a pretty good rapport with some of our neighbors, a neighborhood grocery store that would let you go quite a long while on credit. In fact, [they said], "Scott, [if] you come down and paint, we'd give you bread and butter, we'd give you this and this." "I tell you what, I'll give you five pounds of sugar and one of those big squares of baker's chocolate. Why don't you, your uncle, out here on the canal, has a cow, get a little extra milk, make some fudge, and sell it." I did that. I peddled fudge for a long while. Then, he got his chickens going out there, and he had extra eggs, so, I used to get about six or eight, sometimes as many as twelve or fourteen, dozen eggs and sell them. So, we all pitched in as kids, did our thing to earn a few bucks, to keep the family together. … It was difficult. We did

not, at times, have much in the way of food on the table, as a middle class, working family, … and I knew that Mom and Dad had worries up the gazoo.

KP: I have interviewed other men whose parents owned shops and businesses, including Robert Strauss, whose family owned a stationery store.

WB: Yes.

KP: He told me, for example, that, to save money, his father would keep only one light on in the store. When a customer would come in, he would turn on all the lights.

WB: Yes, well, the Strauss boys, Harry Strauss and his kids, I grew up with them. … Their little store, down on Church Street, was the stationery store in town, [laughter] and that's the kind of business a small family plumbing shop was, and you did all those things. … In the plumbing business, you had to learn to recycle anything you could, early. For instance, this cutting oil you put in the machine, … most of the pipes were threaded, in a pipe-threading machine, and, if you had the power to run the pipe-threading machine, you made sure you found some old cloth or something, strained that oil, and put it back in. [laughter] You did all these kind of things. … We started, at that time, and … we started it again in World War II, … we called … it just our own garden, we had a little plot on Seaman Street, where I lived and grew up, on Seaman Street, and the whole backyard used to be about big enough, almost, for a badminton court, or something like that, but, that was all plowed under, and we grew vegetables. Then, we got a lawn back for awhile there, in the early '40s, '30s, and then, when World War II came on, it was all a victory garden again. [laughter] You grew as much as you could.

KP: What were the worst years of the Depression for your family? When did your father's business finally pick up?

WB: Back in … the late '30s, one year, he took a subcontract with a large company out of New York and went down, on a freighter, with a load of pipe, and fittings, and so forth, built the metro theater and the post office … in (Shalalamali?) on the Virgin Islands, a theater in San Juan, did things like that. … Mom went with him. They made the most of it and sort of had a ball, for a year or so, but, we didn't see them. We had a little, old German lady taking care of us. The first time I got coal in my stockings was that year. [laughter] Yes, she was tough, she was tough.

KP: In other words, your father got this good job …

WB: That was where he could make some money. … Then, one of those years, we moved up to a little, old bungalow on a lake in North Jersey, and he was doing the school at Pompton Lakes, and I went to the Denville public schools. I was in about [the] third grade. So, what would that make me; third grade would make me, what, ten, eleven years old? That would be around '35, '36, somewhere in there. … I don't know when you would actually call [it] the Depression, but, it was in those years that things were kind of [in] turmoil and mixed up.

KP: It sounds as though things did not really pick up for your father until he got this contract in the late 1930s.

WB: That got him through that very well, and then, he came back, and the business picked up a bit here, but, … one of the roughest times for the business, good and bad, was right after World War II. Time, labor, materials, you couldn't depend on anything, and they were building … so many of these penalty contracts into various contracts. I can remember my dad's brother and he took the job of the Methodist home down at Ocean Grove; as a little plumbing outfit, we lost four hundred thousand dollars. It was a beautiful, big contract, but, you couldn't get the material there on time, the labor was lousy, you couldn't get labor. …

KP: Your father struggled quite a bit.

WB: Yes, many times, to stay in a small business like that and keep it going. … His most success was when he finally backed off of this, the last fifteen years of his life, … cost-plus work with J&J, Chicopee, (Gill Bank?), just places in town, where he would keep a crew from three, and, sometimes, we'd get up to five, six, seven, and do mostly industrial piping work that they couldn't handle on their own, mechanical work, in there. I used to get called in on some of those jobs.

KP: You learned quite a bit of the trade.

WB: Yes, yes.

KP: If not for the GI Bill, do you think you might have ended up as a plumber, following the family line?

WB: I probably would, by default, but, the GI Bill was my savior, [laughter] in the old engineering building, right across the way, on this campus.

KP: Did your parents have expectations that you and your siblings would go on to college?

WB: Probably [not], no, no. I think it was almost, until the GI Bill came, that, "We wish we could. We think, maybe, you're bright enough, but, we can't afford it." It was that … thinking, yes, yes. The GI Bill was the only way it was done.

KP: Your mother went to Trenton Normal School and worked as a schoolteacher. Did she teach while you were growing up?

WB: … She taught quite a bit, yes.

KP: You were used to your mother working outside of the home.

WB: Yes. I got to be quite a cook [laughter] and I still like to cook.

KP: As kids, you had real responsibilities.

WB: Oh, yes. I mean, if I didn't get down there at six o'clock in the morning and shake down the coals, and stoke the boiler, and take out the ashes, every day, [I was in trouble]. That was my job. I'd come home from school, I had certain vacuuming to do; … we had an old ringer laundry machine, where you turned the crank. … That was my job.

KP: Your mother did not divide the chores into men's jobs and women's jobs. You cooked and cleaned, which, then, was viewed as women's work.

WB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. My sisters were younger than I, and I was, sometimes, I think, probably, put upon, a bit, … but, I never looked at it that way. We all pulled the oar. We all pulled our own oar very well.

KP: Jumping ahead, your wife must have loved you. You were well trained for marriage.

WB: She does. [laughter] That's what her mom said, "Hey, this guy, catch him, he's good." [laughter] Yes, I think, even today, I've had many battles, … not battles, but, I've been told many, many times, "Will you, please, don't put the red stuff in with the white stuff, in with the pink stuff." I said, "Wait until I get it done a couple times, and then, it'll all go together, and nothing's going to run." … Yes, I had pink T-shirts. They're getting whiter and whiter, but, I still do my own laundry. My job is still, my wife makes the meals, I clean up. The kitchen is mine to leave spotless, do all the dishes, clean up everything. … She can make as much mess as she wants and I've got to clean it. [laughter] That's the way we work, but, that's living, and, if more people would learn to do that today, it's not so bad. [You] get your hands dirty. …

KP: Your mother was teaching in the New Brunswick school system while you were a student.

WB: … When my mom and dad got married, they moved in with her father, his house on Seaman Street. He was the manager of PJ Young's, which was one of the biggest department stores in the area and, certainly, in New Brunswick, and, many a time, I would go down with him, on even a Sunday. He was checking certain things, all the ledgers, and paperwork, and this, and that, and the other. I used to have fun with these things where you'd put the messages in and send them up through the tubes. [laughter] … PJ Young's was … quite a department store in New Brunswick and was one of the classy department stores. He was the manager of that. He used to get, and bring home to me, all kinds of crazy coins, sometimes from China. … At that time, every once in awhile, you'd get a five-dollar gold piece, you'd get that kind of stuff, as change, because that was legal tender, and he would put some of those aside and bring them home to me. In fact, my sister has a whole bingle-bangle bracelet. … She went ahead and had somebody drill holes in all the gold coins and hang them on for charms, [laughter] which kind of ruined their value, but, that's the way it went. … [When] I came home from the service, another funny story of sisters living with the family, I had a beautiful stamp collection, and whenever I could get twelve cents ahead, you know, three-cent stamps, a block of four, twelve cents, I'd go down to the post office and get all the new issues, had them all lined up. … When all of the kids started going away in the service during World War II, she needed stamps. She took, like, one

out of every block of four, mailed letters all over the world to all of her boyfriends, to me, overseas, and the rest. [laughter] You know, this is family.

KP: I have interviewed several people who were educated in the New Brunswick school system, Robert Strauss, Carl Bosenberg, and they said that it was interesting because there were "city kids" and "farm kids."

WB: Oh, we had … the gang from Milltown, North Brunswick, Franklin, Piscataway, all over here, right. … Growing up in New Brunswick, on Seaman Street, my district, as an elementary school kid, was Livingston School, which is up … by the old Roosevelt School, up on Livingston Avenue, and, I'll say it, it was primarily a Jewish neighborhood. The avenue had a lot of doctors' rows up along there and the plumber's kid didn't fit too well, sometimes, in that school. So, after I got left back, and got made fun of an awful lot, and so forth, Mom had me tested by a person from Rutgers here, Dr. (Anna Starr?), at that point. I was supposed to be smart enough, so, she rattled some cages and got me transferred over to Washington School, on French Street, with all the honkies. Man, did we get along great. They were great people, all of the Hungarian and Polish people there, and I fit in beautifully, straight As, right on through, no problem. So, New Brunswick was that kind of a mix-up of certain ethnic backgrounds in certain neighborhoods, and so forth, but, generally, it was … all good people.

KP: You had a tough time in school, at first.

WB: Yes, that's grade one through three, or something like that.

KP: I get the sense that, for many of your classmates, the Depression was nothing to them, that their families were doing quite well.

WB: Quite a few of them, no, even the (Silanos?), who owned the bar, there was always guys buying a drink, you know. They always had neat sneakers, and neat clothes, and money to spend on, of course, candy bars only cost a nickel or less. [laughter] … My whole life, to me, looking back on it, I wouldn't have missed a day of it. It was great.

KP: What did your family think of Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s?

WB: My dad did not go for a lot of government intervention and government taking over things. He thought small business should be helped and encouraged as a competitive thing. So, you might say he … and my mom became stronger and stronger in Republican thinking, at that point. …

KP: How did your mother feel about him?

WB: … The same way. … There was enough influence there, from the business and so forth, but, as far as Roosevelt during the war years, and support there, and so forth, he was a great President, a great leader. I have a lot of admiration for him, when I first got to think something about politics. I remember, … you know, when the Works Projects … built the first stadium

across the way. That was all part of Roosevelt's WPA and all this stuff, when Rutgers Stadium got built over there, and I remember many other things that happened, which were good. As a person who got down to the ocean, fishing, now and then, to see some of the things in the way of … a breakwater, or a dock, or something else, that was good for me. I thought the WPA and some of these projects were [fine]. Of course, we needed things like water, and drainage, and reservoirs, and infrastructure, and a lot of this was being done and had to be done, and it was good.

KP: During the war, Camp Kilmer quickly expanded into a major military base. How did its growth impact New Brunswick?

WB: Well, it was … strictly a soldier's town. I mean, I did not spend much time here during that time. …

KP: However, your mother had a lot of contact with the soldiers as a volunteer.

WB: My two sisters, who are younger than I, grew up, and they would go with Mom to the USO, and so forth, and have their pick of hundreds of real nice hulks [laughter] and handsome guys who were away from home and wanted to dance with a pretty girl. … In that way, I guess, for them, from what I hear, it was sort of an exciting time to grow up in New Brunswick. I think any time you're in a situation like that, where these guys know that they're going to be there a couple of days and they're going overseas, they're out to have their last hurrah and raise a little hell. So, I gather it was not the easiest thing to keep decorum and so forth downtown, but, I was not here to experience it.

KP: You were a Boy Scout. Did you become an Eagle Scout?

WB: No, no. I have a nephew who just made Eagle Scout, about two years ago, and I think he's the greatest. I made Second Class and stalled. … That's like Tenderfoot. That's the first step up and that's all, [laughter] but, I enjoyed Scouting, and I've always enjoyed hunting, and fishing, and camping, and hiking, all my life, and nature, and animals, and so forth. That's a big part of my life.

KP: It sounds as though you went camping quite often with the Scouts.

WB: Yes, we did. That was the thing to do during our early teens, from twelve to fifteen or so. Every time we had a vacation, we'd get a couple of guys together, right out here, behind, we called it "the wireless," these big, big wireless towers, out here on Canal Road, and there's a couple of little ponds, and we used to go out there and camp for a weekend, with the Scouts. There was a lot of pheasant, a lot of game to be seen, some pretty good snakes and turtles. … You were away from mom and dad, and you could burn the Dinty Moore stew, … it didn't matter. … If you wanted to eat six eggs that morning, you'd eat six eggs that morning, no problem, or, "Let's cook … the next couple pounds of bacon. We'll have it all," [laughter] you know. It was that kind of experience. Plus, we used to play capture the flag and some of these group sports with the kids, on our own. We made our own fun. … We'd always be carving a

walking stick … [to] take back as a souvenir. … I remember finding some of the first interesting little plants. My mom liked gardening and plants, and I can remember, and I still do it today, … go down to the trout stream, I'll come back with my fishing creel with two or three little plants in [it]. I used to come back from camping with my knapsack with a couple of little plants in [it] that I would try to nurture in the yard, those kind of things. … Of course, the idea of some of the stuff we used to do in some of the rallies in Scouting, whether it was … semaphore or tying knots, I've used a lot of those skills all my life. … I would like to see a lot more kids go through that sort of comradeship and, if you can get strong leaders that are good, clean, healthy, with some God-fearing faith instilled in them, I think it's the best thing in the world.

KP: Did you go to the Washington Jamboree?

WB: No, no. The Washington [Jamboree], oh, you mean the national [jamboree]?

KP: Yes.

WB: No. … This little Scout troop that I was active in for about five or six years was Troop 3, over at St. John's Episcopal Church on George Street, … between Commercial and (Troop?) over there. They still have the food shelter, things like that, over there.

KP: In the 1930s, how much did you know about what was going on in the world? How much of a surprise was Pearl Harbor for you? Were you aware of, say, the Lend-Lease agreements?

WB: Not a great deal. … Of course, that was my choosing. I was a kid, … [with] a kid's interests. I played a little basketball, I wasn't that good, but, I played a little intramural basketball. Fortunately, I grew to be a tall, lanky guy. I loved building model airplanes and flying those. I did a little, as you say, Scouting. Whenever my dad could get away to a lake or a pond, fishing, he would take me. I remember when he first borrowed a little .410 shotgun, and we went down toward Freehold and Keyport, and I shot doubles on quail that first day out, with my first permit to go hunting. I mean, these are marks in my [memory]. I don't hunt anymore. When I grew up and had a family, and I had two little kids, one about one and one about three, and I went hunting with a buddy of mine, and came back, and pulled a bunny and a pheasant out of my pocket, proud as all get out, the little kids, little Cathy says, "Daddy, when's he going to get up and run?" That was it, no more hunting for me. [laughter]

KP: Really?

WB: No more hunting for me, no more hunting. I quit. It's like, five or six years ago, I used to smoke a bit. I knew it was bad, didn't like it, didn't want to show the kids that, almost quit fifty-six times, and I had a little heart [problem]. That was it, no more smoking for me. Life's too short. [laughter]

KP: When did you take up smoking?

WB: In the service. … As a kid, when you were permitted, on your own, to go and do things, like, even in a place like Marrakech, or some of these crazy places all over the world, I didn't get to the Pacific Theater, but, maybe in a base in England, and you're going down to the pub, and you can order up your own scotch and have a smoke with the guys, that was, you know, growing up, got a four-engine bomber of my own, could be a (chain-popping?). [laughter]

KP: Also, you were quite young.

WB: I was seventeen, eighteen years old, yes. It was, sometimes, a hell of a lot of responsibility, but, exciting and I could do it. There were guys older than me, all around, that didn't have the interest or the motivation, in fact, liked to goof off, or sack it out, or whatever else, who probably could have done many of the things I did, but, I did them, and, as a kid, I went from private, to corporal, to sergeant, … and I never got the bet to officers school. … I don't know if it's sour grapes or not, but, I always thought, "No, I don't want that, I don't want that. This is where the action is," [laughter] and it was great. …

KP: Your parents had to sign your enlistment papers. Were there any misgivings on their part about your enlisting?

WB: Yes, I think [so].

KP: They could have easily said, "Wait a year."

WB: I think Mom was very reluctant. Dad said, "Listen, this boy can handle himself. He knows what he's doing. He wants to get in the Air Force and not be in the trenches. Enlistments for the Air Force are going to close. Let him enlist now, in the Air Force, and get in there, and do his thing. He's going to be taken sooner or later; he might as well get in now." So, I guess, … really, she was talked into it and she signed the papers.

KP: Your father was glad that you avoided the infantry. He knew what that was like.

WB: Yes, yes, and he also knew where my interests were, … but, you know, if you look back on the Air Force, [I] remember Frank (Cavato?), a little guy, from Queens, ball turret gunner, got a direct hit with flak. We had to pull him out, an arm, a leg, pieces, his head; I put his head in the basket. … This was a guy we had brought back from over Frankfurt. This is a kid that I slept next to. So, you weren't sheltered from it; you weren't.

KP: When you enlisted, did you realize how dangerous military aviation could be?

WB: No, no. That was exciting. You know, you knew guys got shot down, guys got shot up. … I grew up. … I was too young to realize [that], think through completely.

KP: The image of the Air Force in the 1930s and early 1940s was, if you were flying, it would be a very clean war. Many Navy and Air Force veterans have said to me, "All I knew was, I wanted to get out of the infantry."

WB: I think I had that feeling, but, like, when we came back from the first [mission], my first actual raid was that Ploesti raid that I wrote on, and, when I saw the number of guys that didn't come back, when I saw the number of guys who, you know, shot flares up for priority landing to pull guys out, and many of them didn't make it, many of them had arms and legs blown off. … I'm seventeen, I had enough war that day for the whole [war], forever. "[I] quit. I'm going home." So, it wasn't [clean]. … In the Ploesti raid, … well, we lost something like fifty, sixty ships.

KP: It is one of the best-documented raids. Many historians have written about it.

WB: … We only had nine men. We usually flew a ten-man crew, but, we only had nine men, because nobody flew in the ball, because we were down no higher than the roof of a house, a hundred, two hundred feet.

TK: You wrote that you suspected, based on your training, that you would be flying extremely close to the ground.

WB: Yes. … When we got out, … we were flying already, I got to look at all these armored things, and these German tanks, and all this stuff we were flying over in the desert. This is kind of interesting for a kid, too, for a young man, to see all this stuff, and you talk about Tobruk and those places, and [to] be there, and all that kind of stuff. … Here, in the States, the only thing we did was push it up, get way the hell up there, at thirty-two, thirty-five thousand feet, and see if we couldn't get a bomb somewhere close to where we were supposed to, and, all of a sudden, we get across there, and here we are, flying [just above the ground]. Jimmy Stewart, one day, we came back from, actually, what we called airspeed calibration, and he comes back, and he's feeling frisky. … We were, maybe, at five, about five thousand [feet], and he kind of put her into a slow [drop], coming into the base. He feathers two [engines], guns the other two, and we came by that tower like this, you know. You did these kind of crazy things, and you wondered, "What the hell am I doing in an airplane?" … We get over there, and we're loading up with real bombs, not fuzed, and we're flying close, real close, formations, down about one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet. There's no chance for error. One wing tip clip, you've lost two guys, you've lost them. … "What the heck are we doing here?" You want to see white knuckles? [laughter]

TK: Were you mad that you were not informed of this directly in the beginning?

WB: No, … we shouldn't know. Nobody should know what's going on. You honored that secrecy, because, if it got out, [it would jeopardize the mission]. … We would go to a briefing. You're rousted out at two o'clock in the morning, you go to a briefing, and they say, "All right, takeoff's at 0400 hours. You're going to be carrying this, this, and this." The armorers are out there, ground crew, … putting that stuff in your ship. … You're given maps, you're given pictures of the target, you're given all this stuff. … That's the first time you know that you're going to a ball-bearing plant in Schweinfurt and you're glad that nobody else knows this, because you've got too many people greeting you. There were times when we came back from a twelve, thirteen-hour flight over Europe, looking around, joshing a bit, and so forth, "Oh, yes, get my ice

cream. I put it on the catwalk." You know, I mixed up the frozen ice cream, which freezes … upstairs. "Hey, it'll be ready. I forgot it," that kind of stuff, and you're all relaxed, and, all of a sudden, in behind you, as you're peeling off, all of these ships are peeling off to head for the runway, in comes three or four German fighters and wipes out three guys, right at your home base, that had infiltrated [our air space]. You know, England is not the clearest place, clouds; they had infiltrated. … They'd get right up above your bomber formation, above the next layer of clouds and radar, nobody knows they're there, and you think, "Well, we knocked the hell out of them. We took a little flak; we got a few brass knuckles. We're safe. We're coming home," and, all of a sudden, you see thirty guys get blown up in front of you. Wow; … they're things you remember.

KP: Going back to your induction, you mentioned that, as a seventeen year-old, you had an eye-opening experience when you were sent down to Trenton.

WB: Yes, yes. You weren't here when I said that. … When you first sign up, they send you a notice, a week or two later, saying you're to report to the, I don't know, induction center or someplace, and they'd throw you on a bus, and they took us down to Trenton, and they did more physicals and had a battery of tests, IQ or other kind of stuff, and they put us up at the Y down there, and it was a bunch of us, mixed, from guys around fifty to guys around my age, and I get paired up with a guy who was, … I don't know if he was Mexican or Puerto Rican, he was of foreign extraction, more Spanish background, probably around thirty-five or forty, I don't know, somewhere up in there, and we get assigned a room in the Y. It has a fairly good-sized single bed [for the] two of us. Well, it wasn't … more than fifteen minutes gone by and I knew he had ideas of having anal sex with me and really pushing hard. I fought him half the night. That's my first night away from home. You grow up in a hurry. You learn what the world's about.

KP: That must have been very shocking to you.

WB: It was, it was. You take it in stride after awhile, but, it's something that's … imprinted in your memory. Living through that night was hell for a young kid who had never been involved with sex and especially with that … relationship or never had that kind of thing.

KP: Did you ever have another similar experience in the service?

WB: No, not at all. That's why, when they talked about having different thinkings mixed in the barracks, I wouldn't want that, I wouldn't want that.

KP: You made it through the initial induction and you were slated for training. Did you hope to be a pilot?

WB: No, no. Just before this signing up for the Air Force, I got the nod from … Congressman Frelinghuysen. He signed me, "Okay," and made me a nomination to Annapolis. I went down to Annapolis, went through all their screening, it was a three-day affair, and they wouldn't accept me, because I have a serious overbite. They wouldn't accept me. So, I was told, then, that you probably will never be accepted into pilot's training, or a couple of other things, and I said, "Hey,

the next best choice is, I'm going to get on a flying crew and do something. I'd like to get on flying status." So, it worked out.

KP: Were you disappointed that you did not get into the Naval Academy? Was your motivation for going there war-related?

WB: No, no. … It was an opportunity that I would never [have]. I never thought I would go to college, I never thought I'd have the opportunity to go to college, and, if I could have gone to Annapolis, college there, at this particular time, [that would be great]. I did like the water. Boats, I was not afraid of. I don't think I'd like to spend a hell of a lot of time in a submarine. I just don't like those cramped quarters. I like to get up on deck. Many times, I've had the "who-hahs," as I call it, from being out on fishing boats and stuff like that, but, I was not anxious to go in the Navy, really. [I was] not longing to go in the Navy. It was a way to get into college and have a college education, but, we went a different route.

KP: Did you apply to Annapolis before or after Pearl Harbor?

WB: Before. … It was early in my high school years. You had to finish high school, and then, go, but, you had to get the nomination, … [that is] just how that worked out, but, I remember … Mom writing all these things and getting all this paperwork back from, I think it's a Congressman. You get this appointment, … just like you wrote this letter here, "Report to So-and-So, down in Annapolis." Then, they'd greet you, and treat you, and examine you, and bend over, [laughter] and you go through about three days of stuff, and then, they finally give you an evaluation and tell you what they find, and they say that, "We cannot accept you." The one major thing I remember was the overbite.

KP: It sounds like your mother would have liked to have sent you to college. She knew how the system worked.

WB: Yes, she did.

KP: To get a Congressional recommendation, you were the nominee for the district.

WB: Right. … She even, I think, to work toward those ends, played a little politics as a committeewoman for the Republican Party in New Brunswick, District So-and-So, and so forth, and we used to kid her about her politicking, as well as we used to kid her about going down with the Salvation Army and playing the horn on the corner of George and Albany Streets. [laughter]

KP: She did that.

WB: No, she never did, but, I used [to kid her]. In fact, I told my wife, I said, "Let's go down and see Mom. She's down on the corner of George and Albany. She's got the tambourine," [laughter] just joshing with her, but, we had fun.

KP: Your mother was very active in the community.

WB: She was, she was.

KP: She was a teacher, a committeewoman, and a Salvation Army volunteer.

WB: … When she left New Brunswick, they moved to this little lake house up in Denville, she became very active there on the Denville Township's Beautification Commission on this, and that, and the other, you know, just community stuff. She was into that, you know. She got the roads paved, she got lights brought in, … in this backwoods lake community. She worked to get all these things done and got them done, made her enemies and made her friends. …

KP: Looking back on your wartime experiences, how good was your training? What were the strengths of your training and what were the weaknesses?

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

KP: Please, continue.

WB: Okay. Basic training for the Air Force, for me, was from Camp Dix, on a troop train, down to Miami Beach. Now, remember, I went in the service in November, so, I'm arriving down there, like, the 1st of December, in Miami Beach. I'd never been out of the State of New Jersey, hardly. Here we are, down there, with palm trees, and flowers, and all this stuff, in one of the best hotels on … Collins [Avenue], right along the beach, beautiful rooms. … One of the first days I was there, though, I got assigned to KP and the truck backs up and dumps, … like, an open truckload of about two tons of potatoes there. "Okay, guys, let's peel them. Let's get them peeled by three o'clock this afternoon, so [that] we can cook." So, you're peeling two tons of potatoes, and you're watching the waves and so forth, and you're sitting in the sun, but, you're peeling potatoes, but, going through that, from running with gas masks on a golf course, to rifle training, to just discipline itself, it was what troops needed to get together. It was basic. It was what was needed to get the troops together. Then, from there, they shipped me, most inefficient, that way, because of wartime circumstances, they shipped us to Denver, Colorado, but, it took five days on a troop train to get to Denver, from Miami. … You're in one car with about a hundred guys, two guys in the seat, one guy sleeping underneath, for five days, and you're sleeping every which way, you know, trying to, at any time, and they bring around some K rations kind of stuff, a couple times a day, and you're given a chance to march back through a couple cars, take a pee, and wipe your face off, and come back in again. … You looked at all these places, "Hey, we're now in Oklahoma," [laughter] and all that kind of stuff, and, for a kid who hadn't been out [of New Jersey], that was great. We ended up in Denver, went out to Lowry Field, and [had] my first taste of technical training, which was on the Norden bombsights, classified, top-secret, all kinds of security, and here's this young kid, now, he's … about seventeen-and-a-half, and he's learning to calibrate the bombsight, learning all the ins of it, learning about gyros, electronics, feedback systems, the latest in electronics, and, as an offshoot of that, … since the bombardier actually flies the airplane on the bomb run, through the automatic pilot, you had to learn the feedback systems, and the servos, and things, the amplifiers that ran the automatic pilot, that moved the

ailerons, and elevators, and so forth. … You had to know all those systems, and you had homework galore to come back and spit back out again, and you had problems to solve. They put problems in there. You had a gyro that was not holding its own, was (pre-cessing?), why? You had … something happening with an amplifier circuit. You had to know about vacuum tubes and it was all tube circuits then, no solid state. … All the basics in that kind of stuff, for today's world, was great. …

KP: It sounds like you were given a heavy course load, but, you were able to handle it.

WB: Yes.

KP: How many people washed out?

WB: About three-quarters of them. … Out of about a hundred guys, twenty-five guys got through.

KP: You were in a select group.

WB: Yes, yes. That made you feel good, too. …

KP: Most of those guys were probably older than you, also.

WB: Oh, yes, [laughter] "Here's this young kid, wet behind the ears." Of course, you get into the Air Force, with a specialty like this, and you're primarily geared up to lead ships, … the ship that's responsible for a mission, or the backup ship, with, maybe, thirty, forty, fifty bombers behind them. You're in that kind of a crew, with full birds, and colonels, and majors, and captains, and here's this kid, [laughter] telling them what to do and … why this is going wrong. So, it was an interesting thing, but, the training was great. Then, we went up to Ephrata, … I never realized the State of Washington had quite a desert like it has there, up above the Columbia River Valley, and we were receiving our new aircraft, the new Liberator Ds, from the Boeing plant, out in Seattle. … I was given gunnery school out there and, with my background in some electronics and hydraulics, I didn't have to do as much in the way of [studying], because I was assigned in a Martin upper, which is, you know, … all hydraulically moved and so forth. You moved this thing around and fired your .50s. I did have to learn more about clearing guns and all that kind of stuff. … After going through the gunnery school, we got assigned to a crew and we went down and flew two missions, back and forth, from Natal, Belem, Brazil, to Marrakech. … In four trips, back and forth twice, we dropped two depth charges on a submarine. We never heard from it. We saw some oil. We don't know what happened, but, then, when we ended up over in Marrakech, or Dakar, they diverted us up to Tobruk, special assignment with the 12th [Air Force], and that's when we got involved with the [Ploesti raid]. They needed all the aircraft they could to knock out the oil supply for Germany, so, they concentrated a lot [there]. The Liberators were the only aircraft [there]. You know, the Flying Fortress, the B-17, got a lot of the glory in that war, but, a lot of the work was done by the Liberator. The Liberator could carry more, fly further. It was a big, old elephant and goose, but, it was quite an airplane.

KP: Several air crew veterans have mentioned that their pilots trained them, informally, to fly the plane to the extent that they could crash land.

WB: We'd have all kinds of drills like that. … Because of some of this stuff that I was involved with in many of these lead ships, we would actually take, essentially, a kit, [which] was sent over by Sperry, that could go into any airplane and install these joysticks, for low-altitude and for tight-formation bombing. … I think, in my time, I probably installed about thirty of them on different aircraft and you'd have to go up and check pilots out who had never seen this before. So, you would usually say, "Captain, you mind getting out?" You'd take his seat, take over for a minute, switch it on autopilot, and you'd fly the ship for a bit. Nobody around you; you're not flying in formation or anything. You're just up in the wild blue at twenty thousand feet, maybe not even up [at] oxygen level, maybe only up at twelve thousand feet, … that give and take, back and forth, and then, of course, if you're curious about things, like, I was always curious about what the navigator was doing with his plotting. I was curious about any kind of systems in an airplane. I already pretty well knew automatic pilots, and bombsights, and hydraulics, and electronics, and stuff like that, but, even guys who were doing the arming of bombs, you know, and so forth. "All right, supposing you'd get it, and you're laid out there for awhile, and I've got to go back and arm the bombs, over Schweinfurt or someplace like that, what do I do?" … We always swapped these ideas, they'd tell you what you'd do, or guys would say to you, … "Suppose my turret gets hit and I'm losing hydraulic pressure, what's the best thing I can do?" "Well, first, look for the leak and if you can crimp the line and break it off, or crimp it on itself," like, you'd take a hose, and stop it from spilling so much oil, … you know, we were always swapping these ideas, … because we had to save each other's neck whenever we could. [laughter]

KP: I have been told that Air Force crews were tightly knit.

WB: Well, most crews were, because most crews, in general, … stayed together. Because of my difference, I never got assigned permanently to a crew. I only flew nine missions, in three years in the service. … I flew two of the toughest ones that [were] ever flown. I flew six sorties over D-Day, but, they were just up and over and drop and back. We flew three of those a day for a couple days on D-Day. That was, you know, flying over the Channel that day and [in] the [poor] weather. We got credit, one time, on the second day, during our second sortie, … for about a hundred trucks and guns. We caught a move-up of armament beautifully. We plastered it, [laughter] coming into the front there, but, I never was really assigned to a crew, and a lot of crews stayed together for twenty-five or thirty missions.

KP: That was the general tour length. Since you flew with several crews, did any crews strike you as being better than others?

WB: Oh, there were definitely some. Some guys were … the guy you hear about as a hotshot flyer, … maybe just go on a practice bomb run or something like that, do something. You've got two new engines and you're breaking them in. He'd have to throw this four-engine bomber up in about a ninety-degree bend and do all kinds of things like that, that those ships were really not

meant for. So, you had those kind of hotshot guys and, sometimes, you raised your eyebrow a bit. … Jimmy Stewart was as steady a guy as he … was in the movies. …

KP: His movie image fit his personality.

WB: Big, slow drawl, … but, he and I, and three other guys, were all six-foot-four, and a lot of guys in the Air Force … were shorties. Some of those captains, colonels, and pilots, and so forth were little fireplugs. [laughter] … There's one crew that I flew with on two missions, where we had one guy on board from Biloxi, on this ship, and I had nothing to do with naming the plane, but, the plane was named, *Nine Yanks and a Jerk*. [laughter] The rest were all New England boys and this one guy, who was a sugar cane guy, from somewhere down in the bayou someplace. … I flew flight engineer. Their flight engineer got hit badly. … In fact, he lost one eye and had his head tore up a bit. Until they got a replacement in, I flew twice with them, as Martin upper flight engineer on that ship. I had a picture taken with [them] that got in the paper one time, [laughter] because we did good, … but, I never got … tight with a real crew. I got to know guys over at the bombsight vault, where we kept [the] sights, and I got to know certain technicians. We had one guy [who] was a pretty good crackerjack on vacuum tubes and electronics, the state of electronics in that day. I picked his brains a lot and I learned a lot. He used to talk about this whole thing of solid state and chips coming in, you know, fifty years ago. I said, you know, "This is Mickey Mouse radio stuff." [laughter] Dick Tracy, Buck Rogers, whatever you want to call it, but, you know, these things happen, they come.

KP: Air Force flight training was very dangerous, even in the United States. Do you have any memories of how dangerous it was?

WB: Yes, yes. … You've got guys learning. A guy's checking me out on guns, .50 calibers. When the ship is in a hard stand, over top of the muzzle of the gun, they put these sleeves. I'm up on, like, a ladder, reaching … over the guns, one gun here, one gun here, unhooking and pulling these sleeves off. The kid that's in the turret mistakenly fires one round, "Boom," right through my fountain pen, right through my shirt. In fact, … it was a good one, my mom gave it [to me], a Waterman. They sent me a new one for it and a nice note, [laughter] but, that's how close [it was], a .50 caliber machine gun bullet, and this was on the ground with my own guys. … There's too many things that can happen. One time, I had my head split open. We got into real rough weather. We had a slight hydraulic leak back in the bomb bay. I was going back through the bomb bays, back to the waist, to check a couple of amplifiers, and you've got this narrow catwalk, with hydraulic fluid on it, and the ship's going like this, and I landed on my ass, cracked my head open, looked like I got a real war injury, [laughter] big, old patch and stitches across my head, but, that was … a training flight. Things could happen so quick, so many places.

KP: Did you witness any crashes while you were in training?

WB: Yes, oh, yes, yes, you did. They weren't as dramatic, though, as ones [overseas]. Most of them, if you're taking off on training flights, you've got gas, but, you don't have bombs, and gas will burn and explode, and burn pretty doggone good, but, if you're lucky, and you skid long enough, and you're with it enough, you can usually, in many ways, get out of an airplane before it

booms. … When you have a string of bombers about to take off, like, basically, I spent a lot of time out in Tibenham, in England. I wasn't up that day; I wasn't doing my usual thing. … I go out to the flight line. Everything checks out all right, they're taking off, and the tower shoots the flare up, and the first plane guns it and goes down, the next one swings in, and the next one swings in, and all four engines, give it to it, and they're each loaded with ten, twenty tons of bombs, full load of gas. This one guy must have blew an engine, just about when he got to pull back, went like this, hit one wing, cartwheeled, and, when twenty tons of bombs and thirty-five thousand gallons of gasoline go up in an explosion, that's a dramatic thing. Those guys never knew it, but, that was it, and the rest of the guys had to take off behind him, almost immediately, through the flames and the rest.

KP: I would imagine that was a very sobering sight for them.

WB: Yes, yes, and, here, you're only starting out on a ten-hour flight, through Messerschmitts and flak, over Europe. … It was one hell of an experience, that's all, if you look back on that one.

KP: You noted in your story about the Ploesti raid that you traveled all over the United States and Africa.

WB: Yes, … never got out to the Pacific, that's all. When we came back here, right after V-E Day, we set down in Greenland, Goose Bay, Labrador, and then, on down into the States, and we were given thirty days [of leave], and that was in the summer, and my family was up in this bungalow on the lake, up in North Jersey, near Denville, had a beautiful time, reported back down to Dix, that's where I was supposed to report to, and we were supposed to … get our 29s. We were going to go from 24s to be B-29s, which were the newest big bombers coming out at that point, and we were scheduled … to go to Okinawa, and then, things kind of slowed down a bit, then, the first big boom [atomic bomb]. Boy, I was glad. I thought that was the best thing. … You know, … you read a lot of this stuff about apologizing for that. … It saved my ass, maybe. [laughter]

KP: You wrote in your story that, at first, you were ambivalent about your missions, that you would have preferred to destroy things, not necessarily people, but, your feelings quickly changed.

WB: Well, … it was kill or be killed. … When you got into war, war was war. No, I remember, very consciously, saying and thinking, my conscience, … "I'll shoot down the airplane; the guys will get out. They'll be all right." Then, after you see some of your buddies blown to hell, [you changed your mind]. … I think I had more animosity, really, in my mind, toward [the] Japanese, for the sneak attack, and … I still have the slanty-eyed gooks [image], and I've still got all kinds of bad connotations here. The Germans, who I saw almost eye-to-eye several times, in combat, it was, to my estimation, … "All right, come on, you're ready for an even fight? Let's battle it, let's do it. I'm ready. You give it your best, I'll give it my best." [laughter] That's the way it was. "If we've got to do this thing, we'll do it." … I'm not a warring person, that's for sure, but, I think

we've had, and my grandchildren have had, and my kids have had, a lot different life than if we didn't do what we did. … I really think that.

KP: You also mentioned in your story that the Roman Catholic chaplain played a crucial in your life during the war. You seemed to be quite shaken up by your first raid.

WB: Over in North Africa, when you come back, and you go to the mess hall, and there used to be guys all over the place, and there's about, in my sitting, it was probably about three hundred, no, two hundred missing, from the ten or fifteen tables, and you know that most of them had it. Some of them were on Cyprus, some got down [bailed out] at sea, some of them got here, some were in the hospital there and [were] all right, but, most of them had it, and you'd go back to the barracks that night and … already, see, the next day or so, this guy's stuff being bagged up to send home to mom and this, that, and the other. … It does affect you. I was, literally, a basket case for a couple of days there while I got it back together again.

KP: You were shocked by the fact that men you had known only a few hours before were no longer there.

WB: Yes.

KP: Were you also shocked by your own mortality, how vulnerable you really were?

WB: … You thought, unconsciously or consciously, "Enough war. What the hell do I do to get out of here? Do I go AWOL? Can I quit? How can I get sent home?" Did you ever see *MASH* and the guy that dresses up? [Klinger], got to do something, you know. [laughter] I wasn't *MASH* at that point, but, you think about some of the things [you could do].

KP: The "million dollar wound" took on a greater significance.

WB: Yes, yes. … You don't want to make it your way of life, that's for sure, but, you still had this job [that] has to be done, in fact, it was just starting, at that point, so, you can't be a quitter, "Let's go."

KP: Was the raid against Ploesti the only mission you flew from North Africa?

WB: Yes. … Then, we immediately went up to East Anglia and were assigned to the Eighth Air Force, 445th Bomb Group, 703rd Bomb Squadron. … That first mission there was with James Stewart. In fact, … my sister, Jenny, was a fairly tall girl. How tall are you?

TK: Five-nine.

WB: Yes, that's neat, that's neat. … She was a tall blonde, and she was in high school at this point, and she used to say, in her letters to me, "Get me some more of Jimmy Stewart's autographs. All the girls want them. All the girls want Jimmy Stewart's autograph." [laughter] So, of course, every time you got a pass or any document like that, he was signing it, as my

squadron commander. I was sending home five or six Jimmy Stewart autographs with every other letter. [laughter]

KP: Did you save anything signed by Jimmy Stewart? [laughter]

WB: No, no. I haven't kept any of that stuff. One thing that … did in a lot of it was, when we lived on George Street, in the third story apartment, one Christmas, I think I put some stuff up in an attic, in a big, metal trunk, and … I had some war memorabilia stuff there, and I pushed this back against the wall, and it had this old wiring, and I must have shorted out the wire, because, about an hour later, I'm downstairs in the kitchen, and I say, "Hey, there's smoke." It was coming out of the attic, and a lot of that stuff burned up. … You know, things like wings and some of the things were there, some of my papers. I put my things, like [my] discharge and so forth, in a safe deposit box, but, a lot of the stuff [was lost], … but, I really had enough [of] airplanes [by] then. In three years, you're up in the air for … two thousand, two hundred and some hours. That's like a hundred days in the year and I sort of felt, "I don't need flying anymore. I did that thing. [laughter] No more, that's enough."

TK: You mentioned earlier the one airman from the South; were there times when the regional differences became more than just a joke?

WB: Oh, yes, oh, yes, … but, most of it was … really good-hearted kidding. … You had this, really, first-generation blood Indian from out there; Chief, we called him. He could hang on some pretty good drunks when he came back from a three-day pass, firewater. We had very few, in the Air Force, … blacks, and, at that point, we didn't have, I don't think, in the American makeup, a lot of the Indians, Chinese, Islanders, didn't have that makeup. … You had North, South, East, West. A lot of the people that I met during the service [said], "Where the hell are you from, Buddy?" "Jersey." "Hell, no, you don't talk like a Jersey boy," you know. Language, you could pick up an awful lot, the typical, you know, guy from Brooklyn, the drawl from the Midwest, or South, or something else, and you got busted on for that kind of thing, but, in a friendly way. … I thought, during … that war, men treated each other a lot better than they treat each other today, on the street or anyplace else; I think so.

TK: Was receiving letters from home a significant or frequent occurrence?

WB: That was great. … Mail call was very, very important. … My sisters and their friends and my mom was very faithful. Mom, I think, wrote, if not every day, every other day, always got a letter from Mom, and, about once a month, it may be six months after she sent it, … you may get the Fourth of July package on the 16th of February, but, she sent me these packages. … She'd send things like the ice cream mix that I would mix up. We'd go up to do some high-altitude practice bombing, or something. I know we're going to be up at thirty thousand feet for an hour or two, heck, it's, sometimes, fifty-two below up there, we could freeze this in a hurry and come back down with ice cream. She'd send me packages with all kinds of goodies, creative goodies. …

KP: Did you ever chill beer that way?

WB: At that point, I didn't, because I wasn't heavily into beer or drinking anything else. If I would chill anything, it would've been [ice cream]. I was more of an ice cream (kook?) at that point; [laughter] I was more of a kid than a grown-up. I would go with the guys down [into town]. We used to go into Norwich and a couple of the towns up there. … They had these six-by-six trucks that would take you in on a night's pass, and you would, very often, end up going to some pub and chewing with the Limeys, and … I didn't smoke at that time, not until the very end, when I was coming home from the war. In fact, candy bars and cigarettes were great barter, yes. They loved it. "Hey, Yank, you got any more of those Camels," or something like that, "or Lucky Strikes?" "Yes, you want a pack?" "Hey, you're a nice lad. I'll buy you a pint." [laughter] Heck, I don't know, I brought them in to barter. … The Brits, the people over there, were great. We went back, my wife and I, about thirty years after the war. … I was working for a steel company, doing some training, and I had to go to Birmingham, and London, and so forth, and we got to talking to several old bed and breakfast kind of people, and they were so gracious about … expressing, "Oh, I don't know what we would have done without you Yanks coming over here. You tore up the country and messed up our women, but, boy, you bailed [us out]." [laughter] In Europe, you get a three-day pass from the base to go to London, big deal. You get down there, it's right in the middle of the blitzkrieg, immediately, sirens are going off. You probably arrived there at five or six o'clock and they're getting hit left and right. … You're directed down in the shelters, and then, pretty soon, the guys come down and say, "Hey, all you Yanks, all you ready-bodied men, come on up, we need you," and you'd get out there, and the buildings are all broken down, there's fire, and you're pulling guys out from under bricks and all kinds of stuff, and … you're helping [to] salvage London. London's burning like hell. "Three-day pass? I'll go back to the base and get out of this war." [laughter] It was fun; it was interesting.

KP: You actually saw what bombing could do.

WB: Oh, I was on the receiving end, yes. … At the time we were over there in London, London was being hit hard. … It's like if you got up on top of the building here, and looked out, and saw almost all of New Brunswick burning, and fire and raining ashes, and … the lights going around. Yes, it was a mess, a lot of blood and guts, the civilians. You know, America never got hit with this kind of stuff, fortunately, but, the British took one hell of a beating, especially in the bigger towns. Birmingham, one day, we were up there when they got hit. … For awhile there, in the early part of the war, the Germans had the air. They had it. … Then, toward the end, they started shooting these rocket powered bombs, and so forth.

KP: Did you have any close calls on the ground?

WB: Well, … some of these movies that you see, where all of the dust and the ceiling comes down and the rest, I've been in a couple of situations like that. [laughter] … If a five hundred-pound bomb goes off on the same block you're in, you're going to have windows all shattered, ceilings down, bookcases over. I've been in the middle of that, you know, in a Y down there. … In that Ploesti raid, when we went over the target, after the first wave had gone in and dropped those delayed-action bombs, we flew right over five hundred-pound bombs going off, and we're

two hundred feet above, "Boom," and you get close to things like that, yes, but, the good Lord was with me and a guardian angel, and it was a good experience.

KP: How often did you attend services when you were in the Air Force?

WB: Every Sunday. … Once I got overseas, I found I needed something more spiritual to hang on to. I didn't have family, I had to find God, I had to rely on faith. I needed that and it was good for me.

KP: In your unit, how many men would attend religious services on a weekly basis?

WB: On a weekly basis, maybe only half, yes, maybe only half. Of course, they had different denominations and that'd only be a wild guess, really.

KP: Were you surprised that more men did not attend services?

WB: Well, in the family that I grew up with, Episcopalian, and so forth, my dad, I think he was a God-fearing man and I think he was a good Christian man, … [he] did what I think was right, morally and everything, in business and with people, but, he would not have any kind of conscious guilt for getting up [at] four o'clock [on] Sunday morning and going to the trout stream and fishing. … If anybody'd talk to him about that, he said, "I think I had more communing with the Lord up there in that trout stream than you had in church," and that's what he would say, a rationalization, maybe, I don't know, but, I can live with that, too, and I can see other people couldn't. … I know that … when you don't have family, like so many people don't have family in all these mixed-up things that are going on today, where people haven't chosen right, and you don't have faith in the Lord, … I don't think it's easy to face these things without getting all fouled up with all kinds of stuff, getting into self, getting into drugs, getting into abusing your body, with drinking, or kids, or spouse, or just being honest. …

KP: I have been told that many airmen coped with the stress by drinking and carousing heavily.

WB: Yes, oh, yes. Oh, I was not pleased with … some of it. When we went down in basic training, a couple of these guys came back in one night, into one of these hotels, and tore up the place. They were drunker than skunks and loud mouthed and they thought this was macho, manly. Even as a kid, I thought it was stupid, [laughter] but, I was brought up differently.

TK: When you came back from the war, did it matter that you had converted, in a way?

WB: That's a good question, because my … dad was a staunch Masonic, wanted me to join the Masons. I really don't know what the difference [is] and what the whys and wherefores are of all of this, and I think there was some disappointment, and … I think some people in various faiths get pretty narrow in their faiths and think the Episcopals are the only thing, or the Lutherans are the only thing. We've got some neighbors, my own neighborhood out there, now, because you profess to be Catholic, "You're not as good as I am." [laughter] I mean, they give that impression, so-to-speak. It's too bad, but, that's the way some people are. That's the way they

come across, at least, and I think my mom was a little disappointed that I decided [to convert]. Actually, I had not really converted. I had gone around; I didn't convert until I was back here at Rutgers, that I actually went for instructions.

KP: However, you considered yourself a Catholic.

WB: Yes. … When it was exams, right here on this campus, of course, I'd go over to St. Pete's, down in the grotto, say a few prayers, look over my notes, and that was part of my [routine], "Lord, I need all the help I can get," [laughter] and he's been there for me, so, I won't knock that.

KP: You thought very highly of Jimmy Stewart, your group leader. He really lived up to your expectations.

WB: He was great. My one sore point with my wife was that I would never capitalize on that. "Jimmy Stewart's playing in," what's the rabbit on Broadway? [*Harvey*] "He's onstage in Broadway; let's go in and see him, say hello to your old buddy." I said, "Ma, I can't do that. I wouldn't push myself, no." I did write him once. He wrote me back once. I gave the letter to my sister. [laughter]

KP: When did you write to him?

WB: "Just … for what little part you had in getting me back, once or twice, I appreciate it and I'm doing fine. I'm in college." It was when I was in college.

KP: It was shortly after the war.

WB: Yes.

KP: You have not talked to him or seen him since the war.

WB: No, just in the movies, [laughter] but, he's just as natural. I mean, that's Jimmy Stewart.

KP: I have been told, and you may correct me, that while there are, obviously, officers, NCOs and enlisted men in the Air Force, the relationship between each caste is less formal or rigid than in other branches of the service.

WB: Right, right. … You weren't allowed into the officers' club … on bases here, but, … Tibenham is a town about one-third [the size] of Milltown, mostly farm, [or] was at that point, fifty years ago. Most of the farms were being run with steam driven tractors, and so forth. One pub was the center of social life. You could go down there with a full-bird colonel and hoist a Guinness, no problem. … You were all in there doing the same job, that's all. So, I think there was a lot less [rigidity]. There weren't a lot of real orders given, so-to-speak. You had your job to do.

KP: Many airmen have said that, often, they would not have to salute.

WB: That's right.

KP: You normally would not call each other by rank. It was very informal.

WB: Yes, that's right. You'd say, "Captain," to them, sometimes, "Hey, Cap," you know, "Major, what do you think we [should] do here?" It was easier than saying (Fafalowsky?) or something like that, [laughter] but, it was … run the way I think it should have been run during wartime. I don't know … how different it would be today.

KP: You spoke about life in England during the war; I am curious about your time in Africa. What was your opinion of, for instance, Marrakech?

WB: When we landed in Marrakech, the guys were saying, "Hey, kid, we've got to take you downtown. You're going to see it all." So, we … stayed there three nights, and, one night, I went with some guys, in a jeep, from the base down through town, and we went [in the] early afternoon, it was still daylight, and, of course, the women are all bare-breasted, and the whole style of life, and so forth, "Wow." [laughter] To a young kid, growing up in America, in our family, it was quite different. … The way you sensed the women … out where our base was, where we finally took off from, out there, toward Tobruk, those women wore all kinds of [veils], you never saw their face, and … you would just guess by tone of voice. … We went into a marketplace one day; the women were treated like shit, excuse me, and it was disgusting to me. I mean, they had their place. …

KP: What in particular did you see that rubbed you the wrong way?

WB: It's just that some of the men, maybe they were trying to be macho in front of some Yanks that didn't understand their language and didn't understand their culture, but, they were sort of showing off and almost antagonizingly calling your bluff to get involved or something. … It just was an attitude I didn't like, that's all. You sensed it, more than anything else, but, … if we had gotten to talk, people-to-people, if I had known their language, any time I really get to know somebody, [it is okay]. We have friends, now, coming back over from Czechoslovakia and Poland, … a couple guys. (Jishi?) was one. Jishi … is his name, Jishi. [laughter] Jishi's from Czech [Republic], and we looked up [some things] on the computer one night, and … he was asking all about the computer, and I said, "We get the weather all over the world." He says, "How … about in Bucharest?" or someplace. It says, "No weather in Bucharest." [laughter] He always reminds me of that, "Hey, no weather in Bucharest." It just wasn't reported on the screen, they didn't call in or something like that, but, he said, "How come? They've got to have weather," but, [if] you get to know somebody like those [people], it would work out. This world's got a lot of problems to solve like that. The cultures of the Libyan, the North African, even back fifty some years ago, I saw there. Of course, the lifestyle, leaving from America, where we literally have it all, with automobiles and this, and that, and the other, and you talk about camel jocks, and so forth, that's it. It's just different, and, I suppose, if you get right down to it, they're God's people, and they're maybe even better than we are, [laughter] right? …

[TAPE PAUSED]

KP: You have written quite a bit about the Ploesti raid, but, I would like to get more of your observations on the record. I get the impression that you had no inkling of how badly the mission was going to go or how hard it would be.

WB: No. It was very questionable whether or not the reports, and forecasts, and so forth, you were given at [the] briefing would pan out. There were times when you got all kinds of things, where, "You're going to face the toughest [fighters]. You're going to face heavy flak," and you come back, and it was a milk run. "What happened, they run out of gas, [laughter] … no more shells for their antiaircraft guns, or what?" you know. So, you couldn't predict, and, sometimes, it would work the other [way]. One worked the other way, totally the other way, when you would think you were going to have what they would call a milk run, … "This is a short [hop]," but, again, this idea of secrecy, there were some times there, I think, during the war, in England, where, I think, certain communications were not as secret as they should have been. We worked a lot with the British and a lot with [the] Underground. If you were going in someplace, like, I went to Ploesti, all the Underground, all over Bulgaria and the rest, that we knew, we had contacts with and were on our side, were looking for us, to hide us. Now, that's good, but, if it gets out of hand, it's bad. They know … you're coming, they know just where you're coming, what you're going to be doing. So, it was the strategies of war, I guess. That's the way it goes. Most of the time, your briefing came … pretty clean.

KP: The mission matched what you were told.

WB: Yes, yes. "When you get to Dusseldorf and you turn twenty miles south of there, at (Einkeiner?)," or something like that, … "there'll be a lot of flak up to your north. You've got to go around that, … go over to [here], … turn left on there, thirty degrees." They'd plot your whole thing out. They would let you know this, and you would know what you're doing, [the] navigators would have their stuff and everything else, and you'd go to your ships, maybe, at six o'clock in the morning, but, if, somehow, somebody got some of this on some kind of short-wave radio or something else, you had welcoming parties. … I think there was a time there, … oh, late '43, early '44, when we had some mix-ups like that. Nobody ever confirmed it to me, but, I think, sometimes, they knew where we were going to be, when we were going to be [there], and they had everything mustered, and it could get rough.

KP: You were with the 445th Bomb Group for a long time. What were your responsibilities in between missions?

WB: I had several men under me. … Usually, it takes three to five hours to run a good calibration check on a Norden bombsight, or a Sperry bombsight, for that matter, and I had guys doing that at the bombsight shack, or vault, continually, checking on the readings, checking on the problems. … On the base, attached to the 445th Bomb Group, we had four squadrons of thirty-six airplanes, so, you've got a hundred and fifty airplanes or so, and, periodically, you'd have these thousand-hour checks or something like that, … and I would, very often, fly on those and check out the systems that I knew, because all of them had automatic pilots in them, and

most of the Liberators, at that point, … had Sperry, … not Norden, Sperry stuff in them, and the big amplifier box, as big as one of your old, huge stereos or something like that, which had these racks of amplifiers in [them], and they were vacuum tube things, and vacuum tubes, not like solid state stuff, that once it gets run in, it's usually pretty good for a long while, but, vacuum tubes, because they had glowing wires in there, had a life, and they would gradually get weaker and weaker, and I, very often, carried a monstrous, old wire tube checker with me, and we'd be getting a lazy response on the aileron, or on [the] rudder, or something, pull out the amplifier, check all the tubes, replace a couple tubes, perk it up a bit, you know, give it its vitamins or whatever else. I did that continually. On days when I knew I was going to be flying with a crew the following day, I was usually on the roster as flight engineer. That means you're essentially responsible for all the general … things that go onboard, all the mechanics, electronics, the alternators, the generators, [laughter] all the lines, and so forth. So, you'd go out and you'd be checking everything, you know. Individual gunners would check out their gun stations. I would check out the Martin upper, because that was my station in flight, that particular turret, make sure that everything was perfect on that, and then, I had to check out the bombsight we were going to use on that run, and take it out, mate it with the other Cannon plug wiring, and so forth, check that all out on the ground, usually run up the autopilot and see that it responded to the joystick, and so forth. … Many times, I would feel better sleeping in the ship that night and I would go in [there]. …

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

WB: … Checking out their stuff on the ground. Then, I'd come back, get my report, go with the crew.

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. W. Scott Buist on September 27, 1995, at Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. You mentioned that you would actually sleep in your airplane.

WB: … A ship that I knew I was going to fly the next day, and I knew it was going to be an important mission, and I knew it was going to be a lead ship of a squadron or a group, I would stay with that ship until the ground crew got out in the morning, and they would get out early for pre-flight. Then, I'd go in for briefing, with the rest of the crew, and breakfast, or breakfast, and then, briefing.

KP: Was that necessary or was that a superstition?

WB: … I guess it was more superstition. It was my responsibility to make sure that things were perfect and I didn't want anybody coming in there and, you know, doing something that they don't know what they were doing about, not that I really had any experience of anybody messing things up, but, it was also my life the next day. [laughter] It was very important to me and, to some extent, my reputation and [the] guys that depended on me. I had that responsibility and that's, I guess, superstition, you could say. …

KP: It sounds like it was a little of both.

WB: Yes, yes.

KP: You were in a unique position, because you flew several very dangerous missions, but, you spent most of your time as part of the ground crew. You experienced both worlds.

WB: Yes. Being on flying status meant that, … oh, every other day or so, you were in the air, on ships that needed a checkout of something or other. … Well, I was in the service roughly three years, from November '42 to November '45. To put in a little over two thousand hours, two thousand, two hundred, almost, … if you divide it up into twenty-four hours, that's about a hundred days in the year. A lot of your missions would end up only being, well, … a couple of them were twelve, thirteen, fourteen hours, and so forth, but, a lot of them were only eight hours. A lot of times, when you did flight checks, you were only up for, maybe, three hours. So, you can see that, … many times, I was up in the morning and up in the afternoon, … checking out something. … There's one Captain (Wright?) who coordinated the whole operation that I was involved with, mainly electronic type of stuff, and bombsights were under that, automatic pilots were under that, along with radar and a bunch of other stuff. … He would call, we had a telephone in this bombsight vault-shack, … and say, "Scott, 701, Ship 44, Hard Stand 36, is going up at one o'clock. They need you onboard." "Okay, Cap, I'll be there." You wouldn't know just what was going on, but, that's the way it went. So, you … kind of made the base your home. You'd wander over to the cold showers, you'd wander back to … your bunk and get a little shut-eye, or that Mars bar that Mom sent in that last box was burning a hole in the bottom, "I have to go back and get that Mars bar. I want that. I need a chocolate break." [laughter] You'd do these kind of things, but, you checked in for messages. … It was a practical sort of thing. Nobody was on top of you every minute. You'd know when chow was being served, and, as a non-commissioned officer, or as an enlisted man, so-to-speak, you didn't go the officers' mess, you went to [the enlisted men's mess], and you usually knew when the long lines were and when the short lines were, and, if you had the flexibility of making the best of it, you just did that. Also, being in my position, there was a long time overseas, almost a year-and-a-half, I and two other specialists were in the … cooks' barracks, got to know the cooks, and they're the best guys to get to know. I mean, [if] you need a good-sized chunk of cheese, you need an extra egg sandwich at two o'clock in the morning, or three o'clock in the afternoon, you'd go over to the mess hall and they got it. So, they were good guys to know.

KP: What kind of creature comforts were available in England, the food, the barracks, and so forth?

WB: It was a Nissen hut. … First, we had one pot-bellied stove, which wasn't enough. … It was raw and damp over there all the time and … one pot-bellied stove, about this big, in the middle of a Nissen hut, with about thirty bunks, just cots, [was not enough]. One time, we had double decks, but, most of the time, it was single deck. You had your footlocker at the end, and you had your cot, and you had, usually, a place where you could hang up a dress uniform on the wall. … Most of the airbases over there were built on farms, and there were no, like, sidewalks, … a lot of mud and gunk going, but, you didn't worry about keeping [your] shoes shined. You wore old trench boots, more or less. There was very, very seldom any hot water for anything. …

It doesn't get that cold, though. It gets raw and damp a lot. Out in East Anglia, … that's the very eastern end up there, Norwich is the center, [there is a] cathedral out there, … North Sea, you get a lot of close to freezing weather, a lot of dampness, and it could chill your bones, that's for sure, but, the barracks was probably equal to walking from here up to the Rutgers gym, from [the] mess hall, and our little place that I spent a lot of time in, the bombsight vault, we called it, was nothing more than [that]. It was a brick building, though, and we had a security guard, an MP, there, and we had a lot of other stuff, besides bombsights and things, in there that were code machines and stuff like that, which were restricted. … The bombsight vault, we had a jeep, Captain Wright had a jeep assigned to the vault, and I had that at my disposal, most all the time. So, [when] you're going out to the airplanes, they were all on these what they called hard stands, or little places they'd bring them in and swing them around, all over the airbase, and Hard Stand 104 is three miles away, for crying out loud, and you're taking some pieces of equipment out there, and you had to have a jeep, to run it back and forth, but, also, nobody kept too much track of you. For instance, I would say to the guy at the gate who knew me, at the base, "I'm going over to So-and-So Airbase to pick up a couple gyros for a bombsight." "Bullshit," [laughter] and I'd take a ride all though East Anglia, on a nice spring evening, in my little jeep, going over those little bridges, and roads, and so forth.

KP: You were able to tour a good part of England.

WB: Yes, and you'd stop in a pub, or you'd talk to a few people, and you'd certainly get lost and ask them … how you got to someplace else, and you'd hope you'd get back to your base, sooner or later. Road maps and signs were all down, nothing to indicate where anybody was. This was part of the war effort, too, [laughter] and I wasn't a native there, that's for sure, but, … that was neat. That was first time I ever [drove a jeep]. The Captain said, "Scott, take the jeep." Well, I'd driven Dad's trucks in the plumbing yard. I never had a license. "Take the jeep." I drove all over. [laughter]

KP: You did not have a driver's license.

WB: No, I never … had a driver's license, [laughter] not during the war.

TK: Regarding the Ploesti mission, I know it was kept top secret, but, were you made aware of the target's strategic significance?

WB: Well, yes. In your briefing, they told you that, "This is a high priority mission. You know it from all the shenanigans we've been going through," or somehow they would say that. "The *Wehrmacht*, every tank, every airplane, every car and truck, depends on getting gas and oil. This is their biggest supply. You must knock it out. … Since, at this point, Bucharest, which is forty miles away, is the official headquarters of the *Luftwaffe* and they have the newest top pilots and their new 109s, 108s, 109s, you are going to meet the heaviest resistance that any air force ever met any place. Besides, there are, … within that area, at least seven or eight antiaircraft trains. You see a train, you may see it open up [at] any minute, and all kinds of pompom guns come out of it. Almost every farmer has two or three haystacks hiding antiaircraft guns. … You're going to see that your one saving grace is, they're going to be shooting almost straight at you, because

you're going to be so low. They're used to setting shells to go off at ten thousand feet, once they get a reading on how high you are, and shooting the shells up there, you know, or twenty thousand or thirty thousand feet. This is a new game for antiaircraft guys, to shoot almost straight out, like a rifleman or something like that, as you're coming over the treetops, and we should have," in briefing, they said, "the element of surprise, but, once … they know we're on our way, the only logical target will be Ploesti oil fields, and you will have them throw everything they've got at you. So, that's what you're facing. That's about it," and that … was it, too. [laughter]

KP: Did you ever worry that the bombs might have missed the target and killed some civilians or did you not think of that at the time?

WB: No, I kind of shut that out of my mind. The thing that I think I worried about the most was, every once in awhile, bombs would hang up in a bomb bay. The bombardier [would] say, "Bombs away," you'd feel a surge, and then, my job, the flight engineer's job, when I was up, would be to check that everything was clear in the bomb bay. "We got a five hundred-pounder hung up with a live fuze, dangling on one shackle." That got to be touchy, sometimes, to try to get out there, bomb bay doors open, somehow get leverage on that, kick it away a bit, pry or trigger that one shackle to drop that, and hoping it wouldn't hit against the catwalk or the side of the bomb bay door, … blow you up. … I never worried. I knew that, within reason, a good bombardier, with the equipment we had, … could do what he's doing. Now, there were reasons for not [doing that]. You get rushed at times, you're under heavy attack, and this, and that, and the other. "Okay, … we didn't mean to wipe out that part of town, along with the truck factory or tank factory. You guys shook us up a bit here. That's your problem." [laughter] You had to think of it that way, but, you knew [some civilians died]. By the way, … when my son married his wife, my son's mother-in-law, (Elsa?), was in Germany, in one of the towns, when I bombed it. She remembers us. We were hitting the marshalling yards of the rail yards. … I mean, there was a train station there and other things, a town, businesses. We wiped out a lot. We pattern bombed about a square mile in four or five formations and she relates what it was like on the ground. That was interesting, beautiful lady, beautiful daughter-in-law, but, it shows how the worm turns in this whole thing. She married, at the end of the war, a Russian who fled the Russian Army, and because he did that and didn't shoot himself, and didn't do what he was supposed to do, and all of this kind of stuff, his village disowned him. He could not go home, Dmitri (Bogdonov?), by name. Dmitri and Elsa got married and they went to Argentina. My daughter-in-law was born in Argentina, and, finally, he was a machinist and a darn good Volkswagen mechanic, foreign car mechanic, you might say, here, and they came up to Bridgeport, Connecticut, and that's where my son was going, to Bridgeport, going to college up there, met Ursula, and [that] ties a bunch of stuff together with fifty years ago. [laughter] So, it's an interesting world.

TK: Have you kept in touch with anyone that you served with?

WB: Once or twice, people have stopped in and, as I said before, I'm the world's worst communicator. When my son and my daughter get a letter from me, they frame it and put it on the wall. [laughter] Since I've been into computers and using the Internet and e-mail, they say,

"I've had more communications with you, Dad," [laughter] you know, via letters and mail, "than I've ever had," but, right after the war, for two or three summers, while I was at the college, we had guys stop in and visit. … The last day or two I was in the service, before we went for discharge, a bunch of the guys I went with kind of, somehow, fell together, from overseas, and my dad said, "Why don't you guys come on up to the lake for a weekend?" He and one of his buddies from the plumbing business took the truck and the station wagon, they got these big, old picnic hampers full of clams, and shrimp, and lobsters, and beer, and we had these guys up for that weekend. … Captain Wright was there. Captain Wright's from out in Iowa and I can still remember him, at five or six o'clock in the morning, it's just breaking, "What the hell are you doing out there peeling clams at this hour?" He's out there peeling clams, and, one day, we took him for a walk around the lake, it was getting dark, and I said, "I'll fix these guys," and it was this shallow swamp that went out, and I walked around it, and I said, "You guys, wait here a minute. I dropped my flashlight," and I went around this way, shone the flashlight, "Come on." They walked right through the swamp, up to about here in muck. [laughter] They never did forgive me for that, but, this was a whole bunch of guys we had from the service. That's the last time, really, I saw those guys. I've heard, [through a] Christmas card, from some of them for twenty or thirty years, saying, "Got four kids now," this, and that, and the other, "Going through college," "My son just got a job up in Rochester at Kodak, in the photo lab," those kind of stuff, but, I haven't really seen any of them for years.

KP: Have you ever gone to a reunion?

WB: No, no. I don't know … why, but, I've never [gone]. It's the same with Rutgers. I think I'll go to my fiftieth, Class of '49, yes, we'll go to the fiftieth. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

I don't think I've ever felt the need to join organizations, even in Kappa Delta Pi or Epsilon Pi Tau, things like that, which I got indoctrinated in. I've never really followed through on those things. I'm, maybe, a loner, I don't know, [laughter] but, [with] my family and I, and all the things I like to do, I've never found life dull, that's for sure.

TK: After the war, what was it like to start in college?

WB: Coming back to Rutgers? Well, first of all, the idea of being able to go to college and to feel I wasn't leaning on my mom and dad for a lot of things, I thought, was great, and I was immediately accepted in [the] engineering school, and I felt at home with a lot of the stuff there. In fact, a lot of the background that I got in the service tech schools was ahead of what they were doing here. [laughter] So, as far as math goes, in high school, I was in the … scientific college prep course, and trig, and science, and chemistry, and physics, and all that, they never were any real hassle to me, so, I felt very comfortable here. I rowed crew for a couple years. I lived at home. The big, white house, … one of the fraternity houses, anyway, I met my wife at a dance at the fraternity house. She was at Douglass, NJC, Douglass, and she was finishing up. In fact, she was coming over here. Home Ecs, surprisingly enough, have to take a hell of a lot of science courses. She came over here, and she was taking a physics course with some of the engineers

here, at Rutgers, and she came to me one night, after I met her at the dance, and I met her again, and she said something about, "We're in this physics class, … and they're talking about watts, and the guy says, 'Now, what's a watt?' and he's doing all this double talk about power, really." [laughter] She was so confused about this stuff, and we talked about that, but, anyway, Cath and I got along, obviously, [laughter] very well for years. So, they wanted me to pledge Chi Psi. … I was living at home, over on Seaman Street. Of course, what does a pledge do? Some of the things that pledges do is, they shovel the sidewalk when it snows, they sweep, they rake. … "I can do this at home. I don't need this over here." To some extent, some of the fraternities I saw, and I'm not a snob, I like a drink, and I can put down a few beers, but, a lot of them were doing too much drinking and not enough thinking, and I said, "Fraternities are not for me, either," anti-social? …

KP: Did you also feel that you had outgrown that sort of thing?

WB: Well, yes and no, but, you realize, right at '46, most of the population of Rutgers was guys, really, a year older than I that had been in the Army, Navy, Marines, and so forth. The place was full of GIs and guys as old or older than I am. … In that way, I hadn't outgrown them. … It just didn't feel good to me, … or didn't seem to be of any advantage to me, to become a fraternity brother. I had lots of friends. … They accepted me rowing on crew, that bunch, with Chuck Logg and his gang, and we had a damn good crew those couple of years, too, mostly veterans on that, and we had some darn good football games back in '47, '48, '49, too, [laughter] and I didn't need that. … I needed the ticket, I needed the diploma, and I liked the kind of work I was doing. I liked that kind of thing. So, coming back to Rutgers, I felt very much at home in my town, my old stomping grounds. I knew lots and lots of people in town. There were about five, six guys that we stayed together all through junior high and senior high in this model airplane club I talked about before, and they were all back from the service, and we were getting back together now, with wives and kids coming along. … That was the way it was. My sister was getting married. My other sister just graduated from nursing school, … up your way, up there in All Soul's Hospital, up in Morristown. … I worked with Dad a lot, in the plumbing business, at that point, did a lot of estimating for him, and so forth, but, something else happened to me [at] about that time. … I saw a lot of these kids on the street that, maybe, needed to build a model airplane, I thought. So, I started a model airplane club down at the Y, volunteer. A fellow named Ed (Heard?), New Brunswick Public Schools, chairman of the Industrial Arts Department, came down there one night, said, "Buist, we need you to teach shop." "I'll teach shop, it'll be fun," general wood shop, junior high. "I know all the machines, I'm pretty good mechanically, with tools and everything else." He said, "We can get you an emergency certificate. How about starting this coming September?" At that time, Dad's business, as I mentioned before, … labor, tools, materials [were] very undependable after the war, you couldn't get things, you couldn't depend on things, and I said, "Dad, I'm going to teach school for a year or so, going to teach shop." So, I started teaching shop at Roosevelt Junior High School, taught for twenty years. [laughter] Well, I got to know the town quite well, and the kids, and the families, and so forth.

KP: In the service, you had received state-of-the-art training in electronics. What was it like to then come to college, where things were not as state-of-the-art?

WB: … Frustrating, in a way, because you knew, when you went to the old hydraulics lab, and you had been working with very sensitive fluid control mechanisms that were driving guns and turrets, and actuating the ailerons, and all the electronics that go with it, and so forth, and you saw the stuff [here], they were giving you, as a new engineering student, the basics, and I thought, sometimes, they put you through a lot of exercise to come up with your lab reports, and all this, and that, and the other, which, for a lot of people that had never been exposed to some of the things I had, it would have been a great foundation, but, it didn't take me along the track very much further. I don't know [if] it was a waste of time. It solidified a lot of basics. It wasn't a waste of time, it wasn't. I can remember guys like Slade, who taught differential equations, and some of those higher mathematics stuff, that was challenging, that was challenging. [laughter]

KP: You did learn new things.

WB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. … Even in electronics, we had, I can't think of his name, but, he was of Chinese background, that taught electronics in 1948 and '49, and he was up on things. He was up pretty well. He was quite challenging with all his calculations, and so forth, on these circuits and terminology and I had to work my ass off [laughter] to get a passing or a decent grade in electronics, because … he was all electronics. There were two guys, two professors, that were so far out in, mostly theory, but, theory that could be applied, and they were advanced, and they were challenging, but, there were a few … snotty kids [who] thought, "I can teach a better class than this." [laughter] So, it goes. I mean, that's the way life is, I guess. You have to accept it all, but, along with the activities that any undergraduate guy took here at Rutgers, coming back from the service and being able to enjoy, you know, college ballgames, basketball, football, as an observer, not a football player. I liked rowing on the crew. That was a good sport. … That's a hell of a workout, rowing crew, if you've ever pulled a shell. When you row against such crews as Washington State, well, Princeton, Harvard, the whole thing that Rutgers had on its schedule at that time, we stayed with the best, the Henley's, over in England. We did good. Rutgers had a good crew. Chuck Logg was … real neat people here at Rutgers. … It was my big exercise, and relaxation, and so forth, but, along with, basically, in engineering, you had either three or four labs and two courses, you had, usually, eighteen credits, sometimes nineteen. When you carry eighteen … [to] twenty credits in the engineering school, you don't have a hell of a lot of time to play around.

KP: I have been told that the curriculum became very tough in the junior year.

WB: Yes, and we were packing in, in three years, a four-year course. Yes, come back and really started, really, in '46 and graduated in '49. So, it was three years [that] we did the engineering. … That was good, got me the ticket. Then, I came back and went to the School of Education and got my Masters in education.

KP: You taught in the New Brunswick school system for a long time.

WB: Long enough to vest my pension and get the hell out of there, because things were getting tough. I was in a couple of those riots in '50, where I got busted up a few times, breaking up riots

in the cafeteria, where chairs were being thrown. Things got pretty messy and I said, "You know, life's too short."

KP: When did you begin to feel that you just wanted to vest your pension and get out?

WB: The time that, in Roosevelt Junior High, I was called down from one of the other schools to come in and help squelch a riot in the cafeteria, and being tall and sort of, you know, manly, at that point, I dug right into it, and I got hit once here, hit once here. I went out of there with a few stitches. We squelched things down, with the police and the rest. Half [of] the windows in the ground … floor were broken, furniture was busted up, kids were running around. A lot of it was black and white and, you know, it was no … shakes. After you get … kicked in the balls, so-to-speak, and called a, "Motherfucking son-of-a-bitch," by so many of these black [kids], … you begin to say, "Hey, this is no place for me. Life's too short. I've … got some living to do." … I started looking at the paper and saying, "Come on, Lord, get me out of this thing." There, in the paper, was an ad for a training director for an international steel company, Sandvik Steel, Sweden, went up and applied, got the job, got six thousand dollars more the following year for getting back into industry, [laughter] and was told [that] any time I was out of the country, that my wife could come with me, if I was out [for] more than a week. … She had some nice trips to Sweden, to Europe, to Switzerland, England. … Being the English-speaking training director in technical carbide cutting tools and some specialties in metals and steel, I got to talk to many, many of the steel, carbide associations, the professional meetings, and so forth, put on papers at international [conferences], and that was an interesting chapter in my life, but, it was all built on the rest of the foundation, from the Army, from Rutgers, and so forth.

KP: The Army Air Force and Rutgers were crucial to your career development.

WB: Oh, yes, oh, yes, right.

KP: If not for the war, how do you think your life would have been different? Have you ever thought about that?

WB: Yes, I have not thought about it much, but, a few times, it's crossed my mind. It's an experience that … I would've missed a lot, … to tell you the truth. The feeling in our country and amongst families [was] that we had a real mission, we can stick together, we can do it, everybody pitching in and not caring what. I mean, … the highest muckety-muck, pompy, old lady could get in there and wash somebody's khakis for him, if he needed it, and grease a car, or a Rosie the Riveter type of thing. Everybody did all this kind of stuff. … It was an awakening to industry to see this kind of thing happening. I remember taking my bike up to Jersey Avenue, where (Scorbo Cast?) was making engines for Mack Trucks during the war, and seeing these ladies pouring big ladles of steel to make castings for engine blocks, and so forth. … Everybody was in it, everybody was doing it, and you knew right then, no matter what Adolf or Tojo had to say, sooner or later, we were going to whoop their ass. … That was just the way we were going to do it and … that spirit was so great. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

KP: You continued to live in New Brunswick, even after you retired from teaching. Why did you stay here?

WB: Well, I suppose [because of] the idea that when Ed Heard, from the public schools, found me down at the Y that night and said, "Would you teach?" and offered me the job. I mean, I was at a point, then, where I was saying to Dad, outward, verbally, "Dad, I don't think … we can both do this. I've got ideas I want to do. I think you should … get into your connections with all the factories around here and run this as a very small, cost-plus business, where you know you can make a living, but, not burn up the world, and let me see what else I can do. So, I'm going to try this teaching job," and then, once I taught, I loved it. I liked working with the kids. … After about five or six years, when Ed Heard died, I became the department chairman. Now, industrial arts was at a state, at that point, where it was pretty industrial artsy, but, not up together with industry. Some of the first [decisions were], you know, offset printing, "Get rid of this Gutenberg type, get offset in here, get chemicals in here, get chemical etching machines, get some automated machinery, where you can set up things, put a part in, and the lathe'll make it," but, you've got to do all the thinking behind it, and plot it all out, and do the math, and this, and that, and the other, and we started to get into graphic arts, where you get process cameras and all the stuff that goes with it, and computers, the early Macs. We got all that stuff started and, … really, I got the love of [the] vocational sort of thing. That's when I got involved with the vocational schools, over in Piscataway. … We had, even, practical nurse, you had food service, things to be done in the food service.

KP: Was this in New Brunswick?

WB: Well, I tried to get New Brunswick to move further on that, because the population we had needed that kind of teaching and I knew that we could get a lot of kids into the Culinary Institute in Hyde Park, I knew that we could get kids into other places. We could get some … basic electronics kids into DeVry Institute. We could get them into these places, and they could go places, some of the better ones, but, [New] Brunswick wasn't up for that, so, then, I went to Piscataway, and we did the vocational thing. … With the riots, and the stuff that was going on, and the lack of, really, … "looking ahead" support by the Board of Education for more technology, I just didn't want to play on that team anymore. I said, "This team's not going anyplace."

KP: You were with the New Brunswick school system until 1969.

WB: Yes, '68, '69 was when the riots started, was when my twenty years was coming up, so, as soon as I saw I had twenty, … at that time, you could vest your pension at twenty years, I said, "This is a smart move for me. I'll vest my pension, I'll bail out of here, go to the next step."

KP: At one point, you were tapped to serve on the New Brunswick School Board.

WB: Yes.

KP: As a teacher and life-long resident, how did that go?

WB: Well, I felt that I was somewhat used and abused by the school board, a few times. An old friend and neighbor of mine, who was president of the school board, we talked about [this]. My family's coming along now, I've got four kids, living in a second floor apartment, taking my wash and laundry down to Bernie's Laundromat, down on George Street, and I'm saying, "Look, I've got, now, an engineering degree, a Masters degree in education, I should be put on the guide. I should be put right up at the top of that guide. I need it, for my family, for bucks," and they screwed around for awhile with promises; nothing came of it. I said, "To hell with them. I'm not appreciated here. I think I've worked hard and done my job and, if this is this cheap of an outfit, [I should leave]." I mean, I … felt more at home teaching basic algebra and trig in shop than they taught in the practical stuff in the math department. I mean, I could see this going on, and it bothered me, and I knew it.

KP: You watched as the school system deteriorated.

WB: Yes, yes.

KP: Who do you think was to blame, the Board of Education, other political leaders, etc.? Was it inevitable? Could it have been reversed?

WB: It's all of those combinations together. There also was a lot of teachers in New Brunswick, in the '50s, who had been here for twenty or thirty years. They were in a rut, teaching their *Macbeth*, teaching … the same old stuff that they had taught and had all the lesson plans for years, and years, and years, and years, and years, and most of them had no kids or family to tie in. Teaching was their thing. So, that was … a part of it. The Board of Education was another part of it, the influx of low-income housing, blacks, Puerto Ricans, others, that had some different cultures and values, and the lack of a discipline. I mean, when a kid'd come up to a teacher and say to her face, right in front of a class, say it to my face, right in front of a class, "What are you going to do about it, you motherfucker?" and nothing happens, and you try to throw the kid out, it gets into … all kinds of things. … People [step] around, twinkle-toes, instead of facing the problem, and [say], "Let's be reasonable here. Let's square this away."

KP: How shocked were you when students began to talk back to you? When you were a student and when you began teaching, that would have been unheard of.

WB: I always felt fairly comfortable with teachers … and I could talk back in a different way. I could say, I remember Mrs. (Shoehof?), over in Washington School, Mrs. (Dunham?), "Mrs. Dunham, can we talk after class? Can we talk at three o'clock?" "Why did you do [it] this way and say that?" you know, and so forth. I felt mature enough, or self-secure enough, … maybe it was my mom's school teaching upbringing or something else, but, to say these things in [what] I thought was a polite way, and I wasn't putting myself on their level. … I was making suggestions. I was telling them how I felt about things. "I'm not saying you're wrong, but, this doesn't quite gel with my thinking or fit with me." Most of them took it very well or would be glad to talk those things out, but, it was just a different way of approaching the same kind of thing, I suppose. … I don't like every other word being a gutter language word.

KP: I imagine that, if you had done that in the 1940s, you would have been in big trouble.

WB: Yes, you probably would've, yes. There's a lot of things in the 1940s, 1930s, that we did [differently], but, I look at my grandchildren today, all nine of them, altogether, and see the struggles they're going through, with broken homes, and drugs, and kids, and alcohol, and sex, and I'd rather be back in the '40s, I would, be better for all of us, I feel, anyway. I don't know how you feel. … It didn't seem to hurt most of us guys.

KP: Did you talk much about the war after you returned to civilian life?

WB: No, very little, very little.

KP: When did you write your story?

WB: … Not until fifty years later. I had some old notes I came across, some old stuff, half-burned from that fire, and I was cleaning out some junk, and I saw these notes, and I had written some of these overseas, and I showed one to one of my boys. "Pa, tell us more," and he kept asking questions. "I'll tell you about that first raid," and I started with the [computer]. I peck, you know. It's got spellchecker and it does all that stuff. … Finally, I was getting it together and … I think we had to go over, "Was it the Ural?" "Was it the Balkans?" … In fact, even in there, I wasn't sure and I know there's some mountains there we had to go up and over, and then, get right down again. I know we had rain. You know, I know certain things I put in there, some things I do remember. I remember the [P]-38s. I remember, we didn't have [P]-51s, at that point. We had the guys off the Navy ships [who] picked us up. You know, what I remembered, I put down. It may not be totally accurate, but, that was my memory. I said, "This is something I probably should [write down]," and they appreciate it. "Pop, you should tell us that." So, they got me writing a few others.

KP: I hope you will send us copies when you finish them.

WB: It not only kept me busy, but, "It'll keep you out of trouble, Grandpa. You won't be climbing the ladder, cutting limbs or something else, and breaking your neck." So, it goes; didn't we exhaust it? It's kind of fun to reminisce [about] a lot of this stuff. I don't spend a lot of time doing it.

KP: None of your children served in the military. Do you have any regrets that they did not or were you glad that they did not?

WB: I'll tell you, during the Vietnam War, because I had such strong feelings that we weren't in that to win, and I had certain feelings about that, I was ready to send … my Jim, who would be eligible, up to Canada or someplace else, to avoid it. I mean, I just felt, at that point, you know, if you're going to do something and you make up your mind, you're going to do something that's that serious, and going to affect so many families and people, do it like Desert Storm and get the

hell out, and do it to win, don't play games with all of these families and lives, and not with my son's.

KP: You were glad he did not go to Vietnam.

WB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. I would have, I suppose, pulled strings to keep him out, even though, I think, a trick in the services is good for any kid, boy or girl, can be … a good growing up experience, but, under those conditions, the way I read it, … if you know the … quicksand's this deep, you just don't send the kid through it, that's all. You steer them around it. That's what fathers and experience are for, I think. [laughter]

KP: How did your son feel about the Vietnam War at the time?

WB: No. He said, "I'm ready to go. If I get called, I'll go." I said, "I don't think you should." That's about as much as we [discussed it]. He knew how I felt, I knew how he [felt]. He said, "Pa, you did your job when your country called." I said, "Yes, but, this is different. In my book, this is different, in my book." That's the way I looked at it. Some people have confirmed feelings of that, too, recently. … This country, God forbid it ever gets into a war with a country that [is just as strong]; I mean, right now, our industry is, to a great extent, in bad shape. I mean, we'd have a hell of a lot of building up to catch up with even … China, and Japan, and Germany, and Austria, and so forth. … This whole thing with Mexico, I think, has backfired, like I thought it would, sort of a fiasco. I mean, liberal do-gooders, great ideas, are something else, but, you've got to take care of your own hearth, your own family, your own neighborhood. You have some community and feeling for your neighbor and feeling for other people, and feeling for, well, I think, something like some guidance from the Lord, … whoever may be your Lord, or God, or whatever else, or some spiritual, or uplifting, or leaning on [thing]. It's important.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you about?

WB: No, I don't think so. I think I've probably talked much too much. [laughter]

KP: More is always better. [laughter]

WB: … If this is just about the war, it's about life, it's about growing up, it's about the world, and the world is getting to be a smaller and smaller ball, like, when I went to work for the …

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

WB: Well, for instance, one of the things I was involved [with] there, from a mechanical engineering point of view, is carbide cutting tools and the cutting edge in (meeting?) steel to make drive shafts, axles, pinion gears. Whether it be at Caterpillar Tractor or (Ford Leonia?), … in all these different plants, the idea is, you've got these machines, that you should be the boss, and the machines should do what you say, and you shouldn't be doing what the machine's telling you. We've [got] guys out there making a gear in [the] Ford (Leonia?) plant that could be made to better tolerances in about one-third the time. Because of unions, because of old workers,

because of old tooling, and workers feeling they shouldn't pick up too much iron, well, there's automated ways of feeding these machines, and there's new, high-speed, coated carbide and other space-age materials that can take the heat without breaking down, and remove chips, and shape things up where it actually is working in this metal until it gets to a fluid state, a hydro-dynamic state, and leaves a perfectly smooth, micro-finish on it. … If the guy runs it slower, and he chews it and gets a lousy finish, and, … if he doesn't see all of this and the industry doesn't see it, but, … the little, old guy in Japan does, or the guy in Germany, or Austria, or somebody else does, soon, you're out of business, and that's what … the US is facing in many, many places [over] the last ten, fifteen years, … not that we don't have the brains here or the smarts to do it, but, "Well, the union says we can't do this. The union says we can't do that." I said, "Look, you've got a fifty-horsepower machine. You're using fifteen of it. Why not use the fifty? Run that machine's backside off and get the parts out. … What's the biggest cost here? labor." If you're paying, you know, twenty-eight dollars an hour for this machinist, or thirty-seven dollars an hour for this machinist, and he only makes two parts an hour, there's your machine cost right there. If that machine can make twenty parts an hour, do it, but, that's where much of America is today. If we ever got in the same battle we got in like [in World War II], I would be afraid that a lot of things could happen, though … I like competition, to some extent, fair, honest competition, and I think that's what industry should be about, that's what business should be about, that's what a democratic society should be about, but, I think, along with it, you've got to have the spiritual and all the rest, and Rutgers has partly shaped me, along with family and all the rest. I've talked too much.

KP: No, no. Thank you.

WB: I thank you. …

TK: That was a good ending.

KP: Yes, that is a very nice summary.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/8/03
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/10/03
Reviewed by W. Scott Buist 11/4/03