RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MORTON H. BURKE

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

G. KURT PIEHLER
and
FRED ROBINOVITZ
and
ALTHEA MILLER

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TRANSCRIPT BY

FRED ROBINOVITZ

Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Morton H. Burke on March 11, 1997, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler ...

Fred Robinovitz: ... Fred Robinovitz.

KP: Probably, we will be joined occasionally by …

Althea Miller: … Althea Miller.

KP: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents, who emigrated from Russia. What did they tell you about their lives in Russia? Why did they leave?

Morton Burke: Well, we were Jewish, and my father, actually, was the victim of a *pogrom*, his brothers were, and he just decided [that] he just didn't want to get involved in the Russian Army. They were going to draft him for some reason. He came over first. Now, he and my mother lived in the same village. My mother was about six or seven years younger than he, so, he knew her as a child, and, when she and her mother came over, he visited them, and, when my mother grew up, he married her.

KP: Your parents' families came over separately, correct?

MB: Yes, and they were from a small, small village outside of Kiev in Russia.

KP: Where did they settle at first in the United States?

MB: Oh, well, look, when you came through Ellis Island, everybody (in the east?) settled either in the Newark or New York City area. My father settled in the Newark area, but, my mother and her mother, and two other children, they settled in New York City.

KP: Did they stay in touch with your father?

MB: Well, not immediately, but, … yes, they kept in touch, because there was a network, … because people would come first and they would ... make arrangements and so forth for other people, when they came over. That was the arrangement with the family.

KP: How many members of each family emigrated to the United States?

MB: My father was the only one in his family. He had two other brothers. One of them stayed in Russia, with his mother, and then, another one moved to Jerusalem in Israel.

KP: When did the other brother move to Israel?

MB: Yes, oh, yes, oh, he was quite a guy. ...

KP: When did he move to Jerusalem?

MB: Oh, he was there, golly, it must of been ...

KP: Was it before Israel won its independence?

MB: Oh, yes, 1911, 1910. …

KP: He was a very early Zionist.

MB: Oh, yes. He was there and he was … doing the fighting. In fact, his son, who's my cousin, oh, he was in the navy there. … I think he was the … navy port officer for … one of the local towns there and they did fighting. … They had to fight the British and you know that whole story.

KP: Did your family stay in touch with your father's brothers?

MB: Oh, my father kept in touch with his … older brother and his mother. … He tried to bring them over, because … he got into business here, he started making money, but, they didn't want to come. [She] was too old and, for some reason, they felt more comfortable in Russia. Now, the other brother wanted to stay in Jerusalem; he was a radical kind of guy. … As a matter-of-fact, I don't think my father got along well with him, no kidding, but, … they still kept in touch. In fact, his son, my cousin, we used to send him money. I used to send him books. He ended up being an engineer, also, and I used to buy books in America and send them over to him, so [that] he could do … his studying.

KP: How did your father feel about Zionism?

MB: My father, no, my father wasn't a Zionist, no.

KP: Even though his brother was.

MB: Oh, yes. … He was the kind of guy, … he just thought about himself and his family. He came over and he raised a family, that's all. He was a one hundred percent family man.

KP: Your father served in World War I.

MB: Yes.

KP: Did he enlist or was he drafted?

MB: No, no, … I'm pretty sure he was drafted, and he was wounded. He got a Purple Heart. He was gassed in one of the attacks there.

KP: Did he ever talk about the war?

MB: Not really, not really. All he said [was], "It was a mess." I've got a few pictures of him in France, you know, pictures and so forth; he never talked about it, never talked about it.

KP: Did he ever join the American Legion or any other veterans' groups?

MB: Oh, I think he joined … one or two. Believe it or not, I never asked him that, but, … he was a member of a Jewish veterans' group for awhile, yes, he was, … but, he was never active. …

KP: You were born in Newark, but, eventually, your family settled in Howell Township, near Freehold. How did that come about?

MB: Very easily. My father was in business in Newark and, believe it or not, the neighborhoods were deteriorating very, very quickly when we were there. When we were there, it was basically a mixed neighborhood; … we had Irish people on our street, we had Polish people on the street, and so forth, and then, … the influx of other kinds of people into the area made it so that we had fights, and my brother got injured, very seriously. So, my father said, "This is it." So, we moved to Irvington for one year, he had a piece of property there, and then, we moved out to the Howell Township area.

KP: Was your father's business located on Prince Street?

MB: No, no, no, no. … My mother … was very skilled in the dress trade, you know, seamstress and all that, so, he had a store there where he sold women's dresses and so forth, and he was also in the, oh, I guess you'd call it the installment business. I don't know whether you know how that … worked. Do you know how that worked in those days?

KP: Yes.

MB: … He would make contacts with people, many of them who were not native American; my father spoke many languages, he spoke Russian, he spoke Polish, and so forth, and these people would want things like clothing, they would want furniture, and so forth, and, somehow, they couldn't deal with the Americans. So, they'd find someone who … would go to a place like a furniture store, they'd make the deal with the furniture store, and my father, it basically was a credit business, he would pay for the whole thing through the store. Then, he would collect the money from them on the installment plan. He'd buy from the store, mark it up, and he would go there [to collect], and he had collectors working for him. It got to be quite a business, quite a business. He had people working for him, and they would go around weekly, you know, … collecting the money from the customers, and then, that business all went to heck, 1929, you know, during the Depression. These people couldn't pay their bills. [laughter] My father owed the stores money. He was able to get out without actually going bankrupt, but, it got to the point where the business was no longer viable.

KP: It sounds as if he suffered a substantial loss.

MB: Yes, he did. He took substantial losses, but, he ended up [not going bankrupt]. Well, again, my brother got hurt, and he said [that] he had to get out of this business, and … he didn't want my brother and I to get involved with all this mess, so, we moved out to the country.

KP: Which neighborhood did you live in? You mentioned that it was not Prince Street.

MB: No, no, it wasn't Prince Street. We lived on Hunterdon Street, I can still remember the number, 378 Hunterdon Street. ...

KP: What kind of a neighborhood was it?

MB: Oh, boy, what a neighborhood, very bad, now. … It was right in back of a grammar school, so, I used to just walk across the street and go to school.

KP: Do you remember the name of the school?

MB: It was the Hunterdon Street School. We were between 17th and 18th Avenue, one block below Belmont Avenue. I remember all these things.

KP: How old were you when your family moved out of Newark?

MB: … Well, let's see, I was about eight.

KP: Newark, then, was the most urban of New Jersey's cities.

MB: Oh, yes.

KP: What was it like to move from Newark, a very cosmopolitan city, to the Freehold/Howell Township area?

MB: No problem. It was [the] country; it was different, (pious?) living, because my father bought a place, … we had thirty acres, we had a small home, and it was nice. I mean, I had no objection. … Suddenly, I had and cats. I … enjoyed it very much, very much.

KP: Do you know why your father chose Howell Township?

MB: Oh, I know why; … it seems that we used to summer out there. I don't know whether you know it or not, but, there used to be periodic epidemics of infantile paralysis.

KP: Polio.

MB: Polio, that's the word, and it always happened around August, and they used to tell people, "Get out of the town. Get away from people," because they didn't know what caused it. Okay, so, we used to go and summer in a place, it was called West Farms; it was outside of Farmingdale in Howell Township. So, we knew people in the area and we knew the area. That's

it. So, when he decided to move, he looked around for a business. Most of the businesses in that area … were farms. My mother didn't want to get involved with a farm, so, he found a place that had a building that he could make a store out of. After all, he was a retail man, anyhow.

KP: He did not buy an existing store, he established his own store, correct?

MB: He created his own store.

KP: Did your parents belong to a synagogue in Farmingdale? How active were they in the synagogue?

MB: Zero, zilch, zilch, there were no synagogues there.

KP: Did they belong to a synagogue in Newark?

MB: Oh, yes. … We used to just go, like most Jews did, on the High Holy days, but, that's the end of it, not active at all.

KP: Did your family adhere to any dietary laws at all?

MB: No, not in our family, but, they knew them. My mother's family were Cohens. Do you know what they are? Those were the super-religious type people, but, it didn't bother her, no. We were not religious.

KP: You were a fairly secular family. I would guess, then, that, from a religious point of view, the move to Howell Township was not a hardship.

MB: Oh, not for us, no problem.

KP: Your father started his business during the Depression.

MB: No, it was before the Depression. Oh, you mean the second business?

KP: The second business, yes.

MB: Absolutely. We moved there in 1936. …

KP: How tough was it for him?

MB: Well, it was very tough. It was a general store. There were three or four other food stores within a four or five mile area. … See, now, people don't handle businesses that way, but, he had myself and my brother, so, he had two sons, my mother worked, three, and himself, so, he had four workers, and none of us got paid. You know what I mean?

KP: Yes.

MB: Okay, so, he was able to start [up the store]. … He was able to make a down payment on the property, and it was almost all paid for, so, that wasn't the burden. The burden was building up the business, but, obviously, when you build up the business with no overhead, you got a pretty good chance, and this is what happened.

KP: It was a general store.

MB: First, it started as a general store, first was the groceries, and then, we added clothing, we added shoes, and then, he got a liquor license, so, all of a sudden, we had … a good operation going. It took five years, but, it got going very well.

KP: It sounds as if the store really prospered during the war years.

MB: Well, I wasn't there during the wartime. Now, there were problems during the wartime, you know. There was always shortages. They had stamps; we sold gasoline out there, they had two gas tanks out there, and … the problem was getting people to work, you know, a worker who would work for you.

KP: He lost his two sons to the war effort.

MB: Yes, … and he had to pay the new hired workers, if you know what I mean. [laughter] So, that's how it worked, but, I'm sure he did [fine]. They worked very hard, I know they did.

KP: What is your earliest memory of working in the store?

MB: Oh, I started working in the store [when] I was like nine, ten years old, right away. I was always good at arithmetic, and there was never any problem. My brother and I, we had good personalities for that. Well, my father thanked us for that many times. [laughter]

KP: How often did you work in the store? How long did you work for?

MB: Constantly. Once again, even now, the modern businesses realize that service is important, but, at that time, my father knew it was very important. That store was open seven days a week, it was open from eight in the morning to eleven o'clock at night. … To build up good will, we used to make deliveries, believe it or not, and I remember delivering a nineteen cent can of tuna fish to someone who lived two, three miles away, but, this is how you build up good will.

KP: Did you drive or walk when you made these deliveries?

MB: Oh, no, no, we had cars, and, incidentally, there were times when I had to drive when I didn't have a license, but, I knew better. That was done, [laughter] but, … again, it was a rural area. The area was policed by the state police and they were miles away; you hardly ever saw them.

KP: Given the nature of the business, you probably never got very far from the area.

MB: We were there all the time.

KP: Did you take any vacations when you were growing up?

MB: Very little, none, none whatsoever. … As I said, we had a pretty good area, … a large area, in the back. My brother and I used to get exercise. We used to throw baseballs in the back of the store, when it wasn't busy. This was when we weren't in school, and we had a little barn there, and I put … a backstop with a basketball hoop on an outside wall. I used to practice shooting baskets, and then, when the store got busy, you could see all the cars and so forth. We used to go to work. I belonged to the 4- H club, and … they had baseball teams and softball.

KP: Newark was a very cosmopolitan community.

MB: Oh, yes.

KP: However, you saw its negative side, the fights between the different ethnic groups.

MB: Oh, boy, yes.

KP: It sounds like you remember that very distinctly.

MB: Oh, yes, I do. I remember, [laughter] this is one case, we had a snowball fight. I don't know, some kids from down the block, they decided to attack the kids who lived near us, and I'll never forget my mother coming out the door, trying to stop it, and one of these snowballs hit her right in the forehead, okay. It knocked her back. It didn't knock her out, but, boy, she was hurt.

KP: Was there any anti-Semitism in your neighborhood in Newark?

MB: Oh, now, … to me, that's a funny word. … I don't know of any particular group where they said, "We hate Jews." I don't think that was, but, all it was [was], the Polish would say, "Let's go get the Jews," in other words, "Let's harass them." We had an Italian neighborhood nearby, too, which was very difficult, and the way the cities worked was not what you were, but, if you were on the block and if they didn't recognize your face, you were an outsider and you were subject to, oh, how can I say [it]? harassment.

KP: It sounds like that ended when you got to Howell Township.

MB: … There was no problem like that; this was the country. No, [that] ended it all, never had that problem. ...

KP: How many Jews lived in your area?

MB: Well, where we were, there were no Jews, but, there was a whole Jewish settlement about three or four miles away, [it] was called West Farms, and, … believe it or not, they were radicals, … I think some were Communist, even, but, they had chicken farms. … At that time, a man could make a living, when I say, "Living," [I mean], "Subsist." He might have a little car and he could feed himself and so forth with fifteen hundred chickens. It was possible that a man and a woman, these women also worked on these farms, [could] … do that, subsist. There was about, maybe, fifteen or twenty Jewish families in that one area.

AM: Did the fact that this community was radical and affiliated with Judaism affect your family at all?

MB: Oh, no, oh, no. In fact, most of our business was not with these people, because my father wasn't a Communist. [laughter] Oh, we knew them, you know. … There were times when we would have some sort of social function, where they invite you because they wanted your money, you know, donate something, and so forth, and so on. So, we used to go. We knew them.

FR: Did you carry kosher products in your store?

MB: No, that was a novelty. ... Oh, we had stuff, but, I don't know whether you know it or not, but, a lot of this kosher stuff, in those days, was phony. You'd get the normal stuff and they'd send you … a bunch of labels. [laughter] Okay, that's it. We pasted the labels on and that made it kosher. Soda used to be that way, a lot of other foods, also. "Yes, we made it kosher," but, how do you know, you know? So, you stuck these labels on the food package and people who wanted something kosher, that's how they got it. I don't know how it's done now, but, that's how it was done then.

FR: It makes you wonder.

MB: Oh, yes, you got to do a lot of wondering about it. I don't know what goes on now, but, I'm sure it may not be much different.

KP: Did you notice a difference between the schools in Newark and Howell?

MB: The schools in Newark, these were big schools, let's face it, there was no problem for me in Newark. … I went to a one room schoolhouse when I moved to Howell Township. … It was the Adelphia Grammar School #1, it had two classes in it, then, a seventh and an eighth grade. Now, I got into the seventh grade and it must have had maybe twenty or twenty-five students in that one room. We used to get bused, yes, and that bus used to drop us off ... at this grammar school and used to go on to Freehold, to the high schools. So, we did all those things at once. Now, I had a very marvelous teacher, a little woman named Mrs. Griebling, I'll never forget her, she taught both classes, and the way it was done, while she was teaching the eighth, we'd have an assignment in the seventh, we're all in one room, and then, we'd switch back and forth. ... If you listened while you were in the seventh grade, you'd be smart [laughter] when you got into the eighth grade, … you knew all the work, of course, and this is how it worked.

KP: That must have been such a change from Newark, where you had very big classes.

MB: To me, I adjusted very, very rapidly, had no problem, no problem.

KP: What about your friends? In Newark, you lived near many different people.

MB: Yes, close to them.

KP: Then, you moved to a more isolated area.

MB: Well, remember, in the store, you meet a lot of people, and a lot of the young kids, my age, used to come in. … They used to come in there and talk to me. [I] got to know them, no problem.

KP: You did not feel isolated.

MB: Oh, no, no, no. As I said, I didn't and I'm sure my brother didn't. … I enjoyed the whole experience.

KP: You mentioned that you joined the 4-H.

MB: Oh, yes, these were local groups, yes. There was a 4-H club there. That was one where there was a lot [of people]. What we used to do was meet over each others' houses, and they … had an agent, an agricultural agent, [who] was part of the 4-H clubs, and we used to have functions. … Basically, they had a baseball team. We used to discuss how to lay out a plot of grass, … a plot of ground, so [that] you could grow radishes and so forth. That was the whole program, basically.

KP: Did your parents grow any vegetables?

MB: Oh, yes, they did. In fact, we had a little orchard right [in] back. I told you, I said, we had a pretty large place, and my father didn't know how to take care of any of that stuff, … but, we had apples and we had chickens. He had about twenty or thirty chickens that we used to feed, it was good. We had dogs, cats, we had all the animals there. One time, … this is interesting, we had about an acre of land right alongside of the house and my father said he was going to have a farm. So, he went out and hired someone to lay all these vegetables and so forth, and, of course, he never took care of it. We did have couple of tomatoes, this and that, but, it all went to pot.

KP: Did your parents always intend for you and your brother to go to college one day?

MB: Oh, yes, there was no doubt.

KP: Even though you were working in the store.

MB: No doubt about it that we were going to get educated. In fact, I was supposed to be either a doctor or a lawyer, [laughter] which was their preference, their preference, [that] I should be either a doctor or a lawyer.

KP: Did they want the same thing for your brother?

MB: Oh, yes.

KP: You mentioned that your father was not a radical, but, you wrote on the pre-interview survey that he was a Democrat.

MB: Oh, yes, always a Democrat.

KP: Was he a mainstream, Franklin Roosevelt Democrat?

MB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Even today, I have a mother who's over a hundred years old and still has all her marbles. When election time comes, she says, "You're gonna vote Democratic, aren't you?" [laughter] He was a man of the people, I guess.

FR: Your parents did not have a great deal of formal education.

MB: None, zero.

FR: Why did they want you to pursue a higher level of education?

MB: Well, I got a hunch this goes back to Jewish history for years and years. In fact, my father was afraid that I would become one of these Biblical scholars. [laughter] I was very good in school, okay. Now, it seems to be a basic history, back in Russia, those Talmudic scholars studied and studied, but, they couldn't make a living. My father always felt, "If you can't make a living, what's the good of being alive?" He used to actually tell me, "Don't you turn into one of those," you know. That was what he was afraid of, but, you had to get educated, no doubt about it. You had to get educated, but, you had to make a living.

KP: You mentioned that the one room schoolhouse was great. What about your high school?

MB: I went to Freehold High School and that was also small. … I can still remember it, I was very active in the high school, and, in fact, we just had our fifty-fifth reunion, and the whole school had 450 people in it, this is freshman, sophomore, junior, senior year. So, within a month, you knew just about everybody in the school, and all the teachers knew you, even though they never had you. … Every thing was quiet. It was a quiet school, no real problems, and the interesting part, 'cause it was a rural area, when I was there, approximately ten percent of the senior class went to college, which is a very small percentage. We'd graduate about 120 kids and only about twelve or thirteen went on to college.

KP: Did most graduates wind up back on the farm?

MB: Oh, yes. They stayed in the area, too. [It is] amazing how many of our class attended our reunion.

KP: … Most people still lived in the area?

MB: Yes, yes. …

AM: Were the teachers supportive about you going to college?

MB: Oh, the teachers were fine. They were all college people, sure, oh, yes. Well, it just happened that, … either there was no money or there was no inclination on the kid's part.

FR: Was that typical of the times, where ninety percent would not go on to college?

MB: I don't know about other areas, now, here, again, in this Freehold High School. … At that time, … in that area, the people didn't have much money, there was no real inclination to go to college, and, believe it or not, the girls waited to get married. … So many of the girls that I knew in high school, soon as they got their diploma, they got engaged, and they were married within a year. I mean, this was the norm.

KP: You mentioned that you were very active in high school. What did you do?

MB: Oh, I was involved in everything there.

KP: Did you play any sports?

MB: Yes. [laughter] This is a funny situation. I was ninety-five pounds and I went out for freshman football. [laughter] So, my coach looked at me, he says, "You, Mort? You're out for football?" I said, "Yes." He said, "How much do you weigh?" So, I said, "Ninety-five pounds." He said, "You know I can't take anybody on this team that weighs 135 pounds. So, he says, "If you want go out for waterboy, I'll let you apply for that." [laughter] I was about five-foot, five-foot-one. I didn't start growing until I was about a junior or senior in high school.

KP: Did you play any other sports?

MB: Oh, I got involved in intramural things. No, I always wanted to be, but, I just didn't have the size.

KP: What other activities were you involved with?

MB: Well, I was in all the clubs, you know; we had a German club, we had a photography club, and I was involved in all those things.

KP: Were you a part of the yearbook staff or the student government?

MB: … Not as such, not as such. … Oh, they had a election there; I was elected [as] one of the councilmen. I remember when the little towns used to have the high school students take over the government for a day. You know, in that time, Freehold had a mayor and they had four councilmen. So, they had the kids have an election and I was elected [as] one of [the] councilmen. So, I went to the borough hall there, and they put me through the jail, and they had a guy who had just held up something, you know, a big, big robbery. So, he looked at me and I looked at him, but, *he* was behind the [bars]. [laughter] It was this kind of thing. It was all small. It was all window shopping, more or less, but, it was interesting. Again, I was on the prom committees, you know.

KP: Did your high school have any fraternities?

MB: No, no.

KP: You mentioned that your father was worried that you would become a scholar.

MB: That I was going to become a scholar, a professional scholar, that worried him.

KP: It sounds like you read quite a bit.

MB: Oh, yes. Let's face it, I used to get all these good grades. … The teachers used to write him letters, and that was it, and, of course, he didn't understand what engineers did, you know. I was interested in technical things, I always was. I liked to use my hands and so forth. He didn't know what engineers did. All he knew was, you had to be either a doctor or a lawyer to make a good living.

FR: When did you become interested in engineering?

MB: It has to do with what you do as a kid with [your] hands. I was building things all the time. I was always fixing things. I told you, I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer and I used to look at the airplanes [and] say, "Oh, great," you know, "this must be fun," you know. I used to get involved; I used to swim. I was always involved in doing things.

FR: Oh, sure. I remember fixing computers in third period.

MB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. I used to fix cars, I used to do all these things. It was fun.

KP: Aviation had a very glamorous image in the 1920s and 1930s.

MB: Oh, yes. It was great.

KP: Do you remember any particular flights?

MB: I didn't go on an airplane, oh, golly, I didn't fly on an airplane 'til … when I was in the Navy. I was stationed in Portsmouth, Virginia, and, on weekends, I took flying lessons.

KP: You really maintained your interest in aviation.

MB: Oh, yes. In fact, … even after I got out of the service, I took lessons. I was getting ready to solo, and this is the interesting thing [that] happened, I used to fly a plane, locally, with someone who had a part interest in the plane. There were ten fellows; they owned an airplane. You could do that in an airplane club. In that plane, I had three near catastrophes. I'm not too religious, but, I said, "Look, each one was worse than the previous." The last one, we caught fire over Trenton, and I said, after the third time, "God does not want me to fly these little airplanes," okay, so, that was the last time, … but, I still like to fly. I mean, I fly commercially.

KP: However, it is interesting that you kept up your interest for so long.

MB: Oh, yes.

KP: If Rutgers had had an aviation program ...

MB: Not at that time.

KP: … But, if a program had been in place, you would have participated in it.

MB: Oh, yes, I would have, absolutely. … We were in the infantry here, when I was here.

KP: ROTC?

MB: Yes, the ROTC was infantry.

KP: Did you ever try to enlist in the Civilian Pilot Training Program at Hadley Field?

MB: No, no. … From what you tell me, I'm unaware of such a thing, but, remember, … we got here in 1941, and we did four years in three years, so, we were very busy. We used to have one week between semesters, then, we went right back into work, and, again, we had these ASTP guys there. … [If] you ask me questions about that, I will have some interesting things to say. [laughter]

KP: Oh, good. Do any of your high school teachers stand out in your mind at all?

MB: Oh, yes. One, … two, really, well, maybe three, … one woman and two men. …

KP: Who were they?

MB: Okay, well, one was an English teacher, Miss Button. She just died a couple years ago. She was just smart and very nice. She would take all the guff from people and never got mad at

you, you know, and she just kept you [interested]. She used to do Shakespeare. … She was a theater type person and the only way you could get extra credit in her English class was to read plays, [laughter] plays that we never studied, you understand? We had to read these, so, I read all her plays. So, we got along very, very well, and we had another fellow, what the heck is his name? his name was Clayton, and he was a teacher in civics and that area. He had a Ph.D. He was the only Ph.D. in our high school, and he was so lax, and so liberal, and such a nice guy, but, very impractical. I mean, he was the kind of guy that says, "Let these kids do whatever they want," okay. He'd get something organized, and he'd go to the back of the room and let you do it, and it was a mess. Here were fourteen, fifteen-year-old kids, what do we know? and, one time, … we had some sort of function planned, I've forgotten the details, but, he let the kids handle it all, and guess what? They forgot to send out the invitations [laughter] ... for the people to come, he never checked on them, and this is what struck me. He was a very nice guy; he could sit there, you could swear and holler, you could expouse the worse things, but, he just wanted you to get whatever's bugging you out of your system, and he let the kids straighten each other out. He wouldn't say, "Hey, that's wrong, that's fallacious." No, you don't do things that way; he let one of the kids suddenly say, "Hey, you can't do it that way." … I had a Latin teacher, his name was Mr. Shay, and he was so strict, I got a hunch that either he wanted to be a priest or had been a priest; whatever the reason was, he was unbelievably strict, and, yet, he was basically a nice guy. He would find a kid who didn't have any money or couldn't get to work. We happened to know that he used to lend kids his car. You know, kids who needed to get to work and so forth. He didn't publicize it, but, we found this out.

KP: You had a number of supportive teachers and they must have liked you because you were a good student.

MB: I had no problem with the teachers, no problem. You know, it was good.

FR: Did they do anything to support your goal of going to Rutgers?

MB: Well, I got in without any trouble, you know what I mean. All I did was make an application. They left [it] up to me and, … for me, I had to go to Rutgers.

KP: Had you considered any other schools?

MB: Oh, sure. I was thinking about going to Rensselaer [Polytechnic Institute], because they had a course in, what was it? mining engineering or something like that. That was my next choice, … but, again, my father had the store, okay, and … I used to come home weekends. … I lived on campus, but, we were only three-quarters of an hour [away]; in fact, it was closer. It was only half-an-hour from [the] Howell Township area and I used to get a ride. I used to take a train and so forth, get home Friday night, and ... my father would drive me back … on Sunday nights, weekends were always busy, and, … basically, this is how I worked my way through college, working in my father's store.

KP: So, you would spend the week on campus, and then, work at home on the weekends.

MB: Yes. I went to … maybe one or two football games during the whole time I was here. I dated a couple of girls [from], at that time, it was called NJC, remember? … okay, but, at that time, it was very difficult for a girl [to go out] during the week. They had to be in by eleven o'clock and, on weekends, they had to be in at twelve. It was impossible, I mean, … actually going to the movies, and, oh, my God, we can't go out and have a soda, because the girl says, "I [have] got to get in by eleven," and they were strict, and, oh, it was just a mess.

KP: Before the interview began, you mentioned that you met Dean Metzger very early on.

MB: Oh, yes, before I came to Rutgers. Here's what happened; there was one fellow who used to come into our store who was a Rutgers graduate. His name was Higgbee. … Believe it or not, I met him here for the first time in thirty years, last year. He's ninety some years old. I think he was the Class of 1917 or 1918. He was in the store there and … I got to know him. We used to kid around. He had a son a little older than I am and a beautiful wife. I remember, I was like a fourteen, fifteen-year-old kid and this woman was absolutely gorgeous. I had a tremendous crush on her, and I found out, later on, because I got to know them, that he happened to do very well with beautiful women. He was married, I don't know, two, three times, [laughter] girlfriends, but, … he had owned a farm near us. He used to come and do business in my father's store, and he said, "Where are you going to go to school?" I said, "I don't know." He says, … "Did you ever think of Rutgers?" I said, "Yes, I thought of Rutgers." He says, … "I'll get an appointment … [for] you with the administration over there and maybe we'll be able to talk you into it," and, to me, it didn't make any difference. So, my father said, "Go, what can it harm?" So, good, he brought me up, and I was in my senior year in high school, and that's where I met Dean Metzger. So, obviously, he knew Metzger, I don't know how well he knew him, … and he was a pretty well-to-do guy. He was also a school teacher. He owned property elsewhere and so forth. Now, I don't know whether he's still alive. I tried to contact him, but, I couldn't connect, but, last year, I saw him.

KP: You actually saw him here last year.

MB: Saw him here. Unbelievable, he asked for me. His son came over to me, … because I didn't know he was there, and there he was, sitting down on the ground. He looked at me, he was hunched over, he says, "Remember me?" I said, "Of course I remember." I told him, "You're the reason I came to Rutgers." [laughter]

KP: You met Dean Metzger for an interview about Rutgers.

MB: Oh, yes, sure. Now, here's my guess; I think I was over there because Mr. Higgbee was trying to get me a scholarship, this is my guess, I don't know the details, all right, and, I guess, before they did that, they wanted an interview. That's how I met him.

KP: Had you applied for any scholarships?

MB: No, no. I did, later on. Remember, this was the early part of the year. … I applied for a scholarship. Why not?

KP: Did any of your teachers tell you about the State Scholarship?

MB: They did, yes, they did.

KP: However, you never took the State Scholarship exam.

MB: No, I didn't, but, after about the sophomore year, I was given one; I was on a State Scholarship. What happened is, as the people got drafted, you know, the state had the money allocated for these guys, so, the University would give it to anybody who was around, and I had good grades, so, it wasn't any problem, but, I did get one, I think in my sophomore year.

KP: You entered Rutgers in 1941.

MB: Yes.

KP: For one semester, until the attack on Pearl Harbor, you experienced "traditional" Rutgers.

MB: Oh, it was fine.

KP: What do you remember about that first semester?

MB: Well, my brother went to Rutgers before me. He was four years, three years older than me, and he transferred to the College of Pharmacy in Newark. Okay, so, … he stayed off campus and … he got me into the house that he stayed in in the very beginning. So, that's how I got there. … They had social events with the girls' college, we had mix-ups, you know, get-togethers, they had those, and it was no problem. … I lived up there on Somerset Avenue. I lived up there in the Hungarian section, and there were a lot of the local girls coming around, and they wanted to meet college boys, so, there was no social problem.

KP: Even though you went home on the weekends, you had a pretty active social life.

MB: Not super social. As I said, I did relatively little dating, but, … I met a lot of people, yes.

KP: It sounds as if you would have taken part in more social activities if you could have.

MB: I think so, I think so, but, it was very important for me to go home weekends to work in my father's store.

AM: Where did you live for that first semester during the week?

MB: I lived on Somerset Street, … off campus housing.

KP: According to your pre-interview survey, you lived there for two years.

MB: On Somerset Street, yes. I lived in one house, and we got kicked out of the first house, and I moved to another house about half a block away, and then, I moved over here to Ford Hall, then, from Ford Hall, I moved over [to Chi Psi]. At that time, the Chi Psi fraternity was taking anybody, [laughter] anybody.

KP: Had you considered joining a fraternity before that?

MB: No, no, I was definitely anti-fraternity. … They tried to pledge me at, what? at that time, the Pi Epsilon Pi was there, that was a Jewish fraternity, and there was another one ...

KP: Sammy?

MB: Sammy, I think so, but, I didn't like it. I don't like the hazing bit.

KP: Hazing was pretty rough back then.

MB: Yes, I saw some very, very serious, dangerous results of the hazing. I said, "Forget it, forget it. I want no part of this."

FR: When you moved into the Chi Psi house, were you just living there?

MB: Yes. They had room, and they wanted to keep the house open, which was fine, so, all you had to do was apply. They wouldn't make you part of the fraternity. When they had their secret meetings, they'd ask you, "Please, leave."

KP: You mentioned that you saw some dangerous fraternity initiations.

MB: Oh, yes. We had one fellow who was a cripple. His name was Jack Dempsey. In fact, our scholarship fund for the Class of 1945 is named after him. … Both legs were hurt in either infantile paralysis or whatever it was, but, they were shriveled up, and he walked on crutches. He belonged to the Kappa Sig fraternity.

KP: Okay.

MB: All right, … during the hazing, the hazing scene was usually [in] the fall, early/late fall. I was in the men's room with him. He says, "Mort, I've been through the worst I've ever been through." I says, "What do you mean?" He says, "Look at this." We're in the men's room. He pulls down his trousers. Now, this was a crippled guy. He was purple, literally purple, from the waist all the way down to his shriveled up legs. I mean, have you ever seen when someone's been hit hard, you know, you get bloody, you're purple inside? I said, "Jack, what the hell happened?" He said, "They're paddling the," quote-unquote, "out of me," just because he wanted to belong to the fraternity. That's it. So, when I saw that, I said, "Forget it," and then, I talked to other guys who were pledging, and they were telling me about all kinds of excuses to paddle someone, all kinds of excuses. If a student … wouldn't … answer an upperclassmen properly, he could get paddled. The pledges, they had to … go out to the store, buy things for guys, do favors

for them, and so forth, and there was … no purpose. I couldn't see it at all, so, I was definitely anti-fraternity.

KP: What did you think of the class competitions? We read in the *Targum* that there was an on-going competition between the sophomore and freshman classes. The freshmen had to wear beanies.

MB: Well, I wore a beanie, didn't bother me, for, what? five weeks, six weeks. That's all it was.

KP: It did not bother you.

MB: No. Come on. … [laughter] In other words, you join a society and they want you to wear a pin, so, you wear a pin. It wasn't degrading or anything. In some cases, "it looked cute," quote-unquote. [laughter] Remember, we were young kids. We were about sixteen, seventeen years old.

KP: You mentioned that you were disappointed that Rutgers did not have an aviation engineering program.

MB: So what? … I was involved in engineering. I took up electrical engineering. That was the nearest thing I was involved [with]. I ended up as an electronics person and I was very happy in the profession.

KP: When did you decide to pursue electrical engineering?

MB: Oh, I decided to pick engineering when I was high school.

KP: When did you choose your specialty?

MB: Well, I had a choice. At that time, there was civil engineering, ceramic engineering, mechanical engineering, and there was electrical engineering. I think that's about all there was. So, electrical was the nearest thing to what I wanted to do. … I didn't want to be a civil engineer, because they're out in the weather, you know, it rains and it's messy, dirt, and mud, and so forth. That wasn't for me. [laughter]

FR: When you entered Rutgers, was your father still trying to convince you to become a doctor or a lawyer?

MB: Well, they had no choice. All my father said [was], "Why do you want to do [it]?" I mean, "Can you make a living out of it?" That was my father's first thinking, and I said, "I think I can. I don't know." I said, "But, I would rather try this than something else." … If I could have gotten into a med school, if it had looked like there was good possible of getting into a med school, I would have applied for pre-med, I would have, but, what happens is, I went around asking people, because, after all, my parents pressured me, "Why not? Being a doctor isn't such a bad thing." You know what I mean? … but, I found, at that time, the odds or the chances of getting

into a med school were unbelievably stacked up against you if you were not a family member of a doctor. That was the situation then, and … we had no connections at all, and it just didn't look good.

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

KP: … You mentioned that you had looked into medical school. Were the Jewish quotas a factor in your decision to not pursue a medical degree?

MB: I don't know. This, I don't know. … I mean, this … Jewish quota … never really bothered me. I always felt that I would work around any kind of [prejudice] and it usually worked out. I mean, things like this happened later on in life, but, I've always been able to work around any kind of things, even quitting a job and getting another job, I mean, but, it never really bothered me that much.

KP: You mentioned that, in your first meeting with Dean Metzger, he had the sunlight shine on you and, also, shine on his Phi Beta Kappa key.

MB: First on the Phi Beta Kappa key, and then, in my eyes, yes. [laughter]

KP: Did you ever have any other experiences with Dean Metzger at Rutgers?

MB: None, not any confrontations. Now, I had a confrontation with his assistant, a fellow by the name of Crosby.

KP: Oh, yes.

MB: Okay, Crosby, he was assistant dean. I had some confrontations with [him].

KP: What were the confrontations about?

MB: Well, it wasn't [because he was] mad at [me]. I told you, I had to leave that first house.

KP: Okay.

MB: This is an interesting story. Now, as soon as I get there, the woman, the house mother, at that time, the requirement [was], if you rented rooms to students, there had to be a qualified adult in there, more or less supervising the behavior, and they had a woman there, her name was Mrs. Furlong, and she got sick. Within a week, she was dead. I'm there three days, four days, something like that, and I'm attending Mrs. Furlong's wake. I'm upstairs in the room, okay, and she's down on the ground [floor], and her family's there and so forth. So, she's dead. So, they bury her, and, here we are, about four, five students up in each room, we have no supervision. Now, she had either a daughter or a daughter-in-law that was suppose to come and supervise, but, she lived elsewhere, and then, … we had a couple of students there who used to bring their girlfriends up into the house. Now, what went on, I don't know, but, that's besides the point. It

got to the point where there were complaints coming into the University that girls were seen coming in and out of our house. So, Crosby … calls me in. I mean, I got a note in the mail, I go up to him, and he says, "You're living on Sommerset Street." I say, "Yes." He says, … "Look, you're not being supervised." I said, "It's not my fault [that] I'm not being supervised. [laughter] I mean, this woman died, you know." So, he says, "Well, you're going to have to get another place of lodging and you can't do," blah, blah, blah. So, I tried to argue the best [I could]. I says, "Well, Dean, it's not my fault," and so forth. So, he says, "You're going to have to move." … I call that a "confrontation."

KP: Is that why you went to Ford Hall?

MB: No, I moved to another place, I told you, down the street, 'cause we knew people down there, other classes. I moved in a house about … block or so away, a Hungarian woman by the name of Mrs. Reese, and it was pretty good there, but, I had a serious thing happen to me. She had about five or six students and … I had a big double bed in the room I was in. Two other guys, who lived elsewhere, they used to like to wrestle in my bed, really wrestle, and, one time, oh, they broke the bed, big mess. … Meanwhile, I rushed into the room, 'cause I had been elsewhere, and, meanwhile, the woman, Mrs. Reese, comes up and sees me in the room, the bed's all broken, and she assumes that I had done the breaking. So, when I went to come back, to rent the room again, the next semester, it suddenly was taken. So, then, I had to look for new lodging. I knew someone who was moving into Ford Hall. He says, "Look, come here, I've got room."

KP: Do you have any memories of chapel?

MB: Oh, yes, lots of memories. I mean, we had to go, I forgot whether I went on Tuesdays or Thursdays, I forgot what day it was, we used to go, and that's when I used to hear Dean Metzger. We'd talk; … sometimes they'd have a discussion and so forth. [When] it was over with, I just left. That's all. To me, it was just something you had to do, you know. That's all. I was not impressed … with what was said, I was not impressed with what he did and what he looked like. I just went; I think we had to sign something and that was it.

KP: You also mentioned that your favorite professor was a math professor, Professor Brasefield?

MB: Yes, short guy, five-foot-two, and no nonsense. … To me, he was the fairest guy in the world, a very difficult man. I mean, as far as the grades were concern, he was a very tough marker. He gave assignments every morning. Everybody got up to the board. We were lucky. We had small classes then. We had like twelve, thirteen people in a class. He'd give an assigned problem, and he'd come around, and he'd mark every one of the things. That was part of your grade, and then, he'd … pick people out to explain the problem to him. I had one thing happen to me which let me know that he noticed me. I'll never forget this. One time, I forgot an assignment, I did, I forgot. I don't know what happened. When time came to hand the paper in, I said, "Oh, my God, I didn't do it." He very seldom gave us homework to hand in, and this hurt him, get it? because, here, all of a sudden, [I had not turned in my work]. So, he called me, he said, "Mr. Burke, I want to see you after class." So, I go, I looked at him, I says, "What can I

do?" He says, "Mr. Burke," he looked at me, he says, "you probably … never had any trouble … with math or any other kind of subject, have you?" So, I says, "No, I haven't." He says, "But, why didn't you hand in [the assignment]?" He wanted to know why I didn't hand in his [homework].

KP: He was hurt.

MB: Oh, yes, he was hurt. … Other than that, I felt that he never even noticed me, other than I was just a number or a name that he marked in his book.

FR: Maybe that was because you had not had any problems.

MB: Whatever it was. … In a way, I was happy and, yet, unhappy, you know, because at least my prof noticed me. [laughter]

KP: A number of alumni engineers have told me about a professor who was, apparently a terrible lecturer. He was so repetitive that his former students used to sell his notes to his new students. Possibly, he taught here after 1945.

MB: Oh, I didn't know him, but, we had a colorful professor, a surveying professor, a fellow by the name of Lendall. … You're not engineering students, right?

AM: No.

FR: No.

MB: … Rutgers probably had one of the finest engineering curriculums, I think, anywhere. We were in school, actually in class, thirty-six hours a week. … On Saturday mornings, I had to take a surveying lab here. … I remember having only one afternoon off and that was on the Thursday afternoon. … I used to sleep, okay, but, we used to have ROTC, we had machine shop labs, we had all these wonderful things where we had to work with our hands, in addition to doing the [course] work. So, we had the surveying lab and this fellow, Lendall, he was an older gentleman, a very nice, (sparkly?) guy, but, … I don't know whether his mind was going or something, but, he was the kind of guy that would give you an exam, you'd look at the exam, fill it out, I mean, do it, the paper would come back, and something was marked wrong, and you'd look at it, and you'd see, you know, it's right. So, you'd raise your hand, "Sir, so-and-so is marked wrong, I think you erred." Then, he'd stop and he'd think. … I'll never forget, he says, "Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen, forgive me, forgive me, I made a mistake. Hand all the papers back. I'll have to remark them," [laughter] and he did this more than once. Now, again, I don't know whether it was the beginning of Alzheimer's or what. He had a very funny habit. When he lectured, he always put his hand in his pocket and he always had change in his pocket, okay. So, guess what we called him? We called him, "Jingle," ... [laughter] and you can just guess what the words were. That's what he was called.

KP: There seems to have been a number of faculty members who earned nicknames, including this "Jingles" …

MB: Jingles, I'll say it, "Jingle Balls," we used to call him. [laughter]

KP: A number of people called William Demarest, "Whistling Willie."

MB: Well, I never had Demarest, but, I used to hear the words, "Whistling Willie," yes.

KP: Growing up in the 1930s and early 1940s, how closely did you and your family follow the events in Europe and the rest of the world?

MB: Oh, good, I remember, my father was trying to get his mother and one of his brothers over there, and, at that time, he had already gotten some messages from his other brother. We followed it as closely as anything … [that] would affect us, but, the main deal was survival here, you know.

KP: It sounds like your father was aware of the threat that Hitler's Germany posed for your family.

MB: Oh, yes, everybody knew. … Come on, everybody knew the threat.

KP: Yes.

MB: Everybody knew the threat. I mean, he knew people who had been kicked out of Germany and it was in the papers. It was all in the papers.

KP: In 1941, before Pearl Harbor, did you expect that the United States would enter the war?

MB: All right, I expected [it], yes, because, remember, they started over in Europe … in 1939, and it was just a matter of time, because the British, … they couldn't take care of themselves, and especially with France going … down so quickly, it was inevitable, yes. We all knew. I knew that, sooner or later, I'd be involved in a war. My father knew it, everyone knew it.

FR: When you were in high school, did any of your friends and classmates enroll in basic training?

MB: You could get drafted at eighteen, and, if you were seventeen, you could go in with your parents' permission. This is high school age. Yes, some of them did.

FR: When you graduated from high school, did many of your classmates rush off to join the military?

MB: Oh, some crazy kids did, sure. [laughter]

KP: How did your parents feel about the military, because they knew that the military in Russia was very severe?

MB: As long as we weren't in the service, they didn't care, because I know [that] the chances are, the atmosphere in America was a hell of a lot different, much better, than it was over in Europe. … In other words, they knew [that] if they could keep us out [laughter] of the service, the chances are we'd stay alive, but, of course, they did not succeed.

KP: He would have liked that, though.

MB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. I know for a fact, I didn't know the details, my mother told me, "Your father went down to the draft board, he told them that you were his only sons, but, … they couldn't do anything for him." We had a local draft board and knew the members. …

KP: He argued your case before the draft board.

MB: Oh, I've got a hunch [that] he went down to ask them, "Is there anything I can do?" I know my father would be that kind of a [guy]. "What can I do to make it so my sons don't have to go to the service?"

KP: Your brother was old enough as well.

MB: He was … older, but, believe it or not, he was stalled. He didn't get inducted until about only three or four months before I was.

KP: Really?

MB: Yes.

KP: Was that your father's doing?

MB: I don't think so. I think [it was] because he was in the pharmacy school, … medical. I don't know what the deal was, because my father had no influence at all with the draft board.

KP: You were able to finish college.

MB: Yes. I started very young. I'd just turned sixteen in my freshman year and what happened is, I got involved in this EDDY Program. They considered me enlisted, because, when I took this EDDY test, I must have enlisted. I didn't realize it. So, on my papers, it doesn't say, "Inducted," where they checked off, it says, "Enlisted," and then, it gives the date I was inducted.

KP: When did you learn about the EDDY program?

MB: Oh, that was right here, while I was going to Rutgers.

KP: Was it in your freshman year or your sophomore year?

MB: Oh, I don't remember. I think it was the sophomore, probably, but, remember, I started at sixteen, I was already seventeen and a sophomore, I was just turning eighteen in my senior year, which was when I was eligible to get drafted, so, … I heard about it. I signed up for it immediately, which was good, because they allowed us, I think, a six month deferment and/or, if you graduated within a certain time, they'd let you finish, and this is what happened.

KP: You joined the Navy through the EDDY program. Given your love of aviation, had you considered joining the Air Corps?

MB: No, no, I'll tell you why. I did the most practical thing. Okay, what was the EDDY program? I was already an engineer, you understand? Okay, I knew a little electronics. To me, this was the best way to do it, better than that, 'cause … I didn't know my abilities of flying at all. I wanted to do engineering, obviously, if you join the Air Corps, [laughter] you fly. So, I knew that was not for me.

KP: It sounds like you really emphasized the practicality of your decision.

MB: Oh, yes, absolutely.

KP: It would have been impractical to follow your dreams of aviation.

MB: As I said, I didn't really do my flying until I was already in the Navy.

KP: While you were at Rutgers, many of your classmates were simply disappearing from campus.

MB: Yes, yes.

KP: When I went to the Old Guard dinner in 1995 and 1996, I noticed how small the Classes of 1945 and 1946 were by comparison to the other classes.

MB: Yes, yes. Well, again, I do remember that, when we did graduate, there were only about thirty of us ... in the whole class, and this is interesting. The graduation ceremonies for Rutgers University, here, and the College of Pharmacy and ... the med school they had in Newark, okay, ... it all took place in Kirkpatrick Chapel, and we were each given ... two tickets for our parents to attend it. Can you imagine that? This was a whole year's ceremony. So, there were very few people around and most of those who graduated were either very young or they were, quote, the expression was "4-F;" in other words, unfit for service due to medical reasons.

KP: Even though you were completing your education and you were enlisted in the EDDY program, did you ever say to yourself, "Everyone else is in the service; why am I still here?"

MB: No, no. That did not bother me whatsoever. I knew I was going to get into it eventually.

KP: No.

FR: Did you ever consider leaving school?

MB: Never, never, never.

FR: Did many of your friends leave school to join the service?

MB: ... Oh, friends of mine did that. Oh, a lot of them quit. Well, also, it was ... a good excuse, because, at that time, in the Engineering [Department], Rutgers used to flunk out about half the students.

AM: They still do. [laughter]

MB: Okay, and, [for] the kids who weren't doing well, it was a great way to say ...

KP: It was a patriotic way out.

MB: Oh, yes. In other words, they didn't have to say, "Gee, I flunked out of engineering." You know what I mean? You said, [laughter] "I became a gung-ho American and I joined the military." Yes, I don't know how it is now, but, then, the attrition rate was very, very high.

KP: It is nice to see that some things have remained the same. [laughter]

FR: How competitive was the engineering program? Was there a lot of competition to get into the program?

MB: Well, no. ... I remember, they gave us two tests. First, you're accepted to the University. They go to your high school background, what your teachers think, and so forth, and, at that time, then, you have to get grades. ... I forgot what the numbers were; you had to have a three point something. At that time, ... "A" was a one, ["B" was a] two, okay. You had to have the equivalent of a "C-" to stay into it, and you could only have the equivalent of one "D," or something like, and they would get rid of you in about half a semester. They'd say, "I'm sorry," and, if you could, you'd try to get into another curriculum. I know some of the engineering [students] who became English majors. I know [that] you could go ... elsewhere, but, it had to do [with your grades], and this guy, Brasefield, oh, he was a riot. Oh, he got rid of students fast. [laughter] ... He used to lecture us, "You don't belong in engineering."

KP: Could you tell us about how the presence of the ASTP affected life on campus?

MB: Well, what happened was, with the ASTP, you know that they brought in soldiers ... who were taking engineering courses. Now, here, again, I'm here, I'm seventeen, eighteen years old, okay. Here comes a man, twenty-three, twenty-four, and ... they're bright guys, let's say. They were screened, ... no doubt about it, bright fellows, and their job was to stay in school and get

good grades, or else, they'd get out on the battlefield. Now, just look at yourself, "What would you do in these cases?" All right, now, here, again, I was going home weekends, and it was tough competition, and these guys were good, absolutely good.

KP: You were in separate classes.

MB: No, we were in the same class. ... ASTPs were in my classes.

KP: That is interesting.

MB: Oh, yes. I was a civilian, oh, sure. I remember, one time, one of my professors, ... he happened to like the ASTP guys, and, I don't know, somehow, he felt [that] we should have been in the service. I won't mention his name, but, what happened [was], one of the ASTP fellows got across a hot transformer, ... didn't get killed or anything like that, but, somehow, he was deenergised, and the first thing my profs said, ... I was in the class, in the lab, when it happened, "Why couldn't this happen to one of my civilian guys?" [laughter]

KP: Was there any animosity between the ASTP guys and the civilian students?

MB: No, no animosity at all. ... In other words, the feeling I get was, if you were a basketball player and you were a mediocre guy, and in comes this real, six, seven-foot giant who makes everything he throws up, okay, and you're on the same team, for some reason, you have to be, all you can say is, "You're good." [laughter] ...

KP: We read in the *Targum* that some students resented the ASTP guys because they really were not a part of Rutgers, that they were segregated.

MB: Well, they lived separately, okay. Now, remember, I told you [that] I lived in Ford Hall. I had to get out of Ford Hall because they moved the ASTP people into Ford Hall, okay. They were there. Oh, yes, they had to march to class. Oh, yes, they had to keep them separate. They were in the Army. I see nothing wrong with that. A lot of them were married. Yes, some of these men were twenty-five, thirty years old, they were not kids, and they were good, very good.

FR: Did you feel as though they had an academic advantage over you because you were obligated to go home on the weekends and work in your father's store?

MB: Oh, yes, and, again, I used to go out, I used to get a soda, I used to go to a movie, once in a while, and these poor guys would be there studying the whole time, and they had the advantage because some of them had experience in industry, they had that kind of advantage. ... I'd say they definitely had an advantage, as far as getting better grades than we did. Yes, they had that advantage, but, so what? I don't care, you know. I did well in the grade department.

KP: You mentioned earlier that the war was a mixed blessing for your father's store. Business picked up, but, he also had to cope with shortages.

MB: Oh, yes, yes.

KP: Do you remember any black market activity in the area?

MB: Not that I know of. I doubt if there were, because my father ... never wanted to get involved with the [black market]. He didn't want to do anything like that. ...

KP: Did he complain about other stores that handled black market goods?

MB: No, no. ... He got the stamps, the gasoline stamps and so forth. ... No, there were no black markets, because I don't think you could have done it in our area. It was a rural area. Everybody knew everyone else. ... Oh, no, it would have shown up right away, because there was never any comment, afterwards or somewhere, where someone would say, "Hey, you know, you did this, you did that," never, and, again, my father was always straight-laced. ... [He] never got involved with ... doing things which could mean that somebody could get in jail, let's put it that way. [laughter] No, he was good that way.

KP: When did you graduate?

MB: [When] we graduated, ... oh, golly, I think it was June, June of '44. ...

KP: When were you called up?

MB: Well, I was called [up] right away, but, I didn't get inducted until September, you know what I mean. ... [laughter] Within two weeks, I got the (letter?).

KP: However, you had an entire summer in-between your graduation and your induction.

MB: Yes, and I worked.

KP: Did you work at your father's store?

MB: Sure, sure.

KP: Where did you report to for your induction?

MB: Camden, Camden, New Jersey.

KP: Where did you go for your pre-induction physical?

MB: It was in New York. The name of that place in New York was called the Coliseum. We had the pre-induction physical there, then, when I passed it, I got the notice, and I was inducted in Camden.

KP: How long were you at Camden?

MB: Oh, Camden, I was there just a day.

KP: Where did you go from there?

MB: It was quite interesting; when I was in Camden, they were putting everybody in the Marines ... or the Army, and I and two black guys were inducted into the Navy, because ... all I had to do was show them that ... paper from the EDDY program. They had to put me in the Navy, and there were two black guys ... [that] were put in the Navy with me, and, from there, we went together.

KP: All three of you?

MB: Yes, three. We went together; we went to Great Lakes.

KP: Did you travel by train?

MB: We went by train and it was interesting. Now, again, we were in a rural area and I grew up with blacks. Let's face it, as far as I'm concerned, many of them were really friends, and when we got outside of Baltimore, the train stops, and the white conductor comes back, and he says, "You can stay here, but, you two guys will have to go in the back of the train," okay. [laughter] So, I said, "Whoa, what's going on here?" you know. [laughter] I said, "We're going into the Navy." ... I didn't say the expression I was thinking. "Here, we're going to go fight for you, you know, and these two guys have to go to the back of the train? This is ridiculous." So, I started complaining and one black guy says, "Look, forget it, we'll go in the back. We won't make any trouble." So, that was it. So, they went in the back and, when we got to outside of ... Great Lakes, I think we stopped in Chicago, believe it or not, I don't know that, we rejoined, and we went into Great Lakes together. I never saw them since.

KP: In other words, for a few hours, you got to know these guys.

MB: Oh, yes.

KP: Where were they from?

MB: The local area, I don't know the details. ... They weren't from Freehold, where I would know them, but, they were from the area around Camden and so forth, but, these were bright guys. When we were talking, one of them says, ... before we got to [Baltimore], he was saying, "I don't know why the hell I'm here for. What good is fighting for this country?" They were already hurt.

KP: You had not traveled much before this train trip to Great Lakes.

MB: No. What, traveling? ... Up until I was ... seventeen, I think the furthest I ever was to New York. Oh, ... once, when I was a real little kid, my father took us on a trip to Canada. He had some relatives there.

KP: So, this trip to Great Lakes must have been some adventure for you.

MB: Look, I've got all my faculties, I wasn't hurt during the war. I enjoyed the experience very, very much.

KP: Do you remember which company you reported to at Great Lakes?

MB: 1898, sure I do.

KP: What were your first days at the base like?

MB: Well, ... we got there on a weekend. Nothing could happen until Monday, so, they put us in the equivalent of a, it was like a gymnasium, it was a big building, and we couldn't go out, ... couldn't have leave, couldn't have anything, because I was still in civilian clothes, they locked me up. I was able to walk around the room, and I still remember what happened. There, in a corner, was an old piano. I was all alone, there were other inductees elsewhere, and I sat down and tried to play the piano for three days, until Monday.

KP: What happened on Monday?

MB: Oh, yes, they gave me uniforms, they gave you this, they organized you into a company, you went to a barracks. ... Your commanding officer was really a [seaman] first class, [the] equivalent of a sergeant, and he told you, ... "You're boots. You're the lowest person in the Navy." There's nothing lower than a boot in the Navy, okay, and then, ... he wanted to prove to you how mean he could be and that you had to take it. This was the Navy. There's got to be discipline.

KP: Was he as mean as he said he was?

MB: Yes, most of them were mean, ... [laughter] most of them were, oh, yes. ... Come on, these fellows, ... I guess it was like a king who, suddenly, he's got all these subjects to rule over.

KP: Great Lakes was a huge facility.

MB: Huge, absolutely huge.

KP: Was there any pressure to push people through training?

MB: Yes. I think we were there for twelve weeks, or something like that. We were one of the longer ones, for some reason. Usually, there were nine weeks or eight weeks, whatever they had to do. ...

KP: What did you learn that you found useful and what did you think was an absolute waste of time?

MB: Where, at Great Lakes?

KP: Yes.

MB: Let me think.

KP: A lot of it was simply marching around.

MB: Marching. ... Here, what I learned, it was a practical thing, because they had all kinds of duties, you know. They'd divide you up and do different things and so forth. In many cases, I was able to watch the older men, forty-five years, ... work their way into positions where they didn't have to do much work. [laughter] This is something I learned. I mean, I was always taught, you know, ... if it's important to do this, you do it, okay. So, I was used to it. I dug ditches. I remember, we built a park in one weekend, worked very hard, all this other stuff. This one sailor says, "Yes, I can type, I can type." He couldn't type, but, they believed him, so, he went into an office. He just sat there, and I don't know what he typed, but, he enjoyed himself. This was not one sailor, this was several sailors. So, this is where I figured out, "Hey, you know, it's possible, if you want to, you can find ways to get out of work." ...

KP: There were certain jobs that you did not volunteer for.

MB: Oh, well, yes. They always used to ask for the Navy volunteers. You know what a Navy volunteer is, don't you? "You, you, you, and you." No one ever volunteered for anything.

KP: How did you feel about KP duty?

MB: I did it.

KP: Yes.

MB: I did it, and it was probably the hardest work I've ever done. ... Since then, I always sympathize with a woman with a large family. We used to get up at five o'clock in the morning, get everything ready for [breakfast], I think they started serving at six. This went on 'til about 9:30 or ten. We'd knock off. At that time, everybody smoked. The guy would say, "Okay, knock off," you know, "take fifteen minutes for a smoke and get back here." Okay, we'd get ready for the lunch meal. After that was over, another fifteen minutes, you're ready for the supper meal; imagine that. I can just imagine what a woman with five or six kids goes through, assuming she's making three meals a day, endless, endless. ... What happened is that, at [laughter] certain times, well, I was there when they were passing out food, some of the people would be regular Navy mess people, who were not in boot camp, okay, and what they would be doing is, they would go on weekends, and I actually saw a sailor fall asleep with a ladle of

potatoes in his hand. ... They throw the potatoes down on the tray. Yes, he leaned up against a post and he fell asleep. [laughter] We had to wake him up, "Come on, dish out the potatoes," but, it was tough work.

KP: Many men who trained at Great Lakes recall the intensive fire fighting course there.

MB: Yes, yes, ... I think it was a three day program, ... and, also, at the end of the fire fighting, ... they put you in a gas chamber, just to simulate it, and we all ... didn't do it right, or maybe it couldn't be done right, it was tear gas, and, ... I remember, it was not a nice situation, but, fire fighting wasn't bad. I didn't mind that.

KP: My understanding of the EDDY program is, you were destined to be an electronics specialist.

MB: An electronic technician, yes.

KP: Where did you go after Great Lakes?

MB: Right after Great Lakes, ... now, again, this was the Navy's way of weeding the not-so-smart guys out. We went to a school, not a high school, it was a grammar school, in Chicago for thirty days. That was the preliminary. If you got good enough grades for that, then, they had other schools through[out] the country. Then, I went to Gulfport, Mississippi. I was there for three months. After that, if you passed that group, you were sent elsewhere. I happened to be sent to Navy Pier in Chicago, there was a school there. ... I tried to get [in]to the one in Washington, DC, but, I didn't make that, ... and I was in Chicago for six months.

KP: You went from Chicago to Mississippi.

MB: Oh, yes. ...

KP: They are two very different places.

MB: Oh, yes.

KP: What do you remember about Mississippi?

MB: Well, I probably had ... the most peaceful of feelings that I've ever had, during the three or four months that I was in Gulfport, Mississippi. I was there at the best part of the year. We got there in January and we stayed until about May. It started getting warm when we left and ... the regimen was very simple. We were out in Quonset huts in the middle of the big field, okay, and what we'd do [was], we'd go to school, we'd come in ... at five, we had liberty, usually on weekends, and there was an Army base called Kessler Field that was right nearby. That was in Biloxi. Well, that was only three miles away. We could take a bus there and they had a few bars and few other things there that we could go to. In Gulfport, Mississippi, they had a girls' school. [laughter] You couldn't get a date with one of the girls in that school under any conditions,

unbelievable. [laughter] I mean, even though you were a college person or just wanted to meet someone with a little intelligence, no, ... those girls were off limits.

KP: That whole area served as the backdrop for Neil Simon's *Biloxi Blues*.

MB: The whole area, and, also, at Gulfport, that was right along the Gulf of Mexico. As I said, it was beautiful, peaceful. I really enjoyed it and ... I think Jefferson Davis had a summer home there, so, you could go visit all these historic places, they were right there. It was quite nice, and, also, New Orleans was only about two hours away, and we'd go to New Orleans.

KP: You really enjoyed that part of your training.

MB: All I can tell you, I told you. My two years experience in the Navy was wonderful. I enjoyed it thoroughly, because, again, I hadn't done any traveling. ... I went to New Orleans, where else did we go? golly, I think I went to Mobile, Alabama, one time. Whenever we had that time off, [we went somewhere].

FR: Did you maintain any friendships during your time in the service?

MB: You mean outside of the company? No. I traveled with sailors who were in my company or who lived in my Quonset hut.

FR: Did you keep up any of those friendships after you left the Navy?

MB: Oh, I met some fellows that I've more or less stayed in contact with, yes. ...

KP: After this very pleasant experience at Gulfport ...

MB: ... Wonderful. In fact, I went back there, two or three years ago, to see if I could relive [those days]. I did. ... My wife and I, we flew down to New Orleans, rented a car, and visited it. Right now, it's a Seabee base.

KP: So, it is still a base.

MB: Oh, yes, still a base, but, now, they do all heavy construction training there. I didn't go in, but, I could look in from the outside and remember what it was like, yes. So, it must have had a good effect on me, right, to make me travel all the way down just to see what it was like. [laughter] I never went back to Great Lakes. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned that there was a weeding out process. How many people were eliminated from the various stages of training?

MB: Oh, golly, the number seems like fifty percent, in most cases. ...

KP: There were that many?

MB: Oh, yes, there was a heavy attrition [rate] all the way down. ...

KP: After the first thirty days, half of the people that you entered with were gone.

MB: Well, something like that. ... At the end of the time, someone says, "Are you going on?" "No, I'm not going on to school. They're sending me out to sea duty," you know, so, there we are.

KP: Was there a similar attrition rate at Gulf Port?

MB: Same thing, and ... the academic level there was still high, ... well, let's face it, the people who were in the program, a lot of them were college people. ... At this time, now, ... they had people who had doctorates and so forth. Somehow, they got into the program. So, it was really difficult, not difficult, how can I say [this]? It was really competitive; that's what it was.

KP: After Gulfport, where did you go?

MB: I went ... back to Chicago, Navy Pier.

KP: How long were you at Navy Pier?

MB: About six months, and that's when they started doing the real practical things. The first month, it was transmitters, and the next month, I think it was receivers, then, the next month was sonar, [and so on]. [laughter] Then, the last month, I think it was radar.

KP: You were at Navy Pier for V-E and V-J Day.

MB: Yes, yes, ... both of them. ... What happened, I think it went January and the next one was around August, wasn't it?

KP: V-E Day was in May, V-J Day was in August. [Editor's note: V-J Day was September 2, 1945.]

MB: May and August, okay, good, May and August.

KP: Did you join in any of the celebrations?

MB: Oh, yes, we went out. Everyone jumped up and down, but, it was nice. I was glad it was over.

KP: Your training continued after V-J Day. How did the end of the war affect your training?

MB: Well, no, after V-J Day, I ... got out of school very quickly. I was sent out and I got on ships. I was on three different ships, but, obviously, there was no combat going on. So, I ended

up in what was called the 16th Fleet. We were actually decommissioning ships, 'cause certain things had to be done with the equipment, because ... you probably don't know this, but, the government didn't know what to do with all the war equipment. They mothballed ships, oh, hundreds and hundreds of ships, and they had them anchored up on the Hudson River. I don't know whether they're still there or not. They may not be there anymore, but, they had a mothball fleet up there.

KP: You did serve aboard ships.

MB: Oh, yes, three times. I was on three different ships.

KP: Which ship were you assigned to first? Do you remember?

MB: Oh, yes, sure, I remember. The first one was the USS *Card.* It was an escort carrier. The next one was called the *Botetourt*, which was an APA, ... "Attack Personnel." In other words, it moved soldiers to different areas, and the other one was a similar one; it was called the *Latimer*.

KP: You mentioned that you reported to the USS *Card*, shortly after V-J Day.

MB: Yes.

KP: Where did you meet the ship?

MB: ... I picked it up in Portsmouth, Virginia.

KP: Did you take it up to the Hudson?

MB: No, no, no. ... We got on the ship, ... it went under its own power, and then, it was towed [to] where it was supposed to be inactivated, which was in Portsmouth. I think I really picked it up in, oh, golly, right near Portsmouth, what the heck is it? the big naval base there.

KP: Norfolk?

MB: Norfolk.

KP: How long were you on that ship for? What were your duties?

MB: Oh, I was on that first ship, oh, probably, maybe, [for] two or three months, and then, after we decommissioned that, we went to another ship and decommissioned that, went to another ship, decommissioned that.

KP: What were your specific instructions?

MB: Okay, well, right now, we're out of school, right now, you're in the Navy, okay, ... and you're on board ship, they've got discipline, you had liberty cards, and, in most cases, you did

your work up ‘til about five or six o'clock, and then, if you had liberty, you went out on liberty. You had to be back by six o'clock the next morning, usually. Now, [in] that area, there was not much to do, no places to go, really, so, you usually came back. [laughter]

KP: What were your responsibilities during the decommissioning process?

MB: Well, I was in the electronics area. So, what we would do [was], we would separate all the tubes, at that time, they had tubes and so forth, we’d pick good ones and bad ones, and the transmitters, if they had motors, motor generators, we'd have to clean the brushes, we’d put grease on them to keep them going, also, the actual shacks, the radio shack, they'd have floors. Now, again, by that time, when you got out of the EDDY Program, you were a petty officer. So, all of a sudden, I had [the] responsibility of men, okay. We had strikers and people who had no rating at all, and ... they’d have to chip the floors and paint, and they’d keep the bulkheads in good shape, and we were always there to help the skipper of ship. He needed help, like, his radio wouldn't work, so, we’d have to go and get his radio working. There was a lot of personal stuff done in the Navy for the officers.

KP: It sounds like you were a repair crew during the decommissioning process.

MB: That's all it was, oh, yes, maintenance and repair. That's exactly it.

KP: Did you operate the radio room while you were aboard ship?

MB: Oh, yes, yes, we used to have to communicate ... with something called “NO BASE” and that was the center where the Navy kept track of everything that was going on, yes. We had regular schedules. For awhile, we even had a radioman who was copying things that he knew we would never use, but, they had to keep busy, you understand? So, he would be there, copying schedules. They called it “copying scheds;” that was the expression.

KP: I assigned a book about a radioman in the pre-war Navy to my students. The book goes on at great length about strikers and the rituals of the radio room.

MB: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

KP: You mentioned that you had some men serving under you. What do you remember about those men?

MB: They were [from] all walks. Now, I've always worked with people, let's say, [who] were farm boys and so forth and these were real tough kids. Now, I had associations with officers, only because they would want my services. Even though I was non-commissioned, they would call me in and say, “Look, can we get this? Can you do this? What would it take to get this done?” and so forth, but, my men, a lot of them, just had high school diplomas and a lot of them were real tough kids, really tough kids.

KP: Were most of them from urban areas?

MB: Most of them, for some reason, ... that were aboard ships, somehow, were ... from the East or somewhere from ... way down South, but, most of them were eastern, New York City kids. They were tough, tough kids.

KP: It sounds as if your job gave you a real opportunity to get to know the captain of the ship, at least on the first ship.

MB: Oh, yes, always, yes.

KP: What do you remember about your first captain?

MB: Oh, boy, [laughter] the first captain? He was not the first one on that ship.

KP: Yes.

MB: You know, sailors retire or whatever, so, they keep moving around. Now, my first experience was when we were decommissioning the escort carrier. Now, this escort carrier had done a lot of war work, and, ... when I say, "Carrier," there used to be airplanes and so forth, and, when we were decommissioning [it], it seems there was a manifest. When a ship is put in commission, they have a list of everything that goes on it and, when it's decommissioned, the Skipper has to make sure that everything that ... was on the ship manifest, you know, was there, or he'd have some real tough explaining to do. What happened is, we had an unbelievable amount of overage on everything, too much stuff on the ship. How this happened is very easy to explain. As soon as the ship would go into a port and, if certain equipment had trouble, let's say, like a radar tube, the Skipper would say, "Okay, I know we [are] only assigned two of them, but, we'd better get more of these." So, for some reason, they would be able to go to a depot and talk someone into giving him more. ... I know [that] there were two transmitters [that] we were supposed to have on board. We had five of them. What do you do with the extra three? Now, this is a real serious problem. How can a skipper, even though he wasn't the original one, explain to whoever he has to explain [to], "I've got three more transmitters than I should have. I've got ten more of this," and this is expensive stuff. So, the answer was, the expression, [have] you heard the word, "Deep Six?" [laughter] We threw them overboard. ... You talk about unbelievable waste? I don't know how much was thrown overboard.

KP: It was easier to throw it overboard than to account for it.

MB: How could the Skipper explain? When he got on board this ship, all he signed was the manifest. He wasn't going around inventorying everything that was on the ship. [laughter] So, there you are.

FR: Were there any records of these parts being requisitioned and distributed at the ports?

MB: No, no, no. This was never done. ... I happen to know someone who was in the infantry in Italy. After the war, they were coming back to the United States and they ended up with thirty-

two more trucks than they were suppose to have in the company, ... thirty-two more trucks. [Do] you know what they did? They drove them into a swamp and left them there.

KP: I heard a story about a sailor who acquired a jeep illicitly and, when the time came, it was just easier to dump it overboard than to explain why they had this jeep.

MB: Throw it overboard. You can't explain how you got it without getting someone in trouble.

KP: You probably realized, at that point, that there was a legacy of unauthorized trading in the wartime Navy.

MB: Oh, yes. ... One other thing that was done that was against regulations was the use of fuses. You have fuses at home, right? If you draw more current, obviously, the fuse blows. You can change the fuse and correct the problem. When I got on the *Card,* I looked around, just checking all the fuse boxes, see what's going on. There were no fuses there, there were solid pieces of copper rod pushed into where the fuses were. So, I get a hold of someone, I said, "What goes on [here]?" He says, "Look, when you're in a combat zone, if a fuse goes, your equipment doesn't work. Even though it may not be serious or not, okay, you don't have [its] use anyhow. Here, if it's just a simple thing that can clear itself with a solid (bus bar?), at least you have the use of the equipment." There you are; it makes sense. Of course, I had to take them all out [laughter] and put fuses in them, but, in a combat area, that's what they did.

KP: That must have been completely against the manual.

MB: Yes.

FR: That is a serious hazard.

MB: Absolutely.

KP: However, in battle, it makes perfect sense.

MB: Absolutely. In battle, you don't care. [If] you're gonna die, who cares whether the fuses are there or not?

KP: In fact, if a fuse goes while you are engaged in hostilities ...

MB: ... Then, you can't use the equipment at all, but, a lot of times, when you have an overage, it clears itself very quickly. Okay, in that case, the solid (bus bar?) will let you use your equipment.

KP: Even though you were never in combat, it sounds like you learned a lot just from decommissioning the ship.

MB: Oh, yes.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Morton H. Burke on March 31, 1997, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler …

FR: Fred Robinovitz.

AM: And Althea Miller.

KP: Mr. Burke, you were saying that the captain was like a king.

MB: That's it, that's it. Yes, he kept away. I mean, there was very little fraternization.

KP: There was a real officers' country.

MB: Oh, it was a separate part of the ship, oh, absolutely, … and that's it. If you were in officers' country, … there was usually a cabin boy or someone there, asking you, … "Do you want to see someone?" or something like that. Usually, I never went in unless I had an officer with me. [If] he wanted something done, you know, he'd walk with me.

KP: Did you have ship's stewards on all of your ships?

MB: Yes, on all, except, at the very end, the *Latimer,* they had nothing on them but us guys (technicians), but, there were stewards on the *Card*, yes, 'cause it was an operating ship when I got on it.

KP: I imagine that there were a lot of people leaving the ship during the decommissioning process, people who had enough points to get out.

MB: You mean getting discharged?

KP: Yes.

MB: Oh, yes.

KP: Usually, the crew changed every week.

MB: Not the decommissioning crew. When I was assigned to a ship, I never knew when I was going to get discharged. In fact, I don't think I would have gotten discharged if they had something else they wanted me to do. …

KP: Eventually, the *Card* was decommissioned. How long was it before you went to your next ship?

MB: Oh, golly, a couple days, because we were in an area where there were decommissioning ships all over.

KP: You stayed in Portsmouth.

MB: The whole three times, within a fifteen mile area.

KP: They just put you on another ship.

MB: Put me on another one, and then, another one, yes.

KP: How long did you stay on the second ship?

MB: Probably about a mouth, month-and-a-half.

KP: Did you get a new captain?

MB: Oh, yes, new. Well, this is interesting, the experience on the second ship. We had six ships tied together, all lashed together, in the middle of the York River, and, I remember, when I was assigned, I got on to it, there was … a chief petty officer. He asked me what I was doing there. I says, "Look, I'm assigned here, I'm the new technician." He said, "Oh, oh, good. Wait here, the Captain will see you." Now, "Captain," I thought, oh, well, you know, a captain is a pretty "big" guy, you know. He's like a full colonel, all right, and this was six decommissioned ships, side by side. So, I said, "Oh, well, maybe it's just an expression he uses on the ship." Then, suddenly, out comes a full captain. … On this cluster of decommissioned ships, there were thirty-two men. …

KP: … And a full captain.

MB: A full captain in charge of us. Well, I knew something was wrong. So, I found out a little later, two or three days later, that this captain had gotten himself into real trouble. During the war, out in the Pacific, he had turned loose a whole bunch of Marines, this was an APA, on the wrong side of an island, which meant … either they were wiped out or captured, and, since he was an Annapolis man, the Navy took care of him. They gave him an assignment where they got him out of their hair. I don't know whether he was court-martialed or not, and, the whole time I was there, he spent his time on a Higgins boat, which is like a motorboat, with the captain of an Army prison. There was a prison on the other side of the river. … Our captain's buddy was an Army man and they just paled around together. He had nothing to do.

KP: He was a captain.

MB: A full captain.

KP: How did you find out about his situation? It must have been very intriguing to you.

MB: Oh, I found out, again, I'm a nosey kind of guy, because, usually, I have a pretty good idea when something's not right, and, … with a little snooping, you can find out all these things.

KP: In other words, he should have had a battleship or a better assignment.

MB: Oh, yes, absolutely, but, again, … I never saw his records, you know, his personnel records, but, I'm sure there were a lot of "nice things" written in it.

KP: Yes.

MB: I'm sure ... he was never promoted after that. I'm sure [he got] nothing.

KP: Did you get the feeling that he absolutely hated this duty?

MB: I had nothing to do with him, really. ... I never saw him after my first meeting. I did my work, and that was it. I had about twenty guys working for me, because, after we finished our electronics stuff, they kept me there. We took care of the side of the ship, painted the side of the ship, did all kinds of crazy things.

KP: Then, you moved on to your third ship.

MB: Oh, very similar. The third ship was very similar and that didn't last too long.

KP: Did that ship have a captain?

MB: No, we had no captain at all. Nothing, there was nothing there, and, I remember, that was the only time I ever went AWOL in my life. Now, we were in the middle of the York River on another ship, and they were decommissioning the ship itself, and it was in the summer time. The temperature where I was supposed to sleep was over 120 degrees. They had all the engines going, all steam. Can you imagine sleeping in 120 degrees? You know, it can't be done. So, I complained and I said, "I'm not going to sleep here." I was told I had to sleep there. … I didn't have liberty, because it was an important job, okay, but, I knew there was a liberty boat going out at six, and I knew, if I was real good, I could get back by six in the morning, you understand. So, this is what I did. … I snuck out, slept in the USO, on shore, and got the early liberty boat, and came back in the morning.

KP: You were not caught.

MB: No, I wasn't caught.

KP: Even though you were decommissioning the ship, the Navy treated it as though it were still on active duty.

MB: Oh, the *Card*, ship number one, was a working ship. Oh, yes. They had a small dance band. They had dances in shore USOs. … There must have been three, four hundred people on that ship when I first got on.

KP: What about the second ship?

MB: Well, again, another two or three months later, there was not much going on.

KP: Did they drop the pretense of a working ship on the second ship?

MB: Oh, yes, it was a work task. In other words, it was just like an abandoned ship that you were taking care of.

KP: The third ship …

MB: … It was in … practically in the same area, because, again, the decommissioning process, it got to a point where you couldn't cook, you understand, there was no food facilities, nothing.

KP: Particularly on your first ship, there must have been some crew members on board who had been in combat.

MB: Well, yes. … In fact, they were already out there, ready to do battle out in the Pacific with the Third Fleet, when they were sent back.

KP: Did you ever talk with those men about their experiences at sea during the war?

MB: Oh, yes. Remember, my first ship, the *Card*, was an escort carrier. Oh, there were lots of stories that I heard people talking about.

KP: Do you remember any of those stories?

MB: Oh, I remember lots of them, but, the whole problem was, of course, landing on that small ship. It was a single screw ship that couldn't maneuver well at all. It was, essentially, a merchant vessel. It was about three, four hundred feet long, with a deck, and they had to catapult planes off, and it was difficult. They wrecked a lot of planes.

KP: Did the veterans talk a lot about crashes?

MB: Oh, they would talk about the conditions, okay. They had men sleeping all over the place, because they had gasoline and so forth. It was very dangerous. … One story I heard was, I had a communications officer on the ship. Shall I use names? I don't know whether I can. ...

KP: Yes, please do.

MB: Maybe he's still alive. His name was Lt. Carmody. … You've heard of people who are just foul ups. No matter what happens, they do everything wrong. This is the kind of guy he was. I worked with him a lot. I did a lot with him, because the skipper, the head of the ship, would come to him and say, "Do this," then, he would come to me and say, "You got to do this for me." So, I worked very, very close with him. … Out in the Pacific, when they were in, really, a war zone area, they used to fly in the schedules, the frequencies at which they used to communicate. Every week, [they] used to be flown in. … In case the Japanese found out, they didn't want them to know too far ahead of time when they were going to talk. So, what they'd do, they used to fly the scheds in, … and the fellow was suppose to take his old schedules, and burn them, destroy them, go in a security spot and burn them. Well, this officer burned the wrong sacks. He burned the new ones. So, the ship had to break radio silence to say, "I need another set of schedules." Of course, this is terrible during wartime, so, he got an "unhappy" citation. They were going to court-martial him. … I wasn't there, but, I heard from a friend of mine, who was there when it happened.

KP: It sounds like a lot of guys engaged in scuttlebutt, since there was little else to do.

MB: Yes, come on, if you're not fighting, what else can you do? Stop, just think, you're in the Navy, you're in the Army, anything, if there's nothing to do, what can you do? They give you things to do. I mean, I actually went through this, I chipped and painted the same deck three times, within a week. [laughter]

KP: To keep your men busy?

MB: Yes, I told them, "Isn't there something else we can do?" My superior says, "No." … He says, "Look, … chip and paint the floor again." [laughter] Yes, this is what it was. I did it. We were out in the middle of the York River and I had about twenty guys, what could I do? I couldn't put them on liberty. That was against the law.

FR: Did the busy work ever get frustrating? Did you ever say to yourself, "Gee, I could be doing something more productive?"

MB: Oh, yes, you get angry, but, what else are you going to do? I mean, I think you've seen movies where they've actually showed this. … I've seen movies where the skipper [says], "What do I do with my men?" and he gives them something ridiculous to do. It's true, absolutely true.

KP: You are not the only sailor to tell me this.

MB: I'm telling you, I painted. I'll never forget, it was a small radio shack. We'd chip the floor, a day later, two days later, I'd give the guys the chipping irons. "We're not doing it." "Look," I said, "we've got to do something. Chip it again."

AM: Did you paint and chip a lot slower that time? [laughter]

MB: I didn't care. They had nothing else to do. I didn't care.

FR: Did you ever get the feeling that even your commanding officers were unhappy with this situation?

MB: Well, no. To me, career officers have an entirely different mentality. Remember, he joined because he wanted to spend his lifetime there, okay, and he's looking for the next promotion. All he does is try to get the guy higher than him to like him, so that he can get promoted. That's all. He doesn't care what I think. He knows his job. … Whatever it is, … if there's a vice admiral in charge of it [that] wants him to do something, he's going to do it. The whole attitude is different. I mean, we "drafted guys," quote, we wanted to get out.

KP: It sounds as if you and the men under you were very frustrated at how long you had to be there.

MB: That's true. … I actually had a chance to sign up for a tour with the regular Navy. This Lt. Carmody had a chance to become the communications officer on an aircraft carrier that … had been shot up during the Pacific war, but, it was recommissioned, which meant it would have been a big promotion for him, but, he told me, "Mort, I don't know anything about electronics." He says, "I'll get you a commission, okay. You're going to have to sign over," and I said, "No, Mr. Carmody, the Navy's not for me." [laughter]

KP: He was ready to make you a career man.

MB: Oh, yes, I helped him tremendously. I told you his background.

KP: Yes. [laughter]

MB: Okay, now, I found out what he was. He was a radioman, just an ordinary radioman, that, somehow, got a commission.

KP: Was he a mustang?

MB: I don't know how. He was just a radioman, dots and dashes. Somehow, he got a commission. [Whether] it was during war time, whatever it was, he was in the position where he was an Ensign, then, he became a lieutenant commander.

FR: He probably impressed the right person.

MB: Whatever the reason, I don't know.

KP: What do you remember about the Norfolk, Virginia, area?

MB: A lot of people, that's all I remember.

KP: It sounds like there were a lot of Navy people in the area.

MB: Of course it was all Navy people. Oh, there were things, there were a lot of bars, a lot of prostitutes running around. Everything was there.

KP: So, the image of drunken sailors on leave ...

MB: Oh.

KP: ... Going to prostitutes is not entirely a myth.

MB: I will tell you, this happened to me [laughter] with Mr. Carmody's boss, a full lieutenant. … We come back from liberty, it's eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock at night, going into the gate, and [there are] shore patrol guys. I look around, and, oh, my God, there's his boss, believe it or not, I've forgotten his name at the moment, he's walking around, obviously drunk. Now, this is the senior officer, barefooted, no shoes, an officer, I mean, all dressed up, get it? drunk, and no shoes on. What do we do? So, I'm with a friend of mind, luckily. I says, "We've got to help this guy out." So, I walk up to him, I says, "Remember me? I'm on your ship. We're on the *Card*." He says, "Yes." [Mr. Burke slurs his voice when speaking for the officer.] He says, "You've got to help me." He's drunk. "You've got to help me." I says, "Wait here." So, I go up to the shore patrol sailor, I says, "Look, I've got an officer here, you know, and we've got to get him in, but, I don't want you guys [to arrest him]," but, he says, "But, we're suppose to." I says, "Look, the guy's a full … lieutenant, and, if he wants, he can get you." He says, "All right." He says, "I'm going to turn around and get him the hell through here fast." I put his arm on me, my friend got his other arm, we walked this guy all the way through. We got him aboard ship. That man never looked at me again, for the whole next month that I was on the ship. He was so embarrassed, so embarrassed.

KP: You never found out what happened to his shoes.

MB: No.

AM: Did he ever thank you?

MB: Never. No, he never thanked me, never spoke to me again. I remember, I'd catch his eye, he'd look at me and look away real fast. [laughter] ... You know, I caught him in a weakness.

FR: It was not very becoming of an officer.

MB: Oh, come on, officers are people. A lot of them didn't like what they were doing. I'm trying to remember his name, because, I remember, he was a non-entity kind of guy. Carmody did all his dirty work for him.

KP: You met your wife in Chicago.

MB: I did.

KP: When did you meet her?

MB: At a USO.

KP: Really?

MB: … The Chicago area was very, very friendly, Milwaukee, Chicago, very friendly to servicemen, really wonderful, and what they used to do is, all the girls who were old enough, used to volunteer to go to the USOs. You know, they'd dance and talk, but, they were not suppose to date, obviously, any of the soldiers or sailors. So, that's it. I met her, I think it was at the Washington Street USO, in … Chicago.

KP: Obviously, you hit it off.

MB: Oh, well, no, not at first. After all, I talked with her, I danced with her, and that was the end of it, because she couldn't date me, and this is an interesting thing. Do any of you believe in fate? I don't know. [laughter] Oh, about a week or so later, I go to a dance at another USO, way the heck out of town, I look up, there she is. So, we talked and danced again. This happened on three or four different occasions over a three month period.

KP: You kept running into her.

MB: I kept running into her, for no reason, at different places in Chicago. So, I says to her, "Look, this must mean something, you know. Can I take you out to dinner?" So, she says, "Well, you've got to come home and meet my mother first." [laughter] She was all of seventeen. I was like nineteen, you know, so, I had to meet her mother.

KP: You met her mother.

MB: I met her mother, that's right. Well, I married her about four years later, so, it wasn't a quick relationship.

KP: Did you stay in touch while you were in the service?

MB: Oh, yes. Well, luckily, I didn't know this when I met her, but, she was an actress, going to dramatic school. After I was discharged, I come back home. I used to call her up once in a while. All of a sudden, she's coming to New York. She's trying to make it big on Broadway. … She lived in a women's club in New York City and I used to date her every week, so, that's how we got to know each other very well.

KP: However, it all goes back to the USO club.

MB: Yes, that's how it started, and the fact that [I was] constantly running into this gal.

KP: I think this might be our first USO marriage.

MB: A lot of fellows met girls at the USO.

KP: Yes, it was very common.

MB: Oh, yes.

KP: However, of the men that I have interviewed, you might be the first man who married a woman that he met at a USO.

MB: Really? Oh, yes.

KP: Other people met their wives during the war, but …

MB: No, no, this was definitely USO. The boy from New Jersey meets girl from Chicago. … [laughter]

KP: You could have been commissioned as an officer.

MB: Absolutely. ... [laughter] I was offered it and I know I could have gotten it.

KP: When were you finally able to get out of the Navy?

MB: Oh, after that third ship, we had nothing to do. So, I went to ask someone and the "boss" says, "What's with you?" He said, "Look, you guys are scheduled for discharge real soon," you know. So, that was it. So, we hung around in the ship and, all of a sudden, we're moving out; we're moving to Long Island.

KP: When were you finally discharged?

MB: I can remember the date, because, … later on, I got terribly frightened, it was July 12, 1946.

KP: The war had been over for almost an entire year before you were discharged.

MB: Oh, yes, yes. Well, they kept us busy. It was interesting.

FR: Did you return to New Jersey once you were discharged?

MB: Yes, when I was discharged, but, I really wasn't discharged. I decided to join the Naval Reserve. So, I got a paper saying, "You're discharged, but, then, you're not discharged."

KP: Yes.

MB: So, I was in the Reserves for four years.

KP: Were you in the active Reserves?

MB: This is what happened. … We did radio communication exercises every so [often], but, soon, I ran into trouble. The US got into the Korean War in 1950 and they were calling up Reserves. I'm in the Reserves, okay. Now, I'm already married, I got a good job, you understand, and, here, it's July, and, in July, Truman, they knew he was going to extend the enlistments for an indefinite period of time. I was being discharged on July 12. President Truman's proclamation was, "Anyone who's … enlistment period was July 20 or after was going to be reassigned to active duty." So, I made it by eight days.

KP: It sounds like the Korean War convinced you to drop out of the Reserves.

MB: Absolutely. … I mean, you don't join the service to get killed, let's face it. [laughter] I joined the Reserve because it would be fun, I thought, because they said [that] you could go on a cruise every two weeks, okay. Our group was involved with electronics. I liked it. We were in a radio group. We used to meet every month and we carried on communications with other Reserve groups.

KP: You liked many things about the Navy.

MB: Well, again, I liked working with equipment. I always liked working with equipment.

KP: At that time, you had some very expensive toys to play with.

MB: Oh, yes, wonderful, wonderful.

KP: This was equipment that you normally would not have access to.

MB: Absolutely, yes, yes. No, that part, I liked.

KP: When you initially returned to New Jersey, did you move back in with your parents?

MB: Oh, yes, I came back, and then, we had the GI Bill. Remember the GI Bill?

KP: Yes.

MB: Okay, so, I came back to Rutgers. I did graduate work here.

KP: Do you think that you would have gone on to graduate school without the GI Bill?

MB: Oh, I think I would have, yes, but, there was a double incentive here. … It worked out well, because I got a fellowship here at Rutgers. It paid all for my tuition and so forth. I got a job working in the lab, where I got some money. So, my tuition cost me nothing and I got, what

was it? twenty dollars a week from the GI Bill. So, it got to the point where I did all this graduate work and I had some spending money on the side. So, it worked out very well.

KP: Did you notice any changes at Rutgers since you were an undergraduate?

MB: By that time, it had already become a state university, but, it was a mess, it was a mix up, but, also, all the returning students, who were in the war, came here, so, it was a very busy place. [19]46, '47, and '48 were very, very busy.

KP: It was very small when you left.

MB: [There was] nobody here, yes. Well, we were a private institution. It wasn't until, what? '45, I think, because I left here in '44.

KP: All of a sudden, the campus was big.

MB: Oh, big, everything was big, big, big, big.

KP: Did you run across any of your classmates who had left, and then, returned after the war?

MB: Oh, yes, all the time, yes.

KP: My students are always impressed by the fact that, even after the war, when most of the students were older veterans, there was still a very active social calendar.

MB: What do you mean, here, at Rutgers?

KP: Yes.

MB: I was doing graduate work and, believe it or not, I was still going back, working in my father's store.

KP: Even after the war?

MB: Yes, even after, because they needed the help.

KP: How long did your parents keep the store?

MB: They sold it, because my brother and I did not want it. By that time, it had grown into a good sized store. My father was smart. … He said, "Look, in order for me to do anything here, I've got to get bigger or get out," and he actually offered the business to either my brother or myself. Neither of us wanted it, so, he sold it. I think it was in '48 or '49.

KP: He sold it that early.

MB: Oh, yes, yes, maybe ’50, you know. [19]49, I think it was.

KP: Your brother is a pharmacist.

MB: Yes, he is retired now. He was a pharmacist. He had his own pharmacy. Believe it or not, he had bought a store in Farmingdale, right near where we lived. He was elected mayor of the town a few years later.

KP: Your family really developed roots in Monmouth County.

MB: Oh, yes.

KP: Both you and your brother.

MB: Absolutely.

KP: When did you receive your Masters from Rutgers?

MB: ‘48. Actually, I got my Masters in a year-and-a-half and I stayed on a research project, working on crystals for the Army. When I finished that, I went out and got a job.

KP: Where did you get your first job?

MB: My first job was with a small company in Eatontown, New Jersey. It was called Electronic Measurements Company, and it was all electronics, and it was good. I liked it. I was over worked. I mean, the fellow who owned it didn't have much money and I remember my first day. He says, “Okay, you got the job. I'm going to need a lot of help.” … He did government subcontracting. These are for replacement parts, but, it was all electronic things. He said, “I’ve got five projects. Three are already overdue. [laughter] Two of them, I want you to work on.” So, I ended up working on five different types of equipment. So, it was good. I got a tremendous amount of experience very, very quickly.

KP: Over the course of your education and your career, you have seen the entire electronics industry change.

MB: Oh, yes, absolutely.

KP: When you started, you were working with vacuum tubes.

MB: Absolutely, went from vacuum tubes to transistors, but, basically, when we were in school, studying electronics, all of it was radio, which was either receiving or transmitting, and there was some power stuff, you know, power supplies.

KP: Yes.

MB: That's about all there was to electronics, and, of course, the telephone company stuff. That's all.

KP: Now, there are a whole range of possibilities.

MB: Forget it, forget it, there's so much, it's so diverse now, it's impossible to know even one-tenth of what's available.

KP: It sounds like you absolutely loved being an engineer.

MB: Oh, yes, I enjoyed myself.

KP: What was the most interesting thing that you worked on?

MB: Oh, I worked for lots of companies. I was involved with something called analog computers, before they had digital computers, and I remember, at that time, they were asking all the engineers, "Do you think we ought to get in digital computers?" [laughter] …

KP: What did you say?

MB: "Of course, of course, you've got to get into it," but, of course, they made all the wrong decisions. They got into it in the wrong way.

KP: It sounds like that company did not do too well.

MB: It did well in the beginning, when I was there, but, then, it went all to pieces. [It] had management problems. It was … people not knowing what they're doing, and they guessed wrong. When you don't know what you're doing, you have to guess, and, if you're lucky, you guess correctly. Well, these guys guessed incorrectly.

KP: All of the engineers were telling them to go digital.

MB: Oh, yes, they did it. They bought a company that had a product that didn't work, if you know what I mean, this kind of thing, [laughter] unbelievable.

KP: You were working with computers very early on.

MB: Oh, yes, well, I was with the company when it was doing great. I mean, we all did well. We all made money on their stock, and so forth, and so on, and then, … when I knew something was going wrong, I left. Went to another company. I was actually in my own business for about four years, [laughter] funny.

KP: What stage of your career was this in?

MB: No, no, later on, probably after about twelve years. It was a good opportunity. It was a small electronics business, doing things I wanted to do, but, this is an interesting thing, I knew the owner, the president, and I had done consulting work for him. … He had a vice-president that just dropped dead. I should have found out why he dropped dead, but, I didn't, get it? So, he offered me a job. So, I became vice-president, I was doing real well, and I noticed that he never got in early. It was a small company, you know. He'd be coming in at 11:30, we'd talk and so forth. … We had a production manager who knew him. In fact, he was his brother-in-law or something like that, you know. So, I says, "What goes [on] with Martin? What's going on?" He says, "Don't you know?" I says, "No, I don't know. What the hell's wrong with him?" He says, "He's an alcoholic," so, [Mr. Burke gulps], and, if you're in business with someone, it's almost like a marriage, almost, okay. ... So, it took me four years to get out of this marriage. The man spent all his time thinking about what he was going to have to drink. … You see, I was doing the technical stuff. I was doing the engineering. I was also working with the production people and his job was to make contacts and bring business into the company. That is a good, sensible way, but, when you're gonna worry more about what you're going to have to drink that night, you don't do very much business. So, it got to the [breaking] point, as I said. I was able to get out. I didn't lose any money on the venture. I did well. ...

KP: It sounds like you were very comfortable changing companies.

MB: No problem. I must have worked for, what, how many companies? maybe six or eight different companies.

KP: Many of the engineers that I have interviewed will tell me something like, "I started working for the phone company a week after graduation and I retired forty years later."

MB: Yes, well, I've always been interested in change. In other words, every time I changed, it was to a different phase of the electronics business. I always wanted to keep up with it.

KP: Which phases did you go through during your career?

MB: Everything. I was in a design phase, and then, also, with manufacturing phases and so forth, and then, when I went to the analog business, I did both design and the manufacturing end of it. … Then, I went in my own business, where we did mostly subcontracting, and, at the time, I did design work, but, I didn't have time to do any real research. Then, after that, what did I do? I went into the television business, when it first got going.

KP: You really have seen a lot.

MB: Yes. … We did design and production work in TV, and then, after that, where did I go? … Let's see, I went from there, I'm trying to guess, I went from EAI into my own business. … Again, I was always in the power business, but, these were huge, uninterruptable power systems and this was … for working with very large database companies. In other words, I actually worked for an outfit called Teledyne INET, where we had huge equipment. … It would start from here, we'd go like seventy-five feet down the room. We were regulating AC power for all

the digital computers that were in the New York Stock Exchange, Merrill Lynch, all those big companies.

KP: Where they cannot afford to have a power failure.

MB: You know, in those days, … when your light blinked, you'd knock down their computers. In those days and they couldn't afford that … at all. So, I got involved. … I was in that business for, what? about eight years. I was in that business for eight years, and then, believe it or not, I went to work for the US government for the last eight years of my working life. They had a project that needed someone like me, so, it was great. I was working in New York, in the power area there. So, here I was, only fifteen minutes from work. So, I took a cut in salary just to get down here. My kids were out of college already, everything was fine. So, within two-and-a-half years, they decided to cancel the whole project. So, I stayed, you know, to work for them, but, the whole reason I went to work for them was gone.

KP: Which project were you working on?

MB: Well, it was, again, a power project, but, it had to do with developing power, so [that] you could run electronic equipment, using what they called a thermal electrical device, semi-conductor type stuff. If you heat it, you can get a voltage out of it. From that, you can drive transmitters and so forth. You get the heat by burning gasoline, which meant that you could have a quiet [machine], it didn't make any noise. People couldn't hear it. Now, they're still using motor generators and they make noise. This method was quiet. … This is why the Army was interested.

KP: You could use it on the battlefield.

MB: You could be out in a remote area, no one would know you were there, and you could work.

KP: It sounds like an interesting project.

MB: It was, it was, but, what happened was, they decided [that] it was too expensive and this and that, and there was a lot of politics. … So, I got a good insight into politics, as far as funding in the Army is concerned, and I'm sure the Navy is the same way.

KP: In a sense, you began your career with the Navy and ended it with the Army.

MB: … Oh, yes.

KP: I was reading an alumni publication and I saw that you were dubbed "Mr. '45." That must have made you very proud.

MB: Yes. I've been president of our class now for, oh, about thirty-five, forty years. I'm also the class correspondent for the Class of '45, so, I've been active with the University all along.

KP: You also have an all-Rutgers family, in terms of your children.

MB: Absolutely. Every one of my kids went to Rutgers. I think I was the only one in our class where every one of his kids went to Rutgers.

KP: Do you have three daughters? I cannot tell with your second child's name.

MB: Yes, three. Geri is a girl.

KP: She was in the first co-education class at Rutgers.

MB: Absolutely.

KP: My intern, Melanie Cooper, is doing her undergraduate thesis on co-education at Rutgers. She will definitely want to talk to your daughter.

MB: Oh, Geri, well, she lives in New York. She lives in Manhattan. She'll gladly talk to her.

KP: You must have been delighted that your daughters could go to Rutgers College.

MB: I wanted them [to]. Now, I gave them a choice. One of my daughters, I'll never forget this, the oldest one, wanted to go to Georgetown, you know. ... [laughter] After all, this was the '60s. I don't know, you may have read about the '60s, but, all hell broke loose, [laughter] ... even on this campus, in the '60s, okay, and this was a very liberal place, and so forth, and so on. So, I said, "Okay, you go." She knew a girl who was going there at the time. So, I gave her money. I said, "You spend time there." She went and she spent two weeks there. She came back and she said, "I'm going to Rutgers."

AM: Why?

MB: She said, "They're so disorganized." She didn't like the way they thought. She didn't like any of it. My daughter is very liberal, a very liberal girl, but, somehow, she didn't like their twist of liberality. There you are, but, oh, yes, … my oldest daughter did. ... She ended up, of course, going to Livingston. You know, that was the most liberal part of Rutgers.

KP: Did she get her degree from Livingston or from Rutgers?

MB: Livingston.

KP: Your first daughter, Robin, could not get into Rutgers in 1970, because it was still an all-male college.

MB: Whatever it was, she went to Livingston, but, she was the editor of the *Medium*.

KP: Oh, really?

MB: Oh, yes. But, she had a very interesting [time]. [laughter] I don't know, do you want to hear about it?

KP: Oh, yes, I am very curious.

MB: She was in the middle of this big black/white confrontation that was going on at Livingston, right in the middle of it. Again, she was editor of the *Medium*, and the University came up and said, "What are you guys doing? You're raising all kinds of hell here. What do you want?" Okay, so, what happened is, they were so disorganized, they couldn't write down what they wanted. Now, she was editor of the paper. She went over to them and says, "Look, you guys have got to meet at so-and-so." Okay, again, she's very liberal, a very friendly kind of gal, she had no animosity, "But, you can't go to a meeting without telling the University what you want. What are your demands?" So, she sat down with them and recorded all the demands. I still have a copy of the *Medium* where it says, quote, "The demands of the group are so-and-so," no reference that she did the writing for them or anything like that.

KP: If we could get a copy of that issue, that would be great.

MB: I still have it at home.

KP: Yes, if you could, someday, make a copy of it and drop it in the mail for me, I would really appreciate that.

MB: Yes, in other words, the guy got up and said, "These are our demands," and she handed them a (cheat sheet?). She wrote it. Look, these guys were fighting among themselves, I don't know whether you know it or not. They had different black groups, okay, and her comment was, she convinced them, … "You've got to tell the University something. You just can't either not show up or [keep] saying, 'You guys aren't fair,' or something like that."

KP: She acted as a broker in many ways. She was trying to get them organized.

MB: Yes, she says she wanted to be fair. …

KP: Yes.

AM: She wanted them to form a united front.

MB: Whatever it was. My daughter, Robin, is very liberal. When she arrived in school, Livingston [had] just opened up. So, I'm bringing her there, bringing clothes, and the front door is not locked. I says, "Robin, what goes?" and she says, "Well, we believe that if you trust other people, [laughter] they'll be nice and you won't have any kind of problem." Six months later, she says, "Daddy, they're stealing things out of the rooms. She says, "We have trouble with people from the street coming in, sleeping on the floors and so forth." I says, "Robin, you're

going to have to lock the doors." She says, "Yes, maybe. We're thinking of that," [laughter] and I remember telling her, I said, "Robin, you can't negate two thousand years of people living with each other. You just can't leave doors open. Someone's going to steal something," but, this is how naive she was.

KP: Your daughter was pretty liberal.

MB: Absolutely, she still is, but, she's a little better now.

KP: What does your eldest daughter do now?

MB: Oh, Robin's done quite well for herself. … Right now, she's a writer, obviously, but, right now, she's producing independent TV programs. She's a talk show hostess, but, she's doing it on her own.

KP: That is very interesting.

MB: Yes.

KP: Your daughter, Geri, went to Rutgers College in the first co-education class.

MB: Yes.

KP: How did it feel to have a daughter going to Rutgers College?

MB: It didn't bother me at all. [laughter] Getting an education, that's all.

KP: What were her experiences like? She must have had a much different time here than your oldest daughter.

MB: Well, it was only two years later and she was interested in, more or less, political science type things. She also took dance; she happened to be a dancer. She took it, went to a dance course here, and she had a good time. She had a good time.

KP: What is she doing now?

MB: Oh, she's married. … Her husband's done very well.

KP: It sounds like she is a full-time mother.

MB: She's a full-time mother, but, she's quite active, charity things and so forth.

KP: It sounds like your youngest daughter is the science person.

MB: Yes, she's an electrical engineer. [laughter] This girl was a riot, the only one of my three daughters who … walked up to me, she was about a junior or senior in high school, and said, "Daddy, what should I become?" I'll never forget this, I says, "Hilary, I'm going to tell you what I think. Now, don't get mad at me," I says. "Now, Hilary, you're very good with your hands, you're very bright, and you're stubborn as hell." I says, "These are wonderful qualities for an engineer." [laughter] So, she did. She did very well. She's married now and, right now, she works for Princeton University.

KP: Oh, really?

MB: Yes, she's on the staff in their computer science [department]. Incidentally, she just had her first baby. She's thirty-eight years old, just had her first baby. So, she's on leave. They have some kind of maternity leave over there.

KP: You must enjoy having one of your children carry on your profession.

MB: Oh, yes, oh, sure. … She was out in industry for ten years, twelve years, and she ran into all this prejudice that women engineers run into, and she had some very interesting stories. Luckily, I was able to help her, 'cause she had some personal situations which were very difficult for her.

KP: How did you help her with those problems?

MB: That she faced? Oh, very interesting, she's a bright girl who knows what's going on. She was working for an Indian, I don't know whether he was from Bangladesh or something like that, and, in those areas of the world, women don't "know" anything. Women are suppose to be home, okay. Then, comes the confrontation. He wants to do something. She says, "It's not going to work." He's her boss. … This happened to be a project that was being done for a Japanese company, it was an aerospace project, and … she had the confrontation, and what happened [was], she comes to me, she says, "What should I do?" [I] say, "Here's what you do. Get everything ready. Let this guy go to Japan to install the equipment and, when he runs into trouble, when he calls, get his boss on the conference phone, then, you're suppose to say, 'So-and-So, remember when I told you "so-and-so" and you didn't want to do it, "so-and-so?"' and then, tell him what to do. Get it on record." That's exactly what happened.

KP: He got to Japan …

MB: He got to Japan, he had to call her up for help, and … it went on record, because their boss wanted to know what the problem was, because he said that … Hilary, my daughter, "goofed."

KP: She got him on record admitting that he rejected her suggestion.

MB: Oh, yes, but, she came out okay. She got moved on to another project. They moved the Indian away and so forth. Oh, she did very well, but, … this is typical complications that women engineers run into.

KP: You noticed that she was having this problem.

MB: … I knew she was going to have it.

KP: You knew beforehand.

MB: Oh, come on, I've been an engineer a long time, [laughter] come on, come on.

KP: Even when you recommended engineering to her, you knew that she would have problems with prejudice.

MB: Oh, yes, but, I told you, she's stubborn and a winner. [laughter]

AM: Did you see any similar situations with other women that you worked with?

MB: I've never worked with any engineering women, never, never. I've worked with women technicians and so forth, but, that's a different relationship. I mean, here, this is equivalent. "Do it this way," and this woman says, "Don't do it. It's not going to work. How can you do this?" Here, this man's five years older, ten years older, whatever it is, and he thinks he's the biggest, smartest engineer in the world, and this little kid, this woman, tells him he's wrong. [laughter]

FR: She got into engineering when women were just starting to enter the field.

MB: Oh, yes, she graduated, … what class was this?

KP: 1981?

MB: Yes, '81.

FR: At that point, there was a separate College of Engineering.

MB: Yes, well, let's face it, … there was a class of, I think of, 450 engineers at Rutgers that graduated with her and, believe it or not, out of [the] ten that graduated *Magna Cum Laude*, she was one of them.

KP: You have very bright daughters.

MB: Yes, very bright.

KP: You have been very active with Rutgers as both a parent and an alumnus. You have seen the University change tremendously since your days on the Banks. What improvements have you seen and what has disappointed you?

MB: The only thing, … the fact that it's big is nice. ...

KP: You like the idea of bigness.

MB: There's nothing wrong with it. You've got more money coming in, you can afford better equipment. Now, the only thing that I have noticed, especially in the engineering programs is, … they've loosened things up. I think the University has gotten a lot easier on the students.

KP: Really?

MB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Now, I happened to know the training that I got, okay, and I know the training my daughter got. My daughter was in class like twenty, twenty-one, twenty-five hours a week. She had no labs like I had, you understand? In fact, they did … mostly lectures. It was like a physics course and, for engineering, this should not be.

KP: You see a need for more hands-on training.

MB: Oh, yes, absolutely. They've got to be tougher. Now, I've got a hunch, maybe because the University just didn't have the room to do all this, I don't what the reasons were, but, also, I think another reason [was], I'm going to get involved in a little politics here, that a lot of the professors want to be popular.

KP: Yes, it is unpopular to fail half of your class.

MB: Oh, no, you can't do that.

KP: Yes.

AM: They still do that now, though.

MB: Pardon?

AM: There is a fifty percent drop out rate.

MB: But, to me, the best way to judge is, … how long does a kid have to spend in class and what does he do in class? and, to me, lecturing is not the way to teach anyone.

KP: Yes.

MB: I happen to know this from experience, lecturing is not the way to teach anyone.

FR: In addition to your training at Rutgers, you also got a lot more training in the Navy.

MB: Well, I was fortunate, oh, yes, I was fortunate.

KP: Your Navy experience really complimented your Rutgers education.

MB: Oh, yes, absolutely. I had … to get equipment working that I never saw before in my life. I mean, all the radar that was on the ships, we never studied in school, because they were top secret. [laughter] I had to study from manuals that were on the ship with the radar equipment.

FR: Did that experience help you in your professional career?

MB: Always. Anything that you can do, even though it's not specific, what it does is, it makes you learn to put things together, so [that] you can come to a decision. That's the important thing. In most cases, you have to act, you know, "What am I going to do?" All right, if you've got experience doing all kinds of crazy things, whether they're crazy or not crazy, okay, it's going to help you make that right decision.

KP: You mentioned that your daughters, particularly your oldest one, were very liberal.

MB: Oh, right in the middle [of the Vietnam War], oh, don't talk. ...

KP: What did you think of the student unrest and the Vietnam War? Your daughter was very involved on campus.

MB: Oh, yes, and the Vietnam War, I thought, my personal [feeling] was, it was ridiculous. There was no reason for it. In fact, on Veteran's Day, Robin and her high school friends marched in the parade carrying a banner protesting against the war. …

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

MB: Before she marched, Robin told me, "Daddy, we're going to do it. I mean, I hope that you're not too mad." I says, "Look, you do it, okay," [laughter] but, then, … she asked me one question, she says, "Daddy, why are we fighting in Vietnam?" I thought and I said, "I can't answer that. … I can't answer that." That was all she said. So, they marched. [laughter]

KP: A lot of the people that went to Rutgers during your time seem a little hawkish. You seem like you are perhaps dove-ish or at least neutral.

MB: Oh, yes, but, again, there's no doubt in my mind that we should fight. I mean, Hitler was very unpopular. [laughter]

KP: However, you did not feel the same way about Vietnam.

MB: No, no, Vietnam, I couldn't justify it. … I couldn't see it

AM: When you were in the Navy, you saw a lot of the ships returning from the Pacific. Did you notice the stereotypes that the sailors had about the Japanese?

MB: The only stories I know I happened to have an ear infection. I was in the hospital for awhile and I was in the hospital with people who had been shipwrecked. There was one cook there who had been … torpedoed three times in twenty-four hours. [laughter] His ship got torpedoed, he got picked up by another ship, that was torpedoed, and they picked him up, that ship was torpedoed. He was tough, I mean, this guy. … He was running a fever and he had a low grade infection they couldn't cure. So, when I got in and out, he was still in the hospital, but, anyhow, his comment was that, when they were out in the Pacific, … they did not take prisoners. Every once in awhile, an order would come in, "Get a Jap. We want to interrogate him." For some reason, they wanted to do that. So, that's what it was. So, there was a take no prisoners policy. I guess it was in reprisal for what the Japs had done to the Americans, but, they killed them.

AM: I just wondered if you saw some of the same stereotypes used against the Japanese in World War II in the Vietnam War as well.

MB: Oh, no, no. I really didn't have any contact with servicemen then. This was in the late '60s, wasn't it? I was out of the service for ten years.

KP: Are any of your daughters active in alumni affairs? You are very active.

MB: Yes, I'm pretty active, but, not yet, but, they will be. Now, Robin was called back. She gave a lecture here, because, … before she did what she's doing now, she had a high position in an advertising agency. They had her lecture to … one of the groups here about her experiences in industry. Later, she became the director of public relations for the Kenny Shoe Company, and she won that job out of a hundred applicants, and she was the … only woman there at the time, and I keep telling her, now, "Robin, if you had stayed, you'd probably be a vice-president of the Woolworth Company, now." … They would never make her a president, ... because it seems that the man she worked for directly became president, moved up, and you know how it works.

KP: Oh, yes.

MB: You get a successful business group, you just move right along, all move up together.

KP: Yes.

MB: So, she came back to Rutgers. She will again. …

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

MB: No, I don't know, nothing. … This is your interview. [laughter]

KP: Did we skip over anything about your time at Rutgers or in the Navy?

MB: None. ... I mean, again, you ask a question. I don't know what you want to know. [laughter] I mean, there's lots of stories that I know that I could talk about, but, they could be irrelevant, I don't know.

KP: One thing that comes to mind, many of the Navy veterans that I have interviewed said that they joined the Navy because they would have clean sheets, hot food, and so on, on a regular basis.

MB: I found it [to be] relatively good food, but, the sheets you cleaned yourself, you know, you did your own washing. Now, granted, you don't have the conditions you'd have in the trenches and so forth. Oh, yes, that was it, because it was dangerous; you had no place to go. If you were on a ship and something happened, forget it.

KP: Yes.

MB: Good-bye, good-bye. Any questions? [laughter]

KP: I think we have covered everything, but, if there is a good story or two you would like to tell, good Navy stories you have heard, like the guy being torpedoed three times.

MB: No, but, that's a true story.

AM: You would think that no ship would ever pick him up again. [laughter]

MB: Isn't that awful. He said [that] the last time, he heard the sound of the torpedo running into the ship. He said, "I didn't even look around," he said, "I just dove overboard." [laughter]

KP: You must have felt very fortunate that the war ended by the time you were put on active duty.

MB: Oh, yes. I mean, I had done all [these things], I had seen all these [things], I did a lot of traveling, I met a lot of people, and, as I said, since I came back with all arms and legs, to me, it was a rewarding experience.

FR: You really did get the best out of the military.

MB: Yes, I mean, discipline never bothered me. There was discipline going to Rutgers, you know what I mean? The coach would say, "Do this, do that." The teacher would say, "Come in, I want this by Friday night." That was no problem.

KP: You were in ROTC for your first two years at Rutgers.

MB: Yes, yes.

KP: What was that like?

MB: We had classes, if I remember, … two classes a week, okay, and, if you studied and listened to it, it was an easy "1" or an easy "A," okay. So, that worked out, that helped my average, and we marched, I think it was every Tuesday afternoon, I forgot what it was. Tuesday afternoon, we marched, over there, right where there used to be, what field did it used to be, right across from the college?

AM: Nielson Field?

KP: No, I think it had another name.

MB: I don't know, whatever it was, we used to march on that field, and we used to go, "Hip, haw, hip, haw," and we looked good. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like your ROTC experience convinced you not to join the infantry.

MB: Well, again, it was to my advantage to join the Navy, yes. If there had been a similar program in the Army, okay, I probably could have done that. It made no difference to me. ...

KP: Yes.

MB: But, the Navy situation was better. It was electronics, it was what I wanted. It worked out all right.

KP: Thank you very much. We really appreciate this.

MB: Yes, if you want anything more, as I said, I would come back.

KP: You might be hearing from Melanie about your daughter.

MB: Geri, absolutely.

KP: Melanie is planning some reunion activities for the Class of '76 to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of co-education.

MB: Did she look at Geri Burke? She's probably in that class. … Well, her last name is Haupt now, she's married.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/29/01
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/2/01
Reviewed by Morton Burke 9/01