RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT L. BYRAM

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Dr. Robert L. Byram on September 11, 2003, in Hobe Sound, Florida, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Thank you, Dr. Byram, for taking time to sit down for this interview today. To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

Robert Byram: Yes, I was born on March 9, 1920, Jersey City, New Jersey.

SH: Can you tell me a little bit about your father's history and background?

RB: Yes. My father was employed by the telephone company all his working life, in the commercial department. He was a high school graduate and was a very stern parent, but a good one.

SH: Do you know if that sternness originated in his background?

RB: … Yes, I think his father appeared to me to be a stern individual, too. So, I assume … he got it from his dad.

SH: Did he come from a large family?

RB: No, he was a family of three, two sisters and he. He was the middle of the three, had one younger sister and one older sister.

SH: Can you tell me a little bit about your mother and her family background?

RB: Yes. My mother was of Irish descent, was also born in Jersey City and was … one of three children in her family. Her brother, James Driscoll, her maiden name was Driscoll, … was a captain in the fire department in Jersey City and was well thought of.

SH: What was it like to grow up in Jersey City?

RB: Yes, where I lived in Jersey City was very close to Journal Square, which was really the hub of uptown Jersey City and it was like any big city; there were very few playgrounds and lots of traffic, carts, peddlers, all big city people.

SH: Was the neighborhood that you grew up in ethnically diverse?

RB: Yes, it was. There were areas … in our neighborhood, that's Magnolia Avenue, that were almost wholly Italian, another that was almost all Polish. Our particular area was Irish, because that was my mother's background. It was very, very diverse, ethnically.

SH: You said that her brother was a fire …

RB: Captain, yes.

SH: Were any other members of the family involved in the fire department?

RB: No, he was the only one, but he'd been in it all his life. … He served in World War I in the Air Force and, when he got out, he went to work for the fire department in Jersey City.

SH: Did he ever talk about his experiences in World War I?

RB: No, very little talk, very little about it. His son told me a few things, but he did not. He did not speak about it.

SH: Did your father serve in World War I?

RB: My father did not serve in World War I. … My brother, older brother, [was born] at that time and they were not drafting men who had children, young children. … When World War II broke out, and before World War II broke out, my father was the chairman of the local draft board and they had, as you know, a lottery. They drew the numbers; everybody had a number and they drew the numbers. Well, of all the numbers that were out, the second number drawn was my brother's and he went on the second bus load from our district. [laughter] Actually, it was before the war began and he was not very pleased to go, [laughter] but my father said, "You're going with the rest of them." So, he did.

SH: The peacetime draft.

RB: Yes.

SH: Can you tell me about your family? How many siblings did you have?

RB: I had one sister and one brother. My brother, Jack, who was older than me and he was a graduate of Fordham University, Class of 1939, and he spent five years in the Army. As I said, he was in the second group that was drafted. I have a sister, Mary, who went to NJC, studied journalism and, in fact, met a classmate of mine after the war, back at Rutgers, and married him. That was Mr. Ed Bodner. Her name is now Mary Bodner.

SH: Since she was a journalism major, she must have attended classes at Rutgers College. Did she ever say what it was like to go to school with all the guys?

RB: Yes, she enjoyed it. [laughter] … The boys that were coming back from the Army, she graduated in '47 and she just caught the first group … coming back from the Army and many of them were friends of mine, so that she got to see them all over again, fellows that I went into the service with from Rutgers.

SH: When she entered NJC as a freshman, were you still on campus or had you already left?

RB: No, I had left campus. … We were in the ROTC and, as you probably may have heard from others, what happened was, they decided to leave us in school for a year and, at the end of that year, and that was in the fall of 1943, they took the advanced ROTC, the seniors, who had

finished their senior year, and commissioned them immediately and the other group, which was my group, the junior class, was sent to OCS, except I'll explain later why I didn't go. [laughter]

SH: To back up a bit, what did you do for fun as a child growing up in Jersey City?

RB: Yes, mostly sports. I was always very much into sports. I never liked Jersey City. I never liked any big city and that's part of the reason why I ended up where I did … after the war, but I was in a neighborhood where we played football along the railroad tracks and there was very little grass available where we played, but most of my leisure time was spent playing sports. I never studied much, either. I was not a very good student. In fact, I went to Dickinson High School, which was a very large high school at the time. The numbers that I heard were ten to twelve thousand students. However, as big as it was, the first two years, we went to school from one to five-thirty and, the second two years, we went from eight to twelve-thirty. So, the same school was used with different teachers, a very big school, and a lot of good athletes left there at the time. In fact, one of … my classmates was Al Blozis, who went on to be an All-American at Georgetown University and, also, was the world's record holder in the shot-put at that time. He then went on and played for the New York Giants and, at the Polo Grounds, … still, although the Polo Grounds isn't there, there was a monument to Al. … He tried to get in the Army and they told him he was too big. At that time, the Army had regulations as to your size. Well, he decided he was going to go anyway, so, he signed a waiver and was taken and they put him … in the phys ed department. He was madder than hell and he decided that he wanted to get in the action. So, they then moved him to the infantry and he was killed in the first wave at Normandy. So, he never got back to play any more football. … Dickinson High School was a cross section of nationalities and backgrounds and a big, big school. … Jersey City, at the time, had a population of, I think it was around 250,000, and there are only two high schools, so, it was a big project.

SH: What are your memories of the Great Depression?

RB: My memories of the Depression are not that bad, because my dad, as I said, … worked his whole life with the telephone company and the telephone company, at that time, when things were bad, during the Depression, were nice enough to, instead of laying people off, they cut back their hours, so [that] they all got a chance to work. They worked two or three days a week and we never really were [poor]. We had enough food. … We were not wealthy, but we were certainly not poor.

SH: Did it impact other members of your family or your community?

RB: Not my family. My family was pretty well [off]; it was small and my uncle, who was our closest, he was the one who was the fire captain, so, he always had a job and my dad always had a job. However, our neighbors … were not that fortunate and I can remember, as a kid, going up to Journal Square, it was called Journal Square then, it's Veteran's Square now, the fellows standing on the corner, selling apples, roasting chestnuts and selling them and standing on a little piece of wood to try and keep their feet warm and it … was tough times for a lot of people. … The advent of the war was the thing that really changed things, and then, … conditions, … economics became much better.

SH: How did politics impact your family? Were they involved in politics?

RB: No, except, in Jersey City, everybody was into politics. We had a mayor by the name of Frank Hague and almost every family had somebody who was, they used to call it "on the pad," that is, works for the city or the county, and the closest one is my uncle, who was a fireman, which, I suppose, could be called that, but we didn't have any politicians. One of my classmates, Frank Burke, from Dickinson High School, was also a Medal of Honor winner, so, that was another person from Jersey City and Dickinson that was well known.

SH: Did they ever discuss Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal policies?

RB: Yes. My father hated Franklin Roosevelt [laughter] with a passion and, in fact, I grew up in a Republican household. Both my mother and dad were Republicans, and then, finally, … maybe fifteen, twenty years ago, I said to my wife, "You know, I can't understand why I'm a Republican. [laughter] The things that have influenced me the most in my lifetime, two things that did the most for me, one was the GI Bill and the other was Social Security, both of whom were put in by the Democrats." So, I'm now a Democrat. So, I switched. [laughter]

SH: Was Hague a Democrat?

RB: Hague was a Democrat, but my dad always said that you vote Democrat for a mayor and governor and Republican for president, then, you never have the same party running everything. That was his thinking.

SH: Did anyone in your family ever work on any of the WPA or CCC projects?

RB: No, no, we never had to do that. My dad, closest to being into politics, he was on the grand jury in Hudson County, several times, and, in fact, later, became president of the Grand Jury Association, which was a collection of people who had served on the grand jury. That was the closest that … we got to any politics.

SH: Did you belong to the Boy Scouts?

RB: No, I never did. In fact, [in] our neighborhood, if you were a Boy Scout, you're a sissy. … So, I did not join the Boy Scouts.

SH: Were you involved in the church?

RB: Yes, we were all Roman Catholics, … to a degree. My dad [was] not as staunch as my mother, but, yes, … I was raised as a Roman Catholic, went the first eight years to St. Joseph's Parochial School in Jersey City and my sister, … after St. Joseph's, she also went to St. Al's Academy, which was another Catholic high school on the boulevard in Jersey City. So, we had a Catholic background. My brother went all the way, including going through Fordham, which was also a Catholic, Jesuit institution.

SH: When it came time to go to college, what influenced your decision to come to Rutgers?

RB: … My wife has heard this story so many times, but, … as I said, in high school, I never studied, never really opened a book, just got by in everything. So, then, I wanted to go to work and I did go to work. … My first job was at 1440 Broadway for a display company. … I was there probably six months and got a job with Hallmark Greeting Cards in the Empire State Building in New York City. I worked there until maybe a year later, when I said I wanted to make more money. I was only making sixty bucks a month, paid twice a month, paid lunch money and car fare out of that. It didn't leave you much. [laughter] So, my dad said he'd get me a job at the shipyard, the federal shipyard in Kearny, New Jersey, which he did. He knew somebody on the staff there. Everything was politics in Jersey City, but, anyway, he got me the job there and I worked there. Well, after a year-and-a-half there, it was the hardest work I've ever done. Hot in the summer, those boats … just held all the heat, the metal did, and, in the winter, it was just like a refrigerator. It was just terribly, terribly hard, physically, … not that I worked that hard, but the weather was so bad and it was on the water, too, with the wind blowing off it. Well, anyway, I finally went back to my dad and said, "You know, I think, if I can, I'm ready to go to college." [laughter] He said, "Okay." So, he got us an appointment down at Rutgers and we went down and … I was assigned an adviser by the name of Dr. [Henry] Keller. He was a professor of agricultural economics and we sat down with him. I brought my transcript from Dickinson. He sat across the desk from us, looked at my dad after about twenty minutes, he said, "Mr. Byram, save your money; this kid will never graduate," and my dad looked at him and he said, "Well, … it's my money, so, let's go." So, he said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I can't just let him in," although it was much easier to get into school then, I think, than it is now. He said to my dad, "I'm going to let him take two courses this summer, one in college level English and one in college level math. If he can pass these, we'll accept him." So, I did that that summer and, after two weeks, I knew that the English was not going to pose a problem for me, but the math was impossible. … I had no background; I had no way of knowing any part of it. So, I came to my dad and I told him the story and he said, "Well, we'll get you a tutor," and he got me a tutor down there, some way or other, and … he put me through and we had two months, I saw him three times a week, and he got me through the course. It was unbelievable. … I didn't find out until two days before the term was to begin in the fall that I had passed, and so, I had no place to live. The dorms were all full, but, here, again, my dad had a friend who worked for him at the telephone company, a man by the name of Lundberg, and he was a Rutgers graduate and he went to him and he told him the story. He said, "Don't worry," he said, "I'm an alumni of a fraternity down there and I'll get him in," he got me into Pi Kappa Alpha. … I never lived in a dorm one minute. They pledged me before I went in the house and I spent my three years at Rutgers in the corner of College Avenue, across from the old gymnasium, but it was … a great experience and, when I got into school, I became active in sports. I played lacrosse for my freshman year, and then, two years of varsity and, in the end of my junior year, when we were called to the Army, I received notice that I was invited to play in the All North-South game at Annapolis that year, which was quite an honor, the biggest honor I had in sports. So, I played down there and the Rutgers coach at the time was an interesting man. I don't know whether you want to hear about him, but his name is … Fred Fitch. … Several of the guys in my class, like Dick Hale, we all played lacrosse, and Doug McCabe. … Anyway, this was a sideline for him. He was the head of the Boys Reformatory at Rahway, New Jersey, and he drove over every day after [work] and coached us and I don't even know if he got paid for it. I have my doubts that he

did, but he was a former All-American from Syracuse University and I have a feeling he was donating his time. … At Rutgers, I got a little involved in campus politics and got elected president of my class, I think it was my sophomore year, and I sent my dad home a copy of the *Targum*, my picture was on the front page, a big picture. … He, in turn, sent it to Professor Keller and told him that he wasn't always right. [laughter] … Then, I was on the Student Council and Cap and Skull and Scabbard and Blade, so, Professor Keller never apologized, though, can't say I blame him.

SH: That is a great story. You graduated from high school in 1938.

RB: Yes, I think so.

SH: Did you know about what was going in Europe in 1938 and 1939?

RB: Very little, very little, until I worked in the shipyard. … We were building destroyers and Liberty ships to send supplies to England. This is, of course, before we were in the war, and then, I mean, we worked seven days a week, because they were trying to put these ships out so fast. So, that was my, really, first knowledge of the war going on and, even then, it was quite far off and, until Pearl Harbor, really, I didn't think too much about it and I was at Rutgers when Pearl Harbor [happened]. It was a Sunday afternoon. I was at the library, near College Ave … there, when we heard that they had bombed Pearl Harbor and that was really when … I really got involved in the war, … except the fact that my brother was down in Louisiana, … using a broomstick for a gun. Otherwise, I had no direct connection with the war or the Army.

SH: How did the campus react to the news?

RB: Oh, a lot of fellows, the next day, went and signed up, joined up, and, as a matter-of-fact, … I went to Philadelphia to try and join the Marines. The Marines had an officer's course that they were accepting college people into and I went down there, spent two days and found that I had two problems, medically, … and they said they'd give me a … waiver on one, but not two, and one was a flatfoot, of all things, and the other was a deviated septum. They sent me to a doctor and I had my foot taped and he said, "If you wear that through the summer, I'm sure that they'll be corrected enough so that they'll accept you." Well, on my way home from Philadelphia to Jersey City, I stopped in New Brunswick to see what was going on at the college, it was in the summer, and somebody said to me, when I went in the fraternity house, … they'd had an infantry ROTC at Rutgers, but that was all, that they were signing up sophomores, the end of sophomore year, signing up fellows for the Signal Corps. They were going to take twenty of them, I think they said. So, I said, "Well, I'm here, I might as well," and I went over and interviewed and got chosen and it was not going to be easy for me, because, except for a couple of us, they were all engineers … and I was an ag student. So, I knew very little about electricity or codes or Signal Corps things, but, anyway, … when I was accepted to that, I never did anything more about the Marines and that's how I ended up in the Army.

SH: You entered college as an ag student.

RB: Yes, I did.

SH: Why did you choose ag?

RB: Because, from about the time I was twelve years old, I used to spend the summers in western New York, out south of Buffalo, about a hundred miles, in a very little town of five hundred people, Belmont, New York, where my aunt lived and I spent all the summers there. I'd leave on the day school closed and come back the day it opened and I just loved the country and that's why I wanted to get into a rural development when I got out of school and got a job and that's why I got interested in veterinary medicine and, in fact, I had applied, at the end of my sophomore year, to Cornell University for veterinary school and was accepted, but, when I was taken into the ROTC, the Advanced ROTC, I notified them that I was going into the Army and they said, "Well, let us know when you get out and we'll see about getting you back in," … but that was the reason that I was interested in rural [life], … I just liked the country so much better than I did the city.

SH: That was your summer job in high school.

RB: Yes, I worked there, yes, that's right.

SH: How did campus life change after Pearl Harbor?

RB: Yes, a lot of things changed. … I was older than most, because I had worked a couple of years, … but because of the area, down in New Brunswick, which was quite a calm, little town, we only had, I think, fifteen hundred male students, or close to that, when I went there, campus life was quiet and we had good sports teams, but nothing real great, but we all enjoyed [them]. I enjoyed it. In fact, … three of the best years of my life were spent at Rutgers, … until the second year, when Pearl Harbor came. Then, everything changed. We all became aware of rationing. We all decided we wanted to make something of ourselves, to get ready to serve in the Army. We all realized we were going to go in the Army. Everybody went. There was no two ways about it, either you joined or you were drafted.

SH: What was the social life on campus like?

RB: … For people like me, who didn't have much money, the social life wasn't very much. Most of the dates that I had, anyway, were girls from NJC and it meant walking across [town]. Now and then, one of our group would have a car, but very rarely, but it meant walking from the Quad in Rutgers to NJC, which was a long walk. … If you had a date, … then, you'd have to walk back at the end of the date. It was a very trying deal, but most of the fellows … dated girls from NJC, or, as they used to call it, the Coop, because the chicks were there. [laughter] It was a quiet … town and small, nothing like Rutgers is today, nothing.

SH: What kind of freshman initiation did you have at Rutgers?

RB: They had what they called Hell Week. … All houses were different. Some were much worse than others, but a year or two before I got there, and I'm not sure of that, exactly how long it was, one of the things [was], in the middle of the winter, that the plebes, the class of pledges,

were to swim the Raritan River and one boy drowned and that put a real blinker on … all the activities during Hell Week. … They would do things, like, they'd start us out … [for the] week, they'd put twelve eggs inside our shirt, between the shirt and your body, regular eggs, not hardboiled, and every time somebody walked by you, one of the upperclassmen, they'd bump against you, so [that] they'd break it and, for every egg you broke, you had to put two back in. So, at the end of the week, most of us were full. That was just one of the little things that they did and they did a little paddling, but nothing real serious, at least in our fraternity.

SH: What was your fraternity most known for?

RB: Athletics. You had to partake in a sport. If you couldn't make the varsity, you still had to [participate], but it was mostly in athletics; it certainly wasn't a scholastic [fraternity]. [laughter]

SH: Do you remember mandatory chapel?

RB: Sure do. Every week, we went to chapel and all the announcements would be made as to what the social calendar was for that week and, in fact, … I can remember, when I was running for president, there were actually two groups that controlled the elections. One was the fraternity people, who are known as the Greeks, and the other group, who are non-fraternity, known as the Barbarians and I can remember having to get up in front of the chapel, once or twice, and give a pep talk to my backers to see if we could get elected. [laughter] … We had prayer down there and it was non-denominational and different people from the University would make little announcements and I remember that we had a choir director by the name of Soup Campbell and he would always [sing], a lot of singing.

SH: Soup Walter?

RB: Soup Walter, yes. A lot of singing, … I mean, I can still remember the songs, we sang them so often at college.

SH: Did you participate in the Glee Club?

RB: No, no, I didn't.

SH: What kind of interaction did you have with the administration? You talked about Dr. Keller and Soup Walter.

RB: Yes, and the professor who influenced me the most in the agricultural school was Professor Helyar, … really a fine gentleman. … In fact, his son is, was, I don't know that he's still alive or not, … a veterinarian, also, but he was a perfect gentleman, was interested in all the students, taught some basic first year courses and had a great deal of influence on me and what I liked and what I wanted to be. He'd be number one. … The fraternity I lived in was across the street from the Dean's house. I think his name was Frazier Metzger, at the time, and so, we got to know him and someone said he had … those binoculars on us all the time [laughter] and the president was a good looking man.

SH: Clothier?

RB: Clothier, Robert Clothier. Yes, he was the president and the college was a small college. It was exactly the kind of town I wanted to go to. As I said, I was not happy in the city and Rutgers … was just like a small town. New Brunswick was really nothing at the time, as far as the town was concerned.

SH: You talked a bit about your lacrosse coach. Did you travel much as a team?

RB: Yes, I'll tell you one little story about lacrosse and sports and the difference [between] today and then. In my sophomore year, I was a regular and one of the better players, frankly, but, anyway, we were to play up in Syracuse, which was the *alma mater* of our coach here at Rutgers, Fitch, and what you had to do, at that time, to get excused, we were going to leave, I think, Friday morning and be up there over the weekend and come back Monday, you had to get an excuse signed by each of your professors that you were going to miss the class. … I was taking a course in physics at the time. Why I ever got into that, I don't know, but it was a hard, hard course and I brought my slip around to go and … the professor said, "Hell no, I'm not going to sign that. … You can't afford to miss any classes." So, I went back to the coach, Fred, and told him and he said, "Oh, we'll take care of that, don't worry, we'll take of it." Well, the next day, I went into class and … the professor called me up and said, "I'm going to sign the certificate for you, the slip, that you can go, but," he says, "you're going to flunk the course," and I said, "I am, for missing one day?" He said, "One day." I said, "Thank you, I'm not going," and I didn't go. That's the difference in athletics today, yes.

SH: Did you pass the course?

RB: I passed it, [laughter] but I didn't miss … any classes either. He was an interesting guy. At the end of the year, … he gave a tough final, he gave us a card that was, as I remember, maybe four inches by six inches, and said we could write anything we wanted on that and take it with us into the test. Well, you might just as well have taken a Collier's book at the time, because … that didn't help you, but that was one of his little joys.

SH: He wanted to see how much time you would spend on that.

RB: Yes, wasting your time.

SH: Do you have any other stories about Frazier Metzger?

RB: He was an ordained minister, as were most of the deans of men at that time. I think it was in the Dutch Reformed Church and he was just a spiritual leader that any of the guys could go to if they wanted to talk on any problems. He was very available to you. You could go to his office anytime, not that I ever did, but I know people who did, you know. Clothier was aloof and away from everybody. … I don't know if he did anything. He was the president.

SH: How strict was Metzger with the fraternities?

RB: Not too much, although he tried to keep the drinking down. Most houses had bars and I think they were legal, or maybe they were, maybe they weren't, but, anyway, there were certain rules about not partying during certain days of the week or things like that, but he was never very on top of it. I mean, he was, at that point, a pretty old man and I don't think he knew what was going on.

SH: Did you take part in the Corner Tavern activities?

RB: Yes. There was a group on campus at that time which was known as the Hilt Club, which was made up mostly of athletes, although not all, and that was a drinking club and they would meet every, … oh, I think, maybe, month or so and just go down to the Corner and drink.

SH: You were part of the Scabbard and Blade. Did you compete off campus?

RB: No. Scabbard and Blade was a military fraternity, honorary fraternity, and they had a pretty rough initiation, though. I remember that they shaved all our heads, among other things, and back then, that was kind of an unusual thing to do, but they took us on an overnight trek and left us out in the country and did a few things like that. In fact, one of the fellows, who was a senior when I was a junior, was a good friend of mine, was a football player, Emil Potzer, he was also killed at Normandy, … as were some of our best men, Jack Everett was killed over there, Mal Schweiker … was killed over there, just some of our very best. … What happened to us, fortunate for us, was that when they called us up, as I said, the seniors … got commissioned directly and the juniors went to OCS. Well, those that were commissioned immediately were just in time for the invasion of Normandy and a lot of guys got killed, a lot of good men were killed. The others, the juniors, which I was a part of, we were far enough behind, there were three months or four months of OCS, that we missed that first landing. … It was really a bad time, … good men were killed and a lot of good men.

SH: Did you return to Rutgers as part of the ASTP?

RB: No, I did not. … When we were taken into the Army, we were first sent to Fort Dix, to a classification center, and one of my classmates, who was a junior, also, came to me and he said, "You know, the classification officer is having me come back and … I told him that you were a veterinary student, pre-veterinary student. He wants to see you, too." … This was Chizz Thayer or Charles Thayer, who is a member of our class, and so, the next day, I went over there and he said, "I see you … were accepted to veterinary school," and I said, "Yes, I was." He said, "You know, I think they need you worse there than with the ROTC." So, they sent Chizz and I up to New York City and we were put up at a Jewish orphanage, across from Lewison Stadium, … with a lot of other pre-meds and pre-veterinary students, and so, I called Cornell, when I got there, and told them what was happening. They said, "We're sorry, but your place has been taken," and the same thing happened to Chizz. His place had been taken. Well, we called other veterinary schools and I was accepted at Michigan State and Chizz was accepted at Kansas State. So, they took us away from the rest of the group, sent me to Camp Grant, Illinois, to take basic training and left me there until my course was starting at Michigan State, and then, shipped me to Michigan State and Chizz to Kansas State, but I never did come back to Rutgers. After my first year in the ASTP, Rutgers awarded me my diploma, using the first year at Michigan State as my

senior year at Rutgers. So, I got my BS at that time from Rutgers and stayed at Michigan State and I don't know, time is [fuzzy], I can't tell you exactly, but, after a certain time, a year or two, they called us in and said that the Army, well, they had needed veterinarians back when we were sent there, felt that they now had enough. The war was looking a little better then, and so, they said, "Well, what do we do?" They said, "If you're in the upper ten percent of your class, you're probably going to stay here. Otherwise, you're going back to the Army." Well, I happened to be in the upper ten percent, and so, I stayed there and that's where I ended up the war, at Michigan State.

SH: What would you have done as a veterinarian in the Army?

RB: … What the veterinarians did in the Army, and in a lot of places, is that anything that is of animal origin has to be inspected by a veterinarian. This includes eggs, meat, milk, anything, cheese, anything that is of animal origin is all inspected by veterinarians. … That's what we would have been doing. They were … in great need, at the start of the war, but they quickly caught up. The ASTP, [which] was the Army Specialized Training Program, did a big job for the Army in training all kinds of people for many, many different trades. I never was sorry and I met my wife at Michigan State. We were both students there and she was a sociology major from a little town in Michigan and we went back there and that's where we started our veterinary practice.

SH: As president of your class, what were your responsibilities?

RB: Well, not much. [laughter]

SH: Getting elected, for one.

RB: Yes, and one is that he's in charge of the Student Council and conducts their meetings and a lot of things. … If fraternities had to be disciplined for anything, you were part of that committee and … [there] used to be [what was] known as, I think it was … the Blue Jackets, something with blue jackets, and it was also an honorary group that greeted incoming athletic teams and people who were coming to Rutgers to speak or sing or whatever. They were kind of a group who welcomed them and showed them around and did all those things. … The president was involved in that and would be called, frequently, … by the president or members of the college if there was a problem with any of the fraternities or a problem with any of the students, that they would first try to get the Student Council and the president to get it straightened out, rather than go before a college committee.

SH: Did you hold office within your fraternity?

RB: Yes, I did. I was the house manager for two years. House manager bought all the food and … hired the cook and hired the waiters, they were students, the waiters were, and kept all the books and had to … deal with our adviser, our alumni adviser, who was a man by the name of Johnson, who was the head of the hospital there in New Brunswick, the biggest hospital in town. … He overlooked your books every month, but, in return for that, you got room-and-board,

which is why I was doing it. … I was house manager. That was an appointed rather than an elected position, but it was worth the most money of all, so, that's why I was in it.

SH: Did you attend basketball and football games?

RB: Sure, sure did. I worked at the football games. At that time, the stadium was the same stadium, but it's been added on to since then. … There was no connection, electrically, between the field and the scoreboard and our house had this job, and passed it on from year-to-year, of having a guy up on the board and another guy on the field and, by a series of hand signals, I would give the board up there … what yardline the ball was on, and then, got the best view of the game and that was our house [that] had that position for a long time. After you worked up on the board for a year or two, then, you got to get down on the field. [laughter]

SH: Do you remember who was on the board?

RB: No, I can't remember who was. They were guys from our fraternity, I do know that, yes.

SH: Who was your roommate?

RB: My original roommate was Jack Dargin, who was a football player from Newark, New Jersey, and he had been an All-State player at St. Benedict's in … New Jersey and he was a real, real staunch Democrat, oh, man. … Before the war, he was very, very liberal, very liberal minded and he used to say, "The one organization I'm looking forward to joining is the … VFW, because I don't want to die over there," [laughter] and Jack, … after the school, he was a year ahead of me and he was an officer in the Vosges Mountains in France during … World War II and a great guy; afterwards, became a professor at one of the colleges in either University of Massachusetts or one of the colleges up in Massachusetts. He was … a political science major, so, that's what I'm sure he taught, and then, in the room next to me was Nick Dennis, also an interesting guy, was a football player from Philadelphia, was quarterback on the football team. At that time, they used a single wing and the quarterback never threw the ball, never did anything but hand it off, and block. Anyway, he … went in the Marines and stayed in and retired as a colonel, and then, I think, after the war, he came back to Rutgers for a while, after he retired from the Marines, and was in charge of security at Rutgers University, stayed there for a year or two, and then, got the same job at University of Florida and has since retired from there and I think he still lives in Gainesville, yes. Nick Dennis, his name was, tough, tough guy, oh, man, tough. … The fraternity used to … invite the different coaches, not all at once, … for dinner, so that we'd get to know them and they'd get to know us and so forth and I remember, once, we had the boxing coach [over]. There used into intercollegiate boxing at that time, it isn't any more, but Nick was there and he was a big, strong looking guy and I mean big. He was probably 220 and maybe six-[foot]-two, good looking, big guy and he sat next to the boxing coach and the boxing coach says to him, "Why the hell aren't you going out for boxing? … You think you could lick those guys?" "Oh, sure," he said, "I could lick those guys." … He said, "Well, why don't you?" Well, then, Nick found out that, at that time, … he had a football scholarship, they said they didn't want him to box, because they were afraid he might hurt himself for football, but he went over one afternoon and he said, "I'll fight the heavyweight," he said. Boy, he just pounded that heavyweight, and then, he said that the coach wanted him to fight so bad, but he

never did after that, [laughter] but he was a big, tough guy. His father was a detective in the Philadelphia Police Force, Nick Dennis.

SH: What do you remember about the dances, like the Soph Hop and the proms?

RB: Yes, … they were, at that time, held across the street from our fraternity house, which was the corner, I'm trying to think of the other streets on College [Avenue], it was the old gym, if you know where that is. Do you know where that is? …

SH: Senior Street?

RB: Senior, I'm not sure of that. Anyway, it was … the gym at the time and it was across the field and down a little ways from what was known as Neilson Field, which was an old football field, … but, anyway, that's where the dances were held and most of the dances, they always got a big name band for, and it was a big event. Girls … got all gussied up and the guys, too, and everybody looked forward to it, had some good bands there. That was before the war. After the war, that all went by [the wayside]. The last year, there was none of that.

SH: During your time in the ASTP and at Michigan State, how much contact did you have with your fraternity and your classmates?

RB: Not a great deal. There are one or two guys that I still hear from. …

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

SH: Please, continue.

RB: Well, in the last year, anyway, I heard about … a fellow here, in Hobe Sound, who was not a Rutgers man, but was involved in the 101st Airborne and I called him one day. He was a retired minister now and he said, "How did … you get me?" I said, "Well, I have a friend, a fraternity brother, by the name of Joe Quade." "Oh, God, I know Joe." He said, "You know, he is … the guy who has really kept us together as an association." He said, "He's led that … 101st Airborne." So, that's one guy that I've heard from. … Joe had a brother. … They both were in the service and, when they came back, his brother went to school. Joe went back to school at Cornell and finished there and, in fact, had my sister up for a dance once. They met then. In fact, Joe said to me, when I talked to him, … "That was the highlight of my social career," [laughter] and he had a brother who got killed at college; after going through all the war, got killed in a car accident, I think, and I get the … annual list of fraternity brothers and where they are and so forth, but, each year, they get fewer and fewer.

SH: You spoke about your favorite professors. Who were your least favorite professors?

RB: I think that physics professor who didn't want to give me a release to go to the game. [laughter]

SH: I can see that.

RB: Yes, yes. Well, I really didn't have any that I didn't like. I really enjoyed my stay at Rutgers so much that I have very little bad to say about it. … In fact, I'm not as happy about what's come of it since then, because I was so happy with a small college and it was conservative and, now, it's become a large institution and not what I would send my boy to.

SH: Did you go back to your aunt's home in Belmont during college?

RB: No. … When I was at college, I worked at various jobs in the summer, one at Kearny, New Jersey, at the Western Electric plant, to earn money, so that I could help to pay my expenses at Rutgers. … I wanted to go, in my senior year in high school, to school up in New York State, where I used to spend the summers, but my dad didn't want me to do that and I can see that. He wanted me home, … but, most of the time, I worked in the summers when I was in college and, actually, at Michigan State, we went twelve months a year. There was no summer vacation, so, … that was it, but my fraternity was … a group of fellows who were … from about the same class, as far as environment that they came from was concerned. One was Don Van Nest. He was a classmate of mine and a nice guy, … who's still alive and lives in New Jersey, and I, now and then, hear of him, but [I have lost track of] most of my fraternity brothers. I understand there's one down in Jupiter, which is, like, ten miles south of here, by the name of Griffin, but I've never, never talked to him. He was a year or two behind me, but we were at Rutgers at a time when it was a small school and a closely knit group. … I think I knew almost everybody in my class, almost everybody, and, when we had classes out on the farm, in Ag School, we had to find our own way to get over there. We either walked or hitchhiked or did something, but, like, Dick Hale, who's a big deal now at Rutgers, a big alumni, he was in our class … [in] Ag School and we were all a small group. … Fritz Kroesen was also in that group. We were very close, because we had small classes and got to know each other and, as I say, we all played a lot of sports. So, we played intramurals together when weren't playing intercollegiate sports. So, we saw a lot of each other.

SH: I assume that you went on to Advanced ROTC.

RB: Yes, I did.

SH: Why did you decide to go on to Advanced ROTC?

RB: Well, the only reason was that I had been to the Marines and they had turned me down, because of my nose and my foot, and because they were opening up a new branch, which was the Signal Corps, and I was kind of interested in that and I thought, "Well, I'll join there, and then, I can go right in with the rest of these guys. We all go in together. You go in with a group," and they did it. They all went in together. That was how the start of the so called Black Fifty was concerned, where they arrived at Signal Corps OCS in an open train, as I understand it, and they were all just black. When they got off, the sergeant that met them said, "Well, you're the blackest fifty I've ever seen," and that's how the Black Fifty came into being, I understand, anyway, … and it was like still being in school and, yet, you were in the service. … After you finished OCS, it was a different story, but, for the time being, it was nice going in with a group and, because you were either college graduates or had completed three years, you were going to

get officer's treatment. You were going to get to be an officer, you know, [if you] were halfway decent; I'm sure they were.

SH: Did your family talk about what it was like to be in New Jersey during the war, with rationing and things like that going on?

RB: Yes, they talked some about it. … During the war, as I said, my dad worked for the phone company in the commercial department and, during the war, he was in charge of all telephone installations at Army and Navy camps in New Jersey, which was a big job, and he traveled a lot on it. … If one of the bases needed a hundred phones, they were there in a week and he was aware of the war, because he saw guys coming back from North Africa at the time and wounded and shell-shocked, as they called it. … He was very, very concerned about … doing a good job for the Selective Service Board, … but he also had some very funny things happen. I'll tell you one or two of them. One was, he got a letter from a mother, an irate mother, saying that her son shouldn't have to go in the service, that he was the sole support and it went on and on about all the things that he did. … At the end, she said, "If you don't do anything. I'm going to go to the Governor. If he doesn't, I'm going to go to the President," and she said, "If he doesn't, I'm going to go higher," and he wrote back and said, "Where are you going, to Jesus Christ?" [laughter] That was a funny one that he had and another funny example that he had was, in our … very neighborhood, we had a young Irishman who was a milkman, as I remember, Johnny (Cleary?), and Johnny did not want to go to the Army and there were some guys who didn't want to go, but, anyway, my father was just as sure that he was going to go and, after all kinds of tricks and funny things, he finally got him and one of the things that the … Selective Service Board did is, when the boys went on the bus to camp, they were always there to say good-bye to them. He was there when Johnny was leaving and … Johnny walked over to him, he said, "Mr. Byram," he was an Irishman, "Mr. Byram," he says, "would you do me a favor, please?" My dad said, "Sure, Johnny, anything." He says, "If you're ever looking for a fight, would you look me up?" [laughter] My dad always told that story. That was funny, … but, as I say, … we had a car, but we did not drive much, so, gas rationing did not affect us, living in the city, because we either took the bus, the street car or the subway. You could go … from Journal Square, which was a block from my house, to 42nd Street for six cents, … and then, for a nickel, you could go from there up to Yankee Stadium or the Polo Grounds, which is a long, long ride, for a nickel.

SH: Did you go to a lot of sporting events or movies?

RB: … I used to go to the Giants, baseball Giants, games. I was always a fan of the National League and you could go there and the bleacher seats, at that time, were fifty-five cents and we used to go there two hours before the game and argue baseball with all these guys. Yes, we did. I didn't go to many football [games]; I went to a few football games. My brother's class was Class of '39 at Fordham and he was there when … Fordham had such great football teams. They were rated first, second or third in the country for years. They had what was known as the "Seven Blocks of Granite," which were undefeated for three years. They had three ties during that time, but, anyway, I'd go to those games, too, now and then, and, as I said, we played sports all the time. … Any place there was a lot that was, maybe, fifty-feet-by-fifty-feet, we played football.

SH: Did you participate in athletics during veterinary school at Michigan?

RB: No, at that time, we were going to school twelve months a year and there was just not time, although I did run on the track team. I ran a little bit at Rutgers and we had a coach, at that time, Bernie Wefers, … at Rutgers, who was a former Olympian and an excellent coach, and so, when I got to Michigan State, after the war ended and I was still at State, I ran a couple of meets, against Ohio State and a couple of others, but I never could do anything. [laughter] … Anyway, I also went to him to see if they wanted to start a lacrosse program, that I would, you know, help him get it started and the athletic director, at that time, said, "Yes, we'd love to have it. … We've got all the equipment here for [it], but, what happened the last time we started [it], … a kid got mortally injured," and he said, "The State doesn't want us to start it up anymore." … I participated in inter-fraternity and intramural sports, that was all, at Michigan State.

SH: Did you stay involved with your fraternity at Michigan State?

RB: Yes, yes, I did, … but I didn't live there, because I was what was known as an intern. Each year, two members of each class were allowed to live at the veterinary hospital, which is a huge building, and we lived there and ate there, cooked there, ate there, and so, I was busy all the time there. So, I didn't live at any fraternity. We had two bedrooms back there and there were two guys in each bedroom and it was free room-and-board, … plus the fact that, by that time, I was out of the service. When I finished up, I was out of the service. When the war ended, we were out, … but I got the GI Bill, so, I actually had more money than I've ever had, … since or before. [laughter] We were getting ninety bucks a month and they were paying all our bills.

SH: However, you kept working.

RB: Yes, right, but … I now wonder if I would have been better off to go back to Rutgers and I would have gone back, but they didn't give a degree in veterinary medicine and, since I had put a couple of years in at Michigan State, I stayed there and I really liked it, anyway, and, beside that, I had met my girlfriend and we got married when I graduated. I graduated and went to … work for a man in Claremont, New Hampshire, had a big veterinary practice there, mostly a diary practice, but, also, small animal, large animal and spent two years there and got a lot of good experience and enjoyed my stay at [Claremont]. We got married at that time and we lived there for a couple of years. It was very hard work, but it was good.

SH: How did you meet Mrs. Byram?

RB: … I lived in a house, we were allowed to live off campus, … on the corner of what was known as MAC, which was Michigan Agricultural College Drive, and across the street was a sorority house, Alpha Chi Omega, and we used to wave through the windows and stuff like that and, finally, we went over and introduced ourselves and met her that way. I met several of them. [laughter] … Then, I came back to Michigan, to her hometown, as a matter-of-fact, and, at the time, there was a veterinarian there who I had been in class with at Michigan State and he said his wife was having allergy … problems and, if he could pass the board in California, they were going to move out there and he says, "If you want to take this over while I go out there and take the board, … you can keep the place if I pass the board." Well, he passed the board, and so, I

stayed there and we have two children, Ellen and Bobby, and Ellen is named after my aunt, … where I used to spend my summers, that was Ellen Byram, and they both still live in Michigan. One still lives in Rockford, the town we lived in, and the other lives twenty miles away in another little town in Greenville.

SH: Where is Rockford?

RB: Rockford is on the north end of Grand Rapids, in western Michigan, beautiful country, hills and lakes and just beautiful and, when I went to work there, my practice was primarily a dairy practice. Dairy and horses was the big part of my practice. Well, the area has now changed. Grand Rapids has moved out twenty, twenty-five miles and … there's still some horses in the area, but it's mostly all small animals. I built a small and large animal hospital where they could bring horses and cattle in and we could do the surgery there, under sterile conditions, and, also, did small animals. … I had a couple of guys work for me and, usually, I get somebody who was interested in horses and that's what we did. [It] was mostly a large animal practice, until the last few years, when it became small animal.

SH: What did you find to be the most challenging?

RB: Well, the most challenging for me was the horse work, because restraint was a problem. Back then, we didn't have the anesthetics that they have now or the tranquilizers that we have now and it was just a physical problem, holding them, so [that] you could do anything to them. It was very difficult, very physical work. That was part of the reason I hired young guys, after a while, so [that] they could do that and I could do the dogs and cats. [laughter]

SH: Were these pleasure horses, work horses, race horses?

RB: Well, we took care of a lot of what are called standardbreds. Those are trotters and pacers. There were a lot of those in the area and, also, we had three or four polo teams in the area. Polo teams require a lot of horses. I mean, they need four to six horses for every game, each player does. So, there was a lot of horse work and a lot of polo players and a lot of what they call hunters, which were jumpers. So, there's still a lot of horses in the area, but the dairy practice is pretty well gone.

SH: Did any of your children follow you into the veterinary profession?

RB: My daughter wanted to. It is so hard to get into veterinary school now, almost impossible, and, in fact, she applied and had good grades and one of the men on the admissions committee was a friend of mine. They were all veterinarians and he called me a week or so before they were to announce who was getting in and he said, … "Your daughter is a second alternate. Don't worry though, we always have five or six dropout." Well, nobody dropped out that year and she got so disappointed, she never applied again, never applied again, but she went to school in a little private school in Michigan, Albion College, very, very good school. They have wonderful pre-med and pre-veterinary courses and my son went to school in Northwood Institute, which was in Midland, Michigan. That was a college that was originally started by car dealers, not car makers, car dealers, and they, in fact, have a college down here, too, in Palm

Beach, a very good school, too, but neither of them … became veterinarians. Today, over fifty percent of the classes are female veterinarians and they're better students, usually. [laughter]

SH: Well, now, you can restrain the animals.

RB: Yes, put them to sleep for a few minutes. [laughter]

SH: How do you feel about the GI Bill and its impact on the country?

RB: I think it was one of the best things that ever happened and the reasons were twofold. One was these guys who would not have had any money, because they weren't earning any money, when they were in the service and, you know, getting ninety bucks a month. It started at thirty. I remember, my brother was getting thirty when he went in the Army, gave them a chance to go back to school and some of them got married. A lot of them got married while they were there in school, … plus, instead of dumping all these men in the job market when the war ended, it got them in school and they could gradually get into the job market. So, I really feel that it was a tremendous boon for soldiers and sailors. I certainly appreciate what they did for me and can't say enough about it. In fact, that's why I'm a Democrat today, because of that and Social Security. [laughter]

SH: Did you consider staying in the Reserves? Did you have that option?

RB: I did stay in, yes, I did. In fact, when the Korean War began, I was in the Reserve. I was a first lieutenant in the Army Reserve and they sent me a form to fill out, which I filled out, and they called me and said I had to go to Detroit for a physical, which I did, and passed the physical, no problem. When I got back, I got a letter from them saying that, in investigating this, because I was doing so much work for farmers, … I was not going to be taken. They were going to take small animal guys. … Most of my work, at that time, was with dairy cattle and they needed a veterinarian. The government wanted them, then. … I stayed in the Reserve, probably, I'd say, eight or ten years, and then, finally got out. …

SH: Did you think that you would be called up for Korea?

RB: Yes, I was called up for Korea and went and took the physical and thought I was going to go, until … somebody investigated and they sent me notice that I was not going to be taken.

SH: Did your son serve in Vietnam?

RB: No, my son has not served in any war. He's one of those who was in-between. … Now, I think he's almost fifty and, no, he was not in Vietnam, never was, no.

SH: At Rutgers, before the war, was there any polarization on campus between those who thought we should get involved with the war and those who thought we should not?

RB: Not much. No, I don't remember that. I think that when Pearl Harbor happened, maybe before that, we had some. …

SH: Before.

RB: Before. … After Pearl Harbor, there was no problem, but I think, before that, there was. … There were people in New Jersey; Bergen County, New Jersey, had a large German population and they had many, many what they called *Bund*s … and they were strongly pro-Hitler. Charles Lindbergh was strongly pro-Hitler. … One of the senators from New York, Hamilton Fish, I think his name was, was strongly German and … not pro-English. So, there was a lot of talk there, that way, but, on the other hand, … most people were, you know, … siding with the English. They were having, at that time, guys walking the beach in New Jersey with police dogs, because they were afraid of submarines landing personnel. … At that point, there was a little animosity between the Germans and the English or Americans, but Franklin Roosevelt was such a strong personality and he was so strongly behind the English that I think the news was maybe slanted a little, but, once Pearl Harbor came on and once they started sinking all our Liberty ships that we were sending material with, [things changed]. I can remember when I was working at the shipyard, that was, as I say, before we were in the war, God, those things were being shot down maybe two or three a week, it seemed like, and … we were involved in building them and, as I say, we worked weekends all the time, never had any days off, because they wanted to build up the Navy.

SH: Since there was so much *Bund* activity in the area, do you remember if anyone in Jersey City was taken away?

RB: Not that were taken away, but … I can remember a family and I think their name was (Von Wittenburg?) … and I remember, a couple of times, their house was egged and … they were kind of tormented. That's about the only thing I remember as far as people … who were anti-German.

SH: Was there any kind of reaction like that against the Italian population because of Mussolini?

RB: No, no. I don't think so. … I think that's still the largest share of ethnic groups in Jersey, … Italian, I'm sure, and, no, most of the guys in the Army that you met were Italians. They didn't have any closer ties than we did. No, … I never remember anybody talking that way about Italians.

SH: Before World War II, did your family do any traveling or go on vacation?

RB: Yes, summer vacation was, … my dad got two weeks off, usually he took the last two weeks in August, and we'd either go to the Jersey Shore, rent a place for two weeks, or we'd go up to someplace like … Finger Lakes, someplace in there. … Our vacation was two weeks and that was it. … As I say, we'd rent a place, usually at Point Pleasant or Seaside Heights, Ocean Gate, one of those places.

SH: Did any other Rutgers men wind up at Michigan State?

RB: No. Chizz Thayer, who was a classmate of mine, the other veterinarian, … I think he was at a university, teaching at a university, at the time. He stopped to see me once and spent a couple of days, when we were in Rockford. … My ties with Rutgers alumni have not been that close, because I lived in Michigan all my life. … I went back for my twenty-fifth reunion at Rutgers and saw a lot of them then. Now, our numbers are thinning down so [much]; I hear, you know, from Doug McCabe and I hear from Crandon Clark and … Joe Quade and a few guys, but … not really close. I'm sorry to say that I don't have any close ties with them. My fraternity, … they may be back, I don't know. They were going to come back on campus. They were off campus for a while, because they had some bias thinking about who could join and who couldn't join them, so that they were put off campus, but the group, Don Van Nest was one of them and Joe Quade was [also], … kept the alumni group together and had meetings and so forth, outside, and … they sold their house and had all that money in the pot now. Something tells me that they were either talking about it or … are back on campus, I don't know.

SH: Is there anything else that you would like to say or anything that I forgot to ask about?

RB: I think I've probably talked a little more than I have in ten years, but … the thing I wanted to stress is that … my years at Rutgers were really great years. I just loved the college and loved my friends there and, as I say, it was probably one of the best periods of my life, even though, at the time, the clouds of war were overhead. We still managed to have a lot of fun. … When I started applying for veterinary school, in fact, before the war, when I applied at Cornell, I was the first one, and then, when I was shipped up to New York and had to find a spot in another school, I think I wrote to three colleges, Iowa, Michigan State and so forth. … I chose the one that was starting first and it happened to be Michigan State, but my credits from Rutgers were good as gold. I had absolutely no problem. It was a remarkable deal that, when I'd say I was from Rutgers, there was no problem, no problem, didn't have to go through anything. … It was an eye-opener for me; Rutgers had such a great reputation, scholastically. That was another reason that I was very happy that I went to school there.

SH: Wonderful. Is there anything else that I forgot to ask?

RB: Okay, I'm trying to think. My dad, I mentioned that he was in charge of all … telephones at all military installations in New Jersey. As I say, it was big; there was Camp Kilmer, Camp Dix and several big Navy yards down in Philadelphia, across from Philadelphia. … When we were shipped to Fort Dix, which is where the ROTC group left and went there before they were sent to their respective camps, Princeton was also there. Their ROTC was also there and my dad was down visiting and … he dealt with the general down there when he was there. … He mentioned to the general that his son was there and he says, "Let's have him come over for lunch." He sent his squad car over for me, the general's car, with the guard and the whole thing, picked me up and all these guys were standing there with their eyes wide open. He got a kick out of that.

SH: That is a great story.

RB: Yes, yes. … I met some other people … though that, while I was there at Dix. Jack Leonard was the singer with Tommy Dorsey's Orchestra at the time and he was there and I met

him and had lunch with these guys, but, among the things, I don't know whether you've met Livy Goodman; have you met Livy?

SH: I have only corresponded with him. I have not met him.

RB: He was also one of my classmates and, also, a lacrosse player. … We were freshman together; at that time, freshman played freshman lacrosse, not varsity lacrosse, and we had our own schedule and we were undefeated as freshman. He always said that was the only undefeated team Rutgers had that year, … but he didn't go on to say that we only played four games, [laughter] but, then, later on, in my junior year, we beat Princeton. That was the first time that Rutgers beat Princeton in lacrosse. They were always a hot lacrosse team, but we beat them that year, had a fellow by the name of Ralph Schmidt, who was a football player and a great guy. He was a big man on campus then, a great athlete and a nice person and he played with us and he was on that team and, boy, he was big and strong, oh, man. [laughter]

SH: He played several sports.

RB: Yes, he was captain of the football team.

SH: I think he played five sports.

RB: I wouldn't be surprised. … At that time, a sport didn't take the whole year, like it does now. You know, today, if you play basketball, you've got no time for anything else. Even these high school kids play all summer long, which I don't know if it's good or bad, but you couldn't be a four-letter man like Ralph was and he was a good one and I think Emil Potzer played two or three sports, football and baseball, but, today, you can't do that. They practice too much. … We had some great days when the intramural and inter-fraternity competition was big. … Part of the pledging process was to find out whether these guys could play sports, [laughter] so that they would get pretty good teams that way, and I can remember, we had a big softball rivalry with … Sigma Chi, a big, old house it was, and they had a good pitcher, a classmate of ours, Tom McCluskey, and, boy, we had to get somebody that could pitch with him. That was an important part of the pledging process, was to get some athletes. [laughter]

SH: Was there another house that was equally sports minded?

RB: Yes, Kappa Sig., for one, was and I think the Beta House was, too, and DU, I think they were, but … we were in school with Fritz Kroesen, never guessed that he'd stay in the service and go as far as he did. I mean, he was just a gentle, nice guy, like everybody else in the group, you know, just a nice person, good looking, big guy and he went on and on. I understand that he was the head of the European …

SH: NATO

RB: NATO, yes, and, for a non-West Pointer, that's something. Yes, it's really something. In fact, I was playing golf, oh, maybe a year ago, over here with a couple of generals, one was a general from the Engineering Corps and one was … artillery, I think, and they were beginning to

get to me, because they were kind of bragging about what their position had been, that they were generals and all. I said, … "Did you ever run into Fritz Kroesen?" "Fritz Kroesen, do you know him?" I said, "Yes, he was a classmate of mine at Rutgers." He said, "Oh, yes, he writes articles for the magazine," [laughter] but that kind of calmed them down then. They were … self-important there for a long time until they knew that I was a friend of Fritz.

SH: He has been very kind to the project.

RB: Has he?

SH: He participated in our Rutgers Living History Society dinner and gave the certificates to the charter members. He was also part of our Distinguished Alumni Lecture Series a few years ago and his talk was well attended and very well received.

RB: Good, good. … I was fortunate in being close to two guys that won [the] Medal of Honor during the war, both lived, too, and both of them were the same type of guy, just mild, calm guys. How they ever got mad enough to do what they did, I don't know, but they're entirely different.

SH: Were they both from Jersey City?

RB: One was from Jersey City, Frank Burke. Buck was, Frank Burke, … I think it was at the Bulge that he got his and the other was my neighbor in Rockford. In fact, he's my daughter's godfather, Carl [John Carleton] Sjogren, and he's just a mild, easy-going guy. … He said, … "I just finally got so mad, … we'd been pinned down for three days, I said, 'The hell with it and I'm going to do something,'" and he did.

SH: Unbelievable stories.

RB: Yes, I'm sure that they are. I noticed that this guy is the only Rutgers man, [Colonel Jack Jacobs]. He's not a very big guy, either. … That doesn't matter.

SH: Thank you.

RB: You're welcome. I hope … I did well enough for you.

SH: You certainly did. Thank you.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/7/04
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/15/04
Reviewed by Robert L. Byram 8/3/04