RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH FREDERICK O. DE SIEGHARDT

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Frederick De Sieghardt in Stone Harbor, New Jersey, on September 23, 2004, with Shaun Illingworth. Mr. De Sieghardt, thank you very much for having me here and setting up this interview. Of course, you do not live in Stone Harbor; you live in Kansas. [laughter] This is a big help to us.

Frederick De Sieghardt: Glad to be here.

SI: To begin, could you tell me a little bit about your father? I understand he was from Germany. Did he ever talk about his life in Germany with you?

FD: No, my father was born in the United States. His father, my grandfather, whom I never knew, was born in Austria and was in the Army of, what I suppose was, the Austro-Hungarian Empire or the leftovers of the Ottoman Empire. … He migrated to this country late, as nearly as we know, … in the nineteenth century. My father was born in 1893, so, his father must have come [over] some years earlier, because he got married in this country. … There was a considerable German mentality in our household, … one of [what] I would call, not necessarily rigidity, but structure, appreciation for and respect for senior members of the family, particularly males, which seemed to be characteristic of the culture of Germany and Northern Europe at that time. … I recall his father, … my grandfather, that is, was not a man who commanded great respect for what he did. He was not a particularly wholesome individual, but my father would absolutely not criticize [him], because he was his father. That's how it was and I guess that's as much as I remember. There was very little said in our household about World War I, except that my father, who was of age at that time to be employed, recalled frequent fights in his place of work, which was a dye house, D-Y-E house, in Philadelphia, with people who were of British extraction, because he was German, they were Brits. … They spoke, that is the Brits, especially, spoke with an accent, because he would often recite what they had said and try to give the accent. So, I know that they were immigrant types, …, but that's almost as much as I recall.

SI: Did this German influence extend to holidays, foods or customs?

FD: Well, there was a considerable awareness of German dishes, although my mother rather readily accommodated everything American. My mother was born in this country. My grandmother on her side was born in Europe. My grandfather on her side was born in this country. My grandmother migrated as a four-year-old and was, apparently, an adoptee. I've only recently learned that by looking at her birth certificate, versus her baptismal certificate, and they contained two different surnames. So, she must have been adopted, but, in those days, you didn't talk about that. … You didn't, … but, yes, if we had German pancakes and things like that, there'd be a comment about it, but was no effort made to reproduce a German lifestyle. … We were very American and very pleased to be so.

SI: Could you tell me a little bit more about what your father did for a living?

FD: Yes. My father was not well educated. He was, in his, I suppose, early adulthood, trained as a dyer, because … the dyeing industry was pretty well represented in the Philadelphia area, where he lived. … As the dyeing industry moved to the South, of course, he didn't migrate there and he became a mattress maker and that's what he was until he had some health problems. [He]

had to give that up in the ‘40s. He died in 1963, at the age of sixty-nine.

SI: Was he ever in a union at this dyeing job?

FD: No, no, he was fiercely independent and I recall, when the union came into … the mattress factory where he worked in the ‘30s, during the Roosevelt era, he did everything he could do to avoid being a union member. He was a working foreman and the union wanted the working foremen in the union. … I don’t know, I was not old enough to understand everything, but I recall his bosses making offers of a little more money if he would go in the union, just kind of not make trouble, [laughter], but he was independent and did not do it and … that was not in any way a problem when the whole matter of union representation settled out in that company.

SI: Did he ever talk about strikes or any of those kinds of problems?

FD: No, … no one that I know of in his factory, none.

SI: Did your mother ever work outside of the home?

FD: Only before marriage, and she worked for Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company, now Colgate-Palmolive, and, apparently, her work was clerical and, since everything was done on paper and manually, they needed a lot of girls and that’s as much as I knew.

SI: Could you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what kind of neighborhood it was?

FD: Yes, I grew up in Somerdale, New Jersey, which, in the 1920 Census, had 1020 or 40 people and it had 1020 or 40 people in the 1930 Census. [laughter] So, it was one of those little blue-collar towns. It was just far enough away from Camden and Philadelphia, going east toward Atlantic City, where poor people or working-class people could find cheap land and build cheap houses, and so, that’s where we lived. In 1933, and, again, some of this has to be legend, because none of it was written down and it’s only as I remember it as a boy, my father was told by a doctor that his health problems were going to cause an early demise. So, he and my mother concluded that … they should have a house of their own, which would at least be there, should he die young, and so, in October of 1933, we moved into a very old house that had no conveniences of any kind, no running water, no electricity, no bathroom, nothing. It had a well outside and an outhouse down the pathway and, little by little, they put it together and it still exists today. It’s old and it’s frail and it’s picturesque. I lived in that house until I went off to the Army and, ultimately, until I got married.

SI: You were only a kid then, so, you might not know, but it had to have been difficult, at the height of the Depression, to buy a house or put that kind of money together.

FD: [laughter] Well, that’s very interesting. My father had insurance policies, because he always was aware [that] he had somewhat tenuous health, and so, he would sell an insurance policy and the insurance policies were a thousand dollars and he’d have three or four of them and he’d pay nominal sums a month and the insurance man always came around to collect, as they

did in those days. … Then, he would buy a new one and, of course, the new one was always a little more expensive than the one he sold, … but he had money in hand and this house and an acre of ground cost a thousand dollars. … It wasn't worth any more at that time. He had to pay something like five dollars a month, plus a hundred dollars a year, on what was the mortgage until the thousand dollars was paid off and that was done. That was a very simple, basic transaction, and so, that was it.

SI: Was he always steadily employed at the mattress factory?

FD: Until his health gave way in 1944, I guess it was. Yes, I was overseas at the time, in 1944. Yes, he was there for twenty-six or [twenty]-seven years, I suppose.

SI: Was the house also in Somerdale?

FD: Oh, yes.

SI: Okay. You mentioned that it was a blue-collar town.

FD: That's the way I would characterize it.

SI: How would you characterize the impact of the Great Depression on the town?

FD: Bad. [laughter] A lot of the people were unemployed, because things like the shipyard, the New York Shipbuilding Corporation, which was a major employer, was on … part-time work. After all, the New York Shipbuilding Corporation built battleships and similar craft, an occasional cruise ship, but cruise ships weren't all together like Public Service busses, [laughter] and so, they didn't build many of those. … This was 1931 and the government didn't have much money, and so, it wasn't building many battleships, and so, those who had done their turn in the shipbuilding enterprise during World War I were either on part-time or on lay-off. I recall people … who had kids in my elementary school class who couldn't afford more than one pair of shoes and, if the shoes had to be repaired, the kids stayed home. So, [when] the shoes came back, the kids came back and nobody saw anybody as different, though. That's how it was. I recall a substitute teacher, a Mrs. Ely, and … she was old. Everybody was old, you know. I was twelve or ten or something and I recall sitting, at lunchtime, next to her desk with another boy and I had three shirts. I had three shirts and that was sort of something of which I had a right to be proud. … Yes, Somerdale was hit hard. There was a time when the teachers were paid in scrip, which they then attempted to sell for money, at a discount, so that they could do the usual things people need to do with money. So, yes, it was not good.

SI: Were most of the people in town employed by one company?

FD: No, no. It was an easy commute to Philadelphia. There was a streetcar line that ran through the town and a bus and, for a while, the Reading Railroad had a line that ran from Philadelphia, or from Camden, to Atlantic City and you had passenger service and the passenger service was twenty cents each way from Somerdale to Camden. The bus was fifteen [cents] and … my father rode the train until the extra five cents made a difference, and then, he started

taking the trolley or the bus.

SI: Did you spend a lot of time in the Philadelphia or Camden area?

FD: No, no, no. I recall, in the summer of 1935, and I remember this because we had to write the usual, "What I did in [the] summer," when we got back to school, and my little essay, story, as I then called them, was about going on a ride on the subway in Philadelphia. … That was the high spot of the summer. There were, here and there, little lakes and we might walk to the lakes. … I couldn't swim, …, but we might have a little picnic, but there were little people in our house, so, my mother would be pushing a baby carriage along a dirt road to get there and I don't mean to make this sound primitive, but it was of the time. … We had the experiences that people had. Now, we had chores at home. We always had chickens and we had a big garden, and so, we weren't at a loss for things to do and we were of the generation [that] you always had chores. That's what your parents set you up with. So, we had them and we did not feel terribly deprived.

SI: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

FD: There were three boys and two girls. I'm the middle son. The boys came first. My two brothers are dead.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your early education in elementary school?

FD: [laughter] … [My] early education was, I recall learning to write cursive writing in the first or second grade and … I say it surprises me, thinking back on it, because I've had youngsters in the third grade say, "Mr. De Sieghardt, I can't read cursive," … because they're still in the printing stage these days, but we learned to write. … I remember that we had a regular morning ritual, in at least one or two of the early years, which involved health inspection. We had to show we had a handkerchief, that our face, neck and ears were washed, that we had brushed our teeth, that our hair was combed and there was a check sheet … that was posted and this was to teach us habits. Now, curiously enough, while we were learning that, apparently, there were places in the world that weren't learning that, because, when I was in the service, one of the men I met from England, who was in his early forties, told me, one day, and quite without any apology for saying it, he said, "You know, I once was going with a girl and she said, 'You know, Jim, you should brush your teeth,'" and he said, "I had never thought about it." … So, those health habits that we were learning in the third grade and that I look back on now, I think of our grandchildren, who take showers daily and comb their hair and all the things that you do to make you acceptable and civilized, [laughter] they were being learned sixty-five years ago or seventy [years ago]. … We studied the history of New Jersey in the fifth grade, I remember that. We started to get into more nearly world history in the sixth and seventh and eighth grades, not that we got in it very deeply and, in the seventh grade, we had an absolutely outstanding program on taxes, what they were and … what agencies required the payment of [the] same, what a sales tax was, what property tax was, and so on, and it was good enough that it received some sort of commendation at the teachers' convention in Atlantic City that year. In the eighth grade, we had a man teacher, the first one I'd ever seen, that was 1937, '38, and Mr. Fox was an innovator. He brought typing into our classroom … and this was an enterprise outside the school board's

direction, which ultimately put him at odds with the school board, but he taught typing for twenty-five cents a week and he had all kinds of typewriters in the classroom. … He had a very good following; lots of kids took typing. I didn't, because, frankly, we couldn't afford twenty-five cents a week, but, now, I think the school board said, "This has to go," and so, the typewriters disappeared and, at the end of the year, so did Mr. Fox. He was there two years, but to have a man teacher, in Somerdale, in that era, was just unique.

SI: Was the school itself a one-room school?

FD: Oh, no, no. It had eight grades, 233 students, as I remember. Remember, this was the era of post-World War I families, so, there were kids. Some families had three and four [children]. Of course, ours had five. So, in that small town, 233 [students] and there was a Catholic school three or four blocks away and … I don't know what its student body was.

SI: Were your classmates in elementary school the children of immigrants? Was there an immigrant community?

FD: No, there was a large population of Italian immigrants on one end of town, maybe there were three hundred or more, and the parents and grandparents in that community were, as we would call it, "right off the boat." They were immigrants and we would go by their houses and see the strings of peppers drying on the front porch and things that you knew were old country, the gardens, the grape arbors and so on, and those kids were all … [at] a little bit of a disadvantage, because they sometimes had language problems, but they all got through it. … I'm thinking of people who, and they were, I don't mean fiercely proud to be American, they just knew they were here and they were going to make it, and so, they did, to the extent that it was available to them, stuff that Americans did. Now, they had their Italian social enterprises, but those kids were in the class with us and they were going to make it and there was a very wholesome and competitive immigrant mentality there, which, today, … I look back on with some respect, because I didn't all together understand it at the time, because I was born here. [laughter] … They must have been bringing with them some pressure from home to stay Italian, but, also, to make it. I'm thinking [of], there was a man who ran a truck that picked up junk, … every town had a junk man and we had a junk man, Mr. (Pellegrino?), and he had very pretty daughters, who were very wholesome young people, and Mr. Pellegrino hired my older brother to drive his truck, because he had failed the driver's test. He couldn't read. So, he hired my brother, as a seventeen-year-old, to drive his little truck and, I remember, the radiator leaked and Mr. Pellegrino put fennel seed into the core, to have it swell and fill the holes, and, of course, it filled the core, too, [laughter] but he was not ashamed to be a junk man. … In later years, we had an Italian grocery that all the town came to love and appreciate. … I don't know where any of those people are today, except that, as I've been back, I see their names on businesses and whatever, so, they did, they made it.

SI: How did your parents feel about Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal?

FD: Well, my father didn't like him and I'm not sure that my father completely understood the circumstances in which the country found itself at the time when he was elected. [From] the reading that I've done, … I would characterize him as somebody who had to be there at the time.

I don't think that Herbert Hoover could have done some of the things that the situation mandated, but my father didn't like him. He was an agent of change and necessary change, drastic change, and it was not something [he approved of]. … Now, my father had a sixth grade education and he was a product of the society in which he lived and worked and everybody had very little education. So, they didn't read a lot and they didn't study political enterprise, as perhaps we might find … ourselves doing today, if we really wanted to be informed. I can remember, and this is a digression, mildly, but the president of the board of education, in 1938, when I graduated from grade school, was a man who had, as far as I know, a second grade education and, when he addressed the graduating class, he started his remarks by saying, "I hope yez remember what yez learnt." That was it. …

SI: Were there any New Deal programs in action in the area?

FD: Oh, yes, yes. … Among the things that I recall, the elementary school had a lunchroom and the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] fell heir to surplus commodities, which were used to make lunches, and some of them were just luxury items to us. They would get boxes of shelled pecans, there was graham flour, there was five-pound blocks of butter. … My mother would bring it home and, in the kind of oven that you put on top of an oil stove, it was a portable oven that sat over two burners on a three-burner … kerosene stove, she would bake muffins for the lunch program … as a member of a PTA committee that rotated responsibilities. … She would make several hundred muffins in an afternoon. Can you picture doing that, in this little oven on that little stove? and we were never allowed, as kids, to have any of them, because it wasn't our stuff. It was all flour and butter and whatever else that came from the program and it had to go back to the program, and so, the committee divided itself into groups and each group had a week of menu preparation and delivery and I think there were four, maybe five, groups and they rotated. Our street was a hard surface street by about 1935, and then, the WPA [Works Project Administration] came along and they put in dirt sidewalks, which, of course, was, in my opinion, totally unnecessary, but it was a place to give people work to do and, in the project, they took down two massive maple trees that were in front of our house and, on up the street, some beautiful, beautiful majestic oaks. Now, … what they did [with] the pathway [that] they created on both sides of the street has now been paved and it is indeed sidewalks, but they worked on that for the better part of a year or more, because they were dealing with picks and shovels and wheelbarrows and handsaws and when you saw a tree … two feet in diameter with a handsaw, you don't do it in twenty minutes. [laughter] So, I do remember that. I remember the WPA [Federal] Theatre Project sending one or two artists to the grade school … and they were usually musicians and they would bring their instrument and we'd all gather, and then, there'd be a small collection. Sometimes, the artist would go away with three dollars or four dollars, but, again, he was being paid by the WPA and the money that he collected either was his own or it went somewhere. … Nobody ever asked a lot of questions. I remember that. No, I don't remember much else. Street work was mainly what [it was]. In the … middle '30s, our town got a public sewer, which was a PWA [Public Works Administration] project, and it covered one half of the town, not my half, the other half, but it was a start and it was quite an enterprise, but, again, it was … a job creation entity and it did benefit the town.

SI: What were your interests in high school? Were you involved in just academics or were there extracurricular activities?

FD: … I took the so-called college preparatory, technical course, all through. I was not a particularly well person, because I had had pneumonia twice, between 1929 and 1935, and so, I was not physically able to participate in sports and, in fact, only took one marking period of physical education in four years. I weighed 122 pounds when I started my senior year in high school, which may or may not … identify me as a weakling or a small person, but everybody thought I was. … I concentrated on journalism. I was editor of the school paper and participated in the yearbook, did a little bit in a couple of the plays. … In my senior year, I had a paper route … back home, because the gasoline shortage mandated that the person who delivered the paper just had to cut back his delivery activities. He hired kids to deliver the papers, and so, I was torn between extracurricular [activities] at school and getting the papers out and I wasn't always successful at either one, but I did [it]. Being the editor of the paper was perhaps the thing that I remember the most, with the most satisfaction.

SI: What got you interested in journalism?

FD: Something genetic. [laughter] That's the best I can tell you. … Again, a digression, my younger son has a degree in journalism and it is often said that insanity is inherited. You get it from your children; well, there is some appreciation for words that just is.

SI: Did you always follow the news in the paper?

FD: Oh, my, yes, sure, yes.

SI: How aware were you of what was going on in the world during your high school years?

FD: I remember, with some considerable satisfaction, that is, I recall now with some considerable satisfaction, that I did follow what was going on in the world. I remember when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia and I have just read, just within the last year, the six Churchill volumes on World War II and he describes that whole interplay of events. … Again, I say I was there [laughter] and I remember when World War II started in September of '39 … and I remember the build-up to it all. … It upset me to think of Chamberlain being so conciliatory. … So, the build-up to World War II was something that you could almost chart. You could say, "It's going to happen," and then, let's see, Hitler invaded or took over Austria, and then, Czechoslovakia and, by then, he was feeling his oats. He had made his deal with Russia and, having made his deal with Russia, he now could turn his attention to Poland, which he did. … Of course, the Russians supported him in that, to a point, and then, how he deceived the Russians is a mystery to me, that he deceived them as he built up his troops along the Russian [border]. I just cannot imagine how. They must have been absolutely dense or totally lacking in intelligence resources, because, when he invaded, it was wholesale chaos. … So, yes, I remember all of that with some considerable [satisfaction]; even as we talked, I'd sense a feeling of … just how important it was and how it carried with it a feeling of anticipation of worse things to come.

SI: Did you discuss these events either with your family or your friends?

FD: Oh, yes, sure, and we had what was called PAD, I understand, now, it's POD, you know,

"Problems of American Democracy," and we talked about these things a lot in high school. That was a senior course, but we talked about that around the kitchen table, sure.

SI: Between the invasion of Poland and Pearl Harbor, did you have a sense that we were going to stay out of it or that we were going to get into it?

FD: The country was divided. You have to remember that, in grade school, we were singing, we had a songbook, a paperback songbook, and in it were World War I troop songs, [*It's*] *A Long Way To Tipperary* and some of those and we sang those. So, we weren't that far removed, nor were our parents, and there was a considerable feeling that we should stay out of it. … Now, stimulating and encouraging that was the presence of … the German-American *Bund*, who, of course, were seeking to weaken any American resolve to enter [the war]. … They were being fed from Germany with propaganda and seeking to identify themselves with good causes, even as the Klan has done at other times in this country. So, there was a divided attitude. England was not popular in this country, because they'd, quote, "never paid their war debt" from World War I and, of course, they never have, [laughter] but that was seen as, really, quite a serious lapse of, if nothing else, courtesy and good judgment on their part, to treat us that way. Then, as I read the Churchill book and as I think I knew … as a kid that we were going to have to be in it. I knew that, because it wasn't going to stop with Poland and, of course, I will always … be curious to know … whether Roosevelt really had a strategy for involving us, by way of a conflict, with Japan, because Japan and Italy and Germany were the Axis. It was … in the middle of the year, 1941, when he said, with support from the Dutch, that we were no longer going to supply Japan with oil and, of course, Japan has no oil. So, when their reserves were gone, they were going to be hopeless, vulnerable, poverty-stricken, whatever. So, they had decisions to make and … Roosevelt's condition was, they had to get out of China. Well, you just don't tell a [country what to do], … unless you expect to fight, and the Japanese had some very serious decisions to make and they decided that they weren't going to take this, and so, they attacked. Now, if we had been more intelligent in our use of our available resources at the time, we probably could have done some nasty things to them at Pearl Harbor, but we didn't. We were just [unprepared] and I remember that very well, very well. I was a senior in high school and … the editor of the paper and, within a week or two, we had banner headlines about boys who had gone off to join the service and war stamp and war bond campaigns and we had servicemen coming to our assemblies and so on, but, yes, I remember Pearl Harbor very well. One of the kids, a boy in a family to whom I delivered eggs from our house, was in Pearl Harbor at the time, in the Navy, and, happily, he was not killed, but it was devastation, but I knew … it had to happen. I just knew.

SI: What else do you remember about Pearl Harbor specifically, hearing the news and so forth?

FD: I don't remember exactly why we turned on the radio, but it was on and it was like the World Trade Center. [Editor's Note: Mr. De Sieghardt is referring to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.] Everything just stopped. … There was sort of cancellation or interruption, but there was a lack of detail. With the World Trade Center, we had cameras and we had people who knew and who were on-site and so on. Here, we had only radio messages, but among the things I remember was that the Japanese Embassy had been seen that day burning their files out in the yard and this was perceived as …

being a bad omen. They had had negotiators at the White House the day or two prior and there'd been, of course, an impasse, … but there was no detail, just that the Japanese had attacked and there had been ships sunk, but the inventory of damage was just not anything that showed up until a day or two later. … Then, I remember … Roosevelt's speech to the joint … houses of Congress, in which he asked for a declaration of war and I remember one person who voted against the war. It was a woman. She came from a Western state, Montana?

SI: Wyoming or Montana, I think.

FD: Yes. …

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SI: Please, continue.

FD: Yes. I recall the radio commentator saying that, when the session was over, people had chased her down the hall … and I don't mean to hurt her, but to scorn her and she had taken refuge in a phone booth; that, I well remember. … Pearl Harbor Day was a nice day in New Jersey, as I remember. We might even have been ready to do things outdoors. For December, it was a mild day, that I do [remember], which no researcher … will ever need to worry about. [laughter]

SI: Little details like that help researchers paint a picture of what it was like at that time. They certainly do it with 9/11, recording details about the weather and so forth.

FD: Oh, yes.

SI: Can you tell me how the war began to affect your community, even before Pearl Harbor, the lend-lease program, for example? You mentioned that many people worked in shipyards.

FD: … Well, of course, lend-lease was one of those things that Roosevelt set up as a hedge against [a British collapse], and I may not be using [the proper term], but it was a way of giving the British assistance without it costing us any money and without us being involved. It was a sort of, "If we do this, then, we won't have to do that," and so, he got that through and was masterful and I think it was also unconstitutional, but he did it and nobody argued, because I think the benefits, at the moment, outweighed the price or the alternatives, but it was … very clear the British were going to need help. Now, I didn't know how much help they were getting and how it was coming, but, of a recent time, I have been doing taxes for the old and the poor as a volunteer and one of the people in our little team of tax preparers is married to a man who operated a munitions factory in western Pennsylvania. It was a factory that produced for the British and it was sort of hidden away, … until, I don't know when it started, but, clearly, before we got into the war and, of course, all during, the product of that factory was directed to the Brits. … Right after World War II started, then, we began to have things like sugar rationing and meat rationing and shoes and rubber tires and, of course, the Japanese had taken over all the rubber plantations and synthetic rubber … was not something that was a perfected entity, to that point. So, all those things immediately, immediately became subject to scrutiny and, gradually,

to regulation. … When I got overseas and saw men doing their dry cleaning, filling steel helmets with gasoline and putting their uniforms in to dry clean them, and then, hanging them on makeshift wash lines, so that the odor of the gasoline would go away, it just jarred me, because my brother was getting three gallons a week and his car got fifteen miles to the gallon, so, you can imagine … how far he could go. He finally got what was known as a C card, because he carpooled, and so, he could get more gasoline. … We, during the time that I was still at home, were never seriously impacted, because we had chickens and, let me see, we also had, it seems to me, … a cow and we had a big garden. So, a lot of what people were doing without, we could grow … and we did and I don't mean that we selfishly withheld anything we had, but it was one of those little [Victory gardens]. This is the family plot, as it were, and we dealt with it in that way. My mother worked on the ration board and my wife did, too. … My wife, now, we weren't married, but she was teaching school somewhere else and she … worked on the ration board someplace, didn't you?

Mrs. De Sieghardt: In several towns.

FD: So, those were the exposures you got. Newspaper, that is, newsprint, got to be harder to get and much higher in price and, of course, ink, so [that] the school paper had fewer issues. We did get our yearbook … and I recall that we started a paper saving campaign at school and, one day, and it's funny how these things stay with you, one day, I was in the hall, after school, and we had a big, Swedish, immigrant-type who was a janitor, Pete. I can't remember his last name, but Pete was a big, hulking, husky man and he was usually very friendly and he was collecting paper from classroom wastebaskets and I said, "What are you going to do with that, Pete?" and he said, "Oh, I'm going to burn it," and I said, "Pete, we've got to save paper," and he laid into me as though to say, "How dare you tell me what to do. Everybody has an idea for what we should do and nobody wants to help," and, now, he didn't say it in those words, but I had the feeling that his life was impacted, too, and I was just the trigger point, you know. I said something … that set him off. We never talked about it again, but … it may be that he had a son in the war. It may be that the school board hadn't given him a raise when he thought he should get it. I don't know.

SI: Could you tell me how you found out about Rutgers? What were your aspirations for going to college? Where did those aspirations come from?

FD: I explained earlier that I had had pneumonia twice. We lived in an essentially rural area. I was not a well person, and so, all the adults in my life were saying, "Well, you've got to get a job that's outdoors. So, you need to be a farmer," [laughter] and so, I was going to be a farmer. That was it. After all, that's what you did. … Here we are, the working class family, … boys became men, men got jobs and, many times, they followed their parents' example and, of course, all the relatives that I knew wanted me to be a farmer. So, I was going to be one and where did you go to become a farmer? Why, you went to Rutgers. [laughter] … So, as a senior, I went to Camden High School, on a Saturday morning, and took, I think it was an examination for a State Scholarship, which I was awarded. It was two hundred dollars and it paid for my tuition and fees and that's how it all started.

SI: Why did you want to go to college, as opposed to going straight into agriculture? Was that your idea or your parents' idea?

FD: No, no. Well, … nobody in my family had gone to college, not for generations, and not on my mother's side, either. So, I had good marks. I could go to college, if we could raise the money. I got the scholarship. I was going to be a "scientific farmer," was the term, scientific farmer. So, I guess that's where it all … started.

SI: Where did you live when you first came to Rutgers?

FD: I still lived at home, Somerdale, lived in Somerdale from the … time I was born until I got married, with the usual breaks for the Army and for going to college. So, I was seventeen years and three months when I got out of high school and, that fall, I went to Rutgers.

SI: When you went to college, where did you live on the campus?

FD: Oh, I lived in what was called the Michelin House. It was a big residence, [at] about 160 College Boulevard, which had been the home of members of the Michelin Tire family, when they had an enterprise in the United States, and there were maybe twelve or fourteen of us, because there were lots of rooms and lots of bathrooms. I remember, my room was a private room, but it was the laundry room. So, right here, next to my bed, were two big washtubs, those set-in-place washtubs of a kind of stone, and my little desk was right there, forward of them, and it was okay. It worked. I knew where I was going and we had milk delivered. Several of us had milk delivered by Paulus Dairy. I don't know if they still exist.

SI: I am not sure, but there is a Paulus Avenue just off campus.

FD: Yes, okay, by Paulus Dairy, and so, I ate breakfast at home. My mother … gave me cereal, and so, I had cereal and it was not that big of a walk from there down to the main campus. It was just a block or two behind the gym. Is that the gym still, around in the 140s?

SI: Yes. It is not the main gym; it is the little gym.

FD: The little gym. [laughter]

SI: This was an on-campus house, not a boarding house.

FD: No, no. Yes, it was on campus. … As I remember, the fee to be there was, let's say, fifty dollars a semester, yes.

SI: Did you have a job during college?

FD: From time-to-time, I collected coats at dances, but I didn't have anything permanent, anything regular, my freshman year, no.

SI: Did you take any jobs, for example, in exchange for your meals?

FD: No, no. That would have been a good idea. I just didn't know that it existed, if it existed,

and didn't have any connections to find out about it.

SI: What do you remember about your first month or so at Rutgers?

FD: It was tough. I was homesick. I'd never been away from home, never. The fellows with whom … I was involved on a daily basis, in class and whatever, were neat guys. … If I was different from them in my approach to life, because of the isolation of my little community and my little life and they were mostly from northern New Jersey and had driver's licenses and stuff and I didn't, … well, I was just barely old enough to have a New Jersey driver's license, they didn't make fun of me. I don't recall, ever, that. It was teasing, but it wasn't the kind of destructive, debasing [ridicule].

SI: Was there any kind of freshman hazing?

FD: No, oh, no, no. The war had taken all that away. There … were vestiges of it, but nothing, nothing consequential.

SI: When you arrived in 1942, the war was already beginning to impact the campus.

FD: Oh, yes.

SI: How did that play out in your experience?

FD: Well, of course, we all had to take ROTC and, either at that time or almost immediately after I got there, the Army came in and took all the ROTC officers and garrisoned them in the Quad and put them in some sort of program, … the identity of which I knew, but I've forgotten. It was like a V something program. …

SI: ASTP?

FD: Yes, ASTP, right, see, you've been there; you've talked [with] more [people]. [laughter] That's right, and so, we would see them and, of course, … when we had ROTC drill, … now, instead of having these men in their class C ROTC uniforms, they were wearing olive drab, Army olive drab, and eating in some sort of supervised environment. That, I well remember … and I don't recall much else. …

SI: The student body was shrinking.

FD: Oh, my, yes. … I was part of the largest freshman class [up] to that point and, as I remember, it was five hundred. Now, of course, I graduated in the largest class to that point, which was twenty-five hundred, but there were maybe two thousand people, total, give or take, and so, yes, sure, it was shrinking. People disappeared, from time-to-time, and we knew where they went and we understood and we knew that our turn was going to come. In March of 1943, I turned eighteen and I went to the post office, it was, let's say, a Monday, and registered and, on Wednesday, I got my draft notice to report for an examination. … Now, in '43, we needed people. We needed bodies, and so, that sort of urgency was apparent.

SI: Before you turned eighteen, as I have heard from men who were on the campus at that time, sometimes, if you walked through town, would people say, "Hey, why aren't you in uniform?"

FD: I don't ever remember that. No, nobody ever asked me that.

SI: Was it something that you looked forward to? How did you feel about going in the service?

FD: It was a matter of, "I know it's going to happen," and so, it was just a matter of, "When was it going to be my turn and how much of my college could I get done before?" Well, at the end of my freshman year, I was summarily informed that I couldn't come back, because the alternatives were either working in agriculture or in some defense industry, … a very selective defense industry, or going in the Army. … For a little while, I worked on a dairy farm. It was very close by, and then, the draft board eliminated that type of deferment and I was called up.

SI: Do you remember the name of the dairy farm?

FD: Yes, it was Laurel Mills Farm in Laurel Springs, New Jersey.

SI: Going back to Rutgers, academically, was it difficult to go from high school to college?

FD: No, no, it wasn't. … I was good in English, so, I didn't have to take the so-called bonehead English course. I got into whatever the theme writing course [was], creative writing or whatever was the upscale version of English. We had algebra, college algebra, and I had had algebra. We had chemistry and … we had botany and biology and these were all things that I liked and did well in. If I had any problem at all, it was that I had to work harder at math.

SI: Were most of these classes on the Rutgers College Campus or the Ag Campus?

FD: Yes, no, … the basic Ag courses, such as they were, were usually lecture courses and they were taught on … the main [College Avenue or Rutgers College] campus, again, as I recall.

SI: In terms of social life at Rutgers, did you attend dances or football games, anything like that?

FD: No, I didn't have any [time], because I came home on weekends and I was busy with whatever you ought to be busy [with] during the week. So, no, I had none.

SI: Did you have any interaction with the administration at Rutgers, the deans?

FD: There was a man named Crosby.

SI: Howard Crosby?

FD: Howard Crosby, who was just newly anointed, as it were, into some capacity. … He wasn't a dean, but he was sort of a front man for the administration and he was there after the war. He must have been there for quite a while.

SI: He retired in the 1980s.

FD: … So, I knew him and … the administration generally made itself known, that is, they knew you by name, those with whom … you came in contact with in any way. I do remember one experience that I had. We didn't have any money and I took the pay-as-you-go sort of approach to paying for my dormitory fee and I recall, let's say, … one payment was due on the 15th and I had classes on the Ag Campus that afternoon. I remember that, so, we must have had some courses over there, and so, I had had a pretty full day. So, I went to the Ag Campus and I paid my fee the next morning and I was charged a four-dollar late fee and I always wondered how … they justified it, because, A, I did come in and, B, I came to college to go to college, so, did they want me to miss class to pay and avoid a four-dollar fee? The man who was the comptroller at the time, whose name escapes me, but he was a rather gray-flannel-suit type, grey-haired and so on, … he dismissed my request for mercy summarily … and I could not afford four dollars. Something else had to go. Within weeks of that time, the University took over Michelin House and gave us back our money, but not my four dollars. [laughter] They took it over for the Army program or something. Oh, incidentally, yes, I did join Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity at the time, as a pledge, and I was initiated in January or February and I was there when the house closed in May and we carted all our stuff to a farm barn up in Bound Brook or some place. We had a couple of social events, what did they call them? open houses. We didn't have house parties, [which] were a more regulated thing, open houses were not, and so, we had two or three of those, but our house ran out of fuel oil, and so, it was a cold place. You couldn't have an open house then, so, that sort of curtailed everything.

SI: What got you interested in pledging?

FD: A Mr. Ralph Adams Brown, who had been my history teacher at Haddon Heights High School, made contact with the fraternity and said, "You ought to look this guy up." Otherwise, I never would have pledged to anybody, I don't suppose.

SI: Did they have the same pledge initiation as they did before the war?

FD: I don't know, I don't know, the so-called "Hell Week?" No, we didn't have anything much like that. There were one or two days when you were mandated to do more menial tasks around the fraternity house, but I don't remember being severely put upon.

SI: I have heard that they wanted to get more people in to keep the houses going.

FD: No, if that was true, they didn't ever tell me. Maybe I got in by default. [laughter]

SI: I was not saying that. [laughter]

FD: You never know. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: When you turned eighteen, you got the notice to come in for your physical.

FD: I got the notice that I was 1-A, … and then, I was called up for a physical, I don't know, six weeks later or something like that, yes.

SI: Can you talk about your initial interaction with the Army, your induction?

FD: … Now, my little discourse that I'll send you will cover that in some detail, but, on a given day, … we lived in Somerdale and I got a Public Service bus to a nearby transfer point and went to Haddonfield, New Jersey, where the Army had a bus. It was a Public Service bus, but it took us to Fort Dix and the induction was ritual. There's the white line; if you step over it, you're in the Army and there were maybe forty people or sixty that day. It was not a big crowd and we all walked over the line [laughter] and I remember that. See, I'd been getting up at four o'clock in the morning, or three o'clock in the morning, to milk cows. This was a snap. I was young, I was physically fit, I had what amounted to a curious attitude and a respect for authority, so, it was okay. It worked.

SI: It was not a shock.

FD: No, not at all. … The experience at Fort Dix was very good. People talk about Army food, hey, Army food was okay with me. I'd been in a family of seven people; we ate basic food. I appreciated my mother's cooking. The Army fed me well. There were fruits and vegetables and meat and dessert and it was okay and the chores, when you're a second son and [there are] five children in the house, you learn early to wash dishes and to scrub floors, clean toilets, run the vacuum cleaner. So, I didn't feel in any way imposed upon, and so, the first ten days or two weeks in Fort Dix were just fine, and then, they shipped us out.

SI: What did you do in that period? Was there any testing?

FD: Yes, getting our uniforms and a little orientation and I really don't remember much of it, but it was not anything that involved a lot of typical Army [routine]. We weren't in training. We were just there until there could be some disposition of us to another place.

SI: Where did you go?

FD: Camp Blanding, Florida. Oh, I remember, when they were … sorting us out, trying to decide what we should do, of course, there were the tests and one of the tests was [for] radio operators and they start with, "Dit-dit-dot," and so on, and, by the time they got into it, in about fifteen seconds, I knew I was not a radio operator. [laughter] … When I got to the point of turning my paper in or whatever I was supposed to do, there was a very nice NCO who asked me what I liked to do and I said that I thought I had some science that might be useful and he said, "Where did you go to college?" and I said that I went to Rutgers and he said, "I see you're in agriculture. We do not have a sergeant of the Victory garden," [laughter] and the next thing I knew, I was on a train for Camp Blanding, which was an infantry replacement training center.

SI: What was that trip like? It does not sound like you had traveled much outside of New Jersey

before.

FD: No, no. … It was at least three days on a Pullman coach and, again, this I describe in some detail [in my memoir], but, between coaches, that is, there were coaches at the back and coaches at the front, and in-between were baggage cars and some type of mess facility. So, when you went for meals, you walked through and you got fed and came back. You ate, and then, you brought your tray back, but it was all very orderly … and we had a porter, a Pullman porter, who took care of our beds and provided whatever basic services we thought we needed, which we didn't need much of. So, it was not a big deal. It was okay. I was, again, still curious and wide-eyed and very aware that the Army had a plan and it was executing it. When we got to Camp Blanding and I realized it was an infantry replacement center, I thought, you know, "You're into this pretty far now, Fred, [laughter] and this may not be where you want to go, where you want to be, but this is where you are."

SI: You recognized that the infantry was probably not the safest place in the Army.

FD: It was not going to be very safe, no, and, when I read the Churchill books, I realized how unsafe it really was, because he talked about a given battle that lasted three days and he was reciting the fact that, "Our casualties were only ten thousand." Now, this, of course, was dead and wounded, not all dead, but war … doesn't have a whole lot of economies about [it], and so, I was an infantry replacement. It was to take the places of those who fell and that's what we proceeded to train for.

SI: What do you remember about your training?

FD: [laughter] Well, again, I was in good shape physically and getting up in the morning didn't bother me and doing chores didn't bother me and I could run with the best of them, although, frankly, my bouts with pneumonia had affected my ability to avoid puffing hard when I ran a lot and that's still a minor problem, but I took bayonet training and I got a pretty good score on the rifle range. … I remember, the last thing we did before our so-called graduation was to march twenty miles overnight, that (was a lug?), but we were carrying only light packs. So, it was not as though we were carrying those sixty-pound things, but it was not an experience that I would say would stain somebody for life. It was a rite of passage. … So, I think it was September when we finished and they gave us what was called a delay en route. We didn't get leave, we got a delay en route, and … we went by train from Camp Blanding to Philadelphia and we got, I think, six cents a mile travel expense, which I thought was very nice of them. [It was], I don't know, eight hundred miles, so, I got forty-seven or forty-eight dollars. … I had ten days at home, and then, I went to Fort Meade. … It was raining when I left home and I'll always remember getting on the train at, I think Broad Street Station was still there in Philadelphia, and the cars were … pre-World War I vintage. They were old, old cars, passenger cars, but old and everybody was sort of damp and we carried our duffle bags in and everybody who smoked lit up a cigarette and you could not see the windows. … The smoke pervaded the coach that much, and then, they turned on the little fans that exited the air through the roof and, in the matter of a minute or two, the air was essentially clear as it can be when somebody's smoking, but … I will always, always remember that, the whole scene disappeared as people smoked, lit up.

SI: You did not smoke at the time.

FD: No. There were two reasons. One, I had this health problem and, second, I didn't have any money. [laughter] So, it was a bit of a blessing. …

SI: Do you remember anything about the men in your training unit at Camp Blanding? Were they from all over?

FD: Yes, oh, yes.

SI: What was it like to meet these different people?

FD: Oh, it was fun. We had an attorney who was about thirty-five and he left to become somebody in the judge advocate general's outfit, … but his name was (Burke W. Drummond?). He was from Buffalo, New York, a fine man and very patient. You know, as I look back on it, … those who were in their thirties or their late twenties had to be very tolerant of people who were eighteen and nineteen, because, if these older people had any credentials, academic credentials, we were still using as our resource the daily newspaper and the *Reader's Digest,* and so, we were not deep people. We were trying, but we were not deep people, and so, Burke Drummond was one guy, and then, there was a man named, I think his name was (J. L. Clark?). He was a postmaster from Massachusetts and an older person, a very fine guy, a very fine person, and, again, very tolerant and very aware that there wasn't much he could do except be a soldier, [laughter] and so, he was taking life as it came and that made it easier for us. … There was a young man from Georgia, whose last name was Childs, and he was, … we called them "crackers" and [he was] eighteen years old, so, that made him younger than me, a little bit. … Then, quite late in the basic training cycle, somebody who had been in the service earlier, had mustered out and, now, was back, might have been in his forties, came in and, of course, he had all the old Army stories to tell, some of which were a bit randy. [laughter] So, he added color. We had a corporal who had spent some time in the Aleutians, who was in our training cadre, and Corporal (Dawes?) did not have quite a full deck, [laughter] because, … when he called cadence, we all were out of step by the time he was done, because he would go, "One, two," you know, "hup two, three, four, hup, two, three, four," no cadence at all [laughter] and all of his fellow cadre people, knowing that he was there because he could not be anywhere else, would just sort of smile and encourage us to keep on going or they would call "route step," which is just break step and follow one another. So, I remember him. We had a young corporal from Jersey City whose name was (del Duca?), Leonard del Duca. He was eighteen, sharp, little guy, sharp, mildly egotistical, but you should be when you're a corporal at eighteen.

SI: Of these people, was there anybody who made you say, "I've never met anybody like this before?"

FD: No, no. … There was another fellow from Buffalo whose name was Ciapa, C-I-A-P-A, an Italian. There was a young man from Fulton, New York, named (Dennis?). I met him after the war and I was disappointed in him, because what he did was go back to Fulton, New York, which was a little factory town, and just fit in, but he had some brains, I thought, and he never made use of them and, I don't know, if he's alive, he's an old man. [laughter]

SI: Since you had a year of college under your belt, did that make you one of the more highly educated people in the unit?

FD: Yes, but, remember, my education was not liberal arts, so, there were lots of things I really wasn't very well informed about.

SI: Was there anybody in the unit who could not read?

FD: No, no, they all could read, yes.

SI: Do you remember if you were indoctrinated to, say, despise the Japanese during that period?

FD: Yes. There was the whole series of … movies that Frank Capra produced called *Why We Fight*. There were five of those and we got them every Saturday morning for five weeks and they were indoctrination films and we were taught how to approach a Japanese, if we encountered him on the battlefield, to aggravate him or make him feel debased, so that we would have the advantage in any physical combat we might … have to experience. The Germans, the Frank Capra films showed Americans and Germans encountering one another and, of course, we were always winning. … It was a matter of principle with us and, happily, there were things we could endorse, because, hey, we knew we were right. … You weren't there, but you have to know we were right in seeking to bring down Hitler. You have to know that, but, in terms of making it the kind of thing that … will always color your life or your attitude, I don't recall that. Maybe it is just me, but I don't recall them wanting us to hate the German for who he was, but only for what he was doing. … The Japanese, they were not like us, and so, … they were seen as a little bit less, the word human might be [used], but I don't remember coming away with an attitude that would color my [perspective]. In fact, I did business with the Japanese, when I was in the business community, and spent some time in Tokyo, several times, and I was always impressed with their ability to accommodate their standing as a defeated nation and rise from it.

SI: You mentioned that you went to Camp Meade.

FD: … Yes, to Fort Meade, … and we were there several days, but, again, it was all orientation and, "You know where you're going, guys. You're going; don't draw any conclusions, you're going."

SI: Was it a Point of Embarkation.

FD: No, we went from Fort Meade to Hampton Roads, Virginia, Port of Embarkation, and that was another day on the train, or overnight, something like that, and … we were at HRPE, Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation, for a few days, during which time we spent most of our time in busy work, the greater portion of which was making sure that our duffle bags had everything in them that should be there. Thus, we would lay our shelter half out on the floor and the non-com in charge would say, "Shaving stick? Now, put it in the right-hand corner. Tent pegs? Put them in the left-hand corner," and so, you would create a pattern, and then, the pattern, the way it was structured, allowed you to fold everything together and put it in your bag.

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

FD: … There were also lectures about what you couldn't do. You couldn't make a phone call, you couldn't write a letter and, I remember, I had about sixty-five dollars with me and … we were instructed to send our money back home, because we weren't going to have any use of it, and so, I went to the post office and sent fifty dollars in an envelope back to my folks and it drove my parents crazy, because they didn't know what I meant and I couldn't tell them. So, again, … for what we were, where we were, we were treated comfortably and according to the system and, in a few days, we got on trucks and went to the war and walked up the gangplank and we were on a Liberty ship, … going in a convoy over to Italy.

SI: What were you feeling at that time, going overseas? Were you still at that point an infantry replacement?

FD: Oh, my, yes. … When I walked up the gangplank, I said, … I will [always] remember this, "Well, this is it. There's no turning back, is there? There just is no turning back." … We were twenty-eight days on the water. Those Liberty ships, they don't go very fast [laughter] and there were convoys all over. Now, this was October of 1944, so, the submarine threat was essentially gone and there were, I'm only guessing, maybe eighty or ninety ships in the convoy and there were little destroyer escorts that were weaving in and out and, occasionally, I suppose, testing for foreign sounds, but we had … nothing unusual. Those ships were short, as ships go, and so, when the waves were four or five feet, the ship bounced a little, but I don't recall anybody being seriously ill or even having distress. There were times when you could look down and see the propeller out of the water, but it was just what it was. Nobody seemed to feel that it was a weather phenomenon that was going to do us some damage. There was at least one antiaircraft crew onboard and it seems to me they were Navy people and we didn't have much to do with them. We were in the first hold, below decks, and [there] were maybe three hundred of us and we had a little eating area and, again, we got Army food. [laughter] I remember, the last night before we docked, … they were cleaning out everything and I got a couple of hard-boiled eggs and I went up on deck and it was after dark and I began to peel them and, of course, the ship was moving and I dropped the eggshells overboard and they came back and I heard one of the men in the antiaircraft crew say, "Is that snow?" [laughter] but, again, it was one of those things you take as a wide-eyed youngster who, yes, you can see you're coming to the war, but, up until now, it's okay and it was. …

SI: How did you stay occupied?

FD: There were books. They had a locker about half the size of that little kitchen area that had books and miniaturized magazines, like *Time* and *Newsweek* and other sports magazines, and so, I read books and they would occasionally try to get us up on deck and do some calisthenics, but there wasn't enough room and the ship rolled a little bit, so, you couldn't very well do push-ups and maintain balance and it was all just to keep you from going crazy and, if you weren't disposed to go crazy, you could do all right by yourself.

SI: Before we discuss Italy, at any time during your training, did anybody have to leave because

they did not fit in?

FD: No, I don't remember that, no.

SI: Where did you land in Italy?

FD: Well, we landed in Bari, which is on the east coast. … We landed in Bari on the day before Election Day 1944 and … I remember that as a very simple set of facilities that were just expedient sort of entities. We were bunked overnight in, as I remember, wooden buildings. I remember, everything seemed dark. The weather was not particularly favorable. We were just there, maybe, overnight, maybe one more night, and then, we were put on freight cars and sent across to Caserta, Italy, which is outside of Naples. … Caserta, Italy, we were [there] overnight. Maybe we were in Bari while the election was going on, because I seem to remember, we got the report of Dewey's defeat at the hands of Roosevelt … before we left Bari. … When we arrived in Caserta, it was, as I recall, early in the morning and the railroad station was dark, except for that occasional lone bulb hanging on a wire over here or over there, and there were little crowds of what I would have to call, they seemed like refugees, waiting for a train, and the trains weren't necessarily running by timetable, so, they were to themselves. Now, maybe they were just waiting to go somewhere to see relatives, because that part of Italy was … securely in Allied possession by then, but they seemed like people who were in distressed circumstances. We were put on trucks and taken out to the Volturno Valley, to an encampment, a tent encampment, that was set up in what had been an olive grove and we stayed there for, I don't know, let's say the better part of two weeks. … Well, we were there until just before Thanksgiving; I say we, the entire body of people with whom I came over. I did not go with them beyond that encampment. I had flat-feet and I felt they had been worsened by the Army packs and the marching and so on, and so, I went on sick call and asked for arch supports. … The doctor looked at me, rather severely, and there … was a sort of council of medicos there and one of the doctors said, "Why did you wait until now?" … I explained that I had asked in the United States and I hadn't gotten the arch supports and I said, "If I don't get them now, it doesn't matter, but I think I will be a better soldier if I have something like this," and so, when the body of us gathered along the edge of the road to get into the trucks to go farther north to where the fighting units were, the sergeant who was in charge of the orderly room came out and came over to me. … I had never seen him before and he said, "De Sieghardt, turn in your rifle," and I stayed at the camp for another ten days. Everybody else went on. I was on KP, [laughter] officers' KP, which meant I got a little better food and I enjoyed, I say enjoyed, I experienced Thanksgiving at the officers' mess, after the officers ate, and then, I was sent to a replacement camp outside of Naples, in a city called Bagnoli, B-A-G-N-O-L-I. The camp was established around a racetrack, a flat track for horse racing, and you can appreciate that the land around it was disposed to or was useful … for assembling people, because, hey, if you've got horses or you've got animals that you're going to race, you've got space, and so, I was there. It was the place where they sent people who had been injured in battle and who were recovering and waiting for transfer back to [their] units or to other assignments. So, I was there about two months and, during that time, I got to work in the personnel department, handling records of people and bodies of folks who were going forward or to other assignments, living in a tent, eating in some type of outdoor facility. I learned to know what Spam was and I don't mean the vagrant messages you get these days. [Editor's Note: Mr. De Sieghardt is referring to "spam" as a slang term for junk e-mail.] … I believe it was called

luncheon meat, something or another, in a can. … At the end of two months, I was sent back to Caserta, where the Allied Force Headquarters, which was the theater headquarters, was located, in a palace, a rather well turned out what must have been a residential facility of the Royal Family at one time. … With twenty or thirty other people, I was paraded around and, here and there, people picked folks, so [that], by the end of the day, there was just me and one other person and we hadn't been picked and I could understand why. See, I had no typing. I was an ag student, so, "What are you going to do with me?" … So, finally, somebody decided I should be in military government, as a clerk, and so, that's where I ended up. … It seems to me, we went back to camp and got our duffle bags and were sent to Caserta and I spent the rest of my time in military government in that location and that was a very good experience for me. It was a very good experience for me.

SI: Did you have to learn anything about being a cook?

FD: A cook? No, … again, I mean, going back to the KP and so on, when you're the second son, there are things you learn [laughter] and, of course, … at home, we had sold chickens and I had killed and dressed thousands of chickens, and so, I knew how to do that. … When Thanksgiving came along, I said, "The turkeys, I'll take care of those," and they all came in frozen. So, they had to be pin-feathered and the innards had to be taken out and they had to be washed, and so on, and prepared. There was a little Chinese cook who was sort of my overseer and he was just mildly impatient with me, because I know he could have done it faster, but, I tell you, he could not have done it any better, [laughter] because that was something I knew and knew well. … Of course, when you're a kid, you peeled potatoes and scraped carrots and took the trash out; that was no problem. … One of the things I … will always remember about that little Chinese cook was that he was so mild and, yet, so everywhere and so efficient. … When he sat down to eat, he had his little bowl of rice and he would put butter on it, and then, he would go off in the corner and eat and there was this air of contentment that was on his face when he was doing that. Now, I never knew his name, [laughter] but I worked for him for several days.

SI: How long were you in this position?

FD: In KP?

SI: Cooking in the military government.

FD: Oh, well, now, wait a minute, I didn't do any cooking in the military government.

SI: Oh, sorry, I thought you said you were a cook in the military government.

FD: No, no, no. I was a clerk in military government

SI: Oh, I am sorry. I misheard.

FD: … I was trying to retrace our conversation, so [that] I could pick up the word or words that might have misled you. [laughter] I was a clerk. No, I was a cook, if you can call it that, back at the encampment in the Volturno Valley, but the military government was the policy-making

body for the theater and they dealt as much in political … as military things. … As I recall, the function of military government was to assure that political units that were overtaken and captured by us were restored to reasonable functionality in the most efficient manner. So, troops would go in, they would make sure that … there were indeed police, if there were police, and that the police were not people who are likely to be fifth columnists and that they, therefore, could patrol the streets, that the electricity would be on, that the sewers, if there were sewers, that they would function and the water supply, so that you'd have, what do you call it? pacification. … Then, on the more global level, if there were resources that the Allies wanted to tap that were available for use in a variety of locations, … we made sure the resources were available, to make … those accessible. For example, when the Allies took over Sardinia, there are a lot of coal mines in Sardinia and they are in deep mines. So, the mining pits needed support for the roofs. So, we sent thousands of pit props to Sardinia. I can't tell you how many cables I processed that were for pit props for Sardinia, and then, there were grain ships to Castella Mara, which is outside Rome, and these were for relief supplies, a lot for the Italians, but there was more going on politically than I ever realized and I realized there were political things going on, because, as the troops penetrated farther and farther, the ultimate remaking of the map of Europe was foreseen. So, where were the Russians going to stop, or be stopped in a gentle way, but forcefully, by Allied presence? … and so, I could see that sort of thing coming through and, much of the time, it was secret or top secret. … When the war essentially ended, there was the potential for a battle between the Allies, that is the Western Allies, as opposed to the Russians, and the Yugoslavs over Trieste, because they wanted Trieste and the Allies had determined that that would put too much of a Communist influence … within and accessible to Italy. These things, they were subtle, but not subtle. … Well, you're in the History Department, you know these things, … and so, that was rather an exciting time. We had some very, very well credentialed NCOs who handled the paperwork flow. They had been in the Civil Service in Washington, DC, before they'd been drafted into the Army, and so, they were good at what they did. … Since it was an Allied cause, there was a British component. Now, the Brits were not as in charge as we were. … The G-5 was headed by Charles Spofford, who was a New York banker before he went into the Army, … but those immediately in his council were a handful of Brits of pretty high rank and they would call themselves into meetings and discuss strategies. … So, again, I had a job which gave me access to stuff that I would never have known, had I not been in the Army and not been there. I saw how … the forces, political forces, were finally going to establish themselves to create a balance that had to happen. … Unhappily, in my opinion, we were much more, as a nation and as a body of people involved, much more naïve than we should have been about what the Russians intended to do, because a great deal of the Cold War could have been at least blunted if we had occupied more territory sooner and with a sense of authority. We were much more comfortable with moving back from conquered lands, to a point, and letting the Russians come in, because that was sort of what was tentatively agreed upon at … Yalta or someplace, and so, Eisenhower was taking his orders and his orders were, "Be cooperative," and that's my over simplistic interpretation, but the Brits, on the other hand, were much more aware of what [was going on]. They'd lived there [laughter] for several hundred years, so, they knew what was possible and a great deal of what they forecasted ultimately happened and it took fifty years for us to get over it.

SI: The propaganda at the time presented the Americans, the Russians and the British as friendly allies. Was it shocking to see that it was not quite like that when you got there?

FD: Well, the British and the Americans were essentially strong and of common purpose. It was okay. … Now and again, … how do I want to put this? They, the Brits, didn't always see us as people who knew what we were doing. That goes all the way down to the sergeants and so on, … but they were okay, they were okay and they were used to taking [the lead]. They had been in the war for a long time by the time I got there. Some of the people in the unit … had been in India and in Malaysia, the Malay Peninsula, and really suffered, and so, they were hardened and maybe even cynical about it, … but it became clearer, as time passed, that the Russians had revenge [on their minds] and they also had political motives that went well beyond simply reestablishing themselves. … I sensed this during the orientation period, clear back in Camp Blanding, Florida, when we saw a Frank Capra film on why we fight and it had to do with the Soviet Union and they wouldn't let us in [to film]. What we had were films that were absolutely so restricted in their coverage that we saw the same shot four or five or six or seven times in an hour, because we couldn't get any other shots. … They were so secretive and so distrustful. Now, I didn't personally ever come in contact with any Russians.

SI: You mentioned that this British attitude of treating Americans as less than competent extended to the NCO level. Did you experience any of that?

FD: Well, only to the extent that they would allude to the fact that they had been through this a lot and we were newcomers to it, so, … if we were trying to lead, we should be very aware of the fact that they had experience that might be useful to us. So, it was not one of these, "Us-versus-them," or, "We may be on the same team, but I know who you are," kind of relations. Maybe I was just plain naïve and didn't understand it, but I got along okay. … We had to work from seven-thirty in the morning until five, and then, we had a little time off for supper, and then, we came back and worked until seven-thirty or eight, all the while the war was going on, and so, after that, what were we going to do? So, a handful of us would sit around and, sometimes, it would be them with us and we just talked about our homes and families. It was very clear, … many of them came from rather more basic environments, with less opportunity than I thought I was going to have.

SI: I have heard from people who had interaction with the British that, while in the United States Army, there was a distinction between officers and enlisted men, there was a clearer class distinction in the British Army. Did you see that?

FD: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, and I've seen that since. … It was officers and other ranks and the other ranks were all seen as lesser and a lot of the officers, of course, were officers because they had come from titled families and they had been to certain schools and it was an obligation that they had, to be in the service, and not just an obligation, it might have been, but it was also a privilege. It was what you did, and so, yes, there was a distinct … class and my wife and I ran into this as we were traveling in England as tourists. The attitude of the people at various levels was very apparent, that the class system rankled, rankled, and it was, at least to some extent, perceived by them as being in place yet. When the war ended, very shortly afterward, it was necessary to call an election in England and Churchill did and, of course, he was displaced from office, but, while the … pre-election discussions were going on, between parties and candidates and so on, I had an opportunity to talk to some of these lower, other ranks and their attitude was,

"We deserve more because we are alive," and I don't mean through the war. "It's just because we exist." … It wasn't, "We deserve more because we earned it; we deserve more because we can achieve." It was, "Because," and I was just shocked by that, because I perceived that, … in the US, if you worked hard, had your head on straight, conceivably, you could achieve something, but they were saying, "It ain't possible, unless we have a Labor government, which will abandon some of the traditional restrictions on us," and I very much recall that attitude being expressed by a guide who told us that there was a time when, if you were not of a certain class, you didn't go to certain schools and, therefore, your education ended at a certain time and where you went was to some sort of less than opportunistic placement. …

SI: How did you get along with your officers and NCOs?

FD: … It was more nearly … what we might call an office or a business environment.

SI: It sounds like a lot of them were direct commissions.

FD: Yes, yes.

SI: Were any of them regular military?

FD: The only people who were regular military were the occasional senior officers from the US Army, who came in as their contemporaries rotated out, after the war, but all the people I knew were there because there was a war.

SI: What was an average day like in your work?

FD: Well, we got up at six o'clock in the morning and got breakfast and got on a bus or a truck, usually a truck, and went a mile or so; well, initially, we walked across the street. We were housed in the King's stables, which were rather drafty and primitive, but they were what they were and it was war, and so, we walked across the street and went into the office and I was known as a cable clerk. So, I handled all the cables that came through, just separating copies for distribution and making sure one copy got to the senior NCO, so [that] he could classify it for filing. We used the Dewey Decimal System, … the Dewey Decimal System as it had been adapted by the War Department. So, every cable had a file, and so, Sergeant (Wood?) got the cable and he would classify it, and then, return it and we would file it. … We didn't get phone calls. There weren't many phones and we didn't get phone calls. We occasionally took the cables to officers or officers would come to us and say, "Would you get me the following?" and he or she would be asking for files which contained cables and this would go on and, some days, we'd get two or three hundred cables, and then, … a handful of us would break for lunch, and then, at supper, a handful of us would break for supper, and then, we'd come back. … As I say, we'd finish up at seven-thirty or eight in the evening, and then, sit around and talk or go back to where we belonged or go to the Red Cross Club. I have to be excused. Would you shut the machine off?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We just discussed your average day. Is there anything else?

FD: No. After we finished work, many times, we'd write our letters to home and I got to be a very adequate typist, using these two fingers and this one, and so, we would do that … and a lot of people did just that. It was a good thing to do.

SI: You mentioned there was a Red Cross Club. What kind of amenities were there for you?

FD: Oh, there was a lounge and a snack bar and, upstairs, there were game rooms, where they had Ping-Pong and so on, and it was very well managed. I was very grateful for it. It was a good place. They related, to some extent, with the people in the town. I remember, once, playing Santa Claus for a bunch of orphans and learning enough Italian that I could fool the nuns who brought them, because I said what I said to the kids so fluently that … the nuns started to talk to me in Italian. [laughter] … That's an experience that deserves a little mention. I was told by one of the Italian clerks or whatever, employees of the Red Cross Club, a way of saying, "Hello, children," and, when I sought to perfect my use of the term, I was standing in the hall upstairs, saying this out loud, and a woman, also an Italian, also an employee, put her head around and she said, "Sergeant, what are you saying?" … I said, "I think I'm saying, 'Merry Christmas, children,'" and she said, "No, you aren't. You're saying, 'Merry Christmas, you little devils,'" [laughter] and so, somebody crossed me up. So, she taught me how to say, "'Merry Christmas, boys and girls,'" and it all went very well. Apparently, the children were in the orphanage because there had been some bombing in the Naples area and we were twenty-five or so miles from Naples and their homes had been hit and their parents killed. So, that's how it is. … What did I read yesterday? "War is unhealthy for children and other living things."

SI: What other kinds of interaction did you have with the Italian civilians?

FD: A lot of them wanted to buy clothes on the black market and cigarettes and so on. Late in my time there, there was an illegal restaurant, because we were not allowed in the civilian restaurants, but somebody put a restaurant together for American service people in his living room and it used products that I suppose they intended [for the people], that is, … the policy was in place because what they were using really should have gone to the people and I remember taking two hostesses from the Red Cross Club and a friend, … a buddy from the organization, to this place and getting steak and eggs and spaghetti and a big salad for eight dollars a piece, which I thought was pretty good, [laughter] and the MPs knew it. The MPs knew all about it. It was not a matter of working under some sort of blanket of secrecy. The Italians wanted it and I'm not rationalizing. It probably shouldn't have been done, but it was a very good evening out. As time passed and the war ended, then, all of this restriction ended and we were able to go into restaurants and enjoy some very good food.

SI: Were you ever able to visit Naples or Rome or any other places?

FD: Well, I could go into Naples any week that I had a day off, and so, I did that, but I spent a week in Rome. The Army requisitioned a hotel, and so, we went up and we lived in an Army environment, ate Army food in the dining room, but we're able to see the Vatican. … They arranged tours, and so, yes, I did that. I also went to Amalfi, the Amalfi Drive, which is south of

Naples, very scenic, very historic. In fact, Jackie Kennedy spent some time at Amalfi. I wasn't there [then]; [laughter] it was a long time after. … I also went on several day trips up to Monte Cassino and I don't recall other places. Really, those were the kind of things I always liked to do with family and [my] family wasn't there, so, I stayed fairly close to home.

SI: During the war, were there ever any air raids or anything like that?

FD: Only once and it wasn't for real. … It went like this; it was before I was assigned to military government. I was still at this racetrack replacement or reassignment center. The racetrack … had been accommodated, … a movie screen had been put up on the infield, and so, if you were sitting in the stands, you could look out at the movie. … There may be a couple of thousand people, fifteen hundred people, in the camp, and so, after supper, and this was December, we'd go up and … see a movie and it's dark. … We'd be wearing our overcoats and, on one day, at the far end; well, I was new when this happened, very new, when it happened. What I just described to you was the normal order of events, … but this was the first time I'd been to the movie. I got there just before the movie was to go on. I mounted the steps and went up and I was the last person on the far right side of the crowd, the very last person, so, I was sort of alone. Way at the far end, the other end, somebody flipped a cigarette over the grandstand, down on to the walkway that was below it, and, as he did so, he said, "Tracer," and everybody bolted from the grandstand. I turned and said, "What is the…" and those are my exact words and there was nobody there. They were all down on the ground, some of them falling all over one another, two and three and four deep, and then, the movie blacked out and a voice came on and said, "Now, let's get ourselves organized." Medics came out to work with several injuries, a couple of broken arms. It was alleged that somebody broke his back, but that's as close as I ever came to being in anything like a combat situation.

SI: Do you remember if there were any celebrations for V-E Day?

FD: I remember V-E Day and I remember when people started throwing papers out of windows in the palace and into courtyards and the poor Italian staff who cleaned up were just distraught, but there was that kind of celebration. There was no hugging and kissing of your neighbor or going out in the street and finding somebody to share your great joy. We were all happy, … but, then, it was also [that] the Japanese were still to be dealt with. So, there was that air of uncertainty that hung over [us].

SI: Did you think that you might have to go to the Pacific?

FD: I did, sure. I thought so, because, you see, I had never gotten my arch supports and, for all practical purposes, my tenure as a limited service person was really now in jeopardy, and so, that seemed to be a possibility, but, of course, the atom bomb changed all that very quickly.

SI: How quickly? Getting into the point system and all, how soon did you get back to the States?

FD: A year.

SI: You were there for a year after V-E Day.

FD: During which time, for one span of fifty-eight days, I had Spam every day. [laughter] I had it boiled, fried, broiled, with pineapple, with cherry sauce, I mean, name it … and I had it.

SI: Have you had Spam since?

FD: Not that I remember [laughter] and that's unfair to Spam, but, fifty-eight days, people say, "Well, that isn't so bad." You eat it for fifty-eight days, then, come and talk to me. [laughter]

SI: Can you tell me about the process of getting out of the Army? Did you ever consider staying in the Army?

FD: No, because I wanted to get back to school. After all, I had to get a job and whatever. So, on a given day, I was told that my points … entitled me to move out, during the month of June.

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

FD: … Because I could look out my office window and see the station … from which I'd come to come in to this part of the country. Now, I was going out of it. So, I … went out, got on the train. The train went up to Milan; no, it went up to Leghorn, Livorno, and we were there about four days and we got on a troopship and the troopship had thirty-four hundred people. Many of them were combat veterans; most of them were combat [veterans]. Some of them … carried the burden of that with them and some of them were happy and lighthearted and it didn't seem to trouble them, but I remember well, several of them were very hardened and non-communicative. The trip was seven or eight days and, when we pulled into New York Harbor, everybody ran over to the side of the ship to see … the Statue of Liberty and the captain or a voice came over the loudspeaker system, said, "Don't do that. She is tender. You don't want to tip the ship over," [laughter] but three thousand people looking out one side might do some damage, yes.

SI: How soon after leaving the Army did you get back to Rutgers?

FD: I went to Rutgers to reenroll while I was at Camp Kilmer and I was at Camp Kilmer about three days. So, [I] got there; the next day was kind of an open day. I got on a bus and went to New Brunswick and signed up to come back and I got back in the fall, September, and the rest is history. [laughter]

SI: In general, how was Rutgers different? How were you different as a student?

FD: Well, if you look at the records, you will find that that class, [the Class of 1949], and the classes that involved veterans, had a higher grade point average than those that preceded or followed. C was still the average and we were all Bs. Our class had a B average and I graduated in '49. I don't know, there were, say, seventy ag students that graduated. … So, we were generally more serious. I remember, who are some names? … There are names that, if you show me a list, I'll pick them out, who were eighteen and nineteen and freshmen and they wanted to reestablish some kind of hazing and we thought it was the dumbest thing in the world,

because, hey, we had other things to do. We just didn't want to be bothered, and so, a number of the students were married. Of course, there was a whole colony of married students living in trailers or in somewhat substandard housing.

SI: Did you know your wife at the time?

FD: No, no. We met when we were both teaching in a high school in Burlington. If we had met when we were in high school, we probably never would have married, because she went to a rival high school and we hated them. [laughter] So, it was fate.

SI: In general, do you have any observations about how Rutgers itself had changed? You talked about the veterans-versus-the high school graduates.

FD: … Again, so much of that is colored by the fact that I wanted to get in and get out. When people … assume that your college years were happy, mine weren't happy. … We were poor people and my father, by then, wasn't well enough to work, and so, I didn't have time for any of this. I didn't have a girlfriend. I didn't have time for one. I didn't have the money for a girlfriend. … I don't know that I'd do anything different under the circumstances, if I had to do it again, just had to get busy and get to be productive.

SI: Could you briefly summarize what you did for a living?

FD: Yes, I taught vocational agriculture and biology for two years. I worked for Sealtest Foods in various capacities, in the manufacturing of cottage cheese and bi-products and, also, in milk sanitation. I worked for the Federal Government in the Public Health Service, for a short time, mainly concentrating on regulations, recommended regulations involving milk and milk sanitation, and then, for almost twenty-seven years, [I was] in the packaging industry, … providing packages, packaging, for milk and food and ice cream. … Are you acquainted with Breyer's Ice Creams? [Do] you know their half-gallon package? I designed that.

SI: Really?

FD: Yes, and I have a patent on it. Now, I don't get any money for it, because, when you work for a company, you get a place to work and they get the credit for what you do and that's all right with me, always has been. … In the twenty-six plus years, I did a variety of things, which included quality control and industrial sanitation and marketing and offshore marketing and product development and I retired as the executive vice-president in 1990 and the company was sold in 1998 to a Finnish company, and so, the name exists only on products, not as a company letterhead.

SI: You invented the half-gallon box.

FD: I designed that one, yes.

SI: You designed it. Is that unique to Breyer's?

FD: No, it is unique; that one is unique to Breyer's. … Unless somebody conceded exclusivity to them after I retired, it wasn't intended to be that and you have to appreciate that so-called square ice cream packages [have] some limitations on flexibility. One … has to do with the way they're hard frozen. They are put on a conveyor belt and passed through … a serpentine course with super cooled plates on top and bottom and, in an hour, they come out the back end and they're hard frozen. So, to replace that with any other system would be very expensive, so, the package had to be sized accordingly. The main difficulty they'd always had was that when you … opened the lid, and then, reseal it, you can't reseal it, because you've torn something and, in a frost-free refrigerator, the cold air gradually sucks the moisture out of the ice cream. So, either you use it all or it becomes a less attractive product; putting a lid on it eliminates that risk. So, with the rounded corners, it scoops easier; with the lid, it stays viable as a product longer. It took two years to get everybody onboard that, but it was good. … So, that's my fifteen minutes of fame. Is that what you're entitled to? [laughter]

SI: As a little kid, when I went over to my grandparents, I always had the Breyer's Ice Cream.

FD: Oh, sure.

SI: Is there anything you would like to say about the rest of your life, anything that we skipped over?

FD: [laughter] It's kept on going. … Yes, there are things, but we'd have to go back and sort and sift and so on to make anything of it. …

SI: Is there anything else you want to put on the record?

FD: You can look at the thing I will send you and piece together anything that makes sense, that ought fit or that ought to be annotated to what we've just done now.

SI: That will be side-by-side in the Archives.

FD: Okay, that's fine, that's fine.

SD: For now, I will conclude the interview. Thank you, very much.

FD: That's fine, and thank you for giving me [the opportunity to participate in your project].

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

Reviewed by Jessica Catera 2/13/05
Reviewed by Laurie D'Amico 2/21/05
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/2/05
Reviewed by Frederick De Sieghardt 10/9/05