RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ENGEBRETSON

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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Nicholas Molnar: This begins an interview with Mr. David Engebretson on May 5, 2005, in Colts Neck, New Jersey, with Nicholas Molnar. Thank you for consenting to this interview, Mr. Engebretson.

David Engebretson: Oh, you're welcome.

NM: When and where were you born?

DE: Well, I was born in Brooklyn [in] 1932. … My father was an immigrant. He came from Tonsberg, Norway. He was born [in] 1896 and my mother was raised on a farm in New York State and her parents came from Norway, up near the Artic Circle, in a place called Bodo. … Her mother came from a place in southern Norway called Farsund. … Apparently, when Norwegians immigrated to the United States, … usually, if they came in, they would tell their relatives and the relatives would then settle in one area and that particular area happened to be Bay Ridge, in Brooklyn. … A lot of Norwegians, Finns and Swedes settled there and my father had gone out to Minnesota, where his brother settled land. They were given land for nothing if they stayed there for five years and farmed the ground. So, he stayed there for about a year with his brother and, apparently, there was a misunderstanding [as to] whether … he was going to be given land, part of the land, or not, but, in any event, my father left his farm, went into Minneapolis, Minnesota, and became a railway conductor. … The First World War had started, so, then, he joined the Army, volunteered for the Army, and was stationed down at Fort Jefferson in Missouri. … At that time, they had a serious flu epidemic and he was quarantined to the base for until the end of the war, but, during that time, he became a naturalized citizen. … When I sent for the Form 180, [the form to request military records] [I] found his medals that he got, an American Defense Medal. My mother had relatives in Brooklyn, as did my father, and, apparently, somehow, they met and my father's sister lived in Bay Ridge, and so did my grandparents' relatives. … They were married in 1920, and then, he became a steelworker, as most of the people from Norway, Sweden and Denmark and Finland did. He later became a rigger in the Brooklyn Navy Yard and he earned the first class rigger's license, which is very hard to get. During the Second World War, we lived on a farm. He used to commute, back and forth, from Brooklyn Navy Yard to where we lived in Beacon Hill. … We had moved out there because, apparently, we lived in a flat in Brooklyn and I developed scarlet fever and double mastoids and almost died. My brother developed asthma, so, they sent him to his grandmother's place in New York State. … My parents saw an ad in the paper for caretakers for a farm up in New Jersey, in Beacon Hill, and they then became the caretakers on that farm. They had about five hundred apple trees there, but they had to take care of the road and the lawns and maintain the buildings.

NM: Your family moved for health reasons.

DE: Yes, yes. We had an apartment that, apparently, was like in a basement apartment, that it wasn't very healthy. My father worked in [the] Brooklyn Navy Yard and commuted back and forth to the farm. … Then, the war started and he asked to be released from the Brooklyn Navy Yard, so [that] he could operate the farm and they gave him a release. … It was a very formal thing, and then, he became [employed in] farming full-time in Beacon Hill. Now, you have to picture that the farm itself was two miles from the nearest tar road. My mother had friends in

Brooklyn that they used to visit, back and forth. … They'd have coffee, they'd have, you know, different delicacies that they'd eat and just enjoy everybody's company. When she moved out there, it was desolate. The nearest neighbor was a half-a-mile away. The nearest road, tar road, was two miles. So, life was pretty isolated for her. It was a big change. My father, you know, he worked in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. … He traveled back and forth, so, he saw a lot of people. When I went to school, I started school in what's called "beginner's class" and that was in Morganville School in Marlboro Township and I remember all the teachers I had, simply because it was a small school. 1947, if you can picture this, … half of Marlboro Township, twenty-two square miles, went to our school; our graduating class in 1947 was thirteen children. All of the people were farmers and there was no growth at all. They had another school in Marlboro Township, the Marlboro School, elementary school, and that took in the other twenty-two square miles and their graduating class was about the same. … We walked to school. It was two miles. There were no tar roads, so, in the wintertime, it was walking through the snow, in the spring and the fall, it was walking through mud, because the roads were almost impassable. … The interesting thing was that, as I walked to school, I would see these men planting trees and I found out that they belonged to the CCC workers and that's Civil [Civilian] Conservation Corps. … They were planting trees and they would also dig ditches along the road, because, if you didn't dig any ditches along the road and lead the water from the roadway, it would be a quagmire. So, they would dig trenches back to lead the water off the road and that was their job. Our school was next to a blacksmith's shop and, during the war, Lavoie Laboratories, in Morganville, started a factory where they would produce radio gear for the military and they grew, or they produced quite a bit. They built a lot of buildings and the interesting thing was, in Marlboro Township, at that time, you never tore down a building. … There was a house and there was a lady called Mrs. Maloney and she used to sell hot soup, crackers and candy in the front of her house. … About fifteen years ago, as I was looking at the old Morganville School, of course, it was built on to and it's now a private school, I looked and I said, "I wonder where Mrs. Maloney's house was. What happened to that?" … Lo and behold, they had built a building around it and, if you looked, you can see the gable ends of Mrs. Maloney's house. It's still there, across the street. We had no gym, we had no auditorium, we had no cafeteria. We ate lunches in the classroom. We brown-bagged it from home and the teachers would be there in the classroom while we ate. … If we had any kind of assembly program, we went across the street to the firehouse and I often wondered what happened to the firehouse. Well, one day, as I was driving down the road, I said, "Gee, now, this is a newer firehouse. I wonder where the old firehouse was," and I walked … on the side and, lo and behold, here's the old firehouse. They added on to it. They moved it and added on to it. … That's what they did to the old buildings. There was a huge complex of greenhouses, Becker's Greenhouses, in Morganville and they hired many people. They used to grow vegetables inside and my brother used to work, in the wintertime, there and, during the summer, we worked on the farm, with the apple orchards, but they have since torn down the greenhouses. … I asked one of the relatives, … his name is Jack Becker, "Jack, what happened to all those greenhouses?" … He said, "Once the railroads started to run on a regular basis from California and Florida up to here," he said, "they couldn't compete with the cost." You know, they had greens and spinach and all sorts of beets and carrots being grown in California and Texas and he said, "There's no need to grow them up here under glass," but they used to come in with huge locomotives and they burned soft coal and they had an enormous smokestack and that boiler used to take care of all the greenhouses. … There were two Germans who came from Europe who built those and, at that time, that was … really the

epitome of growing under glass. Then, we had factories there. We had [the] Brocker Chemical Company and what happened there [was], one of our neighbors was working [there] and there was an explosion in the plant and he was severely burned with acid. … He was horribly disfigured. I don't know what ever happened to him, if he passed away or what, but, during the war, we used to have the apples, there were five-hundred apple trees, and my brother used to pick the apples and, sometimes, we'd have migrants picking the apples, too. … My job, and my mother's job, was to pack the apples and we had what's called the ring packer. … The ring packer is a base and what you would do is put the apples around here, and there was always, … like, a bull's-eye, and it would be a nice package when you got through there. You had a liner [that] you put on this part, slipped it over, build up the same apples, not small ones, not bruised ones. They all had to be good apples, build it up to the top, and there was a liner inside and you took the liner, the paper liner, lifted this up, and the paper liner would be standing right here, with all the apples inside. Then, you take the basket, push it down and flip it over and, now, you had a beautiful package of apples. … Then, you take a rag and shine it and put a cover on it. It was a padded cover, and then, a wooden cover on top of that. … You'd send it to the; now, we didn't have a truck, see, so, you'd send it to the commission merchants in New York, who'd sell it for you on a commission basis. You would call a place called Warnock, over in Keyport, or there was another trucker in Old Bridge Township, and they would come in. You'd call them and you'd say, "We have fifty bushels of apples that are going into this commission merchant," and he'd say to you, "I'll be up there at two o'clock in the afternoon." Well, he came up two o'clock in the afternoon and, if you weren't ready, whatever you had ready had to go in his truck and he was very put out about that, because, when he came in, if you told him fifty and you only had ten, that meant that he had a lot of empty space and he'd have to drive into New York with empty space; let that happen a couple of times and he wouldn't bother to truck your apples. So, you had to be accurate with what you were doing. [The] commission merchant would charge you, usually, ten to twenty percent of what he sold your apples for. … Lord help you if you packed apples and they were small on the bottom and big on the top, because, then, you got a reputation of sending in junk and that's what you got as a price for your apples, a junk price. So, you always [were] … honest.

NM: You had to be.

DE: Yes, but, then, you also … said to yourself, "Now, I wonder about him." So, you may split twenty-five [bushels] to here and twenty-five to here, of the same [crop of] apples, and then, you would compare the price you got from Commission Merchant A and Commission Merchant B. If B was lower, he wouldn't get any more from you, and then, he would call. He'd say, "Hey, how come you didn't ship me any apples?" and you'd say to him, "I shipped to Commission Merchant A and they got fifty cents more a basket." "Oh, well, try me again." [laughter] So, you'd try him again and, sure enough, his price would be up there. During the war, also, there was a big demand for furs. The Government was encouraging everybody to trap animals and the reason why they trapped is because the aviators, at that time, in the older type airplanes, it wasn't heated. … You wore these big, furry parkas and fur-lined gloves, because you were up, you know, maybe thirty, forty thousand feet up, where it's cold, and the same way with the troops on the ground. You know, they were cold. They'd have fur-lined mittens. Well, where do you get the fur? You trap, and there were big ads in the journals, you know, *The Rural New Yorker*, the other farm journals, "The Government encourages you to trap." Now, who bought the skins and

what did you trap? Well, my brother trapped anywhere from skunks, raccoons, muskrats, squirrels, sometimes rabbits; they had nice, soft fur. What did you use? leg-hold traps. They're illegal now. A leg-hold trap is one that springs open, looks like a mousetrap, and goes like this. … The animals, you know, if they were caught, … you set the traps in the morning, you went by there in the afternoon, they'd be suffering all day long, you know, in the leg-hold traps, but that was life, you know. When you got there, then, you either clubbed them or shot them to death. Sometimes, they would chew their leg right off. … Who bought the skins? Well, Montgomery Ward, Sears, Roebuck [& Co.] and they would have buyers, local buyers, one being a fellow named David Shermal, up in Englishtown. He would come around in his truck or his car and buy the furs. … The advantage of selling to David Shermal was that he had the money right there. He probably didn't pay as well as Sears or Montgomery Ward, but you didn't have to wait for your money. Now, when you sold to Sears or Montgomery Ward, you took the skins, sent them in by mail, parcel post. They would receive the skins, … the furs, and then, send you a check for the amount of money. … What you had to do first is, when you caught the animal and while they were fairly warm yet, you would skin it, and then, put it on a skinning board and turn it inside out, and then, flesh all of the fat … and meat off the skin, and then, let it dry. Usually, it was either a spring-loaded affair or it was cut from a piece of wood and it resembled the shape of the animal. … Then, you would take those, when they were cured, dried, they'd pull it out, put them in a box, and then, send them to Sears or Montgomery Ward, but the Government was encouraging you to trap. Now, it's the Government [that] says, "Don't trap," [laughter] mainly because you don't need them anymore. You've got synthetics, you know.

NM: How long did you live in the apartment in Brooklyn?

DE: Let's see, I was born in '32, probably two years. …

NM: You moved to New Jersey when you were very young.

DE: Yes.

NM: You said that, at first, your parents were the caretakers for the farm.

DE: Yes.

NM: Then, they eventually became farmers. How did that work? Did they ever own part of the farm?

DE: No. The person who owned the farm was Thomas Valenti and his family. He was a button manufacturer in Astoria, Long Island, and they used to make buttons out of horns. … They would send up the shavings of the horns and we would spread it in the orchards and that would make a good fertilizer, but he owned all of the property. Now, today, almost all of the relatives have houses on that property that once we were farmers on, but they owned all the property. …

NM: In exchange for taking care of the property, you were allowed to live there. How were the profits from the apples split?

DE: Oh, that was all ours.

NM: Basically, you took care of the farm and he owned the property. Is that how it worked?

DE: Yes, and then, we had to mow the lawns and, if there were any trees that needed to be trimmed or anything, [we did that]. … We lived in a small house. Now, you talk about small, now, this house, if we took the kitchen and the family room and the living room, that would be the size of our entire house. My brother had a room that was about eight-by-ten and I had one about eight-by-ten. We had an upstairs and that was in the attic, unfinished, and there were times where we had a hired man live with us and he would be paid a dollar a day and room and board. … Then, he'd be working six days a week. … We had a kitchen. We had a black kitchen stove. Now, my job was to take black, it was like a salve, and polish the stove. It was a black polish and I had to polish the stove, I had to dump the ashes. … For a while, we were burning coal and I had to take the coal and go out … [with] a little shaker, it was a quarter-inch square mesh, … it was built in a box and the box had the mesh on the bottom, and I'd shake that out and put it in the driveway, especially in the wintertime, so [that] it wouldn't be slippery. … We also put it on the garden, too, for potash, and then, the remaining coals, we would put back in the stove and re-burn those, but, most of the time, we used wood. … Then, the other job that I had was making butter. We had a cow. My mother milked the cow, put a big pan in the refrigerator and, when the cream had risen to the top, I'd skim it off, and then, there was a glass butter churn and my job was to churn the … cream until it turned to butter, and then, take a paddle and push out all of the milk, put more water in, until, finally, it was pure, and then, salt it a bit, and then, that was my job.

NM: Since you grew up on a farm, you were always involved in the daily activities on the farm.

DE: Yes. Now, my father worked seven days a week and he would come home [late]. He had lights on his tractor and he would disk and plow. … I would go to church on Sundays and the nearest church was two miles away and I would have to walk through the woods in order to get to it and that was the Methodist church, but, really, we were Lutherans. Now, the closest Lutheran church was about seven miles away and I wasn't about to walk seven miles. … It was a nice church, nice, friendly people, but most of the people there were Methodists. Why? because that's where the church was. If you were Roman Catholic, you had to go four miles, if you were Baptist, you probably went six miles, if you're a Lutheran, seven miles; so, [there were] a lot of Methodists. … Then, later, you know, when we moved to Matawan, … then, we went to the Lutheran church.

NM: When did you move to Matawan?

DE: 1949. …

NM: What did you do for fun on the farm? Were there any other kids your age in your neighborhood?

DE: Not really. We had one fellow, Johnny Osterheld; he had a horse and my father bought me a horse, but we never really associated too much with each other. We went to school. I had a

good friend, Jimmy Himmelwright, but he lived over in Robertsville. … He used to visit my house, and then, I'd, in the afternoon, ride him on the handlebars, or on the bars on the bike, back to Morganville, where he'd then hitchhike home. … Nobody worried about anybody hitchhiking, because you all knew everybody else, you know. You saw a car coming, "Oh, yes, that's Jim McCormick in his car." They'd wave and he'd stop and say, "You want a ride?" "Sure." That's the way it was. … When you went hunting, you know, you could get your license for hunting [at], I think it was thirteen or fourteen years old. You walked down the highway. You had your shotgun broken open and you'd walk down the road. Nobody would ever say a word to you, and then, you know, when you got into the fields, then, you'd load your shotgun. They either had a shotgun or a rifle. They used to sell the shells in Matawan, you could buy any amount of shells you wanted, and guns. You know, there was no problem buying a gun, no license, no nothing. … When we were in school, the girls, you know, usually just ran around like crazy, you know, and screamed and carried on. … They had one what's called a giant whirl, and other people call it a maypole, where it has a rotating top and chains coming down. … Then, there's a little triangle and you hook your arm in and you'd run around like crazy, and then, what would happen is, your feet would lift off the ground. It was fun, until, one day, the pole broke at the base, fell on one of the girls and killed her right on the spot. … I never knew who it was. That was 1944, but I said, "I have to find out more about her and write a little story about her, get her name." So, that's what I did. I looked in the newspaper and found out who it was, and then, wrote a little story about her, but the ambulance came from Matawan and we didn't have a local police force. The State Police were located in Keyport and they came in, but they sent us in the classrooms, you know, and our teacher covered up the body with her coat, but she was dead, you know. She was bleeding from the ears and mouth, but, otherwise, you know, they let us out for phys. ed. and, well, they called it recess. … The teachers, I'm sure, crossed their fingers and hoped that we didn't kill each other, because they never went out, you know. There might be one out on the playground to watch all of us. We played baseball and, you know, we had knives. We used to play mumblety-peg and nobody ever got upset if you brought a knife to school. No, as a matter-of-fact, we had what's called high tops and there was a little place for a pocketknife, with a little snap.

NM: In your shoes?

DE: Yes, in a boot. The boots would come up mid-calf and there was a little place for a knife right there and nobody even thought about that. You know, you didn't bring a gun to school; knives are okay.

NM: Do you remember when Pearl Harbor was attacked? What were you doing? How did you feel?

DE: … I think we were home, but I remember hearing the broadcast from Franklin Delano Roosevelt that night and, you know, everybody just looked at each other, "My God, what's going on here?" and then, it was full mobilization. My brother and all of his friends joined the service. He couldn't get into the Navy, so, he went into the Merchant Marines, and then, you never saw such a mobilization of labor. People … from town would come out and help us with the crops. You know, we'd pay them, but, many times, they wouldn't even accept money and people that my father knew from [the] Brooklyn Navy Yard would come out and help and stay over. …

Usually, if they stayed over, I went up in the attic to sleep and they got my bed. Now, of course, my brother was not around. He was in the service. He was a radio operator on a tanker, but everybody from town would come in. … We would put planks down on a table and underneath the trees, and then, spread just a sheet over it, and then, we would have sweet corn, tomatoes and there might be twelve or fourteen people eating at the table. …

NM: You grew all of those crops on your farm.

DE: Yes. …

NM: How big was the farm?

DE: Let me see, that probably was about eighty-five acres, I guess, and we had our own garden, and then, we had one place up [in an area] that was a hilly, it used to be a pasture, [where] we planted corn there. … We had cantaloupes, too, [which] we planted. My father was one of the first ones around to grow soy beans. He was really an interesting person. He'd always tryout something new and he read about this method to keep [corn safe]; you know, worms tend to get into the ears of corn and, you know, nobody likes to have worms at the end of the tip, you know. They call it earworm. So, he read this article and you take mineral oil, in little squirt cans, and you squirt it in just the tip of the silk and he had the hired men doing that and it was beautiful corn. … He was one of the first around to use soy beans for a cover crop. Everybody else used to use wheat. …

NM: A turnover crop?

DE: Yes. That's green manure. … You let it grow, and then, you turn it under and it will give you a lot of nutrients for your soil and soy beans were especially good, because they had nodules of nitrogen. There's a high nitrogen content. So, his crops were pretty good and we used that for the orchards, too. Now, we had a horse, a workhorse; … what a piece of work he was. He had a black mustache and he was coal black and we had to get him shod, because, … in your fields, you have rocks. You know, if they step on a rock in the frog of their foot, they can get hurt and they can break open their hooves. So, we had this one guy who's supposed to be a pretty good farrier, called him up and my father said, you know, "Now, this horse is a little balky, you know. He gets a little nasty. He'll crowd you." He said, "I haven't met a horse that I can't take care of." So, he gets in there and shoves this horse. He gives it an elbow in his stomach. The next thing, I hear all sorts of kicking and cursing and yelling and the horse had crowded him right against the stall, almost crushed him, and he got out of there. He says, "That horse is nuts." He said, "I wouldn't touch that horse for love nor money." So, we contacted another guy, Bill Smith. He was a good farrier. He came up and my father said, "This one's a little tough." He said, "So-and-so tried to shoe him and," he said, "he practically killed him." He says, "Well, let me take a look." So, he goes in and he gives him an apple, some sugar, pets him, you know, and patted him and talked with him. … He said, "Oh, let's see your foot." So, he takes the rear hoof, you know, lifts it up and the horse started to get a little itchy. "Oh, it's okay." Then, he's talking with him and stroking him. Pretty soon, he had them all; you know, he went on to every hoof and looked at it. He says, "Okay, I think I can shoe him." So, little by little, you know, it took him about an hour-and-a-half, but he talked with him and patted him and he gave him an apple

and, you know, fed him, and then, finally, got him all shod, but the other guy came in like gangbusters, you know. [laughter] Just one poke in the ribs and that horse flew off the handle, and then, it was my job, also, to cull chickens. Now, here we had a flock of chickens, there were usually around fifty, and you're feeding them chickenfeed and you're saying to yourself, you know, "We're only getting about forty eggs when we should be getting fifty," or forty-nine or forty-eight, because we used to weigh the eggs and we used to candle them. Well, which of those pretty hens aren't doing their job of laying an egg? Well, you go to each chicken and you grab it by the neck, by the feet first, … turn it over, so that their bottom is facing toward you and their head is down here, and you take three fingers, and they have a pelvic bone, the same as women do, and that's how children are born, you know, through the pelvic bone, put your finger [there]. … If it's three fingers, that means that the hen is laying, because it's wide enough for the eggs to go through, and four fingers, hey, that's some kind of a good chicken. You give her a little kiss and say, "Hey, good job." Well, two fingers, "Sorry, honey, you're going to be on the table within a day," because that's the one that's not laying. So, you cull your chickens to make sure that they're layers and the others, you cut their head off, and then, you can either can it or have it for a roaster. … Chickens are sort of funny. Now, they'll start laying at about thirteen weeks, but some of them are so cute, because the first ones that lay have little eggs like that. They look like a robin's egg. They call them peewees. So, this is, you know, just a beginner, and then, after that is another egg, when they get older. It's called a pullet egg, and then, after that, you've got your small, medium, large, extra-large and that's how you grade them. You put it on a scale. Now, peewees, you know, you don't do anything except just break open the shell and use it for cooking, and the same with pullets. There's not a big market for those and it was my job to also kill the chicken. Once I culled her, kill it. Now, you know, people slit the throat and, you know, I couldn't go that route. So, you have a chopping block and you hit the neck. You hold it by the feet and [hold] the wings together, hit it on the chopping block, just to stun it, and then, hit it with a hatchet, cut its head off, and then, you got a bushel. You throw it in a bushel and it flops all around, you know, then, bleeds. … Then, the next step is, take all the feathers off and you've got to put that in boiling hot water, and then, strip all the feathers off. Now, you're done with that, then, you've got to cut open the skin and remove all of the intestines. So, that was my job, too.

NM: Can you tell me more about how people would help your family out on the farm?

DE: Yes, a lot of people that we knew from town. … In those days, you knew almost everybody in town, in Matawan and Matawan was a fairly good-sized town. You knew most of the people in Marlboro Township, but the town is where, you know, people commuted to New York. We had some friends, one being a truck driver; he would come up on the weekends to help us pack tomatoes, pick corn. That was during the war. … You know, there were no complaints, you know. People just helped you, because they knew that the war [was] going on. … We had a farmer named Mr. and Mrs. Ronson and they had a bull and we had a cow and, of course, at that time of year, usually in the spring, you'd bring the cow down to get bred to the bull. … You'd be walking the cow down the back road and, you know, she'd be just plodding along and drooling. You knew she was in uterus, you know. She knew that you knew she was going to be bred and the closer you got to the farm where the bull was, suddenly, her eyes lit up. [laughter] It was like a smile on her face, you know, "Wow, oh, that's the bull I saw last year," and the pace would pick up and, pretty soon, you'd get to the gate where the bull was and she

was almost at a fast run. … Mr. Ronson would; you know, we'd have a halter on her. We'd take the halter off her, and then, she'd go into the pasture with the bull, and then, he would service her and, usually, it took about, well, I'd stay there about three hours. Then, I'd take her home and, of course, then, she plodded all the way home, you know. She was satisfied. She had a little tryst with a bull, and then, about eight months later, she'd have a calf, and then, we used that for food. We'd kill the calf in the fall. We had two hogs and there was a colored guy who used to do all of the butchering. His name was Baltimore, a huge black man. … I always remembered him, because … he made the hair stand straight up on my head. He'd come in. He had a truck. He had a broiler and the broiler was really a great, big cauldron, and then, he had concrete blocks set up and he would build a fire under it. He'd get water from, you know, our house there and fill it up to, I guess, about a foot from the top and just let it boil. … We'd talk, you know, and he'd look around and gossip, you know. The farmer always has something to talk about. He'd look at the apples and he'd say, "Hey, got a good crop of apples here," you know, and then, he looked at me. Now, my brother was in the service and he said, "Going to help me?" So, I said, "All right," and he got out a big box. It was bigger than this box right here. It was like … [what you] kept flatware in. … He opened it up and it was all in white linen and here are all these knives and a hatchet, and a cleaver, rather. … He'd look at me and say, "What do you think, boy?" I'd say, "Good, nice linen." "Do you think these knives are sharp enough?" I said, "Well, I don't know," and he had what's called a steel. It was a long piece of metal and you'd run your knife back and forth on it, like they do in the butcher shops, and he said to me, "Think it's sharp enough?" I said, "I don't know," and he'd take a piece of paper and cut it. [laughter] The hair on my head would stand straight up and he'd say, "Now, boy, you've got to help me," and I said, "What do you want me to do?" I was maybe … twelve years old, yes. Now, I fed the hogs, see. That was my job, too. I got all the lousy jobs, [laughter] but I'd go down and feed the hogs every day. … They all knew me, you know, and I'd scratch her head and, you know, give them a pat on the cheek and they'd all come, "Oink, oink, oink," you know, and talk to me. … He said, "Now, you've got to hold their ears back." He says, "You get on their back and put their head between your legs, grab a hold of their ears and pull back." Well, the pigs, you know, trusted me. So, you know, what's he going to do? So, I pulled back on the ears and he'd take this knife, … he called it a sticking knife, and a quick slit and he cut the jugular vein. Then, he had a stick and he'd goad it up toward the scalder, walk them up, until, finally, they just fell down. They bled, and then, he had a big block and tackle. We hauled it up and they put a piece of wood between the Achilles tendons to hold them up, and then, brought them over the scalding tank, dropped them down and let them sit there for a minute, bring them back up again, and then, he'd take a, it looks like a curry comb that they use for horses, and get all the hair off. After that, then, they would bring him over to the garage, where we had open girders, and they would take this …

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

DE: Okay, then, after he got the intestines out, now, … he could take what's called lungs, he took the lights, they called them the lights, he'd take the intestines. … For the most part, they would take the intestines and clean them and wash them and turn them inside out and clean it again, and then, [soak them in] salt and water, and then, they would fry that. They called them chitlins. … Then, he would take the tripe, which is the stomach. We kept the heart and the liver and, usually, he'd take the head and there was some good meat on that, you know, the jowls and

so forth. Then, he took his cleaver, and I used to love to watch him do that. He'd take the cleaver, come back like this, and where the animal is hung up, it was like a V, … where the backbone was, and he'd go right down the backbone and he never missed. He'd just keep on chopping down until, now, you had two parts to the pig, and then, he'd … lay it down, cut it up into loins, cut it up into hams. Now, the hams we brought down to Mr. Ronson's house. They had a smokehouse and he used to smoke all of the hams for us. … You often wondered, now, you know, "Are we taking advantage of him?" because he smoked our hams, he serviced our cow, you know, with his bull, but, then, things happened. In the summer, they cut hay, usually early summer, June, and they had a bailer come in. The bailer required two people. The bailer was owned by this one guy named Milton Rose and he had his helper, but it was a wire bailer and, on the other side, this guy would push the wires through, in order to attach the bales, and they had to have somebody there to tie the wires the together. That was me. … They would be bailing for maybe four or five days straight and the first time I was on the bailer, you know, I was a farm kid, Mr. Ronson said, "You want a pair of gloves?" [I said], "Naw, I don't need any gloves." Well, at the … end of the day, my hands were raw and bleeding. The next day, I wore gloves. … Mr. Ronson wanted to pay me and my father said to me, "You aren't even going to think about taking money, because he smokes our hams, you know. He has our cows serviced. Don't even think about it." You could eat lunch there. You know, they had lunch. Usually, they had guys who would load up the hay, you know, on the hay wagons, but you never accepted money. … That was the trade, you know, that you used, nice family. … They always had, during the hay season, five or six men there working, you know, tractor driver, a couple of guys loading, but that's what neighbors did. You know, you never took money. It was all, you know, a trade or a barter and you were neighbors.

NM: During the war, did you see any changes in town? Were there scrap metal drives or bond drives?

DE: … In school, they used to sell savings stamps, and then, there were little books, that once you filled up the book, then, you could get a bond and they sold those at the school, the stamps. The filled books you would take down to the bank, and then, you'd get a bond. We used to sell seeds for Victory gardens. … They would come into the schools, and then, the teacher would collect the money and we'd go out and sell them. They did have metal drives and we used to bring in gum wrappers with foil and we also brought in any, either tin cans, not too much in aluminum in those days, except pots and pans, you know. If we had a dented pot or pan, we'd bring that in. … They always had scrap drives, and then, they would have, we called him the junkman. They would come around with a truck and a scale and, a lot of times, you had things that you didn't need anymore on the farm and you'd have this guy come around and buy them from you. … He had a scale, and then, of course, you know, he bought, you know, at one price and sold at a higher price. If you didn't do that, you didn't make any money, you know, but that's what we did during the war. … It was pretty much a common thing that they would have, you know, the cans for the war effort. Now, some of the tin cans, we used to stamp our heel on it, and then, walked to school with those. … Of course, our mothers were going bananas over that. "You'll ruin your shoes." Shoes, too, were rationed. Meat was rationed. Sugar was rationed. We were lucky that we had chickens. Lard was rationed. Gasoline was rationed. Tires were rationed.

NM: Did your family own a truck?

DE: We had a car and that was all we had. We had, I think it was an A stamp that we had. You know, it's A, B and C stamps. C stamps, I think you couldn't get much [gas]. It was depending on the mileage and the type of work you did. … Then, for the farm, tractors, you had, you know, a separate allotment for that and they had something called the black market, where some of these people would buy stamps, and then, resell them, you know. The older people or lowlifes would have extra stamps, and then, they would sell them to the guys and they would make money on them, but, when you went in, [if] you bought meat, you'd have to have your stamps and money to buy [meat]. Now, if you've got a second, I'll show you, I don't know if you've ever seen it, … this is sort of interesting here. I collect all sorts of stuff. This is not mine, but this is a record that was sent to this person and it was from this soldier and Pepsi-Cola would make the records, and then, they [the soldier] would send it home, the recording.

NM: Pepsi made records in World War II.

DE: Yes, and here's something else. This is 1942. This is *Food For Victory,* yes, and this is a member of [the] 4-H organization and they raised vegetables, but this was the original record right here. … Then, they had V-mail. V-mail was very thin paper and part of it was the envelope. … There's so many letters going back and forth, they had to reduce the size and weight of the letters. So, the V-mail would also be censored. … If the censor figured that you shouldn't be saying this, he would darken it out, so [that] nobody could read it. Then, … like, the Department of Agriculture, they would have different canning [programs] and tell you how to can and store vegetables. … This one right here is … the savings stamps. That's an old brochure about the savings stamps. I collect all this stuff, you know, and I can't see throwing much of anything out, because it always has a purpose. … Some people say, "Oh, that's a bunch of junk," but, if you really wanted to see what was printed at that period of time, you know, here it is. Yes, here, see this "War Savings Certificate," and then, different rates and all. … Have you ever seen ration books?

NM: No, I have not.

DE: … This is just a few of them that I've got. A lot of the stories, I start [them] and, someday, I'll finish up. These are ration books here. Now, those aren't ours, because, … at the end of the war, you just threw all that stuff out, but, then, I said, "I'd like to be able to show kids, you know, what it's like." So, these are ration books and each member of the family got one. … If you needed some stuff and you didn't have it, either you got it from somebody else who didn't want it or else you went without. You'd never buy rationed goods without ration stamps. … This one is sort of interesting, because this one was a little book that was given to the troops during the Second World War to read, a little story that they gave away, sort of like what the USO does now. … *Reader's Digest,* they sent me a letter and said, "Would you like to donate ten dollars and we'll send a *Reader's Digest* to one of the troops." So, I said, "Sure." Here's another one here; that's during the Second World War. They have all different types of stamps. Here's the stamps right here. Now, this is gas stamps. These are the As, and then, the other ones, right here, now, this is … coffee and others, I'm not sure about, you know, what they are. … They had tokens, too. These are the rations, supplemental mileage. So, I've got quite a little

collection. Some day, when, you know, I'm ready to kick the bucket, I'll probably give it to the local historical society. Here's your stamps; … that's what they look like. Then, you would buy them at school and you'd take the full book and bring it down to the bank, and then, you'd get a bond. So, that's how they also helped with the war effort. Then, here's checks; these are ration checks. The store owner would bring [the checks] in and he would give [them] to the bank. This is the Office of Price Administration. …

NM: What did your parents think about Roosevelt and his programs?

DE: Well, you know, it's funny, they probably were very, very staunch Republicans, but there was a war going on. Your country, right or wrong, who's ever leading it, you're behind him one-hundred percent, not like today. There are opportunists. You know, if Bush wants to do something, the Democrats are right away opposed. They badmouth him. You never, never did that in the Second World War. That would be treason, that would be treason. It's a disgrace what we have, today, going on. There's no support for the President, there's no support for our troops. … I'm a conservative from the word go. I think the Democrats are unholy. They're unholy. I hope you're not a Democrat.

NM: You saw the Civilian Conservation Corps in action around your town. Did you see any other programs at work in your town?

DE: No, just the CCC, but there was an interesting thing that happened. When we first moved up there, and I was a little bit too young to notice, we took baths in a great, big tub and the water was heated by the cook stove in the kitchen and that was fired by wood. You know, we had a wood stove and that was my job, too, when I got older, to fill the wood box, but we didn't have electricity. We had, you know, lanterns. Now, you could get electricity and how you got the electricity was, you would buy, from the Government, one share of REA, Rural Electrification Authority. That one share, and I don't know what the cost of it was, it wasn't too awfully much, enabled you to get Jersey Central Power and Light to come in with poles and current, all the way to your house. Then, we would have running water. Then, we would have a refrigerator and, following that, on the same poles, the telephone would be installed, the line, and we had, like, six people on the line. It was a party line and you could tell who was getting a call, whether it was yours or not, by the number of rings and ours was 12427R. So, we had, I think, five rings and that was a rural [line]. The "R" stood for rural or rings and the telephone would ring and, if it wasn't yours, you don't pick it up, but, if it was yours, you'd pick it up and, you know, have a conversation. If you wanted to dial a number, you just dialed "O" and the operator would get you the number you wanted. You didn't have touchtone or anything else and neighbors, sometimes, would get a little nosy and, here, you'd be talking on the telephone and you'd hear a click. [laughter] Somebody's trying to eavesdrop, and then, you'd say, "Oh, we're on the line. You can use the phone as soon as possible, when we're off," and then, you'd hear a click and they'd hang up. … That's how we got our electricity and telephone. Now, this one [photograph] right here, I just wanted to show you, this is some of the kids from our school. Now, you notice that little building right there? That's an outhouse. We had outhouses in those days. See that little square building? That's the outhouse for the boys. Now, we had one over here on this side for the girls. This is the old Morganville School and that was such a nice girl. I loved her with a passion. She died a couple of years ago, and here's graduation.

NM: Is this the elementary or the middle school?

DE: No, we didn't have elementary. We had just K-8 and these are the girls who graduated and here's the boys. That's Carl Taburrie and Mark Bealan and Bruce Robinson. … It's just on this side, right here is the girl's bathroom. That's when I was in Great Lakes, as a seaman apprentice. That's when I was in the Navy. This is when I was in the SeaBees [or CBs, construction battalions].

NM: Could you tell me about your high school experience?

DE: Well, high school, we took a bus from Morganville School to Matawan High. Matawan High School is on Broad Street and they have since demolished the building, but Matawan High took in half of Marlboro Township, all of Matawan Township, part of Old Bridge Township, part of Matawan Borough, or all of Matawan Borough. Can you imagine that? … twenty-two square miles in Marlboro, Matawan Township, the entire school district, Cliffwood, which is part of Old Bridge Township, Laurence Harbor, and then, Matawan Borough, all of it.

NM: How big was the high school?

DE: Numbers-wise, we had, I think, a graduating class of somewhere around 250 students.

NM: Was it hard for you to adjust to going from a small school to a larger school?

DE: Well, not really. It wasn't the adjustment so much as a comparison between my brother and me. That's the thing that really [bothered me]. I just said, "I don't want any part of this high-school."

NM: Could you tell me about when you dropped out of high school? What year were you in when you dropped out?

DE: … My junior year, yes, and, you know, it was a good school, nothing wrong with the school. It was just more personal than anything else, you know. We had gym and the interesting thing about gym was, when you had gym, you had to take a shower. Today, the kids don't do that. I said to myself, you know, "The coach at that time, the phys. ed. teacher, would go bonkers if he knew that you weren't going to take a shower." Everybody did. They were open showers, you know, no little cubicles or anything, same way in the Navy, you know, and we had biology and we had general science. We had, you know, commercial, we had college prep. I was in the college prep course and I was on the football team, JV football, and, of course, then, … when you practiced after school they had no activities busses. You had to hitchhike back to Morganville School, and then, walk two miles up the nearest dirt road.

NM: Did you play any other sports besides football?

DE: No, just football, and then, my brother was on the baseball team. … Let's see, I was in the glee club, too, yes, and then, he was baseball and, I think, band, yes. I think he was playing the

trombone, if I'm not mistaken, and, you know, it was good. I mean, the library was well-staffed and, you know, well-supplied. Teachers were good. There's the same teacher, now, picture this, his name was Mr. Lloyd and he is still teaching. Now, I was in school [until] 1950, when I quit. He was a teacher then. He's a teacher now. He must be about eighty-six; what a nice, nice person, yes. I inspected the schools. I inspect schools and I did Matawan and, lo and behold, here he was in the hallway, yes, just as nice as the day back in 1950, yes. That was a pleasant memory then.

NM: You dropped out of high school. What did you do afterwards? Did you plan to work?

DE: Oh, yes.

NM: At that point, you did not think about going to college. You were just going to work.

DE: No, didn't even consider college and one of the things is, with my mother and father, you did not sit around. You got a job right away and, on the farm, you know, you did almost everything. …

NM: You went back to working on the farm full-time.

DE: No, no. I left and I worked for a builder. I was putting up rafters and gable ends. I did that until I joined the service, but, just to go back a step, in winter, you know, you think of farmers sort of sitting … near the fireplace, you know, with their feet up on a couch. Well, that didn't happen. My father used to haul coal and they had [heavy] bags. Bags of coal weighed ninety pounds. He used to deliver coal for (Peterson, CM Peterson?) Company, in Perth Amboy, and you'd go up two stories, up the back steps, to deliver coal, because they burned a lot of coal in those days, during the war. … I worked, a couple of times, with him, you know, after school, and, I'll tell you, I couldn't keep up with him. We went down to Lakewood and cleaned chicken coops. You used to get paid to clean the chicken coop, and then, you can keep the manure and we used to heap the manure on the farm that we rented and you would keep it there until spring. … The reason why you keep it there until spring is, because, if you spread it on the field, the chickens pass all of the seeds through their gullet and they don't digest the outer shell and what happens is, you'll have weeds all over the farm. So, what you do is to pile it in this enormous pile and, in the wintertime, it looks like Mount Vesuvius. … It's nothing but steam rising from it and the ammonia is heating up and killing all of the weed seeds, and then, in the spring, you can distribute the manure. … Then, he used to be, also, the night watchman in one of the factories, (Handsome?) Company, used to be a night watchman there. My mother used to work as a practical nurse. She was a practical nurse and she'd go tend to people in the wintertime, too. In the summer, then, of course, you worked on the farm, but nobody sat around. So, you also maintained your vehicles, repaired them, painted them and got ready for the spring planting. Then, I used to order chickens, chicks, and we used to order them from Pennsylvania, from a hatchery, and [American] Railway Express [Agency] would have an office by the Matawan Railroad Station. You'd call them up in February and say, "We want to order a hundred chicks." So, they'd say, "What kind?" "Well, Leghorns," and [they would say], "Pullets or cockerels?" and you'd say, "Well, pullets," because those are the ones that lay eggs. Cockerels are the roosters. They could guarantee [to] at least ninety percent accuracy that you would get pullets,

and it doesn't hurt to have a cockerel, now and then, because you could use them for food and, also, he could fertilize the eggs. So, they would come in; … see, these were a day old, so, they didn't know how to eat or drink. They were shipped just in a box, about, maybe, three-feet-by-thirty-inches. You'd take them home and you'd have little saucers and you'd take each one and dip their beak in and raise it back and they'd start to get the idea of drinking and you'd put them back again, until, finally, they drink by themselves. Then, you had their mash, which they called a starter mash, very fine mash, mix it with water, put their beak in, lift them back. … By reflex, they'd try to swallow, and then, you'd teach each of them how to eat and drink. … Then, in the winter, you know, it's cold. So, under our stove, our stove was about this high and we could slide the boxes of chicks underneath and keep them nice and warm. It wasn't too hot, and then, when they got a little bit older, [we would] keep them in the house for about five days, they never really smelled or anything, then, you'd bring them out to the chicken coop. … You'd have a big shell with an electric bulb and they called it a brooder and they'd all go under the brooder and just lay there and gather together and keep nice and warm, until they got bigger, and then, you take the brooder cover away, but that's how we got them. Now, the question is, "How do you know it's a pullet?" Well, I didn't know until I went down to South Jersey and inspected this school and a custodian down there, he and I were talking and, you know, he said he was raised on a farm. I said, "What kind?" He said, "Well, we had chickens," and I said, "Did you ever cull chickens?" He said, "Oh, yes, you know, to tell if they laid eggs or not." So, I said, "But, you know, the only thing I never could figure out [was] how they could tell a pullet from a cockerel from the hatchery." He said, "I can tell you that." He said, "I worked in a hatchery." He said [that] when [they are in] the incubator, and, usually, it's about twenty-one days [in the] incubator, they start to hatch. They would have kids come in and take the ones that are … already hatched, and they had a lot of Japanese who came from the West Coast to the internment camps in South Jersey, but they knew how to sex chickens. So, they would sit and they had, you know, the type of glasses that you use as magnifiers for gems. They would open up the legs and, like, when we're born, we have an umbilical cord. When a chick is born, they have a yolk sac that they come from. You open it up and, inside, there's either one dot, one white dot, or two white dots. One dot is the female, two dots is the male and there would be two boxes, right here, female, male, and then, here are the chicks that were just hatched. You opened them up, male, female, male, female, and ninety percent accuracy, and that's how they sexed the chickens. … As I went home, I said, you know, "I wonder if that's really so." So, I went to the … *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* and looked under chick sexing and it said, "People who determine … the sex of chickens when … the chicks are hatched." Yes, never knew that either, did you?

NM: No, I do not know much about farms, except from visiting my cousins when I was little.

DE: They're probably vegetables, right?

NM: Yes, they had vegetables. They had cows and pigs. They owned a pretty big farm, but I did not learn the technical details of farming.

DE: Well, … these right here are just, you know, books that I refer to, because, when I write a story, I want to be sure of my facts. Nothing's worse than writing a story, and then, [to] have inaccuracies. This one right here, I told you, I worked as a planker on a boat. So, I did a story about planking the boats for Henry Luhrs. This is my article I wrote for the boating magazine

and I contacted the Luhrs, and then, I got photos and people's names that worked there. … This is his son right here. It was a nice family, and then, … when I was working for Henry Luhrs, it took us two days to do a boat, twenty-one-foot boat, to plank it, but, in those days, I wasn't fat, that's for sure.

NM: When did you decide to enlist? Why did you choose the Navy?

DE: … Well, my uncle, … who is my grandfather's son, was in the Navy and my brother was in the Merchant Marine. His choice would have been to join the Navy. So, I had a friend who joined the Coast Guard and I said, "Well, I'll join the Navy." So, then, I joined the Navy and went up to Great Lakes.

NM: When did you enlist?

DE: 1950.

NM: Did you think that you would end up in Korea?

DE: I didn't know where I [would end up].

NM: You did not know.

DE: Just, you joined and wherever they sent you, that's where you go.

NM: Why did you enlist? Did you think about going into the military for a career?

DE: No, I just joined because that was the thing to do. My father was in the First World War, [my] brother was in the Merchant Marine in the Second World War and I was in the Korean War.

NM: What procedures did you go through to enter the Navy? You volunteered.

DE: Well, when I joined, you went into Newark and that was the recruiting station. You signed up and I think my mother signed for me, and then, I got my papers to go to Great Lakes for training, basic training. I went up there and that was in July. It was so darned hot up there and I loved to march, but I was always out of step, [laughter] always out of step. There was just something about my feet; [laughter] [they] don't listen to the music, but it was a great experience.

NM: Could you tell me a little bit about basic training? How was Michigan different from New Jersey?

DE: Well, I had never really been anywhere. The furthest I was away from New Jersey was up in New York State, to visit my grandparents. That was it. So, when I left to go, my brother sang *Anchors Aweigh* to see me off and, on the way up, of course, I cried. … "Where am I going? What am I going into? Why did I do this?" and then, I said, "Stop it, you know. You're in." So,

I went up there and we got to the gate and here's a bunch of recruits and they all said, "You'll be sorry," [laughter] inspiring confidence, you know. So, we went in. We got all of our gear and we had what's called a sea bag. That's where all your clothes go in. Then, you were issued your dungarees, your whites, [the summer] uniform, and the blues, the winter uniform, and then, dungarees, shoes. You had work shoes, and then, you had regular shoes, and then, the interesting [thing] was, they had a little thing they called a ditty bag and that's where all of your shaving cream and soap and everything else went, in the bag. … Then, I'm looking at these things and they looked like little pieces of rope. I said, "What the heck are these for?" "Well, those are called clothes stops," and I said, "Clothes stops? This is going to be interesting." Well, what it was was, when you're in the Navy, you know, you don't iron your clothes. You roll them up, and then, you tie them with these little clothes stops. … When you unroll it, you got nice creases. … Of course, you did iron, if you wanted to, but that's the way it was done. Then, when you get ready to go some place, all your clothes [are] rolled up, you put them in the sea bag, and then, your ditty bag [goes] on top, tie the [top], you know, you had rope and enclosed it, and then, you were ready to go. You had a handle and wherever you had to be shipped, you just carried this with you and that's all your clothes. It's called a sea bag, and then, the same thing with your bedding and all. You washed your own bedding and made sure everything was [okay]. Oh, we had inspections. Oh, they were something. You had to be able to flip a coin on your bedding and have it bounce. They were pretty particular about that.

NM: Was it hard to adjust to military life?

DE: No, because everybody was in the same boat. We only had one person, who was a drug addict, and they got rid of him fast. … The only tough one I had was, you see, they teach you how to swim and I swim like a rock. [laughter] So, you had to climb up this ladder and you had no clothes on. You climb up the ladder and you go out to this long diving board and there's a little space for the petty officer, they call them non-COs, to stand and, now, you're naked and you hold your privates and you jump. So, what happens is, you know, some people look down and [say], "Oh, my God, it's thirty feet down," you know. The pool is like thirty feet deep and they say, "Jump." Well, you know, I was watching these guys and they froze at the end of the board and this petty officer'd come up and give them a kick in the cheeks of their rear end and off they'd go, you know, like a bird. [laughter]

NM: This was in training.

DE: Yes. So, then, you go down, and then, hopefully, come up again, and then, start swimming the pool and you had to do two lengths of the pool, which is an Olympic-sized pool, and, by the end of that, you know, if you didn't make it, then, you had to do it all over again, go up and jump. So, you know, you struggle. I mean, you did everything in your power, "I don't want to go up there again." So, then, once you passed that, and the reason for it is, because, when you're on the side of a ship, from the waterline to the deck is about thirty feet and you'd better be prepared to jump. It's not like six feet off a diving board. It's thirty feet. So, that's what they did and they … taught you how to, and you had to, climb down cargo nets and they taught you how to use a .45-caliber handgun. … They had a carbine, … it's a small rifle, and you used a carbine, which was no big thing, because I used to go hunting. So, when I got out, I asked to get out about two months early, because my father was planting seeds on our farm, you know,

getting ready to plant crops. … They let me get out early and, as I was getting out, I said, "Gee, you know, they've got a guidance counselor who's here and I'd like to find out, really, what I'm suited for," because, you know, you don't know. You're twenty-one years old. You've been in the Navy. You're getting some experience. So, they sat down; they had a counselor. … I took aptitude tests and all. So, he says, "You're an interesting person." Now, picture it, I only had a GED and I said, "What did you find out?" He said, "Well," he says, "you've got a couple of avenues you can go." He says, "You could be a mortician." "I really don't enjoy dead bodies," and he said, "You could be a social studies teacher," and I'm saying to that, you know, "I just quit high school. How am I going to do this?" and he said, "You could be a mechanic." So, I got out, worked with my father … on the farm, and then, in the fall, I worked for this …

NM: I want to interrupt you for a moment and back up. You mentioned that you could have been a mechanic. On your pre-interview survey, you said that you went to a specialty school.

DE: Yes, mechanic.

NM: Could you tell me a little bit about the mechanics' specialty school?

DE: … Well, when I got out of Great Lakes and went down to Little Creek, Virginia, I was assigned to the SeaBee unit and, there, you know, I had some ability with small engines, you know, cars and all. So, I worked on ducks [DUKWs] and jeeps and trucks, but I really was interested in bulldozers, you know, big equipment, cranes. … Finally, after I'd gotten my GED, I went to heavy equipment school, came back and didn't really work too much with heavy equipment, because they needed me in lighter [equipment], you know, the trucks and ducks and jeeps. Then, when I got out, … I said, "Well, what seems to make sense is, you know, the mechanic part, but not with the mortician or the teacher," and then, lo and behold, I later became the teacher.

NM: Before we began the interview, you told me that you wanted to go to heavy equipment mechanics' school and they said that you could not because you did not have a high school diploma. Could you share that story again?

DE: Oh, yes, because, when I was in Little Creek, Virginia, I saw all these fellows going out to Port Hueneme, California. This was where they had a heavy equipment school. It was an excellent school and I saw these fellows ship out and I said to my chief, "Hey, Chief, how come I can't go?" He said, "You're a high-school dropout." So, I'm thinking, "Well, that can be taken care of." So, I got my GED … diploma, and then, they sent me out to heavy equipment school.

NM: How did getting your GED in the military work?

DE: Oh, you go through tests through the mail. They'll send you tests, and then, you complete the assignments, send it back, and then, after they think that you'd mastered the information they sent you, then, you get your GED.

NM: How long was that process?

DE: It was about three months, yes, General Education Diploma, yes.

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

NM: This begins tape two of an interview with Mr. David Engebretson. On your pre-interview survey, you wrote that you were involved in NATO maneuvers. Could you tell me a little bit about the maneuvers?

DE: Okay. We were to conduct NATO maneuvers with the Second Marines and Amphibious Seabees, ACB2. I was on the ship called the AKA *Rolette* [AKA-99] and we made maneuvers on Malta and we had done ports of call in Messina, Sicily, and Naples, Italy. Then, we received a signal that there had been an earthquake off Greece, in one of the islands called Assos, [Argostolic or Argostoli Bay], and we steamed into that island chain and what happened was, they had a serious earthquake in town. The prison, which was a prison that contained most of the violent crime persons, they had the wall shaken down and the inmates had gotten out and the people were terrified. Well, the Second Marines landed. They rushed over to the prison. They rounded up the inmates that had tried to escape and they set them to work clearing the roads of debris, and then, at night, they locked them back up … under Marine guard. The town itself was pretty much destroyed. It's sort of eerie to look at a building, see the wall completely gone and bedroom furniture resting on the edge of a floor, ready to topple into the streets. The post office, on the second floor, had a large safe and they wanted us to take the safe and bring it down to the street level. Well, [with] the floor being so bad and the safe being so heavy, there was only one real alternative. … That was, we got up on the second floor and, with long poles, shoved the safe out through the air and into the plaza below. [laughter] They didn't appreciate that, but that was the only way we could have gotten the safe down without serious injuries. The people were so friendly, though. At first, they were apprehensive, because, … we were on an LST, [Landing Ship Tank], also, when the door was opened of the LST and our tanks rolled out, they looked with astonishment and, of course, behind the tanks were our trucks, and then, the kitchen equipment. So, we set up tents for the people, and then, we went up to the hills, to make sure everybody was okay up in the hills, and they were quite friendly. They offered us wine and cheese. …

NM: This is in Greece, correct?

DE: Yes, Assos, and we had cooked bread aboard ship, and then, brought it on to the shore. So, they managed to survive the earthquake. [It was a] beautiful town, all-tile plaza that they had, and then, we went back to the United States after that.

NM: When you say that tanks rolled out, were they real tanks?

DE: Yes, oh, yes, tanks and bulldozers, yes, yes. That's where they're kept.

NM: Okay, they rolled off of the ship.

DE: Yes. We had LSTs with us and we were on an AKA [Attach Cargo Ship] and LSTs were flat-bottomed ships they used for landings. So, I was on the LST then and we had what's called

a duck [DUKW] and a duck is one of those [ships that] looks like a bathtub, with an inclined front and back and wheels and a little propeller in the back, and you could be steaming down the highway, check the air on your tires, to see if … everything is inflated, and, if one is low, you just pull a switch and that pumps air into that tire, as you're traveling along the highway. Then, when you get ready to go in the water, you're driving along, you drive right out onto the beach, into the water, your wheels are pulling you on the sand, and then, when you start to float, the little propeller in the back, they call it a screw, … that propels you through the water.

NM: What year were these NATO maneuvers held?

DE: 1952.

NM: Were the tanks World War II models or newer models?

DE: No, they were World War II.

NM: They were Sherman tanks.

DE: Small ones, though, and LCMs, [Landing Craft Mechanized]. We had LCMs, also, those are the ones with the ramps, and we had troops. … The LCMs were on what's called an LSD, [Landing Ship Dock]. They're a floating dock. They're quite interesting and they pump water into that dock and the whole ship goes down and the ramp door opens and these little LCMs … that transport troops pull in, like little ducks [waterfowl] swimming into the ocean, and, when all of them are there, they turn them around, and then, they pump the water out and the ducks are sitting there, just on steel. Yes, it's quite interesting.

NM: Did you know if you were going to stay in the United States? Did you think that you might be sent to Korea during the war?

DE: Didn't know, we didn't know, no.

NM: How closely did you follow the Korean War?

DE: Oh, quite closely, yes, because, you know, I had friends who were shipped over, you know.

NM: Were they from the base that you were stationed at?

DE: No. … One fellow got shot in the head when he made the landing. He was in the Army and I felt quite badly about that, but you were assigned to, you know, an area and, if they needed you, you know, say, for instance, they needed a replacement for ACB2, which was in Korea, they would have shipped us over there, because you had the ability to do any kind of work in the SeaBees, you know. If they needed drivers, they could pull you out and send you over, but they never did.

NM: You followed the Korean War closely.

DE: Oh, sure. … It never really bothered me, you know, if I was going to be shipped over or not, because, if you did, you went. You know, your country, you did it.

NM: When you left the military, did you think that it would be hard to readjust to civilian life?

DE: No, no. You had all the skills that you needed and the only thing that I was surprised at, when I went to Monmouth Junior College, in Long Branch, … was the ease that I had in getting into the classes and [in] doing such a good job.

NM: Did you believe that you would be able to use your specialty training in civilian life?

DE: When I got out, and it was in the wintertime and there was not a whole lot going on with the farm, I went to work for the White Motor Company, on their tractors, you know. They have big tractor-trailers and I worked on the tractors. … It was interesting, but what happened was, when I got in contact with oil or grease, I would get boils. Yes, I was allergic to that.

NM: You were allergic to petroleum products.

DE: No, it was just the grease, the dirty grease, and probably petroleum products. … I said, "Oh, my gosh, you know, I can't keep on doing this."

NM: You cannot be a mechanic and be allergic to oil.

DE: No, because, I mean, these were big boils and carbuncles.

NM: When and why did you decide to go back to school?

DE: Well, at that time, I had worked for Henry Luhrs. I was a planker on the boat and that was right after the crops were over. I started to work in the winter and I worked for there for, I guess, about a year-and-a-half and I helped my parents on the farm, in the summertime, but worked full-time for him, and then, there was a lay-off and I said, "Well, I've gone to college. I think I can do it." I enrolled in Monmouth College full-time, and then, it took off.

NM: Did you know about your GI Bill benefits?

DE: Oh, yes.

NM: You wanted to take advantage of those benefits.

DE: Sure, and, at that time, the GI Bill paid for everything at Monmouth College, everything. It didn't pay for everything at the University of Pennsylvania. I had to pay additional for the first year, and then, all of the half a year. I did a two-year program in a year-and-a-half.

NM: What do you mean by everything?

DE: Tuition and books, yes, and then, I, of course, had to pay for the lodging. I lived in a rooming house, so, that was, you know, not [too bad]. …

NM: You lived in a rooming house at Monmouth.

DE: No.

NM: At Monmouth, it was night school. You lived at home.

DE: Yes. They didn't have dorms in those days. They didn't have day school in those days.

NM: Could you tell me about what it was like to attend Monmouth College back then?

DE: Oh, sure. Most of the people who were going to Monmouth College were … [going] under the GI Bill and, when I first went there, I looked and I said, "Oh, my gosh, this is a high school." … We were going, at nights, in the high school in Long Branch and their registrar's office and bursar's office was a little house, and then, they got their property at West Long Branch. … When we went to school in that building, it was something that you'd never saw before. We attended classes where … there was a fireplace in every room. There was an indoor swimming pool. There was a small church that they had taken from England and made it into a little abbey, downstairs, indoor bowling alley. You looked up at the ceiling, in the main hall, and it was all stained glass and, when they turned on the lights, it looked like daylight coming through. It was beautiful stained glass. [On] the outside, they had a beautiful fountain and gardens. It resembled the garden at Versailles. They had a main staircase that, when you went up, it was like something from Tara, you know, you just looked at it, you know, *Gone With The Wind*. They had a magnificent room that was their library, yes.

NM: Which building was this?

DE: The main building, the [Mr. & Mrs. Hubert Templeton] Parsons Estate, and then, later, they had the library at the Guggenheim House, which is about a half a block away. As a matter-of-fact, it was interesting, because I used to operate a bookstore and I was teaching at the same time, too. I had a lady manage it and I was appraising their gifts at Monmouth College, for their rare book department. So, that was sort of an interesting thing, too.

NM: You went to Monmouth College while it was expanding.

DE: Yes, from the small high school to the large campus, and then, for the first graduating class, I and a girl named Sue Vogel were the marshals. She was a female marshal, I was a male and we led the procession up for their first graduating class. Yes, … for me, a high school dropout, that was the epitome.

NM: What did you study when you went to Monmouth?

DE: Business administration, yes. That was pretty interesting. Of course, I studied quite hard. I'd be up until four in the morning, studying. …

NM: Were you working at the same time?

DE: Yes, with my father, on the farm, at that time, and then, you'd get up at seven, then, go out in the field and work with him. … I did the four years in three, and then, I made the Dean's List five out of six times and the one course was English lit., and I loved to read. I just couldn't get … a B, that was it, and that was the only time I missed out on the Dean's List. … I read a story and I couldn't even remember the title. [laughter] It was a mental block. Good teacher, it was just me.

NM: After Monmouth, you went to the University of Pennsylvania.

DE: Yes.

NM: Why did you decide to go back to school?

DE: Well, I had a year left on my GI Bill and I said, "Well, I don't want to waste it." So, my one school I wanted to go to was Harvard. I wanted Harvard like you wouldn't believe. So, I drove up there. I looked around the campus. I talked with the admissions people. I applied to Boston U. I applied to Rutgers. I applied to University of Pennsylvania. I got turned down by Harvard, accepted by Boston U., by Rutgers and by the Wharton School. … I was devastated. [laughter] I wanted so badly for Harvard, but it turned out all right. I got accepted into [the] Wharton School.

NM: That is the University of …

DE: … Pennsylvania, yes. It's a tough school.

NM: What were you accepted for?

DE: Industrial relations, yes, for the master's.

NM: What did the industrial relations program entail?

DE: Mainly collective bargaining, personnel.

NM: Industrial relations, unions and such.

DE: … Some of the finest people were teaching there, Dr. George W. Taylor. … The Taylor Law was drafted by him. Edward Shills, you know, [who was] in charge of Exxon, he was one of the top-drawer people. All of them were great. … Just to sit in their classes and listen to them is worth every penny.

NM: After you finished at the University of Pennsylvania, you decided to continue your education?

DE: Yes. As a matter-of-fact, when I was in Monmouth College, I was traveling with three or four people, because we used to pool together, you know, and there was this one girl and I knew her for years. She was a teacher and she said, "You know, there's a real nice girl you ought to meet." It was my wife. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

DE: So, I met this teacher, who is Dorothy, and she later became my wife. … After I got my master's degree, we were going out together and I went into the field of teaching and, later, we became husband and wife, in 1961. So, that's how I entered education.

NM: You went to Rutgers for education.

DE: Well, I had to take certification courses from Newark State, [now Kean University], and then, later, I got my … master's degree from Rutgers in administration supervision.

NM: You earned another master's degree.

DE: Yes, and then, I went further and I got my specialist's degree in administration supervision from Rutgers.

NM: Which campus?

DE: New Brunswick, yes.

NM: When was this?

DE: That would have been 1981, I believe, either '80 or '81. I'll have to check on that, my diploma from there. I was so disgusted that I didn't complete the dissertation that, when this specialist's degree came, it's still in the original envelope.

NM: With Rutgers?

DE: Yes.

NM: Why were you disgusted with it?

DE: To me, it was a defeat, you know, that I didn't get my doctorate. I got the specialist's degree, which is a doctorate.

NM: Were you going for the doctorate?

DE: Yes, yes.

NM: They would not let you write a thesis.

DE: No, I just prolonged it, prolonged it and, you know, I didn't write it. So, that was the end. So, when the specialist's degree came, … I knew what it was and put it in a drawer. That's not the doctorate. [laughter]

NM: You have had a variety of jobs, from working on the farm, to being a mechanic and working as a planker. It seems like you are pretty flexible.

DE: No. You know, probably the best thing that I've had in all of the jobs is this one that I do right now. I don't like to spend a lot of time in one job. When I go out and inspect schools, I'm there for maybe, at the most, two weeks, then, I'm on to a new district.

NM: It is always something new.

DE: Yes. I don't think I could really sit down and have a job day after day after day. I have to have a … different routine. … To me, it's fascinating, with inspecting the schools.

NM: You currently work for an insurance company. How did you get a job inspecting schools?

DE: Okay. I was in education for nineteen-and-a-half years.

NM: What did you do?

DE: Well, I was a media specialist; I was a principal. … At the end, I was a middle school principal. We had eighty-eight teachers and thirteen hundred students, two VPs and an assistant superintendent that was the biggest idiot I've ever seen in my whole life and I just couldn't stand him. I mean, that's my problem. If I don't like somebody, I telegraph it. [laughter] Well, he probably wasn't an idiot, but I thought so. So, this one day capped it off. He came into my office and said, "Dave, there's a kid who doesn't have a book." I said, "All right, tell me who it is and I'll get him a book," and he said, "Well, I can't tell you who it is," and I said, "You can't tell me who it is." I said, "Is there a reason for that?" He said, "Well, I promised the parent that I wouldn't tell anybody, because, then, the teachers might get annoyed with the kid." I said, "Oh, I see that. This is fairly clear. What you want me to do is to go to each of the 1350 students and I'll ask them this question, 'Do you have a book?' 'Do you have a book?' 'Do you have a book?' and you want me to do that, right?" "Well, no." I said, "How do you propose I do this? If I don't ask and you don't tell me, I'm not clairvoyant." I said, "Why don't you get the hell out of here and stop being such an idiot?" [laughter] Well, he went back to the Superintendent. … Now, this is December. The Superintendent comes over and he said, "What did you say to him?" I told him. He said, "David, apologize to him." … The Superintendent and I got along well together. He's a real nice guy. I said, "No." He said, "You've got to." I said, "No. I'm going to make it easy for everybody." I said, "I'll resign. I'm not going to do that." He said, "Don't, don't do that." I said, "It's done." So, I wrote a letter of resignation, handed it in. I said, "The only thing I want to do is to be paid from now until June 30th." He said, "Don't do it." So, they accepted my resignation. Then, I went to school for installing alarm systems, because that's one of the things that I'd always wanted to do. I put an alarm system in my house in Matawan and there was a burglar who tried to get in. The alarm went off and it dialed the Matawan Police Department. That was a big write-up in the paper. So, I started

my own alarm company and, for, I guess, ten years, yes, about ten years, I had it. … I was in attics and crawlspaces and, you know, all sorts of creepy, crawly places and I think, "Geez, you know, I'm now fifty-some years old," and I said, "I'd love to sell this company," and I saw an ad in the paper for a loss control representative. Now, at that time, I got my … fire inspector's license and I said, "This sounds almost like what I do, you know. It's security." So, I applied for the job and I had one interview, I had two, I had three and they said, "Okay, you know, we'd like to hire you," and I said, "At what salary?" and they told me. I said, "That's a little bit low," and they said, "Well, it's all we can afford right now." So, I said, "Okay." Well, within two years, it was up to, you know, where I wanted the salary and I worked for them for ten years and, during that period of time, I had the OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] training and I went to the boiler license school, for boilers in the schools. … One day, I was sitting there, figuring, and I said, … "I travel five hundred miles a week to go to work and, if I had my own company, I could take all of those travel expenses off." Now, when I worked for this company, also, it was New Jersey School Boards Association Insurance Group, that was part of the pension group. So, I had my whole pension. I didn't have to worry about that and I was old enough, at that time, so [that] I could get Social Security, if I wanted. So, I wrote a proposal, gave it to them and I said, "What do you think about this?" and they said, "It looks good to us. … You sure you want to do this?" I said, "Yes." Well, what happened was, … they had a retirement party for me on a Monday and, on a Tuesday, I … started to work for them as a contractor. So, I never missed a beat and I've been working there, I guess, … almost ten years, after retirement, and so, it's a blast.

NM: This is the job you are doing now.

DE: Yes, yes.

NM: You said that you sold your alarm business.

DE: Yes, I sold it to a company here in Colts Neck.

NM: An alarm company?

DE: Yes, yes, and, of course, you know, the people [customers] were, you know, calling [me], "Don't quit your business, you know. We think you're the greatest," and all, but, at that time, too, my wife … began treatment for cancer. So, I said, "No, it's time," but I still, you know, like, [for] my church and there's another church, I got my fire and burglary installer's licenses, so, I …

NM: You do it to help out.

DE: Yes.

NM: Is there anything that you would like to add to the tape?

DE: The only thing, … it's disappointing, because, … during the Second World War, this was a nation behind the President. … Here, we … had a Pearl Harbor, we had an enemy attack on the

World Trade Center, where three thousand people lost their lives, this is war and, yet, we have people who are taking advantage for political reasons, mainly because they're Democrats, and you've got a few skunks who probably are Republicans, too, and it's a disgrace that they try to make political hay out of this. We should be behind our country because we are at war. Three thousand people have died in one day in New York in … [2001] and people seem to have forgotten all about that. What does it take, another six thousand before they realize that we have enemies who are after us? … I'm so disappointed in that, and the corruption that we have in New Jersey. …

NM: Corruption in what respect, in the government?

DE: Payoffs, yes.

NM: You are referring to the state government.

DE: State government, yes, and, you know, I look at the amount of money that's being wasted where it should be spent properly and wisely and I just say, "Aren't there any politicians out there who really care about the people? Aren't there any politicians who have the guts to say, 'Close the borders to Mexico. Close the borders to Canada,' so [that] we don't have terrorists come in our country?" They don't do it. They kowtow and they want a few lousy votes and they don't care what happens to our kids. You know, all it takes is one terrorist in one school, like [what] happened in Russia, and then, they'll wring their hands and blame everybody else but themselves. [Editor's Note: Mr. Engebretson is referring to the September 2004 takeover of a school in Belsan, Russia, by Chechen terrorists. The siege ended in the deaths of hundreds of hostages.] Our borders are porous and the terrorists can easily come through and, yet, the politicians maybe want a few votes that they possibly could get. It's a disgrace, and the mentality of what we have today. For instance, going back to the '40s, you could go into Asbury Park. They had a nice amusement park there. They had clay ducks, or they called them clay ducks. Actually, they were metal ducks on a chain that would go round and round. They had rifles down there with live ammunition. They call them .22-caliber pump guns. You'd fire your live rounds and knock down these ducks as they go along on a chain. Today, you wouldn't even consider having something like that, because you know that some nut would be firing into the crowds. What's happened to our people? What's happened? … You know, they accuse the far right Christians of being demagogues. The liberals took away the Bible. They are taking away God in the Pledge. Every mention of God, they want to take away and you say to yourself, "Isn't there some relationship between our decline and what we're doing today?" and I think the people ought to just sit and think and meditate about that, and I love our country.

NM: Is that it?

DE: I think so.

NM: Thank you for consenting to this interview today. It was very informative, especially about the farm and about life in New Jersey during World War II. You had a very interesting life.

DE: Thank you.

NM: This concludes an interview with Mr. David Engebretson on May 5, 2005, in Colts Neck, New Jersey.

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

Reviewed by David Bendel 12/13/05
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 1/30/06
Reviewed by David Engebretson 2/8/06