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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ISAAC W. FEINBERG

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Daniel Feinberg: This begins an interview with the Rutgers Oral History Archives on October 20, 2006, in Rockaway, New Jersey, with Isaac W. Feinberg. I am Dan Feinberg and with me is Sandra Stewart Holyoak. I guess, Ike or Grandpa Ike, we should begin with describing when you were born and where. [Editor's Note: Daniel Feinberg is the grandson of Isaac Feinberg.]

Isaac Feinberg: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, November 16, 1925.

DF: Let us start by describing your general family life and upbringing with your parents in New York.

IF: Well, we lived in the ... Bay Ridge Section of Brooklyn, near Fort Hamilton, near where the Verrazano Bridge is, and we lived there most of my life. ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Tell us about your father's background. Where was he from?

IF: My father was born in New York in 1895, Lower Eastside, Cherry Street, I think it was. I'm not sure, I don't remember. [laughter]

SH: You were not there. [laughter]

IF: Not having been there. My mother was born in 1899, also in New York. They were married in 1923. My father had been in World War I, victim of a gas attack, disabled, died as a result of the injury years later. They diagnosed it as tuberculosis, but we're not sure, in those days, just what it was. It was a lung injury, from gas in Europe.

DF: How was your relationship with your father at that point? How did his death affect you?

IF: Well, when I was young, he was in and out of the veterans' hospitals and we moved to California at one time, because they thought, with TB, the change of climate would be helpful. He had been in Saranac Lake, [New York], in sanitariums, a couple of times, Kingsbridge Veterans' Hospital, New York, Tucson, Arizona, Veterans' Hospital, and that's where he passed away in 1937. He was forty-two.

SH: Were you able, as a family, to travel with him and live in the areas where he was in the sanitarium?

IF: Yes, we left New York in 1935. We actually cruised to California, sixteen days, through the Panama Canal and around, and we settled in San Bernardino, California, had a nice, big house there, rental house, but he was not well and had to be taken to ... one of the Los Angeles area veterans' hospitals, and then, he was transferred to the Tucson, Arizona, veterans' facility. I remember, we came back to New York for the Summer of 1936. In fact, I went to summer camp in New York. Okay, '36, I was eleven years old, or going on eleven, and then, we came back West, my mother and my younger sister, and we lived there, in Tucson, maybe about seven, eight months, and then he passed away and we came back to Brooklyn.

SH: Were there benefits from the Veterans Administration to help you and your family?

IF: My mother received a pension, yes. I don't know whether [it was] a pension or a veteran's benefits of some sort, I'm not sure exactly, right now, what the classification was, as a widow of a disabled veteran.

SH: What had been your father's trade before?

IF: He was a court officer in the Children's Court, as it was called in that time, in Brooklyn.

SH: Had your mother ever worked outside of the home?

IF: She was an LPN [licensed practical nurse] and a high school graduate, worked in nursing, later became an LPN.

SH: You had said she was about four years younger than your father.

IF: Yes.

SH: Did she also grow up in New York, in the same area?

IF: In the Lower Eastside, then, in the Williamsburg Section of Brooklyn, and then, we moved to Bay Ridge, while I was quite young.

SH: Did they ever tell the story of how they met?

IF: Well, the families were close, her family and my father's family. In fact, my father's brother married my mother's sister. So, it was, you know, a cozy arrangement they had between the two families. [laughter]

SH: Did you have brothers and sisters?

IF: I have one sister. She was born in '29 and she lives in Hartsdale, New York, right now.

SH: With that close family connection, did you interact a lot with cousins and grandparents?

IF: Not too much, mostly with my mother's side. When my father passed away, there were discussions among the family, "Where should the mourning be?" and so on. I wasn't really a party to it, but I was aware of things happening. So, we didn't have too many cousin relationships at that time.

DF: Did your father, Louis, talk to you much about his involvement in the war?

IF: Not at all, not at all. I was too young, really. Let's see, I was eleven, twelve years old when he passed on.

SH: It must have been tough to be that age and been uprooted so often.

IF: Yes, it was very difficult. ... Looking back, I can see problems.

SH: Did you enter the school systems there?

IF: ... Let's see, I went to elementary school in New York, and then, we moved out there. I was in elementary school, sixth grade, for awhile in California, then, went to junior high school. I didn't really fit in too well in there, [laughter] in junior high school, I remember that. ...

SH: That is a tough age.

IF: It's a tough age anyway.

SH: Yes.

IF: Yes, having taught that age, too, I know that, [laughter] and then, of course, when we came back to Arizona, I was in junior high school there, did a little better there, and then, we came back, I went back to an elementary school in Brooklyn. At that time, we still had eighth-grade schools.

SH: Did your mother work as an LPN when you returned?

IF: No, we moved in with my aunt and uncle, the brothers, the brother and sister-in-law, whatever you want to call them, [laughter] and we lived there for quite some time, in fact, until I got married. ... I would say, retroactively, that was not the best arrangement, but it worked. [laughter] You know, you try to merge two families; they had no children, so, that helps.

SH: I was going to say, that must have been a benefit at least.

IF: Yes.

DF: Was it difficult for you, just with your mother at that point? How would you describe your relationship with your mother, especially after your father passed on?

IF: It was a tough mother/son relationship, yes. I had to toe the line. [laughter]

SH: Especially when you are living in someone else's home.

IF: I was not the man of the house.

SH: That was a question.

IF: Then, I went on to high school. I went to Townsend Harris, which was, at that time, a three-year high school under the auspices of the City College of New York. ... Well, the full name was the Preparatory High School for the City College. In fact, it was the original City College, which later became City University.

SH: You must have had to pass some sort of an examination to get in.

IF: Yes, there was a special examination, from the eighth grade. ...

SH: Was this something that you sought or your family knew about?

IF: Well, I tried to keep the three-year part of it a secret from the family, [laughter] until I was admitted, and, again, retroactively, it was a great school, but, retroactively, I was probably too young. ...

SH: How old were you when you graduated?

IF: Fifteen, from high school, went into college, and I guess I was too young.

DF: That was before Pearl Harbor when you entered college.

IF: Yes.

SH: What year did you graduate from high school?

IF: ... 1941, and I entered; well, I went to Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn upon graduation. I wanted to be a math teacher, but, at that time, there was no market for math teachers, none at all. In New York City, you had to die to make a vacancy. You know, it was after the Depression and there weren't many vacancies. So, somehow or other, I got steered into electrical engineering.

SH: For Brooklyn Poly ...

IF: Polytechnic Institute, which is now Polytechnic University, I think, [the Polytechnic Institute of New York University]. I did pretty well at Poly, for the first year or so, and then, I was just not interested in engineering and, after two-and-a-half years, I went into the service.

SH: Can you talk a little bit about the Depression and what you remember personally seeing?

IF: I don't remember very much, really. I know I had uncles who were unemployed or always looking for work. Fortunately, I don't remember any effects, as far as I'm personally concerned.

SH: We have heard people say that they did not know how it affected their family, but they remember seeing other people being affected.

IF: Well, that's it. I know my uncles were always looking for work, on my father's side. My mother's side, two of her two brothers, one became a physician, one became a dentist. They had lived with us for awhile. So, I guess that was a byproduct of the Depression. I wasn't really aware of it. See, I remember the parade when repeal came, [laughter] a big parade in the neighborhood.

SH: Tell Dan what was repealed.

IF: You know what I'm talking about, with Prohibition?

DF: Not exactly.

IF: No.

DF: Oh, the repeal of Prohibition, yes. [laughter]

IF: And I remember walking to the polls, in, I guess it was 1931, with my uncle, who was living with us. That was, I think, the Hoover/Roosevelt campaign, but, other than that, I don't remember too many specifics. [Editor's Note: Democrat Franklin Roosevelt defeated Republican incumbent Herbert Hoover in the 1932 Presidential Election, during which the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, which initiated Prohibition, was a major campaign issue.]

SH: Bringing up the Herbert Hoover/Franklin Roosevelt campaign, what about politics in your household? Were there a lot of discussions around the table?

IF: None at all.

SH: None? [laughter]

IF: All Democrats. You know, it came in the blood.

SH: Were there any people in your family, or in your neighborhood, that you knew took advantage of some of those programs that Roosevelt put through with the New Deal, like the WPA?

IF: No, not that I know of, not that I know of.

SH: There were programs for young students, the NYA [National Youth Administration], things like that.

IF: That was really a little bit before my time, but, when I went to college, I did have a scholarship, as a war orphan. New York State gave a tremendous two hundred dollars a year to qualified children of veterans ... who'd died, veterans from military service, and considering that the tuition for the full year was 360 dollars, two hundred dollars went a long way. [laughter]

DF: Wow.

SH: I am certain.

IF: I think it's 360 for a course now?

DF: Yes, right, or just part of a course.

IF: ... [laughter] For a credit, but it was 360 for the year and I got a hundred dollars each semester from the state. ...

SH: You lived at home then and commuted to school.

IF: Yes, yes.

SH: Did you have chores as a young man?

IF: Chores?

SH: At home, or jobs outside the home?

IF: When I was in high school, I delivered flowers, for a wholesale florist, you know, bridal florist. So, I traveled all over the city, to the brides' homes, delivering big bouquets and boxes and whatnot.

SH: This means that you were able to drive then.

IF: No, by subway. No, nobody had cars in New York.

SH: You are talking to a real country girl here.

IF: Only by subway.

SH: You had to carry this.

IF: Yes.

SH: Oh, my. Did you have help?

IF: No, I was the help. [laughter] I was the help. No, it's a part-time job, and they paid us a trivial, nominal sum, but we got tips, from the bride's family usually, which helped. I'd walk in, you know, the bride was there, wearing practically nothing, say, "Oh, it's all right, it's only the flower boy." [laughter]

SH: Perfect job for a young man. Were you involved in any sort of extracurricular activities in high school?

IF: In high school, I was the treasurer, and, later, the president, of the Classical Society, which was the largest club in the school, other than the American Student Union. It was the Latin Club, essentially, called the Classical Society, and I did enjoy that.

SH: Were there other organizations that you belonged to, like the Boy Scouts?

IF: Yes, I was active in the Scouts, yes, went to Scout camp for several years.

SH: Where did you go to camp at?

IF: Lake Tiorati in New York; no, that was another camp. [laughter] I'm sorry, that was the one in 1936. No, the Ten-Mile River Scout Camps, tremendous reservation, ... not too far from New York City, in the Lower Catskills, went there for several years, yes, right into college, actually.

SH: You stayed with it then.

IF: Yes, yes.

SH: Do you know what rank you finally attained?

IF: Oh, in the Scouts? I think I was a Star Scout, that was about it, sort of lost interest.

SH: That is just below the Eagle Scout. That is wonderful. [Editor's Note: The Star Scout rank is the third-highest rank in the Boy Scouts of America system, below the Eagle Scout and Life Scout ranks.]

IF: You know, when the war came along, we didn't get too much involved in that.

SH: Were there any musical activities that you were involved with?

IF: When we lived in California, I took piano lessons, and I played recitals in the county fair, or something or other, but that didn't stick with me too long. [laughter]

SH: What about sports? Were there things that you enjoyed or participated in?

IF: Well, of course, the Dodgers were in Brooklyn at that time. We don't talk about them anymore, [laughter] but went to Ebbets Field, and we played a lot of ball, but it wasn't organized the way things are today. It was, you know, free play.

SH: What were some of the games that you played on the street that we do not hear anything about, or Dan probably has never even heard of them?

IF: Ring-a-levio; don't ask me what [that was].

DF: She is right. [laughter]

IF: Stickball.

SH: Tell me the name of the first game.

IF: Ring-a-levio.

SH: Ring-a-levio.

IF: And I don't remember how to play it. [laughter] I know it was an awful lot of running around, and, of course, I was active in the Scouts. Later on, when the war started, I was an air raid warden, part-time.

SH: What were the duties of a very young man as an air raid warden?

IF: Well, ... I was an air raid warden during the day, because, you know, they had different crews at night, because people were back in their homes, and then, in the business areas, my school was down on Livingston Street, downtown Brooklyn, right around the corner from Borough Hall, Brooklyn. So, I had a post about two blocks from the university. Well, it wasn't a university then. ... We just had to patrol, if the sirens were there, or they had organized tests. We had to shoo people into the shelters or the homes or whatnot. In our own neighborhood, at night, I guess they had more adults, so I was not serving in the neighborhood, but, there, we had blackouts, ... blackout tests. So, we had to make sure that no lights were shining from the houses.

SH: What did you do in your own home to make it lightproof?

IF: Well, you had to pull your shades down, keep your lights dim, the cars had the headlights [where] the top half of each headlight was painted black, so that the light focused down. Lights were dimmed in the streets or put out during tests.

SH: Backing up to 1939, how aware were you, as a very young man, of what was going on in Europe?

IF: I was not too aware. I was not really up to it. Well, I was only a kid, you know.

SH: That is what I meant.

IF: I started high school at twelve years old and was not fully aware of what was going on. Oh, later on, of course, I did.

SH: I thought maybe some of the family members were talking about it.

IF: No, no. I remember my uncle being very active in the Jewish War Veterans, and I remember, also, the German-American *Bund*.

SH: Tell me about that.

IF: Was very active here in New Jersey, and, also, in New York and whatnot, a Nazi organization. I mean, pure and simple, it was a Nazi organization, with a lot of backing from what we would now possibly call rednecks or skinheads or whatever, I mean, the equivalent, and they had rallies in New York. I remember, my uncle and many of his colleagues being there, Jewish War Veterans, actively getting involved in fights, melees, in Madison Square Garden.

SH: They would go and confront the people from the *Bund* that were rallying there.

IF: Yes, I do remember that. I met an awful lot of them, colleagues of my uncle.

SH: This was the uncle that you were living with.

IF: Yes, yes.

SH: He too had served in World War I.

IF: He was in the Navy in World War I.

SH: Did he talk about his experiences at all to you?

IF: Not really. I don't think that he ever went to sea, [laughter] but I don't know where he served or how he served, but not very long. I do know my father was overseas with the AEF, American Expeditionary Force. He was a sergeant in the Quartermaster Corps.

SH: Do you remember which unit he was with?

IF: I could tell you if [I] got my notes home, [laughter] but I don't remember now.

SH: We will add that later then, great. [Editor's Note: His father was Sgt. Louis Feinberg, enlisted May 25, 1918, discharged June 18, 1919. He served in France in the Limoges area, from September 8, 1918 to June 13, 1919. His last unit was the Second B and S Det DB Group, APO 753 Quartermaster Corps.]

DF: If we could switch gears back to your college days, was it very common for somebody who was fifteen or sixteen to go to college at such a young age then?

IF: Only my colleagues from Townsend Harris High School. It was a very small school. I think the population was, student population was, probably no more than a thousand or twelve hundred. It was only a three-year school and most of us came in from the eighth grade, although we got an influx coming in from the ninth grade and junior high schools, which were just developing in New York City at that time. They were in a transition from eight-year elementary schools to six-year elementary schools with junior highs. So, you know, we did have more coming in. ... I don't know if you're interested in the high school program itself; it was strictly an academic program, no frills. Each of us had to take two languages. I took French for three years and Latin for two years, and then, I stayed an extra year, because, at that time, we didn't have annual promotions, we had semi-annual promotions, and I was in the January group. The colleges accepted for September, so, I stayed on for a post-graduate semester and I took Portuguese for six months. [laughter]

SH: Just for fun.

IF: Just for fun, and I didn't like foreign languages in the beginning, but I got to enjoy it, and there's a whole big story there.

SH: Please, tell us.

IF: Because, when I got into the military, I went to Military Intelligence Language School and, for four months, all we did was study Chinese, and that's the only language I really learned to speak.

SH: Really?

IF: Yes.

SH: We need to ask why.

IF: At that time, the United States Army was training Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army, and they needed basic training instructors. I was a basic training instructor in the US Army and we had infantry replacement training centers all around the country and they took two instructors from each of those camps, sent us to Yale University, School of Oriental Studies, I think they called it, but, officially, it was the Military Intelligence Language School. ... We were being trained ... to speak enough Chinese and understand enough Chinese that we could do, in China, with the Chinese troops, what we were doing in the US with the US troops.

SH: Who was training you to speak the language?

IF: The faculty of Yale University. They had native-born speakers. ... That was the beginning of the audio-lingual approach, with wire recorders, as we used at that time, it was before tape recorders, and we had four hours a day of formal instruction, followed by an hour each day of military drill or physical activity, all in Chinese.

SH: That is what I was going to ask; was this all in Chinese?

IF: Yes, Chinese by Chinese.

SH: Was it almost like an immersion-type program, what we would call it today?

IF: Well, to some extent, you know, to some extent, because it was four hours straight.

SH: Were you housed at Yale?

IF: We were in the dorms, in uniform.

SH: Were you speaking Chinese in the dorm or were you able to speak English?

IF: Probably not, [laughter] but, in class, we had to put money into the kitty if we spoke English where we should have known the Chinese.

SH: Really?

IF: And it was hard not to learn it. I remember two fellows from North Carolina; actually, they were from artillery instruction groups. They were desperate to get out of the program. "They don't know how they got into it, they didn't want to be in it." I was happy to be there, [laughter] but they learned. They got out in about six weeks, eight weeks, but they spoke some Chinese. [laughter]

SH: You would have been teaching them just basic rifle commands and marching commands, is that correct?

IF: Marching commands, rifle.

SH: You talked about the artillery men, but yours would have been infantry.

IF: Well, it was, yes, the same sort of thing, but they were specialists in their field.

SH: Let us back up, because I know Dan has his questions.

IF: Yes, I sort of jumped ahead with that. ... We were talking about the language.

SH: We will back into it then.

IF: Oh, that goes further, because, when I got out of there, [when] I went back to school, I didn't go back to Poly, I went to City University, City College. They gave me fourteen credits in Chinese for my four months' work, excused me from all further foreign language study and that, in a way, led to my being recalled for the Korean War, as a Chinese linguist. So, one thing leads to another.

SH: This is great. What we will do is back up and talk about 1941. You graduated in May; no.

IF: ... Well, I graduated in January, but continued until June and entered in September '41

SH: You were still not eligible for the draft.

IF: I was ...

DF: You were sixteen.

IF: Well, there's a story there, too, because, ... as the son of a disabled veteran, deceased veteran, I had a Presidential appointment to West Point, but I failed the physical, because of my eyes, at that time. So, I couldn't go. So, then, I applied, through the President, Roosevelt, for the Naval Academy, or I think it was vice-versa; the Navy first, and then, West Point. So, I was deferred while that was pending, but, again, ... they didn't take me, because of my eyes. So, let's

see, Pearl Harbor came in December '41, I remember that, because we had a special convocation the next day.

SH: Tell us about when you first heard about it and the reaction.

IF: Well, we were at home listening to the radio, I don't remember what was on, a Sunday afternoon program. ... At that time, you sat around the radio and you read your newspaper, but you listened.

DF: I have heard this. [laughter]

IF: And, of course, they made the announcement of Pearl Harbor. The next day, I remember going to school, there was a special convocation, university-wide, college-wide convocation of all students, and we listened to the President's addressing Congress. ... I remember also coming out of the subway, which was around the corner from the main building of the school, hearing the sirens, police sirens, at that time, we had nothing else, and it was sort of an alert, air raid warning, whatever. I do remember that vividly.

SH: What was the reaction as you heard it on the news?

IF: Shock, you know, shock.

SH: How did you take it? Did you expect it? Did you know enough of what was going in the Far East to be alarmed?

IF: Oh, we knew negotiations were going on, but I didn't know anything specifically.

SH: You knew already what was happening in Europe.

IF: Oh, yes, yes.

SH: Had your focus been more towards Europe?

IF: Oh, sure, yes, by that time, we were well aware of what was happening.

DF: After Roosevelt declared war the next day, we hear a lot of the time ...

IF: Congress declares war.

DF: True, that is true, [laughter] but he urged Congress to declare war. That is not how it works today.

IF: Daniel will rub it in for me.

DF: I am confused about Iraq and Bush, but that is a different day. [laughter] Was your initial reaction like so many others, "Let's get those Japs, let's show them?"

IF: Well, let's put it this way. I said before that, at my first year at Poly, I did well. The second year was not so good. Then, I really was flubbing the whole business. So, one way to get out of there was to volunteer for induction. So, I wrote to my draft board, because I had still been deferred, with the pending [applications to the] military academies, and I volunteered for immediate induction. It took them three weeks to do it. So, in a sense, I enlisted, but that was, you know, sometime later. That was 1944, when ... I guess I was nineteen at the time, or going on nineteen. ... When I went through the induction process, I even volunteered for the Marines, but, fortunately, they said no. [laughter] They sent me to Camp Upton, Long Island, and I ended up in Camp Blanding, Florida, which was a real garden spot, because, after the war, they put the electric chair there. [laughter]

SH: I think he is saying that facetiously, by the way.

DT: Yes, of course, I understand.

IF: And I went through my basic training; I don't know whether I'm skipping around too much or not, but I went through my basic training there, a seventeen-week course.

SH: In Fort Blanding?

IF: No, ... in Camp Blanding. That's in Northern Florida, about ...

SH: Is that B-L-A?

IF: B-L-A-N-D-I-N-G. It's about forty miles out of Jacksonville, about fifty miles from St. Augustine, forty miles from Gainesville. Those are the places I went on leave. The end of my seventeen months, my seventeen weeks, rather, the Battle of the Bulge was just beginning and ninety-eight percent of my training company went right into the Battle of the Bulge. We were all infantry replacements and, for some reason, I didn't get any orders. I just hung around for a few days and then they kept me on as permanent party cadre, transferred me into another training company and I was there as a drill instructor, for the next six or eight months, and that's when they picked me out of a hat to go to Yale.

SH: Do you really think they picked you out of a hat or do you think they were holding you back for a reason?

IF: No, they had something, knew my age, ... my Army General Classification Test scores, they had everything; they pulled me out for reasons of their own. I had one of the highest AGCT [Army General Classification Test] scores on record at the time and it was not the local people who did this, it was from higher up, that I remember being summoned to the division headquarters, or whatever you're under, ... I don't remember, and with somebody else. ... The thing was explained to us, it was absolutely confidential, and do we or do we not want to go? I didn't hesitate, because I was anxious to get out of there anyway, and that's when they sent us to Yale. That was in July, June or July, and, of course, that was after V-E Day.

SH: Had you, prior to this, applied for any; you had applied for West Point and the Naval Academy.

IF: Yes, well, that was history already by that time, yes.

SH: When you were first in your basic, in Blanding, did you apply for any additional schooling, any special courses?

IF: Before this came along, I even volunteered to go into the K-9 Corps. I just wanted to get out of there, [laughter] but, fortunately, they turned me down. I didn't like dogs anyway, [laughter] but that's how desperate I was to get away from this. I think, frankly, there was quite a bit of anti-Semitism involved.

SH: All right, can you speak to that?

IF: Because I never got a promotion, which I should have gotten, considering the duties I was doing, as an enlisted man, and my first promotions came only after I finished with the Chinese language [program], but that's something else. ... I didn't apply for anything else, just that K-9 Corps, just to get out of it.

SH: Do you think the fact that your father had been a veteran of World War I, and had suffered as he did, had anything to do with them holding you back?

IF: Not at all, not at all. They were not aware of it. They had no way of knowing that, really, and I don't think they would have cared, frankly.

SH: You did not apply for Officer Candidate School or anything like that.

IF: No, no, because, at that time, with the war raging as it was, as an infantry soldier, you became an infantry officer and you became a platoon leader, as a second lieutenant, and that's where the highest casualties were.

SH: You were aware of that.

IF: Yes, "Take it and follow me," was the slogan of the infantry replacement training corps. I have, still have, a pin that says, "Take it and follow me." [laughter]

DF: Before you got called to Yale, you were definitely worried about the specter of going to combat, being sent off to the European Theater.

IF: Well, I was happy not to.

DF: Right.

IF: I mean, I wasn't actively trying to avoid it, but I didn't want to go into infantry officers' school at Fort Benning.

SH: Having had your college background ...

IF: Well, I hadn't graduated at that time. I had about two-and-a-half years.

SH: Right, but there was the ASTP Program and others.

IF: No, I was not in any of those.

SH: A lot of times, if someone had a college background, they would recruit you for Officer Candidate School or something.

IF: Yes. No, I was not in any of those programs. ... In August, of course, V-E Day [V-J Day], and I was right in the middle of the Chinese language course, but they let us continue. We graduated in November, but, at that time, the war was over.

SH: Talk about the reaction to the war being over.

IF: Well, we were in New Haven at the time and we had quite a close group, you know, because, ... every day, we were together for the four months. So, we went out to celebrate, nothing special. We just wandered around, mostly, and that was it, and we graduated in November, from the language course. They didn't know what to do with us. They sent us to Camp Pickett, Virginia, and we had no duties there. We just hung around waiting for them to decide, and then, we were alerted to go to Germany, and somebody had a great idea, "Let's contact somebody in Washington. It's kind of silly to take thirty people who just finished Chinese language school, send them to Germany." [laughter] So, they made some contacts. I don't know who did it. They made some contacts in Washington and those orders were revoked and we were sent to, I don't know if all of us were, but a great many were sent to the Counter Intelligence Corps Headquarters in Fort Holabird. Well, at that time, it was Holabird Signal Depot, in Baltimore, where we started training to be undercover spies in China. I don't know how undercover we could be with our faces, [laughter] but I remember taking about two or three days of instruction in how to pick locks and stuff like this, but, at that time, demobilization had already started. They had a point system. Points were awarded on the basis of how long you had been in, whether you had combat service and overseas service, and so on, and I, at that point, had enough points not to be eligible for this course, counterintelligence, ... unless I wanted to sign over, reenlist, which I did not plan to do at that time. So, I ended up in Headquarters Company and I became a supply sergeant, and my duties, at that time, were to outfit the Counter Intelligence Corps agents who had been all around the world, to be discharged. ... You know, they had been doing it for a couple years and they operated in civilian clothes, but, under Army regulations, they had to be in uniform to be discharged. So, as supply sergeant, I had to outfit them as if they were just new recruits, because they didn't have uniforms. So, I got all sorts of souvenirs from them at the time.

SH: Did you really?

IF: Yes. They came from all over the world.

SH: Did they tell you anything about what they had been involved with?

IF: [laughter] No, not really. So, I outfitted them and we sent them off to a separation center and they were discharged, and I stayed on there until I was discharged. I put in two years, all together.

SH: These were some of the people who were dropped behind the lines and worked in the resistance.

IF: Yes, yes. They finished the lock picking. [laughter]

SH: Amazing.

IF: So, that's when I got my promotions, really, at that time.

[TAPE PAUSED]

IF: Okay.

SH: Go ahead.

IF: When I was discharged, one of the options they gave us was enlistment in the Army Reserves, which I did.

SH: Why did you do that?

IF: That's a good question. [laughter] Because, at that time, we were engaged, Lila and I were engaged to be married, but it looked like a nice part-time job. You know, once every couple of months, you go on active duty, and so on; I took correspondence courses, got promoted again in the Reserve, but that's how I was recalled in Korea, just like the fellows now in the Army Reserves [are] being called up. [Editor's Note: Mr. Feinberg is referring to the Reserve deployments for the Iraq War.] So, I was activated. ... Actually, I was on active duty when Korea was attacked, in 1950, June 1950, and I thought I'd be frozen in, the way they were at Pearl Harbor time, but I was discharged in; not discharged, but released from active duty, June 30th of 1950. That was five days after the first attacks.

SH: Really, someone with a Chinese-language background?

IF: But, I was recalled with my outfit, in April of 1951, yes. Our first daughter was about two months old at the time.

SH: Can we back up to your getting ready to be discharged? What did you think you wanted to do then?

IF: Oh, I wanted to go back to school, but I wanted to be a math teacher, which is what I wanted to do before. That's why I did not go back to Poly; I went to City College. Now, I told you, Townsend Harris was the prep school; I had automatic admission to City College, by telephone. I just called them up. I said, "Here I am. I graduated from Townsend Harris in 19--, whatever, '41." "Hey, come on down." So, I came to the school, went over all my military service and my transcript from Poly, which were not the greatest, but, you know, ... we negotiated. I got a lot of credits. That was 1946, so, I got my degree in 1948. I should have been Class of '45, but I graduated in '48, with a bachelor's in education. I then went on to earn my M.A. in 1949

SH: When you stayed in the Reserves, you said you got a promotion to ...

IF: I became a master sergeant, eventually. I was the First Sergeant of the 354th Communications Reconnaissance Company.

SH: In the very beginning, before Korea, what were your obligations as a Reservist?

IF: Well, we had to appear at meetings, periodically, and I think, twice, I was on active duty, two weeks' training. Hazardous duty; I was assigned to the Bronx, [laughter] and that was it. I was in uniform, two weeks a year, and then, they paid me. I took correspondence courses and that counted toward promotion and, also, counted toward retirement. At one time, I thought I'd get a pension from it, but, as I say, they activated [the unit]. It was a nice part-time job, but they made it full-time. [laughter] ... They sent me up to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, with my company. My company, at that time, consisted of me, a major and four or five other fellows who were non-coms, of one rank or another. I had, as the First Sergeant, [the rank of] master sergeant, [which] was, at that time, the highest enlisted rank.

SH: Was there any chance that you would have been sent as a unit to Korea?

IF: Yes, well, eventually, they enlarged the unit, you know. They took other Reservists or National Guardsmen, put them in our unit, and I led, with the officers, them in training and, eventually, they went overseas, to Korea, but that's another story. [laughter]

SH: Please, go ahead.

IF: Lila and I had quarters on the post. As a master sergeant, I was able to live in the officers' quarters. ... I think it was field grade officers and master sergeants only. So, we had had quarters on the post, our daughter was with us, Lila was pregnant, and I was saving up my leave time for when the baby was due. So, that came in '52, but the baby was late, my leave expired, and the doctor arranged for an emergency leave. While I was on emergency leave, my unit was sent overseas. They were fully trained. They sent them right to Korea, but I couldn't go. They had to put a replacement in for me. They couldn't touch me while I was on emergency leave. When I came back, after the baby was born, I brought Lila back up to our house, and they had nothing for me to do, because my unit had gone. ... They didn't have another unit like it to put me in and after I complained enough, they found an assignment for me. I was assigned to the Army Security Agency School and I was an editor for training manuals.

SH: Where was this at?

IF: That was at Fort Devens, the same overall command.

SH: Okay.

IF: It was the same overall command. The company that I had been with was a division of the Army Security Agency. They did interceptions of enemy radio communications for intelligence purposes. ...

SH: Were you involved in that at all?

IF: No, ... I had nothing to do with that, but I was in charge of the assignments and the duties and whatnot, for, you know, KP and stuff like that, [laughter] and marching and scheduling, and so on, as company First Sergeant. Now, there, I thought for sure, there was an element of anti-Semitism, because our company had four officers, all Jewish, a top NCO, me, Jewish. Three of our lesser NCOs were black, and they filled us up with "mountaineers" from West Virginia. So, it was very [clear]; there were no other Jewish officers or enlisted men in the area.

DF: Did you experience any specific instances of anti-Semitism?

IF: No, no, nothing you could point a finger at, but it was there. It was in the air.

SH: One question I did want to ask was, as you were being discharged from active duty, in 1946, shortly after that, Truman orders the integration of the troops. [Editor's Note: President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order No. 9981 in July 1948, which legally ended the practice of segregation in the US Armed Forces, although *de facto* segregation would persist for years afterwards.]

IF: Right, after; supposedly, it was integrated.

SH: As a Reservist making your way to master sergeant, what did you see within the Reserves?

IF: In the Reserves, I had no [problem], there was no problem. First of all, it was all New York City. It was all New York City, which was itself integrated, yes. [laughter]

SH: Right, but they allow that. I mean, it did integrate.

IF: Yes. ...

SH: Because we have heard where certain units were white ...

IF: Reluctantly, yes. It was still a work in progress at that time, no question about it, but it was more than coincidence the way we were set up.

SH: The unit that went while you were on emergency leave, what was the makeup of that unit?

IF: Well, the officers were still Jewish officers. I don't know who they put in my place. I have no idea. I never heard from anybody again.

SH: The unit that you are talking about ...

IF: 354th Recon Company.

SH: With the primarily black NCOs, and then, the West Virginia group.

IF: Right.

SH: That was the group that went to Korea.

IF: Yes. As I say, I never heard from anybody again, so, I don't know what happened to them.
...

SH: You do not know what they encountered when they got over there.

IF: Yes.

SH: No one ever came back to that Reserve post at all.

IF: No, no. I don't think I was the best-loved master sergeant there. [laughter] We certainly weren't "buddy-buddy."

SH: No, I meant when the war was over in Korea. They did not come back into the unit.

IF: I have no idea what happened. I have no idea what happened. I know they went into some fierce fighting, same thing that happened with my first outfit, when they went to the Battle of the Bulge, but they went as individuals [in World War II]. ...

SH: Individual replacements in different units.

IF: Yes. This outfit went as a unit.

SH: One of the things that Dan studied is the reaction to replacements.

IF: So, you know, I finished out my time there. I did apply for a commission, they gave me a commission, but they would not activate me as long as I was a master sergeant, unless I signed up for a five-year term. At that time, I'd really had enough. They offered me civilian employment, when I was discharged.

SH: Really?

IF: Doing the same thing, at that school, doing the same thing, as an editor.

SH: As an editor, what were you editing, training manuals?

IF: ... Training manuals. I was doing proofreading, looking for consistency in what was promulgated, checking the spelling of all the editorial work.

SH: Were these training manuals for equipment or the training ...

IF: No, procedures.

SH: Okay, just totally procedures.

IF: Yes, procedures. ... Remember, I mentioned correspondence courses earlier, that I had taken; this was the same sort of thing.

SH: To back up again, tell us about when you first met your wife and where. I keep stealing Dan's questions.

DF: That is fine, and how you had time to do so. [laughter] I mean, I am in college [and have little time]. Where? When?

IF: Where? I met her in 1943, I guess it was. That would be about right. What's that, sixty-three years ago? [laughter] in synagogue, Friday night.

DF: You lived close by to each other.

IF: We lived, yes, a couple of miles apart, but walking distance, if you were pushed.

SH: You were still basically finishing up school.

IF: I was still in college. This was before I went into the service. I mean, the war was on, but this was '43 and I was deferred at the time, and I spotted her and I said, "That's for me." I didn't have any idea who she was. I stalked her. [laughter] Well, Grandma can tell you the story better than I can. [laughter] I found out where she lived. ...

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

DF: This continues an interview with Isaac W. Feinberg. You were talking about how you were stalking your wife.

IF: Yes. Well, she wasn't my wife then. [laughter]

DF: I mean your future wife.

IF: I knew, I don't think she did, [laughter] and that was the beginning of the story.

SH: When she opened the door, with all the family ...

IF: She didn't know my name. [laughter]

SH: Did you invite yourself in?

IF: But, I invited myself in, [laughter] or they invited me. Her mother was gracious and I met the whole family, [laughter] but that started a long courtship, and then, when I went into the service, she wrote to me regularly. I saved all the letters. I don't know what happened to them later, but I had saved them for a long time.

SH: I hope you find them.

IF: ... Oh, they're gone, [laughter] they're gone. Then, in 1946, when I was at Holabird, we became engaged. In '47, we got married.

SH: Was she a younger woman or the same age as you?

IF: A year younger. She was at Brooklyn College and she had a part-time job and, I remember, I was taking the subway to downtown Brooklyn, for Poly Tech, and she would take the subway, on certain days, for a part-time job she had downtown, also. ... She got on the station before I did, but I knew where she stood, and I knew which door of the subway train was the one where she was and we always bumped into each other, accidentally. [laughter]

DF: There is also a story about your wedding day, right? She graduated earlier that day from Brooklyn College.

IF: Oh, yes. That was June 15, 1947, Father's Day, and she got her degree in the morning from Brooklyn College. I was there. We had Good Humors [ice cream]. She went her way, I went my way, and, that evening, we got married. [laughter]

SH: Great story.

IF: And then, we went on our honeymoon and somebody had to register for me for college, because I had to go to summer school that summer, and my program was all messed up, but we managed to straighten that out. [laughter]

DF: Your honeymoon was in Niagara Falls.

IF: Well, we ended up; we didn't end up there, but we didn't start there, either. No, we flew. In those days, flying was still a novelty. We took DC-3s, on Colonial Airlines, which later merged into Eastern, and we flew to Montreal and we stayed there a couple of days. We boarded a cruise ship. We went up the St. Lawrence River, up the Saguenay River, back down again, back down to Quebec. I may have it inside out. Anyway, we came back down to Quebec, we stayed in the Chateau Frontenac a couple of days, and we got on a train. ... We found out we had an upper and lower berth, so, we canceled one of them [laughter] and we trained to Toronto. We

went to a ballgame in Toronto. I forget the name of the [team], Toronto Chiefs [Toronto Maple Leafs?], I think it was, I'm not sure, minor league game, in those days. ... Then, we went on to Niagara Falls, the General Brock Hotel, stayed there a couple of days and we went to Buffalo and we flew home, and we went to the Waldorf Astoria.

SH: Did you?

IF: Yes, one night, [laughter] and then, we came home.

SH: Had you done all the planning for this?

IF: Oh, yes, yes. I had worked it all out with an agent. The agent did a good job, except for the upper and lower berth, that we cancelled the upper, [laughter] and then, I went back to school.

SH: Did you see a real difference in going to school as a very young man, going to college, and now coming back?

IF: Oh, straight "As" when I came back, yes, all the way through, yes.

SH: Were there a lot of veterans in the program when you came back?

IF: Yes, I guess there were some. I don't know. Actually, ... at that time, the field for teaching mathematics was still pretty dry, and so, I said, "What am I going to do if can't do that?" There was nothing in mathematics ... in those days, nothing really. So, I decided to major in accounting and, essentially, I was going for a BBA, bachelor's of business administration and accounting, but came my last summer, I couldn't get the course I needed to get my degree at the end of the summer. If I stayed with the bachelor's of business administration, I'd have to go on another six months, but, by switching majors, I was able to take a different course, which was given over the summer. So, I ended up with a bachelor's of science in education, just that sociology [was needed] instead of something or other, I don't know what it was, and then, I stayed on for my master's degree, because there was still not much field in teaching, 1948.

SH: You were using the GI Bill to pay for school.

IF: Oh, yes. Oh, the GI Bill was tremendous, yes, Public Law 346. ... Of course, when I first got out of the service, I don't know if you know about the "52/20 Club."

DF: I do not.

IF: The 52/20 Club was, I guess, a glorified unemployment insurance for veterans. Readjustment, I think it was called, or readjustment allowance. ... As long as you didn't have a job, but were actively seeking one, you got twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks.

[TAPE PAUSED]

IF: ... Took me through the summer, and then, I went into school and Public Law 346 paid my tuition, paid for my books and gave us an allowance besides. So, Lila was teaching. She just started teaching that summer. So, between the GI Bill and her salary, you know, we managed.

SH: Who took care of your little ones?

IF: We didn't have any little ones then, yes. That was '46, yes.

SH: That is right. I jumped ahead.

IF: That was '46, so, '47, thereabouts. So, when I got my bachelor's, I just stayed on full-time, went for a master's, got my master's in '49 and I started teaching in 1949.

SH: Was that the first time you taught or had you done student teaching?

IF: Well, I did the teaching in the Army.

SH: Okay. Had you done any teaching with civilians? You were going to teach high school students.

IF: Yes. ... My goal was to teach mathematics and my first certification was in business subjects, but, once I was appointed as a teacher in business subjects, they gave me a math program. So, I was teaching math. Actually, I taught while I was in the college, as an undergraduate, because my primary instructor was quite ill and he could not handle his classes. ... So, they hired somebody to sit back of the room and I essentially taught the class, for a whole semester; the same thing with my ... student teaching. I was assigned to Washington Irving High School for student teaching, which was an all-girls school. So, I had no problem there.

SH: And you still went ahead and became a math teacher. [laughter]

IF: [laughter] ... There, again, this same instructor, who was my college professor, was also a teacher for certain subjects at the high school. So, I taught his subjects. They had a sewing teacher sit in the back of the room and I taught business law, I taught bookkeeping, business arithmetic. So, even before I was hired, you know, I had done quite a bit of teaching.

SH: Did you focus on trying to get into a high school or were you, at that point, willing to take anything?

IF: Well, New York City, at that time, had a merit system. Now, I hate to think of what it's like, but, at that time, it was a merit system. You had to take examinations, interviews, teaching tests, observe teaching, and so on, to be certified and it was competitive. So, it took awhile to go through that procedure, but, eventually, you know, I became full-time, registered. I ended up as an assistant principal, head of the math department for a big high school, and certified as a secondary school principal (but never actually worked at it, although I was acting principal for awhile).

DF: This was Fort Hamilton High School.

IF: Fort Hamilton was an interim station along the way. I started with the junior high; actually, I've taught everything from fourth grade up through college.

SH: Have you?

IF: Fourth grade was great. I enjoyed that. [laughter] They're like sponges, you know, fourth grade kids, the greatest. I taught them Chinese songs. That was right after I got out of the service and one of the social studies units, on the fourth grade level, was the study of China. So, I became the local expert. I had a long-term substitute assignment; I became the local expert on China and I taught that. I had them all singing real Chinese songs and stuff like that. I loved that. [laughter]

SH: You had always wanted to teach math, but did you ever think that your language skills would have a role?

IF: Oh, I taught everything, yes. I even signed up to teach French, one year. They didn't have a French teacher. Fortunately, they got one at the last minute, [laughter] because French was not my favorite language.

SH: Primarily, it has been math.

IF: Math, oh, yes, and at Rutgers also. I taught evening high school for fourteen years, in Brooklyn, in addition to my day schools, and that really gave me an appreciation for the people who studied part-time while they're working.

SH: Were these mostly immigrant students?

IF: No, no. They were people who, for one reason or another, didn't get their high school diplomas and needed them. It was not GED, they were standard courses and they got diplomas when they finished their full course, took them years, in some cases. ... I did that for fourteen years, and then, I moved on to Brooklyn College and I taught in the School of General Studies at Brooklyn College. That was for seven years, until the big budget cuts hit. I was an adjunct, you know, while I was working. Actually, I couldn't teach in the public high schools while I was a supervisor. So, when I was promoted to assistant principal, I could no longer teach in the high schools. So, I moved on to the college. I taught there for seven years, and then, the budget cut came, so, ... I don't think they had any adjuncts there for quite awhile. ... Then, I retired in 1980 and I taught one or two semesters in a private high school in New Jersey, the Ranney School. I don't know if you ever heard of it?

SH: Which one?

IF: The Ranney School. It's in Tinton Falls, and then, I connected with Rutgers and I think I was there two, maybe three semesters, when Lila got hit with this walking problem. That was in

'82, '83. So, then, since I had already retired from the school system, we were in a position to move. We went to Florida.

SH: When you were teaching at Rutgers, were you still living in New York?

IF: No, we were living in New Jersey. We were in Manalapan.

SH: When did you move to Manalapan?

IF: 1979.

SH: You basically had finished your teaching in New York.

IF: Well, I retired in 1980, but Lila was still teaching. She was still teaching.

SH: In New York?

IF: In New York. We were both working in Staten Island at the time. We were living in Bay Ridge, but teaching in Staten Island. So, we just hopped over Staten Island, went to the other side to live, in a condo, and, when she could no longer teach, we found out that the warm weather was better for her than the cold. She couldn't move at all here in New Jersey during the winter. So, we already had a condo in Florida, which we used for vacations, so, we just up and moved and sold our condo in New Jersey by telephone. [laughter] We listed it with an agent and a friend of mine was a lawyer and he handled everything for us. So, we never met the people who bought it.

DF: What were your impressions of Rutgers students in the early 1980s, just from your short time there?

IF: Well, I enjoyed it very much. There are always a couple of wise guys, whatever the class. [laughter]

DF: You taught more elementary math.

IF: I taught freshmen survey courses, yes. I remember teaching in one building where we were below grade; we could look out and see the highway.

DF: There are the river dorms.

IF: ... Yes, a river dorm. I had an office at Cook College and, another year, I had an office up in the hills someplace; I forget what it is. It's been a long time ago, but I enjoyed it. I enjoyed teaching there. The only thing is, with any part-time teaching job, it becomes full-time before you know it, with committees and marking papers and office time, and so on. So, it really began to fill up my time, but, if Lila hadn't been ill, if we hadn't moved, I probably could have stayed on there, maybe qualified for another pension, who knows?

DF: She was ill. Was that because of her polio?

IF: No, it had nothing to do with the polio, nothing at all to do with the polio. Lila had polio in 1953, one of the last cases in New York City.

SH: Really?

IF: Yes, but it's got nothing to do with her condition now.

SH: She was able to pull through that.

IF: She was able to, with the Sister Kenny approach. That was a rough time. It was before the Salk vaccine. Gamma globulin was the antidote, I guess, for those who had been exposed. That was a rough time. That was the summertime. I taught day school and night school that summer, just to keep us going.

SH: How many children did you have?

IF: At that time, we had two. That was 1953.

SH: How many children do you have?

IF: We have four.

SH: You have four.

IF: Yes, and each of them has three. So, Dan's number three in his group and, here, we have numbers ten, eleven, twelve, the youngest set. [laughter]

SH: I wanted to ask about your teaching career. You started out as, basically, a drill sergeant and moved ahead. What have you seen in students? Are you disheartened? Are you heartened? You taught through the 1960s and the 1970s, and then, at Rutgers in the 1980s.

IF: Oh, I enjoyed teaching. I miss the kids, miss working with the kids, and I think I was a good teacher.

SH: I suspect so.

IF: I think I could have taught anybody anything, in math, you know, at that level. ... No, I remember my oldest grandchild, who was having great difficulty in algebra as a freshman, ninth grade, and she was really disheartened and we had come up for a visit about a week or so before the New York State Regents Exams and I sat down with her for a couple of hours. She ended up with a ninety-eight on the Regents Exam. Teacher accused her ... of cheating. [laughter] I taught her what she had to do.

DF: I have also heard stories, horror stories, about Aunt Lynne, your oldest daughter, and your teaching her calculus.

IF: Oh, no, insisting that she take calculus, [laughter] the only non-"A" she got in school, in Brooklyn College, yes. She was valedictorian for her high school.

DF: Did you encourage any of your other children, my father included, to go into teaching then and continue that?

IF: Your father came up with engineering as his major. That was a surprise to us. We had no idea, but I think, retroactively, he would have been a teacher. I think he'd like to be a teacher now.

DF: Yes, he says that.

IF: Maybe when he retires, he'll go into it, could be. No, I loved teaching.

SH: How do you think your time in the military during World War II impacted the person that you are today?

IF: That's a hard question to answer. I really don't know. To some extent, the military was good, but, look, I gave them four years. [laughter] I could have put those four years to more useful pursuits, yes. At one time, after Holabird, when I was up at Fort Devens, they had a big program of teaching English to foreign, you know, soldiers who ... had been immigrants, perhaps, who served in the military on our side and were becoming citizens, but had to learn better English. They had a big program on the post and I had been certified to teach English to foreigners, and I could not wangle a transfer, from one side of the post to the other side, because it was a different command. ...

SH: There was actually a program to help reintroduce them.

IF: Right. They might have had some POWs involved, too, I'm not sure, but I met a lot of different, interesting people. I was in one unit, in Holabird, which was mostly *Nisei*, second-generation Japanese, and they were great kids. They were really great.

DF: You mentioned that you did not speak to your outfit in Korea. Have you spoken to anybody since World War II?

IF: Anybody I served with?

DF: Yes.

IF: No, no. I have not run into any contacts, from World War II or [Korea].

DF: No reunions.

IF: No. I always look in the columns [in veteran's publications], but no. With the Navy, it's different. When you look at those reunion columns, you see ships. Well, the ships had a closer identity than the Army did. So, I have not run into anybody.

SH: The men that were involved in the Chinese language school, do you know where they wound up?

IF: ... Some of them went and became agents. Some of them went through the full training. Whether they signed over or not, I don't know. They might have been younger than me, I really don't know, but, as I say, I have never run into them.

SH: At the different bases where you were stationed, I guess Florida would be as far south as you went, was it a shock for a young man from New York to suddenly find himself in Florida?

IF: Well, Florida, of course, at that time, was very strictly segregated. Yes, they had one of the best restroom systems in the country, because everything was duplicate. You know, on the turnpike, and so on, everything was in duplicate, black, white, all over. The Army itself, at that time, was segregated. They had separate service clubs for black soldiers and for white soldiers. There was no mixing; the public transportation, the same way, and that was a shock. You know, in New York, we didn't have that, up here, and New Jersey had a little bit of it, yes. Maryland had quite a bit, down US 40.

SH: You actually did see that progression as you came south from the North.

IF: Yes, very definitely, very definitely, Washington, DC.

SH: Were you ever stationed in Washington?

IF: I would get to the Pentagon, periodically, when I was a supply sergeant, because we had operatives working in the Pentagon and I had to get certain supplies and papers down there from Baltimore, from Holabird.

SH: That you would take to them.

IF: So, I would go on one of the Army Courier Service's vehicles and go to the Pentagon, to make deliveries, pick-ups, things like that.

SH: As a person working in this environment, what kind of inspections did you have to go through? Were there people who were spit-and-polish or was it more relaxed?

IF: Well, basic training was spit-and-polish, more spit than polish, [laughter] but that was my first experience with a hurricane, at Camp Blanding.

SH: What happened?

IF: ... That was in '44, some time. That might have been the time when Atlantic City was hit so badly. [Editor's Note: The Great Atlantic Hurricane struck the East Coast of the United States in September 1944.] I'm not sure, but there was a big storm over there and we all had to huddle in a shelter at the mess hall, which was really not much of a shelter. It was a wooden building.

SH: However, it was all right. I mean, everybody came though.

IF: Oh, yes, everybody came through, yes, but the nearest town, Starke, Florida, was a microcosm of segregation. They didn't take too kindly to the soldiers, either, for that matter. [laughter]

SH: I was going to ask you, what about going on leave?

IF: Yes, just like "town-and-gown," yes.

SH: What was a leave like for a young man from New York? Did they think your accent was funny?

IF: No, I don't remember anything like that. I used to go to Jacksonville, every couple of weeks, when I had time off, and wander the streets, look around, sightseeing. I loved St. Augustine. I got down there frequently. Gainesville was just a little town at the time, University of Florida was there, but, now, it's a big place, but I never got further away than that, because time is a constraint.

SH: When did you learn to drive?

IF: I learned in the Army. I failed my driver's test in the Army, but, the next week, I was giving driving tests myself, on big two-and-a-half-ton trucks. [laughter] I remember taking my driving test there. It was part of my basic training, I guess. I got in this two-and-a-half-ton truck and started driving and I come up behind another one; I didn't know they were parked there. I thought they were just stuck in traffic, they're going to move on. [laughter] So, I flunked that test. It was maybe a year later before I got an Army license, but that didn't stop me from driving. After that, you know, I got in my jeep, drove all around. I didn't get a state license until I came back from the service. Well, in New York City, you didn't need a car.

SH: I know.

IF: So, that was no problem.

SH: We have heard other stories of people coming out of New York who did not want to admit they did not know how to drive, because the duties looked better than the others.

IF: Well, we had no occasion to drive. We didn't even own a car. My family didn't have a car, rode busses and mass transit stuff.

SH: Did any of your children serve in the military?

IF: No, no, hopefully, nobody ever will have to, either. It's good training, you know. I think universal military training would be a good idea, but no war, [laughter] but the discipline and organization is good.

DF: How close was my father to being drafted in Vietnam? Was he at all involved? He was towards the tail-end of the war.

IF: Well, at that time, there was a lottery. That was the Vietnamese War, and there was a lottery for picking numbers, for assigning numbers; I'm not even sure now how it worked, and then, there was a lottery, they picked numbers, to serve, but, fortunately, all our sons and sons-in-law were lucky. Well, son-in-law Howie went into teaching. That was one of the [exemptions].

DF: Irwin came close, right?

IF: Yes, he came very close, but, fortunately, nobody had to go.

SH: What has been your passion, other than teaching? I do not know if you had time for anything else with all these teaching jobs.

IF: Well, along with my teaching, I did a lot of editorial work. I got my background in the Army and, when I was teaching in the junior high schools, I was often the faculty advisor for the yearbook, literary magazine, newspaper, just as an added duty. Then, I did some of that in the high school, too. Oh, at Fort Hamilton High School, one of my non-teaching duties was, I was treasurer of the school. So, I was in charge of all the financial income and outgo, not the tax money, but the athletic funds and all of that. So, everything that was spent had to go through me and everything that came in had to go through me. I had a bookkeeper assigned to me, and I took charge of all those finances, various funds, graduation funds, award funds, things of that sort, you know, a general auditor, really.

SH: Had you been involved in politics at all?

IF: No, ... only school politics.

DF: Synagogue politics was all.

IF: Yes, synagogue politics, for awhile. Yes, I was active in our synagogue, editorial work. I did the monthly synagogue bulletin, on my own PC. For years, I did all the typing and setup.

SH: Where was this?

IF: This is in Florida, yes. That's when I had the time for it. Yes, so, I put out a twenty-page monthly bulletin, and then, we have an annual Book of Remembrance, which was in Hebrew and in English, I used to set that up. I did that for five years, designed it and published it.

SH: You had a question about the *bar mitzvah*.

DF: Yes. This is going way back now. I was just curious whether your father; your father died in 1938, you said, 1937.

IF: '37, yes, that's before my *bar mitzvah*.

DF: Before your *bar mitzvah*. What kind of effect did that have on you at that point?

IF: Not the greatest, to tell you the truth. No, I don't know what to say. I was a little boy, [laughter] I did what I was told most of the time, not all, but most of the time, and things were different in those days. I was well into high school when I was *bar mitzvah*-ed. Nowadays, kids are in elementary school. I still can't get over the idea that fourteen-year-olds are in the eighth grade and I was fifteen and I graduated from high school.

DF: I cannot imagine.

IF: I can't get used to that. ... It was not necessarily a positive thing, I still say that, yes. I got to school too soon, but, then, I made that even by four years in military. [laughter]

SH: You did?

IF: Yes.

SH: Almost like a holding pattern.

DF: If we are talking about passions, I know you have a passion for traveling now. When did that passion for travel start? Do you want to talk about some early family trips that you took?

IF: Well, the first family trip, I remember, was the cruise from New York to Los Angeles, sixteen days. Of course, I was nine years old at the time, but I still remember. We went to Cuba. I remember being in Cuba, at the time.

SH: Really?

IF: Yes, that was a port stop. I remember seeing the bullet holes. That was the Batista Revolution [Fulgencio Batista's 1933 coup], bullet holes in all the buildings, traveling in open touring cars, probably 1929 versions or whatnot. Going through the Panama Canal, that was an experience. I remember that, and then, after we were married, we did a lot of traveling by car. We crossed the country several times by car, just the two of us, and then, later with the kids. We took four kids on a ten-thousand-mile summer trip.

SH: Where did you go?

IF: We left New York, came west, basically parallel to US 80 all the way to Denver. We didn't go to Denver, north of Denver, Rocky Mountain Park, then, down to Grand Canyon, into Mexico, across the Rockies in Mexico, up through Tijuana, up to Vancouver, Victoria, saw the

beginning of the Alaska Highway, but they wouldn't let us go on it. We didn't have all the equipment you needed in those days, came back across Canada, on the Trans-Canada Highway, yes. No, we did that a couple of times, with or without children.

SH: Were your kids involved in Scouting, as you had been?

IF: No, no. Your father didn't like Scouting because of uniforms. He wouldn't wear a uniform. [laughter] ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

DT: We would like to thank you for taking the time to talk with us. We appreciate it and all of your stories were great. This concludes an interview with Isaac W. Feinberg on October 20, 2006.

IF: Okay, it's been a pleasure. I didn't know I could talk so much. [laughter]

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

Reviewed by Daniel Feinberg 4/1/07

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/22/10

Reviewed by Isaac W. Feinberg 3/29/10