

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT M. FELLER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

KURT PIEHLER

and

JAMES DUNNE

HIGHLAND PARK, NEW JERSEY

NOVEMBER 27, 1995

TRANSCRIPT BY

G. DOROTHY SABATINI

Kurt Piehler: ... This begins an interview with Mr. Robert M. Feller on November 27, 1995 in Highland Park, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

James Dunne: James Dunne.

KP: I would like to begin by asking you about your father, who was a Rutgers man and quite a remarkable man.

Robert M. Feller: That's correct. Well, he was something special, yes. ...

KP: First of all, he was born in Russia. How old was he when he came over to the United States?

RMF: He was, I think, five or six when the family arrived in this country. ... As a matter-of-fact, he started his schooling at the old Bayard School in New Brunswick. He used to tell us of how the family got him all dressed up to go, complete with a derby hat, and he got to school, and the kids took one look at him and descended on him, beat the daylights out of him. Whether it was the derby hat, or because he was new, or what, I don't know, but, ... that was the beginning, and then, he went through the New Brunswick school system, and graduated in 1904, and received a state scholarship to Rutgers, and he was an engineering major, but, of course, things are somewhat different now. ... In those days, the chances of a Jew becoming acceptable in the engineering field were very, very small, and so, after his graduation in 1908, incidentally, he ... got a commission as a second lieutenant out of the ROTC, although he never served actively.

KP: However, he was in the Reserves.

RMF: ... He was in the Reserves. However, by the time, in World War I, that he might have been eligible for service, he already had a wife and ... two children. So, he was not called up. As a matter-of-fact, I still have, downstairs, the ROTC dress sword that he used to wear. ... He did earn a Phi Beta Kappa key and he did earn a number of other prizes while he was at school.

KP: Would your father have been able to attend college without the state scholarship?

RMF: No, absolutely not.

KP: What did his parents do for a living?

RMF: My grandfather was, and this is a term that you may not be familiar with, a custom peddler. Familiar with the term?

KP: No.

RMF: Okay. Those were the days when there weren't as many cars around, and there weren't such things as shopping malls, and so on, and there were a great many farms in the area, and so, there were men who earned their livelihood by taking a horse and wagon, loading it with all of

the things that they thought the farmers might possibly need that they couldn't grow, or produce, or create on their farms, and then, go around from farm to farm selling it. So, that's what he did.

KP: Did he sell to the farmers around the area?

RMF: ... He sold to people who were ... too far away from the stores in New Brunswick and ... he was not unique. There were a number of them. As a matter-of-fact, I think that there was a cousin of mine, a man married to a cousin of mine, who ran a truck doing this sort of stuff for a considerably longer period of time, into the 1960s, but, by that time, of course, between the shopping malls and everybody owned a car, it just didn't function anymore.

KP: Your father held a number of different jobs. He was a teacher, he worked as a manufacturer, and he went into the real estate and insurance business. How did his career progress and why did he switch jobs?

RMF: ... The thing that happened at first, and it's something that he always was extremely grateful to the City of New Brunswick for, was the fact that they accepted him as a teacher. He taught math [and] he taught German in the New Brunswick high school system. He was the first principal of the night school in New Brunswick, and created their classes, English for New Americans, and he was extremely involved in the community. He was one of a group of young men who created the first Jewish Community Center, which became the YMHA, as we have it here in town. As a matter-of-fact, he was the first president of the Jewish Welfare Board. This was the case of the ... child being parent to the father, because the Jewish Welfare Board, which covers all of the associations, came after the creation of the first Y, and he stayed in the teaching profession until, I think, ... around the end of 1914, and, at that point, we were coming up towards the possibility of involvement in World War I, and he was beginning to feel squeezed by the fact that teachers, in those days, were not paid particularly well, as they are not today, and ... somebody came to him and said, "You know, I think you could do pretty well if you would be willing to undertake the operation of a clothing factory." ... He thought about it, and he realized that he could earn more money that way, and so, he did. He left teaching, and he started with an outfit, who, I believe, had a factory in Hoboken, and he used to commute from New Brunswick to Hoboken for an extended period of time, and then, well, all right, ... the story that always comes up as one of the favorite family stories. There was Harry Feller's "labor relations technique." His cutters came to him one day and said, "We want a nickel an hour more," and he said, "Okay, you got it, but, you have to clock out every time you go to the bathroom." That was the last that anybody heard of the request for the nickel an hour more. Anyway, he was there for a fair number of years, and then, and I don't remember exactly when it started, it was after World War I, but, he made the classic mistake of many, many, many people who said to themselves, "If I can do it for them and make money for them, I ought to be able to do it for me," and so, he opened a factory on lower Fifth Avenue in New York City and started manufacturing men's vests and clothing specialties, smoking jackets, fancy vests for formal wear, and stuff of that sort, and did reasonably well, at least for a while, and then, unfortunately, we came to 1929. ... He was one of thousands, and thousands, and thousands who went down the drain in the Great Depression, 'cause he didn't have the financing and he was a little operator, and ... my mother joined him in the business, and so, we were left at home with my mother's mother, and my

grandmother, actually, was the one who raised my sister and me.

KP: You were accustomed to seeing your mother go off to work then.

RMF: Actually, actually, no. ... Incidentally, we had moved to Bensonhurst, in Brooklyn, by then.

KP: Okay, that would be why you were born in Brooklyn.

RMF: That's why I was born in Brooklyn, at home, no hospital in those days, and I didn't see them go off because of the fact that the two of them were usually out of the house by, like, six-thirty in the morning. We would still be asleep, and Grandma would get us up, get us dressed, get us off to school, so on, and then, they would come home late, and ... we saw them most of the time on weekends. They would go into work on Saturday, but, we, my sister, myself, and my grandmother, would join them at the factory, which was never referred to as the factory. It was always "the place," and ... we would join them there, and then, it was a special occasion, really, from there on. I mean, they took us to our first New York theater from there, they took us to museums, they took us ... to the restaurant up the block, where they had the special kind of pickled beets, [laughter] and then, ... Sundays, we spent pretty much together. The family would go to Coney Island, which was a less tensioned place than it is today, and go to the beach with the usual, typical things. Grandma would pack a box full of sandwiches and stuff of that sort and we would go to the beach. Incidentally, sometimes, on Saturdays, we would go to visit my grandmother's sister, who lived on, well, 144th Street in Manhattan. It's an area, now, which has gone downhill incredibly, but, in those days, it was still pretty nice, and we'd go to visit her. One of her sons would take my sister and me out for walks, and stuff of that sort, and then, when the rest of the family came back, because they worked, also, six days and they would come back from their factory, having stopped off in downtown New York to pick up bags and bags of delicatessen, all sorts of goodies, and there would be an enormous party, and then, eventually, we'd head back for home, and I would usually just fall asleep on the train, wake up the next morning in bed with no memory of how I'd gotten there. So, it was interesting.

KP: It sounds like you had a very happy childhood.

RMF: Yeah, yes, we did, and the important thing is that we had no idea, in that period after 1929, how desperate things were, because my father was a very stubborn guy. He refused to declare bankruptcy. He was a man of enormous pride, ... and, yes, he had great debts, relatively, for those days, but, he was not going to ... declare bankruptcy. He was going to pay everybody back. ...

KP: Was he able to do that?

RMF: Yes.

Frieda Feller: It took years.

RMF: Years, and years, and years, and years. ... We had a family reference, “burying the dead horse.” ... That was it and it took, golly, ... until just about 1950, from 1929, before the “dead horse” was finally buried.

KP: When did your father leave manufacturing and go into insurance?

RMF: Well, he had no choice, because the factory ... simply had to close, and he did all sorts of things. He used to go door-to-door, trying to sell fountain pens and stuff of that sort, and, finally, about 1930, as I recall, my uncle, two of them lived in town here, and my Uncle Meyer called him one day and said, “Harry, we got a problem here. There has been trouble with the secretary of the building loan on whose board I serve and we’re going to need somebody as a replacement. Will you come? ... We’ll pay you \$3,000 a year,” and, in 1930, that was not bad, and so, he said, “Yes, certainly,” and, ... in 1930, we moved the family back to New Brunswick, to an apartment on Livingston Avenue, and he started with the building loan and it didn’t take too long. In fact, he was almost certain of this, beforehand, that the salary from the building loan was not going to be enough to support a family of five, because my grandmother came with us, and so, I don’t know who it was that suggested to him that he get involved in real estate and insurance, but, ... he did, and he opened a little office, sharing with the building loan, down on Paterson Street in New Brunswick, and then, it just went on from there, and he was reasonably successful at it.

KP: The 1930s, in many ways, was a hard time to start an insurance-real estate business. Did your father have enough ties to the area to make it successful?

RMF: Well, if he had not had the ties, it would have been absolutely pointless to even consider this, but, yes, he did, and his brother, my Uncle Meyer, who was in the wholesale butter and eggs business, started him off by turning all of his business over to him, and then, others, I mean, the same way, and ... it still wasn’t easy, I can assure you, because, you know, I was ... a kid, and I used to have to go, ... I wanted to, I guess, ... into the office and help out there. ... I still remember, with great bitterness, I suppose, that there was one month that he sent me out to try to collect back bills, ... one entire month, and I could not collect one nickel. It wasn’t good. I mean, people ... still do not realize how terrible that time was for many, many people, and remember that this is before there was such things as welfare, although, knowing my father, he would have died rather than go on welfare, but, there was no such thing, and, to the extent that the community was willing to help out, fine. ... My mother, who also got involved in activities in the community, became the center at the office. We had an office, you know, so, they used it for everything. There was a group, I think that they are still around, the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent and Free Loan Society, and, ... what they did was, ... people in real need, they lent them fifty bucks, no interest, but, with the understanding that it would be, eventually, paid back, and ... people used to come to our office to make payments, and people used to come to the office to pick up checks, and ... she handled that end of it. ...

KP: Your mother was really an active woman. She really enjoyed being in business and she enjoyed her benevolent activities.

RMF: Oh, yes. I am not sure that she really enjoyed it. I’m really not sure. It was a necessity, ...

because, certainly at the beginning of the business, the business could not afford paid staff, and so, my mother, who was a skilled, qualified professional, she had been an executive secretary before her marriage, in New York, [went to work there].

KP: How did your parents meet?

RMF: If I remember correctly, they were introduced by members, I think, of the (Aaron?) Family, from Aaron Plumbing, and ... I don't recall ... how they got together, but, they were introduced. As a matter-of-fact, I have, upstairs, and I haven't had the heart, as yet, to really dig into it, ... a whole box of letters that they wrote to one another during the period of time before their engagement and their marriage, and, someday, I will sit down and read it, read through them, but, I haven't, as yet, but, they were introduced, as I say, by these people out of the Aaron family, and, what the tie was, I'm not quite sure, but, it went on from there, and they got married in 1912. My sister was born in 1914, and then, I was born in 1918, and, anyway, ... well, they were both very, very special people, but, ... he was the guy who said, and this was really an appreciation of what the City of New Brunswick had done for him, I think, ... that, "Community service is the rent that you pay for the privilege of living in a community," and he set his rent very, very high.

KP: He was very active and you followed in his footsteps. You were also very active.

RMF: Yeah, ... I was indoctrinated pretty well, I would say.

KP: It is often helpful in insurance and real estate to maintain civic ties, but, it went beyond that for your father.

RMF: Oh, it went so far beyond that that you could not believe it. I mean, there was absolutely nothing that would affect the insurance business by being president of the Red Cross. There was nothing that would affect the insurance business by being treasurer of the Boy Scout Council. As a matter-of-fact, he received the Boy Scout Silver Beaver Award. ... The Urban League, he was on their board, and, of course, even when we were still living in Brooklyn, he managed to get back for reunions at Rutgers. He was in the Class of 1908.

KP: Did you ever go to any of his reunions?

RMF: All of them. [laughter] All of them. You see, it worked out very well, in a way, because we could come from Brooklyn, we could go to the reunion, and then, we had tons of family in the New Brunswick area, so, there was always an additional visit, and so on.

KP: How active was your family in the synagogue?

RMF: My grandfather, now, we're going back another generation, but, my grandfather was one of the founders of [the] congregation of (Ahavas Achim?), and my father, because of the fact that he could handle both English and Yiddish, was its first secretary, and, of course, a lot of the family ... were congregants there. I still maintain a membership in the same congregation, but,

they ... were quite active.

KP: How observant was your family, in terms of the dietary laws and the Sabbath?

RMF: As far as dietary laws, they were completely observant, until my father developed diabetes and had to make some modifications. As far as Sabbath observance, it was impossible, simply because of family survival pressure, and I always had tremendous respect for my grandfather, because there was one time that he had come to visit us in Brooklyn, and he asked my father, "Harry, do you have to go to work on Saturday?" and my father said, "Pop, I've got no choice. I have to," and I respect that fact, that he never said another word about it.

KP: Your grandfather?

RMF: My grandfather.

KP: He would have preferred it if your father stayed home.

RMF: He would much have preferred it, I assure you, much, much preferred, but, ... he was always involved with the congregation, always, to the extent that it was possible.

KP: Your father was a Democrat. Was he a Wilson Democrat or was he more of a New Deal Democrat? Was he ever a Republican?

RMF: No, he was never a Republican. I guess that you'd call him a Wilson Democrat, yeah.

KP: How did he feel about World War I? Did he ever talk about it? Did he ever wish that he had served? He had children by that time.

RMF: Two children, yeah, 'cause I was born in July, just before the Armistice. He was, as I understand, within a matter of a couple of months of call up when the war ended, but, no, I don't recall his ever discussing the war.

KP: You went, for a time, to the public schools in Brooklyn.

RMF: Oh, yeah.

KP: What were the differences that you saw between that school systems and the system in New Brunswick, in terms of your education?

RMF: Well, as far as New York was concerned and the area where we lived, I attended, what I guess I would call, quality schools in ... New York and Brooklyn. The level in those classes was much higher than in ... New Brunswick, ... to the point where, in New York, they were able to handle like thirty-five, forty student classes with no difficulty, because everybody wanted to learn, and then, when I finally finished the sixth grade, I was apparently scholastically qualified to the point where I was put into the New York City Rapid Advance Group. I don't even know if

they still have that.

KP: I do not think so, but, you are not the first to tell me about the Rapid Advance Group.

RMF: Yeah, okay. ... Well, the idea was, simply, that, the RA, you did your seventh grade in six months, RB, you did your eight grade in six months, and then, RC was, supposedly, a full year for ninth grade. ... One of the things, really, that's a memory for me of the education there was the fact that that was a period of time when the New York School System was expanding tremendously, and the net result was that I started off at PS 128, and then, they opened PS 101, so, I went to PS 101, and I went to PS 101 to the sixth grade, and then, I went to Montauk Junior High School for the ... RA, and, by that time, they had opened Seth Lowe Junior High School, so, I moved again, and I was there for the RB period, and then, the family went back to New Brunswick. So, I came back to Roosevelt Junior High School for the ninth grade and it was quite different, quite, quite different, and I finished the ninth grade, and then, went up to the New Brunswick Senior High School on Livingston Avenue. I think, now, it's the junior high, the (Redshaw?) School, and I graduated there in 1934. ...

KP: It sounds like you were way ahead of most New Brunswick students.

RMF: I think so.

FF: Well, he wasn't even sixteen, yet.

RMF: Yeah. ... I graduated from high school before my sixteenth birthday. I graduated from Rutgers before my twentieth birthday, but, ... the thing that contributed, and I think that this has to be recognized, is my parent's influence in this, because, when we were whatever the minimum age was, we were walked over to the Bensonhurst Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library and gotten library cards, our own library cards, and then, a year or so after that, we were taken to the 42nd Street branch, the main branch of the New York Public Library, and we got library cards there, also. ... They encouraged us to read and they really did everything they possibly could to encourage this.

KP: Do you think they expected you and your sister to go to college?

RMF: Oh, I don't think that there was ever any question about that. I mean, if there was financing, if there was funding available, one way or another, yeah.

KP: They were going to make sure.

RMF: Oh, yeah, sure.

KP: They also made it a point to take you to the museums, and shows, and so forth.

RMF: Sure. Look, museums didn't cost anything in those days. Subway was a nickel. I mean, unless you went on one of the double-decker buses on Fifth Avenue, that was a dime, and that

was an experience. [laughter]

KP: How did your father feel about Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, as a businessman?

RMF: I think that he was very much ... in favor of it, even though it created problems when we had to raise our office girl's salary in New Brunswick to eight dollars a week, you know, to comply with NRA, and, but, no, I think that he was very much in favor.

JD: I have a question.

RMF: Sure.

JD: Did you ever feel neglected because your father and mother were so involved in all these other activities?

RMF: No, no. First of all, there was no such thing in those days, at least that I know of, as a latch-key kid. I mean, my mother's mother, my grandmother, she was there. She was very definitely *in loco parentis*. ... Golly, she was in her, I guess, thirties, forties in those days. She had been tragically widowed very young, and she never remarried, and she kept an eye on us, and I supposed that the other half of it is, you know, these days, they give everything fancy names, so, quality time, I mean, when my parents had the time, we got it. We got it, and they really paid attention to us, and they really took us places, and they really showed us as much as they possibly could, and so, no, I don't think that we ever felt neglected.

KP: Did you ever take long vacations away from the New York or New Brunswick area when you were growing up?

RMF: What do you call a long vacation?

KP: Well, say, to a different part of the country, like New England or something.

RMF: No. When we were little kids, in Brooklyn, I recall a couple of years where, and it's funny, I don't remember, I don't think that my sister was with us, but, my grandmother and I went to a farm in New York State, Halcotsville, ... I think that's what it was. It was a working farm that supplemented their income by taking in boarders for periods of time, and so, I went there with her, and I remember, one time, going to another place, also for a week. ... I don't think it was much more than a week, two weeks at the absolute outside. I did go to camp. I did go to camp in New York State and Boy Scout Camp when we were here.

KP: Were you a Boy Scout?

RMF: Oh, yeah, yeah.

KP: What rank did you achieve?

RMF: I was a Life Scout, never made Eagle. My son made Eagle, but, I didn't.

KP: You were close though.

RMF: Well, look, I was never, ever, ever a jock, okay? Therefore, I could qualify for all of the merit badges except the one required one, Sports, and I never earned that. ...

Wife: But, you were a swimmer.

RMF: Yeah, I was a pretty good swimmer. ...

JD: Did you ever regret that you never became an Eagle Scout or was that just something that you lived with?

RMF: Oh, I would have liked to, I would have liked to, but, ... I don't rank it among the great tragedies of my life. [laughter]

KP: You were planning for college during the depths of the Depression. Things had picked up a little in 1933 and 1934, but, still, it was not the most auspicious time.

RMF: No, it was not.

KP: Why Rutgers? There is an obvious connection, but, had you thought of going elsewhere to college?

RMF: Look, I was grateful that I was able to get to a place. I never lived on campus. I lived at home. I walked to school, I walked back from school. It was cheaper than anyplace else. We had to borrow student loans to get through, which I ultimately paid off, ... I think while I was in service.

FF: No, the year we were married.

RMF: The year we were married. No, no.

FF: Was it afterwards?

RMF: Yes.

KP: Where did you get a student loan?

RMF: At Rutgers.

KP: From Rutgers itself?

RMF: Yes. ... They had a student loan program, which was very much needed in those days. I

assure you, I wasn't the only one.

KP: No, I know it was very tough in the 1930s to get through college.

RMF: It was. We had many people who were forced to drop out. Some of them finished up later, but, not many of them. I was lucky.

KP: You were initially pre-med.

RMF: That's right.

KP: What happened to your pre-med career? Did you finish?

RMF: Yes, I finished ... as a bio-sci major, but, there, we had a combination of things. I mean, number one, absolutely no more money to consider going on, absolutely not. Number two, I will admit that I was not the greatest student in the world and ... I would have had to do better to get grades to get me into a medical school. Number three, okay, I had sort of specialized in bacteriology, but, when I started to look for jobs, one of the hospitals in town said that, well, they would be willing to put me on for a year, for the experience, and the second one made a much better offer. They said that they would put me on for the experience, but, then, if I worked out, they would put me on at fifteen bucks a week, and then, I bumped into Joe Eckert ...

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

RMF: ... From the Class of '36. ... He was a Rutgers graduate and he had been extremely fortunate in that he got a job almost immediately at Squibb's where they paid him \$22.50 a week, and then, a year later, he had even gotten a raise and he was up to \$27.50 a week, and so, it just no longer really made sense, and I had, by that time, figured out that there was a difference between girls and boys. [laughter] I was getting interested.

KP: We saw in the yearbook that your description read, "He spent most of his time in New Jersey Hall, but, he found time to become acquainted with most of the Coop." [The Coop was the nickname for the New Jersey College for Women, (NJC). It was short for chicken coop.]

RMF: Yeah.

FF: Well, his sister was there, ... and they lived only a block from ... what was Douglass Campus.

RMF: Yeah, now Corwin Campus. Yeah, well, ... this is true, because [of] my sister. ...

KP: Oh, okay. [laughter]

RMF: Well, no, ... both correct, but, my sister graduated in 1935, and, as a result of this, and because of the fact that our home, at that time, was just off Nichol Avenue, we had women from

the college over at the house all the time, and then, when I did start dating, ... they were much, much more concerned about the *in loco parentis* bit, and they employed this group of older gentlemen who were really, really, really, protective of the girls, and, if you stepped out of line by the thickness of a hair, you were in big, big trouble, and some of the campus mistresses knew me, also, [laughter] not necessarily to the best of my reputation, but, oh, well. [laughter]

KP: You lived off campus, but, very close to it.

RMF: Yes.

KP: Did you feel that you missed anything by not living on campus or joining a fraternity?

RMF: Yeah. I can't exactly tell you what I missed, because I didn't know what I missed, but, there was no question. ... I mean, some of the guys who were living on campus and who were involved in fraternities did seem to be having a lot more fun, in many ways, than I did, so, yeah.

KP: You joined crew your first year and you were also in the band. How was your crew experience?

RMF: Oh, yeah.

KP: You mentioned that you were not a natural athlete.

RMF: No, I wasn't, and ... it was an interesting experience, and this was, I think, the first year or the second year, I don't remember, that Rutgers had reestablished crew. So, it was, I won't call it experimental, but, ... this was back in the days of old Ned Teneycke, who was ... the crew coach, and I got out, and I rowed, and I was never good ... enough to qualify for varsity boat, but, it was fun. It was fun. It was an interesting experience. It was a good workout, and so, I did that for a year, and then, I got involved with the band.

KP: What instrument did you play?

RMF: Clarinet and saxophone. This was one of these funny situations. My sister was a music major, and, as part of the requirements for music majors, they had to learn to play instruments, and so, she had a ... clarinet which she brought home from school, and, in 1936, I had been working, as a summer job, as a camp waiter, up in Pennsylvania, and developed appendicitis. They shipped me home, and they took care of the appendicitis, and that left me with the rest of the summer to kill time, and so, I killed time by teaching myself the clarinet, and, if you can play the clarinet, you can play saxophone. You can play most of the ... reed instruments.

FF: ... You played the piano.

RMF: Well, I had always, yeah, and, anyway, having learned to play the clarinet, more or less, and, since I loathed having to go marching around with the ROTC, you know, you had to have two years of ROTC in those days, I was looking for an angle, and ... my angle was that I went to

see Charlie Cook, who was the bandleader in those days, and said, "Can you use a clarinetist?" and he said, "Can you play a clarinet?" [laughter] So, I auditioned for him, and he probably went [Mr. Feller makes a gulping noise], but, he said, "Okay," and he let me come aboard, and put me as far back as you possibly can in the clarinet section, and then, I managed a little bit further, and then, the next year, I took the money that I had earned, again, I worked as a waiter up at the camp, and ... bought a very second-hand tenor saxophone. So, I now owned my own clarinet and my own saxophone, and so, I went to Charlie Cook, and I said, "Hey, I can play the saxophone," and he said, "Okay," and so, I played the saxophone, and the band, of course, not only played for all the sports events, as they do now, but, they also provided the band for ROTC. So, you did have to put on a uniform, but, at least you didn't have to go marching around like an idiot.

KP: You did that the second year.

RMF: Yes, I did.

KP: You were part of the marching band.

RMF: Out, yes, yeah, and, of course, in those days, the attitude, I don't know whether it's the same now, whether it's different, but, in those days, ... there was a very substantial majority who had great contempt for the military. ... Again, I don't know whether they have it today. ... Do they have the big dances that they used to? I don't know.

KP: No, in fact, my students often comment that they absolutely loved the social life of the '30s and '40s.

JD: The bands that you had were phenomenal, Jimmy Dorsey, Ozzie Nelson.

RMF: ... Yeah, who came here? Who came here?

FF: The gym, the big gym, the Barn.

RMF: The Barn, Ellington? ... We had all of the big bands here, but, there was also another dance, sort of a feature dance, which was Military Ball, and all of the junior and senior ROTC guys would dress in their uniforms, and take their young ladies to the ball, and, of course, for this large majority that I mentioned, it was a matter of pride to say, "Oh, we would never go to that one."

KP: Why was there this contempt for the military?

RMF: ... I don't know whether it's a carry over from the bonus marches and ... MacArthur's ganging up ... on the veterans who marched on ... Washington. I don't know, but, you just didn't, or a great many of us.

KP: Was there any support among the student body for the peace movement of the 1930s?

RMF: I don't know. I don't know. I don't think so. I know that my mother was a member of the Women's Peace Society and used to march in parades and stuff.

KP: It sounds as if your mother might have been an early suffragette when she was coming of age. Do you have any recollections of this from stories she may have told?

RMF: No, I don't have any recollections. It is quite possible.

KP: She never talked about it.

RMF: No, I don't recall it. ... By the time that I was old enough to understand what a vote was, woman had the vote, so, no.

KP: Everyone I have talked to has a story about Dean Metzger. [laughter] So, I take it that you have a story about Dean Metzger, too?

RMF: Of course, of course I have a story. ... I had to appear before him a number of times when I was getting careless with grades, but, yeah, I think that my ... Dean Metzger story probably is, well, ... first of all, the fact that he was, at least among a certain group, informally referred to as "Comrade Metzky," because there was a modest communist movement on campus in those days. It was sort of the thing to do, but, I think that ... my Metzger story, well, ... I'll give you a couple of them. One was the fact, you know, we had a weekly chapel that we had to go to, compulsory chapel, and this ... one morning, he was making this very impassioned speech about morality, ... how he had seen this woman who was less than she should be, and he said, "And I said to myself, 'My God, what if that were my sister?'" and a voice from somewhere at the back of the chapel, and I know who it was, said, "Yeah, you wouldn't have had to pay as much." [laughter] No, the other story ... was not a Metzger story. The other was a Demarest story.

KP: Well, please tell it. [laughter]

RMF: Well, look, Demmy was quite a guy and I understand that he was an excellent president while he was in the job. He was, as I recall, a minister, and, as a result, there was no such thing, even after Prohibition had ended, as liquor anywhere on campus, legally, but, the funny thing in our memory was that Demmy had a rather, I think, ill-fitting partial plate, and the result was that he had definite whistles in his 'S's.

FF: Sssibilant

RMF: Yes, sssibilent. ... I can't do it anymore. I used to be able to do it very well, I don't know why. ... One Rutgers concert, we had the Boston Symphony there, and the conductor, Kousivitsky was given an honorary degree, which was presented by Dr. Demarest, who got up, and, I'm sorry, ... because I can't do the Sssibilant 'S's anymore, but, you can just mentally add them, "Ladies and gentlemen, I present *Condidatum Doctoros Musica Honoris Causa Serge Koussevitzky*," ... [laughter] and the house came down. Koussevitzky couldn't quite understand what was so funny about it, but, anyway.

KP You mentioned mandatory chapel.

RMF: Yes.

KP: How did you feel about having to go to chapel as a requirement?

RMF: Well, ... it was a nuisance, but, chapel was used for making announcements which were of interest, supposedly, to ... things going on, ... things taking place, so on, and they checked. So, you really had no choice but to go. Fortunately, it wasn't very, very long and it wasn't, as I recall, a particularly religious event. So, you know, you accepted it. There were a lot of things that you accepted in those days. ... You accepted Saturday classes, which, I understand, no longer exist. You accepted the fact that ... they didn't think anything unusual about having registration coincide with the High Holy Days and I know that my wife had to come in on Yom Kippur to register. Oh, sure, you could register late, but, that cost money. You paid a penalty for it. So, anyway, those are things which have changed for the better.

KP: Did you, or your father even, ever detect any anti-Semitism at Rutgers?

RMF: My father, no, I don't think so, and ... I don't particularly recall any. ...

KP: It sounds more like insensitivity.

RMF: Well, no, I won't say that. I won't say that. The thing is that, had I lived on campus, I might possibly have, because, look, ... in those days, I mean, number one, we did have a couple of African-Americans in the class, but, officially, they weren't people, you know. My father had one in his class, but, they didn't count. Then, in the fraternities, there were three specifically Jewish fraternities. If you wanted to be a fraternity man and you were a Rutgers student, you pledged either Phi Epsilon Pi, Sigma Alpha Mu, or Tau Kappa Epsilon, ... those three, and you never thought of pledging for any of the other fraternities, because you wouldn't be asked anyway. So, look, we knew it was there. It's there today. I know, a number of years ago, I was retained to do an appraisal of the DU house, then on campus, and, when I checked, ... there was a lavatory on the lower level and somebody had scribbled some distinctly anti-Semitic remarks on the wall of the stall. It's there now. It'll be there. It's going to take a good many years for us to finally change it, but, look, this is something. ... Part of it is insensitivity, there's no question about it. ... I've been dealing with a situation just in the last month or so. I am an amateur radio operator, as is my wife, as is my son, as is my daughter-in-law, but, that's something else, and we found that the ARRL, Amateur Radio Relay League, scheduled their 1996 convention so that it will fall on Rosh Hashanah. Now, I am quite certain, at least I would like to think that I am right, that they did not do this with any malice. It was simply a total lack of sensitivity, and we've written to them, we've been in touch with them, we've begged them to try to change it. Well, look, I am also aware that, when you are dealing with major things, you know, football schedules, conventions, stuff of that sort, they're scheduled years in advance, and, once they are scheduled, it's almost impossible to change. We're going to make it damn well difficult for them to make that same mistake again, but, okay.

FF: ... Get them a hundred year calendar. [laughter]

RMF: Yeah.

KP: Before we started, we talked about the Hauptmann case. What do you remember about the Hauptmann-Bergel case, when you were at Rutgers and your sister was at Douglass?

RMF: Yes. ... We were both out by then. This was all after 1938, but, the same thing, we were, through my father and ourselves, ... involved, and it was a very distasteful thing, but, you've got to remember that this was in the beginning, leading up to World War II, and so, it was not exactly a happy feeling to be walking up College Avenue, and look through a window at Ford Hall, and see in somebody's room a huge Swastika flag on display, and, ... as far as Bergel is concerned, and my classmate, Dick McCormick, to the contrary notwithstanding, I believe that he had a dirty deal, and I do believe that Hauptmann was not pure as the driven snow.

KP: How did most students feel at the time? Did students at the time think that Bergel got a bad deal?

RMF: Well, I can't respond to that, because, as I say, I was already out of school. So, I had no sense of what was ... on campus.

KP: You mentioned that, apparently, there were some Nazi sympathizers on campus.

RMF: Oh, sure.

KP: Where did most students fit, politically? I have the impression that, over all, it was a fairly conservative student body, that Republicans tended to do quite well.

RMF: ... Yeah. Well, it depended. I have a recollection, from 1936, I guess it was, yeah, presidential election, Roosevelt, and we invited, ... oh, let me go to one side for a minute. While I was never a member of a fraternity, I became a member, ... as a matter-of-fact, I was one of the organizers of, if you will, ... the "non-fraternity" fraternity, known in full as the Scarlet Barbarians, otherwise, the Scarlet Barbs. Okay, and so, they were mostly commuters, and we had our own program schedule, and we invited representatives of each of the parties to come and speak to us, and they did. ... I don't think, in a way, that college kids were very much different at that particular aspect, because I still remember that there was this young guy who came to speak for the Republican Party and who started his talk by saying that, "Gentlemen, I suppose that I am a Republican because my father was a Republican," and, when we came to the question and answer period, he was just taken apart, ripped to pieces by the entire group, and the person who was, if you will, the most vindictive of all was one of the members of the Young Republicans on campus. [laughter] You know, we didn't have patience with people who said dumb things. ...

KP: Did you think most students were for Alf Landon in 1936 or Roosevelt?

RMF: I don't think that they were for Landon. I do not think that they were for Landon, but, of course, most of us couldn't vote then, so, it really didn't matter.

KP: Your father was at Rutgers with Paul Robeson.

RMF: No, no. No, Paul Robeson was Class of 1914, as I recall.

FF: '17.

RMF: '17, well, anyway, and my father was out. He graduated in 1908.

KP: Did Paul Robeson revisit the campus while you were here? How did Rutgers students feel about Robeson?

RMF: ... When the Rutgers concert series began in ... 1932, the series was held at the Barn and he was the performer at the first concert. So, he was very much respected in those days. He didn't start to have difficulties until some of his political feelings became public and ... I am still not too sure as to what his frustration was. I don't think that he was a communist. I think that he was a black man who was very frustrated by the fact that he couldn't be as much as everybody else and this notwithstanding the fact that he was an All-American football player, and a fine singer, and a great actor, and all the rest. It was sort of ... a "couldn't be accepted just as me," kind of deal.

FF: Sad.

RMF: Yeah, it's a pity.

KP: You were one of the organizers of the Scarlet Barbarians. What were your activities and how large was your membership? It sounds like you did many of the things that a fraternity would do.

RMF: ... Yeah, ... that I can't help you with. I'm just blank, but, yeah. We had dances, and we had lectures, and we had all sorts of [stuff], and we had a pin, but, I do not remember. It's long gone.

KP: You graduated in 1938 and you started early on your career path? Did you pursue a career the sciences?

RMF: ... Well, I tried. I tried and there was no career path there. So, I ended with the next logical thing, which was to move into the family business, because I had been more or less involved, one way or another, [like at] year's end, when ... everybody got a calendar, and I used to go hauling around a whole knapsack full of calendars, and delivering them to people, and trying to collect money, and all sorts of things of that sort. Sitting down with our office girl and helping her with postings and stuff of that sort, and so, ... in 1938, I guess it must have been September, since I had ... come into the business, ... it was decided that I should go to a special

training school held by one of the companies up in Hartford, and so, I went up there for, I don't remember how many weeks it was, three, four, six, blank, I'm sorry, and it was an interesting experience. Just as a side comment, one of my classmates, ... Tom Macmeekin, ended as a vice-president of the company. Anyway, I spent my time up there, and I did learn a great deal, and then, came back to New Brunswick, and started going to work. Things were a little bit different, of course, in those days, because, in those days, the office opened at nine, closed for an hour for lunch, and, at five o'clock, the key was turned in the door, and everybody went home, and, if you had to work on Saturday, well, you came in 'til noon, but, that was it, not like today.

KP: You joined the family business on the eve of World War II. What do you remember about those days, particularly in the Jewish community, concerning what was going on in Germany? Also, how did your family feel about the Zionist movement?

RMF: ... Working backwards, as far as the Zionist movement is concerned, there's no question that they were very strongly and actively Zionist. My father, [laughter] ... he was president of the Zionist Organization of America, local chapter. He was president of everything, of course, [laughter] a habit that I sort of fell into. ...

FF: Master Mason. ...

RMF: Yeah, well, he was more than a Master Mason, he was a member of the Grand Lodge of the State of New York, but, as far as the community was concerned, I think that, well, it was almost a sense of disbelief that such a thing could be happening. I know that we were involved with some very practical aspects of it, ... making a place for jobs, and getting people into the country, and stuff of that sort. As a matter-of-fact, my brother-in-law is one of those who came over with that group, and anything that could possibly be done was done, but, ... I don't know. ... I think that there was a subconscious feeling that, sooner or later, we were gonna be in it. I don't think that there was ... any question about that.

KP: How did your family feel about supporting the British cause?

RMF: I think we were in favor of it, yes. ... Look, if it could be done without our having to go, fine.

KP: However, your family was not isolation at the time.

RMF: No, no.

KP: It does not sound like you were an isolationist, either.

RMF: No, I don't think so. This is one of the things, somehow, you don't think about, but, no, you know, when you had people on the air like Father Coughlin, and stuff of that sort, it was a little bit horrific. So, no, I think that we were prepared for it. We certainly did not expect a Pearl Harbor, but, ... when it happened, ... we were kind of not surprised.

JD: You entered the Army in 1942.

RMF: Right.

JD: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

RMF: Well, this is another slightly complicated story, okay? I mentioned before that my father was a diabetic. This is something which, apparently, runs all through our family, and, at the beginning of the war, at the beginning of the draft, I was discovered to be a latent, they called it, diabetic, and I was classified as 4-F.

KP: Was this during the 1940 draft or was this after Pearl Harbor, your initial 4-F classification?

RMF: I don't remember. I don't remember. No, I think that it was the ... 1940 draft. Sure, it had to have been.

KP: Yes. So, in a sense, the standards were higher.

RMF: Well, ... I was exempt. ...

FF: He was passing sugar ... or they decided that it was renal. ...

RMF: No. That's not important. That's not important, but, I remained at home, and then, somewhere along the line, a doctor, who was my physician at the time, said, "You know, what's happening here doesn't quite make sense and I would like to perform one more test," and I said, "Fine, let's do it," and he did a glucose tolerance test, which ... were very common in those days, and it came back clean, and, incidentally, I was married by that time. We had an apartment in New Brunswick, and [laughter] I guess I got noble, or something of that sort, and I went down to the draft board, and I said, "It looks as though I'm not diabetic. Put me back in the pot," and I went back, and waited, and, all of a sudden, November, '42, came along. ...

FF: "Greetings!" [laughter]

RMF: [laughter] And, "Greetings!" ...

KP: I want to do a separate interview with Mrs. Feller, but, if you do not mind, I just wanted to ask one or two questions. How did the two of you meet?

FF: Well.

RMF: He wants to ask you. ...

FF: Well, I was a freshman at NJC, living on Douglas campus, now Corwin, and I left my house at Douglas D to go up the street to another house, I don't remember which one, to pick up a friend of mine. We went to the same high school, had been friends since first grade, to pick her

up to go to dinner, and, when I got in the house, there were two young gentlemen sitting there. [laughter] ... One of them was my friend's cousin, and the other was Robert, and they said, ... what did you say? "People are coming over to my house ... after dinner. Why don't you all come over. We'll play the piano, and sing, and what have you."

RMF: ... This was a very common thing, you see.

KP: So, you were a frequent guest. [laughter]

FF: Yes. ... [laughter]

RMF: Oh, sure. ... [laughter]

FF: He was a friend of ... this other Rutgers man, and so, anyway, we went down there after dinner and we've been together ever since. He was a senior and I was a freshman, [laughter] and [I was] impressed.

KP: You got married in 1942. You decided to get married during the war and not to wait until after the war.

RMF: Yeah, ... because, at that time, it looked as though I wouldn't be going.

KP: Because of the 4-F?

RMF: Because of the 4-F, yeah. So, there was nothing to prevent us. ...

FF: We were engaged at the Senior Ball, my senior year, that night. So, we waited a year. We had planned it. ...

KP: You planned to get married in 1941, before the war.

FF: ... Yes. I got out in '41, in June. So, it was just before Pearl Harbor, before the war.

KP: You mentioned that, during the war, you worked. When did you get your job?

FF: January 19th, 1942. ...

KP: Okay, so, you had the job before ...

FF: Before he went. We got an apartment and I commuted from New Brunswick.

KP: You did not get the job after Mr. Feller went, but, before.

FF: It was before and I worked until V-J Day, August 14, 1945.

KP: You were drafted. Your number came up. Is this correct?

RMF: Well, ... I was a drafted volunteer. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you could have just stayed 4-F for quite a long time.

RMF: Oh, sure, I could have stayed in 4-F, period. They wouldn't have come after me. Look, ... there are some very unpredictable things. You're dealing with human error. I know that a friend of ours, at the very beginning of the draft ...

FF: Harold.

RMF: ... Harold, yes, was called. His number came up. This, of course, was the time that the standards were very, very high, and he was called, and he was sent down to Fort Dix, and I don't know what they found that they didn't like.

FF: He was wearing glasses.

RMF: He was wearing glasses. ... I don't know, but, it was something ... that, a little while later, meant absolutely nothing, and they sent him home, and they said, "Go back. We don't want you. Wait until we call you." Now, he never was able to figure out what happened, whether his card was lost, whether it was filed with deceased, or what, but, he was a 1-B, as I recall, which was the second classification, and never was called again, ever. So, go figure. Anyway, I went. I went and I left [on] November ... whatever it was. I have a picture. ... I haven't really tried to find me in it, but, I know that I'm in it and we went down to Fort Dix.

KP: You left with a group of people. You all gathered down by the train station.

RMF: Oh, yeah. Yes.

FF: ... The picture at the train station.

KP: Did you get a send off from the community?

RMF: Yeah.

FF: He wouldn't let me go.

KP: Really, you did not get to say good-bye at the train station?

RMF: No, no, and ... we went down to Fort Dix. ...

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

KP: ... This continues an interview with Mr. Robert M. Feller on November 27, 1995, in

Highland Park, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

JD: James Dunne.

KP: You were leaving on a train from New Brunswick with a group bound for Fort Dix.

RMF: Yes, we went as a group to Fort Dix, and we went through the induction process, and were issued uniforms, and so on, and walked down a line with medics on either side, where they would, very kindly, zap you in both arms simultaneously, so that you shouldn't lose your balance and fall over, and went to the barracks. We had been told, "Don't bring anything that you can't afford to lose," and spent a couple of days there, as I recall, sort of, I suppose, getting a basic feel of what it was like, being in the army, and then, everybody was called out to one of the main drill fields and given assignments, and there was absolutely no rhyme or reason to this. I mean, this is the one thing that I can tell you, as far as the army was concerned, that background experience, any of that sort, meant absolutely nothing. You were part of a large bag of beans. If the bag of beans were supposed to go into this pot, it went into that pot and it didn't make any difference at all, 'cause there were a group of the men that went down there with me who went into the Air Force. I don't know that they knew anything about airplanes, but, they went to the Air Force. I was one of a group that was sent down to Camp Polk, Louisiana, to create the Eleventh Armored Division, and so, we were distributed. I ended up with the 56th Armored Engineer Battalion. Why, I don't know, but, we started off basic training, and it used to be one of our standard jokes that it always seemed to work out that, when we were coming back from a twenty-five mile hike, we would watch the armored infantry people riding past in their trucks. ...

KP: Had you thought of trying to get into another branch of the service, such as the Navy, or trying for Officer's Candidate School or the ASTP?

RMF: You had no choice, you had no choice. ASTP, they had no place, because I was already a college graduate. OCS, you had to be in first. I mean, it was only later on that they started giving some special commissions and stuff of that sort.

FF: You wanted to work in a laboratory or a hospital.

RMF: ... I would have been very happy to be a medic, because I had a background for it, but, ... it was logical. I mean, a college degree with a major in biological sciences was absolutely the perfect qualification to be a demolition man, okay? [laughter] ... So, I learned how to use dynamite, and learned how to use TNT, learned all of the refinements of high explosives. I used to remember all of the formulae for calculating how much is needed to blow a tree down and stuff of that sort, which I couldn't give you today, I assure you, but, a lot of it was simply getting everybody physically fit, getting everybody back in shape, and they did it, by golly.

KP: You had not traveled very much outside of New York and New Jersey while growing up. What did you think of being sent to Louisiana, which, even today, is a very different place from New Jersey?

RMF: Well, all right, by the time that I had graduated from college, I had made at least one trip to Canada and knew that there were different things in the world, but, of course, when you got down to Leesville, Louisiana, that was a special experience, particularly, ... the signs on the stores saying, "No Dogs, Snakes, Skunks, Niggers, or Soldiers Permitted," and this is not imagination, this is for real, and watching people trying to learn that it was very hard to smuggle booze back into camp, stuff of that sort, but, most of it was, as I say, the basic skills of being a soldier, of learning how fire an M-1 rifle, of learning how to fire a machine gun, ... a Thompson sub-machine gun, all of these other things, and physical, physical, physical. I remember the first time that I was able to successfully negotiate a nine-foot wall. I really felt very proud of myself.

KP: You mentioned that you were not a natural athlete. [laughter] It seems like you have a certain fondness for the physical training the army gave you. [laughter]

RMF: No, I don't think that I would call it a fondness. ... Look, when you can achieve something that you hadn't been able to achieve, you have to feel pleased with yourself, and, anyway, we went through this. We were the lucky ones, because we had the full fifteen weeks, I think it was, of basic training. I can tell you that, later on, we had people coming in who had, maybe, two weeks and that's all, and then, it was a question of, "If you survive the first three days, fine, then, maybe, you're good for another week," but, we did ... all sorts of stuff, and some of it was interesting. I was, in a way, fortunate in some of the stuff, because I found that my Boy Scout training, knot tying, and stuff of that sort, prepared me for some of the work that we had to learn how to do, and then, let's see, we were still ... at Camp Polk, and we went out on a field exercise, and it was the typical Army thing, where everybody went out with the trucks, and we set up a bivouac of some sort or another, and, just about the time that we had everything all set up, the word came down, "Nope, you gotta break down and move. You're in the wrong place." Okay, so, we had a truck, a so-called six-by-six truck, powered, all six wheels, and we had to get the thing ready to go, and I hopped up on the tailgate of the truck, which was up, and I was supposed to roll up the rear curtain of the truck, which I proceeded to do. Now, what I did not realize was that our truck driver, who was, I think, a reasonably competent truck driver, but, not exactly the swiftest, mentally, in the world, had figured out that it would be really perfectly okay that that tailgate would stay up just as well with only one tailgate chain hooked, and I couldn't see it, because the canvas cover of the truck had covered it, and so, I was up there, and was rolling up ... the back curtain, hands above the head, leaning out against the tailgate, when one of the sergeants came along and decided that he could save thirty seconds in getting the truck loaded if he loosened one of the tailgate chains. ... He never bothered to check that the other one was already hanging, and so, he kicked the thing loose, and the tailgate chain, the tailgate with me having it between my legs and leaning out, went, "Whap," down on the ground. I was fortunate. I landed between two very hard rocks, okay, but, I felt something, and I wasn't quite sure what it was, but, it was bad, and ... I got up on the truck with everybody else, and we started moving out. ... Oh, just as another side thought, there was a special exercise that day for the guys from the medics, so, we had nobody but some of our field people with us, no doctors, and, when we got to the place and we stopped, I was particularly grateful, because one of the guys in my company went to the medic that was with us and said, "Hey, something is wrong with Feller. He took this whack when we got off the truck, and he got up there, and he has been passing out and coming to and passing out and coming to." So, the medic said, "Well, nothing I can do. I guess I'd better

send him back to camp.” So, the only vehicle that was available was an amphibious jeep, which I mention only because of the fact that amphibious jeeps don’t have doors. You have to somehow get over the top and into it. Well, they took me back to camp, and they took me ... to our medical group, and they said, “We don’t know what it is. Take him to the medical battalion, at least they had a doctor at the medical battalion.” The doctor said he poked me, and I said, [Mr. Feller makes a woozy noise], and he said, “I think you better take him into the hospital.” ...

KP: While all this was going on, did you realize that something was wrong or were you in a fog?

RMF: I was hurting. I was hurting. ... I knew something was wrong and I was in a fog, both. So, they got me to the hospital, and they took me over to the X-ray department, and there was nobody there, ‘cause it was lunch time.

FF: ... SNAFU.

RMF: ... Finally, ‘cause, by that time, I couldn’t sit and I couldn’t stand, so, I went into one of the X-ray rooms, and I crawled up on the table, and I passed out again, and three-quarters of an hour, whatever it was, later, the door opens, and this voice says, “Hey, there’s somebody on the table.” Okay, so, I told them what had happened. They took X-rays. They said, “Go wait.” I waited, and somebody comes out, and says, “Did you ever have a back injury?” I said, “Not that I know of,” and they said, “Well, you’ve got one now,” and then, they were very careful. They brought a wheelchair, they brought a ward boy, they put me in the wheelchair, and they wheeled me to the ward. I had managed to bust three vertebrae. Anyway, I stayed there, at the Camp Polk Hospital, for a fair period of time. Finally, I ended in a body cast, which is much fun.

KP: Especially in Louisiana, where it is very warm.

RMF: Yes, it is. Louisiana is a very special place, you know. ... When we were in Camp Polk, ... the cockroaches used to hold divisional maneuvers on the walls. [laughter] It’s just incredible. Oh, yeah, it’s just unbelievable. ...

FF: You used to say ... you’d give it back to the Indians, but, the Indians wouldn’t take it. [laughter]

RMF: This is true. Anyway, she came down to visit me once and that was an experience she can tell you all about.

FF: ... People were standing in the isles, because you couldn’t sit [on the train down].

RMF: Anyway, I was transferred from the Camp Polk Hospital, which, incidentally, was an interesting experience, because it was a segregated hospital, and ... you could be sick or you could be injured, but, if you were black, you couldn’t be sick or injured with the white boys. They had separate wards. Anyway, they transferred me to Camp Barclay, in Texas, to the 34th General Hospital. Boy, you’re making these things come back to me, it’s incredible, and, there, the first shock was the fact, “Gee, it wasn’t segregated.”

KP: Really?

RMF: That's right, because it was a general hospital, not a station hospital. Station hospitals, at that point, this was before the word came down, "No more segregation," so, a station hospital, they could follow the practice of the state that the place was located, but, a general hospital was no segregation, and, curiously, that took getting used to again. ... I was there, again, for a number of months, and, one of the things, well, I remember there the fact that I visited my first air-conditioned house, which was something. The second thing that I remember was the experience of seeing a house which was like a regular house, except for the fact that it had an oil thing pumping a well right in the front yard. They were all over the place.

KP: The house with air conditioning, how did you end up visiting that house? Is there a story there?

RMF: ... No, just one of these things. Somebody invited us.

KP: Invited soldiers?

RMF: Yeah. ... I don't even remember, but, they used to do things like that. It was very, very nice and ... I spent as much time as I could trying to pass time. Started playing the piano again there. ... There was this black guy who had ... been brought in for something or other, and he used to sing, and I used to play, and then, one day, they invited us to come into Abilene to give a performance on the local radio station, and we came in, and we realized that we had a little time to kill, and so, I said, "Well, let's go in, and get a soda, and then, we'll go to the radio station," and we went into this store, and they were very polite, and so on, but, they were very, very slow on service, and then, suddenly, I looked up, and there was this very, very large gentlemen in uniform with the biggest .45 caliber revolver, bigger than the ones that we had in camp, on his hip, and he, very politely, but, made it very clear that, "We don't do things like this around here and you-all are gonna hafta leave," and so, we left, and we went to the radio station and did our little program, and then, went back to camp, to the hospital, and stayed there for, whatever it was, months, and then, they finally decided that I could [go] back to my outfit, and caught up to them.

KP: This was your original outfit.

RMF: Yeah, yeah.

KP: Did you consider yourself lucky to be able to go back to your original outfit?

RMF: Yeah.

KP: A lot of guys were often just sent to random units or, sometimes, they were sent to a specialty.

RMF: Well, if they had sent me to a new specialty, particularly one that I was interested in, I

would have been very, very happy, but, they didn't. As a matter-of-fact, I caught up ... to my outfit out in the field. I had none of my equipment with me, and froze miserably through the first night, and, eventually, I got back to rights, and got things pretty well organized, and the only problem was that, of course, I was living with pretty constant pain, and there was a lot of stuff that I couldn't do anymore. So, I don't know what they would have ultimately done with me, except that it just happened that our company clerk, who actually was, in the real world, a truck driver, went into town one evening, and met up with a young lady who was very kind to him, and gave him a very nice gift of a first class case of gonorrhea. So, he was sent to the hospital and somebody said, "Well, you can't do the rest of this stuff. You're now the company clerk." So, I learned a new skill.

KP: Which, in some ways, fit your background.

RMF: Fitted me better, fitted me better, and it was also interesting. You know, you mentioned ASTP earlier, somewhere. ... Oh, we had left Camp Barclay and gone out into the California desert, because they had thought that we might go to Africa, so, we should have desert training. ... About fifteen miles outside of Needles, California, at a location which didn't even deserve the dignity of being a camp, it simply was called (Ibis?), that's all, out in the middle of nothing. Water from wells six hundred and eight hundred feet deep to serve the camp, temperature fluctuations of about one hundred degrees during the day, from thirty-two degrees at two o'clock in the morning, to 132 at two o'clock in the afternoon, and this was an incredible experience, not fun, but, incredible. I learned one thing ... about it and that was the fact that the desert doesn't necessarily mean sand dunes. The California desert was all fine gravel and you learned to live with it out there. You never left camp unless you had three days water and three days rations for every person leaving the camp, and you did the best that you could, and we stayed out there, and I learned to do my thing, and there's a lot of stuff, people going out, and, ... you know, interesting things, like getting out there and finding a tank and its entire crew that had been from one of the other units that had trained out there, and who had gotten lost, and their radio had quit, and they all died out there.

KP: The whole crew?

RMF: The whole crew and the tank.

KP: This must have impressed upon you the importance of being careful.

RMF: Oh, look, oh, absolutely, and it was not done on purpose, but, boy, ... we remembered. So, anyway, we did our thing out there, and then, one day, they posted a notice that they were going to run a special trip to Las Vegas for anybody who wanted to go. Well, any sort of variety was better, you know. So, I signed up. We went into Vegas and slept on the floor in the high school gym. ...

KP: What was wartime Las Vegas like?

RMF: It was just like it is today, except not as high tech. I mean, I was there ... for two days,

and I didn't really gamble, and I ate stuff that the USO handed out, and I still managed to leave twenty-five bucks behind me, but, some of the guys were very successful, and some of them started successful and ended not so successful, but, we got back to camp, and continued the routine, ... and, suddenly, I started to feel very, very uncomfortable. Making this story, which is far too long already, I think, shorter, I had managed to pick up, whether it was in the desert or out there, an acute case of an atypical viral pneumonia, both lungs. So, they shipped me to another hospital and stuck me with needles every four hours, which really didn't do any good.

FF: That was when they started using penicillin.

RMF: ... Yes, that was, I think, my first experience with penicillin, but, you know, ... the thing that I'm sure is no different these days, ... in any of the services, that it's, "Hurry up and wait, hurry up and wait," and an endless, endless boredom, ... filled in with some activity. I got back to my outfit. They sent us to Camp Cook, on the coast of California. I think that the most memorable thing about Camp Cook is the fact that, beginning around six o'clock in the morning, a wind would start to blow off the ocean that would blow all day long, and then, when about six o'clock in the evening came, the wind would die down, and the fog would roll in from off the ocean, and you would sit in the fog until six o'clock the next morning. The same thing would repeat itself. Anyway, this was near Lompoc, the Lompoc Valley, the heart of the vegetable and flower growing belt, which it was in those days, and I think that the most exciting thing about it was the fact that, after we had been there for awhile, they started to issue weekend passes for Los Angeles. Oh, now, I started to mention before, ... you said ASTP. It was while we were ... at Camp Cook that the ASTP program was folded completely. Well, they had this whole bunch of bright guys. What were they going to do with them? What do you do with them? You send them where they need warm bodies, and so, our company was completely filled out with ASTP, which was very interesting, because, you know, the army, oh, God, I've forgotten the ... name already, they gave you a qualification test. ...

KP: Yes, I know which test you mean.

RMF: Yeah, all right, it'll pop back in, but, at any rate, our average for our battalion was about a three, and then, all of a sudden, the ASTP guys came in and our average was a one. It was very interesting, very, very interesting, particularly, some of these guys were so much brighter than ... the officers in charge. ...

KP: When you say it was interesting, were there any clashes between the ASTP men and the officers?

RMF: Well, all right, I guess a favorite story from there was, we had this one guy who had been an engineer with the Port of New York Authority and had worked as an engineer. He wasn't just an intern or something of that sort, and we had this one second lieutenant that we all referred to, affectionately, as Rusty, not because of the color of his hair, but, because of the fact that, ... always, when confronted with almost any sort of a problem, he would look it over and say, "Well, I'm a little bit rusty on that one." [laughter] ... Anyway, we needed a landing strip, because we had, assigned to us, a couple of Piper Cub spotting planes, and Rusty came to this

guy and said, "You're going to have to lay me out an ... airstrip." "Yes, sir," and he sort of mumbled to himself and said, "Let me just see what happens," and so, he actually made two sets of drawings. One set of drawings had a runway which was approximately, I think, two hundred feet this way, and then, the rest of it went straight up the face of a cliff. [laughter] The other one was a proper layout, and he handed the first set in to Rusty, who looked at it very seriously, and said, "Oh, that's fine, very, very good," and he was going to turn it in, but, my buddy had some kindness in his soul, and he went back, and he said, "Oh, Lieutenant, I think I just noticed an error. You better let me take that back and correct it." He took it back and he handed him the corrected set. Everything was fine, but, it was interesting.

KP: Was Rusty a career Army man?

RMF: I don't think so. ... No, we had, at various times, a couple of West Pointers assigned to the battalion who were all outstanding people. We had one ... man who was not career, matter-of-fact, came from South River, ... by the name of Douglas, who was a fine draftsman, artist, and so on, did a lot of nice stuff for us, and, anyway, we stayed around there at Camp Cook and used to get into LA as often as we possibly could. I happened to be fortunate, this is one of the advantages of having ended up as the company clerk, that I had the entire ... supply of pass blanks, and so, I learned very quickly to do a reasonably good forgery of the company commander's signature. [laughter] ... So, number one, I got into LA a lot more than some of the others did, and, number two, when I got home on that final furlough, I took like a half a dozen or a dozen pass blanks with me, and each one of them, in those days of gas rationing, was good for three gallons of gas. So, I had no problem with gasoline while we were home. [laughter]

FF: [laughter] The things that come out.

KP: You did not know this, did you? [laughter]

FF: He's not the type to talk ...

RMF: Anyway, one day, the word ... came down, "Get all of your records up to date, but, all of them. Something's about to happen," and so, we worked like dogs, got everything up to date, went into town for a final farewell to beautiful downtown Lampoc, got drunk, and, God, I had never been so drunk in my life. Finally, ... they took one of my buddies away and just put him in the tank. They didn't bother to arrest or charge ... anybody. They just put him in the tank until he sobered up, and then, sent him back to camp, which was all right, except that he ruined a pair of shoes for me. [laughter]

KP: Was he wearing your shoes?

RMF: I lent him a pair of shoes. I lent him a pair of dress shoes, and, when they took him in, he couldn't walk, so, he was simply dragging, with the toe caps scraping ... on the road. Well, be that as it may, back onto the train and across country. It didn't appear to be a priority, because they sidetracked us for every freight train that was going in either direction, but, we finally ended up ...

FF: Right here.

RMF: At Camp Kilmer. [laughter] ... After having, literally, been all over the country, we got to Camp Kilmer.

KP: You were home, basically.

RMF: Well, yeah. As a matter-of-fact, ... I don't remember what town it was in Ohio, but, one of the guys in the outfit, as we rode past, actually was able to see his home from the train, which never stopped, of course. Anyway, we got into Camp Kilmer, and we were assigned to barracks, and they told us, "Don't expect that we are going to be around for more than three or four days, because you have to get final medical checks, and shots, and stuff of that sort," and I walked over to the PX, and, ... lo and behold, standing behind the counter was one of our old insurance customers who had closed the store and was working out at the camp for the duration, and I walked over to him, and I, very quietly, said, "Hi, Sam," and he said, "Oh," and I said, "Yeah, ... you know what you have to do, don't ya?" and he said, "Of course," and I went back to the barracks, and, that night, my parents got a phone call, and this voice said, "Hello, this is Sam. He's here. You know what I mean." Bang. [Mr. Feller makes the sound of a phone being hung up.]

FF: ... I was there. I was in the kitchen.

RMF: ... Anyway, by Friday, I don't remember the date, ... we were just about complete with everything, and so, I had some papers that had to go over to headquarters, and so, I asked permission, I said, "Everything is done. I have to take these to headquarters. Would you mind if I detour on the way back for Friday night services," and they said, "If everything's done, yes. You can do that," and so, I got rid of the papers. We'd had a couple of guys who had gone over the hill, out of Kilmer.

KP: Permanently or temporarily?

RMF: I have no idea.

KP: Really?

RMF: I mean, ... they were gone when we left there, and, anyway, I went over to the chapel. Now, once again, my father was involved with everything, ... including USO, including everything for service men, and he had a pass permitting him to enter camp with Mrs. Feller, okay, but, it didn't specify which Mrs. Feller. So, I walked into the chapel and I looked around. There they were, down near the front, and I walked on down, sat down along side of her, and I don't remember us saying anything, and, when the service was over, an announcement was made that everybody would have to report back to their units and that all visitors would have to ...

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

RMF: ... Leave camp. So, I walked her back to the bus, and, it's funny, I don't even remember whether ... we kissed good-bye.

FF: I don't remember either. ...

KP: So, you got to say good-bye before he went overseas. You were very lucky.

RMF: Very. ...

FF: It was nice of Mrs. Feller, Bob's mother, to let me go. ...

KP: Because she would have liked to have see him also.

FF: ... She would have liked to. ...

RMF: Anyway, we went ... back to the barracks, and, at 4:00 a.m., the next morning, typical army, we were awakened, given some breakfast, and loaded aboard a train which took us to Hoboken, and, at Hoboken, we got off the train [and] onto a ferry which took us out to a ship which was docked [at], I think ... it must have been Brooklyn. I don't know, but, anyway, we loaded aboard the *Hermitage*, a former Italian liner, the *Conti di Mano Bionco*, and, ... if I remember correctly, I was on F Deck, which is about as far below the water line as you can be without ending in the bilge, and we were told that we were to, more or less, stay put, that we would be given two meals a day, 'cause there were 15,000 troops aboard, and they couldn't handle three meals for everybody, and, the next night, I guess it was, we were out to sea in a convoy, and, of course, I said, "This is terrible. [laughter] ... Two meals a day is against my religion." [laughter]

KP: Did you get seasick at all?

RMF: No. No, I didn't. There were some who were terribly seasick. I was one of the lucky ones.

KP: How tightly packed were you on that deck?

RMF: Five.

KP: Five above?

RMF: Yeah. ... It was crowded. It was uncomfortable, so, I figured, "There's gotta be an angle." ...

FF: [laughter] Gotta get an angle.

RMF: ... Somewhere, somehow, and, ... some time during the day, I was going to say that

evening, but, I don't remember, ... a ship's newspaper was distributed, and I said, "This may be the magic," and so, I got a hold of one of the guys, who got a hold of somebody else, who shipped me over to the newspaper office, and I said, "I'll be very happy to write stories for you," and, of course, I was interested in knowing what's in it for me. Well, what was in it for me was two things, both of them very, very important. Number one was the fact that I didn't eat with the troops, I ate with the crew, which meant, A, three meals a day, not two, B, steak, ice cream. [laughter] The Navy ate very well. [laughter]

KP: Were you shocked at how well the Navy was eating, by comparison?

RMF: I couldn't have cared less. I just was happy to have it and the other thing was an all-vessel, all-deck, twenty-four hour pass, so that I was no longer trapped down on F Deck. I could get anywhere on the ship that I wanted to, including being on deck. Well, that is not exactly a bargain on the mid-Atlantic in November, but, it was still better than F Deck, and I wrote stories about the engine room, I wrote stories about all sorts of things.

KP: Do you have any of your old newspaper clippings?

RMF: No, no, I don't, and one of the interesting things that I found out while we're aboard was the fact that this was the last trip that ... the *Hermitage*, the *Conti di Mano Bionco*, was going to make before going into dry dock, because somebody, on the previous trip, had inadvertently let salt water into one of the boilers. So, ... the best that we could do, which was all right, I suppose, because, ... you know, when you travel in convoy, ... your speed is limited by the speed of the slowest vessel in the convoy. So, we had liberty ships that could go, maybe, eight, ten knots and we, with one boiler, could go, maybe, eight, ten knots. ...

KP: Were there any submarine attacks or alerts on the convoy?

RMF: On the way, yeah, we had a couple of alerts, but, no, nothing serious, nothing serious. On the way back, that was something else, but, on the way over, [no], and, of course, the typical Army thing, we were headed for ... Africa. No, we weren't headed for Africa, we were headed for France. No, you're not headed for France, you're going to England. We landed in Southampton, and we debarked, and, being an armored division, the logical place is that they sent you out to the Salisbury Plain, and we ended up in a bunch of Nissen huts, just outside of a little town of (Codford?), and we remained there, doing our thing, getting into town, seeing ... the sights, drinking the beer, and some interesting, interesting memories there. You know, one of the things that they had done, because they were expecting a German invasion of England, was that they had taken down all of the identifying signs for towns, for streets, for anything, and so, I do remember being in this one community, and I don't remember the name of the town right now, but, we heard what sounded like many feet, and looked down this road, and the first thing which you realize was that there was this tremendous stench of unwashed bodies, this group of German POWs, and they were being marched down this road, preceded by the smell. ...

KP: It must have been pretty bad to remember it over fifty years later.

RMF: Yeah, yeah, it really was, tremendously. Well, you pray that this ... never happens to me, you know. Anyway, I realize that I'm getting very detailed here. ...

KP: No, that is good. We want details.

RMF: Okay, all right. Well, my assistant, who was a guy from Chicago, who had originally started off to be a priest, and then, changed his mind and decided not to be, he and I used to do a certain amount of traveling around in England together. ... We had gone to Bristol one day, and then, we're on a bus going to Bath, and the bus was loaded, you know, practically (press fit?) with everybody, and we got into conversation with these two women on the bus who were, oh, I would suspect just five years or so older than we were, and it was very friendly, and the usual kidding, you know, that, "If you let us sit down, you can sit on our laps," and stuff of that sort, and they said, "You come with us when we get to Bath." One of them owned a home just outside of the city where they had brought a group of people, most of whom had been bombed out of London. There was this one man, who was a British Army officer, who had stopped a chunk of shrapnel with his head. He was there with his wife. There was this woman, ... the other woman of the two, who worked for the Admiralty, and the daughter-in-law of the woman who had invited us was a little fourteen-year-old red head, and we ended up with that as our pied-a-terre home away from home, and, of course, what we used to do was that, before we left camp, we would load up with anything that we could get out of the mess hall, oranges, which they hadn't seen in years, white bread, GI bread, awful stuff, but, they loved it. Anything, anything that we could get.

FF: Because you were going to eat with them.

RMF: We were going to eat with them, so, ... we brought all of this stuff to them.

KP: You really got to know some people in England.

RMF: Oh, yes, yes, indeed.

FF: Still do.

RMF: Still do, and, interestingly, little things like, one time, this wasn't at their home, this was at somebody's ... home in Codford, and they served us, I ... was going to say something about this being, "Gee, strange tea," and then, I heard somebody else talk about the coffee and I realized [laughter]. I caught myself just in time, but, yeah, we got to know people. Look, there was the usual assortment of relationships that got created and destroyed. There were women who hadn't seen their men for more than three years, and some of our guys distinctly took advantage of it, but, anyway, we stayed there for a period of time, and, finally, the word came down, "Get ready fellahs, we're moving," and, one day, once again, loaded on a train back to Southampton and on to a British Channel steamer. That is something else, again, and that one I think I got a little bit sick [on], but, it was just an overnight trip, and we managed. ... Fortunately, we didn't visit any unpleasant people, and we landed at Cherbourg, and our trucks, and our equipment, and everything were waiting for us, and we headed south, down to Rennes, yeah, where we had

showers, which was a special event, and we thought that we were going to be really in a very, very good deal there, because there was a little gentlemen's war going on down there in the ... south-west of France. We would fire a half a dozen shells a day at them, they would fire a half a dozen shells a day at us. Every evening, Bed-Check Charlie would come over, one of their spotter planes, to see if we were still there, and we figured this wasn't a bad war.

KP: That was your initiation to the war.

RMF: Yeah, yeah, it was. It was ... very, very laid back and very calm, and then, all of a sudden, "Everybody, pack it up, load it up, we're moving out." Three days across France to a former French Army camp, which had then been taken over by the Germans, which was then taken over by us, at a town called Sissons and ... we moved in there. That was just before Christmas, and, on Christmas Eve, we were at the USO, and the word would come in, "Everybody from this outfit, report. Everybody from that outfit, report," and the next day, we went in. This was part of the Bulge, the beginning of it, and, by the following day, ... some of our outfits had lost eighty percent of their personnel. We were fortunate, ... engineer outfits are specialists, and so, we didn't ... get hurt that badly, and then, we started moving, and we went down into the Moselle Valley. We used to hear the buzz bombs coming over, heading for England. ... This was interesting, this little town, because we were bivouacked in the barn of some people who were farmers there, and who played it very smart, in a way, because they had had to live with the Germans, also. So, as far as the children are concerned, there were, I think, a ten-year-old and an eight-year-old, or seven-year-old, and they referred to the German soldiers as, "Uncle Hans and Uncle Franz," and, ... also, we became "uncles," immediately, and we lived in the barn, and we stayed there for a while, and it was ... interesting there, because we had learned that food was kind of a factor, and so, we used to scrounge whatever we could from the mess hall, and the nice thing was the fact that they loved our GI white bread, but, they had one of these old-fashioned brick ovens in the house, the kind where you build a fire in the oven, and then, when it has gotten to the appropriate temperature, you scrape out all of the coals, and they would, first, put the bread in, and the bread would bake, and then, they would take the bread out, and they would put whatever else they had available to make, and they were more than happy to trade us fresh baked, gorgeous, delicious Baurenbrot for our GI white bread.

KP: Which you hated. [laughter]

RMF: Well, look, you eat it. You eat it 'cause it's there, but, you don't have to like it.

KP: However, you could trade it.

RMF: Exactly.

KP: Also, you were getting bread which you would now pay top dollar for in New York.
[laughter]

RMF: ... Exactly. Anyway, we managed ... there for a while, and then, we started moving again, and we started moving up, well, here's a town, here's Bastogne, okay. I can't read what I have

there. ... What did I write there? ... Yeah, whatever. ... Yeah, but, there was another little town where we were. New Château, we went, ... okay, and Houfalize, ... yeah, this was one of these incredible experiences, because, for whatever reason, [I] have no idea, the town was of no value at all, and the Germans decided they were going to hold onto it for a while. ... Unfortunately for the people of Houfalize and the Germans, Houfalize, as I remember, was sort of down in a valley, in a bowl, and the high command decided that they needed a lesson, and so, they proceeded to ... completely surround the bowl with rings of mortars, tanks, with .75s, .105s, .155s, and then, the planes were flying again, so, the fighter-bombers came over, and, when we came into that town, toothpick size, that's about all. How the people survived, I do not know, no memory of it. No knowledge of it, I should say not, no memory of it.

KP: Often, these towns were very sturdy.

RMF: Oh, sure, stone buildings, and so on, but, we kept on going, and down through the Moselle Valley, and somewhere ... in here, and I am sorry, I have no idea, no memory. I don't know whether I ever knew the name of this town, but, I had taken German while at school. I had some German, and so, they decided that, "Okay, you're it," and they said, "You see that town up there on the map?" and I said, "Yeah." "Well, we want you to go up there, you and two other people," a jeep driver, a warrant officer, I think, "and you ... get everybody out of that town, 'cause we want to use it. We want our troops to be quartered there." "Okay." [laughter] So, we headed on ... up the road, very nice, very interesting, and we passed through this artillery group who were busy digging in their guns. Digging in their guns? It didn't register, really, but, yeah, they were digging in their guns, and we finally got to this town, and, oh, I should mention that, to ... make life more interesting, I had liberated a German P-38, which I was wearing on my hip. So, I had the P-38 on my hip, and I had my carbine, and everybody else was, three guys, and we went into the village, and we got a hold of the burgermeister, and we told him that, "Everybody gotta get out and we don't want to hear from nothing. We don't want to know from your troubles, everybody out," and they cooperated, and they had no choice, apparently, they felt, when you consider that what we had was a total of four weapons, ... maybe five, but, that's about it.

KP: There were no German soldiers in the town.

FF: Wait. ... [laughter]

RMF: [laughter] Gotta tell my story my way, I'm sorry. Okay, anyway, the units came rolling in, and we were relieved from duty and relaxing, taking it easy. One of the guys decides he wants to sweep up the floor. He did, that was very nice, took all the junk, threw it in the metal stove that was there. [He] didn't notice that he had managed to sweep up a couple of cartridges that had been lying on the floor, and, all of a sudden, "Baa-room. Baa-room," and everybody sort of came to shock, and, "It's all right." Then, one of the guys calls me and says, "Hey, I want you to look at something." He had opened a closet, and, there, hanging in the closet, was a full SS dress uniform, and we said, "That's very interesting," and we were about to do something about it, and, all of a sudden, all hell had broke loose outside. ... Apparently, you remember, I mentioned seeing the artillery digging in? We had, apparently, come across a town where our units, on this

side, thought that these guys had taken the town, and the guys on this side had thought that these guys had taken the town, and they had both gone around it, leaving the town loaded to the ears with a whole group of SS people.

FF: But, this is in Germany. This is already Germany.

RMF: Yes, yeah. It might have even been in this loop here, I don't know, but, anyway, we lost a fair number of men before that was straightened out and cleaned up, and, anyway, we kept rolling. One of the problems we were having, at that time, was that we were beginning to move so fast that we were actually out running our maps, and we got to a town about nine kilometers from the Rhine. You can probably find it there, I don't even remember the name, and ... I don't know. By that time, we were not getting that much resistance from the Germans, because ... the Bulge itself was really the last hurrah, and we were heading toward the Rhine, and this town was particularly nice, because we found a place that was, apparently, a winery, and had these great, big tuns of wine, and so, we became very popular, because anybody who showed up with a five-gallon Jerry can empty could leave with it full of wine, and ... it was really quite good. It was a good vintage. [laughter] So, anyway, we kept going and there were a couple of things that I think I remember. One, and I've got the souvenirs somewhere downstairs, of having our own planes come over, and somebody hitting the trigger just a little bit, a fraction of a second, early, and I have, downstairs, somewhere, the core of an armor piercing .50 caliber that missed my head by about this much, and then, the constant riding, and the constant pounding, and the constant everything else really started to do me damage, and I had had, for many years, a pilonial cyst, which is a thing which develops right at the base of the spine, and it fills up, and it empties, it fills up, it empties, and this time, it got infected, and so, I ultimately ended in the hospital, again. I'm a graduate of seventeen Army hospitals. ... I ended in the hospital. As a matter-of-fact, that was ... the famous hospital where Patton smacked the guy, historic whatyoumacallit, and they decided they couldn't treat me adequately, so, they shipped me back through the hospital chain. ... [laughter]

KP: Was this before the war had officially ended in Europe?

RMF: Oh, sure, sure, sure, sure. ...

FF: Your outfit went into Austria.

RMF: They went into Austria, yes. ... They were the ones who liberated the Mauthausen concentration camp, and ended up quite a ways away, but, I came back ... through here, and ended at a hospital in Paris, and I remained there while they treated me, and, ultimately, got the thing under control, and then, they decided, apparently, that they would do me a kindness, that they weren't satisfied. They shipped me back to a hospital in England, and I flew back, and you know, it's funny, the things that remain in your head, but, we went to, I guess, it wasn't De Gaulle then. It was, what did they call it?

FF: Orly Field?

RMF: Yes, Orly, ... before it became De Gaulle, and ... I have to explain that I had been awakened out of a sound sleep, and they told me, "Hurry up, get dressed, get ready, ... buck the chow line, you're gonna be flown back to England." Well, I was in no shape to argue. I was practically asleep. I showered, and I shaved, and I bucked the chow line, and ... they had GI pancakes that day, which I mention for a reason, and out to Orly, and, finally, we get ... to load onto this C-47, the paratrooper version of the DC-3, and, as we're walking to get aboard the plane, I hear somebody say to somebody else, "Jeez, I never thought that they would get that wing back on." [laughter] So, I got on the plane, we sit down, they wind it up, and we take off, and I did see Paris from the air, which is an experience. I've seen it since, but, this was a very nice experience. Now, one thing that I did not realize is that the English Channel makes a distinct weather front separation, okay. So, we came across the Channel, and there had been a storm over the Channel, and we got past the separation. That plane started to go up and down, and up and down, and the pancakes stayed level. [laughter] ... Finally, the plane drops just about a foot too much and, "Weeeee." ... So, they laid me down on the floor, and we made it back to England, and we're taken to the hospital, which was on the Longleat Estate, which is the estate of the Marquess of Bath, and stayed there for a period of time. Not much to do, but, it was the kind of place, everybody there had just come off the lines, so that, every night, the nurse would simply walk around with a GI soup bowl full of pills, sleeping pills, you know.

KP: Everyone was still very hyped up. ...

RMF: Oh, everybody ... was hyped up. ... [laughter] I was. I remember being given a clean pair of pants and, ... for the first time that I could remember, I was wearing a thirty-four or a thirty-six. Anyway, they said, "Okay, you're going home." Well, that wasn't hard to take, and so, ultimately, back again to Southampton and aboard, ... yeah, now, I've gone blank for a moment, but, ... it may pop back in. Okay, but, at any rate, this one was in better shape than the other and we headed back, in convoy, again. ...

KP: The war was not yet over.

RMF: Oh, no. No, no, no. ...

FF: He got back on V-E Day, May 5th.

RMF: Yeah. ... You know, the experiences that you remember, I said before, are not the high drama sort of stuff, but, the ... thing that you remember is things like, we had, aboard, a fair number of, called them shell shock. What the heck did they call them?

KP: Battle fatigue?

RMF: Battle fatigue, combat fatigue cases, and there was this one ... man who had completely lost his ability to speak, and I mention this for a reason. One of the requirements of the trip was that, at a certain point in the trip, they would have to exercise the gun crews, 'cause all of these boats had [to]. Was it the *Argentina*? ...

FF: Yeah. ... *Uruguay*.

RMF: *Uruguay*.

FF: You're right.

RMF: The *Uruguay*. I knew it would pop back in. ...

FF: I'm trying to think of the Italian name. No, it was a Grace Liner.

RMF: So, this man had missed the notice, they were going to have gunnery practice, and the procedure was that, when they were ready for the gunnery practice, the vessel who was going to do it would speed up, and get slightly ahead of the convoy, and then, fire their guns, and they had, I think, four-inch guns, two forward, two aft, something like that, and a whole bunch of twenty-millimeter antiaircraft, and so, they moved ahead, and, all of a sudden, all hell broke loose, and this guy wakes from a sound sleep, "What the hell is that?" and then, he says, "Oh, my God, I can talk again," and, from then on, 'til we got back to New York, they couldn't shut him up. ... He was afraid. He was afraid that if he stopped talking, he wouldn't be able to talk again, and we made our way relatively peacefully towards New York. Then, about a day out of New York Harbor, suddenly, we had sirens going off all over the place, and I was up on deck, and we had these destroyer escorts doing convoy duty, and, boy, I wouldn't want to serve on one of those things, because, I don't know, I don't see how ... they could manage, unless they glued everybody down, because they are all over the place, and, when they make a quick turn, it looked as though they were going over, like, forty-five degrees, but, they went flying out there, and, all of a sudden, the depth charges, and we had depth charges going off all the way back into New York Harbor, everyday at various times. Fortunately, none of the attacks were successful, but, we arrived in New York just in time for a seaman's strike. ... I'll tell you, it was something very, very interesting, and this is a sailor who knew what he was doing, to take this big ocean liner and dock it with no tugs. No tugs and he managed to bring this thing in. They had the end of the pier heavily padded, and he brought it in, and he laid that thing against the pads, and then, rolled it around, and brought it back on in, and then, from there, we were taken off, back on the train, and, guess what? back to Camp Kilmer Hospital, and I landed there on V-E Day, and I got to a telephone. I called her at work and I said, "Hello, are you sitting down?" and she said, "Yes," and I said, "I'm home!" [laughter]

KP: You actually had no idea.

FF: No. As a matter-of-fact, that wasn't the end of it. Then, ... he still had an assignment. He didn't get out until, this was May, ... December. ...

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

RMF: ... For returning veterans, and so, I was shipped, of all places, to the Hadden Hall Hotel in Atlantic City, and I was allowed to take my wife with me, and we had a wonderful time. I didn't have to pay for anything for myself and I had to pay, like, some ridiculous ...

FF: It was the dentist, the hotel dentist.

RMF: The dentist. I'm sorry, you're right, excuse me. ... You're right, it was the dentist, a ridiculous sum for her. ... We got to our room, found a fruit basket from the commanding general, all sorts of stuff. We're there for about ten days, and then, I was shipped out again, and, this time, I was sent to a hospital where they decided they were going to surgically correct this problem that I had, and I ended up at Deshon General Hospital, in Butler, Pennsylvania, and, when I saw what was happening with some of the other people that were being handled surgically there, I decided that I had to try to do something about this, and so, I really can't take any credit for it, but, I developed a fortunate cold just before I was supposed to have the surgery, and so, they decided not to do it. [laughter] Incidentally, I've never had the surgery performed, and so, from there, they sent me up, a few days, at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and, finally, out to what was then known as Percy Jones Hospital, Battle Creek, Michigan, tell you about that in a minute. ... There, I ended with, really, I think, one of the most interesting jobs that I had when I was in service. I was assigned to what they called the personal affairs and counseling section, which was a group of troubleshooters who handled any individual problems at the hospital.

FF: It was an amputee hospital.

RMF: Well, it was an amputee hospital, it was a mental hospital, it was a whole bunch of things, and I stayed there, really, well, I foreshortened this a little bit, got home, got back, and, after more than three years in the Army, they decided to send me to school, this sort of idiocy. ...

KP: [laughter] Where did they send you to school?

RMF: Fort Oglethorpe. ... Yeah, and, by that time ...

FF: ... Michigan.

RMF: ... I was in Battle Creek, and I had called her, and I said, "Hey, look, quit your job, come keep me company," and she did, and I had an apartment, but, the timing was such that, when she got to Battle Creek and I met her at the train, I said, "Did you have a good trip?" She said, "Oh, yeah, very good," and I said, "Great, we're leaving tomorrow." So, at that point, fortunately, she had a friend whose father was a railroad engineer, or something. ...

FF: No, he was working for the Southern Railroad.

RMF: Yeah, down in Chattanooga. So, we called her, and said, "Please, you've gotta find a place," and she said, "Okay, I found you a place, but, you can only stay ...

FF: At the hotel ...

RMF: Three days," or five days, or something of that sort, but, we had no choice, 'cause I was ... under orders already. We went down to Chattanooga and we stayed together for five days. We

saw one another about twice, three times, maybe, because I could not get a pass to leave the post and she couldn't get a pass to come on the post. It was very frustrating. ...

KP: Was this after V-J Day?

RMF: ... This is after V-J Day, yes. Anyway, we finally ended up back at Percy Jones and we had a nice little apartment there. It was very interesting. Did you ever hear of Vell? Vell, it's not on the market. It's a dish-washing detergent.

FF: ... Not dishwasher, laundry.

RMF: Laundry detergent. It was the only thing you could use to wash your hair, because the water out there was so hard. ...

FF: Nothing would make a lather. Everybody used it.

RMF: Nothing, nothing. I used to go back on post, where they had a huge water softening plant, but, I couldn't take her on post at the hospital and I stayed there until it was time. ... You were assigned points. ... Each battle star was so many points, and each this was so many points, that so many points, and I was in a position to do a lot of research, and I realized, from my research, that I was entitled to at least one more battle star, that I was entitled to three, not two, and so, as soon as I got that third battle star confirmed, I immediately said, "Fellahs, I'm ready. I wanna go home." ...

FF: They didn't let everybody out all at once. ...

RMF: ... So, they finally discharged me from there. Oh, one more peripheral story. I've mentioned my grandmother who lived with us for all these years. She was already an old lady. [laughter] Old lady, she was probably about my age now, and ... we'd talk on the phone, and she would say, "When are you coming home?" and so, finally, I said to her, "Look, the way it looks, and I don't want you to say anything to anybody, is, I may be home for your birthday," which is December 10th, but, I said, "Don't tell anybody, okay?" So, we got back into New York. We got into Newark, they picked us up at the station. ...

FF: I'm from Newark, my folks were.

RMF: Yeah, and the next day, or was it the same day? I got a suit. Oh, dear Lord, you would not believe [it], ... but, at least no more uniform. It was a wonderful feeling.

FF: ... Tweed.

RMF: Yeah, tweed. ...

KP: But, it was a considerable change.

RMF: Yeah, and I could wear my ruptured duck on the lapel, [laughter] and so, anyway, ... we found out, a little bit later, that Grandma would put on a very dreamy face and say, "You know, I had a dream last night [laughter] that he's gonna be home for my birthday," and they would say, "Oh, Ma, come on, please." "No, I had a dream."

FF: It was before Martin Luther King. ...

RMF: Yeah, and, anyway, we got back to New Brunswick. ...

FF: They weren't home.

RMF: My mother wasn't home. My grandmother was home, and we were home in time for her birthday, but, the interesting thing was that my mother, my sister, and the car were not there, and the reason they were not there, as we found out, was that my brother-in-law had been discharged at Dix that same day, and they had gone down to pick him up. ...

FF: You were playing the piano.

RMF: ... What are you going to do when you've got nothing to do? You play the piano. So, I played the piano. I was playing the piano, and they pull up at the door, and they get out of the car, and my sister says, "There's nobody that can play like that." [laughter] Well, we had a really great reunion that day, that night, really, really, and ... that is the story of my military career.

FF: The saga.

RMF: Now, I'm back to you.

KP: Actually, I have a lot of follow up questions.

RMF: Go ahead.

KP: You found your experience at the Battle Creek Hospital to be very interesting. What made it so interesting?

RMF: ... Because of the fact that, for the first time, I was working with people, using my head, using a skill that I had from before, in a sense. You know, eventually, anybody can learn to field strip a weapon and put it back together. Eventually, anybody can learn to shoot at somebody, and walking is not a great skill, either, but, ... here, this was a case where we had a group of, I don't know, maybe twenty people, ranging anywhere from privates to a major, all doing exactly the same work. My secretary outranked me. She was a staff sergeant, I was a corporal, and [we faced] the challenge of ... working with people who had problems, and, I must say, I'm still doing that, because I am a member of a group that's called Caring Hearts. These are all people who've had cardiac surgery and who visit patients at Robert Wood Johnson who are about to have the same sort of surgery, or, at least, cardiac surgery, and so, I'm still doing it and I'm still comfortable with it.

KP: What kind of problems did you help them with?

RMF: Range anywhere from, "What is the correct order to wear my ribbons on my chest?" to ... I used to work with this one woman ... who had Hodgkin's disease and was in deplorable shape. I used to have to get into the locked wards. ...

FF: You took care of business. ...

RMF: Took care of business for them, and I think, possibly, the most complicated one, or the most difficult one for me, was, I was on one of the wards, and one of the guys, ... it was interesting, the fact that I had overseas ribbons was an entrée to these people. I'd already been overseas.

KP: They could relate to you.

RMF: They could relate to me, and this one guy came to me and said, "Look, see him over there?" I said, "Yeah, what about him?" "Well, he tried to throw himself out the window today," and I said, "Oh, how come?" "Well, we're not sure. We'd rather not say." Well, fortunately, again, [I was] with a group where we could go anywhere, do anything, use our own judgment on stuff, didn't have to ask permission, so, I said, "I will do something about it," and I went down to the psychiatry office, and I got a hold of one of the psychiatrists, and I said, "I've just come from the floor. This is what I was told, this is what happens, I do not think that we should wait for you to get into this picture," and he said, "I agree." This poor devil had been overseas, maybe, nine months, during which time he had managed to be blinded, shot up very, very badly. The same shell that ... took his eyes wrecked his shoulder, did a lot of other things. Came back to the States and was told by his wife that she had just had an "eleven-month" baby, and, obviously, he didn't buy it, and so, they pulled this guy off the ward and put him into one of the lock wards for some crisis therapy, which was in time, fortunately, and then, when he went back on his regular ward, ... I tried to work with him as best as I could, and I learned one thing out of that which I have retained and I'm very grateful for. At the USO in Battle Creek, the man running the place was, fortunately, a trained social worker, and he and I used to spend time talking about my problems at the hospital, and ... he gave me a big lecture on what they call, "over identification." You familiar with the term? Okay, and he pointed out to me, you know, that you simply have to have one portion of your mind [that] never gets emotionally involved, and it helped me enormously, and I worked with this guy until the day I was discharged, and so, ... that's why the hospital was interesting and challenging.

KP: You were the company clerk for your combat engineering unit.

RMF: Yes.

KP: What would you do when your unit was advancing and placed in combat, during the Battle of the Bulge, particularly? What was the range of jobs you would have in an average day?

RMF: ... Well, I think that, probably, the most difficult part was casualty lists. I mean, you did your work, you did as much as you possibly could, ... you kept your weapon ready to go. I told you about getting pulled out for liberating the town. ... I was tossed a job one time where a couple of guys ... in my company ... had raped a German girl and I had to interview her and her family.

KP: How did that case get resolved?

RMF: I haven't the slightest idea.

KP: But, you interviewed everyone.

RMF: I interviewed everyone, yes.

KP: What had happened?

RMF: What had happened was that they had grabbed her. This was in Germany.

KP: This was a group of GIs?

RMF: Two. Two, ... yeah. I mean, you know, this thing that happened in Okinawa, they didn't make such a big deal of it back then, unfortunately. ... They didn't make a big deal of that, they didn't make a big deal of a ... group of guys being told to take a group of POWs, this is our guys, ... back to a POW camp, and, "Be back here in twenty minutes," knowing that the POW camp was forty miles away, and they were back in twenty minutes. Those are the things you don't have much noise about, but, the guy who said, "War is hell," knew what he was talking about.

KP: You mentioned the one town that you liberated where a battle erupted. How many times were people trying to shoot at you directly? I mean, my image of a company clerk is of a man behind the lines, but, it sounds like you were right there.

RMF: ... I was there. I was there. ...

KP: How often would you fire your gun in anger? Would you fire your gun?

RMF: If need be. Yeah, a few times. Again, you have to remember that an ... engineer battalion has different responsibilities, bridge building, mine sweeping. ...

KP: What types of missions were you given, particularly during the Battle of the Bulge? Do any stand out? Everything was chaotic, so, you must have been given a range of different duties.

RMF: Yeah. It's strictly a case of, "Whatever had to be done was done." I can't put a finger on it.

KP: You did the work.

RMF: Did everything, everything, everything. I had to qualify with my weapon. ... I did get lucky when I had to take over the clerk's responsibility. I was able to turn in the M-1 rifle, 9.6 pounds, and pick up an M-1 carbine, 4.5 pounds, or five pounds, which was nice and quite accurate, within its range. Did I ever knowingly kill anybody? I don't know. I haven't the slightest idea. You know, one thing that a lot of people do not realize in this sort of situation, and I am grateful that we were given a demonstration before we left England, and that was that they told us, "Look, we want you to know what you may be involved with," and they took our entire group out to one side of a large meadow, a couple of hundred yards, maybe, and then, they said, "Now, we want you to watch on the other side and we're gonna give you a break. We're gonna tell you that something's happening. We want you to watch on the other side," and they proceeded to have a number of men who came out of the woods on the other side, and then, drifted back in, and then, another group ... came out and drifted back in, and a third group came out and drifted back in, and then, we were asked, "Okay, what were they? Who were they?" and, without binoculars, you wouldn't have the slightest idea, and then, they brought the three groups up close to us, and we could see that one group were GIs in regular uniform, and one group were British in their regular uniforms, and the third group were in full *Wehrmacht* uniforms.

KP: Were they actually Germans?

RMF: No, no. No, they were ... a training group, but, the thing is that it doesn't take much distance and you can't tell, you absolutely can't tell. Look, there are all sorts of stories that you can tell, and some of them are funny, and some of them are not funny, and the bottom line is, you say, "I'm home, thank God. I got a discharge, I'm finished with it," and, as far as I'm concerned, I turned in my carbine when I was heading back ... through the hospital chain to the States and I have never touched any kind of a weapon since.

KP: It sounds like you were glad you did your part, but, you would have been glad if events had not forced you to.

RMF: Oh, if the war hadn't happened, I would have been delighted. Yes, I feel that ... I'm glad I did my part. ... I am proud that I'm a veteran. I'm delighted that my son never had to go in service, and so, no.

FF: His number was high enough.

KP: Have you ever been to any reunions?

RMF: ... Yeah, I have been. ... There is a division association, and it does meet in New Brunswick, like, once a month, and we get back to them, yeah, Joe's Barn, a tavern, and we get back to them, occasionally. They now meet in Highland Park. We have been to a couple of ... the division reunions, but, only a couple of them, because, when they ... had one in New York, I went. When they had one in New Jersey, I went.

FF: They had them in San Diego.

RMF: They had them all on the West Coast, and New Orleans, and stuff of that sort, and it's an expensive proposition. I mean, there are some guys who go. There are some who are so completely dedicated, it's just incredible.

KP: When did you join the Jewish War Veterans?

RMF: ... I joined the Jewish War Veterans shortly after the war, and then, I remained a member for a couple of years, and I gave up the membership, because I just don't want to be involved anymore.

KP: You spent a lot of time in Army hospitals.

RMF: Yeah.

KP: How would you rate the medical care that the Army delivered? At one hospital, you were glad you got a cold, but, you were also in a hospital where there were many amputees and battle fatigue cases.

RMF: Well, that's where I was working later. Look, you are dealing with personal relationships. You had some very good doctors, you had some very bad doctors. You had doctors who felt that they were ENT specialists and they put them in gastrointestinal, or something. ... Nurses, in general, were excellent and they liked ... the fact that they had much more authority as military nurses than they would in civilian life.

KP: By virtue of getting a rank?

RMF: ... Not just that they got the rank, but, it's simply that, ... remember, if you have to go to the hospital today, under normal circumstances, you are going in as the patient of Doctor So-and-So, and Doctor So-and-So is responsible, in a sense, for you. The nurses do nothing unless the doctor says, "Do it," and they are hands more than heads, trained hands, but, hands nevertheless. In an Army hospital, you're ... one of fifty, a hundred, two hundred, however many patients of Doctor So-and-So, who absolutely cannot take personal time and personal interest in you. Therefore, the one who is going to take personal time and personal interest has gotta be the nurse, and, because of the fact that the doctor's patient load is so high, the nurse makes decisions on, "Do you get a shot? Do you get a pill? Do you get this, do you get that?" and makes that decision herself, and the rest of it, as I say, ... it's a very subjective thing. I was in this one hospital by accident. The reason I say by accident was, there wasn't a damn thing wrong with me, but, I had to go up to the hospital to have, as I remember, somebody sign a payroll, and, while I was on the ward, they suddenly discovered that somebody in the ward had meningitis, or something communicable, so, they said, "Sorry, you can't go back. You are now a patient." ... [laughter]

KP: You really got a good look at Army medicine.

RMF: I tell you, and ... this hospital, which was out in California, I think, ... was run by a man that we insisted was absolutely in the wrong Army. I mean, he was Army, but, he was in the wrong Army. He should have been, ... because, in his hospital, when they made rounds on the ward, if you were more or less ambulatory, you had to stand at attention. Okay, but, did you ever hear of lying at attention? [laughter] You had to lie at attention until he was out of the ward. So, anyway, but, ... the bottom line is that, by-and-large, I think that the care that we got was as good as they could have hoped to give, under the circumstances.

KP: What about when people were hurt on the line, how good was the care?

RMF: Absolutely, yeah, sure. ... As a matter-of-fact, I know that there was one of our medics, and ... I don't think they do anymore, but, [this was] back in the days when every medic wore a big Red Cross on a white background on his helmet, and a German sniper used it as a target, and he took the bullet right through the helmet, through the head, through the everything, and, in his case, the big, overall war came to a screeching halt until the outfit had found the sniper, and I think that he was very sorry before he died that he ever done what he did, because it was a very, very leisurely, very, very slow death, but, yeah, the medics, in general, ... were good, dedicated, wonderful people.

KP: You were fighting in Patton's army.

RMF: The Third Army.

KP: Did you wear ties or had the ties finally given way in the Battle of the Bulge?

RMF: Oh, no, no, no. No, the ties, I don't remember. ... I don't remember ties.

KP: It might have also been for the armored personnel.

RMF: No, no, I don't remember that. I do remember ... serving there, out in California, under a guy that we used to call "Standing" Eddie Brooks, General Brooks. He had ... those bars, like Patton used to use, in his vehicle and he never sat when he went through camp, through anyplace. He stood, and, boy, if you didn't snap to when he came past, you were in big trouble, and, in his case, yes, you wore a tie, and it was tucked in properly, and you did not wear anything but issue boots. You wore them even if you went to town. ... Yeah, you have one pair of them. Did ... we get them back from (Arthur?)?

FF: I think so.

RMF: Well, anyway. Yeah, I still got a pair of them around.

KP: As company clerk, you also got to know some of your officers better. What did you think of your company captain, George Gardener?

RMF: George was a good guy who we lost from the outfit in the early days of the Bulge, when,

unfortunately, he stepped on a mine, lost a foot. Apparently, from what I understand, it didn't really hold him back, because he ended, as I understand, as a dentist in practice. Now, how he managed without a foot, I don't know, but, he was a decent guy, and, as I said, the West Pointers that we had ... were outstanding people. They were not afraid. ... No, they ... weren't afraid to, sort of, mix with the men, you know, to fraternize, that's a good word.

KP: In other words, they treated fellow officers the same who may not have been West Point, but, went through OCS.

RMF: No, I mean, ... if you were riding with one of them on some sort of assignment or other, that some of the ninety-day wonders were terribly, terribly on dignity, you know. They wouldn't open their mouths to you other than to give an order or instruction, but, the West Pointers were not like that.

KP: A lot of people in the Navy were struck by how tight the Annapolis circle was and how they were very rigid in the way they operated, but, the West Pointers you encountered were not like that.

RMF: Look, this was two men. ... Who can say what the rest of them were like?

KP: Yeah.

RMF: I don't know, and Patton was a West Pointer. [laughter] So, I don't know.

KP: What did the men in your company think of Patton?

RMF: Well, there was a sort of sour amusement, if you want to call it that, when we would get an issue of *Stars and Stripes*, or some other newspaper, and the headline would read, "Patton Takes 20 Towns." Patton, sitting on his tail, somewhere back in God knows what?

FF: Behind the lines.

RMF: Well behind the lines, and we've got guys who ... are being banged up, and stuff of that sort, and he took twenty towns, and, you know, this sort of thing, and we were not amused by the slapping incident, and, look, unless you have experienced it, you cannot just live with ... the amount of pressure that combat does create. I know I had one of my friends in my company who, well, he snapped and solved the problem by shooting himself in the foot, which was a guaranteed out.

KP: How common was that? How often did things like that happen?

RMF: Enough. That's all I can say.

KP: You knew that his was not an exceptional case.

RMF: No, he was not ... an exceptional case. ... Look, I don't know what the total percentages were. I have no idea, but, combat fatigue is a totally unpredictable thing, and you just don't know how long it takes before the human psyche can just collapse, and it's not a permanent thing, necessarily. You can't tell. Look, there was a man that we met, 'cause our son and his daughter were going out for a while, who had been a POW, and he was okay but not okay. I mean, he had never made a complete recovery from the experience of that POW camp.

KP: Was he held by the Japanese?

RMF: Germany, Germany, and so, you don't know. ... No, I was just going to go back for one minute. I was telling you about these people in England, and I wanted the record, if you will, to show that this is one case where we have remained in touch ever since, ever since ... we visited with them when we were in England. What happens, as a matter-of-fact, curiously, ... is, you know, fourteen-year-old red heads may remain red heads, but, they do grow up, and they go beyond fourteen years, and so, this particular woman, she grew up. She got married. She comes from a seafaring family in Cornwall and she decided she wanted to visit all of her relatives, wherever they might be. So, she took a job as a ... stewardess on an Orient liner, the SS *Oransay*, which used to leave Southampton and sail, as I call it, backwards around the world. They would go ... back and around, end up at Vancouver, and then, come back again, never touching the States, but, they did used to stop in Hawaii, occasionally, and, also, in Australia, and, as it happens, we have friends, again, one of these things which has gone on for years, and years, and years, ... just outside of Adelaide. ... When we found that the *Oransay* was going to make a stop in Adelaide, we said, "Oh, this oughta be interesting," and so, we contacted the people in Australia and said, "Watch for the shipping notices, watch for the *Oransay*, and go look for Cynthia," and each of them thought that they were going to meet an expatriate American, and we pulled them together, and they've been in contact ever since. ... We're still in contact, and, ... well, she doesn't look like a fourteen-year-old anymore, but, she's still a red head.

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

RMF: ... Had her at our home, she's visited with us, she's visited with our daughter, and, occasionally, we spring for a phone call.

KP: It is a tie that goes back to 1944.

FF: ... V-E Day, she called us from London.

RMF: Yes, that's right. ...

KP: I mean, a phone call from London in 1945 ...

RMF: No, this was ...

FF: Fifty years. ...

RMF: ... A fifty year thing.

KP: On the anniversary?

RMF: She called us and said, "I was thinking of you."

FF: There was a celebration over there. ...

RMF: So, we called her back. ...

KP: How many hot meals would you get on the line?

RMF: Well, you have to, in a sense, define the term 'meal.' [laughter] If you mean ... how many prepared, hot meals, cooked by cooks, and distributed one way or another, that depends. If you're talking about opening a can of C-rations and heat it, we didn't miss any meals.

KP: What about from an Army field kitchen?

RMF: Okay. I would say, probably, seventy to eighty percent of the time, maybe more.

KP: You fondly recalled one shower, but, when you were on the line, how often did you get to shower?

RMF: How many? Oh, God, I don't know.

KP: Were they frequent?

RMF: No. Whatever you're going to ask me, the answer is no. [laughter] No, it was very infrequent. I think that I can recall, maybe, two in Europe, I think. [laughter]

KP: Did you have any chaplains with your company? Did you ever see any chaplains?

RMF: ... We had a chaplain assigned to the battalion, nothing below battalion level, and we managed.

KP: Did you ever go to services at all when you were in the Army, particularly when you were overseas?

RMF: Overseas, no, never had an opportunity. Never had an opportunity to go to any services. I'm sure they were held, but, you know, ... you had a group that were the troops on the line, and then, you had the troops who were behind the lines, certainly very important. I'm not trying to take away at all from the guys who didn't get up on the line, count them lucky, and then, of course, you had these ZIs, zone of the interior, that's the back home people, and I think it's like with everything else, that the further toward the front you get, the less the amenities become.

KP: You were fighting against the Germans. Did you have a sense, going into the war, of how bad the Germans were? I mean, we would later discover the camps and so forth, but, was there any sense of it prior to your induction?

RMF: Oh, we knew. We knew when ... we went in. As a matter-of-fact, to the point, you know what a GI dog tag looks like? ... Typically, your GI dog tag will have your name, your serial number, your blood type, and, usually, a religion, and they gave us the option of getting new dog tags and leaving religion off.

KP: When were you given that option?

RMF: Before we left.

KP: Left England or left the United States?

RMF: I think, left England. I think, won't swear to that.

KP: Did you have any concerns that, if you were taken prisoner, you might be singled out for mistreatment?

RMF: Oh, I was reasonably sure that it would happen, but, again, this was one of these nothing-you-can-do-about-it cases.

KP: Did you encounter any refugees at all as you were going through Europe?

RMF: Not face to face, but, yes, yes. Particularly as we were getting towards the end of the war, we would see people walking down the road in the opposite direction from us, yeah.

KP: Did you liberate any small slave labor camps?

RMF: My outfit liberated Mauthausen, which was not a small [camp]. ...

KP: Yes, but, when you were still with the unit, did you liberate any camps?

RMF: No, no. ... We're moving too fast.

KP: Yeah.

JD: I would like to ask about the song. The words are very interesting. When did you write it? Were you in a hospital?

RMF: No. Where was I? No, I don't remember, no, but, ... I think it was back at Camp Polk.

JD: That early?

RMF: Yeah. I remember, we wrote a bunch of songs then. ... Never really heard it performed unless I performed it myself. [laughter]

FF: You made a record.

RMF: Yeah, that's true. Her father had somebody make a record of it.

KP: Do you still have the record?

RMF: I don't know. I may have the music around, somewhere.

FF: It's good.

KP: I want to ask about the rape case. Were the soldiers who were accused of the rape black or white soldiers.

RMF: White. We had no black soldiers. ... You know, you must remember that [was] the way the army was set up then, until, I think it was Truman ... who said, "No more segregation," and, when we were at Camp Polk, the 92nd Division was also stationed there. That was an all black division, except for the officers. There may have been some black officers, I'm not sure, and they were used as a training division. In other words, they were the bad guys whenever there was a field exercise. They were used, really, ... in many menial areas. They were not considered [capable of fighting], although there were, and I believe I've read of a black combat squadron, but, ... they were ... the buggy luggers. They were ... transportation units.

KP: Were there any tensions between the black soldiers and whites, any incidents or fights?

RMF: We hardly ever saw them. We hardly ever saw them. ... When we were in Louisiana, they had to find their own way to do things. When we were in Texas, I told you of my experience in getting thrown out of the store, but, other than that, I never had any difficulties, and, for the rest of that, my war was an all white war. So, no, ... never had any difficulties.

KP: Going back to Rutgers, you had mentioned that William Lamont was your favorite professor.

RMF: ... Oh, yeah, Wild Bill.

KP: What do you remember best about him?

RMF: He was a brilliant man. He was an English teacher. He was, today, they would call him, I guess, very laid back. He was the kind of man who would assign a book, a novel, to be read, and then, start a big discussion on the novel. ... "What should the author have done to make this a better novel?" ... Let this whole crew of sophomores, juniors, tear it apart, and then, introduce the guy who had been quietly sitting in the back of the room as the author of the novel. [laughter] He would ... tell somebody, ... if he was going to watch the girls walking down

College Avenue, shaking their tails, they had to do it on their time, not on his time. Somebody who was trying to show off a bit, he'd say, "What are you trying to prove? You're going to get your one anyway." He was a very warm man. A very knowledgeable man. Lived here, in Highland Park, for years. Used to see him all the time.

FF: ... Is he the one that used to pick out the ... Nobel literature?

RMF: No. He used to prepare reading lists, reading lists which were circulated nationwide, very popular.

KP: Did you consider using the GI Bill to go to school?

RMF: I did. I did some. I took some special insurance courses under the GI Bill.

KP: Did you have any thoughts about medical school or law school?

RMF: No. No, by that time, ... I had a pregnant wife. So, I wasn't thinking in terms of going back, ... not at all. It takes two to tango.

KP: You also used the GI Bill to buy a house.

RMF: Yes, I did, this house.

KP: When was this?

RMF: 1949.

KP: So, this is your original GI Bill home?

RMF: Yeah.

FF: We couldn't buy it today.

KP: It is rare to find someone still in their GI Bill house.

RMF: ... We paid \$15,500 for this and a comparable home across the street sold a month ago for \$235,000. ...

KP: You went back to work in the family firm.

RMF: Took a week off.

KP: You stayed there ever since.

RMF: Ever since, yeah.

KP: What did you like most about staying with the family firm? Some people would have found it very suffocating.

RMF: Well, again, my father was not that kind of guy. ... I stayed with the firm, and then, we brought my brother-in-law in, and, when we brought him in, my father started to slow down a little bit, and then, our life was considerably complicated by the fact that my mother developed an incurable cancer and it took four-and-a-half years for it to finish her off.

FF: They didn't have Medicare.

RMF: ... They didn't have Medicare, ... but, incidentally, I mentioned at the very beginning that he had refused to accept bankruptcy as a means. Every nickel, ... the "dead horse" did get buried, ... and then, she got sick.

KP: He paid all his debts from the Depression.

RMF: Every nickel.

KP: But, then, he assumed new debts with the medical care.

RMF: Sure, yeah.

KP: You followed after your father as a community activist. As a matter-of-fact, I read in one of the *Rutgers Alumni Magazines* that you were hardly ever home at night because you were constantly going from meeting to meeting. What are some of the highlights, or low points, of your civic activities?

RMF: ... Oh, sure. ... Well, look, ... I found myself in a situation, one time, where I was caught between two organizations, where I was a vice-president of the Jewish Community Center and I was on the board of the Red Cross, and they both met on the same night, and ... I tried, at least at one time, "Well, I'll go to this one this month and that one that month," and ... neither of them were satisfied. So, I finally said, "A plague on both your houses," and I gave up both of them. [laughter] ... I was involved as a Scout committeeman. ... I think I was president, or chairman, whatever they call it, of the troop committee of the troop that my son was involved in, and we had a tremendous satisfaction being able to present him with his Eagle. So, yeah, that was very satisfactory. There were a couple of others. ...

FF: The Junior Chamber of Commerce?

RMF: Well, the JCs, that was fun. There was another one, whose name I have put out of my mind, that I was thoroughly unhappy with, because I felt that they did nothing but make speeches, and so, I spent a while, and then, said, "Enough," and this volunteer thing at the hospital is, to me, very, very satisfying, because I really feel that we're being helpful, really truly being helpful. ... The Radio Club, as I mentioned earlier, we're both amateurs, and I was ... president of it for

three years, and I am sure they would be very happy to let me be president *ad infinitum*, [laughter] but, finally, I said, "Look, either you get another president or let the club die, I can't anymore." So, they got another ... president now. So, now, I'm doing their newsletter, and, of course, I've ... been class correspondent for my class at Rutgers for I don't know how many years now, ten years, fifteen years, something like that. ... Yeah, I'm chairman of the Commission on Aging for the Borough of Highland Park ... for, I don't know, sixteen, seventeen [years], I've lost track, and that one is one I'm trying to get rid of and haven't succeeded so far. ... So, I think that what's going to happen there is that, when our present director of the ... Department on Aging retires, I've told her that she and I are going to go out together. So, but, other than that, no, ... I have kept involved. I have given up some things. I no longer have any memberships in any veterans ... organizations.

FF: Master of the Masonic Lodge.

RMF: Yeah, there's Master of my Masonic Lodge, back in '62, and I think, right now, I'm more interested in going down to visit my grandchildren. [laughter]

KP: You were very active in New Brunswick and Highland Park. This area has been through growth, decline, and rebirth during your lifetime. Any thoughts on the history of New Brunswick?

RMF: ... Well, let me give you what may be a bad analogy, but, I think that it applies, and I have used it in the past. You own a car. What year is it?

KP: An '86.

RMF: An '86, okay. You expecting to buy a new car?

KP: Probably pretty soon.

RMF: Pretty soon, okay. Then, at that point, when you decide to buy a new car, you're going to take your '86 and set a match to it, right, destroy it? ...

FF: Or sell it?

RMF: Whatever, or, more probably, you are going to look for somebody who can't afford a '96 and you will either trade it in or you will sell it outright, okay? When we bought this house, we didn't have it built for us.

FF: We were the second, I think

RMF: The third. The third owner ... of this house. So, what you're dealing with is a case of people not simply destroying and giving up on what they own now, but, when ... it no longer fits their purpose, they pass it on to someone who can afford, and they, hopefully, move on to something better. Cities are like this. Cities are absolutely like this. I mean, you've gotta

remember that there's a fair amount of the City of New Brunswick that the housing stock is over a hundred years old, okay, and the people who originally lived in those houses ... have graduated, one way or another, either ... to a higher plane or they have graduated to more superior things, and, when they move to something superior, then, somebody who can't afford the superior, but, can afford this, buys this, which usually means that their socio-economic status drops a trifle, and, eventually, you get to the point of the somebody who has been living in rent, and says, "Now, I must have my own," and depending again on their socio-economic status, they move into the ownership pattern. Okay, this is what's happened to New Brunswick. A lot of it, simply as the housing stock has aged, has ... become available to people who qualify for the less expensive, while the people who lived in the less expensive are now moving into the more expensive, and this has happened over, and over, and over in the City of New Brunswick. Look, you take ... the Sixth Ward, ... okay, from French Street on over to the college. ... Well, you had a reasonably well-to-do Irish Catholic ... majority who occupied those homes, and they were reaching the point of, "Now, we should consider upgrading ourselves," and, beautiful timing, around the turn of the century, Johnson and Johnson and ... a number of cigar factories who made cigars, and cigar boxes, and stuff of that sort, in the New Brunswick area were all confronted with a problem, and they were saying, "Look, we need people to staff our factories. We need people ... to work in our factories." Now, start with one basic assumption and that's the fact that Blacks were not people in those days. So, nobody ever thought of bringing Blacks in to operate the factories. So, what they did, in New Brunswick, was that this group of manufacturers got a hold of a group of labor contractors and they said, "We need people that'll operate our factories. Go out into the world and find us personnel," and the people went back to their offices and their maps, and they studied, and they came to a conclusion, Hungary. ... They had to be steady, reliable, dependable, docile people who would work hard, and they said, "Hungary," and they went over to Hungary, and they imported, [in] some cases, literally, entire villages, everybody in the village, everybody. The lawyers, and the judge, and the doctor, and the burgermeister, and the midwife, and ... everybody, and they brought them into New Brunswick, and the Fifth and Sixth Ward were ripe, and so, the Hungarians moved into the houses in the Fifth and Sixth Ward, and, if you check in New Brunswick, ... you will find that they still have a Hungarian Catholic [Church], a Hungarian Protestant Church. There was a synagogue which has since moved to Highland Park, but, used to be on New Street in New Brunswick and they had this entire community. When I was a kid, you used to be able to walk from one end of ... French Street to the other and never hear a word of English. All that you heard was Hungarian. Mama, and Papa, and Grandpa went to work in the factory. Grandma stayed home, and cooked, and took care of the kids, and they, maybe, had meat once a week, and every spare nickel that they had went into savings, and the kids, the minute that they were old enough to have a paper route, or something of that sort, until, finally, it has reached the point where we have the Hungarian doctors, and the Hungarian lawyers, and the Hungarian nurses, and the Hungarian accountants. ... We have the entire community, and, as they decided, "We can do better than the Fifth and the Sixth Ward," the Hispanics came in, Blacks came in, other minorities, Asiatics, that we haven't had, and so, this is what has happened to the City of New Brunswick. I mean, ... it isn't anything that's unique to the City of New Brunswick.

KP: You have seen this pattern for a while.

RMF: Oh, certainly. Certainly, and, all right, look, ... Lee Avenue in New Brunswick was always a minority street, always, back as long as I can remember it, but, ... as the condition that I've described to you has gone on and on, it has spread both ways, and, look, I don't [know] how many years ago, it was fairly obvious that, certainly by the year 2000, New Brunswick was going to have a minority-majority, no question about that, and this happens to every community.

FF: It happened in Newark.

RMF: Oh, it happened in Newark. It happened in Camden. It happened in Paterson. It's happened [in] you name it and there's no solution for it.

FF: J&J is trying. ...

RMF: But, even so, I mean, ... there's no solution, unless, ... I mean, if we were to ever to reach a position where every person who got unhappy with where they were living could say, "Okay, tomorrow, we bring in the wreckers, they ... tear it down, and we build a new one," and, even then, that wouldn't work unless everybody else in the neighborhood was committed to doing exactly the same thing, and, look, we have a forty-three-foot lot. People these days feel that the standard is half an acre, minimum. Our son has a three-quarters of an acre lot and that's not unusual for his neighborhood, and a young cousin of ours, he's gonna buy a house, and it's on a two-and-a-half acre lot. When we bought this house, there was a bathroom upstairs and there was a lavatory in the basement. We had young children, and it was asking too much to be running up and down stairs all the time, so, we turned ... the pantry into a powder room, but, ... the only thing that really makes this house salable today is the fact of the quality of the neighborhood, because, these days, somebody wants to buy a house, the number of bath and a half houses is, remarkably, getting smaller and smaller. ...

FF: Townhouses or apartments, like Randy and Paul, ... they have two baths in a condo. Each floor has a bathroom

RMF: ... It's a question of ... what the standard has become. ...

FF: My father had an outhouse. [laughter]

RMF: Sure. Look, I was born and raised in apartments, none of which had more than one bathroom. I mean, it was a standard thing that you had to watch out, timing, ... when I'm gonna be able to get in there, you know. ...

KP: Your son did not go to Rutgers, but, your daughter went to Douglass. Did you want him to go to Rutgers?

RMF: No.

FF: No.

RMF: No, I feel that he made this selection. ... At least, at that time, I knew that he was interested in engineering, but, ... well, no, let me back up. Rutgers, at that time, back in the middle sixties, their electrical engineering was, sort of, more heavy power oriented, and ... he was interested in electronics, and the University of Pittsburgh has a fine electronics department, and so, he went there, and he got his degree there. ...

FF: He was recruited from there.

RMF: He was recruited from there, yeah.

KP: I think your wife mentioned that you are glad that he did not serve in Vietnam.

RMF: Oh, yeah.

FF: Oh, he had wanted to be a pilot.

KP: Really?

FF: Yeah, but, Bob, four days after D-Day, lost a first cousin, and ... Arthur's named after him, and ... I just couldn't. ... I've been through one war, I didn't want to be through another.

RMF: One was enough. ...

KP: Your son was, in a sense, supportive of the war by wanting to become a pilot.

RMF: I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't say that. If he had been truly supportive of the war, he would have enlisted, and there wouldn't have been a damn thing we could do about it, because he was old enough, but, we did manage to, and a number of our friends managed to, persuade him [that] getting his education complete was important.

KP: How did you feel about the Vietnam War, separate from having a son almost enter the service, which makes it very ...

FF: Very close.

KP: Yeah, very close?

RMF: Very mixed, very, very mixed, and I went through a period of time when I was, in effect, saying, you know, "My country, right or wrong," and then, I realized, as time went on, that not everybody who was opposed to the war was a "Communist crackpot," in quotes, and started to try to look at it more objectively, and I know that ... some of his schoolmates, who are still our friends, and who did go, and who, thank God, came back, and I still see signs ... of scarring. Look, I know that there ... was a long period of time that I couldn't hear a plane go over without ducking in response.

KP: What about sleeping? Were you always able to sleep well?

RMF: Well, when she came out to keep me company, yeah, then, I was able to sleep well.
[laughter]

FF: My daughter went to Douglass.

KP: Yeah.

FF: Our daughter went to Douglass. She wanted to go [to] a co-ed school. She also wanted to be a language major, and she wanted to go to Europe for her junior year, so, we said, "Well, if you want to go to Europe for your junior year, you'll have to go close to home, because it would become impossible." She was an excellent student, another Phi Beta Kappa, as his sister and everybody.

KP: We noticed that you are a very Rutgers and Douglass family.

RMF: ... Yeah.

KP: It was more than just you going to Rutgers and your father, but, a number of other cousins as well.

RMF: ... Oh, Lord, sure, golly. Well, my father was 1908, and I had ... one cousin, Dan, I think was 1922, and then, Al in '24, and the other, Dan, in 1926, and my sister was 1935, my cousin, Ruth, was ... '37, I think. Bobby was ... '48, yes, anyway, in the '40s. ...

FF: ... My father was adopted. He went to New Jersey Law School, which became Rutgers Law School.

KP: Yes. Any thoughts on how Rutgers has changed? Many of the alumni comment that the university today is quite unlike the university that they attended.

RMF: ... Well, it isn't. ... It can't possibly be the same university and there are ... good things and there are bad things, you know. There was no way to avoid the university expanding as it has expanded, because, particularly when they decided, and this is really back in my time, that they were going to be, ultimately, the State University of New Jersey, and a state ... university can't just be a little school, such as it was when I was there, and Mason Gross had a very good idea, and ... he had the idea that, when you have a college that expands to about three thousand students, you stop and start a new college, and I think that this is an excellent idea. ... So, that part of it is good, if you can continue doing that. The fact that it's going to expand, and that the number of people who are going to be on campus is unavoidable, and, of course, the disadvantage, when you have that many people in a college community, is the fact that it becomes increasingly difficult for professors to have really personal contact with the students, and my relationship, for example, with Bill Lamont was totally different from what many of the kids have today. You have some of them going into lectures with 500 kids in them. [laughter]

KP: James has been in classes like that.

FF: ... Six hundred.

JD: My freshman year, I took a communications class with a little over 500 people in it. I could not even tell you the teacher's name.

FF: It's so different. ...

RMF: Yeah. Well, this is ... unfortunate, and I do not know whether there is any solution, because there just isn't enough money in the world to take that freshman communications class section and divide it into ten sections of fifty, and even fifty may be too much, you know.

FF: We had four in one of my senior classes.

RMF: This is not a simple ... thing. As far as the overall operation of the university, I am not sure at all that when, as, and if we need a new president, that we should not be simply ignoring the candidate's educational qualifications, other than the fact, I'd assume, he'd have, at least, a bachelor's degree, but, rather, that we need an administrator who is a skilled, knowledgeable person as far as administration of corporations, or ... whatever else, rather than somebody whose primary focus was [education], 'cause he's got to always have it as an educator, and I'm not sure about this. I have many, many questions in mind on this.

FF: Mason Gross was a doll.

RMF: Mason Gross was a politician. ...

KP: Almost everyone has a fond memory of Mason Gross. Is there anything we forgot to ask about? [laughter]

RMF: Oh, when you talk off the top of the head, which is what I have been doing right now, you don't keep track of what you're saying. So, I haven't the slightest idea whether there's anything else that you should have asked. I mean, I thought that we were going to be doing strictly the military thing and we seemed to have wandered all over the place, which is all right, because I have no objection to talking.

KP: Well, thanks. ...

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 1/21/00

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 2/1/00

Reviewed by Robert Feller 4/00