RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH NICHOLAS W. FILIPPONE

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and
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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Nicholas W. Filippone on December 12, 1996, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Fred Robinovitz: ... Fred Robinovitz.

KP: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents, both of whom immigrated from Sicily.

Nicholas Filippone: Well, actually, I should explain that. My mother was born in this country.

KP: Okay.

NF: She was the youngest child of my grandparents and the only one born in this country, even though my grandmother had emigrated earlier. Back in those days, the American way wasn't really the right way; ... my grandfather came over first, with his sons, my mother's, two, three, four brothers, and then, when he earned enough money, he sent for her, and my grandmother came over. She got pregnant, and she went back to Italy to have her child, and then, she came back over, she and my Aunt Rose. … When she got pregnant, subsequently, with my mother, my mother was born here, in 1903. She is vain enough to admit to eighty, but, she doesn't admit that she is in her nineties, [laughter] but, the fact is that she was born on May 12, 1903. ... Back in those days, the children of immigrant parents usually were put to work very early in life. My mother, I think, started work in a silk mill at, probably, age fourteen and had an elementary school education. My father emigrated from Sicily, along with his whole family. My grandmother, who is the only one I ever knew from that generation, was blind. She had been blinded in Sicily, because she'd had an eye problem. In the late 19th Century or early 20th Century, they used to use leeches and, apparently, they used leeches on her eye problem and caused her blindness. My father was the youngest of one, two, three, let's see, Uncle Joe, Uncle Mike, Aunt Josephine, Aunt Marie, my father was the youngest of five children. His name was Anthony Filippone, and I don't really know his date of birth, but, he immigrated with the family. He served in World War I. He was a musician. He was a barber, hair dresser, through the course of his lifetime. Of course, being a musician while he was in the Army in the First World War, he was a bugler. I don't have any other stories. I only know he was a bugler because we had an old picture at home.

KP: A picture of him with a bugle.

NP: Showing him with a bugle, [laughter] but, he and my mother separated, oh, probably when I was four or five years old, and we lived with my grandparents. ... You know, in today's world, where people have these big houses and hardly enough room for anything, we lived in a little house with, let's see, actually, three small bedrooms, one bath on the first floor, and, of course, the bedrooms were up on the third floor. ... Back in those days, people used chamber pots through the night. So, that was my early life in an area called Stony Road in Paterson, New Jersey, an ethnic neighborhood comprised mostly of Italian and Irish people. I guess one of our most famous residents was a guy named Danny O'Connell, who played second base for the Pittsburgh Pirates somewhere along the way, but, we grew up in this neighborhood, and my mother remarried when I was eight or nine years old. My stepfather, who's name was Eckert, E-C-K-E-R-T, was in the

moving and storage business and some of my earliest recollections of that business were that you had to pay the standard price for moving, within the city. If you had a three-room apartment, you could move within the city for eight dollars. If you had a piano, it was fourteen dollars. So, you know, it's a different world today. If you move, it's kind of an expensive, costly proposition, even within the city. I went to School #25 in Paterson, graduated there, and I went on to East Side High School. ... I entered East Side in 1936 and I graduated East Side in 1940. Along the way, I had taken, what they called then, a classical course, which was, allegedly, a college prep course, but, unfortunately, I had not chosen the proper electives along the way to enter an engineering situation. So, I took a situation where I spent a year at East Side doing post-graduate work, and I took, during that year, one year of physics, 'cause I had had chemistry, and most schools required either chemistry or physics to enter, and, further math, I took trigonometry and solid geometry. I had taken all [of] the algebras that were available. ... As a matter-of-fact, I had chosen a couple of gut courses, like European History, one and two, [laughter] instead of physics, but, at any rate, I graduated, probably, number twelve in a class of 405 students, and, while I took the post-graduate course, I worked in a silk mill. I went to school from eight to noon, and I had a job that paid me the munificent sum of thirteen dollars a week, and, for that, I worked from two-thirty to ten o'clock, every day, and, in order to make my forty hours, I had to go in on Saturday morning for four hours to oil machines, and that got me thirteen bucks a week, forty hours, I think. I don't know what the percentage is, but, I think they extracted thirteen ... cents for Social Security and thirteen cents for unemployment insurance, and my paycheck, weekly, was $12.74. Of this, I banked ten bucks toward my future in college and I proceeded to apply to a number of different schools. I applied to Cornell, McMullen School of Mechanical Engineering, Rensselaer Polytech[nic Institute], Stevens Institute, and Rutgers, and, since money was short, I applied to all of these institutions for scholarships. I think I made the semis at Cornell, the finals at RPI, there was no consideration at all at Stevens, and, along the way, I took the State Scholarship test and was successful in getting a State Scholarship. Of course, we were notified of this quite late in the game and, at that point, when we called down here to see what housing arrangements might be available, all of the dormitory spots were totally racked up. So, I came down with a young man, a friend of mine, named Morris Rosenstein, he was in the class behind me, because I knew him from the PG year, and he and I managed to get a room off-campus at 65 Morrell Street, [in] back of the old gym, and I think the rental that we had in that room was $2.50 a week. Now, for eating arrangements, I think we got meal tickets at Winants, where basement of Winants had a dining room, and I think the meal tickets were seven dollars a week, and, for this, you got $7.70 worth of food, and, if you were careful in your selection, you could manage the week with that. [laughter] Of course, often, we went downtown. There were a number of restaurants down there, these little, excuse the ethnicity, but, these little Greek greasy spoons, where they would serve spaghetti and meatballs for thirty-five cents. Stollman's Restaurant, which was right across the street, on, where, Union Street is it? ... just up from St. Peter's. What is that street [that] St. Peter's is on?

FR: Easton Avenue?

NF: No, Easton Avenue is up above. This goes into Easton Avenue.

FR: Bartlett Street?

NF: ... The Corner Tavern's on the corner up above. [Somerset Street or Hamilton Avenue]

KP: Albany Street?

NF: No, whatever, but, there was a Stollman's Restaurant there, and Stollman's was, you know, another greasy spoon where you could get hot dogs, French fries, and that type of thing, and, also, they had quite a bit of Rutgers paraphernalia, T-shirts, sweat shirts, and so forth, and so forth. This wasn't all licensed back in those days. So, that was the meal arrangement as a freshman. Of course, ... there was a drugstore on Easton Avenue where you get a decent breakfast. There was another restaurant further down Easton Avenue where we used to frequent, also, because we lived nearby there. On the corner, almost immediately next door to where we lived, was Becker's Bakery, and, of course, this was a great spot for, you know, a late evening jelly doughnut or whatever, and Mr. Becker had a very attractive daughter. [laughter] We used to go over and see [her], once in awhile, but, [at] any rate, it was fun living there, and we had in the house, at the time I moved in, ... Morris and I in one room, a fellow named Victor Campi and Ed Norcross in the adjacent room on the second floor, and, downstairs, ... in a little, small cubbyhole, about as big as this room, was a graduate student in physics from Trinity College in Hartford, named Steven Hart. Of course, I have lost all track of all these people, including my old roommate, Morris, but, I lived there during [my] freshman and sophomore years. I think the middle of my sophomore year is when I moved out and ... Morris had moved out ... late in the freshman year, because he joined the Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity, which I noticed is now newly arrived here on College Avenue, at least to me. They used to be up on Easton Avenue, and they moved from there over to where they had the tragedy during the war, over on Albany Street, but, at any rate, we had other graduate students come in the second year, a couple [of] guys from Colby College in Maine, Kurt something, who turned out to be my roommate, and I don't remember the other fellow's name, but, we had a very nice, interesting group. ... Our landlady was an old Irish lady, ... she wasn't Irish, but, she had an Irish name, named Mrs. Mulligan, and, on Sunday night, she might allow us, you know, down to the kitchen and have a cup of tea and a little toast and something like that, but, other than that, it was very little back and forth. The only thing, of course, she made sure, since I was the only Catholic in the house, that she would boot me out every Sunday morning and get me out to Mass. [laughter] Eventually, I pledged to Kappa Sigma, and our house was on the corner of College Avenue and whatever, Hamilton Street, which is now a large parking lot containing these places where I got my coffee this morning, [the grease trucks] but, at any rate, even after I joined Kappa Sig, I still lived up at 65 Morrell. I finished out my sophomore year up there. I was a pledge at the house, and I think the food plan at the house was also about seven or eight dollars a week, and we had a cook named McCanna, and he had a son who was a member of the house, Greg McCanna, who was an athlete. I think he had been recruited from some school up in Vermont. You might have the name in some of your stuff, but, Mac was our cook, and they had a system that, if you worked a week as a waiter, you didn't have to pay for your food. So, I, occasionally, got a waiter's job, and that was the way I kind of survived [for] the first couple years, and I guess my first indication of the war coming along was, one Sunday morning, I had been to Mass, picked up the paper, and we were just sitting around what we called the "Mahogany Room" in Kappa Sig, which was the kind of a club room, with a fireplace and mahogany paneled walls, and the radio was on, and, of course, we got the news about Pearl Harbor being bombed, and everything quickly changed after that. I think the University shortened up the term, eliminated exams that year, which we were grateful [for], [laughter] and, ... like I said, they

shortened up the term, that ended in January, instead it was going to carry on into February, my recollection. ... Of course, people started leaving. At that point, I think, we went into the so-called accelerated program and this was a bitch. ... We had twelve week terms, four a year, with one week vacation in between, and, of course, at this point, I'm handling a fairly heavy engineering program, spending most of my time in this building across the way, at the Engineering Building, and, also, across the way at the Chemistry Building. We were pretty much limited to this area of the campus. I think I had my freshman algebra in Old Queens, on the third floor. I had a professor named Dr. Fender who turned out to be my physics professor the next year in this building, when I took Physics 101 and 102, which was required, and that's pretty [much it]. Do you want me to just ramble on like this or do you want to ask questions? ...

KP: I did not want to interrupt your story. I do have several questions.

NF: Why don't you ask some questions, and then, I can go on from there.

KP: Okay. To touch upon your life in Paterson and your family, it sounds as if much of what you know about your father, you learned indirectly. How much were you told about him?

NF: Very little. As a matter-of-fact, now, in closeness with the family, ... my mother and her sister, my Aunt Rose, married two brothers, so that my Uncle Joe and my father were brothers. My Aunt Rose and my mother were sisters, but, my father kind of left the family and went off on his own. We subsequently found where ... he had kind of terminated, through a friend making a call to an aunt or an uncle, and we went down and saw where he was buried. He passed away at age sixty-five, but, I never had any relationship at all with him. Briefly, I guess during the '30s, I would go off with him on an occasional weekend, but, other than that, I have hardly any recollection.

KP: Were your parents actually divorced?

NF: Yes.

KP: In that era, there was a palpable social stigma against divorce.

NF: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

KP: That was not only a Catholic sentiment, but, the opinion of society in general up until the 1960s. How did your mother react to the divorce?

NF: Well, ... after a few years, you know, she began seeing other people, socially, and, eventually, met the man ... who became my stepfather. ... Somewhere in the early '30s, I guess, let's see, I would have been eight or nine years old, [it] would have been about 1932 or 1933, they married, and we moved to a different section of Paterson. I maintained relationships with my family. Still, as of last week, I went to a fiftieth anniversary wedding party for my cousin, Vince, who lived in the house with me when I was a child, and, as a matter-of-fact, it turns out, I had hardly any recollection of it, that I was a member of his wedding party. [laughter]

KP: What was your father's name and background?

NF: His name was William Eckert and his family background was, basically, Swiss-German. I never really determined [that]. I think he had come from a broken family and he was in the moving and storage business, so to speak. We didn't have much storage that I recall, but, if he had storage, he would arrange with someone who had a warehouse to store stuff, at a rate, but, he had come from a broken family as well, and, as a matter-of-fact, I think he might have been a year or two younger than my mother. He has subsequently passed away and he ... hadn't been really, very formerly educated. He was a bull of a man, being in that business, of course. The interesting thing is, he would have these fellows [that] worked for him through the day, and, if they finished up in the afternoon, they would sit down and play pinochle, and, you know, they made a buck-and-a-half, two dollars a day, or something like that, with all these big moving jobs, and they would play pinochle and, very often, lose what they had been paid, [laughter] but, at any rate, we lived in a different section of Paterson. ... Of course, it was Prohibition days, and I had an uncle who was in the business, not in the business, really, but, had an avocation of making alcohol, and, very often, I was kind of the minder of the still. [laughter]

KP: He was a small-time bootlegger.

NF: Yes. ... He made it, more or less, just for his own consumption and for a few friends, but, this was a deal where, ... well, let's say we had a gas stove here, and then, a set of the old type tubs, you know, with the enamel covers, and then, a kitchen sink, and the boiler would be on the gas stove, with a pipe up from that, with a little thing in the middle where you could take out some stuff, and then, eventually, into a round container, which had pipes in it, which was the condenser. ... Of course, you had to run water ... in and out of that, from the sink, and out of that came the alcohol. So, ... like I say, my father and he would make it, my stepfather, ... for their own use and, also, for the use of some friends. It wasn't a business situation at all.

KP: He was not connected to a larger group.

NF: No, no, it [was] strictly a home brew situation, but, they made alcohol, and, somewhere along, they would go and buy little spirits bottles, I don't recall where they bought them, but, they would make brandy, you know, anisette, this type of thing, ... but, interesting, part of the area, you know, that there was Prohibition, but, ... I don't know how many bootleggers you had in here.

KP: I have heard a few stories about bootlegging and home-made alcohol. Some of the men that went to Rutgers in the 1920s have told me about speak-easies in New Brunswick.

NF: Well, I never got involved in any of that, because I was too young, but, I did mind the still, once in awhile.

FR: It sounds like you really thought this through.

NF: ... Oh, no, this is all just off the top of my head. You know, some things you just don't forget, even at seventy-three.

KP: Did your mother work for most of her life?

NF: Yes.

KP: She worked before being married and during both marriages, correct?

NF: True. As a matter-of-fact, the job I got after I graduated high school, in the Van Raalte Silk Mill in Paterson, was the mill that my mother was working in at that time. She would work in one department; she worked a different shift than I did, most of the time. I don't recall her ever being on the shift that I was on at night, but, at any rate, she did work [for] most of her life, and, through the war, she worked for the Wright Aeronautical Corporation in Paterson and Woodridge. [Did] she ever work in Woodridge? No, I think mostly in Paterson. They originated in Paterson, and, through the war, they expanded so rapidly, they had plants all around the perimeter of Paterson, with the major plant being built sometime in the mid-40s in Woodridge, New Jersey. They also built plants in Indianapolis and, what I learned Tuesday was, the largest plant built in the country, up until that point, which was in Lockland, a suburb of Cincinnati. The plant still exists and is in use right now by a subsidiary of General Electric who make aircraft engines. My mother worked at Wright, ... and, through the war, she got into a situation where she was a spare parts packer, and they packed, and parts were being shipped to tropical areas, where the humidity was high, and it would erode the parts. ... She got to be quite [an] expert in handling the packaging that was necessary for those shipments. Subsequent to her employment at Wright, after the war, ... she worked a variety of jobs. She worked in, I don't know if you've ever heard of the Shulton Corporation? [They] made Old Spice, among other cosmetic products, and she has many, many stories about working on a production machine the gals all called "Elsie the Cow." [laughter] The stuff came off so rapidly, they could barely [handle it]. You know the *[I Love] Lucy* episode where all the candies are coming down the conveyor belt? [laughter] At any rate, she had experience there, and then, subsequently, her final job was working as a spare parts packer for Kearfott, ... guidance and navigation. ... I think, right now, they're a division of Loral, but, at any rate, they've had many ownerships along the way. This guy, Bellsen, from Florida, bought it somewhere along the line, I don't know. He is a entrepreneur, and he was a rapist of these big companies, and he's being indicted, but, they still haven't nailed him, but, I think Loral now owns the company, and, like you say, she worked [for] most of her life. I think she retired two years before I did. I retired at age sixty-three. That would make her, let's see, sixty-three, that was 1986, that would make her eighty-three, eighty-two, excuse me. Obviously, in order to get a job during the Kearfott thing, she was in her fifties, and, I think, in order to get the job, she kind of doctored a birth certificate by about twelve years. So, when she reached their mandatory retirement age of seventy, which meant that she was really eighty-two, she was retired, which was about two years before I was forced to retire with a number of medical problems, but, at any rate, that's the story of her working life.

KP: Did your mother ever belong to a labor union?

NF: Let's see, I don't really think so.

KP: Who took care of you while your mother was at work, your grandmother?

NF: Well, in the early stages, ... when we lived with my grandmother and grandparents, yes, my grandmother took care of the whole family, as a matter-of-fact, and the elementary school we went to was as close as Ford Hall is to this building, [less than a block], and not only did the people who lived in the home go there every day for lunch, but, all my other cousins, who lived, like, a half a block up the street, whose parents also went to business, landed there for lunch and at the school. So, my grandmother and grandfather did take care of [us]. Well, I guess it was my grandmother, because my grandfather was working back in those days, too. He was a loom fixer in the silk mills, but, at any rate, that's the story there. Mama, I don't think, ever belong to a union. Now, through the course of the war, my stepfather, who was an excellent rigger, because of his background in the moving business, accepted a Navy appointment and went into the Sea Bees [CBs] as chief boatswain's mate, CBM, and spent most of the war in the Navy, and, eventually, became, before his discharge, a warrant officer. ... I guess, after he was discharged, the business was gone, so, he went to work as a security guard in the Curtiss-Wright Corporation, but, at any rate, I guess [in] the early '50s, that marriage kind of fell apart, also. ...

KP: Your mother and your stepfather separated.

NF: Yes, my stepfather and mother. The one thing, along the way, when I was younger, you know, and trying to go to college, he was very, very supportive in that effort and wanted, you know, to see to it that I did go to college. So, I can't really be too upset about the man. ...

KP: Do you know why they split up?

NF: Oh, yeah. He went to work in a defense plant as a security guard, you know, things happen, you meet people, and he met some gal who didn't really care about breaking up a family, and one thing led to another, and they ran off and got married. He went to Nevada and got a divorce decree, and that was the end of Mom's marriage, but, these things happen.

KP: Your stepfather was fairly old when he entered the Sea Bees. He could have "sat the war out," as they say.

NF: I suppose, yeah. He decided, you know, that this is what he wanted to do. The Sea Bees offered this opportunity and, I guess, at that point, the moving business wasn't all that great. I don't remember. I was away at school, here, when that happened, and, when I returned, I expected to be drafted. Through the course of the war, here at school, I had a 2-A deferment, which, basically, was occupational; I was an engineering student. As I got closer to graduation, they called me in for a physical, and I was classified, about in ... early '44, as a 1-A, limited service, because of my eyes. I think I was like 20/400. So, when I spoke to my draft board, "Hey, I'm going to graduate here in July." "Don't worry about it. We'll take you; you'll get your degree under the seven-eighths rule," because, at that point, I think the ruling out was, whether it was governmental or whatever, if you completed seven-eighths of your college work, you were given your degree. So, as it turned out, they didn't call me, and, when I got home, after I graduated, I was kind of at loose ends. I had not really interviewed with anybody here, because I didn't know whether I was going to be able to go to work or not. So, I had a cousin who was working in the defense plant for Western Electric and she

indicated, “Well, why don't you come down to my place, you know? They are hiring engineers.” Why, I immediately did and immediately was given a job, because that's the way things were back in those days. They needed people, ... but, what I didn't realize [was] that once you got a job, like I did, in a war industry, you were frozen into your job by the War Manpower Commission. So, although there were many other jobs out there, ... begging, at probably a great deal more money than I was making, because I think I started out at Western Electric at thirty-five bucks ... a week. Two raises later, I think I was making, like, forty dollars a week, forty-one dollars a week. It was a situation back then where, tacit between the management, if you were put in for a raise more than four dollars a week, the department chief had to do a big write up about why you deserved all this kind of a increase. So, it was easier to give you two $2.50 raises, something like that. So, that's basically the way that worked. Of course, we were doing totally all war work at the time, making radio transmitters, receiving sets, and I was in a production engineering group, dealing with problems that were attendant to making this kind of equipment. ... V-E Day came along and things started to slow down, this was in May, and, of course, when the bomb dropped, later in that summer, ... you know, although they had started to cut back, I guess in today's world, they would call it down-sizing, the curtain really came down, ... when that V-J Day occurred. ... When I got called in, it was, "Well, we are going to give you two weeks’ pay, in lieu of notice.” So, they, you know, released you immediately. At this point, ... my stepfather and mother were in Port Hueneme, California. I made a great mistake. I sent a telegram saying, “I just lost my job and I’m going to come out and see you,” and I got a telegram back, “You stay the hell where you are and get another job, [laughter] because we expect that we’re going to be coming home pretty soon.” So, I went out and got a job, through an agency, what are they called? a placement agency, and, funny, ... you know, I was a year out of college and quite young, and one of older gentlemen in the engineering department where I worked, at Western Electric, said, “You know, [if you] go looking for a job,” he says, “you don't want to be looking like a kid.” He said, “What you ought to do is go out and buy yourself a hat.” So, I went to the Adam Hat Store in Paterson, any hat, five bucks, and I brought a fedora, which I wore on my interviews. I think it was the last time I ever wore hat, to any degree. Of course, now, I wear them in foul weather, because I have to do that, but, at any rate, I signed up with a placement agency and interviewed. Actually, I think I probably came down here and got a number of leads from the placement office here, and they were mostly jobs like at Calco, over in Bound Brook, and J&J down here, and I didn't really want to move. So, I was called in by this agent, and, ... well, I called this company in Paterson here, and here’s the requirements, and the gentleman who wrote the requirements for the job, I don't know if you’re familiar with the air conditioning industry, but, Willis Carrier was one of the originators of the industry.

KP: Was it a Newark firm?

NF: They were in Newark, but, this guy wrote a letter, he really wanted someone like Willis Carrier to go to work for him, and, for this, I think he was willing to pay all of fifty-five dollars a week. ... He said, “I called this man,” he said, “I asked him if he would be willing to hire somebody who doesn't know the business, but, has an engineering background, and he said he’d be willing to talk to you.” So, I went over, an old factory building, and the gentleman that interviewed me, I found, was more or less trying to sell me the firm, rather than my trying to sell myself, and he indicated that I had to have one more person interview me, and the gentleman came in, and interviewed me, and indicated that he thought that I might do, and I went to work for this firm,

which was a family firm, called the Frank A. McBride Company. They're located, presently, in Hawthorne, New Jersey, although they were in Paterson when I started with them, and I started working for them on October 5, 1945. I retired from the company on April 1, 1986, at age sixty-three, had forty-one years in, including my service related time. I worked for the company, let's see, ... I started in '45, now, through the course of this time, you know, people are coming home with points from being discharged and so forth, and so forth, and the Army is really dwindling. ...

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

KP. Please, continue.

NF: So, the people in Washington drafted the so-called Draft Act of 1948. This provided that people would be drafted between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six. Of course, in order that people don't escape, [laughter] they started taking the twenty-six-year-olds first. So, I was drafted, finally, in November of 1948, late November. I had my basic training at Fort Dix, and, subsequently, [was] classified, and, during the classification, you know, they check your background, and take the AGCT, is that what they call it? [Army General Classification Test], but, at any rate, I guess I did pretty well on the classification situation, because, upon the completion of basic training, they took certain fellows who were [from] an engineering background, or college background of some sort, and sent us to Fort Myer, South Post, in Washington, not the big First Infantry post, but, a little post just adjacent to the Pentagon, as a matter-of-fact. There is a walkway across, under one of the major roads there, and I was there for a couple of weeks, and, through the course of that time, we were sent for interviews with people at the Pentagon, and, through the course of the years that I had been working with McBride, I developed what they call today "a relationship" with a gal, and my interest was, basically, to try and get ... assigned as close to home as possible. So, through the course of this, I was interviewed by a man from the Signal Corps, and I tried to drum up an assignment to Fort Monmouth, and, eventually, wound up with a colonel who told me of all the wonderful things they were doing with missiles down in Fort Bliss, Texas, and, of course, I didn't want any part of that. So, after he and I jousted a little bit about it, he said, "Well, maybe," he says, "I could ... set up an appointment at Aberdeen, Maryland." He assigned me to a situation at the BRL, Ballistics Research Laboratories, in Aberdeen, Maryland. I was a member of the BRL Company down there. I want to get back to Fort Dix, just to ...

KP: How long were you at Fort Dix for?

NF: ... I was at Fort Dix from November, late November, to early February. So, I spent all that winter doing exercises outdoors, you know. I don't know whether you've been through a basic training, but, you get up there, and you get your squad, and you get this big telephone pole, and you lift it up, and you go [up it], you know, and put it back down, and all these good things. I think that was before they had the, what do they call that course, where you have to crawl under the wire and they shoot?

KP: The obstacle course?

NF: Yeah. No, we had an obstacle course, but, this was [where] they fire over your head, you have to crawl, you know, and stay under the firing, but, I didn't have to do that, but, we did have the obstacle course, where you had to go over these big, high fences and so forth, and climb up and around, and go over the creeks and so forth, but, [at] any rate, one of the things I remember most was, ... you would catch details, on KP or whatever. ... If you didn't have a training situation that particular day, you would be assigned KP, and I drew that quite often, and I have a memory of being on a detail called "Ash and Trash," and, of course, all of these barracks had coal furnaces, so, you had barrels of ash to dump and collect garbage, and one of the guys that I was on the "Ash and Trash" detail with was an engineer, also, and he was an electrical engineer, and it turns out that he and I both were assigned to Fort Myer, together, later, and he got the assignment that I wanted, which was Fort Monmouth. Well, he was from the North Jersey area as well. I don't know where he went to college, and his name was Abraham Schussel, and, through the course of my working with McBride, I encountered him along the way in the electrical contracting business, and he had become quite successful, and the company that he runs is called Electricon. As a matter-of-fact, my most recent contact with him, not directly, was when my son, who is an electrical engineer, who could not get a job as an electrical engineer, went to work for his firm as an union electrician, because, through my contacts over the years with the unions, and I dealt with the laboring end of my business, with the unions, I got to know people in the union movement very, very well, although I never became a union member myself. Well, when my son was unable to get a job, as an EE graduate of the University of Cincinnati, I was chatting with a friend of mine, who is an electrical business agent, and he said, "Gee, Nick, [do] you think it would be any good to put him in the union?" and my thinking was, "Well, here's another nice line on the resume." As it turns out, my son had been making a very, very good living as a union electrician for the last four years, ... as a very, very happy happenstance, and one job he had this summer was working for my old friend, Abe Schussel, and Electricon. That's just a little side story, but, at any rate, Abe was very successful. He and I went to Fort Myer together in February. I think we might even have roomed together down there, but, he got the assignment at Fort Monmouth that I was fishing after, and I finally wound up working for the plant engineer of the Ballistics Research Lab, and, as a member of the BRL Company, we went to, like, a job every day, to the BRL laboratory, which was manned, mostly, by civilians.

KP: Where did you live at Aberdeen?

NF: I lived in the barracks. Yeah, I'm in the Army.

KP: You were in uniform as well.

NF: In uniform, and going to the consolidated mess hall every ... morning, afternoon, and evening for my meals, playing on the company basketball team, that type of thing. ...

KP: You knew you were in the Army.

NF: Oh, yeah, but, at any rate, I worked for the plant engineer of the Ballistics Research Lab, a beautiful man, Tony Cerrito; with a name like that, how could he be bad? but, at any rate, we worked in the same office, as a safety engineer for the Ballistics Research Lab. ... People would

come into the office to set up firing programs. They had an area there, where most of the ranges were, called Spesutie Island. Now, Spesutie Island was originally a hunting preserve owned by JP Morgan and a number of other rich friends of his, and they used it as a hunting preserve, and, subsequently, I guess, the government took it over and made it part of Aberdeen, and that's where ... many of the firing programs were held, as well as in the so-called "industrial area," which was kind of south of the regular post, but, Tony Cerrito had charge of all of this, and whatever new construction was being done on these facilities, and people would come into the office and set up firing programs, and one of the people that came in was a young lady who worked in the Terminal Ballistics Department. She was a physicist, graduated [from] Smith College and the University of Maryland, with her Masters degree, who I subsequently married, forty-five years ago. At any rate, that was ... a plus in being assigned to Aberdeen, but, at any rate, through most of the course my time down there, she was going out with some friends of mine, and we were kind of not looking at ... one another, but, over one another's heads, and she had a very tall girlfriend that she was trying to get me to date. [laughter] Well, at any rate, one thing led to another, and, eventually, about two months before I left the service, she and I started dating, and one thing led to another, and, after I got discharged, I was commuting between New Jersey and Aberdeen, until we subsequently got engaged and married. That happened, what? 1951, but, at any rate, back to Aberdeen. We had a number of different things going on, and most of the capital projects were in the jurisdiction of the so-called "post engineers," and I was working for Tony, and people would come in with different things, and, of course, with the experience that I had had for some years with McBride, I was fairly adept at drafting and laying stuff out, and ... Tony got on my case. He said, "You know, you're doing too much. For this type of thing, we're only supposed to set up the criteria and the post engineers are supposed to be doing the layout." So, it was a situation where I was kind of stepping in and doing things that were not really our jurisdiction. We should have gone to the other people, ... and they got a little upset about it, and, I guess, let Tony know about it, but, at any rate, the funny part about this was, being a good civil servant, I would get back from lunch on Friday afternoon, and, before I left, he would say, "Meet me in the parking lot. We've got to get the hell out of here before the phones start ringing this afternoon." So, every Friday afternoon, we made a tour of all the facilities at Aberdeen and the industrial area over on Spesutie Island and checked out whatever programs he had current at the time, and it was a good experience, ... which I finally got into in later life, [laughter] when I was in that situation. I used to get the hell out on Friday afternoon, too, but, at any rate, I was in the service, a member of this company, and ... it was a very odd company. Many of the guys were people who, you know, like, worked in the motor pool, ... but, many of them were people like myself, who were engineers from all over the country. ... There were some guys who were aeronautical engineers. They worked at one branch of the laboratory, aerodynamics. There were guys who were mathematicians who worked in the mathematics. There were chemists who worked in the, now, what do they call it? whatever ballistics part, but, ... I was fortunate that I got to know the whole range of the lab activity, because I was with the plant engineer of the lab. He had worked, basically, for the director, the Colonel who was in charge of the lab. My wife worked for the Terminal Ballistics Department, which was, basically, a group of physicist who did firing programs on ... the terminal effect of bombs, and ammunition, and this type of thing.

KP: How many women worked at Aberdeen? You mentioned that many civilians worked there, including your wife.

NF: ... As a matter-of-fact, the head of her department was a lady named Dr. Jane Dewey and the number two guy was a guy from Brooklyn, a nice man, named Joe Sperazza, all physicists. Irene had herself, Virginia Valuronis, Betty Smith, and Mary Alice Lookenott, I think there were three or four just in her department, but, you know, quite a number of women.

KP: What was the focus of your wife's work?

NF: Terminal Ballistics. She was running a program where they were blowing up B-29 wings, to determine the effects of different size charges on that type of thing, and she was running a program out on Spesutie Island, and she would come in and have, you know, the clearances by the safety department. That's really how I really got to know her.

KP: Your department determined whether or not she could conduct her programs.

NF: Not my department. The safety ... [department] gave her clearances for the safety aspect of the program, where they were located, whether they were far enough away from everything else, what else was going on at the time. On Spesutie Island, for instance, they had a range right down the middle of the island with cameras [all] along, you know, and they used to run jets, which were fairly new back then, which were from the airport up there on a Route 40, Newcastle, is it? Wilmington Airport, and they used to run the planes down from there, and fire rockets, and, you know, determine the speed, the trajectories, and all, with all these cameras they had on this range, and, of course, you know, she couldn't go out and do programs in her area when they were doing other programs like that. So, they had to clear it with the safety department, what ever was going on, and that's really how I got to know her, and, also, they had service club dances, which she attended with some of her friends, and [we] got to know one another.

KP: You were a PFC at the time.

NF: I was a PFC. That was the ... highest rank that I ever attained.

KP: However, you were not doing traditional PFC work.

NF: No, absolutely not.

KP: You were more of an administrator.

NF: Well, yeah, you know, in other words, people would come in with applications for [the] moving of telephones. We had to arrange for that. That was part of our job, and, like I say, we're a division, a branch, of the director's office. We wrote requisitions for material that people were looking for to run programs, that type of thing, but, at any rate, it was very interesting, and, also, basically, another year's experience for me in a little bit different area than what I was used to. Now, my company, of course, did heating, air conditioning, plumbing, power piping, and all of that type of thing.

KP: Did your company ever do any defense work?

NF: Oh, yeah. ... They did the mechanical work, so-called, for this plant in Lockland, Ohio. That's how I know about it. As a matter-of-fact, I went to the company Christmas party the other day, and one of the people who was out there, still a member of our company, since he's a member of the family, he hasn't retired, said that he was out there, and, at the time that they built it, it was the largest defense plant built in the country, and it's still there, ... because my son lives in Cincinnati and I've been by it; questions?

KP: Do you think that your Army experience helped you when you were fulfilling your defense contracts?

NF: Not really.

KP: Overall, would you say that your Army experience positively influenced your career?

NF: Well, it enhanced my career, because I met my wife and she has been very career enhancing, [laughter] made for a stable home life, wonderful family life, three wonderful children.

KP: It sounds like your wife had quite a career before she met you.

NF: Oh, yeah.

KP: Did she continue to work as a physicist after you got married?

NF: Well, I think, she had a program going, on which she had to write the report after we were married, and, at the time, it was a year after we were married, in '52, I was assigned to a company job we had at Newark, Delaware, and we were building, or we were doing the mechanical work for, a Chrysler plant which was building the Patton tank, because, at that point, we're in the middle of the Korean War, and, I think, one of the weeks, while I was at Newark, Delaware, Irene went back to Aberdeen, Maryland. I was at Newark, she was at Aberdeen, and she went back and wrote up this report that was published, ... but, the only involvement she ever got into after our marriage was as a volunteer teacher in the parochial schools where my children attended. She was ... the "math resource center," so to speak, and, ... actually, I guess, she might have been employed for one semester by the diocese at the magnificent sum of two dollars an hour. I think it paid for the gas to get to the school. That was about it, but, she never had any other involvement, other than that.

KP: Writing that final report.

NF: Filing that one, final report for publication, but, now, she was very, you know, well-qualified. ... Actually, when we got married, before we got married, I'm getting mixed up here, not really; while she was still at Aberdeen, let's see, it was ... 1950, late 1950. Now, I'm in the Reserve. They called it ERC, Enlisted Reserve Corps. ... Oh, I was discharged. Oh, I didn't get to that. I was in the service [for] exactly one year and twelve days. I went in in November 1948, and I was discharged on December 1, 1949, and, of course, I was discharged from Aberdeen, and, at that time, when you were discharged, you automatically went into the Reserve for five years. Shortly after, I

guess it was in late 1950, I had gone back to work for McBride and I was concerned [that] I was going to be recalled. Of course, by this time, we had marriage plans. So, I got to know quite a few people at Aberdeen by this time and I thought that, in order to avoid being recalled and being put into a PFC position again, I would rather work for the federal government as a Civil Service employee. So, I interviewed, late that year, for several jobs, one of which was at Aberdeen and another which was at Edgewood Arsenal, which was just down the road from Aberdeen, where they make poison gases and all this kind of stuff, and it was during the Christmas time of 1950. I recall it very vividly. I went down for this interview and this colonel interviewed me, you know, said, "We really want to have you here. Can you start Monday?" I said, "I've been working for this company that I'm working for for four or five years; I'm certainly not going to dump them without having to give them some notice." So, he says, "Well, we'd like to have you," and the interview consisted of reviewing some plans and reading specifications, ... all of which I was very well-versed in, I thought, and I guess he thought so, too. So, I says, "Well, no, I would have to go back and give my people notice," and so forth, and so forth, and I had taken the week off between Christmas and New Year's to do this type of thing, with my employer fully knowledgeable of what I was doing. When I got back from vacation, after the first of the year, I was told, "Nevins wants to see you," Nevins being one of the principals in my company, a family company, and he said, "I want you to go out and see Tom Best tomorrow out at Wright Aeronautical." I said, "Oh?" He said, "Yeah, I don't think you have to fuss around ... going back into the Civil Service." He says, "We just got a job with Wright, ... directly for the Air Force, to convert a lot of their facilities from reciprocating to jet engines. They have the license now to build the jet engine from Rolls Royce in England." So, he said, "We'll put you down there," and he says, "we'll keep you down there, so that you don't have to worry about being taken back in the Reserve." He says, "I think the Air Force people down there can arrange for that." So, that was how I never went to work as a civil servant. I went down to Wright and I was there, oh, well, it was early 1951, ... for probably a year-and-a-half.

KP: Where were you working?

NF: Working at Curtiss-Wright in Woodridge and, through the course of that time, we converted, oh, probably forty or fifty test cells from reciprocating engine test cells to jet engine test cells. We built, ... I keep saying built, we did the mechanical work for approximately seven new buildings. We converted an old factory that was the Woolen Mills, nearby, from like a 1890 facility into a modern, 1950 manufacturing building, with all the attendant facilities that they required for that, and it was a very, very busy time, and, through the course of that time, I got married, in 1951, and the funny part is, I was married in June of 1951. Now, I had interviewed at Edgewood back in late 1950, Christmas week. When I got home from my honeymoon, which was in July of 1951, I had a telegram from the Army Ordnance Corps, whoever was running Edgewood, to report for work. This is the man that wanted me immediately, [laughter] but, at any rate, that was the story of my Civil Service career, which never happened, but, at any rate, I figured, if I got a Civil Service job, and Irene continued with hers in Maryland, we could live down there, but, [it] never happened. So, we started our life together in '51, and I was still working at Wright at the time, and, at that point, I had advanced to the point where I was making 125 dollars a week. Now, this was top money and it was shortly after that job terminated that they sent me down to Newark, Delaware, building the tank plant down there.

KP: You were doing defense work during the Korean War.

NF: Oh, yeah, yeah. We did many, many projects at the Wright Aeronautical [factories]. We did a two bay addition up on Curtiss-Wright, which is the propeller division, up in Caldwell, and we had many, many involvements of that nature.

KP: At the time that you worked for Curtiss-Wright, in the early 1950s, it was one of the leading aeronautical corporations in the nation. However, not long after, it simply collapsed. When you were working there, did you have any idea that the firm was headed towards such a bleak future?

NF: None at all, none at all. As a matter-of-fact, one of the jobs we bid on, and were successful with, was that they were going to air condition the entire plant in Woodridge, and I really don't remember what year this was, it's, again, in the early '50s, and I guess this might have been the only indication ... at that time. They were going to do the entire plant and they cut it back to a point where they only did the north end of the plant. Where we were originally going to do maybe fifteen centrifugal refrigeration machines, we wound up doing three or four. Piping, let's see, this was all done with penthouse machine rooms on the roof of this plant and I think we wound up with one, two, three, four, five, six. The duct work, at that time, today, it's a dirty word, was all on the roof and it was asbestos duct work. It had an asbestos, hard, thin asbestos, core about a quarter to three-eighths of an inch thick, and then, a heavier asbestos coating, and, since it was installed on the roof, it had roofing paper over the entire thing, and, when the thing was put together, it kind of telescoped the interior core over the next piece, and then, covered the thing with roofing paper, and then, the insulators came along and tarred that up on the joints, and that type of thing. I remember this job very vividly, because I went down and I, so-called, "air balanced" the job, which was a situation where you had to take readings, and pitot tubes, and the amount of air being discharged by the fan, and *et cetera*, but, ... I spent a whole summer up on that roof, and ... it was very interesting. ... At any rate, they only did the north end of the plant, and then, the jobs that we were bidding on, like, almost weekly, kind of, you know, less and less, and we heard from them less, to a point where they became totally a non-factor in our business, where, originally, through the war and immediately after, this was the bulk of McBride's business. So, you know, ... things happen and companies just, you know, get poor management, fall by the wayside.

[TAPE PAUSED]

KP: You were going to tell a story.

NF: This was about a campus prank, really, that I was reminded [of] by William of Orange out here. Back during the war, and, probably, Brady told you this, everything closed in, in terms of housing facilities. Now, we at Kappa Sig had an enormous house there. I don't know if you remember seeing it.

KP: No. It was torn down long before I came to Rutgers.

NF: It was an old, mid-Victorian mansion that had originally belonged to the Johnson family, I believe, three stories, a big cupola up on top.

FR: I have seen a picture of it in the yearbook.

NF: Yeah, and, since all of the housing facilities around campus were taken by the ASTP, and many other houses could not afford to maintain, you know, the expense of running the house, we got a lot of dormitory guys and other people in the Kappa Sig house, and Al Brady was one of them. ... One night, after all of the guys, it was Saturday night, got back from their dates at NJC and from wherever, [we were] sitting around the house, down here at 38 [College Avenue], and we decided, "Gee, [let's] get some paint and go down to Princeton, locate the cannon." [laughter] Well, we get down there, and that's why I asked if Bill Stalker was here, because our main mode of transportation back in those days was Stalker's car. He lived in New Brunswick. We got down there, and, not knowing anything at all about the campus down there, parked and started moving into the campus, and, at that point, they had the Navy program down there, and we're looking for the cannon. So, here's a guy doing sentry duty in one of the quadrangles there, and they have all these duckboard walks, and we ... stopped him and asked him if he could direct us to where the cannon was, and he said, "Oh, yeah," [laughter] not knowing, "go down here and there," and, eventually, you know, we painted a lot of the duckboards that you walk on and so forth, [laughter] and, eventually, we found, I guess they had an eating club down there called the Cannon Club. It has this big, goddamn cannon in front of it. We painted that, and we got in the car, and came home, and never thought another thing about it. ... Lo and behold, a couple, three weeks later, we woke up, and the campus here is painted orange, and the thing that reminded me out here was, William of Orange had a roll of toilet paper on it, all wound around him, and the difference is that ... the Kappa Sig [house] had an iron picket fence in front, and they had kind of striped that with orange and black paint, just going along with [a brush]. ... Apparently, the security guards holed up in what's the Dean's Office now, it used to be the student union building, and they picked up a phone and called the cops, and the cops picked up all these Princeton guys. So, that's the story about William of Orange and the toilet paper, you know. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned earlier that the ASTP was a real presence on campus. It was hard not to notice them.

NF: They took over everything.

KP: How did the remaining civilian students feel about the ASTP cadets?

NF: Adversarial.

KP: From what we have read in the *Targum*, it sounds like the students really resented the ASTP guys.

NF: Oh, yeah, 'cause they took everything ... over, had their own football team, you know. We tried to have a football team. [As] a matter-of-fact, even Brady and I were out for football, of all things, and it just didn't work out. We had a "home-and-home" series with Leigh and Lafayette, and Brooklyn College came in here, and, of course, I don't know whether we won any games at all. Of course, by that time, I had been cut off the team, and I'm sure Al Brady was, but, at any rate, I

think, probably, the most interesting part of the season was the fact that Allie Sherman was the quarterback for Brooklyn College, and, of course, Allie eventually became the coach of the New York Giants, but, I don't know whether that story was pertinent to your thing or not, but, at any rate, yes, as far as I was concerned, and most of the people that I was involved in [would agree], it was kind of an adversarial thing with the ASTP. Of course, these poor guys had to march to class and all and we would stand up on the roof of the porch at Kappa Sig and throw snowballs at them.

KP: They could not retaliate.

NF: What else could they do? They had to keep marching. [laughter]

KP: Our study of the *Targum* also gave us the impression that the acceleration of the school year fostered a great deal of resentment within the student body, particularly among the science majors, who had to contend with a monumental workload.

NF: It made things a lot more difficult, but, in retrospect, I guess, I'm glad it worked out that way, because I got through earlier, and who knows what might have happened?

KP: How did you feel at the time?

NF: Oh, it was a bitch. It was a real [bitch]. Brady probably told you the same thing, and it was a tough, tough time, and Al and another of our classmates during that period were not only struggling with the curriculum, but, ... they held a job, which they shared, as the night clerk down at the old Rutgers House, which was located down where the Hyatt is. I don't know whether Al mentioned that to you in his interview or not.

KP: I think he did.

NF: But, he and Joe Finelli, who was a wizard, really, in mathematics, and a hell of a bowler, used to share that job. Of course, Joe helped himself on Saturday; you'd go down to the old New Brunswick Alley there, just off of George Street, and, on Saturday afternoon, they bowled pot games, put up a couple bucks, and whoever wins the game takes the pot. So, that's how he helped himself. I think Al might have gotten involved in that, too, but, at any rate, they were strange, strange days. ... You know, you were really struggling to keep up with things and all-nighters were very frequent when you had, you know, testing situations.

KP: Besides the ASTP, you also had Camp Kilmer in the area.

NF: ... As far as I was concerned, ... I don't even ... remember that it had any effect at all on [us].

KP: You did not feel as though New Brunswick was overrun by GIs.

NF: No, not really.

KP: Camp Kilmer had no effect on New Brunswick, from your point of view.

NF: No, because the presence of the ASTP on campus, here, was really overwhelming, because they took over pretty much everything.

FR: The accelerated program that you dealt with for the majority of your time as an undergraduate allowed you only one week of vacation between terms. Did you ever feel slighted by the fact that this system denied you the time to earn extra income from a summer job? You also did not have much time to relax.

NF: Well, actually, one week between semesters, [for] those of us, a few of us, who were out, say, like, trying to make the football team, such as it was, [laughter] didn't even get to go home that week. [laughter] ... Also, we tried to play baseball. [We] didn't make that either, but, at any rate, I think the coach of baseball was Mike Stang. You may have heard the name. Mike was a trainer when the coaches were here and the football coach at the time was ... a little guy named Tom Kenneally. You may have heard his name, but, at any rate, the whole campus aspect was totally different with the presence of the Army here.

KP: We also read in the *Targum* that the ASTP people were really not carrying on the Rutgers traditions.

NF: Well, like, they really weren't a part of, you know, Rutgers. You know, I don't know what these fellows felt when they were here, but, for instance, I have a brother-in-law who was in the ASTP, and he attended every state college in New England. [He was] originally at Holy Cross, then, the University of Maine, University of Connecticut, University of Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, and, eventually, [he] got his medical degree at the University of Wisconsin, without ever having gotten a BS or BA, because he never fulfilled any residency requirements anywhere. So, I don't really know how you could have any feeling at all for any university under those circumstances. ... I don't know whether these guys who were here were passed along elsewhere after one term, or two terms, or whatever.

KP: Did you ever get to know any of the ASTP people?

NF: None at all, none at all. No contact, from my point of view, at any rate, no contact at all. We were our own cohesive, little group of engineering students and we were struggling to keep up with what we had to do and, you know, get on with our lives as well.

KP: Rutgers was a small place before the war, but, it became even smaller after 1943-44.

NF: Oh, yes, very small and self-contained. You practically knew everybody who was a civilian on campus.

KP: Also, the classes were fairly small.

NF: Oh, yeah. As I say, I think, and I should have brought it, one of our classmates prepared a little ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Nicholas Filippone on December 12, 1996, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

FR: Fred Robinovitz.

KP: Please, continue.

NF: Yeah, Edward Davis, who is now deceased, prepared that eight-and-a-half-by-eleven sheet, which was a cartoon representation of the class, and, for instance, he characterized Joe Finelli walking along with a baseball bat, and a football under his arm, and a bowling ball in the other hand, I guess the baseball bat was under his arm, and he characterized it as, "Sporting Life Finelli." He characterized Al Brady as Sinatra. I don't recall what he characterized me as, but, at any rate, he had a little cartoon for each of us, and that, ... basically, ... was our yearbook. ... I don't remember the actual number who received degrees in July of 1944, at the chapel ceremony, but, it couldn't have been more than twenty-four. The number four sticks in my mind; whether it was fourteen or twenty-four, I don't really recall. I recall, for instance, Sev (Severin) Golojuch, who was a physician, now, and probably retired, attended and he was in a Marine Corps officer's uniform, the green [uniform]. The guy who ... addressed our commencement was the Secretary of Defense, at the time, and his name was Edward Stettinius, [Editor's note: Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., was Undersecretary of State from September 1943 to November 1944, when he became the Secretary of State], [I don't know] whether you [have] got that or not, but, at any rate, he was the speaker at our commencement. I guess Robert Clothier was still the president at the time, and, of course, Dean Metzger, and Howie Crosby was the assistant dean.

KP: What do you remember about Dean Metzger?

NF: Well, I recall one Saturday night when he walked into the Mahogany Room of the Kappa Sig [house], and we were sitting around with a can of beer, and [he said], "Oh, boys, you know that this is not the way you're supposed to behave," but, that was Dean Metzger. He was a Doctor of Divinity, you know.

KP: I have been told that he was very stern.

NF: Quite stern.

KP: Calvinist.

NF: I don't recall whether he put us on suspension or whatever, but, at any rate, he had the facility of just doing that, walking in on you, ... but, he was a stern disciplinarian. I think his assistant was Howie Crosby at the time.

KP: Did you have any dealings with Howard Crosby?

NF: Nothing that I remember, you know. In terms of today's world, I guess, you'd wonder if the guy was gay or not, but, ... I always kind of thought of him as like a pansy, but, at any rate, maybe that's a judgment that really isn't too general.

FR: Did you have any dealings with President Clothier?

NF: Not directly, not directly. We were all very much, at least I was, very much affected. He lost a son in the war, as you know. I guess the guy was a flyer, if I recall, and it was a very grim time on campus at that time, but, I don't recall ever having any personal direction with him. I think I've had more personal contact with President Lawrence ... than I ever had with Clothier at the time.

FR: What was your opinion of how he handled the situation with the ASTP?

NF: Again, this is something I don't really have a firm recollection of, but, I think he handled the situation probably as well as anyone could under the circumstances that became the University at that time.

KP: Did you go through the mandatory two years of ROTC or were you exempt for medical reasons?

NF: I took ROTC, I think, for one semester, and then, I was drummed out, so to speak, because of medical reasons. I don't recall what the medical reasons were and, under the circumstances, then, I think [it] maybe took a year, I think that you were required to take a first aid course or something that was conducted. I don't even recall who taught it, maybe Tom Kenneally or somebody like that, in the phys. ed. department.

KP: Do you recall the rivalry between the sophomore and freshman classes in 1941-42?

NF: Oh, yeah, yeah. I have a story, if I can.

KP: Yes, please.

NF: This is just a recollection of story, but, initially, when you registered at the gym, you were obliged to take a sport, and I had some crazy character influence me, and this guy had come from Teaneck, or Hackettstown, or one of those big wrestling towns, and he said, "Take wrestling, good sport." So, I took wrestling, and, you know, I knew beans about wrestling, and I was never much of an athlete any way. I always considered myself more of a student than an athlete. So, this was 1941. Okay, now, I don't know if you're aware, but, ... at least up until that time, there were two athletes in the history of Rutgers who have earned five varsity sport letters. Paul Robeson was the first. Ralph Schmidt, Class of 1942, was the second. I confronted him at the last reunion, and he doesn't remember the incident, but, of course, I do, very, very vividly. They had, along the way, something they called a wrestling clinic, where they brought in all the high school guys from all over the state in high school wrestling, and they had the members of the Rutgers wrestling team and freshman there as well, and the idea here was, now, they team up, for a match, the people who are

equal weight and equal experience. Now, Ralph Schmidt, to this point, had earned his letter in football as a blocking back, lacrosse as an attack man, and whatever else, baseball, swimming, maybe, and he was going to earn his fifth letter in wrestling. So, who do you think gets the draw to wrestle Ralph Schmidt? Nick, who is equal weight, certainly equal experience. Well, I think it's probably one of the shortest wrestling matches in the history of Rutgers. He hit me with a flying tackle and that was it. [laughter] I was pinned in seconds.

KP: That seems remarkable, because that is the sport that he went to the Pan-American Games to compete in.

NF: Wrestling?

KP: Wrestling, and he almost made the Olympic Team.

NF: I wasn't aware of that. ... I was an early opponent, a very early opponent. [Of] course, he did pretty well. He wound up, what? CEO of Beecham.

KP: He was not the CEO, but, he did very well in his career.

NF: Was he an interviewee, by the way?

KP: He is actually one of our biggest supporters. He was the chair of the project's funding committee. I have come to know Ralph quite well.

NF: I confronted him with this story at the last reunion, over there by the cannon, and he had no recollection of it at all, which I can understand, you know, because he was the big senior athlete and I'm the poor, little, dumb freshmen [who] decided to take wrestling instead of swimming. [laughter]

KP: Over the past few years, I have gotten the impression that Ralph really was the big man of campus.

NF: Oh, yeah, see, and in order that he got some experience wrestling, they teamed him up, the next match, with a guy [that] you may have heard of also, he turned out to be a pretty fair athlete at Princeton, and his name was Frank Parantoni, and I think, at that point, he was the heavyweight champ in the State of New Jersey, on the high school level, and I think he and Ralph wrestled to a draw. So, that was my recollection of the wrestling clinic. I immediately dropped wrestling and went into swimming, by the way. [laughter]

KP: Why did you decide to join your fraternity?

NF: Well, I think the social aspect, for one thing, the fact that I could eat in one place, and, of course, the brotherhood aspect as well. I had met quite a few guys from the Kappa Sig [house] who were member of our class. At this point, the class was still pretty much together, and they invited me to come by, and I enjoyed a few good social evenings there, and they're a bunch of real good

guys, and so, I decided to join, even though, ... you know, financially, it was a little bit of a drain, but, really not that much.

KP: You mentioned before that your stepfather really wanted you go to college.

NF: Oh, yeah.

KP: Did your mother and your family also urge you towards college?

NF: Well, you got to understand, at this point, I'm from a working class family, and, at this point, almost to the day, I don't know how many I have in the family, but, at least in my generation, I don't think, up until that point, there were any people who had been to college, let alone graduate. I mentioned that I was at my cousin's fiftieth wedding anniversary. Well, as ... a matter-of-fact, he almost became the second guy to go to college, because he was a very good athlete, football player, on the high school level, and he and good friend of his from, at that time, it was Paterson Central High School, it's now Kennedy High School, went to Muhlenberg for a tryout. ... At the time, Muhlenberg had a coach named Ben Schwartzwalder, who became quite famous when he moved from Muhlenberg to [the] University of Syracuse. ... My cousin, Vince, and his friend were out there and it was a condition where, if you made the team, you got the scholarship. If you didn't, you were out. Well, my cousin made the mistake, ... he was doing fairly well, ... of coming home for a weekend, and got together with his girl, and decided [that] getting married was more important to him and her than going back to Muhlenberg. So, whereas his friend went on to be a very famous athlete at Muhlenberg and, subsequently, a tackle for the Baltimore Colts, my cousin decided to get married, and he would have been the second one in the family, perhaps, to go to college, but, ... everybody was supportive of my being here, and, you know, very happy. ...

KP: It sounds like you were the pride of the family.

NF: Well, from the point of view of, you know, scholarship, yeah.

KP: They were very proud to have a son in college.

NF: You know, everybody knew that I had gotten a scholarship and were very happy that I had managed it and managed to get to school, even though, you know, from a working class standpoint, you wouldn't have expected too much from us.

KP: Did you ever notice a difference on campus between the students who came from backgrounds similar to your own and those who came from families with money?

NF: I think it was a difference, for instance, in the fraternities. Many of the guys who were from wealthier families were, for instance, DEKEs. [As] a matter-of-fact, some of them are still very good friends of mine, but, for instance, they might have belonged to the Phi Eps over on Union Street, or Delta Phi on College Avenue, or the DEKEs, but, ... I guess we had a few fairly well off guys in the Kappa Sig [house]. ...

KP: It sounds like your fraternity was more modest.

NF: Well, I think, at that point, they might have been the jock fraternity on campus, you know, but, at any rate, I guess there were people here from ... wealthier families, many wealthier families than I, but, you know, it was a much closer, friendlier time back then. There weren't the terrible class distinctions that exist now, I think, more so.

KP: Do you think that there are more class distinctions now?

NF: Right now, I think it's more not class, but, ethnicity, and I can't say the word, but, you know what I mean, ethnic people.

KP: Do you remember going to chapel at all? I know that your landlady forced you to go to Mass on Sundays while you were living there.

NF: I was excused from Sunday chapel, which, at that point, was required, because I attended the Catholic Church, but, my recollection of chapel was more like a meeting where you were notified of coming events, and we were obliged to go to chapel at noon on Monday, as the freshman class, but, I don't remember, in subsequent years, if that was a requirement. I don't know whether the Army took over the chapel as well, but, I continued to go practice my religion, because it was important to me, and ... some of the friends of mine and myself ... were, you know, very strong members of ... the Newman Club, which we had on campus at the time, jointly with NJC. I don't know whether it's a joint situation now or not, but, we were members of that, and that was quite a big thing for me, for us, but, chapel, I have really no recollection, other than the Monday attendance when we were freshman.

KP: You wrote on your pre-interview survey that Professor Fender was your favorite professor. What made him stand out?

NF: He was an excellent teacher, a little guy, very nice man, and, you know, I felt I related well with him, and the fact that I think I did well in his courses, particularly freshman algebra [helped]. I think I might have slipped a little bit when we got to physics. ...

KP: Physics is one of the more demanding courses.

NF: It was here, but, subsequently, we pretty much fell into a situation where we got into the engineering professors, Joe Cejka. ... I don't know, did Al tell you about Jerry, Jeremiah, [James] Slade? Many of our classmates felt that he was their most favorite.

KP: Is he the professor that sold his notes to students?

NF: No. Jerry Slade was a very excellent professor, but, not a real good teacher. He would get up at the board and start with these ... [equations] sideways and just keep going. [laughter]

KP: He would just write and write. Yes, I have heard about him, then.

NF: Mechanics.

KP: Yes.

NF: Oh, no, you may have heard about Dean Read at the Chemistry Department, [his] chemistry lecture, and they had a double board there, and he would scratch notes on it, and, "Bang," the board would come down, and he'd scratch notes, and, "Bang," he'd erase it, and you had to really go to keep up with him, and you're in a lecture hall there, like next door here, but, that was Dean Read. He was a chemistry lecturer and, at that point, we had chemistry freshman, I guess it was. "Chemistry Mechanics" was a second year course and that's where I had Jerry Slade. We had an electrical engineering professor named Bill Pyott, and he had pretty good aim, and he used to, if you'd fall asleep in his class, he'd pick up an eraser and chuck it at you. [laughter]

FR: After your post-graduate year of high school, had you, or any of your classmates, considered joining the military?

NF: ... No, because the war hadn't started yet. Remember, I started school here, Fred, [in] September of 1941. Although there was a war in Europe, it wasn't an American war, at that point, until Pearl Harbor happened on December 7th. At that point, yes, many of our classmates and people in school here were volunteering for the military and we immediately shrunk up, very, very quickly.

FR: Did you ever consider leaving school for the service?

NF: No, no, because, at that point, ... you know, I was struggling along with [my] ROTC involvement. [laughter] I wasn't a very good marcher even. I was almost as good a marcher as I was a wrestler, but, no, I never really considered volunteering. I might have made some inquiries about, you know, officer programs that were available at the time, but, again, I was also fully aware that anything really good I would be deprived of getting into, because of my eye situation being as bad as it was.

FR: You knew that at the time.

NF: Oh, yeah. I had developed nearsightedness, very, very badly, as a freshman in high school. They discovered it right after I had a bout with diphtheria and I had been wearing glasses, ... very, very heavy glasses, from the time I was a freshman in high school. So, I was aware of my limitations, as far as the eyesight was concerned, and, back then, it was quite an impediment to getting anywhere in the military. In today's world, it's different. For instance, my son, who was my youngest son, who has like 20/100, 20/150 sight, was allowed into the Naval Academy on a waiver, although he was limited in what fields he could enter as a graduate. He couldn't be a pilot, for instance, but, he could be in the backseat of an F-14, which he was. So, those limitations still exist, to a degree, but, not to the same degree that they did then.

KP: It sounds like you have always been an avid sport fan, going back to your childhood in Paterson, up to the present day.

NF: Oh, yeah.

KP: It also sounds like, with the exception of golf, you had a difficult time with athletics, even though you were giving it the "old college try."

NF: Oh, yes. We did, in terms of, like I say, during the war time, when all the athletes were in the service, we did give it a try. I tried out for the baseball team with Mike Stang and I wasn't much of a hitter. Bob Goldberger, from our class, was a pitcher. I think Al Brady probably tried to play baseball, too. I don't know whether he was successful or not, but, as far as I was concerned, I was not much of an athlete at all. We also all tried out for the football team, and, at that point, I thought I was going to make #77 famous for Rutgers, but, [it] never happened, but, I was, and still remain, an avid sports fan. As a matter-of-fact, ... I have season tickets to the New York Giants football stadium, which I managed as a result of being project manager on the Giants Stadium construction in 1976.

KP: It sounds like that was a very advantageous job.

NP: Oh, yeah. Well, eventually, I progressed to a point where I was the senior vice-president of my company, and, being a family company, all of the people who were above me were members of the family, and that was okay, because it didn't turn out too badly.

KP: It sounds like you really enjoyed your career.

NP: Oh, yeah. It was, you know, very varied and interesting. ... Well, as I said, one of the things I got into was the program of expansion of the defense facilities for the Korean War, the construction of the Chrysler tank plant in Newark, Delaware, and, subsequently, I worked for the company as a project engineer, and, as a matter-of-fact, one of the projects I was on immediately after I came out of the service was the Veteran's Hospital in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and, you know, the government spent a lot of money in those years immediately after the war, and we were fortunate enough to get our share of the work.

KP: Did you have any kind of security clearance when you worked at Aberdeen?

NF: Yes, I had a full security clearance at Aberdeen.

KP: Did they conduct a full investigation into your background?

NF: Oh, yeah. The FBI went and checked people out in the neighborhood, ... people that I had put down as references, ... but, they did a full security check during my time at Aberdeen, and, of course, the same thing applied to my wife as an employee there.

KP: How long had your wife worked at Aberdeen?

NP: Let's see, ... she got her bachelor's at Smith in 1946, and she shopped around and got an assistantship at the University of Maryland, in the Physics Department, and spent, I think, two years there. So, she was there from 1948 to 1951, when we married. So, it wasn't really a long period of time, but, she did some very interesting work there. I've seen some of her reports on the work she did, blew up the B-17 wings and this kind of thing, it was fun, but, she enjoyed it, and she had a good, full program down there, a lot of friends. [She] still keeps in touch with many of them.

KP: Really?

NP: Oh, yeah, some girls even from her Smith days. She corresponds with a lady that was at Smith with her, who was the dean of a black college in Tennessee, who is now living somewhere in East Texas, ... and she had a number of roommates while she was at Smith that she still keeps in touch with, but, everybody is at a distance. One girl she roomed with ... has married a Frenchman and they've both been working for NATO for many years, in Belgium, but, she does keep in touch, an excellent, excellent lady, a wonderful thing, you know. She hasn't worked, but, ... I think the fact that she was a mother showed up very, very well with our three children, all of whom ...

KP: Your children have done very well.

NF: ... [Are] college graduates. My one son, who got out of Annapolis, is still working for the company he went with out of the service, Armstrong, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and he is still a member of the military reserve. He is a lieutenant commander now. He has a military [commitment] once a month, down in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. My oldest son was in the Air Force ROTC, not a scholarship winner, however, but, he has maintained his connection with the service. He is actually an adviser to the, what [do] you call it? Civil Air [Patrol], CAP, as is his wife. They don't have regular Reserve slots, but, they do earn some retirement benefits from their involvement with the CAP, and they also get a couple [of] days a month commissary privileges as well. Any other questions?

FR: Concerning your wife, it was quite remarkable for a girl growing up in the 1930s and 1940s to be so interested in the sciences.

NF: Oh, yeah, well, she was a brilliant student.

FR: What do you think motivated her to enter a field that was almost completely dominated by men?

NF: Well, as I say, she was a brilliant student. She was, like, out of her environment, because, in today's world, I think they try to keep people socially where they belong, as well as scholastically. She graduated high school at the age of fifteen-and-a-half, sixteen, and immediately went to Smith College on a scholarship and became a Phi Beta Kappa. So, you know, ... she is just scholastically very, very much with it, and I guess she is not a women's lib-er by any means, but, enough of a person that she did not feel challenged at all in a male-dominated field, and she did very well at it, and, again, you know, the fact that she retired from business when we married did not mean that she

retired from being involved in the sciences and math and education. At that point, you take up the cudgel and you try to help educate your children and help them get to where you want them to be.

FR: She was successful with that.

NF: I hope so. Sometimes, I think the jury's still out. [laughter]

KP: What did your family think of Franklin Roosevelt?

NF: Well, I think [that] most of them voted for him. One branch of the family, I think, however, was pretty staunchly conservative and Republican and, probably, went in the other direction, but, ... that's the way I grew up. ...

KP: You were in the staunchly conservative wing of your family.

NF: Absolutely. I just don't care at all for what's going on in the country right now. However, I think we might have the (leash?) properly tightened on "Slick Willie." [President William Clinton]

KP: When you were stationed at Aberdeen, you were working on missile development in the early stages of the Cold War. Did you have any idea how rapidly our missile capability would advance over the next few years?

NF: Not really, and that's an interesting point, because, as I mentioned, I was in the service one year and twelve days, and the reason that I was discharged in one year and twelve days was because, ... at that point, Mr. Truman didn't feel that the military requirement was what the build-up had come to. Now, you have to understand, I was in Aberdeen, and many of the guys in my company had been returned from occupation duty in Korea, and this is pre-Korean War, so, you know, the requirement for the people in the military, at that point, seemed to be diminished, rather than on the uptake. This happened six or eight months later, after I was discharged, when Korea started in June of, what? 1950. That's when I started worrying about being recalled.

KP: In many ways, you would have been the perfect candidate.

NF: I had been a PFC. I had an engineering MOS, ... you know. [I will] give you a story. One of the people that I was in the company with at Aberdeen was a very bright Japanese gentleman named Kenzo Uyeno. He had the misfortune of being on the West Coast, as a graduate of UCLA, when the war started, and he was interned, with his family. The only one in his family who wasn't interned was a brother who was with the 442nd, which was the Nisei regiment, and, during the war, he was at Arizona, conducting physical education classes, and, immediately after the war, the poor guy got drafted, like I did, [laughter] because he was twenty-five years old, and Kenzo, fine attitude, wonderful guy, and a very good friend, and he did get recalled. ... You know, here is a guy whose whole life was totally destroyed, because, while he was in the service, after he had gotten recalled, he had a tonsillectomy that went south and died. So, here is a guy that was probably, what? twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old and never really had a life because of the war. I don't know if you've heard that kind of a story.

KP: No, not really.

NF: Tragedies, really.

KP: It sounds like you feel very fortunate about the way things worked out for you.

NF: Oh, for me, everything broke beautifully. I managed to get a scholarship, I managed to get through college without having to go into the service and had that disturbed, and, when I did get into the service, it worked out beautifully, because I met a wonderful woman who was a lifetime partner. So, you know, from my point of view, my life worked out beautifully. I had some medical problems, very, very late in life, that I was able to overcome, ... and provided for an early retirement for me, which I have been enjoying for twelve years. So, I am very, very happy. I thank my lucky stars that I was where I was when I was and things have worked out that well for me.

KP: It sounds like you also enjoy your connection with Rutgers and your classmates.

NF: Oh, yeah. ... You know, I was one of these "every five years" people, and I've stayed, kind of, that kind of an alumnus, until we got involved in the fiftieth reunion program, and, somehow or other, somewhere along the line, they told me that I had been elected vice-president of our class. So, I became actively a member of the fiftieth reunion committee. It enabled me to get in touch with a lot of people that I hadn't been in touch with for many, many years, and in working toward the fiftieth reunion program gift to Rutgers, and, fortunately, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the meetings, I enjoyed getting together with the guys that were on the committee, I enjoyed getting together and talking on the phone with some people who I was commissioned to contact. ... You know, we had a very, very interesting thing there. I don't know if you know the story of our fiftieth reunion, but, I think, at this point, we may have the highest percentage participation.

KP: For a reunion class?

NF: For a fiftieth reunion group, and, along the way, ... a couple of the members of our committee, worked very, very hard, and one of members of the committee, Howard Pierson, I think, now, this is not a guy who graduated with us in '44, but, subsequently, a member of the class, Howard was a member Chi Psi, and, through the course of the committee work, he got in touch with a young man, a guy who had started school with us, [by] the name of Henry Bartels. Now, I don't know if you're aware of this story, but, Howard contacted Henry, and Henry was very happy to be involved as a member of our class, although he had not graduated from Rutgers. He started here at Rutgers with us, and, at some point in his career, he went into the service. He was an engineer, like I was, and I knew Hank during freshman year, a nice man, and, when he returned from the service, he wanted to go into industrial engineering, and this is what he did. ... Since Rutgers did not have an industrial engineering curriculum at that time, he went to school at Cornell, graduated, met his wife there, a lovely, lovely girl, and went to work for a metal working company in Connecticut. Now, I don't think he was from Connecticut to begin with, she may have been, and, apparently, through the years, [he] became very successful, to a point where he grew to be the CEO of the company, or president, or whatever, and, upon his retirement, Howard got in touch with him, he decided to

become a member of our class, and he and his wife donated a $100,000 scholarship, which became part of our class gift. ... He set up a scholarship in his wife's name and his name and he set up the criteria that they want fulfilled for the scholarship. ... I don't know who made the contact, but, there was another gentleman, I don't even remember his name, ... you would be interested in this, Fred, [who was from] a Jewish background, and he donated a scholarship, a Jewish chair, and he set up the criteria for that, also another $100,000 gift. Neither of these guys were really, you know, members of our class. I remembered Hank, but, I don't remember the other guy. So, this was almost over two-thirds of our goal. So, now, all we had to do was get to work on the rest of guys that we were into for donations, and, now, we're angling to get the highest percentage participation of any fiftieth group, which I think we attained, and I don't think, once '46 got by, that there's anybody ever going to get that percentage of people, because the classes after '46 got so damn big.

KP: Yes, particularly the Class of 1949.

NF: Was that yours?

KP: No. I did not graduate from Rutgers College. I went to graduate school here.

NF: Oh, good. Any further questions?

KP: Is there anything that we forgot to ask?

NF: Oh, hey, I could go on relating stories for a hundred years. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed growing up in Paterson.

NF: Well, I lived in a community that's immediately adjacent to Paterson and Paterson was a very nice town. I came from a very ethnic type neighborhood. ...

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

NF: ... But, I have to admit, the demographics of the situation are becoming quite distressing to me, as a property owner, because I own the house that my mother lives in, which is about a block away from the house that I was born in.

KP: Your mother still lives in Paterson.

NF: Oh, yeah. She has her own apartment. I have to admit, she seems to be slowing down a little. Her memory and her mental facility is sharp as a tack, but, she had a (procedure?) in the hospital earlier this year, and, unfortunately, it was not a good situation. I should never have allowed it, because it slowed her down, her activity, almost to a walk. She attended several senior functions a week, prior to that, but, now, ... it's difficult [for her] to get around.

KP: From doing these interviews, I have seen how aging affects different people. However, when you look at your mother, you must think that aging is not necessarily a bad thing.

NF: Well, I'll be honest with you, I am seventy-three, she is ninety-three, (2001: She is now ninety-eight), and I don't really hope to attain ... that age, because, when it comes, [it brings along] arthritis [and] a lot of problems. Now, I had my medical problems. I had a heart attack, I had heart surgery, I've had a stroke, I've had cancer surgery, and, you know, somewhere along the line, the law of averages is going to catch up with me, and I don't really want to attain that kind of an age. I'd like to go along, and I always say, "I want to be shot by a jealous husband about the age of eighty-nine," [laughter] but, it's difficult for her, because, ... actually, I have a cousin at home taking care of her now, practically full-time.

KP: It sounds like your mother is determined to stay in her home.

NF: Oh, yes. ... The quote is, "If you put me in a nursing home, I am going to come back and haunt you after I die." [laughter]

KP: Thank you very much. We appreciate this.

NF: Okay. I hope it's of some value to your study.

KP: Oh, yes, it is.

NF: I know you've gotten a lot of stories. I don't know whether they have contributed at all. ...

KP: We are particular interested in hearing from people who were at Rutgers for the duration of the war. Very few students were able to graduate during that time.

NF: It was an interesting time, ... very interesting. Well, thank you, gentlemen.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/8/01
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/10/01
Reviewed by Nicholas Filippone 7/01