RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT GARDNER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

WOODSTOWN, NEW JERSEY
JANUARY 28, 2008

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Robert Gardner on January 28, 2008, in Woodstown, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here today. To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

RG: April 21, 1922. [Does] that figure out right, '22 to '08 is eighty-five?

SI: Yes. You turned eighty-five this last …

RG: … April, born somewhere in Ohio. I'd have to look it up. I don't remember. … I can't remember. I was there, but I can't remember. [laughter]

SI: What were your parents' names?

RG: My father's name was Robert. I am not a junior. My middle initial, my middle name, is different than his. So, I'm not a junior, but I still have the same first name. My mother's name was Mary and, to all of her friends, she was always Molly. [Editor's Note: Mr. Gardner's maiden name was Klipple.] Someplace in Ohio, started with a "Z;" I'd have to look it up. I don't remember.

SI: We can add it to the transcript later.

RG: All right, 1922, yes.

SI: How did the family wind up in Ohio at that point?

RG: My father went to Ohio State College. I remember him telling a story that when he told his folks he was going to go to Ohio State, they all broke out in a cry of sympathy that he was going into "Indian Country," [laughter] and, of course, that was ten thousand years ago, of course, and it practically was Indian Country, but, anyway, that's how he got [to Ohio]. He went to Ohio State, and one of his professors was a Professor Bear and he was a soils specialist. … When it came my turn to go to college, we had already moved to New Jersey and it was to our financial advantage to go to Rutgers, where Dr. Firman Bear was also the same Bear that taught my father.

SI: Really?

RG: He was teaching me. … Bear had transferred East, to Rutgers; … so much for Bear. I was in the ROTC, the Rutgers undergraduate chapter of ROTC, and that's how I got involved with the Army, because I was going to get drafted one way or the other and I thought the easiest way was, [the] "chicken out" way, was through ROTC; go ahead.

SI: Can I ask a few more questions about your family background?

RG: Yes.

SI: Where was your father's family from?

RG: Pennsylvania, outside of Scranton, and Mother's family was there, too. Factoryville, you ever hear of that? outside of Scranton somewhere, Milwaukee, just a dip in the road. Okay, they came from Pennsylvania.

SI: Do you know how they met?

RG: No idea. No, I don't remember any gossip about that. [laughter] No, I have no idea how they met. They were both from Pennsylvania and they were married before they went to Ohio, of course, and he went to Ohio because that's where the job was.

SI: What did he do for a living?

RG: County agricultural agent. That's how I got my start, because I was following him around like a puppy dog, and every picnic and every fair, every this [or that], it's the same old story. It's like living out of a suitcase, almost, but it wasn't quite that bad, but, anyway, he got his start in … Ohio, as an agricultural agent in Ohio, and then, after awhile, … I can't fix the time, but he got a job in New Jersey and we moved to Somerville, which you've heard of, no doubt, and he was ag agent in Somerset County forever. … That's how I got my start, because I was following him around and … learning, trying to learn everything he knew, which I never did. He always outsmarted me. [laughter] Anyway, that's how we got to New Jersey, and I'm an only child. I was a spoiled only child, and thank God I was, because there were a lot of advantages to that. [laughter] What else can I tell you?

SI: You grew up in Somerville.

RG: Yes, went to Somerville High School, grammar school, I mean, kindergarten, grammar school, high school, and then, on to Rutgers.

SI: What do you remember about Somerville in the 1920s and 1930s, when you were growing up? What was it like?

RG: Oh, I remember Somerville as having a great automobile agency, Duryea's Automobile Agency. You could walk the streets of Somerville any time of day or night without carrying a gun. They had all the municipal services. One time, the mayor lived around the corner, or a couple of blocks away from where we were, so, we had a first name basis with the mayor, one time. Well, it was a nice town and, every once in awhile, we get a card or a Christmas card from one of my old playmates, and [they] tell us about the number of Hispanics and the number of people moving in, not all complimentary, but it's not Camden, pardon the expression, it's not Camden, but it's not the old …

SI: The old Somerville?

RG: The old Somerville; nothing is. I mean, this is not the old Woodstown, it's not the old Windsor, it's not the old; so what?

SI: Was it very rural back then? Were there a lot of farms, or was it more suburban back then?

RG: The only thing that I remember is Manville, Manville and somebody. They make asbestos.

SI: Johns Manville?

RG: Yes, and that was the nearest manufacturing that I could remember. There were possibly others, but Manville was always in the news.

SI: Were you involved in clubs in town? Did you have hobbies, like Boy Scouts or anything?

RG: No. There seems to be a faint recollection of a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], a, quote, "Hi-Y," H-I-Capital-Y, but I don't remember any Boy Scout activity. We all had bicycles, but there was no bicycle club, that I know of. All I could come up with is that YMCA group. I don't know where that came [in].

SI: Was that mostly sports or was it other activities?

RG: No. … I was not athletic. What did I do in high school, anything? No, I just barely went to school, went to high school. No, I was not an athlete. No, that's all dim, dark, beyond recall, sorry. [laughter]

SI: Did you have to work at all when you were a teenager?

RG: Well, I don't recall being beaten over the head to work, or … had to go to work, or whether I did go to work. When I was bigger, then, when I was of high school age, yes, I worked on the neighboring farms, drove a team of horses, … raked hay, hauled bales, loaded bales on a wagon, helped with the milking, feeding the calves, feeding the cows. It was strictly day labor. I commuted. I either walked or rode a bicycle to a farm. It wasn't necessarily the same farm every day, but I worked on somebody's farm most of the time, after I was; well, I was going to say how old I was. I had to be, probably, … twelve or thirteen or fourteen. I'm guessing now. I don't know. Where are we now?

SI: How did the Great Depression affect your town and your family?

RG: Well, I remember Dad coming home for supper one night and had an emergency [discussion], had a rapid exchange of information, with my mother, which I really … wasn't supposed to pay much attention to, but the net result was that he told her we were getting a cut in pay, that he was getting a cut in pay. … We tried to cut back, as I recall, with the expenses of grocery shopping, for one, as to buy food that would go further or last longer or stretch it out, but we were not in a poverty situation at all. We were aware of a declining economy, but we were not destitute and we were not welfare people.

SI: Did you have to do a lot of chores around the house?

RG: Yes. Well, I was … the only son they had, the only child they had, so, yes, I was responsible for doing a little "boy work," inside and outside, but there was no problem. I didn't have any major conflict about anything.

SI: What kind of jobs would you do? Would you gather wood?

RG: Empty wastebaskets, burn the trash. I mean, we could have an open fire in those days. You'd take a big wire basket-type out alongside the curb and set it on fire and bring it back in. Well, one time, we had a dog and I [was] the dog walker. Boy, you're digging me back … where I have no idea … where I can go from here.

SI: That is all right. Did you see how the Depression affected the people around you, like in the town?

RG: No recollection, no recollection.

SI: Do you remember transients ever coming through and asking for a meal, or coming up to the back door?

RG: No, no, I don't remember that. Possibly, they did, but I don't remember. I could have been at school. I don't know. I have no memory of that.

SI: What about Roosevelt and the New Deal? What did your family think of Roosevelt?

RG: I have no idea.

SI: Did you see any of the New Deal programs being put into action around Somerville?

RG: No. That was beyond my ken. [laughter]

SI: You mentioned that you were following your father around, as you put it. Did you actually go out with him when he would make the rounds as a county agent?

RG: No, not as that, but, if they had a farmers' picnic or the county fair or a dedication, or something, well, anyway, I would go along as a chore boy. I would set up tables, set up chairs, set up exhibits, set up posters. I was just a handyman, but this was only on special occasions, when they had to do something at the picnic ground or a ballpark or at a backend of a diner, or someplace, that … had to be set up as kind of a meeting place. … That's when I would get my knowledge firsthand, just from doing those picnics and setting up exhibits and stuff, but I didn't go on a day-to-day basis, no.

SI: Were you involved in any 4-H activities outside of that?

RG: No, no. That was a rural thing and, if I had been, I would immediately have been suspicious, because of the close tie, but I was not.

SI: In high school, did you think that you were going to go on to college? What did you think was going to happen to you? Do you think you were going to go get a job or did you want to go to college?

RG: Well, I think I was brought up, from the year one, that I would probably go to college. I mean, I was told that was going to happen, you know, more or less. [laughter] So, no, I never had any concern about it, any qualms about it.

SI: Even in high school, were you always interested in things like agriculture and science? What were you interested in?

RG: No, not really, but I got more interested in it from association, I guess, than from anything else. … See, all my parents' social friends were farmers at that time. As I recall it, [they] had a game called, card game called, Five Hundred. I couldn't tell you any more about playing cards today than I did then, but their Five Hundred card group would meet at our house on social occasions and they were all farmers. I don't recall any; we had a mailman living across the street, we had a banker living across the street, we had a politician living up there, but all our social friends were farmers, not those people over there, down around town. … I don't know why, I mean, I have no idea why that was, but that's what it was.

SI: Did your father associate with any of the faculty of the College of Agriculture at Rutgers?

RG: Not socially, that I know of. Oh, they always had meetings, meetings and meetings. … It's an aside, this hasn't anything to do chronologically with what we're talking about now, but … this is long after the war. I was looking for a job and somebody said, "New Brunswick, … Middlesex County, was looking for an assistant," and they said, "Put your name in for Middlesex County," and some of the older and wiser agents in other counties said, "Don't bother putting your name in for Middlesex. It's too close to New Brunswick. Every time the phone rings, somebody from New Brunswick's going to be hollering down your head. Go further away." [laughter] Well, whatever it was, and it turned out to be good advice, but, no, to answer your question, no, I didn't. We did not socialize with other agents.

SI: Had you ever been to Rutgers before you came as a freshman?

RG: I can't recall ever being there; no, I was a total stranger when I walked in. It was reasonably close. There's no reason I couldn't have been. I don't recall what we were doing there. I have no idea.

SI: Did you have any scholarships or anything to Rutgers?

RG: … Only son of an employee.

SI: Okay, that is right.

RG: I do not know how much it amounted to, but it was worthwhile going there for a son of an employee, basically.

SI: What do you remember about your first few days at Rutgers? Was there anything special they did for freshmen?

RG: No, I'm sorry, … moving into the dormitory, which I thought was just one big closet, and I thought, "Well, we'll find out what it's like," because I didn't particularly like it. I didn't wave the flag and say what a wonderful thing it was, but it was a place to … hang your hat and a place to sleep, and that's all I needed at that time, and right about the same time, after you moved into the dormitory, there was a few knocks on the door from the fraternities, wanting you to spend all your money with them. So, the "rushing," quote, of fraternities took up some time, which it was pretty nice, to be thought of as … [them] wanting to have you join their group, which I did, finally, eventually.

SI: Which fraternity did you join?

RG: Phi Gamma Delta. We had a house on George Street, up overlooking the river, and, oh, I guess that burned down. I don't know. I haven't been back on [campus]. I'm not an avid fraternity flag-waver.

SI: Why did you choose that one?

RG: I don't really know. I think … it had a little bit to do with opportunities, that they had their own members do some of the kitchen work, and I don't know, it just seemed to work out all right and was favorable. I don't know.

SI: Could you get your meals by helping out in the kitchen, that sort of thing?

RG: Yes, yes. I became quite an accomplished waiter. [laughter] … We'd have a weekend dance or a party, you invite your girlfriend down and the members would move out, go someplace else to spend the night, for a couple nights. … We turned the house over to the girls, the women, dates, and then, when they got out of there, Sunday night, we'd move back in again, and, well, I was a pretty good waiter for the girls, [laughter] but, anyway, it was an interesting time.

SI: Many interviewees have told me about how fraternity life was more formal then. For example, you had to wear a jacket to dinner, sometimes. Did you think it was more of an upper-class type of lifestyle?

RG: Well, I won't argue with them, because I just don't recall, but I was interested in the kitchen and I was not particularly interested in sitting out in the living room, listening to a bunch of records on a record player. … Every once in awhile, there'll be something on television now that dates back a hundred years and I say, "I remember that. That was played over and over and over on the damn record machine," and I quote the member who requested that or who had kept playing that over and over and over, but I was more interested in the kitchen. … Well, I went from waiter to kitchen help, and I was number one behind the cook. I was a server, whatever a

server is, but that was the name that they gave us, but I was number one after the cook, and I didn't go out and wait tables. Then, I was working in the kitchen.

SI: Did the fraternity hire a cook or was that another fraternity brother?

RG: No, we hired our own cook. It was two people, … a black man and a black woman, they were husband and wife, and he was the janitor and she was the cook, wonderful people, nice people, good, hard workers, good, honest sense of humor, just wonderful people.

SI: Do you remember their names, their last name?

RG: I don't even remember their first names.

SI: Did you move into the fraternity house?

RG: Yes, yes. Well, as it turned out, my, quote, "senior father" was Flitcraft. Now, you're not a native, but you've possibly heard of Cream Valley Dairy, which was right across the street, right over there, which is now a golf course, but Dick Flitcraft, Richard Flitcraft, was my senior father. He was a Rutgers senior, chemistry major. He graduated, and I think he went to that clinical company out in Colorado, out West. I had it in my hand and I lost it, too. Anyway, he graduated and went there and he was the son of [the] Flitcrafts who had Cream Valley Dairy. His brother, Richard [Hildreth], was not a fraternity member, but he played, he tried to play, baseball, commercial, and really was not all that great. I mean, he spent some time at it, but he never became a hero in baseball, but, anyway, that's how I got to know Cream Valley Dairy, with Dick, his father, and I just mentioned his name.

SI: Richard, the son.

RG: Richard, he was the senior father. Hilly, Hildreth; God, how could you forget a name like Hildreth? He was my age and he was the would-be baseball player, but never really made it too well. [Editor's Note: Hildreth M. Flitcraft, Rutgers College Class of 1950, pitched for the Philadelphia Phillies in 1942 and later played in the Interstate League from 1945 to 1947.] He became an insurance agent, [laughter] go from baseball to insurance agent, but that's how I got to know Cream Valley Dairy, and, one day, Hilly, Hildreth, Hilly, invited me to come down here with him for the weekend. He was going to go home, and would I like to go home with him for the weekend? I said, "Sure." So, that's how I got to know Cream Valley Dairy and they had a couple of sisters and they had a couple more brothers. It's a big family, but that was my first knowledge that the state did not stop at Trenton, [as] I figured up until then. [laughter] … We had a great time here and they became very close friends. … Hilly's dead, Dick's dead, their mother and father are dead, their grandchildren, I met several times, and I worked with several times, their grandchildren, as members of Reliance Fire Company. This gets me out of [order]; we're jumping ahead now. I'm over fifty years in the fire company, as a volunteer fireman. So, that's way ahead; that's next week. [laughter] All right, so, where are we? …

SI: I want to ask you one more question about Rutgers. When you first got there, was there any sort of freshman hazing? Did they make you wear anything or do anything as a freshman?

RG: Oh, I'm sure there had to be some … type of little skullcap, maybe, a dink, a little cap, which marked you as a freshman. … It didn't impress me much, whatever it was, if we had any, but I'm sure we must have had some, but I don't remember what they were.

SI: Where did you live originally, before you moved into the fraternity house?

RG: A college dormitory. I was trying to remember which one. It was the one [on the] north end of College Avenue, on the east side.

SI: Ford Hall?

RG: … No, it was beyond that. …

SI: Winants?

RG: That was the dining hall, wasn't it, Winants? No, this was …

SI: Demarest?

RG: Was there one on College Avenue?

SI: Yes, those are a few on College Avenue.

RG: North end?

SI: Do you mean away from Winants or towards Winants?

RG: Away from Winants, … across from the gymnasium.

SI: Okay.

RG: A couple blocks east of the gymnasium?

SI: Yes, there might have been. That area has all been redone now.

RG: Oh, yes, okay.

SI: I know, after the war, they put up the dorms by the river. Was Rutgers Prep down that way, Rutgers Preparatory School, the high school or prep school?

RG: … No recollection; sorry about that.

SI: What about your classes? Did you start to specialize and choose a major right away?

RG: No, everything was [predetermined]. … I guess we had a mathematics course, an English course, a history course. I mean, they really made a tremendous impression on me, as you can tell, [laughter] but we didn't start to specialize much until, well, second year, I guess, we had started to. I know I flunked botany. I was a complete, total failure in botany. I took a re-exam and failed that, too. I was not an A-1 student, obviously. The other one was organic chemistry. I can remember Dean [William T.] Read, who had organic chemistry, and we met in some place with a tiered student section here, here, here, tiered, and Dean Read was down here in the pit, with sliding blackboards, went up and down, and, as soon as he got one blackboard filled, he flipped it up, started on the second. You never even had time to copy what he'd been writing, and I did not memorize salt and sugar and I totally flunked organic chemistry. … I was not an A-1 student, obviously.

SI: Were there any classes that you particularly liked?

RG: Yes, I really enjoyed farm crops, barley, wheat, soy beans, grains, oats, winter oats, spring oats, that and the dairy classes, dairy manufacturers, genetics; waving a flag for Holsteins all the time. [John W.] Barlett, Dr. Barlett, is that his name? Dr. Barlett was the … dairy teacher, I think. Soils [was taught by] Prof. Bear, who Dad had.

SI: Did you have any classes with Waksman? Did you have any classes with Selman Waksman?

RG: … I don't recall, doesn't come back. (Mitchelltree?) … was a soil specialist. He was an [Rutgers Agricultural] Extension man; he was not the college man. I haven't thought about all this stuff for fifty years; go ahead, from somewhere else. [laughter]

SI: It sounds like most of your social activities were on College Avenue and not the agricultural campus. Is that right, that you were mostly on College Avenue?

RG: Yes, yes. … The ag classes were mostly in the afternoon, as I recall, which meant that immediately after grabbing something for lunch, you got [on] a bus or you walked or [rode] a bicycle or a friend, or something, with a car anyway to go all the hell away across town to the Ag School, and then, reverse [to] come back. … It was inconvenient to say the least, but it was a lot better than … having them all grouped in one afternoon, instead of having them spotted here, there and everywhere, but, yes, it was inconvenient to go over, walk across town.

SI: When you entered Rutgers, the war had already started in Europe. Were you following the news about what was happening in Europe even before the war started, when Hitler was taking over all these countries in Europe?

RG: Well, I guess … what really catalyzed most of us was Pearl Harbor. Well, we were aware of the news about Poland, what was it, Lithuania? Was that a … country?

SI: Yes.

RG: Czechoslovakia, and we thought, "Well, some nut's over there," but I don't recall getting all out of shape about it. … Of course, then, after Pearl Harbor, why, it began to hit home a little closer.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, did you think that the United States would stay out of the war?

RG: I didn't think we'd ever get in it before Pearl Harbor. I thought that, well, we shouldn't put that much confidence in the French, but I figured they'd have a bigger role than they took, and Italy, I … didn't realize they would do so little. So, to answer your question, no, I wasn't concerned about Europe.

SI: Do you remember, on campus, people debating over whether the United States should get involved or whether they should do more for Britain?

RG: No recollection, no recollection.

SI: What do you remember about ROTC and that training?

RG: We had to go to school, I mean, had a classroom [course]. We'd read about it and we'd draw pictures and we'd paint pictures or we'd rearrange pictures. Somebody would be lecturing about Gettysburg, or some place like that, that you probably had no interest in, and then, one day a week, Tuesday, one day, we had to get in these uniforms and learn close-order drill and march around like soldiers. We all figured that we were going to have to go one way or the other, so, we might as well take the easy way.

SI: Did you ever give any thought to the Navy or the Air Force?

RG: No, not really, because we didn't have any way of working that off, like you did with ROTC and your weekly drill and daily class.

SI: You talked about how important Pearl Harbor was; do you remember where you were that day and how you found out about it?

RG: No, no. … It's December sometime, but I don't know when. I guess it was December; wasn't it January, December?

SI: December 7th.

RG: Yes. No, I have no idea.

SI: Did you stay on campus most weekends or did you go back home?

RG: No, I stayed on campus. … No, I didn't go home every weekend, any weekend, no.

SI: After Pearl Harbor, did you notice any changes on campus? Did they have blackouts or rationing, or did people start leaving right away for the service?

RG: No, I'm sorry, I can't picture anything. I can't come up with anything.

SI: Did you do any work, other than what you did in the fraternity house in the kitchen?

RG: No. Well, after Pearl Harbor, I guess I did do some work. The Raritan Arsenal was across the river and I went over there and applied for a job for doing something or other. … I don't know how long it lasted or when it started, but I got a job driving a forklift-truck, ninety-five cents an hour, anytime that you're available, ninety-five cents an hour, just like finding money, to sit there and ride around on a forklift, easiest money I ever made the rest of my life, [laughter] but that's the only, quote, "wartime" job that I ever had. … Well, I was an air spotter, … one of those guys who listened or looked for airplanes, and you never got paid for that. That was all volunteer stuff, though.

SI: Where did you do that?

RG: Well, it had to be somewhere around New Brunswick, but I have no idea where it was. I have no recollection whatsoever, except we got a telephone, that they said, "If you hear something, call so-and-so and tell us what it sounds like." Hell, it'd be a damn South Jersey mosquito, … telling them what it sounded like, so, anyway, I don't know if we ever reported anything serious.

SI: Did you go out there with other Rutgers guys, say, your fraternity brothers, or did you go by yourself?

RG: No idea. No, I wasn't by myself. There were at least two of us, and maybe three, out there. We'd swap lies about whether we heard it or whether we didn't hear it, or whether it was a mosquito or whether it was an airplane, or whether it was a mail plane. Who knows? Well, anyway, dim, dark days beyond recall.

SI: Did you do any other volunteering?

RG: … I don't recall anything that sticks in my mind that amounts to anything. This is all the time I was still at Rutgers and that didn't last long. … See, we really never got to our third year; we're still working on [our] second year of college. I don't recall anything more.

SI: The Army took you out of Rutgers in 1943; is that right?

RG: That's about right. Yes, we went to Anniston, Alabama, for basic training. We were [in] just like basic training, just like a draftee, but we were all together, all the Rutgers group was together, and that's where they got the name Black Fifty. You heard this from the other guys.

SI: Yes, but you can tell it again.

RG: Yes. … I guess we went to Fort Dix. I'm not sure about that, but, then, we got on a soft coal burning engine train, and I swear that the cars were the same ones Lincoln used to go from

Pennsylvania to Washington. Hot, all the windows were open, all the soft coal smoke came rolling right through, and that's where we got all black and that's where the name came from, because, when we got out in Alabama, this hillbilly, probably Kentucky, sergeant bellowed at us four or five times and told us what we looked like and the name stuck. Now, a hundred years later, it's still the Black Fifty, … and we were, we were black as soft coal smoke could make you, and then, we went through basic training, run up … [the] Anniston, Alabama hills, Talladega National Forest. The Talladega National Forest should be wiped off the face of the Earth. Anyway, we survived.

SI: How sudden was it that you would be leaving to go to Alabama? Did they give you any preparation?

RG: Oh, golly, I have no idea, just one day after another after another, a day at a time. … No, I have no chronological sequence there whatsoever.

SI: What did your family think of you going into the service?

RG: Not much, but they didn't have much choice, any more so than today's draftee has much choice. I mean, all we had to look forward to was basic training and OCS [Officer's Candidate School], whereas today's draftee really doesn't have … OCS to look forward to, unless he's really outstanding in the Air Corps or the Navy or something to promote him beyond a draftee, whereas … at least we had OCS to look forward to. … Well, anyway, we came back to Rutgers, went back to school.

SI: Was this after you were done at McClellan?

RG: After Anniston, Alabama. …

SI: What else do you remember about Anniston? You mentioned it was very physically demanding, the training.

RG: Well, it was a rude awakening to be bossed around by a bunch of, we thought, or I thought, we thought, sergeants or master sergeants or first sergeants or even buck sergeants that didn't have enough wit to come in out of the rain. How they ever got to be a sergeant, we wondered about, but, anyway, it was just a matter of time. If you were there long enough, you got promoted to anything. … Anyway, we didn't have … a hell a lot of faith in the ability of our teachers, for what it was worth.

SI: Do you think they were harder on you because you were "college boys?"

RG: We had nothing to compare it to. We don't know. No, we don't have anything to compare it to.

SI: Was there a lot of harassment or hazing by the sergeants? Would they make you do things?

RG: No, I don't think they made us do anything more than any other recruit would do. We were not segregated. We were thrown in with whatever group they happened to have going through at that time. So, we were not picked on or segregated or beat up more so. We were just part of the mob and I think they treated us all the same, like double timing up the damned hill and whatever.

SI: What did you think of the training in general? Did you feel like it was adequate? Did you receive good weapons training?

RG: Yes. We went on a firing range. We shot targets. Yes, I think we had as much or more than anybody else. I don't think we had any consideration, or any animosity.

SI: Do you think going with all the people that you knew from Rutgers helped you get through the training?

RG: Oh, yes, we could commiserate with each other, yes.

SI: Did you also get to know a lot of people from other parts of the country down there?

RG: Not really.

SI: The Rutgers group stayed together.

RG: I don't remember any [of the others?].

SI: Did you ever get to go off base, into Anniston?

RG: … Oh, yes. I don't know where we went, but what's across the river from Anniston, Columbia?

SI: Was that Georgia?

RG: I don't know. Anyway, it was a big, wide-open town, sometime then, anything you wanted to get, if you had enough money. I don't recall.

SI: Then, after that was done, you came back to Rutgers.

RG: Went back to school.

SI: Was that part of the ASTP?

RG: Yes.

SI: What was that like? Where did you live, first of all?

RG: … I think I went back to the fraternity house. We were not segregated. I think I went back to the fraternity house, lived there.

SI: Were you living with other fraternity men or was it all Army at that point?

RG: No, … fraternity people; [to his wife, who entered the room] yes?

Jeanne P. Gardner: You're really hurting me.

RG: Why?

JG: When you came back from basic training, we got married.

SI: Oh, okay, thank you for bringing that up.

RG: [laughter] We didn't get there. We didn't get there, yet.

JG: Well, you said, when you came back from Alabama, you lived at the fraternity house, and we were married and we lived in a room. …

RG: Where did we live?

JG: On Mine Street, in some little one-room one room.

RG: Where, in New Brunswick?

JG: Yes.

RG: Where's Mine Street?

JG: Damn if I know. Jane and Sid lived next door, that's all I know, but you didn't live in the fraternity house. We lived together.

RG: Well, I'm glad you [said that]; you'd better sit here and keep me straight. I might as well tell him anything. [laughter] I probably have been telling him [anything].

JG: That was a big event for me. I wasn't going to forget that. [laughter] …

RG: All right, so, I'm off base again.

JG: Sorry.

SI: How did you meet your wife?

RG: How did I what?

SI: How did you meet Mrs. Gardner?

RG: Meet her?

SI: Yes.

RG: You want to tell him?

JG: Sure.

RG: I picked her up at a fairground. [laughter]

JG: Well, that was where it started, but I needed a date. I was at Montclair and I called him and asked if he'd like to come and he said, "No," and then, eventually, we got together.

SI: Was that when he was in college? Okay.

RG: What happened to your neighbor?

JG: What neighbor?

RG: That girl [that] lived next-door to you in Readington.

JG: Oh, she's dead now.

RG: Yes. What happened to her?

JG: She died. …

RG: She's the one that introduced us.

JG: Right.

RG: What was her name?

JG: Pearl Kellum.

RG: Pearl, okay, yes, Pearl.

JG: … We were at a fair and they had music and they danced and he asked her to dance, not me, [laughter] but we did talk a little bit.

SI: That is good.

JG: Whatever.

RG: All right, go ahead. …

SI: You got married when he came back from Alabama.

JG: Yes.

RG: That's what she says.

SI: Okay. [laughter]

JG: Were you there?

RG: That was in November of "Aught-Four."

JG: 1943.

RG: … That was sixty-four years ago. See, I remember that.

JG: … Your arithmetic's very good.

RG: … We each keep looking for the ideal mate, but we're stuck with each other. [laughter]

JG: Habit now.

SI: What was it like to get married during the war? Things were pretty limited and there was rationing. Were you able to have a reception?

JG: Just family.

RG: We took a train to New York.

JG: But, I don't know, you came home on a Wednesday or a Thursday and we were married within three days, the time limit.

RG: Saturday.

JG: Yes, Saturday, and we were married at my parents' house and only our immediate relatives were there, and I was working at Western Electric at the time. … We had no occasion to buy anything, because, as I say, we were living in a room and he was getting his meals, what? at the dining hall, I guess, for lunch, and I was working, and then, at night, we'd eat out some place; no gas, no cars, no, not many wedding presents, because things were tight. …

SI: The Army did not have a problem with you living with your wife, outside of whatever they had for the other ASTP students.

JG: No. [laughter] I think the guys were supposed to sleep in a dorm, or in a barracks, or whatever, but they figured out a way how to …

SI: Sneak out.

JG: Get home, [laughter] and, as I say, another fellow, who was in the Fifty, Sid Foster, and his wife, lived in the adjoining room, and so, Bob and Sid kind of left to be with their wives. Not many of the guys were married, were they?

RG: Don't know.

JG: I don't think there were very many that were.

SI: I have heard of a couple that got married down in Alabama.

JG: Oh.

SI: Yes, I think a few got married on the base. Did you have to keep your marriage a secret?

JG: Oh, no, oh, no. … Just as long as they reported in when they were supposed to, I don't think they really cared about their personal life. [laughter]

SI: Were there a lot of military touches to the ASTP? Did you have to wear a uniform all the time, did you have to salute people, or was it more like regular college days?

RG: I didn't wear a uniform all the time.

SI: No?

JG: I thought you did.

RG: … We went to New York in uniform?

JG: Oh, yes. It was very helpful.

RG: Yes.

JG: I mean, you know, you got a lot of sympathy. [laughter]

SI: Yes. People were good to the servicemen.

JG: Right. I mean, everybody was very patriotic at that point, and I guess, when you went in for basic training, you were nothing, you were a private, but, then, when you finished basic training, they made you a PFC and I think you were getting something like twenty-one dollars a month or twenty-eight dollars a month.

RG: Oh, yes, we managed to get paid.

JG: Oh, yes.

RG: And then, we got insurance, and you're still the beneficiary.

JG: Yes.

SI: Is that the GI insurance?

JG: Yes.

RG: Yes.

JG: Which he converted when he finally got out of the Army. …

RG: Well, it's still government insurance.

JG: Oh, yes, but it was very advantageous to pay for it yourself and keep it.

RG: Yes. Every June, is it? we get a check from the government, rebate on your military [insurance], that I switched when I had the opportunity, to what they called the twenty pay life, and I paid X number of dollars for twenty years, and then, got coverage for life and, every June, we get a rebate. …

SI: That is nice.

JG: I think what happened was that not as many guys died as they thought would, so, there was money left in the pool. So, they distribute it to the ones who are still alive each year, which was a big surprise, but very nice. [laughter]

RG: Yes.

SI: That is good. A lot of people have said that they were upset with the fact that they dropped it and they were not able to get it back.

RG: Yes.

JG: Well, a friend of his family's, his mother and father's, was an insurance man and I guess you talked to him, I don't even remember what his name was, … and he recommended this and it worked out wonderfully, for us.

SI: What else did you do at Rutgers the second time? Did you take classes?

RG: Just went to classes.

JG: What kind of classes? I don't remember.

RG: The second time around?

JG: Before you went to OCS, in that period from November to about June, I think it was?

RG: I don't remember what classes.

JG: I don't know what kind. … I don't think they were your regular classes, but maybe they were, I don't know.

SI: They were not agricultural classes.

RG: No idea, no memory.

SI: Was there any engineering?

RG: Was what?

SI: Engineering. I know some of those guys took engineering classes.

RG: No.

SI: After coming back to Rutgers, then, you went to OCS. That was in Fort Benning.

RG: [Yes].

SI: What was that like? First, what was it like to leave your wife behind to go back into training, or did you go with him, Mrs. Gardner?

JG: Not for that.

SI: What was it like to leave your family behind and go back into OCS?

RG: I don't know what you want.

JG: Well, … if you don't mind, he has a bad hip, which he got when he was twelve, so, when he finally got into the Army and OCS, they had, he and Bill Huber, both had to sign releases that whatever happened to them was pre-existing and they weren't going to sue the Army or anything. So, both he and Bill, and maybe some of the other guys, really suffered through any physical training, because it was hard. They had a small disability along with it, and, when he came home from OCS, I think he weighed about 130 pounds.

RG: Soaking wet.

JG: He was the sickest looking person, because it had been hot and very physically demanding, and Bill was the same. He and Bill were very good friends, Judge Huber, … but, anyway, at least he was in the country and I knew he was safe and it wasn't as though he were fighting someplace. So, that part wasn't a huge worry.

SI: What do you remember about the training down in Fort Benning?

JG: I've done my [time].

SI: If you want to come back in, anytime, or if you want to sit down.

JG: I've done my thing. I just thought there were important things [to get down].

SI: Absolutely; come in whenever you want.

RG: It was very physically difficult, physically demanding, and, well, climbing ropes and going over walls and all the physical activities, the physical edge, doing pushups and running around the track, [was] just physically difficult. That's what I didn't like, that's what I remember about OCS, and that I was glad to get out of it, glad to be done, glad to finish it.

SI: Do you remember anything that they taught you about being …

RG: Being what?

SI: Do you remember anything that they taught you about being a leader or leading men in the field?

RG: No.

SI: Roughly how long was OCS?

RG: Ten weeks, eight weeks, ten weeks, guessing, pulling numbers out of the air.

SI: Okay, but a couple of months.

RG: Yes. It was hot. Georgia's hot.

SI: What was it like to get your commission? Did your life change at all once you were an officer?

RG: Yes, to a degree. … Well, you had more responsibilities. You had to account for forty men. Come Friday night and you've got forty men going, "Whoosh," like that, and how many of them are going to come back like this or how many are going to come back like that, or how many are not going to come back at all? … Until Sunday night and everybody got checked in, it was apprehensive [thinking] about, "What the hell are they doing now?" and, "Where are they now?" "Why? Why?" and I guess I worry too much, but, "If it didn't happen this week, will it happen next week?" and, "What are you going to do about it? How do you write a letter to some guy's wife and say he died?" I don't know. I was not a good lieutenant, a good leader.

SI: You were worried even before you went overseas.

RG: Yes, yes.

SI: You were worried they would get hurt when they were on leave.

RG: Yes.

SI: Did that happen a lot?

RG: No, no, just that I worried a lot.

SI: Okay.

RG: I was, well, I transferred from one company, … [in] the First Battalion, to another company in the Second Battalion and transferred to [become] supply officer, and I thought, "Man, at long last, I don't have those guys to worry about. I'll just worry about how many blankets we got." So, eventually, we went to the Philippines, on occupation duty, because the war was over, and thank God for the atomic bomb, for us, but not for them, but for us, and we still had so many points to get before you could get discharged. … They sent the whole damned division over to the Philippines, and there we stayed until we worked out enough points to come home on. …

SI: Right after OCS, is that when they put you in the 86th Division?

RG: Yes.

SI: You went from OCS to Louisiana.

RG: Sounds about right.

SI: Did you get to go home in-between?

RG: Did I get what?

SI: Did you get to go home in-between?

RG: Probably.

SI: Every time I look at this book [*The Class of 1944 Military History Book*], it seems like the Army just went alphabetically, "G through H, you are going to the 86th." Is that how they assigned people? It was at Camp Livingston in Louisiana.

RG: Louisiana? Yes.

SI: That was when you first joined your unit.

RG: Yes.

SI: Had the unit already been in existence before you joined them?

RG: Yes.

SI: Tell me a little bit about that, taking control of your unit. You mentioned that you worried a lot about your men, but did it take awhile to get to know them and to get them to trust you?

RG: Well, I think back on it, and think; where'd they come from, Oklahoma? Where'd they activate that 86th, somewhere out West, Oklahoma? …

SI: It could be Oklahoma, or the Midwest, probably.

RG: Midwest, somewhere.

SI: A lot of the guys in the unit were from Oklahoma.

RG: I thought so.

SI: It [*The Class of 1944 Military History Book*] says the unit was activated in Texas.

RG: Oh, I don't know.

SI: I do not know if that means it was a Texas unit or not.

RG: Well, it was just another day, I don't know. Me and the military were not "buddy" buddies, really.

SI: What would you do in an average day during training with your men?

RG: What'd we do?

SI: Yes.

RG: Went on the range, we did physical/athletic events, did close-order drill, tried to get to know who they [the soldiers] were, tried individual discussions, individual talk. [I] put a lot of dependence in my sergeants, because they were a lot closer to the enlisted men than I was, than I ever would be. It's not one of my favorite discussions. I'm not happy with the military.

SI: Okay. Did you like your sergeants? Did you think they were good non-commissioned officers?

RG: No, I just was there. I was just there. I was not good, not bad, I was just there.

SI: Okay. What about other places that you trained in the United States? I know the division went out to California.

RG: Yes. We went from Louisiana to California, San Clemente Island, off of California. We did amphibious landings. We were going to attack Japan. We were going to be the Japanese invasion force, and [would have] climbed down the rope ladder on the side of a troopship and get into a little DUKW boat with a drop front ramp, where you're going to open up and get shot at while you walked down that ramp, wade through the water up to your neck, soaking wet and can't move, up the beach, full of sand, just not a happy situation. [I am] just not the kind to wave the flag and say, "Follow me." …

SI: Were you apprehensive about going into combat at that time or did you start to feel this way afterwards?

RG: No, I was just spoiled rotten, because I … didn't want to have to work through all that hard work. … Well, anyway, we went to California, went through that, and then, after awhile, we went to the Philippines.

SI: You went to Europe first, right?

RG: Beg your pardon?

SI: You went to Europe first, right?

RG: Oh, yes, we went to Europe from; oh, I got ahead of my story. I got ahead of my story. Where'd we go from Livingston? From Livingston, we went to California? No. That's right; yes, we went to California, and then, we got on a train and came back through Canada, … came all the way across the country in the train, through Canada, to; it's not Boston. What's that Canadian place?

SI: Newfoundland?

RG: Who?

SI: Newfoundland?

RG: Yes, the village, the harbor.

SI: Nova Scotia?

RG: Oh, well, the harbor, where we got on a troopship.

SI: It says Camp Myles Standish.

RG: No, that's not right.

SI: Okay.

RG: … I mean, that may be right, but I don't recall Myles Standish. I'm thinking of the harbor.

SI: Goose Bay? That is all right. We can put it in later.

RG: Well, anyway, we got on troopship to Le Havre, France. All right, we got through [to] the troopship. All right, now, I'm in France. Where do you want to go now, … up through Belgium?

SI: What was the voyage like going over to Europe?

RG: What was the what?

SI: What was the boat trip like, on the troopship?

RG: I don't know what you're after.

SI: What was it like to get on the ship and go over to Europe? Were there any submarine alerts? What were the conditions like on the ship? Were you concerned about going into combat then?

RG: Well, we got onboard ship and we got a place to sleep in these tiers, four or five deep, down in the bottom of the ship. … I was trying to recall about whether you had to go up on deck to smoke or whether you could smoke down [below]. You couldn't smoke down in that hold. It would be a gas chamber. No, I don't know. I just know we got there.

SI: You landed in Le Havre.

RG: Yes.

SI: How quickly did they get you to the front?

RG: I don't even know what month we got to Le Havre. What month was it?

SI: This says April, April of 1945, near the end of the war.

RG: … Is that where they had the cigarette camps, Camp Lucky Strike?

SI: Yes.

RG: That's the cigarette camps?

SI: Yes, Lucky Strike, Chesterfield.

RG: That's where we went, Camp Lucky Strike.

SI: Okay.

RG: And I don't know how long we were there. We could have been there a month, we could have been there two, I have no idea how long, but I know we headed up through Belgium, and then, over east into Germany, and, by the time we got to that thing that became known as the Bulge, it was winter. So, if we got in Le Havre in April, May, June, July, it took us all the way up until December to get to the Bulge. [Editor's Note: The Battle of the Bulge had ended prior to the 86th Infantry Division's arrival.] … I never claimed, never thought I'd freeze to death before or since like I did that winter in Germany. … That was the coldest I was, ever been, before or since, and, finally, … I don't think we ever fired a shot, and we never … went down to Paris, never got out of Germany. … Where'd we get on the boat? We go back to Le Havre, to get out of Europe? I don't remember.

SI: Do you remember any of the places where you fought?

RG: No.

SI: No?

RG: No.

SI: Do you remember where your first day in combat was?

RG: I don't think we ever had any combat. I don't think we ever fired a shot. Maybe we did, maybe I [did]; I have no recollection of anything in Germany, except the cold, freezing, freezing to death.

SI: Were you involved in the crossing of the Danube, the attack across the Danube?

RG: Yes. We crossed the Rhine somewhere, the Rhine or the Danube, and we crossed the Rhone. Is there a Rhone River?

SI: Yes.

RG: I don't know, that was a hundred years ago; no help.

SI: Okay.

RG: No help.

SI: Did your unit suffer any casualties in Europe?

RG: Well, I don't remember writing any "Dear John" letters, or "Dear Mom." I don't remember any major conflict, but maybe there was and I wasn't there, or maybe I was asleep that day. I have no recollection of any major casualties or any major attack. … Military was just not my thing. I just don't remember.

SI: What was life in the field like?

RG: The who?

SI: What was life in the field like? You mentioned it was very cold. Were you living in a foxhole or did you have a tent?

RG: I think we didn't set up tents. We didn't set up anything that's permanent. The only thing that I recall is getting in six-bys, trucks, and driving all the way through the mud and the sleet and the snow, and, surely, we must have slept somewhere, but would it be possible that we drove into town and slept in houses?

SI: That could be possible.

RG: We drove into town and we'd see a nice-looking house and somebody'd say, "You take that one," and so, we'd go in, shout, with rifles, and whoever was there, [we] would say, "*Raus*, ten minutes, *raus*, ten minutes," and we'd sleep in their house. Then, we'd stay there until we got ready to go, and then, we'd leave, but we'd been eating their food and sleeping in their beds. So, we did not set up camps and set up tents any place that I remember.

SI: Were a lot of these towns that you were in pretty beat up by the war?

RG: Not appreciably, not appreciably. They were very livable, very livable.

SI: Did you have adequate food supplies and other supplies?

RG: I don't know. We never went hungry. I don't know what we ate. I don't remember.

SI: Did you have a chance to interact with any of the civilians, besides telling them to leave the house?

RG: No. We had a language barrier right to start with. No, I have no recollection.

SI: Did you ever see any German prisoners or any German soldiers?

RG: No.

SI: Okay.

RG: Not in our [area], not where we were.

SI: Before you came back to go to the Philippines, how far did you push into Europe? Was it into Austria?

RG: … We ended up back down in France. We made an arc from Le Havre, Belgium, Germany, down back down into France and back to Le Havre. We got on a boat to come home, and to go back to Oklahoma. That's where we got off in New York, then, back to Fort Dix.

Then, we got a train from someplace; New Brunswick? I don't know where we got a train out of Fort Dix, but … that took us to Oklahoma and there we were, in the middle of summertime, in Oklahoma, with winter wool clothes, cooking, and, eventually, we got issued summer clothes, but we cooked in Oklahoma with those winter clothes. Then, I guess, from Oklahoma, we went to California again, didn't we? … Then, we did the Marine [style landing training], over the side, into PT boats and going to [make a] beach landing, and then, they dropped the bomb and said, "Okay, you can go home after a bit. We'll take you to the Philippines and leave you there."

SI: Where did you do the landing?

RG: Where was what?

SI: You said you went into the boats and did a landing. Was that in the Philippines?

RG: No, that was out in California.

SI: Okay. That was more training before you went over to the Pacific.

RG: … Yes. It's really funny that our daughter and her family are living in California and they're living in the same town that we did a hundred years ago, today. [laughter]

SI: San Luis Obispo?

RG: Beg your pardon?

SI: San Luis Obispo?

RG: Yes. They're living in the same town … where we did. They said they walked down, looked at the same house we lived in, the same street we lived in.

SI: Did your wife come with you this time?

RG: Yes.

SI: Okay. How did you feel when you were sent to the Pacific? Were you upset that you had to go back overseas?

RG: Well, I wasn't too happy about it, but, by that time, … I think I was a regimental supply officer and hoping for a promotion to captain, which never came. … I did get that Combat Infantryman's Badge, but I never got any other badge for anything [else], and I wasn't too happy about going to the Philippines, but we had some good times there, with still a lot of the same group that we'd been to [Europe with]. Well, like Jeanne said, this guy, Sid Foster, his wife still lives in California, we just talked to her. … He's been dead for a few years now, but we still talk to her; whatever.

SI: Did you get to socialize a lot with the Rutgers men that were in the 86th?

RG: No. … I think I went back for one of our reunions. Is there a date on that?

SI: No. Actually, this is blank. Was it in 1994 or 1999? I know there was a reunion of the Black Fifty in 1999, I think.

RG: … Well, I haven't been back for; I don't remember. I didn't write it down, when I went back, but people are leaving us. I read the thing in the back of the [Rutgers alumni] magazine about the classes and it said, "Oh, so-and-so, how long ago, how long ago, how long ago;" whatever.

SI: When you were in the Philippines, did you get to meet the natives or interact with the local Filipinos at all?

RG: Yes, but I didn't keep any addresses or didn't meet any long lost brothers or any friends in there. Oh, I can tell you a story about [that]; I fell down. … I hurt my shoulder in here, after we lived here, [Woodstown], hurt my shoulder, my elbow, my hip, my ankle, when I fell down, anyway, went through the normal procedure of X-rays and stuff. … After a bit, the doctor said, "You have to have some therapy to get your arm moving again." … I couldn't hold a cup of coffee in this hand then. Well, anyway, I went to therapy down here, in our part of the Friends Village, and the guy who was the therapist was a Filipino, which I didn't know. He was just another man and, after I'd been there for two or three times, we got to know each other and I asked him what his name was, and he spelled it for me, and I said, "That sounds like some people I used to know a long time ago." He says, "Who was that?" and I said, "They're in the Philippines. We had a little place outside of Manila called Marikina," and he said, "Well, it's funny you should mention that," he says, "because I'm a Filipino. I came here and I'm a registered therapist. I went to school here," and I said, "Well, you remember Manila?" and he said, "I know Manila very well." I said, "Do you remember the brewery, the San Miguel brewery?" He says, "Oh, yes, I used to drink their beer all the time," and, well, anyway, from then on, we just chitchatted about [the] Philippines. … I asked him if the Hukbalahaps were still active and whether they were raising hell, and he says, "No, we used to go up in the north end, up in the far, far north end, where it was cooler," and I said, "Yes, we used to spend weekends up there where it was nice and cool." I can't remember the name of that now. Well, anyway, yes, … that's the only tie I've had with the Philippines, but I had that tie here with this guy.

SI: Could you tell me a little more about that? What were you doing in the Philippines?

RG: What did we do?

SI: Yes.

RG: Nothing, just sit around, wait for, well, nothing, try to find some entertainment, I mean, drink a lot of beer, go to the … cooler places, and, of course, you had so much; well, at that time, I was the supply officer, so, oh, I'd take a little boat and go down to some of the islands and pick up some dead bodies and bring them back for the Graves Registration people, … and, while I was out in the little boat, why, it was handy to enjoy a cruise. So, I stole a little time and drove a

jeep around, stole a little time to go up to [the] north end, … but, no, we didn't have any formal schedule that we had to follow. We're just waiting for time to get enough, build points to go home, which happened after awhile.

SI: You mentioned that you knew about the Hukbalahaps.

RG: Yes.

SI: Did you have to go out and patrol for them or do anything else?

RG: No. No, we didn't. It was just a name. … We never had any contact with them, just read about it in the paper.

SI: Okay. The people that you knew in the Philippines, the American soldiers, were they anxious by that time to get home? Was there a lot of unrest about how slowly people were getting home?

RG: You mean GIs, you mean Americans?

SI: Yes.

RG: Oh, yes, we were all [anxious]; everybody said, "Just sit still. Every day is another day. Just sit still, nothing you can do about it. Don't get all excited," which is what we did. We just waited and waited. One day, they said, "All right, everybody's name begins with 'G,' … line up here." I don't even remember how we got home, … must have been on another troopship, but where did we get onboard, Manila?

SI: Probably Manila.

RG: Don't know, don't know.

SI: What happened after you came back to the US?

RG: Well, the first thing I did, or the first thing we did, was, see, we had our first daughter by that time, and I guess we started looking for a job. … No, the first thing I did was to go back to Rutgers, and I talked with Prof. Helyar, H-E-L-Y-A-R, Prof. Helyar, good, old soul, fine gentleman. I explained who I was, where I'd been and why I was there, and could he help me get back into school or do I have to start all over again or would I pick up where I left off? … cried the blues and cried and cried on his shoulder, and thank God for Prof. Helyar; I don't know what he did, but his word was law. Whatever Helyar said … was the law, and he said, "Now, I want you to go back to school and take a course called 'Beef and Sheep.'" I said, "Jesus Christ, beef and sheep, I don't know a damn beef and sheep." … He says, "Any damn fool can pass it. Now, you've got to pass that." Well, that was a snap course. It was a "gimme" course, and I said, "I never finished that requirement of history," and he said, "History, I think you are history. Scratch that." So, he scratched that. So, what it amounted to was, I took one course in beef and sheep, which I have no recollection about whatsoever, and this would be in, what, '45, '46?

SI: Yes.

RG: Well, and that was my return to college, and I graduated in June of '47, and that was because it was already too late for June '46, and I got a job in Salem County as assistant county agent, had to be in '46.

SI: Was it difficult to find work then, with all of the GIs coming back?

RG: … No. I remembered the advice about Middlesex County, so, I deliberately stayed away from that and tried for Salem, figured that was far enough away to be safe, and I got the job in Salem as assistant county agent. … It had to be '46, I guess. I don't know. Time slips by.

SI: Yes.

RG: Time slips by, and I came down here and met with their ag board, and Harvey Beal was on the board, Marvin Coombs was on the board. Harvey Beal was from Friesburg, which I mispronounced and called "FRYS-burg." You remember junk like this, insignificant junk like this, but, anyway, [he] corrected me in how to say it, a village, and, of course, he's dead, Marvin Coombs is dead, … (Miller's?) dead and they're all gone.

SI: Can you give me a …

RG: Anyway, they said, "If Rutgers will hire you, we'll hire you." So, I became assistant county agent, been here for thirty years, before; be right back.

SI: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Let me put the recorder back on. I am looking at a copy of *Today's Sunbeam* from November 14, 1977. There is an article here, the headline of which is, "Robert 'Bob' Gardner is Honored Guest at Agricultural Dinner." There is a photo of you and your wife and William Brooks, Jr.. Do you want me to read this or do you want to tell me about this, or give me a little bit of an idea about your career?

RG: I just wanted you to see it, to make sure the dates were right.

SI: Sure. It says you first came to Salem County in 1947 when you were assistant agricultural agent. Then, you became a senior county agent ten years later, in 1957, and then, in 1960, you were made a full professor at Rutgers. Can you tell me a little bit about your career as a county agent, what you did and some stories?

RG: Well, it was informal teaching. You don't have a classroom, you don't have students, you don't give grades, and I really liked working with some farmers, mostly all farmers, but, every once in awhile, you find a son-of-a-bitch someplace that you don't want anything to do with, but,

most of the time, they're all "the salt of the earth." I always loved to introduce new varieties. Campbell's came up with a new tomato variety. Rutgers came up with a new tomato variety. A place out West came up with a new corn hybrid. They started zapping [them with] nuclear [energy], treating some barley seeds, and some of them panned out and some of them didn't, but I would love to go find (John Doe?), (Billy Ross?), Billy somebody, say, "Look, I've got four new varieties I'd like to have you plant. When you're planting corn or when you're planting soy beans or when you're setting out tomato plants, can I have ten feet of a row and I'll hand set these and you treat them just like your normal [crop], treat the rest of the whole field, and, come harvest time, we'll see whether … the new ones are any better than the old ones?" and I would love these, quote, "field demonstrations." … After the mature date, if we had anything to talk about, either good or bad, I would send out a postcard to our mailing list of people interested in that particular crop. Maybe I wouldn't send it to a dairy man if it's going to be about sheep, or something like that, … and say, "At seven o'clock on Tuesday night, stop by So-and-So's farm on road so-and-so in so-and-so and look at the new tomato variety," or, "look at the tulip variety," look at that, and this was my classroom. Sometimes, there'd be four people there, sometimes, there'd be forty people there, depending on how much interest there was in a new anything. … That's where I got my enthusiasm for Extension work, because it was so timely. If it didn't have anything to do with anything, you ignored it. I mean, … you weren't like you were teaching a bunch of students that didn't give a damn, because anybody that showed up at seven o'clock on route so-and-so was interested, otherwise, they wouldn't have been there, as compared to going to a school, a formal school, five days a week and talking to a bunch of heads that didn't have any interest in it whatsoever. I could get turned off just like that and say, "The hell with you guys. You don't care, I don't care," but, if I've got five guys out here on Route 45 at seven o'clock at night, they're interested, I'm interested. So, that's my theory of Extension work. [laughter]

SI: Would the farmers also bring problems to you and ask for your help with them, problems that they were having on their farms?

RG: Well, depends a little bit. If they're having a problem with a Puerto Rican labor guy, I'm no help to them. If they're having a problem with nematodes [roundworms], I'm a help.

SI: Okay.

RG: I can help, but that, I mean, being a "father confessor," was not a big issue.

SI: What were some of the big problems that people would bring to you that you would try to help them with?

RG: Well, Kelly Brothers, out here, were great carrot growers, mostly for Campbell's, but it doesn't make any difference who they were for. They grew a lot of carrot and the carrots were being eaten up with nematodes. So, I'm not in a position all by myself, but with the Extension people at Rutgers, who I can call on, I said, "What kind of a fumigant you got that kills nematodes?" and they suggest such-and-such, but one of the drawbacks was, it had to be covered. You couldn't just spread it on the ground and let it be there. You had to put plastic or put something on top of it. Well, anyway, this made it pretty expensive, [by the] time you

bought the chemical and bought the plastic, both, but they agreed to a trial, and whatever the chemical was, it worked and it killed the nematodes and … did not hurt the carrots. All right, so, that's one example of a thing. … Another one is, in those days, … all the fresh market growers were using a thing called cold frames. They were just pieces of glass over eight-inch board … and there was no heat involved, except from the sunshine, and, if it was a cloudy five days, there was no light in there at all. All right, so, and the ventilation, there's no ventilation, except when the owner went around there and lifted up a corner and shoved a two-by-four on the edge, underneath it, to let some [air] in. Well, anyway, this was the beginning, and I'm not solely responsible for it, but this was the beginning of all these hothouses you see. … When you drive down any road, you see (tons of these?); there'd be miles and miles and miles of these. Well, that was the beginning, and the next step was to put a heater inside, which cost you money, because you had to buy oil for it, but, then, put a fan inside and put it in there, and one of the things that I saw [was]; that's a table. All right, now, on this table, we have a popup toaster, just an ordinary kitchen toaster. Behind this table, we have an ordinary kitchen fan. This is electric, this is electric, and this heats the whole thing and that keeps your little flowers all growing. All right, from this little, simple thing of a kitchen toaster and a house fan has evolved into this whole thing now, with a heater like that and a fan like that, for, what? two hundred feet long, but this is a farmer's idea, which has come full circle to these nursery men who are building these great places, with big heaters and big fans.

SI: That started in Salem County.

RG: Yes. That's it, okay. [laughter]

SI: You mentioned that you had one daughter. Do you have other children?

RG: Two daughters, one in California and one in Connecticut. They're both married and both have family, and I guess they're both working. Well, no, … I don't know whether one of them is working or not. She was ready to quit; she's ready to retire. [laughter]

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add about any part of your life, World War II, Rutgers or your career in the Agricultural Extension Service?

RG: No, if I've satisfied everything you want. …

SI: Yes. You have given me a great overview of your life and some great stories, but, if there is anything that we missed, I want to go over that.

RG: Well, I think, I don't know whether you're interested in the military, but you're much too heavy on the military to suit me. I have no use for the goddamned military.

SI: You did not like the military.

RG: As you could tell, I've tried to forget ninety percent of it. As far as after coming to Salem, after seeing Sussex County, after seeing Somerset County, I have nothing good to say about [the] Northeast concentration of people. Hunterdon County, Gloucester County, that's getting pretty

shaky. … When Gloucester County gets full, Salem County'll fill up, but I think Salem County is a pretty county, which sounds ridiculous to say any county is pretty, but, when you see [fields where] you've got anything but white potatoes, thirty acres of white potatoes, in bloom, full bloom, it's the most glorious sight in the world, barley, wheat, oats, in full bloom, through twenty acres, beautiful, pasture, alfalfa, alfalfa for hay and pasture for grazing, beautiful, green, green, green, twenty acres of green, beautiful. Animals in that pasture, whether they be beef cows or whether they be dairy cows, they're beautiful, just wonderful. Salem County is one of the prettiest counties in the whole world. I don't care what you say about Oklahoma and about Texas or anyplace else, but Salem County is a pretty county and I'm just very, very happy to be able to have spent … ninety percent of my life here. I don't know, there's not another bit left to go, but I enjoy what's here. I'm rapidly aging, I'm blind in one eye, I'm deaf in one ear, I'm short legged in one leg, and there's just so many things I wanted to do, but I never had time to do. I was commodore of the … local boat club. I enjoyed the water. I enjoy having our own little boat, little eighteen-foot outboard. I enjoyed duck hunting, goose hunting, and the social life. We belonged to Rotary Club at one time, don't have it anymore, and we went to Australia and New Zealand as representatives of the Rotary Club. I've been a president of the local Rotary and I've had a lot of fun. I've had a lot of experiences that you can't buy. … Either you live through them or you don't, and I'll never be a national hero, or even a Salem County hero, but I've enjoyed what opportunities I've had; let it go at that.

SI: Okay. Do you want to say anything about your volunteer work with the fire company?

RG: … Yes. Well, okay, we moved here. … We lived in Elmer. It was the only place we could find to live. The office was in Salem, but I still had to commute back and forth. So, we lived in Elmer. One of our neighbors was a fireman and I joined the Elmer Fire Company when we moved there. When we moved out of … Elmer and went to Salem, I joined the Salem Fire Company and, when we moved out of Salem to Quinton, I moved to [the] Quinton Fire Company. So, counting all three of them, oh, and I was the chief in [the] Salem County Fire Police, which you have to be a member of a fire company first, then, you have to be a fire police for that company first. So, I was a fire police, and, eventually, I was chief of that, and I've stopped now. I couldn't any more direct traffic now because I couldn't [hear]. If a tractor trailer was behind me, I wouldn't be able to hear him or see him, whatever. So, yes, I had a lot of time with that. If you want to check up on some dates, you can look at the dates. I want them back.

SI: Sure. Okay. This is a plaque, with a golden hatchet, a fireman's hatchet, "Presented to Robert E. Gardner in appreciation of fifty-six years of dedicated service to the Quinton Fire Company on February 7, 2004." That is very nice. I think you were good on all your dates, or pretty close. [laughter] You left the US on February 19, 1945, for Europe. You arrived on March 14, 1945. You returned in June of 1945, left June 4th, arrived June 19th. Does AP mean the Philippines? All right, I assume AP is the Philippines. It says you left the US for the Philippines August 21st and arrived September 13th. Were you on the boat when you heard about V-J Day? [Editor's Note: Mr. Gardner indicates that he was.] Okay. What was that like? Do you remember any celebrations?

RG: No.

SI: It says you left the Philippines in June of 1946 and returned home on July 15, 1946. Do you think that your experiences in World War II have affected your life afterwards or changed who you were?

RG: Oh, I can't [say]; I guess all I can say is, Roosevelt sure knew how to run a war, better we should have had … one now, Republican [or] Democrat notwithstanding, … I mean, no endorsement intended. [laughter]

SI: You admired Roosevelt.

RG: Yes, for running the war.

SI: Do you remember when you found out that he had died and if there was any reaction to that news?

RG: No, not really.

SI: Thank you for bringing out all the documents. Is there anything else you would like to add?

RG: … Did you write down any of this?

SI: No, I did not write it, but I read some of it onto the tape. I just wanted to make sure we knew when you went overseas and when you came back and when you went to the Philippines.

RG: Put you back in the file. That's right, down in the bottom; all right.

SI: Thank you very much.

RG: You're done?

SI: Unless you want to add anything else.

RG: I've blubbered more than I should have already.

SI: [laughter] No, believe me, you did not, but thank you very much. I appreciate your time and everything you have done.

RG: Well, as I say, I think I'm a better writer than I am a talker. [laughter] …

SI: All right. Thank you very much.

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

Reviewed by Emily Shapiro 12/9/09
Reviewed by Stephanie Student 12/9/09
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/10/09

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 1/5/10
Reviewed by Jeanne P. Gardner 6/24/10