

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT L. HOEN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Robert L. Hoen on February 12, 1996, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Richard Fox: Richard Fox.

KP: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents.

Robert Hoen: My parents, okay. [laughter]

KP: Your father was born and grew up in Buffalo.

RH: That's correct.

KP: What did your father do for a living?

RH: Well, he was a lawyer, actually, and I imagine, I don't know, but, he probably went to some kind of [law school]. ... I don't think he went all, full-time, at once, you know, but, he ... had his degree, of course, he's been gone for many years, [from] the University of Buffalo, and, I guess, Canisius, too, College.

KP: Where did he practice law?

RH: He practiced in Baltimore, and then, he moved up to New York, and a lot in Newark, too.

KP: It sounds as though you did not know your father very well.

RH: Well, it was awhile ago. [laughter]

KP: Where did you live for the longest time while you were growing up?

RH: In Maplewood, New Jersey. ... I was born in Baltimore, too. I can see why, because that's where he met my mother, but, we moved up to Maplewood in 1926, and I was just a little kid then, and, until the war came, ... except [for] coming down to Rutgers, I was always in that area.

KP: You mostly grew up in New Jersey.

RH: Oh, yes.

KP: Your father primarily practiced law in Newark.

RH: Newark and New York. ... He was an insurance lawyer and he would travel, you know, I don't know what exactly they did, for insurance cases and things like that.

KP: Your father was rarely in the same place.

RH: That's right.

KP: How did your parents meet?

RH: I wasn't there. [laughter]

KP: Did you ever hear any stories?

RH: I think my mother had a boyfriend, and then, she met my father, and my father stole my mother away from the boyfriend, but, as I say, I wasn't around.

KP: Your mother went to college.

RH: She went to Columbia, right.

KP: Was she a teacher while you were growing up?

RH: No, she didn't do any teaching after I came on the scene.

KP: However, she had taught before having you.

RH: Yes, home ec, and, it's interesting, my wife's mother also happened to be [a] home economics [teacher], too.

KP: When she got married, she left teaching.

RH: Yes.

KP: Did she ever work outside of the home after that?

RH: Not after; I don't know ... exactly when it was, but, no, she didn't work.

KP: She did not take a part-time job during the war.

RH: I think she had something, but, just to be patriotic, but, nothing ...

KP: ... Nothing long-term.

RH: No.

KP: Your mother was born in Kansas City, Missouri.

RH: Right.

KP: Did she come East to go to college?

RH: No. My grandfather, I guess, he was brought up in Pennsylvania, and I don't know why, maybe times were tough, but, he took the whole family to Kansas City, and that's where she was born, and then, shortly after that, they moved back to, of all places, Point Pleasant, New Jersey, and that's where I did most of my [vacations] in the summer. I went to ... school in Maplewood, as I say, in the winter.

KP: In the summers, you went to Point Pleasant.

RH: Right, but, my mother always lived down there, "Grandma," as my kids ... called her.

KP: It sounds like you had a nice childhood, going to school in Maplewood and spending your summers at the shore.

RH: Oh, yes, sure, definitely. ... My uncle paid for her tuition, and she could either go to Columbia or Juilliard, and she couldn't make up her mind, and, I think, when the subway came in this [part of town], she finally decided [that] she'd go to Columbia, thank God. [laughter]

KP: Your mother was very gifted.

RH: Oh, yes.

KP: Did she play a musical instrument?

RH: Piano. [laughter]

KP: You grew up listening to her play the piano.

RH: Yes, and, of course, we took the usual childhood things. I had to play the piano, my sister played the violin, and my father would [say], "Goddamn that noise." [laughter]

KP: Was your mother active in any women's clubs or other organizations?

RH: She belonged to the Maplewood Women's Club and all that and she was a member of the DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution]. That's the only things I can remember, but, I didn't pay much attention, either.

KP: Did you belong to any clubs? Were you a Boy Scout?

RH: No, I belonged, actually, to very little. We had, like, athletic teams in junior high school [and] high school.

KP: Did you go to Columbia High School?

RH: Columbia High School, [yes].

RF: How did you and your sister get along as children? I know that, often, brothers and sisters have clashes.

RH: Oh, yes.

RF: Did you have the usual sibling rivalry?

RH: Well, the usual, but, we got along very well, and we were just down in Florida, where she moved a few years ago, so, yes, I still see her. We're very friendly.

RF: Did you have any other siblings?

RH: My brother. He died ten years ago.

RF: Did all three of you interact as children or did you do your own thing?

RH: Well, we did our own [thing]. He was a little bit younger, and, ... when you're young, five years makes a big difference, and he was in the war, and, when I got back, ... his voice had changed, [laughter] and he was a regular person, you know. So, we got along fine, yes.

RF: How did the Great Depression affect Maplewood? Were its effects apparent or did it seem a little distant?

RH: I think that was pretty distant. ... I've read about the Depression since. ... I wouldn't have known, you know, [laughter] if they needed a new car and couldn't afford it. I wouldn't have known that, you know.

RF: As a young man in high school, did you have any opinions about politics or global affairs?

RH: ... Well, of course, everybody was Republican in a town like Maplewood, and ... I know my father didn't like Roosevelt, and so, obviously, I didn't like Roosevelt. Don't ask me why. [laughter] I'm much more of a Democrat, now, than ...

KP: Than you were then?

RH: Oh, yes.

RF: What brought about that change?

RH: [laughter] I think, when I had to go out and work, and things like that.

KP: Was the Great Depression tough for your family?

RH: It probably could have been; I don't know. I mean, there was always a buck coming in. My father was a lawyer, as I say.

KP: Did he have his own practice or was he part of a firm?

RH: He had a firm, and then, he was in his own practice, no criminal law, just ...

KP: Just insurance?

RH: Yes, insurance, yes. Actually, when I went into the hospital, about five years ago, [for] something very minor, at the time, although I didn't know it until then, ... the doctor came out, it was one of these guys with the green [scrub uniform], I didn't even know he was a doctor, and I told him my name, and he said, ... "He used to be my attorney," [laughter] which is kind of a coincidence. This was an older doctor.

KP: Did your parents expect you to go to college?

RH: I think they did, yes.

KP: Did you take a college prep course in high school?

RH: Oh, yes. I took college prep, sure.

KP: Did your parents have any expectations about where you would go to college?

RH: No, I don't think [so]. Actually, what happened, and I don't know who did it, maybe an advisor, [he] talked me into ceramics, so, I came down here, and that was just that little, dinky building there. [laughter]

KP: Your parents were Presbyterians.

RH: Right. No, they weren't both; my father was Catholic.

KP: Your father was Catholic?

RH: My mother was Presbyterian.

KP: Which church did you attend?

RH: Catholic.

KP: Catholic?

RH: Yes.

KP: Would your mother go to the Presbyterian Church while your father went to the Catholic Church?

RH: That's right. I don't think she went all the time. I know my father didn't, [laughter] but, we were always dragged off to Sunday School, and I guess it was that way until I graduated from high school, not quite that long. ...

KP: Why did you choose Rutgers?

RH: I think, probably, the high school advisor. My marks weren't tremendous. She thought that would be good. I mean, I wouldn't get into MIT or anything like that, and I guess that's why I went, and I liked the whole atmosphere, even in those days, when there weren't half the buildings here.

RF: What was the atmosphere like, aside from the buildings?

RH: Well, it was much more friendly, and I don't know how it is now, it might be friendly, too, it might be friendlier, but, it looked like a nice, congenial place, you know.

RF: Did you visit the campus before you actually enrolled here?

RH: Yes, right, for, I don't know, I think it was just a day, ... and then, they had orientation, is that the right word? week, [when we] came down, and things like that.

KP: You were originally a member of the Class of 1944.

RH: That's right.

KP: What are some of your most distinct memories of being here in 1940?

RH: I don't know. ... Well, of course, after I got out [of the Army], it was very busy, a rush, I mean, personally, and, before that, it was, if you had to go to English, of course, you went to English, or whatever the course was. ... I think it was ... low key and things like that.

KP: I have been told that there was a great rivalry between the sophomore and freshman classes.

RH: Yes, ... where you had to wear the hat, the dinks, was that the right word? and that never flew after the war, no way. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned that you initially came to Rutgers to study ceramics. How long did you stick with ceramics?

RH: I only stuck [with it] a year, and then, I got thrown out, as I like to say. ... I was ... being drafted anyway. ... It was about a year.

KP: Were you drafted as part of the peacetime draft?

RH: No, ... Pearl Harbor was going, had just started.

KP: You did not return to ceramics after the war.

RH: No. When I looked at ... what I needed for credits, you know, it was three years, of course, I needed to build up, but, I figured, "I'll never do it in ceramics." ... I was very bad in mathematics and you needed a lot of math in these courses. Strangely enough, when I did get out, suddenly, the light went on, and I liked math, but, it was a headache [laughter] ... as a freshman, I guess.

KP: Most of the men I have interviewed, who were at Rutgers before the war, remember Dean Metzger.

RH: "Say hello," that's what [one of] his things was. Yes, he seemed like a nice guy, white hair?

KP: Yes. I was told he was very stern.

RH: I guess he was, yes.

KP: Did you ever have any run-ins with Dean Metzger?

RH: ... Not direct, no.

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

RH: Chapel, that's the only place we went when we got here today, 'cause we're parked there. [laughter] ... You had to go to chapel, and it was just something you didn't like, but, it wasn't any big deal, I don't think. It wasn't horrible.

KP: As a Catholic, you did not mind going.

RH: No, no, no.

RF: Did anyone ever pull any pranks during the services? Was there any general tomfoolery?

RH: Probably. ... All we did, that I can remember, is sing hymns and there wasn't much, nothing, a big deal, that I can think about.

KP: As a high school and college student in the late 1930s and early 1940s, how did you feel about the events that preceded the United States' entry into World War II?

RH: Of course, we were, "Rah-rah," ... against the Nazis and all that, and I think we were a little bit excited at, you know, war movie stuff, bombing and all that. So, when it came, it didn't concern me much. [laughter]

KP: Before Pearl Harbor, did you think that the United States would be involved?

RH: No, I don't think we ever thought so.

KP: What did you think of the ROTC?

RH: I didn't like that very much, you know, and we had to go march and all that, and one thing that ... always amused me, the squad, whatever it was, you had to put the rifles [down] and hook 'em, [forming a teepee], and I could never do that. [laughter] They always fell. ... "What are you laughing about, soldier?" Then, I really broke up and laughed again. ... So, I thought it was kind of comical, I guess, and then, after the war, we didn't have to [do it]. Yes, you still had to, unless you'd been in the Army, and I was, of course, so, I was excused. In fact, I remember, we had to go into the gym and there was a couple of big sergeants there or something. ... "What do you want, kid?" and I said, "I want to be excused from active duty." "Did you serve?" I said, "Sure," and I showed him my discharge, and he says, "Holy mackerel," and he said to the guy next to him, "This kid has been in [laughter] the Battle of the Bulge, you know, the whole bit, England," ... and he was going to salute me. [laughter] So, that was the end of that, though, and I ... thought it was kind of a waste of time.

KP: It sounds like the ROTC gave you an introduction to the Army.

RH: Yes.

KP: You were not crazy about it.

RH: No, no. Oh, I hated the Army. [laughter] I hated the Army. Some guys liked it.

KP: However, you were not one of those guys.

RH: No, and ... one of the jokes [went], "Why don't you like the Army? You never had two pairs of shoes before, you know, and then, the government gave it to you," things like that, you know. ... Then, afterwards, when we were finally mustered out, you could sign up for the National Guard, and I never did, [laughter] and I might have been smart, I don't know, 'cause Korea came along.

KP: You mentioned that you watched war movies before World War II. Do any films stick out in your mind?

RH: No. We'd go to the movies almost every week, you know. I can't think of any.

RF: You mentioned that there was an anti-Nazi atmosphere on campus. How were the Japanese viewed at that time?

RH: I don't think there were any Japanese. You mean in school?

RF: Either in school or the Japanese Empire as a possible enemy.

RH: I don't know. I don't think I ever saw a Jap until I got out, and the Germans, I mean, American-Germans, were just like us, you know.

KP: You did not really think about the Japanese before Pearl Harbor.

RH: No, no, it was all the German Nazis. ... What was the movie? It was *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, or something like that. So, they weren't popular with us, [laughter] ... and then, after Pearl Harbor, of course, then, there were all the movies with the planes.

KP: I get the feeling that you enjoyed watching movies as a teenager.

RH: It might have been. We never go now. That's one of my wife's complaints, "We never go to the movies," but, when we were down in Miami, we saw *Nasty Old Men*, [*Grumpy Old Men*], or something like that. That was very good. I hadn't been [to the movies] in two years and I said, "We should go more," 'cause I was laughing. [laughter] We don't watch TV, either, except football. I like football.

KP: You probably saw many football games as a student here at Rutgers.

RH: Oh, yes, sure, and, ... relatively, I think, they had a better team. [laughter]

KP: Did you join a fraternity?

RH: No.

KP: You lived on campus. Do you remember where you lived?

RH: ... Well, I was in a house [on] Bartlett Street, it's right off there, and then, finally, I got into the Quad. In the senior year, you went into Ford Hall, if you wanted to. That was for seniors only, at that time.

RF: Do you have any particular memories of any of those dorms? I have heard that there were social clubs in some of the dorms.

RH: Yes, there was. I forget what they were.

RF: Did you join any of them?

RH: ... No, no.

RF: Were you involved in any other on campus activities, Glee Club, for example?

RH: No, I wasn't that good a voice. [laughter] I think I am, but, my wife says, "You stink." ... Her first husband was very active in choral groups and things.

KP: You mentioned that you did not have a favorite professor. What was your opinion of the professors before and after the war?

RH: I don't really remember them, honestly. They were just something to put up with, you know. [laughter]

KP: Did you work during your first year in college?

RH: I worked in the summer, down at Point Pleasant. I was an umbrella boy, ... on the beach, you know, things like that, but, not during the school year, no.

KP: Did you have a scholarship before the war?

RH: No.

KP: Your father paid your tuition.

RH: He paid, yes.

KP: Do you remember where you were when you found out that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?

RH: Yes, I was in Newark, [laughter] and I was working then, 'cause I had gotten thrown out, as I always like to say, and I was driving around Down Neck, [Newark's Ironbound District], I don't know if you know where that is, ... to pick up a foreman or something, and I guess I must have had a radio in the car, and then, he announced it.

KP: Where were you working?

RH: I was working for the United Color and Pigment Company, which, ... it's not there anymore, but, I think that was part of Cyanamid, in the lab, and that's another question you asked. After I got out of the Army, they said, ... "Any job you get, you'll have to have at least two years of chemistry." So, that's one reason I took things where I didn't need a heck of a lot of chemistry. ... I worked there, and then, got different jobs, and so forth, to build up my career.

KP: You remember driving around Newark on December 7, 1941.

RH: I remember that distinctly, yes. That was an exciting time.

KP: Did you expect to go off to war yourself when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?

RH: Yes. I think we'd already had some kind of a draft, but, not active, and they were called up.

RF: Did you consider enlisting in a branch of the Armed Services, other than the Army, immediately after Pearl Harbor?

RH: No, no, I wasn't interested in that. ...

KP: You did not want to join the Navy or Air Corps.

RH: Once, I thought, ... this is before [the war], I'd join the Marines. I don't know why, probably because it was romantic, which it wouldn't have been, [laughter] ... and I was too light. I didn't weigh enough. You wouldn't think that today, [laughter] but, I think I weighed 120 pounds, you know.

KP: You were underweight.

RH: They said, "Gain some weight, kid, and we'll be glad to have you."

KP: Was this before Pearl Harbor?

RH: I guess it was before. It could have been after, I don't know. [laughter]

KP: When did you join the Army?

RH: It was in 1942, in the summer.

KP: Did you volunteer?

RH: No, I was drafted.

KP: Did you continue to work at the United Color and Pigment Company in Newark?

RH: [Yes], except when I was drafted. ... Of course, I took time the summer off, or two weeks, whatever it was, yes.

KP: How did your parents feel about your going off to war?

RH: ... They were not real nervous about it or anything. ... They were glad, not glad, but, not sad, you know.

KP: They understood.

RH: Yes, right.

KP: Where did you report to when you were drafted?

RH: To Fort Dix. [laughter]

KP: How long were you stationed at Fort Dix?

RH: Oh, not long, I think it was a week, and we formed cadre, is that the right word? and we went down to Camp Gordon, Georgia, Fort Gordon, now.

KP: What did you hope to do in the Army, as opposed to what you wound up doing?

RH: Well, I was ... a technician. Well, at that time, I was still a private, but, I was in the Medical Corps, in the laboratory, doing tests, you know. My background did help a little bit. Of course, there was a lot of "square pegs in round holes," anyway, when they drafted people, but, I was in that, ... not at Camp Gordon, but, [for the rest of] ... my Army career.

KP: Did you want and expect to be assigned to lab work initially?

RH: Yes, I thought I was pretty good, 'cause a lot of the clowns, you know, drove in a motor pool, or something like that. We had our own little lab group, sort of. ... We stuck together, 'til we were mustered out.

KP: You stayed with the men you trained with for the duration.

RH: Three years.

KP: That is a long time.

RH: Yes, it is, yes.

KP: Especially in the Army.

RH: Yes. ... We were [about] two years overseas and a little longer in the country here.

KP: Do you consider yourself lucky to have avoided the infantry?

RH: Definitely. [laughter]

KP: Are you surprised that you did, or do you think that the Army just got it right in your case?

RH: Oh, I think it was just luck.

KP: Yes.

RH: Yes, it was just luck, although the guys in our little lab group all ... had some college. I don't think anyone had graduated.

KP: They were all similar to you. They all had one or two years of college under their belts.

RH: Yes, right.

RF: Did your college background cause any friction between your group and the career NCOs in basic training?

RH: The career NCOs, which was the original cadre, they were, you know, rough guys and all that, but, they slowly disappeared. I guess they went back to form another one, [cadre], and our own guys [took over]. ... There was a sergeant who was ... some technical thing and, by the time the war was over, we were ... a pretty good outfit, you know, as far as things go. Now, of course, we had a lot of doctors and nurses and they had gone through, actually graduated from, med [school]. The doctors had; I don't know about the nurses.

KP: What do you remember about basic training?

RH: Well, I remember, we had to ... get up real early and ... do calisthenics, go on a lot of hikes, twenty-mile hikes. We had to go through the obstacle course, where the guy was shooting [at] you with real bullets. Of course, he had a bar welded [in front of him], so [that] he couldn't lower the gun too low, [laughter], but, ... you could look right up and see these tracers going by, and things like that.

KP: Do you remember your drill sergeant?

RH: Yes, he was a big, tough guy.

KP: How close was your basic training to the traditional infantry basic training? Were you given any lab training during basic training?

RH: No, ... as far as the lab goes, we were sent to a general hospital.

KP: You went through the traditional basic training at first.

RH: That's right, ... and then, in the hospital, that's where we learned blood chemistry and how to run things like that, which I find a little useful today.

KP: Which hospital were you trained at?

RH: There was one ... in Camp Gordon, just an Army hospital, and, I think, when we were in England, there was another GI hospital.

KP: You trained in a regular GI hospital.

RH: Yes, right. I never was in a civilian hospital.

KP: How would you rate your training, both the basic training and the specialized lab training?

RH: I thought the lab was good. I didn't know whether it was good or bad in the infantry. ... I still retain a lot of that today.

KP: The lab training?

RH: The lab [training], yes.

KP: What was good about that training? I have found that most military jobs depended on on-the-job training.

RH: Yes, well, that's what it was. ... They had a good textbook for civilians, too. ... It might have been an Army [manual], but, I don't remember that. ... We had to learn, you know, the important things. If there was something that was sort of esoteric, no; it was strictly practical. ... I have a friend who's a doctor, who is about my age, and I could talk to him pretty well.

RF: You mentioned that you thought the lab training was very practical. Did you feel that the infantry training was not as practical, as far as your assignment was concerned?

RH: Oh, no, not at all, unless you liked to walk, [laughter] but, I wasn't really in that that much, you know. I forget how long we were in the [basic training], and it wasn't infantry, it was just hiking, and running, and pulling up on ropes, and all that, you know, obstacle things. This was just to condition us.

RF: No weapons training?

RH: No. The only time I ever handled a gun was in Germany and we were in a hospital building, or I don't know what it was. It was a hospital, but, it was just a regular building, and they kept the POWs down in the cellar, and this big, tough infantry guy came up and said, "Here's how to use the gun; you pull it back and shove the bolt forward, and then, if they come up the stairs, just pull the trigger," you know, "Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat," [laughter] and then, that was it. Of course, they weren't going to come up. They were being fed well and everything, but, the guy ... [who] happened to be put on there with me, it was just for a couple nights, he said, "Even if they come up, I can't do anything. I'm a conscientious objector," [laughter] but, it didn't matter. That's the only time I handled a gun in the Army.

KP: Really?

RH: [Yes].

KP: Did you ever encounter any other conscientious objectors in the Medical Corps?

RH: Not many, no, no. Our outfit, *per se*, didn't have any. ... Maybe they did have some and we didn't know it.

KP: However, in this case, he was clearly a conscientious objector.

RH: Yes, right. [laughter]

RF: Did you ever know anyone who thought about "going over the hill," or actually did, or was caught going AWOL?

RH: Well, I did, too, but, not as a conscientious objector. [laughter]

KP: When did you go "over the hill?"

RH: Well, ... just for the night, you know. If you wanted to go downtown and you didn't have a pass, you figured you could get away with it.

KP: At Camp Gordon?

RH: Camp Gordon, yes. ... There was a bus that went up [to the camp], you know, a regular bus, I guess, I don't think it was an Army bus, and you could go downtown and get a couple of beers. I think it was more just to get the beer, [laughter] this getting away with something.

RF: Were you ever caught?

RH: Never caught. Well, actually, when we were in Camp Kilmer, which was the port of embarkation, whatever they call it, ... that was very close to my house, and I remember walking out to a road, and I knew it anyway, because I had been driven down here, and the first guy picked me up and drove me very close to my home. [laughter] ... Then, my mother was [saying], "Well, I don't know how you're going to get back," and all that, and she, of course, gave me supper, and then, I came back. I think I re-climbed the fence, [laughter] but, ... I never got caught, and, I think, ... when we were going overseas, half the outfit was going home, 'cause they were mostly New Jersey boys and New York boys.

KP: There were a number of you scaling the fence.

RH: Yes, right.

KP: It must have been strange to be at Camp Kilmer, which is next-door to Rutgers.

RH: That's right, it was, yes, 'cause the guys that were ... from Illinois or something, they [said], "Oh, you're lucky. You're practically home," but, I can't quite recall, I know gasoline rationing

was on then, and I think my mother was concerned, "How are we going to drive back if we don't have enough gas to get back?" Probably, she took me to a bus somewhere.

KP: How long were you stationed at Camp Gordon, between basic training and the lab training?

RH: I would say six months. Then, we were shipped overseas.

KP: You were shipped over to England in 1943.

RH: ... Yes, '43.

KP: You were in England for a long time before the Normandy invasion.

RH: Oh, yes, six months, I think, and then, we lived in little buildings that they'd commandeered.

KP: In England?

RH: [Yes].

KP: Had you traveled much before the war?

RH: No, well, not the way kids today do. [laughter]

KP: Before you joined the Army, how far west, north, and south had you traveled?

RH: I had been to Chicago, which my father took me out to [for] the World's Fair, and he was from Buffalo, we went to Buffalo several times, and Washington, DC, that was the thing to do, and I guess I'd been to Boston, but, nothing [that was] a big deal, no tropical paradises or anything. [laughter]

KP: What were your impressions of Camp Gordon and the South in general?

RH: Well, I didn't think much [of it]. We didn't like the "Rebels," as we called them, and it was all right. It was just a stopping off place.

KP: What did you think of England?

RH: Well, looking back on it, I kick myself [that] we didn't take more advantage of the thing. ... My wife and I have gone to England several times, recently, and we like it very much. In fact, I went back last year. We were in a little town called Wootton-under-Edge, [southwestern England]. That's where we were billeted in England. ... Recently, I mean, we took a bus that happened to go to Wootton-under-Edge and I showed her, "That's where this [was] and that's where [that was]," and it was very nice. We've been back. We like England. We're not going again, though. We've been [there] too many times. We'll go to something else. I thought it was

nice. We had very little contact, actually, with the British soldiers. Now, the British civilians, we did. I think they kept us apart, so [that] we wouldn't fight. [laughter]

KP: What did you think of the British civilians and military personnel that you encountered?

RH: ... I thought they seemed very well educated for guys ... [who] didn't have a uniform. Of course, most people did, and then, there was the British girls who were in the service, WACs and WAVES, whatever they called them. They were nice and we were always trying to get dates with them and all of that.

KP: How successful were you and the other men at getting dates?

RH: Some guys got dates and got married, you know, and that was a big problem for the Army. ... I took out girls, and so forth.

RF: What was it like to go from the United States to wartime England, where rationing was a lot stricter and there was a real threat of enemy bombing raids?

RH: Yes, the rationing, you couldn't get much. I know the pubs would run out of Scotch or whiskey; they'd run out of beer. They always had cider, hard cider, which was like drinking vinegar, you know. I guess they mix it, half beer and half cider, and that was "hof n' hof." So no, I didn't appreciate ... England. I hated England. ... I wanted to go home and ... our outfit had a few little trips, in Army trucks. ... I went to London for a couple days and places around [the base]. We went to Stratford-on-Avon and so forth.

KP: You were able to see a good portion of England while you were there.

RH: Well, southwestern [England], yes. Now, when we were over since, we went to a lot of places. We were up in Edinburgh, Scotland, and so forth.

KP: While you were based in England, what kind of work did your lab do? Were you attached to a hospital?

RH: No, we ... spent a lot of time setting up the equipment and so forth.

KP: In other words, you were basically waiting for the invasion.

RH: That's right.

KP: You were not doing lab work.

RH: No, no, not then.

KP: It sounds as though you had a lot of time on your hands.

RH: Oh, I guess we did, yes. We had to crate up stuff. ... Of course, over where we were, they had Double British Summer Time and, in the winter, it wouldn't get light until ten o'clock in the morning, or even later than that, I guess.

RF: What kind of indications did you have that there would be an invasion, since they were trying to keep the operation under wraps?

RH: Well, obviously, there was going to be. They had all these troops, and equipment, and tanks, not in our outfit, ... and I knew it was going to happen. We all did. In fact, I was on guard duty one morning, I mean, in the middle of the night, and, all of a sudden, I could hear these planes coming. There were lots of them, and they all came over, and they had their running lights on, and then, maybe a couple of hours later, they were coming back, and you could see their [static] lines, where the ... paratroopers had jumped. They had the running lights on, so [that] they wouldn't get shot at [laughter] by their own people. So, ... we knew that was going to happen. "Why are we spending all this time here if it's not?" you know.

KP: Do you remember your voyage to England?

RH: Yes, ... we went over on the *Aquitania*. ... That's probably been chopped up now, and there was five cots, you know, and I was smart enough to take the top one, so [that] nobody would throw up and get me or anything, [laughter] and that was boring, of course, because there was nothing to do. ... The *Aquitania* could go very quick, fast, and we could go out on deck, and so forth.

RF: Were you concerned at all about U-boats?

RH: Well, they said the reason they went alone, see, there was no convoy, [was because] it could go so fast that by the time the Germans knew it was coming, it would be by them, which I didn't really buy. [laughter] "What if they're there already?" you know, but, no, ... I didn't worry about the U-boats. Actually, I didn't worry about anything, as a young kid, I guess, and not a young kid, either, I was twenty, twenty-one, but, you never think you're going to get it yourself.

KP: It was always going to be someone else.

RH: That's right, yes, like these fighter pilots. They [were] very cocky. ... "Nobody could shoot me down," you know. You have to do that when you're young. Now, I'd be [frightened]. [laughter]

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KP: What was Army food like, both in the States, but, in particular, in England?

RH: Army food in the States was pretty good. I don't know what we would think about it now, if we got served it, but, it was pretty good, and, in England, it was more canned K rations or C rations, where you got three different kinds of [meals]. What did you get? For breakfast, it was

eggs, sausage, like, scrambled eggs, and very little fruit. It was good, but, I was never a chowhound, so, ... I didn't think too much of it.

KP: Was your hospital intended to be a mobile hospital?

RH: Yes. ...

KP: Your lab unit was to be field based.

RH: Yes. We had, I don't know if it was always the same truck, but, that was, like, our truck. We could load all our junk in, and our tent, the big ward tent, you know, which was heavy, and then, when we'd go to a new spot, it probably took half the day to set everything up.

KP: Your unit was part of a larger field hospital.

RH: We were part of the First Army and that was the ... 45th Evacuation Hospital. ... You used to have to know this; the first thing was just a very forward ... battalion aid station, and then, we were the last hospital before ... the wounded were sent back to, like, say, Paris, or to a real big hospital.

KP: How large was the field hospital as a whole and your lab unit in particular?

RH: You mean in people?

KP: Yes.

RH: ... I think we had five guys.

KP: In your lab group?

RH: Yes, Sergeant, like, he was our top sergeant, not top, but, he was higher than me, then, I was a sergeant, and then, we had a corporal and a couple of privates. Now, in the big hospitals, they were ...

KP: What about your field hospital?

RH: Yes, that was the size there, and I don't really know ... who was big in the ...

KP: Yes, but, for example, how many doctors and nurses worked in the hospital?

RH: Oh, we had forty doctors and forty nurses.

KP: There were about eighty professionals.

RH: That's right.

KP: How many support personnel worked there, such as orderlies, administrators, cooks, etc.?

RH: Oh, they had a few guys, but, they were something they would take out of the ranks, you know. The nurses were a pain, 'cause they had so much junk to carry, you know, and we had to carry it and load it when we moved. Doctors, they carried their own stuff.

KP: However, the nurses ...

RH: Oh, they were awful and they were always collecting souvenirs. You know, they'd have this big roll of stuff. [laughter]

KP: How did you get along with the nurses in general?

RH: Some of the nurses were very nice. ... We had ones that were like girlfriends, buddies, you know, who we liked, and then, there were guys that were taking them out in the woods all the time, I think, the salesmen types, you know. [laughter]

KP: Were the nurses officers?

RH: Yes.

KP: You were enlisted men.

RH: We were enlisted men, yes.

KP: How did that relationship work? You mentioned that some nurses were like buddies and others were more aloof.

RH: Oh, yes. Well, we didn't care. ... There was a couple of nice nurses who we were friends [with], you know, and we liked them quite a bit, and they'd stop by and have a drink of Coke, I don't think they drank much, and things like that. It was someone you liked to talk to.

KP: However, there were other nurses who ...

RH: There were love affairs, with the handsome officer and the pretty nurse, you know, and, immediately, everybody knew about it here. [laughter]

RF: There were no real secrets in this outfit; it was pretty tight-knit.

RH: Yes.

KP: You knew if a nurse and a doctor or an officer were dating, or going out ...

RH: Or fooling around, yes.

KP: Was there any fooling around between the enlisted men and the nurses or was that forbidden?

RH: A couple, if a guy was a good, as I say, salesman, and handsome. Some of them had girlfriends, even though they were nurses, but, there was nothing you could do. You couldn't take 'em to a nightclub or anything like that. [laughter]

KP: Yes, the regulations pretty much restricted what they could do.

RH: That's right.

KP: Did you train with this hospital unit before the invasion?

RH: Yes, after awhile.

KP: While you were in England?

RH: Yes, it was set up [as] the 45th Evacuation Hospital.

KP: Did you set up and break down the facilities? Did you participate in any practice missions?

RH: Well, ... there was always plenty of things to do, as far as running tests. Even though they weren't in combat, ... there was always somebody getting seriously injured, you know, and we would take care of him until he was taken back to a better hospital.

KP: In England?

RH: Yes, and it was also true in the States. When we went on maneuvers in Tennessee, there was always somebody [who] got his foot run over by a tank, you know, that kind of stuff. It wasn't just play war; it was real.

KP: I did not realize, before conducting these interviews, how dangerous training could be.

RH: Oh, yes.

KP: The Air Corps was particularly dangerous, but, every service had its share of accidents.

RH: Oh, yes, it was. ... We never were very sick in England, but, when we were in Tennessee, there was always an outbreak of diarrhea. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you have interesting memories of the Tennessee maneuvers.

RH: [Yes].

KP: Where did the men of your unit sleep when you were in the field on maneuvers?

RH: It depends. ... In England, we had ... sleeping bags. You'd just sleep on the floor. ...

KP: In the field hospital?

RH: Yes, and, generally, in Tennessee, we didn't have any cots, but, you could get some hay from a farmer, or something, make a bed.

RF: Do you think that other units, infantry, perhaps, envied how relatively cushy your lives were while on maneuvers?

RH: I think it was. I mean, it wasn't anything violent, but, I know, if you have to go out, like, on a day like this and sleep in a foxhole all night, compared to a nice tent, with straw and everything, obviously, you're going to be envied. In fact, I used to tell my son, "If you want to know what the Army's like, go out in the backyard and dig a hole, deep hole, and sit in that all night, [laughter] especially with water in the bottom, and see how you like it. Forget anybody trying to shoot at you," you know. [laughter]

KP: Did your son ever do that? [laughter]

RH: Well, he likes to camp and I don't. [laughter] He and his wife and kids, they're always going camping. Of course, they have nice [camping] stuff, now. [laughter]

RF: When were you finally ordered across the Channel, either as part of the invasion or after the invasion?

RH: ... Actually, we ... didn't ship out of England until, like, I told you the story about the airplanes; that was, maybe, twelve hours notice, and then, we got in trucks and went down to some Channel city, where we got on the [LSTs]. ... We went from there.

RF: Was that on D +1?

RH: No, D +10.

RF: Can you describe your crossing? I have heard that the weather was stormy during that period of time.

RH: It wasn't real bad. ... The Channel was choppy. I think it had been worse when Eisenhower had to make up his mind, whether to go or no go.

RF: What was your reaction when you first saw the beach?

RH: Well, this is where they'd been fighting, and, occasionally, there would be an explosion, you know, "Boom," and we went in on little boats. The big boat took us, and then, dropped us down,

and I think we all got our feet wet, though. They couldn't go right up on the beach, [the] sand, but, it wasn't any big deal, I don't think.

KP: Where did the field hospital initially set up its operations?

RH: We set up in a little town called La Cambe, ... in Normandy, which I read, recently, it's a German cemetery, now, and we were there for awhile, maybe three weeks, and then, we moved into another place, and so forth.

KP: What kind of lab work did you do? How long would an average day be for you?

RH: You mean ...

KP: In France?

RH: Oh, well, it depended, you know. ... The Army would go ahead, and then, it would get very dull, you know, ... and then, they'd move, and it would be really hot again, a lot of action, but, ... we were on call all the time.

KP: How long could you sleep at night without being interrupted?

RH: ... Well, you see, there were shifts, I mean, just within our little group. "You can have it tonight," and, "You take it tonight," and, if you're up all night, not that you were working that hard, ... it took about, I would say, oh, four or five hours.

KP: That you could sleep?

RH: Yes, right.

RF: How far behind the front was your unit usually deployed?

RH: Well, as I say, when ... we'd pull up, we were very close, maybe four or five miles, maybe less, but, then, you could hear, ... after a few days, the shooting would die down, and then, you were, maybe, twenty, thirty miles. Then, you'd move up again.

KP: Were you ever in a situation where the front became more fluid than the military planners who deployed you expected?

RH: Well, during the Battle of the Bulge, we were close, [laughter] and got bombed, and things like that.

KP: Was that the first time you were bombed?

RH: Well, the first time, we were still in France, and we were bombed by the USAF, [laughter] ... and they put a stick of bombs very near. In fact, I think a couple of guys were wounded, not

bad, and that was something. We could hear these freight trains coming, it sounded like that, and then, "Boom."

KP: At the time, did you know they were American planes?

RH: Oh, we ... knew they were, but, they didn't know we were. [laughter] Well, I think they missed, that's all. They thought they were bombing out something.

KP: Was this during the offensive at St. Lo?

RH: Yes. ...

KP: At the time, did you know how many Americans had been killed in the operation?

RH: No, you never knew that then. ...

KP: Did you realize how widespread the problem was during that operation?

RH: I forget whether we knew right away or not. Oh, obviously, we knew it wasn't the Germans. ...

KP: However, you did not know that this had been a mistake.

RH: No.

KP: What kind of lab work could your lab do?

RH: Blood counts, things like, well, white blood, red blood cells, hemoglobin, and, I guess, blood sugars, and then, urinalysis, too, and that was about it.

KP: Were you ever called upon to perform duties other than your lab work? Were you and the men of your unit ever pressed into service elsewhere?

RH: A little bit. Of course, when you were setting up, we would. You'd have to go help this other group or something.

KP: Within the hospital, were you ever pressed into service as, say, an orderly?

RH: No, not really. I know, in the hospital in France, we had to sit in on autopsies and watch the guy get cut open and all that. ... If they had an amputation, we'd have to bury it. ... The kid would come around, "Do you want to bury this thing for the Captain?" and we'd go out, and dig a hole, and bury the poor guy's leg or whatever. That didn't happen often. I don't mean we were there, twenty-four hours a day, digging and burying.

KP: It sounds as though you buried enough legs, though.

RH: Yes, right.

KP: How many autopsies did you witness?

RH: I don't know, ten, fifteen. We did those in the States, where they're much more interesting, from the doctor's standpoint, 'cause they'd die of some disease. I don't know even why they bothered, when a guy had his head almost blown off, to run an autopsy, and I don't think they did later. I think it got to be, "Who knows? Who cares?" you know.

KP: How strange was it to see your first autopsy?

RH: It didn't bother me that much; I don't know. Actually, the first guy, he was ... on a pass, and he was on a bus, coming out of Camp Gordon or coming out of Augusta, and he was sick, and he stuck his head out the window to throw up, and something else sideswiped him. It mashed him up pretty bad, and then, they brought the body in. See, now, again, there's no real [question as to] what caused it, [laughter] he got hit by a truck, but, once in awhile, there were some guys with leukemia or something, obviously very sick, and they took his blood and [said], "This guy is bad," and he died, ... and then, the doctors were very interested in that.

RF: It sounds as though you had very little contact with casualties who were still alive. Basically, you saw them as blood groups and whatnot.

RH: Yes, right. We'd take blood from each one in the morning, healthy guys and unhealthy.

KP: You went through the wards to take blood.

RH: Yes, that and urine. Yes, that's about it, oh, and, of course, another thing we did, which I haven't mentioned, we were the focal point for testing for VD. ... [For] that, we would run just microscopic [tests]. We couldn't run Wassermanns or things, 'cause ... you needed more equipment. It took too long, too, but, we would take smears ... from your penis, you know, pus or something, and then, you'd look at it, stain it, put it under the microscope, and you could see the gonococci, if it was, indeed, that.

KP: Were you testing people who went on sick call? Would units cycle through to be tested?

RH: No, well, ... for VD, they would complain, you know.

KP: You tested those men.

RH: "It doesn't feel right." We would test [them], and we also had, this was ridiculous, our outfit would hire civilian girls to work in the kitchen, or things like that, in the mess thing, and some of these guys would take her out, and before he would do anything, ... "I want to have a Wassermann done." Well, a Wasserman takes, maybe, a week to run, ... not to run, but, to get the results. ... It was funny. [laughter]

KP: Did you hire these civilian cooks in France ...

RH: Both.

KP: England and France?

RH: And Germany.

KP: How many cooks did you hire?

RH: Oh, I don't know, maybe five or so. They would do the dirty, dirty work, you know.

KP: Did you have regular cooks assigned to the hospital?

RH: Oh, yes, sure.

KP: This lightened their load quite a bit.

RH: That's right, that's right. I think, maybe, they'd go to our commanding officer and say, "How about putting a few cooks on, so [that] we don't have to work twenty-four hours a day?" something like that, you know.

KP: The cooks were responsible not only for the hospital staff, but, also, for the men in the hospital.

RH: [Yes].

KP: You saw a lot of casualties come through the hospital. Did this ever upset you?

RH: No, I don't know. As I say, if you're a young kid, and you know you're going to have to look anyway, you ... grow immune.

KP: Were you shocked at first?

RH: No, I was never shocked. I expected it. I can't think of any of my buddies who were either. This is war, you know, and that's it.

RF: Did you ever get to know any of the casualties on a more than first or last name basis?

RH: No. Well, you see, they were never there that long.

RF: The hospital's main duty was to process them and ship them out.

RH: That's right, get 'em through.

KP: Did the doctors operate at this hospital?

RH: Oh, all the time, and I was never involved in the operating room, but, yes, they would be taking out shrapnel and so forth, or, if some guy had an appendix attack, they took out a few appendixes and things like that, but, ... those guys, they were ... equivalent to my job, but, they were, I think, better trained, as far as ... how to do the right thing during an operation. Everything we did was either dead or dying. [laughter]

KP: Did you have much contact with the doctors? Did you get to know any of them?

RH: Oh, yes. ... Well, we had a doctor, in addition to being in a medical [role], he was our officer-in-charge, and we knew him pretty well. He was an average, nice guy. ... Some of them could play bridge, so, we would play bridge, sometimes, which I didn't know anything about, then, but ...

KP: You learned.

RH: Yes, right.

KP: How formal or informal were both your lab unit and the evacuation hospital?

RH: Oh, it was very informal.

KP: How often would you salute the officers?

RH: Once we were over in England, I don't think we had to [salute]. You know, in the States, every time an officer passed, you had to salute and all that. ...

KP: However, that went out the window once you were sent to England.

RH: Yes, right.

KP: How strict were the regulations regarding uniforms?

RH: Well, ... the main thing were these green fatigues, and they would look like hell anyway, and, in the winter, we did have the OD [olive drab], is that the right word? the brown [uniform].

KP: You always wore an Army uniform, though. There was no mixing of civilian and military clothing.

RH: No, no. Oh, we didn't have anything civilian to put on.

KP: Did your hospital display any red cross emblems?

RH: They did when we were, well, it wasn't an emblem, ... in the field. They put a big, red cross on the ground, so that the Air Force, both German and American, ... they'd know it was a hospital, and then, ambulances had red cross symbols, too.

KP: Were the red crosses effective? The US Army Air Force bombed you by accident and you mentioned taking hits during the Battle of the Bulge. Were you ever bombed again?

RH: Oh, you mean besides that? Yes, we were, a couple times. It wasn't so much bombing; we were shelled. ... One night, we could hear these shells coming in and they didn't hit near us, thank God. I mean, they were near, but, not real near.

KP: How scared were you during these attacks?

RH: Well, I don't know, I wasn't very [scared]. I was dumb in those days, you know. [laughter] ... When we went to London, on a pass, me and my buddy, ... an air raid went on in London. The *Luftwaffe* was up there. ... We were, I guess, in a pub, and someone said, "Let's go out and see what's going on," and we did. We were up, "Ah," [laughter] and you could see the anti-aircraft things burst, and then, you could hear, "Clink, clink, clink, clink," and it was the shrapnel hitting the sidewalk, and we were stupid. ...

KP: You were watching the sky when you should have taken cover.

RH: That's right, yes.

KP: Did any of the bombs land nearby?

RH: No, that was the end of the war, as far as the [German air raids].

RF: Did you pick up any hobbies while overseas to help pass your free time?

RH: No, not really, no. I don't think so.

RF: You never got into souvenir collecting.

RH: Oh, a few things, but, nothing big, you know.

RF: What were some of the items you picked up?

RH: I had a bayonet, and I didn't have any guns, a couple of shells, empty, you know, and things like that. I had a German officer's cap, stuff like that, you know.

KP: Did you treat any German prisoners?

RH: [Yes].

KP: How soon after entering the battle zone did you begin to receive German prisoners?

RH: I guess, whenever they got caught. [laughter] ... In our hospital, they would be [treated]. If they found a German wounded, or shot down in an airplane, they'd, I guess, [be] obligated to treat them, yes. So, we had a few. Actually, the most Germans I saw, though, were in Camp Gordon, Georgia. They had a POW compound, which was right behind ours, you know, and they would be over marching, and they would be yelling at us and mimicking us, you know, because we didn't look very military. [laughter] ... They'd be yelling at us. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

RF: We were discussing the German POWs at Camp Gordon. You said that they would mock you.

RH: Yes. ...

RF: Did you toss any insults back at them?

RH: We were told, "Don't pay any attention to them." [laughter] That's really true. ... The ones behind us were Afrika Korps, and they were well-trained soldiers, and, of course, we were sloppy draftees, you know. [laughter]

KP: Did you ever encounter any African-American troops, either in the United States or overseas?

RH: The same place, not direct, but, there was also a black battalion behind us, and they could march. In fact, even the Germans', the Afrika Korps', eyes would go open when they'd go by. They'd ... swing their legs, and then, count cadence. Oh, man, they were good. They were all black and no women, of course.

KP: Did you ever treat any black casualties in France or Germany?

RH: I don't think so. There weren't many there that would have gotten wounded, at that time.

RF: Did you happen to notice how the black troops were treated, since Camp Gordon was in the South? Did you ever encounter any black soldiers while out on a pass?

RH: ... I don't remember in Augusta, which was a big, bigger, city. ... Other than knowing them a little bit on the base, we didn't really have much to do with them.

RF: When you were in Augusta, did you notice anything pertaining to race that you had not expected or had not encountered until then?

RH: Oh, yes, I remember the bus. ... The bus ... would go around, you know, like this Rutgers bus, and they weren't allowed to get in the front. They had to sit in the back.

RF: What did you think about that at the time?

RH: We thought it was pretty bad, but, we had other fish to fry, you know, at that time.

KP: You mentioned that things got a little hairy during the Battle of the Bulge. What else do you remember about the Battle of the Bulge?

RH: Well, that's when some of ... our guys in our outfit, mostly the motor pool, were actually shot at and bombed, and we had to pack up and leave. We were sitting up pretty close to the front, and then, we had to get out and move back. ... It took about a week or two before, I guess, Patton ... came up and, [the] next thing you know, it was all over. ... It had been quite rainy, and the Air Force couldn't bomb ... the German tanks, and the day it cleared, man, that sky was just full of American airplanes, ... and that was the end of the Bulge, I guess. [laughter]

KP: It sounds as though you were on trucks for much of the battle.

RH: Yes.

KP: When you were ordered to evacuate, how long did you drive before you stopped?

RH: Well, we knew where to go, or ... the officers did. We went back, not real far, maybe ten, fifteen miles. ... Actually, [during] the Bulge, the German troops ... weren't thick. You know, they were just a pincer, I guess they call that. So, we got out of the way. [laughter]

RF: Were you, or the officers and men at the field hospital, ever afraid of being captured?

RH: Oh, yes. Well, there's no one in our outfit that did, except, they got wounded. ... Well, you'd be questioned, ... at a checkpoint, by Americans, to see if you were Germans, because a lot of them had American equipment on, the uniforms and everything. So, they'd ask you, "Who won the World Series last year?" and things like that, and, if you didn't know, then, you're in trouble. [laughter] That was the main thing, but, we didn't have much to do with it, as far as danger goes, I don't think.

RF: After you were re-deployed, did you re-set up the hospital? What did you do?

RH: ... We didn't re-set up for awhile, and, generally, then, we were in buildings, school buildings, or something like that, so, there wasn't too much to set up. ... We knew the ... Germans couldn't get very far with it. Of course, ... I've read, they wanted to go all the way to Le Havre, or one of those ports, you know, and then, have the Allies sue for peace, but, that never came about.

KP: I get the impression that your unit was never overwhelmed, that you could always adequately care for all your patients.

RH: Yes.

KP: You never had more casualties than beds.

RH: No, no.

KP: Recently, historians have commented on the fact that medical care in World War II was very good.

RH: [Yes].

KP: How would you rate the care delivered to the patients at your hospital?

RH: I thought they were getting good care, and the story was, ... "Don't go into a British hospital. They're terrible. Go into a German [hospital]," I mean, if you could choose. The German care was very good, too, medically, ... and American was good, and the British wasn't that great. It could be; they probably changed that.

KP: That was the rumor during the war?

RH: Yes, right.

KP: Did you ever treat casualties from other countries, besides Germany? Did you ever treat any British soldiers?

RH: Not that I can remember. We might have, one or two, but, I don't think so.

KP: Did you ever treat any civilians in France or Germany?

RH: Only these kitchen help, and they weren't wounded. [laughter]

RF: How much contact did you have with civilians as you were passing through France and Germany?

RH: Very little. Sometimes, well, we'd try to buy wine from them, or something. ... We were always trying to buy eggs, you know, 'cause we were getting sick of the GI food, but, we didn't have too much to do with them.

RF: Were you hailed as liberators or seen as conquerors?

RH: We were hailed as liberators, going in, and coming out, especially in France, they'd all go [Mr. Hoen makes an obscene gesture]. They were sick of all that. No, they liked us. Of course, when we're bombing them, ... you know, not directly, but, a bomb hits them or something, [they became angry]. When we were in England, our outfit went on just a brief maneuver, and it was very muddy, and these big trucks churned the fields, you know, and there were ruts like that, and,

I remember, the farmer complained. That field had been his for years, centuries, and we should pay for it, [laughter] ... and I'm sure we did, not then, but, [later], but, we thought that was pretty shocking. Here, we're saving his life, and their lives, and they didn't appreciate it. [laughter]

KP: What did you think of Germany and the German people?

RH: Well, I liked the scenery, and the *autobahns* were great, you know, like our superhighways, and the Germans, ... [of] course, I work, ... or did work, for a German company, and I thought they were very, sort of, American-ish. They liked more modern things, like us, and so forth, but, I didn't see too many when I was there.

KP: There was very little fraternization.

RH: They had that saying, "No fraternization."

KP: How closely was that rule followed?

RH: [At] first, it was, but, later on, ... especially when girls got involved, [laughter] the whole thing fell apart.

KP: Were you ever stationed near a concentration camp?

RH: Yes, well, we were in a concentration camp. ... Our outfit was sent in to liberate Buchenwald, not liberate it, shooting, but, once the thing was taken, ... we had to provide all the care, and so forth, and those guys, inmates, were in pretty bad shape.

KP: You did the blood work for them.

RH: Well, yes. It was more just feeding them and getting them back, 'cause they were all like skeletons. I don't think they needed much blood work at that point.

KP: Did you have any involvement in their care?

RH: ... Actually, the big thing was, ... they all had TB. We had to run microscopic tests for the germs, and, I guess, sure, if the guy was very bad, we'd run a blood count, but, it wasn't like our Army, where everybody goes and gets a blood count, whether they need it or not.

KP: The Army could be very bureaucratic about medical care.

RH: Oh, yes, sure, but, ... Buchenwald, it wasn't nice, obviously. There were dead bodies all over, dying [people]. It wasn't like fun, see.

RF: Had you known about the camps before going to Buchenwald? Were you briefed before you were sent in or were you sent in sight unseen?

RH: Well, we were sent in, ... since we were probably the nearest hospital, and we knew it wouldn't be very much fun, as I say. We were there, maybe, I don't know how long, two weeks? and they were dying when we were in there. ... I had a few pictures I had taken, you know, of these guys, and ... you'd see one dead guy being carried by his arms and legs. So, that was an experience, I guess.

KP: Were you surprised by what had happened in the camps?

RH: Well, of course, we had gotten a lot of propaganda, which ... may or may not be true, and so, we were kind of prepared, you know.

KP: Were you surprised that this was true?

RH: ... We were surprised, yes. ... I remember, we were in our truck, or somewhere near, stopped, and a couple of German women came up, and we had had some pictures we had taken, and we showed it to them, and they broke down crying, and I don't think they were putting it on. They were really shocked that all this had happened. ... "What will happen to us, now?" you know, morally, not get shot or anything.

KP: How long were you stationed in Germany after V-E Day?

RH: Not long. ... I'd say it took the Army three months to get rid of us. [laughter]

KP: You were back by V-J Day in September.

RH: No, we were still in Germany [on] V-J Day.

KP: You left shortly after V-J Day.

RH: Yes. ... I got back around Thanksgiving.

KP: Was your unit going to serve in the Pacific?

RH: Oh, yes, we were supposed to, [yes].

RF: You must have been pleased on V-J Day.

RH: We were happy and that's when, ... I don't know if they're right or not, ... all the senators were [saying], "Bring the boys back," and everything. ... Maybe we did it too fast, I don't know.

RF: Did you know how the war had ended by that time?

RH: I think we knew about ... Hiroshima and all of that, right away, but, I guess we thought, "Well, now, they can drop it on the Japs," 'cause we didn't drop it on the Germans. ... I know the government [said], "Let's get the boys home."

KP: It sounds like you wanted to come home.

RH: Badly.

KP: Did you ever write letters to your parents?

RH: Oh, yes. In fact, I just found a copy of a V-mail letter. ... It was photocopied. I used to have millions of them. I guess I threw loads of them away.

KP: That is too bad.

RH: Yes, right.

RF: Which branch of the service did your brother serve in?

RH: He was in the Air Force, but, on the ground. He was a ground crew guy.

RF: Did you correspond with him during the war?

RH: I think we sent a few letters, not much, no.

RF: Did he also serve in the European Theater?

RH: He was in England.

RF: Did you ever see him while you were in England?

RH: [I] never did, no. He was in, like, the northeast of England and we were more, like, the southwest. ...

RF: Your sister was a student at NJC during the war. Did she join in any of the patriotic volunteer work on campus, such as Red Cross work or bandage rolling?

RH: I don't think so. ... She might be killing me if I say she didn't, [laughter] but, I don't think she did. She started out in William and Mary, and then, either she was transferred by her parents or wanted to come up here.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Robert L. Hoen, on February 12, 1996, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

RF: Richard Fox.

KP: Did your sister write to you?

RH: Oh, I guess I got a few letters. I don't remember. [Editor's note from Mr. Hoen's sister, Mary: I wrote a lot and had my friends do so as well. We sent stuff quite often (Mother and I). I remember agonizing over the lists in the newspaper of soldiers being released and the days they would be expected to arrive. It took forever and I can remember crying in frustration when Bob's name wasn't on the list. I took him shopping when he returned and we found a suit at Macy's we both liked. It was an awful plaid and we laughed about it in later years.]

KP: Did you ever see any USO shows while you were overseas?

RH: ... Yes, when we were in France, the USO show would come through. ... They'd come in every once in awhile. I don't remember going to anything in, like, New York.

KP: Were there any chaplains assigned to your unit?

RH: Yes, we had a chaplain. I don't know much about him.

KP: Did you attend services regularly?

RH: Once in awhile; I went to services on the boat going over, for something to do. Really, I hate to say that. [laughter] ...

RF: Did any of the men you served with suddenly find religion while in the battle zone?

RH: "There's no atheists in a foxhole?" I don't know. I doubt it. We had ... a couple, like the conscientious objector I told you about, ... and he was very religious. There was a few like that, but, no, there was no big conversion. [laughter]

KP: Did your time in the service alter your plans for your career and education?

RH: Oh, yes, because, when I got out, as I told you, I wanted to go finish my education and get out in the real world. ... I had organic [chemistry]; I needed ... "qual & quant," as they say, took that, and a couple of other chemical courses. ... I'm filling in the blanks, "Well, that's what I need," and it did interrupt [my plans], but, I graduated.

KP: How helpful was the GI Bill to you, in terms of completing your education?

RH: Very, because I think my parents had fallen on slightly hard economic times by then, and I'd get the check for, what was it, fifty bucks a month?

KP: I forget the exact amount, but, that sounds right.

RH: ... Yes, and that really helped. Plus, it paid for the actual tuition. Yes, that was a big help.

RF: You mentioned earlier that Rutgers was a bit more hectic after the war. How hectic was it? Did it change the warm, family feeling you felt here earlier?

RH: Oh, yes. ... I can't remember joining in any organized social activity after the war ... and, before, that was very important, you know. Dances, we had the dances in the gym before, bring your girlfriend, and so on.

RF: Did you attend the Military Ball before the war or did you skip that one?

RH: I don't know, [laughter] not after. I didn't go to any balls afterwards.

KP: Did you attend any events before the war?

RH: Oh, yes, ... I've got some of these names mixed [up], I think the Junior Prom. Did we have a Junior Prom, here, or was that Columbia High School?

KP: Yes.

RH: Yes, things like that, Soph Hop, yes. Oh, I went to them all.

KP: When you returned to Rutgers after serving in the Army for several years and serving overseas, how did you get along with the students entering Rutgers right out of high school?

RH: Yes, well, ... I don't recall too much. I think they were sort of naïve, and so forth, and the later kids that came overseas, like, we were seasoned veterans, and a new outfit would come in, and they [were] much younger, and they seemed like they were very immature.

RF: Did the professors treat you any differently?

RH: No, I don't think so. I never [laughter] know how I got treated anyway, you know.

RF: Do you think the veterans had a stronger work ethic, based on their wartime experiences?

RH: Oh, yes. The younger guys, who had never been in the service, I think, were still enjoying themselves, having fun, and, as I've said before, we wanted to get out, get it over with.

KP: How did you meet your first wife?

RH: My first wife? [laughter] ... Actually, she was ... ten years younger than me and she lived on York Avenue, with her mother. ... Me and another guy had an apartment fairly close, and we were always looking for girls, and everything, and ... we played bridge, and [we were] trying to get bridge opponents, or partners. ... Her mother did play bridge. So, we went around, and her mother was so embarrassed, not embarrassed, but, [she said], "You should be playing with my daughter," and she went in the bedroom and brought my future wife out, all in curls and all that. Of course, ... she was very curious, you know, "Who's out there?" and I thought, "I would never

date her," and then, the next time I needed some kind of a partner or date, I called her up, you know. ... Finally, she said, "Well, we'll go out, but, not on Thursday. That's when I do my hair," [laughter] and, later on, she started to go out on Thursday, too. [laughter]

KP: You met after you had graduated from college.

RH: Oh, yes, this was 1950, I guess.

KP: Do you ever feel as though you missed out on the typical college experience? Do you sometimes wish that you could have gone straight through from 1940 to 1944?

RH: I guess so, a little bit, yes. It would have been nice, but, I don't regret anything, no.

RF: Was there anything in college that you wished you had done?

RH: Well, there are other things; I always wanted to take geology. ... I wish I had gone out for track, ... you know, athletics. I was a pretty good runner. That, of course, got interrupted by the war.

KP: You mentioned that you enjoyed football.

RH: Yes.

KP: Did you attend the football games after the war?

RH: Yes.

RF: You mentioned, also, that you attended some recently.

RH: Yes, a few.

RF: Was there a different sort of spirit at the game back then?

RH: I don't think so. Once you go to a game, you get excited. It's your team. I couldn't tell what kind of spirit it was. [laughter]

KP: After you graduated, where did you find your first job?

RH: In New York, at Warner-Lambert, the pharmaceutical company.

KP: How long did you stay with Warner-Lambert?

RH: About two years, and then, I got a job, ... right down here. In fact, I went by where he was, New Jersey Dairy Laboratories, I don't know if he's there now, and I worked there [for] about a year, and I was making seventy-five dollars a week, and Warner-Lambert [said], "We couldn't

pay you that much, ... anything like that." ... After I left them, I got a job with, it's the one thing Rutgers really did for me, I guess, with a manufacturer's rep, a distributor. Some old guy was looking for, "A good salesman," he said, and he had two sons, and neither of them were interested in that kind of a life. So, he said, "We'll give you a try," and he did, and I liked it. I'd never had that much freedom, you know, ... and I was with them until I got another job with more money, you know, building up, and then, my last job, before I retired, was with the Henkel Corporation, and they were very good to me and everything, but, my real kick-off in that career was the Rutgers, they had some kind of employment office, or something. They still may. I don't know.

KP: You were able to get a good job that made use of your education.

RH: Yes, pretty good. [laughter] No, they were all right. They were good. ... The Warner-Lambert job was just ...

KP: A lab technician?

RH: No, ... they had fancy names for them, but, you were a chemist, then, you know, but, I was always glad, by that time, to get out of the laboratory, so, when this guy gave me a chance, I jumped at it, you know. ... It didn't pay much, but, unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, this old guy died, maybe three or four years later, and I was left holding the bag, as far as doing things, you know. "You can run that and run this," and I did. ... It got to where, you guys ought to know this, too, you go up so far, and then, the enthusiasm for you kind of dies down, and so, that's when I would change.

RF: Did you enjoy moving from job-to-job or were you looking for something permanent?

RH: I didn't enjoy it. I didn't like to go for job interviews, and so forth, and I had to, because we had kids, and so forth, but, you were well respected. ... They got to know you, I mean, your peers. ... By the time I retired, I knew everybody in our field, you know. So, I really ... am glad that this old guy needed someone. His sons didn't want to get in it.

KP: I get the impression that you liked sales a lot.

RH: I did, I did. He made me take a salesman test and a lot of stupid stuff, but, most of ... the reports was, "This is what he should be." [laughter]

RF: Did that surprise you?

RH: No. Well, I don't know. What I didn't like about the lab, I mean, in the long run, was that ... no matter what you did, somebody else got credit. When you're in sales, if you land a big account, then, you get credit. [laughter] I liked that.

KP: Was there anything that you did not like about sales?

RH: Didn't like?

KP: Yes. You mentioned that you liked getting credit for your work.

RH: Oh, you had a lot of independence. You could leave, 'cause you were busy, you know, and then, later on, when we flew, ... [I could say], "I'm going to fly out to Chicago. There's an account out there I want to talk about." ... That's a lot of freedom. It was all hard work, but, ... you were your own boss, I guess.

KP: You enjoyed the autonomy.

RH: Yes, definitely.

KP: What were some of the disadvantages of sales?

RH: Well, you were away from home a little bit more and you never knew what was really going on, as far as the main office is concerned. ... My son, who is a geologist, and he seems to be doing well, but, he's on the road. They send him out to a chemical spill and I told him, "Stick close to the main office, 'cause you'll make more money that way. You will. This guy that no one ever sees, they don't appreciate as much."

RF: Did your constant traveling put a damper on your marriage?

RH: No, neither wife. My present wife's husband was in sales, too. Actually, I think, both of them kind of liked to get us out of the house, once in awhile, [laughter] [so that they could] go to the movies with the girls, just have scrambled eggs, instead of making a big meal. No, neither of them mind.

RF: Did you miss out on any childhood moments with your children because of your traveling?

RH: No, no. I never was gone over a weekend; so, I always was there, which, you see, is a good advantage. You can arrange your schedule, what you're going to do.

KP: What were some of the products that you sold?

RH: Well, we sold surfactants, mainly, ... glycerol monostearate, sodium lauryl sulfate, things like that, alkanolamids, and a lot of oils, cosmetic oils.

KP: Would you visit the cosmetic manufacturers often?

RH: Cosmetics, that was probably our biggest field. ... We had all the big cosmetics houses and, also, industrial sales, ... like cutting oils, things that used surfactants.

KP: None of your children served in the military.

RH: [No].

KP: You do not sound disappointed.

RH: No. I don't know why. There's nothing wrong with my kids, I mean, health wise. ... They're all married, maybe that's got something to do with it. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned that you have become more of a Democrat over time. It usually works the other way for most people.

RH: That's what I've read. ...

KP: I have interviewed a number of people who were Democrats in the 1930s and are now Republicans.

RH: I don't know. I think, well, one reason, and my friends would hate me for it, I think they're ... a bunch of jerks, not the candidates, the people. ... They seem to be so wrapped up in watching TV and so forth, you know. They're not a bit interested in anything esoteric at all, you know. So, I don't know, but, ... actually, I'm not a Democrat. I'm still registered as a Republican.

KP: However, you lean more towards the Democrats.

RH: That's right.

KP: What was your opinion of the Korean War and the Vietnam War? It sounds like you were glad to avoid being recalled for the Korean War.

RH: Korean War, yes. Well, I'd just got out. ... The Vietnam War, I don't know, I think I was, ... not if I'd wanted to go, a little older, and I was very much a Republican reactionary for the two wars.

KP: You thought they were ...

RH: I thought they were just wars.

KP: You thought that we should have won them.

RH: Yes.

KP: Has your opinion changed since then?

RH: Well, I think, ... we weren't minding our own business as much as we should have.

KP: Did you ever stay in touch with any of the people you served with?

RH: No. For awhile, they had little reunions; haven't had that for twenty years, I guess.

KP: Did you ever join a veterans' organization?

RH: No. The VFW was after me [laughter] and my wife said, "Don't join. I'll be making cookies." ...

RF: Did the American Legion ever contact you?

RH: Oh, I think so, yes.

RF: Was it just the "cookie issue?"

RH: Well, I wasn't interested, either. I don't think I'm a joiner, that much, but, both organizations seem fine, and we go to the VFW, [which] has a dance once in awhile. ... We go to that. I guess I'm very independent.

RF: You mentioned that you have learned more about the battles you were in from movies and books. Has your point of view been changed at all by what you have seen or read?

RH: I guess a little, no big deal, you know. Of course, I didn't know much about the war, the history, ... the background, 'cause most people don't, I don't think. I wasn't a student of military [affairs].

KP: Was there any movie that really captured your experiences in either the war or the service in general?

RH: Well, there was *The Naked and the Dead*, without all the barges landing and all that. ... I liked that book, Norman Mailer. ... After awhile, I got sick of silly war movies, you know. What's the one TV show? ...

RF: *MASH*?

RH: *MASH*, yes. That wasn't how it was. Of course, that wasn't [set] in World War II.

KP: No movie really depicted what your hospital was like.

RH: Well, I guess *MASH* would be closest.

KP: However, it was not that close.

RH: No, right.

KP: Did you ever talk about the war with your children or your friends?

RH: Yes, a little bit. My younger daughter, who's very tomboyish, she always liked to hear [my stories], and, of course, I'd exaggerate. [laughter] When I got my bravery badge, "Tell us about that, Dad. How many Germans did you kill?"

RF: Were you ever actually decorated?

RH: No, well, the outfit got ... a unit citation, you know, another bar. No, I never had [another decoration] and you've got your Good Conduct Medal.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask?

RH: No. The only thing I'm interested in is, who is the guy that came around and I went through this with him? ... He was from Rutgers and no one ... can ever answer that.

KP: Do you mean who initially called you?

RH: He called up, and ... he came to my house, and he had a mike, and he was going through ... [these] kind of questions.

KP: Oh, he is not actually at Rutgers.

RH: No. ...

KP: He was conducting independent research. He is a former journalist who is doing a project on the GI Bill.

RH: And he ... lived in Maplewood at some time?

KP: Yes. Speaking of the GI Bill, did you buy your house with the GI Mortgage?

RH: [Yes], definitely. It's all paid for now. I really don't even live in it now. I live in my second wife's house. [laughter]

KP: Do you still have your first house?

RH: No, I gave it, *gave it*, to my kids.

KP: That was very nice.

RH: Yes.

KP: How did you meet your second wife?

RH: ... [laughter] She was a good friend of my first wife, and, when my first wife died, ... of course, everybody has to come to supper and feel sorry, and she asked me, and I enjoyed the evening very much. So, I thought, "The only way I can pay this back [is], I'm not going to cook dinner for her, take her out to a ... nice restaurant," and we did, and then, "How about doing this again?" you know, and it kept building up. [laughter] It's funny how things work out and she's a college graduate.

KP: She was a research chemist.

RH: Yes, and she went to Auburn. My first wife wasn't a graduate. She went to ... high school.

KP: She never went to college.

RH: No.

KP: Did your first wife ever work outside of the house?

RH: Yes, she worked for *Time* magazine.

KP: As a secretary?

RH: She had some kind of a fancy name, but, it was a secretary, and she was smart. I don't know why she never did more with that, and, of course, that's where my kids get their brains. [laughter]

KP: Thank you, unless there is something else that we forgot to ask.

RH: No, no. I think we've covered a lot. I hope it's been ...

KP: Oh, this has been very helpful. We are very happy with how this turned out.

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

Reviewed by Nichole Barbato 12/5/02

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 4/14/03

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 4/15/03