

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH IDA PERLMUTTER KAMICH

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Mallory Reichert: This begins an interview with Ida Perlmutter Kamich on April 22, 2005, in Monroe Township, New Jersey, with Mallory Reichert ...

Rachel Marcus: ... Rachel Marcus ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: ... and Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Thank you very much, Mrs. Kamich, for agreeing to sit down and talk with us today. To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

Ida Perlmutter Kamich: I was born in New York City. You want the date?

SH: Yes, if you do not mind.

IK: No, I don't mind, [laughter] December 25, 1916.

SH: Can you tell us about your father and his family history?

IK: Well, my father came here from Russia. I think he was nineteen and he started out working in needle manufacturing, you know, making shirts and things like that, in New York City.

SH: Do you know where in Russia he came from?

IK: Yes, he came from Minsk, in Russia.

SH: Did he emigrate alone or did he come over with family members?

IK: I think he came by himself.

SH: Did he have any other family members in the United States at that time?

IK: Not that I know [of]. I know he had sister; he had one sister and a nephew. He had very few relatives here.

SH: Do you know about your mother's history?

IK: Yes, my mother came from Riga, ... from Europe, and she came from a large family. There were five sisters and five brothers, yes, and they had a tutor coming to the house, to teach the children. ...

SH: Was that in Europe or here in the States?

IK: No, no, in Europe, and ... most of them all migrated to the United States.

SH: Did they ever talk about why they immigrated to this country?

IK: No, they didn't mention that.

RM: Did your mother ever work?

IK: Well, she did when she first came over here. She also worked in the needle industry.

SH: Is that how they met?

IK: No, they met at a dance, yes, and they got married. They were both very young. I think my mother was ... around eighteen when she got married.

SH: To back up, was it common or uncommon for women to be educated by tutors in the home?

IK: I think that was uncommon. I didn't hear of many other families ... that did that.

SH: This would lead us to believe that education was very important in her family.

IK: Yes, it always has been, yes, on my mother's side, very much so.

MR: Did your parents, your father, keep in touch with any relatives back in Europe?

IK: No. A nephew of his came over and he, like, sponsored him, and then, he was very friendly with his sister, who lived in Manhattan, and we were friendly with his children, but my mother's family was very, very close and kept in touch. ...

SH: When did your mother and father marry?

IK: I don't know the date, but I know they got married very shortly after meeting. I think they were both very young.

SH: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

IK: I had one sister.

SH: Older, younger?

IK: Older.

SH: You were born in New York City.

IK: Yes, and then, we came to New Jersey shortly thereafter. I think I was two years old when we came to New Jersey.

SH: Which part of New Jersey did you settle in?

IK: South River. ... My father had a factory there and they manufactured ladies dresses.

SH: The factory was in South River.

IK: South River, yes.

SH: Did your mother continue to work outside the home?

IK: No, she didn't. She didn't work. After they were married, she didn't work, not in South River.

SH: Did any of her family members also live in South River?

IK: No, ... the rest of the family, a lot of our family, stayed in West New York.

SH: How long would it take you to travel from South River to visit your family in West New York?

IK: Like, less than an hour.

SH: Did you travel by rail or car?

IK: No, we got a car, eventually, not in the beginning. [laughter]

SH: Where did you go to grade school?

IK: In South River, I went to Lincoln School for ... kindergarten, until ... about the eighth grade, and we went to South River High School and, from there, of course, I went to NJC, [laughter] by bus. I commuted.

SH: Did you really?

IK: Yes.

SH: How uncommon was it to be a commuter student at NJC?

IK: We didn't have too many, and then, of course, it was the Depression and, of course, you didn't have the means. ... We didn't have the means for me to stay there. So, I went by bus, and then, friends had a car and we'd go [together], a group of us that drove in. The boys went to Rutgers and the girls went to NJC.

SH: What is your first memory of South River?

IK: I guess kindergarten at Lincoln School and my sister took me to my first first-grade class.

SH: How much older is she than you?

IK: She's deceased. She was eight years older.

SH: She really was a big sister.

IK: Yes, she really was.

SH: Was it delightful to be the youngest in your family?

IK: I didn't know any different. [laughter]

SH: She never said anything about you being the baby of the family and getting more things.

IK: No. [laughter]

SH: Were you involved in any activities as a young girl?

IK: Girl Scouts, yes.

SH: Did you stay in and stay involved?

IK: ... I stayed involved until a certain age, and then, I didn't belong anymore. We didn't have Brownies at that time.

SH: Were there other activities outside of school that you were involved in? Were you involved in the synagogue or anything like that?

IK: For a short time.

SH: Did they have Hebrew lessons for girls at that point?

IK: Well, I started out in a Hebrew class, but I didn't continue. I didn't finish.

SH: This was before they did *bat mitzvahs*, right?

IK: Right, right.

SH: Did your mother keep a *kosher* home?

IK: Yes, she did.

SH: Was that difficult for you?

IK: Well, when I went into the Army and I came home, I didn't keep *kosher* anymore.

SH: What were your favorite subjects in high school?

IK: I always liked English, reading, very, very fond of reading, all kinds, and foods.

SH: Did your mother and father teach you their native languages or was only English spoken in your home?

IK: No, they didn't, only English. I wish they had. We didn't [learn them].

SH: Were there any customs, such as food, dress or other traditions, that they kept up and passed on to you?

IK: Well, holidays, especially, like, Passover and all the other holidays. My mother made the traditional matzo balls and, of course, the *tzimmes*, you know, carrots with sweet potatoes, and my angel is baking all that. [laughter]

SH: You mentioned that your mother's family only lived an hour away. Did you visit them often? Were you involved with your cousins?

IK: ... They came to us more often, because we were in the country. So, they came to us for meals and things like that and my mother always made a big spread.

SH: How did the Great Depression affect your father and his factory in South River?

IK: ... Well, at one time, ... I think it was in '29 when it affected him, because ... what he had saved up in the bank, he lost. So, it was kind of difficult then.

SH: Did the factory manage to stay open, even though he lost all of his savings?

IK: Yes, yes, it did.

SH: That must have been marvelous for the people who worked for him. How many workers did he have in the factory? Do you remember?

IK: Quite a few. I can't remember the exact number.

SH: Were you or your sister ever asked to work there?

IK: Well, I used to work in the summertime.

SH: Did you?

IK: Yes, I used to work.

SH: What was your job?

IK: Well, dresses had to be trimmed, so, I used to cut the threads off and ... they paid by the hour. So, I would get a salary, oh, yes.

MR: Do you remember how much the salary was?

IK: That, I don't remember. [laughter]

SH: Did anyone ever make you a special dress for a special occasion?

IK: No. These were, what do you call it? large, all the same, you know, that they sent to different areas, mostly in New York. It was picked up by truck.

SH: They were sent to the Garment District in New York City.

IK: Right, right.

SH: Were you interested in continuing in that sort of line of work?

IK: No, I wasn't interested in that.

SH: Did your sister continue on?

IK: Not really. She was more interested in business. Eventually, when my sister got married, ... my father took her husband in the business, and then, my brother-in-law took it over and my sister would help him out. There, she did, like, the books and she was always interested in business.

SH: Had she thought of going to college, as you had done?

IK: No, no, she was not interested. She worked in the bank in South River. She was always much more interested in business.

SH: Was your mother involved in any of the women's clubs in South River?

IK: No, she wasn't. She didn't drive, so, she didn't get involved with that.

SH: What would be a typical day for you as a young woman, I mean, get up, go to school, come home? Were there social activities at that point?

IK: Not too many. I used to do a lot of reading. I had a lot of books from the library and magazines and things of that type.

SH: Why did you decide to go to NJC?

IK: Well, I was very interested in going on to school and I was very interested in becoming a dietician. I was always interested in food and food magazines and cooking. See, I used to do a lot of the baking at home, yes, cookies and cakes and things like that. My mother used to make the entrees, all kinds of roasts and things like that.

SH: Did anyone in the high school encourage you in this area? Did you take any home economics courses in high school?

IK: No, no, none of those. I had a great interest in foods.

SH: Was there a program at NJC that piqued your interest at that point? Had you checked out what was being offered?

IK: No. I knew they had a dietary department and that's what I majored in.

SH: You said that other friends also came down from South River to New Brunswick.

IK: Yes. ... We all went to NJC together.

SH: Were you all in the same major?

IK: One friend had the same major and she also became a dietitian and her brothers were twins and they were at Rutgers. So, they had a car and they would take us and drop us off at NJC and they'd go on to Rutgers. ... They sometimes picked us up to go home, if our time schedule allowed it. Otherwise, we took the bus home.

SH: What was her name?

IK: Becker, and ... they had Becker's Newsstand in South River for years and years and they sold it ... some time ago.

SH: Have you maintained this friendship with the Becker family?

IK: Oh, yes, we were very close friends all along.

SH: Great. Were there any times when you did not go straight to New Brunswick or straight back?

IK: No, just, then, back and forth.

SH: How difficult was it to become a part of NJC when you were commuter student?

IK: Very difficult. You really couldn't participate in any of the activities that went on in the evening or anything like that and you really didn't get a feeling of campus life at all, because it was just commuting back and forth.

SH: I know there was a certain dress freshmen women had to wear. Did you have to wear that?

IK: ... No, we didn't, no, no, because we went by bus and everything; no, not at all.

SH: Did you ever go for tea at the Dean's home?

IK: No.

SH: Which professors really piqued your interest? Did you have a mentor?

IK: Alberta Dent. She was a professor of nutrition and dietetics.

SH: What was her name?

IK: Alberta Dent.

SH: D-E-N-T?

IK: Yes, and she was outstanding and very, very helpful in all situations for me.

SH: Were there any professors that you felt were not kind or not encouraging?

IK: No, the only one that I remember ... was Professor [Friedrich J.] Hauptmann, the German professor.

RM: Were you aware of the scandal involving Professor Hauptmann? I think it broke the year you graduated.

IK: Yes, afterwards, not while I was going, but I didn't care for him at all.

SH: Can you tell us more about your intuitiveness regarding Professor Hauptmann?

IK: Well, his attitude was very different from all the others, ... in whatever classes I took, and it was just not a very pleasant situation.

RM: What did Professor Hauptmann teach?

IK: German.

SH: Obviously, German was your foreign language.

IK: Right, right, that's right.

SH: Did you ever have a class with Lienhard Bergel?

IK: Yes, I did. He was good. He was very, very different, altogether different.

SH: When were you first aware of the scandal with Hauptmann and Bergel?

IK: Oh, way after I was out, yes.

SH: The students were sheltered from what was taking place at that point.

IK: ... Right. No, I had no idea.

SH: You were getting ready to graduate in 1939.

IK: '38.

SH: As a young woman, how much of the world were you aware of? Were you aware of what was going on in Europe? Were you involved in politics?

IK: No, I wasn't involved in politics.

SH: Had your family been involved in politics?

IK: No.

SH: Did your family keep any contact with family members in Europe?

IK: Contact, no.

SH: There was no word on what was going on in Germany.

IK: No.

RM: Was there a political atmosphere at NJC? Were there any peace protests before Pearl Harbor?

IK: Not when I was there. I wasn't there at that time, you see. ...

SH: Did you bring your lunch? Did you eat in the cafeteria?

IK: We ate in the cafeteria, and then, being a dietetics major, we worked in the cafeteria, yes, and then, the commuters would eat there. That's where they ate.

SH: Were the Becker twins taking part in any of the activities at Rutgers?

IK: Oh, they weren't part of the family. ...

SH: The twins that you commuted with.

IK: No, they went to Rutgers, but they were friends. They were not part of the family.

SH: I meant the brothers of the woman that you commuted with. Did they have a chance to stay involved with any of the activities at Rutgers College?

IK: I doubt it.

SH: Did you ever go to a dance or anything at Rutgers College?

IK: No. I wanted to, but I'd have ... to get transportation and everything. I never participated. I was very sorry about that. I missed it. ...

SH: Can you tell us about your graduation? Did you graduate with the rest of your class?

IK: Yes. ... My family came out and everything else, but ... I didn't have that many friends on the campus. ... In my immediate class, there were only five.

SH: Does that mean among the dieticians?

IK: ... Right, yes, [the] nutrition class that I took. So, I knew those five girls, see, and I didn't have contact with the others, hardly at all.

SH: Did you stay in contact with them after graduation?

IK: With one, just with one.

SH: Who was that?

IK: Corrine Blum.

SH: After graduation, did you start looking for a job as a dietician?

IK: Oh, well, see, Alberta Dent was instrumental ... in my getting my first job.

SH: Please, tell us about that.

IK: ... I interned, after graduation, in Philadelphia, at the Philadelphia Jewish Hospital. I think ... the name has changed and I was at home. Oh, they offered me a job, after graduation, from Philadelphia. They had ... an old age home and I felt I didn't want to work there. So, when I came home, and jobs were at a premium and all, Alberta Dent called me up and she said, "There's an opening at Trenton State Hospital," [and she asked] if I would be interested in going for an interview. I said, "Yes, I would." So, I went there and had the interview and that's where I had my first job. She was the one that helped me get that.

SH: Were you then working for the State of New Jersey?

IK: Yes, yes, very, very minor; there, I remember the salary. It was fifty dollars a month, a month, with room and board.

RM: You did not have to live at home.

IK: No, I lived there.

SH: You had always lived at home and, now, you were living in Trenton. Were you homesick?

IK: ... No. [laughter]

SH: How often did you come home?

IK: Well, I couldn't come home, because, again, I had no car; not too often, when I could get a ride home. ... That's when I started to belong to different organizations in Trenton. ...

SH: What did you join?

IK: To the Y, and I also took courses, ... evening courses, in weaving and different classes. ... I took basketball at night. I did this after work. ... Things that I couldn't do before, I tried to get to do then and that's where I met other people that I became friends with.

SH: Either at NJC or in Trenton State Hospital, did you ever feel subject to anti-Semitism?

IK: Not really, no. ...

SH: How long did you stay at Trenton State Hospital?

IK: Let's see, I came there ... in '39 and I was there ... until I got the opening in Fort Dix.

SH: What year was that?

IK: ... That must have been '40.

SH: After the draft was instituted, you went to Fort Dix as a dietician.

IK: Yes, there was an opening there and that was Civil Service.

SH: What were your hours? What were your living conditions like?

IK: There, we lived in the officers' quarters there and there was, I think, four other dieticians that we became very, very friendly with. ... They were from New York, most of them from New York. ... It was four or five of them. I think I have their pictures in here, too. [Editor's Note: Mrs. Kamich is referring to a photo scrapbook.]

SH: Were they older or younger than you?

IK: We were all about the same age. ...

SH: Can you tell us about the period from 1940 through Pearl Harbor at the end of 1941? What do you remember about being a young woman, living and working at Fort Dix?

IK: Well, it was very, very interesting. ... The other dieticians and I had very, very close relationships, because [that] we always went together, did things. ... Being in the Army, ... they had officers' parties and things like that, which we attended and enjoyed.

SH: Were there other female personnel in the Army at Fort Dix at that time?

IK: ... We weren't in contact. We just had the group of dieticians. ... I guess we had our own quarters. We all had, you know, private rooms and things like that.

SH: You were not considered part of the military at that point. You were in the Civil Service.

IK: ... Right, we were Civil Service, but, then, ... they said that if we wanted to continue with these jobs, with our jobs, we had to join the Army.

SH: At what point did they tell you that?

IK: ... That was in 1942.

SH: It was after Pearl Harbor. What do you remember about Pearl Harbor? Where were you when you heard the news?

IK: I don't remember.

SH: You were working at Fort Dix in December of 1941, correct?

IK: Yes.

SH: I thought you might recall how the Army base reacted to that news.

IK: No, that I don't, ... not of that. I know where I was when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was killed. I was in Paris at the time.

SH: Were you?

IK: On a weekend leave.

SH: What was the reaction when Roosevelt died?

IK: It was quiet, it really was, but it was very noticeable.

SH: After Pearl Harbor, in December 1941 and January 1942, did you notice a large influx of men coming into Fort Dix? Did your job change at all?

IK: No, because we were connected with the hospital, you see, and that's where we started working and everything else.

SH: Did any personnel change suddenly at that point?

IK: No.

SH: Did you notice if the hospital was getting ready to expand? Did it stay static?

IK: Right.

SH: When the Army came to you and said that you needed to enlist, did you have any second thoughts about that? Did you wonder why?

IK: Well, I did. I said, "I like my job very, very much and that as long as I could stay at Fort Dix and not [be] sent overseas, I would take it," because I had a widowed mother. My father had died in 1942, see, and I said, "As long as I don't get sent out of the country, I'd be very willing to stay." They said, "Don't worry, we will not send you overseas." So, I was the first one of the five of us to be sent overseas, [laughter] and so, one of the other dieticians said she was very anxious to go. Could she please go in my place? and she went to the head officer and asked if she could go in my place and he said, "No." I don't know how [it happened]. The orders came from Washington ... to send me overseas. So, that's how it happened that I went overseas.

SH: Before then, were you sent somewhere for training?

IK: ... No, no.

SH: What was the transition from civilian life to military service like?

IK: Well, they came and said that they got these orders. There was a unit leaving from New York to go to England and they were short a dietician, that I could go home for the weekend, ... say good-bye to my family, but I can't tell them that I was going overseas.

SH: It happened that quickly.

IK: Yes, yes. ... So, I went home for the weekend and saw my family. ... I couldn't tell them that I was leaving and, the next day, I left for New York to join the group that was going to England.

SH: What was this group called? What were you being sent over for?

IK: It was the 30th General Hospital and it so happened that I knew one of the dieticians that was there.

SH: Where had you met her?

IK: ... Yes, she was a friend of one of the others and she was also from New York.

SH: While you were a civilian dietician, you said that most of the other women were from New York. Did you ever go into the city?

IK: Not while we were in Fort Dix. We had plenty to do there. There was something all the time.

SH: Did you ever go to the Jersey Shore as a young woman?

IK: Oh, before I went, yes; I went there for one weekend. No, it was a week's vacation with another friend from NJC, from Douglass, Judith, very, very bright girl, and we spent the vacation together and, unfortunately, a couple of weeks before she was supposed to graduate, she was riding on Route 18, coming home from a movie, and their car was struck and she was killed instantly.

SH: She was in the same class as you.

IK: No, she was a year ahead of me and ... she was a math major.

SH: When you came home, were you tempted to leave a note and tell your family that you were leaving for overseas?

IK: No, no, not at all. [laughter]

SH: They were able to ingrain in you this need for secrecy.

IK: Yes, yes, right, that you couldn't [tell them]. So, I didn't think [to leave a note].

SH: When you came back to South River to say good-bye to your family, was it noticeable that a lot of young men had already left for the military? Were there any changes that you were aware of? Had rationing gone into effect at that point?

IK: No.

SH: You had requested that you not be sent overseas because of your mother. Your sister was married at that point. Was she able to watch out for your mother?

IK: ... Yes, she was. She lived a couple of blocks from my mother's.

SH: Did you go overseas with the 30th General Hospital on a troop transport or another type of ship?

IK: No. ... I know we had the *Queen Mary* there. We went over on that.

SH: Did you?

IK: Yes.

SH: Then, you did not go over in convoy. You just went ...

IK: Individually.

SH: When did you go over to England?

IK: 1942.

SH: Was it in the spring or the fall?

IK: It was in the summer. ...

SH: That was when things really started building up over there.

IK: Right, right.

SH: Where were you stationed? Where was the 30th General Hospital set up?

IK: It was stationed in Braintree. That's about thirty miles outside of London.

SH: North?

IK: South.

SH: South; in Kent?

IK: No.

SH: What was it like to set up a whole new hospital unit? What were your duties?

IK: Well, I didn't set it up. ... They had a Nissen hut establishment in Braintree and that's where ... the hospital was and I was only there a short time and they got orders that they didn't have a dietician up in Mansfield. ... I got orders to get transferred ... from there up to Mansfield. So, I was ... [there only a] very short time in Braintree and, the next thing, I was traveling by myself, by train, up to Mansfield, England.

SH: How far north of London is that?

IK: That was a couple of hours.

MR: When did you finally tell your mother? How did she react to the news?

IK: ... She called up Fort Dix and she got one of my friends there and they told her that I had left.

MR: Did you send any letters home to tell your mother and sister that you were okay?

IK: Oh, yes, yes, afterwards. I couldn't tell her anything before and we had to be very careful what we wrote home.

MR: Your letters were censored.

IK: Yes, yes.

SH: What rank were you inducted into the Army at?

IK: Second lieutenant. ...

RM: Were you given any formal training when you got to England?

IK: No.

RM: They just let you go over.

IK: Right, right. I didn't get any training. The only time I got training was when ... we were in England and getting ready to leave for France. Then, everybody got training then.

SH: What did your training consist of?

IK: Twenty-mile hikes, yes.

SH: After all this time?

IK: Yes, right. This is before we went to France, before D-Day.

SH: When you were sent north to Mansfield, had you been to London yet, at that point? Did you ever get a chance to go to London?

IK: No. After I got to Mansfield, then, I had more opportunity, because, there, I was stationed with that group. ...

SH: Which group was in Mansfield?

IK: That was the 30th General. ...

SH: When you arrived in England, the English had already been bombed extensively.

IK: Yes.

SH: Were you ever in one of those raids?

IK: We didn't have that much ... when I was in England. When I was in Belgium, that's when they had the buzz bombs.

SH: There were no bombings in England.

IK: Not where I was, no, not where I was situated, ... the different places that I was situated at.

SH: What were your duties when you were in Mansfield? You were there for almost two years before D-Day.

IK: ... I was in the hospital for special diets, anybody that needed a special diet. So, I would set that up, and then, I also was in the kitchen with, ... we had a mess sergeant and, of course, the kitchen personnel and ... the captain was the head of all of it. So, I was under the captain's supervision.

SH: Was the captain female?

IK: No, a man. ... The only other females there were the nurses and I was the dietician, and then, they gave me two assistants.

SH: Were they Americans?

IK: Yes, they were from the States.

SH: Were they officers or were they enlisted women?

IK: No, they were officers.

SH: Where were they from?

IK: One was from Boston and the other one, I don't know where she was from.

SH: Had they entered the Army in a manner similar to the way you wound up in the Army?

IK: I think so, and then, I also would have nurses that would go on duty in the kitchen. So, they'd be under our supervision.

SH: What was a typical day like for you before the D-Day invasion?

IK: Well, you went on duty very early. I just don't recall, you know, what time, and you looked at what the menu was, and then, you worked with your enlisted personnel, with the different things that they had to make, and then, I would also go on the wards, to see if there was anything special that some of the patients would want, that we would make for them.

SH: At this point, was the hospital attached to an Army Air Force unit or was this strictly for ground forces?

IK: Well, ... in Mansfield, that was ground forces and that was a permanent structure, a very nice hospital.

SH: Were you housed in the hospital?

IK: Yes, ... I had a very nice room by myself.

SH: How close were you to the nearest town or village?

IK: Well, Mansfield, that was right close to where the hospital was, ... located very close.

SH: Were you only dealing with American personnel?

IK: Yes.

SH: There were no other Allied groups there.

IK: No, no.

SH: Did you venture into Mansfield?

IK: Oh, yes, and then, Sheffield was close by and we're very close to Nottingham and ... I think I got one day off a week. I would go to the different antique places and browse around those.

SH: Did you send anything home?

IK: No, I didn't. I brought [things] home.

SH: How often did you receive mail and send mail? Was the mail delivery fairly regular?

IK: Yes.

SH: Did your mother ever chastise you for not having told her that you were going overseas?

IK: No, she accepted the fact.

SH: Did they talk about how the war effort was affecting them?

IK: No, they didn't.

SH: Your father's factory, now being run by your brother-in-law, did it get any military contracts?

IK: I don't think so.

SH: Did they change what they were making?

IK: ... No. They were making women's clothing.

SH: You mentioned that your mother had kept a *kosher* home and that you had to give that up in the Army. Did you give that up as soon as you went to work at Fort Dix? How long were you able to maintain a *kosher* kitchen for yourself?

IK: Well, I didn't. I mean, when I left home, I didn't maintain a *kosher* kitchen.

SH: Okay.

IK: ... Once I left home, I didn't pursue it.

SH: While you were taking care of your patients' nutritional needs in England, was it difficult to get supplied with the foods that you needed?

IK: Well, that all got sent from the United States and we had to be very careful not to waste anything. That was very important, because one of our enlisted personnel threw out some cheese that was really moldy, because the officer in charge there told him, ... "You can't use that. Throw it out." When they made a general inspection, the General said, "Why is this cheese in the garbage?" and the enlisted man said, "Well, I was told to throw it out." He said, "You can't waste food like that," and he was broken down to a private.

SH: Really?

IK: So, you didn't waste any food.

SH: I guess not. You did not have any difficulty in getting anything.

IK: Well, we didn't get anything fresh. ... We got canned butter. It was like axle grease, you know. It came in a ten-pound can and stuff of that type.

SH: Did you ever ask your family to send you a CARE package?

IK: No, I didn't. No, the only time ... I asked my mother to send me something [was] when I had to leave to go to the Riviera and I didn't have clothes for that.

SH: What were the people on the base at Mansfield doing? What were they training for? Was it an armored group or antiaircraft? Do you know?

IK: No.

SH: It was not an Air Force base.

IK: No, this was just a hospital unit. That was one of the first units over there.

SH: What was your social life like in England?

IK: Well, we had the officers' club there, too, and they had parties at different times and different holidays, and then, it was Christmastime or New Year's and ... the bombing was very bad. So, they said they'd have to be very careful if they would have any social activities, but, then, they said they would take whoever wanted to go, by ambulance, to a certain area where they had a party.

SH: Did you wear civilian clothes or did you always wear your uniform?

IK: Oh, no. I didn't have any civilian clothes, didn't have any.

SH: How did the people in England treat you?

IK: Very well, outstanding. They were terrific, very friendly and very giving, and I can't speak too highly of them.

SH: Was this an English hospital that the Americans took over or was it constructed specifically for the US Army?

IK: No, I think it was there already. It was an English hospital.

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

MR: Do you know if there was any black market activity going on, where local people would get goods from the Americans?

IK: Not that I know of.

SH: You have been very kind to show us this wonderful photograph album that documents the different places that you were stationed, from Fort Dix right on through. After leaving England, you went over to Belgium first, right?

IK: No, no, France.

SH: You went to France first.

IK: We went to France, ... I think, forty days after D-Day and we were in France for one year, see, and then, after that one year, we went to Belgium.

SH: Were you aware of what was going to happen on June 6, 1944? Where you were stationed, could you see a continuous build-up of forces? Would you say that you knew what was going to happen, but you did not know when?

IK: That's correct.

SH: Did anyone come to you and say, “You have ten days to get ready to go?”

IK: No, no, nothing like that.

SH: What do you remember about being in England on June 6th?

IK: Well, we knew that we would eventually be going over to France. They told us that, and then, we were just preparing, you know. ... The nurses, mostly, were on the twenty-mile hikes. I would go in the ambulance with the driver. ... Fortunately, I wasn’t asked or forced to go on the hike with them. I went along to provide any refreshment or anything that they needed.

SH: Can you tell us more about your preparations for going to France? Did anything change for you, your responsibilities?

IK: ... No. We didn’t have any hospital duties or anything like that. That was all getting ready before we went over to France. That’s when ... we had hikes and the nurses, mostly, were on that training period. I was along to provide refreshments or something like that.

SH: Were there still patients in the hospital?

IK: No. ... We weren’t connected with the hospital at all at that time.

SH: Were you sent to a different area of England?

IK: No, that’s when we were in Wales. ...

SH: You went from Mansfield to Wales. Which city in Wales were you nearest?

IK: Llandudno.

SH: How long were you there? How long did this training last?

IK: I think it was six weeks.

SH: Was it intense training or did you have a lot of free time?

IK: We had a lot of free time, and then, that’s when I went to services, in Llandudno, and that’s where I met these very nice [people], the Kleins. There was a couple that said, “Would I care to come to their home for ... dinner on Sunday?”

SH: Really?

IK: Yes. So, they came and picked me up. We were billeted at different places in Llandudno.

SH: There is a photograph. Are they the people with the dog?

IK: Right, yes, and they had a beautiful home situated, like, on the hilltop, and then, down below was, like, a brook, very, very lovely home.

SH: Were there other service personnel there for the services?

IK: I went, I think, with another nurse. ... I think her name was Mary and they invited both of us for dinner.

SH: Mary Cohen?

IK: Yes.

MR: Did you keep in touch with the Kleins?

IK: Yes, I did. In fact, ... they were so nice to me, I asked my mother to send me some make-up, because they couldn't get that in England, and she sent me, you know, different things that I had asked for to give to them, because they were so great. ... There was another couple that invited us for the holiday and they had us for overnight ... and they had two daughters. I have pictures of those there.

SH: Did the Kleins have family members involved in the war for England?

IK: Not that I know of. ... That was strange. The husband was Jewish and the wife was not. So, she was asked to live with their family before they got married, so [that] she would learn the customs and everything of the Jewish religion.

SH: Had his family lived in England for a long time? Did you know?

IK: I didn't know.

SH: From Wales, where did you go, to Lincoln?

IK: No, no. From Wales, we waited there until we got our orders ... to go to France.

SH: How did you travel to France?

IK: By boat.

SH: Was it a troop transport?

IK: ... Yes. ... Since I was the head of my dietary department, I was given a private cabin and the nurses all had to go in one big room where they had hammocks, and then, I ate with the officers, because ... it was very British and very caste system.

SH: Really?

IK: Yes, very much so.

SH: When you were in England, were there any African-American troops stationed there?

IK: I didn't see them.

SH: What was the first thing they had you do in France?

IK: Well, in France, it was altogether different. Our set-up was the tents. Our hospital was a tent hospital and we were all situated [separately]. The nurses had a certain area and I shared one tent with the head of the Red Cross. Yes, she's there.

SH: Where was she from?

IK: From Ohio, I think, and then, we serviced an airport.

RM: I would assume that things got busier at the hospital. Did your duties change at all? Did you have to switch from dietician's work to some nurse's work?

IK: No, no nurse's work at all. They had enough nurses. They had a whole Corps of Nursing.

SH: What kind of activities did the Red Cross organize?

IK: Well, they went to the troops and everything else and ... contacted families for them and things like that and ... they did activities with them.

SH: You were still in charge of the dieticians. Did any of your duties change?

IK: ... No, not really, because I still worked.

SH: How far were you from the front at that point?

IK: In France, we were pretty close. ... We landed in (Le Hay-Du-Prix?) and that's when the paratroopers were coming in there and ... there was a lot of casualties. ... Even coming into France, before we got into [the area], we were all put in a great, big tent, and then, ... they were still bombing and everything else. So, they said you had to sleep with your helmet on.

SH: Were you able to do that?

IK: Well, it seemed awfully silly to me, [laughter] you have your helmet on and the rest of you is without any protection.

SH: How long did that condition last?

IK: Well, that was our beginning, yes, entrance. We came in on Omaha Beach, and then, we were there, I can't recall just how long we were in that. ...

SH: Coming into Omaha Beach so soon after D-Day, did you see any of the carnage or the destruction?

IK: No, no, ... not when we came.

SH: There were no ships that were still incapacitated.

IK: No, no. There were bunkers. ... You saw the bunkers, but that was it.

SH: When you came in on Omaha, did you set up there or were you able to go forward?

IK: No. From there, we went to (Le Hay-Du-Prix?), and then, that's where we had our hospital unit.

SH: Is that where you stayed while you were in France? You did not move again.

IK: Yes, yes, no, yes.

SH: How many casualties would come in in a day?

IK: I couldn't [tell you]. See, that was under the nurses. That didn't come under my area at all.

SH: Okay. I thought maybe you would know because, all of a sudden, you had requests for forty meals instead of four.

IK: No, no.

SH: How often were you on call?

IK: You weren't on call.

SH: Where you responsible for certain hours or were you on duty all the time?

IK: No, ... almost like nine to five or something like that, or nine to six.

SH: What would you do in the evenings, when you were not at the hospital?

IK: Well, you got to visit with some of your friends, the nurses. ... I was very close with the Red Cross [worker] and a couple of the nurses, and then, as I said, we had one day a week [off] and that's when I went, really, antiquing different places.

SH: Even in France?

IK: Yes, yes. In fact, I brought back *Quimper*. I think I have it [still]. There's a green dish right over there. That's it.

SH: Had you met anyone, when you were either at Fort Dix or in England or France, that was special to you? Did you have a boyfriend or did you date a whole bunch of people?

IK: No, ... because I had a boyfriend from Fort Dix.

SH: Was he still at Fort Dix and you were the one in Europe?

IK: Yes, right, and then, ... when I was in England, ... he asked if he could possibly get sent to England, which he did, and then, we got together for a weekend and that's when ... we thought we might plan to get married, but you need sixty days notice, which is very fortunate.

SH: Did you change your mind?

IK: Yes, yes.

SH: Okay.

MR: It seems from these pictures that male soldiers were living right next to the women. Was there any fraternization that you knew about?

IK: Yes, there was. In fact, one very good friend was; see, they didn't want the officers going with enlisted personnel. It was very taboo, very much so. So, I didn't fraternize. [laughter] ... We were very good friends. They were really great, every one of them, because we had reunions every year. In fact, our outfit has [had] reunions for the past sixty years and I get mail from them, or the one that plans it, in fact, letters and everything else, correspondence, pictures and notes and everything else.

SH: Working with the Red Cross, were you asked to visit some of the wards and help with the morale of the men?

IK: No, no. They had their own department. They had quite a few and they were excellent, very good.

SH: When you were stationed in France, did you have any interaction with the French people?

IK: [No]. ... They were not friendly or cordial, right. ... See, now, in England, the enlisted personnel, quite a few of them, got married to English girls.

SH: Really?

IK: Oh, yes. There was a very different, very, very different, atmosphere and everything else, and the French people were not friendly or cordial.

SH: Some of the photographs show that you did get into Paris and Versailles.

IK: Yes, I had a weekend, yes. ...

SH: How was that?

IK: That was great and I went with, you know, different nurses and ... we went to the *Folies Bergere*.

SH: Did you really?

IK: Yes.

SH: How was it to be a young, single American woman in France? Did you get to do things that you probably would never have even tried if you had stayed in the States?

IK: Well, everything I did, I didn't do before. [laughter] In fact, ... we were stationed near an airport, so, on my days off, I'd go down to the ... airfield and, there, I spent the day with them and they'd take me on their flight, when they'd go to pick up patients. We went to Paris, and then, we'd stop in different bases and have lunch or something and come back for the day. That was great.

SH: How long were you stationed there before you were moved to Belgium?

IK: Well, we were in France for one year.

SH: Did you go to the Riviera before or after you went to Belgium?

IK: Yes, no, before.

SH: You told us off the tape that your mother had to send you a bathing suit and we have proof here, in these photographs, that you look good in a bathing suit. [laughter]

IK: That was a week at the Riviera and that was wonderful. We went down by train and we had a really great time.

SH: There is one photograph here that depicts the Fourth of July games.

IK: That was in (Pink Knee?) Park, before we went overseas, before we went to France, and that's when we had the training, because it was during the summer.

SH: This was in Wales.

IK: Right.

RM: Did the women have a curfew?

IK: Well, see, they came under the nurses' restrictions. I didn't and I did what I wanted and I didn't have to report to anybody, which was [nice].

SH: That would be my next question, who did you have to answer to?

IK: No, I didn't.

SH: Were you asked to not travel alone? Were there any cautionary requests?

IK: Well, when I went, like, on a day [trip], I went with somebody else. I didn't go by myself.

...

SH: Did they recommend that you do that?

IK: No, they didn't. ...

SH: Did you travel by jeep? Did you have a driver?

IK: Well, when I went up to Mansfield, I went by ordinary train and I was traveling with a bunch of miners and they were wonderful, too. They really were taking care of me.

SH: When you were in France, how did you travel?

IK: Well, ... the only time I traveled was on my day off and I'd go to an Army base and, one day, I think I took ... a ride in one of those armored vehicles and I went to see what that was like.

SH: Was it exciting to fly for the first time?

IK: I loved it. Yes, I really did.

SH: Did you take a train when you went to the Riviera?

IK: Yes, and it was compartments.

SH: How many of you went together?

IK: Well, I just went with another nurse. See, now, the enlisted personnel went to Nice and the officers went to Juan-les-Pins, which was a very quiet, very lovely area. So, each one had their separate place.

SH: When you went to places like this, did anyone talk about what they had been through?

IK: No.

SH: It was all kept private.

IK: Right, nobody talks about it and, when we were in the Riviera, we each had a friend who was a pilot and nobody discussed anything.

SH: Where was your pilot from?

IK: Waco, Texas.

SH: When you returned from the Riviera, you were then transferred to Belgium.

IK: Yes, after being a year in the tents and everything, and, in Belgium, ... it was a hospital that was vacated by the Germans and it was a very well-established and ... constructed hospital.

SH: You had your wards, your accommodations and your kitchens.

IK: Right, right. We all had very good rooms.

SH: At the tent hospital, did you have your own tent, with the Red Cross person?

IK: Yes, ... right. We had our own small tent.

SH: How did you take care of everyday things, like showers and laundry?

IK: ... They had showers in a tent and, ... like, all the nurses had to take a shower together.

SH: Did your uniform change from when you were in England to when you were in France? Did you dress differently?

IK: Well, in the tents, we had fatigues and things like that, because it was muddy and things like that, ... and then, in Belgium, we had regular uniforms and I know I got an outfit, ... a new skirt and jacket, that was from France. It was an Eisenhower jacket.

SH: In some of the photographs, we see Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna. Did you attend any of the USO shows?

IK: No, no. They came to the wards and, when we were in the Riviera, they were right out in the open and spoke to us and we asked if we could take their pictures and they were very obliging about that.

SH: They were not putting on a show. They were just there resting as well.

IK: ... Yes, but they had, you know, formerly gone to the hospitals, but I didn't see them perform.

SH: Okay. They had not come to your hospital, where you were stationed in France.

IK: Well, they were there in France; just which place they were performing at, I didn't know.

SH: Did you see any USO performances?

IK: No. ...

SH: When you went to Belgium and entered this hospital formerly occupied by the Germans, did you see anything that they left behind? Had they taken everything with them? You saw the buzz bombs when you were in Belgium.

IK: In Belgium, right.

SH: What would they have you do when they knew one was coming? Were you a fatalist? Did you say to yourself, "If it is going to happen, it is going to happen?"

IK: ... Really, because we didn't know when anything was going to happen.

SH: You just kept on with your daily activities.

IK: That's right.

SH: There were no air raid shelters.

IK: No.

SH: Did you ever see Eisenhower or any of the people that we read about in the history books?

IK: No, not at all.

SH: How long were you in Belgium?

IK: A year.

SH: Did you keep abreast of how the war was progressing?

IK: Not really. ... When things were bad, they would warn us, you see, like, when we were in Belgium and ... the buzz bombs were still coming over, they didn't have any activities that we would attend.

SH: How did the people in Belgium treat you?

IK: Very, very nicely, very nicely, very friendly, could not be nicer.

SH: Were you ever able to go to services while you were in Belgium?

IK: Well, ... we had a service with all the ... Army personnel for Passover.

SH: Did you?

IK: Yes.

SH: In your position as a dietician, did you ever have any interaction with the chaplains?

IK: No.

SH: Did you have any knowledge of how the war was progressing in the Pacific?

IK: No, we didn't. ...

SH: What was it like when the war ended in Europe? Where were you? What did you see?

IK: Well, I was in Belgium and I was supposed to get a leave to go to Switzerland and that was cancelled. They said that our outfit had been there over three years and it was time for them to all [go home]. We were all going to be sent home. ...

SH: I do not remember the date that you were sent home, but had the treaty ending the war in Europe been signed?

IK: ... Yes, right.

SH: You came back on the *Argentine*.

IK: Yes.

SH: How was that? Was it a celebration the whole way back?

IK: No, it was ... just glad to be going home. That was the attitude.

SH: Was there any thought among you that you would then have to go on to the Pacific?

IK: No, because they'd been over there ... over three years. ... They had served their tour of duty.

SH: You came back into New York.

IK: Yes, and then, to ... Camp Kilmer. ...

SH: Did you work at Camp Kilmer then or were you discharged from there?

IK: No, just discharged from there.

SH: What did you decide that you were going to do now? You had seen the world.

IK: I wanted to settle down.

SH: Did you?

IK: Yes.

SH: Had you met someone at that point?

IK: Not yet, no.

SH: What did you do after being discharged?

IK: Shortly after I came back, my brother-in-law arranged to have a friend that he thought was very nice call me up, which he did, and he came to the house and it was a very interesting meeting and that's the one I got married to.

SH: This was Mr. Kamich.

IK: Right, right.

SH: What had he done during the war?

IK: Well, he worked for the government. ... He was a chemical engineer, but he worked writing manuals for the use of firearms.

SH: He worked for the government. He was like the civil servant that you had been.

IK: Right, right.

SH: However, he managed to stay in the Civil Service.

IK: Right, right.

SH: Where had he been sent during the war?

IK: He was in Camp Kilmer, also, ... and he did a lot of translations, because he was originally from Russia. So, he ... did a lot of translations from Russian into English.

SH: Can you tell us a bit about your life after the war? You married shortly thereafter.

IK: Right, and then, I wanted to settle down and have a family and, after I had my two sons, I decided I wasn't going to go into dietetics, that I was going to take up teaching. So, I went back and got education credits.

SH: At Douglass?

IK: Rutgers.

SH: Okay, the graduate school.

IK: Right, and then, ... I taught for twenty-eight years after that.

SH: Where did you teach?

IK: In South River.

RM: At your old high school?

IK: No, I taught elementary, first, second and third grades.

MR: Your survey says that you got married at ...

IK: At Douglass.

MR: Where?

IK: Woodlawn.

MR: Okay. It is gorgeous.

SH: What did Mr. Kamich do after the war was over? Did he continue to work for the government?

IK: Yes, he did. ...

SH: Were you able to stay in South River?

IK: Right.

SH: Do your sons live close by?

IK: Well, I have one son and he's living in Flemington and commutes to New York every day and he married a dietician.

SH: You know he is being fed well. [laughter]

IK: Right, and then, I have one grandson who's a chef at Lambertville Station. Are you familiar with ... Lambertville Station, in Lambertville? and he's getting married to another chef in June.

SH: I hope they are in the same kitchen or they will never see each other.

IK: Well, they're not, so, they have a hard time, you know, getting together.

SH: Where does your other son live?

IK: He's in Kansas, Topeka, yes. We keep in touch.

SH: Thank you so much. Is there anything in your notes that we did not ask you about that we should have?

IK: No, I just put down, you know, where I was, the years, ... so [that] I'd know when I was in England and France, and then, in Belgium. We were stationed in Antwerp.

SH: Have you stayed involved with the NJC/Douglass Alumnae Associations? Are you involved with them?

IK: Not now, no. See, I had a stroke and I'm limited. I can't get around unless I get transportation again. So, Angel takes me to where I have to go to.

SH: This has been a true delight. Thank you for your hospitality and your wonderful story.

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

Reviewed by Kelly Curtin 10/12/05

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/5/05

Reviewed by Ida Perlmutter Kamich 1/9/06