RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH BERNARD W. KOFT

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

KURT PIEHLER
and
MIKE O'NEIL

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TRANSCRIPT BY

G. DOROTHY SABATINI

Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Bernard W. Koft, on February 28, 1996 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Phieler and …

Michael O'Neil: Mike O'Neil

KP: I guess I would like to begin by asking about your parents, who were both immigrants?

Bernard Koft: That's correct. They immigrated to the United States in 1906. They were married in Kiev, in the Ukraine. My mother is actually Polish. My father is a mixture of Ukrainian and German. Although the name would sound German, actually it's a Ukrainian name, that's been shortened.

KP: Did your father speak German or Ukrainian?

BK: Russian, because they both were in the school system … that was run by the railroad, [which] both of their parents worked for. So, therefore, … Russian was their prime language, although Ukrainian was something they were quite capable with, too. But, their educational language was Russian.

KP: Your father worked for the railroad?

BK: Yes, before he was married, he worked for the Russian railroad. And actually he was a telegrapher in the Russo-Japanese War out in Manchuria, for the railroad base out there.

KP: Did he ever talk about his experiences?

BK: Oh, once in a while.

KP: What did he say about it? This was a crucial turning point for Russia.

BK: Yeah, well, he felt that the generals and the others goofed terribly. [Laughter]

KP: He said this?

BK: See, he was not in the service. He was with the railroad, but because of the railroad's needs for communication, he was a telegrapher in the town of Harebin, which was the center of the Russian activity out in Manchuria.

KP: Your father had a fairly stable job. What led him to immigrate to the United States?

BK: [Laughter] Well, actually, see he was with the Orthodox Russian Church, which is related to Constantinople Eastern Rite, and my mother was Roman Catholic. When they were married there was a big [Mr. Koft makes a gesture illustrating a split] like this between the families, and my father's mother, just before they were married, said he was no longer considered her son. And therefore, he was eligible for the draft. Before that, the mothers could keep their eldest son away from the draft in Russia.

KP: So, by marrying a Roman Catholic, your father …

BK: They got married, and they went to Austria on their honeymoon, and kept on going to the United States. They were accepted by an aunt of my father's, who then lived in Michigan, as a[n] immigrant status that they were in charge of.

KP: So, but for this marriage, your father and mother might never immigrated?

BK: That's correct, yes. Well, there's … everything in one's life that you don't know. What happened? See, if I wasn't working at the Freshman Reception, when I was a Sophomore, I might never have met my wife!

KP: You're actually the second person that I have interviewed, who met their wife at the Freshman Reception. [Laughter] Ralph Schmidt, also met his wife at the Freshman Reception. Your parents initially came into Michigan?

BK: That's correct. St. Joe Benton Harbor, Michigan area where his aunt had a very large farm, and a couple of other relatives in that general area, and then, he started working there with them. And because they were all … she was German, and because everybody he did the work for was German, they couldn't pronounce that Ukrainian name, so he cut the end off it and used Koft as the name.

KP: Do you know what the original name was?

BK: Kofteneuk, which if translated means a "coat maker" in … Ukrainian. Most names can be translated into something.

KP: How did your family work its way down from Michigan to New Jersey? You were born in Hammonton, New Jersey.

BK: Well, they were talking about going back over to Russia … and had come to Philadelphia on their trip to begin that, when, the First World War broke out, and they couldn't go overseas. So, he got a job in Philadelphia, in one of the private shipbuilding companies there … Then, they thought maybe they'd go into farming and bought this farm out there in Hammonton, and in [the] summer of that [year] my father said, "No way," and went back to work in shipbuilding. He spent most of the years that I knew, or really remember, working as a shipbuilder with the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

KP: It's interesting that your parents, in some ways, they were encouraged inward because of family disputes, and they planned to go back to Russia. How did they respond to the United States? Were they glad that they had not gone back?

BK: They were going to go back to see if they can resurrect the family ties, I guess, originally. But, of course, after the First World War there was no way they wanted to go back, after the communist regime took over.

KP: Did your family stay in touch with relatives in Russia in the 1920s?

BK: A fair bit, yes. My mother, in particular, stayed in touch with her brothers and sisters, in particular. One of them was killed during the revolution. A brother or sister, the last I heard, was still living in Kiev but, that's … about 12 years ago I last heard anything about that. A brother was out in Uzbekistan, and lost all contact. My mother had some contacts with her family right after the Second World War, and she would send them some old clothes and things like that. Of course, my joke along this line is, whenever they didn't want us, my brother, my sister and I, to understand what they were talking about, they'd talk in Russian. So, I learned Russian in self-defense. [laughter]

MO: Do you know how your father felt, being with your German relatives in Michigan, coming from Russia before the First World War?

BK: I never heard anything about that, in particularly. This was his mother's older sister. There, was about a fourteen or fifteen year spread between the two sisters … Every once in a while, his mother apparently tried to make some contacts, indirectly, because she had heard that there was some grandchildren. She never knew about me, of course, until after the Second World War, and she died, actually, in Germany. They were, in the middle of the Ukraine. The German Army came right through there, and she was dragged back to Germany but dad's father died while trying to avoid the invasion. And since she was of German origin, she was special … not a prisoner of war, particularly, but then, I guess, somewhere right after that, she passed away. She was in her nineties at the time.

KP: So, your grandmother was quite a woman.

BK: Oh, yeah. She ran everything from what my father said. [Laughter]

KP: Did you grow up in Hammonton or Woodbury?

BK: Woodbury Heights actually is the town that I grew up in from about the age of four. Graduated from grade school in Woodbury Heights, Woodbury High School, and then came to Rutgers.

KP: Your father commuted into Philadelphia?

BK: The Philadelphia Navy Yard is in the south end of Philadelphia and they had a ferry that ran from National Park, New Jersey right into the Yard. They had a car pool kind of arrangement that went back and forth that way. It was only about, maybe ten miles from the house.

KP: It sounds like your father had fairly steady work during the Great Depression, or was it more uneven then?

BK: Well, he had some problems in the '30s, as I remember. There was no work, essentially. But, they had some money that they had sort of saved, that was going to pay for the trip back to Russia, that they were still managing to hang onto … They didn't spend it all in buying this house in Woodbury Heights in 1925.

KP: What type of town was Woodbury while you were growing up? What are your most distinct memories?

BK: … Well, Woodbury Heights was a small town of about 2,000 population, I guess, at the most … I guess, having that relatively small population, those kids of my age at the time … we use to play ball together and do things together, go fishing together and that sort of stuff. It was fairly close-knit, as long as you weren't considered one of the "sissies". [Laughter]

KP: Were there any ethnic divisions in the town?

BK: No. Well, black and white. There was no blacks in Woodbury Heights to speak of, except this one farmer had a black family on the farm. So, that the school only had, I would say, about five or six blacks in the entire eight grades and they were the kids of this black family that worked for this one big farm. But, we were very much on the edge of two fairly large black communities that were really established during the Civil War times … before and with the Underground Railroad … The town of Jerrico was one of them North Woodbury is another one and another part of Woodbury was. Because Woodbury was a large Quaker settlement in that area. The one you hear about mostly is over around Haddonfield, but there was an active Quaker community in Woodbury too, Quaker community.

KP: In terms of your peer ethnic groups, were there any Ukrainians in town?

BK: No, the closest along that line was a couple of Lithuanian families. But, we were not in an ethnic, shall we say, enclave at all.

KP: So, there was a lot of older generation Americans. Quakers and other …

BK: Not so much in Woodbury Heights. Woodbury had a lot of older Quakers … But, in Woodbury Heights, I would say, the largest percentage probably would have been Irish – German. My best friend's last name was McCue so that's Irish. I was trying to think of some of the others but …

KP: How good was your education? Your elementary and high school education, particularly in terms of preparing you for Rutgers?

BK: Well, I don't have much to say one way or another on it. I mean, each step seemed to go very nicely. I came from a relatively small town, relatively low activity kind of thing, into the activities of college. As a matter-of-fact, that's not unusual now. That often always a problem when I would get Freshmen to advise, you know.

KP: The South Jersey you were living in was very rural.

BK: Yes. At that time, yes in particular.

KP: Did you work when you were in high school?

BK: No. There weren't any jobs available. [Laughter] See, I graduated from high in school in '39. The '35 to '39 period was when I was in high school and there was not much available.

KP: You never worked, say, at harvest time, at any of the local farms?

BK: Well, okay, if you want to call it work. I did a little bit of caddying at the golf course, to pick up a few bucks … That went down the tube when the clubhouse burned up, and they closed up the whole thing. [Laughter] I used to pick raspberries, strawberries, and sell them and things like that.

KP: But, nothing steady?

BK: No.

KP: You mentioned that your town was divided, among the kids you were growing up with, between the regular guys and the sissies.

BK: About every class there might be one or two. … They didn't participate in sports. That was the main thing against them.

KP: So sports was …

BK: Yeah, if you played baseball, football, or whatever, that was something else.

KP: Did you play on any of the high school teams?

BK: Not really, I tried out for baseball three or four times, but didn't make the team. I wasn't heavy enough. I was almost the same height I am now and, about sixty-five pounds lighter. I could hide behind a telephone pole at that time. [Laughter] Although I could throw a curve ball, that wasn't enough in high school. Especially since were three guys that were really good pitchers …

KP: What prompted you to come to Rutgers?

BK: Well, I was always interested in biology and I looked at a couple of different schools … I started to look at Bucknell and Temple but then again, at that time the tuition at Rutgers was also an important factor for a New Jersey State resident ... The cost of tuition was about 150, 200 dollars a semester or something like that, you know.

KP: How did your parents feel about education? Did they envision you going to college or was it something that you planned yourself?

BK: Mother was behind all of us with a pitchfork, "You're going to school!" [Laughter]

KP: Oh, really.

BK: Oh, very positive along that line. All three of us went through … college. My sister had a Master's Degree in Social Science, social work. My brother has a Ph.D. in Chemistry from Temple.

KP: So, it was equally important for your sister?

BK: She was the oldest one, yeah. Definitely. She had to go to school. She got a Bachelors Degree from Temple, and a Master's from Tulane. My brother got all his degrees at Temple.

KP: So, it was never a question whether or not you would go, but where?

BK: … Something like that.

KP: You were interested in biology. Where did that come from?

BK: I can remember back in grade school being interested in plants and insects, but primarily, in insects … Okay, there was an ant colony here, you know, and I'd fuss with that, and I guess, when I was in seventh grade I found a swarm of bees and a friend of my sister's had kept bees, so I got some equipment and ended up being a bee-keeper for many years. Up until I hurt my back about fifteen years ago, I used to do a lot of work with bees. I was the only (faculty?) member here, who sold honey, and I could walk into the library, and the women would say, "Oh, here comes our 'honey man'". [laughter]

KP: You came to Rutgers in September of 1939. You were in one of the last classes, probably the last class, that had a "normal" school cycle, until December 7, 1941, then it sped up. But, when you get to the Class of '44 then …

BK: Yeah. … Those who were drafted, or enlisted and then came back, they were really, officially, the Class of '48 or something like that, if they got a Bachelor's Degree. My college roommate was 4F and he was one of the few that ended up getting a degree in 1944 … He was a year behind me, and ended up in the Class of '44.

KP: In '44?

BK: In '44. There weren't too many of them … Well, for that matter, in my graduating class there was only about eighty here for graduation. There were some who had finished up in January, and there were others who were granted a degree "in absence." There was about fifteen or twenty of us I guess, somewhere in that neighborhood, who were at that time, in the Navy, in the Officer's Training Program at Columbia, who were given a couple of days off to come back to graduation. We outnumbered just about anybody else. But, it was rather weird to see this lineup of Navy uniforms, dressed in white, up there on the platform.

KP: Other people were in robes?

BK: Yeah, we weren't supposed to wear robes, you know, over our uniforms.

KP: One of the things that students have to do is they have to go through back issues of the *Targum*, and one of the sticking things was when your class entered in September 1939, President Clothier gave a long address about World War II and basically said …

BK: In '39?

KP: Clothier basically said to the incoming freshmen that, "World War II wasn't really our fight, it was Europe's fight." He would later reverse his position. What did you know about Europe during the 1930s?

BK: Well, I was always interested in geography, so I knew all of the areas, and what have you, and I knew about the hassle that the Nazis were behind at the time. And, of course, at that time, there was a very large "isolationist group" within the United States that thought "Let's not get involved in this, let's not get into this war," that was already started, in a way ... It was minor. Things were going on already, not the major part of it. [As] a matter-of-fact, there were a number of major politicians, nationally, that were very big against really getting involved. FDR, of course, was obviously pushing the help to England, to try to keep them from going under. That was obvious, and I would say that the attitude changed somewhere already in '40, maybe '41, before Pearl Harbor was already a major change. But, when Pearl Harbor hit, of course, it was an absolute "about face" for everybody.

KP: How did you feel about the war? Did you feel that it was something we should get involved in or did you view it as distant … Were you interested in it?

BK: You mean before I …

KP: Yeah, before 1940 – 41.

BK: I really don't have too much of a memory on that, other than the Nazis had to be contained somehow, but I didn't know how. I was very anti-Nazi, even though I had German background. I felt that this was a very unfair political business. But, I was not about to run down and enlist in … the English Army or something like that.

MO: How did your parents feel about it, being from Russia and Poland?

BK: They weren't happy about what was going on in Germany, nor were they happy about the communists bit in Russia. So, basically, they were against them. I wouldn't say, very vehemently. But, then when the Nazis turned on their so-called Russian allies, of course, they were very much against Germany at the time then. That's my memory about that. I can't say that we discussed it an awful lot. As I say, much of this discussion would transpire when they would have some of the Ukrainian friends visiting. Which happened, more than a few times a

year. They'd come out from Philadelphia to visit then they'd get yakking on this. And, boy, the arguments would get kind of high because two of these friends had been in the Cossacks before World War I, and I'm not sure of the other two. But they would get in big arguments. The Russian would get so rapid and so loud that I couldn't translate. [Laughter]

KP: What about your fellow Rutgers students, how did they come down in '39, '40 and '41 about the war? Do you have any impressions about that?

BK: I don't have any real impressions about that.

KP: Did you know any very pro interventionists or any American Firsters that stood out?

BK: Not off the top of my head, no.

KP: I guess, my first question in relating to Rutgers is academics. How did you find the biology major?

BK: I wish I didn't have to take Physics. [laughter]

KP: I guess this brings back memories.

BK: And that was taught here at that time.

KP: Yes, I know. A lot of people …

BK: This was the Physics building. Yeah, it was quite a challenge in Physics and Chemistry.

KP: So, you found Biology to be the easier science.

BK: Of course, I was much more interested in it than the others and that made it easy for me to get involved. And actually, my father had gone back to try to visit his family that summer of '39, and got trapped there when the German Army invaded Russia. He said, well, the way things were going you didn't know whether his parents would stay alive very long. They were already quite old, so he went back to visit alone and got trapped there … As a result, I had to get a job here on campus, because Mother had to send him money, in order to buy a ticket home by the Swedish or Norwegian Line. Since the British no longer were going, he had a ticket on the White Star Line, to come back. Then he was shunted over to Stockholm, where he got sick and had to pay a hospital bill there. I don't know whether he got pneumonia or something like that, it was a short term thing. So, I had no money. I ended up having to get a job here, and the job ended up being up in the bacteriology lab, … cleaning up glassware and helping to make media and things. "Gee, what do you use all this crap for and all those things?" God, that stuff stinks. You know. [laughter] But, that's where I really [had] gotten involved with microbiology, per se, going up and working for Murray and Anderson on the third floor of New Jersey Hall, at that time.

KP: Since you mentioned it, your father went to Russia at one of the crucial times, what did he say about his experiences visiting there? He had not been back in over three decades.

BK: I don't remember him discussing it too much. Other than, nobody had any rights, I guess, is about the only thing he said …

KP: Did he send you any letters back?

BK: No, no. He'd just barely gotten over there when … You know what hit the fan, and he had just barely gotten to see his mother and father … He had to go to her, she couldn't come to him. And then he barely had gotten to see them when … he was shipped to Stockholm to get him out of Russia … in order to get travel back I guess he was about three weeks plus beyond when he was supposed to be coming back … Mom didn't have any money coming in and what had been stashed in the bank to pay for my expenses here at school was being used by Mom to live on.

KP: Did your mother get a job at this time?

BK: No. Well, she raised more chickens and was selling eggs and things out of the garden and odds and ends in the garden. But that was about it, you know.

KP: Did you have an NYA job?

BK: That was it … NYA job. You know, at thirty-five cents an hour.

KP: But, that job was a crucial. Do you think you would have gone into Microbiology but for that?

BK: It's hard to say. I mean, certainly I was interested in biology and maybe I would have discovered it before four years were up. But … then I discovered it early on, as a freshman really, and it made a big difference, in terms of selection of courses, in my junior year in particular.

KP: You knew this was the year you were going to …

BK: Yes, by … the middle of my sophomore year this was what I was going to concentrate on. I had to take Botany in my freshman year, and I had to take Zoology my sophomore year. Microbiology would be in … the junior year but there were other electives in the Microbiology or Bacteriology courses that I ended up taking as preference to say, other things in Zoology or Botany.

KP: You mentioned that Professor Nelson was your favorite professor.

BK: He was in Zoology, of course, but … I took a course in Parasitology with him … We all thought of him as a very special person. He really came through to us … He was never, shall we say, unavailable if you had something to discuss with him. …When we talked and he was

saying, “Well, you’ve got to go to Graduate School.” You know, that kind of thing, "In this field if you really want to get somewhere in it …"

KP: So, you had thought of Graduate School when you first came here?

BK: No, not when I came here, no … hadn't really. I had taken one thing at a time, I guess, at that stage of the game. [Laughter]

KP: So, you didn’t know what you would do with your biology, or did you have a career in mind?

BK: Not when I came here, no. I mean those who, everybody else were either going to medical school or dental school, and I had no real great desires to do that.

KP: You’re not a frustrated doctor or dentist?

BK: No, no, no.

KP: Did you join a fraternity?

BK: Yeah. I … joined a fraternity at the end of my sophomore year. It was Alpha Kappa Pi then … Then things, sort of, folded during the Second World War, and what was left nationally became part of Alpha Sigma Phi, they combined them.

KP: Why did you decide to join a fraternity? Was it to get out of the dorms?

BK: Well, I wasn’t in the dorms. At that time you had a hard time getting a dorm. I was renting rooms. Well, my freshman year I was on Eastern Avenue, my sophomore year I was over on Hardenburg Street … Part of it, of course, just meant a place to live, but I think more than anything else was the organized social life. You know, being with other people, and doing things together, and the like. As long as they didn’t go too far out in left field, it was fine, and fortunately, at that time, there wasn't much drunken parties. I mean, yes, there were … part of that was the fact that you weren’t allowed to have beer, even, in the house. So, if we wanted to have a beer party, we went out to East Brunswick in the middle of the Pines, essentially. There was where you dug up sand pits and the like, and were full of water but you had to go through the pine trees and that’s where we used to go hide and have our beer parties. There were only one or two of those a year. [Laughter]

KP: Some people did drink at the fraternity houses and I have heard stories about Dean Metzger and raids?

BK: Oh, yeah. He was great. I remember him coming up in front of Delta Phi, and these guys were carrying out a great, big batch of empty beer cans and they went on social pro for the rest of the year. [laughter]

KP: Which leads me to the inevitable question about Dean Metzger. Many people seem to have a story about Dean Metzger. Did you have an opinion?

BK: Well, I had some contact with him, of course, about having the NYA job. I mean yes, they had an employment little thing here. But, when I was having this problem, I was only here a couple of weeks, and I went and talked to him and he was the one that, sort of, led me into this. But, my best recollection, or funniest recollection of him comes after the war … Since the Navy came to the university and said they wanted to form up this ninety day course for officers, a V7 at Columbia, in April, it was about three weeks before the end of the semester … Metzger called us all in, and talked to us, and said, "Now this is your choice. You have to go to each professor and have him sign this special … chit saying that you would get a good grade based on the work to date, you would not have to … and he would not require you to take the final exams." So, we went around, and I had gotten all the professors to do this, and okay I went off. At the end of the war, [as] I [was] just … applying to graduate school when I got my academic record, and there's a blank space after Biochemistry. I'm trying to think of the name of the professor now. It escapes me this minute. Anyway, I called to find out, and they referred me to Metzger. He said, "Well, when the grades came in, there was a C on your record for Biochemistry and I called in the professor." "You said… you would give a good grade based on work to date. He said, 'C is a damn good grade in my course.' And we argued about this for about a half an hour. And finally I instructed the registrar to not put a grade in your course for Biochemistry, that you got your degree on that basis, you had taken and completed the course adequately, but there was no grade given." [Laughter]

KP: A lot of people have memories of Metzger in Chapel. What did you think of Thursday's Chapel, since you were on campus you had Sunday Chapel, as well?

BK: … I have no real recollections of that so much. No, nothing really comes from that.

KP: You mentioned that you met your wife at the …

BK: Freshman Reception … Well, because I was on this NYA bit and they were setting up the gym for Freshman Reception, to which they would … bring the girls over from NJC, that's now Douglass, and the freshmen of Rutgers together. President, Clothier, and all of the Deans, and what have you, would be there in the reception line. And they had a band playing, you know, a Forties type of band. I wouldn't say it was a national one, but it was a local [band], usually [with] a bunch of students, who had their own band. But, I don't remember exactly what this was. Our job was to take the gym, here on College Avenue, and clean it up. Set up the bandstand and set up the place for the … goodies and what have you, … the water… bubblers, and punch and all that sort of stuff, and set up for the President and the receiving line … We were late getting started because we had a hard time chasing the basketball team practice out of there at the time, in order to get going. So, we were still in the midst of getting things ready when everybody started to come in … There were two young ladies who were from my high school in Woodbury, N.J., that were in this group. The band's already starting to play and they were running over, "Look, every time they played music on our Friday afternoons things back at Woodbury High you were in there dancing. Come on, let's dance." So, I stayed and danced one dance, when I should have been going out the door, you know and about this time, I saw this

redhead come by, … "Boy, what a pretty head of hair. May I have the next dance?" [Laughter] I've been dancing with her ever since. [Laughter]

KP: Did you participate, besides the fraternity, in any clubs or teams or were you really too busy?

BK: Well, I belonged to the Biology Club and I tried out for baseball in my freshman year … Didn't make the team, but, that year they had Intra - Collegiate Baseball Teams. The Ags, and the engineers, and the science majors, and the education group, and we had a league, and I actually played as a relief pitcher … for the science team that year … My sophomore year I didn't go out for sports, because I signed up to take the Civilian Pilot Training program, … the CPT. I have a pilot license, which I have never used, and that was quite a thing on top of my sophomore schedule, in the spring semester. So, I didn't go out for baseball that year because of the time demands, in order to complete that work, flying and what have you. I guess, I ended up with about thirty-six hours solo, and I guess it must be about eighteen and twenty hours, dual instruction. So, I didn't have time then. Then come junior year, … everything hit the fan for WWII. So, although they started to have practice, they discontinued inter-college sports altogether.

MO: Were you still too small when you …

BK: No, well ... I was, shall we say, fairly thin, and what have you. But, my favorite story along that line was I was a relief pitcher, because I could throw all kinds of junk. Not a very fastball pitcher, but I could throw all kinds of crazy things. And the guy, who had been the manager of the team, from the Phys Ed department, ended up going into the service, and Harry Rockafeller was given the job of finishing off the last two or three games as our manager. And it was the last game for us and we were playing the Ags, and the fellah that was pitching was getting tired, obviously. We were behind by about two or three runs, and it was the last inning, and they were first up, and our pitcher let the Ag pitcher get a scratch single, and then he walked the next two, eight straight balls. He never threw a strike. So, Harry Rockafeller says, … "Out." He looks over at me and says, … "In." So, with a little bit of a warm up I said, … "I know these characters." Because I had known two of the three that would come up, they came from down in the Woodbury area, even further down in the farm area. Then we got yakking back and forth, you know, "How do you do?" I struck the three of them out on nine pitches, nine swinging strikes. [Laughter] I could throw a good drop. I could throw a drop that would come in, it would break about this far, and drop about that far, and go right over the center of the plate. They didn't even get a foul ball. [Laughter] I come off, Rocky look like a big didn't say anything. I came back on campus, as a faculty member seventeen years later, and went out to the President's house to be introduced, and Rocky was out there with a new member of the Phys Ed department introducing him, and when I came by he said, "You still throwing curves?" [laughter]

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

BK: … I had a lot to do with setting up the seventy-five minutes periods, is it still in use here?

MO: Eighty minutes.

KP: Eighty minutes, yes, it's still the pattern. We'll have to ask you about that when we get the post war's segment. Did you have a long standing interest in baseball? Did you got to Phillies games while you were growing up? Or was it more that you played?

BK: … More that I played. I went to a few games, but then … the money was a problem then. I mean, I couldn't save enough pennies to go, and my mother would say, "That's not something I can spend money on."

KP: Did you have a longstanding interest in aviation, because you mentioned the Civilian Pilots Training program?

BK: Well, in a way, yes. The reason that I didn't get in the Naval Air Corps was that they decided that my feet were too flat. I said, "If I had a flat rear end to sit there it would make a difference, but what does a flat foot have to do with it?" [Laughter]

KP: So, you would have preferred to go into …

BK: As a matter-of-fact, I went to go to try to get into the V5 program first, and the doctor turned me down. I knew I had flat feet, but I never thought it would be a problem, and I went through this line, and I was rejected for my feet were too flat. I had problems with them, in fact, when I grew a lot back when I was a freshman in high school, and I had gone to a doctor on and had a lot of exercises … So, they didn't hurt, and I could actually hold up the arches, with the muscles, since I had been constantly exercising, "Hell, what am I going to do? My draft number is coming up in about two months. I'll get drafted." So, I went around and down the hall, and got into the line for the V7. Went through … the physical exam, and the doctor looked (not the same doctor). He was looking at me, and lets me stand there for a while and looks over at another, … looks at me a while, and says, "Well, if you can hold those arches up that long, I guess you can pass." [Laughter]

KP: It sounds like you wanted to avoid the draft?

BK: That's correct, yes. I felt that I … for a number of different reasons, I'd have a better choice in doing things as an officer and they're were … a lot of publicity and advertisement about the Officers Training program for this, and Officers' Training program for that, and I could see no reason why I couldn't go in as an officer if I could make it.

KP: What about the Army Air Corp? Had you thought of that as opposed to …

BK: No, I hadn't really at the time … See, they were separate at the time. The Army Air Corp and Navy … I had thought mostly of the Navy. I guess that's because I had so much contact with the Navy people in the Philadelphia Navy Yard, where my father worked … whenever they had an open house day, or things like that, I was always over there going through the ships and the like, as a kid. I don't know that I had anything against the Army Air Corp. Except that as

I'm going down the hall, there's another line going in for the V7. While I'm here in New York, I might as well take care of this. [Laughter]

KP: You had decided not to stay on for advanced ROTC?

BK: That's correct.

KP: Is there a reason? A number of people didn't. What do you recollect about your mandatory ROTC experience? …

BK: Well, it's just like as soon as they said I could get out of the Navy, I said, "Don't stand in front of me." Basically, the military bit was an absolute necessity, but not a way of life that I liked.

KP: It sounds like you did ROTC but it's not something …

BK: I did two years of ROTC, yes. But, I did not sign up for the advanced ROTC. In other words, the … possible military life did really not appeal to me.

KP: A lot of people who I've interviewed about the CAP program have really fond memories of their flight, particularly their final solo flight. What do you remember about your CAP, your instructor, and some of your flights?

BK: Well, I don't remember too much about the instructor. He was pretty good. Some of the funniest things, of course, were we were flying out of Hadley Airport and it was all farms out there … What they use to do a lot was … we'd be flying along, and he'd turn off the motor. You had to find a way to try to land, you know, prevent a crash … These were pretty light planes and it was impossible to land them in open fields. So this was part of the test, actually you had to do. Come down and put it facing into the wind and heading into a big … relatively, big field. And my memory about that was, I'm coming in and he said, "Okay, this is fine." He puts the motor back on. "Take off, take it up." You know, we didn't land, and there was this whole bunch of cows down there. They must have had cottage cheese by the time they got done. I never saw about two dozen cows come right up off of … the ground … It's silent until he puts the motor on full blast with a great roar right over the top of them. I'll bet that farmer was happy. [Laughter] The other one, of course, is a show off. By this time I was dating with Betty, … and we had to practice a whole flock of different maneuvers … I'd gone over NJC, and I could see [a] whole bunch of them out there in the backyard sunning themselves in back of the … dormitories there, … up near the reservoir off, Nichol Avenue, and I wagged the wings and went off to do the practice, [which] I'm supposed to. So, out over the Ag farm road I decided to do what they call, … controlled spins, and what you do is you're supposed to be able to go up to … a certain height, and you've got to be able to put it into a tail spin, and go exactly around twice and head right out the way you were going. And I did that, and I looked back and there wasn't a girl to be seen, and I wasn't even over them, I was, you know, out about where the cow barn is out there … When I got back I called up, [and] she said, "Who were you trying to scare, anyway?" [Laughter] I mean the fact that it went into a tailspin was, well, you know this was

going to be a crash kind of thing, was the attitude that most people would have, not that this was a controlled spin.

KP: I guess one of the questions that I ask everyone is, where were you when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred?

BK: I was in the fraternity house, and there was a great big yell, and everybody goes down to the radio to listen. It was a Sunday, if I remember correctly. Those of us who were on campus were all down there glued to the radio. Swearing at those "Goddamn Japanese."

KP: How much did you know about Japan before the war? You mentioned your interest in geography.

BK: Well, I knew about where it was. I knew about the names of the islands … But, as far as the Japan as such was, I had mostly read in the newspaper about their invasions of various places out there. China problem, down the Malay peninsula and the like. But they, … the press, was really at length about how bad they were in treating the people there, and the like. Our feelings at the time were, "What in the hell do they want all that area for, anyway?"

KP: How much of a shock was Pearl Harbor?

BK: It was quite a large shock. I mean that they would have the nerve to do something like that, and more than anything else, that they were able to do as much damage as they did. That was the shock that bothered most of us. "Where in the hell was our defense system out there?" I think that was the biggest shock when the word came out about how much damage was actually done to the Navy out there.

MO: Did you think that after Pearl Harbor there was more hatred for the Japanese than the Germans?

BK: Oh, yes. Definitely, and of course, there … were more of a German ethnic background here that said, while we hated the Nazis, we didn't hate the Germans quite so much. Here Japan and the Japanese were synonymous at the time. Even though when you look back at it, at the time, it was the ruling military group that you had to blame, not the people themselves. But … yes, say there was a large Japanese group out in California and the hatred there was quite intense, and that's why so many of them were … dragged off and put in camps, concentration camps, even though many were born here in the United States. But, I had a Japanese friend after the war, who was into Microbiology, and we got talking about that. He said it made a major difference in his life, that's a real positive. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "By getting dragged out of there, stuck in the camp, I was no longer going to be working in this grocery store, selling Japanese food, and everything led around, and the like, and then I qualified for going for … a higher education, and I went on and got a Ph.D., which I may not have ever had a chance to do if my life hadn't been disrupted at the time." He said, "There were a number of others that went on to much greater things because they got dragged out of the, shall we say, the narrow part of life that they were facing."

KP: That's interesting. After Pearl Harbor, did you have an urge to enlist or did you have the notion that you wanted to finish …

BK: I wanted to finish school.

KP: Did you think that you would be able to do that?

BK: No, I was kind of worried about it. That's … why when the V5 and the V7 were published. At the time they wanted you to get your degree. A V5 ended up taking people a little bit beforehand, but they put them in schools where they could get what they were missing, if they had only one year to go or something like that. So, a lot of people got degrees from other schools even though, they, let's say, they were in V5 and up through three years here at Rutgers. They transferred back all but, maybe, one course that they had to take back here … to finish up. Whereas, the V7 didn't do that, and for the most part they held to the idea that you wouldn't be taken, until you got your degree, and that was why the Metzger bit. [Laughter]

KP: So, you enlisted in July of '42, and the Navy, unlike the Army ASTP, kept their promise and you were able to finish Rutgers?

BK: Yeah.

KP: What did you think of accelerated course work? Since Rutgers had made a number of concessions, as a science major, what did you think of accelerated sessions?

BK: Well in science, [it] was not so easily done. About the only place where it had a real positive [impact] was for those going to medical school, or dental school. Where the dental schools would say, "All right, you don't have to get all of this in, okay, you can accelerate." And then let's say, as a first year medical student, "You can transfer your course credit in anatomy, or whatever it is, back as your biology." That was done in a few cases, so that a lot of the accelerated program really as far as biology was concerned was of … real use to the pre-meds, and the pre-dents.

KP: But in terms of the course material that you have to go over, it is a lot of material in a short amount of time.

BK: I didn't really run into much of that.

KP: Even in the summer sessions?

BK: … Well, I didn't take the summer session. No, in other words, the normal progression of course work was what I had signed up for, such that I would finish up. About the only thing that was accelerated was [that] they eliminated, let's say, Spring break or whatever, and they eliminated Easter vacation, and they eliminated a number of things, and they started early instead of, at that time, it was about the last week in September by the time we'd come to school. So they started early … So that, actually, my program did not falter very much, in other words, I

didn't have much of that so called, cramming. So the pre meds had some of this particularly for their BS courses. You know what BS courses [are], of course? [Laughter]

KP: [laughter] I've heard …

BK: History [laughs]

KP: You've already mentioned some of the changes due to the war, particularly with the athletic programs. What other changes did you notice after December 7th, in terms of life at Rutgers? What stayed the same, and what changed very dramatically?

BK: Well, the biggest dramatic [change] was the bringing onto the campus the Army education group that was based over here in Kilmer, but would come, and then later on, they even took over many of the fraternity houses that went empty, when we left … I guess they started to do that actually in the Fall of '42. So, that the …what was it? ACP?

KP: ASTP.

BK: ASTP, yeah, was a very large group on campus, taking courses, college courses, and the like. I would say that was the biggest thing. The other, of course, is the almost elimination of much social life on campus that you didn't make up yourself, you know. There were people leaving all over the place, being drafted or whatever they were signed up for, being called to active duty and the like. So, I would say that my senior year, the biggest change was the social life went down almost to zero.

KP: It sounds like you people missed it, not having the balls. One of the things my students are very struck by, is how active the social life was in '39, '40, and '41.

BK: Yeah, I mean, let's see, there was at least two major dances each semester, where they would bring in a name band. Then this club would have a Saturday night couple hours little dance in the gym, or that club, they would raise a little bit of money for whatever, you know. The fraternities would have a dance, and if there was a big dance going to be held then they would have a weekend affair where all the fraternities boys would move out of the fraternity and the girls, who were dates, moved in. You had two couples that were chaperones in the fraternity house with the girls. Usually parents of one of the fraternity members … I would say, the biggest thing … beginning in September the social life went "whoosh" like this, as far as what was going on.

MO: Did the beer parties continue?

BK: Not really, no.

KP: You enlisted in July of '42. When did you actually report for training with the V7 program?

BK: April 4th, 1943.

KP: So, you had finished your course work?

BK: That's right. Except of maybe a half a week or a week of actual course work, and the final exams.

KP: You were done?

BK: Yeah, and Metzger said that we would to be signed out, that we would get a good grade even though we didn't take a final exam.

KP: [Laughing] Which, in some ways, is a nice arrangement.

BK: [More laughter] Most of us said, "Let's go." I think there was only two out of the whole bunch that decided to stay … I think, the rest of us said, "Let's get out. Let's get going. There's no sense standing around here another couple of weeks and not knowing when we would be taking off for the V7 program." But, here we'd all be going over to Columbia, which isn't too far. The other one would be out in Northwestern in Chicago, which is far away, and now we would all go as a group, a dozen or more. I guess there were around close to twenty of us, would go together to this thing, and most of us ended up in the same two divisions. I mean, I would say [that] about half of them were in the Fifth Division with me, and the other half was in the Sixth Division, which they were in the same building and we would see each other quite a bit.

MO: Did you know where you were going to be located? Did you have any preference as to the Pacific Theater or the European Theater?

BK: You mean after finishing this?

MO: Or at any point during or after.

BK: No, we had no real choices along this line. I mean going to the "Ninety Day Wonder Course," as we used to call it, we got the commission around the first of August … They were assigning an awful lot of them already, and the big wheels, you know, the Cadet Officers and the like, most of them already had their decent assignments. They were beginning to hand out assignments for the landing craft bit down in Chesapeake and said they had decided to have another communications course down at Annapolis, and they would prefer people who had math and physics in college. Well, I passed physics though it was not my favorite course, and I said, "Eww," going down on to landing craft … The landing craft didn't really turn me on. Six months at Annapolis sounded pretty good … What this would be, of course, was being able to know all about radio, and also extensive bit on coding and decoding, and that kind of stuff. So, I signed up, put my name down for that, and since I apparently had a record that was good enough for them, I was sent down to Annapolis in August of '43.

MO: So, that just came up? You did not have any idea …

BK: No, I had no idea about going into communications before that. It was just a, you know, you were going down to the landing craft training center, or were you going to Annapolis as an officer. "Annapolis, here I come." [Laughter] Landing craft at that time was not a very beautiful thing to look at. I mean what was going on with the landing craft at that time, already. The funny story about that is, okay, now I was an ensign, and I had been told [that] two of my classmates, … I'm not sure what category they were in, were in the midshipmen training programs for engineers. They had been engineer[ing] students here. They were … down there. So, I went in and looked up where they were, and there I am with a gold braid on and I walk into their room, they jump up and … they didn't know whether to call me "Bernie," or what, you know. [Laughter] Because, you know, in the Naval Academy, I mean, it's "Yes, sir. Yes, Sir." ... "Ensign Koft," and that sort of stuff. [Laughter]

KP: Backing up a little bit. What are your distinct memories of midshipmen training at Columbia? How much of the training was for becoming a naval officer? I've gotten a range of assessments in terms of people's training. Some said it was great, some said it was lacking.

BK: I guess, I would vote for in between. I mean, there were some things that seemed like a bunch of BS. But, in essence, what you had to learn was how to deal with the organization. I mean, one of the things about any military organization is, it's not democratic, to say the least … Therefore, learning how to fit in with this kind of autocratic arrangement is something you had to learn. And you absolutely had to learn it, otherwise, you were in all kinds of trouble elsewhere.

KP: Did you have to learn this lesson the hard way?

BK: I didn't have any trouble with it, no. Especially not in midshipmen school, but …

KP: It seems like if you thought about it in terms of …

BK: Oh, yes. I mean it seemed like, as I say, a lot of unnecessary bit. But, then you got a little bit of it in ROTC. But, that was one of the reasons why I didn't go for advanced ROTC. I mean, it was the fact that this was an autocratic society we had to go into. You couldn't question your orders, you did them, and that was about it.

KP: One of the things is that the Navy strikes me as one of the most hierarchical of the services, particularly on the bigger ships. The Navy is very strict about fraternizations between enlisted men and officers.

BK: Then again, it depended so much on the captain on the ship.

KP: Really?

BK: He was the autocrat. Everything he said had to go, and it depended on the character of the person who was the captain of the ship … Fortunately, the guy was the captain of the *K.S.S. Alaska* is probably one of the easiest going Naval Academy graduates that I ever got to know. He was a very personable type of individual, from somewhere up in Connecticut. … When he first came on board, to take over, which was in Pearl Harbor, … we were lined up to receive our

new captain. The first captain had been promoted to Rear Admiral, and they were transferring, and he was going around and inspecting each division. Well, I was the number two in command of the radio division. … The number one was down waiting for the captain and our executive officer and the new captain and a few others to come by for this inspection when a messenger came running out from the radio shack about something that went real haywire down there … So, Cassat came running by me and says, "Go, take over." I didn't get to … the place was where they were coming around in time. So, I'm running and call the men to attention and the executive officer starts reading the riot act about me not being ready for the review, and he is giving me one holy dressing down. I'm just standing there, you know, like this, and all of a sudden he stops and he says, "Goddam it, if you dare say what's going through your mind you'll be in hack for three weeks." [Laughter] The new Captain damn near peed in his pants he laughed so hard. He just thought that was the funniest damn thing, he could imagine, and since my job said that I had to see the Captain every time I was on watch about, "This is the communications that are in," "This is what I've decoded. This is what I can't decode," "It's not addressed to us," or this sort of stuff, you know. The whole bit of what's coming in on code messages.

KP: Did you get to know your Captain?

BK: I got to know him very well … in a relatively few days. Because, that was the opening, you know, bit … you know, this commander [was] giving me holy hell for what I'm thinking. [laughter] I guess it was about five days after that, that we were going to take off from … Pearl Harbor and go out to prepare for the Iwo Jima bit, I got an impacted wisdom tooth the day before we left. The dentist looked at it, took x-rays, and said "You've got troubles." I said, "What's the matter?" He says, "It's coming in sideways and … it's got to come out. But, in order to get it out, I have to chip that into four different pieces and pull each piece out separately. So, that's going to hurt, even though you'll have pain killer." I said, "Well, I don't have any choice, do I?" He said, "Nope." So we did that. So, my first watch after that I can't talk, and I'm taking communication up to the Captain and he looks at me, [I'm trying to think of the dentist's name], and say, "Lieutenant Commander So and So crawled into your mouth." I said, "Yes, sir." And that was the way it was going for three days … The third day I'm beginning to get better, but I couldn't touch my face to shave. He comes up and looks at me and says, "Lieutenant, you're growing a beard." Then he started laughing. I said, "Is that an order, sir?" He said, "Yes, goddam it, grow a beard." I was the only officer out of 200, for about three weeks that had a beard. Because they couldn't grow a beard without the Captain's order saying they were allowed to do this. They all knew that I saw the Captain every day, two or three times. [Laughter] The medical officer, who most people disliked, on board was a Lieutenant Commander. He starts giving me holy hell about having this beard. Well, that started because as a bridge player he stunk. I drew him as a partner once and we went down six, I think, on one of his bids and he could read my face, too, and he's giving me hell about the beard, and about it being a dirty mess and this sort of stuff. I said, "Well, I've had more microbiology and bacteriology courses than you have had, sir, therefore, I know how to take care of what might grow in there." [Laughter] … About this time, the Commander, who was the executive officer happened to come by and hear this and he turned to the medical officer and says, "Lieutenant Commander, shut the hell up. The Lieutenant was ordered by the Captain to grow a beard, and it's none of your business." [Laughter] But, what I'm saying is, we had an easy going officer and it made a big difference.

Let's say, the *Alaska* was CB1, the *Guam* was CB2, and we came alongside for something, for a transfer, and here were all of our enlisted men are in khakis … and they didn't have ties on. And the ones over on the *Guam*, all in dress whites. That's the illustration of the two differences in terms of [captains] … But, the Captain of the ship was supreme over everything. What he said went, no matter what.

KP: You mention that in training there was an emphasis on discipline, because training is based on the ideal. Everyone salutes and everything, and you make your bed a certain way, however, you spent time in Annapolis and you said that …

BK: But, I was an officer there, so it wasn't as bad. [Laughter] And for the most part, we avoided the main campus, the (Halligan Hall?) where we were based for this communications training, was way up on the north end of the campus, and we saw very little of the midshipmen at all. They were way down on the far end.

KP: Did any of the authoritarian decisions seem incredibly petty, especially when you were in training?

BK: Oh, yeah. You'd run into all sorts of little things. Why are they making a point of this? Why does it have to be this way? I mean like on any issue there's usually two sides … You didn't have any right to weigh the both sides. If the man was senior to you, and this was his point of view, you didn't dare argue with him, and there was too much of that in many different ways.

KP: In terms of your midshipmen's training, how well did it prepare you for life aboard a ship? What did you think was lacking in training in terms of …

BK: Actually, any real feeling of how the ship is going to perform … you had none, I mean you sort of had a very, very poor feeling of what you would do on board ship, by going out once a week on this little ride up the Hudson River, and back again with umpteen midshipmen on board. You really didn't get much of a feel of what the command, what were the various jobs on board. In other words, that there was communications, that there was engineering, that there was damage control, that there was supplies, and all this sort of stuff. This you had absolutely no feel for. In other words, the understand[ing] of who was going to be responsible for what and how you had to relate to that individual.

KP: Even if you were in a particular test, you still have to interrelate with all those different functions, is that one of the …

BK: Well, you mean on board ship. Well, not all of them. But, you had to interrelate with certain different aspects of it … In other words, when they would have the siren go off … "Man your battle stations" bit, it was, you know, you were all running together. Even though, let's say, I would be in the communications shack, I would still have to have some connection with who was in charge of the various gunnery things and the like, is what's going on.

KP: Training never really gave you …

BK: No, that was not what the training really gave you; the feel of how things were organized on board ship.

KP: It sounds like you did not get that until you actually got on the ship?

BK: That's right.

KP: So, you were learning on the job.

BK: Well, the Annapolis bit didn't give me anything other than, this is what goes on in the communications. But, the biggest emphasis was in cracking codes, and understanding how the machines worked and the like. Most of us had to learn how to type, too.

KP: How fast could you take code?

BK: Well, I got up to about eighteen words a minute. I hadn't had any code training before that …

KP: Did you have any washouts, or many washouts? Or did most people make it through the midshipmen's and communications schools?

BK: I really have no idea.

KP: You didn't look around?

BK: No, I didn't see too many of them disappear, and, in most cases, it was hell for the ones I did know. One [guy] sort of went out off the deep end mentally, 'cause he couldn't take it. That's about the only one I could see there. On board ship we had more of that, of those who were, shall we say, unable to handle this. The mental stress was too much for them.

KP: Among officers and men?

BK: Mostly among the men. Occasionally, I only knew of one officer… part of that was, he happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, to start with. The biggest example of the difficulty was, we had a group on board that were actually musicians. As a matter-of-fact, I ended up being in charge of their division, later on in the game. But, they had no idea of what would happen to them beforehand, as to what would happen to them on board ship, when "general quarters" was called.

KP: What was supposed to happen to them?

BK: They were sent down there to pass ammunition. You know, the stuff for the 12 inch guns or the 5 inch guns. So, they were in very close quarters, getting the ammunition and powder, and what have you, and passing it up to the demands of the guns that were firing. Boy, they were a

mental wreck after … Well, the first training bit wasn't too bad. But, the first time that we were shooting at the incoming Japanese planes at Iwo Jima they were …

KP: They could not cope very well.

BK: They couldn't cope with it, and the conditions where they were was part of it. I mean, if they were up on deck and watching it that was bad enough. But, to be down there and hearing all of this banging away and the ship shaking every time they fired guns, you know, that was a "brown underwear" event for them. [Laughter]

KP: You were in the code room while all this was going on?

BK: Yeah, but, I was in communications with what was going on all over the ship.

KP: So, at least you knew what was going on ?

BK: Yeah, I would be talking with the Captain about this, and if something came in at the time I would call the Captain and say, "All right, we have this, I can't bring it up now, but this is the sort of stuff..." So, … I was in constant communications with the bridge, whether it was the Captain, the executive officer, the officer of the deck or whatever. Yeah, it was sort of scary that you're down below deck. The biggest scare is to be in a typhoon when you're down there, though.

KP: A lot of people say that a typhoon was much scarier than combat.

BK: This ship that I was on was about 900 feet long, about ninety feet wide and stood about seventy-five feet above the water, and about seventy-five feet below. It was a big ship, battle cruiser. We were in a typhoon, and the waves are going over the top of the bridge, which is three decks up from the main deck, which I said was seventy-five feet above the water, and everybody said, "We're the largest goddamn submarine we've ever seen." I said, "Look over there and there's the *Missouri* doing the same thing," you know, and you didn't dare … I mean everything had to be shut, of course, and … [it was] difficult moving around on board ship. They had to button down all the hatches and all that sort of stuff. Then the scariest thing was to be there when the typhoon broke the bow off the *Pittsburgh*, and there goes the bow floating this way with men on board, and the rest of the ship going that way.

KP: Were you on duty in the communications room while this was happening?

BK: No, I was not on duty at this particular time. That's why I could see what was going on.

MO: You could not see from the communications room?

BK: Oh, no. We're three decks down.

KP: Did you think that the typhoon was worse than combat?

BK: Well, it was worse in a number of ways. I mean, let's say you had thirty men on duty down there, and they are all puking all over the radios and typewriters and what have you, a stinking mess. [Laughter]

KP: Which actually brings up a point. One of the things that struck me when I went to the *Intrepid*, the first time several years ago, was how confined things are on a World War II navy ship, even for the officers. Officers live far better than the enlisted, but even they do not have a lot of space. Whereas, the enlisted men have …

BK: That's even less space ... [laughter]

KP: Even for the Captain.

BK: This might be the size of the Captain's cabin. [He is apparently showing them the size.]

KP: It might be even smaller.

BK: But, everything is relative. When we were coming back after the war we were sent over to Korea to pick up a thousand Army people, who had been in bivouacked in Philippines and Okinawa, and now were out camping in Korea. They were there to take over from the Japanese and send them home, and now they were being sent home. We were getting our orders to report back to the States, and in order to hasten the movement of troops back …

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

KP: This continues an interview with Bernard W. Koft on February 28, 1996 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Phieler and …

MO: Mike O'Neill.

KP: You were talking about picking up the …

BK: We were picking up these thousand Army people and maybe their meals are mostly C ration or canned this or that and a few other things … A shower might have been that once in awhile someone would go down and get a bucket with holes in it, and go down and get some water out of the stream and pour it over them. They came on board and our Captain looked at them and said, "Okay, at ease." He said, "You're going to be our passengers back to San Francisco, and you've been assigned to this billet and, yes, there's going to be about … ten of you in this billet." That's a room about this size [demonstrates], I think it's like this. "But, in the meantime, we have a system on board the ship of being able to take showers and relax. A navy shower is, you go in, quickly get yourself wet, turn the water off, soap yourself down, scrub yourself, then turn the water on … If you do this there'll be enough water for all of you to have shower." Boy, you should have heard them. "Oh, boy!" The other thing he said, "We'll make special provisions where you guys can come up on this deck because it's not going to be needed

during this trip back, "since that would be underneath these two big 12 inch gun mounts, and what have you," and you guys can have your sessions here and relax here." So he said, "All right, there are the signs with the arrows that say where the shower is and where the billet is. You follow those arrows. You're dismissed." They started running, shoes were … being taken off, everything was going. And by the time they got to the shower, they were all bare naked. [Laughter] You should have heard them singing. "Oh, boy. I haven't had a shower in …" Okay, the next day, after breakfast, coming down to the radio shack, one of my men comes in and says, "Those goddamn "dogfaces. Oh, what an awful life they must have had." I said, "Why?" "Well, at breakfast, there's this big sergeant crying into a bowl of corn flakes. He hasn't had any corn flakes for six years, … no three years." [laughter] And he was pouring this powdered milk into it like it's going out of style." [laughter] … And at lunch time he came back and said, "See those guys putting away the SOS. They're eating three and four helpings of it." You know what SOS is, don't you?

KP: No.

BK: Cream chipped beef, known as "Shit on a Shingle". [laughter]

KP: Oh, yes. That I have heard. I've never heard it referred to as SOS but that I have heard.

BK: He said, "They're each putting three helpings of it away." [laughter] And you know we'd gotten sent that an awful lot … We were limited, particularly the men, as to what they might have in the way of food. The other thing is, inside of three hours, we ran out of the makings of the ice cream … What was the name for it, I can't remember, it was an artificial ice cream that you could go and buy. But, the Army guys got in line there, and the ship ran out in a matter of half a day.

KP: It sounds like when these Army guys came in you really began to appreciate some of the …

BK: Yeah, I mean … all the men would say, "Oh, good Lord, "you know" These guys must have really had it rough." I said, "Well, you're living out in the mud for three years, … what do you expect. You didn't appreciate how nice and clean you guys were here, on board here, and you didn't appreciate all that SOS you could eat." [Laughter] "And think of the corn flakes." [laughter]

KP: What were the variations in food?

BK: Well, of course, most of it was what could be prepared and stored for a long period of time. But, every once in a while what we would get is a reefer boat, that's the refrigerator boat, come by, with something special, and we'd get some special meat, particularly the officers … Once in a while we'd get some eggs, which was rare. We had that dried egg, which left a bit to be desired. But, this one time we got, from the reefer, a bunch of what would be real expensive beef.

KP: T-bone?

BK: No, it was sirloin.

KP: Fillet mignon.

BK: Fillet mignon, that's what I was trying to come up with, and everybody is looking at this as it was being brought around to the officers' table. "Oh, boy." We'd pick up our knife and fork and it'd bounce right up. We tried cutting again, it won't go in. Without a word, my whole table, which was about fifteen of us at this big long table, got up … went down to our room, came back up with our real sharp knives. [Laughter] Cutting this, … and you cut it in normal pieces, nope. Then you'd take it and cut into little pieces like this. [Laughter] But, that was, you know it was the funniest scene. Everybody was drooling, looking at this thing. "Oh, this is great, you know. Oh, boy. We're going to eat this come hell or high water." [laughter]

KP: How much did you eat different from the enlisted men? How much better was your food?

BK: Much better. We very seldom had SOS. They had it fairly regularly. They would have Spam a lot, which we didn't have … It would be a rare day that we would have that … I would say, it was still sort of [Mr. Koft makes a distasteful sound] at times. I mean rice was sort of the main ingredient in just about every meal. There was rice pudding, and rice this, and rice that, and rice something or other … I don't know why but it seemed like they never got it so that it was anything but a good grade of glue. [Laughter] I thought … that's our cooks, you know, and didn't think too much more about it. At the end of the war, when we were back home in South Jersey, you couldn't get much in the way of food at the stores. They were still, not really getting the supplies back. This is January of '46. Both my brother and I are still officers in the Navy, and we'd go over with our wives to the commissary at the Navy Yard to see what we could get, that you can't get in the stores. So, the four of us come back with … each one of us are carrying great big paper bags full of all kinds of stuff that we'd get there, that you couldn't buy in stores at home. Sugar being one of them, at the time. Coffee was hard to get, [and] a few other things, and my brother and I are emptying one of the bags on the table for our wives to put away. My brother picks up this brown bag and says, "Ida, what in the hell is this?" Ida says, "Oh, that's rice." "Rice, what the hell did you buy that crap for?" [laughter] I said, "Oh, I take it your rice was the same quality as ours." In other words, it was always a good grade of glue.

KP: Did you have black stewards serving you as officers?

BK: Yes, yes.

PK: Did you have any black sailors in addition to the stewards?

BK: Just black stewards. Of course, they had … "on deck" assignments for general quarters during attack, they manned the 20 mm guns.

KP: So, they actually manned the guns and fired them?

BK: Yes, yes.

KP: It is interesting, because, usually they were the ones passing the ammunition in battle. But, on your ship they …

BK: On a certain number of the … 20 mm mounts, they were the ones that would man the guns and, of course, some of the others would be passing … [the ammunition].

KP: Yes, but they weren't below deck?

BK: That was right up on deck, yes.

KP: Who made that decision to put them on deck, because usually, I have read, that they were always to pass ammunition way below deck?

BK: I think that was the Captain.

KP: Really. He had decided that they would man the guns. That is very interesting.

BK: … Again, this depended on the numbers of people, too, I guess, that manned the guns. Without them, I would say that there would have probably been about a dozen 20 mm that would have had musicians manning them, maybe? [laughter]

KP: Well, it sounds like the stewards, although they'd been assigned as stewards, that they were good sailors. Did they perform well on the guns?

BK: Yeah. They performed well on the guns. They had good training on that, going primarily on the trip out from Pearl Harbor to Ulithi, and then from Ulithi up to the Iwo [Jima] bit. I don't know whether you know about Ulithi, don't you?

KP: Yeah, a number of people …

BK: A major base there for a campaign … They were assigned to that, and we had practice runs immediately in Pearl Harbor. We'd go out once, and come back in, and go out and come back in, before we headed for Ulithi, and then on the way to Ulithi, we had a couple of naval airplanes and pilots and the pilots would go up and drag a target way behind and they'd be taking training on shooting the targets then, and they were in trouble if they didn't hit that target. [Laughter]

MO: How were the black stewards treated by the rest of the crew?

BK: Well, they were segregated, there's no two ways about that. I don't remember any real, any major clashes or anything on board our ship. But, I've heard in some other cases where it had happened. But, I don't remember any clashes. Yes, there was segregation, and the service, yet, had not integrated, really. That came, what about five years after the war?

KP Yeah, that would come in '49. It sounds like your Captain kept a looser ship?

BK: Yes, very definitely.

KP: A lot of the petty discipline was more relaxed. But, did you have any disciplinary problems?

BK: On board ship?

KP: Yes, because you have a lot of people living in a very confined space.

BK: Yeah. The Captain's mast was held with some regularity, and usually it was a clash between two different individuals over something. Or, if somebody didn't do what he was ordered to do, that kind of stuff. Yes, there was a Captain's mast, I would say at least once a week … He would give out some kind of punishment, or what have you, for this. I would say the one problem that was difficult to deal with, dealt with the gay that would come out of hiding in this sort of situation. I would say that was the most difficult one.

KP: You had gay sailors on board?

BK: Well, we didn't know that at the time.

KP: You did not know that.

BK: But, when they came out for it, of course, then they got crushed by whoever was sharing a room with them, you know … Then that would go before the Captain's mast. I'm not sure exactly how it was all handled. But, the gay was given his discharge, and sent home. So, there were a few that decided that they would become gays to get the hell out of this mess. [Laughter]

KP: So, your Captain got gay sailors off the ship?

BK: Yeah, if he had a good reason for it, he would send them out. They were sent back for discharge. There was never any question about that.

MO: As an officer, you said that in midshipmen's school there was that sort of pettiness for discipline. Did you ever get frustrated and give that back to the enlisted men?

BK: Well, we were, essentially, the enlisted men, as such in this type of organization. We saw very little of enlisted men at the midshipmen's school. I mean, we had officers in charge. Naval officers running [things] … About the only place we saw enlisted men was when we went to eat. We didn't have any trouble with them. We just went down with the plates. [Mr. Koft makes a noise indicating the ferocity of their eating]. You know, whether you wanted it or not. That was about it. You know?

KP: Did you have any Marines aboard?

BK: Yes, fifty of them.

KP: Did they mount any guns?

BK: Yes. They had a certain number of the 5mms. [The] 5mm guns was their responsibility.

KP: What was the relationship between the crew and the marines? Which could often be a testy one.

BK: No. I don't think ... I'm not aware ... I don't remember any real clashes, or what have you on this. [As a] matter-of-fact, in a number [of instances], when we went ashore and things like that they used to go together in bunches. Mixed bunches not, not separate. Of course, we didn't get ashore that much. Until we were in Tsingtao, at the end of the war. There were pictures of the Marines and sailors out in the town and all that sort of stuff.

KP: It sounds like you had a very happy ship, in a sense.

BK: Relatively speaking, definitely, yes. That was the Captain's doing. As I say, you didn't look at this book, and even now they hold reunions, and all the members who come, and, of course, the Captain is gone and the like. They make very, very positive things, about that, "Captain Noble was one of the best men that any of them ever knew in the Navy." I mean that's one of the things that are said at these reunions. I've only been to one, because, I didn't know they were having them until they were having the commemorative fiftieth at, in Philadelphia, and I happened by accident to find out about this, about three months before it happened.

KP: So, you went to that reunion?

BK: I went to that reunion, yeah. There was only about four other officers there. But the rest of them were enlisted men, and I would say they must have had about two hundred people there.

KP: Did you recognize anyone that you knew?

BK: More of them recognized me than I them. The only one that I immediately recognized, were the other officers. And, particularly the other one who came for the first time, was the guy who shared the room with me on board ship. [laughter] First time he'd ever ... He was the pay officer on board ship. We walked in and, "Hey," You know, kind of thing. I had about five who had been in my division, who'd come up and "God! You haven't changed too much, have ya?" [Laughter] Well.

KP: How often did you get leaves, and how often did you have beer parties?

BK: Well, Ulithi was infamous for being the place to have a beer party. I think the pile of empty beer cans was larger than the island.

KP: Yes, a number of people have referred to that.

BK: Yeah … I don't know how many hours you could go, and then you had to be back, and the only thing to do on there might be to play (quaits?), drink beer. I mean, you had an allotment of five cans of beer, or something like that … You had to drink it up before your time was up.

Otherwise you had to give it back … The trip back aboard ship was, shall we say, a water pressure problem. [laughter] But, I mean, you figure that, I don't know how many hundreds of ships were going there … There was a schedule, as to how many could be on the island at any one time, and you got five cans of beer and back on board the whale boat [to] go back to your ship, you know, and that pile of cans made the rest of that atoll, little. The island of that atoll that this was on looked like a postage stamp. It was one big pile of empty cans. [laughter] Huge. Well, even if you just say my ship. Let's say there's nine hundred … men and, let's say, only seven hundred drink beer. But they each, somewhere in the three or four days, we're there, each one of them get five cans, let's say, twice during that time we're there. That's a hell of a lot of cans just for one ship.

KP: And then if you have multiple ships …

BK: Yeah. Many, I mean, carriers were in there … Other, … the battlewagons were in there, and the like. Of course, DD's, also. He didn't know what a tin can was.

KP: Really?

MO: Yes. I have never heard of that.

KP: What about aboard ship? What did you do when you weren't on duty, or in a very tense combat situation?

BK: Well, in combat you had to be at your watch station.

KP: But at the times when you weren't on general quarters. What did you do, versus the men?

BK: Well, we did a fair bit of card playing. That was mostly in the evening … A lot of sleeping, since, what four on, eight off, four on, eight off, something like that … If the weather was nice you'd go out and, sort of, appreciate this. On board ship we had an area that was for … the seaplanes. It was a deck, open, and on there they had put up a basketball court, kind of thing … I didn't do that so much, but a lot of the men, and the officers would go and play basketball there. [As a] matter-of-fact, they even made a league after a while. About four, about five teams would play. The other was read and the thing that I did, also, was I'd gotten hold of a couple of Russian textbooks … Well, let's see, I had learned enough words in self-defense from my parents, but I'd never studied it. So, I started going through the book on beginner's Russian … Or Russian and German combination sometimes, and … began to understand the language. That had two real positive things come up. When we went into Tsingtao, there was a large White Russian settlement there, and I got to know a number of the white Russian people there, and when I'd go ashore, I'd visit with them. They'd have me to dinner. Sometimes, even go to church with them … Socialize with them.

KP: You mentioned a second?

BK: And then the second was when I came back, and went to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania. The first year there, they changed their requirements on foreign language.

Before that you had to pass an exam in French, and German. They expanded that to French, German, Spanish, Russian, and, I guess, Swedish … But you had to take two of them. So … I took one summer course in Russian grammar. The poor professor, "Hey, you pronounce this better than anybody else, but you don't have very much of a vocabulary." [Laughter] And then I came and took the exam with them, and I had, in a way, cheated, only, not intentionally. He said, "Go to the library and get a Russian journal." I went to the library, got a Russian journal, went through it and said, "Ah. Here's an interesting article, here's an interesting article." So, I opened it up, and really sat down with pencil and paper and translated these articles, because the titles told me there was something that was related to what I was doing research in, as a graduate student. Took the journal back to the Russian professor. Gave it to him. He looks at it, "Yeah, this'll do." He opens it up and guess what? One of the two articles that I was really interested in, and I had completely translated. Handed me the pencil and paper and I sat down. Big eyes, he looks at it. "Excellent, you pass." Darned if I'm going to tell him that I had translated that article before hand. [Laughter] …" In Russian, "…*Horosho, ocyen horosho*." ... Signed my card and away I went.

KP: What about gambling? How much gambling went on?

BK: Quite a bit. The enlisted men played a lot of crap. The officers mostly poker and bridge. I mean, it was so much a point in bridge and, of course in poker. It was, supposedly, a pot limit, but the next thing you know the pot, like this? But that was still not too bad until after the war, when they took the pot limit off. That's when I stopped playing poker. I lost two hundred dollars on … one hand.

KP: That's a lot of money.

BK: I'd been ahead a few dollars here, a few dollars there. Probably, that much. But it was seven card stud, nothing wild and my first two down were a pair, nothing wild, of deuces. The first two cards up were a pair of deuces. I threw everything but my under shorts in. Another guy had a pair of jacks up. He had two jacks down and two jacks up. That was the Marine captain on board. I told him he must have been hiding them in his pocket, and he damn near killed me he was so mad at me. "Where'd you get your four deuces?" I said, "That's the way they dealt them." "That's the way I got my four jacks." [Laughter] But, … I said, "Well, if I can't win with four of a kind and nothing wild, I don't deserve to play this anymore." I never played poker after that.

KP: What about movies? Did you get any?

BK: Yes, we had movies on board. Sometimes they were showing the same movie about every, twice a week, or something like that. I don't know how many they'd have. They'd have about three they'd show in a fantail. Depending, again, on where we were and this, of course, was not during the campaign itself. When we were up bombarding Iwo [Jima], or in the Okinawa bit. But back at Ulithi we'd have, or sometimes even if we were way out at sea, they would show them in a place where the light would not show out to a possible submarine detection … I would say, whenever we would get a new supply of food, or what have you, we would exchange movies, or if we got close enough to some other ship, you know. "Well, let's see, how many

movies have you got?" say in a tin can "Well, we got two." Okay, and we'd switch, "Saw this one last month." You know, that kind of stuff. But … they had that regularly.

KP: What about chaplains? Did you have any chaplains aboard?

BK: Yes. Two of them. Catholic and a Protestant.

KP: How widely attended were services?

BK: I really couldn't tell you. I was not in attendee of these, since I was not an active member of this. But, I was fairly good friends with the Catholic chaplain. We used to sit down and chat about things, but not religion … Talk about all sorts of different things, what we've been reading and the like. And I'd help out sometimes with the stuff for what we called the "North Star" Publication … The story along this line is when we were in Tsingtao, there were a bunch Greeks on board, who were not Roman Catholic or Protestant. There was this Greek Orthodox Church in Tsingtao, but, they had their services on Sunday, when we were not allowed ashore yet. This Greek chief petty officer, who was in my X division, went to the Captain about trying to get shore leave for church services. He says, "Well, we can arrange this but you have to have an officer in charge." He came running over to communications, "Lieutenant, Captain said we could have …" He knew I had been with the people there quite often … We were not docked. We had to go back and forth by boat. The ship had too large a draft to be at the dock. "I have to have an officer. Would you do it?" And I said, "Sure. Tell the Captain I've agreed, and if he wants I'll come up and say yes." He went up and the Captain said, "Well, okay." So, the orders of the day came out for this Sunday morning that "there will be a special church party to Such and Such Church, over in Tsingtao at … eleven a.m., and Lieutenant Bernard Koft will be in charge." This comes out the night before, and the Catholic chaplain and I are sitting there and he says, "Now I've seen everything. You're in charge of a church party." [Laughter] I said, "Sure, why not?" He says, "Well, I don't know. I've never seen you at any of the services." I said, "Well, I have my own beliefs." He says, "That's for sure. You're probably one of the more Christian individuals on board this ship."

KP: You'd mentioned this sort of run-in with the medical officer. How good was the medical care?

BK: Generally, quite good. There were two other medical officers on board. lieutenants, and they were very nice guys, and they worked hard, and they did a lot. The other guy, I mean the lieutenant commander, I would say medically was okay. He just personally was a disliked individual. I mean, he was constantly giving the wrong word out to individuals. You know, if they were complaining he would tell them, "There's nothing wrong with you, get the hell back to work. Get back to your duty station." This kind of stuff, and if he did that to a couple of officers, who were junior to him, pretty soon he was on the list as far as officers were concerned. Because even the more senior officers didn't like, that way of doing things.

KP: Basically, his job was rooting shirkers? People going on sick calls.

BK: Well, that's what he was accusing everybody of doing, when coming on sick call. Yes, … he had no sense of humor. He had gotten the enlisted men mad at him, and in this "North Star" they came out with a picture of "Time for Immunization." And there is this guy with this great big long needle, it's like this in shape. Great big syringe behind it, and his hair, it almost looks like he has horns on him. There's the enlisted men with the pants down, and the cheeks out and this, and this guy's going like this with the syringe ... The MD Lieutenant Colonel wanted to put that artist on Captain's mast. He was accusing him of everything. The Captain talked to the Catholic chaplain and the Protestant chaplain, the two who really did most of counseling of the men, and told them about it. The Captain refused to accept the charge of the medical officer, of this being, shall we say, something to be punished for.

KP: So, it sounds like your Captain knew what was important, and what was not.

BK: Oh, yes, he was, as far as doing the things that were part of the service and part of what the ship do, he was right on it.

KP: But, about petty stuff?

BK: No, no, definitely not.

KP: What about the relationship between officers and the enlisted men?

BK: For the most part, pretty good. I would say that most of the junior officers, particularly where I would have contact … there was always a good exchange, and the like. But, then nearly all of us had gone through "ninety day wonder school," not Annapolis.

KP: How many Annapolis people did you have besides the Captain?

BK: Let's see. The five most senior officers were, and I would say about maybe five or six others, out of ninety.

KP: Did you break up? The Annapolis stuck together and did the junior, ninety day wonders, stick together?

BK: I didn't notice that. But, then, at the senior level, yes. I don't know about the junior level so much.

KP: So, it was more of the relative rank than anything else.

BK: You could still see that even in the junior ones, that their four years there had not taught them what a democracy was like. That ended up as a major thing here on campus. You know in your history. When they were trying to get rid of ROTC they had the faculty vote. And the faculty had a vote, but it was … I've forgotten what was wrong with it, to eliminate ROTC, and then the Dean of Rutgers College said we had to have that again, because, about five faculty members said they misunderstood some things. And the Dean asked for comment, and I got up. I said, "Well, I had spent two years in ROTC here, and did not take advanced ROTC. But I had

been an officer in the Navy, and dealt with graduates of the Naval Academy, and, occasionally, I had some contacts with graduates of West Point. And one of the things that I think was one of the most positive thing in World War II, is there were a lot of people who were officers, who were not from the Academy, because then we had a democracy, which we couldn't possibly have had, if we just [had] graduates of those Academies." And all the faculty looked at me and they changed the vote a hundred percent. To not get rid of ROTC.

KP: It sounds like you gave them a lot of questions as to the authoritarian nature of the military. What about your chiefs? Particularly, in communications, around how many career chiefs did you have?

BK: Two career chiefs. Well, yeah, they were very much, "This is the way things had to be done, period" … The lower enlisted men had more problems, I mean, they didn't dare try to countermand anything that I would give or tell them to do. But you could hear them grumble among themselves, occasionally, about, "This was not the military way of doing things." But, I would say, most of them had not spent quite that many years in. They'd come up as chiefs fairly rapidly, because, they had served on board a couple of cruisers in the Mediterranean in encounters there. [As a] matter-of-fact, one of them was on one of the ships that was sunk in the Mediterranean. So, that, I would say, that their career in the Navy was mostly during the war. They may have gotten in pretty early during the war …

KP: But you did not have the career chiefs that had been in for ten years?

BK: No, no. We had none of that. All of these were, I would say, they may have gotten in a year or two before we really got in it. But the situation was already a mess.

KP: How frightening was your first experience in combat? What were the close calls that you remember from combat?

BK: Well.

KP: Also the fact that while you heard everything, you could never see it.

BK: I would say the first frightening bit was to have all these Japanese … bombers, you know suiciders.

KP: Kamikazes.

BK: Kamikazes. Coming out after us for the Iwo Jima bit.

KP: You are one of the targets they wanted to hit.

BK: I don't know whether there is a picture in there of us shooting down a whole bunch of them, or trying to get the *Intrepid*. But that was our first bit not knowing, what they were after. But they were after the carriers that we were essentially protecting … I believe that there was about fifty of these things coming at us, and about five got through, and were shot down in the midst of

the ships. One of them dropped on a carrier … and one dropped within about fifty feet of our ship … That was sort of scary, because, that was our first real experience. We went up and bombarded the main island of Japan just before Iwo. We made that tour up there, and bombarded, and came back down Ulithi. I don't think that real bit hit until then. I mean some of our fly boys ran into some hassles out over Tokyo, and that area. But, I don't think we got too much of it out where the fleet was.

KP: So, it was really Iwo Jima and Okinawa that were the worst.

BK: Yeah, yeah, oh, yeah. We stopped at the Philippines for a period of time, but that was after it was, just about all cleared up, and just a few pockets. The Philippines down in … Leyte Gulf is considered our dysentery encounter. [laughter]

KP: What had happened?

BK: Well, we went down there to repair some of the damages that had happened at the Iwo bit … I would say, about eighty percent of us came down with dysentery. Not just on my ship, but on every one of the Fifth Fleet ships that were in there.

KP: From drinking the water?

BK: No, from drinking beer, because the beer was put cold in ice that is made from local water. But, after dysentery hit Leyte Gulf turned brown in about forty-eight hours. And the reason we didn't ship out of there within three weeks, to go up to Okinawa, was that such a large percentage of all ships were incapable of manning a really full crew. So, we stayed in there an extra two weeks, and as a result, we stayed in the Philippines for a month and a few days. So, therefore we qualified for the Philippine Campaign Ribbon. The joke on board ship was "for every fifty trips to the head you can put a copper pot on your ribbon." I figured five pots. [Laughter]

KP: Did you have any contact with Filipinos while you were in Leyte?

BK: Not really. I mean, we could go ashore to a couple of places where you could have beer. See, there was no beer on board ship. So, you went ashore to these little recreation kind of areas that the Navy had as a base there, and you'd see an occasional Filippino in there working on this. But, … no real contact with them, no.

KP: How well did your men perform, and what was your relationship with your particular chief in the communications section?

BK: Well, most of the time it was very, very good. Occasionally, you'd get a guy who, I don't know, would get his fingers in the wrong part of the typewriter. And you'd get a coded message directed, to the ship that, one of the addressees would be your ship or your particular division that you were in, and this was the kind of thing you had to be able to get the Captain almost immediately. And something like that would come in, and it would be a garbled mess. I mean, the senior enlisted person would really hit the fan about this … I would disappear into the coding room while they try, they might try to get this from another ship nearby sometimes,

which is usually impossible. I'd disappear into the coding room and say, "Now let's see. What's this? This code says there ought to be fifty groups. There are fifty-five. Whoops! We already put two in that, were not supposed to be there?" Or if, … you know, I'd look at this and it still wouldn't translate I'd say, "Now, let's see, numbers are one of the easiest things to make mistakes on." And all, everything changes for every day according to the date. I would say, "Well, let's see, this is the sixth. Let's see, let me try what the code said it would be for the fifth or the seventh." Or you know, this kind of stuff, and start all over. Change the whole, enciphering machine setting around and start all over again. I would say, while I was in a room about this size with all the coding machines and the all the information about coding locked in there, well, not locked. I could get out. I mean, they couldn't get in. The Chief Petty Officer would be out there really!

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

KP: What were the backgrounds of your men? How well did you get to know them?

BK: I can't say that I knew the chiefs that well. But, … the number two person that I would deal with, usually a first class, I would have most of the dealings with. In terms of course there was one of those on every watch. Whereas, the Chief, sort of, covered a watch, but, … was running back and forth about a number of different things … I would say, that of the enlisted men there was always two or three that I had pretty good contact with … Some of them liked me. Some of them hated me, I guess, I don't know. I mean one of them at this reunion back in … a couple of years ago, the fiftieth reunion of the commissioning of the ship, came running up and says, "Oh." I said, 'Oh, you remember me." He says, "I'll never forget you." I said, "Why was that?" He says, "You were the one that was responsible for me getting my promotion. More than anybody else I came to you about what this problem was, and you told me what I had to do … Got me in line, and everything worked out fine just because of the time you spent with me."

KP: You probably had no recollection.

BK: I don't remember it at all, no.

MO: Since your ship was looser, was there any sort of fraternization between officers and enlisted men at all?

BK: No. Well, I don't know, it depends on your definition of fraternization. I mean many times we'd go ashore as a group … Not just as officers, but, let's say, okay, a bunch of the communications gang and I would go ashore together, and sometimes, we'd go and sit down, [at a] place to eat.

KP: So, you had boxing matches, too. (Kurt Piehler is pointing to a picture in Mr. Koft's *USS Aalaska* book)

BK: Yeah, yeah. This is mostly after the thing in Tokyo (peace signing) …

KP: What was this? Was this a play?

BK: This is a show. See, these pictures from the *USS Alaska* book this is, of course, we're sitting in Okinawa waiting for our orders to what we're going to do after the peace treaty had been signed. I thought there was a picture of them going to shore. Yeah, okay. This is an officer being dressed by some of the gals that came on board, and here's a non-officer being dressed. In other words, the officers and enlisted men were part of this show that went on board ship. But, with [the] entertainment ladies.

MO: Where were the ladies recruited from? (Pointing to another picture in the book)

BK: This was in Hawaii. See, and here we had these Chinese entertainers on board in Tsingtao. That was another time. Okay, see, here's a … This is obviously an officer but these, some of these back here are men from his division. This is an officer going in to Tsingtao. I thought there was a picture of them out eating together. Yeah, here … This is in Tsingtao, after the war. This is the officer and this is his division that are with him, and that happened with some regularity. Especially, with this guy. I mean he had an, you know, ability to really deal with the … men in his division. Of course, he was a big guy, six foot three and about two hundred and twenty pounds. But very easy going.

KP: Well, one reason I ask is because some people have been on bigger ships with tighter captains. One guy was telling me this story about this officer who was supervising some men on how to paint. He was so bored, because this was at the end of the war, that he decided to help them. For that he got reprimanded at Captain's mast. He got severely reprimanded for breaking rank.

BK: What was he an officer?

KP: He was an officer, and he decided to help his men paint just out of shear boredom, and for that he was reprimanded.

BK: Yeah, I can see where that could happen. I don't remember anything like that on board, but, I'd say the nearest thing that came to that was in those entertainment kind of things. When there was a mixture of enlisted and officers, and what have you, fussing with each other about different ways of entertaining. Dancing, singing, and the like. But, I don't remember any real hassles … I would say the nearest thing to a hassle came over censorship. We had to read and censor all mail, and if we picked up something that was not right, in other words, you're not allowed to say where you were, in your mail, or say anything about what's been happening. And if we picked that up, it was our job to tear it out. But also, it was our job to reprimand the person who did this and, I would say, this was nearly always done without it ever going to the Captain. In other words, theoretically, it could go directly to the Captain for Captain's mast. For … improper information, because they're very positive about this. … I would say, that if it was somebody from my division I would get the letter … and give 'em holy hell. But, I would say, it was never anything [that] drastic. We haven't had orders to say we could do this yet, write and say, "We're sitting in Buckner Bay in Okinawa, waiting for the peace treaty to be signed." We weren't given the orders to allow this. Call the guy up and say, "Look, write it over again."

KP: What was it like reading other people's mail? You know you are doing this for censorship purposes, but you are still having to read other people's mail. Did any of it surprise you or did you just try to ignore what you were reading?

BK: We had to endure it. Once in a while you'd have a laugh. I'm picking up this one envelope reading it. Obviously, addressed to Mary. Mary's his wife. Fold it back up, put it in the envelope. Pick up another. It's from the same guy. It's addressed to Dorothy. And it goes on at great length about this, and that I look at the envelope, and this one, with Dorothy's in it, is addressed to Mary, and this one with Mary's in it is addressed to Dorothy. I get on the P.A. system. That was a seaman first class, "Report to the board room, immediately." He comes in. I said, "Do you actually want these to go out?" He says, "What's wrong with them Lieutenant?" I said, "Look at them." He looks at them. He says, "What's wrong with them?" I said, "Look at the envelope." "Holy Christ!" [Laughter] In other words, he had picked up a girlfriend in San Francisco when we were on the shop there for some work being done in the Navy Yard there, on the way out. And … [his] wife was back in, let's see, that was Maryland, I believe, somewhere. He had the wrong envelope around the letters.

MO: Did you in any of the letters come across anybody admitting, that they were gay or anything like that, any sort of wrong doing that required reprimanding?

BK: Well, about the only thing, and I didn't pay any attention to it, was, all right, when we're in the Okinawa that we were very limited as to where we could go, when we went ashore. There were still hassles going on, and somewhere these guys had gotten into (two or three) rickshaws or what have you, and they were off into such-and-such a place, where we weren't allowed to be. I gave them hell about that and cut it out of his note but that's about it. I mean to me it wasn't drastic. It was about a week, no, two weeks before the signing of the end of the war, and we still weren't sure what was going on. [As a] matter-of-fact, that we had our closest call there, sitting there.

KP: Waiting.

BK: Waiting.

KP: What had happened?

BK: A torpedo plane had snuck in from some base, and the pilot didn't know about the end. He hadn't gotten the word on some little island nearby. He hadn't gotten the word about what was going on in Tokyo … [He] had dropped a torpedo out at the mouth of Buckner Bay, and I was up on deck and saw it. We didn't see the plane, actually. We thought, well, you know, it was so low you couldn't tell that it was a … that it didn't have the red circles on it, and all of the sudden I see this thing going by us, and hit this World War I cruiser that was sitting in there. It didn't do too much damage to it. Put a little hole in it.

MO: How close was that ship to yours?

BK: It went by and hit the ship behind us. (Fifty yards)

KP: You were in sort of a rare position, as communications officer, that you know everything that is coming in and going out. Could you tell what was going on in battle? Or get a sense of it?

BK: Oh, yes.

KP: Because a lot of people who I ask about combat say that you really do not have a clue as to what is going on, I mean, you know what is going on very immediately.

BK: Yeah. Well, see, besides the radio and the signal bridge, and what have you, which I would get also then, there was also the voice, which would come into the radio bit. I mean, the voice between the immediate ships and the … I mean, the Admiral wouldn't put anything in code. I mean, well, it was in code in a way. In that, … he would tell which ships to make an immediate turn forty-five degrees to the right, there's something like this, and then you would hear it come from him. How many bogies on such and such a direction, and the like … Then you'd hear the report that forty-five of the fifty are shot down, and this sort of stuff out there, "Here comes five more!" That I would hear on the voice radio, because, although, he would be hearing that, we had to copy it for our record.

KP: So, in other words, you are keeping a narrative of the battle. Did you ever look back on it, or did you just file it away, or pass it on?

BK: Mostly, file it away, I guess. But most of this was pretty well ingrained in memory at that time. I mean, you didn't have to go back and look at it. [laughter]

KP: Did the kamikazes surprise you? I mean, they obviously frightened you.

BK: Well, we knew about them beforehand. We got out there, they had already been hitting, and I'm trying to think of which group it was down off the Philippines. They had, … really done a major job on a group of Navy ships down there. So, we knew about them before we even left Pearl Harbor to go out for the Iwo Jima campaign. They had already started … What is difficult to say is, how much are true kamikazes, and how many are this is what they had to do. In other words, in a couple of instances we would have this big group coming over after us, and we would start shooting at them, and they would then drop down. We would put our own planes in the air to meet them. And to give you an example of this, we had these picket ships, these are small ships, whose job on radar was to say, "From Kyushu is coming this many bombers," and that word would come from the picket ships, because, they had radar we couldn't get our radar out that distance. But they were about half-way in between. So, okay, then the Admiral would command [to] put the fighter planes in the air, and we'd do this, and the planes would go over. Nine times out of ten they would meet the Japanese ships in the same area where the picket ships were, and, okay, the kamikazes, if there were such, were really out to get the carriers or a battlewagon, or what have you. But they're getting shot down there. And one of these picket ships, which was a DE that I know of, had six of these Japanese planes drop right on it. There wasn't a single bit of superstructure left on that ship. The survivors were all down below, because, they were not up there and it still could get underway.
KP: It was still floating?

BK: It was still floating, and they could still make it move, because all it did was take off all of the superstructure. They couldn't shoot anything. But the engineering stuff was all down below, and that was not damaged, because none of the drop-ins came in sideways to make a whole in the side. They all dropped right on top, and what I'm saying from this is that … a very large number of so-called suicide bombers were already being shot down and they're dropping on whatever is available. Now part of the problem with the Japanese, is they're putting pilots out with these ships that had very poor training yet. They were not experienced pilots, and they were meeting very experienced pilots. I mean, if we sent out fifty planes to meet fifty planes, maybe we'd lose two or three or four or five, while they would lose all fifty. And, as I say, … out of fifty, maybe, we'd have to shoot down five. Because our pilots would go away when they would come in. [As a] matter-of-fact, a couple of pilots got hit by our own fire. But, … I don't know about our fire but by some other ships. I know we got accused of having some of our 20mm's hit the deck of the, I guess, it was the *Intrepid*, no, the *Enterprise*, on the carriers that they were coming after. And the guys are following them … and keep on going and the next thing you know there's the ship and the plane at the same height. But, the big guns, the five inch guns, as a rule, had been shut off automatically… But the 40mms and the 20mms were not that easily … And you can't blame the gunners behind them, "Boy, … they gotta get them because, maybe, they're gonna come and get us?" So, that the gunners were looking very precisely at the plane, not seeing where the plane is going.

KP: How badly damaged were you in either Okinawa or Iwo Jima? Did you take any direct hits?

BK: No.

KP: Were any of them close?

BK: No. 'Bout the only thing in the way of damage was this one plane that dropped within a very, relatively few feet from us and exploded, and we had all sorts of stuff fly on deck. Nobody was hurt. Not much damage.

KP: Did you have any battle casualties aboard?

BK: No. The only, only problem we had is, and we hadn't signed the treaty yet, but we were sitting in Buckner Bay and we were trying to get one of the airplanes fixed. It was having some minor problem, and our pilot went off with, to test it, and crashed out at sea. I'd say about five miles away from the ship. That's the only major casualty you might say was war related. We lost two people when we were in Inchon, well, then, Jinsin, Korea, and they were already saying, "All right, people with so many points of service could go home for discharge." And this one fellah, he was a cook on board ship, had a lot of points, and he and about eleven others were put into these motor whale boats to go over to this ship that was being sent back to the States, and there was a major tide change that we didn't know about that caused this tremendous wave, and it swamped the motor whale boats. All of the men but one swam back to the ship. This one drowned, and I knew him from when we were in pre-commissioning detail. So, I went to his buddy and I said, "How come he couldn't swim back to the ship?" He started crying. This is a

seaman first class, crying like fool. He says, "Remember when you were forcing us all to take swimming tests up there in Newport?" I said, "Yeah, he took it." He says, "No, I took it for him. I went up with his dog tags and stuff, and did the swimming tests and the diving tests for him." I had known him, [as a] matter-of-fact, from up at Newport. He was then a chief cook there, and I had done something very special for him, and he would come along with special baked goods and put it down on my watch station. "Here," you know? This kind of stuff, you know. "This is a thank you for what you did for me." Kept him out of trouble …

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed a lot of what you did in the Navy.

BK: Well, let's put it this way, I also have a good bit of pulling down the curtain on the unhappy things, and forgetting about them.

KP: Were there a lot of unhappy things?

BK: Not a lot. But every once in a while something would be.

KP: It sounds like your experiences in China were very memorable.

BK: Yes. Very, very.

KP: Why were you sent to China?

BK: Okay. In Tsingtao there was a big Japanese division there. I'm trying to think of how many thousand there were. Ten thousand? Maybe less. But anyway, and near Tsingtao. Tsingtao being the only … the nearest port of any size, there was a large concentration camp, Wei-shen. Up on the Shangtang peninsula, and in were a lot of civilians. It was not [a] military concentration camp. But there were a lot of British, French, and U.S. citizens who had been taken over by the Japanese, when they took over those areas of China, and they put them in this concentration camp. So, we were sent in with two jobs. One was to see about taking over from the Japanese command there, and then seeing about arranging for them to be shipped back to Japan … When we went in there, we really didn't know how many were in there, and the other thing, they knew about the concentration camp, and our job was to go get these people out of the concentration camp and bring them on board and see about them getting … medical treatment and that sort of stuff, and then arranging for them to be sent back to their homes, and that was why in September we were sent there. We were the first to really go ashore … There had been one other ship that has gone in a couple of days before us and, sort of, cased the place, and then came back out before we were ordered to go in there. I don't know whether it was an old cruiser, or a destroyer, that I don't remember. So, that was our purpose, to go in there. What I found out when we got there, [was] that there was an American Marine that had been serving with the forces down in the Burma Pass area. [He] had commandeered a Japanese plane and flown up, first to Shanghai, and then to Tsingtao, found out about that the funny way. There's another funny story. But anyway, our job was to take over, and since I was a communications officer, I went ashore with the Captain and a couple of other officers and the Marines. The fifty marines with the Marine captain … When they had gotten things organized with the locals, I walked down another street and there was a whole Russian section. A large population of White

Russians had immigrated there when they were defeated at Lake Baikal. The mostly White Russians, Belorussian … There's the Russian language on the various buildings about things, and this one said "restaurant." You know, transliterated. That's the Russian word for restaurant. Well, I haven't had a good Russian dish, what they call *pilmeny*, which is a little stuffed dumpling about this size with meat in it, and cooked in a soup kind of. I wonder if I could get something like that, nobody's in there. Then this big Chinese waiter, fairly tall for a Chinaman, comes by, and he looks at me, a naval officer, U.S. Didn't come over. Walked by to do what he was doing. Came by and, sort of, tentatively walking by me, and he didn't answer English. So I says, "Ketaietca," that means Mr. Chinamen, [come here please] which means, come over here. "Ja hoce tkusit,"…"Da, da sto vi hocete?" [laughter] I said, "Well did they have … "in Russian," did they have,… kanjecno"? "Yes, certainly." "I'd like to have some." It wasn't eating time. It was about three in the afternoon. Four in the afternoon. I had to be back on board ship at about, or to the motor whale boat to take me on board ship in about … an hour. What I didn't know [was] that around on the other side was a small bar, and there was five Russian men at that bar. They heard me. They come [quick noise] around, you know, like this, and started [speaking] … in Russian to me. I try to, in Russian, say, "Pardon me, my Russian language isn't too good." "You sound very good to me" is the translation. "You sound like Russian." You know, like you know something about it. So then we talked about this. It turned out one of the guys in that group, actually, did microbiology for the medical people in the area. He did the lab testing stuff. I got talking with him, and his wife was a dentist… The next time I come ashore, "here's the address, come over and visit," you know. Okay, so, about three days later, when I get about three hours, I can go ashore. I went over there. Well, they're in pretty bad shape food wise. So, I took over some coffee that I, [as a] matter-of-fact, got it from the guy that drowned later … No, his buddy I got it from … Some sugar and coffee and some regular baking flour, which I found out later was almost impossible to get in that market … You could get Chinese food, what's raised around there, and I took it over there. That was something great, you know. So, then after that if I got ashore, I had to go over and visit with them all the time. Well, he was in his fifties but she was about thirty-five, and they had about a five year old little boy, and had gotten so familiar, that I became a friend … which is very common in that area of Europe, that a good friend of the family is an uncle or an aunt, you know. So, he started calling me "uncle," and the familiar way of calling, saying uncle is "*daya*." So, I'm walking down into the market with the dentist woman and the little five year old in between us, and he's referring to me as "*daya*." I get back on board ship and guys in the division come over and says, "Holy smokes! We haven't been here a month, and already you got a little boy calling you, Daddy." [Laughter]

KP: It sounds like this experience in China was very rare.

BK: Yeah.

KP: You probably never would have had that sort of contact.

BK: Well, the thing that most people don't think about is Tsingtao is a city that was built by the Germans as the equivalent of Macao and Hong-Kong, back before the First World War. Then it was after the First World War it was taken away from them. So, when you go in there, there are all, (particularly on the water front), are all these buildings and hotels. It looks like you're in Bavaria, and, still many of the professionals there, the doctors, and what have you, are German

doctors, and the town, Tsingtao, was very much a German city, yet. Have you ever seen Tsingtao beer around here?

KP: No.

BK: In some Chinese places you can pick it up. I've seen it in the store, once in a while. Tsingtao beer is made in Tsingtao, China. It was a German colony, what else but a brewery, and they made pretty good beer. 'Course there was a large White Russian settlement there so they had their own vodka producing place. Very, very, very, very, very good vodka …

KP: What about your mission in terms of the camp? Did you end up rescuing people?

BK: We, within relatively few days, we took just about all of them off, and had them come on board ship, and the medical people examined them, and we had transportation coming in to pick them up and take them home … Okay, that's one of the women from the concentration camp. That picture there.

KP: What was it like to have women aboard ship?

BK: Oh, boy. [Laughter]

KP: I mean, here you have a bunch of men who have been out to sea for a long time.

BK: … Oh, yeah, that's, shall we say, there was drool all over the place, [laughter] and the reason that picture was taken, [was because] she was the most attractive of the whole bunch. [laughter] And if the guy who did the "North Star," who was involved in this and had his way there would have been four or five more in there. But the Catholic chaplain said, "No, no. One's enough. Let's not go with too many." Whether one was enough, I couldn't remember whether there was two or not, but there was just that one that I could immediately put my finger on … Yeah, a lot of it was, of course, health wise, because, they had very poor food up there, and they had practically no real medical treatment up there. There were four or five that were in not too good shape and were shipped immediately off to, I guess, the Philippines, the hospital there. I think it was where they were shipped to … The others were mainly, well, they looked [like] they'd been pulled through a knot hole. But with four or five meals, they began to feel like they were human again. We had, I'd say, about maybe ten that our medical people had to work on. The dentist had to work on one that I remember. All the teeth were swollen, and what have you. But, … they didn't stay on board very long. I mean, the idea was to bring them out of there as quick as we could and get them shipped to home.

KP: So, you did not actually, move them on your ship. The ship was more of a way station.

BK: That's right.

KP: I am going to have to end this interview soon, but I would like to do a follow up on, your post Rutgers years. It sounds like you had a run in with Vince Kramer in China.

BK: Did I say that here, or did you read that here?

KP: Well, I interviewed Vince Kramer, and he described this encounter.

BK: Oh, okay. This is the Marine that came up from southern China, the Burma bunch, into Tsingtao, and this was the first day we were there. No, the second day we were there, I guess, and our Captain had a small car. I think a Buick. That he put ashore, in order to travel … back and forth, and had left two privates' Marines, to supposedly guard it, and I'm not sure how this happened, but Vince who was, what a three striper by this time in the Marines, came up there and … "There's this car," and he wanted a car so he commandeered the car and went up to this hotel, which is where the Japanese were primarily based. In this big hotel up in the northern end of the town. When the Captain went ashore, the vehicle was gone. The Buick was gone … Next thing you know we hear the Captain bellowing for our Captain, "Hey, Saviano. Get your fifty men out and go on shore and go find my Buick. Don't come back on board ship until you do." Okay, I come off a watch and a messenger comes down from the officer of the deck. Says, "Hey, you're a Rutgers man, aren't you?" It was a good friend of mine who was the officer deck at the time. I said, "Yeah." He says, "We got a Rutgers man up in the Ward Room. He's got to answer a few questions to the Captain." I says, "Oh?" "Yeah." So, I go up there, and who's sitting there, it's Vince Kramer. Well, apparently, the Captain chewed him out, but didn't do anything drastic about it, about the fact that, "Hey, what are you doing running off with my car and this sort of stuff." Things were in a happy state in other ways so …

KP: He could let this slide.

BK: He could, sort of, overlook this. Particularly, since Vince had been in so much down in the Burma area, Burma Pass area and in southern China. So, I chatted with Vince a good bit, and the Captain saw to it that now he was, shall we say, sent home. Not to stay there. So, I didn't see too much of him. After I was back here on the staff, and Vince had now retired from the Marines, and it was written up about him coming, and being on the alumni … and what have you. So, the next day I walk down to the faculty club and it was not like it is now. There was a small little bar that's now a big room, you know, and there he is, sitting there. He didn't see me coming in and I said, "You stealing any Buicks these days?" [laughter] He says, "Holy Christ! Tsingtao."

KP: Yeah. I don't remember if he talked about stealing the Buick, but when I see him again, or after I send him his transcript, I will have to write him a little P.S. about the Buick.

BK: The Buick … from the wharf in Tsingtao. In order to go up to the big, nice, fancy hotel.

KP: When did you leave the ship? Did you take the ship back to the States?

BK: Yeah. We came all the way back to the States, and … the Captain, with his connections, saw to it that we were going to Boston. We came to San Francisco. After stopping in Pearl [Harbor] overnight where we had a hula show, hula-hatty show on board. Boy, the Army boys thought this was the greatest cruise they'd ever been on. [laughter] When we got back to San Francisco their orders were they had to go ashore. We nearly had a mutiny. They didn't want to

get off. They had heard we were going back to Boston. They wanted to go with us through the Canal, and what have you. So, they went off, whether they liked it or not. We went through the Canal, and up to Boston … I guess, it was about ten days into December, maybe ten or fifteen days into December, I was given terminal leave. I had a couple months of leave coming to me. Well, I wasn't given leave yet. I was given orders to report to the … the office in New York City for my terminal papers, my papers to get out of the service. So, I was back in New Haven, Connecticut for Christmas of that year. That's where my wife was with her family, in New Haven, Connecticut, and then, I was officially out of the Navy, about the first of February of '46. My joke along that line, since I like telling funny stories, is I wanted to go to graduate school and I started applying to different places. They were having trouble, because, they didn't have any staff around, yet, getting graduate programs organized. Well, I was told that this fellah, Dr. Stuart Mudd, down at the University of Pennsylvania in the Medical School, had a very active program going. So, I went down to try to find the graduate office in the University of Pennsylvania and it was closed, and it had been closed for a year or more. So, I walked over to the department, found Dr. Mudd, he looked at my transcript, said, "Oh." I'm in uniform, see. I'm still on terminal leave. [He] Says, "Oh, you want to go to graduate school in microbiology …?" I said, "Well, that's what brings me here, sir." He says, "Okay, follow me." Next thing you know, he crossed the hall and says, "John Flick, you have a course this afternoon?" He says, "Yes, it's my second lecture." "Well, here's a new student for your lecture."

KP: And that was it.

BK: I had never applied to the University of Pennsylvania, officially, as a graduate student. Never made out an application. I just, all of the sudden, was enrolled. I didn't know about this, and then, after he says, "Well, the class meets at such and such time." We walk up to the zoology building, I can't remember the name of the physiology professor. Dr. Stuart Mudd says, "Let's see, you've got this course going?" He says, "Yes, I have my first lecture, … in about an hour." He says, "What textbooks [are] you using?" So, Mudd walks me over to the bookstore and buys me the book and says, "All right, you're taking physiology at this time." I get home, to Woodbury Heights, it's about six-thirty. Normally, my mom's, supper is five-thirty. What happened to me, you know? Betty, my wife, was there. She's, "Where've I been?" I come walking in with a bunch of books under my arm, you know, "What happened to you?" Says, "I've been to class." "You've been what?" [laughter]

KP: You probably have had one of the more unorthodox entries into graduate school. How crucial was the G.I. Bill in allowing you to get a PhD.?

BK: A lot. The GI Bill was a major bit. I was thinking of only a Master's degree at the time, because of the money … Yes, I had saved a good bit of money from my naval pay. A little bit that's humorous on that, since I was married I kept the allowance allowed to married officers, and my wife was living with her mother and father up in New Haven, Connecticut. So, that money went into an account that was going to pay for my graduate work. But then the GI Bill came along, and my wife got a job in the University of Penn library. So, we weren't using this money. Now, my father-in-law was very against us getting married before the war, or before me going off. He felt that since he had gone into World War I, and came home and got married, he felt that that's what Betty and I ought to do too. But, we insisted and he was very peed off about

this. But, finally, "okay." Then, I'm at Graduate School and they have to get out of this apartment they were renting. They had decided they wanted to buy a small house, and they were having trouble getting enough money, and what have you … Betty and I says, "Well, here. We can loan you four-thousand." His eyes went big as saucers. "Where'd you get that?" I said, "That's the money that accumulated, because, you kept my wife living with you, even though, you were mad at her for marrying me." [Laughter] He says, "I wasn't mad about you marrying her. I was just mad about the timing you had." I says, "Well, that's what this money came from. The living allowance that I didn't lose. If I were a single officer and went to sea, I wouldn't be getting it."

KP: Well, I hate to end it like this.

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

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