RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT MACPHERSON

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Robert MacPherson on September 13, 2001, in Orlando, Florida, with Shaun Illingworth and …

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

SI: Mr. MacPherson, I would like to thank you and your wife for joining us this afternoon.

RM: You're welcome. [laughter]

SI: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents and your family history. Your father was born in New York City. Do you know how his family came to settle in New York City?

RM: Yes. … On my father's side, his grandfather was an immigrant from Scotland.

SI: Do you know why his grandfather emigrated to the United States?

RM: I have no idea. [laughter] He was an engineer, and, oddly enough, I guess, … [for] part of his career, he designed amusement park rides, and he worked on the one at Coney Island. [laughter]

SI: Where in the city did your father's family live?

RM: I think it was the Upper West Side. What was it, Morningside Heights or something like that, Gay?

Gay MacPherson: … It looked over the river.

RM: Yeah. …

SI: You wrote on your survey that your father had some college education. Do you know where he went to school?

RM: Yeah, he went to CCNY in New York, nights.

SI: Do you know what he was studying?

RM: I have no idea, actually. It was, basically, in sales and sales promotion.

SI: Your mother was born in Philadelphia. Do you know how her family came to settle there?

RM: No, I don't. … I've been unable to trace anything back.

SH: Do you know how your parents met?

RM: Nope.

SH: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

RM: No.

SI: Your father served in the US Army during World War I.

RM: Right.

SI: Do you know anything about his time in the service?

RM: No. He said very little about it.

GM: He was an officer.

RM: He was an officer. He served in France, but, he never … discussed it.

SH: Did he have any memorabilia that you found later on?

RM: He had a few standard medals and stuff like that. …

SH: He never shared any stories about his military career.

RM: No, nope.

SH: What was your father's occupation?

RM: He … did sales promotion with the Kelvinator Division of Nash-Kelvinator, I guess it was then, refrigeration stuff.

SH: Okay. I did not know what a Kelvinator was.

RM: [laughter] Like a Frigidaire.

SI: Did your father's job require him to travel often?

RM: … He did some traveling. Basically, he handled [utility companies]. In those days, utility companies, the big ones, all had retail outlets. The idea was, if you sold a refrigerator, they used electricity for the next umpteen years, and the utility sales bit was my father's province.

SI: Did he sell mostly to businesses or private individuals?

RM: He was selling, basically, to big utility companies, who resold them in their retail outlets.

SH: Did your mother ever work outside of the home?

RM: No.

GM: She was a club woman.

SH: What were some of your mother's social activities when you were a young man?

RM: I think I'll just say no. [laughter] … You're getting into a … not too comfortable … [line of] questioning here.

SI: You were also born in New York City.

RM: Yes.

SI: Was your family still living in Morning Side Heights at the time?

RM: Yes, yes. I was only there, what, a year, about?

GM: I know your mother complained about taking the baby carriage down the elevator to get out in the fresh air with you.

RM: Which was when we moved to [the] New Jersey suburbs.

GM: Yeah, she didn't want to do that anymore, so, they moved out to New Jersey.

SH: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

RM: Well, my father was jobless, occasionally. We were on a tight budget, although we lived fairly middle class until, what? my senior year in high school; … it was '38. He was out of work and we spent that last year living in, I guess you would say, an upper class boarding house, [laughter] and then, he got relocated. I've forgotten what he was selling in those days, some appliance, but, he seemed to get back on his feet and so forth.

SH: When your family left New York for New Jersey, where did you first settle?

RM: Fanwood, New Jersey.

SH: Did you attend an elementary school in Fanwood?

RM: Yes, until the fourth grade.

SH: Where did you move to next?

RM: Then, to Plainfield.

SH: That was where your family settle permanently.

RM: Yes.

SH: You later entered Plainfield High School.

RM: Yes.

SH: What were your interests as a child and an adolescent?

RM: Well, actually, in the fourth grade, I decided that I wanted to be a newspaper person and my interest was divided between a vocational interest and a very strong interest in Big Band music. …

SH: Did you play a musical instrument?

RM: My parents made an abortive attempt to teach me piano, but, that didn't work, no.

SH: However, you were a good audience.

RM: I was a good audience. …

SH: Do you dance?

RM: Well, I don't know; [you] better ask my wife. [laughter]

GM: No, we'd go to hear the music, the bands, and we'd end up standing in front of them. [laughter] All he wanted to hear was the music.

RM: Yeah. We were, not "we," it was a date with another girl, … in, what was that, about 1936?

GM: Yeah.

RM: We were at the Manhattan Room of the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York, where the Benny Goodman Band played, and CBS was doing publicity photos that night, and, oddly enough, we have the photo of Benny Goodman and the young lady and I staring up devotedly at the master, but, it turned up on, what was that fellow that did the *Jazz* series recently on PBS?

SI: Ken Burns.

RM: Ken Burns. They used that photo on the Ken Burns show. …

SH: It is your claim to fame.

RM: "Your claim to fame." [laughter]

SH: Did you pursue your interests in journalism and music in high school also?

RM: Yeah, yeah.

SH: Did you participate in athletics at all?

RM: No.

SH: At Plainfield High School?

RM: No.

SH: What led you to choose Rutgers for your college education?

RM: Rutgers was one of two, maybe three, universities that, at that time, had a journalism course. There was Columbia, and Missouri, and Rutgers, and being a state university, of course, we lived in the state, it was cheaper, you know, … there was no question that I would [go there].

SH: Did you qualify for a State Scholarship?

RM: No. … We never applied for [it]. I got "gentleman's Cs" in high school. [laughter]

SH: I like that term. Did you meet Mrs. MacPherson while you were both students at Plainfield High School?

RM: We attended high school together, and we knew each other briefly, but, we never dated, until much later.

SH: What did you do during your summer breaks?

RM: At college? …

SH: High school or college. Were you a Boy Scout? Did you go to a summer camp?

RM: I worked.

SH: Where did you work?

RM: Well, I was a soda jerk in Howard Johnson's. I worked for American Stores as a vegetable clerk. I worked for a public utility, repairing gas meters.

SH: When you were applying to Rutgers, did you come down to campus for an interview?

RM: I don't remember.

SH: Where did you live when you first entered Rutgers?

RM: Plainfield.

SH: You lived at home and commuted to Rutgers.

RM: No, I lived on campus. What was the name of that quadrangle? I've forgotten.

GM: Right near the Phi Gamma Delta [House].

RM: Right by the river there, with those brick buildings.

SH: Do you remember the name of the hall that you lived in?

RM: I think it was Pell.

SI: Did you have a roommate?

RM: Yeah.

SI: Do you remember his name?

RM: Yes. His name was Bob Johnson. I believe he's since deceased, quite some time ago.

SH: Who were your favorite professors at Rutgers? What kind of courses were you interested in?

RM: Well, I got through Rutgers, basically, with "1"s and "2"s in any journalism course, and "3"s in the rest of it. I failed trigonometry once and had to take that over, which, of course, being a young man, interested me not one bit, [laughter] and there is a story about one of the professors, … we may be jumping a little ahead here, but, when the war broke out in December of '41, in January of '42, the Army, or the government, or something, created a bunch of … airplane spotting locations, where you picked up the phone and said, "There's an airplane up there," and somebody did something. At any rate, the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity volunteered to man the midnight to dawn shift, and, unfortunately, I was put in charge of that, and, as you may expect, there was a lot of extra shifts that I did. I also had an eight AM American history class with Professor Peter Charanis, I think it was, something like that, … which saw me very, very little, and so, when it came to graduation, which was in early May of that year, I went around to see Professor Charanis, and I laid it on the line, … and I told him exactly what I was doing. I said, "I deserve to fail the course, I admit it. If you fail me, I don't graduate. I'm going in the service in two months, let's strike a bargain. Give me a "4," and I get my degree and get out of here, and we'll forget it." God bless the man, he did. [laughter]

SH: Do you remember being hazed or initiated as a freshman at Rutgers in 1938?

RM: I don't recall any.

SH: Do you recall having to wear a dink?

RM: I guess I did. The only instruction I remember is that you had to say, "Hello," to upperclassmen, or something of the sort.

SH: Did you attend the mandatory chapel services?

RM: Yes. I got out of that neatly.

SH: How?

RM: One of my skills from Grace Episcopal Church in Plainfield was some mild ability to play the carillon, and so, you had to have a pretty good excuse to get out of chapel, and so, they let me off, because I assisted the regular bell ringer.

SH: That is unique. I have never met anyone who was a bell ringer.

RM: Well, I didn't think too much about [it]. To be perfectly honest with you, I was home most weekends. I mean, I got free food there, and laundry, and stuff like that, … and so, the chapel was very inconvenient.

SH: How did you travel home?

RM: Mostly hitchhiked.

SH: Were you rushed to join a fraternity in your freshman year?

RM: No. [laughter] I didn't have any money for that at that time.

SH: When did you join your fraternity?

RM: '41. …

SH: Did you ever receive any advice on which course to enroll in? Did you participate in any extracurricular activities on campus?

RM: I don't recall that I got any advice on what course to take. This might be important to some historian, but, you asked me why I picked Rutgers. Rutgers, also, was the one college of the three that did not require a foreign language, at that time, and, as foreign languages go, I'm inept.

SH: Were you enrolled in the ROTC?

RM: Yeah. … You did two years of that.

SH: How did you feel about the ROTC?

RM: It was just something that had to be done. [laughter] …

SH: Who were your professors in journalism?

RM: Well, I remember Professor Jennings and I think there was a Professor Boyenton, or something like that. I really don't [remember].

SH: Were you a writer for the *Targum*?

RM: Yes, I did the, … what would you call it, Gay, the amusement column? Is that right?

SI: Variety?

RM: Yeah, because one of the great advantages, as a matter-of-fact, I instigated it, … of that is that you could take your dates, and Gay went with me many times, to just about any of the Big Band hotels in New York, and get a free dinner and … the whole business, because they were delighted to get a write-up in a nearby college newspaper. …

GM: [I remember] going to the Hotel Biltmore and having a filet mignon dinner and I was dressed in a long ball gown. It was very nice.

SH: Can you repeat that story for the record?

RM: Well, Gay was saying that one of the highlights was going to the Hotel Biltmore, where we got a filet mignon dinner, I've even forgotten the name of the band that was playing there, but, you dressed in those days. Gay had on a very lovely, long, black dress. …

SH: Did you own your own tuxedo?

RM: No. [laughter]

SI: Do you remember seeing any of the bands that performed on campus, such as Ozzie Nelson?

RM: Yeah, they had big bands, in those days, for all of the dances and we went to many of them.

SH: What else did you participate in, besides writing for the *Targum*?

RM: I remember some involvement with the dramatic group there, but, I'll be darned if I could tell you exactly what it was. …

SH: Queen's Players?

RM: Queen's Players, that's it, yeah.

SH: Were you an actor?

RM: I think so, a very modest one. [laughter]

SH: In writing the *Targum*'s entertainment section, did you also cover Broadway plays and local concerts?

RM: … We never went to any plays in New York, on the house or anything like that, but, I mean, … we might mention that, if there was an opportunity to get discount tickets for students or something like that.

SH: Did you work while living on campus?

RM: Oh, yeah.

SH: Where did you work?

RM: Well, I had the morning *New York Herald Tribune* distribution route and I worked at Howard Johnson's [in the] evenings.

SH: Oh, I was not sure if you were a Howard Johnson's soda jerk in high school or college.

RM: … No, in college.

SH: Before you joined your fraternity, did you notice a division between the fraternity men and the students in the dorms and the commuters?

RM: I don't recall that there was any particular [enmity].

SH: Did you go to the football games?

RM: Yeah, I went to some of them.

SH: Do any games stick out in your memory?

RM: Well, I can remember going to, my freshman year, I guess it was, they still used the, what went before even the first stadium, which was back at the Quad there, [Nielson Field], and playing teams like NYU, [laughter] and we did go to the first game of the, then, "new" stadium, where Rutgers managed to beat Princeton, 20-18. That's something to remember.

SH: I think everyone who attended that game remembers the score.

RM: Yeah. [laughter] Yes, I think the last four minutes of that game was the longest four minutes any of us ever spent.

SH: In conducting research for this project, both Shaun and I have read numerous issues of the *Targum* from your days at Rutgers. I particularly remember one editorial, I can not recall who

wrote it, that chastised the student body for a lack of school spirit and the fact that fans were not cheering loud enough at the sporting events. Do you recall that sentiment at all?

RM: No. The only thing that happened out of Rutgers football, it was, oh, I don't know, twenty years later, when I was doing a lot of freelance writing, and *Gentlemen's Quarterly* was still a magazine of some repute, rather than just a fashion magazine, … I wrote the re-creation of the first football game between Rutgers and Princeton, and I read it the other day. It's a pretty definitive description. [laughter]

SH: The current generation of Rutgers students is amazed by the on-campus social life of your day. Because of your knowledge of popular music, were you ever called upon to help out with any school dances or fraternity social events?

RM: No, no. [laughter]

SH: Did you ever visit the NJC campus on social calls?

RM: Well, I think I might have rode over there or something a couple times. As a freshman, they tried to have introductory visits, but, … I didn't have any money to mess with dates and stuff like that in those days.

SH: Did you go to the movies?

RM: I don't recall that I did.

SH: Since you studied journalism under Professor Jennings, what was the most important lesson that he taught you?

RM: I hate … to say this, but, in retrospect, I could have learned in one year on a good weekly newspaper, probably, more than I learned in four years at Rutgers and two years in journalism school.

SH: Did you ever contribute articles to any of the local newspapers?

RM: No, I didn't.

SH: I know that some *Targum* writers also wrote for the local papers. I just wondered if you ever had that opportunity.

RM: No.

SH: Before Pearl Harbor, how aware were you of what was happening in Europe and Asia, with the rise of Hitler, Japan's expansion into China, and the outbreak of World War II?

RM: Oh, I think very little. I mean, I assume that even in journalism class, where you had to deal with stuff off the wire every day, we must have had some idea, but, I don't recall, and I was

always an avid newspaper reader. … We knew there were problems in Europe, but, I mean, it certainly wasn't a day-to-day thing that you were [following].

SH: What did your family think of Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

RM: We didn't like him at all. [laughter]

SH: Were you involved in any of the political campaigns that took place during your years at Rutgers?

RM: I did get an assignment, what was the year Wendell Willkie ran?

SI: 1940.

RM: '40? I did get an assignment to ride his campaign train from New Brunswick to, I don't know, Trenton, or Princeton, or something like that, and then, do a story for the *Targum*.

SH: What did you think of Wendell Willkie?

RM: I don't know. I wasn't, I guess, in retrospect, that much impressed with the guy. …

SH: Did you ever hear Rev. Norman Thomas speak at the University?

RM: No.

SI: Do you remember Paul Robeson returning to campus to perform?

RM: No.

SH: When did you and Mrs. MacPherson begin dating?

RM: I don't know. You know these dates better than I.

GM: January 7th, we started dating, 1940. … We went to the Military Ball.

RM: Yeah, no, we went to all the events down there, yeah, sure.

SH: Did Mrs. MacPherson live in Plainfield at the time?

RM: No, she lived up in Verona, near Montclair, about … twenty miles away.

SH: Do you remember where you were when you heard the news that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?

RM: I was … with a fraternity brother, at his home in … either Roselle or Roselle Park, … a fellow by the name of Paul (Hoseinstock?), I think it was, something like that. …

SH: How did you react to the news?

RM: Well, I think it just changed everything completely. Suddenly, you had an absolute new focus. Something you didn't expect had happened and you knew it was going to change your life. I mean, we were, what, twenty-one years old? We were Army fodder. [laughter]

SH: Before the attack, what were your plans for after college?

RM: Get a job on a newspaper.

SH: Had you been looking for a job or were you just focusing on finishing your senior year?

RM: No, I really hadn't begun any job search at that point, no.

SH: What were your thoughts during your senior year?

RM: I don't know. I can't speak for others, but, with the war, any kind of planning just went … out of your mind. …

SH: Your plans were completely altered.

RM: … I don't think that graduates, at that time, really began this job search six or twelve months ahead of time, the way, I suppose, they do today.

SH: Given that the draft was on before Pearl Harbor and Great Britain's prospects for holding off the Nazis were looking grim, did you believe that, sooner or later, the United States would be drawn into the conflict?

RM: … I'm not sure that we did a lot of thinking about it before Pearl Harbor.

SH: Okay. After you heard the news, did you consider going out and enlisting right away?

RM: Oh, no. [laughter]

SH: Were you given any advice by your family or the Rutgers administration?

RM: I didn't get any. [laughter]

SH: Some men said that they rushed out and enlisted right away, going from one recruiter to the next until they found a branch of the service that would take them. Others say that they heeded the advice of their parents and the administration to wait until they were called to duty.

RM: I don't know. The thought of not getting my degree … never entered my head.

SI: Since your father was an Army veteran, did he advise you on which branch to join?

RM: … Yes. [Do] you want to get into the service bit? Well, that's a very interesting story. … When I enlisted, which was in, what, July, early July? he gave me a card before I left, and it had the name of a colonel on it, and an address, and so forth, and … my father said to me, "When you get your serial number, send a telegram to this man … with your serial number," and he said, "Then, just sit tight." So, I [went] off to Fort Dix, I sent the thing, and one week goes by, another week goes by, finally, the third week, they called us up, you know, and [they] say, "You're leaving in the morning," and, sure enough, I got assigned to Fort Monmouth. [laughter]

SH: Really?

RM: Really.

SI: Do you remember anything about your induction, the physical and so forth?

RM: Yeah. I mean, it's about what you would expect. I didn't think it was anything out of the ordinary. They get through you in about four or five days, all these tests, and shots, and whatnot, and then, you just kind of sit. As I recall, they had me typing stuff somewhere, like a fool. You know, I learn quickly, but, not that time; the Sergeant, one morning, said, "Can anybody here type?" you know. …

SH: When you left Plainfield, did you report to Fort Dix, New York City …

RM: No, to Newark.

SH: Did anyone accompany you?

RM: I guess my father must have drove me. Didn't he?

GM: Must have.

SH: Did you know any other young men on the train to Fort Dix?

RM: No.

SH: What do you know about the man that you sent your information to?

RM: Well, the story behind that is that, I guess, my father had something to do with refrigeration stuff at Fort Monmouth, and he knew this colonel and made a few inquiries, and that's how I got sent to the Signal Corps at Fort Monmouth, instead of some god-awful place in Missouri.

SH: Did you ever meet this colonel?

RM: No, I never met him.

SI: What did you do once you arrived at Fort Monmouth?

RM: Well, at that time, Signal Corps, they sent you to Sea Girt, the old governor's compound there, for three weeks of basic training, most of which was marching in classes. … We did get a chance to use the rifle range, which was a lot of fun. …

SH: Do you say that tongue-in-cheek?

RM: No, no, I enjoyed that immensely. Nights, after supper, … a lot of the permanent cadre there used to go out on the beach with their .45 revolvers and, you know, shoot clam shells against the dunes and I went out with them a couple of times. I enjoyed that. Then, we had an overnight hike, God forbid, to Fort Monmouth. [laughter] … When I arrived at Fort Monmouth, in August of '42, the first thing they did was put me in a class to try to teach me Portuguese. This was obviously a mistake, and, in about two weeks, they realized it, so, it was then off to cryptography school, and that's what I graduated in. In November, I was sent down to Arlington Hall in Arlington, Virginia, which is the Signal Intelligence Center for code breaking and analysis, and I worked there … 'til about March of '43. … I should say, at this point, by that time, we had received very, very high security clearances, what they called a "Q Clearance," and so, these nineteen other guys and I were sent to a Signal Corps establishment called Vint Hill Farms in Virginia, which was about, oh, I'd say seventy-five miles from Washington. This was … one of these radio reception places. We never did anything there. I will not know, to this day. … For four weeks, we unloaded freight cars of coal and other supplies. I think, maybe, they were trying to toughen us up or something, so, I really don't have any idea, and, during that time, or just prior to it, the FBI was doing all the investigation with my neighbors and whatnot, to get our clearances.

SH: Did anyone in your family or your neighborhood write to you and ask why they were being questioned?

RM: Yes.

SH: What did you tell them?

RM: … I just told them I couldn't tell. [laughter] At Arlington, this was a very highly classified operation, … but, by the end of April, presumably in better physical condition than when we started, we got shipped out of Vint Hill Farms, and, along the way, we picked up twenty radio operators, and we're off to Norfolk, Virginia, and put on a truck, and taken out on this pier, to the last ship in the line, and the radio operators immediately became very excited, because there was all kinds of antennas, radar dishes, and so forth, on top of this ship, which was the USS *Ancon*, AGC-4, the first of the command ships that the Navy had put into service, and the *Ancon* was a former Panama Line steamship. There were three of them, the *Cristobal*, the *Ancon,* and the something else, and they had converted it completely to a military headquarters ship, and it turned out, and I don't know whether this story is true or not, but, there was considerable concern among the Navy, which ran the ship and were, you know, ninety-five percent of the crew, that we Army enlisted types were gonna handle all the communications. I mean, it appears that, in the Navy, only officers handled secret and above material, and [it] … took a little while for all of this to settle down. The story we were given was that where the Navy code people were trained,

the officers at Yale University, they simply didn't know how to run the stuff on their ship. [laughter] So, for quite sometime, actually, from then until September of two years later, we were literally part of the crew of that ship. …

SH: Were you under the command of Navy officers?

RM: Oh, yeah. Well, no, we had two Army officers in charge of the group. … I mean, we were what you would call "permanent crew," and, for about the next three weeks, we did training exercises in Chesapeake Bay, and we got a final three-day leave, and, on May 18, 1943, we sailed for Africa. … This was a long trip. We sailed way down to the south in a big circle, and we also had a seagoing tug in the convoy, and so, we were doing about twelve knots the whole way, [laughter] but, we got there, and it was calm, and that was about it. We first were in Oran, and we could live without that town, [laughter] and then, we went to Algiers, and it was at that point that General Patton came to visit us, in all of his glory. It was quite a sight to see his open convertible vehicle, with motorcycle outriders, and, you know, the whole panoply coming down the dock, and he starts up the gangway, and … stops, and looks over the ship, with the pearl revolvers in his pockets, … a real character. [laughter]

SH: When did you see General Patton?

RM: This would have been … May, early June, of that year, and I'd have to go look at my *Ancon* records here, make sure I keep this in context here. …

SI: Were you under the command of the same two officers throughout your two-year tour?

RM: Yes, yes. We were stuck; we were lost. We were known, officially, as the Fourth Signal Amphibious Detachment and that was it. I mean, high, almighty military Army officers would come onboard and say, "Who are you?" [laughter]

SH: Were most of the members of your Signal Corps unit college-educated? Were they mostly from the Northeast?

RM: They were all college-educated, yeah. … I think most of us came from the East. …

SH: Had any of them been in the ASTP program?

RM: What is that?

SH: The Army Specialized Training Program.

RM: No. We'd all been through cryptography school and we had all worked at Arlington. …

SH: For two years, your unit consisted of the same two officers and twenty personnel.

RM: Yes, same two officers, same twenty personnel, no promotions, no nothing. In fact, we looked like a pretty ragtag bunch at the end of it, because we got no uniform supplies, and many of us were reduced to wearing blue shirts with khaki pants and things like that.

SH: Did you have any problems getting your mail?

RM: No problem.

SH: Really?

RM: … I forgot, what was it, a Naval post office or something, whatever the thing is? USS *Ancon*, yeah.

SI: How did you take to working with what was then state of the art technology and being a cryptographer?

RM: I liked it.

SI: It seems like quite a departure from what you studied at Rutgers.

RM: Oh, yeah. Well, it was still working with words. [laughter] We were working on the very latest coding equipment at that time, and it was … an interesting challenge, because your typing had to be extremely accurate or the whole thing would go, "Ka-blewee," and you started over again, and it was sort of fun to try to make that machine go as fast as [possible], it had a capacity of … sixty words a minute, and to get it up to that speed and keep it going. There was also the interesting challenge that, in contrast to the Germans, who didn't do this, when you sent a message in code, we were always required to put a little phrase first, before we started the message, and a little phrase at the end, and you could get pretty creative about that. In fact, you could even send queries back and forth to Washington, if you were doing it, like, "How are the Yankees going …" into the message, [that] kind of thing. …

SI: Was that done for security reasons?

RM: Yeah, that was [for] security.

SI: Your job was basically to decode and encode messages.

RM: That's right.

SI: I have seen several pictures of the German Enigma machines. Was your equipment similar to those machines?

RM: They're much like the Enigma, yes.

SI: Did you use new codes every day?

RM: You changed it every day, yeah.

SH: Did you handle only the Army's communications or did you decode/encode messages for the Navy as well?

RM: No, no, we were doing the whole thing. Because it was a command ship, we had to decode almost everything that came through on certain frequencies. … You'd get a thousand-block message of what was on some blooming ship coming across the Atlantic, and have to decode it, and send it off, upstairs to the Navy command. I don't know what they did with it. …

SH: How were the code books delivered?

RM: Well, … you mean the information on how to set the codes? … I don't recall how that was delivered, to be honest with you, probably in a message, I imagine.

SI: Were there admirals and corps commanders onboard the *Ancon*?

RM: Oh, yeah. We had [them].

SI: Do you remember any famous commanders that came aboard the *Ancon*?

RM: Well, you name it, we had them. [laughter] We took … Omar Bradley into Sicily … for the Sicilian invasion. The command ship, actually, the communications ship, … on all of the invasions I was on, was the first ship in there, behind the minesweepers.

SH: What position did the *Ancon* take during the invasion?

RM: We had the number one slot [laughter] and I suspect because the Navy command wanted to see what was happening and so forth. …

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

RM: … Everything was off and they suddenly realized that, "Hey, these guys are staying; they're part of the crew," and we had backup assignments, I mean, just like any of the Navy, … on general quarters and things like that. …

SI: What were your other duties?

RM: I was supposed to be helping [to] haul ammunition up to the twin .40s tub on the port side. [laughter]

SH: Was that your battle station?

RM: That was my battle station.

SI: Were you given any training on what to do in case the ship was in danger?

RM: Oh, yes, yeah. All of us were assigned specific duties that, if the ship was in danger of going down, there was certain stuff we had to get overboard, yeah.

SH: Can you give us a rough estimate of how much equipment you were working on?

RM: Well, we had, as I recall, three or four coding positions, and, well, I mean, the code room, … I don't think it was as big as this bedroom, and we had stuff in book codes that we rarely ever used. …

SH: To step back for a moment, where had you tried to enlist in the Navy?

RM: … I guess, Newark.

GM: Yes.

SH: Were you engaged to Mrs. MacPherson at this point?

RM: No.

SH: Were you corresponding at that time?

RM: Oh, yes, sure. We were going steady at that point. I didn't really feel it was a good idea to tie Gay down with an engagement. … I mean, who knows whether I was coming back or in what shape? [laughter] but, we corresponded regularly throughout the whole war, sure.

SH: Did you keep in contact with the University?

RM: No, no. That's one of the great problems … that I think the Class of '42 had. … We didn't have any contact with the University for three, three-and-a-half years, and we never managed to develop the rapport of being an alumnus. I went back once. … Was it my fifth reunion? And, you know, I had lost my roommate in the war. We had lost other guys in the [fraternity].

GM: The president, you lost.

RM: Yeah, and many of that class in the fraternity, and it just seemed a little empty.

SH: Who was the president of your fraternity?

RM: Who was the president? John Huntley, wasn't it?

SH: Was your first landing at Oran?

RM: No, that was already taken. That was Allied-occupied. First landing we did was in Sicily.

SH: You said that the *Ancon* was positioned right behind the minesweepers.

RM: Yeah.

SH: Did you see any of the battle or were you stationed down in the bowels of the ship?

RM: Oh, sure. Well, we worked eight-hour shifts, and, obviously, you didn't spend a lot of time on an open deck, because there's too much stuff coming down, but, we got … enough on deck to see what was going on and so forth. The *Ancon* carried troops for these landings, too. I mean, we had our own set of LCVPs and stuff like that. …

SI: Did you talk with any of the troops that were preparing to go ashore?

RM: No, not particularly. … They were generally quartered in a different [area]. I mean, we had the run of the ship and they didn't. [laughter] …

SH: What did you see once your eight-hour shift was over?

RM: Well, I think on Sicily, the main memory is … that we had an almost unopposed landing. … I think the serious part of the first night was that we had a whole bunch of airborne troops that were off course and, of course, everybody in our flotilla opened up like crazy, and we wound up shooting down a few of them, … but, other than that, the troops got ashore, and, by the next day, everything was unloading. …

SH: How were you informed that those were American troops that were being shot at?

RM: We didn't know it. We were told that no aircraft was scheduled to come over us and they were off course.

SI: Were you on duty as a cryptographer at that point or were you aiding the Navy personnel in their duties?

RM: No, I was not. The Navy could handle that pretty well by themselves. [laughter]

SI: How much more communications traffic did the *Ancon* handle during the actual landing?

RM: It speeded up quite a bit, yeah, because you were getting them from shore. Basically, the *Ancon* served as a command center for the Army and the Air Force controllers and generals until they could get them ashore, which was, usually, depending on the situation, three or four days or three weeks. …

SI: Was there any resistance put forth by coastal artillery or the enemy's air force?

RM: Very little. … (Scicli?) was manned almost entirely by Italians, who immediately surrendered, and we had no trouble with that landing at all.

SH: Once the landing operations were complete, what was the *Ancon*'s mission?

RM: Normally, the regular procedure was that, once we had the brass on the beach and they had their own communications set up, we got out of there and went back to Africa, and that's what we did … after Sicily, and … we went back to Algiers, I guess, just before the Fourth of July, which was a nice story.

SH: Please, tell us about that.

RM: This is one that I have difficultly telling, because I still get a bit emotional about it, but, the harbor, of course, was full, and we had a big British battleship anchored, I don't know, a hundred yards away from us, and we had the usual muster, July the Fourth, on the deck, you know, and, "Everybody here? Fine, let's go eat," and then, we were called back to attention, and the British, … I mean, they know how to do things right. The battleship had its own band and, after they did *God Save the King* and raised the Union Jack, they played the *Star-Spangled Banner*, and they raised up the biggest damn American flag I've ever seen, and, believe me, being that far from home, this was quite a moment. …

SH: Did you ever go ashore in Algiers?

RM: I think I went ashore once in Oran and, I don't know, maybe twice in Algiers. Those places didn't hold any interest to me. They were dirty, the people ran around in sheets, and the only safe place you could go was the Red Cross or Salvation Army canteen, and we had better food on the ship. There wasn't any entertainment. … The only entertainment is, this was the only time I … ever knew, I was walking down the street on one liberty, there was this long line of GIs lined up in front of this building, and I had asked what it was, and, apparently, in those days, the Army ran their own whorehouses, so that the soldiers wouldn't get as badly infected or whatnot, and this was the Algiers house of ill repute, … under the control of the US Army. [laughter]

SH: Well, we will not go there.

RM: [laughter] But, no, I think there may have been some people on the ship who went ashore more often, but, there really wasn't anything in these North African towns that was of [interest].

SH: Having grown up in New Jersey, how did you react to the culture and climate of North Africa?

RM: Well, I guess all I was hoping was, "When do we get out of here?" [laughter]

SH: How long after the Fourth of July did you stay in Algiers?

RM: Well, … we went into hiding in a little town about fifty miles east of Algiers called (Mostaganem?), which was a little bitty town, a little, hundred yards square harbor, which we could barely get into, but, they thought it was a good hideout from air raids, and then, in September, of course, we led the invasion into Salerno, which was our unhappiest place.

SH: Why?

RM: Well, we didn't have any air cover, and, by that time, the Germans had discovered what the *Ancon* was, and they were experimenting with radio controlled bombs, and they did a pretty good job of bombing us, every hour on the hour, and, at night time, we'd haul anchor and put smoke pots on the bow, with two destroyers, and go out and run in circles, and then, come back in the morning. That was a very difficult thing. … I mean, the cruiser, *Boise*, got hit with one of those radio controlled bombs about a hundred yards from us, and hit the front part of their ship, and disabled it, and … we just plain didn't have any air cover for days and days. We stayed there three weeks, because it was so dicey as to whether … we were gonna get on the beach or we weren't.

SI: Since you had your finger on the pulse of the messages going back and forth between the beach and the fleet, were you aware of just how close the ground forces were to being thrown back into the sea?

RM: You got some general feeling, but, I mean, you were so busy just pushing stuff through. … I always remember that during, what was it? the day after D-Day in Europe, I handled one message from somewhere, I don't know where, but, it was requesting Ping-Pong balls from the States, and we all got a big laugh out of that. Here, we're sitting off Omaha Beach and [that comes through]. [laughter]

SH: If battle stations were called during your eight-hour shift, would you leave your cryptographic post to take up your battle station …

RM: No, no, no.

SH: … Or would you only leave if you were relieved or not busy?

RM: That's right.

SH: I was wondering if everything stopped during battle stations.

RM: … No, no. [laughter]

SI: Were the messages that you decoded pretty straightforward or were they written in cryptic language?

RM: No, they were all plain text, yeah. Every once in a while, you'd get one that started out, "For the eyes only of," and that's when you had to call an officer and let him decode it, [laughter] but, since we often split messages in half and started at odd places, you'd be banging away there, … all messages coming out, and, suddenly, it comes out, "For the eyes only of." [laughter]

SH: Do you remember any of the messages that you decoded during the Salerno operation?

RM: Well, I remember, when we left Salerno, after about eight days, and were halfway back to Africa, I handled the message from Salerno that said, "Turn that ship around and come back here." [laughter]

SH: Why were you sent back?

RM: They were afraid they were gonna get [thrown] off the beach, that they couldn't hold it.

SI: Were they prepping the *Ancon* for use as a hospital ship?

RM: No, no. They wanted the communications equipment. …

SI: Did the ship turn around and head back?

RM: Oh, yes, right away.

SI: Was the beachhead secured by the time you got back there?

RM: We were back there in six, eight hours. We stopped by Palermo, Italy, loaded up a couple of the holds with … shells for the cruisers, just laying on the bottom of the hold, [laughter] and went back to Salerno.

SH: How did you unload the shells onto the cruisers safely?

RM: Oh, we had crane capacity, capability, yeah.

SH: When did it become apparent that the beachhead would not have to be evacuated?

RM: I guess another five or six days.

SH: Really, that long?

RM: Yeah. We were there a total of three weeks. …

SI: Did you transport any big brass at this time?

RM: At Salerno, … who we took? … Mark Clark, we took him, with the Fifth Army.

SH: Did you actually see him?

RM: I could see him on the bridge. …

SH: Did you have any contact with him?

RM: No, we had no contact with them, no.

SI: Were you there when the *Savannah* was hit?

RM: It might have been the *Savannah*, I thought it was the *Boise*, but, I guess it was the *Savannah*, yeah. It was about a hundred yards away.

SH: What was your closest call?

RM: Well, probably Salerno, because, when these bombs drop, you can hear the whistle, or whatever it is, and, on a ship, you can tell how close they are by how the ship rattles. … I knew some of them went off close.

SH: Did you rescue anyone from any of the ships that were sunk?

RM: Yes, we took some people onboard from the *Savannah* and, also, in other areas. We had a pretty good medical unit onboard. …

SH: You were at Salerno for almost three weeks. Where was the *Ancon* ordered to next?

RM: You've got to realize that they never tell you anything. [laughter] … We went back to Algiers, … and we stayed there, … I'd say we got back there, probably, around the 1st of August or so, or in August, … until, probably, early November, at which time, they decided that they would send us up to England, and that was an interesting trip. It was just the *Ancon* and two destroyers and we went so far out in the Atlantic that, one day, we saw the Azores Islands, because Brittany, over here, had German aircraft. We went all the way around the northern end of Ireland, down the Irish Sea, and into Plymouth, England, appropriately enough, on Thanksgiving Day. [laughter]

SH: Did you have turkey for Thanksgiving?

RM: I guess we did, yeah. [laughter] The Navy eats well.

SH: Did you realize what you were being sent to England for? Were you able to pick that up from your duty as a cryptographer?

RM: Normandy? Oh, sure, yeah, we were aware then. We were aware of the Manhattan Project and other things that went on.

SI: How did you learn about the Manhattan Project?

RM: In the codes. We'd get messages referring to a Manhattan Project, "Send So-and-So," or, "Detach this guy," not from our ship, but, I mean, this is overall information [that] the admirals and whatnot wanted. We didn't know what Manhattan Project was, but, [we knew the name].

SH: Do you remember when that phrase began appearing in the messages?

RM: Oh, I guess, maybe a year, well, it must have been a year, let's see, the bomb went of in … August, I guess the summer before.

SH: Right around D-Day?

RM: It was before D-Day.

SH: D-Day was in June.

RM: Yeah, it would have been before that. …

SH: You left Palermo, returned to Algiers, then, went up to England. It was somewhere in there.

RM: Yeah, that frame, I think.

SH: During that voyage, you were well aware of the impending D-Day invasion. Was it called Operation: OVERLORD at that time?

RM: Yes.

SH: When did that codename make its debut?

RM: Before we left Africa.

SH: Really?

RM: Yeah.

SH: Was there any chance that you may have remained in the Mediterranean Theater?

RM: No. They wanted us at Normandy. [laughter]

SI: All of the invasions that you participated in involved not only American forces, but, British and other Allied forces as well.

RM: We had very, very little to do with the British forces. The British forces had Utah Beach in Normandy.

SH: What about in Italy?

RM: Yeah. … In Sicily, they were ten miles to the east of us. They were a separate component, with their own ships and however they ran things.

SH: During the preparatory phase, in Algiers, perhaps, did you have any interaction with other Allied personnel?

RM: Not really, no. … Most of the people on the *Ancon* stayed on the ship. I mean, it was clean, you had water that you could drink, you had food. …

SH: Were you restricted because of your high security clearance?

RM: Yes.

SH: Where could you go? Could you travel alone?

RM: We could travel alone, but, there was a very [interesting occurrence], which we will come to when it happened to flare. If you had an 807 spec number, which was a cryptographic technician, you cannot be sent anywhere that you can be captured. Of course, that sounds silly, that we led three invasions, but, I guess, on the ship, they figured that was [safe].

SI: When you arrived in England in November of 1943, were you able to take shore leave?

RM: Oh, sure, yeah. We could go ashore whenever we wanted to. … In fact, we could even get three-day passes to go up to London, although, after one visit, that wasn't very attractive, because the "buzz bombs" were coming over, and I also went up to Edinburgh, Scotland, and to Warrington, England, where I met some, what was that guy? Is the term my great uncle?

GM: Yeah.

RM: Yeah, lived there and spent a day with them. Plymouth … was a shipping town, a Navy town, basically. I mean, you could go to the movies there. They spoke the language, but, I mean, outside of that, you could not, or at least it was very bad form, … eat in the English restaurants or take their food. I mean, the Red Cross and the USO, I guess, had places there, but, after a while, there really wasn't a great deal. I took a couple of small excursions to market towns nearby. One of them was called Tavistock, and that was interesting, because, you know, there were … very few other GIs there, and you could, more or less, get a feel of what the English were going through.

SH: Did you transport any brass from Algiers to England?

RM: … No, we were going strictly as a Navy unit.

SI: In the eight months before D-Day, were you always stationed at Plymouth?

RM: Yeah. We went out and did some exercises. …

SI: Were you involved in or aware of the disastrous Slapton Sands operation?

RM: … Yeah, we were aware that the thing went horribly wrong. Yeah, we were sending messages. …

SI: How close were you to the LSTs that were sunk?

RM: Oh, I don't know, maybe two or three miles, out in the Channel. … No, we didn't see any of them.

SI: Did you participate in any other exercises like that?

RM: Yeah, there were several at different places along the coast there, some involving just launching our own LCVPs and getting them into the beach and back again, and some more involved.

SH: As D-Day approached, did your workload increase or did it remain static?

RM: It stayed pretty static. As we got closer to it, we had one kind of interesting incident in Plymouth, in that some of us decided to take liberty on the beach, and, of course, being on the Navy ship, we had no knowledge of the fact that that particular day, and for a couple of days before, all of England had been locked down. The Army was trying to find people who were AWOL or who were, maybe, dressed in American uniforms and weren't Americans, stuff like that, so, … this group of, I don't know, four or five of us, we got about a hundred yards up from the landing, and this MP vehicle runs down and, "Who the hell are you guys?" etc, etc. … We were very limited in what we could say, other than, "We belong to this detachment. Here's our ID," and, finally, one of our people said to this sergeant, "Look, you better take us to an officer," and so, we explained the whole thing to an officer, and he looked at us and started laughing, and he said, "Look, do me a favor, will you?" He said, "Give up the liberty for today. Go back to the ship. You're gonna louse up the whole thing." [laughter] So, naturally, we did. …

SH: Did you have any personal encounters with the English people prior to D-Day, other than your tours around Tavistock?

RM: No, other than my family. …

SH: Was your family in Scotland amazed to see their grandnephew? What were their circumstances at the time?

RM: Well, actually, my aunt had kept in contact with them and had been sending them aid packages, and this, that, and the other thing, and so, they knew that I was in the service. They seemed very glad to see me. We had … dinner, and then, went to the local pub and talked and stuff.

SH: Did you get to spend any time with them?

RM: No, just that evening.

SH: Just that one evening?

RM: Yeah.

SI: When you visited London, the city was under siege from the V-1 buzz bombs.

RM: London was, yes.

SI: What did you see? What was the mood of the people on the street?

RM: Well, I think, you must remember, it's hard to describe this to somebody who wasn't there, but, London is a big city. It covers a great deal of ground. I mean, it's like New York, and a buzz bomb comes over, and maybe it lands in the farthest end of Queens. Well, if you're in Midtown Manhattan, this doesn't affect you at all, and what you quickly learned was to listen to when the engine stopped, and if it was anywhere near you, get underneath something, if you can, but, none of them landed anywhere [near me].

SH: What kind of devastation did you see from the "buzz bombs" that had landed prior to your visit?

RM: Oh, much similar to what you saw in New York. [Mr. MacPherson is referring to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center that occurred two days earlier on September 11, 2001.]

SH: Did you read in the newspapers about the King and the royal family and how they were contributing to the war effort?

RM: Not really. We didn't have much access to English newspapers. We got the *Stars and Stripes*, the American … military paper. …

SH: Did you contribute anything to the *Stars and Stripes*?

RM: No. [laughter]

SI: The military was segregated during World War II. Did any African-Americans or Filipinos serve aboard the *Ancon*?

RM: We had no African-Americans onboard. Filipinos were the mess boys and the rest of us, in those days, were white.

SI: Were they separated from the rest of the crew?

RM: What, the mess boys?

SI: Yes.

RM: Well, I wouldn't say they were "kept" from the rest of the crew. I don't know. I don't think there was any overt, "You stay [on] this side of that." I mean, there was the usual officers' quarters and enlisted people's … quarters.

SI: Your situation was unique, since you were an Army enlisted man serving on a Navy ship. Was your relationship with the officers formal or informal?

RM: Between the Navy and the [Army]?

SI: Between both the Army and Navy officers.

RM: Well, my officers … spent most of their time playing pinochle. Actually, they didn't have anything to do. …

SH: Did they have wardrooms separate from the enlisted men's quarters?

RM: Yeah, they had rooms in officers' quarters.

SH: Did they fraternize with the Navy officers?

RM: I really don't know. [laughter]

SH: Did you develop any relationships with any sailors?

RM: No. The only person that I had any relationship with on the *Ancon* was a fellow who worked in the navigator's office and I'm not sure how that developed. … I mean, it was an occasional relationship. It was good enough that I could ask him, "Where the hell are we now?" and he would tell me. [laughter]

SH: What are your memories of the days and hours leading up to the Normandy invasion?

RM: Well, we loaded a lot of troops two days before D-Day, and, as you know, D-Day was originally scheduled for the 5th of June, and we were out to sea, on the way, that evening and got called back. … Well, I think one of the most interesting things is, a couple of nights before we left, the German Air Force came over the harbor and dropped a lot of mines, which … had timers on them, and so, about six o'clock in the morning, boy, these things started going off in the harbor, and they really rattled things. [laughter] Fortunately, nothing got damaged anywhere. … Crossing the Channel, as I say, we were behind the minesweepers, and it was pitch dark, moderate sea, and, by this time, I guess, most of us had been through it twice, and we were absolutely assured we had full air cover, so, we weren't worried too much, and we anchored off Omaha, you know, as the day progressed, got closer and closer to the beach, unloaded our troops, and there was a great deal of confusion as to what was going on on Omaha Beach, … but, we were busy. I think the one thing that we remember, and … it became a famous broadcast that George Hicks made on, I think it was CBS, or whatever his thing was, that most of the nation heard that night as the first news coming from Normandy, and he was one of the correspondents onboard the ship. …

SH: Were there newspapermen and press onboard the *Ancon*?

RM: Oh, yeah, yes.

SH: Were they restricted to certain areas of the ship?

RM: … They were given a great deal of freedom.

SH: Really?

RM: Yeah. Of course, they didn't bother too much [with] coming down to see enlisted personnel. [laughter]

SH: Were there photographers onboard also?

RM: Yeah, we had one photographer from AP onboard. I've forgotten his name. …

SI: You also carried troops. Do you remember which unit they were from?

RM: … I think it was 45th Division units.

SH: Were their commanding officers onboard the *Ancon*?

RM: Oh, yeah, sure. Who did we take into Normandy? … I'm afraid that they did not give us that. Much of … that time, [they were] directing Naval gunfire on the beach and things like that.

SI: What was it like to be in the middle of one of the largest concentrations of naval gunfire ever?

RM: Noisy. [laughter] I think the biggest impression I've had since is that if you go to the movies, like *Pearl Harbor* or these other [films], you see gigantic flashes of flame as ships are hit and go up. That isn't the way it happened at all. You might … not even know that a ship was hit, unless you saw smoke or it started down. …

SH: Really?

RM: Oh, yeah, … aside from the *Savannah*, well, you saw that hit, but, … actually, Normandy was an easy landing, for us, in the sense that we had plenty of air cover, nobody was dropping stuff on us, and we did our work. The only time we saw a German plane was, the night of D-Day, one single German plane came in, … directly over us, and the gun crews of the *Ancon* claimed that they shot it down. It did go into the sea a few hundred yards away.

SH: Through your duty as a cryptographer, were you aware that the *Leopoldville* was sunk in December of 1944?

RM: … No.

SI: By the time the *Ancon* entered the combat zone, were submarines and mines still considered a threat?

RM: No, no. [The] Navy survived that operation quite well.

SH: After serving on the *Ancon* for so long, did you consider yourself to be part of the Army or the Navy? [laughter]

RM: I don't know if we thought of ourselves as Navy. We did get to the point, at least with me, where I thought of myself as part of the crew. …

SI: What were your R&R options onboard the *Ancon*? Did they have movies onboard the ship?

RM: We had movies, occasionally. … They had a pretty good library. … My folks and, I guess, you, [his wife], sent me an occasional book, or a pamphlet, or something to read. We had the mail.

SI: How important was the mail?

RM: Mail was pretty darned important. [laughter]

SH: Do you think that the *Stars and Stripes* portrayed the events that you experienced accurately?

RM: Well, you must remember, on a ship, you didn't get it on a regular basis by any means. You got it at odd intervals. The thought never occurred to me.

SH: I was just wondering if you had read anything about Salerno or Sicily.

RM: Not that I recall. There have been books written about the *Ancon*'s adventures at both Sicily and Salerno.

SH: Were they accurately portrayed?

RM: Yeah, I think so, written by people onboard. One was John Mason Brown's *To All Hands* and what was the one that Reynolds wrote? I forgot. … Quentin Reynolds wrote it, yeah. I've forgotten the name, but, that was Salerno.

SI: How would you rate the food, your quarters, and other creature comforts aboard the *Ancon*?

RM: The food was very good. We had good food and it was warm. The *Ancon*, being a former passenger ship, had air conditioning and it worked, so that we didn't die of the heat. As far as comfort, I wouldn't say that; our quarters were in a hold, with bunks three, four high. You could sleep there. You get used to it. …

SH: How many days were you stationed off of Omaha Beach before you were ordered back?

RM: We were there three weeks.

SH: Were you refueled during that time?

RM: Yeah.

SI: What were your duties once the invasion moved further inland?

RM: Same thing we did before, [laughter] coding and decoding.

SI: How did your focus shift?

RM: Well, it shifted from the immediate, in front of us, to supply stuff coming in from England.

SH: Was there a constant turnover of personnel during the invasion?

RM: No, no, not during any invasion. You'd have the same group onboard.

SH: When did the brass leave the *Ancon*?

RM: As I remember, D-Day, the brass probably left, felt comfortable setting up quarters in France, probably around the fourth day. Omaha was a slow job.

SH: Had any landing orders changed in reaction to the battle?

RM: Not that I know of, no. …

SI: Did the *Ancon*'s crew ever suffer any casualties or injuries?

RM: Yes, one.

SI: What happened?

RM: [laughter] You'll kill me for this story. At Salerno, one of the mess boys was relieving himself over the side and a piece of shrapnel came down and nicked a rather important part of his equipment. I'm happy to say that, presumably, he recovered all right, but, that's the only wound that we ever had. I don't know whether he got a Purple Heart or not. [laughter]

GM: That's the first I've heard. [laughter]

SH: Did the *Ancon* have a ship's chaplain?

RM: Yeah, we had a permanent chaplain onboard, Father (Belinger?), and he was with the ship the whole time, part of the crew.

SI: Did your ship have a newspaper?

RM: No. They might, once or twice a year, put out a summary thing. …

SH: Did anyone ever try to organize a variety show?

RM: Well, some of the fellows had musical instruments with us, and, you know, they'd get together and play, and there were movies. … I don't remember any theatrics or visits by the USO or anything like that, no.

SI: Did you ever see a USO show?

RM: I don't think so, no.

SH: After returning from Normandy, where did the *Ancon* report to next?

RM: Back to Plymouth, and we sat in Plymouth until September, and, at that point, the rumor began to circulate pretty thoroughly that we were going to the United States for a refit and out to the Pacific, and there had been a directive by General Eisenhower, who said that, "No *soldier*," which we were, "who had served in Africa and in Europe, could be sent to the Pacific," and this became a matter of [debate]. …

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

SI: This continues an interview with Mr. Robert MacPherson on September 13, 2001, in Orlando, Florida, with Shaun Illingworth and …

SH: Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

SI: Mr. MacPherson, you were telling us about the possibility of being sent to the Pacific.

RM: Yeah, well, in September, the rumor was pretty strong that the *Ancon* was going back to the United States for a refit, and then, to the Pacific. Under an order by General Eisenhower, he had stated that, "No soldier," and I emphasize soldiers, because that's what we were, "who had served both in North Africa, or in the Mediterranean, and in Europe, could be sent to the Pacific," and some of us put up quite an argument with our officers and said, "Like hell you're sending us to the Pacific." [laughter] So, come about the middle of September, … about half the code people were transferred off the *Ancon*, and put ashore, and sent up to London, to a signal headquarters, the main European signal headquarters in London. I felt, and I guess the rest of them [did also], that we'd rather take our chances in London than go to the Pacific.

SH: You were part of the contingent that left the ship.

RM: Yes.

SH: Were the other men going to the Pacific against their wills, so to speak?

RM: Oh, I think that some of them probably were sent against their wills, some of them were afraid to open up and demand their rights, and some of them just figured thirty days in the US, while it was getting refitted, was a good deal, but, anyhow, they sent us up to London, and we were quartered in [London]. … The Army Signal Corps had taken over this block of London townhouses, … in town there, and we were quartered in one of those four, five-story buildings, which, of course, had no heat, and the mice and the rats were running around at night, and so forth. … One of the buildings was a mess hall, which was reasonably comfortable. We were assigned to the main coding and decoding operation for the whole European Theater, which was located in the fur storage vault of Selfridge's Department Store. We worked eight-hour shifts. … London, of course, was blacked out. We didn't do much sightseeing or anything like that. I had the good fortune to meet a fellow by the name of Jimmy Miller, who was with the RAF. He was the leader of a band called the Squadronaires, which would be the British equivalent of the Glenn Miller Band, and I got to go to a lot of their radio broadcasts, and we became good friends, and he and his wife had me out for Christmas dinner and stuff like that. That's really about [it].

SH: How did you meet him?

RM: I guess he was doing a concert somewhere and, being interested in Big Band music, I went.

SH: Was he also a cryptographer?

RM: No, no. He had the same position Glenn Miller had with the British Air Force and that was kind of fun. The buzz bombs were always a nuisance, and then, of course, when the V-2s started, that was … a little troublesome. … I was working a midnight to dawn shift, … thank God, in the fur storage vault, three decks down, when a V-2 hit the bar across the street and totally demolished the top of the building. We were at Selfridge's. … That was a little shaky. It's as close as I want to get.

SH: Had St. Paul's been bombed by that time?

RM: I think it had, yeah. We had other things happen there. The American Red Cross, Rainbow Corner, there, was a big establishment and very nice, and I had the good fortune to meet Fred Astaire's sister there, Adele Astaire, and she very kindly wrote home to my mother, and I think that was the highlight of the bloody war, that she got a letter from Adele Astaire. It said, in effect, "Your son is all right," or whatever she did say. [laughter] … That was interesting, but, most of it was pretty routine. You went to work, maybe you caught a movie.

SH: Had you seen the Astaires perform in the United States before the war?

RM: Well, we'd seen the movies, but, never seen them personally. Then, we were there until, well, in early December, when I was there, that's when I got the letter back from my college roommate with, "Missing In Action," on it, and I wrote to his commanding officer in Alaska, and he was a Liberator bomber pilot and never made it back, so, that was not too pleasant. …

SI: Were you attached to SHAEF Headquarters in London?

RM: I don't know whether we really were or not. It was a, you know, theater Signal Corps headquarters, … and then, in December, we got into another little adventure, because they were gradually, in sections, moving the Signal Corps headquarters to Paris, and our turn came, and, I don't know, there was a group of six of us that, right after Christmas, set out for Le Havre, and got across the Channel, and got dumped in this camp about three or four miles [inland]. You remember, this was when the Battle of the Bulge was on. Everything was chaos and … we had very educated people with this group. They were all college graduates. We took one look around and said, "It is time to get the hell out of here as fast as we can, or we are going to wind up someplace we won't like." So, the next morning, we went out on the road to Paris and started hitchhiking, and some guy in his truck picked us up, and we got as far as Rouen, however they pronounce it, and spent the night on the floor of a Red Cross establishment there, and set out hitchhiking the next day, and got into Paris, and reported to where we were supposed to report to, and, as I mentioned, the chaos, we didn't find ourselves doing code work at all. We found ourselves guarding the Eiffel Tower and we spent eight hours a day walking around along the foot of the Eiffel Tower. …

SH: Was the Eiffel Tower used as a communications tower?

RM: Yes, because of the signal stuff up top, and, … for six weeks of that and having made every effort to get back to where we thought we belonged, one of the guys came up with a wonderful idea. You see, the 807, or whatever it was, spec number was always a critical number and he said, "I've got the idea. We'll file a transfer for the Air Force. It's bound to come up on that number," and, sure enough, it worked. They found us and we went to work at Signal Headquarters in Paris and did code work through V-E Day and up to July. … I was working V-E Day night and the officers were kind enough to let some of us out for an hour or so. It was quite a scene. …

SH: What was Paris like on V-E Day?

RM: Well, I mean, you know, the streets were crowded. There was a lot of noise. There were fireworks. Aircraft were flying right over the top of the Arc de Triomphe, down the Champs-Elysees, and everybody was just plain elated. I mean, the war was over and, at that point, of course, all of us started counting how many points we had, to get out, [laughter] and what happened then was that they began to peel us off, one by one, and I guess it was in late August or so that I got sent to some kind of a, what they called a repatriation camp, up near Rouen, and, since I was a single person coming in, I was, more or less, assigned to headquarters, and that's when I discovered a great thing about the military, that if you could latch on to a clipboard and walk around with the clipboard, nobody would give you any attention whatsoever, and I did that for, I guess, two months, and, at that point, I got disgusted with the whole damn thing, and I noticed, on one of the boards at headquarters, that the 102nd Cavalry was coming through, on their way home. That's a New Jersey based unit, and I knew many of … the people in it, so, as soon as they arrived, I tore over there, greeted my friends, and said, "Look, can I transfer and go home with you?" and they said, "Sure." … So, I persuaded some sergeant; on the day's orders, at the bottom of the mimeograph sheet, he typed in, you know, "Sergeant MacPherson … is

hereby transferred to the 102nd Cavalry," which I grabbed with my records and ran over there, and, three days later, I was out of there.

SH: Did you recognize anyone that you knew?

RM: Oh, several of the people from Plainfield, I don't remember names at this point, but, it was interesting, coming home; there's a couple of stories there that are interesting. One of the things they did at this camp in Rouen, … before we left to get on the train to go to Le Havre, was to give every GI an extra blanket, brand new, you know. This was their idea [of] how to get them home, where they'd be collected at Fort Dix or something like that. Halfway to Le Havre, … the train stopped for water, or fuel, or some damned things. Dozens of Frenchmen materialized out of the sides of the track and began offering us, I don't know, 200 francs for a blanket or something like that. I don't think there was a blanket left on the train by the time we got to Le Havre. So much for the blanket story. [laughter] There was also something else that … interested me, … obviously, in the military, when you have nothing to do, there's a lot of poker, and dice, and so forth, and so on, and it was interesting that, at Le Havre, where they changed what French money we had into American money, how the bets dropped. I mean, the perception [was] that the French money was junk anyhow, but, suddenly, you had to put a dollar bill out there to ante up. …

SH: Did you play cards often?

RM: No, no. I never got into that. I quickly decided that that was a good thing to stay out of, unless you knew what you were doing. [laughter] So, … we spent a couple of days, … three days or so, in there, and then, they loaded us on a Victory ship, the *Cranston Victory*, and we set out for home, and here we were, down in the hold again, with these bunks piled up. I said, "This isn't really for you, Bob," and so, I went prowling around the ship, and I said, "You got a PA system on this thing?" and the officer said, "Yeah." I said, "Do you play records or anything like that for the troops, occasionally?" He said, "Well, we used to have a guy who knew how to run the PA system." I said, "Show it to me," and, up above the deck there, in a nice, cozy, little spot, was this PA system, and a mike, and some records, and a turntable, and so, I became the disc jockey for the ship and immediately moved my gear up there, where I could sleep in the corner and be comfortable. Of course, being on a ship didn't bother me at all. It bothered … many of the troops. … So, I played music for them, a couple of hours a day, and there was an interesting story that did happen. … The night before we got to New York, we were, perhaps, I don't know, eighty miles off shore and going at a slow speed, so that we hit New York in the morning, and I was fooling around with the radio, and I picked up WNEW in New York, clear as a bell, out there, and I thought, "This … will get everybody," and it was like, you know, three o'clock in the afternoon, and I got a hold of the electrician, and I said, "You've got to do something, so [that] I can the pipe the radio over the PA system." So, he did some wires and whatnot, and, when I was gonna do my disc jockey bit at five o'clock, I just said something like, you know, "The next music you will hear is from New York City," and I had it timed so that Martin Block's *Make Believe Ball Room* theme would come on, and it was impressive, because the guys, almost all of them were from the New York area, and then, the next morning, we got to New York, and another guy and I did the description going up the Hudson. They took us up to some miserable place near Newburg, I've forgotten the name of the camp, … and, once we got on land, it

became obvious that everybody was going in and out of this place without passes, so, somehow, in my youthful exuberance, I figured, "Well, if I can get to Newburg, I can get a train to New York. If I get to New York, I can get a train to Plainfield," so, a few hours later, I was home in New Jersey, and I had dinner with my folks, and my father ran me twenty miles up to my wife's home, and we had a reunion, and I guess I got the last trolley back to Newark, and spent the rest of the night getting back up to Newburgh, and walked in there, had breakfast, and went to sleep, and, about ten AM, some guy says, "Come on, Bob, come on. We're getting on the train," and we got on the train for Fort Dix, and, at the end of the week, I was free. [laughter]

SH: You were describing, over the ship's PA system, the scene as you entered New York Harbor. Were you greeted by fireboats as you sailed by the Statue of Liberty?

RM: We had a couple of fireboats and, I think, … I don't know whether it's run by the Red Cross or the USO, but, they had some kind of a welcome ship of some sort, a tug boat or something. … Fortunately, we had a World Almanac onboard, which gave this guy who worked with me, he was also a New Yorker, we did a pretty good job of identifying things going up the river. [laughter]

SH: In December of 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, you were stationed in London. Were you aware of the assault and its magnitude?

RM: Oh, yeah.

SH: Then, you were sent to Paris. You were aware of where you did not want to be sent.

RM: Yes, we were very well aware of where we didn't want to be, [laughter] particularly with Fourth Signal Amphibious Detachment on our record. They were having river troubles up there, you know. We didn't want anything to do with that.

SH: How were you treated by the French civilians?

RM: We had very little contact with the French people. There was the language barrier. I think there was a perception among most of us, … from our fathers, that these weren't really people to be trusted entirely and, well, weren't just very nice people. [laughter]

SI: Were you aware of a lot of black market activity on the Continent?

RM: There was black market activity that we heard of, of a major scale, like stories of jeeps being sold and that sort of thing. The cigarette black market was rampant and I participated in that, like anybody else. You got your allocation of, I don't know how many cartons it was, a couple of cartons a month, or two weeks, or something like that, and I didn't smoke at that time, and you got them for a nickel apiece, and I think we sold them for 200 francs apiece, but, no, we never sold any equipment or anything like that.

SI: I have heard stories about trains showing up without the supplies that were supposed to be onboard.

RM: I've heard that, too, but, I never [personally saw anything]. …

SI: Did the black market issue ever surface in your cryptography work?

RM: No, we never handled anything like that.

SH: When did you realize that the Manhattan Project was related to the atomic bomb?

RM: Well, I think they said, immediately, did they not, that that was Manhattan Project? Maybe it was a little later, I don't know.

SH: Do you remember any large celebrations after the end of the war in Europe or the Pacific?

RM: Yeah, I don't remember there being a big celebration in Europe. I think that the main feeling was one of relief and, "Now, we'll get home faster."

SH: As a serviceman, what did you know about what was happening on the homefront?

RM: We got very little information on that, except what I'd get in letters from Gay or my family, and they were mostly personal things. …

SH: Did Merchant Marines man the vessel that you went over to Europe on?

RM: No. We had many ships with us in the convoy that were Merchant Marine.

SH: Were Merchant Marines in charge of the Victory ships that carried you home?

RM: I really don't know. I suspect they must have been. I don't think it was Navy.

SH: Did you ever take advantage of your GI Bill benefits?

RM: Well, that's something I always regretted, and I don't blame anybody, but, it was never really, by my family or by Rutgers, in any communications, given the suggestion that there was an opportunity to go get a Masters degree or something like that. I didn't think of a Masters degree as necessary in journalism [laughter] and I think I was quite anxious to get a career started. There were parts of the [GI Bill]; we used the GI Bill to buy our first house and I used the educational benefits to take some night courses at Columbia and … NYU.

SH: How soon after you returned home did you propose?

RM: Well, I don't know, we'd been going together for a long time. … We actually got married in 1948 … and I think that any delay to that time probably was because we didn't have enough money [laughter] to get married and set up shop.

SH: You returned to your parents' home to Plainfield.

RM: Yeah, I lived home, yeah.

SH: What was your first job after the war?

RM: Well, actually, I never seriously attempted to get a newspaper job, because, under the circumstances of the war regulations, all of the papers had to take back the people who worked for them previously and were in the service. Those of us who went right from college, of course, had no, what would you call it? crutch or job security like that, and the general theme of things was that it was hopeless to get on with a newspaper. A Rutgers graduate, an older man by the name of Art Hall, was a friend of, what, my father's? or he had met him somewhere. … He lived over in Rahway. He was working for a brand new industry, public relations, working for one of the top PR agencies in New York, and I went over for an interview, and, very fortunately, I got a job, 160 dollars a month, … as a writer, and that's how I started after the war.

SH: Can you tell us about some of your accounts?

RM: … One of the big accounts that I worked on was TWA and, … a year later, the most interesting part of that account was to help in the introduction of the Constellation aircraft. We spent a lot of time sending out news releases and publicity about this or that Constellation setting a new record from London to South Africa … or that sort of thing. They had some good accounts. They had Firestone, they had General Electric, and some stuff like that. …

SH: Do you remember where you were when Roosevelt died and how people reacted to Truman's assuming the Presidency? Also, do you remember where you were when Glenn Miller's plane went down?

RM: Glenn Miller. Well, let's do the death of Roosevelt first. Obviously, there was great pomp and circumstance in Paris and you had to go to special memorial services and stuff like that. My first reaction was, "Well, we're finally rid of him."

GM: I was glad, too.

RM: [laughter] As you can see, probably you have two (rock ribbed?) conservative Republicans here. My reaction was not one of loss or anything like that.

SH: Were people confident in Truman?

RM: Well, none of us knew anything about Truman. I mean, that was an unknown. In fact, I can recall people asking, "Who's the President?" [laughter] but, he turned out to be pretty darned good.

SH: What did you think of the atomic bomb?

RM: I think I thought it was the greatest. That may be difficult for this generation to understand, but, I mean, you've got to remember, you had millions, I guess, of Americans who

had been tied up with this war for two years, three years, and most of them in Europe were scared to death they were gonna be sent to the Pacific, and something like this was, you know, … a savior. I mean, this was the greatest. It was the end of the war. We could go home.

SH: We are only looking for veterans' reactions. We do not have a political agenda.

RM: No, no. I mean, it would be hard for somebody who was not alive at that time to realize, I guess, the intensity of the fear of the people in Europe of being sent to the Pacific. I mean, you had already survived Europe and we had all … these horrible battles that they had in the Pacific. I mean, we wanted none of it and, when the A-bomb went off, why, that was hailed as great. I never had any thoughts other than that, and so, I don't know, twenty or thirty years later, some people started saying, "Oh, we shouldn't have done that."

SH: What about Glenn Miller's disappearance?

RM: … Oh, Glenn Miller. I saw the [Glenn] Miller Band once … while I was over there and it was a good experience. Probably, Glenn Miller's very untimely death did not hit me as hard as some people, because I was a very avid Benny Goodman fan, and, as far as I was concerned, he was the big man on campus, so to speak, of the Swing era, and I was sorry to see Miller go, obviously, and his band did some really good work, but, I think I had a single track mind at that stage of the game.

SH: Was there any way that you could have used your cryptographic skills in a civilian career?

RM: Made me a good crossword puzzle worker. [laughter]

SH: Did anyone try to talk you into staying in the military?

RM: Yes.

SH: I assume that was not very appealing to you.

RM: I asked the officer at Fort Dix, I said, "You want to go through the whole spiel or do you want an answer now?" [laughter] He said, "I have to go through the whole spiel." I said, "Okay, go ahead." [laughter] He offered me a first lieutenancy or something or other in the Army, if I'd stay in.

SH: Did you join the Reserves?

RM: No. I wanted out. I'm an independent sort of cuss and I don't take to absolute authority very well. …

SH: Were you worried about being called back to duty for Korea?

RM: No.

SI: Several journalism majors that our staff has interviewed have ended up in public relations. Why do you supposed that is?

RM: … Because we could write. I mean, the big media then was newspaper, it was printed, written word, or a magazine. … We had the radio, there was no TV, and even radio had to be written news. … I think that was you started in PR as a writer.

SH: Could you briefly guide us through your career?

RM: Well, … I floated around to a couple of other agencies, and then, wound up as the assistant PR director of an outfit in New Jersey, in Murray Hill, called (Datestrom?), Inc. That was an early conglomerate. Among their companies was American Type Founders in Elizabeth and I spent time with them. They were bought out by somebody else and I spent time with the American Petroleum Institute in PR … at Rockefeller Center, … set up my own agency in New Jersey for, what, six or seven years? At that time, my wife's mother was getting older and was living in Florida. … I had an opportunity to join an agency in Jacksonville and that seemed like the right move to make at that time; I'm not sure it was. I was there three years and one of my clients, a big company on the New York Stock Exchange, called me and said, "How would you like to come back here as director of corporate communications?" which I took, and I was there for, I don't know, six or seven years, and then, they spun off some of their companies, and I went with that unit as an officer and director of investor relations and stuff like that.

SH: Your writing skills served you well throughout your career.

RM: Yeah. I did a lot of freelance writing during that period. … Oh, I got sixty or seventy pieces for the travel section of the *New York Times*. I've written cover stories for *TV Guide*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, and a bunch of other magazines.

GM: Writing comes easily to Bob. … It just flows.

SH: Were you writing about your travels?

RM: Yeah, … when I was doing work for the *Times*, this was in addition to a regular forty-hour a week job, stealing some time off, but, I covered most of New Jersey, the Chesapeake area, and eastern Pennsylvania, on a regular basis, and they sent us on a couple of nice trips. We had a long Caribbean trip and we had five weeks in Europe out of it, which was worthwhile.

SH: Have you visited any of the places where you were stationed during the war?

RM: Yeah, when we went to Europe, we went to see Selfridge's fur storage vault and we saw … the headquarters in Paris, … which, incidentally, was still the signal headquarters of the US Army at that point.

SI: Have you stayed in touch with anyone from your Signal Corps unit or the *Ancon* crew?

RM: From time-[to-time], not really close, but, you know, occasionally, I have been in touch with one of the fellows that I knew. There is a story about the end of the *Ancon*. My wife and I were visiting her sister down in Willingboro, New Jersey, … Route 130, that goes up along the Delaware River, and we were coming home this Sunday night, and I happened to glance over to … the left, and I drove on another mile, and I said to Gay, "I swear to God, that was the *Ancon*," and I said, "I've got to turn around and find out," and, sure enough, it was. They had hauled her up there to dismantle her and junk her. … That was interesting. I told my friend, who was a historian at Lehigh, was he at, or Lafayette? one of them, … Karl Blair. He taught history at Lehigh, or Lafayette, or one of those colleges up there, and he … drove down and actually got a chunk of the deck railing out of it; they gave it to him. [laughter]

SH: Did he serve on the *Ancon*?

RM: Yes, he was with me on the code work, yeah, but, the *Ancon* has had some reunions. I have never attended any. They've never been anywhere near where I happened to be at the time.

SH: Did you write any articles about your service as a soldier on the *Ancon*?

RM: No, no.

SH: You mentioned that you were a lost unit.

RM: Well, we were lost. … I mean, we got paid, somebody was paying us, but, once we were assigned to the *Ancon*, that was it. I mean, … there was no promotion. I was on that bloody ship for … almost two years and we … got no contact with any other Army units at all, anywhere.

SH: Do you remember any of the more famous people that came onboard the *Ancon*, other than General George S. Patton?

RM: We had King George onboard for a visit.

SH: What was he like?

RM: I don't know. [laughter] We didn't get anywhere near to see him. Everything was locked down tight. Eisenhower had been onboard, of course, in Algiers. Many of the other division generals had been onboard. I don't know whether Montgomery [was]; we had some British people onboard, but, I don't know whether Montgomery was ever on the ship in Africa.

SH: You remained at your post during these visits.

RM: If we were working, we worked. I mean, if we didn't, obviously, the rumor would spread; you'd try to get a peek from somewhere. …

SH: Were you required to stand for spit-and-polish inspections?

RM: No. The extent of formality seemed to be based on rank in the old Navy. There were so many side boys to greet you at the gangway. Those were the only people that were in some kind of clean clothes. [laughter]

SH: Since your uniform eventually became a hodge-podge of Army and Navy apparel, I do not see how you could even stand for an inspection.

RM: Well, we never had any inspections. We had a morning muster, to make sure everybody was on the ship and was accounted for. That's what they had.

SH: Is there anything that we forgot to ask?

RM: Well, I don't know, let me see my list here, if I've got anything that I missed. I don't think so. … I made a few notes here.

SH: How do you think World War II impacted the man you are today?

RM: Well, I think when I came home, I was probably older and wiser. It … obviously impacted a career path, very definitely. I think if I'd just graduated in '42, I really would have sought a newspaper job. I don't know … that it impacted me greatly, and I suppose it did, but, I mean, it's hard to [tell]. I mean, I don't bear any resentment whatsoever at spending three plus years of my life in the service. It was the thing to do, the proper thing to do, and we all did it. I think, as I said before, that it made a big difference in my relationship with Rutgers. I don't know how they could have kept in touch with us during the war, … because they couldn't have had our addresses, but, when it came time to go back, … I went back to that one reunion and there were just too many blanks to make it some kind of a happy, joyous occasion.

SH: We are certainly grateful that you took the time to sit for us.

RM: Well, I thought that this project was rather interesting. … I had visions of somebody listening to this fifty years from now, but, it struck me [as] funny, doing it today, … you know, a couple of days after what apparently is the next war started, [the War on Terrorism].

SH: Shaun and I have discussed that several times in the last two days.

RM: Yeah, I bet you have.

SH: Thank you both very much for sitting down with us today.

RM: Thank you.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: This is an addendum to the interview with Mr. Robert MacPherson. Please tell us about your activities since you moved to Florida.

RM: Well, we came down here in nineteen, what?

GM: '93.

RM: '93, and my major interest since coming down here has been the organization [of] and help with the Scottish Society of the Treasure Coast. I've become quite a professional Scot. … [laughter]

SH: You are the treasurer …

RM: I'm not the treasurer. I was the president for three years of the Scottish Society of the Treasure Coast, … which is based in Vero Beach. We have about, oh, 250 members now and a lot of activities. I do the monthly newsletter. I've learned the computer and I know how to do that.

GM: At the monthly meetings, you give an interesting talk.

RM: I give about three minutes on the news of Scotland and that's kind of fun, to pick it up off the computer from Scotland and so forth. … I've also done a little more genealogy research, in that one of my ancestors is, being in history, you might be interested, … a totally overlooked Revolutionary War general by the name of Major General William Alexander, and he was … the ninth ranking officer in the Revolution. He commanded every … part of the Revolutionary Army, at one time or another, except the South, but, he was always just one level down from the top general. He probably saved the American Army in the Battle of Long Island, where he was captured. …

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

RM: … Wound up in charge of the northern section, which was from New York on up to Canada. Few people realize that the Revolutionary Army actually expected an attack from Canada, both during the war and after the war, and I've done a lot of research on him and he's an interesting guy. [laughter]

GM: [He was] with George Washington.

RM: Yes, Washington was his superior. He would have been my great, great, great, great, great, great, great-grandfather. [laughter]

GM: Three greats back.

RM: More than that, I think, dear. [laughter]

SH: Genealogy is fascinating. You may find, once this interview is posted on our website, that you may hear from others who are researching the topics that we have discussed today.

RM: Do you put this on the web, do you?

SH: Yes. This concludes the addendum to Mr. MacPherson's interview.

RM: Okay.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/26/02
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 3/27/02
Approved by Robert MacPherson 3/31/04