RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD E. MCKEEBY

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

KURT PIEHLER
and
GERALD ROBERTS

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Richard E. McKeeby on October 31, 1996, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and Gerald Roberts. You mentioned that you'd actually prepared a short text to read and if you'd like to read that now, please do.

Richard McKeeby: Okay, thank you, Dr. Piehler. I am an Associate Professor at Union County College in Cranford, New Jersey in the Biology Department. I am a graduate of Rutgers 1957 Class. I was an education major, and I was born on January 17, 1935, in Hampton Township, in Sussex County, which is two miles north of Newton, New Jersey. My father's name was Charles Major McKeeby and my mother's name was Rebecca. I had four older brothers and four sisters who were younger. My three brothers all enlisted and served on active duty in World War II. My oldest brother, Benjamin, was killed on D-Day in 1944 in St. Lo, France. He was a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division and had been a prisoner of war. He was being moved in German supply trucks, which were not marked for prisoners, and he was strafed and killed by American planes. He had enlisted in 1939, and made many jumps, until he was captured, early in 1944. He fought in the battles of Sicily, Salerno, Holland, Africa and Normandy. I remember the first telegram that came to our home when he was missing in action, and the hopes and fears of my parents and the rest of the family and friends. Then came telegram two, where he had been killed. My mother became very depressed, cried a lot and stayed in bed, and lost her interest in the world around her. She underwent treatment at Greystone [Psychiatric Hospital] in New Jersey for several years. I lost a brother and a mother. A memorial service for my brother Ben was held in Newton Presbyterian Church and a stained glass window was dedicated to him and also a neighbor of ours who lived one half mile up the road, whose name was William Sanford who was also killed. My brother is now buried in Beverly National Cemetery in New Jersey. His body was brought back in 1948. Another brother, Don, was a Navy TBF [TB-Torpedo Bomber- F was a model. TBF's and TBM's were both Grumman *Avengers,* they were not fighter designations.] pilot, torpedo bomber pilot with 950 hours of combat flying time off of the new USS *Lexington* and USS *Yorktown* carriers. The first two *Lexington* and *Yorktown* had been sunk early in the war. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and an Air Medal, [with] two Gold Stars [Oak Leaf Clusters], which are equivalent to two more Air Medals. He graduated from Penn State in 1948, taught agriculture and science at Newton High School, and Washington, New Jersey High School, and is now in Leesburg, Florida, retired. In the air he saw the USS *Franklin* burning after a kamikaze hit it, and also saw the USS *New Jersey* get hit by a kamikaze, as well as the USS *Pittsburgh*. A kamikaze also hit the carrier *Lexington* as my brother was taking off and fifty men behind him were killed. He says he never kept a diary, because they were told not to. He participated in strikes against Iwo Jima, Okinawa, Tokyo and the Japanese fleet in the Western Pacific. When I was eight years old in 1943, I remember him flying over our home off Route 206 on his way, in his Navy plane which was sometimes an SNJ trainer and sometimes a TBM. He came from Willow Grove, which was north of Philadelphia, during his training days and flew over our home. He came so low over the cow field next to our house, that we could actually tell it was him as the pilot. He also buzzed the smokestack at the creamery where my father worked and all of the old timers still talk about that today. He even buzzed the Laurel Grove Grammar School, which was a one-room school that I attended and I was so proud of him. My brother, Bob, was an air crewman and side gunner on a Navy B-24-type bomber, which was a twin rudder plane. He was wounded in combat and received the Distinguished Flying Cross and a Purple Heart. After World War II he lived at Lake Mohawk,

New Jersey. He passed away two years ago. He was undefeated in wrestling at Princeton, when he enlisted in the Navy in 1943. His flying missions were also in the Western Pacific and he never completed his college education after the war. Myself as a child, I remember very well my family sitting around the radio listening to the news about the United States and in those days the Japs and Germans. I remember my father reading V-mail letters to us, saving tin cans and crushing them with a sledgehammer in our basement to be used for guns and tanks, and also gathering scrap iron for the war effort, and going with my father to Route 206 traffic light, to turn it off for blackouts. My father was a civil defense volunteer and wore the CD armband as he did that. I remember helping paint the headlights of our car black for the blackouts. The top part of the headlights had to be painted black on all cars. We had to turn off all the lights in our house whenever there was a blackout, and us kids had to sit still, make no noise during a blackout. My mother suspected our neighbors, [who had a German name] of being spies, and she always thought they had a secret radio in their attic. I remember the state trooper raids on the German Bund camp at Lake Iliff, which is also in Sussex County. I remember seeing all the 'loose talk' signs all over town, and the war bond posters and the "Uncle Sam Needs You" posters. I remember hearing on the radio the day that Franklin Delano Roosevelt died and Truman became President, and then the big surprise when Truman beat Dewey, in the next election. I remember V-J Day, and the town celebration with all the fire sirens blowing, and most people happy and partying, but my Mom and Dad were crying. I remember our daily visits to the Newton Town Square, to see the big serviceman's board with a list of the names of people in service and the gold stars, that seemed to go up almost every day, being added to some of the names. I remember seeing an Autogiro and a Zeppelin. I remember the Army convoys coming up and down Route 206 past our home and going to and from, Grand Central Station, with my mother and father and our brothers after they've been on furlough. I remember everyone crying and wondering if it would have to be the last time we ever saw them again. I, also, remember the gas rationing, the car stamps, the sugar rationing and all the rest, and also talk about the black marketers in town. It was a long time ago, but the McKeeby family remembers World War II very well. I will never forget what my brothers and thousands of other servicemen did for America and for me.

KP: Well, thank you, thank you very much. Maybe we could now ask you some questions and I guess, we'll be going back to the beginning with your father and your mother. Your father served in World War I.

RM: He was a dispatcher. He rode a motorcycle around but he never got out of the United States, I guess.

KP: Really? He never went overseas. Did he ever talk about serving in the army when you were growing up?

RM: He talked about it, and I have some old photographs of him on his old motorcycle. I wish I had the old motorcycle that he rode, collector's item today.

KP: In which part of the United States did he drive dispatches?

RM: He was in the South somewhere, one of the southern training camps. He was in and, the war ended, before his time was up before he got sent overseas.

KP: Did he ever join any veterans' group? Did he ever join the American Legion?

RM: My father was an American Legionnaire, but the surprising thing is neither of my two surviving brothers, joined. They just didn't do that.

KP: Your father never went to high school.

RM: That's right. My father was an eighth grade graduate only but he earned his engineer's license for boilers and he helped build the Becker's Creamery in Sussex County, as a laborer, and then later became the head engineer there, who took care of all the equipment.

KP: Which is great, you need a lot of intelligence; I mean it's a very specific job.

RM: He did very well for himself, yes, he did, without [formal education]. He also was called all around the county to do refrigeration work for the apple orchard people and the Newton Ice Plant ammonia cooling systems. He was the person that everyone sought out.

KP: It sounds like he made a good living, a comfortable living not extravagant.

RM: We were not a poor family. I was very fortunate; we owned two acres of land right off Route 206, with a brook going through, a good place to grow up, with fields all around us, places for hunting and cattle, cows, not cattle, cows we called them in Newton.

KP: Yes, because … Sussex County was still very rural.

RM: Still very rural, but when I drive by now, I see a Newtonian Shopping Center, which used to be hunting fields, and an automobile agency, which used to be the cow fields, and our home was torn down and a gas station sits there now.

KP: How long did your family stay in the home?

RM: I was born there and raised there all my life. My father sold it in the early 1970s.

KP: Did they retire from the area?

RM: My father lived in Newton for a while. My mom had passed away in 1959, and my father died in 1978, but they stayed there. I still have sisters who live in the county.

KP: How did your parents meet, do you know?

RM: I don't know.

KP: Your mother grew up in Sussex County.

RM: They're all natives of Sussex County. My grandfather was born and raised in Sussex County and my mother came from Flatbrook, which is a good trout fishing area by the way.

KP: So, it sounds like growing up, you and your brothers did a lot of fishing and hunting?

RM: It was all around us, so that I could just walk out the back, I could probably see a rabbit before I left our property. We would always see pheasants in our garden, sometimes deer drinking from the brook.

KP: Your mother, it sounds like she had a handful raising eight children?

RM: That's right. If I mention this to any of my students today, they don't believe it when they hear that there were nine children, I had an older brother who died when he was a baby, too, by the way, but those were the times. Most of my friends came from fairly large families, too, in those days. Now, of course we live in a world of family planning, but in those days, children were needed to help around the farm or the home.

KP: It sounds like growing up, even though your father wasn't a farmer, farming was very important to you?

RM: We depended on the farm, of course, the creamery job for the milk.

KP: And your friends in school?

RM: Right, many of my friends were also farmers. You could smell who they were when they came to class. [laughter] Growing up in the farm area was probably one of the best things that ever happened to me. We had good, clean, outdoor fun. It was a big thing to go to town to visit a friend, or even to have a friend come to our house from town.

KP: Even though by today's standards, you wouldn't be that far from Newton, you'd be just …

RM: Only two miles, but then it seemed further.

KP: Did your father own a car?

RM: He always had a car, yes. We had a one car family, not two like today.

KP: So, in other words going into town was a big …

RM: Going into town was more or less a Friday night deal. Friday night the stores were open late.

KP: And so you'd go to town and go shopping?

RM: We'd do the shopping, right.

KP: What about movies?

RM: We had two movies, believe it or not, in that little town. The old movie was called the Ranch House, because it usually showed cowboy movies, and the other one was the New Theater, that's where we saw Elizabeth Taylor and those kinds of films.

KP: When you were growing up, you mentioned you could smell the farm kids. How good was the education?

RM: Well, I remember in high school taking biology. Our education was good, I think in many ways. It was not so good in some ways. My biology teacher pulled out a microscope once, and I remember standing in line to look at the scales on the butterfly's wings and that's the only thing I ever saw through a microscope in my high school.

KP: This was high school?

RM: But I thank my coaches from wrestling and Newton, by the way, was the home of wrestling in New Jersey, and our coach just made the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, which is very unusual for a high school coach to be admitted. His name was Henry Boresch. He started wrestling at Newton in 1926 so all my older brothers wrestled and so did I. In fact, wrestling brought me to Rutgers, [on] State Scholarship.

KP: It is sort of ironic that with the one look at the microscope, you ended up studying biology and teaching biology.

RM: I learned to love the outdoors, I guess, by living in the country, seeing the snakes and turtles in the brooks and dragonflies, and insects, and spiders, and getting stung by bees, and that was my background.

KP: You pointed out the weaknesses of your education, for example, your science classes. What were some of the strengths that you saw?

RM: Strengths were, I think, teachers who were really dedicated to us kids. They also knew we were children of war families. They looked out for us. The coaches were excellent, the football and wrestling coaches always looked out for us, and made sure we didn't curse, made sure we didn't hang around with the wrong people, made sure we came to school regularly, but, of course, our parents did that, too.

KP: You were very young when World War II broke out but you were even younger during the last years of the Great Depression. What are your earliest memories?

RM: I don't remember anything about the Depression except my parents talking about it, and how no one had any money. Somehow my father came through it, I guess, he was one of the few people probably to be working then at the creamery, which was a good paying job in those days, in the county.

KP: Was he paid a salary?

RM: He was salaried, yes but he always was out on the road making extra money because he had a big family. Of course, with all of us to feed, clothe, he was always cleaning oil burners for people, or doing refrigeration work, like I mentioned.

KP: What about your friends? Did you have a sense of them not doing too well?

RM: Well, some of my friends, a couple were killed in automobile accidents in high school. One was killed hunting, by his friend, and one of my friends killed his father accidentally, [while] hunting. His father happened to be the principal of the high school. That was a terrible tragedy, but as far as having trouble, my friends, not too many of us from Sussex County went to college. When I came to Rutgers in 1953, I think, there were two of us, two of us from Sussex County, we came to Rutgers and probably only five or six kids went to college.

KP: Which isn't a very big percentage?

RM: It wasn't very many.

KP: So, really high school was not geared to induce the people to go to college, it sounds like.

RM: Either that or the times were different. Many of the farmers expected their children to stay home a while, and they may have had the ability but didn't want to do it, or else the parents pressured them not to.

KP: What about your family, because you had a brother who went to Princeton?

RM: He won a wrestling scholarship to Princeton. He was undefeated his freshman year. He actually told me he saw Einstein. Einstein came as a visitor in one of their math classes and then through the Navy V-12 program, I guess, he ended up in the service. He enlisted.

KP: But he went to Princeton as a regular student on a scholarship.

RM: He probably stuck out like a sore thumb, but he did all right. He passed all of his classes. He was passing when he went into service. After World War II, though, he just never returned because he got married, number one, and he wanted to make money, so, he had jobs selling. He was a good salesman, and in the county he was well known from his wrestling, and then, of course, everyone catered to the war veterans.

KP: What did he sell?

RM: He sold Packards in an automobile agency and then he sold other kinds of automobiles, Buick, Oldsmobile, at other agencies. Then he got into wholesale furniture, and then he ended up, later, managing a furniture store in town.

KP: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor occurred?

RM: I don't think I really remember, but, I swear that I can remember my mother and father sitting around the radio, with my aunts and uncles, and I was probably six years old, because that was December '41, I swear I remember them sitting there and saying the war has started, when Roosevelt made the announcements.

KP: What did you think war meant as a child?

RM: Well, we would go to the movies and see what it meant. I knew pretty soon what it meant, when I saw my mom crying all the time, and the fear that, when you see your father cry, it's tougher than seeing your mother cry, after my brother was killed. So, by that time … by D-Day, when we found all these out, I was probably nine, or ten, or eleven years old.

KP: Had you ever played war as a five or six year old?

RM: We did, we probably did with our friends, we probably did, we made wooden guns and carried them around.

KP: I mean, you would learn that it had quite a price.

RM: We sure did.

KP: What was your parents' initial reaction in terms of your older brother going off to war?

RM: Well, more on that story. My oldest brother, Benjamin, who was killed, had been shot in the head with a .22 rifle while he was woodchuck hunting and he was not supposed to live. In fact, when he went in the service, the bullet slug was still in his skull and he was denied enlistment in the Navy, and in the Marines, and my mother and father had to sign papers for him and I think that was on their conscience all their life after he had been killed. They had to sign special papers for him to enlist.

KP: And if they hadn't signed those papers he wouldn't have …

RM: He would never have served.

KP: It sounds like he pressured them to sign.

RM: He wanted to go in the service. He was fresh out of high school and Hitler was on the rise and some of his friends had joined and, I guess, my brother, he just wanted to, a young guy, probably [sounded] exciting to him to go in service.

KP: And this was after Pearl Harbor then?

RM: No, this was before; my brother enlisted in 1939. He was one of the first people well trained and ready to go when Pearl Harbor happened.

KP: Even before the war began, you saw your brother come back on leave?

RM: I remember him coming back, and he'd lift me up and bump my head on the ceiling in our living room, and I remember that he was so big. I was so small and he was so big. He was a big guy.

KP: When your parents signed, they didn't expect the war, did they? Or did your brother expect the war?

RM: I think people sort of knew things were not good in the world. I think everybody knew by 1939, '40, that things were not good.

KP: Speaking on that, Sussex County, more towards Andover, was a real hotbed for the Nazis, I mean, they were out for the Nazis and your mother had suspicions of the neighbor, I guess. Can you speak a little bit on that, what about the neighbor and more about that?

RM: Should I mention the name?

KP: You remember, I mean, that now that you're taking a course in biology.

RM: Their German name was Evertz, I think, and my mother always swore that she thought that they had a secret two-way radio on. She saw light in their attic. She thought they were communicating.

KP: Any basis for that?

RM: Maybe not, and probably not, but that's the way people were in those days, too. You really did have suspicion of …

KP: She didn't have suspicion, because say in the '30s, the Evertz family had expressed a lot of sympathy for the Germans, for the Nazi cause, or that of type of thing?

RM: I don't think they had anything. I think it was just the World War II thing that we were now at war and therefore Germans were suspects.

KP: What about Andover?

RM: I just know as a kid that the State Police raided the *Bund* Camp, and that was a big thing in the history of Sussex County, that they were actually there training. I think they were using wooden guns that they could practice with, march and all.

KP: You didn't know any *Bund* members, did you?

RM: No, no, no way. I hope not.

KP: I didn't think people have actually known *Bund* members growing up, but so in other words, you knew they were there but they were not in your immediate vicinity?

RM: That's right, but it was a surprise to everyone that they had been able to do that and get away with it, the secret, that no one knew it. The general public didn't know.

KP: You didn't know. You were just surprised?

RM: The State Police raid was supposedly a surprise raid, I think.

KP: Your other brothers, when the news of Pearl Harbor came, how quickly did they enlist and what did your parents think at the time?

RM: My brother, Don, was in the service, since '43, so he probably was just getting out of high school. He was younger than Ben and my other brother, Bob, was another year or two younger. So, he didn't go in until about late '43 or '44, I guess. They were both out of high school then. No, my brother, Bob, was at Princeton. I have their ages mixed up. But, '42, '43, somewhere around there, Don the pilot and Bob the gunner entered the service.

KP: It sounds like your mother was really a nervous wreck even before you learned …

RM: She was a nervous wreck all through the war and always read the letters and always wondered and cried.

KP: Did your family save all the letters that came?

RM: I think, my sister who lives in Florida probably has some and she's our family historian, more or less. In fact, it's only been recently that my brother, Don, has given me some information. He's never talked to anyone, and he had five sons in Florida, and he says that he's written out pretty much in detail things that he can remember for his sons.

KP: It sounds like your two brothers who survived the war, it was a tough war for them.

RM: They were very lucky. My brother mentioned he considered himself very fortunate to come out of there unscathed.

KP: Going back to being a child during the war, you mentioned that there were a number of things that you took part in at the time. What is a child's perspective of the war? What did you figure was your part in the war effort?

RM: We were building the tanks and planes that our brothers would be flying or using. We were going to win the war against the Japanese and the Germans.

KP: So, tell me about the scrap drive.

RM: They meant a lot to us. They meant a lot to most people. Most people rounded up all the scrap iron they could find. We went to a little dump area we had in our back property and dug up, with shovels and picks, anything we could find that was not rusty, or too rusty, that could be melted down.

KP: What about at school? Did your school do anything special, any fund drives?

RM: There were always war bond drives in the school. Yes, I do remember that very well. Selling war bonds and encouraging students to buy. We had a little, so-called, banking system where we would put so much money a week, whether it was twenty-five cents or fifty cents, twenty-five cents was a lot of money in those days, toward the war bond.

KP: What about any assemblies you remember or any other special programs?

RM: I don't remember too many assemblies, interesting things you ask. No, I don't remember any special assemblies on the war effort.

KP: What about in Social Studies classes?

RM: Teachers would mention the war, and what was happening, and we would get "daily readers." Sometimes we would be called on as kids to see if we had any relatives in service, what their names were and where they were.

KP: It sounds like for you and for other kids it was hard to have your brothers overseas, particularly, when they were in harms way.

RM: We missed them because, to me, they were my older brothers, and, of course, they were my idols. I looked up to them and I remember being with them when they were home, and then not being with them when they were gone. When they were gone it was a long time. It wasn't one or two years, it was four, or five, or six years.

KP: So, it sounds like you were very close to them and then they all of a sudden were gone.

RM: That's right. I was there at home with my four sisters and mother and father.

KP: How old was the oldest of your sisters?

RM: My oldest sister is still living. She is pushing eighty now, I guess, but she's still in good health.

KP: So, she was fairly old when the war began.

RM: She was probably, well, my brothers went in service at age seventeen and eighteen, in fact, and she was probably nineteen, or twenty, when the war began and when they first went in service.

KP: What did she do? Did she work, or was she in college?

RM: She worked in a bank in town, in the Newton Trust Company bank.

KP: Your other sisters, were they in school?

RM: Right, my other, one sister is older than me, she was in school and then two other younger sisters were coming along in the elementary school.

KP: So, you had gone from a world where you went out hunting with your brothers and fishing with your brothers, to having just your sisters how did that change your dynamic? Did you try to encourage your sisters to go fishing?

RM: No, but I remember one of my aunts took me hunting once. The first pheasant I ever got was with a .410 gauge shotgun and one of my aunts took me and that was right at that period of time during the war.

KP: Did your aunt hunt, too? Or she just sort of went with you?

RM: She didn't really. I think she just did it to take me.

KP: Just as someone to chaperone you. Let me see if Gerald has any questions.

Gerald Roberts: I was gonna ask you about, I have the book by Mr. Piehler … and they mentioned earlier, about the blackouts, right, and they said … they mentioned lots of things about the town being completely dark … no lights at all.

RM: They tried to make it really dark, that's why the automobiles, when an automobile is on the road it was supposed to stop and turn its lights off, supposed to pull over to the side, and other times, all the headlights were painted black, half way up to the top, so that the beam couldn't shine up in the air and my mother was very strict about us. All the lights out in the house and very quiet, "Don't make any noise," not that anybody would probably have heard it, but it was true that the whole area … was supposed to be one hundred percent black. My father had a flashlight, but he only turned it on to flip the light on Route 206, and then he would stop all traffic and they'd turn their lights out.

GR: So, you'd sit in the dark, in complete darkness?

RM: Yes, and he would pull his car over to the side. I would sit in it in the dark and he would stop cars and make them turn their lights out.

GR: How long did this go on?

RM: It seemed like a long time, but it's probably five minutes, or maybe ten, maybe not that long sometimes, but at least five minutes, I bet, five whole minutes, or ten.

GR: I want to ask you about the rationing, did it seem to have a cramp on your lifestyle?

RM: Not real serious, but my father had to watch. We didn't mow the lawn as often with a power mower, which was new to us in those days, and he had an old-fashioned garden tractor with big iron wheels that he had to worry about how much he could use it because he needed every bit of gas. The creamery was three miles north of where we lived, so, he had to travel six miles every day and that added up in the old days and you really could not get gas if you didn't have the stamps, unless you went to black market, which some people did, but our family never did that, but we knew which gas stations in town which were supposedly the black marketers, and people frowned on them, but of course, some people went to them anyway, [and] the same thing with sugar. I guess butter was margarine in those days, though it wasn't much butter, real butter.

PK: You were in dairy country and your father worked for a creamery.

RM: Right, but you know, at the creamery, we got cream and buttermilk and chocolate milk and regular milk, but we never got the butter. That was not one of the products we got.

GR: So, it was just certain products. It wasn't all foods, just like sugar, I guess and the butter?

RM: Sugar was a big thing in the household that the housewife really missed, because without the sugar you couldn't make the cake, birthday cakes, and things like that and we had a lot of birthdays to make cakes for.

KP: During the blackouts, were you scared at all? As an eight year old you could be very scared.

RM: In my mind we wondered. Then if we ever heard a plane, up in Sussex County we didn't see that many airplanes, and if we did hear one at night, or whatever, we would wonder if bombs were going to drop, and, of course, reading in the newspaper about the New Jersey Shore, and the sinking of the U-boats, and the oil along the beaches, this really had us scared. As a child, of course, you know your mind really goes wild with that kind of stuff.

KP: So, what kind of scenarios did you envision? I guess some people who lived by the Shore thought that German saboteurs would land.

RM: Just wondered if there was going to come a marching army and take our house away, or shoot us. We really did wonder that as a kid and most people, I guess that I know, don't realize how close America came to real problems.

KP: How much of a shock was it to get a telegram that your brother was killed?

RM: It was a big shock. I can remember exactly each time. The first time when we got the missing telegram, we had been to an amusement park near Netcong and near Lake Hopatcong, it was called Bertram's Island and we came home from there and the telegram was stuck in our door. Then, of course, that was the big terrible thing but then my family had hope. Everyone

was hoping, "why, he's okay. He's really okay. He's just missing," but then, I guess, it was a while later, almost a year, before we knew for sure that he had been killed in the Normandy invasion, I guess. I came home from school, and got off the school bus, and my mother said, "Benny is dead." I thought she said "Betty" which was my oldest sister's name and I didn't understand what she was talking about, but she was saying "Ben" or "Benjamin," and then she said, "Look on the table," and I saw the telegram.

KP: So, this was, D-Day was in June, and you didn't get …

RM: We didn't know for quite a while.

KP: A year.

RM: I think it was, I may be wrong in the time span but it wasn't right away. It wasn't a matter of weeks, or a month, or two. It was quite a while. [Editors Note: The telegram notifying the McKeeby's of Benjamin McKeeby's death was dated July 1, 1944]

KP: So, there was a fear because he was missing, but also hope that he was missing and he'd be alive.

RM: He'd be alive, right.

KP: Which probably made it even harder in the end.

RM: Another interesting twist of the whole story. I just talked to my brother in Florida, who was the TBF pilot. When he was at Penn State, it turns out one of his fraternity brothers came into his room and saw the picture of my brother, Ben, the paratrooper, and said, "I know him," and he had also been a prisoner at the same place where my brother had been killed, which was St. Lo, France and my brother did give me his name; his name was Munson. He just told me that this morning and I remember he told me that once before. I have forgotten the details of that, but here my brother ends up being a fraternity brother with a man who had served also in 82nd Airborne Division as a paratrooper and had known my brother during the war. Had made several jumps with him.

KP: Being a paratrooper was very dangerous.

RM: That's what I'm told today and I know from watching the historical films of World War II and the 82nd was always there doing the job and, of course, the Patton movie.

KP: You mentioned both in your pre-interview survey and your talk that really, in other words, you lost your mother because of World War II.

RM: I ended up living with my aunt for a while, just because they felt I needed somebody, to keep her eye on me at ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen years old going into high school, and all, after that.

KP: You mentioned your mother was institutionalized. How long was she institutionalized?

RM: She was in and out several times. She was in sometimes for almost a year. They even did the old-fashioned shock treatment on her, which probably made her worse rather than better.

KP: What they knew about mental illness is not as good as today, did she ever get cured, or did it haunt her until she …

RM: I think it haunted her right till the time she died. That was another thing, I always hoped for during World War II, I always hoped that my brothers would come home, and I always hoped that mother would be better, but she never really was. She, of course, received checks, money, after my brother was killed, and she always referred to it as blood money, and she hardly would ever spend it on anything. So, those were tough times.

KP: It does sound like your mother was a casualty of the war.

RM: Yes, she was. She certainly was. I'm sure my father was, although he didn't show it.

KP: Your father seldom cried it sounds like.

RM: I never saw him cry except once.

KP: And that was when you got the telegram?

RM: The second telegram, and I caught him crying behind our garage.

KP: You said that he didn't show it, but were there scars that he'd left? It must have been hard to have your mother, his wife have to be in [a mental hospital].

RM: He would always talk about the war with his friends, and all, and I'm sure that it was always on his mind, and signing the paper, especially when the older brother would never have had to serve, not with a .22 bullet slug in his head.

KP: I mean, they had almost lost him before the war and now …

RM: Right, right, but he just wanted to go so bad they decided they had to let him do it.

KP: Gerald, I may have cut you off before. Do you have other questions?

GR: I was just going to ask you if you felt your mother felt any resentment towards the Germans, the German people?

RM: I'm sure she did. My mother didn't live that long actually. Of course, 1959 is a while, but she felt resentment against the Red Cross and Roosevelt. She blamed Roosevelt for getting us into the war, and, of course, it really wasn't his fault as we know today, and she blamed the Red Cross because they didn't send back some of the belongings that were my brother's for quite a

while. We did finally get some things back. One was a German Luger pistol that he had and some personal belongings. I have his memorial flag and dog tags at home.

KP: Does your sister have the correspondence from him?

RM: She has the other correspondence.

KP: What would your brothers write to you, from your memories of them, at the time?

RM: Actually they didn't write to me, I would write to them about …

KP: What would you write to them?

RM: "Get a Jap for me." These are things you did and the word "Jap" was a common word in the newspapers and in everyone's language. That's just the way it was. In fact, my wife gets a little mad at me today if I happen to use that word, when I'm driving down the highway or something, but that's something that was ingrained in me and, of course, I learned to get along with all kinds of people in teaching biology at Junior College. I don't give it a second thought anymore.

KP: It sounds like the Japs were real enemies.

RM: Well, in the movies we saw as kids the Japs were the ones that tortured the Americans and of course, history has proven that they did do that, too, where, supposedly, the Germans weren't so bad for torturing.

KP: What did you think of the Germans as an enemy?

RM: I really didn't understand it. I just knew who Hitler was and he was a bad person, and people somehow followed him, and I couldn't understand why people like us, with the blond hair and blue eyes, were doing this to each other.

KP: It sounds like, as a ten-year-old, the war is very confusing in some ways.

RM: It was very confusing, yes, it was. It was understood [as to] what was happening but it was confusing as to why it was happening.

KP: During the war, did you have this notion that you would serve in the military? Did you feel that this was something that would be part of your life?

RM: Yes, I did, and I'm glad you asked that question. In fact, I was very lucky not having to serve, but, also, I had two living brothers who told me never to volunteer. My two oldest brothers said, "Do not volunteer. If they draft you, that's one thing, but don't volunteer."

KP: Really?

RM: Because of their experiences. So, what happened was I started teaching in '57 and Russia put up the first *Sputnik*. I came out of Rutgers, I was in the Air Force ROTC and then I dropped out after the first two years, and took my chances for a draft. I was 1-A of course. I was 2-A, 2-S; I guess it was when I was in school. Then when I came out of Rutgers, I was 1-A and I figured I would never finish my first year of teaching. I took a teaching job at Rahway High School in 1957. I figured I'd be in the Army and get the two years over with and I'll be out. When Russia put out the *Sputnik*, and it wasn't too long after that, while I was at Rahway, I received a letter that all science and math teachers were deferred until final notice and I was just lucky they never took me. Then came the Cuban [Missile] Crises in the '60s, and I was 1-A again, for a short while, and then for some reason because I was teaching, and I was married, but I didn't have any children or anything, by that time, they still didn't, I never was called. So, I was just lucky, a lucky person, I guess, not having to have served.

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

KP: Not only did you grow up during World War II, but the war would end and your surviving brothers would come home, but then, while you're in high school, Korea would break out, so, you might well have thought that this is inevitable, like your father, like your brothers.

RM: By now I know it's inevitable. One of my fraternity brothers, Chi Phi, at Rutgers was killed in flight training in the Korean War. One of my wrestling teammates, you may have heard of him from here, a very famous person, John Dramesi, was a Hanoi prisoner for six years. John was a tough guy. I wrestled with him on the wrestling team, and John was a tough guy. He came back and he was head of the Veterans' Affairs for New Jersey veterans. He was fired and I forget which Congressman fired him but one of them, after a couple of years. He was fired by one party because he went to a rally for another party, but John Dramesi, he is still around and he's a tough guy. John came through Hotel Hanoi. He wrote a book, by the way, called the *Code of Honor*, have you ever heard of that one?

KP: It sounds very familiar.

RM: You should read that because he explains how, he tells you the whole details on how he was tortured, and how they communicated with each other, at Hotel Hanoi, *Code of Honor*. I have the book. I think I have it home. I could even send it to you if you like to read it.

KP: I also think Rutgers should have or if it doesn't I'll suggest that to the library.

RM: Get the press. He wrote it. Also I was gonna mention something else there. One of our '57 members whose name I just saw, I can't remember, is listed at the Vietnam Memorial.

KP: Oh, yeah, that's right.

RM: But I was very fortunate in that area. I never did volunteer. My brother said, "Don't volunteer."

KP: It sounds like, as a kid, you would have that sense.

RM: I think today, I have a fear, a guilty conscience, a little bit of a guilt, that I probably should have, like my brothers did. I guess maybe the times were different and things happen that I didn't. I started teaching. Got into the groove of teaching. Then was married in 1962, I guess it was, and pretty soon I was old enough they just didn't ever ask me.

KP: Growing up, did you join any organizations like the Boy Scouts?

RM: Oh, the Boy Scouts for a short while.

KP: What about the 4-H?

RM: We had 4-H, that was a big thing in the country, but I never was a member, but it's a good organization, I would…

KP: You would go to the fair?

RM: We always had a Sussex County Fair. I'm active in the Middlesex County Fair now. My wife and daughters have all put items in the fair, almost every year for the last ten or fifteen years, so, we are still country people at heart.

KP: Even though you live in East Brunswick?

RM: East Brunswick and teach in Union County.

KP: Growing up what did you think you'd like to become?

RM: Somehow I always thought I would like to be a teacher.

KP: Really?

RM: I don't know why, but I just did. I think out of respect maybe for my, teaching and coaching, I think that's what I thought, because I loved my high school coaches. They were good to us, and they watched out for us.

KP: You wrestled, did you participate in any other sport?

RM: I played high school football. I was fortunate enough to become a member of the Sussex County Sports Hall of Fame. About five years ago I was inducted. So, whenever I go to a New Jersey Cardinal's baseball game, it's at the baseball stadium now. In fact, if you ever go to the New Jersey Cardinal's baseball stadium, it's right next to the creamery where my father worked. It's still called The Creamery but it's an office building now.

KP: When did the creamery go out of business?

RM: Mid '50s. My father managed to retire, I think, the year that it closed up. There are no more creameries in Sussex County.

KP: Really?

RM: Most of our New Jersey milk, if there are enough farmers around, goes to Pennsylvania.

KP: How interesting, because I went to Washington Township, at Mount Shirley and I came across a creamery that was still in operation and also a dairy store for farmers to buy and sell.

RM: Maybe in Warren County, there may be one or two left, but not in Sussex County.

KP: Not in Sussex.

RM: No. There were two creameries. There was one, my father worked for Henry Becker, which was at Rosses Corner, which is where the baseball stadium now is and then there was another creamery right up the road from our house, right on Route 206, that was the new creamery we called it. Becker's was with the old creamery. When I was a kid in high school, there were more cows than people at Sussex County. That's true, but what a change, the farming land has been sold off and like I said, for shopping centers and …

KP: Because, even though Sussex County compared to other counties is still very undeveloped, it's for you, if you go back …

RM: I see many, many changes, right.

KP: Did you see any changes in Newton and your surrounding area caused by the war? Any defense factories, or influx of new people, or did it really remain an agricultural place for you?

RM: My aunt worked for a mill, Darlington Fabrics, and, of course, during the war they were doing a lot of, I guess, uniforms and other war clothing. There was another fabric company on the other side of town, Printworks Company and I think they were war effort also, for a while. Both of those factories are now just closed down, nothing.

KP: Did you ever take any boarders in during the war?

RM: No. We had too many kids.

KP: Even with your brothers all gone.

RM: Even with them all gone, right.

KP: I guess one of the inevitable questions for anyone who lived in the States, were V-E and V-J Day very memorable days for you?

RM: Right, [there were] sirens blowing and my parents crying. Most people were happy the war was over and everyone was celebrating in the town square, and all, but for us it was a sad time. I was, I guess, mixed sad and happy, but mostly sad in our house. We were glad our other brothers are coming home.

KP: When did your brothers come home, their homecoming?

RM: I don't think it was until 1946 when both of them, or maybe '47 for one, depending on when they had enlisted. They had to put in their four years, I guess, before they could come out. I remember the first thing my brother, Bob, did when he came back, he was a belly gunner, bought himself a zoot suit with big … baggy pants and a big watch chain.

KP: Which in Sussex County must have really been out of place.

RM: He was a girl's man right after World War II. He got around to meet the girls.

KP: They must have been viewed by the community as being heroes.

RM: They were definitely heroes, yes, they were. They could get anything they wanted.

KP: So, would people, in a sense, buy them meals when they were in restaurants?

RM: I don't remember having that happening, but I'm sure it did. I know people took care of my brothers, I know that favors were done for them, here and there, and everywhere.

KP: Because you mentioned one brother went into business, he didn't go back to Princeton.

RM: He went right into sales; he wanted to buy a home. He bought his home on Lake Mohawk, which is more than the average type of home.

KP: Yeah. I know Lake Mohawk is a very nice.

RM: In fact, my nephews have his home now and I still go up there bass fishing. I was up there a couple of weeks ago. Very pretty lake, very pretty homes.

KP: Now, you mentioned he was a salesman, and because he'd wrestled he was widely known.

RM: Right. He was widely known. That helped him in his sales.

KP: What did your other brother do after the war?

RM: My brother Don, the pilot, he taught at Washington High School, agriculture. He majored in agriculture at Penn State and graduated. [There is] another interesting story with him. When he was in the Navy, he wrestled, and his coach was Charlie Spiedel, who was the Penn State wrestling coach. So, that's how a Sussex County boy ended up at Penn State, and on a scholarship, too. He wrestled for the Navy, and he wrestled for Charlie Spiedel, at Penn State,

on the varsity wrestling team. [Don's assistant wrestling coach at Annapolis was Gerald Ford, past president of the United States and Charlie Spiedel was the Navy head coach.]

KP: So, in other words, he didn't just go to Penn State because of the GI Bill?

RM: No.

KP: But because he had in a sense been scouted.

RM: Right, right. He was scouted in there by the wrestling coach. Then he taught agriculture at Washington High School for a few years. Then he came to Newton and bought a house, and taught agriculture there for a while, and some science, and then he finally moved to Florida about twenty years ago. He taught science down there for a while and now he's retired, still living.

KP: It sounds like you had quite a bit in common with him in terms of sciences, interest in science.

RM: Right. In fact, he had sent me articles from Florida and I post them on the board at the County College and he's gonna send me a live tarantula, although I don't want one, and I send him things down from New Jersey once in a while.

KP: After V-J Day, the war had been very distant, but then you have the Cold War starting while you were still in high school. What did you know of the Cold War before coming to Rutgers?

RM: Not a whole lot. I just knew that when the first *Sputnik* went up, the world heard a word they never heard before and that was the word, satellite. Also we knew that we were not probably the strongest nation in the world anymore and we were scared of Russia and what Russia might do.

KP: We're talking about the time you really thought the United States might be threatened by Russia, it sounds like you assumed the United States was the strongest?

RM: The whole world looked up to the United States pretty much, I think, after World War II. We were not in the situation we're in today in the eyes of the world.

KP: When the Korean War broke out, did you think that might be a war that you might be going into after high school?

RM: Positively. In fact, only the *Sputnik* and the National Science Foundation were the reasons why, I think, I was never called. I thought I would never get to finish that first year teaching.

KP: What about your fears that your brothers might be called back? Was that a fear at all? Not that it was necessary, or a rational fear but at the time?

RM: It was a possibility. My oldest brother, Don, was in the Navy Reserves for quite a while so he possibly would have been, but, I think, there was some kind of clause that because he fought in the other war, he wouldn't. I don't remember the details. That's an interesting question now. He was in the active Navy Reserves for a long time after World War II.

KP: I could just imagine that your parents, particularly now that Korea started, had fears that their sons would be called back again, and that you would finish high school and then go off to war.

TM: I'm sure my mother thought that, too, but, of course, she passed away in '59. So it wasn't that long after I got out of college, I certainly did think Korea or, by the time of Vietnam I was already too old.

KP: You mentioned that you came to Rutgers because of wrestling. Had you thought of going elsewhere to college? Were there other schools you thought of trying to go to?

RM: I had scholarships to five places. One was Lehigh, one was Rutgers, one was Franklin and Marshall, one was Lafayette. I don't remember the fifth one, [Muhlenberg] but I know I had five.

KP: You had quite a pick of schools.

RM: And I decided to pick Rutgers.

KP: Why Rutgers?

RM: I was in-state, first of all, cheaper as a resident, but we weren't the State University then.

KP: Yes, no, I know.

RM: I guess, in my mind it was the most prestigious at the time compared to Lehigh. Although one of the matches I lost, when I was a senior, happened to be with Lehigh. Ten to nine, I lost to Lehigh in my senior year.

KP: Had you been to Rutgers before you came?

RM: I don't think so. We lived in the country, went to high school, never got out of the county very much.

KP: In fact, had you traveled much growing up as a kid before college?

RM: No, no.

KP: Had you?

RM: We didn't.

KP: So, what is the farthest east, west, north and south that you had been to?

RM: I do remember once making a trip to visit my brother, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, I guess, when he was in paratrooper training. I guess, he was through training then but it must have been early '40s. I was probably five or six. I do remember taking a long trip and staying in motels, and that was a long trip.

KP: It sounds like …

RM: No. We never went into the city, New York City. The biggest place for us to go was Paterson, I think, and Dover. They were the cities near Sussex County, to go shopping, if you want to get out of the regular town shopping. We were country all the way.

KP: You grew up in a very rural area where most of your friends were farmers or somehow farm related. What was it like to come to Rutgers where you really have a lot of urban?

RM: First thing was, you didn't walk across the street. You ran across the street. In Newton, we walked to cross the street, because there was never much traffic, but in New Brunswick, you didn't dare walk across. That was the big awakening. Another thing was how smart everyone else was, and how dumb you were.

KP: When you say that, in what ways, there must have been something.

RM: I remember taking my first biology classes right next door here in New Jersey Hall, and most of the students around me had dissected the frog in high school, and had used the microscope a lot, and everything, and we never had dissected a frog and I had only looked at those butterflies, so I didn't know anything that was going on. So, to me these people were so smart, and they even knew things that were already in our lab manuals that I was seeing for the first time.

KP: So, it sounds like you had a lot of catching up to do.

RM: A lot of catching up to do. Somehow I did it.

KP: How rough was your first year, which is usually rough for even prepared students?

RM: First year, I, well, I was on a scholarship making average, which was 3.5 in those days where 1 was high. I think that was right, 3.5 and I may have had a 3.7. So, my sophomore year I was on the hot seat, and I was supposed to go to the Scholarship Committee and I didn't go. They wrote me a letter; I didn't go, so now they sent someone to find me and I had to write a letter explaining what average I would make the next semester, and I had to make that average. I had to get this letter approved by all the people on the Scholarship Committee, and there were five or six people. So, I had to walk around with this letter I wrote, and get it signed, and everyone did sign it and I just exactly made the average I was supposed to make, which was the minimum you had to make, which was 3.5 in my sophomore year but after that I did all right.

Up to my sophomore year I did fairly well. I was no great student, but I made it, and I never got a D or an F, at Rutgers. So, I'm proud of that.

KP: You mentioned, before we formally began; we started talking about Professor McCormick. You liked a lot of your professors it sounds like.

RM: I had him for recent American history. He came in with a top hat, and a pearl-handled cane, the first day of class, and he started talking about a chicken in every pot, and a car in every garage, and the Hoovervilles. He was quite a showman. He was good. He was New Jersey State historian also at that time. In fact, our class ended early, because he had to go to England, or somewhere, to meet some heir of a castle, of royalty, having to do with New Jersey history way back when.

KP: So, it sounds like as a science major you were still very intrigued by this course and by him.

RM: Right. Yeah, I liked the history courses.

KP: What about Professor Harmon, what do you remember?

RM: Harvey Harmon?

KP: Oh, yes, yes.

RM: You mean the football coach?

KP: Yes, because you list him as a professor.

RM: I knew Harvey Harmon very well. He was a football coach, and I was student athletic director, at the old college gym, and he came to me one day and he held out his hand and said, "I know you, you're Dick McKeeby, you're on the wrestling team," he said, "but, I don't know if you know me. I'm Harvey Harmon, the only coach to ever get fired and hear about it on the radio," and he said, "They want to get rid of me, but they offered me this job, being faculty adviser to student athletics, and I'm going to fool them. I'm staying." So, he stayed about a year, I think, and he was the faculty adviser and he actually had plans for us, through the intramurals program. He was going to get, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello to come, because Bud Abbott, supposedly, was a good basketball foul-shooting person and he had plans to get them to come here, but then Bud Abbott died. I think that happened at that period of time. He never got him to come. But Coach Harmon, he had the longest scoring streak of all football teams while I was at Rutgers, but, of course, they weren't winning many games, they were always losing to Princeton, and a lot of other people, but he had the longest scoring streak and that was a big thing Rutgers looked up to him for in those days. What else did he do?

KP: I heard he was a very colorful.

RM: Oh, he was colorful. True stories, I heard, that he actually bought shoes for some of the football players who couldn't afford them, football shoes or regular shoes for class, or whatever.

He used to get presents. One thing he did was, he was a public relations man for Pabst Brewing Company, and one day he came to me and he said, "Dick, I'm probably paying my housekeeper up in Maine more money than you're gonna get your first year teaching," and then he said, "Guess what I have to do next week?" And I said, "What?" He said, "I have to ride around the city." I guess it was New York City. "I have to ride around New York City, and in a gold Cadillac wearing a gold suit, with a pretty girl in a gold gown, and I have to drink the Pabst Golden Brew, and every once in a while I have to kiss her." But that's the kind of a guy he was, and he really did do this. He was public relations man for Pabst. Oh, another time he came in and he gave me five dollars or something, which was a lot of money, and he said, "Go down to the liquor store and get a case of beer and drop it off for the boys at the *Targum*, because, they gave us a nice write-up about intramural athletics." He got neckties in the mail. One day he came in and he throws a box at me. It had an address on it, "Harvey Harmon" and all, he says, "Take this. I know what it is, another damn necktie. They want me to sponsor neckties." At that time, he was executive director of the Football Hall of Fame and then, of course, that folded as you know, it went to Ohio. Coach Harmon was a colorful person, yes, he was. I'm sure all of his football players would have said the same thing.

KP: I've interviewed some of his football players.

RM: He was quite a person. I really got to know him through the intramural athletics. He was quite a nice person. He was very good to me. He took good care of me.

KP: How did you get into this role of intramural coordinator? Were you appointed, or elected, did you apply?

RM: How, I got it? To tell you the truth, I didn't really know anybody, I wasn't elected. I don't think I was elected. I was the class officer for my class. I'm very proud of that. I was secretary, and I had a nice full page picture in the back of our yearbook, with my class president, John Hurley, and vice-president, George Ohye, but how I got the sports, I'm not sure. I guess, I got it through the athletic department since I was wrestling.

KP: What would you do? What was your job?

RM: I'd hire all the intramural officials. I would go to the fraternities and have guys send in their names, or go looking for them. They would get paid two dollars a game, or something, to officiate softball, or whatever, we were doing, soccer, or touch football. I delivered all the balls and bats to the game. I was one of the few people who had a car. I had a '41 Plymouth and all my friends would borrow it, of course, and run the heck out of it. But, because I had the car I could run around, with the baseball bats, and bases, and footballs, and all those things that I had to do.

KP: It sounds like in some ways it was a good job in terms of getting some real experience in how to run, manage the place.

RM: It was. It was a very good job. That was good experience for me, too, although I never became an athletic director or anything.

KP: You got to meet Harvey Harmon and really in a sense work with him.

RM: I knew everybody in the gym in those days. Al Twitchell was assistant athletic director and lacrosse coach. The athletic director was Harry Rockefeller who helped save my scholarships.

KP: Yes, you mentioned that.

RM: Fred Grunningeris, the new athletic director here, I taught with him at Rahway High School, Fred Geunnenger.

KP: Yeah.

RM: I knew Fred Grunningeris before he ever came to Rutgers. We were teaching together at Rahway High School and he also was selling insurance in those days. In fact, he sold me a Prudential Life Insurance policy that I still have.

KP: You mentioned, and I'm not sure whether he was a coach or a professor.

RM: I remember Professor Nelson. In fact, I went to see him, and I had trouble with religion and evolution, as a freshman, and he told me to look at it this way: that evolution is designed in nature and in the universe. Science and evolution are designed and you don't have to give up your creator idea, that there is a designer, and, I guess, I was satisfied with that.

KP: But you were troubled by that?

RM: As a freshman, yes, because I was a religious kid, as we went to church regularly. My mother and father made sure we went to church and the funny thing is they didn't.

KP: They did not go?

RM: They didn't go regularly, or if they went it was at Easter, maybe, or something, or at a wedding, but they never went regularly to church but we did. I can remember having Sunday School pins hanging down to my belt, so, being there regularly you learned to believe.

KP: You never really encountered evolution? Had you before?

RM: I don't even remember that word in high school to tell you the truth.

KP: So, this must have been a very new and startling concept.

RM: Right, right, and of course, today I teach it. The way I get around it today is I tell the students, "Well, here's Darwin's theory and here's what science tells us how life began on the earth and all. The other story is, religion, and the most accepted one is Genesis of the Bible," and I tell the students, "Please don't be anti-science if you're religious, and you don't have to be

an atheist if you are science. You can really accept both if you want it to work. The Bible says, 'in the beginning there was no life,' and science says the same thing. First, there were creatures of the sea, and later, the creatures of land and last, came man." Only we can't say man anymore. Now we have to say "human" or it's politically incorrect.

KP: Gerald is a student at Rutgers, Livingston College. Let me see if he has any student related questions?

GR: I was going to ask about being a child, did the elementary school do anything to try to keep you in the dark about what was going on in World War II?

RM: Maybe they did, but I didn't know that they were doing it. We did not hear that much about the war. Our little Weekly Readers, we would get, when we were in elementary school, would tell us things about science, like soybeans were being used, or something like that, but I don't really remember much war news in school, even in my history classes, although I had US history in high school. Actually I had it in eighth grade. The war was over by that time.

GR: The war was obviously, it was probably on everybody's mind. Did they address that at all? As a communal group, did you try to organize anything through the school?

RM: You know, way back in my memory, probably we did have to save things. We had to save probably paper, if I remember right. They probably had metal drives. I just don't remember specifically, which school, or what grade I was in, but I remember the other metal drives that we would take things into town. The school probably did. I just don't remember that that well. I don't know why.

GR: You said before that you were in a fraternity. Was there a lot of rivalry between the fraternities on campus?

RM: Oh, yeah.

GR: Like what?

RM: The house across from Chi Phi up here, built a big steam roller, and we went over and rolled it off the porch, and broke it in pieces, but the next morning when we woke up for breakfast, there wasn't any milk or buns, or anything, so they knew who did it, and they stole all our milk and buns.

GR: They got even?

RM: They got it, they got even, or they think they did. There were good friendships, too, though. Good friendships and good rivalry.

GR: So, it never got too violent?

RM: We also stole their charter. Somehow, somebody, someone in our fraternity sneaked in their basement near their secret room and found their charter, got their charter, but we finally gave that back.

KP: After you held it?

RM: Serious fraternity stuff.

GR: I've read that students get tied to trees and thing like that? Have you see any of that?

RM: What was that?

KP: During hazing?

RM: Oh, hazing. I had to wear a fish head around my neck for a week. A dead fish head on a string, and I had to go to class with that. Yeah, no kidding. We had limburger cheese under our armpits, too, and we had to wear that. The only time I could take that off is when I went to wrestling practice, and then after I was done, put it right back and the fraternity brothers checked us, too, for a week, a dead fish head, and limburger cheese under the arm. Oh, yeah. It was good hazing.

GR: That didn't stop the wrestling.

RM: Oh, one good story I did want to tell you about Coach Harmon. Our mascot was the Chanticleer, which of course was the fighting cock, which everybody called "chicken." Well, Harvey Harmon was pushing the change of the mascot. They change the mascot our senior year, I think it was, and they didn't know what it was going to be, a Scarlet Knight or a Red Lion. Red Lion was up there, in the voting, and, of course, we had the chicken the Chanticleer. Well Coach Harmon told us, "You can call it the Chanticleer, you can call it a fighting cock, you can call any damn thing you want, but everybody knows it's a chicken." One of my fraternity brothers, whose name was Gus Lachenauer, was the Chanticleer. He used to wear that costume at the football games all the time. In fact, he did that most of our four years of college. He was the chicken. He danced around and pecked at people.

KP: You mentioned the lion almost won. What was the thinking in terms of the Scarlet Knight? Do you have any sense of why people favored the Scarlet Knight as a symbol as opposed to the lion?

RM: It may be more chivalrous. The Red Lion was close behind, but, I guess, it just didn't seem to have the class that the Scarlet Knight might. I liked the Scarlet Knight, except I think they need a younger, whiter horse, [it is] a little bit gray and old looking.

GR: You had seen in the *Targum*, the fraternities are always at odds with the city of New Brunswick, about taxes and things.

RM: This is today, right? You're talking about modern times?

GR: No, I was talking about your era.

KP: You didn't have any problems in terms in your era?

RM: No, I don't remember.

KP: Before early '40s there were problems.

RM: The only problems we had with the town were the young guys coming up and crashing fraternity parties. We called them 'townies.' The townies would come into a party, and say they were a brother of somebody, or brother-in-law of somebody, and then they would sneak into the party and birddog the girls, but we didn't have those kinds of problems. I read in the paper now, I notice the problems with Livingston College, too; they might do away with it. I guess you know that, right?

GR: Yeah.

RM: At least an indication of it.

KP: You went to a college that was still all male.

RM: Yeah, pretty much. It was rare to have a girl in the classroom. Once in a while a Douglass girl would be in the class.

KP: Did you still call Douglass the Coop?

RM: We called it the Coop. The girls were the Coopies. Panty raids a couple of times over at Douglass.

KP: So, you actually, did you participate in these panty raids, or did you just hear about them?

RM: No, I actually didn't, but some of the guys in our fraternity did, and they came back with them. There was always a chance of getting caught, too, and that was a big, that was supposedly a big penalty, that you could get thrown out of school, if you did that kind of thing.

KP: So, you decided you wouldn't participate.

RM: I just never participated. But, we, of course, spent time over at Douglass at the Student Center meeting people and all.

KP: It sounds like there was a lot of dating between the two campuses.

RM: It wasn't Douglass then, it was NJC, yeah.

KP: What about chapel? Did you attend?

RM: I did. I saw Robert Frost at this chapel. One of my fraternity brothers, myself and my wife now, when she was still at Douglass, the three of us went to see Robert Frost speak.

KP: I had never known he had come to Rutgers.

RM: Oh, yeah, he used to speak at Kirkpatrick Chapel. Yep, sure did.

KP: And so did you meet your wife at NJC?

RM: I met her after I was teaching. I was teaching a little while and then I, through a friend of mine, I met her at the student center and we've made it through thirty-four years, thirty-five, I'm not sure which.

KP: You were in ROTC like everyone for two years.

RM: Air Force.

KP: Air Force ROTC, and did you want to stay in advanced ROTC?

RM: I did. I wanted to be a pilot real bad.

KP: Really?

RM: I did want to be a pilot but.

KP: Really? Even though your brothers said not to?

RM: Even though they told me not [to], but what happened was, I forgot to tell you that part of the story, I flunked the eye test. I was 20/40 and they told me that I could come back and be a bombardier, or a navigator, with glasses, but the enlistment time then was seven years, and I said to myself, because this was the beginning of the jet age, and also they were looking for young, and small people, because a big guy wouldn't fit in the jet plane, in those days, and I was small because in wrestling, I wrestled 123 when I was a senior, so, I would have been a prime possibility for the jet training, if I had passed the eye test, but I flunked the eye test when they gave it to me. So, they told me about this coming back with glasses, in for seven years and I said, "Wow, I'm going to be twenty-two when I graduate from Rutgers and be twenty-nine if I go in the Air Force and do something I didn't really want to do." So, then I just dropped out of the two year program, took my chances the next two years where we were 2-S anyway, it was 2-S they called it in those days, and then luckily got through the Korean thing, but mostly because Russia put up that *Sputnik*.

KP: It sounds like in the '50s the draft is something you always, [even if you didn't think about it] were conscious of.

RM: Oh, we were always conscious of it but it and it was still there. There was no draft, when did that happen? Do you remember? I don't remember the year of no drafting?

KP: I think it was only in the late '40s briefly. It was always a sort of continuous draft from '45.

RM: But today we have no draft system at all, right?

KP: Yes, since '73.

RM: Oh, so it was '73, that's the year. We were conscious, we certainly were, right through the '60s and right on through. After a while I never gave it a thought because they just hadn't bothered me and I didn't think they would and they didn't.

KP: But for a while you were in college.

RM: Until that time.

KP: Immediately afterwards.

RM: It was two years in college I wondered, too, because we really didn't know what was happening and …

KP: Yeah. Did you ever lose classmates who got drafted?

RM: Really I don't remember anybody being drafted out of our classes. No, I don't.

KP: No.

RM: I think we were all 2-S for a while.

KP: You also played freshman lacrosse and 150 pound football. You were very busy in college.

RM: I was, because, I worked in the cafeteria, I didn't have money from home, my father didn't have money to give me for college. Once in a while a few bucks, but, actually, I didn't need any because my state scholarship paid everything except tuition and fees. My freshman bill was $9.50. I had to buy my books and I had to live, so, one of the first things I did was I got a job delivering newspapers, all up and down College Avenue, for the College. There were a couple of vending machines, too, and I delivered by hand, and then I worked in the cafeteria, and I also sold sandwiches, cake, milk, and ice cream at night time around to the fraternities but the funny part was, it wasn't funny, I was on the wrestling team, and couldn't eat. So, here I am working in the cafeteria, and then I was selling sandwiches, cake, milk, and ice cream at night time but I did it. Somehow I did it. Willpower.

KP: I knew from high school the wrestlers really had to watch if you are in the lower weight class.

RM: Right. I would do it over again, though. I really would. I've had experiences that most of these kids I see now, at the two-year college, they don't begin to know the fun it was. It was a lot of sacrifice, too, wrestling, but to know that I've competed against Yale and NYU and Columbia and Princeton and Navy and Army, who else did we go to, Lehigh, of course. [also Colgate and Cornell] Those are good memories. I wouldn't trade them for anything but when I was doing it, I don't know how I did it, but I would do it again.

KP: It sounds like that you really did not have a lot of wasted time.

RM: Wasted time, no. In fact, I didn't go home most weekends. I forced myself to stay at the college. I got very homesick, of course, at first, but I forced myself to stay here till Thanksgiving in my freshman year.

KP: That is rare at Rutgers because everyone, even from your neck of the woods, went home on Fridays.

RM: But then we did go up and my friends went to Sussex County with me when I went. Sometimes they went hunting with me. Sometimes we just went up for the ride to go to the lake.

KP: You always wanted to be a teacher. Was your thinking in college that you would teach high school?

RM: My thoughts through college [were] to teach and coach, which I did do for a while. I coached, and also officiated wrestling for quite a few years.

KP: You did serve as a coach for a while?

RM: Yeah. I was assistant coach at Rahway High School, then I was head coach, and then I came to East Brunswick and was assistant coach and then when I went to the college in 1968, I dropped all my coaching and officiating. I became too busy with the biology.

KP: You've been at Union College for awhile.

RM: This is my twenty-ninth year, with eleven at high school. This is my fortieth year of teaching, twenty-ninth at Union.

KP: I mean, when you started there it was very small.

RM: It was very small. Now we have three campuses. We have one in Scotch Plains and one in Plainfield and one in Cranford.

KP: Where did you go back for your masters?

RM: To Union College, Schenectady, New York. That was through the National Science Foundation, that was an A/B program and I'll never forget it. The first two courses were Physics and Chemistry, graduate level Physics and Chemistry, and I squeaked out two Bs. We had to get

all As and Bs. We had two options. We either do the thesis or the A/B. I took the A/B. I don't know why I took the A/B thing but I did. That was three summers, eight weeks, all day long, Monday thru Friday. Start at 8:00 AM in the morning and go up to 4:30 and come back at, most nights for maybe labs or films or special lectures.

KP: You've been interested in majoring in science before *Sputnik*. *Sputnik* must have really given you a sense that you were doing something very important for the country, and all along it's something you enjoyed.

RM: Yeah. I don't know if we felt it was so important. I guess we did. We were being trained to help do something important. That's why the National Science Foundation, and that's why these special, courses at Union College of Schenectady, and all. But my love of the outdoors came from when I was a kid, I suppose, the hunting. I guess, like I said, seeing the spiders in the fields, and insects, and the dragonflies in our brook, snapping turtles, water snakes, and all the rest. I just was always fascinated with living things.

KP: What did you enjoy teaching the most? Did you ever miss high school once you started teaching junior college?

RM: In some ways I miss the high school. I still have very good friends that I taught with from the high school there, that live in the East Brunswick area because I still live there but the most enjoyable thing about teaching at Union College, I think, is the students that thank you even if they didn't do well. The students would thank me even if they get a C or something. They say, "Thank you for getting me through it and I learned a lot even though I didn't do that well." That's the biggest reward, I think, and I get nice letters here and there.

KP: Are there any frustrations that you've noticed?

RM: Oh, yeah. The smart-ass is my frustration. I can't stand the smart-ass. We get these kids right out of high school, as you know, and some of them haven't grown up yet, but I know how to put them in their place.

KP: When I was in college I took two summer courses at a community college, but there's something in teaching at junior college, community college, some students treat it as grade number thirteen. It's grade thirteen to fourteen.

RM: We had a pretty good mixture of people, though, older and younger and all kinds of IQs, so, most of the people don't really do that down there, I don't think. We have a pretty good reputation all the way around, but the place is changing so much as is probably much of Rutgers, toward the computer world and careers. The old time things are being dropped. I taught an animal biology course. I developed it myself and taught it for seven years and built it up from seven students to a full house of twenty-four, which is what the labs hold, and we were ready to go into extra labs, and that course was just dropped, and we really need more courses like that, especially for the non-science majors.

KP: You've seen, and it sounds like you've enjoyed teaching basic science, basic biology, and there's been a push really to careerism over the years.

RM: Right. I enjoy working with non-majors because they are a special challenge. They need to be tricked into understanding a difficult idea, sometimes boring, like anaerobic respiration, doesn't sound too exciting, but when you start talking beer and wine and sauerkraut and yogurt, then it starts to have a little meaning.

KP: It sounds like you've learned some of the tricks.

RM: We learned gimmicks and tricks for sure.

KP: Had you ever thought of going farther in terms of graduate studies?

RM: I did once, and I came over and applied at Rutgers at the Education Department, and I wasn't accepted.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Richard E. McKeeby on October 31, 1996 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and Gerald Roberts.

KP: You mentioned that you'd applied at Rutgers and, unfortunately, didn't get accepted.

RM: I guess I said the wrong things when the professor interviewed me. I forget who it was. I won't mention any names. I can't remember anyway, but at that time I had been teaching, probably, at least fifteen years already and I was seriously interested in going to do doctorate work. However, I was also doing part-time jobs, carpentry and masonry work, which I can do pretty well, and I was probably making more money than I would have made if I had gotten the doctorate anyway. With the doctorate, my college would have given me six percent of my salary. So, I said, "Well, why should I worry about it?" And I didn't. I did what I had to do to earn some extra money for my family, and then as I got older, of course, I eased off and I don't do that anymore. That was my PhD work.

KP: Have you taken any interesting courses?

RM: I've taken many N.S.F. Chautauqua, short courses at University of Georgia from the famous shark lady, Dr. Eugenia Clark. I had Yogi Berra's nephew, Timothy Berra, for a professor at Memphis, Tennessee. He taught natural history of Australia. I had Dr. Gerald Lanier from Cornell. He taught, "Chemical Communication Among Animals," and I've forgotten two professors Dr. Debra Martin and another professor taught, "Nutrition in the Mound Building Indians," where we studied skulls and bones to see how their bodies were affected by their diet such as fish or corn.

KP: It sound like you have enjoyed science a great deal.

RM: I've enjoyed it and I kept active. I'll probably be sorry when I retire, but I'm ready.

KP: Really?

RM: There's a lot of hassle around me. I enjoy the classroom and the teaching but the test grading, I don't really enjoy.

KP: I know in humanities, in community college, it's a five course load, what is it like in science?

RM: Five courses, yeah. They tend to be giving us more busy work all the time now. For example, they're increasing our labs from twelve in a semester to sixteen and the reason, there's no good educational reason for doing it, it's just because there's sixteen weeks. Maybe I shouldn't say that but …

KP: So, you think that? You were very active when you were at Rutgers as a student. You were secretary of your class and you remained active with alumni affairs. How has Rutgers changed and how has it stayed the same? You've seen the continuity with the Rutgers of your era?

RM: Well, it certainly grown bigger, spread out all through, of course, Livingston and Cook, the new buildings. The football team is a disappointment to me, to tell you the truth. I would rather we were still playing Princeton and Lehigh and those teams.

KP: Really?

RM: Really, and, I think, many of the old-timers do feel that way with what's happening with the new program. The new stadium is nice, it's impressive, but …

KP: You would still rather go out and see Princeton?

RM: Right. That was more of a challenge. When I was in school, we lost to Princeton nine to seven one year and then the next year it was ten to eight and then the other years, I don't remember. I think somewhere in there we actually beat Princeton once in the …

KP: But that was the big game to go to?

RM: Willy the Silent [the statue] is still here I noticed.

KP: It was in your period that Rutgers, I think it was in 1956 that Rutgers actually became fully a State University. Did you and your other friends give any thought to what that meant to Rutgers, and where there any concerns?

RM: We probably didn't really care a whole lot because we were on the way out, but I remember the name change to the State University of New Jersey and all. It was hard filling out applications to be putting down Rutgers. I don't remember any real thoughts about it at that time.

KP: Let me see if Gerald has any final questions.

RM: I was just wiping an eye there, that's all.

KP: The sun is blinding at this time of year. Do you have any final questions?

GR: It seems like you had more of a sense of togetherness or school spirit when you were at Rutgers. Do you think the diversity of the campus has taken away from that in a way?

RM: It probably has. I don't know if you have any team spirit or just local spirit up there but when I was here, it was much smaller school, most classes and all were right here. Very few busses ran out to the Heights. The Waksman Building was fairly new in those days. So, there was no RAC [Rutgers Athletic Center]. There was no Livingston. There was nothing else out there much for classes even. The only time we went to the Heights was to go to the stadium for a football game.

KP: Even in the sciences?

RM: Yeah, most of the science courses were right around here, physics, right across the way, here was engineering, physics, and all, and in New Jersey Hall was a lot of the biology courses. The geology building [was] right up the hill here. I saved part of Rutgers geology fossil collection once. It was stolen. I had a young man in my class at East Brunswick High School, who was a loner, and somehow he ended up getting a job working in the ceramics department, after he graduated, and one day he came to my house with a present for me, which was a big dinosaur tooth. The only thing is, it had a painted number on it, and then he invited me to his house, and he had on the ping-pong table, about four feet [long, a] big plaster mold of a dinosaur footprint, and a bunch of other stuff. So, right away, I figured, [this boy's name is Tom] I figured what he was doing. So, I had to talk to him and he admitted it. So, then I called Rutgers Geology Department and we got everything back. Dr. Murray, I think his name was Dr. Murray, at the time, this goes back maybe, it has to go back when I was at East Brunswick High School, before 1968 this happened. No, right after that, because the boy, I left, I was at Union College, probably happened in the early '70s, and Dr. Murray has laid out the red carpet for me. If I ever come to the geology building the red carpet is laid out. Dr. Murray is very good, by the way. He invited this boy to join the Fossil Club they had and to go on field trips with the Geology Department.

KP: So, charges were never pressed?

RM: No, it was handled through the campus police, and Dr. Murray, Nobody ever filed any formal charges against the boy.

KP: It sounds like they were just delighted to get everything back.

RM: They were just glad to get it back but it was just a terrible thing. I have a special stake at Rutgers, my sweat and blood and the four foot sweat box in the wrestling room. We used to go

in a four foot square box with heaters and we didn't have plastic in those days. We didn't have plastic suits that make you sweat more. We had the old regular wool suits, or whatever they were, cotton, I guess, sweat suits.

GR: Trying to make weight?

RM: I can remember going in there with the guys heavier than me. They lose four pounds in about twenty minutes and I'd be there weighing 123, and I'll still weigh 123 because I was smaller, it was harder to lose.

KP: Do you wish your two daughters had gone to Rutgers?

RM: Yes and no. I'm glad they went to Union College because it was free, first two years free, because I'm a faculty member. I wish my second daughter had finished here. She started and she dropped out. She's was full fledged junior, and now works in a bank. She just recently married, but we're hoping that someday she will get back and finish up. My son-in-law is here now, part-time and he should be graduating in June. So, we'll be real proud of him if he makes it. I think he will.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you about Rutgers? Anything about the war, about teaching?

RM: I don't think so. I appreciate your time and the interest in our family and what happened there in World War II. I appreciate the work you're doing in this project.

KP: I want to thank you. We really enjoyed it.

RM: And [thanks to] Gerald here for calling me at home and sitting here with a suit and tie on.

[My brother Dan, the WWII Navy TBF pilot passed away on January 3, 2003 and was buried with full military honors at Florida National Cemetery at Bushnell, Florida. My son-in-law, Leon Molokie, did graduate from Rutgers in June of 1996 with a degree in Political Science. He earned it the hard way- evening classes while working full-time as "Director of Margins" for CIBC World Markets in New York City.]

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

Reviewed by Mark Segaloff 6/30/04
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/08/04
Reviewed by Richard McKeeby 11/30/04