

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD J. MERCER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Richard J. Mercer on November 17, 1995, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and....

Rob Archer: Robert Archer

KP: And I guess I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. Particularly your father who was an assembly line worker for the Ford Motor Company.

Richard Mercer: That's right.

KP: Now I get the impression he probably got to know Henry Ford a little bit, because he became a dealer.

RM: Yeah, it was a very interesting thing. My mother and father fell in love when they were just out of high school and about 1916 or '17, somewhere in there, they decided to get married. And Dad said that they, they lived in Long Island, out in Elmhurst, Long Island, and my father was a great athlete. He was a great baseball player. He was a little man, but he was fast as all get out and he, he was a sure-handed shortstop. And he could hit like Sam Hill, as they used to say in those days. And, he said, and my mother said, you know, "Dad was going to drafting school." He was learning how to be a draftsman. And my mother says, "We can't get married. You don't have a job or anything." He said, "We're gonna get married. And we're going to Niagara Falls on our honeymoon, and we're going to go to Detroit, and I'm gonna go to work for Henry Ford. He's paying men five dollars a day just to sweep the floors." So that's exactly what happened. And all his friends said, "George, you're crazy." Henry Ford is making, I forget how many cars a day, you know, maybe a thousand, which would have been an awful lot in those days. And they said, "In a few years everyone is going to have a Ford car and you'll be out of a job." [laughs] So he went out there, and he discovered that the lines were, you know, a half-mile long for the employment office. And he went out every day and he'd be there for eight hours, from the time they opened till the time they closed, [and] he still wouldn't get in. So my mother, who was a remarkable woman. They were just kids, you know, and they were very young, she wrote a letter to the head of personnel. And the letter said, "You're really missing the boat. Because one of the most talented applicants spends eight hours a day there and never even gets through the door." And she told him about this superman that she was married to. [laughs] And she got a letter back from the guy who was the head of personnel. And he said, "Mrs. Mercer, I'd like to meet this incomparable human being, he has an appointment with me at such and such a time." So my dad got in there, and sure enough, he got a job. Sweeping the floors at five dollars a day. And then he moved up. He ... had to drill a three-sixteenths hole in ... a camshaft for the Model T. And he set a record for it, at the time, ... and, you know, those people who check you on time and efficiency, they, boy he set a record. Everybody else was mad at him. [laughs] But then they gave him a job at the personnel department. He moved right up. He discovered that Henry Ford was the first corporate socialist. He kept track of all his people. For example, my father played the piano very well, so they bought a piano, and before it was even delivered, a social worker from the Ford Motor Company came around and to ... their little row house that they lived in, which Henry Ford had built. He'd built the row houses. And they said, "We see you have bought a piano." And they said, "Yes." And they said, "Well, you can't do that. Your husband's salary

doesn't warrant it. You'll get ..." And Henry Ford wouldn't let them have the piano that they bought. And that's the way ... he did things.

KP: Did your father think of this as an intrusion?

RM: Oh yes.

KP: It was his money.

RM: Oh yes, but they were kids. But I must tell you, they were, they were apolitical. I mean they weren't ... they didn't know anything about socialism or communism or democracy or anything. They were just American kids. And ... they were upset by it, but they didn't, you know, they had never heard of George Orwell or anything. You know, they didn't say, "Well, this is terrible," you know. They just said, "Okay," and they didn't do it, you know. But that's the way Henry Ford ran things. And that was [as] close as my father ever got to knowing him, but he got to know the ...

KP: It sounds like he got to know the organization.

RM: ... the organization very well. Yes. And then, as a reward for his good work, he was offered a dealership. And he, and two other men, who also were doing very good work there, Freddy Hebbler and Bill Schmeltz, the three of them opened up a dealership in Bayside, Long Island. And they were very successful there, and then they sold it and they came to Roselle Park, New Jersey. And they opened up one there. Which Roselle and Roselle Park are called the twin boroughs. And I have a twin brother and I grew up thinking that the town was named after us. [laughs] ... Cause it was the twin boroughs and that's what he called his garage. It was the Twin Borough Auto Corporation. So yeah, ... he was some guy, and ... he worked for Henry Ford. And he opened up a dealership which was very successful until the Depression hit them about seven years, about ten years late. Yeah, about 1939 the Depression really hit the auto ...

KP: That is when they started to have trouble.

RM: That's when they had terrible, terrible trouble. And my dad sold out his interests to his two partners. Just for payment of his debts. So he said, "Okay, ... I owe one-third of our terrible debts, and I'll just leave if you guys will ... absorb my debts. That's the price I'll pay, or the price you'll pay me rather, for my share of the business." So those guys said great, and of course, they didn't realize that we'd be in a war in a couple of years and they'd all become millionaires, which they did. [laughs]

KP: If your father could have just held on for a few more years then he would have been ...

RM: That's right, he would have been all set. Yeah, yeah.

KP: But instead he had to start, it sounds like he had to start all over.

RM: He did indeed, he did indeed. My mother went to work for the Elizabethtown Consolidated Gas Company. And again, she was a remarkable woman. ... I've been a writer all my life, an advertising writer, but I write, I've written many speeches for many corporate big shots and I've written magazine articles. And ... I still, even in retirement, I still write speeches for corporate big shots. ... And I've written a book incidentally. I'm still looking for a publisher. I sent it here to the Rutgers Press and I got a beautiful letter back, but they didn't want it. [laughs] But mother saw an ad in the paper. It was a blind ad, wanted: salesman. Well I will tell you, this was in 1932. Seven years before dad really gave up the ghost, but it made it possible for him to give up his business and try other things. She wrote a letter to these people, who advertised for a salesman. Now I will tell you, that in 1932, when an ad in a paper said, "Wanted: salesman," then they wanted experience and that sort of thing. That meant salesman, you know, women need not apply, just forget it. My mother had the most beautiful handwriting. The most feminine handwriting. And she wrote this letter in her handwriting to them. And told them that, that she was the person they wanted. Well I was, in 1932, I was eight years old. And I remember I was outside when this touring car pulled up with these two guys in it. And I mean a touring car, boy that cost a lot of money, and I thought, "Wow, this is something." And it said on the panel, it said, Elizabethtown Consolidated Gas Company. So I ran inside and said, "Hey Mom, they're here to collect your gas bill." ... And mother answered the door. And it turns out, of course, I learned all this years later, that it was the sales vice president, and the president of the Elizabethtown Consolidated Gas Company. And they had come out there cause they had wanted to see this remarkable woman, but they wanted to catch her as a surprise. 'Cause they wanted to see what she looked like, what her house looked like, how she behaved. Well the interesting thing about my mother is she was born and raised in New York. And lived all her life in New York and New Jersey. But uh, she spoke like Lynn Fontaine. Because she had studied elocution in high school. And my mother had a very theatrical way of speaking, you know. And these guys came in there and here's my mom in a house dress. And she sounded, you know, here's somebody from New York living in New Jersey, and she has this grand manner of speech. They couldn't believe it. She was a very pretty woman, chubby, very sweet face, and God, she was good on her feet. Well, they just fell in love with her on the spot. And they hired her. And she went on to become the first woman sales manager in the history of the Elizabethtown Consolidated Gas Company. She worked there for ten years.

KP: And she had gotten a job in the depth of the Depression.

RM: Sure. And I was, you know, I was eight years old. But I immediately saw, in my gut, I saw our whole way of life change. I mean for the better. I mean all of a sudden when I asked for an ice cream cone, I could actually have one. [laughs] ...

KP: Really, it made that much of a difference?

RM: It made an enormous difference.

KP: It sounds like your mother was good at the job, too.

RM: Oh, she was a remarkable gal. She was wonderful. You know, years later when I was in the navy, I was down in Chincoteague, Virginia training in B-24 Liberators. And the navy called them PB-4Y's, but they were the same airplanes that the army air corps had. But we painted them white and blue and ... theirs were khaki colored, you know. And they had an amateur night. And so I did something that I had been doing since high school which was the great Julius Caesar thing. You know, I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him and so on. So I was doing this, and I was imitating what I thought were the Shakespearean actors that I had, you see, we used to go Drew University all the time, and they always did Shakespeare. That was the first Shakespeare I ever saw. And then I saw Shakespeare on Broadway. So I was doing, "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do is oft interred with their bones." You know, and I thought I was imitating the Broadway people that I had heard and seen, and the Drew University people.

When it was all over, a kid comes up to me and he was from God knows where, you know, maybe Montana ... and he said, "Is your name Mercer?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "Does your mother work for the gas company in Elizabeth, New Jersey?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "Boy, I knew it." I said, "How did you know?" He said, "Well, I have a girlfriend in Elizabeth." And he said, "I was there a year ago, visiting her." And he said, "I went out with her and her mother shopping and they went in to pay their gas bill." And he said, "I'd never been in Elizabeth, and I'd never been in a place called Elizabethtown Consolidated Gas Company," but he said at the first desk there was a woman. And he said, "I will never forget her, she greeted us," he said. "And she talked to us for a few minutes and asked if we'd like to see her demonstrate a new stove that they just had in." He said, "You know, I never heard anybody talk like that in my life." And he said, "She had the greatest smile, and the most beautiful voice, and the way she talked was amazing." He said, "It was just incredible. I couldn't figure out whether she was English, or she'd been on Broadway, or what." And he said, "When I heard you doing that thing tonight," he said, "My God, that's that Mrs. Mercer that I saw." He said, "I saw her for ten minutes, never forgot it." And he said, "You talk just like your mother." [laughs] Isn't that amazing. ... So I wasn't imitating the Broadway, I was imitating the first voice I ever heard on this Earth. She was a terrific lady.

KP: In this era, most married women did not work.

RM: That's right.

KP: You were used to your mother going off and working?

RM: She worked from the time I was eight until the time I was eighteen. And we had a house on the corner of Sherman Avenue and Lincoln. And Lincoln was a main drag, still is a main drag in Roselle Park. And she used to come in, you know, my father would go and pick her up, and he'd drive her home. And I used to stand by that window every night at 5:30, just waiting for my mother to come home. ... It was tough. And you know, as I got older, and I was lucky, because I had a twin brother, and my darling Muriel always says, "You know, you really were lucky, because you always had your best friend with you." You know so that helped a lot. But ... that was a wretch, because everybody else, their mommy was home all day, you know.

KP: Who took care of you? Who watched over you while your mother was gone?

RM: My sister Doris quit school after the eighth grade. Doris, our folks had three sets of twins. Doris and Donald were eight years older than we, then my brother and I. And they had twin girls, much older than any of us, and those two died very shortly after birth. And they had one single child, and she died at age four, in a diphtheria epidemic that followed ... [World War I], or was during it, I can't remember which. But Doris ... had a tough [time] growing up, although she wound up, she had a very happy life. She died two years ago. She had ... two kids and a good marriage. But she was tied to a brilliant twin brother. ... My oldest brother Donald, who's still living, her twin. They were both left-handed and red-haired. But Donald was a genius and I'm serious, a genius. The man never went to college, we couldn't afford it. He got out of high school in 1932 at age fifteen, and he went to work as a page boy for the National Broadcasting Company. They were on Fifth Avenue then, they weren't even in Rockefeller Plaza. He was with them, he wound up a senior vice-president in charge of station relations in the entire NBC tv and radio networks. And never saw the inside of a college book. He was one of the best educated men I ever knew. He was like Winston Churchill, he was self-educated. He read everything, he went to the theater, he was just a remarkable [individual], and he still is at age, what the hell is he now, 79. He's still a bright, very with it, terrific guy. Well Doris, unfortunately, was not bright. And school was hell for her. And, especially, you know, it was not the psychological and enlightened age that we have today. Teachers didn't understand. And she was constantly getting, you know, "Why can't you be more like your brother?" And so forth. And it was really tough, so after eighth grade, as a matter of fact, Roselle Park was a very small town, and Cliff Knerr was one of my father's closest friends in the Rotary Club and he was head of the Board of Education. And he made a deal with dad. He said, "Look, we'll put [her] right through the eighth grade if you promise that you won't send her to high school." So she got an eighth grade diploma, and that was it. So fortunately, that was just how she stayed home and took care of us. And she became the world's greatest housewife. And she married Fred Hendershott, who absolutely adored her, and they had a very good life. And that was the story of that.

KP: Your father was a Presbyterian, and your mother was Catholic.

RM: Yeah, yeah. That's right. Yeah, well he ...

KP: Did he end up going to Mass?

RM: No, I'll tell you what he did. He was a Scotch Presbyterian. And mother went down and told the priest, and of course, he was an Irish priest, it was a federal law, [laughs] just like you had to be Irish to be a cop in New York in those days. She went down and told the priest that she was going to marry George Mercer, and he said, "Not in this church." She said, "That's fine, Father." She said, "We'll go to his church and get married, and I'm sure they'll welcome us." And he said, "Well, now wait a minute Margaret." [laughs] He said, "That he'll have to come and take lessons, and he'll have to learn to be a Catholic." And she said, "No." And he said, "That all the children would have to be raised Catholic, and he'll have to sign the papers." She

said, "No, he won't sign any papers." She said, "I told him that I want our kids to be Catholic and he said that's fine, and that's going to be it." And she said, "I believe him." And he said, "Well, he'll have to sign the papers." And she said, "All right, we'll get married in his church." "Alright, Margaret." So they got married in the church. In that way, she was a very strong woman. And all us kids were raised Catholic. And my father never missed mass. What he did was, he sat out in front of the church with the Journal American and the New York Times. He bought both papers. The Hearst Journal American, you know, the arch conservative Journal American and the liberal New York Times and he read both papers on the steering wheel every Sunday morning. And we were all raised Catholic, and we're very happy Catholics, and he's just a great guy. And I'll tell you another thing, he never did go to church except for family weddings and funerals. And he's probably one of the best Christians I ever knew.

He was a decent, wonderful, charming guy. He was very talented, God, he could sing and dance and draw. And he taught me a great lesson in life. And that is if you can do something, don't be falsely modest about it. Don't brag about it. But, for example, if they said, "Hey George, give us a song," or "George, play the piano for us," he'd never say, "Nah." He never had to be coaxed. He was good at that so he'd do it, you know. You said, "George, do a sketch for us will you, draw Margaret or something." Boy, he'd whip out a pencil and a pad and he'd do it. So I grew up that way, and there were certain things that I could do, and certain things that I can't do. Now if you ask me to sing, I can't sing, and I won't do it. But if you ask me to tell a joke or make a speech, you bet, when do you want it, I'll be there. Because I can do that, and I got that from both of them. They were both very good at that and they were both incredible mimics. They had great ears. And you know, they lived before radio. And when they used, when they were kids, everybody wanted them at their house parties. They'd go see a Broadway show, and they'd come back and dad could sing every song, and mother could do all the dialogue. And it was hell to have any kind of an idiosyncrasy in your speech around these two, because they'd pick it up like that. [laughs]

KP: It sounds like both your mother and father were quite a team.

RM: They were.

KP: And that they really enjoyed life.

RM: We had, supper time in our house, the dinner table was amateur night. And everybody had to perform, including Doris. And we all did. And, you know, we just thought that that was the way everything was. And one of the things, one of the problems that I have with society today, is that the business that I earned my living in for 40 years, television and radio, but particularly television, I think have hurt our society. Because children, all children, used to get their manners and their morals at the dinner table at night from their parents. But all of a sudden there was a great big hole cut in the wall of every house. Television. And here was the outside world, and manners and morals being taught to them, and interpreted to them by people other than their parents. And I think that is a terrible thing.

KP: I think you sense the irony, that you were in part responsible for this trend.

RM: Oh yes.

KP: That you were part of this industry.

RM: Oh yes, oh it bothers me terribly. Because I didn't realize it. You know, Marshall McLuhan, who I read all of his books. He said that we can't understand our environment as long as we're in it. And as proof of this, he offered the fact that when we transitioned, by we I mean civilization, the world, from an agrarian society to, you know, when the industrial revolution took place, we went from agrarianism to industrialism. He said, it was in the industrial age when all of our painters started painting the agrarian age. And look at Thomas Hardy. He, it was at the very beginning of the industrial revolution when Hardy wrote all of these marvelous books about the agrarian age. And McLuhan says that's because Hardy was now out of that. So now he could see it for what it was. So that, gentlemen, is my alibi. I was immersed in it, you know. And, there's a great interpreter of McLuhan, and McLuhan at times could use an interpreter, who said, that what McLuhan meant when he said that we cannot understand our environment while we're in it, what he meant was, that we don't know who it was that discovered water, but we can be damned sure it wasn't a fish. And I think that explains it beautifully. And that's my alibi for having been in that destructive business for 40 years.

KP: You mentioned your father was in Rotary, it sounds like your father was a joiner in some ways.

RM: Yes he was, yes he was, very much. ... As a matter of fact, he wound up in the fraternal insurance business. ... Now you guys all know the Elks and the Moose and the Masons and all that, well I'm gonna give you one that you never heard of. It's called the Royal (Arcanum?). And it's a, just like the Elks and the Masons, it's a beneficial protection association. Well, all of these things ... happened, after the Civil War. You've heard of the Odd Fellows and ... there was a big one that the farmers all had.

KP: The Grange.

RM: The Grange, right. Well all of these things developed because, you know, we had the carpetbaggers. And we had a lot of, a lot of bad people around. Crooks is what they were. So people became afraid of insurance companies, so they banded together with each other, because they knew each other. And that's how you got the Woodmen of the World, and the Grange, and all that kind of stuff. And the Elks, and the Moose. And the Royal Arcanum. Which is still going today. And it was a secret order, you know, a lot of the stuff I think was probably copied from the Masons. And my dad got to be the Supreme Regent of the Royal Arcanum. You know, when his business failed, he was trying all kinds of things, and he'd belonged to this thing. And everybody loved him. And they wanted him to be the Regent of the State of New Jersey, and he did that, it was a non-paying job. Then someone said, "You know, you should run for Supreme Regent, that's the United States and Canada. And they'll pay you ten thousand dollars a year if you get the job." So he ran and he was elected, and my God, ten thousand dollars a year. Now

this was just about 1942 and that's why mother was able to quit the gas company in '42. But by that time, Bob and I were graduating from high school and going off to college.

KP: And your father did that work for a while.

RM: He did that and then they put him on the executive committee and he worked on that until he died. And he was like Will Rogers, he never met a man he didn't like. ... He was just a neat guy, and everybody liked him. And he was so entertaining and witty, just a wonderful guy.

KP: Your mother, did she join any organizations?

RM: No, no. ... They had a great relationship and she pulled the fat out of the fire for the family a couple of times, but you would never know it. She just thought that George was the king. He was the prince of it all. But they were equally talented people. And wonderful, wonderful people. I've had, Muriel and I just celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary, and I'm convinced that one reason we had such a good marriage is that we both came from families that had great marriages. Her mother and father celebrated their 60th before they died. And my folks, their 50th before they died. And so Muriel and I have done it for 50, and I'm ready for another 50. [laughs]

KP: Your parents were Democrats.

RM: That's right.

KP: But it sounds like your father particularly really wanted both sides, reading both the Hearst paper and the Times.

RM: Yes, he did. He was a very thoughtful and an interesting guy. And the funny thing is, and I think about things today. Today there is so much hatred in politics. My dad ran for council in Roselle Park and was elected. He was police commissioner and everything. And he was a Democrat. And one of his closest friends, was Clifford C. Knerr, who was an arch Republican. And they were friends. And fought politically, but they didn't call each other names. It was amazing. Absolutely amazing.

KP: It sounds like your father liked politics.

RM: Oh yeah, he was good at it. He had the kind of personality that, it was just perfect for him. ... He could handle things. And he was quick witted. I always said in the advertising business, there's a thing that we call the account executive, and I think it's the toughest job in the business. I was a writer all my life so I didn't have to worry about that. But I used to say to be an account person is very simple. You have to be smart, quick, and be able to tell the truth. Now I'll tell you, I know a lot of people who are smarter than I, but they weren't quick enough. And I knew a lot of people who were quick, but they weren't smart enough. And I knew, unfortunately, I knew people ... who were smart and quick, but they couldn't tell the truth. And the truth is not always easy to tell, particularly when you're dealing with a client, you know, or a customer. And they

say, "Okay, now we need this next Thursday." Well, I'm sitting there shaking my head, because I'm the guy who has to produce it. This television commercial. And they can't have it next Thursday. Hell, it takes six weeks just for film production alone. But the account guy doesn't want to tell the truth, see. "Well, not Thursday, but we can have it for you in two of three weeks." And I'm sitting there and [growls]. [laughs] ... But that's a minor example, there are other, there are other ways where telling the truth can be very difficult. And fortunately, ... from my side of the business I've never had that problem, because I didn't have to deal with these people. But dad, dad could always tell the truth. But he could tell the truth and make you like it. [laughs]

KP: What did your mother and father think of Roosevelt and the New Deal?

RM: They loved Franklin Roosevelt, and they loved the New Deal. My father was sorry when the Supreme Court struck down the NRA. Because that was just beginning to help their business. That was the National Recovery Act. And in retrospect, it probably came pretty close to fascism. [laughs] ... But Roosevelt was no fascist. Roosevelt was a pragmatist. You know, he even said, "I tried gold and that didn't work, I tried silver and that didn't work, let's try both of them and see what happens." [laughs]

KP: It seems that that side of him really appealed to both you and your father.

RM: Yeah, yeah that's right.

KP: That try a few things and see what works.

RM: Yeah. Yeah, exactly right.

KP: How did your parents feel about the coming of World War II in the 1930s?

RM: Well, I tell you something. There was a German man [who] lived across the way from us. He was a violinist, a very talented man. And when the Germans took Paris, you know, we weren't in the war yet, I think the Germans took Paris, if I remember correctly in 1939.

KP: 1940.

RM: 1940? 1940. Well this guy came over the house, he was a very good neighbor. And he came over all excited and happy, "I want you to come over and have a drink." My father threw him out of the house. We never spoke again.

KP: Really.

RM: Oh yeah. Absolutely.

KP: What happened to the neighbor when the United States did go to war?

RM: Well, I'll tell you a very funny story about that. He had a sign on his front steps that said "Beware of the Dog". Bob and I were in 1940, let's see, we were born in '24, so in 1940 we were, what the hell were we? Sixteen. Yeah. And we delivered papers for Mrs. Bromberg. And we delivered them early in the morning before we went to school, and then we delivered them after school. And on Sundays, we delivered them extremely early in the morning, and it took many, many trips on our bicycles because those Sunday papers are huge. And we discovered on our paper routes, we each had different paper routes, we made 85 cents a week for this, I used to spend [the] whole thing on Saturday night taking Muriel Davis to the movies. [laughs] And getting a Cherry Coke afterwards. There's the 85 cents, shot. But, we discovered on our paper routes that a bunch of houses had "Beware of the Dog" signs on the front steps. And we discovered that every one of those houses, including the guy across the street, they took the Stadt Zeitung und Herald. That was the German language newspaper. It was printed in the German language, and always the people in those houses talked that way. And they all had the "Beware of the Dog" signs. [German accent] [laughs] So Bob and I at age sixteen called the FBI in Newark. [laughs] Oh-Oh. When my father heard that he went right through the roof. [laughs] Boy, he said, and then he called the FBI, and he said, "Hey, I want you to understand that these are sixteen year old boys. They are fine young men, but they don't know any better. And these are good people." He said, "I don't like the man across the street one damned bit, he roots for Adolf Hitler, but I gotta tell you, he's a musician and a good guy," and you know, so he called the FBI and took the sting out of it. [laughs]

KP: Did you call them up and report this observation?

RM: Yes, yes. Oh, we said here are all these people, they're all German, they all have "Beware of the Dog" signs in front.

KP: Did they take it seriously?

RM: They were very nice to us. Very, very polite to us.

KP: Yes, I mean they did not just dismiss you.

RM: No, no. "Alright, thank you. Thank you very much." But Bob and I were so excited about this. You know, when we told this at the dinner table my dad went right through the [roof]. [laughs] That's a terrible thing.

KP: It is interesting that your dad should say that, because it almost sounds like your dad, going back to Ford, when the plant sent that social agent, he was almost rebelling against that, and did not want to do this to other people.

RM: Yeah. Well, as I told you, he was one of the best Christians that I ever knew. And he never went to church. He just believed that you should be kind and decent to people, and you know. But he was so against Adolf Hitler, and he was so against rejoicing, and then to go, "This guy wants me to have a drink with him."

KP: It sounds like your father was very sympathetic to the Allied cause before 1941.

RM: Oh yeah. You know the interesting thing when we were in high school, and I'm not sure this is true today, we were all the handiwork of our parents as kids back in the 1940's. We had been all been molded, and developed, and raised. We got our manners and morals at the dinner table, as I told you. So, when we would have straw votes in school, they absolutely reflected our parents. And time after time, before America was in the war, and this was the very phrase, the very cliché that was used, "All aid to Britain short of war." That was it. And that was the way our parents felt. And it's funny, my dad was a Democrat, you know, and Roselle Park was a little blue collar town, and you know, a lot of my friends didn't have telephones. They used to come to our house to borrow the telephone. And, most of my friends didn't have a family car. We had one, because my father was in the business. And, [pause] I've lost my point. The point is that ... we reflected our parents. ... So in things like this, oh, what I wanted to tell you was, that when Alf Landon ran for president, the straw votes in school, Landon won by a landslide. You know, so I'd go home to my Democratic parents and say, "Hey, Mr. Landon is going to be the president." And they just laughed. But, see, to us the world was Roselle Park. And we didn't understand that sure, Roselle Park was a Republican town. And you know, I must tell you, their Republicanism was built on nothing but hope. The only place you could realize the American dream in Roselle Park, New Jersey was in the Park Theater. Where it was on the big screen. And you saw wonderful, wonderful movies. No sex, no bad language, no violence. But you saw people wearing tuxedos, women wearing evening gowns. You saw high society. People who had made the American dream. That was the only place you could see it, except in one other place, and that was in the halls of Roselle Park High School. Our parents believed that if we could make it there, this is 40 years, 50 years before the song "New York, New York" was written. Our parents believed that if you could make it there, in Roselle Park High School, you could make it anywhere. And they packed that hope in our with our school lunches.

KP: So your parents viewed your education as there gift to you. It was very important that you could do well.

RM: And the whole town felt that way. The whole town felt that way.

KP: You mention that your brother could not afford to go to college. There's a bit of an irony.

RM: That's right. He was our celebrity. He would come home at night and names would drop like manhole covers, you know. He was a pageboy. And he would be sent out to get a cheeseburger for Toscanini for God sakes, who was directing the NBC orchestra. The maestro wants a cheeseburger. And Donald would go out in his uniform and his white gloves and bring back a cheeseburger for Arturo Toscanini who was rehearsing in 8H.

KP: Did your brother ever get you tickets for anything?

RM: Oh yes, he'd take us in those days, to the Fred Allen Show. And it would be the second show. They'd do a show, at nine o'clock at night for the East Coast, then they'd do the West Coast show at midnight. Because, you know, nothing was recorded or anything, it was all live.

So we'd go to the midnight show. We were, you know, Donald was eight years older than we were, so let's see, he was twenty years old and we were twelve. And he'd take [us] ... I'll never forget that, I'd see Harry Vonzell, and Fred Allen, and you know, ... the whole outfit. I can still remember some of the jokes. I'll never forget that. One time Portland Hoff said to Fred Allen, Fred loved words, he just loved words, and there were certain words that he liked a lot. One of his favorite words was pallbearer. And I'll never forget, they were talking about that they needed a guy for a lifeguard, and Fred Allen said, "Hey, I have just the man." And she said, "Who is it?" And he says so and so, and she said, "Well, can he swim?" And he said, "Can he swim? For years he was a pallbearer in Venice." [laughs] ... It was the funniest thing I'd ever heard, I've never forgotten it.

KP: Growing up, what did you think you would become?

RM: I wanted to be, ... I wanted to be what my father was. I wanted to be an actor. That's all I ever wanted to be. And I, I was always performing. In the navy I was always performing. I did stand up comedy before anybody ever heard of it. Because every Friday morning in Roselle Park High School, I was up on the stage doing the athletic announcements. And it was just ten minutes of stand up comedy, you know. For example, I remember one time we went down to Belmar, we played our first night game. Boy, what a thrill, a night football game. We went to Belmar, New Jersey and they had all these lights up, you know. So, I remember my opening line the following Friday, what I do is, I'd get up on the stage, at assembly on Friday morning, and I was a cheerleader. I'd be in my cheerleader outfit. And I'd get up and I'd tell them the results of the past week's game or games, basketball, baseball, whatever, it didn't matter. And then I'd announce what the schedule was for this coming weekend, you know, usually tomorrow, you know, Saturday. And I'd work jokes in between, so the Friday after the Belmar game, I remember starting out, I said, "Last Friday, at a beach party in Belmar," well, you know, that brought down the house immediately. They thought that was hilarious. A beach party in Belmar. And ... it was so damned cold there, you know, it was bitter, bitter. I'll never forget that day, I've never been so cold in my life. And I said it was a nip and tuck battle all the way, the women in the stands keeping themselves warm with comfy blankets and the men with a nip here and there. And ... all this kind of stuff was pretty outrageous for high school. And our cheerleaders looked very ravishing, and they had, and very patriotic, yeah, I said those red sweaters, white skirts, and blue knees were very ravishing. So that's a sample of the quality of my material, [so] now you know why I didn't make it in show business. But it was great fun.

So I thought I, when I went to work here, I was an announcer right away. And I enjoyed it very much at W-CTC. But I did all these other things, and one of the things that I did was write the commercials. Well I found out that the merchants of New Brunswick, New Jersey were fighting with the sales department, to get this kid Mercer to write their commercials. But nobody was ever fighting to get this kid Mercer to read them. Well hell, even an amoeba can learn to react to it's environment, and so I figured, hey, this is what I've got. But I knew that since second grade. In second grade I won a school wide essay contest, which was two tickets to the sixth grade play. And from that time on, I just knew that I could do this, but the things that you can do, you kind of devalue. You know, I was always trying to do the things that I couldn't do.

KP: You would have liked to have been an actor or a radio announcer.

RM: That's it. You bet your life. That's exactly what I wanted to do. Yeah, exactly. But I got close to it, I got on the fringes of show business, you know. Hell, I worked with Carl Reiner, I did the commercials for, for Jack Benny, I did all the cast commercials for the Beverly Hillbillies, for Campbell Soup. And I used to get out and work with those people, and see them, you know. So ... I had a lot of fun, it was a great career. I enjoyed it enormously.

KP: You were in elementary and then in high school when World War II was breaking out, first in Europe and then in the Far East.

RM: That's right.

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

RM: Yes, that was a Sunday, December 7, 1941. And mother and dad, and sister Doris, and Bob and I, my twin, we went out for a Sunday drive. We used to have Sunday drives all the time. And we had driven up around western New Jersey, Gladstone, and Peapack, and Mendham, and it's beautiful country. That's where Muriel and I lived for the last 23 years, was in Mendham. And we came back to Westfield, I'm staying in Westfield right now, because my oldest boy, a doctor of psychology, he and his wife live there. And there was a delicatessen there called the Robert Treat, and I was delighted to see last night that the Robert Treat is still there, and we stopped at the Robert Treat. It was dark, it was about 5:30 or 6:00 and it was pitch black. We stopped there and mother and Doris went in and I knew what they were going to get for Sunday night's supper. They were going to buy two small roasted chickens, and those two small roasted chickens stuffed were 75 cents each, and potato salad, and cole slaw, and poppy seed rolls. That was a typical Sunday night dinner. And dad wasn't yet Supreme Regent, but mother was still working. So, you know, our life had changed considerably. And dad said, "Marg, dear," he called mother Marg, her name was Margaret, he said, "Marg dear, I'm going down to the gas station and get gas." So we drove down, it was a Sunoco station, right now it's a shoe store, and it's on Quimby Street, in Westfield. And we pulled in, and the attendant came out, and he was swearing a blue streak. Blankety-blank blank blank this and that and the other thing, you know. And my dad, who soaking wet, weighed a 140 pounds, but he used to do this at ball games too, some loud-mouth at a ball game would swear and call the umpire a son of a bitch or something, and the guy could be six feet-two and 200 pounds and my father would tap him, "Just a minute, watch your language, I have two young gentlemen with me." And you know, I always thought someday he's getting-- nobody ever, nobody ever tried to punch him or anything. [It] didn't matter how big they were he, "You just a minute, there are ladies here." You know, he was, that was my father. So he said to this guy, "Watch your tongue please, I have two young gentlemen in the back seat." And the guy looked and in those days said, "Oh, I'm sorry." Now my father said, "Now what's the matter?" He said, "Haven't you heard," and no we hadn't heard. So he told us that the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. Those were his very words, "The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor." I didn't know where the hell Pearl Harbor was [laughs], I'd never heard of it. I think my father did, as a matter of fact I'm sure he did. So, holy mackerel, this meant war. So we filled up the tank, and turned around and went back to the Robert Treat, and Doris and mother came out

and dad told them the whole thing. We drove home, it's only about six miles from there to Roselle Park where we lived. We drove home and went in the house and here is my brother Donald, who had already been drafted, and his friend Paul Hulick, and they each, I remember I always thought this was cool, they each had pewter beer mugs with their names on them and glass bottoms. And I thought, wow, boy, I mean I never drank beer, or anything like that. Hell, we were only, however old we were in 1941. We were eighteen, seventeen going on eighteen. And here they were, and they were talking about this. And they knew this meant that they were going to go in in a hurry. Then we discussed the whole thing. And, remember that I was terribly excited, terribly excited, and I wished that I were my brother Donald's age. I thought this was terrific, to go to war. You know one of my favorite history teacher was Miss Vossler, in eighth grade, and what I didn't understand was that 1939 and 1919 were twenty years apart. Well I thought they were aeons apart. I thought twenty years was like a hundred or a thousand years, you know. And I never understood, of course today I do, how Miss Vossler felt, like how she felt. And that's the way the British felt. You know the British hated Churchill, they hated him, they called him a warmonger. Because he knew as well as they did that they had just ...

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

KP: You were just finishing a thought about Churchill and your teacher.

RM: Yeah, and they understood. You know, they'd just finished this terrible senseless war. And they didn't want to have another one, but Churchill understood that this war would not be senseless. That it would be absolutely necessary. That there was no other way to handle this. And I agree with him one hundred percent. I just read last year, maybe it was two years ago, I read a book by an Oxford professor about Churchill and he says that Churchill could have done business with Hitler and could have avoided the war and everything. Well I enjoyed the book, and the guy is a brilliant guy, and I couldn't shine his shoes for heaven's sakes, but I do disagree with him. What ... I didn't understand how closely these wars came, one after another. And you know, now of course, I understand it, and I remember seeing the American Legion every Memorial Day marching in their uniforms. Well those men, mostly weren't even 40 years old. And here they were veterans. Of World War I. So I was quite excited, I think, at the thought of going to war. And I couldn't understand why Miss Vossler detested it so. And it's interesting, I love the English poets in the First World War. Marvelous guys. And I was puzzled at their dim view of war. You know, here were heroes, and I couldn't understand why they were knocking this thing. [laughs]

KP: So it sounds like you really had a sense that still war was very heroic and noble.

RM: Yeah, yeah.

KP: And you were getting conflicting views of this even from the poetry you liked a lot.

RM: Yeah that's right. Exactly right.

KP: It sounds like you went to the movies quite a bit too, do you remember any of the war movies you saw?

RM: Oh, All Quiet on the Western Front, what a great, great film that was. And let me think, that of course, was World War I, and those were the war movies that we knew. They didn't start making the war movies about World War II until after I was in the service.

KP: It was a silent movie, but did you ever see Wings?

RM: Yes, I did see Wings. Was Richard (Dix?) in that?

KP: I am not sure.

RM: Yeah, I would think, I would bet that he was. Yeah. That's right.

KP: What about Gone With The Wind?

RM: Oh I loved it. I loved it. That was a thrill. And of course, I read the book for heaven's sakes. Yeah.

KP: You mentioned your brother Donald had been drafted.

RM: Yes.

KP: Was he a part of the 1940 draft? Is that how he had been inducted?

RM: Yeah. The night before he went in, that's another thing. My brother Donald, he was eight years older than we were, and he had this wonderful job with NBC. You know, he went from page boy to, I told you, he got to be senior vice president, ran the whole ... station relations thing for the network. ... When he retired he had been with them for ... 50 years. And you know what they did, they sent Don and his wife to Wimbledon. They were great tennis fans. For his graduation gift from NBC. [laughs] They sent him to Wimbledon, they went to Europe, two weeks in England with front row tickets at Wimbledon. Two weeks, [with] all expenses paid. That's what NBC thought of him.

KP: This really interrupted his career, I mean he was drafted as part of the 1940 draft.

RM: What I wanted to tell you about Donald, and I'll tell you about his being part of the '40 draft. Is that when, when Bob and I were, I guess you start high school, what, let's see, we got out when we were eighteen, so I guess you're fourteen when you start? Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, no I guess I was fifteen; fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. Yeah. Well I was fourteen, because in March, I became fifteen. Yeah, that's it. Well Donald had a chance, NBC wanted to give him a promotion and send him to Chicago. And we're all excited about it, you know, at the family dinner table. And then he came home one night and says no, he turned it down. He's gonna stay in New York. And they asked him why, and he said "Well, I'll tell you

about it sometime.” Well I later learned, after I, probably while I was in the service, and so my twin brother Bob learned too, that after Bob and I had gone to bed that night he told mother and dad why he turned it down. He said, “The kids are starting high school next year. And that's going to be a great four years, and I don't want to miss it.” I tell you, it's hard for me to say that without weeping. It's just, and that's the kind of a guy he was, and is. He had a profound influence on both of us.

KP: He's a brother, I mean it's one thing for a father to say that if he was a traveling salesman, but he's your brother.

RM: Yeah, and he guided us all through high school. And you know, ... one reason I ended up being a writer, and you know, I wish I were a literary writer, but I have been published in Sport magazine, I've been published in Flying magazine, and I've written speeches for some of the most famous corporate people in the United States. And I wrote commercials, you know I wrote "Have it your way" for Burger King, and I did the "Manhandler" for Campbell Soup. Now that isn't literature, but it is writing, and every penny, I mean literally, I put myself through college with my typewriter. Every penny I've ever earned since my 21st year came out of my typewriter. So I must be a fairly good writer. And I put four kids through college. It all came out of my typewriter. And my retirement, which is very enjoyable all came out of my typewriter, so I must be a fairly good writer. And it's probably because Donald and Bob and I always shared one big bedroom, with three beds in it, you know, the beds were just cots.

KP: Even though your brother was eight years older than you and having a real job at NBC?

RM: That's right, that's right. And he had this profound influence on us. And one of the things I want to tell you is that at night he would read to us. The three of us would go to bed and he would read to us. And he read to us from the New Yorker. He read S.J. Perelman. He read Robert Benchley. He taught us that Perelman was an erudite Benchley. I've never forgotten that. And he's right. Perelman had had Benchley's same use of the non sequitur, Benchley's same demented approach to life, you know, they just come at life off-center. And it's hilarious. I mean anybody who came home to our house, you know, after Donald reading us Robert Benchley all the time, if they ever asked Bob or me, "Did anybody call?," they usually got an answer like, "Yes, a Mr. Bleevy, Peavy, or Rasmussen." [laughs] You know, cause that's a line straight out of Benchley, see.

And he had this profound influence on us. And he made us get dates when we were sixteen years old. He said, and I think my mother thought the pair of us were going to be homosexuals, because all we gave a damn about was baseball. My brother Bob was a brilliant baseball player, All-State, I was lousy. But I got my letters anyhow after four years. The coach always gave me a uniform, because he was scared to death that if I didn't get a uniform my brother Bob would quit. [laughs] Bob wouldn't have quit for God's sakes. Never. But I didn't bother to sway the coach of that thinking. So we had this incredible relationship, and he, when we were sixteen, we were discussing something or other, and he said, "Isn't the Thanksgiving Dance coming up?" And I said "Yeah." And he said, "Well, you guys have to get dates for this." And we said, "What!" ... My folks would buy us nice clothes, overcoats, and all that kind of stuff, and we wore baseball

caps with them. We would never take off our baseball caps, that's all we ever thought of. So I think my mother thought, my God, they don't even look at girls. And they were right. So he said, Donald said, "You guys are going to get dates," So he said, "When is the dance?" And we told him, so he gave us a date, and he said, "alright, you have to have a date by next Thursday, whatever it is, and we'll discuss it." So sure enough we went out and we got dates. ... It was the day of the deadline, my brother had gotten a date, God she was a cute little girl, I'm trying to remember her name, little Italian girl, and he'd gotten a date with her. And I didn't have a date yet. So I'm in chemistry class, and I'm sitting on a high stool at ... this slate top table. And we're doing experiments, and across the way from me, and here's these two faucets you know, and the little sink there, and the bunsen burners, and sitting across from me is Olga Bensik. I knew Olga Bensik from kindergarten, and we're both sitting on these high stools, and I looked over and I suddenly thought, "Gee, Olga's kinda cute, she's pretty." So I said, "Hey Olga," and she said "Yeah," I said, "Are you going to the Thanksgiving Dance?" She said, "No." I said "You want to go with me?" And she said "With you?" [laughs] And I said, "Yeah." You know, I thought her next line was going to be, "The Mercer boys don't go out on dates." ... And I said, "Yeah." And she said "Well I don't know, I'll have to ask my mother." So I said, "Okay, thank you." And that was the end of that. Next day [in] chemistry class, here we are sitting on these high stools, and she says, "Dick." And I said, "Yeah." She said, "You still want to go to the dance?" and I said, "Yeah," cause the night before I had told my brother I had asked Olga Bensik, and geez, I had better deliver. [laughs] And I said, "Yeah." And she said, "Okay, I'll go with you." So that was great, now we're all set. Well, about two days before the dance, Donald tell us at the dinner table, "You have to call up the girl and ask her what color dress she's wearing, because you have to get her a corsage to go with her dress." I'm ready to die now, and my brother Bob is ready to die. It's bad enough we had to get dates, you know. So we each make the telephone call, and we find out. And now we order the flowers. And, it was too damn much money, Donald paid for the flowers. And he said he would drive us, you know, so we had a chauffeur to take us to the Thanksgiving Dance, and a chauffeur to pick us up. [laughs] And most of the kids in town, believe me, walked, and nobody ... borrowed the family car, I'll tell you that right now. Roselle Park was not well off. And so I go to Olga Bensik's house, and Don is, we picked up Bob's date, and I wish I could remember her name, she was something. So I go to Olga Bensik's house and I knock at the door, you know, and the door opens and no light comes through the door, because Olga fills the door. I had forgotten sitting on this high stool, of course that Olga was like six feet, and a hundred and sixty pounds. I was five feet, and a hundred and ten pounds. [laughs] So all night long it was painful for both of us. "Hey Mercer, you got a heavy date there huh? Heh Heh Heh." [laughs] See, I mean it was dreadful. And it was very painful for both of us. And we got on a conga line, I think Olga picked me up and put me on the conga line. And so I grabbed the girl in front of me, and the girl was blond and she was wearing a silk jersey dress with a basque top, and a pleated skirt. And that dress still hangs in our attic, I'll never let Muriel get rid of it. And that girl's name was Muriel Davis. And she turned around and I looked at those blue eyes and that pretty face and all of a sudden, who cared about baseball. And that was the beginning of the end. And that night I was still, I was raised to be polite and decent, but you're allowed to change partners once in a while so that night I danced with her a couple of times, and one of the dances I asked her would she go to the Christmas Dance with me? And she said, "The Christmas Dance?" [laughs] "This is Thanksgiving." I said, "Yeah, I know, but what about the Christmas Dance?" And she didn't have to ask her mother, she said, "Yes, I'd love to." And that was the

end of that, and that was the only girlfriend I've ever had in my entire life, including three years in the navy.

KP: So this date with Olga was very important ...

RM: Yes, yes.

KP: ... because if you had not gone.

RM: Yes, that's right, that's right. But that ... was hilarious.

KP: I can not resist following this point up and I should note for the record since they the listener will not see this on the tape, that you are wearing a baseball tie.

RM: Oh, oh yeah. I'm still a baseball [fan]. Fred Hill, of all the members of the faculty in this university, Fred Hill is one of my favorites. And I, every penny that I give to the college, and I will tell you right now, they're not going to build any buildings with my name on it, [laughs] but for me it's a lot, and every penny that I give, I give to Men's Varsity Baseball. I write it out just like that. [laughs] And that's it, and when I die, they're gonna get a good, you know, not enough to build a building.

KP: You must have fond memories I would take it of going to baseball games.

RM: I went to all the baseball games, here at Rutgers. I just absolutely loved them. Frankie Burns was president of our class and he was a great catcher. And he was a freshman at Roselle Park when I was a senior. And I love the guy, he's just a terrific guy.

KP: Did you go to professional games?

RM: Oh yeah, I was a big New York Giant fan. And, you know, I will never forget, has anybody here ever seen the show Damned Yankees, I mean the play, the Broadway play? Well there was, Ray Walston played the devil in that play, see. And he had a great line, at one point he comes out of the locker room, he's dressed in civilian clothes, well this is the point I want to make to you, this is pre-TV point. You know, we didn't know what our heroes looked like. I worshipped Carl Hubble and Mel Ott. Carl Hubble was a left-handed pitcher, Hall of Famer. Mel Ott was a left-handed hitter, Hall of Famer. All we ever knew were the black and white photographs of them in the newspaper. So when we went and hung out at the locker room door outside the Polo Grounds after a game to get autographs, we were there with dozens of kids. And when the players would come out, the kids, all of us we'd shout, "Who are you? Who are you?" [laughs] We knew they were players, you know how we knew they were players? Because they had what baseball players in those days used to call ditch-diggers suntans. See, today ballplayers don't get suntanned, except down in spring training. But they play all their games at night now. So ballplayers always had ditch-digger suntans. And that is they were white from the eyebrows up, they were white, from the eyebrows down they were tan. [laughs] And their sleeves, if they wore short sleeves, you know, they would be tan only from about here down, you'd see that they were

white here. And the players called that ditch-diggers suntans. That's what they'd call them. So we would all be, well in Damned Yankees there's a great thing. Now understand, Ray Walston is playing the devil, and he's very much involved with this baseball team, because a 40 year old man has sold him his soul to let him play for the Yankees. So he's in and out of the Yankee locker room all the time and as you'd expect of the devil, he's beautifully dressed, see. So he comes out of the locker room in this marvelous suit and he has to walk from stage left to stage right, right in front of the curtain. This scene takes place in front of the curtain. And he comes out, and these kids all shout "Who are you? Who are you?" And he stops at center stage and turns and says, "Not a soul." [laughs] And then he goes on. Well, that's the way things were. And we loved these guys, and I'll never forget, the first autograph I ever ... [got] was Frank Demaree, who played outfield for the Giants. And I remember standing there shaking, because I was in this man's presence. ... We loved going. We used to go see the Jersey City Giants play all the time too, because you could get a reserved seat there for 85 cents, whoa! [laughs]

RA: How did you feel when the Giants moved?

RM: Oh, I followed them, you know. From New Jersey I followed them. And, of course, we had television. But every time they came to Philadelphia, my Dad and I would go to Philadelphia to see them play. But then after a while my kids, my boys grew up, and they were Mets fans, so then I became a Mets fan. Now I live up there, and I'm a Red Sox fan. Of course, the Red Sox blew it. [laughs] I moved to Boston and the Celts are lousy, the Sox are lousy. [laughs]

KP: Well, at least you have a great stadium to go to.

RM: Yeah. But the Patriots are coming back. The Patriots are coming back.

RA: You had mentioned in high school, like at dinner, your family had the talent nights, did you or your brother, you had mentioned on Friday mornings what you did, did you do anything else like that? Were you in school theater?

RM: Oh yeah. Yeah, I was in all the plays and all that stuff. And Bob and I, and our oldest brother until he left for the service, we used to on Thursday nights, we would write my stuff because I soon found out, boy that's another thing, I learned how to be a writer from this experience. I discovered meeting a weekly deadline, and everybody expects you to, you know, like when they print the school paper, they had a column called "What would happen if?" and there was a "What would happen if Dick Mercer never got a laugh in assembly?" [laughs] Boy, that puts the pressure on you. So I soon enlisted my two brothers to help me. And we would write it, and my material improved, believe me. And then I'd do that stuff on Friday morning, it got to the point when as soon as I started running up the side aisle to get up on stage, you know, they'd be applauding. God, what pressure that was.

And I'll never forget, one time the most popular light bulb in the United States was called the Mazda, that was the trade name, General Electric made it. M-A-Z-D-A. Mazda. So, I'll never forget that. Oh, and Mr. Brown, tough thing to go to high school when the principal is one of your father's closest friends. [laughs] That was tough. Because I didn't want to embarrass my

father in any way, but I was the big loud-mouthed, fooling around, class clown kid, you know. But anyway, here's what happened. I got up on the stage, and we had just played, we played three night games that year which was a lot. So I'm up on the stage on Friday morning and I reported the score of the game which we had won last Friday night, and I said, "That was the last night game of the season, so ... from here on in our theme song is Mazdas in the cold, cold ground." Well that was an old Steven Foster song, a pun, you know, "Master's in the cold, cold ground." It was a slave singing about masters in the cold, cold ground. Which was perfect so I said, "So from here on in our theme is Mazdas in the cold, cold ground." Well everybody laughed like hell. All of a sudden I hear Mr. Brown say, "Mercer, Mercer! That's it, that's it! Off! Off!" So I get off, and ... I'm [wondering] what did I do wrong, see? So I knew that I'd better go to his office, or I guess when I got back to my homeroom the teacher said, "Mr. Brown wants to see you?" And he was rip roaring mad. And I was, "Mr. Brown, Mr. Brown, please, what did I do?" "You know very well what you did," [he said]. Well it turns out he thought I had said, "My ass is in the cold, cold ground." [laughs] Which I got to tell you was unthinkable in those days. I mean, I went into the United States Navy and the word "Hell" or "Damn" had never passed my lips. And certainly not did "Jesus Christ" ever pass my lips, except in prayer, but I tell you, that's the way we all were. That, we lived in ... I think, in a better era socially than we're living in now.

I think that we had great standards of decency and conduct, ... that are missing now. When I left the advertising business, only eight years ago, the language that was coming from young women, I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't, I mean it was just. And I remembered that only a few short years earlier, you know, if a man ever said anything like that at a meeting with women, I'd say, "Hey, for pete's sakes, stop it will you." All of a sudden the rules are changed. I don't know why, but that's the way it is. So what was the question, I took to long too answer? [laughs]

RA: Did you work for the school newspaper or perform in any school plays?

RM: Oh yeah, I was always in all of those things. Yeah.

RA: You had mentioned how your parents were very influential with pushing education.

RM: Yeah.

RA: Did you ever have any conflict with your love of baseball, being played during the day a lot, and did you ever miss school to go out to the games and stuff?

RM: My brother was graduated number three in the class, and we would do our homework at the dining room table at night. And he'd be there for a half an hour, and I'd be there until midnight. I graduated twelfth in the class, and he was third. We got in the United States Navy, we went in together on April 1, 1943, at the Newark Post Office. And they gave us a battery of intelligence tests and they proved for sure that we were not identical twins. [laughs] They, they immediately sent him to Yale University, and they handed me a mop and a broom. [laughs] Bob wound up as Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. I got to be Executive Vice-President of the world's fourth largest advertising agency, but that

was about it. That's the best, that was my personal best, [laughs] but Bob had a rip roaring personal best. That's terrific. Yeah, he's a neat guy.

RA: Because I know in high school a couple of times, me and my friends, you know, we took the afternoon off and went out to Yankee Stadium. [laughs] So I was curious if you guys would ever leave to go out to the Polo Grounds?

RM: No, and you know the funny thing is, I really did love studying. I got straight A's in Latin, straight A's in French, and I wasn't too good at Mathematics, ... and straight A's in English. But I really loved it. And to this day I love digging things out of books. Yeah, we were fortunate. And I think that it was our family, when we were at our poorest, and we never knew we were poor, believe me we were poor. We lived in three houses on the same street, Webster Avenue, because the Sherman Avenue house, the first house that we lived in, my father lost that. You know, in 193 ..., I'm trying to remember when he lost that house, it was '35 , '36, something like that. But I remember my dad weeping at the dinner table, you know, and daddy's don't cry. But my father was in tears and he left the table. And then I later learned that we had lost the house, and he was just beginning to make plans to get out of the business, and finally they had the settlement where, "George, we'll let you out scott free, and we'll pay for your share by just absorbing your debts." And maybe, you know, they knew something my father didn't, I don't know. But I don't think so, they were good men, every one of them. They were good, three fine men. So ... there were plenty of times ... when we were between the rock and the hard place financially. But our house was always full of books. And always full of ideas. And always full of laughter. And that just stayed with us.

KP: It sounds like that, your father crying, was very memorable, because it sounds like he was an upbeat person.

RM: Yeah that's right, that's right. Oh yeah, he would come home and leave his troubles on the hat rack with his hat. But I guess this was the day that he found out that the bank was going to foreclose, you know, it was just too much for him.

KP: Was that common in Roselle?

RM: You know I didn't know. I really didn't know. And there were so many things that I was used to, but I did discover that once Mom got that job, that all of a sudden if you wanted to go to the movies you could go to the movies and there was the ten cents. If you went on Saturday, it was ten cents. To the matinee, for kids. For the Sunday matinee, it was fifteen cents so we always went on Saturday.

KP: How did the war change your high school and change Roselle Park? And Roselle the twin boroughs?

RM: Yeah, yeah. Okay, I can remember two profound things. One was our basketball coach. I was the manager of the basketball team when I was a junior. Now I got out of school in '42, so it must have been my senior year when Pearl Harbor happened right?

KP: Yes.

RM: Yeah, cause it was December '41, so I got out in June of '42. Yeah.

KP: Okay, yeah.

RM: Okay, yeah that was it. I was the senior manager my junior year and I had gotten my, my brother Bob was a superb baseball player, but he wasn't interested in any other sports. But I ... I managed football. ... What happened, it started out I would go out for every team, and they'd always cut me so then I'd go back and ask to be manager. [laughs] And, I gotta tell you, my whole life has been built on hope and I'm very glad, because it turned out pretty good, you know. But the thing that I remember specifically about the change and the war was that the Monday after Pearl Harbor, Monday, December 8th, ... my twin brother was now the senior manager of the basketball team, and one of the senior manager's most coveted jobs, the most fun jobs, was refereeing the practice games, you know. That was really fun, boy, you got the whistle and all of the things. Well, my brother Bob had turned his ankle, and he asked would I referee for him that day? Because ..., I wasn't a manager anymore, I was out of there. So, "Yeah, great. I'd love to." So, I came and took the whistle. And before they started practice, the coach, Red Woods, who probably, I'm guessing was 35 years old, and he taught P.A.D, Problems of American Democracy, and he also coached basketball, and he was assistant coach of baseball and football. And I remember thinking, "Jesus, when are we going to start this practice?" Because Red Woods just stood there bouncing this basketball, you know. And finally he called everybody around and he made a little speech in which he said, he felt all this was stupid and useless, you know, "I should be going to war." And he was just, ... I really, really, I just realize that "My gosh, Coach Woods is really upset about this thing." He was so damned mad about Pearl Harbor. And he just about told us that he was gonna go to war. And he did, by God, he went to war. And I'll tell you this, he went to war, and he was in Europe for a year, and when he was there just about a year, his wife, Mrs. Woods, who was one of our teachers, had a baby. Nice. Nice. Yeah. So obviously she was impregnated about three months after he left for Europe and he wasn't home, was he? Terrible, terrible thing.

KP: Did that marriage survive?

RM: No, no. And I'll tell you an interesting story. Kenny Flath was married, Kenny Flath was the class ahead of us, and he married Ione Stork, who was in our class. Very pretty blond girl. Well, Kenny was a B-25 pilot in the Pacific and he was shot down and lost. He was shot down over the Pacific and that was the end of Kenny. Well, in 1946 or '47, I guess it was '46, his widow Ione, who was who was now 22 years old, and Coach Woods, who was now back at his job, and he was now, what, 41 or something. She came to him, because she wanted to give something to the basketball team in memory of Kenny Flath. He was a star basketball player. He was a great center fielder too. And good friend of mine, wonderful guy. Handsome. And they were a handsome couple. Ione Stork looked like a movie star. She was just very pretty and very bright and nice. And she wanted to give an electric scoreboard to the team. And she wanted to have on it the dedication, and it would be from Mr. and Mrs. Kenny

Flath, or In Memory of my dear Husband Kenneth, or something like that. And Red advised her not to do that. He said, "You're young and your life is going to go on. And has to go on. Just put Kenny's name on it," you know. Well those two wound up getting married. And it was a good marriage, still is. Yeah.

KP: So both are still living.

RM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's right.

KP: To be widowed at 22 is something. In peace-time that would be exceptionally rare.

RM: Yeah, that's right. It was tough. It was very, very tough. And what happened to him I think was just as bad. I mean, again we're talking about social things, but today, you know, I don't think that today's people can understand what a disgrace that was. I mean, first of all if you were single and got pregnant, I mean that was, that was such a disgrace. ... I mean people would send their daughters out of town to have the baby. You know what I mean? ... And if the word got around, people were shamed to show their face on Main Street. Now I'm not telling you this was right or wrong, okay? I'm telling you that's the way it was. I guess, in my heart of hearts, I think that's the way it should be, you know? If you disagree with that, that's fine, but I think that's the way it should be.

KP: What happened to the coach's first wife?

RM: You know, I don't know.

KP: Did she stay teaching or did she leave town in a sense?

RM: She left town, and she went back to Reading, Pennsylvania, which is where they had met. They had met in Albright, isn't that in Reading? Albright College, yeah, pretty sure it is, yeah.

KP: Yes.

RM: That's where they had met. He was a star athlete there. ... He was a great athlete, and he was dear man, and he told us that when he was in college he played for a semi-pro team, because he needed the money. So he took the name Forest. And he said one game he struck out three times, and he said, "Somebody in the stands must have recognized me, because as I dragged my bat back to the dugout I heard a guy holler 'Woods or Forest,' you stink!" [laughs] It changed, yeah, I'm trying to answer the question did the school change, yes, oh that was the first thing. The second thing was our football coach, and he was also the athletic director. A man named Herman Shaw, Herm Shaw, wonderful guy, and he was, you know, he was Frankie Burns mentor and Hermie Herrings mentor. Burns and Herring are two of the Hall of Famers from my class. Their team was the first team to beat Princeton in Palmer Stadium. We beat them by golly, first time. Prior to that we used to get the "Palmer Stadium Palsy," we couldn't hold onto the ball. [laughs] Herm Shaw made a similar speech and he immediately, he was married as was Red. And neither of them had any children, but Herm actually volunteered for the army before Red

did. And Herm was older than Red. And the Army finally got rid of Herm, they decided he was too old. [laughs] But they took him in right away. But after a year or so they gave him a discharge. You know, he may have had a medical problem that I didn't know about. Oh, and then let's see, ... we used to entertain the troops. We did the "Minstrels of 1942," and we had the guys come in from Fort Dix. Now that's a long bus ride, but they came in.

KP: That is a long way from Roselle Park.

RM: Your damn right it is. ... And then we had, in our town we had a searchlight battalion. Now, you know, I fly my own airplane to this day, and I'll tell you, searchlights for airplanes, it's crazy, it's stupid. But that was where we were, you know, it was primitive. ... And we had all these searchlights, and tents, here were soldiers in tents in little Roselle Park. With all these big searchlights and they'd have them on at night, you know, it was just crazy. But we did "Bundles for Britain," our mothers, I don't understand how you wind bandages, but all our mothers wound bandages. Now for all I know, it wasn't even necessary, it was just to keep them busy or something so they'd stop worrying. But they'd come to the school every afternoon, and we'd look in the cafeteria and here were all our mothers in there winding bandages. [laughs]

KP: Did you have any bond or scrap drives in school?

RM: Yes. That's right. I remember that now. ... Anything that was metal. People were taking down their iron fences around their houses. You know, we had a lot of old Victorians in the town, a lot of old bungalows. And a lot of them had these old wrought iron fences, and they'd take them down. Yeah. And, of course, the car thing didn't affect us, because none of us had cars. My parents did, ... and I remember Billy Ellis' parents had a car, but it was, God, you can't know what a different time it was.

RA: You got out of high school in June 1942. What was it like for your senior class knowing so many of the guys were going to go off to war?

RM: Oh, gee I forgot. Jackie Reindel was from our class, and he was shot and killed by a Japanese sniper on Guadalcanal.

KP: That is very early in the war.

RM: Yeah, yeah. Well he'd quit school to join the marines. He lived two doors away from us, we grew up together. Wonderful guy, his father was a partner in Reindel and Valdez Hardware Store. Jackie was a great, great kid. And boy he was gung-ho, he joined the marines. And you know, it was tough to get his Mother and Dad to sign, but they realized that was what he wanted to do so they let him do it.

KP: It must have been hard on them to lose him.

RM: Oh, it was terrible. You know that's the first time I ever had to get dressed up, and again, our parents, ... even at that age, our parents were a profound influence on us. They said, now of

course, we have to go see Mr. and Mrs. Reindel. And I said, "What do you mean we have to go see them?" ... [They replied,] "Well we have to visit them." "Why do we have to visit them?" They said, "Well Jackie's been killed, we've got to go and console them and commiserate with them." That's when I learned the word commiserate. So Bob and I combed our hair, and put on ties and jackets, and with my mother and dad we went over to see the Reindels. And I remember, I can weep now thinking about it. It was just awful.

KP: He could have waited another year. I can imagine the parents feeling terrible and responsible, because they had signed the papers.

RM: Yeah. Yeah. And death, my God, I mean just, wow! It was just so enormous at that age. ... You know we were always doing things for the war at school, school was full of that. And ... I remember that we all gathered in the auditorium and they had two radios plugged in and we heard Roosevelt declare war. "A day that will live in infamy," you know, I heard him make that speech over the radio. "The hand that held the dagger has stuck it in the back of it's neighbor." The guy was brilliant. God, what a speaker.

KP: You graduated in June of 1942, what did you do between the time you enlisted and high school graduation.

RM: I worked my way up Frelinghuysen Avenue in Newark. I started with the S.E. & M. Vernon Company, they make ... blank books. ... Have you ever noticed that the edges of accountants ledgers are painted either green or gold, well I was the guy who painted them green. And I got to tell you, you have to be very good at that. There are a whole bunch of ladies who sat, and I want you to notice something else unless the technology has changed, that the numbers on the pages of accountants ledgers are usually just a little bit crooked. Well that's, because these women sat at treadles on high stools and they would pump these treadles, and the numbers would come flying by. From number 999, 998, 997, 996, they would come flying by. And they would each wear a little rubber thing on their fingertip, and they would have these books that had not had the covers put on them yet. They were bound, but not yet covered, because they have hard covers. And they would flip these pages so that these flying numbers would come through and catch those pages. Just incredible. And there was this one gal, she had a bun and no teeth, and she would sing a very popular song at that time. And all day long I'd hear singing this song, and pumping this treadle, and the numbers are being put on the pages. See, these numbers would come up and pass an ink pad, get inked, then come and brrrrrp [hit the pages]. And those pages had to be perfect, you know. And she would sing, "You'd be so nice to come home to. You'd be so nice by the fire. You'd be so nice, you'd be paradise." [laughs] Here she is singing this song and doing this. Well I had to keep those women supplied with the books and I got to tell you right now, books are heavy. I weighed 121 pounds when I got out of high school. I'm lugging these books over there, after they've been numbered, now I have to take them over to my table here. And I have a beautiful kangaroo brush, beautiful thing, and I have green printers ink, and I have a big board. I put the board, I stack up ten or twelve books, put the board on top. Now I have to press just the right amount on the board and get this printers ink, and paint those pages. Now if you press too hard, the pages will overlap and you'll get some white spaces, and that's unacceptable. If you don't press hard enough the ink will seep in between the pages, and then

you get pages with sloppy ink on them, that's not acceptable. So you have to do it just right. Well it takes a while to get good at it, and I'm proud to tell you that I got very good at it.

But the foreman was an old German fellow, his name was Clemens and well he talked this way [German accent] all the time. [laughs] And he would come in and take off his suit jacket, and he would put on a ... a black rayon jacket. Worst looking jacket I've ever seen in my life. But he still wore the vest and the big gold watch, see. And I never heard Mr. Clemens, but I would feel him behind me, as I'm doing this. I tell you I did everything perfectly. But he would stand there and time me with this watch, and as he walked away he would drop the watch back in his vest and he always said the same thing, "Richard, you spoiled the whole goddamned shooting match." [laughs] And, of course, I never spoiled anything, but I guess he felt that was money in the bank, just in case I ever did spoil anything. So I had that job.

Then I was thinking of becoming a communist then, because every Friday we got paid in cash, and Mr. Vernon, the big shot who owned the thing, my God, he was like six foot three, 200 pounds, handsome man and splendidly dressed. And here we all were in our crummy clothes with printers ink all over them and he would come down and shake hands with a few people and personally hand them their money. And you know we got paid in cash in an envelope. And I always hated the son of a bitch. [laughs] I think I was thinking of becoming a communist in those days, because it is mindless, demeaning, God-awful work. And I know that it was part of my resolve to go to college.

KP: How did you end up there at this Newark factory?

RM: An ad in the paper. Prior to that I had a job with Traubman's New York Grocery. And it was on Morris Avenue in Elizabeth. And I used to have to be there at five o'clock in the morning, and I would sweep out the store, and I would sweep out the truck. And my job was driving Mr. Traubman's truck. And I would deliver to the whole Westminster section of Elizabeth. My God, I thought those were millionaires, you know. And maybe they were, I don't know. But those houses were glorious, and beautiful. And sometimes maids would answer the door, you know, I just couldn't believe it. But I got this job, and I had to work around the store like all get out, and then I would deliver all these groceries in this paneled truck. And Mr. Traubman, I guess, noticed that every time I went off on a delivery, I guess I would go the same way down Morris Avenue. That's because the first thing I would do would be to drive to the corner near the railroad overpass and ask the cop there how to get to such and such an address, see. [laughs] So Traubman soon figured that out, because I had told him, "Sure, I know my way around Elizabeth." You know, baloney, I did. ... So one morning, the bus would always stop down the block past Traubman's. So one morning after a few months of this, I'm on the bus at five....

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Richard J. Mercer on November 17, 1995 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and...

RA: Rob Archer

KP: And we interrupted this funny story where...

RM: So I walk in the front door and there's Mr. Traubman standing behind the counter, and I'm no fool. I said to him, "Mr. Traubman." He said, "Yes." I said, "I came here to tell you that I'm quitting." He said "Damn good thing Mercer, because I was just about to fire you." [laughs] And my brother worked on the same street, he worked for a man named Henry Schutt. Schutt's Soda Store was the most famous soda store in Union County, New Jersey. Henry Schutt was a wonderful man, he was a German fellow. And very exact, very interesting guy. And he paid, there were men who worked for banks who went to work for Schutt because in those days 35 cents an hour was a good wage, and he paid a dollar an hour to guys to jerk sodas. And he had rules, you had to wear a black bow tie and a white shirt, you had to wear a white apron, when you went over to a table to take an order you had to stand with your hands behind your back, you were not allowed to write anything down, you had to memorize the orders and bring them back perfectly, if you made a soda and some of the ice cream dripped down the side of the glass he would grab it away from you and throw it in the sink. Everything had to be perfect. And his ice cream was expensive, and he made it all himself. As I told you he was German and he had a German accent. And several times when he put the garbage out at night, he was attacked in the alley, people wanting to beat him up, and they would put swastikas on the front window and all that kind of stuff. He was an American. A very decent, nice, fine man. But there was a humorous thing about him. My mother and father by sheer chance had been his very first customers the day he opened his doors in 1924. So now here ... it is in 1942. He was a very successful man, and very well off. He had a beautiful home in Hillside. So anytime Bob and I went in there he was glad to see us, he watched us grow up, you know. And he loved my mother and father. Even though they weren't close social friends, they remained friends over all those years. So we came in there looking for jobs, and he said, "Richard, it would be a mistake for me to let you go to work here, because you are full of fun, you are very loud, you are very active, that is not, I run a place where I have everybody they behave very serenely. They are like gentlemen here, you know, so we shouldn't. ... I will hire Robert, because he is very different from you. He is very quiet, you know." [German accent] [laughs] So okay that was it. But he said, "Now Richard, ... Now I don't want to put Robert in a position where he will be dishonest, so anytime you come in here to see your brother you can have anything you want in the store for free. That way your brother is not tempted to do something dishonest." [German accent] And by God that was it and I always went in there and Bob always gave me a free soda. Now, I'm in there one day having my free soda when Henry comes in. And we've announced that we have volunteered for the navy which we have and that we're going to go in on April 1st. And he says "Let me give you a little situation. ... You go into the Navy, and one of you becomes an officer and the other is an enlisted man." [German accent] Which is exactly what happened, he was no fool. [laughs] He says, "Now, let's say that it is Robert who is the officer, [and] you are the enlisted man. You have both gone in, of course, as enlisted men now Robert is the officer." He says, "You are in his outfit and he is the officer in charge." He says, "Let's think of this, the other men would think that there is preferential treatment here, that he will give you easy details, easy duties, he will let you break some of the rules. That's a terrible thing. So the only thing is that one of you must apply for a transfer, right?" ... [German accent]. I said, "Right, Mr. Schutt." He said, "Wrong, that would be dishonorable, that would be cowardly. You are supposed to be a man. You are

supposed to behave according to the rules, both of you!” [German accent] And this is the kind of guy he was. Isn't that something. Marvelous. We loved him.

KP: How long did he stay in business?

RM: Oh he stayed right in business until about the 1960's, and then he retired. And he retired very well off. And it's the best, until this day I've never had ice cream as good as Henry Schutt's ice cream. But that was the kind of a mind he had. He was a remarkable man.

KP: You've mentioned a lot of Germans, both in your neighborhood and in the soda shop.

RM: Yeah, yeah.

KP: And you have mentioned one who was very happy about the German victory over Paris.

RM: Yeah, the only one I ever knew.

KP: But did you know any Nazi sympathizers who joined the Bund.

RM: No, no. Particularly the people who had the beware of the dog signs. [laughs] One of our star basketball players was Oscar Gellerman, and I grew up with Oscar. And both his mother and father talked this way, you know. [German accent] But they were wonderful American people. And Oscar served in the United States Army. Yeah.

KP: Why the navy? Had you considered the army or the army air force?

RM: We wanted to be in the navy air force. I have no idea why, that was our dream. And the Navy said, “Okay, fine. ... But you have to go to boot camp first. Oh yeah, don't worry about it.” see. Well we were in boot camp and the thirteen weeks were about to get-- oh, I want to tell you a very funny story. We had our ... [commander] of our company, I was in Company 382, Barracks Baker at Newport, Rhode Island, and the commander of the company was a boatswain's mate first class named Gamba, G-A-M-B-A. And he was from Newark, New Jersey. And he had a magnificent build. He was a man about 40 years old, and God was he navy. He used to soak his white hat in salt water so that after it dried it would sparkle. These little particles of salt, you know, it would be absolutely virgin white, but it would sparkle, because there were little particles of salt all over it. And he wore it down over his head, you know. He was bald as all get out. Tough guy, I mean this guy could just murder anybody in a fight. And he talked, “This way, he had some kind of a way of talking.” And he would say, “I want you to do that `shmartly,' the Gamba way, shmartly, see.” Well, of course, I had Gamba down to a tee. [laughs] And we had a communication between the quarterdecks in the barracks, where the officers were, and our place which was up on the ... third deck as they called it. And every once in a while you'd hear over the loudspeaker, “Gamba, Company 382, this is the Quarterdeck, are you there?” And guess who would say, “Yes shir, shmartly sir. Gamba right here shir.” [laughs] “Report to the Quarterdeck at once, Mr. Gamba.” “Shmartly shir, coming right down there sir.” Well this went on for a few weeks and one night the entire company is rolled out of bed, and Gamba paces down, back and

forth, he says, "Shombody here, some shmartass has been imitating Gamba, and I've been getting in trouble downstairs with the officers, I want to know who it is right now, or we're all outside in full packs for a run." And I wouldn't confess, and nobody else confessed. [laughs] So we got on full packs and we ran, and when we got back and Gamba went away, these guys said, "That's it Mercer, no more, that's the only one, forget about it." [laughs]

One time he, Don Pierce and I were laughing in the ranks, so he took us outside. He said, "You shee that garbage pile? I want that to be the loveliest garbage pile on this whole island, and yous two are gonna do it." [laughs] So Pierce and I worked all day long. Piercey had been a state champion wrestler in our high school. We were all high school buddies that went in the navy together. And we worked our tails off. And all of a sudden we hear, "Hip, hut, tree, four, hip, hut, tree, four." And here comes the entire company marching past our garbage pile, and then he says, "Eyes left. ... Now look at that, there's officer material. That's the loveliest garbage pile on this whole island and those two bird brains did it." [laughs] I'll never forget Gamba. [laughter]

KP: Basically you were raised in a very innocent way, and then to go into the navy, I mean it sounds like he used every obscenity in the book.

RM: It was whiplash, it was whiplash. Now I'll tell you the interesting thing about my brother Bob, my twin brother Bob, who went on to become Chairman. ... A bad word never passed his lips in all his time in the navy. Never. Still hasn't to this day. But I was soon in there saying "shmartly" and all this with the rest of them, you know. And I remember one time we're doing the manual of arms, you know, and he says "Mercer, shtep out of line. Let me see you do that shmartly." So I'm doing it, I'm doing this thing and he comes over and says, "Mercer, what do you think you got there, your shweetheart's ass? That's a rifle, slap that rifle." [laughs] Now this was tough, but as you see, I soon learned.

KP: Now were you and your brother in the same boot camp?

RM: Yeah, we were together in the same boot camp.

KP: You were together for the first thirteen weeks with your brother.

RM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then they sent him to Yale University. And I went down, after he left I went down to the quarterdeck, and I asked to see the officer in charge. And that was unheard of, but they said, "Yes I could." So I got to see him. And I said, "Sir," standing at attention with my hat in my hand. I said "Sir, you've just sent my twin brother to Yale." I said "We came in the Navy together, we volunteered as you know." He had my records right in front of him, and I said, "We asked to get into naval aviation. We both wanted to be pilots, now you're sending him to Yale. He's going to be an engineering officer, and I don't know what you're going to do with me, but I'm sure that my GCT--" that's the General Classification Test, I'm sure it was the old Stanford Binet Intelligence Test, I'm sure that's what it was. I said, "My GCT is not that far apart from my brothers," and I still want to get into aviation, and Sir, they promised us at the recruiting office." He said, "You want aviation, Mercer?" And I said yes. He said, "I'll let you know." Well the next day I got called down there [and] he said, "You're going to Aviation Radio

and Gunnery School in Jacksonville, Florida,” so I still wasn't going to be a pilot. But I fooled him, 25 years later I bought my own airplane. [laughs]

KP: It sounds like you were both upset that they were splitting you up.

RM: It bothered us terribly, [but] as a matter of fact it was probably the best thing that ever happened to us, because I don't know, but I think Bob probably did fine. But the first few months I went nuts without my brother. I don't mean that I caused any trouble or anything, but inside.

KP: You really missed your brother.

RM: Oh, I was terribly lost without him. Yeah. Terribly. ... And today you know, it's funny, we are the closest of friends and throughout our careers we always managed to have our vacations together. We'd always go down to the New Jersey shore, on the Metedeconk River, in a place right down next to Bretton Woods, it's called Kingfisher Cove. And we'd have one big house that we'd be in down there together.

And it started out, you know, he was working for Goodyear and I was working for BBDO, I tell you, I ... left here in 1949 and when I filled out all the forms that you fill out when you graduate they want to know if you have a job, and where, and how much, and so on. So I filled out Batten, Barton, Durstine, & Osborne, New York City, advertising agency, 100 dollars a week. Well Dr. Merwin, who was the dean of the School of Journalism called me in, he wanted to see me. And I went to see him in Van Nest Hall. I just stopped by Van Nest this morning just to look at it again. And I went up to his office, and I said, “You wanted to see me, Dr. ... Merwin?” “Oh yes, Mercer sit down.” Got out my folder and picked up this piece of paper and he said, “This, of course, is a joke.” And he handed this thing to me and it was that thing I had filled out for the Bureau of Personnel & Placement. And I said, “What do you mean a joke, sir?” And he said, “One hundred dollars a week.” And I said, “No sir, that's what I'm going to work for.” He said, “Well if it's true, you're the highest paid graduate in the history of our School of Journalism.” I said, “So be it Dr. Merwin, you know, in all the time I was in school here, I worked at W-CTC,” and I said, “I put together a book of radio commercials this thick that I'd written, and that's how I got the job.” He said, “Did Personnel Placement help you?” I said, “No sir, I never went to them.” I said, “I went out at Christmas time and I got three jobs.” And I said, “My toughest thing was to decide which one to take, ... as a matter of fact with this company I got two jobs.” One was in the print advertising department, they had two separate departments, one did the magazine and newspaper ads and one did the radio ads. There was no TV really to speak of. And, I said the guy, “Mr. Bill Orchard, who runs the print department, he wanted to hire me for 35 dollars a week.” But I said, “Mr. Robert Foreman, who runs the TV [radio] department, wanted to hire me for a 100 dollars a week.” And I said, “My big worry ever since Christmas has been worrying whether or not these two guys ever talked to each other.” [laughs] If they did, I'd be in deep trouble. Well, after I got there I discovered that Bill Orchard and Bob Foreman hated one another and they never passed a word. They never talked to each other ever. They just despised one another. Isn't that funny? [laughs] So there's a lot of luck involved in life, men. I'll tell you.

KP: I can not resist, you had such good stories about your boot camp. Is there anything else you remember about boot camp? About the guys you were with? About what you learned?

RM: Yeah. This is something very interesting, and it bears on war. And it makes me think about and understand the English poets of the First World War. The New York Yankees had a famous outfielder named "Twinkle Toes" Selkirk. George Selkirk, they called him, "Twinkle Toes." Christ, he could catch butterflies bare handed, I mean the guy was just great. Well, he was made a warrant officer in the United States Navy, and we marched to Rouché's Point from Newport, which was probably a fifteen mile march to take rifle training. ... The navy used Springfield 30-30's. And we went there, and you were in ... these buildings that were sheds, long sheds. And they had as you stood up, there was like a shelf about eight feet long, ran the entire length of the shed. And there were little steps, and you'd climb up on that shelf and you'd lie there. And there was a little window, and you'd look out at the pits where the targets were. ... The roof was about this high, but when you got up, no the roof was even lower, yeah, it was very enclosed, tight. And it was a long shed and you weren't allowed to put your fingers on the trigger unless the nose of the rifle was outside that little square window. And there was no intercom or anything, we just shouted back and forth. Well, George Selkirk was the warrant officer in charge. And he had us all lie down and look out the window before we were issued any rifles, and then he had them put the targets up and down, you know, out there ... in the pits, those were called the pits, and we were called the butts, I guess that was it, yeah. Then you'd here, the call would be "Ready in the butts. Ready in the pits. Raise the targets." And then he'd say fire. Well Selkirk, this famous baseball player, you can imagine how thrilled Bob and I were to meet this man, but you know, you couldn't shake his hand or anything, he was, "Mr. Selkirk." But still just to be in his presence, and we had seen him play. And this terrific, strong, manly guy talked to us, and he said all the safety precautions, you know, no man will put his fingers near the trigger until the nose of the rifle is out there. And finally he said, "Now there's one other thing I want to tell you." He said, "This is going to be the most deafening racket you ever heard in your lives." He said, "This building contains the noise, keeps it right in here, it's not going anywhere except straight into your ears." And he said, "Some men will start crying." And he said, "Anyone who criticizes any man who's crying will get KP and even maybe more severe punishment." He said, "This is a perfectly normal reaction, ... I've seen some of the bravest guys I've ever known, do this." That was it. So then we proceeded and he said, "Fire." And sure enough, quite a number of guys broke into tears. I'm not just saying eyes well up, I'm talking cried like babies. It was, all of a sudden you understood in your gut that we weren't playing games. I mean, it was just incredible. And there's that acrid smell of gunpowder, you know. That's incredible. Incredible. Let me think if there's anything else about boot camp.

KP: How was navy food?

RM: I thought it was wonderful. I really thought it was wonderful. You know, they had what they called the "Ship's Store," and you go there and get, and you know it's amazing, it really is a good life, you know. They ran us every morning, the entire company. And you know, there's something uplifting about, I'll tell you why wars can be popular, I mean to tell you the truth, I loved every minute of the Navy. I just loved it. And even though there were things about it that

were confining and rigid, you know, I think I found satisfaction in being able to do those things. As a matter of fact I was so good at shining my shoes, and you know you had to do all your own laundry, your hat and everything, and I stole from Gamba. Boy, I soaked my hat in [salt water]. [laughs] So we were over here waiting to go to Europe. We were [at] Pier 86 I think it was, it was the embarkation pier, we went over on the **Queen Mary**, and they lined us up one morning, we all had to work, we all had to work and do details while we were there waiting. Pier 92, that was it. It was at 52nd Street. We all had to work in our dress blues, and the reason for that was very interesting. If the spies saw you in your dress blues, which was the way you had to travel in the navy, they would never know when you were going to leave. But if they saw you running around in navy dungarees and chambray shirts all the time, and then one day all these men are in dress blues, they go [snap], the ship is leaving. Because, these guys are all dressed for it. Because Navy regs, are Navy regs. So we had to do everything in our dress blues.

KP: So when leaving you had to be in dress blues?

RM: Yeah. Any time you traveled you had to be in dress uniform. And that meant even when you got on the **Queen Mary** to go overseas. So one day, you know, we were at muster in the morning, and there was a new officer there that we hadn't recognized. We'd been there for a couple of weeks, they kept us there for a month before they sent us overseas. And this officer walked down the line and said, "You, one step forward. You, one step forward. You, one step forward." Well it turned out that we were to go to the Waldorf-Astoria that night, they had Lord and Lady ... Mountbatten there, Jim Farley, who was the Postmaster General of the United States and a big Democratic politician, in those days you know, if you ran the campaign you got to be Postmaster General. And, oh the biggies that were there. And we were selected, because we were so 'shmartly' dressed. [laughs] And I had stolen everything from Gamba, and I wanted to be that way. And boy, I did my own laundry, and ironed all my stuff, you know, and I always looked like a million bucks. And apparently three other guys did too, because they chose the four of us. And we had a fantastic dinner in the Waldorf-Astoria, what a night we had.

KP: It sounds like it was particularly nice thing, having been through boot camp and all.

RM: That's right. And you know what, one of my pals, Bud O'Toole, he and I were in the same crew, he was our tailgunner, he and I were standing right outside the door, and everyone had entered, the banquet had begun. Lord and Lady Mountbatten had come by, and Cordell Hull, and oh Jesus, the people, Jimmy Byrnes who was the Governor of South Carolina, and he was a pal of Roosevelt's. And we saw all these famous people. But now there all in there, see? And he and I are standing there, he's on that side of the door, and here we are at attention. All of a sudden there was electricity in the room. I swear to God, the air crackled. And why, all by himself the Honorable James A. Farley had stepped into that foyer. And he came down that hallway, and he turned to me and he said, "At ease, sailor. My name is Farley, what's yours?" He stuck out his hand. And I said, "Dick Mercer, sir." "Where are you from?" "Elizabeth, New Jersey." "That's a good Democratic town." [laughs] Then he turned around, because we had moved to Elizabeth by then, ... then he turned around, [and] he said, "You're Irish." He said, "That's right sir, my name is O'Toole." He said, "Well, mine's Farley, ever heard of me?" [laughs] And Bud said, "Yes, I have sir." Bud O'Toole went on to become the youngest judge in

the history of the State of Florida. We're still very close. You know, we write back and forth, and we fly down to see them and all that.

KP: It sounds like it was an enormously fun thing to go to. I mean to observe this whole scene. What did you think of Mountbatten?

RM: I loved it. See, I'm a [pause], what do they call them over there? I'm a royalist. I like the king and queen, you know. I don't like some of the behavior we seeing, I deplore that. And I think those people ought to be kicked out of the king and queen business. But I like it. And one of my idols is Winston Churchill. And he was a great royalist, he believed in it. He was heartbroken at the Wally-Warfield-Simpson thing, you know. ... That just broke his heart.

KP: The reason I asked is that several people have sort of encountered Mountbatten in almost very similar ways and all those people have said he exuded, almost to look at him, he exuded charisma.

RM: There's no question about it. And I say I learned that thing about electric personalities, [pause] I learned it in the presence of Jimmy Durante when I did a recording session with him. I tell you ... there are people who are bigger than life. Who have personalities that make the air crackle. I swear I've seen this. I've witnessed it. It's an amazing thing, just an amazing thing.

KP: You did get your wish of going into aviation training.

RM: Yes. Yes.

KP: And you also went to Jacksonville, Florida, and I guess one question is: had you traveled much before the war?

RM: Never been away from home before the war.

KP: So your family never really took vacations?

RM: Yes, we always went to Vermont. But that was it. Rutland, Vermont. And Ludlow, Vermont, you know, Lake Champlain. But that was it, and you know, that was just an automobile drive. But yeah, to go to Jacksonville, and to be away from home, that was ...

KP: And you were far away from home.

RM: Yeah. Plus I'm separated from my brother. Yeah, it was quite an experience. Yeah, as a matter of fact when I was first there I would never go on liberty. All the guys would disappear. I'd be in an empty barracks every weekend. I didn't want to go anywhere. All I did was, I wrote letters to Muriel Davis every single day that I was in the United States Navy, that's two years and eight months, and then, well then we got married, so up until then. Every single day I wrote Muriel Davis a letter, and she wrote me a letter every single day.

RA: What was her reaction to you enlisting in the Navy?

RM: Oh she was very proud of me. She was delighted, yes. And I was very proud of me. God I was so excited. Never forget, coming back on leave from boot camp, you know that's when Muriel and I got engaged, and my mother and father they didn't want us to get engaged. They kept saying to me, you have to go to college, you have to go to college. ... But I said, "Well, I just want to get engaged." Then when I came back from Europe, we got married. And my mother, I remember her saying to me "You know, Dicky dear," she called me, God love her, she said, "You know Dicky dear, when two people get married pretty soon there are three people, and you have to go to the Pacific now." And I said, "I know all about that Mom." She didn't like that too much. [laughs] I wasn't supposed to know all about that at age twenty, 21, whatever we were then. [laughs]

KP: How good was your aviation training in Florida?

RM: It was marvelous. I learned to be a radioman, a radar operator, the first radar was primitive, you know, you didn't see a real image there. It was just an oscilloscope, and you saw these blips and you had to figure out what the biggest was and then you'd measure it. It was strange, strange thing. But by the time I got to England, boy, you turned on the radar and you saw a real picture. A real graphic silhouette of whatever it was you were looking at there, all the rivers and the coastline, whatever you wanted. It was great.

KP: In your initial boot camp you had a lot of hometown people.

RM: Yeah.

KP: What was the group that came to Jacksonville like?

RM: People that I'd never seen or known before. It was just complete, and that was another big wrench, you know. Geez, I didn't have my, because a lot of my identity came from, as a matter of fact, you know Bob and I don't look alike, he's tall, blond, blue eyed, he still has all his hair. And he was a superb athlete, and ... he played for Red Rolf at Yale, you know, I've got a thing from the Herald Tribune about 1945 or '46, big framed thing on my wall of my study, and the headline is: "Yale beats Holy Cross 2-1 on Bob Mercer's Ninth Inning Home Run." I got a lot of my identity from him, you know. His prowess as a scholar and an athlete I always felt kind rubbed off on me. And people, even though we didn't look alike, in school twins are psychological, because everybody called us "Bobby-Dicky." ... [laughs] "Hey Bobby-Dicky," you know, and we'd both answer. Because, they didn't know who the hell they were talking to. And that's just the way it was, you know. But we didn't [look alike], gosh they should [have known], it was easy to tell us apart. Always has been, except when we were little kids we were both blond and identical. But that changed.

KP: Your brother, it sounds like he got a real break by going to Yale. I mean the G.I Bill really gave him the opportunity to attend Yale.

RM: That's right. Well you know, we started out, when we left high school, my brother was all-state third baseman, and he got a baseball scholarship to Ohio University which was a big baseball school in those days. So I went along, because my folks only had to pay for one of us. So I went along to Ohio University with him. And it was out there, after the first semester that we decided let's volunteer for the navy air force, because we knew we were going to be called up in the draft anyway. And we wanted to be in the navy air force. I can't remember why, I only know that's what we wanted, that was our dream. So when we got home for Christmas vacation, the end of the first semester, we volunteered for the navy air force, and they said, "Oh yeah, fine, you just have to go to boot camp, first. You're all set." Wrong! [laughs]

KP: So you had spent a semester at college.

RM: Yeah.

KP: What was Ohio University like for both of you?

RM: It was a wonderful place. And it was a very good school. And I remember Muriel Davis came out for Homecoming Weekend, and there was another friend of ours there from Roselle Park. And his girlfriend, Elsie Shicko came out with Muriel, you know, so they were able to chaperon each other and all that sort of thing. Everything was prim and proper in those days. We enjoyed it very much. And the president of the school, I'm trying to remember his name now, he called us both in, when he heard we were leaving and [he want to know] what our plans were. Because we said, we were going to go and volunteer. And he tried to dissuade us. He said, "You stay right here until you're drafted. ... We need educated people for this war and everything. You can join the ROTC." ... But no, we wanted to go to home and volunteer. And that was what we did. But it was a good school. We enjoyed it very much. I can still remember some of the teachers, I had an English teacher named Paul Murray Kendall, who was just a magnificent guy. And I always loved poetry, and he taught me that poetry is everywhere. There was a famous radio message from an American bomber pilot in the Pacific who went out and bombed and sunk a Japanese aircraft carrier. And in those days, you know that's what I did, I can still do da dit dit dit da dit dit da, I still know the morse code like a cracker jack. And he had his radio operator send back a message, and the message came out, "Scratch one flattop." Paul Murray Kendall said that's poetry. And he said poetry is something that happens, and it's all around us. I've never forgotten that. He was great. The psychology professor there was a great guy too. Yeah, I remember the school very well.

KP: Had you any thought of going there after you got back?

RM: You know what, when they dismissed our squadron, we were in San Francisco. I came back from Europe, married Muriel, we had 30 days rehabilitation leave so I married Muriel, and then we went out to San Francisco. And our folks were really worried about us. Two kids going out there alone. And I wasn't an officer so, you know, you didn't get quarters and all that stuff. ... We had to find a place to live. Well my aunt and uncle, Ed Walsh, great big Irish guy, a marvelous guy with a great sense of humor, they were visiting my folks at the time that Muriel and I were about to leave for San Francisco. So he sent a telegram to friends of theirs, Virginia

and Wally Markley, who lived ... in Richmond, which is right next to San Francisco. It's a suburb. And the message was: "My nephew and wife arriving San Francisco, ten A.M. train, such and such a date. Can you put them up until they find a place? Great kids. Signed, Ed Walsh." Well that was fine and we left the next day. Well, what we didn't know was that the telegram arrived out there, it read Nephew and wife arrive ten A.M. train, such and such a date. Can you put them up until they find a place? Eight kids. [laughs] Thanks, Ed Walsh. So Ginny Markley showed up at that railroad station. And we're looking for her, and she's looking for us, and, of course, everybody has now disappeared and there's just this one young couple there, a navy guy and this very pretty blond girl, and Ginny. And she walks over to us, and she says, "You couldn't be the Mercers, could you?" And we said, "Yes we are." And then so help me God, I saw the relief on this woman's face, and I didn't know why. [laughs] I didn't know why. Well they put us up. Her husband was the youngest captain in the Standard Oil tanker fleet. And they put us up, and ... they helped us find a place, you know.

I'll never forget, we had to go down to Modesto, because that's where I was going to train ... at the Naval Air Station there. I was going to move from B-24s to Privateers, we called them. We called the B-24 the PB-4Y, well these were the PB-4Y2's. And they had single tails, instead of double tails, and they were much bigger and heavier. Great bombers. So we went down there and I was training in those, you know, to go to the Pacific. And I came home one day in August, we had this little room, it was a room in ... an old lady's house. And Muriel met me at the door, she was all excited. I had given her a little radio for our first month's anniversary, you know, it was hard to get radios in those days, very hard. And she just heard about this bomb that had been dropped. This atom bomb. I didn't even know what she was talking about. And after she told me, neither of us knew what she was talking about.

So then our training progressed and they moved us ... back to Alameda. And we felt that we had imposed on Ginny and Wally enough and also we were now familiar enough with the area, and with how to get around. We found a place in Oakland and it was one room with a hot plate and a bathroom down the hall. And it was a Swedish lady named Mrs. Reidberg. And so we said, goodbye to Wally and Ginny, and thanked them a lot, and we moved to there. Well I came home one night from Alameda Naval Air Station and Mrs. Reidberg, this sweet, old Swedish lady greeted me at the door. And she said to me, "Well, she's caught." And I said, "Who's caught?" "Your wife." And I said, "What do you mean?" "She's caught." And I said, "What do you mean she's caught?" And she said, "She's pregnant." And I said, so help me, I said "Oh, she's not caught, we're married." [laughs] So that's how I found out Muriel was pregnant, I didn't learn it from a navy doctor or from Muriel or anything else, I learned it from [Mrs. Reidberg]. 'Cause what happened was Muriel didn't know it either. But she was throwing up, see, morning sickness. So this smart old lady who had six kids of her own, she said well, she's caught. [laughs] I said, "She's not caught, we're married."

KP: So your mother in a sense was right.

RM: Yes, yes. That's right, that's right. Especially if your Catholic ... in those days. [laughs]

KP: Going back a little earlier in your service, you had mentioned you had a new group in Jacksonville. I mean this was a whole new group and it sounds like you had a very innocent background. What about the guys around you, particularly in Jacksonville? What was your sense of them?

RM: You know what, we sought each other out. And I think that will happen in any society. And I don't think it has anything to do with race, or religion, or anything else, I think it has everything to do with behavior and social attitudes. I found a guy named Meara, I found a guy named Mooney, I found a guy named, ... I can still see his Irish face but it's [his name] escaped me right now. But we all had the same values, now I don't know whether, you know, there's no secret handshake or anything. And you don't start a great books club, you know, or you don't stand up and say, "Everyone who likes poetry, come over here please." Nothing like that. It's just that you find one another. And also, as I tell you, I can swear with the best of them, the truth is I didn't do it all that much. And we were, I found a bunch of guys with my same values and you know, but now, I must tell you, I didn't think about it. I didn't say, "These are my values." It was just that you found each other.

KP: Someone made the observation, he had been a sailor, but then he had been an officer. He remembered that among the officers there was more bravado, but far less action. But he found that sailors did really hit the town when in port or on pass.

RM: That's right.

KP: Did you observe that?

RM: Yes, I did indeed. And some of the guys, well, Bud O'Toole, who became the youngest judge in the history of the state of Florida, we used to come up from Norfolk when we were down in Norfolk for training. We used to come up on the train on weekends, you know, if you could get a weekend pass. And I got to tell you, that was a hell of a thing. You'd ride all night on the train, I'd get to see Muriel for a day, then ride all the next night to get home. It was crazy, but we were young. Well, the train always stopped at Wilmington, and it would stop for like forty minutes. Well O'Toole used to get off the train at Wilmington, run down the street, and screw a young school teacher who had a house down the street. And then come back again. Yeah, that was it. And another thing, he was a drunk, and he was a fighter, and he was one of the finest, bravest, nicest people I've ever known in my life. But we went to see him when he was the young judge in Fort Lauderdale. And I said, "Gee, I want to see your courtroom, I want to see you in your robe." So we went there, you know. Eleven o'clock at night and he puts on his robe, and he sat up there. And I said, "Okay, Judge O'Toole ... I'm a young sailor, I've been in a bar fight, a young girl's father wants me put in jail for what I just did to her. How are you going to treat me? I'm you pal. I'm you. Here I am." He said, "You're not me, I'm me, and now I'm a judge and your in trouble." [laughs]

KP: How good was your aviation training? How much did you have to learn on the job? You have spoken at length of your training in radar.

RM: Well, we learned an awful lot before, but the great thing was learning on the job. But one of the great pieces of flying, I tell you right now, is air to air firing. My basic training was in PB-Ys. Or we'd take off of the St. John's River. And I fired the bow gun. ... You stood, I'm telling you, it was like Icarus. You stood ... in this bow gun port and there is no plastic over it. And from the waist up, you're out in front of the airplane. And that airplane can only cruise at a hundred miles an hour. But there you stand, thousands of feet above the earth, from the waist up out in the open. And the truth is you can turn those guns around, and you can shoot your own engines out, or shoot your own wings off. Which was something the pilots were always warning you about, you know. [laughs] And then other airplanes would go by towing targets. Well, you know, ... when you get machine gun ammunition, it comes in great rolls that are on belts, you know, on metal belts. And these rolls are like this and they weighed a ton. And you'd take these rolls before you got in the airplane, and you'd dip them in paint. So one guy would have red paint on his bullet tips, and another guy would have green, another with blue paint, and so forth. So they'd tow these targets past you, and you'd shoot at the target. And then they could tell by the colors that were left in the holes, you know, who shot and hit it. ... And I got to tell you, it was great, great fun. And one of the fascinating things that ... I learned, you know, actually life, the whole world is very simple. And I will tell you, at age 71, there is nothing worth a damn in this life that isn't very simple. Firing air to air sounds very daunting. You know it's bad enough that a hunter has to lead a duck, ... but here, not only is the duck moving, but the hunter is moving. And they're moving in three dimensions. The hunter may be going up, down, and sideways as well as forward, while the duck is going up, down, and sideways, and many times if you're overtaking him, appears to be moving backward. Well here's another one of God's little jokes. Things are not what they seem. Longfellow said that, and it's true. It doesn't matter how fast the target airplane is going, or how fast the airplane that's firing at it is going. All that matters is what appears to be the case. If you're overtaking that airplane, and the airplane seems to be moving backwards although it's not, it's going forward at 200 miles an hour, but it seems to be going backwards, you shoot behind it. If it seems to be going forward and up, you shoot up above it, and a little forward. ... You go by apparent motion. The whole rule of aerial gunnery is apparent motion. And I'm telling you, that's a lesson for life.

KP: Did you know that lesson right away, or did you learn it over time?

RM: They taught it to us and then we got up and tried it, and by Golly it worked. And you know one of the things they did that was really fun, you got an enlisted man in dungarees and a chambray shirt and a white hat [that] was treated like royalty. We would go out and shoot skeet.

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

KP: I've been unfortunate, I've always interrupted a real good story.

RM: That's okay. That's no problem. So you're standing there, and here's a guy standing here, he's another enlisted man, but usually an expert, usually a chief or a first class petty officer. And he loads your gun for you, and he puts the thing together, and then all you have to do is shoot. This guy's your caddy. [laughs] ... And he ... even hollers pull, you know, for the guy that's in the

... traps, you know, getting the things going. Well boy, what training we had with the shotgun, to fire at skeet, you know. And they go all every which way, all different directions. Now that gives you the whole idea of lead and swing, which is incredible. And you got to be very good at it, as a matter of fact you had to qualify on the skeet and trap range or you flunked out of gunnery school. And I knew from the time I was a little kid that I was a good shot. I learned that in Boy Scouts with .22 rifles. We used to go in the basement of the Methodist Church and Puggy Williams would teach us how to shoot. And I learned there that I was a good shot. And then I learned out at Rouche's Point that I was a good shot. And I was one of the lucky ones who didn't cry. ... So I knew that.

KP: So in a sense, I get the impression that you were well placed in the navy. You really had been given a specialty that you were good at.

RM: You know, I hate to tell you, but if you came through that war in one piece, physically, and mentally, and emotionally, it was a blast. It was fun. I got to tell you. And there were times that I feared dreadfully for my life. And yet, the funny thing is one time when I knew for certain that I was going to die, I could picture my house on Magie Avenue, the living room with the lights on, and my parents in it. And I pictured Muriel Davis in her house on Grant Avenue in Roselle Park with the lights on, and I could see here there and the dress she was wearing and everything. And the only thing that bothered me was that they didn't know how easy it really was. I really felt that this is very simple and easy. That's when I had completely given up.

KP: What was this close call, what had happened to you?

RM: We lost both engines on one side. And the word was passed [to] bail out. And it was night time, terrible weather, and this big B-24. And they had already jettisoned all of our bombs, and I'm going through on a catwalk this wide, with the bomb doors wide open there. And going back to get my parachute. And the navigator back there was a guy named Roy D. Carter, Ensign Roy D. Carter. And what I didn't know, ... he was a bigger man than I was and he had grabbed my harness in his haste and put it on. He had to squeeze himself into it. And he had his chest pack on. And I grabbed his harness. Now I didn't know this, and I don't know whether he did or didn't, but when I put his harness on, the damned thing, I was loose in it. You know, when that chute opens, Christ, I'd have just gone right out of the damned thing. And I said, "Mr. Carter, I think we got," shouting to him over the roar of the wind and the two remaining engines. I said, "I think you got my harness and I got yours." ... And he looked at me like he'd never seen me before in his life. [laughs] And so I said where are we, can we go, you know? And he said, "I don't know." So I grabbed a headset and I talked into the damned thing. I said, "Are we really supposed to bail out?" And a voice came on and said, "Well wait a minute, wait a minute, we think we got it." And sure enough, a 27 year old mathematics teacher from Altoona, Pennsylvania, William Gaines, landed that damned thing with nothing, but needle, ball, and airspeed. Because the two engines that went out were the engines that also had all of our instruments on them and we're in absolute, you can't see the sky, you can't see the ground, you can't see anything. And he landed us at a strange airport, and we made it. But I will tell you that I was convinced when I put this thing on, that well this is it, you know, and that's was when I could picture those people. ... It's funny, that was one week to the day after we cracked up. We

crashed on our very first operational takeoff. We went through three farms and two hedge rows. The airplane broke right in two. I climbed out of the copilot's window, because it was dark, and I didn't realize that all I had to do was turn around and step out. [laughs] ... I climbed out the copilot's window. There were two, we used to call them gas kings, the guys who work on the gas truck, that were standing in the catwalk, you know. They were not part of our crew. One of them ended up a paraplegic, and the other guy was in the hospital forever. ... But all the rest of us, we made it with cuts and scratches and bruises. First time the Navy ever bought me a drink, and I didn't drink it. I saved it. When they took us to the sick bay, the doctor gave us each a little bottle of scotch, that said, "U.S. Navy" on it, you know. I took mine and kept it as a souvenir. And I put it in my father's china closet about 1946, and when I went to retrieve it, it was gone. [laughs] So somebody ... drank my souvenir.

But you know, that was worse than the other thing, see, ... that happened so fast. What happened was that we had carburetor icing, and, there was a similar accident that happened at Newark airport 20 years, I beg your pardon, LaGuardia Airport, twenty years later. I remember reading about it. ... An Eastern Airlines plane had sat in the cold and drizzle forever, and then finally they were given the go ahead. Well, what they didn't realize was all this icing was building up and when they gave it the juice, the icing kept building, and they were just in the air when it just ... shut down all four engines. And this is what had happened to us. We had been waiting for more than an hour to take off. And we were only going to fly five miles over, or ten miles over to the next airport, Uppotery, because our main runway, a 6,000 foot runway, was being worked on. So we had to use a short runway. So we were going to go to Uppotery, five or ten miles away, land there, and there we would put on all of our fuel, and there they would put on ... all of our bombs and stuff. So that then we could take off on that long runway. Well these two guys who were so badly injured, because they were standing in that same catwalk that a week later I was running across with the bomb doors open when we were in the air, those two guys, they didn't want that crummy ride on the trucks all the way to, the bomb and fuel trucks, all the way over to Uppotery. They said hell, we can get there in five minutes, can we come aboard? And our crew chief said, "Yeah, come on, just stand in the catwalk there." Well we didn't know that this was going to happen to us. But that happened so fast you understand that I didn't have time to. ... But this other thing, there was a little time to reflect and think about mom and dad and Muriel, you know.

KP: Your stories are interesting because, if I had to make a top ten list of things I have learned from the interviews, and I knew a lot about World War II going into the project, one of them has to be the dangers faced by those entering navy and army aviation in this conflict. Not even so much the enemy, but just the sheer nature of training and the quality of aircraft then. I mean you were in harms way and you did not even get close to the Germans.

RM: Well you know when I was training at Chincoteague, you're right, your absolutely right. When I was training at Chincoteague, on Mother's Day, on Memorial Day, and on Father's Day, ... we lost on each of those three weekends we lost one four engine B-24 bomber and eleven men. And every single one of those things happened on a Saturday night. And every single one of those things happened within a space of a month. And it just so happened that my crew and I had the duty on every one of those weekends. In the navy the duty means that you're not assigned to your normal activities. You are assigned to administrative activities. You stay on the base and

you handle things that normally, you know, you're now doing staff work instead of line work, you know. So here we were, and every one of these things went in just short of the main runway in the terrible woods and swamps of Virginia. Chincoteague is an island, and it's famous for wild horses, wild ponies. We used to buzz them. [laughs] The locals didn't like us for doing it. But here we were, so here I am, at that time I guess I was nineteen years old, and we find ourselves out there wading through this swamp water, which we didn't realize, and should have, was full of gasoline and terrible, terrible fire. And we're picking up bodies of fellows that we knew. And some of them had no heads, no arms, no legs, so we couldn't tell, the dog tags were gone because the dog tags are on your neck and if you lose your head it's just. ... I remember that it was a long time before I could eat meat after that. Because these dead bodies that had been consumed in these flames, they smelled just like roast beef, you know. It was just terrible, terrible, terrible. And I have a friend, still a great friend of mine, he lives in Morristown, New Jersey and we keep in touch all the time, Jimmy Mooney. He was a kid from the Bronx. And there was a body, a guy we knew and we could recognize him, and his foot was under one of the engines, you know, those engines weigh a couple of tons. And they couldn't get the body out of there, and somebody said leave it. And Jimmy said, "Get me an ax." And somebody produced an ax and Jimmy just chopped his leg off at the ankle and then we were able to get the body out of there. I could not have done that, but he did it.

KP: It sounds like you had really gotten a chance to see what war does to people, before you even left the United States.

RM: Before I even got over there. Yeah, yeah. Exactly right. We used to see flak from the Channel Islands. ... We did anti-submarine patrol in the Bay of Biscay, the North Sea, the Irish Sea, the Bristol Channel, the English Channel. When the Battle of the Bulge took place, we were assigned to do square pattern in the English Channel, because I've never seen it, the Channel, I've never seen it, I mean we had been over there for quite a while, but I'd never seen it so full of ships. And hospital ships, ... because they were bringing all the ... wounded guys back from the Battle of the Bulge. And we saw a hospital ship torpedoed right beneath our very eyes. It was just dreadful, awful. And we were there to prevent that sort of thing. We were on anti-submarine patrol. And we flew very low. We used to get flak from the Channel Islands: Guernsey and Jersey. And it's funny, those islands gleamed, and they sparkled, and we never understood why until after the war. We went down low over them, they were full of greenhouses. And the sun used to sparkle off the greenhouses. Yeah, it was some experience.

I got back there in 1984, Muriel and I went to England with two friends of ours, and we did a wonderful tour of England. It was just so much fun. We went to Churchill's house, my God, the man was a genius. And we went to Thomas Hardy's house, I love that guy, and I said, I would just like to go to Dunkeswell, to where I was stationed, I'd love to get there. So they said, "Great." So we arrived at Dunkeswell, and the airfield was still there, and it is now being used by Royal Marine paratroopers. And the runway is still there, and the tower, and everything, only our huts are gone, the huts are all gone. So I went in there and here are all these Royal Marines. And I saw these little children, you know, in these uniforms, then I realized, Jesus, that's what I was, I was a little child in this uniform. [laughs] So I told them, I said, you know, that I had been here, I was here 40 years ago with the United States Navy. And they said, "Get the sergeant

major, get the sergeant major.” [British accent] So I didn't know why the hell they wanted to get [the sergeant major]. Well as soon as the sergeant major came out, I realized why. He was a guy my age. And he came over to me. And they were saying, “sergeant major, Mr. Mercer was here 40 years ago,” you know. And he stuck out his hand and he said, “I believe I've met one or two of you blokes before.” [British accent] [laughs] And he said to me, “You've got to get over to the church here, ... you'll see your name there, your name's there.” And I said, “My name is in your church?” And he said, “Yes, you blokes gave the town there first electricity.” And that is true. When we built, believe me, I didn't build, I was an air crewman, but the Seabees built it. And when they built the place, they realized that we were going to need a lot of, because we had six squadrons there, young Joe Kennedy, the first Kennedy, the one that was going to be president, he flew out of Dunkeswell. And he was killed flying out of Dunkeswell.

KP: Was he there when you were there?

RM: He was not there when I was there. He was killed before I got there.

KP: But it sounds like everyone knew about him on the base.

RM: Yes. Now nobody knew then, they knew that his father had been ambassador to Britain, and I don't think we knew that his father was a Nazi sympathizer, I know that now. And I don't think we knew that his father was a terrible anti-Semite. And we certainly didn't know that his father was a womanizer, for God's sakes.

KP: But the Kennedy's were very prominent at that point, a very prominent family.

RM: Yeah, well he had been ambassador to England, embarrassed the hell out of our government with his sympathies. You know it's fascinating, if you've ever read A Man Named Intrepid, I recommend it to you. It's about Wild Bill Donovan, who was the head of the OSS, which went on to become the CIA. In that book I learned that when Franklin Roosevelt recalled Joe Kennedy from the ambassadorship, because he had embarrassed us with his pro-Nazi talk, he sent him a cable and the cable read, “It's time to come home, Joe. The girls of Hollywood are waiting.” [laughs] Isn't that something. Yeah, marvelous. But anyway, we gave them when we built the thing, and this is, see, I'm an old fashioned patriot. ... I'll tell you, the Vietnam War was a terrible problem for me. Our oldest boy went, he didn't burn his draft card, he didn't go to Canada. And I am still, I will never, I will die, and you don't have to wait too long for me to die I can assure you gang, I'm 71, but I will go to my grave never understanding, I mean I just couldn't wrap my mind around what I considered to be completely unpatriotic, completely un-American sentiments. ... I can't now. I'm an intelligent man, I've got a good college education from this fine school, ... and I can't even ... bring myself to even try to understand it. ... My boy went, and we were terribly proud of him. But anyway, that's the kid that was born in the middle of French class. What the hell subject was I on?

KP: You were talking about the church.

RM: ... Oh, what I wanted to tell you was, this was what I'm trying to say. This is the kind of patriot that I am. I really believe that the United States of America is one of the greatest civilizations, and one of the greatest cultures in the history of the world. That we are good, wonderful people. When we built that air station, and again I didn't do it, but Americans did it. We built that air station. And we saw this town where the mayor's wife took in washing, she took in some of my washing, and ... the floor of her kitchen was dirt, and she was the wife of the mayor. We saw this town and we knew that we were going to have six squadrons, and I forget how many men that was, but thousands of men. It takes a lot of men to keep one airplane in the air. We said, Jesus, if we're going to do this, let's include the town. It's not going to cost any more money. So we gave that town their first electricity. We electrified the entire town.

KP: How big was the town?

RM: It was a small English town. You know that's the other thing, I'm a real anglophile. I love the English. Every town is built around a church, which I think is wonderful. And, you know, they're Anglicans, and they didn't care for my pope, you know. The hell with him. They're great people, and they're great Christians. They're wonderful people.

KP: You spoke of your love of Thomas Hardy, and it sounds like before electricity came to this town, it was something out of a Thomas Hardy novel.

RM: ... Yes, exactly right. Exactly right. So that's what we did for them. So, as a result, in the town church they have a book with the name of every single American who served on that air station. And they pray for us every week. I love it. I need those prayers. I'm glad.

KP: That must have been something to see this town that doesn't have electricity in England.

RM: Yeah, yeah.

KP: How often did you get into town?

RM: Well I'd go there to give my laundry to the mayor's wife. And we actually, ... most of the time we went to a town called Bridgewater. And we went to a pub called the Golden Ball. And in 1984, I said to my pal, "How about we go over and see the Golden Ball." Well, the girls didn't want to, the girls, we still called them the girls, except my pal Jeff Campbell, he's just 50 now so we've been friends for a long time even though he's a lot younger than we are. So we left the girls in Exeter, and we drove to Bridgewater. And you know what, the Golden Ball is still there. It's exactly the same, it still has the same sign. We went inside, the still play "Shove Haypenny" over by the fireplace. And I took him out back, because I wanted him to see the window sills, you know the phrase "It's time, gentlemen", it means we're closing up the pub now. And you could drink from twelve noon until two o'clock, and then they'd open again from four until six, then they'd open again from eight until ten. So I took Jeff out back, because I wanted to show him the window sill where we used to put our pints of beer so they'd last us through the two hours that it was closed. [laughs]

KP: Going back a bit, when did you join your crew that you would serve with?

RM: Oh, I love this story. We're at Chincoteague, Virginia, that's where we were all sent. And we were called Crew Eleven. And we just, one day we were there doing general things like KP, and sweep downs, and swab downs, and we weren't organized, and then everyday you'd go and look at this bill [board] to see what new crews had been formed. So hell, I must have been there for a month, and I just got to know a few guys, because every day you're on a different detail and all that kind of stuff. As a matter of fact, I was there on D-Day, May 6 and we were putting down linoleum in what was going to be the officer's club. And we were listening to Don McNeil on the radio, in the morning he had a thing called "The Breakfast Club", and they broke in with this news ... that it was D-Day.

Oh, incidentally, here's another story that I love ... and then I'll get back to the one that I was just starting to tell you, how we got put together as a crew. When we lost those ... three airplanes and 33 men in the space of four or five weeks, they dismissed our commander. The commander of the air station there, the training station. And they brought in a new one. And this guy very dramatically came in one day where we were all working in the officer's club, and we were just assembling the pool tables with the help of a couple of civilians experts. I never realized, boy, a really good pool table, you know, that thing's got to be just perfect. They do that with mason's levels, you know, and boy, it is something, and they weigh a ton. So we're doing all of this, we put down the linoleum and we'd done all the painting and put up the drapes. And this commanding officer, the brand new one after we lost, he came in, and he [said], "Attention!" ... You know, we all stood up and he said, "At ease." And he said, "Have you men done all this work?" [We said,] "Yes sir." [He said,] "This is supposed to be an officer's club?" [We said,] "Yes sir." [We said,] "Well from now on, it's an enlisted man's club. Enjoy it." And he turned around and walked out. And that's what it was. It was our club. ... He knew that morale was down to here, I mean God, we'd just lost all these people. And apparently they blamed it on the commanding officer. And you know what, that's fair. You know, if ... that big ship that ran aground off Nantucket, I went out in my brother's boat to look at that thing. What a mistake. Seventeen miles off course, you know. Well the saying around Nantucket is the only thing that captain is going to have to say on his next job is, "Would you like fries with that?" [laughs] And you know, I think it's fair. I don't care if the captain is sound asleep, as a matter of fact, the **Missouri** ran aground 25 years ago and the captain was sound asleep in his bunk, it was one o'clock in the morning, he had a right to be there. They canned him. The captain is responsible. So that's what they did, they kicked this guy out.

But I loved the new guy. He came in, boy oh boy. Because, you know, we had complained that the place was, a terrible phrase that the navy enlisted men used, it's called "chickenshit." ... That means that they're too strict, you know. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine, Glen Harris, there was a big review, a big investigation, and Glen Harris had the guts to tell the investigating officers that this is the most chickenshit place I've ever been on, and he said, We lost 33 men and officers ... I'll tell you one thing, sir, they all died with their shoes shined and their kerchiefs squared, and their hats properly on." And he told them that the place was chickenshit, and that they were so busy making us march and drill that nobody took care of the engines and the airframes. That's what Glen Harris told them.

KP: It's interesting that you should say that, because one of the things that struck me also was that the Army Air Corps, particularly overseas, but even in the states could be remarkably a remarkably loose military organization that placed very little emphasis on saluting rank, on polishing your shoes, especially once you got out of the initial cadet training. So once you were really flying, it was very informal. But you give the impression that the navy, even once you had gotten your crews that there was still a lot of emphasis on the spit and polish, on following Navy regs, even if your missing ...

RM: Yes, exactly right. Exactly right. Let me tell you how we got to be crews. So we're there, we're all different people. You just get to know one another, but nobody's a crew yet. And everyday you go and look to see, or it may have been once a week you looked at it to see what new crews had formed. And one day we saw the thing that said, "Crew eleven." And underneath it was O'Toole, Fitzpatrick, O'Shea, Kelly, Mercer, Palmer, and I can't remember the other guy, but anyway, and we were crew eleven. But we didn't know who our officers were. The next thing you know we get called into headquarters, and we go in there and they say "Your officers are Lieutenant Gaines, Lieutenant Perkerson, and Ensign Carter, and you are to put on athletic gear and meet them at the baseball diamond at O ten hundred tomorrow. Don't be late." So at O ten hundred tomorrow we got on our athletic gear and we bring our baseball gloves, and here are these three officers standing there. Gaines was, as I told you, a 27 year old math teacher from Altoona, Pennsylvania; Perkerson was an ex-carrier fighter pilot, big tall guy from Atlanta, Georgia, very handsome; and Ensign Carter was a red headed guy, very athletically built, pug nosed and freckled face. And he had been at Pearl Harbor as an enlisted man, and he left, what was the one, oh geez, I was there, the one, he left it when decks were bulkheads and bulkheads [were] decks. The thing turned sideways and it's still there, and I stood on it.

KP: The **Arizona**.

RM: The **Arizona**. Yeah. He left the **Arizona** when decks were bulkheads and bulkheads [were] decks, and that means that ship was exactly on it's side, you know. And anyway, they met us there. And Lieutenant Gaines said, "I'm the captain, and this is Lieutenant (Perkerson?), who's the first officer, and this is our navigator and third officer, Ensign Carter." And he said, "I picked you men, it took me longer for me to pick you men than any other PPC," that's patrol plane commander. He said, "That's because I spent three weeks going through all the GCT's." And he said, "You seven men have the highest GCT's that I found." And he said, "That means you're intelligent, and that's what I expect from you. And now I'm going to find out whether or not you're athletes, so let's play ball." So we played a softball game. [laughs]

KP: Which must have delighted you.

RM: I loved it. I loved it. And I hit that day too, I was good that day. And I loved it. And we became just like that. And we went through the whole training period, and then we went to Norfolk to get our new airplane, and we were going to fly it to England by way of the Canary Islands. And I was there the day, a guy came in the hanger, and he and Lieutenant Gaines had old home week together. And I was there when he asked Bill Gaines if he had his airplane yet,

and Bill says, "Yeah, we're going to leave at the end of the week." And he said, "Well can I borrow it? I want to do an orientation flight with my crew." He said, "Go ahead, take it." And they took it and spun it in. So they sent us to New York, no one knows why, no one knows what happened, they were all killed and our airplane was destroyed.

So they sent our whole crew, the ten of us, three officers and seven men, to New York for a month. And finally we got a berth on the **Queen Mary**, and we went over on the **Queen Mary** with 15,000 paratroopers. And we were the only American sailors on board this thing. So the ... the British Navy, which was running the thing, they took us like that and we ate with them. You know, the 15,000 paratroopers, all they did was stand on line all day long. They'd stood on line for breakfast, and right after breakfast they'd get on line for lunch, and right after lunch they'd get on line for dinner. But we ate with their crew. I stood bridge watch on the **Queen Mary**, it was fabulous.

Oh, among the 15,000 paratroopers was a Special Services Army Division, not a division, I used the wrong term, Special Services Army group. A small group of actors led by Mickey Rooney, a famous young movie star named Bobby Breen, they had Patricia Peardon, who was the star of the Broadway show "Junior Miss" at that time, and two other actresses. There were three women on board the ship with 15,000 paratroopers. [laughs] Now I want to tell you something very interesting, on the sundeck of the **Queen Mary** there was a gigantic cage, I mean an iron cage that went up like this, it was just ... an iron cage, you know, and lattice work like that. And it was completely closed in, and that's where the three women spent all their time everyday. They were up there inside that iron cage. And believe me, they knew what the hell they were doing. [laughs] They put that up. And the paratroopers, a couple of times on the trip over, they hung Mickey Rooney by his heels over the side of the **Queen Mary** right in the middle of the Atlantic. [laughs]

KP: Well paratroopers, particularly before battle, I have read could be a very arrogant lot. It may have something to do with the nature of their training.

RM: Oh, and you know what, they all had these Indian haircuts, you know, where their heads were shaved, except for this tuft in the middle. It was an amazing thing. And I remember I was disillusioned, because I thought Mickey Rooney, a famous actor, you know, he must be very dignified ... and a refined gentleman, you know, until I heard him coming through the door one day saying, "Out of the fucking frying pan into the fucking fryer." [laughs] And I saw him years later, years later I saw him in the Beverly Hills Hotel in the Polo Lounge, I was out there, I shot most of my commercials out there. Believe me, if it wasn't for the advertising business, ... if I ever went to Hollywood it would be in an unpainted motel at the discharge end of the active runway at LAX, you know. But thanks to the advertising business I got to stay in some neat places. Well I saw him there and I was tempted to go over to him and say "Hey, I was over on the **Queen Mary** with you." But I never did it. I wouldn't bother.

KP: What did you think of the British crew of the **Queen Mary**?

RM: They were wonderful people. I tell you, I went over there really not liking the British really all that much, I did love Thomas Hardy, but you know, they were the redcoats. I learned in grade school that they were the redcoats, you know, and we fought the war to divest ourselves of them.
...

KP: Growing up in a Catholic home I would imagine that there is some lingering animosity.

RM: Yeah, yeah, probably there is some of that in there, too. But ... I got over there and I fell in love with them. ... And I really felt the average conversation in an English pub is so far above the average conversation in an American bar. [laughs] And I mean I was living right through, and I could just see the difference, these were literate people, you know, they read books. And it was just marvelous.

KP: Even in this village that had no electricity?

RM: Right. And you know, ... in the Golden Ball in Bridgewater we used to play, "Shove Haypenny," and there was an old man there. And you know, you play for beer, and boy, he was, "Shove Haypenny" is like shuffleboard only it's on a little slate and you really, you know, these half penny's, and the whole idea is to see how near you can get to the line without crossing it. And you can bump another guy. This old guy, he won. Christ, ... he could be drunk all night just off his winnings at "Shove Haypenny." But he told us this story ... of the build up before D-Day, you know. And I can still hear him now, you know, he spoke a marvelous dialect in southeast England. "Rainan idneet," that means it's raining out, isn't it? "Rainan idneet." You know you get to the point where you can understand all this stuff. But this guy would tell us how, "All night and day lad, you should have been here lad. Night and day they rolled through this town. The windows shook, the building shook, the earth was vibrating." [British accent] And he told us about this build up. And he said, "How could they keep it from any spies?" He said, "What did we know, but we knew it was happening. Here they came, tanks and trucks, men by the thousands. Night and day, the din of it, never stopping." [British accent] I mean to hear this guy describe it, all I could think of was Paul Murray Kendall. Poetry. This man was talking poetry. It was beautiful. And he was a common Englishman. Wonderful. Wonderful. Yeah, I think they're great people. They gave us our culture, I think.

KP: It sounds like you had a lot of fun, when you did get passes and leaves in England.

RM: Oh yeah. We would go to London. Now get this, this is nuts. Here we are doing anti-submarine patrol, we'd fly fourteen hours at a stretch out over the North Atlantic. I'm talking about in the dead of winter. If you ever lost an engine, there's no way, you'd be in the drink like that, and you couldn't last twenty seconds in that freezing ocean, I mean we were above the 49th parallel. People don't realize that England is far north. We got the air medal. I hold the air medal. And one reason why that I know of, is because we flew above the 49th parallel, which is just, ... man wasn't meant to fly that far north, because the weather is so dreadful and the ocean is so unforgiving.

KP: Well especially in the planes that you had.

RM: Yeah, that's right. We were taking a high altitude bombers and flying with them a thousand feet off the deck in icing conditions and roaring winds. It was just dreadful. So here we are living like this, and yet every time we got five days leave we'd head straight for London. You know what was happening in London? The buzz bombs. The V-bombs. So I was the cultural director of our crew, you know. [laughs] O'Toole, Fitzpatrick, and especially Kelly, they all wanted to go out and get laid. I was a scared Catholic and I was engaged to Muriel Davis, and that was not for me. We would, oh, I'm just remembering what Kelly used to say, Kelly would say, "All I want is a semi-beautiful, 45 year old woman." "Why is that, John?" "A, because they're grateful, and B, because they think that each one may be their last so they really work like hell at us." [laughs] Now there's a philosopher. Kelly, believe it or not, Kelly became a truck driver after the war. Now doesn't that surprise you? Not at all. Well, we'd go up there and Kelly and O'Toole and O'Shea would go out and get laid, and I would get tickets to the theater.

So I got all of these guys to go to see Anna Nagle, who was a great movie star in those days in Jane Austen's **Emma**. And in the middle of the first act, a V-bomb hit practically next door. And that theater shook, and the plaster came down, and the whole thing, you know. And those actors froze on stage like a tableau, they just stayed there, they just stayed there, indefinitely. And the English audience had let out kind of a whoa, like that, and then there was silence. And everyone stayed in place, the actors in whatever pose they were in, right there. And we just heard all the plaster drop, and this and that, you know. And when they finally decided that was the last one, the actors came to life on the tableau and continued.

KP: As if they had just taken a little freeze.

RM: Right, as if they had all suddenly become catatonic, you know, and then came out of it. Yeah, marvelous. They're great people.

KP: I mean it sounds like you really got quite an education.

RM: No question about it. No question about it. It was wonderful. And you know, the other great thing, see I think we should still have the draft. Because, see I thought that men who went out and got laid and said, "fuck," and "shit," and all the rest of it in every sentence were not good people. And I discovered that they weren't culturally apt, you know, they were inept culturally. [laughs] But they were wonderful people. John Kelly, when we cracked up and that airplane broke in two, Kelly stood on top of that broken, smoking airplane and called muster. And he didn't leave until he got an answer from everybody. Everybody. And then he left, and he ran as far and as fast as the rest of us did. And when he got there, somebody said, "Red, what about the two guys?" And he said, "Holy shit," and he went back and got the two guys. Now you know we thought that airplane was going to break up. ... So you learn a lot about people, and you learn a lot about-- we were not well off in Roselle Park, New Jersey, but ... I didn't associate with any roughnecks, you know. I didn't associate with people who used double negatives, I didn't know any. And ... I didn't think much of people like that. And I found out that a lot of double negative people are damned good people.

KP: It is interesting that you observed this, because it is one of the things that I have noticed that made your generation very unique. During the war, a lot of people, especially men, were literally thrown together with individuals they never would have come into contact with under normal circumstances.

RM: Exactly. Exactly right. Yeah. Well Red Kelly is a perfect example, and I love the guy, just super guy. And it was, I tell you, if you lived through it and came out okay it was a wonderful experience.

RA: This is going back a little bit, but I was curious, when exactly did you arrive in England?

RM: I arrived in England in October of 1944.

RA: So you were there when the Battle of the Bulge occurred?

RM: Yes indeed.

RA: What was the reaction of a sudden Nazi offensive again, after everyone thought the war was coming to an end?

RM: Well you know, one of the things I'll never forget was listening to the radio, and you know the British ... Armed Services Radio did the news at dictation speed. "General Rommel, R-roger, O-oscar, M-mike," and it went on painfully like this. They would spell out any difficult word. And you know, this was for some soldier, or sailor, or marine anywhere to copy down so he could copy down so that he can tell, you know, the guys who didn't have radios and everything all about. The news at dictation speed. Well I got to tell you, it was painful to listen to that and hear the inroads that the Germans were making. And they had a show that they called "Mark up the Map." It is time for "Mark up the Map," and we had a map on our quonset hut wall. And we would put these crayon marks, you know, wherever the hell they said. And boy we watched this bulge coming and coming and coming. And my oldest brother Donald, he was a Captain in the Eighth Division Field Artillery. He went from D-Day plus three to the Russians. And boy I was worried about him. And we were worried about, we thought maybe these guys were going to win the war. It scared the hell out of us. And I think maybe every quonset hut we had on that base, everybody, did "Mark up the Map," I mean we used to do it desultory prior to that. But boy, once this thing happened, ... we were doing it for real. And we couldn't wait for "Mark up the Map" to come on. Yeah, we were worried.

And also we were worried, because we hadn't seen any German fighters on our patrols. We patrolled the Bay of Biscay, you know, and someone asked me did I ever fire guns in anger? Yes, I did, every time in the Bay of Biscay and south of Ireland, every time we saw a Spanish fishing vessel we would make runs on it. Now we did not strafe them. We fired across their bows. And we came as close as we could, and we did it repeatedly until they turned around and went south. Because those bastards were refueling German submarines. And they were doing it south of Ireland too, so we did the same thing up there.

KP: This strafing, was this authorized?

RM: We were ordered to do that.

KP: You were ordered to do that.

RM: Oh yeah. Before we went out on patrol we were briefed, and this is an interesting thing about officers and enlisted men and about the breakdown of command, ... when you had a mission, and the missions usually took place, you know, you'd take off at two o'clock in the morning and you'd fly for twelve hours or you'd take off at four in the morning and you'd fly for twelve hours, fourteen hours actually, you'd be typically, you be ten or twelve hours on patrol, but you'd need one, or two, or three hours to get there and the same thing to come back. Well, we'd go into this big room and it looked just like the rooms you saw in the movies, it was an amphitheater, seats, and there was a stage, and the entire wall was a map of Europe. It was fantastic. Huge map of Europe. And an officer would come out with a big long pointer, and some of the pointers had chalk on the end of them. And they would show us the fronts, and give us the weather briefing, then they'd show us where the enemy was and all that sort of thing. And suddenly, at the time of the Bulge, they started showing fighter sightings, you know. And they were getting closer and closer to us. So we worried about that, too. Well then ... after that briefing, and always the last thing was the weather, and we always waited patiently for that. Because we knew any time we went out, as a matter of fact, the worse the weather was, the more important it was, because bad weather is good submarine weather, so the more important it was for us to go out on patrol. So ... we knew that usually we were going to have to divert, that meant that we had to go to another airfield. And you hated to go to another airfield, because a lot of them didn't have landing systems, you know, ILS, and ... radar, and all that kind of stuff. ... So you always worry about that. So then after that we'd go and have breakfast. And we would eat with the pilots. The enlisted men and the three officers sat down together. And for breakfast ... [tape runs out]

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

[tape resume in the middle of a story]

RM: One day I was leaving class, and he said, "Mr. Mercer, so I stopped and walked back to him. He said, "You pulled a shitty on me today. You weren't prepared." [laughs] And I said, "Professor Turner, I'm sorry. I won't let that happen again." He said, "Don't." What a great guy. And another time I picked him up in my battered old 1933 Plymouth. It was a very cold, snowy day, and I picked him up and let him off at the French House. He said to me, "Mr. Mercer, that's another thing, the professors always called us mister, I don't know if they still do that, but they always called us mister. [laughs] But anyway, he said to me, "Mr. Mercer, the French club is meeting at 4:30 this afternoon. We're holding elections, why don't you come and get elected?" [laughs] What a neat guy. Now one other story I want to tell you is about an English teacher named Billy Twiss. He had an eight o'clock class and it met in the basement of the Engineering building, right over here. And he taught English literature from Beowulf to Thomas Hardy. Well now you know, I'd leave ... the radio station at eleven or twelve o'clock at night, get

back to the trailer and still have my studies to do, and still need dinner, I hadn't had dinner. So I'd work until three or four in the morning, then I'd go to Billy Twiss eight o'clock class three mornings a week. And sometimes, well, to tell you the truth, I slept my way from Beowulf to Thomas Hardy, that's pretty good sleep. Well, examination time came, and it was Christmas vacation preceding the exams, is that still the way it is?

KP: No, unfortunately not. Or fortunately.

RM: Well, we had Christmas vacation preceding the exams. And I went into W-CTC, we were on the ... third floor of the People's Bank building here on George Street, and I went in there as I always did after school, I told you, I worked there full-time, went to school full-time. That's another thing, I'd be at the damned radio station forever, and still I'd have all these studies and everything to do, so I went in there and Jeannie Burns, the receptionist and secretary said, "Mr. Howe wants to see you." He was the owner of the radio station. He was a Rutgers graduate, he was like 37-38 years old. I was the third guy that he had hired for that station, I'll tell you that story too, which was funny. And he said, "Richard, you're fired from now until examinations." I said "Fired?" He said, "You're fired from now until examinations. After examinations are over, you're rehired." And I said, "Jim, I don't understand this." He said "A friend of yours came to see me today." I said "Who's that?" He said, "Billy Twiss." And I said, "Professor Twiss?" He said, "Yes. He came to see me." He said, "He thinks you're the brightest kid in his class and you're flunking." He said, "You've been sleeping through all the classes. And he said, "He found out that you worked here, and he remembered me, I was one of his favorite students, and he came here to tell me that you're in deep trouble. And if you flunk, you're going to lose the G.I. Bill and you'll be out on your ass. So get home and start studying." I said, "I can't afford this." He said, "I'll pay you anyway, get the hell out of here." Rutgers University-- a professor.

Now, let me tell you what I did. I went home and I studied for I forget how long, a week, two weeks, whatever it is, and I made an outline from Beowulf to Thomas Hardy. And I made Muriel ask me all these questions every night, you know. I had to learn an entire semesters English literature in a week and a half, whatever it was. So I came to the gymnasium, where the exam was held, do they still hold exams in the old gym?

KP: Not that often.

RM: Well it was a sea, it would be a sea of chairs. I mean you've never seen so many one armed chairs, you know, in your life. A sea of those things. And I drew three blue books, and I took the examination thing and I put it down like that, didn't even look at it. And on the inside blue covers of those three books, I did an outline of English literature from Beowulf to Thomas Hardy, then I turned the exam over. I must have spent the first hour doing that outline. And I spent the next two hours answering all the questions. Desolve. I'm walking down College Avenue, it's snowing, and I just parked my ... car somewhere, and I pass the English House, and I hear, "Mr. Mercer!" And I turn and it's Billy Twiss. "Come here. I want to talk to you." And I thought oh my God, I'm out of school, this is the end of everything. So I go inside and I sit down in his crummy office, I mean the thing, there were teetering piles of books, you know. What a

dear man. Oh, I forgot to tell you the best thing about him. ... You know I told you about where we used to put our beer outside the Golden Ball, well there was a window in the basement there of the Engineering building, and there were steel stairs that you'd go up and then you'd go down to the basement to his class. Well Billy would come to school smoking a cigar in the morning and he would put his cigar on that ledge, and he'd teach his class, then he'd come out and take the cigar off and relight it. And he didn't know whether a dog had pede on it, or whether it had been rained on. It didn't make any difference to him, or whether some hobo had had a few puffs, you know. [laughs] What a dear man. So he called me in, and I'm terrified. He said, "Sit down." So I sat down. And he said, "I've given you an A+, and you've passed by the skin of your teeth." He said, "Without the plus, you don't make it. And I want you to know that I saw what you did on the inside of those blue book covers." And he said, "I graded you on that too." He said, "If you had made a mistake on that outline, you'd be in trouble."

KP: So it sounds like you had a tough time in terms of keeping your grades up.

RM: It was tough. ... I did not graduate **cum laude** or anything like that. No, it was tough.

KP: But it is also working 40 hours a week.

RM: Yeah, you know, I almost died. I got double lobar pneumonia, they had me in the infirmary here. And I was lost for three or four days. They didn't let Muriel come to see me or anything. I was out of it. My only memory of three or four days of that period was a nurse sticking me in the fanny with a needle a couple of times a day. And it's just a dim memory. When I graduated I weighed a 118 pounds. It was tough. But I didn't know it was tough. We had a wonderful time.

KP: How did you get the job with W-CTC?

RM: Oh, I worked in the Miles Shoe Store here on George Street. The average shoe cost four dollars, women's shoes. I worked in that shoe store. And ... I went there looking for a job. And the man who ran the store was a Jewish guy named Fyvdlant. And I went in and I said, it was a busy Saturday morning, you know, here he's got all these women, and I said, "I'd like to see the manager." He said, "You're talking to him." I said, "Sir, my name is Richard Mercer, and I would like to help you sell more Miles shoes." He says, "Have you ever sold shoes before?" And I said, "No sir." He said, "You want to be a porter?" And I said, "What's a porter, sir?" He said, "You clean the store, sweep up, all that stuff." I said you got it, let's do it. So I signed on there ... and that's what I did. And I went in everyday after school and I cleaned that store. Well I found out that shoe stores are the dustiest places in the world. Absolutely, incorrigibly dusty. And my God, my eyes would water and everything.

Meanwhile, I was trying to do what they call, "learn the wall." There were a couple of nice guys there, shoe salesmen, who said, "You want to sell?" I said, "Yeah." [They said,] "Learn the wall." So they told me how to learn it. Every shoe was marked by color, size, and type. And a successful shoe salesman, when a lady comes in and says, "I'd like a brown and white sports pump with a three inch heel." You can't go over to the wall and look and look, you know, you got to go straight to the spot. Here's that sucker, boom, you know. So that's what I did.

Meanwhile, I worked like hell around the store. One day I'm down in the cellar, and I'm sweeping the cellar, and Mr. Fyvdant comes down and says, "Mercer, I think you're ready." And he handed me a shoe horn and then he shook my hand. He said, "Go upstairs and sell." Isn't that funny? So that's how I became a shoe salesman. I made 35 cents an hour, and I got a penny for every dollars worth of shoes that I sold. Now the average shoe in that store was like four bucks, so you realize that for me to make another dollar I had to sell 100 dollars worth of shoes. I mean Jesus, it was just murder.

Well, when I was there, my brother Donald with NBC wrote me a note and said look at this. And inside was the clipping that he had cut out of a magazine called Broadcasting, it was a trade magazine. And it said that Major James L. Howe, recently retired from the United States Army had applied for a building permit for a radio station in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Well Christ, I finished the shoe store one afternoon and I went straight to the Chamber of Commerce and I said, "Do you know where I can find a Major James L. Howe?" And they said, "Oh yeah, he's over in Johnny Lynch's office." It's a lawyers office over on such and such a place. So I went over there and I said, "I'm looking for Major James Howe." [They said,] "Oh, he's at 105 Carol Place." I said, "Thank you." So I went to 105 Carol Place. I was looking for Carol Place on the way in here this morning, I don't think it exists anymore. But here was this old house on Carol Place. And I went up and knocked on the door, and a very pretty lady with a southern accent, I mean lady, hell she was 35, I guess she must have been 35, she was pretty. Terrific figure, pretty face, and a wonderful southern drawl. She said, "Yes, may ah help you." [Southern accent] And I said, "I'd like to see Major James L. Howe." "Well, he's here hon, you just come on in." So she brought me in, and the place was full of packing cases, no furniture, you know. And he did have a desk and a chair. So I went in and he said, "What can I do for you?" And I said, "I'd like to go to work for you." [He said,] "Doing what?" I said, "Well, I'd like to be an announcer, a news writer." I said, ... you know, I wanted to have a career in radio. And he said, "For Christ sakes, I don't even have my construction permit yet. All I've done is apply for it." And he said, "I've discovered that every airline in the United States flies over this god damned town, I don't think I'll ever be able to put up a tower. I don't need anybody." So I said okay.

So I went home that night and I listened to the radio. And I discovered, taking copious notes, that the average radio drama, half hour drama, had ten or twelve scenes in it, that they started out fairly short, got longer in the middle, and then wound up fairly short. So I sat down and I wrote a program called "Blue Plate Special," and I forget what the other program was that I wrote. They were dreadful. [laughs] And I was up all night long. Then I wrote a brochure to sell these radio programs, that you would leave with a merchant to make them want to buy. And the next morning, I skipped my eight o'clock class and my nine o'clock class, and I went to 105 Carol Place. And I knocked on the door, and this time Jim (Howe?) answered. And he said, "What can I do for you?" And I said, "I just wanted to talk to you." He said, "Aren't you the kid who was in here yesterday?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "For Christ sakes, I told you I don't need anybody, I don't have any help, I don't even have my construction permit yet." And I said, "Well, I just wanted to leave this with you." So I handed him this big manilla envelope. And he said, "What's this?" I said, "Well, ... I just want to show you what I can do." So he said alright. So he took it, so I left.

Well Jim Howe was one of those people who could whistle this way. I was just about to turn the corner on George Street when I hear a [whistle]. [laughs] You know, here he is. "Come back here!" So I came back. And he said, "Come on in." So I sat there while he finished reading this thing. And when he finished he put it down and he said, "You ever do this before?" I said, "Never." He said, "Well, it's lousy, but it reminds me of the first one I ever did." He said, "You got a job-- 75 cents an hour, and that's it." He said, "Be in here tomorrow. I don't know what the hell I'm going to do with you, but come in here tomorrow." So I came in and ... I wrote letters and brochures to get people to buy stock in the company. And he allowed me to buy, stock was 100 dollars a share, 100 dollars and 50 cents, and he allowed me to buy one share. And I borrowed the 100 dollars and 50 cents from my brother. And incidentally, I paid him back. So I bought the one share of stock. And I was the third guy that he had hired. And we went on the air: December 12, 1946. And I'll never forget it as long as I live. It was a cold, snowy, damp day in New Brunswick. And it was one of the happiest days of my life.

KP: Well radio was still in its golden era.

RM: It was the biggest thing in American home entertainment.

KP: I mean in the 1930s and 1940s it was radio.

RM: Yeah. That's right. My picture was in Targum, because they said, "W-CTC goes on the air with full Rutgers staff," and they show Jim Howe, Bob Bell, I don't remember whether Nat was with us or not yet, and Dick Mercer. But everyone who had anything to do with Rutgers, ... we were all pictured there. And I had gone to the first, the very first Targum meeting, which was held in, I don't mean Targum, the very first W-RSU meeting, which was held in the Targum building. And a guy named Tink Rothen, Marshall V. Rothen, who was graduate class of '39, who was a producer with McCann-Erickson in New York, out of the goodness of his heart as an alumnus, he came over here to help us get started as student radio. And I remember I went to that first meeting. And then a week later, I'm with W-CTC and my picture is in the paper and all that sort of thing. It was very exciting.

KP: You mentioned that you wrote a lot of copy. What other roles did you have?

RM: I was a copywriter, a news writer, a news announcer, a commercial announcer, an actor, and I was the only guy, I was the only traffic manager. I was also traffic manager. ... Our sales manager was a handsome young ex-air force captain named Ed Derryberry. And I was the only traffic manager that Derryberry didn't try to take to bed, because I was the only male traffic manager they ever had. [laughs] All the other traffic managers, Derryberry was banging. [laughs] I don't know how I got the job without banging Ed Derryberry, but I did.

KP: Actually, Bill Bauer, I don't know if you know him, but he remembers Nathan, I mean he remembers Uncle Nate, Uncle Shoe.

RM: Oh yeah. Who is that?

KP: Nathan Shoehalter. Bill Bauer remembered his children's program.

RM: Oh yes. That's right, he was Uncle Shoe. That's right. Oh, and there's a guy with CBS ... that was with us just about the time I was leaving. I'm trying to remember his name. Harvey Hauptman.

KP: Yeah.

RM: Yeah, he's still with CBS.

KP: I have been told that people who started at CTC went on to bigger and better things, and you are a prime example of this trend.

RM: Oh yeah. ... Well, let's see. Bob Bell was with us and we had a guy who went on to be a big guy with ABC, as a matter of fact he was the White House Correspondent for ABC, I'm trying to remember his name. Terrific guy. Wonderful guy. Beautiful voice. In those days you had to have a good voice to be on radio. Today anybody can be on it.

RA: Well, this does not particularly relate to W-CTC, but did you ever run into anyone at Rutgers who you had earlier met from your time in the service, who was here on the G.I. Bill?

RM: Yes. I'm trying to remember his name now. He was in my squadron, not in my crew, but in my squadron in England. And he played football here. And it's funny, I can't remember his name. But anybody else from the service, huh?

RA: Yeah.

RM: No, I never ran into a single guy that I knew in the navy here, except that one guy, and his name is--I tell you, you don't want to get to be 71, because your brain turns to oatmeal. [laughs]

KP: I don't know, I hope my memory is as good as yours when I'm 71. How did you decide on a career in advertising? It sounds like CTC played a role in the decision making process.

RM: Well, you know, I was determined to be in show business. And as I told you, I found out that the merchants in town didn't give a hoot whether I read their stuff or not, but everybody wanted me to write their stuff. And I also, you know, I had known since second grade that I was a pretty good writer, but I discovered that I was really very good at this. And I also had learned that you could make a lot of money as a copywriter with an advertising agency in New York City. And here I had a wife and a baby, so I went into New York on, you know, at Christmas vacation and ... as I told you, I got a good job. And ... that's what did it, it was just pragmatism. ... I was desperately in love with Muriel Davis and I wanted to support her, and give her a good life.

KP: It sounds like if you had not been married, you might have really tried to pursue that show biz. Of course, life is full of the big if's.

RM: That's true, but you know what? I would rather have spent my life with Muriel Davis than been a trillionaire. There's just no question about that. I've just, you know, I've been blessed with something magical. I've never remembered what Muriel looks like, not since the day I met her. I can never remember what she looks like. And every time I see her again it's like the first time. And I'm just thrilled to look at her. You know, I can describe my car, my airplane, I can't describe Muriel. [laughs]

KP: It is a question I meant to ask earlier, but do you think your service experience made you understand advertising better? Did any of that have an impact?

RM: It made me understand people better. And I think it made me a better human being. Now only God knows what kind of a human being I am, but I think it made me a better human being, because I, well, the first thing I learned from the service was honor and integrity. I learned to tell the truth. And I mean, I had always been truthful, but I mean, for example, I sat at a fight in the Navy in boot camp and the referee was dreadful. And Donny Pierce, and my brother, and I all agreed he was dreadful. Desolve.

That night we're all taking showers and in comes the referee. And he knew that the crowd hated him, they booed him like hell, you know. And he says to me, "Were you at the fight?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "What did you think of the way I refereed?" I said, "I thought it was fine." And Donny Pierce turned to me and he said, "Are you out of your mind?" I said, "What?" He said, "You sat there and agreed with your brother and me that this guy was lousy." He said, "What the hell is wrong with you?" And I said, "I'm trying to be nice." He said, "You're trying to be nice?" He said, "You're not helping him, you're hurting him, and you're hurting yourself, because you're being dishonest." I never forgot that. And I've never done a thing like that to this day. Never again.

KP: But it must have been hard with clients who had big accounts.

RM: Well, I was lucky, because I was the copywriter and all I had to do was sit there and let the account men handle it, you know. But I also, I also learned how to tell the truth without hurting people's feelings, you know. So what I would say is, like I tell you, when I came in a situations again like that guy who had been a lousy referee, I would say, "What we're talking about here is a situation. ... We're not talking about people, we're talking about something that happened. And about the events surrounding it." And that's the way I, you know, I would say to our clients, "You know, what we have here is a business problem. And the truth is that your opinion and my opinion don't count in this case. What matters is will this thing do the job? And that is more important than what either of us think about it. Will this do the job that we're trying to get done?" And I think I learned that in the navy. And I think I learned it from that one specific thing, where Donny Pierce-- I've never forgotten that. I saw Donny Pierce at our 50th high school reunion, and I reminded him of that. He didn't even remember it.

KP: I had seen a press clipping of one of your public talks and it mentioned that you had been in charge of the Burger King campaign which came out with the slogan: "Hold the pickles, hold the

lettuce." Before this interview, I mentioned to my class that I was going to be interviewing someone who had written this slogan. I should also add that the slogan is stuck in my head and I still remember the initial campaign.

RM: Isn't that something.

KP: And I should also add for the record that my wife likes Burger King over McDonalds. [laughs] You should be pleased to know that she actually thinks that it's better. Would you view that campaign as one of your big achievements or is there anything that you look back on and say that was a really big ad.

RM: That is the most famous thing I ever did, and the most successful thing I ever did. And I wrote that on April 1, 1974 in my study in Mendham, New Jersey. And the reason I know that is that in those days I used to take a percentage off of my income tax for my study that I used to work in. So my accountant said, "Well, you better have evidence of every piece of work that you've ever done." So it was a Sunday, April 1st was a Sunday, and I wrote, "Have it your way. Have it your way. Have it your way at Burger King." I decided that was a piece of American slang, "have it your way," that I could do something with. I thought that if I could take a piece of the language and turn it around and make it mean something good, because "have it your way," and my clients were quick to tell me this, so were the account guys, "have it your way" is something you say when you're teed off. I still can't get used to today, people even on television say, "pissed off." ... I am so affronted and offended by that. That's terrible language, but they do ... today, we've got a different culture. So you say have it your way when, "Alright, have it your way," but I said if we can take this phrase and turn it around and make it mean something good, how wonderful that would be. So that's why I wrote, "Have it your way." Then I wrote, "Hold the pickles, add more lettuce. Special orders don't upset us. All we ask is that you let us, serve it your way." Well the client bought the whole thing after I made this big presentation. They loved it. But they immediately said, "Forget that, add more lettuce, it's hold the pickle, hold the lettuce too, we're not adding anything." [laughs] That was the only change they made.

Now the reason I know that it was April 1st, April 1st was a very big day in my life. It was the day my twin brother and I went into the Navy in nineteen whatever the hell it was, '43 I guess. And it was the day that I wrote "Have it your way." And the reason I know that is that I wrote it on the yellow paper I that I had in my typewriter, when I finished it I wrote April 1, 1974. Well, a couple of years into the campaign an outfit, I can't remember whether it was, it was Burger Chef. Burger Chef sued Burger King and BBDO and said that we had stolen the slogan from them. So I found myself in federal court in Miami testifying. And here's all the clients there. And I got to tell you I got a big kick out of this, because clients don't know how hard, clients think that we're a bunch of drunks and loafers, and that we don't work hard, see. So this sheet of paper with the date on it in my handwriting is evidence. And the judge said, "What day was April 1, 1974, Mr. Mercer?" A federal judge. And I said, "Oh, I don't know your honor." And I didn't, cross my heart. So he directed the court clerk to find out what day it was. And the court clerk went through one of these magic calendars and said, "That was a Sunday." So here are all my clients sitting up there and the judge says to me, "A Sunday, is that unusual for you to be working on a Sunday, Mr. Mercer?" I said, "No sir, not in our business." I said, "We work lunch

hours, nights, weekends, holidays, vacations, we're in a deadline business, we're in a service business. We work very hard and we work all the time. There's the clients sitting up there." Well, the judge through the case out of court, because what happened was they had opened a salad bar in one store in Springfield, Ohio, oh, they wanted to know had I ever been to Springfield, Ohio? The answer is no. Never been there, never even heard of it. Didn't know there was a Springfield. So in the local paper, a weekly paper in Springfield, Ohio, they said, "Come to our salad bar and have it any way you like it." Then they had [an]other ad that said, "Come to our salad bar and have it your own way." Well I had never seen those ads, and neither of them was, "have it your way." I mean I like to think that I'm such a good copywriter that if I had got to "have it your own way," I would have realized that wait a minute, get the "own" out of there and make it the American expression, "have it your way." ... So that's the whole story of that. But it was the most successful campaign they ever had, to this day it is their most successful advertising campaign. And my friend Jeff Campbell was the assistant advertising manager at the time. He was the guy I told you about that I went to England with.

KP: I remember the campaign as a teenager, but also because I have read stories in the Times about Burger King and how messed up their advertising was after this campaign and the differing approaches taken by a succession of chief executives.

RM: Then the "Manhandlers" was a big success for Campbell's Soup. We took thirteen soups that were either going south or were flat, and we turned them around.

KP: Were there any campaigns or ideas that you thought: this would really be it, but that in the end it did not live up to expectations? Either on the part of the client or with the public? Were there any strategies that did not work?

RM: Oh, any failures. Oh I'm sure I had plenty of failures.

KP: Do any stick out?

RM: I was the pall bearer for the Ban underarm deodorant thing.

KP: Oh yeah, I remember that.

RM: We had the account and we were losing it. So they put me on the account to save it. I was the pall bearer, I didn't save it. So I can't even remember what I did, it couldn't have been very distinguished. [laughs] I do remember that I worked my tail off night and day to no avail. But I think there are times when, you know, if the king doesn't want to be pleased, the king cannot be pleased. And the client is the king. And I think there's a point where the client has decided, "I want a new agency," and you can't please him, because he does not wish to be pleased.

KP: Some people praise advertising and there are other people who have been very critical of advertising. And one of the criticisms of advertising is that it sells products that no one really needs.

RM: Yeah.

KP: Whereas other people have said it plays this really crucial way in defining who Americans are, in part in positive ways. Have you thought about that, especially now having retired?

RM: Yes, I have thought about it a lot. And you know, the first or second year after my retirement, I taught here at Rutgers for a whole year. Two semesters. And one of the happiest years of my life, and then Governor Florio cut down the budgets and all that kind of stuff, so I was called a visiting part-time lecturer, and they got rid of a whole bunch of us, at least they got rid of me, I know that. But I loved it, and I got good marks from the students I'm happy to tell you. Well I told them that we can't, and I really believe this, so, I tell you, I gave this a lot of thought, as a matter of fact teaching right after retirement taught me more than I taught the students, I think. Because I gave this a lot of thought. I was amazed at the work I did, I worked my ass off for 1400 dollars a semester. I worked night and day. But I loved it, loved every minute of it. So having given it a lot of thought, I am convinced that advertising cannot make any cultural changes and it can't sell anything that isn't needed. That all advertising can do is reflect our society. And if there is a cultural trend, ... for example a trend away from regular size cigarettes to king sized cigarettes. I was doing the advertising for Lucky Strike, for years I did it. Jack Benny, you know. We couldn't stem that, it was a cultural change. And advertising didn't create it, and advertising couldn't stop it. And I watched the American Tobacco Company, our client, spend millions and millions of dollars trying to stop it and they couldn't.

And as far as selling things that people don't really need, I am convinced, and this is what I told my students, that in the advertising business if you don't solve a problem, you don't make a sale. When I was a kid, Proctor & Gamble and their advertising agency came out with a brand new product called (Teel?). It was a liquid dentifrice. It came in a triangular bottle, it flowed like molasses, it tasted like peppermint candy. They spent millions on this terrific new idea. And they couldn't sell it. It didn't solve a problem. Nobody needed a liquid dentifrice that flowed like molasses, that was red, and tasted like peppermint candy, and filled your mouth with pink soap suds. Nobody needed it. And the bottle was glass and it could fall on the tile floor and break and the whole business. And you couldn't get the stuff to stay on your toothbrush, I mean forget it. Alright, 25 years later Crest comes along, same outfit, same agency, same millions of dollars, overnight success, "look ma, no cavities." It solved a problem.

Now you say to me what about products like Pepsi Cola, well I did the first Pepsi Cola campaign, "Now it's Pepsi for those who think young." Now I want to tell you who wrote that line. Charles H. Brower, a charter trustee of Rutgers for whom the Brower Commons was named. He wrote the line, but I wrote every single lyric and every single commercial for that. And I'll be honest with you, I didn't like the line, but when the Chairman of the Board comes to you and says, "Richard, Charlie talked this way, I don't know why I talk this way, but this is the way he talked." [Raspy voice] "Richard, I've got a line here. I want you to use this for Pepsi Cola. We've got a meeting with them next week, do something good with it." ... In spite of my lesson in the navy, you know, I said he didn't ask me what I thought of it, so I don't have to give him that navy lesson, you know. He just said do it. Well he's the chairman so I went off and I did it. And it was fun. It was a very successful campaign. But with a product like that, you're still solving a

problem, because Pepsi Cola and Coca Cola, when you drink that stuff you're making a statement about yourself, because most of the time you drink it out of the bottle or out of the can. So the problem we were solving was we were helping people to express how they feel about themselves. Now I'll tell you, that first Charlie Brower campaign, he was a brilliant man, they're still doing that same advertising, because what it said was: "Now it's Pepsi for people who think young." They're still selling Pepsi Cola to people who think young. "You've got a lot to live, Pepsi's got a lot to give," boy what a smash that was. But it's still the same strategy, the same objective and strategy. And that's what you do. It's like a necktie, what the hell good [is it]? A necktie doesn't keep you warm. [laughs] What the hell? But it's a statement about yourself, you know.

Alright, here is a statement I made about myself this morning, I hope to get over to see Fred Hill today and by God I'm wearing my baseball tie. So it's solving that problem. I think that advertising also makes democracy possible, and I explained this to the kids. Under our system the newspapers, the magazines, the radio stations, all of these things that deliver the news to us, and deliver analysis of the news, and deliver political opinion and social opinion, all of these things, they are all made possible by advertising. As a matter of fact I think it's the basis, one part of the basis, part of the foundation of our democracy. I mean Christ, there wasn't any advertising in communist Russia. I really think that all of these newspapers, and magazines, and everything that come in that we have, advertising is what makes them possible. If there were no advertising in The New York Times, you'd pay twelve dollars for the Sunday Times. Twelve bucks.

KP: I know, because there are a few, a handful of magazines that do not take advertising and they are prohibitively expensive.

RM: Yeah. That's right. Yeah.

KP: You mentioned you had worked on some cigarette accounts. How did you feel about this? And you had been a smoker yourself, it sounds like partly as a result of the war.

RM: Well, I'm very lucky and I'll tell you why I was very lucky. I went off the Lucky Strike account on November 12, 1962. Now how do I know that. Well, because November 4, 1962 was ... I beg your pardon, November 11, 1962 was a Sunday, and there was a football game at the Polo Grounds between the New York Giants and the St. Louis Cardinals. And I was co-chairman of the committee that made that Ray Wietecha Day, he was the Giant's offensive center. We gave him a brand new Dodge automobile, and a truckload of television sets and you name it. And the next day I went in to work and we were all called to a meeting and they told us that today is the day that this company reorganizes. We used to have separate print creative department and a separate broadcast creative department. I was one of the biggies in the broadcast creative department. Now they were combining both departments, they should have done that from the very beginning but they didn't. And I went off the Pepsi Cola account that day, off the Pepsi Cola account and the Lucky Strike account that day. And I had a pack of cigarettes in my pocket and I took them out and threw them away, and that's the last I ever smoked. ... Because when you went over to American Tobacco Company everybody smoked, as

though they were afraid to be caught not smoking. And I was one of them, I guess. So that's how I remember that.

KP: So you did not even bother finishing the pack.

RM: No. So I want to take you back now to 1962. We didn't know then. There had been an article in Readers Digest titled "Cancer by the carton," but that was it. And we scoffed at that. And the reason I remember that is I was writing the commercials for the Dodgers broadcast by the good old redhead, Red Barber. And they had asked me to do a carton campaign so I had the redhead doing the thing, "Hey friends, you want a cigarette that tastes better? You buy yourself a carton of Lucky Strike. We call it the Convincer Carton, you just smoke one carton and if you ever pick up another cigarette after that, we'll be very much surprised." Well ... they said to get rid of the "Convincer Carton," because it sounds like "Cancer by the carton." That's how neurotic clients get to be. But that was it, so we didn't know anything about that. So I went off the business and I stopped smoking. Why did I stop smoking? Well, ... I just felt that smoking wasn't good. I .. [have] always been an athletic nut, you know, I ran three miles a day, five days a week, for 27 years. I've since had two corneal transplants, I got a donated cornea in each eye that came from the eye bank that some dear departed person, and my eyesight is wonderful, I mean I pass the flight test every two years. ... So I ran, ... I was an athletic guy, but they asked me after I had this done, and the doctor said, "We don't want you running. We don't want you to fall down. ... These things are sewn in there." So I was really, I've always been an athletic nut, you know. I wanted to be an athlete, I wanted to be a ballplayer. My brother made it, but I didn't. Well, so that's why I quit. I mean I didn't say, "Oh, cancer!" We didn't know anything about it. We didn't believe it either.

KP: What was your response though when the surgeon general's report came out?

RM: Oh I was amazed. And you know what, when they said we were not allowed to advertise anymore, hell, I was still working for BBDO and you know, I couldn't claim, "Well my hands are clean. I don't do cigarette advertising." Bologna. I was a profit sharer, and I owned stock and all that kind of stuff. ... So I thought, boy, that's going to hurt our business. It didn't hurt our business one damned bit when we lost the ability to advertise it on broadcast, you know. Today I'm amused when I come here, I see all this, "This is a smoke-free building" and all that kind of stuff. I frankly think that if people want to smoke, I think the government ought to stay the hell out of it, that's what I honestly think. I mean why don't we ban automobiles? Christ, we kill more people in automobiles every year. Why don't we ban booze. Boy, booze kills people left and right. I think we're supposed to be responsible for ourselves. And when I go to, of course, now you can't smoke on the airlines at all, but it used to be that they would say to me "Smoking or non-smoking?" I would say, "I don't smoke, but I don't complain either." And that's true, I don't. And if one of you guys wanted to light up right now, it wouldn't bother me one damned bit. So that's the way I feel about it. I mean if I were in the liquor business should I lose sleep, because so many people are dying of cirrhosis, because there are so many bowery bums? No way. You can't do it, you know. And I'll tell you, I'm anti-gun control. I don't own a gun. I don't own a gun, but I got a lot of friends who are hunters, and I really think that human behavior is-- ... my twin brother is one of the smartest people I've ever known, I jut love the guy, I admire

him so much. He won the Polski Award for humanitarianism. It's a coveted award out in Cleveland. And my brother had a big job, he's always doing pro bono things, you know, while he was chairman. And they put him on a school committee in Akron, a public school committee. And he went to a meeting there. And he talked to, you know, they had a lot of racial problems. And he said, "I want to tell all of you, blacks and whites, that I'm going to say a lot of things tonight. We're going to have a free and open discussion. And there are going to be a lot of things that some of you people will say I am a racist." So he said, "I want to tell you what I am. I'm a behaviorist. I judge people by their behavior, and not by their race." And he said, "If you want to mark me down as a behaviorist, go right ahead, because that's what I am." And that's the way he talked. And that's the way I feel, I think that behavior is what counts. And I think that if someone wants to smoke, let them smoke. If someone wants to drink, let them drink. But I expect, or if they want to drive, let them drive, but I expect that their behavior will be such that it's not going to hurt other people. It's that simple.

KP: You mentioned political advertising, did you ever do any political advertising?

RM: Yes. BBDO did the advertising for Eisenhower's presidency, they did it before I got there for Tom Dewey. [laughs] They flunked with Tom Dewey, they went for Eisenhower. And they also did it for ... Dewey, Eisenhower, oh, we had a Republican Senator, Clifford P. Case from Rahway, New Jersey.

KP: Oh yes, Rutgers.

RM: Rutgers. Yeah. He was a great friend of Charlie Brower's. We did his advertising too, and I worked on that.

KP: How did you like political advertising?

RM: It was fun to do. Yeah, I thought it was fun to do. Yeah, I liked it. I guess the most fun I ever had was working on the Burger King account. But I had a lot of fun, and you know, then I did a lot of freelance stuff. And some of the things that I did nobody ever heard of, but I thought they were wonderful. I did, for a bakery in Cincinnati, I got a hundred dollars for the job, I was just a kid. But I think it was one of the best jingles I ever wrote. It went, let me see if I can remember, the name of the product was V-10 Protein Bread, and my campaign was "Kachung, you just can't wait till the toast pops up, when it's V-10 [Protein Bread.] ...

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

RM: ... the best things I ever wrote, and nobody ever heard of it. The bakery was happy with it.

KP: You moved from the Democratic party to the Republican party and you are very forthright about it.

RM: Yes I did.

KP: I can partly explain it from having myself grown up in Morris County: Morris County is just Republican, almost everybody is a Republican. But it seems like there was an ideological shift from a New Deal Democrat to a ...

RM: Yes, there was. I was a Roosevelt, Truman, Stevenson, Acheson, Kennedy Democrat. Balls to the wall as fighter pilots say, that's when you put the throttle full forward. Balls to the wall. And I was, and a sincere one. And part of it was my heritage. My father and my mother, they were wonderful Democrats. Great people. But I got angry with the Great Society. I think we have what amounts to an entire third world country in our 40 major cities right now, of shiftless, mindless, lawless people. And it's because they've been living without having to lift a finger for damned near sixty years. And I think what we have done to those people is dreadful, it's unconscionable. I think that if we wanted to hold them down and guarantee that they would never partake of American freedom, we couldn't have figured out a better plan than the Democratic plan of the last sixty years. Now hey, I could be wrong, but that's what I think. ... And you know, I started work in New York in 1949, and when my kids were ten or twelve years old I used to say to them, my two boys, we have two girls and two boys, well it was the two boys, I'd say to them, "Meet me at the Port Authority bus terminal at 5:30 and we'll go to the ball game." And if I'm not there, because you know, you can't just leave my business like that, it's not a nine to five business. I said, "If I'm not there, just wait by the information booth." Well I did that. No problem. Today you try and leave a twelve year old by the information booth of the Port Authority bus terminal for even five minutes, that kid will be raped, murdered, kidnapped, God knows what. And I blame it on what we've done. We've robbed people of a shot at the American way. And I know that the intentions were good, but you know.

Lyndon Johnson, he drove me straight out of the Democratic party. And because I think he lied. I mean we can't have guns and butter, we cannot. I mean in wartime you can get away with it, but in wartime you put in price controls and all that kind of stuff. And the other thing is that we just took a whole bunch of people and practically told them that you're hopeless. Here, I have to give you money everyday because you can't earn it yourself. Here, it's yours. Yeah, don't worry about it, you don't have to do anything. Just do it, take it. So that's where I am.

RA: For your ad campaigns, did you ever find any specific place that you found inspiration? A certain memory, a person, or anything, or was it just regular creativity that did it?

RM: Here's something I told my students about advertising. You know, we all hear that necessity is the mother of invention, well that is true in advertising. We always have something that we want to accomplish, and that's what controls the creativity. I'll tell you how "Have it your way" was dreamed up. "Have it your way" was dreamed up, because we had fast food, and McDonalds started it. And they started on one very simple, even here necessity is the mother of invention, and they had one very interesting statistic, they knew that when Americans go out to eat for lunch, 50 percent of the time they order hamburger. They also knew that the problem that Americans had with this was that it took too damned long to get your hamburger. So on those two statistics they started the whole fast food business, right. We discovered something else. We discovered that now that the business was mature, there was a new problem. They couldn't get it the way they wanted it. If you see, McDonalds makes all their hamburgers ahead of time and

they stack them up on a grill or under these infrared lights, you know. So if you asked them [to] hold the pickle, hold the lettuce, or no tomato, or whatever, leave off the sauce, they have to go make one from scratch, and you have to wait, you know. They send you to a waiting room with a magazine. So we discovered that Burger King, because of their chain broiler, they build these things like on an assembly line. They're all made fresh anyway. And it takes just as long for that chain to go through whether it has cheese on it or not, or pickle on it or not. So that's what we did. That's where our ideas come from. But, now here's the next part. See, everybody says necessity is the mother of invention, including us in advertising. We say what has to be said, that's necessity. But invention is not a bastard child. Invention has a father, and the father is ambition. The need to say what has to be said, but the ambition to say it exceedingly well. That's what I told my kids here at Rutgers, and that's what I believe.

KP: Did you ever help a client particularly define a product where he did not see the potential of a product? Like for example, you mentioned with Campbell's Soup that they had these twelve soups that were not going anywhere, they were stagnant and declining.

RM: That's a very good example. Let me tell you what happened. They did, an outfit called Shepherd Research Incorporated did a study for us and for our client, Campbell Soup up in the Boston area. They were trying to find out how women served canned soup to their husbands. Now it so happened that the area we were in was a blue collar area. Men who did hard work for a living. Now I got to take you back now to the late 1950s when we did this. Now is a different era. The purchasing agent of the American home then was mom. Well today mom is out working, you know, so dad does a lot of the buying. But we had it easy, our target was mother. She was the purchasing agent of the American home. She did all the cooking. But our society has changed so, and now we have single families and all that kind of stuff. But back in those days it was mom. She cared for her family, and she cared for her husband who was the bread winner. Mom stayed home, raised the kids, cooked, cleaned, dad went out and brought in the money. ... This research company discovered that when we asked these women: "Now tell us how you use canned soup." ... You wouldn't say Campbell's soup, you'd say canned soup because you don't want them to bias the thing. "How do you use it in feeding your husband?" Well they would always answer in terms of feeding their children. And this frustrated the research company, and it frustrated us and our client. So we set out to find out why the hell they wouldn't answer the question, you know. They were like politicians. They didn't answer the question. So we went out and we discovered that these blue collar wives never even considered canned soup as something that you could feed to a hard working man. Because these guys wore blue collars, they came home tired and hungry, and by God they needed real food. They didn't consider canned soup as real food.

So we got to thinking about it, and a man in our company, an account executive named Two E. Norris, he's now dead, he was a marine fighter pilot in World War II, he's a Princeton graduate, and his name was Ernest Eden Norris, Ernest Eden Norris, so everybody called him Two-E. Two-E Norris. He said wait a minute, now we've got twelve or thirteen soups that are either flat or going down, down south on the sales chart. And he said, "They're full of garnish." Garnish is what people in the soup business call meat and potatoes, vegetables, and stuff that's in soup. These things are full of garnish, and one of them was bean with bacon, which was one of my

favorite Campbell's soups. A good soup. I mean the whole thing, you could stand a spoon up in it, you know. ... So we said let's see if we can get these blue collar wives to use this stuff. So I went home, you know what, I did all my best work at home, because all day long you're at meetings, and the telephone rings. So I always, my kids were used to me, as a matter of fact they wondered if I was really a success, because they wondered what kind of success is that when after dinner every night you grab your briefcase and you go upstairs to your study and you work until midnight. But that's when I did all my writing, because during the day the phone rang, and there were meetings, and all that. So I went home and I wrote a whole bunch of things. And one of the things I wrote down was: "How do you feed a hungry man?" ... First I wrote: "How do you feed a hard working man?" then I wrote: "How do you feed a hungry man?" Then I thought, geez, how do you handle a hungry man? I liked the alliteration, you know. So I wrote: "How do you handle a hungry man?" Then I said to myself, what can we call these damned soups? Thirteen soups, we ought to give them a name. And I thought well, what do they do? ... Well, we could call them the hunger killers, and then suddenly I had here, "How do you handle a hungry man?" and I said, "The Manhandlers." And again I said, my God, you take something that means something awful and you give it a new meaning. It's going to stick in people's minds. Well sure enough, I wrote "How do you handle a hungry man? The Manhandlers."

And I got Frankie Lane to sing this for me, you know, there's a story in that. The Manhandlers. "The Campbell's Soups that have what it takes to handle a hungry man." I decided I wanted this thing to be like his famous record "Mule Train." Now this young fellow never heard of Frankie Lane, but believe me, Frankie Lane was a big famous guy and he had a robust voice. A real baritone. So I wrote this song. ... And the first commercial I did was called "Rock Building." We shot it up at Pound Ridge, New York. Here's this guy building a "Stone Wall" I called it, here's this guy building a stone wall with rocks, you know. And we used all kind of people like that. So anyway, here it was, "How do you handle a hungry man? The Manhandlers." And we went to the client and we took these twelve soups down, and we poured them out. Now these guys know their soups, but we poured them out. Every one of these thirteen soups, poured them out in the bowls in their test kitchen. And we showed them. Look at all the garnish. These things are loaded. And we can tell blue collar wives. "Well how are you going to do it?" And I said something that scared the hell out of them. You know clients always tell you that they want something new, as soon as you bring it to them it scares the hell out of them. They think it's a communist plot, you know. [laughs] But here's what I told them, I said, "100 years," and at that time we had a hundred years, exactly a hundred. I said, "100 years of Campbell's Soup advertising and this will be the first Campbell Soup advertising that has no mommies and babies in it. All it's going to be is big, tough, strong, hard working men." It scared the hell out of them. But they let us do it. And they let us do it in a test market. And the test market was Minneapolis. And the sales went right through the roof, so they let us do it all over the world.

And that gave rise a few years later to Campbell's Chunky Soups. That was it. But I'll tell you something, marketers talk about positioning, the consumer knows how to position products much better than advertising and marketing people do. When we brought out Chunky Soup, the whole idea of Chunky Soup was to get canned soup at the dinner table. There's a figure that has never changed in 100 years and you know, I've been out of the business eight years now so maybe it has changed since then, but not the first 100 years. And that is that 40 percent of all soup servings at

home are homemade soup. That's it. But the housewife, again I'm out of it now, because we don't have housewives anymore, damn few of them. But the housewife at that time felt that the only soup that was really soup was homemade soup. But that the gold standard for canned soups was Campbell's Soup. That was the best. But the only soup that appeared at the dinner table was homemade. Canned soups were at lunch with a sandwich, see. Well, when we did Campbell's Chunky Soups we said these soups are so good, these soups are going on the dinner table. And we advertised them. All my commercials, my first commercials had people sitting at the dinner table with candle light and everything else, eating this Chunky Soup. Well we went out in the test market, and it was so good we went all over the United States. We rolled out immediately and sales were fantastic. It was the most successful new product introduction in the history of Campbell's Soups Company, still is. But guess what when we did our return research, what we found out? We found out this great dinner table soup was going straight to lunch with the sandwich. [laughs] The housewife knew where it belonged. But we did, in the case of the Manhandlers, take another look at their product. And we showed them that it could do this job.

KP: I remember the campaign very well-- if I remember correctly, it did not have the traditional Campbell's Soup label.

RM: That's right. We put the Manhandlers on it, the same logo that we used from the TV commercials we put on the can, and it's still on the can. I wanted to put that on my tombstone. The Manhandlers. [laughs] Also on my tombstone, you could put, "Okay, God, have it your way." [laughs]

KP: That must have been for the client: "What! You are going to take off the Campbell's Soup label." Was that an issue with them?

RM: No, because it was the same label, we just sniped it. We call that a snipe when you put something like on a billboard or on a magazine cover. No, they let us do it. Yeah. It's still on there. No, what bothered the hell out of them was the no kids. I had to resell and resell and resell, they always wanted to get mommies and babies in there. And I had to explain to them, for Christ sakes, you're going to ruin this whole thing.

RA: What made you switch to SSC&B advertising after spending 27 years at BBDO?

RM: I was on the board of directors and I wasn't having any fun. And we had a new president, his name was Jim Jordan. He was a younger man than I was, and he was making my life miserable. And I went home and I told Muriel, and she said, "Why don't you go somewhere else?" And a guy named John Bergen had left four or five years earlier, gone to SSC&B, and he had always after me to come there. And I said, "Honey, you know, I want to stay with BBDO for the rest of my life." And she said, "But you're not happy." And I said, "Yeah." I said, I keep thinking maybe Jordan will quit, go somewhere else and start his own agency, which he eventually did. And she said, "Why don't you give John Bergen a call." So I gave Bergen a call, and he said, "Do I want you?," you know. And he doubled my salary. So I left. That was it. And I mean doubled my salary, and I was already making a hell of a lot of money. Yeah.

RA: And then with McCann-Erickson?

RM: Oh, I was at SSC&B for about eight years and we got a client in Europe that was a conflict with our Mennen account. And among other things I was the executive vice president of the creative department there. ... Among other things I was the top creative guy on Mennen. So Mennen announced that they were going to leave the agency, pull their business. Well SSC&B is a sister agency of McCann-Erickson. I don't know whether agencies are male or female. [laughs] I think they're probably female, because their clients are always screwing them. [laughs] We were the sister agency of McCann-Erickson, and they're all part of the Interpublic Group of Companies. So Phil Geyer, who was the head of the Interpublic Group of Companies heard that Mennen was going to leave us, because of the conflict. So he called up the president of Mennen and he said, "Hey look, go to another agency. I don't blame you. But go to an Interpublic agency, then you've got some continuity." And Hal Dannenberg, the president of Mennen, said, "I don't have any continuity unless I've got the two top people on my account, Dick Mercer on the creative, and Gunnar Wilmot on the account, on the business side." And Geyer said, "You got it." So they moved me over there. It was literally one block away, I just went up the street to a block. And I went there and lived happily ever after. And then, I could have stayed there forever, ... I liked them and they liked me a whole lot. But I discovered that no matter what meeting I went to, I was the oldest person in the room. And that didn't bother me, but what bothered me was that so often I had to sit there and bite my tongue while young people reinvented the wheel. And I think young people should be allowed to reinvent the wheel. And I said to Muriel, "You know, I'm really not having the fun anymore that I used to have. And I have to hold my tongue, because I'm always three or four steps ahead of these kids, and I don't think that's fair to them. And it's not fair to me, because I'm not happy holding my tongue." And I said, "Geez, I got everything we need." And she's a peach. You know for 40 years she said to me "Hey I'm ready to go back to the trailer camp any time you want, pal." She was wonderful. So that's why I left. I've had a wonderful life. ... I tell you, if I drop dead in the next five minutes, don't feel sorry for me. I have been so fortunate. I have just been so fortunate.

KP: Had your wife ever thought of going to college while she stayed at the trailer camp? She had gone to secretarial school.

RM: ... Yeah, that's right. Geez, I told you a lot about myself didn't I?

KP: Yes, I know.

RM: I'll be damned.

KP: We could not have asked these many questions without the survey.

RM: You know I was thinking, I certainly was not a war hero, I don't have the Congressional Medal of Honor or anything. I didn't think you guys would even be interested in me. I just put down what I put down. I'm glad you were, this was fun.

KP: I'm glad, we're enjoying it a lot.

RM: But Muriel went to, what is the most famous secretarial school in the world? She went to that.

KP: Katherine Gibbs.

RM: Katherine Gibbs. Right. In East Orange. And she loved it. And she was the world's best secretary. And when we were in the trailer camp, many times she read the books that I wrote cogent reviews of for my English professors. Because hell, I was working night and day. And she's just a neat, she's the brightest woman I've ever known. Yeah, college would have been great for her, but her dad was a brakeman on the Jersey Central freight trains, and you know, it was just out of the question. But we've had a wonderful life and she's just a peach. And she's extremely well read, and she loves the theater, and she's an interior decorator. My God, she made our house look like a palace. And she's just amazing what she can do, and still doing. Yeah, she's great.

RA: You had said in 1984 you got back to Dunkeswell, England.

RM: Yes.

RA: Have you ever had an opportunity to go down near NAS Jacksonville at all?

RM: I've flown over it, on our way down. ... And the first time I flew over it, oh, there's two good stories here. First time I flew over it, I was talking to Jacksonville Center, because I always file an instrument flight plan and they hand you on from one controller to another. And I was talking to Jacksonville Center and I said, "Is the designator for Jacksonville Naval Air Station still NIP?" And they said, "Yes it is." And I said, "Well I trained there 50 years ago, and that was it, dah dit dit dit dah dah dit." And he said, "I'll vector you right over it if you'd like to see it again." I said, "Please do." He said, "Fly a heading of one nine five." I said, "One nine five on the heading," he took me right over that sucker. So I was glad to see it.

Then Chincoteague, Virginia, where I trained in B-24's, that is now called Wallop's Island and NASA has a station there. So a few years ago, ... I'm an instrument rated pilot and in my instrument approach plates, Chincoteague is down there. And it says PPO, which means prior permission only, you can't go in there without prior permission. But it gave a phone number so I called the phone number. And I said, "I have a Moony Two O One, ... I trained at Chincoteague in navy B-24's in 1943. ... And it said, official business only, PPO, "Official Business Only." And I said, "I don't have any business there, but I said I own Moony Two O One and ... I'd love to fly down there and land my airplane there again and walk around again, just for old time's sake to see the place where I trained in the navy air corps." And he said, "That sounds like official business to me." [laughs] So I flew down there, and NASA had a shot up then, and all the people were there. It was a rainy day. I shot an instrument approach, came in there, rolled over, and shut down, you know. I got out in the rain and walked around the whole damned place. Went inside, here were some people watching the NASA shot on radar. I told them what my business was, Christ, they dropped everything, forgot ... [what they were doing] and talked to me about it.

What was it like? ... The only thing I remember, I said, "Is there a gin mill called the Pony Pines still here?" "Oh you bet there is." ... And I said, "Holy mackerel." I said, "I used to drag my friends out of there." [laughs] Yeah, so I've been back to a couple of places.

KP: You are now a member of a number of veterans organizations, when did you join them?

RM: Am I? I don't ...

KP: Well you mentioned that you were a member of the Air Force Association, Fleet Air Wing, and Liberator Club.

RM: Oh yes, that I am. That's right. I belong to all three of those things, but I don't go to any meetings. I just belong to them.

KP: And you never joined the American Legion or VFW?

RM: No. No. And as a young Democrat I hated the American Legion. And I just thought the VFW was a bunch of cranky old men. Today, I find my positions are very much in line with the American Legion and the VFW. [laughs] But I want to tell you something that I learned in journalism school at Rutgers. Dr. Merwin. Great guy. Wonderful professor. He taught us that Walter Lippmann said that a man, now understand, we were then a men's school ... and I only went to school here with one woman, and I'll tell you about her in a minute. He said, Walter Lippmann, who was one of the great political columnists in the newspaper business in the United States, he was a world famous man, he told us that Walter Lippmann said, "That a man moves in his life from left, through center, to right. And that a man becomes conservative at that point in life when he has something to conserve." And I can honestly say that happened to me. You know, it took me 25 years to make 40,000 dollars a year, now that doesn't sound like much to you, but I want to tell you, when I got to \$40,000 dollars that was a lot of money. I mean we had surplus funds for the first time in our life. And you know what, the government took half of it away from me. My income tax rate was 50 percent when I got to make 40,000 dollars a year. And that's when I fell out of love with the Democratic party, and Lyndon Johnson, and the whole gang. And I mean 25 years of busting my ass. I did not inherit my money. I was not a Kennedy. I wasn't a Rockefeller. I earned every bit of it. So that's what happened to me. That's part of it.

And then there were philosophical things, and that's it. And ... I resent what I think are the cultural changes. You know what I did? Last May, I flew out to Austin, Texas and I went to the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. Because I wanted to do research for an article. October 3rd was the 30th anniversary of the Immigration Act of 1965. On October 3, 1965, Lyndon Johnson signed this act into law standing at the foot of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. And he said, "It is with a happy heart that I sign this into law today. This act will not change the face of America. This act will not change our culture. It will not change the way we live. The way we get along with one another." [Texas accent] This is what he said. Here it is 30 years later and I think it caused absolute chaos. I went down to Austin, Texas because I was convinced, and I wanted to write a magazine article. My conviction was the previous year, 1964, he had signed the Civil Rights law, which I think is a wonderful and great thing. And I applauded it, and still

applaud it. But he said, and I've got the quotations, because I went to the library, it's a very fascinating thing. When you go to the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and you know, I had to get a card and all that kind of stuff. ... It's right on the campus of the University of Texas and it looked to me like only the football players were allowed to work there. They have these great big guys, they're built like you, do you play football?

RA: No.

RM: Well you look like a football player. And believe me, that's a compliment in my opinion. Well they had young fellows like you, and they do one fetch an hour. Fifteen minutes after the hour. So you sit there, they assign you with a desk and everything, and you have to check your briefcase, and empty your pockets and everything because apparently there's a lot of thievery. There's another cultural change that I blame on Lyndon Johnson. Nobody ever, you didn't steal a paper clip here at Rutgers, for God sakes when I went to school. I don't know what they're doing now. We didn't have campus police and all that crap. But I'm convinced, and I have the quotes, four times Lyndon Johnson said, various different versions of it. He said, "I have lost the Democratic party in the south for three generations to come." [Texas accent] Another time he said, "I have destroyed half of the Democratic party." He said all these things. Well I am convinced that Lyndon Johnson ... and Nicholas Katzenbach, his Attorney General, Emmanuel Celler, congressman from New York, very liberal, Bobby Kennedy, and Teddy Kennedy, that those five men plotted to put over the Immigration Act of 1965, which defeated the acts of '21 and '24. Are you a history teacher? Am I wrong or right so far? I'm not asking whether they plotted, '21 and '24 right? Which was, that was the Act of National Origins. That was the law of national origins, wherein every year our immigrants came in in proportion to their representation [in] our existing American society. If we were twelve percent Irish, twelve percent Irish came in, if we were twenty percent English, twenty percent English came in, if we were fifteen percent German, fifteen percent German came in, and so on. They turned, now our heritage, this is fact and if I'm wrong tell me, our real heritage here in the United States of America, our historic heritage is Western European. That's our heritage. They turned that immigration not down to a trickle, but down to a drop in the bucket. And they opened up third world immigration like Niagara Falls. And I think these guys plotted to do that to save the Democratic party, because they believed that all these new third world immigrants would go straight to our inner cities. And the people in the inner cities would tell them hey, become a Democrat, they're the people who are going to take care of you right now, do that, see.

So I went down there to Austin, Texas, and I got all the accreditation and everything, and I spent all this time down there. And every quarter, fifteen minutes after every hour they would do a fetch. And what I wanted to see was all the correspondence pertaining to immigration ... among these five men. Well I got it. And all of the letters were nothing. Those files had been rifled, and they discarded everything. The only letters I got between these five men were things like, "Dear Mr. President: Thank you so much for the two pens you sent me, with which you signed H.R. 3943. The two constituents I gave them to are thrilled. Best, Manny." And so it went. All I got was drivel. There was nothing there. So I went to my, they gave me a research adviser. I went to this guy, a very nice man, this incidentally, it's funny down there, when they say Lyndon Johnson, they say it the way the pope says Jesus Christ. [laughs] Their heads bow. It's

incredible, incredible. So I went to this guy and I said, "Say, was President Johnson too early in the presidency to be one of those fellows that recorded all of his telephone conversations?" He said, "Oh, not at all. We have all the tapes here." And I said, "Could I have those?" He said, "They're not available until the year 2010." So I came away without an article. But I'm convinced that I'm right, and I'm convinced that they did it for purely political reasons to rebuild their party, and that he was lying again when he said it won't change the face of America, it has changed the face of America over 30 years. But, of course, all of this is recent stuff, that had nothing to do with my leaving the Democratic party back then.

As a matter of fact, that's another thing. They waited, he was a brilliant man, Lyndon Johnson was a brilliant man, and they waited until America was asleep at the switch. You know there were, for many years liberals like Emmanuel Celler, and he was a flaming liberal, wanted to change this thing. A lot of Italian people wanted to change this thing, because it was really northwestern Europe that was our heritage, you know. And then there were tons of people who were against it, so it never, but we were asleep at the switch, why? Well, in 1964 and '65 we had riots in the cities, we had riots on college campuses, we were shell shocked. So they just slipped this sucker right through, nobody paid any attention. I mean the American Legion didn't fight it, all the traditional people who had always fought this thing, we were all asleep at the switch. We were shell shocked. We turned ourselves inside out, and we should have. The civil rights movement turned this country upside down, and it should have been turned upside down. And it was the right thing to do. But now we were worn out, ... and we didn't pay attention. I'm convinced that they knew that and they took advantage of it. I thought I had a super article. And I thought I would get it published in ... the National Review or in The American Spectator. I would send it to The New York Times Magazine, but I knew god damned well they would never print it. But that's it. But I must say I learned a lot. No experience is wasted. I learned a lot in those couple of days down there in that library.

KP: As my students know, I always encourage archival research, so they can relate to that.

RM: Primary research, ... it is a thrill. You know, even finding those stupid letters was a thrill.

KP: Yeah, the problem with politicians after the invention of the telephone is that they increasingly use the telephone and they do not put it on paper.

RM: Yeah.

KP: Because I can relate my own experience doing archival research that the best, the golden years for doing archival research are really 1900 to about 1950, because then they write everything down, but they also type it, so whereas in earlier years they wrote a lot down, you also have to decipher their script.

RM: Yeah, yeah.

RA: You said you had written a book and were trying to get it published.

RM: Yes.

RA: I was curious what type of book you had written?

RM: The title of the book is Marbles in the Soup. And the subtitle is "The toil, trouble, boil, and bubble of advertising." And I'm very proud of the book. It is really my memoirs, well you can't publish a memoir if you're not a famous person and I'm not a famous person, but the things I'm writing about are famous. I write about the famous Campbell's Soup episode where they accused us of false and misleading advertising, because we put clear glass marbles in the soup, and they said, that we did that to make it look like it had more garnish, more meat and potatoes and pasta in it than it had. That isn't true. We did that to let you see what was in there, because the garnish sinks to the bottom of the bowl. So I tell that whole story in it, and it's a fascinating story, because there was a group of law students at Georgetown University who, we were all free and clear, we had signed a consent decree and we're on our way when these students blew the whistle and said oh no, we want a complete review of this case. They took this thing up to the Supreme Court, where it was finally thrown out. But I tell that whole story, and I name the names of the people and the students and the whole damned thing, and it's a very exciting story. And a year ago this past October, Advertising Age, the most important magazine in the industry, gave me the cover story, a full cover, the whole front cover. Had a big can, a red and white can of soup and it said on [it], "Marbles in the Soup," and then they took three chapters, and they printed excerpts from the three chapters. And I think the book is terrific, and the young woman here, I assume she's a young woman, I've never met her or seen her, she sent it back to me and said, that a memoir is a very difficult thing to pull off if you're not famous. But she said, the prose, quote this, she said, "The prose flows impressively throughout and it's a fascinating book, but we don't think it's right for our list."

And since then I've sent it to other editors. You say, how the hell do you get to editors, you know I don't have an agent, you know what I do? I read recent books that I like, and the author always thanks his wife, and his brother-in-law, and my indispensable agent, Adam Bellow. So I call up Adam Bellow at the Free Press. And I said to him, "Hey, I'm talking to you from the island of Nantucket." He said, "That's very interesting, What can I do for you?" And I said, "Well, I've written a book, I'm retired from the advertising business, here's the title of it, and it tells a terrific story, and I just wondered if you would allow me to send it to you?" He said, "Sure, send it along." So I sent it along. And I got a letter back from another editor who said, "Adam Bellow asked me to read this and ... I think it's wonderful, but it's not right for our list. Why don't you send it to Andrew Stewart over at Simon & Schuster." So I sent it to Andrew Stewart, and he had it for three months, and finally he called me up and he said, "You know, everyone around here had read this thing." He said, "We love it, but you need a smaller press." He said, "This wouldn't generate enough money for us." So I said, "Well how do I get a smaller press?" He said, "Why don't you have an agent?" I said, "I don't know any." He said, "Well here's three names, and three phone numbers." And he gave me the names of these three agents. And I called them and every one of them said, "Why didn't Andrew Stewart want to take this at Simon & Schuster?" And I said, [that] he said I needed a smaller press. And they said, "Well, he's right, and there's not enough money in a smaller press for us. Thank you. Good-bye." So that's where I am. But I love the book and I'm very proud of it. And I really think it's very interesting. And I wrote it, because of Rutgers University. My students used to hang around after class just to ask

me: "What is it really like? What is it like, when you work for an agency?" They asked me so many questions about that, I went home and I said, "Muriel, I'm going to write a book." One that will answer all of the questions these kids have. And that's what I did. It's 60,000 plus words, twelve chapters. It's all complete, you know. It breaks my heart. I'd like to get it published before I die. Now I don't figure I'm going to die next week, but at my age you never know.

KP: Yes.

RA: I had two questions going back to your service in England.

RM: Yes.

RA: One of them was, on your PB-4Y, did your crew have nose art or paint bombs for the missions you went on?

RM: In the navy air force, in our squadrons, we got assigned different airplanes every mission. So no one, the army air force, you had your own airplane and you kept it, every time we went out, we went out in a different airplane. We did have a few enterprising crew chiefs, a crew chief is, what is meant by that is the chief mechanic on the ground who takes care of the airplane. They all took care of the same airplane, so they'd get to know it real well. Some of them drew some pretty ladies on them and all that kind of stuff. But none of ours had names or anything like that. We'd just say, "What plane are we flying today?" And they'd say, "Eleven thirty one." And we'd say, "Geez, that's the one we lost the engine in last time, wasn't it?" ... [laughs]

RA: And also I was curious about on the base and among the British population, what the reaction was when the Germans surrendered?

RM: Oh, it was fabulous. And I went into London on V-E night. It was absolutely incredible. The cheering, and there were tears of joy, there was laughter, there was fun, everybody was friends, it was just amazing. Remarkable. Wonderful. The joy, I mean really, it was just so great. And, you know, all I knew was great, I'm going to go home and get married. ... And boy, my pilot, he said to me, "Well (Perkerson?) was the guy who really spoke to me, he said, "Hey Merc, I hear you're gonna write your girl, tell her you're gonna get married. Hell man, you don't know when we're gonna get out of here. You know, they're not gonna send us home tomorrow or anything like that." See, so I figured, and I went by the scuttlebutt, and I said, "I'd be home on June 15th. Well I got home on June 21st and the wedding was scheduled for the 24th. So here I am in Norfolk on the 21st and I had my dress blues tailor made, which was against regulations, but hell, for my wedding. I had tailor made dress blues made overnight in Norfolk. And, now what was the original question?

RA: The reaction on the base or among the people.

RM: Oh, so yeah. I was so thrilled, because I was going to go home and get married. And it was wonderful to see humanity so happy. I mean the British were always nice to us and we were always nice to them, and we got along extremely well, but the happiness there was remarkable.

And we were all so happy. It was just great. And London was, oh it was glorious. And especially for those people, ... this meant no more buzz bombs, no more V-bombs. Just marvelous.

KP: I'm out of questions at this point, but is there something we forgot to ask you about? About the war or your postwar years, I mean in some ways we have only scratched the surface on advertising.

RM: All I can tell you is that Rutgers was wonderful to us. And I told you about Billy (Twiss?), and I hope that there are still Billy (Twiss's?) teaching here. I don't know. I can't imagine frankly, a professor today going to that trouble. I mean he walked all the way downtown, to the People's Bank building, he walked up to the third floor, he went in to see Jim (Howe?), his student of some fifteen years earlier I guess, and told him about this G.I. student that he had who was going to get himself in serious trouble. And he had found out about me. He went to the trouble to find out about me, that I was working all hours and all that kind of stuff. And went to see Jim (Howe?) and said, ..."Geez, this kid's going to be out on his tail." To me that's fantastic. And Clarence Turner, you know, there's a guy who used to, we had a class with Turner every afternoon at two, a two o'clock class. And there was one of our students who would spend from twelve until two in the CT. Do you still call it the CT? The Corner Tavern.

KP: Yes

RM: Is it still there?

KP: It's still there. [laughs] And students still go there.

RM: Yeah. Well, this guy would go over there and drink his lunch, I mean the guy was a lush. Clarence Turner got him to work. I don't think he was passing anything else, but by God he was passing, I mean Clarence Turner [was remarkable]. ...

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

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