

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAYMOND MORTENSEN
FOR THE
RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
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TRANSCRIPT BY
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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Raymond Mortensen on September 11, 2001, in Orlando, Florida, with Shaun Illingworth. Mr. Mortensen, thank you for coming to Orlando for this interview today.

Raymond Mortensen: You're welcome.

SI: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. Your father grew up in Newark. How did his family come to settle in Newark? Do you know anything about his family history?

RM: ... No. His parents were immigrants from Denmark, and they settled in Newark, and, therefore, he was born in Newark, and that's why he was there. [laughter]

SI: How long had his family lived in Denmark before they emigrated?

RM: I'm trying to remember. ... My grandparents came over from Denmark in the late 19th Century. My father was born in Newark in 1898, so, they were already here.

SI: Was your family involved in any particular trade?

RM: ... His father was a blacksmith, and he was a blacksmith, and that was his trade [for] most of his life, and then, in the ... early '30s, he went to work for the Second Presbyterian Church in Newark, where he worked until he died.

SI: Was your mother also from Newark?

RM: That's true.

SI: Do you know anything about her family history?

RM: Only that as far back as I could find, both on her mother's side and her father's side, they were all from New Jersey and mostly from Newark. I don't know when ... her ancestors came over. [laughter]

SI: Do you know how your parents met?

RM: Yes, they went to school together. ... That's how they met. They were a year apart in age, and so, they were schoolmates and, ultimately, got married.

SI: Your father began working at a fairly young age.

RM: Yes. He went to work for his father. [laughter]

SI: Can you describe your father's trade for the tape?

RM: Oh, he went to work for my grandfather and was a blacksmith, because, in the early 20th Century, horses were still used for a lot of commercial deliveries, milk, groceries, whatever, and he had a very promising future, except, along came the automobile, [laughter] and, when that happened, why, of course, horses went out. He had been a member of the Second Presbyterian Church in Newark since childhood, and they were expanding their facilities, and they asked him to come to work as a recreation director. My father was a sportsman. He played baseball, basketball, bowled, tennis, and he headed up their recreation program until he died.

SI: Did he play for a league team in Newark?

RM: No. He played, but, ... the churches in Newark had a league, and he played in the church league, representing the Second Presbyterian Church, and there were all sorts of churches in that part of the State that had baseball teams.

SI: Did your father and grandfather have a shop in Newark?

RM: Yes. They did, but, eventually, my grandfather went out of business also, for the same reason.

SI: How did they cope with the advent of the automobile?

RM: Well, all their commercial business began to dry up, you know. Borden's Milk, for example, was a big customer of theirs and, all of a sudden, Borden's replaced all of their horse-drawn carriages with delivery trucks. Bakeries were a big one of their customers and they were all replaced. So, all they wound up having were the people that owned individual horses and that, ultimately, dried up. There was just no more work.

SI: Which area of Newark did your parents live and grow up in?

RM: ... Both my parents were born in what is now downtown Newark. My grandparents owned a home in, well, it's probably gone now, because Rutgers is there. Their home was right in that area, and my father's parents were over on James Street, which is where some of Rutgers used to be, also, and, ... when I was born, of course, they'd moved out, because that had all become commercial, ... but, when my father went to work for the Second Presbyterian Church, he went back to that neighborhood and lived in a house that the church owned, right next door to the church, on James Street in downtown Newark. So, they lived there [for] most of their lives and died there.

SI: How would you characterize the neighborhood that you grew up in?

RM: Oh, fairly middle-class, let me see, mostly two-family houses, you know. You could walk to school. I walked to school [for] all of elementary school and all of high school, because I lived close enough to the high school, even though, now, I'm sure that, from that distance, people ride, [laughter] ... and I knew most of my classmates. [They] were friends that lived in the same neighborhood. It was that kind of a relationship.

SI: Were any of your neighbors first-generation immigrants?

RM: ... Well, let me put it this way, Newark had ... ethnic neighborhoods. I mean, there was an Italian section, where all the Italians lived, there was a German section, and Polish, and so on. ... At one point, when I was in high school, we lived in an area that was predominantly Italian, so, I had a lot of ... Italian friends. Other times, we lived in areas that were not Italian; they were a mixture. So, that's all I can say about that. I don't know anything else.

SI: What did you do for fun as a child?

RM: ... Well, see, my father went to work for the church in ... 1930, which would make me eight years old, and the church had a very active program for all of their members at all ages. So, I would go to Sunday school on Sunday, and they had a gym, so, ... for my age group, gym was probably on a Wednesday, after school, so, I did that. They had social programs, as well as religious programs, for people of all ages, so, that would be another day of the week that [I was there]. I spent a lot of my leisure time at the church doing, you know, those types of things. The rest of the time I spent doing whatever you're doing ... in school. I was on the swim team in high school, for example, so, I did that.

SI: The church played a very ...

RM: A very, very big part in my life.

SI: Were your activities mostly of a social nature?

RM: Well, it was social, and it was ... religious, and, also, the friends that I have today, that I made at those ages, were people that I had met and knew in church. For example, I have a friend now who was in the regular Navy during the war. I hadn't seen him ... in, like, twenty years, corresponded all the time, Christmas cards. He's now living in Daytona Beach and we see each other frequently. My best friend in my entire life lived in Newark, and then, in Verona, and he was a friend I made in church. ... We were friends all of our lives, and that's how we became friends, because that's where we met, and, even further, my wife and I met, she was not from New Jersey, and she was from Massachusetts, and my ties were so strong to the Second Presbyterian Church that the minister that presided there during all of the time that my father worked there, or most of the time, was retired, and he came to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, from Newark, New Jersey, to marry us. That's how ... strong my tie was to the church, not too much a religious tie as, you know, ... a familial type thing.

SI: It appears as if the church was your community in Newark. Did you belong to any other "communities?"

RM: No, ... just the school, that's all. ... The time I had in school and the church, that was my social life.

SI: Your father was in the New Jersey National Guard during the World War I era.

RM: Yes, yes.

SI: Did he ever discuss his time in the service with you?

RM: No. He never served overseas. In 1914, he would have been sixteen years old, so, ... he joined the National Guard after World War I, I believe, and stayed in, I don't know for how many years. I don't remember. After I was born, ... I guess he was still in, but, I don't have any recollection of his being active. I have pictures of him at camp and so on. I have a medal he won and some kind of what they called a gymkhana, which is wrestling on horseback, [laughter] but, that's about all I can remember.

SI: He never discussed his motivations for joining the National Guard.

RM: No, no. I think, basically, if you want it, both he and my uncle, who was two years younger than he, joined the National Guard, and I think he joined the National Guard because the National Guard needed blacksmiths, and that's what they did. [laughter]

SI: A number of interviewees have commented on how wonderful the school system was.

RM: ... During my youth, it was, yes.

SI: Can you tell me about your education from elementary school to high school?

RM: Well, ... comparing it to what my children had, you know, and leaving out the fact that we have learned more, I believe the methods are different now, I think I had a better education than they did in the public school system, and they were in a good public school system in Upstate New York, but, I read better than they did, I could do basic math, arithmetic, better than they could, and my grammar was always better than theirs, and, to this day, is better than theirs, and I learned all that in elementary school and in high school. ... Also, I think that the requirements, then, of courses that you had to take, and that you had to pass, made us better adults, because we had to take, and you had to pass, arithmetic, and you had to pass English, you know, grammar. You couldn't ... fluff it off and you had to take certain [courses]. Well, I took a college preparatory course, so, you had to take a foreign language, and you had to take two foreign languages, really, to pass the college boards, and so, I took Latin, and I took French.

SI: What was your opinion of your teachers?

RM: ... In public school, excellent. I have no quarrel whatsoever. ... I can't think of a bad one, really, or one that I would say didn't help me.

SI: What was your favorite subject? What were you interested in?

RM: Mostly history. I enjoyed history and, ultimately, political science, which, of course, they didn't teach that course. In my day, you took history. Now, you get civics or some other mish-mash. I learned history and I like history.

SI: I cannot argue with you there. [laughter]

RM: No, obviously.

SI: You were on the swim team in high school. How involved were you?

RM: Okay. At some point, I guess during my sophomore year, I decided that, to be a “big man on campus,” you had to have a letter, okay? and ... you wouldn’t know it to look at me now, but, I was thin. ... When I got married, I weighed 140 pounds and I weighed less than that, of course, when I was younger. So, football was out. I hated baseball, because my father played and I had to go watch him, all the time. By the time I got old enough, I said, “No more,” and I finally, by a process of elimination, said, “Okay, I’ll go out for the swim team,” not that I was in love with swimming, but, that was what was left. So, I earned my letter. It took me awhile, but, in two years, I ... earned my major letter as a swimmer, breaststroker. That was the slot they needed somebody in, so, they taught me how to do it, [laughter] and that’s how come I joined the swim team, and I became a “big man on campus,” because I had the letter and, you know, a few other things. [laughter]

SI: Did you join any clubs?

RM: No, not really. I was mostly involved in student government, you know. I liked that.

SI: Were there fraternities in your high school?

RM: No, no.

SI: Was your high school a melting pot for the Newark ethnic groups?

RM: Yeah, Westside High School, at that point, was a good mix of nationalities. ... Even in those early days, in those days, ... I’m going back into the late ‘30s, there were blacks, but, not that many, you know, but, there were, you know, and I can’t think of any predominant [group]. I guess there were a lot of Italians, because Westside High School stood right in the middle of a big group of [Italians]. ... Two of my best friends in high school were Italian and they lived right across the street from the high school. [laughter]

SI: Do you know which ward in Newark the school was in?

RM: I should, but, I don’t anymore.

SI: Did your parents discuss politics around the dinner table?

RM: No. ...

SI: I cannot remember, at the moment, anything about Newark politics. All I can remember are the stories I have heard about Mayor Hague in Jersey City.

RM: ... That's funny. The minister of the church that I speak of, Second Presbyterian Church, was active in New Jersey politics. He ran for public office, was elected to the Jersey State Assembly, served as Speaker of the New Jersey State Assembly, and ran for the New Jersey Senate, and was elected a senator from Essex County. At the end of his first term, he ran for Governor of New Jersey, on the Republican ticket, against a man by the name of A. Harry Moore, who was Mayor Hague's candidate, and I was old enough, at the time, to be at Republican headquarters in Newark on election night, and Dr. Clee, that was his name, Lester Clee, was ahead ... after twenty counties were substantially in. I think New Jersey had twenty-one counties. Hudson County hadn't come in yet. When they came in, he lost, and, oddly enough, they asked for a recount, obviously, and they were awarded the recount, but, the Commissioner of Elections in Jersey City, all of a sudden, was in the hospital and was *incommunicado*, and, before he came out of the hospital, the time had expired to have a recount, and it all was washed away. [laughter] So, that was the end of Dr. Clee's career in politics, but, ... I was there during the reign of Mayor Hague.

SI: Apparently, Mayor Hague had some influence.

RM: Yes.

SI: Were you politically active?

RM: Yes, myself, only because I enjoyed it, but, I wasn't "the young Republican" or whatever.

SI: Were you involved in any other campaigns?

RM: No, no; along came college, and then, World War II, and you know. [laughter]

SI: How did the Great Depression affect your family and the community?

RM: Well, the Great Depression coincided with my father's ... [decision] to get out of the blacksmith, the horse-shoeing, business, and, at that time, the church came and said, "Hey, come work for us." So, it had no effect on me at all, ... and I was the only child, so, you know, it didn't have any effect that way. It had an effect on some of my father's siblings and, I remember, we helped them out, ... you know, at various times during the next five or six years, until the economy got going again. That's about all I remember. We always had a car, you know. [laughter] We always had food, you know, that type of thing.

SI: Were there many hobos passing through Newark in those days?

RM: Not that I was aware of.

SI: Did anyone knock on your back door?

RM: No, no. I don't recall any of that.

SI: Do you remember how the Great Depression affected Newark as a whole and your neighborhood in particular?

RM: No. I'm trying to think. The rust belt part of Newark's economy and all the manufacturing was always very minor, even though it was the center of the one part of town, and some of the biggest businesses that I can recall, when I was growing up, were white collar. Prudential Insurance Company, for example, their national headquarters is there, was there then, those other big insurance companies, Mutual Benefit Life. Newark had a number of breweries, once they repealed the Eighteenth Amendment, and they were all fairly active. So, I don't recall that there was that much [suffering]. I'm sure people were unemployed. I know they were, because I saw [that] my father's relatives were struggling with that as well, but, not to the point of being destitute.

SI: Did your church offer any relief programs?

RM: Oh, yeah. ... We had a man whose sole job at the church ... was to be in contact with [the] personnel managers of every industry in the area and make sure that he knew what they needed, if they needed anybody, ... you know, sort of like a temporary help agency that we have now. ... So, he was very active doing that. ... The church was also active in opening its doors to all people to come, and I know we used to have ten cent movies on Friday night, and they had all sorts of recreational programs, food programs, and so on, for people, not only who were members, but, who were not members.

SI: Were you ever able to travel outside of, say, Northern New Jersey?

RM: No. I don't think I did any traveling to speak of.

SI: Did you ever visit the Jersey Shore?

RM: Oh, yeah. Oh, well, living in Newark, ... I almost grew up on the Atlantic Ocean. We would go Sundays, then, after that, weekends, and, after that, for vacations, and then, a few years, ... my mother and I spent the whole summer. My father would come down on weekends. ... Yeah, we did that, love the Jersey Shore.

SI: Where did you go?

RM: Well, we just sort of began moving south, from Sea Bright all the way down, ... almost to Lavallette. That was, you know, just [a matter of] finding a place we liked. Point Pleasant, I guess, would be the place where we spent most of our seaside recreational days.

SI: I grew up at the shore, so, I am always interested in learning about how it has changed over the years. I understand that there were more boardwalk attractions before the war.

RM: At Point Pleasant? ... Well, yeah. The biggest attraction, well, there was always a miniature golf course, and (Jenkinson's), of course, had a number of, you know, things, and there were bingo games and so on, but, ... it wasn't like this, [Disney World]. There weren't a lot of

Ferris wheels and attractions like that. It was just a nice place to be, and we used to rent a cottage just north of Jenkinson's, and a whole bunch of cottages, they ran perpendicular, ... you know, like that, up to the beach, and you could just walk up to the boardwalk or walk up to the beach, ... very nice. Where did you grow up?

SI: In Hazlet, near Matawan.

RM: Oh, yes. Did you read in the *Reader's Digest* about that shark in Matawan Creek?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Your mother worked as a telephone operator and a receptionist. Was this before your parents were married?

RM: She worked as a telephone operator before she was married, and then, when she married, she stopped working, and then, when my father was between jobs, he also had a short stay in the hospital for an appendectomy, she went back to work for the telephone company, and worked there, I guess, until I went to college, yeah, and she had an accident in the ocean. She fell and broke her heel, her ankle, and she was forced to quit. ...

SI: Was your mother as involved in the church as your father?

RM: Yeah. As a matter-of-fact, ... after she quit the telephone company, she worked for the church as a receptionist. When you ... got the church number, you got her. [laughter]

SI: Was she involved in any clubs or societies?

RM: Only in the church, yeah. She belonged to the Missionary Society and women's organizations of that type, but, I don't recall that she belonged to any outside of the church.

SI: Your parents were Republicans. What did they think of Franklin Roosevelt?

RM: Oh, yeah. They didn't like him. [laughter] Of course, I think, in retrospect, they recognized, as we all [do], as everybody does, just how great he was, but, I think, ... as hard as my father worked, he was always a Republican, and he could never understand the "giveaways," as he put it.

SI: Were you able to see the effects of the New Deal, the WPA and the CCC, in Newark?

RM: Yeah, yeah. I think that was good. A lot of things got built, you know; stadiums got built, school stadiums got built, swimming pools got built, libraries got built, things like that. So, I think, in effect, it was good. I think it was a worthwhile program, if you have to do it. Apparently, we had to do it. Rather than just handing money out, you might as well work.

SI: In high school, how aware were you of what was going on in Europe and Asia, the rise of Hitler and so forth?

RM: I think, probably, more aware of the European thing than I was of the Oriental. When I was a boy, before I went to high school, [in] one the houses we lived in, the people on the first floor were German immigrants, and, because both my parents worked, when I would come home from school, Mrs. Krueger would take care of me, and they were German, you know. I'll tell you, the accent, you could cut it with a knife. This was ... just about the time that Hitler was coming to power, because von Hindenberg was president, ... which was sort of a nothing job. The power there was [in] the chancellor, and they hated Hitler, but, ... they liked to be German, and they felt that he was doing some good in correcting or righting what they thought was a wrong after World War I. So, that's what I knew at age, whatever I was, ten, but, as I grew up, and ... as he assumed more power, this was [in] the days when he was kicking everybody else out and becoming the chancellor, I formed my own opinion that what was happening was [laughter] not good, and I think, even before, ... I was aware ... that World War II was gonna happen, and Chamberlain and his people had made a terrible mistake. He could have been stopped, and they should have tried, but, then, he bluffed them, and what he planned worked. [laughter]

SI: Did you follow these events in the newspapers and the newsreels?

RM: Yeah. I must confess, how can I put this? Among the people that I knew, among the people that my parents knew, including my parents, ... there was always, it seemed to me, an undercurrent of anti-Semitism. It existed in the people I knew that were Roman Catholics, it existed in the people I knew that were WASPs, like me, never necessarily spoken, but, it was there, and ... I don't think that ever dissipated until after World War II, until after people became aware of how horrible the Holocaust was, and that includes my parents. ... They were like everybody else.

SI: Did you ever hear any opinions on Mussolini coming from the Italian community in Newark?

RM: No, no. I don't think I ever heard that.

SI: I have read that there were some pro-Mussolini, black shirt marches in the Italian communities of New Jersey.

RM: No, no, and I'm married to an Italian ... whose parents are both Italian immigrants, and I never heard anything. [laughter]

SI: Did you know of any *Bund* activity in the Newark area?

RM: Yeah. Not in the Newark area, but, they had a, whatever you want to call it, in western New Jersey, I remember. I can't remember what the name of the town [was], Andover, something like that, up in the foothills of the Poconos, but, I don't remember any ... activity in the Newark area, running around in brown uniforms.

SI: Why did you choose Rutgers for your college education?

RM: ... Well, of course, I'd always known, well, not always known, but, by the time I was in high school, I guess, I knew there was a Rutgers. [laughter] My friend that I told you about, my best friend all my life, Stanley Bedford, he went to Columbia, and he was a couple of years older than I, so, he wanted me to go to Columbia with him, ... enter there after he was there. Then, I had a Sunday school teacher, a dentist, and he went to the University of Michigan, and he wanted me to go to the University of Michigan. [laughter] So, I had those two and Rutgers, and the other one was Wesleyan, oh, and I was invited to a couple of prep school weekends, one at Lafayette, you know. Anyway, I guess Rutgers came up because I ... applied to Michigan and I was too late. ... They wouldn't take me the first year. ... My parents were opposed to Columbia, I guess. ... I don't know why they were opposed, but, they were. I guess they were just opposed to New York City, whatever, and Wesleyan was too expensive, just couldn't afford it. So, I applied to Rutgers and, when they offered me a State Scholarship, that sealed it, [laughter] no other way.

SI: Did you take an exam for the State Scholarship?

RM: ... Yeah.

SI: How did you find out about the State Scholarship program?

RM: ... I don't know. I think I got the catalog, and read about it, and then, applied, and, all of a sudden, there it was. When I think back, I think, "Holy smokes, [the State Scholarship] wouldn't pay for a week," what the annual [tuition is now]. [laughter]

SI: I am always shocked by the difference in tuition. [laughter] Did your parents and teachers always encourage you to aim for college?

RM: ... I think my teachers did, all of them ... that knew that I wanted to go, and they were all supportive. My father was probably supportive, to a point. He was looking at the dollar sign, "Yes, yes, yes," and wondering where the hell he was gonna get the money, and then, when the scholarship came along, why, then, he's [on board], you know, but, all the time I was there, ... he sent money, you know, as much as he could. In those days, you could buy a meal ticket. The dining hall, of course, was in Winants, downstairs. Ten dollars would get you all the food that you could eat for a week [laughter] and I lived on Bartlett Street, right off of College Avenue, behind the Chi Psi House.

SI: Do you remember your address on Bartlett Street?

RM: Number 10, first house on the left, behind the Chi Psi House.

SI: I live on Bartlett Street now. [laughter] Was your house owned by Dr. Hugh Copelman?

RM: I don't know. The people that owned it when I lived there, ... are gone, but, their name was Fenton. ... They were in their mid-fifties. ... They lived on the first floor and everything else was rented out to the students.

SI: What percentage of your high school class went on to college?

RM: I'd say, probably, fifty percent, if that, even though ... Westside High School had a college preparatory course. You could take that or something else. Some high schools in Newark didn't even offer that. They were strictly general or commercial, but, ... I'm trying to think, of my friends, and of my friends that were classmates, how many of them went to college, and I don't know, except for two or three that I can think of, ... my close friends, went on to college, and I went back to my fiftieth reunion, and I'm trying to think ... how many were there, maybe more. One thing I will say, are you acquainted at all with the New York theater?

SI: A little bit.

RM: Well, there's a producer that's up at Lincoln Center, [his] name is Bernie Gersten, he has produced a couple of plays on Broadway, and Bernie was a classmate of mine. ... [laughter] He went to Rutgers, I know that. ... So, I'd have to say maybe more than I said initially, because I'm sure all the Jewish boys went to college. ...

SI: I get the sense from these interviews that a number of Rutgers traditions vanished as a result of the war and the GI Bill years. The Class of 1944 was one of the last classes to experience them. Do you remember being hazed as a freshman?

RM: Sure.

SI: What do you remember?

RM: Well, I had to wear a green tie. I had to wear a beanie. I always had to run when I was on Queens Campus. Those three I remember distinctly. What else? I can't remember anything else that was school-oriented, you know, college-oriented. There was hazing in the fraternity, of course, which was of a different nature, but, those three things, I do remember. I can't remember anything else that we had to do.

SI: Were you forbidden from walking on grass or taking shortcuts?

RM: No. I don't recall that. I do recall that you could walk on Queens Campus, but, if somebody caught you walking, you know, an upperclassman, you had better start running, and you better have the beanie. I remember that. Jeez, I hated that thing.

SI: You probably dished it out to the Class of 1945 in your sophomore year.

RM: Oh, of course. [laughter]

SI: When you entered Rutgers, did you have any idea of what you wanted to study?

RM: Yes. I had intended to be a lawyer.

SI: Why?

RM: Because my friend, Stanley, was going to be a lawyer and we're gonna be partners in New Jersey.

SI: What do you remember about your classes and professors before the war?

RM: Well, as far as classes are concerned, in my freshman year, the man, the professor, that influenced me most was a professor in the History and Political Science Department by the name of Edward McNall Burns, and he taught a course, History 101, 102, which was Western Civilizations, I even remember the name, Western Civilizations: Their History and Culture, and I would never, ever, miss that class. I don't care how ill I was, he was that good and was that influential. So, I enjoyed that. I took French. I enjoyed the French professor. He had the class on the top floor of Queens. That's when Queens was still used for classes. [laughter] The man that taught Economics, he was good, too, because he was also the ... New Jersey State Banking and Insurance Commissioner, but, he was a full professor. Dr. Agger, his name was. ... I liked that. ... I took Geology, I hated it, only because you had to have a science and that was the easiest [class] to satisfy that requirement, ... and I took Speech the whole time I was there.

SI: Did you continue to swim competitively?

RM: No. I'll tell you, two reasons; one, a man that entered Rutgers the same year I did, a classmate of mine, was the varsity ... breaststroker at Blair Academy, Charlie Gantner, and I swam against him at Blair when I was at Westside, and ... he came on the swim team [at] the same time I [did]. ... Why should I knock my brains out [laughter] when he was gonna be the star? So, I just gave it up.

SI: A number of alumni have praised Professor Burns. What made him such a great professor?

RM: Well, one thing, he, obviously, knew his course. He would stand there without a note and lecture for forty-five minutes, without interruption, and, if you paid attention, which, you know, most of us did, you learned a lot about where Western Civilization began. You learned enough to make you curious to go back and learn more about the people that he told you about and he was never devious if you asked him a question. I remember, one day, where was I? I wasn't in class. I was walking up College Avenue, or down, or something, and he stopped and picked me up, he and his wife, in the car, because it was ... raining or whatever. ... He always impressed me as being an agnostic, you know, and I think he was. I said, "Well, if that's the case, how do you explain the universe? How do you explain the Earth?" "Just think about it ... as always having been here," and I thought of that a lot. It was always here, [laughter] and, whatever we are, we have evolved from, if you believe that, the Darwinian sense, [the] origin of the species, but, he was that good, at least I thought so, and easy to understand. His lectures were fascinating.

SI: I will pass that along to the current professors. [laughter]

RM: I'll tell you this, when I went back for my senior year, after the war, I finished three years before, and then, I went in the service for four years, came back, they weren't as good. I enjoyed having professors teach me. Ethan Ellis was another fabulous teacher. John George in Political Science, Constitutional Law, he was, I thought, excellent. Richard Reager, I had him in Speech and so on, he was excellent. I didn't find ... that caliber again.

SI: Did you live in Winants for your freshman year?

RM: No, no. I lived at 10 Bartlett Street.

SI: Oh, I am sorry. You ate there.

RM: I ate in Winants, yes, and then, in my sophomore year, I moved into the Zeta Psi House.

SI: Why did you live off campus?

RM: ... I, apparently, was late, not knowing about how early you must apply. I was late in applying, and all the dormitories were booked, and, in those days, all you had on campus was Ford and the Quad. ...

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RM: ... It had to be five or six of us and there were people who lived ... in houses like that. How would I get the name, the number, 10 Bartlett Street, [to] go there, except [that] the University gave it to me?

SI: Since you lived off campus, were you more independent?

RM: I don't know. You see, in the early '40s, Rutgers was a small place. The whole college went from Queens Campus to the gym and from George Street to College Avenue. Except for the Ag School, that was it. ... I never felt that I was different from somebody who lived in the dorms, for example. I was friends with the people that lived in that house. We were good friends. So, I never had a feeling of being strange.

SI: How did you become involved with the Zeta Psi fraternity?

RM: I got rushed. [laughter] ... What happened? All of a sudden, somebody says, "Come around for dinner," you know, and I was rushed by them. I was rushed by Chi Psi and I forget who else, but, those two, I remember distinctly.

SI: What attracted you to Zeta Psi?

RM: I guess I liked the people, you know, and I liked where it was, you know. I still think it's a great location. [laughter]

SI: Zeta Psi is still in that house today, correct?

RM: Yes, oh, yeah. ... I don't know, I just liked it. When they asked me to join, I said, "Yes."

SI: From what I have read, each fraternity was associated with a particular sport or activity through its members. I understand that the football team was full of Zeta Psi brothers.

RM: No. We were *Targum*-oriented, when I was there. ... The circulation manager was a Zeta, the editor was a Zeta, you know, ... and we were in [the] *Targum* and Glee Club. ... In all the years I was there, we were never, ... oh, we had Don Macfarlan, who played on the football team. He played with Bill Koar, but, [Zeta Psi was] never [too football-oriented]. ... In my years, Kappa Sigma was the big jock fraternity.

SI: It seems as though the fraternities really ran the campus. If you wanted to do anything, you had to be in a fraternity.

RM: ... Yeah, I think that was true.

SI: Were you aware of the split between the fraternities and the Scarlet Barbs?

RM: Yes, there was, very definitely, and I think, I guess, in my innocence, [laughter] I enjoyed that. ...

SI: Was there a rivalry?

RM: I don't think so, you know. I had friends on both sides of the fence, you know. I had good friends, classmates, who were in courses that I was in, that were good friends of mine, particularly [the ones] that lived in Winants, 'cause we used to [live] right across the street. We would study together and some of them were also from Newark ... that lived there. I was a good friend of Bernie Gersten's in high school, but, he was ... a commuter in college, so, I never really got to know him that well at Rutgers, because he was gone when classes were over, but, yeah, there was a very definite distinction, I think, good or bad, I don't know, probably not good.

SI: What was life like in the Zeta Psi House? Was there more discipline?

RM: ... Oh, yes, for example, we had a housemother. She had an apartment in the house, right off the kitchen, a two-room apartment, with a bath, and you could not have someone of the opposite sex for dinner or lunch, whatever, unless she came out and sat during the meal. ... So, that imposed a certain damper on any kind of activity that was [laughter] untoward ... and you had rules. For example, ... we dressed for dinner, not dinner jackets, but, you had to come to dinner in a coat and a tie, shirt, coat and tie. Otherwise, lots of luck, you couldn't eat. There was that. ... There was no raucous behavior. ... In the years that I was there, we never had any drunken nonsense, windows being broken and all that stuff. I found that after I went back. I said to my wife, "I'm never going back there again." [laughter] So, there was that. ... There was a respect for the property. I remember, one spring break, three of us went back and spent two days sanding the floor on the second floor and painting it, because it needed it. There was that type of thing. ...

SI: From reading the Archives' interview with Harry Van Zandt, your classmate and fraternity brother, I get the impression that it was a beautiful house.

RM: Yes. I always felt it was, huge room on the right hand side, which we called the "Bum Room," and [it] had nice leather furniture and a big center library table. ... When you brought a gal there for a dance weekend, you were proud.

SI: What was the campus social life like, since you were a Zeta Psi man and the NJC campus was right across town?

RM: ... There, again, ... I thoroughly enjoyed it. I had, not a number, but, I went out with my fair share of girls when I was at Rutgers, at NJC, and it was so easy, because they had a curfew. [By] the time you had dinner ... and got over to NJC, you've got to take the bus, and walk to someplace where you could have a drink or something, and had a couple, it was time to take her back. At eleven o'clock, she had to be in, and only one hour later on weekends. [laughter] So, it was really [easy] and, please, God, if she lived over on Gibbons, you had a hell of a long walk. [laughter] I enjoyed it and I think a lot of people benefited ... socially, you know.

SI: Do you remember any of the social events at Rutgers, the dances, the Military Ball, etc.?

RM: Well, there ... were three major ones, the Soph Hop, the Junior Prom and the Military Ball, and they were, you know, very festive occasions, you know, full dress affairs, and, usually, a three-day [affair]. Ladies usually arrived on ... Friday and left on Sunday. ... When they arrived, if you were in the fraternity, you had to move out. You went ... over to a dormitory and bunked with a friend of yours, or, if he had gone home, he let you stay in his dorm room, and they were ... very festive. I enjoyed them, the ones I went to, and, of course, NJC had similar events. I remember going to ... a couple of their Christmas Balls over at NJC.

SI: Did Zeta Psi also hold house parties?

RM: Yeah, only in connection with those parties. Oh, we used to have a very swishy spring event called a "pink tea," [for] which we invited the faculty to an afternoon tea, you know, and parents. That would buy them over, obviously. [laughter]

SI: Did you have any run-ins with Dean Metzger?

RM: Yeah. Dean Metzger, what did we call him? had a name that incorporated his snow-white hair. I've forgotten what it was. ... As a matter-of-fact, ... I worked all the years that I was at Rutgers. One of the first jobs I ever had was at the Dean's House, it's not there anymore, but, it used to be just outside of Bishop Campus on College Avenue. There was a big fence around Bishop Campus in those days. (Across?) the fence was where Dean Metzger lived, and I got a job there, the first year I was there, washing windows, [laughter] but, ... the only ... personal relationship I had with Dean Metzger was, I cut a class, once, and it was a class that I should not have cut, not only because ... it was against the law, almost, it was a Military Science class, ROTC class, and I got caught, obviously, and I had forged a medical excuse. [laughter] I got

caught at that, too, and got called to the Dean's Office, and went in to see Fraser Metzger, and he confronted me with all this. ... It was a Monday morning after one of those long weekends, okay, and I just didn't want to get up, and I figured, "This is easy," and I told him the whole story, just like I told you. "This is what I did, this is what I thought I could get away with, and ... I apologize." The fact that I graduated from Rutgers proves the fact that he didn't have me expelled. [laughter] Well, I have a nice letter from him, handwritten, I still have it, congratulating me on being truthful. So, that's my experience. ... See, it was so much simpler in those days, because there were so few of us, I think. I liked Dr. Clothier. What I liked about him was, he was very presidential. What I read about him was that he was not a good fundraiser. [laughter] ... When you looked at Robert Clarkson Clothier, you knew he was the president of the college. So, I liked that about him. ... I've since read that he really didn't go out there and beat the bushes, like some of his successors have done. ... When you consider, when I was at Rutgers, the whole administration was in Olde Queens, the President, the Dean of Men, the Comptroller, the Treasurer, the Registrar, everybody's office was [there], [laughter] plus, there were classes on the third floor. ...

SI: You mentioned that you spent some time in Winants with your friends.

RM: Oh, yeah, because some of my friends lived there and we studied there. I'd go across there and study there. Also, ... at the end of my freshman year, I think, I began working in the bookstore, which was in Winants in those days, and I worked in the bookstore until I went in the service. When I came back from the service, I went back to work in the bookstore and loved it.

SI: Do you remember any pranks in Winants?

RM: Any what, pranks? No.

SI: Were there any water bags dropped on anyone's head?

RM: Oh, not at Winants, no, but, I've had water bags dropped on my head. [laughter]

SI: Do you remember any pranks played in the name of inter-fraternity rivalry, such as stealing another fraternity's flag?

RM: I don't think so. I can't remember. You know, ... they all had their identifications. We had flags. Some fraternities had flags. They also had dogs. I don't remember anybody trying to steal Bismarck, I think that was ... Theta Chi's Belgian Sheep Hound. [laughter] ... I can't recall any.

SI: Did you go home for most weekends?

RM: No.

SI: Did you attend the chapel services?

RM: Oh, sure.

SI: What do you remember about chapel or any of the speakers?

RM: I think that was also good. ... Again, because of the size of the college, I think ... freshmen were Mondays, sophomores were Tuesdays, and juniors were Wednesdays, and seniors were Thursdays, and Friday was nobody. ... They made announcements, that, "This is gonna happen. You're gonna have to do this. ... These are plans for something else." So, that was good on a ... weekly basis and, of course, [there were] the Sunday mandatory chapels, which I thought were extremely enjoyable, because you just didn't have anybody up there talking, you know. They had fine speakers in the public area, you know, Norman Thomas. We always had Norman Thomas, at least once a year, William Lyons Phelps. We had the head of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary.

SI: Cooper Union?

RM: We had people from Cooper Union, yeah. So, you know, going to Sunday chapel, you didn't have to go every Sunday, a certain number were required each semester, but, I enjoyed that also. ... When I go back, I haven't been back since my fiftieth [reunion], but, still, going into Kirkpatrick Chapel, to me, is a real thrill.

SI: Were you in the ROTC?

RM: Yeah, I was in basic ROTC, and then, advanced. ... The first two years, you had to take it, [laughter] so, it was mandatory, and I joined the third year, I guess, because it looked like we were all going to go in the service, and I didn't really want to be a buck private, quite honestly, and that's why I joined, and it turned out that happened.

SI: How well do you think the Rutgers ROTC prepared you for the service?

RM: Well, I think we were probably better prepared than people in the program before us. For example, my roommate was in the ROTC, also, and the only field experience he had before he was sent to do his wartime duty was summer camp at Camp Drum in New York. Because whatever the logistical reasons were, we were called to active duty, my class, in 1943, but, they didn't need us right away. So, what they did [was], they sent us to basic training. That's seventeen weeks of hard work, [laughter] particularly in the South, you know, hot, and I was just reading the beginning of my classmate's [essay in the *Class of 1944 Military Book*], he's still a very good friend of mine, we still correspond, Fritz Kroesen, and he starts off by saying [that] the best experience he had, which prepared him for his life in the Army, was the time he spent as an enlisted man. So, I think that helped us a great deal. ... I know, when I came back from basic training, my father looked at me and he said, "How much do you weigh?" I said, "I weigh 165." He said, "You don't look it," and I didn't. I was hard as this table and I hadn't put on any, you know, fat with that kind of [training]. So, that was great, for us and for the service, so that when you got into combat, you were really prepared for ... those types of things.

SI: Do you remember where you were when you learned that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?

RM: Yes. It's very vivid, as a matter-of-fact, because, that weekend, I was home, and I was home because my mother was in the hospital, and my father and I had been to the hospital to see her. She was recovering. ... He insisted upon driving me back to New Brunswick, rather than have me take the train. I said, "Oh, okay." So, we had a 1937 Chevrolet and it didn't have radio. So, I got back to the fraternity house, he dropped me off, I went in, and that's when I found out that they had bombed Pearl Harbor, and that's what I remember. Then, of course, there was the long time after that when nothing really happened, because we weren't doing anything, except trying to get ready to go to war. [laughter]

SI: I understand that some men ran to the roofs of their fraternity houses to look for incoming planes. Do you recall any reactions like that on campus?

RM: I don't recall that. What I do recall happened afterwards, ... there seemed to be a let down of some of the restraints ... we [had] before that, but, not bad, you know, nowhere near what it was when I went back for my senior year, and there wasn't even a war, you know. [laughter]

SI: You remained at Rutgers for a year after Pearl Harbor.

RM: No. ... I didn't leave Rutgers 'til '43.

SI: Was the administration adamant about keeping students on campus?

RM: You mean in school? Well, they tried their best, yes, and people that were in those kinds of disciplines, you know, [remained in school]. I had a classmate of mine, who I ultimately met again in Syracuse, he was a doctor, he became a doctor. He never went in the service. He just kept right on and he went to medical school and ... so on. So, those people were allowed to continue and the University encouraged that.

SI: Did your ROTC training become more intense or more serious after war was declared?

RM: Oh, yeah, much more serious. ... That's when I cut Major Cope's class. ... Before that, you probably would have gotten away with it, you know, but, now, ... you were getting ready to go to fight the real war, so, those types of things became more strict and more important.

SI: Were you set on going into the infantry?

RM: I was. You'll notice that I got out as soon as I could. [laughter]

SI: Did you have any idea of what being an infantryman would entail?

RM: Yes, I did, and I really wasn't looking forward to it. You know the motto of the Infantry School ... at Fort Benning? "Follow me," ... and that's all I could think of, you know; 150 men over here, and you say, "Follow me," and you go out, and you're going to get killed, or wounded, or whatever. Your chances are more out here than they were over here. ... That, I was aware of, and that didn't thrill me too much.

SI: Did you know about the high casualty rates, particularly for second lieutenants?

RM: I had no idea. Only from what I say, I was assuming that more of us would die, proportionately, than them. [laughter]

SI: How did the Rutgers campus change between Pearl Harbor and the time you left for the Army? Did the student body just melt away?

RM: No, I don't think so. I wasn't aware of it, anyway. Our fraternity house was still [active], you know. I didn't move out of the fraternity house 'til they called the junior class ... to active duty. Then, I had to move up to the Quad and I don't even recall that we had any trouble getting food or anything else. ...

SI: Were any government or military programs established on campus?

RM: No, not that I was aware of.

SI: Did the college offer any courses related to the war?

RM: Not that I can recall.

SI: Do you remember the ASTP program?

RM: Yeah, that was after. ... When they called up the class of the Reserves, which we were, we were the Enlisted Reserve Corps, and we joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps in 1942 because of the war, so, we were now in the Reserves, which meant that the Army could call us anytime they wanted to. Before that, they couldn't do that, unless they drafted us. So, when we were called to active duty and ... billeted up at the Quad, we were the only uniformed people on campus, and, to my knowledge, those people who were sent to the ASTP program never began arriving until after we left, because, when we went back to Rutgers in 1944, as they still weren't ready for us at Officer Candidate School, then, there was a big ASTP program, and we became part of that.

SI: When you entered the service, you were ordered to Fort McClellan, Alabama. Can you tell me about your trip to Fort McClellan?

RM: ... I guess that was really my first introduction into what Army life was. ... We went down in two different groups, 'cause, I remember, I was in the same group as Bob Prentiss, and Tom Ward, and I can't remember, maybe Harry, I don't know, and I know Fritz Kroesen was in a different group, because he didn't arrive the same day we did, but, to spend all that time, from ... Fort Dix, I guess, on a troop train going to Fort McClellan, Alabama, no air conditioned train, summertime, windows open, you got your meals in your mess kit, because the mess car ... was up here, ... it was a horrible experience; not a horrible experience, but, just nothing that anybody has ever conceived of [as] being ... something you'd want to do, and that's all I remember. We got off the train in Atlanta, and then, we had to get back on to get over to Anniston, and then, we got off and marched to the company area, and took a bath for the first time in a few days. [laughter]

SI: How did your group get the name “The Black Fifty?”

RM: I guess ... from inhaling, or getting bathed with, all that soot from the steam engines, because we got pretty dirty. [laughter]

SI: Can you tell me about your first seventeen weeks at Fort McClellan? One drill sergeant’s name always comes up, Pappy ...

RM: Well, he was not a drill sergeant, Pappy Vopat. He was a first lieutenant and he was our physical fitness instructor, plus, bayonet and dirty fighting. I mean, that was his whole bailiwick. ... You’d finish your training for the day, you know, it’s hot in that part of Alabama in the summertime, I mean, beastly, and had your dinner, and taken your shower, and washed your fatigues, because they were soaked with salty sweat, and [you were] sitting there, having a smoke on the edge of your bunkhouse, and he’d blow his whistle. That meant, “Everybody fall out,” in your skivvies, shorts, ... T-shirts and your shoes, and then, you’d run until he got tired of making you [run]. Doubletime, out [of] the company area, down the street, ... wherever he wanted to go, that’s where [we went], and that was almost a nightly affair, so that after awhile, ... you know, you got used to it, but, think about it now, terrible. The other thing was, ... he was circumspect about his language, which some of the non-coms were not, [laughter] but, he was rough, and he said [that] he’d make sure that you were prepared, physically, and he made sure that you could always do just a little bit more than you thought you could do. You could ... march longer, ... you know, all of those things. He was great. ... He was right. We hated him, but, he proved [invaluable]. That’s what Fritz meant, I think.

SI: There was hatred, but, also, respect for him.

RM: ... Oh, yeah. I don’t think there was anybody, in our company anyway, that didn’t. Everybody recognized, you know, what he was doing and, deep down, knew that it was good for them, but, [it] still hurt. [laughter]

SI: How would you rate your basic training?

RM: Excellent. ... Say what you want, the Army had a certain way, and a certain approach, I guess, is what I’m trying to say. ... You’ve got to do things their way, and so, they’ve got to unlearn you. You’ve got to forget what you learned about doing anything before you went in the Army and learn their way, okay, and I was never more aware of that than one night on bivouac. This is at Fort McClellan and you used to have a shelter half. You had a half a tent. You had to find a buddy with the other half. ... So, I said, “I’ll be smart. I’m a city boy,” and a fellow by the name of Will Johns was in our company. ... He was in the ROTC in the University of Maine and was from Maine. “This guy knows the country. He knows the woods. He knows how to pitch a tent,” [that] kind of thing, so, I teamed up with Will Johns. We trained all day. We pitched our tent. Then, he put in, so we’d have a nice, soft bed to sleep on, a whole bunch of what looked like long grass, laid it all inside, and we slept. [I] got eaten up by chiggers. You know what chiggers are? Yes, around your waist, around your shoe tops, anyplace where the collar is tight, that’s where they go, ... big welts. So, we had to unlearn [laughter] that. So, I

think, in that regard, the training was absolutely fabulous. You did it the way the Army says you're supposed to do it and you fired a gun the way that they taught you. I don't care whether you were a sharpshooter ... wherever you came from, "This is the way you do it here," and I think that's the way they built an efficient Army, ... and the physical part of it, I think, was absolutely excellent. I was never in better physical condition than I was when I came home from basic training, [laughter] from Fort McClellan, Alabama.

SI: What kind of weapons training were you given at Fort McClellan?

RM: Well, all the infantry small arms, you know. We had carbines, what was then the M-1, Browning Automatic Rifle,30 caliber machine gun, both air-cooled and water-cooled, and that's about it, oh, hand grenades and .60 mm mortars, all of the weapons that ... were germane to an infantry company. ... They don't carry the .81 mm mortars. That's in the weapons company.

SI: What do you remember about your other instructors?

RM: I think [they were] very competent, and they knew their subject, some of them were officers, some of them were enlisted men, who knew [how] to take apart a rifle with their eyes closed. I had never fired a weapon in my life, ... but, I earned the Sharpshooter Badges in both the Browning Automatic Rifle and the M-1.

SI: Were most of your instructors regular Army men?

RM: ... I don't think so. A lot of them were National Guard, you know, and all of our instructors, at least the non-commissioned officers, were Southerners.

SI: Was there a North-South division within the unit?

RM: Not really. The only problem we had, ... and I don't like to say this, because it may sound anti-Semitic, but, some of the Jewish boys from ROTC units were ... not quite used to the way Southerners spoke and the language. ... There are words that I had never heard in my life, prior to my going [laughter] to basic training, and I think this upset some of our [Jewish soldiers], but, they took it, and nobody got ... physically, you know, involved. [If] a non-commissioned officer called you a you-know-what, you didn't go running to the Company Commander and say, "He can't call me that." [laughter]

SI: Do you think that having other Rutgers men around helped you through basic training?

RM: ... Yeah, I think so. I remember, I had two of my very best friends at Rutgers [there]. One, I think, is still alive. That was Jigger Morrison, Harris Morrison. I don't know if you've gotten to him or not. He lives in New Jersey, ... and the other one was Ernie Mikus, and Ernie is dead, but, because ... we were all alphabetized, Mikus, Morrison and Mortensen were always together, and Jigger, that's what we called him, he hated the Army, and he hated to get up, and, of course, ... literally, Ernie and I would get him out of bed and stand him on his feet, you know, not that he was hung over or anything, it's just that he hated to get up. So, that was good and,

also, he would say, "Oh, all right." ... We'd all be sitting around complaining, you know, and he'd say, "Yeah, yeah, twenty years from now, if we're still alive, we'll all be laughing about this." [laughter] So, I think, in that case, it was good. So, you had a friendship, if not close, but, you had the Rutgers tie that was there before you ever got to basic training. You didn't have to depend only on the fact that you were there, but, Ernie and I remained friends. He died of a heart attack a long time ago.

SI: Where were most of the other men in your training unit from? Were they from the Northeast or all over the country? You mentioned that one man was from Maine.

RM: Oh, okay. When we went to basic training, what they did, as you know, all of the junior ROTC cadets in the country, none of them went to OCS that year. We all went to basic training, someplace. So, ... in our company, we had people, I guess, from the Northeast. We had Cornell, for example. I remember a few guys from Cornell, ... from Maine, University of Delaware, you know, that whole area.

SI: Did you ever get to go on liberty during basic training?

RM: Yeah, yeah. ... You had to work Saturday, you know, six days a week. The only day off was Sunday, so that you could get Saturday night and Sunday, but, you had to be back Sunday night, because, Monday morning, it was reveille again. So, during basic training, the only time I got off the post to any place of any consequence was, I went to Birmingham once, but, Birmingham and Atlanta were equidistant from Anniston, and it took forever to get to either place. By the time you got to Birmingham or Atlanta, everything was closed, [laughter] so, you slept, and then, came home the next day. So, ... we'd go into Anniston, which was the local town, because you could get there in fifteen, twenty minutes, but, Anniston was a typical Army town, like Bordentown, around Fort Dix. That's about all. You could have almost as much fun just going to ... the NCO Club, the PX. [laughter]

SI: Did you notice any differences between the South and New Jersey?

RM: ... I guess I did notice a difference. ... Of course, in the company that I was in at Fort McClellan, the only Southerners were not part of our group. They were the non-coms, and so, they were different. They were Southerners, and, as I said, their language was different, their attitude toward a lot of things was not the same as ours, and it wasn't unnatural, it just wasn't the same. Dietary, ... you know, things they ate were different. [laughter] I never heard of some of the things that they would eat. Grits, I never heard of grits 'til I got there. So, I guess that. So, I never had to associate, on an equal basis, in those seventeen weeks, with a Southerner, because there were no Southerners, except the non-coms.

SI: How did the people of Anniston feel about your presence in their town?

RM: They were rather nice, I thought, you know. ... Servicemen can rip up a place pretty good, but, in the South, there were no, or very few, bars. ... You brought your own bottle, ... so that you didn't have a place where you could drink openly, you know, unless you brought your own, so that that kept the lid on pretty good, but, I found that they had the USO there, met a girl there

that I used to see a couple of times a month, when I'd go into Anniston, you know, call her up and say, "What are you doing Saturday night?" [laughter] you know, that type of thing. So, I found them quite nice.

SI: Would you like to add anything else about basic training?

RM: I can't think of anything. I think you've probably heard from Harry; you've heard his side of it. I'm sure you've heard some of it from Fritz, because I'm sure he's been interviewed. I think the training was excellent. I hated every minute of it. ... Fritz and I talk about this when we're together, because we usually get together sometime in the summer, we had water discipline. You got a canteen of water in the morning, and you had to make it last all day, and, when you got home, they inspected it, and you had to have water in your canteen. Now, you know, I live in the South, lived there now for twelve years, you've got to drink a lot of water, [laughter] and my wife, we're out on the golf course, she says, "We'll get some water." I said, "I don't want any water." She says, "You've got to have water." All of that has changed. [laughter] Even the Army does now. You've got to have water. I remember seeing a newsreel, at one time, when they were shipping things over to the Persian Gulf, and here's a whole bunch of (Zephyr Hills?), which is Florida spring water, being loaded onto a ship or cargo plane going to the Arabian Gulf.

SI: It must have been difficult to do all that running on one canteen of water.

RM: Yes, but, we did. [laughter]

SI: After basic training, you returned to Rutgers. When did you return to New Brunswick?

RM: We came back, ... like, around Thanksgiving.

SI: You were in the ASTP program then.

RM: ... What they wouldn't let you do, you had to take courses offered ... in the Army ASTP program. Now, that's okay if you were some kind of a scientist. You could take Physics, Math, whatever, and get your degree, or you could take them and get your degree even if you weren't in that, but, I couldn't do that. So, there were a few of us and we became rebellious. "We want to take our courses, so [that] we can get our degree." Well, in the ASTP program, nobody was offering Constitutional Law, [laughter] or Constitutional History, or whatever, so, I was taking Math, and Physics, and I forget what else, and flunking all of them, and threatened with, ... if I failed, you know, then, you were going to be out of the ROTC program completely, and ... you're gonna be sent back to some unit, and, you know, serve as a private, and ... that's where I was going, but, all of a sudden, they needed us. [laughter] Saved by the fact that we had to go to OCS. ... Now, some of them, I think Fritz did finish enough work to get his degree, I know Harry Simon did, and I forget who else.

SI: Can you tell me about OCS? Most members of the Black Fifty say that it was easy after Fort McClellan.

RM: It was. Of course, I went to Armored OCS, so, it was different from what you heard from Van Zandt and people who went to Fort Benning, but, it was very similar. You were treated a lot better. The barracks were a lot nicer. [laughter] You were treated more like human beings, rather than cattle. I thought that was good. The physical part wasn't anywhere near what it was in basic training. It was a lot more mental, you know, things like map reading, ... this type of thing that you had to absorb, and, of course, in the Armored OCS, then, you got to start fooling around with those tanks.

SI: Why did you choose the Armored Corps?

RM: Okay, I've been asked this before. ... Have you been in the service at all?

SI: No.

RM: Well, okay. ... In the service, like in any organization, I guess ...

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

SI: This continues an interview with Mr. Raymond Mortensen on September 11, 2001, in Orlando, Florida, with Shaun Illingworth. Please, continue.

RM: In the Army, as in every organization, rumors abound. No one seems to know where they started or who started them, but, in the ... early Spring of 1943, '44, I'm sorry, there was a rumor going around in our unit, at New Brunswick, that the Armored Force was looking for officer candidates. Five of us went to the Company Commander and said, "We would like to apply for Armored OCS, as opposed to Fort Benning." When we were asked, "Why?" we said, "Because we heard they were looking for officers in the Armored Force." He told us that was [laughter] poppycock, but, he took our names anyway, and, shortly thereafter, they wanted officers for the Armored Force, and that's how the five of us got to Fort Knox. [laughter]

SI: That was your introduction to the Armored Force and OCS.

RM: Well, I think, the five of us who went all shared the same reason for going. We didn't want to walk. We didn't want to dig foxholes, which was typical infantry tactics, and the fact that we could ride and be fairly well-protected from enemy fire was attractive. At Fort Knox, we learned a lot of things that the infantry learned as well. We also learned a lot about all of the Army's wheeled vehicles, including tanks, mostly about tanks, but, any track laying vehicle, half tracks, trucks, jeeps, we learned all about those, first echelon maintenance, how to drive them, you know, that type of thing.

SI: Did you have any idea of what being in the Armored Corps would entail?

RM: ... No, I didn't really. I think most of my reason for going in the armored was, I wanted to be out of the infantry, and those tanks looked awfully big, [laughter] and, as I said, I preferred riding, and there was a certain exclusivity. You weren't quite the Air Force, [laughter] but, you

were something different from the infantry ... or the artillery, you know. You were something else. You wore your hat differently, you know. You wore boots.

SI: The Army Air Force was a more youthful and experimental branch of the service. I get the impression that the Armored Corps was one of the more experimental branches of the Army.

RM: Yeah, I would say so. The armored grew out of the cavalry, and most of the people that were senior armored people had come out of the cavalry, George Patton, particularly, so that they ... already had the fact that they were different from everybody else, and that just carried forward ... into tanks, instead of horses.

SI: Were your instructors from the old cavalry school of thought?

RM: No, ... the people that trained us were from the Armored School. ... This was later in the war and we even had veterans from the African Campaign that were instructors at the Armored School at Fort Knox. The commandant of the Armored School was a wounded brigadier general who served under Patton in North Africa, so, we had good, you know, instructors from that standpoint.

SI: What did you learn from the veterans of the North African campaign? Did they teach you more than the non-veterans?

RM: Well, yes, I think so. Having been in combat, you know, they added a certain amount of experience to what you would get out of a book. What you'd get out of a book would tell you ... how a thing worked or how to proceed tactically. ... If you had an instructor that had been in combat, he would say, "Yes, that's true, but, if this happens, you have to do something else," or, "If this happens and your weapon misfires, you have to do these types of things." So, to that extent, it was good, and a lot of the tanks issued, you know, brand new, if you're gonna live in it, as we did, it's got to be modified, [laughter] ... just the inside, so [that] you can get around. The people that drew up the specs, they didn't fight in it. These people did. "This has got to go and this has got to stay," and so on. Those things helped with the book, ... somebody who had been there and used the equipment.

SI: In OCS, did you have access to adequate equipment?

RM: Yes.

SI: Was it the same equipment that you used in the field?

RM: Unfortunately, ... it was [laughter] what we used in the field, which was not as good as we should have had.

SI: Another veteran of the Armored Corps told me that he was disappointed to be assigned the M-3 tank when he knew that there was a better tank available. Did you ever realize that the best equipment was not making its way down to the field units?

RM: Well, yeah. Unfortunately, ... in our division, I think in every armored division in Europe, if you were in a medium tank unit, you ... had Shermans, General Sherman tanks. Some had a different cannon, the newer ones had different cannons than the older ones, but, the tank was the same, you know. It was a Sherman tank. Some of them were diesel, some of them were not diesel, and the thing that everybody objected to about the Sherman was that the gun was inadequate against the German .88 mm. ... The gun velocity was so slow that, if you wanted to, you could pick up your binoculars, after you'd fired the gun, and you could follow the missile to its target, you could see it, you know, and that was disheartening, because you were fighting somebody that could penetrate your tank with his gun. So, that was a big disadvantage. ... We never got the Pershings until the war was over, you know, and we got one. [laughter] So, we had to do with what we had. Now, on the other hand, as opposed to, vis-à-vis, the German Panther, the Sherman was fast, you know, very mobile. Also, the turret rotated 360 degrees. This was not true of the Panther. The Panther ... weighed a lot more, was slow, and the turret didn't revolve 360 degrees, so that, in that regard, you had more speed and more mobility than ... the German tank. So, you give a little and you get a little, I guess.

SI: Can you describe some of the tactics that you learned in OCS? Did you learn how to work with the infantry?

RM: Well, see, that's one thing you didn't really learn until you got in combat, ... how to work with infantry. We did that in combat. I never learned it in OCS. What I learned in OCS was tactics, how to deploy your tanks for any particular situation, how not to be blindsided, you know, this type of thing, but, working with infantry was something that we did learn almost on-the-job, you might say.

SI: How did becoming an officer change your status within the military?

RM: Oh, I don't know. It only changed my status in that I was an officer and not an enlisted man. ...

SI: Did it change your life in the military?

RM: I suppose, until you really went overseas. You lived a little bit better, you know, until you got into combat, but, basically, you lived a little bit better in this country. The short time I spent between the end of OCS and going into combat, I guess I lived better, I ate better, you know, to that degree. When you get in combat, it's almost a whole different [story]. It's all the same.

SI: Were you sent overseas shortly after you graduated from OCS?

RM: No. ... I was assigned, first, to the 20th Armored Division ... at what was Camp Campbell, Kentucky. They were scheduled to go overseas, and I was surplus, so, I was sent back to Fort Knox for reassignment, and, from there, went to a replacement situation, and then, overseas. So, I went overseas in December of 1944.

SI: When you went overseas, did you travel with a unit or as a replacement officer?

RM: No. I went over as a replacement officer. We had a troop ship, you know, thousands of troops and officers, and we were all replacements. It was not a unit.

SI: Do you remember the name of the ship?

RM: ... The name of ship, I think, was the *George Washington*. I'm not sure. It had been an ocean liner.

SI: Were you sent over with any equipment?

RM: No.

SI: You were assigned to your tank over there.

RM: Yeah.

SI: Crossing the Atlantic in December, particularly during one of the worst winters on record, does not sound very comfortable.

RM: Well, the only thing uncomfortable about it was that, if you were torpedoed, you were gonna die a very cold death, [laughter] but, other than that, it wasn't all that bad. The ship was fast, and we zigzagged during the day and went straight at night, to pick up lost time, but, except for the fear of being torpedoed, it was not a bad crossing. As a matter-of-fact, from a standpoint of rough weather, when I came back from overseas, ... three years later, in the spring, a lot rougher seas. [laughter]

SI: Did you have any U-boat alerts?

RM: No, no, not that I can recall.

SI: Did you travel in a convoy?

RM: Yes.

SI: Was it a large convoy?

RM: No. ... It was small, because the convoy almost couldn't zigzag. ... We never picked up an escort until a day or two out of Liverpool.

SI: Did you have any duties on board the ship?

RM: Oh, yeah. ... I was assigned a hundred enlisted men, and, basically, my job with them was to censor their mail, read their mail and censor it, and that's about all.

SI: Were most of the men infantry replacements?

RM: Yes.

SI: Did you get seasick?

RM: ... No, either way.

SI: Once you landed in England, were you sent to a replacement depot?

RM: No. We landed in Liverpool, and were marched quickly to a train, and were shuttled across Great Britain to Southampton, and marched quickly onto an LST, Landing Ship Tank, and sailed, all in one fell swoop, off the ship, on the train, on the LST, to La Havre, ... that quick.

SI: You saw England through a window.

RM: Oh, yeah, that's all, and at night, you know. ... You didn't sleep over any place, until you got on to the LST, 'cause this was right about the Battle of the Bulge.

SI: You were sent over there right away.

RM: Oh, yeah, "Go, quick." [laughter]

SI: Were you put in charge of any men during this trip?

RM: Oh, yeah. I had the same hundred men on the LST and had the same hundred men on the forty-and-eight, only we couldn't get a hundred in each car. [laughter]

SI: What happened after you landed in La Havre?

RM: Well, there, we got to a replacement depot, up on a hill outside of La Havre, and we got fed and slept, and ... it was cold, and, the next day, we boarded a troop train for Belgium. ... French troop trains are freight cars which hold forty men or eight horses. ... We were fifty men in each car and me. Fifty of the men I had in my jurisdiction were in one car and I was in the other car with the other fifty.

SI: What was morale like during the Battle of the Bulge?

RM: Well, ... I think, on the way up, on the forty-and-eight that we took up to Belgium, I think the people, including myself, the troops, we were not gung-ho, you know. It looked like it was gonna be tough. It was cold. It was snowing. We were gonna be right into combat. We weren't gonna go into some training unit. You were gonna be shipped right into some unit and start fighting and that didn't make anybody feel very happy, including me. This didn't really turn me on. [laughter] So, I guess, our morale was pretty low, our morale. ...

SI: Did you have any contact with any combat veterans during this trip?

RM: Not 'til I got to my unit. ... Once we got to Belgium, to a replacement depot, ... the troops that I had in my jurisdiction and I were separated. They went one place and I went someplace else. [I] didn't have any responsibility again for a couple of days, until I was sent to the Third Armored Division.

SI: What happened after you joined the Third Armored Division?

RM: [When] I joined the Third Armored Division? Okay, ... you were sent to the division, you're sent down, all the way, through channels, to the regiment and so on. I was assigned to D Company of the 33rd Armored Regiment, who had had some officer casualties, and, at that point, they were just being withdrawn from the line. ... The Bulge had been closed and they were in rest area, which, for me, was very good, [laughter] 'cause I didn't have to run out and command a tank platoon right away. I got to know the people that I was commanding in my platoon and got to be acquainted with the other officers, including the Company Commander, you know, that I'd be working with, without having to jump in and fight right away.

SI: What did you learn about your men?

RM: Well, the first thing ... I did, ... I was told by the Company Commander that my platoon sergeant was competent, that he'd been with the outfit since they landed in Normandy in June. So, I said, "Okay." ... When I talked to him, the Platoon Sergeant, I said, "Look, when we start out from here, start the shooting war again, let's you and I work together. ... You've been doing this longer than I have," and I said, "I'd like you to run the platoon like you have until I arrived, until such time as I ... get my feet wet and know what I'm doing." ... I said, "I want the orders to come from me, but," I said, "I want you to tell me what I should be doing, until I tell you otherwise." He agreed. We got along great, and we got along great 'til I was wounded in March, and he was still the platoon sergeant. He became a very trusted ally.

SI: Many officers say that their first NCO really helped them learn the ropes.

RM: Yeah. ... If you took the other tack, ... came fresh from the United States and you're gonna take command of the unit, ... unless you were exceptional, you know, you didn't succeed.

SI: The 33rd Armored Regiment had been through some heavy fighting.

RM: Yeah, ... the code name [nickname] of the division was Omaha. They landed on Omaha Beach, not D-Day, but, they landed in June of 1944. So, a lot of the people that I was with, ... they came over with the unit from the States. So, [when] you're coming in as a replacement, you know, right away, they looked down their nose at you. [laughter]

SI: How long did it take you to integrate into your unit?

RM: I guess, ... just about the first baptism by fire. ... I think I did well, and, after that, they were my troops, and our first baptism by fire was getting across the Roer River ... at Duren, took off from Stolberg, Germany, and it took us a couple of days, and then, after that, they were my guys.

SI: Can you tell me about the Roer River crossing?

RM: Well, ... [laughter] I don't know how to explain it. ... We crossed the Roer at night, which is not good for tanks, but, we crossed, and we secured the town, and took our prisoners, and sent them back to where they had to be sent, and waited for further instructions, and the next move was the drive for Cologne, and that was in our sector, Cologne, and the Rhine, not far from the Rhine, and that was, I guess, the best example of how to use an armored unit that I could think of, because the Cologne Plain is flat, and you can see for miles, and you can deploy your tanks the way [laughter] you want to and make them effective units. ... I enjoyed that, but, I mean, I could use what I learned to great advantage.

SI: Did you begin working with the infantry immediately?

RM: Not then. We did after that, because, obviously, a tank is a sitting duck at night. ... If everybody's in the tank, nobody's outside watching and making sure someone's not dropping a hand grenade down the turret, or something like that. So, it was determined, I guess, by people at a higher level, that to have infantry support tanks in a certain situation was a good idea. They could provide security for the tank. They could also provide hand-to-hand combat where that was necessary. So, just after that, we began [to work with the infantry]. As a matter-of-fact, after we crossed the Rhine, I had, for the next three or four days, at least four or five infantrymen riding on the back of my tank, as did every tank in our outfit, for that specific reason.

SI: The infantrymen guarded your tanks at night.

RM: Yeah, well, they would, and, also, ... they were particularly useful where you were being harassed while advancing. You know, they could dismount the tank and perform their infantry type duties that you couldn't do from the tank.

SI: What were some of the difficulties in leading a tank platoon? What came naturally to you?

RM: Well, I had a great deal of help when I arrived at my unit, ... the 33rd Armored Regiment. One of the things the Company Commander insisted upon was, ... he would not tolerate panic over the radio. He said, "It's gonna get tough," and it did. "You're gonna be frightened," and we were, but, he said, "I will not tolerate panic and, if I hear it, you're gone." So, that helped, you know. I'm sure, if I hadn't been forewarned, there were times when, instead of ... speaking calmly, I would probably have screamed or something else. I never did that. Also, you had to learn, and this you can only do by experience, ... how far you can push the people that you command without lowering the boom by saying, "Either do it or we'll take disciplinary action." You can't do that, you shouldn't do that. You should be able, somehow, to make ... the people that you command do what they're supposed to do without invoking some kind of punishment. Sometimes, when push came to shove, this didn't happen, even in my own case. The day I was wounded, I had been leading our tank taskforce since the morning. I was already in my third tank, having lost two before, and I ordered one of my section leaders to proceed ahead of me, and I got no response. He didn't say no. He just didn't answer my radio signal. [I] tried again, didn't work. He didn't answer. So, I went ahead anyway and that's ... [laughter] when I got

wounded. The next shot came in. So, I think the point I'm making is, the obvious thing was to say, "If you don't go, you know, I'm gonna have you court-martialed," or, "I'm gonna have you reduced in rank," and he wouldn't have gone anyway. If he was that scared, at that particular point in time, threatening him with dire results wasn't gonna make him do it.

SI: Did that happen often?

RM: No. ... We were now in the closing days of the war, and this was closing the Ruhr Valley Pocket, and we'd been on the road, one tank behind another, for two days, and that's no way to run ... [laughter] a war, because the first guy is gonna get hit all the time. So, everybody was, you know, white knuckles, [laughter] including me.

SI: When you were fired upon, was it mostly harassment or direct combat?

RM: Oh, direct combat, yeah. Of course, again, once we got across the Rhine, once we secured everything west of the Rhine, things began to crumble, and the troops that you began to see were younger, not as experienced, and, once subdued, stayed subdued. If you happened to knock out a .88 mm Panther tank, the occupants came out with their hands up and surrendered. ... The troops that were in the field, the infantry, ... looked very young. ... There wasn't the fighting spirit that I think the Germans had back in the hedgerows of France and so on.

SI: Were you able to take prisoners or did you have to send them back?

RM: Well, we'd just send them back, because, again, at that time, ... when we closed the Ruhr Valley Pocket, there were 300 and some odd thousand German troops that were there. ... They couldn't go anywhere. ... When they came out, you just [said], "Keep going. Somebody back there will take care of you."

SI: From Cologne, you crossed the Rhine.

RM: From Cologne, we crossed the Rhine, and then, we got the orders, ... "This is what we're gonna do," and the First Army was to proceed from the banks of the Rhine in an easterly and northeasterly direction to a town called Paderborn, and the Ninth Army was to come the other way, down south, like that, and that was all supposed to be done in ... as short a time as possible, so that nothing was secure. You just went and kept going, cut off [the Germans] or whatever, and, once that was done, why, then, the war was about over. All they had to do was decide who's gonna take Berlin [laughter] and they decided that at Potsdam, I guess.

SI: What kind of resistance did you encounter in Cologne? You mentioned that the terrain really lent itself to armored warfare.

RM: ... Again, yes, but, I think the Germans, by that time, realized that, once we got through the Siegfried Line, which was ... on the west bank of the Rhine, ... our side, there were no more built up defenses. The next defense was the river, so, I think the Germans said, "Let's get across the river and we'll fight again from there," but, that's about all. It wasn't really that much of a pitched battle, moving from Belgium, after the Battle of the Bulge, up to the Rhine.

SI: Did you have any interaction with German civilians at this time?

RM: During this time? Whatever interaction we had, and I don't recall that there was that much, they ... behaved like conquered people. Whatever you wanted, you got. ... I don't recall anybody ever being belligerent.

SI: I have been told that the first words from a German civilian's lips were often, "I'm not a Nazi."

RM: Of course, and ... nobody, and nobody's family, ever fought on the Western Front. Everybody fought the Russians. Nobody ever fought ... us. So, there was that.

SI: What kind of casualties did your unit suffer during this period?

RM: ... During the time I was with the unit, we did not suffer tremendous casualties. I don't recall anybody ... being killed, in my company, as a result of enemy fire; wounded, you know, I was, a couple of other people were, and so on. ... I did say, in my article, I wrote the armored article in that book, [the *Class of 1944 Military Book*], that our division commander was ... killed at this time. He was shot, but, he was off with his party, and he had been cut off and was intercepted. ...

SI: Did you have any fear of becoming a prisoner of war?

RM: No, I don't think so. ... The only thing that was still abroad, publicly, was the fact that Hitler may flee to what they called his "Bavarian redoubt" and hold out there. We were gonna have to get down to Berchtesgaden and root him out. Well, it turned out, that didn't happen. That was all a myth and never did happen. ... I think once ... it was announced that ... the armistice was gonna be signed, why, everybody said, "Good. When can I go home?" [laughter]

SI: In a typical engagement, how many tanks would be involved? Were they mostly small unit actions?

RM: Oh, well, in ... the unit that I was in, if you were involved, it would be a company unit, you know, so, you're talking, maybe, fifteen tanks.

SI: Did you encounter any large German *Panzer* units?

RM: What you were encountering would be antitank fire, from either gun emplacements or other German tanks. ... If you were successful, what happened was, you'd overrun their position and they'd flee or they'd surrender. I remember, ... one time, when we were ... just outside of Marburg, Germany, on this same trip, we were closing the Ruhr Valley Pocket, and, again, we were one tank behind the other on the road, going back for miles, company after company after company, and the Germans had put up a roadblock of trees, and logs, and so on, that we couldn't [pass]. ... The engineers had to come and remove it. So, on one side, over here, was a river, a small river, you know, narrow, not like the Hudson, just a little stream, but, maybe, fifty yards

wide. On the other side was a hill, and, there, we sat, and there were people up there, Germans, in foxholes, throwing down antitank grenades. Well, that's not very nice. No, I mean, you could get killed that way and we were trying to eliminate these people up on the hill. So, I had a .45 caliber pistol. They weren't that far away. I could see the guy's head. I emptied eight rounds, there were seven in the clip and one in the chamber, and he never ducked. So, then, I ... told the gunner to rotate the turret and I tried the machine gun, mounted right alongside of the tank cannon. ... We walked the bullets, we had tracers right up to his foxhole, and he ducked. ... Then, I loaded one round of high explosive and I fired that. Now, that's pretty deadly, also not very nice, and I wasn't really proud of myself. We didn't have any more problem with it. The Company Commander called on the radio, says, "What was that?" I told him. He wasn't too happy with it either, but, I couldn't do anything else. ... There were others who were doing the same thing, but, I couldn't get this guy to stop with those grenades, and I knew [that] once he ran out of grenades, he'd come out with his hands up. In the meantime, we'd ... have lost a tank or two, a person or two. Eventually, the roadblock was cleared and we spent the night in Marburg and took off again the next day. So, there's that type of thing.

SI: Did you encounter a lot of harassment like that?

RM: Yeah, you'd get that, because that's all they had left to do. There was no big, pitched, army against army [battles] anymore. They were fighting a losing battle and they should have given up before, you know.

SI: Did you have any problems with mines?

RM: Yes. They did a lot of that. The first day out of Altenkirchen, the day before we got to Marburg, I was leading off, again, and, by George, I hit a mine, and, of course, nobody was hurt, because all the mine did was, it blew the tracks on the tank, and you can't go anyplace. ... Pretty soon, a German .88 got us in his sights, and he started firing at us, and he hit us. We bailed out, the infantry got off, and you had to walk back and make sure that you walk back in the tank tracks, ... in case there were more mines around. That's the ... only time I had trouble with mines. ... Again, that was the only day ... and it was deliberate. You knew, once you were stopped, ... that there was somebody out there who's gonna fire at you, and, sure enough, [they did].

SI: How closely did you work with the engineering company?

RM: Not very close.

SI: Did they build bridges for your tanks?

RM: Yeah. Now, see, when we crossed the Rhine, we crossed on a ... pontoon bridge that the engineers had built, but, by the time I got there, the engineers had already built the bridge. [laughter] ... They did it, you know, but, I wasn't any part of it.

SI: Did you have to call them up?

RM: No, no. Somebody did, somebody at a higher echelon than where I was, and somebody had to decide where they wanted the bridge, but, that was somebody else's authority. ... Not even our regiment, I wouldn't think, would have to get a bridge, particularly across the Rhine. That's the only bridge, ... oh, we had one across the Roer. The Roer was a much smaller river.

SI: Did your unit liberate any camps?

RM: ... Yes. Unfortunately, I was in the hospital and I only saw them after. There was a camp at Nordhausen, Germany, and the Third Armored Division liberated Nordhausen, and the only time I saw anybody from that camp was, the day I went back to my outfit from the hospital, I drove through the town. ... Of course, they were out of the camp, all these emaciated people. [Mr. Mortensen shudders.]

SI: Were you shocked?

RM: ... Yeah, because, by that time, some of the camps had been liberated and the *Stars and Stripes* had accounts, you know.

SI: Did you hear any rumors before the first camp was liberated?

RM: Yes, but, nothing, you know, substantial, until that. I've since been to the Holocaust Museum in Washington. [Mr. Mortensen shudders again.]

SI: Did you receive adequate supplies of fuel and rations?

RM: Yes, yes. ... The rations, the best thing that could be said for the rations was, they were rations. [laughter]

SI: What was a tanker's life like? How did you live day-to-day?

RM: Okay, in combat, ... whether you were fighting or whether you're just in a situation where you were gonna be fighting, the five of us, there are five men in a Sherman tank, we lived in the tank, which is why the tank had to be modified, because, when it was built, somebody put a basket around the bottom of the turret, so that you couldn't get from compartment to compartment without rotating the turret ... to an opening in the basket. First thing that happened when you went into a new tank, cut out the basket. Now, you can get all over the tank. So, in the turret, there was the gunner, the assistant gunner, and the tank commander, which, in my case, was me, and what we did, we had places to load the ammunition, and we also had to carry extra on the floor of the turret. We had shells (that were like that long?), and you ... carried food, water, and the gunner and the assistant gunner, which were down in the lower part of the tank, they slept down there, ... when you stopped. Nobody got out of the tank to sleep, unless you got out of the tank ... to go in a house and sleep. We did a lot of that, ... like in Marburg. We had the town secured, and I slept in a nice, warm bed that night, [laughter] but, otherwise, I slept on top of the ammunition, and, usually, at night, we would get refueled, and we would get resupplied, you know, with food, because, in an armored company, except if you're in rest area, you don't have a mess truck or whatever. They bring you up rations, like, K rations or C rations,

and you eat, the five of you, pretty much together, not with anybody else. So, there's that. ... I remember, one time, this ... turned out to be a very funny incident, although, at the time, I was panicked; this was after the Battle of the Bulge, and it had gotten warmer, and ... we hadn't gotten to Cologne, yet, and the snow had melted, and we were now in mud, I mean, lots of mud, and it was in the evening, and the Company Commander had gotten his orders for the next day from regiment, and he called each platoon leader to, "Come to the command post and get your instructions for tomorrow," so, I did. We walked up there, and he was up the road a little bit, and we had a meeting and decided what time we were gonna depart, who was gonna do what and when, and I started back to my tank, and, all of a sudden, artillery fire started coming in. Now, I'm standing as close to my tank as you are to me and all I have to do is get inside. I couldn't get up on the tank, because of the mud. I kept slipping down. I said myself, "I'm gonna die out here because I can't get [laughter] into the tank." So, what I did, I crawled under, [laughter] and I still lived, but, ... later, a week later, that was a funny thing. [laughter]

SI: I get the impression that a tank crew was very closely knit, like a bomber crew.

RM: Yes, yes.

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

RM: Each of those tank crews, I have pictures of. ... They were a unit and they became [close]. You'd better, because [laughter] [you depend on each other].

SI: How well did you work with the other tank crews in your company?

RM: Oh, pretty well, yeah.

SI: Was there a lot of interaction in combat?

RM: Yeah, there was interaction, and, ... if you needed help, you know, ... "Hey, watch out, there's a guy over there," and somebody would cover your flank. ... This kind of talk, [you would] hear, back and forth, on the radio during any action, without going through the chain of command.

SI: The other armored veteran that I interviewed mentioned that he really had to drill into his men the importance of using the radio during maneuvers. They were used to communicating with hand signals.

RM: ... By the time I got there, you know, ... my guys were pretty well used to using the radio, ... because, by then, it had been pretty much ... perfected. The original ones that we had at Fort Knox, you were supposed to be able to use a throat thing, here, ... and that was terrible. You had to have the microphone, one of these, you know, about that big. You held it right here, and you talked into it, and then, you had a headset, ... and I know that the only bad part about the microphone was that you had to hold it, and, after three or four hours, ... [laughter] it was hard to unhold it, you know, and the other thing was, ... we didn't wear the tanker's helmet, we wore the regular steel helmet, like the infantrymen would, because, with that turret open, you know,

you've got to be protected, so that you either had to wear your headset under that helmet, which didn't really fit that well, or you had to wear it over the helmet and extend it. ... Well, extended, it wouldn't go in both ears, it went in one ear, and the other thing sat up here on the top of your helmet. That's how come, when I was wounded, I lost the hearing in this ear, 'cause I didn't have the headset in there.

SI: According to this article, your tank was the first one to reach the Rhine River.

RM: Well, the reason I said that was, ... after I sent that back to Rutgers, I had read that the Third Armored Division was the first unit to reach the Rhine in the First Army, okay, and then, I didn't realize how close we were, because we were a little bit north of Cologne, in, like, what I call a suburb, a little different town, and we're wandering through the streets of this little town, [laughter] encountering no resistance, and, all of a sudden, bingo, like that, and I called the Company Commander, and I said, "Is what I'm seeing what I think it is, like, the Rhine River?" He said, "Yes. ... Can you see it?" I said, "Yeah." "That's it, you're there," and that's all it was. Now, the other people, the real heroes, were the people that captured the Remagen Bridge, which was south of us. All we did was get to the Rhine, had to wait for the engineers to come and build us a bridge. [laughter]

SI: Can you tell me about the action in which you were wounded?

RM: Oh, yeah. ... It was late in the afternoon, and we were in a town called Worberg, and, again, we were still one tank behind the other, and we'd come through the town, and ... I was going through an underpass, railroad, here, you don't see many of them anymore, just one of those one way, only one at a time through it, ... [tunnels], and I went through this underpass, and, "Boom," that *panzerfaust* hit us, ... antitank grenade, right in the seam, where the turret sits on the hull, and, with that, it comes in, you know, the explosive, and sparks [are] flying around. Now, we had ammunition laying on the floor of the tank and ... I couldn't see. I put my hand up to my right eye, like that, and came away all warm [with] blood, and I thought, "My God, I've lost the side of my face." [laughter] So, I gave the command to bail out and we did. I went over the top, and two guys went over the top, down the side, two guys in the front, and we wound up in a ditch on the side of the road, which was full of rainwater, and crawled back to where it was safer and got up, and the medics came and assured me that I hadn't lost my face, and ... I hadn't lost a lot of blood, and that was it, you know, and they had immobilized the tank. Nobody else in the tank was hurt. They just pushed the tank to the side, and kept right on going, and sent me back to the hospital, or to the aid station, first, and then, the hospital.

SI: How would you rate the medical treatment you received, from the field to the hospital?

RM: Oh, good. I got to the aid station, and I had a wound right there, you can't see it anymore, ... and they bound me up, and then, sent me back to the evacuation hospital, and, there, they sewed me up, and I was supposed to go back to my outfit right away, but, then, in a further examination, they'd found that I had lost my hearing, [laughter] not all of it. ... So, they sent me back to a general hospital in France, and I stayed there until that cleared up, and then, they sent me back to ... my unit, but, once the evacuation hospital sewed this up, I was, for all intents and purposes, as good as I am now. The only thing that was frightening was, right after the surgery, I

was back in the ward, and I had gone to sleep, and I woke up, and I was feeling no pain, I was in good shape, except I had my head bandage with this thing, and I went to sit up, and I couldn't get my head off the pillow. It was stuck. So, pretty soon, a nurse came along, and she got some alcohol or something, and I had two crease marks right across the back of my neck, and, upon further examination, my jacket, which was the tanker's field jacket, it was like a blouse, you know, it fit you like a blouse, elastic here, and then, full around here, the back had four bullet holes, two that went in and two where they came out, which were ... not the same bullet, but, the same guy fired them that almost got me in the neck. I didn't sleep for a couple of nights after that, how close I'd come to being killed. Another inch on this, another three inches on that, [laughter] ... but, it probably happened when I went over the tank, and he was firing and missed, or he got me, but, didn't kill me, but, from there, ... from the evacuation hospital, I was flown back to France, to a hospital in a place called Bar de Duc, where I spent a delightful couple of weeks [in the] spring. [laughter]

SI: Was it a rest and recuperation facility?

RM: No. I spent most of the time at the hospital. ... The French had nothing. ... They had no food to feed us or whatever, so, your best bet was, ... stay at the hospital. ... I never got to anyplace. I got to Paris later, but, not then.

SI: Did you rejoin your unit once you were discharged from the hospital?

RM: Yeah, went back up ... through the replacement depot system, got back to Marburg, where I ... shot that fellow up there, and that's where I was on V-E Day, in Marburg, and then, from there, I went back to division, and then, ... all the way back down the chain of command to my company.

SI: Do you remember any of the V-E Day celebrations?

RM: Well, all of us in the ... replacement depot were on our way back to our outfits. We'd all been in the hospital, in some hospital, and we were being returned. Somebody had a bottle of scotch, and, I think, it didn't take ... long, because there were six or seven of us, and we drank. ... That happened, then, we went to bed, [laughter] but, joy, you know, really.

SI: Were there many rumors at the end of the war, such as the one about Hitler's Bavarian redoubt?

RM: That was one, yes.

SI: Were there any rumors about the Russians?

RM: No, not that I can recall. ... I don't know [if] it was that early or not that George Patton insisted that we should continue up through Austria and push them all the way back to east of the Elbe, anyway, or east of Berlin, but, there was nothing, you know, circulating among our people that I can recall.

SI: What was the general attitude towards the Russians? Did anyone voice their opinion?

RM: No. ... This picture, these are all Russians here. [laughter]

SI: Where was your unit stationed when you rejoined them?

RM: Oh, they were stationed outside of Nordhausen at a place called Kyfehauser. Now, my son was there a couple of years ago. He went with his German class from the University of Central Florida, and Kyfehauser was like a German park, had a big monument to somebody, I forgot who now, and in the vault of that monument was stored hundreds of paintings, apparently that had been stolen, you know, from French museums and so forth, and there was also a big villa, and it had been a rest area for German officers from the Eastern Front and, also, a baby factory, because there were, I don't know how many, [pregnant women]. Most of the women over there were pregnant. We were there about a week, and then, when they had drawn the lines for the ... zones, that was ... in the Russian Zone. We had to leave. It was over near Dresden. So, then, we moved, from there, down to Frankfurt, but, that was ... an interesting place and very pretty. ... Our company all sat down to dinner in one room, a big, U-shaped table, like [where] the man that owned the place used to sit, and ... our company commander did take down the picture of Adolph Hitler that was hanging on the wall. [laughter] ...

SI: You were on occupation duty for two years. What were your duties?

RM: ... Before the division was deactivated, we just did basic occupation, keeping the peace, like a police force, and then, the Third Armored Division was deactivated, and those of us who were staying, and I was staying because I didn't have enough points to come home, were reassigned, and I was reassigned to a German prisoner of war camp. It was a prisoner of war camp with German prisoners of war, and I commanded that, ... in Mannheim, for a few months, and then, I ... was transferred to Frankfurt, in the Information and Education Division of the Army. ... We were now in the process of reeducating all of the American troops. So, I was transferred up there and, from there, I joined the intelligence unit in Frankfurt, where I spent most ... the rest of my time in Germany.

SI: When did you return home?

RM: Came home in April of '47.

SI: You mentioned that the voyage was rougher the second time.

RM: Yeah. ... I don't know why. I thought I was gonna fly home. ... I had some connections, [laughter] I thought, in Frankfurt. I'd become quite friendly with some people in the United States Forces, European Theater, Headquarters, and they were constantly sending couriers, back and forth, and so on, and so on. I had myself assigned to temporary duty in Frankfurt, awaiting one of these, and it never happened. So, the guy, Joe Cutrona, his name was, ... called me and said, "Ray, ... you can hang around all you want, but, ... I can't just keep you on the list. You're not doing anything. You know, you're drawing pay." [laughter] He said, "How about if I put you on priority surface?" I said, "What does that mean?" He said, "That means you go to ...

Bremerhaven and you get on the first ship,” which would be, like, the next day. “You go ahead of everybody else.” So, I said, “Okay.” So, I went up to Bremerhaven on the train and stayed overnight, and, the next day, I got on a troop ship and came home, but, it was rough. I became friendly with one of the ship’s officers, and I used to go up there for coffee in the morning, up where they were, not down where we were. I’d ... stand outside of his stateroom, and then, watch the bow of the ship go down in the water, and then, you’d watch the bow go up, you know, and, if you did that long enough, you’d get seasick. ... It was that rough. A lot of the troops were seasick. Their quarters were miserable, you know.

SI: Was it a Liberty ship?

RM: No. It was converted, but, you know, they had them stacked up, you know, like four high, and terrible.

SI: When you were traveling through Germany, both during the war and the occupation, what kind of destruction did you see?

RM: Oh, terrible, at least where ... I was. ... When I joined this outfit that I was with ‘til I came home, I was the personnel officer, and, in the Army, a man had to be paid, if you could find him, every month. He had to get his pay. Well, we had people all over Germany, so, I would travel. I traveled, from Frankfurt, all the way up to Dusseldorf and Essen. I traveled, from Frankfurt, all the way, ... on the train, to Berlin, ... and, every place you went, except maybe ... down in the Alps, in the Bavarian Alps, Munich wasn’t that bad, I didn’t ever travel in the Russian Zone, but, all along the Rhine, ... Essen, Cologne, Koblenz, Dusseldorf, any place where ... there had been any manufacturing, destroyed. ... I went to Kassel once to get a train to go to Paris, on leave, devastated, not a house standing; Mannheim, destroyed, not Heidelberg, which was close by, ... not even Frankfurt. ... Berlin was terrible.

SI: Did you ever see Dresden?

RM: No, I didn’t go to Dresden, because ... we were out before I ever got there. My son did, though. He went there, and he said ... a lot of it’s been restored, but, it was really, what I saw, ... bad.

SI: How quickly were you discharged once you returned to the United States?

RM: ... I had sixty days leave accrued coming, ... June of ‘47.

SI: Did you return to Rutgers right away?

RM: Well, ... this is before Rutgers had a full university in Newark. They had a unit there and I thought, “Well, maybe I could go nights in Newark and get my degree;” well, lots of luck. So, I decided, because, heck, I had the GI Bill, “Why don’t I go back for a full year and get my degree?” ... I went back in the Fall of ‘47 and graduated in the Class of ‘48.

SI: What was it like to attend classes with both seasoned veterans and kids coming straight out of high school?

RM: ... I think the people that came straight out of high school missed what going to college really meant, to me, in 1940. They were thrust into ... a living situation with people who were four, five, six years older than they were already and ... those people, which were ... maybe the majority of the people on campus at the time, their main object was to get this education, get out, get a degree, get a job, you know, because they're already [behind], well, even myself, I was whatever I was in 1948, I was twenty-six years old, and ... some of them were not as old as that, but, they were starting as freshmen, you know, and they're in their early twenties, because they'd been in the service. So, that attitude was entirely foreign to somebody who was entering from high school. Now, when I went, in 1940, everybody was from high school and college was, well, ... a lot slower experience. ... You absorbed a lot just from osmosis, you know, rather than having to rush from this class to that, and hurry up, and get it, and do the next thing. So, I think that hurt, ... maybe it didn't hurt, it was just different. Life in the fraternity was different. People just didn't come down from their studying forty-five minutes before dinner, and sit around, and talk, or play records, or whatever, you know. Everybody was in too big a hurry, not too big a hurry, but, a big hurry.

SI: Were most of the Zeta Psi brothers veterans?

RM: At that time, yeah. ... Having come back to the fraternity, and I went back and lived back there again, I remembered what it was like before, and you couldn't put that way of life, ... those customs, back on to these guys who had served three or four years in the service. "[I am] not gonna put up with that crap," ... and you couldn't blame them. They were there for a different reason, not a different reason, but, their reasons for being there were ... different from mine ... when I went to college. ... When I went, I went, primarily, to learn, and then, the profession came later. They went, "Got to get a job and I've got to learn those things that are gonna help me get a job," different thing, I think. ...

SI: You went to work for a few years after graduating from Rutgers.

RM: Yeah. Well, what happened [was], my plans to become a lawyer went down the tube, my plan to become a diplomat went down the tube, [laughter] so, I went to work.

SI: What did you do?

RM: I went to work for a firm by the name of Cluett Peabody. Cluett Peabody were the manufacturers of Arrow Shirts.

SI: What did you do there?

RM: I was a salesman. I spent the rest of my adult life being a salesman.

SI: Was being a salesman a new experience for you?

RM: Well, it was. What happened was, I was supposed to go to graduate school, [the] School of Advanced International Studies, which is where my roommate had gone, my roommate from college, and I signed up to enter their summer program in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and then, continue into the Masters degree program in Washington, DC, in the following year. In the meantime, the person who had been my company commander in Germany called me and he was in New York, from California, on business and wanted to see me. I had, ultimately, become his executive officer, before the war was over. So, I went into New York, we had dinner, and he said that he was sales manager for a firm in California, and he said, "I need a second banana. Why don't you come and work for me?" California seemed nice. [laughter] I was already twenty-six years old, why not take a shortcut? I said, "Okay." The day before I'm to leave, I'd already bought my airline tickets, my mother and father had a big party for me, and that night, at the party, I got a telegram. He'd just lost his job. [laughter] So, I didn't go to California. Now, I'm in Newark in the summertime and I figured, "I can't do this, standing around all summer, ... wait 'til fall, 'til I go to Washington, DC, to school." So, I went to work, and I went to work for Cluett Peabody, and I decided, by the time fall came along, I liked it so much that I thought I'd make a career out of it, and that's what happened. [laughter]

SI: You were recalled for Korea by the Army.

RM: ... Yeah. [laughter]

SI: Were you in the Reserves?

RM: Yeah, involuntarily. ... When I got out, out of Fort Dix, I sent out a little letter, to the commanding general of the First Army, resigning my commission. It was not accepted. ... Because you're in the Reserves, you were in for the duration, plus, six months, and the President had not yet declared the duration at an end. Harry Truman declared the duration at an end sometime in the Spring of 1950. I should have resigned my commission then, because, in June, the North Koreans marched over the 38th Parallel and, bingo, we're back. [laughter] That's how come I was in [during the Korean War]. I never did anything, except not go to any meetings, nothing, but, they called me back anyway.

SI: What was your first assignment?

RM: My first assignment was as company commander of a training company in the 69th Division, at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

SI: Was this an armored unit?

RM: No, infantry, and I hated it. I didn't want to be back in the first place, but, you know, ... I'm not saying that I'm such a great person, but, it was my duty, so, I'm here, you know, and I'll do the best I can, and all I could see was that what happened to the Army between the end of World War II and Korea, ... some bad things happened, unfortunately. People got into the Army and ... got commissions who really shouldn't have had them. I had a neighbor who joined the United States Air Corps Reserve unit in Brooklyn, this is before the United States Air Force was a fact, and he was called to active duty, as a second lieutenant. ... He didn't know doodley about

being an infantry platoon leader. He went overseas to Korea as an infantry platoon leader. This was happening, and it was gonna happen to me, ... I was gonna go overseas and become an infantry company commander. There weren't that many tanks in Korea. It wasn't that kind of warfare, and all I could think was, "I'm gonna get myself killed, and I'm gonna get these guys [that] I'm supposed to be leading ... killed, and that's no good, for them or for me, and I don't want to do that." So, one of the men that I had worked for, a regular Army type, was in the Pentagon, and I wrote to him, and I said, "Could you think of something better for me to do than what I'm doing?" I didn't get a letter, didn't get a reply. All of a sudden, one day, about two weeks after that, I received a letter from the Department of the Army, transferring me for duty to the Office of the Chief of Staff for duty with the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4, that's supply, by order of the Secretary of the Army, J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff. Now, there's nobody that can rescind this order, except the President. So, I took it over and I waved it in front of my battalion commander. [laughter] Oh, he was mad. In any event, that's how I got to the Pentagon and I worked as a company grade assistant, I was a captain, to a major general, cushy, long hours, but, not very hard work.

SI: What kind of work did you do?

RM: Well, you see, he was a staff officer. He was the Assistant G-4 and staff officers are not authorized ... an aide. ... A commanding general is authorized an aide. A staff officers is not authorized an aide, but, he can have an assistant, all right. Now, General Reeder had two assistants. He had a colonel, who was my friend, that's the guy that got me there, and a company grade assistant. Now, Colonel Osborne was operational. He was in the actual preparation of the Army budget. That was what General Reeder's job was. My job was to make their job easier. I got there in the morning before they did, I opened the safes, [laughter] I signed for all the equipment. When my boss had to go up on the Hill to testify, I made sure he had a car. I went with him and held the charts. That's what I did. When ... General Reeder's wife died, while I was there, ... he wanted her buried at West Point, I made all the arrangements, [getting] the remains to the train, on the train, up to West Point, all that. So, that was my job for fourteen months and I enjoyed it, you know. [laughter]

SI: Would you like to say anything else about your time at the Pentagon?

RM: No. One thing I did, I met a lot of ... high-powered brass in that job. ... Once a week, the heads of all the technical services, which was ordnance, quartermaster, engineers, those type people, not commanding people, they met with the G-4 in the office next to ours, ... and they're all, at least, major generals. They all pop into my office and wait to be called in. I had never seen that much brass in one place in my life before. [laughter] So, that was all. I enjoyed that.

SI: How did you meet your wife?

RM: My wife was secretary to the owner of a department store in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and that was in my territory when I was traveling for Arrow Shirts, and I met her because I wanted to see him, [laughter] and he invited me to their Christmas party, and, from that, we were married. [laughter]

SI: Congratulations. Were you married after you were recalled?

RM: I was married before Korea. As a matter-of-fact, we were supposed to be married in December of 1950 when I got my notice to report, so, we moved it up, and we got married in October, and I went back in November. ...

SI: You have two children, correct?

RM: Two children, I have a son and a daughter, neither of whom is married, the son living in Las Vegas, and my daughter lives here in Florida.

SI: Your son served in the Air Force.

RM: Yes.

SI: Did he serve during the Vietnam War?

RM: No. My son ... was born in 1960, and so, it had to be ... in the '80s before he was in the Air Force. He went in the Air Force out of high school, because he didn't really know what he wanted to do. So, he asked me and I said, "Go." ... When he got out, he went to the University of Central Florida. Ultimately, he got a degree. He's out in Las Vegas, doing something for the gambling business that has to do with computers. Don't ask me what, I don't know what. [laughter]

SI: That sounds very lucrative. I have found the Class of 1944 to be a very cohesive group.

RM: ... Yeah, I'm proud of the class. I'm proud of what we've done, you know. I'm proud of the fact that we were able to give the kind of money we did for so few people, you know. I'd like to talk to you a little bit about Rutgers. Just recently, [in] the last alumni magazine, ... I can't think of the name of that committee, the Committee of A Thousand, or whatever it is ...

SI: Rutgers 1000?

RM: Is that it? They are the people that would like us to return to ... ["smaller time" sports]. I read that, and I visited their website and read all the stuff they had in there, and then, I read the Sunday paper and found that Rutgers was defeated, 61-to-nothing, by Miami. ... Then, I read the *US News and World Report* and *Time Magazine*, which I get, and no place do I find Rutgers mentioned as any kind of a scholastic rating, you know, and I wonder why we're doing this. How do people in your class feel about our pursuit of excellence, or whatever, in [the] football and basketball leagues that we're in and getting our ass kicked? [laughter] ... We don't go any place. We have no business in a league with Syracuse, Penn State, West Virginia, and Miami. It's ridiculous. ... When I look at the schools that are so popular and so efficient in sports, I don't see any of them that are ranked up there with Cornell, and forget Harvard, and Yale, and Princeton, with Cornell, and Swarthmore, and schools like that. Now, when I was in college, we had a league that Rutgers could play in and win. ... They played schools like Lafayette, and Lehigh, and Colgate, and people like that. ... Of course, if you read any of the stuff on their

website, whoever is writing it, they don't think a lot of our good friend Francis Lawrence, mercy.
How is he perceived on campus?

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 1/16/02

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 1/25/02

Reviewed by Raymond Mortensen 2/02