

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH EDWIN ROBINSON

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Edwin Robinson on February 8, 2006 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth and ...

William Olson: Bill Olson.

ER: and Edwin Robinson

SI: Thank you very much for coming back.

ER: Pleasure to be here.

WO: Can you tell us a little bit about your family history with your mother and father?

ER: Okay, yes. As a matter of fact, I can start with my father's side of the family. My father was born actually in the 19th Century, 1899, and his actual full name is Joseph Ten-Broeck Robinson. ... Ten-Broeck is a hyphenated Dutch name. It comes from an Old Dutch family from the colonial days that settled in the Hudson River Valley up near New York. During the American Revolutionary War, there was an American General named Ten-Broeck. There is a Ten-Broeck Museum up in Albany. ... The Ten-Broecks married into another Old Dutch family named the Van Rensselaers, and you may have heard of Van Rensselaer Polytech or Rensselaer Polytech. That's the same family. On his mother's side, my grandmother, her middle name was Boraem. [Editor's Note: Boraem is one spelling of this name, others are Borem and Booraem] ... If you look in New York City, I believe it's in the area of Queens, you'll find a Boraem Hill, and I believe that's also partly related to the family. ... If you go down into Sayreville here in New Jersey, you'll see a Booraem Avenue. [Editor's Note: Booraem Ave. is in Milltown]. Slightly different spellings of the name, and I tried to do some family tracing, you know, family history kinds of stuff. ... I kind of get lost when the family came out of New York, at least the Boraems into New Jersey. The only thing I could find out was the Boraems' were the first settlers in the State of New Jersey. They settled in the area that surrounds Jersey City right now. So staying with my father's side of the family, his father was at one time the Superintendent of the Newark City Cemetery, which people call Potter's Fields, where they bury the poor folks. He had, I think, six children that lived, my grandmother and he had six children that lived, two I believe died. That was pretty common back then, kids dying early or dying in childbirth. My grandfather also worked for Thomas Edison one time, up in his West Orange plant. ... My father used to tell me stories about how they used to go up there at night. ... Edison would run off the old silent movies, because that's where they made them. ... He got to see silent movies for free. Unfortunately a bad thing about my grandfather, in that side of the family, he was what today would be called a domestic abuser or an alcoholic. ... We used to call them drunks, and wife and child beaters. He was a pretty bad guy. My father, his schooling went up to about the ninth grade. He went as far as the ninth grade in what then was called Boys Industrial School. Today it's called Essex County Votech. [Vocational School] ... He was apprenticed to a plumber at one time, and he tells me or did tell me, one time one of his chores was taking care of the plumber's horse. At the end of the day, he had to clean up the horse. He was drafted in World War I, in 1918, went up to Fort Slocum, New York, and then was sent back home from medical reasons. So fortunately he never participated in World War I, didn't have to go overseas. He wound up being a house painter and a paperhanger, that was his career. On my mother's side

of the family, I'm second generation German. They come from a town in Germany called Pforzheim. Now my grandfather came over to the US in 1904 in the SS Vandenberg. ... To make a long story short, he wound up living on Frelinghuysen Avenue in Newark. A German family took him in. ... They owned a building in a factory district there in Newark, which is kind of unique. On the bottom floor of this building, in the front, was a bar, in back of it was a restaurant, and a kitchen in back of that. Then upstairs were about I think two or three stories were a couple apartments and rooms for single men. ... In those days, it was basically a boarding house, because a lot of the people, a lot of the men, who came over from Europe, worked in the local factories. ... They had a room there ... what turned out to be my grandparents home. The bar was unique, like I remember as a kid, because it had stained glass windows in it, and the windows were an advertisement for a beer called Feigenspan, P.O.N, Pride of Newark. [It had a] beautiful set of stained glass windows. The bar would close down around six o'clock at night. The restaurant part would serve lunch, hot meals to the workers. ... Then that was about the only meal they served. ... After working there for a number of years, my grandfather went back to Germany and my grandmother came back with him. ... I believe they got married here in the US but I'm not quite sure, but she was also from Pforzheim, Germany. Later on at some point in time, the owners of that building, I guess retired. ... They sold the building to my grandmother and grandfather. So they took it over and my mother was born in that building.

SI: When did they return to the US?

ER: Well, my grandmother came over in 1913, and my mother was born a year later in 1914. I've been able to check records in Ellis Island, and I found out my grandmother went back in '34 and '37. The family story is she went back there, because someone had died and left a few dollars. ... She went back and somehow managed to get that money back out of Germany, even though Hitler had put an order out, no Deutschmarks to leave Germany or no Reich marks to leave Germany at the time. ... I guess she paid underneath the table to somebody, and she managed to get the money out. My mother was born in '14. Her name was Aimee Frieda Stumm. My grandfather on that side, his name was Max and ... my grandmother was Frieda. There were stories that my grandmother was a little bit pro-Hitler, but we don't know about that. There was the conflict there, because she also had Jewish doctor. So how could she be pro-Hitler, but having a Jewish doctor. ... That was the family stories. The other strange thing about that is my mother was baptized in an Episcopalian Church as were her brother and her sister. ... I don't know how that ever came about, because over in Germany there weren't any Episcopalians. You were either Catholic or Lutheran, most likely. So somehow, they wound up changing religions when they came here to the states. My mother's education only went as far as the eighth grade. She was pulled out and sent to work at the restaurant and boarding house kind of thing. Mom and dad met when, I'm not sure, I think my father may have even rented a room at that place and that's how they met. ... They were married in 1934, and my sister was born less than a year later. ... That was a big family hush hush, because my mother was pregnant. You know, and in those days, a pregnant woman that was horrible, but that's what happened. My sister was born in '35. My brother was born in '38 and I was born in '41, and all three of us baptized in St. Steven's Episcopal Church in Newark. We lived in Newark originally, then we moved up to Irvington. That's where ... actually, my childhood begins in Irvington, because I was maybe two or three when I moved from Newark to Irvington. So my recollections of

Newark are not great, because we didn't live in a great neighborhood. I remember rats in the neighborhood, going to see my brother in school one time, and seeing rats run across the schoolyard. Not a great area of Newark, I can tell you that.

SI: I was just curious, particular on your mother's side, were there any stories about backlash during World War I against Germans?

ER: No. Unfortunately, my family didn't speak a lot about what was going on. ... I've been trying over the past several years to get some information, particularly from my aunt and uncle. ... Last summer I had a family reunion, only my aunt showed up. ... I tried to get some information out of her as to what was going on in World War I, World War II. ... I guess her memory is slipping. She's somewhere mid to late 80s right now. ... I tried to get some more information, but not successful. I was really curious. I'd like to find out what the family may have thought going World War II, because my uncle served in the US Army. So he could have been serving here in the US Army, where cousins of his may have been in the Wehrmacht. ... I never found out anything about that.

SI: Was there contact? It sounds like there was some level of contact with the German relatives.

ER: There was a little bit, because I did meet many years later, at my grandmother's funeral, one relative, who did come over from Germany for the funeral. ... I also know that, not so much contact with the family, when my grandmother died she had a really messy will. ... One of the reasons it was messy was because she had stock in German companies. So there was some contact with people over in Germany between my aunt, who was executor of her will, and relatives over in Germany and companies in Germany. ... Outside of that, I don't know anything about my German side.

WO: What was it like growing up in Irvington?

ER: Irvington was fun. It's not like Irvington today unfortunately. [laughter] Irvington today is a very crime ridden little town. It used to be a beautiful town. It's always been a white-collar town as a suburb of Newark. [Editor's Note: Mr. Robinson meant to say blue-collar] ... As a matter of fact, I lived one block away from the City of Newark. I went to Grove Street Elementary School, Myrtle Avenue Junior High School, and then Irvington High. ... I graduated there in '58. We had a lot of fun. One of the nice things about Irvington was at one time they had an amusement park there, across the Irvington, Maplewood border, called Olympic Park. It was a great park, a lot of fun, a lot of rides. They had what was billed as the largest outdoor freshwater swimming pool. ... They had a circus there, they had fireworks and stuff like that. The house I lived in was a six family tenement house, and it had a flat roof on it. ... In summertime, we could go up to the roof. People used to go up there and take chairs, and sit on the roof and watch the fireworks in the amusement park, which is clear across the other side of town. It was a great view and you had these great big trees in front of you, but fireworks always came up above the trees. So it was things like that made Irvington a nice little town. I grew up in the Polish section of town, which ... that was only a block away from Sacred Heart Church, where all the Polish kids went. ... They also had a school. The neighborhood was originally German and then it became Polish. ... Yet there were still some touches of Germany in that

neighborhood. There was a drugstore that was owned by a German, and he lived down the street. ... His house was raided during World War II, because he had a short wave radio. ... He was listening to the Fatherland. There was this big descending with all kinds of flashing lights, I remember that. [laughter] I mean they hauled this guy away, because he was listening to Germany on the shortwave. There was also a German bakery. ... In a photographic history somebody has of this town, I should have brought the book with me, is a sign in the bakery shop. I think it said "500 dollars to anybody who could prove we're Nazis," because people were accusing them of being Nazis. Next to that was the German theater, movie theater. It was closed during the war, but after the war, it opened up. ... Kids in the neighborhood used to have fun walking by with doing the goose step and the swastika. [laughter] You know, the Heil Hitler stuff. We were kids, but it was really good. Like I said, the elementary school was nice, because I walked to elementary school. I walked to Junior High School, and rode the public bus going into high school. ... We get on the street corner and get on the bus with everybody else, and rode to the center of town, then walked from the center town up to the high school. I was on the soccer team for my junior and senior years. That was the only sport I played. I worked a little bit in a photo shop. I also delivered newspapers. I first started out with the newspaper bit. My brother and I actually sold newspapers on the street corner in Newark. Then, we finally got our routes. We had an afternoon route, then we had a morning route. ... That was pretty good, because we used that money to buy anything that we wanted. My parents didn't have to buy us [things.] Like if we wanted anything special, sometimes even clothes, we bought them instead of my parents buying them. ... Like I said, we grew up in a working class town. We never had a lot of money. There were times, ... because my father's work was seasonal, we didn't even know how we were going to get the rent paid. We were always like one-step ahead of the bill collectors. Particularly the guy, who used to come around, and collect [a payment] for the insurance policies. In those days, you could buy an insurance policy from the Prudential Insurance Company, and you'd pay so much every week on it. ... The guy would come around and make a collection, as we used to hide from those guys once in a while. It was really crazy, but that was when my dad was out of work.

SI: Did he work for himself or somebody else?

ER: Both. One of the understandings that I got was that when the Depression came along, he had his own painting business and he got wiped out. ... Somehow, he never recovered, but he never talked about that. My family never talked a lot about their history unfortunately, but he was hard hit during the Depression years. ... He managed to struggle. ... So sometimes, he would work for himself and maybe even hire one or two people. ... Later on, he got in working for companies, who put up houses, so that after the houses got constructed he'd come along and paint them. ... So he did a lot of house painting in Roselle, Roselle Park, Kenilworth. He used to take us through there and say, "I painted this house; I painted that house" all that kind of stuff. ... Basically, he was, just in the later years anyhow, usually working for somebody.

WO: You said you graduated in the late 1950s. How was it like growing up during the McCarthy era?

ER: Well, I don't remember that much about it only because, I forgot exactly when the McCarthy dates were, but ... we were just about the last family in the neighborhood to get a

television set. One of the things we used to do, this is nice about growing up then, I love this part. Somebody in the neighborhood got a television, like the first one, and they would invite all their neighbors in to watch television shows. ... People used to bring food, and they bring chairs, and they line them up in the living room like a theater. ... We just sit quietly and watch McCarthy?

SI: I think the trials were on TV in '53, '54.

ER: Yes. Now we had TV by then. ... I do remember watching some of it, but didn't have the understanding of what was going on that I do now. ... At that time I thought, "Yes, he's getting rid of all these communists in the government." ... I didn't know that he was really berating people, and he was really off the wall. ... As a kid, about thirteen, fourteen years old at the time, I had no idea what it was. All I know is he was a rah rah American, and he was getting rid of the communists all over the government. I didn't know he was scary.

SI: How much was the Cold War and the threat of communism on your mind?

ER: It was on our mind all the time, because we were constantly bombarded with what today might be called propaganda. The movies were always having something about the fifth column or the communist threat. In school, we had the duck and cover exercises. Where in addition to fire drills, we had air raid drills. We'd all have to get underneath our desks. Well then, we didn't know [laughter] that that was totally useless. ... The other thing we used to sometimes do in school if you didn't duck and cover, you went out in the hallway and crouched down against the wall, but you had to stay away from windows. It was not like World War II. We didn't have air raid drills then, but I do remember in our apartment we had blackout shades. ... One of the other people who lived in our house, in one of the other apartments, he was the local air raid warden. So he had this old World War I style Army hat painted white, with a logo on the front that showed he was the local air raid warden. That I remember. I also remember the end of World War II. That was V-J Day. The guy upstairs took my brother, myself, I don't know if he took my mother, but he took my father too. We all went down to downtown Newark, to celebrate, and it was wild. People were shouting and screaming and laughing and waving, I have my little American flag that I was waving. ... That was a great time, the end of the war, you know.

SI: Was World War II like a scary time for you?

ER: No, no. All I know is that it was over, everybody was celebrating. That was '45, so I was four years old. I do remember a little bit of rationing and ration stamps. My father didn't have a car, so we didn't have to worry about that part of rationing. ... In the Korean War, they also did the old black and white, original television shows, Milton Berle and Ed Sullivan, Show of Shows and all kinds of strange things like that. ... They were a lot of fun. ... Then sometimes even the local tavern always had a TV set, and my father was a boxing fan. So Friday night, he would go down and watch the boxing matches, or before then we used to listen to them on the radio all the time. ... Friday night was boxing night. Then, later on of course, when we got our own TV, we knew what we were going to watch on Friday night. [laughter] There was no question about that, but that was really good. ... McCarthy I think, let me see, what were the years of some rationing. ... I remember helping my mother take, I think it was lard, and some kind of coloring

tablet and squeeze this coloring into the lard to make something that looked like margarine or butter. I don't remember how it tastes, but I remember doing that. They used to sell War Bonds in school, and I remember that both grammar school and junior high school. You paid so ... much for a couple of stamps, and you paste them into a book and you filled the book up, you got a twenty-five dollar bond. I did a couple of those. That was kind of nice. ... As far as being afraid of communists, yes we all were. We were scared stiff. In one of the local parks, they put an anti-aircraft battery in there. Some National Guard or soldiers from the South took over like half the park, and they put in these small anti-aircraft batteries. ... That was supposed to protect Newark and the greater New York area from Russian bombers. ...

SI: Oh, this was during the Cold War?

ER: This is during the Cold war. So that was how the threat of communism was really brought home to us. We had to be on lookout for them. ... Then I remember Korea, of course, that was going on. ... Everybody was so glad when that finally got ended. ... That was part of Eisenhower's campaign to end the war, and bring the troops back home.

SI: You mentioned that your uncle was in the Army during World War II. Did you have any other relatives in the service then?

ER: Yes. On my father's side, I had a cousin. Going back to my uncle temporarily, I had asked him to be part of this interview process here. ... He didn't want to do that. ... He was doing something down in the Miami, Florida area. So he never got to fight actually against any of his relatives. So he spent the whole war over here in the US. On my father's side, I had a cousin, who also basically spent his whole time in the US. ... He was a Navy pilot. He was classified as what they called a ferry pilot. ... All his job was is to fly an airplane from point A to point B. ... He flew it back and forth [laughter] across the states. ... Growing up as a kid, I thought he was my hero, because I saw pictures of him standing next to this plane. ... One or two pictures he had ammunition strung across his neck. I thought he was this great big fighter pilot. ... [laughter] Then years later I found all he did was flew planes from point A to point B. What a disappointment, but he was my hero when I was growing up.

WO: Did the Korean impact your decision to enter the Navy at all?

ER: To some extent it did. I always had a fascination with the Navy as a kid. I can recall an incident when the Second World War ended. ... They brought the Navy fleet back to New York Harbor. They had it in New York Harbor. You could get on a ferry and go around the ships. ... Well, one of aunts, on my father's side, took my family out there and we saw the ships. ... We went to an Italian restaurant, I think it was Mama Leone's. ... As a little kid I'm singing the song *Bell Bottom Trousers, Coat of Navy Blue* in the restaurant. My family never lets me forget that, but I always had this fascination with the Navy. So when I got out of high school, I knew I wasn't going to go to college, because my grades basically were horrible. [laughter] We didn't have the money, scholarships were not available as they are now. You know, there were a few of them around. So I knew I had to do something. So what was I going to do, I always had this dream I'm going to be a sailor. So when I got out of high school, ... the first thing I did immediately was go down and see my local Navy recruiter. That caused a problem though in the

family. I was seventeen when I graduated from high school. ... My father didn't want to sign the papers for me to go into the Navy. Here I was, this was in June, my birthday was in January. Six months later, legally I didn't have to ask him for permission. So we got in a little bit of an argument on it, and that was the first time I ever faced my father down. It surprised me, and I basically told him, "You're going to sign for me now or in six months I'm out of here anyhow." So he realized that there was no holding me back. So I went down to the Navy recruiter, he signed the papers. ... In late July or maybe early August, I was off to Great Lakes Naval Training Center. ... That was the beginning of my Navy time.

WO: Was there any particular reason why he didn't want you to join the Navy?

ER: I'm not quite sure. I know he didn't want me to join the National Guard. He was dead set against my brother and myself joining the National Guard, because when he was growing up through the Depression and stuff, there were a lot of strikes. ... The National Guard was very often called out to bust up the strikes. ... He knows of some instances, friends of his in particular, where one brother would be a striker and the other brother would be a National Guardsman. ... Sometimes the National Guard had to fire into the strikers. Well, that really was in my father's mind. So he absolutely said, "No National Guard, because my brother came to him one time said he was going to. ... My father blew a top. He was really angry at my brother. ... I always wanted to join the Navy, and that was it. ... He said ... I guess it was he wanted me to stay around and get a job, and then maybe contribute some money towards the household upkeep. That's what I kinda think it was. ... When he saw I was very determined to go in, he realized there was no stopping me.

WO: Did he give your brother a hard time joining the military?

ER: Only with the National Guard, because when my brother got out of high school he was eighteen. ... He had already joined the Navy Reserve. He became a Seabee [Navy Construction Battalions, CBs] and wind up spending thirty years in the Navy Reserve, retiring as a ... chief petty officer.

WO: After you enlisted, what special positions did you apply for?

ER: Well, when I first enlisted, I thought I would be an electronics technician. That is great. So I went to the boot camp at Great Lakes. That was nine weeks. Came home, they give you a week off or so in between boot camp, and a school, where your next assignment [was]. Then I went back to Great Lakes to go to an initial set of schools they had for people who go into the electrical and electronics fields. I got about halfway through, maybe ten weeks, and I flunked out. I said, "Oops, there goes my ET. There goes my electronic technician career down the tubes." ... I had enough training behind me that I qualified to go to what they call Interior Communications School. So they sent me there. So I became an Interior Communications or IC man. ... An IC man is really responsible for things like, all the alarm systems on a ship, all of the indicators for communicating between the bridge and the engine room. They call them engine order telegraphs. You may have seen in the movies, where somebody up on the bridge he's got this big instrument and he holds this handle and he pulls it down to full steam ahead and all kinds of things like that. Down in the engine room some guy responds with another one. So

that was one of the systems we took care of, but we also took care of the ship's telephone system. The ship I was on, I'll get to that later, had a telephone system. ... Later on, they sent me to a school to learn how to take care of that system, and that was the basis for my career later on with AT&T. If I hadn't gotten the training there, I don't know what I would have done. [laughter] So for me going in the Navy gave me first independence, because that was the first time I was ever on my own. I cut the [apron] strings, particularly to my mother. ... I was a mama's boy to put it mildly, and it was important to cut that apron string, that umbilical cord. ... I did that by joining the Navy. I was responsible for the first time for everything I did. Nobody else could take the blame, if I screwed up, or take the credit, if I did something good. I had no vocational training, no job training whatsoever; the Navy gave that to me. So I came out of the Navy with being a better person, I think all around, plus being able to have a job skill to go on to get a job. So I never regret, never ever regretted going in there.

SI: Was this something you thought about before you went in that you would get some technical training?

ER: Yes. I had realized that probably if I didn't go in I would wind up maybe driving a truck or something like that. Some job that anybody could do, and go nowhere, ... I didn't want that for myself. Even back then, when I was only seventeen years old, I knew that I didn't want to be in the same economic strata that my parents were in. I wanted to be better, and they helped me do it.

SI: Can you kind of take us through the enlistment process and where did you get to go for your physical? What were you thinking at the time?

ER: Well, first I went down I talked to the recruiters in Newark, on Broad Street, Newark. ... We talked about things that I could do, what I couldn't do, what my interests were, and that's when they signed me up. In the Navy, you could actually indicate at the time of enlistment what your interests were, and they would try to get you in there. So I told them I wanted to be electronics technician. I thought also about being a radar man, look at the radarscopes and stuff like that, but that was all electronic field. So we had a cursory physical exam in Newark, on Broad Street. ... After that exam, myself and a couple of other young enlistees took the, what we called the Hudson Tubes in those days, now they call it the PATH Train, over to Church Street, in lower Manhattan. ... That's where the armed forces recruiting station was. All the branches of the military were there. So I went there, another quick physical there, and then they line you up in a room. Everybody raises your right hand, swears an oath, and you take one step forward, [which was] a symbolic step forward to join the Navy. ... Then they took a bunch of us, sent us to Penn Station, in New York, put us on a train, and out to Great Lakes Naval Training Center. ... So the enlistment process was pretty good. It was when you started getting into the recruit training where it got a little difficult, [laughter] but that was good. I still enjoyed that.

SI: How did you adjust to military discipline going from civilian to military life?

ER: I had it pretty easy, and I don't know why. It may be because in general, my father kept me under a tight rein. He was pretty strict with all of us. ... He wasn't a beater, and he wasn't

anything like that. He was stern with us. So adjusting to taking orders, ... that's what you really did in boot camp, you learned how to take orders, was pretty easy for me. Hard for other guys I recall, but pretty easy for me. ... There was a certain amount of regimentation, you know, up at a certain time, go to sleep at a certain time, march to class, do exercises, all kinds of stuff, and drills, and everything else you had to learn in the Navy. ... It was marching, marching, marching, ... guard duty, and all kinds of other kinds of stuff they wanted you to do at boot camp. Interesting stuff that we learned, you had to learn Navy customs. The hardest part of boot camp for me was swimming. I didn't know how to swim. I tried several times to learn how to swim. ... I still I'm not a great swimmer, but the requirement was you had to learn how to swim. If you didn't know how to swim, you were out. So [laughter] they took us to the swimming pool one day. ... I said, "Oh here it comes. This is going to do it in for me." ... First of all, for some reason, they make us go to the pool without any bathing suits on. That was weird. So there's a whole bunch of naked guys. They're going to take the swimming test. ... You climb up on this platform. There is a guy behind you. ... He says, "Spread your legs." ... He puts his leg directly between yours. ... You put your hands across your chest, one large step out, close your legs and down, because the guy behind you prevented you from turning around. That's what the whole idea was. So here it is, me not knowing how to swim, take the big step forward into about ten to fifteen feet of water. [laughter] Down I go, come back up going [Editor's Note: Mr. Robinson imitates himself drowning.] "Save me, save me," all those kind of stuff. They stick a pole in the water. I held to the pole, and they pulled me back to the edge of the pool. Then I had to go to take swimming lessons. Well, it turned out to be that was a great thing, because I went to boot camp in July. So July, August, and part of September, that was hotter than could be out in Great Lakes. So almost every day after marching around, ... going to classes, ... doing drills, and all kinds of stuff. Instead of going back to a sweaty barracks, I went to the swimming pool. ... I went for swimming lessons. So around the last week or so, I had to prove myself that I could swim. ... Their idea was you can swim the length of the pool, in any fashion you wanted. ... You had to tread water for about five minutes or a couple of minutes. So I swam on my back, tread water and they said, "Okay you passed." I said, "Wow, wow, I made it. I'm going to stay in the Navy." That was a big thing for me. [laughter]

SI: That test where they push you into the water, is that where you're thirty feet up?

ER: Yes, it was about. I think it was at least maybe a ten to fifteen foot drop, another ten to fifteen feet of water. I never saw so much water in all my life. I can tell you that. ... [laughter] I don't want to see that much again. [laughter]

SI: Was this the first time you'd really been away from the Irvington, Newark area?

ER: Yes, yes. The first time I had been away. We didn't go on vacations, because my father didn't have the bucks. For us, a vacation was a trip over to a beach in Staten Island. ... We used to sometimes even take the bus down to a ferry in Elizabeth, take the ferry over to Staten Island, ... then take a bus to the beach, and then back again. That was a big trip for us. Later on, my father did get a car. ... We would take a couple of little trips around the State, and maybe over to Staten Island. ... I like taking the Staten Island ferry, because you could drive your car right onto the ferry. The thing doesn't run anymore, but as a kid that was a great adventure, going out on the ferry boat.

WO: What was it like on the ship that you served on?

ER: Oh, ship was interesting. It was originally a World War II cruiser. It was built in the, [as a] light cruiser. It was built at the end, kind of like the end of World War II. So it never saw any action. ... It was over in the Mediterranean. ... Then somewhere in the '50s I guess, they put it in mothballs. ... Then somebody got the bright idea to bring it back out of mothballs, and convert it from a regular light cruiser into a guided missile [light] cruiser. So it was the USS Providence, and it was originally CL82. Then they made it USS Providence CLG6. So, they had the ship up in Boston. They took guns off of it, and they put missiles on the back. ... They assembled the crew down in Norfolk. So after I finished my schooling in Great Lakes, they assigned me to that ship, which was great, because I had asked to go on to a cruiser, but I wanted to go to a cruiser in Long Beach, California. ... This cruiser was out of Boston. I said, "Okay." They assembled the crew [in Norfolk]. They put them through training. They got them up into Boston, [and] put them on the ship. ... The ship was actually still being built, when I got on it; still a lot of clean up work to be done. So the ship got commissioned. ... Then, we had to go down to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The same Guantanamo Bay where they hold these supposedly Al Qaeda terrorists [terrorist group involved with the events of September 11, 2001] these days. They called it Gitmo. [GTMO] [I] went down there for what they called a shakedown cruise. ... That was to get the crew to function as a unit. So all you did, from the time you got from about four o'clock in the morning until you went to bed around maybe ten, was you went to a lot of drills and exercises in the real hot weather. Sometimes they cut it off real short, and they would allow you to go to get liberty. Well, liberty, in Guantanamo Bay, meant you got on this little boat; they took you over to the shore, where there was a shack that sold beer. ... So you got into a line to buy the beer. It was Cuban beer. It was horrible. You sat down, you drank your beer at picnic tables. You went to the john. You got back in the beer line. It was a circle that you made, table to john, you know all that. [laughter] That was all that was. Fortunately, for me in the middle of all of this in this hot, hot summer, they said, "We're going to designate you as the guy who's going to be responsible for the telephone system on the ship." So they sent me from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba back to Great Lakes. ... Within twenty four hours, I was gone from wearing my white uniform, and maybe walking around in a T-shirt, to wearing my blue uniform and wearing a navy pea coat. [This is] because the temperature change was dramatic, but I became the guy responsible for the ship's telephone system. ... I wound up later on having one or two people working for me. Which was kind of nice, but life on a ship was okay. It was regimental. You had ... at times, you were in port, at times, you were at sea. When we were in Boston, we usually were in port on weekends, because our captain was a bachelor. He wanted his weekends. So no matter what happened, we'd somehow managed to get back to port on a Friday. ... If you were granted liberty, you went off, and you went off on liberty. ... Whenever I had liberty [for an entire weekend], I usually came home. I would take a Greyhound bus from Boston to New York. ... Then from New York I'd take the subways over, the PATH Train over, or the bus sometimes over to New Jersey ... [to] come back home. That was a lot of fun, but it was all regimental. The people that you met, some of them are great, some of them were people you would rather forget. ... That's both on the enlisted and the officer's side. Anything specific you want to know about life on a ship?

WO: Did you make any like friends that you kept in contact with after you left the Navy?

ER: For a while I did. There were two guys, both in Pennsylvania. As a matter of fact, one guy I went to his wedding later on. ... Another guy, when I had got out of the Navy, I was working for AT&T. Now they sent me to school in Pittsburgh. ... While I was in there, I went out to his parent's farm, in a place called Zelienople. ... Zelienople, where Joe Namath came from. [laughter] I was out there at his parent's farm. Then he came out and saw me there. ... We corresponded for a while, but unfortunately, I lost contact with both of these guys. ... I have tried to find them on the internet, and haven't been able to. I'd like to get in contact with them again though; I really would to see what happened to them and what their lives were like.

SI: In general, what was it like to meet people from all over the country for the first time?

ER: That was interesting. I got to tell you. Men from all walks of life.

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

ER: Okay, well people from all walks of life, and all areas of the country. [It] was the first time I really encountered honest to goodness racism. I'd encountered it when I was growing up, because we didn't go into the Negro section or the black section of Newark, because we were always told to stay away. ... In the Navy you really, really found out a lot of these guys from the South really hated black people. I mean they just couldn't stand to be around them. ... When I was on the ship, it was interesting. [laughter] One good old boy, he was from South Carolina, he was constantly, constantly saying things about black people. Well, one of his bosses was a real sharp black chief petty officer. This guy, [the chief petty officer], as far as dress, he was the best-dressed guy in our whole division. ... Maybe he was trying to prove something that he had to be better than everybody else [was]. ... He was also a darned nice guy, but this guy really hated to take an order [from him]. ... I'm surprised he didn't hit that chief petty officer sometimes, because of the hatred. That it was really there, and you could see it on liberty too. The white people went to one bar; the black people went to another. It was segregated. ... First, I actually encountered it in a civilian capacity, to some degree. ... When we were in Norfolk, [we would] go on liberty, went to the bars, because there wasn't anything else to do in Norfolk. ... [You could only] just go to the bars at the time. ... There were these signs there about the right to refuse to serve anybody. ... I didn't know back then that was their way of segregating those bars. So if a black person came to that bar, bartender would tell him to get the hell out, because he wasn't wanted there. His bars [the black bars] were down the street somewhere, and that was very unusual. ... I really didn't realize at seventeen, eighteen years old what was going on, but it was later on when I was on the ship, I really realized these Southern guys really, really hated blacks. ... I saw guys, you know, from the West, and all areas of the country, all degrees of education. The same thing with officers, we had Southern officers and we had Western officers and guys from the North.

SI: Is the Navy a more like Southern oriented, it was in that time?

ER: No, no. I think it was pretty much even. The one thing I did notice, again from the people from the South, particularly in boot camp, they apparently didn't have very good medical or dental care, when they were growing up. ... They would come into boot camp, and a lot of them

were getting glasses for the first time. ... A lot of the Southern recruits were getting their teeth yanked out. ... The Navy was giving them full sets of false teeth, because their dental hygiene was absolutely atrocious. ... I didn't see that from people from the North, but I guess there was the different standard of living. ... That was strange to me to see. ... In general, we learned that we had to be with each other and we had to work together. ... If you didn't do it, you just made life for yourself very hard. It was difficult to get any kind of advancement, if it was noted that you were prejudiced, or you couldn't get along with your fellow sailors. ... You had to also learn how to lead, so you couldn't show those tendencies. If you want to get promoted, that meant you were a leader to some degree. You had to show no biases; you had to be fair and even.

SI: You mentioned that at least one chief was black. This is ten years after the integration. How integrated was the crew?

ER: Well, actually the crew was integrated pretty well. My group only had a couple of blacks in it. Now other areas see the whole ship was divided into divisions, depending upon your job specialties. Certain job specialties, you were inclined to have more blacks in them. Those were the guys who worked on the deck. I hate to say it and appear to be snobbish, but those were the less educated. So both whites and blacks, who didn't have a lot of education wound up being the guys who chipped paint all day, ... hold ropes, and all that kind of those stuff ... did the lousy jobs. Those who were more educated got into the more technical fields. ... Some of them were basically all white. There was also a group of Filipinos on our ship. The Navy had some kind of a deal with the Philippines, where Filipinos could join the US Navy. Ninety nine percent of those Filipinos wound up being called stewards. ... The job of the steward was to take care of the officers. You made their beds. You cleaned their rooms. You cooked their meals, and you served their meals to them. That was a steward's life, and ninety nine percent of those were all Filipinos. We had a contingent of Marines on the ship. We had about a hundred Marines.

SI: How large was the crew in general?

ER: Okay, the crew was, if I remember correctly, I said a hundred Marines maybe a little bit less than that. ... The crew was a little over a thousand, ... seventy-five of those were Marines, the rest sailors, and about a hundred of the officers. ... Officers, like I say, came from all over the country. Some of them you liked. Some of them you didn't. One thing I didn't like about being in the Navy, it always irked me, was personal inspections. For some reason it just irked me that we'd have to stand there in uniforms, all dressed up. ... These officers would come around and say, "Well your hat is not straight or your creases aren't sharp. Your shoes aren't shined." ... You looked back at them sometimes, and you'd say, "Have you looked at a mirror recently?" Because some of these [laughter] ... weren't sharp either. ... That was the way they, you know, ... how discipline was enforced in the Navy. You always had that rank and file stuff going on. You even had it within the enlisted ranks. You know, you have somebody of a higher rank would occasionally have to do a personal inspection on somebody of a lower rank.

WO: You mentioned racism on your ship. Was there anything against the norm, different? Was there any white and black interaction?

ER: Well, we always had to get along. ... Yes, there were people who didn't mind being friends with someone of a different race. For the most part, I would say for myself, because I didn't have any blacks in my group. So I was basically with an all white group. ... The few blacks that were part of my division, [I] got along with them very well. ... Except for the Southern guys, never saw any hard feelings against them.

WO: What about when say the group is granted liberty? Was there a possibility that whites and blacks would socialize together?

ER: In some cases, people went off in integrated groups. ... For the most part, I think it was usually segregated. [It] may have been like an unwritten law, to that effect. You're over in Japan or something, you would have a white bar. You'd have a black bar. Sometimes you go into a bar, you have blacks at one table and whites at another table. ... Sometimes you'd have them mixed in. It all depends. I noticed on several occasions, if I went into a bar and there were chief petty officers around, they were more integrated than their lower enlisted ranks. ... They all realized they all had risen up to a certain level, and they were all in it together, I guess.

SI: Can you kind of take us through like an average day or an average watch?

ER: Yes, okay. Well, an average day, ... that would say take an average day, if you were at sea, because they differed, sea and being in port differed. An average day you'd probably get up around five, shower and shave, get breakfast, make up your bunk. ... Your bunks were three bunks high. ... It was just a metal frame, a piece of canvas tied in this frame like a cot, and a mattress put on top, blanket and pillow, and you had these straps to hold everything together. ... So after you made your bunk and your other two buddies made their bunks, the whole thing was pushed up and folded up out of the way. So you would get more room to walk in through the living compartments. So then, after breakfast, you would have a muster in some area. They would make sure everybody was present, and read off any assignments and anything like that, pass news on, and then everybody would go to their basic workstations. ... My particular workstation was about three decks down. ... That was where the telephone system was, it had a desk there. One guy was always on so-called watch. He had to stay there in that room, by the telephone. ... He took reports in of any equipment that we were responsible for, if it had failed. ... He would tell the petty officer in charge that so and so called in and something has failed. ... The petty officer would assign somebody to go out and fix it. Then we'd have lunch, go back to work again, dinner would break out about maybe five, six in the evening. ... Then afterwards, they would show movies on the mess deck. That was another thing our group was responsible for, was showing the movies and also repairing the movie projectors. ... We used to show the movies and usually get paid a dollar a movie. ... If it was above four reels then you get two dollars. [laughter] ... Then ... like ten o'clock was lights out, but there was in that room that we're responsible for, our main workroom, somebody had to be there twenty-four hours a day. ... You'd assign people in four-hour shifts. ... If you're at sea, the person in that room always had to be awake. ... If you were in port, what they did was, we had a mattress hidden behind the telephone equipment. ... When you report at ten o'clock, at lights out time, you could break out that mattress and go to sleep. ... You slept there all night. They didn't wake you up until the next morning. ... Then somebody would wake you up and relieve you. You go back and take your shower, get your breakfast, and change clothes, and get ready for the next day. That was

basically a fairly typical day. If you're at sea, you're expected to have drills. Once in a while, we'd have a general quarters like battle stations drill, or a drill for collisions. When we went down to GITMO, that's all we did. It was one kind of a drill after another. If you were in port at a certain time of day, maybe five o'clock, they would hand out the liberty cards. ... Each group was divided into thirds, and one third had to stay aboard all the time. So two thirds could go on liberty, if they wanted to. They just had to be back in time for roll call. You know, if you want to come back just before roll call, that's fine. If you can miss breakfast that's fine, ... [laughter] they didn't care as long as you were there at roll call in the morning. ... That was kind of like a typical day for my group. Other groups, they would do other things. One group I wouldn't want to be in was those that chip paint all day. That's all they did is chip the rust away, paint it gray again. Chip the rust away, paint it gray. To me that was a waste of time. If that's what you wanted to do with your Navy career that was fine, but to me it was a waste of time.

SI: Were a lot of those like make work assignments?

ER: There was a lot of make work assignments. Every once in a while we'd have inspections of the crews' quarters. So everybody had to get in there and help clean the place up. Once in a while, we'd have inspection of our lockers. We had to make sure all our clothes were folded correctly inside of our lockers, but you learned that in boot camp. That's the only thing that they taught you in boot camp, because you had this small locker on your ship. ... All of your clothes, everything you owned had to go into that locker. So it had to be folded precisely in a special way. ... I don't know if you noticed on sailor's uniforms, those collars that they have hanging down in back. ... They have their folds in a certain way. Well, that's all done by folding your uniform in a certain way. You fold it inside out. ... The end result is when you unfold it. ... You put it on, all your creases are going in a particular way. See they teach you that in boot camp, because it was important for you to learn how to stow your gear in that locker. You'd also have, like I said, we used to have liberty. That was fun. ... Well, the good thing about being on a ship I was on, we were kind of like a showboat, a flagship. ... We had missiles on the back, and we went on to different ports, both here in the US and overseas, just to show off the missiles. So we had a lot of liberty time. We had a lot of guests come on board. A lot of local people go to tour the ship, things like that. So that made it kind of interesting, broke up the routine too.

WO: What countries did you travel to when you were on liberty?

ER: Okay, get your pencil and paper out boys and girls. [laughter] The ship started in Boston. That's where it was commissioned, and by the way being a member of the original crew. I'm what the Navy calls a plank owner. ... Navy tradition says when the ship is scrapped, you're supposed to get a piece of the plank, the deck. Well, I just recently found out that the ship was scrapped. So I have to write the Navy [that] I want my piece of plank. The ship by the way has been resurrected, but as a different kind of ship. It is now a nuclear submarine. So the name Providence stays on.

SI: I was going to ask you about that, because since it was a ship that had been refitted that means you're a plank member even though it's an older ship.

ER: Yes, I'm a plank owner of the guided missile cruiser. By the way, the first USS Providence was commanded by John Paul Jones. ... There's a model of it in his crypt at the Naval Academy in Annapolis; a very interesting history of that ship. ... Anyhow the ports, so we started out in Boston and after commissioning and going down to GITMO, orders were cut. The ship was going to be home ported in Long Beach, California. I said, "Yes, this is where I wanted to go anyhow." [laughter] You know, and for further assignment over in the Pacific. So to get from Boston to Long Beach, we had to go to Charleston, South Carolina, Houston, Texas, Vera Cruz, Mexico, through the [Panama] Canal, tied up on the western side of the Canal, at a little Navy station, Costa Rica, Acapulco, then to Long Beach, California. In all these places, we had liberty, which was great, the first time I've ever been to a foreign country. ... I got to see Mexico from two ends, East and West coast. Costa Rica was nice. I took a bus into the capital, and this bus stops along the way and somebody gets on with a pig or a parrot in a cage. [laughter] It was the weirdest little thing, but I loved it. [laughter] In Acapulco was the first time I drew shore patrol. So here I'm only 5'4" skinny guy, I got shore patrol. I couldn't believe it. They teamed us up with a bunch of Mexican cops and we're going to patrol the town. Well, I get the only Mexican cop there that didn't have a gun. I don't know what that was about, [laughter] but they stick me with this guy without a gun. So we're walking down the street in ... Acapulco, not in the hotel area, more or less in the area they expected the sailors to hang out. [The area was called] the red light district [laughter], where all the bars were. ... Pretty soon, we met up with another shore patrol and another cop, and then another one, then another one. Pretty soon, the whole crew is assembled there and this Mexican cop steered us into this cantina for lunch, and if we wanted to the ladies were available for us in the back room. [laughter] I said, "Oh great, just what I need." ... [laughter] I said, "No, I don't think I'm going to do this." ... That was my first of two times having shore patrol. We did make it up to Long Beach, which was great, because a girl that I had known from high school had moved out to Los Angeles. ... That's why I wanted to go to Long Beach in the first place, to be close to her. ... So when I was on liberty in Long Beach, a lot of times I went up to see her. Sometimes I just hang out in Long Beach, which was basically your sailor town. They had a small amusement park. We'd go to Los Angeles sometimes. That was nice. Southern California was really nice. As a matter of fact, I almost stayed there when I got out of the Navy. ... I figured if I didn't come home my parents, especially my mother, would really, really be upset. So I figured [to] keep peace in the family, I better get my little rear end back home. So I turned down offers to be employed at the telephone company out there. ... I'm glad I did. Everything worked out to the best anyhow. When we're in Long Beach, of course, we had to go out the port a few times. I mean go sailing, do your exercise. You're always training, constantly in training, always constantly being ready to go into battle. The ship went to Seattle one time. I went on liberty there, in the middle of summer, went climbing Mount Rainier in the snow, couldn't believe that. The ship went to San Francisco and I went to San Diego. In San Diego, I learned how to repair movie projectors. ... That was the first time I also saw a strange custom. For me it was strange, were guys walking down the street on a Navy base holding hands. I said, "What is this," because here my whole thing was these guys are homosexuals. What's going on? Well, it turns out to be they were Filipinos, and in the Philippines, it's very common for guys to walk down the street holding hands. So on the base they held hands. That was you might say a cultural shock.

SI: You mentioned once in class, [Mr. Robinson took a history class in Oral history. Shaun Illingworth is referring to that class.] you told a story about these two guys that got really harassed, because they were always together?

ER: Yes, there were two guys who were friends. One was from Montreal and I forgot where the other guy was from. ... They got to be good friends, and they just went out on liberty a lot. ... Somebody spread a rumor that these two guys were gay. ... Once that got started, some other people just shunned them. ... We found out that really that was a lot of hooey, because we went out on liberty with them sometimes too. ... There was no sign of what I call them ever being gay. They were just good friends, but there was this stigma put on these guys. ... It was unfortunate. If you got some kind of stigma like that in the Navy, you were really shunned. ... According to Navy regulations, you were probably setting yourself up for a court martial, and some prison time, and being kicked out of the Navy with a dishonorable discharge. ... Nobody ever brought any charges against them.

SI: At that time, was there like any hysteria or witch hunts for homosexuals?

ER: No, no, there was kind of a like, you just didn't want to be around anybody who was gay. No witch-hunt going on. The Navy wasn't trying to route anybody out. They had enough problems. ... I think if they were going to go after anybody for any sexual infidelities if you want to call it that. Everybody was sleeping with everybody, particularly in Long Beach. One of the things I was amazed at in Long Beach, there was a group of minesweepers stationed there too. ... When the minesweepers went out to sea for a week or so, you knew that if you wanted to get hooked up with a woman you go to a bar, because their wives would be there. ... It was really, really, crazy the guys would be out to sea. ... Their wives would be out there picking up other sailors and taking them home. It was a crazy scene in Long Beach, I got to tell you.

WO: Did you have any fear that there was a possibility that maybe you'd go to war during your time in the service?

ER: A little bit. My first experience with anybody in the so-called Navy, take that back the so called enemy, was when we went down to GITMO. On the other side of the Guantanamo base is naturally Cuba. ... When we first got there the very first night, we just anchored out because the ship was too big to tie up to a pier. The next morning we woke up and there were X chalk marks all over the ship. Somebody had taken pieces of chalk and put a big X, down the engine rooms, inside all kinds of crazy compartments. ... What it turned out to be, while everybody was asleep, the Navy frogmen, which are now called Seals, came aboard the ship, went into all these spaces and put an X. ... Then the next morning, we were told that our security stunk. So from then on in, we had to rig a series of lights on the waterline. We nicknamed them Castro Lights, and we had to have armed guards. ... Then later on, much, much later we were out in the Pacific, we went to Hong Kong. You knew that over in the other side of those hills in Hong Kong was Communist China, but we never had fear of being involved in any kind of shooting incident. However, after I left the ship in Long Beach, and it went back to the Pacific, then it got involved with the Vietnam War. ... Newspaper articles said that it had once exchanged fire with a Vietnamese coastal battery and it participated in the raid on Haiphong Harbor in North Vietnam, just before the harbor was mined. So it did see action then. Fortunately, I was off. ... If I was to

participate in any action, I don't know how it would have affected me, because it was not like being on the frontline. ... We would have stood off the coastline, and somebody would have pushed a button and the guns would have fired. That's it. You know, there was no face to face, and you didn't realize you're going to kill somebody. There was none of that kind of stuff going on. So it was no really fear of going to war. In a way, I'm glad though that I didn't do it. I don't know what I would have thought if I had actually been involved in a war.

SI: Recently, I've been talking to a few guys, who were, you know, in their mid twenties or early thirties who were in the Army and the Marine Corps, but they didn't go in any of the action. They kind of said, "Oh you know you built up for it and then like it doesn't happen, and you feel almost like down anti-climatic." I was wondering like for sailors is it the same kind of feeling?

ER: It may have been for some. You do build up for it. Like I said, you're constantly going into training exercises. You're doing general quarters drills, you're doing collision drills, damage control drills, fire drills. We would fire off the missiles sometimes. That was spectacular to see, and you had gunnery exercises. It was all prepared to go to battle, but I didn't feel a sense of letdown. I felt more of a sense of relief that they didn't have to go to battle, but nobody seemed anxious to want to get into a fight for anything. ... I got off that ship in '62, January of '62. Now we're still going through the Cold War. We still hated Communists. We were thinking that they were going to come over and shoot us, and all that kind of stuff. ... Nobody seemed to have a desire to want to jump into a battle. I don't know what it was like after I left that ship, and it went over to the Pacific and wound up in Vietnam. I don't know what the attitude was like then. I suspect it may have been different.

SI: Were you out of the Navy before the Cuban Missile Crisis?

ER: Yes, because that was JFK, [John F. Kennedy] and I was already out, because Eisenhower was president in '62 of January [JFK was elected in 1960] when I left. ... I do remember that very much on TV sitting on the edge of my seat saying, " Oh boy, here we go." That was a hard time. It was in the middle of the Cold War. I was working in Tuckerton, New Jersey at the time. Just thinking about the Cold War here, the place I worked in Tuckerton was underground. It was an AT&T building that was built underground. The reason why it was built underground was because of the Cold War. They thought that the Russians were going to come over and bomb us. ... The office was ... the terminal end of two overseas telephone cables. One went to England, one went to France. So they wanted to protect this cable, and the communications that came out of it. So they put everything underground. They put it two stories underground. They mounted all the equipment on great big shock absorbers. So in case there was a bomb, they could absorb the shock. They had diesel generators, its own diesel generators. ... They had big air intakes that were spring mounted, so that if there was a bomb and the shockwave hit the building, the shock was enough to set off these springs and the air intakes would close. We'd be sealed into that building. ... It was crazy; we were all jittery about the war back then. That was the closest war threat that I ever came close to. ... We lived everyday with the fact that we thought the Russians were going to bomb us. ... You also went on with your daily life. So the other things that were going on, they kind of took precedent. The Civil Rights movement was going on then. The '60s and '70s, there were a lot of crazy times in the '60s and '70s. ... There was JFK's assassination. [November 22, 1963] Those were the important things going on in my time, the

'60s and '70s. ... I was working in Tuckerton when JFK was shot. ... The way we found out how he was shot, was that in the Bell Telephone System, at that time and all of our AT&T offices, we were connected by a series of teletype machines with all the AT&T offices around the country. ... It was usually somebody cut a cable, ... microwave radio tower collapse, ... or failure of some office that information would come over the teletype machine. ... Everybody would respond as needed. All of a sudden on November 22, I guess it was. We get this message from the Montreal office of Bell Canada, "President Kennedy shot in Dallas, Texas." I said, "Whoa what's going on?" ... Then we get another message from headquarters in New York City, go to Condition Orange. Well AT&T had a series of conditions, like we have now with your security risk conditions. [Referring to Homeland Security Advisory system instituted after September 11, 2001] We had a green, orange, and red. ... When it was announced that he was shot, and we went to Condition Orange, well that means we had to stop doing any kind of work, we were doing. Then a few minutes later comes another message, "Condition Red." Oh my goodness, then rumors were going on. We didn't know what the heck was happening. We had Western Electric people working in the building. They did all the installation work on the telephone equipment. They had to leave the building, that was Condition Red. We were not allowed our stations. ... We had to sit there and just wait and wait. ... It was finally announced that like I said President had died. ... Then a few hours later Condition Red was eased off. ... Being in that office, we were underground and we really didn't have any communication outside. So we didn't know what was going on. The only thing we knew was what the teletype machine said. ... Fortunately, up the highway from Tuckerton is Manahawkin, another telephone office up there, another AT&T office, we had cable lines between the two offices. ... What the people in Manahawkin did for us was, they hooked up a radio to a set of speakers in the office. [Then] from the speakers, hooked a microphone down to one of those circuits on the cable. So we could do the opposite down at our end. So we got to hear the radio, kind of a jury-rigged kind of a system. ... Then we got to hear the fact that he had been shot and Lee Harvey Oswald stuff. ... We had more of an idea of what was going on. It wasn't until later when we got home put the TV on, and we got more information.

SI: You were thinking of like there might be a war.

ER: Oh, there were all kinds of rumors; Communists shot him, there was going to be a war, maybe blacks shot him, you know, all kinds of things going on. The rumor mill was really going on. Our boss was almost going ballistic. He was of no use. ... The rest of us just kinda like had us sit there and just realized it was something we couldn't do [about it]. It was out of our hands. Something's going to happen, it was going to happen. ... As we said, as we listened to the radio, we got more information. Everybody kind of like settled down, because we were prepared. ... That office was prepared to settle in for any kind of an emergency, except, you worked underground two stories at that time. ... [It was] not a great place to be.

SI: It sounds like the paranoia really built up fast in there.

ER: Yes, oh it did. Like I said, nobody knew what was going on so theories are rampant, paranoia is right.

WO: You mentioned that you left the Navy shortly before the Cuban Missile Crisis. Did you ever worry that maybe they'd call you back during the Missile Crisis?

ER: Yes, that did occur to me, and also for Vietnam. ... I said "No, I really didn't want to go back," because at that time the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War, I was now getting involved with a girl, got married and that's it. ... You know, I don't need to be away from home. I didn't want to do that kind of stuff. ... I was looking for that envelope in the mail that says, you know, I had to report. The only envelopes I got from the Navy said, when I first got out off of active duty, because ... I got off active duty the day before my twenty first birthday. ... When I enlisted like I said I was seventeen and a half. They called that a minority cruise, no a minority enlistment. It was nicknamed the kiddie cruise. If you joined before you were eighteen, you got out of active duty the day before your twenty first birthday, but you still had six years of military duty obligated, because the draft was in effect then. That was another reason why I joined the Navy, because I didn't want to be drafted into the Army. Me, a rifle in my hand, forget it. So I knew I had that obligation, that six year obligation. When I got out of the Navy, I did have to go down to [a] reserve center in Newark, and interviewed [with] an officer there and I said, "You know I really don't feel like going to the reserve meetings." He said, "Okay." [laughter] So I didn't go to reserve meetings. ... [laughter] My six years are up, and I got this letter from the navy that says, "Now you have been transferred to the Inactive Reserve." ... Many years later, I got another letter that said I have been transferred to whatever category it was that they would never call you back. ... I was a little bit scared about it during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War that they just might rescind that, just like they're doing nowadays, [War in Iraq] recalling guys back who had been out of the military for many, many years.

SI: How quickly did you get this job in Tuckerton with AT&T after getting out?

ER: Yes, when I first got out of the Navy, I was living at home with my parents and they had moved to Newark. I went down for a job interview at IBM, failed that interview miserably. I said, "Okay now let me try the telephone company." Went down to New Jersey Bell, interviewed there, and they said, "The only jobs we have open now are for linemen." He said, "Quite frankly kid, your physical, you're physically never going to pass you're too skinny." [laughter] So I said, "That's fine with me." ... They said, "AT&T is looking for people." Well, I had no idea who AT&T was at that time. I had no idea that they were the parent company of the Bell Telephone System. I took the interview there. ... They said, "Yes, we're looking for men to work down in Tuckerton." I grew up in New Jersey, but I had no idea where Tuckerton was. ... They said, "In the meantime you would be working in Newark, and you would be getting some experience in Newark." So I came back home and said, "Mom, Dad, I got a job. I'm working for AT&T and I'm going to go down to work in Tuckerton at sometime." So they knew at some point in time I would be leaving home. So, I was working in there in Newark. I worked on telephone systems for business corporations. They called the private line telephone at that time. It wasn't the general telephone system we would know now. This is strictly for corporations. ... Then I had come back from some training in Philadelphia, got back to the office in Newark, and my boss says, "You're persona non grata here." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You're supposed to be reporting to more training in Tuckerton this morning." "What?" So went back home packed my bags and left. ... Of course, mom was upset. ... Then I came back a week later, and got more stuff and I stayed with a co-worker for a while. ... Then they helped me get

an apartment. Lived down there in Tuckerton, [Editor's Note: Mr. Robinson worked in Tuckerton, but he lived in Bayville and then in Tom's River] and that's where I met my first wife, and moved out of the area into New York later on.

WO: Did you ever consider deciding to stay in the Navy?

ER: Yes, very much so. I did pretty well in the Navy. I made the rank of second class petty officer, which is equivalent of a sergeant. ... I had also gotten ... proficiency pay, which means you took special exam in your profession. ... If you're good enough, you got that extra bonus money. They wanted me to reenlist pretty badly. They dangled a reenlistment bonus in front of me. ... I was really tempted to take it. ... Then I also thought I want to get married at some point in time. I know I wanted to raise a family. ... I didn't like the idea of moving around with a family, and being away from them for periods of time. I didn't think that was good for a family life. So I said, "No, I don't think this is what I want." ... I know that if I had stayed, I would definitely make chief petty officer. I had no doubt. I could have made that without any problems at all, but I just didn't want to be in that life. I said, "It's nice, I enjoyed it, I learned a lot, particularly since I grew a lot as a person I think." ... It was not the life I want to spend more additional years at. I didn't want to be as regimented all my life for twenty, thirty years. So I decided, well first should I stay out in California and work for the Pacific Tel out there?... Then I said, "No, I think I better go home." My parents would appreciate it if I came home. ... Like I said, I'm glad I did. So, as a career probably not. It was just in the back of my mind, but not something that I really wanted to pursue.

WO: Did you receive any medals?

ER: One. [laughter] One little medal, but that was one, it's called the Good Conduct Medal. ... [laughter] People basically would say that means you didn't get caught doing anything bad. [laughter] Not to say I didn't think anything bad, but I did a few. ... That's basically all it was, and they give you one little medal. Nowadays, it seems like you almost get a medal for everything. I see pictures in the paper of sailors, really at the low enlisted ranks, and they've got almost three or four medals hanging from their chest or ribbons hanging down. ... That's only for, not specifically for something they did, but they were in a particular place at a particular time. ... They handed out millions of these medals. You know basically, they're like what they would call campaign medals. So if I had stayed in on that ship and gone to Vietnam, I would have gotten some kind of Vietnam Medal and something else. You know, I would have a few medals there, but just the one medal I have it my safe deposit box.

SI: What about some of the places that you went? Did you call them ports of call?

ER: Yes, okay from Long Beach we went out to Japan via Hawaii. So we had to stop off and had some liberty time in Pearl Harbor and stuff like that. Pearl Harbor is interesting to see because you went right into the Navy base, and that big USS Arizona Memorial was not built at the time. So all you saw was a little bit of the mast and stack above the waterline. I do recall going into that harbor, and the shoreline was jet black. ... That was from December 7 bombing of Pearl Harbor. [1941] The oil had stained the rocks on the shoreline so much, that they never ever got them cleaned. So you always have that memory of it. ... After that, we sailed to

Yokosuka, Japan. That was our homeport. ... When I get the tape back to review, I'll make sure Yokosuka is spelt right. Don't worry about that. ... [laughter] That's where we home ported out of. We were the flagship of a cruiser division, and we operated with an escort of destroyers. ... We operated sometimes in conjunction with aircraft carriers, but we went out to other places.

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

SI: This continuous an interview with Edwin Robinson on February 8,2006 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth and

WO: Bill Olson

ER: Okay, from Pearl Harbor, we sailed to Yokosuka, Japan. That was our home port. former Japanese Navy base, I believe, which makes sense to make it a US Navy base. Once you got outside the gates, it was nothing but junk shops and bars. ... What was nice was when you were there and no matter where we went in Japan and elsewhere, they tried to arrange tours for you to go on. So you can get an idea of what the culture was like, what the people are like at the various places that you were visiting. So I took advantage of that as much as I can, as much as I could. I even used to go to Tokyo, with some of the guys sometimes. ... One time, I went to a place called Kamakura, and in Kamakura was a great big bronze Buddha [The Great Buddha of Kamakura]. ... You could see it in pictures of Japan all the time, big outdoor statue of Buddha, and it always fascinated me. ... I couldn't find anybody who wanted to go with me. So I got on the train and I went by myself, and I stayed over in a little Japanese hotel. It was fun, had Japanese meals, and came back on my own. So I got to see the great Buddha of Kamakura all by myself. We had visitors quite often, sometimes Japanese naval visitors, sometimes civilians, sometimes dignitaries, who came aboard the ship. We also went to places like Sasebo. ... In Sasebo, I recall one of the things that they took us to see was an all female theater, a Japanese female theater called Takarazuka [The Takarazuka Revue]. ... Have you ever heard of Kabuki?

SI: Yes.

ER: Kabuki is all male, and Takarazuka is all female. ... Half the show was old Japanese myths, and legends, and folklore kind of stuff. The second half of the show was more like a Broadway production. So they took us to see that. We went to Yokohama. ... In Yokohama, they took us out to Madame Butterfly's house, where Puccini wrote his Madame Butterfly opera, or it was based on it anyhow. We went to Kobe, Japan, where they make the famous Kobe Beef. We went to Kyoto, which used to be the capital of Japan, and if you take the name Kyoto and just move the letters around you come up with the name Tokyo. So when they changed the capital over to Tokyo, that's how they did it. Let's see where else they took us. I can look through this book real quick and tell you. Japan was not the only place. Oh, in Sasebo, we spent a Christmas there. ... That was interesting for me to see how Japanese celebrated Christmas, with some guy in a red suit called Santa Claus, [laughter] and candy canes and all these other kinds of stuff. Christmas is a big shopping holiday for the Japanese, and that was a shock. I also remember going to the cities in Japan and seeing people wearing western style clothes and others traditional Japanese clothes. Sometimes you hear, you'd be walking down the street and you hear the click clack, click clack, click clack, and you turn around and it's either a man or a

woman coming behind you on wooden shoes, on tongs kind of shoes, clippity clop, clippity clop. You see women in kimonos, occasionally, on the streets. In the wintertime, everybody covers their face with like a surgical mask, so you don't spread the colds around and it was also disrespectful to do that. Their idea of the culture thing was different than us. As I said, we had visitors on the ship. At Christmas time in Sasebo, we had orphans come aboard the ship. We had great big party for orphans. It was a great thing, everybody chipped in. ... I remember being part of it, taking kids and getting them food, and sitting down and talking with them. Sometimes when we went out on liberty in Japan, particularly if we got away from the Yokosuka, to a place where they didn't see a lot of sailors, we'd be walking on the street and we'd be stopped by a bunch of Japanese school kids. [They were] wanting to ask us all kinds of questions about the United States, and wanting to practice their English, and you spend a few minutes with them. It was really enjoyable. It was a great time. We also went, as I said, to Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, the thing I remember about Hong Kong was unusual. Many, many years ago, [1958] there was a movie with Ingrid Bergman called *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*. It's about an American woman, who had gone to China and was a missionary. ... She saved a lot of people from the Chinese Communists. ... They had this popular song about knickknack palowak, give your dog a bone, came out of that movie. ... Anyhow what I'm getting to is that woman wound up in Hong Kong. ... While we were stationed in Hong Kong, we were anchored out in the bay, she would send sampans of women out to the ship. The women would come aboard the ship and they'd work in the kitchen. ... After you finished eating, you would normally take your food tray, [and] anything leftover just throw it in the trash. Well, they would take the tray from you and separate it. They'd figure out what could still be eaten, what could still be used, and they'd put it into separate trash cans. Then they would load these trash cans down the side into their sampans, empty them out into the sampans, clean the trash can out, and haul them back up. ... They take this stuff and feed people with it. ... The sailors got together unofficially, we would take things that we had, and we'd sneak it to these people. My particular group would sneak off electric cable, light bulbs, some rope, things like that. ... We'd give to these people. They would take these and then use it to help refugees and whatever in Hong Kong. ... Other groups were doing the same thing. So these people were getting a lot of stuff, just lower it down into the sampan and away they go. [laughter] Just before we left Hong Kong, the sampans came back out again and these women had buckets of gray paint, donated by us. ... [laughter] They painted the side of the ship. ... They painted the number six bright white. You know like it's supposed to be, and that was their way of thanking us. That was really, really interesting. So we gave something to them, they gave something back. We also went to the Philippines. We went to Subic Bay, great big Navy base there. Outside the Navy base [was] the typical slutty, rundown town, nothing there except bars. [It was] extremely hot in the Philippines. I recall having a bottle of San Miguel Beer, out in the hot sun, and almost collapsing, because of the heat and the beer. The combination just almost wiped me out. [I] went into Manila, managed to get to see a Jai-Alai game. ... A bunch of us went to a Jai-Alai game, and a Filipino woman showed us how to bet on Jai-Alai. ... We cleaned up. We just bet whatever she bet, [laughter] and had no idea what the game was about. All I know is we just cashed our tickets in at the window constantly. [laughter] It was interesting to see Jai-Alai, but that was the kinds of things to do. We just went to here and there and everywhere. Like I said, because our ship was a flagship, and by that I mean we had an Admiral aboard. When you have an Admiral aboard, he has a personal flag with X numbers of stars on it, Ours' I think had three, two or three, and because of that you got to go to places that people came aboard and visited. So

you got to be kind of a showboat. It wasn't like other flagships, from what I understand, were more spit and polished than we were. We were a bit more relaxed. Our admiral was a very much relaxed guy.

SI: What was his name?

ER: I don't remember his name, but he might be in one of these books I'm not sure. His thing was submarine and the aviation arm, because he had a submarine badge on and also aviator's badge on. ... He would walk into a space, everybody would say, "Attention on deck." That means you had to stand up, because here comes the admiral. He would just say, "Sit down, don't bother me." He used to talk casual. I used to show movies in the Officer's Mess. ... He would come in. He would just tell the other officers, " Sit down, enjoy yourself." He was kind of easy. ... By that time we also had a new captain. Now he was more spit and polish and rugged than our first captain. He was an old guy. ... He was not as favored as the first guy was. He wasn't too interested whether or not we got to port on Friday or not. ... [laughter] I really did get to go and see a lot of countries I would never have gotten to before in my life, which was a great thing for me. It's a great experience for any young guy to go and have. ... [I] got to learn a little bit about other people, and got to see some sights. One of the nicest things I ever had was, we were coming back from someplace, going back to Yokosuka, and the way we had it in, because Yokosuka is near Tokyo harbor, we got to see Mt. Fuji. Whereas the Japanese call it Fujiyama. Fortunately or unfortunately I should say, I did not have my camera with me, because there was this beautiful shot of Fujiyama, that I could have taken through the clouds, nice snow capped mountain. It would have been a perfect picture to bring home ... but I didn't have my camera with me at the time.

SI: Were you able to get a feeling for how the Japanese people felt about you and American servicemen?

ER: In general, [the feeling was] very good. Like I said, if we had the money, they would have liked us even better, because one of the things they always want you to do is get to spend money on you. The girls wanted you to buy drinks and go off with them to a hotel room. So that was their thing. The shopkeepers were always trying to get you to buy things. In Yokosuka, the shopkeepers didn't like if you just went up to them and said, "How much is that worth?" or "How much does it cost?" and you'd pay them the money. They would rather that you bargained. They got a kick out of bargaining with you. ... Some of the stuff that you bought was junk, and other stuff that was pretty, pretty nice, particularly figurines. I never bought any, but the Japanese had a knack for creating figurines that were extremely lifelike. ... Those were really good things, but they just like you to bargain for them. ... In general, we got along extremely well with the Japanese people. Like I said, the school kids want to come up and always talked to us. People in Tokyo were very helpful to us. We're trying to get around, trying to go restaurants and eat. Not being too familiar with the language, even though they gave us language books to study from; they treated us very, very nicely. We had no problems. We didn't get into any trouble; we didn't go to places we shouldn't have gone. We were warned about black market money operations, while we were there. Did anybody ever speak to you about Military Payment Certificates?

SI: Not in this era, no.

ER: When we're overseas, they did not pay us in US Dollars. ... They didn't want us bringing US Dollars into a foreign port, because of the black market in US money. So they paid us in the thing called Military Payment Certificate, MPCs. It was another form of paper currency, even down to a nickel. So you could take that MPC and spend it on the ship. You could spend it on the base, but if you were going to go on liberty and go outside you could not spend them outside the gate. So if you're going to go on liberty, there was always a bank somewhere on the base where you could exchange your MPCs for Japanese currency. ... Even in Tokyo, they had a specific place for servicemen to go to exchange money into Japanese currency. So we never got to use that. ... That was the first time I ever saw paper dimes and paper quarters and things like that. [laughter] Now obviously they didn't fit the vending machines, but we managed to get around. That was just an interesting thing that I've never seen before or since. I don't know if they still do it or not, those MPCs.

WO: Did you keep any of them as like a souvenir?

ER: Oh, yes. I don't know, if I have MPCs with me, but I do recall I did keep some Japanese coins and Japanese currencies. Any country I ever go to, on vacation, business whatever, I always bring back some currency. It's always nice when I go back to the country to have some currency in hand. [laughter] So you know [when] I have to get out of the airport and pay the cab driver I always have a little bit of the currency. ... Usually I exchange money at the airport or something like that. ... I loved collecting all those coins. It's part of my memories and I don't know who's going to get them after I die, [laughter] but I don't care by then.

SI: What about the relationship between the officers and the enlisted men on the ship? What do you think of your officers?

ER: Okay. Our relationship on the ship itself was pretty good. You had those officers you thought were extremely hard nosed and in some cases incompetent. I remembered a few of those. ... Others that you really thought were sharp, on the ball, we loved our first captain and of course, we loved the admiral. ... We didn't have a lot of intimate contact with them. I had one officer in our group was a warrant officer. Now warrant officer is an enlisted person, who comes up through the ranks, and he's in an officer category that's really between an enlisted man and a commissioned officer. ... We had one of those in our group. He was an electrician warrant officer, and he's an old guy. You know, he's been around for so many years, but he's proficient, and he was a great leader. ... Everybody loved him. He was that kind of a [guy.] He knew how to get the work out of us, without being hard nosed. ... We knew if we had a problem we could go to him. ... I'd never had to go to him, but he reported then again to a lieutenant junior grade or a lieutenant sometimes. ... Our first two lieutenants, nobody particularly cared for, but the next guys that came around they were more regular guys you might want to say. Like I said, doing personal inspections, sometimes I couldn't understand why these guys were inspecting us for wearing our uniforms properly when they looked less than what I thought an officer should look like. There were a couple officers, I thought were really boobs. ... Fortunately, I didn't work for them, but in my dealings around the ship I could see that they didn't seem to know what they were doing. ... These were a couple of guys, particularly one who was a deck officer. Saw him up on the bridge a few times and it looked like he had no idea what he was doing. ... Yet he

was I think he was a full lieutenant by that time. So how this guy ever got to be a full lieutenant is beyond me. ... [laughter] I remember him being hollered at a few times by the Executive Officer or by the captain. I just don't understand why he was still in the Navy.

SI: Were a lot of these officers, were they Annapolis men or they come from other areas?

ER: ... It's hard to tell, but I know a lot of them were Annapolis men, because I can see their rings. We also used to have, when we're in the States, midshipmen come aboard from Annapolis for their summer cruises. ... They would always come aboard with workbooks, and they would constantly follow you around and try to get information for their workbooks. ... They would ask us questions, and we got along with them pretty good. We didn't have a lot of intermingling with them, because they stayed mainly with the officers and they had to do whatever they had to do. ... They seemed pretty savvy, pretty nice guys, and ... their uniforms were like ours. They wore white uniforms at the time, but their white caps had a dark blue trim around the top. That's how you always knew the midshipmen. You can spot them right away.

WO: I want to go back to your working at AT&T. Could you like describe like a typical day at work?

ER: It depends upon where I was working at the time. Basically, I worked daytime shifts. My first job was in Newark, and I worked as I said on circuits designed specifically for businesses. ... When I got down to Tuckerton, then I had to go to different schools to learn different equipment. ... I worked on besides oversea telephone cables, microwave equipment. Now if you look on top of your telephone buildings, even downtown New Brunswick, you see these towers up on top of the buildings. Those are microwave towers. ... I don't know if they're still AT&T microwave towers or not, but they were when I was working there. ... They were used to transmit telephone calls from one place to another, and all over the country; that and underground cables. So a typical day would be you arrive at work, and I usually carpooled. ... You would either work in the office, and you would do routine maintenance work on equipment, or you would handle trouble calls. Somebody would call in they said, "Circuit between ... London to New York City, had a problem in it." Well you had to determine along with some other AT&T offices or maybe your British counterparts, where that trouble located to. ... Then, get it fixed. ... Usually the first thing you did once you got it isolated and you knew what part of that big circuit from New York to London had a fault in it, you would bypass the fault. ... Then you go back and fix that circuit, and then pull the bypass down, so you get the circuit running up again. ... That was a typical day if you stayed in the office. However, we also were responsible for microwave towers, and one of those towers was on top of the telephone building in Atlantic City. Now if you're going to do tower work, you got in an AT&T vehicle, and you went out and you did tower work. These were usually unmanned offices, and you would be out there by yourself. You could either bring a lunch with you or take off during lunch for a local diner if there was one, and diners down in South Jersey were not as good as the diners up here. ... [laughter] Quite often you would be working by yourself. Sometimes if you were working on an underground cable, you would have to go into a manhole kind of a thing, because there would be equipment inside of a manhole. ... But, you didn't look, they didn't look like manholes. There was like little tiny houses on the side of the road. There was actually a trapdoor on the bottom of the house. ... You'd open it up, and you'd go down inside. ... The equipment would be there.

You'd have to ventilate it for about an hour first to make sure there was good fresh air. Then you do routine or trouble shooting kind of work, and you fix that. If you were working in Atlantic City, you drive down, park the car there. ... Usually there we work on microwave equipment. ... Also, when there were special events happening in Atlantic City, we were called in to work on those special events. They would ship in extra microwave equipment and put it up in our quarters. ... Special events would be like the Miss America Pageant. We work on hooking up the television hookup. If there was a boxing match in the Convention Hall, we'd hook up that television [hookup]. As a matter of fact there was one that was really interesting, the Sonny Liston-Cassius Clay Championship Heavyweight. This was before Muhammad Ali changed his name. We're down the Convention Hall, everybody is watching this fight on the big screen. Round One, they start out boxing, the screen goes blank. Somewhere along the line from New York City or wherever that thing was coming from, the feed got cut. Well, we checked our stuff out. There was nothing wrong. It's up the line somewhere. They finally got the feedback, the fight was over. Clay knocked out Liston in the first round. [laughter] It was a riot. There was like chairs flying, the boss said, "Get the heck out of here. We'll come back tomorrow and get our equipment." ... [laughter] He was not about to get clobbered by a flying chair. [laughter] We took care of the Democratic Convention down there when LBJ [Lyndon Johnson, president from 1963-1968] was running. ... They had all the demonstrations, Civil Rights demonstrations going on, and women burning their bras for women's equal rights. All that was going on down in Atlantic City; so we took care of that. The worst part about going to Atlantic City, there was one time when we didn't go into Atlantic City, was because it was just after the Newark riots. [Riots took place in 1967] [The] race riots up in Newark. ... We were told stay out in Atlantic City for a while, because we drove through the black neighborhood to get to the office. ... Then when we started driving down, we had to make sure the doors of the cars were locked, windows rolled up and you don't stop for anybody. ... You pulled into the parking lot and then they closed the gate behind you. They didn't use to do that before the riots. ... Then after a while everything settled down. ... A typical day was down there and work on equipment. If it was nice weather, go lunchtime, we went out walked on the boardwalk. You ate there, got something out of the boardwalk, hotdogs or whatever you want to go watch or eat there. ... It was great work in Atlantic City. It was kind of rundown, then I think too. It's before the casinos had come in. ... It was just a dump really. It really a dump, but I don't know I haven't been down there really much since then.

SI: Were you working there in that area when the casinos came in?

ER: No. Casinos came after I had left. I left in late 1960s, early '70s, [I] was engaged by then, got promoted to management up in New York City. ... I got into an office that handled the business telephone circuits, because of my experience that I had when I first started with AT&T. They liked what I was doing [in Tuckerton], and they said, "Would you like to work in New York as a manager?" I said, "Sure, that's sounds like a great idea to me, promotion, get extra money." I was living in Toms River [New Jersey] at that time. ... My typical day there was get up, get a five thirty [A.M.] bus out of Toms River, go to work, come back, I forgot what time I arrived home, cook a quick supper, and go to bed, because I had to get that five thirty bus the next morning. [laughter] That was not a great haul. My first day in New York was an eye opener, because I had taken a bus up to Port Authority Bus terminal, taking the subway up West Fiftieth Street. ... I was working in a windowless building at Tenth Avenue and Fifty Third

Street, not too far from where the ships pull in, the cruise ships pull in. ... [It was] completely windowless. Again [laughter] this was part of this Cold War stuff. I don't know why, but it was. ... I'm walking down Fiftieth Street, my very first day in New York City, and I'm looking at all the buildings. ... In a doorway, is the absolutely gorgeous black woman, and she says, "Hey, want to go out." I said, "Oh my God; here I am in the Big Apple in my first day of work. I'm getting propositioned by a hooker. I have arrived." [laughter] What a crazy feeling that was. ... Sometimes I would, if the weather was good walk up and down Eighth Avenue. ... At that time Eighth Avenue was really sleazy, [because] all the massage parlors, X-rated movie theaters, hookers all over the place in hot pants and high shoes. It was a riot. It was really a crazy time. ... So I worked there for a while, and a typical day like I said was I supervised a group of guys, and I had a hard time with them. I was clobbered, to tell you truth. The working attitude in New York City was confrontational, all the time. When I worked down in Tuckerton, everybody got along with everybody. Your co-workers got along. You got along with your managers. It wasn't this labor-management strife. In New York City, everybody was in your face. Everybody was fast paced. There was constant labor-management strife. There was constant competition between managers. There was competition between different offices, even if they're in the same building. It was horrible, and I had a horrible, horrible time with it. I was not a good manager. Fortunately, they got me out of there. The most interesting experience for the whole time that I was there [was when] we had this period, when we had a brand new boss. ... He was going to cut down on the overtime, because we had this thing where everyday we ask people to stay and work overtime. It was done on a rotational basis, so the overtime was evened out. ... People were living on that overtime. They looked forward to it. So we'd always have four or five guys stay over extra at the end of the day. Well this boss came in. He said, "This is not the way to run an office." So he's going to cut down on the overtime, and the union's answer to that was we're going to start refusing overtime. Well, the company policy was if they went through the entire office and everybody refused overtime, those who had the least amount of overtime were forced to take it. So there was this one Friday night, they did that, and all of a sudden the union guys said, "Gee we got to go to a union meeting tonight, we can't work." So they all left. ... There were five guys that had been asked and they had refused to work overtime. Now I was scheduled as a manager to work the weekend day shift. So my boss says, "When they come in on Saturday morning, you had to take their ID cards away from them and send them home for the day. We're going to suspend them for the day. No pay." So they came in on Saturday morning; I said, "Fellows I got to take your ID cards away." They knew what the routine was and there was no hassle. They gave me their ID cards. They went back home. I go back up into the office, and the telephones start ringing, because the people calling in with problems. So I'm going to go answer the phone. That's my first inclination and start trying to fix these problems. In the meantime I'm also ... trying to get more managers into the office. Well, my crew went home, but there were other union members in the office at the time. They see me working on the test boards. I'm trying to solve the problems. ... They said, "Whoops, management is doing craft work. You can't do that. That's against the rules." So they walked off the job. Before they walked off the job, they called all the other AT&T floors in that building, and they walked off the job. So I cleared the entire building. [laughter] So I call up my boss, and let him know what happened. Well, it just happened to be that weekend was the management fishing party. [laughter] Most of the managers were out on some boat fishing. [laughter] Well, I managed to get enough managers in there to tide me over. ... Then the next morning, Sunday morning, the same guys arrived back in. I gave them their ID cards, sent a couple of them out for coffee and

doughnuts, and the Sunday newspapers, like we always did. ... It was like a regular time, like forget about it. [laughter] The other thing was my name now wound up on the doors in the bathroom; Ed Robinson is [Editor's Note: Mr. Robinson imitates a noise describing how his employees felt about him.] you know. [laughter] So I had made the official list, but that was the most interesting that happened to me when I was working there then. ... They transferred me out there. They realized I was not doing a good job and thankfully. They transferred me into a training unit, where I was training new employees. ... I was also writing training courses, and that I loved. ... That proved to be good for me later on. Then later on, I got transferred into the headquarters part of AT&T. ... I worked at No. Five World Trade Center. At that time they were making the second King Kong movie. Interesting thing I just thought about the World Trade Center, we had fire drills in the World Trade Center. ... They were horrible. ... Thinking about what happened in 9/11, [September 11, 2001 the World Trade Center was destroyed by two planes crashing into each of the two buildings] well that building was one of the buildings destroyed. ... I can understand why people ... may have gotten trapped. It was just chaos to get a fire drill going. I don't know if they fixed it or not after I had left, but it was chaos at the time we had it. ... Working in New York is nice. I was working down there in the World Trade Center, used to go out to the Wall Street area for lunch. ... In the Wall Street area, [I] used to go see street musicians and vendors. ... New York had characters then. There's some strange stories. [laughter] One character was called Moon Doggie. ... He was a big guy, dressed up like a Viking, walked around in this Viking outfit, didn't bother anybody. [It] turned out to be he was... his obit was written up in the New Times. He wound up being homeless, but he was a guy with a lot of intelligence, who somehow run off the deep end. Then another on Eighth Avenue, I saw a guy walking down the street with a duck, leading the duck on a leash. ... The duck had a pair of glasses and a beret on his head. [laughter] Then by the World Trade Center, one day, [laughter] I was watching some street jugglers, during lunchtime. ... All of a sudden this guy comes on roller skates zooming through this crowd, and he is wearing a purple tights, purple shorts, tight purple top, like a purple cap, and he had on an old telephone operator's headset that came up in front of you. ... He just skates through the crowd. We didn't know what it was he was doing. [laughter] Everybody was just laughing like crazy. Here was this guy out of nowhere. New York is full characters, I got to tell you. We used to go to China town for lunch. That was a lot of fun. [We] used to go for a Sabrett Hot Dog, because they were the best kosher hot dogs. ... [We also used to go] for a Mr. Softie, out of the Mr. Softie truck. [Editor's Note: Mr. Softie is a brand of soft ice cream] ... Then a couple of years after I had left there, some Puerto Rican nationalist group blew up the Mr. Softie truck. I could never understand why but my Mr. Softie truck went all over the neighborhood. ... It was fun working in New York, I just loved it. Then that whole group got transferred to Bedminster, New Jersey, until I stayed in New Jersey. By then I had been married and divorced. So it was okay to move back to Jersey, and I had moved to an apartment house in Edison at that time. Do you need to change that or anything?

SI: No, no

WO: I want to ask were you affected at all by the breakup in the early '80s of AT&T.

ER: Yes, because nobody knew what was going to go on. ... Not originally, but there was a lot of reorganization, there were some job cutting. Fortunately, by then I was in Headquarters'

Finance Department, that's where I worked at the World Trade Center. ... That dealt with settling the monies with foreign countries for when people made overseas telephone calls. X number of dollars was charged for the call, and a certain amount of it had to go to a foreign country. A certain amount of it had to go to New Jersey Bell, if they were involved, and a certain amount stayed with AT&T. So we dealt with transfers of monies on large scales. I couldn't believe the first time I heard somebody say, "Oh, we're only off three million this month." Like only off three million, give me a break. I wish I had that off three million in my pocket, but they thought nothing of it; all three million dollars trying to balance the books for the month. ... We dealt in currencies that are used in international finance markets that most people don't even know about; even currencies that only existed on paper, as far as [the] books goes. ... Then I got back into ... Then I got into some other organizations, but basically I was doing a lot of computer systems development work, writing specifications for AT&T's computer systems that they used in house. [It was] nothing that they sold to the public. ... I would have to write specifications and get the specifications to programmers, who actually did the coding. These guys were smart, I got to tell you. ... I would have to test it out and make sure that it worked, and then write up instructions for the people, who actually used these computer systems. So I went through the whole series of jobs like that. ... Every time there was reorganization, because of the split up of the Bell System, everybody was always on pins and needles wondering if they were going to get cut. Fortunately, I never got cut. ... I went through several downsizings, in several departments. ... Then I finally got over to a training organization in Somerset. ... I was living in Piscataway at the time. I had bought a house in Piscataway. I had not remarried at this time. ... They had one reorganization, one downsizing, then they said, "We're going to offer managers an incentive plan to leave the company." "Okay, they said, "You've got so many weeks to find another job somewhere else in the company or else you're going to have to leave by the end of December in '89." Well, I was going all over the place trying to find a job. ... See I was in what they call the Network Operations Education Training group, NOET. We nicknamed ourselves the "Know it alls," and I was just getting into developing training programs using computers. ... I also wanted to be involved with making one a film, a training film. ... So the call came out. You had to find a job. ... I went to different places, including the Marketing Department, who had a very big training organization. ... I said, Look I'm available have you got anything for me?" ... They said, "No." ... I knew Marketing was very much into computer generated training programs. They do everything on computers. They were far ahead of my group, and I wanted to really get in on that. ... They said, "No, we don't." Well it came to point in time where they said, "If you don't find a job, you have to sign off on a piece of paper and say you were going to leave the company" ... Once you signed off on that piece of paper, that was it, you're going to go. I signed the paper, and about two weeks later [the] Marketing Department called me and asked me if I was available. [laughter] Unfortunately I couldn't go. That was it. So at that time I was dating my current wife. ... I was going through angst, because I had almost twenty eight years with AT&T. ... It was worse or just as bad, as when I got divorced. It was the same kind of a feeling, this life that you had is now ended. ... I didn't know what to do. Fortunately my fiancée at the time, she said, "Look whatever you do, I'm going to be with you. Go ahead and do it. I'll back up any decision you make." So I signed off and said, "I was going to leave the company." Fortunately I went out and I landed a job with Blue Cross-Blue Shield of New Jersey doing training work, training and development work. [I] did not like the job, didn't get along with the manager. I didn't like the way, their culture and AT&T's culture was completely different. ... I was not doing as good as I should. I knew it. ... I was about to quit,

because they were moving back to Newark, and I didn't want to go to Newark, when they said they're going to fire me. [laughter] So I arranged with them to say, "Look just let me quit, okay?" and they said, "Fine." So I left Blue Cross-Blue Shield. ... I've been there six, maybe eight months, but I just knew that was not the company for me to be with. So then I hooked up with consulting companies. ... The way consulting companies worked, they hired you directly. ... They paid your salary, but they would go out and find other companies, who are looking for people who had your talents. So those other companies then would pay the consulting company, consulting company took their cut, and then they paid you. So I said, "Okay." So I signed up with one. ... My first job was with AT&T. ... They sent me back to the group that I retired from. So I walked into this office [laughter] and who's sitting at the desks, everybody that I used to work with. [laughter] They turned around and looked at me and they said, "What in the world are you doing here?" I said, "I'm here to help you guys, what else?" ... [laughter] They were running behind on projects, because they had gone through cuts. ... They were behind time, so I went and I helped them. ... Then I started to get other kinds of assignments at BellCore, [Bell Communications Research] which when the Bell Systems spin off they became the regional telephone companies equivalent of Bell Laboratories, kind of a like. So that was in Piscataway. [NJ] I had gotten several assignments there. ... I had taken other assignments at other AT&T locations ... all through consulting companies, different consulting companies. ... Whatever consulting company came along and gave me a job, at a price that I liked I went with them. I didn't care where it was. ... Then I hooked up with a consulting company that sent me down to AT&T Laboratories in Lincroft, and that was nice.

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

ER: Okay, I have been sent to work at AT&T laboratories in Lincroft, New Jersey, down in Monmouth County. ... I used to take a nice relaxed drive down through back roads, through country roads, wonderful. ... The project I worked on down there was AT&T's version of their internet service. They were going to be the people that were going to throw AOL [America Online. A popular internet service provider] out of the market. That was their job. They're going throw AOL out. Well, they never did. Initially, they were great and good, but they didn't quite do it. My job there with a whole bunch of other consultants was to develop the online screens, and the training materials, ... and methods and procedures used by technicians out in Kansas, who were going to maintain this internet service. The service was called WorldNet, and they still have it. WorldNet is still going on. How it is I don't know. [laughter] It's not so great, but they still got it going on. ... I worked there for a while. ... Then AT&T came along with some crazy rule that they wanted to get rid of these consulting companies. They wanted to deal with the individual rather than the consulting company. So what we're going to do, the entire team went out, everybody, individually, formed their own company. So all of a sudden I became Somerset Technical Writers, which I still own. [laughter] So I now have my own company. ... [laughter] I'm getting paid from AT&T directly. Actually I got paid through Sun Microsystems, but that's another story. ... I was getting this money. I didn't have to pay a consulting company a consulting fee. You know I got top dollar. I negotiated a great rate for myself. ... That job ... was supposed to have lasted me six months initially, because most consulting jobs are for six months, I stayed there for five years working on WorldNet. ... The greatest thing about that, well two of the greatest things, the people I worked with were terrific. I learned a lot. I learned everything about the WorldNet system. I started out on one little piece, and eventually as the

group started shrinking. I got to take over more and more responsibilities. ... It finally got down to the last two contractors. ... Just before I started here at Rutgers, they let all the contractors finally go. ... The nice thing I liked about that besides working with all these people, ... learning what the project was, and developing my skills was because I was my own company, I was allowed to set up a special kind of IRA, [Individual Retirement Account] which allowed me to put money into it as an employer and an employee. So I wound up socking away money that you couldn't believe. Most of my paycheck went into this thing, because by then I had gotten married. I still am, living on my wife's paycheck. [laughter] So all this money has gone into this wonderful IRA, [laughter] that until I take it out its tax free. ... I just made a bundle of money. [laughter] I was making more money as a consultant, than I ever did as an employee. I came close, my last year as consultant, to making 100,000.00 dollars. I was only maybe 2,000.00 dollars away. I couldn't believe me, without a college education, was earning almost 100,000.00 dollars. ... That's how it happened. So then I retired finally. Finally retired and I said, "Here I am I'm in my 60s what am I going to do?" ... Lo and behold this nice university called Rutgers was looming in on the horizon for me.

SI: You had a variety of jobs. Did you have to go for training at each point or take courses anywhere?

ER: Not especially. What I did was, when a consulting company said, "XYZ company wanted a technical writer." That's basically what I was doing, technical writing. You write manuals and training courses and stuff.

SI: Or even when you were at AT&T and you went to like finance to other divisions of the company?

ER: Yes, yes. AT&T had a wonderful training program. Every department ran some kind of training program. I never understood why they never got it all together under one umbrella, to have a corporate training program or organization, but they had great training. ... I got to tell you from the time I first joined, because my first training was really technical, I went to Philadelphia for that. ... Believe it or not, some of the books I used were the same books they had used in the Navy. I got a radio telephone license, because that was required to work on microwave radios. So that was an FCC license. They sent you to school to pass the FCC tests. ... Any kind, you got any new equipment, they sent you to school somewhere for it. They were really, really great. ... Then later on I became part of the team that developed the training for this kind of stuff. So that was interesting. ... Then when I got to this NOET organization, what was wonderful about that, they had their act together. They had realized the people who taught training courses were not the best people to write them. They may have had the expertise, but they were terrible training course writers. So they split it off and they had one group of people, who just wrote courses, and another group who taught them. They worked together and then sitting above them was a group of people with Master's and Doctorates in adult education. ... They helped you learn how to do your job correctly, whether it was writing the training course or teaching it. So the end product when it got sent out to the person who had to receive the training was a real high quality product. They spent a lot of bucks. What they do now I have no idea. I know when I got into the AT&T Labs, their training was not as good as when I was in the regular AT&T headquarters. They had gotten back to this idea that a technically proficient

person is qualified to write a training course. ... When we saw some of the training courses they were writing, we had to rewrite them, because they're just horrible. ... The screens that they designed for somebody to look at, were just horrible screens. We had to redesign the screens too. ... Then again it was down to when I finally retired, there were a couple of AT&T employees who had joined the group. Originally the group was all contractors. ... One by one they all left, for various reasons. ... Myself and another old Bell System guy were the ones with the last two contractors standing. ... I couldn't believe that here was the in some respects brighter and sharper younger people, but they had been let go before us old timers were. It was kind of nice to realize that we were the last Indian standing, you might say. ... [laughter] AT&T's training is spectacular. ... I think they still do have a training center in Somerset that just trains their employees on what they call soft skills. That's a skill of how to be a good manager, how to be a good leader, how to interface with other people, how to make decisions, things like that. Those are soft skills. I had gotten involved with the hard skills, how to do job ABCD.

WO: I wanted to go back to the 1960s.

ER: Oh, the '60s, the roaring '60s. [laughter] No, I did not smoke dope. Yes, I did. [laughter]

WO: I wanted to know what are your feelings about the US's stance on foreign affairs.

ER: Back then, again the '60s, I'd just coming out of the Navy. At that point in time I was pretty much a rah rah my country, right or wrong kind of a guy. I still had this military mindset, and I didn't know that we were really getting involved with Vietnam at that time until '62, I got out, '63 maybe I went to Tuckerton. In that time frame in Tuckerton, one of my co-workers was a former Army helicopter pilot. He too was a warrant officer, and some point in time. He showed me a series of pictures from Vietnam. Some of them were pictures of his helicopter that had been shot up. ... A series of pictures that really threw me for a loop, was a bunch of Vietnamese peasants. ... You could tell they were the peasants, you know the black pajamas and the cone straw hats. ... They're digging a hole in the ground, and there's a bunch of South Vietnamese soldiers standing around. ... In the background was a bunch of Americans in civilian clothes. ... Then the next picture you saw, was the hole dug. It was a rectangular hole. ... The civilians were lined up at the edge of the hole. I still got choked up over this. The next picture was them in the hole. These South Vietnamese killed these suspected Vietcong people after they dug their own grave. ... There were Americans in the background watching this. ... These Americans I were told, when the guy showed me the pictures, were CIA guys. So we knew, we were involved in about 1962-1963, but we were not officially involved yet. The Gulf of Tonkin [1964 Vietnamese attack on US ships] hadn't happened. The so called military advisers were not originally in there, officially yet. ... These were guys who were clandestinely put in there. So we were fighting the Vietnam War before it was really made known in the public. I was shook up a little bit then, but not as much as I really am actually. I understand it better now. That's why I still get choked up on it. ... I was still pretty much, we're fighting the Communists, and if we didn't win South Vietnam, the whole Southeast Asia was going to go Communist. The Domino Effect [Domino Theory] that Dulles and the Eisenhower, and Kennedy's were telling us all about. I believed that one hundred percent. ... I was really behind this whole war effort. ... Little bit by little bit, as the war dragged on [things changed.] ... I got to see General

Westmoreland calling for more and more troops. I got to watch it on television, with all these body counts. ... We were supposedly killing all these Vietcong like crazy, and we were bombing them. ... Yet, they kept coming back. My mindset began to change, and I began to think we're not doing something right here. This is wrong. We're in a war we shouldn't be in. ... Then when the Tet Offensive [A battle taking place in early 1968 that changed the United State's outlook on the Vietnam War] happened and all these spontaneous attacks across South Vietnam happened, I knew then that we were in a wrong place, wrong time, everything. Then, I became not active, but vocal anti-war, anti-Vietnam War. ... I still carry that mindset with me now, because I'm very much anti-Iraqi war, at this point in time. Again wrong time, wrong place kind of a thinking. So my first wife at the time also shared my feelings that the war was not the right thing that we should get out. I didn't participate in any demonstrations. I did remember when I was working in New York, I made a mistake of putting the peace symbol on my desk. Oh boy, did I hear it from a lot of people. Oh, the mindset back then what are you doing? You're a communist, you're a pinko. ...

SI: Corporate America wasn't very ...

ER: ... I was not well liked for my political viewpoints, let's put it that way. So it's another reason I was glad I got out of that particular office and sent down to something else. ... I also learned not to express your political feelings.

SI: I have heard that from a few people.

ER: It was definitely not the thing to do. I naively learned, because people would do like a little sabotage to me while I was there. ... I learned after a while not to listen to them, just keep my mouth shut. So to this point, I'm still leery about any military involvement that we get into. I have to be convinced that we're doing the right thing for the right reasons.

SI: Just going back to your friends showing you these photos, do you know how he got those photos?

ER: Yes, he took them. He took them, and he took the pictures ... of his helicopter. He's a nice guy. We were co-workers. ... Everybody else in the office at the time was pretty much in favor of the war. It wasn't until like I guess ... when I got starting working in New York City that my mind started to change, and I started to think that the war was the wrong war. ... Yes, that's how he did it. He took those pictures himself. Nice black and white photographs, but eerie not to say the least.

WO: Do you think President Nixon and President Johnson made conscious enough efforts to end the war quickly?

ER: No. Well Johnson I thought was wrong by, he ran the war from the White House instead of letting the generals run the war. ... Then again, they listened to General Westmoreland, which other Army officers at the time were saying we should have gotten out. ... Westmoreland, he was in charge and he kept on saying more. Johnson originally said he wasn't going have American boys fight South Vietnamese's war. That was paraphrased, but he made a speech on it.

... He wound up doing just the opposite. That angered me. What angered me with Richard Nixon was it was during his administration I believe, that the peace talks in Paris opened up. ... If I got it correct, originally when the two sides sat down, and they finally got the shape of the table straightened out, because there was a big controversy about the shape of the table, the US and South Vietnam proposed a certain settlement. ... North Vietnam proposed another settlement. So they were far apart. So the peace talks continued. The bombings continued. the war continued, in general. People [were] being killed on both sides, thousands. The country [was] being torn apart. When they finally settled that war, the final terms of the Vietnam War settlement were very much like the terms that were originally proposed by North Vietnam. I said, "Wow, we could have ended this war a lot sooner." ... That made me very angry at Richard Nixon, because all of these Americans, South Vietnamese, North Vietnamese, civilians were killed, maimed, everything. The country ruined, you know that old saying out there about "We destroyed the village in order to save it." That kind of mentality was out there at the time. That really angered me about Richard Nixon, more than Watergate and all that. So to this day I don't speak very well of Richard Nixon. I was glad to see him leave. No matter how he left, disgraced or not, I was just glad to see him get out of there.

WO: How did you feel when Robert Kennedy was assassinated? Do you think that if he had lived would he have been elected? Do you think the outcome of the Vietnam War would have been different?

ER: Hard to say, because learning later on what I knew about his involvement with the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis. ... I didn't know it then. I would not have voted for Robert Kennedy. I thought he was an opportunist. I thought he was a carpetbagger. I would have voted for Eugene McCarthy. I was a "Plain Gene" guy. [Editor's Note: The phrase was "Clean Gene."] He was my man. Whether or not he would have, Kennedy would have gotten us out of the war differently I'm not sure. He did change his attitude I think at some degree concerning the war. I think that was mainly to get elected. I could be wrong. He also changed his views on Civil Rights originally. ... The Kennedy family was not pro-Civil Rights originally, but they realized the handwriting was on the wall and they needed to get behind it. So a lot of people would have voted for him. I don't recall who Kennedy's opponent was, was that? Help me out.

SI: Was it McGovern or Humphrey?

ER: ... Humphrey wound up being the candidate. Oh yes, McGovern I voted for him. What a waste. [laughter] He won one State. Oh yes, and I voted for him, because of the anti-war thing. I forgot who the Republican candidate was, but obviously I didn't win on either one of those kinds of Republicans. ...

WO: You said you were disappointed with how Nixon handled exiting Vietnam. How would you compare Nixon handling Vietnam to say George W. Bush handling Iraq today?

ER: Very much the same I think. I don't think they ... either one of them, had an exit strategy. I don't think George Bush knows how to end this war. I think he could have ended it earlier. I think it was wrong to get into it. ... You know a lot of people think he could have just stuck with Afghanistan and gone after Al-Qaeda, and maybe had gotten Osama Bin Laden. ... I think there

is a certain degree of truth behind that. ... His exit strategy right now, I'm not quite sure if he has one, but I got a funny feeling. ... I will predict, write it down on paper, Eddie is predicting, George W. Bush is going to pull a Richard Nixon Vietnam, get out of Vietnam stunt. By that I meant, as Richard Nixon said at one point, "We basically got them. There's going to be a Vietnam War between the Vietnamese forces. The South Vietnamese are now capable of taking on this war effort themselves, and we pulled out of South Vietnam, and we brought the troops home, because this is what people wanted." This is what people wanted. Half this nation was split down the middle you know, terrible times. ... Within a short period of time, the South Vietnamese army was overrun. ... The whole country was taken over by North Vietnam. So some people said, "It was a complete waste." ... Now we have great relations with North Vietnam. We trade with them. We have ambassadors back and forth, and we send tour groups over there and everything. I think George W. Bush is going to say that the Iraqi Armed Forces are capable of taking over, and we're going to pull these troops out. ... Then at some point in time, I think we're going to have a terrific Iraqi Civil War. ... I just hope we don't get sucked into it, because we sort of have one now. ... If we get sucked into it more than we are now, it's really going to tear this country apart. ... I don't know how we're going to find enough men to fight it without going to a draft. ... If we go to a draft, then I think you're going to see the country get really upset, because that's when our sons and daughters, particularly those of college age, will be sucked into this draft. ... I think, one of the reasons why there was so much protest against the Vietnam War was because college age kids were being drafted. ... Their parents were against it. The college age kids were against it too. So, I kind of think that we're going to see ... George Bush pull the troops out of Iraq, in the same manner that Nixon pulled them out of Vietnam. What happens after that who knows? I just hope it settles down, even though I know in my heart of hearts that for years and years to come the Middle East is going to be a sore spot. I can give Richard Nixon credit for saying at one time when he was in his presidency that the Middle East would be the next big hot spot. ... He was right. That was one of the two good things I think Nixon did that was good. The other good thing is, I think, was sending Kissinger over to China and opening up trade relations with China. That's a good thing.

SI: What was the other good thing?

ER: Recognizing that the Middle East was going to be a big hot spot, because it still is.

WO: How was the home front? I mean you described how it was at work, but how about like your friends and family? How did they feel about the issues?

ER: My family originally and some of my friends were very much in favor of the war. They always thought that if you spoke out against the war, you were not supporting the troops. ... That's currently the same feeling today. So, most of my family and friends were very much in favor of the war. My former wife and I, and some of her family were against the war. ... You could talk to different people on the street, and you could get different feelings. If you put the TV on or listen to the radio and read the newspapers, you would definitely understand that the country was split fifty-fifty, just about fifty-fifty. There was a very, very strong anti-war movement. It wasn't just college kids or their parents. Veterans became involved in it. Some of those who returned from the Vietnam War, especially, were against the war. Older people who had been through World War II, Korea, from all walks of life, started protesting in masses and

masses and masses. I found out later on that my wife [my current wife] protested in one of the marches in New York City. ... I was pleased to hear that. ... [laughter] It was really a horrible time in that it did split the country. ... At the same time the country was going through a lot of upheaval concerning Civil Rights, through Women's Rights, the Hippie era, the use of drugs, there was a change of time. ... A lot of people couldn't take that change. They had a hard time dealing with change, and they still do have a hard time dealing with change. ... It was exciting time, at the same time. I liked the music, and the changes in rock and roll that went on, stuff like that.

WO: Did your parents still live in the Newark area during that time?

ER: No, both my parents are dead. My mother died. Let me see, I was still working in Tuckerton. She went to a hospital for a gastro-intestinal problems, she wound up having an MI, a myocardial infarction, in other words a heart attack. So she died in the hospital. ... Then I was still living down in South Jersey, and my father had developed emphysema and lung cancer. I guess that was from smoking and being exposed to lead based paints all his life. ... He finally died in a nursing home up in North Jersey. So both of them have been dead several years. They're up a cemetery up in Paramus somewhere, but I don't go. I'm not one of these people that visit graves, you know. I think I've been back to my parent's graves three times, if that's a lot. ... I probably won't be back either. ... I'm just not one of those people that visits graves all the time. ... I think it's hard to say, my parents probably would have supported the wars, my father especially I think. I didn't know what my mother's opinions on anything were. she didn't express opinions on anything. My father usually did. So, I would say he would probably would have supported the war, or at least the troops anyhow.

SI: You talked a little bit about the corporate culture at AT&T and you know from everything I've read about corporations and particular the '50s and '60s of like IBM, it's not just a company it was more like family or regimented life? Was it like that when you were there?

ER: It wasn't as regimented as IBM was, from what I know of people who have worked with IBM. ... Yes, it was a close knit family. They would encourage things like picnics and [going]out to dinners. There was a lot of camaraderie. Even in New York with the antagonism between the labor and the management factions, there were some times some good times together. Bosses would arrange things for both management and the non-management people to get together and do stuff. Sometimes the non-management people were not appreciative of it. In one case, the same boss who cut down the overtime, he went and redid the employees lounge, beautiful new furniture, nice chairs everything. Within a couple of weeks the chairs were slit, all kinds of things like that. It was just like nonsense, but we're going to show them kind of stuff. There was a lot of camaraderie during strikes, and that was interesting. During strikes in New York City, you had to cross picket lines. Now depending upon what the strikers thought of you as a person [determined] whether or not you could get through that line easily or not. If you were not well thought of, you can guarantee there would be hassling. ... Other than just a little shoving and name calling, once in a while an egg would be tossed. ... so you see a couple of managers come to work with some eggs on them. You know, they'd have police barriers but the cops kind of, sometimes looked the other way. ... Once you got in, there was a camaraderie in there, because a lot of these managers used to be technicians. They did those jobs. So now, they

love to get out from behind their desks, and get a set of tools in their hands, put a headset on, and shoot troubles. They loved it. ... They got these great little set of teamwork going on. It was fantastic and the bosses would be appreciative. ... Our boss, especially, would order out to have feasts brought into the office, because we couldn't go out at night. ... We were working long shifts; we were working ten sometimes twelve hour shifts, which was kind of long, but you're sitting there eating steak and lobster for supper. [laughter] You could take twelve hour shifts easily, and for those who lived long distances away, they put them up in hotel rooms. So that was kind of nice. A lot of camaraderie there, but strikes were something I didn't like to do. I was a shop steward one time. I didn't like doing that, because I was between the devil and the deep blue sea. I had to sometimes press grievances that were not really worthwhile pressing that the guys were just trying to be hard nosed with the company. ... I knew that the company was right, but yet I had to press the issues because I was their representative. When I became a manager and I had people working for me, ... I saw cases where workers had legitimate gripes, but the corporation refused to acknowledge them. ... They would rather force a walkout or a picket line and force the issue up to a National level, and get it resolved there at the National level. Then say, "Gee, you know you're right. We made a mistake, and we won't do it again." New York for some reason that's how they did it. If we had a grievance down in Tuckerton, the boss sometimes would back down. He'd said, "Yes." Now usually the grievances were about your work schedules. ... The boss would say, "You know you're right, he changed your work schedule." ... It was over, it was done, everybody got along. Up in New York, it was head to head all the time. So they kicked the issue up to the National level to get resolved. Made me think twice sometimes about whether I want to be a manager, [laughter] but it's better to being a non-manager. The pay was better.

WO: Back to Vietnam. I wanted to know what like what were your feelings about May Lai?

ER: My Lai an atrocity, [it] should never happen. These guys, I can understand them, particularly from being going through Professor's Chamber's [History professor at Rutgers University who is part of the Rutgers Oral History project] course where you learn about the tensions that these guys go through. ... They're seeing their people cut down by what looks like civilians, but they were really Vietcong and they flip out. ... Then again, you can't just excuse it. They have to be responsible, because if you look back to World War II, we said the atrocities committed by the Germans and the Japanese were wrong, and we had war crimes tribunals to try these people. So you can't on one hand say it's bad for them, but its okay if we did it. You have to be completely balanced. You have to be fair. You can't be two sided. So what's good for the goose is also good for the gander. So the Lieutenant Calley, I think his name was, he should not have done what he did, but he should been punished for it. ... If anybody authorized or condoned that, I think also they should have been punished for it. Just like what happened in Abu Ghraib prison. [Mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners during the War in Iraq. Evidence of mistreatment is as early as 2003.] The lower guys got punished for it. I think some of those commanding officers, who instigated those programs or to some effect had a degree of making it happen, causing it to happen. I think they should have been punished too, but I think the officer corps got away with that in Abu Ghraib. Yes, in My Lai absolutely wrong, wrong thing to do and they should have been punished.

WO: If you got called back what do you think you would have done?

ER: In Vietnam?

WO: Yes

ER: Oh God, it depends upon again where my head was at the time. Maybe I would have tried to have gotten out of it. I know people have gone to Canada. I don't think I would have taken that route. I probably would have gone kicking and screaming. I know now that if they had called me back, I think I know how to get out of it, but be [laughter] like the guy I had talked to in Chambers class. He mentioned that he had been called back and he wrote a letter to the Secretary General, Secretary of the Navy, I should say. ... He talked about how bad the Marine Corps was. ... They were going to call him back as a Marine Corps. The Secretary of the Navy said, ... "Well with that attitude we don't want you." So that's I what I would probably do. [laughter] I'd tell them how horrible the Navy was, and if they don't want me, then send me home.

SI: Going all the way back to your time on the Providence, you mentioned that there was this Marine contingent on board. How do Marines and the sailors get along?

ER: Good, and there was a lot of good-hearted rivalry. We called them Jarheads, Sea Going Bellhops. They called us Swabbies. My group definitely had to get along with them, because to get from our living space to our working space, we had to go through the Marine space, the Marine living quarters. [laughter] So you didn't give them a hard time. ... Particularly if they were polishing their floor, it seems like they always polished their floor. They were spit and polish; we weren't. So there was a definite difference just by looking at us. [laughter] We got along very well. Their jobs were basically security jobs, and they were orderlies for the admiral and the captain. ... When they had those jobs, they had to put on their spiffy uniforms. [They had] really great looking uniforms, much better than ours. They had some jobs manning the gun turrets and the missiles and things like that, fire control office. ... Their main purpose was security. ... Then if there was ever a landing that the ship had to do, [laughter] they were the lead component of the landing party. They went over in the little boats and stormed the shore, which is what they're trained to do. ... Before we actually got on board the Providence, they sent us to Little Creek, Virginia for Landing Party School. It was a farce. We pretended to be a landing party. We had to throw hand grenades at each other. Hand grenades were pinecones, you know. [laughter] We'd jumped over barbed wire and things like that. It was a farce. We had to go take apart ... an M1 rifle, put it back together again, fire at the firing range, take apart a forty-five pistol, we didn't have to fire it. I got to the firing range, I don't think I hit the target once. [laughter] I kept getting, they would run up these white flags, and they called them "Maggie's Drawers." ... That means you didn't get near the target. [laughter] I was constantly getting Maggie's drawers. I think I hit once or twice. I would never have been good at a landing party, but that's what the Marines were for. Good natured, sometimes you'd even see sailors and Marines drinking together in the bars. That was really good.

SI: What about areas you would go to on liberty like interaction with other groups of Marines or even an Army base nearby? Remember any fights or anything like that?

ER: No, as a matter of fact I never saw any fights between different branches of the military. We got along very well. There was one time that maybe there could have been a confrontation. ... I forgot what Japanese port it was in, but that was my second time that I had pulled shore patrol. So, I had been on liberty during the day, but at night I had shore patrol duty. ... My duty was at the pier. ... There were several ships docked out in the bay; our ship, there was an aircraft carrier, could have been the Coral Sea or the Yorktown, I don't recall which one. ... Our whole job there was just to keep the guys in line until their little boats came and took them back to their ships. Well, we were there, and there was this line of Marines from one of the aircraft carriers and they were drunk, like you never saw a drunk before. ... We thought they were going to get rowdy. ... They came close to getting rowdy, and then all of a sudden a bunch of shore patrol pulled up from their ship. ... They kind of like reinforced us, and that was okay. They cooled the guys down. ... If they had ... I they wanted to come after us shore patrol [laughter] or gone after other sailors, who were waiting to get back to their ships, it could have been something. I would have been in the middle of it, and all I had to protect myself was a little club, an armband that said SP on it and a whistle like that was going to do a lot of help, you know. ... [laughter] I'm just glad that was not a confrontation I got involved with. I can never see myself as being a shore patrol person. ... Everybody had to take a turn to doing it at some point in time. All the petty officers had to do that.

SI: When you are at sea do you remember ever seeing any storms? I hear a lot of sailors talk about the hurricanes and typhoons.

ER: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, when I first started in Boston, I didn't have my sea legs. What they call sea legs, your ability to walk around the ship without slamming into something. ... The guys, who were more experienced, knew how to get us young guys seasick. ... The way they got me seasick first times, one of the first things we had to do is take care of the gyrocompasses. We had the master gyrocompass in one of our workspaces. ... You'd have to look down through a glass top onto the compass. ... What you would see you will see the compass tilting back and forth. Well that's enough to get you sick. ... [laughter] Another case where they forced me to sit in a chair, they suspended a spoon from the ceiling, with bucket alongside the chair and make me watch that spoon as it went back and forth, back and forth, and then pretty soon whoops. After a while I got used to the roll of the ship, got my sea legs. I could go anywhere on that ship. I used to carry Coca Cola; cups of Coca Cola on a dust pan down flights of stairs to get to my workspace, without spilling a single one, and have to step through hatches. You know stuff like that. Oh, you just reminded me, you were talking about the Marines. We go back digress to the Marines. One of their other jobs was taking care of the brig, the prison on the ship. If there is somebody in the prison that meant they had to pull extra duty. Well they did not like that. So if you were thrown in the brig for some infraction, the first thing that happened to you was you got your hair shaved. ... You were required to wear your hat down over your eyes. ... Anywhere you went on that ship, because they would make you work like crazy while you're in the brig, you had to have a Marine guard with you. ... As you were walking through the compartments you had to yell at the top of your lungs, "Gangway, prisoner coming through." ... The Marine guard would say, "I can't hear you." ... You have to shout it and shout it until he was satisfied you shouted enough. ... Then when you came to a doorway, a hatchway, you had to ask permission to go through the hatch. ... You had to shout that at the top of your lungs. ... So the Marines really would harass the sailors during that period of time, because like I said it was extra

duty for them. ... Otherwise, it was okay. ... I don't think it was any sailors later on that tried to get back to any of the Marines for doing that, because they were doing their job. ... The worst thing you wanted to do is be in the brig or be in a Navy prison. I got to see part of a Navy prison through the fence in Yokosuka. ... I'd be walking towards the main gate, and I'd have to walk near the prison. ... You could see through the chain link fencing, these guys out in the middle of the night, in just swimming trunks and T-shirts exercising [in the winter], all these guys who were in prison. ... When I was in Long Beach, I saw prisoners being transferred from one place to another in leg irons. ... They would take them to places to work during the day. ... They had handcuffs and leg irons on these guys. Really weird, but that's the way they did things. ... You don't want to be in a Navy brig or a prison, because whoever has to take care of you, basically controls your life you know. They're brutal, I think.

SI: Would they throw people in for like any little thing or more serious offenses?

ER: No, no, only serious offenses. You had a group of regulations called the Military Code of Justice [UCMJ]. ... That's spelled out specifically what the punishments were or could be. ... We never had anybody on the ship get sent off to a regular brig. We had one Marine wind up in the brig. He got it worst than the sailors did, because he was a disgrace to the Marine Corps. ... You didn't want to do that to the Corps. Their Esprit the Corps was terrific. The Navy never had anything like that. ... I always remember when I was going to school at Great Lakes, and the sailors used to saunter up ...

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

This continues an interview with Edwin Robinson on February 8, 2006 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth and ...

WO: Bill Olson

ER: Okay, I was talking about how at Great Lakes, the Marines were always marched to the chow halls. ... We used to call them the lean, green, fighting machine, because they were absolutely sharp looking, marching. ... We had a lot of respect for them. We always had a lot of respect for the Marines, and I still do to this day.

SI: Just out of curiosity, what did the guy do to get thrown in the brig?

ER: Well, you could be insubordination, mouthing off to an officer, hitting an officer, or anything like that, coming back late to the ship several times, and refusing a ... legitimate order. ... Most of the time the brig was empty, which is the way Marines loved it. I think there was room for three prisoners. I saw the brig one time.

SI: For a lot of the people that we interviewed, they you know they're like you they're seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen years old. They go into the service it's been their first time away from home. It's also the first introduction to vices like drinking, smoking, gambling. Was that how it was with you?

ER: Yes, [laughter] drinking, not gambling.

SI: Did you smoke?

ER: No, I took up smoking when I was in the Navy. [It's a] little hard not to go to the bar and not smoke. That was the difficult thing. Also difficult when I decided to stop smoking, the big test when I ... said I wasn't going to smoke anymore, could I go to the bar without smoking. Yes, and then my virginity got lost in ... Vera Cruz, Mexico. That was the end of that. ... Then after that, I was a bad boy. Yes, I availed myself sometimes over in Japan. [laughter] Let's face it ... that was it, but not like some of the guys. I mean there were sometimes when guys would see the same women later on in the daytime; they said, "Oh I was with her?" It was really bad. ... Most of the time all the bar girls are always trying to proposition you. ... That's how they got their extra money, or they would try to proposition you to buy more expensive drinks than you were buying. ... You would order drinks for them, and they'd get down watered down drinks. ... After a while, you knew that was what was happening you didn't care. ... So most of the time the crew I hang around with when we did go to a bar, we just go out and have some drinks, talk to the women and come back home, come back to the ship. Oh, speaking about going to the bars. The most interesting bar I ever went to was in Hong Kong. I had come back from liberty somewhere else, and had lost my liberty card. So I couldn't go on liberty [in Hong Kong]. My buddies were going on liberty. The last night of liberty, just happened to be my birthday. ... I found my liberty card. So I was able to go on liberty, and I knew what bar these guys were going to hang out in. So I get in a taxicab and I said, "Take me to so and so bar," and the guy took me there. I go in and all my buddies are there, "Hey Robbie, glad you could make it." I said, "Well I had to come over and celebrate my birthday." Well next thing you know, the owner of the bar and the girls were singing Happy Birthday and everything like that to me. I didn't have to buy any drinks. ... What made the bar interesting was years ago there was a movie called the *World of Suzie Wong* starring William Holden and France Nguyen. France Nguyen was a bargirl in that bar at one time, and her picture was all over the place. Everybody was so proud of France Nguyen that she got out of being a hooker and got into Hollywood. ... I thought that was just a hoot to be in this bar, where a movie star that I knew and liked used to be a hooker. ... [laughter] That's where I celebrated my birthday. I forgot what year it was. I guess I was twenty then, celebrated my twentieth birthday.[1961] ... I did get to see Hong Kong that little bit. If I had had my liberty card, however, I would have been able to take a tour that a lot of the guys went on. ... They all praised all the different places that they took them to see in Hong Kong, especially one place called the Tiger Balm Gardens, supposed to be in a beautiful, magnificent garden. Like I said, remember earlier I said they took us on tours and stuff, when we hit Nagasaki, they took us on a tour that I wish I could go back to again sometime. They took us to ... where the atomic bomb had fallen. ... There is a museum there depicting the falling of the bomb. ... As I had mentioned earlier, the Japanese were very good at making painted figures and stuff. They were able to duplicate, in plaster and in paint, what the bodies looked like. It would turn your stomach. If you didn't have a strong stomach, you'd really get upset. ... In there, they also had a magnificent huge statue. It's called a Peace Statue, of some figure, one arm was pointed straight out like to the left or right side. ... The other one was pointed straight up in the air, similar to what you see in paintings of the ancient Greeks, like Socrates, showing wisdom, pointing up in the air was a symbol of showing wisdom. ... There was a reflecting pool in front of it. It was a Peace Monument. It was the first time I had ever seen a monument

dedicated to peace. ... I'm so used to seeing war monuments and monuments dedicated to the war dead, and things like this, but here the Japanese were saying no more, we don't want war, we want peace. ... It wasn't until I got back home here, living in Somerset I saw another memorial dedicated to peace. They got one outside the library, but that was very interesting to see, worthwhile seeing. ... I'm glad that they arranged to take us there. It was good.

WO: How revitalized was Nagasaki when you saw it? Did they leave some part of the city destroyed and built around it?

ER: Exactly, exactly what they did. They wanted you to see what had happened. Therefore part of that whole park area; they had some of the buildings still the way they were. They had great big maps that they point out. They had pictures of the buildings, what they looked like, but the maps would show you where the buildings originally stood, and stuff like that, and where you were in relationship to the building. ... Definitely, they wanted you to see the destruction ... when they showed you the photographs, just leveling that city. ... Later on I found out that Nagasaki, was not even their prime target. They bombed it because their prime target was covered by clouds, and they got a break in the clouds and they found this one city. ... They had this bomb on board, so they couldn't come back with it. [laughter] So they dropped it.

WO: After seeing that monument in Nagasaki, how do you feel that they should design the World Trade Center area?

ER: They should have a monument. I don't like the idea of putting up big towers again for several reasons. I think it just maybe invite another act of terrorism. ... Also because I happen to know that the original towers never were fully occupied. There was so much vacant space in those towers. So if they're going to build towers the same height or even higher, they're going to have a lot of vacancies down the tubes, a waste of taxpayers' money. There should be some kind of monument, some kind of memorial, but you got to also say, "Life goes on, the world's business goes on there in that area." You should still have a World Trade Center there, but not great towers. ... The pictures of the tower I've seen so far, I don't think I'd want them. I wouldn't have voted for anyone of those that we're up for contention, but [laughter] definitely some kind of memorial, something ... as dignified as the one for the Vietnam Veterans in Washington. That was a memorial that made me cry. I was surprised what happened. I went down there to see it, and I started to look at all the names. ... All of a sudden I'm crying like crazy, I couldn't believe it. ... I looked around and other people were crying, and veterans are there taking rubbings and stuff like that. ... The way they had constructed it was at an angle, and at one end you see a few names. ... At the other end you see a whole bunch of names, because that's how the body counts increased. Very, very touching, very simplistic, very moving, and people first thought it was ugly, you know. ... I'm glad I saw it. So, I hope they put something dignified at the World Trade Center.

WO: You spoke about the social movements that were going on in 1960s. How actively did you support these movements?

ER: I support them basically verbally. I have to say, not proud to say it, but I have to say that I did not really participate. ... I could just as well been out there marching as other people did, but

I didn't. ... I could come up with a hundred excuses, but they're all invalid, really. I should have been out there. I should have put my money where my mouth was. My action should have followed my words, but I didn't do that. Even today you don't see me out there joining that group at the Highland Park that protests the war all the time, even though I agree with them. ... I just think I could have done better.

WO: Going to school in high school, was there African-Americans or any other minorities that went to school with you?

ER: One. One African-American, and I can tell you I would not want to be in that person's shoes. I don't think the person had a friend in school. We just did not associate with him. Now, there were some Chinese in our schools, and everybody thought the world of them. As a matter of fact our class president was a Chinese guy. ... Once in a while I hear from him. His two older sisters were the head cheerleaders. They were very, very popular in school these people. ... We thought, get a black person in here that means they're coming up from Newark. We didn't want to associate with them. So there was a form of segregation and prejudice there. Well it was there, but it really was not in your face kind of stuff. It was not confrontations. Nobody was in this guy's face. Nobody beat him up or anything like that. It was just like he sat alone all the time.

WO: How would you compare your high school experience to your Rutgers experience seeing how integrated Rutgers is today?

ER: Oh, I think it's great. My first college experience was really Middlesex County. I took advantage of AT&T's tuition aid program, and got an Associate's Degree there. That's when I first started being in with a lot of black people, all at one shot even though I have worked in New York and I had black people working for me. There was not a lot of mixing with them, but there was more when I was going to Middlesex County. ... That was good. There were also some Asians, stuff like that. ... Then population was mostly still white. Here at Rutgers, I think they do a great job. I think the integration of all races; I think the mixture of gender is great here. It's what a college should be. ... If this was an all lily-white college, I'm not sure I would attend. I'd kinda look for something else, even if I had to go elsewhere. ... Now that I'm almost through with my college days, you might say, I'm glad because the people I'm getting to meet from all different walks of life are really interesting. Particularly now in the class that I'm taking right now, which is the *Arab-Israeli Conflict*. You have a lot of Jewish people, and you have some Arabs in there. ... You have a professor from Ryder College, who has a Jewish background, but he's not always taking the Jewish side. ... You see some antagonisms from the students, [laughter] and they're wondering, one of us is saying we're wrong. ... He's telling it like he thinks it is. He's trying to give a balanced approach to understanding that conflict. ... It's hard for some of the students, I think, who may have been oriented towards one point of view. ... They come in to the class with a certain degree of orientation or prejudice going into it. I think Rutgers does a job with integrating all the races. ... I think all these little fraternities and clubs that they got; you know, they got a little Latino club, they got that Afro-American Club, and they got the Philippine Club, and the German Club. ... I think that's all part of college life and I think that's great.

SI: Why did you choose Rutgers? Was it just location?

ER: Location, and I knew I wanted to be a History Major, and because I always had some kind of an interest in history, particularly 20th Century, World War II especially to some degree. ... I wanted American History. I already had my Associate's Degree, and Rutgers was taking all of my credits, except one from Middlesex County. So here I was coming in as a junior right away. ... So that made it good. I also since I've been here have been very impressed with the degree of scholarship of the professors. They're really, really topnotch professors. Some of their teaching skills, I think leave to be desired. I wouldn't recommend a few of them, but others are marvelous. ... They've got a first class group of professors here, even outside the History Department. Among the most interesting ones I have ever come across was Dean Go pin. He is the guy that's in charge of the programs for study abroad. ... He's also an Art History professor. ... I took Introduction to Art History Two. ... When he get up here and do his lectures, he would suck you into those paintings or sculptures. ... You came out of that class, you knew what they were about. ... It's just like, this man was just marvelous in the way he approached everything. ... He wasn't just a straight lecturer. He would bounce around, you know, the stage there, and he would also try to get students to talk to him. ... Any professor that try to get someone to talk to him or back, an interchange of ideas between the students and the professors, were my kind of professors. Those that just get up there and lecture and that's it, and hand you the test, I think they are wasting my tuition money. Even though I got something out of them, I think I could have gotten more out of them. ... There was one or two professors that are in that category. For the most part I really like Rutgers professors.

WO: Who is your favorite History professor?

ER: Well, Chambers was one of them. Lawson, I won't name who I don't like. We can skip that part of the question. [laughter] They were good. ... As history, those two were the top history professors that I can recall, because Lawson, I liked him because he lived through the '60s and '70s. ... That was the period of time that I was studying, *1945 to the Present US* history. ... He was going for his Master's and Doctorate in Columbia University, in New York City, at the time of all this unrest, of the strikes that they had, the taking over of the president's office, and all that stuff. So he was involved, and then he got involved to some degree down South. He went down ... I think he went to teach down South, and the Civil Rights movement was still going on. You were there in the class.

WO: Yes, North Carolina

ER: North Carolina.

WO: He was down in Florida for a while too.

ER: Yes, and he actually met one guy, whose father was one of the original sit in people down in North Carolina at the counter. The guy's son was a banker. Remember, he telling us the story about him being a banker. ... He said, "Are you really the so and so?" ... The guy said, "Yes, that was my dad." He just made it so lively. He encouraged people to talk, even if you disagreed with him. ... He got off on a tangent one night, I think it was election night. [Election of 2004

Bush v. Kerry] He blew the whole lecture on election night. He didn't want to, but he did. Just like we had a guy on the *Arab-Israeli Conflict* just blew a whole lecture on the Hamas elections. He didn't want to, but it was so engaging. ... You got so much out of that class. So Lawson and Chambers. Chambers was good, because he also would clarify things for you and talk, and bring in all these vets, and getting those vets to talk to you. I thought it was really, really good on his part.

WO: What factors led you to decide to go back to school?

ER: Going back to when I was in high school, I recall I might have said "I knew I wasn't going to go to college." I did want to go to college. I had gotten out applications for what was then Ryder College, and Alfred University, up in New York. ... I was going to even try to get into Navy ROTC, if I could. ... I looked at that and I said "Oh my grades are not going to do it." ... I was a high C at the most, and I knew I wasn't qualifying for scholarships. ... I said, "Well the dollars aren't there." ... Even then, I always said I wanted to go to college. So many, many years later, I was dating this girl at AT&T. ... She was from Puerto Rico. ... I was encouraging her to try to get a promotion into management. ... I told her that, "You get some college behind you, that would help you in this company," even though I was doing pretty good without it. So I helped her with some courses at Middlesex County, English courses, helped write papers. ... After she got her credits, I said, "You know, I could have gotten those credits myself." Here this company is offering this nice tuition aid program, if I took courses that were related to business. ... I said, "That's all I needed to know." So I signed up. ... I went at nights, one or two courses at a time down to Edison, to Middlesex County College, and finally got my Associate's Degree. Liberal arts/business it was called. ... For some reason they made us take a Physical Ed course. I took golf of all things. ... That was the one credit that Rutgers wouldn't accept, which I can't blame them. So I knew that I had half the credits right there. So when I finally left the business world, I said, "What am I going to do. I can't just sit around the house and drive my wife crazy. Wait a minute; I got half my college credits already in the bag. Let me go finish this up, let me accomplish the thing that I really wanted to do when I was seventeen years old." So now I'm going back and doing it, and I will do it a year after you however.

WO: Do you have any intentions of doing anything with the degree afterwards?

ER: Ah, originally I said, "No, I just want to this for myself." ... I still do, that's my main thing, do it for myself. ... Then again at some point in time I'm going to be sitting around the house. What am I going to do with this history degree? My wife has been encouraging me, and a lot of people say get into education, because my wife is in education. She has a Doctorate in education.[EdD] So I said, " Well I don't want to be in a classroom." I hear too many stories from teachers that I know and from my wife and other people. I don't want to get into the classroom at all. ... What I might do and I have to check this out with the school system, volunteer to be a tutor in after hours [programs]. They don't have to pay me a penny. Somebody out there needs some help with history or maybe something else that I can help them with. Just be a volunteer tutor to help somebody bring their grades up. Also ... Somerset County has a Volunteer Literacy Program, helping people learn to read. I had a neighbor that did that. ... I felt that might something I might want to do. ... Immediately after graduation, what's on my mind besides taking vacation is I'm going to come back to Rutgers. ... The Cook College runs a

Master Gardener course, and I'm going to become a Master Gardener. It's six months or something like that. ... It requires you to volunteer at different functions like their schools that operate, home garden schools they operate twice a year, 4H fairs, and things like that. You have to man a hotline for the County Extension Service. All those kinds of things, I'll do that too, because I love gardening. ... I could help people out. I like helping people out.

WO: Now I wanted to ask you've been registered to vote, until today, how much do you think your view on politics and the government have changed?

ER: Over the years?

WO: Yes.

ER: It definitely has changed. I am cynical. I have become very cynical. I used to accept everything my government told me. ... I guess [the] Vietnam War changed me on that. ... Also looking at what congressmen, senators, the presidents have to say over the years, they sometimes say one thing and they do another. I've learned to take campaign promises with a proverbial grain of salt. knowing they are just that. A lot times they know they can't deliver on their promises, but they make their promises anyhow. I appreciate when somebody does follow through on some projects that they say they're going to follow through, and they get a bill in there that really helps people. Occasionally they'll get a bill in there, I think it doesn't help people. ... Sometimes I get annoyed at Congress for just rubber-stamping what any president puts up in front of them. ... I say, "How could you not even understand this bill." ... Sometimes on interviews they'll say, "Well, we didn't know what the particulars of the bill were," and I'm thinking, "We elected you? You're supposed to look at these things and understand before you cast your vote." ... In general, I know I won't get involved in politics myself. I am not a party person, even though I'd vote mainly Democratic in the National and State levels. I'll vote both parties in the county and local levels. ... There's a lot of stuff that goes on behind, I think, closed doors, party politics. So I do not align myself with any party. At one time I was a registered Democrat, now I'm an independent.

SI: I have a question about being at Rutgers and being a non-traditional student. Do you feel like you're getting the same out of it as, you know, a more traditional student?

ER: Yes, I find it for the most part, [I] make up conversation, not long friendships, but conversation easily with a small number of students in the classroom. ... I don't think there's anybody that looks to me like saying, "What's this old man doing in the class." I haven't gotten any of those vibes. Some of them sometimes ask me about things, which I think was very nice. ... I don't try not to brag if know something that they don't know. Once in a while I do though, I have to admit it. ... [laughter] Yes, I enjoyed that. I haven't joined any organizations, except the History Honor Society. I enjoy looking at things that the traditional students get involved with, particularly that camp city that comes out here every spring. ... [Tent State University. It's an organized protest against government budget cuts that harm public educational institutions like Rutgers] I think that's great. All these people with all their causes, whether you agree with them or not, they're out there doing their thing. ... I think that's terrific. I just like the whole atmosphere. I haven't dealt one on one with a lot of professors. Like some people, whom I

understand sort of get mentored by a professor over [a] period of time. I've never had that. I don't think I've ever needed it. That's why I've gone to a couple of professors for advice in scheduling. That's about the only thing I've ever had talked to them about off hours about. ... Also Professor Chambers, prior to going into his class, kind of like I want to get my foot in the door make sure I got into it, because in knew it was a limited number of students. so I made sure he knew that I wanted to be there which he did. [laughter]

WO: Do you feel like you're most up to in some of your classes? Maybe history classes that cover time periods you have lived in.

ER: Some of them, like in class you and I were [in.] [*US 1945 To Present* with Professor Lawson] There was some people who talked to me about my experiences. ... They wanted to know. If I know something about a subject, I try to bring it up without trying to be the smarty, smarty at a party in a class. You see those kinds of student always raising their hands. They got to put in their two cents. ... They're trying to show off to the professor or maybe trying to show the professor how much they really know. , I try to avoid that. I try to say something I know is going to contribute that maybe add a little thing or flavor to what the professor has said. ... I speak up, when I am not understanding what the professor says. If I need some clarification, I have no hesitancy about raising my hand, or if later on I think of something I would get on the email send that professor an email right away. ... So I always have rapport going on with professor then. If I can contribute something I do, I brought in some music one time for a music professor, because he had a bad recording of something. ... I said, "Hey I've got it," because I knew that's what he wanted to teach. My recording is what he used.

SI: Do you have any other questions? Is there anything we skipped or missed? Anything else you want to talk about? We kept you here a long time.

ER: No, but afterwards if you want to look at that crazy little book I can show you a couple of nice pictures and stuff. That's about it. I really enjoyed doing this. You're going to be the person editing my script?

WO: Yes.

ER: Okay, I will give you this. There are some names in here. Don't worry about the spelling on the other stuff. I'll take care of the spelling.

SI: Worry about the spelling, its part of your grade. [laughter]

ER: If you have any concerns about that email me, I'll get right back to you okay. ... I enjoyed this. I wanted to be a part of it. I asked my brother to be a part of it. Hopefully you can do that with him, but he works. ... His interesting aspects are two basic ... things that I find interesting what he did, being a thirty year naval reserve guy and becoming a chief petty officer. One, he spends six months in the Antarctic, when he was in the Seabees. Then he transferred out of the Seabees and he got into the computer world. ... He had to do some of his reserve weekends in Washington, DC. ... He met Rear Admiral Grace Murray, who was highlighted on *60 Minutes* one time. ... She was one of the original founders of the COBOL programming language. So,

he really admired her. ... I think there were some rumors that she invented the term bug, because she actually found a bug inside of a computer one day. ... I think IBM was really credited for doing that. So his experiences, particularly down in the South Pole. There's got to be stories behind that, because he showed us hour after hour and after of slides he took when he was down there. ... It's all white I can tell you that, and those penguins, he knows them by name. ... I think he had an interesting experience. Whether or not you can team up with or not, I don't know.

SI: We'd certainly welcome that.

ER: Sure.

SI: I guess he didn't get called up during Vietnam.

ER: No I didn't. ...

SI: Oh no, your brother.

ER: Oh my brother no. No my brother didn't even though I know there are Seabees in Iraq right now that had been killed. He didn't get called up. Thank goodness, but he's finished with it too.

SI: Alright, well if there's nothing else we'll conclude the interview. Thank you very much for coming back in, and this concludes our interview with Edwin Robinson on February 8, 2006 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth and

WO: Bill Olson.

SI: Thank you.

ER: Thank you very much.

[Editor's Note: Since this interview, Mr. Robinson graduate from Rutgers University College in May, 2007, where at the age of sixty-six he was the oldest graduating senior in the Class of 2007. He earned a BA with High Honors, majoring in History. He was initiated into the History Honor Society and the University College Honor Society. He currently volunteers with the Rutgers Oral History Archives and is a member of the Rutgers Oral History Society. Mr. Robinson also volunteers with Elijah's Promise Soup Kitchen in New Brunswick, the Raritan Valley Habitat For Humanity and the Master Gardeners of Somerset and Hunterdon Counties.]

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Reviewed by William F. Olson 3/31/2006

Reviewed by Edwin Robinson 3/9/2009