RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL AARON ROCKLAND

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
OCTOBER 7, 2009

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins our second interview with Professor Michael Aaron Rockland on October 7, 2009, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

Dan Ruggiero: … Dan Ruggiero.

SI: Okay, Professor Rockland, thank you very much for coming in again.

Michael Aaron Rockland: Thank you, guys.

SI: To begin, we wanted to get into your time in the Navy, but, since that was deep into the Cold War period, before that, we wanted to get an idea of what you had learned about Communism, the Cold War in general, if that played any part in your life or your education.

MR: Well, I remember one thing, and that was, in college, I had a teacher in philosophy, professor in philosophy, and then, one day, he wasn't there anymore. Somebody else came in and we asked what happened to him, and he had literally been a victim of McCarthyism, and what's most appalling is that none of us in the class said anything. We were known as the "Silent Generation." I don't know how silent I was, but I think it had mostly to do with the fact that I couldn't stand the course, and so, the fact that he was gone was sort of nice. [laughter] I remember, also, unless I touched on this last time, that, when I was about fifteen, I was pitching for a team. Did we talk about that? I don't remember.

SI: I do not believe so.

MR: Yes, there was a softball team in the Bronx and I was pitching for it, and my parents were very upset that I was on this team and I said, "Why? It's just a team." … Apparently, this team was supported by some group that was supported by some other group that, and, anyway, after about three connections, to a list that Senator Joseph McCarthy had put out, and so, I was "guilty," quote, "guilty by association." … Later on, when I went into the Diplomatic Service, … which we'll talk about, I'm sure, in a bit, and I went through many steps to get through, the last one was the FBI check, and the FBI told me they were going to do this and I said, "Well, before you do this, one thing you should know about me, I played softball for this team." [laughter] … I thought that was a wise thing to do, but, when you think of it, what a ridiculous thing, that you should be worrying about having pitched softball for a team that was connected with a group that's connected with another group that's connected with another group that was on Senator McCarthy's list, and given the fact that he was a villain who practically destroyed this country, but the fact that I was concerned, or my parents were very concerned about it, anyway, the fact that I actually would tell the FBI that I [played ball for them] was, I think, symptomatic of the times. I don't think people would, under normal circumstances, worry about the fact that they happened to pitch for a team. [laughter] …

SI: Did you feel that way at the time, that McCarthy was a villain, or was that something you developed later?

MR: Oh, yes. I remember watching the Army-McCarthy Hearings, which finally did him in, and I think his name was Joseph, but the lawyer, Welch, for the Army. [Editor's Note: Professor Rockland is referring to the hearings of Senator Joseph McCarthy's Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in 1954 known as the McCarthy-Army Hearings. During the televised proceedings, Joseph N. Welch, counsel for the US Army, famously asked, "Have you no sense of decency, sir?" as part of his counterattack against McCarthy, which was cited later as the beginning of the Senator's downfall.] I mean, now, McCarthy was saying that the Army was riddled with Communists. Now, he's gone too far, I think, because the last place in the world one would have found any Communists, I think, by common sense, was in the Army, … but I remember watching that whole thing and cheering for Welch and glad that McCarthy had been done in. No, … at the time, I remember looking at McCarthy as, at best, crazy, but very, very dangerous, yes.

SI: Going through school in this time of duck-and-cover and the nuclear threat, were you affected by that at all? Did you, to any degree, fear a nuclear war or the Soviet Union?

MR: Yes. I can recall, when I was in grad school, the fact that there were people building shelters in their backyard, digging big holes in the ground and building underground shelters. Not everybody did it, and maybe not that many people did it, but people did it, and, yes, the thought that I, and everyone else, was going to be evaporated by a nuclear bomb was very much part of your thinking in those days, that there definitely was going to be a nuclear war and that much of the Earth would be destroyed. Yes, it was very much part of my thinking and feeling and fears of the time, yes.

SI: That was in Minnesota that they were digging the shelters.

MR: Yes, while I was in grad school in Minnesota is when I was most aware of that, yes, because, by then, I was married and had two children, two little children. … I kept thinking, "Should I do this in my backyard?" even though I was renting a house, [laughter] and it seemed crazy to build such a shelter in the backyard of a house you were renting, because, pretty soon, you wouldn't be there. So, that was part of it, and I was a grad student; all four of us were living on fifty bucks a week, [laughter] and so, building a thing like that would have been, probably, financially impossible, quite apart from anything else.

SI: Going into your time in the Navy, can you go over your thinking on why you wanted to join the Navy, how you got in, the process of applying, going through your physical, and so on?

MR: Yes. Well, I didn't want to join the Navy, I was drafted, and, to me, if I could put in a commercial here, I believe very strongly in the draft and I don't believe in the volunteer army at all. I think it's a disgrace for a democracy to have a volunteer army, mercenaries, who could be sent off to something like Iraq, an absolute disaster, which, let's face it, between the Vietnam era and this era, … Iraq happened and virtually nobody on campus said anything, but, during the Vietnam era, the campuses were ablaze. … I know we'll talk about this later on, because I was very much in the center of that, having arrived at Rutgers just then. … So, I was drafted and I was actually drafted into the Army, and I went to be inducted at the famous [1] Whitehall Street

in Lower Manhattan, which is where Arlo Guthrie's *Alice's Restaurant*, if you know the song, or if you know the movie made from it, that's where some of it takes place, in that very facility. … A guy came, a military guy came, into the room where we inductees were standing around, and it kind of blew me away, the language he used, the limits of his language; everything was, "Fucking this," and, "Fucking that," and, "Fucking the next thing." I mean, this was a word which I may have used a couple of times in my life, but this guy, … it seemed to be his all-purpose word. I daresay that's what happened in America, now that it's become the all-purpose word, [laughter] seems to have to do with everything but sex, but, anyway, he came in, "Okay, you fucking guys, now, fucking listen up to me. Some of you fucking guys can be in the Navy, if you want to be in the Navy, instead of the fucking Army." I mean, that's the way he spoke, and we were just standing there, thinking, "What is the matter with this person?" [laughter] and he said, "Okay, I'll give you thirty seconds to make up your mind. Anyone who wants to be in the Navy, step forward." I thought, "Oh, gee whiz, I've got thirty seconds to make up my mind. I imagine that the Navy would be kind of [nice]. Oh, I don't know, you wouldn't be in foxholes, you'd be on nice, clean ships, wear nice, white clothes," and I kind of liked the sea anyway. So, I stepped forward, and he said, "Okay, all you guys [who] stepped forward, go outside and get on that bus," and there was a bus parked out there and we didn't know where it was going. … I mean, that was part of the idiocy of the military, that they didn't treat you as a human being, and we weren't ever told where we were going. We got on this bus and the bus went to Bainbridge, Maryland, and then, … we had our heads shaved off and we're in boot camp, in the Navy, … but they never even said, "You're going to Bainbridge, Maryland." I didn't know, getting on the bus, whether they were going to the West Coast. I had no idea, and so, boot camp, in the Navy, was, oh, I don't know, a whole lot of foolishness, as far as I was concerned. They didn't like me, for two reasons; one, I was a college graduate, I had just graduated college, and, second, the Navy didn't like the fact that, during that particular month, they did not have enough volunteers. Most people in the Navy were always volunteers. [The] Navy was proud of the fact it could always get enough volunteers, whereas the Army could not, but they didn't have enough people in the pipeline that month. So, that's how I got into the Navy, and so, both the fact that I was a draftee into the Navy, which meant I hadn't gone in as a volunteer, like everybody else, and the fact that I was a college graduate, and not only was I a college graduate, but they immediately, knowing I was a college graduate, offered me the opportunity to go to OCS, Officer Candidate School, to be an officer, and I said, "No, I don't want to go to OCS school," because it would have meant two things. First of all, it would have meant another year. I would have had to have been another year on active duty, minimum, and, also, I was already doing my military service. … I'm kind of a take-charge guy, but I didn't want to take charge in the Navy. I was going to do what they wanted me to do, but I didn't want to be in charge of anything. So, I got through boot camp, where, basically, all they tried to do is humiliate you, as far as I could see.

SI: About how long was boot camp?

MR: Boot camp … was eight weeks, and they kept saying, "We're going to make a man out of you," but it seemed to me quite the opposite. They were trying to make a mouse out of you, and that you had to try desperately to hold on to your manhood, was really what the deal was, not to allow their humiliations to get to you. … Basically, [we] marched up and down, they didn't let us sleep and we all got sick, and, one time, I got beat up by some senior Navy guys, when I

happened to walk across a place in the mess hall which they had recently swabbed, and I didn't know that, and these guys came at me and just literally beat me up. [laughter] … When I went to the guy who was called our company commander, who was really our drill instructor, and told him this, he said, "Well, I'd keep that to yourself." I said, "Why should I keep that [to myself]?" He says, "You want to end up in the brig?" I said, "Why should I end up in the brig? I didn't do anything. I got beat up by these guys. These guys ought to be penalized in some kind of way." … He said, "Young man," he said, "there's the right way and there's a wrong way and there's the Navy way, and this is the Navy way," and I said, "Wow, I didn't know that." So, I never did speak up about it, because it seemed like, "Well, if I was going to end up in the brig…" and, in those days, in the brig, I mean, I don't know what the … military brigs are like now, but they're not like regular prisons. I mean, they beat the living daylights out of you, or they did then. So, that seemed to be the highlight of my boot camp. … Were you going to ask something else, or should I go on with this Navy story?

SI: Just in general, how did you adapt to this new situation, losing the freedoms of civilian life for the regimentation of Navy life? Did you see others who did not adjust well? People talk about their first few days in the Navy, seeing other men crying, that sort of thing. What was the adjustment period like?

MR: Yes. Well, there were a couple of guys in our company who went around the bend. I mean, they were just driven around the bend. They became, as this term was then, "Section Eight," they became Section Eights. I don't know what the other sections are, but Section Eight was [that] you were mentally incapacitated in some kind of way, and they just flipped out, I mean, from this kind of harassment, the eight weeks of it. … I was later to learn all about Section Eight, when I got to my job in the Navy, but, you know, it was just something to get through and I didn't take it too seriously, and I don't know that we learned anything very valuable. The only thing that I can recall that we learned, if we learned it, was to take orders, and the whole thing seemed to [be], as they say, as I said, "We're making a man out of you," and … I thought it was quite the contrary, that we came in as men and we were going to end boot camp, some of us weren't going to be men anymore, and I was just trying to, somehow, keep my own counsel. … Towards the end of boot camp, you would go to some sort of a specialty school, something, and mine was medicine. I actually volunteered for that. I was glad I got it, because I thought I'd learn something worthwhile, but this was another reason why people in the Navy would look down at you, because, "Real men don't become medics." [laughter] You know, I can't explain it, … because being a medic in combat is probably the most dangerous position to be in, … and so, I went to, … it's called hospital corpsmen's school, at Bainbridge, Maryland, also, and that was another sixteen weeks. … They told us that our whole group in hospital corpsmen's school, at that time, where we were learning basic medicine, basic first aid and that sort of thing, so that by the end of that, we could be like sort of junior nurses, junior male nurses, which was another reason people would put you down, because, "Real men don't become medics," you know. People say, "Oh, you're a pussy, you're a medic." You know, you'd hear that kind of language, you know, but I was glad for it, because it seemed to me I might be learning something kind of valuable, and they said that, of our whole group, our whole group was going to be sent to Camp Pendleton, California, which is a Marine camp, and because the Marines, to this day, I understand, do not have their own medical corps. The Navy takes care of

the medical care. I mean, the Marines used to be part of the Navy, but the Navy takes care of the Marine medicine, see. So, when you're a medic in the Navy, you take care of Marine guys as much as you take care of Navy guys, you know. In fact, the language for what we were called was "pecker checkers," that was the term used. … That term came from the notion that what you did as a medic, more than anything else, although I didn't end up doing this, was giving people shots for gonorrhea. That's what you did. [laughter] That's why you were a "pecker checker," [laughter] but, so, they said, … as a reward; they wanted us to all work hard in medic school. … They said, as a reward, the person who got the highest grades, and there were fifty-two of us, I remember; in fact, I remember my serial number. That must be branded, must be hardwired, to my brain, 4882463. Now, why would I remember a number like that? but it's funny, you know. Anyway, … they said that the one person who got the highest scores in the medic school could go to Japan, instead of going to Pendleton, California. I said, "Wow, God, I want to do that." So, I studied up like crazy. I really worked on it, and I did get the highest grades of the fifty-two of us, which meant that, good, I could get to go overseas, see Japan, and that would be neat, and then, we got our orders and mine said, "Pendleton." [laughter] … So, I went to, I don't know, the personnel people. I said, "Look, we were absolutely promised that whoever got the highest scores were going to go to Japan," and I was very glad that the guy said, "You're absolutely right; we made a mistake." I couldn't believe it. This was the first humane conversation that I'd had in twenty-four weeks, eight … and sixteen. He said, "You're right, we made that promise, we're going to keep it. You're going to Japan," and the guy just changed my orders right there to go to Japan. So, I went to Japan, and I'll never forget this, on the way over to Japan, these were not jets. First, I had to fly to San Francisco, and there was a Navy base right out in the harbor called Treasure Island, like Alcatraz. It was another little island in San Francisco Harbor. I don't know if it's a naval base today, but it was then, and so, I had to fly there, and these were prop planes and not jets. … Then, after a couple of days or so, a few days there, I was put on a plane on its way to Japan, only the plane was going to make two stops on the way, and it nearly crashed the first two stops. [laughter] It was absolutely horrible. Coming into Hawaii, coming into Honolulu, the cabin completely filled with smoke, which had something to do with the landing gear not working and they couldn't get the landing gear down, and one of the guys came back, from where the pilot was, came back and … literally took a window out, or something, to clear the smoke out. I thought we'd all get sucked out of the airplane, … and then, we landed, in Hawaii, and part of the idiocy of the Navy is, we were there about three days and we were confined to quarters. The only time I've ever been to Hawaii, I wasn't in Hawaii; … I was just confined to the barracks. I mean, why they couldn't have said, "Hey, you guys, you know, we're going to be here a couple days, why don't you go out and enjoy the beach, get to know Hawaii a little bit?" but I never saw Hawaii. I just saw this barracks, I think at Hickam Field, the famous Hickam Field, which, if I got the name right, was bombed by the Japanese, [during the December 7, 1941 attack on] Pearl Harbor. So, I never got to see anything, and then, … they got another plane and we took off on that plane to go to Wake Island, which was going to be the next stop. This was a Navy plane. The plane from San Francisco to Hawaii was actually an Australian Qantas airline plane. I don't know why it was, but it was, and then, on the way to Wake Island, we crossed the International Date Line, and that was when I had a one-hour twenty-first birthday, because we crossed the International Date Line on July 13th, and, now, it was July 14th. It was eleven o'clock at night, now, it was July 14th, and, one hour later, it was July 15th. So, I had this one-hour twenty-first birthday, [laughter] up in the sky, nobody to celebrate it with, just a bunch

of sleeping Navy guys, and I happened to glance out the window and noticed that one of the props on the plane wasn't turning. It was just standing straight up. I thought, "Oh, God." So, I went up and I knocked on the cabin door, and, again, … this was a military plane and somebody said, "Come in." … I went in there and there was a guy sitting there. Everybody else up there was sleeping in bunks, in the cabin, had places for them to sleep, and there was one guy, who was presumably in charge of the plane, and he had his feet up on the dashboard, so-to-speak, … which scared the hell out of me. He didn't seem to be holding on to anything, and I said, "Sir, I need to report that one of the props back there isn't moving. It's just straight up." "Oh," he says, "yes, I know." He said, "We've alerted Air-Sea Rescue. Don't worry about it." I'm thinking, "Air-Sea Rescue? Okay, well, at least they've alerted Air-Sea Rescue." [He] said, "But, don't worry about it. We've got three still going. It's no big deal. This happens all the time." I'm thinking, "Oh," and, well, we finally landed on Wake Island, which was very important in World War II, with the Japanese. It was all covered with old, rusting Japanese tanks, teeny tanks, and some of them were on the land, some of them were in the shallow water, … but, anyway, I saw that the next day. We landed at night and all it was a bunch of Quonset huts, and one of the Quonset huts was a bar. … So, we all, coming off that plane, didn't know what to do, so, we went down to the bar and I was sitting at the bar, … with some guys who, apparently, were stationed at Wake Island. … I said, "What do you guys do?" He says, "Oh, we're Air-Sea Rescue," and these guys were drunk as skunks. I said, "Oh, no kidding, how do you do that? because we just came in a plane and they told us Air-Sea Rescue had been notified," and they said, "Oh, yes, yes, yes, we were notified." "Well, how could you save us if we had to ditch in the Pacific and didn't sink right away? How would you save us?" He said, "Oh, we wouldn't have been able to save you." "Oh," I said, "well, what kind of equipment do you have?" "Well, we've got this big rowboat," [laughter] and I was thinking they could maybe make it a mile out, but that was about it, in the Pacific Ocean. It's just absolutely ridiculous, you know, and we were on Wake Island for a couple of days. … That was kind of nice, because I was able to walk around Wake Island at least, even though it's only about a mile long or so. I think there was a John Wayne movie called *Wake Island*, a World War II [movie], about the battle there. [Editor's Note: The film *Wake Island* was released in 1942; John Wayne did not appear in the film.] … There was an airstrip and there were these big goony birds standing around, never seen these kind of big birds before, and then, we continued on, after a couple days, to Japan, and, when I got to Japan, I was brought to Yokosuka, "Yo-ko-suka" is the way you might pronounce it, if you didn't know otherwise, if you didn't know Japanese, which I learned a little bit of while I was there, and I was assigned to psychiatric. … This was peacetime, and so, the hospital was essentially empty. This was the largest naval base in the Far East and, you know, except for somebody who had the flu, you didn't have people with war injuries. This was, after all, after Korea, before Vietnam, … but the psychiatric … wards were filled to overflowing, and we were, essentially, the hospital, the psychiatric part, which I've always found terribly funny, in a way. The typical inmate was somebody who had been a hero in the Korean War, and then, had elected to stay in after the Korean War, make a career of it, and, now, had nothing to do. They were in Japan, there was no real work that needed to be done. You could get a bottle of Cutty Sark for about fifty cents, you could get a shot of heroin for about ninety cents, you could get a woman for about a buck, and they were doing all three, [laughter] and then, they started to go crazy, and some of them ended up in the psychiatric ward, either because they'd try to shoot themselves or they'd try to shoot somebody else, and there was nobody to shoot, see. [laughter] We weren't at

war, so, we started to shoot each other. I didn't, but … the typical patient was somebody who had either attempted murder, or had committed murder, or had attempted suicide, guys who'd cut both wrists, and I was assigned to the locked psychiatric ward. We had an open ward and we had a locked. The open ward was large, the locked ward was a small ward in size. We had, maybe, thirty patients at a time and the open ward had, maybe, seventy-five patients. Everybody was admitted to the locked ward, and the shrinks, as we called them, saw the admittees the very next morning, and most of them would then be moved to the open ward. Most of them were kids who had had an anxiety attack. They missed their mothers, their girlfriend wrote them a "Dear John" letter, or something, and they would go to the open ward and they would eventually return to duty. The locked ward, the people we kept on the locked ward, were dangerous to themselves or others. Well, no, they weren't all dangerous to themselves or others. I'll describe the kinds of patients we had?

SI: Sure. Did you also have armed guards to help you, or was it just you guys?

MR: No, it was, this particular ward had actually been, and this whole hospital had been, Japanese property during World War II, and the ward, … the locked psychiatric ward, had been the prison ward, that is, that somebody, … in the Japanese military, during the World War II, who got into trouble was put in this ward, not somebody who was psychiatric, but … all the windows had cages on them. There was a front door and a back door and we medics, or corpsmen, carried the keys. … Basically, we were trying to have some sort of a, quote, "therapeutic community" for these guys, although I'm not sure if I answered your question.

SI: If somebody got physical, was it basically left to you to handle it, or would you call on somebody else to come in and break up a fight?

MR: Well, I was nearly murdered twice in that place, so, that's the answer. [laughter] … No, we didn't have anybody else to call on. A Marine, … who fit this description perfectly, he'd been a hero in the Korean War and, now, had gone crazy, strangled me when I was on night duty, came up from behind me. … I didn't know then, and I've never known since, how I got him off me. He was a pretty big, burly guy. I think it had something to do with my training … in senior lifesaving and [as a] water safety instructor, because … you're trained in how to get a handle on people, but I don't remember. All I remember is, this guy is strangling me; the next thing I know, I'm on the floor, on top of him, banging his head against the floor in an absolute rage. I could have killed him, but one of the other guys came along and said, "Jeez, what are you doing, Michael?" … I was just in an absolute adrenaline rage, and we took this guy and threw him into the padded cell for awhile, because we had padded cells on that ward, when patients would really get dangerous or out of control. … Then, another time, while I'm on that subject, one of the patients from the ward escaped and he was a Navy SEAL, and he actually made his way up into the vent, like a ceiling vent, like one of these things, [an exposed duct in the room], made his way up through there and crawled through the vent. I don't know what you call those.

SI: Ducts.

MR: Ducts, yes, crawled through the ducts, and out, right out the building, … and then, climbed to the top of the building, and I was sent after him. No, we didn't have anybody to help us with that. I was sent after him and I remember his name, Joe Louis Smith. [laughter] He was named after the great boxer, Joe Louis, and I was sent after him, because we needed everybody else to stay in the ward. I was sent after him, and he tried to throw me off the roof, because I was trying to convince him to come with me, come down, and so, twice, I was in real danger. But, I never got any combat pay, even though I was in "combat," except all the combat I ever saw was "friendly-fire," as they like to call it, in quotes. I nearly got killed by our own guys, a little bit like Pat Tillman in Afghanistan, although I wasn't getting shot, … but I was nearly murdered twice. … As I say, I got no combat pay, but I should have. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Patrick Tillman was a professional football player who left behind his athletic career to join the US Army in May 2002, following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. He served multiple combat tours before being killed by friendly-fire in Sperah, Afghanistan, in 2004.] I was really in combat in that place.

DR: Was that just considered a risk that came along with the job? Did you have to report those incidents or was that just considered normal?

MR: Yes, I reported the incidents to the shrinks, and it was [reported], you know, and they wrote up some stuff. I don't know. I was just glad to be alive in both cases. I did get into trouble during those two years, almost, well, a year-and-a-half, that I was on that ward, because, … and this happened just after I arrived; not the two times I was nearly killed, but earlier. I had just arrived, I had only been there a week, and a patient escaped from the ward. … There'd been a number of escapes, apparently, before I came, and the commander of the hospital said, "Well, somebody's got to hang for this. Somebody's got to be blamed for this. We can't have patients escaping from your ward all the time," and so, I was elected, [laughter] because I was the new guy. It seems to me, if I was the new guy, I should have been the last one to be chosen for this "honor," but somebody, the … commander of the hospital, was absolutely adamant that someone had to pay a price for this, someone had to be charged for this, and so, everybody in psychiatric decided that I would be the one, even though I was the least to blame, I think, having just arrived. … So, I had what was called a "captain's mast," which isn't a court-martial, … and I was told, "Oh, look, you don't get much of a [punishment]," but I had to appear before the commander and my penalty was two weeks' confinement to the base, that was what, but I had a record now. It didn't stop me from getting honorably discharged at the end, but I had a record. [laughter] It was the only time in my life I have actually been accused of a crime, and convicted of it, and I didn't do anything, but, you know, it's funny, in retrospect. At the time, it was really scary. "Military justice."

DR: Prior to going over to Japan, in your training, had you had either any experience or training in working with psychiatric patients?

MR: No, none whatsoever, and I might tell you about, by the way, … after the book I'm writing right now, which is a book based on my four years in … Madrid, as I said, I'm writing it for the University of Valencia and it's being translated into Spanish, a book on those four years … as a diplomat and earlier. I was in the Diplomatic Service for seven years, total, first Argentina and

Washington, and then, four years Spain, it was mostly Spain, and so, I got off my own subject here. [laughter] What the heck was I talking about? … What I wanted to talk about, though, was … my memory of the kinds of patients we had on the ward, that were sort of categorized, at least in my mind, okay. We had murderers, who were there to be observed by the shrinks who would be testifying at their trial. … These guys, some of them, were going to be ending up, maybe, in Fort Leavenworth Federal Prison for the rest of their lives, depending on what the shrinks had to say at their trials. Some of them had murdered another sailor or Marine, some of them had murdered their Japanese girlfriend or her father, or whatever. They were murderers, and that was a little scary, to be in a place with murderers around, and then, the second group were the suicides, and they were mostly, as I mentioned earlier, guys who had cut both wrists and walked around with bandages. … We had to watch them very carefully in terms of something like that, and then, there were the people who were obviously mentally ill, people who were catatonic, schizophrenic, hallucinations, people who were so deeply depressed that they were utterly and totally nonfunctional, just sat there like vegetables. … They took up most of our time, because they didn't do anything. We had to feed them, we had to try to anticipate when they had to go to the bathroom and walk them down to the bathroom, open their flies for them, and, you know, so [that] they could pee, you know, and stuff like that. I mean, it was really basic kind of stuff, and, usually, and often, they would shit themselves and we had to clean them up. … That part of it was kind of awful, you know, and they were just like vegetables. … It's funny, and then, the fourth group, remember, this is the '50s, the fourth group, on the locked psychiatric ward, who were kept there because they were considered "serious" mental patients, were homosexuals. You got this? [laughter] … It's hard to believe this, but they were kept on the locked ward and we were told, "Keep your eye on those guys at all times," and not only that, they were given shock treatments. If there's anything I regret from my active duty time; hell, I was twenty-one years old, I'd never even heard of homosexuals. I didn't even know there was such a thing. I grew up in a world very different from the world you guys grew up in. I mean, [the] gay world is something I just never heard of, growing up. … We were told, "Keep your eyes on those guys," … but that's the one thing I regret, that I was a participant, that I was one of the guys who grabbed these guys and put them on a gurney and strapped them down and took them down and put electrodes on their head and zapped them. The whole idea was that these guys suffered from an illness and the "illness" was, they were attracted to their own sex, instead of the opposite sex, and we're going to "fix" them. We were going to zap them, and then, they were going to start to like girls instead of boys. Can you imagine this? I mean, that was the theory of the whole thing, and, at twenty-one, I was participating in it. I mean, I could say, "Well, I didn't know any better," and I didn't know any better, but that's a little bit like a Nazi saying, you know, "*I was just following orders.*" So, that's the one part of the Navy that I sincerely regret, that I was a participant in that, and, obviously, it's something I'm going to write about in the book. I'm going to call that book *Blueberry Hill*, because Fats Domino's *Blueberry Hill* had come out during that year [1956] and there was a guy on the ward who had a little phonograph and a little forty-five [record] of *Blueberry Hill* and he'd play it all day long, to absolute distraction. I mean, I love that song, but, during that time, it was driving people completely around the bend. He would just play it all day long, and so, *Blueberry Hill* became almost a kind of a nickname of the ward. There's two experiences I want to tell you about, which I think are really, really extraordinary, that I haven't told you about yet. One of them concerned Cardinal [Francis] Spellman. Cardinal Spellman was the New York Cardinal then and he had an extra title, "The Vicar of the Orient."

[Editor's Note: Francis Spellman ascended to the posts of Archbishop of New York and Apostolic Vicar for the US Armed Forces, a function of the New York Archdiocese, in 1939 and held both positions until his death in 1967; the position of Apostolic Vicar for the US Armed Forces was abolished when the Archdiocese for the Military Services was created in 1985.] Whether the New York Cardinal still does this or not, I don't know, but Cardinal Spellman, once a year, would come to all … major American bases in the Far East and visit the bases and, in this case, came to our base, Yokosuka base, and came to our hospital and came to our ward. Well, when we learned he was coming, the head shrink, who was a captain in the Navy, said, "Oh, we've got to spruce things up. The Cardinal's coming to our ward," and we had meetings with the murderers and the suicides and the homosexuals and the catatonics, and [said], you know, "Everybody's got to behave when the Cardinal comes here." … So, the catatonics and schizophrenics, they were difficult, because the whole idea is that when the Cardinal came in the ward, that the patients would be standing by their racks, as they were called, their beds, their racks, and they would be standing at attention, and you couldn't get the catatonics to stand at attention. So, we actually put ropes around them and tied them to their iron beds, [laughter] and so, they just stood there. … I was thinking, "Gee, I never met a cardinal before and he's going to come into our ward. Wow, this is really exciting and everything." Well, five minutes before the Cardinal arrived, … the head shrink, Captain Nichols, I remember his name, called me into his office and he said, "Rockland." I said, "Yes, sir?" He said, "Look, I don't want the Cardinal to see these homosexuals. I don't want him to know we've got these disgusting humans here. I want you to take them out in the backyard and play basketball with them, so that they're not on the ward when he arrives." We had a front door and a back door and the back door went out to a play yard, where there was a two-court basketball thing and where the patients could get exercise. It was completely fenced, about twelve feet high, with barbed wire on top, but at least they could get some recreation there, some exercise. So, I go, "Oh, sir, I'd really like to be here when the Cardinal…" "No, somebody's got to do it. Take them outside." So, I went outside and played basketball with the homosexuals, and never did see the Cardinal. Now, the funny thing about this, of course, is that, years later, it was revealed that Cardinal Spellman was not only homosexual himself, but was a predatory homosexual who preyed upon young priests, and, also, would get together with J. Edgar Hoover and Roy Cohn, who were both people who persecuted homosexuals and who were also both homosexuals, and that the Cardinal and Roy Cohn, who was one of McCarthy's guys, and J. Edgar Hoover would party and dress up and all this kind of stuff. *Vanity Fair* had an article about that. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Professor Rockland is referring to excerpts from British author Anthony Summers' 1993 book *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover*, which appeared in the March 1993 issue of *Vanity Fair*.] It just tore me all up, but the really horrible thing about Spellman is, apparently, and this is before all the revelations of priests preying on kids and whatnot that we've had in recent years, but that what was revealed about Spellman, by several priests who spoke up about this, is that he would just prey upon young priests and basically tell them, if they didn't have sex with him, they weren't going anywhere in the Church. I mean, it's just [incredible], and I was "protecting" the Cardinal, and I'm the guy who protected Cardinal Spellman from seeing the homosexuals, and, besides, what would you have seen? What would you have known? You know, Nichols, the commanding officer, just didn't want them on the ward. I mean, it's both horrible and terribly funny at the same time, which is maybe the best kind of humor, that's both horrible and funny. … I want to tell one more story of one of the patients, which, … you know,

all of this stuff, you can see how excited I am about this, in terms of this book I'm going to write after the one I'm writing now about my Diplomatic Service. There was a kid on the ward; I couldn't see anything the matter with this kid at all. He was neither a murderer, a homosexual, a suicide or a catatonic/schizophrenic. This kid seemed more normal than my own neurotic self, [laughter] and I just couldn't [figure it out], and I got quite friendly with this kid. … I enjoyed talking to him. He was very bright. He read books, I wanted to be a writer, and we'd talk about literature. Whenever I had … any free time, which was rare, I'd go sit with him and we'd talk about things, and I just kept thinking, "I think this kid's on our ward by mistake. This kid doesn't belong in our ward." So, I went in to see Captain Nichols, the head shrink, one day about this kid, and I said, "Sir, excuse me for interfering, but I think," and I forget the kid's name, let's say Smith, or whatever, Jones, "I don't think there's anything the matter with him. I think he's here mistakenly. There's nothing the matter with that kid at all." He said, "Trust me, there's something the matter with that kid." I said, "Okay." So, I continued to … hang out with him whenever I got a chance, and he was very skinny, real skinny. … I noticed he drank a lot of coffee and I noticed he smoked a lot of cigarettes, but only subliminally, because a lot of people drank a lot of coffee and … smoked a lot of cigarettes, but, then, I noticed, a couple of times, when the food cart would come on the ward; breakfast, lunch, dinner, they'd come on the ward with a food cart. … The trays and your food all went right on the tray itself, which had compartments, and, when the food cart came on the ward, that he would never get up and get any food. Well, two times, I noticed this, and I said, "Hey, aren't you hungry?" He said, "No, … I've had plenty to eat. I'm not hungry." … Well, finally, after a couple of days, … when it happened again, the food cart came, I said, "What have you had to eat?" He said, "Oh, lots." I said, "Well, what? What do you eat? You don't go to the food cart. What are you eating? Are you getting candy bars from somewhere or what? What are you eating?" He said, "Oh, no, no, I don't like candy." I said, "Well, what do you eat?" He says, "Well, I drink a lot of coffee." I said, "Well, how many cups of coffee do you drink a day?" He said, "I average about thirty to forty." I said, "Thirty to forty cups of coffee a day?" "Yes." "And you put sugar and milk in it?" "Oh, no, I like it black. I like my coffee black; I don't want anything in it." "Let me get this straight, you drink thirty to forty cups of black coffee a day?" "Oh, yes, yes." "And you eat nothing; what else are you eating?" … He said, "Oh, I don't eat anything else, but I smoke cigarettes." "You smoke cigarettes?" "Yes." "How many cigarettes do you smoke a day?" "About four packs a day." "Okay, so, what else do you take in?" "Oh, I don't eat anything else. I've got the cigarettes and the coffee, that's plenty." I said, "Well, that's ridiculous." I mean, now, I'm beginning to think maybe there *is* something the matter with this guy, you know. I said, "That's ridiculous, you've got to eat something." He said, "Well, I am. I'm eating the cigarettes and coffee." I said, "Oh." I said, "Hey, look, would you do me a favor? Please, would you just do *me* a favor? Would you please have something to eat between now and the time I come back on duty tomorrow?" and he said, "Sure, I'll be happy to." So, I came back on the ward the next day and I went up to him after awhile and I said, "So, did you eat something?" He said, "Yes." I said, … "What did you have to eat?" He said, "Razor blades." I said, "Razor blades?" He says, "Yes, you get a lot of iron out of razor blades." I said, "You're joking." He said, "No." I said, "How the heck did you eat razor blades?" You see, it was very tricky with the razor blades, because there were certain patients who were allowed razor blades and other patients were not, and those who were, were allowed to shave themselves. The suicides, in particular, were people who we shaved, we didn't allow them to shave. Even though the blades were locked into [it],

that had a locking device, into the shaver, we didn't want the suicides to even be near them, but the other patients, just how he got a hold of these, I don't know. I said, "Well, what do you mean you ate razor blades? Nobody could put a razor blade…" "Well," he says, "no, I broke them in half." These were the old Gillette blades, "I broke them in half." I said, "How many did you eat?" He said, "Well, I ate four razor blades, so, I ate eight halves. That ought to take care of my [obligation]," you know, "I hope you're satisfied now. I did have something." So, I went in to Captain Nichols. I said, "Captain Nichols, I want to talk to you about this guy again. I know you said there is something the matter with him, and, now, … I guess you're right. He told me, just now, that he ate four razor blades, or eight halves of razor blades." I said, "I can't believe that's possible, but that's what he told me, and I thought I should report that to you." He says, "Okay, get the guy on a gurney and strap him down, and take him down to X-ray immediately, okay." So, I said, "Okay, come on, get on the gurney, we're going down to X-ray," and he was compliant, he wasn't fighting me. He got on and I rolled him down the hall, strapped down, to X-ray, and, sure enough, they took an X-ray of his stomach and there were eight halves of razor blades. Eight halves of razor blades were in his stomach, which would have killed him. He would have bled to death, and we went right from there into surgery. … They just opened up his stomach and took out the eight hunks of razor blades, and I think, in my book, I'm going to call that story, "The Gillette Kid." So, that's the kind of stuff that went on. I saw more strange things, in that year-and-a-half than I think I've seen in the rest of my life put together, strange. Every day, there was a strange thing. We had two patients die on that ward; people aren't supposed to die on psychiatric wards. I mean, you're not there for physical reasons, you're there for mental reasons, but we had two deaths, and I was involved in one of the deaths as well, peripherally involved. You think, is that an interesting story?

SI: Sure. Were they suicides?

MR: No. One of the deaths actually happened off the ward. A guy went from … our ward. He was a heroin addict, really bright, nice kid, very handsome black kid, incredibly handsome, and he went to the open ward, and, from the open ward, they would let you have liberty in town. … After awhile, he went into town and shot up with a huge dose of heroin and it killed him, and I was asked to be the witness at his autopsy. … It's always something when you've known somebody, now, you're watching them cut the top of his head off and going into his brain and stuff, and you're standing there. … It was just absolutely horrible, just horrible, but the other death happened right on our ward and what it was, it was not an American military guy, it was a French military guy. A French warship had put into Yokosuka Harbor and they had no facilities there, and this guy was an alcoholic and he had DTs, delirium tremens, and never should have been admitted to our ward. He should have been admitted to a medical ward, I mean, because alcoholics often are people that have had very little nourishment and they need to be put on a medical ward, and, if necessary, restrained, and IVs put in their arms, with food, you know, sucrose, or whatever, going in, and that's what they need. Instead, this guy was brought to our ward and I was on duty with a guy named "Klink," who was a regular Navy guy. … When this guy was admitted to our ward, raving, Klink said, "Let's throw him in the padded cell, because he'll wake up all the other patients." So, we got this guy and we put him in the padded cell. Well, this was summer, in Japan, and unbelievably humid, and it was hot enough in the ward, there was no air conditioning in those days, … and, if it was ninety-five in the ward, it was

probably 110 in the padded cell, because it had no open window there or anything, and so, Klink and I put him in there. Klink outranked me and he said, "That's what we should do," and it was also shortly after I arrived, and I don't know, … again, I mean, it's just disgraceful that he wasn't admitted to a medical ward, and Klink said, "Let's put him in there." Well, in the morning, (we were on night duty), in the morning, when the day crew came on, we told them, "Look, there's a guy, a French sailor, and he's in the padded cell. Maybe we ought to get him out now." … Before Klink and I went off duty, we opened the door, and the guy couldn't speak a word of English, didn't know where he was, so, he was frightened, but, in addition, he was so dehydrated. … We got him under his arms and walked him out the door of the padded cell, and he didn't go ten feet when he dropped dead. He just plain had a heart attack and died. That guy was, I think, about thirty-five years old, and, I mean, we damn well killed that guy. By we, I mean the whole hospital. It was just disgraceful that he was admitted to a psychiatric ward with his symptoms. He just plain died, right in our arms. He just went limp, and he lay on the floor and his heart had stopped, he wasn't breathing, he was dead. … It's funny, people didn't do CPR in those days. I don't think anybody knew about it. I didn't know about it then and we didn't have defibrillators. So, you can see why this is such rich material for a memoir; that's what I did in the Navy. [laughter]

SI: In general, the men, like yourself, who were in charge of the unit, both the officers in charge and the other men working the wards, how did they view their job and how did they view the patients? Did you think they were sympathetic to the patients? Was there any abuse?

MR: There was never any abuse of the patients that I was aware of. I think we were sympathetic to them, I think, and, in order to encourage this, we had this notion that there was a therapeutic community. … There were group therapy sessions on the ward every morning, for an hour or so, but, in addition, the staff would have kind of a group therapy session of our own, including the shrinks, the medics, like myself, the nurse. We had a nurse and a … psychologist; it was a nurse, a psychologist, several psychiatrists, and we medics. … We would leave a skeleton crew on the ward and go to another empty ward, because all the wards were essentially empty, and go there and have a group therapy session, because the whole idea is that we had to have no flak between us, so that we could work with each other, and this was a session where everybody who had any complaint to make about anything, or about anyone, could make that complaint. … This, I'll never forget, because, in one of the sessions, a guy named Jerry, I remember him, and he was kind of a sensitive guy, and, anyway, two other guys, at this session of the staff, off the ward, two other guys said, "Hey, Jerry, how come you came on the ward today and you didn't even say hello to us? You're kind of surly and stuff. How come you didn't say anything?" because the whole idea is, we were all supposed to, like, get along with each other. We were a therapeutic community. We were supposed to all, you know, work together in great harmony, for the patients' sake. … Anyway, they started in on him, these two guys, about why Jerry … was uncommunicative or didn't say hello, … you know, that this has gone on for a couple of days, and they brought up something, which was something that needed to be brought up, I think. … [laughter] All of the sudden, this guy Jerry stood up and said, "I ain't taking any more of this shit. Fuck you," and he ran out of that ward, and went running down the main corridor of the hospital, with the entire psychiatric staff following him. It was terribly funny, in retrospect. We all followed, the nurse and the psychologist and all the shrinks and all we medics,

younger guys in the lead, chasing Jerry down the hall. [laughter] … I'm not sure we had any firm notion of what we were going to do once we caught up with him, but he stopped and reached into a case and grabbed a fire extinguisher and threw it at us, and I was in the lead. I was the fastest of the group, I was in the lead, and this damn fire extinguisher came rolling down the hall and hit me in the shin, and I just went down in agony. It just hit my [shin], you know, the shinbone here, "Oh, jeez," and I went down, and the other people finally caught up with Jerry and tackled him, and then, everybody said, "Well, what are we going to do with him?" So, the one shrink says, "Put him in the locked ward." We were near the door to our own ward, and the shrink said, "Well, let's put him in the padded cell," and so, Jerry, who had been one of us, [laughter] now was in the padded cell, and, eventually, was regarded as a regular patient and was air evacuated back to the States, as I recall. … This gave us a bit of pause about the wonders of this therapeutic community, when we'd driven one of our own completely crazy. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

MR: I love this stuff, obviously. [laughter]

SI: Let me just pause for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: All right.

MR: Well, one thing I think I should mention is that I got married the first time at the age of twenty, a foolish thing to do, perhaps, but I did end up with three terrific kids out of it, and I have a total of five, two from my second marriage, and my wife, when we got married, I was twenty, she was seventeen-and-a-half. … She came over to Japan and we lived in a little Japanese fishing village, Ishiki Hayama, which is where the Emperor, at least then, had his summer palace, and the little house I lived in, a thatched-roof house, backed up, that is, the back of it, backed up right against the wall of the Emperor's summer palace. I used to see Hirohito all the time, while I was in Japan, because he was an oceanographer by hobby. … If we went down to the beach, you'd see … Hirohito out in the bay, in his little rowboat, with a glass bottom, surrounded by Japanese warships, this one guy in a little rowboat, surrounded by Japanese destroyers. You could just see him out there. So, I lived, as I say, in this house and bought myself a scooter and would go to the base to go to work on my motor scooter, which was fun. [Editor's Note: Ishiki Hayama and Yokosuka are on opposite sides of the Miura Peninsula, approximately seven miles apart.]

SI: Were there other servicemen and their families living in that area or were you by yourself?

MR: I think we were by ourselves. I don't remember how I exactly found this particular house, but the owner of it, my landlord, lived right next door, across the alley, and he had a grocery store. There's a funny story I could tell about that, if you think we have time, about him.

SI: Sure.

MR: … Yes, okay. Well, we decided, my wife and I, to invite the landlord and his wife over for dinner, and this was a real Japanese house that we lived in, you know, *tatami* floors and *shoji*, I think that's what they call the sliding paper doors. … You know, we had earthquakes, once in awhile, and we'd get cracks in the wall, [laughter] and so, we invited them over for dinner. … He and his wife just came across the alley, and, after we finished bowing for about ten minutes, I mean, … he'd bow, we'd bow, they'd bow, we'd bow, this bowing just went on forever and ever, we sat down on the floor, because you eat on the floor, at a low table, and we served them chicken, or something like that, I don't recall, really. … We spent a pleasant enough evening, although they had no English, and we had just a few words of Japanese, … but, we more or less, got along. Well, the funny part of it is that, beginning the very next morning, every time I'd see him, every time I'd go out into the alley to get my scooter to ride to the base, he'd come out and say something to the effect of what a nice time they had had and that they had to have us over for dinner some day. … We said, "Oh, that'd be very nice. We'd like that very much," but, every day, this would happen. He'd say, "We have to have you over for dinner someday," and I'd say, "Oh, that'd be very nice," and this went on for well over a year, where this guy would say this to me, every time he saw me, that … he and his wife were going to have us over for dinner. … I thought, "This is pure torture. I don't care if we go over there to dinner or we don't go over to dinner." I mean, I didn't know how to communicate this with him, you know, "Lay off, man, either do it or don't do it." It was driving me out of my mind, and, by this time, I knew exactly the Japanese words for what he was saying, I knew what he was talking about. … Finally, on the last day in Japan, just as we were about to leave Japan, … he did this again, and he said, "You're going to have to come back to Japan, so that you can come over and have dinner." I thought, "This is just pure torture." I was just out of my mind. I thought, "Enough of this," it was ridiculous, and it's funny, because I went away from Japan thinking, "God, that's awful." … I happened to mention this to some guy who was a scholar on Japan and he said, "Oh, well, he was treating you with great respect." I said, "Really?" because, you know, in the States, if somebody has you over for dinner, you might have them over for dinner, or maybe you wouldn't, but you wouldn't talk about it forever. He said, "Oh, yes, that was how he treated you with respect." I said, "Well, what kind of respect is that?" and he said, "Well, you see, from his point of view, if he had you over for dinner, he would then dissolve his obligation to you." I don't know if this guy was on the ball or not, but that's what he told me, "By not having you over for dinner, he would be beholden to you for the rest of his life." I said, "Well, that's a curious way to be beholden." [laughter] Anyway, that's what he explained to me. I have no idea if it was true or not.

SI: From what I understand, it was somewhat rare for servicemen serving overseas to have much contact with the civilians or to get to know anything about the culture that they were living within. Were there other examples of that in your experience?

MR: Other examples?

SI: Where you tried to learn about the Japanese and interact with the Japanese civilians.

MR: Not really, not really. I mean, my work was at the base, my wife was in the little thatched-roof house, and I can't recall really knowing any other Japanese. I mean, I went to a tea ceremony one time, I knew *geishas*, and it was very interesting to learn about *geishas*. The *geishas* weren't prostitutes, they were courtesans, they were hosts, hostesses, but, no, it was neither encouraged nor discouraged. It just happened that I was one of the very few people, I was perhaps the only guy, actually, who worked on the ward, who was married. … I think if you were an officer, you would have been offered base housing. So, we weren't, and so, I, somehow or other, found this place, but … I can't remember how I found it, why I ended up there.

DR: You mentioned seeing Hirohito; was there any leftover animosity that you would encounter in the Navy? Did any of the other people in the Navy look down on him, because the war had been rather recent?

MR: Well, I was there, you know, '56, '57, the war had been over for some time, and, while I grew up, I think I mentioned this last time, … with, you know, just an almost inherent hatred of Germans, I didn't have that feeling about the Japanese at all. I should have, I mean, when you think of them going into places like Nanking and just using human beings for bayonet practice and the Death March of Bataan and all that, with Americans who had died, and the Japanese committed plenty of atrocities, but I didn't have that feeling towards them. … As I say, I think I should have, but I didn't. … All of my animosities with regard to World War II were directed towards Germans, something … from which I'm still recovering, I think, because … I don't know if I mentioned this last time …

SI: Yes.

MR: That two books from now, I want to write a book about it, a novel, about a guy who endeavors to [overcome his prejudice], who falls in love with a German woman, a guy like me who falls in love with a German woman, and, now, he's really into it, he's really up against his hatred, and how he endeavors to overcome it through that process. I have never fallen in love with a German woman, but it seems like [laughter] a good idea for a book.

SI: Did you start thinking about grad school while you were still overseas?

MR: No, I thought about grad school just before going overseas. When I was a senior in college, at Hunter College in the Bronx, I had a professor named Leo Gurko, … teaching American literature, and I just loved that course. I just fell in love with American literature and I always wanted to be a writer and he had a great influence on me, because he said, "Well, you love literature and you love history." I said, "Yes, I love them both equally, I think." He said, "Well, you ought to do American studies. You ought to go to grad [school]." I said, "What's that?" I didn't know. I hadn't a clue what it was, and I applied to Minnesota and was accepted, but then I was drafted, and then, I asked them to put it off, and they did. They were kind enough to put it off, and so, I knew I was going to the University of Minnesota to do graduate work in American studies when I left the Navy. … After getting out, I indeed went there with my first wife, who was by now pregnant, and our first child was born shortly after we got to Minneapolis.

DR: Why did you choose Minnesota?

MR: Oh, because that was kind of the "Mecca" for American studies in those days. In many ways, the whole American studies idea began at Minnesota. … We had an extraordinary faculty. They were just wonderful. They were brilliant, but they were also kind. In fact, Minnesotans in general were kind. I was a New Yorker, and I remember the first time I crossed the main drag, University Avenue, just outside of the university, jaywalking, as was my habit, and cars coming. … When you jaywalk in this part of the world, you sort of go across the street in a zigzag way. … The cars don't stop, you just make your way around the cars, although we may … yet get New Jerseyans to pay some attention to pedestrians and crosswalks. I've nearly been killed a couple of times, I'm sure you have as well, using a crosswalk when you have the right of way, but they'll kill you anyway, but I remember that the traffic coming in both directions, in Minneapolis, came to an absolute halt as I jaywalked across the street, and I just couldn't believe it. I just looked at them, and I said, "Well, I'm not going to do that anymore. This is a part of the country where … you'd better not jaywalk, because you're taking advantage of the people in their cars." So, Minnesota was this "Mecca," as I say, for American studies. It was essentially founded there by a guy named Tremaine McDowell. He was the grandfather, one of two grandfathers, of American studies, really; another one was at UPenn. It was Minnesota and UPenn, but Minnesota was *the* place and Penn was secondary then, and, ironically, because I was a medic, I was given a job by the American Studies Program at Minnesota. Tremaine McDowell was dying of a debilitating disease, I don't know if it was MS [Multiple Sclerosis] or MD [Muscular Dystrophy] or something like that, and becoming weaker all the time, and I was given the job of taking care of him, because they knew I'd been a medic, even though I'd never done anything like this. I was just with psychiatric patients. [laughter] … The department hired me to take care of him, and I needed the money, and we had brilliant people there. It was just incredible. We had Saul Bellow there, we had Robert Penn Warren there, we had Allen Tate there, all three of these guys, in the English Department. [Editor's Note: Saul Bellow was a celebrated Canadian-born American writer, whose awards include the Pulitzer Prize, Nobel Prize for Literature, the National Medal of Arts, and National Book Award. Robert Penn Warren was an American poet and journalist whose distinctions also include the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award. Allen Tate was an American poet and founding editor of *The Fugitive*, a literary magazine of poet and criticism.] Practically the most interesting people in American literature at the time were teaching in the Minnesota English Department, and then, similarly, interesting people were in history and poli sci and stuff, and so, it was a wonderful place, and they were very kind to me, also.

SI: Who was your advisor or mentor?

MR: Well, I was a TA [teaching assistant] for two years to a guy named David [W.] Noble, who's in his eighties and still teaching there. … My plan, if my health holds up, is to do the same thing here, … unless I lose my marbles, … but, later on, … I entered the Foreign Service as what you call an ABD, "all but dissertation." I'd finished everything in the degree but the dissertation, the languages, the exams, the whole thing, but that's a big old "But," because a dissertation is; I didn't even have a dissertation topic. … I guess we'll get to that later, as to how I found … this topic, but they were so kind that, when I found a topic, I wired, I sent a cable back

to Minnesota, saying, "Look, I've got this great topic. What do you think?" and they just cabled back and said, "Do it." I mean, I had none of the troubles that people have, I think, who are in graduate school working on their PhD, where they're submitting chapters and people giving them grief, and they're writing about something that everybody knows about, and so, therefore, you have to come up with something novel to say about it. I was writing about something that nobody knew anything about, which was the perfect dissertation topic. I'd recommend it to anyone, find a topic that nobody knows anything about. Then, you are the world's foremost expert on it and nobody'd give you any grief about it, and that's what I did. So, I have great admiration and respect and affection for the University of Minnesota and the people who were there then, most of whom have died; they sure looked after me. I was terribly lucky, too, because, when I came, they also, in addition to the job I had going over to Tremaine McDowell's house and getting him up in the morning and cleaning him up; … he eventually, a year or so later, died. By that time, he had to be hospitalized, and he was a wonderful man. In addition, I arrived and somebody who had been offered a TA-ship had not shown up, and they said, "Would you like to be a TA?" and I didn't even know what that was. I'd never heard of that, and so, there was a job there, and so, I had two jobs, and I was able to support myself and my wife. My wife worked for awhile, but, then, she was very big with child, and then, we had two kids in a row, two boys in a row, and so, she basically was a stay-at-home mom with the two boys, and I supported all four of us, on about fifty bucks a week. It's hard to imagine such a thing, but that pretty well paid for everything.

SI: Going back to your job with Tremaine McDowell, were you able to converse with him much? You said he was one of the founders of your discipline.

DR: Yes, sure, he could talk. His voice became increasingly slurred, but he could talk. In fact, in my first semester, … he wasn't so debilitated yet. It was only in the second semester that I got this job. In this first semester, he didn't come to the university, he taught a seminar in his house, and we went there, to his house, which was in Minneapolis. We grad students went there for kind of our opening seminar, and he was a wonderful guy and he used to say, all the time, "If English departments and history departments did their job, there would be no need for American studies," because American studies is really about cultural history, as opposed to, the only history I'd known up until then that was really, in a sense, political and military history. I mean, when I went to school, maybe that was true of you guys as well, what you learned about was Presidents and wars. Cultural history was so much more interesting to me, and that's what American studies really is, in a sense, cultural history. It's really like the anthropology of Americans. [laughter]

SI: I am skipping ahead, but how did the opportunity to enter the Diplomatic Corps come along?

MR: Oh, well, I was in grad school, and Kennedy was elected President, and, when he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," I said, "Here I am, Jack." I mean, I was one of those people who was just so moved, by that expression in particular, that sentence in particular in his inaugural address, but, also, I was in grad school, basically, you know, when Eisenhower was President, and, you know, I had no interest in government at all. I was going to be a professor, I was going to be a writer, hopefully, someday,

but Kennedy came along, and the New Frontier and the whole thing, and I just was moved. I was one of those Kennedy enthusiasts. I was absolutely; I should think there are young people today who are going into government to be with Obama in the same way, almost, as I went into government to be with Kennedy. It was Kennedy, and then, in addition, Edward R. Murrow, who was … perhaps the finest broadcast journalist this country's ever produced. Kennedy lured him away from CBS to be the Director of the United States Information Agency, and that was a part of the State Department, had a dotted line to the State Department. Since, in recent years, it's been absorbed back into the State Department, but, then, it was a separate agency. [Editor's Note: The United States Information Agency was merged into the Department of State in 1999.] I thought, "Holy mackerel, Edward R. Murrow will be my boss and Kennedy will be his boss." I'd had four years of grad school anyway and I didn't know how I was ever going to finish my PhD, but I really wanted to go into government. So, I took the written exam and I didn't pass it the first year, and then, I took it the second year, and I knew how to take it, and I did pass it, and that's the first step. There were five steps. You had to pass the written exam. Then, you had to pass an oral exam, which was given to you by some senior Foreign Service Officers who would travel the country giving these oral exams in hotel rooms to young potential diplomats, to see if they'd pass the oral exam. … The Bay of Pigs Invasion, or disaster, tragedy, or whatever you want to call it, had just happened, and all they wanted to talk about was this, and, luckily I had been very interested in it. God, what a disaster, the Bay of Pigs in Cuba, and so, that's all we talked about, for an hour or so, and they passed me on the oral with enthusiasm. [Editor's Note: The failed Bay of Pigs Invasion took place in April 1961.] The written, I had just passed, by about two points, but, now, they were very enthusiastic about me on the oral, and then, I had to pass a physical, and then, I had to pass a psychiatric, and, since I was in Minnesota, I had to go to Rochester, Minnesota, where the original Mayo Brothers Clinic was, and, now, there are several of them around the country, I believe. … I wasn't an in-patient at the hospital. I stayed in a little hotel and I went over to the hospital, two days in a row, and met with shrinks, and they gave me all sorts of tests, including Rorschach tests, you know, they showed you inkblots. … I mean, I didn't really do this, but I've always said this as kind of a joke, "Yes, I told them that this inkblot meant that I wanted to sleep with my mother, murder my father and tear my eyes out," you know, the standard Oedipus story. I didn't actually do that, but it was like that. I thought it was absurd. I've always thought the Rorschach thing was ridiculous, I don't even know if it's used anymore, but one little footnote to those days, going over to the hospital, is, I learned, shortly afterwards, that a very famous person had been an in-patient at that hospital the very days I was there, under an assumed name, Ernest Hemingway. … Hemingway was deeply depressed, … but he was in the hospital the days I was going to the hospital. I never saw him but he was [there]. As I say, nobody said he was there, and then, a few days later, he left there and, on the way back to Ketchum, Idaho, where he was then living, he tried to jump out of his little plane and they pulled him back in, but, then, after they landed and … he went to his house, a couple days later, he stuck a shotgun in his mouth and blew his head off. [Editor's Note: Ernest Hemingway, journalist, novelist, and Nobel Prize winner, returned to Ketchum on June 30, 1961, following his stay at the Mayo Clinic and committed suicide on July 2nd.] The fact that he was there when I was there interested me, because, some years later, … a couple years later, I was in Spain and all anybody ever wanted to talk about was Hemingway. … In fact, in the book I'm writing about Spain right now, … I'm writing a chapter called "*Mis Toros*," "My Bulls," and it's going to be about Hemingway and bullfighting, and my own attractions to bullfighting, and my

own amateur bullfighting that I did for a little bit, and running with the bulls in Pamplona and all of that sort of thing.

SI: After you completed the physical and all these mental tests, then, you were …

MR: Yes, and then, the last step, which I mentioned earlier, was the FBI background check, and then, I received this phone call from Washington, from a woman, I was in my office at Minnesota, saying, "Mr. Rockland?" "Yes." "I'm calling you on behalf of Edward R. Murrow," she said, and I thought, "Oh, my God," I said, "put him on," [laughter] and she said, "No, I'm calling on behalf of him." I didn't get it; I was too unsophisticated, that when you call on behalf of such a distinguished figure, he's not going to come on the phone. "He's asked me to call you to invite you to enter the Diplomatic Service." I go, "Wow, that's wonderful," and so, I basically gathered up our few possessions, and my wife and two little boys, and we left Minnesota and went to Washington, [DC], and I spent the next, almost a year there, studying at the Foreign Service Institute and studying Spanish.

SI: What were you studying to do? Was it to set up cultural centers?

MR: Well, … first of all, I said I wanted to go to Latin America, and so, they put me into a Latin American studies course. I mean, I learned a lot about Latin America in some months, and they were teaching us techniques. Basically, there was a course we took called "Answering the Critic of the United States Abroad." It was a brilliant kind of a course, really, on how you might, without lying and without making a fool of yourself, or compromising yourself, how you could put America's best foot forward and do it with honesty. … That was a terrific course, it really was, and then, I had sixteen weeks of full-time immersion in Spanish, towards the end of it, and that was the most powerful educational experience I've ever had. I didn't talk about that last time, did I?

SI: No.

MR: Oh, well, they put you … in full immersion, and you sit around a table, about this size, just this table, with three others. There were only four young diplomats in the course, and I'd had three-and-a-half years of high school Spanish and I could conjugate verbs, but couldn't say a word. I don't know what was the matter with these people, the way they taught languages then, and I daresay we still don't teach languages well in this country. I think … if the President, if President Obama wanted to appoint somebody as a "language czar," who would absolutely … change language study in this country, he should appoint me. I could, in a very brief time, revolutionize this country in terms of language study because of my own experience. … What I would do, actually, is, I would say, "Some time in your education, whether it's kindergarten or junior high or high school, college, whatever, you must have a semester of full immersion in a language," which is exactly what I had. You can't do anything else, you just do that, in small classes. That's why you couldn't do it, you know, and the way it worked is, it was sixteen weeks, and, every two weeks, we'd have a different instructor. They were basically Latin American or Spanish grad students who were earning their keep while going to grad school in Washington, and I remember the first guy, he came in the very first day and said, "This is the last English

you're going to hear or speak for the next sixteen weeks," and then, he put a jar in the middle of the table, … there was a slot cut in the top, and he says, "See this jar? Anytime you use an English … word, you have to put a quarter in the jar, and I want you always to come to class with quarters in your pocket, so that you can do that if necessary. We're not going to make change here," and a quarter then was worth about, probably about, a buck-and-a-half now, you know. So, it wasn't an inconsiderable amount of money, it was something, and he said, "That's it, no more [English]," and, sure enough, for sixteen weeks, it was torture, but … it blew my mind. It absolutely blew my mind, because even when we weren't there ten hours a day, we were supposed to be listening to tapes, we were supposed to be watching Spanish-language television, we were supposed to be only going to Spanish-language movies. … I remember, two weeks into the course, waking up in the middle of the night, screaming, and it wasn't as if anything scary was actually happening in my dream, it's that the people in my dream were speaking Spanish to each other, in the dream, and that's when I knew I wasn't the same person anymore, because my mind had been absolutely blown, because, now, I was thinking in Spanish. Obviously, in that dream, nobody was translating. I wasn't thinking, "How do you say that in Spanish?" The people were speaking Spanish to each other, in my dream; scared the living daylights out of me. It was like "*The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*," or something. I felt like I'd been taken over by some alien force. I saw an article not long ago, in *Time* Magazine, where they did MRIs, or some sort of scan, or a CAT scan, I don't know, of people's brains before they've gone through a really important learning experience, and their brains look different afterwards. I suspect mine did as well. I bet you it's a similar kind of thing when you learn how to swim when you're a kid. At first, you're terrified of the water, and then, to get to the point where you realize that the water will hold you up; riding a bike is another thing, I think, like that, that we learn at a certain point, and we can't believe it, that we can actually stay aboard that seat, on these skinny little wheels, and, yet, once you can do it, you'll be able to do it forever. … I think, in a much bigger way, that's what Spanish was for me. I came out, walked out the door, after sixteen weeks, speaking Spanish just the way I'm speaking English now. It was a mind blower, and, luckily, I was sent to Argentina, and then, later to Spain, so, I had six years of affirming that Spanish. … To this day, I lecture in Spanish overseas and it's a great richness in my life, really, having another language, a richness I wish all Americans had, Arabic, Chinese, whatever. … One of our problems in the Middle East is: we don't have enough people who can speak Arabic, and the ones who can speak Arabic, everybody's worried about whether they're terrorists or whatever, you know. … So, we need people speaking languages. I mean, this country is made up of all the countries in the world. We ought to be the country where the most people speak other languages, but we're the country where the least people speak other languages, which I've always thought was a shame, and, again, … it's, ever since, been a great richness in my life, to have this. I wish I had a few more languages, you know. I have bits of other languages, but just bits.

SI: At the completion of the language course, was that when you were sent to Argentina?

MR: … Yes, sent to Argentina, to Buenos Aires, with my wife and my two boys, and we lived out in the suburbs of Buenos Aires and I worked in Buenos Aires. I was a junior officer then. I didn't have a specific assignment. I did a little bit of everything, and that's where I discovered my doctoral dissertation. Is that of interest?

SI: Yes, absolutely.

MR: Okay, well, one day, I'm sitting in the office of a guy who, I think he was the agricultural attaché. I don't know why I was there, but I was sitting in his office, and we were both sitting there with our feet up on his desk, you know, just hanging out and talking about this or that, and I had the sense that something was looking at me. [laughter] … I had this almost sixth sense that someone or something was observing me, and I looked down and there was his wastepaper basket, and, sure enough, there was a little head in his wastepaper basket. There was a little bust, a plaster bust, of a figure peering out of his wastepaper basket, and I said, "Who's that?" … and he said, "I don't know; some ugly guy. He's been in my office all this time. Today, I just got sick of looking at him. I just … had to throw him out." I said, "Can I have it?" He said, "Yes, sure," because I had the humblest office in the Embassy, no windows, practically a closet, you know, and I wanted some art in my office. I'd have put a bust of anybody on the shelf, with the possible exception of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, you know. [laughter] It would have been something to give my office some class. Well, a few days later, there were some Argentines in my office, for some cultural program I was organizing with them and stuff. … They looked up and they saw the bust on the shelf, and they said, "*Pero ud. es Sarmientista*?" "You're a Sarmiento guy?" … I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." He said, the bust was of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. I said, " I didn't know who he was." He says, "Well, Sarmiento, you know, was very much involved with the United States. He wrote books on the United States. He was Ambassador to the United States. He knew all the whole New England Transcendentalist crowd, [Ralph Waldo] Emerson, [Henry Wadsworth] Longfellow." I said, "Holy mackerel. I think I have just found my doctoral dissertation," and I went to the Sarmiento Museum and began, in my spare time, … to work there, and then, in a few days of that and I sent a cable back to Minnesota, saying, "I've got this dissertation you won't believe," and they said, "Just do it," and it was a great piece of luck. [Editor's Note: In addition to being an Argentine activist, writer and serving as Argentine Ambassador to the United States from 1865 to 1868, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento was the seventh President of the Republic of Argentina, from 1868 to 1874.] If I had been in the other guy's office the next day, that bust would have been thrown out, but look at the ignorance of it. Sarmiento was the equivalent of Lincoln or Washington, let's say, in American thinking, and I'm sure that an Argentine guy, certainly in cultural work, but anybody in the Argentine Embassy in Washington, if there was a bust of Lincoln or Washington or Martin Luther King or somebody like that on the shelf, they'd know exactly who that was. … The fact that this guy didn't know who that was, but I didn't know who he was either, although I had just arrived, is kind of an index to our problems overseas, shall we say, which have never left us, that we're not sufficiently sophisticated about the world, about geography, world history, about different cultures and stuff, and so I wrote as my dissertation during the six, five-and-a-half or so more years that I was in the Foreign Service. … When it was finished, I got my degree, and, by then, I'd gotten out of the Foreign Service and was living in Princeton, and I walked across the street to Princeton University Press and said, "Would you like to consider my dissertation?" It took awhile, but they got back to me and said, "Yes, we want to publish it, but, you know, we want you to cut it down here and there," and do all kinds of things, and so, my very first book, look at the luck of that: I'm living in Princeton and I only submitted it to that university press. I submitted it there because there had been two books done about this same

figure, very different from the one I had done, by a professor at Princeton, a young professor, who had actually killed himself playing Russian roulette; would you believe that? These faculty members at Princeton got drunk and were having a party and they started to play Russian roulette and this guy blew his brains out. … So, the only place anybody knew anything about Sarmiento was Princeton University Press, and because they'd published an anthology this guy did of Sarmiento's works, in English, and, also, a book about Sarmiento in general, and I was writing about only him and his connections with the United States. … So, my first book came out with Princeton University Press and shortly after that I was at Rutgers and got tenure a year or so after that. … I mean, from the time I got tenure, which was in 1972, I've considered myself a very lucky person who's been able to do exactly what he wanted to do with his life, you know, be free and not worry about the bottom line and not worry about earning a living. Not that professors are rich, but we're reasonably well paid, and I've been somebody who's been able, since 1972, to concentrate, in my work, on being a creative teacher and a creative writer. So, I feel very, very lucky, and I think also that those years I had in the Diplomatic Service, and in the Navy, and the one year I had in state government, after getting out of the Diplomatic Service, really prepared me to immensely enjoy my job as a professor and a scholar and a novelist and filmmaker. I've also … worked in film and television. I've enjoyed it, I think, more than many others who are people who go from kindergarten through full professor without ever having left school. I think that's wrong. … They don't have these crazy stories to tell, for one thing. [laughter] … You know, when I look at my course evaluations that students do, and I get letters from students, many years later, they often say that I blew their mind with my stories, not the material in the courses, necessarily, and that many students will write to me years later, tell me I told them such-and-such a story, it changed their life. … That makes me feel really good, and I wouldn't have it otherwise, and so, what I had, really, was eleven years outside academia per se. I had two years in the Navy, I had seven years in the Foreign Service, that's nine, I had, let's see, I had one year in state government, and then, my first three years at Rutgers, I was a dean. So, I had, like, eleven or so years, if I've counted right [thirteen], of, let's say, the, quote, "real world" before I ever became a full-time teacher/writer guy. … I think it's one reason why I appreciate so much the trust of the people of New Jersey, let's say, and this university, to let me do just exactly what I want to do, and pay me for it. It's a great privilege. When you're a professor, it seems to me, certainly once you've gotten tenure and made full professor, in my own case, you're like an aristocrat. You are free, you do what you want to do, and people cherish you for it. It's a very blessed occupation, I think, and, often, when I hear people around the University who complain, who are always whining and complaining, they're generally people who have been here, who have been in school from kindergarten right on through, and never left school. [laughter] They don't realize how great this is, because they haven't experienced, as I did, eleven years of, no, thirteen years, including the Navy, of the "real world," let's say. Maybe I've gotten ahead of the story, I don't know.

SI: I do want to go back to Buenos Aires.

MR: Right.

DR: What did your duties include when you were in Buenos Aires?

MR: Well, as I said, I was a junior officer, and my duties were a little bit of everything. In other words, this USIA, in those days, had, maybe they still do, had it that your first post would be a short one, and, also, that you wouldn't have a regular job, you'd do a little bit of everything. So, I wrote speeches, I edited some of the magazines that we put out there, American propaganda, shall we say, I worked in film a little bit, I worked with the photographers a little bit, but, then, something happened where I became disillusioned. … Oh, and one other duty I had; the people, it's funny, the people who were in Madrid, when I was there, all my colleagues there were terrific people. The people in Buenos Aires, I don't know if it was Buenos Aires that did it to them or whatever, because Argentina is a strange country, in some ways. Good Argentines are the best people in the world, but bad Argentines are really bad, and, I mean, you know, lots of Nazis ended up in Buenos Aires and elsewhere in Argentina. When Juan Peron was dictator of Argentina, I mean, he was just, you know, so cozy with Fascists and Nazis, and plenty of them were still around when I was there, and, I don't know, the people in the Embassy, they were a strange lot. [Editor's Note: Juan Domingo Peron was elected three times as President of Argentina, his first two terms spanning from June 1946 to September 1955, and his third from October 1973 to July 1974.] Every day, we'd go out for lunch, because I lived out in the suburbs, and we'd go out for lunch every day, and so many of these embassy guys were alcoholics. It was just incredible, and … I wasn't formally given this job, but I was sort of informally given the responsibility, by the head of the Cultural and Informational Service, called the Public Affairs Officer, of making sure these guys got back to their desk after lunch, because these guys were drunk. I like wine, but I only like to drink it in the evening. These guys would not only drink wine with their lunch, along with a steak and a salad, and good bread, … but these guys, after drinking a bottle or two of wine, would belt down three or four cognacs at the end, and they were completely sloshed. … My job was to sort of corral them and get them back to the Embassy. It was terribly funny, but, at the time, it was very difficult, because they were also superior to me in rank. I had to somehow get them back to their desks, and some of these guys would go back to their desk and, absolutely, their head would go right down on the desk. They'd go right to sleep. I mean, that was a crazy embassy. The Ambassador, then, was an absolute bastard, McClintock. I didn't like him at all. One time, he was a guy who really wanted to be a naval officer, an admiral. Instead, he was an ambassador, and he would come around and do inspections all the time. Madrid was totally different, but this guy in Buenos Aires was really small, he had this whole Napoleon complex thing, I mean, the classic Napoleon complex that little people have sometimes. … He'd come around inspecting. He'd go around, wearing white gloves and he'd see if there was dust somewhere, on somebody's desk or something. It was just ridiculous. Everybody was afraid of him, and, one time, he came by and I was busy working at my desk and I didn't see him. I was just working, writing, and he sort of came into my little office, and he said, "When the Ambassador comes into your office, you stand at attention, young man," and I was terrified. I just stood up, and, also, I mean, this is [the] Diplomatic Service, it's not the military. You don't stand at attention; what the hell's that? You don't stand, … and so, because I hadn't seen him, I hadn't gotten up, I seemed to be in bad with him after that. So, I don't know. It was a hellish place, that particular embassy, in contrast to how wonderful things were for me in Madrid. It was just totally, totally different then, and so, because it was [rough], and because I'd found Sarmiento, okay, and the *Museo Sarmiento*, the Sarmiento Museum, I took to sneaking out of the Embassy every chance I'd get, precisely because I didn't have a specific job and, often, nobody knew what I was doing and nobody'd give me anything to do. … Since I had nothing to

do, I would say, "Well, I'm going off to some cultural event," but I was really going off to used book stores to buy up Sarmiento's works, his fifty-two-volume works, and to photocopy others, and to make microfilms, and I found … all these letters, all this correspondence that Sarmiento had with all kinds of Americans that nobody even knew about. I found it moldering away in the Sarmiento Museum. … By the time I left Argentina, I had this entire library of Sarmiento and the United States materials, and I had also met the principal *sarmientistas* among the Argentines, because, I mean, again, this guy is maybe the most famous guy in all of Argentine history, certainly among the good people of Argentina. … There were many scholars there who really loved the fact that this *gringo*, me, [laughter] was, you know, paying attention to their great leader, and so, they helped me and I became sort of a favorite of theirs. They helped me all the time. I saw them socially, and, in a way, I was doing what a cultural attaché ought to do, but I was doing it also to work on my dissertation, and to get away from the hateful embassy. …

SI: Roughly what time of the year, and what year, did you leave Argentina?

MR: Oh, that's important, I think. I left Argentina in November '63. … I had an uncle who lived in Miami then, who invited us to stop off in Miami, because we were on our way to Madrid, and, in November '63, the spring, you know, the Southern Hemisphere, the spring had just come to Argentina, after a long winter, and I was about to go to the Northern Hemisphere winter, and so, this uncle invited us to stop off in Miami, and we did and he put us up in this nice hotel. Funny … about this uncle, because there's a character in my novel that's just come out, called *Stones*, who's loosely based on this particular uncle, in part, you know, very loosely based. Anyway, we went to sleep in Miami having arrived there in the middle of the night and went to sleep, and, the next morning, we went out onto the beach, just to catch some sun, catch some rays. … We went out on the beach, my first wife and me and our two little boys. I didn't lay down on the sand five minutes before some man, who was wearing a very loud tropical shirt, yelled, "They've shot the President," and I went half nuts. I mean, I went up to this guy and grabbed him by his collar, because I was such a Kennedy guy then. I grabbed him by his collar, I said, "That's not funny," but it had happened, and we spent the next four days, essentially, sitting, which is the time we were in Miami, hardly getting any sun at all, and, basically, just watching television in our hotel room and crying. I mean, it was just so powerful, it was so dramatic, so awful, so tragic, and then, you know, the fact that, surrounded by cops, Jack Ruby makes his way down into that basement, where they were transferring [Lee Harvey] Oswald, and shoots him. [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas. Lee Harvey Oswald was charged with the murder, which he denied committing, but was subsequently killed by Jack Ruby before he could be tried. Ruby, who was then arrested and convicted of murdering Oswald, successfully appealed his conviction and death sentence, but died of cancer while the date for his new trial was being set.] [laughter] I mean, God, you had all this happening live. We're watching this live. It was just incredible. You know, I often say that was the day my youth ended. I hope … I'll always be youthful, my whole life, but my youth ended in the sense that the power of the disillusionment, the horror of it, changed me. … Of course, in recent years, I've learned all kinds of things about Jack Kennedy, and about the Kennedys in general, which are less attractive, shall we say, than what I believed about him and about them. I mean, they were the American aristocracy. They were gods. … I practically worshipped them. In my Madrid years, … later, I spent a whole day with Teddy

[Edward Moore] Kennedy, I met Jacqueline Kennedy, I met … Pat [Patricia] Kennedy Lawford, the sister who married the actor Peter Lawford, and so, I met three of the Kennedys, and the more I knew about the Kennedys, the less I admired them. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Edward and Patricia Kennedy were both siblings of President John F. Kennedy, and Jacqueline Kennedy was the President's widow.] Even though I think there's still something to admire in them, but I began to see they were human beings, but, at that time, I didn't think of Jack Kennedy as [human], I thought of him almost on a kind of a super plane. I mean, I loved Jack Kennedy, … as a lot of people did. And so, when he was killed, it was like 9/11 for me. [Editor's Note: On September 11, 2001 nineteen Al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four American commercial airline flights, crashing two of them into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, one into the Pentagon building in Washington, DC, and the fourth into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after some of the flight crew and passengers attempted to regain control of the plane.] I mean, … I feel obscene saying that, because he was just one person and close to three thousand Americans died 9/11 and the World Trade Centers went down and the whole world changed, terrorism and all that kind of stuff, but that's the way it was for me, at the time. It was just [very powerful]. I'd say there have been two experiences in my life; Pearl Harbor happened when I was just a little, you know, tiny boy, so, I have no memory of it. I don't even remember it happening, but Kennedy's assassination was like 9/11 for me, in terms of my world changing. Maybe that's when I began to grow up, because I no longer worshipped somebody as I did him until that very moment.

SI: All right, we will conclude for this session.

MR: Sure.

SI: This concludes the second session with Professor Michael Aaron Rockland on October 7, 2009. I am sorry, did you have any other questions before we end?

DR: No, I can save them for later.

MR: Yes, I guess. I mean, you can go, … if you want to go another ten minutes, up to you.

DR: Could you tell us a little about how the move to Spain happened?

MR: Right. Okay, well, in those days, the Foreign Service, when you moved from country to country, they moved all your possessions, amazing, you know, boxcars, practically, full of stuff, your automobile, everything, and we went from Miami to New York, in order to see our families, and then, we were put on a plane for Madrid and arrived there. … I immediately loved Madrid and I now had a real job. I had one job, and, later, I got another job on top of it. I was student affairs officer. I was the guy responsible for, oh, cultivating promising young Spaniards, against the backdrop of the Franco Dictatorship, but I was very much working with democratic forces within Spain, not the way the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] was working them, perhaps. I mean, I knew CIA guys in the Embassy, but I didn't know what they did, but they seemed to be very pleased with what I was doing, because, one time, I was called into a meeting and they just told me how glad they were I was doing what I was doing, which was, basically, I was just

basically … the liaison with the Spanish universities. Later, I also became, Director of the *Casa Americana*, the America House, in Madrid, and I continued as student affairs officer, but I also was the Director of the *Casa Americana*, which is a story unto itself as to how it happened. It had to do with us losing four hydrogen bombs, and it's a story that I should tell at length later on, but when my family and I arrived there, we found a house in a nice Madrid neighborhood. [Editor's Note: On January 17, 1966, a B-52G collided with a KC-135 tanker while refueling over the Mediterranean Sea; one of the nuclear weapons onboard fell into the sea while the wreckage of the aircraft and the three remaining hydrogen bombs landed on the Spanish village of Palomares, causing radiological contamination.] It was actually a house, with a parting wall, although living right on the other side, oh, the guy who had lived in that house before us was a major in the American Air Force, because we were very cozy with the Franco Dictatorship, because it was the only way we could have these three major bases in Spain. We had Torrejon [Air Force Base], which was right outside of Madrid, where I often went, we had Morón [Air Base], in the south, near Seville, and we had [Naval Station] Rota, which was a nuclear sub base, and this was the Cold War. … Indeed, my major Cold War experience was to come about with these bombs, and this B-52 crashing into a … KC-135 tanker, and what it did to all of us in the Embassy and what it did to America's position in the world and what it did to and for my career, actually. [laughter] I mean, that's a story I need to tell next time, and that was really when one experienced the Cold War. My job was a lot of fun. I traveled around Spain, to different universities, I gave talks; I was almost like a professor in the Foreign Service, and then, later, when I also became Director of the *Casa Americana*, it was like I was running an institute. It wasn't on a campus, but we have institutes here at Rutgers that … are similar to what mine did. … Everybody was very nice to me in Spain and the people there, … in the Embassy, were just kind and smart and I served under two different ambassadors. They were both fine. Robert [F.] Woodward was the first one, [Ambassador to Spain from May 1962 to February 1965]. Indeed, one of the great things he did for me is, one time, I was talking to him and the subject of Martin Luther King came up. … I told him I'd written one of my major MA papers on Martin Luther King and the Montgomery bus boycott in '56. He said, "No kidding?" and then, when Martin Luther King came to Madrid, he said, "Why don't you look after King? Why don't you have that assignment?" I spent the whole day with Martin Luther King, just he and I. We were "Martin and Michael," it was wonderful. … You know, he was my new hero, let's say, and the things that happened that day, which I think I should probably talk about next time, because … they were really extraordinary, the things that happened. This was one of the things about the Foreign Service that was very attractive; you met famous people all the time. Not so much in Buenos Aires, but very much in Spain, and especially when the second ambassador came, who was Angier Biddle Duke [Ambassador to Spain from April 1965 to March 1968], who had been the Chief of Protocol in the State Department, and, if you possibly recognize those names, Biddle and Duke, Biddle is the great banking family, Duke is the great tobacco fortune family, and he was both. [laughter] … So, he was, you know, a super millionaire dude who gave a lot of money to the Democratic Party, and that's why he was Ambassador to Spain and why he'd been Chief of Protocol, but, also, a very nice guy. I had no prejudices against him just because he was so rich. He was terribly nice to me, and so, I served under Robert Woodward from '63 to; … well, very late. I mean, I arrived in Madrid, it was already maybe December 1, '63, and so, I served under him until '65, really about a year-and-a-half, and then, Duke came, and then, I served under Duke for two-and-a-half years, and then, I left the Diplomatic Service, because I'd been assigned to

Vietnam and I didn't believe in the war. … I also had three little children by then and the Tet Offensive had happened, and, now, diplomats couldn't take their families to Vietnam, and I also had begun to have some serious doubts about the war. … In addition to everything else, I was now going to have to go study Vietnamese for thirteen months, to get myself up to the same level in Vietnamese that Spanish [instruction] had gotten me up to in only sixteen weeks. I was going to spend more than a year of my life learning a language [that] I didn't want to learn, because I was going to be a cultural attaché in Vietnam, in the middle of the war. [laughter] In other words, a diplomat, having nothing to do with the war, I was going to be in charge of worrying about the "hearts and minds" of [the South Vietnamese], if you remember that documentary, *Hearts and Minds* [Peter Davis' 1974 Academy Award-winning film]. … So, I mean, I know I'm getting ahead of the story, but that was how I ended up leaving the Diplomatic Service, in early '68, and then, going into state government for a year, and then, coming to Rutgers, in January '69.

SI: All right, thank you very much.

MR: That gives you the chronology; thank you. That gives you the chronology of it, anyway, but you could see all the things we've got to fill in, I guess.

SI: Absolutely; I wrote down pages of questions to ask.

MR: Yes. Well, I'm honored that you find these stories so interesting.

SI: Absolutely, yes.

MR: I'll put the check in the mail; I'm getting free psychiatry.

SI: This is the real conclusion of our interview with Professor Rockland. Thank you very much and we will pick up again for the third installment.

MR: Yes. …

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

Reviewed by Jessica Ondusko 2/24/10
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/22/10
Reviewed by Michael Aaron Rockland 3/31/10