RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MORRIS STEINBERG

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SANDRA STEWART HOLYOAK

CLARK, NEW JERSEY
APRIL 1, 2009

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview on April 1, 2009, in Clark, New Jersey, with Mr. Morris Steinberg. Thank you and Mrs. Steinberg for hosting me this morning. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

Morris Steinberg: I was born in Newark, New Jersey, May 4, 1919.

SH: Can you tell me a little about your background family, starting with your father?

MS: My father was an immigrant from Romania [and] had no education. So, he was a peddler. My mother was from Poland. … As I will tell you, she had many children. … Somehow, they were brought together and married.

SH: They met here in the United States.

MS: In this country, … through relatives. That's how it generally was done. They both wound up in the New York area, I presume. … My mother worked more or less as a laborer for her aunt that brought her over, out of gratitude. I don't know if they were taking advantage of her or what, but, anyhow, that's how she came to this country. They had to be sponsored, as you know.

SH: Do you remember what year your father came and how old he was?

MS: … When he came over here, he must have been a boy. He came from Romania. At that time, a lot of them left Romania to avoid going into the Army service. They were taking them at sixteen, seventeen years of age. … Many, throughout the European countries, came over under the same cloud, shall I say.

SH: Do you know what year he came?

MS: Oh, that's difficult. … He was in his late eighties when he passed away.

Beverly Steinberg: He was eighty when he passed away. … I believe that … his sister was born here, and she was the oldest. … Kate would be over a hundred years old. He must have come in the early 1900s, but we don't know exactly when.

SH: If you do not know, that is okay.

BS: … I think Kate was born in 1904 or 1902. …

MS: Yes, well, she's older. …

SH: Kate is your aunt on your father's side.

MS: No, that's my eldest sister. I came from a large family.

SH: Let us talk about your father. Did he have a trade when he came to the United States?

MS: No, he had no trade. He … became a peddler, as many immigrants [had].

SH: Did he come with other members of his family when he immigrated?

MS: I think he came alone.

SH: Did other members of his family eventually immigrate to the United States?

MS: That, I don't know. We're talking a long time ago, before I was born.

SH: Yes.

MS: So, I don't really know. … He never spoke out too much … of him leaving there as a boy to avoid the Army service. Beyond that, I didn't know too much about him. I knew he came from Bucharest, [Romania].

SH: Did your mother come alone as well?

MS: Someone had to sponsor you. She was sponsored by her aunt in this country. Beyond that, I don't know. … When they sponsored someone, a lot of the relatives took advantage, in my estimation. They more or less became like servants.

SH: They did.

MS: I mean, you heard this from other people. … She was a hard-working woman, an honest woman, and, of course, we all loved her. … When I get to the amount of brothers and sisters I have, you'll see what happened. [laughter]

SH: Do you know who your father's sponsor was?

MS: No, I don't. …

SH: When your mother and father married, do you know if your mother continued to work?

MS: She was brought over by an aunt. … In retrospect, I think, they were taking advantage of her. She had to work more or less as a domestic. … She really couldn't have worked outside of the house, because she had so many children so rapidly. She had ten children, you know, eventually. … When I think back on how hard she worked--they were poor. … She was an excellent mother and tried to … live up to her responsibilities, as a married woman should, and it was very difficult. … You know the history of immigrants, like my father. They had no trade, they had no profession, they had nothing to fall back [on]. They were peddlers.

SH: Were you the youngest or next to the youngest?

MS: I'm next to the youngest.

SH: You were born in 1919. Your father did not serve in World War I.

MS: No, he was busy with other things. Well, that's one of the reasons … he left Romania. They were taking boys, fifteen to sixteen years old, and I guess it was the popular thing to do then, … to run away to another country. [He was] probably no more than sixteen or seventeen when he came over here.

SH: Can you tell me how many brothers and how many sisters you have?

MS: I wound up with two brothers and I had seven, six [sisters].

BS: Six sisters. Well, one was passed away.

MS: One passed away. I never saw [her], but there were seven girls.

BS: Six girls that you knew.

MS: Six that I knew. … She, unfortunately, was ten years old. … Actually, she was run over by a horse and wagon. … They used to sit around in the kitchen. The only heat they had [was] these black stoves, and there was a boiler connector for hot water. That exploded, and it's what did her in. She was about ten, … twelve years old. … Ironically, many years later--the sister next to me in age--the same thing happened. … She didn't pass away from it. She's still living, that sister. She's about ninety-four.

BS: She will be ninety-four.

MS: Yes, she lives near her daughter. … She's in a facility in Florida.

SH: You have one sibling younger than you.

MS: Yes, she lives here in the same development, Frances. She's four years younger than I. …

SH: Talk about your parents' expectations for your education.

MS: Well, at that time, if you were a high school graduate, it was like a *cum laude* in the university. I had one sister, … the current one that's younger than I, she graduated high school. I did, and one other sister, who's passed on, she graduated high school. The thing was, they had to go out and work.

SH: Yes.

MS: You see what I mean? particularly with a family the size we had. … They … worked in Woolworth's, or any place they could get a job. … I don't have to tell you what they earned at that time, but every little bit helped. … It used to break my heart, when I saw my mother had to wet-wash [the clothes] herself and hang it out on the line to dry. She didn't have the thirty cents--or whatever it was--to send out wet-wash. Now, is this interesting?

SH: Yes, of course.

MS: And [she] would often speak about that, coming from a large family. … Well, there's not many of us left now.

SH: Where did you grow up? Where was the family living?

MS: I grew up in Newark.

SH: What area?

MS: It was [the] Prince Street area, which today, is like a ghetto. … Today, it's primarily black, you know what I mean? At the time, there weren't too many black people around. There were some, but not as many as there is today.

SH: Was your neighborhood comprised mostly of Jewish immigrants?

MS: I would say so, part of the pattern, though, I think. There were also a lot of Irish immigrants, too. In fact, I don't know if you have heard of Longy Zwillman? Did you ever hear of him? He was like a mobster, shall I say, delicately. [laughter] … He was like the saint of the Jewish people in that area. Anytime they were attacked, "Call up Longy Zwillman." Did you ever hear the name? [Editor's Note: Abner "Longy" Zwillman, a Newark native, was an organized crime figure who gained his wealth and influence during the Prohibition era. He was known to donate money to the Newark community.]

SH: Longy Zwillman.

MS: His real name was; I don't know it.

BS: Something else.

SH: Was he a very tall gentleman? Maybe that is why. [laughter]

MS: Yes, in Yiddish, there's a word, *langer*, … [which] means tall. … He was like the St. Christopher of the Jewish people. [laughter] … Let's say they would rob a pushcart or something. They'd get a hold of Longy. … The Irish gang, sometimes, would come in. There would be fights, and so on, and so forth.

SH: Really?

MS: Yes.

BS: Are you surprised?

SH: No.

BS: Rotten place.

SH: What are your earliest memories of Newark?

MS: Mine? poverty, extreme poverty. [laughter]

SH: Did you know that then?

MS: No. In fact, I recount the stories to my wife, and people laugh. We lived in a tenement house on Prince Street. I don't know if you know Prince Street.

SH: I am somewhat familiar with it.

MS: [laughter] This tenement house had a common toilet. There were no individual bathrooms. We have two today--thank God--and that's not enough. … So, when you had to go to the bathroom, they didn't have the flush then. It was a big box still, and you'd pull the chain. Did you ever hear this before?

SH: Yes, I am familiar.

MS: All right, you pull the chain and water would come down to flush. … A lot of the time, we had no toilet tissue. … So, it was a good day when you had orange wrappers. [laughter] These put my friends in stitches, when I tell it to them. … When times were not good, you cut up newspaper, and you had to do the essentials after you had your duty. … The good part about that was, we didn't even have a radio. … Television, of course, was not out yet. … If people didn't know the news, you'd bring your friend in and he'd pull your pants [down] and he would read the latest news off your behind. [laughter]

SH: That is a great joke.

MS: They love that, whoever I tell that to. It's a true story about the plight of our tenement.

SH: Do you remember playing stickball in the street?

MS: Oh, well, later on, when we moved to a finer neighborhood, Peshine Avenue, we often played football in the streets. We played baseball in the streets, and we're thrown together like a melting pot, with people of other persuasions. … I remember that very well, and she [Mrs. Steinberg] used to walk, [was] never was afraid to walk. She also lived [on] Peshine Avenue at the time. … I didn't know her then. … At night, she would walk down several streets to go to her girlfriend's, at night, past railroad tracks, and everything else. … That's extinct today.

SH: That is true. When you were a teenager, did you have any jobs?

MS: I would sell newspapers. I would go out with my father on the horse and wagon, when he was peddling, and anything I could make a few cents on, because we had nothing.

SH: Were your other brothers and sisters working?

MS: Well, after a while, yes. They got other jobs, as I did, you know. Once I got out of high school, I had permanent work. … Then, the war came along. So, that ended … the job that I had.

SH: Was your family involved politically at all?

MS: Politically, I don't think they knew, to be frank. After Ellenstein, … [who] was a previous Mayor of Newark, my father would show interest in that, because of the ethnic background, which was natural. If an Italian man ran, an Italian would be interested in the history of the man. Beyond that, politically, … he was a staunch Democrat. Why, I don't know, but, when he was able to vote, he would vote Democratic and [it] more or less went down the heritage. … A lot of Jewish people do vote Democratic. So, I'm probably telling you stuff you already know and you could tell me. [Editor's Note: Meyer Ellenstein served as Mayor of Newark for two terms, from 1933 to 1941, and was the city's first Jewish mayor.]

SH: No, I want to hear your story.

MS: … You probably find that interesting; I don't know.

SH: Did your mother and father speak Yiddish? Was that their common language?

MS: That was their common language, yes, as [with] so many other immigrants. … When my mother first went to school here--you got a picture of that?

BS: If I could find it.

MS: We have a picture of her in the class, and she wanted to learn English in the worst way. She was so busy scrubbing clothes and raising nine or ten kids, you know. We don't feel and realize today the luxuries that we have. Some of these kids, if we brought [them] back to what I'm speaking of, maybe they would appreciate it. … Anyhow, … they teach you how to spell, "Cat." So, you had to enunciate the word after you spoke it, "C-A-T," … pussycat, you know. … Little anecdotes like that are what stick in your mind.

SH: Did she go to school for English when she was younger?

MS: No, with nine kids, you don't have time.

SH: She waited until after her children were born to do it.

MS: Yes, she wanted, … in the worst way, to learn how to speak and write English.

BS: Well, she spoke English.

MS: She spoke English.

BS: But, with an accent.

MS: With an accent, with the Yiddish [accent].

BS: … His father, too

SH: Your father as well.

MS: Well, my father did learn to read. He used to read the newspaper.

BS: He read the newspaper.

MS: Yes.

SH: Do you know if they were naturalized citizens?

MS: I think, yes. … They were very proud of it.

SH: Did religion have a big impact on your home?

MS: My mother was more religious than my father. They went to temple on holidays. The worst part [was], they didn't have the money to buy a ticket, you know, for the High Holy Days. … Through the generosity of the temple, you know, they always got in, and so on. My mother was more religious than my father.

SH: Was that because of her family background?

MS: Probably so. … As a Jewish person [with] the tradition of Jewish mothers, they had that affinity towards raising their children properly. I'll show you an example. There were two other boys in the family, older than I. At that time, you used to have a rabbi come to the house and teach them Hebrew, so [that] they can get *bar mitzvah*-ed. Well, they would always skip off, as so many American boys did. … My brother was the same way. The Rabbi would come and, at that time, I think we paid him fifty cents a week, if you had it. So, they would skip off and run away. They never were *bar mitzvah*-ed. I went to a temple on Prince Street. I don't know if you know of it, a very poor neighborhood. … This place, it was like fifty cents a month. … We couldn't afford the fifty cents a month, but it was endowed by very wealthy Jewish people. … Prominent rabbis, from the different temples in Newark, would appear every Saturday and give a sermon. So, when it came time for me to be *bar mitzvah*-ed, my mother's glory was that I was in this temple. … She couldn't afford [a big party], like you hear of galas today, where these kids have the entertainment and it goes on with the noise. We don't even go to them. We send them a check. We don't go. … She bought a bottle of wine and sponge cake, and this was her grand glory, that she saw one of her sons *bar mitzvah*-ed. … I can read Hebrew. I'm not fluent in it. Oh, yes, my sister--she's my youngest sister, … the only one that lives here--she goes to temple every … Saturday. We go once in a while, you know, not as diligently as we should. … We

have the feeling in our heart that we are Jewish, and follow the traditions. … We respect other religions, of course, too. … Particularly, we remain with that constant thread and just hope that it lasts down through the generations. … There's a lot of intermarriages. …

SH: Where did you go to grammar school?

MS: … My first year, I went to Peshine Avenue School in Newark. Are you familiar with Newark at all?

SH: A little bit.

MS: Okay, so, I went there one year. My family, unfortunately, had to move a lot, because they couldn't afford the rent. … She knows my punch line, [laughter] what I'm about to say. … I'd go to school in the morning [on] Peshine Avenue, come back, and they'd moved somewhere else, and didn't even leave a note. [laughter] So, I got the hint and I figured I'd leave home when I can. So, anyhow, I went to one year in Peshine Avenue School, and then, seven years in Bergen Street School in Newark. Then, I went to Southside High School. It was a big honor in our family--in general, then--to graduate high school. I had one sister--she's passed on--she was the only one that preceded me, [that] did graduate, because they had to work. They had to go out and work, unfortunately. … My sister Frances, that lives here, she graduated. … Hilda, I don't think graduated.

SH: Did your siblings go to work with your father?

MS: No, my father was a peddler. He could hardly earn any money at all for himself to bring home, to feed all these kids. … When they were sixteen, you were allowed to quit school, and that's what they did. Just one sister, she went on through high school.

SH: How did she manage that?

MS: … She had a different mindset than the other ones, and she managed. It must have been very difficult. … We were very close to her. In fact, she married a man out in Connecticut. We used to go out there in the summer. It was a big thing for myself and, occasionally, she would go.

BS: Not me, I wasn't married to you.

MS: Oh, you weren't married then; [laughter] see what you missed--a trip to Connecticut.

BS: I went after I was married. His sister used to go, too. His younger sister went. Everybody went there if they wanted a vacation.

MS: It was like going on a vacation. It was not far from the farm area. … His parents owned a farm in Newtown, Connecticut. … My sister went there--the younger sister that's still living--and I had to take her home in my car. I had a car already. I paid fifteen dollars for it, and I got stuck in the Holland Tunnel. You're not supposed to get out, but, at that time, I don't know if

they were that strict with that. Well, they didn't want you out. … I knew the distributor cap came loose a lot of the time, [so, I] pushed it down. Thank God, it worked. I got out of there.

SH: That must have been an adventure.

MS: Oh, I'm telling you.

SH: As a young boy, what did you do for entertainment?

MS: Once in a while, if we could scrounge up ten cents, we went to the … National Theater in Belmont Avenue, in Newark, where we would see the episodes over and over again. We called it the "garlic house," because people would bring lunch--salami, and so on. … It smelled the place up like garlic. Every now and then, they'd come through and spray the [theater].

SH: Really?

MS: Really. You're learning something. [laughter]

BS: Tell her how you used to smell each other.

MS: Oh, yes, out of desperation. I'd go with my friend and we'd smell each other bodies, right in the garlic theater. [laughter]

SH: When you got into high school, did you work after school?

MS: I'd sell newspapers. I did whatever I could to earn a few dollars for spending money, you know. They couldn't give me anything. … You look back in retrospect today, and they laugh at these things, but where there's a will, there's a way. We wanted an education--my kid sister, that still lives here, myself, and this one other sister, who I admired a lot, for doing it at that particular time. … She took a commercial course. I think she was able to get a bookkeeping job, which was a highly respected [position].

SH: What kind of a course did you take?

MS: Commercial as well.

SH: You took commercial as well. Later on, it must have served you well.

MS: It did. I was very good in the Army with records. That's how, initially, I got a start. I started off as a private with the infantry.

SH: What year did you graduate from high school?

MS: … I think it's '37.

SH: What do you remember about the Depression?

MS: … Well, as far as I was concerned, it was always a depression in my house. … I sold newspapers [and] tried to make [money]. Newspaper then was three cents, *Star-Ledger*. *The Newark Evening News* … was a very fine paper. They went out of business because of union difficulties. The owner was very "P-O"-ed at the unions for their demands, and so, he left. … Then, it was *The Star-Eagle*, and they combined with *The Ledger* and they became *The Star-Ledger*. That's what you have today, the one paper. They're financially [successful] today, as [much as] *The New York Times* even. [Editor's Note: *The Newark Star-Eagle* and *Newark Ledger* merged in 1939 to become *The Newark Star-Ledger* and, later, was simply known as *The Star-Ledger*. *The Newark Evening News*, its major competitor, shut down in 1972. The *Star-Ledger* is currently the largest circulated newspaper in New Jersey.]

SH: Was there a favorite subject that you had?

MS: Commercial, because of my sister that graduated. She took a commercial course in bookkeeping. So, I was good with figures, and, to this day, … I handle the finances here and the stocks that I have. I don't have to tell you what's happening to them. … I write the checks, basically. She does some, but I basically write the checks. …

SH: Did you already have a position when you graduated high school?

MS: No.

SH: What did you do then?

MS: Eventually, I got a job. …

BS: When did you work with the radio dials?

MS: Oh, yes, through a brother-in-law of mine. You had to know someone to get a job then. He got me a job up in South Orange at a factory, which made dials for the radios. You know what I mean? So, there were different shifts. Sometimes, I'd work eight to four, then, sometimes, four to twelve, which I didn't particularly like, but I had to do it. So, I did that for several years. Then, I think, I went into … Hawthorne Bar Supply on Clinton Avenue, in Newark. Do you know Newark at all?

SH: A little bit.

MS: Anyhow, through a brother-in-law of mine, who was a salesman with them, [I got the job]. They sold dishes to restaurants [and] glasses to restaurants and bars. I got in there, and, at first, I worked in the stockroom. There were a million items to learn, but I never did learn them all. … That's where I got the notice to report to the draft board. In January of '41, I went in, and I was in there for a little short of five years.

SH: Tell me about reporting for the draft. Did any of your older brothers have to report?

MS: They were older than … the draft age.

SH: Were some of your friends being drafted at the same time?

MS: Oh, yes, sure. I had a friend of mine--interestingly, he was sent to Hawaii. … You couldn't tell where a person was. … I told her where I was … [when] I wrote a letter, "You won't be hearing [from] me for a while." You might have seen the letter.

SH: Yes, I did. You showed me.

MS: … So, I had a picture. I was sent to Hawaii.

SH: You were sent to Hawaii.

MS: Yes, and I knew where he was, in Schofield Barracks.

BS: We knew where he was.

MS: They knew where I was.

SH: When did you meet Mrs. Steinberg?

MS: … I was home on leave. I had just become an officer. …

SH: Where did you report in 1941?

MS: I reported to the Armory in Newark, for a physical. The day [was] January 23, 1941. … I remember, [at] Peshine Avenue School, they had a bus [and] took us to the Armory on Jay Street, in Newark. There, you had your physical, then, shipped off on the bus. Initially, I was sent to Fort Dix, in New Jersey. … I was there for several weeks, and it was disgusting, because I was used to eating kosher food and most of the stuff was not kosher. In fact, … I would eat potatoes, but I'd get in line with my mess kit and get up to where the potatoes are, and I'd see a big piece of pork. I would go without food for a long time.

SH: Did you really?

MS: I'm telling you, I don't know how I survived. [laughter] … Later on, when we were doing our training, I was assigned to the Ninth Division in Fort Bragg, which was a very prominent division, saw a lot of action. If I had stayed with them, I wouldn't be here talking to you. They were sent into North Africa, then, they were sent into Sicily, then, they were sent into D-Day. I ran into one of the young men who was in the service with me. After the war, I happened to run into him in New York. There were very few of them left. He said, "Not that they all were killed," he said, "but a lot of them … were sent to hospitals," and so on, and so forth. … There's "grab-ass" turnovers within the division itself, as you progress from battle to battle.

SH: What were some of the other things you had to get used to while you were training at Fort Dix?

MS: Sometimes, the bias of some of the other soldiers against my religion.

SH: You experienced that at Fort Dix.

MS: … Not to a big degree, outwardly. It would be covertly.

SH: Were there other forms of anti-Semitism that you encountered in the Army?

MS: Any other forms? Yes, in the Army, after I became a company commander, these Polish kids were saying something anti-Semitic, and it got to me. … I called them in and I laid the law down to them, you know. "I'm of the Jewish faith, you're Polish." I said, "We don't talk about each other's religion. … Now, we're all in the United States Army, with one purpose." I didn't hear any more from that, after that. … In the kitchen, you know, they knew I was of the Hebrew faith. There was one Jewish kid who was one of the cooks. He says, "Captain, what can I make you?" "Make me eggs or something." [laughter] …

SH: When you were sent to Fort Benning to join the Ninth Division, what were you assigned to do?

MS: … First of all, this will tell the story right here, but I'll tell you verbally. … When I first was assigned to the Ninth Division, I worked in the dayroom, where they made the records, where the Captain had his office.

SH: You were assigned to be a clerk.

MS: I was like a clerk. … They had a vast payroll sheet, each month. Maybe you know about that.

SH: Tell me about your experience with it.

MS: … We were making twenty-one dollars a month in the beginning, and it went up to thirty, after a while. … My experience was that … we had what we called a collection sheet. They didn't have the money to pay the GIs. … Not the government, I'm referring to [money] to pay the barber, to pay the tailor, to pay the PX [post exchange]. There were different things that they would put on the charge, and I had orders--close to two hundred men in the company--and I learned to make out this collection sheet. … We were getting twenty-one dollars a month then. Later on, it went up to thirty for a private. …

SH: Were you sending the money home?

MS: Are you kidding? I don't think so. [laughter]

SH: Just thought I would ask.

MS: … At that time already, [my] sisters were working, and jobs eased up. … They were looking for women to work, and so on. … So, no, I wasn't sending any money home.

SH: You were doing these duties in the Fall of 1941.

MS: I went in January '41. …

SH: We can take a minute and look at the sheet you are holding.

MS: "Company L court officer from 9/15/42 to 12/31/42."

SH: Let us talk about 1941.

MS: … Yes, we're going back. No, this picks it up when I became an officer, more or less.

SH: Let us talk about how you became an officer.

MS: … Apparently, I became very in demand, being able to do that work. … The First Sergeant was illiterate, couldn't do anything. He was a thirty-year man, gray-haired, fat man, nice man, but he never had an education. You know, I had very little to work with before … the draftees came in, with a better education. … I said, "Well, I have a commercial background." I said, "Let me see if I can [help]." I had trained, too, to learn how to shoot a rifle and march and go on hikes--twenty-five-mile hikes--you know, infantry.

SH: You were doing this at Fort Benning.

MS: No, this was still as an enlisted man.

SH: You were an enlisted man where?

BS: Fort Benning, right?

MS: … This was before. I was enlisted, in North Carolina, [with] the 391st Infantry, [39th Infantry Regiment?].

SH: Okay.

MS: … At that time, a strict order came down from Washington. Anyone with a certain IQ--I don't remember the IQ--was not to be denied going to officer training school. They were expanding like crazy. They needed officers. So, I qualified, but the Company Commander didn't want to let me go, because I was doing a lot of his work. … Eventually, orders [came that said] under no circumstances--signed by the commanding general--would they deny a qualified man from going to OCS. So, finally, they had to let me go, and I went to Fort Benning, Georgia, Infantry School.

SH: When did you first report to Fort Benning for training?

MS: When I went to Fort Benning? … This was after [Pearl Harbor]. … Pearl Harbor was not until December the 7th of '41.

SH: You were at Fort Bragg with the 39th Infantry.

MS: Right.

SH: Then, you realized that you are eligible for officer training.

MS: I think this is '42. …

SH: What do you remember about Pearl Harbor? Where were you when it happened?

MS: Pearl Harbor had already occurred.

SH: In December of 1941.

MS: '41.

SH: You are at Fort Bragg.

MS: I'm at Fort Bragg, and, of course, it was a shock to the whole world what happened.

SH: What was the reaction where you were?

MS: Well, it intensified your desire to help, to do what we could to survive, because it looked like they're going to California next.

SH: That was the thought among the men.

MS: Yes. So, they were expanding, as I said. So, they were looking for officers to form new divisions. …

SH: In February of 1942, you report to Fort Benning.

MS: Fort Benning.

SH: Fort Benning, Georgia.

MS: Yes, ninety days later, which is about three months later. … I think it was in June or so that I got my commission.

SH: That is what the document said, June of 1942.

MS: Yes, June of '42. … I was appointed as second lieutenant, assigned to the 98th Infantry Division. … No, wait a minute, I was in the Ninth Division as an enlisted man, but, … once I became an officer, to the 98th Division.

SH: Okay.

MS: That's where I went to as a second lieutenant. At that time, I was … in charge of a platoon of maybe forty men. There were about four platoons in the company. … Also, I was doing a lot of administrative work for the Company Commander, doing a lot of his work. … He had morning reports, collection sheets, [and] a lot of paperwork. He saw that I had administrative ability. So, out of that, they sent the Company Commander. They were sending them constantly to schools to learn higher things within [the military]. I was the executive officer of the company, and took over the company when they sent him to school. … I never received the rank of captain. … I was running the company. Eventually, I did. I was a first lieutenant, and I had six officers under me, five or six officers. They were different platoon leaders, one was an executive officer. That was the composition of a company then. … The Colonel liked me, but, one day, I had the nerve to say to him, "You know, sir, I would like to get rank commensurate with what job I'm doing." He said, "Oh, we'll take care of you." So, finally, … the whole division went to Hawaii. We replaced another outfit that was being sent further into combat. We were taking up [the] defense of the Hawaiian Islands. Eventually, he did put in for promotion, and I was promoted to a captain.

SH: You were housed at Schofield Barracks when you got to Hawaii.

MS: At one time, we were in Schofield. One time, we were in the Island of Maui. … We were at Maui first, … defending the island. Then, we were sent to Schofield Barracks. We were defending Oahu. We relieved another division. That's what they used to do, send them further into combat. … We were amphibious troops. You know what that is?

SH: Yes.

MS: … Amphibious training, landing in the small boats. … I was very fortunate. I never saw combat, thanks to the H-bomb. [Editor's Note: Hiroshima was the target of the first atomic raid on August 6, 1945. Nagasaki was attacked on August 9, 1945. On August 15, the Emperor of Japan declared an end to hostilities, with Japan formally surrendering on September 2, 1945.]

SH: When you got to Hawaii, did you see any of the damage from the original attack?

MS: Well, first of all, I was on Maui for quite a while, which was not affected. Then, I was sent to Oahu, where Schofield Barracks is [and] where Honolulu is. … I cannot frankly say that I saw damages, personally. … Our assignment was to guard the beaches. … After the horse is stolen, they always lock the barn. [laughter] … Anyhow, they were sending divisions--that was the progression--into the different islands … that you read about in the Pacific. … We were constantly training--going over the side of the ships, down the net, into the little boats. Then, [we would] have maybe eight or ten boats [and] attack the shore. … You saw the movies about D-Day. Thank God I never saw that. … Guys were drowning, with such heavy equipment on

them, as they came off the boats … into the water, and I couldn't swim. … I said, "Oh, God." [laughter]

SH: You were in an amphibious unit.

MS: Amphibious troops, yes.

SH: Were you still in administration?

MS: No. … At that stage, as a company commander even, the second-in-command is the administrator and you're the commander. I had five officers under me, I believe. Each were a platoon leader, and one was the executive officer.

SH: From Oahu, where were you sent?

MS: [At] Oahu, we trained and we trained and we trained. … We kept seeing the divisions they were sending forward each time. Many a time, we went down to the docks … loaded. … The war, at that time, turned around to where, apparently, they still kept us in reserve. Just an act of God, I guess, I don't know. …

SH: Sometime in 1943, you leave Hawaii.

BS: No, not '43.

MS: No. Let's see, I was discharged in 1945.

SH: I think that is what you said.

BS: '46, you were discharged.

MS: '46, yes, January '46.

BS: But, he went to Japan.

SH: In March of 1946.

MS: We occupied Japan.

SH: When you were still in Hawaii, you said that you would have to go down to the dock all packed and ready to go.

MS: Yes, constant … amphibious training to different little islands, and so on, and so forth. Fortunately, as I say, they dropped the bomb.

SH: Do you know where you went from Hawaii?

MS: Yes. …

SH: Before the war ends, are you sent to Tinian or Saipan?

MS: No, we remained as a unit, constantly training.

SH: The 391st Infantry.

MS: The 391st Infantry. … We thought, at any time, we're going to be sent in. …

SH: Were you aware of what was going on in Europe in June of 1944, when the Normandy invasion took place?

MS: Oh, yes, sure.

SH: Did things change at all for you as a result?

MS: No, if you were in a certain theater, that was the extent of where you were. …

SH: Did you see more supplies coming in?

MS: Well, as we progressed along, yes. You could see, we were more suited in the quartermaster, and so on, to furnish the things that we needed. … Don't forget the tremendous expansion of the Army at that time. That's why the order originally came down, "Under no circumstances is a man who is qualified to go to officer training school is he to be denied, if he had the IQ," and so on. … After all, the average company has six officers, and multiply that by the amount of companies in a division and a regiment. …

SH: How did your responsibilities change over time as the company commander, and then, as the executive officer?

MS: I'll tell you, not too much. I'll tell you why. As a first lieutenant, I was running a lot of these companies, because the company commanders are off to different schools that they sent them to. … I was doing the same thing, even when I was the first lieutenant. … Eventually, as I told you, I asked for a promotion, and, eventually, they did promote me to captain.

SH: As a captain, did your responsibilities change?

MS: No, because I was running it as a first lieutenant. You know what I mean?

SH: Right.

MS: I was doing the same job. It was doing a certain job for one pay, and they promote you to a title, but you're getting no more [responsibilities]. [laughter]

SH: When you came home on leave, you met Mrs. Steinberg.

MS: Right.

SH: Where were you on leave from?

MS: … I had just gotten my commission at Fort Benning, Georgia, and promoted to second lieutenant. … A sister of mine--who has passed on--she gave a party for my homecoming. …

BS: It wasn't a party. It was just your sisters were getting together at her house, and I was walking up. …

MS: Go ahead, sure, you tell the story.

BS: Oh, I'm going to have to talk?

MS: Yes.

SH: Unless you get him to tell the story.

MS: That's right, you wanted to tell it.

BS: Yes, because he gets a little mixed up with the story.

SH: Okay.

BS: I was walking with my friends, to somebody else's house, and his friend was driving by in a truck. … Years ago, they had this truck--he worked for …

MS: Poppy's.

BS: Poppy's, and they had a …

MS: Bathing suit, a figure on top of the truck, of a woman in a bathing suit.

BS: … I knew him. I had gone out with him previously.

MS: The other fellow.

BS: … He was with another friend of my husband's, and he said, "We're going to see our friend who is home from service." They were not in service, at the time, and they said, "Would you like to come along?" … I was with another friend of mine. In fact, there were two friends. I said to them, "All right, we'll go meet him," you know. So, we went up to his sister's, and he was there. … While we were there, … his friends didn't want to stay there, so, he said, "Let's go to Olympic Park." Do you remember where that is?

MS: Olympic Park is in Irvington.

BS: In Irvington, there was a swimming pool there. … They had all kinds of different rides and a roller coaster. So, we went there and, of course, there was a truck that we were in, like a little van, and there wasn't room for everyone to sit. So, I was the smallest person, and I sat on his lap and that started the whole thing.

MS: That started all the trouble.

BS: That started the trouble. Anyway, so, we go to Olympic Park and we go on the roller coaster, and I was petrified. … He was holding me around, so [that] I wouldn't fall out, because I thought, "Any minute, I'm going to fly out of there." [laughter] … Then, when we got back home, and he said, "Good night," to me, … he said, "I'd like to write to you." … That's the way we corresponded, through the mail, and, eventually, it became a romance, and that was it.

SH: Okay. [laughter]

MS: In fact, we've been together sixty-three years.

SH: Congratulations.

MS: … May 4th is my birthday, [I am] ninety.

SH: That is a real milestone. I would celebrate.

MS: Well, I might have an extra glass of water. [laughter]

SH: Were there other people that you were corresponding with, other than Beverly?

MS: Not really. I couldn't meet too many people, unless you want to marry one of the natives in one of the islands.

BS: He wrote to his family.

MS: Well, my family, yes.

SH: Did you see the natives on the islands?

MS: Oh, yes, sure, the Hawaiian natives. … Then, eventually, we got into Japan. …

SH: What were you told about the preparation for the invasion of Japan?

MS: Well, we knew from past battles, and so on, what had occurred--the airplanes, the bombings, and the infantrymen, what happens--and what our course was. …

SH: Did you lose men as replacements to other divisions?

MS: You mean to go to other divisions? Well, here and there, a minority, not too many they would take. [They would take] someone that has a specialty.

SH: Did you see any African-American troops?

MS: No.

SH: You did not have any interaction.

MS: No. …

SH: Did you see any Allied troops, such as the Australians?

MS: No, can't say that I did.

SH: How soon after the surrender was signed did you go into Japan?

MS: The armistice was signed on September the 2nd, I think aboard a vessel, [the USS *Missouri*]. … We went in roughly around the same time, maybe a few days after that. … We were to go to a dormitory in Osaka. We were occupying the southern part of Japan, and we had some miserable experiences going in with the weather.

SH: How were you transported to Osaka?

MS: On a ship.

SH: Do you remember which ship you went on?

MS: No, they had many ships then [that] they were using. They were taking a lot of liners from different cruise lines and using ships. … When we were ready to go home for discharge, we had to go from Osaka and land in Seattle, Washington. We had to wait awhile to get a ship to take us, because they were so busy. … When we got to Seattle, you couldn't board a train right away. There were so many people going across the country to get home. So, we went through southern Canada. … We just rode through. It was wintertime, in January, snow, and so on. … They took us into Grand Central Station and, eventually, back down to Fort Monmouth, where I was discharged from.

SH: Tell me about Japan. What were your first reactions?

MS: Well, when we landed, we were told to land combat-loaded, even though the war was over. "Don't trust any of the Japanese." … So, when we landed, we were landing combat-loaded, with the little boats coming in. … The Colonel had told us, "When you get to this road parallel to … the ocean," we're to check in. … "I'll give you further directions." Well, … the map don't agree with the terrain. There's no road there, and we were told to land combat-loaded. As infantry, we expected, you know, combat. So, we do, and, as I say, I sent out patrols from my company, and [led by] the different lieutenants. … One of them comes back--he was a Southern lieutenant--he

says, "Captain," he says, "these are little old people. They don't want to fight." He said, "They're bowing down to us." [laughter] That always stuck with me, that story. He's Lieutenant Webster, from North Carolina. Most of the officers were from the South, but there was one in particular that impressed, to this day. Lieutenant Von (Baron?), gray-haired gentleman--he was old, at the time, to even go in. … He had been an Osteopath.

BS: Osteopath.

MS: … I could never see why they took this man into an infantry unit. He had treated people, like … a famous tenor, John Charles Thomas. Did you ever hear of him? He was a patient of this particular man. [Editor's Note: John Charles Thomas was a popular American opera singer who performed live and on radio during the 1930s to 1950s.] Here, they're putting him in the infantry. … Today, I learned even a new respect [for] osteopaths, because since I have some pains, I've been going to osteopathic doctors. The regular MDs did nothing for me. One of them was a pain management doctor. … After a series of shots, he cured something that the MDs didn't do. … It's ninety percent better.

SH: That is good.

MS: … We didn't stay there [long], maybe two or three months.

SH: What were your duties in Japan?

MS: Well, they sent us, luckily, into a college dorm. We were bivouacked [camped], which was nice, and just more or less waiting to be sent home. So, I don't recall precisely what we did, you know, to pass the time.

BS: Tell them the story. Didn't you have to wait someplace and use tires to get warm?

MS: Oh, yes, going there, we had a miserable experience. It was in September, and it was cold and rainy. … So, we get into the first place where we were bivouacking. So, the GIs had ingenuity. So, we go into this vast hangar where there were Japanese airplanes. … The guys had [been] pulling straw out of different objects there, to sleep on. It was a concrete floor, in the middle of the night, with lice in there. So, the Colonel heard about it, said, "Everybody out in the field." It was raining and drizzling. He said, "Pitch your pup tent." You know what a pup tent is? … It was so cold. So, finally, I went into my pup tent and had a bag of dirty laundry that I accumulated in my duffle bag. I kept putting it underneath, because, through the ground, the water was seeping up. So, I used up the whole bag of dirty laundry. … Finally, several of the GIs got a hold of inner tubes from the Japanese planes. We found a big fifty-five-gallon drum, put it in there, and threw them in to start a fire to warm ourselves. The trouble with that was, it was so cold outside, the front of you roasted, turn around, and the back of you was soaking wet. So, we made it through the night, and it was … the longest night. Then, eventually, … [they] put us on trains and got us to Osaka, which is very large--second-biggest city in Japan. … I had to wait out my turn, more or less, until they could get transportation to take me home. Then, they put us on this liner, which Matson Line was having built [at the war's onset], but it wasn't rigged for luxury. They just bounced, and the guys were getting sick. They were like this in the

northern passage. [laughter] Thank god, I didn't get sick, but you could smell it all over. … Finally, we landed there, and went around the northern route, which is very rough, Kiska, Alaska, then, down into Seattle. Then, we head into Seattle. I called her from there. It was around New Year's Eve, I think. … I was standing in line to use the public telephone. All the other GIs are calling. I said, "I don't know when I'll get out of here," but, finally, they had enough trains.

SI: Had you proposed already?

MS: No.

BS: Oh, yes, I was engaged to him.

MS: … We were engaged, yes, but we hadn't set a date.

BS: It was on another leave when we got engaged.

MS: Her mother saw to that when we got home. She took us right away to Ann Gordon's, which was … a catering place in Newark, and we set a date up. … At the time, it seemed redundant to say, "You going to have air-conditioning?" … They were waiting for parts. "Oh, yes, sure, June 30th, no problem." Well, June 30th, I was wearing a heavy full dress suit. Now, I was sweating, … with new shoes.

BS: Because they had no air-conditioning.

MS: … They were supposed to have it.

BS: They said, because of the war, they didn't get it.

MS: During the war, they didn't get it. So, anyhow, that was our wedding. … We were sweating. … That's about the story.

SH: Were there any casualties because of the rough weather going from Hawaii to Japan?

MS: No, most of the rough weather was after I was leaving Japan to come home.

SH: That is why you took the northern route.

MS: The northern route. … He made it in about eight days--which, they say, was a tremendous amount of time--really speeding home, the captain of the ship. It was a new ship, but it wasn't rigged for a cruise, you know.

SH: Were you well-supplied the whole time you were in the Pacific?

MS: Pretty much so, yes. Well, that's one thing they did.

SH: Were there men who were more anxious than others to get involved in combat?

MS: … A silent, crazy minority. There were some, but you know.

SH: Did you ever interact with people who had been involved in the island fighting in the Pacific?

MS: … When I was an enlisted man with the Ninth Division, they were sent to North Africa, then, in battle in Sicily, then, in D-Day. I did run across one fellow. He says most of the original guys were not there. Even if they weren't casualties, a lot of them were so broken up in the war, they were sent to different institutions.

SH: You did not meet him until after the war.

MS: Right.

SH: As part of the occupation force in Japan, were there any men that were under your command who had been involved in combat?

MS: Frankly, I don't think so, because we pretty much remained as a unit. So, wherever I went, they more or less went.

SH: What was the general consensus of you and your men toward people like Douglas MacArthur?

MS: Very arrogant, self-loving individual. I loved it when Harry Truman fired him. [Editor's Note: President Harry S. Truman relieved General Douglas MacArthur from command on April 11, 1951, due to his public comments which threatened to escalate the Korean War into a larger war with China.]

SH: Had you met or seen MacArthur before?

MS: I can't say that I did, outside of on film, but I had a lot of respect for Harry Truman, believe me. I don't know what your feelings are.

SH: What was the reaction among the troops when President Roosevelt died? [Editor's Note: President Franklin D. Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945.]

MS: Very sad. … He was a very efficient man, and everybody loved him, as you know.

SH: You talk about your respect for President Truman after firing MacArthur. When Roosevelt first passed away, did you have confidence in Truman to be the new Commander-In-Chief?

MS: Not too much. … I was pleasantly surprised at Truman's ability to get things done, because I'm a great believer [in] "get things done." … [Editor's Note: Harry S. Truman served as President of the United States, after Roosevelt's death, from April 12, 1945 to January 20, 1953.]

SH: You were engaged to be married when you returned home. What else were you planning to do when you returned to the United States? Did you think a career in the military was a possibility?

MS: No. I was engaged to her.

BS: That's interesting.

MS: … My education didn't qualify me for a brain surgeon. … I had a brother-in-law who was part-owner of a distillery, and he liked me a lot. In fact, it was his house--through my sister--that we went to that party, where she met me. … He had an affection for me, respected me personally, or the fact that I was in [the] service. … He [was the] part-owner of a distillery. So, he got me a job working for a liquor house on the route in the Catskills [Mountains] in New York.

SH: Really?

MS: Yes. That didn't turn out too well, because, by then, the storekeepers of the liquor stores were very mad at the distributors of liquor, because, during the war, they had to buy eighteen cases of an undesirable product to get one case of liquor. [laughter] I received a very poor reception wherever I went, as a result of the way they were treated. So, I did that for a couple of years, and it didn't work out. I had to buy a car, which cost me a lot of money. Then, you could only buy used cars. There were no new ones at the time. … I bought a used car, and it didn't work out well, and I had to leave that and go on to something else.

SH: Did you consider using the GI Bill for your education?

MS: I was so involved already, … about to be married, that I frankly didn't.

BS: Well, you did. He is not a good dancer. [laughter] He took lessons at Arthur Murray [a dance studio chain].

MS: That's all I got under the GI Bill.

SH: You were able to use the GI Bill for Arthur Murray dance lessons.

MS: Yes, because I wasn't into brain surgery, I had to talk to Arthur Murray. [laughter]

SH: Did you ever have to use veteran unemployment benefits?

MS: … I didn't, no.

BS: You should tell her that when you got discharged, you were in the Inactive Reserve. You should tell her that.

MS: Oh, yes. I was in Inactive Reserve, because Korea already was starting to brew.

SH: You knew that when you left Japan in 1946, that Korea was a potential problem.

MS: I didn't know, or was not too aware of it. I just thought, "I'm never going to get back in again," you know, because I was engaged. … After all, how long can I do this? … I have a little lapse in memory at times.

SH: When you and Mrs. Steinberg married, where did you live?

MS: … Actually, it was very hard to get an apartment then. We lived in Newark, on Hedden Terrace, in a furnished room. We had an old refrigerator in the same room we slept. That thing on top there rattled, and I was able to sleep. … We couldn't find an apartment. Finally, we sublet a lovely apartment on Maple and Grumman Avenue. Actually, it was Hillside, on the border of Newark. … That's where our daughter was born, when we were in that apartment, and then, eventually, my son. We have two children--a daughter, who's the elder, and my son. … We saw some pretty rough times. She worked, and I did what I could, and then, I went into the installment business, at a job.

SH: Installing what?

MS: No, not installing. Like, you know, people would buy stuff and would pay so much a week.

SH: Okay.

MS: You're getting an education. [laughter]

SH: Yes, I am. When you returned home in 1946, it was very difficult to find a job and a place to live. Was there a sense of optimism that things were going to get better?

MS: Well, at that age, yes. At that age, you were optimistic about everything.

BS: What about the Korean War?

MS: Oh, yes, then, the Korean War.

SH: In 1950.

MS: I'm in the Inactive Reserve, you know, as an officer. So, one day, I get a notice to report to the induction station in 1060 Broad Street in Newark. Are you familiar with that industrial office building? So, I go down there, and they question me, same stupid questions, and so on, and so forth. … This one doctor … says, "I'm going to send you over to Fort Jay for further questioning." So, they sent me over to Fort Jay, which was an Army hospital.

BS: He had trouble with this neck, by the way. You have to tell her that.

MS: Yes, and, already, my daughter was born, you know, and I still hadn't established where I can make a decent living. So, when I go over there, right away, they send you in front of a shrink, and he interviewed me and it was fine. His conclusion was, "You don't want to go in service again." I said, "You're right." I said, "Five years, don't you think it's enough? I'm married now, I have a child. I have to fend for myself, to support this child." He says, "Well." … All this time, the Reserve Officers Association is fighting this thing to take Reserve officers, unless they volunteered. … Finally, it came through where we were not to be taken unless we wanted to go in. … So, that relieved my mind to that extent.

SH: Were you a member of the Reserve Officers Association?

MS: Yes.

SH: Had you joined the association as soon you left active duty?

MS: Yes, you figured, … "There's not going to be another war, and what's the likelihood?" you know what I mean? That's the way you thought, and here I had to earn a living. …

BS: The other officers, who were in the Army Reserve, they weren't taking them at that time.

MS: They would go to camp for two weeks in the summer and go to the Armory once a month to march. … They were getting paid for that. I didn't get a dime, but the main thing was, I had to structure myself for … [being] married, and I had a child. … So, luckily, by the Reserve Officers Association fighting it, they changed that rule.

SH: Did you take yourself out of the Inactive Reserves?

MS: I never stayed in.

SH: You completely got out at that point.

MS: I didn't want to associate. … It was not easy, I'll tell you, for an ex-GI, and there were millions of us at the time.

SH: Did you continue to live in the Newark area?

MS: … As I say, we finally got a decent apartment up on the borderline of Newark and Hillside. At that time, that was a nice area. … Were we still there when Randy was born?

BS: Yes.

MS: Yes, and my son was born.

BS: We had only a three-room apartment. So, we moved to Stuyvesant Village in Union.

MS: Then, we moved to Stuyvesant Village in June. … We had a two-bedroom apartment. … From there, we moved here, about twenty years ago, … and the two children married. My son has three boys, as I told you. My daughter has a lovely daughter, who's about to graduate from The College of New Jersey. … She's very good at school.

BS: Chemistry major.

MS: Chemistry major. So, she applied for the inner-city teaching job. I don't have to tell you about the inner-city. It's awful.

BS: Gets a job offer.

MS: … She's accepted, and she has to go to … southern Maryland.

BS: Prince George's County.

SH: Prince George's County, Maryland.

MS: Yes, are you familiar with that?

SH: Yes.

MS: … She's running into a combat zone. … She said, "But, oh, I'm fortunate." She said, "A lot of my classmates can't get a job." … They're starting her off at forty-one thousand a year.

SH: Good for her.

MS: Yes.

SH: Hopefully, she will make a wonderful contribution.

MS: Yes, but she still has to take a teaching course, even though she was an expert in her field. …

SH: Is there anything you would like to put on tape about your military background or life experiences?

MS: You mean my personal life?

SH: Or other aspects of the war that we did not address, such as rationing.

MS: Oh, yes, sure. There was gasoline rationing. … She would know better than I. … There was food rationing, and so on.

SH: There was butter and sugar rationing.

MS: Yes, sugar. … The memory has a wonderful facility [to] forget the bad things.

SH: It is not a bad thing.

BS: We don't want to remember it.

SH: Thank you so much for talking to me today.

MS: It's a pleasure. You are a very personable lady.

SH: I thank both of you for your hospitality.

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

Reviewed by Andrew Esler 5/5/11
Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 9/6/11
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 9/8/11
Reviewed by Beverly Steinberg 7/5/12