RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW B. WHITE

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Mr. Andrew B. White in Summit, New Jersey on December 5, 2000 with Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Mr. White, I want to thank you, first of all, for taking time out of your time here in New Jersey, since you are up for the holidays, to sit in for this interview. To begin the interview, let's talk a little about your parents. You can tell me, please, about your father and his family, or maybe your mother, if you would, please.

Andrew White: Okay, my father was born in Lithuania. His parents died at a very young age, and he doesn't remember them. He lived on the family farm, and his sister became the owner, despite the traditional ways when the son got the farm. She was older and married, and, apparently, she wasn't very nice to him. He went to school. I doubt if he went to more than the third or fourth grade, if that, but he could read and write Lithuanian quite well. He could read English, but he could not write it very well. … At age twenty they gave him enough money to come to America through Hamburg, Germany. … It's interesting, I have the Manifest … of the ship that he came on. It was the *Augusta Victoria*. I guess he came in steerage. … His Lithuanian name was Jonas, which is John in English, and Vaiciulis was his surname … Immediately upon arrival, he could see the problem with his name, especially in 1914, so he changed it to White, 'cause there is a White sound to it. He told me that the sound of V in Lithuanian had a W sound in English. Phonetically, it would be, "Wychulis," so he made it White. … He had some relatives here that changed it to White. Anyway, he became John White. Do you want more about my father?

SH: Please. That's a great story.

AW: Continue, okay. [laughter] He landed in New York, and, according to the Manifest, they asked if he had fifty dollars. He had [laughter] twenty-five dollars when he came here. … He was sponsored by a relative in New Britain, Connecticut, and I cannot locate the family. … I'm trying to decipher the manifest, and it's very difficult to decipher the writing, but he did land in New Britain and stayed there for a short period to get established. … He was an adventuresome sort of fellow. He then went to work in the mines in Pennsylvania. He went to Homestead, which was a very ethnic neighborhood of Pittsburgh. … He told me that he did not like it. In fact, he said he was in a cave-in so he quit. … He came to New Jersey. Apparently, he had two aunts in Perth Amboy. He called them aunts, but I could never find out if they were really aunts. With Europeans, for some reason, everyone was a relative [laughter]. But this one aunt was very good to him. I remember meeting both of them as a young child. … He did odd jobs around New Jersey, and … joined the New Jersey National Guard. I'm not sure, but probably to earn some extra money. … Upon the start of World War I, they did away with the Guard and nationalized them and he was in the United States Army, at age, twenty-three or twenty-four. … Should I continue about my father?

SH: Please.

AW: Okay, [laughter] he was trained in Camp McClellan in Anniston, Alabama, and it was quite an experience for him I'm sure. … In fact the soldiers built the camp. It was full of dust, and I have some old photographs of the camp. It was in a booklet he purchased at the time. Anyway, he went overseas. He was also in Camp Upton on Long Island. That's where

the embarkation port was. I have a huge photograph downstairs of the men. Do you want to see it?

SH: At some point, yes. That would be great.

AW: I guess it was taken during his training at Camp McClellan. There must have been hundreds of men in a huge grandstand, and I can still pick him out. … He has another photograph taken in France, when World War I ended, which is very clear, and only a fraction of those men, he said, were left. I'm not sure if … that many were killed, but I'm sure a lot of them were killed. Anyway, he went into action in France. He had quite a few battles listed on his discharge papers, which I have. … He was a PFC, and a machine gunner. He had been gassed. He had a wound on his face from shrapnel. World War I was very short, so he was out of the service within a year and a half. He moved to Linden, where there was a whole network of people of the same background, and a Lithuanian family said he could board with them. I knew the family. He worked at odd jobs in industry. … He met my mother around Elizabeth or Linden. She lived in Linden. … They were married in 1920. So [laughter] [in] six years after he came here, he was in the service, had been around the country, and a married man. [laughter] … He was a very loyal American, he loved America. He just loved this country. He worked very hard. In fact, he bought a house in Linden, upon his marriage. It was a two-family house. He figured he should have income, so he had a two-family house, and the original house at 1804 Clinton Street was where I was born. … He worked hard and … I guess it was kind of tough after World War I. He did get a job eventually with Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, which then became Esso and is now Exxon-Mobil, and he worked as a pipe fitter out in the yard (the tank field), and worked in the mud and filth. … He later became a maintenance man. It was sort of a janitorial job, an inside job, and he liked it very much. He said, "Better than working out in the mud." He was a handyman and he could do a lot of things, so they liked him there. … He put in about … thirty-seven years with Standard Oil and was pensioned from there and was a very loyal Exxon-man. In fact, he used to be very upset by the GIs coming back after World War II. [laughter] He said, "They didn't know how to work." He said, "They were horrible workers," but, you know, that's my generation! [laughter] … He did retire at age sixty-two, lived in Linden until he died. He sold the original house and moved up about eight blocks, bought another two-family house, and I lived there until I was drafted into the Army. … He never got to the … real nice part of Linden, although he could have. … The reason he wanted to live on that street was so he could ride his bike to Exxon, about a mile away … He rode a bike to work. [laughter] He loved bicycles. He even had a racing bike when he was a young man. I learned to ride on one of his huge bikes. There were no training wheels. He just put me on the bike and I took off. So he was a biker and he went to work on a bicycle. … At that time, there was a whole [swarm] of men going to work on bicycles from Linden. You could see them all going to work in the morning and coming home at night. … He worked long enough to be the last man to go to and from the Exxon Refinery on a bicycle. He did ride a little after he was retired. He enjoyed retirement at age sixty-two. Upon his retirement, my parents purchased a summer home in Lavallette, New Jersey, and he had about twelve good years there. He enjoyed the summers in Lavallette and he loved to go crabbing. … My children still remember Grandpa taking them crabbing in the bay, and he would get very upset when they missed a crab. … He loved his crabs and he would go out every morning when they were running. … Lavallette

was good for him, and my mother, too. In fact, they were very thrifty. They built two houses. They built another house on the same property, so they had two bungalows on the same property and they rented one out. … They enjoyed that. We had a lot of fun, and our children have many good memories of Lavallette and so do my wife and I. We spent part of our vacations there. Actually, we spent one summer there. We rented our house in Whippany and I commuted to New York City for the summer. We went there because my daughter had an allergy, and the doctor said the seashore and the saltwater would be good for her skin, which helped it a lot. My father lived to be seventy-four and never worked again. He was quite a veteran; he loved the VFW. He was one of the founding members of the John Russell Wheeler Post in Linden, and he was very a good worker for the post. Whenever they needed some help around the post headquarters, he was there working, and he loved to parade.

SH: Really?

AW: He would put his whole uniform on, and I remember him wrapping those leggings around his legs. As he got older, he had trouble getting them just right. He'd be sweating just trying to get that wrapping just perfect around his leg. I always wondered why they had those wrappings. That was his dress uniform, and he liked to parade. We were very proud of him, my brother and I, We would be running along the parade, shouting, "That's my father marching in the parade." … After the parade, there was always a party at the VFW home with hotdogs and soda for the kids. The veterans loved their beer and … my father loved his beer, too. He … liked a drink of beer and a shot of whiskey, I guess, everyday. He wasn't an alcoholic, but he liked to have a drink. During his retirement years, he used to go to a club and play cards, and my mother always said, "You better get home by five, John, for dinner, or you're not going to eat." And, boy, he'd be home after playing cards in the afternoon. [laughter] So he had a pretty good life. I think he'd be very sad with what is going on today with the young people, but he did live to see a lot in his lifetime.

SH: Tell me about your mother.

AW: My mother is also of Lithuanian descent. She was born in this country. Her parents came from Lithuania. By the way, at that time, it was under the Russian dominance. Lithuania got their independence about ten years ago for the second, or third time. … My grandfather had been drafted in the Russian Army, and he deserted from the Russian Army, and like a lot of men in those days, came to this country. My grandmother had one child in Lithuania, my oldest uncle, and he came as an infant. I think they came around 1890. My mother was born in 1894; she was the same age as my father. … My mother lived in Elizabethport, which, at that time, my mother said was a very lovely neighborhood. She always used to say, "We had great neighbors, many firemen and policemen. Nice people lived down in Elizabethport." … Front Street had nice houses, and they liked it there. … My grandfather got a job with Standard Oil Company at that time. He was a laborer when they built the refinery around the turn of the century. And he had to walk from Elizabethport to Bayway, which is a good walk. I'm sure it took him up to an hour to get there. … They decided to move to Linden, so that he could walk about a quarter of a mile to work. So around 1904, they moved to a section of Linden called Greater Elizabeth, bordering Linden and Elizabeth. … My mother said it was horrible. They moved in the winter, on a street called

McGilvery Place and … had the house built. She said it was a horrible street of mud. She wanted to be back in the Port where at least they had paved streets, even though they were cobblestones, and stores around. … They had to walk to the trolley, which they called the "Fast Line," that went through Elizabeth into Newark, and that was about a mile away. She always told the story that sometimes when there was deep snow, her older brother, Steve, would go to meet her at the end of the trolley line with a lantern to show her the way home. That's how sparse that section of Linden was, even though it's right off US Route 1 today, you would never think so. … She said that there were only one or two houses on the street, but springtime came and they loved it. She said the flowers were out and the birds were chirping, and they were settled in Linden. They loved that spot in Linden. … My mother, I guess, went to school up until the third, or fourth grade. She did know how to write and read and … there was a very big family, about nine children. And being the second oldest and a girl, she became the second mother to her younger siblings. … Some of her younger brothers were twenty years or so younger, so she was like a mother to them. She helped my grandmother with the wash, cooking and cleaning. They had a pump from a well in the kitchen. I remember that as a child. They had an outhouse for the toilet. I remember when my uncles got a little older and were working, they said, "No more going to that outhouse and taking our bath in that big galvanized tub in the shed. We're gonna have a bathroom put in." So they put an extension on the back of the house, and that was their first bathroom. … As the family grew, they later put a second level on the house with more bedrooms. It was a very small house. In fact, after World War I, my grandmother employed my father, since he was out of work, to … dig out a basement under the house. He and Mr. Ryan, he became a cop in Linden, the two of them, by hand, dug out the basement. It's only about five feet high. So that's the old homestead. It's not in the family anymore. … My mother went out to work for some wealthier families in Elizabeth, where she became a housemaid at age thirteen or fourteen. I think it was one of her first jobs, she said she came home for the weekend and told her mother there were cockroaches in the bed, and my grandmother said, "Nothing doing, come home. We don't need that kind of money." Then she got a job at a shirt factory in Elizabeth, and I have some nice photos of the girls from that factory. … It was owned by a Jewish man from Rahway, and he was very nice to the girls. He would make sure they had good working conditions. … They were all dressed alike, with the white blouses and the long, dark skirts. My mother said her boss had a comfortable and presentable shop, and paid them the going wages. My mother said she stood at that one spot, I think, she put buttonholes in shirts, and said she wore a big hole in that floor. She worked there until she was married … in 1920. They were both about twenty-five years old. … My mother had a lot of stories about Linden in those old days. I have a picture of US 1, when it was a narrow, partially-paved road, and is now a four-lane highway in each direction. In fact, I remember before they made the first improvement of US 1. I have a photograph of my mother and some ladies on a Sunday afternoon, walking on US 1 when it was a dirt lane. It's a great photo. [laughter]

SH: Right.

AW: There was horse racing in Greater Elizabeth on the West side of US 1. People from New York used to race their horses there. … It's interesting, the houses for the jockeys and the stable help were moved across what is now the highway into Greater Elizabeth. Some of those small, barrack-type houses are still there as single-family residences. They're only

about as wide as this room and two stories in height. There must be at least a half a dozen you can still recognize. A lot of them have been improved. … I have fond memories of that period because we used to go to my grandmother's when I was a child. My uncles were much older. Actually, the youngest uncle of mine was only about eight years older than myself. But they were so good to us, my brother and I, and all the other grandchildren. … My Uncle Joe worked in a bakery around the corner, and Saturday afternoon, when he finished work, he would come home with a bunch of day-old buns, and some were fresh, too, and Danishes. … My grandmother had a Victrola made by the RCA-Victor Company, and my brother and I would stand on a chair and wind that thing and play records of music. My uncles bought that. As they started working, they started getting a lot of things. In fact, I remember one of my uncles, making a radio. At that time, they used to make radios. I made one with my grandchildren. They'd use the round oatmeal box, Quaker Oats. They'd wrap wire around it, that became the coil, and with the crystals, it was a crystal set, and earphones, they would have a little radio. I remember when I was little, my uncle said, "Gee, listen to this. We have music from New York." That was their first radio. This was the early '30s, or late '20s. I was only a child, but I remember. Then they got a factory-made radio.

SH: Did your parents ever say how they met?

AW: I guess through Lithuanian circles. There was a Lithuanian Church in Elizabeth, St. Peter and Paul. It's still there, but not many Lithuanian people go there now. It's very Spanish today. But they went to dances there, and went to a lot of dances in Newark. It was a section of Newark called Down Neck. It's now a Portuguese and Spanish neighborhood, but then there were a lot of Lithuanian, Polish, and other ethnic people. The only ethnic group from that period that's down there now … might be some Italians. … We are such a mixed nation today; we don't have the neighborhoods we used to have of the ethnic groups. My mother and my father loved to dance. In those days, people worked five and a half or six days a week, so they didn't have very much time. My mother told me they used to go to the beaches on Staten Island. There were some beautiful beaches on the island before the waters became polluted. In fact, I remember going with my mother and grandmother. They were nice beaches then, believe it or not. They had amusements, boardwalks, and restaurants, and my mother said they used to go there a lot. They would take, before Goethals Bridge was constructed, a small ferry from Elizabethport and then a trolley across the island. It took about an hour or so to get there, maybe longer, crowded with people from Jersey, but she said they had a lot of fun. South Beach, I think, was one, and New Dorf might have been another one. They used to go on picnics, she told me, around the neighborhood. Linden, at that time, even though it is a city today, was rather rural, especially where they lived, and they had a lot of open space.

SH: Did you go to church in Elizabeth?

AW: [laughter] No, we went to church in Linden, we were Roman Catholics, and went to Saint Elizabeth's Church. It was a church for everybody. There was a Polish one, too. Even though there was a Polish church within a block of our home, we would not go there, my father would not go to the Polish church, because there is a love-hate relationship between Polish people and Lithuanian people. They marry each other, and they live near each other,

but, for some reason, they love and hate each other. So my father, during that period, said, "No, you can walk right by that church and go another three quarters of a mile to Saint Elizabeth's." … That's where I was Baptized and made my First Communion and Confirmation. It wasn't until they moved to their third house, which is just up the street, also on Clinton Street, that my father, then retired, decided to go to St. Theresa's Church down the street. They were tired of walking to Saint Elizabeth's. He became very active helping the priest out. They loved my father and his working on the clothing drives. When I became a teenager, I occasionally went to St. Theresa's Church. We lived in a predominantly Polish neighborhood. There were some Lithuanian people around, but not many. A lot of my boyhood friends in the neighborhood were of Polish or Slovak descent.

SH: Was Lithuanian spoken in your home?

AW: That's interesting. My father, naturally, could speak it well and could write it. My mother could speak it, but she could not write the language. That was her first language with her parents. She was ninety-seven when she died, and could still speak Lithuanian. My mother said, when we were very young, my brother, who was about two and a half years older than I, did speak Lithuanian at home, but I don't remember. However, I remember a lot of the words, and I can, somewhat, pick up Lithuanian conversation when it's spoken slowly. I don't remember speaking it, but I can remember some of the terms and words. But, no, we spoke English at home, and my mother and father only spoke Lithuanian when they were angry with each other. [laughter] … When my father got angry with us, he would say something in Lithuanian, all these little phrases they had, as every nationality has. … He spoke with a broken accent and people loved John, and he was a good worker and an honest man …

SH: Was he involved in politics at all?

AW: Yes, he helped with the Democrat Party in Linden. Linden, as it became more industrialized, turned from Republican to Democrat in early '30s, and Dad became a Democrat. That was the predominant party … he worked at the polls. In fact, after the war, he had me work at the polls, bringing people to vote in my car. I'd get gas money. I didn't like that, but he said, "You gotta help." So, yes, he was a Democrat until he died. Probably later on, he voted for some Republican presidents and governors. I'm not sure, but he was a registered Democrat, as was my mother.

SH: Did he ever get involved in the unions at all?

AW: Standard Oil had no union. They had a company union, which was very good by the way, for that period of time. They were very interested in their employees, and they had a "Bayway Home," in Bayway, it was a Community Center with recreational basketball and bowling. … They also sponsored baseball teams and a band. They had a great marching band. … My Uncle Eddie, a little younger than my mother, was in the band. He'd get a day off to march in some parade around the state. [laughter]

SH: What did he play?

AW: He played the saxophone. He liked that Esso band. … By the way, even in those early days, Esso had a what they called a "thrift plan," where you could buy stock at a discount, which was unheard of in those days. So my father became quite a stockholder in Standard Oil Company. But after the war, the young GIs were restless, and they felt that they could do better with the Teamsters Union. In fact, my very good friend, Paul Yurick, who came from Linden originally, became one of the union heads, and we had more arguments because I was never a union man. I became a Republican after I was married. There were two other guys with whom I went to high school, who also worked there. They're my lifelong friends, but we used to have more discussions about unions. … I used to say, "What do they do for you, nothing." In fact, Paul hates to admit it, but he says the unions never did a darn thing for them. They paid dues every month, and I think they had one big strike, back in the '60s or '70s. But he said, looking back, "We paid a lot of money, never got anything out of it." They still have that union. Exxon is not in Linden anymore. They sold the plant to Tosco, even though they do own a part of Tosco. But … my father … was not a Union man. He was a company man.

SH: I'd like to ask a question about his family. Now, when he left Lithuania, was he able to keep in contact with the family?

AW: No, that's the sad part about it. I never could … find out what his sister's married name was. In fact, before my mother died several years ago, she said he had two sisters, but didn't didn't know their married names. He never communicated with them; he wasn't very happy with Lithuania, and especially with his family. So, I think, he might have received one or two letters from them and maybe had written back, but he never communicated with his family. … He had relatives in Perth Amboy, New Britain, Connecticut, and Duryea, Pennsylvania. They were distant relatives, and I could never pin down how he was related, but he thought a lot of them. In fact, I went to Duryea recently and saw my cousin, Monica Getson, who is a few years older than I am. … I asked, "Gee, Monica, how are we related?" and she said, "Hey, don't worry about it, we're related. You know, in Lithuania, everyone is related." So we were related, and we have fond memories of when we visited our cousins in Perth Amboy and Duryea. Unfortunately, do not know the name of the family in New Britain, 'cause that could have been a good tie to Lithuania. He did have a brother named Andrew. I remember a picture of him, he had a beard, and he was a bachelor as far as we know. … He went to Kentucky to work in the coal mines and [there was] very little communication with him. My father received a telegram in the early '30s from Kentucky [that] said his brother had died, and if he wanted to claim the body, he could. But during the Depression, my father wasn't about to go to Kentucky, so we never knew what had happened to Andrew. I was in Kentucky once, on a business trip, and I thought I'd try to do some checking. I didn't do much, … but there are a lot of Whites, and even some Lithuanian names down there, but I couldn't trace the Lithuanian name. I did try to do it on the Internet, too, but I didn't get very far. It would be nice if I knew if Andrew was married, had children, but as far as I know, he never married. I often think my father probably has nephews and nieces in this country 'cause a lot of Lithuanians scattered during World War II probably into this country. I went to Lithuania, by the way.

SH: Oh, you did?

AW: Yeah, about twelve years ago. After I retired, I became active in a Lithuanian group, and we formed a Lithuanian-American Club with a very good friend of mine, Betty Di Andriole, a Lithuanian-American. We started the club at Morris County College and had over 200 members. … She was president, I was treasurer, and we had a lot of fun. … Through that connection, I went to Lithuania with a fellow named Jack Stukes, who was a Seton Hall professor of Lithuanian descent, American-born. He had a Lithuanian radio program on the College's station and he and his wife Loretta organized the trip to Lithuania. Unfortunately, he couldn't get on the plane at Kennedy Airport, because the Russians wouldn't give him a visa, because he was … so vocally against the Russian dominance of Lithuania, so he had to stay home, while we said goodbye to him at the airport. I went to the village of my father's birth, called Rudimina. … I went to the graveyard and I saw no names of Vaiciulis, the Lithuanian name, so I tried to see the parish priest, but he wasn't in that day. I learned later that all the records were sent to either Kaunas, or Vilnius, the capital, and a lot of them were destroyed by the Russians or the Germans, so there were very few records available. There is a museum in Chicago, Balzekas Museum, a museum sponsored by Lithuanian people, and a man by the name Balzekas organized it. They have an archive of Lithuanian names, and … I entered our name and did get some responses, but there were no connections. My visit to Lithuania was just about six months before they gained their independence from Russia. That was a very interesting trip. When I rented a car, I could not drive it, so I had to have a Russian driver. They said he was actually a Russian agent. He said he couldn't speak English, but we think he could understand and speak it. … He was a very nice young man, and took us wherever we wanted to go. I also went to a place called the "Hill of Crosses." There's a hill of crosses in Lithuania where, during the Russian occupation, these people, for some reason, started putting crosses on a little hill. … The Russians would tear them down, and then they would put it back up again. … Lithuania is a very Catholic nation. It was a great demonstration of faith of the Lithuanian people in their Catholicism. It was quite a sight to see, on about an acre, all sorts of crosses and pictures. People still put them there. The Lithuanian countryside is very green, and I was surprised how green it was. People were very nice, but not much improvement was evident in living conditions. They have some superhighways. We stayed in good hotels, American-type, but there was only about one in each big city. … My wife didn't go and she said, "You have your own fun," which I did. … I had a great time. I really enjoyed that visit and met some nice young people who spoke English and took us around.

SH: What were your memories of the Depression?

AW: Depression. My mother and father always said, "Look how lucky you are, your father is working, you have shoes on your feet." There were some kids around the neighborhood who'd walk around in bare feet in the summertime. … We were, I guess, considered the best clothed on the block, so I was told by my mother. [laughter] I guess we were well clothed. It was a blue-collar neighborhood. Many of the men either worked at Exxon or Warner Quinlan, a big chemical plant, City Service, another oil refinery, or General Analine, another big chemical plant down there. Some men worked part-time for the Works Progress Administration, a government work program that constructed roads, public works, and parks. … We had food and were clothed because my father was fortunate to have worked all those years. I remember, there was a soup kitchen in Linden at the old City Hall, about two blocks

away. In the basement of the building, they had a kitchen established with the actual cooking of the soup done outdoors in a big iron soup wagon on two wheels, coal fire, cooking a huge kettle of soup. … People would come from different parts of the city with a little aluminum pot with a lid on it for their soup and a loaf of bread, especially the few black people in Linden. At that time, there weren't many black people in Linden, but … most of them were very poor. … There were also many white people visiting the soup kitchen. I remember a black kid, a friend of mine, who used to go there. It was kind of embarrassing for him, and he would walk by the house and carry the soup home, but he had to eat, which is more important. We had a pool near us in John Russell Wheeler Park, a county swimming pool, where we would be let in free every morning from ten to twelve, and everyone would go there. On our way to the pool, we used to go to the old City Hall, to the soup kitchen, and they would give us coffee and buns. We liked that. My mother said, "What are you doing there? You're taking it away from all those poor people," but there was plenty of bread and buns around for all the needy people. There were a lot of vacant stores in Linden. I didn't know of anyone who was starving. There were kids whose parents weren't working, but seemed to manage during the Depression. … They had the WPA. President Roosevelt introduced the NRA, the National Recovery Act, and the whole town, and country, was plastered with big NRA signs. I don't know if you've ever seen them, they were red, white, and blue. I wish I had one of those signs, they were all over. I don't think the country recovered until World War II, quite frankly. The war brought the real recovery.

SH: Where did you go to school? Now you said your brother was two and a half years older.

AW: Yes, we went to public schools. The first school was School Number Two. I spent two years in the first grade, by the way. [laughter] There was no room in the kindergarten, so they said, "He can stay two years in the first grade." … We walked to school and it was about eight blocks. I came home for lunch and classes ended about three-thirty. That was our grade school through the sixth grade. It was a good school. The classes might have had thirty, thirty-five kids [with] good teachers, I think I can remember every one of their names from first grade on. … In grade school, I had my first trip to New York City. They had an outing where they would take us to Radio City and I was so excited. I guess I was in the fifth grade, and my mother said, "You can go," and I guess it cost us fifty cents. … We had a bus take us, and went on a ferry across the Hudson River and came back through the Holland Tunnel. … We saw the Christmas Show at Radio City Music Hall. … I remember on one trip; we went to the Museum of Natural History and the Planetarium. I still remember … very vividly those trips. … That was a big event, during that period. … We played marbles on the playground and baseball during lunchtime. We had a great principal, Mr. Ozmun. He would play baseball with us. He was a nice man, and we would play tag and all kinds of games out in the playground. We had a big playground, in back of the school. I think a lot of it is gone today, but the school is still there. … I went to Linden Junior High School and that was a big change. That was a little longer walk, probably three-quarters of a mile, and we walked that everyday. I guess I biked once in a while. … That was seventh and eighth grade, and we had lockers and we would change classrooms. That was quite an experience. By the way, in those days, we had to be dressed up nicely in grade school and junior high and high school. You had to wear a tie and a sweater, or a jacket. We could not go with shorts or sneakers. Well, I guess you wore sneakers if you had to.

SH: Did you wear long pants?

AW: I wore knickers, until I was in junior high school. I have some pictures of the way we dressed. I got my first long pants in junior high school and that was quite an experience. We only had one junior high and high school in Linden, so we got to meet all the kids in town and I made a lot of new friends. One fellow I met in junior high is still a very good friend of mine, Lou Hasbrouck. … Then I started to learn about girls, in the [laughter], seventh and eighth grades. When I went to high school that was a longer walk. That was over a mile, but it didn't bother us to walk. We never did come home for lunch in junior high, or high school. That was my first experience with a cafeteria, but I always brought my lunch from home. In high school, I had a very easy curriculum. … I had a General Course. I made a big mistake, I think I can blame the advisors in junior high, they should have put me in a technical course. It was just to get me through high school, very light coverage of math, chemistry and physics, but I did graduate 1942.

SH: I wanted to ask, while you were in high school, did you discuss in your classes what was going on in Europe?

AW: The war?

SH: Yes.

AW: Yeah, we were conscious of the beginning of World War II, and we kept abreast of the news in Germany and the Chamberlain episode. I wasn't allowed to go to the movies too often, but I do remember the newsreels, which brought you up-to-date on what was happening; the march into Poland, Czechoslovakia. It became evident that we were going to get involved because Roosevelt loaned the destroyers to England and Russia. … The factories were gearing up for war production and people were starting to get work. We were very conscious of that. In fact, at that time, a lot of people from the Pennsylvania coal mine region were starving for work. Thousands of people moved to Jersey for employment, including cousins of mine. The big General Motors plant on US 1 stopped making cars around 1941. They built an airfield across from the General Motors plant and started making Grumman airplanes. As they completed the plane, they would roll them across the highway and fly them off to the Navy. They were Navy fighter planes. They put out thousands of airplanes at G.M. … They must have rebuilt that plant in months, for the manufacturing of airplanes.

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

SH: This is side two of tape one. We were just talking about how you were able to tell that we were going to get involved in the war and the buildup.

AW: There was a lot of work around.

SH: Specifically, in your neighborhood, you said it was a very Polish neighborhood. What were the reactions that you remember to Hitler's going into Poland?

AW: I don't recall exactly, but I'm sure they didn't like it, and were aware of what was going on in their ancestral home. They are very proud people. … Their former country was devastated by the Germans …

SH: You said your father was very involved still with the VFW.

AW: Oh, yeah, he was involved. He was a great poppy seller. [laughter] Every Memorial Day, he was the best poppy seller. For years, he had the record for selling the most poppies. He'd get out on the highway and sell his poppies. … I personally never thought I would be in service.

SH: That's what I wondered, that's the reaction …

AW: I was seventeen and had a girlfriend. This friend of mine, Horace Portman, had a convertible. On December 7, 1941, we were with our dates in his car … in Warinaco Park in Elizabeth, listening to Glen Miller's band on the radio. About four or five o'clock, someone interrupted the music and said, "The President has something to say." He announced the infamous attack on Pearl Harbor. I said, "I'm too young." [laughter] "They'll never get me. I'll never get in, I'm too young." … Within fifteen months, on March 6, 1943, I was in the service.

SH: What about your brother?

AW: In high school, he had a commercial course. … He went to work for Berry Biscuit Company. They were in Elizabeth and later moved to Linden. Then he got a job with Western Electric, which in Kearny and very much involved in defense manufacturing of electronic equipment, so he was deferred from the draft into service.

SH: But then the peacetime draft would have gotten him at ...

AW: No, he was too young for that. Uncle Eddie was one of the first draftees. He was single and discharged after a year of service, but called back in when war was declared. He recently died, he was eighty-five years old. Fortunately, he never went overseas.

SH: While you were in high school, just before we start talking about World War II, did you have any thoughts to go on to college at that point?

AW: No, and my mother and father never encouraged me. To me, it was a task that would be very difficult to accomplish financially. I just couldn't see myself going to college at that period of time. My thinking changed rapidly. As soon as I graduated I realized I should have prepared myself for college. I envied the people who went, and there weren't many from my high school. Linden was an industrial city with a lot of blue-collar workers. There were some children of blue-collar workers who did go. … I'm trying to guess, I bet, I'm gonna take a wild guess, not more than twenty-five percent, if that, and I'm not sure that's right even, who went to college. The war prompted a lot of us to go. I had a chance to go during the service

and after, but it wasn't in the thinking, then, unless you had some very far-minded parents who made the sacrifice. I don't think my father wanted to make the sacrifice. He probably could have afforded it at that time, to send me, but I don't think he wanted to part with the money. Not that he was tight, but he was very conservative. … He couldn't visualize any of his children going to college. I had one cousin who went to college. The only one of my ten cousins that went to college. I'm the second one that went and I did that after the war. So during that period, college wasn't in my mind, although the day I graduated, oh, I knew I made a mistake. I was so unhappy, 'cause I dreaded working in a factory. I didn't want to do that. I couldn't see my whole life working in a factory. I had a lot of respect for people with blue collar jobs. In fact, as I said, three of my best friends all worked at Exxon and did quite well financially. Well, I just didn't want to do that. … After … graduation in 1942, I could not get a job, 'cause I was so eligible for the draft …

[tape paused]

SH: Please go ahead about …

AW: Where were we?

SH: You were talking about graduating and thinking you were going to work in the factory.

AW: Yeah, I was very unhappy, and I have to skip back a little. I think I might have mentioned I was a musician. I guess I was in maybe eighth, or ninth grade, [when] I mentioned to my father that one of my boyhood friends was playing the accordion. Before I knew it, I was playing the accordion, too; he thought I wanted to play. … In any event, I went at it very earnestly, but I could see that I would never be a great musician, though I was pretty good, and learned quickly. … By the time I was a sophomore, I was playing in gin mills. I can't believe it.

SH: Wow.

AW: My brother played the drums, and a friend of the family, an older married man, John Ronay, played the violin. Imagine that combination. We played in a bar in Rahway, Yannick's Bar, I'll never forget that. We played there every Saturday night for about a year. We were paid ten dollars, imagine that, ten dollars for the three of us. … John had the car, and he would drive us there. And he insisted, and said, "Andy, you get four dollars, you work the hardest, you gotta buy music. Sylvester and myself will take three each." I could drink all the root beer I wanted. … Mr. Yannick was very nice. He would also give us something to eat. … We'd play from nine o'clock until two in the morning. Then, towards my senior year, a friend of mine, a Polish-American lad, Walter Horbuzinski, they called him "Hobby," played the clarinet and the sax, and he heard about my playing. He insisted I practice with him, and he taught me how to play polkas quite well. … We joined a band called the Royal Ambassadors in Bayway. They had an eight-piece polka band and we played at weddings and picnics. I was only a junior and senior in high school. … We played around Elizabeth, Linden, sometimes in Plainfield, wherever there was a Polish National Hall, or some Polish-American was getting married. They were wild parties. … I did a lot of that and was tired of

it after doing it for a several years. At that age, I wanted more of a social life. … I played until the day I went into the service in March 1943. I was so glad to get drafted because I was so tired of playing my accordion and happy to get out of that rut! What I did in the summer of '42, I could not get a job in a defense plant. Someone said, "Why don't you go to a vocational school and learn to be a machinist?" They had a quickie course of … two months, I guess, at the vocational school in Elizabeth. I went there for five days a week, and learned all about lathes, milling, and grinding machines. … I liked that and got a job in a place called General Instrument Company. They made record changers in Elizabeth, in the old Durant Building, where they made cars years ago. The General Instrument Company was now making radio parts for the war effort. …With my very brief training as a machinist, I was put in the sample department, with men who were machinists and toolmakers, making the sample prototype for the design that would go on line. … We made everything from scratch, and they made all the dies … very, very smart men. It was quite a group of clever men. They were a funny bunch; they got along well together. The … foreman was a German-American, Mr. Langer, and he had a quite an accent. Many of the other men were also foreign-born: from Germany, Scotland, Poland, a displaced Jew, and a few American-born. They kind of liked me 'cause I was the only kid in the department. They were all buying war bonds … because they had children in the service, too. I became their runner. I had to get them coffee in the morning. … They taught me a lot, though. I worked there from September '42 until I was drafted into the service in March '43. … They gave me a big party in a bar across the street, wished me farewell, and gave me some money. It was quite an experience. I thought I might become a toolmaker 'cause … I like to work with my hands, and thought that maybe after the service I could do that. … I welcomed being drafted, and had thought about enlisting. I looked into it, but then it was very difficult. They weren't taking enlistments of your choice, so I said, "I might as well wait, I'm going to be drafted anyway." I received my notice on February 27th of '43 to report to the Armory in Newark. … I remember taking a streetcar up to the Armory, and I could swear that the Irish-American man, who was the conductor, was my future father-in-law. I can picture that man. I have said many time to my wife, "I swear that was your father." He was so rigid and strict, you know, he ran that car like it was his own. Anyhow, a week later, I was in service on March 6. I kind of welcomed it because I was in a rut. I could see I wasn't going to like my life as it was at the time. I had a girlfriend in high school, after a very torrid romance. … That broke off, and I'm very glad because I would have been sick knowing that my girlfriend was home while I was in the service. [laughter] I was eighteen and I just felt I was missing too much. … I didn't like the life of a musician. I saw too many broken homes and musicians fooling around and drinking. There was a lot of drinking. I tried to drink, but I didn't care for alcoholic drinks. I remember one affair I went to on a Sunday, and I think had a beer or two. I felt so sick Monday morning in school. Some of the guys in the band would get loaded and play and I had to carry them through the affair. … I did welcome the service.

SH: You said that you decided to wait to be drafted. Were you interested in the Navy at all then?

AW: Somewhat, but I just wanted to get out of the rut I was in. Whatever happened, I said, "I'll do it."

SH: Was your brother already drafted?

AW: No, he didn't go in until the following year.

SH: When the deferment ended.

AW: Yeah, he was deferred for quite a while. When my brother was in high school, he had a paper route. He was a good worker and he saved his money. By the time he was seventeen he bought a '29 Dodge coup. I think he paid twenty-five, or fifty dollars for it. It was a huge car; it had wooden spoked wheels and a rumble seat. … We went all over in that car; we had a lot of fun. It was always breaking down. … I remember once we were going to Lake Hopatcong, and we couldn't make the hill on Route 24, leaving Short Hills. So we had to go home, start all over again some other time, but we did get up there once. Then my father bought a car, a new '39 Plymouth. He didn't drive, and said, "This is going to be the family car, so you have to drive us where we want to go." Well, that was the end of that. My brother just commandeered the car and it became his car. When I became seventeen, he did teach me how to drive on his old first car. Then when the new car came, I never had it. I drove it with him occasionally, but I never had the car on my own. For my Senior Prom I might have had it. He drove me for my junior prom. He did take my father and mother around [to] where they wanted to go, but not as much as they wanted to. It became his car.

SH: Were there any activities other than music that kept you busy in high school?

AW: I was a class representative. I wasn't very active. I could have been. I remember, one of the teachers wanted me to get involved in some musical, playing my accordion, but I had a girlfriend and I said I didn't have time. … I didn't get involved in sports. … I couldn't, my mother wouldn't let me play football. I wanted to play football, in fact Coach Cooper said I was pretty fast … and might make a good quarterback. Quarterbacks were smaller in those days. My mother said, "No you're going to hurt your fingers and you won't be able to play your accordion." When I first went to high school I worked in a butcher shop after school, in Andy's Butcher Shop, around the corner. I delivered people's orders and stocked shelves. By the time I was in high school, I was earning my own money. It wasn't much, but I was buying my own clothing, and had enough for spending money. The only allowance I remember was when my father would get paid in cash and he would open up the envelope and we'd get the pennies. That's about all we got. … We never had any allowance. So by the time we were in high school, we were working, my brother delivering papers, and I was working in the butcher shop. I probably earned fifty cents for the afternoon. With tips, I would get maybe a dollar or so on weekends. That was my spending money, and there was enough to [get by]. So therefore, I never did get involved in extracurricular activities in school. I had a lot of friends, boys and girls, in the Linden High Class of '42, and it was a great class. Our fiftieth reunion was in 1992, and I hope they have one in 2002. … We all have such fond memories of that period. They all gave me big hugs at the reunion. We all came from similar backgrounds. … We had a lot of fun at the school dances and parties. The girls always had some kind of party. My friend, Jimmy Good, and I started school together in the first grade and are still friends. He and I went to many a party. The gals were great party girls. We'd play all kinds of games and danced. Jimmy and I lived on the wrong side of the tracks in Linden. Nothing wrong

with the neighborhood, except it wasn't a beautiful neighborhood, but it was clean and orderly. … I remember one girl had a party at her home in Sunny Side Gardens, a nice section of town. … Her father said he would drive us home. As soon as he got by the railroad station, he said, "Well, that's enough, boys, I'm gonna drop you off here, you can 'shanks mare' home." It was the first time we ever heard the phrase. Jimmy and I still laugh about that. Linden was a great town us to grow up in. … There were enough of woods around when we were children. We used to go hunting for snakes and rabbits. We never caught any [rabbits]. We caught a lot of snakes in the little streams. We used to hunt. We made everything ourselves. Bow and arrows were made from branches in the woods, and arrows from reeds. We made slingshots and rubber band guns. I don't know if you've ever seen these guns, it's a type of gun where you shoot a rubber band made from tire tubes. I made one for my grandson several years ago, and my daughter said, "Daddy, that's a gun, he could hurt somebody," so she took it away from him. We had a lot of fun. My father liked to pick mushrooms. Lithuanian people eat a lot of mushrooms. They are a great people of the woods. In Lithuania, they were great mushroom pickers, and he knew all the different varieties in this country and he taught me which ones to pick. I would go with him into the woods around Linden, and, we'd come home with bags full of them, on a fall day, found amongst the leaves. He had Lithuanian names for them. Some were the stump mushrooms; others were red, brown, or white. I can still recognize about two or three of them … My mother would cut them up and have them for dinner. They also preserved them in jars and ate them during the winter. Lithuanian people ate a lot of mushrooms. Even today many Lithuanian-Americans will include mushrooms as a dinner vegetable.

SH: Were there other Lithuanian customs that you remember that your family kept?

AW: There was a whole ritual of food preparation for Christmas Eve. I remember my grandfather spreading straw on the table with a sheet over it for the evening buffet. Christmas Eve was considered as important a holy day as Christmas. The meal consisted mainly of seafood, such as herring, vegetables, breads and cakes. They also loved certain cheeses. … The organist from the Lithuanian church would come around and distribute communion wafers, rectangular in shape, embossed with religious scenes, and the family would "break bread." The organist would be given a gratuity for distributing the communion wafers, to supplement his income. They never came to our house because we were too far from the Lithuanian church and not parishioners of the church. … As for other customs, in the Lithuanian language there are many tales about the woods and spirits. I also learned this from a Lithuanian-American, born in Lithuania, who was a teacher. When I was in Lithuania, I was told there are volumes of books of all these old stories of Lithuanian people and their superstitions. My mother still had some, like if you were frightened you had to spit three times onto the ground, and all these little things she did, that she learned from her mother. … They had a lot of stories that go back to their pagan days. Interestingly, Lithuania was the last nation in Europe to be Christianized.

SH: Oh, really?

AW: It's very interesting. I often think about that. Lithuania is a Baltic nation, and there were three, originally: Prussia, Lithuania, and Latvia. Estonia was not a Baltic nation. It is

only geographically when they now refer to the Baltic States. Lithuania, Latvia, and Prussia had a common language and a common heritage. … The Teutonic knights, from Germany, after the Crusaders were out of work, were sent by the Pope to colonize and Christianize those pagans along the Baltic Sea. Well, they were successful in doing it to the Prussians, and today they are considered German, but they were really a Baltic nation. They lost their language and much of their heritage. The Teutonic Knights went into Lithuania around the twelfth or thirteenth century to Christianize them. But the Lithuanian people soon found out they weren't there to Christianize. They were there to take their land and make them serfs, so they chased them out. It wasn't for another couple hundred years that Lithuania became a Christian nation. It's interesting, I already mentioned the Polish and Lithuanian relationship, I'm not much of a historian, but I know a little about it. … Apparently, you weren't a nation until you were crowned by the Pope. In those days, the Pope crowned the royalty in Europe. … They were going to crown a prince in Lithuania, but he was murdered, [so] it never happened. Lithuania, at that time, was a large country, and extended from the Baltic to the Balkans. They were fierce warriors. … It wasn't until Poland, their neighbor, needed a king that there was a marriage between a Lithuanian prince and a Polish queen. That's when it became Lithuania-Poland. … History may have been entirely different if they had stayed together 'cause at that time they were strong. The Lithuanian people were the minority, and were soon dominated by the Polish people. That's when the resentment started, when they tried to "Polanize" Lithuania. They were almost successful in doing it, and almost eradicated the language, but they did Christianize them. That's how they became Christian and Catholic. There was also a Russian influence, and they almost became Greek Catholic. There is a lot of Eastern European history that we never studied in this country. We were always interested in the Anglo-Saxon history of England and France and even Germany. But we never studied to any extent the history of Eastern Europe. There are a lot of beautiful stories and a lot of facts. The Tartars from the Near East, they were fierce warriors. They overran Eastern Europe, including Lithuania, and they were there for a couple hundred years and inter-married with the people. … To this day, there are traces of the Tartars in Lithuanians and in many other Eastern Europeans. In fact, my eyes might be a little slanted. The Tartars were fierce warriors and great horsemen, and overran most of Eastern Europe. When the Lithuanians did chase them out of that part of the world, some remained and they became the elite guard for the Lithuanian royalty. … To this day there is a group of people of Tartar origin in a place called Trakai. They wear the skullcap and a very decorative jacket, and they still retain some of the language and customs of the thirteenth century.

SH: That answers my question.

AW: Is the mike on?

SH: When you were in high school, what did you do during the summers? Did you work? Were you involved in Boy Scouts, or any of those kinds of activities?

AW: I could not join the Boy Scouts because they met in the Methodist Church Hall. I did work in a butcher shop, helped occasionally delivering newspapers for my brother, worked part-time delivering milk in the early morning, and played my accordion professionally, but really had a lot of free time during the summers. Summers we went to the shore. The shore

wasn't very far, we used to go to a place called Charlie's Beach, just beyond Lawrence Harbor. … At Charlie's Beach, you'd pay fifty cents to park your car, and undress in the car and swam in the lower Raritan Bay. It was cleaner then, and you could dig for clams. Going down wasn't too bad, but coming home the traffic on US 1 was bumper to bumper. It was one continuous line from the Raritan River to New York. There was only one bridge over the Raritan River! That was before the Edison and the Parkway [bridges]. You didn't get home until ten or eleven o'clock at night after leaving about eight. … They used to have what they called truck rides, this is funny. We used to have truck rides from Linden. Mr. Stankus was in the moving business, and he would use his truck to take people to the beach. … He'd charge, I guess, a quarter apiece. [There were] benches in the back of his truck, and he'd take about thirty or thirty-five people, I don't know how many people, but it seemed like a lot. The truck was open-sided with a canvas top. … I remember the men would have a barrel of beer, and my mother would prepare hard-boiled eggs and pre-cooked chicken for our picnic meal. … Those beach resorts are all gone today, I can't believe it. … Once and a while, on a treat, we'd go to Long Branch, which was then a very nice beach. I have some photographs with my grandmother in Long Branch. My grandmother had a car; and would take us down there. She didn't drive; my uncles were the chauffeurs. They had to take my grandmother wherever she wanted to go. She enjoyed Sunday rides in her car. I have fond memories of the Dominican monastery in Summit. I remember parking on Springfield Avenue, it was a narrow road at that time. They would have these long processions going into the church. She loved to go to different shrines around the country. My grandfather originally worked for the railroad and received free passes, and she used to go to different parts of Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut. … Summer for me was fun. We went swimming in the morning from ten o'clock to twelve, rain or shine. That's where I learned how to swim, and it was free at the county pool in Wheeler Park. … We had a playground in the park. They had really great programs for the whole summer. They had a man and woman who would supervise the playground area. You earned points for the different activities you participated in, whether it was a baseball game, a race around the park, bicycle race, foot race, or arts and crafts such as making vases out of glass jars. We made more little jars, vases, I guess you call them. We always saved our colorful interior wrapping from the Christmas card envelopes and would take them to the park in the summer and cut these unusual shapes and paste them inside our jars. … They became our vases. We gave them to my mother usually. We also had woodworking. Mickey Mouse had just been introduced and I remember cutting a huge Mickey Mouse out of wood. We didn't buy the wood. We used to get egg crates and use that wood to make our wood cutouts. We never had to buy wood for crafts. We never bought a kite; we made our own kites. We'd get reed or scrap wood from our yard and cut strips for our kites. Comic sheets from the Sunday paper would be used for the kite body and we would make paste out of flour. I made them once for my grandchildren. I can't believe they can't make a kite. They are so easy to make. Why pay five dollars for a kite [when] you can make it for nothing? So we had a lot of kites. I guess you had to buy the string once in a while. You saved the string from the A&P and used that for your line. By the way, do you know what the old A&Ps were like? They were neighborhood stores like a deli. They sold no fresh meats, just cold cuts, groceries and vegetables. They were the Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company. Originally they only sold tea and coffee. My mother didn't go there too often, because she thought they were expensive. … The A&P, usually had a manager, assistant manager, and delivery boy. A delivery boy for the A&P was considered a good job. I never

had it. But when you went into the A&P, in those days, and had a big order, they would wrap the order … in brown paper off the roll, and make it into a suitcase and tie it with A&P cord. There was a thing known as A&P cord, it was a strong black cord, and they would put a handle on your wrapped package, a sort of suitcase affair when you bought enough food. So that was the A&P in those days. [laughter] Summers were for bicycle riding … around the countryside. We also did a lot of roller-skating in those days. … We went to a rinky-dink roller rink in Roselle. I can't remember the name of it, but [it was in a] converted garage. … It was small, but it was a great place to meet people on a Friday night. … I went there every Friday night when I was in high school with my good friend Jimmy Good. We have good memories of those days. We had shoe skates with four wood or fiber wheels on each shoe. That was the big thing in the '40s. We'd go to other rinks around the state. In fact, there is a former rink in Millburn. It's now occupied by Linens and Things, but it was a roller rink. You can still see the maple floor, and how it was made in an oval form. That was a lot of fun in that period of time. We played a lot of sandlot baseball in the summer and football after school, in the fall. We were busy and never bored.

SH: Did you have favorite teams in New York?

AW: I didn't follow professional baseball to any great extent. I knew about the Yankees and the Newark Bears, the farm team for the Yankees. I remember going to a game at the Newark Bears stadium. On Sundays there were baseball games in Wheeler Park and I would go with my father to watch the games. My uncles were good softball players and we always watched then play.

SH: You talked about being in the car actually listening to Glen Miller …

AW: Yeah, Pearl Harbor.

SH: … when you heard about Pearl Harbor. Did you, because you played the accordion, try to play some of the same music?

AW: Oh, I did. We played the popular music of the day, and I also played the ethnic music such as polkas and the ozandas.

SH: … Did you do any singing?

AW: No, I didn't sing. Some of the fellows sang. A lot of the fellows sang in Polish. Adam Anton was the leader of our band. He played a bass, but he could not play well, but he had the connection to get jobs and the personality. [laughter] We made a lot of money because of his personality. He knew how to speak Polish and he flattered the old Polish people by singing their songs. In 1942-3, we were probably earning upwards of twenty-five dollars per man for a wedding party. Sometimes we'd make a deal with the bride and groom to let us make a collection. They'd let us play at each table, and if people gave us money, it was ours. … Then we would charge a little less for the affair. … That was at Polish weddings. I also played on the radio. Every Sunday morning, for about a year, our band would play on station WHOM out of Jersey City on the Lithuanian radio hour, playing Lithuanian music between

commercials and announcements. [laughter] That was big time. [laughter] But I was tired of all that playing.

SH: When you went into the Army, did you take your accordion with you?

AW: No, I stopped playing it. I didn't play it at all.

SH: Well, let's then start with your career once you were drafted?

AW: I was drafted and entered the Army on a rainy March 6, 1943. We assembled in front of the City Hall. All the dignitaries were there, wishing us the best of luck, and I think we were one of the largest groups to be drafted from Linden. So the ragtag group walked about three blocks down to the Pennsylvania Railroad Station and boarded a troop train that started in New York, picking up draftees as it went through Newark, Elizabeth, Linden and Rahway. We were given our official notification of being in the Army and boarded the train around noontime. It took a long time to get down to Fort Dix, New Jersey. … Immediately, we went through the process of becoming a soldier. I think the first thing you received were immunization shots. You surrendered all your civilian clothing and were given all Army clothing, including a toothbrush and toothpaste. All that process of medical examination and clothing issuance took until about ten o'clock. We had our uniforms on, very awkward in this strange OD uniform (olive drab). It really wasn't fair, they gave us an aptitude test at about ten-thirty that night. We were tired and I wasn't about to take a test. Well, we did take it and finished around midnight. We were assembled and marched (it was still raining) down this dark lane. Names were called off as this ragtag group was marching, and the sergeant said "White, you're down in tent number ten," the last tent down a muddy lane. They were pyramidal tents. It was now twelve thirty or so. There was only one cot left in it, and it was all wet. It was near the flap. … I was tired, I threw my blankets on and went to sleep, and at six o'clock in the morning, we were awakened. I had my first experience with a latrine, men shaving and doing what is necessary. … A lot of men had upset stomachs, because of the trauma of it all. … I went to a cafeteria for my meals. One thing I remember about Fort Dix is I "volunteered" to work on a garbage detail. Several men were picked to help two sergeants in a truck pick up garbage around the camp. They were black men and very impressive. It was my first experience working with black people, especially when they were the boss, but they were very nice and we did our duty. … I remember that very vividly. That's about it for Fort Dix. We were there for several days and boarded a troop train, not knowing where we were going. Heading south, we eventually arrived at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, outside of Columbia, a huge fort. … I was now in the 106th Infantry Division in Company C. I can't remember the battalion or the regiment. I was in that company for several weeks. I can't remember exactly how long. Then I was called to go into the 106th Reconnaissance Troop, because I had some aptitude for music. They thought I'd make a good radio operator, since I could distinguish sounds. I didn't like being in the rifle company but [was] pleased to be transferred to the Reconnaissance Troop. We were the eyes and ears of the division. We were the ones who would reconnoiter forward areas for the division. It would've been a dangerous mission, but I welcomed to be out of the rifle company. It's interesting, at that time, the cavalry had recently given up their horses, but some of the men unofficially still had their breeches and the officers still wore their white and beige breeches and shiny riding boots. Our

troop commander was Captain Kusell from Texas. He was a West Point graduate and had been a horse cavalry officer. He was a handsome guy, tough but fair. … They still had the tradition of the bugler sounding all the calls for reveille, dinner, mail, payday, and retreat. It was kind of nice. The bugler was an older man. In fact, he was a drunkard. Sometimes, he would have a few drinks. I don't know where he got them, but you could tell when he slurred his bugle calls. He was a very good bugler when he was sober. Anyway, that was the start of basic training. The cavalry troop was highly mechanized and there was a lot of firepower. They had light tanks, armored half-tracks, jeeps, cannons, machine-gunners, and riflemen. My assigned weapon was a carbine, thirty caliber, lighter than the traditional M-1 rifle. We were awakened at six in the morning. We would go running through the woods around Fort Jackson before breakfast. We were a bunch of kids and had a lot of fun doing that.

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

SH: This is tape two of an interview with Mr. Andrew White on December 5, 2000. You were talking about the cavalry.

AW: Basic training was pretty tough, very rigid in physical endurance, calisthenics, close order drill, and all the things that soldiers do. We learned how to use the weapons and vehicles. We went on a firing range to shoot our rifles, machine guns, revolvers, and cannons. We had to go through an infiltration course at night, where they had you crawl for approximately one hundred yards under barbed wire through mud holes and ditches with tracer bullets over your head. … We had to carry a gas mask all the time. It was a pain in the neck, the most awkward thing, and we went into a building with tear gas to test them out and to make sure none of us panicked. You had to get used to putting the thing on and seeing through them. I'm glad we never had to fight with them, but overseas you had to carry them all the time. It was horrible, but I think towards the end of the war, they were just thrown away. I wonder what happened to all those gas masks. Sometimes we would carry goodies in them, such as candy bars, but you'd better not be caught doing that. Boy, that was frowned upon. . … The reason I got into the cavalry is because I had some musical background, and they thought I could distinguish sounds. They had a radio school in the troop compound, a little shack. … I used to go there several times a week, which was nice because you would miss some of the physical part of training. I learned the Morse code, sending and receiving on the "key." Basic training lasted three months. We couldn't go off the base, initially, and when we were able to, we had to recite some rules of good conduct, I forgot what they called them, which was kind of CS, if you know what that means. [laughter] Our passes were to Columbia, South Carolina. I often felt sorry for the civilians in those days with all those GIs around. Oh, it was horrible. The streets were full of them, although I guess it was good for the businesses. I remember having a weekend pass, went to Charleston, same type of situation, very crowded. I remember going to a dance there at the USO. In fact, I remember going to the beach outside of Charleston to go swimming. We also went on bivouacs, going out into the woods overnight and learn how to use a compass, playing games trying to find each other. Lots of ticks in those days. You had to be careful of the ticks in the pinelands in the Carolinas, but we survived.

SH: How much of a shock was the South to a boy from Linden, New Jersey?

AW: It was a shock to see the discrimination against the blacks. It was very evident not only in the military, with separate units for the black men, but in town, where they could not go to the places that we went to. When I went to school later on at Fort Riley, there were black men from other cavalry troops in my communications class. It was very evident with the separate living quarters for the black soldiers. I remember going on the train to Columbia and you could see the places where they lived along the railroad tracks in miserable little shacks. I felt sorry for them. It was kind of sad.

SH: I just wondered, what were your impressions?

AW: Yeah, there was discrimination. … We had very little contact with black soldiers. The only time I had contact with them was at Fort Riley. They did not live with us, but we were in the same classes and they were treated well, and we got along fine with the young men. There were three or four black men out of a class of twenty, learning radio procedure.

SH: Then from Fort Jackson you were sent to …

AW: At the end of basic training, I wanted to go home, but I was picked to go to Fort Riley at an advanced radio school. That was the cavalry headquarters for the mechanized cavalry. … I wanted to go home, so I approached Captain Kusell, and here I was, a nervous nineteen-year-old kid. I guess I wasn't timid and apprehensively asked him if I could have my furlough now instead of when I finished my schooling. He sternly looked at me and grinned and said, "Of course," so … I was the first one to get a furlough. … I went home to New Jersey on the famous "Silver Meteor" train, it ran from Florida to New York. I believe a train with the same name is still in existence. It was crowded with GI families, soldiers, and everyone else who wanted to travel, 'cause gas rationing was in effect by then. But I was glad to get home for a week or ten days but wasn't very happy at home. I was very bored, quite frankly, [but] glad to see my family. A lot of my friends were disappearing into service, and I really didn't do much but stay around the house. My brother was around, but he was busy with his girlfriend. … I enjoyed being home, but I was anxious to get back. So when I got back to Fort Jackson, they put me on the train from Columbia to go to Fort Riley, Kansas. I love traveling, so I enjoyed the train ride through the Carolinas, probably Kentucky, Tennessee, and wherever else it went. It took several days and my first experience on a Pullman. [laughter] At Fort Riley, I was assigned to the usual frame wooden barracks, two stories high. That was typical of the Army housing at that time. … The school was very tough. We had to go to school five and a half days a week, from eight-thirty until four or five in the afternoon, and it was a very tiring day, 'cause all day long we were sending and receiving code and working on decoding machines. At that time, we were sending the Morse code in five letter segments and able to distinguish every one of those little letters. I guess I got to do about twenty-five words a minute, sending and receiving, and learned how to do it on a typewriter, so that was interesting. We were supposed to get our sergeant's stripes after we finished and went back to our troop. … Fort Riley was a hot place in the summer, but we had a lot of fun. We played a lot of sports, volleyball and baseball, and we went to dances in Junction City outside the fort. I remember going to Manhattan, one of the state colleges was there, for a weekend, to a dance. Oh, one memory I have of Fort Riley. At night sleeping in the hot barracks, you could hear the train

whistle of the old steam engines miles away. Every time it came to a grade crossing the whistle would sound, and when it got to the fort it was real loud, then it would disappear. … When it was going toward the east, you would think, "Gee, that train is probably going home." You'd get kind of homesick. It's a beautiful sound, especially on a quiet night in the middle of Kansas, that whistle approaching miles away. That was one of my memories of Kansas. … Towards the end of our training, there was a notice posted on the bulletin board that the Army was going to start a new education program called ASTP, Army Specialized Training Program. They wanted volunteers to take the test to qualify. So my good friend, Ernie Murray, and I, rather than go back to the troop, said, "The heck with the sergeant's stripes, we want to go back to school." He had been at Michigan State for about a year. Anyway, we took the test and passed. I never had a college preparatory course in high school, but I passed the entrance test. … Our captain was livid when he heard that several of his troops were not returning, especially after receiving the advanced radio school training. Anyway, we went to the University of Wyoming in Laramie. What an experience for a nineteen-year-old kid and another train ride, and I really enjoyed seeing the West. I remember when I first saw the Rockies and I could not believe their majesty and beauty. I asked the conductor how far away, they were. He said, "Son, they are fifty miles away." The air was so clear in those days. I really enjoyed that trip. Laramie was a great town for the GIs. There weren't many GIs around, except those going to school. We were treated royally by the people. Some of the men were invited for a day out to the ranch. The food was really good, a lot of steak, because it was cattle country. We were there for a refresher course, which I welcomed, since I never had any college preparation. We had an intensive month of algebra and other college subjects. I really had problems with them and was concerned about going to college. After a month, we learned we weren't going to stay there and were going to go to another school. So my good friend Ernie Murray and Bob Mojo, who I still see, [and I] were sent to University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. They used to call it "Missoura" then, and I hear people saying "Missouri" now, but back then people said "Missoura." Anyway, Columbia, Missouri is in the center of the state. It was a great town. There were two other colleges there, Stephens College for Women, one of the prestigious colleges of the West, and Christian College, both of them for girls, so there were plenty of women around. … I remember getting off the train and all the gals from the dorms, waving to us, "Come around, boys." Anyway, I was placed in the engineering program and it was very intensive, crammed with a lot of courses. I could never do it today. Classes were from eighty-thirty to five o'clock in the afternoon, with an hour break for lunch. … We had college algebra, physics, chemistry, English, public speaking, history, and political geography. I had no trouble with the non-technical courses, such as history, geography and English. Public speaking, that was another experience, but I did fairly well. Algebra and chemistry and physics were a problem. Fortunately, I had a roommate, Stanley Helvik, out of New York City. He was a smart kid. He helped me a lot at night, doing my homework. He never went back to college. I met him in New York City about twenty years ago walking on the street. I said, "Hi, Stanley," as though we had just seen each other a day ago. He was working for the telephone company, a respectable job, but that guy should have gone to college. He was so smart. We had no military program at all. We had an hour a day of physical education that was run by the college athletic department, and they put us through the paces. We were in really good shape. We did everything … ran, played sports and the exercise was invigorating. We had quite a social life. We were invited to a lot of parties at Stephens, where I had a girlfriend. I also dated a girl from the University.

We had a lot of fun. My good friend Ernie was a lot of fun. On Saturday afternoon, when classes ended, we would go to a bar in town, play the jukebox, probably have a drink and dance. We went to all the college games, and they still had basketball and football teams. I survived the first semester, believe it or not. We lived in a dorm, actually it was a recently constructed women's dorm (without the women), and next a brand-new student union building. So we had nice quarters and the food was excellent, cafeteria style, and no military discipline.

SH: Did you have to wear a uniform?

AW: That's another funny story. It was so lax. The guys were starting to write home for colored socks. [laughter] In fact, I had a robe my mother sent me. I have some pictures of that. Even though discipline was lax, you could not miss a class. No one missed a class, but at night and weekends it was different. There was a curfew, but we would sneak out at night. The only supervision was from a sergeant and lieutenant and they were having a good time, I'm sure. The staff sergeant would ride around in a Jeep, patrolling the streets of Columbia and we'd be dodging him and sneaking back in the dorm through a window. I remember once, I can't remember the lieutenant's name, he assembled us one morning and said, "Would you take it easy? You got a good deal, don't ruin it. Take it easy, you are still in the Army." He was such a nice guy. Wonder whatever happened to him. Anyway, I survived the first semester and I had a furlough to come home by train. I guess I was home about a week or so, around Christmas, the end of the semester. I had use of the family car. I remember going to New York. In fact, there was a gal there from Stephens, who had quit Stephens and was going to Pratt Institute. I remember going out with her and another gal from the university who was visiting friends. I remember dancing at the Plaza Hotel and going to a place called the GA [German-American Club], I guess it was near the village, a real beer-drinking place. It was full of college kids, and you were bound to meet someone you know, and sure enough, we met kids from the university. That was a nice furlough, and back for my second semester. More advanced algebra, chemistry and physics, and since we were in the electrical engineering program, we had an electrical engineering lab period on Saturday morning. We had to work in this a big laboratory with generators and … it was immense, but it was fun. We didn't have computers. I learned how to use the slide rule. It wasn't easy, but I got through that second semester, and by then, the program ended. You probably heard this before, but the government said, "Well, the war is ending. I think we can send you guys back to the Army with whatever training you have." … I often heard that the only reason they had this program was to keep the colleges going. It was said that they did it because there was such a void in the schools that they had to keep the teachers there to have a program when the war ended, so they filled it with the military. Of course, the air and naval cadets were in these schools also. … About the cadets, we used to have more fun. The air cadets were in Columbia and they would be marching in rigid cadences, singing their songs, and we used to laugh at them and they'd laugh at us. … We got along with them, but they had a much different life than we did. I'm sure they had a good social life, too, but they had very strict discipline while attending college during the war.

SH: In your ASTP program, were the men from a wide geographic area?

AW: From all over the country. We became very good friends. We'd help each other during exams and with homework. The same group went from class to class.

SH: Were any of the black people from your Fort Riley class …

AW: No, there were no black soldiers in the Missouri ASTP program. I did manage to survive. I received a year's college credit, which I used for my Rutgers education later on, so that was nice and I knew I could at least handle some sort of a college curriculum …

SH: When did this the program end, at the end of the summer, the end of the term?

AW: It ended at the end of the second semester, which would be in April, or thereabouts, and we were told that we were going to be sent back in the Army and they were waiting for us. Many of us were sent to Camp Robinson outside Little Rock, Arkansas where we joined the Sixty-sixth Black Panther Division. They were a division that came out of Camp Blanding, Florida, and they had been around a while. They had their cadre, so there was little room for [us] to earn any stripes. Not many from ASTP got any kind of stripes, but it didn't matter. We were there for about a month of training, and then sent to Fort Rucker, Alabama, outside of Dothan and Enterprise, a peanut growing area. Enterprise was a real hick town. It isn't that way now, but at that time it was just a small town, again loaded with GIs. … There we had basic training again. They said, "You guys are soft," so they put us through basic training again, but we survived. I was put in a headquarters company of a battalion, connected to a regiment. I was in Battalion Headquarters Company in the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon. There might have been thirty men in that platoon. We were to build small bridges for our battalion, supply them with ammunition, and set booby traps. It is now the summer of '44.

SH: Yes.

AW: We were there for about three months, or four months, and went on maneuvers somewhere in the Carolinas, where you have a couple divisions playing war games. That went on for a week or two. I can't remember if we won or not, but that was a war game of some sort, and I guess we were ready to go overseas. We didn't know where we were going. We hoped we were going to Europe rather than the Pacific. We boarded a troop train and went north and ended up at Camp Shanks. That's in Rockland County, about thirty miles north of New York City. That was an embarkation camp and we waited to go overseas. I remember zeroing in on our rifles at a rifle range near the Bear Mountain Bridge, that's to get your rifles accurately calibrated. We had no military exercises except marches through the countryside. Let me tell you about Reese Dygert, a very good friend of mine. He was a little older than myself. He was married and he and another man had their wives at Fort Rucker. We had total security, and you weren't supposed to tell anyone where you were going. They had told the wives where they were going and when we arrived at Camp Shanks, their wives called the camp asking for their husbands. Poor Reese, I can't remember the other guy's name. They were put under arrest for telling of their whereabouts. They were threatened with court-martial and placed under barracks arrest there. His friends had to be the ones guarding him with a loaded rifle, and he could not leave camp to see his wife and she was pregnant. I did go to New York City one day, and I came home to Linden. My father and mother were

glad to see me. I didn't do much but stay around the house; I was only home for a day. They knew I was going overseas. I couldn't tell them where I was, total security, but they surmised I was going overseas. … My father was a veteran from World War I. I remember him taking me to the train station in Newark, and he had tears in his eyes when we said goodbye and he hugged me, the first time I remember my father hugging me. He wasn't that type of man, but he was proud of me. After several days, we had orders to pack. We were in good shape, as was our equipment. We boarded the train at night. We went to the docks of the Holland American Lines in Hoboken and to the Lackawanna Ferry and taken across the Hudson River, where we boarded a troop ship, the *George Washington*. They said it had been a German passenger ship before World War I, and one of the war booties the US had in mothballs since World War I. It was reconditioned as a troop ship, and I guess it had 10,000 men on it. The Marines were onboard to man the antiaircraft guns. We moved out to the lower bay and assembled there. They said it was one of the largest convoys to ever leave the States. We were in the center of the convoy, and when you were away from the coast, around us were all the freighters, destroyers, and there were even one or two aircraft carriers, and perhaps battleships. We were pretty well centered amongst all those ships. They had to hit a lot of ships before they got to us. The trip across was in the middle of the winter in the Atlantic. We were housed in the hold of the ship. They had built bunks six tiers high, and you had to go down a wooden stair to your berth. It was warm enough, and we ate in shifts. You had to stand up and eat. Considering you were on a ship, it was adequate. Nothing to do. We did calisthenics on deck. There were so many men you couldn't move around easily and we did a lot of reading. It took about ten days for the crossing of the Atlantic. As we neared the continent, the ship started doing a zigzag pattern, and I remember destroyers throwing over depth charges and we could hear the ping on the side of our ship. It didn't bother us. We surmised they were practicing. Within a day or two, we were inside the English Channel and you could see the cliffs on the shoreline. … We went to Southampton and went to a camp outside of Manchester. We were now told that we were going to be the army of occupation, the war was going so well … This was now December. We were going to sit out the war there, so we didn't mind that. We had passes. I went to London with my friend, Reese Dygert, and we had a great weekend, saw all the sights, the Parliament Building, Trafalgar Square, and Westminster Abbey, and there was a total blackout. We could see the war damage. People were busy, bustling about. Everyone was employed. There were young boys and older men working on the railroads.

SH: Were you amazed at the destruction that you saw?

AW: Yes. We could see the bombed out buildings around London, but they cleaned it up as best they could. They piled the debris neatly on the sides of the building or in front of it them. But it was total blackout. We experienced the Underground, their subway system, which was also their shelter during bombings. But by then, I think the Germans didn't have much of an Air Force left, the war supposedly was going so well. The Allied forces were approaching the Bulge. Christmas Eve was approaching, and our cooks were preparing our turkey dinner. Turkeys were slowly roasting in our field kitchen stoves. We had turkeys and the trimmings for Christmas. They were big black stoves fired by kerosene and set out in the field. I'm not sure the exact time, it might have been 23rd, or early morning the 24th, they said there was a change in plans. We learned about the Battle of the Bulge and were going to replace the guys

that were captured or killed in the Bulge, so we had to dump all that food out on the ground and pack up all our kitchen and military equipment and move out to Weymouth, near Southampton. In the early morning of the 24th, we boarded a troop ship, smaller than the *George Washington*, called the *Leopoldville*. It had been a cargo-passenger ship, considered a luxury line of sorts, going to the Congo prior to the war, and, again, I was in one of those holds, where they had hammocks instead of bunks, since this was a British ship, but it was only a short trip across the Channel. We weren't sure where we were going, but we knew we were going somewhere in France. … It was a small convoy. I don't think there were more than one or two ships and about two or three destroyers. We were approaching land and could see twinkling lights about six o'clock at night, when we heard this loud noise. I was down in the hold. We had heard depth charges before, but it sounded like more than that. We went on deck, the lights were still on, the motors had stopped, and we were told that either a torpedo or a floating mine hit the ship, but "don't worry" … We weren't too concerned, and thought we probably would be towed in to port or beached. No announcements or alarm of any sort was sounded. We saw the ships' officers scurrying about, and soon, the crew, who were Congolese, were getting into the life boats and they didn't know how to launch them. They were capsizing and dumped into the sea, kind of sad. … As time went by, the ship started to list toward the stern, and the destroyers were going around us in circles dropping depth charges. At one time, a British destroyer, came alongside and tried to take men off, which was very difficult in the rough sea. Some men did jump across when the two ships bounced close together. Some missed and were lost at sea, but a lot of men were able to jump across. I was in the forward part of the *Leopoldville*, standing on the rail, and I thought when the bows of the ships were near each other I could jump across, but it would have been suicide. I decided not do that. I figured it's better to stay with the ship until something happens, so after two hours or so, the ship was really sinking and some of the crew were trying to lower the rafts. I don't think any of the rafts were ever lowered properly. But none of the soldiers got into the rafts. There was never any kind of signal to abandon ship. About eight-thirty, or thereabouts, the ship was going down rather fast. We threw ropes over the side with knots in them, and this man, maybe a little older than I, decided to go down the side. The ship was now sinking rapidly. He went down first and last thing I remember him saying was, "Andy, I can't swim." I never saw him again. But I kicked off the ship. … Probably the water hit me first, before I got down to it, but I kicked off and started swimming away. I did make some progress, and I did look back and saw the ship go down. A lot of my friends were on that ship, and some of them actually stayed with the ship when it went down, but they were able to float to the surface. There was no suction that kept them submerged. It's interesting, we were all a bunch of young kids and every one of my platoon buddies that hit the water was saved.

SH: Really?

AW: Yeah, it's amazing. Anyway, it was cold on that December 24th. The British were criticized that they did not immediately notify Cherbourg that we were sinking. Apparently, they notified England, but the message never got to Cherbourg we were sinking. But that's history. The Americans in Cherbourg were also criticized, 'cause they were partying and couldn't believe a ship was sinking that close to shore, so there was a delay in sending any rescue vessels out. Eventually, they did come out. I doubt if I was in the water more that fifteen or twenty minutes and would not have survived because of hypothermia. I saw a

tugboat coming towards me, an American tugboat. … I was yelling my head off and it went right by me. I doubt if anyone heard me. [laughter]

SH: Oh, no.

AW: After a little while, another one came towards me. It was going fast. It almost passed me. I was yelling when all of a sudden someone on deck threw a rope with a life ring at the end of it. I grabbed it and hung onto it, but they wouldn't pull me in. They were dragging me like a surfer. But, eventually, I was dragged in. Then I realized how cold I was. I don't remember feeling cold in the water, but once I grabbed that life preserver, I had trouble holding when they pulled me up onto the tugboat. … They told me to stay in the bow with a lot of other men who had been picked up. They gave me a blanket and I just huddled there. We weren't able to get into the cabin of the ship until later on. They gave us some coffee. It was a tragedy that probably could have been avoided if they had acted sooner. There were 800 men lost of 2,000. We always felt it could have been avoided. … The sad part about it is there are families, even to this day, that don't know what happened to their loved ones, because the British were embarrassed and they asked Eisenhower not to publicize it back home. It never made the press. … It wasn't until about four or five years ago that a documentary was filmed for the History Channel and it went through this whole episode, and the British refused to show it. There was some recognition in Congress, but we always felt there should have been more recognition for the men lost on the ship. Those who hit the water, and I was one of them, were awarded Purple Hearts for exposure. I still have mine and it helped in getting me home sooner because of the extra points. But it was a tragedy. It helped me personally in a few other ways. We could have been up at the Battle of the Bulge, because the 106th Division, in which I had my basic training, was the division that was caught there, and my friends in the Recon troop were killed or taken prisoner. I could have been one of them. They were green troops. Secondly, we were going to replace these men and we missed that.

SH: When the *Leopoldville* sunk, it was about six o'clock in the morning?

AW: Night.

SH: At night.

AW: Yeah.

SH: Six o'clock at night. Did you have to wait all night long?

AW: It sunk in two and a half hours at eight-thirty that evening.

SH: Was there some daylight to help with the rescue?

AW: Oh, no. It was pitch dark when I was rescued. That's probably why they didn't see me, a little speck in the rough water. A lot of men panicked when they hit the water. There probably were hundreds of men in the water. I realized I could not help anybody, because if

someone grabbed me, I would have drowned. So I decided to stay clear of all the crowds and just swim away. You could float with a life jacket, but a lot of men panicked, probably the guy who went down the rope with me panicked. I was a good swimmer …

SH: Were there any directions given by any of the officers?

AW: No, we had no one in charge to tell us what to do. We did everything on our own. Some jumped into the water earlier, some jumped when the ship went down, and some stayed with the ship. But we never had any officer tell us what to do. Some of my friends were well on their way to the Bulge. We went over in waves and they had to be pulled back when the tragedy occurred.

SH: What were the casualties on the *Leopoldville*?

AW: Approximately 800 casualties.

SH: You said there were Marines on board, too …

AW: Not this ship.

SH: Not this one?

AW: They were on the *George Washington.*

SH: Oh, okay, the one that brought you to England.

AW: Yeah, our troopship coming overseas. In a way, it was a blessing for those who survived, because now we were not going to the Bulge. We went to Rennes and reassembled. It's funny, some men didn't get back to us for about a week or so. One guy in my platoon said, "Oh, I was picked up by a Frenchman and he invited me to stay with him for the duration of the war." He was a guy from Arkansas. We assembled at a bombed-out airfield in Rennes and went to Lorient and Saint-Nazaire, which were two pockets that housed the Atlantic German submarine fleet. … That's where a lot of Germans escaped to when they were cut off from the rest of the German forces. The division who was there went to the Bulge and they didn't like that. We passed them on the road and they were very unhappy about going to the Bulge, because they had a good deal on the coast. The first night, we went to an area outside of Plouay, a little village, and typical of the military, they gave orders to dig foxholes. … My friends, Reese Dygert, Bob Gross and I decided, "We're not that close to the front line, we're not going to dig any foxholes, we're going to go to sleep," so we found a little depression in the terrain and pooled our blankets, three on the bottom and about six on the top of us, and I was in the middle. That's the warmest night I ever had in Europe. During the night it had snowed, and we were completely covered in snow. In the morning, everyone was looking for White, Dygert, and Gross, and they could not find us until someone tripped over us. We were in the middle of everybody, under the snow, and were reprimanded but nothing serious. It was decided that this would be our bivouac area for awhile and were told to dig in. We were going to supply our battalion forces with ammunition, engineering services and set booby traps. We

had a lot of freedom. We roamed the countryside with our truck and became scavengers. We found all kinds of building materials from bombed out buildings. We dug underground shelters, about four or five feet deep with a roof of logs and corrugated steel and sod cover, and we found potbelly stoves. … We had plenty of wood around, although the French didn't like us cutting down their trees, and we had a supply of coal. I can't remember where it came from. But we had stoves in those shelters. There were about six men to each little hut. Everyone was very ingenious in building the huts. I wish I had pictures of that area. It was warm for the winter, and we were guarding our ammunition dump, building small bridges, repairing roads, but we had a lot of time to roam the countryside. Reese Dygert and I really had fun. We used to go out with our French-English translation book and visit the countryside. With our cigarettes, chocolate, candy bars and soap, we would barter for fresh eggs. We craved fresh eggs. For a pack of cigarettes, or a bar of soap, we could get a helmet full of eggs, probably a dozen or so. We went to one farmer who had all the other farmers' supply of eggs in a big bin full in his huge kitchen. We liked to visit, 'cause he would share his cider. We bartered for cider. They drank cider in that part of France. It was their table drink, so we drank cider also. We found a yard engine in an old foundry, a small engine, and we repaired it. There was about half a mile of track, and we learned how to operate that thing back and forth on the track. We used to try to stop it before we hit the bumper at the end. It was a lot of fun taking turns playing engineer. We often went into the village of …

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

AW: … Quimper. We met a family and were invited for dinner. I had the most delicious dinner. I think the basic food was eggs with vegetables, but it was my first experience with the French cooking, and how well they could do with the simplest foods. It tasted so good. That evening, we invited them to go to the little cinema in town, and the young gal said, "Oh, sure, but you have to take my mother, too," so we took this young girl and her mother. Reese was married, but he was a good guy, he never fooled around. I admired him for that; he was a good, wholesome guy, but he liked a good time. We had a lot of fun. … Outside Quimper, we found a bombed-out ice cream factory. With some of the French men who had worked there, we got the plant running again and donated our condensed milk, sugar, and whatever else they needed. We made ice cream for the kids. Some of them had never tasted ice cream. That was quite a sight to see that. Brittany was a very primitive area at that time and most of the transportation was by horse and wagon and the people wore wooden shoes. During the week, they were very plain, but on Sunday, when they went to Mass, the shoes were etched with decorative designs and sometimes with silver buckles. The women wore fancy lace aprons and a huge white starched hat that extended out like wings. It was interesting to see them.

SH: Did you go to Mass, too?

AW: Yeah. On Sunday when the chaplain came around for Mass, the hood of a jeep was the altar. We built a chapel for our chaplain that was partially underground. It was actually a building of sorts and we also had meetings there, but it was open-sided. … All our meals were eaten outdoors. We ate all our meals in the field, wherever we were. We had our mess kits and coffee was welcome. I learned to like coffee. I did drink it before the war, but we

welcomed a cup of coffee from our canteen cup. It was steaming hot. It would just warm your hands in the wintertime, a fond remembrance.

SH: Did you feel that the French were very welcoming of the American GIs?

AW: Oh, yeah, they were, we had no problem with them. They liked us, 'cause we gave them food, and we shared our goodies with them. For a bar of Octagon soap (a brown soap in the shape of an octagon), we could get our laundry done and they would have soap left for their own use. The women would pound those olive drab uniforms on the stone slabs in cold streams and they would come back nice and clean and pressed. They had no soap during the war. There was a lot of body odor in Europe at that time, and it's still there in some parts of Europe. We've been to Europe a number of times, and in some areas, they don't have the degree of hygiene that we have.

SH: Did you have the opportunity to use your skills as a radio operator?

AW: I never became a radio operator. We eventually moved out of the Plouay area and went to another area closer to the so-called front. We never had much action. I never shot my rifle. I don't think many men did shoot a gun in a battle situation, even though they may claim they did. They say for every man in actual battle there are ten men backing him up behind the lines. We set a lot of booby traps. I often wonder who ever deactivated those booby traps. We used to set them with hand grenades on the end of a trip wire. We left charts of these areas, but I wonder how many people were hurt, or even killed, by those booby traps. My good friend, Reese said to me one day, "Gee, it's kind of quiet here, Andy. They need a replacement up at our cannon platoon." They were at a bombed out monastery overlooking the so-called front and had to stand guard in a pillbox twenty-four hours a day. What happened is one of the men on guard during the night had taken his grenade and pulled the pin out of it and would place the triggered grenade under the lapel of his overcoat. When he came off guard duty, in taking his overcoat off, the grenade fell to the ground. That's when he remembered he pulled the pin out. Fortunately, he had enough sense to jump on it, but it exploded under his stomach. He was killed instantly and the man with him was injured, and fortunately the men sleeping nearby in the basement of the monastery were uninjured. The shrapnel did fly around, but he was the only one killed. But, anyway, we volunteered to replace those two men. Reese said, "It's only going to be for a couple of days, Andy. Let's see what's going on up there." So I said, "Okay, but you don't volunteer in the service." [laughter] So we went up there, since we knew the men. They were from our company in a different platoon. We got into their routine, but Reese was sent back within a couple of days to our platoon, and I was there by myself, even though I knew them. I didn't get back to my platoon for another two weeks. … It was very interesting there, because it had been a monastery and taken over by the Germans as a submariner's school and dormitory. … I used to roam around that old building. The whole thing was bombed out upstairs and we lived in the basement. I found a lot of old photographs of the submariners. I even found some photographs of the Allied ships they torpedoed, I have them somewhere, and some old German epaulets and some medals. … We had booby trapped the entire upper floors with tin cans on top of each other, so if someone walked in the halls above us, they would make a lot of noise, and we also placed a lot of hand grenades tied to trip wires. But we didn't have any problems. Cats once in a while would trip a pile of cans or bottles. … One evening, I had an experience with, I

can relate, nothing hazardous, but in middle of the night, sitting at the hedgerow, you hear all kinds of sounds. … At night, you hear the "cloppity-clop" of the horses, when they would take supplies to the German troops, and once and a while, you'd hear them talking. But one evening, when I was out there, it might have been two o'clock in the morning; we heard a lot of rustling in front of our pillbox. We assumed they were Germans, so we cranked our hand-phone and woke the guys up in the monastery. … They came out and we decided that just in case there was someone lurking there, we all threw hand grenades over the wall but nothing happened. We went there in the morning and found footprints, so it probably was a German patrol going by. In our new bivouac area, we were also very ingenious. We again had to build our own huts, and Reese and I had our own this time, but it was above ground. It was behind a hedgerow, so the fire from the enemy would go over the hedgerow. We constructed our hut from building material found around the countryside. In fact, our motor pool was ingenious. They found an old generator and put together an electrical system. We found a lot of wires and old bulbs, and in our little dugouts, we had electric lighting. We always laugh when we talk about it. We had so many lights, we were overloading our system, but we actually had electricity throughout our compound. There was another episode I'd like to relate, and, as I said, I never saw any action, but I volunteered again with Reese one evening. They wanted to destroy a little house that was between our lines, outside of Hennebont, and Lieutenant McMinn, Reese and maybe two others went there in a jeep at night. We parked the jeep behind a cemetery wall and went to the headquarters of the rifle company. They had said this old farmhouse was used as an outpost for the Germans between the lines. They wanted it taken away, so that was our task, to blow it up. We crawled out there and wired that thing with dynamite. We hit the plunger and ran for the village and within seconds the Germans were bombarding us with their 88s, a deadly weapon. … We jumped under the beds and tables and plaster was falling all around. Fortunately, the fire from the Germans was coming down the street, the shells would land in the street, some on the buildings, but there were about half a dozen buildings between us and the German lines, so unless they had a direct hit on our roof, they weren't going to get us. We got out of there fast. The guys didn't like what we had done, disturbing their quiet front. That was one experience I had under fire, and about the only time I was under fire. The Germans had 50,000 men in Lorient and Saint-Nazaire. We were a division of about 15,000 men, so we were outnumbered. There were very few skirmishes, just artillery fire back and forth. We lost more men from accidents probably than from any enemy action. I knew one young man who did a foolish thing. We'd get gasoline and pour it in a wine bottle and put in a rope and light it and that became our candle. This young man was carrying one and dropped it. It exploded and he was killed instantly, so that was the kind of accident that occurred, including those involving Army vehicles. We had one artillery barrage while we were eating. Fortunately, we had a rule to disperse when eating, so I think maybe one man was killed. But nothing else ever happened; we were very quiet. … When the war ended, our regiment went into Lorient. The fortifications the Germans built were unbelievable. They had bunkers and underground tunnels, a very elaborate system, and we were kind of glad we never had to attack the city. They were starving, both the Germans and the poor civilians. They had little gardens here and there. We saw one of the kitchens the Germans had. A huge kettle of cabbage had been there for days, and that was about all they were eating, plus perhaps turnips and what little bread they baked. They were isolated. The submarine pens were never touched by the Allies. The Allies bombed them many times, but the roofs over those pens were ten to twelve feet thick of reinforced concrete. All they'd do was dent it. The submarines were intact in the pens, and we saw them. We were only there a short

time. When the war ended, we were given warm cases of beer to celebrate, we shot off our rifles, and that was the war's end for us. … Now we didn't know where we were going, perhaps to the Pacific. We soon learned we were going to be the army of occupation. I really traveled a lot around Europe. We got on our trucks and went to Coblenz, Germany. It was now springtime, and what a beautiful ride from Lorient across France. We saw vineyards and crossed the Rhine River and ended up in Coblenz on the Rhine, a lovely old town untouched by war. … We had confiscated a Nazi family's house, so we had nice quarters, well furnished. The family came around to maintain it. In fact, the grandfather used to come around and bring us wine that he had buried and we would give him cigarettes for it. We weren't supposed to fraternize, but we did. There were two young children, a girl about fifteen and very bitter towards Americans. She had a younger brother and we used to give him chocolate and little goodies, but she really did not like the Americans. You can understand why. She played the accordion, by the way, and I borrowed it a couple of times. I have some music I had copied from her, a lovely girl. But we only stayed there a month. Oh, one experience I had there, Reese and I were very adventuresome men. We used to roam around the countryside and along the Rhine River. On the cliff above the river, we came to a cave full of art treasures from churches or museums. No one was around, the gate was open, and all these beautiful paintings were just stacked against the walls. I often wonder what happened to those art treasures. We didn't touch anything. This is a Catholic area of Germany, and they had a May procession in town. It was really beautiful.

SH: What town was that?

AW: Coblenz.

SH: Is that where you saw the paintings?

AW: Yeah, outside Coblenz in the cave. In the procession, the people were dressed in native costumes and little girls had baskets of flower petals and were throwing them in front of the procession, so pretty. We were only there about a month and were told that we had another assignment. We were back in our trucks again, going to southern France outside of Arles above Marseilles and were going to run an embarkation camp for those men going to Japan. Good thing it wasn't us, but we didn't mind that, so we had another nice trip across France in a truck. … We settled on a farm with a pecan orchard. It was an arid area, and the camp that housed the men going overseas was just a dustbowl, but we were fortunate to be in a pecan orchard on a farm. There were about twenty men in each large tent. We were in charge of transportation and had trucks to transport the men to their place of embarkation and to the beach. We weren't far from the Mediterranean, and we used to swim there. We learned how to drive those huge trucks. That was fun. … I remember swimming in the Mediterranean and they still had big mines in the water, big round spheres. They said they were deactivated, but you'd kick off one of those things, frightening, because they were full of explosives. I also remember swimming in the Rhone River. We had a lot of free time. We went to Arles. It's a historic city. … Reese and I went to the ruins of a Roman theatre and decided to bring back a souvenir, which is forbidden today. We found a piece of cornice approximately three by six inches in two sections and broke it in half and said, "Someday, we're going to join these two pieces together." I still have mine and he has his. … He lives in New Port Richey, Florida, and we often talk about meeting someday and put them together. I often thought we ought to send them back to Arles. I used my

half as a paperweight in my office for years. We'd probably get arrested if we did that today. … We enjoyed that area. We went into Avignon on the Rhone River, and once in a while were able to get a jeep to go there, but there was always a truck going there everyday. … We made friends with a couple of civilians, a young man and a young woman. I became friendly with the young woman who spoke English. We would meet her and we'd swim in the Rhone River. We even made our own bathing suits. We got some material that went through our crotch and tied it around our waist. That was our bathing suit. … She would come to the beach and get undressed right in her dress. She'd shimmy out of her underwear and put her bathing suit on under her dress. It was a very lovely old city. The Pope was there during a period in the Catholic Church when there were two Popes, one in Rome and one in Avignon for several hundred years. They were starting to get luxuries now that the war was over there, and there were little cafes with music in the afternoon and you would sit there, have a glass of wine and dance. Kind of sad, my wife and I took a trip through France twenty years ago, for a whole month, I wanted to retrace my steps. You don't go back. We went to Avignon and along the Rhone River, where we swam, it is now a big parking lot.

SH: Oh, no.

AW: Outside the walled city, it's just full of parking lots, and the town square in front of the Pope's palace, I think they built buildings on it and there is a garage underneath it, which isn't bad. But I was very disappointed seeing what had happened since my previous visit. You don't go back. We were in that part of southern France until the war ended with Japan. … Then the point system came into effect, and my friend Reese had enough points, being married with a child, and went home. I did not have enough of points to go home, even though I had a Purple Heart, which gave me five extra [points]. I had to stay awhile, so I was sent to Austria to a place called Saalfelden, a small village outside of Salzburg. … When the war ended in Japan, our division was deactivated. I was now put in the Forty-Second Rainbow Division. I was assigned to a headquarters company in Saalfelden. … There was nothing to do there; we had no duties. I don't remember doing anything but hanging around, so my good friend then became John McLain from Pennsylvania, and he and I had a lot of fun. He was from my original platoon. We went hunting for wild goats up in the mountains. We never shot any; we couldn't shoot the poor things and roamed around that countryside. We were able to converse with the civilians with the help of our German-English dictionaries. I remember meeting a couple of young ladies once at the railroad station, the train ended there. We asked them if we could walk them home, what a lovely day that was, they said, "Sure." We did not realizing that the trip would take all day to get them home. But it was like *Sound of Music* scenery, going over the small hills and cross-country, and the gals just led us along. … We stopped at a farmer's hut on the way and he was very gracious and he gave us lunch of fresh milk, cheese and homemade bread. He was getting ready to take his cows down to the lower pastures for the winter. … We went onto this little village, where the girls lived. I can't remember the name of the town. It was dark when we got there, and they said goodbye to us but found us lodging. We slept in a big feather bed. Next morning, they put us on a bus and we got back to Saalfelden. We had nothing to eat; I think we might have had some rations in our pocket. When we returned to Saalfelden, no one missed us, an indication of the lax atmosphere is the army of occupation at that time. Mac and I were together for about a month or so, I guess, I don't know what happened, but we got separated. I was now by myself in Salzburg, living in a former hotel with no former wartime buddies. I

remember it was cold, no heat, washing with cold water, and there was a hof-brau house in the basement of the hotel, with a lot of music on Saturday nights and dancing. I volunteered to work in a prisoner of war camp outside of Salzburg in the airport. It was a camp where we were discharging Austrian prisoners back into civilian life. They said they needed someone there as a clerk, and I could type, I had taken typing in high school, so I said "I'll go." I became the clerk. There were about three or four of us living within a camp similar to a concentration camp, with barbed wire all around the barracks. We lived within this compound with the prisoners. We felt very secure; the war was over and the prisoners wanted to get out of the service. We had guards in towers at each corner of the compound with bright lights shining along with fencing. We didn't handle the actual discharge. There was a warrant officer that came every day with several soldiers and they did the actual work, but we maintained the camp, made sure the prisoners were fed and ran transportation out of the camp. That was good duty. I was a PFC; by the way, I made PFC before I went overseas. We each had an orderly; they would shave us in the morning and wash our clothes. I also had a lot of free time. I often went to Salzburg, went to Midnight Mass at the cathedral, and I think the Vienna Boys' Choir was singing. Their voices were beautiful, echoing throughout the cavernous cathedral.

SH: Did you see any displaced persons?

AW: I became friends with a young lady who was a displaced person. She came from Poland and lived in an Army barracks. They had a whole bunch of displaced persons there. Many of these people worked as slave laborers for the Germans during the war. They weren't doing any sort of work but they were getting food stamps. I used to give them food. There were two girls and a boy. I was young, too. I guess by that time, I twenty-one years old. They had to be eighteen or nineteen. In Saalfelden, I met another young lady. I wanted to take her out. She was a very pretty girl, and she came from Yugoslavia. She lived with her mother in a single room and her father was Hungarian. Her father wasn't around; he was lost in the war. I wanted to take her out, but her mother said, "You can't take her out unless you marry her." I said, "No, I'm not going to marry her." [laughter] But she was a pretty girl. I have a picture of her somewhere. All the kitchen help in Saalfelden were displaced persons; that's where they worked. We had no kitchen duty. They worked in our kitchen and were fed and paid. They liked that 'cause they were being fed. They were good cooks. There were a lot of Polish and Slovak people around Salzburg, I recall. I met some Jewish displaced persons. I met one Jewish man who had been in the concentration camp. He showed me his arm with the tattoo on it with his number… I think I met him in Salzburg. A lot of displaced persons worked for the Army.

SH: The men that were coming out of the prisoner of war camp, how quickly were you able to process them out?

AW: A lot of these men had been in Norway with the Germans. They never wanted to be in the war, just like us. Most of them were older. They were very artistic. In fact, I have some drawings they made for me, paintings and also woodcarvings. They were a very nice bunch of men. They were there for about a week or so, if they had no unfavorable military history. We would give them some German or Austrian marks and transport them into Salzburg and from there they were on their own. A lot of them came from Vienna. A few men, who worked for us in our barracks, were Viennese, nice older men who for some reason could not be discharged

immediately. I'd say they were in their forties but very well educated and spoke good English. It's interesting during that period, our American soldiers were rapidly leaving Austria. … In that little group of ours, there was a sergeant in charge of the group inside the camp. There were a couple of other guys, I can't remember their names, and our first lieutenant, who came around once a day, a very nice man. … I was only there several weeks, but within a week after arriving, the sergeant was going home and said, "Andy, you're in charge now. Maybe we could get you some stripes," so I was in charge of that little group as a PFC, which I liked. It was interesting keeping records of the prisoners being discharged and ordering supplies for the camp. The lieutenant, before he was going home, said, "Andy, why don't you stay in the Army? You're young, you're only twenty-one years old, and we could get you into OCS." They had OCS in Germany. He said, "You're a young man, and I think you have the qualifications with your wartime experience. You can teach a lot to the young men." Anyway, I said, "No, I'm going home." That was the end of February. I had enough of points to go home, but I contracted strep throat. I was so sick. I went to the medics, and they said, "Andy, you can't go home. You're too sick to ride in the '40 and 8s'." They were boxcars that could carry forty horses and/or eight men. I said, " I want to go home." So the doctor gave me a sulfa drug. When I boarded that boxcar, I was really miserable. I couldn't swallow, but I kept taking the medicine and drank a lot of water. But despite my illness, I really enjoyed that train trip in the boxcar. We were sitting, our legs dangling out the boxcar door, going through Germany and seeing all the devastation. I think we ended up in Le Havre, France. They had big Army camps, full of tents and men getting ready to go home. I was by myself. All my friends were dispersed. A funny incident was the Catholic men going to confession. There were more men going to confession, I guess, to confess their promiscuity during the war. What a big line. I'll never forget that. They were all going to confession for a clean conscience. That was a humorous event. Anyway, I boarded the troopship. Oh, I want to tell you something. May I backtrack a little?

SH: Sure, please do.

AW: When I was in Saalfelden, I had the opportunity to go on a furlough to Rome. They provided us with a lot of opportunities for various experiences. Some men went to schools during that period. My friend Bob Mojo went to a school in Berritz, France. Not many men wanted to go to Rome, because they had to go part way by truck in the middle of the winter, on a two and a half ton truck, with partially open sides, but being the curious person as I am, I wanted to see Rome. "I may never see it again." So we went to Innsbruck and by truck we drove through the Brenner Pass. I have a picture of me standing at the Brenner Pass, snow all around me. We froze in back of that truck. I'm not sure how many days it took us to get across the Alps, probably a day or so, I can't remember where we slept, but I remember we ended up at one of those beautiful lakes in northern Italy. … They put us up in a villa on the lake, a beautiful scene, nice beds, and breakfast. It was now warmer and we boarded a fast train and zipped into Rome. It was a beautiful train. The Army had taken over Mussolini's military academy built during the war and it was very lavish. They had a structure and called it the "Marble Stadium," made of marble with marble statues around it. It's still there. I saw it when we went back to Rome in later years. We lived in large dorms, but very comfortable, and had good food. They took good care of us. … It wasn't in the inner city, but in the suburbs, and they had special buses to take us into the city. … We had tours, and I had an audience with the Pope. I think I sat about ten feet from the Pope.

SH: Oh, my.

AW: … I had purchased Rosary Beads and had them blessed by the Pope. I still have them. They were for my mother, and it was very touching scene. Many of the people there were Italian women. I believe the audience was in the Sistine Chapel. He sat on the throne and I was in the front row. … The Italian women were trying to touch him. It was a very stirring experience. I went through the Vatican Library, Saint Peter's, the Catacombs, saw the Spanish Steps, Pantheon and all the other historic sites. I saw everything and I couldn't see enough. I just enjoyed it tremendously. I'd read about all these places, and it was worth going part way by truck. Then I went back to Salzburg the same way, via train and truck through the Italian and Austrian Alps, and back to Saalfelden. … That was in February, but I had to tell you about that experience. That was a great trip. I guess we're back in Le Havre. I boarded a Liberty ship called the *Partridge*, a freighter that had been converted to a troopship with the same kind of holds with multiple berths.

SH: Did you have any trepidation about getting back on a ship?

AW: No, not really, but it was a stormy Atlantic. It was March 11th, and it took us ten days to go across, no convoy. Those Liberty ships were sturdy, but fragile in many ways. I remember it would bounce, "boom, boom, boom." You'd hear this all night. Waves would also come over the bow of the ship, but we were anxious to get home. I met one friend of mine on board ship. It was a coincidence, Joe Koloski. He was from my original outfit and now on the same ship with me. We had a lot of laughs about our days overseas. … He was an older man and we used to call him the "Old Man," kiddingly. I used to travel a lot when I was employed and happened to be on a business trip in Des Moines. That's where Joe came from. He was married, had a child and owned a gas station there, and he always said that after the war, he'd go back to his gas station. His wife ran the gas station while he was in the service. … I went to his gas station. His attendant said, "Oh, Joe, he just went home." I called him up, and Joe answered, "Come on over Andy, I want to see you." I had a very lovely visit with Joe and his wife. They had a nice little home. He had lived there before the war. I asked Joe, "How old were you when I was eighteen or nineteen?" He said, "Andy, I was probably about thirty years old." I said, "I want to apologize for myself and everyone else who teased you about being an old man." His wife roared when she heard that. It's interesting, I had to get some documentation recently and I had lost contact with Joe, since I visited him in Des Moines years ago. I never kept in touch with him, and I wanted to get verification about the *Leopoldville* and I did reach him this past summer. His wife had passed away. His daughter was now married, and she was living on the West Coast. … He has since passed away, but I did get the letter I wanted from him. What a first rate guy. We arrived in New York Harbor around the 20th. The military always had bands playing on tugboats to meet you in the harbor. I remember the tugboat, early in the morning with this band playing. … We docked in Staten Island and then went by train across the island and into the Elizabeth and Newark area and onto the Pennsylvania Railroad. Going through Linden, I was only about half a mile from my house, couldn't see it, but I was that close to it. We sped by and went to Fort Dix for the discharge procedure. … Another mishap, I contacted scabies, a skin ailment you get from being unclean. I guess I contracted it on the troopship or in the boxcar. I never had it during the service. Anyway, I had scabies, and they had a quickie

treatment, the Army knew what to do. I had to spend three days in Camp Kilmer to go through this de-scabies treatment. It was in a barracks, there might have been a hundred men in there, and you had to surrender all your clothing. They gave you a new pair of shorts, that's all you wore, but the building was heated. … All you did was every hour, you sprayed yourself with what looked like brown kerosene. You sprayed your whole body, and after the three days, you were considered cured and went back to Fort Dix, [where] I was discharged. … The scabies did reoccur, by the way, and I had to go to the doctor. It wasn't easy to get rid of. I had it for several months after that. … Anyway, I was given three dollars for carfare and my mustering out-pay of a couple hundred dollars and onto a bus outside of Fort Dix. The bus was going through Linden. … I got off in Linden in the morning and walked two blocks to my house, [where] my mother was home and in tears. … The first thing she did was look for my arms, she thought I had lost my arms, because when I was in Arles, Reese and I had a picture taken, and we were in our fatigues and I think I had a cigarette in my mouth. I didn't smoke, but we tried everything then, and I had my arms behind my back. My mother thought I had lost my arms during the war, and she never wrote to me about the photo, she was afraid to ask. So the first thing she did when I got home was check my hands and arms. They were there, and she was very happy. I took my uniform off and into some civilian clothes. I never had my uniform on since that day, and that's the end of my story.

SH: When did you first start thinking about using the GI Bill?

AW: Oh, I should mention this as part of my experience, because that's part of the Army, too. I always felt I grew up in the Army, I really did. I was a kid, eighteen going on nineteen. I came out when I was just twenty-two, and it was a great experience for me. Fortunately, I never had any great hardships, one disaster that almost cost me my life, but other than that you forget all about the hardships. We griped a lot; we always griped. Sit and wait, that type of thing. You remember the nice and humorous events, and that's why I am relating all the funny things that happened. That's how I like to remember the war years. I must have been blessed by the good Lord because twice, I could have been in some terrible situations. There was a book written about our division in 1963. It was called *The Night Before Christmas*, and the author, a member of our division, is still living. He is working for a newspaper down in Tampa, but he'd never take any active role in our veteran's organization. There have been other books written about our division, especially about the *Leopoldville* disaster. In fact, I met a man within the last year, Allan Andrade, from Flushing, New York, a younger man and not a veteran of the division. He has taken a great interest in our division and our disaster and has done a lot to make the public and the government aware of our disaster. He's written two books about it, total stranger to us, and I keep I touch with Alan, a very nice man. For the last twenty years, I've belonged to a veteran's organization for my division. I never knew they had one. I worked in New York City, and I saw in the paper they were going to have a Memorial Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral for the men lost on the *Leopoldville*. Cathy and I went to the service, and it was there that I learned that they had a veteran's organization.

SH: Is this the Black Panthers?

AW: They had a reception in one of the hotels in New York and I met a lot of people there, none I knew, but I did join them and we have reunions every two years. We will have one this spring

in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. We go all over the country. I've been to Seattle, Las Vegas area and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I'm not active in the organization, but I am a member. We were known as the Black Panther Division.

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

SH: … This is tape three of an interview with Mr. Andrew White. December the 5th, the year 2000, in Summit. Please, you were telling me about the Black Panther Division.

AW: Interestingly, during the period when the Black Panthers, a black organization, was very active, many of their members wanted to join our organization, and we kept telling them that we were a veteran's organization, nothing to do with any civil action, so we changed our name. We no longer refer to ourselves as the Black Panthers. We're the Panther Division, or Sixty-sixth, no more Black in our organization name. So that was an interesting episode in our [history]. … It's interesting, at all the reunions I've gone to, maybe four or five, I've never met any men there from my immediate platoon or company. … Bob Mojo was with me in basic training in the 106th, and radio school at Fort Riley and University of Missouri. He went into the Sixty-sixth Recon Troop. I went into the infantry in the same division and I saw very little of him after the University of Missouri, but we have become better friends now, because we see each other at the reunions. In fact, he's the one who told me about your program several weeks ago when I got in touch with you on the Internet, so Bob's the only one I really have a lot in common with, because he and I started together in 1943 in Fort Jackson. … We were acquaintances more than friends at the time. … He's a nice man and lives in Oklahoma City. He had a very nice life and has a nice family. I met his wife; she's a graduate of Douglass College. … We always have a good time. The last time I saw them was in Nevada at our last reunion, and we hope to see them at Cherry Hill. I never [felt] cheated for never have attained any rank. I just think it was a great experience for me. The fact that I learned so much and came back very anxious to do more things with my life was really an education. I grew up in the service, and it was a great experience, traveling, and meeting different people, but the most rewarding part of it was the GI Bill. … Twice, I tried to go back to school full-time. I went down to Rutgers, signed up, but I just could not see me making it financially, and a little concerned about the curriculum. When I went back there in 1946, it was crowded, they were having classes in barracks buildings. … I could not find a place to live, so I changed my plans. Then I wanted to go out west to school, and that didn't work out either. But I wanted to go back to school. In the meantime, I had a good time after the war with my high school friend Lou Hasbrouck. We went out together and had some wild times. Then I met my wife, Cathy. Oh, it's interesting, after I came out of the service, this is funny. You want to hear this?

SH: Yes.

AW: As I said, I didn't want to work in a factory. My father was anxious for me to get a job. He talked to the guy next door, Eddie MacLachlan. The man had been in the service, and maybe five to ten years older than myself and recently married. Dad said, "Eddie, gee, you work down in City Service Oil Company in Linden, down by the waterfront. Can you get Andy a job?" "I'll try, John." I could hear this from upstairs, they were talking across the fence. He came back several days later and said, "Gee, John, they're not hiring anybody right now, but my wife, Tina,

works in an office in Newark, it's an insurance office of some sort. They don't pay much money, but it's a great place to learn the business." So I met Tina. She said, "Yeah, come to Newark and I'm sure you can get a job," and I did. I worked for the Fire Insurance Rating Organization of New Jersey. They promulgate rates for fire insurance purposes. … I worked in the Engineering Department as an inspector. It was there I met my wife, Cathy. Do you want to hear where I worked prior to that?

SH: Pardon me?

AW: Do you want to hear where I worked prior to that, too?

SH: Sure, I'd like to hear your story.

AW: Okay, before that, I worked for the War Assets Administration. After the war, the government had to get rid of all the machinery and raw materials used in the war effort and sitting in warehouses, like that General Motors plant I mentioned where they made airplanes. They stripped that whole plant and built warehouses across the highway and had all the surplus machinery and materials for sale. I worked as a clerk typist. I worked there for about a year. I also worked in a factory, yes. I needed money, so this friend of mine, Johnnie Romanowski, a neighbor of mine, said, "Andy, let's go to Hyatt Roller Bearing Company." They were in Clark Township … so we went there. … The head of the employment department interviewed me and said, "Are you sure you want to work? You're not one of those guys who's going to work the summer and go to school?" I said, "No, I need a job." … Johnnie and I both got the job working shift work around the clock. That was dirty work on screw machines. It was a production line. You worked with close tolerance, feeding the machines. By the end of the summer, I quit because I wanted to go back to school. The employment manager was livid and said, "I told you not to take this job unless you were going to stay." I said, "Well, I changed my mind." Anyway … I did go to work at the Fire Insurance Rating Organization of New Jersey at Thirty-one Clinton Street in Newark, and I worked with Tina, the gal from next door in her department. She helped me a lot. I learned a lot about the insurance business; I knew nothing about it. … I became an inspector. They needed young men and I guess I got the job because they paid such little money. I earned only twenty-one dollars a week; imagine that in 1947. Fortunately, I was living at home, and my mother was very good; I didn't pay board. … I was playing my accordion again. That's another story. But I did work there a year. I then met a man who happened to have the same name as mine, Jim White. He worked for a firm in New York called Hall & Henshaw. They were insurance underwriters. At that time, they had agents representing various insurance companies. They don't have that today, but they represented various companies and [it was a] well-respected agency downtown in the insurance district. Jim was a very stiff guy, although a nice man. I could never get friendly with him. That bothered me all the time I worked with him. But anyway, I had visions of a beautiful New York office in a high-rise. He said, "It's right around Wall Street." I didn't know much about downtown New York, but I found my way to Platt Street. It was near Wall Street. Hall & Henshaw was a three-story loft building with a storefront. I was a little disappointed in the surroundings, but Mr. White was a great teacher and I learned by observation. I never became friends with the man and that bothered me. On the first day of work, I thought he'd take me out to lunch, but he just let me go to "Eat 'Em and Beat 'Em," a cafeteria where you paid for your food by an honor system. He

was very nice to me and bought me Christmas presents, but I could not get friendly with the man. His secretary, Miss Plouser, with whom I became very good friends, was also a great teacher and helped me a lot. I had to dictate all kinds of reports and she gave me great instructions on report writing. … I worked there three years and I learned a lot about that very specialized area of fire insurance rating and inspection. Then I met a man at the rating office in New York who worked for the Continental Insurance Company, a very large insurance company. … I came from a family that liked security, which I felt I did not have at Hall & Henshaw. The Continental was a well-established company in business for a hundred years. At first, I went to Jim White, before I quit, and said, "You know, I'm twenty-four years old, and I want to get married someday. I'm only making 3,300 dollars a year." Although I did get a good raise, I was making about 3,600 dollars a year, which wasn't too bad. But I said, "Mr. White," (he never told me to call him Jim) "I have to make more money, things are expensive, commuting fares and all that from Linden and I plan to marry next year." I did get a raise and his buddy said to me, "Did you stick a knife in Jim's back?" So I decided to leave. I wasn't compatible with the man. Not that he wasn't nice, he was well respected in insurance circles in New York, and everyone liked Jim White. Anyway, I left him and went with Continental Insurance Company and became Superintendent of the Metropolitan Fire Inspection and Rating Department. I got married when I worked at Hall & Henshaw. In 1951, I went with the Continental Insurance Company. I liked insurance and the freedom to go out and look at big properties all over the city, New Jersey and out on the Island. I was the boss of that little department [of] about eight or nine men. Some were older than myself. One was an alcoholic, but we handled that tactfully. … I was just below an officer level. In those days, insurance companies did not make officers that readily. I wanted to do more [and] I felt I could do more. I worked there fourteen years and I became very active in the Society of Fire Protection Engineers, even though I wasn't an engineer, and I belonged to a Conference of Special Risk Underwriters, a very technical underwriting group that reviewed difficult underwriting problems. … I was a member of the National Board of Fire Underwriters. I taught at the College of Insurance in New York. It was a degree-granting college, and I taught two nights a week and taught in the company training program, so I had a lot of prestige, but I wasn't making enough of money. I could see there was a wall I couldn't breach for a better position in the firm. At that time, the Continental was merging with other companies. The men in the merged companies were getting the top jobs, even though we were the bigger company. … Just before I left them, my boss said, "Andy, I'm sorry, we have to make Jim Smith, a good friend of mine, your boss, and you are now going to become an assistant superintendent." I had been a superintendent for ten years. I said to Cathy, "I got to make a break." In those days, you don't make a break at age forty change jobs, but I made up my mind.

SH: That's tough.

AW: I'll step back a little. … When I married Cathy, we both talked about my continuing college education. I give her a lot of credit; it was her encouragement that made me go back to school. We were married in February 1950. In September, I enrolled at Rutgers University College in Newark as a sophomore. I used my year's credit from the University of Missouri. I did it the hard way, at night.

SH: You worked hard for that first year.

AW: I studied intensely at night, I must say. I put in a lot of hours. I used to do my homework on the train. On weekends, Cathy would go to her mother's house with our two young children. We lived in an apartment in Irvington. I even sold my car. I was without a car for about three years, but the buses were great in those days. I went to school by bus. But in five years, I had my degree, a Bachelors of Science degree, and I did quite well. I didn't make any honor roll, but I had fairly good grades. … I found the courses in psychology and the statistics very interesting. [There were] no computers then. We had calculators and very slow by today's standards. … Public speaking and business courses were really challenging. I really got a lot out of it. I graduated in 1955, a little late but rewarding. … I did it in five years, and it was well worth it. I bought a new car. Then in '56, we had a third child coming. Cathy also worked part-time at night once in a while. She was a great support for me. … We bought a house, I had no money, but my father gave me the down payment of 1,000 dollars and I used the GI Bill to get a lower mortgage rate. Oh, by the way, I went to school on the GI Bill. It was free, one of the greatest benefits of the war. It changed the world. Many men went to school and made a great contribution to this world, because of the GI Bill. It helped me tremendously. It gave me a whole new life. … In 1956 the GI Bill was still around, and we started looking for a house, because our family was growing. We were paying sixty-five dollars a month for rent. We had a nice apartment in Irvington [and] was considered at one time a luxury apartment. It had an elevator, but it was only one bedroom. We had two children, a third on the way, so we looked around. … We kept going farther and farther away from New York and Newark, where the prices were cheaper, so we ended up in Whippany. It was an industrial city. It had a lot of mills those days, but all we could afford. I think it cost 17,000 dollars for a split-level. It wasn't our choice of a house. It was great for a growing family. It was a whole new development with young families. The whole neighborhood was just like us, all GIs. We had families from all over the country there. Some were also from Jersey. In fact, our very good friends came from Montana and Washington. We just saw them about a month ago. They now live in South Carolina. We had a great neighborhood with a lot of community affairs, and we had a fourth child; we now have three girls and one boy. We really enjoyed living there. It was tough commuting, 'cause I worked in New York. It took about an hour and fifteen minutes, sometimes an hour and a half to go each way, but it was a good place to live, and, surprisingly, the town kept getting better. The mills closed down and today Whippany is considered a fine place to live and has been written up in the *New York Times*. Apparently, it is now a prime location. … One time, I considered trying to get a job in Jersey, but there was nothing out there in '56. I think when Chubb moved from the City to where the Short Hills Mall is, they had trouble getting people to work from the City. They constructed a building, and in fact, the building has been since torn down. You had to work in the City or Newark. Anyway, I had a great career. I stayed with the Continental Insurance Company for about fourteen years and I saw a roadblock. I was now forty years old and said, "Gee, I can stay with the Continental and probably be comfortable, but I'll never set the world on fire. I want to do something different." Just by coincidence, my good friend Bud Boors lived across the street and worked for Morgan Guaranty at that time. He was in personnel and they had just merged with JP Morgan. Well, he was so upset and said, "Andy, you know, I'm not going to make out well," but he did and became a vice president. Later on, he said, "Andy, you know, I think there's an opening for someone with your knowledge in our investment department. You have a great knowledge of real estate through your insurance background." So I went over to the bank and, sure enough, in 1965 I went to work for JP Morgan and I became an inspector of properties. I traveled all over the country,

which I loved to do. I was a little sorry I took the job after I learned more about my boss, because he was a snob, you know, a Yalie. … He was good to me in his own way and did a lot for me, but he could have done more. We got along fine but he was a snob, and I was always defending him. He did absurd things and no one cared for him. But he was my boss and often we traveled together. He was great with clients of similar background until they learned more about him. He recommended me for officership. When the bank was named executor, we would dispose of properties according to the terms of the will. I've sold town houses in the City, ranches out west, estate properties in Newport and hunting lodges in the Carolinas to name a few. It was a very interesting career. We also did a lot of investment for our pension trusts involving purchase and sale of large commercial properties countrywide. It was a great career at the bank and I became an assistant vice president.

SH: So it was a good move even at age forty.

AW: I worked there just over twenty years and retired in 1986. [I] have never worked since. … I sent all my children to college and paid for most of their education costs except graduate school. My oldest daughter graduated from University of Pennsylvania with a Master's degree, [and] my son graduated and has his Master's degree from Rutgers. My two other daughters graduated from Providence and the University of New Hampshire. They are doing well and we are very happy. We have twelve grandchildren.

SH: Well, I thank you very much for taking time to do the interview.

AW: Well, I'm glad we could fit it in. I didn't think we'd finish.

SH: Thank you so much.

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

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