

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GERALDINE BELL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins the second interview session with Geraldine Bell on July 23rd, 2012 in Voorhees, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth. Mrs. Bell, thank you very much for having me here again.

Geraldine Bell: A pleasure.

SI: I appreciate it. Last time we talked a little bit about your work for the first few years at the depot. Just to get some context, I know you started there in the summer of 1943.

GB: Correct.

SI: When did you leave there to start your family? How many years did you work during that first period?

GB: ... I got married in 1950. In 1952 I left, went out on maternity. When the boys started high school, I went back to work. Total years in was twenty-four, one month plus 12 days.

SI: For the record, we are sitting at your dining room table with your records out related to your husband's career and some of your work at the depot. We will probably be referring to them throughout the interview.

GB: This is 1943 when I started--june.

SI: I am looking at two pictures.

GB: One is the staff and one is the military.

SI: One is all naval personnel and the other is all civilians. It looks like mostly women with some men sprinkled in the crowd.

GB: It was June of '43. You see the reverse. ... Some of my men signed it.

SI: A Lieutenant was your superior, the person you reported to?

GB: ... Yes.

SI: In this building that they are in front of, this is the building that was laid out like a hospital?

GB: ... That originally was the plan for a hospital and they had to build a building quick, ASAP. So they used this and it was laid out like a hand. The main building had four wings and the only part that was air-conditioned would be the operating rooms which were on the ground floor. ... They became where the computer equipment was kept.

SI: You said they had some computers there?

GB: Computers, yes, when they first came, that's where they went because it was air-conditioned. The rest of the building was not air-conditioned for ten years.

SI: Did they have the computers during World War II or did that come after?

GB: ... They had some of them during. It started in the beginning but as they progressed they came in piece by piece--certain areas had them, certain areas did not.

SI: You briefly described the kind of work that you did last time during the war. You described it as involving logistics.

GB: First I started out as a secretary and as I became more familiar and the officers wanted me to do more work, I was trained a little bit more by them in what they wanted and I became an Equipment Specialist, and my field originally was oxygen equipment, then I went into O-rings as I progressed.

SI: When did you make that switch to Equipment Specialist, during World War II or afterwards?

GB: It was ... During World War II. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: They had computers coming in during World War II. Did any of your work involve working with computers?

GB: No, our section did not have them. I relied upon my three by five cards. There was a power outage before I left on maternity leave, and everybody's records were in a computer, they didn't know about back up in those days. I had my records, and when I went back after my children were in school, they were still using my records, my three by five cards, they were a little shop worn, but they were still using them. Then, they got more sophisticated, new things came out, you just didn't know everything, and they got more sophisticated, so that worked.

SI: You said that before one of the major challenges was making sure that the parts were there when they needed them, making sure that the aircraft can get up when they had to. Were you also involved in other aspects of the work like putting together bid jobs?

GB: No, we would tell the Purchasing Department, "We need part number A-B-C-D-E," and we'd go out to our former vendors and they would handle the purchasing contract. We would approve it or disapprove it, but they would do the intricate paper work. I didn't have to do that. I had to do the buying, the accepting, the storage, and make sure whoever needs it, gets what they needed. We had storage in Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio and every military Naval Base in the States, and if we didn't have it at Point "A" we'd call Point "B." "Do you have stock number," 1-2-3-4-5-6. "Will you please send it to aircraft station so and so?"

SI: Did they store anything on site or was it all off site?

GB: They had storage on site for a lot of things, but my items were not on site. Medical equipment, when I first started with oxygen equipment. It was not on site. The O-rings were down where the aircraft hangars were. I didn't have aircraft hangars where I was so I did the buying [and] the shipping. If one agency in Florida did not have something, and a plane was down or helicopter down, I could call anyone of my other points and ship it, and then they would get it almost the next day.

SI: Helicopters were basically coming out at the very tail end of World War II and then developed in the interwar period.

GB: ... Not the tail end, they had them, but they became more and more adaptable, and subsequent wars afterwards they were extremely valuable.

SI: When did that start becoming a bigger part of your work, working with the helicopters?

GB: I did the oxygen, medical equipment. ... I was secretary for two years and then it was four years. I'm trying to calculate. ... When I left, I was pregnant already, that's when I started working with the helicopters big time.

SI: That would be during the Korean War?

GB: No. ... It was '43, World War II, right?

SI: Yes, that was when you started.

GB: ... By the time they were winding down, I was very involved in that.

SI: By the time World War II was winding down you were involved with them.

GB: Yes. I was more in the O-rings and ... oxygen equipment first and then I went into the other station.

SI: Given your job, did you have to learn a bit about these different aircraft and these different types of equipment?

GB: Oh, yes. We had instruction. They had a helicopter right on base and we had to get in there and see what it's all about. And then the Harrier was built and we worked on the Harrier, that's the one that had the Rolls-Royce engine out of England and he landed on our base too. It flies like an airplane and then he lowers and rises like a helicopter, ... rotating engines, and went in that one too--unbelievable.

SI: You went in the Harrier after you came back?

GB: Yes.

SI: When you first were working on helicopters, and they first showed you this helicopter, did you get to go up in it?

GB: No, thank you. I'm not going up in anything. When I had to fly on "provisionings" to different bases but especially the contractors out in California, it was a white knuckle job for me. I was not a good flyer but I did it, and I never flew in a helicopter. Sat in one, but never flew in one.

SI: Did you travel during that first period you were at the depot or was that mostly later?

GB: Not the first period, 43 to 46, I was a secretary, I did not travel. When I became an Equipment Specialist, 46-52, I had to travel.

SI: Just for the purposes of this interview, when I am saying "first period," I mean the first part before you left to start your family and then the "second period" would be when you came back after.

GB: Oh, I was a secretary in ASO to start my career. Then into Oxygen Equipment, then into O-Rings. That was 1943 to 1952. When I came back I worked in NATSF from 1968 till 1977. Then I was in NAVILCO 1978 to 1980. Then I went back to ASO 1980 to 1983. Total 24 years, 11 months and 12 days.

SI: Sorry.

GB: That is okay.

SI: Before you left to start your family, you were already traveling around. How often did you have to travel?

GB: Not that often. In the beginning it was maybe once or twice a year, that's all. Later on it was more.

SI: Would they send you on military aircraft or civilian?

GB: Once. It was a MATs flight, Military Air Transport, the seats were cargo netting. ... It didn't have any facilities, no washrooms, got as far as Kansas City and we had to stop, all the women got off and said, "We're not getting back on that thing, forget it." So they put us on regular airlines after that. MATs was an experience. ... We're sitting there in dresses and high heels, I don't even want to discuss it, there were no facilities there, none at all. Some of the

ladies went by train after that. [laughter] They refused to get on airplanes altogether. So they went by train, but I flew.

SI: When you would fly out to these different facilities, what would you be doing there?

GB: We would be buying, spare parts and doing provisioning. This is the aircraft, this is what we have, we'll need this, how many do you need replacements for, we'll need so many of them--that's when we start buying replacement parts. ... We bought replacements, we provisioned for the spare parts, that's what we did. ... Sometimes the contractor like Lockheed and Martin, they would come to our base, and we'd have the provisioning right there, and I have a picture here somewhere of what provisioning tables looked like, blueprints all over the place, and then big discussions, "What do you mean, you need so many of these?" "That life expectancy of that should be X-Y-Z, not A-B-C." ... They want to sell us more parts of course and we were conservative, and don't forget we had to put parts all over the place so if we're short in "A," we could get out of "B." I did a lot with parts at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base too. They had the "Powder-Puff" flyers. Those were the Military Ladies, who could fly, used to transport the planes to Europe all the time so the service men didn't have to leave the base.

SI: What service did they work for?

GB: WAVES, WACS, but Wright-Patterson was not Navy, it was I think, Army Air Force, and we worked with them. Those women were great, they were tough, they were Amelia Earhart types, "gung-ho" on everything. They were wonderful women and they went back and forth, never lost a plane or a woman that I know of. ... You have these warehouses where you stock all these parts you buy for all these planes, and some parts can be used on two planes and some strictly for that plane, and ... this base down in Florida, he's all out of a certain O-ring so I called Wright-Patterson and she says, "There's nothing." ... I said, "We bought it on a certain date, it should be there." So she goes back and she called me, "They transposed two numbers, put it in the wrong bin," and you could look at them, you could see that there were two different things in the one bin. She took the incorrect "O" Rings out of the wrong bin and straightened it out. I got the planes off the ground. Those pilots were good, they not only flew, they knew what they were doing.

SI: In working with people who were either vendors or people who would be part of the logistical system, did you have to develop personal relationships with these folks?

GB: Yes, you do, and you keep calling them all the time or they keep calling you. You get to know some of the personalities, and then they get transferred out. ... Military doesn't stay around. So you have to find new people to work with, and it was always a learning situation dealing with new people all the time, but the ones I encountered were terrific.

SI: Were there any instances with personality conflicts becoming a problem or people who were not particularly helpful?

GB: May have been a bad day on both sides--who knows, who remembers, but when ... I have planes down, that was a red flag, you had to move on that one. I remember once we had, in the Air Force, some helicopters were down in a base out in Montana but Wright-Patterson came through. It was like five O-rings, it was no big deal. You could have put them in an envelope and send it, but it kept an aircraft and men off the flight. ... They got them out there.

SI: Were you providing supplies to the other services as well?

GB: We could. ... Marines are part of Navy also, and if somebody had a problem we could help them, why not. Our offices were amenable to everything.

SI: Mostly, you were providing services for the Navy.

GF: Yes.

SI: Was there a particular territory or was it all over?

GB: Worldwide. ... Wherever they had to be, they had to be, and then like in O-rings you had to worry about where they were going. Is it Alaska? Cold. Is it South America where it's hot, or the Middle East, you don't know. ... Each thing had to be for what it was. ... The people in my department, we all worked together. If Joe was out and I could help, I did. If I couldn't help, I said, "I haven't got a clue, somebody else will have to help," and they did. The object was to keep them flying and keep them safe.

SI: You said as new systems or equipment were being introduced your own job changed and they would give you additional training. Was this formal training or on the job training?

GB: ... Most of it was on the job at that time, I mean the base, it was supposed to be a hospital. It turned out to be a base. These people are coming in from all over and they got all the girls that they could, secretaries real fast, and everybody didn't know about airplanes in those days, it was a new field, and as ... the men saw she could do this, she could do that, they put them in different areas, they moved them around. It was interesting work and you always were worried about the safety of the aircraft and the personnel. Safety was first--when anything happened, everybody felt bad.

SI: Would you hear about crashes and failures?

GB: If something happened, you would hear about it eventually and you felt bad, really bad.

SI: How would that come up, would they just be let you know?

GB: Through the grapevine.

SI: It was not like this happened and they decided to change how the system operated.

GB: You know what, I don't recall because we didn't have that much--thank goodness--in my field. We didn't have that many problems. If they were having trouble like with some oxygen equipment, we went back to the manufacturer, and say, "We're having a problem here," and so forth and so on, whatever happened, and they were very cooperative, they would help. I dealt with part numbers and parts. I did not deal with the mechanics.

SI: You told a story last time that made me think that your boss had a lot of leverage and flexibility to work with vendors, and to make decisions about who got certain jobs.

GB: Oh, yes.

SI: I think you used Westinghouse as the example, that, when there was a problem they got rid of it.

GB: Every once in a while things would happen. It could have been on their assembly line, but we don't know where it happened, but when the problem popped up, he knew somebody in Westinghouse. He called them, he said, "Hey listen fellas, we got a problem." He would tell them, it'd get fixed. The object was safety. I just came across some of these pictures before you got here. I'll find it, I'll show you the conference, where they're all sitting there and what it looked like.

SI: From the pictures you showed me from 1943, it looks like between the civilians and the military folks there are around 350 people.

GB: I think there were more civilians.

SI: If you took them altogether, how many people would there be?

GB: Altogether, ... maybe 400 civilians and 300 military. ... Some Military were only there six months, some a little longer. They kept going back and forth, rotating. They had to have so much land duty, so much sea duty, air duty.

SI: After the end of World War II, was the work force reduced?

GB: A lot of it was voluntary, husbands came back from the war, and they left. They went to live wherever it is that they wanted to live, a lot of ... rotation. But there were a lot of people who stayed. The military moved out more than we did because they had, so many months land duty, so many months sea duty.

SI: In overall size between wartime and peacetime, how much of a difference was there?

GB: Nothing that you would really notice, because you walk in the hallways you have military walking all the time, and civilians, but you have to have a backup force to support the military.

For every officer you have, you had to have ten behind him, at least, in different capacities. The packaging department, the parts department, etc., whatever it is they need for support, they got it.

SI: The parts that you were working with, were they all for aircraft that were part of the regular force already deployed or were you working on anything that was in development?

GB: It could have been both.

SI: I was just curious because you said that there was a lot of secrecy involved.

GB: Oh, yes, everything we did stayed inside that building. You never knew who was listening, you never know what's going on. ... If they want to be sneaky, they gather, like little ants, they gather things and they put it together and they come up with something. Everything was quiet because we had Marines on base, we had Navy on base and after a while we had friendly foreign military on base too.

SI: Do you know if you were ever investigated or did they have to do any kind of security clearance for you to do this type of job?

GB: Probably, but I didn't know about it. I wouldn't know.

SI: Nobody came to your house and asked your family about you?

GB: No, not that I know of.

SI: Once World War II ended, did that change the pace of the work or were there any changes to the routine?

GB: Not really. The transition from war to peace is a big job. It was a big job from peace to war, it's faster. ... I didn't notice it. I still did my work, I still had my planes flying, worried about safety, worried about getting the part you needed when they promised it. "What do you mean you're six months behind, I don't want to hear that." But everybody cooperated with everybody else because there was a common goal--win the war and bring them home safe.

SI: What do you remember about the end of the war, V-E Day, and then later V-J Day?

GB: V-E Day, I remember because we had a lot of family military too. My Mother and I went to New York City, we stayed at the New Yorker Hotel, we watched them carry on. Mother and I, we watched them in Times Square out in the street, breaking up feather pillows and throwing the feathers out of the hotel windows. It was an exciting, thrilling time. I don't have any pictures from that time and Mother is not here, just me, but I remember being there in New York at the New Yorker Hotel. I was never in a New York Hotel in my life, it was a really big thing and it was quite exciting. I'm trying to remember if I have any photographs. Well as we go through some of the pictures, I may be able to show you some things.

SI: Let us talk a little bit about your husband. When did you meet him?

GB: Let me tell you a little bit about my husband. He was born in Russia. My father-in-law was a brewmaster, my mother-in-law was a farmer's daughter, and they had three children and things got very bad and my father-in-law decided he's going to leave that country. So, the story as was told to me by my father-in-law was he went to his father-in-law and got two horses and a wagon, piled his wife, his three children and himself in that wagon with all the worldly goods that they could carry, and went from Russia to France in that wagon, stopping at relatives and friends and so forth all the way. That's a long ride, ... and it was a terrible time for them. When they got to France they boarded a ship. They could not get into America, they went to Cuba and he was a brewmaster in Cuba too. He did very well but my mother-in-law had a sister in Baltimore and she wanted to go to her sister. They couldn't get in and in order for him to get into America, he had to prove that he had so much money for each child, he had a job, that he wouldn't be dependent on the system. That's how refugees were handled and he had a sponsor. Well, he also went into the denim shirt business down in Cuba, he had worked with another man and he amassed a good amount of money and they got passage to Florida and then they got to Baltimore. My husband would never get on a boat again. He even got sick on the Staten Island ferry years later. ... It was the worst time for him. Then my father-in-law went into business here with another gentleman and supported his family. He never was on the dole, he never asked for a handout, ... he worked. My husband went to school and he was extremely bright and he won, in Philadelphia, I don't remember what it was, but he won an award from Northeast High School. There was no money for him to go to college, so he went to work for the Navy, it was wartime. He worked for the Navy and he went from a packaging man, ... everything has to be in a package, to the head of the Department for the entire NavelAir. So, that's why he was involved in the first Space Suit, one thing led to another. He also packaged the engines for the Harrier from England to the USA. You know the size of those engines, it's huge, the O-rings I used for Alaska, he also packaged those. That department designed every package and everything came in perfect shape and they had also devised reusable containers with foam rubber inserts that fit the item. For instance, a gyroscope is very delicate to ship and it's at sea and it has to go back for overhaul, you put it in this reusable container, and it's safe. He was on the USS *Saratoga*, big Aircraft Carrier, he's in the supply room. A sailor comes down, swinging two paper bags, bangs them on the counter, and says to the Chief, "These don't work." I understand my husband picked them up, ... and said, "Do you realize what you just did? You know how much they cost us? It's going to cost us twice as much to regain them now." It was one of those moments, because he designed the package. The sailor didn't know. So, that was another problem. ... Now, he was called to Iceland, Keflavik, and went there. His boss said to me, "You want to go?" "Are you out of your mind? I'm not going to Iceland." It was January. He could only fly an American aircraft into Iceland, an American aircraft out. So Pan Am went in on Tuesday and came out on Wednesday. So, if you finish the job on Thursday, he had to stay there. That was an experience because he said, "The snow doesn't fall down, it goes sideways and, it's windy."

SI: Sideways.

GB: ... They used Hawser ropes, do you know what a Hawser rope is? They have them on ships, but also between the Aircraft Hangar and the Mess Hall. He said, "If you let go of that rope they'd find you in the Spring." It's a volcanic rock, you don't see dogs, you don't see cats, you don't see trees. He said, ... "Only spent a week there, it was a week too much," as far as he was concerned but he stayed with the officers. I have some letters from the commanding base officers who thanked him for what he did. I have commendations from here to there. He was brilliant, he wanted to be a physician, but there was no money, and there were no scholarships available, it was wartime. So, he became an engineer and he did extremely well.

SI: Was he self-taught or did he go to school eventually?

GB: He went to Drexel University. Then he went to Temple University and he went at night additionally, then on-site instruction. He picked things up, he was like a sponge. ...

SI: When you said he started out in packaging, you are talking about physically on the line packaging items?

GB: Yes.

SI: He went from that to the Head of the Department.

GB: He went from the roots--ground floor--to the top of the pyramid. ... This is all Hall of Fame stuff, that's where he wound up. ...

SI: Just to go back, when his family came here from Cuba, roughly how old was he or what year was it?

GB: Seven, a child. His sister I think was nine, he was seven, his brother was five.

SI: He was born in 1925.

GB: Yes.

SI: That will be about 1932.

GB: Yes, give or take.

SI: His family decided to leave long before World War II.

GB: Oh, yes, they were having trouble staying alive there.

SI: Were they being persecuted by the Soviets?

GB: Yes, because they were Jewish. No matter what they did it was no good. The Russians figured everybody was a millionaire and that wasn't true. In fact, I got a recent novel out of the library of the History of Russia called "Russka" by Edward Rutherford (1991) because I didn't know anything about it. ... Between Genghis Khan and the rest of the Turks and all that, they were always being taken over by another group of people. They were terribly poor and the soil was bad, which I didn't know. ... In a lot of Russia, the soil was terrible. The rivers were big and good but the soil in lots of parts was very poor. They were taken over by the Finns and they were taken over by the Lithuanians. It was always in transition, a very interesting book, and I got it out of the library. I didn't know anything about it. ... What do I show you now?

SI: Your husband was working there and you were working there. Is that where you met?

GB: No. I lived in Philadelphia, he lived in Philadelphia. I lived near the College of Optometry and they always had dances for the students because they were from all over, studying Optometry. ... To keep the students happy, they arranged dances and socials for the kids then and we ... got a group of girls together. ... I was always asked if we could go over there and there were a dances, ... so I joined that group and the dances were held either at a Church or a Synagogue because it was, a way to get people together. ... I met this student and he turned out to be my husband's boyfriend. So, then little factions broke off ... and a group of six or five whatever could fit in the car was going somewhere, "You want to join us?" So you got to meet people and a lot of these people were from out of state, they came to be Optometrists. So, I met Stanley's friend and he introduced me to my husband. You never know who you're going to meet through some blind date. I don't know what your growing up was like, but in my day, wartime, you met people through people, and that's how we met. ... When he got older, he worked for the Holy Redeemer Hospital at Christmas time, he relieved the cook, he loved to cook. I have pictures of him cooking in his own office for the men and you could smell it all over the building. ... "Bell's cooking again." ... We'd go over to Holy Redeemer Hospital at Christmas-time to let the regular staff off and he would be in charge of the kitchen. ... I have a picture from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We found the article, it is from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on December 26th, 1987. The headline is, "They also serve who only wash the breakfast dishes," and it's about your husband and other folks from Keneseth Israel Synagogue who volunteered to relieve the workers at the hospital of the Holy Redeemer.

GB: In the kitchen, yes.

SI: There is a nice picture of your husband slicing the meat and also in front of the stained glass window.

GB: Yes, he would do things like that.

SI: I think last time you said he was very involved in community activities and volunteering.

GB: Yes, now Christmas-time at the base we had a big Christmas dinner for the children that were in Social Services and the employees would give donations. If a child wanted a bike, he got a bike, whatever the child wants, within reason. They had a huge cafeteria. You know the base is still available, if you ever want to go, I could possibly get you in. ... Some of the men who worked for my husband are still working there. It's under a different name but it's the same base. ... A huge cafeteria and these agencies would all come in with the aides and the children, they were all dressed up. Some of them were pathetic and some of them were pretty good, and they walked out with their gifts, grins from ear to ear. They fed them lunch, they had clowns, and they gave them gifts and he was part of that too. ... This is an Admiral giving him an award, we have a lot of Admirals there.

SI: What year did you meet?

GB: End of '48, beginning of '49.

SI: He had been working there since World War II?

GB: Oh, yes.

SI: You had never met at work?

GB: That base is big. I have a layout of the base. ... I'll show you where he worked in building Twenty-Six, I worked in building One. That's a long way down, and I had no business to be there so I was never there. ... I'm looking for that one picture. ... Every Christmas-time for the employees, the Admiral said, "We're going to have a party for everybody at the Ben Franklin Hotel." So, here's a snapshot of my table. Now, my cousin was lost in the Battle of the Bulge but was found, when he got back home, I dragged him down here. ... These are some of my officers. This Lieutenant I'll never forget. He was from the South. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

GB: Do you want to take this home and return it to me? Would it be easier for you?

SI: The resume?

GB: Yes.

SI: We can read a little bit of it for the record.

GB: ... You can do whatever you want.

SI: You have given me two pieces--your husband's corporate resume and also an article from June of 1955 which talks a little bit about his career. It is called, "Meet Your Reporter." It was during the time when he was a reporter for the Union--Packaging Shop and Labor Group.

GB: Yes, that was before I knew him, I didn't know what he was doing.

SI: He graduated as you said from Northeast Public High School in January 1943. He studied for a time at Drexel University in engineering and he was also in the Army ROTC there. He went to work at the Navy Depot working in building Four. In August 1943, he was working as a packager and crater. He then enrolled in Temple University and he earned a Certificate in Elements of engineering in 1945, and then he also studied at night at Temple University from '45 to '50 studying Business and Accounting. ... He earned his certificate in 1950. You were saying before, he had his mindset as both as an Engineer and an Accountant. Can you tell me how that shaped the way he approached things?

GB: Yes. As an Accountant he was always aware of the cost of anything and as an Engineer he was always aware how they can do it better and cheaper but don't give up the quality. Quality was very important to him. ... People worked at jobs and thought, "Oh, we can use this part, how much does that part cost, what is the shelf life of that part, how does it work? Will it fit into just one piece of equipment or ... multiple applications?" His mind worked that way. Most engineers work that way. The couple downstairs--the Spetgangs, you interviewed them, "Is it cost effective, does it do the job, is it the best thing available, has it multiple applications?" That's how they work, that's how their mind works and for him it served a good purpose.

SI: He started there in 1943 and according to his resume, in December of 1957, he became a branch supervisor, and then he was the Department Head until early 1985, so a long period there, over forty years in total up to that point at the Depot and almost thirty in a supervisory position and then was a Packaging Specialist in mid-1985. Logistical Computer Systems Equipment Specialist from '85 to 1990 and then from 1990 to the end of his career he was working for SERD Logistics in Morristown as a Packaging Specialist. Did he retire as a supervisor and then take consulting jobs?

GB: Yes.

SI: Okay.

GB: He worked here in Moorestown, New Jersey, for a group of some of the men that he used to work with, and he worked there, he couldn't stay home. ... He had to do things, so they said, "We could use you because you're the packaging [person], and knowledgeable on this stuff," and these contractors grabbed him, and he worked for them.

SI: SERD stood for Support Equipment Recommendation Data and that was in Morristown. You said he retired in 1995.

GB: Finally, finally. [laughter]

SI: Also, he earned the Meritorious Civilian Award from the Navy in 1985 and you also mentioned in 1996 he was inducted in the Hall of Fame. You pointed out a few of his many accolades over the course of his career. You showed me many photos of him receiving letters of commendation from Admirals and Superior Officers and also that box. There was a little story with that box, that he designed a special box I think in the early '80s.

GB: Yes, that was a big award.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You were telling me about your work at NAVILCO. [Editor's Note: NAVILCO stands for US Navy International Logistics Command Office.]

GB: Yes, I worked at NAVILCO, and we had some foreign friendly country's representatives on our base. ... I was in that head office and when they came on board, I had to show, for example, the Taiwanese girls how to send their messages in and out of their country. They also got permission from the Admiral to eat in their office because they were having trouble digesting white flour. They invited me for lunch, after a while, and it was very interesting, and very good, and smelled delicious. When I went to drink the tea, I thought the top of my head was going to come loose, it was so strong. ... I don't know how they drank that, I really don't. ... Then they asked me to teach them how to drive, ok but not my car and not on the city streets. So I said, "You get a car on the base, I'll teach you how to drive," and they borrowed a car from the Canadians, and from every outfit that was there, and I eventually taught them how to drive. Then we took them to the supermarket. They never saw a supermarket and they didn't know how to buy. ... It was a whole learning experience for them. We also had during the reign of the Shah Representatives from Peru, the Australia, Canada, England and Japan. They all came down from Bayonne and were very nice people. They had no problems on the base. ... "We have to do this, how do we do that? We want to see this Independence Hall, how do we do that?" I mean they're in a foreign country, they spoke book English. ... When you grow up in America, you speak English. When you go to a foreign country you speak book French, it's not real French, it's not quite the same communication. So, I helped them on that department.

SI: How long did you work with NAVILCO?

GB: ... 2 years.

SI: That was in the early 1977-1979.

GB: Yes, I retired from ASO. I started in ASO in 1943, Left 1952 on maternity leave, came back to NATSF 1968 to 1977. I went to NAVILCO 1977-1980. I went to ASO from 1980-1984 Aircraft Support Unit.

SI: What year did you retire?

GB: I retired in 1984-total 24 years, 11 months and 12 days.

SI: In NAVILCO, you would teach others how to do your job.

GB: Yes, also how to get along and how to work and so forth.

SI: Would they be pulling parts from the same places where you worked before?

GB: No, no. ... NAVILCO was an organization, down from Bayonne with Friendly Foreign Military. It was Logistics. Where would we have NAVILCO? They were on the ASO base.

SI: Can I ask you some questions while you look? During your first stint with the Depot, you said you left in about 1952, so you were there for most of the Korean War.

GB: Sure, yes. ... in 1968 till 1977 I was in NATSF, the Naval Air Technical Services Facility. It was on the same base, it was building two.

SI: You were still working for the Navy in 1958?

GB: No. I was in ASO from 1943 to 1952.

SI: What year did you leave?

GB: From ASO in 1952, I was in Naval Air Technical Services Facility from 1968 to 1977.

SI: You and your husband have two children?

GB: We have two sons, yes.

SI: When were they born?

GB: My older son in 1952. My younger son in 1954.

SI: So '52 and '54.

GB: Yes.

SI: You were in ASO at the end. You said you started in ASO in 1943. What was the place you were in before?

GB: I left ASO in 1952 on maternity leave. I returned to NATSF in 1968. I left NATSF in 1977; went to NAVILCO 1977 till 1979; went to ASO 1979 and retired in 1983 from ASO. Different components, but all Navy support activities.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were looking for some more records during the break. In the first stretch of your employment with the Navy, you were in the Aviation Supply Office in 1943.

GB: Yes.

SI: Then you went out on maternity leave in 1952 and then when you came back it was to the Naval Air Technical Services Facility from 1963 till 1977.

GB: Yes.

SI: Then you were with NAVILCO working with the foreign nations.

GB: Yes, in NAVILCO from 1977 to 1979.

SI: You said they had shut down their base at Bayonne.

GB: They came down from Bayonne

SI: Your time with NATSF, was it the same type of job that you had earlier where you were ordering parts?

GB: No, not at all. It was more records keeping because we handled publications they are different than parts and you had to deal with companies for example Westinghouse--favorite company, for example we bought the part or that piece of equipment and they had this booklet. One of the pages was wrong. I mean it didn't make sense. ... Something happened in the printing and they put it together wrong. So we did things like that, but we took care of all the publications for the Navy. That part of the base was called (NATSF) Naval Aviation Technical Services Facility. We had a lot of people who were visually handicapped there, even with Seeing Eye Dogs, because their Department worked around the clock. ... If you knew the keyboard, you didn't have to see. They had the earphones, and they took the dogs out and brought them back in, whatever it was. Some people were afraid of those dogs, they were very good animals. The Seeing Eye Dogs--and Service Dogs--are wonderful animals. We have a gentleman here with a Service Dog and a fabulous animal and according to him, when he expires that dog goes back to the company that trained so it can work for somebody else. When they get to a certain age and too old they just become a house pet. But we had these people work around the clock because ... the time in England is different than the time here, the time in China and Taiwan is different than the time here and you have to be available when you're servicing the military.

SI: People from Naval Bases all over the world would make requests.

GB: If they had a problem, and they need something, or need more of a stock number so and so, whatever it is they needed, that was the organization that handled it. I didn't know all the parts of it, I just worked in that one part.

SI: At that time, was that when you were focusing on the helicopters that you showed me before?

GB: No, that was different, that was the Aviation Supply Office. This is publications--different.

SI: As you spend from 1940s through the 1980s with the Navy, what were some of the major changes that you saw in the workplace or just things that stand out in your mind?

GB: I have to think about that one. ... Computers, we didn't have computers in the beginning, we had three by five cards. Computers were a big change and then we got air-conditioning. We didn't have that either.

SI: You said originally that men and women had very defined roles. Did that change later on?

GB: Yes. Women had more opportunities, one lady I showed you in the white outfit, on the steps with my husband, she became the Head of Key Punch, which had a man first. When he went out on vacation she had to take over while he was gone, those two weeks a big problem came up and she handled it, no problem and the officers were impressed. So when he came back they made him a head of something else and she got to keep that job. Those days they used key punch. They no longer have that. Things became digital, ... computers came in. ... As new inventions came, they adopted them. They took them away and gave everyone IBM Selectrics and ... then they gave them computers when I left. They said the transitions for some of those women were tough because they comfortable with Selectrics, and they were crackerjacks. They had to learn a whole new system. ... When you're doing something for twenty-five years, very difficult, but women made their mark--they moved up.

SI: You were telling me before that you had your own struggles with the glass ceiling in the workplace. Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

GB: Well, Equipment Specialists were men. Then I came along and I went on thirty-eight interviews that I was qualified for, but was never taken. So, instead of going through the personnel office on my base, I sent my applications to Fourth and Market, the Head of the whole 4th Naval Command. I put my application in there and was called for an interview. I had five officers and no women and they're waiting for Mr. Bell--surprise, it's me. So, this one officer said, "Well, you might as well sit down, let's hear what you have to say." I said, "I was born in Pennsylvania." He said, "Let's go past that if you don't mind." I had the interview and I thanked them for their time. I went back to my office. The next day my Commanding Officer comes

over to me, he says, "What in the world did you say?" "What do you mean? They asked me what I did and I told them." He said, "Well, you got a promotion." I got the promotion I was aiming for. It took five years. Some of the men did not like it and one guy gave me a really hard time. So, I marched into the Head Office, I had a Marine Colonel or Captain, I can't remember his rank. I said, "Sir, I have a problem. ... We have a gentleman in the Stock Control Department," and I told him who it was. I said, "I went for information he's stone-walling me." I've got an airplane down in Florida, I need a certain part, he was stock control. I want to know where else he had those parts so I could tell them where to go for the part and he's not going to answer me," and then I sat down at my desk. ... My boss comes up to me after lunch, and he says, "What happened?" I said, "I went over there to find out what stock was in the stock system and, he wouldn't tell me." He says, "Well, he's in deep water up to here," and only because I was a female, but that changed when they realized you can't do that anymore. It changed, but I was not the only female that had a problem. One of the Captain's secretaries wanted to do more work, she was bored, and she was capable. She finally got a foot in the door, things changed a little bit and the qualified ones got good jobs and they contributed. They were not a detriment, they were an asset, because these men went out on business trips and they went all over the country, they had to go, somebody had to take over their job while they're gone, you just don't leave a desk empty and the women filled in that way and then as things progressed they became heads of departments. ... My friend became the head of that department when that man went on a two-week vacation and a really big problem arose. They saw that she was capable and she handled it and it was a smooth transition. The other guy got a different job, he didn't lose his job, he just got put into another area where he was more suited for. Working with all the women, he didn't like it. Some men could not handle it. ... He had all women in the key punch office. So, it helped all the way around but there was a glass ceiling.

SI: Do you think in your career you experienced any anti-Semitism while you were working for the Navy?

GB: Sure. Not from the military, from the civilians, but it was handled, no problem because I would volunteer to work on Christmas, so when I wanted off for my holiday there were no arguments, they never encountered it before. If you don't know about it, you don't know how to react. It was a little bit of that too.

SI: Would it be people making ignorant comments or did they not want to deal with you because you were Jewish?

GB: Not that severe, no, just little snide remarks.

SI: In looking through your documents, you showed me quite a few certificates honoring your work with the USO. When did your association with the USO begin?

GB: When it really started, was World War II, the girls used to be asked to go to the USO dances. ... That's how I started with them, we had a group of girls, they gave us transportation out to the hospitals. We'd sit and read, write letters whatever they needed, and later on we'd go

to the dances, and my Mother was active in the USO. Atlantic City was an R&R area for servicemen, and the big hotels would handle a lot of them. The ladies would come in with all the baked goods and so forth, and in the big auditorium in the hotels, they'd have dances and, of course, I went with my Mother and every other lady there took their daughters, everybody went to help, and that's how I got started. Then, after a while, after my children went to high school, I went to a Jewish War Veterans' meeting and somebody came up and said we need some girls to volunteer to this, that and the other--bingo. When I went back to the office, I was working at the time, I said, "They need girls for the USO." I'll tell you, we had bus loads of them from the office, everybody was very patriotic and then things change. You move, your parents, take care of this, you don't have time and then I met another war veteran group and they were down in the Center City and they were going to move to the airport and the people there didn't want to go to the airport. I said, "Well, I'll go and I know a few girls that will go." We drove. So, we started at the airport and the head of it was Mr. Jay Hill and he had an area in Terminal D, the Airport gave us space and he set up a whole canteen. We had television, we had chairs, we had ... three beds. We had a nursery, I have a picture here, we had a bar, my husband and I are serving food. I came across that by accident the other day.

SI: This picture you are showing me looks like it was taken in the 1990s.

GB: Could be. I'll tell you, I got a plaque here. ... I got this plaque, let's see, yes in the 90's. You know, you are so smart, you're scary.

SI: The uniform the soldier was wearing looked like it was from the 1990s.

GB: ... I was there for quite a while. And my husband, the cook, he would make soup. He was always cooking something and I drive up into the parking lot in Terminal D and the guard would say, "He's bringing soup," and two policemen would come out and carry it for him. ... At that time he had very bad legs, he couldn't walk very well. So he would go there and he'd serve the soup whatever they wanted. I sat at the desk, and handled all queries and if they wanted to get somewhere, since I read maps and I know the city, I was the one who did that, and then there was a time when Target, I think it was, they would get a new shipment in of merchandise they decided to give the merchandise they were replacing down to the USO. So, stewardesses, airline pilots, and everybody, if you needed socks, you needed hose, we had it. I have pictures somewhere of me at the carousel, that was my job with the clothes. We had great items and the stockings we sold to the stewardesses for twenty five cents. It's still in packages, some of the packages were torn, there were towels, whatever merchandise they wanted to unload, and they did that for about a year and the money went to our USO. I have some photographs somewhere, of me behind the carousels with the clothes hanging, ... For the servicemen that come in, the child threw up and they didn't have pants or a shirt or whatever--if we had it, they got it. They want to make a donation, fine, if they didn't, it's okay. The airline stewardess, the pilots, they paid, but the servicemen didn't have to if they didn't want to. So, I worked on that and he kept on serving soup. He was the cook behind the counter, and he did that for a long time.

SI: How many hours a week would you do that?

GB: In the beginning, we were three days a week. When he started making soup it was five days a week, and then one day I said to them, "It's too much for you." So we went back to three days and then he couldn't do it anymore, leg problems. But I kept going down and my friend, she came down. But the drive from where we lived was a little too much for some of them, they got older so they and I stopped going. I'm still in touch with all those people. Now, there's a retired officer, who lives in the area, we still get together and go out to lunch with all the volunteers that are still walking and talking. I just turned down an offer to go, I don't know where they were going but I couldn't go that day. I had just fractured my back so I couldn't go, but I still support them and at our Synagogue, we had a USO night, and they charged admission and the USO got the proceeds. They hired a band who had three women dressed up like the Andrews Sisters and they came in an old Cadillac. They were great. ... Those girls could sing, you could have sworn, if you closed your eyes, it was the Andrews Sisters and all the proceeds went to the USO. It was really very, very nice. I also did public relations for the USO, Channel six, I did letters to them, and they put it on TV. I can't go looking for it now, but I have all that from the USO. I have the 50th anniversary of the Bob Hope book.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We are looking at your ten year certificate of appreciation for both you and your husband.

GB: This is the one we had at our synagogue, November 13th, 2005. ... It was a great night. Those three women were absolutely marvelous and the proceeds I took down to the USO. This is the Fifty years life of the USO with Bob Hope. ... I did the public relations, so I dealt with Channel six. ... This is from Linda Munich, director of Public Affairs of Channel Six.

SI: This is from the early 2000s. You would get in touch with channel six where you would make public service announcements on behalf of the USO.

GB: Right. The USO is funded strictly by donations, they're not funded by any organization. They would have these big soirees at the big hotels. You paid to go and different organizations and businesses would pay a lot of money to go and they had their tables. Here's one of the things down at the USO honoring somebody, myself, my husband, and my friend Faith that I dragged in from ASO. ... They would honor us and put these tables up like that. To the US Coast Guard training station, I sent prayer books and different stations when we found stuff the Champions needed then, including McGuire, and they sent me thank you notes. I also wrote to the *Montgomery County News*, the *Record*, the *Intelligencer* of Doylestown, WPBI Channel 6. I would do this publicity for the USO. At these affairs, they would have a table with silent bidding on items people would donate. My husband's boyfriend Joe was a West Pointer, and he had some stuff that his wife said, "Get it out of the house." We turn it and Ron Castiel bid on it and got it, and he wrote a letter to Joe thanking him for it. I said to him, "I need that." This is us at USO functions. ... This was a fundraiser held at the aircraft hangar at the Naval Base in 1994, May 13th, and they had a raffle, a ten dollar raffle, and the raffle was a trip to Paris. Guess who

won the raffle? ... Me. My husband bought one raffle ticket, put my name on it. Did you ever walk across ... an aircraft hangar. You know how big it is?

SI: Yes.

GB: I had just come out of the hospital, I had a cancer operation. I hear my name called and I said, "If Jay Hill needs me, I'm not going." The head of McGuire, he looked like something out of the movies, said, "I think you better go." I said, "I don't feel like it." ... My husband said, "Go." It took me a while to get across that hangar and he and Nick Celli who was the head of American Airlines at that time was there. I said, "Jay, I am not working now." He says, "It has nothing to do with it, you just won the trip to Paris." So Nick grabbed me because I thought I was going to faint. I said, "You got to be kidding. I didn't even know we bought a ticket. It was a wonderful trip, really wonderful." So here's a map of Paris to prove I was there, otherwise I never would have gotten there. This is my mother's picture. ... This is another one of the admiral's lunches, how to display your flag. Here we are, this was in the *Inquirer Newspaper*.

SI: The headline is, "Helping the Helpful, USO Needs Donations To Serve Military Travelers."

GB: Yes. ... We went down to the Coast Guard station for some big function and they insisted upon taking our pictures. ... We had these shirts that we used to give to the people who volunteered. My husband never wore the shirt, never, and I never washed it. This was one of the anniversary salutes to the USO, booklet resolution.

SI: That was from 2002?

GB: Yes. ... Campbell's Soup gave us cards to give out, and "Chunky" soups, there were cute little "doohickeys" on it, when we got to the end of the box, nobody wanted them. Well, these people were not from this area, they don't know Campbell's Soup. ... Instead of throwing them out, I said, "I'll take them," and I made a donation and British Airways, in those days they used to give out cards
, and this is the packaging. ...

SI: Were you and your husband involved in any other activities? You showed me some articles that showed you were involved with your synagogue in doing community outreach.

GB: We were active in the Synagogue and the USO and also working. Some days I worked from Monday through the weekend and the following Friday, never off. ... You're off Saturday and Sunday and then you start all over again. You didn't have time to do a lot of things, take care of what you have to take care of. This is from Linda Munich Channel 6. So, that's my USO stuff, interesting?

SI: Yes. Any other anecdotes from your time in the USO that stand out?

GB: I don't dance with them anymore.

SI: Did you wind up corresponding with any of the servicemen?

GB: ... No. You know I have one thing I have, I'll show you. I don't remember exactly how it happened. ... It's a little prayer book. If I ever find it I'll tell you the story. We saw so many servicemen that came through. ... The Coast Guard recruits came in, they came to the USO and waited for the busses to take the recruits down to Cape May Station. That's a lot of people, you couldn't possibly remember everything or everyone.

SI: You were always doing USO duty in Atlantic City?

GB: No. Atlantic City was way back in the '40s.

SI: I am asking about the 1940s. Did you ever do USO activities in Philadelphia then or was it all in Atlantic City?

GB: No, Atlantic City was just with my mother there in World War II. The rest of the time it was Philadelphia. We were down at the airport at the end. In the beginning, the USO was on Broad Street, ... one of the buildings, I can't remember. Atlantic City was only that summer with my mother.

SI: There were mostly guys that were in the hospitals.

GB: Yes. They were R&R--Rest and Recuperation. They had problems. If it wasn't physical, it could be mental, but it was to give them a break, rehabilitate them. They weren't around all the time. Everything was a little different. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You told me before that you and your husband had two boys. Would you like to tell me a little bit about them, their families, and how your family has grown after World War II?

GB: Robert the elder, who will be sixty this year, a great man, graduated Temple, and he worked in banking all his life. He works for Wells Fargo now. He's married, I have a daughter-in-law Joann, they have a daughter Melissa, and Melissa graced me with two gorgeous little boys, William and Shane. Two adorable little boys and they live here in Jersey, that's why I'm here otherwise I'd be in Pennsylvania. I hate to tell you this, New Jersey, it's a weird state. My other son Michael, he's going to be fifty-eight, he lives in Massachusetts, brilliant man, went to Penn and then he went to Harvard for his MBA. He wanted to go into business and two of his professors went with him and they went into business together. Married a very lovely girl, Elizabeth, in Massachusetts and they gave me two wonderful grandchildren, a boy David and a girl Elaina, they're both in college now. They're fine, they're doing very well, and my daughter-in-law and son in New Jersey, had two great Danes, now they have one--big Dane. In Massachusetts, they have Shepherds and a "Doxie." ... They always had two or three dogs in the

house, we're not cat people, we're dog people. I had Boxers. My family is doing very well, they're all fine, and everybody is healthy. Thank God. What else is there to say?

SI: That is great.

GB: That's great.

SI: Have you continued with any other community activities other than the USO in retirement?

GB: No, USO took a lot of my time. I was so grateful for what those servicemen had done to let me live the life I'm living because if it wasn't for them, we'd be in "yogurt" up to here. ... Just that they did so much, it's the least you can do. How many boxes of cookies can you make. You do other things and other services, outside of my synagogue and my high school, I keep in touch with everybody. We were talking about having a reunion and Mildred said, "Are you out of your mind?" She says, "Who's going to come?" I said, "Well, I'm still walking and you're still walking, we'll go." She said, "What about the ones that live in Florida or wherever?" I said, "That's their problem." ... That's about all I ever did.

SI: Where did you and your husband live when you worked in Philadelphia?

GB: We lived in Philadelphia and then we moved to Cheltenham, Pennsylvania and then in Montgomery County, we lived there till he died. All my family had expired, my cousins and so forth, everybody is gone, and my son said, "You'll come here, I'm not crossing that river anymore, it's enough." So I moved here and I'm now in a senior citizens' complex, it's very nice, people are nice, and I go out to visit my family in California.

SI: Great.

GB: I've seen the United States, and let me tell you, this is a beautiful country. You can't imagine the size of this country until you've traveled it and if you really want to know, drive it, it's unbelievable. People have gone to Europe, it's okay, but this country is absolutely gorgeous and the experiences you get. When the people from Rob Royce Company, that worked on the Harrier in England, came over, and wanted to see "Cowboys and Indians." We all went to Vegas, rented a car, and we took them up to the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon. In England, evidently snow doesn't fall down, it goes sideways from the winds. They said, "Look at that, it really snows like that here," you know. ... They were amazed because they thought everything was like the movies and the deserts, the jack rabbits, the canyons and the Mississippi River, they couldn't believe it. Then we got to the West Coast and I was tired, we did a lot of driving. The English went on, up into Canada to Vancouver, but we went home.

SI: How long were you with these folks that worked on the Harrier?

GB: On this trip, we took a month off. We did a lot of traveling. We also went up to New England, and then we went down to Florida down to Key West at different times. It's a gorgeous

country, beautiful, and then you eat different kinds of food in different areas. On my first trip West, I never had grits, we were somewhere in Kansas or Iowa, I don't remember, I looked at it, what is this stuff. ... The waitress said, "They're grits." I said, "How do you eat it?" She says, "Me, I pour syrup all over it, I can't stand them." [laughter] I said, "So why did you serve it?" ... She said, "It's on the menu." But people were very nice and the scenery is beautiful, the Painted Desert, the West is unbelievable. How those people went across this country in covered wagons, I'll never understand. It's unbelievable because I never would have made it. You had to worry about water, the cattle and Indians. It was an unbelievable experience. I've driven across three or four times, and every time we go a different way, see different things, and the corn belt that their having all these problems right now with the temperatures, like the Dust Bowl--we'd drive for days and all you see is corn, it's a beautiful country. I've never been to Hawaii, I've never been to Alaska. That's what I'll do some year if I'm still walking and talking.

SI: I am sure you will be.

GB: I have plans, I better be. [laughter]

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add for the record?

GB: I can't at this point think of anything else. Twenty minutes after you leave here, ... I will think of something. That's how it works.

SI: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate all your time over the two sessions, and for bringing everything out and showing it to me.

GB: Would you like to stay around and put everything back? ...

SI: I can help you with that. Thank you very much.

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

Reviewed by Katie Ruffer 5/15/13

Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 6/4/13