

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM R. BOES, JR.
FOR THE
RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY
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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. William R. Boes, Jr., on October 16, 1995, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with James Dunne. I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. Your father was a chiropractor, correct?

WB: Yes, and Director of Safety at Calco Chemical Company, which is now American Cyanimid.

KP: Why did your father become a chiropractor?

WB: Well, my mother suffered [from] some kind of illness, and they told her [that] she would need surgery every so often, and, when he was in the Navy, he was a pharmacist in the Medical Corps. So, he had a little knowledge. ... He went to ... Eastern College, I think in Newark, of Chiropractic, and decided [that] she wouldn't need surgery, and she didn't. [laughter] ...

KP: Your father became a chiropractor after serving in the Navy.

WB: Yeah.

KP: Your father enlisted in the Navy before World War I, correct?

WB: True. He and my uncle both went in.

KP: What year did they enlist?

WB: I would say 1912, 1913, in that area.

KP: Were they part of the naval force that was sent down to Mexico?

WB: Yes. He was shot down there, in the leg, and he didn't even know it until he collapsed, by a sniper. [laughter]

KP: What was his rank? What were his responsibilities?

WB: He was, like, a first aid man or a pharmacist, in the medical end of it.

KP: When he was shot, was he serving as a medic with the Marines on shore?

WB: ... I would think so, yeah.

KP: Did he ever tell you any stories about his days in the Navy?

WB: He remembered, over in the Japan area, [being] in one of those storms [and seeing] ... the guy being washed off the deck of one ship and onto another. He never really said too much about his service, that I recall. Apparently, he liked it, but, I kind of liked the Army, pretty much.

KP: It sounds like he had a very positive view of his military service.

WB: Yeah.

KP: How did your parents meet?

WB: That, I don't know. ... That was his first marriage and her second marriage, but, I don't know whether they met in Newark or Irvington.

KP: Was your father married when he joined the Navy?

WB: When he went in?

KP: Yes.

WB: I don't believe so. I think they might have known one another, 'cause I remember seeing a little postcard [from] the USS *Arizona* to her. I don't know when they got married, actually.

KP: Your father held a number of different positions in his career. He was a chiropractor, a safety director, and then, later, he became a police commissioner.

WB: Yeah. Down on Long Beach Island, he was elected commissioner of police. I remember going through the police station with him, [to] see what they had. He was always a member, and, when I lived in South Bound Brook, he knew the police chief, and I'd ride around, sometimes, with the police chief at night. [laughter]

KP: Did your father ever have a private chiropractic practice?

WB: He had a private practice in Somerville, and then, he continued it down in Beach Haven, Long Beach Island.

KP: How did he become the director of safety?

WB: The person that brought him [there] used to be with Congoleumnarin. An official down there brought him from Congoleumnarin to Calco with him. I think it was Mr. Jefcott.

KP: Did he like that job?

WB: Oh, yeah. He was pretty strict about it, too, in maintaining safety.

KP: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

WB: Dad lost a lot in some, what did they used to call them? savings and loan, not a bank. I forget what it was, one of these financial institutions, but, I can't remember the name. ... It affected him, but, he worked out of it.

KP: Did your father stay employed throughout the Depression?

WB: As far as I know, ... as far as I remember, he was always doing something. He used to repair my shoes. He had a thing, an iron anvil of some sort, to repair our shoes and things.

KP: It sounds like your father was a jack-of-all-trades.

WB: Right. He was pretty handy with a lot of things. He wouldn't let me wash or clean his car. He'd do it, simonize it, [use] simonize cleaner, and then, simonize it. [laughter] It was years before he'd let me touch it.

KP: It sounds like he was very active in politics.

WB: Oh, down the shore, yeah, area.

KP: How did your father feel about Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal?

WB: I don't think they were in favor of it, in favor of him, but, I didn't hear too much demagoguery about, you know, [Roosevelt]. ... He was a Hoover [supporter]. He was on Hoover's side, as I was as a kid. [laughter]

KP: Did your father support Alf Landon in 1936?

WB: I don't recall. I just knew of him, but, I don't [know]. ... In fact, I went down to Washington, when I was a kid, with a friend of mine, who I just saw yesterday. We went down there and stayed at the YMCA for a week and we met a lot of people. In fact, William (Knuckle?) Doak, the Secretary of Labor at the time, invited us up to his office, gave us a big portrait, and signed it. I met with Dr. J. Hurley, Secretary of the Army at the time, quite a handsome guy. [I] saw ... Mrs. Lou Henry Hoover, right in front of the White House steps. Now, of course, you can't get in there, but, ... some congressmen invited us to a party. We had fun. ...

KP: It sounds quite memorable.

WB: I started collecting autographs. I have quite a collection now, although I've sold some of it off. I used to have the whole presidential collection, which I sold. I wish I hadn't, 'cause, today, it would be worth five, six times what I sold it for, from Washington all the way through Johnson, I think.

KP: When did you sell them?

WB: Probably fifteen years ago or so. Now, I have some more presidents, but, I'm trying to stay away from documents and big things. [I] just got John Quincy Adams the other day. ...

KP: You began collecting autographs on this trip to Washington.

WB: Yeah. I bought a letter written by a Speaker of the House at the time down there, probably for pennies compared with what, you know, things cost today.

KP: Growing up, you spent most of your time in Somerville.

WB: Yes, except [for] when I was in Panama, and Puerto Rico, and Alabama.

KP: When did your family move to the Long Beach area?

WB: He just thought it would be better for my mom's health. ... I was in Puerto Rico, I guess, when he moved. They had a home down there that they'd go down [to] in the summer and he wanted something a little larger. So, two blocks over, they built a home with a partial cellar and everything, which survived that big hurricane/storm.

KP: The Hurricane of 1938?

WB: Yeah. ... No, it wouldn't be that. [It was] later than that, when the island was cut in half, 'cause, I remember, I got a call, I was with Chase Manhattan Bank at the time, ... to come down [and] pick up my mother, who was evacuated from the island to Manahawkin. ... When I took her back, ... we had to get permission to go on the island, and there was no heat, so, I scrounged up some wood and started a fire in the fireplace, 'cause she wanted to go back, but, it was partly so [that] her health would be better down there. I don't know.

KP: What was Somerville like during your childhood?

WB: ... Somerville used to be considered a very healthy, quiet place, as I recall. There were a lot of trees, you know, on the main street and all around the town. It was nice. ... [It is] still a pretty decent town. I've always come back there. I almost thought of staying in Florida, when I was waiting for a trip back to Panama, a flight back, and I had a chance to buy a lot down there on one of these waterways where ... you could bring them boats in, although the last one was in ... Miami Springs, I think it was, and a druggist was willing to sell it for 5,000 dollars. Today, God knows what that thing would be worth, but, I had considered living in Florida, but, I came back to Somerville.

KP: What kind of an education did you receive in the Somerville school system?

WB: [In] high school, I thought we had a fine bunch of teachers. In fact, years later, I met one of the teachers who had retired, a Mr. Fenstermacher, and I told him that, you know, thinking back, ... I think we had the finest bunch of teachers that we ever had, and he said, "Well, we teachers felt that your class, the Class of '35, was the best class we ever had." [laughter] He was a math teacher. We used to call him "T-Mack."

KP: You went to high school and college during the Great Depression.

WB: Yeah.

KP: How did the Depression affect your education?

WB: ... The first two years, I commuted, and I'd thumb my way to save the bus fare, and then, the last two years, I lived on campus, and I was a preceptor over in Ford Hall. The Dean of Men, Metzger, I guess, appointed some of the ROTC officers as preceptors. My most troublesome student in Ford Hall was a very lovable senior who'd get the younger ones into trouble, but, he was a guy [that] you couldn't help liking, even though he caused problems. [laughter] ... I remember selling text books, so [that] I could go to the Charity Ball or something, or Military Ball. Then, I had to go to the library to do my studying.

KP: I have interviewed several people from Somerville and many had distinct memories of the Ku Klux Klan and its activities in the area. Do you have any memories of the Klan in Somerville?

WB: No, I don't recall any activity, no visible activity that I know of. I knew of the existence [of the Klan], but, ... no, I don't [remember anything else].

KP: Do you remember any marches?

WB: No.

KP: Why did you choose to go to Rutgers?

WB: Well, partly because it was close and, I guess, money was a little tight. ... I don't think I interviewed with any other schools. I remember coming over here for an interview. I think my mother came with me.

KP: Did the fact that Rutgers was a Dutch Reformed school influence your decision at all?

WB: Well, I don't know. ... We were members, at that time, of the Reformed Church in Somerville, First Reformed Church, there is a Second Reformed, but, I don't know whether that had too much to do with it. It might have had, way in the background, but, I think [that] closeness and the fact that I could commute [were the deciding factors].

KP: You commuted for two years, often by hitch-hiking.

WB: Yeah.

KP: Did you feel like that caused you to miss out on part of the college experience?

WB: Well, I didn't have time for the after school activities. In high school, I was on the student council, debate club, and into things, but, here, I started on the *Targum*, did a few short stories, but, I didn't stay with it. I probably, you know, missed something. I did join a fraternity, Alpha Kappa Pi. I never lived there, but, I'd go there for lunch.

KP: Were you initiated by the fraternity?

WB: Yeah.

KP: What do you remember about your initiation?

WB: [laughter] Not much. I had to make a paddle, I remember that. I still have a paddle that somebody made for me when I was a senior.

JD: How did you commute to school, since Route 287 did not exist? Did you go through Bound Brook, and then, up Easton Avenue?

WB: Yeah, Easton Avenue. ... We had to go through Bound Brook and South Bound Brook.

JD: Is that how you got here?

WB: The bus, Public Service, I believe.

KP: Was Easton Avenue a toll road back then?

WB: I don't think so. ... I don't recall. No, I don't think so, 'cause, on Saturday, I would have my dad's car. He used to go work, and I took a girl, Jessamine Smith, to Douglass, and I'd drop her off. I always had classes every Saturday, throughout the four years, and one of them was at eight o'clock. That was no good. [laughter]

KP: You stayed in the ROTC program for the advanced course. Why did you stay in?

WB: ... Yeah. I guess I liked it. I had a pretty good grade in that, as I recall. ... Colonel John Stutesman, who was the senior man, and, also, Lieutenant Colonel Davidson, [who] was an instructor, both were in Panama, but, Colonel Stutesman had left before I got there, and Davidson became a full colonel, and he was chief of the general staff of the Panama Mobile Force when I was still there. I don't remember, [but], I never ran across Major Croonquist, who was also an assistant professor of military science.

KP: There was a significant, college campus-based peace movement in the 1930s, while you were in the ROTC. Do you remember any peace movement activities?

WB: No, no, no ... major consequences, nothing like, you know, in later years.

KP: James and my other students have been studying the Bergel-Hauptmann controversy at NJC, which reached a head in 1938. Were there any discussions among the students at Rutgers at the time about the case or how it was handled by the administration?

WB: I don't recall that ... we had any group conversations or anything.

KP: While in college, what kind of a career did you envision for yourself? Did you think that you would become a military officer?

WB: No, I think I was leaning toward more a diplomatic career, the State Department. In fact, while I was in the service, they were looking for personnel, the State Department, in all [of] the liberated countries, and this, and that, and Foreign Service, and I applied for it, and I was accepted. ... Then, I got out of the service, and I was with Chase Manhattan Bank, and I was supposed to go over to Princeton and take the exam for Foreign Service Officer, but, I hesitated about asking [for] time off from the bank, since I was just with them recently. ... They were going to give you credit for your military service, so, there might have been a chance at that, and then, I even thought of going down to Georgetown University for further training, but, along came marriage and other responsibilities. [laughter]

KP: You thought of going to Georgetown on the GI Bill.

WB: Well, I probably had that in the back of my mind, yeah.

KP: Did you ever regret not taking the Foreign Service exam?

WB: Secretly, or way back inside, I think I would have liked to have gone on with that.

KP: Are there any Rutgers professors that stand out in your memory?

WB: Professor Davidson, English, ... and the French professor. I think, overall, I had a good group, a fine group, of professors. You don't realize this until later in life, just like the high school teachers I had, what a splendid group of men they were, dedicated, good people. Davidson, I recall that, when I came to Rutgers, ... if you took this concentrated course, I don't know [if] it was six, eight, nine weeks or what, in English and literature, then, you wouldn't have to take any more throughout college. So, I made sure I passed it, even though I had a Saturday class and all that. ... [laughter] English was never my favorite subject.

KP: You were very busy in college. How many hours would you work each week? What kind of jobs did you have? You mentioned that you sold textbooks and programs at the stadium.

WB: ... They had the National Youth Association. I did some gardening. I didn't know anything about gardening, but, with the various professors, their homes, ... you worked on the grounds. I don't know how much time [I spent on that]. I still was able to get to my homework, but, usually, I didn't start my homework until late in the evening, when everything quieted down. I could study better at ten o'clock than I could at seven or eight.

KP: In terms of your home and your family?

WB: Yeah. Of course, at home, ... I know, before college days, when the street lights went on, I'd better be in, and, of course, I'd better have my homework done before I went out.

KP: What did you do for fun during your college years?

WB: Even then, I used to do a lot of reading. Of course, we didn't have television. I'd go to different lectures, like, in Somerville, ... they used to have programs, Admiral Byrd came there, I went to see him, and different people. ... Major General Butler of the Marines came there and John Philip Sousa, [I] saw him. You got all these people [that] you could see, and hear, and get their autographs, at the time. I had Admiral Byrd sign my ticket, the entrance ticket. There was movies. I liked movies. I spent a lot of time with my friends, visiting back and forth, ride a bike, you know.

KP: Did you date any of the women up at NJC, or "the Coop" as it was better known?

WB: The Coop, right, yes, Virginia Leigh Atkinson. She was much smarter than I. She got a Phi Beta Kappa, as I recall. I met her in the library or something one time. [I] thought she was cute. I think one of her relatives had a band or something. She was the only one, I guess, [that] I dated. I was dating a girl at home that I took to the Military Ball in my junior year, when we had George Hall and Duke Ellington both, I think, [at the] affair.

KP: My students have been quite impressed by the bands that Rutgers used to attract.

WB: Yeah, imagine, two bands, not just one.

KP: Did you read the paper? It sounds like a simple question, but, did you read the daily paper when you were in college? A lot of people tell me that they never read the paper or that they just did not have the time.

WB: Maybe on weekends. I don't know what paper. I guess we probably got the *Star Ledger* or ... whatever was available at the time, but, I don't think I saw it every day.

KP: How aware were you of what was going on in the world?

WB: Well, I was pretty aware of what Hitler was doing over there in Austria and Czechoslovakia. Yeah, I was interested and followed those things and Neville Chamberlain's failure, you know. He thought he achieved something and he achieved nothing. ... I tried to follow what was going on before we entered the war. In fact, I was at Fort Niagara, and I ... wrote to the Canadian Defense Department to volunteer, but, they wrote a nice letter back saying [that] they were looking for aviators, not infantrymen. [laughter]

KP: Was this in 1939?

WB: Yeah.

KP: Why did you feel compelled to volunteer?

WB: I don't know, just, you know, Canada, Britain, I both had an interest in. ... I didn't realize, I guess, at the time, that we might be getting into it. I should of, but, I didn't.

KP: When the Canadian government wrote back and said, "We are looking for aviators," did you consider applying for an aviation program in the Royal Air Force or the Royal Canadian Air Force?

WB: No, no, I figured that's [it]. Later on, I did try to get in as a bombardier, but, ... I found out later, ... they said, "When you return to the States from Panama, you might reapply," [the] non-pilot program it was called or something.

KP: You mentioned that, in the 1930s, you did not feel that we were going to fight in another European war.

WB: No, no, I didn't.

KP: Did any of your ROTC officers have a hunch that a war would break out in Europe or that we would be involved?

WB: I don't recall Colonel Stutesman or Davidson ... really ever bringing it up, least not in class.

JD: You played lacrosse.

WB: Yeah, varsity, junior.

JD: Did you play while you were commuting or while you were living here?

WB: I think I was living here then, yeah, yes.

JD: What position did you play?

WB: Attackman on the right side. I recall playing over in Princeton. [We] played the Princeton Junior Varsity on a muddy, messy day and that's when I got to see Albert Einstein. So, I wrote to him, and told him [that] I saw him, and asked for his autograph, which I received, ... a little, tiny autograph on a card.

KP: Where did you see him?

WB: On the campus, in his coat and his pipe. ... It wasn't a coat, it was a jacket/shirt, made of leather, probably.

KP: Were you surprised that you received a regular Army appointment? Most ROTC cadets were simply placed in the Reserves.

WB: Well, I had applied ... under the Thomason Act to go in. Of course, at that time, I think it was ... six months or a year, and then, of course, things were extended. There was no volunteering after that.

KP: In 1939, when you were first sworn in as an officer, did you expect to stay in for a year or did you consider making the Army your career?

WB: Probably, I'd considered trying to, ... you know, take the exam for [it]. I did, eventually, while in the service, pass for the regular Army, but, I was too far down the list ... to get appointed.

KP: Where was your first Army assignment?

WB: 28th Infantry, First Division, Fort Niagara, New York.

KP: That is pretty far north.

WB: Yeah, right. Yeah, the Canadians, ... they'd have their bugles going long before ours were, wake us up, right across the river [at] Camp Niagara. They had a Camp Niagara there.

KP: What were your duties?

WB: ... I think I might have been in H Company, [which] was a machine gun company, and you'd train the men on how to take the machine gun apart [and] put it together. ... You had air-cooled and water-cooled both. The air-cooled was a heavier machine gun, and the water-cooled was a .32 caliber, and ... you'd have maneuvers. The general [was] Lieutenant General Hugh Drum, which Camp Drum was named after. We had a First Army maneuver in New York and, because ... Major General Irving Philips, commander of the First Division, didn't like our Colonel McDowell, we had to go set up the camp in the New York area. It's outside of, I forgot where we had those maneuvers, beyond Watertown someplace, and we set up the camp, and then, when the maneuvers were over, we had to [be] critiqued, and the General critiqued the whole thing. Then, we had to clean up that area, our regiment, the 28th Infantry, and then, we marched all the way back to Fort Niagara from Plattsburg. The 26th Infantry lived in [the] Plattsburg area, or ... were stationed at Plattsburg. They rode in on trucks. So, you don't cross the General.

KP: Why was your colonel so despised?

WB: I don't know what Cassius M. McDowell [did], but, we paid for it, 'cause the General didn't care for him.

KP: You were a member of the pre-draft peacetime Army. Comparing the Army in peace and war, what was unique to the 1939-1941 period and what changed after Pearl Harbor?

WB: Well, you probably had more parade formations and whatnot. Up there, of course, when you were officer of the day, you'd have to have the change [of] the guard out on the old reservation, the old Fort Niagara, which was historic, and people, you know, watch and all, but, I think, basically, we had a lot of good training and serious training. [We] did our duty, like, when you'd pull OD, it'd usually be from noon, Saturday, till six o'clock, Monday morning, six-thirty, when you reported to the headquarters. ... We did a lot of serious training and maneuvering. I don't know.

KP: How did your fellow officers react to the outbreak of war in Europe and the Fall of France? What did they notice about how the nature of warfare had changed?

WB: Well, the speed, the mechanism, you know, the more mechanization, with tanks and an air force, the whole thing was ... come to life. I don't know.

KP: Were changes in American tactics and strategy debated?

WB: I think they felt that, probably, you need small, efficient striking forces, combat forces, to go in and do a quick job, and then, have the infantry move in, take over, and hold. I think they, you know, thought a lot about how they could [operate]. In view of Hitler's legions, how they performed, they realized that [changes were necessary].

KP: How did they view the use of tanks, since Hitler's Army had proven the tank's effectiveness?

WB: I never got involved with tanks, until I was down in Panama and I was with a cavalry unit, with their half-tracks and tanks. I took some wild rides with those guys. [laughter] They were really gung-ho with the whole thing, but, back in '39, ... in our maneuvers, ... I don't recall any big use of tanks. Of course, we had them, but, not in the huge proportion that they were later used, and they were necessarily required. It took a lot of extra studies and thinking [on] how to employ them, you know. I know, in Africa, with the sand and all, they had problems. There was a lot of technical things that unraveled before you could employ them to good use.

KP: You wrote on your survey that you were trained in winter warfare and that an Olympic medallist taught you how to ski.

WB: Yeah, up at Lake Placid, tail maneuvers, bedding rolls, guns, ammunition, and they had us use sleeping bags, and I recommended zippers instead of snaps. I had to make a report to General Irving Philips. He was, for a while, chief of staff to General Drum, and then, he became First Division commander. I think the 28th Infantry was moved to the Eighth Division, but, I'm not sure, as I recall, later.

KP: Did you learn to ski well? Was it mostly cross-country skiing?

WB: Well, I could go cross-country. I wasn't that proficient on the down[hill], on the ski trails, 'cause I wound [up] wrapped up around a tree one time, [laughter] but, it was fun. You spent a lot of time on the hill. They had ropes or something that would pull you up, I'd hurry down so [that] I could get a ride up, and you would learn how to dress after a while. If you dressed too heavily, you'd cut off the circulation, [we] found that out with the sleeping bags, and, when skiing, you'd be taking things off after a while.

KP: How many men did you train in winter warfare?

WB: ... We had a battalion of the 28th Infantry go out, by companies. You couldn't take the whole battalion out.

KP: Were they all outfitted with the proper equipment?

WB: Skies, and poles, and the white parkas, I guess you'd call them, I have a picture someplace, and I had arranged for ski boots for the whole battalion though Ralph Munson, who was an Olympic Ski Team jump captain at Lake Placid, and his two teenage kids, wow, what skiers they were. [laughter] I had never seen anything like that.

KP: James and I thought that it was ironic that you were trained in winter warfare, but, you wound up in Panama. How did you end up in Panama?

WB: Well, I think, partly, I volunteered. I think a request came through for volunteers for Panama duty. They wanted to protect the locks and installations. ... When I was a battalion executive officer, later on, I'd have to go around to all these installations [and] see if the men were okay, and the guns, and equipment, everything was [okay], particularly on the eastern side.

KP: Did you apply for the Panama duty before or after Pearl Harbor?

WB: Before Pearl Harbor. I was down there. I was teaching my wife ... how to drive when the thing broke on that Sunday. I couldn't believe it, you know, when I heard [that] Pearl Harbor and the Philippines were hit. We had no idea what had happened down there, but, we immediately went on emergency status.

KP: I have read that the pre-war Army, particularly in the case of officers, placed great emphasis upon parades, proper uniforms, and military etiquette. What was your experience with this rather formal set up?

WB: You'd better dance with the Colonel's wife, I learned that.

KP: Why was it important to dance with the Colonel's wife?

WB: Well, because she was much younger than the Colonel, and she liked to dance with the younger officers, and it would be an insult, you know. You had to be properly dressed. ... Off the base, of course, then, you could wear civilian clothes, until ... we entered the war. Then, I was in uniform all the time, but, ... you know, I had to have a sword and all that stuff.

KP: Did you own a dress blue uniform?

WB: I had even a white dress uniform. ... I was going ... with a young lady whose father was captain of the port down there, in Panama, and her ... brother and brother-in-law were in the embassies. ... I was invited to the Chilean Embassy, where her brother was attached, or her brother-in-law, when they were having the President there, to Panama, to decorate him, and I had to wear a white uniform at the embassy, all lanterns around, you know, a great affair. It was nice, but, you know, there was attention paid to dress, proper uniform, and all that. ... I was ordering a formal set of dress uniform, with the epaulettes and all, when the thing broke out, so, I canceled the order.

KP: Unlike sergeants, you had to pay for your uniforms. Did that get expensive?

WB: Yeah. I think I was getting 125 bucks a month and lodging as a lieutenant.

KP: What was daily life like at Fort Niagara? For example, how good was Army food before the war?

WB: Oh, I never had any complaints. When I was the mess officer, I'd stop in and eat with the company. ... We had an officers' club there, and I shared a room with another officer, and he ... came from Syracuse, and we'd have hot meals in the evening. I forgot about lunch, whether we ate with the company [or not]. [It] depended upon whether we were out on maneuvers or whatever, and then, on Sunday, they'd leave cold cuts there for you to eat, but, usually, I'd go out to a little town outside the fort. There was a little place on top of the hill where they had good duck, and I'd have a duck dinner, but, overall, the food never bothered me, in or out of the Army. [We'd] line up in the mess and it'd be raining, sometimes. [laughter] ... Down in Panama, I'd always make sure that, when I was the headquarters commandant, ... there was always coffee going, 'cause some of the general staff officers would come over. [On] Thanksgiving and Christmas, we'd invite the General and his staff over.

KP: I have also read that the pre-war Army was a hard-drinking Army.

WB: Well, we had ... that, yeah. I never got caught up in it. ...

KP: However, you knew officers who drank.

WB: Oh, yeah. Well, I knew some of them. One of my best soldiers, who never wanted to be promoted, but, I'd use him as an example, to perform different duties or [give] demonstrations, you know, God, he was the best looking soldier, when you'd get him dressed up in his uniform. He was always neat and all, but, he had a drinking problem, but, I could never promote him. He didn't want to be promoted, yet, he could do the work of any of the sergeants. Yeah, there was some of those guys. G Company was ... mostly all Polish. It was a fun company. I was in that for a while. In fact, Anton P. Bragan, whom I later met as a colonel, down in Fort Benning, he was my logistics instructor down there, he'd go off fishing in a hole in the ice on Lake Champlain, and I'd be guiding the company around on the snow covered hills, firing at targets and what have you, but, that was a great ... company, and I would kid them that Poland lost the war 'cause all the Poles were in G Company, 28th Infantry. ... The first sergeant and the company clerk were ... the best comedy team you ever would want. I really enjoyed those two, Sergeant (Lagift?) and I forgot the other one, but, they were a pair. They were fun. [laughter]

KP: What made them such an amusing pair?

WB: Oh, just clowning [around] in the office there, in the company headquarters. They were just comical.

KP: You mentioned that your company was predominantly Polish. Where did they all come from?

WB: Who knows? New York area, I guess.

KP: How long had most of them been in the Army?

WB: A lot of them were veterans. We had a lot of veterans in the 28th Infantry, a long time, yeah.

KP: Would you say that most had more than five years?

WB: We didn't have too many new recruits, as I recall. Of course, as, you know, things went on and I left there, I supposed they changed rapidly, especially if they went to the Eighth Division.

KP: As a young second lieutenant, how important were your sergeants to you?

WB: Very important, yeah. They were good. You needed good non-coms, platoon sergeants, and tech sergeants, master sergeants. Of course, your first sergeant was always a key.

KP: Did you make any mistakes on your first assignment?

WB: Yeah. ... Before you'd become officer of the day, you'd be commander of the guard, and you'd sleep at ... the guard headquarters at night, and I came in, and the officer on duty at the headquarters, [I] reported to him, and he said, "Actually, you're supposed to report as the old commander of the guard," and whatever. ... I just said [that] I had nothing to report, when, actually, that was incorrect. I should have reported as the old [commander]. ... Well, when you're officer of the day, you come in and report as the old officer of the day, "Second Lieutenant So-And-So reporting as [ordered]," but, I just said [that] I had nothing to report. I didn't know what he thought. He didn't say anything, but, I realized later that that wasn't the correct report.

KP: Were there any other mistakes?

WB: None.

KP: Was there anything that you felt that the Army was not doing properly, either in training, or requisitioning, or supplying the units?

WB: Well, later on, I ran into that. When I was headquarters commandant, they expected you to have certain type guns and certain things and they criticized you 'cause you didn't. Well, you went to the quartermaster or the ordnance department. [If] they didn't have it, you didn't get it. You didn't have the right anti-tank guns, or the right this, or the right that, or the right whatever. ... It wasn't the fact that I didn't requisition, it [just] wasn't available.

KP: Why did you apply for duty in Panama?

WB: Well, it was just, I guess, going overseas someplace, probably. At that time, I had no attachments, you know, other than home.

KP: Had you traveled very much before you entered the Army?

WB: Well, I had been to Canada, and New York, and the New England states. I hadn't been out of the country or anything.

KP: Had you ever been south of Washington, DC?

WB: Oh, yeah. I'd been to Washington, yeah, never to Florida, but, Washington and Virginia.

KP: How did you get to Panama?

WB: Went on a transport ship, ... I forget the name of it, but, I think it was later sunk, regular Army transport. When I came back, I came back on the battleship *USS Texas*.

KP: What did you know about Panama before you got there? What did you learn once you were there?

WB: Well, I knew about Teddy Roosevelt, and, you know, the building of the Canal, and all that sort of stuff, but, ... the problem I had [was] with the disease down there, and malaria, and this, and that. ... When I was down there, you still had to take quinine, or something else, and you'd check to see if the men took [theirs] when they went though the mess line, and you'd wear mosquito netting, gloves. It was still a problem.

KP: What were your impressions of the Panamanians?

WB: ... I met a lot of nice ones, you know, in Panama, a lot of nice people. A lot of them were just, you know, workers on farms or this and that, but, in the city, you'd run into some descent people. In the Canal Zone, you didn't have much contact, well, unless you went into Panama City or in the old City of Colon.

JD: Did you become proficient in Spanish?

WB: I was never [fluent]. I could read it quite well, but, I was never a good talker in it, no.

JD: What did you do while on leave? Did you play golf?

WB: No. We had swimming pools. We'd have contests. In fact, the one time, ... under my jurisdiction, I had the stables, had about thirty-six riding horses, so, I used to do some riding, and I was going with a girl, and she'd go riding with me. ... Then, one time, I had a little show and [there were] some small prizes [that] we awarded one Saturday afternoon. The horses were for the general staff and officers and that was another side job I had, that, the motor pool, and, when you're

headquarters company, you have a little of everything under you. My favorite horse was Rex.
[laughter]

KP: It sounds like riding was pretty important for an Army officer before 1941.

WB: Yeah. Well, of course, we used to have a real cavalry. Of course, ... at that time, they were introducing the half-tracks and other things to take place of horses. They were mainly [for] pleasure, ... parades, or riding. ...

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

JD: There were four camps in the Canal Zone, two on the Atlantic side and two on the Pacific side. What kind of interaction was there between the camps?

WB: Well, I was at (Amadore?) for a while, Fort (Amadore?), but, my duty was at Fort Clayton. My unit was, at the time, over there. We would get along. If we wanted beer, we'd have to get along with the Air Force, because they'd have it all the time. When I was out at (Nueva Gorgona?), about sixty miles from the Canal Zone, at an advanced post, isolated, we would go to the Air Force if we wanted beer. They were stationed a few miles away. [There was] some intermingling, but, at our post, we had engineers, we had infantry, we had a unit from Puerto Rico that was stationed there. They were an infantry unit. We had cavalry. It was the Panama Mobil Force. It was a makeshift division. ... Major General Edward Harding was commanding general, a very nice guy, had come from the Pacific. ... Colonel Tom O'Neill, when I left, he was ... chief of staff, I believe, a real West Pointer, but, he had commanded the company. I later was headquarters commandant, headquarters and headquarters company, Panama Mobil Force. Colonel O'Neill, he was then a major, commanded that, and then, there was a Major (Skeldon?), who later wound up, over in Korea, as a major general. ... Where were we? What was the question? [laughter]

JD: I had asked if there was any intermingling between the camps.

WB: Oh, yeah. On the post, there was a lot of it. In fact, ... my company had a basketball team and we won the post championship. I had two Indian soldiers, and I had to light a fire under those guys to get them going, but, we won the post championship. We took them out to dinner and I invited the Colonels, O'Neill and (Skeldon?), to the local restaurant in Panama City where we took them out for dinner when we won the championship. [We] beat the Puerto Rican team, which was pretty good. I'd get them over there and practice periodically, when I wasn't doing company duties, and I was on the general's court martial for a long time, 'cause I was a senior captain. That was time consuming. I was also [on the] summary court martial. ...

KP: What kind of cases would you handle?

WB: Well, usually, you know, absent without leave or other problems. [laughter] ...

KP: Were there any serious problems?

WB: Impersonation of an officer, different things, no murders. [laughter]

KP: Were there any theft cases? Did any cases involve civilians?

WB: Only one case that I recall and I felt [that] it was a frame-up by the civilians in Panama.

KP: What do you remember about the case?

WB: I forget the details, but, I felt [that I had] seen enough of it to realize that [the] guy was put up, or framed, or whatever. In fact, one time, ... I was a headquarters company commander in a National Guard outfit for a while and I was also battalion adjutant. ... Automatically, when you're headquarters company commander, you're an adjutant. ... One of my soldiers got in trouble in Panama City and I refused to court martial the guy, 'cause I figured it was a frame-up. They were sort of annoyed at me, but, I didn't care. I felt that the guy hadn't done whatever it was.

KP: How much of a shock was the attack on Pearl Harbor to you and your fellow officers?

WB: ... I mean, after a while, it sunk in that this happened. We had no idea, ... you know, what would happen to us, whether we'd be moved out or what. We were put on a defense thing right away. In fact, ... underneath one of the barracks, we set up a temporary headquarters for the General and his staff, and, you know, life changed. [laughter] You were constantly on duty or subject to duty, a different life. The social stuff went by the board.

KP: Was there any concerns that there would be an attack on the Canal Zone?

WB: Yeah, definitely. We figured that the Japanese would sneak in there, somehow, with submarines or whatever. We had the big guns at Amadore, but, of course, they wouldn't probably come in as something visible. ... I don't know. They just thought there might be a sneak attack. ...

KP: Was espionage a concern?

WB: Oh, yeah.

KP: Was the Canal Zone ever attacked?

WB: No, no.

KP: Did you ever have any false alarms or submarine sightings?

WB: I don't recall that we experienced that, until I was going north on a battleship and this Japanese submarine got into our area, but, the destroyers took care of it. I had that experience going from New Orleans to Panama on a transport, and some German subs got in, sunk the lead ship, and we started dropping depth bombs, and I was afraid, all the lights were out, of course, ... to put my foot down, for fear [that] I'd step in water. I didn't know whether we got hit or what with all the

noise that went on. We had to pull into Guantanamo Bay, and remake the convoy, and then, proceed. ...

KP: When you were in that convoy, was that the closest to danger you had come by that point in the war?

WB: Probably, yeah.

KP: How long were you stationed in Panama?

WB: I came back for leave after two-and-a-half years, came back around, I think, ... Christmas time. I hit Florida. They were having a freezing spell. ... The car I was in, the pipes froze, and, when I got home, I went to bed with the flu, [laughter] 'cause I had no winter clothes at the time.

KP: Your body was probably quite shocked.

WB: Yeah, the blood thins out. ... The next time I came back was to Fort Benning [for the] advanced officers', field grade officers', course. I was there for three months. I'd shiver there all [the time]. I'd wear my socks to bed and everything else. They had these pot-bellied stoves in the hallway. They ain't that great in heating. I remember first trying to shave. I couldn't hold my hand still. [laughter] ...

KP: Did you want to leave Panama or were you assigned to Fort Benning?

WB: At one time, I was reassigned there. I was surprised that I went back after Fort Benning. Usually, after Fort Benning, you'd go to a more active theater, but, for some reason, they sent me back there, and I had to set up a combat village. [I] took an old, Panamanian village, with houses on stilts, you know, and set up a mock combat village course, with machine guns, and hand grenades, and targets, and they gave me a platoon of engineers to do the construction work, and digging, and the foxholes, and what have you, and [we] drew up a program. That was on the Atlantic side, a little deserted village. They wanted to start training.

KP: Did you actually supervise the training in Panama?

WB: No, not at that thing, no. ... When I finished it, I went back to my assignment.

KP: What was your new assignment in Panama?

WB: I was still with headquarters and headquarters company, but, eventually, I got moved to an infantry unit. I was headquarters and headquarters company commander and battalion adjutant, and then, I was moved from there to another battalion of the same regiment on the Atlantic side and was made the battalion executive officer. My first day of duty, the Colonel, Alexander I believe was his name, took off and who shows up but the commanding General, who I had to show around the whole battalion area. I think he did that on purpose. [laughter]

KP: That must have meant that you were really in charge.

WB: Yeah, when the Colonel [left]. Well, he was a lieutenant colonel. Usually, the battalion commander was a lieutenant colonel, and then, the executive officer's a major.

KP: You went to Fort Benning and you expected to be sent to a more active theater. Do you have any idea why the Army sent you back to Panama?

WB: I think that the staff there felt that ... they'd send people to Benning, and then, they'd disappear, and they didn't get the benefit of the training. I don't know whether it was Major General Harding's idea, or the chief of staff's idea, or the G-3, ... the plans and training officer, over at the Panama Mobil Force.

KP: How good was your training at Fort Benning?

WB: Oh, it was very good. We went through one of those infiltration courses, you know. You crawl on your belly and machine guns fire, very good. There were ten major courses, including logistics, and village combat fighting, and map reading, and all that stuff. If you didn't pass map reading, you were dumped. They had to send you out on a night course and give you coordinates, compass things. ...

If you weren't careful, you'd wind up in tank traps or some other place, but, ... I forget how long it took, and you had to work your [way] back. We wound up within fifty feet of one of the command posts, so, we passed it all right, but, it was a good course. ... What they [would] do [on] one of the combat courses, ... it was cold and rainy and you were out all night. We got in around six o'clock, maybe five-thirty, six, [after being] out all night, and, at seven-thirty or eight, we were in taking exams, tests. They wanted to see your endurance, I guess. ...

KP: All of the people with you were officers, correct?

WB: Yeah. Some of them were lieutenant colonels, field grade officers. They were majors and lieutenant colonels in there. I was one of the younger [ones], being a captain.

KP: Did anyone washout?

WB: I don't really know. I don't know. There are certain things, I passed all ten, but, certain things [that] you had to [pass]. ... There were a couple of courses that, if you didn't pass them, you were automatically released, but, I don't recall that anybody [washed out]. ...

KP: You were in the Army even before the war broke out and you received a great deal of training. Were you ever frustrated that you never saw combat?

WB: Well, the time I felt it most [was] when I was home on leave, I guess, and the Battle of the Bulge was going on. I felt bad for those guys and felt that, "I shouldn't be here. Oh, I'm uncomfortable and they're fighting it." That time, it bothered me, yeah.

KP: Early on in the war, it was feared that Panama would be attacked. Did you feel that you were receiving enough men and materiel to properly guard the Canal Zone?

WB: We never got the larger anti-tank guns [that] we should have while I was there or certain other equipment, but, I did get the tanks in, and the half-tracks, and stuff like that, and, of course, the Air Force was always, I guess, ... adequately staffed, it would appear. ... Then, I don't know about the east coast, but, [on] the west coast, they had these big, tremendously big, guns that would take care of any ships that would, battleships or whatever, move in, and the Navy was there, but, I would think that while we, individually, our unit, didn't get everything that was required, we did pretty well.

KP: Were you reassigned to the United States after the war ended?

WB: ... No. I came up with the fleet that was going [to the West Coast]. We landed at San Diego and we got a commendation. I was commander of all the troops [that] were spread around all the different ships and we got a commendation from the Admiral commanding that post for the good behavior of the troops and all that. Then, I brought a troop train across the country to Fort Dix. We stopped at Salt Lake City. We were going to be there for five or six hours, so, I arranged, with the MPs at that station, to give the men a four-hour pass, so [that] they could go around and wander around, which I did, too, and then, we continued to Chicago. We get there and, around five in the evening, they take off the dinging car. So, here, I have a train load of [hungry] troops. So, I go into the central station there, and they had a big restaurant, and I said, "How about arranging to feed these men, and I could sign a chit for the number of men, feed them in shifts?" and that's what we did, and got them fed, and then, took them on to Dix. We lost a man who jumped train, I guess at Salt Lake City, so, [at] the next stop, I reported to the MPs his name, rank, and serial number.

KP: You only lost one.

WB: ... He was supposed to be getting out early, and he started causing trouble on the train, and the warrant officer in charge of his car, I assign[ed] warrant officers or a junior lieutenant in charge of each car, ... came and said he was drinking and causing trouble. Well, I went back to him, and spoke with him, poured his liquor down the sink, and then, reminded him and said, "Hey, you may be leaving the Army, but, you're still in the Army," and, you know, tried to settle him down, but, he went off to a telephone, I don't know whether he missed it purposely or just missed it, but, he didn't make it. ...

KP: Did this train trip occur while the war was still going on?

WB: Oh, yeah, yeah, definitely. [I] got them to Dix, and then, I was assigned to the Hotel (Dennis?), rehabilitation, and physicals, and this, and that, and then, I went to Fort McClellan, Alabama, and I was with a black regiment. I was a company commander, and then, left as a battalion executive officer.

KP: What was that experience like?

WB: Fine. I gave them hell just like I would have, you know, a white company. I lined them up one time, chewed them out when their rifles weren't clean, ... which I did with my headquarters company in Panama. I lined them up and said, "Hey." I had a lot of high ranking people and most everybody I had [was] a corporal, sergeant, tech sergeant, [or] master sergeant. We had a lot of rank in the headquarters company, as far as enlisted personnel. I said, "I don't care if I command just a company of privates here. You'll all be privates," and they were goofing off, AWOL, you know, venereal disease, everything, and they straightened out. In six months, I had no disciplinary actions whatsoever, and, unfortunately, the commanding general decided [that] my company should be the model infantry company for display, and he'd bring [in] these South American generals, and defense ministers, and one British general came, and [they] visited our company, and "visit" [meant], you know, go through, look at lockers, and all [that]. That was a pain.

KP: Was this in Panama?

WB: Panama, yeah.

KP: You became a model unit.

WB: Yeah. That was a pain in the neck. [laughter]

KP: You were always on display for the VIPs.

WB: Yeah.

KP: It sounds like the men were not too thrilled about it.

WB: Well, none of us were, but, what are you going to do? [If the] commanding general says something, you do it, you know, whether you like it or not.

KP: How long were you with your unit at Fort McClellan?

WB: Several years.

KP: After the war ended, you remained at Fort McClellan, correct?

WB: Oh, no, I'm sorry, I'm thinking of Panama. No, McClellan, ... I got out [on] Christmas day, 1945, ... [I was] probably there a year or so.

KP: In early January of 1945, you joined the black regiment at Fort McClellan.

WB: Yeah. It was actually a training regiment, and they could lose anything, including a thing as big as an anti-tank gun, if you didn't watch it, but, we trained. We went out and bivouacked for two weeks, and the Colonel of the regiment ... was a stickler about keeping the formation tight, so, I stayed at the back of the column when we marched in from the camp. We had quite a distance to march. It was hot and ... I stationed a couple of lieutenants along the line to keep them from

straggling. ... The Colonel commended me for, you know, close formation after two weeks out in the bivouac. ... Then, I'd get in there and my battalion commander wanted to restrict me for the weekend, 'cause the inspector general found out that the sick book, the record of sick books in the company headquarters, were [incorrect]. ... Something before my command had happened. Meanwhile, I said, "Hey," I forget his name now, "you can court martial me. This is nonsense. I've been out there in bivouac for two weeks and you want to restrict me to the post because of something that happened long before my command?" and we straightened it out, but, I was mad.

KP: You mentioned that you were almost restricted over the sick book. It sounds like there was some tension between the Colonel and you over this.

WB: Well, he ... got mad at me, because, when he came in, I knew about him, and I didn't care about him, and, normally, you report to your new commanding officer. I didn't. I was out in the field one day, and he'd come out, and he made the remark that, "It's really something when the commanding officer of the battalion has to come out in the field to meet one of his company commanders." So, it got around that the Colonel, the Battalion Commander, had to come out in the field to meet me.

KP: Do you remember what caused this friction?

WB: (Lafave?), I think is his name. ... He wasn't a well-liked officer in some other units or something like that, you know. I knew his reputation.

KP: He had a reputation before you got there.

WB: Yeah, yeah. So, I just decided, "I'm busy. I'm out in the field," [laughter] but, he didn't like that.

KP: Why was his reputation so bad?

WB: Well, we just didn't consider him [to be] a good officer, I guess. I don't know.

KP: Had he been overseas before?

WB: I don't recall. ...

KP: In your training unit, did you have any experienced regulars or overseas veterans among the NCOs or officers?

WB: I had a pretty good group of junior officers there, lieutenants. They were pretty good instructors, I thought, and, basically, most of my non-coms were pretty good. What happened [was], we got in a group of junior black officers, grade of second lieutenant. I think there was one first. When I was battalion executive officer, I had about twenty-four or twenty-five black non-coms come in to me and ask for transfer. They didn't like these black lieutenants. ... They didn't get along with the men or the non-coms. I had one come in to report to me for duty with his cap

hanging down over his ears, like the Air-Force, ... the (ear phones?). He had boots on, non-reg pants, a swagger stick, [as] a second lieutenant. I told him, "Get the hell out of here and don't come back until you come dressed as an infantry officer." So, eventually, they shipped them all out, except the recreation officer, to a port battalion, but, the men didn't like them and the non-coms didn't like them. They would just try to ... lord over them. We got rid of all of them.

KP: How long did that take?

WB: A matter of months, six, seven months, you know. They didn't work out.

KP: Why were the sergeants so opposed to them?

WB: They just didn't like the attitude. ... I don't know. There was nothing I could do about it. I tried to talk to them, but, the word got around, you know, and, eventually, the post shipped them out to the port battalions.

KP: Was your unit expected to see combat in the Pacific?

WB: Yeah, yeah. Even when, you know, the war ceased in Europe, I told them, "There's still the Japs over there," and, you know, "You wanna learn what you can here, 'cause they're not an easy foe." I didn't want them to, you know, get lazy and slack on their training just because it was over in Europe. ... Then, even, I think, ... after V-J Day, we still tried to tell them, you know, they might go over there and have to clean them out, some that didn't surrender, and this, and that. [I] tried to keep them paying serious attention to it.

KP: After V-J Day, it must have been even harder to keep them focused.

WB: Oh, yeah.

KP: You are not the first person to mention the problem of venereal disease. How did you deal with it, in terms of trying to keep the venereal disease rate down?

WB: Well, you know, ... you'd try to caution them to, "Watch with whom you go," and, of course, you have the medical officers speak to them and whatnot, but, it was a problem, especially, I suppose, if you drink, and then, these gals wail on you. ... It became less of a problem in my particular unit. I would threaten them [that] I'd take their rank away from them.

KP: That was very effective in the headquarters company.

WB: Well, it did work, unfortunately. [laughter] Well, both fortunately and unfortunately, because we became a display [unit], "typical infantry unit" or something. Really, they should have taken a rifle company ... from a battalion for a typical infantry [unit], 'cause ... a lot of my people were over in the staff headquarters.

KP: That was in Panama, correct?

WB: Yeah.

KP: You met your wife in Panama. How did you meet?

WB: I saw her at the post exchange, and I liked her nice, long hair, and, today, it's short, and I asked one of the other girls I knew to introduce me. Actually, the post chaplain formally introduced us. [laughter]

KP: Was her father a career Army officer?

WB: Yeah.

KP: When did you decide to get married?

WB: ... While I was at Benning, I asked for time off, 'cause I had a lot of time coming. In fact, when I got out, I had two-and-a-half months leave coming to me. We decided then, and I applied for leave, and I had to, you know, go through headquarters and let my parents know and all. They arranged [the wedding], ... and she let her parents know, and they came up from Texas, I guess, to be there for the wedding in Somerville. I was married in uniform.

KP: How long did your wife live in Panama?

WB: Most of her girlhood, 'cause her father was reassigned. She born in Chicago, but, spent a lot of time down there in Panama, 'cause he was reassigned.

KP: It must have been quite a change for her to live in New Jersey.

WB: Yeah. ... When we first went to New York for our honeymoon, she was amazed, you know. Of course, she had been to, ... you know, Chicago, [which] isn't a small place. They were stationed, I forget what barracks, in the Mid-West someplace, too, for a time, but, she liked Panama. She'd like to go through the Canal again. I've been through it on ship. I've been over it by plane. When the British general was there visiting, the chief of staff invited me to go with him and the general, to fly out with an Army plane, fly around over the jungles and what have you, and then, I went by truck across. ... They have a train. I've gone by train. So, I've been [through the Canal by] ... all means.

KP: Have you ever been back to Panama?

WB: No. My wife would like to go, [but], I don't know whether we'll make it, though.

KP: Jumping ahead, how did you feel about the decision to eventually turn the Panama Canal over to the Panamanians.

WB: I don't like it. I didn't like. I don't think they can really give it the attention. I don't think they have the technical background for really handling it. There was a lot of politics in Panama. As you know, they kicked enough people out of there. I was there when they had a small revolution, kicked out Arnulfo Arias, [who] was president, and we couldn't enter Panama City for a day or two. ...

KP: Had you thought of staying in the Army and making the Army a career?

WB: Yeah, I had considered it, but, the assignment, at the time, wasn't good, and there was no chance for a transfer at Fort Dix for at least a year. The commanding general wouldn't permit any transfers, and I had just married, and I had bought a small house in South Bound Brook. [If] they had sent me to Camp Kilmer, I probably would have gone back into the service.

KP: What was the assignment that you could not get out of?

WB: Oh, I would have been an adjutant or assistant adjutant in a training center or something like that and I had enough training in Alabama. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you wanted something else.

WB: Yeah. ... It's all second guessing, whether, you know, I might have wound up in Korea as a dead captain over there or something. [laughter] Who knows? Maybe it worked out for the best.

KP: Did you stay in the Reserves?

WB: I was in for the Reserves, but, I wasn't active down in Panama or in Puerto Rico. They had no real active unit for me, and I did have to take a physical, and I was reappointed as a captain in the Reserves, but, I never followed up on it.

KP: Were you surprised by the dropping of the atomic bomb?

WB: ... I was really, you know, surprised and amazed at the power of the thing.

KP: How well-educated were the men under you? Do you think that most knew how to read and write? I would imagine that this would be true of the headquarters company, but, what about your other units?

WB: No, I didn't feel that they did. In fact, at one point, down in Panama, I was thinking of starting a school, ... or classes, for history and English, and [using] whatever officers I could dig up to instruct. I forgot why it bogged down, maybe I was transferred to the other side about that time, but, I had considered having evening classes for soldiers at one point.

KP: You saw that a lot of them were not very well-educated.

WB: Yeah, well, you know, you can always use more. Anyway, you know, I could have used more.

KP: How did you get your first job, which was with Chase Manhattan?

WB: I wanted to go to work for the local bank. Howard Lyons was the mayor of our town and president of the Somerset Trust. I had an account there and I talked with him. He said, "No, you'd do better over in a New York bank." He gave me letters to Chemical Bank, which is now going with Chase, and then, Chase Manhattan, and I went to both interviews, and I opted for Chase.

KP: What was your initial job?

WB: I was in the credit department, foreign division, which dealt with Central and South America and the Caribbean area.

KP: Did you work out of Manhattan?

WB: Manhattan, ... 1 Chase Manhattan Plaza. ... No, I forget. ... They moved their building. Now, Chemical is in there where they were originally.

KP: It sounds like your experience in Panama proved to be a real edge in getting this job.

WB: Yeah, I think. At one time, David Rockefeller, for whom I, later on, wrote letters for him to sign, had called me up, and they were going to send me to Panama, and then, the Korean War came along, and he said, "Well, you're a captain in the Reserves, and they already called up Bill (Beatty?) down there in Panama, and you might get called." Later on, while he was still a big shot in the foreign department, he was going to send me to Cuba, and, eventually, when he was later president of the bank and all, they sent me down to Puerto Rico, but, I used to write some of his letters. He was always very decent. I never had one returned to me, and then, he had me do a study on Cuba for one of his big customers, on the sugar industry in Cuba, and then, I had to really dig to come up with that, and, when it got done, they started a department just for researching of industry and all that stuff, and they wanted a copy of my study. When he came to Puerto Rico, he was always interested in branches in the Caribbean and Central America and all around. ... He stopped by my desk to see if I was doing studies for new branches in Puerto Rico, two of which [were] opened while I was there, one in Bayamon and another in Rio Piedras.

KP: It sounds like you had a rewarding career at Chase Manhattan.

WB: I probably should have stayed there, but, you know, with the commuting, and this, and that, [it] got more expensive. We thought of moving to Westfield, but, then, that was pretty expensive, so, we stayed in Somerville.

KP: In fact, you eventually did join the Somerset Trust Company.

WB: Yeah.

KP: How did that come about?

WB: Well, Dick Lothian, who passed away, I talked with his wife last night, he passed away with Alzheimer's Disease, eventually, but, Dick asked me to come join him in the loan area, and then, I got an opportunity. ... The professor of money and banking, I believe, I've forgotten his name, he was the commissioner of banking at one time, and then, I had a classmate, Ned Benson, who joined the New Jersey Bank Examiners, and I took the exam and passed it. That's where I wound up.

KP: Do you ever look back and wish that you had stayed with Chase or the Somerset Trust Company?

WB: I probably would have retired earlier had I stayed with Chase, but, I don't know. ... What happened with the Banking Department, ... you know, they cut back and they offered this early retirement. I had twenty-eight years with them, and they'd give me credit for five more years, so, I did well. [laughter]

KP: You stayed with the Banking Department until relatively recently.

WB: Yeah, '91, September, '91.

KP: That is not that long ago.

WB: No.

KP: What would you say were the major changes in banking over the course of your career?

WB: Well, the use of computers, that's one thing, and, of course, all these mergers taking on. You don't know one bank from another anymore, like, UJB, they took over the New Jersey Saving Bank in our town, and they took over another bank. Now, they have, actually, I think, five offices, but, they're going to close the old Somerset Trust main office, the bank with the clock, on Main Street. I hear they're going to close that. That is now Summit, but, ... UJB is taking over Summit Bank. So, there's a lot of changes, a lot of competition, a lot of, "Gee, you look around, there's all these new charges." It's hard to determine, very competitive.

KP: What was it like to work for the Banking Department, verses working for an actual bank?

WB: It used to be a little more fun, and then, they'd start trying to make a generic examiner out of you. I used to do commercial banks, savings banks, bank holding companies, and, now, they want you to do S&Ls. I did do one S&L. Fortunately, it was one of the better ones. ... You used to have experienced bank examiners come on the job, and then, they started sending S&L men and other people, personnel who'd never been inside of a commercial bank or a savings bank, and it was hard to get a job done, and then, they'd restrict you to the number of man days from the last time the bank was examined. This time, maybe the bank's doubled in size, more branches. They'd still expect you to do it within the time limit and, if you went over twenty percent, you had to write a

letter to the chief examiner explaining why and give him details, you know, where the time was spent. It wasn't as much fun when I retired as it used to be.

KP: Do you have any memorable cases where the banks really appreciated what you were doing?

WB: Well, some of the banks really appreciated what you'd uncovered and discovered. I recall, years ago, [at] a bank in Trenton, which is now something else, the Trenton Trust, I went to a branch, a very busy branch, and I couldn't prove out a certain area, and I found out, when I took a transcript, I got a transcript of what I should have had and what I actually had, ... that the branch manager had been pulling some bad checks that were his checks on a closed bank [account] or checks, ... you know, where he exceeded his limits and so forth. Here was a guy, in fifteen years, [who] was going to be promoted to the biggest branch in a good position. ... When I told the examiner in charge, I wasn't the examiner in charge then, just the branch, and he said, "Well, go see the controller," vice-president, controller, and the guy didn't believe me. He didn't see how this could be. The assistant manager at the branch who was there didn't know that the manager was doing this. In fact, the manager wasn't there. He didn't come [in] until noon, and then, ... the controller called in, the branch vice-president in charge of branches, and he said, "We warned him about, you know, overdrafts and whatnot a while back," but, they just still didn't believe it, that their audit department hadn't [discovered that] this had been going on. I went back several years to trace out, you know, in case there was some error, and they finally found out [that] I was right, and, of course, the guy got fired the next day. ... I don't know whether the prosecutor took over from there. Then, I went to a bank down in Atlantic City from there, and I couldn't prove [out] one of the tellers, and I called the branch manager over, "You have a discrepancy here," and he counted it, and there was. ... The girl claimed that, well, they had some deposits, they were short, and they were going to bring the money in, but, she had been slipping out twenties and tens in these strapped money things, so, she was like a [thief]. ... You run into [hard cases], ... but, a lot of them appreciated things that you discovered.

KP: What else did you discover, besides theft?

WB: Well, I discovered [that] one of the vice-presidents, a public relations officer, [was crooked]. I had a suspicion. I always asked for the officer accounts and directives, and looked at them, and studied them, ... [to] see whether they had overdrafts which were not permitted. I didn't like the pattern of this lady's [records], it was a lady in this bank in Raritan, and we found out that she was [pilfering]. ... She didn't, you know, get any money, but, what she was doing was very unlawful and she'd get a look at a pack of checks. ... I don't recall the story, but, needless to say, the president was very upset when he found out what she was doing, trying to cover-up her overdrafts, and, actually, this was living high for her. The bank didn't lose money, but, it was a very underhanded thing she was doing, and he thanked me. I had the federal examiners in with me and they, of course, notified the FDIC, too, of what was going on and gave my name as the examiner who discovered what was done.

KP: Did you ever consider going to work for the federal government?

WB: I had considered going with this other outfit that was taking care of failed S&Ls and whatnot. I forget the name of it.

KP: The RTC?

WB: Yeah, yeah.

JD: The Resolution Trust.

WB: Yeah, Resolution Trust, ... 'cause a couple of our examiners, including our ex-chief examiner, went there, but, ... I never followed. ... I got out in September. They said, "Wait until January of the following year and apply then," ... but, I had considered that, yeah.

KP: As a bank examiner, were you surprised by what happened with the savings and loan companies?

WB: Well, maybe the extent of it, but, I'm not surprised, 'cause [of] the rates they gave, and then, the rates they had to pay, and they were so heavily involved in the mortgages, you know, and that was the natural result. The one I examined had an old-line banker in as the president and chief executive officer and they did all right. He didn't get [defensive]. ... The loans that I found were bad, he agreed with, and it wasn't a serious effect on the bank's capital or reserves.

KP: Were you ever involved in any debates over good and bad loans?

WB: I did the Somerset Trust, one time, and somebody else, the year before, had done it, and they found a lot of loans [that] they thought were faulty, and the president, Jack Abate, was very upset, and he said, "The next time this bank examiner [comes], I want to talk with the examiner in charge and go over the loans." ... When I presented my list to the executive officer of the bank, the president said, Jack Abate said, "I don't need to talk with him. What he has here is right." ... Sometimes, they'd get upset [with] what the examiner said or did.

KP: Both of your sons joined the military.

WB: My son, Bob, was in the Navy and went to Spain for a short time and John was in the artillery over in Vietnam.

KP: Were you worried about him when he went over to Vietnam?

WB: Yeah, a little bit, but, he's a pretty healthy, hardy kid.

KP: It sounds like you are proud that your sons served in the military.

WB: Oh, yeah, yeah. I don't know why Bob chose the Navy. ... I don't know why he chose the Navy. He was in the ... hydraulics in the Air Force.

KP: Did any of your sons go to college?

WB: No, none of them wanted [to go]. Bob would have never, probably, gotten in, although that kid's smart. ... He didn't actually finish high school, but, to get in the Navy, he had to take the high school equivalency test, and he passed it, and he's taken tests since, emergency medical technician [tests]. He was with the rescue squad and the fire department in Alaska. He took that test [with] people from Mexico, [the] United States, and Canada, I don't know how many, and he came out number one. He got the highest rating ever on an exam, and then, in the Navy, I don't know how many were at that Naval post on the other side of Chicago, wherever they have the Naval training post. ... He came out number two in the whole class and the only one that beat him was a former teacher. When he took the exam for engineer [in the] the fire department, thirty-eight took it, Bob was number one, but, I don't know what he could have done with college. ...

KP: Do you wish that any of your children had gone to Rutgers?

WB: Oh, I would have liked it if they'd come here. My daughter didn't want to go to college. We wanted her to go, at least, to finishing school, but, she wanted to work and get a car. So, she did go to work at the hospital.

KP: You joined both the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

WB: I'm still in the American Legion, yeah. I was in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I joined the one my dad was in. ... I'm still in the Trenton office, which is not American Legion. I'm thinking of joining the one in Somerville, but, then, I might get involved in activities. ... I'm involved with the Worthy Patron of the Order of the Eastern Star. [I'm the] secretary treasurer of the Royal Arch Masons. I'm an a trustee and an officer of Solomon's Lodge, and, when you're a Worthy Patron, you not only go to your chapter meetings, but, you got [to] go to all the functions. A couple of weeks ago, I was in a tux, Thursday night and Friday night, going to functions, you know. So, I don't know whether I want to get involved in any more affairs, and then, I substitute as an officer in a chapter up in Flemington once a month on a Thursday night, and I don't want to get over involved.

KP: Is there anything that we forgot to ask?

WB: No, I guess not.

KP: I should just add, for the record, that you enjoy your reunions a great deal.

WB: Oh, yeah, yeah. We had one yesterday, [our] sixtieth. There are sixty-five of us out there. I had a good dinner at the Elks' Club. [We] used to go [to] the (Jaspers?), but, I guess who was ever in charge found the Elks' a little [better], and they had good food.

KP: Have you ever encountered people or gone to any reunions of the units you served in?

WB: No, but, I keep looking in the American Legion magazine. I did see reference to one or two associated with the Panama days, and I found the 28th Infantry, but, nothing too close by, but, I keep looking.

KP: You never stayed in touch with any of the people you served with?

WB: No, no.

KP: Thank you very much. We appreciate it.

WB: Thank you.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 8/24/00

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 8/25/00

Reviewed by William Boes 10/00