

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR J. BURGER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Neal Hammerschlag: This begins an interview with Victor Burger on May 14, 2001 at 27 Kent Road, Cherry Hill, New Jersey with Neal Hammerschlag and ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

NH: Mr. Burger, we'd like to thank you for taking the time out of your day to talk with us. Would you begin by telling us where you were born and about your parents?

Victor Burger: I was born in Washington, DC, and I don't know what to tell you about my parents. They were there. [laughter]

NH: I read that your father served in World War I.

VB: Yes, I understand that he did, very briefly.

NH: What did he do?

VB: I don't know.

SH: What was his name?

VB: Same as mine.

SH: So you're a junior.

VB: No, not exactly, strangely enough. He is Victor J. Burger, and I'm Victor J. Burger, but the J stands for different things, (Jessup?) in his case, John in mine, and it's very confusing. Junior might be better and easier all around.

SH: Where was your father born?

VB: In Brooklyn, New York ...

SH: Did he have a lot of brothers and sisters?

VB: He had an older brother and an older sister.

SH: Did you get to know them as a young man?

VB: Oh, yes, to some degree, but we were down here in what is now Cherry Hill, or near Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and they were up in Brooklyn, so we didn't see [them that often].

SH: Tell us your mother's name and where she was born.

VB: Well, her name was Suesser, S-U-E-S-S-E-R, which is German, and she was also from Queens or Brooklyn, whatever it was in those days.

SH: Did they ever tell you how they met?

VB: No, I would only be guessing if I said that. She worked in New York City, and he was in sales, in various kinds of sales ... I suspect he met her on one of his sales calls, and so that was that.

SH: Do you remember what year they married?

VB: I guess, 1920, probably, is when they were married.

SH: After he had done a brief stint in World War I.

VB: Oh, yes.

SH: ... Are you an only child?

VB: Yes, I'm one of those.

NH: Where did you go to high school?

VB: Merchantville High School, which is ... about ten minutes from here.

SH: What's the story behind your being born in DC? Your mother and father met and married in New York ...

VB: Yes, that's right, and he took a job with Judd & Detweiler, which is a huge printer and printed the *National Geographic* in those days, and he had a job with them. ... He met someone from the printing plate, local printing plate, the Potomac Electrototype Company ... Oh, then my father took a job up in New York State, and this man remembered him and wanted him to come down, so he came down, and that's that.

SH: Did your mother, as far as you know, have any kind of a career before she met your father?

VB: No, well, she was a secretary in one of the financial houses, (a factor?). I'm not sure what (a factor?) is, but that's what they did, I understand, in lower Manhattan. [She] got there by subway, an L.

NH: How long were you in Washington for?

VB: About twenty breaths, I mean, a very short time, and then we went up to Binghamton, New York, which is where my father took this position. ... Actually, when he went with the electrototype company, it had opened a subsidiary plant in Camden, New Jersey, so he never actually worked for them in Washington, but in Camden, and that's how we got here.

SH: How old were you when you moved to this area?

VB: Two, something like that.

SH: So your earliest memories are here in this area.

VB: Oh, yes, yeah.

SH: When you were in grade school, what do you remember most about grade school?

VB: Well, I remember being there. I mean, you know, you can forget some things, but it was a school. I know one thing, it was the Depression, and the teachers never changed. The same eight teachers when I arrived in kindergarten, and they were still there when I left the sixth grade.

NH: What about high school during the Depression?

VB: Well, the Depression was pretty much over by the time we got to high school. So it was, I have no particular comments in that regard. We did everything we should have done.

SH: Do you remember anything about the Depression, how it affected other members of the family?

VB: Well, I didn't exactly know what was going on, of course, because I was, what, six or seven, but it didn't affect us too much, because my father had a job. ... There were a few people who moved away in the night, and things like that.

SH: What was your favorite subject in high school?

VB: ... History, English, French.

SH: Were you involved in anything like Boys Scouts or any kinds of clubs at all?

VB: In high school? No. In high school, [I was] in the usual clubs, you know.

SH: Were there sports or activities that you found interesting?

VB: Well, I just wasn't too much into sports and things, but I was in the senior play and the junior play, and things like that, and that's about it.

SH: Did you have any musical talents, too?

VB: Well, they tried and they tried, but it didn't work.

NH: Can you tell us a little about Rutgers, when you first got there?

VB: Well, it was a lot smaller than it is today. We were the first class to have 500 members, which didn't last long. It went down from in the earlier days.

SH: What do you remember about wanting to go to college? Was Rutgers always your first choice?

VB: No, there wasn't as much emphasis put on the college, at least not in our high school, but everybody got somewhere, and I got to Rutgers. I was up on a visit one time. That helped.

SH: What brought on the visit? What precipitated it?

VB: I don't know. Like so many things, I don't remember.

SH: Well, that's quite all right.

NH: Where did you live?

VB: In Pennsauken? You mean at Rutgers? Well, I lived in the Hegemen dorm the first year and the DU [Delta Upsilon] fraternity house the other three years.

SH: What was your original major, or what did you plan to major in?

VB: Business administration.

SH: From the very beginning?

VB: Yes, it didn't change.

SH: How were you recruited for the DU house? Did you have friends there?

VB: No. It just sort of, you are recruited, that's true, I mean, but I don't exactly know. I couldn't tell you exactly how, but suddenly, there I was.

NH: Can you tell us a little bit about those guys that had lived in the house, that group of people?

VB: Well, we were one of the top fraternities on campus. I will say that it was voted, some years after I got out, that it was [voted] the top fraternity for the past fifty years. However, times change, and it's no longer there. They had some arguments, I gather, with the administration. The house is there, but somebody else is in it, which is too bad, but that's the way things are.

NH: I live in your house now.

SH: Can you tell us who your roommates were in the Hegeman house?

VB: No, they were private rooms, all of them.

SH: Who was your roommate in the DU house?

VB: Well, one year, it was Tom (Germas?), and for a year and half, I guess, it was Bob Jones, and after the war, it was almost everybody, because people kept coming back and there was no place to put them. So we usually had four people sharing a room, which is a lot of people and a lot of desks, but that's the way it had to be, so we got through it.

SH: Tell us about some of the social activities that the house presided over.

VB: Well, actually, they had a limited number of parties allowed. It was very much under control from the dean's office, or whatnot, and so we had house parties, I think three, probably, each semester. That's all it was. There weren't any other parties like you hear about now. That was it, but it was fine. I think it was a great fraternity. I was glad I was there. I'm sorry you're in our house now, but everybody's got to be someplace.

NH: I read also you were in the Queen's Players.

VB: Yeah, that's right.

NH: Did you put on any shows?

VB: Well, I just sort of helped before the war. See, the whole thing is before the war and after the war, and after the war, yeah, we put out two plays, and I was in them both.

NH: How did you and your parents feel about interrupting your college education to serve?

VB: Well, it had to be done. It had to be.

NH: When you left, did you plan on returning?

VB: Yeah, I think so. I think you could say that. We went to a lot of trouble, those of us who were leaving at the same time, to get credit, this would have been in our junior year, just before the war, credit for a year's courses, even though we didn't quite complete them, because we had to leave. So that kind of indicates that we were thinking of coming back, and I think that's true.

SH: Do you remember where you were when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

VB: In the library. It was a Sunday.

NH: What was the general reaction?

VB: "Where's Pearl Harbor?"

SH: Did they make an announcement in the library?

VB: No. No, I guess I didn't hear of it, until I came back to the DU house, and somebody there with a [radio], or something, and, well, that was it. ... There were a couple of days of speeches by the president and various people, and for a while, life went on as before, for a year or two, actually.

SH: Before Pearl Harbor, how involved were you as a student with the news of what was going on in Europe?

VB: Minimally. We did get newspapers and we read them, but it wasn't a hot topic of conversation.

SH: Were there any groups on campus demonstrating for involvement or against involvement? Do you remember?

VB: Not that I know of.

SH: What did you think of mandatory chapel?

VB: ... Well, you had to get out of it. ... For freshmen, they had to go every Monday at noontime, or something like that. That was just a meeting of the freshman class really.

SH: What about the administration? Who was the Dean of Men when you went into Rutgers?

VB: Fraser Metzger.

SH: Tell us a Fraser Metzger story.

VB: He was from the old school. I don't have any particular story. Well, actually, he also was a DU, it just happened, and anytime the DUs got into trouble, "Oh, my own boys."

SH: Was Demarest still there when you were a freshman?

VB: Oh, yeah, Whistling Willie, or something like that, yeah, yeah, I guess.

SH: We were just wondering if you have any stories about Rutgers administrators.

VB: I have no particularly great stories, no.

SH: Was there any competition between fraternities and non-fraternities that you remember on campus?

VB: No. Fraternities versus fraternities, yes.

SH: What was that competition?

VB: Oh, it was decorating for the football game coming up the next Saturday. ... I don't think there was too much in the way of formal athletics, you know, basketball games, or something. I don't think there was too much of that.

SH: Did you go to the football games in the fall?

VB: Yeah, sure.

SH: Did you have to wear a dink?

VB: Yes, I wore a dink. Oh, sure. Well, that was part of it. All freshmen had to wear the dink.

SH: What else did you have to do?

VB: Oh, golly. I think you had to wear a necktie, too. ... There were other things we had to do, and I don't remember what they were.

SH: What did you have to do to for upper classmen, as a freshman? Did you just avoid them?

VB: Probably, but, no, there wasn't too much of that ...

SH: Was it the sophomores that gave you more trouble or the seniors?

VB: Neither.

SH: Who was your favorite professor, before the war?

VB: Before the war, Professor Corlett, perhaps.

SH: What did he teach?

VB: Spanish.

SH: Really. You said you had taken French.

VB: Yes, that was in high school.

SH: Did you continue with your Spanish studies at all?

VB: After the war, it was a long interval, [and] I think it would [have been] difficult to take it, of course, just to catch up to where you were, so I wouldn't say that.

SH: Were you drafted, or did you enlist?

VB: I enlisted, because I probably would have been drafted.

SH: Did you have any thoughts about going into the Navy or any other service, the Marines?

VB: I probably thought about everything. That's what you did.

SH: The DU men, did they all go into one form of service?

VB: Well, a lot of them were in the Advanced ROTC course, and they all left in one group. Other than that, I think they went every place.

SH: You were in ROTC the first two years. Did you think about doing Advanced, at all?

VB: I thought about it, but it didn't appeal to me. It probably should have, but didn't.

NH: Why did you choose the Army Air Force, as opposed to the other services?

VB: They chose me.

NH: Were you happy with that?

VB: Yeah.

SH: Where did you report? Where was your first induction?

VB: Fort Dix, for just a couple of days.

SH: Did you go down by train from Rutgers?

VB: No. I was home and took the train to Fort Dix, which was a short ride, but there it was.

SH: After you heard about Pearl Harbor, how long was it before you talked to your parents about it?

VB: I really don't know.

SH: I wondered if there was a phone call, or letter, or any communication.

VB: No. Well, I was still in college then and came home from time to time.

SH: You would have come home a couple of weeks later for Christmas break. What kind of discussions did you ...

VB: I don't remember. Those fifty years went by pretty fast, and I don't remember.

NH: Basic training in Atlantic City, what about that?

VB: I said goodbye to everyone, you know, “We’re off, sixty miles down the Pike.” There I was for basic training and ...

NH: What kinds of men were there? Were they basically from your area?

VB: No, no. They were from anywhere. They were from all over, the whole country.

NH: Did you leave a favorite girl back at NJC?

VB: No, not particularly. No, not really.

NH: Looking back now, do you feel that you were adequately prepared for basic training?

VB: For basic training? Not really.

SH: Where did you go from Atlantic City then? Where did your training take you?

VB: Fargo, North Dakota.

SH: There is a switch.

VB: Yes, a switch. A great place, if you’re there in the summertime, which I was. Those who were there in the winter said it was unbelievable there, but not when I was there. For a couple of months, it was very, very nice.

SH: Did you go by train from Atlantic City?

VB: Yeah, we didn’t know where we were going ... Oh, rumors got around, you know, like rumors do.

SH: What was your training in Fargo?

VB: That was a clerical training school. It was at a college.

SH: Was there the same mix of people from all over the country?

VB: Yes.

NH: What kinds of things did that entail, the training? I haven’t read much about clerical schools.

VB: Well, I really, it’s hard to capsulize it, but it was just how to run an office, I suppose is what it was, when you got right down to it.

SH: Why do you think that the Air Force chose you?

VB: They needed some men. When I came along, it was nothing personal, I'm sure.

SH: I thought maybe you had taken a test.

VB: Well, we took some tests ... Well, no, I suppose you were in the Air Corps by that time, so they just needed men in the Air Corps, and there we were.

SH: How did the people in Fargo, North Dakota treat these servicemen?

VB: Oh, very nicely, very well. It was a very nice, small city.

SH: Did they invite you into their homes?

VB: A couple of them did, yes, and they were very friendly.

SH: Was there any kind of a USO set up in that area?

VB: I don't know about the USO, but it seems to me that we could go [downtown]. Well, we practically were downtown. It wasn't a case of going downtown, [since] we were almost there ...

SH: Were there movies? What did you do for fun to keep yourselves occupied when you weren't in school?

VB: I don't know. Movies, no.

SH: When you traveled cross-country, how different was it to go from New Jersey across the country to North Dakota? What do you remember about the train ride?

VB: Oh, the train ride, I don't remember at all.

SH: I thought maybe there was a real difference in topography.

VB: No. But I think as far as socially, Fargo was just like a small Philadelphia.

SH: Then from Fargo, where did you go?

VB: Well, the next real stop was Alamogordo, New Mexico. Now, that was a little different ...

SH: Tell us about that.

VB: Well, there, it was a base, an Air Force base, whereas in Fargo, we were just at a local college. ... Here we were on a base, and there, we had movies, and, you know, the usual things that they have on a small base.

SH: Now, were you assigned to a group at that point?

VB: No, we were in training by a group, an Air Force group. Yeah, we were, yes.

NH: You were assigned to the 449th Bomb Group.

VB: Yeah.

SH: Was that done in Alamogordo?

VB: I guess so, yeah.

SH: What kind of interaction did the clerks have with the bomb group itself, I mean, the pilots and the ground crews? Tell us what your job was.

VB: Well, it was taking care of the airmen, assigning crews, training, not physically training them, the results of their training. The bombers, for instance, they had practice runs, and they were recorded. Well, somebody had to record them, [and] we did.

SH: Did you have any personal interaction with them, like if someone washed out? Were there any problems like that?

VB: No. By this time, they weren't washing out.

SH: They were training as crews by then.

VB: Yes, yeah.

NH: Did you serve with anyone that you knew from Rutgers or basic training?

VB: I don't think so. Possibly, but, no, when we got together, we were all pretty much strangers.

NH: You left the United States from Virginia.

VB: Yes.

NH: You went straight to Virginia from New Mexico.

VB: Yes.

NH: How long were you in Virginia for?

VB: A few days. We were among the last ones there for this convoy that was going.

SH: Do you remember the date?

VB: December 4 comes to my mind, so I'd say early December.

SH: What did you know of how the war was progressing, by the time you got ready to leave? What had you heard?

VB: Not much, and even less when you're over there. I mean, the *Stars and Stripes* was around, but, of course, for up to the minute news, not even close.

SH: When you were in Alamogordo, did you have any idea whether you would be going to the Pacific or to the European Theater?

VB: No, no idea.

SH: No rumors?

VB: Well, we had a stop or two after Alamogordo.

SH: Did you? Tell us.

VB: Well, we went to Bruning, Nebraska, which is about as big as our backyard here, and it seems to me there was another stop in there somewhere. But at any rate, it wasn't a direct trip.

SH: How many of you traveled at once? How did they move a bomb group support staff?

VB: Trains. They flew the flyers, mostly. The ground crew went by trains and all at the same time.

SH: How did the chain of command work?

VB: Well, you mean once we got overseas?

SH: No, at first.

VB: Well, we just sort of operated as an entity, getting the next day's flights going, really, and taking care of, well, any other problems that came along. It was in the operations area that we were ...

NH: What about the journey across to Europe? Was it tense?

VB: No. ... It was, even though it was December, it was just like today, and you could be out all the time on deck, or doing whatever you were doing ...

NH: What did you do to occupy yourselves?

VB: We played cards, and we just, I don't really remember. That's how uneventful it was.

SH: Did you remember the name of the ship you went on?

VB: Nope. It was a Liberty, what they called the Liberty ship ...

SH: How many were in a convoy, when you would look out over the deck?

VB: Who knows? A lot of ships.

SH: Was that the first time you'd really been out on the open seas?

VB: Oh, yes.

SH: How was your seasickness?

VB: Nonexistent. However, on the way back, mine was still nonexistent, but it was rough seas, and a lot of people were having a lot of trouble.

SH: How cramped were the conditions on a Liberty ship?

VB: Well, they were pretty crowded, but everybody had his own space ...

SH: Was it just Army Air Corps, at that point, onboard?

VB: Oh, yes, it was just our group, which is, what, four squadrons, and I think three out of the four were on it. I don't know where the other one was, but they got over somehow.

SH: Where were your ports of call, once you left Virginia? You left Hampton Roads.

VB: Yeah, Hampton Roads, yeah. ... Well, now I'll tell you sort of an interesting story. We were in the harbor of Bizerte, which is in Africa, and, in fact, I think we were there for Christmas Day, fun. ... About two days later, we woke up, and we were the only ship there. The rest in the convoy was gone. Now, they told us that somebody forgot to tell the captain of our ship. Well, who knows, but about two or three days later, we, with one ship's tender coming along, we went across the Mediterranean to Italy, just by ourselves.

NH: Did you see the other ships once you got to Italy?

VB: Oh, no, they were gone, God knows where, but they were gone. I never saw them again.

SH: Did you get off the ship at all in North Africa?

VB: Nope.

SH: You stayed right there and just waited and woke up the next day.

VB: Thank goodness, we didn't get off. We might still be there. [laughter]

SH: Where did you first arrive in Italy?

VB: Sicily, really, which is still Italy. Well, I guess just for a few days. ... Then we went to the Naples area, and most of them went down to where our headquarters for the group was, but a few were picked, which didn't seem like a good idea at the time, but it turned out to be just fine to stay. They had, I don't think they had a name, these machines that manufactured smoke, the idea being in an air raid, you put that up and hid the lights and whatnot. ... I had the job of, during the day, from six to noon, I guess, guarding three of these things. ... Other people had that, too. Of course, we were all strangers. But most of them were there at night. ... One night, they did have an air raid, where they had to make the smoke. Other than that, they were there all night, and I was glad I had been there in the morning, when it was uneventful.

SH: How long were you there?

VB: Oh, I'd say maybe three weeks.

SH: What did you see of the destruction that had gone on before your arrival?

VB: Not much.

SH: The harbor and everything was basically undamaged.

VB: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SH: Both in Sicily and in Naples?

VB: Yeah.

SH: How were you transported then from Naples to your headquarters?

VB: Truck, which was not that far. I mean, it's maybe a couple of hours at most.

SH: What was the name of the town where you were headquartered?

VB: Grottagliae, G-R-O-T-T-A-G-L-I-A-E.

SH: What was your impression of Italy, compared to your history books?

VB: Well, Grottagliae was very, very tiny. In fact, I was in the town perhaps once or twice, and that's it. ... We could visit Taranto, which is a port, which is a fairly big city, or Bari, which is a very big city ...

NH: With a background in French and Spanish, did you find it easy to pick up Italian?

VB: Well, you didn't speak to many Italians.

SH: Did you talk at all to the native people? The Italians that were there, how did they treat you?

VB: You didn't really talk to them too much.

NH: Did you sense animosity from them, or did you try to stay away?

VB: No, I didn't, no.

NH: The 15th Air Force, their main target was Ploesti.

VB: Ploesti, yeah, oil fields.

NH: What kind of information did you receive about them?

VB: Well, see, I was still back in Italy with the people that did the flying. I suppose they got, I don't know, they were briefed every morning on where they were going and why. They probably did.

SH: What were some of the incidents that happened? Were the planes all successfully airborne and returned?

VB: Oh, yeah, well, that was a big ritual every day. They left in the early hours and got back usually in the afternoon. We would get the count of how many didn't come back, and all things like that.

SH: For three weeks, you were left behind to guard the smoke machines. Then you began your regular duty in your headquarters. What was the typical day like for you?

VB: Just like any other office anywhere. That's what it was, nothing eventful.

NH: What did you do with your free time?

VB: Not much. There wasn't much to do.

SH: Did you run into any other Rutgers men while you were there?

VB: Yes, a couple.

SH: Tell us how you ran into them.

VB: Well, one of them, I guess, knew I was there, George Jarvis. So he came down one weekend, and he was up in Foggia, which was kind of the headquarters for the whole smear. I went up there once, and that was about that.

NH: Did you see him, when you came back to Rutgers after the war?

VB: Well, yes. As a matter-of-fact, he was from, he's dead now, he was from Buffalo, New York, and so he wasn't local. But one day, I went over to my parent's apartment, because they wanted me to take the mail in once in a while, and who was coming out but George Jarvis and his wife and child. They lived on the same floor as my mother and father. So I saw him once or twice, and then he was gone.

SH: Who was the other Rutgers man you met?

VB: It was a fellow named (Johnny?) Harmon. I remember four of us got together one time, and I've never seen Johnny Harmon since, and I don't remember whom the fourth man was. So it wasn't a big to-do. I'd just see him once in a while.

SH: What kind of information were you getting about the progress of the war, once you were in Italy?

VB: Not much.

SH: Did you read *Stars and Stripes*?

VB: I did, but that was old by the time it got to us. So there wasn't much, not like today, with the Internet ...

SH: Did you have any cousins or any other relatives that were involved in the war?

VB: Not there, no.

NH: Were you worried about the possibility of going to the Pacific at all?

VB: Well, I don't know. Yes.

NH: Did the thought cross your mind?

VB: Well, it more than crossed our minds. As the war progressed up Italy, our bombers down at the bottom, which was where we were, were not as effective as they had to, because it was too far away. So we were really on our way home. We were going to, I think it's, Denison, Texas to train in these new planes called the B-29s, and some people, thank goodness, not me, but some people put personal belongings in some of the boxes of whatever equipment they had, figured they'd get it when we got to Denison, Texas. No, no. Well, the war ended. At least, the V-E Day came, and we all went home. Then the point system came out, where you got so many points for however many months you were there, twice as many if you were overseas, and then suddenly V-J Day came, and that took care of that.

SH: Tell us about the activities that you had. Did you get any R&R, and where did you go? Did you get to tour any towns of Italy?

VB: Just one time, really. I was all set to go to Capri, but the war was over. ... I went to Rome once, three of us, I mean, with two other fellows.

SH: What was it like to go to Rome?

VB: Well, we did all the things you got to do when you got to Rome. We saw the Coliseum and one thing and another, and it was ...

SH: Did you go to see the Pope?

VB: He came to us. No, no. We did, because he was giving an audience that day, one day when we were there. We were only there about three days, so we went, and that was that.

SH: What did your mother think of that?

VB: Well, I don't know. I'm sure I told her, but, you know, whenever she heard about it, it was two weeks or a month later.

SH: Tell us about the supplies. Were you well supplied? Were you ever disadvantaged because you weren't well supplied?

VB: No. We were always well supplied.

SH: Your mail service was pretty decent.

VB: Yes, mail service was decent, and cigarettes arrived, which at that point didn't interest me. Unfortunately, later it would have, but we had everything we were supposed to have.

NH: What about the weather?

VB: Sunny Italy. One month, it must have been February, that would be '44, there was so much rain. They couldn't get, most of the missions could not take off, and rumor had it that they were going to move us, because we were ineffective, but they didn't. ... Generally, the weather was good, but they did have snows, I can remember, occasionally, and rain.

SH: What brass visited the base that had everybody spit and polished? Did you have any of those inspections?

VB: Well, this is the Air Corps. They are different than the infantry, somehow. I don't know why. But we had, one time, somebody or another visit, and we had to get spit and polished. Fortunately, I was not involved in that project, except to get the individuals to be involved, making sure I wasn't one of them, but, so that came and went.

SH: Was there any interaction with other Allied forces involved in the war effort?

VB: No, there were some British around occasionally, but, no, basically we were ...

SH: Were there French?

VB: No, no, no.

NH: You never had any contact with the Royal Air Force.

VB: No.

NH: What were some typical complaints or comments about the B-17s and the B-24s? Is there anything you remember?

VB: No, I'm sorry. We were B-24s, and that's all we were. There were B-17s somewhere, but not anywhere near us.

SH: The training that the pilots had to fly the B-24s was fairly new, was it not?

VB: Yes, yeah.

SH: Were there any comments about which plane was the better plane to fly?

VB: No. They probably had some among themselves, but I wasn't involved with anything like that.

SH: Did you continue to report the effectiveness of the bombing runs?

VB: Well, only if there was a tragedy. Well, one thing we did was that if planes didn't come back, we had to investigate that, whether someone in the other planes, "Did you see parachutes?" or anything of that sort.

SH: Did you actually go and interview to find out this information?

VB: Yes.

SH: Can you tell us about how you went about doing this? Was it yourself and other people?

VB: Well, that happened to be my job, when this happened. [I talked to] anybody who might shed some light on whether these people were dead, or could have escaped, which they did ...

NH: Were the crews often hesitant to talk to you about these particular events?

VB: No.

SH: Were you ever able to find airmen that were presumed lost?

VB: Well, yes. Every once in a while, somebody would come into the base, who left a couple of months ago and been [in a crash] ... I just can think of one fellow. He came in and he'd been, I guess, sort of hiding out somewhere, and he eventually got back to where he started out. ... I don't remember whether they shipped him home or kept him there.

SH: Was he helped by partisans?

VB: I think so.

SH: You were able to talk to these people to get these stories, and that was part of your reporting.

VB: No, this fellow just came in, because he had to go someplace when he got back.

SH: Did you ever have any trouble with anybody being AWOL?

VB: I don't remember that, no.

NH: What about mental collapses or people trying to just skirt their responsibilities?

VB: Well, there was one fellow ...

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

NH: This continues an interview with Victor Burger. This is tape one, side two. You were telling us about ...

VB: Well, there's really no story. I heard from one of the other squadrons that he had gone berserk, and I guess that was that.

NH: Was it after he had flown?

VB: No, he was not a flyer.

SH: Were there chaplains involved at all in any of your work?

VB: Chaplain, singular. Yes, there was a chaplain. I mean, there was one. There's no story particularly.

SH: Did you have regular services then, before you went out?

VB: Yes, yes, yeah.

NH: You have fourteen battle stars.

VB: Maybe even more. Now, that's ridiculous. ... Those of us on the ground, who were not involved in the bombing runs, it was just like in the theater, that they give credit to the fellow in charge of the scenery and sound and all. Well, that was us in the war. ... We kind of laughed in getting it, and six, seven, nine battle stars. Then we found out each one of those is five points towards getting discharged. Well, suddenly, they took on a new light, and they even kept coming in. ... The reason, I guess, I have different figures there is even after the war was over, we'd hear that we got some more battle stars, but it was still sort of a laughable thing, except that, as I say, it brought us closer to being discharged. Other than that, I mean, being up there with the flak is a little different from being back at the home base.

SH: In your training, did you ever think of going to OCS?

VB: Yeah, I had one lieutenant who wanted me to go ... but I did take a [test]. Seven of us passed this big test at one of the airbases in our area for a flight officer, which is like a warrant officer, except it was in the Air Corps, and I'm happy to say, I was one of the seven who made it. But it was too near the end of the war, so it never came to fruition. I just made sure it was in my service record, in case this ever happened again and I could point to that.

SH: Did you ever hear information about the Bulge, the Battle of the Bulge?

VB: No, just hardly.

SH: What about the D-Day invasion?

VB: We heard about it, sort of. You know, somehow, you heard about it. We heard it had happened. That's about all.

SH: I just wanted to know how much information you got.

VB: No, not much.

NH: You also earned an Army Distinguished Unit Badge.

VB: I did?

SH: It's all part of those points.

VB: Well, I've told you that I had forgotten a lot of things, almost everything.

SH: What sort of celebration occurred on your base when V-E Day was announced?

VB: Well, yeah. We knew we were about to go home in a day or two. Well, that's when they started adding up the points ...

SH: Prior to V-E Day, you thought you were going to Denison, Texas. How was the end of the war in Europe celebrated?

VB: Well, we were still going to Texas [to train] for the Far East. Yeah, we were still going there theoretically, but that didn't happen. Things changed fast.

SH: How did your base celebrate the victory in Europe?

VB: I don't know. I don't think [the celebration was] anything worth remembering.

SH: We had one gentleman who said that the celebration was the closest thing he ever came to live fire.

VB: Well, yeah, that's what I would say.

NH: Did you ever have any contact with people in command?

VB: No. Generals operated in their own capacity.

SH: Did you have a jeep that you could buzz around camp on, or was everything with you on foot?

VB: No, we had a jeep that we could, yeah, go around. There were four squadrons in headquarters, and they were pretty far apart, quite far apart. Yeah, we used a jeep or something.

SH: Now, you were housed in regular barracks.

VB: No. Well, no. It's interesting, in that ... when we got there, we were in what had been a German barracks. There were "*Achtung*" signs on the wall, and that sort of thing, and they were very nice for several months, until one morning, one caught on fire, and then two caught on fire, three caught on fire, four caught on fire. The fifth barracks belonged to the, I don't know, they were the mechanics, or whatnot. They were able to spray their building with water and saved their building, but the other four were [destroyed]. We had plenty of time [to escape]. Nobody's life was threatened, but there was one guy who wasn't too swift in our barracks. He forgot he had a wristwatch up in the saltwater taffy box on the top shelf, and, of course, that went. ... We, at any rate, got in one of the makeshift houses that they had around there and spent the rest of our time there. The other ones had big tents, and they lived in tents for the rest of their stay there.

SH: Did you feel fortunate to be in a house and not in a tent?

VB: Yeah, I do think so, but I guess the tent was all right, except there were a lot more people there.

SH: Where were the people from that you were housed with?

VB: You mean what part of the country? Oh, any place.

SH: Did the boys from the South have interesting stories?

VB: I can't figure anything that would fill that bill. It was pretty calm.

SH: What did you do during the time when you weren't actually at your job?

VB: Not much.

SH: Did you go to a club?

VB: Yeah, they had a club, and you could go into town. I mean, that's into Taranto, which is a city, and Bari, which is a big city, but there wasn't much to do there either.

SH: Did you go dancing at the USO?

VB: There was no USO, no.

SH: Did you have facilities like that?

VB: No, there was nobody to dance with.

SH: None of the shows came your way.

VB: Oh, occasionally, we had a few shows that came along, yes.

NH: What were your general feelings when you found out about President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs?

VB: It was all right with me.

NH: As long as the war was over.

VB: That's right, because we were on our way there.

NH: Did you have a full understanding of what the dropping of the bombs entailed? Or were you just happy that the war was over and you could go home?

VB: I was happy that I was staying in the United States. I know contrary to what has occurred in the last twenty-five years, these people who are dissenting were not on their way to the Far East, and it does add a little relativity to the story.

SH: Do you remember hearing about Roosevelt's death and the reaction of the country?

VB: Yeah, yes, I do. And, "Who's Harry Truman?" was the big question. But, yeah, that was our last days, I'd say, overseas that we heard he had died.

SH: What did your family think of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal policies?

VB: Not very much, I don't think. We didn't talk politics too much, I would say.

SH: How did you make up your mind to go back to Rutgers, or was that just an automatic decision after the war ended?

VB: Perhaps automatic, but with this point system that we were talking about, I was discharged. Now, we're back in the States, of course. [I was] discharged on Wednesday. I went to New Brunswick on Friday and signed up for courses, which they were reluctant to give me, because the semester had started, but I talked them into it. ... Monday morning, I started classes, which is pretty close to the previous Wednesday, when I was still in uniform.

NH: Apparently, you didn't have any trouble adjusting back to life in the States.

VB: No, it was very pleasant. I felt like I'd never left.

NH: What are some of the major changes you noticed in pre and postwar Rutgers?

VB: Well, the size of the student body was very, very small, but then, I was only there for a year after the war. After that, of course, it blossomed, but when I was there was, the undergraduates were very few, and I just, as I said, sneaked in at the last minute.

NH: Did you see a lot of the gentlemen that you had lived with before you went to war, who had been in the Advanced ROTC? Did they come back to Rutgers also?

VB: Yeah.

NH: Did you at all discuss the war, or was it not really spoken of?

VB: Everybody just got right back into the swing of things.

SH: Did you move back into the same room?

VB: Same fraternity house, not same room. Well, they knew I was coming. Well, a story, but it's no real story, but I was supposed to have been out about seven or eight days before I did, so they knew I was coming. Well, through paperwork, we didn't get out as soon as we should have, but the room was still there ...

SH: Where did you leave Italy?

VB: Taranto.

SH: Do you remember the name of the ship?

VB: It had been the USS *Manhattan* in its inception, but a lot had gone on, of course, and we landed in Boston.

SH: From Boston, where did you go?

VB: Fort Dix.

SH: In Fort Dix and out of Fort Dix for your Army career.

VB: Oh, but the career wasn't over yet. No, no, no. ... V-E Day had just happened, and [the war continued] in the Pacific. We were still going to Texas.

SH: All right. I misunderstood. I thought you'd found out before you left Italy that the war was over completely.

VB: Oh, no. No, no.

SH: You actually were coming back here to be trained. Please go ahead with the story.

VB: Well, it's not much of a story. Somewhere along the line, it was decided that, well, I think, maybe these points coming out, you know, one point for every month you're in, and all that sort of stuff, and for the battle stars, suddenly, they became very, very important. ... Then, I guess, somehow we weren't going to Denison, Texas. We went to Rapid City, South Dakota, where there was a big [base], or had been a radio operator's school, or something, but we were just there because they had to put us somewhere, I guess. ... Then I was down in Texas for, in Tucson, Arizona, not Texas, Tucson, for maybe a better part of the month, and then it was finally [over].

SH: What month did you leave Italy then?

VB: May. Just about this time of the month in May, in about 1945.

SH: You were back in school in September at Rutgers then.

VB: Yes.

SH: Your travels from Boston to Fort Dix to Rapid City, South Dakota were by train.

VB: Yeah, yeah.

SH: Did you ever go on a plane?

VB: ... They'd check out planes, [and] a couple of times, I went along for a ride. You said, "What did you do on your time off?" Well, that was something you could do once in a while.

SH: In Italy and in the States?

VB: Well, in Italy, yeah. I guess I could have done it in the States, but I don't remember doing it.

NH: Were you at all interested in flying?

VB: Well, no. If they'd said, "Fly," I would have flown, but they didn't, so I didn't.

SH: Can you talk a little bit about being stationed in Rapid City? Was it any different than Fargo?

VB: I'm sorry; I gave you [the wrong city]. It wasn't Rapid City. It was Sioux Falls, South Dakota. ... That was a delightful city. The winters were terrible, but, no, we didn't do anything. ... You could be in town all the time, which we did.

SH: What did they do to keep troops occupied that were now no longer needed?

VB: Got rid of them, I guess.

SH: It didn't take long to get you out. Where were you when heard about the bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

VB: I guess I was in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

SH: Where did they muster you out?

VB: Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. Well, we had been sent from Arizona ... They didn't know what they were going to do with us, and that's why the paperwork problem came along for the thirteen from Arizona. Now, we were the thirteen from Arizona. I'd never seen any of the other twelve before, and I doubt that they had seen one another before either. So we arrived a day or two later, and nobody knew why we were there, I mean, and we just hung around for, I guess, a week, ten days. I came home one day, went into Harrisburg, I know, once, but eventually, they found all of the thirteen service records, and we went out.

SH: Did you ever find out how many people from your high school went overseas? Did you ever see anybody that you knew from your hometown?

VB: Oh, well, I know most of the men, boys was really what they were, at that point, went, I think, just about all of them.

SH: I just wondered in your military career if you saw any of them.

VB: I did see one or two of them, yeah, briefly, I mean, just very briefly.

SH: We already asked you about the difference in the numbers at Rutgers when you came back, and you said the numbers were very small. So you came back very quickly then.

VB: That's right. ... I didn't give a date. It was 1945, and there was, more or less, nobody there. I mean, the senior class was [very small]. There were some people, [and] they were called the chemistry majors. They apparently ... hadn't been drafted or anything. I mean, there were a few people there, but the graduates in 1946, when I actually graduated, I mean, [there were] not too many of us.

SH: Did you go right back into the same curriculum and had the same professors as when you left?

VB: Yes, I did.

SH: You said you got involved with the Queen's Players and put on a couple of plays. Were there other activities that you had not taken part in that you now took part in, other than Queen's Players?

VB: Not really, yeah. No, basically, no. We were running a fraternity and getting it off the ground, because it had gone [down] during the war.

SH: ... Was the *Targum* back in business again, and the *Scarlet Letter*?

VB: Oh, yes. Well, the *Scarlet Letter*, we did not have a yearbook. There weren't enough of us, so we had a section in the '47 yearbook. ... The only work we did was we decided not to put one out. That's basically what it was. And the *Targum*, well, I wasn't involved with the *Targum*, but I think that was going all the time.

SH: When you graduated in '46, what did the job market look like?

VB: Oh, I think there were plenty of jobs, yeah, plenty of jobs. Of course, there were plenty of men, too, but the job market was good.

SH: What did you start out doing, when you left Rutgers?

VB: Oh, we had a small family business. I went into that. ... That technically went out of business.

SH: Right after that?

VB: Well, yeah. It was geared to letterpress printing, and if you know anything about printing, in 1946, it was probably ninety-five percent of the printing was letterpress. Now, ninety-five percent is offset. The result was the same, but ...

SH: How long did the business continue?

VB: Oh, I guess about twenty-some years.

SH: So you were there for a while.

VB: Oh, yeah, sure.

NH: What did you do after that?

VB: Then I became in charge of development, fundraising, for a medical center. That was just, that job was just starting, you see. Hospitals didn't bother with that stuff. They were there to take care of the patients. Well, things changed. So that's where I was when I retired.

SH: How did you meet Mrs. Burger?

VB: Well, a friend of mine dated one of her friends, and that's how we met.

SH: How much longer was it from the time you got out of Rutgers, or had you met before you left?

VB: Oh, no, no, no. I got out in '46, so I'd say three and a half years.

SH: Was she involved at all with your business, or what was she doing?

VB: She was a nurse.

SH: Where was she from?

VB: She's from Ardmore, Pennsylvania, which is not that far away.

SH: It sounds like such a career change to go from a printing type of business to ...

VB: I had to go. The business disappeared. It no longer existed, as it no longer exists today. I mean, the whole business, anybody's ...

NH: I saw a picture of you from 1954 with then Vice President Richard Nixon.

VB: You did? Where did you see that?

NH: I saw it in your file in the library.

VB: I don't even know where you got that thing. Well, yeah, I was in this advertising club, and one year, Nixon was vice president, we gave him our award, and he gave us his presence.

NH: Did you have the opportunity to speak with him?

VB: Oh, yeah, sure. I was in his bedroom.

SH: It wasn't at the White House, was it?

VB: No, no, heavens no. It was the Ben Franklin Hotel, or, no, the Bellevue-Stratford. I forget which one.

SH: What were your impressions of him?

VB: We didn't really get a chance [to talk]. I mean, anytime I was with him, there were five or six of us meeting him at the train and took him down to his hotel. Let's see, it was an afternoon affair, so he gave a speech, and that was the end of Nixon.

SH: What have been your hobbies and your passions?

VB: Well, various things. Just living, that's all.

SH: Have you stayed involved with your church or service organizations?

VB: Moderately. I have no reason not to say it, but if we're going to stick to the war, we'll stick to the war.

SH: All right, well, we thank you very much, Mr. Burger for taking the time to interview.

VB: Well, I thought it was going to be fifteen minutes, myself.

SH: Well, thank you very, very much.

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

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