

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROGER CONOVER

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Roger F. Conover, on May 5, 2022, with Shaun Illingworth for the Rutgers Oral History Archives. Mr. Conover, thank you so much for joining me.

Roger Conover: Looking forward to it.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

RC: Yes, I was born on May 23, 1926 at Mountainside Hospital in Glen Ridge, New Jersey. I can't remember it myself, but that's what they tell me. [laughter]

SI: What were your parents' names?

RC: My father's name was John Hale Conover. My mother's name was Sara Greenwood Frankland Maxwell Conover.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, do you know any of the family history or, maybe going back to your grandparents' generation, what they did in their lives?

RC: Yes. My father was very proud of his Dutch background. The Conover name originally was van Couwenhoven, and they go back to Holland. The van Couwenhovens came over in, I think, about the mid to late seventeenth century to New York. Over the centuries, [they] lived primarily in the New York-New Jersey area. I'm not sure when the name was Anglicized to Conover, but it's been Conover for a century or more probably.

SI: What about your mother's side of the family?

RC: My mother had English and Swedish roots. Her father George Frankland was from English stock. He married my grandmother, who came over from Sweden probably in her mid-teens, and this was in, I think, the mid-1890s, and became sort of a maid. She came over in a non-professional calling, and she met George. I think this was not too appreciated by the Frankland family, but George ended up marrying this Swedish young girl. Actually, I never knew any of my grandparents. They were all dead except for my grandmother, this Swedish woman, who died when I was the age of four, so I don't have any recollection of her.

SI: What do you know about your parents' lives before they met and started their families?

RC: My mother was born in Berwyn, Illinois. I'm not sure what they were doing in Illinois, but they came east. She was born out in the Midwest but actually was brought up in New York City. She was one of a very large family. She had, let's see, five sisters and three brothers. There were nine children in the family. She was brought up in New York City and never had schooling beyond high school, never went to college. My father too never went to college. He went to Barringer High School in Newark. That was the extent of my parents' formal education.

SI: Do you know how they met?

RC: I have the impression that maybe they met through my Aunt Mary, who was my mother's oldest sister. My father, at that time, was in the car business; he sold cars and trucks. I think it was through Uncle Mark, who was Aunt Mary's husband, that they probably met. My mother had been widowed. She had been previously married and widowed at a very young age. I think she was probably twenty or twenty-one when she was widowed and then remarried, still a very young woman.

SI: I want to talk about your life growing up. You were one of the younger siblings in your family.

RC: I had an older sister, Beth. She was not a Conover. She was Beth Maxwell, and she was the product of my mother's first marriage. Mom's first husband died at a very early age. I have an impression from family stories that he was a drinking man, and maybe drink had something to do with his early demise. So, my older sister Beth had been born in 1917, so she was nine years older than I. My older brother John was born in 1923, three years older than I. I was born in '26, and I had a younger sister, Jean, who was born in 1929.

SI: Tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what your neighborhood was like, that sort of thing.

RC: Looking back, I think I was a very, very lucky youngster. My dad had built a house in the little town of Essex Fells. This is in Essex County, close by Caldwell. Essex Fells, even today, I would describe as a wealthy town. There are no commercial institutions of any type. No stores at all. In my time, there was just the little Essex Fells Public School, [where I] went to kindergarten through eighth grade. Just a lovely town with beautiful homes.

We were at the lower end of the economic scale. The house that my father built was a little brick bungalow and probably the smallest house on the street. Looking back, I just feel very lucky to have been privileged to grow up in a town surrounded by very well-to-do people and going to school with very nice kids. We lived in a house, actually, on one side was a girl who was my age, on the other side, a girl my age, across the street, a boy my age. So, there were four of us in the same class, which was quite amazing in a very small neighborhood, going to Essex Fells School. It was a somewhat idyllic growing up. Despite that, even at that young age, I sensed that my family was a little bit different, that we did not have everything that lots of neighbors had, but many of the people in town belonged to a country club. My folks were not members of the country club. Both Mom and Dad had very good friends but not with the upper crust, as it were.

SI: Would you say that the Great Depression affected your family?

RC: Very much so. I don't honestly know for sure, but I have the impression that my father may have been out of work for a year or more during the depression. It had a very great effect on where we lived. Dad had a hard time keeping up with the mortgage payments on our house, and in 1940, I can't remember the exact conversation, but I have a picture of the word that was given to us kids, "We're going to have to move from Essex Fells." This was just after I had graduated from Essex Fells School, eighth grade, and we were told that we would have to move

from Essex Fells and go to Montclair. That was a very big impact of the depression, that my father was not doing well and could not carry the house that we lived in.

This carried into times beyond the depression. As I mentioned, dad was in the car business, and the car that I remember from all those years was a 1927 Pierce-Arrow. Now, Pierce-Arrow was, in its day, a very nice car. Dad worked for the company, so he had a Pierce-Arrow. But he kept it all through my grammar school days, my college days, and didn't get rid of it until I guess the mid-'50s. By then, it was a very old car. That was maybe one other effect of us not having too much money. [Editor's Note: The Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company, a motor vehicle manufacturer based in Buffalo, New York, was in operation from 1901 to 1938.]

SI: Working in the automotive field, I would imagine that World War II had a big impact on his work as well.

RC: Yes, I suspect that's true, and as I say, I don't have firm tracks on what happened, but I'm quite sure he was out of work for a while in the late '30s. Then, I'm not sure when he got the job, but he worked for a big trucking firm in Paterson called Arrow Carrier. Arrow Carrier originally was, I think, put into business as a carrier of silk. In those days, Paterson was a big silk town, and Arrow Carrier transported their silk goods. Dad worked as, I guess I can describe it, as a freight, solicitor, and did the sales part of the business in the '40s and '50s.

SI: Tell me a little bit about your early education, first in Essex Fells and then Montclair, but also what you thought of the schools, your teachers.

RC: Essex Fells Public School, we had from kindergarten through eighth grade and a teacher for each grade. There was also a music teacher and a gym teacher and a principal, and that was probably the extent of the small staff at a small school. It was a short seven-minute run down the hill from our house down to the school. I used to run down through the woods to school every morning. At lunchtime, we'd go back home for lunch for forty-five minutes and then run back to school. I guess all of the teachers were female, and I have wonderful memories of them. I started at the age of four in kindergarten. In those days, most of the kids went to kindergarten for a couple of years, aged four and five. I think my class was probably, I want to say, twenty-two or twenty-three kids. There were small classes. All of the subjects were taught by the class teacher; it wasn't as though there was a history teacher and a geography teacher and so on. Each class teacher taught all of the classes. I would say that the teachers were, all of them, extremely well qualified. They were well loved by their students. I would say it was a well-behaved student body. We didn't have any problems with unruly kids and that sort of thing.

SI: Was there a particular subject or area that you enjoyed?

RC: We had a wonderful American history teacher. I always loved Mrs. Freeman, who was our seventh-grade teacher, and I can remember her class. She was very, very thorough. I still remember a notebook that I put together for her, making drawings and putting in clippings and so on. I loved American history. I always liked math and was pretty good at it, and I remember Mrs. Kaas, our eighth-grade teacher, being very good at teaching math. As far as music is concerned, there was, I think, one piano in the school, and that would be transported from

classroom to classroom. The big boys, in the eighth grade, a couple of them would be assigned to move the piano. Whenever it became necessary, they'd move the piano from one classroom to another, and we'd have our little music class. There was a shop in a basement. Mr. Davis was our shop teacher, and we'd have simple little wood projects, making things or Christmas presents for our father, little things made out of wood. We'd use primarily wood handsaws and hand tools. I guess we did use some electric tools, fundamental electric tools. As I recall, we probably went to shop maybe once a week, maybe twice a week. I also had gym, and during the winter, we had an auditorium that also served as the gym. We'd play inside kickball and tag with balls and all sorts of things. We'd go out on the playground, in the spring and fall. A wonderful school.

We moved from Essex Fells to Montclair in the summer of 1940. Essex Fells did not have any kind of high school or junior high school. Traditionally, Essex Fells kids were given a choice of either going to Caldwell High School or Montclair High School. I must say that most kids went to Montclair. Montclair High School started in tenth grade, and Montclair had a junior high school system. So, if you went to Montclair High School, you would go to George Inness Junior High School in Montclair for ninth grade. I guess kids who went to Caldwell probably went to ninth grade at Caldwell High, I don't recall.

In any event, we moved just as I was going into junior high school. We were not in the George Inness Junior High School district, so I went to the junior high in my district, Hillside Junior High School. I went there to ninth grade. It was sort of funny joining a group of kids who knew each other, they had gone to school together, if not in grammar school, at least seventh and eighth grade at Hillside. So, I was into a completely new group of kids who knew each other.

In the meantime, my old Essex Fells classmates were going to junior high over at another school. So, it was a brand-new experience, and I did very quickly develop a neighbor, Ralph Carpenter, as one of my very best friends, and this went through my life, as a matter of fact. We would walk to school together, and he was very helpful in introducing me to Hillside [Junior] High School. From the kids he knew, I quickly became friends with a number of Hillside kids.

Then, from there, in tenth grade, we all went to Montclair High. We lived, I guess, probably a fifteen or twenty-minute walk from school, and we'd walk to school together. I was very involved in school activities, not only the academic program, but the International Club and the French Club. I got involved in athletics. I played soccer my sophomore year and then played varsity baseball for all three years at Montclair High; I have wonderful memories of those days.

It's funny, as I mentioned, my parents were not college graduates; they didn't go to college, and somehow, I had a different view of academic subjects. A number of my very close friends in high school had had Latin earlier in their school work. I never took Latin, and I would say, in general, my high school subject program may have been somewhat lighter than some of the other kids. On the other hand, I was competing with them in math and French and English and all those other subjects and did quite well. I guess I had the feeling that maybe my high school curriculum was somewhat lighter than some of the kids who came from different families. I did extremely well. I was first in my class academically, and I relate that a little bit to the fact that maybe my class load was somewhat lighter, I don't know.

SI: I am curious, I guess you were already in junior high when the war started, I wanted to ask how America's entry into the war affected your experience in school. Were things cut? I think in some places, for physical education, they added an extra class maybe. What in general do you recall about the impact of the war on your high school education?

RC: I guess I've never thought about that, and I can't say that I saw any direct effect on what was being taught. I will say that the war was always out there and much the subject of discussion, certainly in class, of course, among the kids. It had an effect on my male classmates as we got to be age seventeen and kids electing to leave school and go into the Army or Navy at the age of seventeen. They would come back to school and talk about their experiences. You asked about the physical education program, for example. I can't remember anything being said directly about, "We're doing this because we have to be more fit," and that sort of thing.

I must say, I do recall Pearl Harbor, when it happened. I was playing with a couple of my neighborhood kids and hearing the news that Pearl Harbor had just happened, and I can always remember exactly where I was, that sort of thing. It had much effect on what was talked about and all of that, but I would say not much of an effect on my school life.

I will say it had a very real effect on my own thinking about where I was going, and I do have something. Maybe you can see it on the screen. Now, this is *Life* magazine. The date of it is November 3, 1941. I had just started as a sophomore at Montclair High School, and this is the cover article. It's a big spread about West Point. With the war starting, young men were starting to think about where they might go. This goes back to earlier in my life. I'll tell you this story now; it's not too far off track. When I was a boy, one of our next-door neighbors was the Wiggin Family, and Emily Wiggin, the mother, had an uncle who had been a West Point graduate, I think something like the Class of 1907, 1908, something like that. So, the Wiggin Family, as a result of that association with the academy, were members or had access to the Army Athletic Association, and they would get tickets to Army football games. We called him Uncle Paul. Uncle Paul, on two or three occasions--I probably did this three times, I don't recall--my brother John and I in the car along with his son, we'd go up to West Point for a football game. This was probably in 1935-1936, something like that. So, I have a very early memory of being up at West Point. That was in my mind. This *Life* article really stoked my real interest. From that time on, my primary goal as a high school student was to get into West Point, and that's what happened. That was a bit of an inspiration for working hard, and I felt I did very well in high school. [Editor's Note: The United States Military Academy, also known as West Point or Army, is a U.S. service academy located in West Point, New York.]

SI: Before we talk about West Point, I wanted to ask a little more about your impressions of the war. Before Pearl Harbor, had you been following either the war in Europe or more general news about what was happening with Japan and Germany?

RC: Yes. I was relatively young at that point, but I will say that both my mother and my father, despite the fact that they weren't very highly educated, were very interested in world affairs. They read the newspaper and listened to the radio, so the war was very much a subject of discussion around the dinner table and very much a part of American life, even though at that

point we were not in the war. Maybe I'll say a little bit about my parents' political leanings. They were both Republicans. I'm not sure when they started being Republicans but very much anti-FDR, and around the dinner table was much anti-Roosevelt discussion and that sort of thing. I'm trying to think exactly what was said in the family about the war, but it was very much there as something that was important and was going to have an effect more directly at some point. [Editor's Note: Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), a Democrat, served as the U.S. president from 1933 to 1945. Roosevelt was elected four times and died at the beginning of his fourth term. Roosevelt led the United States through the Great Depression and World War II.]

SI: After the war started, did you see any impact on your town, like maybe they had scrap drives or shortages of material? Does anything like that come to mind?

RC: Very definitely, yes. Rationing was a very big thing at that time, and the things that Mom could buy in the store were very restricted. I can remember the coupons there in the kitchen and that affecting what we ate. As a high school kid, I'm trying to think what year this might have been, it was probably 1943, there was, in Montclair, a very real corps of civilian people involved in air raid warnings. It might have been in 1942, we began to see searchlights at night in the distance over New York in the sky. I became a volunteer. I'm trying to think what the organization was called down at Montclair town hall. [Editor's Note: The Office of Civilian Defense (OCD) was established through executive order in 1941 to coordinate protective functions, such as blackouts and fire prevention, and war-service functions for civilians on the home front during World War II.]

SI: Was it Civil Defense?

RC: Civil Defense, yes, that's the term. It was basically, of course, adults who had more important jobs, but I, as a teenager, was sort of a messenger. When the air raid sirens [started], I'm trying to think how I was notified, but I'd run down to town hall and act as a messenger during air raids. A very real effect on the town and what they did in a civilian way during those early days of the war.

SI: As you were getting further along in high school and thinking about West Point, were there other things that you would do to apply or prepare yourself to go? Just talking with a few students today, it seems like there is a lot that goes into it to make your résumé or application look the best. What was it like in that day? [Editor's Note: Applicants to West Point are required to obtain a Congressional or Service-Connected nomination. Congressional nominations include U.S. Senators, Representatives, and Delegates. Service-Connected nominations can be satisfied in varying ways but most often are nominations by career military personnel.]

RC: Well, it primarily was a competitive academic competition. I guess this is true even today; appointments to the service academies come basically, for the most part, from members of Congress. So, the application system is through Senators and Congressmen. Early in the game, I got acquainted with what that system was. In the summer of, it must have been 1943, I heard about a school in New York City called the School of Ten, and it was on 57th Street. Their main business was in preparing high school boys for the service academies, to take the competitive

examinations. I applied to the school, and I became a student. As I recall, this was probably six weeks, and that must have been my summer after my junior year in high school. So, I would go into the city and attend this school. They had just one instructor. He would go through--I wouldn't say they were memory exercises but very detailed, factual stuff about history, a lot on mathematics--a large part of the competitive examination was going to be on mathematics--mathematics, history, a lot on English literature. We had six weeks of that. I just put a great deal into my head and then took the competitive examinations. Then, I guess it was November of '43, I heard that I had won a nomination and was all set. So, I would say that the fact that I was interested in going to the Military Academy had a great effect on how I spent my time and worked during high school. I knew that the physical demands would be great at West Point, but I guess they didn't feel that I had to do anything extra. I was much involved in school athletics and was in shape, so I didn't have to do anything special there.

SI: How did your parents react when you told them you wanted to go to the Military Academy?

RC: I would say they were both extremely happy. I think they both had a very good feeling about the academies. My older brother had wanted to go to Annapolis and had applied and had not been successful. That, I think, was a disappointment, not only to my brother but to my father as well. So, I think they were both proud and happy that I was going to go there. I must say, I had mentioned earlier the fact that my family was not wealthy, and this was not a self-serving reaction on their part, but I'm sure it was a big relief to know that they were not going to have to be paying for tuition. [Editor's Note: The United States Naval Academy, established in 1845, is located in Annapolis, Maryland.]

SI: You went up there probably in the summer of '44. Did they do the plebe summer during the war? [Editor's Note: A first-year cadet at West Point is called a plebe.]

RC: Yes, they still do. I entered on the 1st of July 1944, and this was three weeks after D-Day. It was a very big time in American history, and all of a sudden, you knew that you were in the military and [had] the feeling right off the bat that these upper-class cadets were unhappy that they were still here in school, and the fellows that had just graduated a month or two before were now about to get into the thick of things, and here they were still stuck in school. Because of that, it was made probably more military than it is in a peacetime situation in the sense that this is extremely important what we are doing. [Editor's Note: D-Day refers the Allied invasion of German-occupied Normandy, France on June 6, 1944.]

SI: Tell me about, first, the summer experience and then going into your first year there. What stands out in your memory?

RC: Okay. First of all is the trip up there. Dad drove me in the old Pierce-Arrow from Montclair over to, I guess, Jersey City or Hoboken, and I jumped on a train. On the train were a lot of young fellows, seventeen and eighteen-year-olds who got on the train to West Point. There was one fellow in khakis, a cadet, and it was funny talking to him about what was in front of us, as we were on the train up there. I got off at the station at West Point. At that time, there was a train station at West Point. There is no longer one. We were met there at the train station and

put into ranks. We were in civilian clothes and carrying a similar bag and walked up the steep hill. From then on, things got very military very quickly.

There was an effort to make that jump from civilian life to the life of a cadet extremely sharp, and right off the bat, you're just another soldier and you don't have any sort of personality of your own. You're quickly made to understand that you're really not anybody and all you have to do is say, "Yes, sir. No, sir," and follow instructions. My first day, it was just a blur of learning initial movements in ranks and drawing your first equipment and uniforms. Within ten hours, from the time we reported until the swearing-in ceremony, all of a sudden, we're out on the plain in front of the Battle Monument taking the oath of office, and we had been able to march in ranks, everybody keeping in step, even after those few short hours of instruction.

Immediately what followed was known as Beast Barracks. I guess there were eight new cadet companies, and I was in the First New Cadet Company in old cadet barracks. This was the very oldest barracks that there were. They are no longer. They were torn down in the '50s. I was assigned with three other new cadets, and I must say, they were, in general, older than I. I had just graduated. I was only eighteen. These other fellows were a little bit older and had been through a preparatory program, so they had been in uniform for at least a few months and were a little ahead of me in basic things. Anyhow, we got through the first six weeks of Beast Barracks. [Editor's Note: Beast Barracks is the summer training for incoming West Point cadets that precedes the freshman/plebe academic year.]

I'm trying to think of the timing. At that time, the whole Corps of Cadets would go up to Fort Drum in Northern New York State for a full week of maneuvers out in the field, and that was sort of the culmination of Beast Barracks, where we'd go up for field training. We all loaded up on two-and-half-ton trucks at West Point, all in convoy up north, and we stopped in--I'm trying to think of the name of the town. It was a big open field, and we all opened up our packs and got out our pup tents and put up our pup tents for the night and, the next morning, got in the trucks again and went up to Fort Drum. At that time, there were two regiments in the Corps of Cadets. Our two regiments were in a combat situation, and [it was] a tactical exercise where one regiment was on the offense and the other on the defense, sort of learning the rudiments of combat--the first classmen were the battalion commanders and company commanders and we plebes were ammunition bearers and riflemen and that sort of thing. So, that was the culmination of our summer preparation, leading just a few days later to the beginning of academics at the beginning of September 1944.

SI: At the end of the summer, was there a procedure put in place to weed people out? Were there washouts, so to speak, over the summer?

RC: Yes, there were. I'm trying to think when most of the washouts were. Some certainly going into the fall of '44, and part of it was academic, of course, but I would say most of them were washouts because a new plebe could not take the system, the harassment or the feeling of being treated as if they were dirt, and maybe not being able to do rather fundamental things that were vital to being a soldier. To answer your question directly, I think it was sort of over a period of time that we lost classmates.

SI: How did you react to the strictness of the military discipline?

RC: It's funny. As I say, I was a little bit younger and more of a novice than my roommates. I guess I had the feeling that I took things a little bit more seriously than my older classmates. I don't mean that they took it with a grain of salt, but I guess they could see that there's going to be an end to this. They certainly didn't talk back to the upperclassmen, but I felt I had to do what they were telling me. I must say I had my trouble with giving the right answer, or my shoes weren't shined right or something like that. I had my share of being stood up before the upperclassmen for not doing the right thing. I never had the feeling, "I can't take this. I'm going to go back home." The other thing about it is that Beast Barracks, everybody knew, was the worst of it, and once you got through, there was still the plebe system until you reached what's called Recognition Day in the following June, when the first classmen graduated and the plebes were recognized as full cadets and no longer made to race and cut corners when they walked and do all those things that plebes have to do. Once you got into the academic year, the plebe system was less rigorous. You always had to show this respect for upperclassmen and to walk in a particular way and go upstairs in a particular way and all of that, but there wasn't quite the overwhelming sense of someone always on top of you. As far as my attitude is concerned, I thought, "This is something I have to go through, and June will come."

SI: Tell me a little bit about the academic side. Did you feel prepared going into it by your previous high school experience, or was it difficult to get into the rhythm there?

RC: I feel that the School of Ten may have done something in really sharpening some of my [preparation], but I feel that I had a very fine high school education with good teachers. Some of my classmates had had a year or two of college and, obviously, were way ahead, particularly in the plebe subjects. I guess this is still true, but at that time, the actual classes were set up by where you were academically. As the academic year went on, as you did in your examinations and so on, you would move up or down in your section. I think it was twelve or fifteen in a section or class. The first section were the smarter guys, and the last section were the guys that weren't doing well and were in danger of being flunked out or something like that. Of course, the more you continued to do well, [you would] move up in your sections. To answer your question, I felt I did as well as any other non-college person that I was competing with, and my marks were pretty good. They had what they called a star system for academically-distinguished cadets, and you wore a gold star on your uniform. I never made stars. I was down below, well, probably about the ten-percentile mark, something like that, never up on the star ranks. I guess that didn't bother me. It's not as though I particularly aspired to it, but I always admired those who were star men because I knew they were not only smart but worked hard at it.

SI: What was the typical day like during the plebe year? What would you do from the time you wake up until you go to bed?

RC: I think reveille, first call, was probably 5:15. So, the reveille gun would go off over Trophy Point. You could hear that. Then, the Hellcats, the bugle players, would play reveille and get us out of bed. As a plebe, normally we would get out of our bed before reveille because we had to make sure everything was set, our shoes were shined, and we wanted to make sure we were ready to get down to six o'clock reveille formation. On top of that, *The New York Times* was

delivered every morning, and it was delivered to the main office over across the area. A plebe was designated as the newspaper deliverer, and if you were the newspaper deliverer, you'd have to run over across the area barracks and pick up the papers and deliver it to the upperclassmen. My point is we had to be ready for reveille formation at six o'clock. Everybody had to go to that, upperclassmen too. There would be a taking of the roll, a report to the company commander, and we would fall out, go back to our rooms, shave.

I'm trying to think when breakfast formation was, but it wasn't much more than a half an hour after reveille, I would say, maybe 6:45, I don't know, but there would be a formation. We'd have to form out, our formation was out in the street, the First Division. The roll call would be taken, and then we'd march in formation over to the mess hall. Then, as plebes, everyone had to take off his cap, and then the plebes would have to go to their assigned table. Everyone was assigned a table, and we would have normally three plebes to a table. The system, at that time, I'm not sure whether it's still there or not, we could not look up. We would never look at people around the table or the rolls or anything. Our eyes would be down. One plebe would have to say what the menu for the day was. Another would be the coffee pourer. Each of the three plebes would have an assigned duty at the table. Then, there would be table talk. The upperclassmen would talk among themselves and occasionally ask questions of the plebes. Part of it was plebe knowledge, "How many lights are there in Cullum Hall?" These were things that we would have to memorize and these were exercises so that your mind would be attuned to remember things exactly.

Then, we'd go back to barracks. I don't recall when first call for classes was, certainly not until after nine o'clock. At that time, we would form up in sections, that is, by class section. In our case, it was in the area barracks. There would be a section leader who would take the roll, make sure everyone was there, and then we would march a very short distance to the academic building and to our classes.

Most of the instructors, at that time, I'm not sure that this is still the case, were uniformed officers in the United States Army, primarily majors and lieutenant colonels. Virtually all of them had earned at least their master's in their subjects and, of course, many of them were doctors. The section leader would report to their attendance, we'd sit down, and then there would be normally an introduction or discussion by the instructor. Then, in many, many classes, at that time, it was most of them, the instructor would say, "Take boards," and all of us in the class were to go to a blackboard, put our name at the blackboard, and then he would ask questions. In mathematics, he'd give problems, and we would write the answers. Of course, there would be no looking from side to side. We had a very strict honor system, that all of our work would be our own. I don't remember the time, but maybe it would be ten, twelve, fifteen minutes, whatever it would be, and he'd say, "Stop work," and then we'd go over the answers. So, that was typical of many classes, how they were run. Some of the classes we would have in the auditorium. I'm thinking of perhaps an English class, or I'm trying to think of what else, where we'd be in the auditorium, and cadets would be asked to make a presentation. You would be in your seat shaking, worrying that they're going to say, "Cadet Conover," and you'd come up and give a short talk on whatever it might be. But most classes were in this small section classroom arrangement.

The morning classes were over just before noon. We'd have, once again, a formation out in the street, walk to lunch, have lunch. Afternoon classes were maybe two-and-a-half hours, two different classes, ending around three o'clock, something like that. Then, there were afternoon activities. Those who were on a corps athletics squad, that is, a varsity squad, would go to the practice. There [was] competition. If you weren't on a corps squad, you were on a company team. There [was] competition in just about any sport you could think of, where each company would have a team, track, baseball. We didn't have football, I guess, at the company level. So, that was the afternoon. Then, evening mess was probably at six o'clock and then call to quarters at 7:15 or 7:30, call to quarters, and you had to be in your room and studying. I guess lights out, at that time, was 10:30, something like that. That was a typical day in a nutshell.

SI: As a plebe, were you able to join the baseball team, or did that come later?

RC: They did have a plebe team, yes, and I went out for the team and played. We had a schedule and we played against other neighboring schools, but most of them were public schools, unless we played a team or two of prep schools, but it was at that level, not other college freshman teams. Teams would come up from New Jersey. I can remember once, I was pitching against a team, and this team sort of rode me from the bench because they had recognized that I had played against them in high school, from Montclair High School. That was fun.

One nice thing, toward the end of plebe year, I was brought up and pitched batting practice for the varsity team. So, I came up for the varsity practices and pitched. They had this protective cage; I don't know whether you've seen one of these, but it's in front of the batting practice pitcher and it protects you. You pitch over the screen, and it protects you from a hard-hit ground ball. So, that was fine. My control was always one of my very strong points, and being a batting practice pitcher, you always had to have very good control. That was very good for me. So, that was fun. Then, I moved up to varsity for my three upper-class years.

SI: You were there for this transition from wartime to peacetime. When you came back for your second year, was there any kind of difference that you noticed? I have heard that sometimes after World War II, veterans were allowed to go to West Point. Was that something that you noticed?

RC: That's a funny thing. I've never thought about that. Yes, there was some of that, certainly. Yes, I do remember a cadet or two who was outstanding right off the [bat]; I saw this when he was a plebe and, obviously, was like that when he came out of the service. I don't know what the percentage was, but a fair percentage of my entering class, they'd been in the service in one way or another.

First of all, I remember when the war was over and the bomb dropping at Hiroshima and all that. Then, not a strange thing, but a difference certainly in the composition of the faculty and the higher-ups. Very quickly, in 1945, Maxwell Taylor came back to be superintendent. He, of course, had had notable duty as the 101st Airborne commander, a tremendous World War II reputation. He came back as superintendent and had a very real impact on the way things were run and the whole place. [Editor's Note: The United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945 and on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. Japan surrendered on

August 15, 1945 and signed the official surrender on September 2, 1945 onboard the USS *Missouri*. Maxwell D. Taylor (1901-1987) was a four-star Army general who served as the commander of the 101st Airborne Division during World War II. After the war, from 1945 to 1949, he served as the superintendent of West Point. He later served as Chief of Staff of the Army and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.]

As far as getting back to your question about fellow cadets, we haven't talked about the way my class was divided. I'll get into this; maybe this is a good time to talk about it. At the end of the war, in early 1946, the spring of 1946, it was announced that--we were called the Class of 1947. We had entered as a three-year class. That all started in 1942, where the curriculum was shortened from four years to three. There was a class of January '43, June '43, and then a three-year class of '44, a three-year class of '45, '46. We were the three-year class of '47.

The war was over. It was announced, very big news, that our class was now going to be divided. Half of us would graduate in three years, the other in four. There was quite a program of education and a period of thinking given as to whether we would take three or four years. It was made very clear that these classes would be pretty equal. They would try to make two classes that were about the same. They would not leave it strictly up to us, Class of '47 people, to determine how many would be in each.

As I say, there was a period of education where the pluses and minuses of each were pointed out to us. For example, if you took a three-year class, you would become a second lieutenant. You would have a full year of advantage on the date of rank rolls over these classmates that might take four. If you took four years, look at this much fuller education you were going to have. You would be broader in what you would know and you would certainly have a fuller West Point military education as well. So, there was a period of great thought on our part, a lot of discussion amongst ourselves about what we're going to do. I must say that part of it, I think, for us was an age question. Several classmates had come in at the age of twenty-one or twenty-two, and people like me at seventeen or eighteen, we were thinking maybe four years would be the way to go.

Anyhow, we put in our elections, and the announcement was made. It turned out that a few more elected three years. There was some forced fitting--I think it was done by age, that maybe the younger people who had elected three years were forced into four. In general, I think people were happy with where they came out. [Editor's Note: Mr. Conover graduated from the United States Military Academy in the Class of 1948.]

We finished our sophomore year, what we call the yearling year. The corps was reorganized late in the summer, and all of our classmates who had just been cows were then first classmen, becoming corps commander and members of the brigade staff and company commanders and all that, you know, leading the corps, certainly, a year ahead of time. So, that was good. We became subordinates to them, corporals and that sort of thing, and they were our sergeants and lieutenants and that sort of thing. So, [there was] a complete change in the corps as a result of the reorganization that General Taylor put in. [Editor's Note: A member of the freshman/fourth class is a plebe. A sophomore/third class at West Point is nicknamed a yearling or yuk. A junior/second class is known as a cow. A senior/first class is nicknamed a firstie.]

SI: Going back to the end of the war, what do you remember about that? I guess you would not have been there for V-J Day, because it was over the summer, but what do you remember about V-E Day? [Editor's Note: On August 15, 1945, Japan announced its unconditional surrender in a radio address. Japan then officially surrendered on September 2, 1945 onboard the USS *Missouri*. Both dates are known as Victory over Japan Day, or V-J Day. Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945, thus ending World War II in Europe. This date is known as Victory in Europe Day, or V-E Day.]

RC: Yes, V-J Day, let's see, that was probably August '45. We were not at West Point at the time. I'm trying to think where we were. I'll have to look that up and see just where we were. It's a funny thing that I don't have a recollection of V-E Day and what was done specifically on V-E Day. Maybe I'll do some digging on that and get back to you, sorry.

SI: That is fine. Over that year you were there during the war, do you have any sense that they were bringing in any knowledge gained on the battlefield as they were training you, or was it too early in your education for that?

RC: Yes, I would say very definitely they were. You had detailed branch training, and I'm thinking about infantry and artillery and armor. We were being trained in and using in our training the equipment that was being used in the war. I can remember a field trip in the summer of, I guess it must have been '46, we were out at Fort Bliss and seeing anti-aircraft weapons and being amazed at the state of the computerization, early computerization, of gun direction. That was true of machine guns and larger-caliber weapons. We were using the latest stuff and learning from how it was being used in combat. I must say, in our summer training, we also had the advantage of regular Army people, these were not officers and graduates of the academy, but NCOs [noncommissioned officers] who had had combat experience and were leading us in field training. [Editor's Note: Fort Bliss is an Army installation near El Paso, Texas that was established in 1849.]

SI: As you got into your second year and the postwar changes settled in, were you able to have more control over what you studied? Were there tracks at that time in courses of study, or is everyone kind of going for the same area of engineering?

RC: At that time, and it's not true now, the curriculum was very set, and every cadet took basically the same courses. The only difference was in foreign languages, where there were four languages, German, French, Spanish and Portuguese. In that sense, there was a difference, but beyond that, everyone had the same curriculum. That is not true today. You select, much like a civilian college, areas of what you want to major in. So, everyone was taking the same course, perhaps at a little different level depending upon whether you were in the first section or the last section, but just the same curriculum. Now, as far as branches are concerned, that too was the same. If you pictured yourself going into armor, it's not as though you could take something special at West Point in that direction.

There was one thing that was in effect when we got in there, [which] was an Air Corps training program. One summer, our first summer, we had six weeks of Air Force training. We got some

training in a BT-13, an open-cockpit training plane. In any event, this was an opportunity for cadets to see whether they wanted to be in the Air Force. A lot of them had made an early decision that that's the way they would like to go, and there would be the opportunity to elect to be in the Air Force at graduation. So, this six-week period was a chance to be trained in Air Force equipment and tactics and theory and all that. That answers the questions about the only branch training that was special. Everything else was generally uniform. [Editor's Note: The United States Air Force was established as its own branch of the military in 1947. Prior to this, and during World War II, it was part of the Army and known as the U.S. Army Air Forces.]

SI: Were you interested in the Air Force at all?

RC: No. I enjoyed the pilot training and that sort of thing, but I never had an interest in it. I must say, those that did, I think, had very wonderful careers. Actually, a third of my class, a hundred of us, went into the Air Force, did very well. One of them became Chief of Staff of the Air Force. Others rose to high ranks and did well. But, no, I never had an interest in it.

SI: Now, regarding your baseball career, do any of your experiences or games stand out in your memory? I would imagine they went back to a schedule of playing college-level ball at that point.

RC: Yes, we were playing all college teams. We were in something called--I'm trying to think what it was called. The Patriot League is the current league that includes lots of good academic schools and the service academies. We were playing the Ivies, Princeton, Harvard and Yale, Penn, as well as Swarthmore, Williams, lots of wonderful academic schools at the college level. I do have very wonderful memories of those years, and I pitched varsity three years. [Editor's Note: The Eastern Intercollegiate Baseball League was a baseball-only conference that existed between 1930 and 1992 and consisted of eight Ivy League schools and two service academies: West Point and the Naval Academy. The Patriot League is a collegiate athletic conference that was established in 1986. West Point competes primarily in the Patriot League, although it is independent in football and belongs to other conferences for athletics such as hockey, women's rugby and rifle.]

We had a particular good year my cow year, my junior year. I remember, in particular, games against Yale. They had a fine first baseman, George [Herbert] Walker Bush, who was their captain my senior year. The first year, we played at New Haven. I was a relief pitcher, and our star pitcher got knocked around the first couple of innings. The game was sort of out of sight, so I was put in as a sophomore. I can remember those first few innings, I didn't do too badly. I can remember later pitching and we won one game against Yale and lost the other: very wonderful memories. [Editor's Note: George Herbert Walker Bush served as the U.S. president from 1989 to 1993. From 1945 to 1948, Bush attended Yale University, where he was captain of the baseball team his senior year.]

I have a very specific memory of a game at Baker Field against Columbia. My dad, at that time, was working in New York. Unbeknownst to me, he went up to Baker Field and was way out in the outfield. This was a field that had stands in the outfield, and he was sitting out there by

himself. I was the starting pitcher, and we lost 2-0. [laughter] I talked to him after the game. It was nice that he had made the effort to be there.

Our centerfielder was a guy named Glenn Davis, one of the great football players at West Point and just a tremendous athlete. He covered a lot of ground in centerfield and was just a great hitter too. So, I have wonderful memories of baseball games there. [Editor's Note: Glenn Davis (1924-2005) was a Heisman Trophy-winning halfback for the Army football team from 1943 to 1946. Davis also played baseball, basketball and track. After graduation, he fulfilled his commitment to the Army and then played in the NFL from 1950 to 1951 but had to retire because of a knee injury.]

I pitched against Navy twice, once at Annapolis. Harry Truman was there at the beginning of the game. I'm not sure how many innings he stayed. I don't think he stayed the whole game. I got knocked around. We lost the game 10-0. The other game we played at West Point, that I started, and [we] went into a late inning, I guess, ahead 5-4. A couple of men on, and I can remember the second base umpire saying something like, "Just one more out." The batter hit it over the fence, and we lost 8-5. A sad day, so I lost both of the Navy games. But we had good teams. We actually had only a couple of losses in my junior year. Great memories.

SI: As you got further in your studies in your upperclassman years, you were involved in some activities. What stands out about those years where now positions were reversed? You were dealing with the underclassmen. What was that like?

RC: If you're talking about the academic end, I can't say too much about it, except that I have a feeling that we were doing real good college work. I felt that our professors were extremely qualified in the non-military subjects, challenging. I'll say this about West Point, and it's probably true of the other service academies, you had to study. That is, there wasn't any just going to class and getting through. You had to do your work at night and a lot of outside reading, so that was very good.

Now, if you're looking at differences between being a plebe and an upperclassman, very tremendous differences in responsibilities. This was every day of the week in military leadership, working up the chain of command, initially being a squad leader and then a platoon commander. My first-class year, I became a member of the regimental staff. There were a couple of major staffs. One was the brigade staff, which was over the full Corps of Cadets, and then two regiments, each of which had a staff. So, I was a cadet captain and brigade training officer. Our cadet lives were completely different in that we were not in company areas. There was the, I'm trying to think what the nickname for it was, but we were in the eighth-and-a-half division, a separate tower area of the barracks, where the brigade and regimental staffs lived. So, it's sort of separate, apart from company life, and [we had] our own camaraderie in the evening and in the mess hall and all that. So, I appreciated that first-class year on the regimental staff.

SI: Do any of your professors stand out in your memory?

RC: I can't remember names. I can remember having a very fine professor in English literature, who impressed me with his depth of knowledge and the way he presented it and enhancing my own appreciation of the field of literature.

SI: Do you want to take a quick break?

RC: Yes, I think so.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We are back on.

RC: I'm sorry I don't have firmer memories of specific people on the academic side.

SI: That is okay.

RC: I do remember my German professor. I guess I mentioned earlier that, in general, the professors, at least at that time, were in uniform and active Army officers. In the foreign language department, these were basically civilians. They did wear uniforms, but they didn't have rank. Our German professor was obviously German. I just was very impressed with him as a teacher of the language. Of course, he never got into military things, but he certainly was a fine teacher of his specialty.

SI: What about activities outside of baseball and academics? You were on the magazine and the ring committee. What did those entail?

RC: Well, as far as the magazine is concerned, that was not really a responsible position. I always liked drawing. I'm not sure when I made my first cartoon, but at West Point, I started doing some cartooning and submitted them to *The Pointer* magazine and had a few things done. That was not a very time-consuming activity. As far as other activities outside of athletics, I remember trying out for the choir and not making that. I had been a soprano chorister as a youth, but I didn't quite make the cadet choir. I didn't spend any extra time at chapel but always loved the chapel services.

SI: Did you get more free time as you moved up in years?

RC: Yes, very definitely. Part of this is actual time off, that is, the provision of a weekend where you did not have to be there. I developed this friendship in the summer just before my junior year, a friendship with a cadet who lived over in Northern New Jersey. I had not known him well earlier in my cadet experience, but during our summer trip, I got to know him very well. He became my very best friend there, and we not only did things while we were there at West Point but over the summers and into our later married lives. In any event, there were things we would do during time off. You mentioned extra time as an upperclassman. His family had a place in Oakland. We'd go down there. He was a hunter, and we'd go out and do a little shooting. We'd go into New York City and do some drinking and dancing, that sort of thing. I would get home to Montclair every now and then and see my folks on a weekend. Let's see, I'm

trying to think of what else I could tell you about how I spent free time. First-class year, yes, we did have time away from the academy.

SI: During the summers, would they send you to other bases for any training?

RC: Yes, and that took different forms different years. We did have a summer where we went to bases, learning about the different branches that we might wind up in. So, we spent some time in Fort Benning. We flew down there and then had very excellent classes and demonstrations put on by the cadre down there of not only the tactics but the weapons that were then being used by that branch of service. We went out to Fort Bliss and learned about artillery. I'm trying to think what other branch trip we took; it doesn't come to mind at the moment. [Editor's Note: Fort Benning, now known as Fort Moore, is an Army installation near Columbus, Georgia that was established in 1918. Today, it is home to the United States Army Maneuver Center of Excellence, which includes the Army's Armor and Infantry Schools.]

Let's see, other summer activities--one of our summer tours was in training the new cadets. That is, upperclassmen were responsible for Beast Barracks, and I was one of the cadre at that time. Once again, I was on the brigade staff, not actually leading individual classes for the new cadets but involved in such things as laying out the parade ground for reviews, responsible for the parades and that sort of thing. Turn it off for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: As your time at West Point was coming to an end, how did you choose the branch that you wanted to go into, which was the Corps of Engineers? What do you recall about that choice? [Editor's Note: The United States Army Corps of Engineers, established in 1775, carries out engineering projects for both the military and civilian sectors.]

RC: I think from the beginning I had been interested in the Corps and the sorts of different careers that they could lead into. [They are] responsible for large government works across the country. They have their combat portion, combat engineers, and the things they do in supporting infantry, artillery, armor units in combat. I think [there was] the feeling that they [were] perhaps more of an intellectual branch than the straight combat arms. So, I don't remember when I made up my mind, but I think rather early in my cadet career, I was heading in that direction. Then, that strengthened as I took more academic courses that were built on that feeling.

SI: Intellectual, yes.

RC: In that field. I think I probably made my decision in those weeks when that was on the table, when cadets were asked to think about the choosing of their branch. My friend was heading toward engineers as well. I pretty well made up my mind in the middle of my junior year.

SI: What do you recall about your commissioning and graduation?

RC: Well, I remember specifically that it turned out to be not a sunny day. If it had been a sunny day, our graduation would have been outside. I guess at that time, it would have been in the stadium, but it turned out to be a rainy day and therefore it was at the field house. I can remember marching down there. Part of my family was there, my parents and my bride-to-be. The speaker was James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy at the time. A disappointment about the fact that it wasn't a nice, outdoor, sunny event, but I do remember the speech, the crowd, holding up our hands and being commissioned as second lieutenants and our commitment to service. Then, I remember after the ceremony talking to the family and going back to barracks and putting my things together and uniforms that I'd already purchased and a feeling of elation and yet a feeling of sadness about ending these four years. [Editor's Note: James Forrestal (1892-1949) served as the Secretary of the Navy from 1944 to 1947 and as Secretary of Defense from 1947 to 1949.]

SI: Did you get that first assignment before graduation, or was it afterward?

RC: We were not assigned units and stations right after graduation. We all had commitments to go to branch school. The Air Force, I'm trying to think where they went, but this was basic officers training for the Air Force. All of the ground force officers regardless of branch were assigned to Fort Riley, Kansas for what was called the Ground General Course. We all knew, right off the bat, that we would be going to Fort Riley after a short leave after graduation. So, there was no question about where we were headed. As I recall, we had one month of leave, and so most of us went home. Some of us got married right on the spot, either graduation day or the day or two after, in the Cadet Chapel. All of us went home, and in my case, I got married at the end of June in my hometown. Fort Riley was where we were headed. [Editor's Note: Fort Riley is an Army installation in central Kansas that was established in 1853.]

SI: When had you met your first wife, and how?

RC: I met my wife-to-be in early September 1941 at Montclair High School. We were assigned to a homeroom. I went to my homeroom, and in my homeroom was a girl named Barbara Beatty. I hadn't met her before. In that homeroom were a number of kids from a different part of town. I don't know when I first said hello to her, but it was probably the first day or the day after. I got to know her through classes in French and English. I'm not sure whether she was in my first math class or not, but it was during those first few weeks of my sophomore year of high school.

SI: She came with you to Fort Riley, or did she stay in New Jersey?

RC: She came with me. We drove together. As a junior at West Point, I had applied for and got my first car. I had it during my senior year. We had that car, and after we got married, we got in the car and drove to Fort Riley, Kansas.

SI: What was that first posting and that training like for you?

RC: From a civilian standpoint, knowing that I was going to Fort Riley, we had made some inquiries through the mail and got in touch with a woman who had a basement apartment in

Junction City. When we went out there, we had a place to go and set up a one-room apartment in a basement. Of course, at Fort Riley were all of my ground school classmates, some of whom (I don't know what the percentage was, but a fair number) had gotten married. So, they were there with their new brides.

It was a wonderful period. It was not a period of deep study. That is, the classes did not require a lot of homework. They were not classes that demanded a lot of brainwork, and yet they were filling us with everything we needed to know about being a lieutenant. These were classes in all different branches of service and sort of a fundamental class in being a uniformed officer in the United States Army. I don't remember what the hours of our class were, but there were full days of work in the school. Then, at lunchtime, frequently, the wives would get together, and we'd have a bagged lunch together and talk social and military things. Then, in the evening, people would get together for a drink and supper and that sort of thing, a very wonderful tour, and I felt very hopeful in being a new officer.

SI: That summer was also the summer that Truman desegregated the services. Do you recall that having any kind of impact initially, or how did people around you react to it? Then, did it have additional implications as you went on early in your career? [Editor's Note: On July 26, 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981, which desegregated the United States military.]

RC: Well, very definitely in the composition and roles in units. I saw a very real difference in the responsibilities that were given to Black NCOs, and I must say that I had very real not only support but friendships with NCOs who worked for me. I think all of us who were white officers felt that this was a very real step forward.

At West Point, I guess I really didn't talk about this, but in my entering class, there was only one Black cadet. I saw what the attitude of the Army was at that time, upperclassmen who wanted us to silence him as fellow plebes, not to talk to him. I think society was at a point at that time where it just was not starting to go down well with white people. The efforts of the white upperclassmen to have us white plebes silence our Black classmate did not go over. We did not do it. I must say that he had to leave the corps, I guess, very early in the academic year. I don't recall the reason, but it wasn't because he was drummed out by the Corps of Cadets. My point in bringing this up is that it was basically a white Army that I was entering, and as time went on, I began to see the effects of desegregation and what it was meaning for very, very capable Black people. I also saw this later on, when I was overseas, seeing a Black lieutenant join the outfit who was a West Point graduate. So, that was beginning to feel its effect in the assignment of officers to units that I was in.

SI: After Fort Riley, where were you assigned next?

RC: From there, we ground force officers went our separate ways. Infantry officers went to Benning and the Armored force officers down to Knox and we Engineers went to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. We knew this. This was not a surprise. We all were prepared for it and once again had made some preparations in where we were going to live. I had found an apartment in Groveton, close by Belvoir, so we were set from that standpoint. [Editor's Note: Fort Knox is an

Army installation in Kentucky, near Louisville, that was established in 1865. Fort Belvoir is an Army installation in Fairfax County, Virginia near Washington, D.C. It was established in 1917.]

We reported to Fort Belvoir and had a six-month course in the details of the Corps of Engineers, what they do both in their big projects as well as in combat. We had great both classroom and field training in what an engineer officer was responsible for.

SI: At that point, how did you feel about your choice of branch? Did you have a choice to become a combat engineer as opposed to some other aspect of work in the Corps of Engineers?

RC: I think I was always attracted to the physical part of their work: moving earth and building things and that sort of thing. I won't say I was particularly attracted to the combat part of the mission, although I always appreciated how important it was to what infantrymen did, all of the things that we did in support of the combat arms. I won't say that I was trying to stay away from being assigned to an engineer that was doing works. I was always very interested in the training we had in the use of bulldozers and earth-moving equipment and all of that.

SI: Your classmates there, were they a mix of West Pointers, OCS [Officer Candidate School] graduates, and ROTC? [Editor's Note: Officer Candidate School is a twelve-week course that allows enlisted personnel who possess a bachelor's degree to become a commissioned officer in the Army. Another route to become an Army officer is ROTC. The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) is a preparatory program for potential military officers at colleges and universities across the United States. Army ROTC cadets are commissioned as second lieutenants upon graduation and either serve on active duty, in the Reserves, or in the National Guard.]

RC: A very good question. It wasn't my first chance to meet other ROTC and OCS officers, because we certainly had that mix at Fort Riley, but, yes, that was very evident. I think I always was very impressed with what I saw of the training of ROTC officers, and OCS too, for that matter. That also was born out in social relationships, where you got to know and socialized with other officers from other places.

SI: From what I have gathered from other interviews, before World War II, the Army had a rich social life, a lot of formality and social engagements. Was there still that sense when you were in there? I would imagine it might be more present on the big bases like Fort Belvoir.

RC: Yes. There was still that element of social formalization, and I must say that I feel that it probably was more evident--I don't know whether it was more important, but certainly more evident--in the pre-war years, this idea of making a formal call on the base commander and social get-togethers, which might involve the base commander and all of that. I don't have strong recollections of just what we did, but it was not a big thing. I do recall that we all got calling cards. I'm trying to think of specific occasions where we might have used them. Not strong recollection there, I'm afraid. The social get-togethers, I would say, were somewhat less formal.

SI: Your next step was being deployed overseas.

RC: Yes, it was. I think all of us in our class knew that this was the next step, and there's no question that every member of my class knew that he would be somewhere probably overseas with a unit next assignment.

SI: Did you have any kind of choice or a wish list for where you wanted to go?

RC: Well, I definitely wanted to go to Europe. I had taken German as my foreign language. I was looking forward to opportunities to use that. The woman whom I just married had spent her junior year abroad and was a language expert herself. She didn't know German, but she was very strong in French. I could see a very not only productive military life over there but also a very happy time with my wife in the things we might do traveling. So, I definitely was hoping that I might be assigned to Germany. This was, of course, before Korea, so it was peacetime, and I think we all were looking forward to ten years of peace ahead of us, in part in overseas assignments.

SI: I mostly want to save your time in Austria for next time, but just in general, were they already teaching you that the Soviet Union was the enemy of the future? How did you think of the Communist threat at that time?

RC: Yes, I think there was no question. I'm not sure when this became evident to the U.S. military, but I think it was very, very shortly after World War II that it became evident that we had an adversary and that it was a future military adversary, not only an adversary from the way we thought about the world and individual freedoms and economics and everything else, but that the Soviet Union was on the other side. Yes, that was very definitely, I think, in my mind as a new officer that that's where there might be a problem.

SI: It is about eleven-thirty. I think we will probably do another session and get more into your military career and then your civilian career in engineering. Let me just ask, to wrap up this session, is there anything that you wanted to talk about in the years that we have discussed so far that we did not cover or that you think is important to note?

RC: No, I don't think so. Something may come to mind, and will that be a problem if I bring this up at the start of the next one?

SI: A lot of people, I always ask at the beginning of the second or third session, has anything come to mind in the interim, so, yes, that is absolutely fine.

RC: I think you did a very nice job in covering my early years, but there may be something that I think of.

SI: Yes, if something comes to mind, yes. Let me conclude for today. Thank you.

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