Sean Harvey: This begins an interview with William H. Epstein, June 5th, the year 2000 in New Brunswick, New Jersey in Van Dyke Hall …

SH: We would like to thank you for coming. Thank you for sharing your time with us and we would like to begin by asking you when and where you were born and then if you could tell us about your father and your mother?

William Epstein: I was born in October 24, 1915, in West Grove, New Jersey. West Grove was then part of Neptune Township and my parents were imported, they were immigrants from Poland, immigrants from Russia, and they were very hard-working people and what happened was that …

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Could you state your father’s name for us?

WE: My father’s name was Jacob Epstein and my mother’s name was Lena Epstein. … For a matter of curiosity, one time, there was some talk in my family that my mother might have been an heir to a tremendous fortune and this is the story. In 1492, and when Columbus sailed to America, well, the same year they sailed to America, the Jewish people in Spain were expelled, those people who wouldn't convert, and evidently, as the story goes, my mother’s ancestors did not convert. So, what they did, they wandered from Spain, to France, to Italy, to Czechoslovakia, some landed in Poland, some landed in Russia. Well, what happened was that along the way, supposedly, one of my mother’s ancestors became a trader, and did a lot of trading and made a tremendous fortune and, as the story goes, … he somehow got the money to the Bank of England and then when the Germans came, naturally, they destroyed everything and there was a question whether or not there was any money there and whether or not the story was true, which sounded very good. Well, I don’t know if the ancestry is true, but it’s a beautiful story, the only thing is there wasn’t any money involved. [laughter] … If there was, she never got it.

SSH: [laughter] … About your father where was he born?

WE: My father was born in Minsk, Russia. What happened was that, I imagine, my ancestors were farmers for many years. I would imagine so, and what happened was that he was one of seven children. He was the second, the second boy, and his father, unfortunately, became ill and died. I don’t know why, it probably was a minor illness, but in those days it was probably major. … he and his older brother, became the breadwinners. They farmed and they just about made a living, they traded chickens, they traded whatever they had there, crops, and in the wintertime, he said they used to take their products to market by sled, they used to go into the Volga River. I don’t know what products they could have had, because they certainly couldn't raise things. I don’t know where they could refrigerate it. Of course, they may have hit upon the idea of refrigeration as many of the Americans had in, farmers of the past, by putting the goods underground and that’s what the American farmers did, but I don’t know if they, whether they did. But, anyway, he said they used to, maybe they were trading chickens. Anyway his brother, his older brother, became of age and they indoctrinated him into the Russian Army and at that time, a Jewish boy had to serve seven years in the Russian Army. If my ancestors had been living there years before, they would have had to serve twenty-one years. A Jewish boy, if he
was in the Army, had to serve twenty-one years a long time ago. Well, anyway, … my uncle in the service was on furlough one day, and came back and told … my father how miserable it was for a Jewish boy in the Russian Army. He had all the dirty tasks to do, he had all the dangerous tasks to do, and that it was very difficult. So, my father was just about draft age, so he decided that he would try to go to America. He had an uncle in New York that worked in the garment industry and they corresponded and … the uncle told him there was plenty of work in the United States and all he had to do was come here. Well, my father was not a slacker when it comes to work. After all, he had been used to work. After all, he helped support his mother and the other children and so what happened was they got in contact with an agent to book a passage to America. But, of course, agents, like everybody else, are sometimes not honest and they had heard stories where they had given money to an agent, and the agent disappeared. So, what they did in this case was that they gave a small deposit to the rabbi which the agent agreed to, and the agent would receive the money when my father would arrive in America and notified the rabbi. So, that’s what happened. So, my father said he went on a ship, and what happened to make a long story short; to get out of Russia was not easy.

SSH: Did he come out before World War I? Do you remember what year it was?

WE: Oh, yes. He got out about, I’d say 1905, by 1905. But to get out was not very easy, because after all they wanted the boys for service, so he had to smuggle out by underground railroad and there was in that group being smuggled out, there was four men, and a woman and a baby. Now everything went fine up to about the last … hundred, hundred yards, hundred feet, hundred miles. They had found patches at night. They traveled by wagons at night and what happened was when they had finally reached a point, which was maybe fifty miles or so from the border, … it was nighttime and they had … not found any guards at all, and all of a sudden a guard came. A guard came in the distance, they could see him walking, and the men knew if they were captured that they would be sent to Siberia and once you go to Siberia you don’t return; there’s no return. … Then this woman had a baby with her and the baby was sick and the baby was crying and so the men didn’t know what to do and the woman didn’t know what to do. Well, I don’t know what happened, really, what I think happened was when the guard came within any distance at all, the woman choked her child. I think she choked it, and my father never told that to me, but he never said anything more about the woman traveling with them. So, finally, they got on a boat in Hamburg and from Hamburg went to Liverpool, England, in Liverpool went to the ship and went to Canada. The reason they went to Canada was because they couldn’t get a visa to the United States so he was going to Canada and he said it was very difficult. There was hardly any room on the ship to move and the toilet facilities were very poor, and the food was very poor but anyway, they developed a certain comradeship among each other. They were suffering. All were suffering and they felt sorry for each other. So, to make matters even worse, he said, someone yelled, “The ship is sinking.” Well, you can imagine what happened, but it wasn’t true. They’d been taking some water on but it didn’t sink. Well, finally it got to Canada. When they got to Canada they evidently had a law at that time that you had to have at least five dollars in your possession and most of the people didn’t have any money at all. My father had ten dollars. So, they devised a scheme. He gave five dollars to a person going off and the person went off one side of the ship, he went to the other side of the ship and they lowered a rope and put the five dollars back on the hook and pulled it up and another person went and the end of the story is my father said he lost the five dollars. [laughter] Well, finally he
gets … to America and he had promised his mother that he would work very hard and he wound bring over her and his sisters and brothers. So, what happens is my uncle, his uncle rather, got him a job in this factory sewing vests together and, of course, he didn’t care about hours, he didn’t care about days, he just kept on working, like a machine, and, of course, everybody else ridiculed him when. They laughed, they made fun of him because he was a foreigner and doesn’t know the rules here. But anyway he just did what he felt he should do. It wasn’t very long before a shotgun, that’s in between … a marriage came. Said he was lucky to meet a pretty girl. Well, what guy wouldn’t want to meet a pretty girl. He’d only been in the country about six months, and he had no money, he was just saving whatever he had. So, what happened was that a shotgun, yeah, he’d like to see a pretty girl. So, he said, “Well, what we’ll do, we’ll go to see your intended on Friday night.” Friday night was the big night for meals. You had chicken soup, and chicken and vegetables, and, of course, my father couldn’t afford anything like that to start with. So, that was interesting, so he decided he was going to go. Well, what happened was they got onto a subway, this is in New York City. They got on the subway, they rode as far as they could for a nickel and they didn’t have any more money, so they had to walk about a mile, or two miles. So, when they got off the subway, my father said they got off into a section, which was poor homes and he hoped that the agent wouldn’t stop there. He didn’t stop there. He then walks, he kept on walking. He walks through homes that were middle class and he knew they weren’t going to stop there. He didn’t stop there. So, he keeps on walking and both kept on walking and finally came to real palaces, beautiful homes. My father knew he wouldn’t stop there. He stopped there. [laughter] So, this agent goes up to the door and rings the bell and a butler comes out, and the agent announced himself … and my father, and the butler said, “We’re expecting you. Come in.” So, my father said he walks in and he knew he was in for a bad deal, because from what he saw the woman had to be a dog. He goes, “After all, with that kind of money,” what he saw, “she didn’t need a shotgun to find a suitor.” So, he said, “The rugs were very thick. There were beautiful paintings on the wall, the furniture was beautiful. It was just, it was like a dream,” and so he really wanted to go home, [laughter] you see, but he was going to get a chicken dinner. So, he decided that he would stay. Well, anyway, his intended hadn’t come down, yet. She was upstairs dressing. So, my father was very uneasy, after all, because he was out of place. First of all, he had no money. Second of all, this was beyond his class. Third, well, he didn’t want to be associated with a dog. Well, to make a long story short, finally, his intended came down. He takes a look at her and he saw, he said she was the most beautiful girl he ever saw. He couldn’t believe it and so she came down and, finally, they talked and he saw she had a beautiful dress on, and she smelled nice, and she had pearls, jewels, and he didn’t understand what the story was. [laughter] Why would, why would somebody want a person who’s an immigrant, who hardly could speak the language, who had no money and she was everything everybody would want? He couldn’t understand it. Well, finally, they couldn’t eat yet, because the father hadn’t come in. This was a Friday night. Well, finally, the father came in. You know who the father was? His employer. His employer had seen him work and he decided that, there’s a man that had ambition, and so, he told the shotgun to arrange the date. Well, the gentlemen was not just a father to him, he was a tremendous … he was the biggest garment maker in New York City. He had factories in New York, it was almost like a dream, he had factories in New York, factories in London, factories in Canada and so, of course, my father was, now he was really uneasy. He had hardly met his boss before and when he sat down, they ate, and so forth, and, finally, after they finished eating, he said, his employer said to his daughter, “You like him?” She said, “He looks like a nice man.” So, his employer said, “Why
don’t you go together for a few months and see if you like each other?” Well, of course, my father was now, he was delighted. He couldn’t understand all this, but, anyway, they started going together and my father liked it very much. Who wouldn’t? It was a dream, but then he started thinking. Now, how could he ask this man to bring over his father and mother and brothers and sisters? Not only that, but he was going to be indebted to her, to him, for the rest of his life. His wife would say, “You never amounted to anything, my father made this.” Well, to make a long story short, he was dumb; he broke the engagement. [laughter]

SSH: Oh, no. [laughter]

WE: He broke the engagement, and he got fired. [laughter] Well, of course, he, naturally, he went into business for himself and anything was fine, then they had the strike in New York, the garment district. He was out of business and then … finally, the union settled, and he started again and then they had another strike. He was out of business all together. So, he had no money. He had nothing anymore and … in between that time, he met my mother. How he met her was as follows: Friday night the synagogue wanted to attract worshipers and so what they did was for Friday night they would have a big spread, so they would get people in, and, after all, he was not making very much money and, so he needed some food. So he went there Friday nights to eat and, that’s the way it was benefit for them and benefit for the synagogue. Well, to make a long story short, my grandfather was like a sexton there. He saw my father coming in, constantly, and he looked at him and he wasn’t a bad looking man. So, he said, “We’d like you to meet my daughter.” So, my father, why wouldn’t he? What have you got to lose? He had nothing, anyway. So, he met my mother and they had some trials and they finally got married and then they went to Farmingdale, New Jersey to have a farm. They farmed and it wasn’t good. Not only didn’t they make any money, they had a child and the child got sick and what happened was they took the child to a hospital in Asbury Park. It was on Asbury Avenue, and she died there and that soured my father on coming here. So he said, “They don’t want to stay in the sticks anymore, they want to go back to civilization.” So, they went back to New York. Well, they’re back in New York, my father got a job in a factory, again working in cutting vests and suits, and so forth and, again, there was a strike. So, he was out of work again and … my mother had a father, who was as I say, he was a sexton in New York. He became the same thing in a place in Asbury Park, in a synagogue. Well, he convinced my father to come to Asbury Park and my father came to Asbury Park. He got him some odd jobs but my father didn’t want to work for anybody. He wanted to be a boss. So, finally, he got a loan of a hundred dollars from a Jewish organization called Hass, a hundred dollars. So, with a hundred dollars, he spent, I think he spent fifty dollars for a wagon, forty dollars for a horse, he had ten dollars left. So, he took the ten dollars and he bought a crate of strawberries. That day that crate of strawberries didn’t last very long. He sold out and he came back and bought two crates of strawberries. Before the end of the week, by buying, and so forth, he now had enough to buy almost a day’s supply. Well, things went good for him and he became more prosperous and worked hard, and he became very successful. … My father ended up by having five warehouses and became, as I say, he was very successful. Well, of course, when he passed away, we … had a safe deposit box and the safe deposit box I never went to, my brothers never went to, but we had a key to it, so, when he passed away we went there. You know, when a rich man what do you expect, you expect titles to property, maybe, mortgages, gold coins, maybe stocks, bonds, anything. So, we were all, everybody was around, you know, to open the box and we open the box. There was only one
little thing there, a little American flag that he received when he became a citizen. That’s all he had in there. He kept that box maybe forty years, that’s all he ever kept there, a little American flag. I become emotional when I say this, because it was … my father and mother had three children, my brother, Sam, myself, the middle son, and my younger brother, Henry. Of course, my father felt very strong about education and he decided that if we wanted to be educated. We had to become educated. We’d have to earn the money ourselves to become educated, not that he couldn’t afford it, but that’s what his philosophy was and so what he did, he was in the wholesale food business, he was the biggest around, and he bought for us a truck. My older brother was then able to drive, he had a license, and we peddled around. My brother made his money for his education. He went to law school and became an attorney. I worked for him without any pay. The only thing was, when my brother graduated, I was to get the truck and the customers, and my younger brother worked for me. Well, that’s what happened. My brother worked, became an attorney, and then I worked and became an attorney, and my younger brother worked and became an accountant. We all worked, we all did, by working on the truck, peddling. Well, my brother, Sam, passed away about two, or three years ago. He was best known for a case that happened, that he had, … here in New Brunswick. It was a case where a young girl, of age two or three, was adopted by, was not, was taken in by a family to raise and, of course, the State paid her money, paid the family money to raise her and what happened was that the family became in love with the child and they wanted to adopt the child and the adoption agency didn’t want that, because they figured that the family couldn’t afford to give the child the kind of education, the kind of upbringing, that was necessary, that they wanted the child to have. Well, my brother had a saying, “Doesn’t the library have books?” Because they said they couldn’t buy books, so, he went on the premise that, “Doesn’t the library have books?” … and what happened was that he, this happened maybe about fifteen, twenty years ago, in about 1980, … he received letters from all over, even from Australia, and he won the case. I say, I don’t know whether he ever followed thorough by keeping in touch with the family or not, but he probably did, because he was very social. He would prepare for a case and he’d find out there was either an anniversary or party, and he threw the case away until the next day and he went there. Well, as for myself, what happened was that I was a football player, but my parents didn’t want me to play football, and so I followed my brother’s steps. I went to what was then Dana College in Newark. Dana College at one time had been Ballantine’s warehouse and now was converted to a college and a law school and I went to college there and then I went to law school there. While I was at law school, I thought it would be nice to try for class presidency and I won and then the next year, I won again. The third year I was beaten out by a friend of mine, by one vote. Well, after I finished law school, there were dark clouds on the horizon. Germany had invaded Poland and Japan was doing their bit, where they’re inland, in China, Manchuria, and so forth. … I am in law school at that time, and becoming a lawyer didn’t sound that attractive, but, anyway, I went to clerk for Edward P. Longtree, who was a big, who was the best attorney at wills and estates in the area and I went to college there and then I went to law school there. While I was at law school, I thought it would be nice to try for class presidency and I won and then the next year, I won again. The third year I was beaten out by a friend of mine, by one vote. Well, after I finished law school, there were dark clouds on the horizon. Germany had invaded Poland and Japan was doing their bit, where they’re inland, in China, Manchuria, and so forth. … I am in law school at that time, and becoming a lawyer didn’t sound that attractive, but, anyway, I went to clerk for Edward P. Longtree, who was a big, who was the best attorney at wills and estates in the area and then my draft number came up. Well, I had gone so far that I asked them if I could possibly be deferred until I take my exam and I was deferred and in January 1942, I became an attorney and, no, in December of 1942, I became an attorney. In January 1943, one month later, I was in the United States Army. Of course, what happened was that when it came time to report that day I had temperature of 102, or 103, and so, … My brother got in touch with the draft board, the draft board said to get in touch with Fort Dix. I got in touch … he got in touch with Fort Dix and they gave me a ten day vacation before it started. So, anyway, when … the ten days was up and I was well, already, I had to leave. I had to go to
serve, to go to Fort Dix. Well, I didn’t know exactly how to dress because I was not in a group. If I had been in a group they would have told me to wear just your clothes, just anything, as long as it’s not dirty. Well, what happened was that, I had to see my roommate off to service about a year before and when I saw him off to service, there was a very important boy also going off that day, in service. The gentlemen was the son of the theater magnet in our area and I saw him go off. I was very surprised he came in good clothes. He wore a French hat, he had spats on, he had nice clothes. He had a pipe and he had golf balls; golf balls and golf sticks in his things. I said to myself, “That’s most odd.” Well, I figured that was the way to go. So, when I went I did my best. I came with a, I had a Homburg hat, Florsheim shoes, spats, … I had a 3G suit. I think I had a handkerchief of gray and, well, anyway I certainly didn’t look like a recruit. So, when I finally got off the bus and I saw an MP, I showed him my papers to where I was supposed to report, so he says, “Go over there.” There was a table there, a man was processing the boys coming in. I’m looking at everybody. They were just in ordinary clothes. They were walking usual, and I was, I stood out like a sore thumb. It finally came my turn, he looks at me and says, “What are you here for?” I said, “Induction.” He looks at me and said, “We didn’t induct any salesmen today.” [laughter] I showed him my papers. He looked at my papers, shook his head and said, “Go ahead.” I went into a line and they took me and a group of other boys to a barracks. … We started changing clothes. Well, it happened that day they were taking pictures of a boy going from civilian clothes to Army clothes. Most of the boys there said, “Take that boy there, that’s an oddity, you don’t see them that way,” but, anyway, they decided to take a younger feller. When it came time to send their clothes home, everybody threw their clothes in a pile, not mine. The sergeant, the master sergeant, came over and said, “It’d be a shame to do that.” So, he got me a hat box for my hat, he got me a liner for my coat and jacket, and a shoe box for my shoes. [laughter] I wouldn’t kid you, and, finally, okay, I finally got into Army clothes and the first thing you do after you get into the Army, is that they have to give you a needle and so, what happened was, of course, after all you’re in there, the first day you don’t know what’s happening, so, you stay in line. You see other men going by and they’re yelling, “Watch out for the needle, watch out, you may faint or something.” You know, by now you’re really scared. Well, finally you get your needles, and, of course, they didn’t do it with any ease, you know, and finally, the first day is over and then we’re eating at the mess, at the mess hall in Fort Dix and I hear people talking about, “there’s a submarine in every group.” I said to myself, “How could they have a submarine in the Army? Submarines go in water and everybody always told me you’ve got to be very careful of a submarine.” I finally found out later what a submarine meant in the Army. That they figured out of every company there’s one person selected to spy on everybody, he’s a submarine, and so, at least, I found out what a submarine was. Then what happened was that I was given a detail. One of the men there said, “You go to supply room, you get me a left-handed wrench for a right-handed person." So, I said, “A left-handed wrench for a right-handed person?” He said, “I told you what to do.” I was so scared. I went to the supply room. [laughter] I go into the supply. I go to the quartermaster there and I said, “My superior sent me over for a left-handed wrench for a right-handed person." He looks at me and says, “Would you repeat that?” So, I repeat it. He says, “Hmm, I don’t think we have that. You better go to the other group.” Evidently, they’d done this before to other people. He said, “You have to go over to another place.” So, I went over to another place, wherever he directed me. I went in there and I told them the same story. He looks at me and he says, “You know, we don’t have left-handed wrench for right-handed persons.” I said, “Why did he send me?” He said, “They’re playing a joke on you.” So, he said, “Here’s what you do, you call up and tell them,
‘we have some, how many you want?’ … so, what happened was that they called up, and he calls up and he talks to the superior and he says, “Yeah, we have a few, how many do you want?” … and then there was a lull, and what happened was that, finally, the other person, the superior said to me, “Never mind, we found some.” So, after a while, he found out that I found something. Well, then I went from Fort Dix to Miami Beach and in Miami Beach where I stayed at a hotel that had been called Freudian. The Freudian Hotel was operated by Siden. Siden had had the Laurel Pines in Lakewood and the reason he had this hotel in Florida was that the people in Lakewood went for the winter and he wanted someplace in between. So, Florida was just starting to operate and started to open up, so he went there with other men from Lakewood and built hotels. It happened to be a very substantial hotel and years later when they came to wreck it, they couldn’t wreck it with dynamite, so they had to use bulldozers. But anyway, I was stationed there and I lived with three other boys in the same room and what we did was we had our basics training there, and I would … have a drill across the street was a lot and we drilled. One, two, three, four, we learned the simplest commands and then what happened was that we used to drill for forty-five minutes, with fifteen minutes off for every hour. We did that maybe four or five hours a day and, then we listened to excerpts from the rules, from a person who was in charge. Well, what happened was that in 1943, it happened to be a very, very warm winter and each day we exercised and did calisthenics. When you finished forty-five minutes, you are really wet and so they allowed us in forty-five minutes to go into our room and change and shower and then put the clothes on which were then still a little wet. At least you had showered and you were clean and you smelled decent and then you went back to the drill hole, you know, which was across the street from the hotel. Well, this day in, I think, it was in February, or it was in February that we had this drill and after the forty-five minutes, the instructor blew his whistle and said, “You’ve got a fifteen minute break.” So, everybody ran to their room. There was about four men in each room. Well, I got there last and so I had to wait for everybody to show and when they finished showering, I jumped in, and I came out and I put the uniform on that was waiting. I got into the uniform and I walked, and I ran to the drill field just in time for them to notify me, notify everybody, that it was time to go, time to start drilling again. So, we start drilling again, and we hadn’t drilled more than five or ten minutes, and I see one of my roommates walking, from the position he was at, walks up to the cap, the captain there, and I see they’re exchanging words and finally what happened was that the captain said, “Easy men, easy, take it easy,” and so, he said, “This soldier here has lost his wallet or mislaid it. Anybody see a wallet?” … I hadn’t seen it and nobody else had seen the wallet, so nobody said anything. “Well,” he said, “why don’t you fellers take ten minutes and try to look around to see if you can find wallets.” I did the smartest thing I could find, there was a tree, I got under the shade. But, anyway, he comes back in ten, or fifteen minutes and says, “Anybody find a wallet?” … Nobody raises their hand, nobody said anything. So, he said, “Well,” he said, “you know you men are all new men here and in the Army and you work together and you depend on each other, and you certainly don’t want anything, anybody here who’s dishonest. Now I hate to think that we have somebody here who’s dishonest, but this man says he’s lost his wallet, or it’s misplaced and somebody must know something about it. I’ll give you fifteen more minutes.” He says, “There’s a box here, I want to see that wallet in the box. If I don’t see it in the box,” he says, “Somebody’s going to be in trouble.” Well, I did a smart thing again. I went to a tree and I stood under the tree until he came back and when he came back, he looks in the box and says, “There’s no wallet here.” “Well, now,” he says, “you know, I’m a very easy-going person, I don’t get mad very fast. I’m going to make one more attempt. That wallet has to be in this box
when I come back. I'll give you ten more minutes." So, ... we all broke. I went under the tree, and ten minutes later he comes back and ... he looks in the box, and says, "There's no wallet there." So, he says, "somebody here is going to pay. "He thinks," he says, "he thinks whoever he is, he's a wise guy. It's best that we find him out now." He said, "I'm going to show you how we find these things out." So, he says, "Everybody stand up," and, of course, you have your fatigue jacket on. It's green and you have fatigue pants, there's pockets in the front, pockets in the back and this, I have to stand up to show you.

SSH: Okay.

WE: So, now he says, "What you do," he says, "you put your hand in your left-hand pocket and pull it out, so, my man can see it and whatever you have, you put in your right hand." Okay. "Do that," he says, "anybody find," he says, "Anybody find the wallet yet?" "No." "Well, leave your pocket out." Then he says, "Do the same thing in your left-hand pocket. Anybody find the wallet?" "No," nobody finds the wallet. Then he says, "Same thing with the back pockets." So, everybody standing up with their pockets out, and their possessions in their right-hand. So, he says, "Now what you do is you take your right-hand and you feel your vest pocket." Well, I did what he said, because he said he'd do it. He said, "Nobody find a wallet?" Nobody found a wallet and he said, "Put your left hand in your." I put my left hand in, I feel something there. I said to myself, "What the heck could that be?" So, I unbutton the button and look, it's a wallet, take a look at my hand, I got a wallet here. Well, okay. Okay, plus you have wallets. ... and he's yelling, "Anybody find wallets, anybody find a wallet?" ... I was so scared I didn't know what to do. I don't know how I found the courage, I said, "I find the, I got wallets." So, I walked up to him and I gave him the wallet and he says, he looks at me, and says, "Why did you take so long to come up and tell, and bring the wallet?" I said, "I followed your instructions and it was right in my left pocket." "Hmm," he says, "Is that your jacket?" I take a look, I was so scared I didn’t know what, I didn’t even say, yes, I just shook my head. Then he finally said, "Hmm, that's mighty short on you." He said, "My supply sergeant should do better than that." He said, "You're sure it's your jacket?" "Yes." So then ... he called the name of the person that lost the wallet, he comes up, he looks at me and he says, "Is that your jacket?" He says, "It is my jacket." "You’re sure?" "I’m sure." "Let me take it off." "Take it off." So, he takes it off and he hands it to me. Captain, the captain looks at it and he says to me, "Take off your jacket." So, I took off my jacket, he takes a look, and he starts smiling, he says, "These boys have the wrong jackets." [laughter] ... I heard that story many times in the service, everybody was telling me what had happened, and I never told no one that I was the one that was involved. So, anyway, now that I’ve finished that story. I was exercising. I was walking one day, after all they wanted to show the American public how the boys looked, so we marched out on Miami Beach and the people were there clapping and while I walking what should happen, my back gave out on me. Just like a knife stuck in my back, my sacroiliac hit my nerve and I almost fell over, and I had the gun in my hand, and so what happened was that the person in charge came and took the gun away from me and told me to go on sick call. So, I go to sick call, they said, "Go home, go to the barracks." I went to the barracks that night. I could hardly walk. The next day I went on sick call. Well, the sick call, the medical officer had his quarters where he saw people, in the basement. It was hot, anyway, to start with and in the basement it was even hotter. There must have been twenty, thirty boys in line and I was in line with terrific pain. I could hardly move, my back was hurting me so bad. To tell you the truth, I thought I was going to pass out it was so
hot there. Between the pain and the heat, I just about made it. So, finally, it was my turn next. I could hear the medical officer talking to the boy who was in the seat. He said to me, “You’re a gall breaker,” and then he said, “You’re a (gall breaker).” He said, “I watch you, back in service.” He said, “You always come here and there’s nothing wrong with you, just, it’s your head. Get back in service.” So, he left, and I just about made it. I just about gave it, I just fell over. I fell into the chair. He looks at me and he says, “What’s wrong with you?” I said, “My back hurts me. I could hardly move.” “Hmm,” he said, “Take off your shirt.” So, I took off my shirt, with difficulty. He said, “I know the trouble with you.” He said, “You’re sunburned.” I said, “Sunburned? I’m not sunburned.” He said, “Yes, you are. Go back to duty.” I said, “I can’t walk.” He said, “I said you can walk, go back to duty.” So, I had to get out of there and the drill field …

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

WE: … I was walking with pain, walking lopsided. One shoulder is up, one shoulder is down. Something like, … if you had raised one arm up and one arm down. I’m walking that way and finally come to the drill field and the boys are drilling. I can’t drill. So, what I did was I stood against a tree. There’s nothing else I could do and, finally, they gave the sign, double time, and everybody left the field and then I could see the captain take a look. He’s on one end of the field and I’m the other end of the field and I’m walking through the sands dragging my foot. I finally come to and I’m lopsided. He says to me, “What are you doing here?” I said, “The medical officer said I’m to go back to duty.” He said, “Duty for what?” “He says I’m fit.” He said, “It don’t look to me like you’re fit. You better go back to the barracks.” I went back to the barracks and he said, “The next day you report to the medical officer, tell him I sent, tell him I told you to come up. In the meantime, I’ll go talk to him.” The next day when I reported to the medical officer, he saw me, he skipped everybody else, he said, “Sit down, sit down, take it easy.” [laughter] So I sat down and he said, “I’m very sorry about yesterday.” He said, “I was mad.” He said, “I have so many gall breakers that I thought you were also one, but I see you’re in trouble.” He said, “Go back to your barracks.” He said, “Let’s try jackknighting your legs,” and that made it even worse and so I finally went back to the barracks and I stood in there. The next day I come back in and he said, “Well, I have a choice for you.” He said, “You’ll make it.” He said, “If I keep you on medical disability for another few days, I’ll have to put you in a different company. If you go back to your company that you’re with,” he said, “you can stay there and you can then, … go through with them but, you have to make the decision now.” So, I said, “I’d like to go back.” He said, “Well,” he said, “You’re going to have to do light duty.” “Okay,” so I did light duty and then my back became well. The next thing I know I’m in Fort Custer, Michigan. I was selected for a job there. … They attempt to teach all the recruits there how to handle themselves in difficult situations. If they’re investigating a matter, … whether they’re with the government, whether they’re working with the FBI or naval intelligence, or whether they’re working with the company that they’re with and they try to teach you how to react in certain situations. I remember … one case in particular, it was a very … very funny. The instructor was saying, “Now, you gentlemen are on the assignment. You have spent maybe half a month on this assignment and you’re getting very close to solving whatever the problem is. You get a call from another agency and you’re told to leave that assignment and go prepare for another difficult assignment in a different town, different place. What do you do?” … A number of boys said, “Well,” he said, “I would lock up my desk. I would give the keys to the instructor
and I would then prepare myself for the next assignment," and other boys said they would give it up too, they would do practically the same thing and give the information to their best friend and hope that they would give them the assignment to finish. Well, when it came to time with me, I said, "I would lock up my desk, give the keys to my instructor and go home and go to asleep," and the instructor said, "Go home and sleep, why would you go home to sleep for?" I said, "Well, I’ll take a bath, I’ll rest and I’ll be, I’d be in good shape for the next assignment." So, he said, "That’s a very unusual way to solve the situation." So, I said, "Well, if I go home, if I take a nice leisurely bath … and I go to sleep, I wake up and have a nice dinner, I’m fresh for the next assignment." “Well,” he said, … "I will remember this," he said, “I’ve been an instructor for many boys,” he said, “you’re the first one I’ve ever known to solve anything by going to sleep." Anyway, so I finished at Fort Custer and then I was assigned to a company that was, … bivouacking in Louisiana. Well, … I had never been on a bivouac before and I didn’t know exactly the rules but I soon found out. As soon as we arrived there, the instructor said, “Pitch camp, pitch camp.” We had tents to pitch. Well, some boys pitched tents and the tents stood erect. Mine fell down. So, he had somebody come over … who had superior knowledge camping, and was able to accommodate my needs and fix the tent for me. Well, we, as I said, when it came to bathroom facilities, I noticed that they were building a trench. So, when I asked them what the trench is for, they said, “That’s your bathroom.” So, I said, “I’m not going to use that for a bathroom.” Well, to make a long story short, … they had this trench, they had two ropes, on both sides of the trench they had blankets … to keep anyone from observing who was inside there. Well, … all human nature being what it is, … within a few days I had to use that. [laughter] … That was my indoctrination to using a slit trench. I was very embarrassed to start with this, but it got, after all, it became natural. [laughter] Then … received a pass to New Orleans. I went to New Orleans on a forty-eight hour pass. I went to … a French restaurant and they asked me for my name and address, and I asked, “Why?” They said, “Well, what we do here, is that we take down the name and address of everybody that eats here and we also put down what their main entree was and we keep a record of that, and maybe someday, somebody whose eaten here will be famous," and so that’s what they did. I gave them my name and address, I didn’t know, I’m famous, but, in the meantime, they had it and so then I went to a hotel, and, don’t forget, I was sleeping on the ground where it was hard, and the only thing we were sleeping on was a raincoat and on top of the raincoat we had a blanket and that was our bed. So, what happened was I took this room and went right to bed and I took a warm bath and I went downstairs and had a beautiful dinner, and for forty-eight hours … I was in heaven. … Finally, that was over … and then we were slated to be sent to Camp Shank. Camp Shank was the point where men shipped out and what happened was that I knew I was going to be shipped out. So, I went up to the captain, I said, “I’ll want a pass.” He said, “Nobody gets passes, we’re slated to go overseas and we, I can’t give you a pass." So, I said to him, “Captain, I haven’t been home in six … over six months, I’d like to show my parents how I look in uniform." Well, I didn’t know this, but, again, this captain had been … in the Army a long time, and … he knew all the tricks in the Army and he knew that there was somebody in the outfit that was a submarine. He figured this, there had to be somebody. Well, the only person in the outfit that really was educated was me. So, he figured that I was the submarine, so he figured he must give me a pass. So, I got a pass. I went home and I got married and then I went … overseas. … What happened was that when we were about ready to board the ship in New York harbor, the girls from the Red Cross would attempt to fill, infiltrate among the lines and give the men various objects, books, or food, or something and they would always attempt, the person in
charge would always attempt to push them away. The reason I said that was because they didn’t want anybody to know about it. Well, … they were watching us going to board, or watching us waiting to go aboard. Then the Jack Benny came. He came and he cracked some jokes. … He had said that … he wished us well and before long I was on a boat. Now the boat was built to accommodate maybe three or four hundred soldiers. There was over a thousand on the boat. I was down in the last, in the hole is what they called five floors down, and it was very hot. … We traveled, … along the Jersey Shore and I was a little uneasy about that, because I remembered … that a German submarine had torpedoed the ship in sight of the shore about a year or so before and I had seen the ship burn and it finally ended up in Point Pleasant, it was a tanker. So, … I kind of thought that you never could tell, there might be some submarines around. In the meantime, there was nothing I could do about it, but I was a little uneasy about that. … Then we hung around the Jersey Shore for a short while and I could see, I knew the area, and I could always feel that my home, that we were passing my home. Well, finally the ship headed out to sea. We ran into a convoy of about nine other ships, we were now ten ships. There was a battleship escorting us, it was a cruiser, and … that’s the way we went for many days. One day I was looking down at the water and I see a big pipe sticking up close to the boat. Well, you can imagine my shock, surprise, and fright, when I saw that pipe in the water. Well … I didn’t know what to do and I didn’t know who to talk to, so, I watch that pipe come follow us and I said to myself, “Boy, this is bad. Submarine keeps following us.” Well, I didn’t move, there was no place to go. So, I kept watching, then I saw one of the crewmembers come out. I said, “Shh, come here,” I pointed to the pipe. He said, “What’s the matter?” I said, “There’s a submarine following us.” “That ain’t no submarine,” he said, “That’s one of the devices that the ship has to detect submarines.” So, that was it. Finally, we landed in Grenock, Scotland, and when we landed there, we landed early in the morning … We couldn’t disembark because the mayor of the town … welcomed us to the English shore. So, we waited until about ten or eleven o’clock and the mayor finally came, welcomed us to town, then we got into trucks, then we got into a bus, and the bus drove us to a railroad station and we got onto an English train. English trains were a little different then. It had compartments. Each train had compartments where maybe six people could be comfortable and, of course, I think we piled in eight or ten of us, in this little compartment. Well, of course, we were instructed, especially at night, not to show any lights, that the Germans would be watching and they always … they greeted new arrivals by bombing them. So, you can imagine everybody on the train was a little frightened. So, … we naturally … would not allow each other to light a cigarette because of fear that the Germans would see us. Well, that night passed by peacefully and the following day we landed, we disembarked at a airfield. It was known as Air Station 138 in Eckels Road in England. Eckels Road in England was located among the farms. There was … farms on both sides of road and this big airstrip that we had, where they had the bombers … and the ammunition dumps, and so forth, and the barracks where we stayed. The first night I came on the base I, naturally, was curious, I had never seen a B17 before. I went riding on a bus which took us around. I saw B17s, and we were told to report back to the barracks by a certain time. I came back to the barracks at a certain time and we marched to the mess hall and along came someone who knew something. He said, “You don’t march. That’s one thing, you don’t march in the mess hall because the Germans may see you.” So, we broke up in small groups and went to the mess hall. That night was the first night I was spending in England and I was told that I was going to do guard duty. I was going do guard duty at twelve o’clock at night and so I managed to catch some sleep and at twelve o’clock at night the sergeant of the guard came along with his truck. It was about ten of us piled in, to do
various jobs guarding. The reason for that was there weren’t too many men in England at the
time and each new group that came in, their first duty was guard duty. So, … in the bus and I
stood in the bus for maybe fifteen, twenty minutes and finally the bus stops, he says, “Epstein,
get out.” So, I get out and I take a look around and I don’t see anything. Of course, it’s dark,
anyway, I don’t see anything. So, I said to the sergeant, “Where am I guarding?” He says,
“Don’t ask me, you got here just like I got here.” So, I said, “What am I supposed to do?” He
says, “Don’t ask me,” he says and he disappears and so, first, besides being dark, it was foggy,
very foggy. You hear about these London fogs, well, this was one of these kinds. I couldn’t see
more than maybe ten feet in front of me and what happened was that I didn’t know what I was
guarding. I didn’t know what I was doing. The only thing I had was, I had a rifle on my
shoulders and I had a pistol on my gun belt and so I felt my gun on my shoulders and my pistol
to make sure at least I had something and so I decided the best thing to do was to try to find
something that I could guard. … I couldn’t see because it was too foggy. So, what I did was I
walked on the road. I could see the road so I walked 200 paces. I counted 200 paces. I couldn’t
find anything but … I smelled something and I said to myself, “I smelled that before. I can’t tell
what it is right now, but I smelled it,” and then I decided I walked back 200 paces and started
again, walked 200 paces in the other direction, and I did that and I couldn’t find anything. Then I
decided to come back and I walked 300 paces the other way and I walked 300 paces, before I
first started, and that smell became a little stronger and I said to myself, “Huh, now what is that
smell?” I couldn’t see anything, so I was afraid to go off the road because I was afraid I couldn’t
find it again. So, anyway, I walked again, I’m back the 300 paces, walked the other way 300
paces, couldn’t find anything. Then all of a sudden I hear footsteps, and I hear lots of footsteps.
I don’t know who’s coming or what’s coming. “Could it be Germans?” I said to myself. “I
better, I better hide.” So, what I did, I went into the bush, the weeds, had weeds there and I
listened and the footsteps came closer and closer and then all of a sudden I didn’t hear them. I
said, “My God, already must have passed by.” I’m going to be court martialed because I didn’t
do anything and I didn’t know what to do. I can’t call. I have nothing to call. … I don’t know
what I’m doing here and so I went back to the road and I decided that I’d walk 400 steps this
way. Maybe I could find something. Walked 400 steps, the strong, … odor was became more,
more distinct. I still didn’t know what it was it … smelled really like a chemical of some kind. I
walked 400 steps back and 400 steps the other way, still didn’t find anything. Then again, I hear
footsteps. I jump, I run, I dive in the bushes again and, you know, I read Fenimore Cooper’s
Last of the Mohicans’ and he could tell by putting his ear to the ground of how many people
were walking, and so forth. I tried that. The only thing I got was a lot of weeds in my ear.
[laughter] … So finally, footsteps disappeared. I said to myself, “I’m certainly in for it. All
these men are going by and I haven’t done, … I don’t know what I’m doing.” So, I got out and I
walked again, and still the same thing, and I come back and the footsteps again. This time, I
decided I’m going to do something. I pull out my gun, I said, “I’m going to, I’m going to fire it.”
I said to myself, “Why am I firing? If they don’t know, if I can’t see them, they can’t see me.”
So, anyway, time passes and finally about six o’clock in the morning, I don’t know what I did, I
knew I couldn’t fall asleep, because if I fall asleep on duty, you’d get shot and I’m cold. I’m wet
and … I’m tired and I’m sleepy and I’m everything, but I can’t sleep. I’m walking and I’m
pacing. Finally, the sergeant of guard comes … and he shouting. I run up, “Shh, we’re
surrounded, we're surrounded.” “What’s the matter?” I told him. … I told him the story about
hearing the footsteps … “Oh,” he says, “they’re rabbits.” He said, “They’re big rabbits.” He
said, “They walk, they make enough noise, you think they’re human beings.” I said, “Rabbits?
What am I supposed to be guarding?" “You’re guarding the cesspool.” [laughter] That was my indoctrination into … to the Army in England. Well, what happened was that … I had always applied for Officer’s Candidate School, but every time I applied for Officer’s Candidate School they told me the school was either closed, or if it wasn’t closed, it wasn’t opened yet. So, I never could get anywhere and so what happened was that being located in a farming area, there wasn’t very much to do except there was a pub a few miles away where most of the soldiers went and I’m a non-drinking man so I never went there and they would come home drunk and they would create a noise, and make noise, and so forth and everybody would try to keep them down. Well, one day one of these soldiers, a corporal, came back to the barrack and he was drunk and he was, not only being drunk, they used to come up to the stove. We used to have a potbelly stove, and the potbelly stove was a stove which supplied the heat for the entire barracks. He would come up to the stove and he would start banging on the stove at eleven, twelve, one o’clock in the morning and disturb everybody and so when this feller did that, everybody yelled at him, “Quiet, quiet, quiet,” and he, “Don’t bother me,” and finally he sets into a bunk and he sees one of the men having a cigarette and he says, “Give me a cigarette.” The man says, “I wouldn’t give you a cigarette, you drunken bum.” “You, I want a cigarette.” He says, “I told you I wouldn’t give you a cigarette.” So, … he pulls out his gun and says, “Give me a cigarette,” and the man looks at him and says, “Put that gun down.” He says, “I’m not going to give you a cigarette.” He says, “I can shoot.” So, he pulls the trigger and he fires. Well, what happened was that the firing woke him up out of his drunken slumber and the bullet went up and I was sleeping in the bunk. Usually I sleep with my hands out, this time I was sleeping with my hands in and the bullet went over, right over me, and right into my clothes and so they immediately … started looking where the bullet went and this person that shot it said, “What did I do?” He says, “You almost killed Epstein,” he said. [laughter] So he says, “Do you think he’s hurt?” So, the sergeant says, “He’s snoring, I don’t think he’s hurt.” He says, “Well, wake him up, probably he’s hurt.” He said, “You dumbbell, you don’t wake anybody up and ask if he’s hurt.” Well, next day, that morning when I woke up, they told me about the episode. I took a look and there in my coat there was a bullet hole and the bullet had passed over me and had lodged into my coat and into the wall and, of course, we never had another case like that.

SSH: You never woke up?

WE: No, never woke up. [laughter] No, never woke up. [laughter] In fact, you talk about never woke up, when coming back to Miami Beach, I snored so loudly and so much that they tried various treatments on me, salt and pepper. They tried … using signs on me, they chanted over me. They finally decided the best thing to do was, please, let them go asleep before I start snoring. Well, … I didn’t wake up at all. I just found out all about this the next day. Well, what happened was that, somehow or other, I was transferred from this outfit, Eckels Road, to the headquarters of the … third Air Force Base in Thedford, England. Now that was a plus; cause what happened was that, I’m a history buff to start with, and the headquarters was located in a place called Ivory House. Ivory House was built, as I understand it, for an English prince and what happened was when the English conquered India, as I understand this story, they killed the king, but he had two young sons. So, what they did was they brought these two young sons to England and they wanted to please the young sons, so what they did was they asked them what they could do. So they said they’d like to have a house built like the house they had in India. So, they built this house, which is mostly of ivory, and the walls are ivory and … it was a
beautiful thing to see and the Princes were allowed to live in there and one became so homesick that he died. The other one lived out his life there and later it was bought by, I think, Lord Ivory, and Lord Ivory either gave it to the British government, or the British government took it for the soldiers and the American Army ended up with it. I stood there and when I was, I forgot something interesting. When I was in Eckels Road I had, of course, not being a smoker, non-drinker, and we received cigarettes … which was like money, and soap and candy and other essentials that the English people couldn’t get and, as I say, I had an abundance of it. So … I happened to see a lady go by and … she always rode a bicycle and she would always say, “Hi, Yank, hi, Yank.” So, I was just curious about her and I asked some of the English people there. They said this woman had been born in the area and had never gone more than twenty-five miles. She was a spinstress and went to work in a certain place and she was, maybe, in her sixties, or thereabouts. … One day she went by and she said, “Hi, Yank, hi.” I returned, “Hi ya, English,” or however I said it. “Hi, ya,” and we starting talking and, just for no reason at all, I said, “Would you like to have some candy and soap?” She said, “Oh, would I love that. We English people, I think, get one bar of soap a month or one pound of candy a month.” So, what happened was that I said, “I have an abundance, I would like to give you some,” so, she said, “I would love to have it.” So, the next day when she came by, I had candy for her and soap, I gave it to her. There’s was no reason why I should, but I did, and so a few days later she comes by and she saw me and said, “Do you collect stamps?” So, I said, “… I collect stamps, but I don’t collect stamps since I’ve been in the Army.” She said, “Will you do me a favor?” I said, … “What do you want, what would you like to have done?” I figured she wanted some more candy. She says, “I’ve been collecting stamps since I’m a little girl,” she said, “I have no family. I have no husband, I have no nieces, I have no nephews. You’ve been a friend to me, would you take my stamps?” Well, I figured, “How does it look for a soldier to have stamps? Everybody would think he’s a sissy.” I couldn’t very well say no to her, but I figured, "she had maybe a little stamps, so a little stamps I’ll somehow get into my locker and I’ll forget about it." So, I said, “Yes, I’d like to have some.” She said, “I’ll be here tomorrow," at a certain time, "and I’ll bring you my stamps." So, I came and the next day I was there at a certain time and she comes riding by with a big barracks bag, with a big bag, and I said to myself, “Could that be stamps?” So, she came to me and says, “Here’s your stamps.” Well, you could have knocked me over with, you could not, believe me, with a feather. What am I going to do … with a big bag of stamps? Everybody’s going to know where I got it. Everybody’s going to think, … after all, in the Army you depend on each other. They’re not going to depend on me with a stamp collection. You know, I can’t say to her, “I don’t want them," … that’s not right. She’s giving me what she considered a very precious gift, and I have no idea if they’re worth anything, and, besides, if they’re worth anything, what am I going to do with them? Well, to make a long story short, somehow I got the stamps to my locker, without anybody knowing anything about it, and, periodically, I would look in the stamps and to my surprise there was the second issue of the British government, the second issue. The first issue was a black penny. The second issue, she had lots of them there, they were un-issued. Now, I know, they’re worth some money. Now, I got a problem. "Should I send them home?" I said to myself, “Well, if I send them home and the Germans torpedo the ship, then, we’ll then. If I keep them here, I may have a chance.” So, I decided to keep them there. Well, what happened was, when they had the Battle of the Bulge, they asked for fifteen sergeants to guard the trailers where the generals worked and generals lived and I was one of the fifteen that they selected. Well, when you’re going over to battle zone, they tell you what to take. They tell you to take so many socks, so many pair, or two, a
pair of shoes, so many underwear, so many jackets, and so forth, and so they certainly didn’t include stamps. So, I certainly couldn’t include stamps and I went over and I had to leave the stamps there. Well, this was in 1944. In France, it was very cold, very cold, and we didn’t have the proper clothes and so one of the men got in touch with the captain of the … group that we were attached to and he, in turn, got in touch with our officers back in England and … they asked for more clothes, than we had there. So, what they did was they sent us more clothes but in going through my clothes someone found I had these stamps, … and when I returned from the guard duty in Paris, in France, when I went to look there was no stamps there. Somebody had taken them, but while I was in, … while I was doing guard duty outside of Paris, … the Germans were thrown back, just around Christmas time in 1944, and the Americans were celebrating by having a party. At the party there was colonels, generals, majors, I don’t think there was anybody lower than a major at the party and guarding all these people was another soldier and myself. Well, it was close to midnight and the party was starting to break up and what happened was as each officer came out, we’d stop and salute them, and they would say, “take it easy,” and “thank you,” and so forth. Well, as I was on, as I stood there, out comes Joe Morris and he came to where I was staying and I salute him, and he said, “Take it easy, soldier. Mind if I light a cigarette up?” He was very polite to me. I said, “No, not at all, sir,” and … so he started to engage me in conversation. He said, “What’s your name? Where you from?” I told him my name and where I’m from. He says, “Where’s that?” I said, “That’s in Jersey.” He says, “Jersey?” “Where’d you say again?” I said, “Asbury Park.” “Asbury Park,” he says, “I got a sister in Ocean Grove.” Ocean Grove is right next to Asbury Park. Now we had something to talk about. So, we were talking and talking, talking, and he says to me, “Sergeant, what did you do in your life?” I said, “I’m an attorney.” So, he’s puffing a cigarette and he stops puffing, he says, “Say that again.” I said, “I’m an attorney.” “Attorney,” he says, “doing guard duty?” He says, “Why aren’t you an officer?” I said, “They won’t let me.” I said, “Every time I applied for officer’s school they tell me the school is either closed or not opened.” He says, “Well, you report the next day to my headquarters, I’ll get you to officer’s school.” Well, you can imagine what happened. Everybody heard about this and the next day I was really a soldier. Boy, I really polished my shoes, I polished, I made my crease in my pants, my jacket was clean, I was really, if anybody looked like a soldier, that was me. So, I am waiting to go out and the men said, “Where are you going?” I said, “I’ve got an important meeting with the General.” They said, “You crazy! The man was drunk. How are you going to an appointment? You come there and he’s going to say, “What are you doing here?”” So, I said … “Maybe you’re right.” I didn’t go. So, what happened was that I was sent back to England and when I arrived in England, I took my barracks bag and I put it down and I put something in my rack. I laid down in the bed and I hadn’t been in the bed more than fifteen minutes and the corporal came in and he said, “A telegram for you, Epstein.” So, I opened the telegram and it says, “Joe Morris: report for Officer’s Candidate School, report for testing for Officer’s Candidate School in Paris.” He hadn’t forgotten, he wasn’t drunk. So, I came back and I took the test and I passed. Well, the test consists of two parts, the written and the oral. So, naturally, you wonder what is on the oral, what they will ask you. So, I said to the person that was guarding us, “What do they ask you?” “Oh,” he said, “Nothing to it, they ask your name and what do you do? … What have you done and why you want to become an officer and would you serve with …?” “Well,” I said, “I can do that, ain’t no problem with that.” Well, he says, … By the time you come out of the room, you’ll be on your way to Officer’s Candidate School.” So, I was the second that he called. I came in, I saluted. I sat down and they said, “What’s your name?” … and I told them. He said,
“What do you do?” I said, “I’m an attorney,” and then from nowhere one of the men popped a question, one of the officers that was sitting at the table, said to me, “How long?” Well, as soon as he said that I knew my goose was cooked, I had just passed the bar, so, I said, “I just passed the bar and I was drafted. I worked for the best attorney in the area. I know my law.” So, he said, “That’s all, sergeant.” So, I knew, I knew I said, “If I’m given the chance I will serve with distinction.” … So I didn’t become an officer. But I forgot one thing that’s of interest, while I was … doing guard duty … of course, the food there in France was very meager. Each soldier could only have two slices of bread. In fact, I lost thirty pounds in thirty days in France, in weight, and the food there was very poor. We were allowed, during guard duty, to raid the refrigerator that they had for the generals, and so forth. … I remember once I looked in the refrigerator, there was nice cake. I knew I couldn’t, I shouldn’t take that, so I took some cheese, or something, and the next thing I know they called me in and they wanted to know what I know about a cake. I said, “I don’t know about it,” I said, “I saw it.” “Did you take it?” “No.” They said, “It’s not there.” What happened was someone came in, and the cake was for the general’s birthday, he had a cake flown in, and somebody took it and someone ate it and there was no evidence and there was nothing they could do about that. Well, once I returned to England, I stood out the war there. The Fortresses kept flying and I would look in the sky and I would see planes rendezvousing for their mission and … there was thousands of them, it looked to me. I couldn’t see where, there … was not, any sky where they could hang … the plane, but, the plane would appear, but then they finally went off to the missions. On occasions, some didn’t return. We had, in fact, a friend of mine was on one of those planes. He didn’t return and his family was trying to find out information from me and I couldn’t supply any, because I didn’t have any. Another point of interest was when I was … on the Eckels Road. It had been only, maybe, my second or third week there in Eckels Road and the alert went on. Now the planes … were coming back from a mission and this was getting dusk and they were landing and all of a sudden, after they had landed, the alert went on. What happened was that the Germans had devised a plan where they would have one of their planes follow the Americans to the landing field, and, after they landed they would either bomb the place, or they would take pictures. Well, what happened was that after all the planes landed and the alert went on, everybody ran to get into a trench, which was lined with bricks to prevent them from being injured. So, I was running, towards the trench, I knew where it was, and I saw a captain on crutches by the road. So, I ran up to the captain and I said to him, “Sir, let me help you to get to a trench.”
saw parachutes come down with little lights and the entire field was lit up. He and I must have made a beautiful picture because we stood out. … If the Germans were taking pictures, they had a good picture, because we were standing right in this field and there was nothing besides hangers and buildings. He and I stood out in the field there and we watched the show. He said, “So, I told you they’re taking pictures.” The parachutes were coming down, little parachutes with little lamps, and it was now almost like daylight. They could, whoever was taking pictures, could really see us. … Finally, it ended up that the alert went off … and I helped him to his quarters and he said, “You enjoyed the show, didn’t you?” I said, “I enjoyed the show.” I said, “I must have been crazy.” He said, “Oh, your time’s not up.” He says, “You’re all right.” So, we watched the show. [laughter] I remember another case where evidently the Germans were taking pictures. This plane was caught in the flares of the searchlights and you could see the plane twisting and turning to get away from the searchlights. Finally, he got away and no shots were fired and I don’t know whether the Germans continued that or not, but I found later they had a more supplelicated way of taking pictures without using manpower. What they did was, they trained pigeons to come in and they had little miniature cameras attached to the pigeon’s legs. The pigeon would fly over a field and would take pictures and they would fly back to the base and they would then develop them. So, they didn’t have to use planes anymore. That’s really pretty good. Well, that’s what they did. Well, finally, I’d say the war was over, I returned home, and … my roommate was Carl Casriel. He was, Carl, … the type of boy who was very smart. He never, … when I first met him, I bought my books I’m supposed to buy and he didn’t have any books. I said, “When are you going to buy books?” He said, “I don’t buy books.” I said, “How are you going to learn?” He said, “I’ll learn.” I said, “You’ve got to read cases.” “Oh,” he says, “I’ll pass.” So, he not only passed, he got the third highest marks in the class. He only bought one book, … that was for a professor he liked, Professor Harris. He taught crimes and he bought the book to show him that he liked him. Of course, … he was an A student, and I was supposed to go into partners with him, but my father had this big business and he talked me into going and try the business. I went in the business one day, and my father left for Florida the next day, and so that’s how I got into the business. But I forgot something very interesting … a couple of incidents that were very interesting. When I was back on Eckels Road, as I said, that was the airfield. It was in a farming area and as I say, there was nothing to do. So, a soldier had to find his own amusements. Some went to town and got drunk. Some did a little reading, and I had been a good checker player and I saw that the Airmens’ Club had checkers there and so I played everybody I could find and, naturally, there was nobody in my class so I was a victor every time and finally, I couldn’t find any opponents, so what I did was I used a method that I had used learning the game. I played both sides of the board and tried to be aggressive and tried to defend. Well, I was doing that one day, I noticed a tall Southerner named, Tennessee, watching me and it was nothing unusual to see anybody watching me, ‘cause I was good and I was doing something that they probably never saw. He said to me, “Boy,” he says, “I’ve never seen anybody do that before. Will you play me?” … and, of course, I’d play anybody, it was something to do. I said, “Yeah, I’ll play.” He said, “You know,” he says, “you’re very good,” he says, “but you’re going to lose to me.” It happens that all these boys said I was one of the best around. So, I looked at everybody and I said, “Wise guy. Want to bet?” He said, “I won’t take your money.” He says, ”You’re like taking candy from a baby.” That got me mad. So, I said, “Let’s play.” So, we play the first game and I beat him and I said, “Wise guy, see? You thought you could win.” The second game I played and I hadn’t made more than ten shots and he won. So, I looked at him and I looked at the checkerboard and I couldn’t believe it. I hadn’t
lost a game in maybe a year and he beat me very bad. So, he said, “Want to play another one?” I said, “Yes.” I was mad and all my friends are around and they figured, “a lucky guy.” So, anyway, we played. We played twenty-six more games and he beat me worse each game. He made me look so bad. I was so hot. I was so mad. I never lost that many games in, maybe, ten years and he finally said, “I’m not going to play you anymore,” he says, “You’re looking at the world championship checker player.” When I heard that, I said, “You’re kidding?” He says, “No,” he says, “I don’t loose to anybody. I let you win the first game,” he says, “that was your pelt.” He says, “I don’t loose to anybody.” He says, “I’m just the world champion checker player.” Well, once I heard that, I realized that I had met somebody that not only could beat me and was much better than I. So he was also looking for somebody to play checkers with and so we started playing checkers and he showed me why he was better than I. … After all he was … the best and so it was very difficult to beat him, but he showed me some tricks, and, slowly I leaned some of his tricks and one day he says, … we used to play to eleven, twelve o’clock at night and he said to me, “Want to go to the mess hall?” I said, “I want to go, but I can’t get in.” He said, “What do you mean you can’t get in?” I said, “The mess hall, at twelve o’clock, is only for flyers.” They’re coming in, they’re either getting an early breakfast, or they’re going to get ready for a flight. He said, “We’ll get in.” So, I said, “Well, I know you have a lot of pull here.” I said, “But, I don’t think so.” He said, “Come with me.” So, we went to the backdoor to the mess hall and he bangs on the door and I hear somebody yelling, “Who’s there?” … He says, “This is Tennessee, with a friend.” He says, “Male or female?” “No, this is a male.” So, anyway, he let us in and I hadn’t, at that time, I was strictly kosher. That’s means, I didn’t eat any un-kosher food and so I’m coming in there and I’ve half-starved, anyway, because I didn’t eat any meat so I use to subsist on bread and vegetables, and packages my folks sent me from home, and cheese. So, I was looking for some cheese and my friend goes to the refrigerator and pulls out a big hunk of meat and he makes two big steaks and I said to myself, “That man is a really hungry.” Two big steaks, they must have been a pound, or two pounds each. [laughter] He puts one in one pan and one in another pan, he puts a pound of butter in each. … pan and so I’m watching him and I’m looking for some cheese, you know, and some bread and so he finally says to me, “How do you like yours done?” So, I looked at him, I said to myself, “That’s un-kosher, I can’t have that.” I can’t eat, not only that, he put in butter, you know, which is strictly un-kosher. [laughter] So I’m thinking, “How am I going to tell him this?” He’s a hillbilly. He had never … he said, before he came into the service, he never seen a train, he never seen a bus, he had never seen a movie, he never seen a trolley, he was a regular, he didn’t know from anything. Only thing he liked to do was play checkers, drink, have women, and not in that order, and didn’t like school. That’s what his main [laughter] assets were. Well, anyway, so I’m thinking, “How am I going to tell this hillbilly about kosher?” … As I started thinking how I’m going to tell him, I kept on smelling it, and I said, “That smells pretty good.” [laughter] You know, that’s the best steak I’ve ever had. [laughter] Well, anyway, this person and I, when I went to Thedford, at headquarters, we separated. They were going to have a … checker tournament to determine the best player in the Army and I knew he was going to be there and I knew I was going to draw him for an opponent. I just felt it in my bones. So I went there and he was there. … Then we drew, and I knew I was going to draw him for an opponent, and I drew him for an opponent. He said to me, “You know, you’re lucky,” he said, “If you hadn’t drawn me for an opponent, you’d be in the newspapers. You’d be in the Army archives.” He said, “As it is, you’re going to be defeated in the first time, and you’ll never get into the finals.” He said, “If you had been lucky enough to not draw me,” he said, “you’d probably be the best around.”
So, anyway, here I have to play him and, of course, I’ve learned something from him. So, we played and he smelled from liquor, beer. He kept on saying, “You know, I was in London last night, I had four women and four beers with each woman. I’m a little high, but,” he said, “I can beat you,” and so the first game he did beat me. I said to myself, “I got to do better than that.” So, I said to myself, “I think what I’ve got to do, I better think of time, before he’s shot,” and I did. He’s talking about these women that he had, and these beers that he had, and I beat him that game.” “Ohh,” he said, “I haven’t lost a game to anybody in years. How could you beat me? I’m the world champion checker player,” and I smelled this beer coming from him. “Well,” he said, “Maybe I had one woman too much last night,” he said. So, we played a third game and I beat him again. “Two games losing to anybody, impossible, impossible,” he said, “something’s wrong here.” He said, “Damn it, I shouldn’t have had that last girl.” He said, “That last one beer, last girl that must have done it.” So, it’s the best four out of four the best person is, the person who wins the first four games. So, I play him another one, I won the another one. So, by now, he’s half-crazy. “Damn it,” he says, “Shouldn’t never had any beer, probably shouldn’t have had any women. Should have really came to checkers in good shape.” Well, we played another one, I beat him again, and this time he was crazy. This time he was saying, “You eliminated me, impossible, I’m the world’s champion checker player. Ain’t nobody beats me.” ... I got up to tell the instructor that I had beaten him. He says, “Where you going?” I said, “I’m going to tell them I beat you.” “You ain’t going to tell them nothing.” He said, “I’m the best player in this area, ain’t nobody better than me.” He said, “Just because I had too many women, too many beers, you must have beat me.” So, I, after all, he had taught me how to play checkers much better than I had played before. He had been in charge of the PX and every time we had any prizes I won. Even though I didn’t win, he always saw that I had chocolate, I had everything, and so I figured, "Well, maybe he isn’t the best player, maybe I am really better than him after all, regardless, of what he says." So I’m playing, “Play another one, whoever wins this one will be the champ. If you win I’ll say you beat me. If I beat you, you say I beat you.” He says, “That’s fair enough.” He said, “Just a minute.” So, he goes to the bathroom and puts water on his face, he’s sobering up. We sat down and we played. This was, this was, really, a game. He was watching me, I was watching him, and then I was trying to corner him so he couldn’t move. He was trying to corner me so I can’t move and I take a look at the board and I say to myself, "I got him, he can’t move." So, I shot and I’m waiting for him to say I won and, you know, if you look at something long enough, your eyes become fixed. You don’t see the thing. So, out of no where, he had a shot. He cornered me, he had beat me, he had won and, of course, he went on to win the champion, naturally, and he said to me, “I’d like to play you again.” So, I’m wondering, if I ever went to Tennessee if I would ever meet him again. [laughter] He used to, he was always telling me about his country store, where he played checkers and drank beer. He was like something out of Huckleberry Finn. He had wonderful experiences. I must tell you about a few of them. Okay, to tell you?

SSH: Sure.

WE: Well, ... he always told me he had women. Every time he went to London he had three women, four women, two women. He ... never had less than two. [laughter] I started wondering if in London there were enough women for him. One day I said to him, “Ever had a Jewish girl?” So, he says, “Not that I know of, why? Are they any different?” I said, “Well, you know a Jewish girl may not let you do anything to her unless she’s thinks, unless you tell her
you’re Jewish." “Oh,” he says, “that’s wonderful.” He says, “I’m glad you told that to me, if I ever meet a Jewish girl, I’ll remember that.” … One day he went on a pass and he goes … to this club and he sees this beautiful blond woman sitting, a girl sitting by herself. He comes up to her and says, “You want to dance?” She says, “Sure.” So, he danced a little, he talked to her, and he says, “Like to go get something to eat?” She says, “Yes.” So, he took her to this little counter where there are little snacks, and so forth, and they get something to eat and then he says, “Would you like to take a walk?” She says, “Of course,” and he walked by the closest hotel and he says, “Here’s where I’m staying, do you want to come in?” She said, “Of course.” So, he brought her up to his room and he says she undressed. He said before he engaged in any activity he always took a shower, so, what he did was, he took the quickest shower on record and he came out there and he was still drying himself, you know, and he came out, he dried himself back and forth. He says “You know that girl sat back on the bed and says, ‘you’re not Jewish.’” [laughter] Well, anyway … he said it was not one of his victories but he had … Oh, I forgot to mention he was a gambler. He was … always winning. He said he was the luckiest gambler alive. What happened was that on the base, because the boys were situated in farmland with nothing to do, they permitted, they unofficially permitted gambling. They had like Las Vegas, a gambling table, and when they first opened this gambling table, I knew he was a gambler, I said to him, “You going to go there?” He said, “Not yet.” I said, “Why not?” He said, “They don’t have enough money. I got to let them get some money.” So, the first month went by; he didn’t go there and, of course, I kid him, “Oh, come on, you ain’t going to break the table.” “Yeah, I’m going to break the table.” The second month went by. After we were playing checkers and had something to eat, and so forth, I said, “You going?” “No, I’m not going,” “Why not?” “I told you, they don’t have enough money there.” I said, “Well, the odds are against you,” I said, “When you let them get too much money, you won’t win.” He said, “I’m the luckiest gambler alive, I win.” Well, the third month goes by. I said to him, “You going to go?” He says, “Yes.” He said, “You follow me and you’ll make a lot of money.” So, I said, “I’m not a gambler.” So, he went. He broke them. He broke the bank. He won all the money. So, they closed down the dice table for that month. The next month, the Sergeant Major, again, got money; he started the table again and this was about the tenth day, and I said, “You going?” … He said, “Well, it’s about time.” He said, “I’ll get some money. “You going this time?” I said, “No, I’m not going.” Well, he said, “Okay, well, you missed out last time. You’ll miss out again.” So, he went and, again, he broke the bank. That’s twice. So, somehow or other, the Sergeant Major got some money together and tried again, and the same thing again; he broke the bank the third time. Well, to make a long story short, they decided to play. The only way this feller, Tennessee, was satisfied, was he had to win. So, he used to play, … the Sergeant Major, in gambling, and he won. He broke him, again. Now he has all this money and he starts sending all this money back to the United States. You know that’s going to cause some commotion. Somebody going to be suspicious. They found out that he had this kind of money, he probably had a hundred thousand dollars, maybe more, in his locker he had locked, and so forth, and he was sending back ten thousand dollars at a clip. Well, they started an investigation. They found out there was a crap table, and that was taboo. So, what happened was that the person who was in charge of the base, they broke him from, I think he was a colonial to a major and the Sergeant Major, who started it, they broke him to a private and this corporal, who had all the money, they did nothing to him. He ended up with all the money. He was also, in his early days, he was a cook and one day the company went on a bivouac, and left him with two other men cooking. So, instead of cooking, he went out looking for moonshine. He found some and when he came back, he brought it back
to the other two men. They drank it and they all became drunk. So, … the captain and his men come back from this long hike expecting to see some food, they found three drunken men. … As I say, he was the kind of a card that you hear about but don’t never see.

SSH: When you were stationed in England, you were with the Air Corps?

WE: Air Corps, yeah, Eighth Air Corps.

SSH: Eighth Air Corps and you were part of the MP division?

WE: Yes, yes.

SSH: So, what did you wind up guarding after the cesspool, what was your official…

WE: Well, … what we did was, we did roadblocks, we directed traffic, we make sure that the soldiers were not interfering with any English people. We were an asset to the British police there, we worked close with them. We generally kept order, to make sure everything was in good shape, and the men would not cause any problems, … like police.

SSH: So, were you ever sent to London to do anything, any special duties, or …

WE: Well, of course, … special duties was just to keep order, … and to, for instance to guard anything. We guarded, eventually, the hangers, and the ships and also part of our group would meet the ships when they came back from a mission. … They stood in at the ends of the field and they would give whatever assistance had to be assisted to.

SSH: In all the time that you were in England, what’s your most memorable memory?

WE: Well, of course, the English people were very hospitable towards the American soldiers. They would go out of their way to help an American soldier, or they would go out of their way to try to make an American soldier comfortable. … I had my first experience with the telephone in England when I went to London. … my first trip. … The newsreel had run pictures about London burning, where everybody was, supposedly most of the buildings were down, and, naturally, I was very curious to see that and I found it wasn’t quite so. … There was a lot of buildings down and when I went there I tried to use the telephone and I noticed that there were two slots, A and B, and so I put the money in the slot, in the first slot, and I pressed the first button, and I could hear my party on the other end, they said “Hello,” I said “Hello,” he kept saying “Hello,” I said “Hello,” and he hung up. I said to myself, “that’s unusual.” So, I put another coin in there and I pressed the A button again, and, again, the same thing. Well, I didn’t know what to expect. So, I finally I dialed the operator and I told her my problem. I told her I put the money in the A button and the party says 'hello, hello' and they hung up on me. So, he says, “You press B button.” I said “What for?” “That’s when you talk.” So, I found out that’s the way you talk. But when I talked to Englishmen that had been through the bombing in London they say, as bad as it was, they said they saw one sight that gave them a lot of courage. The Germans had blasted everything in the center of the town, except one thing: St. Peter’s Cathedral.
SSH:  St. Paul’s …

WE:  St. Paul’s, well, wait a minute, the entire area was down, there wasn’t a building left. The only thing left was that one. For some reason or other, either they, I don’t know how they could possibly not, miss it, guiding from the sky, throwing bombs, but everything else was down. They said they were so inspired when the alert, when the ‘all clear’ went on and they come out of their … hideouts, there was fire all over except by the Cathedral, not there, and they said that was very, very inspiring for them. The English people, a lot of them at night, stood in the subway in regular beds, they stood there all through the war.

SSH:  Did you ever see any of the bombs come in when you there?

WE:  … Yes, what happened was that … when the Germans first started the V1 and V2 bombs, … I was in Thedford and one day, … I hear a putt, putt, putt. I take a look and there’s a V1 bomb floating above me, and it looked like the Buck Rogers comics, where he has the bombs floating, and I see this bomb go right by, not too high, just working on a diesel motor and putt, putt, putt and then, as I watch, along comes an English pilot flying a plane and what he does, he’s attempting to shift his plane back and forth. The reason for that was that these V1 rockets were guided by their eyes, they had two antennas sticking out, and the antennas have the direction port and so by rocking back and forth he … attempted to get the bomb to turn to the right. They would do that to get the bomb to go over the English Channel and once it came over the English Channel, they shot it down. I saw a number of English fighters do that. It was like a ringside seat watching this; the bomb comes by, the pilots come by and shoot it down. It was fantastic to watch them and, of course, as I said, I was not too frightened of those bombs because you could see them. But when they started the V2 bomb that was a different ball game. The V2 bomb was a bomb that would travel in the atmosphere and it was aimed at London and the bomb would, you couldn’t see it, the only time you would hear was, zzzzzzzz, it made a sizzling noise, you had ten seconds to find shelter. Then the bomb would explode. Then, what happened was that as Gerry started sending those V2 rockets, London became a ghost town. All Londoners went, on weekends, out to the country and quite often during the week, but they still kept the Rainbow Room open for American soldiers and, very foolishly, I went there and when I walked in the Rainbow Center, … there was free tickets and free meals and, of course, as I say, there was a lot of bonuses for the American soldiers there. But anyway, so I went to there to meet my cousin. I met him and we walked, started to walk thorough London and all the stores were closed. There’s was nobody around. I think we were probably the only ones around, foolish enough to be around. … All of sudden I hear zzzzzzzz, we are right in front of a Selfridges Department Store, so there was glass all over, there was no place to run. No place to go. [laughter] … So I knew the bomb hit there and there was no sound and the bomb for us hit about a quarter mile away. You could see the smoke rising, the black smoke. Well, I tell you the truth, we got out of London that day, very fast. That was my experience with the V2s. In fact, when I visited a family in London during the V1s, when they had the V1s, … my first experience were the windows were rattling. They actually, the panes were doing a dance when the bombs hit. [laughter] There was, … the curtain, I went under the covers very, very deeply because if the bomb split and the glass splattered, it would go into a person. So, I was, as I say, I wasn’t too happy about going to London for a while.
SSH: Did you ever go to any of the bomb shelters there?

WE: Any what?

SSH: Did you try any of the bomb shelters?

WE: Yes, … I saw the bomb shelters. I saw where the English people had bomb shelters and, of course, Americans had bomb shelters, but they had a trench, like a trench with bricks on both sides. In fact, I attended a dance at the Cozy Hall in England that’s where Lillian Russell and others, English Grace, had sung and performed, and so forth, and while I was at the dance, the alert went on and no one moved. The band kept on playing and the performers performed their act, and everything was normal, was like normal, and then when the ‘all clear’ went out, everybody started cheering. … I went to services on Yom Kippur, that’s the Jewish holy day, and Hitler had promised they would interrupt the services, so, when I was at the services, the alert went on and so there was three Americans, three American soldiers there, I was one of the three, and so I looked to see what the English were doing, they didn’t move at all, they continued the service. I wasn’t going to run away, because I figured if I ran away that’d look bad for American soldiers and I stood right there and prayed, just like they did. Nobody ever moved, everybody had confidence that the English would shoot down the German ships, the German planes rather, and that was, as I say, that was a very … moving experience. … I remember a woman ran, with two small children, she ran for a bomb shelter, nobody else moved.

SSH: Did you have any other experiences being a young man from Jersey and trying to practice your kosher faith?

WE: Yes. … I found a restaurant in England, a few blocks from Rainbow Center, and I periodically went there. I used to go there and I would order corned beef, what they called, they didn’t call it corned beef, they called it, … it wasn’t called corned beef, … I forget. I forget what it was. While I was there, the restaurateur and his waitress always welcomed me and the rest of the English people were very glad to see me. Except one person, who I found later was an attorney. He chastised me for coming there to eat; saying that there was plenty of good food back at the base. I told him I was kosher and that I didn’t eat meat out and, as I say, he was very vocal about that. He probably didn’t think I was kosher, he probably thought I was just trying to get a good sandwich. [laughter] Outside of that, of course, being kosher, it was difficult staying in England and trying to subsist on cheese and bread and vegetables. My father and mother used to send me care packages twice a month and their care packages were really care packages. I would have flavors of, for milk, cherry, strawberry, raspberry, and chocolate and … in fact, we had powered milk and I was always … a big milk drinker and so I would take that, I would take the powered milk and pour one of these drinks into it and everybody would look at me and say, “How can you drink that stuff?” I said, “It tastes good." They didn’t know I was putting in flavors and … as I say, I had those care packages right along for almost two and a half years while I was in the service there in England. They, my father and mother, must have taken a lot of time to make those packages. My mother cooked, my mother baked. She baked chocolate cookies for me. My father included … all flavors of chocolates and, in fact, would include a big kosher salami and the day I was to leave, the day I left England, … just before we left, I received
mail call, and here I’m loaded with my barracks bags and everything I could carry. Everything I
could possibly carry, there was nothing else I could take, my folks sent me five big packages
and I didn’t know what to do with them. I couldn’t have the heart to leave them there, because I
knew they took a lot of time to make them and my mother had cookies in there, my father had
salami in there, but I didn’t have the room. I just didn’t have it and I don’t know how in the
world I finally got on the bus with them packages and got on with my barracks bags, and, finally,
we got onto a train. We got on the train and it was still about nine o’clock or ten o’clock, or
something like that, and we were promised food. No food came. Well, … finally we were
promised food at around one o’clock. No food came. Here I’m sitting with these packages and I
don’t know what to do. Finally, suppertime came, no supper, nothing. Everybody’s hungry.
I’m sitting with these five big packages. I know one had to be a salami. So, finally, I open one
of the packages, and there’s this big salami, it must have been about four or five feet long. A big
salami, a big salami, and I take a look at that salami and it’s covered with slime. So, I say to
myself, “Gee whiz, I can’t eat that, it’s slimy,” and my friends are watching me, and they said,
“What do you got there?” … and I said, “Salami.” They said, “What are you going to do with
it?” “I’m not going to eat it, it’s rotten.” They said, “Are you crazy, that ain’t rotten, that’s salt.”
Got salt from the ocean. So, they took the big salami, about that size, they wash it off, and I take
a look at it, it was beautiful. It was beautiful. So, finally … I went and cut it. I gave everybody
some pieces of salami and then I opened another package, there was my mother’s cookies, I gave
all those out. I fed the entire compartment we had … you know, in the train, I fed everybody, I
finished all the packages. I was so thankful that my mother and father sent it to me, but I didn’t
know how in the world I ever got it onto the … Also while I’m thinking about it, you could send
fifty pounds home, no more than fifty pounds. Well, I went to an antique dealer and I saw a big
book, *The Corination of Queen Victoria* … I said to this antique dealer, “How much is that
book?” “Well, it’s very expensive,” he said. “It’s the only one of a kind.” I said, “How much is
it?” He said, “About five pounds,” about twenty dollars. So, I said, “I’d like to have that.” So, I
took this book, I picked it up, it was heavy. I was kind of sorry I bought that, but I knew it had to
have some value. It was a beautiful book, covered with heavy covering, blue writing, and I had a
job, I had to carry that about three or four blocks to a bus. I was very sorry I took it, really, but I
wasn't going to leave it, lose it. I got on the bus and, finally, carried it from the bus to the train,
and the train to my barracks, and I had to walk maybe a half mile to carry this book. Now I
didn’t know how much it weighed but I figured it was probably over fifty pounds. Well, finally,
I get to my barracks and I want to send it back, I want to send it home. I can’t carry it anymore,
because I can’t keep it in the barracks. I want to send it home. I put it on the scale, fifty-two
pounds. [laughter] That’s without … I had to put it in a crate. So, the supply officer said, “I
don’t know if they’re going to accept that.” So, I put it in … a crate, … put the book in the crate,
and it probably was about fifty-eight pounds by now. … I had no choice, I send it and it arrived
home. It arrived and what happened is, I had that book and I finally gave it to my daughter,
because I moved to a condo and I had no room, but … it’s one of a kind. It has every clipping
you can imagine about the *Corination of Queen Victoria*. It has magazines, it has newspapers
articles, as I say, it’s a one of a kind. It really belongs in a museum or in another place. … Now,
I think, my daughter doesn’t know what to do with it. It probably has to go to a museum,
because as I say, it’s one of a kind. It’s beautiful thing, blue covering, and beautiful gold writing
and, as I say, whoever is interested in history would like something like that.
SSH: You had said you were a history buff. ... Were you able to do any sort of sight-seeing or anything in England or France?

WE: Yes, I did sightseeing. I went to Tower of London, I went to Buckingham Palace. I went to ... the major hotels in town. ... I went to the department stores, I went to the nightclubs, ...

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

WE: ... Also Lord Ivory, who later bought it, had pheasants and their pheasants were beautiful. When they spread their tails, especially the male, they had beautiful blue and yellow colors; their feathers were something to see. They would walk around the base and ...

SSH: Were they peacocks?

WE: Beg pardon?

SSH: Were they peacocks?

WE: They what?

SSH: Peacocks?

WE: There were peacocks there, too, yes, but ... they were really beautiful, very beautiful. The male was more beautiful than the female, and I understand that they used to have shoots there. They would, occasionally, Lord Ivory would invite ... some of his friends and they would shoot the birds, some of them, and, as I say, I was very impressed, and you couldn’t help but be impressed. But, in fact, as I remember now, when I first drove into the grounds on the left-hand side was a church, an old church that they had used probably many years before. In fact, being a history buff, I found out that Thedford at one time had been the capital of England many, many years ago. I don’t know how true this story is, but ... at one time there was a monastery and a nuns’ residence not too far apart and I understand that they found a tunnel connecting the monastery to the nuns’ place. How true it is, I don’t know, but I heard this story. The town itself was not a big town. It ... had a population of maybe ten thousand, tops, and also I had a new experience there. When I went to visit a friend and I stayed later than twelve o'clock, when it became dark, I would notice that a person driving a horse would come by with pails and I often heard the girls referred to it as the “honey wagon," and I couldn’t ... I didn’t know what the honey wagon was. I found out that the person, the honey wagon was ... the person who dropped off pails, that was the bathroom for the English people. They would collect the residue and dispose of it. Well, as I understand the story, once a GI, a little high, got a ride in this honey wagon and fell into the buckets. I can believe that, because as I say, quite often they could hardly walk, but that must have been, if you think about it, it must have been very comical. [laughter]

SSH: Were you in England when VE Day occurred?
WE: Yes, I was in England, in fact, as I recall, in fact even before that. When D-Day started, when D-Day was D-Day, I was in London and a woman came running up to me and said, “They’re invading,” and I went and bought a newspaper and saw that it was D-Day and … naturally, everybody was excited. Everybody’s listening to the news, if there was any news at all. … I listen to the History Channel. Do you ever listen to the History Channel? … I learned a lot about D-Day. In fact, I was watching D-Day yesterday, where they had some scenes that took place. First of all, the Americans on Omaha Beach were in the wrong spot. They were not supposed to be there, that’s why they suffered such heavy casualties. They were commenting on the fact that some of the American soldiers never made it to the beach, they died, they drowned, because they weren’t supposed to be there to start with, and that the heroics of the American soldiers was self-preservation, because if they stood up on the beach they’d be gunned down, they had to get off and some of them got off. They had to climb cliffs and they found that some of the guns that were supposed to be … there were dummies. But the Germans had enough machines guns that they just kept mowing down the American soldiers. Well, those who got … off the beach, got into the mainland … one, they were, a lot of them were Rangers and one of the detachments came across a field where there was … they saw some camouflage where there were some cannons and they saw some German soldiers that didn’t know they were there, and they disabled the guns and they captured the soldiers. The Americans that day had a break on D-Day. I don’t know whether you’re aware of that break they had? D-Day was the day Rommel wife’s had a birthday and he was there, in Germany, not on the front where he should have been. The Germans were all ready to react, according to orders, and the Germans had a commander with a lot of troops and, I think, 127 tanks that he could have brought into action, but he wouldn’t move unless he received orders to move. By the time Rommel came there, the Americans had established a foothold.

SSH: In England, where you were stationed with the Eighth Air Force, had you noticed any build-up, did you have any…

WE: No, nothing. I didn’t notice any build-up of any kind. The only thing I noticed was the planes went out in huge numbers and they, I guess, they bombed everything they were supposed to bomb.

SSH: Then after D-Day, you were back at the group, was there any talk at the base of how the war was progressing at all?

WE: Well, everybody was naturally trying to find out what they could with the radio. They were listening to the radio constantly and, naturally, in the background we were cheering.

SSH: What kind of celebrations happened when victory was finally obtained in Europe?

WE: Well, when they finally, the Germans surrendered, I tell you, the day before, or a couple of days before the Germans surrendered, we had heard that the Germans would surrender and they were waiting for terms and waiting for what to do. So, everybody was, naturally, expecting that and when the news finally came through that they were surrendering, and, unconditionally surrendering, I was at the base, at the camp, and that night I went to town. The English people took out the black-out curtains, they had a big bonfire. They were burning them and singing and
dancing and shouting. One English woman wasn’t happy that day. She had received a telegram from the war department. Her husband was killed. She received it that day of the celebration and she was, naturally, not happy. But the English people were dancing, and singing, and shouting, and crying, and very emotional and American soldiers were glad, too. But then you started thinking about, "When are we going to Japan?"

SSH: How much information had you been getting about how the war in the Pacific was going while you were in England?

WE: Well, the only information you could get was by either word of mouth, or the toilet seat, or the radio, or maybe somebody made something up. But, naturally, everybody expected that after the war was over with Germany, we’d go to Japan. Everybody was more or less geared to go to Japan and you can imagine the relief of a soldier when he found out that Japan had surrendered.

SSH: Did you have orders to go to Japan, or were you just waiting?

WE: No, no. We were just hanging in limbo. Just waiting for orders, what to do, but everybody knew that sooner or later we’d be heading that way.

SSH: In your particular instance, how did your duty, or did it, change once the war was over in Europe?

WE: No, it didn’t change. It just what we did, we helped the English people, the English police patrol the area and keep order and make sure the Americans were not in any problems.

SSH: Did you see any of the troops coming back then from Europe where you were stationed?

WE: No, well, of course, what happened was that a few of the men, … some of men had reached either the age where they were supposed to be discharged, or that they were not feeling well, or that they had completed their missions and, occasionally, one of them stopped over our place and they were very happy and, naturally, everybody was very happy for them.

SSH: So, you were accruing points so that you could come home, is that how it was working for you also?

WE: Well, come home was that … we knew that we wasn’t coming home. We knew we was going to Japan, we knew that. It was just a question of how, or when, and, naturally, everybody was waiting to see what would develop and how soon we would move.

SSH: You had talked before about being sent from England before the war ended to France.

WE: Right.

SSH: Now that was an MP duty?
WE: Well, what happened was that that was the Battle of the Bulge and we were sent over to guard the trailer camps, the trailers that the generals had. They worked, they had their offices set up in trailers and the trailers would be placed in an area and if the Americans, or the Allied forces, were victorious they moved, they moved the entire trailer.

SSH: … You would move then with them?

WE: Yes. Of course, what happened was as I say, it took time for it all to take place, and so by the time the Allies had conquered more of the territory, we were back in England. We were especially assigned for that purpose, to make sure that the Germans would not infiltrate and not damage anything of the officers. I had another experience. I was sent also to Woodridge Airfield. Woodridge Airfield was an airfield in England, which was an emergency landing field. It was the closest field that any plane could come to, that was damaged, from the Continent. The reason how I got to there was based on the fact that a pilot flying a German plane flew into England and requested safety and said that other pilots would follow if they were guaranteed safety. The American government put out through radio. Free Europe, broadcasting, that any plane that arrives in England would, they would give the pilot a hundred thousand dollars, or a million dollars, I forget what it was, and they named this Woodridge Airfield as the airfield that they would come to and that’s why fifteen American soldiers were assigned. I was one of the fifteen. Besides being the emergency landing field, this was an operational field for the English soldiers and airmen. They used that and it was stationed out in nowhere. There wasn’t a house within thirty, forty miles. We had in charge of the American establishment was a Lieutenant Miles. He was in charge and I was second in charge. Now, of course, English soldiers and airmen were not very happy that American soldiers were there, because you probably know; they were "overpaid, oversexed and over there." They weren’t happy about that at all and as a result the English government, rather the mayor, the English people, airmen, would not allow American soldiers to attend their dances. The only American soldier they allowed was me. I would attend there and I remember one, I played a dirty joke, one day, one night after coming back from a dance, you know, I had to make it sounds good. So, I said to the Americans, I said to my friends, said to my roommates, we lived in tents, I said, “There’s no girls in this room?” They said, “What do you mean no girls in the room?” I said, “Why every other tent has at least one or two girls.” So, they said, “You’re kidding?” I said, “No, I’m not kidding. You know what happened, I said, “ten bus loads of girls came on this base and only one left. There’s nothing but those girls are someplace on this base.” Well, man, they went crazy. You know what happened was I disappeared; I didn’t come back for two days. [laughter] … But coming back to the lieutenant, he was a Southerner, and he said, “Epstein,” he said, “don’t you give me any problems." He said, “I don’t want to know from nothing. I’m leaving everything to you." He said … “When you write a letter make sure you don’t put anything there you’re not supposed to ‘cause I’m not going to check on you." So one day I’m in … his tent and he says, “We’re going to get a visit by an English major, WAC. I don’t know what she wants." So, she came in and we both saluted her and she became comfortable and she said, “You know, there’s a problem on this base here." So, the lieutenant said, “What’s the problem?” She said, “I understand the English girls are staying with American soldiers." “Oh,” the lieutenant said, “That couldn’t be, we don’t allow that. That couldn’t possibly be." So, he said to me, “Epstein, know anything about that?” I said, “I don’t know anything about that." So, anyway the English major kept on talking, “That’s not good." “Of course, it’s not good, it’s certainly not good. We wouldn't, allow
that in America, so, we wouldn’t do that here." Well, you know, he, the girl, the women, he … she was talking about the girl he was sleeping with. [laughter] He had a mistress there and so, when, she finally left, he said to me, “You know this girl’s trying to purify this Army. That’ll never work.” He said, “What are you going to do about all this?” I said, “What do you expect me to do?” He said, “I want you to do your duty.” I said, “I’ve done that already,” and so, she never got off the base, she stood right there until I left. When I left, about three months later, I don’t know if she was still there. But that was, an experience with her. But at the emergency landing field I saw a plane come in there and the entire front of it was shot out. The plane is Plexiglas there wasn’t a bit of Plexiglas, there wasn’t a bit of anything at all except where the driver, where the pilot sat, se had his seat and everything else was gone. Besides that I counted a hundred bullet holes in the ship. How the ship ever made it, I have no idea, and, unfortunately, some of the planes that came back had wounded. If they had wounded, they would drop a flare and they would let the planes come in first … land first, but, as I say, it was very helpful for the American personnel to have a field that close because that was the first field that any American soldiers, any American airmen, could come to from the Continent. In fact, the waters of the English Channel in high tide would cover part of the field. At low tide it didn’t. It would cover just the edges of the field and a plane would, naturally, use all that runway to get into the bay area before they stopped.

SSH: Did any other Germans take advantage of the offer to come and surrender?

WE: No, no other plane came. That’s why after three or four months that they disbanded the idea. No plane came, just this one plane.

SSH: How did the weather effect what you had to do there?

WE: Well, as I say, there was a lot of fog, a lot of fog. My first day’s experience was a dilly and … quite often it could be dangerous. One day I was riding in fog on the base in Eckels Road. It was foggy and I could just about see a few feet in front of me and I heard a plane above me, somewhere, coming for landing and, as I say, I looked at the road. I thought I was on the road, I wasn’t. I was on the airfield and, luckily, there was a break in the fog and I saw where I was and I scoot off and I could see the plane not too far ahead above me and he had to make another maneuver to come in. I didn’t … know where I was, I thought I was on the cement, but I was on the airfield. It could have been disastrous, really, for both the plane and myself.

SH: At what point in all of this did you go to Judge Advocate General School?

WE: Well, I always tried to get Judge Advocate General School. When I first came in the Army I applied and when I was told that they was closed, then I tried again, and then they said, "You better wait ‘til you get overseas." Overseas I tried, they said, you know, "It’s closed," and the only time I had … the chance at it was when Joe Morris got me the chance to take the test and had I not, by a strange coincidence the only reason the person asked the question, “How long you’ve been an attorney?” was the fact that he knew somebody in Asbury Park, as strange as it may seem, and he got in touch with them and that party knew me, and he said, “He just passed the bar.” Had he not known this person, I would have been in Judge Advocate General School, but that was a strange coincidence.
SSH: Did you ever consider staying in the military once the war was over?

WE: No, I wanted to get out as fast as I could, really. In fact, I had a deviated septum, they were going to operate on that if I stood in the service, so I said, “No. I’d rather get out.” In fact, there were stories circling that a soldier, on occasion, socked the sergeant in the nose, and he got put in jail, anytime he socked him, I wasn’t going to do that. I just wanted to get out.

SH: You received the sharp shooter medal while you were overseas. What’s the story behind that?

WE: Yes, yes. Well, I think that was generous. What happened was that, I think, they gave that to anybody who was … who didn’t run into any problems. It wasn’t very long before, I was in the Army, that they told me, they gave me a gun and they said, “Now, I’m going to show you how to shoot from three different positions.” The first position that I did was … you lied on the ground, you spread your legs, and with your toes pointing, your heels pointing, with your toes pointing into the ground, … you would line up your gun … with a sight and they had a bulls-eye and you were supposed to hit that and then if you hit that you would see, … the … shot would register on … the diagram they had there and you would see where it would hit and I, you would see Maggie’s Drawers flying. Maggie’s Drawers was a black flag, more or less, and if you had no score at all, or a fail score. The person was in a trench and it was down below and … the target was above him, so, he could see whether anybody hit or not. If they didn’t hit, he would fly this flag back and forth. In my case they kept on flying it back and forth. I think it was generous they gave me a sharp shooter medal.

SSH: When the war was over, do you remember where you were when you heard about the atomic bombs being dropped on Japan?

WE: Yes, where I was when I heard first about the atomic being dropped, I was on the base in England and, naturally, we all cheered. We all cheered that it was lucky enough to have something where we might not have to go to Japan after all.

SH: You mentioned, at one point, you got leave after basic training and you went home and you got married. That was pretty brief, could you talk about how you met your wife and how you got married so quickly?

WE: Well, I had been going with the girl I married for about three years before service and, of course, she wanted to get married. I wasn’t so sure about marriage because I was going into service. I didn’t know if it was smart, but when I got the leave she reminded me … that I should, that we should get married, because she was so much in love with me that she would accept me whether I came back in one piece or in two pieces. So being in love, anyway, and not that I thought that might be the best arrangement for us, but that’s how we got married. But I’d known her for about three or four years before. It wasn’t something that, you know, we pick out overnight. I of course, being an attorney, well, I had occasion, young boys would come to me with stories about how they met their wife and what they were doing and one was very tragic. One was a story about, one boy told me that he met his wife at a bar and they got married and
they never had intercourse because she had an obstruction and about a year later, he received a telegram that he’s a father and he said, “What can I do?” I said, “You can’t very well do much in the service, right now,” but, he’s certainly not the father. But, regardless, whether he’s the father or not, the Army considers a child of a union … that the person’s the father. … They took money out of his allowance, out of his pay, to pay for that child, even though it wasn’t his.

SSH: Did you find occasions to use your talents and skills as an attorney?

WE: Yes, what happened was that … when they … had a court martial especially, most of the court martials were against airmen who failed to fly … or who over-stood their leave and the plane would take off without them, with a substitute person, and I would defend the … I was not the main defendant, the main, they always had an officer, and I would be like a subordinate and I didn’t see the wisdom. What happened was that when a person failed to fly … he was either over, he over-stood his leave, or he was just afraid. What they did was they put him in jail for six months and then when he came out of jail, then they put him back in service, and he would then fly. I had a better idea. I said, "Instead of putting them into jail, put another mission on his … "what they had to do. For instance, … if he missed one mission," and at that time they had to make twenty-five, so he had to make twenty-six. So, that would be enough of a deterrent that it would make the man find that he’d better go on his missions, wherever he was, and not fail, not overstay his leave, or anything, not overpass," but the Army didn’t buy that. They put a person in jail. But I thought a better way was to make them fly, because after all, as I say, if he over stood his leave, if he knows he has to put one more mission in, at that early part of time … a man had to make twenty-five missions. He made twenty-five missions and he would go home. If he had to make, instead of making twenty-five he had to make twenty-six [laughter] then I’m sure he wouldn’t overstay, he would be there in time to fly.

SSH: Sean, do you have any other questions?

SH: I don’t think so.

SSH: Well, we thank you very much taking time to be with us today.

WE: You're welcome, you're welcome. I hope I was helpful for you.

SSH: You were, you were very helpful and Sean and I thank you.

SH: Thank you very much.

SSH: Thank you, again.

WE: You're Welcome.

SSH: You have thought of another story?

WE: Yes, this is … when I was in France … I came across something very interesting. … I saw a GI come out of a house, it had a big red light on it, and in the window was a girl with her bra
showing and this poor soldier comes out of this house and he had no shoes on, and no stockings, and no pants, and no jacket and no shirt. He was carrying everything in his hands. He walks up to an MP and says, “That’s no American Red Cross.” [laughter]

SSH: This concludes an interview with Mr. Epstein on June 5, 2000

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

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