

RUTGERS-THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD KLEINER

FOR THE RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

SPONSORED BY THE RUTGERS COLLEGE CLASS OF 1942

INTERVIEW BY

G. KURT PIEHLER

AND

ROBERT LIPSCHITZ

BROOKSVILLE, MAINE

AUGUST 4, 1994

TRANSCRIPT BY

PAUL SAMBROWSKI

AND

LINDA E. LASKO

AND

G. KURT PIEHLER

Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Richard Kleiner on August 4, 1994 in Brooksville, Maine, with Kurt Piehler and

Robert Lipschitz: Rob Lipschitz.

KP: I guess I would like to begin by talking about your parents a little bit, and your father. Your father went to Yale?

Richard Kleiner: Yes

KP: And he studied medicine?

RK: No, he was a chemist, a biochemist. And he became a professor of biochemistry at New York Medical College. And actually, before that he worked at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, and he actually discovered the cause of diabetes. He didn't discover insulin, unfortunately, but he discovered the fact that diabetes was caused by pancreatic deficiency. Then he went and became ... a professor of biochemistry at New York Medical College. He was a sort of "Mr. Chips" of that institution for many years and wrote a textbook on biochemistry which was used all over the world.

KP: And your mother attended Pratt Institute?

RK: Yes.

KP: What did she study there?

RK: Dietetics, and to be a dietician.

KP: Did she ever practice?

RK: No.

KP: How did your parents meet?

RK: They were introduced by a cousin. I think it was my father's cousin who was a friend of my mother's.

KP: Had you ever considered going to Yale? Your father had graduated from there.

RK: Yes. My father ... and a lot of other relatives, because my family came from ... came from New Haven, [Connecticut]. Yeah, I did consider it, but I wanted to study journalism, and Yale did not have a journalism department.

KP: So that was one of the deciding factors in favor of Rutgers?

RK: Yes.

KP: Do you remember where else you had considered going?

RK: Yes, I considered going to Wisconsin which has a good journalism department too. And one of the mitigating factors ... in favor of Rutgers was [that] I was going with a girl at the time in Brooklyn, and so I didn't want to go too far away. So I decided on Rutgers. ... I broke up with the girl [and] got a girl at NJC [New Jersey College for Women]. That's how I ended up in Rutgers. One of the reasons, because I was also impressed with the Rutgers journalism department.

KP: You grew up in Brooklyn. Which neighborhood in Brooklyn?

RK: Flatbush. Which at that time, I mean it's got a terrible reputation [today], but it was a lovely spot to grow up. It was ... one family homes and trees and grass. It was very nice, a pleasant place to grow up.

KP: And you went to Erasmus Hall High School?

RK: Yes.

KP: And how would you characterize your high school and your education there?

RK: I had a happy, a very happy time. It was a big, ... as you probably know all those New York high schools were huge. I think there was 6,400 students at the time I was there. ... But I liked it. I could walk to school, and it was very nice, and I had good friends.

KP: Did you know you wanted to be a journalist in high school?

RK: .... Even in junior high, yes I wanted to. Well I think you know we all sort of gravitate to something ... we do best. And I wrote. That was my best subject in school, was writing. And I wrote, and I enjoyed [it]. And, of course, another thing was [that] I was a huge baseball fan growing up in Brooklyn, a Dodger fan. I could see that the press corps could see all the games free, and so I thought ... I could combine ... everything. So I started out to be a sportswriter originally, but I didn't work at that. It was my goal at first.

KP: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

RK: It affected it. My dad's salary was cut, I think. ... We had a live-in maid until then and had to dispense of her services. ... He was never out of a job, and we were never hungry or anything, but again ... his salary was cut, and we did have to tighten our belts a little bit, nothing serious.

KP: You came to Rutgers from a much bigger high school. What was it like to come to Rutgers, which was at that time much smaller?

RK: It was much smaller. It was great. ... I had a marvelous four years in college. ... I loved the idea of knowing everybody, and ... the smallness, I really appreciated that. ...

KP: Did you join any fraternities?

RK: No, I thought about it for a while at the beginning, but then I decided not to. I was pledged to some of them, or one of them or something, but I decided against it on moral grounds. [laughter] I didn't like the idea of fraternities. ... I had a happy dorm experience, so I stayed with it.

KP: So you lived in the dormitory all four years?

RK: I think three out of the four. ... I think my sophomore year, no my junior year, ... I thought of quitting school after two years. I was very restless and wanted to get on with my career. I knew ... [where] I was going. I thought it wasn't necessary to go to school to learn to be a writer, because I could write. So I thought of quitting and then, of course, my parents tried to argue, and they convinced me to go back and I didn't, but I finally went back, and I decided to go back at the very last minute for my junior year. And I couldn't get into the dorms, so I had rented, I was in a little house, you know, an off-campus house. But my first year was in one of the (----- ?), but my second and fourth year I was in Winants. It's not a dorm anymore is it?

KP: No, they have actually poured a lot of money into it, and it is now very plush offices for the administrators.

RK: Well it was a dorm then, and it was great. ... The bookstore was down on the ground floor. It was sort of a club.

KP: You had mentioned you had a favorite professor. Kenneth ...

RK: Jennings, journalism, head of the journalism department. No, I guess he wasn't head of the journalism department, but he did do news courses. ... I think Fred [Frederic] Merwin was head of the journalism department, but Ken Jennings was ... in charge of the nitty gritty stuff, and we all liked him very much. He was down-to-earth, and a good teacher too.

KP: One of the people I have interviewed said he was a real hard boiled newsman.

RK: Yeah, he was. He was an old time newspaper man.

KP: When you were thinking about a career in journalism, it was still an era when large numbers of journalists never went to college. Had you thought about that when you considered dropping out of college at the end of your second year?

RK: Yeah, I did, but I'm glad now I went, obviously. But I don't know that it helped me that much in my career, except giving me an ... educational background. But as far as my journalism, actual practical journalism, ... it probably did a little, because we did a lot of ... [practical work]. I think I could have gotten by ... without it, from that standpoint, but I'm glad I went, of course.

KP: What did you see as the divisions on campus? Did you see any divisions present? You mentioned you decided not to join a fraternity.

RK: Well that was just a-- ... I thought fraternities were a little snobbish, but other than that, no, I don't think there was any. You know in the '70s when all the problems erupted about colleges and demonstrations, I couldn't understand it, because we had nothing like that. No feelings, anti-administration feelings or anything like that. I didn't see any cliques, except as I say in the fraternities which I never joined. But other than that, no.

KP: You did not remain in R.O.T.C. after your sophomore year. What did you think of R.O.T.C.?

RK: I think what most of us thought. [laughter] It was a pain, and we were very happy to get through it. ... It was required, I guess our first two years.

KP: Yes.

RK: As soon as it was not required, same as when I was in the army, at that time you had to go into the army and serve, but as soon as it was over, I didn't want to have anything more to do with it. ...

KP: Did you learn to avoid infantry from your R.O.T.C. days?

RK: Well I was pleased when I didn't go into the infantry.

KP: Did you think war was coming in the late 1930s, early 1940s at the time?

RK: It's hard to remember. ... I guess we all sort of worried about it, but I don't remember whether it was-- ... I honestly can't tell you. I remember being stunned at one point when I was going with a, not going [with], but I knew a girl in New York. She said, she made everybody she

hung out with promise that they would never go to war. [laughter] That seemed very stunning and strange that a girl would have those ...

KP: Those preconditions.

RK: ... Yeah, and so we all naturally promised we'd never go to war when we went to take her out, but it didn't help.

KP: Did she go to Douglass?

RK: No, this was just a girl I knew.

KP: In New York?

RK: Yeah.

KP: Do you know what college she went to?

RK: I don't even know. I've often wondered what happened to her. It was the first time that I found a girl who had some ... thoughts about the world, other than dating and cooking and kids and stuff. It was very interesting.

KP: When you were in college, what did you think you would do after you graduated or the time you were going through school? What were your hopes and plans?

RK: My hopes and plans were that I would be able to go and take a tour first. Immediately after graduation go to Europe and ... see the world. ... But it never happened. It never happened. But that was my original plan. And then I wanted to go to work on a newspaper.

KP: Had you thought of being a foreign correspondent?

RK: Not specifically, no. I had always gravitated toward feature writing, rather than hard news. I liked reviews and liked writing stories about people and things.

KP: Had you done much traveling before the war?

RK: No, not much. ... My dad had built a summer home in Connecticut, because he was ... a professor, so he had summers off. So he built a summer home in Connecticut where, actually, my sister still lives in that house. And so I spent all of my summers up there. ... Oh, we did some traveling. He was a consultant one summer in a biological ... station in ... Wood's Hole, Massachusetts. I'd gone through Maine to camp, ... but that's about all.

KP: Had you traveled in the South or out West at all?

RK: No.

KP: Where were you when the Pearl Harbor attack came?

RK: I was at college, and it was a Sunday. ... I was listening to a football game. The Giants, I think it was the Giants, a football game on Sunday afternoon, and I was listening to it. They interrupted with a bulletin. ... I remember that very vividly, of course. We all remember Pearl [Harbor] and when Kennedy was shot. Those are the things we remember where we were.

KP: And what did you think of the attack?

RK: I guess like everybody else I thought it was dastardly, and I thought oh we're going to probably ... wipe those Japanese off the map very quickly.

KP: Which proved not to be the case very soon.

RK: It proved not to be the case very soon, true. ... And I was a little concerned about, obviously I knew I'd probably have to go in the service, and I was concerned about my safety.

KP: You chose the army or did the army choose you?

RK: No, I was drafted.

KP: Had you thought of joining the navy or the army air force?

RK: Not really, no. I sort of toyed with it a little bit, but I didn't have any skills that I thought they could use. I decided to wait until ...

KP: Your number was called.

RK: Yeah.

KP: In one of the surveys that the alumni office had collected indicated that you had published before 1942. Was that your first article?

RK: That was when I was, '42 was it? Yeah I guess it was. I was in the army in Petaluma, California. ... Petaluma, it turned out, was the egg basket of the world. There was a statue of a chicken outside town as you came in. ... And there was a store on main street called the Chicken Pharmacy. And I thought that's an interesting thing, and I thought that would be a good story, so I wrote it up for ... some magazine and sold it for I think, 25 dollars, a story about the Chicken Pharmacy in Petaluma. ... It just sold remedies and nostrums and stuff for chickens, and poultry, except for, of course, newspapers and that stuff.

KP: Were you active on the Targum staff?

RK: Yes, I was editor.

KP: Russ Janoff was talking about in terms of the Targum staff, he mentioned Pearl Harbor. There was an article dealing with Rutgers and the Japanese exchange program. Do you have any recollection of that?

RK: [No.]

KP: The army selected you in a sense. Did you have any sense of where you wanted to go in the army?

RK: No, I don't think there was a matter of choice, but I had an interesting thing happen. I was in basic training, not basic but before it, the induction center at Fort Dix. ... I'd done all the tests and had the shots and all that good stuff. And I saw my name on the bulletin board, or somehow I got the word that I had to report the next morning at five a.m. or something at the railroad tracks for shipment to [the] air corps. So dutifully I got down with my duffel bag and all that stuff and was down at the station at five a.m. for this air corps shipment. And the train came, and it was one car shorter than they had anticipated. ... So they arbitrarily lopped off 40, or whatever it was, 40 or 50 guys in the back. ... I was one of those who was lopped off, so I didn't go to the air corps. The next day I got shipped to the signal corps. So, ... who knows if that train had been the correct length I would've gone to the air corps.

KP: And who knows what would have happened.

RK: Yeah. There's so much luck in the ... army career. I think a lot of people, ... I think everybody got in a unit just because they happened at that time to need people for that particular service. So I went to [the] signal corps.

KP: Would you have wanted to be an officer or did you apply for Officer Candidate School?

RK: I never applied for it, no. I think if somebody came to me and said, zap you're an officer, I would have happily accepted it. But I didn't apply.

KP: In other words you really did not want to make the military career longer than necessary?

RK: No, I was just there because it was the thing to do. ... I wouldn't have been anywhere else at that time. That's where you had to be when it was over. It seemed to me to last forever.

KP: So you ended up in the signal corps. Where did you do your basic training?

RK: Camp Edison, New Jersey. It's right on Sea Girt, right on the ocean. And everybody got sick. I remember I had a 102.3 fever. And you had to be 104 or 102.5 or something like that before you could stay out of work. So I had to work even though I had this fever because it was winter. This was winter. Everybody was cold and wet. I think I was there for about two months.

KP: You went through basic, learning everything for how to shoot a rifle to ....

RK: Yeah, although this was [the] Signal Corps. They didn't pay too much attention to that sort of stuff.

KP: You immediately went into specialized basic training with the Signal Corps.

RK: Yes, yes, yes. We started to learn the Morse Code and all that sort of stuff.

KP: What did you learn? You learned Morse Code.

RK: Well it turned out to be interesting. ... That was my army career. I turned out to have an aptitude for the Morse code, which I never knew I had, for example. They give you a whole series of tests. ... [There was] a series of dots and dashes, and you had to figure out if they were the same or different or something like that. And I had this aptitude for it. So they took me and about four or five other guys who were good at this thing. ... They put us in special training in Virginia, Warrenton Virginia at Vint Hill Station, Vint Hill Station in Warrenton, Virginia. It was in Fauquier County, F A U Q U I E R. You can imagine what the guys would do in Fauquier County. Anyhow, they trained us in Japanese Morse code which is entirely different from international Morse code. International Morse code has only the 26 characters for letters of the alphabet and Japanese Morse code has 30 characters: the 26 plus ten others. ... It's very difficult, because ... they have a character called dit-dit which is i in international Morse code, but in Japanese its called a nigori. That changes the sound of the previous character. So in other words if you've got a ka with the i after it, and dit-dit after it, it becomes ga, ka ... dit-dit becomes ga. So it's really quite difficult to copy ... Japanese Morse code. There were only about, I think, toward the end ... ten or twelve of us in that specialty.

KP: So it was a real mental process. You had a real skill.

RK: Yeah, ... it took about three months to teach us the Japanese Morse Code down in Virginia.

KP: How much Japanese did you learn?

RK: Just enough to understand a few words of procedure. When they would come on and say something to indicate that they were going to change frequencies to such and such a frequency, or [if] they were going ... to go off the air until such and such a time, you know procedural stuff, that's all. That's the only Japanese we learned. Most of it was done anyhow with ...

combinations of letters like qsl to indicate such and such or qrm, which are international Morse code. ... So we had, I think three months down in Virginia studying that.

KP: If you had not had this aptitude for Morse code what were the other specialties that you trained for in basic?

RK: Well I was hoping once I got in the signal corps, I thought it would be fun to be in the cryptography school, and that's what I had hoped I would get into. ... That's what I would have liked to have done. I would have preferred that, but you know we don't have a choice. The other thing, they could have trained me to be a technician, or radio repairman, or something like that, or other radio jobs. ... I'm sure there are a lot of other things that they could have given me.

KP: In basic were you given a little of everything like radio repair?

RK: No, I never took anything like that. So later when I became, when I wanted to get my Ham license, because I ... enjoyed Morse code very much, I had a difficult time with it because the Ham license requires not only that you know Morse code, but that you know about radio repair and the technical aspect which I didn't know. So I had to be coached to get my Ham license.  
[laughter]

KP: You knew quite a bit about New Jersey, so being at Camp Edison was not as new. What did you think of being in Virginia though?

RK: Well I didn't have much time to really appreciate it. It was, that's a famous area. Warrenton and Fauquier County are famous horse area[s] and quite wealthy area[s]. I really didn't have the time to appreciate it. The few days we had off we would go to Washington which was not that far away.

KP: Had you been to Washington before the war?

RK: Yes, I had once on a trip with my parents.

KP: What did you think of Washington in the wartime?

RK: I don't remember. I just ...

KP: It was the nearest big city?

RK: That's basically it. It was a place to ... go to a good restaurant and have a good meal for a change after army cooking, but I don't remember difficulties.

KP: You had trained in this Japanese Morse code. Did that give you a sense that you would probably be destined in the Pacific?

RK: Yes, although the outfit that I was assigned to was called the Second Signal Service Battalion which was in charge of radio intercept, Japanese radio intercept. It ... had stations all over the world. They had stations in Alaska. They had stations in the Philippines, mostly in the Pacific. But I guess, I think they had a station in Europe too, somewhere. But I was originally sent to central California and then eventually to Hawaii.

KP: Now you were first sent to California. When did you arrive in California?

RK: I've kept my list here. ... No I don't have a date. It was ... '43. I went to the Second Signal School in Warrenton, Virginia on January 6 of '43. So I was there about three months: January, February, March. Somewhere around March or April of '43 I went to California.

KP: What part of California were you in?

RK: A town called Petaluma which is just, do you know where Petaluma is, no? It's just a little north of San Francisco. It's a lovely town. Now it's quite a big city, but it was a very small town then.

KP: You had later lived in California. What struck you, especially given that you would later live in California, what struck you about the differences?

RK: Oh, basically that I enjoyed it, the weather. ... It's sunny most of the year and pleasant. ...

KP: You were also in the chicken capital of the world.

RK: Yes.

KP: And you were there for approximately for how long?

RK: In California?

KP: In California.

RK: ... I was there for about a year and a half.

KP: Did you live on base or did you live off base?

RK: At first I lived on base. Then I got married to a girl from NJC. ... We were married in 1944. ... I got permission to live ... off the base and live in a nice little house, on a nice little street. She had a job, and I had work. We had good friends who were in the same situation as us.

KP: Were you lucky to get a house? Was the real estate market tight?

RK: I don't remember having any great difficulty getting a house.

KP: So in many ways, once your wife came out, in some ways you had, I would not quite say a nine to five job, but you went to the base and went home.

RK: Oh yeah. It really was nice. Of course, it wasn't nine to five. We switched. Every week we had a different shift. We had eight in the morning to four in the afternoon one week. The next week four in the afternoon until midnight. And the next week midnight until four a.m.

KP: So you did 24 hour coverage?

RK: Yes.

KP: What would you do while you were doing your coverage? Would you listen for signals?

RK: Yes, actually, we eventually went to Hawaii, but we could hear the Japanese stations better in California than we could in Hawaii, because of the way radio waves bounce. They sort of skipped over Hawaii, but they hit right in California. ... We had certain, very definite schedules that we would monitor. Certain stations we would monitor and listen. ... At one point for about oh six or seven months, I was monitoring American guerrillas in the Philippines which was quite interesting because they would be very hard to find, and they'd be switching around all the time, because they would be chased by the Japanese there. ... Every once in a while one of them would go off ... and get captured. But mostly it was Japanese stations. ... Some of us would monitor the commercial stations and some of us would monitor the small army stations. We'd take turns. And as I say, then we'd sit at the typewriter and copy the messages. Then we'd send them off to, in some way, a teletype I guess, to our headquarters in Virginia, Warrenton, Virginia. That's the headquarters of the Second Signal Service Battalion, where they would theoretically decode them, translate them.

KP: The messages from the guerrillas in the Philippines, were they in code?

RK: No. They were in clear.

KP: What did you learn from them? What struck you when you took them down?

RK: Oh, we got to know these guys. I don't know if you know, are aware, but in ...

KP: Because in movies there is often the thing where they wire back, and people, you know, are getting these messages.

RK: Yeah, also you have what's called a fist, which is like handwriting. Everybody who has a signal has his own little quirks, so that you can recognize them. Joe has, his dashes are a little longer than normal. So you get to know these people, and they'd sign Joe. And they'd be sending signals back to, ... I guess to the navy in Hawaii about the ships they'd seen, Japanese ships they'd seen or the Japanese troops, how many Japanese troops they'd observed.

KP: And these were American guerrillas?

RK: These were American guerrillas.

KP: Who had been planted there?

RK: Or had been trapped there and escaped from Bataan or wherever and gone out to where the natives were pro-American and helped them. But they had to keep moving all the time or they could be traced.

KP: Their signals could be traced. So you picked them up on different frequencies?

RK: We'd try to find them. Sometimes we couldn't find them, but we would try to find them.

KP: Was there anything else that struck you about their messages? Would they send personal messages?

RK: Yeah. They'd send personal messages and sometimes they'd make jokes. ... I can't jokes, but I can't remember them now. ...

KP: So, with that traffic you understood what was in a sense going on?

RK: Yeah, the Japanese were always in codes, groups of letters or groups of numbers. ... We could ... understand what they were saying when they were saying, well I will transmit tomorrow at six a.m. on such and such a frequency. That we could get.

RK: You would record what came in, but had no idea of the significance?

RK: No, that's right. ... We had no idea what it was. ... We were commended. We got a commendation for, somebody, one of us intercepted a message that led to the victory at Wake Island, so we got a special commendation for that-- permitted us to wear ... a wreath on our uniform.

KP: Did you feel that the war was passing you by while you were in California? Did you want to go overseas?

RK: No, I didn't want to go overseas, particularly. No, we felt that we were doing a good job. In fact, when we went overseas, as I say, we found that our reception was better ... in California than it was in Hawaii. So we thought that [when] they sent us over [it was] just to be mean, not mean, but that ... they thought we should have some overseas experience.

Pause

KP: Was there anything else that you remember about being in California, or your duty in California?

RK: No, just that it was a good, it was a nice little town. I remember it had a marvelous little bookstore and stationery store, combination book and stationery store called Ott's. O T T ' S. It had a nice hotel with a nice little restaurant in it.

KP: So in many ways you were living in small town America?

RK: Yeah, it was really very pleasant. Actually, I keep telling you I had a very pleasant war, as wars go. I never got a shot in anger or anything like that.

KP: What were the backgrounds of the men in your unit?

RK: Well my good friends were a guy from ... Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, he's an anthropologist, a lawyer from Los Angeles, and a guy with the phone company in New Haven, Connecticut. It was a good outfit.

KP: Most of you were very well-educated?

RK: Yes.

KP: And you were all privates?

RK: No, no, no. As soon as we got into the army we became a corporal, a T-5, technician fifth class. And then we gradually got a little promotion. I went up to staff sergeant, ... T-3.

KP: But none of your group made officer?

RK: The officers were entirely different. They were not as high class as we were. They really weren't. I mean the commander of the outfit in Petaluma, which is called Two Rock Ranch, we were a sheep ranch really, and he was, Major Lutz was the commanding officer. ... He rode around the compound on a horse with a dog, ... a white German shepherd at his heels. And he was, he was, I don't know. He must have been a carpenter or something. Who knows?

KP: So he was not regular Army?

RK: I don't think so. No, I don't think any of them were regular army. Except, the only ones [that] were regular Army were some of our, what was called our trick chiefs. ... They were enlisted men, but they were staff sergeants or I think master sergeants. ... Mine was mine was a guy named Harry Hirabedien ... He had been in the army for 40 years ... as a radioman.

KP: So you had a few who had been regulars?

RK: Oh yeah, who had been there for a long time. ... It was not ... just a new outfit. It had been in existence [for a number of years]. ...

KP: But just on a smaller ...

RK: On a much smaller scale, yeah.

KP: What did you think of the regular army people?

RK: ... Our trick chief, Harry Hirabedien, was a very nice man. He was an older guy with grey hair, and he was a father figure, very pleasant.

KP: Since you were very specialized, and in many ways an elite unit, how strict was the army discipline and army ways?

RK: [It was] very, very lax. We walked around in sport shirts on ... base, not off ... the base, but on the base. Once we got to Hawaii it was even ... less strict. It was ... very lax. Every once in a while, we'd have a formation just to ... remind you you're still in the army.

KP: So you would not have daily formations?

RK: No.

KP: You were sent to Hawaii after having a fairly pleasant life in California.

RK: Yeah. I didn't know we were going. I mean we knew we were going overseas. We went to Seattle to ship out. ...

KP: But you did not know at the time where you were going?

RK: No. We knew we were going west to the Pacific. It could have been Guam. ... We had a station in Guam I think. I know we did. It turned out to be Hawaii.

KP: At what time did you ship out approximately?

RK: I left Seattle on the day President Roosevelt died.

KP: Oh, so it was very late in the war?

RK: Yeah, '45 I guess.

KP: Was President Roosevelt's death a shock?

RK: Yes. I remember we were in Seattle, and we were shipping out the next day, and they gave us some time off. ... We were walking down the streets in Seattle and saw the headline on the paper.

KP: So you shipped out to Hawaii. Where did your wife stay?

RK: She went back to New Jersey.

KP: You sailed out of Seattle?

RK: Yes, out of Seattle, yeah, on a Dutch trans-steamer called the *Tabinta*, T A B I N T A. ... I wasn't seasick, ... and most of the other guys were seasick. So I was not seasick, so I was assigned to the trash and garbage detail. ... They had a big bin, because they didn't want to throw anything overboard during the day where we could be followed. So they put everything in a big bin off the side of the ship. ... They had this big bin on the side of the ship. And during the day they kept putting all the trash in the big bin. When it got dark the trash and garbage detail would go and would stand in the bin with a hose, and then the Dutch captain over the loudspeaker would say, all trash and garbage overboard [with Dutch accent]. And we'd hose it and open the thing and hose it all out. That was my job all the way across the Pacific to Hawaii.

KP: Is there anything else you remember about the cruise?

RK: Yes I do remember. We had a guy in our outfit who was a great trumpet player. ... As we got on the ship there were some guys playing jazz. ... I think there was a sax, a clarinet, a drummer, and a guitar, or something like that. I said, Bob, I turned to him, his name was Bob, why don't you join them? So he got his trumpet and went and joined them, and they were so happy to have a trumpet player in that group. I remember that. ... And, of course, a lot of poker was played ... on the way over. ... Then I remember when we got to Hawaii, the first thing I saw was a bus ... that said [on it], where you know the destination [is, said] A I E A. I thought, my god, what kind of a place is this. [laughter] It turned out that's Aiea, which is a naval base.

KP: You landed on Hawaii when it was out of harm's way. What did you think of Hawaii?

RK: Well, at the time Oahu, which is ... the island where Honolulu is, was just one big military base. It was all soldiers and sailors. ... We had this little signal corps station ... so we didn't have

too much there. I've got a picture of it. ... Whenever we had any time off, we would go to either Honolulu or Schofield Barracks. ... Schofield Barracks was the site of From Here to Eternity. And that's where we'd go to the movies or go to a bowling alley. ...

KP: Did you get into Honolulu at all?

RK: Yes. We got into Honolulu quite a bit

KP: What do you remember about it?

RK: Well, I remember a great steak restaurant. A steak house. You know that was the main thing we'd go for was food. We'd walk around. It was pleasant. ... When we went to the beach, we went up to the other side of the island, which was a place called (Ipao?). We called it Soldier's Beach. It had another Hawaiian name, but that's where we wanted to go. We didn't go to Waikiki.

KP: Were most of the men in your outfit married?

RK: Well, my close friends were, but I'd bet most, I would guess maybe half of them. ...

KP: Is there anything else that you remember about your Hawaii duty in terms of your job? You mentioned that the radio signals ironically were not as good as in California.

RK: No. I mean some of them were, but we had to work harder to pick out the signals from the static. I can remember my trick chief was a guy named Ross Nesbit who would light a cigarette and throw the match into the waste basket. Every day the thing would start flaming. [laughter] ... I remember a lot of rain during the rainy season in Hawaii. ... It was foggy, and it would get muddy and messy. ... Our camp was ... right in the pineapple fields.

KP: So did you eat a lot of pineapple?

RK: Yeah. Every time they had chocolate pudding they would stretch it out by adding pineapple to it. They added pineapple to everything.

KP: Did you have much contact with native Hawaiians?

RK: No, not much. Not much.

KP: In other words, you really saw just other military people for the most part?

RK: Yeah, most of the time.

KP: Have you been back to Hawaii since?

RK: Oh yeah, yeah, quite a few times.

KP: What strikes you?

RK: Well, it's so much different. You know you go back and stay at a fancy hotel and stuff like that. ... During World War II it was one great big military base. That is all that was there practically.

KP: Where were you when the war ended? I should actually say when the atomic bomb was dropped.

RK: I was on duty, and I copied these messages.

KP [reading]: Copyright flash flash Tokyo, learned imperial message accepting Potsdam Proclamation forthcoming soon. So you received this message? From the Japanese?

RK: Well yeah. It was, what does it say up at top, JUM?

KP: Yeah.

RK: It was a press release, not press, but a message from JUD which was (...?), a Japanese station. And the one on the bottom was from our station to the Japanese.

KP: So these were in clear?

RK: These were in clear, yes.

KP: So you knew what they meant?

RK: Oh yeah. Because we were celebrating. I remember when the atom bomb came off, a guy came running into the barracks and said, the atom bomb has been dropped, and we all cheered hurray, hurray, hurray. We thought obviously that it meant the end of the war, and we could go home. That was basically our thoughts.

KP: Did you know what the atomic bomb meant at the time?

RK: I don't think we had any idea ... of the enormity of it or the deaths that occurred. We just knew it was ... a major weapon, and it could end the war. I thinking we were talking about that for a while and that could happen.

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

KP: Now the war ended. Did you realize that you would be going home?

RK: Well that was the whole point of it.

KP: Yeah. So you really ...

RK: Yeah, we got very anxious, you know. ... I'm sure you've heard of the point system. We got very anxious to find out how many points we had and when ... we would be going home. It was very, it was a restless and frustrating period till we actually went home.

KP: So you were not discharged until February?

RK: Actually, I was discharged on Valentine's Day.

KP: In other words you stayed in the army for a while?

RK: Not out of choice.

KP: How long did you stay in Hawaii?

RK: Until just about ... ten days before that. You know I had to ... ship back. I guess it took about five days. I came back on the *Matsonia* which was bigger than the one I went out on. Then I had a couple days in California, then a train ride across the country. Then I got back to Fort Dix.

KP: Where you were discharged?

RK: Yes.

KP: And you had not thought of making the army your career?

RK: Oh absolutely not. Oh no. I couldn't wait to get out.

KP: After you got out what did you think you would do?

RK: Well, I was hoping to get a job on a newspaper. ... I was 25, had a wife. I knew I had to go to work.

KP: Had you thought of going back to school on the G.I. Bill?

RK: No. I didn't think I needed any more education. I guess a master's would have been nice, but I never thought about it seriously.

KP: But your first job would not be in newspaper work per se. You worked as a public relations assistant.

RK: Yeah. Of course, you know it was hard to get a job at that time because ... during the war they hired people that they wanted to keep, and then they also had to promise back returning veterans. And so I was neither. So I was low man on the totem pole, and I couldn't get a job on a paper. And I wound up in public relations for two months.

KP: When did you get your first newspaper job?

RK: ... I got a job ... on a trade paper, a trade newspaper called Furniture World. ... No, that was before the war. ... I got a job on a trade paper called Public Works News. A guy named Jack Gurwell was the editor. And the problem was at that time, because of the war there was just no public works going on, because they didn't have any money, you know, for that sort of stuff. So the paper folded up. ... I happened to be in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania where the paper was printed. And I came back the next day, and Mr. Gurwell the editor said, oh by the way while you were away yesterday, the paper folded up, and I got you another job, which was very nice. It turned out that the other job was with NEA, Newspaper Enterprises Association in Cleveland, Ohio, and so I went to Cleveland. I was there for a year.

KP: But you stayed with Newspaper Enterprises?

RK: I'm still there. [laughter] ... I'm officially retired, but I still do three columns a week for the syndicate, ... a ... question and answer column.

KP: So you continue to remain active?

RK: Yeah. After I retired they asked me to continue this particular column which was very popular, and which, as I said, wasn't going to take up much time. So I did it.

Hortensia Rivas Kleiner: You ought to show them your office Dick.

RK: Yeah, I will show them.

HRK: Okay.

RK: ... I've got a little office upstairs with a computer and all that sort of thing.

KP: Did you think you would be doing in a sense the Hollywood entertainment beat?

RK: No, not at first. ... When they first hired me at NEA in Cleveland, ... that was the main office at the time, I was doing all sorts of menial things like picture captions and editing copy and all that sort of stuff for about a year. ... I gradually got into doing some sort of ... some reporting,

general features, assignments, whatever there was around. I remember going to Toledo once for an auto auction at that time. Of course, automobiles were very scarce because they had been producing tanks during the war, so people couldn't get automobiles. The few that came out they sold via auction rather than in showrooms. And so I covered this auto auction in Toledo and a few other things. ... Then they transferred me back to New York ... after about a year.

KP: Were you glad to be back in New York?

RK: Yes I was. I mean, you know, New York is New York. ... Then I became just a general assignment reporter for a long time. ... Then television was coming in, and they asked to do something on television. So I wrote a weekly column about television which was done mostly in New York. ... Eventually ... ten years later they said, you're going to go to Hollywood.

KP: You would end up writing about Hollywood. Some have called the late 1930s the Golden Age of Hollywood and of American film.

RK: I wasn't there then, unfortunately. I didn't get there until '64, I think.

KP: But growing up as a kid and in college, what was your impression of Hollywood in movies and stars?

RK: Well, I didn't have much of an impression of Hollywood, because I had never been there. But I was a great moviegoer. I loved movies. I would go down to see everything that came in to the theaters in downtown New Brunswick all the the time. Never realizing that some day I'd be working with these people and writing books with them and stuff like that, but I did. I just thought of Hollywood, as I guess like most people, as [this] glamorous place, exciting place.

KP: So those were the impressions?

RK: Yeah. Yeah.

KP: When you actually became involved with the entertainment industry, what were your myths about the industry that you look back on and now say, I can't believe I had this impression of Hollywood or movie stars?

RK: Well, I guess I thought most of them, like most of us, I'd think of them as bigger than life. ... I met them and found they were ordinary people, ... some good, some bad, some nice, some not so nice. But I don't think I had any other than that. I really understood pretty much what the movies, because I'd seen a lot of movies on location in New York. So ... even though it wasn't Hollywood, it was movies and production. I knew how they worked.

KP: I have seen two of your columns that Rutgers has saved. I think you had written for Rutgers Magazine. In one column you talked a good bit about television and how television should be

judged, that critics should judge it as an entertainment media, and not measure it against high culture. What are your thoughts about television having covered it in many ways from its inception to its sort of almost breaking up with cable?

RK: ... I think ... it's wasting a golden opportunity. It could be doing so much better than it is. ... But, of course, ... that is the ... public desires. ... I mean they like Roseanne, and they get Roseanne. ... When they give them good stuff they don't watch, so they obviously, the sponsors can't afford to sponsor a show that nobody watches, so it goes off. I think it's a marvelous medium for something like news, the OJ Simpson case and stuff like that. It's tremendous.

KP: So you think in terms of news that television in many ways has lived up to its potential as you saw it?

RK: Yeah I do. Except I do think, feel strongly that the news programs, I mean when they're covering an event that's one thing, but the news programs like Rather and Brokaw and so on, are governed primarily by what pictures they have. ... If they've got a good picture of a fire [than] that's the important thing in the news that day. ... A lot of major news events are not photogenic, ... so they don't cover them too well. ... I do think, I've had arguments, I don't know if you've talked to Don Meaney of our class ...

KP: Not yet.

KP: He's an NBC executive or CBS executive I think. One of those executives. Don Meaney and there's another guy in our class who was also a TV connection. And I remember being back at Rutgers once when we had a symposium. And they got very mad at me, because I said that ... TV news was an entertainment medium rather than a news medium. They're governed by the pictures they've got. ... I think that's true.

KP: You covered Hollywood for a number of years. How would you characterize the reporting of Hollywood over the course of your career? Do you have any observations?

RK: Well, it's [an] entirely different type of-- it's not really news, and ... I never dealt in gossip, so it's not gossip. [laughter] But it's personality, a cult of personality thing rather than anything else. ... I mean The New York Times always had newsmen covering Hollywood. ... They did what movies are going to be made and what the studio's money they're making and that sort of stuff. But, ... my job was to ... talk about people ... and what they were like. ...

KP: You interviewed a large number of people from Hollywood over a long period of time.

RK: 8,000.

KP: Is there any sense you have of changes in the type of people in Hollywood in terms of actors and others?

RK: Well I think it's probably changed since I left. ... I haven't been doing it since '86, and I have a feeling that it's changed a great deal since then. The people, ... I don't think they are quite as serious about acting as they used to be. They were actors then. I think they're more interested now in their ... personality. They're ... more self-centered. I don't know.

KP: So you were struck by how many people say in the 1960s and 1970s were actually intent on being good actors?

RK: Yes I really was. I mean, I think, of course obviously there were some starlets and stuff who were not, but most of the people were. ...

KP: They wanted to be known for doing good movies and good performances.

RK: Yes and they had training in acting on stage or theater schools.

KP: You had written a piece, I think for the Rutgers Magazine, and you sort of talked about Hollywood. ... I thought it was very interesting because you sort of said, that the image of Hollywood, well one of the things you brought up in the article was that there is no such thing as Hollywood. You can't even send mail there even though there is this big image of Hollywood. At the time you were writing it, Hollywood in many ways was under very much still, ... the impression you gave from the article, Hollywood had not fully come to terms with television.

RK: It was a slow process. A lot of them thought that television would go away. ... now the movie people did. ... But now, of course, it accounts for more than half of their ... revenues. But for a long time they just ignored it.

KP: You gave the impression that you thought this was really basically a dopey way of dealing with television.

RK: Oh yeah, I think obviously television is here to stay until the next evolution comes along, Internet or whatever it's going to be. But I think [they] ... very short sighted in not recognizing the potential. ... Not everybody, there were some people who did, of course, but most people didn't.

KP: You had a lot of involvement in the Hollywood community in terms of being a journalist. What struck you about Hollywood and the entertainment business in the United States in terms of changes?

RK: Well, one thing that always struck me, and I keep talking about this is that the actors and actresses are people. They're not anything different. Get seven actors, and you'll find four that you like and three you don't like. Like seven pediatricians. You'll find four you like and three

you don't. I think most people outside of Hollywood sort of feel that Hollywood stars are almost god-like, and they're not. They just ordinary people.

KP: You used the term cult of personality. Do you think American society has an unhealthy attraction or interest in Hollywood actors and actresses?

RK: I think ... it's gone too far. But I think basically, it's the same with sports personalities. I think that's gone too far. They make too much money, ... and most of them will tell you that. [laughter] They'll say, "You know, this is not brain surgery we're doing here." Most of them are almost embarrassed to take the money. I don't know about sports players.

KP: So a lot of the big actors are actually a little bemused that people are paying them this amount of money to do this?

RK: Yes, right. And they keep saying, you know all we're doing is play acting and we're making ...

KP: You had covered the entertainment industry in New York. Do you think it's much harder to be an actor in the theater?

RK: Harder in what respect? Harder to get a job or harder to be successful?

KP: I guess both. ... An actor in the theater really has to work three or four hours a night, you know whereas ...

RK: Making movies is hard work. People don't understand that. I've done quite a few parts myself. ... You know, my producer friend would say, you'd like to play a bartender? ... You do just one little scene, and you're there all day, because you've got to have it, take it from different perspectives and stuff. You got to go to makeup and you've got to go to rehearsal. It's difficult work. It can be very boring at times. I mean you do the same scene, an actor does the same scene four or five times from different angles, and it's pretty boring. It's hard to do it the same way every time.

KP: So you have a healthy respect for movie actors?

RK: Oh I think, yeah, I think they're very, they work hard at their job. They earn their money ... Maybe the big ones don't earn millions and millions. But the average worker, he earns his keep.

KP: You wrote a number of books. Some you collaborated on and some on your own. How did you like the transition from newspaper columns which are much shorter to full length books?

RK: You know I liked the freedom you have of just writing and writing and writing. ... In a book you don't have any constraints of space or time. So that's pleasurable. It's a lot of work though writing 350 pages of a book. [laughter]

KP: I am just finishing up a book. So I have a new fast appreciation for the process.

RK: ... And I wish I had the computer in those days. [laughter] It would have been a lot easier.

KP: So you are one that really has liked the computer?

RK: Oh I love it, yeah. It's great.

KP: You are not one of those writers who has resisted?

RK: No, no. ... It makes it so much easier for the writer. Do you use the computer?

KP: Oh yes. I can't imagine how anyone wrote before, even though I used to write before. One other observation you also made about Hollywood at the time when you got out there in the 1960s was that in terms of producers and directors, that anyone under 60 was called young fellow, which I thought was interesting point. So you encountered Hollywood in many ways in the vestiges of the old?

RK: Yeah. I got there just at the last of the big studios. I did get to see some of them and meet some of them. I got to some of the parties and some of the premiers. ... So I sampled some of it. I recognized what it used to be. But it changed. The studio system is gone. ... MGM and Paramount are primarily rental studios. Now they just ... rent space. They don't have much to do of their own. And they don't have anybody under contract. You know it used to be a very good system where they put some kid under contract, and they'd nurture his career or her career and teach them and give them lessons and give them small parts and bigger parts ... So, it was a very good training ground, but they don't have that anymore. A young kid today has a much more difficult time because of that. He's got to go from one job to another without any continuity.

KP: Do you think that in terms of training as an actor or an actress that that really diminishes the craft in the sense that under the studio system you could really hone your acting skills?

RK: Yes, I think so, and they could also hone their attractiveness to the audience by giving them a little bigger part each time, so the audience became more and more familiar with them over time, gradually. Today it's every once in a while somebody will crack through and become a star, but they don't have the background, they used to.

KP: In other words there was a maturing process on everything from how to act and also how to deal with the media?

RK: ... They would get lessons in everything from singing and dancing to walking and etiquette and all sorts of stuff.

KP: Did you notice the studio system decline?

RK: Yes, yeah. I noticed that they didn't have that grounding, that solid grounding. ...

KP: When you started reporting on both the entertainment industry, but then in Hollywood a lot of the people you interviewed had been in World War II. ...

RK: Quite a few of them, yeah.

KP: How do you think the experience of World War II shaped the entertainment industry and the actors or actresses that were involved either through USO?

RK: ... My most successful book was with Jackie Cooper who was a child star and kind of a spoiled brat until he went in the army. ... The army completely changed him, and he became a solid citizen. ... Afterward he became a studio executive for a while and a director and so forth. Without that army experience I don't know. ... I guess the same thing is true of a lot of people. But I really, it's hard to say.

KP: The genre of the war film became one of the Hollywood staples.

RK: Yes.

KP: Any thoughts on that and the people who acted in them?

RK: No, because most of the war films, of course, involved combat, and I had no personal experience in combat. So I don't know how authentic they are. But I enjoyed them as a [member of the] audience, but I don't know how ... realistic they are. [laughter]

KP: What about the actors who acted in them? Any thoughts on them?

RK: No. I do this question and answer column, and I get a lot of letters ... asking about why John Wayne was never in the service. You know, how can he, he's such a macho guy and not have served his country. Of course, the answer is that by the time the war broke out he had four children. So he was exempt. But ... I guess there was some resentment perhaps on our part to see some of these guys during the war who were not obviously ... in service, and we were. And we were unhappy because of that. I suppose we resented some of them.

KP: Like Frank Sinatra?

RK: I don't remember specifically Frank Sinatra, but ...

KP: I have read that Frank Sinatra was very popular and a lot of G.I.s really resented him. him?

RK: I suppose so. I never ...

KP: His is just one name I have actually read that some people resented.

RK: Yeah, I guess we did resent him, but I don't remember him specifically.

KP: Do you remember any USO shows?

RK: Well, we never had any come to our little camps because we were too small for that sort of thing.

KP: So you never experienced Bob Hope?

RK: No. I never saw a USO show, not even two girls and a drum. I went to USO canteens in San Francisco and Hawaii.

KP: You lived in various parts of the country both in the military and in your career. Which parts of the country have you enjoyed? I should maybe phrase it which parts of the country have you enjoyed and which have been less favorable?

RK: Well, ... I've liked everywhere I've lived, because I've been content and happy there. I even liked Cleveland which is not a beautiful city. But ... obviously, I like Maine. We love it up here. ...

KP: Yes, it is a beautiful view.

RK: Yeah, we love it up here.

KP: Even though the weather is not as sunny as California?

RK: No. We're going back to California. We're moving back, because I have three children and five grandchildren in California. So, we want to get closer to them, because we don't see them enough. So we're moving back to California. But I loved California, and I love Maine. I guess even parts of New Jersey are nice! [laughter] Yeah, I haven't been back to New Jersey for a while.

KP: Since you've interviewed quite a few, are there any that you had like to put on record, in terms of your career, your postwar, prewar or military career? Any particularly memorable ones?

RK: I've had quite a few memorable things. Glenn Ford tried to kill me one day.

KP: Over?

RK: [It was] over something he'd thought I'd written, but I hadn't. ... It was an article that appeared in the National Enquirer. For some reason, he got the idea that I wrote it. ... We were at a party, and he grabbed me by the throat. ... George Kennedy, who is six foot eight, and my wife who was about five foot nothing pulled him off of me. That's one memorable experience.

KP: So this was someone with your name?

RK: No, it wasn't a name, but he had told me a story and the story had gotten into the paper.

KP: But you were not the source?

RK: No, no. It turns out I later found out that whenever he's drunk he tells the same story. ... Let me see what else? Oh, some of these people are so weird. Tuesday Weld, there was an actress named Tuesday Weld. ...

KP: I have heard the name.

RK: She insisted that she wouldn't let me interview her unless we played ping pong. So I had to interview her while we were playing ping pong.

KP: Of the stars that you would interview, how many had these really peculiar idiosyncrasies that you just thought this is a little nutty?

RK: Well, quite a few, ... nothing that blatant. [laughter] ... I have a philosophy about these people. People ask me what is John Wayne really like or what's Frank Sinatra really like. I say that I have no idea. Then they say, well you've interviewed them haven't you? And I say, yes I've interviewed them. In fact, we had dinner. We've had lunch. We've played cards together. But I say whenever ... a star ... is interviewed by a reporter he puts on a facade. He puts on a show. He shows the reporter a side of him that he wants to be seen. ... Very rarely can you see beyond that facade.

KP: So in the case of Glenn Ford who had started choking you? I mean that was when the veneer came down.

RK: That was when the facade had a chink in it. Yes.

KP: But you see you got a sense that, partly because of the nature of the relationship, you were getting some sense of the individual, but not the full picture.

RK: You got a ... good show. It made a good story, but not necessarily what the person was really like. It was just what they wanted ... to show.

KP: But even at that you would sometimes get different things, like the ping pong playing.

RK: Yes, yeah. Let me see what else is there?

KP: Who was your favorite person to interview or get to know?

RK: ... Mary Tyler Moore was great. I interviewed her about five or six times. She was always a delight. ... A lot of people are different from what you expect. You see somebody on the screen, and they project a certain image, and you think they're going to be like that, but they're not.

KP: So that initially was a surprise?

RK: Yeah, that was a surprise, because you sort of feel that they project this [certain] image. ...

KP: I've read about Humphrey Bogart, and people have said that on screen and off screen he was two different people.

RK: Well, I think that's true with a lot of them. Humphrey, I talked to him a couple of times. He was always very pleasant to me. ... That's another thing. Reporters will get together to discuss our relationships with the stars. Somebody would say, "Geez so-and-so was terrible." And I'd say, "Well, I found him very nice, you know." It depends ... sometimes on the mood that the guy is in or something. ... I might find somebody terrible, and the other guy would say he's nice. So you can't be sure.

KP: You went into print journalism, in some ways when it was still in its Golden Age. Do you think you were fortunate in terms of when you hit journalism?

RK: I think so because, well, I think if I had come along later, or today I would probably ... try to go into electronic journalism.

KP: You think that would have been your future?

RK: ... I think its everybody's. I mean I don't think there is much of a future in print journalism anymore.

KP: Really?

RK: Yeah. I mean papers obviously are folding up right and left. I mean there's always a few, but I don't think ... there is not ... as much opportunity now as there used to be in print journalism. There's much more opportunity, I think, in electronic.

KP: You mentioned earlier that electronic journalism, in some ways, is entertainment.

RK: Yeah.

KP: How do you think that will change or has already changed? What's your observation of the changes of reporting say Hollywood?

RK: Well, it's becoming now, just tabloid journalism. Hard Copy and those other shows like that are changing it terribly. It's disgraceful. Isn't it? ... They go after sensationalism. I think ... to get ... the real news you have to go to the newspaper.

KP: So even though you think, young man don't go to a newspaper, in some ways, if the newspaper industry continues to decline that would be a real loss for reporting?

RK: Oh yeah, I think terribly. Because I think it's the only ... way you can get the whole story, the real story today. And even that is becoming, some of the papers are going tabloid style, not necessarily format, but style.

KP: In terms of Hollywood reporting on Hollywood and the entertainment industry, do you think the movement to sensationalism is building up the cult of personality more?

RK: I think that it's encouraging it, yeah, probably. Although I don't think it really needed much encouragement. ...

KP: Why do you think that Americans are so fascinated with Hollywood or even the world?

RK: I think it's not necessarily only Hollywood. I think they're fascinated with people, sports figures and politicians, military figures, and anybody who ... cuts up people's body parts.

KP: So you really think the individual is really the key?

RK: Yeah, yeah. And, of course, Hollywood is the forefront of that because it glorifies individuals. ... But it could be anybody. Could be Alan Powell, no not Alan Powell, Clayton Powell.

KP: Is there anything that I forgot to ask? Although in many ways, your postwar career, I could go on much longer. But is there anything else that I forgot to ask on anything in terms of pre-war Rutgers, your wartime experiences, postwar experiences?

RK: I don't know that my wartime experiences, I thought we were going to concentrate more on that but ...

KP: But is there anything I forgot to ask about your wartime experiences?

RK: No, I don't think so. I think, you know four years or three and a half years of-- as I say, I ... was very fortunate in my war assignment. Of course, [it was] nothing that I was able to make anything out of in my postwar life, unfortunately. So many people did learn things in World War II.

KP: So in many ways you did think that this was a three and a half year interruption?

RK: Yeah. I did find, as I say, ... I enjoyed Morse code, and ... so I did become a Ham radio operator after, because I found it very relaxing to sit and copy the Morse code. I put the earphones on and count the dashes and count the dots. I still do that. ... I've given up my Ham license, but I still have the receiver. ...

KP: None of your children served in the military?

RK: No.

KP: Are you glad they didn't?

RK: Well, I'm glad they didn't have to. I don't think it would have hurt him. I only have one son, and I don't think it would have hurt him.

KP: Was he of draft age during the Vietnam War?

RK: No, he was too young.

KP: Any thoughts on American involvement in wars after World War II.

RK: I think that most of them were kind of foolish and should have been avoided. I hope we don't have any more of these ... military ... excursions, raids.

KP: You reported on Hollywood during the Vietnam War, and you had been in World War II, and in a sense you had covered the entertainment industry as a journalist during the Korean War. Did you notice any differences when you were covering the entertainment business between these three wars?

RK: No, ... I don't think that Vietnam or Korea, had the, certainly did not have the impact on Hollywood or on any place else that World War II did. ... It was a ripple. ... There was no feeling that people should be in the military.

KP: One of the continuities is Bob Hope and the USO show. Any sense in terms of Hollywood and the individual actor's response to the war. In World War II there was a number of Hollywood actors that didn't enlist, they often volunteered for the USO show or in some way helped the war effort. Any sense of the change in the attitude of the entertainment industry toward the military?

RK: No. As I say, the other post World War II wars were not, I don't think they had any major impact on Hollywood people.

KP: Often Hollywood is portrayed as being much more sort of liberal, especially in the Vietnam War, very much out of tune with mainstream America. Is that an accurate depiction? You got to know it much closer, or was that a misperception?

KP: I think it was just as I say. People are people, and I think there were probably some ... [like] Charlton Heston who were good and some of them were Ed Asner's who were anti.

RK: So you found that Hollywood was much more reflective of the larger society?

RK: Yes, I think it is. Yes, I do.

KP: The entertainment industry and the country were united in World War II. When you got to Korea and Vietnam the country was divided.

RK: Yes. World War II was a very popular war. It was a hip war, and the other two were not. ... It didn't grab us.

KP: Rob, do you have any questions?

RL: Was there anything else about Rutgers that you liked or disliked?

RK: I enjoyed, loved being a part of the Targum. ... You don't know, but you've heard I'm sure that it was a small place then, and you knew everybody. Do they still have the thing where the freshman have to wear beanies? ...

KP: No. So you remember that very well?

RK: Oh yeah. That was great fun. And the Targum was a little bitty club. I don't know where they meet now or where editorial office is now, but it was an old dinky house on College Avenue. We'd go there and drink beer. No, I don't think we had beer. There were no drugs. We'd go to the Corner Tavern, that was the place. ...

KP: That's still there.

RK: C. T. That was where the wild guys went for a beer. But there were no drugs on campus that I was aware of, I'm sure I would [have] been aware. ... My son went to Cornell, and I think he didn't get as much fun out of his four years at Cornell that I did out of Rutgers. ... I don't know why. Those four years were the ... [most pleasant] of my entire life. Of course having the girls across town was nice too. We'd walk. ... Oh, there are so many stories. I thought at one point I would become very sophisticated. And I would buy a homburg. Do you know what a homburg is? It's a hat. It's very [sophisticated]. ... So I went downtown and bought a homburg. And I started walking across town, and people would look at me and laugh. So I threw it away. By the time I got to ... [NJC], I threw it in the trash can because everybody was laughing. And we'd go to dances.

KP: When was the last time you went back?

RK: My 50th reunion two years ago. That was the only time I've been back. I think the last time was my fifth reunion.

KP: Were you surprised at how much the campus had changed?

RK: Oh yeah. I mean I realized. ... I couldn't find my way around. It's enormous. It's not as much fun, I don't think, as it used to be. ... There's more students. I have some stuff in here from my army days that I thought you might like to see. ... This is my draft notices.

KP: Your draft board was Middlesex?

RK: No, I guess it was New York, wasn't it?

KP: No.

RK: Oh, [it says] Middlesex New Jersey, okay. ... This is the famous greetings. Notice to report for active duty. ...

KP: Did the war hasten your marriage? Would you have gotten married later if you had not been drafted?

RK: Probably, probably, yeah. I married her when she was an NJC girl, ... [and I was] on a furlough.

KP: Where did your wife work during the war?

RK: In Petaluma, California she worked at the hotel. She was a desk clerk at the hotel. As I say it was the egg basket of the world, and she would be tipped with double yoke eggs, because they

were too big to put in the cartons. So they would come, give her a bag of double yoke eggs. This is Christmas at Camp Edison, the menu. ... Turkey with old fashioned dressing. ...

KP: People in the navy have said on big holidays they used to get printed menus.

RK: Oh yeah we had [them too] ...

KP: Oh it's V-mail.

RK: Oh yeah. ... By rail at the proper time to Seattle Port of Embarkation, Seattle, Washington.

KP: So a few more months, and you probably would not have been shipped out at all? You were getting very close to the end of the war, but you did not know it at the time.

RK: No. I didn't know it at the time. This is a textbook. This is Second Signal Service Battalion, (Holomono?), Oahu, ... 1945-- Thanksgiving dinner. ... This is the ship I came back on, the *Mathsonia*. ... Going back to civilian life they gave you booklets on welcome home.

KP: I take it you did not have a difficult transition from military to civilian [life], except for trying to get a job?

RK: Yeah, [except for] trying to get a job. But oh no, I was very happy to be a civilian. I don't understand why the guys in Vietnam had so much trouble. Were you in Vietnam?

KP: No, no. no. I was too young.

RK: That would seem to us to be the most natural thing in the world to get back. We couldn't wait.

KP: So no one in your unit wanted to stay?

RK: I think there probably were a couple of guys who did, yes. ... There were some people, ... some of the radio repairmen, who didn't really have any plans or any dreams or anything. So the army was a good place for some people. ... It was a good life for some of the guys. ... Some of them liked regimentation and being told what to do. ... They didn't make any decisions themselves.

KP: But that was the part you, it seems like you disliked a great deal.

RK: Yeah, I did. I did. I was very happy to be home. ... I came back into Penn Station by train ... and took a taxi home. It was a thrilling moment.

KP: You arrived in New York City?

RK: Yeah, I stayed with my folks for a while. That was another problem because, as you've probably heard, it was hard to find a place, an apartment or a place to live. ... So we stayed with my folks.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Richard Kleiner on August 4, 1994 with Kurt Piehler and

RL: Rob Lipschitz.

KP: So you mentioned that you experienced a severe housing shortage.

RK: Oh yes, yes, yeah. ... It seems to me we spent a lot of time looking for a place. ... We finally found it. ... We got a place somewhere in Central Park West.

KP: In the military did you encounter any black service men at all?

RK: No, not in our outfit. I'm sure there were others in other outfits. ...

KP: In some ways you were listening to the Japanese during the entire war. You did not understand what they were saying, but what was your view of the enemy?

RK: Well, we believed ... what we heard, that they were cruel, and they were relentless, and that they wouldn't surrender. ... And we began to think that the war was going to go on forever. That's why I was saying we welcomed the atom bomb when it was ... dropped, because we felt that the Japanese were just so, so relentless. They would ... never give up.

KP: You really had no clues in terms of the volume of radio traffic that the war was coming to an end when it did in July and August?

RK: No, I don't think that changed at all. I don't think the volume of traffic changed.

KP: And you couldn't read the traffic.

RK: No.

KP: So really in a sense you knew a lot, but also you knew very little?

RK: Yeah, ... you know, apparently did do our jobs. We got a lot of material that was valuable to us, ... but we never knew it. We just sent it all to Virginia.

KP: And never heard back except that one instance?

RK: Except that one commendation, yes. And I guess they told us that we were doing a good job, but nothing specific. There are other anecdotes or funny things that happened that I should probably remember, but I don't.

KP: In some ways we are almost done. Yesterday's interview with John Melrose we ... did close to three hours.

RK: Oh really?

KP: Yeah. He had quite a few stories.

RK: Yeah, ... he was more in action. Wasn't he?

KP: Yes. He ended up becoming officer of the deck, in fact, of a destroyer. ... But we turned off the tape, and we were almost ready to leave, and then we sat down and had another half hour, but this we didn't have on tape. So I resist the urge to end early.

RK: Yeah, I know that feeling when I've done interviews too. ... You fold everything up and then, oh by the way, you know, and stuff like that.

KP: I should have asked this of John Melrose, do you know anyone from Rutgers who died in the war?

RK: Yes.

KP: Did you know anyone really well? Who were they?

RK: "Red" Aronoff, ... Seymour Aronoff and Jimmy [James A.] Kirrane. Yes.

KP: What do you remember about them?

RK: They were both in my journalism department.

KP: And they died during the war?

RK: Yes.

KP: Any stories about them?

RK: No. ...

KP: Nothing that distinguishes them?

RK: No. They were good friends of ours, and we were close because, as I've said, the journalism department was very small, 20 to 30 people. Of course, what was nice in those days, I don't know if it still applies, ... it was the only .... part of the university that was coed.

KP: So you had women in your classes?

RK: We had women in our classes.

KP: And you got to notice the difference with women and without. What were the differences?

RK: I thought it was great. I mean, not just because of girls and stuff like that, but I think it gave you more of an even opinion on things. Girls had a lot to say frequently. ... [laughter]

KP: So you, in a sense, thought they added quite a bit to discussion?

RK: Yes I do. I do. I still do. ... I was glad to see it go coed.

KP: Really, even though you went to Rutgers when it was all male, you were not one of those who were sad to see the tradition go?

RK: No, no. I think it's good for everybody.

KP: What about the women? Do you think they benefitted from it?

RK: I would think so. I think women should go to school with guys, I mean boys.

KP: Did your father do any wartime work?

RK: In World War I, not in World War II.

KP: He did serve in World War I?

RK: He didn't serve, but he was asked to fill in ... on the Yale faculty for some guy who was going. He couldn't, ... my dad had very bad eyes. But he did, during World War I, he did go to Yale ... as a professor filling in for somebody. That was when he was working as pharmacologist. I had a couple of uncles who were in the service during World War I.

KP: Did they ever talk much about the war?

RK: No. One of my uncles, my mother's brother, was quite ... a hero, apparently. He was in one of the various serious campaigns, and was wounded, but [he] didn't talk much about it. ...

KP: What image did you have of war? Did you expect the war to come out the way it did for you? Or did you have a different image of war from growing up in the 1920s and 1930s?

RK: Well, I suppose I expected that ... when I was drafted I was going to have to go in and shoot somebody, you know, or be shot. Neither of those appealed to me particularly. [laughter] And I was very fortunate, very happy to find myself ... with a pair of earphones on instead of a gun.

KP: So that was the impression you had of being in the military and war?

RK: Yeah. I think most people, ... when you think soldier, you think gun, you think shoot, a tank or something.

KP: You did not expect to be doing what you were doing, basically?

RK: No. I had no idea. Like as I say, ... I never thought of radio. I just didn't think ... that I had this aptitude for it which was very surprising. I didn't expect it. I didn't know about it.

KP: So you had taken also a lot of science courses?

RK: No. Well, I had taken the required ones ... like chemistry. It's funny, my dad, when he started out at Yale, he wanted to be a writer. And then he too, he took a chemistry course because it was required, and he fell in love with chemistry. I took chemistry courses that were required and did not fall in love with chemistry.

KP: Oh really. So in your family the desire to be a writer is there?

RK: Yeah. I have a whole shelf of books there that were written ... by me and my father. And he wrote a textbook. ... My nephew wrote a couple of novels and so on. My brother-in-law wrote a book. Quite a few [have been published]. ....

KP: Is there anything else I forgot?

RK: I'm trying to think. ... Oh, one other thing, I mean it's minor, but I never could, I never developed a taste for coffee. I don't like coffee.

KP: Which in the military you drink quite a bit of it.

RK: Exactly what I was going to say. ... Most of the time that's all there is, that's all that's offered is coffee. ... If you get thirsty, so ... I would wait until I could find some water. [laughter] ... I never drank coffee. That was a bit of a hardship.

KP: Anything else about army food? You brought up coffee.

RK: Well, at the beginning, I forget where at one point, where it was, in basic training or somewhere, where you passed down a line with your tray, and they'd put the stuff on top of each other. I mean put the pie on top of the mashed potatoes. Everything was all put together in one [lump]. It was terrible. But the food wasn't bad. I don't remember the food being particularly bad. ... Once I got to California, it was good. And as I say, when we were in Hawaii they stretched everything out by adding pineapple to it.

KP: Have you managed to eat pineapple since then?

RK: Yeah. I like pineapple even though. ... I wish I could have had more exciting stuff for you.

KP: No don't think that. Actually, it has been interesting in terms of how varied the experiences of the Class of 1942 were in the war. We actually know more about the front line. The front line stuff is often more interesting at times, but you know the gripping stories, but that's actually what we know best from a historian's point of view, that's what we know best. It the sidelines we know far less about.

RK: Yeah, well mine was very unusual, but it's certainly not dramatic particularly. But ... as far as I was concerned, I was very pleased to be in an undramatic situation.

KP: That's also what is striking. How for the majority they saw little direct enemy action. Various people, even on naval ships, saw almost nothing. I talked to Ray Taub. I don't know if you remember him.

RK: I know Ray.

KP: He basically said they were often in harm's way, but nothing ever happened to them. He was pharmacist's mate. He treated basically minor things. And he was very lucky he said in many ways because other ships had been attacked. The war, he remembers, was doing minor pharmacist mate duties, reading on the deck of the ship and doing watches.

RK: As I said earlier, the whole war situation was a matter of luck. You know, tremendous luck. What unit you got put into, then whether your unit got attacked. ...

KP: And so you have an appreciation for luck, I think, from the war?

RK: Oh yeah. ... One of the problems in wartime was travel. ... Whenever I had a furlough, ... we used to have to take the train. And it was long, you know. You sit, there were no sleepers. ... I had to sit up for five days. And there was always some rowdy guys getting drunk and shooting. ...

KP: Oh, so train rides were long, sleepless affairs?

RK: Yeah, and they were very uncomfortable. Very uncomfortable. And I remember when I got married in March of '44 and my wife was a senior at NJC, and she graduated that June and then came out to join me in California. ... She had to take a train across the country, of course. ... I went down to Oakland to meet her. ... The train was something like four hours late. ... She got off, and she was a wreck. She really was a wreck. She had been ... sitting up for four days.

KP: Oh, so she also had to sit sitting up?

RK: Oh yeah. It wasn't jetlag. It was trainlag!

KP: And also there was no air conditioning on the trains.

RK: I don't think so, no. I remember, I guess it was a joke, but we all used to say we could see it clearly. There used to be a sign on the train: Passengers Please Refrain From Shooting Buffaloes From The Car Windows. But I don't think it really was, but we used to make that joke. The trains were so old that. ...

KP: You mentioned that on the base you were actually quite informal, but when you left base.

RK: Well, we had to wear a uniform in town, you know, ... but around the base we didn't. And, of course, at home we didn't. We had a very active social life among the married folks. We played bridge a lot together. We often had parties and barbecues.

KP: Of course your traveling was limited so you really were limited in what you could do?

RK: There was no travel, except as I say if we had a furlough or something. And I don't think since after I got married I went on furlough.

KP: Did you have enough gas to drive anywhere?

RK: I didn't have a car. ... From the base to the town we took a truck. They had trucks. We would just hop on a truck. ... We had to have our own amusement. There were no movies. I guess there were movies. ... I remember we played a lot of bridge.

KP: Did you develop any new taste for food being out in California?

RK: Yes, I did. I'd never had artichokes or avocados before.

KP: Oh really so that was something you really could not find out here?

RK: I don't know if they didn't have them in the East, or if they just didn't serve them in my home where I was growing up. ... I never had an avocado or an artichoke before I went to

California. And some of our friends who were in California would serve them at parties. ... I became an avocado and an artichoke aficionado in a sense. ... But that's about all I can remember.

KP: And coffee you never developed a taste for?

RK: No. Coffee I just don't like. I don't like mocha flavoring in ice cream.

KP: The reason I asked about clothing and dress is apparently the army, I read in one book, actually sent military police out on trains to inspect, basically to keep watch on soldiers to make sure that they were properly dressed, that they had the uniform on correctly.

RK: I think that's probably true, yeah. As I say we could do it around our base because, not so much in California, but in Hawaii. ... It was ... very casual. Oh, one thing I forgot to tell you was an interesting story. This was in California. I had a Captain (Santoro?), was his name. ... He came to me one day and he said, "Corporal, do you love your country?" And I said, "Yes I do, why?" [He said,] "Will you do some service for your country?" And I said, "Yes I would." He said, "Well I'm going to give you a box number, and you write me a letter once a week. And you let me know if there's anyone who's talking too much in town about what's going on at the camp, because we were supposed to be very secret. So once a week ... I wrote a letter to Captain (Santoro?) at this box number. I don't think I ever reported anybody, but ... theoretically, ...I was a spy.

KP: Really? Where was Captain (Santoro?) based at?

RK: He was part of our outfit.

KP: For some reason he detailed you to write to him.

RK: I suppose others, too.

KP: Yeah.

RK: I suppose others, too, but.

KP: And the concern was that you would be telling?

RK: That there was anybody blabbing about in town, talking about what's going on.

KP: How they were intercepting Japanese codes?

RK: Yeah.

KP: Because you were sworn to secrecy?

RK: Supposedly yes, yeah. Even, you know, when I wrote home, I couldn't say what we were doing. As soon as I got home on a pass or something, I told everybody what I was doing, but I did not do it in writing. [laughter]

KP: Because your mail was censored?

RK: I guess it was. Yeah, I'm sure it was. Or supposedly, theoretically, yeah.

KP: Although you lived off base so it made it a little difficult.

RK: Yes, I probably could have gone and sent a letter home, but I was very serious about the war. Most of us were. We wanted to get it over with, and we wanted to do anything that we could to help.

KP: You mentioned earlier over lunch that you had done quite a bit of traveling with your work. You went to Japan. Having gone through the war and then to actually go to Japan, do you have any comments?

RK: Yeah. Well, actually I felt more ... stronger about my anti-German feeling when I went to Germany.

KP: Really?

RK: Yeah. I was very upset. ... My wife, particularly. ... We were very angry about the Germans, the Japanese too, but the Germans because of, you know, ... the atrocities were much worse. So when we got to Germany, ... we looked at everybody with the suspicion: ... Were they Nazis?

KP: And this was in the 1960s

RK: Yeah. Probably late '50s, early '60s, '70s maybe.

KP: This view of Germany, during the war did you have the same feelings toward the Germans?

RK: Yeah. Of course, we didn't know the extent of their, the concentration camp stuff until ... later, but we were aware that something was going on.

KP: So it was, in a sense, difficult for you to go to both Japan and Germany? ...

RK: ... I didn't feel as strongly as some people. Some people, you know, wouldn't drive a Volkswagen. I didn't feel that strongly, because I figured it wasn't Volkswagen's fault. But, yeah ... I did face difficulties.

KP: What were your impressions of the two countries after you saw them?

RK: Well, you know, I guess [like] most people, they ... were so prosperous. ... It was really unfair that we were helping them to such an extent. We really ... shouldn't have perhaps ... gone that far to help them out after the war.

KP: Have you been back to either country since your initial visit?

RK: Yes. I've ... only been to Japan once, I think. I've been to Germany a couple times. I never felt that strongly about the Italians, you see. Not quite as strongly as the Germans.

KP: What struck you about the travels and the countries you have been to?

RK: Well, I enjoy ... every place I've seen. ... There's so many places I would still would like to go. I just find travel, very, very pleasant. I love to see new people and new places, sampling the foods and go to new shops. ... The world is there to be seen.

KP: Do you wish in the military that you had gotten better assignments?

RK: No, no.

KP: You did not want to see the world that way?

RK: No. I was very content where I was. In fact, I was unhappy when we were sent overseas. But we did do a good job just as well in California. ...

KP: Thank you very much for your interview.

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

Reviewed: 8/97 by Melanie Cooper  
Reviewed: 9/97 by G. Kurt Piehler  
Edited: 9/97 by Tara Kraenzlin  
Edited: 9/97 by Richard Kleiner  
Entered: 9/97 by G. Kurt Piehler