

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH EUGENE POLINSKY

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

and

LAUREN O'GARA

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Lauren O'Gara: This begins an interview on December 11, 2001 at Van Dyke Hall, Rutgers University with Mr. Eugene Polinsky. Conducting the interview is Lauren O'Gara and Shaun Illingworth. I would like to begin the interview by asking you a little bit about your family.

Eugene Polinsky: About my family?

LO: Yes. Where was your father born?

EP: My father was born in Russia. My mother was also born in Russia, but they met over here. My father came here when he was thirteen. I think my mother arrived here when she was fourteen or fifteen. They still did not meet until ... several years later. ... I don't know how they met, but I still have his letters to her from before they were married and those letters were written in beautiful Yiddish, which I cannot read, oh, damn it. My mother's history, I have written down from when she was a little kid. She lived in a one-room log cabin with a dirt floor, which was sanded because they lived out in the country. ... She'd go to the river bank; throw the sand around. ... They would also cut up rushes for clearing the air and making the air smell sweet, but they all lived in the one room. Her father was a bootmaker and he was apparently quite extraordinary at it. He used to make boots for the most important people and she remembered him measuring a person's calf by using a piece of paper which he put around a person's leg for him to measure. I remember her telling me that, and she told me other stories about her childhood, which were charming and fascinating, and vivid. My father's early childhood, he did not tell me about for a very long time and he didn't tell me much about his family, my family, until I was thirty. Want me to go on like this or do you want to ask a question?

Shaun Illingworth: I have a question. Did your parents ever discuss why their family decided to come to the United States? Did your parents come over alone?

EP: My father came over with his father. My grandfather had been widowed. He was a widower and he had five children, and he brought more children here, gradually. There are a lot of stories about all that. My mother, her father died and her mother remarried. ... She became too large and too beautiful, so, they thought it best for her to visit her brother here in New York, and that's what happened.

SI: So, your parents wound up in the same community.

EP: Yes. ... I think they were both living on the Lower East Side in New York, which was a large Jewish immigrant population at the time. It stayed that way for years. Later on, when we were a family, we used to visit once in a while, and we would go to my mom's aunt and uncle when we were little kids. It was a very unpleasant experience for us because it was so dark, so difficult, so uncomfortable, but the people, they couldn't have been happier to see us. We were rotten, little, American kids by then. We just didn't want to go into this kind of atmosphere. Already, there was a big change.

SI: What was the neighborhood like when you were growing up?

EP: My neighborhood when I was growing up.

SI: Yes. Did you grow up in the same neighborhood?

EP: No, no, no. My father moved our family, as a matter-of-fact, all of us. No, you're right. Most of my family, my sisters, were born in New York City, but when we were infants, we moved to New Jersey and we grew up in New Jersey. We grew up in Hackensack, and mostly in Maywood. ... I was the oldest, and I was not allowed to go to school. I was kept at home for the most part until I was six and I didn't go into kindergarten ever. I spoke only Yiddish until I was four. ... In school, I was apparently so large, they kept promoting me. I skipped a couple of grades and got to kids of my own size, but not my own age, after a while.

SI: So, what was ...

EP: ... What was life like then? ... It's hard for me to remember what life was like then for us because I think, in general, we were pretty protected, pretty sheltered as kids. ... I remember Maywood, when we were a little bit older, much more vividly. I remember school quite vividly. I loved the school. I used to read voraciously. ... I did start to experience a difference in the society because I was going out into it. ... This was the time before World War Two when there was a lot of, I don't know if you know anything about the German-American *Bund* in this country? Well, Maywood happened, at that time, to be a focus of it and one of the significant Nazis used to come to visit Maywood. His name was Putzi Hanfstaengl. So, Maywood was kind of a strongly German-centered town and there was Jewish prejudice, no question, but Maywood was also the place that my father and several others started a temple and it's still going there. It's been under a lot of trans-modifications, but it's still going. ... I do remember that when we had to walk past the public school to go to the temple on Jewish holidays it was a scary experience. Things have changed.

SI: So, with this presence of the *Bund*, would there be people flying Nazi flags, or that sort of thing?

EP: I didn't remember any of that, but I did remember being pointed out with unpleasant words, and things like that.

SI: Were there any marches?

EP: I remember one, but not well.

SI: Do you remember hearing the news about the big rally in Madison Square Garden? This was when there was almost a riot between communist protesters and the *Bund*?

EP: I get a bit confused about that, and I don't know if that was the rally. Do you remember the people who were present in that rally? ... I was urged by one of my friends to be an usher at a rally when I was a teenager. The rally was in Madison Square Garden.

SI: No. I don't remember who was there.

EP: No? ... Fredrick March was one of the stars. This was, I think an anti-war [rally].

SI: Was it the America First rally?

EP: No, it was not. I don't remember it. I don't remember it, but your government remembers. It's still on the books, that kind of thing. Do you know that? It's still on, for years, for years I was actually interviewed by the Feds because of my presence at that rally.

SI: Were you involved in it or were you just working as an usher?

EP: No, I wasn't involved. I had no idea what was going on. It was just a neat thing to do. Teenage friends ask you to do that. "Sure." Sure, you'd do that. A whole bunch of interesting things happened as a result of it, only I wasn't aware of it for a very long time.

SI: How did it affect your life?

EP: It affected my life this way. My life after the war was show business, theater, before the war, too. I was blacklisted and I didn't know about it for four years. I just didn't know it. Finally, the Feds, the FBI, came to interview me. I gave them coffee and my wife and I thought, "What are they doing here? This is strange and interesting." ... Just because I knew people like Elia Kazaan, Sheryl Crawford, who had communist associations and some of my best friends had these same associations. They put me on the list. I was on the list.

LO: How did you find out you were on the list? Was it when they came?

EP: I found out, when after four years of not being able to get jobs as an actor, somebody said, "You stupid ass, you're blacklisted." I kept on working in theater. I worked on all kinds of stuff. I became a writer and a producer, a director.

SI: Can I ask you about your career towards the end of the interview?

EP: All right.

SI: Can you tell us about your elementary and high school years?

EP: About my elementary school, I remember a number of things, vividly. It was a really interesting school, looking back, because it was progressive in ways that have not been reached since. I started languages when I was in middle school. It was also retrogressive at the same time. Every single day, we would go into the auditorium and our principal, Miss Elizabeth Edwards, would lead us all in singing hymns, and this went on every day. I didn't realize what it was, but that's how I learned an awful lot of Christian hymns. I loved school. I loved the teachers and all those things that we did. You know, girls had classes like domestic science, they called it, and they'd make these wonderful (stainless steel?) cookies which I love to this day. I took classes in manual training, which are objects which may still be around after all these decades. ... You did all of these things and you learned all of these things, which just doesn't go on in school today. I learned to type because I could spell. If you could spell you were given the

privilege of learning how to type. I learned French. I learned Latin, and I didn't realize anything was out of the ordinary. When I went to high school, I stayed there through the ninth grade ... and high school was quite different. In high school, I used to do theater pieces, monologues, and so on. I worked with plays a lot, worked with the magazine, worked with the newspaper. It was continually like that.

SI: What spurred your interest in the theater?

EP: I don't know. ... The first time I walked onto the stage, when I was six or seven, I must have thought it was the greatest thing in the world, and it just stayed. Nobody else in the family that I know of was connected ... in any way.

SI: How did your parents feel about your interest in the theater?

EP: They put up with it all through school, but after that, they thought I should forget all that nonsense. I didn't forget the nonsense. I stayed with the nonsense.

LO: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

EP: Yes, we knew we weren't well-to-do, but we were never without food. My father had a small factory, and he used to give jobs whenever he possibly could to any of his family, or relatives who were out of work, or literally, totally broke. ... We had a house and they would live in our house with us. As a kid, this was all fine. This was all great. I didn't realize the incredible pressure and strain it was putting on my family. We eventually lost the house for six hundred dollars. ... So, the Depression had a significant impact on us, but as kids, we took it in stride. We had something to eat and something to wear all the time, and my mother saw to it that we were spotless when we went to school.

SI: So, your father remained employed throughout the Depression.

EP: Yes, he did. He was his own boss, which was really remarkable because he had practically no formal schooling. He did all his accounts. He, at one point, employed sixty people, but he worked like eighteen hours a day, seven days a week. That was too much for any human being, but that's what being your own boss was. ... As I remember, the operators would say, "Give me work. Give me work." He had to continually supply the materials, so, that they would work.

LO: What was it exactly that he did?

EP: He ran a dress factory. They used to manufacture dresses, and then they were sold to various companies. He was the manufacturer, and he was doing very well. ... Then the early stages of the mafia came, and you had to pay money and protection. I don't know whether you know about incomes in those days. He paid out one hundred thousand dollars when annual income of five thousand dollars made you rich. So, he never grew. The business got smaller and smaller, but we ate, we had a roof over our heads, even when we had a roof to an apartment instead of a house. The more I think about it, the more remarkable he was.

SI: Did the unions and the labor movement ever play a part in your father's business?

EP: I don't know anything about that. I don't remember anything about the unions at the time. I do remember ... that we had to pay to make sure that the dresses got to where they were going. I knew that he could look at anything, and capture it and reproduce it, but that didn't do him any good. He had to turn out work ... as hard as he could. So, he did.

SI: So, was he a trained tailor?

EP: He was a trained tailor and I don't know where he learned that training. He was a brilliant, resourceful, and strangely, a very dignified man all the time, which again, you don't see at the time, but you see in retrospect. ... I didn't find out anything more about, I'm still trying [to find] ... out what, possibly, I can about the family from him until, as I said before, until I was in my thirties. ... I was on one of my trips to Europe, theatrical trips, and he told me to look up some people ... connected to the family, and that was the first I ever heard, we were descended from the Margraf Polonsky.

LO: Did your mother work?

EP: She used to work from time to time in the factory, but her job was at home with five kids and taking care of things. That was more than enough. We're nowhere near WWII.

SI: We'll get there.

LO: When did you start thinking about going to college?

EP: I didn't think about going to college. I wanted to go into the theater. I didn't want to go to college. I wanted to go right into the theater, but I got a scholarship to Bergen Junior College. So, I went. I worked a whole lot of shows. Work, work, work, shows, magazines, [and] newspapers. I had a wonderful time there and I also learned something. ... Then I said, "Okay, I've gone this far in college, I've gone for two years, now I'm going into the theater." My father said, "No, you're going to school. You're going to go to Rutgers." He couldn't afford me going to Rutgers and I couldn't afford going to Rutgers. So, at Rutgers I got a partial scholarship and went. ...

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

EP: They were a hundred percent in support. They thought he was absolutely wonderful, wonderful.

SI: Did you ever see how the New Deal affected your neighborhood?

EP: No, I didn't see any of that. I wasn't aware of it.

SI: Were you aware of any of the New Deal's programs for the arts?

EP: Yes, and I was aware of the WPA in the theater. In fact, I worked at them. I worked with, what the heck was it? I worked in the production of *Androcles and the Lion*. I remember that. I don't remember what I did anymore. I was seeing more WPA theater when I was working there. ... [I'll] tell you that, it was hard to get jobs. So, I was aware of it that way. I can't remember when that was. That was also before the war.

LO: Where did you live while in Rutgers in 1939?

EP: I lived off campus, ... I can't remember [where]. I boarded in more than one; I boarded in three different places while I was at Rutgers. ... The one I remember most vividly was, they were ancient, sort of, tiny people and they just insisted that I drink a cup of hot water and lemon every morning because it would do me a world of good. ... They were very sweet, and I did it. I remember sleeping in a bed, big dark arch of a headboard, and I can't remember the street. One of the other beds, I remember, was really a sort of laid out couch in another lady's house. The third place, I don't remember at all, except it was near the football field. No, it wasn't, it was near the soccer field. No, it wasn't, right across, right behind the gym or someplace.

SI: Neilson Field?

EP: Yeah. Oh, I'm sure. There wasn't any other field at that time.

SI: Is it across from the ROTC?

EP: I don't remember. It was behind what was then the big gym.

SI: The new gym?

EP: What's the new gym?

SI: Today students call it the old gym, but everyone called it the new gym.

EP: You [know] where the Student Center is?

SI: Yes, right next to it is the gym.

EP: That's the gym, okay. Behind that there was a field. ... Behind that field, I lived. The last place that I recall.

SI: Like Ray Street?

EP: I can't remember. ... There's another thing I remember. [I remember] going to the cafeteria in Winants. You know, I have stories about that; ... having your meal ticket every week and getting it punched. ... When I didn't do that, I would, mostly, go to ... (Doc Kaufman's Soda Fountain Place?) and have my two meals in the day, tuna fish on toast and a chocolate shake, twenty cents. You're on a budget of three dollars a week.

LO: Did you work while in school?

EP: As a matter-of-fact, that time, the thing I remember most was, they were very clever. They used my talents. There was a big celebration in which the president at the time, Dr. Clothier, sent out invitations all over the country, maybe the world, to come to the great event at Rutgers. What was the year? It might have been one of the bicentennial, or sesquicentennial, something centennial and I signed all of the handwritten signatures of Clothier's and I got to do his signature better than he did, hundreds and hundreds of them. I could do it to this day.

SI: So if we look at the archives it's probably yours.

EP: It's my signature, not his.

SI: Did you interact with Clothier and Metzger?

EP: No, no. I've met them, of course, but I didn't interact with them. Metzger was ... in retrospect, not funny at all. ... He was the perfect grouchy, grouchy dean.

SI: Of course, the people who knew Clothier said he really fit the mold of what they thought a college president should be.

EP: Perfectly, perfectly. You couldn't have gotten a more picture perfect president than Clothier. He was just ideal. ... Metzger was right out of Dickens, he really was.

SI: Did you go to chapel?

EP: Had to, every week. Yes.

SI: Do you remember any of the speakers or other aspects of mandatory chapel?

EP: No, I don't. ... I do remember something, but I don't know if you can put this in here. It was a typo one week, it was not *Agnus Dei*, they dropped the G. That I remember.

LO: Were you uncomfortable with mandatory chapel?

EP: I was kind of annoyed. I put up with it because at the same time, when Jewish holidays occurred here, it was also a problem, [like] how to eat properly. I was still very, very, heavily influenced by my mother and father and I would try to stay with the Jewish dietary law during the holidays when I was still on campus. ... I had a classmate, who is a professor here, and remained here forever, Milt Seidon, and his family had a restaurant in town. I used to eat there.

SI: Did you join the Jewish fraternity?

EP: I didn't.

SI: Did you consider joining one?

EP: Yes. I wanted to very much and then I got rushed by a couple of them. ... Then I realized there are the Jewish fraternities and there are non-Jewish fraternities and my best buddy at the time was in a non-Jewish fraternity. ... I thought, this is not fraternity and I just got turned off by the whole thought, of all of it. Later on, my son didn't get turned off. He went and joined a fraternity.

SI: We hear a lot about the divisions on campus like the Jew and Gentile fraternities, and non-fraternity.

EP: That was all here.

SI: Can you tell us about your experience?

EP: I can't remember what we used to call ourselves. ...

SI: Scarlet Barbs?

EP: No. We were ... off-campus ... No.

SI: Commuter club?

EP: It wasn't a club. We didn't do any of that. ... As I told you before, there were 1700 of us, mostly in these small campuses, which I thought were very large campuses at the time. ... The school I thought was very large school at the time and, nevertheless, you would get to meet, not just your own class, but the members of other classes. I have a lot of friends in the Class of 1942, Class of 1943 and I have friends in Class of 1939 and 1940. As a matter-of-fact, I still have friends in the Class of 1940, who I see once in a while, ... the Class of 1941 and I have friends from Class of 1942, who I still see once in a while. So, Rutgers made that kind of impact on me, but made the impact, I think, because I went back to reunions. ... I felt greater and greater attachment to this organization and school because of how I saw the people grow, which was kind of wonderful. I was rather brought up short at the last reunion because it seemed to me it had nothing to do with reunion, but only with fund raising. That was a big disappointment. ... Yes, there's a lot of fund raising that goes on through these reunions and that's part of the process. This was so blatant. Where did it turn me off to? We're deep in WWII, I can tell.

LO: We're getting there right now. What was campus life like as the war was approaching? Did people talk about this country's involvement in the war?

EP: Sure, there was talk of it, but I don't think it was fear of it, at least not with the kids I hung out with. They thought we were going to get into it and we thought we should. We thought we should.

SI: Were you in the ROTC at the time?

EP: No. I worked for the magazine. I worked for the newspaper a little bit. I was in the theater group here, and I took a lot of French, which stays with me.

LO: What were your plans after graduation?

EP: Go into the show business.

LO: Did the attack on Pearl Harbor cause you to enlist?

EP: Yes. I enlisted shortly thereafter. My show stopped and I went right down and I enlisted.

SI: What were you doing between your graduation and Pearl Harbor?

EP: Looking for jobs. Getting whatever I could, and looking for jobs, or actually working. Jobs were few and far between. It was still, strangely enough, Depression. Still I thought Depression in 1941, it was a long time Depression. ...

SI: While you were in the theater, did you work with Jane Inge at NJC?

EP: Yes, but ... mostly on this campus. You know about Jane Inge?

SI: Yes. A few people I've interviewed mention Jane Inge.

EP: The most astounding thing I remember about Jane Inge was going to her apartment and seeing her portrait. Is it here still on campus?

SI: I think so.

EP: It's the artist Sargent's portrait of Jane Inge. You have to see it. I remember that. I remember that nice theater she had, we didn't have a nice theater over here.

SI: Would you say that she had influenced you?

EP: No, not a bit.

SI: Not a bit?

EP: Not a bit. I didn't want to go into theater her way, that much. She was very RA. She was very Royal Academy kind of person. I wanted the real theater, which I got.

LO: Being of the Jewish faith, how did you feel about what the Nazis were doing? Did you feel disturbed on a very personal level?

EP: Absolutely. Absolutely. I was more than disturbed. I was scared, because I would experience something almost everyday in Maywood and something on campus everyday. You'd experience something that was not a clean cut, really American, All-American feeling anywhere.

There were a lot of Nazi or German sympathizers, more than you believe. ... So Jews experienced a lot of prejudice and we knew it just sort of came with the job, because that's how we were brought up. We were brought up to be quiet, not to attract any attention, don't make any waves. I got over that, but not for many years. It's hard.

SI: Were there a number of Nazi sympathizers at Rutgers?

EP: I don't know. I didn't try to find out. They were here. Rutgers has a very checkered past like that. ... As an aside, I have a good deal of Paul Robeson material because I was going to do a book about him. If you're interested.

SI: Sure. While you were at Rutgers, did Robeson ever come to perform?

EP: No.

SI: No?

EP: Not that I remember. No.

SI: Do you remember going to New York City to see him perform?

EP: To see him perform? No. I didn't. He was not one of my idols. I saw him in some movies and I didn't understand the great attraction. I didn't think his voice was so great. I didn't think he was so beautiful. I didn't think he was a very good actor. I was focused on the performance. I didn't realize what a great person he was for years and he's constantly being labeled a communist. His communist sympathies turned me off for years, until I tried to help out some other people. ...

LO: ... Where and when did you enlist?

EP: I enlisted in New York City, probably in 1942, and was called to active service in September of 1942.

SI: What made you decide to enlist in the Air Corps?

EP: I knew I wanted to be a flyer. I knew I was gonna be a flyer at one place or another. I tried at first to get into the Navy, into the Air Force. There was a lot of the prejudice there. It was easier to get into the Air Force. So, I actually got into the Air Force for pilot training. I washed out as a pilot, out in California. I always blame it on weather. You're supposed to solo when you had eight and one-half hours and I was at the field up in the San Joaquin valley, which kept getting weathered in and it got to be nine hours and ten hours, eleven hours and twelve hours, twelve and a half hours, constantly being socked in, so they figured I wasn't gonna make a pilot. I must be scared, so they took me up on a flight, did Immelmans and loopy loops and I was grinning all the way through it. They decided that that wasn't it. I just didn't have it. I hadn't put in the time to get enough of the coordinates, so I washed out of pilot training and I went into navigation training. I trained as a navigator. Worked my tail off as a navigator because I

realized after a while at that particular time, if you didn't have the exact, or as close to exact data, and if you didn't do your work as hard as you could, you could screw things up, not just for you, but everybody else. Your pilot could be wonderful and your crew could be wonderful, and you can lose them all. So, I worked very hard and what could I tell you? That's what I did. It didn't come natural and I was shocked to find out that I was considered a good navigator.

SI: Do you remember anything about your initial physical interview and that process?

EP: The initial physicals took place in New York City and they were shocking to me. I was still one of those innocent kids and then we were shipped out. ... When I was finally called up, to Tennessee ... I remember riding by train with a fellow from my hometown, which was kind of nice and then we got to this place in Tennessee in the middle of the night. That was it. ... It was freezing rain and they just walked us in our civilian clothes for a mile or so to some barracks. Nothing to sleep on and nothing to eat. They gave us cold salami and coffee. I had never drunk coffee until then and they gave us a blanket, a piece, and we were all soaking wet and we were all totally miserable and that was my introduction to the military. I didn't think that I was going to care for it one bit. Things didn't improve until we were really assigned to the places and we were outfitted, had a place to sleep, and a place to eat, and a place to get dressed. ... Basic early training was kind of a blur, except that I knew that I could never, never run a mile the way that everybody had to. I kept trying. I think that that is kind of funny now because now, at my age, I walk five, six, seven miles a day. I don't think that much about it, but what kind of a kid was I? From there, where did we ship to?

SI: How did they decide if someone was a good candidate for pilot school?

EP: Oh, there were a whole bunch of tests one took. All kinds of eye and coordination tests and general information and IQ, all of it and a lot of coordination tests. So I passed all those to go to pilot training. Those tests were also what got me into navigation training.

SI: Did you realize at that point the difference between being an officer and being an enlisted man?

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EP: Since I qualified on the officer level I figured I'd go to cadet training. That's what I wanted to do in the Air Corps at the time.

SI: Where did you go for your basic? Did you go to Miami Beach?

EP: Pilot training?

SI: Yes.

EP: I was shipped out to California, to Dos Palos and that's where I stayed until I went down to pilot training. Then I was shipped down to Santa Ana, which was a reprocessing area. There I fell in with bad company. These were all the other pilots who had also washed out. They had

been there a little bit longer than me. They knew where to hang out and how to hang out, things like that, and how to get out of one detail or another. I learned all those techniques. I still didn't learn to smoke, though. Then I was shipped off to navigation training, which was at Hondo, Texas. At Hondo, Texas, it was really tough. The training was very hard and I really enjoyed it, except that it got so hot, we wasted away. I think I lost twenty pounds over one summer. They literally closed the camp for six weeks and sent us off into the mountains outside San Antonio to recuperate. Then we came back and we finished our training. I graduated, I think in August or September of 1943 as a navigator. But I remember vividly in navigation training, you train in Dakotas, and you have various seats for each of us cadet students to sit at, [and] do whatever we had to do. In each one of those seats, there was a round object, which is about this deep called the compass cover, which covers the compass. The compass cover served two purposes, the smell never left them because when you get bumping over the skies of Texas in the summertime, you threw up. People got sick all the time. The compass cover was the container. You had to clean it up, never got rid of the smell. I could smell a compass cover to this day. But after the training, I got a leave and then I was going to be matched up with my crew And my crew I met for the first time, in Davis-Monthan Field in Arizona. ... I knew at that time that I was gonna go to high altitude bombing missions the way everybody else does but then I found out I was going to go to B-24s instead of B-17s. I didn't know how much difference that was going to make, except that everybody wanted to get into the B-17s. Then we were sent to Lincoln to pick up our plane, Lincoln, Nebraska. We picked up the plane. It seems to me I am skipping. Yes, I am, because from Davis-Monthan, we had to go to New Mexico, into B-24 training. From there I was sent out to Alamogordo and at Alamogordo we did a lot of night flying, night missions so that our pilot can learn how to fly instruments and I remember one time coming back from one of those missions, instrument missions, and the bottom of the plane had green streaks on it. We were brushing tree tops and we didn't know it. It's mountainous there, beautiful, the Ruidoso Mountains outside of Alamogordo. ... After that, we went to Lincoln to pick up our plane to go overseas because we had our orders. I thought we were going to go to the Far East because we had backpacks, you know, parachutes. ... In the packs were kits that if you had to bail out you had to have different kinds of equipment to work with. ... There was a machete in there for the jungles and maps of the South Seas, so, of course, we went to England. We flew from Lincoln, we flew to Palm Beach. In Palm Beach, we spent the night. Palm Beach, at night, we flew down to Brazil to Fortaleza, Brazil, spent a little time there. At Fortaleza I took a walk in the jungle and met a friend of mine who lived two blocks away in Maywood, New Jersey. So, Jimmy Locklin, I forget where Jimmy was going, but I knew where I was going, I thought. Then we flew from Fortaleza to Belem, which is quite a long flight. Belem was the jump off point to go across to Dakar and that was my biggest, scariest chore because, for fourteen hours, I was the only one who, theoretically, knew where we were. ... As a matter-of-fact, at one point, I was the only one awake. Everybody was asleep because we were flying across the Atlantic.

LO: What kind of equipment did you use?

EP: I used everything I had. I ... shot the stars. I used my drift meter. I used my compasses. I used, I did all the stuff I've been trained to do. I used it all. There was so much time and I was so worried. ... Then my ETA came up, we were already supposed to be there. I didn't see it. ... Dawn was coming up, I couldn't shoot anymore stars. Where the hell were we? Actually, I had been looking at it without even recognizing it. Out of the whole Atlantic crossing, we were

right there. Thank God. Then from Dakar, we flew up the coast and we were supposed to go to Marrakesh, to be the jumping off point to go up to England, but we couldn't get through the Atlas Mountains. We haven't been using our oxygen all this time because the system wasn't installed. So, we couldn't get through the Atlas Mountains. So, we had to land in the desert at a place called Tindouf. Tindouf was a ... French Foreign Legion post and we were freezing cold and we had to stay there and we tried to stay, but they had no place for us to sleep. So, I climbed up into the fort and it was the same fort that was used in the early movie of the *Four Feathers* about the French Foreign Legion. It's a story you may or may not know, and I looked out over the desert and I couldn't believe I was there. It was magic. So I carved my initials ... the only time I ever did it. Then we went to Marrakesh the next day and I acted as translator for the crew, we had to wander around in the streets. Then we flew up to England after that. Oh, before that, in Marrakesh, I met Mort Sobin. He was on his way back. He was ferrying planes. He was on his way back to the United States in order to be home. ... He said, "I'll be home for New Year's Eve." I said, "I don't know where I'll be." ... I met him there. I also met Win Goulden, another Rutgers classmate there. Then we flew up to England. We flew ourselves far enough away from the Spanish coast to avoid the German patrols. We got to England and we hedgehopped across the country, and we ended up on the first base, and then they took the plane, and stole all our goodies that we brought along for ourselves, and we waited a long time. That's where I was finally assigned ... to the Carpetbaggers.

SI: Were you flying in formation?

EP: No, we were alone. We were transporting this new B-24 to England for use.

SI: Were there planes behind you?

EP: By ourselves.

SI: That must have been scary to go past the coast of Spain by yourself.

EP: You had to do all that. Yeah, well, I didn't know any different, now that I think about it. I never flew formation. Never.

SI: When you landed in, now you were in Dakar and then later Marrakesh, did it hit you all of a sudden that you were now in a war zone?

EP: No, I was still having a wonderful time, Extraordinary experiences, in places I ... never dreamed I would be. I knew that, you know, sleeping on corncobs in Dakar was not exactly the height of luxury, but it was great. It was different. ... It was exciting. ... I don't think we were really together entirely as a crew, although we had been together for a couple of months.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your crew?

EP: My pilot was Neil Ellis, country boy from Murfreesboro, Tennessee. I got to meet his wife Virgie Mae in Lincoln before we left and my co-pilot was Glen Stanislaus and his wife, Claudia. We met her, too. Everybody came to Lincoln. My father and mother came to Lincoln to say

goodbye, too. Ray Orwasky was my radioman, he was a nutty kid. Pete Pereda was the tail gunner, small little kid. Cecil Waters was our waist gunner. ... My bombardier, with this original crew, his name escapes me at the moment because we changed bombardiers. His name was Hartman, Lou Hartman. Who did I leave out? ... Actually, of the crew, we had dropped two of the crew when we moved, to become Carpetbaggers, but Salerno didn't stay with us. He went on to high altitude. ... You'll find it in the orders, in the papers.

SI: You kept the bombardier when you went on the Carpetbagger missions?

EP: We kept the bombardier when we went on the Carpetbagger missions and the bombardier had to be retrained as a night pilotage observer. ... That's how we worked. The bombardier would sit up in the nose of the plane and look down at the ground, and maps in Europe, at the time, were very meticulous about retaining the outlines of forests so that you could pinpoint your position there and you could see towns. You could see railroad tracks, you could see rivers and whatever we'd catch, whatever ambient light there was. There were other things you could make out, ... but that's what night pilotage consisted of. It was intended that he do that while I was working with my charts, with my winds, my dead reckoning, and with my G-box. A G-box was an early precursor of Loran. Loran is Long-range Navigational Instrument connecting a grid of radio signals from different places. G was much more detailed, much more precise. It was a British invention, which spread out only over the continent, and if you were really proficient with it, you could stretch it to go even, maybe 400 miles. Boy, did I get proficient. So, that's what I would do and the bombardier would do night pilotage. Well, Hartman got paralyzed. The fact that he was sitting up there ... and he couldn't work. He couldn't do anything. ... I would get angry, thank God, and I told Neil, after, "We'd got to get somebody who can do this." So we changed, thank God, but the bombardier was still scared. I couldn't figure out what he was scared about, because I, the navigator in a B-24, sat behind the bombardier with my back to his. We were back to back, and I was facing the feet of the pilot and co-pilot, which were up here about the nose wheel. They were up there, and I was down here and my desk was a flip lid, which came down, and I sat on a gun case, that was it and I had a light. In some planes, there was a shallow bubble to the sides so I would be able to do some shooting, if I had the opportunity, with the stars. That's the way I worked. ... I remember one night we were told to get ready to bail out because there was flak coming. We had been flying we only flew solo, alone at night, but we flew under an RAF night mission. ... We were in the area. So what that meant was, you'd strap on your chest pack, flip up your desk, put your papers away, I thought that was stupid because it's all supposed to be secret, and get ready to jump out through the nose wheel, if he would lower the nose wheel. If he don't lower the nose wheel, you were in a lot of trouble. So, that was the situation. We got past that.

SI: Did you have any bombardier training?

EP: No, I didn't. There were navigator-bombardiers. Navigator-bombardiers were generally used in smaller planes.

SI: Did you have any gunnery training?

EP: Yes. Small arms, nothing else.

SI: What was it like to train in the Southwest? You were learning pilotage out there.

EP: Yes.

SI: A lot of flyers that I have talked to, talk about how different it was, especially ones that went to England.

EP: Yes.

SI: I always got the sense that the training out there was kind of wasted because the environment was so different.

EP: Totally different.

SI: Yes.

EP: I don't think the training was wasted because you learned to recognize features. The features were drastically different but the English maps were so, so much more detailed than the maps in this country because they have to retain these forest features, which have always stayed with me. ... We have nothing like that. ... Any retraining in navigation over there, I thought was okay. I thought the adjustment was okay because it was easier to recognize places. ... At high altitude ... missions, the lead navigator is the one who is in charge, and everybody else is kind of following in formation.

SI: Were shortages ever a problem during training?

EP: No. Not that I was aware of. ... The training was, in retrospect, really very good, considering the compression of time and intensity. ... What surprised me was that the inventions which have since made navigators totally obsolete ... I found out that nobody uses navigators anymore, they're totally obsolete, it's all done with machines, I don't see why we couldn't have used that more, then. I used to use radio not nearly often enough because we were told the Germans could also home in on the same kind of device that we were using. ...

SI: How did your crew's relationship develop?

EP: That's interesting. Military separates the officers and the men. We were in one Nissen hut and they were called Nissen huts. Our Nissen hut on our base, when we finally got to have a base, because we were secret, nobody had anything for us, was a long tin hut and we were in it, the four officers, the pilot, co-pilot, the bombardier, the navigator, from two crews, we were in the hut. We had a potbellied stove. ... Our bunks were made up of what they called, ... biscuits. They're cushions hard as rock, which was, three biscuits made up the length of a cot. ... In order to maintain the stability of the cot, you had to wrap the whole biscuits in a blanket and in order to survive, you had to promote as many blankets as you possibly could. I remember sleeping in my uniform, in my long underwear, under several blankets that were over my head, in order to beat the cold. ... I maintained a continuing relationship with my pilot. After the war, I sent him

Christmas cards every year. I flew down and saw him twice after ... flying cross country in a private plane. I sent my oldest son to visit with him. I still try to maintain communication but I cannot anymore. I don't even know if he's alive. He developed Alzheimer's several years ago and I was in touch with his wife all these years. ... So, I don't know what has happened. I've tried every which way to phone. ... Communication with my co-pilot stopped almost immediately after the war. The bombardier, I continued off and on for years. He and the co-pilot and ..., the others, not anybody, just me. So, I felt closer to them in some ways than I do to anybody else because it was life and death, and there we were. ... Our strange missions in the Carpetbaggers, it seemed more important to be even more close than ever. I don't know. ...

LO: How did you feel about being a part of this outfit and completing these special missions?

EP: Oh, I was glad to go into this funny outfit. I was glad to do that. It's theatrical. It's different. Then I found out we were secret, oh, that's even better, but then I found out that we were so secret, we didn't have a base. They had a terrible time getting anything for us and I didn't realize at the time that this was really because the whole organization was really being set up because it was the brainstorm of the OSS. They pooled something with the British called Composite Command and they created our outfit. ... I knew there was a comparable outfit, American outfit, in Italy and there was a British outfit, which also did this kind of mission. ... We used to get our orders from, basically, ... the Underground. ... How those orders came to us, I never knew until six months ago. I was doing my job ... to get us to there and get us back. The environment was strange because we didn't go to work until nighttime and I have to get out to the flight line to make sure that the compasses were in order and would be ready for the missions. I have to get our mission information before its crew leaders, so I could plan the whole mission. So, I had quite a lot to do and I didn't realize, I never thought about it that the others didn't have that much to do. That was fine. ... I can still see these dark, these black planes sitting against the twilight ... sky. ... The crews coming out to their planes getting ready to fly our missions. At one point, we got protection for our base from Prince Obolensky and his Rangers. The Rangers were trained, they were trained to kill with knives, and nobody goes near the planes. They told us to stay away from the planes, too, so we were given instructions we were allowed to our planes, which I also found kind of fascinating. We had members of the Polish Air Force come and worked with our outfit for a little bit. I don't know too much about that. It was interesting all of the time to me and constantly tense. There was never any relaxation and I think some of the most fascinating things to me were meeting the agents because we would drop agents, too. ... We were able to drop agents through the joe hole. The joe hole was where the ball turret used to be and the agents and all of the containers that we held which contained all kinds of, we never knew, ammunitions, guns, money, were sent out on trip lines. The parachutes would open right away. They better, because we go down to 200 feet at stall speed and send these things out and the agents, when we had agents. So, that was what our mission is about.

LO: Did you know what you were sending out besides the agents?

EP: No, I didn't. That was one of the revelations I just had, too, this past June. I didn't know. If I had known, I might have been more scared.

LO: What were you sending?

EP: I don't know oftentimes, but then that mission, which I sent you the clipping about, that mission we were carrying limpet mines. Limpet mines are explosives. I didn't know that. I didn't know we were carrying that. ... That particular mission, and those limpet mines, were a turning point for the war effort, of all things. That's why the Belgians were so impressed by us because they had never been able to make a big enough, the underground-effort of any kind. Their effort was mainly harassments. This was a major thing that they had to do and the reason they had to do it is because this whole massive ... war effort was stalled and they had no way of liberating Antwerp Harbor without blowing it up, but that would be self defeating, so by giving this stupid little outfit, our Carpetbaggers, a commission to carry forward this limpet mines project to the Belgian underground, they would carry out the single strand mining around the harbor to protect the harbor. The harbor was saved. They were able to use the harbor for a big push toward ending the war. It helped to liberate Belgium, which was terribly important to them. ...

SI: Did you have a standard tour of duty?

EP: Yes. The idea was you went over there, and you flew thirty-five missions and then you would come back to the States, and be reassigned. When I got twelve missions in, we got word that there was no longer any top, you were just going to keep on flying until you were used up. Well, there was such pandemonium on that and every other base, I guess, and so they decided to put a top back on. ... The morale just went, instantly, to hell. You figured you were automatically dead. So, the top was put back on at thirty-five missions. I flew thirty-five missions. My records say I flew thirty-six missions, I think I did.

LO: What was the amount of time that you flew these missions in?

EP: I flew them between March and August. I flew them in six months and I was back in the United States in September of 1944, ready to go to another theater.

SI: What can you tell us about your first mission? Where was it to, what was it like?

EP: We had two training missions, but they counted as mission times because we were actually going in harms way. ... I remember, vividly, one of these missions because my pilot was the co-pilot, he had to learn the process and procedure. I was along as an observer to see what they were doing and there was another observer on the mission, as well, from another crew and we were sitting up behind the pilots. We were flying a mission to Norway and at that early stage of the Carpetbaggers, we flew in the light of the moon because then we could see something. Then we found out, so could somebody else see something, so we got to prefer the dark. ... On that mission, something happened to one of the bomb bay doors, the door on the right was flapping, hanging loose, and could not get back on its tracks. ... To me it sounded like the biggest noise in the world and everybody is standing on the ground looking up at us, that's my impression. Of course, we were flying over, first, open sea and then over snow covered, and it was white, white sky and white moon, white ground and us, black, right in the middle of it. This door had to get off and it had to get kicked off. So, I was the closest to the door and I had to kick it off. Moose,

he was a moose, Moose Martin, hung onto me, and I kicked off the door. That part worked out all right, but then when we saw where we were supposed to have rendezvous, vehicles with headlights. We turned around. The only vehicles with headlights in Norway were the Germans. So, the mission was never completed. So that was one of the first missions I did. The other missions, I cannot tell you what. I know I went over as far as Switzerland. I know I went down to the South of France. I know I went up toward Denmark. I went all over everywhere, but I was concentrated in this area of my charts and I know when we got into drop zone, my pilot would have to pick up the signals from the ground and the signals usually consisted of a couple of flares ... in some secluded but open enough area. He would have to get into position and fly this plane. We flew, generally, about 7000 feet. We'd go down to 200 feet to make the drop and line up on the lights and then make the drop of containers or the agent, or both and then we would depart. Frequently, we could not make the drop. ... Once we had to bring back an agent and when we brought back an agent, our base was socked in, and we couldn't go back to our base. We had to land at a British base. ... We couldn't go into the base because we were a secret outfit so we all stayed out there in the airplane. We did get some food. ... The agent sat on the ground under the plane. Gasoline was dripping into a paper cup that he had. I can see him now. I can see what he's doing, I can't see his face. He sat on the ground and he was smoking a cigarette and he flicked it into the cup and I thought, "My, God!" What he knew was that, as a fluid, it would put out the cigarette. The fumes are what would ignite, but I didn't know that. I remember that. I remember working very hard with the G to pinpoint things like that. Once we were shot at when we came back over the coast and back into England. I took a fix instantly there and I pinpointed the spot. That was the only time we ever got ... no, we got shot at one other time. The one other time we got shot at was in the south of France. ... I knew where we were. We had swung the compasses the night before, but for this mission I haven't done it and we had to get off in a hurry. We were lost in the south of France. I just ... knew where we were. I couldn't convince anybody exactly where we were. That's a terrible situation on a plane because everybody is then petrified. So, I said, "Fly over there," and I told him where to go. So, he flew the heading and they took a shot at us. See, I knew there was a gun at the place over there and I figured they would take a shot at us. I knew nothing would ever hurt us because we were impervious, we were young. So I knew exactly where we were and I was right. So, we got back home and everything was okay. I never confessed for years what I did. ... Other things that happened on our missions: ... I don't remember seeing the drop zones, it was not my job to see them. I remember making reports after missions. We had to report to our intelligence officer after our mission. ... Afterwards, we were given a couple of eggs and a shot of whiskey. Big treats. ... Can I tell you [about] life on the base?

SI: Sure.

EP: Life on the base. We had an officers' club and there was an enlisted men's club and they were both small, but they were both better than nothing because we mostly couldn't get into town. ... So, as a result, one of the officers from another crew had himself a dog, a playmate. ... The dog was a Pekinese, cuter than hell, but everybody knows that's a lady's dog. But this peke, Mr. Brown, didn't know that, so, the first time after a couple of months when ladies were allowed on the base ... they all fawned all over this dear little lady's dog and he'd yap at them. He didn't know what these creatures were. They were mortified. ... Then when Mr. Brown's owner didn't

come back we didn't know what to do with Mr. Brown, so we kept him around for a long time. Then we gave him to one of the families on a farm, off the base.

LO: Did people wonder what you were doing and what did you tell them?

EP: We were doing secret missions.

LO: Oh, you said it. So it was allowed to be discussed.

EP: They knew that much. Oh, we weren't a big base, we were only, I don't think, more than 600, we were a little tiny base. ... People in town, a little town, oh, dear God, what was the name of it, the larger town was Kettering, the small town ... It will come to me, or it may not. It's in the papers someplace. They would occasionally come to base. They knew. I'll give you an idea. They knew it was a secret base. Eventually, one time, I did a sentimental journey back, in the 1950s, to the base with my brother-in-law. I got to the town of Kettering and figured I might be able to find my way back, because it was so secret. "Oh, yes, you want to know where the secret base is?" The town people would tell me where the secret base was in the 1950s, then they said, "Not only that, it became another secret base." They got other secret installations out there, and then that went bust, too.

LO: So, only secret covert missions were on your base?

EP: Yes.

LO: It wasn't mixed?

EP: No. Everybody involved with the missions, all the support, everybody, had remained with the base and with the mission.

SI: What can you tell us about meeting the Joes on the base? I was told by Dowling that you ate in the same cafeteria.

EP: Did, yeah, but it wasn't a big general cafeteria. This was not a cafeteria. This is, I remember the officers' mess was Dowling a ... What was Dowling's position?

SI: I think he did the same thing you did.

EP: He did. I'm going to look up his name.

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

LO: This continues an interview with Mr. Eugene Polinsky.

SI: We were talking about the Joes.

EP: And meeting them and what they were like.

SI: Yes.

EP: I didn't get any opportunities to meet with Joes at that time. I have since done so. I have not only met them at our Carpetbagger reunions. I met, when I was in Belgium this past June, I have met people who were there on the ground, who were part of the Underground, who were part of the reception committee. It has made an entire difference in my life from now on. I feel community with them that I never really experienced and knew before because I was up in an airplane and they were there on the ground and never actually met, but now we met. I'll never be the same. I can't get over it. I cannot get over the range of gratitude the Belgians feel toward Americans. It really overwhelms me. They see Americans who have shed American blood on their soil for their liberation and nobody does that. They took me to this great huge American cemetery. I went to Bastogne. I went to the Ardennes. They sure took me all over. I became steeped in a way that I never had from doing these missions. ... The way they honored us, very touching, very overwhelming to me. The Joes that I met, I would never recognize. They were quite ordinary looking, but they were very skilled. They were very skilled, not only in language skills but in sabotage. That was their job.

SI: Could you tell if they were French?

EP: The ones I met were French. At the Carpetbagger reunion, was it last year or the year before, I met some Norwegian agents and I met a French agent who has since written about his experiences. He was very interesting and outgoing. He's different, but he's very colorful. The ones I remember were deliberately not colorful. But I can't tell you much more about them. I do know there were women agents as well. We never dropped one.

LO: What did they wear when they were dropped?

EP: Good question. ... Do you know what a bunting is, for baby? You know, in which you have feet and legs complete? This was like an adult size, complete overalls so that, you know, nothing would fly out. They were completely covered. That's what they wore during a drop. Feet, legs it was all in one piece. I always thought of it as a bunting, it was kind of funny. What else?

LO: Did your plane have a name or special markings?

EP: Did it have a name or that the marking of? Yes, there were markings on it. ... A lot of the crews did, you know, the typical designs, decorations of some kind, of a dark lady, or ... I can't remember. We didn't fly a particular plane. We flew a plane, whatever was needed for the mission. There was never "our" plane. A plane was assigned to us for each particular mission.

SI: What were some of the benefits and pitfalls of flying a B-24? I heard they weren't as comfortable.

EP: Not comfortable at all. The benefits: they were supposedly one of the most stable of planes and they have a bigger capacity ... than the B-17. The complaints: they were colder, they were draftier; they were noisier, but that's what you got and that's what you did.

SI: You said, you were usually flying around 7000 feet?

EP: Yeah.

SI: Is that high enough that you had to use oxygen?

EP: No. That's one of the reasons we dropped two members of the crew because we flew low altitude. We no longer needed waist gunners. We kept the tail gunner and the top turret and we were a reduced crew. We had no oxygen system. It was stripped out, so that we could have, theoretically, a little bit more speed. We flew over the English Channel at 500 feet to avoid the German radar and then we would climb and when you climb you affect the radar readings as well. ... Then we would work at an altitude, generally, 7000 feet for best observation till we got within the area of our drop zone and then we drop down to a very low drop speed.

LO: How did you feel when you were in very low altitude? Were you very nervous then? Were you scared?

EP: Just as much as I ever was. It's all the same. I knew we'd be all right as much as we were going to be all right in any of these missions. The fact that we were at stall speed, we had to do that, so the containers wouldn't burst. It worked most of the time.

SI: What were the psychological affects of an approaching mission? Some people say they needed to work themselves up for a mission.

EP: That's true. You got worked up for it. You work yourself up. You become keyed up in just about every which way. ... When a mission is scrubbed, the let down is quite sharp because when you finish the mission, you're letting down as you're going back and it works on you in a different kind of feeling altogether. ... There was never, on my part, any sense that we were ever going to die. We were, no, I was just going to keep on doing this. I just wanted to make sure that I could get all of my missions in because after a while, the odds got to be against you.

SI: Do you know what kind of casualty rates your group had?

EP: I didn't know, until comparatively recently, because we didn't discuss that then. ... Once in a while, we would get a crew back. I heard some stories. ... We had forty percent casualties, which was quite a bit. ... If I had known that, too, it would have affected me. So, I guess, it was, in general, not talked about. What did do a lot for us is to know that our CO, the old man, he was twenty-nine, he was gray, heavy, flew a DC-3 into the South of France, set it on the ground, in occupied country, picked up three members of a crew that had been shot down and flew them back out. Now, that's a big boost. We would hear stories like that. Other stories were not so big. I had one of my friends come back, we used to call him Duffy, his name was Adolph, that's why we called him Duffy. He had been shot down and he was twitching when he told the story. He had been hiding in a barn. He had been hunted. The German soldier had found him, only he had found an ax, he said he split that German soldier in two. He can't get over it. ... That has remained with me. ...

SI: Would you have been treated as POWs or as spies if you were shot down?

EP: Spies.

LO: Did you bring uniforms on the plane?

EP: Yes.

LO: Then why would you be treated as a spy?

EP: Because of the nature of our missions. We knew that. We didn't want to get shot down. The crews that were shot down, we heard from, several of them got back, but they were back through the efforts of the Underground. Anybody who were captured and made prisoner, I don't know all of the stories, but there were prisoners. They didn't kill them all. So, I don't know how they decided.

SI: Would you only know about your present mission and nothing else?

EP: Yes.

SI: Did you know what other planes in your group were doing?

EP: No, there were similar missions, I knew that. That was all that I knew. ... They had to go on similar missions. Sometimes more than one crew would go to this particular location that I flew that one night. ... As a matter-of-fact, that's one of the reasons, that mission that was covered in the paper ... had been attempted, this was the fourth time. One of them was shot down, two of them were socked in, and they just plain had to do it. ... We finally ... were lucky enough to do it. So, it has been a very different kind of war, since understanding war as far as what we did. Further than that, as a result of this, and the story in the paper, I got a telephone call the next morning from somebody who said, "Thank you for saving my life." Well, what do you say to that? He was one of the 'Hidden Children.' The Hidden Children were Jewish children who were hidden by the Catholic priests and nuns, hidden from the Germans all during the war. ... He was one of the kids who survived and then he told me that he knew of another one. ... I met him since and he introduced me to several more and, since, I've become an honorary member of the Hidden Children and I'm going to see some more of them next weekend. You don't know when one thing is going to lead to another.

LO: Are you glad that you did not know about your casualty rates?

EP: Yes, I am. ... I don't know how it would have affected me, but it couldn't have been a healthy positive thing. I would have become fearful, probably not done my job as well or maybe stayed for something. Yeah, there were people who were afraid as it was. I was lucky. I was, I felt careful, not terrified. If I were terrified, I don't think I would have been able to work at all.

SI: Were you ever given training on what you would do if you were shot down and had to bail out?

EP: Briefly, yes. We were told that we should look for people, ... farmers who might help and to try to get to the Underground as quickly as possible. ... Once they knew we were Americans, and we've been in contact with the Underground, that was our mission. I also found out from these Underground people, there were within the Underground fringes, people who spied on them and turned them in.

SI: Do you know if all your missions were over occupied territory or did you ever go into Germany?

EP: All occupied territory, so, no missions in Germany. France, Belgium, Denmark, Norway.

SI: Did you ever make it into London?

EP: Yes. Yes, I did during the blitz. You mean ...

SI: ... Yes.

EP: Yeah, ... and I remember one night, when the buzz bombs were busy... [I went] out into the country to visit some friends, who would sleep in their cellars every night. ... I refused, so they turned their sofa upside down and a couple of chairs and let me sleep under that, on the floor in their living room. ... They went and slept in the basement, but I just, I wasn't gonna do that. ... One night in London, I was down near the (Strand?), and when you hear the buzz bombs, you can hear them, and when the sound cuts off, you know they're gonna drop. This one was close. ... I heard it coming right in my direction and I heard it stop and I tried to run in four directions all at once. ... It dropped a block away, but I'll never forget that feeling. I couldn't go, which way to turn? There was tremendous amount of destruction in London and the people were wonderful, wonderful. On one of them leaves, there was an air raid ... and we all went down into the Underground and there were rows and rows of people sleeping, and singing and talking. This is what they did during an air raid. I loved London during the blitz. It was ... great. It was the warmest feeling I've ever felt anywhere. We were all in this together. We were close. They couldn't do enough for us. They even got meat, of course, it was horsemeat ... It was a vivid and exciting, exciting time and when I go back to London and look at it now, and it's so, not London anymore. It's not English anymore. I think a great deal has been missed, but I'm sure they're glad it's missed.

SI: Did you go to the theater?

EP: Sure, I went to the theater during the war. I saw, I think I saw Margot Fonteyn dance there. ... I remember an Ivor Novello musical, one of those musicals that will never translate into an American theater. We were there. I don't remember a lot of what I saw. I did go to the theater during the war. ... Some of them went on all of the time. They said, "We'll never close," and they didn't. I went on leave to Edinburgh, Neil, my pilot and I went. Where else did I go on leave? No place else, I didn't have that many.

SI: I guess you might have had the opportunity to go to Paris.

EP: No, not until after the war. I did go shortly after the war. Paris was not as lovely as London London all destroyed. Paris was very, "We gotta make do," and they were all busy 'making do.' Six or seven years after the war they were still making do. ... So, it wasn't lovely, cheerful Paris. It was a kind of a wonderful Paris, for me, because I was there visiting some actors who showed me the town. I saw French theater ... and made some friends. One of those friends, she won the Best Actress award last year.

LO: Who's that?

EP: Judith Magre. I had to look her up on the internet. I sent her the clipping from the *Times*. We hadn't been in touch. She and my wife had gotten very close from the time we were there. In fact, there's a little story. Mary and she went to the fleamarket in Paris, the fleamarket, and they got to be terribly good friends. So Mary thought she would get Judith a going away present and Judith had admired an amethyst necklace, that she told Mary to buy for herself because it was just ideal. Mary bought the necklace and when we parted at the hotel, Mary gave Judith this present, the amethyst necklace, and then Judith gave Mary a present, and Mary opened the present and it was a pair of amethyst gloves to go with the necklace, which has nothing to do with the war.

SI: How did, did the invasion change your mission at all?

EP: I happened to have been flying the night before D-Day and we weren't told. We knew it was imminent. I came back over the coast, I saw all of this activity there, "What the hell is going on? This is important, I better report this," and I did. I reported it back to base and I woke up in the morning and I found out it was D-Day. That was my only connection with D-Day, but I saw it all happening and I didn't know what it was.

SI: Was your morale affected because you could not see the progress your missions led to?

EP: That's an interesting question because I don't think our morale was connected in any way with how our missions were being achieved. We knew we were a secret outfit. We knew we were getting orders from the Underground to achieve their objectives. We knew these orders were processed by both British and the American intelligence services, and what disappointed us was not being able to complete a mission. Then we knew that the Underground wouldn't be able to carry out what was intended. But whenever we did complete a mission, we felt a great deal of satisfaction. ... Our satisfaction came from completing missions, not from realizing what the missions themselves accomplished, which was a good thing because I would love to really know. I would love to, but I never did, until June.

LO: What were your feelings about the atomic bombs when they were dropped? Did you feel it was a good thing that happened?

EP: No.

LO: You didn't.

EP: I thought it might mean far more destruction than we could ever possibly control. I thought we were putting the whole world in danger. I was scared stiff in my backyard. That's how I felt. I think a lot of people felt that way. I don't think people are sensitive to it anymore. I think we have all become extremely callous. Maybe I'm wrong. I don't know what young people are feeling about these things. We have become a very tough world. I greatly, greatly admire idealism wherever it is left in this world and I am working toward those ends still myself. There's a better world, and I don't think, in many ways, it has become a better world. Sorry.

SI: What was your assignment when you returned to the United States in September of 1944?

EP: Teaching. I was sent back to Texas via Selma, Alabama and became an instructor, navigation instructor.

SI: At Hondo?

EP: At Ellington. I didn't go back to Hondo. I was teaching at Ellington.

SI: What was that experience like?

EP: ... Still not being able to tell any of these stories. We were secret, period, which was fine. That's the way it should be. That's what I thought. So, I destroyed my maps, and all the stuff, came back home, ... go elsewhere and still keep my mouth shut. Dragged by my parents to some American Legion meetings to be shown off, being one of these secret, oh, secret missions, there's our secret missions in a new Jimmy Stewart movie and ... it was a little disillusioning.

SI: Were you able to correspond with your family when you were in England?

EP: Sure. I'd, those little tiny, you've seen them since, email, not email, it was V-mail, what am I saying? Those little, tiny letters. I would write, they would write. Sometimes I would try to be terribly cagey and sneak a message in. ... They never got any messages. If anybody thought anything was anything. Sometimes they would, all the mail was censored. Sometimes it would be blocked out. I remember being sneaky about it, one note from when I was flying overseas, I wrote from Brazil. I think I wrote, "being really astute, zealous, intelligent, lucky as you are," I don't remember what else I said. They figured that out. That's the only time I really got through.

LO: You weren't married yet?

EP: No.

LO: Did you know your wife then, when you went to war?

EP: My wife, oh, yes, I've know her since 1937. We got married after the war. She died in March this year. ... It's been a strange year, especially this, you know what my birthday is? ... September 11<sup>th</sup>.

LO: I know, strange.

EP: It's been a strange year. In a way, that trip to Belgium is kind of a blessing. I'm gonna keep in touch with the people from Belgium. They have sent a videotape of me being decorated, with all the speeches and stuff. If I make a copy, I'll send it to you, if it's of any use to you. You don't want a bunch of speeches in Flemish and French. ... No, there was one man who spoke in English. Florid prose, you might say. Are we about wound up? ...

SI: Finally, can you tell us about that time you were instructing?

EP: My time as an instructor was something of a let-down to me because I fully expected to be shipped over to the Far East to go do another tour. ... Instead I was sent into instruction, which was okay, which was good. ... It was not at all the same. I remember things about that in which my friends and I were concerned with the hurricane in Galveston and FDR's death. Those are the things, not the day-to-day instructions, being a teacher of navigation. ... That was an all right period, but it was very different. I thought, "Oh, I can't wait to get out." I can tell you that I was playing bridge the night FDR died. I went down 6000 points. Can't do that to too easily. Overall, looking back at all of the service, I'm absolutely glad I was able to do it. ... I understand the feelings of some people who wished now they had, because you don't get big opportunities. That's what this was; to do something for your country. ... It's much harder to take hold of the little opportunity that arises along the way. What you're doing in a way is something for your country and that's a good thing to do and it's harder, in a way, to do than what it was for me, what was major.

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Reviewed by Lauren O'Gara

Reviewed by Dustin Elias 7-2-2002

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7-8-2002

Reviewed by Eugene Polinsky