

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARY ROBINSON

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
OCTOBER 28, 1994

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This begins an interview with Mary Robinson on October 28, 1994 with Kurt Piehler, Bruce Chadwick, and Linda Lasko.

INTERVIEWEE: Mary Robinson with Theodore K. Robinson [brother of MR].

INTERVIEWERS: Bruce Chadwick, Linda Lasko, Dr. Kurt Piehler.

KURT PIEHLER: I'd like to begin by asking you about your parents, particularly your mother. You mentioned that your mother went to college when it was not common for women to go to college.

MARY ROBINSON: No, it wasn't. My mother was a ground breaker in many ways and luckily she married a man who gave her plenty of room. ...She grew up in Rockaway, [New Jersey], and was in the first class of the then- newly initiated secondary school in Rockaway. Then she went down to the Model School, in Trenton, which was associated with the Normal School. It was a very interesting idea, because in the Model school (was where) they framed the curriculum, which then became used in all the secondary schools being set up in the state. And the teachers trained in the Normal School down there, so they knew the secondary school curriculum. So, she went to the Model School and then went on to the Normal School and got her teaching degree. ...(She) taught for a couple of years and then went to Cornell and got her B.A. degree. Cornell was one of [the] few major colleges that became co-educational before the turn of the century, I believe. ... We have some of her letters that describe what life was like for a co-ed on the Cornell campus in 1905, and taught for another year and then she went back and graduated in 1907. Her stories of these years show semi-acceptance, social acceptance, and not very much concern for the intellectual role of women. But she made her mark on it and came out and then went to teach down in ... a settlement house in Hester Street, in New York.

BRUCE CHADWICK: The Henry Street Settlement?

MR: The Henry Street Settlement. No, the University settlement house, adjacent to Henry Street.

BC: That must have been an interesting time to be there.

MR: Very interesting.

BC: With the wave of immigrants which was coming?

MR: Yes, very interesting. She would bring them out to Rockaway for picnics.

BC: The kids.

MR: Yes.

BC: Oh, that's great.

MR: One batch of papers written were the stories of these little Jewish boys and girls who had not seen a meadow. They wrote about the flowers in such a touching way. But anyway, that was one thing. Then she went back to teach in the Normal School, where she had graduated.

BC: In Trenton?

MR: In Trenton. And got deeply into the women's suffrage movement. Well, she had been, ever since Cornell. ...Her stories of marching in the Fifth Avenue women's suffrage parade, where they threw cabbages at them from the Union League Club. ...She had a great admirer by the name of Mr. Ellis. And he was a New York real estate magnate. He owned a lot of New York property. ... He owned a piece of land that.....which insurance company was it?

TED ROBINSON (bystander): Equitable.

MR: ... The Equitable Insurance Company wanted to buy. He wouldn't sell it. ...It was only a small piece of land and they had to build the building around it.

BC: No kidding.

MR: They called it Ellis Island. Anyway, when he died in the late 20s, I guess, that bought the highest price of any land in New York City. ...He was waiting for her at the end (of the parade) with a cab and he greatly disapproved of her.

BC: At the end of the parade?

MR: At the end of the parade. ... He said, "Get in, Mary Emma. Get in, get in. I didn't like this. I won't leave you any of my money." She said, "Well, I don't need your money. You leave it for the Home for Incurables." And by God, he did. When he died, he left all of his money to the Home for the Incurables-- and they had never seen him before.

BC: That's great.

MR: Anyway, that was my mother. She ... and my father both were deeply involved in the Theodore Roosevelt Progressive Party movement. ...Actually, that's what really brought them together.

BC: When did they get married?

MR: 1914.

BC: And what did her husband do?

MR: He was a lawyer. In Trenton.

BC: In Trenton, Okay, and so they moved back to Trenton?

MR: She was teaching down there in the Normal School.

BC: She just came to New York for the parade?

MR: Yes.

BC: So they lived in Trenton? He was a lawyer in a law firm? Where did you stay?

MR: He ... and his cousin both interned or studied law in the law firm of their uncle, who was judge for many years. Earlier he had been general counsel for the Pennsylvania Railroad. My father's politics, being liberal, meant that he cut himself out of that and established his own practice. Judge Woodruff, his uncle, was a very, very conservative person and not likely to look with ... approval on [the] Progressive Party. ...about 1914, he closed down his practice and came up to Morris County and went into the ... sand and gravel business [by 1916]. That, on the whole, ... did all right for awhile, but when the Depression came along it went very bad. So that's his background and my mother's background.

KP: Backing up to your mother, I have a few more questions and Linda has some questions on her experience at Cornell.

LINDA LASKO: Yes, where did your mother live?

MR: What was the dorm she lived in? When we went back to her 50th reunion we stayed in the same one, I can't remember the name of it.

LL: Was it an all women's dorm?

MR: Oh, indeed, it was. And there weren't many women there. I'd say about 50-60 women, was the total.

LL: The size of it? The dorm?

MR: I don't know what the size of Cornell would have been in those days....

LL: Your mother was very active in women's rights at the college. What other activities ...

MR: She began to be ...

LL: What other types of things did she do at Cornell?

MR: I can't really remember. I can let you read through the letters we have from Cornell. It's been a long time since I've seen those, so I can't remember the day. ... The parties were very well described. And she had a good time.

KP: What prompted her to go to college? Did she ever say why?

MR: Oh, ... it was part of a family tradition. Not so much the women, though her mother wanted very much to go to college and couldn't or didn't....

KP: So her mother really wanted her daughter go?

MR: Oh yes, oh yes. And my great aunts ... were teachers. Family tradition of emphasis on education. ... Her great aunts, for instance, came to the conclusion that there weren't any schools north of Rockaway into Hibernia, so they built a little school on their farm, opened it up and taught it. [They] taught it free. Because down in Rockaway, they were going to school, but up there in Hibernia they weren't. The emphasis on education in the family goes way back.

BC: What religion was your mother? Was she a Quaker?

MR: No, she was Methodist. Her family left the Presbyterian Church about the 1850s on the issue of slavery. As you know, New Jersey was very late in enacting anti-slave laws and it was a burning issue. And the Methodist Church, which is on the other side of the house, started up first of all among the miners families--the Welsh, ... Yorkshire and Cornish mining families--inheritance from the Wesleyan tradition. They had a Sunday school where they taught people to read and so forth in the Methodist Church). ... [At] first, the meetings were held in peoples' houses and then the biggest employer in the town, Colonel Jackson, was a staunch Presbyterian and he was slaveholder, he would fire them and put them out of their houses if he heard they were having Methodist meetings. And so my mother's mother and her ...three aunts that lived there in this house ... walked out of the Presbyterian Church and over to the Methodist Church as a protest when the church wouldn't take a stand on slavery. That gives you a sense of

BC: I know. ... New Jersey still had ten thousand slaves at the time of the war.

MR: That's right. It was a burning issue, a burning issue.

KP: Do you have memories while growing up of the Civil War?

MR: Yes, and I'll tell you more about that when I get ... [to] my first army experience down at Camp Robinson, Arkansas. ... So that was the sense of values in the family.

KP: Your father? Where had he go to college?

MR: He didn't. He studied law with his uncle. He went to a Quaker school ... over in Pennsylvania and then taught school for awhile and then went and worked with his uncle in this law firm.

KP: And then wound up in Morris County in the sand or gravel business?

MR: In the gravel business.

KP: Did your father come from Morris County?

MR: No, Hunterdon County. One part of Father's family did come to Morris County, Hartshorn Fitz Randolph, and settled what is now Randolph Township.

BC: Really?

MR: Yes. Hatshorn Fitz Randolph and John Vail. Both came into Morris County. And they're buried in the Quaker cemetery at the Meeting House in Randolph.

KP: Your mother's maiden name? What was her maiden name?

MR: Jones. And so this whole business of education for women comes as a leading motif to the family after the 1860s, I would say. [It has] been with them ever since.

KP: So it wasn't surprising that you went to college. Where did you go to college?

MR: Well, when Ted was in Rutgers, that strained the family purse pretty well. And I came up to Morris County. There had been established in Morristown, under the WPA, the first community college in the area. It was a WPA project to start. I did two years in that. And it was some of the best instructions I ever had. After the war, and I came back to the University of Chicago and took exams in economics and political science and so forth, they passed me on into the graduate school.

BC: So you could say you did have some good education?

MR: It wasn't a marginal institution at all.

BC: When was that, when you were in school in Morristown?

MR: 1939, 40.

TR: It was 1938-40.

BC: Just before the war then?

MR: Yes, I remember being there the year that the Germans charged into Holland and Belgium. 1940. 1940. Okay. Those were the years.

BC: Did you finish there?

MR: Yes, finished there.

BC: Then what?

MR: Then I got a job in New York City. I lived in a delightful little Quaker boarding house called the Pennington Town, next to the New York Quaker Meeting. And I went to work for Sperry Gyroscope to establish a night personnel office. [This was] when they were just beginning to induct people into the army and were beginning to train women to take on the jobs. We hired what was called FURWs -- Female Unskilled Repetitive Workers.

BC: Repetitive workers? What an ominous sounding name.

MR: Right. ... Slowly and surely, they replaced everybody in that plant.

BC: The plant was in New York?

MR: Actually, it was in Brooklyn, at the end of the Manhattan Bridge. ... The night personnel staff came on at four o'clock and we got out at two in the morning. ... A little group of three or four, all women, would walk down that ...dark street in Brooklyn to the BMT subway. [I would] go home on the subway. Then I would walk to 16th Street to Stuyvesant Square and nobody ever thought of being afraid.

BC: Don't do that this week.

KP: You mentioned earlier, when we were having lunch, that your mother was a very active suffrage leader.

MR: Yes, she was.

KP: Could you recount some of the things she did, especially, she did a campaign tour with Theodore Roosevelt?

MR: She was a great admirer of Theodore Roosevelt and she was appointed to head his committee on women.

BC: What campaign was this?

MR: 1912.

KP: When he was running as a Bull Mooser?

MR: Right. ... She campaigned with him through central New Jersey. We used to have a front page of the Trenton Times where the headline says: Roosevelt, a woman and Negro address meeting. My mother was the woman. ... Her stories of that campaign trip of three or four days, I guess it was, through central New Jersey....what a sense of humor Theodore Roosevelt had and how amusing, what a good time they had while they were doing the campaigning and making the speeches.

KP: What kind of stories did she tell you about Theodore Roosevelt?

MR: I can't really. ... It's sad that when these things are told you [that] you don't probe more, as you are doing now.

We didn't.

KP: Did he have a great sense of humor?

MR: He had a great sense of humor.

KP: Your mother campaigned for suffrage and she eventually saw women get the vote. What did she ever say about the struggle for suffrage? Did she ever tell you that you should really appreciate the vote, that we struggled hard for it?

MR: I don't think so. I think she thought it was bound to happen, that it was just a question of time and then we would march on to other things.

KP: What were the other things that your mother hoped would happen when women got the vote?

MR: I don't think she saw it as changing very much, in the sense of revolutionizing things. It was just women getting their due. ...I think ...I can't remember her wanting to shake all of society in terms of sex roles at all. But this injustice of keeping women from having their say in the community, and their say in the schools, and to lead the lives they chose. It just seemed to her, you know, to be long overdue.

KP: After the vote had been won, what organizations was she active in?

MR: Well, she was active in-- ... she went back into the Republican Party, ... but stayed kind of distant in the Coolidge/Hoover period. She was active in the League of Women Voters. After we went down to the farm to live, however, it was kind of hard to ... have a full calendar. And she didn't.

KP: What did your mother think of Wilson?

MR: She had very mixed feelings on him. On some she was very much against him. On many issues, he would not endorse women's suffrage.

KP: In 1912?

MR: Right. I remember her story of the meeting that Wilson held on women's suffrage, where all the women went to his office and her contempt for the way he handled that, in the way he was very patronizing and so forth and so on. ... As contrasted with Roosevelt's more than willingness, eagerness to include women, and his easy way of dealing with them.

KP: How did your father feel about your mother being such an active suffragette?

MR: Fine. I mean it was part ... of the ... she had all during their courtship. He took it for granted that that was her right, her privilege.

KP: Do you think the fact that he went to a Quaker school might have had something to do with that?

MR: Yes, I think so. I think so. He was very progressive in his politics. ... Yes. As a matter of fact, on that side of the family there is quite a long tradition of equal sharing. His grandmother and grandfather, both of whom were Vails and Fitz-Randolphs. One was descended from one Fitz-Randolph twin and the other was descended from the other.He and his wife always signed their letters Abram R. and Jane D. Vail, no matter which one was writing. ...We had a little piece of quilting that Abram R. Vail did and he put his initials on it. He did the sewing and the quilting to show there should be no sex to work. That was the Quaker. They were Hicksite Friends, which meant there was no barrier between the sexes, in preaching or speaking in meeting or seating or anything.

KP: Your family was really hit hard by the Great Depression. ...

MR: Oh, viciously.

KP: Your father, in his business, took a downturn in the Depression. Where was his business based?

MR: Morristown and Succasunna. Both.

BC: What was the name of his company?

MR: Succasunna Sand Company. When the Depression started, in '29, it had been preceded by at least about three years of very, very sharp declines in the construction industry. ...The sand business was knocked out before ...long before people became aware of the Depression itself. And his business went down under and he assumed all the debts of the business himself personally, rather than declaring them in a bankruptcy.

BC: He didn't go bankrupt?

MR: He went bankrupt, but he assigned all the debts over to himself personally, before he did. Especially, if there were any family funds involved and so forth. So, when the Depression came on, there were all these debts. And he developed cancer and died. ... So mother was left with some houses in Rockaway where the tenants were all unemployed. ... She never evicted a tenant. ... We had a farm between Trenton and Princeton, it had been my father's. And she looked at the way things were going and said, well, ...let's go down to the farm and we'll have a cow and some chickens and a garden and what little money we have will go a long way. And so that's what we did.

BC: So when did you leave Rockaway?

MR: Well, we were living in Morristown, we went down to farm about '26. We came back to Rockaway several winters, because both grandmothers lived with us and were in their 80's.

TR: You went down to the farm in 1925, Mary.

MR: No, it was 1926.

BC: How old was your dad when he died?

TR: 61.

KP: You went to Princeton High School like your brothers. You went to a very good high school.

MR: A wonderful high school.

KP: How well did that prepare you for college and did you know that you were going to go to college no matter what?

MR: We knew we were going, somehow or other. We would go to college, period. There was never any doubt in our minds. You had to [go].

BC: After your father died, did your mother work?

MR: No. She thought about going back into teaching, but came to the conclusion that she didn't want to leave her children, no matter what, and I think it was wise. It was better to do without things, than without mother.

KP: Your mother, though, became very politically active in the 1930s, partly because of her tenants ...

MR: Partly because of the tenants and partly because what happened to them impacted us, too. ... My father's cousin, who inherited the Woodruff practice, ... became chairman of the Democratic Party in New Jersey, and so when she wanted access to people, she could always get it. She'd hammer. As ... I told you, how I remember going with her to ... Governor Moore's office ...

KP: A. Harry Moore.

MR: A. Harry Moore and hearing her tell what ... hardships Morris County was putting the unemployed through and the fact that they had decided that they weren't going to have any WPA projects in the county because they didn't believe in putting up the initial funds for which they got

... reimbursed. And he arranged so that some of the people were given jobs in Essex County or in adjoining areas where ...and some of our tenants got jobs that way.

KP: You were saying over lunch that there was a real north-south split in Morris County? That upper county was very poor ...

MR: [It] was very poor. The whole mining area was very poor, and the farming area. ... Morristown still represented the 'haves,' of course. ... That has only recently begun to erode, really.

KP: Yes, and the down county -- Morristown, Harding, St. Elizabeth were not willing to pay...

MR: Harding didn't exist in those days, only as a few very large estates. It was all out South Street and Madison Street.

BC: I guess everybody has ten acres out in Harding now?

MR: Yes. ... That's right. There were some tales, you know, of catastrophe to the very rich too, but, by and large, they still played the conservative game.

BC: You were saying things were very desperate in the mining areas and farming areas in terms of people living in the woods?

MR: Yes. How much they were the locals that lived in the woods or how much they were refugees from Newark and so forth, I don't know. But, anyway, you would drive through the back roads, all the roads were dirt roads, then. You'd drive through and you'd see these huts in the woods where the people had built out of corrugated steel or whatever wood they could [get]. And they lived on the game they could catch.

BC: In the Rockaway area?

MR: On up toward Hibernia and all the way on North and West. All through the area that was formerly the mining area was an industrial wasteland.

BC: These were people who were put out of work by the Depression?

MR: Yes, and the evicted.

BC: Evicted from houses in the Rockaway area?

MR: Not necessarily. I don't know where they came from. But, ... I remember some of our tenants lived by going hunting and ... setting traps and catching rabbits.

KP: Your mother was very important to your tenants?

MR: Yes, she was.

KP: And in terms of the debt they owed her. She was remarkably tolerant.

MR: ...She had to be, for one, and ... she'd say they all have children in the family. They all have children.

KP: And she had struggles with the township over taxes?

MR: Oh yes. She couldn't pay any taxes, you see. There was no income. The taxes came rolling up and rolling up and rolling up, and of course, the Depression was such that the tax sales were put off year after year ... didn't have them. But when things began to improve, they began to press her to pay the taxes. ...She really turned around and made a case against the town that she had kept all the town's poor and therefore ... finally, they came to a tax settlement.

KP: The case wound up in court?

MR: It never got to court.

KP: But she was ready to go to court.

MR: She was ready to go to court, yes.

KP: What kind of relief was there in those days in Morris County?

MR: Well in Rockaway, there was only the Red Cross flour and sugar that they gave out. There wasn't a penny of relief.

BC: Any welfare?

MR: No welfare.

KP: So if you were out of work for a long period of time, the most you could get was flour?

MR: Yes.

BC: Transportation in those days. ... If you lived in Rockaway, it was hard to get anywhere else to get work?

MR: Well, there were buses that ran along from Morristown to the main road to Dover and Wharton.

BC: Route 46.

MR: [Route] 46, wasn't built then.

BC: No. You're kidding?

MR: No. The old Dover road.

BC: When was Route 46 built, in the 1930s?

MR: I think it was after the federal road program started.

BC: It must have been because 46 and 3...well...the Lincoln Tunnel and George Washington Bridge were built in 1933. So people who were out of work in Rockaway had to go somewhere else by bus to get a job and compete with people who lived there, like in Dover, for jobs.

MR: Yes. Of course, there were all these old ramshackle cars that the formerly employed tried to keep in repair.

KP: Your mother was a Republican, a Bull Mooser, a Progressive, she goes back to the Republican Party lukewarm. Did she change parties in the 1930s?

MR: She sure did. Oh, yes. ... She-- and all of us were great Roosevelt supporters.

KP: In 1932?

MR: Lukewarm at first. I remember going with her over to the Princeton Junction Station to hear Hoover talk from the back of his railroad car. We... [came] home feeling kind of glum about it. ...Then, when Roosevelt was elected, it didn't take very long [for him] to convince us that he was the right person. And then, of course, things stayed pretty hard all the way through the '30s. We were going to school and getting along...

KP: Where you grew up in outside Princeton ... it was mainly farm land?

MR: Oh, yes, outside all farm land. ... The minute you got past the circle outside of Princeton ... Penn's Neck Circle, it was farmland from there on.

KP: How did that area fare in the Depression, and the town of Princeton?

MR: I don't remember it being depressed, but I suppose it was for agricultural prices were low.

KP: Princeton itself?

MR: No, no. It was insulated.

KP: What about the farms around Princeton. How did they do?

MR: Well, it was a very rich farming area. ... Some seasons... were good. If potatoes were selling well. ... On whole, I think the farmers were fairly, did fairly well. Wouldn't you say so, Ted?

TR: They scraped through. They scraped through.

MR: They were still ploughing with horses.

TR: They scraped through. They weren't making vast amounts of money by any means. They were making livings.

MR: Yes, they were making livings.

TR: There was a wolf waiting at the door.

MR: In the tradition of farming that came way down, that's what farmers were satisfied with in those days.

TR: A hundred acres in those days used to be a fair sized farm. Two hundred was good size.

KP: You mentioned you went to the WPA school in Morristown. I wasn't aware the WPA had established community colleges.

MR: Yes. There were six or seven of them in New Jersey. And the one I went to really was remarkably good.

KP: Who were the teachers and where did they come from?

MR: One of them was Eugene Curry. I kept in touch with him for years. After I got to Washington [I found that] he was down in one of the Washington agencies. He taught economics. I'm trying to remember the names of guy who taught history and political science. ... John Houston taught English.

KP: Did they give degrees, doctorates?

MR: No. No. It was a two year institution. They gave an A.A.

KP: What about your teachers and their degrees?

MR: A lot of them were doing graduate studies. Gene Curry was getting his ... doctorate down at Drew, I think.

TR: No, here.

MR: Here at Rutgers? Okay.

BC: Where was the college?

MR: On Maple Avenue in an old school building.

BC: When you were enrolled there, where did you live?

MR: Up in Rockaway. I took the bus down every day.

BC: How long did it take to get there on the bus?

MR: Twenty-five minutes, about what it does now. Less traffic jams [then].

TR: Remember the farm house had burned down.

BC: When?

TR: It was May...

MR: It was the year the war broke out.

TR: May 1938.

MR: That was just [a] tragic thing. We had spent over twenty years doing over that old house. Part of it dated from about 1700. It was filled with all the treasures of the family.

KP: You mentioned that you lost a lot of family letters.

MR: Oh, yes. There were about 200 some odd letters, written by the daughter of Euphemia Kitchell, who married a Methodist minister and started west, first going up the Erie Canal, and then across [the country]. ... Her husband became one of the first professors at Northwestern. ... Then they started west after that and went to Salt Lake City and tried to convert the Mormons.

BC: That's a big task.

MR: They had to leave by night. [They] joined up with a wagon train that went to California that found the bones of the Donner party. This was all in the letters. There must have been two or three hundred of them.

BC: What a shame.

MR: ... As I said, there were earlier ones from Abram Kitchell to a Kitchell who had gone to Kentucky dealing with the Jeffersonian election. Aaron Kitchell, Abram Kitchell's brother, was in the House of Representatives. He was kind of [a] Jeffersonian linchpin in the New Jersey delegation. That's why I'm anxious to see that book.

KP: Yes, the Jeffersonian Republicans book.

MR: Right, right.

KP: Your mother, was she in the Daughters of the American Revolution?

MR: No. She had some contempt for them.

KP: What did she think about the whole stir about ...

MR: They had forgotten the revolution, she thought.

KP: What did your mother think of Eleanor Roosevelt?

MR: Oh, a great admirer. And she had a long correspondence with Eleanor Roosevelt. I have been hunting around to see if I could find any of the letters that she got back from Eleanor Roosevelt and I can't find them anywhere.

BC: But she did write back, Eleanor Roosevelt did?

MR: Oh yes, oh yes.

BC: That's nice.

MR: Years afterward, Eleanor Roosevelt came up to White Meadow for some kind of a do--when she was at the United Nations--and White Meadow people knew that mother was a staunch admirer and they asked her up. When Eleanor Roosevelt met her, she thanked her for all her correspondence. She had read it [and] she recognized her name, and read it.

KP: You were in college and mentioned New York on the eve of World War II?

MR: Yes. After I graduated I went to work for the War Manpower Commission after the war got underway.

BC: Where?

MR: I worked in the Dover office of the War Manpower Commission, trying to switch people from ... non-war jobs into war production. I was there for about a year and a half and in December of '43, I enlisted and left. I went in the army.

BC: At that time you were living in Rockaway?

MR: Yes.

KP: You worked in the War Manpower Commission. How big was your office in Dover and what were your responsibilities?

MR: There was a campaign on for actively transferring people from non-war production to war production. ... This was the period of rapid expansion of Picatinny [Arsenal], ... there were many ... working casting companies that became war production firms in the area that were multiplying fast expanding. ... In effect, ... our whole force was really engaged in helping make these transfers. People who had been let out of other industries would come in and we automatically refer them and get them into war production jobs.

KP: The mining industry was really hit hard by the Great Depression. What happened to the mining industry then?

MR: Oh, it began to boom. The mines opened up. ... You had to find people to get the mines going?

KP: How many mines were active when the war was on, say in Rockaway?

MR: Well, Mt. Hope was. Hibernia was, Richard mine was.

KP: So there were a number of mines.

MR: Yes, there were several farther north.

BC: There were twenty. There were twenty to 25 in full operation.

MR: Yes.

BC: They stayed in operation until the mid-1950s.

MR: Well some of them did, some of them went out early. But Mt. Hope Mine stayed in operation until the '50s. It closed a time and then opened.

I guess the one thing that I want to say leading up to this business of going in the army was that the specter of Hitler had hung over us all during the years I was in high school and college. It was a terrible thing, progressing inch by inch across Europe from the early 30s. I believed actually, in contrast with my brother, that we really had to do something about him.

KP: You were really an interventionist?

MR: I was an interventionist.

KP: What led you to be an interventionist?

MR: Well, here was this terrible man gobbling up, you know, or threatening to gobble up centuries of progress toward enlightenment, both east and west. Also, my mother was really a great anglophile and, had spent a good bit of time in England in her vacations and so forth. ... One of her classmates at Cornell was an English girl ... who had married and had several children. We corresponded with those children. So it was a friendship that went down two generations. Later, when I went on to the London School of Economics, they became almost my second family.

BC: That was after the war?

MR: Yes.

KP: Do you remember any Klan activity in the Rockaway area?

MR: Yes. Not so much ... there was Klan activity in the early '30s. There was a parade at one time, I think, and there were people that we kind of knew that were associated with it. Then it dropped out of sight.

KP: Who were the people?

MR: I can't remember, now. I guess I really never actually [knew] who they were as individuals.

KP: What did they do for a living? Were they older families, newer?

MR: I think they were newer, and out of work for a long time and that kind of thing. ... When that was going on I was very young. ... We just heard about it.

KP: You never remember seeing the Klan parade in Rockaway?

MR: No. I understand there was one. But, I didn't see it.

KP: There was also a very active German American Bund.

MR: Yes.

KP: Do you remember any meetings in the area?

MR: Yes, I remember hearing and reading of them because the camp was up above Hibernia.

BC: Is this Camp Nordland?

MR: I believe so. I don't know what it was called.

BC: Near Andover?

MR: I thought it was right up beyond Hibernia. ... There was a camp up there. I never saw it, actively. I heard about it. ...Right near by, of course, was the big Norwegian settlement. And of course, very anti-Nazi. ...There was a woman who wrote for the Rockaway Record, a Norwegian woman, all of that period leading up to the war. [She was] describing what was going on in Europe and so forth. ...We called her up and she would come down. Mother and ... she got to be good friends. Trying to remember her name.

TR: Maggie Landslaad Jensen.

MR: Jensen, yes.

KP: You enlisted in the Women's Army Corps. What led you to enlist in that?

MR: I was just telling you-- this feeling.

KP: You wanted to fight against Hitler?

MR: Yes.

BC: You had had that feelings for years ...

MR: Oh yes. It was no new thing.

BC: This wasn't just a summer of thinking it over?

MR: No, no. Not at all. And while I was doing work that I thought contributed to things, that was all right. We got so we had done practically all the transfers ... we had these enormous files with everybody's work records when they registered for the draft they had to register also ... [for the] War Manpower lists. So these files came into the War Manpower Commission, you called these people up, no matter where they were working and say don't you want to change to a job here or there. So it was an active recruitment to ... War Manpower work. When those files were finished, what was there to do?

KP: So you thought you could be more useful in the army?

MR: Yes, yeah.

KP: The Women's Army Corps, when you joined, there were not many precedents in American History for it. There was resistance to a Women's Army Corps. What did you think of all that? Did you think of yourself as a pioneer?

MR: No, I just thought it was a sensible thing to do. The British had done it in two wars. ... Women were taking on the jobs everywhere else doing everything men had done before being drafted. It just didn't seem to be much of a departure.

BC: When you were thinking of going into the army, did you have friends or relatives who were thinking about going into the Women's Army Corps?

MR: I can't remember any.

BC: No friends?

MR: No.

BC: So this was pretty much a singular decision for you.

MR: Yes, yes. ...I was inducted on December 7th, in Trenton, in the Statehouse. And I got on the train to Fort Des Moines was there for the basic training.

BC: Where was that?

MR: Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

BC: Okay

MR: ... After finishing basic training, my first assignment, was Camp Robinson, Arkansas. We arrived late one night and at eight the next morning, I was assigned to duty in the camp hospital. The hospital unit that was on duty had been called off to one of the Pacific Island invasions and there we were in charge, with no training, no nothing. I was lucky, I landed in the women's ward. ... We didn't have any very sick people, only one or two serious illnesses. But up in the front, there was a sick nurse who had been given too many sulphur drugs, that was in the infancy of the wonder drugs. ... Everyday, I'd go in and sit down with a pad. She would tell me how to run the ward, what to do for people and how to do it. ...I got an education that way without going to ... classes as such.

BC: You had no nursing training before?

MR: No, no.

KP: What had you studied in the junior college?

MR: Oh, it was a basic undergraduate course of study, standard thing, you know, you had English, foreign language, you had some science, history, economics [and] political science. Basic B.A. stuff.

KP: But no nursing?

MR: Oh no, no. It was purely academic curriculum. ... The traditional liberal arts.

KP: How did it go in this ward?

MR: I got bored to death. ... I was complaining bitterly, how bored I was, to one of the doctors. He said, "You want something exciting? Come over to the ward I run here." It was [the] meningitis ward. So, I transferred to the meningitis ward. And by God, that was a real workout.

BC: So you worked as a nurse?

MR: Well, army hospitals were staffed with a nurse for every two or three wards. She had an overview. ... We were medical aides, really. But we ran the wards, gave medications and did everything. The nurse came and supervised. We were the interface with the patients. ...When we got to the meningitis ward, that was a different thing. The doctor was always there. He was a great man. We never lost a patient. ...But, I wanted to say something about Camp Robinson.

KP: You mentioned the Civil War?

MR: Camp Robinson, a major reception center for the state. It was the beginning of '43, early February of '43, people who had been deferred because of illiteracy, both black and white, were now being taken in and given literacy training. ... This reception center, a big reception center ... had large groups of inductees, both black and white. By and large, many of the white inductees had been poor white sharecroppers. There you had the blacks. It was a terribly testy situation. There were fights every night and the military police had to go in and separate the groups because the redneck whites would belay the blacks. There was a great tension.

After the WAC detachment got there, we were called together to the chapel. And the three padres, the Catholic [priest], the Protestant who happened to be Episcopalian [priest] and Jewish [rabbi], got up and said that in order to encourage the WAC's to come to church they would fix it so that none of the blacks could go to a particular chapel to be assigned to us.

Well, that aroused my Quaker ire. I had never heard that. I didn't come from a segregated [world]. I got up and walked out. I was angry that the church could do this. Well, this got back. The next day the Episcopalian padre came to me and apologized and said he shouldn't have been there and wouldn't I come and be his assistant. ...I didn't think I wanted to do that, you know. I was working in the meningitis ward and it was kind of interesting. But that got reported and the first detachment that [was] sent overseas I was on it.

BC: You think it was due to that?

MR: Oh, yeah. I was really very new. There ... [was] a[n] older detachment there that they should have taken ... first. But I was tickled to death.

BC: Your whole detachment went, together?

MR: No, I did.

BC: Just you?

MR: Me, and one or two other WACs.

BC: The black and white soldiers at the camp, were they in segregated barracks?

MR: Yes they were, but at night they would meet up going to the recreation halls and so forth and there would be fights.

BC: Was the camp segregated in terms of mess halls, movie theaters?

MR: Oh, yes.

BC: Were there any black WAC groups there?

MR: No, no. And they really didn't come until a little later, I guess. I don't know. I never saw any....

KP: You mentioned that there were a large number of illiterate soldiers.

MR: Yes.

KP: Did the army make an effort to educate these soldiers, to help them read and write?

MR: Yes. The main WAC detachment was assigned to literacy training. I just happened to be assigned to hospital work because of the withdrawal of experienced medics to overseas duty ... [put] into the base hospital, you know, it was just by chance. That was the reason the WAC detachment was brought down. ...They were given some training in literacy training. That was the main assignment for WACs in Camp Robinson, Arkansas.

KP: You enlisted to fight the war against Germany, but you were sent to the Pacific ...

MR: Yes, I was disappointed in that. ... Then, when we were going to the Pacific, I thought maybe we will go to India, because I always [wanted to see India]. But we ended up in Australia.

The other story I have to tell about Camp Robinson, which reflects on the tensions in the army. ... The last few days, after I had been put on shipping orders....there was evidently some kind of a transfer of people out. And I was put for two or three days on duty in the prison ward of the hospital. ... In those days, the files went with a person. If he was in the hospital, his whole file would be there. ... So that I had the files of all the prisoners in the ward. ... The wards were laid out so there was a big open area in the back and a series of little cubicles for people in isolation in the front, the whole ward was behind bars. In one of the cubicles in the front was this guy who was awaiting discharge. He had been in the camp prison itself. But they had taken him out and put him in the hospital to await his discharge, in part to protect him. He was a black guy. I read his file. He had had quite an amazing career in the army. He had come up very fast--he was very

bright-- he had come up and been a master sergeant in some unit. And then the officer who had kind of brought him along and appreciated his talents and so forth was transferred and somebody else came in. They didn't get along, and pretty soon he was busted. And pretty soon, he was in the sweat box. And he'd been badly beaten at one time, because they had to hospitalize him for it. And he was in this cubicle waiting discharge. Back in the back of the ward, there were a lot of bad boys. ... They had put their heads together. They were going to get him back there, start a fight, and beat him up, and see he never was discharged. ... Sure enough, the fight started. There were bars and I didn't go behind the bars. There were two armed guard orderlies that went behind there, I couldn't trust them either, to protect him. I stood there and talked into his cubicle: "Don't you come out, don't you come out. Don't you go back there. I'll get you out of here." But ... I got hold of this doctor who ran the meningitis ward because I could count on him, "for god's sake, get his discharge papers through." I got him out of there alive. That's the way things ran.

KP: Had you been to the South before?

MR: No. This was all new to me and, of course, I had never really seen any place with a black population of any sort. But, growing up with the Quakers. We had two or three black families in Rockaway. One of them, the woman was a chef and she did the catering for all the parties in town. ... They were members of the church and very accepted. Nobody ever thought of drawing a line. So it was shock to me to see it, it really was a shock. I had read about it, I knew it was there, but to see it was dreadful.

BC: Did you ever find out what happened to that gentlemen?

MR: No, I want to. I often wondered.

KP: You were sent to the Pacific, initially. What was your method of transport?

MR: We were sent first to a center where they gave us some training [in] Oglethorpe, Georgia...[for] two or three weeks. Then put on a train. ...

KP: What did your training consist of?

MR: Can't remember a thing there about it. It wasn't anything remarkable, really. Well, you got your shots and things of that sort, too. You were prepped for overseas assignment.

BC: And you went to train to where?

MR: To San Francisco.

BC: Okay.

MR: While I was in San Francisco, my grandmother had a younger sister who went to California and daughter, her only daughter, was adopted. I was there and she must have been well into her nineties. While I was there. I got on the phone and called her and went in to see her. It was

quite touching. She didn't live long after that. ... I had never seen her before... We went out on the S.S. America. We landed in Australia. What's the capital of Australia?

KP: Canberra?

MR: Sydney. In Sydney harbor. We were the first detachment of WACs to arrive in the area. So they put on a big ball for us in the town hall. ... After some waiting around and one kind of temporary assignment, I was assigned to the information and education section.

BC: In Australia?

MR: In the headquarters of the services and supply, one down from GHQ. And I spent the rest of my army career in that unit. When I came into that unit, the officer in charge was a school superintendent from Illinois. He was a very talented guy with a lot of pizzazz. ... The program very largely consisted of ... running off-duty education programs in the Pacific very largely directed at the black port units, the loaders and unloaders, who shipped things... Where we carried on a literacy training program that sometimes had as many as 80,000 or 90,000 people going to school every night. Amazing. Really was. Then we got them up into the secondary school curriculum so that a lot of them, when they came home, had GEDs and went on ...to take advantage of the G.I. bill.

BC: This was where? These were people throughout the Pacific who were taking this program?

MR: Yes. ... The army units were scattered in little bases all the way along, on the coasts of the islands. On New Guinea, we had three or four bases. ... This was all directed from Brisbane. We were there from ..., we arrived in April, four or five months and then we transferred to Hollandia, in New Guinea. One of the things that interested the colonel, and that I was assigned to, was a look at Army newspapers. We didn't have any Stars and Stripes in the Pacific. ...General MacArthur was running for president (laughter). And he didn't want anything there, either. So he said well if there had to be a newspaper, they could bring in Guinea Gold, which was the Australian newspaper with all the cricket scores in it. That didn't appeal much to the American G.I.'s. So the units began [to] use their mimeograph machines and have a little gossip sheet.

BC: Where was this?

MR: I was sitting in Brisbane. This was all going on everywhere in New Guinea. From the base units. And the colonel brought some over to me one day and said can you make anything out of this, these little gossip sheets.... Except one, it came from an army division commanded by one of the New York Times men, an Ochs. Here was this beautiful thing, with all the news from the states, mimeographed, and got out five or six pages. Then they had it distributed on the mess hall in the morning. And I looked it over and said, well you know, what can we do? Can we tell these people what to do? The colonel said, "No, General MacArthur doesn't want ... any directive given [about creating papers]." So what you do, two kinds of communication went out of our headquarters, a technical letter, which was advice and counsel and a command letter. And

he said..., see what you can do and we'll get out a sheet that you can attach to a technical letter that goes out of here. And don't sign anybody's name, but your own. [laughter]

BC: Don't sign mine!

MR: Right! So, I thought about it ... and then I got the idea that if you could find something good and write a letter of congratulations that went through channels, in which somebody got praised for it, maybe promoted, well that might help. So I consistently did this. Sometimes it would just be part of a sheet that [said this] ... is significant and you're doing us a good job and such. And a letter would go down and pretty soon we'd be printing the letter and pretty soon they began to find newspaper men assigned to other duties and bring them in and have them do the paper. In a matter of about five months, we had these really good little papers printing what was going on in Europe and so forth. Then we got the permission on Armed Forces Radio to have them dictate news thing, put it on the Armed Forces Radio at four in the morning. So we had the United Press dictate news thing broadcast and so we got the news to these people. And we had newspapers everywhere.

BC: The newspapers themselves, how were they actually produced and distributed?

MR: They were mimeographed on ordinary paper with a mimeograph machine which every ... unit had and put on the mess halls in the morning.

BC: Who produced them, former newsmen?

MR: We got started and we got former newsmen assigned to the units.

BC: So your role was what?

MR: Just advice and praise, that went through channels, and saying this is [the newspaper] good, you know, you ought to be congratulated on this issue. ... That's all.

BC: So you're encouraging them?

MR: Just encouragement. And the fact that it came through channels and the commanding officer of the base would get it first and ... then he would send it on I and E officer and say, well look, headquarters [backs this].

BC: Direct from General MacArthur ...

KP: You made it look surreptitiously that command wanted this and that they would get credit?

MR: It wasn't surreptitious. It was quite open.

KP: The way it was interpreted...

MR: That this was a good thing to do. Now, I must say in General MacArthur's GHQ, I and E section, the colonel after I got started said you better go up and talk to them, [the top brass] and tell them what you're doing. I went up and talked to them. They winked and said go ahead.

KP: MacArthur and his relationship with the press ...

MR: It was terrible. And his relationship with his own troops was pretty bad, too.

KP: Do you have any stories to tell from any personal experience in terms of the press?

MR: No, I really don't.

KP: But you did say that his relationship with his troops was terrible.

MR: Yes, it was.

KP: In what ways?

MR: Well, for instance. Before we left Brisbane, the planning for the Leyte invasion was already under way. We were printing up stuff and so forth. For the troops, ...to be dropped in the Philippines. We got one thing out called "We have returned." It was all about America coming back to the Philippines. ... When MacArthur got off [the boat in Philippines], he said, "I have returned." ...

BC: Who came up with the "We have returned" headline?

MR: Oh, the people in GHQ, in our unit, preparing all these materials for the troops on the background of the Philippines. All the troops were briefed.

BC: These were all sent out before the invasion?

MR: Oh, yes. They were planned and produced ... long before they were used.

BC: When MacArthur landed, he pulled out your newsletter and said "I have returned."

MR: ... Well, ... he said, when he left "I will return."

BC: His relations with his troops then?

MR: Well, for instance, I remember sitting on a stump and watching ... an outdoor movie ... the newsreels of the landing in Leyte and him wading in, you know. And the whole headquarters booed [MacArthur].

BC: Really?

MR: Oh, yes, oh yes. He was very unpopular with his troops and he knew this. And the army, Washington ... General [George] Marshall had a unit called "What the soldier thinks?" where they sent people out to find out the state of morale. And MacArthur wouldn't let them in[to] that theater. They set up interviewing ... stations at all the ports to catch the people coming back on leave who had been rotating back to the states and they got it there. ...

KP: On troops, any other stories?

MR: I think that the troops had really a kind of a split feeling on it. His style and his egotism and all the rest didn't go down well, ... but they knew that... the war was progressing and I don't think anybody would have overthrown him.

KP: But they did boo him at headquarters?

MR: Oh, yes. This happened again in Manila.

BC: What happened there?

MR: In a big theater there, there was a jai alai court, an old jai alai court in Manila with big stands and they converted it to a army theater for the troops. And again, there was something that came on that showed MacArthur and the whole thing went boo and hissed. They kind of had a good time at it, you know.

KP: It's hard to imagine that happening to Eisenhower?

From what I have read, Eisenhower was well liked and respected by his troops?

MR: ... Right, right. He was [respected]. Well, he got out among his troops, you know, too. MacArthur never did.

KP: Did you ever see MacArthur?

MR: I saw him come out of GHQ in Brisbane.

KP: He never made it a point to circulate?

MR: Oh, no, no. That wasn't his style. His style was the grand style. He ... was not a populist in any sense.

BC: Were the feelings of his troops about him that way from the beginning of the war, or did the feelings change as the war progressed?

MR: It was that way when I arrived.

BC: In 1943?

MR: Yes.

BC: So it must have been that way early on?

MR: Yes.

KP: What did you think of Australia?

MR: I loved Australia. It was like the American West must have been in the 1880s. You went into Brisbane and there was no building higher than four stories or three stories and that was the biggest hotel in town. And ... people from outback still rode in on horseback. ... The libraries were all subscription groups. ... It must have been like Kansas City in the 1880s. Something like that.

BC: When you were in Brisbane, where did the WACs stay?

MR: First, we were on a fairgrounds or racetrack on the outside of the city. Then we were in ... an old park that they had put up army barracks and our headquarters was ...

BC: At the racetrack, did you stay in barracks.

MR: Yes. No. That was when we first got off and hadn't been assigned. That was partly tents. In New Guinea, it was tents until they got up these big enormous warehouse like structures with corrugated tin [and] iron roofs and three or four hundred people would be in there.

BC: In each building?

MR: In each one of these sheds, these enormous sheds. They were all open to the outside. ... Because you needed all the air you could get. On the whole, though it got terribly hot during the day, 120 degrees. Then, in the afternoon, it would begin to rain and it would pour, you know, there be sheets of water. It would be mud. About five o'clock, the sun would come out and steam would rise [up from the ground]. In the evening the breezes would come in from the sea and be beautiful. The nights were very good.

BC: The 300 person warehouse structures were where the WACs stayed. Were you together or with other people?

MR: There was about three of these. There was a big contingent, must have been 1,200 ... WACs.

BC: 1200?

MR: Attached to services and supply. We ran the services ... [and] supply. In the sense of doing all the clerical and administrative work and so on.

KP: What was your rank in Australia?

MR: I was a private when I was in Australia. I came out a technical sergeant.

KP: You were in Australia at the time of the big scandal, with I believe it was General [Richard K.] Sutherland?

MR: Oh, ya. His Aussie!

KP: Were you talking about that?

MR: Oh, everybody ... rolled it under their tongue. It was a topic of conversation.

KP: Did anybody know either party? Something the WACs all...

MR: No.

KP: But, it was something the WACs resented?

MR: Yeah. We resented it, let me say.

KP: When you say you resented it, why were your feelings so strong?

MR: Because giving a WAC a commission? She was taken to New Guinea, too.... She went to Hollandia.

KP: A lot (of people) thought this was improper?

MR: Yea, yea.

KP: You left Australia to go to New Guinea?

MR: Let me say, by the time we ... nursed this ... series of newspapers along, through New Guinea and again in Leyte. By the time we got to Manila, where printing presses were available, MacArthur came to the conclusion that this was a morale factor, he turned over all the presses. And we had collected in these different little places about 80 newspapermen.

BC: These are American servicemen?

MR: American servicemen pulled out of all sorts of other jobs and put on these little newspapers. We put them all together [in the Philippines] and we put out a major newspaper called the Daily Pacifican.

BC: Where did you print it, on one of the Philippine newspaper presses?

MR: ... There was a big American colony in the Philippines. There was an American newspaper there before the war. There were several of them, as a matter of fact.

BC: Before the war.

MR: Yeah.

BC: Your newspaper was printed in Manila?

MR: [Yes], and it was flown all over the Pacific. We printed ... up to 80,000 copies before....

BC: It was like a major American newspaper.

MR: ... This is all nursed along, with me writing an attached [memo for years].

BC: You were still nursing this along?

MR: Until we got to Manilla. And then, ... one of the guys, in one of the newspapers, I forget his name now, he was such an able guy [that] he was just brought in and put in charge of running, ... he was a professional newsman.

BC: By that time, the ex-newsmen in the army running these little papers all through the Pacific had come together.

MR: We put them all together.

BC: You helped put them together?

MR: Right.

BC: And they worked as a staff? Oh, I see.

MR: They put out this Daily Pacifican.

BC: So the newspaper was fully staffed by newspaper people?

MR: But we had nursed it along. We pulled them out of [units] here and there.

BC: They probably worked for the same paper back in Chicago! A daily newspaper?

MR: It was a daily newspaper.

BC: It was quite an operation.

MR: And it wasn't changed to the Stars and Stripes until, oh, five years later. It was all published as the Daily Pacifican for years, for a number of years. It was for all the installations that were left in the Pacific.

KP: What was your relationship with your male counterparts? It seems your colonel gave you a lot of responsibility?

MR: He was a very good friend. ... I think he was exceptional, he was an educator.

KP: Do you remember his name?

MR: His name was Funkhauser. And he came from the University of Chicago and he was the first person to talk to me about the University of Chicago.

KP: And that's partly why you ended up there?

MR: Yeah. Because I got interested, he would pass over to me all his stuff from the University of Chicago.

KP: In many ways you were exceptional. Were other WACs given these responsibilities?

MR: Some were and some weren't. Some were unhappy and some were very fulfilled.

KP: What did their experiences range? Did some just do routine typing?

MR: Oh, yes, oh yes. I was first put in one of those routine jobs. But, very early on I learned, if any woman learned to type in those days she was [a] goner. I never learned.

BC: That's a good way to get around it.

MR: They sent me to typing school, I went in typing eight words a minute and came out typing sixteen.

KP: What was the relationship off-duty hours between WACs and other soldiers?

MR: There was always a crowd [of men] at the gates. ... And very soon you met people you liked and wanted to go out with and so forth.

KP: Did most of the WACs only date officers or would you also date enlisted men or civilians?

MR: There was supposed to be quite a line and MacArthur's [staff] tried to keep that line very firm, ... but it didn't work.

KP: When you say the line, that was ...

MR: Between enlisted and officers. And quite often the WAC officers tried to keep it, too, but it didn't work. Well, I can tell you a story about that. When we got to Manila, I had written these articles for the newspaper back home and one of the people who read it was a guy by the name of Billy Mott. Billy Mott came from Rockaway. He had gone to the Naval Academy. He was the ... county clerk's nephew.

KP: Mott?

MR: Yes, right after the taking of Okinawa, his ship came into Manila harbor. He knew I was there. Incidentally, he had come out to be Admiral Turner's ... flag secretary from the White House. So he had been a naval aide to Roosevelt. ... His older brother, Bert Mott, the gunnery officer on the Enterprise, had also been Roosevelt's naval aide.

KP: Even though they were from a Republican family, Republican clerk?

MR: Yes.

KP: Do you know anything about how they ended up being assigned?

MR: They were great admirers of Roosevelt in those days. I still keep in touch with Billy Mott. ... He lives down in Virginia and is now very, very conservative. ... Anyway, he decided he'd come over and find me. And he came to the WAC detachment. And he was a commander then. And he was ushered into the commanding officer and said he had come to find me. She said that was against the rules. He said, well, she's my cousin. No difference. Did not want any enlisted woman seeing [an officer]. I came home that night and a guard gave me a card. On the back it said, "A more democratic navy would like you to come out to the flagship for dinner tonight." And by that time, I weighed about 85 pounds. I was really skin and bones. You know, you pick up these bugs and I had several of them and I really was not in top [condition]. He put a telephone number down there that I could call. So I called. He sent a launch in. First of all, he came ... in a jeep to pick me up at the gate. Somebody reported that to her. And boy! ... In the next morning when we were lined up, there was a great lecture given about how this wasn't to be. And everybody looked at me and knew who she was talking about. ... After that, why Billy always sent an enlisted sailor in a jeep to pick me up.

BC: Oh, really. That is a clever way to get around it.

MR: ... Twice a week, I went out to eat on the flagship. And after the dinner,... what food, what food. And Admiral Turner took a liking to me and he said that every time I was to come aboard we would have baked Alaska.

BC: All right. That was worth the trip in the launch alone.

MR: ... Absolutely elegant food in the ward room of an Admiral's flagship.

BC: What was the relationship between Turner and Billy Mott then?

MR: Billy Mott was his flag secretary.

BC: That's how you met Turner, then?

MR: Yeah, sure.

BC: You dined with Turner?

MR: Oh sure, the admiral's mess.

BC: That must have been interesting.

MR: They'd have died [if they'd known]! The poor WAC commander would have died! Anyway, our lives, so little of it took ... place in the WAC detachment as such, because we were working in all sorts of things.

KP: In other words, you were really spread out in different places and only housed together as WACs?

MR: Oh, yes, oh yes.

KP: Were there any units strictly made up of women?

MR: Not in our headquarters.

KP: Many tended to be aides or secretaries or working with men?

MR: Or doing functional administrative jobs in the services of supply.

KP: What was the highest ranking officer among the WAC officers?

MR: I believe she was a captain.

BC: In Manila, you were still working with information services?

MR: Oh, yes. I worked with them ... for the rest of my period in the army.

BC: You would do that and other people in the WAC barracks worked in other offices?

MR: All the offices in headquarters, they were assigned.

BC: At the end of the working day, everybody would come back to the barracks?

MR: Yes, for a shower and if they were so unlucky as to have to eat in the mess ...

KP: You say unlucky to eat in the mess?

MR: Well, the food was very poor. As a matter of fact, it got so poor, one morning we just refused to go in. We stood outside the mess hall tent and beat on our ...

BC: What results did that get?

MR: The cook straightened up. For instance, ...we had these preserved eggs. If they'd open them up and fried them ... you could have gone on to eat them. But they didn't. They put them in big garbage pails and boiled them. And if you've ever eaten ... hard boiled preserved eggs, it's appalling. And things like that. ...The discipline in the cadre and the administration of the cadre that did the housekeeping thing was very poor. And we didn't like it and protested that way.

KP: You were transferred to Australia, which reminded you of what the wild west might have been, and then you were transferred to New Guinea, which was a very different place?

MR: That was very different, indeed. We were right on the edge of the Hollandia Harbor, which was an enormous harbor. ... We were a stone's throw from the water's edge, actually. The first ring of buildings of these big, enormous, two story high pieces of corrugated steel set on trees cut out of the jungle. [This was] where the administrative unit and then a row behind it was where all the barracks were. And it really was very tough living. And the diet was very restricted. ... Rough fodder. ... The heat was terrible during the day. The nights were very pleasant. The hours of work were very long indeed. Because, we were very overworked in the sense of trying to get things staged. We were, the plans for Leyte were already under way. We watched the enormous fleet steam out of Hollandia Harbor to Leyte. It was an amazing sight.

BC: It must have been some sight. What did it look like?

MR: Ships, hundreds and hundreds of ships, as far as the eye could see. It looked very like the movies of the Normandy invasion, actually.

KP: The Longest Day.

MR: Yeah, yeah.

BC: What time of day did they start out?

MR: They left for two days.

BC: Two entire days.

MR: Yes.

KP: When you were in New Guinea, did you ever leave your base?

MR: Yes.

KP: Where would you go? Did you ever meet any of the inhabitants of New Guinea?

MR: No. You'd see them. It was a very primitive [place]. I remember I saw one woman suckling a pig. They lived in these little huts behind, ... not very far from the beach, but built up on stilts. And we didn't go very far that way because there were still Japanese who had been isolated living in the hills. They would come down and steal food. They were seen around the camps stealing food and garbage.

BC: So guard duty was important?

MR: We were very well guarded, very well guarded.

BC: Because there was still a chance you might have enemy contact?

MR: Right, right.

BC: Was the base ever attacked by enemy or snipers?

MR: When we go to Leyte, we were bombed. That is, two or three bombs fell not too far away and we had slit trenches and things like that.

KP: So you came under hostile fire?

MR: Once or twice.

KP: What was your reaction?

MR: We got into the trenches!

BC: Where were you?

MR: Leyte.

BC: You had arrived in Leyte and you were in camp somewhere?

MR: Yes. Then we were all in tents. And that was the most uncomfortable part of the whole thing. Because the heat was dreadful. We were inland, away from the water. We didn't have the cooling breezes that we had had. We're in tents that got hotter than hell itself and working in tents, too.

So that it really was ...

BC: You were in New Guinea and then Leyte and very close to the front. How far was the front?

MR: Well, we could hear gunfire at night. That was true in Manila, too. ... We could hear gunfire in the distance, artillery fire.

BC: So the war--because you were bombed--was not a distance thing. Whereas in Australia ...

MR: I don't think anybody felt that they were in imminent danger ever. I never have remembered feeling that. The bombing thing was kind of a freak.

KP: But a frightening one.

MR: Yes.

BC: In situations like the bombing, what kind of protective gear or clothing did you have to put on?

MR: We had helmets.

BC: Just like the G.I. helmet?

MR: ... Everybody carried a G.I. helmet.

BC: Were you ever armed?

MR: No. No WAC was in World War II. It was only very recently, relatively recently, that women were armed.

BC: In those bombings, did you put your helmet on?

MR. ... Mainly you used it for water or something like that. Washing up.

KP: In Leyte or in Manilla, did you have much contact with the Filipinos?

MR: Yes, lots of contact with the Filipinos. And I have several stories to tell you about that. We established, when we got to Leyte, the newspaper was well under way. And it was out of my hands, you know. ... The next thing we had to do is prepare for the landing of large numbers of troops from Europe, because the war in Europe was over and preparation for ... Okinawa had fallen. The next thing was northern Japan. And one of the things that we worked on was the Philippine Institute. What to do with all these troops when they got into this big staging area and what educational activities. Then we also had a lot of our own troops from New Guinea that were just sitting there waiting. And ... we established the Philippine Institute, using a lot of Filipino teachers and professors from the University that we could find. ... Anybody that wanted to teach their specialty, engineers, doctors particularly, grouped together to give seminars on

advanced techniques that one knew, but the other didn't and that kind of thing. So we had, that Philippine Institute was quite a large thing in a matter of about three months after we got there.

Then the other thing I did was to write a guidebook on Manila to show the troops what was here and what had been destroyed and what had once been here. Manila was probably the most destroyed city in World War II.

KP: Only Warsaw, they said was worse.

MR: Yes, there were lots of interesting things about it. The old city, the walled city, dated from ... the first Spanish conquistadors and it went back to the sixteenth century. Then there was the whole American experience in the Philippines, from the time of ... the Spanish American War. ... So Manila represented major impact of American culture on the Philippines. So I set about going around with a professor ... from the University of the Philippines ... on Philippine history. And we'd go from place to place and take notes and so forth. And one day I went out on my own and wandered in a building over by the Malacanan Palace. And the Philippine Senate was in session there. So I sat there and kind of watched it. When they broke up, why the presiding officer came down and asked me what I was interested in and so forth. He was the President of the Senate. And at various times, thereafter, he would come over to take me to dinner. And that was another time I got really ripped apart, because our commanding officer didn't like the mixing. ...

KP: Even though he was the President of the Senate? He had a very prestigious position.

MR: Yes. He would take me to a restaurant run by a Chinese chef who had been the chef to...[President Manuel] Quezon. Quezon's chef. It was very good food. And then he would tell me all about Philippine politics and Philippine history and that kind of thing.

KP: What did he tell you about the politics?

MR: I can't remember.

KP: But you really got the inside ...

MR: Yes. At that time, you know, there was a lot going on about where America would put its support to the maintenance of the land system, as it existed in the past, or the democratization of the economy and so forth. And it all depended on the way the peso was stabilized and that kind of thing. I've forgotten the ... particulars. We stabilized the peso at a rate that was very hard on the ... Filipinos who worked for the American army and were no longer paid in dollars. That was a big issue. ... Because it stabilized at a rate that was way ... below the black market. And there were issues of that sort. Also, there was the issue of a new tax system, whether it would undermine the large sugar, land holding, sugar central families. And General MacArthur's man he put in charge, his G-5 or his government relations, happened to be a man he took off the island with him, but who had been General Franco's representative in the Philippines. I'll show you the pamphlets and so forth, but the (A'Reba Spania?) stuff with all these pictures and the whole organization of the Francoists in the Philippines. He was a great friend of General MacArthur's.

And that's where MacArthur came down. And he put him in charge of the civil affairs, organizations.

KP: So MacArthur's G-5 was a Francoist?

MR: A Francoist.

KP: And he supported the land barons?

MR: Right, right.

KP: Is this another reason why you don't think too highly of Douglas MacArthur?

MR: Yes, of course. He was hand in glove ... with the sort of feudal land system that the Spanish had hatched and that ... America never undermined ... or never helped resolve. As a matter of fact, you know, it was part of the colonial structure. And later on, this guy and I am trying to remember his name..., he became President of the Philippines.

BC: Really, my goodness.

KP: You really traveled in some circles.

MR: It was curiosity.

KP: This began because you went to the Senate.

MR: Right, to write something about it. ...

KP: When you were in Manila, what were your other duties besides the guidebook and continuing work with the newspaper?

MR: No, I was pretty well out of it [the newspaper]. Well, the Philippine Institute ...

KP: How many soldiers, sailors and other service people took courses?

MR: I don't know the figures now.

KP: Well, over 20,000?

MR: Pretty nearly about, I would think.

KP: So it was more than a small ...

MR: But you see. Let's see. The time schedule was that the Battle of Okinawa took place about three months after we got to Manila. From then on the planning for the invasion of Japan was

paramount. And that was due for November and the war ended in September. So the time span that I'm talking about, ... we got an awful lot done in a short time.

BC: You sure did.

MR: Time spans were so compacted, because you were working so intensely on things. ...

KP: Did you spend the rest of the war in the Pacific?

MR: In Manila. I was in Manila until the war ended. Actually, I was at a party when the war ended. We all were waiting, ... you knew something was going on after the bomb fell. I must say, my first feeling when I ... got the reports of the bomb was thank God we won't have to go into Japan. ...

BC: You were at a party?

MR: ... When the news came and guns began to go off. And somebody said, the war must be over. And we got into a jeep and went over to the newspaper to find out. And I have the first newspaper that came off the press.

BC: What a great souvenir.

KP: We should put that in the exhibition.

MR: I'll give it to you.

KP: That would be great to use in the exhibition.

BC: A piece of American history.

MR: It was the first one to come off the press when we knew out there.

KP: Your brother was overseas in the European theater. How many letters would you receive from him?

MR: Not a lot. It was a long time, between two or three weeks at a time. While his stories [are] all blood and guts, mine really was quite adventurous on the whole, putting up with a lot of physical hardship, wear and tear. I came home weighing 80 pounds.

KP: Your hardships. What about your diet?

MR: Well, the food was very clunky, it was heavy. You either ate it and got fat or you didn't eat it and got thin. I mean there was nothing in between. And you picked up these bugs, too, and were run ragged with diarrhea and that kind of thing. And it took a lot out of you, physically.

And the heat, of course, it was very oppressive, Manila it was very oppressive, like Leyte. Because, we were not near enough to the beach to get the winds at night.

KP: What kind of bugs did you get?

MR: They were all intestinal kinds of things. ... It was before the antibiotics. They did have the sulpha drugs and the sulpha drugs helped some. I finally was sent down to the hospital for ... a couple of weeks, because I got so thin that ... I had to be hospitalized.

LL: Was that common among WACs?

MR: There was quite a bit. ... As I say, ... it was quite a bit of illness. Physical illness. ... One illness in two years was just enough really to say it was a very dangerous proposition.

KP: There was a great deal of animosity ...

MR: Mainly, my problem was ... I ... put my back out lifting garbage cans and that caused me a lot of trouble. The bad disc problem, that had a lot to do with my losing weight.

KP: Why were you putting out garbage cans? Was that a detail?

MR: Everybody had some KP detail.

KP: So you were doing KP ...

MR: Yes. Not after we got to the Philippines. This was probably in New Guinea.

KP: You also did close order drills?

MR: No. ... We didn't even have to stand retreats. I'll never forget the day that we got word that Roosevelt was dead. It was early in the morning and I was walking from the ... WAC encampment to the office where I worked and these kids came along crying. And I asked them what was the trouble and he said "our friend is dead, our friend is dead." About Roosevelt

KP: It was Roosevelt?

MR: That was Franklin Roosevelt. The retreat we stood was very impressive.

KP: You all stood?

MR: It was a big parade retreat. And we looked at the flag and all the rest ...

KP: There was a great deal of animosity towards the Japanese.

MR: Yes, there was.

KP: How did you feel about the enemy?

MR: I probably shared it. I shared it. It's one of the reasons I did not go on to Japan.

KP: You could have had the option?

MR: Oh, yes. Pressed. Please, go. And I said, "No." I did not want to live in a hostile environment. ... We had no reason to believe after all the islands where they fought to the bitter death that there would be anything else but that in Japan, even after they gave up. We really thought there would be a lot of resentment and a lot of terror and that we would live in a ...

KP: Compound.

MR: Compound and have to be guarded carefully.

KP: Are you surprised that relations improved the way they did between the United States and Japan?

MR: Yes, I am.

KP: Any regrets ... about not going to Japan?

MR: No, I don't think so, I don't think so. ... I was glad I came back when I did, got back in a university.

BC: When were you discharged?

MR: December, '45. It was just two years. This all happened in two years.

BC: You did a lot in two years.

MR: Yes.

BC: How did you leave from the Philippines to get home?

MR: I came home on a troop ship.

KP: Was the troop ship all women?

MR: Oh, no. Oh, no. It was a big ship. It wasn't as big as the American, which we went out, but it was a big ship.

KP: When you went out on the ship, there were men and women on the ship. How did that go?

MR: ... You were segregated, believe me.

KP: No love boat?

MR: No, no.

KP: When you got home, where did you land?

MR: San Francisco.

KP: Did you land before Christmas?

MR: Just. ... And I got home around the 15th of December, I guess. And I remember rushing to see San Francisco coming in sight on ship board, it was quite a sight.

KP: To get home, did you take the train across the country?

MR: Yes, and I insisted, by that time I was really pretty worn down, I insisted that they reserve a berth for me, I paid for it, of course. And they didn't want to do it, wanted me to sit up. No, sir. We raised hell until I got a berth and came across the country in some comfort. Can't remember. I got off the train, I guess, in Dover. Didn't I? I forget. ... No, no, no. New York. Mother met me. We walked down Fifth Avenue and I bought some clothes.

BC: Did you come home in uniform?

MR: Yes. Oh, sure. ...

KP: Did you go to the University of Chicago on the G.I. Bill?

MR: Sure did, and I went to London [School of Economics] on the G.I. Bill too.

KP: After you finished your education, what was your first job?

MR: It was with the American Council on Education, I believe. ... That was a short job. From there I went to an organization, a Rockefeller organization, called Industrial Organization Counselors, where I did research on industrial relations.

KP: You once worked in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare?

MR: That was some years later. I went to Washington in '57, first on this grant, to try to work out a labor market things for professionals in the social sciences, non-academic. ... And then I went from there to the National Science Foundation, where we did the first ... major gathering of economists, politicians, and scientists on the impact of our research and development on the economy. Nobody had ever explored this. And from there, I went to Brookings (Institute) and then on into HEW.

KP: You played an important role in higher education, in planning?

MR: Yes, because I went to the Office of Education as the number two person in a new unit, long range planning in education. This would have been '62. And we were well under way in doing a lot of the background work that led to the Higher Education [Act] of 1965. Then from there I went on into ... did the educational planning in the anti-poverty program, both in the task force and Johnson's task force and then for the agency OEO.

KP: Were you a political appointee or were you civil service?

MR: I was civil service.

KP: ... What was your grade?

MR: Fifteen.

KP: So you were a very high level?

MR: That was high level at that time. It doesn't sound so high level now.

KP: ... I think Linda and probably Bruce will want to do some follow ups on your post war career, but is there anything about the pre-war or wartime that we forgot to ask? I have one more question. Have you ever joined any veteran's organizations?

MR: I did for a while. What was that one that was on the campuses?

KP: American Veteran's Committee.

MR: Yes.

KP: You probably didn't like Joe McCarthy very much?

MR: No! As a matter of fact, when I first went to Washington in '57 in doing job interviews and that kind of thing, exploring what ..., people would say, "Don't ever mention you went to the London School of Economics. Don't ever mention it." And I said, ... "How can I not? "

KP: Do you think the service of women in the military during World War II was appreciated by the public at the time and even since the war? Or do you think ...

MR: Well, I don't know. I don't think it needed any special appreciation. After all, everybody there [was] doing their bit. And ... did ours in the military, and I think we did it well. And it wasn't, as I said, it didn't put us in any enormous danger. We did survive hardships, but you know, we have all the benefits that anybody else had. I never would have been able to go anywhere I wanted, to any university, to any foreign country I wanted.

KP: Without the G.I. Bill?

MR: Without the G.I. Bill. ... I look back and say that was a great, great reward. Recognition of, and also, nobody has ever done this, but I'd like to look at the economic consequences of the G.I. Bill.

KP: Only recently are people beginning to study the G.I. Bill.

MR: Because this created the fund of highly trained people that gave America the edge on the world for 25-30 years. And later on when I was in the Office of Education, I was the U.S. delegate to OECD's planning of education in Paris. It was quite clear, you know, when you heard these other countries talk about the small pool of really highly trained people they had. We had this wonderful spread of highly trained people all over the country, you know. ... We were very respected for it. Very respected for it as a nation.

LL: We talked a bit about your feelings about Hitler and Europe. But, what about your feelings on December 7th and the attack on Pearl Harbor? Did the attack come as a surprise?

MR: ... Oh, yes I was listening to the symphony, the Philharmonic, and they interrupted the Philharmonic, and said, we have a dispatch here. We don't know how...to understand it, but it says that Pearl Harbor has been bombed. Ted was downtown getting a Sunday paper. When he came in I said, Ted, where is Pearl Harbor? Where's Pearl Harbor?

BC: You were listening to it on the radio then?

MR: Yes.

BC: So the radio announcer broke in and said, Pearl Harbor has been bombed?

MR: Yes, and then about twenty minutes later he came back with fill ins. That was about two in the afternoon.

BC: I just wanted to ask you, I asked you before on purpose if your friends or relatives had gone into the Women's Army Corps too. When you went off to war then, you were going off really by yourself. You weren't going off with friends or relatives. While in hindsight you're saying you were never in the line of fire, but at the time you went were you apprehensive ... about going off to war and being by yourself and going away somewhere? Were you apprehensive about that?

MR: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. That wasn't part of the feeling of the times, you know. We were in there to win a war and everybody was. ... You don't count that far.

BC: So you were just going and whatever was going to happen was going to happen, and you really weren't worried about it?

MR: Now one other girl from Rockaway, Betsy Paterson, went to college with me at Morristown Junior College. She joined the WACs about two months after I did, I think. She was assigned to the Air Corps.

KP: As a flier?

MR: No. No. Oh, no. No. That was not in the picture then, but she ran across the tarmac with a message and ran into a propeller and was killed. So, it did happen.

KP: Did any people in your WAC unit get killed?

MR: No. No. The only time I ever really felt in danger was on the way from ... twice, in both cases going up from Australia to Hollandia, going over the Owen-Stanley mountains. We were in a C-47 and one of the engines went out. And so we got over the mountains and came down in Leyte, which is just the other side of Mount Stanley. ... While they fixed up the plane, ... and I think everybody was kind of scared then. You know, we all knew that.

BC: And the second time?

MR: And the second time was going from New Guinea to Leyte. We were on a ship that had been converted, a small cargo ship that had been converted from a refrigerator ship, run by a captain from New Orleans. He served us New Orleans coffee. And we were on deck for something like five hours with ... life jackets on because we were being trailed by a Jap sub.

KP: And you knew that?

MR: Yes.

BC: Did the people on deck know that?

MR: Oh, that was why we were up there. We were standing on the deck, brought up from below and all put on deck. We stood there on deck for five hours.

KP: The entire crew and passengers?

MR: The entire (...?) So, in case we got ... torpedoed, there'd be nobody below decks. And we were not escorted on that. ... That was off the Leyte Gulf.

BC: So your plane almost crashed into the Owen-Stanley mountains, you were trailed by a Japanese submarine ...

MR: No, it didn't almost crash, but we lost a motor and you know if the other motor had gone, why we would have been (...?)

BC: Then later you were bombed. You worked a few miles from the front, and you sit here and tell us, I never felt any danger whatsoever.

MR: Those two things were the only time I ever (...?)

BC: Oh, they're two big times!

MR: ... But it was all right.

KP: Well, thank you very much. This has been really fascinating.

MR: Kind of fun.

KP: Listening to your stories is interesting.

MR: When you come up I'll give you some of the things like the newspapers.

KP: The newspapers we definitely want.

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

Edited: 7/1/97 by Mary Robinson

Entered and Reviewed: 6/1/98 by G. Kurt Piehler