

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MAURICE M. WEILL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Mr. Maurice Weill on November 10, 1999, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak and ...

Lynn Marley: Lynn Marley.

SSH: Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to be interviewed. I would like to begin by asking you where and when you were born?

MMW: I was born in Union City, Hudson County, on June 5, 1923.

SSH: All right, can you tell me about your family members? How many brothers and sisters do you have?

MMW: Well, I'm the youngest of four brothers. Three of us are alive. We all grew up in Hudson County, we all went to the same high school. My parents were married in Jersey City. My father had come over from what was either Germany or France, Alsace-Lorraine when he was a young boy and my mother, when she was a young girl from Russia ... they met and married in Jersey City, lived there for a number of years and then moved to Union City where most all of us grew up after that and went to school there, and my father was in business there.

SSH: For the tape can you tell us what your father's name was.

MMW: Isidore, I-S-I-D-O-R-E, called him Gus.

SSH: Did the other members of his family come to the States?

MMW: Yes, a sister and his father. ... the mother, I think the mother came, but she died very early and another sister had died before that.

SSH: When was your father born?

MMW: 1884.

SSH: When did he come to the States?

MMW: About 1888 or 9, something like that.

SSH: Were there other members of the family already here in the States?

MMW: I don't know.

SSH: Do you know if they came as a unit, the sister and the father?

MMW: I really don't know.

SSH: ... Your mother's name?

MMW: Cecilia. Her ... maiden name was Teklin, T-E-K-L-I-N.

SSH: Which part of Russia did she come from?

MMW: Minsk.

SSH: Can you tell us of her family, who came and any history you have of them?

MMW: Well, she was the oldest, no, well, she was the next to the oldest of about four sisters and one brother. I think they all came together, that's my recollection. I believe she had other relatives here. I don't think my father's side had [anyone. He] only had a cousin here, but, I don't think there are any others, they're all gone, there's no assemblage of anybody being around anymore.

SSH: Do you remember any contact with any relatives in Europe as a child growing up?

MMW: Well, I had contact with a cousin of my father's. My father never met her. She lived in Paris and he corresponded with her for many, many years and then ... after he died, my mother continued the correspondence and an aunt had ... met her and then I met her during the war. I was in Paris, just after it was taken and I had her address. I remember it to this day. 33 Rue De La (Solidarite?). So, I went with another fellow. I was a second lieutenant at the time.

... We went to this apartment, it was the end of August. Paris was retaken on August 25th, or something like that and it was a few days later and we went. It was a beautiful sunny day. We went to this place. It was in the (Morue?) section of Paris, which is near the university, and I went into the office and the superintendent or whatever ... [I] asked for her by name. He never heard of her. Then when I said I was a cousin, he pulled out a certificate from the mailbox. It was a Gestapo Certificate. She, ... she had been removed to the unoccupied zone in Lyon. She worked for the Bank of Paris and they must have engineered to get her down there and her father had also worked there. I'm named after her father. ... He told me how to reach her.

So, I wrote to her and the next thing, I got a postcard from her, and she was back in the apartment. So, I saw her then in December of that year and maybe once more in Paris. ... My wife and I, my son and daughter-in-law and a couple of other members of the family went to visit her. ... I had some friends from here, who were ... one who lived in Paris part of the time and the other one whose family was, her uncle was the chief rabbi of Paris, and they looked after her until she died. She had never married and ...

SSH: What a story she must have had. Wow!

[Tape Paused]

MMW: At five feet, less a few inches, and all of our family were all very tall, including my father and grandfather and everybody. So she was very small. ... She kept this correspondence going for all these years, always in French. She wrote in French. We would take it to school and have it translated. My daughter-in-law, Jean, was fluent in French, and so she started to write to her in French. ... My mother would write back in English and we'd get the stuff back as well. ... I guess she's dead about ten or twelve years now and she must have been close to ninety. She lived in a retirement home at the time and she knew everything about our family ... every occasion, every birth, every wedding.

SSH: You had said her last name was?

MMW: Meyer. M-E-Y-E-R. "May-ear" you pronounced it.

SSH: Meyer. ... that's your middle name.

MMW: Yes.

SSH: Can you tell us if she continued to work for the bank?

MMW: She worked for, I don't know when she quit, but she retired and apparently had enough to get along on. She never looked to us for anything. She never sought to come to this country. She used to go in the summer to ... she maybe had a room up on the Riviera, up on the heights from Cannes.

SSH: Did she talk at all [about] how they did get her out of Paris?

MMW: Well, apparently ... I don't know. My recollection is that the bank saw to it that she got out and then ultimately, as she got older, she went to this Morrouge Retirement Retreat, day retirement or something like that in Paris, and that's where she died.

SSH: As a second lieutenant, were you able to see that she had things at that point?

MMW: She had her apartment. She had her apartment.

SSH: Was there a shortage of food or anything in Paris?

MMW: All I know is, we went through the subway, the Metro. When she ... I picked her up at the American Red Cross Club, this was in December, and she stopped in to get a loaf of bread, big, long [loaf]. ... The two of us were walking through the, into the subway car, and here we were in the subway car, and we're trying to make conversation. We can't. We don't understand each other. So people thought I was trying to get fresh and when ... I told her I was a cousin, she said, "*Cousine*". That got applauded. [laughter] That's kind of cute. Then she had a translator there. A lady who ultimately became a doctor. ... We used to hear from her. In fact, we finally got the ultimate letter that she had died from this friend who lived in the apartment. Anyway, she

apparently was okay. She had no problem. All I know is when we got there, she was waiting for us in the hotel. She had a gift for us.

SSH: A wonderful story.

LM: I just want to back up to your parents. They both immigrated ... to this country from Germany, France and Russia. Did they speak of any reasons why they came? Did they experience any anti-Jewish pogroms or anything?

MMW: I have no idea. No. My father's family, my father, I guess they first went to New York City, and my father went to public school. Public School 108 in "Hell's Kitchen", and then my mother went to school in Jersey City. ... Then they moved to Jersey. My father worked for a construction company, which happens to be the same business that I'm in, and he worked there for many years, until they opened up a business in Jersey City and Union City.

SSH: So, he did come to this country and was able to go to school then?

MMW: Oh, sure. I've got his diploma and his graduation program at home.

SSH: Oh, wonderful. Can you tell us a little bit then, too, about the ... traditions that your family brought from Europe, ... [that] were maintained in your family?

MMW: I really ... no, we were just an American family, and that's it ...

SSH: How much younger are you than your oldest brother?

MMW: Twelve years. He's alive and lives in Florida, lives in Palm Beach. His wife died. He has two children whom we're in touch with. My brother, Ray, he died about three years ago, and I see his children. They live near us. My brother is in a nursing home. He had two children, one died and one is not doing well. So, I'm in touch with them and my kids live in Short Hills, and Millburn, where they were brought up and went to school.

SSH: As a young man growing up in a large family with a large age distance between all of [them] ... he would have already been in middle school when you were born. Can you tell me ... [about] your mother? Did she stay home? Did she work outside of the home?

MMW: She worked. They had a store. They had two stores, one in Jersey City that did embroidery and knitting wools, and there were two sisters. Her sister [is] slightly older than she. They opened up the store in Jersey City, and my folks had the store in Union City. The two men quit their jobs because this business had grown and then unfortunately, the other sister died during the flu epidemic, and they continued that, and my father's business was open until nineteen fifty-something or other, and he died. He was eighty. My mother was eighty-four when she died. He died in 1964, and she died in 1971.

SSH: Did they talk to you at all about their memories of World War I?

MMW: No.

SSH: Being in this country, were they active in the Zionist movement at all?

MMW: No. No.

SSH: Were politics discussed in your home?

MMW: I don't recall, I was a little boy, you know. I came down to school [when] I was sixteen years of age and the other boys were out of the house already, and, so ... that's it.

LM: Your father's business survived all the way through the fifties. Did he have problems during the Depression?

MMW: Yeah. They lost the business and then they lost the building we lived in, and they moved and whatever. ... They were, I guess, the business was fairly successful during the '20s but after that, it wasn't and they managed to get along. They were, it was just the two of them, and we all took care of ourselves. My oldest brother was able to go to school full-time during the day. He went to New York University and my other two brothers went at night, although, ... they all worked while I was gone, and I came here on a scholarship and worked during the day. I had a scholarship and then had a little help from home, and then I worked at Sears Roebuck, which was down on ... Albany Street at the time, and I worked there for about eighteen to twenty hours a week, and that's how I made my way through.

SSH: Tell us a little bit about growing up in Union City.

MMW: It was a great place. We knew everybody there and I still have a few friends, but most of my friends from there, ultimately, when they got married they moved to Bergen County. Very few of us moved to ... When we were married we moved to Roselle Park, 'cause I was working out here, and then we moved to Millburn and built a house there. So, other than my one brother who lived near us, most of my friends are up in Bergen County. I talk to some of them now and they're all retired, except one fellow who is still an attorney in Union City.

SSH: What were your interests as a kid going through school?

MMW: Well, ... scholastically, I was a pretty good mathematician. That's what I majored in, mathematics, and as a result of that, I wound up, when I went into service, I was mathematics oriented, as a meteorologist, and that required two years of mathematics and whatnot. ... At one time, I had tried to become an actuarial mathematician, and was never able to get a job at it. I thought I was a good mathematician, but when we took the exams, they destroyed you. Anyway, I never had the opportunity to. ... I did, ultimately, get offered a job, after I got out of service, with the Equitable Life, which I did not take.

SSH: Was there a certain teacher in high school that was a mentor?

MMW: I don't recall. Actually the schools we went to, everybody knew my family. They all knew my brothers and they knew my parents, and we were a bunch of people that used to all hang out at the Y in Union City, which was in walking, everything was within walking distance. I tell my granddaughter that, she's twenty now, and she couldn't understand I didn't have a driver's license until I was twenty-three. You didn't need a car. We lived [where] the trolley car would take us down to the station, down to Weehawken Station, and across the road. So, I never needed a car. When I drove a Jeep in the Army, but I never had a license, so I had to go take a driver's test. And that was that.

SSH: What were your ... extra curricular activities that kept you busy as a young man in high school?

MMW: Well, I don't know. I used to help my folks in the store and I used to spend a little time on arts and crafts. I was pretty good, at that time, a fair artist and sculptor. I used to make marionettes and puppets and stuff like that, and we kept busy somehow.

SSH: How religious was your family?

LM: Did they follow any of the holidays?

MMW: My father was not. He was observant, but he was not very religious at all, and interestingly, when my folks were married, they, both families belonged to different synagogues. My father belonged to a Reform synagogue, which was very unusual at that time and my mother belonged to an Orthodox synagogue, and ultimately, when they couldn't afford two of them, they joined one in Union City and that was that, but, they were not ...

LM: Was that the Reformed one they ended up joining or the Orthodox?

MMW: No, it was the conservative one, or Orthodox, I guess it was called at the time.

LM: Now did your mother's family have a problem since she was marrying someone that wasn't orthodox?

MMW: I wasn't there. [laughter]

LM: [laughter] I didn't know if you had possibly heard any stories?

MMW: No, that was fine. My father spoke German fluently. He used to help me with my homework. He was a great speller. I'd say, "Pop, how do you spell this?" He'd say, "Well, you spell it." ... He used to help me with my German homework and then my grandfather, his father, only spoke French. See, when my father was born, the place where he was born was German at the time, before that it was French and my grandfather used to walk around the house singing the *Marseillies*. So, anyway.

SSH: That's a good story. Now, why did you pick Rutgers? Did you apply to other schools?

MMW: Yes, I did. I was looking for a scholarship. I got a scholarship here. I applied to a couple of [schools], I applied to the University of Chicago. I did not get in. I took the exam and here I got in, and I've forgotten where else I applied.

SSH: Did you have to come down to Rutgers for an interview? Had you ever been to the campus before?

MMW: I don't recall. I don't recall. Yeah.

SSH: Did you have any meetings with Dean Metzger?

MMW: I knew him, I knew of him. I knew him and I probably did. Yeah. He was the Dean of Men here at the time.

SSH: What was the first dorm that you stayed in?

MMW: At first I stayed in a rooming house at 82 Somerset, then I came down here. My roommate at the time was somebody I went to high school with, Charles Albisetti. He ultimately became a chemist with Dupont. He lives down South somewhere now, and then I got an opportunity to move to Wessels first, I guess, and then to Pell for the next two years. I don't know which is which, which came first.

LM: What were some of your recollections coming out to the campus when you were a young freshman? Were you afraid of the sophomores [or] some of the hazing rituals that occurred?

MMW: I did not belong to a fraternity. I was busy working. I got this job at Sears Roebuck and whenever I was finished with school, I was able to go down there, which was, worked out fine. My roommate for two years was a member of the Class of '42, Raymond Gorman who, we became very good friends. He's a dentist, retired dentist, who lives in our area now. I don't know if he worked, but he was a pre-med student, I guess. I don't know, we kept busy and whatnot.

SSH: What were some of the social things that you did as a young man here?

MMW: We used to go to dances in New Brunswick at the Hungarian Club or something or other there. We used to, every Saturday night, they had a dance there with free food. We used to go to that.

LM: See, there's still a run for free food, that hasn't changed. [laughter]

MMW: That has not changed at all. Yeah.

SSH: Did you go out with any of the young women from what is now called Douglass, NJC, I think they called it the Coop?

MMW: Yeah, we used to go out there. There were a couple of girls I knew from home there who were in the same class and we used to go out there. Yeah, but we got around. We didn't have a car. We didn't have anything. We just, we used to eat at (Winants?) for most of, well, we used to eat down also at a place on Somerset Street. I've forgotten the name of it again, and on Sunday we used to go to Jacobs Hotel, which was on Albany Street. That was a hotel and had a big meal for a buck.

SSH: ... What did you think of mandatory chapel?

MMW: It didn't bother me one way or another.

SSH: We had some who protested loudly. Do you remember any of the convocations that were here on campus or any speakers?

MMW: Yeah, I think so, but I can't remember them exactly.

SSH: Do you remember any of the musical programs?

MMW: No. No. No.

SSH: What about ROTC?

MMW: I was in ROTC, yeah. I tried to get into the advanced course, but, when I was interviewed at the gym across the way, I had my uniform on, very tight, and they looked at me and I have very bowed legs, so the Colonel, Colonel Cope, I think his name was, he asked me, "Mister, your legs, did you have an accident or were you born that way?" [laughter] Anyway, I didn't get in, and I was very lucky because most of, a good part of our class was destroyed and anyway, I wound up enlisting anyway.

SSH: Were you involved in any of the athletic events or intramural sports here?

MMW: I went out for track, and I was a high jumper, but I wasn't very good. In fact, I quit when I had spiked myself. Because of my bow legs, I spiked myself on the ankles. Anyway that was the end of that.

LM: Did you attend the Military Ball?

MMW: No. No. I don't think so. No.

SSH: How often did you go home to Union City?

MMW: Not that often. It was a bus ride and a train ride. I don't know. I really don't remember. I know I used to go for Christmas time and Thanksgiving, and, I really don't remember.

SSH: Did you work during the summers then?

MMW: Oh, yeah.

SSH: Working for your father?

MMW: No, I worked for a haberdashery store in Union City. I may have stayed here a little bit to work in Sears down here. I worked in the sporting goods department and sold bicycles and whatnot there. I really put in a lot of time there. I don't remember what happened with the other summers. Oh, I know what. One year we worked down the Shore as waiters, down in Belmar, a group of us.

SSH: As a freshman and sophomore, were you aware of what was going on in Europe?

MMW: I guess I was but I have no great recollections of it.

LM: Did you recognize the changing atmosphere on campus, more uniforms being present and the three semester graduation program?

MMW: Well, what had happened with me was that I had been here three years, and because two of my brothers were already in the service, I said, "Well, I think I ought to go home." So, I continued at Columbia at night. Then before that season was over, I was in myself. I did get my diploma from here because I had enough credits from my three years, plus the other year and whatnot. So, by that time, there were none of us at home and my oldest brother did not [go], he was substantially older and had children, but, the others, of course, were in.

SSH: What branches of the service were your brothers in?

MMW: My brother, Ray, was in the heavy maintenance ordnance, it was tank repairs and maintenance, and he was set in the South Pacific. My brother, Leonard, was in the finance corps. He served out in St. Louis or Indianapolis. Ray was, came out a captain, I came out a first lieutenant.

SSH: ... Do you remember where you were when you first heard of Pearl Harbor?

MMW: Yeah. I was at home. Now, this was December 9th or 7th was it? I was at home as I recall and we had some family company. That I do recall.

SSH: Was the family aware as soon as the announcement was made?

MMW: Pardon?

SSH: Did you have ... your radio on so you were aware as soon as it was broadcast?

MMW: Yeah.

SSH: We're always curious how people heard the news. Do you remember what the reaction was?

MMW: Not really.

SSH: Did you wait to be drafted or did you enlist?

MMW: I enlisted.

SSH: Can you tell us what branch of the service you enlisted in?

MMW: I enlisted in a program, which required two years of physics and math, and I became an aviation cadet in meteorology, and I was dispatched out to Grand Rapids, Michigan, for an eight month training program. In that, it was the equivalent of a masters' program in meteorology. It was given at MIT and the University of Chicago and UCLA and Grand Rapids and one other place, NYU in New York. So, I was there for eight months.

SSH: Where did you report for your induction?

MMW: I reported, first I enlisted at Grand Central Station in New York. Grand Central Palace it was called, and I went home and back to school and I was working. I was working during the day. I worked for Wallace and Tiernan in Bellville, and then I got my notice at the end of December to report to Grand Rapids for a class to begin on January 4th, so I had to quit my job over the telephone, quit school over the telephone and left. I got on the train and went to Grand Rapids.

SSH: Did you have any basic training?

MMW: We had it all there.

SSH: All right there?

MMW: Yeah. We had regular basic cadet training and technical training.

LM: What are some of your recollections from basic? Any particular good points, bad points, the food?

MMW: We were, we had a, it was a new station that was developed just for this. They were in dire shortage of meteorologists to go with the Air Force. It was very cold up in Grand Rapids. It was nice. A group of us, of eight, in the room there in the hotel and we marched out in the snow and whatnot, and then came December and we were dispatched all over the world.

SSH: Most of the people there in that program, obviously they were college educated, but where were they schooled?

MMW: Yes, they had to have two years of math and physics.

SSH: Were they from all over the country or mostly from the East Coast?

MMW: Pretty much so, I think, a lot from the East Coast, but I think they were from all over the country. I think mostly from the East Coast.

SSH: Where did you go then from Grand Rapids?

MMW: From Grand Rapids? I went to Biggs Field, El Paso, Texas, and from El Paso, I was sent in December of '43 to the ... it was a training center for overseas duty in Orlando, Florida. We got there for this class and all the instructors had just come in from the South Pacific, and they all had malaria. So, we never had any classes really [laughter], and then went back to, came back to El Paso where, at that time, it was the end of December. I found out I was graduating from Rutgers in January. I tried to get off to go, they wouldn't let me off because I was then sent to Alamogordo, New Mexico, to get onto an overseas ship. I was replacing someone who got appendicitis. Then, from there we started to go overseas. Went to Scribner, Nebraska, and went from there overseas and landed at Camp Shanks in New York, and then we came down by train to Weehawken, which is where I lived at the time, and got on a boat.

SSH: Were you able to see your family at least?

MMW: No. This was ... the day I was supposed to, I had a date, on Sunday of that week with the lady who is my wife, and my brother and his wife, to meet them, I think near Macy's in New York. I said, "If I don't show up, I didn't show up."

LM: Now, did somebody accept your diploma for you in your absence?

MMW: No, it was sent to me in the mail. I have it in my office. January something of '44, but I consider myself the class of '43. All my friends were from there.

SSH: From '43?

MMW: Yeah, although I have friends at home that I'm still friendly with from '44, a couple of people.

SSH: What was the overseas training like? What did you do to be trained to go overseas, or what were you supposed to be trained to do?

MMW: Well, yeah. I don't know. I've forgotten what it was. We had a good time down in Florida. ... Then, when we went back on the way from El Paso, to Orlando, by train, I stopped off in Tennessee to visit my brother who was in training to go overseas, too. Then I went from over there. We got our shots and everything else we were supposed to get.

LM: In your training, what was your perception of the enemy, or of the Army? What did they portray to you as the enemy, or what was your perception from what you knew of the “enemy”?

MMW: I can't remember. You know, you're talking about fifty-five years ago. Fifty-six years.

SSH: Going from New Jersey to Grand Rapids Michigan, you talked about the cold, but to go from New Jersey and the environment of the Northeast to Texas and the South, do you remember anything that struck you, about that?

MMW: Not really. I met a couple of, funny, I, my brother, Ray, the older one who, he went to the Pacific. He had been stationed in El Paso, also, so we had some friends there. He was at Fort Bliss and I met a couple of guys from school there, the Class of '42, who were there. [I've] forgotten their names now. I met them there and we spent a little time together in Juarez, Mexico. I got home a couple of times by hitching a ride from El Paso to Mitchell Field. I got home one night, the plane landed at four o'clock. I got home in Weehawken about five o'clock and left that afternoon at about six o'clock. That's it.

SSH: [laughter] Were you able to thumb these rides often on the planes this way?

MMW: We were able to because we were dispatching all the planes, we were giving them all the weather forecasts. We knew all the people there. So, I hitched that way once, and then there was somebody else in Pyote, Texas, and some other places.

SSH: So, did you get to any other points of interest?

MMW: In the States?

SSH: Yes.

MMW: Other than coming back home and going to Pyote, there was another one, about three or four times I did. I was there about three months.

SSH: Was the training that you did for meteorology involving only the Air Force?

MMW: It was all for the Air Force, yes.

SSH: Were there people there also training from other branches of the service?

MMW: No, we were all Air Force forecasting, for flights ... I, ultimately, was stationed with a group, the 363rd Tactical Reconnaissance Group, which ... moved with the front lines. When I got overseas, I was in England, and then went across the Channel to Normandy, to Omaha Red, Omaha Red One, and from there we kept traveling. This was in June, late June of '44, and then we traveled around Normandy at the Cherbourg and all the way around. Then into Le Mons, then into Paris. That's where I saw cousin Germaine, and then on, and that, by the way, the lay out, I met a guy from my Class of '43 at the (Rheims?). That's where the champagne is made.

Who was in charge of billeting people there, Bob Dalrymple, from my class. Then I went onto Luxembourg and to Belgium, Holland and Germany, and that's where I was when the war ended.

SSH: ... You were transported by ship. Was it a large convoy that you went over on?

MMW: I was in a large convoy. I was on a ship, I was on the *Sterling Castle*, the HMS *Sterling Castle*. It had 25,000, it had 5,000 troops. We got on the ship about 39th Street in the City, and when we got on, I figured, I was all excited. I got a card that said, "Lieutenant Weill Stateroom E4," very, pretty good. Stateroom E4, I got down, passed A, B, C, D, E and it was the fifth deck down and the capacity says 342. They had 338 second lieutenants and four first lieutenants, that was it.

SSH: [laughter] Some stateroom. Were there any exciting times on this convoy?

MMW: Yeah. I became, my tent-mate out in Nebraska, the group I went over with, was the Protestant chaplain. ... Our commander was the senior commander. So, we got all the jobs on the ships. I had two jobs. I was in charge of the scuttle-butts, which is where you clean your mess kit. So, you don't throw the stuff overboard, and I also became the Jewish chaplain. I ran a service on a Saturday, out of the Jewish Welfare Prayer Book. I ran the service and in the middle of the service the sirens went off. Everybody to the boats. That was the end of it. [laughter]

SSH: [laughter] Was that the only service you did?

MMW: That was it. I have the prayer book at home. I gave it to my mother and I have the thing at home. It was interesting. It was fun and the rest of the time we played bridge all day on the boat, with some guy who was one of the world's great bridge players.

SSH: Do you remember his name?

MMW: Yeah. Sterns. He's one of the Four Aces. I lost twenty-five dollars, my whole take home pay. We played, other than my duties with the scuttle-butts and whatever else I had to do, we played, you know, from eight o'clock in the morning until dark.

SSH: Do you remember the name of the Protestant chaplain that was your bunkmate?

MMW: Not off-hand. Not off-hand. Not off-hand. No. I probably have it somewhere.

SSH: Where did you land when you got to England?

MMW: We landed in Liverpool.

SSH: How or what was your transport then, to where?

MMW: We got on a train and went to, through the night, through London on into Ashford, southeast of London. You know, for about seven or eight hours anyway.

SSH: By then, England had been pretty well hit over and over. What did you see?

MMW: When we were on our trip, I remember the train trip down, I was, the [ack ack?], the planes were flying over. I did get into London quite a bit on weekends, whenever I had a day off, and it was, it had pretty well quieted down, but you know, it was a mess at the time. So, then I was one place, then I was moved to another place, then from there, we ... went across the Channel, into Southampton to go across the Channel. We landed in Normandy.

SSH: Can you tell us what your impressions were as you landed in Normandy?

MMW: It was dark. Funny, ... it was kind of spooky. I guess, I was too dumb to know what the hell was going on.

SSH: ... How informed were you of the invasion?

MMW: Well, we knew, you see, we knew we were going across. We had training manuals and water proofing vehicles if we got off in the wet. We were, weather detachment consists of two groups, each one with about twelve people in it. Weather personnel, that is, two forecasters, and weather observers, and then the other group were the radio people who we seemed to, we traveled together and we moved with this particular group wherever it went. We moved about twelve times.

SSH: You were weather forecasters for the air corps?

MMW: For the Air Force, for its ... yeah.

SSH: Did any of your weather forecasts impact troop movement at all ... ?

MMW: No. We were just on flights and reconnaissance flights and fighter protection flights and flights and whatnot.

SSH: Would you be bivouacked with the regular Army, the infantry ?

MMW: No, we were with the Air Force. An Air Force group contained about 1000 people, which would be about thirty-six aircraft or seventy-six, I don't know how many aircraft, but we lived with this one group, the 363rd, and we were in all kinds of places. We were in tents, we were in old castles, we were in old stores, we were in all kinds of places.

SSH: What type of aircraft was it?

MMW: Our group had P-51s, and P-47s and also some Black Widows, but, we had very close, we lived with the pilots, very close with these guys, and we stayed with them until the war ended. We were up in Braunschweig, which is up in the Northeast, when the war ended, in April.

SSH: You told us a little bit about being able to go into Paris to try to catch up with your cousin there. Were there other instances that you could tell us about?

MMW: Well, ... a couple of times I had to go back to get documents or code books and stuff like that. We wound up in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge, that's where we were and an Air Force group is particularly vulnerable, because nobody knows what the hell to do. You know, we had a gun; you had to carry a gun, your pistol, your carbine, your helmet and your gas mask and everything, but, if anybody came after us, we didn't know what the hell to do. [laughter] Anyway, we were very, very close to the action there and we were always, on two occasions, in two places we were under fire from the buzz bombs, that we had in England for many nights and the same thing in Belgium. I'll tell you a funny story about Belgium. It's mostly a guy story.

We had one guy who was a radio operator from West Virginia. He was probably functionally illiterate, but, he could take a radio code. His name was Basil D'Pasquale, but, he was a great lover. We used to censor his mail. [laughter] ... Every place we left, when we left England, he would get these letters, the responses he would send about what he did with Susie, what he was going to do with this one. Every place he went he had tremendous activity with the ladies.

LM: He had a harem following him probably?

MMW: He did. So, we get into Belgium and the Bulge is on. Everybody is restricted, the only place you can go is down to the airfield to do your duty and get the planes off and whatnot and D'Pasquale gets picked up. We get a radio message, "Pick up D'Pasquale, send an officer." He's caught off-limits in Brussels. So, I have to take a jeep with a driver and we go into Liege. Now, Liege is right up at the front there. Come the place is under fire and I go in and I'm looking in the disciplinary barracks and pick up (Basil?). He says to me, "Lieutenant, am I glad to see you. Let's get the f --- out of here." They wouldn't let him go. He had two more clap shots to take. So, I had to stay overnight to wait for (Basil?). [laughter]

SSH: But, you're even closer to the fire now. [laughter]

MMW: When I was ready to go home, (Basil?) goes, "Lieutenant, you know I need one more point to go home." So, we fix him up with a battle star. We all got about five battle stars for the time I was there. So, we fix him up with something and he goes home. Now, I go home a month later, walking around the streets, there's (Basil?). "What the hell happened, Basil?" He, the medication he was taking he wasn't supposed to drink Coca-Cola and he drank six Cokes in one day, he had a recurrence and he's was still taking shots. I don't know what happened to him since. [laughter]

SSH: [laughter] It would be a good case study.

MMW: He's probably very successful somewhere.

SSH: At something.

LM: Now, your experiences in these different towns, what were the reactions of the locals when they saw the US military? Did you have any positive experiences with them?

MMW: Not really. The only place we had, you know, we were, the only place we saw people was when we got into Brussels. We got into Brussels, because we were in Belgium for about two months in Luxembourg, but [it was] the only contact we had. Later on, after the war, we wound up in Wiesbaden. The war was over and we lived in a castle, not a castle, it was an old home, a beautiful place, and we had help, we had foreign help that came with the place. Tillie, the maid, Tillie, the maid. The cook and her husband, who was the gardener. It was a big beautiful home and we had a lot of fun. The war was over.

SSH: Did you use any of the German that your father had helped you with?

MMW: A little bit. I was a little bit ...

SSH: ... As part of the occupation forces, what was your role as a weatherman at that time?

MMW: We were still dispatching aircraft. When we got to Wiesbaden was the headquarters for the Ninth Air Force and also for the OSS, Officers Strategic Services, which is the same as the CIA now. So, all the flights were going in and out of there into Berlin and every place, all over and back to the States. So, we were all dispatching them.

SSH: At any point in all of this, did you have any interaction with any of the other Allied forces?

MMW: No, we did not to my recollections. We always were within our American group.

SSH: ... Were there any other recollections or stories that you can tell us of your time at ... you were right at the front, it sounds like very close?

MMW: We were close, but, we were, you know, totally in sight. Pilots were getting killed. We weren't getting killed. We had a couple of incidents. One guy got shot, I don't know, during the Bulge. Our mailmen were killed, but, that was the difference of being right at the line and being a mile or two back of it. We were very fortunate.

SSH: Did you feel you had good commanding officers?

MMW: Yeah. I became very friendly with my CO. We were buddies for many years after. A fellow from Scranton, Pennsylvania, Henry Lajewski. We served the fighting group that we ... one of the commanders, by the way, of my group, was a Rutgers man, Hallock P. K. Wormsley, Class of '38. He was the commander of one of the squadrons. I don't know where ...

SSH: That name is not familiar to me.

MMW: Yeah, '38, that was before your time.

SSH: [laughter] You're in (Wiesbaden?) and you said that the pilots were part of the OSS and things. Did they ...

MMW: No, I didn't say that. We had flights going into ...

SSH: Taking OSS?

MMW: Oh, yes. Yeah

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

SSH: Was any of the secret information coming your way?

MMW: No, no. People kept passing in from Washington, going into Wiesbaden, and on into Berlin. The big activity with the guys was, ... if you wanted a carton of cigarettes, I didn't smoke, but the guys were buying cigarettes at the (Templehof Airport?) in Berlin. They had bargains. Oh, you could sell your ration. We all had rations and I didn't smoke. So, I could sell my cigarettes at the airport for thirty dollars and if you went into the town, it would be 100 dollars. Now, I sold a carton of cigarettes, ... and then, with the thirty dollars, I had a trip to go to the Riviera. There was an Air Force rest hotel there. That's how you found ...

SSH: That's what I was going to ask you, if at any time in all of your service over there did you ever get a chance for R&R, other than, you got to the Riviera?

MMW: We got to the Riviera during June and then, you know, I got into, I was able to get to Paris a few times and London, you know, I saw quite a bit, saw a lot, and Brussels. I probably saw Brussels more than anything else.

SSH: You said your brothers were serving. One brother was in the South Pacific.

MMW: He was in the South Pacific. In the Phillipines.

SSH: How was the mail? Did you have contact?

MMW: Yeah. We had contact.

SSH: Was the mail service fairly decent?

MMW: I guess it was. Yeah.

LM: How often were you in contact with your brothers? [Did you have] any phone conversations at all?

MMW: No, no phone conversations. He was on some wild island in the Philippines.

SSH: Was your other brother in Europe?

MMW: No, my other brother was in the States.

SSH: Oh, that's right, he was in finance.

LM: How often were you in contact with your future wife?

MMW: I used to write to her. As a matter-of-fact, my oldest brother, he kept more contact with her than I did, and she knew when I was coming home because he told her. So, I don't know, we corresponded.

SSH: Where had you met your wife?

MMW: At Columbia at night. She was in a English UB-1, but we had two copies of the book from Beowulf to Thomas Hardy. We have both copies at home.

SSH: Can you tell us about your trip back to the States? I know you had to collect so many points and you were the recipient of several battle stars. Can you tell us about those?

MMW: They gave you a battle star like, if you were some place. I had five. This Battle of the Bulge, which I've forgotten what's it's called, Air Offense of Europe. I don't remember all of them, what they are, but it really represented that you were in a particular place at a particular time, but most of our people were. I was only overseas twenty-one months and most of our guys were a little bit longer, but we all had about five battle stars for that service.

SSH: What was your most memorable event? I'm guessing it was probably the meeting with your aunt. What is your most vivid memory of your time in Europe?

MMW: Coming home. [laughter]

SSH: We've heard that before. How did you get home?

MMW: Well, we went from Wiesbaden to Kassel in Germany. Then the train took us to Camp Twenty Grand, and from there we got on the *Wilson Victory*. One of these dumb names, the *Wilson Victory*, which was a small ship and it took us about eight days to get back. I think we came into Jersey City, from there to, I got off to Fort Monmouth and actually, we landed on December 2nd, of '45.

SSH: Do you remember where you were on V-E Day?

MMW: Yeah, I was in Braunschweig, Germany.

SSH: What was the celebration like, or was there one?

MMW: We had German airplanes coming in and surrendering and the guys were jumping out of planes with girlfriends, and silk stockings, and bicycles, and they would run like hell.

SSH: Were there any souvenirs that you brought back?

MMW: I did not. Guys were picking the guns up. I hated guns and I don't like them to this day, but, that was the big thing, guns. I got a Swastika armband. I got a lot of junk at home. A little box with an iron cross of the German mothers. I found that somewhere. Also having twelve kids, we have one of those.

SSH: Can you tell me when you were really aware of what had been going on as far as the Holocaust? Were you already over in Europe or home?

MMW: Yeah, I was there. As a matter-of-fact, one of the camps was right there in ... (Branchwaden?). I did not get to see it there. I've seen it since, but not then.

LM: What was your actual feeling, being Jewish yourself, and being in such a close proximity?

MMW: I can't tell you, I can't describe it.

SSH: When you came back to the States, how long did you wait before you married the current Mrs. Weill?

MMW: I got married. I came home in December and I got married in July. On Bastille Day, July 14th, in '46. We're married fifty-three years.

SSH: Did you use any of your GI benefits?

MMW: Yes. I took a couple of courses in construction estimating at New York University.

SSH: Did you ever join any organizations like the American Legion, or VFW, or Jewish Veterans?

MMW: No. Nothing. Never joined any veterans organizations. Nor did my brothers. Not one of them, my brother, Lenny, may have, but Ray and I didn't. We were supposed to go. We went and we did it. I didn't need the help from ...

SSH: ... We would like to ask you to tell us about your career since you took a turn from mathematics into construction ... if you can?

MMW: Well, a bunch of us had gotten home all about the same time. Everybody got home in the first couple of weeks in December and we went to a bar in Secaucus, which is near where we live. "What are we going to do, fellows?" ... We'd all had graduated college already and one fellow, "I'm going to become a lawyer." He was going to go to law school. Another fellow wanted to go to medical school. He was the Class of '42, of Rutgers. Mel Robbins. Another

one was going to go into his father's business. Another one was going to become a lawyer and I didn't know what I wanted to do. One other fellow said, "Why don't you see my brother-in-law? He's in the construction business." ... I knew him, and so I went to see him, and I got a job working for him. I was a truck driver and construction estimator. That's when I went to school to do that, and I stayed with him ... for about five months. I asked him for a raise because we wanted to get married. He says, he spoke to his partner, and he says, "Give him five bucks. He can't lay brick, he can't." ... So, that was that.

I got another job as a construction estimator with a large firm out of East Chicago, Indiana, in the New York office, and before I did that, I did get a job offer as an actuarial clerk at the Equitable Life in New York and I decided not to do it. ... I got into construction, and while taking that couple of courses and another one, I met a man, who was somewhat older than I, and we became very friendly, and it turned out that he was going to be building something in New Jersey, and he offered me a job, and I went to work for him and I was there for ten years. Then from that, I started my own business in 1957.

SSH: Did Mrs. Weill work outside the home?

MMW: For about twenty minutes. [laughter] She worked for I. Magnum. When I was working on Madison Avenue, in New York, she worked for I. Magnum in their shipping, buying office in New York. I guess she worked for about a year and a half. She's been retired since.

SSH: ... Did you ever come back to Rutgers to see how the campus had changed?

MMW: Yeah, I've been to reunions. I could not make our fiftieth because we had a family wedding in Chicago. That was that, but I went to the forty-fifth and maybe, probably the fortieth, something like that.

SSH: So, you didn't come back to campus right after you came back to the States?

MMW: I don't remember, don't remember.

SSH: I was just wondering if you'd seen any differences in the campus.

MMW: ... A good part of our business, what we've done, is located in Piscataway, New Jersey. I don't know if you're familiar with it, a place called Centennial Industrial Park. Those are all our buildings and so, I get down there. We have men working down there. We have an office down there. Our office is in Springfield. So, I've been in and out the place quite a bit.

SSH: Can you tell us about the family that you and Mrs. Weill have?

MMW: Yeah. My daughter is, Wendy is fifty-one. She's married and has a twenty-one year old daughter at the University of Southern California. Wendy went to get her bachelors in Kean College and then she got her masters from Columbia in occupational therapy. Mrs. Weill also graduated there. Their daughter is at the University of Southern California. She's a junior now.

My son, who is going to be fifty, he graduated from Miami of Ohio as an architect and then has a masters from Columbia also, in architecture and planning, and he has an architectural practice in Millburn, where he was brought up and where we have been for many years. My son-in-law, Wendy's husband, works for me now, as a financial guru.

So, I started the company and we have it a little bit family oriented, because I have a brother-in-law whose there with me forty [years], we have five people there over forty years now. A niece, his daughter, works there and we've got other people there who are known for longevity in the business. Most of the people in my business are retired. I'm the oldest guy around.

SSH: Well, just one question of reflection. ... looking back now at what you've accomplished, how do you think the war impacted the man you are today?

MMW: Well, I don't know what I would have done had I not had the experience in the service. I really don't, I really can't. Certainly I came out fine. I came back with my body and everything else and I'm okay. I've had other friends who didn't do that well, but most of my friends came home. They did okay. All had gone to college. So, as far as I'm concerned I have nothing to complain about at all and my kids have certainly gotten well educated, and they have kids who will be also.

SSH: With a son probably very close to the age of those who served in Vietnam, what were your feelings about Vietnam?

MMW: He wanted to, he went to Miami because he thought they had a Naval ROTC program and before the thing was over, he was all against it and he was very fortunate that when they pulled a number, he had a very high number and he was never called. I don't know what he would have done. I don't know.

LH: So, you were relieved that he didn't have to go?

MMW: Yes, and I had one nephew, my brother Leonard's son, who was in Vietnam. He's a mess, mental mess. Anyway, Jimmy worked out fine and no decision had to be made. It was made for him.

SSH: Did you feel that your education had prepared you well for the world that you had to deal with?

MMW: Yeah. As far as practical applications of what I'm doing, I was a good mathematician and my business is, I think, a big mathematics game. That's what it is. What we really do is we buy and sell money and we buy it, and buy bricks, and sell it to somebody else as a (stafer?). I think my background was very, very helpful for what I did.

SSH: Did you have a favorite professor at Rutgers?

MMW: Yeah. I just refreshed my recollections now. Professor, I'll think of his name, just a minute. It's on the tip, he had asked if I wanted to go on to graduate school up at Brown.

LH: Is it Professor Grant?

MMW: Professor Grant, yes, and that's when I decided to go home and finish up there and go to work, but he was probably my favorite instructor.

SSH: Did you stay in the Reserves at all when you came home?

MMW: I stayed in for just a couple of years.

SSH: Were you concerned that you'd be called up for the Korean War?

MMW: I don't know, a funny thing, I was down at Fort Monmouth and we had a lecture on joining the Reserves. I was very tired. I fell asleep during the lecture because I had been traveling from there up to Yonkers, where my wife lived, and that was, God knows how long that trip was, and I didn't know what was going on and then after I got back to the barracks, everybody else was not there. So, I signed up two days later and I stayed in the Reserves for a couple of years, but I don't know, and then I got called up again, but I didn't ... I was called up but I've forgotten. I had to re-register for the draft, that's what it was. Because I had gotten ...

My other brother, he was called back, but by that time, he had a family and was colorblind. He faked his eye test when he went to get in and then the ...

SSH: Well, one question I have to ask since you were a weatherman, do you have any memorable predictions that came through?

MMW: Yeah. I once grounded the whole Air Force in Luxembourg by a bum forecast. I don't know.

SSH: I thought maybe you'd lucked out, I guess not. [laughter] Lynn, do you have any other questions?

LH: Any particular memorable projects with your construction company that you are particularly proud of?

MMW: Many, many. We've done work throughout New Jersey and New York State and Maryland and Connecticut and Pennsylvania. We have some interesting buildings and manage a lot of buildings, and we have an organization of people who are with us for ... we just had an anniversary celebration for people who had milestone anniversaries. We had David, my brother-in-law who's in charge of money for forty years, our chief salesman for twenty-five years, and David's daughter for ten years. She's an accountant, also, and the secretary to the real estate guys for fifteen years. So, we have longevity. My own secretary, Marilyn, is with me twenty-seven years now.

SSH: A very pleasant woman, I can testify. [laughter]

MMW: Yes, she is and we're known for, you know, people who have been around for a very long time. I have a little involvement with the ... we even lease a building to the university in Piscataway. They have a program there of some kind of a grant, an agricultural grant, they have, and, it's funny. I happened to have lunch last week with Dr. Lawrence and we're probably going to be funding some scholarship fund.

SSH: Wonderful. A great way to put things back, as they say. Can you tell us what your hobbies are now?

MMW: Well, I get into the office very early and I leave early, but, I play. I go to Florida in December and I come back in, but I commute. I go back, I used to do thirteen trips a winter, but I now do two in January, two in March, and one in April and I worked from there, I get a lot of mail and call for documents and I play golf and tennis, bridge with all our friends down there. We've been in the same place for twenty-five years. We don't move around you can say.

SSH: Have you been back to Europe?

MMW: Oh, been there many times.

SSH: You had said you had gone to some of the camps.

MMW: I went to one camp in Belgium, I believe. Yeah.

SSH: Do you do other traveling just for fun?

MMW: Oh, yeah, we do a great deal of traveling. We've slowed it down a little bit now, but we've been to Australia, and to South Africa, and to England, God knows how many times, and to France a number of times. We've been around a lot.

SSH: Had you ever been to any reunions with your military group at all?

MMW: No, we haven't had anything. The only feller I used to see was Henry Lajewski and I haven't seen him in, in fact, my daughter also went to Mt. Vernon Junior College before she went to school back here. She used to see them down there and we used to see him there, but I kind of lost touch and different directions and whatever and ... he got his Ph.D., and his wife was a librarian at Catholic University, and he worked for one of the departments down there. I forgot what job he had, and we kind of lost touch.

SSH: Thank you very much for taking time to participate in the Rutgers Oral History project.

MMW: Okay. I'm not going to get a ticket now. I'm not because it's under two hours.

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

Reviewed by Randy Mitchell on August 8, 2000

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak on August 10, 2000

Reviewed by Maurice Weill on October, 2000