

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID C. WOOD

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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MAYS LANDING, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. David C. Wood on October 24, 2002, in Mays Landing, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Tim Fonseca: Tim Fonseca.

SI: Mr. Wood, thank you very much for sitting down with us today and having us in your home.

David Wood: You're welcome.

SI: To begin, could you please tell us a little bit about your parents, beginning with your father? Where was he from? What did he do for a living?

DW: Well, my father was, I think, a farmer first, but not a very successful one and, in fact, when I was a freshman in Glassboro High School, we had a storm come through the area, a hailstorm, and we were just ready to pick tomatoes for the can house and there was a lot of hail in that storm and we lost the whole crop and we lost the farm. So, that was very disconcerting to me, because I loved the farm, and we had to move into a small town called Grenloch, but that's the way it goes and he did work. Of course, this was during the Depression, back in 1939, '38, and he worked at Bruce's Bakery as a baker and a salesman and he worked in DuPont when the war effort came along and he retired from DuPont, but he was really happy on the farm and he passed away when he was sixty-five. He'd just retired and I think he lived a month, and then, he died; anything else about him?

SI: Did he live in South Jersey for his entire life?

DW: Yes. In fact, our family was the Wood Family that settled in the town of Woodbury and named it as such. Our forebears came from Bury, England, and they settled there, in that Gloucester County area, and they named it Woodbury, so, that's our claim to fame, I suppose. [laughter]

SI: Was your mother and her family also from Gloucester County?

DW: ... She was from Blackwood, New Jersey, and she was a teacher, a very good teacher, and a fine mother, good cook. She passed away early, too. She passed away at sixty-five, but she was an outstanding teacher. She was really well respected and loved by all the students.

SI: Did she continue to teach after you were born?

DW: No, no. She didn't teach until our family was raised and she taught when she was eighteen. I know, she told me several times, she taught at Princeton. She taught kids in the one-room school that were older than her. [laughter] She was eighteen and some of these boys were, like, nineteen and twenty, in a one-room school, but, when she got married, of course, she stopped teaching and helped out on the farm.

TF: Was your family not hit very hard by the Depression until your father lost the farm?

DW: Yes, yes, ... we were very poor and, well, we were very poor, so, he got a job on WPA, I know, and that kind of saved us for eating, because they also provided surplus food, which we would get for the family, but, yes, that Depression was really tough.

SI: What kind of farm was it?

DW: It was a farm for truck farming. We had onions and tomatoes and pumpkins for the can house. Well, actually, they were squash, they're not pumpkins, but they called them pumpkins and things worked good until we got that storm, when the payment was due on the mortgage, and it just kind of ruined things. I remember, I was in vo-ag [vocational agriculture] and they had a thing going, in those days, of trying to promote hybrids and the ag teacher asked me if I'd like to try to plant hybrid corn and see if I could beat my father and, of course, promote the hybrid corn. ... So, I did and I was very happy. I got, ... I think it was a hundred and one bushels per acre and he got like eighty some. So, he was quite convinced that hybrids were the thing to do, because we had the same culture and fertilizer and everything and he promoted that program quite a ... [lot]. So, I think it was a very successful thing. I don't know what else you want to say about that, but, when I was on the farm, ... I had an older brother and an older sister and a younger brother, but I was the guy that worked on the farm, mostly. I can remember bagging onions, weighing them, sewing them up and getting them ready for the truck to take them to Dock Street in Philadelphia for sale and I would do that every day after school, to get as many off to market as we could, but ... my older brother didn't like the farm. My younger brother, I guess, was a little too young. He was ten years younger than I. So, I had most of that responsibility. I can still remember unloading the fertilizer truck. In those days, fertilizer came in, you probably won't believe this, 167-pound bags and there were thirteen bags to a ton and, when the guy drove in with the fertilizer truck, he didn't unload them. I had to unload them, or the farmer had to unload them, and how I ever did it, I'll never know. [laughter]

TF: Did your family have a car? How did you go back and forth to Philadelphia?

DW: To Philadelphia? Why would I go to Philadelphia?

TF: I thought you said you sold produce there.

DW: Well, no, ... there was a fellow who drove to Philly with produce. He would go to Dock Street with the farmers in the area that had twenty, fifty, thirty, a hundred bags of onions or whatever and you paid him a fee. So, that was the easy way. We didn't have a big farm truck to take the stuff to market.

SI: Did you have much contact with people outside of your family and school? How far away was your nearest neighbor?

DW: ... Our next nearest neighbor was like a half mile away and he was a ... dairyman. He processed dairy and sold it into the small towns, like Blackwood and Grenlock and Turnersville, but ... there was another black family that lived on a farm that was, maybe, another half-hour the other way and we would associate with them some, but we were pretty much on our own there. That's about it.

SI: Where did you go to elementary school and high school?

DW: I went to school in Blackwood. I graduated eighth grade there, and then, we moved to the farm and I entered Glassboro High School in the Vo-Ag Department as a freshman and I was vo-ag all the way, graduated in 1939, and vo-ag was a very happy time, because we had a wonderful teacher. You may have heard of him, [E. Warren] Grodotzke? Well, he was a Rutgers graduate, ... 1932, and he's the fellow that was responsible for getting me into Rutgers and he was a great guy. He passed away a couple of years ago, about ninety-two, I think, at that time.

SI: Most of your academic interests were vo-ag.

DW: Oh, yes.

TF: How did you do in your other subjects?

DW: Oh, average, yes. I had Latin and I hated it. Our grandson, who lives in the house back here, he's a junior at Oakcrest and he loves it. ... He can't get enough of Latin. I think he's in his second year of Latin studies now. He wants to go to the Coast Guard Academy. ... He loves the ocean and navigation and that sort of thing.

SI: What were your other interests in school? Did you participate in any extracurricular activities?

DW: Well, I was on the track team and we had an FFA basketball team and I played with them, but that's about it.

SI: How important was religion and the church in your family?

DW: Well, ... I went to Sunday school, ... I guess up to the eighth grade, and my mother and father went to church, but not very often, but they made sure we kids got to Sunday school and we had that training. I don't know what else.

SI: What did your parents think of Franklin Roosevelt?

DW: Oh, they thought he was great and I think he was. He passed the WPA and the NRA and all that stuff and ... he really saved the country, especially poor people. [laughter] It was a rough time back in those years.

SI: What did your father do with the WPA?

DW: Oh, I think, I remember him going around, he worked on the roads and he would leave the house a little before dark and he'd have to set out the lighted pots, so [that] people wouldn't run off the road, you know. I think that was his job and, in the morning, he'd have to put them out and collect them and put them away until evening, not a very responsible job, but it's the job he got, yes.

TF: What made you decide to go to college?

DW: Well, I think it was the urging of my vo-ag teacher, Warren Grodotzke. He said, "Look, I know you don't have enough money, but we can get you a room, no charge, and we can probably get you a scholarship." ... So, I said "Well, sure, that's fine. I'd like to do that," and ... I wrote a letter to the dean there, old Frank Helyar, and, lo and behold, they had a room for me. At the college, they had the program for boys that didn't have any money. They would assign them to different areas on the, it used to be the College of Ag, it's Cook now, and I was going to study poultry husbandry, so, I was assigned ... the Poultry Administration Building. I don't know what they call it now. ... Anyhow, we lived in the attic of that administration building and I got the room; ... my payment was to stoke the furnace and take out the ashes in the cellar and that's what I did for the payment for my room.

TF: You were there with other guys in a similar situation.

DW: Right. There were eleven of us in that building and some of them went on to be pretty famous. There was Dave Tudor, who just passed away a couple of years ago. He was a veterinarian, real well respected, and Dave Francis, he went on to be the dean of the College of Agriculture in New Mexico. He just passed away, too, I think, but it was a nice area. ... We could cook in our rooms and, many times, our only meal was a can of scrapple, but it was ten cents a can. So, we lived on that and we could buy milk down at the dairy for ten cents a quart.

TF: Did you consider yourself pretty lucky that this teacher gave you this opportunity? Were there many students in your class that he encouraged to go to school?

DW: Oh, yes, yes. ... He encouraged quite a few and he told me about Danny Fenton, who was ahead of me. Danny was in one of these rooms on the farm, going to the ... College of Ag Campus and everybody seemed happy. I know my term bill, I think, for my senior year was either three dollars or five dollars [laughter] and I think that was for the diploma. So, it wasn't expensive. Of course, I worked up there. I learned how to caponize chickens and Prof would say, "Dave, I got somebody that wants a hundred chickens caponized. Do you want to do it?" I said, "Yes, sure," and I'd get ten cents a bird for caponizing chickens and that worked out nice. So, then, we'd have a little money to eat that week. ... I don't want to cry poor to you guys, I'm just stating facts, okay.

SI: I know many men who went to the Ag College because it cost less and you could then take any course at Rutgers, but you really focused on agriculture.

DW: I did. Yes, right. In fact, it was my sophomore year when ... I was hitchhiking back from my home to Rutgers. I got in the car and they announced the fact that they had bombed Pearl Harbor and the driver said, "Well, I guess you're through [with] school life." "Yes, I guess so," because we had talked earlier and I told him I was a sophomore at Rutgers and he said, "Well, maybe it won't be so bad." I said, "Well, doesn't look good to me," but, anyhow, when we got to the college, ... FDR declared war and ... I was in ROTC, but I wasn't in the advanced program, because I had real bad eyesight, and all the guys were volunteering to go in the Army

or Navy or something and I went down, tried to get in; nobody would take me. They said my eyes were too bad, but I said, "Well, what can I do?" They said, "Well, you just stay here and study until you can't stay any longer, that's all, or graduate." So, that's what I did and they let us stay until the last term, senior year, and then, the draft board said, "Well, you can't stay any longer in college. You've got to go in the Army." So, I got drafted and Rutgers gave me the second part of the senior year, no questions asked, and I got my diploma in a mailing tube in Fort Dix, [laughter] which wasn't very glamorous, but, anyhow, I got it, and then, I went in the service. That was 1943, December.

SI: Before we talk about your time in the service, can we ask a few more questions about Rutgers?

DW: Okay.

SI: What was your freshman year like? Was there any sort of hazing for the freshmen?

DW: No, not that I can remember. I know that I played on the freshman lacrosse team and we were the only team that was ever undefeated, untied and it was quite a record and I really enjoyed that, but I can't remember any hazing. ...

SI: Did you have to wear a dink?

DW: Well, yes, we had to wear a dink, yes, but it didn't bother us.

SI: The Class of 1944 was one of the last classes to really experience many of the Rutgers traditions that fell by the wayside during the war. Do you remember the social events, the balls, that sort of thing?

DW: Yes, right, yes. No, I wasn't involved in any social events. It was mostly the sporting events and working to survive, so-to-speak, and the classes. That was about it. I don't know what else to tell you.

SI: From what I understand, Rutgers had a very advanced ag program.

WD: Ag? Oh, yes, that was known as one of the best ag schools in the country and the Extension Program, which you may or may not be familiar with, evolved around the College of Agriculture. Most of the fellows that were ag agents or 4-H agents were graduates of Rutgers or Penn State, but mostly Rutgers, and, of course, their job was to teach on the farms and, when I was discharged from the Army, I saw the opportunity, I really planned to be a vo-ag teacher because I admired Warren Grodotzke so much, that I applied for this job as vo-ag in Paterson, not knowing what it would be. I was so interested in getting a job after being overseas for all that time, doing nothing, actually. ... So, I got the job, and then, when I was there not too long, when I was there about a year-and-a-half, my roommate in the Poultry Building, Francis Mansue, who was an Extension agent in Paterson, and his office was across the street from Central High School, where I was teaching, and we were pretty close, so, he told me, one day, he says, "You know, you don't like it up here too much, do you?" I said, "No, I don't." He said,

“Well, why don’t you get a job like I got?” He was a 4-H agent. He says, “There’s going to be an opening down in Atlantic County.” He said, “Why don’t you apply for that?” I said, “Well, I will, give me the information.” So, anyhow, I applied and I think there were either four or five of us that applied for that job and I got it and that was in May of ‘48. That’s when we came down here and I stayed as 4-H agent for thirty years, thirty-two years, yes, and, when you get to be an Extension agent in New Jersey, you’re also on the faculty of Rutgers and I was fortunate enough to get to be appointed as ... assistant professor, and then, you work your way up and I got to be full professor after about, I think, ten years, ... pretty tough to get that now, though, because they want you to publish. ... You don’t get much chance to do that in the Extension jobs, because you’re working in the field. You’re not working in a classroom.

SI: Before you went to Rutgers, had the Extension Service had any impact on your life through your father’s farm?

DW: Not really, no. No, ... we were not aware of 4-H or the county agent or anything, as I can remember. ... I knew about agriculture only through the vo-ag program. I don’t remember a county agent ever coming around.

SI: Was the program as developed then?

DW: Oh, I think it was, but I think, and I hate to say this, but, I think the ag agent, at that time, was only working with successful farmers and, if you weren’t right up there, they didn’t want to talk to you. It sounds bad, but I think that’s true, yes.

SI: When you were at Rutgers, did you feel that the Ag College was separate from the rest of Rutgers?

DW: Oh, yes, yes. Actually, ... in my freshman year, I think I had most all of my classes downtown and they were, like, zoology and botany, Saturday morning labs, eight to twelve, Saturday. These kids today, they don’t even want to talk about Saturday classes. You don’t get any. I mean, I know our kids go to Stockton here and they can make any schedule they want. They can go three days a week, in the middle of the week, and forget everything else, but we didn’t have that luxury. [laughter]

SI: Did you ever take classes at the main campus across town?

DW: Oh, [yes], that’s where our classes were in my freshman year. We didn’t get anything; no, I think we had one class in the College of Agriculture, but the zoo lab and the lecture, botany and lecture, was down there, physics was down there, math was down there, English was down there. So, we lived on the Ag Campus, but we had to go down there.

TF: How did you get there?

DW: Mostly hitchhike or walk, yes. That’s a pretty good walk.

TF: Yes. [laughter] Did you feel separated from Rutgers socially?

WD: Well, they looked down on the Aggies, the guys. I know that even on our lacrosse team, they looked down on us guys. I had a good friend of mine, who was a classmate, we both had to walk to lacrosse practice and walk back, although the coach, ... Fred Fitch, he lived over in some town, I forget the name of it, and he would often take us to the Ag School on his way home, but, if he wasn't there, we had to walk.

TF: Where were your practices held?

WD: ... They were down ... where the old gym is now, on College Avenue. What is that building now?

TF: It is still the gym.

WD: It is?

TF: There is a parking lot behind it now.

SI: Was that Neilson Field?

DW: ... Yes, yes.

SI: You were in ROTC for two years.

DW: Yes. Basically, that's what you're in until, unless you went to Advanced, and I couldn't advance because of my eyes, so, I didn't. I didn't think a hell of a lot of it, to tell you the truth, because there was no future, you know, but that's the way it goes. ...

SI: When you entered Rutgers, the war had already started in Europe.

DW: Right.

SI: What did you know about what was going on in Europe and Asia?

DW: Well, I didn't know too much. ... It seemed like an unknown factor. I didn't know much about the war, really, and ... it didn't bother me for some reason. Of course, we didn't have the television in those days or anything like that, which keeps banging away at that stuff, but I knew I was going to be in it pretty soon, but I didn't worry about it.

SI: Pearl Harbor was like a bolt out of the blue.

DW: Right, yes. That was ... a real shocker.

TF: What was the general attitude of the other students about the war, before and after Pearl Harbor?

DW: Well, before the war, there was very little discussion about the war. Actually, the guys were pretty much taking interests in their studies and their sports and stuff, ... but, as soon as Pearl Harbor happened, then, everybody clamored to enlist, go to school to be an aviator, a flyer, or something like that, and I can remember going down to the medical center and talking to the doctor. I said, "Well, can't you fake this thing a little bit and say my eyes are all right?" "No, we can't do that." ... All the guys were trying to get into the services.

TF: You really wanted to enlist and you wanted to be more active in the ROTC.

DW: Right.

SI: How did the war affect Rutgers, in terms of programs being offered or curtailed?

DW: Well, things kind of fell apart. We had this real good lacrosse team and the next year, when it came around, I didn't even go out for it, ... as much as I enjoyed it, because they didn't have a real schedule and there were too many things that I had to do in order to survive that I couldn't afford it. I couldn't afford the time. So, things just kind of went to pot at the school.

...

SI: Can you tell us about some of your favorite professors?

DW: Well, ... this thing is so hard to remember. We had one fellow, one Platt, Professor Platt, who we had poultry lab with, and, I think, every Tuesday, we went out to the poultry farm and judged chickens and, on the way back, we would walk and that's a pretty good distance from the Ag School out to the poultry farm. They probably don't even have a poultry farm now, but we would walk back, I forget the name of the street, but we'd go past the College Inn and we'd go in there and sit at the bar and Prof Platt would say, "Here, take an egg, put an egg in your beer, it'll do you good." [laughter] I thought that was pretty nice, sitting there, having a beer with a prof, and he would supply the eggs, because he would just pick them up in the poultry farm and that was nice.

TF: What were your career plans then? How much were they affected by the knowledge that you would be going off to war?

DW: ... Well, I planned to be a vo-ag teacher. Of course, I achieved that goal when I got out of the Army, but I got in the wrong area. [laughter] ... They had two programs there in Paterson, a six-six program, where the kids go to school for six months in the classroom, six months on the farm. Then, they had the nine-three, where they had nine months in school and three months on the farm and those kids, some of them went to Rutgers as ag students. In fact, there were, I think, three or four that I can remember that went down to Rutgers and did rather well, but the six-six kids were just the kids that the administration puts in there to give them school. You know, they're the "throw away" kids and you'd have to check on them pretty hard, because ... you'd put them on a farm and they'd go for a couple of weeks, and then, they'd skip a little and they'd skip a little more, but there were some good kids in that six-six program, too, that really turned out to be nice ag students.

SI: Can you tell us about the process of being inducted into the Army?

DW: Well, ... I never liked the Army. I remember going in there and they gave us a test and this and that, and then, they came out and said, "You're going to be in the engineers," and I said, "What? Why in the heck would I be in the engineers?" "Well, you want to be a vo-ag teacher, right?" I said, "Yes." "Well, we think that works for you. You'll be building bridges," and this and that. So, anyhow, I went from Fort Dix to Fort Belvoir, where I took basic training, and, after basic training, they appointed me as a teacher of knot tying. So, all the guys coming through, I had to teach them a bowline on a bite and the square knot and the granny knot and all those different knots. I did that for, I don't know; I was in the cadre school and I did it for a long time, and then, one day, everything stopped and they said, "We're going to make up a battalion." So, they made up the battalion, the 1637th Engineers, and I was assigned to that battalion as a corporal and that means you're second in command of a squad and, a few weeks after that, they sent our outfit out to Fort Lewis, Washington, for maneuvers. We went out there and built a few bridges and did a lot of messing around, really. ... All the way out to Fort Lewis, and then, they sent us back to Fort Belvoir. Then, from Fort Belvoir, they said, "Well, you're going up to Kilmer," and we said "Well, we're going overseas." So, then, we were only there two, three days, I don't know. I think a couple of weeks we were there, and then, they put us into New York and we got on a boat and [were] on our way to Europe and I forget the name of the town we landed in over there in France. It was where ... all the boats landed for the European Theater.

SI: Le Havre?

DW: Le Havre, yes, and ... it was pretty exciting going in there, because these damned things were booming all in the harbor there. I don't know what they were, some kind of bombs, but they shook the ship and the guys got scared and I was one of them, but, then, we unloaded and set up a temporary camp and they told us we were ... going to move into Germany and we got into a situation where we were ready to go to Wurtzburg and Nuremberg and we didn't do anything except travel on the highway in a line and I think our objective was to clear any landing fields that were bombed and rebuild any bridges that were down, but all we did was go up and down the road until we got to Wurtzburg and Nuremberg, and then, we stayed there for three or four weeks. I remember, we were quartered in an agricultural school and I was so impressed with that school, because we bivouacked right in the hall and they had all these beautiful displays of apples and the diseases they carried and it was a wonderful school, really, and I can remember, some of these guys in the Army, they wanted to break into those glass enclosed places, with all these samples, and I didn't like that very much, but some of them [would] just break in there and they'd steal an apple, just to say that they had something, you know, as a souvenir, but that was a great college and I don't know the name of it, but I know we were right outside of Hitler Stadium, bivouacked for two or three weeks. We didn't do any work there, but we were just on the ready, you know, in case they needed us, and then, ... when V-E Day was declared, I think we got it seven days too early, because, the first ... V-E Day, the guys all grabbed GI cans and they went down and got a lot of wine and stuff and they were going to celebrate. So, they all celebrated. I didn't drink at that time; I was only twenty-one. ... Then, the lieutenant came in and said, "Well, ... it's all a mistake. It's no V-E Day. You have to wait until tomorrow." We did that, I think, seven days in a row, until, finally, it was V-E Day, and

then, ... they said, "Well, boys, you're going to leave here and go down to Marseilles." So, we got into another big caravan and we're taking all the heavy equipment and stuff to Marseilles, France, and, [when] we got down there, they told us we're going on a little boat trip. I said, "Oh, we're going home." [laughter] "No, you're not going home. You're going over to the Pacific Theater." "Oh, man." So, we're on this boat and we get to the Panama Canal and I still don't know what happened, but somebody said [that] the captain of the boat, or the person that was navigating, got a little high on something and the boat turned and they tore up a propeller and we'd have to be in port there for a week or so, until they got it repaired. So, that was not too bad.

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SI: Please, continue.

DW: ... They were nice quarters. They were all nice, nice beds and all. So, we liked that and ... they had our mail shipped down there. I remember getting cookies and we stayed there for, I think it was seven days or eight days, and we said, "Well, I guess we'll be going home then now," because we were there and they had dropped the atom bomb on Japan, while we were there in the Canal Zone, and we say, "Well, we'll be going home." They said, "Oh, yes." [laughter] ... Then, we got the word; we were going to the Philippine Islands. So, we ... weren't too happy about that. Anyhow, we were on that danged boat for fifty-five days, in total.

SI: What type of ship was it?

DW: It was just a troop carrier, ... an old luxury liner that they tore apart and they just had the bare essentials on it. ... We got to the Philippines and we were at Clark Field to, essentially, maintain the airfield and we got there, I think it was, I can't remember, it seems to me it was around World Series time and we listened to the World Series on the radio and so on. ... I think it was a little later, in, I guess, maybe, March or April, they said, "Well, we're going to start sending you boys home," and I think that's when ... they put us on a little Liberty ship, which was about as big as this house, and I remember, in that ride, [laughter] we were down ... in the base of that ship and we got into one of those storms heading towards California. ... These guys, some of them were crazy; ... I can remember tackling two or three guys. They wanted to get out of that area down there and jump into the water. They're getting off the boat. I said, "You can't do that, you're going to be [killed]." So, anyhow, that's the way they did it and, finally, the officers came down and got them squared away, but it was a real mess.

TF: Did you feel that you were well trained as an engineer?

DW: I didn't think so, no.

TF: What was the nature of your training?

DW: Well, it was mostly how to tie ropes ... so that they would be secure and laying bridges and that sort of thing, but ... we didn't really get much training at all. Of course, we didn't do a hell of a lot either, [laughter] but we were there, I guess, in case we're needed. ... I went around the world, almost, but I didn't really accomplish much.

SI: Was your basic training similar to infantry basic training? Was there much physical training?

DW: Oh, yes, same as infantry. It's all the same, yes, pretty tough.

SI: Do you remember anything about your instructors in basic training?

DW: They weren't very nice. [laughter] No, you know, they really over do it. They swear at you and make you do things that you shouldn't have to do, like extra laps and extra miles of running and so on, ... but we got through it.

SI: Since you were a college graduate, were you ever offered a slot in OCS?

DW: No. I got promoted to sergeant and that's how I finished up, but ... I had very bad, nearsighted, eyes and, in those days, if you didn't have good vision, you weren't ... up for any officer's jobs.

SI: Was it a shock to suddenly go from a college atmosphere to basic training in Virginia?

DW: It was [laughter] and I hated every minute of it. I mean, some guys say they liked it, but I never liked it, no, never did.

TF: What was your relationship with the other men there like, as opposed to your relationship with other guys at Rutgers?

DW: There was nobody from Rutgers in my outfit.

TF: Right. Were you able to develop some kind of camaraderie with those guys, like you had at Rutgers?

DW: Oh, yes, yes. Yes, there was some of that.

SI: Where were most of the men in your basic training unit from?

DW: They were [from] all over, all over the country. In fact, ... I don't think there were many from New Jersey. ... There was one older fellow in there. ... I mean, we were all young guys, except there was one guy there [who was] thirty-five years old and he was an old fellow for that outfit and they called him Swede. He was a real good carpenter. He was from New Jersey. I don't know whatever happened to him.

TF: Were the men in your basic training unit also in your battalion?

DW: No, no.

TF: What was it like to be thrown in with a bunch of new people in your battalion?

DW: Well, once you get out of basic training, you go to a new environment and you don't see them again, never. ... I guess they do that on purpose, I don't know.

SI: What was it like to travel around the country and, later, around the world? I assume that you had not traveled very far from New Jersey before World War II.

DW: No, that's true. Well, it wasn't very nice, really. I mean, you're on this boat and ... you're jammed together with a lot of guys and your food, you eat it because it's there [laughter] and that's about it. You don't see much sights, you know. You go from point A to point B and you're either in the galley down below or you're up on the deck and what do you see? not much.

TF: Did you have any duties while you were on the ship?

DW: ... No, I never did. I think some of the guys might have had KP. I never did.

SI: How did you pass the time?

DW: I don't know. ... We didn't get much exercise or anything like that. It's hard to remember what we did. I don't know.

SI: Gambling?

DW: Well, some of the guys gambled. Yes, they'd had some big crap games going, but I never took part in that. ... There were leaders that did that and ... I think they were a little shady, too. Boy, they had a lot of money laying out there, throwing dice.

SI: What did you think of the officers in your battalion?

DW: Well, we had a real good lieutenant, but our captain, I think, was really not too smart. I don't know how he ever made it, because he sure didn't impress me one bit and the other guys didn't like him either, but I guess that's the way it goes.

TF: Did they treat you differently at all because you were a college graduate?

DW: No. I don't think they did, but I never got any real bad jobs, you know. I don't think I was ever on KP. I don't know why, [laughter] but I think if you just kind of take care of your lessons and do a good job, you're going to be okay. I could be wrong.

SI: Within your unit, were there any men who had been to college or graduated from college?

DW: There were some, yes, not too many, but most of them were construction people. They worked in construction and I guess that's what the engineers are supposed to be.

SI: Were your officers regular Army officers or draftees?

DW: You know, I think they were draftees, too, but I'm not sure. I think the lieutenant was. ... He was a good fellow. He was nice and he was smart and he was very accommodating to me. ... My wife had our first child while I was in Germany and he was so happy to give us the birth announcement and so on. ... He was nice.

TF: How often did you correspond with your family back home?

DW: Oh, we wrote E-mail or V-mail. Is that what they called it, V-mail? yes, V-mail. I guess we got quite a little correspondence.

SI: Did you meet your wife before the war?

DW: High school. We were high school sweethearts, yes.

SI: Do you think that the coming of the war accelerated your decision to get married?

DW: We got married before; well, yes, I do think that, because we got married between my junior and senior year, during the break in January, and we figured, "What the heck? We're going to go overseas," and this and that, "and we might just as well get married now." I know a lot of guys delayed it, but ... Norma and I didn't feel we wanted to delay it.

TF: Did many other men in your class also get married before going into the service?

DW: Well, I know, my roommate, he got married six months before I did and he was a year ahead of me. He was a senior, ... but he got married right there in New Brunswick, but I don't remember any others.

TF: Were there any kind of accommodations for married couples on campus?

DW: No, no.

TF: You were apart from each other for the first several years of your marriage.

DW: ... Yes, right, yes. ... We were married in January of '43 and I went overseas, ... I guess we went overseas in, I guess it was '45, early '45, and most of the war in Germany was finished. We got there, like, in March and it was over in May. So, then, we went on to the Philippines. ...

SI: When you were stationed in Europe, did you have any interaction with either the French or German civilians?

DW: No, although there was one time when the lieutenant came in and said, ... "Hey, Woody, you want to get ... downtown?" He says, "There's a big bunch of Russians laying all over the city." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, they let them out of the prison and they went down to the railroad terminal and they started drinking buzz bomb juice," and he said, "I want us to go take a look at them. You want to go?" I said, "Yes, I'll go with you." So, anyhow, we went downtown and there's hundreds of these Russians laying around, with their

bellies all swollen, and, on a field not too far from there, they've got bulldozers bulldozing trenches and they're throwing all these guys in the trenches and covering them up. These were the Russians that couldn't be without their buzz bomb juice or alcohol. That was a terrible sight.

SI: They were all dead.

DW: Oh, yes. ... I think that's all only wood alcohol, that buzz bomb juice. I don't know, but it sure knocked the spots out of those guys.

SI: Were you able to see the results of the war in Germany, the Allied bombing and so forth, particularly in Nuremberg?

DW: We saw some of that, yes, but not too much. We saw the Hitler Stadium that was half completed. In fact, we went rabbit hunting in there. ... I went with the lieutenant one time. We took a little carbine, tracer bullets, and they had jackrabbits in this, it's full of weeds and all that stuff, and you get out there and you shoot at them and you see the old tracer bullets going right to them and, I remember, we brought back a couple rabbits and the chef said, "Yes, we'll cook those for you," and ... he had them hanging up ... in the area where they cook and this one guy came in, he was a city boy, and he looked at them. He says, "God, what's that?" and somebody said, "Oh, that's ... a deer from the woods," and the guy said, "Yes, ... small deer, isn't it?" [laughter] This kid never saw a rabbit or anything, you know, a kid from the city, but it was fun to do that. We had a little recreation in that place.

TF: While you were in Europe, was there a feeling that the war was coming to an end?

DW: ... The war? Oh, yes, but we didn't want to go to the Philippines to see it end there. [laughter]

SI: How surprised were you by the news that the atomic bomb had been developed and used on Japan?

DW: Very surprised, yes.

SI: Did you expect a much longer war in the Pacific?

DW: Well, I really don't remember. Sounds like I'm a little stupid, but I don't remember.

SI: Well, it was sixty years ago.

DW: Yes, that's a long time. [laughter]

SI: When you were stationed in the Philippines, were you able to interact with any civilians there or go on liberty?

DW: Yes, I had the opportunity to go down to one of the little towns where they had a school for agriculture and I met the teacher and we got along pretty good and I offered to teach him some

things about American farming and he liked that. ... The agricultural methods there are so obsolete and I wrote my father and he sent me some seeds, tomatoes and squash and cucumbers, and I showed the boys in that school how to grow them and they really appreciated it, so did the teacher. The teacher and I corresponded for a while, and then, lo and behold, I get a newspaper with a notice that he had been ... shot to death by these guys that were hanging out in the woods, the people that were not happy about the Americans being in the Philippines.

SI: The Huks?

DW: ... Yes. I had forgotten all that stuff.

SI: It is kind of interesting that you were billeted in an agricultural school in Germany, and then, you were involved with this school in the Philippines.

DW: Yes, yes. [laughter] It was nice. ... His name was (de la Paz?), nice kids.

SI: How old were the kids in that school? Were they high school age?

DW: They were just a little below high school age. They were like eighth graders.

SI: Were you able to go out to a Filipino farm and see the difference between that kind of farming and American agriculture?

DW: ... Oh, yes. Everything was so prehistoric, I guess you'd call it. I don't know, but, anyhow, my father was happy that the kids could see an American tomato and so on and they really got a lot out of that.

SI: What was an average day like for you in either Germany or the Philippines?

DW: What do you mean an average day?

SI: An average day's duty?

DW: Oh, I don't know. [laughter] Gee, it's been so damn long, I don't remember. ... You get up and you do a lot of cleaning and hustling around. If you've got a job assigned to you, you take the job and, if not, then, you just kind of settle down, write letters or something like that. That's about it.

SI: Were you always well supplied with food and provisions?

DW: Oh, yes. ... While we were overseas, we had good meals and plenty of it and I don't know what else to say. I remember, I got a package, one time, and I opened it up and there's a couple of candy bars and I said, "Man, this is going to be good," and I bit into one and I looked at it and it's full of worms. I said, "Oh, my God." I guess it'd been on the boat so long it just got wormy. So, I didn't like those Baby Ruth after that. ... Well, I don't know what else I can tell you guys.

SI: You got out of the Army in, probably, 1946 or 1947.

DW: '46, yes.

SI: What did you do between the time that you got out of the Army and the time that you joined the Extension Service?

DW: Well, I was vo-ag teacher for two years, and then, I got into the 4-H program.

TF: Did you take any time off after you came home?

DW: Oh, I wanted to go to work right away, because we weren't doing much at all in the Philippines. I mean, we didn't have any repairs on the fields and, as soon as I got that job, and I believe it was some time in the early spring, ... I went to work for them and I stayed there two years, and then, came down here in May of '48. So, there wasn't much of a time gap.

SI: You wrote on your survey that you did not use the GI Bill. Did you know about the GI Bill? Did you consider going back to school?

DW: No, no, I figured that I got my degree and that was it and I wanted to work. ...

SI: Did you ever use any other part of the GI Bill?

DW: Well, yes, we got a mortgage on the GI Mortgage, which was a very low interest rate. ... A lot of my fellow 4-H agents went on the GI Bill and they graduated, like, in the '50s, '51, '52, but I didn't feel the need for that.

SI: Could you just tell us a little bit about your work with the Extension Service and the 4-H and how it changed over the thirty years that you were with the organization?

DW: Well, when I first joined it, you had to ... have a BS in agriculture, because you were going to teach, essentially, agricultural subjects, like how to garden, how to raise a cow, how to raise a steer, and so on, and all that, but, now, ... they're into a lot of things that have no association with agriculture at all and a lot of the projects today, ... I don't know, they go into woodworking and so on and so forth. ... There used to be a lot of home economics. The lady agents used to have to have a degree in home economics, but they're not doing that either. I think it's changed a lot, but one of my goals, ... when I first started here, was to have a place where we could have our demonstrations, have our awards nights, and so on, and so forth, because ... we were using schools for these events and it was getting more difficult to get a school and there was more pressure put on to not ask a school ... administrator to let you have their facilities for 4-H, particularly at night and weekends and so on, and I felt that we needed our own building and that was one of the big missions that we started here and I fought for that, ... I guess I started in ... 1956. We obtained a piece of land in the Egg Harbor area, where this fellow who was a real estate agent, he and I got to know each other pretty well and he said, "Well, I'll tell you what, I'll give you this unsold housing tract, because I think it would be a good site for your 4-H operation," and I said, "Oh, that's fine. ... How much are you going to

charge us?" He said, "Well, there's twelve acres there. I'd need at least a thousand dollars." I said, "Okay, we can do that." I didn't know where, [laughter] but, anyhow, he deeded it to us, and then, he gave us eight hundred dollars back and that's how we got the land, and then, we went into a campaign of, "What kind of a building did we want? What kind of area do we want for the horse program?" and the barns for the cattle and sheep and so on and the first thing we did was, ... we took our plans, what I wanted, to an architect in Vineland and he drew up a simple plan and he said, "How's that look to you?" I said, "It looks pretty good." It was just a simple building, sixty feet wide and one hundred feet long, with a stage on the back and, on the side, there would be a room for classes and a kitchen. So, we figured that would cost, maybe, fifteen, twenty thousand dollars. This was 1959, I guess. Anyhow, we went on this drive. We were selling this and selling that and we finally got ... a lot of the labor donated. We got the pre-stressed girders that were sixty feet long donated. We got the labor to put them up donated, through the Olehasen and Sons, and, anyhow, we got the thing built and, by 1960, we were in the building and we got the gas company to donate a gas range, we got the electric company to donate an electric range, and then, I got the bottled gas people to donate a stove for bottled gas, so that we had all three components there. ... It worked out so nice, because that's our 4-H center building, and then, since that time, we added a room on one side, which is a workshop for the boys, for mechanics and woodworking and so on, and we have two barns there. ... The first barn we put up, we got a lot of telephone poles donated. We got the sheet metal donated and all the guys that I could grab that were skillful with their hands donated to put the roof on and put together and we got that barn up, and then, a couple of years later, we got a horse barn built. ... Then, we got two or three more buildings up there, and then, ... somebody donated enough lumber for the fence around the horse arena and it's worked out nicely. ...

TF: Times were much better, economically, after the war than before.

DW: Oh, yes, oh, sure. Well, you mean personally?

TF: Yes.

DW: You mean my pay as an Extension agent? Well, yes, Rutgers pays pretty good and their benefits are good and, well, of course, when we went through this building program, I don't think you could do it today, because I had contacts with people in the electric company, in the gas company and in the building trades that I knew personally and I could approach them and say, "Look, you know, we've got to have this, we've got to have that," and they said, "Yes, okay, 4-H is a good program. We'll do this," but I don't think you could do it today and, you know, things are a lot higher [laughter] and we're not as close to the people on the top level. So, we did it at the right time.

SI: Is there anything else that you would like to put on the record?

DW: ... I don't think so, no.

SI: Okay. I think we are both out of questions.

DW: You're out of questions? Well, that's good; I'm out of breath. [laughter]

SI: Thank you very much for having us.

DW: Well, you're very welcome.

SI: This concludes an interview with Professor David C. Wood in Mays Landing, New Jersey, on October 24, 2002.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/13/04

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/23/04

Reviewed by David C. Wood 10/12/04