

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
ROBERT FREEDMAN  
Navy, post-World War II

2001

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**Freedman, Robert**, (1928- ). Oral History Interview, 2001.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 52 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 52 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 52 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Robert Freedman, a Chicago, Illinois native, discusses his post-World War II service with the Navy in the Western Sea Frontier. Freedman discusses his reasons for enlisting, basic training at Camp Peary (Virginia), spending time waiting in Outgoing Units, and purposefully flunking out of electronics school at Treasure Island (California). He comments on the deterioration of the military. Assigned to Western Sea Frontier, he mentions trying out small boat duty and diving school, which he declined, and winding up as a storekeeper striker with Commander, Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet [COMSUBPAC] on Oahu (Hawaii). Freedman describes his duties as a storeroom clerk, pleasant living conditions on the submarine base, and side jobs he had as a waiter and a babysitter for some of the officers' families. Shipped back to the states in 1947, he recalls attending officer candidate school before assignment as a deck aid to the *USS Coral Sea* (CVB-43). He talks about an accident when two men fell off the ship's hawsers. He tells about exhausting duty loading potatoes and mentions duty carrying ammunition for the 20 millimeter antiaircraft guns. Freedman touches on his opinions of the Korean War. He talks about using the GI Bill to attend school, getting funds from the "52-20 club", and settling back into civilian life. As a Jew, he recalls "casual" Jew baiting in the service and compares it to anti-Semitism he experienced as a civilian. He talks about his uncle, who was a colonel in the National Guard, his son, who attended Marine Corps Officer training and became a police officer, and his immigrant grandparents. Freedman touches on going into the Veteran's Administration and being struck by the appearance of "broken down" veterans, and he recalls a conversation he had with a survivor of the *USS Lexington*. He states why he is in favor of universal military service.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Freedman (b.1928) grew up in Chicago and served with the United States Navy from 1946 to 1947 aboard the *USS Coral Sea*. After discharge he had a varied career, including insurance business and running the Cardinal Hotel, and he settled in Madison (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001.

Transcribed by Pooja Singh, 2009.

Corrected by Channing Welch, 2010.

Corrections typed by Katy Marty, 2010.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

**Transcribed Interview:**

- Jim: Talking to Robert Freedman. It's the 26<sup>th</sup> of April and it's the year 2001. Where were you born, sir?
- Bob: Chicago, Illinois.
- Jim: And, uh--
- Bob: Am I being in this screen? I just can't tell.
- Jim: We haven't started yet.
- Bob: Oh, ok [laughs]. Alright. I'll be another couple of little scratches on the CD of the eternal hope. Well as long as this country remains a country.
- Jim: Ok, so you were born in Chicago and were you raised there too?
- Bob: Born and raised there. Lived in the same house for--from three to eighteen.
- Jim: Ok. And, when did you get in the service?
- Bob: I joined the Navy on or about February 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup>, 1946. That was two or three days after my birthday and about a week after graduation from high school.
- Jim: Have you always wanted to be in the Navy or?
- Bob: No.
- Jim: You just didn't want to be in the Army?
- Bob: No. I just wanted to get out of the house. Let me explain. When my grandfather came to this country, one of the reasons he came was to avoid military service under the czars. And in 1940 he had three sons and a daughter. And two sons served, one from 1940 through 1945, the other from 1942 or 3 through 1945 or '46. It was ok to serve in this country. It was a duty. And I felt pretty much the same thing, without being able to verbalize it. It was something you should do. It was the right thing to do. Didn't matter to me. I figured that the Navy was probably better food and you had more showers.
- Jim: That's correct.
- Bob: Doesn't necessarily mean it's so but that's what I joined. And at the time I joined, I believe four of my graduate classmates joined. And we were very

smart because a couple of our classmates died in Korea and a couple more were very seriously injured as they were called up.

Jim: So, you trained at Great Lakes?

Bob: No, I was, I went to Camp Peary, Virginia. That's, where the spooks are now. CIA headquarters now. At that time, it was a training camp and also a prisoner of war; we had a lot of German prisoners of war. And, in fact they used to operate our mess lines, at least for awhile. I think they shipped them out sometime in May or June of '46.

Jim: What was your rating?

Bob: When I joined, I was an apprentice seaman. When I was discharged I was a seaman second class. Which is I guess the equivalent of a PFC. Strictly a grunt.

Jim: And, that was your first duty station?

Bob: No, my first duty station, oops. When I came back from boat leave, which I'm sure you're familiar with, I spent about six weeks in the, in a thing called Outgoing Units waiting for assignment at Camp Peary, Virginia. And I was shipped to Treasure Island, California which is in San Francisco Bay and I attended an Electronics school to become an electronic technicians mate which I successfully avoided becoming. I was bored to death with it. Didn't care for it. And I managed to--There were two ways of getting out. One was to die and the other was to flunk. So I chose of course the latter. And at that point, they assigned me to a thing called Western Sea Frontier and then they shipped me by boat to Pearl Harbor.

Jim: What was your specific duty at that time?

Bob: In outgoing units? I was just waiting. Oh, well what they would do is they would run a roll call, and this is at Camp Peary, they'd run a roll call, before breakfast I think. Or maybe after, I'm not clear on that. Then they would herd us into large enclosed areas, bullpens, and then they would draw work parties. And I remember, I think the first or second day I was back from leave and my work party, and this would be I guess mid April, my fourth party was to scrub the floor of a firehouse with a very small brush. On hands and knees. There were about thirty of us. And it was a two or three engine house and at that point, I decided that "This is not smart. This is not for me." So I managed to avoid that kind of duty and I made friends with some of the staff members there fulltime. And I got on to Chesapeake Bay or the James River basically in small boats and you know, learned a little bit about small boat handling. And I had a good time for the last month or two I was there. Let me point out, I think I may have mentioned this to you on the phone, it was a terrible time for the

military services. We just destroyed the greatest military power in the world in less than a year and a half. I mean absolutely gutted and killed. And nobody seemed to be responsible. And as malleable as I was, and as all these youngsters, we could've been turned into something with direction and discipline but we got neither of them. We were just bodies. We were filling in, whether we were competent or not, we were filling in. It's kind of sad. It's very sad.

Jim: So where did you move to next?

Bob: Well from Camp Peary, I went to San Francisco to that Electronics school and from there, after I managed to get out of that, I was assigned to the Western Sea Frontier, and I landed in Oahu, I believe in July or August. Yeah, it would be after July 4<sup>th</sup> but it would be sometime in middle July through middle of August in 46 at Pearl Harbor. And--

Jim: For what unit? I mean what type of unit there?

Bob: There was just Western Sea Frontier, whatever was needed. They took us. I tried to get into small boats and I was unsuccessful at that. They just had too many boatswain's mates and coxswains that, you know long timers, and I tried diving school but I was quickly disabused of that notion. The level of competence was unbelievably bad. Did you see this "*Men of Honor*" movie?

Jim: Hope to.

Bob: Did you? Ok.

Jim: I taped it. I haven't looked at it yet.

Bob: Oh ok, it's very good. Of course you know it's got some glitz, but the equipment really made the hairs on the back of my neck go up. This of course was about seven or eight years later when we had become more formal. When the military was coming back, but the hard hats and the equipment and the weight belts and the shoes, just, and the mittens. Ah, I made a couple of dives. And uh—

Jim: Any specific duty there, on the Western Frontier?

Bob: Western Sea Frontier was to learn how to be a diver which I declined because we had six of us in our class. Two lost the use of both eardrums, one lost the use of one eardrum and I resigned. It was one of those things you didn't have to worry; if you didn't like it, you got out.

Jim: Sure. So what did you -

- Bob: And then they assigned me to the submarine base. COMSUBPAC, at the naval yard, at the submarine base as a matter of fact.
- Jim: You were still in Hawaii?
- Bob: Yeah, still on Oahu, yes. And uh I was a pretty bright kid. I had gone to a couple as I say, some of these [??] schools and everything came pretty easy to me, so they turned me into a storekeeper. And I spent the balance of my service in Oahu at COMSUBPAC as a storekeeper striker. [Background noise]
- Jim: And your duty there was?
- Bob: Worked in a, I worked in a storeroom, supplying the material -- the storeroom was designed and dedicated to supplying of naval stores, not including food and cloth. Well we had clothing too, but primarily technical stores for the maintenance of submarines. And I couldn't get on the subs. I wore glasses and--
- Jim: So that kept you out?
- Bob: Yes. My provision hasn't changed very much since then. But they were very insistent on 20/20. So we worked a deal, another fella and I. He helped me with the long stuff and I helped him with the colors. When they found out, they kicked both of us out. [laughs] It was probably very hazardous, particularly for him because you got the red and the green. And if that light says red and you don't know what it says, you all gonna die.
- Jim: So your duty there was on a --
- Bob: Basically a clerk.
- Jim: Daytime clerk.
- Bob: Yeah, right. Um-hum. Nothing romantic. Nothing at all. Nothing really exciting. After work it was a little more exciting.
- Jim: Yes, I'm sure.
- Bob: [Laughs]
- Jim: More options.
- Bob: Yeah and the place where I was living at that time, the sub base was really beautifully laid out, very comfortable, I don't know, have you ever been to Hawaii? Well you know that for eleven and a half months of the year, it's got

the most perfect weather in the world. And the other two weeks, it's pretty nice anyway. You know, you get that rain in the early morning between six and ten and sunshine the rest of the day. We lived in permanent barracks, second floor, lots of space, very airy, very light. And without fans or air conditioning of course, it was very breezy. Really a nice place to stay. I mean, [laughs], it was more like a very nice youth hostel-what I learned later would be a youth hostel. And the men I served, the young men I served with were a mix. They came from New York, New Jersey, Alabama, of course I was from Illinois. They came probably, there were, in our group, which was, it was the naval stores and it was the clothing and it was, we also had commissary for the boats, commissary for the BOQ, Bachelor Officer Quarters. I wasn't involved in the clothing or the general commissary or BOQ commissary, just in the one, the stores for ships, or boats I should say.

And maybe forty of us. All white with the exception of a couple of Filipino stewards, who slept in the same building. I don't think they slept on our floor. And two-thirds of the bunks were empty because we were, not understaffed, they just didn't need the ones they had. I mean, it was such a poor allocation of resources. You know, at that time, I had no understanding of what was going on. But in retrospect and then from what I read and what I had been reading, is it was a crime. A crime against the United States what went on there. [laughs]

Jim: They allowed the organization to --

Bob: Yeah, to deteriorate that way. And that caused, my thinking, is it caused a reaction because when the people in the Congress finally realized how bad it was and the Russians were flexing their muscles, they went the other way and it really got nasty. Everywhere. I mean, it just, was one of those things.

Jim: Did you find that most of the other fellows felt the same way with--

Bob: No, I don't think so. There were some dedicated guys, I'm speaking of the seaman, who studied and worked hard to become promoted to first class and seaman and third class. Only a few. Most of them were pretty much like I was. Main chance, we were there, we were going to do what we had to do, what we were told to do, and get our time in and go home.

Jim: So you finished in '47 did you?

Bob: Yeah, I was shipped back in the summer, August of '47. I was trying to, you know, this was hardly, you know, military. But I was trying really to find something for myself. And so I applied and took an examination for officer candidate school. It was like the V12 program only it was more primitive. And I had done a number of things after duty hours. I was a babysitter for some of the officer's families. I was a waiter at the chief petty officer's mess.

And the club. And the same thing at the officer's club. You know, we didn't have much money and I usually lost my money the first day. So one of the officer's who I worked for gave me a very good recommendation and of course the way I passed the test, that apparently my grade was good enough so I was shipped back by boat to San Francisco and then put on a train to Great Lakes. And I was in the Officer Candidate School. And then, they said, "If you want, you can get out two months early." So I chose it so they kicked me out of there, well they separated me and I was put on the carrier aircraft, Coral Sea. It was then called CVB43. I was on a plank owner, put it in commission in October of '47. You know what a plank owner is?

Jim: Yes.

Bob: Well you were Navy weren't you?

Jim: Yes.

Bob: Oh that's right. I wasn't sure. And that was a tough row to hoe. At least you saw some, the beginnings of direction. You know—

Jim: What was your duty aboard [??]?

Bob: My duty was I was a seaman, a deck aid. I was a deck aid, yeah.

Jim: And you sailed where?

Bob: I'd never took a cruise. We just got out. I helped load ammunition. We went out into Chesapeake Bay and they brought the barges up and we loaded ammunition. We loaded stores. When the boat hit the water, when they flooded the dry dock, it's an enormous aircraft. I mean they're big. And I was under there scraping paint. You know they ran through their financial budget, so they couldn't use the air powered chippers. You know the ones with the—

Jim: So they had a lot of you guys?

Bob: Oh yes. Yes, yes, they certainly did. They had a lot of us. And we weren't earning our money. So we—

Jim: So you chipped paint?

Bob: That's it. We chipped paint. And we saw things.

Jim: Did you put that on too, afterwards?

Bob: No, no. They had other people do that. I don't remember who. I think civilian contractors put the paint on. And I saw some things that really shocked me.



We had a couple of, while we were dry dock, cause I came aboard while it was in dry dock and the mooring cables, the hawsers are like that. You know the manila. And uh you know, they had rat catchers, or rat preventatives on them. The big metal circles.

Jim: Rat guards.

Bob: Rat guards. And we lost two guys as I recall, one for sure and maybe the second one lived, who tried to walk the hawser to get on board ship because they were over leave. One died and I think, well the other one was hospitalized. I don't remember what happened to him. But I have a memory, [laughs], that isn't fond. We were loading stores and we were moored just ahead of either the Wisconsin or the Missouri, or no, the North Carolina, or South Carolina. The one, Iowa class battleship because a friend of mine from boot camp was on it. And uh, I visited him once there. But they had this loading store, on an aircraft carrier had that side elevator. It had the internal elevators and then they had the side elevator. But all the captains said, "We're not gonna use those because you could drop it down and you get 40 guys each picking up 75 pounds of potatoes. You bring them up and they can get right in there 'cause you don't have to go in from the hangar deck." He said, "No." So what we had to do is we, the way they set it up, we carried the damn things up like five flights, got on the surface, the flight deck, went down the ladders [laughs], into the agra deck. And then had to go down to, and get down to where the perishable stores were being kept. I never worked so hard in my life. I mean it was—

Jim: It's a lot of climbing.

Bob: Yes, well, these were 18, 19, 20 years old. You know, you got a lot of juice. It was interesting. And then of course we loaded ammunition in the Bay. We loaded; we had very primitive jets in '47. I can't remember what their names were. These were some fighters and some guide bombers. Loaded them too. They came in. It was just beautiful watching them come in. I was attached to a sponson gun deck. I slept about one third back from the bow, on the port side. And I was a server to a, I think it was a Bofors, a twin Bofors. Or, no not a Bofors, that's a 40 Oerlikon.

Jim: 20 millimeter.

Bob: 20 millimeters, yeah. And that was my job, hauling ammunition while the gunners were shooting. And I had some leave at that time. I took, I don't know, I got 5 or 10 days. And then of course my day came, which was early in December. I think my separation date was something like December 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, or 8<sup>th</sup>.

Jim: So you were short of two years, then?

Bob: Yeah, they said, “You’re gonna get out two months early.” And I took it. Now I should’ve really signed up, because the ship went to the Caribbean and it was down there out of Panama. I think it transited the canal both ways or it went up to San Francisco and then came back. And I’d had a very very, well that would’ve been Navy, real Navy, not what I did. But I think that what I was in is my time is fairly representative of that period 1946 through mid 1950. By 1950 of course we had reached the nadir of our military. And of course the Chinese or rather the North Koreans taught us a lesson.

Jim: State Department. They’re the ones that [unintelligible]

Bob: Well, when Dean Acheson said, “They’re not within our sphere of influence”-  
-

Jim: Right, that’s what started the war.

Bob: Well I think the war was inevitable because of the tremendous animus between, what was the guy from the South Korea?

Jim: Syngman Rhee?

Bob: Syngman Rhee. The Christian. Syngman Rhee and the North Korean leadership—

Jim: I met him in [unintelligible].

Bob: You did? He was a charming guy from everything I’d heard.

Jim: She went to Northwestern.

Bob: Really? Well, he was our critter from go for a long time.

Jim: You know he lived in the United States for 25 years before [laughs]

Bob: Yes, yes I know. But there it was, I’m trying to think of a parallel, you know a more modern parallel, there was a tremendous animus and it was a political mistake all the way. But we are not interested in the Korean War, you’re only interested in Bob Freedman’s little experience.

Jim: On this machine [unintelligible].

Bob: [Laughs]

Jim: Right. So anyway, after you got out, did you have use your GI Bill?

Bob: Yes. I got out as I say the first or second, right around the 9<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> of December and I flew home in a drunken stupor and—

Jim: Were you married then?

Bob: No, no I was single.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Bob: No, I was not quite 20. Well I went in and I was 18 and 4 days and I got out, I was almost two months shy of being 20. And I flew home, my folks picked me up, and I moved back in with them which was a big mistake but you never, you know, you don't think of it. And I went down and I took some tests at the University of Illinois campus at Navy Pier in Chicago. And I picked a whole bunch of credits and I went to Roosevelt College, at that time it was Roosevelt College on the Michigan Avenue, the old Auditorium Hotel. And I spent a couple years there. I was active intellectually as well as politically, I was a, I think, I was on their council and I was a vice president at one time of the student body or assistant vice president. You know, memory dims. And I was having a good time and I worked—

Jim: Were you trying to be a ward heeler in Chicago and take over one of the—

Bob: No, I don't know what I was preparing for. But certainly nothing political. I think I was just preparing to mark time.

Jim: Get a job.

Bob: That's right. And jobs were pretty easy. I worked, I worked, well what did I have? I had the GI Bill of course which wasn't very much but which was wonderful. I think 65 bucks a month plus books and fees and tuition. But I had a part time job in my uncle's father-in-law's clothing store. I worked two nights and Saturday's and then I had different part time jobs. And I had plenty of money. Oh I was also, they had at that time in Illinois, they may have had it here, I don't know, they call it the 52-20 club. You were entitled to 20 dollars a week—

Jim: All over.

Bob: Oh, they did? Okay.

Jim: [Unintelligible] Everybody.

Bob: Everybody. So I got 20 bucks a week for 52 weeks. And I think I had more money at that time than I've ever had in my life [laughs].

Jim: Not really.

Bob: I mean disposable income based on expenditure. But my experience, you know there's a normal reaction. I know guys that really did some bad time. People I associated with later who were really hurt, who were really damaged by the war. You know, physically and emotionally. And they went and did the same thing I did. They just went back home. Some of them got married, some of them went to school but everybody got a job and just did what they're supposed to do. Is it the manly thing to do? The humane thing to do? You just did it. Which is essentially what I did.

Jim: Well, we were a subservient kind of children.

Bob: Well yeah, yeah it was. My father was a patriarchist, his father was too. But we did the right thing. I mean, by I think, even today's standards although we didn't question as much.

Jim: No, never questioned?

Bob: Well I did. I had my problems with my family that way [laughs]. But essentially we were, oh what word am I seeking, we were cattle. Cattle, we were cattle.

Jim: Very compliant.

Bob: Yeah. And that's not necessarily bad. Because we did one hell of a, the veterans, the ones who did, the G I Bill is the greatest thing that ever happened.

Jim: Greatest piece of social legislation. Ever.

Bob: Yeah, ever, ever. And what we are today is directly—

Jim: That developed the middle class.

Bob: Yes, and you remember, well you're not much older than I am but—

Jim: Seventy-eight.

Bob: You're five years older than me. Ok, so you're born in '23. When you were 12 years old, '35, you remember the guys leaning on the shovels. The PWA [Public Works Administration], the WPA [Works Progress Administration].

Jim: My father was a physician. People couldn't pay him in cash. There were so many farmers, they'd pay them in stuff from the farm.

Bob: Where did you live?

Jim: Westside.

Bob: Here? In Madison?

Jim: Yes.

Bob: Oh, well my father was a lawyer and it was a very tough time for him because nobody had any money. And my best recollection as my father and my mother's older brother were partners and they got lucky once and this would be right around '34, '33, '34, '35, they got a bank for bankruptcy. And they got some enormous fees for those days which carried them for years. But it was a tough time and I remember carrying packages of clothing and food to neighbors. Certainly isn't done—I mean, I call up Salvation Army, "I got some stuff for you" and they say, "Well, bring it in." [laughs] You know, but oh you know, you come some place or go some place and they say, "Bring a can." You know, so you bring some old beluga caviar and you put it in there. But it is different. But then the country is—you know, I first came to Madison in 1940. I gotta tell you this. The governor of Illinois died. A fella named Henry Horner. And the day of his funeral, the schools were closed all over the State of Illinois. But my father was defending a young man here on an attempted murder charge.

Jim: In Madison?

Bob: In Madison, yeah. He was admitted, I guess, here. And so he said, "We're all going up there." And we did. And I remember walking around Madison, it was a tiny little town, 1940. I think it was 40,000 people.

Jim: Here or there [??].

Bob: Yeah, it was just a "burg". And I remember walking along the lakefront, I think it was Monona because we stayed near the courts buildings downtown. But it was a pleasant town. But I didn't come back for, twenty odd years. But you're a lifelong resident?

Jim: That's right.

Bob: Ok, what hospital was your dad connected with?

Jim: The university.

Bob: Oh, ok. That's where I trade. [laughs]

Jim: So, when did you get married then?

- Bob: I got married the first time in 1949 and that marriage lasted, I think eight or nine years. I had a couple kids, got divorced, and then I married again in '65 and I have two children and we're still married.
- Jim: Oh, so four kids?
- Bob: Five. Yeah, three. Boy, girl, boy. Girl, boy. So, I went forth and multiplied.
- Jim: I'm sorry?
- Bob: I went forth and multiplied.
- Jim: So, what did you do for work?
- Bob: I was in the insurance business for about a dozen years in Chicago. And then I had a hiatus, I did whatever I felt like doing for about 4 or 5 years. And then my father operated a business here, called the Cardinal Hotel, years ago. I think he started around 1950. And he was having a lot of problems; it was health problems and other things, and asked me to come up and help him out. So I came up for three months to help him out. That was in '64 or '65 and I've been here ever since.
- Jim: Just never got back to Chicago?
- Bob: Oh no, we go back. I have family there. My daughter in fact lives there and the hilarious thing is, she lives less than three miles from where I was raised. And I have, the only surviving blood relative of my father's generation lives there, she's my father's baby sister. Not \_?? although that's possible too, I don't know. She was born in 1916. And she has a son and then I have a number of cousins, but she's the only one of that generation. And I can see her deteriorating, I certainly hope she lives a long time. It's nice to talk to her, nice to spend some time with her. It's a contact still with my mother and father which wasn't always happy [laughs].
- Jim: No child ever has a completely happy childhood.
- Bob: There you go.
- Jim: There's always bumps. Anyway, what else do I want to ask you? Oh, did you join a veteran's group?
- Bob: Yes I did. I never joined the American Legion because of my personal political beliefs and I just didn't agree with them. I was a member for a very short period of time went to VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and I was a member for a longer period of time with the AMVETS. And by 1958, '59, I

wasn't a member of anything and haven't been since. It's just too many things that, they politicize those organizations to such an extent that I found them distasteful.

Jim: Half politics and half social that it just offers—

Bob: Well they just wanted the country to give them money. I mean how much can you give them?

Jim: I've got so many stickers for the last quarter of my letters. I'll never mail enough letters to use all those stickers they keep sending me because I didn't join it and then I'll send them 10 dollars every time they ask, you know to the VFW.

Bob: Oh VFW isn't really as bad an organization as—

Jim: Never liked the American Legion and I would never give or have I anything to do—

Bob: No, that was my feeling. You know, I'm a Jew. And so we had certain other problems as in my childhood and in my military service. Now, you know if you were a Christian you had a big 'C' on your dog tags. No, not a big 'C' but the same size as your name letters. If you were a Jew, there was a 'J'. I don't know what they had for Buddhists or for atheists but, or Muslims 'cause I don't think there were too many of any of those. But I would, you know, you're in the shower and you've got your dog tags on. You keep them on all the time. And so all the hair, you know, those wire cable. God. Whew. All the hair, it's gone. Pulled out. And there was a lot of Jew baiting. Not so much that I couldn't function, that's in service. It was a, I think, mostly casual. It's like, this guy is from Georgia or from Indianapolis, and you know wherever, he could be from Brooklyn and "Oh, you're one of them shinnies". [laughs]

Jim: Yeah, well, that's social. I mean, I've grown up that way. That's all I heard.

Bob: Yeah, I understand.

Jim: If they're from New York, you assume they're Jewish.

Bob: Well at the city—

Jim: Which is not necessarily so but—

Bob: No, but 40% of the population of the city was. [Laughs]

Jim: You know, often, you were not wrong. [Laughs]

- Bob: Yes. But this was more casual. As a high schooler, I probably experienced more anti-Semitism and threat than as an adult.
- Jim: As a competitive thing?
- Bob: Well the school I went to was 90% Jewish. I did not live in a Jewish neighborhood. I lived across the road from one. But I went to this one because it was so close and it was the one you were assigned to. But we didn't have that problem within the school, although we had some covert anti-Semitism from some of our teachers who were the worst in that world. These are teachers that work for the public school system in Chicago which was totally politicized, totally. You couldn't get a job unless you sucked the right tit. And but what would happen is at interscholastic encounters, basketball games, football games, baseball games, swim meets, you name it, it got pretty hairy at times. And so you know, you grow up with it. And I remember when I was just a little boy, 9, 10, when the German-American Bund marched in our neighborhood. [Laughs]
- Jim: Oh, really?
- Bob: Yes [laughs].
- Jim: Oh, my. Yeah, that was bad. That was extremely, really nuts.
- Bob: George Sylvester Viereck was there. Father Coughlin was probably there. Yeah, well you remember these names as well as I.
- Jim: He was crazy and Father Coughlin, he wasn't just a right wing Nazi. He was off the trolley.
- Bob: Well, I guess I would say that if anyone is as devoted to hate as he was, had to be.
- Jim: I mean, you'd have to have practice.
- Bob: Are we taping all of this conversation?
- Jim: Yes.
- Bob: Oh ok.
- Jim: We'll send you a copy of it.
- Bob: Oh well that's great. Well I was going to say that my grandfather owned a little hardware store in the northwest side of Chicago. He had been a man of some substance, building houses or buildings and he busted out and went



broke in the crash. He managed to salvage enough to get this little hardware store going and so, they're marching just a block and half north or three quarters of a block, they're going this way and then they're going to go that way and we were located here. So my uncles, my father's two younger brothers, who were born, let's see, one of them was 14 years older than me and the other was or 12 years and 16 years older than me. And they got their baseball bats and they had a whole bunch of friends and they were going up there. And my grandfather, talk to him in Yiddish, which was the language at home, and he was really upset.

Jim: He went out in the streets?

Bob: No, he talked to his sons. And of course my mother was arguing with my father who was no fighter, he was a little guy. "You're not going anywhere." She who must be obeyed. The fury, you could feel it in the whole neighborhood because this was before Kristallnacht and I would say before Munich which was in '38, yeah. And we used to listen at home to Hitler's speeches as we listened to Father Coughlin, you know [laughs], almost religiously. But you could sense the man's power. I mean, I couldn't even understand a word he said but some of these NBC and CBS guys were right there in the background translating. But never experienced that intense, except an occasional football game when they gang us and occasionally I suppose, we ganged them. But it was just one of the things you put up with.

Jim: Yeah, I'm sure it was cross to bear.

Bob: Yeah, well we bore it. And we survived. There was very—

Jim: Most of the Jews I know are stronger because of that.

Bob: Yeah, it is—

Jim: And they all have a drive which you can see that compensates for whatever they have to expect, you know. I think it's made 'em tougher.

Bob: Well, you know a lot of professionals but our family--I have my grandfather's Russian passport, internal passport. My uncle before, he was, my father's middle brother was the last one to die, just he was 86, I guess, just a few years ago. He died, well his heart stopped but he had Alzheimer's the last few years. He died, he was a Colonel incidentally. A Bird Colonel. Medical department, he was a dental surgeon. And he was in Georgia.

Jim: Must have been a regular.

- Bob: Well he went in the National Guard and got out in '46 and went into business as a commodities broker because he didn't want to be a dentist anymore. Went broke.
- Jim: Back to the service.
- Bob: Back into service. Just about Korea and stayed. And he did—
- Jim: He got his twenty-five then.
- Bob: No, he got thirty.
- Jim: Oh boy. Bird Colonel, that set him up for life.
- Bob: Oh yeah, I think he was pulling \$65-70,000 before he died. And she's got two-thirds of his pension or whatever it is. And he was a nice guy.
- Jim: Yeah, the military is not a bad profession. If you stick it.
- Bob: Now. My son is going to be 30 next month. He's a Madison policeman. He's a big strong young man, bright, Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi for the UW here. Triple major.
- Jim: Jesus Christ.
- Bob: And so he didn't know what he wanted to do. So he worked for the city for a year.
- Jim: That's a whole new training to be a policeman.
- Bob: Yeah, yes. It's not something I would have hoped for.
- Jim: Oh, I'm sure. That's what I was about to say, that argument has come up once or twice.
- Bob: Well but not anymore because that's what he wants to do at this time. So he decides that he's going to try the Marine Corps, so he signs up, takes the test, and he passes and he goes into Marine Corps Officer training down in Quantico. And it was hard, physically, it was tremendously hard. And I just, I finally sent him that little card that says "Non Carborundum Bastardum."
- Jim: Yeah, "Don't let the bastards get you down."
- Bob: [laughs] And we went down for the graduation and I really was hoping that he'd do it. Because he'd go to school for six more months and then probably 3 or 4 years, 3.5 to 4.5 years you know, of military. And he says, "No, I'm not

going to accept the commission.” He says, “I just don’t want to be put in a position to lead men to kill people.” He said, “I hate a lot of people but I don’t hate anyone enough to kill them [laughs] at this time.” Everybody, I think, there were 3 or 4 out of a 130 or 40 that refuse, yeah, they complete it which is not an easy thing. And I think they had about a 20% failure rate, guys that simply weren’t suited or broke down, you know, physically. So he came home and got another job and started looking into graduate school and he was accepted at Columbia and then at Ohio State and then he decided, oh he had taken the test for the Madison police and he then refused. He was really angry. Do you want this on here?

Jim: Do you?

Bob: Well, ok. So he went and took it again and he passed. So he spent eight months in training, so he’s a policeman. He’s been out now three and a half years but he’s just been accepted for graduate school here at the La Follette Institute.

Jim: In what? History, or?

Bob: I don’t know. I think he’s going to go, I told him, he says “You can’t make a living in history unless you write four successful books like Ambrose does.” And I guess he was, I think public policy is what he’s going to go into or public administration.

Jim: He could go to law school and make some money.

Bob: Yeah, well, he and I don’t really think too much of lawyers.

Jim: I know, but if you are a lawyer then you can—

Bob: Yeah, but there are so many of them now.

Jim: You don’t have to practice law is what I’m saying.

Bob: Oh yeah, I know what you mean. Well he doesn’t really want to do that. And then, listen, between now and September, he could change his mind. But it’s a pleasure to see him—

Jim: Yeah and he’s got a great background now.

Bob: Yeah, and you look at what my father would have just, it would have brought tears to my father’s eyes, let’s see, my dad died in 1980 so Jake was 9. And my daughter the same thing, I mean, worked hard, had a good time in school, has a job, supports herself, does everything right. But, I guess what I was

trying to say is that for me, except for an aberrant marriage, it's just been a normal progression of life and physical deterioration [laughs].

Jim: Circling the drain like the rest of us.

Bob: Yes, absolutely. Coming and going down the tubes a little bit at a time [laughs].

Jim: Right. Now, tell me, back to the anti-Semitism, did you find the situation the same in Madison as in Chicago?

Bob: Well you gotta remember when I came here, in '65 not '35 and as a child I was, now you have to understand a little of the psyche of the Jews. In the past, in the period beginning even to the days of Rome when the Jews were abused, they knew that ok, they'll come and they'll beat a few of us up. They might even kill a few of us, they'll rape a couple of our women, we'll give them some money and in a little while, it'll be over. And we'll come back. And that philosophy worked for a couple thousand years. I mean, Pharaoh, no, but I mean after Pharaoh. And it stopped working in the 30's. And one reason for this easy compliance initially to the Nazis was the fact that a cultured people like the Germans can't do this. It's gotta be a few crazies. So we'll take our lumps, we'll nod our heads, and we'll bow our heads and it'll be over. It'll go away because it happened in Russia like that every 10 or 15 years.

Jim: Well, they had programs periodically.

Bob: Just for a joke, I was in school my first or second year, first year probably, I'm in some political science class and the word came up "pogrom" and I'm in with a bunch of real rednecks. It was a small class, it was a 300 grade class and this young fellow said, "Well, what's a pogrom?" And my answer was, "It's a festival where you all get together and kill some Jews." [laughs] That's it.

Jim: That's it.

Bob: But no, what happened here was there was a good deal of feeling, anti-Semitic feeling among certain levels and that was in essentially in the administration and the political here. But the run of the mill people, I mean ordinary, what's an ordinary person? I don't know, they might mouth a few of the phrases but I don't think they had any real malice. [coughs] That's what happens.

In the Navy it was essentially the same thing. I did get [laughs], I was at boot camp and there was a young man named Michael Cunningham who was in, was close to me because he was a "C" and I was "F". And he was a big kid, I believe 6'1". And I mean, classic Anglo-Saxon, the build, the pectorals, everything. And I was a little plump, five foot niner, you know, just trying to

get by. And we got into something and he said something regarding my ethnicity and I said something to him and he threw me out the window of the barracks. He just picked me up and threw me [laughs]--[**End of Tape One, Side One**]

--But this was low, ground level. We had wooden barracks. And I landed onto [makes noise]. And that was the end of it. We made some talk after that. And then I remember when I was out of service, maybe a year, I get a phone call and it's from this Michael Cunningham.

Jim: Oh my goodness.

Bob: He says, "I'm at the Morrison Hotel and I need help." I said, "Yeah?", or the Sherman House, I don't know. He says, "Somebody stole all my money." And what he really wanted was to tap me for a couple hundred dollars which I had no intention of giving him but I was no longer an outcast [laughs] as long as I could come up with something. And I think there's a lot to that in many relationships.

Jim: Growing up in Madison, they had that significant Jewish community.

Bob: Very. And very very closely grouped.

Jim: Most of the time associated with the university.

Bob: Yeah but then also you had Mound Street.

Jim: Yes and that was, I was gonna say the other part. You know I've always been interested in what little I know the Ashkenazi's who came over right after the turn of the century from Russia. They were different Jews than the ones who came over in the 1930's and you know the 40's.

Bob: Well, this is true.

Jim: So their background was different. They were poorer is what I'm saying.

Bob: Poorer? Absolutely.

Jim: The original group that came over, in Germany when they had the bad guys in 1840 or 1840's.

Bob: In the '48 Revolution.

Jim: Yeah, it was a revolution. And a lot of them--[blank spot on tape]

Bob: Jews were a breed apart. They were very successful. They were very financial.

Jim: Very educated.

Bob: The whole thing. And they looked down up the Ashkenazi. And they also, in fact, I'm trying to remember some of the derogatory, the pejorative names for Jews that came out the--kike?? came from the German Jews. They used that, right, right [laughs]. So you had them and of course they were a presence where I was raised. In fact they were strong in the University of Chicago area and they were strong in the money group along Lakeshore Drive. But we were all Ashkenazi because we came from Poland and we came from Russia. My grandparents came from Poland and Russia, or what was then Russia or what was then Poland, I don't know.

Jim: It keeps changing with the centuries.

Bob: On my mother's side, my grandmother came from Hungary and my grandfather came from Lithuania. Hungary was the best place to come from cause there was just a little bit of that kind of hatred. But in Lithuania and Poland and Russia, it was a lot different. In fact, you know, commenting, a friend of mine is Chinese. I haven't seen him in awhile. But he brought his, finally was able to bring his wife's mother over from mainland China. And he supported her. I think he's still supporting her, never asks for anything from the government. In 1910, my father was about 8 or 9, it just before, my grandmother was pregnant and my grandfather was a carpenter. That's my father's father. And he fell off the building he was building. And he spent 8 months or 10 months in the old Augustana hospital in Chicago. No money, nothing. There was nothing, there was no system, no system. There was no, I mean, you know, your relatives and friends, so they survived. She had her baby. It was my uncle George whose name was Gershom [??] And it was because first born in a strange land I think is the literal translation of the name, which he was first born in a strange land. But today, we have all these structures which don't really encourage people toward independence. There are some exceptions, the Orientals essentially, and by them I mean primarily the Chinese, Japanese, they seem to have retained that drive. You have many other Asians, you're not supposed to say Oriental are you?, many other Asians—

Jim: I don't know. I stopped worrying about that.

Bob: Yeah, ok. Well you get me on record, I might be sued, you never know. Too many of these ethnicities come for the ride. My wife finds it terrible—

Jim: Koreans.

Bob: Koreans are also very good. I mean as far as they help each other.

Jim: They work like hell.

Bob: Yes.

Jim: Most Asians have a work ethic you can't believe [??]

Bob: Right. It's like when I was hiring agents, I was a general agent and a manager for insurance companies here, and they'd come in and if there was a farm boy there and you know, you got the cow manure coming off his shoes and shaved regularly, I'd hire him because he had a work ethic. You just teach him how to do it; he'd do it. But so many of the ethnicities, they come to take. There's no input.

And another thing, I got to mention this, both of, well my grandfather, my father's father, on his passport, it said illiterate. I think it said teamster also, I don't remember right now. I had a fella, a former UW ophthalmologist researcher who speaks five languages, translate it for me. But my grandfather at that time spoke Polish, Yiddish, he could read Hebrew because he would read the Torah, Polish, Yiddish, and Russian. He could write Yiddish and Polish. I don't think he could write in Russian. And I don't think he could write in Hebrew. But he could read. Ok. Four languages. His passport was marked illiterate. And he was happy about it, because you know, the less you showed, the more you got.

Now, when they came here, and this is interesting my point of view, my wife and I talked about this, I was a bright little kid. And I was bored to death with school. And I was eight years old and my grandmother, my mother's mother was probably fifty-three and this nice lady never raised her voice, never said a harsh word to anybody, a true gentle lady, she's having trouble, she's going to school. Now she'd been in the country, let's see, they were married almost sixty-two years, she died in '61, has been in the country since '93 and I'm eight years old, so it's '36. That's thirty-three years. Or maybe even longer. And I'm helping my grandmother. My other grandmother, without any help from me, taught herself to read English. I mean she went to school. But there was always this educational push to become a part of a larger whole. Today every ethnic group wants to maintain its own independence. And very candidly, if you go to Mexico City, and you want to have the title traced on a house that you're planning on buying or you need a driver's license, you better be fluent in Spanish buddy cause you're not going to be able to do anything without that. Don't work that way here. I think they just put out three more interpreters here, in Madison. I don't think that that's the worst thing in the world but it's the continuing process. You got to help people initially.

Jim: You can, but with Asian immigrants, among the problems that I think, they don't mix well in the community. They don't seem to have an interest in becoming apart of the community very often. Few do. But most of them, they don't volunteer for the—

Bob: This generation, we have to wait and see. We have to wait and see. Have you ever read William Saroyan?

Jim: Um hmm.

Bob: Great writer. Wonderful writer. And Saroyan wrote a vignette, a story, this of course is in the early thirties. Saroyan I guess would be ninety now. And he wrote this in the late twenties, early thirties and as he, there's an Armenian relief society meeting and they're trying to get together some money. And so, they're asking, and of course in those days a quarter was a lot of money, and this one man stands up and he says 'My name is' and you know, it's a five syllable ending -ian. 'And my brother' and another three, three Christians and sur – you know, also ending that way. 'And my brother in law' with another five syllable last ending -ian. Six or seven, fifty cents! [Laughs] fifty cents! It was, but the way it was handled was so beautiful. You've read Saroyan and you know what I'm talking about. And, no, I have clear memories. My father because he was educated—you know what the hell am I doing this for? Ok, well I'm kind of reminiscing for myself.

Jim: It's therapy.

Bob: Yeah, my father because he was an educated man, he was a lawyer, well when my grandfather bought his first car, my father who was eleven or twelve drove it home because the old man didn't know how to drive. And father didn't know how to drive either. But he would rely on my father to do the translating for him. I mean he could read and write. He could write his own name and he could figure. But to check the papers. My father became the secretary, the power of attorney for the funeral society that they were in. Which there were about 200 families and they bought a plot for the burial. And I'll never forget the name of this outfit. It was called the Slavaticher-Domachever Verein.

Jim: Wow! What a title.

Bob: Yeah, and you know what verein is. It's German. It's a club or brotherhood or something. But these people were semi dependent. Now they're not very much different than the Koreans coming here or the Hmong or the Mexicans or the Guatemalans, but they attempted to get out of this as quickly as possible, to become homogenized and maybe one of the reasons was because you could shed some of the Jewishness.

Jim: I expect.

Bob: Yeah, and but it wasn't just them. The Irish, well to this day the Irish haven't done it [laughs] but everybody else has.



- Jim: Yeah, people don't know much history. They can't believe when I tell them, you know, in New York, it wasn't always Jewish. It used to be that the scum was Irish. There used to be signs—
- Bob: No Irish—
- Jim: “Irish Need Not Apply.”
- Bob: Right, right.
- Jim: So, it goes through generations and it goes through different groups.
- Bob: Well that's true. And it's interesting. You and I think alike in many ways and of course that's generational too.
- Jim: I think so. I gotta mention this one thing. When I was in college, one of the guys at the medical school was this Jewish guy. He's a Phi Beta Kappa, lives in town and he was my classmate. Wonderful guy, still alive [laughs], despite the fact that he's got diabetes. Roy Rotter tremendous guy. Anyway, he grew up in Milwaukee and talking once, this is back in medical school days, and I mentioned this one fellow I'd met who was in New York and he was Jewish. And I said, “Do you know him?” And the guy said, “No, he's from New York.” And I said “What do you mean?”
- Bob: [laughs] “I don't have anything to do with “with – “[??]”
- Jim: They're entirely different; they're a world apart.
- Bob: Well, I don't hold with that. They are in the sense of the orthodoxy of the group.
- Jim: Yeah, and I don't think it's necessarily the Jewishness as much as New Yorkish.
- Bob: That's true.
- Jim: People in New York have a hard edge that's hard to take sometimes.
- Bob: One of the greatest compliments I ever got from my wife, we were up in New York, we were staying in a hotel on '47<sup>th</sup> Street and you know, you put the car in the garage because it's senseless taking in and out. But we were going someplace, we were going to go across that big new bridge, the—
- Jim: The Verrazano.

Bob: The Verrazano. And I'm driving, I'm whipping that little car right through traffic. And on the way home when we left New York, we were going down to Virginia Beach and Rehoboth down in Delaware and my wife said, "You drove good in New York." [both laugh] Cause I'm not a maniac but I just love heavy traffic. But New York is a rarity and I mean it's, I love the city. Wouldn't mind living there. On Manhattan. Who the hell can afford it, but I'd love to live there.

Jim: It's exciting.

Bob: Yes. I bought a 1934 guide to New York, book about that thick, hardcover. Every now and then I open it up and I look at it, and of course you have the maps and everything, the buildings are all new now, but it was great to read it. Some of the restaurants are still there. But, as an ex-serviceman, that's another thing I was going to mention, you know, I'm a heart patient. On my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday I had a heart attack and I had angioplasty and I've done pretty well. But I go to the Veteran's Administration, I'm in a program there and not much of a program. And I go in and it almost brings tears to my eyes. The guys I see there. These were those guys that were carrying those Garands waving them like that with double bandoleers with 75 pounds on their backs and go thirty miles and think nothing of it and they're just broken down hulks. And it's enough to make you cry. But you see, it's time and the one thing this country has done reasonably well, which is much better than what they did after World War I, is the promises, which are easy to make, were kept. And that makes me feel good. Not because it's me, because I'm not as needy by any stretch as a bunch of other people, but it makes me feel good that something is there for them.

Jim: They're not like Lenin said, "Promises are like pie crust. They break – easy to break." [both laugh]

Bob: Yes. Urgh.

Jim: So, very good.

Bob: I don't think you need me anymore?

Jim: Well, I've pumped all this stuff out of you [both laugh] I can think of.

Bob: And a lot of other.

Jim: Well that's alright. It's good. We like to hear it. Well did you keep in contact with anybody else, one last question?

Bob: No, I don't.

- Jim: You never –
- Bob: Ah, there were –
- Jim: Never [unintelligible] with anybody that --
- Bob: No, I've never gone to a reunion, I don't even know of any. What I did was, a number of years ago, after my divorce, I completely cut myself off from my past.
- Jim: Oh, I see.
- Bob: I don't see my best friends from my youth in high school. I mean, I just don't. So—
- Jim: No specific reason? You just don't?
- Bob: I just don't, no, period. And there were a few guys I knew in service that I liked. I mean, we got along and we had similar interests and there were a lot I just wouldn't care to associate with, which is perfectly normal I think.
- Jim: When you don't see anyone for a long long time, it's impossible to make more than fifteen minutes of conversation. You have nothing in common.
- Bob: My wife three or four years ago, my wife we're at a hotel in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and we were going to have breakfast. And at the time--maybe not Harrisburg, maybe, not Pittsburgh, but another nice, Scranton, one of those towns—and there's a reunion going on from the guys from the Lexington.  
So we go down for breakfast and our room came with you know free breakfast and so we went down, and I bought the paper, she was going to do the crossword and I was going to read the paper. And they say, "We can't seat you at this time because we're full up but if you would like, we can seat you with that gentleman over there." So I said well if he's agreeable and we're agreeable and we're hungry. We sat down with this guy and he was about your age, give or take a year, maybe a year older. Tall, spare, had a crew cut, watery blue eyes, high cheekbones, long face, thin, and I think he had had heart trouble. So we start talking and he was on the Lexington and he said—
- Jim: The first one or the second one?
- Bob: The first one, the one that was sunk.
- Jim: The one that went down in Coral sea.

Bob: Yeah. And I said, cause you mentioned, I say, “Well you know I’m a plank owner on the Coral Sea. I said I never heard a shot fired in anger. And we chatted and then he started telling me when there was a destroyer and a cruiser, the cruiser was farther back but there was a destroyer pumping water on the fires and he was, I think at the fantail. I don’t know the handling lines or whatever, when the Lex blew. And it wiped out 140 guys on this destroyer. Plus it killed a whole slew of guys at the fire and tears were rolling down. It made me -- still right now, I’m ready to cry because you could feel the intensity of his emotion and you know, we chatted and then there was a call for the get together and he said, “Would you like to come?” and I said, “No, I wouldn’t feel right there.” That’s a brotherhood of blood. So he said, “I’m gonna pay for your breakfast.” And I said, “No you’re not, it’s free.” He said, “I don’t care.” This guy he was an electrical contractor and apparently he was retired and he had a buck or two but he insisted and I guess maybe because he had somebody listen. I mean there were some great people in the service, decent—

Jim: They all do it for the right reason.

Bob: Yeah, we have a joke, “Would you take a bullet for me?” [laughs] my son and I. That’s what they did. They did take it for somebody else which is really what the military does and without romance, I just read a book, really a lousy book, called The Colonels by a guy named Griffith or Griffin, W.E.B. Griffin, well it’s about a bunch of you know, officers [laughs], combat—

Jim: So you automatically disliked it?

Bob: No, not that. It just, it was a bad book.

Jim: Oh. \_\_\_\_\_ ?? mutiny?

Bob: No, it’s no *Canine Mutiny*. There’s about as much character development in that as you’d find in an ant’s ass but, I bought a whole stack of books, 20 cents apiece, and I’m the kind that almost never will I not finish a book. I just, I feel compelled. You know, it’s my Protestant ethic [laughs]. But, you could sense a little of this, this guy was a member of the VFW, the American Legion, the National Rifle Association, and was a retired military vet. The good thing about the book, I have never seen even in Tom Clancy, never seen such detail on the mechanics of the military.

Jim: He did do his research.

Bob: Oh, absolutely. And he might very well have been a colonel for all I know. But it was a bad book and I mean, I think I won’t read The Majors, The Captains, or The Lieutenants either. But everything was trite and it was just sexually trite and it was ethically trite and I just, blech.

But the military is a great thing. When I say military, I mean the Coast Guard, the Navy, the Army, the air force—what they do, they are the shield in defense and obviously, you're a man who reads, and Rome. I just read *Hannibal* by Harold Lam, Hannibal Lee, not the cannibal but Hannibal the Carthaginian general and I've read Lam several times. He wrote *Genghis Khan* and a few others and my son is reading it now and the people of Rome, I mean were, [laughs], you know, like almost any other military, keep making mistakes but they outlasted him but they were there. They were willing to make the sacrifice and that's why I respect the military. They're willing to make the sacrifice. Now, it isn't necessarily for the right reasons, but when you stand up and you're counted, that's really important. That's why I'm in favor of universal military—let me finish my propaganda, got three minutes?

Jim: I don't know. Go ahead.

Bob: I'm in favor of universal military service, if not military universal service. Everybody at age eighteen goes in, whether you want to be in the Peace Corps or you want to be in the CCC or you're going to join the Army, the Navy, or the Marines.

Jim: Do something for the government.

Bob: You do something for the country. Like Kennedy said "Ask not what, ask what you can." Totally, and that's one of the reasons I joined the Navy when I was there. It was a good country to live in, we had a fairly small understanding of what was done in Russia and what was done in Germany and I just felt it was the right thing to do. And as stupid as I was, it was the right thing. Because it probably saved my life.

Jim: It taught you a great deal.

Bob: Yeah it did. My favorite president bar none is Harry Truman.

Jim: He had guts.

Bob: That's right and the reason is when he bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he guaranteed that I would live and my cousins would live.

Jim: That's right. He saved everybody.

Bob: Yeah and they figured that—

Jim: But that's not appreciated by the whining public.

Bob: No. So—

Jim: I always enjoyed speaking of the regulars. I've always admired that, the fact that they are there and even though they may not be the most confident people on earth and this may be a job because they couldn't get a better job, in civilian life, still, they're the ones that are going to take that bullet you spoke of. And they're there, as I'm sleeping, they're on the watch. Always think of that the endless amount of The Canine Mutiny that speech, that Barney Greenwald made you know, to these guys who were laughing about the "Old "Yellow Stains," you know—

Bob: Yes, I read the book twice. It's been years.

Jim: The yellow stain, they were laughing about their victory because Grunewald?? had just won the case by just embarrassing—

Bob: The Jew lawyer.

Jim: Embarrassing themselves. Again, you should reread that speech. Essentially it said why you and I are on the playing fields of Eden, running around after girls and things, and who was it that was out there when you were dicking around? It was Captain ?? He was the guy that was out there. And not to appreciate that is—

Bob: I can stand a guy like Curtis Le May because he was willing to do what he thought was right.

Jim: They put him in a thousand feet [laughs]

Bob: Personally, I found him loathsome and disgusting but what he did, what he was willing to do, are you familiar with the guy they called Bomber Harris?

Jim: Sure.

Bob: There's a guy—

Jim: Same thing.

Bob: He—you gotta respect him.

Jim: Well, he stuck with his plan.

Bob: That's right. You gotta respect him. Well there are a lot of other guys from World War, Touchy Spaatz Spots was a good man and Jimmy Doolittle was another great man. And then of course, Omar Bradley who I really have a lot of respect for. Even Eisenhower I like a little bit.

Jim: I should tell you this before we're through. I was divorced after I had four children and then went through my midlife crisis and got divorced, remarried and I just finished, let's see. I was married thirty years the first time and I just finished twenty-five years the second time.

Bob: God, you're a no amateur, doc.

Jim: Right.

Bob: What's your first name?

Jim: Jim.

Bob: Oh, I'm going to call you Jim.

Jim: Fine. Anyways, the point is with the second marriage, I didn't belong to any organized church. In my first marriage, I was forced to join the Lutheran church which I hated because I had to and my wife was very strong and I had to get along and—

Bob: Yeah, you give it up because you want peace.

Jim: I wanted to keep the peace, so sure I'll do it. So after I got divorced, I no longer went to any church. I'd given enough to that Lutheran church on the west side of Madison anyway. Every time I see that church, I think of all my \_\_\_\_\_?? Anyway, so I'd get married again and I talked to Tony Karls, the Catholic priest who services Madison general and he says, "I can't do that." I said, "C'mon. Who knows, really." And he said, "You're a good friend but I just can't." I got Rabbi Swarsensky. He married us.

Bob: Manfred?

Jim: He married us.

Bob: Great.

Jim: Fantastic. [laughs] Wonderful guy. He married us in the hospital chapel. We were the first couple married in that hospital chapel. I don't know how many have since but he was the guy, he and I were on the hospital floor together. I was chief of staff and so I was on the board and so he and I became friends.

Bob: He was a very fine man.

Jim: But he's the guy who married us.

Bob: My father took me to see him. He tried everything. He turned me over to a psychiatrist [laughs] over here at UW Hospital when they were still on University Avenue up there in the old buildings and the thing that impressed me most about this psychiatrist was he had a magazine with advertisements for Rolls Royce automobiles at \$12,000. So, Bob Swarsensky we went there, I had, let's see, there were three of us that had nervous breakdowns in my family. I had mine in a hotel room on the Near North Side. One of my cousins was confined to a state institution and the other one went to the fanciest, flossiest Catholic hospital in the Midwest and he had his. We all had the same amount of time roughly and we are all about the same now. But I did it in a seedy hotel but as I said, I'm having problems, and he takes me to see Swarsensky and we're talking you know, and he says, "You must have faith." And I said, "I have no faith." He said, "Well, you must have." And I said, "I have no faith," and he said, "You must have faith," and I said, "What is this? Some kind of routine?" And he laughed. But if you—are you religious now?

Jim: I tell everybody I'm a reborn agnostic.

Bob: Ok. [Jim laughs] My wife is a, was born in the United Church of Christ which is some kind of aberration. It's ok. And her mother died in 1961 while my wife was, just before her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. And she went to her funeral and my wife hasn't been to a funeral since. She didn't go to my mother's, my father's, her father, her brothers, her nephews, her nieces, her cousins, no one. She can't handle it. But we don't raise, we gave our children no religious instruction. Period.

Jim: Do as you want.

Bob: Do as you want. And I think I may have made a mistake. They got the value judgments, the Western Judeo-Christian values not from the religion but from the family and from the education. But I think so often, that the family and the education misses some of this good stuff.

Jim: Yeah, I made my kids in this Lutheran church; I said, "You have to be confirmed." They were whining, and pissing and moaning. I said, "There's no discussion. You're gonna go on until you get confirmed." That's usually about the age fourteen or so. "And after that, your choice." And my wife says, "Well, that's good. That'll seal them." I said, "I hope so." And that's just exactly. None of them ever stepped foot in a church from that moment on [both laughs].

Bob: I was in the Navy and I was with a guy named Donald Vito Vitullo [??] He was my buddy there. And he would go out and score every time he went out. He was a good looking young kid. I mean he had everything. Looked like –

Jim: A good Italian boy [unintelligible]



Bob: Yeah, looked like --

Jim: Annoyingly handsome.

Bob: Twice as good as Frank Sinatra. But then he'd say, I have to go to confession and communion. He dragged me with him. I'd sit in the back of the church, he'd go up there and he'd come out all smiles and he'd go out and get some again. But hey, if it makes him happy and if he's truly repentant then that's what the church wants. [laughs] Yeah, it is funny.  
Yeah, this has really been a pleasant experience. I didn't know what to expect. I don't know if you can use much of what I said [laughs].

Jim: Well some of it.

Bob: Ok.

Jim: You can use it.

Bob: Alright.

Jim: As I said, I take these home and make copies on the VCR and I'll send you one.

Bob: What size? Beta? Not Beta, VHS. Oh great, ok. I tell ya, I think a lot of my life as it is now, I had a lawyer here in town, I was having some problems, real nice guy, and he said to me, "Did you do your best?" I said, "You know, you're making me think and I'm not sure but I think I did." And he said, "Well, what more can be expected of you?"

Jim: Yeah, I've thought about that. And I decided that a lot of things I did the best and a lot of things, I did not do the best. And, I lost one of my children, suicide and so that guilt will hang on me forever.

Bob: How old was the boy or girl?

Jim: Twenty-four.

Bob: Male?

Jim: Um-hmm. So.

Bob: You have my sympathy, truly.

Jim: That's tough.

Bob: Yes, it is.

Jim: So—

Bob: I had a nephew that just died, January of last year, thirty-one years old. His wife was pregnant with the third one when he died. And he never should have died. He was in a hospital in Janesville and he had testicular cancer. And they had claimed to have gotten it.

Jim: I've treated a lot of those.

Bob: Ok well, you know more than--. I didn't want to say, "You should go to Madison." Maybe if I'd have said it, it would have been important. But, he, well what happened was, it's the triad. He had lung failure, heart failure, and kidney failure. Big daddy, junior, and spook. Triple threat. And the last time I saw him, he was turning black. I mean he couldn't get the fluids out of him. He was swollen up. And his mother, now it's a year and half almost, January I think was the year, she was just in a state of tremendous depression. She's functioning and the father is just—

Jim: Hasn't come to grips with it?

Bob: And my brother-in-law was a nice man, just says, "He's in a better place." And he just shuts it off. And he left three little boys. He only had two when he died but and a lovely, wonderful wife. And it really makes you wonder, why. And I had another nephew, my sister's boy, inoperable brain tumor, died at age thirty-two or thirty-three, from diagnosis to death was five months.

Jim: My oldest daughter's husband, same thing.

Bob: Why? [laughs] God's will.

Jim: Ok, we've come to the end.

Bob: We've come to the end. You've turned me off. Yeah, listen, I enjoyed this and I hope this helps you. Now of course you will edit this so that I appear in the best possible light [laughs].

Jim: Right. It's humanly possible.

Bob: I appreciate that.

Jim: Well thanks.

**[End of Interview]**