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HERBERT M. HOLZBERG
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LEVINE: Today is August 25th, the year 2000. And I'm here at Ellis Island in the studio with Mr. Herbert M. Holzberg, when was a [clears throat]—a trainee at—on Hoffman Island—

HOLZBERG: That's right.

LEVINE: —in the Maritime—

HOLZBERG: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —Radio Operating School.

HOLZBERG: Exactly.

LEVINE: Okay. In 1944 and 1945. [clears throat] Also with us today is Mrs. Holzberg, Shirley Holzberg. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay. Could we start with your birth date and where you were born?

HOLZBERG: Okay. I was born on December 22nd, 1920—1926 in the Bronx, New York.

LEVINE: And [clears throat] did you stay in the Bronx until you joined the Maritime Service?

HOLZBERG: Pretty much so. We did a lot of moving around in the Bronx, in different sections of the Bronx. But we—we stayed there all the time. We really never left the Bronx and I never left it really until I—well, until I went away to the service, to the Maritime Service. And at that time—of course, later on, we—I was married and then we moved to New Jersey.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, just a—a little bit about your family. Did anyone in your fam—was anyone in your family connected with Ellis Island in the sense of coming here as an immigrant?

HOLZBERG: Oh, yes. Just about everyone. [laughter] In fact, there's interesting stories about Ellis Island. You know, I just happen to recall one of them. My mother came from a small town in Russia. And when my grandmother decided that the very—I think called pogram—pograms—

LEVINE: Pogroms.

HOLZBERG: —pogroms that they were having there weren't the place to live. And she wanted—and all the men were going to be in the service or army very quickly. She decided that the street with the paved gold was better. So she wanted to take the family to New York. And my mother was only about two years old, I think she said, at the time. And she took her brothers and so forth, the children at that time. I think—I don't even know how many there were at that time. But they had to go from Russia to Germany as a port where they would get on a ship. And that ship would, of course, take them to Ellis Island. At the time they went to Germany they were examined there. You had to be examined by some medical people there to make sure you were healthy before they would allow you to go on that trip. And one of my uncles had a problem with his eye. One of his eyes had some problem. And so they would not allow my grandmother to go on the trip. And so they had to actually find a place to live in Germany. And I think it's possibly Bremerhaven, though I can't recall for sure. But they had to find a place to live and they were there for several months and have some medical treatment until this condition cleared up. And then they were allowed to get on the ship. Then of course, it was the usual steerage type of ship that they had, not the very deluxe one.

No Queen Mary, that's for sure. And they—30 days later or maybe it was even longer than that, they wound up here. And I'm not sure that their name was completely Levine [PH] at that time when they came here. But somehow, as—as it turned out, a lot of people—they told the—whoever the inspector was at the time what their name was, that it was complicated. They kind of [chuckles] gave them a English version of it, so it turned out to be Levine for sure. Anyway, they did—they did get here and, of course, the thing that always plagued me, or a mystery, was when they got here to the New York area, how did they settle in Maine? Because normally, it would seem to me, most of the immigrants stayed in New York City. And I think I've surmised that we were—my wife and I have discussed this, that there always seems to be one relative or more that ventured up to, in this case, Portland, Maine, and the rest of the flock followed through. [chuckles] And that's how people normally, I think, got established here in this country here. But they did go through Ellis Island and, thankfully, at that point there was no more medical problems. So they were processed properly and they didn't have any more problems. And they went on to lead their lives and live in a small town of—it turned out to be 75,000 people in Portland, Maine.

LEVINE: Hmm. Wow. So how was it that you came to join the Maritime Service?

HOLZBERG: Well, if I may, I think—on my story that I wrote, I—I'm a poet at heart. So I wrote a poem. And—it's only one page. And maybe that would help giving a little information and then I'll carry on. And the poem goes like this. And it's entitled "Merchant Marine, Here I Come," and says, "The Draft Board was beckoning. I really didn't want to go but they heard my story and they wouldn't let me say no. I was destined for khaki but I was really nervous so I had to make a choice, the U.S. Maritime Service. I signed up quickly. There was no time to waste. An infantry position was not to my taste. Two years went by. Many adventures were had. And as I reminisce, I'm just a little sad. So I'll tell my story if you give me a chance. Only a few of the happenings, I may try to enhance. But I'll try to remember each and every detail and hope that my memory doesn't start to fail. It started one day on August 11th, 1944 when I closed the latch on my front door." And so that's sort of an introduction and then, of course, the actual story goes after that. But if you want the—the complete, true version [laughter]—

LEVINE: True—

HOLZBERG: —I'll have to tell you that. The—the way it happened was this. I was going to—to radio—the radio broadcast school, RCA Institutes at that

time, here in New York City. And I had about another 45—well, no, let's see. I had another three-quarters of a year to go to graduate. And the Draft Board in the Bronx was not too friendly to my suggestion that I remain here until I complete my course. So they were about to put me in the service here. And I was working in the post office one—one day there part time to make some money to afford my schooling at the time. And I heard some fellows talking about the Merchant Marine. And they said that, well, it was dangerous in the Merchant Marine. Actually, it turned out that it was more dangerous than the Army. But—but they did make a lot more money, if you lived, [chuckles] and you did see a lot of the world. And somehow, I would—I would have—would have been the first of my family because no one else had any sea legs or any inkling to go to—to sea that I know of. So I thought about it and I guess I'm a little bit of an adventurer sometimes and I like to do things that are new. So I thought about it. And somehow, the fact that you could make some more money intrigued me a little bit also. So I went down the very next day and signed up, not knowing or, at any rate, what was in store for me. And of course, I left on that day and I remember it was Armistice Day at that time on the 11th of November, 1944. And I took the subway downtown to 20—I think it was 25 Broadway or where—wherever the Maritime Service was located at that time, and got into the office. And there was about 25 other nervous individuals there besides myself, [chuckles] though I probably was the most nervous of them all. But at any rate, I didn't let it on. And we waited for the school bus, which was glamorous transportation. And they took us over to Sheepshead Bay. And this part about it, when we got to Sheepshead Bay and you see those doors, it's like going into a prison in a way, sort of. [chuckles] You wonder about whether this is such a wise decision. Especially, you have—there's always some wise guys around that are three-week veterans telling you how tough it is there and, "Watch out for the shot you get for bubonic plague," and this one here, and how bad the food is and, also, how the discipline is really going to make you very upset. Whatever. But naturally, you have no choice at that point. You already put your name on the dotted line. So you go in there and first day is complete sort of a misty in front of you. You're—you're doing a lot of things. You're walking around. You're getting shots. You're doing this and that. And then it takes you—about the second day, were free for a couple of hours and I got homesick. I mean, you know, I'm only 20 miles from the Bronx and New York but [chuckles] I hadn't been away, really, at that time. And so I started feeling a little bad. I remember walking around there. But there was no other choice I had so I went back into the routine. And then on Monday the—it's only two days you're—I think you were there doing nothing, really. You started your classes and everything, you know. You're sort of boot training, as they would call it, where

you're learning the very basics of seamanship and everything like that. And after—about that time I couldn't get—I wasn't as homesick anymore. There wasn't any time for it. And I even remember the—it was like the sergeant of the Army. He was a master of arms, they called them there. They took care of your barracks. And his na—he said, "My name is Corporal Pleasant, only sometimes I'm not so pleasant." And he was right about that. I mean, that was the gospel truth but we got along with him pretty well. But after a couple of weeks of training, they—they want you to make your decision and decide what you're going to do in the Merchant Marine. Because after all, the U.S. Maritime Service is a training school. And I thought about it for a while and the first job that they had open was—well, I hate to use the term mess man, but that's what they're called on ship. And it's a job where you're sort of a waiter for either the officers' mess or the—the regular seamen. And of course, you bring in the food from the—from the galley and then you also clean up the place, you know, so it's not the most glamorous job in the world, I mean. So I thought about that. But if you wanted to go to sea very quickly, that was the fastest way you could go because you could get out to sea in six weeks from the time you got there. And most people didn't think that Hoffman, that top—and I know; I'm sorry—Sheepshead Bay was so glamorous. So they were anxious to leave. So they got a few of the fellows, went in six weeks. But then if you wanted to do a different type of job—I found out they had another one that was an ordinary seaman job on ship. Well, that's a job that involves a lot of chipping and painting on—on ship. And it's cold outside, you know, if you're in the North Atlantic. And somehow, I didn't like the cold—the cold part of it too much and I didn't think chipping and painting all day would be much fun. Besides, you get your hands dirty and everything, I guess. So—so I wasn't too happy with that. But I let that go by. You could get out to sea in eight weeks if you did that. And about the same time, I heard about another job, which was down in the deep denizens of the deep down there in the engine room. And it had the glamorous title of wiper. So I said, [chuckles] "I don't know. That doesn't—what does a wiper do?" Well, of course, a wiper does what the name implies. He goes around with a rag and wipes the oil from the engines and different things like that, wherever it's extra or more than you need and whatever. And of course, that's—each—one of these jobs is the lowest man on the totem pole type of thing, you know. You—eventually, you're supposed to go into higher jobs. But being in the engine room with 130 degrees heat at times and things like that, I didn't think that was exactly what I w—so I was really very worried about that point, I remember, because I fig—'Don't they have any jobs I really would like here? You know. I mean, after all, there must be something.' So then I heard about this marvelous—they had a school there right on Hoff—I—I keep saying

Hoffman Island because that's the last place—but on Sheepshead Bay. And that school was a cook and baker school. It was a 13-week course. And I thought about that and then I thought that my father—you know, he was—when he came over he was—went into the Army eventually and he was a cook there, cook and baker there in the Army. And I thought, 'Maybe this is heredity. You know, after all, it's in our family.' And so I thought about that for a while and I thought, 'Oh, you're going to eat pretty well if you're the cook, of course, and everything like that.' So I thought, 'This sounds pretty good. This is more to my liking.' And I was just about to sign up for that when, out of the clear blue sky, I heard about a radio school. And I—"Radio school?" "Yeah, they're looking for radio operators and they've got a school on Hoffman Island in New York Bay and it's a six-month course." And in order to qualify you had to take the code—you had to pass a code test. You know, dots and dashes, the Morse Code. And you had to take some sort of a math test. Well, that was not a real problem for me because, first of all, I was taking—I took the class in code. It was mandatory out of—from RCA Institutes in 75 [unclear] Street in New York at the time. And also, I had a lot of math. I was in engineering curriculum so math was not really a problem.

LEVINE: What were you studying to do—what—before you too—signed up?

HOLZBERG: Oh, I was going in for the radio engineering course, which was a two-year course. It was equivalent to the electrical engineering course that they have at colleges. But of course, electrical engineering takes about four years because, besides the technical courses, you need to take the various liberal art courses. And, whereas, what RCA Institutes had done was to sort of condense the same training. You'd have the same technical training but they—they had skipped the, you know, liberal art courses. So you could actually complete it in two years. So that's what I was involved in at the time when they went in.

LEVINE: [unclear] so you [unclear]—

HOLZBERG: Yeah. So anyway—

LEVINE: [unclear]

HOLZBERG: So of course—so when half an hour came they gave us a code. That was nothing to me. I could do that in my sleep. And also, the math was—you know, it was simple math for me because I had taken—studying math and engineering-wise. So I got—I was—I was admitted there.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first day?

HOLZBERG: Yeah, it was a terrible—[laughs] do you really want to know about it? We got off—you know, we—we—we were so glad to leave Sheepshead Bay and everything. We got—and we took the—you take—we took the Staten Island Ferry. You have to take the Staten Island Ferry. You know, you have to go to New York, take the Staten Island Ferry to—to the i—to the—to the dock there. And then they—there's another little boat that they had, which took you from Staten Island to Hoffman Island. And they had, like, an eight-man crew on it. And it ran at a certain schedule, not a very heavy schedule. But it did stop off at Hoffman Island. And somewhere along, I—I'll remember the name, I hope. But anyway, I have it written down someplace. But anyway, so we went there and here we thought, 'Okay, this is great. We're going to go here. We're going to go—start school. It's going to be a lot of fun.' And we were all looking forward to it. And it turned out that the first week on Hoffman Island you didn't go to school. You did the menial jobs that are necessary, like the KP type of things, you know, in the kitchen and shoveling snow in the winter and all these other jobs, because someone has to do them. You know, you had to do that. So you were awarded those things first. So we had to suffer through those jobs. But even that worked out pretty well for me because, for some reason, I didn't really like this snow shoveling detail I was about to go on. But I had a friend of mine that I—you know, that I wanted to do the same thing that he did. And some—some fellow there that was in charge at the time, I remember—he thought I was—I went to the back of the line, said I wanted to be near my friend. He thought I was trying to duck some work, I think. So he gave me a terrible job as a waiter in the kitchen in the Officers Club. Well, the food was great there, you know, and they were out shoveling shit—the snow out on there. So I mean, it was a glamorous job. I loved it—for the whole week. And it worked out okay. But then we started our classes right after that at Hoffman Island.

LEVINE: Could you say a little bit about what Hoffman Island looked like when you—when you got there?

HOLZBERG: Oh, yeah. It was a—a island with a lot of buildings on it there. It was barracks. There was water towers. Of course, I'm just—I'll show this to you but—to give you an idea. It was—it was buildings in—oc—occupying the entire part of the island. It was a very comfortable location, actually. There was everything they had there for recreational purposes, big gym and everything. And it was completely built up.

LEVINE: Now, were—were there still hospital buildings there that had been used for immigrants for quarantine?

HOLZBERG: I don't believe so. I think the only the hospital they had—they had a little bit of—they had an infirmary there for sick bay type of thing. But that was the extent of it. I—I didn't see any hospitals besides that, you know.

LEVINE: And had the Maritime Service been there for a while—

HOLZBERG: Yes.

LEVINE: —when you got there?

HOLZBERG: Yes. Well, the—I got there in January—in about January, 1945. They had opened it up in 1944—I think about April, 1944. So the radio operating school was in operation there. In fact, I was in the 34th class.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLZBERG: And each one had a different designation, like mine was 34R, which stands for radio, I guess. And so we were like the 34th week. Now, the way the school worked is that it was a six-month course. So you were there for six months but every—every week or two another class came in. So they started from number one, I suppose, and they went up. And—and when I was there they—they had the program already set in motion where you did, like, two hours of code every morning during the week, one hour of typing and then one hour of something, of life or drill or something like that, something else like—in that nature. In the afternoon you went to theory classes so all afternoon you had, like, theory. And it was pretty much of a regiment thing. And the way it worked is that, as you went along from week to week, every week you might get a little faster, be able to take code, Morse Code a little faster. You know, so you'd learn a little more theory and, of course—and also, typing. That was a very important part. You had to type a little faster every week. [chuckles] And it was sort of a trying experience on the weekend because the last day of each week on Friday you had a test, both in code and also in typing. And if you didn't pass the—either one of those tests you were restricted to Hoffman Island for the weekend. You couldn't get your liberty—go into New York. So even though you made—whenever you made a plan you weren't absolutely certain you were going to be able to make it, you know. It was one of those things, well—and you know, it's—put a lot of tension on you. You're doing—typing your thing, 'Gee, if I don't do this right, you know, I'm dead.' [laughs] 'If I

make one more mistake than I'm supposed to,' you know, and that—it—that's—but everyone lived through it, I guess. So we did that.

LEVINE: Did people flunk out of this school that you know of?

HOLZBERG: Well, not too many flunked out. But the way it worked—you see, the whole course was destined so that when you finished your course, one day, en masse, your whole class would go down to the FCC in New York and take the federal exam in both code, which at that time was 16 words a minute. You had to pass the code of receiving and sending. And then after that, if you passed that, then you had to take two elements, they called, of theory. And you had to pass the theory in order to get your second class radio telegraph license, which is an FCC license. Now, as it—as it worked out, there were some of the fellows that hadn't quite mastered the theory that well or hadn't passed with high enough grades to get their second class license. So they had two other, what they called temporary licenses, that they would allow them, you know, to have. And they were given those license, like a TLT—temporary limited ticket, they called it or something like that. Then there was one that was maybe even worse. But they were able to—but you see, the—the desperate need for radio operators at that time, as long as you could take code, you were not alone on the ship. I mean, there was a chief operator and maybe a second operator, if you were lucky, and then you'd be the third operator.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HOLZBERG: Now—

LEVINE: Just—just the numbers.

HOLZBERG: [clears throat]

LEVINE: You said there were about 25 in a class.

HOLZBERG: Yes.

LEVINE: And there were cla—new classes coming in—

HOLZBERG: Yes.

LEVINE: —every month? Is that what you said?

HOLZBERG: Well, I'm not absolutely sure of that. I think they came in about—I think they came in—well, they came in more often than that. They

came in maybe every week or every two weeks or something like that.

LEVINE: Oh, so—

HOLZBERG: Yeah.

LEVINE: So there were, over a six-month period—

HOLZBERG: There were a lot of classes at one time. Yeah.

LEVINE: Right, uh-huh.

HOLZBERG: Uh-hmm. And of course, when the—when the class went down to take their exam, of course, then they—they came back and, of course, they were heroes. Of course, they had—most of them had passed the exam. And we had a book of questions that they could ask you, you know, and we—what we asked them, not that it would really prove anything—but we asked them, "What questions did you get?" You know, and—and if they—they told us the questions, of course, then we would study those particular questions even harder than the other ones. But of course, you never knew which exams you were going to get.

LEVINE: Right.

HOLZBERG: So I'm not sure it did you too much good but it made you feel psychologically better.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HOLZBERG: That we're studying just the type of material they give you.

LEVINE: And how—how—can you say something about how you and your—and your—your friends from the radio school were feeling about the war and what part you expected to play, or just the whole kind of sense of that time when you were doing this?

HOLZBERG: Yeah. Well, I guess a lot of us were a little nervous, thinking about it, because as part of your training, merchant ships at sea during those days—well, the radio operator had to copy certain radio stations which were sending messages out to the ships at sea. And they would send them in code, you know. So you had to learn how to code messages and how to decode messages. And you actually got some on-air experience listening because they had these radio receivers there. And you'd listen into on the same frequencies that

the ships listened in. And you would hear that—they called them BAMS, which were really short for British American merchant ships, messages to British American merchant ships. And they were given certain ti—there was a schedule. They were given certain times during the day and evening, you know, and you had to tune to this frequently and listen to them and copy them. And then you had to code and decode the messages so that you'd see what they were—wanted us to do. And sometimes, when you had that particular class where you got the actual experiences of listening in and actually copying on-the-air signals, it was kind of a little scary, I guess, because you knew that you're going to be doing this very much, only it'd be real. And we had the last week—after you finish all your classes and even after you get your license from the FCC, you had to go into this, take one week's—one-week course there of convoy school. It was given by a Navy officer. And everything was hush-hush there. You couldn't—you had to pass a test at the end of the week, but you couldn't take your notes out of the classroom so you could study your notes. But you had to come back to that classroom and study them at night, because you had to pass this test. It was convoy procedure, how to operate, you know, because during the war you'd—you'd have ships that'd go out that were somewhat protected by Navy ships, which went around them. And you'd have convoys of ships, 150 ships, going to, say, [unclear] or [unclear], which was a popular run, not a great one, a very dangerous one. But you'd have some Navy ships around you. But in order to communicate, you'd have to know the procedure because it was a different procedure used in convoy than you would use as if you were sailing alone. And you had to know how to code and decode the messages, which changed quite often. And so it was very—it was kind of interesting training the last week. But you were so—you were so intense of passing that because it was necessary. And you did pa—you know, I think everyone passed it eventually and went to sea with that knowledge.

LEVINE: Well, what—could you say something about the men as a group? Wh—what kinds of guys did you run into who—who had opted to do this particular kind of training?

HOLZBERG: Well, at that time, of course, we were all about 18 years old. I don't think there was anyone older than that, or if he was it was a fluke type of thing. But it was interesting. A lot of the guys that I met had no inkling of any radio or going into radio or becoming a ship port radio operator. It just seemed like a—a good school or something for them to do in Sheepshead Bay over what else was available. So it intrigued a certain number of people but most of the guys that went there, they—they—after all, they did have to pass a math test so they

knew something about that end of it. And of course, they had to have an ability or an aptitude for—to take Morse Code. They gave you the famous INT test, you know, when you're first starting out, because most of the fellows didn't have any ideas about Morse Code. So they told you that I was two dots, like dit, dit. N was da, dit. And T was just a dash, da. And then they played it for you and you were supposed to write down, every time they played it, which one, whether it was an I, an N or the T. Of course, if you had code there was nothing—no problem, of course. [chuckles] But I can see where that'd be a little confusing because sometimes they did it faster, then slower and—but they just basically wanted to know if you'd recognize, I guess, most of them and that you could actually be able to copy code and handle the job as a radio operator at sea.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HOLZBERG: So it was good training. It was right to the point. I think the Maritime Service did an excellent job. I mean, it couldn't be any better. The instructors were all good and satisfactory. And they were—and they were earnest. In fact, although our—the Hoffman Island Radio Association that we have now has a—are basically members that went to sea, we do have some of the instructors on Hoffman Island, who actually taught us either the theory or the code. And they were accepted into our group because, after all, they did help us and they did—were actually stationed and working on Hoffman Island.

LEVINE: Hmm.

HOLZBERG: So we still have a couple of them that are great and we enjoy—one fellow's Andy Corinda [PH]. And—did I pronounce his name right? And—yes. And he's a fantastic fellow and we learned a lot from him and he—he just—it's—it's—it's such a group of—I think it's guys that got along very well together. They always—they always did. I don't—I remember—don't remember any real problems there, discipline problems. Because after all, we weren't just—we were there to accomplish something or we wouldn't be there. And if you didn't pass your exams every week you were out. But I don't recall many people being thrown out or if anyone's thrown out for that. People did get sick in there so it was really bad when you got sick there, because you couldn't attend classes. You had to drop out of your group and you go into the group below you. So now you lost your 25 guys [chuckles] that you're pals with and you got a whole new bunch of—new guys who—to get to live with and in a different section of a—of a place. It's like moving, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HOLZBERG: You're picking your stuff up and you're moving into a new neighborhood.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: Did you have guys from all over the country?

HOLZBERG: All over. Every single place you could think of. They were from the West Coast. They were from—they were farmers from the corn belts that'd never even seen water. We had people like that. It was a—a real metropolitan—well, not metropolitan so much but cosmopolitan area there where you come—and the whole country was covered, actually. And the interesting part about it also was when we finished our training and were ready to go to sea, we shipped out from different parts of the country, because different ports had different requirements. There was—New York, of course, had some, but then so did the Gulf of Mexico had some down in New Orleans. There was shipping from there. Then on the West Coast, they had a lot of people ship out of there and Seattle, Washington had people. So the last day or so, or one of those days, I—it was one of those days where you—I don't recall exactly how this happened but you had to pick a number from a hat or something like that or—in order to tell a w—you know, which would tell you where you were going to ship out from. Luckily, I—I wanted to—I wanted to ship out from New York City, of course, because that's where my home was. And I did, actually, because I just happened to draw that particular straw or whatever it was to allow me to do that. But a lot of my good friends shipped out and were all over the place. They didn't—I mean, there was nothing like going on a train and just going to a different place and shipping out from there.

LEVINE: Hmm.

HOLZBERG: And that was a kind of an interesting experience in itself when you got out of Hoffman Island, because most of us had never been on a ship. I mean, I had never seen a ship except in the movies or so forth—you know, big ship like that. Or you saw them in the water sometimes, I guess. I probably did that. But they sent us up to the union headquarters, which was—in my case, which was the Radio Officers Union in New York City, 1440 Broadway. And I met Fred Howe there—H-O-W-E—who was the president of the union. And he said, "Oh, I got a shop—I got a ship for you." And I said, "Where's it going?" He said, "Calcutta, India." I said, "Calcutta?" I said, "That'll

be a whole year." He said, "Oh, no. That'll only be about—be about five months." Well, actually he was pretty right. Actually, I didn't know that but he was right. So I said, "But what are we going to be carry"—"Well, you don't know what he's going to be carrying," he said. "But what co"—he says, "The company is the United Fruit Company." So I thought about that for a while. I said, "Hmm, that sounds pretty safe to me, you know." [chuckles] United Fruit Company. What are we going to carry? Bananas or something like that? I mean, how bad can that be? So—so I said, "Okay. I'll take the ship," you know. So—so my ship was down in Bal—outside of Baltimore, Maryland in a place called Sparrows Island, I believe. And I got to Baltimore, a train, and had to get a cab out to the—that ship. And I couldn't—no one wanted—no one wanted to take me out to that area. No—none of those—none of those cabs wanted to go out there because it was, like, 10 miles out of—side of the city, I think. And finally, I got some g—some good-natured cab. This cabbie took me out there and I remember, they put me in a—in sort of a big Jeep there and I had five MPs at my side, you know. I didn't know why I needed all those people but they were taking me out to this ship there. And there was a liberty ship, the David S. Terry [PH]. And as I looked up, they were loading on the ship, loading thing—cargo. And they were loading something that didn't look like banana stalks, to be honest with you. They had fins on them, you know. And I looked at them first, said, "They look like bombs." I thought, 'Gee.' I'd only seen bombs in the movies, you know, but they looked like bombs. There was no mistaking about that. And they were loading these bombs, 2000-pound bombs in all five hatches. And—and so it was too late to turn back, you know, [chuckles] and say, "Well, maybe this wasn't for me." So anyway, and then they—on top of that, they were putting on deck cargo and everything to slow you down. Liberty ship only does eight knots at best. And so we would only be able to do probably about six knots, you know, while we were going. We were going all the way to Calcutta, India. So we stayed there a couple of days and then I remember we finally left. The day we left, about three o'clock in the afternoon. And they didn't have a band to welcome us, to blast us off or anything, but they had this distorted music, Army march, coming out of the P.A. system there. It's one of these, like in the subway. They talk and you can't understand what they're saying. Well, they had this blaring, you know, and frankly, I couldn't wait to get away from the dock. The noise was too much. [chuckles] But anyway, we went out the Chesapeake Bay. We were going out the Chesapeake Bay, which is almost like a 24-hour deal, going through Chesapeake Bay. And when we went out of Chesapeake Bay, the radio room is right next to the chart room on the li—liberty ship. And they have the chart that shows where you're going all laid out on this table, and the chief mate, the first mate

comes in and he puts a mark on there every—where you are exactly on that position. Well, this line was going from Chesapeake Bay [unclear] Maryland area directly across the Atlantic. So I was wondering, 'When do we—when are we going to pick up the convoys?' You know, the—we went to school for a whole week to learn about this stuff there. After all, we were a munitions ship, you know. I mean, it wasn't the most safest ship in the world. So I said, "We must go out a little bit and then we go up to Long Island probably to pick up the convoy." So I let it go. Second day, I went into the chart room and there's another arc on this line showing us another 250 miles straight out in the Atlantic. I said, 'This is'—talking to myself, 'This doesn't make any sense. You know, why would you be going out and then going out'—so the chief mate happened to come by. He's the officer next to the captain, you know, on a ship. I said, "Hey, Chief. When do we pick up the convoy?" And he gave me this strange look and he said, "What convoy?" He said, "Sparks"—because all radio operators are called Sparks on ships. He says—says, "Sparks, you know something I don't know?" He's a man that been at seas all his life, like 35—I said, "I hardly think so." [chuckles] That it could be possible. Because, I mean, this is my second day on the ship. And he said, "Well, we're not going to pick up a convoy." I said, "You mean we're going out all alone?" Well, it's true the war in Europe had ended. But we were going to go in Japanese waters, you know, going to Calcutta, you're in the—in the—going through the Suez Canal and in the Indian Ocean. That's what I was trying to think of. And that's not the safest place in the world but it was close—getting toward the end of the war so it was safer than it used to be. At any rate, he was right about that. We went all alone for six weeks, it took us, till we went to Calcutta, India. And we unloaded our bombs and by the most primitive methods they have there, because all the longshar—shoremen, of course, their native costume is just like a sheet they wear. And we—they took the ship's equipment, lo—unloaded the bombs on the dock. And then they rolled the bombs, you know, individually, into an airplane hanger. But they did it very quickly. They did it in five days. And we thought the war was over by the time we—in fact, we were over at the Navy's Officer Club in Calcutta. We were celebrating and everything and then we found out that the war was almost over, but it really wasn't yet. And we were headed down to Africa down to a place called Lorrento Marks [PH], which is Portuguese East Africa. And we were going to pick up a coal cargo there. And I don't know whether you want me to go on with this. Shall I—

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, how about the radio part of it? Were you—were you radioing? Did you have—

HOLZBERG: Well, here's the thing.

LEVINE: —[unclear] that were—

HOLZBERG: Well, I had—there were—on—on m—on ships, they tried to have three radio operators. But there was only two on my ship. There was a chief radio operator and myself. So we had one eight-hour shift where there wasn't anyone on duty. But they do have an electronic device on ships that's called an auto alarm, which you set when no one's there, so if a ship is in distress, provided they do what they're supposed to do—they send a certain signal out—it'll ring a bell on our ship in the radio room and on the bridge telling us that there's a ship in distress and we run—and therefore, we should get down to the radio room. So that's how they work it when there's not three operators aboard. But going over there as a radio operator, you were—weren't allowed to send at that time, because you didn't want to let any Japanese submarines or—or any other submarines around—know where you were. You know, they could take a direction-finding reading on you. So we were supposed to maintain silence unless an emergency came up. We went into the Mar—to the Mediterranean Sea one day. And we had—we had two—well, actually, it was a half of a Navy gun crew on ship. We had 11 men, who—we had a five-inch gun on the bow and I think it was a three-inch gun on the stern. Or maybe it was reversed. I can't remember the areas. But we had 11-men Navy gun crew to use it. However, you're supposed to have about 22 men to use those—fire those two guns. So we were supposed to fill in with them. Of course, my experience shooting one of those guns—we had, like a electronic type of target practice at school. I wasn't too good at this, I remember. Kept missing those planes that were buzzing around. You know, they wouldn't go in a straight path. And [chuckles] I had trouble with that, I remember, trying to—but maybe some other people were better. At any rate, when we got to the Mediterranean, the Navy officer, who ran a clothing store when he was—[chuckles] or in some place in New England, I remember—it was interesting, the—the religions that you found on there. There was only three Jewish fellows on my ship. I was one of two others. One was a third officer and—and then there was this Navy gun crew, the captain who was from the Navy. Actually, he worked for the Navy. He was in the Navy service. But they put their own men on our merchant ships during the war.

LEVINE: How many men were on the ship?

HOLZBERG: We had 11 men on our ship and—and actually, the officer in charge, the Navy officer in charge. Now, they were supposed to have 22. So

while we were in the Mediterranean they spotted—he spotted, or someone spotted some flares, which means that a ship was in some distress there. So he came down into the radio room and asked me to send a message to one of the Allied shore stations in Africa. Well, this was my first message, you know. [chuckles] Not the safest part of the world, you know. [chuckles] So I was a—I wasn't too—I sent that message as fast as you possibly could. I didn't want to stay on the air very long, you know. And to my amazement, this—this radio station in Africa picked me up almost immediately. I cou—it couldn't have been any better. And he copied everything I sent down and it was fine. And I could stop sending so I was kind of relieved. But—

LEVINE: Wh—what's the danger when you're sending?

HOLZBERG: Well, the—if you're sending out a radio signal, you—if you have a enemy submarine, or any other enemy ship around, they can—they—they can—if they hear the signal, which they probably do, which they normally do because you all listen in a certain frequently, they can take—in those days, we weren't quite as scientific as we are now. You know, they de—they depended on what they call a radio direction finder, which is a unit that can turn the antenna around. It's a round unit on top. And it pinpoints exactly—you can pinpoint the location of the ship, or help pinpoint it anyway. So you don't want to give anyone a chance to do that, naturally. [chuckles] So it's a ca—it's a—it's a case whether you can only use your transmission at that time when you had to in an emergency situation. But we had a—we had a ship that was in some danger and we wanted to notify the Navy that—what the situation was and whether—you know, so we did that. We did send that message and the location of the ship, approximately where it was. So, hopefully, they got some help as a result of that. But that was the only time we were a—I was able to send any message on that particular trip because sending was not allowed. You did—you did copy a lot of messages but you couldn't send any.

LEVINE: I see. So then how long did you stay in the Maritime Service?

HOLZBERG: Well, I stayed on that and—for—until probably two years. In fact—in fact, as a result of that, you see, service in the Maritime Service at that time, in the Merchant Marine particularly, afterwards exempted you from the active—so-called active services, you know, so-called dangerous services. Very safe for us, of course, you know, with the bombs. But you wouldn't have to be drafted. You wouldn't be drafted in that time. And the government came out with an actual certificate. It was called the Certificate of Continuous Service. And if you had over 18 months of active service, you—you were eligible to get one of these certificates, which I received, which was supposed to exempt

you from any future service in the Armed Forces. So I had this certificate, all right, and—but as it turned out, and I don't know whether I'm getting ahead of myself, so you stop me if I am. But a couple of years—years later, when we got involved in the Korean War, the government conveniently forgot about these certificates. And the draft boards, particularly, forgot about them. And then they decided to draft you into the Army or Navy or whatever if you weren't actively at sea during that time. And a lot of the guys that went to Hoffman Island, including myself, actually wound up in the Armed Forces afterwards for two years, because the government would not honor these certificates, which were—which were actually given out for service. And it was 47 years later, I might add, that they finally decided to officially honor the merchant mariners, who—there's still a handful of us around—who had given service in the Merchant Marine during World War II. And we actually got a Navy dischar—actually, it's from the Coast Guard—a Coast Guard discharge for active service in the Merchant Marine 47 year la—and it was—you know, we talked about Maine a little earlier. It was a captain, I think, in Hallowell, Maine that's—that fought for this for 47 years. And he's the only one I know that actually fought for it. And he was successful in the end, 47 years later.

LEVINE: Speaking about the Coast Guard, did you ever have any contact with the Coast Guards who were stationed on Ellis Island while you were at Hoffman Island?

HOLZBERG: No, I don't think we did. No, we didn't, actually. We had—my only contact with the Coast Guard was later on when I was at sea and we had to—we had to rescue—we had to get a man off the ship. And we had to have the Coast Guard fly a plane in to take him off to—in the middle of the Atlantic.

LEVINE: When you were at Hoffman Island, how was the Coast Guard connected with the Maritime—was it—was there a connection at that point?

HOLZBERG: No, actually the Maritime Service was sort of divorced from the Coast Guard. It was a separate entity altogether. But originally, on Hoffman Island there was a Coast Guard that was handling the training of the—not the radio operators, or prior to that, of the seamen here as—yes. I have some of my actual notes that I will leave with you—indicate how that happened but—with the dates and everything. But it was the Coast Guard first. But then when the Maritime was developed, Maritime Service was developed, they took over completely and we sort of got divorced. I guess the two organizations got divorced at that point.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. Well, I want to mention that we're going to have on file a whole lot of information.

HOLZBERG: Sure.

LEVINE: Thanks to you.

HOLZBERG: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Which I'll do some copying of. So we have about 10 minutes. Let's—let's talk about what became of you after your—after your stint in the Maritime.

HOLZBERG: Okay.

LEVINE: And—and did that—did that lead anywhere, in particular, in your case?

HOLZBERG: Well, I knew where I was going most of my life. Unfortunately, I ran into two wars, which delayed me. So actually, what happened—and you know, as I think about this, I should leave this for the end, I guess, but as I think about it, I'm not really unhappy that it happened in a way, because I had some marvelous experiences, which I never would have had. But I was always interested in radio broadcasting. So I got into radio broadcasting when I left the Merchant Marine and wound up in—in radio broadcasting, you—you have to start—in those days, you had to go into the small towns to get some experience. And I wound up in—my wife went through some of these towns with me. We went into—well, she didn't see Thompson, Georgia, where I started out in broadcasting, and then New H—Newbern [PH], North Carolina. She did visit that station there, Newbern, North Carolina. And then we went on—and then I went on to New Haven, Connecticut. And then I wound up in New York. I did both engineering and announcing but in the—outside of New York, mostly announcing and engineering, but in New York, mostly engineering. But I worked for some of the stations in New York City, of course, and for many years. But what happened, in 1951 when the Korean War broke out, and I was driving back from Brooklyn. I had a date before I met my charming young lady here. And I was coming back from a date in Brooklyn and it—they told about the Korean War breaking out. And I said, 'Oh, oh.' I thought to myself, 'Oh, oh. Now they're going to get me.' I just knew that that was going to happen. And I was working down in North Carolina at that time and so I was a Yankee down south. And guess who they wanted to put in the Army first? [laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah.

HOLZBERG: But I was doing—eventually, I—I left there as a result—one of the reasons then I got—started working in New York City. And we were doing a disk jockey show from Harlem at that time at the Palm Café in 19—I guess it was 19—no, let's see, 1950 or so. So, yeah, 1950 area. And I used to go up there every night. We were working with a fellow, a Negro announcer named Ralph Cooker. And we did his nice disk jockey show from 12 midnight to 3 a.m. from this café th—up there. And I told him one day. I said, "Look, Ralph. I'm going to have to leave you." And we got along so well. Said, "Oh, you can't leave me. Why do you want to leave?" I I said, "Oh, I have to go in the Army." So he said, "Why do you want to do that?" I said, "I don't want to do that." He said—I said, "I don't have much choice"—said. "Well," he said, "we have to go and see one of our congressmen here that'll help you." Well, I won't mention his name because I don't know where this [chuckles] is going to go. He's no longer here anyway but he went into his office and he talked to me. And he said, "You know." He said, "I could get you out of the Army." He said, "But I have some enemies that might discover that and they would crucify me, if I can use that word." [laughs] "So I'll tell you what. Where would you like to go in the Army?" I said, "Well, I'd like to do what I'm doing in civilian life. I'm in radio broadcasting. I'd like to do radio broadcasting." He said, "Okay, I'll give you a letter for the American Forces Network." You know, for the American—which is a radio network in Europe and all over the world. "And we'll see that you—we'll see that you are put—placed there." So he gave me this letter, which I guarded with my life, you know. That's the only thing I had from him. And when the—the time came, I wound up—well, I kept it for a long time and I didn't know when I was going to use it. But eventually, my whole group was going to Korea. You know, the—they told us that. There were 200 guys in my company when we went for basic training and we wound up in Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, and not a desirable place. For 16 weeks, I learned how to shoot a 105 millimeter Howitzer. But it wasn't to my taste either so I was looking to get out of that. And one way—at any rate, one day they asked for volunteers for the Counter Intelligence Corps and I volunteered for that, you know. And they tried to discourage you. At least, we had a sergeant that tried to discourage you from leaving his company. And he said, "You know what that is? You have to jump behind the enemy lines. And if they catch you in—in civilian clothes you'll get shot on the spot." And he was telling us how dangerous it was. Three of the guys out of the 10 that came over there left. And pretty soon there was just myself and two other guys left. So he came over to me and it wasn't that I was so brave. It's just that I

knew what the Counter Intelligence Corps did, you know. And he—so I knew that he wasn't telling us the truth. So he came over to me to try to discourage me. I said, "Look, Sergeant. I want to tell you something. I live for danger. That's my life." I said, "This sounds like the most exciting thing I ever heard and I'm going for it." So he saw I was a hopeless cause, so he left me and he went to two other guys and they both seemed to pass too. But—so we thought we were in the Counter Intelligence Corps when they sent us to Fort Halliburton [PH], Maryland. And then we found out that it's just like Hoffman Island. You get there and the first—first week or so you got to do all the menial tasks, you know. And of course, I was lucky. When we got there with my class, they decided the first two weeks. You know, so we got an extra little chores they had to do for another week there. So I thought I was in the Counter Intelligence Corps and they—we got into the barracks. We found out, talking to some of the guys that we weren't in yet. We had passed the first exam, like, first interview, 45 minutes. But we had to go for—through a board of officers of the Counter Intelligence Corps. And they're going to ask us all kind of current event questions. They can ask you anything a—about the world and they're going to see how you react. And they're going to try to make you the kind of—you know, to get you upset. They're going to try to do anything they can. You had never seen a barracks like this in your life. Everyone's reading "Newsweek," "U.S. News," you know, in all your spare moments, you know. I—it was so funny just thinking about the way this barracks was different than anyone you'd ever be in. And eventually, I went before these three officers. And we were told that—"Don't—don't try to make up anything. If you do—if you do lie to them or tell them anything that's not absolutely true, you're out immediately." So you're supposed to say, "I don't know, sir," if you don't know. Well, I answered every question they had because I'm pretty up on current events and I—I can answer it, except for one. I knew the answer. I thought I knew the answer. I remember it had to do with the Shuman [PH] Plan, which was a feeding plan where they brought food to Europe. And I knew the plan but I wasn't a hundred percent sure and I was afraid that I'd blow it. So I said, "I do not—I—not know, sir." Anyway, so they had me step outside the room for about a half an hour where I died, trying to figure out what he was happening. Then call you back in, they told me I was in. So they—I went into the Counter Intelligence Corps. Eventually, I was shipped over to Europe. And the Army works very funny, actually, the government service because it doesn't matter what your background is. It depends on what they need for that day. That day that we were being assigned, they were looking for ambulance drivers for the 108 Field Hospital, the worst thing in the world for me because blood doesn't go together for me. And what happened was that I had this letter, which I gave to the captain there.

And he looked it over and the next thing I knew, everyone went to the 108th Field Hospital except myself. He was reading, like, the outfits from A down to H. He gets to Holzberg and he says, "Holzberg." He says, "American Forces Network, Frankfurt, Germany." He says, "How in the world did you work that?" I said, "Sergeant, just lucky, I guess." Of course, he knew that wasn't the truth. He knows how the Army works more than I did. [chuckles] But I wound up, which really was the best thing in the world for me because I traveled all over Europe doing remote broadcasts in Turkey. I wound up for three weeks for opening up NATO headquarters and in Paris and places like that.

LEVINE: So how did you get to the broadcasting from Counter Intelligence? How did—

HOLZBERG: Well, actually, what happened is when I finished my school, and I finished the complete school, they investigate you from the day you were born. Now, it turned out that my father at one time had signed a petition. Now, my father was about as American as you can be. He was in the Army for eight years [chuckles] and every—like that. But he—one of his neighbors had a petition that was to keep the Communist Party on the ballot. Now, he didn't—he never was for the Communist Party. But his—his approach was, "Why not let every party on the ballot and let people make up their mind?" Which seems like a very harmless approach, right? Years later, it came to haunt my sisters. It came to haunt me. And this is what—and when I finished they said, "Well"—they wou—they don't tell you what the reason is, incidentally. G2 intelligence in the Army tells you that, "We got to remove you here. We can't tell you why." That's the way it was because I had passed everything. I had high marks in everything I took. So now—but I still had my letter so it didn't bother me too much because—and I did, over in Heidelberg, Germany, I ran into a guy that was in my class [chuckles] that was in the Counter Intelligence Corps. But he didn't want to—no one else was supposed to know that so I didn't give him away or anything because I know the rules. But—

LEVINE: So when they looked into everything, they also knew that you were in broadcasting and that you'd been trained—

HOLZBERG: Well, the only thing that got me in broadcasting was that letter.

LEVINE: Oh, oh.

HOLZBERG: Of course, the American Forces—because I would have been—I tell you, honestly, everyone of the 200 guys who were with me went into

the 108th Field Hospital as an ambulance driver that day—that day. I was only one—of course, they were delighted to have me there at—in Frankfurt, Germany because I had experience in engineering and, as well as the announcing end. And actually, I did broadcast from Heidelberg from—from the—they have a castle there in Heidelberg. And they had a civilian club there, officers and civilian clubs. And we did some programs from there so I had a chance to introduce some bands there. And it was nice because I do things I enjoy. And, you know, it's—broadcast station worked differently than the service, than—than some of the other jobs that you have to do in the service. So I was doing what I liked to do.

LEVINE: Well, we just have a minute or two left. Could you say something about how you think now about your Hoffman Island—

HOLZBERG: Sure.

LEVINE: —period? Wh—are there any ramifications that you feel stem from there? Or how do you feel—think about it now?

HOLZBERG: Well, I think about it very—I guess if I could use the word lovingly, in a way, because I only have, really fond reminiscence—reminiscences from that island. After all, it was in the field that I loved, radio—radio, although it was not radio broadcast. But it was radio and electronics, which was my field. So I loved what I was doing there. The training we received was first rate. I have no—I can't say—put anyone at fault at all. They did the job perfectly. We accomplished our mission. And it helped. It was sort of like a way station on the way to my final destination. But it worked out well. As a result of Hoffman Island, I saw the world. I had many experiences that I never would have had. I met a lot of people. And years later, it turned out, when my two sons who went to high school—they knew about my Merchant Marine experience. However. I had never even mentioned anything about the Merchant Marines for them. I mean, I—they were go—scheduled to go into the University of Rochester, as a matter of fact, to study electrical engineering. And my oldest son decided he wanted to apply to the Merchant Marine, King's Point. He was—Merchant Marine Academy at King's Point. As a result, I—I was very—I was ready to accept that because I knew what you did on ships, you know. I was familiar with the work on ships. And they—and I knew they'd get an excellent education there. It turned out that—well, it takes about a year to get a congressman's—to nominate them and then for them to pass whatever tests they have to get into the school. But they both got in and both graduated from it. And that was one of the proudest days of our lives when we saw them graduate. And actually, for two years, they were both in there together. So that was

nice. And it turned out that—it turned out that—that they both got so much out of it. They learned so much and they went on and they're doing very successful careers. And as—and actually, years later, I—I decided I wanted to get my Ph.D. and I studied for that, took me, I think, on and off for about five years or more of actual work on it. And I finally got my Ph.D. in 1992. And it was a great experience then and I thought—

LEVINE: What was it in? What was it—

HOLZBERG: It was in business administration. My—my main interest is motivation of human resources. We like to work with people—and I've always worked with people in doing counseling and doing every—everything like that. Even though I wasn't actually so-called "qualified," every doctor or dentist we know of, and anyone else that wanted to have problems with a son, or wanted to pick their school or change a job came to me. So I enjoy it. You know, and I've always wondered, perhaps—and some day—I still haven't—I'm 70—I'm going to be 74 in September. But I still think that I still might get into that officially.

LEVINE: Wow.

HOLZBERG: Because it's—it's a lot of fun helping people and—and knowing—because the worst part of it growing up, I think, is when you don't have anyone to really guide you or to help you. And even though my family—my mother and father were from the old school and they really didn't have the expertise to—or able to—to guide me in any of my directions here. So—so—so I started school after we were married, actually, and got my B.S. in electrical engineering from Fairleigh Dickinson University while my wife took care of the children. And I got my master's in business administration from there also. So we went to school for 12 years before that. And it all worked out.

LEVINE: Okay. We—we're at the end of the tape. I want to thank you so much.

HOLZBERG: Oh, It was—

[END OF INTERVIEW]