

KECK-44/AMBLER

KECK-44

ARNOLD AMBLER

BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 29, 1899

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 10, 1985

RUNNING TIME: 44:00

INTERVIEWER: EDWARD APPLEBOME

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAM NEGRI

INTERVIEW LOCATION: CONCORD, MA

TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1986

TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: NANCY VEGA, 9/1995

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

ENGLAND, 1920

AGE 20

PASSAGE ON "THE BERENGARIA"

APPLEBOME: This is Edward Applebome, and I'm speaking with Mr. Arnold Ambler on Thursday, October 10, 1985. We are beginning this interview at 1:25 in the afternoon. We are about to interview Mr. Ambler about his immigration experience from England in 1920. Mr. Ambler, can you tell us where and when you were born?

AMBLER: I was born in September the 29th, 1899.

APPLEBOME: And where?

AMBLER: In Halifax, England, Yorkshire, England.

APPLEBOME: Yorkshire.

AMBLER: Yes. Uh, that's a long time ago, isn't it?

APPLEBOME: Yeah. What was life like in your native country?

AMBLER: I was, well, I was, I was born in a poor section of the town. In fact, my family was consisting of thirteen children. I'm the last one, now, they're all gone. So you can see what it was. And we were rather crowded. But anyway, I left school when I was eleven years old, and how I did that, helped my mother, and I got a job selling different things from a store, like hot cross buns on a Friday, or something like that, Good Friday, or something like that, you know. But, anyway, I, we had a coal mine there, and we, I used to go up in the hills there with a bag and dig, dig for coal, which, we were poor. Thank the Lord I'm not today, I'm not rich, but I'm not poor today. But, uh, so I said, so the war break out, 1940, I was in the Boy Scouts and the war broke out, we were already go for camp . . .

APPLEBOME: What kind of work did your family do, though in England?

AMBLER: My father had three jobs. He had to have to keep us going. (he laughs) HE worked for the electric light company in our town, and, uh, I've forgotten what the second job was, but he had another job, anyway, and, uh, then he sold Sunday papers on the Sundays. But he did work pretty hard for us, anyway. I've forgotten what, but he had another job. He had to have, to keep the family going. And anyway, we, we, I used to go picking the coal and, from the mines, the mine is closed now because it was, it's unsafe today. But we did things like, we didn't think anything of it. We knew we were helping the family, that's all there was to it. I had three, four brothers, was three besides myself. And then the war came along and I couldn't, the Scouts were all ready to go to camp, they stopped that, they wouldn't let us go to camp, so I helped in the hospitals, you know. We had that, volunteer help. They organized, like they do, you know, the women and I helped in the hospitals, whatever we could do. Then it got so, it was 1914 that was, but here we go into, I'm only fifteen years old at that time, you know, and we goes on and on and on and on and my brothers, one of my brothers signed up for

the navy, twelve years, signed up for twelve years over there, you know, he ended up an officer, so he was gone. Then my other brother, my eldest brother, he went. He was a big cook. He was killed at Vii [ph] Ridge, as a matter of fact. Then my next brother, he went in, in the army, and he was killed on September the, 1916 at the great, great Somme battle. So it came to be my time, I didn't have to go because I was one of four children, the last child, the last boy, they didn't, they would leave him with the mother. But, like everything else, you know, I'm not going to be left out, we thought it was glamorous, so I enlisted in the army, and I was underage. They threw me out. They threw me out. My mother got me back. I was, and so I tried it a second time. And she says now we, she threw me out again, I've got you for that. By the third time she said let him stay there. So what I wanted to get into battle, that's what I was, but I didn't. I ended up in the infantry, in the Yorkshire Light Infantry in, uh, in Dorcastle, Pontefract [ph].

APPLEBOME: So how old were you now when you were finally accepted?

AMBLER: I was, uh, seventeen. Oh, I remember the fellow, he says, you were supposed to be 5'4". I'm only 5'1", you know. So he says take a walk, and sergeant says, take a walk out of that room, so I took a walk out of that room, and I came back he says 5'4" now.

I was in the army. That's the way they did it, you know. They needed the men badly there. So off I went. Off I went. And, uh, so I was in France before I was eighteen. But then they, the mothers started hollering about it. They said, "This is terrible for boys of eighteen years old to go out into the firing line, but I was there, so it didn't make no difference to me, so, there's one of my bullet wounds right there (he gestures) on my right arm.

APPLEBOME: Yes, I can see it.

AMBLER: See that?

APPLEBOME: You still have the scar.

AMBLER: Yeah. The scars are there, and I've got one, two here, this was fractured, these were fractured. And I got one in back of the ear. But we were, we were on the way, as I was telling the girls this morning,

they were talking about Paris, I says, you know how I saw Paris. They, they saw the second battle of the Marne, there was a great big rush going across France, you know, and I was in the forty and eight car, truck, you know, the railroad truck, it was forty-eight, and the captain looks out, and I'm sitting out there. He says, "Look, you know what that is?" I says, "No." He says, "That's the Eiffel Tower." And that's all I saw of it.

(he laughs) We kept going. But we ended up in Sezanne and Teetbattle [ph] and Chateauthierry [ph], and that's where the big events were started, when the Americans were getting into the war at that time, you know, they were in it. And so we were going along fine, we didn't get very far. I saw the shadow of Reims Cathedral. The two towers. And I says, "Oh, boy, I'm gonna see that." Well, we were down at the bottom of the hill. Before we knew it, machine guns on the top of the hill were peppering us just like a, a circus, you know. The sergeant yelling, "Get down, get down." So we got down. My pal was right next to me and he was killed. I was trying to crawl to him to get to him, I got it in the ear. I got it in, and that's why the sergeant

hollered, "Get down or you'll be the next." He said, "HE's gone." But, uh, I was lucky. We had our packs on, in the back, you know our outfit, and I always say, a can of bully beef, we call it corned beef, it was bully beef there, saved me, because when I got out and they took the pack off that was split right in half. I've always had a, kind of a soft feeling for corned beef since. (he laughs)

APPLEBOME: Your life was saved by a can of beef?

AMBLER: I would, I would say that, because it was split right in half. And we had a pack of clothes, all our clothes was on the back. I could say that, I don't know what it was, but it was split, I know it was split. And, uh, I tried to get some of his belongings, you couldn't, I couldn't get. So we started crawling away, I'd only been hit that time then. We started crawling away, Saturday afternoon and we, we crawled in, towards some water, and I fell in the ditch there, aw, heck. So the guy said, "What's the matter now?" I said, "I got hit in the arm." This was this one. This one, already, it was only a flesh wound. But this, this was the real fracture. So he got a stick of twig or tree, from

the tree, you know, and I used it as a crutch, you know, and I have a soft feeling for the, for M.A.S.H., every time I watch that M.A.S.H. program.

Did I tell you that before?

APPLEBOME: Yes, but you can tell again.

AMBLER: Oh, well, I didn't want, don't want to repeat it. But I have a soft feeling because we were walking down, we were trying to get away from the firing, you know, and I saw that little Red Cross wagon, American field emblems, and I says, "My God," and that's the last I remember. I do remember one thing, there was a fellow there, a fellow that had a machine gun and, you know, they call it, we used to call it shell shock, here it's nervous fatigue, but it's still shell shock regardless how they call it, and he had that machine gun and he would not get into the ambulance unless they put that machine gun in there. They put the machine gun in there, he got in, and then I got in, and I'd lost so much blood that that's the last I heard of it. I ended up, finally, to put it briefly, after a week, I was a week in the hospital, I ended up in Rouen and he says, "Well, you're going home." I says, "Thank

God." I knew the war was over for me.

APPLEBOME: So you were shot in your first battle?

AMBLER: First battle. I never even fired a shot. I never told anybody that, but I'm awfully glad that I didn't. I didn't want to kill anybody. Who wants to kill anybody? But I was just lucky, you know. And, uh, I got back, it took me a week, and I got back to Brighton, England. That's the South of England, that's like in Florida. In the British Army they always send you to the opposite place where you live, you know. Halifax was in the north, Brighton was in the south, but I was glad I was because I was right by the sea. I was in there from, eh, June, June, I would say about June the 20th, till the Armistice, Armistice. I had, I had a wonderful time. Over there, you know, the wounded soldiers, you know, getting blue, I wouldn't let my people come see me, I just wouldn't let them see me. But over there, you get the first seat in the theater, you know, free, and anything you buy is half price, oh, they treat you right wonderful. They did treat you wonderful. I don't know what they do today.

APPLEBOME: Why didn't you want your family to see you?

AMBLER: Well, I just felt, it's an awful outfit. I've got some pictures of it. I've got some pictures of it. But, well, it's a, it's like a blue, a blue coat and a, and a light pants, and it's white all around it and ties. I was a little fussy, probably, but my mother seen it, seen enough of it, too. She had two of them, two of the brothers killed, you know, one of my brothers was killed and the other one died right after the war, and she dirtied up my thought, and I wouldn't let them come. Then when you get wounded you only get half pay. They cut you down to half pay. But the other half goes to your mother, your parents, which is all, which was all right. But they all, I didn't have to worry because, as I said, you could buy everything half price, you could go to the theater free. I remember one American, uh, she was a prominent one, but no one seems to remember it today, but I remember her coming to the stage, on the stage, the vaudeville stage, you know, and she passed chocolate and everything around to us. And her name, I've forgotten, and her name was something about Francis, but it was an old American,

she was over there with, they all went to. But, anyway, I stayed in there till November, the Armistice Day, and that's where I met my wife. I met this girl, I could undo the brace in back and I gave her a good time for the week, she lived in Richmond, London, just outside of London, in the elite place, and I visited her, I was supposed to be on, going back to my home, but I visited her first and I persuaded her, when I got out of the army, to come down to my part of the country, see what my part of the country was. It's all entirely different, all manufacturing, working class. Like Lawrence and all those places. Textiles. It's not, it's just like, as I said, like Florida, that place where she, she was in service, like those people on Masterpiece Theater. You've seen them, maids up, she was a maid, and that's all she was doing. I did persuade her to come down to my, and my sister got her a job making sweaters in my town, and we got married on the Monday, sail on a Wednesday. There was too many in my house at that time. There was too damn many. We were falling over each other. And I had a sister here in, in, uh, Springfield and she says, "Why don't you come over here?" And I

thought, well, I went looking for a job and you know all the Vietnam boys were taught, you go looking for a job, there wasn't one. I went to look in the place where I worked, and the guy says, "Well, if you want to work the machine the way that, it was a shoesaw, if you want to work the same price as she's getting, you can have it. I says, "No, that's enough for me." And I thought to myself that's what you're gonna get for serving your blood, you know, shedding your blood. But I was lucky. A lot of my luck has been done through a church. My mother was interested, with a big manufacturing woman, I don't know, machine shop, a very religious person. She says, she says, I couldn't get a job, she says, "Send him up to me Monday morning." Well, this, I went up, she gave me a job, and I'm not a machinist, there's no kidding about it, I know I'm not a machinist. She gave me a job in an iron factory and, oh, for God's sakes, it was, it was agony to me. The more I went in there the more madder I got. I said, "I gotta get out of this somehow. How can I do it?" So my wife was, we weren't married then, but we were saving our money, and I said, "Let's save our money and go to America and get the heck

out of this place. This is not for me. I'm not gonna get anywhere here." So she, this Mrs. Wilson, the head of the, she said, "I've been to America." Very much businesslike. "I've been to America. You think the streets are paved with gold." She said, "You'll find your mistake." I said, "I don't care, it couldn't be worse than this." I says, "I'm getting out of this business." So (he laughs) this is not for me, I want a better future than this. So we did. We, we got married, on a Monday. I said to my wife, my mother, she wanted to put me up in the store, to stay there. I said, "Not me. I've had all I wanted." While England, the Yorkshire, is not a very nice place to live in. Let's face it. That's where all the riots are, in Liverpool, and all those places, you know. They're maniacs over there now. And so I, I says, "Oh, let's save." So we saved our money. My wife, my girlfriend and I, and I said in one year we're gonna get out of this country, sure as anything. So we arranged to get married on a Monday, and we did, sail on, on a Wednesday. I think it was the Melangaria, or the, that other boat, I said I don't know what it was, uh, well, I've forgotten, I think

there's another name, I'm trying, Melangaria, or the, well, I've forgotten what the other name was. But we did. So actually the minister didn't want to sign the papers because we weren't married. He had to, he had to sign the papers, it was a weekend, you see, and he had to sign the papers on Saturday before I could get clearance to go onto the boat, he said, "This is not the thing to do, you know, improperly, you know." The English people (he laughs) they're a pain in the neck. But he finally signed it and I, I asked him, tuck it under this door in the Registrar's office, you know, so he'd get it, so on Monday, my wedding would be legal. (he laughs) We were married anyway, we sailed on a Wednesday. I didn't, I said no use having a home here because I'm not happy here. Let's start afresh and see what happens. And my sister said, "Come on over. You can stay with us while you get organized."

APPLEBOME: What had you heard about the United States that you chose to go there?

AMBLER: Well, I, the last, I remember, the only one book that I remember reading on American history and that

was Fennimore's The Last of the Mahicans. I remember having to read that in school. And I'd read about the Indians, the wild Indians, and all that kind of stuff, and I says, "Well, it can't be any worse than it is here, you know." In other words, I was disgusted with the way, the setup after the war, like a lot of veterans are today. I can sympathize with them. And, uh, we sailed on the Berengaria, we sailed on the Berigerry [ph], or the other boat, I think you've got it in there somewhere. And, uh, of course, that was steerage in those days, you know. No such thing as cabin, first, second or third. You were steerage and that's all there was to it. In fact, my sister, when she came in 1906, she brought her own tins and cups, knives and forks and spoons. That's how crude it was in those days, you see. And, uh, she used to tell me about that. Well, we weren't quite so bad as that, we did get steerage, which is third class. But immediately she got homesick, she got seasick. For crying out loud, that was a heck of a honeymoon. And, of course, I took her some eggs down. I wouldn't do that, it's the worst thing you can give a person that's seasick, you know. But I

was having a great time. They caught me up in the second class three or four times. I was reading books, you know. But I says, "Well, I can't help it." She can't get up on the deck, so I might as well enjoy myself. So, finally, they got wise to us all and they put some burlap between the second class and the steerage so I couldn't get through because, they caught me one day, they said, "Do you belong up here?" Well, I was just reading a book. I don't think you belong up here. I said, well, to be honest, I don't. That's to say, "We'll be leaving now, we won't say it, but please go back to where you belong."

APPLEBOME: Where had the boat sailed from when it left England.

AMBLER: Liverpool. Berengaria was the other boat.
Liverpool. That's only close to Halifax, you know, only about forty miles from Halifax.

APPLEBOME: The other people in steerage, where were they primarily from?

AMBLER: Well, well, we stopped in Queensland, Queenstown, it was Queenstown then, you know. It was mostly Irish. Mostly Irish. There was quite a few of us British,

yeah, there was quite a few. Mostly they was veterans, veterans were getting out of the country. They were disgusted with the setup, see, and I can understand that, because I went through that. In fact, we started the veteran's organization in, in Springfield and I was one of the main movers of it, the, uh, well, we'll get to that later. However, however, we sailed on a Monday, and it was a long, long eight day trip, you know. But the first thing you see is that Statue of Liberty. No kidding about it. I, I don't, I'm not ashamed about that. (he coughs) You look at that, you say to yourself, yes, yes, no, no, thank you, you look at that, you say to yourself, this is, that's it. I had read, I do read a lot, and I had read a little about American history. I had because I said, "I'm going to live in this country." Now I'm gonna read about it, read about it, because that's what you should do if you're gonna live somewhere. 'Cause I love reading anyway. My mother always said, "Read. It's an education." I hadn't had any, an education. I left school at eleven years old, so I had to use my head a little if I could and, uh, well, we got, we saw that Statue of Liberty, and it's a great sight.

I've been up there three or four times since. That was one trip I have made, both of us, my wife and I.

She had, she, funny thing about it, Doris, she never had any use for this country. She, uh, a lot of people are homesick for their England and for their homeland. Not just England. Anywhere. International. And yes, I think a lot about my country, but I also had to look at the point where, what kind of a work was I going to do. That's the story. I had to look at the, can I enjoy my work better here than I can over there, and I found out that I could.

APPLEBOME: When the ship came into New York Harbor were you out on the deck, and did your wife join you?

AMBLER: You bet your life we were. Yeah. We were all out there. Yes. By the time she get over here, the air was right, she was doing fine, she was doing fine. But today you get seasick. Oh, yes, you bet your life we stood on that deck and I saw the Statue of Liberty. It's a great thing. It's a great thing. To an immigrant, and I, I still say that I think the average American takes, don't be, be offended, Doris, the average American takes everything for

granted. They're lucky, they're lucky, we had everything we want, mostly, here, in spite of the condition our country's in, we still are much better off than they are over there, three quarters of the population over there are unemployed and they don't want to work, and a lot of that is because they don't want to work. There were jobs, I went through the Depression, four years' Depression, I picked apples. I went out digging, digging on streets. But you had a dignity. You had a pride in yourself. They don't want to do that over here, over there. You, Lord George had just brought in the Social Security, what we, we call Social Security. He brought it in there, and, uh, it was a good thing. You put stamps, you buy stamps and you put it on the book and when you got a certain amount of stamps, and you get laid up, you can join the employed. A wonderful thing. That was the beginning of the idea of Social Security. But, uh, it wasn't, I wasn't happy there. That's all there was to it. I was disgusted with the setup. I'd lost three brothers and, uh, and I left my mother. I'd had enough of it. And I got out, I know that. Well, anyway, we got, we, we got on the Statue of Liberty, we saw

that, and then the next thing you know we were, well, we weren't herded, we were just conducted, like human beings, out of the ship. First class was supposed to get away first, they were right off the bat. Second class, good. Steerage was always last, you know. Naturally. We expected that. I didn't give a damn. We were tickled to death to be here. Finally we got onto Ellis Island and we went to, oh, the crowd, the glamorous, you know, it was a regular crush, you know. Everybody would take a big boat, and all those passengers. And, uh, some of those first class passengers had been inspected on board, the doctors had got on board, you know, came out like the pilots do, got on the boat, and so they was, got through their inspection, they got right off the boat, nothing to it. We expected that, too, you know. We knew, where we were, we were herded into, was conducted into that, Statue of Liberty and, and the next thing you know in front of a bunch of doctors. Doctors were all over, but they were all nice, they were all nice folks. And I think they did give a lot of favoritisms to the ones from England, the one from England and Scotland, I, I really think that. Because, you know, there were

no, maybe I'm wrong here, I hope I am. But, uh, I had no trouble. "How's your eyes?" Test your eyes. "How about your teeth? Stick your tongue out." And all that kind of stuff. Just a regular medical inspection. And, uh, we were clean, that's one thing. A lot of them, they had to go bathe them. There was no question about it. There were, some of them didn't give a damn. But, and they, you had that quota. You see, we'd, before you left your own country, you had to go through a certain system or examination, too. They had American doctors over there, you know. They wanted to know what type of people they were getting, which was right. That was a quota, you know. Quota system. There's only so many people to come in a year. When I came here there was a hundred and twenty million people in this country. Now, today, we've got over two hundred million. And I've studied all that stuff, you know. I like to study history. And you can see the difference. And, as I say, our friend Wilson was the President, and I also, he was running the country when he was so sick, you know. But, for FDR, I got, I took time off my work to go see him, Roosevelt, when he came to Springfield. I went out

of my way, and I marveled at the way he climbed up on a train.

APPLEBOME: Let's talk again about when you were on Ellis Island. They did the medical examination you described. Did you see people from other countries?

AMBLER: Yes, yes. A lot of them were thrown down. A lot of them were rejected. I saw one woman, one woman right next to me, she said, "Oh, no, no, no, no. Your eyes don't pass the test here. We're not taking you in." And they say you sit over there for the time being, and I suppose they put them back on the boat. There was a lot of . . .

APPLEBOME: Where was she from?

AMBLER: Eh, from, eh, Sweden. There was a lot, there was a lot of people like that, you know, rejected. Oh, yes. As I say, we were lucky. Maybe we were all right. We went right through.

APPLEBOME: What did the people do when they were rejected?

AMBLER: They had to stay there, they had to put them back on the boat and had to go back. That's what they had to do. A lot of us stayed overnight, by the way.

Yes, that's right. A lot of us stayed overnight, by the way. Yes, that's right. A lot of us stayed overnight. A lot of them had to take baths, you know, baths, because they, and as I, as I said before, you don't need to print this, but, you wouldn't allow a woman on deck after nine o'clock. Oh, yeah. I'll tell you, because you know what'd happen, anything would happen, scandal and everything else you know. So they were, after the first night out, the sign came up, no women on deck after nine o'clock. Say, well, of course, you could see that. There were priests on board, there were ministers on board, but, those days were a little, a little different, to what's today, you know.

APPLEBOME: How did you feel when you had seen the Statue of Liberty and you pulled into the harbor?

AMBLER: Oh, I could have cried. (he is moved) I feel it every time.

APPLEBOME: Okay.

AMBLER: I feel it, every time you mention it, because it means a lot to an immigrant. Oh, I'll never, there you are, you're twenty years old, see. We're just

married. I had forty-eight dollars in my pocket. There's me and my wife there. We had, all the presents were back over there, they were gonna send them later, naturally, the Christmas, the wedding presents, and all that kind of stuff, my books and everything else. But there we are, and you're saying, now, why, what does my future hold for me? What am I gonna do? I, my life is in the, I made, they tried to get me back lots of times, you know, but, uh, in fact, I did go back five times, but I was better off in America, then, I was. I could have never had done that. My people have never come over here five times. See, there's the difference. And I, they didn't, you can't make them understand that. Of course, they're beautiful people over there, they're loyal to the, the King and their country, which is very nice. My wife, I had one heck of a time getting her to become a citizen. I probably told you that, didn't I. Yeah. What a time I had. And, uh, so my mother and father were celebrating their fiftieth anniversary, and so I got them to come over, I bragged about this country so darn much, you know. I said, "Oh, we're gonna come over see it." Well, unfortunately, they did come

over, but on the way over, my father went blind. You see, he didn't realize that there was three thousand miles separating us, it's a long way, you know, and on that boat. So when they, they called me before the boat docked in New York, your father, come to New York. So I did. I went to New York and I met my father, I met him there, and all the time that he was over here. And I took him to the doctor's in Springfield, and the doctor says, he gave me three dollars. That's what it cost me to let me see the doctor. He gave me the three dollars back in his hand, and he says, "Your father will never regain his sight."

APPLEBOME: Okay, but let's talk again about when you were on Ellis Island.

AMBLER: I know I'm getting away from it, aren't I?

APPLEBOME: Right.

AMBLER: Well, I can't say much, you see, because, as I said, it was only four hours.

APPLEBOME: After you had passed the medical examination, what happened?

AMBLER: Oh, we got over, we got over the fence, to be honest about it. (he laughs) We got over the fence. You had big tags on your arm, right here, you know, big tags, right here, with your name, address. But they didn't bother us too much, they said, "Go." And my, my wife, my sister and my brother-in-law was waiting for me there, and we got on, on the train to Springfield. We didn't have any cars then, you know. But, uh, I, I, you know, you're so confused on that Ellis Island. There's because there's so many people there, but, uh, I, I listened to that Ellis Island program on the television, I don't think they, I don't think they did, did, they did justice to it. I think they did too much romance. You know, they've got to get that in to make a picture out of it but, uh, they treated us, as far as I'm concerned, they treated us, they treated us beautifully. They did all right by us. They treated us like human beings. Oh, yes. We didn't see, I didn't have time to, stayed long enough to have any food there because, I went through the, all the form. My wife, too, she . . .

APPLEBOME: What were some of the questions they asked you when

you were immigrating?

AMBLER: Oh, what are you coming over here for, and what do you expect to do over here? Well, I expect to, to live like an and, and I expect to, to be all right, but I just want a change in life. Of course, I didn't want to say that I was bitter about the veteran part of it. That's really what got me. I was bitter, bitter about the way they treated us after we'd given our blood. Because I'd seen a lot of my pals killed right by my side.

APPLEBOME: Did they ask to see whether you had any money with you?

AMBLER: Oh, yeah, oh, you have to declare, oh, you have to declare, declare everything. That's all right. Yeah, they, oh, yes, they were, oh, they, you declare what you have left. They've got it all on paper anyway, most of it. Because you've all kinds of, uh, uh, declarations to make, even before you even get anywhere near the boat, you know. Because that quota system was going into effect. There's only so many people could be allowed to come to America in a year and there was, divided amongst the

KECK-44/AMBLER

various countries. I will admit that, I'll agree with that, England and Ireland got the best majority, I would, I would agree with that. Yes.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

APPLEBOME: Mr. Ambler, you were going to tell us your impressions of what Ellis Island looked like when you first got there.

AMBLER: I said, "Oh, boy." I was scared out of my wits that I wouldn't get through. (he laughs) You know, you're wondering what it's all about, you know, after all, you work 'em and do that, you know, and the, uh, you have to be clean, that's all I need insects, or anything on your body, that was it.

APPLEBOME: But you didn't have that problem.

AMBLER: I didn't have that problem. But I did see some of the girls you, you, you step over here on this side, you step over here and you get over here. We'll have, we'll have to delouse you, delouse you, they call it, delouse it, in the army, but it's bathing, bathing, that's what it was. But, uh, and as I was

saying it's so confusing, you're anxious to get through, you don't bother about the next person. You don't worry, and I really can't say too much about Ellis Island. But I did, did go through it.

APPLEBOME: How was your wife holding up at the time?

AMBLER: She didn't, oh, boy, she was disgusted. She was, as I say, she never had any use for this country, she never had any use for this country. But, uh, we got, we got back, and we got to Springfield, now I said, "What, what am I gonna do now?"

APPLEBOME: And your sister, excuse me, had met you where?

AMBLER: In Springfield, in New York. They were there.

APPLEBOME: After you took the ferry over from Ellis Island.

AMBLER: Yes, yes.

APPLEBOME: Did you know she was going to be there?

AMBLER: No. No, I didn't. No, I didn't. But, a great blessing, because she says, so she says right away, get that thing off of there, that big tag, you know. Get that off of there, don't let anybody see you're an immigrant. So we cut it off. And then I said

now, what am I gonna do now, I gotta go to work.

APPLEBOME: What would you have done if your sister hadn't been there?

AMBLER: I'd have still stayed there. I'd have gone to Springfield. I'd have got, I'd have found my way, by God, because I was determined. You know ,you can use your head, or try to anyway. And, uh, I'd have looked at the stations, and the trains in the station, and I'd have got there somehow. Oh, yes. What else could I do? I was in a foreign country.

APPLEBOME: But you had the advantage that you could speak English.

AMBLER: That's the story right there. We were lucky. The English, the Scotch and the Irish, all us people like that were very lucky. And, uh, we have a lady here today that's very lucky. She speaks five languages. What, what a wonderful thing it is. But we, we, we got to Springfield, I was disgusted when we got into Springfield because they have a tunnel dividing the city of Springfield, and the station's right there, and one of the exits is right under the damn tunnel, so I come down that tunnel there and

comes out on the corridor and says, "Is this what I came to? Good heavens, what a, what a disgusting, what a disgusting thing it was." I said, "Oh, boy, what a disappointment."

APPLEBOME: And then, your wife, what did she say?

AMBLER: Oh, she, oh, dear. Then, then we moved up to where they're living and they were, don't get me wrong on this now, we rolled up to where they're living, and it was all in the Jewish section, entirely in the Jewish section. Today it isn't there, but don't get me wrong now, I'm not, I don't know, I was England.

But there, I said, "Oh, what a dump this is." Boy, oh, Lord. I wonder if I'm getting robbed here. You begin to think about those things, you know. And then, but we made friends with the Irish, the landlady, she was Irish, the housekeeping room that I got with an Irish landlady and we used to play cards with her at night, we made friends with her, we finally got, you know, we got into housekeeping rooms first.

APPLEBOME: Before you took the train up to Springfield when you were in New York . . .

AMBLER: Yes.

APPLEBOME: Which I assume was less than a day, what were your impressions from seeing New York City?

AMBLER: I thought, "Oh, my God." I says, "Ooh, I'd never seen, well, I had seen London, but, my God, New York, when I saw those buildings, those tall story, high story buildings, I said, "Good God, what have I come to?" You know. Oh, god. Oh, you have a sort of a feeling, you know. Wondering how you were gonna make out. Some of the people, on the Ellis Island were going across the country, Colorado and out West, you know. We were only going to Springfield, a hundred miles away, as you might say. But, some of those people, I wonder how they're feeling, pushing them out on a ranch somewhere. I'd go nuts. But, I says, so I looked for a job, and there was a big place, at, it's a lumber place, just a little way in the back of where she lived. So I went in there and I asked for a job. I was only twenty years old. I can't stand the sun, you know. I get sunburned. So they say, "We'll give you a job, so, unloading trucks." You know, lumber. So I started working. And all of the people who were

with me were Polish. So I said, "Oh, boy, I'm in with a crowd here now." So they says, "Well, you fellas, you only got three days to load this truck, you know." So he say, "You'll have to work tomorrow." I says, I says, "Tomorrow's Sunday." He says, "So what, you're gonna have to work tomorrow."

I said, "Well, I'm not working tomorrow." Well, they say, "You don't work tomorrow don't come in Monday." I didn't work tomorrow, I went in Monday, but I went over yet. (he laughs) I says, "Well, that's my first experience, but I just wasn't gonna work Sunday. I wasn't acclimated to conditions at that time, it was too quick. I got this, then they were just starting the radio. I got a job at the radio store, in the radio factory, where they're makin' the tubes, they were just making the tubes. And, uh, there was a holiday, holiday coming along and he says, "Well, you've got to work on the holiday." I says, "I don't work holidays." I says, "I've got tickets for a show in the theater in town." You know, a vaudeville show. "Well, listen, don't bother to come in." I didn't. And they didn't celebrate New Year's Day in those days, you know, like when we, when I came here. New Year's

Day was not, it wasn't a holiday in those days, just an ordinary day. So I, I didn't, I lost that job anyway. But anyway I got a job making sporting goods with the Right Distance (?) Company, now it's Spalding's today, and I stayed there a long, long time. I did, I did a good job. I got, I worked Saturday overtime, I got twenty-three dollars for the whole week but I, I stayed there, I stayed there for a long, long time. And rather got accustomed to, to things about. And then I, I got into apartments on our own, you know.

APPLEBOME: Did your wife look for work or did she stay at home?

AMBLER: Eh, well, let me think about that now. Oh, she stayed home. After a while she did get a job at Kressigies [ph], which is, now it's K-Mart, but a long time after, long time after.

APPLEBOME: What was it about the United States that she was unhappy with?

AMBLER: Just the country. She was homesick. Oh, there was an awful lot of people that was homesick. Every once in a while I'll get depressed, you know, wished to hell I was back over there, but only, not for

long, I'd say forget it, forget it, because this country's been good to me. Let's face it. And yes, she did get a job, but, uh, she wanted to go back, she wanted to, well, we did, I did go back, I did go back. I said, one fellow in the machine shop says to me, he says, "Look, you, you'll never go back unless you set a goal. I said what do you mean? He says, "You put ten dollars a week, a week, away every week for a year and you'll go back." So we came in 1920, and in 19, uh '27, something years later, what would that be? '54, wasn't it, '55? About that time anyway, yes. I saved it, and we went back, we went back on a visit.

APPLEBOME: Was it 1947, it would have been twenty-five years?

AMBLER: Oh, yes, about that time it would be. I saved ten dollars a week, no matter how it killed us, we saved that ten dollars a week, you know. Of course, our grocery bill was nothing. We were only paying eighteen dollars a month rent. Everything was different, you know.

APPLEBOME: And were you traveling back planning to stay, or just to visit?

AMBLER: To visit. That's all. Oh, visit. Oh, boy.

APPLEBOME: Had your wife tried to convince you to move back?

AMBLER: Yes. We went back five times, you know, and on one of the trips, when we got back, she had a sister over there, and she couldn't leave her sister, you know, and I was walking around London, I didn't come over, spend a thousand dollars just to stay in a home, I wanted to see the country. And I saw London, all, all around. I enjoyed London. I could know it back and front, you know. And so I couldn't get her out, she only went out with me four times. She stuck with the mother. She says, well, we got back, and she says, we always went for six weeks, we got back, and she says, well, if ever we go again, she says, I'm not coming back. I says to myself, well, we're not going, in that case. Because I was, I was coming back regardless. And not only that, I sold a home and we went over, and I got a job over there with the Austin Motor Car Company, right in Richmond, Surrey, in England. Right near her place. I tried, I tried it, and I, I was working nights on a milling machine, and there was another guy from Detroit, we had quite a conversation, this is not

for me. And then she got inflammatory rheumatism, which is all on account, you know Richmond, in London, is all on the water, ay, you know? And so she got this inflammatory rheumatism, she couldn't get out of bed. So I says, "What a life." And my money was going fast. I was losing money and all. I says, "I've got to do, I only had a six-month permit. I had my first papers out. If I don't come back, you know, I lost my first papers. So I says, "I've got to do something about this." So the, the doctor in Richmond says, "Well, why don't you take her up north to Halloway. She may be better in the northern country." So I did. Well, Dr. Kennedy was my doctor up there, my mother's doctor, and I had him look her over, he says, "Look Arnold." He says, "The only way she's gonna get better is by going back to the dry climate, the dry climate." And I says . . .

APPLEBOME: If we could just talk for one more minute about when you first came to Springfield.

AMBLER: Yeah, okay.

AMBLER: You were an immigrant. How did people treat you,

because you were an immigrant?

AMBLER: They were good. They were good. Oh, I laughed at the, the different meanings of different things, you know, like the water closet. That's the water closet, that's a toilet here, and all that. Oh, yes, oh, they were good. They did call you a, a, what did, what did they call my wife? Some funny, but they were good, they were good. They, I was amazed at the democracy. As I say, it was, you could sit by a millionaire and you wouldn't know he was a millionaire, see. That's the story. Sometimes it's overdone, too, a little, but, uh, like the free press and all that stuff, but it's all for the good, it's all for the good, we're all benefitting by it. Oh, yes. They treat us all right. Well, it's all, a "limey" I got that, the term, a "limey." I got the term "limey" so many, many times. I thought, I thought that some of the fellows were nosy because the first thing they asked me was how much do you get? They wanted to know what the pay you got? I thought that was very nosy and I used to, you know, we were reserved in England, we were at that time, and I was tempted to

say, "None of your damn business," but I didn't.
(he laughs) Things like that. But they, on the whole, and when, as I say, when my mother and father came over here, my sister, my wife was going to have her citizenship papers out, and she put it up when my mother and father was over here, just showing you how my mother and father resented things like that, swearing against the flag, that's what it was. Swearing against your king and country. But I was looking, I've got a job to do, I've got a family. And we were lucky the first five years, we didn't have any children. We did have a girl after that, she passed away when she was eighteen, but that, we won't go into that. And then, we had a lot of sickness and my wife had a lot, I had, a lot of sickness. But we did all right. I did all right. They were good to us, they were good to us. I got a job with those Polies, I lost the job, and then I went to Adaskin [ph], the furniture company, and I was on a truck, helping the driver, see. So we went out delivering furniture there, so we had a bamboo chair on there, you know, we had a bamboo chair on there, and on the way in we broke it. So, I was only getting twenty-two dollars a week, by the way,

Adaskin [ph] Furniture. So, eh, we broke the chair, so we came back, report the chair, and he says, "Oh, well, I'll take it out of your pay." I says, "You'll what?" He says, "I'll take it out of your pay." I said, "You won't take it out of my pay," but he did, and so he fired me. So that Monday morning I went to see Adaskin [ph], the big boss himself. I got my twenty-two dollars back, but I didn't get my job back. Well, those are the little things that can happen, you know. But, uh, I finally got a job in a, in a good place, that sports goods, that sporting goods, and I stayed there for a long, long time.

APPLEBOME: Okay, thank you. That was very interesting Mr. Ambler. Thank you very much.

AMBLER: I don't know if it was any good or not.

APPLEBOME: No, it was very good.

AMBLER: I talked a lot. I don't know, you, you'll leave out whatever you don't want. (he laughs) I could talk forever. That's the trouble.

APPLEBOME: This is the end of side two of tape one of the

KECK-44/AMBLER

interview with Mr. Ambler.