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World History Interview

Of World War II Veterans

Veteran's Name: Jacobson, Murray A.

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Transcriber: Vanessa Obas

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1 COHEN: Today is February 2nd, 2003. I am
2 in Boyton Beach, Florida.

3 Okay. Please tell me your name and address.

4 MURRAY: My name is Murray Arnold
5 Jacobson. My address is 25 Southern Drive in Boyton
6 Beach, Florida.

7 Q. When were you born?

8 A. November 23rd, 1924.

9 Q. My name is Claire Cohen, and I am conducting this
10 interview as part of a Veteran's History Project of the
11 American FolkLife Center of the Library of Congress of
12 the United States. The local partner for this project is
13 Temple Emanu-El of Palm Beach, Florida.

14 Present at this interview are Murray Jacobson --

15 A. Right.

16 Q. -- and Claire Cohen.

17 To begin, please tell us -- Okay. Please tell us
18 in what branch of the service you served.

19 A. I was in the army, attached to the Air Force. I
20 was --

21 Q. -- anything else?

22 A. No. I was a weather observer when I was in the
23 service, you know, working.

24 Q. What was your rank and where was your tour of
25 duty? Tell us your dates of service.

1 Okay. So what was your rank and where was your
2 tour of duty?

3 A. Well, I was a ___ private until I got out. And at
4 that point, I was discharged as a sergeant. I worked. I
5 took my basic training. Is that what you want to know?

6 My basic training was in Atlantic City, New
7 Jersey, after having volunteered to go into the service.
8 And that was at Fort Devens in Massachusetts. And that
9 was April -- I believe it was around the 23rd. And --

10 Q. Of what year?

11 A. 1943. I had left school before I graduated from
12 high school and with the intention of being put into the
13 service of meteorology. And after my basic training in
14 New Jersey, I wound up in Hamilton College in Clinton,
15 New York, for a year of education and training to become
16 an officer, a weather officer.

17 The program cancelled after a year, and I still
18 volunteered to go in and be part of the weather, the
19 weather squadron. And I guess from Hamilton College, I
20 went down to a weather station in Albany, Georgia, where
21 I spent a few months. And from there, I was -- Oh, from
22 there, I was transferred.

23 After passing an examination, I was sent up to
24 Harvard University in Massachusetts, which was right
25 near home, and spent about three months there learning

1 some tracking outfit, some tracking equipment, and
2 radiosonde tracking.

3 Q. Radio -- Radio --

4 A. Radiosonde unit that was sent up in a balloon.

5 Q. Sonde?

6 A. Sonde.

7 Q. What is that?

8 A. Well, that -- You sent up the balloon and tracked
9 it. It used to send back the temperature and the
10 pressure and the directions, the wind direction, and so
11 forth so we could tell the weather.

12 Q. Uh-huh.

13 A. After learning that, I was sent down to McDade
14 Field to work for a while. That was an Air Force Base.
15 And I spent, I guess it was about two or three months
16 there, and I got orders to go to Brazil.

17 Q. Where in Brazil?

18 A. That was in Berlin, Brazil, right on the Equator.

19 Q. Was it --

20 A. In the Amazon River.

21 Q. In the Amazon?

22 A. Right. And there we were tracking the balloons
23 and getting the weather details for the bombers that
24 were being ferried to Africa across the Atlantic. They
25 came down by troop and across to Africa.

1 I spent six months there, I think it was. And --
2 Well, I could backtrack a little. Before I get down to
3 the -- I think it was V -- What was the first? The VJ
4 day -- VJ day, I was up in Massachusetts.

5 Q. VJ day was Victory in --

6 A. Japan.

7 Q. Japan.

8 A. And there was a VE day, the first.

9 Q. It was in Europe, August was VJ. Well --

10 A. Well, whatever it was, because I celebrated one
11 of those. It was either VE day or VJ day.

12 And from there, I went down to Brazil. I spent
13 six months there, and then I came out. I had three days
14 and three years of service, and I was discharged. I
15 think it was April. It was April of '46. So --

16 Q. Okay. Now, I'd like to ask you a little bit about
17 your family at the time you entered the service. Where
18 did you live, and where did you go to school?

19 A. I lived in Brighton.

20 Q. Brighton is where?

21 A. Massachusetts. And I was -- I was in English
22 High. I had almost graduated there before I left in
23 1943.

24 Q. How did your family earn a living?

25 A. Well, my father was a salesman on the road, and

1 he managed to get -- to get by just about; and my mother
2 stayed home. And I had a sister and a brother who was
3 younger.

4 And that's about it, until I got out of the
5 service and I signed up. I had three years and -- No. I
6 had four years of college education that I was eligible
7 for. I applied for Brown University.

8 Q. Well, I think we'll come to some of those a
9 little later.

10 A. Okay.

11 Q. So, if -- Were you drafted or did you enlist?

12 A. No. I volunteered to go into this program of
13 meteorology.

14 Q. And why did you join?

15 A. I was probably gonna be drafted, so I figured I
16 -- I wanted to do something with the weather, and I
17 volunteered for that program.

18 Q. Okay. Do you recall your first days in service?

19 A. Yes. (Laughter.)

20 Q. What did it feel like? Tell me -- Think about it,
21 and see what you can recall of those first days.

22 A. Well, you got your unif -- went up to Fort
23 Devens, and you got your uniform, and you marched around
24 for a little bit, got all kinds of erroneous
25 informations to what you were gonna do.

1 I was told I'll never make it into the
2 meteorology program that I thought I was headed for, and
3 I was shipped down to New Jersey on the Boardwalk,
4 Atlantic City. And I spent -- Oh, I don't remember how
5 long -- probably about a month down there, and I got
6 trained on shooting rifles and going out on obstacle
7 courses and whatever. That was a rather sloppy deal, but
8 we stayed around on the Boardwalk, staying at nice
9 hotels.

10 Q. Why do you suppose they told you or they gave you
11 the impression that you'd never make the meteorology
12 school?

13 A. Well, because all of these -- the people in
14 charge, the sergeant, they didn't seem to know anyway,
15 but they knew you were gonna fight, so --

16 Q. Oh, oh, because your -- your --

17 A. -- I was --

18 Q. -- your goal was to be a soldier and fight?

19 A. Yeah, that's right, that's right. But I had
20 other thing in mind and it worked out, so that's where I
21 went.

22 Q. Do you remember any of your instructors?

23 A. No, no -- (Laughter.) -- not really.

24 Q. How did you get through it? Was it tough? Did you
25 find it tough?

1 A. Well, yeah. This was the first time I'd left home
2 really, and I didn't mind it so much. It wasn't bad, and
3 'cause I had that goal in mind.

4 Q. What about the men who were with you, your
5 buddies, did -- were they -- what kind of a background
6 were they from? Were they different from you?

7 A. Well, they were from all over, I guess. I don't
8 have any lasting friendships from there. And, well,
9 that was -- that was about it. It was what I had
10 expected, more or less.

11 Q. Okay. Now, you served in World War II?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. And you told us where you went. Do you remember
14 arriving in Berlin, Brazil?

15 A. Well, I flew down there. I wasn't on any troop or
16 carriers or anything. I was attached to the weather
17 squadron, which is --

18 Q. -- how many men in that group; do you remember?

19 A. When I went down there? Two.

20 Q. Oh, real --

21 A. -- No. There was -- If any, there was maybe one
22 or two, but I flew down.

23 Q. Only one or two men went with you to Berlin?

24 A. Yeah. I was on an airplane that they used for
25 transferring the troops.

1 Q. Did other soldiers go with you?

2 A. I -- I suppose so. I don't remember flying alone
3 there but --

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. No, no. I don't -- I don't recall anyone. But I
6 got off, and I met the -- I was assigned to certain
7 borders, and I went. In the station, I got acquainted
8 there and had to -- Well, they already had the equipment
9 that I've been trained on, and I was all ready to go.
10 I learned how to blow up a balloon with hydrogen.
11 I had to make the hydrogen.

12 Q. How did you make hydrogen?

13 A. Oh, we had tanks with chemicals and threw them
14 together. And we had a little outhouse where we had done
15 that. That was away from the regular station. And we
16 just blew the balloons up with it.

17 Q. Were there any accidents from the --

18 A. No.

19 Q. -- gases?

20 A. No, no, we didn't have any.

21 Q. How big were the balloons?

22 A. Well, they could have been about six feet across.
23 They were big enough to handle these -- I guess there
24 were about six or eight pounds, ten pounds of radio
25 equipment that went up, and we had to let the wind pick

1 it up.

2 Q. You didn't see any combat?

3 A. No. I was -- the only thing that I was issued was
4 a knife, not that it was useful. (Laughter.)

5 Q. What was the knife for? Why do you think --

6 A. I don't know what they expected me to do with it,
7 but that was the only piece of equipment that I was --

8 Q. Tell me about a couple of your most memorable
9 experiences.

10 A. Well, memorable. While being down there on our
11 days off, we went on trips -- sort of local trips to
12 local mines. There was -- We had the USO there that were
13 arranging some of these -- these entertainments you
14 might call it.

15 And at the time, I went swimming out in the
16 Atlantic with the tremendous waves they had there. We
17 had gotten ahold of some of these pontoon boats that,
18 you know, we inflated, and we used to go push them out,
19 swim out with them, and then ride the waves in them.
20 That was an exciting thing for us.

21 Q. What about the -- Were there strange animals
22 there?

23 A. No. While we were out, there were black tigers --
24 black panthers which you might run into out at the shack
25 where we used to make the hydrogen. And I spotted one,

1 but he didn't bother me. I was moving too fast.

2 (Laughter.)

3 That was about it. There were no other animals,
4 no other -- no other problems. It was a good place.

5 Q. What about while you were in service, how did you
6 stay in touch with your family?

7 A. Well, I used to write letters. That was about the
8 only thing, 'cause while I was in the service and
9 transferring from one place to the other, I managed to
10 be traveling on my own. And almost every trip that I
11 made was through Boston, so that was rather nice and
12 convenient.

13 Q. You're Jewish. Did you have any problems being
14 Jewish in the service?

15 A. No.

16 Q. Was there ever an indication of anti-Semitism
17 or--

18 A. Not as far as I felt, no.

19 Q. You never felt it?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Okay. And how about the food? Was it difficult
22 getting used to the food, the army food?

23 A. It was nothing special, but it was all right. You
24 know, you had to eat to survive. (Laughter.)

25 Q. Did you have plenty of supplies?

1 A. Oh, sure. Yeah.

2 Q. Did you feel any pressure or stress when you were
3 in the army?

4 A. No, not really. Just the studying that I had to
5 do or the practicing, that's it. Nothing -- Nothing
6 other than that.

7 Q. Here's a question: Was there something special
8 you did for good luck? I suppose that would refer to
9 people --

10 A. I stayed out of trouble, that's all. (Laughter.)

11 Q. You stayed out of trouble? (Laughter.)

12 How did people entertain themselves? Did you have
13 entertainers come to your base?

14 A. Well, we had -- we had the USO at the units. I
15 know they were in Brazil when we were there. Up in the
16 states, there really wasn't that much 'cause I had my
17 own entertainment when we went off the base.

18 Q. And what did you do when you went off base?

19 A. We were going into town to see what was going on
20 around.

21 Q. Uh-huh. And you told us where you traveled. While
22 you were in the service, you traveled?

23 A. Yes, yes.

24 Q. So do you recall any particular humorous or
25 unusual events?

1 A. Not really, no. But I met a lot of different
2 people, cute girls, you know.

3 Q. And so what were some of the pranks that you or
4 others would pull? Did you have a buddy when you were in
5 the service particularly?

6 A. No. I had one of my roommates, that's it. No
7 buddies. I had some lasting friendships from the school
8 from Hamilton College, and we had reunions.

9 Q. Right.

10 A. Afterwards, we had our 50th reunion. We had -- I
11 guess there was a 45th and then a 50th at the school,
12 and they treated us royally there because we were an
13 elite bunch there.

14 Q. And what happened to some of those men that you
15 were with? Have they -- in their lives?

16 A. Well, they went on. Some of them stayed in the
17 weather. Some of them had other areas, and we all met
18 afterwards. At Hamilton, we met again.

19 We -- There were other schools that had this --
20 these programs, and they had all been cut out. And we
21 all wound up as regular service -- army service for the
22 weather. And afterwards, we had a reunion that all the
23 fellows pulled together. It was very nice.

24 Q. Do you have any photographs of those people that
25 you were at Hamilton with?

1 A. I think I have. I must have, sure.

2 Q. And --

3 A. I don't have them down here. They must be up in
4 Massachusetts somewhere.

5 Q. Were there officers in charge of you at Berlin or
6 at the school?

7 A. Sure.

8 Q. And what did you think of them?

9 A. In the offices where we were working down in
10 Albany, Georgia, McDade Field, there were graduates.
11 Most of them were graduates of the same course. But we
12 were all in, and they were rather helpful to help us
13 when we had the exams. They were rather helpful to see
14 that we made the grade.

15 Q. Do you remember what they told you when they
16 cancelled the program?

17 A. No, no. They -- Not really. No, I don't
18 remember --

19 Q. They just cancelled --

20 A. -- nothing official. I mean, that was the end.
21 They -- They gave us a choice of what we wanted to do,
22 and I wanted to stay in the weather squadron.

23 Q. And they honored that?

24 A. Oh, yeah, I guess. That's where I wound up.

25 Q. Yeah, yeah. So was it in -- At Hamilton, you were

1 there one year?

2 A. One year.

3 Q. And then they cancelled the program?

4 A. At that time, they had cancelled the followup on
5 the program, so we never became an officer. But I guess
6 I got a better rank than I had once I went through the
7 school.

8 Q. Do you recall the day your service ended?

9 A. My --

10 Q. Where you were?

11 A. My service?

12 Q. Yeah. When -- When -- The day you were --

13 A. Yeah. I got out, as I remember, three years and
14 three days from the time that I got in. And I got
15 discharged and shipped to Fort Devens in Massachusetts.

16 Q. Uh- huh. So you flew back from --

17 A. Oh, I flew back from Berlin and then when I was
18 shipped, I was shipped up to Fort Devens. I went by
19 train on my own. And when they gave me my discharge, I
20 don't remember if I must have taken the bus or something
21 else.

22 Q. Do you remember anything about the weather in
23 Brazil?

24 A. It was hot.

25 Q. What do you mean "hot"?

1 A. It was very hot and muggy. That's a tropical
2 spot.

3 Q. Did you have rain?

4 A. Oh, plenty.

5 Q. Plenty of rain?

6 A. Yeah. It rained pretty much everyday during the
7 season. And, no, other than that, there was no problem.

8 Q. Yeah. Did you go into the Amazon?

9 A. No, no.

10 Q. You were near the Amazon?

11 A. I was practically right next to it.

12 Q. And the ocean also?

13 A. Yeah, and the ocean. There was a little side trip
14 that we had a chance to do.

15 Q. And what about tropical animals or insects? Did
16 you --

17 A. I don't recall any of those, but there were --
18 there were some.

19 Q. Okay. Getting back to the day your service was
20 ended, you said you were at Fort Devens or you were sent
21 back to Fort Devens?

22 A. I was sent back to Fort Devens to be discharged.

23 Q. From Berlin?

24 A. Uh, yes.

25 Q. And what did you do in the days and weeks

1 afterwards? Did you work or go back to school?

2 A. Well, I applied for school in April, and I got in
3 there I guess it was in the fall semester. And I had to
4 -- I got into the night program they had because I was a
5 little late to apply for the regular one. And when my
6 scores went up, I was transferred into the regular
7 school for the next two years.

8 Q. Were you in Brown two years?

9 A. I believe so.

10 Q. Was that under the GI --

11 A. From '40 to '49, that was under the GI bill,
12 which I think was a wonderful thing 'cause it gave me a
13 chance to afford college, which I couldn't have done.

14 Q. And when you -- after Brown?

15 A. Well, I had earned a living. I went to work. I
16 went on the road selling, salesman.

17 Q. Selling what?

18 A. Ribbon. That my father had started a little
19 business of his own and then we built the business. From
20 there, it went on.

21 Shortly after that, I met a nice lady, a
22 girlfriend, and then we got married.

23 Q. What year did you get married?

24 A. 1950 -- 1951, '51.

25 Q. Uh-huh.

1 A. I had three kids. And I worked hard and we built
2 a good size business.

3 Q. Did your military experience influence your
4 thinking about war, about the military in general?

5 A. Well, it was a good experience for somebody that
6 hadn't even gone out of the state before and the fact
7 that there was the eligibility to go to school
8 afterwards. I think now you can through your training in
9 the service, and I think they try to get you where
10 you'll fit best.

11 Q. What do you mean, "training in the service"? What?

12 A. Well, there were schools and courses so you would
13 learn. There was -- you know, at that time there was
14 radio and any of the other technical areas.

15 Q. In other words, you got a lot of practical --

16 A. Yeah, you got practical --

17 Q -- education.

18 A. -- education. I know some of them. Well, I didn't
19 have any of the -- Well, the mechanical machines, having
20 a little of that, having repair, minor repairs, and the
21 tracks of the cars. And -- No. But other than that, I
22 was away from these schools 'till I went to college.

23 Q. You were away from school?

24 A. Well, the only training I had was to be a weather
25 observer --

1 Q. Oh, in the service?

2 A. -- and a technician with the units that we had.

3 Q. And it's -- You know, today we are -- there's the
4 thought of going to war against Iraq. Do you think your
5 military experience has any influence on the way you
6 think about going --

7 A. -- about going to war?

8 Q. Going to war.

9 A. Well, I think when it becomes inevitable and the
10 President decides that's what we're doing, I can't see
11 anything against that. I would go.

12 Q. If he would --

13 A. Yeah, you know, I'd like to be part of it in an
14 area that I knew how to handle, whatever it was. But the
15 technicals today is entirely different.

16 Q. And then this question which is more or less a
17 followup on the others: How did your service and
18 experiences affect your life?

19 A. Well, I got out and I saw more of the country and
20 the world and the way people were. I associated with
21 people I was -- I probably would have never met before,
22 and the ones that we really kept in touch that made some
23 real buddies, you might say.

24 Q. Anything you might like to add that we have not
25 covered in this interview, Murray?

1 A. Oh, not really. I just think the experience at
2 that time for me was enlightening. It was good. It
3 brought me into being aware of what's going on around
4 the world in other places other than my own backyard.
5 That's about -- I think that's something that's
6 worthwhile for anybody that wants to volunteer or that's
7 drafted. And as long as you can find an _____ that's
8 there, that would be worthwhile.

9 Q. Do you have any thoughts about instituting,
10 reinstituting a draft? This is optional, I mean, this
11 question.

12 A. I don't know any other greater minds than mine
13 that would like to have that.

14 Q. Well, thank you, Murray --

15 A. You're welcome.

16 Q. -- for sharing your recollection with us.

17 A. Okay, Mrs. Cohen.

18 Q. And I appreciate it. We appreciate it and this'll
19 go into the archives.

20 A. Oh, great.

21

22

23

24

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