



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



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Interviewer: *Mary Baumann and an Unnamed Second Interviewer*

Transcriber: *Nancy Lueke*

Abstract: Sigmund “Sig” Bernheimer grew up in Alexandria. He lived through the flu epidemic after World War I, remembers the streetcars that used to run through Alexandria to Washington, D.C., and served in the Pacific during World War II. Sig spent most of his life working in the appliance business; his wife worked in the printing and engraving business, where she printed stationery for the vice-president of the United States. This is the second of two interviews.

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Introductions	
Mary Baumann:	Today is Thursday, November 11, 2004, Veterans Day, and my name is Mary Baumann. We're doing our second interview with Sig Bernheimer today. Sig, the first interview we talked about your childhood, growing up in Alexandria for the most part. There was one other thing I wanted to ask you about before we move on to after you'd grown up. Can you tell us about the flu epidemic of, of—
Flu Epidemic	
Sig Bernheimer:	As I remember it, yes. Approximately, I think in 1919 and 1920 there was a flu epidemic here in Alexandria...I think about 100 people died, whatever. And Mother had a sister in Philadelphia, was a nurse up there. And she came down, stayed almost a year nursing and helping people that had had the flu. Few things in that period of time. I think 1920 there was a theater that was built in Washington about, oh, 18 th and Columbia Road. The roof collapsed. We had about four and half, five foot of snow in Alexandria. The streets were actually solid four foot high. I walked out of the house and got the only key. I was lost when I stepped out of the door, went down to the corner and there the deep snow. They had cleared some of King Street, but I got lost. I was probably four or five years old at that time. But that snow fall and the flu tied in about the same time and that was about 1920. And, Frieda Salter was her, the nurse's name.
MB:	Now, do you remember if you had to stay in your house all the time?
Sig Bernheimer:	I think pretty much. Well, back in those days, aside from the flu, they had warning signs on homes if someone had measles or whatever the illness. The house was quarantined. I remember 111, the street, the girl died at about age 18 or 19, Landon was her last name. But the house had a quarantine sign on and nobody could go in that house. But there was a visiting nurse that used to come around the schools, Miss Monroe was her name, lived on [inaudible] Street. But she pretty well kept the school kids healthy. She visited each class during the month, the whole city of Alexandria. That big snowfall, the flu epidemic, and other than that, not a whole lot happened.
MB:	Was anyone in your family sick? You guys all made it through?
Sig Bernheimer:	Everyone got through the flu, right.

Transportation	
MB:	Okay. Great, well thanks for talking about that a little bit. I guess there's one other thing that we sort of talked about a little bit that I should follow up on and that's the streetcars. You described the streetcar that was in place.
Sig Bernheimer:	The streetcar fare to Washington [D.C.], I think was 7 cents.
MB:	7 cents.
Sig Bernheimer:	The streetcar line at 12 th and Pennsylvania, the post office at 12 th and Pennsylvania Avenue, there was the terminal, then Washington, for the streetcars. But they'd go down 14 th Street, across the Potomac, bridge at 14 th Street, and I think it was out on Columbia Pike, they went over to Key Bridge...what did they call that up there? The division, Virginia, off of Key Bridge?
MB:	Oh, I'm not sure.
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh, they went over there and then came back to Virginia on Commonwealth Avenue. They came into Alexandria, up about the 18[00] or 1900 block, made a left turn, went down King Street, all the way to Royal Street. They went one block on Royal Street, left turn, one block on Prince Street, left turn, they were on Fairfax Street. A funny thing about the streetcars there in the summertime, the streetcars ran a car with the tourists. They were Alexandria, Mount Vernon, back to Washington. But you know on Fairfax Street at the end of the alley, right across the street, a man named [inaudible] had a little grocery store and he did a lot of business...they did it on credit...I think [Senator?] Grocery was around then the A&P there...those were cash sales. So it was a legal grocery store...he used to come out and the kids in the neighborhood would sell water, sodas, to the people on the streetcars.
MB:	To the tourists.
Sig Bernheimer:	But as they hit Fairfax Street going back to King [Street], made a left turn, and then went up King Street as far as Columbus Street, a right turn on Columbus to Christ's Church there, left turn on Cameron [Street], out to about where the swimming pool is now, and left turn back to King [Street] over to Commonwealth Avenue, back to Washington.

MB:	Back to Washington.
Sig Bernheimer:	7 cents was the fare.
MB:	And what was it like to ride the streetcars? Were they usually pretty crowded, did you stand or sit?
Sig Bernheimer:	That was the only transportation...they were full.
MB:	They were full.
Sig Bernheimer:	And the fare was 7 cents.
Second Interviewer:	Did you pay cash or were there tickets? Did you give them money or were there tickets?
Sig Bernheimer:	No, money. They didn't have tickets those days. I'll give you a good one about 7 cents. Back, we had a doctor from 1890 to 1930, a Dr. Dullaney. He was probably the best physician in Alexandria. He was our doctor for 40 years. He died. But people here in Alexandria would be ill during the night, they'd call the doctor, Dullaney, he would drive out to the house, take care of them, go back home. Charge them two dollars. And if the people didn't have two dollars, he took care of them anyway. His daughter lives in Belle Haven; I grew up with her.
MB:	What's her name?
Sig Bernheimer:	I knew until you asked me.
MB:	[Laughs]. Of course.
Sig Bernheimer:	Catherine is her first name. I've got it written down in there. Garber. G-A-B-E-R. That's close. I grew up with his daughter. In fact, she married military and she has his benefits at [Fort] Belvoir, Fort Myer, ...you can walk the Air Force base. [inaudible]...her daughter's down on the 300 block. But once a month, the four of us would go to dinner.
MB:	Oh, that's wonderful, that's great. While we're on the topic of transportation, maybe I should ask you about—
Sig Bernheimer:	Now a good one. There's a time that the streetcar, streetcars stopped running. They had a bus service to Washington, almost the same thing. That fare was 10 cents. And eventually, I guess, in the [19]30s, the streetcars stopped running and the buses took over. And then there were two bus companies, they had a fare war. One could go to

	Washington for a nickel or whatever. And eventually the EBMW [?], which was the red buses, they took over.
MB:	And how about the build-up to the amount of cars that we see now in Alexandria? Why don't you tell us a little about how that's changed?
Sig Bernheimer:	Well, back in the old days they did not have stop signs or traffic lights. I drove when I was 12 years old.
MB:	You drove?
Sig Bernheimer:	The family had a truck back there so I would practice on that. Across the street at a wholesale produce place, they had two brothers working there. One worked the inside and the other one drove the truck. I went with him delivering produce with him. He let me drive sometimes [inaudible] grocery stores all the way to Quantico and a barrel of potatoes would go about 100 pounds, 125 pounds. I was the man on the other side of the barrel. People they had boats, used to come to Alexandria from down the river bringing produce and that type of thing, watermelons. They would unload the watermelons...four or five men would throw them from the boat to where the truck were. I was one of the boys that took a man's place. I always stopped the first melon, we'd have something to eat.
MB:	Oops [laughs].
Sig Bernheimer:	You know these country markets that are around the place. We had one down where we had the house on Waynewood, that area. And the trucks, the farmers, would bring their trucks in and put them out on the table and quite a number of them went back to the truck. Most of the produce that they were selling, they picked up at the wholesale produce places. [Chuckles] They took 'em out of the crate and were selling 'em as home grown. And I think up here I've seen trucks on Saturday mornings, trucks [inaudible] some of the boxes in there that they're selling out on the stands.
MB:	Really? Well, could be—
Sig Bernheimer:	Without giving you a name, did I tell you about the person who was stealing at city market?
MB:	Oh, yes, I think so.
Sig Bernheimer:	Sitting where the clock is, there were oh, six or eight stores in the first [inaudible] of City Hall and no walls, no locks on each of the

	places...Chauncey [?] Meat Market, Schuman's Market...now I don't remember the others, but the last person out turned the key around at the police station and Chauncey cut a roast for the next day delivery, was not there. Week later, the same thing happened...disappeared...he decided to leave someone on the premises. About 11 o'clock at night, someone opened the outside door, came with a flashlight, picked out what he wanted, turned around and walked out, to walk out, they turned the lights on...[it was] a very high official in the police department.
MB:	Mmm, yup, that's good.
Sig Bernheimer:	That was in the mid-[19]20s.
MB:	So, when did you start to see a lot of cars around here? I mean—
Sig Bernheimer:	I would say probably...we had a truck that was at the store...cars not 'til probably after World War I.
MB:	And did they have to widen the streets over here?
Sig Bernheimer:	No, it's the same.
MB:	It's all the same as they are now.
Sig Bernheimer:	We had an old [inaudible—make of car], which was an open four-door touring car that Mother never drove. She [inaudible] 80 years, Father would drive. I think Sundays we used to go over to Washington sightseeing, this, that and the other...oh, step-dad...mother married my dad 1910 and that's the...1910, I found the deed in there...he gave her the alley here, the south side. I think it was a wedding gift, whatever. The value was \$10. The width from there...the width of the alleys in there...from there, to back where the two cars are parked. Where we had a garage...at the end of the grist [?] there...this wall was not there, so if you were in the alley...but I used to back that out, put it back, out, put it back.
MB:	Were you a good driver, even at 12, or—
Sig Bernheimer:	I was on the street when I was about 12 years old. Yeah.
MB:	Didn't hit anything?
Sig Bernheimer:	Never hit anything.

Marriage and Work	
MB:	Well, that's good. Let's move on to when you met your wife and when you got married. Tell us about your wife.
Sig Bernheimer:	Let's see...we were in Chicago in [19]33 and worked this Evan's Fur Company for about three and a half years at that time. We worked together there. I had the storage end of the business and the retail part of it, and she was in the bookkeeping department. Left Chicago, went on to New York for those...years and we married September the 23 rd of [19]38. Let's see on [inaudible] Street there was a temple over there and we went after we were married, we went on a honeymoon to Winchester. I think we were gone about a week. I had this New York office for the Chicago firm, and we went back to New York. We found a place on 72 nd and Riverside Drive. I think the apartment was about \$49.50. Benny Goodman, the orchestra leader, he lived in that building.
MB:	Really? At the same time?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah. It was a one-bedroom apartment. But we were married down here in Alexandria, moved to New York, and after we were married...oh, before World War II, we came down...I was planning before that to open the first store, and with that, they grabbed me, so I never got the store open. The reason I never opened the store...up until that time, people that opened stores around and rented the property, you had, say a \$200 rent, \$300 rent...the realtors at that point, when I was planning on going into a store, you had to give them a planned figure for what you would do in the way of business. If you expected to save \$200,000 for the year, you had to give them a percentage of the increase over \$200,000. You were working for...you got a partner...the realtor's got his hand in your pocket. And I said, "not me," and I never got the store open.
MB:	Because you didn't want to have that.
Sig Bernheimer:	I went with Hecht's. I don't remember the years, about [19]50...after the War [World War II]...it was about [19]50 or...[19]45 was the end of the War...about [19]47. And I left them in [19]57. That was...I had the assistant in the career department and they promised me the department when the buyer did quit. When she quit, they didn't keep their promise to me, and I walked out. I was looking for a job and ran into someone that had worked for Hecht's. His brother-in-law was George's Radio and Television here in town. He had about 18 or 20

	<p>stores, Maryland, Virginia, D.C. And he took me, this man's brother-in-law, met him on the street... "I want you to come to work with us.". He took me over to his brother-in-law's place, the owner of this George's, and talked to him half an hour, and between the two of them, they gave me the Clarendon store. I went out there, and I had worked [inaudible] for a very short time, so I knew the plant's business. They gave me the store, I was there two days... you know in retail stores, they call it "bait and switch"... I hired myself in a bait and switch operation.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Oh, right.</p>
<p>Sig Bernheimer:</p>	<p>I didn't know until they called from the sales room, knocking a product that was advertised, then trying to sell them something else because it paid him more money. When I found out, I took him and the keys to the store, I went over to the office, and I gave 'em the keys and the salesman. I told 'em m I didn't know that it was going to be a switch operation. This person was with his brother-in-law, said, "Wait, wait, wait a minute". He said, "Hold it man... [inaudible] runs the store any way he wants." He gave me the Clarendon store, without bait and switch, and I ran it for... I was with them almost 30 years. I had the best store in the whole chain.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Good, that's great.</p>
<p>Sig Bernheimer:</p>	<p>The [inaudible name], those apartments, there were four men, that put up about \$5000 a piece. They took an option on that land. They borrowed \$8.5 million from federal, they put up the apartments, the buildings there. They were friends of mine. They didn't invite me in. Within two years, they paid off the \$8.5 million to the government and all of the property. One day the owner, one of the four that ran the place, called me, gave me an order over the telephone for \$40,000 worth of air conditioners. One did call the office, got the price for him and sent him down. I had a deal with the Pentagon, with the Navy Department, with the Marines. Oh, and appliances for the officers who would come into the area, he had to submit a bid, you know, on the product that they wanted. I submit it, and I got two or three of the [inaudible...]. But it was so damn much work, I didn't want it, went over to them, I said, I'll get you the fair prices in the city, but I'm not going to go through this every time you want something. So the three officers who were buying equipment, were officers coming into the area, every one of 'em wanted new appliances. It was [inaudible] so I ran that for almost 25 years.</p>

MB:	Now you said you met your wife in Chicago. Now, is she from Alexandria?
Sig Bernheimer:	She was Chicago.
MB:	She was from Chicago, but you got married down here?
Sig Bernheimer:	She did downstate in Chicago, uh, downstate in Illinois, but was working in Chicago. Her family was there. We dated for about...we married in [19]38, so we dated about two years.
MB:	While you were living in Chicago—
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah. And then we came on downstate New York and then back home. And worked for the appliance, George's Radio and Television, without bait and switch. I've run into more people here that bought appliances from me.
MB:	Really? Oh, I'm sure.
Sig Bernheimer:	[inaudible] In fact, Mrs. Dullaney, her mother—oh, the doctor died, he left everything to his wife...
Second Interviewer:	So, during World War II, did your wife go back to Chicago or did she stay?
Sig Bernheimer:	She stayed here.
Second Interviewer:	She stayed here with your family.
Sig Bernheimer:	She ran a printing and engraving business in Washington. Brother Norman worked there, I think was in out of school, just running the office and what not. When he quit, he sent her over there and there was a man that was managing the place...they had the riots in Washington, I think in about [19]67, this was 9 th and I Street and they damaged the building and everything. About a week later, the [inaudible] presses weighed 2,000 pounds to Rockville, and he went out and managed it. About a year after he took over, driving a car, he drove it into a railroad pile, killed himself in an automobile accident. And the wife took over as managing the office. She was there about 10 years, a little more than that, and we found unissued stock, so we bought the stock, and had controlling interest in the firm and she was president of it for almost 20 years. When she died, I had the stock, so I

	<p>went out as president, [19]95 to [19]97. Then I quit and sold it to the grandson of the original owner [inaudible]. His [inaudible] is still running it today. We had a beautiful operation there. We were the oldest engraving firm in Washington. We did stationery for about 10 senators, 40 representatives, and this was engraving. We did the stationary for the vice president of the United States. You name the department, we did the engraving on it.</p>
MB:	<p>So the reason the company had to move was directly as a result of the riots.</p>
Sig Bernheimer:	<p>Was the riots in Washington, right.</p>
MB:	<p>That's interesting. Were there a lot of businesses that moved as a result of that?</p>
Sig Bernheimer:	<p>Quite a few never opened again on 14th Street there and whatever. It was dangerous over there. Most of it in the first week. I think it was Martin Luther King's death that they rioted.</p>
MB:	<p>Do you remember anything else about that time? About the riots, where were you?</p>
Sig Bernheimer:	<p>No, here in Alexandria, some of the blacks were my best friends. They weren't blacks in those days, they were colored people. There were two barber shops on the 400 [?] block on King Street, the other at King and Fairfax Street. And Ms. Jackson had the one, Mr. [inaudible] had the other. There was a man who worked my father for 30 years. He was almost a master carpenter. They had furniture that needed repair, or whatever, this youth that took care of it. In fact, you know where Washington Street goes to the airport? At the end of Washington Street there used to be a Hot Shoppes. At that point, the street turned, you go left over to the Potomac Yard bridge. He had a farm, I don't remember the name of the street, one of the first streets out of Alexandria, from there down to the corner where Washington Street and this street were. He had a cow, and a horse, and chickens and all of that. He owned about, I would say, 15 or 20 acres there. His pay was probably about \$30 a week.</p>
MB:	<p>And what was his name?</p>
Sig Bernheimer:	<p>Luther Luckett. He was the only man that ever spanked me.</p>
MB:	<p>Oh really? And why did he do that?</p>

Sig Bernheimer:	Caught me riding on the back of a wagon [laughs].
MB:	How old were you?
Sig Bernheimer:	I was probably four or five years old.
MB:	And you hitched a ride on the back of the wagon?
Sig Bernheimer:	Brother Norman, one day out the front here, there was a pie truck going up the street. He ran out to stop it, stopped it, he had a cap pistol, "give me the pies, give me the pies". The truck hit him, knocked him from both sides. He was all right, they brought him in the house, and he was all right. But he never robbed, never held up, another pie truck.
MB:	[Laughing] I bet, with a cap gun. Well, it sounds like you guys were characters.
World War II	
Sig Bernheimer:	[Laughing] All three of us were in the military. Norman was in the Army for a year before Pearl Harbor, and December 5, he was out. A week after he was back in for four years. He was in Africa and Sicily, in Italy, with the Second Army. And brother Sam was hard of hearing, he was actually deaf. One of our aunts was deaf, so it was hereditary. But they took him anyway. He was in France, Belgium, and Germany. He was in the Battle of the Bulge. Sam is the one that if you get called...goes down to the torpedo plant. I mentioned my neighbor was the personnel director down there. He bugged me about three months after Pearl Harbor to come down and help out. And I was at Hecht's, said, "No, no, no." Finally, "Alright, I'll come and work for you." But Brother Sam said if you get called, if you have a hobby, radio and that type of thing, ask for a communications or cars, trucks, transportation, whatever. So I was at the torpedo plant, the draft board got my name and a letter came down [19]45. Now, we were 800 South Washington Street. And when they called me, I went to the draft board...three days later I was 1A, got [inaudible]. [Inaudible]...down at the torpedo plant, they had given me the shipping department. The building that's up now, you know the art building, that was shipping. Ships used to come in pick up the torpedoes. They took 'em down to -- I think it's the York River, Fredericksburg over to Maryland and would test them there. From there they'd take them up to the battles. They were angry with me because [inaudible] would have been there for the duration. But when I said that my hobby was yachting, I figured they would

	already have me moved and send me home. Anybody that ever had anything to do with the water. [inaudible] the Potomac River in rowboats. I swam across the river one day.
MB:	Yeah, you told us about that before.
Sig Bernheimer:	Twelve years old. One of the four didn't make it. The man wasn't long in the boat, so he just climbed in the boat.
MB:	And he rowed back on the boat.
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, and the three of us that did go to war, we climbed in the boat and rowed the boat back.
MB:	So, all three of, you and your two brothers, served in the military. But you weren't together at all during...
Sig Bernheimer:	No, one was Africa and Italy, the other France, Germany, and I was Pacific.
MB:	You were in the Pacific. You want to tell us a little bit about your experience, what year were you called to go?
Sig Bernheimer:	...In, I think, let's see, probably early [19]43. Because [inaudible] almost two and a half years. [19]43 to [19]45. They almost sent him home or sent me to jail. I was in the Army five days, Camp Lee, when I told them that my hobby was yachting. They were looking for anybody that had amphibious training...priority over Air Force, over anybody, over Navy, anybody that had water training was in this boat thing. So, down there, yachting put me in the amphibious brigades. They had brigades [inaudible], they were in the Army by itself. We had the MPs [military police], the troops, the mechanics, you name it, they were there. The camp they sent me up to, Cape Cod. James McCurry [?], Boston Irishman, took me up there. The second day I was in camp, five days in the Army, second day there, he threw his shirt at me, said, "Put this on. We're going to town." In the Army five days, I'm a tech sergeant. He took me into a bar and I had a [inaudible] and it scared the hell out of me. There was an MP in there that spotted me, guess I looked like I didn't belong...he was walking toward me make sure [inaudible], so I got away.
MB:	You got away without getting caught. You were talking about your war service. Have you been to the new World War II memorial?

Sig Bernheimer:	No, I haven't been. I'd have to get transportation from whoever. Oh, one of the rarest experiences I've had...Jewish...never had any anti-Semitism in my life. Let's see, finished basic training in Massachusetts, I came on down to Washington. The wife was working in the printing and engraving plant, the [inaudible] Company...they hadn't moved yet. There was a restaurant at 15 th and New York Avenue. I think it was. Restaurant about four doors down from the restaurant from the corner. I was early, as I went over to Washington, and went in for a bite, a sandwich, this was 3:30, 4:00 in the afternoon, two men, they asked me if they could sit at the table... "Go ahead and sit there." I'm there about five minutes, I hear, "Damn Jews, damn Jews, damn Jews." I listened to them about five minutes, that was all I could take. I put my hat back on, I stood up, got behind the two chairs, I got them by the back of the coat, and picked 'em up and put their heads together. They were both on the floor and my comment to them, "To think I might get killed fighting for you."
MB:	What year was it again?
Sig Bernheimer:	That was have been [19]43.
MB:	[19]43. Right before you...
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah. Right before we shipped out.
MB:	Yeah, that must have been interesting to encounter that at home before you go off.
Sig Bernheimer:	That was the only time I ever...never, never in the Army.
MB:	Or, while you were serving at all.
Sig Bernheimer:	Right...what was your question?
MB:	You were talking about your experience while you were in the service. And so you talked about your first five days. Why don't you continue on from there and tell us about where you served.
Sig Bernheimer:	My first five years...well, let's see, when I was about six years old, my father got me, I think it was a <i>Gazette</i> newspapers. And I went down to the torpedo plant, selling newspapers...there were six or seven kids there with newspapers, all of 'em bigger, older than I. And they pushed me aside, so my father came...I went and got my father, came back down, and he got rid of the papers for me. That was my

	first experience, my first job.
MB:	I'm sorry, when you were serving in the military.
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh, in the military. Well there, let's see. From Cape Cod, Edwards Air Force base out there, [inaudible] was an air field, the other was training the amphibious group. The group that had invaded Africa were there as trainees for us. And, I got friendly with one of the sergeants. He told me get into the first wave, [inaudible] and I decided we would never be heroes.
MB:	Who were they? Your friend...
Sig Bernheimer:	We'd rather be live [inaudible] than dead heroes.
MB:	What was your friend's name?
Sig Bernheimer:	James J. McCurry. He had a drinking problem. But he lived in Boston. We kept in touch for almost 10 years. But from Camp Edwards we went down to Florida. We were in the Everglades down there, boot training, right near the west coast, Gulf of Mexico. The landing craft, more experience there...and then December of...let's see, when did I go in? [19]43...December...I think it was earlier than that. August or September we shipped to Seattle, Washington. And a transport took us to Hawaii. They had about 1,000 sailors going that far, replacements for Navy, and everyone on the ship was sick, but me. Dunn [?] when he put us on ship, the bottom of the boat down on the keel, had climbed on the hammock, stayed there for three hours. I got used to the roll, the pitch. And after I went up on deck, never sick the whole two and half years I was on ships in the Pacific.
MB:	You were lucky.
Sig Bernheimer:	I got lucky. Another part, we made the invasions the night before. There was a tech sergeant, had five stripes, that I had the privilege with the chiefs on board ship. And the night before I would go down to the kitchen. I would make nine sandwiches, had a sandwich in every pocket, the pants, the shirt, the coat, everything. And on these six landings, I had nine sandwiches on every one, they never missed a meal.
MB:	Really? You were well prepared.
Sig Bernheimer:	When they had us in the mess halls in the Army, you had the canteen, you went down the line, took what you want. Everybody went back

	for seconds, some for thirds. When I went down, I took thirds, never had to go back the second time.
MB:	Now how long did you train before you saw action?
Sig Bernheimer:	<p>I would say six or seven months before. We went to Hawaii and there were two islands [?] off Hawaii, Bochinema [?] and Wetauk [?]...the Japanese had conquered those, so we took those back. We didn't, we took the troops down, got those two islands back. Then the Lady in Luzon in the Philippines.</p> <p>Oh, I ran into someone across the street, they had an open house about a month ago. The man's a rabbi down here at Belvoir. He was in the Philippines in 1941 when the Japs [Japanese] conquered. He was a prisoner of war for the four years there of World War II. He was on one ship that was sunk, he was in Japan as a prisoner, Korea as a prisoner for the Japanese. His daughter lives across the street there, and I met them. He was somebody that March the Japanese put the American soldiers in the Philippines. A lot of them died, but he survived and went on to Japan. The Americans fired at some of the ships that he was a prisoner of war on. He's lucky he came out of it.</p> <p>We went to Hawaii in the first operation, back to Hawaii, then the Philippines, and back to Hawaii, and then Okinawa we stayed out there, and Iwo Jima, we stayed there. We had to land in Japan. D-Day was September 1 of [19]45 and thank God they dropped the bomb, that was the end of the war. There were two bombs, the second bomb ended the war. We were about 200 miles from the atomic bomb when they dropped it.</p>
MB:	You were just out at sea.
Sig Bernheimer:	But we didn't get any of the fumes or the clouds. I lost a \$5 bet. We had a chat line going through, the guy behind us says, "They dropped a bomb on Japan, equivalent to 1,000 tons of TNT." "Crazy, there ain't no such thing." So we argued a little bit. "Bet you \$5." I lost the \$5. I heard it on the radio later. So I say a prayer for [President] Truman almost every day that the bomb ended the war.
MB:	And can you tell us about when you came home?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah. If I had stayed out there, instead I was master sergeant, six stripes, my admiral sergeant had enough points to go back. I had enough points too. I think 70 points you could pack your bag, leave when you heard the message. The master sergeant packed and left, and

	the colonel wouldn't turn me loose—"You stay until we go." When they went, they went to Japan. I didn't want to go, so I came home from Okinawa. I didn't see any action. Other than, we got rid of the troops and left. I claimed I may have killed one Japanese prisoner.
MB:	In the whole time.
Sig Bernheimer:	In Okinawa, we were sleeping on the ground there, the boats were still out there at sea going away. The boats stayed, we went and laid on the ground, sleeping. A moonlit night, something caught a flash, and I knew Japanese were in the caves, on the ground, whatever. I had a .45 on my heel, when I saw that flash of light, I fired a shot at that where I saw the flash of light. And you know, it had to be a rifle, just a [inaudible] that fast and I fired a shot where I saw it. And sure enough, the next morning there was a body out there. Now, if someone else killed him or...but I took the money he had on him, the letters he had on him. Still got some of them upstairs. That's all the action in World War II.
MB:	So, were your children already born when you were serving? Did you already have children before you served?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, the daughter. I hadn't seen her, that's the reason I came home. Other than that, if she had not been, I may have gone to Japan because I would have been a captain.
MB:	So was she born while you were away?
Sig Bernheimer:	She was born at Walter Reed. She was born after I deployed.
MB:	After you had left. So you had not seen her until you came back.
Sig Bernheimer:	My wife had an intuition I might not come back, and she wanted a child, so we went ahead with it.
MB:	Were you able to correspond very much with your wife while you were—
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, probably once a week or something like that. I feel sorry, not sorry for her, I feel sorry for my mother, she had three of us in. And all three came back.
Second Interviewer:	Did she have flags in the window to show that her sons were serving?

Sig Bernheimer:	Oh, no. The neighbor down here, the flag lady, she put those flags there on the step.
MB:	I guess they had the stars, the three stars, the panel. To say that there was someone in the household or in the family who was serving.
Sig Bernheimer:	We never put the stars.
MB:	You never had anything like that.
Sig Bernheimer:	No. Norman, the lawyer, he's got that plank on the front door.
MB:	Yeah, I saw that. Did he rent his business out of this house?
Sig Bernheimer:	He was on Royal Street. No, he had clients that came down here to pay rent. He owned about 8 or 10 houses. Oh, I told you they all left money down here...not more than 35 cents for a cup of coffee. All the money that [inaudible] left him has gone into a trust for the two children and two grandchildren.
MB:	Yeah, that's great. Well, speaking of children, tell us about your children. Your daughter was born while you were serving and you also have a son?
Children	
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah, the daughter worked, let's see, she was married here in 1970. She worked all the years up 'til [19]70. Oh, the husband was married to an heiress from California. She had an uncle out there who owned one of the railroads, one of the owners. There were two boys with that first marriage of the grandson...oh, daughter's husband, my son-in-law. He had two children in that marriage. And she died at the age 25. I don't think she'd been ill. Something that she had, died in her sleep. And then he married the daughter.
MB:	What's your daughter's name?
Sig Bernheimer:	Mother's name? Daughter, Carole with an "e" on the end. She married Don Hammond and they had the two children...[Discusses grandchildren.] My son works for Montgomery County, he's in personnel out there. He worked Fairfax County, worked City of Alexandria, and now he's been at Montgomery County about 12 years, 15 years.

MB:	And what's your son's name?
Sig Bernheimer:	Jon. J-O-N. My father was Jonah Bernheimer, and did he take a grilling, "Jonah swallowed the whale," this, that, and the other. And I was tempted to name him Jonah, but what Father went through, it's Jon. J-O-N. He's close to 50. The daughter is 60. He's 53 or 54, daughter's 60.
MB:	And you raised your children here in this house?
Sig Bernheimer:	800 South Washington.
MB:	Oh, South Washington, that's right. Your brothers were living here.
Sig Bernheimer:	We had an apartment in the corner block King Street. And they asked me to move, they were going to remodel the building and this, that, or the other. And I found out they weren't, they just wanted to get me out of there. With that, I got drafted, and we found the apartment 800 South Washington Street. He gave me about \$250 for moving. I'd already raised moving and I took his \$250. Lebbitz [?] was his name.
MB:	That's the person who was leasing the apartment?
Sig Bernheimer:	The apartment in the corner block King Street. We were 800 South and the kids were born while we were there.
MB:	How long did you stay at that address?
Sig Bernheimer:	'Til [19]64. The step-dad had a piece of property at 5 West Linden Street and I paid the taxes on it. Then I inherited that when he passed away. In fact, I owned five houses, they were his and mother's estates. I got rid of all of them. The two brothers...I was married, had kids in school, college. I paid for the remodeling that went in here. They tore all the walls out. The walls were cement and mohair. That's how they stayed together. There were cracks and the ceilings were falling and this, that, and the other. In fact, upstairs the ceiling fell. They say if I'd been in bed, it'd have killed me. About a 7-foot circle, had a brown rim around it. My brother talked about having it taken care of and he never did. Outside here there's a boat car with a trailer pulling a boat up the street. There was a car waiting to park so we had where the alley across the street. He had to swing wide to come by. The boat went off the platform...two police cars, two tow trucks, about 100 people watching that. I saw the people, went out and looked at it for five minutes, ten minutes, and came back in. The loudest noise like

	thunder I had ever heard in this house. I turned in about 11:00, when I went upstairs, this 7-foot patch of ceiling dropped 9 or 10 foot, hit the bed, the pillow, where my head would just have been.
MB:	What year was that?
Sig Bernheimer:	It was...let's see, I came up here in [19]95...late [19]95 or early [19]96.
MB:	So you've only recently been....
Sig Bernheimer:	One died in [19]99, the other died in 2000. And then I brought this man in. He was here two years. Other jobs with it, he had people working.
MB:	Well, it looks like they did a good job.
Sig Bernheimer:	You know Gabriel Higgins? He lives down near where I used to live. He [inaudible] on Royal Street. Brother Norman, they were real close. Gabriel's from Czechoslovakia. They took all the plaster out, which was cement and mohair, and put a regular plaster. You name it, they took care of it. Before he did this, there used to be a kitchen in back of the yard...[inaudible]...that's in the yard.
MB:	So the kitchen was actually separate. All the way up until just recently?
Sig Bernheimer:	Just the other side of the wall. No that would have been—we married in 1935, about 1937, 1938, 1939. The living room, this was the Sunday dining room, that was the everyday dining room, and kitchen outside that.
MB:	And when was the kitchen moved into the house?
Sig Bernheimer:	That would ...well, when they tore the kitchen down, they made the kitchen dinette thing that's there now. So, that would have been about 1938, [19]39, [19]40, somewhere in there.
MB:	So when you were a boy it was outside?
Sig Bernheimer:	Yes, correct.
MB:	In a separate building.
Sig Bernheimer:	That dining room used to be a stair that came down from upstairs.

	When I was four or five years old, I used to sneak out with a penny to go up to the store that was at the end of the alley, get a candy bar or something.
MB:	What schools did your children go to here in Alexandria?
Sig Bernheimer:	Jon went to American University for—
MB:	I mean, I'm sorry, grade school and high school.
Sig Bernheimer:	Oh, grade school. Well the same ones that I did. I had the first three years at Washington Street. There was a Ms. Woodward and she had a sister named Ms. Prock. One was the principal and the other, well, Ms. Wood, had the first floor, and Ms. Prock had the second floor.
MB:	This was when you were in school.
Sig Bernheimer:	Right, I had the first three years there. The fourth year was on Prince Street in the 10 hundred block there. That was Lee School. That was the first year that the, oh no, Jefferson School was the first year where we had the...boys went to the Washington Street School; girls went to the Prince Street School. At Jefferson School, which was the fifth grade—fifth, sixth, and seventh—on the 200, 300 block of West Street. Then it was co-ed at that point. And then the old Alexandria High School, they tore down. You know where the swimming pool is on Cameron Street? Back toward West Street, the big tall terraces? That was the four-year high school.
MB:	And your children went to the same high school, Alexandria High School?
Sig Bernheimer:	No, they would have gone to GW [George Washington]. Fort Hunt first, and then GW High School. I'm trying to remember some of their school names, that type of thing...[Discusses their college educations.]
MB:	Well, tell us what it was like raising your children here in Alexandria. What was it like raising a family here? ...When you were raising them, when they were children.
Sig Bernheimer:	Yeah. No, they enjoyed...the daughter, we had a picture of she and one of my jump boots at 800 South Washington Street. We had never jumped, we took basic training up at New England, Cape Cod, down in Perryville, Florida, West Coast. They sent us down to, in Florida, sent us up to Georgia, I'm trying to remember the name of the camp...the big one. They trained paratroops. We took basic training

	<p>there, but we did not jump. I wear a size 12 shoe. When I went in the Army, they gave me a 13 GI shoe down at Camp Lee. When we finished with the amphibious crowd, they gave me a 14 for basic training there in Georgia, Fort Benning, Georgia. They gave me jump boots. We had the best dressed people in the Army. The Army had wool overcoats, they gave us a gabardine jacket, we had jump boots, we had a breast pocket patch, we had “hanker and machine gun” on one shoulder, “U.S. Army” on the other. We were different than anything else in the Army. We were Army amphibious. So, Carole, when she was a baby, we had my boot down there, she put her in the boot, took a picture.</p>
MB:	<p>Oh, she put her completely into a big boot! Were your children involved in a lot of activities, do you remember, like sports?</p>
Sig Bernheimer:	<p>No. Jon had rheumatic fever as a youngster, so he was confined and whatever. Now the daughter, Carole, she enjoyed growing up. One night, she was going to stay at her girlfriend’s house overnight, and she called me the next morning and during the conversation didn’t sound right—“I’ll call you back.” And she hung up, but I knew where she were. With that, I took her car away from her. She was going to GW High School. We were on 11th Street, probably a half a mile over to the school. I caught her in the story. I took her car away for a week. The week I gave her the car back, “You drive to school and you come back home.” She came back with 10 miles on the car. I said, “What happened!?” She said, “Daddy, I couldn’t find a parking place.”</p>
MB:	<p>[Laughing] Did you buy that? That’s a good one, I’ll have to remember it. —Are there any major world events over, you know, while you’ve been alive, that you remember where you were, that you’d like to talk about?</p>
<p>World Events</p>	
Sig Bernheimer:	<p>[Franklin] Roosevelt, when he died, I was at the Royal Restaurant having a sandwich when the news came over, that Roosevelt had passed away. A couple of the others—</p>
MB:	<p>What about President Kennedy’s assassination?</p>
Sig Bernheimer:	<p>Kennedy,...I was very close to Kennedy. I don’t know whether I ever told you, I had contacts with over six presidents of the United States. Roosevelt—Mrs. Roosevelt’s secretary—lived down here on Prince Street. The car picked her up every day, took her to work, brought her</p>

home. If I wanted to get a message to FDR, I told my neighbor, she would tell the secretary, the secretary would tell Roosevelt.

When Truman was president, his crowd that was overseas with him during World War I, came to the Washington, they were Kansas City. And this General Warren—he wasn't a general, we called him a general—came to Warfield's drug store, at King and Fairfax Street there, and he'd tell us stories of Truman and he growing up together and the crowd at the White House. So that was my contact with Truman.

When Kennedy was president, Jackie Kennedy's husband...let's see, no, the wife, worked for Mary Gallagher, she lives in Belle Haven. Mary Gallagher, [inaudible] Gallagher, have you ever heard the name? He's famous in Alexandria. But if I wanted to get in touch with Kennedy, I told [inaudible] Gallagher, he told his wife, his wife would tell Kennedy's wife, and I had contact with Kennedy. When, I think, when he was president, we were 800, 8426 Stable [?] Drive, down on Fort Hunt Road, there was a major [in the] Air Force that was with the President, while he contacted...I'm trying to remember the person's name...he was the President's physician while he was campaigning for a whole year. When the man was elected president, went to the White House, they brought an admiral in as his physician, and the major went back to his unit.

I had a flight with Jimmy Doolittle, another one of the neighbors down there. At Bolling Air Force Base, some of the people went over, and he was putting some luggage on the airplane, so we took off flew down through Quantico and back.

Oh, I met General Stillwell during the war...at Okinawa, the ducks, the amp trucks—the amphibious trucks, not the bullets—they had each put them under the water, loaded them up, and they'd go take the materials off the ship, take it to shore. The major was trying to, tonnage, for the amount coming in, but they lost about 15 or 20 ducks that night in stormy weather. General Stillwell fired this major down to a private for risking men's lives and this, that, and the other.

There were two other presidents where I had contacts with the White House. Oh, Bush, had contact with his father, the neighbor that lived around the corner worked at the White House. No, this is President Bush. This guy's flown to Texas two or three times while Bush was down there with, whatever he was doing. But he's, I think, the one responsible for getting me some of these cards.

MB:	Well, that's great. Well, this has been very interesting to talk to you and I think we're almost out of tape. Just want to thank you again for sharing your memories with us. I appreciate it.
Sig Bernheimer:	Thank you for inviting me and coming down. Can I fix you all something to drink? [End]