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Interviewer: Marianne Brokaw, Class of 2019 (MB)
Narrator: Elmer "Juney" Morris, Class of 1950 (EM)
March 28, 2019, In Person

MB: This is an oral history interview for the University of Mary Washington's Special Collections and University Archives. The interviewer is Marianne Brokaw, Class of 2019, and the narrator is Mr. Elmer Morris, Jr., known as "Juney", Class of 1950. We are at the Jepson Alumni Center in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and today's date is March 28, 2019. Mr. Morris—could you just give me your full name?

EM: Elmer Rudolph Morris, Jr.

MB: Your date of birth?

EM: 2/12/24.

MB: 2/12/1924. Where were you born?

EM: Edge Hill in King George County. At home.

MB: You were born at home! Good, that was going to be one of my questions I was going to get started with. Excellent. So, could you tell us a little bit about your childhood?

EM: I moved to King George Court House when I was three years old. And I live there to this day. Still in the same [neighborhood] from within 100 yards of where I grew up. Went to high school—King George High School and graduated from there in 1941. You want all this? (laughs)

MB: I do. We want to hear about this – we do.

EM: And graduated from high school in 1941 and went to [The College of] William & Mary for a year and a half until the war started.

MB: Okay.

EM: Then I joined the Navy, and I was in the Medical Corps. I was a pharmacist mate. I went to Newport, Rhode Island for a short time. Then I went aboard ship and went to the South Pacific and was there for a little over two years. I went through several sea battles and the invasion of Leyte Gulf where [Douglas] MacArthur went back to and told the people of the Philippines, "I have returned". Then we went to Lingayen Gulf and the northern Philippines for another invasion. Then we helped liberate Corregidor. Then we went to Okinawa for the final battle of the Pacific and World War II. My ship was hit by two suicide planes when we were on radar picket duty, and we had the largest amount of casualties of any destroyer that didn't sink. We were in the Little Beaver Squadron which was Arleigh Burke's—he was the—who later became the Naval official [Secretary of the Navy] in Washington [DC]. After the war, I came to Mary Washington [College]. I got a letter from Mary Washington; I have brought these things along. (Shuffling of papers).

MB: Here, I'll help you.

EM: Lisa Chinn—did an article on —. Here was my letter of acceptance to—.

MB: To the College?

EM: To the College.

MB: Excellent.

EM: And this is—this is not the picture. Yes, I guess this is the picture that you have there.

MB: We do have—we have this picture at the University. We do, yes.

EM: This is quite a bit of the story. These are the girl vet—there were girl veterans too—and this is the whole group. I don't think you have that picture.

MB: I don't have it with me, no Mr. Morris, but we do have that at the University.

EM: And there are the girls that went to the first party that I took Marcy to.

MB: Is Mrs. Morris [Marceline "Marcy" Weatherly Morris, Class of '50] —is she in this picture?

EM: Yes.

MB: Where is she at?

EM: This is her right here.

MB: That's her right there? She was a beautiful lady.

EM: Oh, she was—she was.

MB: And that's a picture of you, and the veterans on the steps, correct?

EM: Yes. This is Bob Combs.

MB: Okay

EM: President Combs' son.

MB: That's right, he was a veteran also.

EM: He was a veteran. He was a very good friend of mine. We played tennis together and partied together a little bit (laughs).

MB: A little bit 1950s style? Right?

EM: 1947 style.

MB: Got it.

EM: We had a really good time. Most of our talks have been about Marcy. She was a majorette.

MB: But today I want to talk about you. I want to talk about you today. Can I ask you some more questions?

EM: Yes indeed.

MB: Because you've given me quite a bit already, but I do want to ask a little bit—.

EM: That's about it.

MB: Pardon me?

EM: I'm giving you about all I know.

MB: I bet you know a little bit more. I want to ask a little bit more about your time in the Navy if that's okay.

EM: All right.

MB: Is that okay?

EM: Um-hm.

MB: So, you were at William & Mary. What were you studying when you were there? Before the war?

EM: Business.

MB: You were a business major. Did you enlist in the Navy or were you drafted?

EM: Enlisted.

MB: You did enlist. You voluntarily enlisted. So did you go to Rhode Island for your training? Or did you train somewhere else?

EM: I went to Bainbridge.

MB: Okay

EM: Bainbridge—It's up near Baltimore.

MB: And then from there you went to Rhode Island?

EM: Rhode Island.

MB: And then you departed to the Pacific?

EM: Yeah.

MB: And then you were on the USS Baine [USS Braine DD-630]?

EM: Braine

MB: And there's your hat.

EM: DD-630.

MB: DD-630

EM: Arleigh Burke's, like I told you, the Little Beaver Squadron.

MB: Little Beaver? Got it.

EM: Famous, very famous squadron.

MB: And you guys, you were in the South Pacific then? Two years or almost two years?

EM: Almost two years.

MB: Almost two years. Okay. I did do a little research on your time in the South Pacific. Your destroyer was struck by [a] kamikaze pilot?

EM: Twice. Two of them.

MB: I'm assuming many casualties on your destroyer.

EM: I guess we had, I think it was, seventy-eight killed and nearly about half of us injured. I was wounded and got the Navy and Marine Corps medal [the Purple Heart medal].

MB: I saw that, is that in –?

EM: That's in this book.

MB: It's in this one.

EM: I'm going to leave this, give this to you. This has got pictures of it.

MB: Oh is this specifically about that particular – there we go, there you are.

EM: I didn't write this book, it was written by [Paul Conway].

MB: Oh, so this is specifically about the USS Braine? Okay, got it.

EM: History of the USS Braine.

MB: Okay, excellent.

EM: I brought this to leave with you.

MB: Thank you. We will put it with our collection— with your history at the University. So when you left then the Navy, were you discharged because of your injuries or just because of the end of the war?

EM: No, no, just the war. The war was ending.

MB: The war ended, and you came home.

EM: I was home. We were home on leave when the war ended. When they dropped the bombs. They dropped—I guess the one on my way home on the train the first time. We'd come back to Boston for repairs.

MB: Sure.

EM: All the way to Boston. The ship had [unintelligible]. It was built in Bath, Maine. Bahth, I think, is the way they say it. We had come all the way back to Boston for repairs. In fact, we were in dry dock—where they take the ships out of the water—that's where they worked on them.

MB And that's when they dropped the atomic bombs?

EM: That's when they dropped them. Yeah.

MB Did the USS Braine ever go back into commission then?

EM: Yes, yes it went back into commission. It was in the Korean War.

MB: Okay,

EM: In the end, they gave it to—after about, I think it tells you in here, twenty years or so—they gave it to the Argentina Navy, and they used it for several years. Then they used it for target practice and sank it.

MB: Interesting.

EM: It tells you all about it here.

MB: That's very interesting, interesting. So after the war, you came back. Were your plans to come to Mary Washington College? Or was it to go back to William & Mary?

EM: No. I was planning on going back to William & Mary. And I came up here to take a few courses and get myself together.

MB: Sure.

EM: And I met Marcy, and we went to the Veterans Day Party and we were together from then on.

MB: And that was that?

EM: That was that.

MB: There was no sense in going to William & Mary, was there?

EM: No. No sense at all. After we were married, we went back to King George and [have] been there ever since. [I taught seventh grade in King George one year and was a Chevrolet dealer for forty-seven years. Served on the School Board 1952-1972 and on the founding board of King George State Bank from June, 1974 through the merger with Union Bank & Trust in 1999; Chairman of the Board of Directors for twenty-four years and then on the Advisory Board through 2016].

MB: So when you were here at Mary Washington College, as it was known then, what did you study? Did you study business?

EM: [Got my] business [degree].

MB: You did study business. Mrs. Parsons and I were discussing yesterday, how was the academics then for you as a male student, because the College had been geared towards an all-female class or student base. So how was it for you as a man?

EM: It was good.

MB (Laughs) Oh really?

EM: (Laughs) I was very fortunate. I had both Dr. Dodds: Dr. Mrs. Dodd and Dr. Mr. Dodd and they were wonderful to us. In fact, everybody was. Everybody was just, just great, and Dr. Shankle. I think they're all gone by now, because that was—we've been married sixty-eight years. And still love to come back here.

MB: That's good.

EM: Wonderful, wonderful place.

MB Good. Now, when you were in your classes, and I experience this now as a student, so I'm going to assume that you did. Were there times when you were the only male student in a class?

EM: No, I don't think so.

MB: No?

EM: Not until probably the last year.

MB: And then maybe you were the only man?

EM: I don't think I was ever the only man.

MB: Really?

EM: There were, I think, about forty of us – male students.

MB: Interesting.

EM: When I graduated, there were two of us in the graduating class.

MB: Two.

EM: Two of us. Both of us were from King George. Most of them—the boys, after two years would transfer away to a school that had more students—male students.

MB: Got it. Like a more diverse school. Like maybe to UVA, or back down to maybe, William and Mary [or] Richmond [University of Richmond].

EM: Blacksburg [Virginia Tech], W&L [Washington and Lee University] — I had friends that went to all. They left and went to all of those.

MB: So obviously, because it was an all-women's school, you didn't live on campus. Where did you live? [First place Betty Lewis Dorm at Sunken Road gate, then—].

EM: I lived right outside of the—the what used to be the back gate [Double-Drive gate], right on College Avenue. The first house, you go out and turn left. The first house there, I had an apartment upstairs. I could walk to the classes. It was a great experience.

MB: Good. Have the buildings changed a lot?

EM: Not a whole lot. It's been quite a few additions. George Washington was the same and of course, they tore Chandler down—that's where we met. Virginia is the same. That's where Marcy lived most of the two years—where Mrs. Bushnell's headquarters were. Mrs. Bushnell

was really good to the veterans. She was—she kind of took us over. Everybody was scared to death of her, but the veterans didn't have to be.

MB: Didn't have to be. That's good. Obviously, Monroe Hall was there.

EM: Yeah.

MB: Monroe was there. Where did you have most of your classes at?

EM: I had a lot of them—at Chandler. They had classes at Chandler, had English and geography and history at Chandler and several [classes] in George Washington. I had. That's where I had Mrs. Dodd and most of them there.

MB: Most of them there. So other than meeting Mrs. Morris here, what's another very special memory that you have of the University?

EM: I don't know. It used to be fun. We used to be able to ride through the—you know the driveway you came in at the bottom gate and went out the other gate. You just drove through.

MB: You just drove through. And that was the fun—?

EM: Always was fun. We'd load up in the car, and I had a convertible at the time. We'd get a bunch in and ride through, and wave to everybody. We had a basketball team that I was on.

MB: Oh!

EM: We played in the gym, which was—where was that? Where was the gym then? It was the basement of somewhere [Monroe Hall].

MB: Okay.

EM: I don't think I have any pictures of that in there. I might have.

MB: In your photo album maybe?

EM: I got a lot of pictures of Marcy in here (laughs).

MB: I was going to say look at all those pictures.

EM: That's when she was May Queen.

MB: Yeah.

EM: There's Mrs. Bushnell.

MB: She does look like a force to be reckoned with, doesn't she?

EM: Oh, she was a force.

MB: Was she?

EM: She was something else.

MB: She keep you in line?

EM: Yes.

MB: Now is that you and Mrs. Morris?

EM: Um-hm. Here's us in the snow.

MB: In the convertible.

EM: Um-hm. In the winter with the top down!

MB: With the top down.

(Both laugh).

EM: Well it must have been put in there for—that's your picture.

MB: So what years did you play on the basketball team?

EM: I guess we just had—we had it two years. Oh, I have a picture of that in there.

MB: Oh, there it is. There you are.

EM: I was number four.

MB: That was you? Number four?

EM: Um-hm.

MB: Number four. Oh look. Where is that at Mr. Morris?

EM: That was in King George. It's a place, a filling station that I owned. There's a friend of mine, he's dead. Everybody's dead now but me. That was when we graduated. And Mrs. Dodd—

MB: Oh, that's Mrs. Dr. Dodd?

EM: Um-hm.

MB: Now what did she teach here?

EM: This is when they named it Dodd Auditorium. She was a psychiatrist, sociology.

MB: Got it. Mrs. Morris told me that you have a grandson that attends here [UMW] or did?

EM: Yeah, he graduated about over five years ago I guess. Been to New York and he's just come back to a [Greenbelt, Maryland] the Hubble Space, Hubble Camp—what is it? [Also a great-grandson who graduates in May 2020].

MB: The telescope?

EM: The telescope.

MB: There you go, yeah.

EM: He works up in Maryland now. He's only been up there two weeks. It's somewhere up in Maryland, and there's 10,000 people there that work there. I thought it would be two or three hundred when he—.

MB: 10,000.

EM: We're glad he's coming back. He and his wife both graduated from here.

MB: Okay.

EM: She's still going to stay in New York to finish her contract. Now she's working from home.

MB: You keep a good binder full of Mary Washington information.

EM: I got about three books like this.

MB: Oh wow.

EM: Then there's Hurley. Oh, this is probably the article that Lisa Chinn did. You know Lisa?

MB: I don't know her, but I have read the article. That was a good article.

EM: Oh, she did a wonderful job. Get this and look at it again.

MB: It is good to go back through old pictures, isn't it? Oh look, here's some. So is that the filling station that you owned?

EM: Yeah.

MB: How long did you own that?

EM: I still own it.

MB: Oh, you still own it?

EM: You say you've seen this one?

MB: I haven't seen this one. I saw the other one about—I've seen this one. That article I have seen. I've not seen this one. That one's from 1982. I'll have to look that one up.

EM: There we are—that's the Diamond Horseshoe. Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe and this is the Stork Club in New York. We were—out seeing the city of New York that day.

MB: That's good. Have you and Mrs. Morris travelled? Did you travel a lot?

EM: Yes, we've travelled a lot. We've been to New York several times, Switzerland, Germany, England, Australia, and Hawaii several times.

MB: Did you like traveling?

EM: Um-hm.

MB: Like it a lot?

EM: We've been on nineteen cruises. We wanted to get one more in.

MB: Where are you going to go?

EM: I don't know. We don't think we're going to make it.

MB: Oh, come on.

EM: I'm ninety-five—so one more.

MB: One more. You do one more. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your time at Mary Washington?

EM: Only that it has been great.

MB: I think that everybody who knows you would have to agree that that is the truth. That you think that it was great.

EM: Really, really, really great. Couldn't have been better.

MB: That's good to hear. So I'm assuming you would recommend it to everybody?

EM: I wish that all of our—we got, I forgot how many. I think it's twelve great-grandkids. We wish they'd all come here, but they're probably—they're not. But there have been—my mother came here.

MB: Really?

EM: She was, when it was a Normal—the school for teachers. She was here in 1918.

MB: Okay.

EM: I have to think of this, after all these years. Cathy and Paul came here [grandson and his wife, graduated in '10 and '11]. Our daughter came here for a short time [summer class]; she graduated from James Madison [James Madison University]. Our son didn't come here; he graduated from Chapel Hill, North Carolina [University of North Carolina] and law school at William & Mary – at Marshall-Wythe Law School. We got, I think, one of our great-grandchildren that's going to [visit] Williamsburg this week. He's going to come here [visit] too also, to look. But, I think he'll probably end up at Virginia [University of Virginia]. [Our great-grandson, Lucas, graduates from UMW next May '20.]

MB: What does he want to study? Do you know?

EM: I don't know what he wants to study.

MB: Because that may be what makes the decision?

EM: And we also have our grand-daughter graduated from Virginia. And also, she went to George Washington [George Washington University] for a Masters and then she went back to—got a law degree at Virginia. And she said when they called her, for some reason they say, they don't take their undergraduates for law school. I don't know whether that's true or not. But she said, "Are you sure?" She's got a big, big job in Washington now.

MB: That's good. You have some intelligent offspring Mr. Morris. Smart kids.

EM: Yeah, they are. Smart kids. Both of our children were valedictorians—our son and our daughter. I was on the School Board at that time and somebody said, "You've got smart kids," and I said, "No, I've got smart teachers."

(Both laugh)

MB: I think, it's maybe a combination. Maybe good parenting, smart kids, and good teachers, right? A combination. Is there anything you'd like to add about your time in the Navy, about World War II, that might be helpful or that you want to share?

EM: No, just that it was very bad when we were hit. Lost a lot of, lot of, lot of good friends.

MB: I'm sure.

EM: It's hard to get over. The destroyer is not a very big ship.

MB: No.

EM: And when that many, I think it was seventy-eight, never was really truly— because some of them never were found. They were thrown overboard. But I think there were seventy-eight killed. I think the book tells you.

MB: Exactly

EM: That was written by a yeoman who was on it [the destroyer]. He's dead.

MB: They had some interviews in here from some of the sailors on-board.

EM: A lot of those interviews were from people who helped us after we were hit. They came along, helped put our fires out, and we had to be towed down to Kerama Retto, which was an island south of Japan. We were towed into that, and we buried a lot of our people at sea. A lot of them never were—never accounted for. But that's about it.

MB: That's about it. That's more than the younger generation will ever see in their lifetime, Mr. Morris. Fortunately.

EM: Yeah the ships now—we had five big guns on ours, and the destroyers now are four or five times as big. And they are not rounded. They are squared off. They say they have more fire power than the battleships had at that time. They shoot these rockets. And the big ships—they are funny looking boats. They don't even look like boats anymore.

MB: And I would say the construction's different.

EM: Almost look like cruises—cruise ships.

MB: Just the construction?

EM: Uh-huh.

MB: Well I do have one more question, and if you don't feel comfortable answering it, it's fine. But you had mentioned that on your way back to the States for the repairs on the USS Braine that they had dropped the bombing—or dropped the bombs, excuse me, the atomic bombs. How did you feel about that or how do you feel now, in retrospect, about the atomic bombs? Is it something you're willing to comment on or not at all?

EM: No, I thought it was a bad thing to wipe out all those people. Of course, it saved probably many, many thousands of American and Japanese lives that would have been killed if we had invaded. But these were people that—it was bad. They dropped the first one, we were on the train they announced it and I guess [the second was] about a week later. I don't know. I was home celebrating. They dropped the second one, and they surrendered. That was a horrible, horrible thing.

MB: War is not a good—nobody wins.

EM: Nobody wins. Right. Absolutely right.

MB: All right.

EM: This—this has got pictures, pictures in it of—the first one hit right here.

MB: Okay.

EM: There were—there were four people in the Medical Corps and the doctor was killed and my chief was badly wounded and the apprentice, hospital apprentice they called it—he was wounded. And I was the only one left on that wasn't transferred off. Only one that came back to the States with it.

MB: How many men were typically assigned?

EM: 300.

MB: So out of 300, you lost almost 30 percent?

EM: Almost half of them, yeah.

MB: Wow.

EM: I have a tape where I got—got this medal. I should have brought that to you. I considered bringing it to you, but I didn't. It's a CD. I have a tape of when I got the medal at Dahlgren—fifty years—fifty-five years later.

MB: Later. Now which one was that?

EM: That was this one.

MB: That's that one. Is that the Navy Marine Corps Commendation one? Or is that? That is?

EM: I got the Navy [Medal with Valor] —.

MB: The Navy Marine Corps Commendation one [Medal with Valor].

EM: And what do I got—.

MB: I don't know, that's it.

EM: That's it, Navy Commendation. I got the Purple Heart too, but I got that one right away.

MB: You got that one right away, but it was another fifty, fifty plus years before you got the Navy Marine Corps Commendation one. Got it.

EM: Yes.

MB: Well Mr. Morris, thank you so much for your time. I think we'll probably end there, and we can meet up with Mrs. Morris and Carolyn as soon as they're done.

EM: Alrighty.

MB: But I really appreciate it. Hopefully, we got everything we need.

[end of interview]