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Interview with Arthur Bruce Boenau, June 9, 2005

Description

Arthur Bruce Boenau was interviewed on June 9, 2005 by Michael Birkner about his life and time as a professor of Political Science at Gettysburg College. He discusses his childhood, his experiences during World War II and the Korean War in the Counterintelligence Corps, and finally his memories of the faculty, administrators, and students at Gettysburg.

Length of Interview: 94 minutes

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Disciplines

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This is June 9, 2005, I'm Michael Birkner. I'm in the fourth floor study room of Musselman Library with Professor A. Bruce Boenau, a longtime faculty member in the Department of Political Science. This interview follows on several other interviews that have been conducted by students at Gettysburg College. And we're going to fill in some gaps that have been left from those interviews.

Birkner: Bruce, I wanted to start by taking note of your early life because I think of you in two contexts. One is a cosmopolitan person interested in things that one finds in cities, particularly concert halls and museums. I also think of you as a long time faculty member at Gettysburg College. And as one traces your origins, apparently one has to go back to the wilds of Wyoming in 1926. Why don't you set things up a little bit for me as to why you would have been born in Wyoming in 1926?

Boenau: Thank you. My father's first job out of college as a chemistry major was in an oil refinery in Casper, Wyoming. And he sent for the woman who was to become my mother. They married in Casper and I was born the next year, 1926. My father remained and my next youngest sister was born out there as well in 1928. The family returned to New York in 1929. Both of my parents came from Brooklyn, New York. They had family there and it was quite natural for them to

want to return. My father got a job with the Standard Oil Company Research Laboratory in Brooklyn. He worked there throughout his entire career. He was a research chemist. The family settled in Queens, New York, and I attended New York City or should say Queens public schools. My father had gone to Amherst College. When I came of high school age he started talking about the virtues of Amherst. It never occurred to me to apply anywhere else. So I did go there beginning in February of 1944.

Birkner: I'm going to stop you here, we're going to back up a little bit. I want to establish that your family moved back to New York in 1929. You probably don't have memories per se about Wyoming.

Boenau: I have zero memories of Wyoming. I wish I knew more about it but I don't know anything about Wyoming.

Birkner: OK. And so your first memories are of Queens, New York?

Boenau: Yes.

Birkner: Tell me a little bit about Queens. I'm sure that Queens was much more suburban as opposed to urban when you were growing up here, than it would be today. So tell me about that.

Boenau: I lived in the more developed area of Queens called Long Island City. And the particular neighborhood I grew up

in was called Sunnyside. And so it was totally built up, with apartment houses and duplex houses on the streets. You had mentioned my interest in museums and traveling, etc. One of the wonderful things about growing up in New York was that I was able to get into Manhattan very often. But also, the school would take us on various trips in New York, and so it was through school trips that I was first exposed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art. That was a remarkable thing for a young person to experience. Even though I didn't understand very much of it at the time, it was a meaningful experience for me and in later years I continued to develop my interest in museums. Beyond that, this was the era of big bands and swing music. As a young person I studied the saxophone and clarinet, and I worshiped at the performances that were held in Manhattan in the big theatres. Names like Glenn Miller, Harry James and Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey and the like were all well-known to me. In high school, I took part in a dance band which ultimately I headed. We used to play at dances which was why my wife, my later wife, excuses my poor dancing by saying, "he was always on the wrong side of the bandstand."

Birkner: You anticipated one of my questions. I was going to ask you about the things that interested you as a young man growing up. Just curious, was Manhattan once part of

your world? I mean in Queens were you also a baseball fan? Did you follow the Giants and the Dodgers and the Yankees or did you have a particular preference when you were a kid?

Boenau: I had a preference. I have for a long, long time rooted for more than one team, and usually a team in each of the major leagues. And so, I rooted for the New York Yankees, but my parents of course were great Brooklyn Dodgers fans and so I rooted for them as well. Conflict came in later years when the Dodgers and Yankees had to play each other and I had to choose mentally which one I would root for. Of course ultimately the Dodgers moved out to Los Angeles.

Birkner: Among ball players, did you have a particular favorite son?

Boenau: I was much taken by Lou Gehrig. Of course when he came down with ALS at the end of his playing career, it was a great tragedy. I think all of us who had followed him and respected him and admired him highly, were saddened by that disease that took him out of his playing career and ultimately ended his life. Yeah, he was fine.

Birkner: Did you play ball yourself?

Boenau: I enjoyed playing as an amateur, you know the sand lot baseball. My biggest problem was that my eyesight was so poor that I had difficulty judging where fly balls were

going. I was usually relegated to play right field where not many balls would be hit. If they came my way I had to judge by the height of where the thing was going. But I've never been at good that. In school I played things like stickball and softball and I enjoyed that very much.

Birkner: Now you were growing up at a time of real wealth of newspapers in New York. I'm curious what papers did your household get and what papers did you grow up reading?

Boenau: The New York Herald Tribune was the paper that our family subscribed to. We had one delivered every day. As a young person, first of all, my father would read it every day. He would come home from work and he would sit with the newspaper and spend most of the evening reading it. I did see it, as well. But as a younger person I can't say that I read it with any regularity. I was aware as a younger person of the gathering conflict in Europe and it was quite worrisome. I can recall things that were happening back in 1930s and around 1940s. All of that was terribly, terribly worrisome. My father had fought in World War I and had been gassed in the trenches in France. He carried with him a cough that afflicted him throughout his life. So the possibility of war in Europe that might involve the United States at some point was something that did occur to me. And yet when Pearl Harbor came, I remember having been at a

Sunday School meeting, it was Sunday evening when word came through that Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese. Like so many young people at the time, we asked "Where is Pearl Harbor?" And we realized shortly that we would be in the war.

Birkner: You said as a young teenager perhaps you were aware of the gathering storm in the world. You weren't reading the Herald Tribune, so where were you getting your information? Were you getting it from the radio or were you reading it in a magazine here and there? Do you recall how you were following it?

Boenau: We would listen to the radio news. These were radio days and we would get the news that way. But as a young teenager, I can't say I paid close attention to it. I was aware that trouble was brewing.

Birkner: Were there any issues in your neighborhood about the war particularly that people were concerned about it or advocating a particular position?

Boenau: We had a neighbor and this goes back to German American matters. My great grandparents came to this country in 1853, my great grandfather. And strangely enough the name was then, as it is spelled now, Boenau. But somewhere along the way they changed the pronunciation so that it sounded more French. My only theory on that is that

around the time of World War I it was not particularly popular to be of German background. And I've gone through life trying to explain my name to people. Every day I have to spell my name and I have to pronounce it and people will ask the origin of it. But at any case, we were aware of other people of Germanic background in our neighborhood. And we had a next door neighbor who was a member of what was called "The Bund." And I think this was worrisome to my parents. They didn't want anything to do with "The Bund," anything that emphasized anything in connection with Germany, even through heritage. I think my parents wanted to make it clear that we were Americans loyal to this country and had no lingering loyalty to Germany. So I could say as a younger person I was aware of this kind of tension that existed. But the neighborhood was diverse. There were people with all kinds of national backgrounds, ethnic of course, but not racial.

Birkner: It was a white area.

Boenau: Yeah, it was a white area.

Birkner: Let me ask you before we go into the World War II period. What kind of reading did you do as a boy? And did you have particular likes and dislikes? A lot of kids for example might have been reading *The Hardy Boys* or *Tom Swift* or things like that or maybe more serious works. How do you

categorize yourself as a reader of books when you were growing up?

Boenau: I was an avid reader. As a very young person, I loved reading. I loved libraries. And I used to enjoy the novels of Nordhoff and Hall for example.

Birkner: *Mutiny on the Bounty* would be an example of that?

Boenau: Yeah, that's right. And Robert Lewis Stevenson. And I used to read pulp magazines.

Birkner: The kind of things that Bernarr Macfadden was putting out, true crime, detective things like that?

Boenau: Not that. They were more adventure.

Birkner: More adventure stuff?

Boenau: Yeah, as a young kid. And these are magazines you would buy for maybe ten cents.

Birkner: Did you ever have a particular special book or a book that influenced you particularly growing up at any point?

Boenau: There's an author by the name of Wylie, I've forgotten his first name. He was kind of a muckraker.

Birner: Philip Wylie perhaps?

Boenau: Philip Wylie.

Birkner: The man who wrote *Generation of Vipers*?

Boenau: That's exactly the book. Now that book *Generation of Vipers* was something that really caused me to do a lot of thinking. It worried my mother terribly.

Birkner: It was an attack on motherhood, wasn't it?

Boenau: I think it claimed that mothers were swallowing their kids or something like that. *Generation of Vipers* was a notable book I read as a younger person, as a teenager. I think it wasn't until I got to college that I got to a new era in which there was a broader exchange of ideas and exposure to more serious things.

Birkner: Back to family life. Your father was employed with a major company as a research chemist during your growing up years. You probably did not feel the stringencies of the depression from your family as somebody else might have. Is that a fair statement?

Boenau: You're exactly right. It is an absolutely fair statement. He was never unemployed. We never lacked for food or money. We were not wealthy but we never lacked for anything. I think we lived simply, and I can recall that when people would come to our door and ask for food or money, my mother would always give things to people. If they offered to work and do a task, she would have them do a task, I can recall that. But we ourselves did not suffer during the depression.

Birkner: Well, I was thinking of this too in the context that your father was a Amherst graduate and you mentioned earlier in our conversation that when the time was appropriate for you to go to college, Amherst was in the conversation, right?

Boenau: Oh, yes.

Birkner: Was it assumed that A) you would go to college and B) that if you went to college, you would go to Amherst, or were there other issues involved?

Boenau: Both were what we assumed. We assumed I would go to college and I would go to Amherst.

Birkner: And of course the war was on when you were going to college. Tell me when you graduated from high school it would have been around 1944, you would have been subject to the draft. But in those days you could get a bye for a while as I did during the Viet Nam era. I had a free ride in terms of selective service until I got out of college. And in those days you only got the free ride through high school and then you had to be subject to the draft. In a previous interview, you've been asked about this and if my understanding is correct, you failed the eye exam, is that right?

Boenau: Yes. I was seventeen when I graduated from high school, so I was not yet required to be in the draft. I

began college in February 1944, since I had been in an accelerated program in high school. I didn't turn eighteen until May of 1944, and sometime after that I took the physical exam for the draft and I failed the eye exam. At that time Amherst had an accelerated program and the enrollment was very small. Amherst College had B12 people on campus which filled up the campus with military training programs. But there was also a small male contingent of civilians going to college. It was an accelerated program which meant that I could get four semesters of work done inside a little more than a year. So by spring of 1945, I finished my sophomore year. Well I must tell you that even though I was ineligible for the draft, I wanted to do something. And World War II was an occasion when if you were a 4F people would look at you as if you were a slacker. But that's not what drove me, I honestly wanted to do something in the war effort. The options would have been the Merchant Marine, and I was not attracted to going to sea, or else joining the American Field Service which is what I did. The American Field Service accepted volunteer ambulance drivers for service with the British Army. I was sent overseas in the spring of 1945, sometime around V-E Day, but I don't remember the exact date. At that time it was considered likely that the Japanese would continue

fighting indefinitely. And so we were sent to India. It was thought that there would be a battle to retake Malaya, so we were being marshaled in India to get ready for that later campaign which never occurred. V-J Day came and after that I was sent home. Basically what I had was a very interesting first time abroad. It was an amazing experience, and particularly so in India.

Birkner: The poverty in India must have been very shocking to you?

Boenau: It was shocking to me. I would see people begging, see people with disease, people sleeping in streets. There were lots of people everywhere. I came back from all of that with a sense that the world was a very serious place. And I had already learned something about it. I had at Amherst before that time been interested in languages. I'd taken French and German and had thought of pursuing those either one of those as a major. But when I came back I thought that the world was too serious, I'm going to study something else, like economics, which was a disaster. I returned to Amherst in February of 1946 and I did well in courses that dealt with economic theory, the history of economic thought. But something like money and banking did not engage my interest and I didn't think I could do well in that. It was not until my junior and senior years that I

began to take courses in political science. And that just absolutely fascinated me.

Birkner: Let me talk a little bit about the Amherst experience. I consider everything one experiences as in some way formative. First off, when you think of Amherst, it clearly not a normal situation. And in war time many of the male students are away, so many of the male faculty are away. Just describe the situation that you found at Amherst when you went there and also clarify something for me. I am under the impression you arrived at Amherst in February of 1944, which was not a normal time to arrive on a college campus. So tell me a little bit about that.

Boenau: Well, fraternities had been suspended during World War II at Amherst. And so the incoming students like me were housed in fraternity houses. There was a mix of people of somewhat different ages. All of them, I think, had a physical affliction or some condition that made them ineligible for military service. So it was an unusual group in that sense. I don't mean to suggest that they were all cripples or anything like that, but you couldn't always tell by looking somebody what the problem was. It might have been eyesight, it might have been something else. You were quite right that there were faculty who were gone for the duration of the war. So it was a smaller faculty body. The

selection of courses was more limited. But in my first two years at Amherst anyway, I had to take a number of required courses and there was no problem getting those. The social life was rather limited since there were no fraternities, you see. And I should say that there were no huge sporting events.

Birkner: No standard football or basketball?

Boenau: So we had house parties for example. And they were generally fairly mild.

Birkner: Were there fraternities in operation? You said that fraternities were opened to people like you coming in? So were fraternities actually still recruiting members during the war or had they suspended that as well?

Boenau: No, all of that was suspended so that while we lived in the fraternity houses, we were not members of any fraternities.

Birkner: Did you meet any life long friends while you were there?

Boenau: I had a friend from high school who came to Amherst after I'd started there. And he and I had been long time friends. He later became my best man when I married.

Birkner: What was his name?

Boenau: Harry Siderys. He became a physician and a surgeon in Indianapolis. I haven't seen him for many years.

Birkner: What about teachers. Did you have any teachers who were particularly influential for you?

Boenau: I'd say that one of the most influential courses I had and teachers was a freshman composition course which was not an entirely pleasant experience for me, but which I regard as probably the most important course I had. It caused me to review my entire vocabulary and of course along with that my method of thinking. I became aware that I couldn't get by by saying that something was good. I had to say something more than that to describe whatever I was talking about. That was very important to me in the larger sense that I needed to go back over something I had written and edit it and revise it. And it would be better for going through all of that. That was very important to me to do.

Birkner: Do you remember the name of the instructor of that class?

Boenau: It was Craig. I've forgotten his first name. And he would write caustic comments in the margin of any themes that we would write, you know.

Birkner: He obviously had a good impact on you?

Boenau: He had a good impact on me. I needed that. It was shocking, but I needed that and have been better for it ever since. In my more mature years, now that I use computers, I realize how easy it is to revise.

Birkner: It wasn't that easy then.

Boenau: Not so easy then. And as we go back over these years, I'm struck by the changes technology has brought to us all. I think of my teaching years when we were trying to do things like giving exams to students and had to write them down on ditto sheets. You would get purple all over your fingers. Typing we had to do ourselves, and a lot of things with carbon paper. We didn't have photocopy machines, and we didn't have electric typewriters in those days. Now-a-days we have computers and photocopying machines.

Birkner: Time saving opportunities now are tremendous.

Boenau: And when you think of research. We use to laboriously copy things from books by hand, you see.

Birkner: I still do that, to a great degree. I use my computer when I do research. But last night I was up reading a book and writing my notes by hand on these yellow pads. But it doesn't change overnight for everybody. I'm still perhaps too old fashioned. Well, now, on one of your tours of duty at Amherst you met the woman who would become your wife. Which time? Did you meet her the first time around or when you came back from the war?

Boenau: When I came back. I met her in the fall of 1947. And she was a junior at Smith College, nine miles away in Northampton.

Birkner: How did Amherst boys get together with Smith girls?

Boenau: Well, there were fraternity parties at that point. And interestingly enough you know these are the years immediately after World War II when you had to train veterans. There was a wide, wider age span of people, some people in their mid twenties ranging down to the newest people coming just out of high school who might have been seventeen or eighteen. But this was a no-nonsense bunch, hard working students in those post war years. They would party hard on weekends, really party hard. There was substantial drinking, for example and I was part of that. I can't deny that. But I met my wife, Lois, at one of those parties. She was, at that point, dating a fraternity brother of mine. And ultimately the problem for me was how to disentangle her from the other fraternity brother?

Birner: So you noticed her and had taken a shine to her but you knew she would pass at that point?

Boenau: Yeah.

Birkner: How did that work itself out?

Boenau: Well, one day this friend of mine, this fraternity brother and I went downtown for some beer. And we sat with a pitcher of beer between us and we talked about it. And I indicated my very serious interest in Lois. He indicated his willingness to step out of the picture, all very gentlemanly. And we've remained friends ever since. In fact I've seen him at reunions over the years.

Birkner: I assume he married someone else?

Boenau: He married somebody else, yeah.

Birkner: Now, what was Lois's maiden name?

Boenau: Her name was Hooke.

Birkner: And what year did she graduate from Smith?

Boenau: '48.

Birkner: '48. She entered Smith toward the end of the war and did her four years at Smith.

Boenau: Yes. September of '44 until June of 1948.

Birkner: And you dated in '47?

Boenau: Yes. We married in 1949.

Birkner: Which of course made your last term at Amherst more fun, right?

Boenau: Oh, yes.

Birkner: In those days there was a greater tendency for people to marry young, than is the case today. Did your intentions get serious pretty fast and so "this is the right

person for me and so as soon as I can get out of college I'm going to get married," or was that not what was going on?

Boenau: It was serious. And when I first got out of college, and because it was serious, I thought I had better get a job. And so I worked for TWA for a time in the reservations department. And I can't say that I made a lot of money but somewhere along the line I decided what I really wanted: I was much more interested in education. And so I decided that I wanted to go to graduate school. To prepare for that I took a political science course down at NYU, an evening course. And then I enrolled at Columbia University in the Spring of 1949.

Birkner: You enrolled in Spring of 1949 at Columbia?

Boenau: Yes.

Birkner: Were you enrolled as a full time or part time student?

Boenau: Full time.

Birkner: Why don't you just say a word about the process of getting into Columbia. Today to get into a school like Columbia, you have to jump through a lot of hoops. As a person who had been out in the world and you had gone to a first class college, did you have to jump through as many hoops to get into Columbia or did you simply present

yourself to the Political Science Department there to get in? How did that work?

Boenau: It worked for me. There was a school of general studies. It may still exist at Columbia. So I started out there. I didn't have to register with the Political Science Department or be readmitted by them. But somewhere along the line I was admitted as a candidate for the masters degree and ultimately for the doctorate.

Birkner: So you were enrolled by '49 as a regular student in political science going for a master's degree, at least.

Boenau: They called it The School of Public Law and Government.

Birkner: And who are the shining lights at that point at Columbia?

Boenau: Well, William T. R. Fox, who was a brilliant man in international relations, and Nathaniel Peffer, who was interested in East Asian politics. And others, I don't remember all of the names.

Birkner: You were already convinced that you wanted in some way to learn more of this dangerous and complicated world? So I take it that you were gravitating even by '49 toward international affairs studies?

Boenau: Yes. I was thinking of the possibility of an academic career. Now, mind you, very soon thereafter the

Korean War broke out in the summer of 1950. And, once again, I had to go to the draft board. But I strongly thought that there was not a chance the draft board would be interested in me, because my eyesight had not improved. I was wrong. And when I took the eye exam I spoke to the eye doctor at the time. I said "Well Doc, did I fail?" And he said to me with a laugh "You can be blind in one eye and they'll still take you." So I went into service at the age of twenty-six and married. I went into infantry basic training, leaping over tall fences and crawling under barbed wire etc. But at the end of basic training, I was selected for the Counterintelligence Corps.

Birkner: Did you have to take some standardized test for that or how did you get in?

Boenau: I don't recall that. I may have, but I don't remember.

Birkner: You were in the Counterintelligence Corps?

Boenau: CIC. Yes I was. And so the Counterintelligence Corp sent me to a language school at Fort Holabird in Maryland. That was very much like a college campus, and I quite enjoyed that. I was then put in a German language course. I have to admit that while other people were being sent to Korea and facing bullets and worse, I was sent to Germany for a very cushy occupation duty. The occupation

technically existed from 1945 until 1955 and by the time I got to Germany in 1953, it was quite clear that the army was just a lingering presence there. There was no attempt to infringe upon the autonomous sovereignty of the West German Government as it was called, after 1948.

Birkner: You could be sort of an anthropologist as much as a soldier, couldn't you, while you were in Germany by taking a look at the mores of the culture, both inside the military and the general society?

Boenau: Well, I finished the year there in Germany and I took a discharge. And as a civilian I continued with CIC as an intelligence analyst and remained for another two and half years.

Birkner: Did Lois come over?

Boenau: She did. She came over in 1954.

Birkner: What was she doing in your absence in the military?

Boenau: She was working as a social worker in Newark, New Jersey. She graduated from Smith as a sociology major, and her first job out of college was as a case worker for the New Jersey State Board of Child Welfare. She was going to people's homes and even as a young person in her twenties was offering all kinds of advice which she now recognizes was a brash thing for a young person to do with families in

Newark. But she did that for several years. And our first child, a daughter, was born in 1953. So to answer your question, "what was she doing?" She was raising a young child.

Birkner: I was curious about that. But there you are in your mid-twenties in Germany. So, it had to have been a stretch for her to do whatever she needed to get done without having her husband around.

Boenau: Yeah. And then she came over to Europe. Our son was born in Germany in '55. All told I was in Germany for three and half years there.

Birkner: That has to have been a formative influence on you.

Boenau: Europe was, of course, living under the possibility of a Soviet threat in those years. NATO was joined in 1955. Even after the Korean War was over the lingering suspicion that the North Koreans had invaded South Korea as a kind of stalking horse for the Soviets. In those days people saw huge lines of red going from Europe all the way across the Asian continent. Some people in this country thought that North Korea wouldn't have dared invade South Korea without permission from the Soviet Union. In Europe there was some tension. There was a question as to whether East Germany could be a similar stalking horse for the Soviets. In West

Germany, where I was stationed, there was always the thought that something could happen.

Birkner: Where were you stationed?

Boenau: In Stuttgart, in southwest Germany.

Birkner: You were not at the trip-wire line?

Boenau: No, far from it, far from it. And so what I have to say is that for me it was an absolutely fascinating experience. My intelligence work was in writing reports, reading reports, writing reports, meanwhile living quite peacefully with my family and being able to travel. You mentioned Western Europe. So my interest in Europe, travel, museums, music, all that was very strongly influenced.

Birkner: You were influenced by those things?

Boenau: Yes, very much so.

Birkner: How good was your German?

Boenau: It was pretty good. I could understand well. I could read well. I had more trouble when I was forming my own and sometimes too complex sentences. I could cope quite well.

Birkner: Did Lois have the opportunity to learn some German while she was over there or did she rely on you?

Boenau: Mostly would rely on me. But she did learn a little bit of German. For example, at one point we were living in a German home. We were renting a couple of rooms.

And she would go shopping to get food. She likes to tell the story of going to a butcher shop one day and trying to get some chopped meat. She was going to make hamburgers. And her language failed her at this point. She just didn't know what to say to describe chop meat. So she found herself acting out what chop meat was, like playing charades. The butcher just stood there and wondered what in the world this crazy American woman wanted from him.

Birkner: So she told you about it when she got home. Let me ask you this. I'm just curious and it may not be much, but we had fought bitterly against the Germans and we of course were appalled by the holocaust. And yet by the time you got over to Germany, they were our friends and allies against the Russians. Did you ever think about that at all while you were a young man in Germany? The irony of history or the changes of history?

Boenau: Very much so. I certainly did think about it and from a very personal standpoint, I resented the thought that I or somebody else with a Germanic background could in any way be tarred by what other Germans had done. I was a little sensitive when people would generalize about Germans: The Germans were all this or all that, you know. I certainly was repulsed by the terrible things that were done during the Nazi era, not just by Nazis and not just by

military people, but by ordinary people as well. I was absolutely shocked at the treatment of Jewish people and dissidents during the Nazi regimen. I became fascinated by studying German at that point. And of course when I came back to Columbia University after my military service, I wanted to do a dissertation related to it and so I chose to study the formation of the new German armed forces, the Bundeswehr, which was being created while I was over there. What fascinated me had to do with the legacy of militarism in Germany and the problems of establishing civilian control over the military. And so I did study that. I came to realize, of course, that civilian control was no accident there.

Birkner: You know that there were a good number of high level German generals who despised Hitler and who only reluctantly acceded to his orders. Others may have been more enthusiastic about it, but certainly there was no one opinion by German commanders. My guess is that there would not have been a war, certainly not as fast as there was, if Hitler were not driving it. Here you have civilian control on the German military. Hitler's pushing the generals to commit acts of war. So that will factor into your discussion and thoughts.

Boenau: Absolutely. Absolutely, yes.

Birkner: Because Germany was trying very hard to become a quote "Normal nation" in the 1950s, right?

Boenau: That's right.

Birkner: You had to deal with that issue. Did you do interviews when you were doing your research or did that come later, or how does that work?

Boenau: Well, my research was done in this country, so there were no interviews as such. Having been in Germany for several years I came to be fascinated by the history of Germany and I chose the dissertation topic "*Civilian Control of the Military by the West German Government, 1949-1957.*" I was interested in what was happening in the West German Parliament. It placed restrictions on the new military and, of course, one thing established early was a personnel selection committee which examined the background of candidates for the high ranking officer positions. Anyone who had a close association with the Nazi regime or its military affiliations (the SS or the SA) was ruled out or looked at it very, very carefully. That was one of the things the Parliament insisted on. It also insisted on establishing an office called The Parliamentary Defense Commissioner who would be like an ombudsman and who would be responsible to the Parliament. He would have the responsibility of the oversight in what was happening in the

Bundeswehr. There was a new era of soldiers' rights and responsibilities. This referred back to the Nuremberg Trials when some people tried to evade punishment by saying, "We were only following orders." And it now became established that that was not a sufficient justification. If one received an order that is patently criminal, one was obligated to disobey. That is the important point to be made. So there were things like that that interested me greatly as the Parliament sought to establish a new context for armed forces to minimize possible misuse of the armed force. It would not be possible for the military to be a state within the state where it could, in effect, dominate the civilians. I enjoyed reading parliamentary debates and following the acts that were put into effect. That was for my dissertation.

Birkner: Did you complete your course work at Columbia after you came back from military service or had you already completed your course work?

Boenau: I had completed my first work before going into the army and I was at an awkward point where I'd had my oral examinations and had to choose a dissertation topic but I had not yet done that. And so the draft board breathed heavily on my neck in 1952 and I was then drafted into the Army. When I came back after my military service and

civilian work in Germany as well, I returned in the Fall and began to work on a doctoral topic which was then approved.

Birkner: Who was your adviser?

Boenau: That was kind of odd, it was William T.R. Fox. But he felt that he was not totally knowledgeable about that field and so we noted later on to turn me over to someone else which ultimately did happen.

Birkner: You mean somebody else that was there?

Boenau: Yes, it was Otto Kirchh^eimer.

Birkner: Was he a particularly strong influence on you?

Boenau: Well he was a strong influence in the sense that he did not agree with the basic strategy I was following in the outline. I had come up with something that was about 650 pages long. And he felt that the dissertation was too long for one thing. And he insisted that I cut out 150 pages. And then I also sharpened the focus which was a good idea. But this, of course, lengthened the whole process of completing the dissertation.

Birkner: You were on the job market before you finished your dissertation, very typical of that era when there was a growing higher education establishment that needed teachers. Tell me a little bit about when you started thinking about

"I need to get a full time job" and how Gettysburg College came into the picture.

Boenau: Yes. When I returned from Germany with my wife and my two small children, we lived for a time with my wife's family in Montclair, New Jersey. And it was very good of them to put up with us, which certainly extended their household considerably. But, it was clear to me that we couldn't remain there forever. And I felt a need to support them. So even though I had not by any means completed the dissertation, I wanted to get on to the job market. I wrote over a hundred letters. And my wife and I took a look at the map and we drew a circle around Montclair and New York where our two families were. And we tried to figure a distance that would be a reasonable traveling distance if we had to get back to our families and we certainly wanted to. So Gettysburg fell within that circle. I had not known anything about Gettysburg at that time. Now it turns out that in 1957 the Political Science Department was established as a new or autonomous department under Chet Jarvis, housed in the White House on campus. And I wrote to Gettysburg. I didn't know Chet Jarvis at all and got an expression of interest and came down for an interview. I was invited for an interview in the Spring of '57. And the

interview went well, I thought, and I was happy accepting the job.

Birkner: Who was your contact person, Chet Jarvis?

Boenau: Yes.

Birkner: So you had to pass muster with him. Did you have to pass muster with anybody else in Political Science or just him?

Boenau: Just him, because at that point it was going to be a three-person department and so Chet was hiring me and one other person. His name was Joseph Hampton. And that's how we started. And we continued for a couple of years. It was a three-person department, gradually expanded to four.

Birkner: Let's talk a little bit about first impressions. First of all, I'm assuming you had a private session with General Paul.

Boenau: Yes, yes. My interview with General Paul. General Willard Stewart Paul. I guess he became a General on the staff of Dwight Eisenhower. A high speed little man, full of energy. When I went for my interview, it was in an office in Glatfelter Hall on the first floor. And I felt as if I was entering the office of my regimental commander. That military experience, even as a civilian, that whole military environment was still fresh enough in my mind. I thought that I was entering my regimental commander's office

with the American flag behind. I may be imagining things, but I think he had a toy cannon on his desk. His first words to me were terrifying because he grasped my hand firmly, looked me in the eye and said, "This is a Christian College."

Birkner: That was the first thing he said to you?

Boenau: First thing he said to me "This is a Christian College." And I felt the floor had opened up and I was swallowed up immediately. I came from a Unitarian background, me and my wife. And in those days the Unitarians were not yet joined with the Universalists as they are today. That happened in 1961. Today we talk about the Unitarian-Universalists. At that time they were the Unitarians. And even Dean Seymour Dunn who was also at my interview said, "Some people think Unitarians are not Christian." I had to point out to him that the Unitarians historically had derived from a Christian position. I somehow got through that interview, but I felt very uncomfortable. I wondered if you know this is a Lutheran College, how am I, a person who believes in freedom of religious belief and tolerance, how am I going to fit in? Will I be accepted or will I be forced to accept something or conform to something that I cannot believe? Well, it turned out that the influence was a lot lighter than I

thought it might be. Those were days that still required chapel for students. And there was some thought that faculty should be attending required chapel as well. Mid morning we'd go over to the chapel and take part.

Birkner: Had you attended chapel at Amherst?

Boenau: No.

Birkner: That was not an aspect of Amherst either during or after the war. But at Gettysburg, as a faculty member you did go to the chapel?

Boenau: Yes.

Birkner: What went on in the chapel?

Boenau: Well, I would see students with their notebooks doing other things in the chapel. There was not 100% attention to what was being said.

Birkner: Who was usually holding the floor?

Boenau: Well Pastor Ed Korte was there when I first came to Gettysburg. And he did not impress me as did later successors. I'm impressed by John Vannorsdall and Karl Mattson. I liked them enormously. They both struck me as far more liberal and also interested in social policies. That jibed with my own political interests in later years. Ed Korte was I'm sure a very sincere man of religious belief. His was a conservative position that was not mine. I respected him but his views were not mine. So he left

after a year or so when I first came to Gettysburg, and I don't know any more about him.

Birkner: I think that he was not a favorite of General Paul, but I don't know the specifics. Did General Paul ask you anything about your own religious beliefs? You mentioned the comment that he had made about perhaps not being Christian but he didn't ask "Do you believe in Jesus" or anything of that nature?

Boenau: No, nothing like that.

Birkner: He was just trying to size you up, right?

Boenau: I think that's right, I think that's right.

Birkner: And you were not turned off enough that you went back to your wife "Lois, I don't think I can teach at this college."

Boenau: No. All other aspects looked very favorable to me. I liked the notion of coming up to a new department and having a hand in what we changed and what was to be done in that department.

Birkner: What did you make of Chet Jarvis?

Boenau: Well, a genial, friendly person. Of course I couldn't judge much by meeting him for the first time, but in personal respects, quite amicable and welcoming and goodhearted. I couldn't judge him as a political scientist nor did I try to at that interview in the early stage. But

it might also be said and admitted that I needed the job. I had a wife and two children. And here was a chance to come into a full time teaching position. And other openings I had been looking at were more filling-in types of positions. There was a position at Trinity, that would have been for one semester. Then there was a position out in Missoula, Montana, and I decided that I didn't want to go to Missoula, Montana. I wanted to be within that radius of Montclair and New York City to go back to see family. So the position at Gettysburg was quite attractive to me.

Birkner: How much did they offer you to come here?

Boenau: It was a small amount. It might have been \$4,000. It might have been less, I don't remember. And one has to realize, anyone who heard this tape now and thinking in terms of what that money would be today it would be of a different currency system.

Birkner: When you arranged to make the transition to Gettysburg, did you rent property in Gettysburg before you would buy a house or did you buy a house immediately?

Boenau: We first rented in Arendtsville and we lived in the home of a high school teacher who was on sabbatical leave for the year. His name was Allison. And it was quite pleasant out there in Arendtsville. Also living there at that time was Lou Hammann. So Lou and I would very often

come to campus together in one car to save on gas. I also enjoyed his company and I hope he enjoyed mine. I recall one winter day a bitter snowstorm as Lou and I started to make our way down the Mummasburg road. As we went along, the road sealed behind us, the road sealed in front of us and we literally came to a stop by a farm house along the way, not even mid way. We took refuge with the farm family there and I called Lois and explained what happened. Later the roads were cleared and we were able to get out, but we didn't get to campus that day.

Birkner: That's a nice story. So you came to Gettysburg. Obviously the faculty as a whole much smaller. What did you notice as a first year faculty member about Gettysburg College? What kind of things stuck out to you and remained in your head about the nature of the campus or the people who are here?

Boenau: First all, you're quite right when you say that this was a time of expansion when the college was growing in the early 1960s. Prior to that time, it was possible to know quite a number of the students in the course of the four years but that began a change during the 1960s. There was an expansion of the student body and an expansion of the faculty. I was in a group of younger faculty, people like

Ted Baskerville and Jack Locher and a number of other people.

Birkner: Jim Pickering and Bob Barnes.

Boenau: Jim Pickering was here, Bob Barnes, but they had not been here for long. So it was all a bunch of newer people. People very much respected and liked. There was a lot of socializing among younger faculty and I guess one difference between then and now is that people lived here and near Gettysburg. And there were no cases of people commuting from Washington or Baltimore or Harrisburg and anywhere else. So it was a close-knit faculty and that applied to campus affairs and social life. In those days, it was quite common for the faculty to go to football games, for example. And I would go regularly to football games. Those were days when Gettysburg had some powerhouse football teams. And fraternities were very strong. They would have an annual float parade and spent a great deal of time creating the floats for the competition. It was very important who would be the Homecoming queen and so there was a lot of focus on that at the college. Fraternities played a strong role on campus.

Birkner: Were you expected to be chaperone for fraternity events?

Boenau: Yes. Lois and I both went to fraternity dances, for example as chaperones. And we typically would be put in back of the room somewhere or somewhere else in the house with the housemother. These were days of housemothers. But I well remember one occasion that still has me laughing. It was incredibly funny. I might be sitting here and the dancing would be within a few feet from me. I can well recall a situation where there were some women in front of me over here. Their backs are turned to me. And so I had this picture of swaying bottoms in front of my eyes as far as I could see in the small room. I nearly burst out laughing on the spot and it is still in my memory. But I do recall chaperoning.

Birkner: I can think of better ways I might want to spend my Saturday nights than chaperoning. Were you the only faculty couple that would be at a particular place or did they have several faculty couples and you would talk to each other?

Boenau: I think typically we were the only ones at a particular fraternity party.

Birkner: And was this the junior faculty that got tabbed to do this?

Boenau: Yes.

Birkner: Tell me about your colleague Joseph Hampton and tell me about Chet Jarvis and how you got along in the department.

Boenau: Hampton was a brilliant man, a political theorist, very philosophical. He had spent some time in France and was very much interested in western thought. He decided to move on after a couple of years and took a position at the University of Michigan. I liked him very much and we were good friends. In a small department and there was a lot of departmental entertaining. We would be invited out to the Jarvis's house out near Seven Stars. They lived in an old stone house off the road behind a place that now has adult films.

Birkner: Where is Seven Stars?

Boenau: That's west of Gettysburg.

Birkner: Is it as far as Fairfield or between here and Fairfield?

Boenau: Near Fairfield, between here and Fairfield. It's on the road to Chambersburg. You go west of Gettysburg a few miles and there's a place called Seven Stars.

Birkner: You said there was an adult film place there?

Boenau: Yeah. But they had a lovely old stone house on a dirt road off Route 30. And they would entertain us very, very nicely usually around Christmas for example. And Peg

Jarvis was a strong woman, a former nurse. She very much managed Chet and was dominant in the family. She used to refer to me and any other younger colleagues in those years as Chet's boys. And that rankled with me. I didn't want to consider myself a boy, I wanted to consider myself as a colleague. I don't know that I have much to add about the social life.

Birkner: Obviously one of the issues that you got involved with very early on was the CC program. You taught CC right and you did some writing for it as well. Why don't you just say something about how that worked?

Boenau: Yes. When I was brought to Gettysburg College part of the understanding was that I would teach Contemporary Civilization. And I got involved in it at a time that was absolutely fascinating. It was an education in itself. I came to believe that it was a valuable experience for incoming students, particularly the good students. And so I did it for a dozen years. I very much enjoyed Norm Richardson, who headed the program. He was also a graduate of Amherst College, so we had that in common. But I admired other people in the program like Bob Bloom, for example. And the staff would meet once a week, usually have dinner together and they would then discuss what was happening in

the course. So there was a lot of interchange of ideas and talk about teaching.

Birkner: In fact I think in some ways it was an ideal way of teaching, having the opportunity to have dialogue with people who were concerned about the same things you are and then you do a better job with your students. When I talk to faculty members like yourself who went through this and everybody has the similar response to it that it was a wonderful stimulating experience. I like to think it was a post graduate program for our faculty. I'm wondering whether the students got as much out of it. What was your sense of the students' engagement with the course? Let's grant that it was a great intellectual experience for you as a faculty member. I've heard that testimony elsewhere. What do you think the students were getting out of it?

Boenau: I think it was a mixed picture. A mixed experience for students. I came to understand that over time that people we called students are first of all human beings and often immature human beings when they come to a college. And that they have things going on within their lives. They have problems. They have social involvements. People fall in love, people fall out of love. And they have problems at home. There are all of these things in combination. When I, as an instructor, would stand before a

class and look out at all the faces and think of them simply as students, I was misunderstanding something. They're not just empty vessels waiting to have something poured into them. I had somehow to engage them. And I was continually challenged throughout my career and I don't think I was totally successful. I can recall one graduation when I stood next to Basil Crapster in the faculty procession heading for the chapel. And Basil muttered something about "One more failure of liberal education" jokingly. But in a sense it's also well to mention that whatever we did wasn't perfect and we all had to hope that something worked out, that some interest we awakened might somehow rekindle in their future years. I have to say that I had some wonderful people that I got to know over the years. You are one of them. And I liked Bob Finkelstein very much.

Birkner: When I told him I was coming over here to interview you he asked me to say hello to you.

Boenau: But over the years I've known some wonderful people. Fred Fielding was a student in one of my classes, early on. I can't say I had a major impact on him, but I got a nice letter from him when I retired. It surprised me no end.

Birkner: Well, teachers never know who they will influence. And what I'm discovering is that it's not necessarily what

you think influences these people about you. The other experience at the college was your experience as part of the faculty at large. So tell me a little bit about your impressions at faculty meetings. Who were the leaders of the faculty and then on another track, perhaps, who you feel most comfortable in interacting with in the faculty?

Boenau: People in the Political Science Department played an active role in faculty meetings. And I was simply in there, one of several. But I served on major committees, for example The Academic Policy Committee. I was three times on the Committee on Committees. I once was chairman. I was three times on The Academic Policy and Program Committee for a total of nine years. And so in that capacity I often had to appear before the faculty and argue for something. Whether it might be the satisfactory, unsatisfactory grade marking. Whether it had to do with a special major. Whether it had to do with academic purposes of the institution. I was on the first January Term Committee and that was fascinating, absolutely fascinating.

Birkner: Now what you've done is you've taken my question and moved it in a different direction. You surprised me by talking especially about your own participation in the life of the college. But I'm asking you when you went to faculty meetings or just in your general interactions with other

faculty members, who were the people whose words carried more weight? And if you and Lois were socializing who were you more likely to socialize with?

Boenau: I think that in the faculty the people whose word carried the most weight were people like Charlie Glatfelter, Dick Mara, Jim Pickering. Those names first spring to mind.

Birkner: For any particular reason?

Boenau: They were very incisive thinkers and well-informed about academic life and situation at Gettysburg. They took a more active interest in ideas that they proposed. And they were not worried about speaking out.

Birkner: Let me specifically ask a question about Glatfelter because he was a colleague during some of your early years on the faculty and he was Dean at the time when you were still an instructor. Did you have any conversation with him directly or through written correspondence about the status of your doctoral dissertation and the progress you were making through seeing it through. If I understand correctly, you finished your dissertation in '64. That's when you officially became a Ph.D. Did you have any kind of conversation with him about that?

Boenau: Nothing of any substance. The situation I realize is different now. The curious thing was that in those days

there was no pressure even from Columbia University or from Gettysburg College on this side to have me complete the degree. It was something I wanted to do and was planning to do. Curiously enough, when I became involved with the contemporary civilization course, I got involved in writing for a new edition of the text. I wrote two chapters of that book, and was also involved in editing. I enjoyed it enormously. Now it did take me away from completing the doctorate, but neither Gettysburg College nor Columbia was breathing down my neck on that. So it wasn't until 1964 that I finally got the job done.

Birkner: One of your contemporaries, Ted Baskerville, of the English Department, was also working on a Ph.D. at Columbia and I believe he came to Gettysburg just a year before you did. He didn't finish his Ph.D. until several years after you did. And I'm sure he would have said the same thing, "It was not my top priority." But Charles Glatfelter recalls that the understanding was that people were hired to get the Ph.D. They were expected to get the Ph.D. Is that right?

Boenau: Yeah, I think that's true.

Birkner: If you didn't get a Ph.D. it would be harder to get tenure.

Boenau: Yeah, yeah. I was far enough along on that so I had no trouble getting tenure. But I didn't actually have the degree in hand at that time.

Birkner: You got tenure after you Ph.D?

Boenau: Yeah, Yeah. But mind you I put the emphasis in those years happily on teaching Political Science and the CC course. Emphasis then was very much on teaching. And of course over my total career here, I began to see increasing emphasis on publication. That did not bother me for I always enjoyed writing. But writing competed with other involvements that one had on campus, the committee assignments, the departmental assignments. And that was a great occupier of time.

Birkner: I can imagine; and you were teaching a 4-4 load until 1969?

Boenau: Yes, that's right.

Birkner: In 1969-70 you were teaching 3-1-3. Until then you were teaching a 4-4 load even if you're not teaching big classes. The work takes a lot of time.

Boenau: Well, it was not unusual for political science classes, introductory classes, to have thirty five, sometimes up near forty students. So it was not unusual to have a student load of over 100 students in a semester.

Birkner: Which is going to take a lot of time to do grading and related work.

Boenau: That's right.

Birkner: In the 1950s and the 1960s the expectation of scholarships beyond the Ph.D was minimal. And if you did something that was good, maybe there would be rewards involved but nobody would be on your case if you did not publish. And so without that kind of system that we have in place today where they monitor you much more closely, you really could devote more of your time to their various committee work and other activities you had on campus. When you became part of the Political Science Department, was the expectation that Chet Jarvis would be Chair for life?

Boenau: Yes. In those years, in the early years I believe there was no terminal date set on the chairmanship. And it was quite possible for chairs to remain in place for many, many years. And Chet was quite content to do that. I think it was under C.A. Hanson finally that five-year terms for chairs were set.

Birkner: Well, several people remained chairs until they retired. One for example would be Henry Schneider of German. And Jarvis, I think. Were you the natural successor to Jarvis as chair in the department?

Boenau: It was something that in terms of having been at the college the longest time, yes; and age as well.

Birkner: In the 1960s, in the mid '60s Don Tannenbaum and Ken Mott joined the faculty. Tannenbaum first and then Mott. Did you have some say in those hirings or did Jarvis simply take charge of the hiring and you were not consulted?

Boenau: We were involved in the recruitment there. I think one of the best things I ever did was to help recruit Ken Mott. He had a lasting effect on the college, good effect. I guess Chet made the decisions but he certainly consulted us as to what we thought of Ken. We were both solidly in favor of Ken.

Birkner: He was very young at the time.

Boenau: Yeah, yeah. He was from Brown University. He had not yet completed his doctorate. It must have been a year or so when it was done. Regarding Dan Tannenbaum, that was more of a surprise; Chet did that on his own. I didn't meet Dan Tannerbaum until he got here.

Birkner: I heard from another interview about having a woman in the Political Science Department.

Boenau: Yes.

Birkner: Can you say anything about that?

Boenau: Oh yes. She was a fine person Louise Harned got her doctorate from Yale. She was a very able person who

came after Joe Hampton ~~who I picked~~ and taught from about 1959 to 1961. But she became interested in a position in Washington with the League of Women Voters. She went down there and joined the staff.

Birkner: It was a long time before you hired another woman in that capacity.

Boenau: That's right. That's right.

Birkner: There was a woman who was on the faculty for several years in the late seventies or eighties who was not too happy here. The point being you did have a faculty member in the early sixties who was a woman.

Boenau: That's right. That's right.

Birkner: Now when you and Lois were socializing in your thirties and forties, who were the people in town or at the college you like to socialize with?

Boenau: People we knew through the CC course. Younger couples, couples often with children, so we had something in common with them.

Birkner: Now I had a couple of classes when I was at Gettysburg College with Joseph Scheer.

Boenau: Oh yes, Joe Scheer.

Birkner: We used to call him "fighting Joe." He never finished his Ph.D. and he did not stay beyond his probationary period. What can you tell me about Joe Scheer?

Boenau: Well he was enthusiastic about teaching. I think he loved to teach. I'm sorry that he had to leave it. I think it was partly not getting the degree that discouraged him from continuing. A great likeable fellow.

Birkner: I had heard somewhere that he now teaches high school. During the 1960s at some point the temperature on campus changed. You mentioned the prominence of big weekends, the floats, the homecoming queen.

Boenau: Certainly.

Birkner: I'm curious about whether you noticed as a faculty member in the late sixties that something is happening on campus. And if you do get that sense, tell me a little bit how that worked?

Boenau: I think it came about partly in response to the civil rights marches and problems in our country. I think there was a growing consciousness of the problems in our country. Some of us would go down to Washington, for example to some of the major rallies, students would go as well.

Birkner: Civil rights?

Boenau: Remember the time of burnings in cities, terrible things that had gone wrong. So I think that was energizing people. But of course the Vietnam War affected the young men in college who were subject to the draft. And people

began to raise questions about the legitimacy of the war and the prospects of disengagement from the war.

Birkner: So what about the students themselves? What kind of changes did you notice in their interest and activities?

Boenau: Well, I would say that it's impossible to generalize about all Gettysburg students. The most vocal ones that I knew were people who were atypical. I wonder if you ever knew Stephen Warner?

Birkner: He graduated in May of '68 and I came in September of '68. So I just missed him.

TAPE ENDS.