Q. This is Steve Sterrett. I’m interviewing Robert M. Boyce, who was born on March 16, 1919. And the interview is being conducted in the University Archives conference room on September 18, 2003. Bob, could you tell me where you were born and raised?

A. I was born in Akron, Ohio, about the end of World War I and spent most of my childhood in Lima, Findlay, Oberlin, and Cuyahoga Falls. Following graduation from Akron’s Buchtel High School, I enrolled at Antioch College for a year, then transferred to Ohio State.

Q. Why did you transfer?

A. I felt that I wanted engineering. My dad was a mechanical engineer. He was a solid tire specialist at Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Akron, and that was my first thought in thinking of a career.

Q. Alright. Do you remember what year then you came to Ohio State?

A. That was about 1939.

Q. Alright. Can you tell me a little bit about your impressions as an undergraduate student at Ohio State?

A. My first impression was of a large impersonal institution, where you had to make your own way. I made some early connections. I played in a church orchestra and the ROTC band. And worked on some student publications.
Q. Alright. I think I had also heard you say that you had also been involved with the Engineering Experiment Station and that had given you some interest in writing.

A. Yes. I occasionally went to the Transportation Research Center near Marysville, where Ohio State was conducting a number of automotive research projects. And that was one engineering experience that I had. And then there were different projects in engineering, such as the Building Research Laboratory on Kinnear Road, where they tested walls, building walls for fire. That was another engineering project that I covered, and a number of others.

Q. These were projects at the Transportation Research Center, and at the center where they conducted research on fires. That was when you were working for the University.

A. Yes.

Q. Alright. Let’s go back to your undergraduate days. You were at Antioch College for a year, transferred to Ohio State, and at that point you were an engineering major. But you didn’t continue as an engineering major.

A. No, no, I didn’t. During my first year at Ohio State I was in the National Youth Administration for part-time work for John Merrill Weed, editor of the Engineering Experiment Station News. I came to like writing better than engineering and switched majors to Journalism. And I recalled that in high school I won second prize in the state in an editorial contest.

Q. Was there a journalism school at the time or was it a matter of simply taking coursework within journalism?

A. No, there was a journalism school.
Q. Did you graduate then prior to WWII? How, by the late 30’s, did the growing war in Europe begin to affect you as an undergraduate?

A. At first I was opposed to the war which had broken out in Europe. Many students at the time were. However, as Hitler’s aggression became more threatening it appeared that the United States would be drawn in. And during the fall of 1941, my draft status became increasingly vulnerable. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor I decided to enlist in the Army before the winter quarter began at Ohio State.

Q. Can you talk about that transition from one day being on the University campus and the next day being in the Army, and the war that was beginning.

A. Well I first learned about the attack on Pearl Harbor when I was coming back from breakfast to the rooming house where I stayed. And that kind of cinched it for me. I decided that now was the time to go in. Although I had been in journalism, I had taken a course in geology under W. Stors Cole. And I was so inspired by his lectures that I decided that that’s what I wanted to major in when I came back. That was my intention when I went into the Army.

Q. And how long then were you in?

A. I was in there almost exactly four years.

Q. And what was your, what field, what position. I guess what did you do in the Army?

A. Well, I intended since I had an amateur radio license, my interest lay in radio and my intention was to take the introductory course in the Army, at Fort Monmouth, where their radio school was and become a radio operator in the Army. Well,
after basic training I got on the train for my preliminary three month session in the field that I would be in, with the idea that I was going to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. But when I got off the train I was in Petersburg, Virginia. And the Army’s medical training camp was there. And so I was in the Medical Corps for three months. The first day I was there the first sergeant called me into the office and said he saw on my transcript that I had taken some clarinet lessons. So he wondered if I wanted to be company bugler. So that’s just an example of how mixed up the Army sometimes gets. I put in for a transfer to the Signal Corps. And when my three months medical training was up, they did send me off to Fort Monmouth for the basic signal course.

Q. And so for the balance of the war you were in the Signal Corps.
A. Yes.

Q. Were you both in the United States and outside of the United States?
A. Yes, I was stationed in about five or six different Army posts before I went overseas. They went clear across the country and finally wound up in Fort Lewis, Washington. That’s where I was assigned overseas.

Q. And where did you end up overseas then?
A. Well first we went to Hawaii for a month’s stay there during the spring of, I think it was 1943. And I was assigned to a permanent company by that time. And I got a real scare there because when they got ready to send us overseas, they told us that we were scheduled for the invasion of Japan and we could expect two-thirds casualties.

Q. Did you eventually go beyond Hawaii then?
A. Yes, yes. We wound up at Okinawa. And the Army had taken a switch in their plans. They had planned to invade Japan but they decided to go into Okinawa first. We did go ashore until the Marines had softened it up for several days. But we had quite an exciting time going in though, because we went in in the middle of the night. My driver and I were in a six-by-six truck towing the radio section’s generator for power on the radio. And as soon as we hit the water the engine stalled and we had to be pulled out by a bulldozer. But they did get the engine started for us. So we went in to look for the gathering point for our unit. And we wandered around on a number of different roads and finally we decided to camp out for the night before we went on.

Q. But eventually you caught up with your company?

A. Yes

Q. So you were in Okinawa. After that?

A. We were in Okinawa about three months. And we were taken from there to South Korea. Let me back up. While we were in Okinawa, the Japanese surrendered. And so that was the signal for disbanding the Army in that area. And so that’s when we went to South Korea, where we were for about two weeks before we were sent to our discharge point in the United States.

Q. So you were actually discharged in late 1945? Or perhaps early 1946?

A. January of 1946.

Q. Okay. At that point you made a decision to come back to Ohio State?

A. Yes.

Q. So beginning then perhaps the fall of 1946?
A. Well I actually took some summer school courses that summer. Prerequisites that I needed before I went into geology.

Q. Okay. Talk a little bit about what was life like coming back to Ohio State, you and I presume thousands of other young men versus what it was like when you had left four years earlier.

A. Well, of course we felt much older. We felt almost a generation apart from the new students that were coming in at the time. And there was quite a bit of temporary housing going on. They used an Army barracks plan for a lot of the classrooms and for some of the quarters where students stayed.

Q. Did you or any of your colleagues, any of your colleagues who were veterans, find it a difficult adjustment coming back to civilian life?

A. Well, in a way it was. Of course our first question in coming back was, what to wear. There weren’t many clothes for sale at that time. So we just wore what we had on hand before the war. It was a whole new life for us really.

Q. I presume it would have been a good time to be a co-ed on the Ohio State campus.

A. Yes, yes. There was an overwhelming majority of men on the campus.

Q. Tell me a little then about how you finished your undergraduate degree at Ohio State, because obviously, even though you had an interest in geology, your career tells me that you didn’t stay in geology.

A. No, although I was quite interested in geology, I felt a weakness in mathematics mainly. And it got pretty technical as I got into the advanced courses. And I was wondering how long it was going to take me to get through with geology. So at that point I decided, since I was getting older, maybe I’d better just drop out and
work for a while. And that’s what I did. I worked for a year. I got a job at United Press Wire Service on the basis that I had had some journalism before I went into the service. And so I was out for one year. And then decided to go back. And that’s when I decided to switch to English because I felt, looking at my record, I could finish much quicker than I could otherwise.

Q. What kind of work did you do with United Press and was that work here in Columbus?

A. Yes, it was. I did mostly the routine work, the different shifts, throughout the day and night. And some reporting. Mostly rewriting stories that came in from the papers and taking notes on the phone. And also operating the teletype machines. On night shift, when you were the only one, you had to do everything in the office. And take care of any emergencies that came up and make calls.

Q. Now at that point you were still unmarried? You had not met your wife yet?

A. Yes. I was married in 1950. Let me back up a little bit. I went back to Ohio State the year that I was married. The summer of 1950 was when I got my degree in English, and I was married a couple of months later.

Q. Alright. You and Gerry have how many children?

A. Two – a son and a daughter, both of them attorneys. Our daughter graduated from Ohio State’s College of Law. Our son is a San Diego criminal defense attorney. We have seven grandchildren – two grandsons and five granddaughters. Our daughter and her husband live with their five children here in Upper Arlington.
Q. So you earned your degree in English in 1950, got married that year, and then what did you do for employment?

A. I worked at a plumbing supply company for a couple of months. Then they called me back to United Press. So that’s where I spent the next ten years.

Q. Alright. And again, that was here in Columbus?

A. Yes.

Q. Alright. Again doing the reporting and rewrite work.

A. Much the same thing. I did a number of features and a number of special stories, and made some acquaintances which I later continued when I went to the campus.

Q. Let’s talk about then you coming back to Ohio State as an employee. Can you tell me when and what were the circumstances that led you to leave United Press to come back to Ohio State?

A. Well, I just felt that I had gone as far as I could at United Press. It was United Press International by that time. And I had made some connections at the University and I thought I’d like that better. So that’s when I made the change.

Q. What was the position you were initially employed in and who did you work with?

A. At the University?

Q. Yes.

A. Well I worked with Bill Rounds, who was head of the News Services, part of the Office of Communications.

Q. And the position?

A. Office of University Relations they called it then.
Q. Okay. And you were initially a writer in that office?

A. Yes.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about how the office worked and was arranged in 1960? What kind of work did you do with Bill Rounds?

A. We were located in the Administration Building and there were three or four of us writers in the office working on different areas which we were assigned to. I was working mainly in the College of Engineering and of Arts and Sciences, and then some special areas too. I especially enjoyed working with the Institute of Polar Studies and the Center for Lake Erie Area Research. These came a little later. They weren’t at the very beginning.

Q. Alright. Can you give me some sense of how you might describe the role of that Office of University Relations back in 1960? How would you describe its primary functions?

A. Our main goal was to get news about the university to the local media, and further on if we could. We also gave information to people who stopped by. And we had a lady who was out in the main lobby, had a desk out in the main lobby who answered questions. Well anybody that came by she referred them to our office or whatever appropriate office that they should go to.

Q. Over the course of years of your career of course the University itself has grown both in enrollment and in number of programs and employees. The public relations office also has grown. Can you reflect a little bit on how you have seen it grow over the last four decades? In 1960 we were one of four or five writers in the office. How have you seen that expand over the years, both in terms of people
but also in terms of the kinds of functions and the way the University
communicates?

A. One of the first functions that the office had when it began was a radio and TV
operation. We had a radio reporter who interviewed faculty members as did also
the TV reporter. And they sent regular clips to the local radio and TV stations.
And when we started, we used to get our photographs done by the Department of
Photo and Cinema. And it wasn’t until some time later that we actually had our
own photo operation.

Q. Bob, you and I a number of years ago conducted an interview with Harold
Schellenger and I remember him talking at that time about how the origins of the
University ‘s public relations office grew out of the construction of Ohio Stadium,
and the public effort to raise funds to do that. Football has always been kind of a
blessing and curse at Ohio State. I understand that even going back to your early
days in the University ‘s public relations office, that was a concern of central
administration. Can you talk a little it about that?

A. It certainly was a concern and the faculty members felt very self conscious about
the fact that their national image appeared to be one of jocks and football and with
not much emphasis on academics. So they continually strived to emphasize their
academic pursuits. And of course we tried to help in that cause too. Now we
didn’t handle any sports. There was a special sports office that did that, publicity
of football and basketball. So we didn’t concern ourselves much with that.

Q. That concern about the University’s academic image, it was a concern shared all
the way up to the President’s office I presume?
A. Yes. That was reflected on down, from the President’s office and Fred Stecker, who was the executive director of University Relations.

Q. And this was back in the 1960’s?

A. Yes. There was much emphasis on getting out news releases to the local media. And even a tally was kept on individual production for a while. And we always had clippings, we read different newspapers. Each one of us had certain newspapers that we clipped, and these were shown to the President’s office by Fred.

Q. Talk a little bit about how the office was organized. When I worked in that office, writers had beats. Was that something that was in place when you began work there?

A. Yes, it was. And of course the office did not have as wide a scope covering different areas at the beginning. One thing that was started was a newsletter in the early 1960’s for faculty. And this eventually evolved into a separate operation headed by yourself. That has grown even since that time. Eventually accepted advertising which helped defray some of the expenses of that operation.

Q. Good. Let’s stay in the 1960’s. You had mentioned to me earlier about, as we talked about some of the more vivid memories of your time at Ohio State, about some of the precautions that were taken around the Cuban Missile Crises and about how that affected the campus. Can you talk a little bit about that?

A. The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 put the whole country on edge. It was a very stressful time. And some of our staff time was taken up with the precautions and instruction of what to do in case we were attacked by the Soviets. Stockpiling of
supplies and who to contact. Some residents of the community and University constructed underground shelters supplied with emergency stocks, and some of them even firearms. And even after the Americans and the Soviets came to terms and the USSR withdrew its missiles from Cuba, the cold war tensions continued, although at a reduced level.

Q. As the University’s communication staff, were you communicating to faculty and staff and students about what to do in the case of a missile attack?

A. Yes, the administration had instructions that they passed down to the faculty and staff. And of course there were bomb shelters in the administration building and most of the other buildings as well. They were supplied with emergency food and water. We were told where to go and when to go.

Q. Of course at that point I was only 14 years old. So I wasn’t, I certainly recall some of the tensions around the Cuban Missile Crisis, I don’t think I realized how much it affected the day-to-day life of even people here at Ohio State. Well the 1960’s got even more interesting later on. Can you talk a little bit about some of your experiences with some of the disturbances on campus, both around civil rights issues and anti-war issues.

A. Well, it was a time of demonstrations on college campuses against the war in Vietnam and the faculty being accused of being Communist sympathizers. One fervent Columbus activist produced a daily radio broadcast of suspects at Ohio State. Other issues also arose, such as students rights and womens’ rights and black recognition. And these resulted in sit-ins and demonstrations and confrontations between faculty and students, and marked the first establishment of
womens’ courses and black studies courses. And there was a Blue Ribbon Committee of Ohio State faculty members who were anxious to soothe the contentions between factions that was organized. They wore blue ribbons on their lapels and circulated around the campus and attempted to calm confrontations. Football coach Woody Hayes, who was a respected figure on the campus, was active in this group and often spoke out at confrontations. I recall drawing an occasional assignment during student rallies to wander about the Oval with a wire recorder and attempt to pick up conversations at rally points. And sit-ins at the administration building were frequent. Anti-war protests became so intense, at one point Governor Rhodes sent the Ohio National Guard to campus to confront an unruly mob threatening to storm the administration building. But tensions continued for several days and it was a strange sight, to arrive at work in the morning and see Guardsmen in battle gear and fixed bayonets stationed around the building. During one sit-in at the administration building, demonstrators barred the doors and let no one in or out. So at closing time I left the building by slipping out a men’s restroom window.

Q. How did these demonstrations and other activities affect you in the public relations office? Or affect the work in the public relations office?

A. Well, we kept one of our staffers on duty after hours to answer phone calls and keep in touch with the administration.

Q. Was there a lot of contact with the senior administration of the University with the public safety officials, to try to figure out what was going on?
A. Oh yes, yes. There were continual reports back and forth of what was going on and their perception of anything being done and so on.

Q. You mentioned being out on the Oval with a wire recorder. Were you trying to hear the comments that were being made so that other decision makers could have a better understanding of what was being talked about, or I guess what was the purpose of trying to tape record the comments out there?

A. It was to try to get the mood of some of these demonstrations that were going on and get some advance idea of what they might be up to.

Q. I take it, it wasn’t done surreptitiously, you were doing it more like a reporter would do it. Is that correct?

A. Yes, I was pretty obvious in what I was doing when I walked around.

Q. I guess I have some interest in this period. I wasn’t at Ohio State but I am of that age. As a University employee in the area of public relations, was there a period in which it was a hard time for you to really understand what was going on with the students, or to really understand what their concerns were? I guess, if you remember, there was a generation gap. And I guess in terms of you returning to college in 1946, you certainly were a little bit older, not that much older, but you certainly had a much different experience having been a Veteran than the younger students as students were coming in. So here again 20, 25 years later, a sense of really not understanding what this generation was about?

A. That’s quite true. I continually speculated on what their intentions were and what their problems were and what they wanted to do about it.
Q. Let’s go on into the 70’s and the 80’s. The University enrollment had grown quite a bit. Can you give us some thoughts about what you saw happening on campus in the 1970’s and 1980’s?

A. When I first came to the campus, there was kind of a gap between students and faculty that didn’t exist later. Students were a little bit in awe of the professors and hesitant to talk freely with them I felt. And this kind of eased up over time. And the dress too was less formal. Students, when they first came back to campus, they dressed in suits which seems kind of strange now. Went to class in ties and shirt and suits.

Q. Now this was after WWII?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay.

A. So this gradually gave way to a more casual sort of dress to go along with the more casual atmosphere and easier communication you might say between students and faculty.

Q. I guess when we talk about casual dress we’re not talking simply about students but faculty also.

A. Yes.

Q. I think even among us staff members, I think over the past 25 years, I used to always wear a tie. Now I don’t necessarily wear a tie to work every day. It does seem a bit more casual. Do you have a sense that the relationship between students and faculty has become less formal? Do you think in general that has
improved education? Or do you think that it’s had an impact in terms of how knowledge gets transmitted?

A. Well, I think perhaps it has. Some of the barriers to communication being eased up would allow for more discourse about academic subjects and maybe greater learning.

Q. One of the things, when we’re talking about faculty-student interactions, one of the things that also I guess came out of the late 60’s and we saw implemented in the 1970’s, was a greater involvement by students in the governance of the institution, on various committees. Talk a little bit about that.

A. Well, let’s see. Well, there were more students, more student involvement in some of the committee operations. Of course it was unheard of for a student to be represented on the Board of Trustees in the early days. And that was the case in most all kinds of committees on campus. To go back a little bit, back to the trend towards the informal approach to things. One of the forerunners of this I felt was an English teacher who was a favorite teacher of the engineering students who had to take English, a certain amount of English courses, who would wear sweaters to class and sit up on his desk and tell jokes pretty much of the time.

Q. And this professor will go nameless? Was this a professor that you had?

A. Yes, I had him for class when I was in engineering. And I’d have to think a bit to bring up his name.

Q. At this point I’m going to turn the tape recorder over, so we’re going to make a stop here. Alright, Bob, we’re back. Technology has certainly reshaped the news business and the communications business. Talk a little bit about how some of
the technology changed in the communications office over the time you were there?

A. When I first went to work, all copy was written on typewriters and duplicate copies were made with a mimeograph machine. And eventually this process led to a succession of computers, each new computer being more efficient than the last. Computers were attached to printers which would make duplicate copies automatically. So that process was greatly speeded up. And of course accuracy was enhanced, because with a computer you could go over mistakes and correct them before they were copied.

Q. As I recall, you were one of the last persons in our office to be using the manual typewriter.

A. That’s true. I did get used to the computer, the word processor. Well I about had to because a lot of our copying was processed through computers.

Q. Talk a little bit about how the word actually got out of your office. I think now you use e-mail even to communicate with reporters about events happening at Ohio State. But talk a little bit about how those news releases you produced actually got out to the news media.

A. Well, they were all hand delivered. And one of us, for example on Trustee day, after the Trustee report was written up, one of us would have to take copies to the different wire services and newspapers downtown.

Q. I remember some of those days and I think there were a whole series of drop off points. Took us a couple of hours to make the rounds of downtown and the television stations.
Q. Looking back over your time at Ohio State, are there some people here that stand out in your memory for their contribution to the University or for their personalities? You mentioned a couple of faculty members you remembered from your days as a student.

A. Well, one person I recall at CLEAR, Center for Lake Erie Area Research, was Charles Herdendorf, who actually was instrumental in bringing CLEAR into formation at Ohio State, in getting federal recognition and a grant process going for CLEAR projects. And he had quite a wide range of talent in other areas. He was also a biologist and he taught courses at CLEAR during the summer. And he taught courses on campus too. But he had a summer program going at Stone Laboratory on Gibraltar Island, which was a five-acre island across the bay from Put-in Bay. And Stone Lab was a research building that had been funded by a donation from Julius Stone, an early trustee of Ohio State. And it accommodated a program for high school and college students who would take courses in aquatic biology and zoology in the buildings classrooms in that building and laboratories.

Q. I think in your career at Ohio State, I think probably what you enjoyed most was the opportunity to try to share some of your interest in geology and the sciences through the news and reporting that was done out of the communications office. Would that be a fair thing to say?

A. Yes.

Q. Were there some other faculty members in those areas that stand out in your mind?
A. Let’s see. I better think. One of my friends who I became acquainted with before I came to University, while I was at the wire service, was John Melvin, who became the Executive Director of the Ohio Academy of Science. And we did a number of stories together, principally around the Academy’s annual meetings, which were held on campus. And he directed me to a number of different sources for science stories. Then there was a Richard Goldthwaite, professor of geology, and also first Director of the Institute of Polar Studies, which he was instrumental in founding. And I got many stories from him about the annual expeditions that Ohio State sent to Antarctica and other polar areas. And he was instrumental in calling attention to Ohio State’s work in this area on a national scale.

Q. One of the things that I found in working with the University over the years, is that very often these people like Professor Goldthwaite, who are able to build really outstanding academic programs, often know the value of paying attention to public relations. Did you find that true with these folks you worked with, that they felt that it was important to get some attention, not simply for their personal ego, but because it was part of building a program?

A. Yes, indeed. All of those that I had the best stories with were aware of what would be of interest to the public. And especially Jack Melvin. He practically gave me all the stuff that I needed without too much digging.

Q. Reflecting on your more than 60 years affiliation with Ohio State as a student, alumni, employee, how do you view the University? What are your impressions of the University and how it evolved over the last six decades?
A. It’s still pursuing its academic goal of enhancing its reputation as one of the better institutions in the country. And one change that I might mention, I don’t know whether this is pertinent here or not, but when I first went to the University there were almost no women in the administration. And now, it must be on a 50-50 basis almost. And also, as far as blacks went, they are in many different areas of the University, whereas there were none at the beginning when I came.

Q. You’re right, those are significant differences over that period of time. And it hasn’t occurred without some strife at times either. And they remain issues of continuing concern I think, in terms of parity. Any thoughts on student life today versus when you were 19, 20 years old? Or can’t you remember back that far?

A. I recall when I first went to Ohio State the University had one campus cop – Bill North. He was known and respected by the entire campus community and was noted for his pleasant manner and his diplomatic handling of campus problems. When I returned to work on campus there were three police officers and today I believe the force has been expanded to about 50.

Q. You mentioned visiting your grandson earlier this year at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Did it bring back any memories of your days as a student?

A. Well sure, I could sense the atmosphere that students were within and brought back my feelings as a student.

Q. We’re less than a week away from the beginning of classes this autumn quarter, and I know what you mean. It’s kind of a sense of anticipation that there’s going to be a new round of learning taking place and the University assembling again a faculty and students, all in one place. It is an exciting time each fall when that
happens. And I don’t think or we shouldn’t lose our anticipation of learning. I think you’ve continued your clarinet lessons, haven’t you?

A. Well yes, up to a point. I don’t know how far I can advance on that, but I am playing in the Greater Columbus Concert Band.

Q. But you never became a bugler?

A. No.

Q. Alright, Bob, is there anything else you would like to add at this point?

A. No, I don’t think of anything.

Q. Alright.