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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LINWOOD S. ALLEN

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Linwood S. Allen in Mantua, New Jersey, on September 10, 2013, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much, sir, for having me here in your home.

Linwood S. Allen: Oh, you're very welcome.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

LA: I was born in Verga, New Jersey, which I think comes under Westville. The only thing I know about that is my birth certificate, because I'm pretty sure my father and mother moved to Jefferson when I was three or four months old.

SI: What were your parents' names?

LA: I'm a junior, so, my father's name was Linwood S. Allen and my mother was Edna. Her maiden name was Smith, which is a pretty common thing. She was from Camden. My father was actually from Jefferson. The whole Allen Family, Allen and Walters Family, were from that area. The Walters had a farm right outside of Jefferson and my grandmother was one of the seven children. My grandfather on my father's side owned three or four houses in Jefferson. He owned the one that we lived in, the one across the street and two others. I read in the history, at the Woodbury History Society, that in the year 1900, he bought the little schoolhouse on the pike in Jefferson and he moved it. I've always wanted to go look at some back newspaper, because in 1900, to move a two-room schoolhouse down the Bridgeton Pike, and then, down Cohawker Road, to a lot alongside of his house, had to be a big news story, I would think. [laughter] Anyway, he converted that into a blacksmith's shop. This was right across the road from my home. I remember the blacksmith's shop. He must've been almost retired when this happened, because I never really recall him working. I always remember him being around and he used to rent the blacksmith's shop to traveling blacksmiths and people would bring their horses in to be shod a couple times a year. I remember seeing those scenes as I was growing up. His trade was as a wheelwright, where he made large wooden wagon wheels for wagons, carriages, and carts. So, he had two sons. His oldest son was my Uncle Albert, was an automotive engineer for Socony-Vacuum. He graduated from Drexel. My father worked at Socony-Vacuum also. I think what caused his early death was that he worked with asbestos every day, covering pipes in the refinery. So, he died in 1953, at the age of fifty-three; he was born in 1900. My uncle, who was nine years older than him, lived another two or three years after him. So, they both died fairly young.

SI: You uncle went to Drexel. Did your father go to college?

LA: No. I guess he went through high school. He never told me much about his education, but it seemed like he had a long work period, because he worked as a trolley conductor in Camden when they had trolleys. So, he must have started working rather young. I don't know how much schooling he actually had, beyond grammar school. My mother and father were divorced when I was fourteen. I had a brother and sister. My brother's five years younger than me and my sister was six years younger than me. My brother's still living. He lives in Thorofare and my sister passed away about ten years ago. She was the youngest, but she died first. They both have

pretty big families. My brother had seven children and my sister had five. I slacked off--I only had two. [laughter] I have a son who lives in Berlin and my daughter lives in Cherry Hill. My daughter is a CPA. She has her own business. She also does mortgage work. We visit them pretty frequently. In fact, I lived in the house with my son until a little over a year ago.

SI: When I came in, you showed me a picture of you, your brother and stepbrothers in uniform. Did your father remarry after the divorce?

LA: Yes. They were divorced when I was fourteen. Then, he married, a couple years later, a woman from Philadelphia who was a widow and had two sons. The oldest son was Flo's husband. So, we've known each other for years, but, because my work took me away, I worked in Princeton for thirty years. So, we only visited frequently or infrequently, I should say. We were always friends. We got together for family affairs, and so forth, but there was some time between visits, because of the distance between where they lived and I lived. I did some traveling from Princeton and that took up some of my weekends.

SI: You said your mother was from Camden.

LA: Yes.

SI: Do you know how her family came to this area?

LA: Well, I never met her mother. Her mother died I think when she was a child. She had a stepmother. I remember, mostly, her father, but I know her original mother came here from England and her father was born here, but I don't know any details about that. So, the mother, I never knew. Now, my father's parents I knew very well. My grandfather had that blacksmith's shop and he lived next door to the blacksmith's shop with my uncle, my father's brother, and his wife. So, I saw them, like, every day growing up. There used to be a store at the corner of Route 45 and Cohawkin Road. Well, I remember Cohawkin Road when it was a dirt road. Then, they paved it. I never remember it being called Cohawkin Road. [laughter] We always called it Paulsboro Road. I just barely recall this, because I must have been five years old or so, but, when they paved the road and opened it, they had a ribbon go across and another boy named Hunter Zane, the same age as me, he and I held the ribbon and our two grandfathers, who were sort of like, I guess you would call them co-mayors of the town, they cut the ribbon. I didn't know just until recently that it was called Cohawkin Road, but I guess it's been called that for quite some time. [laughter] Now, my grandmother, my father's mother, was born on Walters Farm. You can identify that a little bit by the fact that these high tension wires run across it, down below Mullica Hill. I didn't know that I had any interest in that farm until the Atlantic City Electric Company said that the electrical stands would not be on the property, but would overhang the property. So, everybody with an interest in the property had to sign off on it and that's the first I knew. My sister, brother and I had to sign off. I said, "Gee, I used to ask permission to go hunting on the property, not knowing I was part owner." [laughter] Eventually, that land was sold. As strange things happen, we got a very small percentage out of it. It was kind of a widespread family, so, a lot of people got a cut out of it. Nobody really made a lot of money, but we thought it was going to be developed into housing, because there was houses

being built all around it. I've recently went down there and found that most of that land has been converted to soccer and athletic fields for the township. So, they didn't build that much on it.

SI: When did the property leave the family?

LA: It left the family about fifteen years ago.

SI: Pretty recent.

LA: Yes. There's a regional high school now, very close to that, which used to be Hurff's Farm, who also had a huge gravel pit, which trucks were moving in and out of there all the time. That's one of the farms I worked on when I was growing up, Vernon Hurff, and across from him was Mr. Tomlin, who had orchards. I worked there. Then, I worked for Starkey, who everybody called "the gentleman farmer." I think his family came from Pennsylvania and he bought the property and he was always nicely dressed and directing things, but he was never actually out working on the farm.

SI: Describe Jefferson and the area you grew up in a little bit. It sounds very rural, from what you are describing.

LA: Yes, it is very rural. It's about, I guess, three miles down 45 from Mantua and it starts with some houses that are quite spaced apart, because some of them have some land and some farmland. Then, you come to Cohawkin Road, which is really the center of Jefferson, as you're going toward Mullica Hill. You come to that intersection, the one place that now has a big parking area used to be a general store. That was the hub of the whole town. Everybody gathered there. It was a typical general store that had rows of seats in the back where men could sit and play checkers, and so forth. Upstairs there was a poolroom, where the men were allowed to play pool. No children were allowed up there, except on days when there were no men around and the family allowed them to go up, but that was it. I remember my grandfather and Mr. Richards, who was the other man about his age, walking up the hill to that store. That's where they spent a good bit of their time. It had a front porch with benches. So, on the weekends, a lot of farmers would come in and gather there. They would chat and tell stories. It was quite a friendly place. The kids in the town were all very close. It wasn't that many kids, maybe fifteen around the area, but a big part of that was my family. Besides the Walters, who had seven daughters, there was a large three-story home on the main highway, on 45, just before the intersection. That, I found out, was once called the Vanderslice Mansion. I had an aunt, her name was Olivia Vanderslice. She was one of the seven Walters sisters. I never met Mr. Vanderslice. He was dead, I guess, before I was born, but her and another sister lived there, just those two people. It was a big three-story home. It's still there, but, somehow, they seem to have cut the third story off. Now, it's like a flat roof on it. Then, a third sister lived directly across from them. She was married to a man named Cattell and he had a small farm. My grandmother, who was the fourth sister, lived down Cohawkin Road. So, that's two, three, four of the sisters. Then, there was a sister that lived in Gibbstown and one that lived in Paulsboro. My family kind of dominated the town. There was a service station and repair garage across from the store at that main intersection that was run by Oscar Jenkins. Oscar Jenkins used to always drive the school bus, also. I remember, just a year ago, I got an invitation to gather with a group that had

gone to Union Academy School in Mullica Hill, which has since become a Friends school, and I think it may not even be used now. We graduated in the town hall in Mullica Hill. So, a lot of people gathered there that went to that school over the years, from 1930 on up to '40 and beyond. When we all gathered together, the person who was the spokesperson said, "And who drove the school bus?" and everybody said, "Oscar Jenkins." [laughter] Well, he later opened a large sporting goods store on that corner. He had quite a business and was very well-known. I'm sure he's long passed away by now, but I don't remember what happened to him once he closed the store. I know it continued to operate for a few years. I believe he moved South before he died. The person who was his foreman through all the years took over the business and ran it for a few years. I think that business just ended about five years ago. Now, it's just a vacant lot.

SI: How far away was the refinery where your father and uncle worked?

LA: It was in Paulsboro, which is about six, seven miles from Jefferson. It's pretty much a straight route right on through to Paulsboro. You go through Clarksboro, then, Paulsboro. That was Socony-Vacuum, which was Standard Oil Company of New York, actually. As I was growing up, almost everybody's parents, or at least their fathers, worked at Socony-Vacuum. I remember, my uncle, he and one other man--both of them had engineering degrees from Drexel--they were the first two men that started the research department at Socony-Vacuum. So, he was there from the beginning of the research work. He was like a second father to me, because he didn't get married until he was well up in his forties. I think he had a little bit more time than my dad did to spend with me. He was also--I heard later and I hope to look it up some time--but some older men around town told me that he was the best left-hand pitcher in South Jersey. I can believe that, because, sometimes, he would have a catch with me and he would just say, "Watch this one," and I wouldn't even be able to catch it. I mean, he was very good. In fact, their theory was that if he hadn't been small--he didn't weigh a lot, he was thin and small--that he may have gone further into professional ball, but that's their theory, I guess.

SI: When you were growing up, what did you do for fun? You said you went hunting.

LA: I did some hunting, yes. I never became an avid hunter. I went because my dad and uncle went hunting. I would go with them when I was old enough and I did that until I was maybe seventeen, and then, I sort of gave that up. I wasn't an avid hunter. We played baseball. The town, even though it was a small group of people, we always had a team and we played all the surrounding places. We played in Ewan and Mullica Hill and Mantua, Mantua Heights. We played a lot over in Paulsboro. We played a little bit of football. In fact, we had a team that played around like that for two or three years, but mostly baseball. That was our big activity, I guess, other than regular childhood games, tag, hide-and-seek and things. On one side of the store at the corner was a large lawn and the kids were all allowed to play there and all the outdoor games that the group could play, we used that. I worked every summer, from I guess maybe twelve, usually at a farm, (Starkey's?) and Hurff's and (Duffield's?), which was a little further out. That was another thing that my uncle helped me with. He helped me establish a bank account and he checked on it. He didn't check on what I had, but he trained me to only use it when I needed something and not to just spend it freely, which was, I think, good training. Most of my summers were farm work, but, when I was, I think, in my junior year of high school, I worked at (Dilk's?) Basket Factory in Swedesboro. There was about four guys from town that

worked there and one guy had his license and we all rode with him, which was an interesting experience. I often wondered what ever happened. They must still make baskets, but I don't know where, because that company is out of business. They made farm baskets, five-eight baskets, bushel baskets. In fact, they were making small baskets, which I guess were sold at Eastertime for Whitman's Chocolate, when I worked there. It was not an easy job. Most of the time, I worked on the end of a dryer where they would put this plywood through to dry and it would come out at about three or four different levels, in all different sizes. My job was to stack it or tie it up, and so forth. I was the one guy on one end of the machine and there was about four or five women on the other end feeding it. [laughter] Some of the jobs were a little dangerous, because people were using sharp cutters to cut stacks of plywood. I remember, I went in on a Saturday to work and they were cutting little strips, about four or five inches long, off of a large strip. The man would push it in, it would hit the stop, and then, he would chop it. My job was to lift them off, but it was only three or four inches long. I was glad I only had that job for one day, [laughter] but it was an interesting place to work. I figure most everyplace you work, you learn a little bit. On the farms, I learned how to hitch up a horse and how to plow a field and rake hay. So, all these things, I think, at the time, they were hard work, but they, in a sense, were educational.

SI: On these farms, was it mostly other local kids your age that got hired as well?

LA: Yes.

SI: Okay. There were no migrant workers.

LA: No. There were very few migrant workers. There was a few people. I guess almost every farmer had one or two guys who came up from the South and worked through the summer, and then, maybe returned down South somewhere, but most of those were regulars. They became like part of the community, because you knew them all. Even though they were there part of each year, they would come up. Aside from that, we had local young men. (Starkey?) had a farm between Jefferson and Mullica Hill and his farm seemed a little different than everybody [else]. The other people, they raised potatoes, tomatoes and corn and things like that, but he raised, believe it or not, celery and a couple other things. Peas, I know he raised peas, because Seabrook Farms of Bridgeton would bring a big machine up to shell the peas every year. He also had an orchard. His farm seemed different. Everybody called him "the gentleman farmer," but he seemed to fare very well. In fact, I think at one point, he was the president of the South Jersey Agriculture Association, which operated out of Glassboro. So, that was my childhood experience, as a working factor. Then, when I graduated from high school, there was a fellow in town who worked at Stetson Hat in Philadelphia. Well, people today wouldn't realize how big Stetson Hat was. They were at Sixth and Montgomery in Philadelphia. They covered about four blocks of four to six-story buildings and they took the fur from animals, and they processed it in a place called the back shop, where this was all put together, and then, they made all kinds of hats. Well, in that day, everybody wore a felt hat and Stetson was *the* hat. So, I went to work for them right out of high school and I worked there until I went into the Marine Corps.

SI: What year did you graduate high school?

LA: 1940.

SI: Can you tell me a little about your early education? You said you went to Mullica Hill.

LA: Yes. Remember I told you my grandfather bought the school in Jefferson? There was a two-room schoolhouse there. Well, I went there. We didn't have a kindergarten, but I went there for first grade. Then, I went to Mullica Hill School [Union Academy], but it changed during the time I was in the second, third and fourth grades. They moved the first grade out of Jefferson and they put sixth grade in there. So, I actually went to that school twice. I went as first grade, and then, I went to Mullica Hill, and then, in sixth grade, I came back to Jefferson for a year, and then, seventh and eighth, went in Mullica Hill again. Then, from Mullica Hill, you went to Glassboro High School. Now, we would take a bus from Jefferson to Mullica Hill. Where the current firehouse is now, there was no firehouse there then, was, like, a lot where the buses met. So, we would go there in the morning, get on another bus and go from there over to Glassboro.

SI: What did you think of the quality of your schools in Mullica Hill and Jefferson?

LA: I thought they were very good. As I look back on it, I think of some of the teachers we had and how dedicated they seemed. I thought they were extremely good. I can remember one incident, when I was in, like, second or third grade, just to show you how long teachers hang around--of course, my name was the same as my father's. One elderly woman teacher started me off by telling me she wanted me to behave myself--she said, "I taught your father and I know what he was like." [laughter] So, she gave me a little background on him, but I can recall some very good teachers that I still remember. Glassboro High, when I went there, I took industrial arts, but they had a large agriculture course, because a lot of those people were farmers and they studied things about agriculture and farming, and so forth. That was a big factor. The teacher, the main teacher, of the agriculture group was a man named Gradovsky who, if you'll check the records, once played basketball for Rutgers and, actually, was also the basketball coach at Glassboro. He was a delightful man and he married an English teacher named Helen Elliot from Glassboro. I don't know, I guess in school, you kind of looked at two people and you said, "Sooner or later, they're going to get together," because everybody sort of matched them up and they were married for years. When Mullica Hill had a parade, they were always on the lead car. So, they were very well-known. The senior classes used to always go to Washington, DC. Those two people were voted to go as escorts for the class every year. They never missed it. The class would decide which teachers they wanted to go and those two always won. When we were having our reunions from our graduating Class of '40, we used to have them every five years, and then, later on, we started having them every year--but Gradovsky came to every one. I remember one of the later ones, a guy--this was when we'd had many reunions, we were all getting up in age and Gradovsky was still coming in, and Helen Elliot came in, Helen Gradovsky--I remember one of our graduates, who usually acted as a spokesman for the group, he stood up. He lived in Carolina, but he came up to the reunion. He said, "I have made a vow that I'm going to keep coming to these reunions until I see Gradovsky come in with grey hair and a cane." [laughter] Gradovsky lived a pretty long life. I don't know how old he was, but he was very well-respected and he treated everybody fine and he entered into all the events of the school. I never had him as a teacher, but I knew him as a basketball coach and I knew how he acted.

SI: Growing up, the Great Depression was obviously a big factor. Do you remember ways that the Depression affected your community or even your family?

LA: Yes. I remember that, yes, we struggled. I mean, my dad--this is before he got the job where he worked for several years at Socony-Vacuum--he worked at various jobs. Well, I told you, he started out on the trolley cars in Camden, but he also worked as a bus driver. My grandfather, who seemed to have little businesses of his own, he did some work for him, like painting and repairing farmers' barns and roofs and stuff like that. It was a struggle. I remember, we always carried our lunch to school and, sometimes, it was peanut butter or, sometimes, it was apple butter sandwiches. I don't even see apple butter anymore. [laughter] We didn't struggle like some people did, but we had factors where if you got a hole in your shoe sole, you put a piece of cardboard in it for a while or you got a little patch that you could glue on your shoe and things like that. So, I remember, there were times where you had to cut corners and do things like that, but we always seemed to have food on the table. Well, I guess my family was a little fortunate in that the house we lived in was owned by my grandfather. So, they probably didn't have any rent to pay; I'm assuming they didn't have any rent to pay. So, they weren't hampered by, like, a mortgage or rentals, and so forth, but, even so, it was a struggle. Fortunately, you had farm work, so [that] the kids could work, make some of their own money. So, I remember hearing a lot of struggles that were a lot worse than I was going through. I remember those stories and how some people struggled, but I think, in the long run, the people in that little town of Jefferson, whether their lifestyle was where they had, like, a self-supporting lifestyle, where they made some money on the side, or they worked on farms and they did little odd jobs, they were all, I would think, pretty industrious. I mean, they did most of their [own] repair work, so [that] they didn't have to call in [help]. I remember the house, originally, when I was growing up, had no electric and had no heater. It had a coal stove in the living room, in one corner, and I remember it was a big factor when [we] got what we called an oil stove, which was a large square stove. There was never any heat upstairs. I remember running down the stairs, carrying your clothes to dress by the heater in the morning. So, that house, incidentally, is still standing. So, we had no bathroom. We had outdoor toilets. We had a living room and, between the living room and what was actually the kitchen and dining room together, there was a stairs that went upstairs. There were three bedrooms upstairs, and of course no bathroom. It was just coal stoves and later oil stoves. So, I've often wondered what happened to the house later on and, one day, I was driving by there and a woman was out in the driveway, washing her car. So, I pulled in and I told her that I was actually, you might say, born there; I was there from three or four months old. I said, "I often wondered how you developed this house." She was a delightful woman and she called her husband, who was out in the garage--and she said, "Let's give him a tour of the house." She said, "Now, you have to remember, when we bought the house, we didn't plan on any children. We fixed the house for two people to live in, just him and I." Well, they took the ceiling out, so that there was, like, a walkway around the second floor, and they put in a bedroom and a bath and this walkway. You could look down into the living room and what was the combination kitchen and dining area became just a dining room. We had a shed, which was unheated on the back where we stored stuff. Well, they made that shed into a kitchen. So, they made a beautiful place out of it. The two of them are doing very well there. I even wanted to take Flo to take a [tour], but I didn't want to keep imposing on these people. [laughter] The outside looks--well, it doesn't look completely like it did, because it used to have a front porch on

it. Now, it doesn't have a front porch. It was good to go back and see what it looked like after all those years. It's still there and looking good.

SI: Do you remember when you had electricity and indoor plumbing?

LA: Yes. I was probably twelve years old when we got electricity. Of course, we got a telephone and, at that time, they were party lines. There would be a half a dozen people on the same line, different one would get two rings, another would get three. You knew which one was yours. My mother did some telephone operating, too. There was a second story in a building in Mullica Hill that had the switchboard. She worked in there for quite some time.

SI: Did your mother ever remarry?

LA: Yes. She remarried. It's amazing. My dad--well, she divorced my dad, of course, when I was fourteen and he died a young man. He died at fifty-three and she married a man who was nine years younger than her. It was amazing, because he was a big, husky truck driver and he owned his own truck, tractor and trailer, and so forth. He died when he was only forty-four or forty-five. In fact, both her first and second husband died within a couple years of each other, in 1953 and '54. My mother went on and lived until she was ninety-eight. So, she lived a long life after both husbands.

SI: Did she have any other jobs besides the switchboard?

LA: Yes. She became a nurse, a practical nurse. She loved working at rest homes, and so forth, so, most of her life after that was spent working at two or three different rest homes. She once worked at Pitman Manor, when it was just like a large house, before it became a large brick place. She worked at a place in Merchantville. She was a very vigorous woman. She was probably taking care of some people that were her age or older. She would come home from work and refer to them as "those poor, old people," and she was probably as old as they were. She was quite a lively woman. She lived until ninety-eight..

SI: Did you live with her after your parents divorced?

LA: No, I lived--well, here's an interesting story. When I was a freshman in high school. What happened was, when the divorce occurred, my sister went with my mother, my younger brother went with my father. I remember the judge telling me, I was fourteen, he said, "I'll let you have some decision on it. You can live either way." So, I kind of jumped back and forth between the two. So, I was with my mother when I started high school. Well, she moved around a lot. As kind of a family joke, we can get through almost any town and say, "Oh, Mom used to live there." [laughter] So, I started at Glassboro, and then, she moved to Paulsboro. So, I moved to Paulsboro. Then, she moved from Paulsboro to Pitman, so, I transferred from Paulsboro to Pitman. Then, I thought, "I have to get into a school where I can stay." So, I went back with my father, which meant I had to go to Glassboro. So, I changed four times in my freshman year. I went to Glassboro, Paulsboro, Pitman, and then, back to Glassboro. Then, I finished the next three years at Glassboro. So, I stayed with my father all that time, because at least he had a permanent address and wasn't moving around like my mother was. That was kind of my

decision, that I wanted to stay in one place and finish the school in one place, which was good, because I liked Glassboro High. It's amazing that so many of the places where you now see regional schools, and so forth, all those places used to send them to Glassboro High, Williamstown, even Atco, which is right next to Berlin. I was surprised, I didn't realize this, but we bought a house in a development. Here, a fellow who graduated from high school with me, that was his family's farm and he still had a house there right outside the development. There was another, right down at the next traffic light, there was a house on the corner, where there was a woman who also graduated with me from Glassboro High. When I saw that, I said, "My gosh, I can't believe they went that far to go to high school." [laughter]

SI: You had to take two buses to high school. How long did it take you to go back and forth?

LA: Well, I would say forty minutes. It was only, like, ten minutes from Jefferson to Mullica Hill, and then, we'd get on another bus and it was like a half-hour picking people up between there and Glassboro.

SI: Were you able to get involved in extracurricular activities?

LA: Yes. I don't know why, I was always a big baseball player and fan, but I never went out for the baseball team, but I did go on the track team. I was never great at it, but I made the team and I ran the half mile. One time, I remember we're going to a track meet and they didn't have anybody to run the mile. I had never run the mile, but I volunteered, which was not a good move, because I don't think I finished the mile. [laughter] That was the first and last time. They used to have a lot of various types of clubs, and so, I was in a couple different clubs. I don't even recall what they were. One was like a movie appreciation club or something, a couple things like that. So, I participated in track, but I went to all the football games. I followed all the teams.

SI: You said, in high school, you studied industrial arts.

LA: Yes.

SI: Why did you choose that track?

LA: Well, I kind of thought I would like to be a draftsman. You had mechanical drawing, drafting, and you had woodshop, and so, I thought that was the angle to go in, because the other main--there was a general curriculum, and then, there was the agriculture, and I certainly wasn't going to move or work on a farm. So, that was, I thought, my best selection. I enjoyed that. There wasn't anything to directly connect me with it, but I later became interested in printing. Well, I was more interested in that when I got out of the Marine Corps. So, that's kind of the life that I followed the rest of my career. I guess I can say that going to school under the GI Bill, like after I got out, helped, because I went to Printing Institute and I went to Rutgers and I got a certificate in industrial management from Rutgers. I went in Camden, but I graduated up at the main campus. So, printing became [my field]. I was doing this while I was working at Stetson Hat. I have to say, it's amazing--you go to Stetson Hat now and it's just some deserted buildings or torn down buildings, but they must have had three thousand people working there. It was an interesting place to work. Of course, I've had a lot of requests for hats, because everybody wore

hats and they had a family store and I had a lot of interested people. I was always carrying hats to people. Of course, you had to wear a hat when you went to work and you had to wear one when you came home. You couldn't go in there bare-headed, because they'd figure you'd walk out with a hat. [laughter] It was, in my opinion, and I think the opinion of most people that worked in the hat business, was that the hat business died when Kennedy became President, because he was the first one that didn't wear a hat. People follow the trends of well-known people like that. So, I guess, secretly, a lot of hat makers said Kennedy killed the hat business. [laughter]

SI: In the late 1930s and early 1940s, were you also following world events? Did you know about what was happening in Europe with Hitler and Mussolini?

LA: Yes. I wasn't a student of it, but, I think we were all pretty interested in what was going on, read excerpts of things.

SI: Among the people you knew, was there talk about staying isolationist or getting involved?

LA: I have to think--if I think back on it, at that time, most people were more anxious to stay out of it. Are you talking about after the war or during the war?

SI: Yes, particularly after World War II started in Europe, but even before that, if anyone was talking about the need to do something about Hitler.

LA: Oh, yes. I can remember all the stories that you would hear before we got involved, about how terrible things were and how terrible he was, oh, yes. There was a lot of discussion about that. I guess we didn't--there wasn't as much talk like there is now about when should you act and when should you not act and how much you should take over. I didn't hear a lot of that discussion. I'm sure it was going on, maybe at some higher levels.

SI: Tell me a little bit more about your job at Stetson. Were you still living at home then?

LA: No. By that time, my mother lived in Camden, so, it was easier to commute from Camden. So, I started--I lived with her, because I just had to go over the bridge. Then, a friend of mine got a job in Philadelphia and he wanted to get a room. So, we decided to go get a room together in Philly. It was funny, the first room we got was out around, I think it's like 27th and Chestnut, right near where Drexel and Penn are. It was on the corner and all these trolley cars interchanged there. Our apartment that he and I got was below ground. The windows looked out. You could see people's feet as they walked by. Those trolleys--you couldn't sleep at night--the trolleys would be going around the corner every ten, fifteen minutes, and so forth. So, we only lived there about a month. [laughter] We went to a place at 48th and Cedar in West Philadelphia. There was a woman there. This was a lovely place and I don't know how she managed it, because she had three floors, a nice front porch, a nice tree-shaded street and she must have had about eight or maybe ten men, young fellows, that lived there, that worked at various locations. So, we got a room there. At this time, we were making like--I started at Stetson's at about fifteen dollars a week and I had to pay trolley fare--and I think she charged us, like, ten dollars a week. You would be amazed at what we got for the ten dollars a week. She

gave us our breakfast, she packed us a lunch and we ate our dinner there. I figure, "How can she do this at ten dollars a week?" [laughter] She must have made out with it. She had about--I can't remember how many--but eight people or ten people, something like that. We had nice rooms and she did all this for us. It was like having a mother there. That went on for a year, year-and-a-half. Then, it was about time for me to go into the service. I mean, things had happened and, by that time, it was like '42. So, I was still working at Stetson's when I joined the Marine Corps.

SI: At Stetson's, what did you do every day?

LA: Yes. Stetson's, their jobs were sort of categorized and you would start at--they almost kind of rated the jobs by the pay that you got. The lowest job was, like, fifteen dollars a week. Then, you looked forward to getting to the twenty-dollar a week job. In the fifteen-dollar a week job, a lot of that was like pushing carts. There's always a dozen hats on a rack and, sometimes, you'd stack the racks and you'd push half a dozen racks and moving that around, or, if you were in the division where they would pack hats in boxes, you would supply the packers with all the supplies. You would get the right sized boxes and put them into certain piles and give them the papers that go between the hats and keep them supplied, move the finished hats out and things like that, those kind of jobs, and moving things from department to department as they progressed along the line. Then, when you would advance to, like, the twenty-dollar job, you would have a job in the assembly line. At the end of the assembly line, they would have, like, an air blower and every hat had to get through that, because to get all the dust and fur from it, and so forth. So, if you worked on that, it would be a twenty-dollar job. Then, you would go into a twenty-five, and then, thirty. In, say, a twenty-five-dollar job or a thirty-dollar job, you would work at one of the units, where you were either running the machines that ironed the rims or ironed the crowns. Sometimes, you'd have one guy who just put the hat on the hat block and put rubber around it to hold it on and pass it on. So, it went through a whole cycle. Each one of those jobs paid maybe twenty-five and, if you got into the area where you were putting color or adding color, called it grease and powder work, where you put grease and powder into the hat to bring out the color, and so forth, those jobs would get into thirty and thirty-five-dollar jobs. I have to say this for Stetson--when I went into the Marine Corps, I was working at maybe a twenty to twenty-five-dollar job. When I went back to work, when I got out of the Marine Corps, they gave me an advance based on the fact that I would have advanced if I had been working there. So, they moved me up to where I was like what they called a hat finisher, where you'd be putting the finishing touches on it, bringing out the color and putting grease and powder in and use various greases and powders for the different types of hats. So, that's what I was working at. While I was doing that, I was going to the printing schools.

SI: After the war?

LA: Yes.

SI: Before the war, did you just think you would continue to work at Stetson's or were you looking at other opportunities?

LA: When I went to work at Stetson, it was a pretty prominent place and it looked like there was room to move around and I thought I was going to stay there for a while. I don't know that I

considered it would be my career, but it was a job that I thought I would stay in. Of course, a lot of that changed once I went through the Marine Corps, and so forth. I had different ideas. I don't know what exactly got me interested in printing, but, for some reason, I was just excited about getting into that field. That was a little bit of a struggle, but I kind of made up my mind. There was a company called Edward Stern & Company. It was at Sixth and Cherry, right over the bridge. It had an eight-story building and it was considered the best printing company in Philadelphia. I heard some of this from people that I knew that worked in those places. So, I made up my mind that that was the company, once I got some knowledge of printing, that was the company that I would like to get into. Well, I kind of worked at several printing jobs. In fact, my first printing job was at Constitution Press in Woodbury. The building's still there. It was just sold to somebody. I think it's some art supply or something has it now. Anyway, that was an old company that used to print the local newspaper, before the *Woodbury Times* came along. I got a job there and. I had taken typesetting and letterpress work, and so, I knew how to make up forms and how to feed a press. That's what I got a job [doing] there, running a press and hand feeding material into a printing press. I worked there for--this was funny--it was a start and the reason I got the job there was the guy that ran a linotype machine for them. He told me they had an opening and I went down and I got the job. I worked there a year and the guy who owned the place called me in. He was very nice about it, but he told me he was going to have to let me go, not because of the work, but the fact that he had a nephew that was getting out of school and he had to give him a job and he was giving him my job. [laughter] So, that's how I come to leave there, but I took three or four different steps in the printing field and I made up my mind, I was going to work for Edward Stern & Company. So, I actually applied there about four times. In fact, the personnel director there said, "You've been here before," and I was honest with her, I said, "Yes, I've been here before, because I made up my mind that this is the place I would like to work." I said, "So, as long you're advertising, I'll probably be answering the ads." Well, I guess that was impressive, because I finally got a job. [laughter] The funny thing was, I became the production manager there and I worked there for fifteen years. I scheduled everything on the whole eight floors. I knew what was going on every letterpress and every offset press and when the preparation work had to be done and the plates ready and all. I had big charts--this was before the computer business--of every press and when a job would finish and what had to be ready for it, and so forth, and this was both in letterpress and offset. I worked there for fifteen years. Then, a strange thing happened. They were considered the best printer in Philadelphia and Majestic Press was considered the worst printer in Philadelphia. They printed a lot of slop work. We printed artwork and stuff. They merged. Actually, Majestic Press, I think, bought Stern's, because they wanted the name. So, the guy who owned Majestic Press, his name was Bernie Green. He called me in and he said, when we merged, we were going to move up to Byberry Road in North Philadelphia, to their plant. He said, "You're going to keep the same job that you have here." The man who's doing the job happened to be one of their relatives, a cousin or something. He said, "He's going to move to another position." So, that sounded good to me. I moved up there and it was just a terrible hassle, because the guy who was a member of their family, who had the job before--it was a mixture of two different groups of people, a high level and a low level group working together. So, this guy would come in--even though he had a different job, he would come in--in the second shift and he would change jobs around. I would come in in the morning and everything would be different from what I expected to find. So, we went into the president of the company, Bernie Green, and Bernie would give the man the reading off about not coming in, "That's not your job, stay out if it," and so forth. It wasn't

working. He would stay out of it for a week and he would be back in and, I guess, because he was a family member, they had to deal with it. So, I put in an application for a job at Educational Testing Service in Princeton. Boy, they were picky. I must've been called in there four or five different times. I was interviewed by a different person every time. So, I finally got the job as a Director of Test Production, which was a similar type to what I was doing at Stern's. I was scheduling all the work, but I had to schedule all the professional people, when they had to have their test works in, because my department--I had about forty women working for me--they did the typesetting, the proofreading, the layout and everything from the raw copy up to go into the printer. So, I did that for thirty years. I think I did very well there. I've been retired from there. I get a good retirement. They have a very good system. It was a great company to work for. Like every company, it's changed since then, because they now have outside companies doing some of the clerical work and some of the other things that go on, but it was a wonderful place to work. I dealt with some very highly educated people. I don't know how I managed to get along that way, because I wasn't that highly educated, but I had to say I was very deeply respected. I mean, I think I did a pretty good job.

SI: Was there a union at Stetson?

LA: Yes.

SI: Were you involved with the union?

LA: Yes. We were members of the union and we did go on strike once while I was there. I think we were out for almost a month. That's the only real union problem they had. I mean, everybody was a member, but, other than that one spell where we went on strike, it seemed to work things out pretty well.

SI: Was the strike over wages or some other issue?

LA: Yes. I think it was over wages and over how they had jobs distributed in different wage levels and stuff like that.

SI: You were working at Stetson's and living in this boarding home when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

LA: I have to think about that--yes.

SI: Do you remember where you were that day and how you got the news?

LA: Yes. I think, although I was living at that home, I was at my mother's house in Camden when we got the news, because I remember it was kind of a tight-knit neighborhood. All the neighbors visited and talked with each other, because I remember a lot of discussion and people going from house to house, "Did you see this or hear that?" and so forth. I don't remember any great details about it, but I remember everybody was really upset and excited about it. I can't specifically say what happened, but I remember all the visitations and discussions and, of course, there were people that went right away [to the Armed Forces]. I would've gone in a little bit

earlier, I guess, but I wanted to go into the Marine Corps. I might as well be honest--I thought I was going to be too short to get in the Marine Corps. So, I was holding off and holding off. Finally, I said, "Well, I might as well go down and try it." I don't know why, but, for some reason, nobody even mentioned my height. [laughter]

SI: Why did you choose the Marine Corps?

LA: Well, I had had some literature on it before any of this happened. There was a guy that lived in Jefferson who was a couple of years older than me and he had several books on the Marine Corps, and so, he handed them to me and he had some pamphlets. He later did go--in fact, he went into the Marine Corps, I think, before I did--and he's the one that got me interested. I was reading some of the books about it and some of their background, and so forth. I decided that was the place I wanted to be.

SI: Tell me a little bit about the process of actually getting into the Marine Corps, the physical, going down to report, that sort of thing.

LA: Okay. Well, at that time, I needed--let's see, I was, how old was I?--no, I was old enough to sign in, I guess, but my mother went with me. I think she just went with me for company. I don't know. We went to an office in Camden, but you couldn't sign up in Camden. You had to go over to Philadelphia. So, she went with me there. The reason I remember she went with me is because some street photographer took a picture, which I have somewhere, of her and I walking down the street. We used to say, "This is a picture of when you were on your way to join the Marine Corps." [laughter] So, I went to Philadelphia and joined. It's funny--I'm kind of a fussy eater and I'll tell you one story. My stepfather, my mother's second husband, once said to me--I wouldn't eat baked beans, because I don't eat any kind of cooked tomatoes. So, Italian stuff is kind of out of line for me. Anyway, they were having baked beans one night and I wasn't eating them and he would say to me, "Someday, you'll eat these and like them." That was his favorite saying. I said, "No, Andy, someday I might eat them to stay alive, but I'll never like them." So, that was my comeback to him and it was funny, when I signed up for the Marine Corps and when we signed the final papers and were about ready to go, the recruiting sergeant took us to lunch and they had baked beans and hot dogs. [laughter] I didn't eat the beans there, either. So, I signed up in Philadelphia, and then, of course, I went to Parris Island. That was an experience.

SI: Every Marine I interview has a story about Parris Island; tell me about the trip down to South Carolina and getting into training.

LA: Yes. Well, we went by train. Well, in those days, most travel was by train or a bus, but mostly by train. I went to Parris Island and we no sooner got off the bus and walked the yellow line over to where the guy was going to talk to us and we sat under a tree. Boy, they picked the great guys to greet you. [laughter] They gave us such a story, "Don't worry about home now. You're in the Marine Corps. Your wife or girlfriend is already going out somewhere else." [laughter] They start you off real good like that. I remember this guy, the one thing I remember most is, there was a real heavy-set guy in the group. The first thing he did--I mean, we were only there fifteen minutes--and he said, "You know what? You need to work some of that off."

He said, "There's a bridge." The bridge is like a quarter of a mile away. He said, "I want you to double-time it down to that bridge and back." It's a wonder the guy didn't drop out of the Marine Corps by then, because he was really puffing when he got back. So, that was the first--I still remember that scene, because I said, "Boy, this is the first guy. The guy just got off the bus and he's running a quarter-mile." [laughter] We had two really--well, they all were--tough drill sergeants. Actually, I didn't have a Sergeant. He was only a Corporal. There were two drill instructors. There was a buck Sergeant, who you never saw, only for inspections and stuff. You saw him put on his blues and go out for the weekend on pass or something. The other guy handled the whole workload and he did quite a job on it. I might as well tell you, he looked like a bulldog, because his nose was mashed in straight to his face and he looked as tough as he sounded. [laughter] His name was (Baxter?). It was funny--you figure once you've seen that drill instructor during boot camp, you'll never see him again. Well, when I became a Staff Sergeant, this is after a lot of schooling and all, I came back to Cherry Point and I'll tell you later, I got this lousy job to clean up a place down in New River, but, on that job, we had no mess hall. So, I had twenty-five guys working for me and we had to put them all on a truck and take them in to the main base at Camp Lejeune and eat. So, while I was doing that, I stopped at the bar there and who was standing at the bar but this drill instructor that I'd had, like, a long time before? I came up and I introduced myself and he said he vaguely remembered me, but I was a Staff Sergeant and he was a buck Sergeant. I outranked him. It was funny, and you know what? He was a great guy. I have to imagine that, at some point, he went in on a landing somewhere. I don't know if he ever came back or not, but he was really a tough guy and he did the job right. He talked to me like he really respected the fact that I made the rank, and so forth. I've asked people over the years, "Did you ever see your drill instructor afterward?" Everybody says, "No, never saw them after Parris Island." So, I was one of the ones who did, I guess. Oh, that's another thing--I never met anybody that had the same drill instructors that I did. They separated and you never found them again. Then, I was visiting a relative of my daughter-in-law's who had been in the Marine Corps. We were just talking about boot camp and stuff. This is quite awhile after the war. I said, "Boy, I'll never forget the two guys I had." I told him who they were and he said, "I had the same drill instructors." So, we figured when we went in--he went in, like, two months before me. So, we figured that they had his platoon and they followed with mine, when I went in, they had just changed over and I, just by some coincidence, picked up the same two drill instructors. That's the only one I ever met along the way and this is a guy I didn't even know before, except that they told me he was in the Marine Corps.

SI: What month did you arrive in Parris Island?

LA: May the 1st of--gosh, I've got to go back--'42, May 1, 1942.

SI: The Marine Corps is famous for tearing you down and building you back up. Do you remember some of the things they did during the "tearing down" phase that stand out?

LA: I'm not sure; I don't know what you mean.

SI: Would they try to get you on some kind of punishment detail, like point out something that was minor and give you a punishment for it?

LA: Yes. Anything minor, you had to pay for it. You certainly didn't call your rifle a gun. That was really bad. You wound up sleeping with it. I don't know what happened to this guy, but I remember, we were on inspection and this officer would walk by and he didn't stop at everybody, but [would] pick out certain people. The guy next to me, he stopped in front of the guy and he asked him something about his rifle. The guy didn't have the clip on right and he pulled it and the whole thing came out in his hand. He took him away. I don't know what he did with him. [laughter] He called the Sergeant over--this was a lieutenant--he called him over and they took the guy away. I don't know, I guess they gave him some special training in handling a rifle or something. Those kind of things would happen. I found, despite the fact that you see these things and you hear shouting and cursing and carrying on and discipline, and so forth, it was a tough experience, but I didn't have any real bad encounters, maybe because I'd made up my mind to do everything as it's supposed to be done, but I saw a lot of it. I mean, if you were in a platoon that was fairly new and you were not marching as well as you should, but there was one guy in there that was even further behind, after a certain amount of prodding, and so forth, if he still didn't improve, there was always several platoons out marching. He'd find a more advanced platoon that was really crisp, and so forth, and send this guy over there. That guy could be trampled on and knocked over, and I've seen that happen a few times. I guess it worked good, because they probably came back and was marching with the rest of the group. I had one experience that probably maybe nobody has had. You used to hear stories about, "If you do certain things, you'll go to the brig," and so forth. You never had the chance. All of your time was pretty much consumed by certain things. We went through our original training before we went to the rifle range. That was a whole separate unit. When we went to the rifle range, we got there a week ahead of time, which was not good, because that gave us a week of mess duty. So, mess duty at Parris Island is twice as bad as mess duty anywhere else, because you're going in at, like, two or three in the morning to get breakfast ready, and then, get an hour or so off and you're ready for lunch. You're, like, working around the clock. So, anyway, we were going to start mess duty on a Monday. So, for some strange reason, we had like a Sunday afternoon off. We couldn't go anywhere, but, I mean, we didn't have any chores to do. So, I laid in the sun with two other guys and I got really sunburned. I'd always heard the story, "You don't turn yourself in for getting sunburned, because you should know better than to tend to do that." Well, that must have happened, because the other guy went to sick bay and I never saw him again. To this day, I never saw him again. [laughter] I don't know what happened to him. Well, the first week in boot camp--the first week at the rifle range--you do nothing but snap-in exercises. That means that you stand there all day long and the guy gives you prone position, sitting position, standing position, and you're jumping from one way to the other. I had solid blisters all down my leg, I mean, really blisters. I never had a sunburn like that in my life, before or since, but it was bad and I'm jumping up and down and prone and sitting and standing and all. I could feel these blisters breaking and the water running down. I figured, "I'm not telling anybody," but that was a miserable week, the snapping-in. By the time before the end of the week, they had pretty well dried up and I was back to normal, but I had in my mind, "If I turn myself in with this, I may not see the rest of these guys for a while." That might have been the worst experience I had in boot camp, suffering through that sunburn blisters at a critical time when I was snapping-in, back and forth and up and down. That was the hardest part for me and it was my own doing, because I laid out there in the couple hours I had to lay in the sun. Otherwise, I got through boot camp pretty well, mainly by listening closely to directions and doing what you're told. I mean, that's the main thing. Well, you do some work that puts you through some paces and all.

SI: How did all the men in your platoon get along?

LA: I think they got along exceptionally well, very well, I think mainly because--maybe this is one thing that it teaches you--it taught you to work together. I guess that's why you get these various punishment things, because you know if you don't cooperate with the guy next to you and do the things you're supposed to do, you're going to wind up with the short end of the stick. I think maybe that's part of the reason for that kind of training, because you have to depend on each other. If you need something that somebody can help you with to avoid the whole platoon having a problem, they'll do it. So, I think we had a pretty close-knit group of people.

SI: Was there a ceremony when you completed boot camp or were you just sent to your unit?

LA: Yes. Well, we had a final march on the parade ground and a ceremony and a speech from people and congratulations on finishing boot camp. In the meantime, for the week before you were done, you were usually taking tests of some kind, to determine where you were going to be placed afterward. What usually happened was, if they said you were going to Quantico, you knew you were going into Aviation. If they said you were going to Camp Lejeune, you knew you were going in a line company. So, I was sent to Quantico. That was good. I really wanted to go to Quantico, rather than Camp Lejeune.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You were assigned to Quantico. You said you had wanted to go into Aviation.

LA: Yes.

SI: Did you get a leave between Parris Island and Quantico or did you just go straight there?

LA: No. I went directly from Parris Island to Quantico. Actually, that was like a processing center. It was the aviation processing center, but I guess I was in Quantico for three weeks or so before they decided where I was going to go. In that time, you take some tests, some written tests and interviews, and do a lot of ground work, ground duties of some kind. Then, it was determined that I would go to aviation machinist's mate school at the naval air station in Jacksonville, Florida. So, I went there and it was a great school, very good and thorough. So, it took me four months to get through and they gave me some very thorough training. They break you out in the morning sometimes and take you off to some other field where they had a half a dozen planes lined up, where they had done something to the engines, and so forth. You had to find the trouble, indicate the problem and make the repair. They give you training in case you get on an aircraft carrier deck and they line up planes like they would be on an aircraft carrier and, now, you're working with props. So, like today, you've got jets, but you had to learn how to get between planes without getting into prop problems and running into a [propeller]. It was good, thorough training. Then, I said I wanted to go to aerial gunnery school. So, I went from Jacksonville, Florida, to Hollywood, Florida, and the Navy had an aerial gunnery school. They took over a military academy, which wasn't bad, because there was two guys to a room, an in-room bath and all that, but it only lasted six weeks. A strange thing happened to me there. First

of all, I knew some people that lived in Hollywood and I'd known them for some time, because they came from Hollywood up to Jefferson every summer and they ran a road stand right there at that corner, in Jefferson. So, I went there, like, on weekends for dinner and a visit. Well, it had to be from there that I got the measles. Because I was the only person on the base with the measles. They had to isolate me. So, they put me in a separate room in back of the sick bay. I was up on the upper bunk, just in my skivvies, and these two Navy officers came in, and I guess--it is a Navy base, even though there's Marines on it--they probably figured I was a sailor. The two Officers walked in and they said, "What are you doing in the bunk, sailor?" I said, "I have the measles." The one Officer turns to the other and says, "What the hell are we doing in here?" and they both walked out. [laughter] So, what happened was this took me out of the Marine class and put me into a class with nineteen sailors. So, there was one Marine and nineteen sailors. So, I went through the rest of the course, for the next, I guess that was three weeks, since for the last three weeks, I was with the nineteen sailors. So, that meant that I was traveling on my own, because my class had all graduated and left. I traveled cross-country by train by myself. When I graduated, they told me I had to go, to Camp Miramar in San Diego. It wasn't bad traveling by myself, because I got attention. Two elderly women took me to dinner in New Orleans. [laughter] So, it wasn't a bad trip at all. I went to Miramar in San Diego. I'll tell you an interesting little incident on my way there. I got into Miramar about midnight or one o'clock in the morning and one of the guards at the gate said, "There's two barracks over there for transient people that haven't been assigned." He said, "Just go in one and find an empty bunk until morning." So, this is where I met the guy that I spent the rest of my time in the Marine Corps with. I was a PFC [private first class]. So, I went in and I found a bunk and I went to sleep. About daybreak, I heard all this very familiar cadence stuff, like, "One hup, Reh-Rup." I said, "Somebody's out here marching this time in the morning?" So, a guy brought them over and he broke them up and told them to go on their way. It just so happened he came in and he was sitting at the bunk next to mine. He was a corporal. His name was Rhoteh. I said, "What are you doing out there drilling?" He said, "Well, I came in here, all these guys are in transit. I thought they needed a little exercise." So, I guess they were all PFCs. He's a corporal. He's like a big shot. So, he said, "I just called them out at daybreak and I took them out and gave them a little march." He had no right to do that than fun did it on his own decision.

[TAPE PAUSED]

LA: So, that's where I met Rhoten. He was from Westminster, Maryland, we became friends and later our families were friendly. I was best man at his wedding. Even after the Marine Corps, we used to go down and visit and they would come up here. We had a fiftieth reunion of the formation of our squadron in 1993. He was so anxious to go to it. It was going to be in Cherry Point. He made all the plans. He said, "You stop and pick me up and we'll drive to Cherry Point," but he died before that occurred. So, he didn't get to that fiftieth reunion. He was a good friend and he was very forward, in that he didn't care who he talked to or what he said. He always got away with it, but he was a good man to have around. I enjoyed my time with him, although he never got over the fact I was never a corporal. I got promoted from PFC to sergeant, which put me one rank ahead of him and he never caught up. He was always one rank [behind]. When I made tech sergeant, he was a staff, and so on. He finally got over it. He got used to it after a while. He was a kind of a guy [who] made life a little bit easier, because he was always in good spirits and joking. He knew what he was doing. He did some things that people would say,

"Well, that's a little out of line," but he knew how to handle things and how to do things. It was a good relationship.

SI: How long were you at Miramar?

LA: Oh, I was only at Miramar for a week or so. Then, we got assigned to regular bases. Miramar was like the West Coast staging area, where people went, and then, got reassigned. So, I went from Miramar to Mojave. That's an interesting thing. Mojave probably no longer exists. Well, the town of Mojave probably exists, but I think--I can't be sure of this, but I always suspected--you know how they bring the space shuttles in to Muroc, out there on the West Coast? I think that what used to be the Marine base in Mojave is part of that. I don't think there's a Marine base there anymore; I think it's part of that shuttle landing thing now. It was out in the Mojave Desert. The town is like one street long. It's like going back to the Old West. There's a saloon on every corner. They had one sheriff who packed a six gun [revolver] and wore a Stetson hat. [laughter] We had two-story barracks--at the end of each floor was a staff room where two guys that were Staff Sergeant or above would stay. So, I shared a room with George Temple, who was Shirley Temple's brother. He was at Pearl Harbor when it was hit. So, he was in the Marine Corps earlier. He was a Master Sergeant and he was in charge of the Shore Patrol. He was a nice guy. If the sheriff had a problem, such as somebody acting up in a bar or something, he would call George. George would hop in a jeep and go into town and find the guy that was the problem and bring him back to the base. So, that's the way him and the sheriff worked together. Just to progress a little bit on that, he went into wrestling when he got out of the Marine Corps. One day, I was living in Camden, after service, a friend of mine said, "Didn't you know George Temple?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, I just saw poster, he's wrestling in Conventional Hall this week in Camden." I even remember--why I remember this--but he was wrestling the light heavyweight champion of France, whose name, don't ask me how I can remember this, his name was Maurice LaChapelle. [laughter] So, anyway, we got tickets and we went to the match. The guy that was with me told one of the ushers that I was in service with George. A little while later, the guy said, "Would you like to talk to George?" He said, "I can take you back to the dressing room." I said, "Yes." So, I went back to the dressing room and I talked with him for about ten minutes or so, between the bouts. About a year later, I heard that he got his leg broken, and I never heard any more about him, but I checked and found he passed away in 1996. That was my experience with it. Shirley used to be driven, because Mojave's not that far from Hollywood and Los Angeles. People used to go there, on liberty Shirley would come out maybe every other week or so, like at lunchtime, and go in the mess hall and eat with the men.

SI: Was she a teenager at this point? How old was she?

LA: Yes. She must have been--yes, she was a teenager. She was not old enough to drive, because someone drove the car.

[TAPE PAUSED]

LA: When I went to Mojave, I was in what they called headquarters squadron. I would find out that headquarters squadron is where they put a little bit of everything. We had about a half a

dozen different kinds of airplanes. We had SNJs, which were just little two-seat trainer planes. They decided that--I guess this was a base where they determined where you're going to specialize. So, they sent Rhoten to Burbank, I think, is where the SBDs were made. They're Douglas dive bombers. They sent him to that factory. They sent me cross-country to Bridgeport, Connecticut, to F4U school. That's where they made the gull-winged F4U fighter planes. There were three of us that went there. At that time, I was only a PFC. There were two PFCs and a Sergeant, three of us. We would work on the assembly line with somebody that was assembling the plane in the morning, and then, in the afternoon, we would go to class, where we would study whatever part we had been working on. I still have, somewhere around here, a huge sketch of the hydraulic system of an F4U. This lasted, I think, six weeks. So, I'm figuring that I'm going to go into a fighter squadron--you should never figure that. [laughter] Rhoten thought he was going into dive bombers. When I got off the plane to come home--owe, before we came home. The three of us each sent a telegram to Mojave asking, "Since we were working on the F4Us, why not send us up to Pratt & Whitney engine plant?" which was also in Connecticut. Well, they turned that down. Then, we asked for extra traveling time to come home, or to come back to the base. I was close enough in Connecticut that I got home on the weekends. The funny thing was--the Sergeant was from Philadelphia--we each got a telegram back. The other guy that was with me and me, [it] said, "Request granted. You have five extra days you can have at home." The Sergeant got one back and it said, "Request not granted," Well, he said, "Boy, they must have plans for me." That's the first thing [you think], "Well, if they didn't grant it, I guess I'm going over." Well, that didn't happen. We got our five days. We went back to Mojave and he was still in the same place he had been before. I don't know why they turned him down. Then, a strange thing happens. We go to F4U and SBD school, and then, they came around and told us that they were taking a few men from each of the West Coast bases and we were going to Cherry Point to form bombing squadrons. Well, this is not what we were--in fact, the bombers we were going in to didn't even have the same engines. So, this was the first Marine medium bomber squadrons, which we called PBJs, because we used the Navy designation, which were really B-25s. So, this was the first medium bomber squadrons in the Marine Corps. It started out with four squadrons, four "400" squadrons, 413, 423, 433 and 443. I was in 443. Then, people came from other parts to meet in Cherry Point to form these squadrons. The guy that brought me across was a Master Sergeant who had already served twenty years. He was in Nicaragua back in the '20s, and was on Midway when Japan attacked. He was in charge of our group coming across. So, we had quite a trip across country. There was, like, twenty of us. I was a Staff Sergeant and Rhoten was a Buck Sergeant and all the others were corporals and PFCs. I think they picked guys at some bases that didn't have a good reputation, because one guy had been in the brig that was in the group. Another guy, he was an Indian. I never knew what his name was. They all called him "The Chief." He was a huge guy. He was also a drinker. Sometimes, they say Indians will tear up a bar when they get too drunk. Anyway, we were in this coach, traveling cross-country, and there were some civilians in the coach. Well, the old Master Sergeant, when we first started out, says, "I want your attention." He said to the civilians, "If you see any actions on the part of these Marines on the way or they make you uncomfortable in any way, let me know and they'll pay for it when we reach Cherry Point." [laughter] So, that was under control. Then, we had some layovers. We had a layover in Texas and we had another layover in New Orleans. So, he said, when we left, the Master Sergeant says, "Okay," he said, "I want The Chief to watch (Grabbit?) and I want the two sergeants to watch The Chief." So, when we got off the train, Rhoten said to me, "Which way did The Chief go?" I said, "He went that way." Rhoten

says, "We're going this way." [laughter] So, I don't know what happened to them. They came back all right. I guess they made out all right, but we weren't about to follow them. That was the way Rhoten usually acted. He was a good guy to get along with. We did lose one guy in New Orleans. It was a funny thing. I don't drink, but I did drink when I was in the Marine Corps. I think you had to sort of join the group, I guess. We were in this bar in New Orleans. The guy who seemed to be like the leader of the group was saying, "I called a cab, because we've got to get back to the train station." Nobody seemed to realize it, but we all got in a cab and left and the guy who was organizing it, he wasn't with us. We left him there. He never made the train. So, we told (Ivy?) the Master Sergeant, when we got back, "We thought he was with us, but he's not." He said, "Well, that's his problem." He says, "I'll cover up for him, because he'll go to the Red Cross and he'll get a ticket and he'll wind up in Cherry Point." He was a pretty decent guy, (Crownover?). He says, "Oh, I'll cover for him for a couple days and he'll wander into camp." He did. He came in about two days later. [laughter]

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You were still making your way to Cherry Point. The guy you lost in New Orleans finally came back.

LA: Yes. He got back. Then, we were just standing around and waiting for assignment, because they were just forming these squadrons. So, they formed the "400" squadrons and I happened to get into the one that was 443. There was 413, 423, 433 and 443. Then, they decided that they were going to ship--the planes, we didn't even have the planes yet--but they were going to ship each group to different outlying fields for training. The planes were arriving and the Adjutant came out and he said, "We're going to ship 443 to a place called Peterfield Point, which is the north end of Camp Lejeune. It's a small airfield." He said, "Right now, it's not in use." He said, "The barracks and stuff have been used by an engineering group that moved out. So, they said there's nothing there but these huts." I forget what the huts were called. They looked like they were made out of cardboard. Anyway, there were twenty people to a hut. He said, "We're going to send a group to get this place set up for the squadron to move in." Now, this is where it doesn't pay to have your name start with an "A" and to have a rank that puts you in charge of something. [laughter] So, he said, "I don't know any of you people," but, "I'm going to send twenty-five men to Peterfield Point to set it up for the squadron to come in." He says, "You'll have to set up the cafeteria, you'll have to clean out all the barracks and you'll get everything ready for us to move in." He said, "I don't know any of you people. I'm going to assign Staff Sergeant Allen," that's me, "to head this detail of twenty-five men." Well, I had these two friends of mine, Rhoten was a Buck Sergeant and a guy named Mix was another Buck Sergeant. They're laughing because I got this assignment, but they laughed too soon, because he said, "You can have two Buck Sergeants to go with you." [laughter] So, you know who that was. So, anyway, we went down there and we really worked. We had to clean out everything. We had to bring in stoves and utensils and chairs and tables and all for the cafeteria. We had to set up the bunks in all the different quarters, because it was like a deserted base. We worked at it for, I think, three weeks to get it ready. We had to take a truck into Camp Lejeune to eat, because we didn't have eating facilities there. It was a tough situation. We had a very tough Lieutenant Colonel who was our Commanding Officer. So, when the squadron all came in, the Adjutant called me over and introduced me to the Lieutenant Colonel. I saluted and I gave strictly

military courtesy. We talked for about twenty minutes. I was telling him where things were located and to work we had done. Then, he dismissed me and I saluted and I turned and I walked away. I heard someone say, "Hey, Sarge," and I thought it was a guy in the squadron, turned around and I said, "Yeah?" and it was the Colonel. [laughter] He gave me a twenty-minute lecture on military courtesy, and the whole time he's talking, the Captain is trying to calm him down and say, "He spent all this time strictly courteous and very polite to you." He said, "He didn't realize it was you." He's trying to explain it, but the Colonel didn't listen. So, I got this big speech. At the end of it, he said, "Since you know the territory so well and where things are located, you can be Sergeant of the Guard." [laughter] So, I got the job as the first Sergeant of the Guard there. So, there were things that happened that most people didn't get along with this Lieutenant Colonel. I'll tell you another incident that happened there. Not at that time when I was Sergeant of the Guard, but, like, a month or so later, I was Sergeant of the Guard again. I was out doing some guard duty work, and I came back and the officer of the day was in the office. The Officer of the Day should have assigned somebody to take the flag down at dusk. I came back in and I said to the officer of the day, who was one of our pilots--he was a First Lieutenant-- "Did you have somebody take the flag down?" He said, "Oh, I forgot." So, he said, "Take the jeep, go down to the main flag stand, grab the nearest guard to the flag, and take the flag down." Well, the flag is in a cement stand across from the officers' quarters, which made it kind of tricky to do. I went down and got the guard and said, "We're just going to quietly get the flag down." Well, just as we got the flag almost down and ready to get into the jeep, I looked over and the Colonel was standing in the door of his quarters. So, I went back to the office and I told the Lieutenant, "The Colonel saw us taking it down, but he didn't say anything." Well, this guy was a pilot, so, I didn't see him until he came out to fly my plane one day, a couple weeks later. "By the way," I said, "I never heard anything about the flag incident." He said, "Maybe you didn't, but I was in the Colonel's office the next morning." [laughter] So, the officer of the day got the raking over. I didn't hear anything more about it. On a weekend pass, if you came into Rocky Mount, there was always a few hours to wait for a bus. There was a line, usually all the way around the block, to get a bus back to Camp Lejeune. I went away for the weekend and I came back and I waited several hours to get on the bus and I got into the base about an hour late. Ivy Crownover, who was the Master Sergeant, would have covered up for me, but the Lieutenant that was there apparently turned my name in for coming in late and I had to go in and see the Colonel for ten or fifteen minutes. He just told me--he was pretty decent--he said, "Just allow yourself more time." So, apparently, about five guys had the same experience and it was kind of washed off. Then, they told us we were going to move to Key West, Florida, to practice torpedo runs. They were going to try and put torpedo racks on the bottoms of these PBJs and use them. Before, they had used skip-bombing to bomb ships. They would drop a bomb so that it would skip along and go in like a torpedo, but they wanted to drop torpedoes. So, we went to Boca Chica Navy base in Key West, Florida. When we were ready to leave, only the plane crews and the captains went down. The rest of the main body stayed up in North Carolina. So, the promotion list came out and was posted on the board and I was promoted from Staff Sergeant to Tech Sergeant. These other three or four guys that had that same experience of talking to him, coming in late, they had a line drawn through our promotion. So, we're all saying, "Well, we got cancelled out of that promotion." So, anyway, we went to Boca Chica. We were down there for six weeks. When we came back, the First Sergeant said, "Come in and sign the payroll." So, we went in and I signed it and it said Tech Sergeant. I said to the Sergeant Major, "Must be some mistake. He took that away from me." The Sergeant Major laughed, he said, "Yes, and he gave

it back, too." [laughter] "He got called up to the General's office and the General said, 'When this thing has gone through headquarters and been approved, you can't cross it out by drawing a line through it.'" So, we won on that matter. We got our promotions back and the Sergeant Major was very happy. He said he really got told off by the General. He said, "This thing has already been passed and approved and through the office. You can't just say, 'Well, no, I'll draw a line through it and cross it off.'" So, I got my rank back. [laughter]

SI: Can you just give me a sense of what you did on an average day during this training period where you were getting ready to go overseas?

LA: Well, a lot of it had to do with the original engine training and regular aircraft training at Jacksonville, even though it was different engines and all in Bridgeport. Then, you have--in all these places, you get what they call an inspection sheet and every plane has a daily inspection, a thirty-hour inspection, a sixty, a ninety. At 120 hours, you have a major check-up. So, the job I had, because I was a Crew Chief, I had three or four guys on the crew of the plane that worked with me. First of all, some of these guys were trained in different things. Some were hydraulic men or electricians. So, first of all, you assign them to the area that they're going to work in. Then, you have to, as the Crew Chief, do the overall inspection. You get through the whole check sheet and you make sure that each guy has done all the electrical work and checked all line connections. One of the main things about it, the thing that they always stressed, is small items, where you forget to close up a cotter pin or where you don't tighten something to the tightness it should be. So, all those little things have to be checked, but most of these guys are trained to do it that way. So, you don't really run into a lot of neglect in that respect, because they get pretty stiff training on each operation. It's up to the guy that's the Crew Chief, who's going to sign that sheet, to make sure that they do their work right. It's the same thing as you'll find in civilian life. If you find guys that are good at the job and are conscientious and do the job right, you have a pretty good working crew. I guess, after a short time of actually working in the field and actually working on it, you become even more concerned about all the little details that can go wrong and can cause a problem. It turns out to be a pretty smooth working group, I think.

SI: Were there any challenges in suddenly having to deal with the PBJ, having only trained on these smaller planes?

LA: Well, no, I think the only challenges were getting used to the size, because the basic part of it is pretty much the same. It's just the expanded size of engines and planes. Basically, the two different engines that were used most were Pratt & Whitney and Wrights. We had Wright engines in the PBJs and the F4Us, where we went, had Pratt & Whitney engines. I think the main thing is that once you've done your first one or two checks, because you've already had the training on what to do, once you get used to that particular engine you're on, so, you're assigned to that plane regularly, you get so you know the engine and you know every little detail about what to look for and what to take care of. So, it's pretty much a matter of concentration and not overlooking little things. The little things are what can hurt you, like everything is fixed with a safety wire, so [that] the bolts won't turn, they're wired together. You can study it closely. You can always see where somebody could miss a bolt or nut here. Well, that may not cause a problem. It may never come loose, but you still need to take that safety measure. I think there's

a lot of stress in all the training of, "Don't overlook the tiny, little things that can upset things or cause a problem." I think that was the big part of the training and I think that it worked well.

SI: During this squadron training phase, were there any accidents or equipment malfunctions?

LA: I don't know of anything. There probably was some, where something actually went wrong from the engine point of view. A lot of times, it would be outside things, maybe a pilot who wasn't used to what he was doing or using the instruments properly, maybe a storm that would cause a problem or things like that. My feeling from most of the guys that I worked with, they were trained to really concentrate on every little detail, not to overlook things. One thing they train you to do is never go halfway through the job and quit. You always follow it all the way through. You never get a half a job done, and then, go off on some other thing and come back to it later. You always have to stay on it. If you have some reason to leave, then, you call in your assistant or another guy on the crew to take over where you left off. I think concentration and not taking breaks in what you're doing had a lot to do with keeping things right. I've seen some accidents that were not caused by the guys working on the planes. For instance, we moved from Cherry Point to El Centro, California, before we went overseas. So, when we were in El Centro, we were running two shifts. So, I split the crew up, day and night shift. Incidentally, I got married in El Centro, and so, I was living off the base. I had an apartment. I got married just before I went overseas. I was on the night shift and I was riding in with one of the pilots in the afternoon and he said, "Oh, we lost a plane this morning," and I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes." I said, "What one was it?" He said, "I think it was D-25," and I said, "That's my plane. You'd better drop me at the engineering office." So, I went in the engineering office. They have a board. They have all the planes listed and what their condition is. On D-25, it said, "Out of this world." What happened was, the guy was taking off and some trainer, in a little Piper Cub crossed the runway and the guy had to pull up to avoid the Cub and he went into the boondocks. I saw them haul the plane in on a flatbed. [laughter] It was a mess and could not be salvaged. There was nothing wrong with the plane, it was just an accident caused by a trainee who was flying that little Cub. Well, after the war, at a reunion--I think it was at the fiftieth reunion--I was walking by and these two officers were talking. The one guy was telling the story about the plane that he cracked up in El Centro. He was telling him about, "This guy came right out in the middle of the runway and I'm stuck." He said, "I had no place to go." I heard him telling the story and I said, "That was my plane." He said, "Really?" It was funny, because, then, he started introducing me, "This is the guy who's plane I cracked up in El Centro." [laughter] I got to know the guy pretty well. I corresponded with him later. He lived in Carolina. He would write me some letters after that, because I hadn't known who it was that cracked it up until then. This is fifty years later. [laughter] So, I've seen incidents like that, that were caused by just somebody not thinking about some trivial thing that you had to try and avert. I never saw--I'm sure it happened--but I never remember any mechanical thing causing a problem like that, which I guess I'm kind of thankful for. Well, I'll tell you another little story, though. When we were in Mojave, there was a guy who was a Master Sergeant who was in before the war. His name was (Willy Barnes?). He was from Rocky Mount, North Carolina. He should know better, but anyway, he was a Master Sergeant and he was there in Mojave and he was like the Assistant Line Chief. He said, "There's an SBD down at general maintenance that's ready to be picked up." He said, "I think I'll go down and get it." So, he went down to get it and he was taxing it up. Well, there wasn't much activity going on and there was a fire truck sitting there and he was

coming up the edge of the runway, up the apron. We were all at the hangar and we're saying, "He's not taxiing correctly." You have to taxi in a zig-zag manner, so [that] you can look out the side, you can't see out the front, and he's going straight ahead and we said, "He's going to hit that fire truck." We're all out there trying to attract [his] attention and the fire truck pulled out, but we didn't realize that on the other side of the fire truck was an ambulance. There was a Navy corpsman sitting in the seat of the ambulance and he hit the ambulance with the SBD. When that thing hit, that Navy corpsman was already on the runway heading away. [laughter] It just about cut that ambulance in half. Well, he got court-martialed for it. I didn't see him for a while, and then, I ran into him when we went overseas and he still had the same rank. I don't know how he got out of that. He really messed up two things, the ambulance and the SBD. That's a dive bomber.

SI: Was that called the tricycle landing gear?

LA: Yes, it don't have the tricycle. It's down here--it's got the tailwheel. So, you can't see straight ahead. I don't know what he was thinking of. [laughter]

SI: You said you went to Centro, California.

LA: El Centro.

SI: El Centro. How long were you there before you went over?

LA: We were there, I guess, about three months before we went overseas.

SI: Where did you meet your first wife?

LA: Well, that's rather funny, because I got a call from my mother right after I went in the Marine Corps. She says, "A woman just moved into the house next door." This was in Camden. "She has a very nice daughter and the daughter said she was going to write you a letter." Well, that's how I first met [her]. I got a couple letters from her and we corresponded and I met her when I came home on liberty, and so forth. That's just the few times that I was home, like when I was in Bridgeport, I spent the weekends down there. Then, when I knew we were going overseas, I asked her if she would marry me beforehand. She wanted to marry me, but she didn't like traveling across country on a train. [laughter] So, there was a guy in my squadron who lived in Brooklyn and his wife lived in Brooklyn and he said, "How about if my wife comes out and she meets with your girl, and they travel out together?" which is what they did. They came out together. She would've never traveled by herself, I don't think. Then, actually, we got an apartment that had two bedrooms and separate baths, but one common kitchen, so that we could cook and eat in the kitchen and still have our separate rooms. Ivy Crownover, the old Master Sergeant, and his wife took us over to Yuma, [Arizona], which is one of the places where they have all these wedding chapels all over the place. You can go to any one and get married. So, that happened a month before I went overseas. She sent me--we laughed about it--she sent me a card that I got after I got overseas and I thought it had a design on it. It's a good thing she wrote on it, because she had a ring sewed on to the card. I thought it was part of the card. I almost

threw the thing away, and then, I read her note. "I'm sending you this ring, just thought I'd let you know that it goes on your finger and not through your nose." That's it. It's still here.

SI: What month and year did you go overseas?

LA: I went overseas the end of April '44 and stayed until after the end of the war. In fact, the war ended in August and I didn't get back home until November, mostly waiting for transportation here and there.

SI: It had something to do with the guy you came back from overseas with.

LA: Oh, yes. His name was (Bartlett?). He was a Staff Sergeant Navigator, which is a difference that you'll find in the Marine Corps, when the navigators were Sergeants, Staff, Tech or Master Tech. In the Air Force or in the Army Air Corps, they were officers. So, ours were enlisted men. Anyway, we bunked next to each other when [we] got relieved to come home at the end of the war. They sent us to Manus, the Island of Manus in the Admiralty Islands. I said to him one time, "How long did we stay on Manus?" He said, "I can tell you exactly--ninety-one days," [laughter] waiting for transportation home. This was after the war was over. So, we came home and this is an interesting thing--maybe him and I shared this as a special feature of our careers--we got welcomed in three different cities when we came back to the States. We came into San Francisco, under the Golden Gate Bridge, and we went to Treasure Island and, on the way in, this big fireboat came out and sprayed water and people sang songs, and so forth, and greeted us. Then, we stayed in Treasure Island for, I guess, a couple weeks. They put us on another ship. Instead of taking us by train, I don't know why, they put us on another boat to go down the coast. So, the first night, we pulled into San Pedro, which is the Los Angeles Harbor. We got a big welcome there. People came out. They thought we're coming back from overseas--we'd already been back. We got a big welcome there, a cheer, and we stayed there overnight and, the next morning, we headed down to San Diego. We pulled into San Diego Harbor and a blimp came over with a loudspeaker, said, "The Admiral," so-and-so, "welcomes you back." So, we got three welcomes. That's where I wound up, in San Diego. Well, I didn't wind up there for discharge. I really got discharged in Cherry Point. I got shipped back overseas to Cherry Point. Well, actually, I didn't get discharged until six months later, because I was a regular. Only the Reserves got out. They were all waving good-bye to me, because they were in the Reserves and they'd been overseas. So, they were getting immediate discharges, but I had to serve. I served until May of '46. We got back here in November, but I had a good Christmas leave. Then, my wife got pregnant before I got out and she came down to North Carolina to live with me, but she didn't like it. I guess she wanted to get home and have her mother take care of her while she was pregnant. She wasn't happy in North Carolina. Well, it wasn't really good quarters, either. We got a place off the base and it was a second-floor apartment with a wood stove in the center of the room. It was not the best living. You had to go walk fifty yards back into the field, to a pile of coal to bring in to run the stove. [laughter] So, it wasn't a pleasant place for her to be, but she went home until I got discharged.

SI: From California, where were you sent and where did you ultimately wind up?

LA: Okay. Well, when we first left San Diego, we went to Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. That was like a base where they determined what area you were going to go to. It was off--it wasn't in the war zone, actually. That's down near Australia and New Zealand. We went there for, I guess we were there for three or four weeks. Then, we got onboard another ship and went north. We passed Guadalcanal and Bougainville and all them. We were in two campaigns. One was called the Consolidation of the Northern Solomons. The other one was called the Philippine Liberation Campaign, because, finally, as the war was winding down, we were moving into the Philippines. So, I was fortunate. I didn't have any Iwo Jima-type fighting. I didn't have to--I was in Aviation. I didn't have to go ashore. So, I was fortunate in that respect, but I did draw flight pay and I had to fly so much a month in order to get my flight pay, and so forth. I had already graduated gunnery school, so, I could be called upon as a gunner along with my regular mission. I never really got called on to do it, but I had to fly that way. I lost some good friends. I'll tell you one little story about when the war had just ended and we were getting replacements in. So, you couldn't be sent back home until you got a replacement, because it was that close to the end. I mean, the war is just closing down and ending. So, they wouldn't just send you home. Well, they were already sending planes back to Hawaii, either for reburbishing or to pick up new finished planes to move into the Philippines. So, I was in 443 and 433 was right next to us. So, this Lieutenant Manuel was my engineering officer and he came up and said, "433 is sending a plane back to Hawaii and they need a crew chief to go with them. So, I'm assigning you to the job." So, I said, "Okay." He says, "Leaving the day after tomorrow." So, the next day, he came up to me and he said, "I didn't realize that you're next on the list to get shipped home." He said, "If I send you to Hawaii and back, you're liable to be here another three months waiting for another replacement." So, he said, " Art Theilen," who was a mechanic in my crew, "has been pestering me to get a trip back to Hawaii for liberty." So, he said, "I told him he could take your place on the plane." So, he took my place. Two days later, I got word that the plane blew up coming in for a landing on Palmyra Island. Everybody was lost. They never recovered the bodies. There was, I think, eleven people on it. There's a book called *Marine Bombers*. It's about the B-25s.

SI: This one?

LA: Yes. If you look on this page, it'll tell you probably the last fatality of the war wasn't even in the war zone. I don't know if you can see it on that page there. I think it says …

SI: "On 6 August, just days before the war ended, a PBJ carrying nine members of MAG 61, some going home while others were on their way to pick up a replacement aircraft, crashed and burned off Palmyra Island. There were no survivors." This is *Leatherneck Bombers: Marine Corps B-25/PBJ Mitchell Squadrons in World War II* by Alan C. Carey, a Schiffer Military History Book.

LA: In the back, he's got all the planes that were lost and the crews that were with them. Anyway, that guy was Art Theilen. I put it in my newsletter, the last couple times out, and told the story. When I told the story, I got a letter back from a guy who was a pilot in 433 and he said, "There were three planes on that flight back and I was flying one of them." He said, "They gave us a choice of landing at Palmyra or another island for refueling." He said, "They chose Palmyra and we chose the other one." He said, "It wasn't until I was coming back and landed at

Palmyra that I found out about the crash." Then, he told a little bit about the story that he had heard about it. So, it's funny how these things pop up and somebody says, "Oh, I remember. I was there when that happened," or something.

SI: When you and your unit were getting ready for the Consolidation of the Northern Solomons Campaign, what was that first base like and what were the operations like?

LA: Well, the base that we operated on practically the whole time was an island called Emirau, which is a very small island, but it had two ideal runways. A lot of those islands are coral, so, it's not much trouble to make a runway. It's almost like having cement there, as long as you get it cleared off. So, they had two runways on there and it was an ideal place to bomb Kavieng and Rabaul. Rabaul is probably the most heavily fortified island or installation that the Japanese had. In fact, when they went in there after the war, they found tunnels and crevices in place where enough stuff was stored to last a group for a couple years in there. That's where we were hitting most. The object of this--I heard the story once, I don't want to be--I have to believe there was some truth to it. When the move was going to move into the Philippines, Nimitz and MacArthur had two different ideas on how to go in there. This is a story I've heard and I have to believe that it might be true, that MacArthur wanted to continue island hopping, which would have meant that if they tried to take Rabaul, there would've been like another Iwo Jima or maybe worse even, if you can get worse. Nimitz said, "Rather than island hop and have all these landings, why not isolate the places where the troops are that could cause trouble? If we can keep them from entering the war, that's the best advantage and we don't lose as many men from it." That's where we came in. That was our job. Our job was to keep Kavieng and Rabaul, mostly, and any shipping trying to go in and out of there, from completing their mission and that's what we did. We kept Rabaul so bombed out, they couldn't get a plane off the ground. We lost some planes doing it, we lost some crews doing it, but it wasn't like taking a landing and having another Iwo Jima. So, I kind of take pride in the fact that we served--you may not have heard about us or some people didn't know we existed, but we were doing a job that maybe kept a lot of other people from getting killed. That was my feeling anyway. That's the story I heard. I never saw it actually published, but it was the general story that was circulated among our group. I think we did a pretty good job of that. There were no more Iwo Jimas afterwards.

SI: Tell me about a typical day on Emirau when the squadron was flying missions.

LA: Well, we usually worked a regular daytime job. I mean, we usually slept at night. We would get up, like, six in the morning. Of course, there were crews working throughout the night, but not necessarily our engineering group, but people that were moving bombs, hauling bomb trucks and stuff like that, would be working. We'd get up, like, six in the morning and we'd have breakfast, and then, we would head out to our lines and each plane was parked in what they call a revetment. It was a cleared out area in the jungle where a plane would park. Well, first of all, when we got out there, we would find out whether our plane was going off that day or whether it was assigned to a mission. Then, you had to work accordingly. If it was going out, you had to check it out and rev it up and check the engines and all the instruments, and so forth. If it wasn't going out, then, you would just do general cleanup and maintenance on it, but every plane had a thirty-hour, a sixty-hour, a ninety-hour check, and then, the 120-hour was the major check. That's when you did it, but, every thirty hours of flying time, there was a check and there

was a certain checklist you had to go down. Every man on the crew, who was working on certain parts of it, would have to check off and make comments. Then, it had to be signed by the crew chief, which was [me], that all of this had been done. The crew chief may be doing some of the job, but he's also checking on each one that's doing their work. So, the 120-hour check was the main one. After a while, when we starting getting some planes that got hit and they had more damage to control and maybe some engines got hit, we decided that we'd reached a point where certain engines had to be replaced. So, they formed an engine chain crew. Well, we called it a major check and engine change crew and I was put in charge of that. So, at that point, we had to change a few engines, which was kind of a major operation.

SI: Would you say that you had what you needed to do your job in terms of supplies, like spare parts, new engines?

LA: Yes. We were pretty well supplied and, of course, we also had a machine shop and we had a carpenter's shop and we had all these independent shops where we could get things made. If something didn't come in or there was a short supply, there were certain things that you could actually manufacture or make, especially in a machine shop.

SI: Did the weather affect your job in any way?

LA: It rained every day, but it rained in short spells. You could be in the bright sunlight and, all of a sudden, you'd get soaking wet, and then suddenly, you're in the sun. It might last fifteen or twenty minutes. They also had some very heavy Pacific storms that would really cause some problems. They would knock over trees, because most of those islands are coral. So, the trees that are growing are only short roots. I mean, they can't go into the [earth], so that they're easy to knock over. When a storm would come through, you'd be crawling around the top of your tent cutting off branches and moving trunks.

SI: When you were not doing your job, what other things could you do for recreation?

LA: Well, there wasn't a lot of recreation. Well, every once in a while, a ship must come in with some beer on it, because you might go for a month, and then, all of a sudden, they'd say, "Oh, there's a beer supply," and then, they would say, "Each guy can have two cans," or one can or something like that. I haven't smoked since I was--well, I smoked while I was in the service. I noted the cigarettes that came in there. Maybe that would've been a good time to stop smoking, because most of them had, like, a mold taste to them. I guess from just being stored in ships and supply areas. Recreation-wise, there wasn't much to do. There may be some occasion where there was a break, where you may go out and have a ballgame or something in some open spot, but that was very rare.

SI: What kind of relationship existed between the air crews and the ground crews?

LA: Well, I don't think there was a bad relationship, but it was, like, two separate units. The air crew got the best quarters to sleep in and got a little bit more attention, if there was any ability to give more attention. That probably caused some animosity, but not very noticeable. For the most part, they got along pretty good. They lived kind of separate lives, even though they were

right there on the same island. I mean, the air crew would be in one unit and the ground crew was in another. They would only meet at the runway, when they came out to take a plane. Then, they would, especially the crew chiefs, would get to know them pretty good, because they would ask their crew chiefs a lot of questions about this, that and the other thing before they flew. I never really saw any animosity or any problem between them. I think they all got along pretty good. They just didn't spend that much time together. Now, I had a friend who was a navigator and, when I got married and lived in El Centro, him and his wife lived next door to us, on shore. I remember when we went over on the troopship, he would stand at the rail and try to tell me how to navigate by the stars. I never learned that, [laughter] but we became very good friends. We had a massive raid on ships at an island north of us, actually a good long ways north of us. The fuel just about handled the trip up and back. It was Japanese supply ships and escorts. They sent, I think, two full squadrons up on it. The plane that he was in, wasn't my plane, but the plane he was in got hit and they had to ditch. The pilot and the navigator were killed and the rest of the crew were in life rafts for four or five days, and then, were picked up. So, that was the friend that was the Navigator that died. She kept contacting my wife to see if I could find out anything, which, of course, I couldn't tell them anything anyway, because everything was censored. So, I actually, somewhere here, have the telegram that came from the Commandant of the Marine Corps to her saying that her husband was missing-in-action. I don't know why she sent me the telegram--or sent it to my wife--but I still have it. When you lose somebody that you've been pretty close to, it's really bad. I had three or four of those occasions. There's a guy in North Carolina who was a gunner. He was a radio gunner on that same flight and he was saved and he sent me a recording. I have it here on the tape. He used to go to some grammar school. Once a year, they would ask him to come in and tell a story about his time overseas, and so forth. So, he told about this flight. So, he survived it. It was a very interesting story that he told and he taped it and he sent it to me. It's amazing that he got out. It's not surprising that the navigator doesn't get out, because the navigator in a PBJ or B-25 is down by himself. There's no escape hatch. There's a pilot and a co-pilot, they have an overhead hatch to get out, but, then, you take, like, two steps down and there's the navigator and he has nothing. He's got to come up and get through the pilots' [area] to get out. So, the navigator's in the worst shape of all, even from the guys in the back. They can get out. They have some [openings]. Anyway, this guy, he said when they hit, he was in the radioman's seat and he got his leg caught in something under the seat and he couldn't get it loose. He tells about these things that happened and they know that the plane is going to sink almost immediately. So, you have to really get out of there. Well, the others went out through their hatch. He was there by himself and he said, "You can laugh about it now, but it seems like everything you could do wrong went wrong." He said, "I hit a parachute, which opened it up and that was in my way." Then, he said, "I had already hurt my leg. I had it caught and had to pull it out of this thing in the radio seat." He said, "There was no hatch to go out." I don't know how he did this, because there's a window about this big.

SI: Maybe six inches-by-six inches or eight inches-by-eight.

LA: Yes. I never thought anybody could get through it. [laughter] He said, "First of all, I didn't see how I was going to get through it." I mean, he could get his head through, and then, he must've--I don't know how he squeezed through. I guess you can do things unusual when you're in that position. He said, "But, I did everything wrong." He said, "I had this parachute harness on, which I shouldn't have had," and he said, "I had to take that off and get out. I had to strip

down as much as I could," but he got through that hole. By the time he got out, the others were already out, except that the pilot died and the navigator died. The co-pilot broke his leg. I know who the co-pilot was. He was like six-foot-seven or something. He was a big guy. So, they had to use one of the rafts for him and they had two guys in another raft and this guy, there was no room in the raft for him, so, he was like hanging between them. He said, "When the shark would come, I would, like, raise up." [laughter] They did have some shark problems. He said, "The two guys in the raft by themselves each had forty-fives." He said, "I watched when one shark came up and they both put their forty-fives in the shark's jaws and pulled the trigger." He said, "Blood went all over," and he said, "I think that might've kept the other sharks away." [laughter] Anyway, they were out for four days. He said they were shooting Very pistols, to try and attract attention. Finally, there was one from a ship--well, they assumed it was a ship. So, they kept going closer and they could see that they were getting close to where the flares were going off. He said, "Then, our next concern was, 'Is it an American ship or a Japanese ship?'" He said, "When I heard the Captain say, 'Survivors off the port bow,'" he said, "that was good news to hear." [laughter] So, they survived it. That ship's crew has a reunion every so often and they always invite those guys that they picked up at sea to go to the reunion. Actually, that guy I'm talking about just died about six months ago.

SI: You had to fly a certain number of hours each month. Did you do that just by checking out engines or were there other opportunities to fly?

LA: No, you really just had to get flight time in. You had to show that you flew--well, I think it was four hours a month. It might've been six or eight before, but I think, over there, it was like four hours. You usually would do it after one of the checks had been done and you would fly with them when they would do a little trial run or something. Then, you'd put some time in on that, or maybe after each check or after some major thing that had been done, then, you would fly. Actually, the rule is, you fly whenever the pilot says you should fly. If he says, "I want you to fly with me today," maybe he doesn't trust whether the plane's right or not. [laughter] You're obligated to fly if the pilot says he wants you to fly.

SI: How long would the missions to Rabaul or Kavieng take?

LA: I think it would be about a four to five-hour mission, two, two-and-a-half hours to one or the other one. Incidentally, the first plane that was lost over there was a guy who had been my engineering officer, he died. That was in Kavieng. One of the guys on the crew has a nephew or something that lives in Florida that came to some of our reunions. He's been studying. He said, "That plane is still in Kavieng Harbor and I would like to see them raise it." I kind of ignore that, because I'm not going to prod anybody to try and promote a retrieval of a plane, but he's apparently found out where it went down. All of a sudden, I lost the guy's name. There's two brothers. One was a Marine flyer and the other was a Navy flyer. They both lost their lives in the Pacific, the two brothers. Boy, why can't I think of this? This guy was very well-known. He was an All-American, not the guy I knew, but his brother, was an All-American football player at Iowa and the stadium in Iowa is now named after him. Why can't I think of his name? [Editor's Note: Mr. Allen is referring to Nile and Ben Kinnick.]

SI: We can put it in later.

LA: Anyway, so, the two brothers were both pilots, one in the Marines and one in the Navy, and they both lost their lives.

SI: Tell me about the living conditions when you were on Emirau.

LA: Well, there was no actual floor to the tents. It was just coral. I mean, it was natural coral. The framework was made up of logs of trees that were cut around the bottom and around the top. So, there was just like a coral floor. Let's see, there was four guys in a tent, you slept in a cot and you had mosquito netting over it. One thing I can tell you about it--here's what they had, and it's a funny thing--they had many unusual things, but you never saw them except during the day. They had rats, but you never saw a rat during the day. You only see them at night and I can remember two things about the rats. One night, I was sitting with a candle, writing a letter, and, in the letter, I remember saying, "While I'm writing this letter, I can count the rats running through the floor. Now, I've just seen five; now, six rats." [laughter] You never saw them during the day. I don't know where they went. They weren't big. They were four, five inches long, six inches, but they came out at night. It was good that you had a mosquito net over your [bunk]. You had the branches go up and the mosquito net went across your bunk. Several times, in the middle of the night, I would wake up and there would be a rat on top of the mosquito net scratching to get through, like it fell off of the framework around the tent on to the mosquito net. That's not a nice feeling. [laughter] Things were strange there. This island must have been a little strange, because there was a friend of mine who went through engineering school with me who got into a transport squadron. He was stationed--I forget what island he was on--but, anyway, he knew where I was. They were coming back from Australia with supplies to wherever he was going and they landed on Emirau. He came, he looked me up and he said, "When's the last time you had a drink of milk?" and I said, "I haven't had any since I've been over here." He said, "Come over to the plane." He said, "I've got a big container of milk we brought from Australia." So, I got a canteen cup of milk from him and he stayed overnight. When he got ready to leave, he said, "My god, I never saw an island like this. I see creatures here I've never seen before." [laughter] He said, "We don't have them on my island." So, there was some kind of a worm that, oh, you'd see guys have big stains on them. They would get in the creases of your arms and, if you closed it up like that, they would squirt this stuff out and, sometimes, you'd have a big ring of, like, yellow stuff on your arm. It would last a day or two from the stuff that came out of these worms. You'd see guys have that all the time and these worms came out at night. Nothing seemed to come out during the day. They had toads. The toads had to be eight, ten inches across. They were big toads--never saw them in the day, but the bomb trucks would be going out at night, they would run over these toads. If you're going from your tent over to the aircraft area, you would see these squashed toads all along the roads, where the bomb trucks run over them, but you never saw them during the day. So, I guess you'd have to say the place was pleasant during the day, but it wasn't so good at night, [laughter] and they had terrible storms. Boy, sometimes, you'd be crawling around the top of the tent, chopping off parts of trees and throwing them off. A lot of tents got mashed with trees falling on them.

SI: You were mostly on Emirau, but where were you sent towards the end of your time overseas?

LA: I was on Emirau almost the whole time I was there, except when I went up to Manus in the Admiralties.

SI: That was after the war.

LA: Yes.

SI: Was Emirau ever bombed by the enemy?

LA: Nom but a few times when we were first there, the Japanese would get a plane in the air and we would have to hit fox holes. However, they were always shot down or turned back. After a couple months, they could even do that.

SI: Okay.

LA: They were--I remember reading--actually, the Japanese didn't hold that island, apparently, because there was a famous New York Yankee outfielder, Hank Bauer He was a Marine and he went in on several landings. He told about landing on Emirau. To him, that was just hardly no mission at all. There were no Japanese on the island, [laughter] but it was right after he had landed on some heavily Japanese island. So, to him, it was like a breather.

SI: You were on Emirau for so long and it sounds like it was not the greatest place. After a while, did it start affecting your morale, being there for so long under those conditions?

LA: I don't really think so. I mean, naturally, we would like to have gotten off of there whenever we could, but I could've been in a lot worse places, I mean, when you think about some of the other [things] people had to suffer through. It's amazing, that I always figured I was on an island that nobody ever heard of, but it's strange--my daughter-in-law was visiting her mother in the hospital. She was coming down on the elevator and a guy had on a Marine hat and she said, "Oh, where did you serve?" He said, "I served in a place you've never heard of, a little island called Emirau." [laughter] She said, "That's funny. My father-in-law was on there." He said that he was in some kind of a ground unit. It wasn't one of our squadrons, but it had to do with tracking devices or something that was located at one far corner of the island. Actually, it wasn't a very big island. It was only about--I think it was three miles long and maybe a mile wide. So, there wasn't much to it. In fact, if you look at a map of the Pacific, it has to be a very good map to spot it, but it was an ideal location to hit Rabaul, the two main bases that we had to bomb. It was an ideal spot.

SI: Does anything else stand out about your time in Emirau?

LA: Oh, I'll tell you who was on Emirau--I don't know if you've ever heard of Joe Foss. Joe Foss was, I think, the most highly-decorated Marine fighter pilot. Well, he had a fighter squadron on Emirau and he flew a couple of patrol missions with us. One of his pilots cracked up a fighter plane at the edge of an ammunition dump. There was a guy that was one of our crash crew members, was off duty, but he was near the scene when the plane crashed. There were bullets going off from the crash and the fire. This boy, he looked like a kid, he didn't look

like he was old enough to be in the Marine Corps--but he dashed in and he pulled the pilot out. The pilot was still alive when he got him out of there, but I think he died later on. He got--I forget what medal he got--but, anyway, we had an assembly and Joe Foss presented the medal to this guy. There were some other little incidents there. We didn't get a lot of people coming in to entertain, like you did on some of those places. [laughter] I'll tell you what we had one night. It was Christmas of '44. We had Bob Crosby and his band there. They were there for two nights, I think. So, on Christmas Eve, we heard Bob Crosby. He had some singer with him, a woman singer, but I forget who she was now. We didn't get visitations like that very often. [laughter]

SI: When you were on Manus Island, were you just waiting there or did you have duties to do?

LA: No, we're just waiting. That sometimes is even worse, because you don't know what to do. You just hang around hoping the next ship that comes in will be taking you out. [laughter] Well, there was some things to do, because the war was over and there were ballgames. They made a couple ball fields. Of course, since the war's over, you could sit around playing cards and stuff like that, but it's still kind of tiresome waiting for transportation.

SI: How did you find out about the atomic bomb and the end of the war?

LA: I'm not sure how we found it out, but the word spread. We got the word spread through the camp area and all pretty close to when it happened. Maybe Tokyo Rose told us, I don't know. [laughter] We did hear her once in a while. We had--the head of MAG 61, which included all the squadrons, was P. K. Smith. He was a Colonel. He was not a very popular Colonel, but he was a Colonel. [laughter] I have to admit that he must have had a good record before, because he was flying unarmed transport planes into Guadalcanal with supplies right after they took Guadalcanal. So, that was a pretty dangerous mission and he was in charge of that group. Then, he went back to the States and came back and, just to show you how people know what's going on, if you listened to Tokyo Rose, she said, "Oh, P. K. Smith, we were wondering when you were going to get back." So, she knew he was back in the Pacific. That's amazing. She would come on with a lot of nonsensical stuff, just to disturb people.

SI: Once you got back to the States, you were at Cherry Point for your last six months.

LA: Yes.

SI: What were your duties there?

LA: Well, I'll have to admit they were not very heavy duties. I was still able to draw my flight pay, but I drew it in getting flights from Cherry Point to Philadelphia Navy Yard or something, so [that] I could come home on the weekends. I flew with a Sergeant pilot. The Marines still had a couple Sergeant pilots. It was funny--I flew up in an SNJ, which is a trainer plane with two cockpits [seats], and I flew up with them twice, I think. The one thing I remember, I outranked the pilot. He was a Staff Sergeant and I was a Tech Sergeant. I don't know why he came to Philadelphia, maybe he lived here and he had weekends and stuff and he got flight time in. So, I made out pretty good on that. There usually was a plane coming north on the weekend and a plane you could get going back. So, I flew up a few times, but I was flying with this guy,

this Sergeant pilot, and, for some reason, he wanted to land at Washington Airport. I don't know what it was called at that time. They've changed the name a couple times. He was coming in for a landing and the tower said, "It doesn't look like your wheels are locked down." So, he took off and we went out over the wilderness and he went through maneuvers and shook it down and he made me half sick, but he said, "I think it should be okay now." He flew back over once and they looked at it and they said, "Well, it looks okay now." So, he circled and he came in for a landing and, as we were going into the runway, he said, "Pull your canopy back and, as soon as we get landed, get of here quickly, in case that gear doesn't hold." He came in and he touched it down two or three times and it held. So, we landed all right. That was just one little experience, after the war experiences. So, I flew up a few times like that. I'll tell you one other little thing. We may have set some kind of a record here. We flew from Cherry Point to El Centro when we moved out there. It took us seven days to fly cross-country. We had two nights in Nashville, two nights in Little Rock, overnight in Dallas and two nights in Tucson. [laughter] I think the pilots and the squadron heads wanted liberty, I don't know, because the pilot that I had was from Dallas. So, when we landed in Little Rock, I said, "We've got a small oil leak in the right prop." I said, "I can call the propeller shop down here and see if they want to come up and change it." He went out and he looked at it. "No," he said, "that ought to be good for overnight in Dallas," and it was. [laughter] He landed and he spent overnight in Dallas. That was an interesting trip. I'll tell you, we were getting--we did get--some new planes later on, but we were flying old Army, Air Force hand-me-downs. I'll tell you how bad they looked--we were parked in Little Rock along the edge of the field and people were walking by. It was like a big wire fence. They thought we were just coming back from the war. We were just going over. They were saying, "Oh, tell us about your experience there." "Well, we haven't been there yet," [laughter] but that's how bad the planes looked, like hand-me-downs, but, then, we started getting new ones later on.

SI: When you were overseas, were there modifications that you had to make to the planes periodically, like adding new equipment or taking things off?

LA: Well, not so much engine-wise, but there were--oh, I think PBJs were the planes that changed armament more than any other plane in the war. They were constantly changing. Even when we flew back to Hawaii to get other planes, it was because they had some different armament on them. When I was first flying in training, I would crawl--in order to get up in the nose, you crawl under the pilot's cockpit. There's a little tunnel that goes up into the nose. Well, when we were training most of the time, we just had a glass nose, so, I would crawl under just to get a better view laying up in the nose on a flight. Then, they started--first, they put a machine-gun up there that the navigator would crawl through and use, a moveable machine-gun. Then, they put in a permanent machine-gun that the pilot could shoot. It was all glassed in first, but, then, they enclosed that. They covered that, painted it and all. Then, they put in a twenty-millimeter cannon. That did not work. They said, when they shot it, it slowed the plane down. [laughter] That's how much thrust it had. So, that was kind of a lost cause, just as the torpedoes that we went down to Boca Chica to [test]. First, they were using concrete torpedoes, just for balance and testing them out, and, sometimes, if those things didn't unhook when they were coming in, the plane would tip or something and he'd mess up a propeller. Then, when they tried the torpedoes, they determined that it was of no use. They couldn't get the planes--it was bad to bring the plane down low enough to get the torpedo going and the torpedoes were so unwieldy, because the plane wasn't built for torpedoes to begin with. So, that was a total flop. I don't think

they ever used them, except for that six-week experiment down there. Then, they did a lot of changes. They changed the radar, where it was situated. So, it was sometimes on the wing and sometimes on the side. I used to hear that the B-25 or the PBJ, which we had, was the most heavily fortified at times and the most changeable armament of any plane they used. Now, at one time, they had I forget how many machine-guns in the nose that could be fired by the pilot, and so forth. Oh, they even changed some of the turrets. They put turrets on the side or they put openings on the side, like turrets. Some had the top turret and some didn't. So, they really varied that, but I think it was an excellent plane. I think it really did--both there and in other areas-- a really great job.

SI: Are there any other memories about the World War II period that stand out?

LA: Well, maybe a few comedy scenes that I encountered. [laughter] When we used to visit--I told you about Rhotin, who lived in Westminster, Maryland. My daughter still talks about it. She said, "Every time we would visit or they would visit, we would always have you two guys tell some Marine stories." So, Rhotin seemed to--he was a funny guy. He was sort of a comedian, but he was also a guy who didn't mind what he said or who he said it to. It was that way. So, there were always little incidents with him. So, when we were in El Centro, they sent us with two pilots from each plane to go to San Diego to pick up two new planes coming back. So, the two pilots and a crew chief, three guys, were going to bring the planes back. When we got up there, the pilots, of course, said, "We're going in the officers' club. So, check the planes out and let us know when they're ready." So, they did that and, when they came out, the one pilot had a Navy officer with him and he said to Rhotin, "Would you mind riding in the back, so [that] we can take this Navy officer with us back to [the base]?" So, Rhotin says, "No, no problem, just wait a minute," he said and he climbed up inside and he came out with a parachute and he headed for the back hatch to go in. The pilot said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm going to ride in the back." He said, "There's four people here and there's only three parachutes and I'm not flying without one." [laughter] So, these were the kind of things he would do that would kind of attract attention. I guess he was right. He wasn't going to fly without one. They only told us three people were going to be in the plane. So, there was--he had some occasions. I'll have to admit that, and I was partly involved in this, too, it seemed like any new plane--not new plane--any plane that came in that needed attention, he and I seemed to get the job for it. When the whole squadron moved down to Boca Chica, they all flew from North Carolina down. They said, "There's two planes coming in from Cherry Point that have to be checked out, and then, flown down to Boca Chica." So, I got assigned to one and Rhotin got assigned to the other one and they came in and, boy, they were a mess. They were spouting oil. I don't know where they picked them up from, but it was not much of a flight from Cherry Point to Peterfield Point. That's certainly a little, short hop, but, boy, they needed work and Rhotin and I worked on them day and night. We were out there with floodlights and all, getting them ready. He was always ready with a little quip. I mean, the pilot would come out and say to him, "How are things going?" Rhotin said, "They're going all right. It flew in here, so, I'm sure it'll fly out." [laughter] We spent a couple days just cleaning those things up and putting new gaskets in and stopping all the leaks that were coming from them and all. Then, we left for Boca Chica. I guess he left two or three hours after we did, so, we weren't flying together. He didn't come in until, like, two days later. Then, I heard the story, that the pilot was afraid something was wrong with the generator and he wanted to land at Miami Airport to get it fixed. So, when he was coming in,

the tower told him that the nose wheel wouldn't come down. It wasn't coming down. So, he said, the pilot said, "We'll fly out over the ocean and I'll try to shake it down," and so forth. So, I don't know what was going wrong, but the pilot seemed to think they were having a problem. There's, like, three guys in the back and Rhotin was riding in the back and the pilot said, "I'm going to come in. I'm going to try it with this nose wheel. It looks like it's down now." So, he says, "Pull the hatches and drop them in the ocean, so that we can get out of here when we land." They pulled the hatch in the back and the hatch wouldn't come down. It wouldn't open. So, he was pounding on it and it finally cut loose and he said, "I thought I was going in the ocean." He said, "These two guys were holding on to my feet and I started out the hatch." He said, "I can see the ocean down below me." [laughter] He said, fortunately, they pulled him back in. After all of this went around and they flew back in to Miami, there was nothing wrong with the nose wheel. So, all this was for no cause at all. So, he came into Boca Chica about two days after I got there, and I don't think his plane flew the whole time we were in Boca Chica. Maybe people didn't like the idea of flying that plane that just limped in or what it was. So, his plane never got used. Anyway, that whole experiment in Boca Chica was a failure. They couldn't use them for torpedoes.

SI: After you were discharged, you said that it was at that point you wanted to go into printing, or did that come in a little bit later?

LA: No, it was--I'm trying to think. I lived on 34th Street in East Camden when I came out of the service. Well, that's where they lived while I was in service, but, when I came out, we bought a house on 34th Street in East Camden. I lived near Ninth and Linden. I lived on a street called Fern Street and, if you go by there now, it's just a vacant lot. Anyway, we moved to 34th Street. At that time, that's when, for some reason, I got interested in printing and I'm trying to think why. Oh, I know what it was. I met a man who lived in Merchantville who had a print shop and, for some reason, I had some business with him and I got intrigued by the fact that he had three or four presses. I got interested and he would talk to me about it and he got me really interested in it. Then, he had a press that he wanted to get rid of and he showed me how to set up and hand feed a press and all. In the meantime, I decided I was going to go to school and I went to printing school. That's what got me interested, was this man that had these presses. So, I bought the press from him and I moved it into the basement on 34th Street, which was not an easy job. I had all the neighbors with block and tackles lowering it down because it was a big heavy machine. I graduated from that school in typesetting and layout, and so forth, and I got a few little printing jobs. Then, I got this job in Woodbury, hand feeding a platen press. The guy said he had to let me go so that his nephew graduating from high school could have it. At that point, I said to my wife, "I'm kind of stuck here now. I don't have a job." I'd left Stetson's and, now, this guy got rid of me. So, there was a guy that I had come in contact with that had a print shop about three or four blocks from me. He had a big garage and him and his son had about four presses in there. So, I was telling him, I said, "I lost my job in Woodbury," and he said, "You know what? I've got something that'll help you out." At that time, that's when Camden had a lot of industry. They had Boscul Coffee, was made in Camden. They used to have coffee in bags and they would imprint the names of different stores and different distributors on the bags. Well, he had that job of imprinting the bags. So, he said, "I'll keep you busy until you get a job." He said, "You drive down here, and I'll load your car with coffee bags and you can take them. I'll give you the plates to print them with and you can take them up and print them on your

press." I'll tell you, I lived for about three months doing that, hauling coffee bags and imprinting them. In the meantime, I was getting more and more interested in printing and I was doing a lot of the little printing on the press on the side, little newsletters, letterheads and envelopes and that kind of stuff. With the training I was getting at the school, I really got involved and I thought, "This is a field I want to be in." So, I think I told you I went to Stern's, because that's where I wanted to work and took me awhile to get in there, but I got a job running a web-fed press at a place called Brooklyn Cooperage, which doesn't sound like a printing place, because a cooperage is where they make barrels. I think, originally, it made barrels for American Sugar, which was right next door. It was owned by American Sugar. Now, they're printing bags. So, they had two big roll-fed presses and we would print huge rolls of bags, and then, take them across to the other side of the room where they had about four or five bag machines and hook them up and they would make the printing bags. The bag machines would intertwine the brown paper inside with the printed paper outside, the inner lining. So, I worked on that for quite a while and I made out pretty good money-wise, because I used to work, like, ten-hour shifts and I used to work the night shift for extra pay. So, I was doing pretty good there. I got a call--in the meantime, I applied a couple times for Stern's and didn't get anything. Then, I got a job at American Printing Forms Company, I think it was called, and they had five-color presses, where they printed multiple forms, like five different colors. So, I was running one of them and I got to where I was running the machine, and then, Stern's called me. I was only on that printing forms thing for about two months and I went to the guy who owned the place and I said, "I hate to tell you this, but I'm going to leave," and I told him about what had happened. He said, "That's fine." He said, "That's a good advancement for you. I wish you well." He said, "You were doing well here and you learned the job pretty good." So, things just moved along. So, I stayed at Stern's for fifteen years, until they merged with Majestic. Then, I went to Educational Testing Service. They were great. I was there for thirty years. That's when I went to--see that thing there with my baseball bat?

SI: Yes.

LA: Well, I went to dream week. Well, they called it dream week then--they call it something else now--where you go down for a week before the teams play in Florida. The family gave it to me for Christmas. They gave me a package and it had a letter in there, signed by Richie Ashburn, giving me the trip. So, I went down there for a week and, later on, my son went down. I went down with him for a week, too, but I didn't play then. I just went with him.

SI: We are looking at a poster that says, "ETS celebrates Stu …

LA: Oh, yes, that's a surprise, because, after you do that, when the season starts, the ones that went to what they called dream week then would go to a game. They would line you up along the first and third base lines and they would introduce you individually. To my surprise, like a hundred people from ETS had tickets in the leftfield stands and they had a big banner hanging over the stands, "Stu Allen Night at the Vet." I didn't even know they were there. I went there for the night, and then, they surprised me by all being out there with it. So, that was a great night.

SI: It says, "ETS celebrates Stu Allen Night at the Vet." There is a picture of you with a Phillies uniform on, set up like a baseball card. It says, "June 6, 1989."

LA: Oh, yes, I had baseball cards. I don't have one here to give you one. [laughter]

SI: You used the GI Bill to go to these schools for printing.

LA: Yes.

SI: Did you use the GI Bill for anything else?

LA: No, that's all I used it for.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit more about this program at Rutgers-Camden?

LA: It was called Industrial Management.

SI: All right.

LA: A certificate in Industrial Management. I went two years.

SI: From the University Extension Division.

LA: Yes. I did this in Camden, but, then, I went up to Rutgers [New Brunswick] for the regular graduation.

SI: You graduated in 1959.

LA: Yes.

SI: What did you think about the instructors there?

LA: I thought they were very good. Oh, I'll tell you a little incident about that. There used to be a hospital in Camden called Camden Hospital. It was right off the bridge plaza, which closed. It was a two-story hospital and that's where my daughter was born. It closed down, of course, and Rutgers took the building over. This is a funny thing I told the family, I said, "One of the classes that I took at Rutgers was in the same room that my daughter was born in." [laughter] I'm looking around and I'm thinking, "I was here before." Then, I realized I'm in that building that was [the hospital], which was kind of a funny incident, I thought. [laughter]

SI: Is your daughter your oldest child?

LA: Yes.

SI: What year was she born?

LA: She was born in '46.

SI: When was your son born?

LA: He was born nine years later, '55.

SI: When your job moved up to Princeton, did you live up in the area or did you commute?

LA: Yes. We had a house built up there, very nice house, and it had a nice basement, which had no moisture in it at all. It was well planned. It was a nice house. As a matter-of-fact, we sold it to my oldest grandson. When he got married, they lived with us in that house for a year with the understanding that I was going to sell it to him when I retired and came back down here. That's what happened. Of course, since then, they've got a divorce, but his former wife still lives there.

SI: Where was the house?

LA: It was in Yardville, which is just above Bordentown. It was a very nice place and a very--in those days, I was a little bit more active, so, I refinished the basement. It was a beautiful basement. So, I liked the place. It was very nice, but it was too far away and, once I retired, I wanted to be a little closer to the rest of the family, and so forth.

SI: You were with ETS for a long time. What were the biggest changes that you saw in the company over that thirty-year period?

LA: Well, for the most part, things didn't change a lot in my aspect. I mean, I had about forty people working for me. I had the typesetting, the proofreading and the layout and the artwork. Then, it all had to be assembled into page form, and so forth. My job was to schedule all those operations and trying to schedule a professional staff of educators is not really easy. [laughter] They're not used to being very precise about dates, and so forth, but I had the reputation and I got a couple things here, when I retired, that people from individual departments wrote about how I never missed a schedule. Anyway, most of the work didn't change until the last five years, we started getting into automatic typesetting and computerized typesetting, but that wasn't until near the end of my career, because, even at that time, I was still scheduling things pretty much the same as I always had, except I had to make an adjustment for certain automatic things that were entered in. The last couple of years, we got into so much computerized stuff that I guess things were working out, but they weren't as interesting and as good to work with. I mean, they were big improvements and they did a lot of things automatically, but it wasn't like the old [way]. So, the last couple years, it was too much more computerization. I'm not a great computer person. As I told you, I've got the elderly machine here, but it was good. I had three or four retirement parties, all surprises, certain departments of ETS threw them for me, and my own department. I really have to say that I was treated perfectly there. I got all kinds of good attention and a good sendoff. It was a great place to work. I'm sure it's changed now, because, in the modern-day world, they job out a lot of clerical work. Before, I felt like I knew the head of every department in ETS and I could just call and do this and accomplish things, but, now, it's--I guess I'm just not used to all that automation.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record?

LA: Well, oh, did you see my picture from my ninetieth birthday?

SI: Yes.

LA: I had 110 people there. You know what I thought I was going to?

SI: What is that?

LA: I thought I was going to a surprise party for Colonel [Alfred] Bancroft. He was there, but it wasn't his surprise party. [laughter] He's been very helpful to me, because we had about three or four of our reunions in Cherry Hill and I would call him. He would get the color guard for me and he would do a lot of little extras for me to get this thing going. He attended some of them and he spoke at one of them. So, I've known him for a few years now and he's been very helpful to me. Oh, I don't know if you saw this or not. We were putting out a birthday calendar every year, our group, MAG 61.

SI: How long ago did you start going to reunions or organizing reunions?

LA: Well, they've started reunions, well, in '93--I think there was a couple reunions that I didn't make before that--but, in '93, they had the fiftieth anniversary of the squadron forming and, from that point on, I've been to every reunion since, I think. Now, what they used to do is, they would have a reunion--we would change the presidency every year of the reunion group--we would have a reunion at whatever city that president lived in. So, now, the problem is, I've been the president for, like, ten years, because there's not enough people, presidents, left. [laughter] So, I've been running it for, like, ten years now. So, we've had a couple in Las Vegas. We've had two or three, I think, in Cherry Hill. We had a couple in Quantico. Besides that, we also had one down in Florida and two in Arizona, I think, one in Colorado. So, we've moved around quite a bit. We missed the last year, didn't we?

Florence Allen: Yes.

LA: This year, people keep saying we should have them, so, I decided to put one together. We went to Las Vegas. I put out a thing for them to vote on where they wanted to go and the most [that] came back said Las Vegas. Well, we went there. We had a good time, but there was only seven veterans there. There were sixteen people, but seven veterans. Five of them had their sons with them. Now, the sons were mostly Vietnam veterans. So, it was almost like a Vietnam reunion, [laughter] but we had a good time. It was good to see some of them. The one guy from Arizona, he was a PBJ pilot in our outfit; I think he was in 611, another squadron. Then, he went to the Korean War and was a helicopter pilot. So, now, when I sent the last thing out, I said, "I know everybody hates to see us give up reunions and I like to hear from you," but I said, "Don't send me a letter saying, 'Keep the reunions, but I can't attend.'" I said, "That's no help to me." [laughter] So, a lot of them, in their mind, they want to keep it, but they don't want to attend. I'm going to give you a couple of my newsletters here.

SI: Okay, great. I will take a look at this.

LA: Wait a minute. This one is, it says, "Stu and Flo were married," this one, and then, of course, we've had an anniversary since then. This is the last one. Last year was the one hundredth anniversary of Marine Corps Aviation. So, I put this little thing in here, it might be in that one, about General [Earl E.] Anderson's contribution. This is interesting. General Anderson was our commanding officer in our squadron as a lieutenant colonel. Before that, he was on the *Yorktown* when it was hit at Midway. Not only that, I heard a little more of the story when he was at the reunion in Las Vegas. He was on the *Yorktown* when it was hit and he was in the water for a while and the *Yorktown* went back to Hawaii and went into dry-dock, because it needed some repairs. Then, the report came that the Japanese fleet was moving in toward Midway; [it had been hit] in the Battle of the Coral Sea. They needed carriers. So, they patched it up and sent it back and that's when it got sunk. So, he was on it both times when it got hit, two different times. So, he says he goes to three reunions. He goes to the American Bar Association, because he's a lawyer, he goes to the MAG 61 and he goes to the *Yorktown*. He said, "The last time I went to the *Yorktown*, I was the only Marine there." So, he just turned ninety-five. He's a great guy. When he was my commanding officer, he was a lieutenant colonel. So, I asked him about going to the reunion. He said, "I'll be there." He's an amazing man. He was the first aviation officer to become a four-star general. He was the youngest to become a four-star general. He's just very special to everybody. I had a friend, I should tell you about this guy, a guy named (Van Laningham?). He was a hydraulics specialist and he was a tent-mate of mine on Emirau and we became very good friends. Then, I didn't hear from him for years after the service. We went to Cherry Point for the fiftieth reunion and I heard this guy talking and he looked familiar from the back. He turned around and I saw who it was. I said, "(Van Laningham?)," and he said, "Allen, haven't seen you in fifty years." So, then, I found out where he was. He got out of the Marine Corps. He went to a seminary, became a minister. Then, he went back in the Navy as a Chaplain. He stayed in the Navy for seventeen more years and he came out as a Commander. So, he was a Tech Sergeant in the Marine Corps and Commander in the Navy. [laughter] He was very good. When I had these couple surprise things when I was retiring and all that, he flew in a couple times, from out in Illinois, and so forth, just to surprise me, but he's been very good. He has a son and a daughter that live in New Mexico. Well, the daughter lived in Illinois with him, but the son went to New Mexico, and then, when the mother and father died, she moved out there, too. So, the son called me one time. He's buried in Arlington. He said, "I have a problem. They won't put his Marine Corps statistics on his plaque in Arlington. They'll only put his Navy, because he served more time and he was an officer." He said, "What can I do about it?" I said, "Well, let me call General Anderson." So, I called Anderson and I told him the story and he says, "Tell me when he enlisted in the Marine Corps and where and I'll take it from there." So, I called and told him that. About a month later, I got a call from the son. "Well," he said, "we got the plaque with his Marine Corps record on it." So, Anderson still had a little pull, I guess. Throughout my retirement, and so forth, I've found different events like that, where certain people have come up and done favors and tried to help each other along the way, which is a nice thing.

SI: Thank you very much. I appreciate all of your time today and sharing all your stories and material with me.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 1/8/15
Reviewed by Linwood Allen 2/10/15
Reviewed by Molly Graham 4/6/2015