RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN F. AMBOS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

G. KURT PIEHLER

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TRANSCRIPT BY

KELLY MARTIN
and
LINDA E. LASKO
and
G. KURT PIEHLER

Kurt Piehler: This is an interview with John F. Ambos on September 13, 1994 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. I guess I would like to begin by talking a little about your parents, your father and your mother. You wrote down that your father's ethnicity was German. Was he from Germany or was he born in the United States?

John F. Ambos: I tried to find out where they came from. My father's father presumably came from Germany. Some relatives think it was Bavaria, but I can't find any tracing of his coming into this country. His name was John Ambos, and he had a brother Leonard. .... Somehow I heard they were in Pennsylvania for a while, but my father was born in Omaha, Nebraska. ... His father then had a job there in a brewery. At that time Omaha was a terrible place. The copper refinery practically killed all the vegetation. The trees were all dead. I mean you can't imagine it today. Because of that situation my grandfather moved to Golden, Colorado where he took a cushy job with Coors Brewery. He was still in the brewery business. My father was, I don't know, two years old, five years old, something like that. His only schooling was in Golden for a few years.

KP: He never attended high school?

JA: I don't believe he ever did. My grandfather, though, without any great judgments at all, left this job at the brewery in Council Bluffs, not Council Bluffs, but in Golden, Colorado and homesteaded out in a little town called McCoy. If you draw a diagonal lines through the state of Colorado, they wll cross pretty much near McCoy. ... It was up on a high mesa about 9,000 feet, maybe eight. And he homesteaded up there. And the only way you could live up there is to ... farm, [and you needed] ... to have water. So, he and a group of other people from Golden went up there, and they spent all winter cutting trees, cutting up wood, making a sluice to bring water out of the--they called it the Grand River then, but it's now called the Colorado River--to their farmlands. [They] worked a whole damn year on this when they opened it up and found out that someone had made a mistake and the water wouldn't flow. ... They had to put in another four months [of] work in to extend it up further and get water. And then they lived there, a hard life. My father tells a story about the salesman who comes through in the spring with his wagon ..., and you would order a couple bolts of cloth, a sack of salt, some coffee, and what not, and sugar and they would deliver it in the fall. That's all they had all year.

KP: So they almost had no cash during the year?

JA: I don't think they had much cash. They had no need for cash. They were so remote from civilization. It was about ten miles to the nearest town, and there was probably only one store there. There may have been a hotel there, because at that time railroads were building, and there was a need for providing people for railroad workers. But it was a foolish thing to do, and he, my grandfather, must have been a tough guy, because my father left home when he was 16. ... I'm sure my father left, because he couldn't live with the old man. His older brother had already left home. There were three brothers. The younger brother, John, stayed on with the ranch all of his life, practically all of his life. But my ... father's older brother Ferd was in the navy, and he went around the world. And my father left at the age of 16. He went to work with some local ranchers. He moved around, worked here and there. He told me ... the only reason he went to sea was ... [because] in San Francisco [he was] walking along the docks, and he saw a sign on a

place that said, "Firemen Needed." He went aboard and became a fireman, and he got him a shovel, starting shoveling coals in the boilers and [my father] said, the ship went over to the China area. He started working as a marine engineer at that point.

KP: It was really a complete accident, his entry into the marines?

JA: Just happened to be walking passed it, the sign, and saw it, because he needed a job too.

KP: Yeah, but he had no intention of going to sea initially?

JA: Not really, no. Although I suppose Ferd had gone to the sea in the navy. So I have a feeling ... that even though they lived so far away in Colorado from the sea, I think there was a propensity for it.

KP: You mention your father's older brother joined the navy. Do you know around what time he joined the navy? Was it before the Spanish-American War?

JA: Oh no, it was before World War I. I'm talking, I believe, my grandfather homesteaded around 1910, and I think Ferd left probably around 1914 or somewhere before World War I. He did peace-time duty before the war.

KP: And did he leave the navy or did he stay in and make a career out of it?

JA: He left the navy, he left the navy. His working career was, after that, he did survey work for right away construction for railroads, and, of course, railroads stop building after a while and then he got into highways and actually worked on the Alcan Highway during the war. ... Ultimately, he retired to ... Denver, Colorado, and he died. He was 80. Nice old man, never married.

KP: And your father ended up joining the merchant marine?

JA: He was in the merchant marine and when World War I came, he ... was working on a transport as far as I know, in the Atlantic. He never told me much about it, but he was in the engineering department.

KP: Did he join the navy?

JA: In the navy, yes, in the navy in World War I. ... And he just went from to New York to points in Europe with World War I. After the war was over, I don't know how it came about, but he took a job with Tidewater Oil Company on a tugboat in New York Harbor. The tugboats are pretty busy, I mean the oil companies have a lot of huge moving barges around, [and they] kept the tugboats busy. And somehow or another he met my ... mother. I'm not sure where, but they were married around 1919. I was born in '21, and at that time, he was living in Bayonne because that's where Tidewater was, and they had their boats tied up. In 1933 Tidewater decided to sell off their tugboats and hire out the service, and they did offer it to the people who were on the tugboats, jobs, and my father left for a job on a deep-sea tanker. It was miserable life for a man

like that. He wanted to be a great farmer, wanted a farm ... and the tanker was a sixteen day trip, eight days down, seven days back. They could load the thing down there in fourteen hours. And up here they had smaller pumps. They would unload it in 24 hours. Then he's home for 24 hours, and he couldn't be home all that time, because he had duties on the ship. Somehow or another he wound up being chief engineer on the tankers.

KP: So, your memories of your father are his being at sea for long periods of time?

JA: Yes. At that time we had a home in New Market, New Jersey and my father, being the avid farmer, would lay out the garden, buy the seeds, and I did the work. (laughs)

KP: So the pull of the west was there in the sense of being on a ranch and wanting to be near the land, even though he was not there often.

JA: Yes, ... he liked to be digging in the dirt. During World War II, I would say he was on tankers. And while he was doing his duty on the tanker, his ship was sunk by a German Service Raider, and he was picked up by the boats. We didn't realize this at the time, but we found out later he was picked up by some boats that were put out to pick up survivors. And they took all the survivors over to Japan, by the time they got over to Japan, they had sunk quite a few ships, and they had four or 500 prisoners. And then my father spent the rest of the war as a prisoner-of-war in Japan, and I think he remained there two, two, three and half years, something like that.

KP: Did he ever talk about it?

JA: Not much, but you know oddly, now ... I thought they treated the prisoners so terribly and my father said, they didn't really treat the prisoners so fine. He typically would have ran around 215 pounds, a little taller than I am. ... He came back about 100. He got out of prison and weighed about 140 pounds, terribly malnourished. But he always said to me that they didn't treat their own soldiers any better than they treated the prisoners. They, the officers, treated their own people very poorly.

KP: And your father, did the Great Depression affect his career at all?

JA: No, because he did better as a matter of fact. See they took him off the tugboats, and they put him on this tanker. Something went wrong, the chief engineer got drunk and got into a fight with the first assistant or something like that, and my father very rapidly moved to be chief engineer which was a good job. I think he was probably chief engineer in 1936 or something like that. ... It was a very good job, so we really weren't affected by the Depression at all.

KP: Except that you did not see your father very much.

JA: We didn't see him that much at all, no.

KP: Which made your mother, really in a sense, responsible for running the household, because your father simply was not around.

JA: Yes, a lot of duties fell on me. It was just two brothers, myself and my younger brother. I remember I would get caught, we used to spend summers, my father got a month or so off for vacation trips. He probably got two trips off. We always used [to] camp on a piece of property, probably was up near Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. We used to spend the summer up there. Pennsylvania driving laws, you could ... get a license at 16, so I got a license at 16. And so I began to be transportation for my mother and especially my father who'd come in and "Pick me up," you know, "I'm at so and so."

KP: So your family had a car?

JA: Oh yes, yeah.

KP: Did you feel exceptional for having a car? Because I know a lot of people did not have one in the 1930s.

JA: Well, I felt exceptional in ... having a car and being sixteen years old. Lots of people had cars. You could go to the junkyard and buy a car for fifteen dollars, you know, and drive it away. It wasn't that much money. Cars were very inexpensive, so a lot of people had cars. If you really wanted a car, you could get a car and sacrifice something else, but I was exceptional in I was young, and I had a car.

KP: You said your family had a home in New Market?

JA: Yes, we were renting in Bayonne, 59 Trask Avenue, nice little place, very Irish. In fact, I had to emphasize my Irish antecedents when I lived in that neighborhood or I wouldn't have gotten along with the Kennedys and the O'Neils. And on my mother's side there was Irish. ... My mother's mother was German, but my mother's father was Francis Patrick Quinn. ...

KP: So that was the side you emphasized in Bayonne?

JA: ... Irishman, yes.

KP: You went to Bayonne High School?

JA: Yes.

KP: And you even mentioned that you did seventh and eight grade in one year. How did that come about?

JA: Yes, there was an accelerated class. That's when I really had to be Irish, because there was a Francis Kennedy and myself from our local elementary school [who] attended this class and there may have been somebody else from the local school which was Mary Jane Donahue. But most of class came from the upper end of Bayonne, and they were, I would say, 90 percent Jewish. And we had two Irish teachers, Mrs. (Gurney?) and I can't remember the other one, but what they did was they compressed a seventh-year work into one semester and eighth-year work in another semester. With the result ... that I was always young for a graduate. I was quite

young. I graduated from high school in '38, and I was born in '21. I was just 17. It doesn't seem too young, but I thought so at the time.

KP: What did you think of Bayonne High School?

JA: Well, when I first went to high school, Bayonne High School, it was very congested. They were building a new high school. I went by it not too long ago. It looks like an old dump now, but it was brand new at that time. But it wasn't yet built [completely], so they had part-time classes in other schools. ... We had classes from eleven till four or something like that. Other kids had different times, split session. So, when we moved into the new high school, we may have been in the first graduating class of that high school. Then, I thought that was fancy, that was nice, yes, and I never had any fault with the education I got out of it. My problems were in the courses I selected myself. ... I didn't really decide to go to college until I was about to graduate in my senior year in high school. And I just started to think a little about it, and my father said, "If you want to go to college, you'll go." We moved to New Market, and I said, "Well, I'll go to Rutgers, because it's right close by." So I decided to apply at Rutgers, and he said, "What do you want to do?" "I want to be an engineer." My father was an engineer himself. "Okay, be an engineer." I found out I had never taken a course in solid geometry, and it was a requirement in those days. I can't imagine what they do today. [laughs] This was solid geometry. I'm not talking about plane geometry. So, that summer I studied and took a couple of books out of the library, and I studied my solid geometry. I ... took a test, and I remember I got the results back, and it said, "Your grade was 62." And I thought, "Oh, I flunked it," you know, "which is D, which is passing," so I thought, "Great. I'm qualified." [laughs]

KP: So the one requirement that you were missing was solid geometry?

JA: Yes.

KP: But your parents and education, did they want you to go to college?

JA: Of course, they wanted me to, but ... it was unusual for most. It's not the way it is today. Today any parent thinks their kids are going to go to college. Most of my classmates in high school did not go to college.

KP: And that was sort of the assumption in high school, too?

JA: It was very easily accepted, because you had to have somebody really pushing you. We moved from Bayonne the week before I graduated high school. I had to come back for the graduation. ...

KP: Why did your parents move from Bayonne to New Market?

JA: They moved to a piece of property with land.

KP: It sounds like land was very important to your father?

JA: It was important, yeah.

KP: Your mother, you mentioned that she had been a clerk before she married your father. Where did she come from? Where did she work?

JA: She was born in Brooklyn. She was brought up in Brooklyn, and she worked in various places. Sometimes she told me when she worked in Dugans Bread, in the main office. She said she worked in a factory that made candy boxes. You know, ... pasting the ribbons on ... boxes and stuff like that. I don't think she did any momentous work. ... It was what the women did in those days before they got married.

KP: And you do not know how your parents met?

JA: I had heard a story that they met at one of the dance halls. Now, I can't remember it, but it was a famous dance hall. I had heard that story, but I never really pushed it, and I never explored it. I'll never know if its true or not. My mother had a sister that I know exactly how she met her husband. It's kind of funny. When my father was on the tugboats, there was a fellow he was working with, Walter Fuery, and Walter tells a story that Leonard come up to me one Wednesday and he says, "Walter, I'm getting married this Saturday." He said, "I wonder if you would stand up for me." ... It's bad luck to turn a thing like this down, so [Walter said,] "sure I'll do that." So, we went over to the church and went there, and he met one of my mother's sisters, and they married later. Life was much more casual in those days. I can't imagine someone saying on a Wednesday, "Hey I need a best man for my wedding Saturday."

KP: Yes. You came to Rutgers, and you decided you wanted to be an engineer. And that was partly due to the fact that your father was an engineer? Did that influence you?

JA: Well, not really. I particularly wasn't interested in the liberal arts curricula and that kind of stuff. And I'd rather learn how things worked and what not. I think it was those kind of reasons that made me. ...

KP: Had you applied to other schools?

JA: No.

KP: Did you go up to Saint Peters?

JA: No. One of the funniest things I thought about was East Stroudsburg State Teachers [College], because we had all this property in Stroudsburg. ... We always kind of thought I would ultimately build a house up there and move up there, but the events of the war changed that. And it just didn't work out, but that was the only other line of work. Then ... I'd have been a teacher, and I didn't want that anyway, so.

KP: So you had a sense you wanted to be an engineer. Were you concerned about getting a job?

JA: No, not at all, especially as a graduate in '42. They shortened the year, the college year in 1942, so we graduated in May and skipped the usual spring to summer vacations. A lot of the faculty, especially the engineering faculty, had already made commitments to go into war factories and what not. ... They were going to leave the campus also, so there was very much of a "what the hell" atmosphere on the campus, let's get out of here. ... But if you were graduating in '42, you had at least four or five job offers.

KP: What about when you entered in 1938 and 1939 with the Depression still on?

JA: The Depression was still on, yes.

KP: Was the steady employment of your father reassuring?

JA: I really didn't worry about that. I was too young to worry about things like that. My father had a car. He wasn't there to drive it. I had the world in my lap.

KP: So you really felt that you were fairly lucky with a car?

JA: Oh yeah. Well, my father ran a big garden. All that I sold out of it was my money, so all my spending money was, I earned from selling produce. I used to get up in June and pick 100 quarts of strawberries and go down and sell them in ... Plainfield and be home by 1:00, you know. 25 dollars in my pocket. That was a lot of money.

KP: Yes, I have heard many people talk about prices, so 25 dollars is a huge amount of money.

JA: Well, ... I think 500 dollars took care of my college expenses for a year.

KP: Did you live on campus?

JA: No. I was a member of a fraternity on campus, but I lived in New Market.

KP: So, you lived with your mother?

JA: Yes.

KP: Why did you decide to live at home?

JA: Well, I guess it was the economics, and my mother needed somebody at home.

KP: Your mother never learned how to drive?

JA: Oh yes, she did toward the end, but she never really did much driving. ... She was essentially not a driver.

KP: You joined a fraternity. Which fraternity did you [join]?

JA: It was called the Raritan Club. It was a local fraternity. It's no longer in existence. It's (----------?). I'm not sure what it is, but they did go national. It had a house here on George Street. First of all, ... the first one was on College Avenue, right opposite the new gym, 139 College Avenue. ... That was owned by the college, and they told us [we had to get] out and kicked us out and tore it down. Then we had another one on George Street. It was right next to the Phi Gamma [house]. ... I think that's all gone, too. They're dormitories [now].

KP: Even though you did not live in the fraternity, being a part of the fraternity, did you feel more connected to the life of the college?

JA: Oh, yes. ... If you're just a straight ordinary commuter, you go to your classes. I'd spend some time in the library, but you get pretty well shunted out of the social life. At least that was the way it was then. But being in a fraternity, you met people that you met on campus. They had parties. They scheduled parties. Proms were more important. You had a place to put your gal if you wanted to bring a gal someplace.

KP: As a commuter, but also as a member of a fraternity, what divisions did you see? You alluded to a sharp division between commuters and non-commuters.

JA: Well, there must be today, must be today. Because a commuter is here to go to classes, and he goes to classes unless he has someway of getting involved in staying late for going to social affairs and going across town, or whatever they're doing over there. Oh, of course, in those days Rutgers was male. NJC was a women's [college]. ... It was just, the separation of sexes made it much more difficult too then, because all those activities happened at night. As a commuter you might be home by night.

KP: So having this fraternity tie was very important for your ...

JA: It made my ... college life completely different.

KP: How did you get into the fraternity? Is there a story there?

JA: Well, yes it is. When I started to think about going to Rutgers, I was a high school senior. There were so many high schools were ... having a college week at ... Rutgers, and I wanted to go, so I did. And at that time they put us up in fraternities, and fraternities unabashedly rushed the ones they wanted, because they needed members. So they would be like shooting fish in a barrel, taking high school kids and pledging them up and doing things like that, you know, pre-pledged anyway. But that's how it happened. I never did live at the Raritan Club, but it was a nice club, good guys. It wasn't very large, about 25-30 men.

KP: You majored in mechanical engineering from the beginning or did you change?

JA: You had to declare very early in those days. I think the freshman year was common, and after that you had to declare, and I chose mechanical engineering, yeah.

KP: Do any professors stick out in your memory?

JA: As I was walking up to campus here I looked at the old engineering building, and I can't remember. I can't remember their names. We had a professor who was a whiz in mathematics. God he was beautiful. He had a little beard. We had the, I remember the class on the first floor with the windows open in the spring, and the sun (-----?) on the leaves of the trees. And I remember him doing something in calculus, and he said, "Here we can reduce to this." And somebody said, "Well how did you do that?" ... It took him two boards to explain it in detail. In the meantime, I was just drifting off on the campus and the sunshine. He was very good. I remember him very well. He was a very brilliant man. I wish I could remember his name. I could look it up in the yearbook. There were several instructors that were very good. I think ... we saw almost no assistants. We saw the professors almost all of the time. We were a small class. We were one of the largest classes when we entered. I think we were just about 99 or something like, and then we did the traditional thing, ... we graduated about 28 or something like that.

KP: Is that because people could not cut the engineering curriculum?

JA: The requirements were stiff. They were not only academically tough, but they were tough time wise. As a junior, I remember we had, I don't remember the number now, but I had so many labs that I was practically putting in a 40-hour week on the campus. And then each one of these damn labs required a report, so you could easily put in 60-70 hours as a junior in the engineering program. Somehow during the week you were going to class, doing the reports, preparing yourself. It was a tough year. ... I wouldn't say it was just academically, it was also time wise. Some people dropped out for one reason or another.

KP: Did you apply to stay at R.O.T.C. for an advanced training?

JA: I toyed with the idea and then dropped it, because it would've interfered with my summer because my summers I spent farming and selling produce.

KP: So you would spend your time in New Market and in East Stroudsburg?

JA: Yes. We still went out to Stroudsburg in the summer. Not as much after that, not for as long a period of time, because ...

KP: Because now your family had some land here in New Jersey.

JA: Yeah, about ten acres. Maybe more.

KP: In New Market how large was the community?

JA: Oh very small. It's what's called now Piscataway.

KP: Oh, okay.

JA: And New Market was a little section down near a lake. I don't know what lake it is. Lake Nelson was up the other way, but anyway there was a little pond down there. The post office was a room from here [to] over there, and the windows. ... I guess that was the only to get mail delivered before they started walking to your door. It was a very small town.

KP: Did you think that the United States was going to get into another world war?

JA: In 1938, '39 the whole slogan of all the politicians was "Keep America out of war." Keep America out of war. All of the radio, all pontificating in the press: "It's their war. Let them do it." Of course, Roosevelt, very strategically, and his advisors changed that by the time of the early 1940's. In the late 30's, it was very adamantly to keep us out of war.

KP: And did you support that sentiment?

JA: I went along with it. I was a college student. ... [laughs]

KP: So, events seemed very distant to you in 1938 and 1939?

JA: Yes, yeah, yeah. I really didn't pay much attention to where I was going, but I do remember there was an awful lot of politicians that [said]: "Keep America out of war."

KP: And you were a member of the Newman Club?

JA: Just because it was a Catholic thing.

KP: But you were not very active in it?

JA: No.

KP: What did you think of chapel on campus?

JA: Well, that was required.

KP: Yes.

JA: I was annoyed at the requirement, but I enjoyed the festivities, the ceremonies because it was so quiet and peaceful. We talked about things that engineers don't normally get involved in. In that respect I enjoyed it. But at the same time, I regretted it, that I had to go up there and do that, you know.

KP: So when you actually got there you enjoyed it, but to have to do it, you resented it.

JA: When my son went, I said too bad they still don't require chapel.

KP: So your son went to Rutgers?

JA: My older son, yes.

KP: Did you ever have any dealings with Dean Metzger?

JA: Yes, I did, but not very much. I think he was the assistant dean at that time. He had gotten involved in our fraternity every summer for some reason I don't know. Summertime a few people would stay out and get jobs locally and threw some wild parties (----------?).

KP: In the early 1940s, when did you think the United States was going to go to war?

JA: Pearl Harbor.

KP: Pearl Harbor, really. Where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

JA: I was walking the streets of New Brunswick for some reason. I don't know what I was doing on a Sunday, but I remember hearing it when I was walking down the street.

KP: What did you think? How did you think it would affect you?

JA: Well, I knew, I just knew that it was a treacherous attack on the United States. ... How it affected me I don't really know. I didn't expect it at that time. I continued to go to college, ... I worked, I graduated. I took a job with American Can Company, working in the machine shop they had in Newark. They were rapidly converting to war work, doing all, putting contracts in to do a lot of work, hiring people, adding extra shifts and what not. I had a very peculiar job though. I was an assistant to the production supervisor, but he was involved with the war work, and what he gave me was all the Can Company work. In those days the Can Company owned all of its machines. They wanted to can peas. You didn't buy the machines. [If you said], "I need a machine," We'd say, "We'll rent you this and maintain it." ... So, I immediately charged them a good price for that. ... But they weren't making any new machines at that time, but they still had the obligation to maintain all the ones they had out in the field. So they would always order parts, repair parts, through this machine shop. And it was my job to get them through, and scheduled in order to meet the requirement. So, I saw a lot of different machine operations ... and also how you can salvage things that go bad and also how you can sometimes use a different machine process if you couldn't get into milling for something else.

KP: It sounds like you had extra responsibilities at American Can, because they were on a war-time footing?

JA: ... I don't know. I always thought ... if you're going to hire engineers, you give them responsibility. Of course, then, after a while I worked for the telephone company. There the engineering content of the job was rather minimal.

KP: Whereas at this first job you really got to use your training?

JA: More so, yes.

KP: You mentioned that you were hired by American Can. Did you have a draft deferment?

JA: Yes, I had some kind of a deferment. ... At that time my father was missing, also. So, that, ... when I was the eldest son. ... It was some kind of business, ... the draft situation in those days. But at any rate, as the time went by, I worked for [American] Can Company about a year, I guess. As time went by all my friends were going in the service. Everybody was going in the service, so I volunteered for the navy. I saw in the paper some program was going to end, so I went over and volunteered for that program just before it ended.

KP: How did your employers feel about it, American Can? Did they want to keep you?

JA: I don't think they cared much one way or another to tell you the truth. They were losing almost everybody. It was, ... they were losing a lot of people. And they were in a situation where they could only fight to defer a few very significant people around 21, 22 years old, but you know no kids. ... I'm not a vital part of their operation.

KP: As people were leaving American Can, who was replacing them?

JA: I guess mostly women.

KP: As you were leaving, you saw a big influx of women?

JA: I really didn't know who replaced me, but I never went back again. ... My boss was (Immanuel Bergman?), and he was a nice guy. I'd see him out shuffling around, doing things, yelling on the phone to the shipping room for doing something, really making noise. [laughs] But it was all show, you know. He'd get up and say, "That ought to do something for him." [laughs]

KP: When you were working for American Can, where were you living? Were you still living with your parents?

JA: Still in New Market. ...

KP: And you would commute there by train?

JA: Well, I used to drive in. Then it got sticky from the gas rationing, so then I went in by train. And that was kind of funny. ... There was a station in South Plainfield which is on the Lackawanna, which no longer operates, and that was not too far from my home. ... As I was saying, anyway, I found out that the Lackawanna railroad ran a train from Buffalo to New York that stopped in South Plainfield. And then, the reason I saw this was, because when I was working, I'd see it right outside the plant when I worked in Newark. They would stop this train and change engines, because they had to have an electric engine to go into New York. So, I used to ride this thing, usually in a baggage car and got off when they changed trains. And it just happened that the reverse part just happened at about the time I quit work, so I'd get back on again. I knew the conductor and what not, and I did have a commuting ticket, but the train was

crowded as could be, because it had been overnight from Buffalo coming down in the morning and would be all stinky with people sleeping everywhere. ...

KP: Yes.

JA: ... So I'd get in the baggage car where the air was fresh.

KP: And you would get off before they finished switching locomotives?

JA: Well I'd get off at a non-scheduled stop, where they were just changing engines. The train did stop in Newark downtown.

KP: Yeah, but ...

JA: I had a ticket to Newark, but I never went down there.

KP: Well, it was very convenient to be dropped off.

JA: Yes, very nice I guess. I had that whole train to me. [laughs]

KP: You had this land, this ten acres of land, even when you went into the service. Did your mother continue to farm?

JA: Well, she kept a little bit of a house garden, but not, ... we used about ... two acres or something like that for garden and stuff. The rest of the land in the back we didn't really use at all. There was an orchard of old apple trees which in the fall we used to go down and collect the crummy apples, put them in baskets and take them to a cider press in Plainfield, and they'd give you a gallon of cider for every bushel of apples. ... We got a lot of cider that way.

KP: Your father was captured by a German raider and returned to Japan? How did you react when you first, when he disappeared?

JA: Well, we were told by the captain, the captain got off in a boat by himself. Well, he was not by himself. [He was] with about six, eight guys, and they went back to Capetown, Africa, which was maybe 500 miles [away]. And [from] there he came back to home, and he came out to visit us, and he said that the torpedo which struck them had struck them just underneath my father's cabin or in the area below the cabin. And he said normally-my father had bought a monkey in South Africa-and ... normally at that time of day he'd be training the monkey, so he thought really my father was in the room, and we thought for sure he was killed. So, that's what we thought at that time. He was missing in action. I didn't really know he was alive. It was only a great deal on later that we got word that he was alive, ... maybe a year. So, at that time, I just thought he was dead.

KP: Do you think that play a role in spurring you on to enlist?

JA: Not really, no. It might have had some influence, patriotic, you know. I don't think it was a major influence. It was just the tides of the time and all. Everybody you know is in the service. Everybody you talk to is still in the service, and ... the press.

KP: So, you had the sense that it ...

JA: ... any action. You might do the same thing if a war were to come up again.

KP: You enlisted in the V-7 program, which you said you partly enlisted at that particular time because you knew that it was closing.

JA: Yes.

KP: Did you choose the navy? Why did you choose the navy? Is it your family background?

JA: Oh, I would much rather be on a ship then slogging through the mud somewhere. [laughs]

KP: Yes, several others have said that at least you get clean sheets.

JA: Yes, you eat good food. If your going to get hit you, you're going to go, it will be all over in a minute.

KP: You were accepted into the V-7 program.

JA: Yes.

KP: And you went to Notre Dame. Had you travelled much outside of the New York-Pennsylvania area?

JA: No, I hadn't really. I remember the navy sent us out to Notre Dame in a compartment in a train, two of us. ... It was the first time I had ever been on a train in a compartment with a little sink that folded down and a bunk. ... We arrived at Notre Dame at about five or six o'clock in the morning. They let us out there in Indiana, and they took us out in trucks to Notre Dame. And the sun was just coming up, and the biggest structure on the Notre Dame campus, and probably still till is to this day, is the ... football field, the gridiron. It makes a shadow over the whole campus. That's in my memory. Maybe I am fouled up, and I make too much of it, but that's the way I remember arriving at Notre Dame. They put us up in an old dormitory, Baden Hall, crummy old place, had about two shower heads in this place. And they loved to get us out and have us run four or five miles just about before the evening meal. And you had to run fast in order to get a shower otherwise you're not going to get a shower.
[laughter]

KP: Notre Dame had quite a reputation, especially the number of Catholics that identified with it. How did you feel about being at Notre Dame?

JA: I just enjoyed being on the campus and knowing that it was a known place, you know. ... It was a very nice campus in those days. We went on a trip ... four, five years ago, and they built it up so much that its lost all of the character that it had in those days. And in those days that was strictly a men's college, too. ... There was a women's college across the little pond, the lake they have there. I could remember walking around that lake on Sunday mornings memorizing my flags and things like that and code.

KP: Had you been on a vessel before?

JA: No. No, I never had been.

KP: So, even though you knew a lot of things about the sea from your father, you had not been aboard a vessel?

JA: A little bit. Really not much at all, but I did know (-------?). And I was an engineer, too .... Our midshipmen class which was only engineers and only lasted 57 days, instead of 90 days. ...

KP: So, you were not even a 90-day wonder?

JA: No, we were just a 60, well 57-day or 59-day. ... So ... we had no deck background. ... The silliest thing about that was, of course, when they sent me down to ..., Roosevelt Roads in Puerto Rico. We were in San Juan when they put me on a Y-P, which was a converted yacht. There were only three officers on this thing. ... Total crew was about 25 or so. It was a silly excuse for a military vessel. But once you got aboard, you're on watch, you know! [laughs]

KP: And you had no deck training?

JA: No. I didn't find it difficult, especially on such a small ship as that. Most of the difficulty of being on watch in the navy is the formality of the routines and what not, and the protocols, and the proper order to address the commanding officer, and that kind of stuff. Y-Ps. "As though you have the watch? Okay, goodbye." [laughs] None of this "I'll relieve you, sir" crap.

KP: So, you felt some of the formality really ...?

JA: Not really, but ... on a larger ship there, they have a history of how they do things, and they expect you to do it that way. But on a ... yacht, you didn't worry about that.

KP: Initially you were in what many talk about as the dungaree navy?

JA: I'd say that, yes. I was always small craft, never on a big ship.

KP: So, you never?

JA: No.

KP: Did you regret being on small craft?

JA: No, I liked the small craft. We weren't the most effective military thing in the world, but it was, I enjoyed it.

KP: Before leaving the training, you said you did not have any deck training. How effective were your other courses?

JA: I thought all and all, for the time I had, I think they did an excellent job. They gave you a lot of background and a lot of training, intensive training, a lot of things.

KP: You were also sent to diesel school.

JA: Yes.

KP: And how did that come about?

JA: (------?) and their greater wisdom decided that these engineers who had now been made at Notre Dame to become engineers and learn about diesel engines, so they sent us, a group of us out there. I think there were about four or five of us in my class at Notre Dame that went to that school.

KP: And you then went to Penn State, another inland school.

JA: Tough duty. They put us up in the Nittany Lion Inn. Have you ever been to Penn State?

KP: I have only passed through it. I've never actually been there.

JA: There's a nice hotel on the campus, especially in those days it was a nice hotel. The whole third floor of that hotel was given over the engineers at that school, and we were the only officers on the campus. There were about 8,000 army, we called them ASTPs. You know what that means? Army Specialized Training Reserves or something like that. They all had to be in their bunks by eight o'clock. They were in their room by eight o'clock. We were staying in a hotel, you know and had a car.

KP: And you were officers now, at this point?

JA: Yes, yes.

KP: So, you really have fond memories of Penn State?

JA: Oh very nice place. We mostly ate out in the restaurants. I don't think they brought in mess. ... No, we had to eat out. So you got to eat in all the little restaurants in town.

KP: And you had done temporary duty in Kearny, New Jersey.

JA: ... Kearny ship yards, yeah

KP: You described the shipyards a big enterprise.

JA: Yeah, we were around DE's most of the time. They were making destroyers, you know making them (----------?). I can remember getting in fire control of a destroyer and taking aim on vehicles going across the Jersey shore over in Jersey City.

KP: And did you find it a little strange to be in the navy but also back at home?

JA: No, I could adapt to that very easy, though, very easily. [laughs]

KP: Did you stay with your mother at that time?

JA: ... I stayed at home, yes and because I stayed at home, I went and applied for gas rationing. And then the nice old gal gave me twice as much as I needed, so I had enough gas to take my car up to Penn State. [laughs]

KP: You were assigned to Puerto Rico.

JA: Yes.

KP: Do you remember what month and year it was that you went to Puerto Rico?

JA: No. ... I got out of Penn State, I think, in November, so it was December, I would imagine. But it's always warm in Puerto Rico, so you know there really isn't much [as far as] seasons [go] in Puerto Rico.

KP: So, you ended up arriving there roughly in December of 1943?

JA: Yes.

KP: And you never even traveled to the south, the south of the United States. What did you think of Puerto Rico when you got there? One thing must have been that there were no seasons.

JA: Well yes, but you're not aware of that the first month. It was a poor town. People were poor. I remember we had just left the states, and they had instituted rationing, and you could, this sounds silly, you could only get two pairs of shoes a year, I think was the ration, but they didn't do that in Puerto Rico, because nobody wears shoes. [laughs] It just struck me as so odd. They didn't have to ration it, because nobody was expected to do that around there.

KP: So, in a sense, you could buy shoes without having to worry about rationing in Puerto Rico?

JA: In Puerto Rico, yeah, but I never, remember I was in the service, I didn't have to worry about buying shoes, anyway.

KP: When you were in Puerto Rico where were you based? Were you based on the ship?

JA: No, ... Well, I was based on these ships, ... and you lived on board. ... We would patrol outside San Juan, and we'd also patrol down in a place called Roosevelt Road where the navy built a tremendously big shipyard. We had a big dry dock to take care of things, battleship goings and everything else, and machine shops to support it. And they built all that stuff. We did most of our patrolling in Roosevelt Road, which was fairly shallow water. I don't think a submarine could have gotten in there and still remained submerged.

KP: You never had any sightings of submarines?

JA: No, what we'd get was somebody smuggling rum into Puerto Rico from the other islands. Or bananas or something like that.

KP: The bulk, much of your duty was in fact of intercepting these type of vessels?

JA: Oh, we'd see somebody out there, and we'd go out there. We didn't even have radar. We'd just stop and "Where are you going, señor?" We had a couple crew members that could speak Spanish, but I was not.

KP: And your crew, who made up your crew?

JA: Oh, mostly all young white males.

KP: Because you mentioned several of them spoke Spanish.

JA: Well, we had one officer.

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JA: This new Spanish officer, I can remember, he wrote up the log. We said, we were ... patrolling around, [and] we saw something. And somebody said, "Oh, its only a hog's head." And he wrote up the log, "We saw the head of a pig." [laughs]

KP: How common was this to have a Puerto Rican officer, someone from Puerto Rico as part of the navy crew?

JA: Well, ... I don't think it was normal, but I don't think it was rare either.

KP: It didn't strike you as exceptional?

JA: No, no.

KP: And you had three officers. You were one of three officers on the vessel?

JA: Yes, yeah.

KP: And your captain, was he also a 90-day wonder?

JA: Well, probably, undoubtedly he was. I mean, I think he ... had never been to sea before, no. Nobody on the ship.

KP: No one on the ship had been to sea before?

JA: ... Probably never ever seen the salt water, not more than ten percent of them, I don't imagine. No, we were completely novices. We would always have a lot of trouble when we came into dock the ship. This was the first time we were getting close to the shore and [there are] things you could bump into, and ship maneuvering is something you acquire with experience. ... We were always quite apprehensive when we came up to tie up. We'd go real slow and come in and throw the line over from way out.

KP: Do you remember the name of your captain?

JA: No, I don't. It wasn't even a ship in commission, so he wasn't really a captain. He was officer-in-charge.

KP: So your ship was not even officially commissioned?

JA: Yeah, the YP-202, which we called the **Dos**.

KP: That patrol duty lasted for several months.

JA: Yes, I got a hernia then. I don't know how I got it, but I had a hernia, so the doctors down there operated on me. You know it's odd enough when you think of these days, when a hernia is outpatient treatment. They kept me in bed for 21 days on my back. So by that time, I lost all the callouses on my feet and what not and it takes a while for recovery. So they gave me what they call a light duty at the base. It was the roughest duty I had in San Juan. During the day I was officer-of-the-day at the section base, and it was a fairly active section base, a lot of ... little ships and a lot of all support activities. And ... the Commandant of the Tenth Naval District had his office there. So you'd be busy all day long making ... things and drills and what not. ... I did that for a week, and then the next week I would be in charge of the gate vessel and that was the exact opposite. I was the only officer on the gate vessel. There were about ten people on the gate vessel, and I don't know. ... Usually at day break we would open the gate, and at sunset we'd close it. And that's all we'd do. And I had a steward's mate out there, and we all ate the same food. Somebody cooked the food up, but eating alone, I didn't enjoy that at all. So most of the time I ate very sparingly. But before I'd go out, I'd go down to the chaplain and say, "What books have you gotten?" And he'd give me a whole box of books, and I'd go out and read books for the whole week.

KP: And you were stationed at the gate?

JA: At the gate, at the entrance of San Juan right underneath ... the castle.

KP: What happened in the event that you had sighted an enemy vessel? What would you do?

JA: Oh, there was always someone saying, "Close the gate," and we'd pull it in. It took about five minutes to close the gate, a lot of hulks with big chains underneath that we would swing it around and what not. The gate vessel also was where the harbor pilots stayed while they were waiting for their ship to come in.

KP: And they were Puerto Ricans, the pilots?

JA: They were Puerto Rican, but they all spoke English. Most of the Puerto Ricans in those days, they were economically advanced and what not and spoke English, a lot of them spoke English. ... But they gave the pilots all spoke English, a part ... directing of the ships.

KP: What did you think overall of your duty in Puerto Rico? Is this what you had expected in the navy?

JA: No, ... but I was there to enjoy myself. I just gave myself a hand. While I was on duty from eight to four everyday, you wouldn't believe this, we used to eat in whites on this base-- in white uniform and a fancy meal, because that was part of the big commandant setup. And we'd go out and party at night, till 12, 1 o'clock, and I had to be there the next day. So by the time I got ready to do gate vessel, I was ready for a week's vacation. I know this isn't very maritime or wartime, but that's what happened and that's the way it was.

KP: You eventually left Puerto Rico, though. How did that come about?

JA: I had orders to go to the Small Craft Training Center in Miami. I guess I'd been agitating for it, because I don't even remember what happened, but [it was] the evolving of things. The navy didn't leave you in any one place very long in those days. They moved you. That Small Craft Training Center in Miami was a very excellent training situation. You stayed at some local hotel in Miami, walk down, it was not too far to walk down, but it was a walk, and you could put on a clean uniform and be nice and spruced. By the time you walked out of the hotel and go down to the Small Craft Training Center you were dripping wet with perspiration. But you learned a lot of things, and they had a lot of small ships. And they'd go in and out and do all kinds of maneuvering, more hands on training than we'd ever had to do.

KP: Do you think that the fact that you had served on a vessel enhanced your ability to absorb this training?

JA: Yeah. You realized that you needed some of those things, yes. And this was the first time ever getting into the ASW part of the situation too, while we were theoretically ASW ships in Puerto Rico, we could hardly make 15 knots. ...

KP: What kind of weapons did you have in your Puerto Rican vessel?

JA: We had a water cooled 50-caliber machine gun up front, and we had about four or six depth charges on the back, the old square ash kind.

KP: So you really did not have a lot of firepower?

JA: I know I remember that ... they used to require once a quarter that we drop a depth charge, and I used to go down the engine room at that time. We were so slow [that] by the time the thing went off, we were still fairly close to it and all the seams would open up. You could see the green water in the seams of the ship, and then we'd slap it together, and we'd lean after a little while.

KP: So, in your small craft in Puerto Rico, you would go out, but you never encountered anything?

JA: That's true. Well, we always had a feeling. It was commonly discussed that if we ever saw a submarine, we were going to ram because then we would ... sink the damn thing, and we'd all go home for survivor's leave. [laughs]

KP: You said that Miami was very hot, and I imagine Puerto Rico is also very hot.

JA: Puerto Rico wasn't as hot as the south of Miami.

KP: Really?

JA: No.

KP: Why was Miami so much hotter do you think?

JA: I don't know. Its just warmer and more humid I guess. There was an ocean breeze in Puerto Rico all the time.

KP: So, you did not feel the oppressiveness of Miami?

JA: I felt it more in Miami. Maybe it was the season, ... but there really aren't any seasons in Puerto Rico. But Miami has seasons. In the summer it's hot.

KP: What did you think of Miami?

JA: It was a different place then it is today.

KP: In what ways?

JA: Well, there are so many Cubans there now. It was still a white, like a resort area. The hotels were resort hotels, mostly. Miami beach was just starting. There were structures out there, but there were not many of them. It was, the whole place was just set up as a winter resort area, more then it is today. I think today its a commercial area.

KP: So, you really felt you were training in a resort town?

JA: Oh yeah. You thought it was a good place to be, yes.

KP: Your training was very successful, and then you were transferred to the Pacific ...

JA: Yeah

KP: ... Coast and was placed aboard a PC.

JA: A Brand new one.

KP: Brand new, and how was that transition? How did you get there? Did you take the train across the country?

JA: Oh, yes. We took the train across. It took a long time too. Again I was traveling with some other people who were at the Small Craft Training Center, and there were two of us assigned to the ship. I think many of the others were assigned to other ships in the same sequence of instruction with the same kind of thing. So, we went across together. We were companion ships. ... We went to the Small Craft Training Center at San Pedro, and I really don't have any idea what we did there at all, but we were there several weeks, more than that. And there was some make work type things. We did not go to classes. Then eventually they said the ship was going to be ready, so we took the train up to Portland. I remember, we particularly arranged it that we would stop overnight in San Francisco. An overnight stay.

KP: So you have fond memories of some of the socializing of war?

JA: Yes. You see now I think this is true of most people. This is now 50 years ago, more or less. Your mind blocks out the parts you didn't like and emphasizes the better parts in life.

KP: And so, for you, one of the fonder memories you have of the war is in fact the night out in San Francisco?

JA: (Top of the Mark?).

KP: Did you feel that you were an officer and in the navy that in sense you were in a higher pecking order also? Did you have more opportunities and in a sense a better time than an enlisted man?

JA: Oh God yes. Its a world of difference between being an officer and an enlisted man, especially in World War II. I don't know what it is today, but there was a lot of difference in those days. Wardroom country is wardroom country. The enlisted didn't go there, because they were servants or essentially stewards. And ... [they] had to give up all ... [their] rights, you know, and ... [officers] did what ... [they] wanted to do.

KP: In other words, once you were off duty you could really just hit the town and not have to worry?

JA: You could say to the skipper, "Some of us are going ashore, and we'll be back at eight in the morning." "Okay, yeah. See you."

KP: Whereas a sailor could not have done that?

JA: On a small craft he could arrange it that way, but it would not be as much of a right.

KP: As for an officer?

JA: Yeah.

KP: Your vessel was actually commissioned, PC-807 in February 1944, and you mentioned it was commanded by Lieutenant A. J. Barran.

JA: A. J. Barran, yeah.

KP: Was he in the regular navy?

JA: Oh no, he was just a year ahead of us.

KP: What was his background? Where did he come from?

JA: He had some kind of a beginning managerial job in the Los Angeles area. I really don't think he did very much in it, but I think he just went in the navy a year earlier than I did. He was a nice guy. I don't think he was a great officer, but he was a nice guy. He worked out very well. On board the ship ... he was, funny thing about it, he did not like to play bridge, and there were five officers on board the ship sometimes six, and the rest of us all played bridge whenever we had a chance. So he was nice. Very often he would take the duty while we played bridge. [laughs]

KP: You had six officers. How large was the enlisted contingent?

JA: The whole thing had about 80. I think around 80. We were converted to a PCC, which was-a PC was supposed to be ASW, a PCC was still a ASW, but they also had the feature of a lot of extra communications equipment, and that's why we got another officer. He came aboard with six radiomen. ... We were supposed to get up at the line of departure when you were going to land on a beach and point the way to the beach, which sounds stupid, but when you're in the actual invasion, there is so much smoke and explosion and what not, and rocket fire, that you could very easily get to the point where in all the smoke you can't see where to go. So, we were supposed to point the way to them, and we had a speaker that would carry a mile, and we'd say, "Hey, you go that way." And we did that for drills a couple of times, never in combat, thank God because in combat, we were stationary. About a mile off the beach. ... [laughs]

KP: ... everyone could hear you ...

JA: They knew what we were doing. ... PCC's had a very poor record at the landings at Normandy. The first ship sunk was a PCC at Normandy.

KP: So, you were trained for this. This was one of your ship's missions, but you ended up doing it?

JA: We never did it in combat.

KP: You just practiced for it?

JA: Well we did it at after the war when we landed in Korea. Of course, there wasn't a beach landing, but we were in charge of that landing, in that respect, and we did the same thing in China. But, of course, there wasn't a beach landing. We used all the radios in other words. That became useful then.

KP: You mentioned in your survey that you had done convoy and training and landing operations.

JA: Yeah.

KP: In terms of training, what kind of training exercises did your vessel engage in?

JA: Well, the first is shake down. When you are freshly commissioned, ... at least half the people had never been to sea before, and you have to do a lot of maneuvers. You have fire drills. You have emergencies. You have depth charges, ASW tanks, and rocket attacks, and all kinds of things. And they put you through the paces, and see a whole crew of people doing nothing but that. So, ... that was intensive training, coordinating the crew and writing up the lists, and getting the right person in the right job. And then you were very dependent on their saying, "You qualify." Just a matter of pride, I guess if they said, "You dumbbell. You can't go to sea yet. You have to stay here and practice more." So we worked hard at that. I remember we left Long Beach and went over to Hawaii just the five DCC's. There were five of us together. Once we went over there. And then we hit convoy duty from Hawaii. Very slow, LSTs. They do about nine knots. We, in order to escort them, we would, of course, have to shut down one engine, so that took off quite a bit from your advanced speed. But they're only doing nine knots or eight. We typically would convoy with one engine up one-third, and the other engine off. And even at one-third, the engine gets clogged up. It doesn't run well.

KP: That's how slow the LSTs were?

JA: Yes.

KP: In other words they were really sitting ducks if anything happened.

JA: Yeah, oh yeah. They were expandable, really. ... You couldn't torpedo them, because they didn't draw enough water.

KP: Yes, someone I interviewed had a torpedo coming at him and it went underneath him.

JA: Yes. ... Even we only took six feet of water. We took, we required more water, because our propellers hung below [the] hull of the ship, but the hull was only six feet down. And in an LST its almost about the same. So a torpedo really has to go down about 10, 15 feet.

KP: So, you did convoy duty. Where were you convoying to? Between which point? Between Hawaii?

JA: All those little islands, Eniwetok and places like that. I don't remember the destination, but we were down in the islands, the atolls and what not, and then we would escort up to the Philippines. ... And I remember we had a small escort job where, I think it was only one or two small merchant ships, and we came up to the inland water. It was pretty, because it was right amongst all the islands. ... Then they put us in Subic Bay, and we fared worse. We sat there for six weeks.

KP: Were you on the vessel most of the time in Subic Bay?

JA: I hate to tell you what our life was. You're going to get the wrong idea of the navy. First week we worked like hell, painting everything, cleaning up everything, getting everything all squared away. Then the second week we had a drill. After breakfast we set up an awning on the upper deck, and after we swept down the deck we'd play bridge. And we'd knock off for lunch, and we'd play bridge till 3:30 when a boat would come along side to take us to the officers club which opened at four. So, we would go there till about six, and we'd come back, and we'd watch the evening movie, and that was the day.

KP: While you were waiting for the navy to give you an order.

JA: Different orders, yeah. And the orders they finally gave us was to take the marines ... to Okinawa, and at Okinawa we went and took them to Korea. ... The war was over then when we took the marines into Korea.

KP: So, initially you were taking them to Okinawa for combat?

JA: We never really escorted troops. We always escorted carrier LSTs or merchant ships. We never did any troops. We were too slow for that.

KP: Although you were trained to do communications at beach landings, you never did any?

JA: Yes.

KP: Your vessel basically was not at the right place at the right time in terms of an actual combat landing?

JA: Well, we did that in Korea, but actually when you're doing a thing like that there were a lot of boats, a lot of activity, and a lot of command communications. And we had ... [this] six

separate radio equipments, and I never was involved in that, because there was an officer in charge of that. But there was a lot of flow of communications on that, things like that. I don't know why. ... At all different levels and things.

KP: Your fellow officers, except for the captain, liked to play bridge. What else sticks out in your mind about that?

JA: I remember one poor guy getting it. He was with us almost all the time. He was young. He just struck me as immature, and I still remember him. ... When he wound up losing some publications, and if he'd come up to us and say, "I burned these things, but I don't have a record of it. Would you sign it?" I think we would ... all signed the damn thing. Most of the secure registry publications that you carry on a ship like that were garbage. You know its just, somebody decided to make it secure and put a seal on the front. But that got to him, and he wound up in a mental hospital because of that.

KP: Really, the pressure.

JA: It got to him.

KP: And the other officers?

JA: [laughs] We had one guy, he was, we called him coxswain. He was always chasing women. He could chase women faster and more successfully then anybody, at least by his stories anyway, they were wild. [laughs]

KP: When you were during convoy duty in the Pacific how often did you land at different islands?

JA: Not very often at all. It was not a long spell.

KP: So, once you left Hawaii you were really out at sea.

JA: ... There's a lot of space out there, but yes. The PC has a great disadvantage. It only carried 3,000 gallons of water, and we had a crew of 80 or something like that. ... While we theoretically had a still that could distill fresh water, it had an awful lot of maintenance in it, and it didn't work well. By maintenance I mean if you ran it for a hundred hours, you had to take it all apart and clean it with hydraulic acid to get the salt off, nasty job too, especially in bad weather. So we didn't use that very often. So we used very little fresh water. I can remember in convoys we were going alone and we'd see a rain storm over there. We'd request permission ... to exercise the engines, and we'd dash over there. Everybody would get out there shower up under the rainstorm. ... [laughs] a very military organization.

KP: Did you have salt water showers?

JA: No, we always used fresh water.

KP: So, in other words you had 3,000 gallons, but ...?

JA: Water hour was from 7:00 to 7:05 in the morning. Another funny thing, we, of course, we were always bumming water, and then we'd go along some, oh I don't know, a PA and request fresh water. "Okay, what's your capacity?" "3,000 gallons." "Come along aside." We'd come along aside, and we'd pump up the water. Of course, instantly everybody would get the washing machines going, the showers all going, and after about 8,000 gallons, he goes "What are you doing down there?" [laughs] ... See I remember things like that, but I didn't recall the time we were on a convoy duty. It was a DE in charge. It was near the Philippines, and I don't exactly know, a Jap submarine or, yeah a midget submarine, I think it was, ... or submarine with two midget submarines, but one of the midget submarines rammed the DE, and its gone. Ten seconds the ship was gone.

KP: Really?

JA: 250 guys dead.

KP: In that instance?

JA: ... He hit them right in the forward magazine, and the whole thing went like that.

KP: With no survivors?

JA: I think there were some, but ...

KP: And you were in a convoy?

JA: Yes, in a convoy, yeah.

KP: Was that one of the few actions you saw?

JA: It was one of the few actions that we were actually involved in, yeah. Well, we were also on a picket line at Okinawa. ... We were on one of the outer lines, because we were useless, but we were out there. ... The planes would come over, but they were not looking for us. They were looking for big ships. But we would fire with everything we had, you know. As a matter of fact, we welded machine guns on the stanches along the side, so the crew would have something to do when they were going over, because a lot of guys, ammunition handlers, they didn't have anything to do really at a time like that.

KP: And so you actually put some machine guns out to at least give them something to do?

JA: Yeah, we went over the air force base and got some 50-caliber machine guns, and we built bases. You had to take them off, because later they would not stay up in the weather.

KP: But when you were on picket duty you decided to do this?

JA: Yeah.

KP: Your crew, where did most of them come from? Were they from all over the United States?

JA: All over the United States, yes.

KP: No one region?

JA: No one region. No, ... it was all over. It was not like, I know I had a friend who was in the army, and the place which had been a National Guard as well, half the guys came from that National Guard area. It made a totally different thing. They were the old timers. They kept to themselves. You know it made a totally different thing.

KP: Did you have a stewards mates on board?

JA: Two of them, I believe, yes.

KP: And where did they stay. Where did they live?

JA: In a bunk with the rest of the crew.

KP: Are there any other memories you have of being on a PC? How did you view the rest of the navy, the big ships?

JA: Oh we were ... regular hardly regular sailors. The uniform of the day is jock straps and earrings or something like that you know. And we were very informal. Not having a lot of laundry may have contributed to that, but we were very informal. So, very often when we got involved with other navy ships, we'd have this, tighten up a little bit. You know, insist on wearing dungarees anyway. ... I remember when we were coming back. We were in China, and we were up the river, just below Tientsen, and ... the river froze over in ... early January. But we wanted very much to get out of there, because if we froze over, we'd be there for the winter. So, just before Christmas they gave us orders to go back to the States. So, we went down and stopped at Tsingtao. I believe, and it was miserable, cold weather just around Christmas time. And they loaded us up with everybody that ... needed transportation to get back to the States, and we drew a whole bunch of senior petty officers who were beach commanders. They had been trained to go on the beach and handle the traffic as you came in and all the way around. Most of them had never been to sea on anything smaller than a transport, ... and they were big transports. So they ... came aboard us and most of them were miserably seasick all the way back, and it took us six weeks to get back, because we sort of ... made a great circle. We took the longest way possible because of our need to stop for water and fuel. We went down to Eniwetok and all little islands and then Hawaii and ...

KP: So, you could give them little rest breaks?

JA: Well yeah, but ... they were not happy campers when they were abroad the ship I remember. We were all happy. We're going back.

KP: You mentioned you were in China. You did a landing in Korea after the war. Did you ever set foot on Korea?

JA: Oh, sure we [did], sure. I think it was the first time our crew had really had the liberty, you might say, away from the enlisted crews and places like that. At Eniwetok they have an acre with a fence around it, and you'd go in there, and they'd give you two beers and call that liberty. ... We landed in, we called it Tientsen. They call it something else today, and it has huge tides, 28-foot tides. But the crew all went ashore, and it was a very poor territory. There was reportedly a shipyard there where they made midget submarines. We went out to look at it, and all they had was one big drill press and a bunch a of big sledgehammers. And they just beat on the steel, and made it that way. Or if there was anything more than that then somebody had stolen it and taken it away, but it didn't seem to be. It seemed to be all they had. Anyway the crew wound up drinking a lot of saki. They thought it was wine, but it wasn't.

KP: That was their big liberty during the war?

JA: Well, no. They had a lot more than that. When they got to China, they made quite a reputation for themselves.

KP: And how long were you in China?

JA: Oh, quite a few months. Three or four months, I'd say. We were there in the early Fall. We went up this river, liberating China, and there were hundreds of people along the banks of the river waving brand new American flags, without ... any new clothes at all. ... Some remarkable organization had put American flags in the hands of these people to welcome us. We stopped at a little town, I can't think of its name right now where we established our base, and we tied up there. ... We ran the traffic up and down to Tientsin from there. It was a lot of small craft, LSTs and LSMs would carry their stuff up there.

KP: And what was your mission there?

JA: Just to control the river traffic.

KP: Just to patrol and what were the American forces doing?

JA: Liberating the place, just that our town there was where the larger ships would come in and then couldn't go all the way up the Tientsen. ... And the ships would come in there, and they would unload the things and put them on railroad trains and send it up from there.

KP: So, you were sending supplies and ...

JA: Yes. ... We went into Peking with the marines, who liberated, the first marines to go into Peking. I said, "Let's get around. You don't need us." So, ... two or three of us got on the train with the marines. There was a kind of country there where the local warlords still had the control of a local area. And ... some guy would have some physical or geographical territory and

that would be his territory, and he'd have his little army, and you could tell the army with the arm bands. They had different arm bands. When he stopped paying his people, they'd just tear off the arm band and go work with somebody else. But they would still, I remember marines had machine guns on the roof of the train in case somebody wanted to get in trouble. When we came into Peking, the Japanese army was still there, and they went through the turning over of the authority to the marines. They put us up in the (Wagon Lits?) Hotel, which was a very nice, big hotel, hundreds of rickshaw drivers out in front of it to take you anywhere around town and give you tours of the Imperial City.

KP: Did see the sights of the Imperial City?

JA: We never went out to the Great Wall, but we went through, I spent a lot of time in Imperial City. I was very intrigued with that place.

KP: China would become communist in a few years. Did your experiences indicate that?

JA: No, not at all, not at all. We knew that the communists were the bad people in those days. We were with Chiang Kai-shek whatever ...

KP: Chiang Kai-shek.

JA: Chiang Kai-shek, yes. He was our good guy. There was tremendous inflation there. I remember we got there and one American dollar might be worth 2,500 Chinese dollars and by the time we left it was probably about 6-7,000. It changed everyday. It was a very much non-communistic atmosphere there. Everybody was selling things and hustling.

KP: And you saw these little American flags?

JA: Yeah.

KP: Which when you saw China going communist in 1949, what did you think?

JA: See, ... your thinking we saw communism. We didn't see ... communist ... coming at any influence at all, really.

KP: No, but in 1949 when you looked back?

JA: Oh, when I look back, yes. ... Well, Chiang Kai-shek's regime was corrupt.

KP: And you could even tell that?

JA: You could tell it was corrupt then, yes. Everything was corrupt. So you could understand (...?) feel of the new regime, but you didn't know what was going to happen at all.

KP: When you say it was corrupt, did you have any observations of the corruptions that directly affected the ship?

JA: Well, just like I said, these little warlords. Each one of these guys would exact tribute from everything that went through his territory. It was only when things stopped coming through and he ran out of money that he would stop paying his army and he lost his influence. That was all part of Chiang Kai-shek's setup, the way he ran it.

KP: Had you thought of making the Navy a career?

JA: No, but I stayed in the Reserves. I didn't want to leave. I wanted to get home and get married and do things like that, so I did do that. But then I knew some people who were in the Reserve, and I went down to the Reserve in Perth Amboy, and I put in 20 years in the Naval Reserve. Fiscally, a very shrewd thing to do.

KP: Other people have said that they were glad that they stayed in the Reserves.

JA: Oh, my monthly pension now is more money than I ever earned in a quarter when I was doing the Reserve duty.

KP: Did you ...

JA: Thanks to the generosity of the American taxpayers. [laughs] ...

KP: Did you have any concerns that you would be called up in Korea?

JA: Oh, yes I was especially because I was [in a] Reserve unit, but I never was called. One of the reasons was I lost a drill pay unit, just on June 15 and I think, June 30, somehow or another I became a significant date. Everybody was on the drill pay status at that time, was almost all up, and I just missed it by that much time. But I was really expecting to. I was still working for New Jersey Bell at that time. And they had a very generous easy going policy with it. All it would have meant, is really that I would have lost my family life, been away from my wife. I was never called.

KP: You ended up going back to American Can after the war.

JA: Yeah.

KP: Had your job been saved for you?

JA: Yes, they were going to give me the same job, yes. I should have known who had it during the war, but I guess I don't ... recollect. But, ... I didn't like it. I began to feel it was not, they weren't treating me right. I remember one time I was complaining about pay treatment and what not. And the old German guy who ran this machine shop, a lot of Germans ran machine shops in those days, he said, "Just last week we gave you your own telephone, your extension." You know I had shared an extension before that with somebody. And I thought, "Gee, but he thinks that's a reward!" [laughs]

KP: And so you went to New Jersey Bell. And how long did you stay with New Jersey Bell?

JA: 35 years.

KP: Did you stay with it until it went to the great divestiture of the AT&Ts?

JA: I left before the divestiture. I left in '82. The divestiture, effective in '84, but it had been decided when I left, so there was planning for it. Nobody knew how it was going to work out. But ... I saw tremendous changes in New Jersey Bell. When I came to work for New Jersey Bell, it was essentially a manual company. ... Most of the exchanges were manual. I was in the building engineers, and we converted all of these buildings for what we call the best thing, number five cross bar, and today almost all that cross bar is gone, you know. ... So, the initial dial conversion and I was involved in that and its all been gone.

KP: You did the conversion from manual to mechanical?

JA: Yes, and now the mechanical is gone and the computer runs it.

KP: So, you saw this change take place?

JA: Well, especially in the building engineers because the mechanical equipment required a fair amount of space, so we built a lot of extensions in buildings and a lot of building work. We were very busy, a very small group of us. It was a good time to be there. I enjoyed it very much. But now the computers there take much less space than the mechanical, and there's space galore in all those telephone buildings.

KP: So, those big buildings now which used to be filled with circuits are empty?

JA: ... A lot of them are quite empty in places. It costs money to remove equipment, so they don't always remove it for a long time. But a lot of it is dead.

KP: And your wife. How did you meet your wife? You mentioned one of the reasons for getting out of the service was you wanted to get married.

JA: I met her in college. I went to her freshman mixer at NJC, you know, and I was a senior I think. I was a few years older. ...

KP: Did you stay in touch during the war?

JA: Oh, as a matter of fact, when she graduated from college, she went out and lived with my mother. She had a job with the *Home News* here in town. She was a journalist. She actually had a degree from Rutgers, because at that time NJC closed down the journalism school because they didn't have enough people.

KP: Her degree is actually from Rutgers?

JA: Yeah, because the journalism school was over here.

KP: Oh, that's interesting.

JA: I'm not sure, maybe not. I'm not sure, but she attended all her journalism classes over here. [She] could be. I'm not sure.

KP: Yeah. And when did you marry? Did you marry when you ...?

JA: Right around '46.

KP: So, as soon as you came home?

JA: Well, a few months later.

KP: Had you thought about going to graduate school with the G. I. Bill?

JA: I went to school at nights and did a few courses, but then I didn't see the need for it at work and most of the courses I was taking were management, and I didn't get that much management requirements at work, so I dropped out. I was better off getting a professional engineer's license, which I did.

KP: Is there anything I forgot to ask?

JA: I don't think so. I hope you have a lot of fun distilling the meaning out of any of these things.

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

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