

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LEONARD C. BRIGGS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Leonard C. Briggs on November 14, 2003, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Geoff Cerone: Geoff Cerone.

SI: Mr. Briggs, thank you very much for taking time today to come down and sit for this interview.

Leonard Briggs: You're welcome.

SI: Could you tell us about your father and his background? What did he do for a living?

LB: All right. My father was one of six boys, but the youngest boy died fairly young, before he was nine is my impression. So, they essentially grew up [as] his four other brothers and himself. He was the oldest. He was born in New York and he spent a lot of time up in Slate Hill, New York; that's near Middletown. He went to school there in a little one-room schoolhouse. In fact, he liked that memory so much, we used to go back for picnics. I think I've got about a stack of pictures we took with all of us up there. [laughter] Every summer, we'd go up, have a picnic. . . . I'm not sure exactly how far he got in school. I know he didn't graduate from high school and he went to work very early and he worked in New York. I know that he worked for Wells-Fargo for a while, but, some time in his early twenties, he got into a Dutch company, the New York office of a Dutch company, Van Oppen and Company. They're customhouse brokers. A customhouse broker is similar to a real estate broker or travel agent. You want something done, you go to the broker. He does all the paperwork. These are international shipments from the United States or to the United States from anywhere in the world. You would go to the customhouse broker. He would set up the transportation, do all the paperwork, clear it through customs and see that it's delivered. ... It was a small company. I think they probably had ten or twelve people and he worked his way up and finally he was the manager of the company. ... That was in the early 1930s. ... Then, he and a wealthy gentleman, a friend of his from Summit, where we were living, bought out that branch of the company. They kept the name, Van Oppen, but they owned it. My father owned a minor portion; the other man owned the major portion. So, my father was called vice-president, the other man was president, but the president was not active. He didn't come in to the office because he owned several other investments. ... Subsequently, I would think, in the '40s, my father bought him out and owned the company. He chose the Hoboken-Jersey City area when he started working, because he worked in downtown New York near the customhouse, which is right near the Battery in Lower New York. Then, when he got married, he moved to Union City, which is near Hoboken, and then, my parents had their first child, my oldest brother. There were three brothers; I'm the youngest. Then, they moved to Summit, to a small house, and lived there about two or three years, and then, they moved to another house in Summit and lived there the rest of their lives. In Summit, the second boy was born, Warren, I was born in 1921, and, shortly thereafter, we moved to a downtown location in Summit.

SI: Did the Depression have a great effect on your father's business?

LB: No. Well, he didn't really prosper in the '30s, because there wasn't a lot going on, but, as the war approached, a great deal of shipping occurred. He made more money, I mean, not a lot of money, but he had a very comfortable business in the '40s, because shipping, international shipping, was so big at the time. Everything is moving. During the '30s, what he did was reduce his force and bring the work home. ... He used to type the bills of lading. That's the paperwork that you need to move material on ships and on trains and so on. ... He had a special typewriter, because the paper was laid flat and the keys came down, and so, he used to do a two-finger exercise. He was very good at it. [laughter] I mean, he could go like this, you know, and so, he spent many nights, during the middle of the Depression, middle '30s, doing that work in the evening, and then, going back the next day. ... He had reduced his force a bit and that enabled him to have a good income, adequate income, and we never had any problems, financially. In fact, he bought a new car in 1933, which struck me as a sign of affluence. Not many people could buy new cars in those years. So, we did well.

SI: This is jumping ahead a bit, but, in terms of what he was shipping before the war, was it lend-lease material?

LB: ... No, it was household goods; it was purchased materials in foreign countries. He even was shipping animals. In fact, he shipped an animal from, I think it was Germany, to this country and the man never claimed the animal. So, that's how we got a dog in our house. Every once in a while, something would show up. People would forget to claim stuff. One time, he had several cases of champagne. Of course, we were kids and we never got to taste it, but he was pretty good for entertaining at that time. But it was all kinds of stuff, a lot of household goods, a lot of people moving into the United States or out of the United States. ... There was really no special category, but, then, as we got closer to the war, then, ... I'd assume, I never knew exactly, but it would be raw materials or machinery and whatever was required.

SI: Did he ever mention if, from 1939 on, the U-boats were causing a loss of business?

LB: I never discussed that with him. I'm sure that was a factor and he must have lost a shipment, as far as I know, but I don't know that I ever actually asked him that question.

GC: Did your father have any military experience?

LB: No. He was married in 1916 and ... I always assumed that they didn't take married men, because his two younger brothers, the next two brothers in line, were in the military. They weren't married at the time. My father was the first one to get married. ... I believe that he had a choice, because he was married. I'm not sure exactly what the draft rules were, but he didn't serve.

GC: Did your two uncles serve in Europe?

LB: No, they got in pretty late and they were just in training when the war ended. Then, the others were too young, the other two brothers.

SI: Could you tell us a little bit about your mother and her family background?

LB: Yes. It's interesting. Her grandfather's name was Louis Boye. He came from a French family. As Protestants, the family had been forced to leave a Catholic France and settled in Germany. In the mid-1800s, the family emigrated to the United States. Apparently, they ended up in Hoboken, which had a large German-speaking population and ... I guess they enjoyed the idea that they had a lot of people to talk to and my mother's mother learned German from her father and mother and she spoke German. My mother spoke a smattering of German, and so, there was quite a good social group. The Germans had *turnvereins*, that's, "social hall," and they had all kinds of activities, as I understood it. ... Well, she knew a lot of people around in Hoboken and I don't know exactly how she met my father. I assume it was in some social affair. He was living either in Hoboken or Union City at that time and I never did actually get that detail, but they met and were married in Hoboken.

GC: Do you know if she worked before she got married?

LB: No. She did take some schooling, I think, in the secretarial line, after high school, but she never worked, to my knowledge.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like to grow up in Summit?

LB: Yes. Summit is a fine town. Most of the people commuted; as they called it, a bedroom community. A lot of the people worked in New York, because, some years before, they had established the Delaware-Lackawanna-Western Railroad and it was a commuter line from Morristown, mostly from Morristown, although it did go beyond there to the west, right into Hoboken. So, a lot of people would move out from Hudson County, Hoboken and so forth, ... when they had children, so that they could be out in the suburbs, a common thing to do, and so, somewhere along the line, my parents got the idea that they would like to live in Summit. I think my father had several friends in the industry that he was in that lived in Summit. Also, peculiarly enough, my grandmother owned a house in Murray Hill, which is immediately adjacent to Summit. It was originally owned by her father and it was on a nice piece of property. It was a little farmhouse. It was not equipped with indoor plumbing or electricity or anything. They used to, in the summertime, sort of camp there. Eventually, they did modernize it. So, that was probably another draw and that's why they moved to Summit, but Summit is an excellent town, excellent schools. It was about 17,000 at the time. It's about 20,000 now and there were a lot of nice people. I thought it was a fine place to grow up and the schools were topnotch.

SI: Were most of the people in your neighborhood of similar background, economically and ethnically?

LB: Well, I guess we were kind of in the middle. Most of the people in our immediate area were local businessmen. ... There weren't many commuters on our block. My father had a fairly modest house. He didn't want a bigger house. My mother kept pushing him to move to a better house, but he never did. We had a couple of high school teachers on the block; several people owned local businesses. It was that kind of a situation.

SI: When you were growing up, what were some of your activities outside of school? Did you mostly play games with your brothers or were you in the Boy Scouts?

LB: Yes, I was in the Boy Scouts and I went to Boy Scout camp and enjoyed that a lot. ... I played with the kids on the block. We did little games. I remember, ... you've probably never seen anything like this, you can make a gun that shoots rubber bands that you cut from inner tubes, if you know what an inner tube is, [laughter] but it's heavy rubber and you could assemble the wood, using your rubber bands to hold it together, and then, you would pull a rubber band and put it on a clip and stretch it down the gun, and then, you could shoot it like a gun, but it wouldn't hurt anybody, of course, because it just moves slowly through the air. We did that. We played baseball on the street. We had two families immediately across from us which had girls, who were in the same class I was in high school, and one of the girls was the daughter of, ... I guess he was a tailor, and she had a lot of friends and we spent a lot of time on her porch, with all the kids in our class. She ... kind of attracted people that way. So, we had a kind of a social thing on the block.

SI: Were you close knit?

LB: Yes ... Of course, we all had gone to the same grammar school, so, we knew each other from when we were small children. In the wintertime, the city closed a street nearby, about three or four blocks away, for sledding and it was a long, long hill and everybody would show up at night, after you had a good snowstorm, and that was a lot of fun.

SI: What were your favorite subjects in school? Were you involved in any sports?

LB: I took college prep and I was best, I think, at the sciences and that's why I went into chemistry and math. I had a good teacher in math and he took our class beyond the requirements of high school math and into college level math, which was very helpful to me in my freshman year. The teacher was my homeroom teacher, Merlin Temple, and his favorite expression was, "Surely." Now, you can imagine what we did with that one, "Surely Temple, Surely Temple," not to his face, [laughter] but he was an excellent teacher and he brought us along very fast. ... I like the chemistry, biology and all of those subjects, spent four years of French, can't remember much of it, but, every time we go to France, I do try to say a few things to the people. [laughter]

GC: Did you play sports?

LB: Yes. Mostly, I liked football and I played football for three years and I did try out for track and field events, such as shot-put and javelin, but I don't think I ever did very well at it.

SI: What kind of effect did the Great Depression have on your neighborhood?

LB: I think we got through it pretty well. ... A lot of the people that were close to us were local businessmen who did keep their stores and seemed to do adequately. My father's friends, in the same business he was in, did pretty well, and so, I didn't feel much pressure from that, as somebody else might have.

SI: What did you and your family think of Franklin Roosevelt? What were your political feelings?

LB: I guess we leaned toward being conservative Republicans. ... I think my parents voted for him, because he was the leader and the strength that was needed at the time. I remember, one time, I can't remember all the people who ran against him, I remember Wendell Willkie, I believe ... he didn't get much in the way of votes. ... Interesting, in that connection, was the fact that my grandmother very much had a dislike Franklin Roosevelt for one reason and that is he had the bank holiday in 1933, I think it was, and she wanted to get her money out of the bank, but the bank was closed and they wouldn't give her the money and, ever since then, I remember every time we'd visit with her, she would say negative things about Franklin Roosevelt, but only for that one reason. ... I think we all accepted the fact that we needed that kind of strong leadership in those times of crises, the Depression and the war.

SI: Could you see the impact of any of the New Deal programs in your city?

LB: Well, yes. We had a new post office and somebody painted murals, that sort of thing. ... Then, out on the edge of town, actually, not in our town, but the town immediately next to us, there was a CCC camp, Civilian Conservation Corps. ... They built houses and they had young men, it was a park, ... clearing brush and planting things and so on. I remember, all of that activity went on. I don't know what else I remember from then. Well, we had a lot of roadwork, too, and I assume some of that came out of that. We widened the main street and did all kinds of work like that.

SI: Prior to the outbreak of the war in Europe, were you aware of what was going on, probably in Europe, but also in Asia, with the rise of Hitler and the spread of Japan into China?

LB: I think so. Not as much as I would be now, knowing more about the international affairs, because, at that time, we were kind of concerned, pretty much, with our own careers and our own concerns. I would say that Pearl Harbor was a complete surprise. I did not expect that we were that close to war, although, of course, we knew that we were aiding the Europeans, particularly the English, with lend-lease and knew that that was beginning to get us involved. We knew that the Europeans wanted us in the war, but, living on the East Coast, we didn't think much about Japan. It was something we didn't really expect, although we knew that the Japanese had emissaries in Washington, talking about peace. Obviously, the distraction, I assume, threw us off.

SI: Was that ever discussed, either around your dinner table or in school, whether we should get involved in Europe or we should stay out of it? Do you remember? Was it even discussed in your school?

LB: No. I don't recall it, and you would be speaking of college or high school?

SI: I am thinking more of high school, unless you want to mention something about college.

LB: No. I don't think it was heavily discussed, except just an overall feeling that, as we supported the Allies in Europe, that we were going to get involved eventually, as we did in World War I. You know, we held back and held back and, finally, we stepped in, because it was necessary.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit more about why you chose Rutgers?

LB: Yes. Well, my father was faced with three boys in college simultaneously. ... I was offered a State Scholarship to Rutgers and that was very attractive. ... I think that was the main motivation that caused me to go to Rutgers, because it made it easier on my father at that time.

SI: Had anyone in your school pushed for Rutgers?

LB: Yes. There was a man in New Providence, which is an adjacent town, named Lundberg, I remember him, and he was a great "Go, Go, Rutgers" guy and he used to come around and talk at the high school about Rutgers. ... Then, when I expressed an interest then he took me down to Rutgers and showed me around and all that sort of thing. ... We remained friends up to a few years ago, when he died. He was ninety, almost ninety-nine, when he died, but he lived only half a mile away from us and I used to see him regularly, downtown or here and there.

SI: Within Summit High School, was it the norm for people to go on to college or was it unusual?

LB: Norm. Yes, that's always been very high. I don't know, in those years, how high. You know, it's at ninety some percent now, but, in those years, maybe eighty percent or so. Most of the people I knew went on to college.

SI: That is pretty high.

LB: Yes.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your first few days at Rutgers and being initiated as a freshman?

LB: I can't remember a lot of detail, but I know, when we came down, we went to the old gym; I don't know what you call it now.

GC: College Avenue Gym.

LB: College Avenue Gym, yes. That was the gym at that time and, I remember, we had tables set up and I guess there were certain tests we took, as I recall, or information we filled out. We spent several days, I think, at that, filling out information and getting information from the administration about the college and so forth. Then, I took a dorm room across from there, along the edge of the river. I don't know what the names of them are now. There were three together. It's a quad, yes, that was it; one of those I was in. ... I spent the first year there, and then I joined

Beta Theta Pi in the second year. I forget what the rules were at the time, but I believe as a freshman, you couldn't pledge a fraternity and I lived in the fraternity after that for three years.

SI: Was it much of a shock to go from living at home to being on your own at college?

LB: No. You know, I've heard this discussion and some people, either as parents, miss their children and have a problem or, sometimes, the children go to college and they miss their home. Of course, I was only from Summit. To there, it wasn't very far, though, I didn't go home much, except during the holidays, but, I mean, it seemed to me, I jumped into it. I kind of liked the idea. I was ready for it and, after you've been through this, after you graduate from high school, you've got to have something more you want to do. You've given up the high school, which was a lot of fun, but that's behind you. So, I jumped into that and I was very pleased with the change.

SI: Do you remember any sort of freshman hazing or having to wear a dink?

LB: Yes. It didn't really impress me that much, but there was some of that sort of thing, a dink and I forget what ... the rules there were, but they were minor, as far as I was concerned. Maybe because we were living in the freshman dorm and spent most of our time together, you know, we weren't bothered by that.

SI: Was there a rivalry between the sophomore class and the freshman class? Do you remember any of that, either when you were a freshman or a sophomore?

LB: No. I can't say that I thought that was important or that it was a factor. I don't think so.

SI: It seems like you obviously wanted to go into chemistry right away.

LB: Yes. Well, I thought that I had a knack for the sciences and this might have come, too, from discussions with the other men in my high school, because we were all discussing what we were going to do and so on, particularly as we were still in the Depression at the time and the question was, "Well, what preparation do you have?" and we talked about being engineers and chemists and so on as being something that was needed and very likely would be a good career, even in the time of a slow economy, whereas taking general courses or business courses and so on might not offer too much opportunity. I think that's how I got steered into it.

GC: Was ROTC still compulsory at Rutgers?

LB: First two years, yes.

GC: Did you remain in the ROTC beyond the first two years?

LB: Yes. I kind of like the military. ... I thought it was an interesting thing to do, and so, I volunteered for the advanced ROTC and I enjoyed it. We had various activities. I ended up being regimental adjutant to our colonel of the ROTC, the student colonel. ... I was in Scabbard

and Blade and various other military activities that seemed interesting. So, I guess I had an interest in the military.

SI: Prior to Pearl Harbor, was there also the sense of, “We should get a little military background, just in case?”

LB: Yes, I think that’s true, because we had a lot of people that volunteered for advanced ROTC. There must have been a hundred-and-twenty-five or so. That must have been almost a third of our class, pretty much, and I don’t suppose that would have occurred, except for the imminent threat, in those years, of the war, and subsequently, the actual war.

GC: Between your studies as a chemistry major, the ROTC and your fraternity life, you must have had a very tight schedule. Did you do any other extracurricular activities while you were at Rutgers?

LB: Well, I played lacrosse, because my roommate at the freshman dorm, Don White, was a lacrosse player. So, I tried that. I did that, and then, in my last term, which was the fall term 1942, I played 150-pound football and the reason I got to one hundred fifty pounds was, that summer, we went to school, in ‘42. We were accelerated and the fraternity was closed. ... I lost interest in eating, because there was nothing but greasy spoons around. There wasn’t a cafeteria, and so, I got down to one hundred-fifty-five, my normal weight being one hundred-and sixty-five. So, I played that and I was pretty good, because I had a lot of experience in high school football and I was the biggest kid on the squad, right. I just barely made the one hundred-fifty-five every time we played. I enjoyed that. That was pretty good.

SI: What attracted you to fraternity life in general and Beta Theta Pi in particular?

LB: I think, perhaps, my freshman roommate was talking up fraternity [life] and he did join Beta Theta Pi. ... He was a fine man and I thought that was a good thing to do. ... My brother, my oldest brother, who had started out in Drexel College, but ended up at Rutgers, was a fraternity man, both at Drexel and at Rutgers. ... I was kind of inclined to think positively about that. I had to convince my father. He didn’t think it was such a good idea, but I found out that I could work either in the kitchen or as a waiter, get all my meals paid for. So, between the scholarship and not having to pay for the meals, it brought the cost down quite a bit. So, I sold him on the fraternity life instead of not joining it. ... We had a fine bunch of men in our class and it was good. It stimulated you to improve your academic standing. They talked up, all the time, trying to be active on campus. Of course, every fraternity wanted leadership on the campus and, if you could have leaders in your fraternity and academic standing, then, it was a matter of pride and the University, of course, was always after fraternities to keep up their academic standing. I think that was an advantage. I think, perhaps those who commuted and those who lived off campus, in one way or another didn’t get that advantage.

SI: You could see a real split between the fraternity men and the Scarlet Barbs and commuters.

LB: In academics?

SI: Maybe not in academics, essentially.

LB: Yes, well, that's right, because a lot of them would go home all the time, and so, they would be off campus, except during actual class hours, whereas we were on campus and would have various activities in our fraternity or with other fraternities, and so, you ... really knew a lot of people, too. That was the other thing. In a class, I can't tell you [the] exact number in a class, two hundred and some odd, I guess it was, nearly three hundred at the beginning, but you knew most everybody. When I look at the yearbook, I remember chatting with seventy-five to eighty percent of everybody in that book, because you're on campus.

SI: Was chapel mandatory at Rutgers?

LB: Yes.

SI: Did you mind having to go to chapel?

LB: No. ... You know, I went all through Sunday school and attended church regularly in Summit. So, the chapel was kind of a normal thing and I thought it was excellent and got a lot out of it, I believe.

SI: I know they had guest speakers. Do any of them stand out in your mind?

LB: Can't think of any names right off hand. I can almost; I know we had many prominent chapel speakers. I can't remember a name just right off hand. That was a good program, no question.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: During the break, you mentioned some fraternity pranks. Do any other things like that come to mind?

LB: Yes, well, that's right. The one about the Chi Psi House, because of that covered entryway that was just big enough to get a Model A Ford into it, and, somehow, overnight, some guys would stick a car in there, and then, the fraternity brothers would have to figure out how to get it out again. Now, I don't know that there were a lot of other things like that, that I could recall, and I don't know that there was extreme rivalry among the fraternities. I thought, ... at least on our street, there were about three or four and we were all pretty good friends and didn't give each other problems at all. It was pretty good. Now, in those years, you know, any alcohol was forbidden. I don't know what the rules are now, but they closed fraternities if you had any alcohol in the fraternity. We had an assistant dean, Howard Crosby, who patrolled whenever you had a big dance weekend or any other kind of a party, he would pop in and sniff around. It was a strict rule, but it worked very well, because most of us were under age anyhow and we shouldn't be using alcohol.

GC: You mentioned that you do not recall much rivalry between the fraternities. What about inter-university rivalry?

LB: You know the Princeton thing and I always try to remember the business about the cannon. Maybe you know the story better than I do, but it was always something where, ... before the big game, you would try to get the cannon onto your campus, right, and I don't recall whether that actually happened during the years I was there, but I remember the story was told many times about that.

GC: You were never personally involved in any of the cannon escapades.

LB: No, [laughter] never touched it.

SI: To go back to your major in chemistry, how difficult were the classes? What did you think of your professors? Did you have a specialty?

LB: No. You know, in those days chemistry was different from what you think of today as chemistry, because, actually, most of the organic chemistry was done by the Germans, mostly IG Farben. So, we studied German and we read some of the German books, to some degree. ... There wasn't much in the way of organic chemistry. Most of it was inorganic, so that it changed so rapidly after that, when they got into plastics and all that sort of thing. I think we had Bakelite. That was the big one. The teachers were good. The subjects, some of them were very difficult. I remember crystallography; I'm not sure that I was into this while I was studying it, but it's a very difficult subject. Some of the others weren't so difficult. We had a good dean, Dean William Thornton Read. He was a very fine gentleman and took a lot of interest in students. We talked with him a lot. The other instructors seem to me to be younger men. I don't recall any particular ones, but they were seriously dedicated to their work. It was tough. Chemistry was tough. ... Actually, what happened about that whole issue is, when I graduated, I went into the Army. That was about three years and I came out of the Army and I interviewed with several chemical companies, many in New Jersey, and I decided I didn't want to be a chemist after all. I think the idea was that I had kind of leaned toward leadership, ... having been an officer, ... and I thought I didn't want to put on the white smock. I'd rather go into business and become a manager of some kind, which is what I did.

SI: Before you went into the service, were you ever offered the opportunity to go into private industry, something war related?

LB: Oh, I see. You mean take the chemistry and become essential in the private industry? No, I didn't. I guess I was wrapped up in the ROTC and I just went straightforward.

SI: How would you characterize the ROTC training at Rutgers, particularly in light of your later experiences in training and in combat?

LB: It was really a familiarity with the military, but we didn't learn as much as we did, let's say, at the infantry school, in actually leading troops and that sort of thing. We fired some guns and we studied military tactics and did drills, familiarize ourselves with the weapons, but, ... in order to get your commission, you still had to go for three months, I mean, intensive training, before

you were qualified to do anything as a military officer. So, everybody went to Officer's Candidate School after they graduated.

SI: You mentioned earlier that Pearl Harbor was a shock, but do you remember where you were that day?

LB: Oh, yes, very clearly. We had a sunroom in our fraternity, all glassed in. It was a nice room and we used to sit there and read the Sunday papers. So, we were congregating there that day and, all of a sudden, we got this message. I remember sitting there and hearing that message. ... Then, of course the immediate question everybody asked is, "Where is Pearl Harbor?" Nobody knew much about Hawaii at that time and, of course, that was quite a shock to all of us.

SI: Was there any immediate paranoia, fears of an invasion, an air raid, blackouts?

LB: No. I think that, you know, most of the problems appeared to have occurred in the West Coast. On this coast, it seemed to me that we recognized the fact that, with all the armies in Europe were pretty heavily engaged, they weren't likely to do anything to the United States, because of the nature of the war going on at that time, whereas the Japanese, as far as the West Coast people were concerned, seemed interested in attacking America as such and that's how they got into the internment camps. ... They had a lot of issues with the war, more than we did. We only had to go through some blackout things and, of course, eventually, into rationing, but the people, ... in my opinion, were ready to do what had to be done and people accepted everything very well and, when they asked you to turn in your old aluminum pots and pans for the airplanes, why, you'd get piles of those things and any other volunteer activities.

GC: Was there any initial outburst within your fraternity to drive down to Washington or drop out of school and enlist immediately? Was there any of that?

LB: No, you know, it was interesting. I know that this was true in the high schools, that a lot of boys left high schools and went right into the military. I don't know that we had many people who did it. Those of us in ROTC looked toward the government [for] guidance and they didn't want us, because they had all their Officer's Candidate Schools ... filled and there was no room for dumping a lot of students ... into the schools, but they did ask the students at Rutgers to go to school during the summer. ...

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SI: Please, continue.

LB: Yes, I was saying that the military asked the Class of '43 to go to school during the summer of '42 and graduate in January. Now, the best of my recollection is that we, the engineers and the chemists and perhaps some of the other specialties, didn't have an option. We were told. I don't recall ... if anybody ever asked me, but the rest of the classes were asked and some did accelerate and graduated in January, but I'm sure that I was told I was supposed to do that, as the engineers were.

SI: Did you see how the war affected Rutgers, in terms of the number of programs offered or the social life?

LB: Well, of course, being accelerated, I missed that last semester that most of my class had, but, ... still, we had the Military Ball and the Senior Prom and various social events ... kept going pretty well. I don't recall any change of attitude that much that people had because there was a war. ... Of course, it was new to us at that particular time. I know that, as time went on, I'm sure that people, more and more, got to thinking about the war and the impact on us, especially as there were casualties. Up to that time, there hadn't been much activity overseas.

SI: Do you remember any people coming down from Canada, trying to recruit people to go to the Royal Air Force or the Canadian Army?

LB: I don't remember any specific recruiting activity. No, I know people did that, but I imagine they volunteered more than were asked to do it.

SI: Did you know anyone, personally, who went?

LB: My wife's cousin. ... I didn't know him at that time, but I knew him after my wife and I were married. He did it. He was one of those fellows that went right at it, and then, my wife's sister's husband was one of those youngsters, ... he wasn't her husband at that time, in high school, he jumped for the Marines and a whole bunch of the class in the high school that my wife was in at the time signed up for various military assignments.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to say about Rutgers before we move into the war?

LB: Well, I did say I thought the size of the school, at that particular time, was just right for participating in activities on campus and knowing people. As I say, I knew a large number of people in my own class and that was a good thing, because you would see them on campus and say hello and in the various campus activities. I consider the school well-run. I thought the teachers were excellent. In those years, you did have a situation where most teachers were career teachers, because you had a depression and they stayed a long time. The same was true in my high school. They were all senior in the high school. The teachers were all fairly senior and they were dedicated teachers and had been at it for quite a while and this was true of Rutgers. So, you had excellent instructors, no question about it, because they knew their business. That's my impression of it.

SI: Before heading into the military, is there anything about life on the home front that you remember? You mentioned scrap drives and some rationing. Does any of the rationing stand out in your mind?

LB: Well, three gallons a week, yes, of gasoline. I remember that and, well, there was sugar. I know my mother was always struggling to get some sugar, because she liked to bake, otherwise. I was in the military, so that I didn't experience all the things that the home front did, because, by the time I got back home again, the war was over and things were beginning to become available again. So, it was only some contact, but there were definitely shortages. People still went to the

plays in New York. They still had home parties and so on. It wasn't as though everything shut down, but there were shortages.

SI: After leaving Rutgers, how did you enter the military? What was your induction process?

LB: Yes, well, of the total ROTC class, there were eleven of us who were accelerated, and so, we all graduated in January 1943 and it was interesting. We were all infantry, but four of the men went into the Air Force. Two of them went into the Ordnance and one went into Signal Corps. So there were only four others and we all went down to Fort Benning in January, about the middle of January some time, and reported in there. ... What they would do then [was], you would go join what they would call a training company, about two hundred men and you'd go through the thirteen weeks of instruction, live in barracks. We ... had the delightful opportunity to become corporals immediately, which most soldiers didn't. They gave us ... a couple of extra dollars a month. I don't know why we were corporals, but we were.

GC: Did your training in chemistry ever lead to a more specific role in the infantry? Did you ever have an opportunity to do something that would call for a background in chemistry?

LB: No. I made an inquiry about the Chemical Warfare organization, but there wasn't any chemical warfare during the war, so, they didn't have to build that, whereas, as I say, some of our engineers became ordnance men and so forth, my specialty was not required by the Army except for the infantry. So, nothing came along on that.

SI: Did you ever consider another branch within the Army or enlisting in the Air Force?

LB: I considered the Navy. The Navy was looking for meteorology officers and I ... had the qualifications. Unfortunately, they also required 20/20 vision and I have a bad eye that never made 20/20. Otherwise, I might have jumped into the Navy because of that. I thought it would be a good technology to get into.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit more about your training at Fort Benning?

LB: Yes. We had six busy days a week, plus, we would have night problems, night marches and all that sort of thing. We would do fairly long marches carrying packs. ... We did the usual things you see ... sometimes in the newsreels, crawling under the barbed wire with the machine guns firing over you, and climbing over obstacles. ... Then, there was a lot of classroom work, studying tactics and studying map reading, which became my specialty. It was intense, but, at that age, which you know very well, you can do an awful lot of physical activity and not get too worn down. So, it wasn't difficult at all.

SI: Was there a significant washout rate?

LB: Yes. ... I thought about that, because, ... as I say, I looked at some of my old papers; I kept everything. I've got all my Army orders and ... I have all the publications, but I was struck by the fact that the picture of my OCS class, which was taken early in our training, shows about 220

trainees. However, the list of those graduating and appointed second lieutenant has just over 140 names.

GC: When were you assigned to your company or the unit that you led? Was it in the States or when you made it overseas?

LB: Well, you mean after I was commissioned?

GC: Yes.

LB: Well, after I was commissioned, ... first, I stayed a year at the infantry school as an instructor. At that time, I instructed in map reading. In fact, I came across this publication; this was my creation. I encapsulated the whole course that I was teaching into a booklet, which the Army then printed and it became the standard for the course.

SI: For that year, you were just teaching map reading.

LB: Yes.

SI: What was it like to go from being a student to being an instructor?

LB: Well, I enjoyed the instruction. ... As you see, the size of those classes, they had large rooms where that whole gang would be in the room at one time for the indoor portion of the classroom instruction. ... We had outdoor instruction, where they had bleachers. ... Then, we had exercises, some of them are mentioned in there, where the students would take a compass and walk a course following the compass. Also, at night, we had night exercises to teach them how to find their location at night, how to read map symbols and how to draw a map. Well, one other thing about that I want to mention, you realize that I graduated in January. The rest of my Rutgers class graduated in June. So, they all came down Fort Benning, all the infantry guys, and so, I had the pleasure of instructing my own friends on that subject. [laughter] It was quite interesting and we got to say hello to everybody who had been in our Class of '43, but didn't get into the military until half a year later.

SI: You were strictly teaching officer candidates.

LB: No, just the Officer's Candidate School.

SI: Everyone had a pretty high level of education.

LB: Yes. I did teach more than the Officer's Candidate School. That was another story that suddenly came to my mind, but, yes, all the officer candidates were pretty well educated. I guess they weren't all necessarily ROTC. I think there were other people who were chosen as officer candidates because of their qualifications. Well, it happened during the war; the Army had anticipated certain requirements. For one thing, we had coastal antiaircraft batteries all up and down the coast. They also had some other branches of the military, I can't recall that off hand, that weren't needed. What they actually ended up needing, of course, was infantry. ... They

started converting all kinds of people to infantry, even though, they were coastal artillery or other specialties. ... They did, then, run special officer candidate classes for people who were officers, but had never had anything to do with the infantry. ... We had a class of from lieutenant up to a colonel and I was teaching them the map reading. It turned out that the colonel was my junior high school principal, Colonel Woodward, and he had been a Reserve officer from before World War II and he achieved the rank of colonel, but he was an artillery officer of some kind, but that was quite a thing to bump into your own high school principal in my class. [laughter] Yes, so, I did teach a few of those and, as they were getting converted, ... we were converting all kinds of people to the infantry, and then, as far as enlisted men, they had various training programs, ASTP type programs, at college and so on. They were going to create all kinds of specialties in the Army and they were going to train them themselves, but the heavy casualties started in Europe; they started converting everybody to infantry. It was said, in our division, I think, they sent in seven thousand new people only a couple of months before we shipped overseas, because what they were doing was training the experienced soldiers and officers and sending them over as casual replacements, leaving holes in the division that was training to go overseas and they kept feeding in inexperienced people. So, all of these people who were having other specialties, originally, ended up as infantry.

SI: Did you notice if anyone was disgruntled?

LB: Oh, yes. I think, when you suddenly are converted from something that was your specialty, such as the coast artillery, which never did fire, and the Army didn't need them, I don't think they were particularly happy. I think the regular OCS classes with the enlisted men were not disgruntled, because they were moving in the direction they thought was positive. They thought being an officer would be a good thing, but those who were officers in one specialty and were suddenly assigned to another, some of them were unhappy.

GC: Did they maintain their rank when they made the change?

LB: Yes, yes, ... they let you maintain your rank. I don't recall anybody being downgraded just because they went into another specialty.

SI: Going back to your own training, does anyone stand out, like your drill instructor?

LB: When I was in OCS? Well, we had a captain. ... The captain was the guy that maintained discipline. ... Oh, yes here he is. He wasn't a captain, he was a lieutenant, Casimer Telleys. He was an interesting guy, just kind of a personality guy. He got along well with the students. I liked him. ... I remember this other lieutenant, Roy Ostram, who also was good, because we were green. We didn't know a lot about the military, and so, a couple of those young officers would spend time with us and we could ask them questions. I thought the training went very well. I mean, I felt that they were doing their best to give us all the information we could get. The living conditions were good. ... Of course, we were in barracks and we were carrying loads, packs, on our back and rifles and going on long marches. I mean, that was all physical, but they were trying to make you feel that you were part of the team. The infantry school motto was, "Follow me." That's what they were trying to teach the officers, that they were supposed to lead.

They weren't supposed to get behind your soldiers and push them. So, they did that very well I thought.

SI: Were any of your instructors, or the men that you would later instruct with, combat veterans from earlier in the war?

LB: That's a good point. I don't know that I ever checked that, but, you know, I'm looking here, and this was an interesting thing, and I never realized this before looking at this booklet, the brigade commander was Colonel Sevier R. Tupper. He ended up being one of our regimental commanders in the 87th Division.

SI: When you first entered training, did you realize how dangerous it was to be a second lieutenant in the infantry?

LB: Yes. That began to be something that became very obvious as you realized that one of the heaviest classes of casualties was second lieutenants in the infantry. In fact, a large part of the casualties of the war were infantry, because the other specialties didn't ... actually have to slog through the frontlines like that. So, yes, it became obvious, but I don't recall people talking about it, worrying about it. I guess, you know, when you're twenty-one, you're going to live forever; you know that.

SI: Can you tell us about joining the 87th?

LB: I did the one year, so, that brought me to the summer of '44 and the 87th Division was in South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, Fort Jackson. ... I reported in and I was assigned to a heavy weapons company, that's heavy machine guns and mortars, and I was assigned to be mortar platoon leader. ... This began what I considered a very checkered career. I have gone back over my Army orders, from time-to-time, to try to figure what actually happened, but I spent a few weeks with the platoon and we were doing field exercises and maintenance of the weapons and, all of a sudden, I got tagged to do an investigation. A couple of soldiers had gotten into some kind of a scrape downtown in Columbia and were killed. So, I was pulled off the job and I went down to Columbia. ... I had to identify the guys and I had to investigate and I had to make a report for the Army and that took several weeks. Then, I went back to work and all of a sudden, I got involved in another special assignment and this is the way it went on during the summer. In the early fall, at one time, I was even assigned as a general's aide, the commanding general's aide, for two weeks, because his aide was on leave. That was an interesting experience. That general remained our general throughout the war and what he liked to do was, and I really thought this is an interesting idea, all the troops were in the field, training on one kind of an exercise or another. So, we would go out and he would go to a unit that was doing something and he'd go to some soldier in the line and he'd say, "Soldier, what are your orders?" ... If the soldier gave a good answer, that was good. If the soldier didn't seem to know what he was doing, he would go to the sergeant and he'd say, "Sergeant, what did you tell the soldier?" ... If the sergeant didn't know, he'd end up with some captain or other officer, but he wanted to find out where the breakdown was between orders he gave and what happened to the guy who was supposed to execute them. ... I enjoyed those two weeks. He was really a trainer and he was an interesting man. He looked like General Patton and I think he kind of fancied himself

that way. He was a bulldog, a big man, and he was a little gruff at times, but he was very good to me when I worked for him and it was a great experience, I mean, looking at the division from the top down, instead of just being a factor in the division. ... I did another assignment or two, and so, I really never did get to train those soldiers. ... Then, in September, we were alerted and I was appointed combat liaison officer, which was a staff job at regiment. ... I often thought that, probably, that came out of this map reading experience, because the combat liaison officer's job is to communicate between regimental headquarters and division headquarters. Well, in a combat situation, regiment and division might move twice in one day and certainly they moved once almost every day, except in a static situation. So, the trick was to find the division and find the regiment at all times, and then, you would carry messages, you would carry instructions, maps, information, according to whatever the regimental commander or the division commander or the division staff wanted. I will say, the map reading was very helpful. I only got lost once and this was very early on, when we were first committed. I remember, I had a jeep and a driver, and then, we would do what had to be done. We were driving along; all of a sudden, I realized we were driving through the frontlines of a company of infantry attacking under artillery fire [laughter] and there we were, in the middle of this whole thing, and we weren't supposed to be there. One of the soldiers took a shrapnel hit on his leg, and my driver and I did bind him up, and then, medics came along and took care of him. Then, we got out of there as quick as we could, but other than that, I guess I kept the job during the whole combat, because I always made the connection. The other part of that was interesting, too, and that is, since I was working with the division and regimental staff I was always used as the advance man. For example, when we sailed to Europe on the *Queen Elizabeth*, I was detached and sent ahead to prepare for the arrival of the troops in Scotland, and then, every time we moved, I was always out ahead to find the movement or the route to the place where we were going and so on. So, I spent a lot of time on my own, with the driver. It was very interesting, when we crossed the Channel and I went ahead there to find the bivouac area. It was an interesting assignment and I always knew what was going on in the division area, because I saw all the maps and heard all the orders.

GC: You mentioned that, during your studies in chemistry you studied German. Were you ever proficient in it? Did it come in to play?

LB: Yes, a few words, but, ... we weren't studying speaking German, we were studying reading German, and so, the pronunciation wasn't so hot. ... Yes, I could recognize signs and exchange a few words here and there. It was more helpful after the war, when we would go to Germany on our vacation.

SI: When you went over to Europe, did you go on the *Queen Elizabeth*?

LB: Yes, we took a train from Fort Jackson and went to Fort Dix, and then, after a few days, they loaded us up and took us to Brooklyn, where we finally boarded. ... We could accommodate, I think, fifteen thousand or so people. So that was our three combat regiments, about three thousand each, plus other troops from other units and of course, the idea of the *Queen Elizabeth* was, it could make thirty knots. Submarines, underwater, can only make six or eight knots. So, if you steamed at full speed and zigzagged, unless the submarine happened to be right there in your path, they never could catch up to you. So, it never was attacked during the whole war and it just kept going back and forth. It was a safe passage. It was very good; it

worked out fine. ... Of course, it was a nice, comfortable ship, too, although, you know, the crowding was very bad. I mean the enlisted men were maybe eight high and officers were maybe three high in the smaller cabins.

SI: Were you in charge of any men when you were on the ship?

LB: No, you see, I didn't have anybody, because I worked alone, essentially.

SI: Sometimes, they would say, "You are an officer; you are in charge of this group of people."

LB: Yes. That would be the officers who were the platoon officers that would have the responsibility of their platoon and so on. Yes, being a staff officer was very interesting, because you didn't have troops and you actually worked alone, and then, I had a driver from the motor pool that would drive me as required.

SI: Did you have to have any kind of security clearance, since you went to these places ahead of time and you knew where your division was headed? Did they tell you to keep your mouth shut and only talk to certain people? Were you given instructions?

LB: Yes. That would be standard. I don't know whether I was specifically cleared for secret.

SI: It was considered secret.

LB: Well, as you said, you wouldn't want to go talking loudly about what you knew about these troop movements, although, in the combat situation, it wasn't exactly true. Well, I suppose you could run into civilians who might be blabbing about things. No, I think the instructions were general, under those conditions, not to talk about what you knew.

SI: What kind of preparations did you make in England after the division arrived?

LB: Yes, this is very interesting. We went to southwest England, in various towns. We were in Peover Manor. ... Various schools and so on were used as barracks. ... The idea was, you see, one, that when the division went to Europe, it didn't carry any equipment, except the soldiers' own personal weapons. So, the thing in England was to equip us with all of the radios and the vehicles and cannons and other equipment that didn't go on the *Queen Elizabeth*. That was a staging operation, so that when we left England, we had all of our necessary equipment. So, we spent a month or so, maybe a month-and-a-half, getting ready in England. We were pretty busy, although we did get passes to go to London, at least once that I recall, which was kind of nice, actually saw the famous fog. The soft coal they used generated fog and, also, heard the buzz bombs, if you're familiar with that kind of operation.

GC: Do you remember the specific date when you actually set foot on the European Continent? You mentioned that you hooked up with the 87th in the summer of 1944.

LB: Yes. We arrived in Scotland and went to Glasgow on October 22nd of '44, and then, ... on November 26th, we boarded a ship for the English Channel crossing. We crossed on LSTs,

that's the landing ship, tank. It's a long, flat-bottom boat and I remember that as a rough passage, because, when we stood off Le Havre, waiting for clearance to land, the ship was going up and down; everybody was sick. [laughter]

GC: Was that the entire division or regiment or was that your advance unit?

LB: I was with a different group, but I'm sure they all went on the same type of ship, because that was the ship that carried the vehicles and the tanks and the cannon and all that material, went, to some degree ahead, yes. I guess I was probably with the division advance party.

SI: Had the harbor been repaired by that time?

LB: No, it was in bad shape, a lot of damage, and, you know even at the end of the war, when we went back through it to go home, it was still in bad shape.

SI: Could you see the destruction of the Blitz when you were in London or any other area in England?

LB: In London? Yes, you could see lots of damage and, of course, at night, it would be totally blacked out and you'd have to find your way around as best you could. We were only there one night, but there was damage, no question about it, in some areas.

SI: Did you have an opportunity to talk with any English civilians about what life was like for them during the war?

LB: Yes. We went to a restaurant and to a pub. I went to some of the well-known sights, as much as we could cram into one day, and talked to people. The English were very courageous, although they were taking a terrible beating. I would say that you had a general impression that they actually were following what Churchill was saying, that is, "Fighting on the beaches, fighting on the fields," and they were ready to do that. I didn't hear any discouragement.

SI: What did you do after you arrived in Le Havre?

LB: Well, we went to an open field, in fact, near Le Havre, St. Saens, and we got a bad break there. It was raining like crazy and we were all ... in our pup tents, out in the middle of a muddy field, and a lot of the soldiers got wet feet and we didn't know much about it at the time, but the boots were not waterproof. ... Then, we went to another location under the same conditions, in the mud. ... That's where we first heard about trench foot, when your feet are wet continuously. The feet turn gray and numb and we had a lot of people who also had to leave the ranks and take treatment. ... They relieved our commanding officer, the Colonel, because they blamed him for not doing enough. I'm not sure that it was entirely fair; nobody knew much about trench foot at the time. It was necessary to change your socks frequently and keep your feet dry. We next boarded railroad freight cars for the trip across France. These were the well-known forty-and-eight freight cars or World War I vintage. We went to Metz, which was a city that had a number of forts in it, and most of the Germans had been chased out, but there were some holdouts in the forts. ... There was sniper fire and we had some minor skirmishes until that was all cleared out.

So, that really wasn't combat as an organized unit. It was combat as a sort of patrol activity. ... Then, shortly thereafter, we actually went into action, in the middle of December, and we relieved elements of the 26th Infantry Division. We were in the line and we relieved them and we went into combat and crossed into Germany, actually, at that point. We fought there for a couple of weeks, and then, the Germans attacked in the Ardennes, in the Bulge battle. We were in the Third Army with General Patton and, if you believe the movie, why, he said, "I can put my whole army in there in two days." We didn't quite do that, but, overnight, they pulled our division out of the line. We went to Rheims, due west, and did some refitting, and then, we went straight north to Luxembourg. The entire move was over 350 miles. ... I did have a funny memory of Rheims. We came across a hotel that had this indoor swimming pool. So, a whole bunch of us got in and started swimming around the swimming pool. Of course, we didn't have any bathing suits. [laughter] We were swimming in the nude. All of a sudden, we heard the giggling; little girls were up in the upper balcony. So, we had to scramble out of there in a hurry. You know infantry people don't get an opportunity for a bath very often and it was nice to have the swimming. ... There, again, I was sent forward to Luxembourg, from Rheims, to find the division headquarters, which was in Luxembourg. That was a funny story, because, when I got there, it was in a big office building in downtown Luxembourg and it was on an upper floor. So, I went up to find division headquarters and report that I was available.

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

SI: This continues an interview with Mr. Leonard C. Briggs on November 14, 2003, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and Geoff Cerone. Please, continue.

LB: Well, I was looking for the division headquarters in downtown Luxembourg City and I came into this very, very large room, brightly lighted, as I recall, and there were two people there. One was the Colonel, chief of staff of the division, and another officer. He was the most dejected looking person I ever saw, because everybody else, apparently, had gotten lost or was still on the road. So, he said to me, "Well, what's going on?" I mean, he's a colonel and I'm just a lieutenant, but I told him what I knew anyhow, but I always had the picture of him sitting there, kind of slumped over, waiting for something to happen. It was expected of the division staff to be running things, not to be out of control. ... Then, I went from there to a house somewhere on the outskirts. It became our regimental headquarters and I resumed my job. Well, then, we went into combat from there, attacked the Germans on the south flank of the Bulge, and this was a very tough war for the infantry in the field, because they were out there in snow covered fields. They couldn't dig foxholes, because the ground was frozen. They did the best they could, but they were under fire from the Germans and they were cold. You couldn't feed them properly and it was a very tough situation for the troops in the field, but we did well and did, of course, finally end the Bulge by closing in from the north and south. Another thing I remember about it was very interesting; we had strict light discipline, no lights. On the north flank of the Bulge were the British. They had the lights on, on their jeeps, and they were driving around, singing. ... [laughter] You could hear them over there. They're courageous people, those British soldiers, no question about it, but I always got the biggest kick at it seeing the lights and the singing. The other one thing that was worrisome was the stories about the German soldiers in American uniforms. ... Of course, that was a concern to me because I was out with just the driver and ... driving around at night and you don't know whom you're going to run into, but we, fortunately,

never had an incident, but you're always wary about that and the other obstacle was the wires across the road, head high, to catch the jeep people, and the motorcycle people, but the Army did equip the jeeps with a cutter in the front end. We had one, which was good; the idea being, it would cut the wire before it got to you. ... Then, we went into the Siegfried Line, which was the emplacements that the Germans had put in. They were dug in against artillery and were covered with heavy concrete. ... There were lots of tank traps. We had to go through that, took a lot of casualties, but, once we got through there, then, we started east. We did a river crossing of the Moselle and we went into Koblenz, which is at the junction of the Rhine and the Moselle. That was an interesting situation, because there was, on the other side of the Rhine River, a major fortress, a German fortress, called Ehrenbreitstein. The Germans refused to give that up and they could fire down into the city. So, that held us up for quite a while and, finally, we and others crossed the Rhine and chased them out of there.

GC: When you were reunited with your unit, were you once again assigned to the mortar platoon? Were you in charge of that?

LB: No, no. I was always combat liaison officer, for all the time we were in combat. So, I didn't change jobs. I was in regimental headquarters company and I would go back and forth between division and regiment and do whatever was required to locate them, bring messages and so on. I didn't have any troops reporting to me.

GC: Was there any time when you actually came under fire during your travels between regiment and division?

LB: Yes, for example, when we were in the Siegfried Line, the Germans had the advantage, because, as they retreated, they had already spotted where they could put their artillery shells. That isn't so if you're going forward and you don't know what's on the other side of the hill. They already knew, because they had just left the place. So, there was a lot of shelling in there and there were some close calls, but I was never wounded.

SI: When was the first time that you came under fire, the first time that you said to yourself, "I could really get hurt out here?"

LB: Well, it was in that incident I mentioned, when we ... mistakenly got into the frontlines; my driver and I ... were under artillery fire at that time. ... Occasionally, we'd be under artillery fire at our headquarters, if the Germans knew where we were, and then, in the Siegfried Line, ... there was very heavy artillery fire. Those are ... most of the occasions. I was never shot at, as such.

SI: There were no snipers.

LB: No, not where I was. No, I never encountered any mines, either. Otherwise, I saw areas that were marked with mines.

SI: Your division went through many different types of combat, such as the mop-up operations at Metz, river crossings on the Rhine and this historic redeployment during the Battle of the Bulge. How did that shape your job? What difficulties did each challenge present to you?

LB: Well, as I said, it was really the rapid movement of headquarters and trying to keep up with the locations, and then, the possibility, in the Bulge, that the lines weren't that sure, where people were. You were never sure exactly whom you were going to run into.

SI: During the Bulge, were you stopped by American sentries? Did they ask you question like who the World Series, that sort of thing?

LB: I'm glad they didn't. I was never much of a baseball fan. [laughter] I think we were stopped, but I don't remember that kind of question. I think we ... satisfactorily identified ourselves, but I know what you're saying, the idea of asking questions only Americans would know. I don't think I actually bumped into that sort of thing. I knew it was going on.

GC: Were the German infiltration units a big problem with your division?

LB: Not with our division, no. I don't recall that we actually had that. Mostly, it was the combat. The Germans were very efficient and they had excellent tanks, of course, and it was difficult, when they decided to hold a position, ... to dislodge them and, when you heard the stories of what the soldiers were running into, you knew that it was a tough situation.

SI: Were you ever personally afraid of becoming a POW during the times when you were out on your own, just you and your driver?

LB: Yes, but I was never that close to any German troops that I could have ... become a POW. I saw some in the distance, but never really close up, never had occasion to fire my rifle.

SI: Had you heard stories about Malmedy?

LB: Yes. I don't think it was Malmedy, but I saw massacred American soldiers lying along the side of the road in the snow. It did happen. I don't think it was Malmedy, that I saw, but it was a similar thing.

SI: What about the German Air Force, the *Luftwaffe*? Did that ever present any threat?

LB: Not when we got in combat. By the time we got there, they were really not effective. I think we were fired on once by an airplane. I wasn't in that particular area, at that time. The Americans had cleared the air pretty much by then. The Germans were not too effective, because they were running out of gasoline, for one thing.

SI: What happened after Koblenz?

LB: Well, we just continued across Germany after we crossed the Rhine and the Germans were beginning to lose heart. ... All of a sudden, we keep going. Our objective was Plauen,

Germany, which is right on the Czechoslovakian border. I believe this was an agreement between the United States Army and the Russians, that we would not cross into Czechoslovakia. ... We took a lot of POWs and Germans were giving up right and left at that time. Of course, it was a touchy thing, because their soldiers knew, our soldiers knew, that the war was going to end soon. Nobody wanted to get killed a day before the war ended, but we did have some battle activity with the Germans in late April and early May and, finally, we took the town of Plauen, which was a total ruin. There wasn't anything standing in the place, and then, we linked up with the Russians somewhere just before the end of the war. All firing stopped on May 7th, but the official date, I think, is May 8th, when the war ended, but the word was put out, "Stop firing on the 7th," and the Germans kept giving up and throwing down their weapons. That was the activity there for a while, it was to process the German soldiers.

SI: As you were moving into Germany, did you interact with any German civilians or POWs?

LB: I saw them, but I don't think I interacted with them. I think I talked to a couple of Germans for one reason or another. You know, we would occupy their houses for headquarters and, sometimes, they were in the area, but ... I never felt threatened by the Germans. I understood that there was only one case where a civilian took a shot at one of the soldiers in our division. The Germans were pretty tired. They've been at war for about five years or so by then and I don't think they relished the thought of any more war. That is, the civilians didn't. ... The soldiers didn't, for that matter. So, I didn't have much contact with them.

GC: When did you become aware of the situation in the concentration camps? Most of our interviewees were not aware of them when they were still in the United States.

LB: No, and I think it was just reports. We left Germany promptly. I think we heard some stories before we left. ... Our division didn't have any contact with those camps.

GC: Even well into 1944, you still were not aware of the full scope of the situation.

LB: No. Of course, we didn't have a lot of sources of news during combat. It was only the things that were right in front of you, pretty much, that you dealt with. Then, we left Europe in July. So, we weren't really an occupation army. We ... just did what had to be done in our immediate area, and then we moved back to France, to Le Havre, and took a boat back to the United States. This was July and the interesting fact was, of course, the reason we went back so soon is, we were set to go to Japan, that is, go to the Far East. The idea being, the Army had already spotted ... the beach in Japan that we were going to land on. The whole attack on the Japan homeland was all plotted, and they were taking younger divisions, like ours, with limited combat and leaving the older divisions that had been in Europe for three or four years. You know those soldiers were pretty tired. So, several divisions were promptly shipped back to the United States in the idea that they would refit and sail for the Far East, but the Atlantic crossing took us about ten days and that was followed by a one-month leave, which took us into August, and, during that time, the war ended.

GC: Where were you when you found out about the dropping of the bomb?

LB: I was home with my parents.

GC: What was the general reaction?

LB: Hooray. [laughter] Well, this is true. There's a lot of people that take exception to that method of ending the war, but you can bet that those of us who were scheduled to go and land on that beach were happy to conclude it. ... I always thought that the casualties of the bomb were no more, probably, than the casualties when we firebombed Tokyo or leveled some of the cities in Germany. It was done a different way and it didn't have the effects of the radiation, which, of course, bothers a lot of people, but, as far as the number of casualties, if we hadn't done that, the casualties would have occurred another way. There'd be incessant bombing of Japan, in preparation for our landing. So, we always, that is, those of us in the military, thought it was a great idea.

SI: What did you think of both the Germans and the Japanese as the enemy?

LB: Of course, I never had any contact with the Japanese. I would say, from what I heard of the Bataan Death March and the way [they] treated the Koreans, that they were much crueler to captives than the Germans, who did follow some of the older European customs, you might say, of respecting your enemy. As long as [an] enemy was honorable, you were honorable, although there were the massacres, but, by and large, the Germans operated as a disciplined army and there wasn't quite the fear of being a prisoner of the Germans as it would [be] of the Japanese.

SI: Towards the end of the war, were you able to see the deterioration of the German Army?

LB: Oh, yes. When the surrender started happening, you saw people ... whose uniforms were in bad shape and there were older men and younger boys and they weren't the fierce soldiers that you first ran into, the real disciplined, trained military. They were running out of everything, I guess. They had run out of ammunitions and fuel and soldiers by then.

SI: When you linked up with the Russians, did you actually meet any Russians?

LB: No. Our officers, regimental officers, did. We have some pictures of them talking to the Russians, but I never had occasion, actually, to get near a Russian, but there was a lot of celebrating, because that link up meant the Germans were finished.

SI: Was there any talk among the officers, especially since you had such contact with division headquarters and regimental headquarters, about the status of the alliance with Russia or the fact that we had let the Russians come in, instead of driving on to Berlin ourselves?

LB: Oh, yes. I think the feeling was that we stopped and the Russians came and that that was not a good idea and, of course, as it turned out after the war, it wasn't a good idea, that maybe we should have captured more of Germany and dominated it. I think that was the general feeling. Even though it was nice to have the war over, it would have been great if we had done more in Germany than we did.

SI: During the whole time you were with the 87th, did you ever run into any one you knew from Rutgers?

LB: No, although, apparently, there were two or three from Rutgers.

SI: The 87th is, I think, of all the Army veterans we have interviewed, the division with the most men in the Archives.

LB: Is that right?

SI: Yes.

LB: [laughter] No, I don't know that I ever ran into anybody in the division that I ever knew before. Of course, my contacts were limited to my regiment and the total division is about fourteen thousand, with various other specialties, such as tanks and artillery and so on. Never had much to do with them, so, I didn't know anybody.

SI: How often were you able to get hot food and creature comforts, such as a clean bed?

LB: Since I was going between headquarters, I had a better life than the troops in the field, because, frequently, the headquarters would [be] in a house. Of course, the house wasn't functional. I mean, there'd be no electricity, no running water or anything like that, ... no bed as such. We used our bedrolls, but we had a roof over our heads, which was very nice, compared to what a lot of soldiers had. Also, I was able to have more cooked meals than the soldiers in the field, although we had our run of things. I mean, for example, I can't recall how long I went without taking a bath but it was a long, long time, I remember. ... Occasionally, they'd come through with shower vans, and then, we'd change our clothes and throw our stuff in and they'd wash it. We'd get fresh stuff, but we only got a bath when they had the shower trucks come through and that was pretty infrequent. You know, I can't remember the details, but the more I think about it, the more I think I must have gone months without a bath. All I got was a change of clothes from time to time. ... I ate a lot of K rations and a lot of C rations, but I think I got more cooked meals than most of the soldiers right out in the field.

SI: Which actions were you awarded the Bronze Star for?

LB: Well, ... there were two kinds of awards for the Bronze Star. It would be heroism in action and the other would be, continuous and effective action during a combat situation. ... That was the way mine was written. ... Then, interestingly enough, after the end of the war, they wrote a regulation which said, if you'd had the Combat Infantry Badge, you were entitled to an Oak Leaf Cluster on your Bronze Star. So, I have a Bronze Star and an Oak Leaf Cluster, but it was not for a specific incident, but more for continuous activity during a combat situation. That's the way it was designed, to recognize one or the other, whereas above that, for example, a Silver Star, you had to be [in] a specific incident.

SI: At the end of the war, did you have to deal with the point system?

LB: Yes. Well, you know, this is an interesting thing. When we got back to the United States, my job was changed; I think it was in September. I became a regimental personnel officer, because the then regimental personnel officer was transferred to another job. ... That job was to handle personnel matters for the regiment, which would include pay, family benefits and the point system. It was a regular personnel operation for the regiment. I had about thirty people. You had to have sixty-one points, as I recall, and the people who had sixty-one points, were the people who had children. You would get four or five points per child and a wife. Because I was single and I had a relatively short period in the combat zone, you got extra points for that, so, I knew it was going to be a long time, whereas the soldiers with dependents or who had higher awards, like [the] Silver Star, got right out.

GC: As a staff officer, did you receive the same points as the rest of the men?

LB: Yes. You received a point for every month, plus, you received extra points for being in a combat zone. So, once we were in France and Germany, we got that credit. I forget what the rest of it was. There were several categories, but, mostly, it was months of service, months of service in a combat zone, and then, as I say, those who had dependents got extra points for that. So, they broke up our division at the end of September, and then, I was sent to [the] 28th Division, as a personnel officer, in Mississippi, Camp McCain. That's what they were doing, you see. They eliminated your unit. If you didn't have the points they would send you some other place. So, I was personnel officer of the 110th Infantry Regiment and I was separating these guys right and left, but I wasn't accumulating enough points and we finally broke up that division. ... Then, they sent me to Camp Swift, Texas, in the Second Infantry Division, Ninth Infantry Regiment. I was personnel officer of that unit. ... Finally, I got the magic number in March of '46. ... As personnel officer, I was recommended for promotion to captain, but, since they kept breaking up the regiments, it never went through, but the Army had a policy. If you had been an officer continuously over a long period of time at a certain rank, you would get an automatic promotion. So, I was separated as a captain and left the Army in April of '46.

SI: Why did you decide to remain in the Reserves?

LB: I guess I thought that I could make a contribution in the military and I thought we should have a strong military. ... I was interested in the military, but not as a career, but the Reserves seemed like an interesting way to keep in touch. I was not very active, although I did attend meetings and summer camp. The Reserves were in a continuous state of reorganization and I was moved among several units. I decided to go inactive.

GC: This is all before Korea

LB: Yes. I was inactive for a couple of years, but they called up the Inactive Reserve in the Korean War.

SI: Many people say that there was a bit of a backlash, that they called up the inactives and the actives were not called back right away.

LB: That's right.

SI: Before we jump into Korea, what did you do in your first few months of getting readjusted to civilian life?

LB: ... We had the leave coming back from World War II, from Europe, and then, the war was over, so, I bought a car and that was pretty handy. Then, I would drive around to these various assignments. It was a little, old Pontiac, but it was a pretty good car. I ended up in Texas, with my car. So, I toured the United States for several weeks, went out to California, I'd never been there, and up the coast and across the country, through Chicago, places I hadn't been before. ... Then, I started interviewing. As I said, I went to several chemical companies. It didn't seem to be what I wanted to do. ... I ended up in New Jersey Bell Telephone Company, in a manager-training course. ... That's where I stayed, after that, for a while. I was married [in] 1949, and then, I started getting this threatening mail from the government, about 1950 or so, and I kept saying, "Oh, no, they don't want me," and, finally, I got my orders. At that time, I said, "Well, now, I'm a traffic superintendent, telephone communications man," and I said, "I'd like to be in the Signal Corps," and they said, "Okay." So, I switched to the Signal Corps and since, I guess, I'd been a staff officer and a personnel officer and all of that, I ended up in the Chief Signal Officers Office as an assistant adjutant, they called me, of a division. It was the communications division that operated long lines, in effect, for the Signal Corps and, also, operated the Alaska Communications System, which was interesting. The Army operated the telephone in Alaska, up to that time. That was part of our job. The other was communications planning for any future activity. Of course, this had a lot to do with Korea, at that time, keeping up our communications requirements for the Army in the war in Korea. So, mostly, I did administrative work for about half the time, and then, eventually, I went into communications, planning for the Signal Corps of that same unit. ... That was when I qualified for top secret. Well, of course, that whole issue is gone now, but it was quite a thing to be sworn to absolute secrecy.

SI: What sort of duties were you assigned to?

LB: Well, as an adjutant, it was all administrative work, moving information, instructions and serving on boards; you know, the Army is great for this. I was on an awards board and the qualifications board and a whole bunch of different boards, so that the adjutant himself didn't have to bother with that. I think that was my job, but it was nice. I enjoyed being at the Pentagon. It was a good assignment. It was very interesting, and then, we got into planning where we would plan for maintaining communications under various possible situations in the Korean War. "If so-and-so happened, how would the troops communicate?" and that sort of thing. So, it was quite good. Then, during that time, of course, as you said, the feeling was, "Why were we called and why were they not called?" ... There was a communications division unit in Pennsylvania and, when they went on active duty, the assistant adjutant came in and I trained him. He was getting paid for being on active duty, but wasn't called. That rankled me quite a bit. "Why didn't they call them in the first place?" but, anyhow, there was a lot of activity around Washington for cutting down the length of time you were in the service. It originally started out to be two years, and then, Congress was very interested, because there was a lot of grumbling. I believe they cut it to seventeen months as your mandatory tour, and I did a lot of work on that. I used to, when I had an opportunity go down Washington, sit down with a senator or representative and tell him what I thought. ... They were very good about it. You

could always chat with them a bit. ... There was a lot of pressure and, finally, I got out in about fifteen months. They finally let me go, and then, I went back to my original job.

SI: After that, you decided you did not want to continue with the Reserves.

LB: I think I resigned from the Reserves about the day I got home, yes. [laughter]

GC: You worked as a communications officer. They brought you down to the Pentagon.

LB: Yes.

GC: You were married by that time. What happened to your wife? Did she stay home in New Jersey?

LB: Oh, no. Washington is interesting, ... because, during World War II, they had built a tremendous amount of rental housing, of small units of two, I guess mostly two or three, bedrooms, complete units for all of the people that came into Washington there and they were available. So, we rented one of those and it was very nice. It was in the suburbs of Virginia and they had a bus that you took to get to the Pentagon. ... It was a very pleasant time and our first child was born during that period down there in Virginia.

GC: Had you known your wife before you went overseas during World War II?

LB: No. We met in the telephone company. She was an employee and I was, [too], and we met.

SI: While you were at the Pentagon, were any of these contingencies that you came up with actually implemented?

LB: I don't think so. I don't know if they were. I don't know that we ever were that close to what they actually did with our plans. You have contingencies, a whole bunch of contingencies, and, if somebody selected from among them, I don't know that we would necessarily know that.

SI: Most of your work seems to have been directed towards the war in Korea. Were there other things that you were doing that could be classified more as Cold War activities, like anticipating an aggressive move by the Russians?

LB: I can't remember; I don't think we did any of that. There may be another unit that did that.

SI: What about the Alaskan network?

LB: Well, what happened in Alaska, eventually, was, the Army sold that to a telephone company and it is now operated by a commercial company, but we had, ... I forget his rank, maybe he was a major or something, the officer who did the job for us and he was just what you would think of a man coming from Alaska, big, burly guy with a beard and a hearty, hale fellow, well met. He used to come in every few weeks or a month and tell stories. ... I guess there weren't many people in Alaska at that time, so, it was not a big organization.

SI: Were most of the people in the unit like yourself, coming from a telephone company background?

LB: I think most of them ... had stayed in the Army. For example, the adjutant was a lieutenant colonel. He was going for a career, although he was not a West Point man, and the other captains I worked with were career people. They just decided to stay in. It was nice. ... Where we were, in our little compound where we lived, mostly everybody was in the military at that time and we all got together and got to be good friends and had get-togethers and dinners and parties and the people that stayed in seemed to enjoy the service. ... I didn't hear anybody complaining about it, since they decided it was going to be their career. I guess they had been in during World War II and just stayed in.

SI: You then returned to Bell, which is now New Jersey Bell. Can give us a little summary of your career?

LB: Oh, yes. Well, the Bell Companies bridged your military service. So, when I was in the military, it was as though I hadn't left. That was a custom, which was very generous, and I stayed there a total of thirteen years. ... Then, I was transferred to the AT&T Company in New York, which was sort of a training assignment, two-year rotation ... in the traffic division. We worked on training of operators, telephone operators, because most of the work in New Jersey was manually done by telephone operators, ... at the end of World War II, very little dial. So, there was a lot of employment and training and that's what we did. ... The other thing, of all things, was running cafeterias, because, if you had a lot of operators, you had to have a good cafeteria. So, that was our job, too. I did that for two years. ... Then, the Western Electric Company, which was across the street, was looking for people with a telephone background. They decided that the companies had grown apart, that you had Western Electric, a manufacturing company, dealing directly with the telephone companies, but they felt they ought to have some telephone men. So, they offered me a lateral change to the company and I decided it sounded pretty good. So, I joined Western and went into the purchasing and transportation organization. ... The first job was buying printing and paper for telephone directories, a tremendous operation. We had printers all over the country and we had the big paper companies making paper for us. ... That got me a transfer to California and I became the resident head for the eleven Western states of those operations. That was a good assignment and that was rotational. So, after four years, I came back to headquarters again and continued with that. ... The big job was buying for the telephone companies. ... The telephone companies requisitioned on Western Electric. They didn't have buyers and Western would ... make a buy for them and that was a very successful operation, I thought, and that's why they wanted people of my background, to deal with the telephone company people. ... Then, we got to the breakup of the Bell System, when it was required that the telephone companies do their own buying. So, my job was to either transfer my people to the telephone company ...

-----END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE-----

SI: Please, continue.

LB: Well, what I had to do under those conditions was, effectively, eliminate my own organization, because ... the telephone company did all the buying and we didn't do the buying, of that kind, then, I retired with a good incentive, a couple of years earlier than I might have and that worked out very well. So, that's what I've been doing for the last twenty years.

SI: The Bell system seems like one of the corporate structures, like IBM or Metropolitan Life, that was very paternalistic, very involved in their employees' lives, as opposed to now.

LB: Well, certainly, it's changed, as you say. You use the term paternalistic. I don't think it was that as much as feeling that we were a family, in effect, and that there were many, many benefits given to employees to encourage them to stay and to be loyal and to be happy on their jobs, so that we had good pension plans, good sickness benefits, health benefits and working conditions and so on, but the one thing, it was true, was, promotion was virtually entirely internal, so that the chief executive of the AT&T was somebody who had started somewhere in one of the telephone companies in some kind of an entrance job. ... They loved telling those stories, too. "Well, I used to climb the poles out there in Minnesota, and, now, I'm the president of the whole company," but that was true. ... Of course, since then, that's all changed and most of the senior executives have had experience in other industries and of course the whole structure has been broken up into many, many pieces now. It's not even recognizable. The AT&T Company is a very small company and the Western Electric Company, which used to be 155,000 or so, is now Lucent, down to twenty to thirty thousand, something like that.

SI: In the first ten years you were with the company, would you say that most of the people you worked with were veterans of World War II or Korea?

LB: Yes. You know, the telephone company, in the Depression, in our division, the traffic division, hired very few men. We had a hundred men, about 3,300 women or so. Of the hundred men, all of them had been hired before the Depression, except one or two. So, you had a tremendous age gap between the post war hires and the pre-war hires. So, all the post-war hires were veterans, that is, at least at the time I went in, '46, '47, '48, and then, subsequently, some of the hires were also veterans of Korea, probably not true now, since most people don't have military service. Yes, it was interesting because they flooded the company with new people, because, ... during World War II, you couldn't get any telephones. There was no building of outside lines, telephone poles and switches, because it all went to the military. So, people didn't get a telephone and those that had had one telephone. ... Then, all of a sudden, when the war was over, everybody wanted a telephone. Then, they wanted two telephones, and two lines and all kinds of equipment. So, that's why they built up so fast after the war. That was the biggest problem, satisfying the demand during all those immediate post-war years.

SI: Do you think having all of those veterans in the company shaped the corporate culture?

LB: Well, not in the early days, certainly, but I'm sure that, yes, it did come, but this took some years before those people got high enough up in the company to affect a lot of things. ... Yes, I'm sure that the whole thing began to open up, to bring ... new people in from other companies and having other experiences at the higher levels and not just everybody being from Bell System as such, having, in effect, as they used to say, "the Bell Shaped Head." [laughter]

SI: You never used any of the GI Bill.

LB: No. I might have, but I guess I was anxious to get to work. I had my degree and I ... [felt] I was back in with a career. So, I didn't go to school full-time. I'm sorry now, I might have done part-time. A lot of the other people did, who came back, and then, they would go to night school or whatever under the GI Bill and get advanced degrees, which I didn't do. ... That was an attractive thing, but, no, I got married, had a family, was busy and I didn't do any of that. ... I didn't even, in buying a house, ... use any of those benefits. I think I had some good help locally from the bank, so, I didn't really ask for it, but it was a good plan. [The GI Bill] did a lot for a lot of people.

GC: You mentioned that you have three children.

LB: Yes, our first daughter was born in Arlington Hospital, in Virginia, in 1951. ... Then, we came back and we built a house in Murray Hill, which is right next to Summit, and our two daughters were born, then, in '53 and '54. We lived there and, as I said, then, in '64, we went to California for four years and we came back and bought a house in Summit. By then, our oldest girl was in high school. She went on to William Smith College, up in New York State. ... She got married and she went on to a Master's degree in library science. Then, she went on to a JD degree, Juris Doctor, lawyer, and she made an interesting combination of that. She is now working in Washington, for a law firm, and she runs their communications as such, because she developed the skill. She can find out any piece of information you need, with the legal background, with [the] library background. She is now one of the senior managers of communications for a big law firm and they depend on her to find information and keep the lawyers straight. I often said to her, she really should open up a business for herself and teach people, and then, have them go and help all the lawyers. She said she was not going to work much longer anyhow, she wanted to have children and couldn't have children. So, she adopted two Korean girls and that worked out well, but, as the story goes, then, right away she had her own natural child, the third one, all girls. So, she's doing well and they have a nice [life] and her husband has a good job down in [the] Washington area. He's a lawyer also. ... Then, our second daughter went to Wooster College, in Ohio, small school, very nice school, and she married a classmate and they live in Weston, Connecticut. ... First, she got interested in the library thing and got a Masters in library science, but she's very competitive and, when her husband got an ... MBA, she went and got an MBA. I guess she just felt she wanted to have it you know. He runs a business in the Connecticut area and she does occasional work, Did library work at one time, but she was very interested in French in high school and she had a girlfriend who came from France, was in the same high school, and so, she went to France for a semester and lived with a family in France, and polished up her French and, of all things, her husband took a job in Geneva, Switzerland, which is a French speaking area. So, she polished her French up to a high degree and she's very fluent in French. So, that all fell together. At one time, she worked for a French travel agency in New York, using her French language, and, now, she just does occasional work and she has two children. Now, our youngest daughter went to University of Arizona and married a classmate from there and stayed out there a long time, but eventually they divorced, and so, she came back to the East. ... She went down to Washington, to Arlington, Virginia, where her sister lives, and her sister took her into their house. They have

quite a large house and kind of helped her get through this transition. Now, she is working for a computer science company and she has her own house. So, that all worked out very well, but they both live in McLean, Virginia, now. They're fairly close. It's not bad.

SI: Is there anything else that you would like to put on the record?

LB: I don't think of anything right off hand. I don't think so.

SI: We would like to thank you for coming in today and sitting for this interview. This concludes our interview with Mr. Leonard C. Briggs.

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

Reviewed by Karlee Meibauer 10/24/04

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/16/04

Reviewed by Leonard C. Briggs 4/21/05