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AN INTERVIEW WITH LEE A. CASPER

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

MOLLY GRAHAM

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TRANSCRIPT BY

VANESSA BODOSSIAN
and
ALYSSA FINIZIO
and
SARA ROLFSEN-KOHN
and
SASKIA KUSNEKOV

Molly Graham: This begins an interview with Lee Casper, our second session. The interview is taking place on April 14, 2015, in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. The interviewer is Molly Graham. I wanted to ask you a few more questions about submarine school.

Lee Casper: Oh, sure.

MG: Can you remind me where it was and how long the course took?

LC: Yes, the submarine school was located in New London. There are two towns right adjacent to one another up there, New London and Groton. I was having to remember which was which. The Electric Boat Company, which built submarines during the war, was in Groton, but the sub base was New London and the submarine school was on the submarine base. In other words, that was a naval base. It was the chief or the home base for all United States submarines and the school was located on that, I'm going to call it campus, on that base.

MG: How long was the training course?

LC: I can't remember exactly. I think basic submarine school was between three and four months of training. That's the training that I think I told you something about earlier. So, the school was there and, in addition, there were some specialty schools there also. I seem to remember that there was a torpedo training school there as well. I didn't go to that, because I didn't become a so-called torpedoman.

MG: What was your job on the submarine?

LC: I was a submarine electrician, but everybody had two jobs on the submarine. You had what was your regular duty position, that is, in normal operation, you would perform that function, but, then, when you went to battle stations, you would have perhaps a totally different station, the reason being that you [were], at least the officers who decided this deemed that you were, especially qualified for that particular job.

MG: How were you alerted to general quarters on the submarine?

LC: There was an electronic signal called--in years past, it was a klaxon horn--but this was an electric klaxon horn and it had various tones. To dive, there were two toots of the klaxon and they were, "A-wooga, a-woooga." [laughter] Then, to surface, before you were going to come to the [surface], there would be three, "a-woogas." Battle stations were a continual ringing, "Ding-ding-ding-ding-ding," and, on the loudspeaker, the officer who was manning it would announce, "Battle stations, gun action," or, "Battle stations, torpedo." Almost always, it was torpedo. We didn't aim to go into gun action. Gun action meant you'd have to be on the surface and we had a surface gun. We had a five-inch gun, but we were not designed to do battle with it. It was a defensive weapon, mainly. So, when you went to battle stations, it would be, "Battle stations, torpedo."

MG: That was when you would report.

LC: And then, you would go to your so-called battle station and I had two battle stations. I was a gunner--I mean, nothing to do with my aptitude, that I thought. I was the gun pointer on the forty-millimeter gun. The forty-millimeter gun was largely an antiaircraft gun and it was on the so-called gun deck, which is a little platform above the main deck on the sub attached to the conning tower. The conning tower is the centerpiece. [laughter] I was a gun pointer because the gunner's mate was a buddy of mine, the guy in charge of the gun, and that gun was added to our armament after we were already in commission. We were in Pearl Harbor and they decided they want to add this gun to us. The man's name was Signore, Gunner Signore, and he was a buddy of mine and another electrician. He said, "I want you guys for my gunners," and the officer in charge, the gunnery officer, agreed. That's how I got to be a forty-millimeter gunner and we did have occasion to use it. We sank a lot of mines at the end of the war and we apprehended some Japanese fishing boats. We didn't do anything to them--heck, we gave them food [laughter]--but we did go to battle stations, gun action, a couple of times or more than a couple of times. So, my station at "battle station, torpedo," was as the so-called auxiliary electrician in the control room. That meant that any electrical devices that needed maintenance, servicing, attention, repairs, that's what I had to do during the action.

MG: How many times would you say you would be called to battle stations during your tour?

LC: Oh, we made five so-called war patrols and I guess we went to battle stations--I have the exact record--but memory tells me we went to battle stations perhaps a dozen times on each patrol, because, at each sighting or belief that we had a sighting of an enemy, you went to battle stations. That's not true--if the Captain deemed that it was something that we could attack, he would call for us to go to battle stations. That did happen frequently, and then, also, many times, it came to nothing. They got away from us, they were too fast for us or they eluded us, and then, the times that we did engage, of course, [laughter] was something else. We did have a number of successful attacks and we had some unsuccessful attacks, where we became the victim, but that was typical of most submarines' history.

MG: Were you making contact with other submarines or Japanese ships?

LC: No, it was Japanese ships. From the middle part of the Japanese War, the War in the Pacific, the intention of the Navy, of the United States Navy, was to throttle the Japanese by cutting off all of their imports, because Japan depended on imports for everything, for their food, for their munitions, for their fuel. They had nothing domestic, or almost nothing, and so, they had a tremendous merchant fleet. Our theory--the Navy's theory--was to cut off those supplies, would bring Japan to an eventual surrender. So, our orders were always to first go for the merchantmen, and then, if necessary, or if it looked like an opportunity, to go after a warship. That's what we did and we sank both merchantmen and we sank a major warship as well. Of course, those were exciting events. [laughter]

MG: Tell me more about that, how the ships were sunk, what you remember and how it felt.

LC: Well, in the earlier part of the war, on our first patrol, it was almost exclusively the fact that we would be submerged all day, because the Japanese did rule the oceans at that time. Our first patrol was sixty-seven days, which was longer than usual, and we sank a large merchant ship on

a submerged attack. Then, after we sank the ship, its escorts--the escorts were the Japanese naval vessels that were supposedly protecting it--depth-charged us for hours, but we were in deep enough water. While it was everything that you see in the movies, we survived that without any damage, but they did subject you to a pounding. So, that was a submerged attack. We damaged another tanker in the same manner on that patrol, and then, on that patrol, we made this rendezvous with the group of guerillas that I had already told you about. So, that was a long and very varied experience, that first war patrol. The second war patrol, we had a brand-new skipper. Our skipper was a little bit older than the average Annapolis officer for the time and he suffered a heart attack while we were in port, after we came home on the first trip. Of course, he could not take the boat out, but this all happened a couple of days before we were scheduled to go out the second time. We got a brand-new skipper. To our chagrin, he was a very junior man in Annapolis. There's a pecking order with Annapolis graduates and the younger graduates have to defer to the older. It's conceivable that their ranks could be the same, but the one who graduated earlier was always the guy who gave the orders in some kind of decision-making process. So, because our guy was so junior, we operated, at that time, in so-called "wolf packs." There would be five or six submarines covering a pretty substantial area, with each submarine assigned to a particular spot in that area, and then, one of the submarines would serve as a sort of decoy either by going on the surface to attract enemy attention or go into a particularly dangerous area. Well, the guy who was the junior skipper always got that job. [laughter] So, that's why we would say to him, "Why couldn't you've been a couple years older?" [laughter] The Submarine Service was very informal. You talked to your captain with respect, but there was no saluting and he wore shorts and moccasins, leather moccasins--sandals they were, really--the same as we did and a T-shirt. So, you couldn't tell the skipper, when we were in action, from the lowest guy on the boat.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MG: You were talking about the hierarchy on the sub. Because it was not that obvious, did it change the dynamic on the sub?

LC: Well, that didn't have any influence on our internal [functions], on our crew. It just meant that in the standing with the other submarines, we always got the meanest job. [laughter] Anyhow, so, this captain took us on an attack early on the second patrol. He had only had command for a couple weeks.

MG: Would this have been at the end of 1944?

LC: This was at the end of '44; no, because, at the end of '44, we came in to Perth, Australia, on the first patrol, around Christmastime of '44. So, we went out--it's conceivable we went out before New Year's--but I think we went out in January. Within the first couple of weeks, our patrol area then was off the coast of what was then called French Indochina. It's Vietnam now, but, then, it was called French Indochina and we were on patrol in Cam Ranh Bay, which, during the Vietnam War, was a hotspot. You often saw news releases originating from Cam Ranh Bay. Cam Ranh Bay is fairly shallow or, as submariners think of it, it was very shallow. So, at the time, our Navy was already prevailing. For a good part of the time, we stayed on the surface even during the day, only diving when we had to, to get out of sight. So, on this occasion, it was nighttime and we raised a radar contact. They picked up seven vessels, one, apparently, a tanker

or a merchantman, a large ship, and then, six escort vessels. The Japanese, by now, were so concerned with American subs sinking their merchantmen that they took to hugging the shore running south or north along as close to the beach as they could, figuring that submarines could not get between the merchant vessel and the beach, because the water was so shallow, thereby allowing them to make the best use of their escorts. The six vessels that were escorting them, instead of having to encircle them, could all be on one side, on the ocean side, but our skipper said, "We're going to go inside," [laughter] and so he did. He took us into very, very shallow water, about a hundred to 120 feet of water. A submarine is sixty feet high from the bottom of the keel to the top of the superstructure that houses the periscopes, so that if you're just submerged and you're in 120 feet of water, below you, there's only sixty feet of water, your own height. So, he took us in along the beach. At that time, it was before we had this forty-millimeter gun that I'm telling you about--I was a battle lookout. The reason I was the battle lookout is, I had very good eyes and they look for that when you're going through your initial examination. They sent me, together with other men on our boat, to what they called night vision school. It was a three or four-day school, intensive, all-day long, in which they essentially taught you how better to use your eyes at night, unaided. We didn't have these infrared [optics], all the stuff that they have today. So, there's a simple trick in doing that, which you can use today. If you're in pitch-blackness, if you're on a dark street with no streetlights and you want to see across the street, if you look directly across the street, you won't see anything, but, if you look fifteen degrees higher, above where you think you want to see, you will perceive, almost subliminally, the outlines. It's because the rods and cones in the back of your eye function that way. So, you go through a real training course and they teach you to do that. Anyhow, so, I was a so-called battle lookout and a battle lookout, two of us, crawled up into the periscope shears. That's the superstructure that surrounds the periscopes, like the casing that the periscope emerges from. It's the highest point on the submarine and, on that, they welded two little pedestals, each facing forward and out. In other words, one on the left half of the ship, port half of the ship, starboard, right half of the ship, two little platforms welded up on there and the port lookout stood up in there on his and I stood up on mine. It was a little rail, about chest high, a semicircular rail, so that you could rest your feet on the pedestal and lean your chest--there was nothing to hold on to--you just leaned in there, but you were at the highest point. You used your binoculars and you scanned the area that you were assigned. You were assigned about a third of the perimeter that you could see, the guy on the port side doing his, I doing mine and, at the stern, there was a third lookout. He was a little below us--he was standing on the after gun deck. There was a little gun deck behind us and he stood on that and scanned the after part, so that the whole compass circle was covered with eyes. Anyhow, I was the starboard lookout and I will never forget this happening. So, I was obliged to look straight ahead in my sector, but the Captain made his so-called approach--when he was making an attack, he would call it his approach. We did this on the surface at night. It was a moonless night and we were using radar, but we could clearly see. I saw without any problem and the radar would call up, on the loudspeaker, the range, the distance to the target and to the escorts. Whereas we had sunk the first ship that we sank on the first patrol at something close to two thousand yards away, that's a long [way]--that means the torpedo traveled about a mile to hit the target--and so, that's sort of what I thought we would be doing, but this guy took us in. We were at five hundred yards from the target, five hundred yards, a little more than a quarter-mile track, if you can picture that, and I saw these things loud and clear, right in front of us. At the last few minutes, the target got out of my scope of vision--he was on the portside--and the Captain took us, I remember, to 440 yards

and he said, "Okay, you guys can start firing," and we fired our torpedoes. We fired six torpedoes and the first one hit the tanker and we immediately saw a blaze. It did not explode; we hit it and it started a fire. The second torpedo hit the lead destroyer. There was a very well-known destroyer--we didn't know it then, but we identified it afterwards--called the *Shigure*. It was the Japanese's' latest weapon. It was supposed to be--*Shigure*, I'm told, means, in Japanese, "unsinkable"--and it was their lead vessel then. We sank that with one shot, because we obviously hit it in the magazine--the magazine is where the munitions are stored--because it just blew sky high. Regardless of the rules, I stuck my head around. [laughter] I couldn't help it. I was eighteen then. I thought it was a cruiser. That's how it looked to me [laughter] and we blew this thing up. [Editor's Note: The *Blackfin* torpedoed and sank the *Shigure* on January 24, 1945.] The Captain turned around then and got his stern tubes ready and was going to go after, perhaps after, the tanker to sink the tanker. I think we got another shot at it. I think we hit it twice, the tanker, and it was burning, no question about it, but we just couldn't get close enough. I remember saying to the Captain, "Captain, there's *bees* up here," and he laughed. He was down below me, on the so-called bridge deck, and, of course, directing everything. He laughed. He says, "Sonny, get down from there." [laughter] He said, "That's machine-gun bullets." The Japanese knew, obviously, that there was something out there. They could not see us. Also, obviously, you can tell when the opposing radar, when the enemy's radar, is on you, because you can see it on your radar, but the fact that they would just pass over us--it would continually pass us by instead of stopping and focusing on it--we knew that they couldn't see us, but they knew the direction that it came. So, they were just firing at random and I had never heard bullets before. [laughter] It sounded just like bees to me, and so, he laughed and he says, "You guys get down from there," and he sent us down below. We went below and I announced to everybody that we sank a cruiser. [laughter] It's not a cruiser, it was a destroyer. Later that night, the Captain brought out silhouettes, not photographs, but renderings, silhouette renderings, of all of their ships. He flashed them and we all picked this and it was this destroyer, but, to me, having it happen right in front of me for the first time, I thought it was somewhat larger. [laughter] Anyhow, we nicknamed him--his name was William Kitch--we nicknamed him "Wild Bill" after that attack. [laughter] He became our favorite overnight and he was our skipper for most of the rest of the war.

MG: Did you celebrate a kill like that?

LC: Well, you holler, almost like it's a team sport. Because you're in the environment that you're in, you're not like a soldier in the trenches, you're not suffering, I have to say there's a big piece of guilt that you feel at the same time. You know there are guys out there that you [hit]--I read the report afterwards and I think they lost thirty-seven sailors. They did rescue a lot of them, the other escort vessels, but the tanker was sunk. We radioed the closest submarine to be on the lookout for it and they ultimately put some more torpedoes [in her] and she sank, but we got credit for it.

MG: In addition to enemy contact, what other things happened on the sub, like issues with the mechanics, that you might have been privy to?

LC: Well, this same Bill Kitch took us, on the next patrol, on another attack, this one a submerged attack and in a somewhat similar situation. You know something? I've confused the

two. That attack that I told you happened in Cam Ranh Bay did happen in that area, but not in the particularly shallow water that I spoke about. The attack I'm about to tell you about *did* happen in the same general area, but in the shallow water. So, he took us in, as I told you, close to the beach, submerged, and planned this attack. On an attack like this, it can take some time, because from the time you first sight them until you approach the convoy, both they and you are moving. So, the naval environment changes and positions change and the Captain has constantly to be adjusting the data that he conveys to the torpedoes. The torpedoes actually could do a little bit of thinking, even in those days. We had what were called "torpedo data computers." That was a device that was attached to the torpedo tubes and which fed into the steering and timing mechanisms of each torpedo the data that the Captain was transmitting, either verbally or with instruments, so that as they changed course and we changed course, this information kept changing. What the Captain would do, as we got closer and closer and when he felt he was in position best to fire, he would say, "Okay, last look," he was going to take one more look, "and then, we'll fire." I was in my position right next to where he was and he clearly said, "Okay, last look, and then, we'll fire." The Captain would lay on the deck when the periscope was retracted, so that as it was extended, he could jump on the eyepiece as quickly as it emerged through the floor and follow it up as it came up, so [that] he could get the longest view. He did this again and, before the periscope got totally exposed, he hollered, "Jesus Christ, take her down." He says, "They see us." We then heard the diesel engines of these ships and they had seen us. They were coming at us, but that all changed between the time he last looked and the time he thought he was ready to fire. So, they caught us near [the surface]--we just started to go down and they started throwing the depth charges. We got depth charged for hours and hours and I forget how many depth charges, but it was something like eighty-some and they had caught us on the bottom. As each depth charge would go off, it would roll the vessel over on one side, and then, they would come back and it would explode and they'd roll us on the other. There were leaks all over the ship. Water was coming in all over. The light fixtures all blew out. They did a lot of damage. Our sound heads, which are big, stainless-steel columns, perhaps ten inches in diameter, they project out of the bottom of the hull, on the bottom, and they go down ten or twelve feet and there's a sound head on the bottom of them that can be rotated, but the column that they go on, as you would image, is a great, big, stainless steel column, but two of those were extended. They just got bent back like you'd bend a nail back on a board when we hit the bottom and they blew away all of our top deck. They did a lot of damage. They kept us down about seventeen hours all told, and then, we heard what sounded like pebbles falling on the boat, but it wasn't. Somebody, one of our crew who recognized [it, said], "That's machine-gun fire." So, we realized they weren't firing machine-guns at us; they were firing at somebody, which meant that our Navy had to be there. Our Air Force saw them crisscrossing and throwing depth charges and realized that there must be a submarine down. They attacked them and drove them off. That's how we got out of that. The Air Force got us out of that scrape, but we had to have an escort to get back to Australia. They cracked, the explosions cracked, all of our four main engines. It blew out our compass. It just disintegrated it. It blew away all of our top side, our five-inch gun. It did a lot of damage, but we got back by virtue of the escorts that got us back to Australia.

MG: Were the people onboard unharmed?

LC: No, nobody was hurt. That was one of the saving graces of the submarine, we all thought. You either got home or you didn't get home, but you didn't get wounded. [laughter] So, that was,

like, a by-word in the submarines, but we didn't know at the time what the loss rate was. We actually lost better than twenty percent of the fleet. At the outset, or at the height of the war, we had about 250 submarines and we lost fifty-two of them, but we didn't know that at the time.

MG: What did it feel like to be hit with so many depth charges?

LC: Well, it was a frightening thing, but you just have to work with it. You make the repairs that you have to and you have no choice. [laughter]

MG: Where were those repairs being done?

LC: All over the ship, mainly leaks. When I say leaks, it was not like there were gaping holes in the hull. What would happen is, the concussion would fracture pipelines and fittings that went into the hull and make them shatter, and so, they would spurt water. It would not be that they had blown a hole in the hull. These would be fittings, and, sometimes, very large fittings, that were blown off and that's what we had to be repairing.

MG: Did assessing the damage show you how close the sub came to being destroyed?

LC: Oh, yes, of course, yes. I remember saying to my buddy, who was standing [there], I said, "Hey, we could get killed," like it had just occurred to me. [laughter]

MG: Where was the sub taken to have those repairs done, Australia?

LC: No, they took us--yes, they took us to Australia again.

MG: Where in Australia?

LC: The port was Fremantle, on the west coast of Australia, but the city, the adjacent city, was Perth and that was our base, was Fremantle. There were a lot of stories that came out of our time in Australia, but too many to …

MG: I feel like a lot of them might be a little fuzzy memories. [laughter]

LC: Well, no, a lot of them were, in retrospect, somewhat funny.

MG: Are there any that you can remember or share with me?

LC: Yes. Perth and Fremantle, if you look at the map, they're on the Indian Ocean side of Australia and they're at the southwestern tip of Australia. The battle area was north of Australia. Well, to get from Fremantle up into what became the battle zone, which was off of Darwin, which is on the north coast of Australia--north of that is Borneo and Sumatra and Java and all of the islands and that was the battle area at the time--so, to do that, there was a thousand miles to cover of pretty innocuous area. There were no enemies in there, but, in doing that, you lost a lot of fuel. You used up a lot of fuel. So, at the northwest corner of Australia, there's a point--you can see it on the map--Onslow Point or Onslow Gulf and there's a little town of Onslow there.

There was no town when we were there. It was just a point, Onslow Point, but, off of the beach at this point, our Navy had established a refill station of a tanker vessel anchored just off the beach and they had a little station on the beach. Every submarine coming north out of Fremantle would stop there to refuel in order to go into the battle zone and the Japanese knew this. The Japanese had their submarines lying off shore, waiting for us to come. During the whole war, the Japanese shot at every submarine that came in and *did not hit one*. Their torpedoes were so bad. In the early part of the war, the American torpedoes were very, very inaccurate, inefficient, bad, but the Japanese were equally bad. [laughter.] The beach at Onslow was littered with dud torpedoes, Japanese torpedoes. It was like firewood. You could see them run up on the beach. They would fire at us and they would run too deep or off course or they would even bump a vessel but not go off. It was just amazing. So, we took to calling that "Potshot." We called this Onslow Point "Potshot." Colloquially, people just said, "Yes, well, we were at Potshot," and so forth, and everybody knew what you were talking about. Anyhow, years later--I'm a tennis player, I think I told you--and my tennis club used to host the touring pros. It was before the days of big-time tennis. We had a group of the Australians--the Australians had all the champions in those years--and they had played tennis at our club. The nonplaying captain of their team was a man named Reed and he and I, we were at dinner in Philadelphia and I said, "What do you do, aside from [tennis]?" This wasn't his paid job. He said, "Well, I'm in the real estate business and we have a little company that's been quite successful in Australia. We're hoping to get established in the States." So, I said, "What's that?" and he told me and it suddenly escapes me, the name of the chain of motels. I'll think of it before we're done, but they had what's an everyday word for the successful motels. Travel Lodge. They were hoping to get established in the States and that's what he was doing, as well as conducting this tennis tour. So, I said, "Well, where are some of your [motels]?" He says, "Well, we have one in Australia you wouldn't know about," he said, "but it's quite successful. It's the most successful resort on the west coast." I said, "Well, where is it?" He says, "Well, it's called Potshot." [laughter] So, I said, "Potshot?" I says, "That's Onslow Gulf." He said, "How do you know that?" I said, "Well, I'm going to tell you something. Do you know what the name comes from?" He says, "Well, I don't. Everybody calls it Potshot," and I proceeded to tell him the story. He got such a kick out of it, because his partners didn't know that. [laughter] Anyhow, that was a little sidelight.

MG: The nickname stuck.

LC: Yes.

MG: In Perth, were you responsible for some repairs or were you able to take some time off?

LC: No, no. Really, the submarines crews were treated very, very well. You got what was called two weeks of R&R, rest and recreation, after each war patrol. During those two weeks, a crew totally replaced you. You were completely taken off the boat and, temporarily, a new crew, same kind of guys, but they were in what was called a relief crew, that crew did all the repairs necessary to get you back running again and you were to enjoy rest and recreation. It was, without exception, every time that we went back, everybody was absolutely glad to get back, because they were exhausted from their R&R. [laughter] You drank--that's all you did.

MG: You spoke last time about how the New Zealanders and Australians did not get along.

LC: Oh, they were notorious for the "interfamily" fighting that went on. I don't know what the basis of that relationship was, but they certainly were at odds with one another. [laughter]

MG: How did you see that play out when you would go into the towns?

LC: Well, you didn't see it, because those troops were all in the field. In fact, that's what made us so popular. [laughter] We were the only males around, so, it was much in our favor, that situation.

MG: Was there any trepidation for the next patrol?

LC: Yes, a few people who, for whatever reasons, would say, "I want to transfer." They would not say, "I don't want to go," they'd request a transfer. There were always a few, but just a few. For the most part, people really wanted to win the war.

MG: Did you have that attitude?

LC: Yes, yes. We were aggressive, but my presumption then was--because I thought about it--was that the soldiers must feel the same. While they might be frightened, they still knew why they were there, for the large part.

MG: You mentioned that you were treated very well. I read the food on submarines was great.

LC: Oh, yes, it was the best. [laughter] We literally had steak every day. We had an ice cream machine. We had ice cream every day. I have to say again, it made me feel a little guilty. I mean, I'd read about shortages in the States and we had everything. They really did treat us exceptionally well.

MG: Before we talk about your last two patrols, can we talk more about submarine life and what kept you occupied on the sub?

LC: Well, we were busy. The mechanical trades, the sailors who were mechanics, electricians, radiomen, radarmen, all, when you were so-called off duty--I have to tell you how that worked. The day for the crew was divided in the following way--you had a four-hour tour of duty. Let's say you had the four-to-eight watch. You would be at your station, the person in control, from four o'clock in the morning to eight in the morning. From eight in the morning until four that afternoon, you were off duty and you could sleep then or write letters or play cards or do whatever, read, but, for the most part, people like electricians had work to do, repairs that had to be made that were put aside until you got so-called off duty. So, you were busy and, when you had had a lot of damage, you had to grab a couple hours sleep where you could when you were off duty. So, there were three watches. There was the four-to-eight, eight-to-twelve, twelve-to-four, and then, rotated again. Every so many weeks, they would do what they called "dog the watch," in order to get people from going stir crazy. You would move from the four-to-eight to the eight-to-twelve and you would do that by splitting your watch, adding two hours to the first one, and then, only having two hours to do until you got moved into the next slot, so that you

could do it gradually. That was routine; that's how all subs operated. I gave you a couple of stories, that I wrote some stories about the off duty times, which I can fish out and give you, if you'd like, but, as I said, the mechanical trades, generally, had work to do when they were off watch, engine repairs, oil changes. Electricians were busy all the time, because there was always something not functioning in the electrical system. [laughter] It was a tremendous electrical system, as you might imagine.

MG: Did you get used to living your life in these four-hour chunks? For example, my routine today was set by my early life. I wonder if it is still with you in some way.

LC: Well, you did get used to it. Yes, you fell into a routine and it became your way of life.

MG: Tell me more about some of the other day-to-day things, like sleeping quarters.

LC: There were three crew sleeping quarters on the sub. The main sleeping compartment is what is called the after battery. That was the section of the ship, the compartment of the ship, immediately aft, behind, in the back of, the control room. So, it was near the center of the ship and, below decks, it housed half of the batteries of the ship. That was called the after battery, but above it were a large proportion--I'm going to say fifty percent--of the crew's sleeping quarters were there and the two heads, bathrooms and showers, were in that area and the galley, the cooks' galley, kitchen and the little dinette, I'll call it, where we ate "crew's mess," it was called. It would seat about a third of the crew at a time. It would seat close to thirty people.

MG: I am curious about some of your off-duty stories and how you would pass the time.

LC: Well, when I had the time, I had already determined, which is another story, but I had already made up my mind that I wanted to be a farmer when the war was over. So, I subscribed to--the Navy had all kinds of instruction manuals, college-level textbooks that were available to you and I ordered them. I forget how I got them when we got into port, but I got them and I ordered everything I could about farming. I spent what reading time I had reading these textbooks, farming textbooks, but I was busy for the most part, doing these repairs that I talked about.

MG: What interested you about farming?

LC: I can't remember whether I told you how I got into the Navy--did I tell you about going in through the V-12 program? I think I did.

MG: Yes.

LC: Well, they had sent me to Cornell and I was a cross-country runner and the cross-country team, well, we were working out. It was still late summer--the season hadn't started, yet--but the coach had all the prospective cross-country runners working out. Our course was on the Cornell Agricultural Campus and I just fell in love with [it]. It's a gorgeous farm campus, just beautiful. It's the famous Finger Lakes Region up there and, in the summer, you can't beat it. So, I would run over this course. It was a five-mile course and we would run around the perimeter of these

farms and I would watch them out there working. I thought, "Wow, what a great way to be outdoors and do good." I thought it was a very worthwhile and self-fulfilling kind of a profession and I said, "I don't care that I didn't grow up on a [farm]. I'm going to learn about it and that's what I want to do." I really wanted to and, of course, that's what we pursued when I came out of the Navy, but that's how I got my first exposure

MG: Were the other men making those kinds of plans? Was that a strategy to sort of get through the present?

LC: Some of them were, but, for the most part, no. The bulk of the men were enough older than I was, so that they already had some kind of job that they had left. I'm going to say perhaps twenty, thirty percent of the crew was my age and were still school boys, really, but the rest of the crew were largely working men. So, I don't recall that there were a lot of men, of my age, doing the same kind of thinking. There may have been.

MG: Did the crew get along, for the most part?

LC: Yes, we had a good crew. I'm pretty sure most crews, if they weren't originally, became compatible, but we had a good crew. I made some lifetime friendships. I think I told you, I think there are six of us, that I know of, that are left and I'm in touch by phone and, some, I visit or have visited until a year or so ago, still, and I know their families. One in particular, we had our kids at the same time and our kids know one other, but that, I would say, was a little unusual.

MG: How did it work when you replaced some of the crew? Did you retain most of the original crew for the entire time you were over there?

LC: That's a good question. I'm surprised that it occurred to you, but you're right, that's what would happen. Routinely, as you made each patrol, there would be some new people come aboard, for reasons of health, of people who had to have an operation or something, or the few that asked for a transfer, so that new people would be coming [onboard]. Those new people would largely come from the so-called repair crews that I mentioned to you that were stationed [in port]. In wherever you went, there was a repair crew, and so, they would supply the new material for crew replacement.

MG: Would a new crewmember be treated differently?

LC: I would say it's the same as it is in any place of employment. The newcomer, people look and see, "Is he going to be easy to get along with? Is he going to do his job?" the normal kind of thing, but people generally got fairly quickly absorbed.

MG: We talked earlier about the sleeping conditions. Did you have a "hot sack?"

LC: No. I've read a lot about that. That really stems back to the First World War, where they had really rudimentary sleeping conditions on the subs. Every man had his own bunk. Nobody shared a bunk. You did not "hot sack." The only time that might have occurred is, sometimes,

subs would pick up downed aviators and there wouldn't be room. So, there'd have to be some sharing.

MG: Did you rescue anybody?

LC: No. The only incident that we had that was somewhat similar would've been that rendezvous with those guerillas, but we did not. After the war, my sub, my friends wrote to me who stayed, they did pick up aviators and I have some photographs of them rescuing some downed pilots.

MG: Can you walk me through your fourth war patrol, where it took place?

LC: It was a very short-lived patrol, because I told you that, on the third war patrol, they cracked all our main engines and so badly that, to repair them, the Navy did not feel qualified to repair them. The Navy flew some General Motors, it was--they were General Motor engines, they were called Winton, W-I-N-T-O-N, Winton diesels, and they were, incidentally, terrible diesels--but, in any case, General Motors flew some of their civilian expert welders from the States, civilians, out to Pearl Harbor. They sent us from Australia to Pearl Harbor to be repaired and we were there longer than usual and they spent a lot of time and money and welded all four main engines. We gave them a test run after they did that and they seemed to be fine and we went out on patrol. We were in some small attack and the engines failed. They all cracked again and we had to come back. So, we accomplished very little on that patrol and they did the repairs again and, this time, they seemed to be okay, because we did do a fifth patrol. It was during the fifth patrol that the atom bomb was dropped. We were then in the Yellow Sea with seven other submarines off Japan when the bomb was dropped and we were able to complete that patrol. It was on that patrol that we sank a lot of mines. The Japanese had cut the mines loose from their moorings and they were all drifting down into the Yellow Sea and we spent our time shooting them down, exploding them.

MG: I read that your ship was responsible for destroying sixty-one floating mines.

LC: Yes, that's what we did, that, actually, the war was over, but it was probably the most dangerous time, although it took us a while to realize it. What first happened is, on the first occasion of seeing a mine, one of the lookouts saw it right at the crack of dawn. We were on the surface and reported it and the Captain called for the gun crew. My partner and I and the gunner's mate came up and we sank it, and then, from then on, the radar would pick [them] up constantly, all day long. Then, it dawned on everybody, "Hey, where are these things at night?" So, there was very little sleeping. People played cards all night long. They were very apprehensive, because we would start to see them immediately and radar would pick them up, of course, even at night, but, for whatever reason, radar couldn't always pick them up, because they're very small or, that is, what was showing was small. So, it was a nerve-racking period.

MG: Can you describe how the mines were destroyed?

LC: Yes, if the mine was still live, a shot in it would make it explode. Often, though, they would be a dud--you wouldn't know that--and you would sink it just from punching holes in it.

MG: In-between patrols, when the sub was being repaired, were you also being resupplied?

LC: Yes, yes, that was, if it wasn't in port--they had a supply depot, warehouse--there would be supply ships. The Navy had a whole fleet of supply ships and not only supply ships, but what were called tenders, submarine tenders. I think we had five or six big, large ships that were totally equipped to literally rebuild a submarine from scratch. They could do anything. They had big cranes on them. They could lift the submarine out of the water. They really were complete, *complete* machine shops and welding shops. So, you would either tie up at the tender for repairs, and then, go to a supply ship to restock or be restocked from a warehouse, if that port happened to have warehouses.

MG: Did you receive information about developments around the Pacific?

LC: Oh, yes, sure, but that was informal. I forgot, that was another little story. The radiomen, when they were off duty, would monitor all of the possible stations all over the world. We had the best radio equipment, and so, they would get news reports and that's how we would follow the war. Then, we had one fellow, whom I mentioned in my story, a fellow named Williams, who was the oldest man on the ship. He was a Boston Irishman, that I referred to, very funny guy. He would sit up for a good part of the night, every night, and write a newspaper. He would type it, and then, duplicate it and circulate it. So, when you went to breakfast, you could read the morning newspaper and he would have all kinds of scurrilous stories, [laughter] but he would put the essential news in it as well, very, very funny guy, very funny guy.

MG: Were you aware that certain battles in the Pacific were shaping your course, like the Battles of Kerama Retto or Iwo Jima?

LC: Yes, sure, we were in, took part in, a number of them and we realized what was happening. You got a picture of [the war], if you wanted to, if you paid attention to that.

MG: Can you talk more about that, how it impacted you?

LC: Well, I can't say it really impacted you, because you couldn't do anything about what [happened], but I'm going to say the bulk of the crew were responsible kind of people and they were obviously very interested in the progress of the war. So, we talked about it and we made use of the information that we had, just in conversation.

MG: Tell me about that final tour and what it was like to find out about the atomic bombs.

LC: Oh, well, it was not immediately apparent that that was going to end the war. We all thought that, but there was no definitive word coming down to us. We got, I remember getting--I'm not sure, in fact, I don't think it was referred to as "the atom bomb"--it was referred to as, "A tremendous new kind of weapon had been exploded and it is anticipated that this will precipitate Japan's capitulation." So, we did get that message and, of course, we celebrated. [laughter] We were very happy to hear about that. [Editor's Note: Hiroshima was the target of the first atomic

raid on August 6, 1945. Nagasaki was attacked on August 9, 1945. V-J Day was declared on August 14, 1945, in the United States and August 15, 1945, in the Pacific.]

MG: Did you wait until the peace treaty was signed to celebrate?

LC: No, no, when it was apparent that it was going to be over. [laughter] Well, I might have told you, we had access, the electricians, to the ship's alcohol and we made good use of it, good, and the officers didn't know it. It was really one of the things that we joked about, the Navy, the anachronisms that continue and I think, to this day, happen in the Navy. There were tanks built into the hull of the vessel for grain alcohol. The grain alcohol was to power the steam engines for the torpedoes. Torpedoes were [steam]-driven at the outset of the war, but, by the time we went into commission, we didn't have steam torpedoes, we had electric torpedoes, but they continued to fill our tanks with alcohol. The alcohol tanks had great, big locks on them, but our guys, mechanics, knew how to pick the locks. So, we had keys to everything, but the alcohol tanks were back in our area, and so, the electricians were the bartenders. We always had big jugs that we had drained off of the alcohol. It was 180-proof, pure grain alcohol, like vodka--well, purer than vodka, because there was no additives. It was just 180-proof alcohol and we mixed it with pineapple juice and coffee, [laughter] no, and/or; with coffee, it was called coffee royale and, with the pineapple juice, I forget what we called it. We had a name for it. We drank all the time and we had an elaborate warning system set up, whereby--I think I showed you a cutaway picture of the ship--the engine rooms are located forward of our compartment. The electricians' compartment was called the maneuvering room and it's the furthest aft compartment, except for the after torpedo room. That's the very tail-end of the sub. Immediately forward of that is the section where all the controls for the motors and generators and the motors that drive the ship are located and that's the point at which the propellers protrude from the bottom of the hull, underneath where we sat. So, there was a system, an electrical communications system, called the engine order telegraph. Ships from time immemorial have had engine order telegraphs. That's what you see in the movies with them ringing up, pulling levers, and it says, "Stop, go, astern, fast, full speed, flank." Well, that's what we had, only ours worked in the following way. We had a control board that had dials and windows with indicators, reading for the remote reading of two engines in the forward engine room, the two engines in the after engine room and all of the equipment, the motors, and so forth, in our room. What would happen is, the Captain or the officer of the deck in control up in the control room would holler down to his quartermaster. Quartermaster was the enlisted man who did the maneuvering and navigating at the command of the officer. He would say, "All ahead two-thirds," meaning the motors should generate two-thirds of our possible speed, and the Quartermaster would relay this by phone to the engine room. The engineers would acknowledge it by turning their handles to say, "Okay," that they got the message, "All ahead two-thirds." They, in turn, would relay to us the message that that's what we were to do. When we got that message, the electricians then took over. We threw a switch that put us in control of the engines. That was because, I told you, that you were always being driven by electric motors. On the surface, the engines turned the generators, which made the electricity. When you submerged, the engines were shut down and the battery supplied the electricity, but it was always the electricians who were in control, regardless. So, we had a little system. If an officer was walking through, which didn't happen often, but did happen, would be coming aft, toward our direction, he would have to pass through the forward engine room. Soon as he stepped into the forward engine room, they would send us a message on the engine order

telegraph in a certain way that we had prearranged, meant, "Officer heading your way," and all the stuff would be cleared away, the cups. He would come back and he might see that people looked extremely happy, but there was no evidence of anything going on. Our buddies would come and gather in the after torpedo room, which became like the bar room, and they would sit there and drink with us. [laughter] When I think back, nobody got out of control, that I can remember, but they always had a buzz on.

MG: I have a few notes here; one is on the Straits of Lombok.

LC: Well, the Straits of Lombok were a very dangerous section that all submarines had to go through. If you look at the map, when you come out of anywhere in that [area], either the Sulu Sea or the Celebes Sea or the Sea of Malacca, all of those waters around Borneo, Sumatra, Java, to get back to Australia, you have to pass down, the fastest way is a route that takes you between the Islands of Bali and Lombok. The passage through there is called the Straits of Lombok and there, too, the Japanese stationed--we called them spit-kits--they were small escort vessels. They were considerably smaller than a destroyer, but, nevertheless, then, they would have five-inch guns and all kinds of capabilities for depth charges and machine-guns. They would often be wooden boats, but, nevertheless, built as war vessels and their top speed was usually about twenty knots. Our top speed was twenty knots or thereabouts. To get through the Straits of Lombok, you had to go on the surface. You could not submerge, the reason being that the current, the prevailing current, is the wrong way and it's such a strong current that no sub could go against it. You would go backwards. You just could not do it submerged. So, that meant you had to run on the surface. So, we always timed it to get there in the dark of the moon. We didn't do it on moonlit nights, because we knew we would run into these spit-kits, and it was almost like a game. I never heard of a submarine being lost in that pursuit, but, every time, you would get chased by these spit-kits. Fortunately for us, we could run just a little bit faster than they and we would shoot often, or they'd shoot at us and we'd shoot at them, and there was never any success on either side, but it was inevitable. That running through Lombok was always scary and people didn't sleep then. When you were going to go through Lombok, everybody sat up.

MG: The other note I have is about transferring the codebooks to an Australian destroyer.

LC: Well, that was at the conclusion of that rendezvous with those guerillas. They had captured these codebooks and we transferred them to an Australian destroyer that we rendezvoused with, because the destroyer would make much better time getting back to headquarters in Australia than we would. So, we did do that.

MG: At the conclusion of the War in the Pacific, you then headed to Guam.

LC: Well, yes, we left the Yellow Sea and, after that period of shooting those mines, we ended up going to Apra Harbor in Guam. The decision was made there, out of the seven subs that I had told you about, to send us home. Somebody else went home; I think the other one that went home was the *Becuna*, the one that is down at Penn's Landing. I remember that day, as we pulled out of Apra Harbor, we sailed past the other subs tied up and we waved goodbye to all our buddies and we were laughing, of course, and we went home. This was--I can't remember just when this was, the exact date.

MG: It must have been late fall in 1945.

LC: Yes, sure. It comes back to me now--it was late fall. We came back to San Diego; no, we came back to San Francisco. We pulled into Tiburon Point in San Francisco, tied up there, close to Mare Island. That was the big sub base. We spent a little time there, and then, they sent us down to San Diego. I went home on leave, got married. We spent three months [there]. My wife came back with me. We lived in Navy housing in San Diego and we spent, I guess, almost three months there, two months, anyhow, and then, on New Year's Eve 1946, they sent us back out to Guam. I remember, we had a little launch--it wasn't little, you could put the whole crew on it--full of crying wives and sailors, half of them crying, going back, taking us to the embarkation point, our leaving at midnight on New Year's Eve '46, back to Guam. We spent about four months in there. When we came in to Apra Harbor, there were the other boats waving--they were all going home for good. [laughter] They had the last laugh, the same guys waving us in. We spent [our time there] doing nothing--we were doing nothing. We would go out and patrol during the day and come back in, go out again. There was nothing to see, nothing to do. It was a very boring time. Of course, we all were entitled to be out of the Navy; all of the Reserves, people who were not regular Navy, were entitled to get out based on the points that you had accrued. You got points based on your length of service, how much of the time was overseas, how many battles, and we all had way more than enough points to be out of the Navy. So, it was a disgruntled bunch of guys who were operating the submarines and we couldn't wait to get out, but they sent us back in May to San Francisco and that's where I got out of the Navy, in May of '46.

MG: On the *Blackfin*, how often could you communicate with friends and family back home?

LC: Well, there was a thing called V-mail in those days and it was a very small form, paper form, that made a self-contained envelope and you wrote your letters on that. That was called V-mail and it got, supposedly, special handling to get back to the States and whoever was writing to you would, in turn, use V-mail to get to you. They would address it to your submarine care of your fleet post office, whatever your fleet post office happened to be. When you came in from each patrol, together with ice cream and oranges, fresh oranges, that would be waiting for you on the dock, would be these boxes, crates of mail. They'd have it bundled and you'd get a bundle of mail and my wife wrote to me every day. I would get--I'd have fifty letters. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Victory mail or V-mail used a system of microfilming letter forms to conserve cargo space on ships carrying war materiel.]

MG: Tell me a little bit about her and how you met.

LC: Well, [when] we met, we were both in high school. She lived in my neighborhood and her father and my father did business together. Through some social engagement between our parents, we met one another and I liked what I saw, she obviously felt the same way, and we became boy and girlfriends. That was, I'm going to say, in the last year-and-a-half of my high school. She was two years younger than I. So, if I was a junior, she was a freshman.

MG: How did she spend the war years?

LC: Well, until she graduated from school and married me, she went to Cornell, just very coincidentally. She wanted to be an engineer. She was enrolled as a mechanical engineer at Cornell and she did finish a year at Cornell. She was a very good student in high school and grammar school and, in Cornell, she made the dean's list in the engineering course. There's only one or two other women at the time in any engineering school and she was one of them.

MG: What was her name?

LC: Her name was Doris and her last name was Solondz, S-O-L-O-N-D-Z. You may recognize the name--do you know the name Todd Solondz, the movie producer? He's made a number of hit [films]. I don't care for any of them, because they're really far out movies. Oh, I know, look on the computer, I'll get the names of some of his movies, I know that you know the movies, about dysfunctional kids and pedophiles and just unsavory [topics]. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Independent filmmaker Todd Solondz often produces dark satires, like *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995) and *Happiness* (1998).]

MG: What was the relation to Doris?

LC: Well, he was not even born then. He's the child of her cousin, but it's an unusual name and I thought that you might recognize the name that way. I know him. We've since met on half a dozen occasions, when he's been in town promoting a movie.

MG: Had you made plans to marry after the war before you left?

LC: No, we really hadn't. We were so-called "engaged." She had an engagement ring

MG: When did you give that to her?

LC: The last year of school--no, while I was in sub school. I couldn't afford a ring. My father bought her the ring, which she still had when she--well, she gave it to my granddaughter. We ultimately were divorced, but we remained close. In fact, she died in my arms. She died only about two years ago. She had--I'm starting to say rheumatoid arthritis, but it was not rheumatoid, it was the other arthritis that is not rheumatoid--but it so debilitated her that she had, largely, to use an electric cart. She was pretty famous in her part of Society Hill, "Oh, the cart lady." She would go all over. She was indomitable. She went to the opera; she went to the NY opera regularly, with her cart. We didn't divorce until we were married almost fifty years, but that's another story, but we remained more than amicable. She liked my lady friend and we would socialize together. We went to the opera together. So, it was good. I forget what you asked.

MG: Me, too. [laughter] How did she feel about your plans to become a farmer?

LC: Oh, well, that's what made her so special at the time--neither of us had any background, but she was game to try it. We got a job. We were married and we got a job together in Central New Jersey with a man that we knew through her father, who had been farming, was not a long-time farmer, but had farmed successfully for perhaps ten years. We went to work for him. It

was a potato farm in Central New Jersey and we both [worked]. She helped the farmer's wife with their daughter. She was very good with kids, even when she was young, before she had her own children, and, of course, I worked with the farmer. We were sure, after the first year, that it was the right thing, that that's what we wanted to do. So, we borrowed some money from each of our parents and we borrowed a big wad of money--at that time, the federal government had very, in retrospect, generous agricultural loan programs.

MG: Was that through the GI Bill?

LC: When I say generous, I don't mean that it was for nothing. In fact, they had very stringent collection [requirements], much more stringent than the student loan system, but they were available. You could do it if you could convince them that you were worthy of the credit. You could borrow substantial amounts for long-term mortgages to buy land. That's what we did.

MG: Where did you buy the land?

LC: In Millstone Township, which is Monmouth County, New Jersey. It's about halfway between Hightstown and Freehold, so, you know right where it is. It was beautiful country. It still is, although it's really built up, but my farm is still there.

MG: Maybe I will drive by on my way home.

LC: Yes, you could drive; it's not much of a detour to do that. I have some pictures of the farm. I'll show them to you.

MG: Good. Before we talk more about farm life, I wanted to ask more about when you were living in San Diego and newly married. What was that like?

LC: Well, that was a fun time, because the war was over. It was as if we were in college together, because everything was social. We were friends, our married friends lived--the Navy had villages of Quonset huts in San Diego. They were all named after battles. You lived in "Guadalcanal Village" or "Iwo Jima Village" and what they were were streets laid out in regular order of Quonset huts. Do you know what a Quonset huts is? A Quonset would be divided in the middle. It was a long, tubular half of a tube. It would be sliced in half, in the middle, with a party wall and there would be an apartment on each end. Each end would have--we had two bedrooms and a bathroom, a kitchen and a living/dining room. It's sort of like this. We would entertain. Doris could not cook at the outset. Her mother was a very good cook, but she didn't learn from her mother. She was smart, though; she got my mother's recipes, so, if she had to learn, she learned the way I had been brought up. She became a very good cook and our friends liked to come to our house, where we would entertain, in these various Quonset huts. We would go on outings together. We would go to museums and parks and it was a very social and fun time for us.

MG: Where and when were you finally discharged from the Navy?

LC: I was discharged--what happened was, when I was sent back to Guam, the very next day, they put all of the wives out of the houses. They had to leave literally the next day--maybe they gave them two days, I don't know--and so, Doris and a friend of mine's wife found an apartment together in San Diego and Doris went to work. She worked in a record store, sold vinyl records. I still have some, some of the vinyl records. She worked there until it became apparent that they were going to send me back to San Francisco. So, she went back to Newark and I was sent home to San Francisco to be released. I got released from the Navy on the day that there was the only successful jailbreak at the island, Alcatraz, and we were on the bridge. The bridge goes [to] what they called Treasure Island. We were on the bridge in a bus, a Navy bus, while the Alcatraz thing was going on and they froze us. They said, "Navy personnel may be required, too," [laughter] but that came to an end, but it did put me off for a day or two. Then, finally, they released us, but I remember that. I thought I was on my way home and we get this message. The bus driver says, "I've got to turn around." [laughter] Anyhow, so, I got home, I went home. [Editor's Note: From May 2 to 4, 1946, a failed prison break at the Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary turned into an armed hostage situation that required the intervention of two platoons of Marines and resulted in the deaths of two guards, three inmates and numerous injuries.]

MG: How did you get home? Did you take a train?

LC: You know, as we talk about it, I'm realizing that I'm not telling the exact …

MG: [laughter] Oh, no, do we need to start over?

LC: No. Doris came back out. She had gone home to Newark, but she came back out to San Francisco and briefly lived in San Francisco before I got out, so that we were going to go home together. Our plan was to buy a used car and drive home in a circuitous way, to take advantage of--travel then was a lot different than it [is today]. People were not nearly as mobile. So, we were going to take advantage of the geographical advantage of being where we were. Fortunately for us, our good sense took over, our better sense took over, and we didn't buy the car we were going to buy. To get it, we were going to buy it with another couple and we were going to drive home and go our respective ways after we got home. Anyhow, so, what we did was take a train home and I remember that you were entitled to transportation pay for you and your wife and your belongings to your place of enlistment, which had been Newark, New Jersey. So, I was entitled to be paid from San Francisco to there, but I had relatives in Kentucky, in Louisville, Kentucky, and in Shelbyville, Kentucky, and I had dear friends from the Navy, who had gotten out ahead of me, in Chicago. We decided we're just going to go there and spend time with each of them. So, we did all that and we took a long time to get home, must've taken three weeks to get home with all the visiting that we did. When I got home, you had to fill out a requisition for your repayment. I scrupulously put in everything that I had done and I said, "So, I am not claiming my trip to Chicago, my trip to [Kentucky]--I only want whatever the mileage was that I would have been entitled to," and I forget my original cost for all of the travel. It was probably somewhere between two and three thousand dollars all told and I had crossed all that out, or not crossed it out, but not made a claim for it, and I only put in for $850 or whatever it was, what I thought was legitimate. In a month or so, I got my application back with a check--everything I had written, crossed out, the full amount, they gave me everything. [laughter] Oh, I

remember, I supplied the vouchers for the hotels in it, to show that I had done it, but I didn't claim it. They crossed it all out and paid me the whole thing, so, go figure.

MG: After having served your country, did you see your country any differently over the course of this cross-country road trip?

LC: No, no, because the country was still in the same dynamic. It was still a very forward-looking, *gung-ho*, "things are great" or "going to be great" kind of attitude. It was not, as I think you're alluding to, the Vietnam War, where half of us thought we did wrong and half thought it was right.

MG: I was wondering if you had a stronger sense of patriotism, seeing Middle America. Sometimes, a road trip will do that for somebody.

LC: No, I always had that. I was always a *gung-ho* [guy]. I really believed, and still do, despite what I know. [laughter]

MG: In your life in general and for the farm, were you able to take advantage of the GI Bill?

LC: I was very foolish--no, I did not, but that's the way it is. Everybody hollered at me, said I should be in [school]. I had been a good student and I would've been an engineer. In fact, when I was at Cornell, I was an electrical engineer, but I felt I was married and I had to raise my family. I thought that had to come first and I realized that I was passing up an opportunity--I did realize it--but I was stubborn and I didn't listen and I went my own way.

MG: Can you tell me a little bit about what it takes to start a farm?

LC: Well, yes, it was fortunate for me that I had always liked the outdoors. I camped and hiked, and so, outdoor life sort of came natural to me, although I only grew up in the city. I didn't have a driver's license when we [got married]. Doris taught me to drive; my wife taught me to drive. I drove a submarine, that's what I did, but I couldn't drive a car. [laughter] So, I was an avid reader and I paid attention. I was serious about what I was doing. So, I cultivated friends, farmer friends there, and, literally, the day after whatever they did, I did. That's literally how I learned, but the other fortunate thing for me is, I always was able to work with my hands and I already had an electrical and mechanical knowledge. I could put a diesel engine together and do everything, those mechanical kinds of things, and that's a big, big, big advantage. So, that part was easy for me and I really believed in what I jokingly refer to as "the right way to live." I thought I was doing the best for my prospective kids--we didn't have kids, yet--but I thought nothing could be better than to be brought up outdoors in that healthful manner. I thought it was a positive thing to do, a way of making a living that contributed to mankind, like the kids of two generations later thought.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MG: What were you growing on the farm?

LC: It was largely a potato farm, but I very shortly also started to grow tomatoes. When you grew potatoes and tomatoes, the alternate crops that you grew were always grain, chiefly wheat, and so, we grew wheat, soybeans, corn--that is, field corn, not sweet corn--but the main crops were potatoes and tomatoes. We became good-sized growers of those items.

MG: Any livestock?

LC: I had a short, reasonably happy career with chickens for a couple of years, maybe three years. I had about two thousand white Leghorns for eggs, but that was a mistake. Two thousand chickens, that's nothing; you need a hundred thousand to three hundred thousand. I mean, it's a mechanized industry now, but, at the time, it seemed to be a thing to do, but it was not. [laughter]

MG: How would you distribute the produce? How would it end up in the market?

LC: Well, that was kind of interesting. After a year or two, I realized that growing the stuff was not too hard. If you paid attention, did what you were supposed to do, stuff grew, but marketing was something else and it was really an antiquated system. I don't know how deep we want to get into this, but it was a system of dealerships. There were a number of wealthy local companies who manufactured fertilizer in each of the farming areas. Generally, at least in this area, they would supply the fertilizer and the seed to a grower on credit, no money, for which, while there was no written contract, the grower was obligated, when harvest time came, to sell his produce through the same dealer. So, the dealer would offer a price for potatoes and he would have to be competitive with the market, but he'd generally set the market. He bought the potatoes and let's say he bought three hundred one-hundred-pound bags from you for two dollars a bag--it'd be six hundred dollars. He would credit you with the six hundred dollars against your $10,500 that you had paid for fertilizer and, when things came into balance, when he had sold enough, then, you settled up with him. That was the traditional [way] and I'm sure it was that way across the country with various kinds of crops and the details being somewhat different, but, nevertheless, that's how it works. So, I quickly saw that this was not to my advantage and I got myself a broker's license. I bought and sold potatoes and tomatoes from local friends and from anybody, farmers in the area. I made a commission on what I sold for them, together with marketing my own, and I was able to sell for a little better price than [they would]. So, in a couple years, I was in business as--it was then called a grower-shipper. That's what I was, was a grower-shipper. So, I ended up making a partnership with a local friend and farmer where we farmed together and he did the farming and I did [it] with him until harvest time. At harvest time, I left and went to my office and became a broker and I sold our stuff and others'. I squared it financially with him for the time I wasn't there and he ran our farm. So, that's how we did it. I did have a lot of adventures along the way in those years. They were not great years financially; they were terrible years. [laughter] I was a pretty decent farmer, more than a decent farmer, but you could not make money. You could make a living, but it was the same as a wage in those years, the reason being that you couldn't compete with the major areas that came--well, I have to back up. This only goes for places like New Jersey. A hundred years ago, when transportation wasn't what it is today, New Jersey was the "Garden State" and we grew the stuff that got sold in New York, Philadelphia, Camden, Atlantic City. That's not what happens today--it's all from California and Florida. If we literally gave it away, we couldn't produce it the way [they do] or

with the same quality and dependability that these other places [do]. When you grow ten thousand acres of something, you can control what [is produced] and all that was just starting to happen in the years I was farming. So, markets never developed financially enough. The market just couldn't [compete], because supermarkets could buy their stuff elsewhere. So, your price had to be the lowest or near the bottom in order to make it worthwhile for them to buy from you, but I had that all yet to learn. So, I did pursue that. Despite what I'm saying about it financially not being worthwhile, at the end of every year, we were bigger, we were farming more stuff, I had more equipment and I owed more money, [laughter] but, at the end, we made everything pay. We sold this, sold that--I sold part of the farm. Part of the farm, half of the farm, was condemned by--there was then a Green Belt Initiative, an initiative statewide, in various areas, to establish a preserved agricultural area, to preserve the water quality, and there's one in that area. You have no choice; it was condemned and I had to sell. So, I had to sell half the farm. Once I sold half the farm, it's not worth farming the other half. So, I looked for another business at that time, but, with it all, looking back in my lifetime, it was very worthwhile in that I did learn a whole lot about life in general just through being through what I went through and my kids are all very sophisticated. All three are lawyers, but, if they meet a stranger, they say, "Well, I'm a farm kid." [laughter] They all were born on the farm, but that's all--we moved away when they were young. They all went to Lower Merion High here, but it was still worthwhile and my best stories are still about those years, things that happened during those years.

MG: Can you tell me some of those stories?

LC: Well, there's a lot of [them]. I got involved in politics. Well, the first thing I got involved in, other than the farming, a man drove into my yard one day and said, "I'd like to talk to you about coming on the board of the electric company." We had electric service. There was a narrow segment of New Jersey--there were two areas of New Jersey--that were electrified by the REA [Rural Electrification Association]. Do you know what the REA is? Well, it was one of Franklin Roosevelt's letter acronym agencies, but it was a wonder. It helped make this country. It was the Rural Electrification Administration and it brought electricity to the farms and outlying towns that did not have service. In 1940, it was a bigger part of the country than not. The TVA, Tennessee Valley Authority, was the same program. So, across the country, I don't know, there must've been three thousand REAs, local co-operative groups that built power stations, and so forth. Anyhow, in Jersey, there were two, only two in the state, one in Sussex County, way up, and one in Monmouth, Mercer and Burlington County. The one in Monmouth and Mercer was ours. It was called Tri-County Rural Electric, was headquartered in Freehold, right off Route 33. You know 33, goes from Hightstown? We had an office just off the highway there. We had an office and a little warehouse and a garage for one power truck and a pick-up and we had a little substation there. We bought the power wholesale from JCP&L. By fiat, the state decreed that JCP&L had to sell it to us at a rate commensurate with our being able to retail it, pay our bills and pay the federal government the money we owed them for borrowing for the equipment. Anyhow, that electrified all of these farms from Hightstown down through Roosevelt and Clarksburg, my town, down as far, almost as far, as Millville, kind of a serpentine [route]. They were areas that JCP&L should've served, but JCP&L had the prerogative of, if they had to string a line two thousand feet to get to the guy's service area and that had to be [at] their expense, they weren't going to do it. They looked at the dollars and cents and said, "The hell with them." [laughter] So, those farms would not have been electrified. Anyhow, my farm,

I think, well, they obviously got it somewhere in the late '30s, early '40s, is where they got it. So, this guy, his name was Bill (Emerson?), I said, "Why me?" He said, "Well, I know you're a veteran. We haven't got too many in this area and I know you must have a sense of what might be," and etc., etc. I said, "Yes, sure." So, I became a board member and, within a year or so, they elected me president. So, I was then--I think I was twenty-one, twenty-two, I guess--was twenty-two and I was president of an electric company. [laughter] I did have a lot of adventures with that, because we had our linemen and we had, like, six employees. They went on strike over some grievance that they had from long before I even was on [the board]. It was prolonged. It was maybe three weeks or so, and so, I took it upon myself--we couldn't afford to hire somebody--I went in every day to manage the thing. So, I got a lot of practical insight into what happens. We hired emergency workers to take care of the lines. Anyhow, so, the REA, the company, functioned well. It worked. We kept adding customers and, in, I don't know, it must've been 1955, somewhere in there, we were a desirable little company for JCP&L. All the lines were in, paid for, and JCP&L wanted the thing then. They didn't want us there, but, by then, so many new people had moved into the area, that did not know the background and how we struggled early on, and they were all for giving it to JCP&L, because they figured they'd get quicker service for outages, and so forth. I remember having a big general meeting where a vote was taken on [the issue] and I made an impassioned speech about what had gone before and what it took to bring [it about]. They didn't want to hear any of it--they just wanted to sell out to [JCP&L] and they gave it to JCP&L for a dollar. I was furious. I wanted JCP&L to reimburse and there would've been a pay back to each of the members, pro rata of their usage over the last [period]. I couldn't--they didn't care, they just wanted [to sell]. So, that was the end, but it was sort of a little saga that I think of every now and then and something [that] wouldn't occur to the average person that it was ever like that. Somehow or other, by virtue of my being sort of known a little bit more generally than just farming, somebody induced me to run for the Board of Education in the town and I got elected. I became the new member for the Millstone Township Board of Education. In those years, school buses was a big part of the school budget, probably the biggest part, transportation. You had to cart every kid. It wasn't just some kids--every kid got carted. So, that was a big deal and the way it worked is, these school buses were all owned by farmers. Did I tell you this? no, okay--school buses were all owned by farmers. You would drive out in the country and you'd see a beautiful, big farm, you'd see, parked next to the barn, a school bus. If you didn't know the background, "What the hell's that guy doing with a school bus?" [laughter] but that's what it was. It was a perfect thing for a farmer, because the kids went to school early in the morning. Some of the kids got on the bus six o'clock in the morning. So, the farmer would get up early, take his bus, go out and do the route, be back home by eight, eight-thirty, and have the whole day, until three-thirty, four o'clock, when he picked them up. They would bid, with the local township, for that route. The school board would lay out a route, so many kids, and they would bid on it, but the farmers--we used to call it "huckle-muckle-ing"--that's where bidders gang up and conspire among themselves not to bid against each other. So, the way it worked in the township, there were perhaps seven or eight different bus routes and the same guys, or women, had owned these buses for years and had had the same routes and nobody bid against the other guys. It was an unspoken arrangement; it was spoken, but not for public consumption. [laughter] Anyhow, so, I was the new member and they put me in charge of transportation, because that was a thankless [job], because you were the guy that apportioned the children. Every farmer's wife would come to you, "You put my kid on this-and-this bus? He could've been on [a better bus]." It was terrible, it was thankless. [laughter] So, the new member

always got that job. So, I got it. So, I said, "You know what?" I proposed that we buy a school bus of our own. "Wow, we never had a bus." I said, "Well, you never had, but the first time, that starts a new way." Well, we argued about it. Anyhow, they agreed, "Okay, we'll buy one bus." So, we bought the bus in the middle of summer and they put the bids out in August or something, before the school year starts. So, about the second week of August, I get a phone call and another phone call--it's from each of the bus owners, "Lee, what route are you going to put your bus on?" I said, "Well, we haven't decided yet." "Okay, will you let me know?" "Well," I said, "you can call me." They call again, "What route are you going to put the bus [on]?" I said, "Well, we decided we're going to put it on the one that's the most expensive." Well, they all got scared as hell [laughter] and the bids came in, like, thirty percent under what they were last, just because [of] the threat of our bus. Well, the board went crazy and they said, "We've got to buy buses." If you go there today, you'll see a nice fleet of buses in Millstone Township's garage, but that was my first little outing in [politics], anyhow. So, somebody said--Harry Truman was still President then and I had not registered to vote yet. There was a Democratic administration in the township that had been there for fifty years and it was run by a man named Herman Shteir, who had the general store in Smithburg--Smithburg's just outside of Freehold--and he ran the township like a fiefdom. I mean, he gave out the contracts--it was terrible--and he was Democratic and I had not registered yet. So, the Republicans got hold of me and I registered Republican and I ran. We really mounted a big campaign against this [administration] and I got elected. It was the first time in fifty years that there was a Republican on the Township Committee. So, I was on the Township Committee for, I guess, two terms. I very shortly got disabused of my idea of being a Republican [laughter] and I voted Democratic myself. I had already re-registered before we moved here, but I originally was a Republican elected official. Then, when we moved to Philly, or to Lower Merion, I immediately got active in Democratic politics and we lived in the suburbs, but I was active in town. I was involved in all the mayors' races, all the mayors were friends of mine, and the Senators and the Congressmen. I spent a lot of time, as much time as I could away from my business, at that. So, that was my sort of introduction to the political world. I was an elected delegate to the '72 Democratic Presidential [Convention]. You had to run and get elected to be a delegate then. It's not like it is today. That was for George McGovern, because he was against the Vietnam War, as I was. It turns out George was not a great man, but he was against the war and he was the only Senator, the only one in the Senate, that stood up and said, "We are murdering people in our national name. It's wrong." I thought he was right. Then, the next election, I was a Udall [supporter]. This was Mo Udall, who should've been President. He ran. Eventually, Jimmy Carter was elected, but Mo Udall would've made a good President and he remained a Congressman until he died. He was a very, very well thought of man. [Editor's Note: Morris King "Mo" Udall represented Arizona's Second District in the US House of Representatives from 1961 to 1991 and ran for the Democratic nomination for President in 1976.]

[TAPE PAUSED]

MG: You were talking about Mo Udall.

LC: Yes, he was very good. All these men came to our house, we raised money for them. George McGovern was in, not my backyard, my neighbor's backyard, and we must've had a thousand people there. We had a police escort from the airport and I remember introducing him,

I thought in a very original way, as "The next President of the United States." [laughter] Anyhow, so, there were a bunch of exciting times involved with that.

MG: I wanted to ask about when you started your family, when your children were born.

LC: Well, the first was Stan, who's a lawyer and about to retire out in Walnut Creek, California. He is sixty-seven this year. The next is Alan, a lawyer in Philadelphia, who will be sixty-two and my daughter, Anne, who's fifty-seven, a lawyer, but she's no longer practicing law, although she is a lawyer. She manages her old law office. When her kids were born, she decided that she could not be a lawyer and raise her kids and she became a high school teacher. She actually retired as a high school teacher just about two years ago and her law firm asked her to come back and run the office. So, that's what she's doing now, but they were all born on the farm.

MG: Can you walk me through a typical day on the farm, starting with when you woke up?

LC: Yes, we got up, the day started, I don't know, six, six-fifteen, something like that, not crack of dawn, soon as it got light. You would have almost a specified routine, depending on the time of year. There were certain jobs that had to be done. We had about a hundred acres of potatoes and a hundred acres of tomatoes. We only had one man helping us, my partner, myself. We all drove tractors and you spent your day on a tractor, cultivating, spraying, weeding, doing whatever. So, they were routine days. I would always come home for lunch, though, which leads to some interesting side--I don't know how much you want me to …

MG: All of this is interesting to me, Lee.

LC: Well, in those years, this was specifically 1948, I remember it accurately because television was brand-new and my mother and father here in Philadelphia had the latest television set, but we didn't have television. It killed my father that we didn't have television and he bought a television set for us. So, we ran one of the few farms that had a television set and, in those first years, people went crazy about it. I mean, you were glued to the tube. It was such a novelty. So, I would come home for lunch and, when I finished lunch, I would quick run in the living room, turn it [on], just to see what the news was. At that time, my partner and I, my farming partner, were trying to rent some more land. We rented a lot of land, besides our own two farms, and we were trying to rent a big farm from a man that we didn't know. We just knew his name and that he probably wanted to rent the farm. The farm was on the outskirts of Roosevelt. I told you a little about Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt had started that communal thing. Anyhow, this had been part of the Roosevelt land, a big piece, very desirable, nice farm that Mrs. Roosevelt had bought and this man had bought it away from the Roosevelt development, which had already fallen apart, the farming aspect. [Editor's Note: Under the Resettlement Administration, part of President Roosevelt's New Deal, Jersey Homesteads, Inc., purchased farmland in Central Jersey and constructed a colony of two hundred homes in 1936 to resettle Jewish garment workers. Established as Jersey Homesteads in 1937, the borough was renamed Roosevelt in 1945.] He had a big barn that you could see from the highway. The barn, it must've been 150 feet long, a long, low barn and painted. It was painted from top to bottom with a long, continuous sign, "Mama Mia Olive Oil," painted on it. "What's that doing on a farm?" So, this is the man from whom we wanted to rent the land. So, we knew his name. His name was Profaci, Joseph

Profaci. Joseph Profaci, it ends up, was the inspiration for Don Corleone of *The Godfather*. Don Corleone was patterned after--Joseph Profaci was the don, was the Mafia king, in New York, of the whole East Coast, and he owned this farm. Mama Mia Olive Oil, which you can buy today, it's good olive oil, was owned by the Mafia and that was their way of laundering money, getting money into commercial channels. He used the barn; it was a warehouse for bulk storage of the olive oil in big tin cans, but we didn't know all this. We just knew his name. So, my partner and I drive up in a pick-up truck and we drive down the lane. As we drive down this lane, a series of lights--it was about five o'clock in the afternoon--floodlights go on, as we come down, lighting the way. As we get to the end of the driveway, two big guys, like out of the movies, in flat black hats with black coats, come out, block the way, "Stop." So, we look at one another and I get out and I say, "We want to see Mr. Profaci." "What do you want to see him about?" "Well, we want to know if he would consider renting the land." "Just a moment," and he goes in, comes out. He said, "You can come back and see Mr. Profaci," and tells us a time and a day, said, "Okay." So, we did. We went back the next week and the same two guys stopped us and they ushered us into a nice, modest living room. This little man in a black pinstriped suit, gold-rim spectacles, nice-looking little man, white hair, comes, "What can I do for you gentlemen?" We tell him the story. He said, "Just a moment while I confer with my associates," and he goes off in the corner and they talk and talk. He says, "Come back here next week at five o'clock," so forth, "I will have an answer for you," okay, very nice, and so, we go. That week, I'm having lunch and I tell Doris--there was a Kefauver Committee. Do you know the name Kefauver? Well, Google it when you get home; it's interesting. Kefauver was a Senator from Tennessee, a very good guy, a white-hat guy, all for all good things, but very smart and good. He was investigating--Congress authorized him, delegated him to conduct a survey and come up with a program to combat organized crime. It was recognized then that the Mafia and other gangs were just becoming too hard to bear, and so, he was well along on that and there were, every day, Kefauver hearings. They were, Justice Department, for the first time, televised hearings of what was going on investigating the various mobs. So, I go in the living room and I take my sandwich with me. Kefauver is there and he had a New York Irishman, a good fellow who became famous in his own right through the pursuit of these guys--do Google it, it's interesting--and he was the prosecutor. He had a man on the stand that he was questioning. So, he leans forward and the camera zooms in on the witness. He says, "Now, Mr. Profaci, you know that we have enough evidence on you and your family to deport you. If you're deported, where will you go?" He says, "To my farm in Freehold." [laughter] I couldn't believe it, but it was really a very funny thing. [Editor's Note: Giuseppe "Joe" Profaci founded and ran the Colombo crime family from the 1920s to the 1960s.]

MG: Did you end up renting the land from him?

LC: No, we never saw him again. We did go back--nobody there. He eventually died of cancer or something, but the reason it was for rent is that a young Polish farmer had been renting it from him. This young farmer--my partner was Polish as well--my partner knew this young fellow and the young fellow was a wise guy. He had been telling us that, "Oh, I'm screwing this guy." You did what was called share farming. The owner put up the money for the seed and fertilizer, you did all the work, and the extraneous, the other, expenses, and then, you shared the profits, but he falsified all kinds of [things]. He didn't know who--we didn't appreciate it then, either--but to think of this guy thinking that he's pulling the wool [over his eyes]. That's why; this guy knew what was happening and that's why he was considering renting it. That was a funny incident.

Well, people whose names were known nationally, internationally, by coincidence, that same area, we had a number of people. I might've told you--do you know who Ben Shahn is? Oh, Ben Shahn's name, are you an art lover at all?

MG: I love art, but I do not know a whole lot about it.

LC: Ben Shahn represented a whole genre of American painters, of the Depression era particularly and thereafter. I would say, as they say, in the "pantheon of American artists," Ben Shahn would be one of the leading names. Ben lived in Roosevelt, New Jersey. How he got to Roosevelt--he was unemployed and he was a fine artist. Well, there was nothing for a fine artist to do, so, the WPA, the Works Progress Administration, put him to work putting murals throughout the whole Roosevelt school and, one day, you should visit the school in Roosevelt. You won't believe it. The walls are covered with Ben Shahn's paintings. The central auditorium area, or gymnasium auditorium, has a big truss, semi-circular truss, which has been filled in solid, so that it's like a half moon, that across the middle of the room, maybe forty feet wide by twelve feet high, this way, and painted in on this is the face and miniature body of every person in Roosevelt, New Jersey, every person, kids, are painted in, a little portrait. For instance, the milk driver has a milk container rack with milk bottles and they're all looking out at you. It's just an amazing thing. I took my son there about two years ago. We went in again to see it. So, that whole school is [full of art] and that's what Ben Shahn did, but I knew Ben Shahn's name because I paint a little and I knew very well who he was, but how I met him, there was a general store in Roosevelt. Roosevelt was about a mile from my farm. There was one little general store there, run by a fellow from Brooklyn, nice guy. One spring day, I don't know, in May, he had the back door of the store open when I went in and I was getting some milk and whatever. I look in the backyard and I see what looks like a tennis court. I forget his name, but I said, "Charlie," whatever, I says, "is that a tennis court?" He says, "Yes, I just finished building it." He had rolled the place level and raked it with local dirt and he had a handwoven net put up and he had chicken wire around it. He said, "Yes, do you play?" I said, "Well, I used to." He said, "We need tennis players." He said, "Come back tonight." So, I did go back there and there's a couple of guys there. He introduces me to this guy, he says, "This is Benny. You'll play with Benny." So, Benny and I played and we had a nice match, a lot of fun. We made a date and I came back the next week and, about the third week or so, Benny said to me, "What do you do?" I said, "Well, I have a farm." I said, "What do you do, Benny?" He says, "Well, I paint." I thought he was a housepainter, because all he said was "Benny." So, I said, "Oh, that's nice," and, I don't know, a couple days later, I said, "Is Benny going to play, too?" I was in the store. He says, "Yes. I don't think you recognize him." I said, "How would I know [him]?" He said, "That's Ben Shahn." [laughter] It was. Shahn, when he moved there, convinced a half a dozen of his artist friends to come and little Roosevelt had, I don't know, six well-known artists, Gregorio Prestopino, David Stone Martin, they had several actors and dancers, one of them was the woman, Tamara Geva. She danced under that [name], was a Hollywood star. She was one of the women killed, you might remember, it was a famous plane crash during the war of a planeload of entertainers. I can't remember the woman's name, but the woman movie star was rescued by the pilot who she later married and they made a movie of it. It was a famous thing at the time. I'll think of her name and that name you would recognize, but Tamara was the dancer on the plane and Tamara perished and Tamara is buried in--they found her body--is buried in a little farm field where I grew tomatoes in Roosevelt. [Editor's Note: On February 22, 1943, a

USO plane, *The Yankee Clipper*, crashed into the Tagus River in Lisbon, Portugal, killing all but fifteen of the thirty-eight people onboard, including singer and actress Tamara Drasin (not dancer Tamara Geva), who was later buried in Hightstown, New Jersey. Singer and actress Jane Froman survived the crash and later married the co-pilot, John Burn. Her story formed the basis of the 1952 film *With a Song in My Heart*.] It was really an unusual time and, at that same time, another name who you might or might not know, do you know the name Steig?

MG: William Steig?

LC: William Steig.

MG: Yes.

LC: Well, he was my neighbor in Clarksburg. One day, I'm driving to my place and I drive down a road I don't usually go down. I see a mailbox and I see, "W. Steig," just the way he signed it on his cartoons. I thought, "What can that [be]?" So, the woman lives next door, I did know, and she was kind of a local character. So, I called her up, I said, "Molly, I see a W. Steig." I said, "Is that who I [think it is]?" She says, "Yes, you mean the guy from *The New Yorker*?" I said, "Yes, yes." She says, "Yes." She says, "I got him the place." She was kind of a real estate dealer and she said, "Yes, I talked him into buying." She says, "He's been here a couple months." So, as luck would have it, he became friendly with my doctor, who was from Philadelphia originally, and we had dinner together. So, we had a nice evening together and he starts to tell me about--I asked him something about where he got his ideas. He said, "Well, you may or may not know," he said, "I am a firm believer in the power of orgone energy." So, I said, well, I had heard there was a doctor in New York who became nationally famous for an ostensible cancer cure that he claimed he could affect. I'll think of his name, too; we'll Google it, this cancer cure. Wilhelm Reich. He sold some kind of a something, a product, that he made as a result of his experiments with orgone energy and orgone energy was something that came out of the sky and that he was able to concentrate in a vessel and affect these wonderful things. The Food and Drug Administration had been after him for years as a charlatan, because he made a lot of money. People were desperate to cure cancer and he was peddling this stuff, that he would cure them with orgone energy. Anyhow, when he said orgone energy, I said, "Well, the only thing I know is…" He says, "Yes, he's my guru," Steig says. I couldn't believe it and he saw that I was looking askance. He says, "Well, I'm going to show you some stuff that you'll believe." That year, Jersey was suffering a terrible drought. It was dry as a bone. We didn't have irrigation yet. It was really bad. He brought me--Steig came the next day with all of these newspaper reprints from the blueberry growing area of Maine. I forget the town, but it was two newspapers, little local papers, tabloids, and they're all reporting about the rainmaking abilities of this orgone energy concentrator. This guy had sold them the idea of his device being able to concentrate the rain clouds with the use of orgone energy and make it rain. The reports were very ambiguous. You could see, if you thought about it, that these papers wanted it to happen. They said, "In fact, it did sprinkle a little," two days later or whatever, but there was nothing. It was just a lot of stuff about it. So, Steig says to me he had a disciple--the big mahoff had a disciple--a New York doctor, Jewish name, I can't think of his name, Doctor So-and-So, who had been a legitimate doctor, but somehow got conned into this, believing this. So, Steig said, "Doctor So-and-So is going to be in this area with the device, the rainmaking device." He said,

"Would you be interested in trying to get your neighbors together?" I said, "I think I would." I said, "We would certainly consider it." He said, "Okay, I'll let you know when he gets here." So, about a week later, Joe, my partner, and I were working in a field that's right on the main highway--not the main, but the highway from Roosevelt to Clarksburg, which is how you get from Hightstown. As I'm coming up to the end of the row on the tractor, a pick-up truck drives by with this device on the back of the bed of the pick-up, of aluminum tubes, little, about one inch in diameter, aluminum tubes, about eight feet long, bundled together in a mass and aimed up at the sky and on a pedestal that you can see they can crank. It drives by and, when I look at it, I know right away, I said, "Joe, that's the rainmaker." So, I parked the tractor and get in my pick-up and I follow this guy. I jump in my pick-up and I follow this guy and, sure enough, this guy drives to Steig's house. I knew what it was and I could see the guy looking in his mirrors, looking at me following him. He pulls into Steig's yard and he jumps out of the cab and runs to the house and bangs on the door, looking at me all the time, and door opens, Steig lets him in. In a minute or two, Steig comes out and says, "Oh, it's you." He says, "You scared my friend." I said, "That's the rainmaker." He says, "That's him." So, he brings the guy out, "I'm Doctor So-and-So." I said, "My name's Lee Casper and I've become friends with [Steig]." So, when I put my hand out, he said, "If you don't mind shaking hands with an alleged felon," he said. [laughter] He was very serious. He says, "I'll shake hands if you don't mind shaking hands with an alleged felon." Anyhow, Steig had, in his living room, the equivalent of a coffin, a vertical coffin, door open, that you could operate, and that and some kind of device on the roof of it concentrated the orgone energy. He told me before, when he's working on a cartoon or a story, he goes in there and closes the door and he can feel the orgone energy entering his body and that empowers him. [laughter] The guy was a genius otherwise, but he was an absolute nut, he was an absolute nut. He was really sold on it. There was a woman with him that he introduced as his wife, but, a couple of weeks later, I met her in the general store, she had two black eyes. She had dark glasses, but she took them off and she had two black eyes and I heard that they were no longer husband and wife and she was gone from the scene, but he was a very eccentric fellow. [Editor's Note: The concept of harnessing the pseudoscientific force orgone energy was popularized by Wilhelm Reich in the 1930s. In 1954, the Food and Drug Administration imposed an injunction on Reich to prevent the sale of orgone accumulators. Reich violated the injunction, was imprisoned and died in prison in 1957.]

MG: You sort of changed my mind about him. He was one of my favorite childhood authors.

LC: Oh, yes, he was wonderful. I believed the same, but this orgone, he was absolutely carried away with it. The big shot doctor, he died in prison. They got him; Food and Drug got him. The other guy that I met was just a lesser somebody.

MG: Did you ever climb inside the contraption?

LC: No, but I could see what--it was just a box, just a wooden box.

MG: Did the drought that year affect your farm and your business?

LC: Yes. The next year, we put irrigation in. We went into hock for a pump and portable pipe, and so forth, which we had to do.

MG: What led to you selling the farm, and then, moving to Philadelphia?

LC: Well, by, I guess it was 1956, I decided that the kids were getting old enough that I had to think about high school. There was a very poor high school system. Freehold had a good high school, but that was fourteen miles away. My kids would have to go to Allentown High, which was a few miles west of us, towards Trenton, and it had a very poor school system. My wife was already involved with the PTA and she helped at the school. Very fortunately, the grammar school had two or three women, wonderful women, who were more or less self-taught teachers, but were just good all-around women, were wonderful with the kids. So, my kids had real good grammar school early years, but apart from that, any further learning, there was nothing. So, the kids would've had to go to Peddie School--Peddie was a private school--and I knew I couldn't afford it. So, I'd decided, we had already sold that one part--no, we hadn't, I did that the following year--but I rented the farm, rented the land out. We lived there and I bought a business in Camden, New Jersey, the spice manufacturing business.

MG: How did you come into that?

LC: Oh, another long story. The doctor that I mentioned to you was married to a woman who I later discovered, in the funniest way, was my cousin. His name was Helsen, Aaron Helsen, very wonderful guy, good doctor, who wanted to be a country doctor and moved in, just like I wanted to be a farmer. They moved out from Philadelphia. We didn't know them then. He married one of the Goldman [sisters]. There were three Goldman sisters. Goldman was her family name. I have my cousins in Kentucky that I mentioned are Goldman and it was the same family, but we didn't know it at the time; I didn't know it. So, her father, she had two other sisters and her father was older than my parents, he had run this company for years, very successfully, in Philadelphia. He had had a nervous breakdown and he couldn't handle the business anymore and he was trying to get out. I heard about it and, coincidentally, her brother-in-law, who was a chemist, a food chemist, and who was my age, married to her younger sister, living in Philadelphia, was unhappy in his job. We were together once at dinner somewhere and I said, "I'm thinking about doing something different." He said, "Boy, I'm sure thinking about it." We started talking about maybe buying a business. That's what we ended up doing. We bought it for a very reasonable price, because he wanted to get out and he was happy to see his son-in-law continue. Anyhow, we bought the business. Subsequent to that, my mother was a prolific letter writer and always stayed in close touch with all her cousins. She writes a letter to one of the Goldman cousins and says, "Lee is buying a business," so forth, and she describes, she says, "It's a spice business in Camden, New Jersey." My cousin writes back, it was the mother--was not the mother, but the mother of the person who is my age--writes back, "Isn't that funny? We have a cousin in Philadelphia who just sold a spice business." Now, how the hell many [can there be]? So, we put it together and we find out, we start to talk, we're cousins.

MG: When did you buy the spice company?

LC: 1955.

MG: What was your role?

LC: Well, I ended up, I was the president, but I was on the sales end, generally. I tried to develop the business and we owned the business about fifteen years and we did bring it from being almost nonexistent into being large enough so that a major company wanted to buy us. That's what we did, but, along the way, we did a number of things that were also sort of exciting. I have some of the stuff here with me, if you want to see it.

MG: Sure.

LC: In doing what we did, we had to do things very differently from McCormick's, because we couldn't compete with them. So, we ended up coming out with some different products that nobody else had and they eventually caught on and got out of our hands, so that we lost them, too, but, for a while, they did us [well]. Do you know lemon pepper, the seasoning lemon pepper?

MG: Yes.

LC: Well, we invented lemon pepper. I was just looking--I have some of the original fan letters from the first people who bought it from us and said, "I can't find it in the stores. Why can't [I]?" I had form letters apologizing for it not being available. So, that got us a leg up. We ended up selling it to specialty stores, instead of the supermarkets. To begin with, we had it in Harrods in London, we had it in Fauchon in Paris, we had it up in Canada, we had it in California. We were a big hit in California. It was called, our name for it was, "Lemon Pepper Marinade, LPM." We had "LPM" on it, anyhow.

MG: What was the name of the spice company?

LC: John Lecroy and Son, Incorporated. I'll show you pictures of it. Then, we did a lot of special packaging that we developed. That was also sort of my forte, developing the packaging, and we did things a lot differently than everyone else did and it caught on. *Food and Drug Packaging*, which was then a big specialty magazine, wrote an article about [it]; those were my containers. I developed a way of making these containers and the lids and the bottoms that nobody else had and we made big sizes of them. We ended up packaging them for ShopRite, Pathmark, Food Fair, Food Giant, Waldbaum's, every chain carried it--well, under their [label]. We did the same thing for them under their label. So, that's a little article. One of the things that I got a patent on, that nobody had, and it was a simple thing, spices fade in this [light], so, I made containers of paper, like the toilet paper tubes--that's what they were, basically--but lined with aluminum and a damp-proofing material, with a shaker top, but, on the bottom, I made a clear bottom, and then, there was an arrow, saying, "With the see-through bottom," so that you protected the spices, light couldn't get to them, but you could always see the quality of it by just turning it up. I got a patent on that.

MG: That is neat.

LC: Then, we had another product that caught on nationally and that we lost. That all happened after we had sold the company, but that in itself is a kind of a unique story; want to hear it?

MG: Yes.

LC: We packaged, we invented or pioneered, a product which we called Lemon Tree. What it was was--my partner, I told you, was a food chemist and he cooked this stuff up--it was a crystal, like grains of sugar, but it was a mix of dehydrated lemon and a little citric acid and some kind of carrier. We put it in these little foil envelopes, like the sweetener envelopes, but ours was foil, because it was subject to absorbing moisture. What the idea was was that you would keep these in the sugar bowl, like they do sweetener. If you had fish, you didn't want to go cut a lemon, you could just tear it and sprinkle it on the fish, or, if you had one cup of tea, instead of cutting a lemon, or whatever, or make lemonade with one and some sugar. It was just pure lemon, dehydrated, and so, we decided to call it Lemon Tree. We had a Philadelphia advertising agency. He had a songwriter create a jingle, "The Lemon Tree," and it was on the radio and we were on the television and it caught on. It was the first thing that we had where we could splurge on some real advertising. We took some half-page ads in *Life Magazine*, *Life* at the time, and *Ladies Home Journal* and all the ladies' magazines. Immediately that we settled on the name Lemon Tree, we had our patent attorney--by that time, I had several patents that I had gotten--so, we put him on [it]. The same attorneys do trademarks. So, we applied for the trademark Lemon Tree. We had been marketing it for maybe a year and I suddenly realized, "We still haven't gotten the trademark, officially." We'd been using it. So, I called, the attorney was A. Yates Dowell, here in Philly, I said, "What's happening with our trademark?" He says, "Lee, I'm glad you called, because I haven't had the nerve to call you in the last couple days." He said, "I had a call from my buddy in the patent office the other day and he tells me we're not going to get the mark." I said, "What do you mean?" I said, "We're [advertising it]." He says, "Well, you don't have to [stop], you can do whatever you're doing," I'll tell you about that, he says, "but you can't get a trademark on it." I said, "Why not?" because, originally, you do a search before you go ahead, a preliminary search. The search tells you there is a mark or there isn't a mark already, and so, that lets you have the nerve to go ahead and try to get one. We had done that, but there was none. I said, "Why not?" He says, "Well, you won't believe this," and I couldn't find it, he says, "but the guy told me, the reason is, because we have a wartime treaty with the Canadian Government that rules out your getting a trademark on it." He told me, I think the name of the act was the Langham Act. During the Second World War, the Canadian Government had several munition patents that our country wanted in the worst way, or wanted the use of. So, they made a deal and the deal was that, in exchange for ignoring these patents and letting us go ahead and so-called infringe, letting our munitions maker use the process, hereafter, any Canadian applicant for an American trademark or patent shall have priority over any competing American, regardless of the date. In other words--date of application, not date of issuance--if Canada comes in after me, by virtue of this mark, they get preference before mine gets considered. That was the deal. When they wanted to do it, the [US] Patent Office went to the Justice Department and said, "Don't do this. You're going to regret it. It's a bad deal," and they went ahead. It was the pressures of the war; they went ahead anyhow. So, what happened was, this was one of the first instances where they called this act into effect on a competing patent. What happened? There was a tiny, little company, smaller than us even, called Langis Foods, outside of Vancouver, and they made a whole family of soda water flavors, dehydrated. They made apple and orange and peach and all the fruits, cherry and lemon. That year, they decided to put [on] the name for all of them, add "Tree" to it, "Orange Tree, Apple Tree," their products were all called, but they were

not consumer-oriented products. They were made in big barrels and soda water companies bought them and converted them to [soft drinks]. So, my attorney said he had investigated it and, wherever we were already marketing it successfully, that is, if you had completed a legitimate sale, you could continue doing that and use the name, but you could not go to a new place once they contested it. In America, you could go anywhere; I couldn't go into Canada and sell it anywhere. So, we lost that, but we kept using the name. Not long after that, we sold out to an American company, which is another long story, but it was Iron Mountain. Do you know the name? They do the storage. Well, I'll tell you how they got into that, but that's who we sold out to, Iron Mountain. After I left the company, Iron Mountain, which had acquired four or five different food companies, including ours, went belly-up with the food companies. They lost them all, but, before they did that, they sold my company, Lecroy, to the Durkee Company and you know that name, D-U-R-K-E-E. Well, Durkee's, next to McCormick's, was probably the biggest specialty spice, same kind of company, very big. Durkee's, in turn, was bought by SCM, Smith-Corona Marchant, big board company, internationally-known company. My lawyer, Barry, calls me and tells me that he had a phone call, just before we sold it to Iron Mountain, from a name he was not allowed to reveal, who asked him, "Are you not pursuing your case against the Apple Tree people and that treaty?" Barry said, "No, my principal doesn't want to," and the guy said, "Oh, my god," he said, "I'm going to call you back." He called back in a little while and said, "I represent an international company that has identically the same condition happening that happened to your [company] and we were counting on your company to be the test case. It would be much less expensive for us if you [wet ahead]." He says, "So, my principal is prepared to underwrite any costs for your company to prosecute the case." I was in the middle of making a deal with Iron Mountain. I said, "Screw it. I don't want to get involved with it." Well, what happened is, the deal went through with Iron Mountain, Iron Mountain sold the company to Smith-Corona, Smith-Corona picked up the case. The little company in Canada, which had been, as I say, smaller than us, had a particular product, too, called Mug-o-Soup, that made an instant soup. They only sold it locally. Thomas Lipton, the big company in England, had just come out with Cup-a-Soup and they couldn't get a patent because the trademark, they ran into this guy, Mug-o-Soup. Well, for them, it was easy--they just bought the company. So, now, the lawsuit became between the Thomas Lipton Company and Smith-Corona Marchant Company. It was an international thing. Just before you came, I cranked it in, you can get the whole story on [Google], but what happened, I had a dear friend, still do, Phyllis Beck, from Philadelphia, was a Superior Court judge. She called me one day, before she was a judge, she was still a lawyer. She said, "Lee, I went to a trade seminar this weekend." She says, "You'll never believe what the seminar was on." I said, "What was it?" She says, "It was called 'The Impact of the Lemon Tree Law on International Trade,'" [laughter] and it's the whole story of these two companies. So, that's my little saga. [Editor's Note: This issue was pursued in the cases *John Lecroy Son, Inc. v. Langis Foods, Ltd.* (Civ. A. No. 1353-73, United States District Court, D. Columbia, May 29, 1974) and *SCM Corporation v. Langis Foods, Ltd.* (539 F.2d 196, D.C. Cir. 1976, June 23, 1976).]

MG: That is incredible.

LC: I found a lot of the fan letters, telling people, "I love Lemon Tree, I can't find them."

MG: I would love to take a look at those.

[TAPE PAUSED]

LC: Here's a picture of the farm. You can't see all of it; they took it from the blimp, as you can see. This was the farm and my farmhouse and barns were over there and that's the little town of Roosevelt back there.

MG: What would this look like today?

LC: All of this side of the road bends here and that goes into Roosevelt. All of this side went into the Green Acres program. So, I've lost half of the farm, but other than that, this, I sold it to a family. The original people are gone, but the children live there and we visited there. It's a horse farm now and some of the fields that I told you about are back in here, where Tamara Geva was buried, and so forth. Here was the original so-called (Red Herring?), when Iron Mountain was attempting, going to buy us out. I had neglected to tell you about my first patent, which I got on the farm.

MG: What was that?

LC: I made a bag-closer that automatically--I packaged the potatoes, eventually, after the first couple years, in five and ten-pound bags. I was one of the first ones to do that. There were no machines to fasten the tops of the bags and I made an automatic bag-closer that closed the top with a series of staples. They weren't staples, they were wire stitches, looked like staples made out of wire stitching. That was my first patent, from 19--I don't see a date--oh, here it is.

MG: October 19, 1954.

LC: Yes, and that's what a patent looked like.

MG: I will take a picture of that real quick, too.

LC: This guy was a famous lawyer, (A. A. Stelle?), and he had done a lot of the big national companies. When I first got the patent, about a year after we started, with a couple of other fellows and myself, we started a little side business of making the machines, another big mistake. Anyhow, somebody came on the market with a somewhat similar sewing machine, utilizing a sewing machine, and it infringed, clearly infringed, on my patent. I got upset and I called him. I said, "How do I stop these people?" He says, "Lee, you don't get the picture." He says, "You don't understand." He says, "You want people to steal your patent." I said, "What?" He said, "You want people to infringe and you want them to be successful." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "Then, you sue them." He says, "You have to understand, a patent is a license to fight." [laughter] It was a good object lesson. Well, the others here are boring. They're a bunch of replies to letters people wrote to me for one reason or another, you'd have to read them, about the various products.

MG: Was the lemon pepper the most popular?

LC: That lemon pepper, undoubtedly, was, because every manufacturer in the business now makes lemon pepper and a big portion of the specialty recipes that you see are lemon pepper chicken, lemon pepper fish, but I can establish the dates of when we did it versus when the others all came out. How we started with it, we put a little ad in *The New Yorker*. Do you get *The New Yorker*?

MG: Yes, I love *The New Yorker*.

LC: Well, you know the little ads, about a beret and all kinds of little [things]? So, we had a thing telling, in a half a dozen words, what we had, "And write for a free sample." We ended up packaging a very nice packet, a good-sized packet, it was about a two or three-ounce sample of the stuff, with illustrated [directions] on how to use it. We just mailed that all over and it generated enough people going into stores saying, "I can't find it," that it got us going.

MG: During the Korean War, were you ever worried you would be called back to service?

LC: No, when you left, you either signed up to continue in the Reserve or you were out and I was out. I wasn't going to do that. [laughter]

MG: Can you talk about living through the time of the Cold War?

LC: Yes. Politically, I thought we made a wrong choice too many times. I know that I said it then, so, I'm not embarrassed by being a second guesser, that, for instance, with Cuba, I could never see the sense of it. It was obvious that Cuba went to the Communists out of frustration, despair. They had nobody. We just did wrong things, but even that, I agree, was understandable. The political climate at the moment said, "You've got to be against Communists." I'm pissed at Hillary for supporting the Iraq War, but I know why she did it. Democrats can't be weak on defense, so, she [voted that way], but I still don't forgive her for that. That's a crime. People who really haven't been somehow involved in war, having lost relatives and friends or been there, just don't have the same innate feelings about uttering the words, "Well, we'll go to war." "Go to war? You've got to do everything else before you go to war."

MG: Did you feel similarly during the Vietnam War?

LC: Yes, the Vietnam War was so wrong. We had a group, the Business Executives Move against Vietnam [Business Executives Move for Vietnam Peace], and it was a bunch of really heavyweight Philadelphians and myself. They were John C. Haas--John died last year. He was the senior Haas from Rohm and Haas, just left the William Penn Foundation 750 million dollars. John was our president. The vice-president was Walter Spiro, who was then the head of the Spiro Advertising Agency, which was probably one of the most successful agencies in Philadelphia. Bernie Weiss, Gimbel Brothers were still in existence, the department [store], Bernie was executive vice-president of that company; Shelly Gross, who had the Music Fair, it was the only outdoor venue up in Doylestown area for years, was an outdoor theater. Anyway, that was our group and we marched against [the war]. We marched in Washington. Before we were as heavily involved in the war, we brought over a man who had been the Vietnamese, either foreign minister or one of the cabinet members, at that level. He told us and begged us to get to

Congress and get them to know that this war, where it was at the moment, was not Communist-inspired. He said, "My people, I regret to say, have been killing one another for a thousand years." He says, "It's tribal. It's the Viet-so-and-so against the Viet-something-else. They're all Vietnamese, but they're tribes." Later, when the North really got involved with China backing them, it became a Communist-dominated thing, but, when we went into it, our excuse was, "We were preventing the domino theory, was not going to tumble like a row of dominos to the Communists." There was no Communists at that time, later, it [changed], but that's the point that I made--we followed the political line of least resistance. I shouldn't even say least resistance, but that what appeared to be what will sell, and we made many mistakes over the years. I'm a big supporter of Israel, but Netanyahu is dead wrong in what he had to say. That's not quite true; what he had to say has some truth. It is possible that Iran will eventually make a bomb, but the point is not that point, but rather that this is the best thing that can be done at this time to forestall the making of a bomb. You have to hope for the world to get better in the interim and for things to happen that you can't even dream of that will change, just the way we changed for Cuba, just the way the [Berlin] Wall fell down--nobody could predict those things and they were things for the better. So, the naysayers who are out to sink Obama no matter what just sell us short for what the purpose is and the purpose is to prevent, for as long as possible, under practical circumstances, the building of another bomb, but Iran will have one, sooner or later.

MG: Can you talk about what it was like to live during the 1960s and all the cultural revolutions and Civil Rights Movement of the time?

LC: Well, yes, I forgot this, I was on the Redevelopment--Bill Green put me on the Redevelopment Authority. [Editor's Note: William J. Green, III, served as Mayor of Philadelphia from 1980 to 1984.] I was the treasurer in all the years that we were assembling the ground to build the Convention Center, Philadelphia Convention Center. During those years, immediately succeeding Bill was Wilson Goode and Wilson is the mayor who authorized the bombing of the Osage homes. I originally oversaw the rebuilding of the Osage homes, because we took possession, the Redevelopment Authority took possession, of the burned out homes as a blighted area, which we were empowered to do by federal mandate and federal law. We started out to rebuild them. [Editor's Note: W. Wilson Goode served as Mayor of Philadelphia from 1984 to 1992. In May 1985, the Philadelphia Police Department used explosives during a standoff with the group MOVE that resulted in the destruction of dozens of homes on Osage Avenue in Philadelphia.] Because I was the only builder on the [Authority], the day after the buildings had been razed and they were burned to the ground, I went there on crutches. I had just had a knee [operation], arthroscopic job done on my left knee, and Doris drove me there. I remember walking down, still smoking, the remains of the houses, to assess what we had to do, but Wilson, trying to do the right thing, took it away from the Redevelopment Authority and gave it to--Philadelphia has an OHCD, Office of Housing and Community Development. He had a woman, a bad woman, named (Robinson?). She was not a crook, she just had bad judgement, incompetent, nice woman, charming, good talker, which is how she got there. He put her in charge and it was a disaster, disaster. We couldn't do anything about it. We hired one of the engineers, at our expense, unbeknownst to Wilson and the other authority, to sort of be our spy, to watch the construction for us, and they turned out to be rats. [laughter] They got in bed with the developer. The developer went to jail, Ernie Edwards, a black man, another charming man, talk you out of anything. They got in bed with him, unbeknownst to us, and we got false reports

and, meantime, he's stealing the (chop line?). Anyhow, long story; well, what was your question?

MG: Witnessing the Civil Rights Movement and the changes during the 1960s.

LC: Yes. Well, I'm a long-time, card-carrying member of the ACLU and other organizations like it. One of the groups, it was before I retired, I had long been active with the Reinvestment Fund. Originally, it was called Delaware Valley Reinvestment Fund, it is now called the Reinvestment Fund, and what it is is a social, do-gooder lending agency. We finance inner-city projects, mostly or largely, at the outset, affordable housing. We did affordable housing all over. Everything in the City of Philadelphia that wasn't federally or municipally financed, we financed; here, Chester, Kennett Square, Doylestown, out to Pittsburgh, other states called us in. Presently, we're redeveloping the biggest section of Baltimore. This is the Reinvestment Fund. I still am part of it, but I was on the board for years. So, while I was on it--I started out with them like the year after they organized--I was their so-called technical advisor and, in fact, I went to work every day. I had a desk, and so forth, and I worked with the different groups. What we did was lend to these various local groups who otherwise couldn't get financing. We were very tough in that we only invested where we thought we would be paid back. It was not like a lot of federal agencies, but we would lend where there was no equity--that's what the difference was. So, we were able to discern who were the good people and we lent to good people and got our money back. So, we built a lot of stuff, but the stuff, and you could see it one day, it's at 46th and Market, I spent three years personally there. We built 135 townhomes, called the Nehemiah Project. Oh, I do have some pictures about that, a big project, and we did it together with fifty black churches, called the Philadelphia Interfaith Alliance. We organized them and I got the plans drawn, we got them a contractor and we put the whole thing together, but, early on, we realized, they did not hire the contract supervisor that I wanted and the guy was incompetent. He was one of their fellow ministers who had been an engineer, but he didn't know shit about building houses. I knew it when he went in, but, anyhow, and, within months, I had to take over. So, I went every day with my boots and it was almost three years, but we built it and it's a very nice project. It's at 46th and Market. Since we've built it, the whole area, they've rebuilt houses all around, there's a big supermarket on the corner, the whole area is different. So, it's highly successful, that mode of intervention, and Baltimore is just unbelievable. Baltimore, the area we're in is the area that *The Wire* was made in. It's as bad as you can imagine. We've got the liquor stores cleared out--we bought them out, we got them out by hook and by crook. We have about a half a dozen black ministers there on our board, on our local board, and they do the administrative oversight, and we have offices and people, competent people, there. You've got to see it to believe it. It's gentrified. It's the only act in town that's moving. So, that, I suppose all of that got me into that area.

MG: How did your life change when you moved to Philly? Do any memories stand out from your family life?

LC: No, it was kind of easy to get back into [city life]. I thought that I would miss the farm, and I missed the rural aspect that I have there, but there's no two ways about it, if you're at all gregarious, you miss reading and books and lectures and libraries and museums and neighbors. When our kids wanted to play with somebody, it was a three-mile ride to the nearest [neighbor].

MG: When did you become interested in boat building and boating?

LC: I started to do that I guess as soon as I made a few bucks, about 1960. Now, the truth is, one of my art teachers, watercolor teacher, was a fellow named (Mac Fisher?), who taught at Fleisher, where I go now, and Mac had a little sailboat. He kept telling me, "You've got to come down, sail with me." He sailed below the airport. Essington is the little town below the airport. So, Doris and I went down one weekend and we loved it. This was about 1965, I guess, and we sailed with Mac for three or four years, and then, he decided that the sailing was influencing his painting, that is, taking him away too much from his painting, and he put it [up] for sale. I didn't know and Doris bought it, unbeknownst to me. I came home one day, she said, "Well, we own a sailboat." I said, "What are you talking about?" She said, "I bought Mac's sailboat." So, I had to learn to sail. [laughter]

MG: Where have you been in that boat?

LC: We only kept it for a year, I guess, because I had larger ambitions, but it was a good, little boat. My daughter and I learned to sail on it. We took it down to the shore. We took it to Somers Point, [New Jersey], and we kept it there.

MG: What is Fleisher?

LC: Oh, you don't know Fleisher? Well, there are two famous art schools, public, in Philadelphia, both endowed by the Fleisher Family. The Fleisher Family was a very affluent, successful family in the early 1900s in Philadelphia. Two brothers were the active partners. It was a needle trades business, I'm almost sure. One of the brothers loved music, the other loved the graphic arts, painting and sculpting. One brother founded the Settlement Music School--do you know the name? Well, the Settlement Music School is famous. It's largely endowed, poor kids can go there, but it's a top, top musical instrument [school], teaches instrumental music. It has two big campuses in Philadelphia. So, that was one Fleisher brother. The other Fleisher brother founded what was then called the Graphic Arts Club [Graphic Sketch Club] and my mother belonged to it when she was about fourteen or fifteen. She could draw. It later became known as the Fleisher Institute and it's at Seventh and Catherine in Philly. It's a big, old building attached to a church, which he bought, which he had made into a museum. The church has got a lot of old, strange, wonderful objects in it and the school is a four or five-story, real teaching and every well-known artist in Philadelphia, at one time or another, has gone or taught at [Fleisher] and it was free. That's what he endowed it as. Now, it's no longer free, but it may as well be. The charges are reasonable, as compared to if you were going to Pace Institute or so. So, I still paint there. I've been painting there for more than fifty years.

[TAPE PAUSED]

LC: So, it's now part of the Philadelphia Museum.

MG: How did you come to settle here in Gladwyne?

LC: Well, this was just coincidental. I had to go somewhere; it was after I had split with my wife. I lived for about ten years in a section that is now gentrified called Fishtown in Philadelphia. It's very popular now, but I bought an old building there to build the boat. I built the motorboat that I showed you there. That took ten years, and so, I built an apartment over the shop and I lived there in a bachelor pad for about ten years, in Fishtown, until I sold it and came here, but we came to Lower Merion originally because I was commuting from the farm to Camden, the plant, and it was an hour's ride, about forty-five miles. It was a grind after a while and, also, the schools are why we made the change to begin with. So, Doris came and went house hunting. The first day, she found our house in Lower Merion--don't forget this is 1959--she calls me up and says, "I think I found the house and you'll look at it." I said, "Sure, where is it?" She said, "It's in Merion." I said, "We're not allowed to live there." A Jew couldn't live in Merion, even then.

MG: Legally?

LC: No, not legally, but there were unwritten agreements between the real estate agents. You'd go to see a real estate agent and they would say, "I'm sorry, we don't have anything in this area," but she went to a Jewish real estate [agent] and, of course, he didn't say boo, but that was my [reaction]. I remember telling her, I said, "We can't live there," because, from growing up, my mother and father thought you can't live there.

MG: Had that sentiment changed by the time you moved there or was there still some left over?

LC: There were still some old, buried feelings, but, no, Jews were moving in, and so, that's where we moved. It was, for a little bit, a learning experience. The first weekend on the farm, I had a tremendous lawn surrounding the house. It was actually almost three acres of lawn. It was too much. I cut it way down, but the original owner was very proud of this [lawn]. I couldn't spare the time for the mowing, but I did mow a big part of it myself and I had a big power mower. Well, in 1959, power mowers were still fairly new. So, I took the mower with me and we moved in September and the people that we bought from stopped cutting the lawn in, I suppose, June. They knew they were moving out. I get there and it's like a hay field. [laughter] So, the first weekend, I'm out there with the power mower and I'm going back and forth. Inside of ten minutes, there's, like, six little kids walking behind me. So, I let them follow and I finally stopped the mower and I said, "Kids, don't tell me you never saw a power mower before," and one kids says, "Oh, yes, but our daddy doesn't own one." They had gardeners. [laughter] I went in, I said, "Doris, we're going to have to change our lifestyle." A couple weeks later, we had a cedar shingle roof on the house. Cedar shingles last forever and they can be missing and rain'll run off of them, but you've still got to repair them. Anyhow, I had a bunch of shingles and I had a ladder up and I was halfway up the roof, standing on another ladder. I'm replacing the shingles and I feel the ladder at my feet shaking. I go back to the edge, I look down. There's a kid my oldest son's age and he's shaking the ladder and he looks up at me. He says, "Mister, are the people home?" [laughter] So, I come down and I take him by the hand. I knock on the door. Doris comes and I says, "This little boy wants to know if 'the people' are home." [laughter] I still see the kid; he became a big lawyer in town. So, it was very different. I was used to doing it all myself.

MG: We have gotten to the end of my questions, but I want to make sure there is nothing we are missing from your time in the Navy, your family life and your career.

LC: Well, I'm satisfied with whatever you're satisfied with.

MG: Lee, thank you so much. I have really enjoyed talking to you.

LC: I enjoyed it.

[TAPE PAUSED]

LC: It was a six-acre plot on 46th Street.

MG: In Baltimore?

LC: No, here in Philadelphia, when Ed Rendell was mayor, and it had been the school bus depot for the City of Philadelphia. [Editor's Note: Edward G. Rendell served as Mayor of Philadelphia from 1992 to 2000.] They had five hundred buses parked there every day and that's where they would come out from. I saw in the paper that they're going to move to the airport. I immediately jumped on, I got one of my partners to call ahead, and we sat down with them and he knew where I was building in Philly. At the time, Philadelphia, that OHCD, their office, was building so-called affordable housing for people in Philadelphia, for 135,000 dollars. We were building apartments in the north here, houses in the northeast, and selling them and making a profit at sixty-seven thousand dollars, half. I said, "Ed, we'll build these houses for seventy thousand dollars." He said, "I don't believe it." I said, "We will--we'll commit to it." So, he made a big thing and there was stuff in the paper. We already had this organization, but the land that they gave us, we did not know it--I was trying to find a picture of it originally--well, anyhow, it turned out that the school board was so angry. They had had other plans for the piece of ground and Ed just overruled them and said, "No, this is going to go for affordable housing." They wouldn't let us on the ground to test bore before we got it. So, we already owned it when I did the first test boring. It turned out that that whole area was perhaps fifty feet deep in ash. It had been the bed of Mill Creek. This creek runs down into Philadelphia and was the bed of 46th Street, ran down the middle, which is where this was. That area, the 46th Street area, was infamous over the years for houses literally disappearing. If you drive down a few little parts of 46th and see a few of the old houses, they're sunk, the columns are down, the porches are like this. The foundation, people didn't know it at that time, but the builders then filled with ash. The ash was available from all the coal burning all over. Homes were all heated with coal and they used the ash as fill. The ash is very, very friable. It'll fall apart when it gets wet. So, it's just terrible stuff to build on. Anyway, the long and the short of it, we had to build houses that were like Liberty ships. We excavated ten feet down. We put three feet of crushed stone underneath the foundations. We rolled them. We put fabric like they put on airports--before they pave airports, they put this fabric down that's impervious. So, once you put a layer of earth on it and roll it, it becomes compacted. We had to do all of that, and then, you can see it, the fabric sticking up and another layer of stone, had to build all that up, you can see the layers in there. Then, it's across the street from a famous old--that's on 46th Street--the Provident Mutual Insurance Company, a famous building. We lined with steel going both ways, every six inches,

lashed them together, put plastic over it and poured the concrete over that, and then, oh, these are the forms we imported from Germany to pour the walls, especially for [this]. They're solid, concrete, ten-inch thick walls that are integral with the basement, so, it ends up being--I used to have these [photos] in order--there's one, that's the wall, poured down between the forms, here it is. Each basement, that's all poured solid and every six inches, inside, is a steel bar. So, even if that house should ever shift, which it's not, the whole thing would float like a ship. I said, I called them "Liberty ships." During the war, they built concrete hulls, but that's what every basement was like. That added thirteen thousand dollars per house to our costs, which sounds like nothing today, but, then, was a big part of it. Anyhow, it was a real task to build that project and I guess that's something that I did put a lot of effort in to.

MG: Yes, it seems so.

LC: Yes.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 2/22/2016
Reviewed by Lee Casper 3/18/2016
Reviewed by Molly Graham 3/29/2016