RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LEONARD DABUNDO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Ashley Greenblatt: This begins an interview with Mr. Leonard Dabundo, conducted by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Ashley Greenblatt on April 5, 2007 in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

SH: Thank you, Mr. Dabundo, for having us today, and to begin, for the record, could you please tell me where and when you were born?

LD: Well, I first saw the light of day January 7, 1923, down in a little town at the shore, in Pleasantville, New Jersey.

SH: To begin, can you tell us about your father, about his family background?

LD: Well, my dad emigrated from Italy, here in the early 1900s, was drafted during World War I, over in Europe, seriously wounded, came back and married my mother, and settled there in Pleasantville from where my story began.

SH: Did he immigrate with his entire family?

LD: No.

SH: Just himself?

LD: He came over as a solo individual, yes.

SH: Did he enlist in the military in World War I to get his citizenship? I know many did.

LD: I really can't answer that, and I can't recall, never is he talking about that aspect of it.

SH: Was he in France then?

LD: Yes, yes, wounded in France at a place called Chateau Thierry in 1917, severely wounded.

SH: Did he talk about his military service?

LD: Oh, yes, quite frequently, yes.

SH: And, about your mother, can you tell us a bit about her family background?

LD: Well, she was a daughter of Italian immigrants, who came over early in the nineteenth century and settled in a place in Egg Harbor Township, called Bargain Town, where they became farmers, and after the war, somehow, they were connected with each other and got married and that's how my whole story began.

AG: Do you have any siblings?

LD: Yes, I have. As a matter of fact, yesterday, I just returned from a funeral of my youngest brother. Our family consisted of four boys and a girl, of whom I was the eldest. The youngest

fellow passed away this past weekend so that means two brothers and a sister constitutes our family.

SH: Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like to grow up in, did you continue to live in Pleasantville?

LD: Oh, yes, right. My whole youth was spent in Pleasantville, went to school there, graduated in Pleasantville High School 1940.

SH: What was your father's business in Pleasantville? What did he do?

LD: Well, he was severely wounded during the war, and he really, he got employed by a trolley line down there, called the Shore Fast Line. There was a rail line that ran between Atlantic City and Ocean City.

SH: Really?

LD: Yes, and there were drawbridges they had on the way, going through Summer's Point and getting in Ocean City and he was hired as a drawbridge attendant so most of his working life was spent with the Shore Fast Line.

SH: Was that a state-owned line?

LD: No. It was a private line, private trolley line.

SH: Did your mother work at all?

LD: No, she was busy taking care of the family. I'm sure she would tell you she worked pretty hard.

SH: I would think so.

LD: But she was not employed outside the home, no.

SH: How far apart were you and your brothers and sister?

LD: Well, we were very close. We generally were a year and a half to two years, between one and the next, as we came along, yes. As a matter of fact, from '95, this brother passed away was seventy-seven [years old] so there were five children in that space, eight years.

SH: Your mother was busy.

LD: Yes, she was a very busy.

SH: What are your earliest memories of growing up in Pleasantville?

LD: Well, the usual. Well, one thing I know, in the summertime, as soon as we became of age, we were shipped off to our grandfather's farm. So, our summers were, while our friends were going to the beach and what not, I and my brothers were busy there, hard at work on my grandfather's farm.

SH: Now, this was your mother's father?

LD: My mother's father, yes.

SH: So, it would have been down in Egg Harbor?

LD: Egg Harbor Township, yes.

AG: They have the best produce down there.

LD: Well, [there are] lots of farms still in that area. First, growing up, we were very interested in sports, you know, sandlot baseball mainly took up a lot of our time, and reading books. I became an avid reader. My mother was a reader, and I used to have to go to the library for her and speak to the librarian, "My mother was looking for some books." So the librarian would pick out some books for her, and I would, began reading *Tom Swift*, *Tarzan*, other popular series, *Bobbsey Twins*, ever hear of [books] called the *Bobbsey Twins*? The *Bobbsey Twins* and so on, became a very avid reader as it was.

SH: Were there special chores that fell to you as the oldest?

LD: Well, I guess being the oldest I assumed the most responsibility as my mother's shopper. She would draw up the list of things we needed for the house, food items, and I would be sent off to the stores, the local Acme or A&P, quite often to do the shopping, and then other, I'm trying to think of other. Scrubbing the kitchen floor, that was a chore and mowing the lawn, cutting the hedge, things like that.

SH: Was it before you had a job where you earn money?

LD: Well, my grandfather paid us for working in the summertime.

SH: Oh, did he?

LD: Oh, yes. Then, I had a paper route, you know, serving papers was a way for young fellows to earn pocket money in those days. So, for a while there, I had a morning route. I can remember getting up six o'clock in the morning, had this morning paper route, which sometimes, especially in the winter, was sometimes quite a struggle.

SH: Which newspapers were you delivering, do you remember?

LD: Well, there a fellow who started a venture called *Atlantic City World*. Well, this is some guy. He came in down there and tried to start a competitive paper, the *Atlantic City World*,

which I don't know how long he was able to hold on, eventually it went under. Didn't make the grade. So, then, in the evening there was the *Bulletin*, served *Bulletin* routes, that was another job.

SH: So, you had two paper routes on the same day, one…

LD: Oh, no, no. Not at the same time.

SH: I know you're an ambitious man but, wow. [laugh] Can you talk a little bit about the Depression and how that affected your family?

LD: Well, we were rather poor, I guess, in a way. My father had a pension as a disabled veteran, and he was classified as being eighty-five percent disabled, so, he collected almost the maximum pension that was given in those days for disability, and he also had this railroad job, which he held on during the war. But, I could see the Depression had serious effects on our neighbors. As a matter of fact, I know we had one episode, there, where somebody complains somehow to the government. They didn't understand why my father, who was working and collecting this eighty-five percent, why he would be eligible to collect this pension, and I know, the army, suddenly, because I don't know the details, but somebody in the army or the government concluded, "Well, if he's working full time, maybe we ought to cut him back to fifteen percent." So, I know that when that thing happened, there was a big ruckus there, and my father got several politicians involved, and he, eventually, was restored. His pension was restored to the eighty-five percent disability, but I know the Depression was a hard time. People somehow survived. It was very, very difficult.

SH: Were there other members of your father or mother's extended family that were impacted as well?

LD: No, being on, my mother's family, on the farm, I mean, everyone seemed to be surviving there. I didn't know that, I mean, that being without things sort of became a way of life pretty much. People learned to get along with a little, but I know some of our neighbors, as a matter of fact, I know very well, we had living next door to us was an apartment house. But the house we lived in Pleasantville was built by my father. He had it built, and the house next door to us was a fellow who had come over from Scotland, Bill Simms, was a carpenter. He was a bachelor, and I know Bill Simms fell on hard times, because he wound up living in our house, and I know we were moved out of one bedroom, and this one bedroom was set aside for Bill. Bill Simms lived with us for a couple of years, and what the arrangements were between him, my father and mother, I really have no knowledge of, I don't know. But I know Bill, Mr. Simms, had to live with us. That was as an example, I guess, of the difficulty of the getting along in those days, especially a place like, well, Atlantic City, of course. In the wintertime, you know, when all the visitors went home, there was no industry, or anything around that area, that kept people employed. Everything hinged on the summer tourist trade, and most people hoped that they would save enough from the summer tourist trade then to see them through the rest of the year. That was the usual method of survival in those days.

SH: You talked about your father getting the support of politicians, was your family politically involved?

LD: No, not really, but he joined the VFW, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and they were very aggressive and very vocal in taking care of the veterans, and having been a veteran and wounded to boot, he had a lot support. I mean, the people, I'm pretty sure this job he got with the railroad was an outgrowth of that sort of assistance.

SH: What did your family think of Franklin Roosevelt?

LD: Well, Franklin Roosevelt was elected 1940 and 1940 was the year I graduated from high school and sort of left town, went up to New Brunswick. Well, I guess everybody in those days, from my recollection, considered him pretty much a hero in the sense that he immediately started a lot of programs to put people to work. He had the NRA [National Resource Association], the WPA [Work Projects Administration], I remember, and there was a lot. One program there where they took young fellows.

SH: The CCC?

LD: The CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps, right, and they went back in the some of the pinelands areas there and essentially camped, almost like soldiers, and built roads through the uninhabited areas there, the CCC and organizations like that. So, yes, I would say FDR was pretty much of a well-respected hero to many of those people in those days. Of course, there were a few hardline Republicans who, I remember one, well, this was later in my life. You know that the (Don Kingsman?) piece on one side of it was FDR and a fellow I worked for in those days, the President and CEO, "FDR is the great destroyer." That was the way he looked on FDR, yes, yes. They were really unsettling times I would say, very unsettling times.

AG: How old were you during the Depression and like World War II?

LD: Well, I was born in '23 so by 1933 I was ten years old. That was sort of the onset of the Depression, pretty much '33, so ten, '33 to '40, another seven years, essentially my teen years from age ten up to seventeen, I was pretty well right there in the middle of it, yes, and got me, I mean, getting things was difficult. As a matter-of-fact, I wanted a bicycle, and the way I got the bicycle was getting this paper route earning money, and then I could go out and buy myself a bicycle. That was the way you did things in those days. As a youngster, if you wanted money, you would somehow, you'd try to earn it.

AG: You're saying that you were in your twenties then during World War II, I'm just wondering how you avoided that…

LD: Well, I was seventeen and a half in 1940, that's when I entered Rutgers.

SH: Seventeen and a half, that's kind of young.

LD: Well, I entered the first grade when I was five and a half, being my birthday was in January, school came in the middle of the year, see. So rather than wait, go into kindergarten, say, for half a year, I got in the first grade at five and a half.

SH: Were you a Boy Scout growing up?

LD: No, my father, for some reason, didn't want us to get into uniforms. Strange attitude, yes, but he'd seen enough uniforms, and he said, I know in the back of his mind he didn't want to see us walking around in, his boys walking around in uniforms.

SH: That's very interesting.

LD: Never got in the Boy Scouts.

SH: Were you involved at all in the church?

LD: My parents were religious, but they didn't go to church, but they sent us to church and Sunday school. Every Sunday, we were in church and, then, Sunday school. They themselves did not attend frequently, but they were Catholics. You know, if you ask them what their religion was, they would have said they were Catholics.

SH: When you went to high school, then, did you go to high school in Atlantic City?

LD: Pleasantville. Pleasantville had their own high school.

SH: Okay, and what were your favorite subjects?

LD: Well, of course, we had three courses available in those days, college prep, what they called the general course, and then the business course. I took the college prep course.

SH: Does that mean that you really already determined that you wanted to go to college if possible or, because we're talking about the Depression,…

LD: Yes, right, I guess, back, in the back of my mind was the idea that I was going to go to college.

SH: Were there scholarships available for children of veterans?

LD: Well, as a matter-of-fact, well, in 1940, I applied for a scholarship, and I had done pretty well in high school. I was the valedictorian in my class, and I applied for a scholarship, but there was a lot of competition, and as it turned out, I found out, you had to be pretty much politically connected to get a scholarship. But what essentially saved me, during the '30s, they passed the so-called Bonus Bill. I don't know if you ever heard of that, they passed the Veterans' Bonus. My father collected a thousand dollars. Most of the veterans ran out and bought cars or automobiles. My father didn't, and that was how I got into college. By virtue of, of course the

tuition at Rutgers in those days was, the tuition was two hundred dollars, and then they had a general fee, two hundred and sixty-three dollars. That was the entrance cost.

SH: Because you signed up for the college prep course in high school, did you also work during the summer to try to, were you still working for your grandfather?

LD: Well, as I got older I advanced into other jobs. I know one summer, I worked at one of the hotels on Exit 8 and…

SH: What did you do?

LD: I was working in the kitchen, filling pots of coffee for the waitresses when they came in and did other jobs, sort of escapes me at the moment. I worked in the New York shipyard one summer. This was prior to the war, they started to build boats, as in Camden started to build battleships, or something, got a job there one summer as a helper.

SH: What were you involved in high school? Any extracurricular activities?

LD: Yes, let me think, debating, interested in athletics, but I could never make the teams. I wasn't good enough. There wasn't really that much going on in the schools in those days beyond the sports.

SH: How did you come to the realization you wanted to go to Rutgers? How does Rutgers show up?

LD: Well, I didn't want to, in New Jersey other than you had the teacher's colleges around in those days, I mean Glassboro, Montclair, Trenton, but I never considered any other place but Rutgers. Never even thought about any other place but Rutgers.

SH: What were you planning to major in, and did you continue in that major?

LD: Well, engineering. That was my major when I went in, engineering, that's where I graduated, engineering.

SH: Talk to us a little bit, then, about the first time you went to Rutgers and what your memories are of that.

LD: Oh, well, I remember they assembled the freshman class, I don't know whether it was some place, there were four hundred, I think, in the freshman class in 1940, and I remember Dean Metzger said, "Now, fellows," he said. "I want you to look at the person on either side of you," he said, "Realize that only one of the three of you will graduate." That was a record in those days, in other words, one out of every three freshmen. Of course, this was not having any knowledge of the work, I mean, all the disrupting things. But it was interesting running into fellows from all over the state. I remember one fellow, Len (Theisman?) from Paterson, and he was telling me his father was, well, some sort of a, he was in the real estate business, but he knew all of the politicos, and he was trying to get a scholarship for his son, Leonard, and, Len

was showing us. His father came back, and he said, "Well," he said, "I couldn't get a scholarship for you but I got you admitted." He said that was the extent of what he could do. He was able to get him admitted.

SH: Where were you housed, your freshman year?

LD: Well, I lived off campus. They really didn't have room on campus for everybody, and we lived, I lived in a house up on, near the college. A woman, a Hungarian woman, Mrs. Reece, earned her living renting out rooms to students, and I lived off campus for, in fact, all of my Rutgers career, as a matter of fact, because they never really had the facilities there to accommodate the students.

SH: Did you have a roommate or did you…

LD: Yes, yes, I had a roommate, Walter (Platt?), from Bridgestone. Walter (Platt?) was a farmer [who] came up and we got along pretty well, yes.

SH: Now did you cook your own meals?

LD: No, no. We generally went out. Well, Rutgers ran a dining hall in a place called Winants Hall. Is that still there?

SH: Yes.

LD: In the bottom of Winants Hall, they had a cafeteria, and quite often that was a good place to eat. We ate the meals at the cafeteria or a lot of restaurants around town.

SH: Did you have to work while you were a freshman?

LD: You mean off…

SH: Did you earn pocket money or…

LD: No, well, oh, yes, well, I don't know if it's the freshman year or not, but I did have some jobs for a while. Oh, the government came along with a program that gave the libraries money to hire students to work there, and for a while, I worked in the library. I forget what the heck, it was down in the basement, is the library still there, any library?

SH: Yes.

LD: Down there and then…

SH: I was going to say the library is moved up College Avenue now across from up the old Gym by the ROTC building…

LD: Well, the old library was right down…

SH: Right where the Zimmerli is now, the Zimmerli Museum.

LD: Then, we got a job as an usher in the movies, one of the local movies in town.

SH: That way you get to see the movies, too, right?

LD: Yes, and quite often I'd be there collecting tickets, and I know I'd see this whole crowd of, Saturday night's whole crowd of guys out there waiting for a slack period, and I'd come in, rush by me, you know. Then I used to see another professor, who would come in on this Saturday; this movie in town was a sort of, ran all the cowboys, shoot 'em up movies, and this professor, he would come in. I would see him sitting in the seat there, and he's sitting there, and a briefcase on the floor, and he'd be staring at the screen, goggly-eyed. That ushering job, yes, that was, a couple things happen I know that were interesting, but I can't quite recall what they were.

SH: Who was your favorite professor?

LD: That's hard. That is hard. I can only remember, I'm trying to remember the names of the ones I had before the war, very difficult. They're all men, of course; there were no women teaching there at Rutgers.

SH: That's one thing I'd like you to talk about is was there a difference between the Rutgers, I mean, obviously, there was a large difference, but, I mean, between the professors, during your freshman into your sophomore year, and their attitude toward the students as compared to the way they treated the students, you know, so many of you came back after the war?

LD: Oh, after the war was entirely different. I mean, we're students. We would sit there in classes, I mean, that was, yes, it was entirely different. Well, you were treated more as adults, I guess, and before the war, the professors before the war, you were still considered pretty much of a juvenile, I guess, to some professors. But after the war, they sort of regard you as more of an adult.

SH: As a freshman, what were some of the activities that you remember at Rutgers? Did you go to any of the…

LD: Well, we had compulsory chapel you know that.

SH: [laughs] How did you take to that?

LD: Well, since you had to do it, it wasn't considered that onerous, necessarily, compulsory chapel.

SH: Do you remember any of the speakers?

LD: Oh, yes. I remember there was a big socialist in those days, used to run for president, what was his name? I remember he came down, spoke to us once.

SH: Norman Thomas?

LD: Norman Thomas, does that sound right? Norman Thomas, yes. You had so many absences a year. It was compulsory.

SH: What about the interaction with NJC?

LD: Well, then, we, yes, there was quite a bit of that. There was quite a bit of that. There was quite a lot of cross-town traffic and traveling in those days, yes. Yes, the system they had over at NJC in those days, I don't know what it is now, but they didn't have dormitories. They had houses, and then, you would have groups of the students who lived these houses, sort of, I don't know, maybe a dozen, eighteen-twenty students to a house, and there was a lot of mutual interests there going back and forth.

SH: Were you a good dancer?

LD: No, not really. I had two left feet in those days, yes. I was not into dancing, really. Besides, engineering work was pretty hard, and you really didn't have a lot of time to be in extracurricular work, to tell you the truth. You know, we had classes eight o'clock in the morning till four in the afternoon sometimes, and then five days a week and a lot of work.

SH: You had labs on Saturday, too.

LD: On Saturday mornings, we'd have labs, and, oh, yes, these science students would always make fun of the business ed majors, and the other guys, you know, they had a lot more free time than we did.

SH: Was there any pecking order between the fraternities and those that weren't involved in the fraternities, or between those that were in the Ag school and those who were in Rutgers College, or the engineering?

LD: Well, there probably was, but I have never gotten involved in much of it. Naturally, the fraternity guys considered themselves sort of a step above, I mean, the common people. They were, you know, more of the elite, I don't know, and I guess some of them felt they deserve special attention somehow but…

AG: That hasn't changed.

LD: That hasn't changed? Well, since, you know, they selected the, they had the right to what they called blackball. I mean, they would proffer the freshman group and say, "We want you, you, and you." But, yes, if you were BMOC, big man on campus, you were in one of the fraternities.

SH: Did you go to the football games?

LD: Some of them, yes, generally.

SH: Were there intramural sports for people that first year, or so?

LD: There was, but not on a large scale. Again, I never had time to participate in anything like that, but there was, I'm sure there was. I'm trying to think, lacrosse was a big item in those days; I didn't even understand the game, lacrosse, and then tennis. In fact, even think they had some that were into golf.

SH: What about crew and things like that?

LD: Crew, they had crew, that was another option, another sports, crew.

SH: Swimming, things like that?

LD: Swimming, oh yes. Swimming was big, right, very big.

SH: How prepared do you think your high school education set you for Rutgers?

LD: Not very well. Well, I don't know, I mean, I thought I was pretty smart when I got out of Pleasantville, but when I got up to Rutgers I was just one of the crowd, just one of the crowd.

SH: Was there someone that you studied with, particularly, that the two of you worked together?

LD: No, I don't recall. No, I'd say I know in the fraternity houses they had, well, the fellows used to tell me they used to have copies of previous tests that they would keep, on store in the, and there was a lot of, they were in a position to help the students a lot more than us, scholastically, let me say. But living off campus, as I was, I was sort of a, my roommate was in the Ag school and there wasn't much we had in common there, and the others, nobody was in the same course as I was. I pretty much just struggling there on my own.

SH: Were you also part of the initiation as freshmen? Did you have to wear the dink, or that's only for fraternities?

LD: Generally, fraternities got to that part, if you're non-fraternity people…

SH: You didn't have to wear the dink?

LD: No, you weren't really bothered with too much. Might have had to wear that, I don't know, I can't remember, but beyond that…

SH: I think it was something about your socks inside or, your pant legs inside your socks?

LD: I don't recall any of that. No, no.

SH: You talked about Dean Metzger giving you all the fair warning that not all of you would graduate; were there other professors that you remember that either helped you out or seemed determined to help you out the door?

LD: Well, they weren't, it seems to me none of them really went out of their way to, but I remember one professor, Dr. (Fishman?). Something came up one day, and I just don't recall what the preliminaries were, but I remember (Fishman?) suddenly said, "Sit up straight," and pointed his hand right at me, and he said, "Not you, Dabundo," and it was something I had done or not done, or done wrong, I couldn't remember. But then never, they were generally available, but I can't remember ever going to one for extra help or anything like that.

SH: That must have woke you right up?

LD: Yes, yes.

SH: Can you talk, then, when you finished up your freshman year, you would have then been now eighteen, did you sign up for the draft then?

LD: Well, I was, see, when you went to Rutgers in those days, you're automatically enrolled in the ROTC. After, there were two years compulsory ROTC, first two years, then, the third year, they had what they called the Advanced ROTC, where you applied for it and they selected a group. At Rutgers, they had an infantry group, where they selected fifty fellows, and then the Signal Corps came in and set up a small group for Signal Corps Advanced ROTC, and they admitted twenty students, and being an electrical engineering, I was allowed. I joined that Advanced ROTC, the Signal Corps group, and being in that Signal Corps group, I don't know what the laws were at the time, but I, essentially, was already registered with the government. So they let us stay there our junior year. We were somehow already enrolled in the army, but permitted to stay in college, junior year, as part of this advanced ROTC Signal Corps group. I never did have to go down and register.

SH: Did you have to go to any kind of summer camps with that?

LD: Yes. In the junior year, well, what they did at the end of our junior year they took us out of college and sent us out to Camp Crowder, we were, in fact, full-time soldiers at that point, at the end our junior year.

SH: At the end of your junior year, so that would have been 1943 then.

LD: 1943, yes, summer of 1943.

SH: Let's back up a little bit before we talk about Camp Crowder and that. What do you remember about Pearl Harbor, what is your first memory of that and what happened, where were you?

LD: Well, I was, in fact, I mentioned this fellow, Len (Theisman?) of Paterson, had an uncle who lived in New York City. So he said to me one weekend, he said, "Len, how would you like

to go to New York City with me, spend a weekend with my uncle, and on Sunday, we'll go to see the Giants football game?" And that Sunday happened to be December the 7th, and I remember we were sitting in the stands at the Polo Grounds where the Giants were playing and over the loud speaker a general message came, "Will Colonel Somebody," a well-known fellow, "Will Colonel please report to our office," or something, and when we got out of the stadium we quickly learned the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, that was December the 7th.

SH: Was the news in the crowd already or did you hear it on the radio?

LD: Didn't know it till we got out of the stadium.

SH: Was it on the loudspeaker then or was it…

LD: No, we heard them make this announcement calling for Colonel, famous guy, can't remember his name. Beyond that, we had no inkling of what was going on till we got out of the stadium, till the game was over and we left the stadium. That was when we knew the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor.

SH: You knew then about Pearl Harbor, did you know where Pearl Harbor was? Had you expected this?

LD: I hadn't the foggiest idea. Didn't even know where it was.

SH: You talked about being very intently focused on your studies at Rutgers, were you aware of what was going on in Europe with Hitler and the Battle of Britain and that sort of thing?

LD: Oh, yes, we were aware of that sort of stuff, and, you know, the intention of the country to keep out of it. Yes, it was a very political time. People were, there was a lot of argumentation going on, Roosevelt, remember, lent fifty destroyers to the English navy and there was a lot of talk.

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

SH: Side two, tape one. Please continue; we were talking about how people were aware of what was going on in Europe.

LD: Oh, yes, it was very political time. I mean, you know, there were people who you had for the war and those against, the isolationists and the interventionists.

SH: Was that going on at Rutgers or was that more everyday?

LD: No, no. I'm trying to think of how it affects the ROTC. We knew that the previous grads were in the army, you know, all the fellows were marching off to war, and things were changing at the school, no question about it. In fact, the army came in and, I think, set up some special courses for people.

SH: The Army Specialized Training Program?

LD: That's it, right, yes.

SH: That Sunday that you're in New York with your friend at the game, and, then, you hear about Pearl Harbor, what did you and your friend talk about? Were you with the uncle?

LD: Well, that was Sunday afternoon, and, I guess, we left shortly after, came back to New Brunswick to go to school but…

SH: What were you talking about, I mean, you're not quite in advanced ROTC yet. Would you have been, would you not have been? I mean, this is the sophomore, the first semester of your sophomore year.

LD: Right.

SH: You would have been a regular ROTC.

LD: Well, I guess everything was, there was a lot of uncertainty, since we weren't in the war prior to that point. We weren't in the war, and nobody was, really had any idea we would be in it. I think, somehow, that was all over there, "let those folks settle it." We have nothing, no reason to get in, to enter, so I don't think it affected people's, other parts or actions, decisions.

SH: On Monday, when you're back at Rutgers now, did they bring all the students together and talked to them or did you listen to Roosevelt talk?

LD: Not that I recall, I don't think there was anything.

SH: President Clothier didn't talk to you?

LD: If he did, it escapes my mind.

SH: Because I thought maybe even in ROTC, they might have given you some sort of "take it easy, don't run out and enlist right now," or you had already gotten involved.

LD: Well, of course, our main interest was hoping to hang around and graduate, you know, for the most part. So, I don't recall anybody running, at least in the engineering school, who was running out and enlisting. There may have been in the other schools.

SH: Was the Signal Corps contingent on campus new because of World War II?

LD: No. Oh, well, yes, as a result of the war it was set up as a result of the war, yes, yes.

SH: Did you wind up with increased work to do because of that? In your engineering curriculum?

LD: No. Well, it just meant the advanced ROTC was a course, and if you took that, then that eliminated, as I recall, your ability to take another elective. That, somehow, became an elective, and, in fact, that was it. In the engineering course, we didn't have many things called electives, and the advanced ROTC was your elective and that was it, and all the other engineering courses were prescribed; there's nothing else you can do.

SH: Did they speed that up? Or did you go to school during the summer then? How did things change?

LD: Well, they called us in the army. I didn't go to school in the summer, at first, but I am not sure, it's sort of hazy what happened there, to tell you the truth.

SH: So you were able to finish all of your course work right up through your junior year?

LD: Until the end of junior year.

SH: And then that summer they sent you to Crowder?

LD: They called us into active duty, put us in active duty.

SH: Did you have to go through a basic?

LD: Oh, yes. The plan was we would take basic training, and then they would send us back to Fort Monmouth and go through OCS, Officer Candidate School, at Fort Monmouth. That was the schedule that was set up, yes.

SH: Tell us about Camp Crowder and what that was like for you?

LD: Well, Camp Crowder, it was out there, outside of Joplin, Missouri. Basic army training, I forget, I think it was but eight weeks, possibly, I'm not sure, but they put us through the paces of army recruits, and we went through, and you were there with a group of fellows that you knew, so it wasn't that bad, as though you were called off in the army and sent some place and put in with a bunch of strange people, you were there with your own fellas.

SH: Oh, you were? So all of you that were in this twenty group of went together?

LD: Yes, we went as a group; yes, they sent us there as a group. We made it through the basic training course, and no serious problems that I can recall.

SH: Now you have younger brothers coming right up behind you, what about them and their enlistment?

LD: Well, my next youngest brother, Anthony, joined the Seabees, and then younger brother after him, Vincent, eventually enlisted in the army. So, then, the youngest brother, the chap that just passed away, he missed the whole thing.

SH: Now where does your sister fall in the order of the siblings?

LD: She was, three boys and a sister and then the last fellow.

SH: Now, had your next younger brother thought about going to college as well?

LD: No, for some reason, they just weren't the student types. In fact, I know they used to constantly get it from their teachers in high school, "Why can't you do the work your brother did?" I remember one English teacher had us, we had to put together a collect of three favorite poems that we had, get three favorite poems and write them out and put them in, as a sort of a chore, in order for you to graduate, to get past the course, and I remember I put together *Casey at the Bat*, *The Highwayman* and one other and I know this bound little document was there in our bookcase at home, there in the living room in Pleasantville, and it turns out that my younger brother, Lewis, the chap that passed away, takes that, apparently, the same teacher, he picked that up and he turned it in. It was his submission for that project.

SH: Did it work?

LD: I guess it did, he graduated. *Casey at the Bat, The Highwayman,* and I can't remember the other poem that really affected me. *Casey at the Bat*, *The Highwayman*… Do you know that poem?

SH: No.

LD: "Riding, riding, the highwayman," by Alfred Noyes, I think.

AG: You were an avid reader, and I was wondering if you remember any of the propaganda that was going on in newspapers, or if you had a chance to go to the movies, like when you worked there, did you get to see any government propaganda?

LD: Well, the government had a lot of propaganda. I know in basic training they would release these movies and show us these films, *Why We Fight*. They had films, but prior to that, well there was a lot of "rah, rah" stuff going on.

SH: Was there anybody at Rutgers who refused to go into the military?

LD: Not that I can recall.

SH: Or was a conscientious objector?

LD: The COs, I have no recollection of anyone in that category.

SH: At Camp Crowder then, you were then sent directly back to Monmouth?

LD: We went back to Monmouth, yes.

SH: How far is Monmouth from where you lived, not far, right, or was it?

LD: Red Bank, New Jersey.

SH: I meant, from where your home was, were you able to go home on weekends or did you?

LD: Well, yes, I did a couple of times. Monmouth to Red Bank down to Pleasantville that-

SH: Oh, you were hitchhiking?

LD: Well, that was the main method of transportation in those days, yes.

SH: Totally acceptable then as well, especially, with servicemen, I think.

LD: Oh, yes, it was common, right. Common way of travel.

SH: When you were at Monmouth, did you ever come back to Rutgers at all for football games or social activity or anything?

LD: I can't recall. Well, that was a pretty concentrated time there; I think it was four months. First, they started out at ninety days; they cranked out what they called, "The Ninety Day Wonders." In those days it was the OCS, and then they added another month and made it four hundred and twenty days.

SH: For someone in the Signal Corps, do you think it was more academically…

LD: Oh, sure, absolutely, right, yes. It was all technical, pretty much technical.

SH: Was there a specialty within the Signal Corps?

LD: Oh, yes. We had telephone, radio, teletype; while the OCS courses were all pretty much standard, yes. Everybody gets the same thing.

SH: When you were at Fort Monmouth, what kind of security measures were there? We've heard of the blackouts along Atlantic City and…

LD: Oh, yes, they had the…

SH: There's that security, but then was there security within Fort Monmouth because of the technical development of…

LD: Well, there may have been, but I don't recall so much about it. Whatever it was we got it, pretty much well accepted, I don't think there was, never heard any criticism along those lines.

SH: Where did you expect or hope to be sent after OCS at Monmouth?

LD: Well, I mean, was nobody really knew what the plan was and…

SH: You weren't given a dream sheet to fill out?

LD: Well, you had one option, if you wanted to do it, you could volunteer for the paratroopers, and that was one, usually one place where you will be accepted right away. But beyond that, at least people that I was on terms with, it was pretty much, you were there, and whatever the government selected you to do, that would be your job. You know, you didn't have much choice in the matter.

SH: When you finished at OCS then, where did you go?

LD: Well, I went back out to Camp Crowder, that was Signal Corps camp.

SH: And what was your…

LD: Well, I got put into, then I was conducting basic training for the draftees, and then I got put into a unit that was designed for some overseas assignment, a signal unit, and shortly before the unit was going to be sent out, we had a physical exam, and they told me, the doctor told me I had a hernia. So [they] immediately shipped me off to a hospital, and my unit that, I got transferred out of the unit, my unit left, and by the time I got out of the hospital, they sent me down to Camp Gordon, Georgia, and that was where I hung out until the war ended.

SH: What were you doing in Camp Gordon?

LD: Same thing, basic training.

SH: Basic training for people coming in for Signal Corps.

LD: Right, yes. Training

SH: What were you teaching, then?

LD: Well, basic army life, essentially, army life, the army routines, and some signal, basic signal training using radios, army telephone, string wires around, hooking telephones, that sort of thing. Nothing very complicated.

SH: From the group, the twenty that went from Rutgers, from the advanced ROTC to Crowder originally, did most of them come back to Monmouth for OCS?

LD: Yes, yes, and we all graduated, as I recall.

SH: So did most of them go back to Crowder again?

LD: Well, various places, some went to Crowder, others went to, some were immediately assigned to other units, some immediately went overseas.

SH: Did you keep in contact with any of them?

LD: Not really, no.

SH: I just wondered if you kept up with what was going on at Rutgers.

LD: No, no. That was past history. That was water over the dam.

SH: Do you remember hearing how the war was, first of all, I'll ask what was the reaction when President Roosevelt died, you had been at Gordon then, right?

LD: Well, there was a lot of, it didn't affect any of things we did. I mean, as far as our chores and assignments and work and all, just kept right on.

SH: He has been president for so long.

LD: Yes, right.

SH: Did people have confidence in Truman being the new commander in chief?

LD: Well, he was just sort of an unknown. I don't know that, I guess, I really wasn't into the politics of the thing in those days. Usually your own life, you know, was so full that you really didn't have time to speculate on outside matters.

SH: Was the South a shock to a young man from New Jersey?

LD: Well, I'm trying to think of like out at Crowder or down in Camp Gordon, down in Louisiana, "Lousy Ana," we called it. … It's now Fort Gordon, I believe, the same Signal Corps base. Our life was pretty much confined to the post. There wasn't much doing off; we were in the middle of nowhere, is where this camp is, and, really, it wasn't much else to do, but just stay on post.

SH: Did you have good commanding officers?

LD: Well, I can't recall ever having bad ones. You sort of accepted what was thrown at you in those days.

SH: What about the recruits that were coming in, did you have confidence in them? Were they well-educated?

LD: Supposedly, they were a little higher in the intellectual measurements, but they were, I remember one day I was down at, I get mixed up between the Korean War and World War II sometimes.

SH: We're getting there, hold on. It's okay if you get mixed up, though.

LD: No, as I say, I didn't see much difference in the people, really, no change, so to speak. …Nothing outstanding that I could recall.

SH: When the war ended in Europe, was there a celebration down in Louisiana?

LD: Well, everybody began wondering what was going to happen to them, you know, they were all concerned about how soon we're going to get out of here?

SH: Were you heading for Japan?

LD: No, well, that's right, war ended in Europe, in April, I guess it was, and Japan didn't follow till July, August, yes. I don't recall then how that went over.

SH: What was the reaction to the news about the atom bombs being dropped? Did you know what that was?

LD: Not really, hit us as much as any other person living at the time. I mean, we were just as dumb founded and perplexed as everyone else, really.

SH: What was the celebration like when the war was over then?

LD: Well, everybody immediately began, you know, figuring out what's going to happen to them. How soon they were going to get out, what the government's plans were. But, you know, there were a lot of uncertainty in the army and…, after a while, you just sort of waited until the dust settled, and you could see patterns developing and you would hope that whatever happened to you would be something favorable.

SH: Did you consider staying in the military?

LD: No, I didn't.

SH: When were you discharged, then, how much longer did you have to stay in?

LD: Oh, probably until the end, maybe the end of the year, I don't know.

SH: You said in 1946 you were discharged.

LD: '46, the following year, yes.

SH: What were your plans then?

LD: Well, get back to Rutgers.

SH: You'd already started making those plans?

LD: Well, I had one more year to go to get my degree so…

SH: Was it guaranteed that you would be able to go back, or was there a chance that it will be filled? Or for returning student veterans, did you have a place?

LD: Well, there was no question that I would be able to get back.

SH: The university would take you back no matter what?

LD: They had no other, I mean, they wouldn't have the other students for that senior year because the whole college curriculum had been disrupted. But, no, there was never any thought that we wouldn't be accepted, welcomed back.

SH: Now, you had stayed at the woman's home your first year, anyhow, or first three years actually, you were still…

LD: Well, then the second year, they moved us into a dorm. Yes, that junior year, they moved us into a dorm, they took it over.

SH: What dorm, do you remember?

LD: A place called the Quadrangle, I think, down there in the Quad.

SH: So when you come back to campus where did they put you for your senior year?

LD: Where did I stay my senior year? I think, I rented another room off campus, I think some home, another house in the area.

SH: Because I understand housing was really tight after the war.

LD: Oh, yes, yes.

SH: Lots of returning GIs.

LD: Right, yes, yes, big problem.

SH: Was it good to come back as an upperclassman and not be part of the freshman "GI" class?

LD: Well, of course, there were lots of, you know, you wondered, having been away for three years, taking up another year, and until you remember all that stuff you learned before, which you were going to need your senior year, all that knowledge, I mean, was it going to be easy? Was it going to be difficult? How are you going to handle it? There was a lot of thinking there, wondering.

SH: Where had your brothers served, the one that was with the Seabees?

LD: Well, he went down to the Caribbean some place, sent down to the Caribbean, then, actually, they wound up in an infantry unit over in Europe.

SH: Were you the first one to get out of your brothers, to get out of the military?

LD: I can't answer that. I don't remember.

SH: Did you stay in the reserves?

LD: Yes. Well, as a matter of fact, at my final day there at Fort Dix, when I was getting separated, that was a choice. They said, "If you want to keep your reserve commission," and I said "No," and they said, "Well, let's put it this way. No reserve person has ever been called to active duty unless there was an act of war." So I said, "All right, well, I'll stay in." From that standpoint, he wasn't telling the truth, but, of course, he had no way of knowing.

SH: So in 1946, you report back to Rutgers then?

LD: Yes.

SH: And finished in June of '47. Did you approach your senior year differently than you had the other years?

LD: Well, I don't know. From a scholastic viewpoint, probably it's pretty difficult, but you're older, worldly wise, maybe more confident. Beyond that, I guess I found the work pretty difficult. But I managed to pass it all, so I figure…

SH: You were on the GI Bill for that senior year?

LD: Yes, I was, on the GI Bill.

SH: Did you consider staying in school and going on for an advanced degree?

LD: No, no.

SH: Did you use your GI Bill benefits?

LD: Right, yes, for that year.

SH: But, I mean, did you use them, then, to buy a house or anything like that?

LD: No. No.

SH: Were you part of the 52/20 club?

LD: No. I never collected a day of unemployment insurance in my life. I remember my younger brother, though, had joined the 52/20 club, I remember that. He got in several arguments with my father over that.

SH: Your father didn't approve?

LD: Well, he really wasn't anxious to go out and get a job. He preferred to lounge around and that's what the so-called 52/20 club was. They gave you twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks unemployment.

AG: Not a bad deal.

LD: A lot of them seem to think that, yes, 52/20 club, it was called.

SH: Some people said that was just beer money.

LD: Well, whatever it was, they say a lot of them figured that was their reward for having served, a reward.

SH: Being stateside during the war, were there any interactions with USO?

LD: Oh, yes. I had my share of encounters.

SH: Were they different shows that were put on or were there canteens?

LD: Well, there was, I remember one place playing bridge with some ladies, some place, and I remember the USO dances. They would bring in busloads of girls. Yes, social life was, as an enlisted man, you really didn't have much time for that sort of stuff. I remember when I was living in New Brunswick before the war, across the street from where I lived up there in Somerset Avenue was a cigar factory. It was a Hungarian neighborhood, well, I mean, Hungarian/American neighborhood, and I used to see this girl there, and I thought, "By God, she was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen." And I don't know if she worked in the area or stores and things like that. Walking up and down the street, going back and forth to school, I would quite often see her, and I don't know how [it] worked out, but I got to meet her, know her, and her name was Olga. Well, for some reason, as soon as she started to talk, this whole aura somehow I got up for her, began to sort of fall away. She was, I don't know, somehow very crude and not exactly what I had anticipated when I looked at her, and, I don't know, maybe we went out a couple of times, but I quickly, once I got to know her, I somehow quickly lost interest in her, and, I guess, it became self evident. Because when I got back, this must have been, oh, they sent us away for basic training out of the school, and then we came back to Rutgers, or something, and I remember one day I'm walking down the street, and I turned the corner and bumped right into Olga, hadn't seen her. She said, "Oh, there you are," she said, and I said, "Well, Olga, I'm in the army now." "Oh, Leonard Dabundo," she said, "I hope you go into battle and get both your eyes shot out." [laughter]

SH: What a blessing.

LD: Yes, I forgot about that.

SH: We've often ask about the send off, but that tops it. Were there other women who were nicer to you?

LD: Oh, yes, I ran into, I remember one day, I come home to Pleasantville, and for some reason I went down to high school, and my brother went wandering around the halls, and all my brother said was, "Len, why don't you come down to school?" He said, "There's a teacher there I'd like you to meet." So, I went down the school hall and found this class, and after class was excused, and the teacher come out to the hall, and he introduced us, and then he left, and she said, "Oh, these goddamn little devils in there," she said. "I can't teach them a damned thing," and I went out with her a couple of times. There was a lot, and, it wasn't all work and no play.

SH: As an officer training the troops, in Louisiana, what did the fellow officers do at the end of the day?

LD: Play cards.

SH: Play cards?

LD: Generally, we played cards.

SH: At the officers' club?

LD: Club, yes. Played cards around the clock.

SH: Did you get to do any other traveling at all?

LD: Not too much. There wasn't a heck of a lot to see down there, really. Nobody was busy as I say it was, we hung around. My recollection was they played cards.

SH: Okay. You come back, and you're discharged from Fort Dix, and you report to Rutgers. Do you remember your graduation or what your plans were after graduation?

LD: For sometime, there, I went to a job interview, and I don't know whether this was prior to graduation, but Bethlehem Steel was looking for a lot of people, and I don't know whether this was part of the school or they had set up this meeting. But, anyway, they had offered me a job, and when I graduated I immediately went to Bethlehem. Yes, I had to get on this job.

SH: The Bethlehem plant in Pennsylvania?

LD: In Bethlehem.

SH: Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

LD: Sure. It wasn't much hanging around, I mean.

SH: Just got right to work?

LD: Yes, pretty much so.

SH: Now you were working at Bethlehem when the Korean War broke out?

LD: Right.

SH: What kind of a shock was it, then, to get orders?

LD: You know, you open up this letter, and it says, "Please report to," not please, "Report to Camp Drum," someplace in Maryland. I forget what it was, some place on such and such a date. So I'd just got married, no, I've been married about a year or so.

SH: Did you marry somebody from Pleasantville?

LD: From Johnstown, I married a girl from Johnstown.

SH: What were your plans, I mean, what did you have to do? Did you bring her home or…

LD: No, well, she was living at our home, we were living in Johnstown. In fact, we were living, I'd moved in with her mother, a widow, and so I reported down to Fort Drum. I got sworn back into active duty. That's where it went for the next year and a half.

SH: Were you sent to Korea?

LD: Yes.

SH: Can you talk a little bit about, you know, from reporting in, where did they send you next, and what did you do?

LD: Well, I was there two or three months, and, then, when orders came out, "You're going to Korea," so that was pretty much settled that.

SH: Who were you assigned to?

LD: Well, you mean over in Korea? Well, I was assigned with an outfit called the Signal Corps Long Lines Signal Company. It was an outfit that was responsible for maintaining communications from the frontlines, back down to Pusan. It was maintaining communications in South Korea. They didn't have much in South Korea in a way of communications. Pretty basic country there, mostly small farmers growing rice, and that sort of stuff.

SH: Were you up on the front, or were you…

LD: No, I wasn't in the front. Our outfit was mostly far from the front, on back. Things had pretty well settled down at this point. The front had been pretty well established there, and there really wasn't a heck a lot of fighting going on at this point.

AG: What was your opinion of communism? Did you support going over to Korea?

LD: Well, it never really had, I didn't think too much about it one way or the other, politically, to tell you the truth. The government declared war, and I was called to active duty, and, maybe, I wasn't very political in those days, I guess. Most of the people I knew weren't either. Didn't have very strong opinions.

SH: Were there other people from Bethlehem in your area of work that were called back as well?

LD: Not that I recall.

SH: Did you run into any of the Rutgers men that you knew when you were there?

LD: No.

SH: Tell us what a typical day was like for you in Korea? Did you move around a lot, were you pretty…

LD: Well, I was put in charge of a, since I worked at Bethlehem Steel, and I was working in the electrical section there or supplying power and whatnot, the colonel there in Korea said, "Well, we got a lot of power units over here supplying the electricity and power." See, we had this four-hundred-mile telephone service extending from Yong Dong Po down to Pusan, and every forty miles, or so, they had what they called the repeater station. Well, a repeater station is something more than a way; you take a signal, telephone signal, and you're sending it on wires. As it goes along this wire, it weakens, so every point you got to strengthen, re-energize the signal, and send it down another, and so at this place you need electric power. You had to have battery-powered units there, and so I was put in charge of the section that operated these power units of all these places. There are about thirty men, I guess, working for me. Then we employed a lot of Koreans as helpers.

SH: How well supplied were you as far as the equipment that you needed to do your job?

LD: Well, yes and no. I mean, generally, we had what we needed, but occasionally, we had to go out in the blackmarket and buy stuff.

SH: Really?

LD: Yes, not too often, but now and then, we'd have to do that, we'd resort to that but, again, it was war, and nothing was perfect. You did the best you could.

SH: By the time you got there, were you issued the proper clothing to keep warm and…

LD: Oh, yes, as an officer you supplied your own clothing. You bought your own; you purchased your own clothing. The government didn't give you any clothing, maybe fatigues or something like that, but, oh, yes, there was no problem in that regard, and, for the food, most of the food was imported. We had a mess hall there, and a bunch of Korean women cooked, did all the kitchen work and whatnot. So from that standpoint…

SH: So you actually had a camp.

LD: Yes, in fact, it was an old factory that the army had taken over, and that's where we had set up our main headquarters in.

SH: Were you housed in the factory itself?

LD: No, then up the road, they had taken over an old schoolhouse, and that was the, we had the rooms and bunks in the schoolhouse.

SH: How were the Korean people faring at that point?

LD: Well, it was pretty tough. But for those who worked for the army, I guess they managed to do pretty well, but, otherwise, you didn't have too much conversation. First of all, you couldn't understand them. I mean, the language, they had the language problem, and then their living wasn't that great. I mean, their things weren't, but when you just see them out on the road say, working, let's say, farmers working in the fields; it's a tough life, but they were used to it, I guess. They were used to it.

SH: Did you get any R&Rs while you were there? Were you sent to Japan?

LD: No, never went back to Japan.

SH: How many months were you in Korea?

LD: I was over there about ten months, I guess, about ten months over there.

SH: Do you remember what months you were there or what year?

LD: Yes, I went, I remember we were on the boat sailing over on New Year's Eve, remember there used to be an old newscaster named Gabriel Heatter, ever hear of him, Gabriel Heatter? I remember hearing him broadcasting on New Year's Eve, … Gabriel Heatter, I remember him saying, "Oh the war is over, the war is ending;" you know, here we are on this boat sailing over to Japan. The boat landed in Japan, and there was another boat to going to Korea.

SH: How long were you in Japan?

LD: Just a couple of weeks.

SH: Did you get out to see what it looked like?

LD: I had wandered around a little bit, not a heck of a lot.

SH: Because I just wondered if you saw any of the effects of World War II?

LD: No, not that. We were in some seaport there, and that was where we stayed pretty much. Then we got on this other boat, went to Korea.

SH: What were your opinions of McArthur?

LD: Well, really…

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

AG: This continues our interview with Mr. Leonard N. Dabundo, conducted by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Ashley Greenblatt on April 5, 2007, in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

SH: Please continue. We were talking about your life in Korea, and I asked about McArthur and Truman and their…

LD: Well, I never really got too involved in that as, I recall. At the time, it didn't concern me at all.

SH: The other officers weren't talking about it?

LD: No. I don't think it was much of topic of conversation, to the best of my recollection. It wasn't the thing that interested us the most.

SH: What interested you the most?

LD: What interested me? I guess ending the war, getting back home, probably, yes.

AG: When you came back home was there a lot of turbulence among the different things going on back at home, like Civil Rights and…

LD: After a while, not then that I ran into, whether I noticed it enough to have bothered me. As I recall, I didn't think it, there wasn't really too much in the Korean War, I don't think. It didn't create any backlash like the Vietnam War did. People somehow sort of accepted it and moved on, and I don't recall anything big.

SH: Were there any African American troops?

LD: Yes, as a matter of fact, after, you know, World War II was fought with a segregated army, then, after World War II, Harry Truman integrated the services, and in Korea I had a few, some black fellows in my unit. I remember one incident, one day, I'm sitting there at my desk, and I

had this one fellow, Jackson, nineteen-year-old kid, lanky kid from Mississippi, came running into the camp out of breath one morning. I said, "Jackson." I said, you know, "What the hell are you running for?" He says, "Oh, lieutenant." He said, "I was out here on the road, I just saw a bad accident," he said, "A couple of GIs in a jeep ran into a couple of Koreans and," he said, "Crowd of people started gathering around," and I said, "Well, why? You aren't involved, why did you start running?" He said, "My mother told me," she said, "Son, if you're ever around any place where something happens, get the hell out of there because you're gonna get blamed for it." Yes, Jackson, I'll never forget Jackson.

SH: Were the troops truly integrated?

LD: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, right. No, separation in the barracks, or anything like that. It was just integrated, fully integrated. That was the first time, really.

SH: What about the UN forces, did you have any interaction with them?

LD: Never. Used to run into them, occasionally, but never, really, real contacts with any of them.

SH: Working on the communication lines and things that you were involved in, were you ever under fire?

LD: Well, occasionally, we had some, I guess, I don't know what you will call them. See, we were back in the country that really was mostly, wasn't much going on, but, now and then, there would be. As an example, somebody was, I don't know whether they were native rebels, or who, would try to stir up some difficulties, maybe attack our stations. But it wasn't very frequently, as I recall. The area back where we worked, pretty well under control.

SH: There were no sabotage or anything about your work?

LD: No, nothing. We never ran into anything like that.

SH: That's why I wondered if you had to keep

LD: It's not like today, over there, that you ran into, in the Middle East, nothing like that. The armies were separated at the 38th Parallel. Where it was, the North Koreans and the Chinese were above that, and we were below it, pretty much kept the two forces separated, not much going on.

SH: In other words, the Koreans that were in your area were supporting you and…

LD: Generally, right, yes.

AG: I always had an interest in the Korean War. Do you feel though that it was overshadowed a bit? When Vietnam occurred, historically like the Korean War, was brushed over a bit even

though it kind of led into a lot of other events like the Vietnam War? I mean it doesn't get enough credit, wouldn't you agree?

LD: I don't know how to answer that. Of course, it was the same as the Vietnam War; it was never really declared, I don't think. It was just Truman decided to move in and as far as the …

SH: It was called a police action.

LD: Yes, right, and the Korean War was more, I guess, your last real conventional war. We had the North Korean armies, and you had the South Korean armies and us, and they fought like old wars where one army against another, and that was really, I guess, a conventional war. It was really the last conventional war we fought in. Since then they had all been these unconventional.

AB: I never really thought of it that way.

SH: What about the Chinese threat?

LD: They had them pretty well settled, not settled, but pretty well had come to terms with, let me say, by the time I got there, pretty well. The Chinese came down and US organized and stopped them at the 38th Parallel, and so their threat was pretty well ended.

SH: Any discussion of the Russians and where they fit in all of these?

LD: I don't recall anything along that line. May have been but…

SH: I just wondered if the officers sitting around at night in Korea were they playing cards again?

LD: Probably. There wasn't much to do.

SH: Were you a good card player?

LD: No, well, mostly poker.

SH: You said you were in Korea…

LD: About ten months.

SH: Then what day and month do you remember, when you are sent back, did you get your orders to come back?

LD: It was about September, I think, as a matter of fact, maybe October.

SH: Had the truce been signed, I mean or the peace talks started?

LD: No, I think it was still going on in '51.

SH: When you were sent back.

LD: Yes, they were still going on.

SH: Was there any thought that you might have to return?

LD: No, well, it didn't really because then the next year, I think, the war just the end, by '52, I think it was.

SH: Were you given the opportunity to stay in the reserves again when you got back?

LD: Probably was, but I think I must have dropped out. I can't recall.

SH: Did you stay in the reserves, maybe, would be a better question?

LD: Yes. I've had no contact with the army since then. I got discharged, cut the cord for good.

SH: Went back to Bethlehem?

LD: No. I went to work in Philadelphia. I was not too crazy about Johnstown, got a job in Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Electric Company.

SH: Did you already have that job lined up before you left?

LD: No, no. Walked in off the street, to their employment office.

SH: Did you?

LD: They hired me.

SH: Tell us then about your family if you would like?

LD: Well, my wife came down and we had a child, a daughter. In 1954, my wife kept, we lived in Collingswood, New Jersey, in an apartment house, and she kept pestering me, she wanted to take our daughter, Laura, down to the shore. So, finally one day somehow I agreed, went to the shore, beach, went to the beach with Laura. A couple of weeks later, one morning in the apartment, she said, "Leonard, I can't move my legs." She was in bed. She said, "I can't get up. I can't move my legs." So I went out and got a doctor called Joe DeAbuzzio, and Joe came over and looked at my wife, did some things, and, finally, said, "I think your wife has polio," which turned out to be correct. At that time there was a polio epidemic going on around here, and they'd set up a place in Camden, called the Camden Hospital, now called the Municipal Hospital, and my wife got moved in there. She was there as a patient for about six months, in her pregnancy, and one morning; I would stop on the way home from work. Usually every evening, I'd stop in, spend a couple of hours there. Her mother came down and stayed with us to take care of the baby, and one morning, they called me up at the hospital and said, "You better come in

here." So I went into the hospital, and they said she had developed an aneurysm. There was some blood clots in her legs that had probably gotten loose and worked their way up into her lungs. Well, you know, you've heard this tale: sometimes, generally, you hear it mentioned along religious circles, where sometimes you might be asked to, the question, "Well, should we save the child, the unborn child, or should we save the mother?" They asked me that. They said that was what the situation has come to. I said, well, I didn't think twice, I said, "My gosh, you got to save her." Well, as it turned out, they saved neither one of them. They both passed away. Created another big problem, another big turning point. It was about fifty years ago.

SH: Was your mother-in-law able to stay and help you raise the little girl?

LD: She took the girl back to Johnstown with her. Laura grew up there in Johnstown, and I stayed around here, worked at the Philadelphia Electric Company. Laura and the grandmother developed, I suppose, felt sometimes I met a couple of women, and I just thought, "If I get married and bring Laura here, from her grandmother," it was just a terrible thought. I just couldn't face it, so, finally, my daughter stayed there, graduated from high school, then she went to college, and that went pretty well. Through all of her growing years, I would make the trip to Johnstown, I drove the Turnpike for sixteen years, every three weeks, or so. I always drove up to see her.

SH: She's quite an educated young woman I understand.

LD: Yes, she got a PhD, in English, college professor.

SH: Thank you for sharing that unbelievable story, that is true. There was a polio epidemic during that time.

LD: Yes, and when she was into that, they came out with a serum, polio serum.

SH: Before we proceed, Ashley, were there any other questions on your list that you would like to ask?

AG: I don't think so. You got a lot of the ones I wanted to ask. No, I definitely have a better understanding of the Korean War, what it would be like, a little bit, to be there. So, no, I think it pretty much answered all my questions.

-TAPE PAUSED-

SH: We paused the tape to get a first-hand look at the novel that Mr. Dabundo wrote entitled *Changing Skins.* In our conversation we remembered the name of the colonel that was the head of the OSS that was called out of the Pograms and his name was-

LD: Wild Bill Donovan.

SH: Did you know who he was at that time or would that have been…

LD: Well, the significance, he may have been in the news, he was a well-known figure, but the connection as to what they were calling him, I don't think struck, I didn't connect things.

SH: Well, are there any other questions, or memories, that the conversation this afternoon has awakened for you or reminded you of?

LD: Well, I'm sure that many things there, but at the moment, it's.

SH: Well, thank you so much.

LD: I'm the sort of person, I don't dwell too much in the past. I mean, generally, I try to keep looking ahead.

AG: That's a good philosophy.

SH: That's a great philosophy. Do you have an interest in art? I noticed your walls are filled with…

LD: That's my wife; you can credit her with that.

SH: Really?

LD: Yes, the décor, yes, that's all she ever worked.

SH: Was she an artist?

LD: No.

SH: Just liked it.

LD: Except the clock, I made that.

SH: What is the clock made out…

LD: They're doorknobs, old-style doorknobs. That's a cabinet cover.

SH: Oh, all right. I've been looking at that and to describe it for the tape, it's a blue wash on, as he said, a cabinet door but the hours are designated by the very beautiful glass door knobs.

LD: Yes, they're all done with them and doorknobs…

SH: Doorknobs, they are small round circles. It is very clever and, again, I thank you and Ashley for talking with us today.

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

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