

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH V. DEMASI

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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PHILLIPSBURG, NEW JERSEY

APRIL 1, 1996

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Joseph V. Demasi on April 1, 1996, in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Tara Liston: Tara J. Liston.

KP: I guess I would like to begin by asking you something about your parents, who both came to the United States from Italy.

Joseph Demasi: Yes, and they both came from a town called Bunovento. Bunovento, in Italian, *buno* is good and *vento* is wind, and my mother's maiden name was Buonoanno. *Bunoanno* is "good year," and my father was Demasi. They were married in Italy and came to America around 1910, at that particular time. And I was their third child, third child, and I had a brother after me, four years, who also served in the Army and he was overseas. He is about two years after me, my brother, Anthony, and my two sisters, one is eighty-five and one is seventy-eight, and they are both alive.

KP: What prompted your parents to come to the United States?

JD: Well, my father came over six times and my mother finally said, "Look, if you marry me, I want to go to America, too." So, he says, "Okay." He was going with my mother and coming to America and coming back, and he had come over here and worked for two, three months. And he enjoyed hunting. That's one habit that I picked up off my father, because I have hunted all over the world, from Africa to Alaska. Just about every animal, I've hunted.

KP: What would your father do, I mean ...

JD: Oh, my father was a laborer and he tells me the story of Thomas Edison. Thomas Edison took a liking to him. And he worked for Thomas Edison when Thomas Edison built a cement plant. He built the cement plant in New Village and I still live in the house that I was born in. It is a big house [with] big barns. The walls are about a foot-and-a-half [of] thick stone. My father tells a story about Thomas Edison. My father, in addition to working, he also farmed. He had this one big pig, weighed [about] 800 pounds. Thomas Edison says, "I want to see it." So, he put Thomas Edison in a buggy and took Thomas Edison to see this big pig. My father got to know him pretty well, because he then started being his runner around the plant when they were building the plant from scratch. Thomas Edison wouldn't leave the place to go to sleep. He turns around and he used a room next to his office with a wide bench and a little mattress and he'd sleep on it. My father says, "Do you want to sleep at our house?" and all that, and he [Thomas Edison] says, "No." He says, you know, and I use this expression a lot, "Anytime that you sleep more than two hours, it's a complete waste of time." He would take a nap for two hours and he would be all geared up to keep going. So, my father would tell me all the little stories [about] the Edison Cement Mill. I'm going to take you back to the Depression days, when the tuition at Rutgers was \$333 a year. The superintendent was very friendly with my father and a lot of people were on welfare, but, it wasn't welfare. They just handed you food. They didn't give you a check back in those days, all right? You went someplace and you got yourself a bag of flour and you baked your own bread. They should do that now, you know, give the food and go ask them to make their own food. And we go back to, I got deviated there, ... the Depression days. The superintendent gave me a job, but he says, "Joe, a lot of men have families and you want to work to go to school." And I said, "Yes, I want to work because [of] my father and my mother." My

mother was not permitted to go to school, because her father said that [if] women get educated, then they can write notes to their boyfriends. So, women don't go to school. And that was the feeling of the women in the country, in Italy, at the turn of the century, when she was a young girl. My father could read and write. So, my mother says, "You gotta go to school, you gotta go." I was a good student. In fact, I skipped the fifth grade, from fourth to sixth. But the only episode I can say about school [was], the first day I went to school, I ran out of the school and I ran home. It may have been about a block away. My mother says, "What are you doing?" I said, "Mom, they don't speak our language. I don't know what they are talking about," because I could talk only Italian. Do you follow me? They all want me to talk Italian, because that dialect is gone. Do you follow me? When I go to Italy, they say, "Come on, *parle Italienne*," and they all sit around and laugh, because I am using an expression that their grandfathers have used. Do you follow me? And they're gone. So, anyway, getting back to that, so then, my oldest sister grabbed ahold of me. She was, like, in the third grade and said, "You have got to come back to school." The teacher, I will never forget, put me on her lap and she said, "Okay, you're going to be a good boy here and we are going to teach you." So, I took to school and, once I start studying, why, it sure came a little easier to me. But during the Depression is when I was ready for college [but had] no money. But the superintendent gave me the job and, at that time, I was a good wrestler. I was captain of the wrestling team in high school and I was winning. The coach said, "Joe, I will see what I can do." The next thing you know, I was told to take a State Scholarship. In those days, one boy and one girl from the county got a State Scholarship. Would you believe, I took the test, went down there, two days back then, in 1938. I took the test and I got a State Scholarship. Then, the superintendent gave me a job in the summertime, working from midnight to eight in the morning. So, that kept me out of trouble, kept me working and I got by Rutgers. I took government service and I wanted to get in some phase of government. Whether I would have gravitated to law or gravitated to probation department or stuff like that, I don't know.

KP: Was your father always able to work during the Depression or was his employment erratic?

JD: Yes, because of the cement [factory] and his friendship with Thomas Edison who ran the plant. So, my father, he worked and my people were able to acquire three or four houses, because, in the Depression days, a lot of houses, if you just continued to pay the mortgage, it was your house. People just said, "Hey, I can't continue to pay the mortgage."

TL: What kind of attitude did Thomas Edison have? Do remember if he was a nice man, just a workaholic or ...

JD: He was a workaholic but a gentleman. He admired working people.

KP: How often did you meet him? Did you ever meet him?

JD: Yes, I did.

KP: How old were you?

JD: I was in grammar school. I will never forget when the whole grammar school class was excused to go down to the quarry. They put us in a safe place, all us kids, and they let [go] more dynamite blasts. The whole side of the quarry just went on down. It made a lot of publicity and all of that.

Thomas Edison was there. In fact, today, that quarry is full of water and they built houses all around it and they call it Edison Lake.

KP: You mentioned your mother never learned how to read and write.

JD: No, because her father was the mayor of the town of Airola, a town of about 5,000 people, and that was the, "Don't educate your daughters. That way they cannot write notes to their boyfriends."

KP: What about your mother's own daughters? What kind of education did they get?

JD: They went and graduated eighth grade and they all went to work, just like all the other girls of immigrants, okay? All the other girls of immigrants, none of them went to high school. The boys went to high school. Of the little town of New Village that I am from, which was basically, at that time, mostly Italian people and the rest were farmers. Farmers that may have been the second, third generations farmers. They went to high school, but I was the first one to go to college. Later on in life, of course, others went on to school, but I am taking you back in '38, '39, '40, in those years. I was the only one who went to school. The town was not a big town. It was maybe about 1,800 people. That's about all.

KP: If it hadn't been for the State Scholarship, would you have been able to go to college?

JD: That was problematical. My mother would do anything to make sure, because she always would say, "I wish I could read and write." If that were to happen today, you could almost take her to grammar school and say, "Mom, get over there and learn." I think, today, a lot of these so-called "immigrants" are learning, at least, the English language, anyway. That impressed me in my studies and all that, knowing the handicap. I call it a handicap that a person has, that can't read a newspaper.

KP: Growing up, you mentioned that there was a large Italian community in New Village and some farmers. Were the farmers Italian or were they native-born Americans?

JD: Well, we had, I would say, maybe half a dozen were Italian. All the rest of them were native-born Americans.

KP: Was there any tension between the Italian-American community and the native-born farmers?

JD: No, there was not any tension. You know why? Because my job was, before I got the job in the cement mill, I got that after I started college, but, in high school, what would I do in the summertime, I would work for these farmers. Most of them were, we would say, people who were here, the Oberlys, the Alpaughs, the regular farmers. They would pay us twenty-five cents an hour and they would give us our lunch. I did that every day during the summertime. I would get on a bicycle and go from one farm to the other farm and work. I thought that that was the best exercise, that I did not have to go to the Y, like I go now. That was the best exercise that could come about, and you did not have time to get in trouble, not to get in trouble, go to work and that's it.

KP: When you weren't working and going to school, what kind of activities do you remember taking part in?

JD: Well, the activity was the hunting and fishing. I loved to fish and I loved to hunt. In the fall of the year, we would do that, and, in the spring of the year, that would be it. Traveling came later on in my life, but I am talking about back in the days of high school and college. They were the only things and working around the house. Remember, back in our time, ... in the Depression days, ... we had to go and get coal, because the furnaces operated on coal. Not like today, you turn the thermostat and that's all there is to it, gas. I feel that the work that we did, I look at the property I live on now, it's two acres and it is all grass. Well, outside the front yard, all the rest was garden. Do you follow me? Then, you worked in the garden. When I look at those mason jars that my mother would fill up, the whole cellar was full of mason jars. You grew the vegetables, the tomatoes and all of that, and it was that type of a life that, today, you could never imagine, unless you saw a film. Or his generation, they don't know anything. They were born in money.

Joseph Demasi's nephew: I don't know this guy. I don't know who he is. He is an impostor.

JD: That's my nephew. I never got married. That's my nephew. I had to talk him into going to law school. He was in the computer field [and] he said, "Computers are it." He's right. He guessed it. He said, "Okay, I'll go to law school." He's been here now ten years.

TL: It looks like he enjoys it.

JD: Oh, yeah. I have a lot of fun with him.

KP: How active were your parents in the church? Did you attend Mass regularly?

JD: Oh, my God, the church, the church was everything. The church was everything. In fact, back in those days, when not everybody had a car, when I was a kid coming to Phillipsburg, right now, I go to St. Philip and St. James Catholic Church, the priest would come on out to, the Italians always build their own little club house, social club, Italian-American club, and the beer license and they would get together and all of that. Well, then, on Sunday, instead of having the dance floor empty, they would put all the chairs there and the priest would come and say Mass at nine o'clock on Sunday morning. That's where I went when I had to go through the Confirmation and all of that, right there in the little town, New Village, in the Italian-American club house. Today, they have beautiful churches. But then, not everybody had a car. My God, a car wasn't, not everybody had a car. My father didn't get a car until, my God, when I was almost going to high school.

TL: Is New Village still primarily Italian?

JD: No. In fact, I don't even know who my neighbors are. I have the house that I live in. I made three apartments out of it. There's twenty rooms and I made three apartments out of it and I've got mostly single people there. But you've got to live someplace. I love the country.

KP: It sounds like there were a lot of community activities. You mentioned the Italian-American hall.

JD: Oh, sure. Every wedding, every baptism, we'd have a baby, why, the thing is, right away, "We're going to have a baptism." Everybody goes and, back in those days, I still have the wine press. When I look at the wine press that my father would [use to] make eight barrels of wine, and each barrel was fifty gallons, eight times fifty is 400, and how many days in the year are there? In other words, a gallon a day. When they went to work, he used to bring wine to Thomas Edison. It was routine for them to put a bottle of wine in their lunch pail. Just as routine as, today, you'd take a Coke or 7-UP or whatever you want to bring. The wine was just like putting olive oil, there's a million salad dressings today, and, to this day, I have yet to buy anything other than the olive oil and vinegar, that's it, olive oil and vinegar, I don't want to hear about any other dressings. But with the wine, that was it. I have got to say this, in our family, nobody smoked, and, to this day, none of my brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, nobody smokes, never smoked.

KP: Even in the Army, you were never tempted?

JD: No, no, and it was unusual in my time not to smoke, very unusual. Everybody smoked. "Hey, Joe, how about [a cigarette]?" No, I said, "It don't agree with me. I don't go for it."

TL: What did you do with the cigarettes in your K rations?

JD: What?

TL: What did you do with the cigarettes in your rations?

JD: I gave them to the French girls. We gave them away to everybody that smoked. So, there you are.

KP: You mentioned the wine press and the wine ...

JD: Yeah, right.

KP: Of course, the 1920s was also the era of Prohibition. How did ...

JD: It didn't amount to a hill of beans, because that's the way they did it in Italy, and they did it over here. I couldn't visualize any Revenue guy coming into a cellar and saying, "Hey, you got wine, where's your license?" Now, I could see if guys were selling it, that would be so. But as far as that was concerned, every house, every Italian house, that was my job, too, to crank away the grapes and, back when grapes were two dollars for twenty pounds, twenty pound boxes, they came in boxes. They had white wine, red wine, the Zinfandel, oh, God. But [we] never got involved, like a lot of people think, that they got involved in dandelion wine, no. It wasn't anything like that or any other kind of wine. It was strictly the grape wine. They knew what they were doing, too, good wine. And then they would play bocce. Bocce is that, you know the ball, not bowling, but it's bocce. We would take on Phillipsburg. New Village would take on Phillipsburg. They'd have about ten men. Now, they'd have to roll the ball down the Edison Road, from Route 57. The main road down to Edison Road is one mile. So, everybody rolls the ball and the one that was the furthest, that's the point that they would roll the next ball, all the way down to the Edison and back. Then, they'd go up to the club house and drink the wine. Whoever lost had to pay. So, that was one way that they played bocce.

The men did that. That was before my time. When I got to be, got out of college, then the war, it was a whole different thing. The old timers were starting to disappear.

KP: You mentioned that you wrestled. Did you play any other sports in high school?

JD: Yeah, I was the third baseman, the hot corner. We'd call it "the hot corner," for the high school team, the third baseman. That was it and now, you should ask the question of why wasn't I permitted to play football and I wanted to play football.

KP: Oh, you did?

JD: I wanted to, but they wouldn't let me, because, in grammar school, my brother is a cripple, because in grammar school, he was in fifth or sixth grade, and they got [to] playing tackle in the grammar school. I was three years ahead of my brother, I was in the eighth grade. He had to be operated on and his arm is such that he can't straighten his left arm out to that, and it stays just like that. Now, the doctor that operated on his elbow, he threw his elbow out. You can see an ugly scar there and all of that. He cannot straighten his arm out that way. All I had to do was mention "football" and my mother would whack me around. "Football? Look what it did to your brother. Look what it did to your brother." Do you follow me? In those days, there was no insurance, no nothing. You had to work to pay the doctor, to pay the hospital, and the money is needed for food. What's a kid paying for medical? Do you follow that? It wasn't such a thing now that schools have insurance and all of that. So, I was not permitted to play football. But wrestling, I got by on that, because I said, "Hey, mom, I meet one guy and that's all I gotta meet." In football, you've got eleven guys that can run you down.

TL: She bought that?

JD: Yeah, oh, yeah, she permitted me, and baseball, but not football. See, now, because the experience that she went through, first of all, to see my brother with that arm. My brother, incidentally, went on to college, Lafayette, and he got to be a big engineer. In fact, he got to be general manager of General Crush Stone. In fact, while I was Xeroxing little things and what-not, I had just given that to my brother. General Crush Stone has got about eleven, twelve plants from Tennessee to Buffalo. He was a big general engineer for them. So, he was allowed to go to school, but my two sisters, grammar school and stopped.

TL: Did they ever pursue any other schooling?

JD: Who's that?

TL: Your sisters.

JD: No, no. Back in the days, they did work for [Thomas?] Edison and guess what their job was? Back in the days, when they made cloth cement bags at Edison Cement, and their job was to sew the bags. The cloth runs that way and their job was to push them that way and sew the bags. Then, the bags were filled and that's it, the cloth bags. Now, all of a sudden, they are all paper, now aren't they? Cement's in the paper.

TL: They put your sisters out of work.

JD: Well, then, they went to the silk hosiery mill in Washington, New Jersey, about six miles from New Village. It didn't take long for the silk. There are no more silk stockings. Now, then, all of them went to the factories where they make women's clothing and all of that there, and they gravitated to this big area north of Easton, Pennsylvania, here that does that kind of work. But they worked all their lives, my sisters worked all their lives and they get a pension now.

KP: Did they ever marry, your two sisters?

JD: Oh, yeah. My one sister had no children, but my other one had a boy and a girl and they are both school teachers. They are both school teachers and I have got to take my hat off to her son. One's a woman and one is a son. He's about forty and he's been picked in North Hampton County, right here, next county in Easton, Pennsylvania. They have a special school with fifteen students, the incorrigibles, the ones that stand up to the teachers [and say,] "You want to lose your house, hit me, you punk." I said, "I have to come." He said, "You can come." They run out of the school and he went to grab one of them and right away, [and] there is a million lawyers are trying to see if there is an assault and battery against the pupil. I said, "If he runs out school, let him run. Just pick up the phone and say, 'Hey, Jim Brown decided to get up and run home.'" He's getting, I think, about 5,000 dollars a year. He said, "Joe, one year, I will not take it." It's a new project, where they try to get these incorrigibles out of the regular schools. These are all high school kids. He said, "Go ahead, hit me, touch me, you're afraid, aren't you?" They talk like that. It's just too much for me. I said, "Buddy, we're in another world. It's another world."

KP: You wrote on the pre-interview survey that your parents were Democrats. How did they feel about Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal?

JD: Oh, they talked about it when they came up with the Social Security and that pension. Why, that was the most unheard [of] thing in the whole world, because no plants were giving any pension. You could work as long as you wanted and nothing was deducted from your pay or anything like that. I remember the early days of the union, the cement union. I remember the early years. My father, by that time, was just about ready to retire and I remember the fights. You had my father, who was against the union. He said, "If you do your work and what-not, well, you'll get your increase." And then you have people who felt that you had to have a union, so that someone in the plant couldn't say, "Hey, you didn't do the work right. Go home, you're finished." They feel that they are being taken advantage of. You have ten years of working, fifteen years of working, and you don't have an opportunity to defend yourself. So, my father was not for the union. I can remember, as a young man, him saying that the union is no good, it is no good, because he felt that if you did your work, because I associate it, because he was friends, not friends, you know, not friends, but he loved [Thomas?] Edison and couldn't understand how someone could just like, just like today, you shoot your parents, every so often, you know, or try to beat your parents or something like that. Hey, your parent is your parent and Edison, he runs the plant, you've got to respect him. Whatever he says, whatever he does, is right.

KP: Wasn't the cement factory in fact, unionized?

JD: Well, yes. It was unionized when I was in college, in the '40s. Yes, I was in college.

KP: What was it unionized by CIO unions?

JD: Yeah, AF of L.

KP: But it sounds like there was quite a bit of struggle.

JD: Yes, yes, there was quite a bit of struggle, I recall, because our house is right on the head of leaving Route 57 and, zoom, you take a right and there is the Edison Road, one mile away. Our house was right there on that, facing the Edison Road. So, we got to see the pickets and all of that going on. We got to see that part of it, too.

KP: You had mentioned earlier about the State Scholarship and passing the test. Would you have liked to have gone anywhere else besides Rutgers or were you just happy to go to college?

JD: Well, to us, the state university was the place to go. And we saw here, Lafayette and what-not, but we were under the impression, at least I was, and with the school teachers at Washington High School, that the rich kids went to Lafayette and to Lehigh. Let's see, let's forget Princeton and all the others. The closest to us here, the closest to us where we could come home weekends would have been Rutgers.

KP: Would your parents have wanted you or would you even have thought of trying to attend a Catholic school such as Fordham or Saint Peter's in Jersey City?

JD: They had discussed it but the element of the scholarship, once I got on that there, all the rest of it [was] finished, because, frankly, the financial thing was the big thing. It was unheard of, because I would be the first Italian boy that would be going to college from my neck of the woods.

KP: You must have felt very proud and very exceptional that you were the only one. You had, no doubt, classmates who were fairly smart. I mean, you had done very well in the State Scholarship.

JD: But a lot of the young fellows didn't have the objective of wanting to go to college, because, at that time, rich was synonymous with college. If you're from a poor family, what do you want to [do], where are you going? Where are you going? That's a place for the rich kids, and it wasn't until World War II and the GI Bill that opened the door to a college education. Today, if you don't have a college education, you are nowhere. But World War II did it by giving everybody the GI Bill. I took advantage of it. That's when I went to law school and, being a disabled vet, I have a ten percent disability. And I took advantage of that and we even made more money while going to law school, which I went to Rutgers Law.

KP: Where did you live at Rutgers?

JD: Oh, the first place I lived was right across from Winants Hall, in a place with a room. I think the room, at that time, was ten dollars a week or something like that.

KP: So, you lived in a private home.

JD: A private home, yeah, yeah, private home, two of us, me and Seymour. The thing that amazed me about him was, every night, he would put on a little black cap and get on his knees and say a prayer and I [would say], "What are you doing that for?" And he would say, "Joe, I am Jewish and we do that." I said, "Oh, is that right?" I didn't know anything. I was Catholic, I didn't know.

KP: Was it Seymour Silberberg?

JD: Yeah.

KP: I interviewed him this summer.

JD: Is he a doctor?

KP: A dentist.

JD: Yeah.

TL: There's a big list of people ...

KP: Yeah, I wish I had brought the list of people I have interviewed. Where else did you live? Did you stay ...

JD: I stayed there and then I went to Winants Hall. I went there and, guess what I did to work off all of my stuff? I cleared the tables. I got my meals, room and all that, and I worked with the person there to make certain that the boys did not violate the rules of the place and all of that there. Then, I went to the library and my job there was to put the books away. Then, I find out later on in life that all these fellows that get these school jobs, well, they never even saw the inside of a library. Do you follow me? Then, they get a check and I said, "Oh, my God, we did it differently when I went to school." I had to go there and sign in, what time I put there and put all the books back where they belonged in the library, cleared the tables. So, I worked and, in the summers, I worked in the cement mill. But you know, I think that work and keeping busy makes a better man out of young people today that have nothing to do, and they come up with midnight basketball.

KP: How well did your high school prepare you for Rutgers?

JD: I thought, I'll be very frank with you, going to college was completely different. If you look at my scholastic record, my first term there, and I studied hard, was not good. I think I got barely a C average or something, just enough to keep the scholarship. But then after that, I got As and Bs. But getting acclimated to their way of study and their way of questioning people, it was a new thing for us. So, I've got to say that I wasn't totally prepared for that. Although in high school, I did not take the course of college prep, you follow me?

KP: Which course did you take? Did you take commercial?

JD: I took, yeah, right, I took a regular commercial course, although I did take a lot of history and government service. I like to use this, if somebody says to me, "Joe, what's the best course you took in high school?" I would say, "The best one was typing." "Why typing?" I'll tell you why. When I became a lawyer, I didn't have to hire a secretary for two years. I was the speed champ at Washington High School. I took it two years, not one year, two years. You couldn't take it more than two years, your junior and senior. And that's it. Sixty words a minute and ten words off for every error. The company representative of the typewriter company would come down and give the test and all that and you would get a nice plaque and all that. I put that to use, all right? I put that to use. I didn't have to hire a secretary, because when I started to practice law, hey, I was the only Italian in Warren County. You had some of the Italians and whatnot and there was still that little thing there of not being too freely accepted and all of that. That had to develop.

KP: You had a rough time initially?

JD: Yeah, yeah, and the only thing that saved me was that, during the war, I saved my money. I couldn't spend it, and being a paratrooper, I got an extra hundred dollars a month. I was an officer and I had the money sent home. When I got back here, I had roughly 15,000 dollars in the bank. I went to the bank, I am a young lawyer and I wanted to buy this building and it was 5,000 dollars. They turned me down. So, I went to the bank and I took 5,000 dollars out and I paid cash for it. I never bought anything else. My credit is the lousiest credit in the world, because I never bought anything on credit the rest of my life!

TL: I have a real quick question, back tracking. With a lot of Italians, was there a lot of pro-Mussolini feeling before the war began?

JD: Was there was a lot of what?

TL: Pro-Mussolini feeling? Was there any?

JD: No. I don't think that there was that there feeling. I think it was the kind of a feeling that ... I don't know of anyone that would be fascist or do anything against our way of government. I remember that Franklin Roosevelt was the greatest man that there was. I know that my father campaigned for him and go to all the Italians say, "He's the one that's for the working man." And that was the big thing. But there wasn't that feeling in the rural country because all of them either worked in a plant and they all had a farm or their gardens and all of that and kept working all the time.

KP: You never joined a fraternity at college. Had you thought of it?

JD: I thought of it, the Alpha Chi Rho. I got the feeling that I don't think that I could have kept up with them financially. I always feel that if, that these kids had their parents [who] were doctors and professors, executives and all that there, and I felt that I would be a little hamstrung financially and the other way. Although, I enjoyed being with them a little bit, for two, three months and then I told them that I don't think that I would have the money to stay with them.

TL: You had the wrestling to keep up your social aspect, right?

JD: What?

TL: But you had the wrestling team ...

JD: Oh, yeah, sure, sure. I always made friends with people. As long as you keep joking and all of that with people, you get along. I got along well at Rutgers. I enjoyed it because I got to know all the athletes, whether they were football players and what-not.

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KP: How good was your wrestling coach to you? You wrestled for all four years.

JD: Where at?

KP: At Rutgers.

JD: Yeah, yeah. (Shepard?), Fred (Shepard?) was the coach, who happened to be a lawyer also, from Iowa. What's that?

KP: Did his being a lawyer influence you at all or was law something you had in the back of your mind when you started college?

JD: Well, when I started college, I was hoping to develop into that and, at that time, everything had to do with money. I don't know whether I, if the war didn't break out, whether or not I would have gone on to law school or not. But you see, there were no lawyers in the family. Let me tell you how the Italians would work. I think maybe other nationalities work like that, too. I'll tell you this one brief story. I went through open heart surgery when I was fifty-eight years old and the doctor who operated on me and I are good friends, Dr. Panebianco, who speaks broken English. I said, "Doc," I said, "How long you been in this country?" He says, "Joe, I'll tell you the story. My grandfather died at age thirty-four, a doctor. My father died a doctor at age thirty-three." I read in law school in Italy, in Sicily, Italy, [where] he was from. I had a lot of Sicilian experience, so I could talk to him, and I said, "I called, wrote and called, De Bakey in Texas and I told the doctor that story about my grandfather." And while I am talking about age, let me just digress one minute. My father had his heart attack at fifty-eight. I got mine at fifty-eight. I said, "Doc, and now your father, your grandfather at thirty-three, how old were you?" He says, "I got out of school about twenty-six years old. I called De Bakey. He says, 'You come on over to America.' I come to America." De Bakey gave him the test and what-not and he told me about the blockage and, "Without me getting a heart attack, he did open heart surgery on me, Joe" And, at that time, he was in his fifties, at that time when he operated on me. I keep in touch with him and lived through another open heart surgery, a second one, and now, he is in his sixties and he is alive. So, whatever your father was, that's what you are. So, if my father was a ditch digger, so I would end up ditching. A carpenter, you're a carpenter. And the names, the last names, Panebianco, *panebianco* is "white bread." And Ferraro, *ferraro*, that means you are an iron worker. Follow me? The names of the people, the Italian names, if you made a study of them, they denote some work that was done, see? So, anyway, to get back to that, it is hard to say that I am going to be such-and-such. Unlike today, you turn and say, "Hey, what do you want

to be?" and you say, "I want to be a cowboy." There's a whole lot of cowboy shows. But back in our time, pretty much, it was hard to break out of the wheel, the cycle, and that's why the young fellows, they went to work at plants, they went to work in construction. They got a job and the big thing at my time, a car and, on the billboards, just what you saw. "Ford 777. \$777 to buy a Ford." But they don't tell you it's twenty-five cents an hour. So, I think the ratio is still the same today, today and back in those days.

KP: You grew up in a very heavily Italian community. In fact, you spoke, it sounds like most of your growing up you spoke ...

JD: Always Italian to my mother, all the time.

KP: Did it feel odd to be at Rutgers where there were not many Italians?

JD: Well, I'll tell you who I befriended a lot were the Jewish boys, because I felt that they were almost like in my category. Do you follow me? Is it too cold in here?

TL: I'm always cold ...

KP: Why did you think that you were both, you and the Jewish students, were in the same boat? Was there anything very specific or was it just a general sense of camaraderie?

JD: Well, I always felt that we came from the poor class. Back in our time, it was rich and the poor, rather than a nationality. But, naturally, the people that got off the boat, ninety percent of them were poor. Today, they get off the boat, they're professors, they're doctors, they're this, they're that. But back in those days, the poor people were the ones who came over, the have-nots, the have-nots. Those who, that had it over there were, what would they come over here for? I got a good business over there. However, they were making money.

KP: Growing up, had you known any Jews?

JD: No, none at all, not until I went to college, not even in high school, not even in high school.

KP: Did you have any images of Jews that were dispelled by meeting them in person at Rutgers? Apparently, your roommate and his prayers at night were a surprise.

JD: Yeah, a surprise. He put the black hat on and I said, "What do you have to put a hat on for to say your prayers?" We say our prayers, too. The Catholics say their prayers, you know, and I don't exactly kneel. I kneel in church, but usually at home, you say your prayer, *Our Father* and a few other prayers. That's surprising, but I thought a lot of them, because, frankly, in our religion, Jesus was a Jew and our religion comes from the Jewish people and that's our recorded history. So, to me, I had no problem with them and I felt that they were like in our category at that time. Of course, as time went on, things were different, but I am taking you back at the time of going college in 1938, '39.

KP: Did you know Vinnie Utz?

JD: You bet I knew Vinnie.

KP: Most of you from the Class of '42 have a Vinnie Utz story, I have learned. Any recollections you have of Vinnie Utz when he was at Rutgers?

JD: Well, I know that, I can't come up with any particular story, but I do know that he was well-liked and he was always good for a laugh and a very active individual. What is Vinnie doing with himself now?

KP: He died in the '60s.

JD: In the '60s?

KP: Yeah. He had a very tragic accident.

JD: Yeah. Vinnie Utz was a great guy, no doubt about it.

KP: Most people also seem to remember very vividly Dean Metzger. He stood out. Do you have any recollections of Dean Metzger, either in a general sense or ...

JD: No, what I liked about him was that he'd come forthright with whatever had to be said or done and he wouldn't go, as we say, all around. I think he was pretty direct, he was, Dean Metzger.

KP: What about chapel? How did you feel about chapel?

JD: Chapel? Are we talking about ...

KP: At Rutgers, the mandatory chapel.

JD: Well, at that time, we went to that. Of course we went to that. To me, that was okay. I always, to this day, if it's a house of worship and we are praying to God, why, it's a good house, whether you're Amish or where you are from. One thing about the Catholics, we were never raised to say, "Why, the Protestants are no good," or, "The Protestants are this or the Protestants are that." It's another form of praying to God, another way. Heaven is up there and you do the right thing on this earth and, I think, the bottom line that my parents always tried, was the Ten Commandments. If you live by the Ten Commandments, you will go through life and get to heaven.

KP: You elected to stay in ROTC. Why?

JD: Well, two reasons; number one, I liked the aspect of the military, because I always was a leader, in the sense that if you and I are going to go out now or something, I'd say, "Hey, let's go to so and so." Now, that's a leader. Had I said, "You have some place where we should go?" You see, then, you're not a leader. A leader says, "Hey, let's go, or let's get out of this damn place." In other words, you say. You know, as you go through life, you think back and you say, "Well, who in the heck was I to try to tell these people that we should go here or there?" But it all comes out in fighting the war. I was a

leader, I was well respected by my troops and all of that. You've got to make decisions and you've got to make them. So, I think that's in you, that's all. You are either born that way or you are not.

TL: Do you remember when you heard that Roosevelt was instating the conscription back in '40?

JD: Yeah.

TL: Were you panicky that you may have to go and leave school early?

JD: No, I was never panicky about that. In fact, what turned everybody on was Pearl Harbor. Those of us, here we are, this is December, and guess what I was studying when it came over the radio? ROTC. I was doing my ROTC assignment. At that there time, they said, "All right, all you fellows in ROTC, let's go, pack up and we're going to get you into the service early." I don't know what branch I would have been in, because, but anyway, yeah, that turned us on, simple as that.

TL: What was the general feeling when you found out about Pearl Harbor being bombed?

JD: It is a feeling that has never left us. As much as we want to be nice to the Japs and did everything to them, and [now] they own everything that there is and whatnot, you know. But it is not the people that did it. You have a handful, just like with Germany. It's not the people. You have a handful at the top and it is easy to excite a group if you have a certain type of leaders there, cheerleaders. Why, there you are. In fact, we are getting a little synopsis of that, up in Montana right now. You've got fifteen, twenty people who are persuading maybe, three, four, five, six hundred or maybe more, that are out there, that would like to be with them but they ain't got the guts to come forward. I don't know. We have leaders and we have followers. But the attack at Pearl Harbor [came] when the Japs just got through working a deal out in Washington there and we're friends. "Goodbye." "Okay. We'll see you later." The next thing you know, zoom, Pearl Harbor. How they caught us asleep, that's the other part that I will never, I can't forgive our commanders for being asleep.

KP: But, you opted for required ROTC before Pearl Harbor. Why? You mentioned partly, you were a leader, but why else did you? Did you think we were going to get into the war?

JD: No, no. I didn't like what was happening over there, with that Hitler, getting all those, Poland and all of those places and we never gave it any publicity. But it was it. The other part was the monetary part. And also knowing that we were going to get a little vacation up in Watertown, New York, six weeks up there.

KP: But it sounds like you liked to hunt and fish.

JD: Yeah, I love the outdoors. Sure, I love the outdoors. And guns. Guns, to me, it was a great thing.

TL: I saw your NRA sticker there.

JD: Yeah, I am rich in guns.

KP: By being Advanced ROTC, it was pretty obvious you would be going, once Pearl Harbor ...

JD: Oh, sure. And I was ready. Heck, one thing about the whole thing. Remember the mental attitude that I had? I am going to fight the war and I want to be associated with people who are [of] my mentality, that want to fight. And if you jump behind enemy lines, you don't see the paratroopers raising the flag and saying "I surrender." Obviously, the enemy is all around you. It's death before dishonor. They either get it, or you get it. There is no in-between. I knew I was going to be fighting with men of my attitude and caliber.

KP: So, that's why you opted for the paratroopers?

JD: Yeah. I figured if they would get into the war, I want to get into it. Me and the two fellows, jeez, their names just slipped my mind, but the three of us volunteered. Maybe, if I get a chance to go over this again, I will come up with their names. We volunteered for the Airborne and they said "We'll graduate you a little early," but those that graduate [early] [went] for the submarine service and the parachute troops. So, three of us, none of them volunteered for the submarine, but three of us volunteered for the Airborne, and we go down to Fort Benning, Georgia, and we find out that one guy had flat feet and the other guy had a heart murmur and I am the only one that passed the test and the other two fellows didn't make it.

KP: I guess, before leaving Rutgers, the one question I've asked a lot of people who went to Rutgers before the war is, did you see any divisions among students at Rutgers? Were there any cliques? A lot of people have seen a difference between fraternity people and non-fraternity.

JD: Well, we thought the fraternities, at least some of the fraternities, we felt, were more the people who had a little more money than the others, the fraternities. So, I felt that the Alpha Chi Rho, at the time when I was there, was more for the person that didn't have as much money as some of the other fraternities, follow me? So, there was a little bit of a class situation and we got to see those in some of the fraternities that had automobiles. Remember, the automobile, back in my time, was not a common thing to have at school, not a common thing to have at school. But it was never a class deal. It was just a question of who came from parents that had more money. It was more associated on the financial end than any other distinction. We always felt those fellows were lucky. Hey, money appeared to have been the only thing at that time that tried to put people in a different category.

TL: Did you take part in any of the dances or sock-hops or anything?

JD: Yeah, I dated girls over there at NJC and went to dances and stuff like that. They were the days. I think he's still playing, God all mighty, Tony Bennett. Back when I was, I think, a sophomore, he was there, a young guy. And Tony Bennett is still playing all over the place.

KP: Did you go to football games often?

JD: Did I?

KP: Yeah.

JD: Yeah, I went to football games, sure. Back at the old stadium back at the, now, since that time they had another one and now they have another one.

KP: Tara has someone she has done a lot of research on. Joe Ryan?

TL: Oh, yeah, do you remember Joseph Ryan? He was the Class of '41. He was the head cheerleader back then. He was Mr. Rutgers. I was going through the *Targums* from way back and he was always saying, "Learn your school cheers better," and things like that. He was mad at people for leaving the games early. Do you remember any of those controversies?

JD: Frankly, no.

TL: No? Poor Joe. No one ever remembers Joe. He was in every *Targum*. Do you remember the band controversy in the 1940s?

JD: The what?

TL: The band controversy. The band was horrendous and they wore ugly uniforms and even the student council got on it.

JD: No.

TL: No, you don't remember that either? These are the main things ...

JD: No. You can see that my interest was, at that there time, [on] other things than that.

TL: It is amazing, differences between what our interviewees remember and what was listed in the *Targum*. It was the same time period when Hitler was invading Poland and the headlines on the paper are "Princeton beats Rutgers" or whatever. It was really funny.

JD: That was the bigger headline than Poland, right?

KP: Before the military, had you traveled much?

JD: No.

KP: What's the farthest north, south, east and west you had gotten?

JD: No, I hadn't traveled at all. In fact, the furthest I think I traveled was, we had relatives out in Freeport, Long Island. I will never forget how we got on a train and, there we are, in New York, looking for another train to go out to Freeport. I will never forget that as a kid. I was in grammar school at the time. But outside of that, there was no traveling. No traveling at all.

TL: So, your first major trip was down to Georgia for paratrooper school?

JD: That's right, that's exactly the first time I saw the South. That's the first time.

TL: What did you think about the South?

JD: Well, I found out that the Civil War wasn't completely over. The Southern boys, the boys that I got along with and whatnot, were the boys from Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota. God, those guys, as soon as they said Minnesota, and the Western boys, they were the great guys. Those down South seemed to distrust us, and they all have that accent. As soon as they come over with that accent, we were looking for something.

KP: You had come in with advanced ROTC, so were you commissioned immediately after ...

JD: Oh sure, we were commissioned.

KP: When did you actually report to Fort Benning?

JD: Right there, I think that thing says, it says June the 5th right there.

KP: So, the Army got it right and sent you right ...

JD: Oh, I got there quick. They don't fool around there.

KP: And then you took advanced infantry training at Fort Benning?

JD: Then, we went to heavy weapons school, right. The infantry and the heavy weapons school and graduated from that and then, boom, the parachute school. Graduated from that and assigned to the 505. One took three months and the other took, yeah, three months. June, July, August, right. Then, end of August, beginning of September, I was in parachute training. What's the date on the parachute? That will tell it right there.

TL: Did you feel that the training was ...

JD: There's another paper on the parachuting.

KP: In terms of your training, how good was ROTC training? How useful would that be? You had later taken the ...

JD: Yes. I thought that was very useful. It was very good. It was done well and the classes were gung-ho. Could it be that we had a little confusion over in Europe? Churchill was running all over the place and knowing that the storm clouds were starting to gather. Could it be that? But the boys that were in the military were good fellows at school, conscientious fellows. Those that were our officers, you know, you start out as freshman, sophomore and junior and then finally as a senior, you get to be the officer that's teaching the freshman and whatnot, working with them. Every one of them did their job and there was no kidding around, no joking, no nothing like that. It was gung-ho. We were given uniforms and all of that there.

KP: Ralph Schmidt has a memory though, of one officer, a ROTC senior officer, Mortar Malone. Do you remember him at all?

JD: No. I can't pick any one of them out because I felt that they all did their job, you know? They all did their job and did it in a satisfactory manner. And if someone went by the wayside, he would have stuck out like a sore thumb. I don't know. You volunteer, but just because you volunteer, that don't mean that you are selected. So, they go through a little bit of investigation.

KP: How about advanced infantry training? While you had had sort of the weekends, the summer camp, advanced infantry training at Fort Benning was, I read and have been told by various veterans, was one of the more rigorous in the ...

JD: Yeah, they shoot live bullets over your head while you are creeping and crawling on the ground.

KP: What about your instructors at both advanced infantry training and heavy weapons? Do any of them stick out? Do any other aspects of the training stick out?

JD: Well, I have found that a lot of the instructors were regular Army personnel who were, like, first sergeants and who were much older than, here we are, we're twenty-one years old and, a lot, most of these fellows were in their thirties. Back at that time, ten years, my God, that was another generation, another generation. So, we looked upon them as professionals and they did their job in a professional manner and they did their job in a professional manner. They all were good, I've gotta tell you that. They were all good.

KP: Were you assigned or did you volunteer for heavy weapons?

JD: If you're in the infantry, our ROTC is infantry, and if you're infantry, you had better know your rifle and your heavy weapons. Heavy weapons goes in a category of the small artillery, smaller artillery. But mostly the rifles, the different caliber rifles, the .50 caliber machine guns. That's what I had on the jeeps that I had, .50 caliber machine guns, because, we'll get to that later, how we did our reconnaissance.

KP: Then, you went to paratroop school ...

JD: Right from that, right, from one school to the other. I've been nothing but a student all my life.

KP: What was it like to jump for the first time?

JD: Well, I will tell you what, you've got to get this in your mind. It is death before dishonor, that's it. I went through the whole war that way. It is death before dishonor, and you don't do it. You say, "Hey, others have done it and the chute opens. Why shouldn't it open for me?" So, we did it that way, that's all.

TL: Did you ever see anybody whose chute never opened?

JD: Yes, oh yes. It got tangled up and those that got tangled up. But to show you, though, when we pack our own chute that we jump out of, you pack your own, so that the guy then that does this, after we carefully pleat them and all that, and undo them the way it is. Now the jump master says, "Well, fellows, you guys do a good job and you're gonna have your first jump in a couple of days. You are going to watch me jump, to show you how it is. A couple of you guys, come here." There is a parachute there and he says, "Just put it in any old way. Bunch it all up any old way" and he sewed it up with the twenty-five pound cord, you know, tensile strength, and it wasn't wrapped or nothing. You just pick it up like a bundle, like a burlap bag. He says, "Okay," he sits down, and he puts it on and he says, "I am going to go up now." He took four or five guys up with him to watch him that he didn't switch chutes and he jumped out and we watched him jump and he comes right on down. He says, "Now, you see how simple it is and you people have it folded so beautiful and everything and all that." I never forgot that for as long as I live.

TL: Did you just throw it in your bag or did you always fold it nice and neat?

JD: Oh, my God, I folded it just perfect. Because, when you count [to] three thousand and your chute hasn't opened, you had better pull your other one. We jump at about seven or eight hundred feet up and you'd say, "One thousand, two thousand ..." and, woof, that chute will open right up over your head. Because the plane is doing approximately 100 to 120 miles an hour, so with the propeller and all, and you jump out with that there, zoom, that chute goes right over your head and opens up. And if it doesn't, you've got a reserve chute here. What happens is, a lot of people, when they hook up, don't hook up. That makes their mind go and a couple of them were found that didn't open. They jumped and then they freeze and did not even pull it out and just come right on down. I don't know. Query: did he want to commit suicide? I don't know.

KP: Did you see any accidents in training, of people whose chutes that didn't open?

JD: Oh sure, yeah, you bet. And where two of them get tangled up like they're jumping too close. You know, as soon as the guy goes out, the next guy goes. A lot of times, the guy will go out too quick and his chute will go out over the other fellow's chute and blossom right on it and the two of them become entangled and then they come down. And they open their reserve up and that's more tangulation and then they come down and sometimes they live and sometimes they get injured seriously. In Africa, we experimented with, we wanted to use donkeys in Sicily, when we jumped in Sicily. So, we got ahold of these nice little burros, you can't call them a donkey, they were burros. We would put the things on them and we would toss them out of the plane, all right, and toss them out of the plane. All of them broke their legs, about four of them. Now what are you going to do with a burros with a broken leg? What would you do with a burro with a broken leg? Very simple. Now, we have bayonet training. Do you know what bayonet training is? Instead of sticking it in the bale of straw, ..., well, everybody had to go and get the feel of what a bayonet stuck in flesh, ... So, we did that before our jump into Sicily, so you got the feel of that bayonet.

KP: When did you meet your unit that you would command?

JD: Right away, in jump school.

KP: Jump school.

JD: Yes, sir. As soon as you got your wings, bang, right there. And General Gavin was a major at that time. He was a major when I was there, and that's when the parachute school was just starting, just starting, that summer, starting to get people in to have a parachute. And ours was the first regiment, the 505.

KP: The officers that trained in advance in heavy weapons, where were they assigned? Did they go to units scattered all over the Army?

JD: Yes, scattered amongst regular infantry units. It might interest you to know that very, very few college graduates were in the initial parachute. The parachute, the college fellows, the only college fellows I bumped into were West Pointers. That's it, West Pointers.

TL: How different were the West Pointers from ...

JD: But I never saw a guy from New York University, Syracuse, whatnot, because frankly, they looked upon me as an outcast there. The troopers, you know, they said, "You're a college kid, you're a college kid." That's how I got the job with Colonel Jack. Colonel Jack was a lawyer. He was the G-2 of the 82nd Airborne, the Intelligence. When he went through the scan of who the hell he would like to have, he said, "Joe, you gotta good college education here and you're a pretty good boy here and you just got wounded in Sicily." I said, "Yeah, yeah." "They gave you the Bronze Star. Oh, that's great." He says, "Do you want to get in?" I couldn't find any college graduates, that, hey, "I'm from Michigan University," "I'm from so-and-so university." Most of them were GIs that went to officer's training school and then on into (?). Of course, now it is different, but I am taking you back [to] 1942. I am taking you back then when this whole thing started.

KP: Tara had asked the question which I was thinking, too, about the West Pointers you encountered in jump school and in these other advanced schools. What were they like?

JD: Good boys, very good boys. In fact, the brother of a very, very good friend of mine, I have a place in Jupiter, Florida, and he has a place in Jupiter and we spend a lot of breakfasts together. Go out and talk.

KP: Your unit, the first unit you commanded ...

JD: Was, well, the first unit I was assigned to was ...

KP: Or assigned to, yeah ...

JD: Was C Company of the 1st Battalion of the 505 Parachute Infantry. A company was four squads. A squad was twelve men and there was a platoon. Four squads make a platoon, that's forty-eight men, make a platoon. Now, to show you what they were doing, they wanted to, as far as I was concerned, I felt that we were top heavy in officers but they wanted officers. And they have a platoon leader and an assistant platoon leader. You have a first lieutenant that was the platoon leader and you had a second lieutenant that was the assistant. So, that was my first job, assistant platoon leader of the second platoon of C Company. A company is four platoons.

KP: Did you take your men through training at all or had they been trained? When you got C Company had they ever ...

JD: Oh, we had a rigorous training, a rigorous training schedule and we were all training together, we're all training together. Gosh, before breakfast, we had to run three miles. You'd jog three miles before breakfast. Part of the job that I didn't like was, after every march, we would march, easy, ten, fifteen miles a day. The men had to take their shoes off and before they even went to take a shower or anything like that, their boots had to come off because they, to a paratrooper, he was the only guy that was permitted to wear boots, we had the boots, the parachute boots. We had to examine their feet because if they get a blister or something and it wasn't taken care of right away, you lost that guy. For that blister to get that way and that was something that really had to be checked. That's one thing I didn't like to do. I said, "Tell me, can I have a sergeant?" The sergeant won't do it. "You are an officer, you're responsible and if the men don't come out and they got a sore foot and we examine it, we can tell right away that you overlooked your job and didn't sense it when it first came out. Have them wear a Band-Aid and bandage properly and all that, etc., to keep that soldier on his feet. Without feet, you'll go no place."

KP: It sounds like the sergeants were sort of asserting some authority there with a young second lieutenant. You were, at that time, a second lieutenant?

JD: [Yes].

KP: A young second lieutenant who was still very dependent upon himself.

JD: Yeah, oh, sure.

KP: Did you have a regular Army sergeant in C Company?

JD: Well, we had a certain amount of regular Army and the regular Army fellows were quick to point out, "I've been here for six years. You're not even here six weeks." You had those fellows that would talk like that. But never to an officer. There was never disrespect there.

KP: But it seemed like they clearly knew their way around ...

JD: Oh, you couldn't keep track of them, you couldn't keep track of them. Although the 82nd Airborne today is, I look at the women who are paratroopers and I say, "Tell me something, where do the women stay here?" "Right over those barracks." "Where do the men stay?" "Right over those barracks." I said, "What goes on here, what goes on over here?" I got in here a little too late. It so happens that the women occupy like the second floor and the men occupy the first floor and the little sign on the step says, "Women can come downstairs, but men cannot go upstairs." I guess they all abide by that rule and regulation and they all get along.

KP: What do you remember about any of the men in C Company? I am very curious about your sergeant and your platoon leader.

JD: Well, Sergeant (Stubbins?), I'll never forget him. He died about four or five years ago. The part that you remember is combat. The part you remember is the boys that went out to get the wounded fellows that got shot and how they stuck their neck out to go out and get those fellows. We had an Indian by the name of Adams and he got the Distinguished Service Cross. He should have gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor. We landed in Normandy and we were pinned down with machine guns and he went on around and took that machine gun out single handed, single handed. Not only did he do that, but then he also, that 88mm weapon was the most fearsome weapon that was used in World War II, was the 88mm. They could take your left eye out at a mile away, that's how accurate that thing was. So, we all learned, in Sicily, how to operate that 88mm and, boy, he used that thing in Normandy. He [Adams] rubbed out those people there and turned the gun on their tanks. He knocked one or two tanks out before he got help. He got wounded and I felt that he, I wrote him up for the Congressional Medal of Honor. So, did the Captain, the Major and a lot of people, but they gave him the Distinguished Service Cross because they figured that, "Well, the Airborne, that's part of your job. What, do you guys think you did a great job, what do you guys think you did?" So, we were always belittled, you know, because any other combat units behind enemy lines, you know, "We were trapped, we were this, we were that." But hell, we started out with being trapped all the time by jumping behind enemy lines, all the time.

TL: What did it feel like dropping in behind enemy lines? What was going through your head as you were dropping down those eight hundred feet?

JD: My jump in Sicily was the one that I figured that I got through this, I think that I will live through the whole war. You see, you jump at night ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Joseph V. Demasi on April 1, 1996, in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

TL: Tara Liston.

KP: You had mentioned dropping at night in a parachute.

JD: Oh, yes, I will say this, that all our jumps were at night, except Holland. Holland was the only Sunday afternoon jump. Anyway, but let's get back to Sicily. So, ahead of us, we could see, as we were approaching Sicily, you could see all the fire going on and thirty-six of our planes loaded with paratroopers, and one one-star general, [who] was in the lead plane, down they went. And it so happens that the Germans had just got through bombing the (Jayla?) area where our Navy was. And the Navy's thinking that these planes are more Germans and knocking our own planes down. It never made publicity. Thirty-six planes, one whole battalion of men, all right? Five hundred men, down they went. All killed. Everyone. Now, our pilot in the next echelon, following the first thirty-six ...

KP: When you were flying into Sicily did, you saw these planes being shot down?

JD: Oh, sure, sure, because officers, we are at the door. We jump first. We jump first. I am the guy that says, "Stand up, hook up and check equipment."

KP: You are the first out?

JD: I am the first out, first out. So, I'm watching all this action, I am sticking my head out and watching this action way ahead of us up there and then you got the planes, all of them went to the right to avoid following because they are all being knocked down. Since that time, we have had Naval people with us at all times. Had we had a Navy guy in Africa who had been in touch, knowing about his Navy, "Hey, we're coming over your head on such-and-such," he would know what ships were in the Southern Sicily, in (Jayla?). Do you follow me? The Navy liaison officer. We didn't have one. But since that time, naval liaison officers come out of your ears. After the horse is stolen, we buy the lock to the barn. So, we were about sixty miles up above, so where we landed was not our drop zone. And now, naturally, we get the green light, which means that we're inland about eight miles and we get the green light. Stand up, hook up and out we went. My God, you hear the "Ah, ooh, ah." Guess where we landed? In a grape orchard. You know those sticks that are up there, you know? Like that. A lot of them got speared, their belly. Oh, God, I've got to tell you. And I was lucky. I went right in between the two of them. When you land in a parachute, I would rather jump off of a two, three story building, the way I am right now, then to land in a parachute. You come down and go "oof". You really come down. Although most of the fellows were supposed to be under 150 pounds, I was 165. I was fifteen pounds overweight and I had to sign a paper saying, "You don't belong with us, but if you want to jump, God bless you." I said, "Okay, I'll sign the paper." What the hell is fifteen pounds, it's nothing. But anyway, you landed hard. In Africa, when we jumped in Africa for the shahs that would have the, all of the shahs in Africa, Morocco and all those, we would jump for them in Africa. From Casablanca they came. So, when you jump in Africa, the heat from the desert and whatnot, you landed, you couldn't believe it. You just like stepped in, taken one step, you never, nobody fell. Everybody landed on their feet. But then, you get over in Sicily, just like America and, "cabooof." So, anyway, that was the interesting part about jumping at night because you don't know where you land. In fact, that letter, right there from Normandy, right there, the letter, that's an actual letter. No, no, the envelope. I'm sorry, the envelope ...

TL: Oh, oh the letter. Oh, this one. Oh, okay.

JD: The envelope that is used by Ste.-Mere-Eglise. That's the envelope of the soldier that was, [his] parachute was caught in the church and the Germans killed him. Look what they used for, and the church is on the back. That's an ordinary envelope.

KP: Backing up just a little with your unit back in training in the States, how long did you train in the States before you were shipped overseas? Do you know when that was?

JD: Okay, that's a good question. We got on the plane, and my girlfriend is still singing, and we got on the plane, I mean, on the ship in New York Harbor. We got on around November, so we trained continuously from August, September, October, November. And guess who the girl was that was singing as we were getting on? Lena Horne. Lena Horne had to be a kid. Lena Horne is still around because I heard her sing not too long ago. While we are talking about Lena Horne, it might interest you people to know that there were eight thousand men that made the 82nd Airborne Division and there wasn't one black person. Not one. [Now], I go down to Fort Bragg, and I will be going down there the end of May, for a week, and I'd say fifty percent are black today. We went down there and

there wasn't one black. I think, although I don't know, and I am not going to say it, but as far as I was concerned, they were good soldiers. We saw them in the transportation department and all that, and various other branches, but I don't think that they were permitted to become paratroopers.

KP: Are you surprised how much the unit has changed, the 82nd, that you see today?

JD: Yeah, I am surprised, but I am also surprised of the caliber. They have got the same caliber of people that we had and that's why I keep going down there, because if I felt that it had, you know, degraded down to crap, I would say, "To hell on you." But I go down because they put on beautiful performances for us. We get to see now, not only jumping out of planes, but now they have the helicopter. Now the helicopter goes by this lake and we are all watching, we are on stands, we are sitting there watching this performance and they drop the helicopter, the helicopter comes right on down low and the next thing you know, they drop these so-called rubber boats, okay? Rubber boats. They drop the rubber boats and then you see the fellows in the helicopters there and these fellows coming down a rope, zoom, zoom, zoom. They're in a boat, they turn on a motor and off they go, off into the back. The next thing you know, the helicopter comes back about twenty, thirty minutes later. It comes right on back, the helicopter does, almost gets right on the water and these guys come on this rubber boat, right there, right up to the helicopter. [It] drops a hook, sucks up the thing, the guys get back up on a rope, pull themselves up into the helicopter and off they go. So, they can be dropped for a mission and picked up just like that by helicopter. So, they've come up with something new. A paratrooper, once you drop them, God Bless America. But now, now comes the helicopter, going to come and pick them up and take them out. They did that to O'Grady, right? They did that to O'Grady in Bosnia. Remember, the pilot that had to bail out, the pilot that bailed out? They went in and got him, boy. So, that's great. I know damn well, I see what goes on and I know the boys that do that, see, get to meet the fellows. Great guys, great guys.

KP: When you left to go abroad, you took a ship and ...

JD: Yes, I went to Casablanca.

KP: Which, even today, is still exotic, I guess because of the movie.

JD: The Casaba, right? Yeah, I went there.

KP: But the voyage itself, you had never been on a ship before?

JD: No, never, never.

KP: Did you get seasick at all?

JD: No, no, I didn't get sea sick. We spent all of our time, we had a certain amount of exercises but we were pretty much cramped for that and we spent a lot of time studying about Sicily because we knew that that was our first assault. [It] would be Sicily. Studying the terrain and, being that I could speak the Italian language, I was well liked. I was well liked. Then, we get to Casablanca, there was a train and we get back to the forty-and-eight. Eight men and forty mules, or forty horses, whatever you want to call them. These were the trains that we were on, but at this time they hadn't completely

gotten Rommell the hell out of Africa. He was still around. So, we had to face being strafed, and every so often the train would stop and we all would jump out of the train and we get on our bellies and wait until the strafing was over and get back on the train and continue on.

KP: So, this was your first contact with hostile fire?

JD: Yeah, yeah. First contact.

KP: How scary was it the first time?

JD: Well, heck, like everything else, it wasn't, nobody, you know, everybody was saying, "Did you get hit?" "No, I didn't get hit," and that was it. But there was no return of fire. We had our planes. Our famous plane at that time was the P-38. P-38, it's a double fuselage, it had. But the German Messerschmitt had the edge on them. Of course they had been doing that a little longer than we, at that there time.

KP: Did you ever see any other combat in North Africa besides the strafing? Was that the only action you saw in North Africa?

JD: That was the only thing. Yep, that was the only thing for us. One of the highlights of that was that I was friendly with some of the pilots of our planes. Remember, I was a college graduate, right, so I was in a different category with the rest of the fellows. And the pilots were [also] college graduates. We got [to] talking, [about] various things and all that, and he says, "Joe, we are flying to Cairo on such-and-such a day. See if you can come with us." I said, "Is it safe?" He says, "Yeah, they got Rommell the hell out and it's safe." I said, "Well, what are we going for?" "Joe, we are going to go buy scotch. It is a dollar a bottle, a dollar a bottle." I said, "Yeah, I'll go. You bet I'll go." So, I collected the money from all the guys, collected all the dollars I could collect, okay? We went down and we bought about fifteen cases of scotch. Of course, the scotch that they had was all British, you know? The British had supplied the scotch. We landed right there at the airport, we got the scotch, whipped a U and came on back. Boy, I was the hero of the 82nd. I was the hero because I was friends with the pilots and I said, "You guys know how to live. You guys know how to live."

TK: Do you ever regret your decision of becoming a paratrooper?

JD: No. I wouldn't want it any other way. I got hit a couple of times, but I always felt that I am with people who are like me, that want to fight because, we hear so many stories of the 1st Division, to us [it] was, when we knew they were near us, [it was] okay. The 9th Division was good. Now the 45th, no. We knew the division. I don't know if they were made up of, like, say, National Guard people and whatnot and we say a unit is as good as its commanding officer, all right? Maybe the same thing, like, oh, a college. You've got a sharp professor, he's got beautiful students and they all pick the thing up. The same thing we feel there, that if you're with people that are good and conscientious and we knew we didn't have anybody that ran in the face of fire. Where are you running to? If you are running that way, you are going to get shot. You'd better stay right here, you know? There was nobody that we ever had to discipline, and so ...

KP: You never had any cases of battle fatigue?

JD: No, no, you never heard of it. Imagine everybody that went to college at the time, law school. What was battle fatigue, what's battle fatigue? But in the other units, the line units, we would say that the fellow got scared and they'd put him in a hospital and that's the episode of Patton slapping the soldier and then he had to apologize for it and all of that. He said, "You should be out there fighting. Why aren't you fighting?"

KP: One of the things I am struck by reading accounts of parachute jumps, besides your dropping at night, it is unlike a line unit or almost any other unit where you were pretty much in the same area. You might be cut off at times in a retreat or in an advance, people might get separated, but you are usually fairly close to one another. But in a parachute drop, people can be dropped all over the place.

JD: Yes, and Sicily was our worst experience of all. Of all our drops, [it] was Sicily. Sicily was a great education, but a lot of people died. They lost a lot of people there in Sicily.

KP: What were some of the mistakes you remember the most vividly?

JD: Well, the first one I told you about, the naval attaché. My God, you need those people because you are always flying over water to get to where the heck you were going. I would think that the system that we had to get people together wasn't good. We should've had better radio communication.

KP: So, in Sicily, what was your mission? You were still in C Company?

JD: Right.

KP: What was C Company's mission?

JD: C Company's mission was to take a hill on the outskirts of (Jayla?) and to hold it until the 45th Division got up to us. We were about eight miles inland, but we felt that, with all of our naval bombardment and all of that there, that the 45th could come up that quick. As it turned out, the 45th didn't get up to us until about three days later. The good part about it was that the Italians were quick to give up. We had quite a few boys in the Airborne that spoke Italian and just as soon as they heard an Italian or something like that, the Italians gave up. Their heart was not in the war. It was a question of "Am I going to get shot in the back by the Germans or in the front by the Americans." They looked around the back and didn't see anybody so they gave up to the Americans.

KP: Before the 45th reached you, how much combat and fighting did you see?

JD: Oh, I got wounded on the second day. I got shot. I got shot through my arm and I got shot through my leg by a tank. A tank came up to us and we used a bazooka. It killed one of the guys. I picked up the bazooka and I fired and they fired back and I got wounded in that fight. One of the other fellows was on the other side of the road in a ditch and he got that tank. But, you see, when you have to fight a tank, that's what makes things difficult, even though we had a bazooka. This is where you need that hell of a gun or you need another tank to fight a tank.

KP: After you were wounded, where were you taken?

JD: Where was I taken? The sergeant drug me down into a culvert that went underneath the road while the fighting was going on. What I did was, right there in the culvert, was they'd hand the guns down to me and I would load them up and hand them back up to them. After a while, when they stopped my bleeding there with a tourniquet, I would go up until it got dark. Once it got dark, then the firing stopped, and it wasn't until the next morning that the 45th Division met us. They came on up and I was evacuated.

KP: So, in other words, in those first three days of battle, there was no place to evacuate people to.

JD: No. The Airborne, nothing. You've got to make contact for evacuation, there's no way out.

KP: In other words, if you were wounded ...

JD: Oh, I had a fellow that couldn't see because when they shoot out of the cannon, out of that artillery piece, out of that tank, it kicks up the dirt and all of that there and, here, up against a bank and, gazzoom, misses you there, but you turn around and all of that dirt and whatnot gets in your eyes. I will never forget this one soldier was completely blind. He says, "I can't see." I got ahold of him and put him under the culvert there and I said, "Take your time and keep, when you can see, come on out." So, we always looked for places, you know the old story of the fox hole. You are not going to dig a fox hole, but you are going to look for a depression and things like that, [so] that you're away from direct fire. We're trained for that, whether it's a brook or something like that. Get down in there, get down in the low area.

KP: In Sicily, C Company was eight miles off target. How much contact did you have with other units? You mentioned that the contact communication was a real problem.

JD: You see, not even the platoon leaders had a radio. The company commander was the only one that had a radio. The lack of communication was bad, you see, because everybody thinks that you are going to be together, but you're not together, you're not together.

KP: Were you in contact with your company commander in Sicily?

JD: You never saw him.

KP: So, in other words, basically you had really no ...

JD: No, because the game plan was gone when the thirty-six planes went down and the other guy deviates off of there. So, we were at least eight miles away from our objective. At least.

KP: Did the thought cross your mind or was it ever vocalized that, in many ways, you were so far behind the line that you could be really cut off and could just be eliminated very easily?

JD: Yeah, eliminated. But, so far as to tell you, not one paratrooper gave up. A lot of them were killed. A lot of them were tortured. That's what we didn't like, which we didn't like. There was some

atrocities that happened. I did not see them. I have heard of them, like the throats were cut and stuff like that, and these were people who were wounded, so probably of the Airborne, none of them were taken prisoners. I've got to tell you this, that of all the prisoners, every one of our meetings, there is not one person, that says, "I was a prisoner." Follow me? Not one, not one paratrooper a prisoner.

KP: The units you confronted in Sicily, were they German, or were they Italian, or were they both?

JD: They were both. And it was that the, we later found out, that they wanted the Italians to do the rifleman work while they sat in bunkers. There were a lot of bunkers. The Germans were in bunkers, but they wanted the Italians to be out there to fight the invaders. But what the Italians did, when they were, when the people behind them couldn't shoot them, why, they gave up to us in droves. Yep, they gave up.

KP: Of C Company in Sicily, how many did you lose, killed or wounded?

JD: I say that, of C company, [there] would be about 160 men. I would say approximately twenty or so were killed, roughly twenty. And about thirty or forty were wounded.

KP: And in your platoon ...

JD: In the platoon, in my platoon, I never got to see my platoon until I was, until we got back in Africa because we were scattered.

KP: So, in other words, you were so badly scattered ...

JD: Right, we were scattered and I think in our platoon, maybe, we may have lost two or three killed and about seven or eight were wounded. I was one of the wounded.

KP: So, in the men you were leading and the men you were fighting with were men from different units.

JD: Yeah. Oh, sure. Oh, heck, yeah. And we were trained that way. We are trained that whoever is in charge, the corporal, the sergeant, the lieutenant, the captain, the major, they take charge. The highest in command will take charge and then we go to him. There was a Major (?), there was a major who said, "Hey, lieutenant, we got ... Okay." In other words, I am under his command because someone has got to take control and there's no time to waste.

KP: The group you fought with, how big was it?

JD: Oh, on the hill, when the tank came on up there and whacked away at us, we had about twenty guys, about twenty guys. But hey, nobody gives up. Nobody.

KP: After you made contact, when the 45th finally made it and you made contact, how quickly were you evacuated?

JD: Well, what they did, we had to wait for the vehicles. First, the infantry comes through and then later on, their vehicles came up. I would say about a half a day, it was about a half a day. We were evacuated, evacuated to a ship. That night, a bomb just missed the ship by that much and just about turned the ship upside down. I said, "My God, you get by one load." And so when they say war is hell, I said, "We came pretty close to that."

KP: How good was the medical care that you received once you were evacuated?

JD: Well, our medics were great people. They jump in with us. The other part that I thought was great was that we even have our Chaplain Wood. He made four combat jumps. The Reverend, he just jumps with his cross. He's at every one of our meetings, Chaplain Wood. Hell of a nice guy.

KP: Which denomination was he?

JD: He's a Methodist.

KP: And he jumped at every ...

JD: Every one, four combat jumps ...

KP: With no weapon?

JD: No weapon. Administering to the people who were dying or dead and all of that there.

KP: It sounds like the chaplain in your unit played a pretty important role in your unit?

JD: Yeah, you bet he did. You bet he did. He is at every one of our meetings. We get together. We had a reunion up in Boise, Idaho this last fall and another one down in Myrtle Beach. Every year we, [another at] San Antonio, Texas. Every year we pick a spot where our regiment goes. We get about two, three hundred of the veterans and their wives.

KP: How long did it take you to recuperate?

JD: Well, in Africa, (Oujda?) there, they took us to the field hospital and, what was nice there, the first time I get to see an American girl, now, since last October. Oh, my God. So, the nice nurse and me, being an officer, and they even had officers, you know, in the separate area than the enlisted men, and she kept me like a couple weeks more saying, "He's in bad shape." I said, "God that's great, that's great, that's good." That's the only break I got. But hey, they were all tense. In other words, everything was tense and you wanted to shower, you know, and they would put the bag of water up, bag of water with holes in the bottom of the bag, and you throw the water in and go underneath that and you shower. That's it. That's Africa.

KP: Do you have any other memories of Africa, because you would be there twice, once before Sicily and then after Sicily? Any contact with inhabitants, the natives of North Africa? You mentioned the shows you would put on for the ...

JD: Yeah, yeah, for the shahs. But they were all, let's put it this way, they are the ones that lived in these, you know? Over there, you either have no home or you live in a castle. Two kinds of people, that's all. Nomads and the others. But we never got to talk to any of them or associate with them. It might interest you in our training, we had a lot of training there now. Remember, we got there, so our Christmas and all of that was over there, up until June. At one o'clock in the [afternoon], we would stop, at one o'clock in the afternoon, we stop training and everybody got in their little pup-tent and you would put the handkerchief or a cloth over your nose and mouth and you got up at four o'clock in the afternoon and your tent was all the way down. A sand storm came up every afternoon, every afternoon. And then we trained, got up and, we did a lot of our training at night. And at night there, you could read a newspaper. At that time of the year, in the spring, in Northern Africa, you could read a newspaper. That's how light it was. So, we did our training at night.

KP: You would participate in another campaign in Italy, the Naples ...

JD: Oh, yeah, that was mine because the dialect, my dialect, remember, Italy is all full of dialects. I was a Neapolitan, I was the guy that came from that area. It was very, very interesting. When we went into Naples, the Germans were retreating but we still had a little firing going on up through Sorrento, Naples. And it so happens that General Gavin says, "I think we are going to take the post office for our CP, Command Post." The general was starting to get the people to go into the post office and all of a sudden, the Italians came up to me and say, and they knew that I was Italian because I was talking their language, and he says, "Don't go in there, it's mined. A (*minutia*?), it's (*minutia*?)." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "(*Minutia*?)." So, I told that to General Gavin and other Italians came and said the same thing. So, General Gavin says, "Well, the police are right across the street there and..." so, we had the, *questura* was the police station. Italians call it *questura*. We got them out and General Gavin says, "CP there." So, we're starting to go to, getting ready for Anzio, Caserta, the Northern part of Naples, about fifteen miles north of Naples and that's the time I told the general, "I want to go visit my relatives. I know where they're at. They are in the town of Airola." He says, "Okay." So, I went there and one of these articles is all about that, about me visiting my, all about me visiting my mother['s family], here you go, "Jersey Officer Meets Mother's Family in Italy." Yeah.

TK: Did they receive you well?

JD: Did they receive me well? You know, I had red hair and most Italians are dark, aren't they? Or supposed to be anyway. The first thing I do is I see a couple of the, a girl comes out to me and grabbed me, "Guiseppe, Guiseppe, we were waiting for you!" You know, in Italian she says that. I said, "Well, how did you know who I am?" I said, "There are eleven million GIs," and I said, "You think, that it would be routine that I would be here?" So, to make a long story short, it appears that when the Germans went back, their kitchen, the boards were all tore off the floor because the Italians had a habit of hiding things, taking a few boards out and hiding wheat. And floor, as the German, because they heard that the Germans when they go back, they took all the pigs, the chickens, the cows, everything. They cleaned house, they cleaned house. They lived off the land, see, the Germans did. So, they were in bad shape. So, I said, "Look," I said, "Tomorrow, I will see if the general will give me some food and I will bring you some food." So, they made me honorary mayor of the little [town] of Airola. I showed up with a half of a truck load worth of C rations and all that. Passed them out amongst the people there and they said, "By God, these Americans are great." So, they showed

me where my mother was married and all of that there. They had a fireplace, they put a frying pan in the fireplace and they had some dough, some pizza and just that there. And that was all that they had that they could give me, all right? "Boy," I said. "That's tough."

KP: Have you ever been back?

JD: Oh, I've been back. You bet I've been back. In fact, I think this summer, I think I will go back for a couple of months. Right now, my relatives on my mother's side are farmers, well-off farmers, because a couple of the sons, who would be younger than me, are (*carvonerrie?*), which like means like a state trooper, on the farmer's side. On the other side is the fellow that owns one of the biggest restaurants in the whole area. It would feed two thousand people. Over there, you've got the women in the kitchen, like fifteen, twenty women, cooking in the kitchen, and you got fifteen, twenty waiters serving. Every night, when I was there, the first night, he says, "Guiseppe," and he opens up the cash register and he pays the guy and I said, "Why? Is he quitting? Well, what are you paying him for?" "Oh," he says, "Every day, the waiter that works the hardest gets a weeks pay." And he has got them flying. I said, "Oh, my God, oh, my god." So, I said, "Tell me, cousin, does any guy ever win two nights in a row?" "Yes, yes. There're times when the same guy won two nights in a row." So, I said, "Boy, what an incentive this guy's got." But, just plain unbelievable in Italy [is] every time there is a christening. You know, their calendars have, like today is Saint Joseph, tomorrow is Saint Mary and Saint Augustine, and for every word there is a saint, you follow me? And that's a feast, and that's a feast because your name is Mary. I am Joseph, I'm Joseph. "Hey c'mon, we're going to go have a time." So, that's their way of getting together under the guise of it being a religious event also.

KP: It sounds like you were almost shocked by how little your mother's village had.

JD: Yeah, I was. I was.

KP: Was there anything else that surprised you about Italy?

JD: Because everything was cleaned out. In other words, there were no chickens, no farm, no nothing. The Germans just took everything. Clean sweep, boy. But getting back to that post office, which was the most, the seventh day, when six days go by, seven days go by, and now the General turns to me, "Joe," he used to call me Reddy, "Reddy, what kind of information are you getting? Are you sure they are treating you right?" I said, "General, I don't know but," I said, "you never know, maybe they put duds in there, maybe it is not geared to go off, or maybe you've got to touch something before it goes off." I said, "There are all kinds of mines." He says, "Yeah, I know that." Then, all of a sudden, the ninth day it blew up. And not too long ago, I wrote an affidavit for one of the officers, for his hearing. He was wounded when that post office blew up because they had the military police around and Mr. (Schneiderman?). I, are you a golfer?

KP: No.

JD: You remember back in the days when they would have tournaments of golf and, the guy would say, "He won one hundred thousand, twenty-six thousand, four hundred dollars," you know? Well, he was an official scorer, Jake (Schneiderman?) was, and he was with the military police. Good friend of mine who lives down near Jupiter there at the PGA, and he's the official scorer and I have

been with him when he scores these pros that you see on television Saturday and Sunday. So, I have been with him at different places and he always calls me up and all that there. I wrote this affidavit for him and he got the disability, which means he can get a hearing aid and all of that at no cost. But they would not give him the disability from day one to now which would be a trillion dollars. You follow me?

TK: Yeah. It's worth a try.

JD: It's okay. He got the hearing aid and all that and the medical attention, but he didn't get the disability, the paycheck. Which right now, ten percent is almost \$100 a month.

KP: What else do you remember about Italy and Naples and both your official duties and your units' duties?

JD: That's the closest I got to General Gavin because I was his interpreter then. Follow me? Being that I was with the reconnaissance, that's when I got to be the reconnaissance man and that's when I got close to General Gavin because of me talking with the Italians. This is part of the G-2, it's always nice to know about the enemy. How do you get to know about the enemy? The enemy was there, who are they, where are they, where'd they go, what'd you hear and all that. So, the Italians, those that deserted and whatnot, why they were the ones that were able to talk to us.

KP: The jump you made in Naples, was it a better jump than Sicily?

JD: It wasn't in Naples. The jump was in Sorrento.

KP: Yeah, was it a better ...

JD: Oh, it was a sweetheart. Nobody got shot at.

KP: You mentioned the naval liaison. What else did individual units learn, collectively? What did the whole 82nd Airborne learn from Sicily? When you did this jump, did you sort of say, "Well, we're doing things differently?" For example, were there more radios?

JD: Oh yes, there was closer contact. There was closer contact but still, in all, in Italy, we had felt that smaller units went out than the whole division. Like Anzio, they picked the 504th Infantry to take care of Anzio. And then, Caserta, the 505, and it wasn't like a whole division unit. It was broken down into regiments, like a regimental combat team. In fact, to this day, that has stuck. It is always a regimental combat team that has a mission and not the whole eight thousand people. [It's] down to two thousand as a combat team.

KP: You remained as part of the 505, right?

JD: Yeah, 505.

KP: Were you part of the Anzio Beach assault at all?

JD: No.

KP: So, that was the 504?

JD: Nope, that was the 504.

KP: Were you disappointed at all in leaving Italy?

JD: Well, I was, at this time, after I got to meet my people and whatnot ...

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

KP: You mentioned that you were optimistic about the war.

JD: Yeah, sure, because, hey, we got them on the run. They realized that we are better and, [in] Sicily, we did nicely. Look at this right here now, nothing. I will tell you what we did that I don't think made hardly any publicity at all and that was [about] one of our generals, General Taylor. General Taylor was a linguist. He could speak six fluent languages, okay? He was a three-star general. He went into a submarine and went up into the Tiber River and got into with the huoy-palouy of the high command of the Italians. The deal was, that if they could get the Germans out of Rome, out of Rome, the Italians, you know, would give up and all of that. The Italians wanted to give up from day one, but they were afraid that the Germans were gonna commit atrocities and kill the Italians. So, General Taylor, so there was a big meeting with the Italian generals and the German generals, but not Taylor, to see if it could be accomplished, that the Italians wanted to give up and that the Germans would declare Rome an open city. And the German says, "No, we're gonna fight." So, then the Italians could not give permission because they didn't want Rome destroyed. They didn't want Rome bombed. But these are all little things in a war, that you would think has nothing to do with the war, right? Because the way that the Russians took care of Berlin is unimaginable. What they didn't do to Berlin. They just whacked it right down.

KP: Being an interpreter, getting to know General Gavin, what other memories do you have? What impressed you the most about General Gavin and did he have any foibles?

JD: Well, General Gavin starts out as being raised in a Home, you know? No parents. He starts out by working as a young guy and then he says, "I might as well go to the Army." So, in the Army, at that time, so many GIs would be sent to West Point, based on a written exam. Maybe eight or ten, at that time, a year, went to West Point. They were taken right from the Army and he was one of them, General Gavin. General Gavin has no brothers, no sisters, no father, no mother. Here's a man that, and we all knew that, and a dedicated man, a dedicated man to the Airborne. He just died, not too long ago, a couple of years ago. We always have him at every one of our outings, General Gavin. As far as we're concerned, he is the Airborne. Getting back, as an officer, he was an officer all the time, all the time and a real man. A real man.

KP: It sounds remarkable because generally when I have interviewed people, they generally remember either men, either privates or officers, a few of them who were really were not very good or even worse. It could be a combination. It strikes me that you didn't have officers or men that didn't

work out. Did you lose any, in training or even in combat? Just officers and men who couldn't handle it?

JD: No, because I think they were screened. They were screened and I have a feeling, in fact out there in the waiting room, I have a picture of our 505 officers, the whole ...

TK: Yeah, we saw them.

JD: You saw them? Hey, all those guys, I got to say, if we picked the college graduates there, there'll be a half a dozen West Pointers, but the rest of them came up the other way. You know, coming up from the ranks, we've got to call it.

KP: It sounds like coming up from the ranks, they were even tougher.

JD: Oh, hell, yeah. You come up from the ranks, that's the first test that you pass. "We are going to make a soldier out of you. We're going to make an officer out of you, sergeant." Like battlefield promotions. We had several battlefield promotions. In Normandy, I know of at least three of them. In Normandy, sergeants that were made lieutenants, just like that.

KP: From a lot of the people I have interviewed, but also historians have picked on this a lot, it was very dangerous to be a lieutenant in ...

JD: Well, you are up at the front where all the action is. Yep, where all the action is.

KP: Before we started taping, you mentioned you would leave Italy and you would take a long way around.

JD: Yeah, how about thirty days? How about thirty days on a boat?

KP: What type of boat was it?

JD: Well, it had to be one of these troop carriers, you know? Maybe off-season, I mean, during the season it could have been a passenger boat. But I know, going over to Africa, we had a passenger boat. A French vessel, it was going to Casablanca from New York. But again, the U-boat scare was the biggest scare that we had from years '42, '43. Those two years, they had the edge. The U-boats had the edge.

KP: In your convoys either going over to North Africa or going over to Northern Ireland, were any of the ships sunk?

JD: Not in our convoy, no sir.

KP: It sounds like there was some concern about ...

JD: Oh, yeah, and I stopped to think in this way, that of all the troops, our troops were the only battle tested troops that were out on the ocean to be sunk. Are you with me? One third gets rid of

everybody, you follow me? Meantime, what other, no other division or anything like that, yes, soldiers and going overseas, of course. They all went to England, most of them to England, and then those that went to Africa. But they didn't pick them up and move them around. Are you with me? Because they stayed right there.

TK: That made no sense to you at all.

JD: Yeah, we're the ones that stick our necks out to see if they could drop us into the ocean.

KP: When would you arrive in, I believe you first arrived in Northern Ireland and then ...

JD: Around Christmas time.

KP: Christmas time of '43?

JD: Yeah.

KP: How long would you stay in Northern Ireland?

JD: Well, we trained there, right up until two weeks or three weeks before the invasion. We were there all of May. Not all of May, about half of May.

KP: What was Northern Ireland like?

JD: I loved it. You know what was great about that? How would you like to get up in the morning, and [there was a] potbelly stove and we would have steaks and we would throw the steak right on the potbelly stove for breakfast, you know? Red-hot thing, caboom, and pick it up and turn it the other way or the other way and eat your steak. Now, you say to yourself, England had no meat, had no butter, no nothing. It all came from Northern Ireland, and it's just like trying to pass one egg out to six people. Well, forget about it, don't pass anything. So, all of the stuff was up there. In other words, they exported nothing, Northern Ireland. So, we got to eat all of the beef and everything like that. It isn't that our people didn't feed us. We just went down to the store and we would buy it. In the winter time, we kept them in the outside of our barracks and picked the steaks out and threw them on the lid of the stove, these potbelly stoves with a flat top. I remember those days, I remember those days.

KP: A lot of troops that were stationed in England have fond memories of the English pubs. Did you go into ...

JD: Yeah, you bet! You know the joke about that don't you? So, the GIs don't believe that they should leave. So, the joke goes like this. Their main drink was Half and Half, right, Half and Half, right, Half and Half? So, these guys are out in front of the bar, and this man and woman, him and his wife, are on the second floor and, "Come on, open up, we want some Half and Half. We want some Half and Half. Open up. What are you throwing us out for?" You know, the drunken GIs. So, the guy gets the pee pot and throws it out the window and says, "Half's mine and half's the old lady's."

KP: By the time you were in North Ireland, you had been battle tested twice. You had taken part in two jumps. But you also had a number of replacements.

JD: Oh, yes, we had replacements, you bet. From the casualties in both places.

KP: How well did the integration of the replacements go, especially from an officer's perspective?

JD: I think they went well, although we found that they didn't come on as strong as the people that were in America and we took off with the original group. We could notice that there was a little bit of laxness, you know? We looked upon things a little different, what the hell we were doing, and the recruits, we could pick them out right away. We could pick them out right away.

KP: What type of training did you prepare for in Northern Ireland? How did it vary from training, say in North Africa or in the States?

JD: Well, the training that we did a lot of was shooting. The training of my unit was a little different. We had the reconnaissance, which is the jeep with the .50 caliber machine gun and, not that it was always done by that, we did a lot of walking, too. But if you came across a top of a knoll and then you look ahead and you'd say, "If I were a machine gunner, where would I be?" "I think I'd be behind that clump of bushes there or I think I'd be over there," and, wherever you think it would be, we would fire two, three shots in that thing. Fire two, three shots over there. No response, then we would continue on. Occasionally, why, it didn't work out that way because in Belgium, they got two or three of our jeeps in a museum over there that were whacked with an 88mm bomber. These guns aren't always where you think they are gonna be because once you hit that area, you know right away, people are either running out, that the thing is known that there's a gun placement there, we've accomplished our mission. There's the enemy. There's the enemy. Then, we would call for artillery in that spot. Follow me?

KP: You mention that Gavin picked you out for reconnaissance. When would you actually meet up with your vehicles ...

JD: Italy.

KP: You did get your ...

JD: In Italy. The fellow that was the commander was killed in Sicily. There were two of them and I wind up with having three officers and myself. One officer had three jeeps, three jeeps, three jeeps and, nine of them. Ten of them altogether, with the one I had. That was the only mechanized thing. Now, today, when I go down to 82nd Airborne, wow, what vehicles they have. What armored vehicles they have. Now, they bring them in these big ships. They can bring a whole damn tank in, any spot in the world. Huge thing, huge planes.

KP: You mentioned that your vehicles were deployed by gliders. I've read that glider assaults could be very dangerous. In fact, they often have just as high casualties if not more than parachuting. What kind of concerns did you have about getting your unit ...

JD: Well, it was like everything else and again, the glider was, the timing of the glider was to get that guy down at dawn. Follow me? That would be about it. You see the game plan worked out good and perfect in Normandy. After they dropped the paratroopers, that's the first time they used gliders, now. The first time was in Normandy. Used no gliders in Sicily, no gliders in Italy. The first gliders were in Normandy. After they dropped the paratroopers off around midnight, one, two in the morning, those planes came right on back, right on back, right on back. They got fuel and whatnot, tied onto the gliders and off they went again. The same planes, the same planes that took the paratroopers on the first one. You may wonder and say, "Why don't they bring the paratrooper and the glider?" No. They didn't do it. If a plane took a glider, it didn't take paratroopers.

KP: How much did you know about your specific mission for Normandy in advance? When did you actually learn that D-Day was ...

JD: Marketplace. The mission was called "Marketplace." We got to meet General Eisenhower. [He] came to talk to the officers, General Eisenhower, and we were supposed to go a day before the invasion actually took place, but the weather was bad for the paratroopers, not for the Navy or the people that were going to go in and storm Utah and Omaha Beach, the boys in the regular infantry. Being that the weather was bad, so they held off one day and it was during that day that Eisenhower assembled the officers of the 82nd Airborne in different spots, not all of them together. They could be, maybe in battalion groups. He came in and made a nice talk, a nice speech and said, "This is it, this is it. We've got to succeed." Because they had they had that fiasco at Dunkirk, we don't want no Dunkirk, with the Airborne over there. They dropped us, they got to come over, they have to come over.

KP: Historians have looked at Eisenhower and said he was expecting incredibly high casualties for the airborne assaults of Normandy. I forget the exact number.

JD: Yeah, he expected half.

KP: Yeah, which is very, very high.

JD: Very, very high.

KP: Did you have any sense how dangerous this would be?

JD: Yeah, we were well aware that they had these poles and all of that up. You know, the paratroopers would be dropping out of a plane and they would get speared. No ifs, ands or buts about it, because you don't see them. Another thing about jumping at night, would you believe, that a lot of people got killed by releasing the parachute. You get the feeling that a macadam road is a stream. Sometimes the moon is out and the thing is just so and it takes a good man to say, "Hell, that's no stream. That's a macadam road." Now if it's a stream, you are supposed to smack your stomach and your harness comes right off and you fall right out of your chute. You fall out of your chute and you land on a macadam road and you're finished, you're finished. Those that land in water, you've got to do that because, with all of the hand grenades you got on you and your ammunition and your gun is strapped to your side, bad enough when you land in water without a chute. With a chute, you don't stand a chance.

KP: In all the assaults, you are carrying an awful lot of equipment.

JD: You bet. Forty pounds.

KP: Which makes you even drop faster, I would imagine.

JD: Hell yeah. You are loaded with hand grenades, as much as you can carry in the parachute pockets, and then what we have done to our carbine. There are thirty shots and so we take two of them together this way so when we get through firing thirty, you take it out and you put it upside down, the other one and you got thirty more. Then, what we do is we take the gun apart and there's a sear, so every carbine we get is a single fire. Boom, boom, boom. But if you saw something off, you take it apart and you saw that off, when you pull, it just keeps going boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. So, we made automatics out of all of our guns. We would fool around and just keep the trigger [pulled] and just keep shooting. See, you saw the sear, you file that down. We did that ourselves.

KP: It sounds like before Normandy that you were impressed by Ike.

JD: Yes, greatly impressed by Ike. Made a hell of a nice appearance. Always did the right thing and he was nice enough to say that this isn't just Americans. We've got the British, we have the Polish, we have the Polish Airborne, we have this. He'd try to name as many people that were involved in this invasion, that it wasn't just us. It's a big team effort and this is what we need and this is what's going to win the war, win the war. He tried to say that the things we had then up to that time was great, but this is it. See the big thing about the Airborne at that time was, should we bring them up to Normandy or should we leave them in Africa and jump in Southern France and come up from the belly, you follow me? Rather than going all the way up and coming over and let the regular Army hit them there and let the Airborne hit them down in Southern France. What's the name of that city down there?

TL: Marseilles?

JD: Yeah, that's right, Marseilles, Southern France. We always figured that that would be the, we would call it the Champagne, but actually Eisenhower didn't think that we should have two fronts, got it? One coming up and one jumping over here. He didn't think that that was so, at least that's the word that we got. But it was never discussed by Eisenhower or anything like that.

KP: Where did you, when you jumped in Normandy, where did you land and how close were you to your objective?

JD: No, we were close to our objective.

KP: What was your objective?

JD: Ste.-Mere-Eglise. We landed about a mile south, I'm sorry, north of Ste.-Mere-Eglise. The part that I couldn't believe was the size of those fields. The fields were small fields. We're accustomed, here in America, seeing a twenty acre field, thirty acre field. There're fields there that may have been

five acres, just a little area. And the fence row all around, and the fence row all around. How are these gliders gonna land? How the hell are they going to land? So, they had to top some of the trees and go up against the others. But I venture to say, I don't know of a single episode that people that landed in a glider, that were killed or seriously injured, or stuff like that. Yeah, I don't know a single episode.

KP: So, in other words, you got your scout cars. The gliders made it through.

JD: Yeah. I lost an officer on that there a day or so after we landed. This was my boy Adams. He was just a private, Private Adams. We found out that Indians can't handle alcohol. You didn't know that, did you? An Indian cannot handle alcohol. Adams, the guys would take him out, he wouldn't want to drink beer and whatnot like the others would, and he gets high on one drink. "What the hell is wrong," I said, "What the hell's a beer?" And then the guy, he never could get promoted. You wanted to promote him because he was a good soldier but then he would fall apart when he would have a drink. I don't know, that boy, Adams. He's a character, but a good soldier and did a good job.

KP: After landing in Normandy, how much German resistance did you encounter as an individual and how quickly did you join up with a unit?

JD: Well, it was dawn when we landed and we were together, I've got to say, within two hours, within two hours the whole unit was there. What was great was that there wasn't any of the fire that we had in Sicily. We were able to land, I think between you and me, our Air Force did one hell of a job, our Air Force did one hell of a job. There was nothing in the sky when we landed. I was so impressed with that there. It was unbelievable.

KP: Were you pleased with how close you were dropped off ...

JD: Yes.

KP: Or did you want to be closer?

JD: No, no, that was just perfect. Perfect. Remember, we're mechanized and so we were able to set up a corridor, one facing here, one facing there, one facing there and then we would have the troops coming into us and they would say, "Where is A Company? Where is C Company, B Company?" And we knew the general plan of where A Company was going to be, south of B Company, east of C Company, west, so it turned out to be good and it turned out to be a good operation, a good operation.

KP: In terms of the assault on Ste.-Mere-Eglise, your objective, the town ...

JD: Ste.-Mere-Eglise.

KP: What role would you take part in the capture of that town?

JD: What role?

KP: Yeah, what role did your ...

JD: All right, that's exactly right. And we were stationed on a road and we kept firing at anything that came down, that came down that there road. We were in depth. We had two people up on the knoll and we had two others there and then if something came, all our vehicles had radio in it. It might interest you to know that General Gavin, on the second day, used our radio to communicate with Eisenhower, to tell him of everything. We didn't understand a single word because it was all coded, all coded.

KP: When did you take your objective and when were you in a sense joined by other units?

JD: I say that within three days, we had Ste.-Mere-Eglise. [It] was freed, all the Germans were out and we were starting to get the line. The one beach that was the toughest beach and, I don't know why they picked it, there was a cliff. You go there now and the cliff is about fifty, sixty feet high, straight up and here we are landing on that beach. I guess they thought that the Germans would never figure that the stupid Americans would pick that there beach. To this day, I don't know, but they had a lot of casualties there and once they landed on that there beach, they just couldn't scale that. It was a hell of a job, but they did.

KP: After accomplishing your capture of Ste.-Mere-Eglise, what did your unit do next?

JD: The big thing. All of a sudden, [there] appears Patton. When he appears, boy, "Saint-Lo, let's go!" and we were headed for Saint-Lo. And the Germans were trying to recoup. We lasted out there for about twenty-eight days, thirty days and they withdrew us. When they broke out at Saint-Lo, they had the Airborne go back to England.

KP: You saw a lot of line combat that, in a sense, only traditional infantry units faced?

JD: Oh, sure, the 1st Division was always around us. We could always count on the 1st Division, the 9th Division, the 5th Division. These are line companies that were experienced line companies and we felt good being around them or them coming to save us.

KP: Being on the line, the paratroopers are noted for, in fact, being dropped, doing a mission and then eventually being withdrawn. Did being on the line for those many consecutive days wear down the division or your unit at all?

JD: Remember, we are not geared to be on the line like the line companies are. Line companies all have vehicles, line companies have all kinds of artillery, all kinds of weapons they have, line companies have. We don't have that. We are the guys with the rifle and the bazooka and 60mm stove pipe. We don't have, a German line company [compared] with us, would clean our clock. Follow me? Because we don't have the firepower, the mechanized firepower, that a regular line company would have. So, we have got to hit and accomplish an objective and, once the objective is accomplished, hey that's it. So, what the hell were we going to do? Go through France? The 82nd? No, so they pulled us back.

KP: How many casualties did you lose in ...

JD: I lost one officer in our unit. Our unit had about ninety and about eight of them were killed and about fifteen wounded.

KP: You were pulled back and sent to England. How long did you remain in England?

JD: Well, we remained in England, not too long, until they captured Rhemes in France, way out that there time. And then they had us go back in, go back in. So, we go now on the outskirts of Rhemes, there. This is almost the fall of the year, the fall of the year, we were out there. We wondered what the heck we were doing out there. They turned around now and that's when they felt that there was going to be a push. We got word that the Germans were going to put the last, the Maginot line, the last shot. That's when the 101st Airborne was sent to Bastogne, a little bit before Christmas or something like that. There was one hell of a battle there, one hell of a battle, and that's where the famous word, "Nuts" [came from]. The Germans said, "You guys better have the white flag and give up," and he [the general of the 101], says "Nuts." Anyway, they put us on trucks and they trucked us to the Battle of the Bulge.

KP: Just backing up a bit, when did your unit take part in an assault on Holland that you had mentioned earlier?

JD: A little later.

KP: That would come later. What do you remember about the Battle of the Bulge? 101st often gets a lot of the ...

JD: Yeah, they get a lot of good publicity. What we did is, one of the articles says that we were protecting the northern flank of the Battle of the Bulge, so we never got into the deep fighting. We were thinking that more troops were gonna come from the north and our job was to cut them off. As it turned out, I didn't lose a single man on the Battle of the Bulge. But I'll tell you, there was a lot of fighting. It was nothing heavy like it was in Normandy and things like that.

KP: Almost everyone I have interviewed said you were fighting the climate almost as much as the enemy.

JD: Cold, cold and no food, that's the other part. No food, cold and snow and all that. I guess some of those pictures that I have are of the Battle of the Bulge.

TL: Are those the ones with the ...

JD: Yeah, the story, that story that is in this magazine. Here's the Battle of the Bulge, right here. Right here, there's an article in the magazine there, with my picture in it and all that.

KP: Your division would pretty much fight fairly continuously from the Bulge on. Did you get any supporting armor and other things that a traditional infantry division gets?

JD: Yes, oh, yes. We got a lot of armor there at the Battle of the Bulge. The tricky part about the Battle of the Bulge was this. We are going to give them a hand, right, and the word soon got out, "Don't go by the signs," because at every intersection, they would take the signs, the Germans did. Do you follow me? You would be going in the opposite direction, you know, another way, and well, "Where the hell is this place?" Remember, it's the first time when you are going into a foreign country, that's the first time. So, you had to go through all of that rigmarole. Then, you had to go through the other part of [the country] where [there were] a lot of American soldiers and then you got to talk baseball language to them. "Who's Babe Ruth?" "Who's Joe DiMaggio?" "Who's a few of these ballplayers" you know? You couldn't trust the people that were at the intersections saying, "That way, that way." You follow me? And it did happen, where units were completely taken off their . . .

KP: You have talked a lot about the American units you liked. What about the German units you fought against?

JD: Great fighters. Great, great, great fighters and the prisoners that we would catch, we could see that they were not top people. On cross-examination, rather when they were interrogated, most of them were in the military, maybe six months or a year. In other words, they were not seasoned soldiers.

TL: How old were they, the ones that you captured?

JD: As the war was going on, they were younger and younger. But at the very beginning, like in Italy and Sicily and all that, soldiers of our age, our age.

KP: Did your unit ever encounter the Waffen SS, any SS troops?

JD: Well, they were the ones that we fought most of the time, the SS. And their paratroopers were thrown in against us.

KP: How did they compare with the regular Germans?

JD: I say, your SS was a diehard. You wouldn't catch him giving up. They don't give up, they don't give up. You know, the other thing about the 82nd, the only time I recall getting prisoners was when we were sixty miles behind the lines, when we jumped in Nijmegen, Holland which was our last jump. It was a Sunday afternoon and the first thing my unit did, we stopped a train. Everybody gets off the train and none of them had a gun, the Germans. They were going back on leave, so they were sixty miles behind the lines. You follow me? They thought, how safe could this world be? How safe? That's the only time we got prisoners. We didn't get any prisoners and you hear sad stories about that, that you know, [how] we couldn't handle prisoners. We couldn't handle them and we have a job to do and we didn't have them. But like everything else, [that was] the only time that I can recall we having prisoners and having [them] line up like you see prisoners when they're caught.

KP: What was the toughest and scariest assault you had on the ground? I imagine jumping must have been, even after you had done it several times, but what about on the ground? What were the close calls that you had?

JD: Well, some of the close calls we've had were, we first got to see this thing called the "jet plane." We see it first in Holland, and when a plane goes down, we always go out there and take the propeller off or something like that, [when] fighter pilots go down. So, we had them all over our jeeps and all that. All of a sudden, we go down, the plane gets shot down and going over, it goes whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. "What the hell was that?" Finally, the plane is knocked down and we go to it and we say, "Where's the propeller? Hey, where's the propeller?" There is a hole in the front. How the hell can this thing go with a hole, a hole in the front? It was the most amazing thing you ever did want to see. I got to see that in Holland. Those guys threw a bomb that was an anti-personnel bomb. That is, it spun coming down, it would cast off, like hand grenades, like over an area, maybe, oh, at least like a football field and boom, bomb, boom, bomb, boom, all over. So, wherever the group was, it had to get a few of them. They even went into the fox holes, would land on you. You follow me? But that plane, and then we saw, at that time, the Germans would have that plane going over at about four hundred miles an hour, dropping that bomb on England and then dropping down. We saw all of that. We would count our bombers, four hundred and ninety-seven, no, no, there was five hundred and five. We actually would count the bombers, four or five hundred bombers every time. Then, coming back, we would count them. There would be ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty less.

TL: What was it like looking up in the sky and seeing it full of planes?

JD: Full of planes. And then the fighter pilots going at each other. Yeah, planes go down and we go right out there. Pilots are always dead. Always dead.

KP: What about food, particularly when you were on the line, because you weren't a traditional division? You were traditionally trained to do missions ...

JD: Well, we carried a good supply of C rations and K rations. The C ration is more of the tin can and the other is more of the chocolate bar and stuff like that.

KP: But when you were on the line, especially for Saint-Lo, you were on the line for thirty days, how good was the supply to your division? Were you eating K and C rations ...

JD: K and C rations, that was mostly it. My unit, if we ever got a hot meal was if we got back to ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Joseph V. Demasi on April 1, 1996 in Phillipsburg, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

TL: Tara G. Liston.

KP: And you were mentioning that to get your men a hot meal ...

JD: Yeah, I'd call into the defensive platoon to find out if they had any hot food and half the time, they would say, "Well we got some, Joe, we got some. Okay." You know what the credo was and still is, I imagine, was that the men ate first and, if there was anything left over, the officers ate, when

you ate out in the field that way. The officers never ate first. They ate at the end if there was any left. If there wasn't any, God Bless America. And that's it.

TL: That's a strict contradiction to the Navy, then. The officers got everything and the enlisted men got nothing.

KP: What about replacements? You would see, particularly during the Bulge, your unit would see quite a bit of combat. I get the impression that you got replacements much more frequently.

JD: The replacements came after an exercise. I think the 82nd Airborne, 505, has like three hundred and sixty some days of combat time. Actually combat days. The longest was during the Battle of the Bulge, that was our longest engagement. Sicily also was a good, better than a month. But Holland was the other one, when we jumped in Holland.

KP: Did you ever think of making the military a career and staying in?

JD: No, no, I felt that we had a job to do and when it was over, I wanted to go back to civilian life. I keep thinking that right after the war, they made the reconnaissance troop a regular thing and the commanding officer, at first, was a major and, had I stayed in, I would have been a logical candidate to have taken the job. But I felt that I wanted to get back in civilian life.

KP: Where were you when V-E Day took place?

JD: You mean ...

KP: In Europe, where were you, when did you ...

JD: Oh, in England. When the atomic bomb was dropped.

KP: Not against Japan, but in Europe. Where was your unit when Germany finally surrendered?

JD: Oh, I am meeting them right, there they are, we're getting drunk with the Russians. When you meet the Russian paratroopers, you know what we used to do? "Why, we would have a big dinner and stay at a castle, one of those German castles, [with] a window right there and you have a drink and you throw the glass in the fireplace and you jump out the window, like a couple story drop. The guys, they, I said, "These goddamned Russians are really nuts." But the Russians, they were the ones who had an animosity to the Germans that was second to none.

KP: Your meeting with the Russians at the Elbe, what did you expect? What image did you have of the Russians and were those expectations fulfilled or not?

JD: Well, remember now, when we had captured German officers, a lot of the Germans spoke English and they said, "You haven't seen anything yet until you fight the Russians." They tell the story of how their machine gunners would keep shooting and they would shoot these guys and they'd come over dead bodies, over dead bodies until the machine gun would get so hot, it would cease firing. The barrel would bend and they just kept coming, and kept coming, these Russians. They lost

ten million civilians and GIs, they claim that the Russians. My experience was when I first met them at the, these pictures were taken, we knew we were going to meet them because we heard them on the radio. General Gavin says, "Go out there," and he gave me the interpreter, one of those little guys who's not a paratrooper. He is an interpreter, one of those little guys. He's an ex-Russian himself, the little guy, but he spoke English. We never got to talk to him. But in every tank was a woman and she was a radio operator and they just jumped out and they had skirts, not pants. They would lift up their skirt and get down and do their duty, just like that, just like a man would and no nothing. That was nothing until, all of a sudden, a pregnant German woman is walking by and this Russian soldier runs over and kicks her in the belly and the woman just dies right there. I said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, what are you doing?" He jumped all over me and said, "Hey, you know," in Russian, the Russians explained it to me, they said, "The Germans did the same thing in Stalingrad. The Germans did the same thing in such-in-such." It was unbelievable. Then, they turned around to a house and a shot came out of a house and they "uurrrr", turned their tanks around and "go-oom, go-oom" and they leveled that house, right in my presence, right there. At the time of this meeting. Hey, they were rough people and when they went into Berlin, oh, God. And the Germans were giving up to us, up to us. "Where's the Americans?" They gave up to us and we just took them prisoners. The Russians, the Russians mowed them down.

KP: Were you surprised, towards the end of the war, how quickly the Germans were surrendering? Because they had been very formidable adversaries.

JD: I will not sell the Russians short and whatever happened on the Black Sea when Stalin had all the say, right? Old Stalin turned to Churchill and said, "How many men have you lost?" "A million." To the Americans, "How many men did you lose, Mr. Truman, Mr. Roosevelt, rather?" It was Roosevelt there, it was his last days. "We lost a million." "Well, I lost ten million" So, you wonder why he had the bigger say at the peace treaty, because he said, "I lost ten million."

KP: After meeting the Russians and after Germany finally surrendered, where was your unit sent to? Where did you go to? How long did you remain in Germany?

JD: Well, I had the maximum amount of points anybody could have. The combat from day one right on through and I had my points and I kissed the boys good-bye and got on a plane and came home.

KP: So, when did you leave?

JD: I left, maybe about, oh hell, four or five days after the war was over.

KP: So, you left in May of '45?

JD: [Yes.]

KP: Where did you fly to?

JD: Right to Fort Dix, right to Fort Dix. I had like, I think I had ninety days leave coming or something like that. You usually get thirty days a year. I only had ninety days left, you know? In other words, I didn't take a single day off during the whole period of time. I got down to Fort Dix and

I got supper and that was it. So, I got three months pay while I was home, and I was in college, I was in law school while I was still on ...

KP: ... Active duty.

JD: Yeah, active duty.

KP: When did you decide, when did you learn about the GI Bill and when did you decide that you were going to use this to go to law school?

JD: Well, you know one great thing about being in combat and out and all that was that we got the *Stars and Stripes*. The *Stars and Stripes*, pretty much, whenever we got ahold of them, pretty much gave us what the hell was going on and, you know, anything that benefited the GI, anything that benefited the GI that was headlines for the *Stars and Stripes*, which was our GI newspaper.

KP: So, did you have a sense in '44 that you were going to use it to go to law school and use the GI Bill or was it '45?

JD: '45. Yeah, '45.

KP: Why Rutgers Law School? Had you tried other law schools?

JD: No, because I went to Rutgers. Again, I wanted to be a Jersey lawyer and as far as I was concerned, that was the only law school at the time. The only law school at the time.

KP: Because with the GI Bill, you theoretically could have gone to any law school in the country.

JD: Oh, sure, sure.

KP: You never used the GI mortgage?

JD: No. Never. When I got turned down with the bank at that time, I said, and I was fortunate, I made money the whole time.

KP: What was it like to be a student after being an officer and seeing combat? I mean, you were used to giving orders, people were used to following you, and people were trying to kill you, and you were trying to kill them. Now to go back to a class room which is old hat, but much different.

JD: Yeah, it was a different playing field. I will tell you what now comes into play. You know, you never stop to think how long you do without the opposite sex. All of a sudden, all these girls, all these girls and I said, "Oh, my, God." You had all the time in the world to, you're studying, you're dating and I'll never forget studying and dating and me liking to go deer hunting, all right? You think that I just take my rifle and go in the woods? I take my law book, my studies with me, and I sit on a log because in deer hunting you've got to be patient, you have to wait for the deer to come through. I sit on a log and I read a book. All of a sudden, I see a hunter behind [me] and he said, "What the hell kind of a hunter are you, reading?" I said, "One of these days I'm gonna be a lawyer. I'm studying

my law books." I would always bring a book with me when I went into the woods to deer hunt. Any other kind of hunting you don't, like pheasants, rabbits, that's different hunting. But for deer hunting, you look for a nice log, a good place where you can look, and then I would read, and you can look over. There you are.

KP: What were your favorite courses in law? What kind of law did you enjoy the most, when you were in law school?

JD: Well, I enjoyed contract law and tort. I didn't go too much for estate law, although that now seems to be the major part of my practice is working on estates, so I am doing it the practical way. I enjoyed trial work. I did a lot of personal injury, auto accidents.

KP: You wanted to be a New Jersey lawyer. Did you envision setting up your own practice or did you think you would like to work for a firm?

JD: No, I wanted to do it on my own. I figured that there were no Italian attorneys in Warren County and I said, "You know, all these Italian people and what-not will all come to me." And it did happen that way. I got a lot of my clients because one-third of Phillipsburg, at that time, was Italian and one-third was Slovaks and one-third was Irish. But the Irish ran the town. They were all the politicians, they were the police, they were the fire department, the Irish. The Slovaks and the Italians worked in the plants and in the fields at that time.

KP: What have you enjoyed most about being an attorney?

JD: I think the personal contact that your job calls for and the people placing that confidence and trust in you. And trying to help people and the satisfaction that you get. Today, I had a closing, and this fellow's father and my father were great friends, okay? He is almost my age, he's about seventy. He is, Frank is, Frank (Santini?). He says, "Joe." I did a little property work for the son. I had to go to court and fight over something and I won the case he said, "Joe, you don't know how much we appreciate it." I gave him a break in the fee and he says, "Joe, you call the slaughter house up and I have a lamb for you for Easter, all right?" The guy was a farmer and every so often, he'll give me a calf. Then, I've got to get my sisters and my brother and half a dozen friends and I'll have the butcher shop guy cut it all up, freeze them and then I'll deliver the packages to the other people. But he's that kind of guy, which is nice. Here it is, Easter time, the Italian has lamb for the Easter meal. I will now tell all of my sisters and brothers to come to my house and we going have a whole lamb.

TK: If your family is anything like the Italian side of my family, that whole lamb will be gone in a few minutes.

JD: Exactly. There will be about fourteen, a total of fourteen of us, I guess, will be there. I have, my niece's boy Chris [Pollard?] is a sophomore at Rutgers.

KP: Oh, wow, what major?

JD: I think he is majoring in journalism, I thought. I don't know, I thought so. Chris (Pollard?).

KP: When was the first reunion you went to of the 82nd Airborne?

JD: Well, it took Sergeant Stubbins, my sergeant, to come to my house and says, "You, you've got to get active. C'mon. You were one of us, now." I said, "Well, we're not old enough yet." He says, "Well, it's thirty years, thirty years." I said, "What the hell is thirty years, that's nothing." So, I gotta say, about fifteen years ago, I got active. I go to all the reunions and I am on the board of directors and the legal officer for the 82nd. Not many lawyers were paratroopers.

TK: Can you tell us about the time you met President Clinton?

JD: Yeah, that was on, first I get a letter, and I photocopied the letter that I got. I get the letter and it says, "You are welcomed to join us, join the President in having breakfast aboard the *USS George Washington*. Please call to see whether you will bring your spouse." So, I called up the War Department and I said, "Yeah," I said, "you bet I'll have breakfast with the President." "Are you bringing anyone?" I said, "No, I'm not bringing anyone, I'll be alone." Now over there, my friend, Jake (Schneiderman?), the military police guy, the guy I played golf with, all of a sudden, he's married and his wife, now, we're in Ste.-Mere-Eglise, his wife says, "Joe, can't I be your wife and go on?" I said, "I am not married." "Well, I am your sister." "Oh, God," I said, "Well, I told them that it's just me." Boy, she pressed and I said, "All right, I will stick my neck out and see what happens." So, it's five in the morning and we are in Ste.-Mere-Eglise and there is the helicopter to take me on board the *USS George Washington*, out in the bay out there, off of Normandy and I said, "Major," I said, "I have my sister here, she'd like to go. It's a late entry here." "Oh, my God. Well, we've made arrangements just for you." I said, "Why?" "Oh, there's room on the 'copter but let me talk to the Colonel." So, I could see the Colonel and the Major talking about it, you know? So, finally, the Colonel says, waved like that, so the Major comes out and he says, "Well, okay," he says, "you can take your sister." So, she got on, and that made publicity. In fact, one of the pictures [is] of me with her on a helicopter. And I find out that there was one other man from the 82nd that was invited, Birch. He's the President of the Disabled Veterans of America, he is. President of the Disabled Veterans of America. So, we get on there and there is Glenn, Senator Glenn, there's Hillary and everybody's talking and having fun and eating all kinds of stuff that's there, coffee, juice. Then, we sit down to have breakfast. After breakfast, everybody got up and clapped their hands and the President gave a talk. He says, "I want to thank the 1st Division, 9th Division, the 45th Division," and all the names of all the Navy people that were there. In fact, there were more Navy people than Army people. Well, we're on a naval ship, why not? I found out, you know how many people [were] on that Navy ship? Only 6,000, that's all. To run that ship, 6,000, is aircraft carrier. Anyway, so we go up to shake hands and I said, "Mr. President," and he gave a beautiful, beautiful speech, but "you forgot to mention the 82nd Airborne." "Oh, yeah, I knew they were there, oh, my God, they were great, they were the greatest." So, I wrote that in the article that appeared in all of our Airborne papers, okay? And he gave three other speeches that day, this was seven o'clock in the morning. He gave three, Omaha Beach and right on down to the American Cemetery, and [at] every one he mentioned, "And the 82nd Airborne."

KP: So, your talk to him really made a difference.

JD: Yeah, of course. He brought it up because, then I checked with the various people that were at different places. I couldn't be at all those places, but we had people at all those places.

KP: Did you ever join the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars?

JD: Yeah, I'm the attorney for the American Legion for the County of Warren and I am the legal officer, but I'm not active. They have meetings, the last Wednesday, and I do work for them and all of that, liquor license and any violation that they have, [at] any of the Legions of the County. I do work for them for nothing. They had a couple of corporations that are no longer in existence and I had to dissolve them. The American Legion of Warren County, I am the legal officer of them.

KP: It sounds like that after the war, you really had other things that interested you. You were trying to build a legal career, and it is only about fifteen years ago that you really had an interest.

JD: Right, yeah. I'll tell you, just like, also the Disabled Vets in there. They say, "Joe, you're our officer, why don't you come on down, Joe?" So, I have it stapled in there, May-something is their annual dinner. "Joe, it's a free ticket, it's a free..." I said, "Yeah, that's because of the..." I said, "No," I said, "Okay, I'll be there." Well, some of these organizations, you have a different group of men. Men that, I don't know, that weren't the kind that I associated with in the 82nd Airborne and what-not. Some of these people do it for a business reason or whatnot, for publicity. Occasionally, you find the real individuals, of course. Those that want to be officers, they always are in the political limelight and all of that. I never got involved in politics. I like to use this expression. Bob Meyner was my neighbor, right next door, and he got to be governor and Senator Dumont was my neighbor next door, right there. They were so busy in politics, at each other's throats, that I made all the money practicing law. You can't be a politician and be a lawyer. That's a big job when you want to climb that ladder, when you want to climb that ladder. So, I was friendly with both sides and I vote for the individual and so I just made money. I didn't have to go through any divorce where you get rid of half of your money. You get married again and get divorced and get rid of the other half of your money. So, there you are.

KP: I can't resist because I am involved as an consultant for my weekend and evening job, on remaking Morven [former governor's mansion] into a historic site and I would be curious, do you ever go down to Morven when Bob Meyner was governor? Did he ever invite you down?

JD: Yeah and, oh, hell, also I have been to the place down in, down at the beach down there ...

KP: Sea Girt.

JD: The island there and I've been down there. No, I have. Bob Meyner and I are good friends, and Tom (Zwick?). Tom (Zwick?), who was his partner in practicing law, was a dear buddy of mine. So, as far as that's concerned, I got involved in going to the parties and stuff like that. Wayne Dumont, same way. Nice guys.

KP: Any particular good parties you remember at Morven when he was governor?

JD: Well, we had some real good parties there, I've got to tell you that, some real good parties. Sometimes he invited maybe fifteen, twenty members of the Bar. We would have good parties, a lot of jokes, a lot of everything.

TK: Why did you stay away from politics, because you just liked your law practice better?

JD: Well, no. I felt that with the practice of law, politics can be a deceiving and a disheartening situation. When I was going to law school, I ran for office and I made it. I was the township committeeman, all right? That's about the lowest job you can give to a new townsman. You run the township. I'm in law school, so I did it, okay? Now came the 1950 census and I was picked for the Seventh Congressional District. At that time, it was the Seventh, which took in Paterson, all right? It was a sliver, you talk about gerrymandering, right? I was the man. They sent me to Washington, D.C. and, wow. In those days, they gave me something like, people were working for thirty dollars a week and I was getting 200 dollars a week. "Wow," I said. "This is great!" So, I had to go to school and then I had to come back and teach the enumerators. This is 1950, I now, was a young lawyer. I got to be a lawyer 1949 and here it is 1950 and I'm taking the census for the Seventh Congressional District. I had to give up my job as township committeeman. I win the election and then I have to give the job up because of this, right? But the governor, at that there time, says to me, "Don't worry. We are going to make you lawyer of that township." "Oh," I said, "That's great." After the census is taken, it was a six month job, it is a good job, very good job, and I said, "That's wonderful, made a lot of money." I said, "Bob, how about the job of township." "Well, Joe, politics is funny. One time you can, the way things are, things look one way and then a couple of months later, they turn, so I don't think we can do that." And I said, "Well, I wasn't counting on it, you know? I am a young lawyer and all that." And if you could get any little side jobs, you're meeting people as well as working, you follow me? You are meeting, you're making contacts and that's part of it. So, it didn't turn out. Then, I got busy in the practice of law and I said, "Maybe that was a pretty good lesson that I had in politics early in life." I said, "I know in politics you have got to do a lot of ..." I see these lawyers and I say, "Boy, they're busy." "Yeah, Joe, this is for so-and-so. It's the, so-and-so's brother and it's a no pay job, Joe. No pay job." "Oh," I said, "You look busy. Not making any money." So, that's it. But I felt that if I became a politician, I would do the same thing as I did in the Airborne. I could do it, but I am glad I stayed with the law because with the law you get to meet all kinds of people, you go all over H and back. At that time, I had the only murder case. I'm a lawyer three years and I have a, now murder is every day of the week, I guess, but back in those days, it didn't come that quick, you know, cases like that.

KP: So, you even did criminal work?

JD: Yeah, oh, sure.

KP: Was the murder case the most interesting case you've had or did you had other cases that were ...

JD: Well, that was an interesting case, because the man comes to the office, he says, "Joe, she's been away now seven weeks." I said, "You got this thing wrong." I said, "When she is away for seven years, we can have her declared dead. But seven weeks, my God, that's not enough. She'll show up, your wife will show up. She'll show up." The detective went down the cellar, about a couple of months after the death. This is the summer time, and he noticed that the coal heap, when you put coal in the cellar through the window, it is a nice cone. He noticed the coal heap isn't a cone. Somebody fooled around with this coal heap. So, the detective gets the shovel and starts shoveling and he sees fresh concrete under the [coal]. To make a long story short, he had removed the coal, broke the

concrete floor in the cellar and buried his wife there. My defense was, my defense was that she fell down the steps, that's what he told me, fell down the steps and that he buried a dead body, that she was already dead. The case went to the Supreme Court and, this case in New Jersey holds out that, I don't care how gruesome the pictures are, they can be shown to the jury. They took all pictures of her after being in the ground for two months. They were gruesome pictures. You show that to a jury, and I'm saying that she fell down the stairs, I think about it, you know. But, here's the bright spot of the thing. The guy was such a nice guy, see? This all comes when the women went to work while we fought the war. The women went to work and after the war they continued working with men and the woman didn't come home to do her job as a wife and, dating men while at work and this is, this is where it first started and has continued ever since. Thank God for the divorce courts. But, getting back to this guy, such a nice guy that the superintendent of the prison made him his valet, his valet, all right? Old (Hawkie?) used to drive the stuff around and all that. Now, that's not the end of the story. A nice bunch of women come and sing to the prisoners. Are you aware that there's a choir of women that go to the state prison and sing? Are you aware of that? I get a letter from one of them. She says, "You're Mr. Huff's attorney. Would you give him this letter, please?" Because she couldn't write directly, follow me? But me, being his lawyer, she found out who the lawyer was. Of course, the letter says "I noticed you there and why don't you write to me," so now I am the matchmaker. So, I am getting letters from him and I am sending letters over to him, back and forth, and now, for the rest of the story. He serves eighteen years and I am best man at the wedding.

TK: Are you kidding me?

JD: Not kidding.

KP: Did they stay happily married?

JD: Oh, yeah, they are happily married. Hi there, young man ...

KP: I think with such a story this might a good place to stop.

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Edited by Dennis Duarte 7/7/00

Edited by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/12/00

Edited by Joseph V. DeMasi