RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH CLIFFORD L. ELLING

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SANDRA STEWART HOLYOAK

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TRANSCRIPT BY

EVE SNYDER

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins a second interview, a follow-up interview, with Clifford L. Elling in his home in Bridgewater, NJ on February the 1st, 2000. Sandra Stewart Holyoak is the interviewer. Mr. Elling, again I thank you for your hospitality this morning, and as we begin to catch up on your interview, I'd like you to first tell me what the L. in Clifford L. Elling stands for.

Clifford Elling: Louis, with the French spelling, L-O-U-I-S, which was my father's first name.

SSH: And in the first interview, we briefly have gone over the interview, can you tell me were there any areas that you would like to talk more about. Are there more stories, or anecdotes that you would like to tell me about this morning before we go on with the rest of your service record?

CE: … We've covered my service record through my period of basic training, stationed, and then on to Texas and Utah, but two years of the three [that] I was in the service were spent in Washington DC, which we haven't started yet. That would be the next segment and, of course, the major one, time wise.

SSH: Well, please, let's start there then.

CE: All right. I had been in the service with a disability, limited service. I don't know if I mentioned this before or not, but I had rheumatic fever at the age of six, which left me with an erratic heartbeat and high blood pressure, which didn't show up or surface until I went to Rutgers and entered the military. In those days, doctors didn't pay any attention to blood pressure except to express curiosity about it. And, of course, it was into the '70s before there were effective medications on the market. So I lived for at least thirty years, maybe more, with high blood pressure. Readings of 220 over 120 were not uncommon. And this kept me out of combat, because I would black out and collapse unpredictably. I'd just pass out while I was standing in the chow line, and if you're eighteen years old, and can't reach the food, well, you know, there's something seriously wrong. So I was limited service as this was unearthed. I was transferred to the Pentagon building in Washington, DC, and spent the rest of the war as a desk soldier.

SSH: When was this?

CE: This would have been in the spring of '44, and I'd already been on active duty for a little more than a year. We lived on the old Bowling Field Air Force Base in Southeastern District of Columbia called Anacostia, which was done away after the war. The land was made part of the Naval Air Station when the Air Force built Andrews Base out in Prince George's County, Maryland to replace it. But during the war Bowling Field was the headquarters unit for what was then the Army Air Forces under General Hap Arnold. I was assigned to an organization known as the Office of Statistical Control which essentially kept personnel records for the Army Air Forces, not yet an individual command. The Air Force didn't become that until after the war. It was part of the Army. And we worked with early, original, IBM equipment. Punch card machines and perforated cardboard cards, keeping track of the units and the personnel assigned to the Army Air Forces which, at that time, was something in excess of three million men. So, it was a major branch of the military. To put it in perspective, I'd like to mention that [in] World

War II more than fourteen million people were in uniform, and this is out of [a] total population at the time of no more than 115 million, I think, Census of 1940. So that's more than one in ten, and if we had a comparable effort today, we'd have more than thirty million people in uniform. So that gives you a feel for the effort, and the sacrifices that were called for at this time, to mobilize to that extent.

SSH: What was your rank at that point?

CE: PFC. I later became a corporal and then a sergeant, … which I was at the time of my discharge.

SSH: Now, your housing, was it quickly made or was it an old barracks.

CE: Temporary barracks, which were wooden framed construction with siding on it, no inner wall, no insulation, of course, and Washington summers [I] vividly remember the heat. No air conditioning. I might add, the Pentagon building was air conditioned and on a hot night we adopted the habit of taking our pillows, and rolling up a blanket, and getting on a barge, and going up the river, and curling up and sleeping on our desks to get some sleep. And the barges, of course, ran back and forth all night long because there were many, many shifts. The unit was essentially composed of the men who worked in the Pentagon building.

SSH: What kind of a clearance did you have to have to work in the Pentagon at that time?

CE: The funny thing is, that I'm not familiar with. I do know that they ran background checks on me, because after the war I heard from my family, and old teachers at Somerville High School, that people had come around Somerville and asked questions about me. I was never told and I never knew it, … but I realized, simply by putting two and two together, after the fact, that they had been conducting a background check.

SSH: Now, these barges that you used to go up and down the Potomac from Anacostia up to the Pentagon on the Virginia side ...

CE: Right.

SSH: Were those open to anyone, or only to the military?

CE: Only to the people who had reason to make the trip, who were, practically, all military, and practically all enlisted personnel. Officers were not living in these barracks, and the civilians and civil service workers were not, either. I might add that it was an ingenious way of solving the commuting problem, because in those days there weren't that many bridges across the Potomac. And we learned, in bad weather, that to go into the city, up to the 14th Street Bridge, the South Capitol Bridge didn't exist yet, we had to detour around M Street, around the old naval gun factory, and the trip, instead of being like twenty minutes, became and hour and a half, so that we'd saved a tremendous amount of time. We did away with additional traffic congestion, and probably cost a lot less than running trucks, because the barges held as many men as three or four trucks would have, so that they didn't have to run nearly as many. In bad weather, in snow,

we had to go through the city, or when the river iced over, I should say, not just snow. And those days, Washington had absolutely no snow removal equipment of any sort. You have to remember that during the war years nobody was producing it. Everything was on priority production for the military. In the '30s nobody could afford it, and in the '20s nobody needed it. The auto age was just getting launched. So the way they solved that problem was, the nearest city that was equipped to deal with a blizzard or a snow storm was Philadelphia. And when Philadelphia finished clearing their streets they'd load the equipment on flat cars and send it down through Pennsylvania to Baltimore. And Baltimore would stop the train, and clean up their city, and reload it, and send it down to Washington. So Washington never saw a snow plow until a week after the storm. And what they did use the equipment for, of course, was clearing gutters and drains. You know, cleaning up the old ice and slush was about the only value they got out of it, but that was the snow removal procedure during the war years. [Laughter]

SSH: That's very interesting. Are there any other stories about the Washington we know today, as to what you saw during the war years, while you were stationed there? You talk about the old gun factory on M Street.

CE: Yes, on M Street. Yes, that was the only bridge across Anacostia Creek. As I say, the South Capitol Bridge came after the war. So that in order to reach the city you had to detour up the creek almost halfway across the district, cross the bridge, and then come back down on the other side, and then go in to the 14th Street Bridge before you could get over to Virginia.

SSH: Do you remember any kind of security, or anything around the White House, or the Capitol at that point?

CE: There was no tour, no sightseeing during the war years. And, of course, we didn't get any time off to speak of, anyway, until the war was over.

SSH: As far as being a young man and, in Washington or Anacostia, what did you do for R&R and what kind of duty did you serve, what kind of hours, or watch, or …

CE: The typical hours were eight to ten hours a day, six days a week. We didn't go in on Sundays unless there was an emergency. But we did work Monday through Saturday, which, again, was typical of the war years for all sorts of people, civilians as well as military. You know, the five day week existed on paper, but the Wages and Hours Act was suspended during the war, for the pursuit of the war. For recreation, for R&R, we had USO dances. And, of course, Washington also had what they called "State Societies," like the Texas Society, or the California Society, which was a club of people who came from that state, originally, and who would organize, for social purposes, and throw dances and parties mostly for their own members. But there was a standing invitation for young soldiers, because their own members in Washington were ninety percent women. You know, they were the ones working in the offices, and manning the government desks and jobs at that time. The men were in the service, or they were in heavier production. The older men were working in places like shipyards, and what have you. And the women, of course, even did a lot of work in that area: Rosie the Riveter.

SSH: Right. Right.

CE: What can you say? But young soldiers, and most of us were teenagers, were welcome at all these State Society dances, and USO dances, because there were approximately ten women for every man in the District of Columbia.

SSH: Did you do any exploring, as a history buff, of Washington at all?

CE: I wasn't that particularly developed as a history buff at that stage. But, yes, I did enjoy, after the war ended in August of '45, I was … still in the service for about another half year, through January of '46, and I enjoyed seeing places like the Smithsonian, the National Art Gallery, particularly the Corcoran Wing I remember. We also took the trolley car out to a local amusement park, which was out in Montgomery County in a neighborhood called Cabin John. I don't know if it still exists or not. It's upstream from Georgetown along the Potomac. And it was a typical old-fashioned amusement park. You know, with Dodge 'Ems, and Ferris Wheels, and the whole bit.

SSH: Before we go back to the technology of the punch card that you were working on, were there other things that you remember about Washington during the war?

CE: Well, I particularly remember V-J Day. V-E Day was known in advance, so we were restricted to base. And, of course, it wasn't really the end of the war yet, anyway. In fact, the slogan at the time was "Golden Gate in '48," which gives you an idea of the expectations. Nobody knew anything about the atomic bomb yet, and nobody could foresee the sudden end of the war. But V-J Day was something of a surprise, the timing of it, at least. There had been rumors, there had been contacts, but nothing was really set until it was announced about six o'clock, I think, on a Saturday night. And I was fortunate enough to have already cleared base, and was on a bus on the way into town when people in the streets started shouting. So I was in Washington, downtown, what with the celebrating. And I remember, vividly, seeing sailors dancing on top of the trolley cars around Lafayette Square, people milling in the street. They say there [were] a half million people in downtown Washington, which was the approximate population of the District of Columbia at that time. And I can believe it, because the Pennsylvania Avenue was wall to wall people all the way from the White House to the Capital Building, and spilling over into all the side streets on both sides. And, of course, there was singing, and dancing, and drinking, people waving bottles.

SSH: What did you do?

CE: Well, I was dating at the time and I went into the center of the city. I met the girl I was dating, who'd taken a bus in from Arlington, Virginia which was out in the country at that time. Still a few cow pastures, sort of, outer-suburbia, and she lived in a garden apartment project out there that had been put up in a hurry, just before the U.S. involvement in the war. And … I came in on the bus from Bowling Field, she came in on a bus from Arlington, and we just, sort of, wandered around, looking and wandering with our mouths hanging open, and staying on the edge of the crowd. We did not get in the center of it.

SSH: How shocked were you at the dropping of the atomic bomb? I mean, working in the Pentagon you said …

CE: I knew nothing whatsoever about it, but I was able to piece together a clue, in retrospect, which meant nothing at the time it happened. The 29th Air Force, based in Guam, was a newly organized command, which flew B-29s, the new enlarged version of the old B-17 flying fortress. And it was that plane that dropped the atomic bombs. It had a much greater range than any other plane used before that in World War II. It was a propeller plane, but it had great length and staying power. It could fly like 2,000 miles out and back again, like a 4,000 mile round trip, which was really something. The planes were based in Guam and the supporting fighter planes that escorted the bombers were based in Iwo Jima, which is why we seized Iwo Jima, for that particular purpose. Now they set up some bomber groups in this 29th Air Force. A typical bomber group was four squadrons: pilots, mechanics, support personnel, all the men involved in flying four squadrons of bombers. But the, some of the groups, not all, had one squadron with a different composition, and it included a company of military police. And everybody's scratching their head, and asking, and wondering, "Why-oh-why would they ever have an MP company in a bomber squadron?" You know, it just didn't make sense. And then we thought, after the fact of course, the MPs were the ones handling the bomb. They loaded it, and commissioned it, put the warheads on, you know, the detonators, and put it … in the bomb racks. So they were specially trained personnel for the handling of the atomic bomb, which the flight crew and the mechanics were not trained for.

SSH: Okay.

CE: This was the job of the Military Police.

SSH: So they were truly in uniform? Those …

CE: Yes, they were all in uniform. These men were all stationed out in Guam, and they were the ones who flew to Hiroshima and Nagasaki and dropped the two bombs. And, … in retrospect, the MP company was the clue that, "Here was something different." And when we read and heard what they had done, then we were able to put two and two together.

SSH: What had you been involved in, as far as when V-E Day came, preparing the manifests, and whatever, to send troops for the invasion of Japan? Had you been involved in the personnel?

CE: Well, my particular assignment was keeping track, not of individuals, but of units that were transferred. And yes, after V-E Day, in preparation for the invasion of Japan, there was a massive transfer of Air Force units, fighter squadrons, bomber squadrons, whole Air Forces from ETO and MTO, the European Theater, the Mediterranean Theater, where the fighting had stopped, over to the Philippines, and Guam area, … and of course, Okinawa, newly seized. But these were the forward bases, getting ready for attack on Japan proper. And the backup, 4th echelon, meaning rear support groups, you know, like the headquarters commands, and the major engine overhaul groups, the type of repair squad that was doing real factory rebuilding of damaged, shot-up planes, were based in Australia, still, which was a long way from Japan. But it had the support facilities. You know, the airfields, the railroads, the shops with the machinery

were already there, so they made use of them. The forward bases had been only recently seized. See, we're talking like June/July of 1945, and the Philippine invasion was just the previous fall, and … Iwo Jima, I think, was about the same time, and Okinawa wasn't seized until, like February of '45. … And it was pretty well shot up when we got it, so it was utilized. The recently acquired islands were utilized for fighters, smaller planes, escorting the bombers, which couldn't fly the longer trips, like from Guam. And their runways were shorter, their airports were simplified, and their equipment and people were sent back to Guam or Australia for anything that required major repairs, or sophisticated medical treatment, or what have you. The close-in islands were forward bases.

SSH: What would be a typical day for you in Washington then, after V-E Day and before the dropping of the bomb? … Did your day change at all?

CE: Well, no. It didn't change until after V-J Day, but between V-E and V-J Day [it] was pretty much the same as before V-E Day.

SSH: Was it?

CE: Yes. There was no easing up of restrictions, limitations, working hours, or routine, until after the war had ended completely, and even then it was a little slow.

SSH: What would a day be like?

CE: Typical day? As I say, we'd be up around six, morning calisthenics, shower, shave, breakfast, get on the barge, and be in the office by eight. And you'd stay there until six-like, you know, … that would be your ten hours in the office. Which, of course, you had a lunch break, that's included in the ten hours, so it wasn't really ten working hours. You got forty-five minutes off for lunch everyday. Coffee breaks hadn't been invented yet. They didn't come along until the '50s, but we did get lunch.

SSH: Now what was your specific job?

CE: My specific job was maintaining a file which kept track of the assignment and location of all the Air Force units.

SSH: And you talked about using the new technology of the punch card.

CE: Yes, … that's where the basic storage records were kept. I kept a hand file with ink notations, which I made myself, which were then picked up at the end of the day and entered into the IBM cards by the personnel working the IBM machine. That was not my job.

SSH: Was that a civilian?

CE: My job was originating the entries, not putting them in punch card [form].

SSH: Where did you get the information that you entered?

CE: From daily reports that came in from all the theaters. Each theater group and Air Force commander had to report on his unit assignments and where they were stationed.

SSH: How did that information, how was it transmitted to the Pentagon?

CE: I don't know the details of that completely, except it must have been cable in those days. Or could it have been wireless? I guess it could've been wireless already. Yes, they had the Marconi technology, wireless or cable.

SSH: What was the makeup of the personnel that you were working with? Civilian, military, where were they from?

CE: All over the country. The office I was in was roughly fifty-fifty: military/civilian. Most of the civilians were little old ladies who had been in civil service and worked for the government as a career. Military, the ones doing the clerical side, were enlisted men, just like myself, and there was a liberal sprinkling of officers, much more than you'd find in an ordinary group because a lot of them were doing technical work. You know, it's not command functions. These were staff people, but a lot of the jobs called for officer's training and rank.

SSH: And why would that be? What were the jobs that required an officer rather than a corporal like yourself?

CE: Mostly making presentations at meetings to other officers, command officers, about information that had come in. In other words, the officers were the ones who analyzed and utilized all this flow of data. … The enlisted men kept track of the entries, and the figures, and the officers more or less studied it, analyzed it, and passed it on.

SSH: Being in Washington, and in the Pentagon, did you ever see any of the "brass" or people that we read about in our history books?

CE: Yes. … The colonel in charge of my unit was Tex Thornton. I don't know if that name means anything or not, but he went on after the war to found Litton Industries. That was his company. He was one of the … original whiz kids with McNamara, who became Secretary of Defense in the '60s. And he went, he was class of Harvard Business School of '49, which is, you know, where they all went after the war. Thornton had married. He was a young IBM salesman before the war, and he married Barney Giles daughter. Giles was a three-star general who was chief of staff to Hap Arnold. Arnold was a four-star general who was in command of the Army Air Forces during the war. And Thornton was the son-in-law of his chief of staff, and he got advanced from second lieutenant to full eagle colonel in one year.

SSH: Pretty good.

CE: He was nominated for a one-star brigadier general, but that had to be approved by Congress and Congress deferred. Not because he wasn't capable, energetic, and enthusiastic, but because he received too many promotions already, in their minds, and they left him as a colonel. And, of

course, in his later career it did him no harm whatsoever. He went on … to found his own empire, and did a good job of it. Litton Industries was one of the original conglomerates.

SSH: That's right. Yes.

CE: Yes, you know, … these men had the pioneering sense to see that a business organization doesn't have to be confined to a specialty. Prior to World War II, you know, business organization had not evolved yet to the idea of a single organization being in many lines of endeavor, and Thornton was one of the pioneers in that change.

SSH: Were there other personalities that you remember?

CE: … Well, I remember seeing Eisenhower when he came back. After the war ended in Europe he came to the Pentagon and was hailed and cheered. He drove around the center courtyard in a jeep waving to everybody. Typical Ike. And, of course, we often saw General Marshall, George C. Marshall spent a good part of the war in that building.

SSH: How did they treat a corporal like yourself?

CE: We were more or less ignored, except by my immediate superiors. You know, I was always the guy in the back on the crowd. I wasn't even a corporal until I'd been there a year.

SSH: Then, after the bomb was dropped, tell me how things changed for you.

CE: It eased up. In other words, it was a case of putting time in and waiting for your points to get discharged. But the urgency was gone, the pressure was off, and the whole atmosphere was much more relaxed, and everybody was very anxious to get back to a civilian routine, and pick up where they left off. For some reason or other, a lot of men had the feeling that the war had taken time out of their life, their career planning, and that they had to rush to make up for lost time. In retrospect, I realize this was not true. You know, there's nothing wrong with being in the Army other than being shot at. And if you're not in a combat zone, why it was a very good maturing experience. First time away from home teenagers. I was the generation that spent three years in the military, and never had cast a vote when I got out. You know, the three years were all before I was twenty-one. And that was why they changed the Constitution after the war, because there were men, a lot of men, getting killed, dying for their country, who had never had a chance to vote. It didn't seem right or fair, so that amendment sailed through almost unanimously, without opposition, but it was the war experience that triggered it.

SSH: Now to back up before we go on to after your discharge, tell me about your family and their involvement on the homefront here in New Jersey. … What do you remember?

CE: My father ran a small plumbing shop in Somerville, which got involved in work for the local military facilities. It was the only type of work that you could get materials for. During the war years labor was scarce as hen's teeth. You know, what was left was the old men, and the only available pipe valves and fittings were for military work. He did a great deal of work at the Belle Meade Depot and the South Somerville Depot, both of which were operated in conjunction

with Camp Kilmer. Camp Kilmer was a staging area where troops were stationed while convoys were being prepared to sail from the Port of New York. I think it may have been used by Philadelphia, too, although I don't know, to Europe. And the men were at Kilmer but all their material, trucks, jeeps, guns, mattresses, sea rations, the whole schmear that went with the shipment, was stockpiled at Belle Meade and South Somerville, which were on the railroad tracks leading into Bound Brook. The Belle Meade was served by the old Reading line coming up from West Philadelphia, and the South Somerville Depot was on the Lehigh Valley line. And they all joined at Bound Brook, and went in along the old Jersey Central right of way into Jersey City, where the military piers were: Jersey City, Bayonne, Hoboken, was where they loaded the convoys. Not Manhattan because the Jersey side was, you know, where the trains were, and Manhattan was crowded already anyway. And you would have had to transferred everything from the train, to a barge, to a truck, and it was much easier to load up in New Jersey. Which, of course, they've found out since, with Port Elizabeth and Port Newark. That's why all the freight shipments in the Port of New York are from the Jersey side now. Manhattan piers priced themselves out of business.

SSH: Now, … what were the memories of your mother's experience during the war?

CE: She worked for my father. He had lost his secretary. She went off into some war job or other. And my mother, who I mentioned here, had worked, you know, done office work before she married, came back and ran his office during the war years, [a] one gal office, did the typing, the telephone, and payroll. Not the bookkeeping. The bookkeeping was farmed out to a middle-aged banker who made all the entries on weekends, a moonlighting job for him.

SSH: Did they talk about what the social activities were here, and about rationing, and things like that?

CE: Not much. You couldn't go anywhere. You couldn't do anything.

SSH: Did their church get involved in making bandages, or knitting stocking caps, or anything like that?

CE: All of that, yes. And of course, they had the air raid wardens, and they had the Red Cross workers, as you mentioned.

SSH: Did any of your extended family, here, talk about it at all? What it was like in New Jersey during the war?

CE: No, not much. And, of course, I wasn't that familiar with it.

SSH: Did you get any leave to come back home during the war? Did you come by train?

CE: Yes. I had a furlough in late '43, and I had another one in '45.

SSH: What did you do when you came back? What was it like to be back home in uniform?

CE: I'd really just walk around and go to the movies, 'cause all my friends were gone, You know, they were in the military, too. The people I knew weren't around. I went around the high school, said "hello" to my old teachers.

SSH: Did you go down to New Brunswick at all, to the college?

CE: No. They ran buses in those [days]. You couldn't get gasoline to drive down and back, you know, with the ration system, but you could take the Public Service bus or the Millstone bus. … And of course, you could take the rain into New York. I went into New York at least once on each furlough, and I went to New Brunswick at least once, but …

SSH: What did you do in New York?

CE: Went to the movies.

SSH: Really? [Laughs]

CE: Yes, the old Paramount.

SSH: What were the movies being shown then? Do you remember?

CE: I remember more from before the war than during the war. Before the war Jersey Central had a Saturday morning special for high school kids. You could get a round-trip excursion ticket for one dollar, into the city and back, including the ferry ride. And then, when you reached the Liberty Street ferry slip, you had a nickel subway ride up to Times Square, and a nickel back. So you've invested a dollar ten. And if you got to the Paramount before ten a.m. you could see a big band stage show. This was, like 1938, '39,'40, with somebody like Glenn Miller or Tommy Dorsey, and a first run movie, like Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour in *The Road To* …, something or other, for thirty-five cents. So you've invested a dollar forty-five. And then, when we came out of the movie, we'd stop at Horn and Harthart's Automat, and we'd get a glass of milk and a sandwich. The milk was a nickel, the sandwich was a dime, and a slab of pie was a nickel. So the total investment was one dollar and sixty-five cents, for the day in the city that I just described. But, of course, this is what my first job paid: fourteen cents an hour. So the trip cost, like twelve hours pay. What can you say? All things are relative, but it was $1.65, nice outing in New York City.

SSH: Well, wonderful. To then jump back to the end of the war for you, and waiting to get your points, when did you start thinking about what you were going to do when the war was over, and you were then discharged?

CE: As soon as the war ended in Europe, even when they were saying "Golden Gate in '48," everybody started dreaming, and hoping, and planning about the end of the war. You know, it entered your consciousness even before the atomic bomb, and the sudden conclusion.

SSH: And what were you thinking?

CE: On coming back to Rutgers, and finishing my education.

SSH: When were you aware of the GI Bill?

CE: … That came in during the war, and I'd like to pay tribute to it. That was one of the most successful social welfare programs our country's ever conceived of. You almost have to go back to Alexander Hamilton funding the Revolutionary War debt with the land in the Old Northwest territories to find anything that was equally successful. The GI Bill of Rights did not repeat the mistake of World War I. You have to remember the bonus marchers. And this, the bonus marchers, didn't happen until the beginning of the Depression. See, during World War I everyone was promised a bonus, and it never happened during the '20s, but it wasn't of immediate concern because times were prosperous. But when the Depression started, people started saying, "Hey, I could use that money that they promised me twelve years ago." So hence, the bonus marchers. You've read that chapter. I'm sure you're familiar with it. But the money didn't really accomplish much of lasting good. Maybe it kept some people alive in the bleak years, but I don't think it even did much of that. But Senator Taft, primarily, and ... I don't know who else was involved. Do you have a recollection of that?

SSH: Not really.

CE: … Senator, I guess it was … Charles. Was that his name? Charles H. Taft? Whatever. Senator Taft of Ohio was the leading proponent, I think, [who] put it together. And it provided educational benefits for those who wished to utilize them. Not just college, but all sorts of trade schools, the vocational education. It provided cheap mortgage financing for those who needed it, young families. Things that would be of lasting good in helping people improve their status. And I think it really provided the underpinning for the burst of growth, and productivity, that came after the end of the war. You know, the funny thing is, when the war ended a lot of corporations were looking forward to a re-run of the 1919 recession and panic. Montgomery Ward, Sewell Avery, was the perfect example. He built up a cash horde of 600 million dollars, which was a bundle in the '40s, to be ready for the depression that never happened. And I think the GI Bill of Rights deserves a major part of the credit for the growth, and expansion, and a large measure of prosperity and fulfillment that we've had in this second half of the century. You know, when I was a kid, my generation very few people went to college. High school education was the norm. My father's generation, very few went to high school. His schooling stopped at ninth grade, 'cause he had to bring some money in to help support the younger brothers and sisters, so he went to work at fourteen. Each generation has done a little better than the one before, but I think the GI Bill of Rights was instrumental in continuing, and in maintaining, this tradition. It was a wonderful program.

SSH: Sitting around the barracks, did you hear what other GIs were thinking of doing with their money?

CE: Oh, most of them were thinking in terms of resuming a career and marriage.

SSH: Okay.

CE: I was one of the youngest, and I wasn't thinking in terms of marriage yet. As I told you, when the war ended I was still only twenty-one, and I hadn't even cast a vote yet. But most of the men were in their late twenties, and looking forward to getting married, and starting families, as well as getting back to work, and resuming their jobs or careers.

SSH: Had you made arrangements to come to Rutgers before you got out of the military?

CE: I didn't do this until I knew when I was getting out. I didn't make any contact until December of '45, and I started in the beginning of February '46. And I discharged, returned to New Jersey, and registration, the whole schmear took three days. I got everything done by walking around with lists. It was the first disciplined effort in my life, but I had to do it to get everything done. I even registered to vote in that period, which was important to me. But, yes, every day I had a list.

SSH: Was your family supportive of your ideas of going back to school?

CE: Very much so, but my mother, at the time, was a patient at the Glenn Gardner TB Sanatorium. She'd broken down. She'd had TB earlier, as a young girl, and she broke down a second time, and had to go back for treatment in '45. So there was no home. The family was split up. My father had sold the house when his wife went in the hospital, my mother. He was living with his brother, and I stayed, temporarily, with another aunt and her husband in the same neighborhood, until I got a room in New Brunswick. And then, of course, I only was able to live in New Brunswick for six months. By then my parents, my mother, had gotten out of the hospital, they had rented an apartment, reestablished a home, and Rutgers issued a rule [that] with a housing shortage, all the vets coming back, anybody who lived within one hour traveling time of New Brunswick, by public transportation …

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

CE: … the rest of my time I spent on the … public service buses. Mostly the Millstone, 'cause they were a nickel cheaper. [Laughter]

SSH: Well, tell me about your room in New Brunswick, and your first impression of the campus in that three day rush with your lists.

CE: My room was in the old quadrangle, in Wessels I think, or Leupp. I forget which, 'cause I lived in both of them in that period. One semester in Wessels, one in Leupp. And my first year, before I went in the service, I'd been in Hegeman. So I spent my time out on West George Street.

SSH: What was the campus like when you came this time?

CE: It was just the College Avenue Campus. The Douglass Campus was the women's college, Cook Campus was agriculture only, and the Piscataway [campus] was merely the football field. That's all that was there.

SSH: Were there a lot of returning vets at the same time? Had they already started to come in?

CE: Well, I got in a little early. The real flood came after I started. February of '46 I was what you might call the first wave. Prior to the Class of '48, I had originally been Class of '46, I became Class of '48, I made up a year by going to summer school, which was important to me to make up as much of that lost time as I could. Prior to '46 Rutgers had never graduated, I don't think, more than 400 students in a year. … Our Class of '48 was the biggest … up to then. I think we were maybe up to 600, and then it moved on up after that. I know for our 50th [reunion] two years ago, I served on a fund raising committee, and we were the first class to raise more than a million dollars for our class gift, but of course, we were the first of the larger classes. What are they up to now, ten thousand a year? [Laughter] So a million bucks will be small potatoes as a class gift. But the Class of '48 was just the beginning of the post-war enlargement. … And of course there was no construction to speak of in the '40s. The economic changeover was slower than the tooling up. The tooling up for the war effort had started with the war in Europe, underway before Pearl Harbor, and it was done on a rush-rush, emergency basis. Afterwards the reconversion was slower, and took more time. You may recall the stories, like people waiting impatiently for new cars that didn't show up even in '47 and '48, let alone '46. Christmas of '46, there wasn't that much in the way of consumer goods on the market, and everybody was buying the original ball point pens, which were massive, heavy clunkers, that leaked all over your clothing, and which sold for like a hundred bucks, which was a tremendous price at the time. And you know, … people were giving them as gifts, because there wasn't really that much on the market. We went to Rutgers in our military clothing.

SSH: Did you?

CE: Yes. Yes. We wore all our old uniforms, and Army clothes, throughout the school years. In fact, one of my old jackets I continued using … into the '60s, when it finally fell apart, in shreds.

SSH: Well, tell me about the social activities. And then, also about the academic. What were the professors like? Had there been a change? Were they the same professors that you encountered?

CE: Well, not the same individuals, although a lot of them were still there, and had been during the war, the older men. But of course, I was moving on from class to class, so naturally I was working with different men each year.

SSH: What was your major? Did you continue …

CE: My major was Business Administration, … Bachelor of Science.

SSH: Did … you ever think of changing at all, or you really stayed with that?

CE: I stayed with that, and when I finished with Rutgers I went down to Wharton and got a Masters, MBA, … and then I went into my father's business. So that was my career. So I stuck with the business throughout my life.

SSH: … Who was your favorite professor at Rutgers? Was it someone you had encountered before the war, or after?

CE: I would have to say the ones before the war made more of an impression, if for no other reason than I was more youthful and impressionable. After the war, a veteran, you know, a man in his twenties has a different outlook than a teenager fresh out of high school. I remember Houston Peterson vividly. I had four years of philosophy, even though I was a business major. He taught two of the four years. I remember Eugene Agger, head of the Economics Department. I remember Scotty Cameron who was the university librarian at that time.

SSH: What was it like to be returning as a twenty-one year old, and seeing high school eighteen/seventeen-year-olds coming into the school? What kind of interaction did you see between the returning vets and the [recent high school graduates]?

CE: Not much. The vets, you know, it's no more interaction than there would be between a bunch of eighteen-year-olds and a bunch of twenty-two-year-olds at anytime. … Especially when the twenty-two-year-olds had had the war experience. No, the vets mingled in their own social circles, and the eighteen-year-olds did the same. The intermingling was in class, and there may have been more intermingling for those living in New Brunswick dormitories, rooming houses, and what have you, but, of course, a commuter lost out on a good deal of that.

SSH: … I wondered how it would be in the classroom. The perspectives that you're bringing as, you say a returning vet, and someone coming out of high school, were there any paternal instincts to help them, or was there a competition?

CE: Neither one. You know, in the classroom it was more attention and concentration on the class material. And they weren't particularly interested, or looking for help. They were doing fine doing their own thing, their own way, and the vets who were just out of the Army, one thing they learned is, "Don't interfere and force yourself on others, unless you have to." Because they had just been through that up to here with the military experience. You know, having their lives managed and directed, and it was too vivid, and too fresh to turn around and push the same thing down other people's throats. A funny thing is, for ten years after I was discharged I would wake up, the first thing in the morning the date of my discharge, I'd say a little prayer of thanks to God for getting out of the Army. And it was important enough, and meaningful enough, so that this custom lasted for a full decade before I finally dropped it.

SSH: Tell me about the transition to Wharton and what precipitated that decision.

CE: Well, I had time left on the GI Bill of Rights. I'd finished Rutgers and I still had another year of benefits, which made it possible. Otherwise, you know, I wouldn't have done it. Before the war I had a state scholarship, and my family did not have the resources at that time to afford a full education for me. They helped, and they were a tremendous help, but I mean, without either working on the outside, or getting a scholarship, or both, I never would have had a college education. Because remember, we're talking about the period right after the Depression.

SSH: The choice of Wharton over, say Harvard, or Columbia, what …

CE: I applied at Harvard. They wouldn't accept me, my lacking in experience.

SSH: What was it like at Wharton? Was it the same idea, that there were returning veterans filling up the class rolls.

CE: Yes. Yes, exactly. Yes. Same general atmosphere.

SSH: Now, were you able to live on campus?

CE: In fact, at each school the majority, the vast majority of the students, at that time, were returning vets. The incoming freshman class was pretty much as it had always been before the war. Same size, I mean, the same numbers, but it constituted less than half of the total student body, because of all the vets taking advantage of the GI Bill.

SSH: Now, when you were at Wharton, were you housed on campus, or did you have to stay off campus?

CE: Both. My first semester was summer school and I was able to get a room in a dorm, and when the others came back in September, and the school was filled to overflowing, why, I had to transfer to a little old rooming house on Locust Street, 4th or 5th floor walk-up.

SSH: Were there any memorable professors there, or mentors at Wharton, that you remember?

CE: Yes. I had classes with George W. Taylor, who was the wartime labor czar who kept the lid on union disgruntlement and agitation during the war years, so that there were no strikes. He created, and invented, the concept of portal-to-portal pay for coal miners and the little steel formula. These were the days when, before the CIO had merged back into the AF of L. And under John L. Lewis the CIO was a very strong, militant, industrial type union, which was new at the time. And Lewis was constantly threatening wartime strikes, and he may have even launched one or two. But George W. Taylor was the man who was ingenious enough to create formulas, whereby militant unions could be given something extra without disturbing the façade of no pay increases. In other words, what the unions got was very beneficial and helpful, but it wasn't called "a wage increase." Typical political subterfuge, you know, as I say portal-to-portal pay for coal miners meant … See, in the old days a coal miner would get paid while they were at what they called, "the face of the vein." Where the coal is, is the only time they'd receive pay, but going down the shaft, often thousands of feet underground, and traveling in the little carts on rail tracks to the face of where the mine was working, was often miles. So that from the time they arrived at the mine until their pay started, they were often an hour or so reaching the point of work, but still inside the mine. Coming home, the same thing, so that an eight hour day became a ten hour day with eight hours pay. So George W. Taylor invented the concept of portal-to-portal. You get paid from the time you enter the mine until the time you leave the mine. Now, this, from the government's point of view, and the media point of view, this did not constitute a pay increase. The little steel formula was something worked the same way, but George W. Taylor was a well known figure in labor management relations all his life. As I say,

the high point of his career was his World War II contributions of keeping the economy going full blast without major strike disruptions for three years.

SSH: How did Taylor come to Wharton? After the war was this an appointment?

CE: … I don't know if he'd been there before, or just came there afterwards, but he was one of the leading lights on their faculty. You know, one of the big names.

SSH: So after you received your Masters degree you came back to New Jersey and began working in your father's business?

CE: Yes. And I started in the family business, plumbing, heating and embryonic air conditioning, which grew, of course, more in importance as the years went by.

SSH: When did you meet your wife?

CE: I met my wife when I was about six months old. [Laughs] Our mothers had been school chums in Philadelphia. They grew up together, lost track of each other. Frequent moves in the city, this happens, you know, you're always changing neighborhoods. In 1918, during the first war, quite by coincidence, they met on the street. They resumed, and maintained, the friendship. Each one got married, and even though my mother moved up to New Jersey, North Jersey, Somerville, why, they kept track of each other, and visited back and forth. Norma was her friend's only daughter. I was an only son. So I remember my first wife as long as my memory extends.

SSH: When did you marry your first wife?

CE: I married her in 1949, just as I was finishing Wharton. We lived in Philadelphia for a year while I wrapped up school. I was still a student at the time of the wedding, worked at Wannamaker's store for a few months, but it turned out to be a temporary job, and it ended in a hurry. And that's when I came up to the family business. We bought a small house in Plainfield in 1951, or '50, I forget which. But anyway, it was a four room Cape Cod, 800 square feet, cost 10,150 dollars and we got it with a 10,000 dollar, four percent GI mortgage. GI Bill of Rights again. The only problem was, we didn't have the one-hundred fifty dollar down payment. [Laughter] We had to borrow that.

SSH: Did your wife work then, or had she …

CE: She had worked during the war years, and when we were first married, for Sun Oil. First at the Marcus Hook refinery down near Wilmington, and then after that, at the company headquarters, 16th and Chestnut in downtown Philadelphia.

SSH: Did you have children?

CE: We had no children. It was just the two of us. She died, 1982.

SSH: Then the present Mrs. Elling?

CE: We married in '84, but again, I'd known her for twenty years before we married. I never married a woman that I didn't know for at least a couple decades. We sang together in the choir at church, and that's how we met.

SSH: Now the children that you have …

CE: Are stepchildren. Right. Two boys.

SSH: Well, tell me about the business, as you built it up with your father from the '50s on.

CE: Well, we stuck to the same specialty, but we evolved, and changed, so far as type of work is concerned. Because each decade brought different markets. You know, construction is fascinating in that no two jobs are ever the same. Even though you are doing the same type of work, you're dealing with different people, different problems, different locations. You never die of boredom in construction. It's just fascinating.

SSH: What were your other interests besides, you know, obviously, having your own business?

CE: Well, I was active in church work, as I mentioned, I sang in the choir. And I served on just about every committee and board that ever existed in the Presbyterian Church. I was also active in my trade association, director and president at the state level. Became the national director, served on many committees.

SSH: What was the trade association called?

CE: The Mechanical Contractor's Association. I won the distinguished service award for the year, 1984. And at the national level, I was instrumental in the very first organization of a national education committee to put on seminars, classes and seminars, for mechanical contractors at many different levels. We had seminars and retreats at the national level. We had the same thing at the state level. We had apprentice training programs where we worked with the unions to train mechanics to work in the field. We had classes and seminars for contractors here, in New Jersey, and we sponsored a four year college program at Kean College, where I taught night school to train men who wanted to work in the paperwork end of construction as opposed to engineering or fieldwork. In other words, the part of the business that has to do with the creation and maintaining of budgets and schedules. Which is, if you think of it, the essence of business operation. If you're in construction, how do you control and manage what you're doing? Because you're in the project, not a repeat operation, it's not like turning out Chevys, you know? General Motors can fine-tune as they go along, because everyday they're doing the same thing. And the name of the game is do it better, faster, cheaper each day. But, in construction, every project is unique and different, so that you have to create a game plan before hand: a schedule, a budget, and then the implementation of them is how you control the progress and management of the job. You have to make sure you're on schedule and within budget, or you're in trouble. And, if you're in trouble you want to know it as soon as possible, while there's still a chance to do something about it. And that's what is known as project management,

which is distinguished from management of operations, which is more of, as I say, an ongoing repeat type management.

SSH: How was it to teach, and how long did you teach at Kean College?

CE: Oh, about ten years. And the courses I taught had to do with theory and practice of management, and keeping track of costs and estimates, and so on.

SSH: Did you enjoy that?

CE: Very much so. And I acquired a wonderful appreciation and respect for the student body. Kean is a color-me-gray type of campus. You know, it's located in a blue-collar neighborhood. A lot of the students are night school students. And at the end of a hard day they jump in their cars and they hassle traffic to come down to Union, and sit there for three or four hours to get themselves ahead, which takes a special type of drive and determination that you do not necessarily find on all campuses. Night school is where you really run into the essence of it. The people you see there, by and large, are there because they want to be.

SSH: What other activities have you been involved in?

CE: Well, trade association, the church work I mentioned, and also community activities. I served as a local township commissioner of parks and recreation. I never was in politics, not elective, but I served, as I said, on parks and recreation commission when Bridgewater was first creating and putting such a department together, acquiring land for their first embryonic parks. And also, as a director of the Somerset Hills YMCA when I lived in Bernardsville. [I] helped them with all their building and construction programs.

SSH: So, you moved from Plainfield …

CE: To Bridgewater, to Bernardsville, back to Bridgewater.

SSH: How long have you been in your present home?

CE: Since ’86.

SSH: All right. Well, are there any other areas that I need to ask you questions about?

CE: Not that I can think of, off hand.

SSH: Anything you’d like to leave on tape?

CE: I think we’ve done a pretty thorough job of reviewing my life.

SSH: How involved in the University Alumni Association are you? You had said you served on the …

CE: That was it, pretty much. I was not an active alumni over the years, but I did volunteer and help out with the fund raising effort for our 50th … anniversary.

SSH: Well, I thank you so much for taking time to be a part of this project.

CE: Well, this is fascinating to me. I've always enjoyed history. And I used to say, even when I was a teenager, "I would've been a historian if I didn't have to earn a living." But in those days people thought in terms of practical application and education, you know? We didn't have the rich, diversified economy we do now, where it's possible to earn a good living doing almost any sort of specialty.

SSH: One question that I'd like to ask. You had studied under Taylor at Wharton, in your business, did you use any of his practices in dealing with the unions?

CE: I sure did. I spent forty years negotiating labor agreements with the United Association of Plumbers and Steamfitters, the locals in New Jersey. I was an active member of all contract negotiations, '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, for representing the mechanical contractors association, local independent groups before we had state-wide bargaining, and bargaining with the union representatives, many of whom, of course, were my own employees, for contracts during that period of time.

SSH: Did you ever get involved with any of the state legislatures, in trying to determine policy?

CE: Yes. … We went to Trenton very frequently and offered testimony with what you would call "lobbying for legislation," a particular concern to our industry at the time.

SSH: Was there any particular governor, or administration, that was more sympathetic one way or the other?

CE: No, it was an on-going effort, again, throughout the whole forty years of my active business life, say 1951 to, almost through the 1980s. I retired, formally, in '86, but I remained active in the trade association, say 'til '91. So I had about a forty year period of activity.

SSH: All right. Again, I thank you so much.

CE: And thank you.

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

Reviewed 6/27/00 Sean D. Harvey
Reviewed 7/3/00 Sandra Stewart Holyoak
Reviewed 9/00 Clifford Elling