

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN W. ERVIN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Dr. John W. Ervin, who is also a retired US Army colonel, on July 24, 2009, in Melbourne, Florida, with Shaun Illingworth. The travel portion of this interview was made possible in part by grants from the Classes of 1942, which is your class, and the Class of 1949. Dr. Ervin, thank you very much for having me here today. For the record, you have also completed a very comprehensive memoir, a copy of which you are making available to the Archives. We will facilitate use of your memoir. By contacting us, readers of this interview can gain access to further information about your life.

John W. Ervin: That is correct. You may use any part of my life for the purposes of the oral history organization.

SI: We thank you very much. To begin the interview, can you tell me where and when you were born?

JE: Yes, I was there, [laughter] but I don't remember it. ... I was born in Cranbury, New Jersey, on November 26, 1920, and I lived ... in Cranbury, New Jersey, until I went into the service ... on June 15, 1942.

SI: What were your parents' names?

JE: My father was Clarence Russell Ervin and my mother was Myrtle Ervin. She didn't have a middle name.

SI: Do you have any idea, on your father's side, how the family came to settle in the Cranbury area?

JE: I don't really. My grandfather ... worked on the railroads early in life and became a farmer. He had a farm on Cranbury Neck Road and sold it, and my father grew up on the farm. He also went into the service. He was in World War I, in the Navy, and I don't know exactly how old he was, but probably about twenty-one, twenty-two, when he went in the service.

SI: He served on the USS *Texas* [(BB-35)].

JE: He served ... on the battleship USS *Texas*, yes.

SI: Did he ever talk about his time on the *Texas*, or in the Navy in general?

JE: No, not really, no.

SI: Did that ship go overseas in World War I?

JE: Well, yes, the ship was overseas during World War I. ... He did tell me, however, that when the American battleships fired their large guns, which I think were twelve-inch guns, broadside, the British Navy had a fit, because they thought something adverse was going to happen to the ships when all guns were firing broadside, but it didn't happen.

SI: What about your mother's family? Do you know how they came to settle in New Jersey?

JE: ... No, I don't. I know very little about my mother's family, although her family lived in the area as well. My mother and father were both born in Jamesburg, New Jersey. They went to school together. ... I think, by the time my mother was in the second grade, which is pretty young, she knew that she was going to marry my father, and she did, but it was after the war, after World War I.

SI: Your father was an undertaker.

JE: Yes. My father was an undertaker, working for A. S. Cole and Company undertakers in Cranbury.

SI: You showed me a picture of the house you grew up in before. Was that the house you were born and raised in? Did you always live in that house?

JE: No. I was born in Cranbury and, oh, I don't know, I don't remember it, but my father was a handyman, basically, and then, he got a job with Grover's Mills [The Grover's Mill Company] in Grover's Mill, [New Jersey]. ... My earliest recollections are of living in Grover's Mill, and I can remember back to about three years old. We lived there. I went and finished first grade at the Penns Neck Elementary School. The school, the Penns Neck Elementary School, was located about a half a mile south from the Princeton Circle on US 1. We moved to Cranbury ... after I finished first grade. I didn't go to kindergarten; I went directly into first grade when I was four years old. When we moved back to Cranbury, we lived in a duplex, which was diagonally across the street from the Cranbury Inn, and I believe that house is now the Cranbury Library. ... My father, at that time, got a job with A. S. Cole. Shortly after that, I would guess when I was, maybe, in the second grade, we moved across the street from the Methodist church to the house for which you have a picture in my biography.

SI: Growing up in that main downtown area of Cranbury, how would you describe the neighborhood?

JE: Well, Cranbury was a township and, when I left it in 1942, it had a total population of seventeen hundred. It was founded in 1698, so, you know, we really had a high growth rate. ... I guess the community part of Cranbury had maybe a population of a thousand and all of the houses were rather close together. Everybody knew everybody else and it was a friendly town. Fortunately, I grew up probably as the "fair-haired boy" in the town and I had a good life. It was a rough life, especially during the Depression, but the good thing about living in the town of Cranbury, at that time, was that it was strictly an agricultural community. Potatoes was the big crop, but, then, there were other farmers who farmed a variety of vegetables. ... During the Depression, we all had enough to eat. We didn't have much money, but we all had enough to eat and we did get along.

SI: As a child, would you go out and work on the farms?

JE: No, I never worked on the farm. As a child, I don't know, I think I started to work when I was about in seventh or eighth grade. I worked in a butcher shop, but my first job was, ... on Saturdays and weekends, when the store was open, taking care of the vegetables, and so, I did that. Another butcher came into town and really got a lot more business than the butcher shop for which I was working. So, the shop for which I was working went out of business and I went to work for the new butcher that came into town. ... I'm happy to say I learned the butcher's trade and learned it well, and that information, that knowledge, has stood me in good stead throughout my life. I still use the information I learned as a young butcher every day.

SI: Going back to the Depression and how it affected the town, do you recall things like hobos coming through, looking for meals or looking for work so that they could earn meals?

JE: Well, no, we never had any hobos that I know of come through. However, because it was a farming community, we did have migrant labor, migrant workers, come from the South. Originally, poor Italian people came up from Philadelphia. ... They got tired of picking potatoes, and then, the migratory Negro workers came north as the crops matured coming up from the South, and so, year after year, a few more would take residence in Cranbury and stay there. We never did have a very large black community, but more of the migratory workers stayed there each year.

SI: Was there a division between that community and the older community?

JE: Well, ... there wasn't; yes, there was and there wasn't. Everybody in Cranbury knew everybody else. Everybody was prejudiced against something. The Catholics didn't like the Protestants, the Protestants, or the Christians, didn't like the Jews, the whites didn't like the blacks, and so forth. So, it was a typical; I say typical, I hate to say that, but it was a typical small town, where everybody knew everybody else and there were cliques against every group of society, even in the small town of a population of about a thousand.

SI: Were your parents, or you and your parents, involved in community activities?

JE: In what kind of activities?

SI: Community activities, or church activities? Were they involved in any kind of civic, community or church activities?

JE: Not really. Again, as an undertaker, he knew everybody, everybody knew him.

SI: I am guessing that, with that kind of job, he had pretty steady employment during the Depression.

JE: Oh, yes. Even during the Depression, people had to die, [laughter] and so, yes. ... The undertakers made a habit of, from a business standpoint, during the harvest time, when there was a harvest home, [a fall festival], the undertaker would take all the widows out, or the widowers, for that matter, take them out to dinner, just to be ... on good terms with potential clients.

SI: What were your interests as a child, an adolescent?

JE: Well, early on, ... of course, I didn't have any real interests except doing fairly well in school, which I did. I wasn't outstanding, and we always had a group of kids that played together, whether it would be baseball or whatever. We played together, but, academically, early on, my interest turned to science. I was always interested in science. Early on, my father ... and a friend put together a cat's-whisker radio. Back when refrigeration first came in, and I think the A. S. Cole, as an undertaker, did business as a furniture dealer, as well as being an undertaker, which was common in those days, for the first refrigerators, the first refrigerant was sulfur dioxide. ... I can remember my father charging the refrigerators with sulfur dioxide, with a very pungent odor. Of course, sulfur dioxide itself is poisonous, but I think when I was about in the seventh grade, my family gave me a Chemcraft chemistry set with a hundred different chemicals in it. ... I very soon completed all the experiments and that got me hooked on chemistry. So, when I went to high school, I pretty much knew all the chemistry, or I learned it easily, and then, when I went to Rutgers, I got ... an academic scholarship to Rutgers, I majored in chemistry. Unfortunately, the war intervened and my dream of being a research chemist disappeared.

SI: Throughout your education, was college always the goal?

JE: ... College was always the goal. My parents realized the importance of education. Both of my parents were graduated from high school. I think my father went to Rider [Business College, now Rider University], and took a course in something, and my mother went to Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, for a little bit. So, they appreciated the value of education and I was informed, early on, that no matter what happened, I was going to get an education. I didn't have any problem learning. I learned quickly, kind of lazy, though. I did all my homework. Things came easily for me. Back in those days, as a reference book, my family bought what was called *The Volume Library*, which was a complete small-time encyclopedia in one volume that was about eight inches thick. It was about, like, an unabridged dictionary, except it was like an encyclopedia. Everything was organized alphabetically, but I would sit and read that. My mother also had a copy of the "Five-Foot Shelf," Harvard Classics, and I would sit and read books from the Classics, and reread them. ... So, yes, I liked educational subjects, but I was always good in math and science.

SI: Do you think that the teachers and facilities at your schools in Cranbury, and later Hightstown, were adequate? Were they challenging?

JE: I would say the caliber of teaching which I observed and in which I participated was outstanding. Cranbury, being a small school, we had only a grammar school, grades one through eight. There was just one grade for each class, first year, second year, third year, and so forth. Going to high school was a little bit different, because, in grammar school, one teacher taught everything. In high school, there was one teacher for a subject and it was quite a change when the students had to go from classroom to classroom. As I look back on my education, I'll put it against anything that exists today, based on my observation. I will also say that my education at Rutgers, while I didn't appreciate it fully then, ... in retrospect, it's as fine an education as anybody could have had at that time, in comparison with what I've observed from my contemporaries from schools all over the country.

SI: Cranbury, at that time, seems to have been very rural. Did you get a chance to travel around either to local towns or further, like New York and Philadelphia?

JE: Yes, although during the Depression, it was not uncommon for people to jack up their cars because they couldn't afford to support them, or they couldn't afford a license, and that happened in my family. I can remember that we had a Model T Ford, which was jacked up during the wintertime, to take the weight off the tires, but my father used the company car. So, we would travel around. Our big trip every year was to Sears Roebuck in Philadelphia, where you could get the catalog prices by going down into what was essentially a retail portion of Sears Roebuck, and it was convenient. It was right on the main US 1, as I recall, going from Trenton into Philadelphia. Going from Hightstown to Cranbury and Cranbury to Hightstown was easy. I participated in some sports, although to participate in sports in high school, there was only a bus after classes were over. So, if you wanted to participate in sports, you had to find a way to get home. Well, there was no problem in getting to or from Hightstown from Cranbury, because everybody knew everybody and somebody would pick you up without any trouble. When I was in, oh, I guess about senior year in high school, during the summertime, I think it was between high school and college, I did thumb a ride all the way out to Greencastle, Pennsylvania, to see my cousins, and got back without any trouble. I wouldn't recommend anybody thumbing a ride in today's environment, but, back then, people were more friendly and I think more honest and reliable than they are today.

SI: Do you remember people in town growing large gardens to supplement their food supply during the Depression?

JE: My father always had a garden, and I was always required to dig the garden, or help dig the garden. ... That was a chore I didn't like and I still do not like, ... but my father, having grown up on a farm, was able to grow anything and he did it well. He was also very proficient with all kinds of tools and he could fix almost anything and make almost anything out of wood, and I acquired those abilities as well. ... I guess that's all I can say. ... Yes, not only did we grow vegetables, but we always had chickens. Even in Cranbury, we had a group of Rhode Island Reds. We always had Rhode Island Red chickens, for the eggs, and, yes, I killed the chicken and fixed it and did those kinds of things as a boy, and I was the oldest child of five in my family.

SI: Does anything stand out about the Prohibition era?

JE: No, not really. I remember, the family next-door, or, actually, next-door is on the north side of the funeral parlor, had an individual who did trucking and he trucked potatoes to markets in Philadelphia, Newark or New York, and I would go with him. ... This was after the fall of Prohibition and he was a pretty heavy beer drinker. I was somewhat concerned about that, but he never showed any ill effects of drinking beer and, of course, he didn't drink beer ... before he was to drive. ...

SI: Are there other aspects of the Great Depression that come to mind, such as people around town losing their homes, anything like that?

JE: No, I don't remember anything like that. I do remember that we did have some people poorer than we were, and we were poor, but the community got together and took care of them. So, no, I don't remember any real significant problems from that respect, and, of course, the people, if they were down-and-out, were provided with food and clothing, and some of the kids I played with were assisted. ... No, it was one thing that, even with all the prejudices that existed at the time, people came together to help people out when it was really necessary. That seems like a dichotomy, but that's the way it was.

SI: Would the food and clothing be provided by churches or would they come from the government?

JE: Oh, no, I think some money may have come from the township, but it was people to people, and some of it was church to people, yes.

SI: How were Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal viewed in your family and in the community, and by you, personally?

JE: Well, of course, a lot of fun was made of the fact that Roosevelt discovered the alphabet, but it did some good work, and it was ridiculed in many instances. [Editor's Note: Colonel Ervin is referring to the many New Deal programs known by their acronyms, labeled the "Alphabet agencies."] I guess it depends on whether you needed one of the government activities. Then, you thought it was very good, but, if you didn't need it, it was thought to be a waste, and particularly among those was the NRA, and there was one other prior to that. [Editor's Note: The National Recovery Administration (NRA) was a New Deal agency that encouraged businesses to create fair competition and instituted rights for workers, such as maximum hours and minimum wages.] I've forgotten exactly what it was, but it was good for the farmers at that time, and it was a farming community, basically. I think that the farmers were having hard times, but they got paid for not planting as many crops as they could have planted, and I think that was the beginning of a relief program that has been active, until the very recent past, from that time with the farmers. [Editor's Note: Colonel Ervin may be referring to the Agricultural Adjustment Act.]

SI: You mentioned before remembering when the first refrigerator came into your home. Are there any other things that we take for granted today, like electricity or indoor plumbing, that you can remember when they were introduced into your household?

JE: No, I don't remember when they were introduced, but I do remember that the radio was the big technological advance at that time, as well as refrigeration, and we did have an Atwater Kent radio. There were two big radio producers at that time, Atwater Kent and Philco. ... They were all mostly consoles at that time, pieces of furniture as well as a functioning piece of equipment. Everybody had their favorite radio programs. *Amos and Andy* was the big one and, right off the top of my head, I can't remember what they were, [laughter] but we lived by the radio. Well, there were the movies, but Cranbury did not have a movie theater at that time, although I guess a movie theater did exist for a short period of time when we moved from Grover's Mill to back to Cranbury. ... I remember seeing a movie there, without sound. That was before sound. If I remember, sound came on in the movies in 1927. The only movie ... theater we had was in Hightstown, when talkie movies ... were available, but, ... since I lived in Cranbury, I don't

know exactly when that movie theater became operational. [Editor's Note: The first feature-length film featuring sound, *The Jazz Singer*, was released in October 1927.]

SI: Do you remember roughly where the movie theater was?

JE: The movie theater in Cranbury at that time was in a building, not now existing, that was just south of the current, well, I say current, of what was the firehouse, which I think is your municipal building today, but I'm not sure of that.

SI: That is right by the brook at the edge of Peddie Lake. [Editor's Note: The interviewer was confusing Hightstown and Cranbury, but Dr. Ervin is describing the movie theater in Cranbury.]

JE: Yes. ... Well, it's at the southwest corner of Cranbury Lake, just off the southwest corner of Cranbury Lake; Brainerd Lake, really.

SI: Considering that you were listening to the radio and you would go to the movies, where they showed newsreels, how aware were you of what was happening in the world in the 1930s?

JE: Well, I think the communication with newspapers and radio at that time was excellent, considering the circumstances. I was fully apprised of what was going ... on in the world. I don't know why it was, whether it was discussions with my family or because I liked to read, ... and I kept abreast of what was going on politically. I still do. I think the most advantageous thing on the television today is the news. We ought to really pay attention to it, because we're repeating history and we're not very smart. We ought ... to be making some new mistakes instead of repeating the old ones.

SI: Do you remember any strong opinions expressed by your family, friends or community about what was happening and if something should be done about Hitler?

JE: Well, not at that time. At that time, remember, the United States was self-contained. It didn't want any foreign entanglements. We knew what was going on, but; ... I don't remember the word I want, but, anyway, we did not get mixed up in foreign affairs. Of course, Roosevelt changed that. He started preparing for World War II a couple years before we got involved in it, and, fortunately, he did, because our lend-lease program helped the European countries, also, the Russians, with military equipment before we ever got into the war. [Editor's Note: In March 1941, the Lend-Lease program opened a steady channel of supplies and war materiel from the United States to the Allies.] I don't know why, but I remember that Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and we weren't, as I remember, too excited about it, although we knew what was going on. ... Not until Hitler got well into Russia did we realize; well, not only to Russia, but into France, and ... with the retreat from Dunkirk, we began to wake up and prepare for war in earnest. The great thing about the war was, everybody pitched in. Everybody participated in the war in one way or the other. That hasn't existed since then and it's a big mistake, in my opinion. Only a select few are paying the price for all of the wars we've been in since World War II. ...

SI: Do you recall anything about the sports you played in high school?

JE: ... Well, I went out for the basketball team. That didn't last very long, because I was going after a ball on the floor and somebody else behind me was also going for it and it ripped the tendons in my left knee, and so, that ended my basketball playing, but I did play soccer for three years in high school. ... I played halfback and, in one game, I got a lucky goal. We were not doing well, and I've forgotten who we were playing, but, anyway, they were well forward. We happened to get the ball, I got the ball, and I was going to kick a setup for our forwards. Instead, I kicked it too far and went over the head of the goalie, who was playing forward, and rolled it, rolled into the net. So, that was my one goal in high school. [laughter] ... My only other activity in high school, which has stayed with me for a long time, was that I learned photography as a sophomore, because of a biology teacher who did all of his work with the camera. He developed films and everything. He started a photography club and I participated in that ... during my sophomore, junior and senior years. In fact, during recess, we would go into the projection room over the auditorium, which was closed off and made into a facility where we could develop and print our film.

SI: That is an interesting activity that would lend itself to your interest in chemistry.

JE: Well, yes, because of the photography club, I proceeded to buy a camera, and then, even in Rutgers, I took, for two years, ... I contracted to take, the informal pictures for the Rutgers yearbook, *The Scarlet Letter*. ...

SI: I use those yearbooks often. I had no idea.

JE: Okay.

SI: Was Hightstown a regional high school? Did you have people coming in from all over?

JE: No. ... As high schools go, it was small. Only members from the Borough of Hightstown and the Township of Cranbury went there. Cranbury, now, still doesn't have a high school, but, as I understand it, the town sends its students to Princeton High rather than Hightstown High. However, as I look back, the education I got from Hightstown High was as good as any available. I think my high school graduating class was only about fifty-eight, or something of that order. I had two speeches, the only person that I know of, at least at that time, that gave two speeches for graduation. I was in the high school play and had a leading role in the play called *Green Stockings* [by A. E. W. Mason], I think it was.

SI: Why did you have to make two speeches?

JE: Well, I guess I made good speeches. [laughter] Anyway, yes, I was selected for two speeches, because I think I could get up and speak, memorize rather easily.

SI: When did you first hear about Rutgers? When did that become an option for you or a consideration?

JE: Well, because of football, I figured ... I always wanted to go to Penn State, but that was, ... for financial reasons, out of the question. ... I think maybe when I was ... a junior in high school, my parents and I started talking about going to Rutgers and I did visit Rutgers. We had a friend who was in the College of Agriculture, whose name I've forgotten, but, anyway, we went up to see the College of Agriculture. ... I was advised to enter into the College of Agriculture for the first year because it was the cheapest curriculum at that time and, basically, for most freshmen, all the college requirements were the same. ... As it turned out, I was able to win a Morrill Scholarship, 1862 Scholarship, if I remember correctly, from Rutgers. [Editor's Note: Colonel Ervin is referring to the first Morrill Act of 1862, through which the Rutgers Scientific School was established as New Jersey's land-grant institution (later the College of Agriculture and Cook College, now the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences). In 1890, the New Jersey Legislature passed the Scholarship Act, which provided a scholarship to the land-grant institution to one student from each assembly district. This evolved over the course of the early twentieth century into the State Scholarship Program, which was broader in scope.] ... I think there was one for each county and I won the one for Middlesex County, and so, it was a four-year academic scholarship and I went directly into the School of Chemistry.

SI: Do you remember anything about your first few days and weeks at Rutgers?

JE: I remember that it was as much a change in going from high school to college as it was in going from grammar school to high school, and it took me a little while to find my way around. Fortunately, I didn't have very far to go for most courses. Most courses were right there on the New Brunswick Campus, in the Old Queens area, ... in the Winants area, whatever it was, in that area. There was a building for the School of Chemistry, and so, I didn't have far to go. ... The farthest I had to go was to the gymnasium for ROTC. At that time, all male students were required to take ROTC, unless there was some physical reason why they couldn't take ROTC.

SI: Do you remember any kind of initiation for freshmen or an initiation period?

JE: No, as far as I know. I was just a "nothing" student. When I say "nothing," I commuted from Cranbury to Rutgers. That was about seventeen miles. It took probably forty to forty-five minutes to go there. ... The speed limit was only forty-five miles an hour, as I remember, on a two-lane highway, which was Highway 130 going from Cranbury to New Brunswick.

SI: Did you have your own car or did you carpool?

JE: No, I was in a carpool, and one of my high school classmates also went to Rutgers and he drove and I was in the carpool. I think there were, at that time, three of us; there might have been four. There were four eventually, but I think, at that time, three of us went from Hightstown/Cranbury to Rutgers, all commuted.

SI: Were you a member of the Commuter Club?

JE: No, there wasn't any such thing, to the best of my knowledge, at that time. I eventually joined the Alpha Chi Rho fraternity and I stayed at the fraternity during soccer season, but, when soccer season was over, I went back ... to commuting and I didn't have a car. ... I didn't get a

car until my senior year, after I came back from ROTC summer camp, and, at that time, I had a carpool and I took two students with me to Rutgers.

SI: Let me just pause for a moment.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Since you lived in the Grover's Mill/Cranbury area, do you recall the Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* broadcast? [Editor's Note: The October 30, 1938 broadcast was part of Welles' *Mercury Theatre on the Air* radio program. Based on the H. G. Wells novel of the same name, the radio program was set in the contemporary United States, with Grover's Mill, New Jersey, as the site of the alien invasion. Many people tuning in late believed the story to be true, leading to widespread confusion and panic.]

JE: I do, I do, and there was a picture of Doc "Somebody" who lived next-door to us in Grover's Mill. ... It was a made-up picture, after that came out, but it was in the newspaper, he was behind some bags of grain, or something of that nature, with a shotgun, ready to tackle those invaders from Mars. ... At that time, I guess Doc must have been in his eighties, didn't have any teeth and had glasses on, but there he was, out there in this picture. [laughter]

SI: Did you listen to the broadcast or did you hear about it later?

JE: I did listen to the broadcast and we were not excited at all. It was plainly designated at the beginning of the program that it was strictly a program, ... but it did excite a lot of people. ... I recall, my uncle and aunt visited us during that time and they were all shook up when they heard about it, but that was it.

SI: Do any of your professors or classes stand out in your memory as being particularly good or bad, or useful or not useful?

JE: There's one person at Rutgers who did more for me in growing up than anybody else. He's dead now, I'm sure. It was my soccer coach, George Dochat, and he ought to be honored, because he was out there working with us kids and showing us everything, participating in everything he asked us to do. ... So, he was a leader by example, and that has stuck with me throughout my whole career. He is the one person that had the greatest influence on me at Rutgers. I don't even remember the names of my professors. I do remember the name of Dean [William Thornton] Read, who was chairman of the College of Chemistry, or whatever the designation was at that time, but, other than that, I don't remember anything. They were all good instructors. ... The worst case was the general chemistry course, which we in the College of Chemistry had to take, along with probably 350 other students from the other colleges. ... So, you had one of the professors give a lecture, and then, the graduate students correcting your exams, and so forth, which was not a very efficient or effective way to learn.

SI: Were large classes like that the norm or the exception?

JE: Oh, that was the exception. I think there were four hundred students in my general chemistry class. I think there were about fifty-eight or fifty-nine chemistry students that started out as freshmen, and I think nineteen of them were graduated and two of them live here, at IRCC [Indian River Colony Club], Bill Lewis and myself.

SI: How demanding was the curriculum? Did you spend a lot of time studying or in the labs?

JE: Well, I think it took more credit hours. It took 140 credit hours to get a degree in chemistry. Many of those credit hours were lab courses, and a lab course may have taken, oh, three hours on each of two days, perhaps. So, a lot of time was spent in laboratory courses, but I enjoyed them and I always did well in the laboratory. I can remember one student, in particular, who could memorize the book, but you put him in the laboratory and he was death. I mean, I shouldn't say that, but he was an accident waiting to happen. In fact, on one occasion, he did blow up something, but, no, I always could do the experiments easily.

SI: Were the facilities adequate?

JE: Oh, the facilities were more than adequate for chemistry at that time, yes, absolutely. In the College of Chemistry, being a chemistry major, I think I only had, for the ... junior and senior years, I had two electives. ROTC was one elective, which I did junior and senior years, and the only other elective I had was a half year of music appreciation and a half year of sociology, a one-semester general sociology course, ... one half year of music appreciation and one half year of sociology. Those were the only electives I had during the whole four years. Well, I should say that's not a correct statement; I had other electives, but they were all in the College of Chemistry.

SI: Did you develop a specialty within chemistry, something you were interested in doing?

JE: Not really. I liked all of it, so, ... I wasn't really specializing in one phase of chemistry or the other, at that time. I took every chemistry course that I could take, that was open for undergraduates.

SI: Did the faculty make an effort to try to expose you to what was happening in industry and out in the world?

JE: Not really. There was only one course of industrial chemistry, and that was taught by Dean Read, and, of course, he was a power in the chemistry/educational business, as well as in industry. ... He had all kinds of contacts with the chemical industry, including chemical companies in New Jersey, and he was able to place people with those companies, but the war interrupted that for me, and I'm not looking back. I wouldn't have changed what I did one iota.

SI: How did you feel about having to take mandatory ROTC for two years?

JE: That was fine with me. I had no objections. Now, when I was, oh, sometime in maybe the sixth or seventh grade, it's in my book correctly, but Fort Dix is about twenty miles away from Cranbury and that was an infantry installation. [Editor's Note: Colonel Ervin's memoir dates this

event to the Summer of 1932.] ... Back in those days, the infantry moved by foot and, every year, they were required to go out and take a big hike ... and live out on the countryside for ... a couple of weeks. ... I can remember that they camped on the field, it was then nothing but a potato field, but they camped on the field immediately south of Brainerd Lake, which is now a big housing development, but, at that time, it was just a big field that they either grew grain or potatoes on. ... They camped there and there had to be a thousand of them, and, on one Sunday, I made friends. I was maybe ten years old, made friends with a corporal. Now, a corporal doesn't sound like much today, but, back in the regular Army of 1934, when there was a lot of unemployment, a corporal was a big-time guy in the Army. ... So, we went to church together, and this was the Second Presbyterian Church, which no longer exists, but it's up further off of North Main Street, where there's a cemetery there, but the church doesn't exist. ... I made friends with him and I was impressed, very favorably impressed, with the soldiers. So, being in the ROTC didn't bother me one bit. The required ROTC and the NCOs were fine. The instructors were fine. No, I was happy. In fact, ... when it came time to go to my junior year, I wanted to be in an advanced course and applied for it and, luckily, or fortunately, I was accepted. You know, I wanted to be an officer.

SI: Was it your personal preference or did you think we could get into the war?

JE: It was my personal preference. Everything I did in high school and college was my personal preference. ...

SI: Were you thinking about the war as something that might impact your future?

JE: No, not really. Of course, when December the 7th, 1941, came, that put a different perspective on it, and I knew I was going to war, but that didn't bother me, either. I didn't know what I was going to do, at that time. ... I was in ... an infantry ROTC unit, but I became a chemical officer, because, when it came time to go to summer camp, between my junior and senior years, all the infantry fellows went to Camp Drum, which was the infantry summer camp. They came back with horrible stories about thirty-mile hikes and days in the pits on the firing range and all that sort of stuff. We had three chemistry students that went to Edgewood Arsenal for the Chemical Corps summer camp and they came back with glorious stories, like all kinds of passes to Baltimore and easy training, and so forth. [Editor's Note: Edgewood Arsenal in Edgewood, Maryland, has been the center of the US Army's chemical weapons and chemistry-related activities, training and research since the early 1920s.] So, three of us in my class, ... who were also in ROTC, went to the Edgewood Arsenal summer camp and we were then commissioned in the Chemical Corps, rather than in infantry. ... When I was in the Chemical Corps summer camp, I was intrigued by the mortars. ... So, when I went on active duty, I was immediately put in a class with a total of a hundred officers ranging ... in grade from brand-new second lieutenants like myself to World War I colonels, and we were all in the same boat. ... Out of this hundred students, two of us asked to go with 4.2 mortar battalions, and only two of us went, and all ninety-eight of the others went to some kind of supply activity, either with the Army or with the Army Air Corps. So, only two of us ended up going to the fighting part of the Chemical Corps.

SI: What stands out about your summer at Edgewood Arsenal, when you were still in the ROTC?

JE: I would say two things stand out. Number one were my contemporaries, and they were from all over the country, because there was only one Chemical Corps summer camp, and so, they came from all over the country. ... I was able to hold my own, academically or otherwise, with my contemporaries from all over the country. That made a big impression on me, and that was due to the education I'd had beginning in grammar school on up through Rutgers. ... Then, I thought that the Chemical Corps summer camp gave me an excellent foundation for going into the Army. Now, when I actually went into the Army, it wasn't as good as I thought, because I was just as green as grass, ... but, anyway, at the time, I thought it was excellent and I guess, in retrospect, it was excellent for its purpose.

SI: Were they mostly teaching you about applications of chemistry in the military or were they more general applications?

JE: No, no, this ... had nothing to do with the field of chemistry. ... Well, the summer camp covered everything. It covered the supply aspects of it, very little of the fighting aspects. We did fire the rifle, although the pistol was what we were armed with, and we did fire the pistol. We also fired the mortars and we were shown demonstrations of the chemical, well, I shouldn't say chemical, but of the cloud-making, the fog-making, equipment, which I actually used during the war, but what interested me most were the chemical mortars [M2 4.2-inch chemical mortars], which is a misnomer. It was a mortar designed to shoot chemical munitions, but it was, for a mortar, ... very accurate. It was the only rifled mortar in the world. ... It fired a shell that weighed about twenty-five pounds, of which eight pounds were filler. ... The 4.2 inches equal 107 millimeters. So, it's comparable to the 105-millimeter cannon which we had. Well, a 105-millimeter shell weighs thirty-two pounds and it had three pounds of TNT in it. The mortar round weighed twenty-five pounds and had eight pounds of TNT in it. So, it was a very thin-cased shell and, when the shell landed, I'm talking now of the HE [high-explosive] shell, when the shell landed, it dug a crater only about three inches deep, and so, you had a tremendous side force which covered a large area with very fine shell fragments. ... It was a very deadly weapon and it was used very successfully by the mortars, the chemical mortar units, during the war. ...

SI: I have just a few more questions about Rutgers before we go into your time in the service. I would like to ask about your time on the soccer team.

JE: Okay.

SI: Did that start right away? You joined the soccer team in your freshman year.

JE: No, I didn't. I didn't join ... until my sophomore year. During the freshman year, as I recall, soccer was not an intercollegiate sport for Rutgers. It was a club sport, and then, oh, in my sophomore year, it became an intercollegiate sport, and ... it has remained to this day, where Rutgers, apparently, has a very good soccer team, [in] most years. [Editor's Note: George Dochat founded the Rutgers Men's Soccer team in 1938 and served as its first head coach.] No, I made the team right off the bat, because I had had soccer training in high school. My high

school was too small for a football team, so, the only men's competitive sport team for the fall was soccer. ... Then, we always had a good soccer team, and so, that carried over to college. However, I'm willing to admit that our understanding of the game back in those days is far short of what it is today, and maybe we'll come back to that later, but, when I lived in Winter Park, [Florida], I started club soccer in ... the entire Orlando area. ... That increased the number of kids playing soccer from about two to three hundred a year up to what is now probably forty thousand kids playing soccer, or more.

SI: Yes. It seems like it was a game that was just getting started in America at that time.

JE: Well, it was. It was only played in the Northeast, like, oh, the Indian game.

SI: Lacrosse.

JE: Lacrosse was only played in the Northeast at that time, and I kept saying, after I came back from the war and there was some soccer [being played], "Well, it's about to take off. It's about to take off," but it really hasn't taken off yet.

SI: Do any of the games stand out or any of the rivalries?

JE: No, no, because I think for the three years I played, we didn't win a game. I happened to be co-captain. I was selected after the 1942 season. A fellow by the name of Hill, who was the goalie, and I were elected co-captains. I was, of course, high scorer. I think I only scored four goals, or something, for the year, but I was the high scorer for the year.

SI: Was it Otto Hill?

JE: Pardon?

SI: Was it Otto Hill?

JE: No, he was a football player. He was a football player. No, the other fellow, I'm sure his name was Hill, [James Hill]. I don't have my *Scarlet Letter* yearbook anymore. After I came back from the war, I don't know what happened. ... Well, I guess, really, I was assigned to Panama, and then, when I came back from Panama, ... they didn't have it at home, and my parents had moved from Cranbury, [New Jersey], down to Wabasso, Florida. So, I don't know what happened to it.

SI: How much time a week did the soccer schedule and practices take up?

JE: Well, I would say, on the average, an hour-and-a-half to two hours a day. After classes, we had soccer practice.

SI: It seems like you developed a very close relationship with George Dochat. You must have spent a lot of time together.

JE: Well, no, I didn't, but I just admired what he was doing and the way he did it. It was the way he did it that made a big impact on me. ... I wrote a letter, oh, several years ago, maybe ten, fifteen years ago, when I got a letter from Rutgers which asked if there's anyone that stood out that you wanted to have honored. ... I wrote back and said it was George Dochat, but I never heard whether he was honored or not, but he was a great man in my eyes.

SI: You also joined Alpha Chi Rho.

JE: Yes.

SI: What attracted you to that fraternity?

JE: It was made up primarily of athletes, and Ralph Schmidt was in my class, in my chemistry curriculum. He was one of the chemistry majors, and he was a member of Alpha Chi Rho. So, yes, it was the athletes that I knew that basically belonged to Alpha Chi Rho, not that there weren't athletes in other fraternities, but they seemed to be drawn to Alpha Chi Rho, but I don't know why.

SI: Did you attend a lot of social events at the fraternity?

JE: No. ... When I was there, as part of Alpha Chi Rho, ... there were not a lot of social events. In fact, I would say, in comparison with other ... fraternities, and I did visit them all, because I took pictures in my junior and senior years for the yearbook, I would say Alpha Chi Rho was probably ... the fraternity with the least amount of social functions within the fraternities. Well, we didn't have a decent house to begin with. I don't know if it's still on the campus or not.

SI: I am not sure. Could you see a real division on campus between the people who were in fraternities and the people who were not in fraternities?

JE: Not really. I had ... more of a feeling that the commuters were an afterthought to the college administration, and I didn't recognize any significant, strong feelings one way or the other between the fraternities and the non-fraternities, but it was between the resident students, whether they be on campus or off campus, and the commuters. I thought there was a division there. I think the commuters were getting the short end of the stick.

SI: Did you feel that was coming from the administration and the students or more the administration at Rutgers, this treatment towards commuters?

JE: Well, I would say both.

SI: Did you have any interaction with any of the administrators, like Dean Fraser Metzger or anybody else?

JE: Not at that time.

SI: What about chapel? Do you remember having to go to chapel, or were you exempt from that because of your commuting?

JE: Chapel was not a requirement, to the best of my knowledge, at that time. No, I don't remember anything significant about chapel.

SI: Do you remember attending any kind of convocations, musical events, or if somebody would come to speak at Rutgers?

JE: Oh, well, I think I went to all of the dances that they had, even as a freshman. The one thing that stands out in my mind with regard to guest speakers was, ex-President Herbert Hoover was invited to speak to us and he did speak to us in the gymnasium. ... I don't remember much about his speech, but, at the time, I thought it was an excellent speech and I think that he did very well. Unfortunately, people didn't like his administration, but, as far as his speech goes and as far as a human being was concerned, I thought he was fine. ... Actually, he did great work during ... World War I, but that's the only extracurricular; oh, I guess it wasn't extracurricular. That's the only visitor's speech that I can remember attending. I didn't have too much time because I was either in class, doing lab work or at the library studying, or commuting, and so, I didn't have that much time. ... If it was part of the regular curriculum, I would have had to attend, but I don't remember anything, other than ... ex-President Hoover's speech.

SI: Were you working at all during this period, in the summers or on weekends?

JE: During the summers and during weekends, I worked at the butcher shop in Cranbury. I also worked for the funeral director in cleaning up after funerals. Back in those days, funerals were held largely in the home. We didn't have the big, fancy funeral chapels that we have now. ... So, I would clean up after the funeral, which means taking out the chairs and taking out the flower holders and the lights and all that sort of stuff, which is normally provided by the funeral director, but, mostly, I worked at the butcher shop. Even after school, I would work at the butcher shop. It was great training, great training.

SI: In the years between the start of the War in Europe and Pearl Harbor, when you were at Rutgers, do you remember your fellow students or faculty members, anyone, discussing what they thought about the war or what they thought about isolationism or getting involved?

JE: No. Isolation, that's the word I was thinking of before. The United States was an isolationist country. ... I got around it by saying we didn't get involved in foreign affairs, but we were isolationist. That was the policy, but it changed under President Roosevelt.

SI: What do you remember about the day Pearl Harbor was attacked?

JE: Nothing, really.

SI: Do you remember if you were at home? It was a Sunday.

JE: Well, it was a Sunday. I remember going to see my girlfriend, who I later married. ... I'm wrong. I didn't meet my girlfriend; yes, I was at my girlfriend's. Yes, that's okay. ... I met my girlfriend on Valentine's Day 1941, when there was a great display of aurora borealis, that we'd never seen before in that area. It was red, purple, green flashes in the sky, and this was December the 7th, 1941. So, I ... went to my girlfriend's house Sunday afternoon.

SI: How did you and your wife meet?

JE: Well, my wife and I met because ... I was a junior in college and she was a junior in high school. She was a cheerleader, my sister was a cheerleader, in high school, and my sister needed a ride to the basketball game. ... I asked my father to use the car and take her to the basketball game. After the basketball games, we were allowed to dance on the basketball court, ... with music provided by records. Somebody would bring records and we would play records and we'd all dance. ... Even when I was a junior in high school, we danced up on the stage of the auditorium using records. We'd do that during the noon hour, and so, I learned to dance when I was a freshman in high school. ... Then, on this night, Valentine's Day, that I took my sister to the basketball game, no one took the records, so that we could dance afterwards, and my sister asked me if I would take this girl home to get records to dance. So, I took her to her house on Hutchinson Street. I think it was 5 Hutchinson Street, and we went back to the dance and, of course, I asked her to dance, and we danced beautifully together. ... When she put her head on my shoulder, I'd never felt anything like that before and I said, "Man, this is it." She was sixteen, but she was sixteen only from February the 14th until the February the 26th, which was her birthday. So, I met her when she was "sweet sixteen."

SI: You were with her on December 7th.

JE: Yes.

SI: Do you remember any of the initial reactions, like panic or fear?

JE: No, no, not really. We all realized that we were in a war and it was just an accomplished fact and accept it.

SI: When you returned to campus, did they start preparing you right away, either in the ROTC or in general? Were they saying, "This is what you should be looking for?" Did people start coming to recruit you?

JE: No, no. I personally witnessed none of that. The only way that that affected me was, somebody decided, I know our graduation was to be on June 10th, if I remember correctly, then, it was moved up to June the 3rd. ... Commissioning was normally a part of graduation, so, commissioning was also scheduled for June the 3rd. Well, we seniors complained that we didn't have a seniors' week, and so, the date was moved from the 3rd to the 10th. I'm wrong, I'm totally wrong. Graduation was scheduled for May 3rd, not June the 3rd. Graduation was scheduled for May the 3rd, then, moved back ... to May the 10th. The commissioning took place on May the 3rd, our graduation took place on May the 10th and I went in, was called into the service, on

June the 15th. So, the only effect it had on me was, I was commissioned a week earlier than graduation.

SI: Did you see any of the war's impact in those six months before you went into the service, in terms of what was happening on the home front? Did they start, for example, doing air raid drills, blackouts, that sort of thing?

JE: The thing that I remember most was, they established a system throughout the country of tracking airplanes. ... My girlfriend's father got that started in Hightstown and there was a place over at Peddie, the Peddie School, that was used to track airplanes, airplanes that you could hear or see, and was reported somewhere, I don't know where. I don't know that that was done in Cranbury. I was unaware of it, but I'm sure it was, and I don't know of any other efforts, other than industry was beginning to really gear up for the war. ... So, industry was employing many people of the local area, including males and females, and so, that's my only recollection. Of course, there was some talking about regulating some foodstuffs and tires and gasoline. I don't remember anything significant about that prior to the time I went in the service. I'm sure there was, but I don't remember it.

SI: In ROTC, did they accelerate the curriculum or start trying to get you more prepared for what you would eventually be doing?

JE: Not to my knowledge, no. I mean, as far as I was concerned, they had the regular schedule and that's what we followed.

SI: Okay.

JE: So, actually, it couldn't have had too great an impact on us, because ... Pearl Harbor happened on December the 7th, 1941, and we were scheduled to graduate in May, May 10th, so that, you know, at most, that's six months. So, you couldn't make too many and too great a change in six months. Now, subsequent to that, I've heard about the changes, but, of course, I didn't participate in them.

SI: You were commissioned on May 3rd and you graduated on May 10th.

JE: Correct.

SI: How quickly were you called up for active duty?

JE: ... I don't remember. I think it was about June the 10th, I received notice that I was going in the Army on June the 15th, and I did go in, report to duty, on June the 15th, at Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland.

SI: How long were you at Edgewood before you were sent to Fort Bliss?

JE: Well, I took a smoke generator course of two weeks and, immediately following that, I took this general course, and I guess it ... might have been eight weeks. It might not have been eight

weeks; maybe it was four weeks. It's in my book, because ... I had my orders to refer to when I wrote my book, but I would say that sometime in the end of August, I was sent to my unit, permanent unit, which was the Third Chemical Mortar Battalion, and I was to join it at Fort Bliss, Texas. [Editor's Note: Colonel Ervin's memoir describes the course as about eight weeks and confirms that he joined his battalion at Fort Bliss at the end of August.] Unfortunately, I went to Fort Bliss, Texas, ... but my unit was on summer maneuvers down in Louisiana. I was as green as grass as a second lieutenant and, when I reported in to Fort Bliss, they put me on duty as a duty officer. The first night, I reported as duty officer for the Southern Frontier, [the US-Mexican border region], and there I was, a brand-new second lieutenant that didn't know which way was up, and I had the future of our country for the Southern Frontier in the palm of my hands. ... I didn't know what I was doing, [laughter] and that shouldn't have happened. In the military, all new people go to the bottom of the roster, and so, somebody took advantage of the fact that I was a brand-new "know-nothing" and put me on duty all night. [laughter] Several days following that, ... I went by air. I was flown to my unit in Louisiana.

SI: Was it a shock? You had obviously been exposed to the military through your training at ROTC and your summer at Edgewater.

JE: Edgewood.

SI: I am sorry, Edgewood. Was anything shocking about now being fully on active duty in the Army?

JE: Not really. The thing that surprised me was that when the military got airplanes, up to and including the B-17, there were enlisted pilots, and there was an enlisted B-17 pilot at Edgewood Arsenal and he did not want to become an officer. I didn't understand why then, but I can understand why now, or subsequent to that, and that surprised me. It surprised me. The officers' club as something special surprised me. It didn't surprise me that, at that time, you could charge in the PX, post exchange, because, as an officer, back in those days, your word was your bond. ... I was always brought up, ... not only from the military, but from my home environment, that my word was my bond, and I didn't know any better. ... I was brought up in the military that the first job of an officer is to take care of his men, and I still feel strongly that way today. An officer's first job is to take care of his men, but I have observed that that has not always happened and I think it is not always happening today, where our senior military officers are not taking care of the military the way that it should. The Army, especially, has more jobs than it can handle effectively and efficiently. ... I know that the military is subservient ... to the civilians and that's the way it should be, but somebody needs to stand up for the good of the military, for the good of the country, and too many times in the last twenty or thirty years, that has not happened, in my opinion.

SI: After you flew down from Texas into Louisiana, tell me about joining your unit and what you were doing on maneuvers.

JE: Oh, I was assigned to Company A and I was assigned to the First Platoon. ... That's basically where I've been throughout my entire military career, with troops. I was a leading element. I established records in being the leading element, of effectiveness and efficiency, that

others had to look up to. ... So, as a second lieutenant, not knowing what I was to do, I was assigned to the First Platoon of Company A. There were ... four mortar companies, each with two platoons, and then, there was a service company and a headquarters company and a battalion. My platoon consisted of fifty, forty-eight soldiers and two officers. So, there was a total of fifty people in it. ... I did what I thought I had to do, but I learned one great lesson, which is the greatest lesson I've learned in my life, about management, and I've got an MBA and I've studied management and practiced management throughout my life. ... Well, to go back to the maneuvers, these were maneuvers between infantry divisions or corps, which is several divisions. Some were on defense and some were on offense. Nobody knew what to do with the chemical mortar battalions, nobody. ... So, we were assigned to infantry units, and then, the mortar companies of the two mortar platoons, plus the headquarters and other service elements. The two mortar platoons were attached to infantry regiments or infantry battalions and we went out. Invariably, we'd get captured. We'd get captured not because we were the mortar platoons, because the infantry that we were supporting got captured. Well, on this one particular movement, one of my mortar squads, which were ... then transported by two-and-a-half-ton trucks and trailers, one of the trucks got stuck. Well, I have always been one that could size up a situation and decide what should be done and do it and get it done. So, there's this second lieutenant down there, with a truck driver, and so forth, in there clawing away, seeing what was going on, giving instructions to the people ... to get it out. ... One buck sergeant, whose name was Roy E. Clark, he was from Vincennes, Indiana, he was a draftee, he was a tippie welder, for coal mines, ... he got me aside and he said, "Lieutenant, why don't you sit back and see what's going on and decide what you want to do, and then, give instructions to your sergeants and let them carry it out?" I thought that was a great idea. I adopted it immediately and I've done that ever since. The boss needs to be where the action is, he needs to size up the situation, and then, give orders to correct it and see that they're carried out, but get away from your hands on doing it if you're a real boss. ... That has stood me in good stead throughout my career and that was the greatest lesson I've ever learned in my whole life about how to handle people and what to do. It's all in my book. [laughter]

SI: It is interesting that a lot of officers, particularly fresh second lieutenants, say that the NCO [non-commissioned officer] is really the person that helps guide them through those early weeks.

JE: It is the NCOs that make officers. I'm going to correct that somewhat, based on my educational experience and practical experience. My general thesis is that ninety percent of the bosses are lousy, ten percent are good. Why are ninety percent lousy? They're lousy because they've learned their leadership or management skills, whatever they are, from lousy management. It's like ... a family of alcoholics breeds alcoholics. Poor managers breed poor managers, good managers breed good managers, irrespective of the training. I have seen MBAs who know exactly what should be done and how to do it who are individually, constitutionally, unable to do it. They must control everything, and you can't operate an organization that way. You have to depend on other people to do your work for you, and I will say that it was through this one sergeant, Roy E. Clark, that made me what I am today in the field of management.

SI: How soon after you got to Louisiana were the maneuvers completed? Where did you go after that?

JE: Well, the normal routine was, there was a maneuver a week. You would be on maneuvers four days and you would rest and take care of the equipment, and so forth, for three days, and then, ... it would be repeated and repeated. The only thing that was different was whether you were on offense or defense, and the location of the maneuver changed. So, I think this continued through until probably near the end of October, same thing, and then, we went back to Fort Bliss, Texas. We took all of our men and equipment back to Fort Bliss, and then, we started training just to become proficient at what we were doing, and somewhere, I don't know exactly when, somewhere toward the end of November, maybe early December, probably middle of November, we were alerted to go overseas to the Pacific. So, we then started training in earnest. Most of the training was physical in nature and, of course, we had confidence courses to go through, but it was to build people up to have the stamina of combat, and you do need it, believe me. The firing was routine. We did as much firing as we could, but there's more than firing. There's the logistical support required, because we can fire more ammunition in a short time than can be logistically supplied. As it turns out, we did that. ... I think sometime in early February, again, it's accurate in my book, my company was sent to Florida for amphibious training and we went to Carrabelle, Florida. Somebody had the bright idea that we could mount a mortar in a sandbox on an LCV. ... You could fire the mortar from a sandbox mounted in this landing craft as you're moving into shore. [Editor's Note: In his memoir, Colonel Ervin records that Company A went to Carrabelle, Florida, from mid-February to early March 1943 and that the landing craft used as floating mortar platforms were LCVs or landing craft, vehicle, personnel.] ... As you're moving into shore, this barrage would continue to move forward on land to provide security fires for the troops, and we did that and it worked and it worked well, and so, the two platoons got training in that. However, when we went overseas and we made the invasion of Sicily, my platoon did not do that, but the Second Platoon did that. My platoon went right in with the infantry at H-plus-thirty-minutes, but it was good training and it did work.

SI: Where were you sent next?

JE: ... Sometime after the amphibious training, or maybe before it, I'm not sure, the orders to be sent to the Pacific were cancelled. Then, we received orders to go to Europe, or to the Europe-African Theater, and that was sometime in April. Again, I'd have to refer to my book, sometime in April that the battalion was moved from Fort Bliss, Texas, to Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts, for deployment overseas, and we did go overseas. I met my wife there and we had a weekend in Boston. ... They were going to come back and see me the following weekend and, in the meantime, after that weekend, on a Monday, a close down was placed on everybody, and I think it was Thursday after that, we moved down to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and were sent overseas. ...

SI: Before we go overseas, we should mention that you married your wife while you were at Fort Bliss. How did that come about?

JE: Well, as it turns out, we got the overseas orders, so, it was at least by the middle of November, because I called my girlfriend and I said, "Honey, if we're going to get married, you've got to come down here ... to Fort Bliss, because I can't leave. We've got orders to go overseas." So, we made arrangements to get married on my birthday, which also happened to be Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1942. We were married in the post chapel at Fort Bliss, by the

post chaplain, and there was an inspection that day of our equipment, so that we would have all of our equipment and be ready to go. ... I wasn't sure whether I was going to get free from my inspection ... to get married or not, but, finally, about ten o'clock, I was authorized to leave the inspection and get my bride-to-be and go get married. So, we were scheduled to be married at twelve o'clock and she wasn't sure she wanted to go through with it. So, I did the greatest sales job of my life from twelve to twelve-thirty and we got married at twelve-thirty on Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1942, and we lived happily until she died on December 4, 2003.

SI: I am sorry to hear that. Can you continue with your service overseas? Can you tell me about going overseas, what the trip was like?

JE: ... I don't remember. It seems to me we went overseas on the steamship *Orzabal*. Now, that could be or could not. When I wrote my book, I couldn't think of that name, but I just happened to think it, but it was a passenger ship that was converted for military use. I think there were about six thousand troops on the ship. We had to go up on deck for exercise in shifts. I think it took about ten days to go from the Brooklyn Navy Yard to Oran in Africa, Algeria. It was uneventful as far as we were concerned. We were given naval protection and, incidentally, the USS *Texas* was one of those ships in the naval convoy. At night, we did hear the Navy dropping depth charges somewhere, but we had no idea, ever, what happened. I know that, in the convoy, there was one or more ships that couldn't keep up with the convoy and they were given naval protection and continued on, but I never heard what happened to any of them. Our destination was Oran, and from the Mediterranean Sea, about a mile out or so, it looked like nature's paradise, an oasis. You could see palm trees everywhere, but, as soon as we docked, you knew ... it wasn't paradise, because it smelled bad. The place stunk. ... We were immediately put on busses and transported about thirty miles south of Oran to a town called Assi-Ben Okba, and this is all in my book. I've looked and I've looked and I've looked on the Internet, but I cannot find anything by that name there. So, names have been changed and I've put in my book the names that I think are the appropriate ones for what we were doing. We trained there, but, before we got involved in training, we had to get our equipment and, before that, even, we had to take Atabrine. Atabrine was a little, yellow tablet we took to submerge the symptoms of ...

SI: Malaria?

JE: Malaria. I was thinking yellow fever, but it was malaria. Oh, boy, that made a bunch of us sick with diarrhea, including me, and I put up with it for maybe a week and I decided I would take malaria, I wasn't going to take the pill anymore. ... As good luck would have it, I ... have not had any malaria bugs, to the best of my knowledge, and I didn't have any more trouble, but there were a large number of soldiers who did have diarrhea from the Atabrine. The natives were something else again, something that I had not read about or been informed about. The men wore what looked like cot mattress covers, with holes in them, and that was their native dress. ... Some of the soldiers did sell the natives their mattress covers--where they got them, I don't know--for maybe a dozen eggs or something of that nature. [Editor's Note: Native Algerian garb for men was a long cloak called a *burnous*. Women wore a *haik*, which was a white outer garment that covered their head to their feet.] Now, the natives had queues, the men, I'm talking about, had queues and they had a baggy rear-end in their outfit. The queues were so that could be jerked up to heaven when they died and the baggy pants were to catch Christ,

because the Bible says, "Christ will be born of man;" at least that's their interpretation. ... So, they wore the clothes to catch Christ, if and when he was born to them. So, that was most unusual. While training, I did have a very informative training exercise. ... I was assigned to the Seventh Infantry, I believe, again, it's correct in my book, to an old colonel, who was Colonel O'Mohundro, who was one of the West Pointers who had been a second lieutenant for seventeen years or something, and he was hard, a hard taskmaster. [Editor's Note: Colonel Wiley H. O'Mohundro was the commanding officer for the Seventh Infantry Regiment in the Third Infantry Division.] However, for this training we were going on, we were to demonstrate how we could support the infantry. It was the artillery commander, a brigadier general, that checked me out. ... I always thought I was the best mortarman there was, and I was about the best, if not the best, and so, we were asked to fire on a particular target. ... I was, in that case, the platoon leader and the forward observer, and my assistant platoon leader was back at the mortars, handling that portion of it. So, the target was identified to me and I quickly got it bracketed and I said, "Short five-zero, fire for effect." Now, in mortars, that's a high-angle weapon, and so, if you wanted to decrease the range, you increase the firing angle, so that the mortar is firing higher in the air. So, in this particular case, we had a strong following wind, the wind behind us. ... When the rounds landed, they landed exactly where they did before. ... The General explained to me, which I should have known, that the following wind, with the higher elevation, the shells went higher, and the higher the altitude, the higher the shells went, the wind carried those shells fifty yards further, so that they landed in the same place, ... but the General was satisfied that we were a fine operating unit. Fortunately, they would not have hit any troops and we could have gone mortar by mortar, adjusted the fire, if necessary, to bring it in closer to the troops. So, that was a good learning exercise. Anyway, the time came when we were to move from our training area to Bizerte, in Tunisia, and my platoon was to be on an LCT, a landing craft, tank, which would carry five tanks, or the equivalent in weight and other items. So, my platoon, complete, was on this landing craft with, I think, in this instance, three tanks, but it was a mortar on carts, not mortar ... and vehicles. So, it was just the mortar on carts and the men and off we went. Well, we hit a sunken ship on the way out of the harbor, and then, we stopped and a diver went down to see what the problem was. ... The ship, or it wasn't a ship, the landing craft, was built by assembling three component parts. Well, the middle part ... had a big gash in it, and so, the middle part was flooded, and so, we went from Bizerte to Sicily with a flooded compartment. So, instead of riding over the waves somewhat, we ran through them and we got soaked and soaked and soaked going through the waves. The waves were high, the weather was bad, but we could see the island nation, Malta, between Sicily and Africa.

SI: Malta?

JE: Malta. We could see Malta as we were moving along. Of course, they could see us, but we made it without any problem and we hit the beach at H-plus-thirty-minutes. There was some firing on the beach when we landed, but it was not significant and off we went, pulling our carts. [Editor's Note: The invasion of Sicily began on the night of July 9/10, 1943.]

SI: Were you attached to an infantry unit at that point?

JE: We were attached to an infantry regiment at that time, one platoon of four mortars to an infantry regiment, which is an impossible task, and I think we further supported one of the

battalions, but I don't know which one. Anyway, we went off and my assistant platoon leader was now operating as a forward observer with one of the battalions. ... They spotted a group of enemy soldiers, there were twenty of them, as we found out, and so, we fired our first mission, oh, shortly after we landed. ... I think we fired, I fired, twenty rounds, five per tube, and, reportedly, we had nineteen casualties out of the twenty people there. Oh, casualty means we either killed them or wounded them or something, but we fired that mission and went on. ... During the bombardment of Licata, which is where we went in, there apparently were some sulfur piles, because they do mine sulfur in that area, and they were set afire, which created sulfur dioxide, ... which is heavier than air and it gathered in low places. It caused some irritation. Some of the men put their gas masks on, but I didn't, and we got through it. I think we probably got about nine miles in from Sicily the first day. Somebody realized that we couldn't keep up to the infantry. ... In short order, we were issued two jeeps and trailers per mortar squad, which was a great idea. That allows us to keep up with the infantry wherever they were going, how ever they were going, and we did use those throughout the war and it worked very well. One jeep and trailer was used for the mortars and crew and the other was used to carry the ammunition and handlers.

SI: Were you able to get your supplies readily in the field? Did you have enough shells and other things you needed?

JE: We never once ran out of ammunition for the mortars. Later, in Italy, where we were, we must have fired eight hundred to nine hundred rounds per tube over a period of time, and we never had any problem with ammunition. Now, in some respects, that was good for us, because in Italy, and elsewhere, the artillery was rationed. ... So, within our range, we were able to make up that firepower by using chemical mortars, which we'll refer to here and after as 4.2-inch mortars, and we were able to provide wonderful support. I'll say "wonderful" because we were, in many instances, able to adjust, mortar by mortar, to within fifty meters, fifty yards, of the frontline troops, which is pretty close. ... That's good protection, because of the small crater and great distribution of shell fragments when the round explodes. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: When you were firing these missions, where would you be in relation to the line and the infantrymen?

JE: Oh, the range of the mortar, when we went overseas, was only thirty-two hundred yards. That's not much, when you consider there are seventeen hundred and some odd yards to the mile. That's just barely two miles. So, of necessity, we had to be close to the infantry. Actually, by the end of the war, the range of the mortar was increased to forty-eight hundred meters. Somewhere along the line, we switched from yards to meters, but that ... caused no problem with any of us. The forward observers would be right up front with the infantry, or working with the infantry company or ... whoever was representing the infantry battalion. ... The mortars would be as close as possible, to provide coverage out as far as possible from the infantry, but we needed to be in some kind of defilade. So, I would say, on the average, we were maybe six hundred yards, something in the order of six hundred yards, eight hundred yards, behind the frontlines. There were times when we were closer than that; we couldn't afford to be much

further in back. We were never, ever behind the regimental commander's headquarters. Usually, it was up somewhere, from a distance standpoint, somewhere about the distance of the battalion headquarters. So, I would say, on average, the mortars would be six hundred to eight hundred yards, in defilade, some kind of sight security, and the forward observers would be wherever the infantry was, and I've been there and done that.

SI: Again, this is obviously all covered in depth in your book, but Sicily was about a month long campaign, from July 10th to August 17th.

JE: Well, it was thirty-nine days. The Battle of Sicily took thirty-nine days. I guess we were in that, maybe, effectively, only twenty days, something like that. We went with the Third Division up into the middle of Sicily, and then, we were assigned to the Ninth Division. ... We were at the Ninth Division just southwest of Mount Etna, a volcano on Sicily, and there we sat until the end of the campaign. We didn't do anything after that. ... Following the end of the campaign, we went to a place on the north coast of Sicily called Termini Imerese, which was probably forty-five, fifty miles east of Palermo and it was slightly west of the middle of the north coast of Sicily. ... There, we didn't do anything. I mean, I think we went out and fired once or twice, but it was really rest and rehabilitation, although there wasn't much to rest from or to be rehabilitated from. [laughter]

SI: In those twenty days of combat, what stands out the most in your memory? What is particularly vivid?

JE: I don't have any outstanding ... memories of that. Things went along smoothly. The fighting, yes, the most outstanding thing that I remember about that campaign was on D-Day, when we landed. When we landed, the Italian soldiers were marching back to our lines, complete with rifles and ammunition and all their equipment, and we paid no attention to them and they paid no attention to us. They didn't want to fight, they had no intentions of fighting, and so, something happened to them. They were taken care of in the rear somewhere, but the Italians were not fighters. ... This is also about the time that Mussolini gave up, and I don't remember the exact dates. [Editor's Note: At the end of July 1943, Fascist Dictator Benito Mussolini was forced out of power after the successful Allied invasion of Sicily. The new Italian Government, under Pietro Badoglio, surrendered unconditionally to the Allies on September 3, 1943.] So, the Italians didn't fight. All the fighting that took place in Sicily and in Italy took place by the Germans, and so, that's one reason why the Sicilian Campaign went quickly. The only other thing that I remember of significance was, we went so fast and there was so little resistance that I was able to go into places where no soldier or anybody had been up in the mountains. ... I went up there with my jeep driver, which was dumb. I mean, all we had with us was a rifle and a pistol, and we went up there and there was a little village that was probably a hundred or two hundred people in the mountains. ... Lo and behold, the big guy there was a guy who had sold bananas in Chicago, who obviously made enough money to come back to Sicily and live comfortably in his environment. So, he talked perfect English, well, I mean, he talked American English, [laughter] and we had a nice visit with him, but those are really the two things that I remember about the campaign. After the campaign, the one thing I remember is going to Palermo and visiting the cathedral in Palermo, Monreale Cathedral, all of which is written up in my book, to include a wonderful mosaic of Christ.

SI: Did you lose any men during the campaign? Did you lose anybody in your company or under you?

JE: No, no, I did not lose any men, and, of course, at that time, I was only a platoon leader, right. So, all I had to worry about was just my four mortar people and, no, no casualties whatsoever.

SI: Did you ever come under artillery or air attack?

JE: No, not to my knowledge, no, not in Sicily. In fact, I was never under an air attack, but I've been ... under lots of artillery or mortar rounds.

SI: Once the campaign in Sicily was completed, you prepared to move over to Naples-Foggia.

JE: What we did was, ... the Italian Campaign was opened with an invasion of Salerno. We did not make that. At Salerno, the troops moved in quickly and moved forward, north of Naples, rather quickly, and then, got bogged down, and, when they got bogged down, we were moved to Italy by our own transportation. We were ferried across the Straits of ...

SI: Messina; was it the Straits of Messina?

JE: Yes, the Straits of Messina. We were ferried across there by the British Navy, and then, went up the western coastal road, although it's not on the coast, but the main western road in Italy. ... Can I refer to the map, or do you have a map or something? ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Okay, go ahead.

JE: Okay. We went into combat north of Caserta. The infantry, and we went into combat with the 34th Division, my company, I'm speaking about, my company, my platoon, although I was not company commander at that time, the 34th Division had crossed the Volturno River and they had trouble. All of our infantry divisions had trouble along that part of Italy. The reason was because the mountains were very high and the rivers, while not formidable in the normal sense, we're now looking at a period of November and December, when the weather was against us. It was one of the rainiest winters in a long time in Italy and the rivers were overflowing. So, I went into combat, with my platoon, with the 100th Battalion. Now, you probably never have heard of the 100th Battalion, but the 100th Battalion was ... a special battalion made up of Hawaiian Japanese-Americans, but commanded by Occidental officers. [Editor's Note: The 100th Battalion was originally formed in June 1942 from *Nisei*, or first-generation Japanese-Americans, who had come out of the Hawaiian National Guard.] The battalion had, at that time, an extra infantry company and they had, when it went into combat, had a strength of about fifteen hundred people, of all kinds. This battalion was in some of the worst terrain and where the toughest German fortifications were and enjoyed some of the worst fighting of the war, as documented by other Army documents. When I joined the 100th Battalion, we had to climb mountains. I don't know how high, but it was probably, from the closest road, we probably had

to go up twenty-five hundred or three thousand feet, and we had to go by foot. We had to carry everything we needed for combat, had to be carried up there. This is not so ... for the mortars. ... The mortars could fire from down lower, but, ... if we wanted to be with the infantry and to adjust our fires, we had to be with the infantry. ... I went up with a platoon, which should have been about forty-eight people in the platoon, was down to seventeen people, commanded by a sergeant. I saw the platoon's supplies come up at night and bring three pairs of socks, and the sergeant could not give them away because of the brotherhood of that unit. One would not take it unless all could get it. In my platoon, if one could have taken all three sets of socks, they'd have taken them. [laughter] ... Those fighters, those soldiers, were the best soldiers I've ever seen. Of course, they had something to prove, but they were fearless fighters and I was up there with them fighting and not enough could be said for what they did for our country and for themselves. Now, this lasted probably two to three weeks, something like that, and then, they were pulled out of the line. The whole 34th Division was pulled out of the line. ... I think the American troops were being consolidated because the French colonial troops were entering combat, and then, American troops were going to make another amphibious landing up the line a bit, but that comes later. Anyway, I first saw some Britishers come in and look over the territory, and so forth, and they came and left. This was in less than one day. ... Then, I was assigned to one of the African French divisions, and I don't remember which one it was, but it's in the book correctly. It was either Algerian or Moroccan. [Editor's Note: Colonel Ervin discusses serving with the French Second Moroccan Division and the French Third Algerian Division at various times in this period.] ... Then, I fought with the French Expeditionary Corps from that time until we went to Rome, and we were in combat continually, except for a short period of time, with all four of the French divisions.

SI: Were you at Monte Cassino?

JE: Yes, I was sitting up on top of Mount Cairo, which is on the other side of the valley from Monte Cassino. ... I don't know what the elevation is, eight thousand feet or so. Again, that's in the book. [Editor's Note: Mount Cairo is 5,474 feet high.] I watched every attack at Monte Cassino. The first attack, I watched and they crossed the Rapido River. In front of Monte Cassino, in front of that valley, there's a big mountain that is perpendicular to the valley and it's called Mount Trocchio. ... It's like a hog. It's just a big pig sticking up there in the middle of this valley, and the Germans occupied that and that controlled the whole valley. The Americans tried to capture that and had a difficult time, and that includes the 34th Division. They finally did, ... but there's still Monte Cassino on the west and Mount Cairo on the right, and we're up on the mountains on the right, which is on the east side. The main thrust for that was from the people down in the valley, the Americans and the British troops in the valley. ... When the Americans bombed, the first effort, the wind was blowing toward us and the first bombs hit their target. [Editor's Note: On February 15, 1944, the monastery at Monte Cassino was destroyed in a massive Allied air raid. On March 15, 1944, Allied bombers attacked Monte Cassino and, mistakenly, Venafrò, but the mission resulted in eighty-five Allied deaths, nearly 300 wounded and over 150 civilian deaths on the ground.] The second and third and subsequent waves of bombs ... landed in the dust and dirt that was blown up ... and was moving toward our own troops. I think it was the New Zealand troops that suffered so many casualties, and some of our Americans as well, that the attack was called off. The worst part about it was that there was no anti-aircraft fire, there was no enemy air fire, and there were three cities involved, Cassino,

Isernia to the northeast and Venafrò to the rear. ... My company and the battalion rear echelons were all in Venafrò. Bombs landed within four hundred yards of my company rear in Venafrò, but they also landed in Isernia and they landed in Cassino. So, it was a poor bombing effort. ... So, that stagnated everything, and then, we made another try in which we actually bombed the Cassino, the monastery at Monte Cassino. We didn't bomb the Cassino the first time, ... but that didn't work any better than the first. ... We made four efforts, we, our troops, made four efforts to capture Cassino before we finally did in the push in late May, or middle of May, which finally took us to Rome. Now, in the meantime, the Americans landed at ...

SI: Anzio?

JE: Anzio, which was supposed to take the pressure off of the area where I was fighting. [Editor's Note: The landing at Anzio took place on January 22, 1944, but German forces were able to bottle the Americans up in the Anzio Beachhead until June 1944.] It didn't do it. I mean, we could not move. The weather was against us and the enemy was against us. Now, I went from Mount Cairo back down to my company, for some reason, and the mud was so thick, it was about almost up to your knees, in some instances, and my jeep couldn't get through it. I was stuck and a tank had to pull me to get me through the mud, to get to my company rear. Well, also, while we were fighting in this area, for some unknown reason, my company commander, the battalion commander and another company commander, and some other people, had assembled. For what reason? ... I don't know. ... I believe it was social. One round landed and killed seven of our officers, including my company commander and the other platoon leader. When that happened, we were pulled out of the line and sent back to the rear, in that area, I guess, to regroup. ... Well, as a result of that, I was made company commander. ... The company executive officer was an older officer, probably, at that time, forty years old, and I was, what? twenty-two or twenty-three. ... He was being sent back to the States and ... that made me the company commander. ... So, I was made company commander and, about a month later, I was promoted to captain. ... In the meantime, ... we, the American forces, were assembling to make a big push and we kept the Liri Valley covered with smoke. Initially, we had used mortars to produce a smokescreen, but, subsequently, we used mechanical smoke generators to keep the valley in a constant haze, where they couldn't see what we were doing and we couldn't see them very well, either. However, up on the top of the mountain, where I was, we could see. ... I was taken from the mountain and put down in the valley to operate these smoke generators, and I guess it was for about a month, during which time we recuperated. ... Then, after that period, we got sent back up. Well, not up on the mountain, but back around, and my company was attached to the French Fourth Armored Division, which didn't make any sense, but we went all the way into Rome with the French Fourth Armored Division. Now, at that time, I also was sent back to; God, I'm getting mentally constipated in my old age. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

JE: [I] was sent back to Sorrento. Now, I had also been sent back to Sorrento on R&R about Thanksgiving time. After we went into combat and we were fighting with the 34th Division and in initial combat with the French divisions, I was sent back for a week of R&R. ... So, I also was sent back for an R&R during the big push to Rome, and so, I was not with my company when we went through Rome, but joined them after R&R about nineteen miles north of Rome.

So, that was a period also in which we did nothing. ... We just recuperated. We sent troops in to Rome and they just enjoyed themselves. We didn't have a morale problem. I never had a morale problem with any of the units that I was in. I did have one case in which I had a big Italian fellow, whose ... last name was DeCorovo, in that area, and he looked like Atlas. He had a chest that might have been forty-five, forty-six inches and a waist that might have been thirty inches. He was a picture of body builder Charles Atlas. When we got word that we were going to make the invasion of Southern France, we moved down to Pozzuoli for the training. He asked to go visit relatives in Italy and I gave him a pass and that was the last I ever saw of him. So, I also should add that, all during this time, I had one of Al Capone's guards in my company, and he was as yellow as he could be. His name was John Gallucci. ... He could not stand being up with a platoon, and so, I brought him back to the company and he took care of my personal items for the rest of the war. He was good at that, but he was as yellow as anybody could be, gutless.

SI: Were you ever in a situation where you had to fire your weapon, such as your sidearm?

JE: No, I never was, and ... my sidearm was a pistol. Whenever I got in a position where I thought I'd have to fight, I grabbed a rifle, and I never personally fired my weapon. ... I've been up where the fighting has been going on, but I did not personally participate in it by firing my weapon. ... That wasn't my job. My job was to bring mortar fires wherever they were needed, and I was hit by something three times during the war, never broke the skin. ... A shell fragment got caught in my clothing, but never broke the skin. When I was up on top of Mount Cairo one night, we received, in a platoon position; now, a platoon position, in this case, was about a hundred yards by a hundred yards, although that whole area was not occupied. We were over here, where we were billeted, and we fired so many rounds and the ground was so unstable that we set up our mortars in the road bed and we fired from the road bed. ... That's where we fired maybe eight hundred to nine hundred rounds per tube. So, obviously, we were doing some damage, because, one night, by actual count, we received over three hundred mortar or artillery rounds in our position up on top of Mount Cairo, and we were less than a thousand meters from the frontlines. We were in defilade, so, they didn't know exactly where we were, and I'm sure the artillery couldn't hit us by regular fire, but, by high angle fire, they could, and the mortars could as well. Now, we were dug in where we were. We were dug in pits that were at least three to four feet deep, covered with limbs from trees which were covered with ammunition boxes filled with dirt, and over which dirt was piled. So, we were well protected. ... Of those three hundred rounds that landed, in about a half-hour it was, I did not have a casualty. Now, I was only the platoon leader in this case; I wasn't the company commander. We did not have a casualty. Now, we didn't have to worry about a kitchen or anything like that, but our kitchen was located down around Venafrò, in the vicinity of Venafrò. ... All our stuff was trucked by jeep and trailer up to the mountain in marmite cans, so that it was hot when it started out and it was hot when it ended up, or cold, as the case may be, and the company had a great kitchen. On very few occasions did we have to rely on C rations or K rations. We generally had a hot meal. I might add that, while we were up there, one day, Brigadier General Teddy Roosevelt, Jr., [the son of President Theodore Roosevelt], paid us a visit. Now, he was General Eisenhower's personal liaison with the French Expeditionary Corps, great man, great man. He subsequently landed during the invasion of Normandy and, according to the records, gathered up troops that had been dropped or dropped off, either air dropped or landed at a wrong place, and gathered them up and created a fighting force with them and won the Congressional Medal of Honor, but

he hadn't done that when he stopped to visit us. [Editor's Note: Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., died of a heart attack just a few weeks after the Normandy landing and was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions in personally leading men from his own unit, the Fourth Infantry Division, and others off the beach under heavy enemy fire that day.] He stopped by my area and he ... wasn't interested in talking to me. I reported to him, but he wasn't interested in talking to me. ... I had some men that were drinking coffee over one of these little gasoline burners, and he asked if he could join them. He grabbed an old, rusty can, C ration can, washed it out and sat there drinking coffee with my troops for about twenty minutes, and then, left; a great man.

SI: What were your impressions of the French colonial troops you were with?

JE: They were great troops and big thieves. They would steal anything you had. We would have aiming posts out, so that we could sight our mortars, and then, move fire from place to place. They would steal our aiming posts and use them for walking sticks, to climb up and down the mountains, but, as far as fighters are concerned, they were good fighters. However, I believe that they were always tanked up when they went out to fight. Now, when I became company commander, ... and was also with the French troops, my company was assigned to a regiment, and so, I was allowed to eat in the regimental commander's mess. ... The French know how to fight, or they don't know how to fight, one or the other, but the regimental commander, wherever he was, a thousand meters behind the lines, fifteen hundred meters behind the lines, he would have a tent set up for his mess and an *aspirant*, which was a warrant officer, would report to him, every meal, and tell him what we're having. It might have been C ration stuff, or even, you know, big cans of C ration items or big cans of K ration items, and he would report whatever it was, in a very formal routine, but in the officers' mess, they would have wine. They would have a course, they would have more wine, and they would have wine after every course, and everything was a course, and, at the end, they would have cognac, and the enlisted men were given wine. It was a formality that took place at every meal. I didn't always make it, but I was there for a good many meals, a good portion of the time. Now, that was when I was the company commander and I was there to get information, ... but I had the platoons out doing the work. I was there to maintain liaison with the regimental commander and make sure that whatever fires they wanted, I could relay to the platoons, as well as they could get fire orders directly from the battalions or the companies that they were supporting, which is the same way I operated when I was a platoon leader. I maintained liaison with whatever unit I was supporting, whether it was a company or whether it was a battalion, and my assistant platoon leader and I would change positions. I would be a forward observer and he would be down with the mortars, and he would be a forward observer and I would be down at the mortars, but, when I became company commander, then, I didn't do that as directly. I always visited the platoons and, if they were particularly under fire, I would go visit them, and you'll find in my book that I was never visited in the firing position by my company commander or by my battalion commander, never ever. ... We platoon leaders used to make fun of those people, and I resolved that when I became company commander, and then, when I became a battalion commander or group commander, that I would never do that. I would go where ... there was difficulty. I was never in combat again after World War II, but wherever my units were and there was a problem, that's where I was. ... Of course, that happened in Korea; I had a battalion of Honest John [MGR-1 nuclear surface-to-surface] missiles in Korea and, there, my battalion was split into two parts,

Task Force A and Task Force B, which was a battalion minus, and then, was a battery plus. ... Wherever there was a difficulty, that's where I was, and that's what I did when I became company commander in combat.

SI: You said, after Rome, you were sent down to train for the invasion of Southern France.

JE: Yes. I went into Southern France, again, H-plus-1. I personally went ... H-plus an hour. My platoons went in H-plus-thirty-minutes. ... They were supporting a battalion and I was liaison with the regiment. So, again, it was with the Third Division. This time, it was with the 15th Infantry Regiment. Going into Sicily was with the Seventh Infantry Regiment, and, again, going into Southern France when I went in, which was an hour after the initial landing, there was no firing and we moved in quickly. Now, you have to remember, the invasion of Southern France was August the 15th.

SI: August.

JE: I beg your pardon, August the 15th. The landing in Normandy was on June the 6th, wasn't it? but they were stymied, but they broke out from St. Lo, if I remember correctly, about two days before we invaded Southern France. So, that would make it about August the 13th. [Editor's Note: Operation: COBRA, the breakout from the Normandy hedgerows through St. Lo, took place from July 25 to July 31, 1944.] With that breakout, then, the Germans were interested in saving all of its troops, and it had troops down in the southwestern portion of France as well as in the western portion of France. We landed in the southeastern portion of France, east of the Rhone River. ... Our job was to get over to the Rhone River and make a beachhead available, so that the French divisions could come in and go over to Toulouse, I guess it was, and go up the west side of the Rhone River, and we went up, the American troops went up, the east side of the Rhone River. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

JE: Okay, let's surge ahead

SI: You were going up the Rhone Valley. It sounds like the campaign moved pretty quickly.

JE: Yes, it was going very quickly, simply because the Germans were trying to preserve their army and it was withdrawing. It was withdrawing from everywhere in the South of France, with the French going up the west side of the Rhone and the American corps going up on the right side, which was the east side. Things went rather quickly. Now, everything is relative. The campaign started from our invasion on August the 15th. ... We, I personally, with one of the divisions, I'm not sure which one it was now, got to Strasbourg, actually, it was just maybe twenty or thirty miles south of Strasbourg, by the middle of December. ... We were there for awhile, and then, moved around north of Strasbourg to the vicinity of Wissembourg, Germany, [now France], on Christmas and we were about to go into Germany, along that line, which was the border between France and Germany. ... The Battle of the Bulge happened prior to that, but, on Christmas Day, we got orders to go around and join the ... 28th Division, to help liquidate the

Bulge. ... So, we traveled from our position just north of Strasbourg all the way around to go back into Luxembourg for the Battle of the Bulge.

SI: What happened once you got up to the Bulge? Had the Germans been halted by then?

JE: The Germans had been halted. The 101st Infantry Division had held Bastogne, and Bastogne was on the center axis of the German invasion for the Battle of the Bulge, through the Ardennes, and we went into combat with the 28th Division. Now, the 28th Division, originally, was about on the south shoulder of the Bulge. In other words, the Germans went through just north of that and we went in with the 28th Division. ... The Fourth Armored Division was slipped in to the west of the 28th Division to go into Bastogne. The fighting was tough. The weather was cold. This was in January. Everything was covered with snow, and I remember seeing a column of American troops in their winter uniforms, without any camouflage, traveling down a snow covered area. ... I predicted it wouldn't last, and they were overcome, because, ... I mean, they were going into battle like that, and it lasted about a half-hour and, boy, they were retreating backwards. I had a couple casualties at this time. I'm the company commander, but I had one casualty in which ... we were providing harassing fires for the unit we were assigned to, and which meant, every once in awhile, somebody'd go out and drop a mortar shell down the tube and let her go. Well, in this case, fortunately, only one person did that; I had a blast in the tube, a tube blast. At that time, there was a big stink about the reliability of the fuses for the mortar rounds. Some ball-bearings, ... which makes the fuse inoperative until it gets out of the tube, were left out of the fuses. ... What happened was, when the mortar dropped, the force of inertia forced the firing pin into the detonator and the round burst in the tube and killed the soldier. I also was in a position where one lone eighty-eight round, German eighty-eight round, came in and killed one of my men, no rhyme or reason. The weather was foggy, couldn't see anything and, yet, one man was lost, and, when I was up on Mount Cairo, three hundred rounds came in, by actual count, and I didn't lose a man. So, there's no rhyme or reason for war.

SI: You said, at one point, that your morale never dipped. At this point, after a year-and-a-half of being in combat situations, was that still the case?

JE: I was never in a unit that had any morale problem. Now, I had a couple homosexuals in my outfit that they didn't like, but we tolerated them. I personally was in combat 549 days out of two weeks less than two-and-a-half years in combat. ... I was lucky, very, very lucky. I've been in positions where I've been covered with mud from artillery rounds. In going up with the 34th Division to the 100th Battalion, an enemy eighty-one-millimeter mortar round landed maybe five or six feet behind me and, fortunately, was a dud. You could see it and see it tumbling down the mountain. So, I've had "Screaming Mimis" [German rocket artillery] land within a couple hundred yards of me, but, ... for some unknown reason, I was lucky.

SI: During the Battle of the Bulge, was there any concern about German infiltrators where you were?

JE: No, not where I was, not where I was, but I wrote about, when we first got into combat in Italy, where there was an infiltration problem. A platoon leader of another company, not mine, who ... had a German background, met a German soldier, behind the lines, and tried to talk him

into surrendering. ... The German shot him and killed him, and we never captured that soldier. The German soldier, to the best of my knowledge, was never captured. So, we did have problems, every once in awhile. Now, one of the big problems was, which we never had, was problems with civilians, or people ... posing as civilians, and Americans, being very generous, we would give away the extra food we had at the end of a meal. Now, in Sicily, we picked up, my company picked up, I think, four Italians. They weren't soldiers, but they were four Italians who needed work and they served with the ... company during the entire war. ... When the War in Europe was over, they left us and went back to Italy, but, all during the time we were fighting, those Italians served with the kitchen and they were good workers and good help. So, there were some good ones, but having some kind of infiltrators in the chow line after the meal was always a problem. ... We've had that problem in Iraq and, you know, we learned that after every war. It would be nice if we made some new mistakes somewhere along the line, but we don't do that.

SI: After the Bulge was blunted, can you tell me about the process of closing the Bulge, and then, moving into Germany?

JE: ... When the Bulge was liquidated, my company was transferred to the British Army and we went around, ... we had to go to the west and around the Bulge area, and join the forces that were fighting on the north side of the Bulge. ... I think we joined the 102nd Division and we fought with the 102nd Division from that time. We moved around there, which had to be, I'll say, the end of February. [Editor's Note: In the Battle of the Bulge, the 102nd Division was the first to cross the Roer River in Germany and made its way, eventually, to cross the Rhine.] ... From that time, we moved to the northeast into Germany until we hit the Rhine River. I don't remember the dates, but it had to be, I'm not sure, but, anyway, the fighting was relatively easy, because, now, Germany is pulling its forces back to the east of the Rhine River. [Editor's Note: The 102nd Division took up positions along the Rhine River between Rheinhausen and Nierst on March 11, 1945.] ... We hit the Rhine River at Monchengladbach, and there, all along the river, the river wasn't so wide there, maybe three, four hundred yards wide, and all along the river, you could see houses with white sheets hanging out of them. ... They'd had enough war, and we sat there. ... We knew that we were not going to go anyplace, because, now, we're under General Bernard Montgomery and the English Army, whatever it was. [Editor's Note: The 102nd Infantry Division was attached to the British 21st Army Group, which was under the command of the US Ninth Army, from December 20, 1944, through April 1, 1945.] We knew we weren't going anywhere until all the odds were stacked in his favor. [laughter] So, I think we sat there three weeks before he made ... a push across the Rhine, and it was north of the Ruhr River, and we were attached to the ... 17th Airborne Division. Now, the 17th Airborne Division did make a drop across the Rhine and, of course, when they secured the beachhead across the Rhine, we went over and joined them. ... I think we provided fire support to them for three or four days. ... They were going south into the Ruhr Valley and we were detached from the 17th Airborne and, again, attached to the 102nd Arkansas Division, "Ozark Division." I shouldn't say. ... From there, we went, I think, essentially, all the way to the end of the war, which was the river; I'm trying to think of it. ... [Editor's Note: The 17th Airborne Division dropped across the Rhine River on March 24, 1945. This drop was known as Operation: VARSITY. On April 6, 1945, the division moved south to fight in the Ruhr Valley. The 102nd Infantry Division is a National Guard unit based out of Arkansas and Missouri, which is known as the Ozark Region. Colonel

Ervin's unit, Company A, Third Chemical Mortar Battalion, joined the 102nd Infantry Division from April 9, 1945, to April 19, 1945.]

SI: The Elbe River?

JE: Elbe River? yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JE: ... So, we were with the 102nd Division all the way to the Elbe River. ... We got to the river at a location which is probably, oh, eight or ten miles north of the bend in the river which takes it from going north to northwest. The river flows ... north out of the Alps and enters into the Baltic Sea. ... There again was another city in Germany, which was on the far side, the east side, of the Elbe River, which ... sounds like "Weissenburg," but we weren't allowed to go across there. [Editor's Note: Wittenberg, Germany, lies on the eastern side of the Elbe River, opposite of the Hannover and Magdeburg regions in which the 102nd Infantry Division was located in April 1945. On April 21st, Supreme Allied Command halted units at the Elbe River, where it was decided they would meet the Red Army.] ... Actually, we fired very few missions ... after we crossed the Rhine River. I can remember only one interesting thing. ... Somewhere along the line, we were set up in a big farm area where they had a big smokehouse and the smokehouse was full of smoked meats. ... As a butcher, I would say they were some of the ... best smoked meats we ever had, and we, of course, helped ourselves, which was against the law, but we helped ourselves to the smoked meats we wanted, and off we went again. When I got to the Elbe River, I did another dumb thing. I went down to the river, ... one of my platoon leaders and I, and we asked to go across the river. So, the engineers took us in one of their outboard motorboats across the river. We were hunting for souvenirs. Well, across the river, there were thousands of German troops, all against the river, nobody paying any attention to them. The river had floating ice coming down it. It was cold. There were thousands, well, hundreds, maybe thousands, of vehicles that the German troops came down in. Of course, they wanted to get across the Elbe River, because they didn't want to be captured by the Russians. So, my platoon leader and I went scrounging through the vehicles for souvenirs and I managed to get four Luger pistols, and one was a long barrel Luger pistol, and three sets of binoculars. ... With that, we went back across the river, but, while we were on the east side of the river, I thought I was seeing Genghis Khan and his horde of Russians come down. They came down in light tanks and they looked Oriental, they were untidy, they had wraps around their legs, like we had wraps in World War I. ... As soon as they got there and saw all these Germans that had crossed, and some of them were trying to swim the river, which was almost impossible, they were shooting them as they were swimming in the river. ... It was just like Genghis Khan. I could see him, ... he and his hordes, coming down. So, that was a sight that I'll never forget.

SI: On your way through Germany, did you encounter any slave labor camps or concentration camps?

JE: No, I didn't personally. However, when we got to the Elbe River, things came to a halt and I guess we were there probably something close to a month, in which we did nothing, ... but we had captured some facilities where people were murdered, and there were two in our area. We

didn't see any of the ovens or any of that stuff, but we were required to go to two places where the Germans' prisoners were lined up and just killed. The one ... I remember clearly was a long trench that was probably twenty feet wide and maybe fifteen to twenty feet deep and it was being filled in. ... You could see at the bottom of it, and even partially covered up, you could see Jews that had been killed and you could see their emaciated remains, that they, the Nazis, didn't get to finish their dirty work. [Editor's Note: The 102nd Infantry Division discovered an area near Gardelegen, Germany, on April 14, 1945, where the *Waffen*-SS buried over a thousand concentration camp prisoners alive.]

SI: When you first learned of what had happened in the Holocaust, was it shocking? Did it sink in, what that meant? Did what you had seen become clearer?

JE: No, that didn't have any apparent effect on us whatsoever, that I know of. In my unit, I had lots of; I shouldn't say lots. I would say, out of 207 people in the company, I probably had twenty-five or thirty Jews, and they were all good soldiers. They carried their weight just like everybody else did. They were neither good nor bad, they were just like the rest of us, and so, as far as my company was concerned, we had no problem with the Jewish soldiers. We did have a problem; well, I should say, the Third Chemical Mortar Battalion was a regular Army unit. It was the oldest of the mortar battalions, in spite of the fact that there was a Second Mortar Battalion. The old regular soldiers, some of them were good and some of them were bad, and some of them were illiterate. I had at least two illiterate soldiers and they were sergeants. One was a platoon sergeant, but they were not effective soldiers. ... I had to go through a reduction in rank procedure in the case of a platoon sergeant who just wasn't cutting it. I mean, he was in over his head in ability, but, as a sergeant, or as a soldier, doing "day in, day out," "same old, same old," training half a day, which is what they did in the regular Army, he was a good soldier. I'll give you an idea; I can remember two things in common. When Germany surrendered, the headlines in the newspaper, which I've forgotten the name of it ...

SI: *The Stars and Stripes*?

JE: *Stars and Stripes*; how can I forget that? [laughter] The headline in the newspaper was, ... "Germany Bombs at Random," or, "Germany;" I can't remember that right off the bat, but the soldier wanted to know, "Where's Random?" or the other headline was, "Germany Something," and the soldiers wanted to know where it was. So, that's how illiterate some of them were, but, as far as doing the grudge work and the grunt work, they were okay. Now, there were some good ones. I had some good sergeants, but the best people were the draftees. ... Especially in my unit, believe it or not, I think I had fifty-seven or fifty-eight, I cannot recall, it's in the book, fifty-seven, individuals who either had a chemistry degree or a chemistry-related degree from college. Now, you know they didn't belong in a fighting outfit. I had one individual in my outfit, who weighed 125 pounds, who was one of five nationally-known physical chemists in the country, whose specialty was cement, and here he was in the Army and doing consulting work while in the Army overseas. It didn't make any sense, and his wife was a state representative or a senator for the State of Pennsylvania. It was just a total misuse of educational talent and ability and, yet, they soldiered along with everybody else and I never had a complaint. Some of them, I got commissioned, some of them weren't interested. They were just interested in putting in their time and getting out, but they were all good soldiers, all of them. The worst case I had was a

young regular Army soldier, who was probably nineteen, and he couldn't leave liquor alone. I mean, ... he just was a lousy soldier and I decided, when I could have a unit, I would not have any of those people, and I did my best to get rid of them.

SI: You were attached to many different infantry units.

JE: Yes.

SI: How big of a difference would it make to be attached to certain units and to be under their leadership?

JE: ... Great question. That's where I learned the value of leadership. Now, I fought in the corps, all through the war, which included the Third Division, the 36th Division and the 45th Division, and I personally was attached to units in each of those three divisions. There wasn't any question about which was the best division. That was the Third Division. The good journeymen division was the 45th Division, the "T" for Texas Division; no, no. [Editor's Note: The Third, 36th and 45th Infantry Divisions were all under the command of the US Seventh Army for the duration of the war in the European Theater. However, their corps commands varied throughout the war.]

SI: That was the 36th Infantry Division.

JE: ... The 36th was the; was that the Texas Division?

SI: Yes, the "T" Patches? [Editor's Note: The 36th Infantry Division was a National Guard unit from Texas and Oklahoma. The unit's insignia is in the shape of an arrowhead flint to represent Oklahoma and has a large "T" in the center to represent Texas.]

JE: ... Yes, "'T' for Terrible." Well, the 36th Division was in trouble from the moment it entered combat until the time it finished combat. The difference that I saw was what the commanders did, and I'm speaking now of the battalion commanders, the regimental commanders and the division commanders. I was with the Third Division when General Truscott commanded it. He was a gentleman, a gentleman, a gentleman's gentleman. [Editor's Note: General Lucian Truscott commanded the Third Infantry Division from March 1943 until February 1944 in Sicily and Italy.] I was with it when Mike "Iron Mike" O'Daniel commanded it. He was a tough, rugged soldier. His dying words will be, "Goddamn it, get moving." He'd go down to his men and say, "Goddamn it, get moving. I told you to get moving." [Editor's Note: General John Wilson "Iron Mike" O'Daniel commanded the Third Infantry Division from February 1944 to December 1945.] Now, I was with the 36th Division ... in a defensive position and the regimental commander came down to look at the battalion defenses, and which were terrible, that I, as a company commander, could have done better. ... The regimental commander told him, ... "You put a machine-gun here. You put a machine-gun here. You do this and this and this," and, five minutes after he was gone, the battalion commander did not know what to do. Now, I'm sad to say that, but that's what I have personally witnessed.

SI: Do you think that was due to the fact that it was a National Guard unit?

JE: No, I don't think so, because I was a Reserve officer and, hell, I was green as grass and, yet, I assimilated an awful lot. ... I worked with a lot of battalion commanders and regimental commanders. I didn't work with any division commanders, but I saw how they operated, and I just think it was a poor selection of people. Now, as nearly as I can determine today, the National Guard units that are fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, or have fought in Iraq, did themselves well. I can't answer why the 36th Division was always in trouble. You know, it had a lost battalion down in Italy, along the Rapido River, I think it was. It just got pushed out, ... kept pushing and pushing, without regard to providing security on its flanks, and the Germans just came right in and surrounded them. They were finally saved, but, you know, it took away from the primary effort. [Editor's Note: The First Battalion of the 141st Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division, was considered a "lost battalion" during the campaign for Biffontaine, France, on October 27, 1944, after being cut off by the Germans. They were rescued by the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.] ... I've observed that in my retired life, in providing consulting services, that it's the nature of the individual. ... I'm digressing, perhaps, but there are leaders who will not take a position of responsibility until everything is stacked in their favor. General Bernard Montgomery was a great example, for the British. There are other leaders, I'm saying in military and civilian life, that say, "If it depends on my ability and it's possible, I'll do it," and that's what I tended to be. Now, we had people in my battalion who, on pressure items, such as an inspection, before we went overseas, to make sure we had all of our equipment, couldn't stand the pressure of an inspection and got sick that day. Well, this shows up in many ways, it shows up in many ways, and the differences in individuals and organizations can be incompatibility. You may have a driver. Patton was a driver, a good officer, but a driver, and he wouldn't work well in an outfit that had a team effort. Of course, it shows up mostly in civilian organizations, where you have a big name expert who is going down to organization "A" to salvage it, but organization "A" was not ... used to everybody telling them what to do. They had competent individuals who could solve problems, and so, that type of individual's not going to do well in that organization, is not going to last as well. ... We see that every day and we see it now, at this time, when we look at our larger civilian organizations that are going bankrupt for one reason or another, and most of it, these days, now, is poor financial management; next question. [laughter]

SI: Where were you when V-E Day was declared in Europe?

JE: On V-E Day? I don't know exactly where I was. Yes, I do; I was with a battalion at Erlangen, Germany. We had occupied a former German military facility that was just big enough for us to fire our mortars. ... I was now promoted to S-3, but I was still a captain. So, I was the battalion S-3, the operations officer, and we were doing training, assuming that we were going to be deployed to Japan. It was half-hearted training, because we had people who were about ready to be redeployed to the States and released. ... Of course, I ... wanted to be one of those, and we had new people who just came over, who were drafted into the Army, and so, it was just a half-hearted effort. We didn't know what we were going to do, but we had to fill the time. ... That's what we were doing and, of course, being overseas two-and-a-half years, I was pretty high on points. ... I don't know, I came home sometime in October, I believe, I don't know exactly when, but I was just as anxious as anybody, because I had a wife and a baby. My daughter was twenty-one months old before I ever saw her and I was overseas two-and-a-half years, overseas almost two-and-a-half years. So, I was not interested in continuing in the Army

overseas. ... I wasn't sure I wanted to do chemistry, because I'd lost some valuable time in the field of chemistry. ... I think I wanted to, I know I wanted to, establish a photo shop and that's what I tried to do, unsuccessfully. I was told flat out by Eastman-Kodak, specifically, they didn't have enough supplies for their old customers and they weren't looking for any new ones. ... Then, I had an opportunity to stay in the Army for another year-and-a-half and I took that option. ... Then, during that time, they wanted to increase the regular Army, so, they had an integration and I applied for that. ... Fortunately, I made it, but I applied to be a field artillery officer, instead of a Chemical Corps officer, because I wanted to be with the shooting guns. ... I was integrated in the regular Army as a field artillery officer.

SI: I do want to get an overview of your career from 1945 to 1970. Obviously, that is a long period of time and is covered in your book. I just forgot what I was going to ask.

JE: Oh, join the ranks; you got mentally constipated. [laughter]

[TAPE PAUSED]

JE: Okay.

SI: After the war, with your new commitment to the Army, where were you first assigned?

JE: ... After the war, I had leave. I don't know how much leave the Army gave me. It was at least a month; it could have been six weeks, I don't know. ... Then, I decided to come back in the Army and stay in the Army for a year-and-a-half. I was assigned to Edgewood Arsenal, to the Chemical Corps School, as an instructor, and then, I went through the "charm course" to be an instructor, which was a good course. ... I subsequently went through it, I think, six more times, not because I was a poor instructor, but because that was a requirement for the job that I was doing [laughter] or the school that I was attending. ... So, I think it was sometime, maybe, without referring to my orders, ... probably in March of 1946 that I was assigned to the Armored School at Fort Knox. ... I took the place of a former chemical officer and I was assigned to the tactics department, primarily to teach about the use of smoke and chemicals in warfare, but it was really about smoke. ... I was under a great leader. The chairman of the department at that time was ... Colonel Abrams. ... I know his name, too, as well as ...

SI: Creighton Abrams?

JE: Creighton Abrams, yes, yes, [laughter] General Creighton Abrams. ... He was with the Fourth Armored Division during World War II and he was part of that group that went in through the Battle of the Bulge to save the 101st Airborne Division. ... He was a temporary colonel and, while I was there, the regular officers were bounced back to their regular ranks, if their temporary ranks exceeded their regular rank. So, I went to General Abrams' demotion party, ... but there, again, I was fortunate to be with a great leader, and he subsequently became Chief of Staff of the Army. He was a dynamic leader and, if you produced, he was for you and I'm happy to say that I never had a run-in with him. I got along well with him. I didn't make general, but I think there were fourteen individuals in that group at that time that made general because of their association with the Fourth Armored Division. So, associations do make a

difference, and we know, every day, in civilian life, they make a difference. [Editor's Note: General Creighton Abrams served as director of tactics at the Armored School in Fort Knox, Kentucky, from 1946 until 1948.]

SI: After that, where were you assigned?

JE: Then, since I was the new guy, I got credit for the basic course. I'd learned all about armor. I had been in the tactics department, and then, while I was there, I was made part of an examination murder board. [Editor's Note: A murder board is a committee assembled to aid a person or persons in preparing for an oral examination.] We found early on that there were some instructors whose examination questions always caused some kind of trouble and that an inordinate number of students missed their questions. So, Colonel Abrams formed a murder board and I was one of three people on the murder board. So, I also learned a lot about armor doing that. So, when I left the Armored School, I got credit for the basic course ... and I was assigned to the Artillery School, as a student. Now, some smart individual who wasn't so smart decided that the antiaircraft artillery and the field artillery could be combined. So, I reported to the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill and was immediately sent to Fort Bliss to study the antiaircraft portion of the artillery course. ... The antiaircraft artillery people were, likewise, sent simultaneously to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to get the ... field artillery portion, and that lasted until the middle of December of 1948. That was fine with me, because the artillery firing techniques were just changed and I was in the first group with the changes, so, that made me, as the new field artillery officer, right up-to-snuff. I knew what I was doing. I ended up fairly high, ... in comparison with my contemporaries. I think I was, what? nineteen or twenty. It's right in the book, and out of some two hundred and some. So, I felt very confident in my field artillery ability. From there, I was assigned to Panama. ... In Panama, ... it had no field artillery unit, so, I was temporarily assigned to Headquarters, US Army Caribbean, and I was doing planning work. As a captain, you know, I shouldn't have been doing army planning work, but I was doing it. ... Then, the regular Army artillery battalion that was in Puerto Rico, the 504th Artillery Battalion, was sent to Panama. ... Then, I was sent to the battalion in Panama that was stationed at Fort Kobbe, which was really Howard Air Force Base. ... Because I was up-to-snuff and they had battery commanders and I had already been a battery commander--I was the equivalent of a battery commander--I was made the assistant S-3, which was ... not a regular position, but a "make" position, which was good, because I came down with all of the latest information and I could spread it around easily, and I stayed there. I was there until I got promoted, and then, I was sent from the artillery battalion to Pacific Sector. Now, the defenses in Panama were divided into the Atlantic Sector and the Pacific Sector at Fort Clayton. ... I was the assistant S-3 there, the assistant operations officer, as a major, and I was actually responsible for the security of the Panama Canal, the entire, the east and the west, portion of the Panama Canal. ... They were doing a dumb thing. Every time that the organization that provided the security was changed, they'd print up a whole new set of orders for the organization. Well, I had an old infantry ... colonel, whose name was Colonel Wells, who was the Pacific Sector commander, and I said, "This is dumb." I didn't say it to him, but I said it to my boss, the S-3. ... I said, "Why don't we just do this once and for all?" He says, "Well, you can't do it." I said, "The hell I can't do it." ... I looked in the appropriate manual, I saw there was such an official thing as a standard operating procedure [SOP], and I said, "Let's make this the standard operating procedure." "Well, we can't do it unless we get the Colonel's blessing." So, I went in ... for the

Colonel's blessing. He said, "Are you sure it's official?" ... I showed him where it was official, in the appropriate field manual, and he said, "Okay, we'll do it." So, then, we only did it once, and the only thing we had to do thereafter was, say, ... for the Pacific Sector, to write an order saying, "Organization now will provide security on the Panama Canal from this time to this time and, as reference, you will use this SOP," which simplified everything beautifully. ... I eventually became the operations officer, but no more than I became the operations officer, the Pacific Sector was reorganized out of existence, and so, there was the ... 33rd Infantry Regiment stationed at Fort Kobbe, less one battalion. One battalion was over on the Atlantic Sector. So, the US Army Caribbean made the 33rd Infantry Regiment responsible for all of the actions that the Pacific Sector was doing. ... So, when that happened, I moved back to the artillery battalion and became the executive officer of the battalion. ... I remained the executive officer until I left Panama, which was in June of 1953, but I went to Panama in, I think it was the 5th of February, 1950. So, I was there, essentially, two-and-a-half years.

SI: Where were you assigned after Panama?

JE: Well, from Panama, I was assigned as an ROTC artillery instructor at the Ohio State University and I was there for three years. I was teaching. For the first year, I think I was teaching the standard ROTC freshmen and sophomore courses. ... Then, in my second year, I was teaching juniors, and, in the third year, I was teaching seniors, primarily, but, also, did some work in; well, I don't think I did any work in the freshmen and sophomore courses when I was teaching the seniors. From Ohio State, I was sent to the Command and General Staff College for the regular course, and that had to be '56, '57. That's about right, that's '56, '57. Well, in the meantime, I had applied to go to graduate school at the Navy facilities in California. ... I couldn't do that because I had a neck problem, and I spent six months in Walter Reed Army Medical Center while it was taken care of. ... Then, from Walter Reed, I really went to Panama, but, also, after that, I applied to go to school to study guided missiles. So, at the end of my course work in Leavenworth, I was sent to the University of Michigan to study guided missiles and was there for two years. It was the hardest work I've ever done in my life. I hadn't been to school for seventeen years. I had ... never had an engineering course in my life and, now, I'm studying ... aeronautical engineering, or, really, guided missiles, and it was tough. ... I didn't get a graduate degree, but I did get a bachelor's degree and I had a year's worth of graduate study. ... From there, I was sent, in 1959, ... to the Missile Division of the Artillery Board, which was located at Fort Bliss. ... It was really in the building with the Antiaircraft Artillery Board, and we got along well together. During that time, my first job was to complete the testing of the Lacrosse Missile System, which I did, and then, subsequent to that, I was made test director for Army support missiles, which included, at that time, the Little John and the Honest John. [Editor's Note: Designed to destroy reinforced positions and concrete bunkers, the Lacrosse Missile was fielded in 1959; however, it was discontinued in 1964 due to guidance inaccuracies. The Little John rocket was designed to facilitate transport problems found with the larger Honest John rocket. However, it was phased out in August 1969 as target inaccuracies continued and helicopter transport of the Honest John became possible.] ... I completed the testing on those two weapon systems and was responsible for the development of the performance characteristics for a new missile system, which ended up being the Lance Missile System. [Editor's Note: The idea for the Lance Missile System arose in 1956 and development began in 1962. It was not launched until 1971.] So, I supervised the preparation and the murder board of the Lance Missile

System characteristics. Well, while I was at the ... Missile Division of the Artillery Board and working with the Honest John rocket, I was amazed at the way they were doing business and solving the firing problem. The firing problem is, you're given coordinates of a target and you're either given or you know the targets, the coordinates of the firing position. Now, you calculate the firing data to put a ... weapon on the target at however it's defined, either a nuclear target at X elevation or a non-nuclear target. It was taking them anywhere from an hour to an hour-and-a-half to complete the gunnery problem, because they were doing everything by logarithms and two teams were doing it. ... Every arithmetical operation is a ... chance for an error, and every addition, division, subtraction, multiplication was being done by these two teams and, if they didn't agree at a step, they had to resolve the problem. ... Sometimes, this lasted ninety minutes, which was unsatisfactory if you have a nuclear target out there you want to hit. So, I set about redesigning the firing problem. So, that was also during the time of calculators. At first, there was the mechanical calculator, which we used, and then, the electronic calculators came out, ... but it didn't make any difference. So, I was the first person in the Army, for the calculation of firing data, to use natural functions. So, from the two sets of coordinates, you can calculate distance and direction by using natural functions. Well, I was also the first person to use calculators. So, I made up new firing tables, and then, I looked at the firing tables for the Honest John and I noticed there was a great deal of constancy at elevation eight hundred meters, and that's an elevation at which we want nuclear weapons to go off, at least we did. I don't know, I hope this is not classified yet. ... So, I set about making up a firing table in which the unit effects and the distance were multiplied out for distance, you know. ... So, I had a firing table for a thousand, well, ... I've forgotten what the beginning distance would be, but let's say twenty thousand meters, or fifteen thousand, whatever it was, ... doesn't make any difference. It was a minimum effective range of the rocket. ... Then, I would say for twenty thousand, then, I'd have ... 20,100, 20,200, and so on, and all of the unit effects times the distance would be multiplied out to get the elevation, and I did this ... for the entire effective range of the system. Using that allowed me to get the time to solve the gunnery problem down to seven minutes. ... My team could do it continually at not more than seven minutes. Well, I checked it with the ... Artillery School and the Artillery School turned it over to a couple second lieutenants that just came out of school, who were spending two weeks on active duty. ... They didn't like it, because it didn't agree exactly with the numbers that were in the firing tables, although the numbers came from the firing tables, but, anyway, we used it and it was effective. ... I took it to Korea with me and it was effective and was used there as well. I checked with the ballistic ordnance organization down in Maryland.

SI: The Aberdeen Proving Ground?

JE: Aberdeen Proving Ground, and they said, they told me, they approved of that and they agreed with that technique, because they could get away from using unit factors, but take the factors ... directly off the equation for the trajectory. ... They say they used to do it that way, but the artillery didn't like it. Well, it doesn't make any difference anymore, because everything's done by computer, but it did make a difference back in 1959, 1958, ... yes, did make a big difference then. So, after my tour at the Artillery Board, I took all my work to Korea and commanded an Honest John battalion. Now, this is one of the few times I can cite in the Army where the Army did everything right and, yes, it was natural to go from testing the missile system to commanding the missile system. However, in Korea, ... I was assigned to the missile

battalion of a missile group, and the missile group, or missile command, as it was called, included ... an engineer company, an infantry company, a headquarters company and the Honest John battalion. ... We were assigned to provide nuclear fires to the Korean Army. So, in order to do that, across the front of the Korean Army, the battalion was broken up into Task Force Alpha and Task Force Bravo. Task Force Alpha was the battalion less a firing battery and supporting units, and Task Force Bravo was at another installation about fifty miles away, in the mountains. ... Fortunately, the command, missile command, had airplanes and I had an airplane. We could fly back and forth between the two units. So, I commanded the battalion for thirteen months, a month of which I spent home on vacation. ... Following the battalion, while I was in Korea, I made the colonels list and I was transferred back to the Pentagon. I never wanted to go to the Pentagon until I felt I could make a contribution, and so, my first job at the Pentagon was to be "horse holder" to a general. A horse holder is effectively an aide, but, really, generals in the Pentagon aren't authorized aides, so, I was called his executive officer. ... I was the executive officer to ... Edward T. Rowny, Jr., a great guy, a wonderful guy, a workhorse if there ever was one. Time meant nothing to him. He was also the individual of the Army who was instrumental in using the helicopter as a weapons system, mounting machine-guns and other weapons on the helicopter. ... He did that and did a lot of work in air transportation of troops ... for airborne divisions; no, that's not right. Airborne is parachute; it's air mobile divisions, and he did the great work on that. [Editor's Note: In 1963, General Edward L. Rowny was the Special Assistant for Tactical Mobility to the Assistant Chief of Staff, Force Development, and then, the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development at the Pentagon until 1965.] ... He also was the President's representative for short missiles, too, with the Russians, ... when they wanted to cut down the nuclear armaments. [Editor's Note: General Rowny was the Joint Chiefs of Staff Representative for the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I) negotiations from 1973 to 1979.] Well, so, getting back to the Pentagon and ... Edward T. Rowny, I was his executive and doing well. I couldn't stand the hours that he was living and have a family, and so, in the meantime, I had been made an R&D [research and development] management specialist by the Secretary of the Army. I had applied for it based on my work with the missiles, and so, I asked for an R&D job and I wanted to get out of that. Who knows what might have happened if I'd stayed with him? but I don't look back. So, I was given the job of being the director for the ... nuclear, chemical and biological office in the Office of the Chief of Research and Development. ... I was responsible for all of the nuclear developments, not the weapons systems or the nuclear warheads associated with a particular weapon system, but the other nuclear developments that we might be doing. ... At that time, ... it was to use nuclear energy to see if we could use a ... mobile nuclear power plant in the rear areas, but that was cancelled. ... There were other nuclear things to do. ... Then, I was responsible for the developmental works for the chemical munitions and biological munitions. That was a good job, and I was able to make a contribution in a number of ways when I had that job. One of the ways was to require a five-year plan. They never had a five-year plan to know where they were going or wanted to do for the nuclear, chemical and biological activities. I saved a bunch of money when the artillery had to make new firing tables for the 155-millimeter howitzer nuclear shell. ... We had a number of shells left over as part of the chemical activities and we gave them, released them, and they were able to make the appropriate changes in the firing tables for the 155 howitzer nuclear shell. The big thing I did there was, I was responsible, I wasn't, but my unit was responsible, for the development of the gas detector, gas alarm, field gas alarm, for the services. ... I made the presentation to General Abrams, then a four-star general, who was the Deputy Chief of Staff. ...

We looked at each other, we knew each other and we never said anything to each other, other than I just gave him the presentation. Now, why did I give him the presentation? Well, everything in the Pentagon has to be coordinated with everybody else and, if anybody dissents and maintains that dissent, you go up to the next higher level for a decision. Well, I was working for OCRD [Office, Chief of Research and Development] and what was then called Axe Four, which was Force Development in the Pentagon, disagreed with having the gas ... detector, gas alarm, in the Army at that time. So, we went up to the Vice Chief of Staff for a decision, who happened to be General Abrams. [Editor's Note: General Abrams was Vice Chief of Staff of the Army from August 1964 to April 1967.] ... I made a great, great performance and the General, a two-star general, who was in charge of the chemical portion of Axe Four was there and listened to me. ... He was the one that disapproved of it, based on the recommendations of his chemical people, and, of course, it was turned down by General Abrams, but he went back to his unit and he said, ... "If my chemical officers were half as good as Ervin, we would ... have gotten that equipment passed, and we need one." It was the first one. We had no experience, and at least it would have provided experience for the Army. Well, as it turns out, this same general was Chairman of the Selection Board for ICAF [Industrial College of the Armed Forces]. [Editor's Note: In 1946, the Army Industrial College was reorganized into the ICAF, placed under the control of the Chief of Staff, and relocated to Fort McNair. During the Cold War, it emphasized a curriculum of logistical management.] Well, while I was in OCRD, I got selected to go to ICAF. ... Fortuitously, I made a good presentation to General Abrams and the Chemical Corps general in Axe Four was impressed, and so, that carried over, so that I got an appointment to go to the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. That was the greatest year of my life, educationally, and it was wonderful. ... I also parlayed that into a master's in business administration. An unfortunate thing is, my thesis there, ... without being specific, was, "Was it possible to reorganize the Army Materiel Command so that we only had one method of management?" The Army Materiel Command was basing all of its management decisions on functions. There was the R&D functions, there was the production and procurement function and there was what later turned out to be the material readiness function, but it was really the service maintenance function. ... To get around this, General Frank S. Besson, Jr., who was the original commander of the Army Materiel Command, created project managers, a project manager for this and for that and for the other thing, for all the big systems of the Army. [Editor's Note: The Army Materiel Command was established in 1962 under General Creighton Abrams and Secretary of the Army Robert F. Froehlke.] ... He also created commodity managers for little systems, where several commodity managers could be put together for the management of them. ... These managers were to bridge all the problems in going from R&D to production and procurement to field service management. Well, naturally, I knew, hate to say it, but I knew what the answer was when I started my thesis. ... The thesis was, "Why, yes, we can have project management or system management. Instead of managing by these various functions, we manage the whole system across the functions." Well, I think I was number nineteen in my class when I submitted that thesis. ... There was an old engineer colonel who was the assistant commandant of ICAF and he wanted me to elaborate on commodity management, which didn't affect the thesis one way or the other. It was a non-entity and I refused to do it and, before I knew it, my rating had dropped down about twenty points, but, notwithstanding that, I went from there to Fort Sill for a command job. See, because I had a command job as a captain, I had a command job as a lieutenant colonel and, in being in the R&D management program, I would still get my command positions per grade. ... So, as a colonel, I

was due a command job and was sent to Fort Sill for a command job. Well, there was none at the time. So, I was made executive officer, which was a regular duty assignment for corps artillery, Third Corps Artillery. Third Corps Artillery has a brigadier general as the commander and a ... colonel deputy and a colonel at executive officer, and I became the colonel executive officer. The commander was a colonel on the generals list. I held that job for six months, and then, I became a commander of the largest field artillery group in the Army, even though I was trained and sent to school to be a missile commander. [laughter] A missile command was given to somebody else who had no missile training. ... I forgot to say that, when I was in Korea, my battalion had the highest battalion grades in all kinds of inspections of any battalion unit, ... American battalion unit, in Korea, and then, when I ended up as the group commander at Fort Sill, my group ... did the same thing there. So, I was a group commander for a year-and-a-half, and then, it was ... time for somebody else to take command. ... So, as a field artillery officer, the Department of Army, in its great knowledge, chose me to be the chief of staff of the largest Signal Corps logistical organization in the Army, which was the Electronics Command. So, I became the field artillery chief of staff of the Electronics Command. ... They really needed help and I did help them, and I served there for, oh, about a year-and-a-half, and I couldn't get promoted anymore. ... I said, "When I can't get promoted anymore, I'm going to get out," and I certainly wasn't going to go to Vietnam at that time. ... I applied to get out and retired at Fort Monmouth as the Chief of Staff of the Electronics Command, and all of this is in detail in the book.

SI: After that, you had a long career in management consulting.

JE: Well, yes, then, I figured my knowledge would be appropriate for some organization and I had worked with the then Martin Company before. ... I forgot to mention that the Martin Company project manager for the Lacrosse System was an individual by the name of; turn it [off].

[TAPE PAUSED]

JE: Okay, I'm ready to go.

SI: Okay.

JE: So, the Martin Company was located in Orlando and we moved to Winter Park and Herman Staudt was one of the vice-presidents of Martin Company. ... I think he was a deputy at that time at the Martin Company. So, I applied for a job at the Martin Company and made the mistake of putting down that I did know Herman Staudt. Nobody would touch me, and so, I did not get a job with the Martin Company. [Editor's Note: Herman R. Staudt served as Under Secretary of the US Army from 1973 to 1975. In 1957, he had served as director of Martin Marietta's MGM-18 Lacrosse missile program.] ... We were on social terms and I told Herman what the status was. So, he put me in contact with one of the engineers of the company that was doing work in the solid waste management business. The reason Martin Company was doing that was, they were also doing work in the field of post office operations, because, after the war, and the Korean War and the Vietnam War, the military supply organizations were cutting down, because the military wasn't buying as much materiel, because we weren't really involved in a big

war. So, Martin Company was looking at other areas where they might use their technical ability and do some good. So, one of those areas was solid waste management. So, he put me in touch ... with the engineer who was going to be let off anyway, because solid waste management was going to be swept away, because, now, it was time for the government to be buying more materiel. ... Martin was winning more contracts and they didn't have to depend on that, on the side issues. So, I got together with this individual and I became part of what was called Act Systems. He had the contacts and I had the ability and, with that, we parlayed his contacts into a company that provided a solid waste collection management capability, and very successfully. ... I was doing all the work and he was ... running the company, but I was the only thing in the company that was working. ... First of all, I was asked to develop a management information system for collection, which I did. That was approved, and it was made available to all public and private solid waste collection organizations that were using FORTRAN IV language at the time. Now, this is back in the days when we were using punch cards to talk to a computer. Very successful, it was a great program, and we used it as long as I was with the company, very successfully. So, with that program, the company restructured the collection operations of the City of Cleveland. The EPA, Environmental Protection Agency, was working with the City of Cleveland to revamp its collection system. So, we used that program and we were able to completely reorganize successfully the collection system of Cleveland. The EPA then decided it wanted to determine what the best collection systems were and, at that time, there was a one-man system, a two-man system, a three-man system, collection from a curb, collection from the alley, a unionized system and a non-unionized system. So, they wanted to know what was the best arrangement and we got the contract to do that. Jim had the contact and we got the contract. The contact with the EPA also got me a doctorate degree by using my management information system. [laughter] So, anyway, we used my management information system and we searched the country for the best system in each category. ... We looked at about three hundred systems, not closely, but, you know, superficially, to see ... what we could get, and then, we nailed it down to about twelve systems and we got collection information over a period of two years, information from those systems, phased over the two-year period. At the end of the two-year period, we prepared the report, which took about a year, and we continually provided information to the EPA. I became a nationally known expert in a year about collection, from nothing, based on the information we got through the management information system. We also did a time-and-motion study of the test systems and compared that with the information we got from the management information system and, in all cases, the management information system provided us better data, because it represented what was done normally during a normal weekday. ... What we did, in reorganizing the collection systems, was to determine the maximum waste generation periods, ... which was, in most cases, the autumn. Some systems had two maximum times, but whatever it was, we determined the maximum collection time, and then, we maximized full loads during that time. ... Then, the rest of the year, the organization agreed to live with whatever it was, and so, they wouldn't have to put on extra people and use extra vehicles to make the system operational during maximum waste generation time, which is usually in the fall, because of the landscape, the leaves and all the other stuff that goes with it. So, on that basis, we also reorganized Columbus, Ohio, and Richmond, Virginia. ... I got a doctorate degree through my work at Richmond, Virginia, ... and also used my own management information system, but, in this case, the doctor's degree was related to public administration and not to the management information system *per se*, although, for my work, I developed a management information program for Nova University. When I worked with the

company, Act Systems did a great job on helping other people manage the business, but Jim couldn't manage the business. ... I got fed up with it and, in five years, I quit and, six months after I left, ... the company went belly up. In the meantime, I did other work. The big job I did was with a general construction contractor who did bid work, but not on residential units or road work. Any other kind of activity was fair game, and so, over the course of years, I developed a complete management system for that company and all the details are in the book. ... It was a management system and not an accounting system, but it defined the relationships between the various elements and it was very successful and the company was successful, so that it was bought up by another company. ... That was about the time I was ready to retire and that was the end of my consulting work.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to say about your life?

JE: I had a great life. I had a great wife. I had a great family life. I had a wonderful life.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: During World War II, you received the Croix de Guerre with Silver Star and a US Bronze Star. [Editor's Note: The French Croix de Guerre, usually awarded to foreign military forces, is an award bestowed either to a unit or to an individual who demonstrates acts of heroism involving combat against enemy forces.]

JE: Yes.

SI: Were those for specific actions or more for general service?

JE: I think that it was more for outstanding general service. It was for the Bronze Star. While I did things that would have warranted the Bronze Star for valor, ... well, but nobody knows about it. As I told you, we were always working independently of the battalion. The battalion commander and the company commander never visited me in firing positions, so, they had no idea what was going on. So, it was just for being a good boy at the right time. In fact, it was awarded by the 28th Division and I only was with the 28th Division maybe a month or so, and that was during the Battle of the Bulge. The great bit of fighting that I did was with the French and the Third Division. The Croix de Guerre, well, the same thing; now, we provided good work with all four divisions, but not very much with the Fourth Armored Division, because ... we were only with them on the trip to Rome or the fight to Rome, but the other three divisions, we did good work with. ... It was one of the divisions that gave me the Croix de Guerre with a Silver Star. ...

SI: Thank you very much, Dr. Ervin. I really appreciate all your time.

JE: Well, I might add that I did get a Commendation Medal. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

JE: I did get the Legion of Merit for my work with the artillery group at Fort Sill and I got the Legion of Merit for my work at Electronics Command.

SI: What about the Army Commendation Medal?

JE: The Army Commendation Medal, I got through my work ... in the Office of the Chief of Research and Development.

SI: Again, thank you very much.

JE: You're very welcome.

SI: We appreciate it. To anyone listening to this tape or reading the transcript, you can access more information about Dr. Ervin through his memoir, which we can help make available to you; thank you very much.

JE: You're very welcome.

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

Reviewed by Matthew Zarzecki 11/20/10

Reviewed by Allison Bittner 11/20/10

Reviewed by Mark Kannell 11/20/10

Reviewed by Jesse Braddell 11/20/10

Reviewed by Sylvia Pokrzywa 12/1/10

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/20/10

Reviewed by John W. Ervin 12/31/10