RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HERBERT S. ESTELL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Herbert S. Estell on June 4, 2003, in Tranquility, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

Jared Kosch: Jared Kosch.

SI: Mr. Estell, thank you very much for having us here and agreeing to be interviewed.

JK: Could you give us a little background information on your father?

Herbert Estell: My father was Joseph Alexander Estell and we lived in Orange at the time I was born. Educationally, he was very limited. I assume he just completed grammar school. My mother was Louise Estell and she had a limited education [as well]. My father was a very hardworking man and, in the course of his life, he added [an addition] to our home in Orange and built a house in Andover, New Jersey, with the aid of my brothers and myself. He worked in Public Service, which was fortunate for us, because, during the Depression of '33, unlike most people, he did not lose his job. He was a very good provider and my mother was a very wonderful woman, as far as directing our family of five children.

JK: Which part of Public Service did your father work in?

HE: He worked as a cashier, but, before that, he was a supervisor of probably a hundred meter readers. So, he was really more fit for the supervisor's job than he was for the cashier. He, actually, could make anything. As a result, he should have been a cabinet-maker.

JK: Can you tell us a little bit about your neighborhood?

HE: We lived on a one-block street in Orange between North Day Street and Cleveland Street. It was a mixed neighborhood, [consisting of] almost every nationality you can imagine. We had black neighbors, Italian neighbors and a real mixture. We had one house on the street which was rather elegant, I would say. Outside of that, we had four-family houses, and then, a mixture of double or single family houses. It was difficult in our house, my first experience with possible death, when I caught scarlet fever. During those days, a health inspector would come in. We had an enclosed staircase to the second floor, which they sealed that off. My mother stayed with me in the upstairs room and my father and older sister and brother took care of food and things of that nature. The alternative was to go to what they called a "pest house" in Newark, which was out in the meadows, but my mother wouldn't permit that. I did pull through, although they expected me to not make it for a while.

JK: How old were you then?

HE: [I was] five years old. Then, I had a very bad case of measles when I was about fourteen and, in the same year, I had acute appendicitis. They said it would have burst if I had gotten to the hospital a half-hour later. Both in the case of the scarlet fever and the acute appendicitis, in those days, you didn't have much chance to pull through. So, I managed to pull through those two. The acute case of measles left me with a sight problem for a while. Since, at my present age, I can still see, I guess I'm lucky.

SI: When you were a child, what were your interests and hobbies?

HE: Well, the [nearby] school was Cleveland Street School. It was only … a matter of three blocks away from my house and I was active, my family was fairly religious, in a Baptist church not very far away. We had a lot of activities in that church, but my main interest was with my buddies. We had a little park, very, very little, where we played a lot of football and a lot of sports. Later, I will be talking about my basketball career, in spite of the fact that I am, at best, five-foot six inches tall. I didn't get into [basketball] really until I was out of high school. I was interested in Scouts and we had a boy's organization in our church, which was a boy's club with a religious connotation, and I was active in that, hiking and things like that. We would think nothing of going from Orange, where we lived, to the park in the mountains over near Millburn, repeatedly, on a Saturday. About five of us [would] play various games and take our lunch. We thought nothing of hikes that were ten miles by the time we got home again. We never seemed to think much of that. My father, being that he worked for PS, was instrumental in getting the first electric [power] on our block at that time. He had to pay for the poles to bring it in, but, then, over the years, he was compensated for it as new customers came on. Eventually, of course, by the time I got to be twenty-one, every house had electricity on the street. Up at the corner of the street, we had one large house. I think it was some kind of a writer and he had a lot big enough, so, he would allow us to play football or other games on his lot. Later, another family moved in, or at least rented it. I used to love to climb the trees and look down on that three-story house. I always liked to climb trees, wherever I was. Then, my father bought a place just for us. It was an old, ramshackle house with an outhouse in Andover, New Jersey, which I will be talking about later, where we would spend our weekends. Eventually, he would build a new house, as I mentioned before. The place had twenty-seven acres, but ten of them were swampland. I think he really wanted to build a little ten-acre pond there and we cleared out enough space, so [that] we could go ice skating, in the winter, on it and, also, you could go out and fish in the middle of it. We had a wonderful childhood. I mean, of course, we didn't have a lot of money. We did have one other thing. My father bought his first car and it was a used car. He bought it from his nephew in about 1923. In those days, what you ran into most of the time was flat tires. You could hardly ever count on going any length of a trip without having a flat tire. Then, in 1927, we got our first new car. It was an Overland. We had a touring car that he bought from a neighbor before that, in which the whole family could fit, but my brother and sister were getting bigger. As a result, the whole family could not fit in the Overland, but we used it to go up to the country in the big red car. … [My father] was partners with another guy from Lake Musconetcong, shared the bungalow on the lake with his partner, and, in the summer, [my father's partner] used to commute down to Orange, where he worked, and then, row across Lake Musconetcong. He'd come up on DL&W [Delaware Lackawanna & Western Railroad] and row across the lake. On weekends, of course, he would come, too, and we shared the place with them, but our funds were very limited. I mean, my father and, my mother, … particularly, … were great savers. She was able to pull out what money we had saved just before the Depression, which was fortunate for us. In the summer of '33, … three of my friends and myself went to the Chicago World's Fair. As I was saying before, in those days, you had a lot of flats. I think we had something like eight flats by the time we got to Philadelphia, or Gettysburg, I guess it was. One of the four's father had a little more money than the rest of us and he wired his father and got enough money to buy two used tires. From then on, we only had about one flat for

the rest of the trip out and back. … All I remember is, I had a nickel spending money from Niagara Falls home. That's all the money I had to last [me], but we had a good time. Incidentally, I still correspond with one of the fellows that were on that trip, a fellow named Dante (Guasso?), who lives down North Carolina. I talked to him last night, as a matter-of-fact.

SI: Was that the farthest you had ever traveled before?

HE: No. The year before, my brother, his friend, [myself] and a fellow classmate of mine, a buddy of mine all my life … named George (Simmons?), the four of us went on a two-thousand mile trip up through New England. We climbed Mount Washington. We went on through Quebec. My brother worked for a store in Orange, which was sort of a bootlegger on the side. [laughter] I remember, he had samples of whiskey and why he did it, I don't know, but he took four of them and we went into Canada and out of Canada and never had any trouble. My brother was an expert mechanic and we had spare parts and everything, [in case] anything broke in the car, although, on our trip to Chicago, I will say that we burned out a bearing. I took down the pan of the car, out somewhere in western Pennsylvania, and put it back up. We had to pull into a Willy's Garage, I think. So, we had a good time on the trip.

SI: What did you think of the World's Fair?

HE: That was marvelous, really marvelous. Strange as it may seem, I was in Chicago last year and we went right to the shores of Lake Michigan, which I couldn't believe the change. We actually camped right on the shores of Lake Michigan and we had to take a trolley car to the fair. Well, the first day, we got to the fair and we were looking at the transportation exhibit. It was a big, wide-open circle that you stood on the second floor and you looked down on the first. That was the first exhibit we went to and, when it was time for me to leave, I turned around and the three of them were gone and I never found them the whole day. The second day, we were in the trolley going to the fair and there were two seats on each side of the isle. Two of us sat in the front and two behind. Each one of us was supposed to tap the other when we got to the fair. I don't know whether the fellow next to me, next to the window, [got tapped]. I got out and the other two got out, but he didn't wake up and he was gone for the whole day. [laughter] So, each of those two days, we only had three of us together. That was the beginning of the exotic rides. They had … a roller coaster, but it was in a tube, the Thunderbolt or something, they called it. … This one fellow that had a little more money than the rest of us, he rode that thing about twenty times [laughter] and it was ten cents, while the other rides were a nickel, you know. We had a marvelous time. It was a great World's Fair, much better, in my estimation, than the New York World's Fair, which, of course, was later. Shall we go on to college then?

SI: How did the Great Depression affect your family and your neighborhood?

HE: As far as the Depression is concerned, my father kept his job, no problem there. They cut his salary twice. Now, most people think of the Depression [as being in] 1933; they think that's the year. As far as getting a job right out of high school, I tried, … but, unfortunately, I went with a buddy of mine and that was a mistake. … He was a nice, handsome, tall guy and I can't say I blamed them. I mean, he didn't get the marks that I got and so forth, but, from the standpoint of appearance; we went to New York and the Newark area. Eventually, he got a job

at Firemen's Insurance, I think it was, which, you know, [was] a good job. He was fairly successful, but not really successful in his life. … January of 1933 was my seventeenth birthday. So, I was … one of the youngest ones in the class. We had one fifteen or sixteen-year-old, but I had just turned seventeen. Most of them were eighteen in high school. As a matter-of-fact, I was a very shy person at that time, I mean, as far as public speaking and so forth. … The fellows in high school, particularly the postgraduate guys, were there because they were kind of stupid and so forth. They were talking about the houses in Newark and everything … and, to me, this was out of my world. The same way when I went to the Newark College of Engineering, I was about a year younger than most of my classmates. So, I really didn't get into the social life. I always worked on the committee that put on the class play. I was active in high school in one of the science clubs and very active at home in various clubs, but, as far as being an extrovert, I was not at that time; later, to say that one of the courses I took at Rutgers helped me in that respect. … I went to the Newark College of Engineering and my folks as I said, were not rich people, but my mother managed. My older sister had gone to … Montclair State. It was called the Normal School then. … It was a two-year course and I think she only went one year and she ran into trouble with even the little cost. [In the case of] both, Newark College of Engineering [and Montclair State], it was ridiculous how little they had cost. It cost nothing for people in Newark. … I used to buy lunch for fifteen cents, right next to the school. So, I stayed [at Newark] for a year, but, then, in August, I got a job as a lab assistant in New York Color and Chemical in Belleville, New Jersey.

JK: What were your thoughts in regards to, at first, Herbert Hoover, and then Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal?

HE: I am very strong in my views on politics. When I moved here [to Tranquility], I ran for the council, which, at that time, was unheard of if you weren't born here. Of the two-hundred-and-some votes that were cast, I only lost, really, by about five votes. I have always been a conservative Republican. My folks didn't get involved in politics. My father was the recording secretary or treasurer of the church. My mother helped finance the family. Her profession was a dressmaker and she had a few fairly wealthy customers and she would make dresses for them. By this time, my sister and my brother were out working, but they hardly made enough money to keep themselves, you know. … When I got out of high school and was looking for a job, I had a year of college and became a lab assistant at New York Color and Chemical and I made fifteen dollars a week. Now, most people think that the height of the Depression was in 1933, but it wasn't. It was in 1937. … My salary was fifteen dollars, the Pru [Prudential] was paying fifty dollars a month and Monroe Calculating in Orange was paying eight-fifty a week. So, I was in a very good position. I paid board at home and I joined the Orange YMCA. That's where I started playing basketball. I would go down there on Saturday mornings and stay with it from about nine or ten o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. When you're as small as I am, you have to be fast and you have to have a good eye [laughter] or you're nothing, you know. … Anyway, my father had his salary cut by ten or fifteen percent. … In the job I had, we worked Saturday morning, in addition to the five days of the week. … In 1937, … I was making seventeen-fifty and, when the second phase of the Depression came along, they cut my salary back to fifteen dollars. Fortunately, soon after that, they did increase it. Also, during that period, they gave [us] the Saturday morning off. So, you only worked five days a week. During World War II, I was chief chemist at New York Color and Chemical. We made printing ink for the

ration books, pigment to waterproof Navy tents, Uranine, which helped in spotting downed aviators at sea and had many other uses and Nigrosine, which was used as a shark repellent. So, I went to work as a lab assistant at New York Color and we made dyes and printing ink. That … was the reason I was not in the service. I was not in the service because I had a 2-B classification, which is essential occupation. Eventually, I became chief chemist at NYCC. This was later, but jobs were hard to find. In our case, I would say it was almost, as far as my family was concerned, a blessing. … Except for having a small cut in his salary, [my father kept his job], where other people were losing their job or being cut forty percent or something like that. So, relatively speaking, we were pretty well off, compared to the average person. As I said, my mother was a saver and really didn't lose any money. I remember, we had some kind of a mortgage firm in Newark. … I think it may still be in business. It went out of business for a while during the Depression, but … she had [money] in that and she advised a friend of hers to put their money in it and I don't know [how], but she had a feeling that the thing was going to bust, so, she collected her money and told her friend to collect their money. So, they were relatively well off, because the thing really went, "Boom." While I was working at New York Color, I met a fellow who was in a similar position, a little higher than I was, in our laboratory named Ted (Langstroth?). He was a brilliant color chemist. I mean, he really was, but, in those days, you had to be careful, particularly in the laboratories. … The head of the lab, who had it set up, … was a hunchback and he had his son working for him and I actually worked, when I first went there, under his son. He died after I had been there in the lab about eight years or so, … but there was also the superintendent of the actual works of the whole plant and my friend had started at Rutgers in what they called the certificate course. Do they still have that?

JK: They have versions of it.

HE: It is an associate degree now, or something like that, isn't it?

SI: They also have programs and relationships with the community colleges.

HE: Well, he went to Rutgers, and actually before I got there, he had graduated. Then, I decided I would go there. There was no degree being offered, a BS degree; the only one they had was a BBA and they didn't have that when I first started. I think they started the BBA … just about the time that I graduated. I think the first graduating class had three people in it, if I recall. My graduating class in 1945 only had six people in it. … So, [Ted] thought that a certificate course was a good thing and we just took our own individual things like, chemistry, organic chemistry, math courses and so forth. That was it. … He overheard two top people in our group talking and they said, "You have got to be careful. These young guys are getting a little too smart." So, that was the feeling, but, other than that, they were pretty nice. This fellow that was head of the lab, the hunchback, of course, he was taking care of his son, but they treated us nice and we had no union when I first went there. We had all kinds of parties, at Christmas and so forth, and we played softball or soccer every lunch hour. We played on a cinder field, where they had thrown the cinders from the boilers out. I was very active, by this time, in all kinds of athletics and, as a result, you know, the lunch hours were extended a little. In my whole career at high school and grammar school, I was never late, but I got in a bad habit at work. I think I was always a little late. If I took the busses, I had to take three, … from Orange to Belleville, to get there. Most of the time, I would walk at least the last mile, or two to get there and, in the winter, it got pretty

cold. I've seen the Passaic River freeze over and, of course the Tide River is in Belleville, so, it really got cold. It's been colder up here though. Then, I investigated the BBA course and shifted over to that and got credit. … I started that around in … 1937 or around that time and there weren't too many people. Of course, we were going to the College of Pharmacy as our home school. [For] the certificate course, I had gone to Rutgers in New Brunswick. We used to finish work and … a buddy of mine that I picked up at school, Steve (Strub?), worked in a plaster house in Newark. He would take the train down and, sometimes, I would take the train down from Newark, but, then, I got a car, a '31. It was a fellow that worked at Newark Color and Chemical, a black man, … he was a chauffer and the fellow died and gave him the car and I bought it from him. I used to go and pick … up two fellows and go down New Brunswick, and then, drop them off on the way home. There were a lot of cars around, I mean, … not like today, where I have three. At one time, I had seven, two [of them were] antique cars. Now, my son has about five antique cars and a couple of other cars. I finished my course and there were a couple of unusual things at Rutgers in those days. … One of the courses that was most helpful to me was speech.

SI: Was that with Richard Reager?

HE: [It was] a young teacher. Now, we're talking late '30s, early '40s, I don't know. He taught me … and gave me confidence. … I actually taught at Fairleigh Dickinson for eighteen years, at the evening college. I always loved history, so, the history teacher was great. As it turned out, the fact that I took a BA instead of a BS was a blessing, because, in 1956, I went in business for myself. The experience and the subjects that I learned at Rutgers were very helpful to me at that time. At the time I started there, there was a woman named Helen Hurd, I think she was the Registrar, [Dean of Students for University College]. … There was another fellow there that took it over. Pop Elder was an adviser for our fraternity, but let me say this, that the co-op in our fraternity and in the business fraternity that was operating at the same time, … I'll exclude myself, but these were the innovators. These guys were all *gung-ho*. I mean, they were interested in the school, but they wanted the things that they wished they had at day school and we got them. We had a basketball team. … I played with the team for two years, and then, after the war, I coached the team for two years. We had a fraternity, but we didn't have a fraternity that was just a name. We had dances and dinners. We had all of the things that you would expect, except living together. We had all those things. We had a publication. We had a ladies group. We had a bowling team. I wasn't in that and our fraternity was really the backbone of our thing there. We had stag parties, we had everything and as a matter-of-fact, this old shack we had up in Andover, by that time, my father had built his own house and our fraternity used to go up there like on weekends. We would play poker until maybe three o'clock in the morning, [laughter] and then, we would go over to the Lackawanna nine-hole golf course and play golf on Sunday. We had a really tight knit group there. …

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SI: Please, continue.

HE: We had one fellow who was an expert drummer. We had one fellow that was on a horn of some kind and we had Charlie Waller; he was an excellent pianist. … We had printed invitations

to some of the affairs we had. … We had a fellow, who at first was not in our fraternity, [his name was] Madison Weidner. … He later worked for Rutgers and he became a member of our fraternity. He was the one that organized the basketball team. Now, our basketball team didn't play topnotch teams. … At that time, there was a Panzer College in East Orange, with the athletic schools, now part of Montclair State. The biggest team in the East at that time was LIU, Long Island University. … They were the top team around here. Well, they made the mistake of playing Panzer College and Panzer College beat them. So, they never would play Panzer College again. Now, we would play, not their first team, but their second team. We would play schools, [including] Rutgers home school, as a warm-up game at the beginning of the season. I remember, our gym was not at the Pharmacy School, it was kind of small by comparison. … It was a longer walk from one goal to the other one. … We just had a good time. Now, two years ago, I thought maybe I could go down and get someone to take my uniform. … I could sell it as an antique, believe it or not. I'm into antiques, a little bit. Anyway, I went down and I got to talking with a fellow that was at a dinner by the Alumni Association of University College. They were honoring three or four people, in addition to having the dinner, supposedly. I got talking to some fellow that was … half in charge. … So, I said to him, "Do you have a team anymore?" He said, "Oh, no," and I said to him, "Do you have a publication?" He said, "Oh, no," and I said, "Do you have a fraternity?" He said, "Oh, no." I … didn't expect them to have me get up and make any speech or anything, but I thought someone would come over and say, "It's nice to have you, after all these years, come to this dinner." That didn't exist. It seemed to me that all they did was work and go to school. I mean, that's all they did, I mean no fun. Although, you know, it's a school, primarily, to teach you something, but we managed to have both. A little sidetrack on Rutgers, in those days, incidentally was that there was a college called Essex College. It was only a little ways away from the College of Pharmacy and they would transfer credits from Essex College to Rutgers in those days. I only took one three-credit course there. However, if I wanted to make it six courses, basically, all I had to do was write an essay. … Say you were taking accounting 1 and there was an accounting 2 course; all you had to do to get that credit, the second credit, was to, I don't know, maybe attend a couple of classes and write out an acceptable essay. That's all you had to do, but … there was one fellow in my fraternity, he got a lot of his credits there. … I had one good semester, as far as marks were concerned. I was a little disappointed in appraisal. We had the Newark chief appraiser as the teacher and one of my fraternity brothers was an apple polisher … and, basically, he got a lot of the information from me. How did we mark then, A-B-C or 1-2-3? [Editor's Note: Mr. Estell is referring to the grading scale used at the College of Pharmacy]

SI: 1 was equivalent to an A.

HE: Yes, okay. I took four courses, which you weren't supposed to do. That was four nights a week that semester. You're only supposed to take, I think, two nights a week. I got As in three of them and, on that course, I got a B, he got an A. It was a queer situation. Of course, it has no reflection on the teacher. He didn't know that sort of thing. In 1956, I left my job. I was sort of a rebel. Our firm had been taken over by an outfit that later sold [it]. It was just a stock manipulation. In fact the head of the firm that took over was up for indictment. In fact, he had to go down to Brazil or something to get out. I couldn't motivate like the vice-president of the company, who was running it. … I was treated fairly well, though, because, this time, I was working both inside and out, so, if I had a problem, I'd go back to the lab and work it out myself.

… I was no longer the head of the department there, but I had a lot of leeway, you might say. Because of … my training at Rutgers, … I was able to take over a salesman's job. The only thing I objected [to] was that we sold to the tanners who made the sweatbands for the hats. I never in my life wore a hat, at that time. When you went in to the reception room, a big sign read, "If you don't have a hat, don't ask for an interview." So, I had to buy a hat and just carry it in my hand. So, I had an invitation to work at the Prudential, but that didn't appeal to me, after being in the science lab, really. So, I started my own business and a friend of mine was an instructor at Fairleigh Dickinson and he got me a job. I had some experience on purchasing when I was still with the company, so, I got a job teaching at Fairleigh Dickinson at night. It was a little different than Rutgers, because, instead of going two nights for an hour-and-a-quarter or something like that, we had a two-and-three-quarters thing. So, for eighteen years, I taught at two campuses, Teaneck and Rutherford and two of my sons have graduated from Rutgers, one from Cook College and the other one from Montclair State. He's also taken his Master's. He just retired as a teacher. He was a veteran in Vietnam. The most pleasant phone call I ever got was a collect call from Fairbanks, Alaska. I had a suspicion he was coming home and that's what it was. He was just calling to say he was on his way home. Anyway, I taught there for eighteen years, but they wanted me to go on. … This dates back, now, to fifty years ago and I had no desire to. My business was fairly successful, so, I decided not to go on to advanced degrees and so fourth. So, I left, but they treated me well. I had no regrets and I used to actually have about a fifteen or sixteen-hour day, but I didn't mind that at all. Coming in from Teaneck would take me an hour-and-a-quarter and it was close to [eleven-thirty] by the time I got home. They have this long single day and, you know, I used to plan my business for the next day and so forth. It gave me time to relax. One time, my headlights went out. That was a little scary, but, outside of that, I had no trouble. This was driving home at night.

JK: Could you explain your work with shark repellent dye?

HE: Oh, yes. There were several uses for dyes during the war. One was nigrosine, which is a shark repellent, a black dye. The other one is uranine, which is a fluorescent dye. Now, the uranine is the most soluble dye that there is. … It absorbs water and, eventually, becomes a paste. However, it's so visual that you can see one part … in a million parts of water. So, either when a ship sunk or when an airplane came down, if it was a lifeboat, they put it in a canister. If it was an individual, they had a vest and it had two packets, one with the uranine and one with the shark repellent. The shark repellant … screened off the flyer that was in the water or the seaman that was in the water. We did not make that dye, but we were instrumental in packaging it. We made the uranine. Now, the uranine is used for many other purposes. It was also used in small, … little, tear-drop bombs. When an airplane was trying to sight a submarine, they would make their first pass over the submarine. By this time the submarine starts to dive. So, the [airplane] would line up and throw down maybe three or four of these in a row in the [direction] that the submarine was going. Then, on the second pass, they would drop the depth bomb. It was also used in the Artic areas, where there was snow. The artillery would shoot off a dye bomb and it would color the snow, so [that] they could … get a sighting of where the artillery should be shot. We made the dye and … we also made printing ink for high-class printing, not for newspapers, but for magazines and so forth. It was also used in the ration books at that time. Our dye was simply to enhance black ink. It was really a paste. It was put in with the black paste to give it a depth of color. That's how that was used. … There were some other uses for it

at the time and, today, … uranine is still around. It's used in washing fluids. You've probably … seen it, an opalescent greenish type of color in water solutions. … It's also used today when they put the formaldehyde solution in a corpse. It's used to replace the color in your cheeks. So, it has many uses and is still around today. In the war, it was vital, really. We had to test it. I … recall that we'd never see the inspectors [during] the war. Maybe they were busy, but I don't know why. Near the close of the war, when we were selling hardly any of it, we had a dozen inspectors come in there, trying to hold on to their jobs, you might say.

JK: During the war, how large was the firm? How many people were employed there?

HE: Well, if you consider our packaging department, [the firm employed], roughly speaking, a hundred, maybe a little less, but not much less. See, we were a part of the American Dyewood Company in Chester, Pennsylvania. That was, in turn, part of the United Dye and Chemical Company. So, all together, those units didn't have too many people. … During World War I, [our president] was instrumental in getting … synthetics, a submarine loaded with them, to come into this country, and that's how he got enough money to start New York Color and Chemical Company. … Today, they say that one thing you should do is establish your credit. … One of the things I did when I went to Rutgers was borrow, I think, for argument's sake, let's say two-thousand dollars from the president of our company. I did it for the same reason that you would establish credit today. … I paid him back, even before it was due. I could have gotten the money from my parents, I'm sure, but, from then on, I knew the president. … When I got married, he gave me a gift. At Christmas time, … I got … twenty-five dollars more than some other guy. So, … that's a good thing to do, if you're ever in that situation, where you want to establish a good relationship with the top man. Maybe some men wouldn't react that way. … The firm was taken over and those people were entirely different. They were only interested in milking the firm. We had a salesman up in Massachusetts; he had established a good relationship with all his customers there, always very friendly with them. A lot of them bought just because of him. … He was fifty-nine years old and … our local president fired him. I said to myself, at that time, I was thirty-nine, "If they could do that to him, they can do it to me, anyday." So, that's one of the reasons I left. I just couldn't stand it.

JK: Can you explain your participation in the sky watchers during the war?

HE: Yes, … it was in Verona. We … had a little penthouse, … not as big as this room, up on top of the sanitarium. … Depending on the time of the year, it wasn't a long thing, it was late at night, though. I've forgotten how many nights a week. A fellow that was up there with me most of the time, sometimes I was alone, was the head of northern New Jersey unemployment, the state unemployment, all northern New Jersey. He told me that he was a broker and, during the Depression, he was *kaput*, out. He went down to the unemployment office, he had a wife and a couple of children, and he said to them, "I have to get a job. I'll do anything, [even] sweeping floors." That's how he started, in 1933. This was around 1940. It was during the war, so, it was in the '40s. He had built himself up to the head of northern New Jersey unemployment. … My wife died about fifteen years ago. I had been married almost forty-five years. … My wife died very suddenly and unexpectedly. I was grieving for a year and that's when I started collecting rocks. Before you go, I'll show you part of my collection. Then, I sort of broke out and remarried about four years later. I did things that I never would have expected I could do. For

one thing, I hadn't sung. I don't have a very good voice. When I was a teenager, I used to sing in our church junior choir. I went back and joined the … local chorus here and, although I sing entirely by ear, I started taping songs that I wrote. I actually started singing at taverns or, occasionally, with our chorus as solo, which I never thought I could do. … I would never, never think of writing a song. It just didn't seem possible and I used to go to the Rutgers UC annual alumni dinner dance. That was the one dance I would do every year. I started to go dancing about three-nights-a-week and most of it was disco dancing. I'm seventy years old, but it didn't seem to bother me. …

SI: Could you explain more about your role during the war?

HE: In our family, we had no close man in service. My oldest brother was a plumber and he was sent to Bermuda to set up service camps, as far as the plumbing was concerned. It was either Bermuda or Aruba, one of the two places. So, that was the [closest] we got to service, no actual combat.

SI: Do you remember where you were when you found out that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

HE: Yes. I had come home. I married on the 22nd of November, this is my first marriage, and I was on my honeymoon for a week or so. I had just gotten back to work when the news came in of Pearl Harbor.

SI: What was the reaction?

HE: Well, I went home and, at that time, I didn't even know what a 2-B was. … I said to my wife, "It is possible that I may have to go." My wife was a registered nurse, so, all her friends that she graduated with … all went. … Towards the end of the war, they had come to scrapping the bottom of the barrel. I had to report in Orange. The West Orange High School football coach and I, without bragging or anything, were as far as I could see, the only two good physical specimens that were there. Of course, I was still short. One fellow said to me, "They say I don't have to go. I got dementia praecox," you know split personality. [laughter] That was the type that was there and the fellow from West Orange [and myself] were given the authority to take this group to Newark. We were set up to take them to Newark. After that, … I got my second 2-B. … Generally speaking, the wars are so short now. They are so mechanical. That was sort of a continuing situation. Today, I get the impression that, with television and reporting right at the front and everything, that most people … miss the war the excitement of it. … It's a harsh thing to say, but you're talking about two people maybe getting shot or something. Reaction today to something like the Trade Center being blown, [Editor's Note: Mr. Estell is referring to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11/01] … demands your attention. … You have to have second thoughts about [the] National Guard and these other fellows, who, actually, [this is] a job with them. They had the choice of joining, like my friend that I mentioned was in World War II, he was in decoding. He never served overseas or anything. He was always local. He made a very good living … out of it. The funny part about it was that he was in the deciphering division, but he was color-blind. [laughter] I don't know how that happened, but he was. I really am a fatalist when it comes to those things. When they were talking about nerve bombs and all that stuff, I always felt … that you couldn't really do anything about it. … I think,

generally, if … the people in this country were getting less and less nationalistic, [9/11] revived some of the patriotism. I really had a big flag up in my barn, but it wore out, unfortunately. It's the same way with this sabotage effect. I just took a trip to Puerto Rico and the airplanes are much better, security wise, than they were when I took my spring trip last year. However, I will say that no matter how careful they are, … it's like breaking into a house, if they want to get in this house, they'll get into this house and there's nothing you can do. I mean, what could a stewardess do against some six-foot saboteur, you know. It's just ridiculous. Another thing I can't understand is, they are very careful with the change in your purse and so forth. I had a money belt on and they had a lot of trouble with the buckle, but the zipper underneath [laughter] … didn't bother their machines at all. The worst thing, I think, of all, and I'd like to get to someone and talk to them about it, is the pilot luggage, with the wheels and the thing you pull out. These saboteurs, they probably have their own company and could make their own thing. Now, most of those things you pull out are wood and they don't show up. All they [need] to have is some arrangement, … take those things in and have a sharpened end down and they got a thing that's better than a knife to go after the stewardess. So, why they allow those things on the planes, I don't know. Besides that, last year, one guy was taking down [his luggage from the overhead compartment] and it fell down and hit me on the head. [laughter]

SI: How did Pearl Harbor change the pace at your company? Did the company expand or add more shifts?

HE: … When I was at New York Color and Chemical, at times, I would have like fifty men that I controlled, not complete control, and I had fifty personal headaches. [laughter] So, I've always worked on the premise … that I didn't want to get big. You know, whatever I earn, I know where I earned it. [That is] the same [reason] I like being in business. I can see in the future if things are going to be tough or not. If you're in a large company, … who knows? Tomorrow, you may be fired. … Pearl Harbor, as far as that was concerned, I was with the company at that time, … it didn't really mean too much to me, except that we had to send all our material out to a testing lab. We had a much more intimate relation with quality than we had had before. After the war, we relaxed it and there was a lot of surplus around. … It really didn't make any difference. … I never liked [Franklin Roosevelt].

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

SI: This continues an interview with Mr. Herbert S. Estell in Tranquility, New Jersey, on June 4, 2003. Please, continue.

HE: … Actually, the Depression … was over when lend-lease came into effect. That stimulated the economy. Everybody, from then on, mostly, did very well … during those years, … if you were in business, like we were. … I don't know exactly, but I would be surprised if we were selling more than five ton a year. During the war, we were probably selling five tons a month or something like that. I don't know the exact figures, but that's the way it was. As I said, we also made printing ink, [which] increased. Everything increased. … A 2-B meant that you were frozen to your job, but it also meant that you were frozen to your salary. [laughter] So, … with things going up during the war, … it was a little difficult from that standpoint, although, when I got married in 1941, I was making thirty-five or forty dollars a week, which was considered, in

those days, pretty good. … When I … started, … making fifteen dollars, in addition to paying board at home, I was actually saving some money. It doesn't seem possible. I don't know if I read it correctly, but one of the … formal dances at the … St. Cloud Mushroom Farm, I think the bids were two dollars. It just doesn't seem possible. So, I had more money than I had before, but, sometimes I think I saved more, proportionally speaking, than when I first started to work. I'm a saver. Unfortunately, I save what I can of money, but I saved everything. … The top floors packed with stuff. … You have your problems and everything, but life is funny. People tend to think of the bad times they had. Sometimes, I sit and reflect on the good times I had and how lucky I am to be alive. I'm going to tell you a miracle that happened to me and it wasn't too long ago, about a year-and-a-half ago. I have a … power lawn mower [that] weighs about 350 pounds. My grandson, who does repairs on it, told me that it has a professional engine in it, which has a little super power, let's say. My wife usually does the front lawn, which is relatively level, and I take over and do the trim work. On the other side of the house is a garden and beside the garden and up to the fence shrub is about four feet across. … After I do the lawn, [I usually] go up there, because of these weeds. … Having short legs, I have the clutch pedal, which is on the left, padded and taped up. Lately, I had a little trouble with my eyes, so, I had goggles on and a mask on my nose. I usually go up to a row of trees, one about fourteen inches across. I usually go up, step on the clutch, put it in reverse and go back. [There is a] slight grade going up to this tree. I went up to the tree, my foot slipped off the clutch and the lawn mower went straight up the tree. [It was] unbelievable, [it went] right straight up and I'm seeing 350 pounds coming down on top of me. I said to myself, "Estell, you're dead. You're dead. There's no other way you can do it." When you lift the hood of that lawn mower, it makes a racket and it only comes … straight up. I heard nothing. In other words, from sheer fright, I must have passed out. When I came to, I was on the ground, but I didn't have any pain or anything. The lawn mower is now the steering wheel is on the bottom and the moving parts are on the top. The hood is completely out in front, straight out with the lawn mower. My legs, or one of them, is where the steering wheel is, above the steering wheel. The other one is almost where the wheels are. I got a little [scrape], about the size of a dime, … on my leg. The lawn mower was red hot, because I had done the whole lawn. The gasoline was pouring out of it. The oil, where you put the oil in, was broken off and I'm alive. I mean, it's just impossible to believe that I wasn't killed or at least … had my legs crushed or something. Over in the field here, a couple of years ago, a guy on a tractor was plowing, and then, disconnected the tractor. He was going in for lunch and racing across the field. He turned over and was cremated; the thing caught on fire. That's one of the first things I had thought of when I was lying on the ground. So, I got away from that as fast as I could. That's the way it goes. Some young kid in a motorcycle crashes into guardrail gets killed. So, I'm a fatalist.

SI: During the war, did you have to deal with the problem of people leaving because they were getting drafted and bringing in new workers?

HE: Well, particularly in the school, many of my fraternity brothers had to take a hiatus. … Back in the '40s, there's a picture of a graduating class and there seems to be about thirty in it. … By the time I got out, it was six and that was both campuses. … I thought that I was the first vice-president of the Newark Alumni Association and (Brass?) was the president. I may be wrong, but I have never received [notice of] officers' meetings. … I don't know if this was formed or anything. Yet, … they were very diligent in sending me a notice about being a

letterman, [with an] invitation to go down to the school. At that time, we used to have the homecoming game and a picnic on the president's lawn. What's that, Palmer Stadium?

SI: No, Rutgers Stadium.

HE: Oh, yes, you're right. Well, of course, I'm very disappointed in the Rutgers football team. I always went to a homecoming game, until … several years ago. … I [have] sort of been disappointed in the Rutgers football team. I guess most of the alumni are. One [way] I'm still connected with Rutgers is because of my stone collection. I do go down there and I belong to the Morris Museum Mineralogical Society. I do go down and they have a show, twice a year, at the geology department, … near where the old office used to be. … I get invitations to that, but I can't drive. I can, but I don't drive very much at night anymore. I'm having trouble with a bad doctor.

SI: Did you notice a change in events, due to the amount of students leaving Rutgers and being drafted?

HE: Well, the world has changed and, evidently University College has changed. I mean, … we live in what's become a rather lush community, because we're two miles from Route 80. I don't know, maybe this is part of the trend. People just don't seem to have time to do the things that we used to get a lot of enjoyment out of doing. I mean, they certainly have more money to spend and, if it cost money, they spend it. … I always felt that, if I worked hard for something, I would enjoy the results. … Now, in most of the households, the woman is working, … because of our society today, which has had a dire effect on children being raised and how they're raised. … I get publications and I don't know if you saw … the signs for our local politicians [before elections]. I mean, they ought to do like the British do and not spend all this money. … The government, they helped … break up the Bell Telephone system and, now all these competitors are paying big money to work on. Well, it has to come from somewhere. So, it was better to have it in one hand than a bunch of hands and out of my pocket. … It seems that all the politicians are on their way to being crooked. There is no respect for politicians anymore and policemen. I can remember the time when, [if] you saw a uniformed policeman on the street, did what he told you to do … and there was a lot of respect there. Between my wife and I, I have fifteen grandchildren. Those kids, in most cases, have experiences in travel and luxuries that I was maybe forty before I even thought about them, you know. … Their parents all have two cars. In a community like this, you have to have two cars. On the other hand, my granddaughter says that when she was in grade school over here and they started some of these three or four [hundred]-thousand dollars homes, she would go to parties … and they had no furniture. You know, they had two cars, they had a big house, but they're working their heads off just to support the cars and the house. I don't know. Some things are good. Certainly, I'm like everybody else I like wireless telephones, but I got rid of my big car, [laughter] because it was too wide. So I reduced the number. That's about all I can say.

SI: Thank you very much.

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

Reviewed by Travis Omilian 10/24/04
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/6/04
Reviewed by Herbert Estell 4/27/05