

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN G. FOLKER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SANDRA STEWART HOLYOAK

and

RICHARD LIN

and

BRIAN BICKERTON

WALDWICK, NEW JERSEY

MARCH 4, 2010

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview on March 4, 2010, in Waldwick, New Jersey, with Mr. John G. Folker ...

Richard Lin: ... Richard Lin ...

Brian Bickerton: ... Brian Bickerton ...

Carolyn Folker: ... Carolyn Folker [Mr. Folker's wife] ...

SH: ... and Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Thank you so much for having us here today. For the record, can you tell me where and when you were born?

John Folker: Bergenfield, New Jersey, 1926, July 26th.

SH: All right, sir, thank you so much. We are going to start by asking you a few questions about your family background. I think the best place to start is with your father. Can you tell us a little bit about his family history?

JF: Being it's about the service, ... he was in the Navy in the First World War and he was a cook [in the Navy]--what rank, I don't recall--and he enjoyed cooking all through life. [laughter] He was in the textile business.

SH: Did he ever talk about where he served during World War I?

JF: Yes, but I don't recall that.

SH: That is fair enough. Did he encourage you and your brothers to join the military?

JF: We knew he was in the Navy and that's the direction we wanted to go. Being in a family of eight, four boys and four girls, three of the boys went into the Navy also.

SH: Can you tell us a little bit about your mother and her family background?

JF: In Bergenfield, the Cornell Family were well-known. He worked for the town and Mom wound up ... working for the telephone company. So, she went through high school, and so forth.

SH: Do you know how your parents met?

JF: No. [laughter] He was born in Hoboken and Mom was from New York. ...

SH: I was just curious.

CF: Your mother was related to the Cornell College [Cornell University].

JF: Yes, but we never [took advantage of it]. I inquired, and we inquired, about a scholarship, to no avail. [laughter]

CF: And so, may I interrupt and say your father's name is on a monument over in Tenaflly?
[Editor's Note: Mrs. Folker is referring to the Camp Merritt Memorial Marker at the Camp Merritt Memorial Circle on the border of Dumont and Cresskill, New Jersey.]

JF: Yes, at Dumont, ... Cresskill.

CF: Cresskill.

JF: Borderline. ...

SH: For his service in World War I?

JF: Yes.

SH: Was your father always in the textile business?

JF: Yes, yes, and they wound up with a company of their own, and it was amazing, because his education was [only] to the sixth grade.

SH: Amazing.

JF: And he and his brother went out to work and Grandpa was, his father was, a chandelier maker and the business went down. So, that's why the boys came out to go to work, two of the boys.

SH: Your father was raised in Hoboken.

JF: ... At the beginning, yes, and then, moved to Bergenfield.

SH: Did your father and mother have large families? Were they part of a big, extended family?

JF: My father had six brothers and sisters, five and him, and my mother had a brother and one sister.

SH: Did they live locally? Were there big family gatherings?

JF: Yes, they lived within three blocks of each other. We were on one street with one family, Frank Folker, and a block away was the Algors, and then, the Cornells were three blocks away, and we did [gather together]. In those days, there were a lot of picnics and things, gets together.

RL: Your community was very tight-knit when you were growing up.

JF: The families, yes.

RL: What about with other households in the neighborhood?

JF: We were close. As children, we would play with [their children], make up ballgames and stuff like that, enjoying that type of a relationship.

SH: What about the Depression? How did that affect your family?

JF: My father and mother lost the house.

SH: Really?

JF: The situation was, the gentleman that handled it came to the house and told my mother and went over it with my mother and father, and I'll say my father was very understanding. They sat down and had a little party. [laughter]

SH: Really?

JF: And we wound up moving three blocks away, into ... my grandmother's house and grandfather's house. ...

SH: To the Cornells?

JF: Yes. They had passed away and my folks got together with the relatives and bought the house, or made arrangements to buy the house through that situation.

SH: Was your father able to continue to work in his textile business?

JF: Yes, and that's how they built [the business]. They were working, and then, they eventually started their own business, Folker Fabrics.

SH: Okay. Did you and your brothers work? Did you have outside jobs?

JF: Yes. My younger brother, Bill, he was a year-and-a-half younger than me. [laughter] We had a little lawn business in high school. One of our accounts was the (Blue Moon?) Ice Cream Factory and we got paid with a gallon of ice cream. [laughter] ... At that time, we had to get home quick before it melted, and the Folker Family kids enjoyed a lot of ice cream. [laughter]

BB: When you were growing up, were you involved in any extracurricular activities, other than the lawn cutting job?

JF: Columbus Cadets, with the Church, and then, just we had also a basketball team that we put together to play different groups around in the area, went so far as Hackensack, and so forth, like that.

SH: This Columbus Boys ...

JF: Columbus Cadets.

SH: Columbus Cadets, what did that entail? What did you do with that?

JF: Usually, the typical fraternal association [activities], with meetings and sports, and so forth.

SH: That was where the basketball team evolved.

JF: No. ... We didn't make the team, so, we got our own team together, even the uniforms. I was number five. [laughter]

RL: Were you guys any good?

JF: We were mediocre. We hated to go down to Hackensack, because they had a very low ceiling. If you jumped, you could touch it with your hands, and they knew their own court. ... That was a challenge that we never did overcome. [laughter]

SH: Did you defeat the Columbus Cadets team?

JF: No, no. [laughter]

SH: How involved were you as a young man with the Church? Were you an altar boy?

JF: No, I wasn't. [laughter] I went to St. John's Catholic School in Bergenfield.

SH: Did you?

JF: ... Finished the seventh grade, and then, I transferred to the junior high school, public school.

SH: Did you? Was it a big deal to come out of parochial school and into public school?

JF: No, it was a transition you knew was coming, and so, you might as well take advantage of it, at that time, get a little head start. [laughter]

BB: Was there a big difference between the parochial school and the public school?

JF: Not at that time, no.

SH: What was the makeup of your neighborhood, the ethnic makeup? Where were most of the families from? Were they mostly Roman Catholic? Were they German?

JF: My mother was not a Catholic.

SH: Okay.

JF: And she converted awhile after. ... I don't recall what year it was. ...

SH: You remember that she did this after you were grown up.

JF: Yes. I watched her going to Communion. [laughter].

SH: Did you really?

JF: So, there's no problem. The situation, one story, I understand that my aunt, my mother's sister, got married at home. When my mother and father were getting married, he had a challenge. My aunt got married in the home and he had to talk the priest into coming down to the home to marry them in the home in Bergenfield. So, I think that won his good standing in with his father-in-law. [laughter]

SH: Did you have any hobbies as a young boy? Did you collect anything or were you interested in a different type of sport than your brothers?

JF: Yes. My brother, Charlie, the oldest, he wound up on the Mighty Mites, a football team for the town, high school, in Bergenfield High School, and then, he went on the semi-pro team, [the] local Redskins.

SH: Did he?

JF: So, we played all sports with just the makeup teams as we went along.

SH: Were you involved in Boy Scouts?

JF: No. Columbus Cadets were a similar organization.

BB: While you were growing up, what were your close childhood friends like? Do you remember your best friend from that time period?

JF: Oh, yes, ... we're very close and there was--I'm hesitating because we had a different society of friendships at that time. One friend was known as "The Purple Pig" and another was "Shaky" and stuff like that, [laughter] and they all knew their name. ... The one young fellow, he was from a very close family and he had a tick and it got to the friends who tried to change it. So, every time ... his tick came out, he would get belted. So, needless to say, he changed a mite. [laughter]

BB: It worked. [laughter]

JF: It sort of was a strange kind of therapy, but it worked. [laughter]

SH: What was his nickname?

JF: Well, Bobby. [laughter]

SH: I think that is an abridged version. [laughter] What was your nickname?

JF: I'm John, but I was Jack. One of my nicknames was, my mother called me "Jake the Gigolo," right? [laughter]

RL: I see humor runs in the family.

JF: If you didn't have a humor in your body, the rest of the family played on it. [laughter] I can remember, ... my sisters had this play furniture and I was in the basement with a couple of buddies and we had a play thing and it erupted into a conflict with the furniture. ... We wound up throwing it to one another and we broke a few pieces. So, you could see that we all got in trouble, the whole gang. [laughter]

SH: Who was the disciplinarian in your family?

JF: They both had, Mom and Pop both had, their methods. My father was the strongest one. He would want to take care of it; stronger than my mother. [laughter]

SH: Was there a weapon of choice? [laughter]

JF: They both had nice hands. [laughter]

RL: What was your mother's working experience like? Did she ever talk about work at all?

JF: Yes, she ... worked for the telephone company and she was familiar with the working of that.

RL: Was that something to admire? Was there anyone who looked down on it?

JF: It was prior to the marriage. ...

RL: Okay.

JF: And then, when she had children, that was it. She was a homemaker, a very good homemaker. [laughter]

SH: You talked about going through high school. What was the favorite subject for you?

JF: I enjoyed most of them. We did have a good French teacher and I picked up a few words there, ... but sports and the general curriculum. ... I was on the academic curriculum, [laughter] but, in general, [I] enjoyed most of it. In fact, we had the opportunity to learn how to dance in the gym area, ... not the subject, but the woman gym teacher would have these classes for the students interested in that.

BB: You became a professional engineer later on in life. Did you take a lot of math and science courses in high school? If so, which math and science courses did you take?

JF: ... They had three classes in the academic [course], was certain classes that you would take, mathematics and you had to have a language or two, and so forth, and that's the one I pursued.

BB: Did that help you out later on when you ended up going into higher education?

JF: Yes, yes. The higher education started when I got out of the service. I applied for Lehigh University in Pennsylvania and I was turned down. They suggested, the gentleman interviewing me suggested, another course and I said, "Why?" and he said [the] engineering class was full, and that was the end of that. ... My uncle and father worked together in Folker Fabrics and he knew people in North Carolina, and I wound up going to North Carolina State for one year, engineering wise, and then, the next year, I enrolled in Stevens, Hoboken, and completed the education there. [Editor's Note: Mr. Folker is referring to the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey.]

BB: This was all after your service.

JF: After the service, right. It was on the GI Bill.

BB: Okay. Before you entered the Navy, what was your impression of the military?

JF: You couldn't wait to get in. It's a different situation when you've been bombed like we were in Pearl Harbor, and there were two attitudes. Some people didn't want to go, and they went to Canada, and other people couldn't get in soon enough.

BB: How many people went to Canada? Did you personally know anybody that sought to avoid the draft?

JF: Yes.

SH: For World War II, as well as Vietnam?

JF: No, no, World War II.

SH: World War II.

JF: There were those very few people. The people that were concerned, or the people that were not accepted by the military, they were quite discouraged, ... but there were other people that decided they were not interested in war.

BB: They just ended up waiting for the draft.

JF: Normally, they waited for the draft, because of their occupational [needs] or [personal] beliefs.

SH: Did you personally know anyone who was a conscientious objector?

JF: No.

SH: Okay.

JF: To my recollection.

SH: I would like to go back to high school and talk a little bit more about what you knew of what was going on in the world, for example, the military buildup in Germany and Hitler's actions. What were you aware of?

JF: Well, we were aware of anything that came over the news, as well as the families talking. We were well aware of what was happening with Hitler, and so forth, and then, the Japanese situation came into being and we were well aware of that. In fact, when we were lulled into truce talks with the Japanese in Washington, and then, all of a sudden, they attacked us, ... that was devastating, to the point that ... anybody [who] had a doubt about war, they were ready to go. [Editor's Note: Japanese and US diplomats had been meeting for intermittent peace talks in Washington, DC, up until the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th.]

SH: In 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland, you would have been in eighth grade or just going into your freshman year, if my math is right.

JF: If you say so. [laughter]

SH: What year did you graduate high school?

JF: 1944.

SH: In high school, you graduated in 1944.

JF: Yes.

SH: Okay, if we take away four from that, it was about 1940. Was there talk around the dinner table about what was going on in Europe?

JF: Yes, it was a conversation. ... In our table, meetings, ... there's nothing forbidden to talk about [concerning the] war. ...

SH: Were current events being discussed in your high school, in your classes?

JF: Yes, yes, but ... nothing in particular that took the forefront.

SH: Right. When you entered, you were in the academic course and you were planning to go to college. Had your brothers also planned to go to college after graduation from high school?

JF: I was more interested than the others.

SH: To go to school?

JF: ... To go to college. The others had different ways of entering college. ... My older brother went to North Carolina for a short stint, hoping to get on the football team, but he didn't make it.

SH: Okay, the one who played semi-pro ball.

JF: Yes, that's the one.

SH: In high school, in the summers, was that when the lawn mowing business was in effect?

JF: Yes.

SH: That was your summer job. Did the family go on vacation at all?

JF: Yes, we used to go to the shore, and then, my uncle wound up in the shore area and we'd go on his property, swimming, and so forth. Then, my folks moved ... to Rumson, [New Jersey], down there.

SH: Were you still in high school when they moved to Rumson?

JF: No, ... they had a prior move from Bergenfield to Tenafly, [New Jersey], and I went in the service and came back when the family was living in Tenafly.

SH: Okay.

JF: And then, they moved to Rumson. ... When they moved to Rumson, then, I was setting up my marriage in Tenafly, ... residence in Tenafly.

SH: Where did you graduate from high school?

JF: Bergenfield.

SH: From Bergenfield. That is what I thought.

BB: In high school, did you have any classmates of German, Japanese or Italian descent?

JF: Every one, all of them--no problem. Again, I revert back to names that were common to us. They're offensive now, "the little guinea," or something like that, or "the dumb German," or something like that, but there's no fist-fighting or physical action.

BB: They were just looked at as regular students.

JF: Conversation. We had ... another one we called "Wimpy," because he was smaller, but there was no problems.

SH: Were there any African-Americans in your school?

JF: Yes. I graduated with a Gertie Holmes and she was my partner going down the graduation isle. ... In fact, that was the first time I ever realized that there was a racial situation or a racial condition. After the graduation, we were at a function and somebody came up to me and said, "That was very nice of you, walking down the isle with Gertie." ... I looked surprised and I said, I think I recall I said, "What the h--- did you mean by that?" [laughter] and [they responded], "Well, a different color." I said, "Gertie was a classmate."

SH: Good for you.

JF: So, that's it, but that was [the] first, but the racial thing was not a situation where I wasn't aware that [it existed entirely]. I was aware of the caste system, if you want to call it that, job wise, and so forth, but that was the first personal thing regarding that.

SH: With your father's textile business, were their jobs for you and your brothers and sisters to do after school or on weekends?

JF: No. After high school and education, two brothers went into the Folker Fabrics. ... My route was going to Stevens and graduating as an engineer, and I became an employee of Public Service Electric and Gas, for thirty-six plus years.

SH: Good for you.

RL: Was there anyone in the community who talked about World War I? Were there any World War I veterans that shared their experiences with you before you entered World War II?

JF: The reason my brother and myself and my brothers were interested in the Navy [was] due to my father's ... talking about the Navy, and so forth.

RL: Was there any sort of antiwar sentiment in the community prior to the attack at Pearl Harbor?

JF: No, there were no demonstrations that I remembered, or concern.

RL: What about people like Charles Lindbergh, who actively agitated for a neutral stance? He was prominent in New Jersey for awhile. Did you see him or was there anyone who talked about staying out of the war?

JF: We knew about his exploits, and so forth, but it had no effect on me, as I recall.

SH: There was no discussion about the America First movement, the isolationists, anything like that? [Editor's Note: The America First Committee was formed in September 1940 by Yale

student R. Douglas Stuart, Jr., and promoted the popular interwar belief that US servicemen had died and suffered for foreign interests in World War I and should commit to isolationism in the Second World War.]

JF: No. We were brought up as [thinking] the Americans were the best [of] all time, so, there was no concern. [laughter] ... With my father's background, as far as education went, ... he was adamant about an education.

SH: Where were you and what do you remember about the attack on Pearl Harbor, when you first heard about it?

JF: Well, it shocked everybody and, when we heard about it, we were all interested in how it was going to be handled and we're concerned about what would the next move [be] and concerned about what happened in Hawaii. ...

SH: Where were you when you first heard the news?

JF: I was home.

SH: Were you?

JF: I wasn't in the service, and then, later on, I went into the service. I was in high school.

SH: Were you listening to the radio or did someone come and tell you? How did you learn about it?

JF: The noise was pretty loud, whether it was the radio or people talking, and they were quite concerned.

SH: I would imagine, with an older brother as well, that your family was very concerned. Did you have cousins that were the same age as you and your brother?

JF: Well, the demonstration for [having] a person in the service was a flag in the window with a star on it and, if [they had] the mishap of being killed in service, turned to another gold star. ... In looking at the [service], in high school, and then, when it was time for me to become involved, I was trying to get into the Navy Air Corps and I was eating carrots until carrot juice was coming out of my ears, [laughter] because I had heard the stories about the other fellows that tried and their eyesight was bad. So, I took my own remedy, but it didn't work. [laughter] I still had good eyesight, but I didn't make the Air Corps, but I ... went into the regular Navy. ...

SH: When you went in, your brother was already in the Navy, correct?

JF: Yes, yes.

SH: Where was he stationed?

JF: At the time, he was on a landing barge and he wound up in Tarawa.

JL: Wow.

JF: ... So, we were actively waiting to find out how he made out. [Editor's Note: In the Battle of Tarawa, fought from November 20 to November 23, 1943, the United States suffered approximately 3,300 casualties, of which about one thousand died.]

SH: He had already enlisted.

JF: Oh, he had been in the service for a couple years before, let's see, a year or so before me.

RL: In 1943?

JF: I was still in high school.

SH: Was he in the Pacific when Pearl Harbor happened?

JF: Well, he went in before he graduated from high school and he wound up getting a [substitute], and I don't know what they called it. After the war, I forgot. Then, he got his diploma.

SH: Like the GED?

JF: Yes.

SH: Was he already in the Pacific when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

JF: No, but he had several buddies that were in boot camp with him and, along the way, he had met [them], and they were on one of the ships that went down in Pearl Harbor.

SH: Oh, my.

JF: ... That was a continuing thing, as long as the war went on. One of his best buddies was wounded, to the extent that he couldn't get around, couldn't walk, and wound up, after the war, we met him at one of the local places downtown. ... He was taken around in [the] back of a station wagon, so that we met after in the back of the station wagon, would chat with him and meet with him and have a beer with him there. So, this was the extent of the camaraderie, or whatever you want to call it, with the situation then.

SH: We know from what you told us that you definitely wanted to get into the Navy. From looking at your pre-interview survey, you went in two days before your eighteenth birthday. Where did you report to?

JF: I went in after graduation. ...

SH: Right after graduation.

JF: Right after graduation, yes. My birthday was in July, graduated in June.

SH: Okay. Where did you report for boot camp?

JF: Sampson [Naval Training Station in Sampson, New York].

SH: Up in New York.

JF: Right.

SH: How hot was it?

JF: Well, we met and got on a train to take us up there, and it's quite a long ride, [laughter] in those days. So, I didn't know that we were concerned about temperature.

SH: Okay. Many veterans have talked about being on a train that was very hot and uncomfortable, with no air conditioning.

JF: No.

RL: What was basic indoctrination and training like for you?

JF: Very nice. You learned how to do things quickly that you had never experienced before, [laughter] and one of the first things you get is a uniform, when you're going through the line of recruits, and so forth. ... When I got back to the assigned dormitory and got my bunk, and so forth, and I pulled out my uniform, I noticed a difference in the color of the top and the bottom of the dress blues. [laughter] So, it took me three days of welcoming other recruits in order to transfer my mismatched uniform for a matched uniform. [laughter]

RL: Did all the people have the same problem with mismatching tops and bottoms?

JF: I never said a word. I just would hope they handled it the same way, a long chain of mismatched uniforms. [laughter]

RL: Is there anything about basic training and indoctrination that sticks out in your mind today?

JF: Yes, they didn't have any problem telling you, or advising you, that you were going to do a certain thing. One thing we would be taught, ... we would go in a swimming area on a mock platform and jump off, in case you're onboard ship and you have to abandon ship. ... We had one fellow recruit that refused to jump and the petty officer said, "Well, if you don't complete your jump, your unit is going to go around the grinder," which was the track around the field, "twenty-five times," or something like that, "tonight." So, there was a situation that arose quickly. Two fellows started to go up the ladder to help him get down, [laughter] and he did get down, himself.

CF: Splash.

JF: But, other than that, they had a nice way of getting you to follow the rules. In the chow line, if, when you were finished, you took your tray to the scullery to dump it out and leave by that exit, ... the cook was very proud of his cooking and he would stand by the exit and watch the display of emptying trays. ... If it was quite a bit left and you didn't eat, you were sent back to eat the rest of it.

RL: Was the chow good?

JF: Well, it was good, yes. I'd say good, yes, but, later on, ... different things came. On Guam, I had a buddy that would come in on an aircraft carrier, periodically, and I'd go out to the carrier and he would come on base to eat, and I raved about his food and he raved about our food. So, when you got a change of menu, it helped your palate. [laughter]

SH: You said that your father had been a cook in World War I and that he continued to love cooking. Were there any dishes that you found in the Navy that were similar to what your father also prepared?

JF: No.

SH: Were there any nicknames for any foods?

JF: Sometimes, there was very bad names, especially when the fellow was sent back to clean it up, finish the plate. [laughter]

RL: You guys had "SOS."

JF: "Skate on the sidewalk," right. [laughter]

RL: We also had that at the chow hall. [laughter]

SH: I have never heard that version. [laughter]

RL: What were your impressions of the petty officers and senior enlisted sailors who trained you?

JF: They were king. [laughter]

RL: What were their backgrounds like?

JF: Normal backgrounds, because most of them came out [for the war]. They were not, in my recollection, long-term people. Like a CPO, a chief petty officer, you would have a long-term service person in, but a lot of them were recent recruits or [others], and the more time they spent in the boot camp, the ... higher they rose in the chain of command.

RL: Were the chiefs any different from the other petty officers?

JF: No, the chief, they knew the tradition and scheduling of things and they enforced them. On liberty one time, we were in Rhode Island; no, California. We were on liberty and we met a group in the movie theater and a chief from our outfit started to chew out some fellow. You mentioned racial. He was with a Negro girl and he was being chewed out by the chief, who happened to be a Southern chief, was a Southerner. We were all quite upset about that, simply, I guess, [because] it was in public. You didn't have to do it in public.

SH: At Sampson, had that always been a training facility?

JF: Yes.

SH: Okay, it was not just built for World War II.

JF: Not that I know of.

SH: How big was it?

JF: Enormous, [laughter] barracks after barracks, and, in fact, a buddy that was in the same outfit, SeaBee [US Navy construction battalions, known as CBs or SeaBees] outfit, as I was, we heard from him. He lives in Florida and had a place in New York State. ... His daughter found my name on the Internet and informed him of it, and some of his buddies, and he got in touch with me and we would meet him every year in New York State and have a luncheon together with the ladies and ourselves. ... He had a good memory. He would say, "Do you remember Lieutenant So-and-So?" or this one, and my memory was lacking, [laughter] but he had some recollections, and so forth. ... One he had was [of] a dump site where he visited on Guam and there were a couple of planes there and he happened to climb into one of them, and so, was explaining how the plane was riddled with bullet holes. ... He wondered how the guy made out who piloted that unit. So, those are the things we talked about, and then, ... we would talk about some of the stuff ... on Guam. The coral, you had to have your GI boots on, shoes on, or else get cut feet and things like that.

SH: When you were at Sampson, did you already know that you were going to go into a construction battalion?

JF: No. ... After graduation, you were assigned a particular location, and so forth. ...

SH: After boot camp then.

JF: Right, and my assignment was to go to Davisville, Rhode Island, the SeaBees, yes.

SH: Were you pleased or disappointed with that assignment?

JF: No, I was ... very excited about it. It was something different and you were in a different unit than the regular Navy and, when I found out, in Rhode Island, I became [a SeaBee], well, and then, I was assigned to landing barges, and so forth. So, I was trained in that area and, when we got over to [Guam], off the troopship in Guam, ... I didn't get any more training on landing barges. [laughter] I wound up in the construction equipment and I became a crane operator.

SH: Where did you get the training for crane operating?

JF: ... Watching the other guys. [laughter]

RL: Sounds like a very informal sort of ...

CF: On-the-job.

SH: On-the-job, right there in Guam.

JF: ... My first assignment was [being] assigned to a crew on the pile driver. ... My first day on the job, I was holding a pile going in the ground and the noise was enormous. ... I had met, I had developed a relationship [with], one of the ensigns and I saw him and I said, "This is not for me," and he said, "I'll see what I can do," [laughter] and it was nice of him, because, the next day, I was assigned to something else. [laughter]

RL: Speaking of the ensign, what was your impression of Navy officers during your service?

JF: They became close, but you had to do [the work]. ... You knew what your assignment was and ... there was no messing around. You did what you had to do.

RL: Were there any particularly good officers that you remember, or any particularly bad officers that you remember?

JF: Well, ... no, it was a lucky strike that ... [I met] the ensign I knew and [he] reassigned me. ... It's a funny thing. At that time, if you got too close in your relationship with an officer, you might have been called a "brown nose." So, you didn't want to do that, because you've got to live with the other guys. [laughter]

SH: Your first liberty was when you graduated from boot camp, back in Sampson.

JF: No, you were shipped out to Davisville. No, we did have a few days off, and then, we went to Davisville. [Editor's Note: Davisville, Rhode Island, was the US Navy SeaBees' primary East Coast base in World War II.]

SH: Did you get home to New Jersey?

JF: Yes. ...

SH: How big was the training facility at Davisville?

JF: Very large. It was on the ocean, the waterfront, and so forth. ...

SH: Were you being trained by naval personnel or civilians?

JF: Naval personnel.

SH: Always, okay.

RL: Were the sailors in the SeaBees different then?

JF: ... They were pontoon barges we were trained on. They had these units, like squares, attached to one another, and ... you were out in the open, the operator. So, then, they got the landing barges, and so forth.

SH: You were housed in barracks.

JF: In Guam? Quonsets, [prefabricated structures].

SH: Okay, but, at Davisville, you were in barracks.

JF: Quonsets.

SH: You were in Quonsets at Davisville as well. Did you get liberty in Rhode Island?

JF: Yes.

SH: What does a typical eighteen-year-old do in Rhode Island on a weekend pass?

JF: Well, we'd go into town and, generally, the bus, or transportation, that took us in and [would] dump us and we had ... various facilities, go to a theater, something like that, and, usually, wind up with a gin mill or a bar. ... [laughter]

SH: How did the civilians in Rhode Island treat sailors?

JF: Very nice.

SH: Did they?

JF: ... Very nice. In fact, one of my high school buddies was in the same outfit and he was going with a girl I knew, [laughter] and he was going with somebody else in Rhode Island. ... It kind of ticked me off, [laughter] but they were very [nice], and this is an attitude that we found [elsewhere]. The civilians in town treated the people [well] and we experienced that in Cape May, when we were down there, going on vacation, and we see ... how the sailors were treated down there, same way.

SH: Did you have any idea of where you were going to be sent after your training in Davisville, Rhode Island?

JF: No, we were ... going to Port Hueneme, in California. ... [Editor's Note: Port Hueneme, located between Los Angeles and San Francisco, served as the US Navy SeaBees' primary West Coast base.]

SH: How were you transferred there, by train?

JF: Yes. It was sometimes called a cattle car and sometimes not, [laughter] and, on the way, sometimes, ... we were delayed for other trains, by other trains. ... While we were waiting, there were situations [that] developed where things like milk containers would be removed from the platform and, suddenly, wound up on the train, [laughter] but it was a five or six-day trip out to the coast and, today, a three-hour trip is too much on a plane. [laughter]

SH: Were most of the people traveling on this train already assigned to a specific unit, or were you just being sent to California for deployment from there?

JF: From there.

SH: Okay.

JF: ... We had our training and that's all we would know until we got to California, and then, you were assigned. ...

SH: Was this friend from high school sent to California at the same time?

JF: No, he went somewhere else, and that wasn't the one I met on the aircraft carrier. [laughter]

SH: Were there other people on the train that you knew?

JF: Oh, yes. You had your group. ... The one thing about it is, when in the barracks, you made relationships with other guys in situations and, if there was a non-conformer, he soon conformed. [laughter]

RL: Were there any conflicts between the men?

JF: The situation being that if someone got the impression that he was stinky, he would be taken to the shower, with GI brushes, and he learned how to get rid of the smell, [laughter] but there was nothing like [today]. Nowadays, ... I think you'd be strung up for harassment or something like that. [laughter]

RL: We still do that. [laughter]

JF: Yes, thank you, times haven't changed, in that area. [laughter]

RL: The Marine Corps and the Navy have not changed. [laughter]

SH: Was anybody ever assigned KP [kitchen police] as discipline?

JF: Yes. ... It was an assignment; it didn't necessarily [have to] be disciplinary. You had your chance. I was fortunate enough; I didn't have that much KP. [laughter]

RL: Was there ever a disciplinary fire watch?

JF: That was the boring thing, a fire watch. That was a long, silent time you're spending alone and waiting for the watch to end. [laughter]

SH: What kind of firearms training did you have?

JF: Carbine rifle, ... no sidearm training.

SH: When you were traveling across the country, were you ...

JF: And, excuse me, and you had to call the firearm whatever the Navy told you to call it. If it was a carbine, ... that was the name. You were sure that you used the right name of the equipment.

SH: Did your father coach you on some other Navy terms?

JF: Well, I think he had some of his own, Navy terms, and so forth. ...

SH: It was a different lingo.

JF: Yes, we were familiar with some of them, and most of them.

RL: How long did it take for you to stop using Navy terminology in regular life?

JF: Well, when I got home, ... on one occasion, I remember, we were helping my father move some lawn equipment out of the basement and ... I handled it different than my brother, and they said, "Oh, there's the SeaBee again. He'll get it out one way or another." [laughter]

SH: Just rebuild what needs to be rebuilt, right? When you entered the military ...

JF: Excuse me. ... On Guam, I was assigned to a gentleman that was in his sixties, and I have to say, the cooperation there was very good and he taught me a lot of stuff, too, on our assignments.

SH: This was the crane operator.

JF: No, this was [during the] construction of the Quonsets.

SH: Really?

JF: Yes. So, then, I got the crane operator [assignment] a little bit after that.

RL: Were the SeaBees different from other sailors in the Navy in any way, other than their MOS?

JF: The word around was, Admiral [Chester W.] Nimitz came to the island and he wanted to know how many stars he had to have before a SeaBee would salute him. [laughter] So, they became [well-known]. ... Most of them were construction people. ...

SH: That was why you would have someone who was sixty years old training you and working with you.

JF: Yes.

SH: There was no age limit in the SeaBees.

JF: No, they were volunteers. They, like me, and so forth, ... became volunteers in the Navy.

SH: At about the time, you joined ...

JF: But, that's how these units were constructed and the whole system worked.

SH: Because they had the knowledge, as construction workers.

JF: Now, I understand, a unit goes to an assigned location and ... weren't no tents and stuff like that, or they were constructed before they got there. Some of this stuff was done. Units next to us were in tents, we were in Quonsets, on Guam, and the natives were nice and good ... to the soldiers, ... sailors, rather. They were making different things and they would find some service sucker [laughter] for their wares, could be a pearl necklace or something like that, and then, we wound up having Japanese prisoners be in work assignments. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: During the break, we reviewed some of the materials that Mr. Folker has been so kind to share with us. One of them is a tongue-in-cheek list of rules for air raid drills. Would either you or Richard like to read a few favorites?

BB: I will let you do the honors, sir.

JF: Yes.

SH: He is going to pull rank on you, Rich.

RL: Okay. The first one is, "As soon as the bombs start dropping, run like hell. It doesn't matter where, as long as you run like hell." The second one is, "Take advantage of opportunities

afforded when air raid sirens sound a warning attack. For example, if in a bakery, grab some pie or cake. If in a tavern, grab a bottle. If in a movie, grab a blonde." [laughter] Another one is, "If an incendiary bomb is found burning inside a building, throw gasoline on it. You can't put it out anyhow, so, you might as well have a little fun." The very last one is, "Knock the air raid wardens down if they start to tell you what to do. They always save the best seats for themselves and their friends anyway."

SH: [laughter] There was a sense of humor to go along with all this seriousness, right?

JF: Yes.

SH: Before you joined the Navy, the D-Day invasion of Europe had taken place.

JF: Yes.

SH: Was that something that you followed with interest or was it just part of the regular reporting of the war that you saw?

JF: No, we were, everybody was, interested to see how things were going and, also, how they ... were being impacted, having servicemen from all walks of life. So, it was common knowledge and discussion.

SH: Were you writing to your brother and keeping up with where he was in the Navy at that point? He was in the Pacific already.

JF: He was out in the Pacific, yes, and we would write, but, not knowing where they were, and so forth, you took a chance and see if it got through. ... Then, as I showed you, the V-mail, we used, utilized, that also. If you wrote a letter, be it short or prolonged, the recipient home or buddy in another area would get a letter, get paper that had holes in it, because it was censored. So, we had that available to us where I was on Guam. The people in the post office would do a nice job with a razor blade. [laughter]

SH: It was not your direct commanding officer doing the censoring.

JF: No, they were ...

SH: People at the post office?

JF: ... I don't know what their rank was, but they were in that area, probably in a clerical [position]. ... We had a rating that had a quill pen on it, so, that was the group.

SH: The yeomen.

JF: Yeomen, exactly. [laughter]

SH: What was your older brother assigned to?

JF: He was assigned to the landing barges.

SH: Okay. He was in the Seabees as well.

JF: No, he was regular Navy, in the Naval Reserve. That situation, I might as well explain, there, when you enlisted, you had to be careful whether you marked off or said regular Navy or Reserve. The Reserve was duration and six months, it wasn't three months overseas and three months home, ... and the regular Navy was six years. So, there was a difference. [laughter]

SH: What did you mark?

JF: Reserve. I was clued in by other people, and as well as my brother and father, [laughter] and as knowledge wise and as exciting as the service [was], ... the situation, I guess, would have been a different story ... if it was peacetime. ... When I got off the train in New York to come home for ... the discharge, I met my father at the George Washington Bridge, and the first thing I did was, I hugged that man as hard as I could and thanked him for [telling me about] the Reserve. [laughter]

SH: I bet you did.

JF: ... And it was a situation [where] anybody coming back was interested in picking up where they left off and moving ahead. There was no, "Poor me," or regrets, or anything like that. Their biggest regret was, like I said, the fellow in the back of a station wagon can't walk, and that's it.

SH: How quickly did your younger brother join the Navy?

JF: As soon as he could, [laughter] and there was only about a year or so, and-a-half, between us, and so, he went in. ... Physically, he was heavy, but he came home from boot camp with an oversized sailor suit. They'd trimmed him down in boot camp and he maintained it. [laughter]

SH: Good for him.

JF: Yes, yes.

SH: What was he assigned to?

JF: He was assigned to Washington and he discharged [personnel], was involved with discharging Charlie and I.

SH: Really?

JF: Yes, and then, ... well, he got out after we did.

SH: He too took the Reserve option.

JF: Yes. [laughter]

SH: I would like to go back to when you arrived in California. What did you see? You talked a bit about the trip over, how some of the milk cartons were relieved of their contents and the things that you found along the sidings. Did you ever have a chance to visit towns or stops along the way?

JF: If you could run and get back on the train, [laughter] but not too many wandered away from the train. They always had in mind what the results would mean, AWOL [absent without leave], ... but it was a slow journey ... and we didn't have a dining car. [laughter]

SH: How did they feed you?

JF: Well, we had different stops, and so forth, but ... we didn't wander from the train.

SH: They would bring food onboard the train for you. Okay, I thought maybe they gave you C rations or K rations.

JF: No.

SH: Okay. When you got to California, what did you see? What welcomes you, I should say?

JF: The Navy base. [laughter]

SH: The train took you straight to the base.

JF: Yes, and then, we didn't get any liberty. We were left there. ... We waited to board a ship and we boarded a troopship. ...

SH: Did you travel in a convoy then?

JF: Yes.

SH: Did you go first to Pearl Harbor?

JF: Yes, we stopped at Pearl Harbor and, at that location, we couldn't get off the ship. ... I got in touch with the chaplain and my brother was on R&R [rest and recuperation] in Hawaii and he came onboard. ...

SH: Really?

JF: Yes, and he visited with my buddies and myself. So, that was [that]. Then, we went on to Guam.

SH: What did Guam look like? You talked about there being barracks and Quonset huts. Was it basically flat and you were building what needed to be built?

JF: They were established. It was not secured yet, but we went on into a barracks, Quonset [hut]. They were built, but we were building, continuing to build, on the island.

SH: What were you assigned to work on? What were you building, a port or more barracks? What were you working on?

JF: We were a supply unit, so, we had a stockpile of Quonset materials and stuff like that and we would load that on trucks, trailers, and to go on to other locations on the island. ... While on Guam, I met my cousin, who was a Navy pilot, and he was on the base just a few miles away up.

SH: He was assigned there.

JF: Yes.

SH: Oh, my.

JF: And then, I met him, not too much, and I'd met ... his brother, was in the Air Corps, Army Air Corps, and he was flying the Army plane out. ... While you get to see him, it was okay, but, then, he was a bombardier. [laughter]

SH: You could not go to the club together.

JF: No, but you could get a plane ride, once in a while, just around testing and stuff.

SH: You did?

JF: Yes, and there were learning situations when you take a plane [ride]. There were openings on the side, because they had turret gunners [gun positions on the sides of the aircraft fuselage] and I happened to look out and get caught in the wind. ... I was thrown to the back of the plane. So, it's a quick learning experience; you didn't get too close to the port. [laughter]

SH: The port. [laughter]

JF: ... But those were the side lines, and we would periodically go on an expedition. A group of guys, we would go down along the waterfront into some caves, and so forth.

SH: What were you doing?

JF: We were looking for souvenirs, whatever, [laughter] but, ... if you found souvenirs, you had to figure out how you were going to get them back.

RL: What sort of souvenirs did you find?

JF: Different coral and stuff like that, these beads that the natives used to make and sell to you, [laughter] but, ... in the expeditions in the cave, or something like that, you would look for any Japanese stuff.

RL: During your deployment, did you meet a lot of natives and civilians? If so, what was your relationship with them like?

JF: Not too many of them worked on our base, but, other than that, they were in their own area and it was strange to see some of the cooking of the families over an open fire and stuff like that, ... but I didn't have any [close relationship]. We would visit every once in a while. We had certain friends we would talk to, and so forth, but that's about what I experienced, but other fellows had different experiences. They, well, [interacted with them] more closely, and I mentioned to the family, once in a while, that there was one fellow, he wanted to go home, Jimmy "Dash." [laughter] He wanted to go home and he tried everything he could think of to try to get the psychiatrist to declare he was ready to go. [laughter]

SH: Section Eight, [slang for a person seeking a discharge for psychiatric reasons].

JF: Yes.

RL: What were some of the things that he did?

JF: Well, one time, one situation he would do, he would get up in the morning--and he would go to sleep with his clothes on--and he would get up in the morning and walk around naked. [laughter] So, that was one way he'd do it, and then, that didn't work. ... The final thing he thought of was to have an accident, and he shot his foot.

RL: Self-inflicted gunshot wound.

JF: Yes, and then, they took him away. [laughter]

SH: Did he want to go home or did he just hate the Navy?

JF: I think he just wanted to go home.

SH: It was not a family situation.

JF: No.

SH: Okay.

JF: No, he was a little older, but not [that much].

SH: He was in the SeaBees.

JF: [Yes].

SH: Right, in the Navy.

JF: In our camp. "Hey, there goes Jimmy." [laughter]

RL: During your deployment, were there any ...

JF: "How's your suntan?" [laughter]

RL: During your deployment, were there any disciplinary problems? Did anyone resort to requesting a mast [a non-judicial naval punishment]?

JF: No. There was a situation. Let's see, twenty, twenty-five guys in a Quonset and you had your bunks, a cot, and you had a cabinet, that you built, for your stuff and that was the separator from the next bunk. In one situation, I woke up when two fellows were having a discussion and they happened to be on opposite sides of my cot, and then, they resorted to a little dueling with their GI knives. ... I awakened and got up suddenly, but cautiously, and then, they settled their argument nicely. Nobody was injured. [laughter]

RL: There were no situations where people were formally charged.

JF: Nobody told on them. It was a friendly discussion. [laughter]

RL: With the involvement of GI knives.

JF: Yes.

SH: Did you ever entertain the thought of staying in the military?

JF: No, you know, ... it was a--I was going to say common, but I don't know whether it was that common, but I felt I had to go my way [laughter] and not the Navy way.

SH: Okay.

JF: One thing, I was writing to my girlfriend, and I had the situation, when I was gone, that I broke up with her and told her that I didn't know what would happen. ... Then, I took up writing to her when the war was drawing to a close and we got back together again, ... and thanks to her very nice mother. So, we communicated, and then, that's what I was concerned about, going home. I have to tell them, I was mentioning about coming back to Mildred ... and I took up writing again, and then, Lyn saved me when Mildred passed away. [laughter] We worked together in Public Service and I lost my wife. She passed on, away, in a playground with the kids, and Lyn and I were working together in Public Service and I had meetings to go to. I was an engineer in Public Service and I had meetings to go to and trips to take and my mother-in-law was taking care of the kids while I [worked], living with me to help. ... Lyn suggested, "To give your mother-in-law a break, I could watch the kids," and so forth, and it developed into a forty-five ...

CF: Forty-seven.

JF: Forty-seven-year "temporary" [laughter] situation. ... I had three children and we had two and, thank God, the families just cemented together in one--all for one and one for all.

SH: Good for you guys, congratulations. To go back to Guam, talk more about some of the day-to-day assignments that you had. Were there any particular days that you remember, or incidents at this point in the war?

JF: Good or bad?

SH: Either way. It is up to you.

JF: There was a situation ... on the base. ... One of the things we had, there was a chapel, and so forth, and we had ... a person that was killed, rather, died. ... His crane boom hit an electric wire and he didn't jump clear. The wire was on his crane and he ... stepped down onto the ground and he was electrocuted. So, we were having a Mass for him. It was a chapel for all religions, but I'll say Mass, but I was there and I was assigned to drive the car, a truck. ... While in the church, I got up ... to stand and, going down to kneel again, I hit the brace on the chair in front, in the pew in front, and I held my breath and I passed out. [laughter] So, I ... could never forget, because I was always reminded, when I went down, I was going, "Mama, Mama." So, after that, that was, "How's your mama?" [laughter]

SH: So cruel. [laughter]

JF: But, then, we got on with the service and we got in the trucks and the truck had a gas pedal that didn't have a pedal, but it just had a piece of metal sticking out of the floor. Luckily, I had a hole in my shoe. ... I could direct it that way. [laughter] So, you talk about accident prone, that could have been a lulu, but that was it, and then, we had established a beer garden, that they had beer time every night, so that that was another form of entertainment. [laughter]

SH: Did the beer come often? Were you well supplied?

JF: Yes, and we had innovative people in our company. One of the fellows in our barracks, he would go to the sandpit. He had some equipment he would operate out at the sandpit, and he had this little container he would take with him every day, and it was booze they were making out at the sandpit. [laughter]

RL: Was it good?

SH: A distillery.

JF: Yes. [laughter] He was making it. So, he'd come home sometimes under the influence, or partially, because he could walk well, [laughter] but, then, he would take the can back the next day. So, there was other operations, and then, sometimes, you made a contact with a friend or

somebody who met [you] in the officers' area and they would get a bottle that way, [laughter] but the beer was pretty good, it came in cases.

SH: Were you well supplied as far as your work was concerned? Was that materiel being sent to you as you needed it?

JF: Oh, yes, yes. ... There was a regular stockpile of equipment and we would not only have it come in, and then, some of it would go out. ...

SH: Were you supplying the other services or just the Navy?

JF: Periodically, they would supply [others], swap supplies with other groups. There were some Marines, the Navy, Air Corps, Army.

SH: Were there any of the other Allied forces on Guam?

JF: Not that I ...

SH: Just you.

JF: ... Was familiar with.

SH: What would be something that you would do for R&R? Did you play baseball? Did you play football?

JF: Well, there would be baseball, football, as you mentioned, and there would be going fishing or something like that, and take a swim in the coral, [laughter] but basketball [as well].

SH: Were you restricted to only certain portions of the island?

JF: No. You had, generally, ... free, clear [access], unless you tried to go on another base and they had a sentry [a gate guard] there, that you would ... be ID-ed and checked out, and then, depending on whether they had an alert, you would be permitted or not permitted.

SH: Were there ever any air strikes while you were there?

JF: I was involved in an incident, not an air strike, but, ... in the middle of the night, I woke up. ... The Quonsets were open on the ends, screened, and the airbase for the Army was close enough [that] when the plane was taking off, the lights from the plane--I was going to call them headlights--but the lights from the plane would shine in to the end of the Quonset. ... One night, I woke up and I saw the lights and I started to arouse the rest of the people to, "Get out of here. The plane's coming in." It was that close to coming over the Quonset. So, that was another time that Folker was the gist of a few jokes. "Now, go to sleep, go to sleep, now. Don't wake us up again." [laughter]

SH: Better safe than sorry, right?

JF: In another vernacular.

SH: What was the makeup of the men? Were they all from the Northeast? Where were they from?

JF: We had a fellow from the South, and we had a fellow called "Looney," [laughter] and he was a lot of fun, and we had a fellow from the South, as I said. He was checking with the group [command] then, when we were going to leave the island and we were being told how much time we had remaining, and so forth. ... He came out of the tent and [was] quite disturbed, because he found out he signed up for six years, and he was planning to go home. ... He was young, like we all were--not we all, but a lot of us in the SeaBees--and he was quite disturbed then, but everybody was anxious to get in and find out what their status was. [laughter] "Was that a mistake or was that [because] he upset the recruiter?" You had to look at all options. [laughter]

SH: Did you see any of the African-American troops?

JF: No, no, ... other groups like that, no, not that I can recall.

SH: Were your cooks African-Americans?

JF: No.

SH: Your stewards?

JF: No, no.

SH: Okay.

JF: I don't know what was in the adjacent hospital unit. ... The natives were dark; I don't know whether any were in the hospital unit.

SH: Did you ever have to go to the ...

JF: ... Sick bay. ... We had one on base, but, [not] on our unit, but I never had to go to the hospital. They were [used by] other groups coming in. You had some Marines on the island, too.

RL: What did you and your fellow sailors think of the Army, Army Air Corps or the Marines?

JF: Well, if you were looking like you'd like a plane ride, I got to go with the Navy and the Army. ...

RL: Was there any sort of inter-service rivalry?

JF: The biggest thing, I think, would be the food. "Was your food better than my food? [laughter] Now, I've got to try it," or something like that.

SH: How did you celebrate the holidays, like Christmas and Easter?

JF: Just that favorite song of Bing Crosby, *I'll Be Home for Christmas*. [laughter]

SH: Was there a USO or Red Cross presence?

JF: Yes, we had the USO, Bob Hope, and so forth. We had some of them come in.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: You saw them.

JF: Yes.

SH: Yes.

JF: If anything came on, everybody got back on. [laughter] ... In fact, ... it was almost like a parade when you're going back, going to be sent home and you had to board ship, but you went on this big field, like a cleared area, and [would] be lined up. ... Then, they would check the gear you're taking home, and there was not supposed to be any rifle equipment going out and that would be the "no-no," and they would search everything or you laid [it] out for them to look at. So, they were quite positive about that, but, from what I understand, there were people that had the ingenuity to break apart things and take them home.

SH: You said they were trying to figure out how to send these souvenirs home. Did you send anything home?

JF: No, no. [laughter] I think I sent them some couple of towels. [laughter] That went through.

SH: Did you go to any other islands on these plane rides, or were you always right on Guam?

JF: Guam. The only other island was Hawaii, on the way in, and it took thirty days, the trip from California to Guam, the Marianas.

SH: What about the weather?

JF: When it rained, ... it was interesting, you could see it coming, rain, and, many times, I had the opportunity to try and beat the rain and get back to the Quonset. [laughter] Sometimes, I made it, but, other than that, it was warm and we had, sometimes, shorts, and so forth. ...

RL: While you were on Guam, were you ever exposed to Japanese propaganda? Did you guys have a radio in the Quonset to listen to Tokyo Rose [Japanese propaganda broadcasts]?

JF: Onboard ship. ... Tokyo Rose, they had the loudspeakers on the ship, and so forth, and Tokyo Rose was saying our ship was sunk. [laughter]

RL: I guess you guys did not take ...

JF: "We're flying," you know. [laughter]

RL: I guess you did not take anything that she said seriously.

JF: Yes, right, so that you'd find out these rumors, and so forth.

SH: Did it affect the morale at all, listening to Tokyo Rose?

JF: No, no. You'd find flaws, and so forth, like it wasn't you, [laughter] but it was interesting to hear it.

RL: What was on the Tokyo Rose program? Was it all talk? Did she play any music?

JF: She played some sad and some good records, and some of that. [laughter]

BB: The music was good. [laughter]

JF: My recollection is, she was a citizen of the US.

RL: I think there were multiple "Tokyo Roses." One of them was a prominent citizen, I think.

SH: Were you reading the *Stars and Stripes*? Was the family sending you any local newspapers from home? What were you reading?

JF: You'd get mail, and I would get a box of homemade doughnuts, but they were about a month old. [laughter]

RL: Were they still good?

JF: They were still sugary [laughter] and they were very good and we all ate them, a little bit of home. [laughter]

RL: Did senior petty officers ever take a sample before giving it to you?

JF: No, no. They must've felt that, "Was it baked goods?" [laughter]

SH: Were there some little things that you can remember that you all did to make your living quarters more comfortable, that you were clever in designing?

JF: Well, there were. As I mentioned, we had these [cabinets]. You either used your sea bag or you had a cabinet that you made with the available stuff. Being the supply group, we had all

kinds of stuff available, so that there were some ornate stuff and stuff like that, and then, it became a situation. If you got too close to a piece of furniture and somebody got mad at you, they may break it. [laughter]

RL: Wow.

JF: So, picky, picky, picky, [laughter] but, generally, that was it, instead of the sea bag.

RL: Did anything from your experience in the SeaBees carry over into civilian life, like everybody working together and living together, or using ingenuity to build things? Did that help you later on in your life?

JF: Yes. My summer job used to be working for a builder, and that was interesting. He was a local builder and I got [a job]. I would sit down with the other guys and have lunch, and so forth, and I was the summer help. [laughter] ... One time, we were talking and it got to pay and I opened my mouth and said what I was getting. ... One fellow dropped his [lunch], packed up his lunch and went, left the group, [laughter] and I heard he went back to the office and started complaining, because he was a long-time employee and I was getting more than him. ... I was asked not to tell them anymore. [laughter]

RL: You were getting more because of your experience in the SeaBees.

JF: Yes, yes, but that ... [it] was the top guy in the group that wasn't getting paid, but he was advised [that] he got other benefits for his family, and so forth, but I didn't take a cut. I didn't get a cut.

SH: On your pre-interview survey, I am going back to the Navy again, you listed the 144th NMCB [Naval Mobile Construction Battalion], and then, the 56th NMCB.

JF: Right. Well, I was transferred to the 56th just before I came home.

SH: Okay.

JF: Transferred. They were beginning to cut out the supply group.

SH: Okay. The 144th was the supply group.

JF: Right.

SH: What was the 56th?

JF: They were the ones using the supplies that we were sending around, building, and so forth.

SH: Did your job change at that point?

JF: No, no. They still had cranes, and so forth. I would be assigned another unit, just temporarily, ... go back to the barracks where I was assigned, the Quonset, but go to another one.

SH: Have you ever worked on a crane in civilian life?

JF: No. [laughter]

SH: When the war was over in Europe, did that change the level of supplies that were readily available, or was it the same?

JF: No, it was always ...

SH: The same. How did the group react to the news that President Roosevelt had died?

JF: They were quite concerned, startled to not only his passing, but, then, worrying about who's going to become the Commander-in-Chief.

SH: For you, were you confident that the new Commander-in-Chief would do well?

JF: At that time, yes. ... I was quite sure because of the people in charge, [General Dwight D.] Eisenhower, and so forth, military-wise.

SH: What did you think of General Douglas MacArthur when you were stationed in Guam?

JF: He was quite a leader. In fact, you had to give him credit, he'd stand up for what he thought, and he watched out for the guy on the line.

SH: I know you have questions about some of the brass.

RL: What did you think about top-ranking commanders like [William F. "Bull"] Halsey and Nimitz? Did you have confidence in their ability to win the war?

JF: Yes. We had confidence, because I even voted for Eisenhower. [laughter] [Editor's Note: US Army General Dwight D. Eisenhower served as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during World War II and as President of the United States from 1953 to 1961.]

SH: Did you ever see Nimitz or Halsey?

JF: No.

SH: Okay.

JF: Nimitz, yes, yes, but ...

SH: You did.

JF: Not Halsey. ... I was on Guam when the planes went over to Tokyo. So, that was quite an exciting time.

SH: When you heard the first bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, how soon did you know that it had happened?

JF: We knew.

SH: You knew.

JF: We knew. ... They left Guam.

SH: For Tinian, right. [Editor's Note: Both atomic bomb missions originated from North Field on Tinian.]

JF: So, the situation was, when we were attacked, we didn't know what was going to happen. You see the air raid instructions, [laughter] and everybody was in the condition that [was similar to] when the [World Trade Center's Twin] Towers went down [on September 11, 2001], similar to that, but more serious. ... It became a situation like in Germany, [with] the Nazis, with the Japanese, it was you or me, you or me. So, we have one friend that was in England and he experienced the bombings of England. So, that's what the kind of conditions were.

SH: What was the celebration like when you heard that the war was over, when V-J Day was announced?

JF: ... "Was my enlistment going to be the duration and six months, or was it going to be sooner?" [laughter] So, it wound up [being] not too bad, not six months. [laughter]

SH: What did they have you do? Did things change at all from the time the surrender was signed to when you were released?

JF: The situation became, "What are we going to do with all these supplies?" [laughter] and then, it became a situation that we found ... [we had to] dump it off, take it out in the landing barges and dump it out into the ocean, what couldn't be used by the natives, and so forth.

SH: Really? You were part of that.

JF: No, I didn't; I didn't want to see that. [laughter] Then, you'd see guys taking [things down], bulldoze it apart and everything else, [laughter] but, no.

SH: What were you assigned to do?

JF: The substitute group that I moved over to, the 56th, I was still with the group that would be building or moving stuff around.

SH: You came back on a troopship again.

JF: Yes, another, but it was a shorter trip, than the thirty days [getting out to Guam]. [laughter]

SH: You were not in a convoy, obviously. Did the ship have a name or a number that you remember?

JF: The [USS] *General Harry Taylor* [(AP-145)] is what we went over on. ... I didn't know what the [returning] one was, but I was on deck every day, except when it was raining, I'd be in the gangway, because they were six high bunks. You had that much [space], just about to turn around, [sleeping in] hammocks then.

SH: Were you seasick at all?

JF: ... No. God forbid you got a ... low bunk. [laughter] So, there was always a rush when the bunks were assigned to get a high one, [laughter] and there were--you talk about ... what they did--and there were card games and crap games, and so forth. ... We had two Italian brothers, twins, and that they used to kid the brothers, and I guess, mainly, it was their Italian accent, and so forth. [laughter]

SH: Was it all SeaBees that were on this troopship coming home?

JF: Yes. From that field, you lined up to get on the ship. [laughter] ... Most of the deck was always full of sleeping men and you always had, going out [to Guam], ... the option to, not option, you always had it planned where you would go if anything flew over, some *kamikaze* or something like that.

SH: You had battle stations.

JF: No, hide. You'd be looking for hiding stations. [laughter]

RL: Hiding stations. [laughter]

JF: But, you don't go below. You've got to be some[where on deck]. You want to be blown over instead of sunk.

SH: Was there any rotation in and out of your unit on Guam of men who had been, say, at Tarawa or any of the other places?

JF: No.

SH: No.

JF: No, that I knew.

SH: Okay. You never really knew anyone who was in combat.

JF: No, they didn't rotate them [or] us.

SH: Okay, fair enough.

JF: My brother, when he was [in the service], he was sent to Hawaii for R&R and he would get a question by his senior officer, his officer in charge, "How's your family?" and, "How's everything home?" ... or, "How's your wife?" or so forth. Charlie didn't have a wife, but that were some of the questions [that] were asked, and then, the next thing Charlie had, the brother, was his name was on the rotation list to go back out. [laughter] So, you ... had caution in your mind when you were being asked questions, but the tours were years, not months. ... You didn't know when you were going home. The President didn't say, "We'll rotate six months, three months, four months." No one had that option.

SH: Did you ever think of trying to get out of that unit and into a different one? Could you make a request to be transferred?

JF: No, there was no requests. If there were, I'm sure they were not accepted. [laughter]

SH: A moot point, right? [laughter]

JF: You could hope or dream if you wanted, but, if you made the request, I don't know whether it would be a laughing session for the person receiving your request or what. [laughter]

SH: Where did you dock when you came stateside?

JF: California.

SH: Then, what happened?

JF: Back to a barracks, and then, I had a lucky shot. Somebody that had been there before me, at my bunk area, he left this Oriental outfit for a child. So, I quickly took the souvenir [laughter] and put it away, because they had left. I didn't know how to get in touch. [laughter]

SH: You came back by troop train.

JF: Yes, yes.

RL: When you returned to your home community, did you notice that anything in particular had changed?

JF: No, no.

RL: Did it seem the same as when you left?

JF: No, ... just the missing guys, [and] so forth, and their families. They were all welcoming everybody home, and, as I said, [with] the GI Bill, the colleges were getting full, and then, I went that route myself. ...

SH: How had your family changed? You had much younger siblings.

JF: Well, one thing is, when Charlie, the older brother, went in the service, when he came home on liberty, he had his picture taken with the two youngest children in his arm. ... I had to have my picture taken like that when I came home on liberty, and then, Bill, when he came home on liberty, the children had grown and he had to struggle a little bit. I don't know whether I've got a picture. [laughter]

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: I want to say thank you very much, Mrs. Folker, for a wonderful lunch

CF: You're welcome.

SH: I know the students enjoyed it as well. You have wonderful photographs, by the way. Did you have a mascot? Did every unit or every barracks have a mascot? There is a picture of you holding a dog. Was that commonplace, to have a dog?

JF: No, it was just a stray dog that was picked up by the group, and that was my turn [to] hold it. [laughter]

SH: Do you know ...

JF: Picture taking.

SH: ... If anybody brought the dog home?

JF: No, no.

SH: When you came back to the States, you talked about taking the train back to New York and your father meeting you at the George Washington Bridge. How long was it before you went back to school on the GI Bill?

JF: ... I started looking right away and I wound up going to North Carolina State for a year. They had an opening, if you want to call it that, and I went down there for a year, on the GI Bill, and then, I transferred to Stevens Institute of Technology and completed the program there.

SH: Did you live at home when you went to Stevens?

JF: Yes. I lived at home until I got married.

SH: Okay.

JF: I got married ... while I was in school.

SH: Did you? This was someone that you had known from high school.

JF: Yes.

SH: After Stevens, where did you go?

JF: Public Service Electric and Gas Company.

SH: I understand you stayed there for ...

JF: Thirty-six-plus years.

SH: You are still involved, it sounds like.

JF: Yes, in the retirees' groups.

SH: You have remained active with some of the men that you served with in the SeaBees.

JF: Yes.

SH: Do you go to reunions or gatherings?

JF: Just with the individuals, husband and wife. We'll meet them, have dinner, something like that, but there's no [formal organization], like my brother-in-law, Joe, he would go and meet, get together for his unit's ... annual meeting, but we didn't. We've never done that.

CF: We just went to Wilmington, North Carolina, where there were seven sites in the United States like that.

JF: Oh, the North Carolina ship, right.

CF: The ship, yes. When was that, V-J Day?

JF: Yes, and we went with the ... son-in-law's father, and he came out in the full Marine uniform, fatigues, but we had another gentleman with his winter uniform on, complete uniform on, in the Marines.

CF: This was somewhere in North Carolina. It was hot.

JF: And it was summer. It was a very hot summer day. We gave him a lot of credit, but he did not shed a bit of sweat. [laughter]

SH: You said that, when you came back, everybody was more interested in getting on with their lives than talking about their experiences. What about between you and your brothers? Did you and your brothers speak about your experiences?

JF: We shared them. ... We knew what happened, and so forth. We'd talk about it, but never to dwell on it, that I could remember. ... There was no conflict, because everybody was in the Navy. It wasn't the Army-Navy [rivalry], like my cousins. [laughter]

SH: Did you or your brothers take advantage of the "52/20 Club?" [Editor's Note: A provision of the GI Bill provided unemployed veterans with twenty dollars per week for fifty-two weeks.]

JF: Fifty-two weeks, yes, you got twenty dollars. [laughter] ... Now, it seems paltry, but it was good to start on.

SH: Did you have difficulty finding a job when you first came back, due to the number of men who returned from war?

JF: It was difficult to find jobs, but you worked where you could, part-time or whatever.

SH: Did your mother and father talk about how rationing affected your father's business? Did your father remain in the textile business during the war?

JF: Yes.

SH: Did he make things for the war effort?

JF: No, it wasn't. It would be material for dresses and clothing, not any wartime thing.

SH: His offices were in New York City.

JF: On Sixth Avenue, opposite Bryant Park. [laughter]

SH: Did he have to do any traveling?

JF: Just to go to the mill in North Carolina, or in the Paterson area.

SH: His business was not really affected by the war.

JF: Yes. They went to rayons, wherein they had silks before the war, [laughter] so that they went to rayons, and then, the silk came back.

SH: Did your mother talk about how difficult it was to get food with rationing in place?

JF: No. We all ... went shopping together, because A&P and things like that, markets like that, would have a limit. So, we, all the children, would have the limit purchase of the article, [laughter] so that if you needed, you wanted, six cans of tomatoes, ... that was split up. If you

could only get two per customer, hey, we all became customers, and my father always found somebody in the meat department that could utilize cuts of cloth. Their wives made dresses and stuff like that. ... He would generate friendships [laughter] and utilize their knowledge of meat cuts, and so forth.

SH: There was also rationing of shoes. Did having so many kids make buying shoes difficult?

JF: Well, sometimes, it was based on who ... grew a size and somebody grew into a size. [laughter]

SH: Fair enough. Did you have a victory garden?

JF: No, no.

SH: When you returned, did the family already live in Rumson?

JF: Yes. No, they moved after, when I got married. ... They moved from Tenaflly to Rumson, New Jersey. [laughter]

SH: Did you use the GI Bill for anything besides your education?

JF: No. ...

SH: You did not use it to buy a house. Did any of your children serve in the military?

JF: No.

SH: I was just curious. Did you join any veteran's organizations when you came back?

JF: American Legion, still in it.

SH: Did you?

JF: Yes.

SH: Did they recruit you or did you want to join because your father had been in it as well?

JF: Well, he was in [the] American Legion and I followed suit because we used to see the drum corps, and so forth, ... when we were growing up. ... When I married Lyn, she was involved with enjoying the drum corps route, circuit. [laughter] So, we continued.

SH: Okay.

CF: And your brother also was in that.

JF: Doremus Post, the color guard.

CF: But, he was also in the Legion.

JF: Yes, and Billy, too, but he didn't last long. ...

SH: All right. Do you have other memories that you would like to put on the record?

JF: No, I'm amazed at myself, talking so much. [laughter]

CF: I am, too. ... He usually doesn't talk about this.

SH: Yes. That is what we find.

JF: Not, again, that it was ... a [bad] memory or a hardship or something like that. It was just that we had to get up and go.

CF: It was just something that you did.

JF: And, if you would dwell on it, you would always get the thought, "Well, I'm the lucky one, and don't knock anybody for complaining," or something like that.

SH: Do you feel that having been in the war impacted the man that you became?

JF: Yes. I was always a picky guy, [laughter] ... to the point where, if I was playing cards with my brothers and the deck got out of line, I'd straighten it out. So, I was picky, [laughter] and I'm still the same way, right? [laughter]

SH: You like things neat.

CF: He does.

JF: It drives my kids crazy.

SH: You have a wonderful collection of photographs and other memorabilia. Thank you for talking to us and hosting us today. I really have appreciated and enjoyed this.

JF: And, [if] anything else comes up, ... give us a call.

SH: Okay, and the same for you.

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

Reviewed by Michael Hano 3/1/11

Reviewed by Noah Glyn 3/1/11

Reviewed by Sean Strausman 3/1/11

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 5/1/12

Reviewed by John Folker 6/1/12