

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN A. HURLBERT

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. John A. Hurlbert on November 15, 2002, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Richard Fischetti: Richard Fischetti.

SI: Mr. Hurlbert, thank you very much for coming in today.

John Hurlbert: Well, thanks for letting me come back. ...

SI: We will begin by talking about the Okinawa campaign. What preparations were made leading up to the invasion?

JH: Yes, I believe it was the Fourth Marines; ... we took a unit of the Fourth Marines, the light artillery battalion of the Fourth Marine Division, to Okinawa; and they were great guys. ... Once we got underway we were told everything about our [mission]. Well, the officers at least were brought up-to-date on everything that was going to happen, and our mission was to, ... on day one of the battle, ... make a demonstration, fake landing, on the south shore, southeast shore of Okinawa with the purpose of bringing the whole Japanese Army as far south as we could to allow the ... next landing, which was on the opposite shore, the west coast and in the north, to go in pretty much unobstructed; and ... somehow it worked. At five o'clock ... it was to be my first actual battle, and let me tell you everybody who was there was in the Battle of Okinawa. The Japanese flew in every morning in the morning sun and strafed; and they came again at night on the setting sun, and you couldn't see them. They were right in the sun. They were excellent. They could ... cover their trail. You could hear them, and you could see them and see the results of their passing over you and everything. They were there, and it seemed to all of us that they ... had decided to trade a plane for a ship if they could possibly do it. There were a lot of *kamikaze* things going on; but, anyway, ... we pulled out of the staging area for the battle. As we approached the island just before daylight, I had been awake for a couple of hours, and I actually read some passages in my Bible from my bunk. Then all of a sudden President Roosevelt was announced on a recording, and everybody was listening very intently to what he was saying, a real pep talk, congratulating us for being there and fighting for our country and asking us to acquit ourselves like men. For many he knew it was their first battle, and we were going against a deadly enemy and should act accordingly. Everybody thought the world of Franklin Roosevelt that I knew except my father. When I got home, ... I caught hell for voting for him, the first election I ever voted in; but I liked him. My dad was such a Republican he didn't want to even hear about Franklin Roosevelt. Anyway, I'm getting off the story, I guess; but ... we got acquainted with a lot of the officers and men from the group we took on the trip up. ... One of the things that I found was [that] the Navy was always resourceful. Although our boat group was a separate group on the ship, ... when we were underway and not in an invasion, we were part of [the] ship's company; and ... I stood watches on the bridge. I was an ensign at that time, and later on I was fortunate enough to become a ... lieutenant, j.g., on a different ship; and I was navigator on that, but that's another story. ... At any rate, on this particular day we were ... all told, the night before, to shower, put on clean underwear, in case anybody got shot, as ... it would be a lesser means of getting an infection [than] if you had old clothes on. So, you had to get really dressed up for this battle, and at about five in the morning I was dressed fully and in my gun tub. ... I was the gunnery officer for the .40 mm, twin .40s, ... just in front of the bridge

on the starboard side. When we went over the side in our boats to lower them down on the davits and climb in then someone else, one of the enlisted men with seniority, took over the gun tub. ... On our first approach toward ... our objective that morning it was still dark, and I was standing in the gun tub. All of a sudden one of the fellows on my left tapped me on my arm and said, "Look at this." I looked, and there was a big exchange ... between a Japanese plane, I couldn't tell it was a Japanese plane, it was pitch dark; but it was firing at the ship where we had been fifteen minutes before. Because we had so many more lines then we had to get back behind another group. We were in the middle of a long line going toward the beach. So, they reduced the number of ships spread out and got them more in longer lines. Right where we had been just about fifteen minutes before, you might say, this ship was exchanging fire with a Japanese plane, which crashed right through the hull into the engine room. Boy, that was my first introduction to the battle, and we're all watching this. As daylight slowly broke we could see that [the ship] had taken on some water and had a slight list to it. The ship slid back past us because the engine [had] stopped. ... It hit the engine room. They had to seal the engine room in order to save the five hundred ship's company and to save the boat group that they had and to save the Marines that were onboard. They just had to close off and lose a few men down there. They couldn't get them out, and we were all saddened by [this] as we watched them kind of drift off to our left. ... It wasn't long after that I had to leave the tub and go down and get my men organized and into the boats so [that] they could lower us over the side. The night before the boat group commander came to the officers, ... we had Commodore O'Leary onboard. ... It was the mission of our ship to lead the invasion groups as they went into the beach; and so the boat group commander said, "So-and-So, you take the first wave. So-and-So, you take the second"; and I thought, "God, is he going to give me the third wave?" ... because, somehow, I could tell. He had given me some tough assignments along the way; and he said, "Hurlbert, you take the third wave." ... I said, "Yes, sir;" and I thought to myself, "Gee, I thought he was my friend." What happens is, when you go in, from all the things that we'd seen and done the Japanese get out of the way of your assault on the first wave. The first wave goes in, and you'd think it would be the toughest one; but the first wave everybody's looking for shelter on the shore. The second wave they're brushing themselves off and climbing back behind their machine guns so [that] when the third wave goes in they're firing at you; and I thought, "Jeez, he must not like me, but that's okay." I mean, I didn't even give it much more of a thought. It just crossed my mind, you know; but I found out later that he did think a lot of me, and he told me so from various little things that we [did]. I saved a couple of the boats when we were in our [training]. We had to prove that we were ready to go overseas; and, I'll be damned, we had the toughest winter, ... a windy, rough seas day to stage our proof that we could go overseas. We lost two boats, but fortunately one of them was salvageable. The one I was in, I swam down, and ... I tied something on a cleat; and I got a big ... like crowbar type of thing, and I stuck it in the sand so [that] it wouldn't go out with the tide. So, they did save that boat; but there was a huge LST that they had, [which would] take a tank in, and ... the water was so rough that it smashed the coxswain against the wheel and crushed a couple of [his] ribs. They had to carry him off and lay him in the sand. I came down the beach because I didn't have a boat anymore. We had guys ... [that] went in ahead of us at every mission, and they kind of cased the place. They would leave a little message like "Kilroy was here" or something; and you'd know darn well they were there the night before. You'd know that they'd cased it already for you, but you still had to face the guns. Anyway, I volunteered to take it out. I was so embarrassed about losing my boat, and the guy got [hit] broadsides, and it just filled right up like a tub. I mean it was just gone, but we saved it anyway. So, we didn't lose

any; and for all this they gave us the permission to go because they said, "My God, you saved two boats," and all this kind of stuff. So, anyhow, here we were; and this is how it was. When the time came, I got out of the tub and rounded up my gang. I had three ... landing craft under me at that point with their crews; and then the Marines would get in, and you took them in. ... What happened here was we were told to go in. We had a staging area. I don't know if you've heard [of this]. You've probably heard this so many times from everybody who was in the Amphibious Corps, but at any rate you circled until it was your turn to go in. Somehow, ... we never even gave it a lot of thought. ... Everybody was a little bit on edge. If anybody tells you that they weren't a little bit frightened maybe something's the matter with them, I don't know, because it's no joke. ...

SI: Was this the first combat operation for every member of your crew?

JH: For every member of my crew, yes. ... We had picked up a new ship in Washington State ... and took it down along the coast and then went across. We loaded up and went across. Going out under the Golden Gate, we went through there at one point, is quite an experience. You'd be glad to see it coming the other way; then you [would] know you got back. ... Anyway, we staged, we were [going] in circles out there and went in; and ... I had to make sure that everybody in line on the third wave ... was with us, and then we started. We got in within, I guess, quite a number of yards, a few hundred yards, maybe even more like a thousand yards; [and] they told us to start turning left. As I looked at the contour of the island I wondered how in the world they ever thought ... we could have made a landing anyway. It was a very narrow beach like a cliff as I recall it; but they were shelling us. They had a few guns that they were letting go, and I saw the splashes. You could hear [the shells] go over your head, and then they were kind of zeroing in on us. You could see the shell splash closer to you, and the shell looked so big when it hit that I thought it would just completely dissolve our little landing craft, which held thirty-six men, thirty-six Marines, ... and a boat crew of three or four men. ... So, we had a machinist's mate and a coxswain, and there were three enlisted men. Then every third boat had an officer in it, and so that's how we went in; but we did turn, and then ... they were firing over our heads. Somehow ... they didn't expect us, and they didn't have the ordnance that they should have had to destroy us. They were shooting over our heads because we went in close to the beach, and went down a mile or two and then ... went back to the ship. ... Then, the fireworks started. ... We were told that it was such a surprise landing for the Japanese that it did in fact draw pretty much the whole army south. Therefore, the invasion itself on the west coast only used half of the troops and boats that were assigned for the landing. They were going to make a real assault, and it wasn't necessary because the troops weren't there. ... There were, no doubt, people being fired upon by sentries and so forth; but they were able to get ashore ... without a lot of casualties, which was marvelous, and that's what we wanted. Our next day's mission was to go and land, actually land there with [the] troops that we had onboard on the island of Ie Shima. That's where Ernie Pyle, the columnist, the wartime hero of the reporters, was killed. The Japanese had decided that they were going to be very tough at Okinawa and at Ie Shima because they were, I think, called prefectures. They were like towns that belonged to Japan even though they were out in the water. They weren't ... on the homeland. ... They were towns named after Japanese things and so they defended ... the hell out of them. ... There's a Marine, ... I hope he's come here, Tom Blanchet from Freehold. He was in the ... thick of several battles, and he was a little older than I. He was probably five years older than I am, and he played football at

Rutgers, and [he is] quite a guy. Everybody likes him. ... He's a real man's man. He's kind of like John Wayne. He looks like John Wayne. Did you interview him?

SI: Yes. I am actually reviewing his transcript right now.

JH: Oh, God, ... don't lose it. He was there. He told me [that] during the battle there was a colonel, I guess, he was working with; and he said, "Goddamn it," he'll swear a lot you know, ... "I don't feel like fighting today. What are we going to do?" He was sort of a funny guy, but he was the kind of guy I'd like to have on my right and have John Wayne on my left, you know what I mean? Aside from that, if you get a chance to meet Tom don't miss it.

SI: Yes. I hope we will be able to do a follow-up interview.

JH: Oh, yes, please do. I don't know why he waited so long. Christ, the guy's not young anymore; but he's pretty sharp. He organized a company. ... He got in the garbage business and talk about success. ... I mean, he could just tell these guys, "Goddamn it, pick that up and keep moving with it will you?" ... You'll like him; that's all I can say, you'll like him. He said to me [when] I was telling him about the battle, "You were there?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Who did you land?" I said, "We didn't because, ... once again I felt deprived, the thing was such a success that we pulled off down in the south that everybody walked ashore." He said, "Yes." He knew that, but said, ... "Did you land those guys on another island?" I said, "No." ... What happened was we were going to do it. They didn't need us because they had so many troops that they could use either way ... on the side. They got us out of there finally after about a week because we were losing ships. I mean they were coming in, and they were sacrificing [themselves]. ... I heard somewhere [that] they strapped the pilots of these *kamikazes* ... in there and gave them a lot of *sake* or something and sent them on their mission. It was a one-way trip; and so the admiral of the fleet let it be known that while we could do a lot of things we were just sitting ducks, and he wanted us to get the hell out of there. That was just about how it came over, you know. ... So, after a number of days and nights, we just weren't going to take this anymore. We ... had to do something so we got out of there. They told us to go and get out at sea because ... we're going to lose the fleet. [The Japanese] were tough even still. ... Yet the funniest thing about it is that ... I did go to Tokyo after all. We did land one group up in northern Honshu Island, but the war was just over. The residents of the town didn't know we were coming, of course, and didn't know either that the war was over. We pulled in, but they evacuated the town. The thing about that was they were building tugboats, but they were building them out of wood, just to show you ... what we were fighting. They should never have gotten in this with us; but they were tough, ... let me not kid you. If they were any stronger, if they were any more populous, I think we would have really had our hands full. Don't forget these guys started this damned thing with us, and they deserved what they got, believe me. I still would never buy a Japanese car. Excuse me, but this is how I feel. My buddies who were in Europe buy them; they don't even think about it. They even buy Mercedes, but, somehow, it's "America First" for me. That's the essence of that battle. They were going to sink us in another way, and so we finally had ... to pull out in order not to get [sunk]. It was ridiculous to sacrifice a ship, ... and from there, ... I don't think I got into much of this, right after we landed ... the other troops on northern Honshu, the people started to realize [the war was over] when we posted things in Japanese and in English on telephone poles around [town] and so forth. They came

back that evening. They went up in the mountains. One old man was sitting out on his front lawn. ... I went in with two waves and dropped the troops, and ... I sent the boat back. I said, "I'm going to walk around." So, I walked around with some of the guys we took in and looked it over; and ... there were signs in English, "Anybody looting will be ... severely dealt with." They were going to kill you, I think, or shoot you. So, they just had to put that out, you know; ... but I walked along, and here was this old man sitting on his lawn. He would bow and sort of bow forward, raise both hands, and ... I tried to calm him down because he was, you know, surrounded by troops coming into the area; and I felt sorry for the old man. His family went and left him. I think the Americans would have carried the guy up the hill or something, I mean, but not this guy. So, anyway, there he was; and I think I calmed him down a little bit. Then, I went on and looked around ... the town, and I saw what they were doing. They were building tugboats. When the Army ... itself, the units that we put on the beach, we had a whole fleet with us for that, posted things. They ... invited the people to come and help us offload. You should [have] seen these guys. ... They unloaded more by hand than we did with all our big equipment and nets and everything else. ... They worked like dogs right up until midnight. They came back around four in the afternoon, three in the afternoon, and they ... formed long lines, and they just kept passing stuff. ... They never stopped just like a machine. You can see ... they were tough. So, anyway, that sort of ended the whole thing. Then the next thing I knew I was in Tokyo Bay, and they have whales there that come up and spout. ... The whole thing was interesting. If you ever have to go in the Navy, don't knock it too much, because ... you'll like most of it. There'll be some days that you don't like, but you'll like most of it. I've cut out about seven-eighths of the whole thing that I experienced. ... We had to make one run, one time, sort of like that cruiser that got blown out of the water by going alone; I'm trying to think of the one. Was it the *Indianapolis*? I think it was. Anyway, we found ourselves having to make a run between two points, and the war was still on. We weren't loaded with troops, but we had our ship's company there. We had five hundred people onboard, and it could have been a disaster; but somehow we had ... a fast ship and ... got through. Having told you so much the first time, I think I don't want to make it repetitious. I have never read what I did before.

RF: I would like to ask you a few more questions about Okinawa. Was that type of diversion maneuver typical in amphibious combat?

JH: Oh, in other words, to draw them to different places?

RF: Yes.

JH: No, no, because, you see, Okinawa ... was pretty darn big; and most of the [previous combat] activity, ... the landings, were on small islands, and so the whole thing was concentrated. I mean, you didn't have a hundred miles of whatever it was. You didn't have fifty miles ... of roads and so forth. ... Most of the operations that the men went in on, a lot of them, they couldn't get off. ... The landing craft would either crack up a little bit on some rock or something like that, or the firepower ... came back down above them, and they couldn't go up. You had to stay overnight ... with the troops because you had no way to get off until they sent another wave in.

RF: You had to get in close to drop the troops off.

JH: ... You know the thing that puzzled me when I saw movies about the landings in Europe ... when [they] landed some of the coxswains dropped these guys off in water over their heads. ... That never happened in the Pacific to my knowledge unless they got shot. If they got hit, then they had to swim, maybe; but you took them in, and you dropped the ramp down, and these guys went in on sand, you know what I mean? It was up to you to get off. Nobody I ever knew or anything I've ever seen gave me the impression that we did it the way we did it at Okinawa. We didn't land at all there. That is, our unit had a mission ... to bring them down and then go around and land the next day. That had to be tough, too, because Ernie Pyle was killed; and, ... you know, he'd gone through so many battles. It was sad. We got the news right away. There was a good network of news. ... You knew right away whether your troops were making it or not. Now, when they went in at Guadalcanal, that could have been a little different. They had to go up a river. It was a big place, too. That could have been a lot different. They could have had several staging points and so forth. ... I went to Guadalcanal but a couple of years after it had happened, maybe a year-and-a-half after it happened; and we took supplies down to them because they wanted us to do that. We had just come out with a group of ships, and ... they were between missions. So they asked us, as a group, to take a lot of things down there that they didn't have the ships for. You know, they didn't want to take, let's say, a destroyer and send it down with stuff because you couldn't get as much on it as you could on our ship. So, we loaded up and took it down there, and it gave us a chance to see [Guadalcanal]. ... I think the Australians were very grateful to our troops that they were there during the trouble because the Japanese were very strong, very strong, and for a small island very populous. You know, they were all over the place.

RF: They put up a tough fight.

JH: Tough, tough.

RF: They almost viewed Okinawa as a home island.

JH: ... In other words, ... well, it would be like Alaska is with us. In other words, not attached to the main country but ... even more isolated because it was ... really out to sea quite a ways. It was a big island, but it was ... part of their whole structure. ... It wasn't a different entity, and so you were really ... hurting the Japanese quite badly when you knocked them off in there.

JH: As a result, the fighting on Okinawa was very fierce.

JH: Oh, fierce, yes.

RF: You were also susceptible to *kamikaze* attacks. Did you see any enemy planes?

JH: ... Every morning and every night they came over us and strafed. ...

RF: They were not just going after aircraft carriers.

JH: Oh, no, no. Well, they really would [have] loved to have gotten an aircraft carrier; but I think that they were so ...

RF: That was a good trade as far as they were concerned.

JH: Oh, that would have been; but this trade was good. ... Hey, they had five hundred men on each boat. Every time [the Japanese] sank a ship [we had to double up], but ... they were after them. They were dive-bombing our fleet; and so we were told finally on about the sixth day [to go]; I don't know why they waited so long, but they had to be sure that the things that were started could be finished by the group that was there.

RF: What kind of learning curve was there when it came to piloting and navigating a ship?

JH: What do you mean? ...

RF: How quickly did you pick it up?

JH: You mean ... when I became a navigator?

RF: Yes.

JH: Oh, well, let me say this. ... I learned that after every battle you went home for thirty days. We had the luxury of that at the end of the war. ... So, I was sent home after Okinawa. We came [by way of] the Great Northern Route. I tell you I would rather fight the Japanese than go through one of these, what the heck did they call them? not a hurricane but a typhoon. ... I saw pictures of destroyers that the waves had taken them right up on the beach, and they could never get off again. They just had to dismantle the destroyer. ... We were in this. We dropped our troops off and were told to proceed back to California, but we went on what they called the Great Circle Route. Anybody ever told you about the Great Circle Route? What it is, here's a globe, right? Now, you can either go around the globe, all the way around like this, or you can go up north and go around it, and just come right down that way, and it's a lot shorter. It doesn't sound that way the way I'm saying it, but it is. What we did, we dropped off those troops, got orders to go ... back to California, and we were far enough north, ... we dropped those guys off up there, [Honshu]; ... our captain decided to go the Great Circle Route, and we got up to a point where I had been out there for two-and-a-half years before I got home; and I saw my first snow. I mean, all of a sudden, we got so far north; ... this gale had driven us north, too, ... this typhoon. My God, don't ever get in one. We had lockers and had four guys in bunks in each stateroom. When you're standing on the bridge you had to tie yourself to something on the bridge. I was standing on the bridge on watch; and I [was] looking down about thirty-five, forty feet to the water; and I [was] looking up at another twenty-five feet to the crest of a wave; and it [was] frightening, I want to tell you. You just think, "Well, take us home, God." I mean, I don't know what's going to happen. It's the scariest experience I [ever] had. To tell you the truth, I'd rather be shot at, almost, than get into a typhoon. You're looking up at such walls of water, and ... you know you can't get your ship down in the trough; or they'll never see you again. It will just come down the stacks and everything else. So, you have to go, let's say the waves are ... this way, and so you come across this way so that part of your ship, ... this end, is being held up by water, and this

end is being held up by water even if the middle is over the ... big dip because you can't go down in there. If destroyers get caught in that, they're gone. They'd just never come up. ... The sea can be very, very scary even more so than anything ... that man can throw at you; but, when it started to snow, we were pulling out of it because we had gone far enough north to get just a little bit away from it; but it followed us quite a ways, and it drove us like mad ... toward America. I mean, we got there ... sort of in record time for a ship our size and so forth; and we were glad to be there, but ... the water [is] the roughest part of the Navy. ... I'd rather face a foe, almost, than get into ... one of those because [there's] nothing you can do. You've just got to stay in the right position, or you're going to go down.

RF: How important was experience, for example, in navigating a ship? Would you improve the more often you did it?

JH: Oh, yes, sure, of course you would. ... Once you've done it, the next one you know what to expect. You think, "Well, oh, God, here we go," ... because I was in a pretty stiff one, not as bad as this one. This one washed ships up that you wouldn't believe on the beaches of Japan and everything else. It was almost as though God was telling them to get off their high horse and start quitting or something because it was the roughest thing I'd ever seen; but anyway we did go back, and we went the Great Circle Route; but, no, I would say that, then, I was assigned to a different ship. A lot of the fellows that I knew were with the same group through the whole war. In some way our ship needed some repairs and so forth, ... I guess from the storm as well as a few things that ... they hit us with. I was transferred to a different ship because that one was going to be in dry dock for a while. I think everybody onboard got assigned to a different place, but they had a thirty-day leave. ... I got back to California, and I called home; and my dad was there. My mother and grandmother ... we had an old farm upstate New York, they were up there; and he said, "I'll tell your mother that you called," and I said, "That's great." ... They did say, "If you want to see somebody [do it now]." We were told we were going to be in the invasion of Japan next, and so I did say to my father, "Don't tell Mother she'll get all upset; but tell her that we're going to be in the invasion of Japan next, and they told us to get ready for it. If we wanted to see somebody in the family, now's the time to do it." I said, "I don't want her coming out here to California." I said, "That's a long ride." My, God, the next night I called up; and my father said, "You know where your mother is?" I said, "Where?" "She's on a train. She's headed for you out there." I said, "Oh, my God, I told you not to tell her that"; but, anyway, she came. I was a little embarrassed. I met her and showed her around a bit, but it was good to see her. The first thing she said to me [was], "Boy, do you need a haircut." I guess it was hanging down on the sides and everything, and I looked like hell, you know; but we had just gotten in. I did get a good haircut the next day, right when she was there; but then I was assigned to another ship. I had to pick it up in Seattle. ... I wanted to be in a small boat. ... A friend of mine was skipper of a minesweeper in the North Atlantic. We went to midshipman's school, we went to Colgate together, in the V-12 program and did our junior year in about four months, three months; and then we went into the Navy ... because you had to have three years of college before they'd make you an officer. Dave Kingston and I both did that, and so I went up to ... where I enlisted in New York; and they said to me, "Hey, we can use guys on these ... boats out here."

RF: Minesweepers?

JH: Minesweepers, and he said, "You'd be a good skipper. You've been around." I was sent for a medical [exam]. The guy gave me this book, about this size, full of dots, like on each page, different dots; and you had to come out with a letter or a number. You know I had more trouble with that. I mean, you've got a tan sweater, blue pants, black and white, blue, you know, Navy. Tell me I'm not colorblind. I argued with this damned doctor for half-an-hour. He said, "Young man, I'm going to tell you something. If I send you to sea and your minesweeper has a collision with somebody, you know who they're going to blame? They're going to hang me, ... not you, because I'm the doctor." He said, "Now, do me a favor and be a good guy." He said, "I don't get too many volunteers for this work. What do you want it for?" I said, "Because a buddy of mine is on one." "I've had enough of the Pacific." He said, "I'm sorry, but I think you're going back there." So, anyhow, I wound up on the train; and ... I reported for duty on Christmas Eve; what a rotten time to have to report. I went onboard and saluted and was welcomed by the officer of the deck. He said, "The Captain would like to see you in the morning, Sir." He said, "Why don't you try 0900 or something like that." I said, "Thank you." Christmas Eve I opened a few little presents that my mother had put in my bag, took a shower, climbed in bed, and left word that I wanted to be called at seven so [that] I could get a little breakfast and go up to see the Captain. He was very cordial, a nice guy. He said, "I see you've been around a little." I said, "Yes, not much but enough." He said, "I'd like you to be my navigator." I said, "Oh, Captain, jeez I haven't used that since midshipman's school." I said, "It wasn't my best subject." He said, "Don't give me that stuff. You were exempt from every one of your examinations in midshipman's school because you did well." I said, "Well, that was a long time ago." He said, "It'll come back. I need you." I said, "In that case, I'll do it." So, I did and had fun. ... He said, "Now, the executive officer is our navigator. He's getting awfully damned tired of it. You get up there as soon as you can." So, I stood watches besides. I was up at four in the morning and all this kind of stuff; but I still shot the morning sun, the noon sun, and the stars, the morning stars, and so forth. It came back to me; and the captain said to me, "You're doing all right." Oh, no, he said to me one time, ... "I like the way you're doing it." A big, burly Irishman came to me; he was ... in that group and said to me, "Mr. Hurlbert, can I work with you?" He said, "I've always wanted to learn more about navigation." I said, "Well, you're asking the wrong guy." I said, "You're welcome to come, but I'm as green as ... can be because I haven't done it for so long." He said, "Yes, but ... at least you're doing it." I said, "Yes, come on, you can come up anytime you want, just bring a cup of coffee with you." ... I showed him how to use the sextant, and we shot the stars; and I had to learn some of the stars over again, Aldeberon, all these stars.

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

JH: ... I had a helper, and I was there every morning. It didn't matter; if I went to bed at four, I was up at five. Sometimes, I just slept in my shorts and got right up and put my uniform on. The guys knew to wake me; they're not going to fool around. I said, "I want to be on that bridge when I can shoot stars"; and he was there, this guy Nolan, he was there. These are little anecdotes that don't have anything to do with war, I guess; but still by the time we hit Mexico, going south, we were supposed to go overseas again on what they called MAGIC CARPET duty. That was to go over and take the boys home, the troops. In some way the story of my life was always that something happened, don't ask me what; but we were ordered not to go to MAGIC CARPET at the last minute. Our ship was sent around and told to go to the East Coast, and I

wondered, "What in the world's going on?" I thought I was going to have to go back there again, but I had had enough. I didn't need to go back for a suntan or anything like that, and the war was over. We came down the coast and through the Canal and up. My cousin, Jean Hurlbert, was going to be married in West Hartford the week after we were supposed to pull in. Here I am navigating this damned thing through the Panama Canal. They brought a guy onboard anyway, and I had to answer to everything he asked. The Captain said, "You see, I told you you'd make it." So, we came through; we came around. Let me tell you something. If you ever go to California, leave your bathing suit home. You won't need it. It's ice water all the way from Alaska to the end of California, the very tip of California; it's ice water all the way. The only time you're going to get decent swimming is when you go into Mexico a little bit. Along the coast of Mexico the water turns pale green, and you see turtles swimming, big turtles, big as this table; and, I mean, that's the part of the Navy that you love. You see the world. So it has it's good and it's bad [points]. If you get in when there's no war, count your blessings and enjoy every minute because it's a damned good career. If you make a living at it you'd be surprised these guys get good money. I never stayed in. I was invited several times because I was a navigator. Perth Amboy had a PC [patrol craft], and they wanted me to come and be their navigator. Every day I got a call; and I kept saying, "Guys, I was away long enough. That was, like, three years, you know." I said, "I don't want to be difficult, but I'll be damned if I want to go to sea every time I have a vacation." I said, "I'm not going to do it. I'm sorry." Finally, they left me alone; and I never knew what happened to them or anything else. I thought for sure, when we got into a couple of these wars, that I was going to get called back because of my experience; but, somehow, they didn't. They left me alone; and I saw guys, not too many guys, who had been, went, were called on to go to Korea and so forth. I thought for sure I'd go because it was recently that I had been in, and I had the experience. I would have gone, but they never asked me. I thought, "Well, thank you, I'll take it." [laughter]

RF: You took on a lot of responsibility at a fairly young age. You were probably only a year or two older than I am now.

JH: Yes, I was about twenty-three, twenty-two, I guess. I had to be twenty-one, but I was twenty-two when I was made a navigator, I think, or twenty-three, twenty-two or three. I'm getting so darn old I can't remember what it was now; but anyway it's a great service. If you're not looking for trouble, the Navy is a great place to be. Some guys are always nitpicking and trying to blame this guy for that or "This is a rotten system." That's all you hear from them. Stay clear of them because they're not going to go anywhere anyhow. They soon line up who's going to make it, you know what I mean? If you get drafted, I don't know that a fellow in your position would be smart to go and make a career in the Navy unless you had a chance to go to Annapolis to polish it off. That would be a nice thing, and then you'd know you'd make it for sure. The peacetime Navy would treat you a little differently, perhaps, than I got treated because they needed us at that time; but you [can] never go wrong. You know, unless you ask, you're never going to get into Annapolis; but, if you ask, you might be very surprised that you would, if you want it. You might have to tell them why; but, if you thought it through enough to really want it, I think they'd take you because they need good men. It would be a lovely career if you were in that end of it because they would treat you, from the beginning in a very special way. They did treat us in a very special way. That uniform says a lot, and besides they've got girls in Annapolis now. You might just have a good time, you know. [laughter] I would want [the] Navy again

were there a war. I told my wife I'd like to enlist. Once in a while I think about it, you know; but she says, "Now, go cut the grass, will you?" or something like that. [laughter] So, that's long gone. I used to think I'd like a pleasure boat, and I met a guy who builds them over in Keyport. I managed an office of the bank. I was there with First Union Bank for many years, and I had good success there. I came out, and I was a regional vice-president. I had a good time, but you throw yourself into whatever you do. But be cheerful; that's how you're going to get there. You're not going to ever get there if you're one of these troublemakers, be careful.

SI: My grandfather was also in the Navy. He always told me that it was a great place to serve. You get three square meals a day and clean sheets.

JH: That's right; but, if a torpedo hits, you go straight down. They don't carry you back on a litter and bring you around again. You're gone. That's the only thing ... well, unless you're on the *Indianapolis*, and you could float around for a while. A lot of people did come through though, but that's the only bad feature. Other than that I think travel at sea is fine now; and, of course, nobody is shooting at you. If you're going to go in the Navy, I wouldn't go from here to the Navy. I shouldn't say that. Unless there's a war then they'll treat you like a gentleman. I don't know what it's like to be an enlisted man. I didn't have that experience; but, I tell you, ... I could see the difference. I didn't ever lord it over my men. My men always knew they were on my team, you know what I mean? They knew that. If they got in trouble, they didn't go somewhere else, to the chaplain, or something. They came to me, and I got them off. I got them off every time. I'd say, "God damn it, don't do that again, will you?" Then I'd say, "How are we going to get out of this?" The two of us would talk it out, and I'd get him out. I took care of them, and I had a feeling [that] if anything happened to me they'd kind of pull me around and get me out of there, too. So, that's the way you've got to do it. Some guys thought they were really God's gift to the country. I just avoided them a little bit because I felt they weren't going to go anywhere.

RF: Other officers?

JH: Yes. They couldn't help themselves, I guess. ... You wouldn't pal around with a guy like that anyhow.

RF: I am sure you felt a certain responsibility for your men.

JH: Oh, every single one, and the saddest thing happened to me onboard. I had a young guy and his wife, no, not his wife, he never got married, his girlfriend, and his father, mother, sister, and girlfriend, came to the train, ... and he got onboard, from leave or something. We were all there on our way [to] somewhere, ... to go over for the first time, to pick up our first ship; and his father said to me, "Look after him," or his mother said to me, "Look after him, will you?" I said, "I'll do my best." We had an ordnance [notice] come out that I had to read to my men by flashlight every morning as we mustered on the deck by our three boats. ... Two of them were slung over, and one was on the deck, the landing craft. ... We had all kinds of landing craft, but I had three of those LCVPs where the front went down, you know, and the guys ran out on it. So, I got my men together; and I read to them by flashlight, and I made them ... repeat after me. I would read the safety provisions for firearms and what not to do. "Don't pick up a spent shell,

planning to take it home and make an astray out of the damned thing because you might get blown up yourself, okay?" I don't know how many times I told them this. So, we're at Saipan, staging, and there was an officers' club over there where you could go for a Coke; or ... I guess they had some beer, a lot of beer, and so forth. ... I'm on the island, and a few of the officers went over; and I would make sure my men all got the leave they were deserving. When I got them on the beach, I'd say to them, "Okay, now, there's a canteen for you guys right over there where you can get anything you want. Take advantage of it because we don't have it onboard ship." I'd even go over and make sure the place was clean before I'd let them go in there. Then I'd go back; and I'd join a few of the guys, and we'd talk. ... We had to make one trip, I forget what it was [for] in a jeep. ... We took our ship's jeep over, and I went up north; and I left these kids over there, ... the battle had not been too long before we got there. We just missed that one, and there was a big, sort of, gun emplacement. We had taken the gun out of there and took it apart, I guess, and did something with it when we invaded a few months before. ... So, I told the guys, "If you come across a shell still stuck in the tree," because ... we shelled it, you know, and there were shells sticking out of palm trees, and guys were pulling them out, "Don't touch anything. Don't touch any of that. Just have a good time, get yourself a little beer or something, and get back to the ship on time to meet your quotas and everything. I mean, if you've got to stand a watch, be there." I said, "If you've got a problem, look me up, somehow. I'll be on the island." So, I climbed in a jeep with two other guys, and we went up to get whatever it was we had to pick up. I heard this damn explosion Boom. ... You could hear it, like, a mile-and-a-half, two miles away. I thought, "What the heck is that?" We're driving back, and a couple of the men saw me. They came running over and said, "That young guy in your group got killed." I said, "What happened?" They had taken a shell case, a five-inch shell case; and they kept whacking it against the building to break it so [that] they could take the case home. It was live ammunition, and it blew the sailor out of this world. ... I made sure they buried him right; and, you know, I was heartbroken. I mean, ... this kid, it didn't matter what you told him. He was just too young to be in the Navy. ... He was eighteen; but, I mean, he was too young. He was young for eighteen; that's what I'm trying to say. He didn't take it seriously. When I heard what happened, jeez, I couldn't help it, I just got tears in my eyes; and I just said, "Oh, crap." ... So, I had to make sure he got correctly buried. ... I was the only guy onboard ship who lost a man; and it was his own doing, and it was devastating. ... I had to write to his parents, but I didn't write that he did it to himself. I said to them, ... "He was where he was told to be. He was fulfilling the assignments he was given," or something, "to the best of his ability." I didn't know what else to say because I didn't want his mother to think that he killed himself all her life and ruin her life and his father's too. Yet, I was told that ... it was mine to decide what to do and how to do it. So, I did it that way, and it was one of the hardest things I ever had to do. I went to make sure that he was properly buried, and they buried him right in the sand on Saipan Island. I guess he's still there; and his parents, of course, were heartbroken, but so was I. ... You know, if you're in an invasion and somebody shoots you, you've done your best. If you ever get in, don't ever horse around with ordnance; leave it alone. If it's on the ground, leave it. That's a good place for it. ... I've heard of many people who've picked these things up and taken them home; but this was live ammunition, and the Japanese were only recently there. I blame the American group that should have cleaned it out when ... they dismantled it. They should have cleaned it out, but ... what could I say? So, I didn't get ... anybody down my back for not doing it. ... I thought, "It's done; let's bury him." I had to ship his things home to his family ... with a letter. It was the toughest assignment I had in the Navy; and I wouldn't want to do it again, but ... that

was that. So, you've got to protect yourself, too; but you're old enough to know. When you're levelheaded, you know you've got to have fun; but that isn't fun. ... That was just sad. ...

RF: These islands must have been beautiful.

JH: Oh, right. My first stop was Guam, ... and I saw bananas just hanging there on these huge trees. ... When we went down to Guadalcanal, ... we saw black men, tall, stately black men, with red hair. The British had these islands, and they gave them, in pay, ... for bringing the stuff on the shore, for working with the Navy and so forth, the British Navy, ... red hair dye. [These] guys thought they were in heaven, you know, big bruisers, and the women all looking at them with the red hair; but ... you see the world when you're in there.

RF: However, at the same time, you were there ...

JH: ... For another mission.

RF: Right. It must have been odd, doing what you were doing in these exotic locations.

JH: ... I wasn't much older than the men I had to work with; and yet somehow I ... felt a very heavy burden of responsibility for each one of these guys, and so, ... I handled them like they were kid brothers, almost, you know; and, when they had something, they thought they did me a favor. All of a sudden, one time, ... maybe I was a little too lenient, but they had to take our boats and go and get supplies for our ship, you know, and they brought them back. ... So, they'd siphon off a ham, once in a while, or something, stick it, unbeknownst to me, in one of our boats, maybe one in each boat. They said, "If we ever have a problem, we'd be able to live on this." ... I said, "Don't take anymore. ... That's it. If you take it back, they'll catch you doing it. Just leave it alone. Don't do it again," but, when I found out what they did one night, they took our fresh water, in kegs, and dumped it, and then, when they brought supplies over, they kept adding stuff that would ferment to make booze, something, ... and they came to [my door]. "He's here, he's here," I heard them out in the hall, "He's here," in the passageway. So, I open up the curtain. I said, "What are you guys up to?" "Come with us, come with us." So, I grabbed my hat, and I went out with them. I said, "What are you guys doing?" So, they took me to our nest of boats, and in the darn boat was this keg that they [had] dumped all the water out [of]; and it had liquor in it. "We wanted you to be one of the first persons to have a drink of this stuff." I said, "Listen, you're good guys. My advice to you is this: I'm not going to turn you in, you know me better, nor am I going to condone it." I said, "Get it the hell out of here. Dump it over the side, now." I said, "I'm going to turn around and leave. Don't drink it. You don't know what's in it, really."

RF: That was against Navy regulations.

JH: It is, but they bring it on. So it depends on who's on watch, and I never let them on with it. What you do [is], the first guy that comes with one, you throw it over the side; and after that you hear them all hit the water because they know they're going to get caught. ... I'm not trying to be a bum, but they could wreck the ship. A guy ... could be drunk at the wheel and kill a hundred people; ... but they act like kids is what I'm trying to say. You're only four years older than maybe some of them, five years maybe; but they need ... a father image or something. They

need somebody to talk to, and this is what you have to do. It's amazing. Don't shy away from it. If you're going to go in, try to get in officers' training at all costs because you've got the background now. Don't go in just as a private or a sailor. It isn't worth it; ... but, if you do go, try to get into [officers' training]. If you're so really *gung-ho*, make an application for Annapolis. You'd be surprised what your congressman can do, you know. I didn't know enough to do that, but the war was on. Everybody was in, you know. ...

SI: Was there any noticeable difference between Reservists, like yourself, and Annapolis "ring men?"

JH: Not much, no. Let me tell you, we had a good bunch. We had a devoted group of officers onboard our ship; and I would stack them up with anybody because, let me tell you, these midshipmen had never been ... in a war either and don't be afraid of them. ... Treat them with the respect that they really have earned by going through for four years but don't feel inferior at all because, I mean, look at this guy who invented the atomic submarine. He wears a Navy uniform, but he never went to Annapolis. He's brighter than most of them anyway and so, I mean, never feel inferior to anyone. If you have to learn a new thing, learn it that's all; and you will, you can. It's recognizing what you need sometimes that's really more helpful than not, and it doesn't take long to figure that out. ... For me to go back to the beginning of my service, you've heard that, I'm sure; and I don't know that that has to be dwelled on, but I wanted you to know that ... I thought that, even though it seemed like a nothing mission, my mission, our mission, every guy in that fleet who was there ... had to keep the engines running down below, or they had to do some other thing, and didn't go even in as far as I did. ... We all were there drawing the Japanese south, which was our mission; and I don't care who they were, the cook, I mean, everybody who was there helped to do their thing. So, don't ever think that your mission wasn't as romantic as another's. It worked, and it worked well. If they hadn't decided to trade a ship for a plane or *vice versa* it wouldn't have been quite so scary, but they were desperate. ...

RF: Were you under heavy fire at that point?

JH: Not as heavy as we would have been on the land. I mean they were taking it, too, like what Tom Blanchet will tell you. I mean, I'm so glad; I thought, "If anybody I know should have come, Tom should be here." You tell him I said so and, "Why did you wait so long for?" He's just one of those guys who doesn't talk about it much; but he could talk about it forever, I'm sure; and you're lucky to have him. Don't let him get away. ...

RF: When you were on leave, just before ...

JH: ... I went back again.

RF: Yes. You expected to be a part of the invasion of Japan.

JH: Oh, I thought for sure we would.

RF: What were your expectations? Okinawa ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

RF: I had asked about your expectations for the invasion of Japan. Your mother was very worried. She took a train to California to see you.

JH: That really was something; but, you know, it's funny I was embarrassed to have her show up because none of the other guys that I knew had a mother come. They may have had girlfriends and stuff like this, you know; but ... they met them out there, I think. ... I had a girl that I thought I was going to marry, but somehow when I got home she looked entirely different than I remembered; [laughter] and she hadn't waited much, and I just was very glad to break that off and find the right one, which I finally got. We all thought we were in for it for sure, and I want to tell you, the Japanese, I never expected to see what I saw. When I went to Japan ... we were anchored off Yokosuka. Then there was Yokohama and Tokyo, and you go up on a train. When you go to the subway in New York, that thing kind of rocks and rolls and ... tears along. They have these overland versions of that; and, boy, they're rocking away, and they're going sixty miles an hour through the countryside; and ... as I stood there and looked out, ... three of us went to see Tokyo from our ship, and we got on this train, and all of a sudden we realized when we pulled into ... Yokohama that we had to do something. This wasn't going to go to Tokyo. So, we started talking ... and we were surrounded by guys in Japanese Army coats, those tan coats, and their caps, those battle caps, ... like baseball caps, you know, surrounded by these troops, who are now home; and ... the war wasn't that old, I mean, the war wasn't that long over, and the three of us are surrounded. ... I could have taken, maybe, two or three; I had a .45 on my belt ... but, I couldn't clear the car out, I mean, and neither could any of us; but, you know, we started to ask about, "Where do you think we should go?" We didn't know anybody spoke [English].

RF: Were they armed?

JH: No, no, no, but, they had their overcoats on and their caps. They were soldiers, discharged; and I never saw a change like that in my life. They heard us, and many of them spoke English fluently and probably went to Harvard or somewhere or Rutgers. They might have been lucky enough to come to Rutgers. ... Don't belittle your school because it's pretty nice; and I think we've got a nice, new president now. ... I liked the old one, too; but, I mean, I think this guy ... [is] younger. ...

RF: The school has changed quite a bit since you were a student here. When you were here, I believe the school's reputation was a little better than it is now.

JH: Maybe. Have you got a lot of younger professors that are kind of students?

RF: Yes. It is a lot bigger now.

JH: Yes, see, and you don't have the association with everybody. You knew everybody at that time. I knew everybody on campus just by sight.

RF: Right. Now, the class sizes are enormous.

JH: No, see, you lose something that way. That's why a college like Middlebury or Williams College or something would be kind of more like what I would think I would want now because you know everybody, ... but don't knock it. ... Columbia's worse, I'm sure, in many ways. So, yes, you could be in the city and all. ... So, here we were; and I said to the guys, "I don't know how we're going to do this"; and ... this very tall fellow turned around, and he said, "Sir, if you'll pardon me, what you do to go to Tokyo is you go to the next stop, ... get off here, and go across the platform, and there'll be a series of three lights; and, when the right train comes in for Tokyo, ... on that flasher, take that and go up, and you'll get right into town. When you come back from Tokyo, you get off at this station and get back on one with two lights, and it'll take you back to your ship." I said, "Thank you very much." ... I mean, he was as cordial, he was as helpful [as could be]. I could tell by his face he was glad to be home and alive, and so ... the others there nodded. ... They'd bow a little bit to you when you looked at them; and I thought to myself, "What a change." Because my first stop, I don't know if I told you guys this the first time, I might have; but our first assignment going over, once we had been approved, was to pick up five hundred Navy nurses, young girls going over for the first time to Guam, and it was our job to get them safely over to Guam and on the shore; and we did, but we got to know a couple of them, sort of. You'd talk a little bit. ... One time I was out on deck, and we're steaming along, about a day-and-a-half or two from San Francisco; and one girl was sitting there, crying her eyes out; and I said, "What's the matter? Are you well? Are you feeling well?" "Oh, yes," she said, "I just left my boyfriend back in California." I said, "Oh, that's a twist." I said, "Usually you'd be the girl back home"; and she said, "I know. I had to go and enlist; and here I am, and he's there." I said, "Well, let me say this, you're going to do a lot of good to a lot of fellows who need it; and you don't know what's in store for you in your young life. ... You'll be fine." I don't know why I was talking to her. She was probably older than I was, I don't know; but somehow she kind of wiped her tears away, and I saw her once in a while. She'd always say, "Hi," or something. She was a nice girl. ... So, it was funny, but that was an unusual assignment; ... but, they wanted us to do it rather than some guys who'd been out to sea for about three years and hadn't seen a girl, you know. [laughter] ... It could have been a rough trip; ... but then there were always a couple of ... older guys in our officer group, I noticed trying to comb their hair a little more special for these girls and kind of make out with them a little bit on the deck when they were talking; and this kind of stuff, but ... we all came through that, and I just saw them as nice, sort of young college girls on a very important mission for their country. They had to take care of these guys who needed help, you know, and they were there; and I know they ... did a lot of good when they got there. We stopped at Eniwetok Island for a moment or two with them. I think it was Eniwetok; one of the islands we stopped [at] before we dropped them off. I guess that was the second stop where we dropped them, and the officers on that small island threw a party for them. They never saw so many women, you know what I mean? I think we had 150 women or something ... [or maybe] we took more than that. Anyway, they were only allowed on our ship to go [to], like, amidships, and we'd watch everything from the bridge; and from there [to] their quarters but nobody ever hurt them. The guys all had girlfriends at home, you know, that kind of thing; ... but it was an unusual assignment for a first assignment, and ... I found out who some of the racier girls were because they wouldn't come back [from the party]. I knew some of them would want to come back ... like the one who was crying. I knew she would come back from the party, and so I took a jeep and went over there; and ... I went in, to the door; and, when the girls saw me, several of them said, "Oh, my God, look, he's here; let's go." So, they all came

running out. I couldn't take them all in one jeep. I got about seven girls on the jeep anyway, and I took them back to the dock; and I said, "Don't go anywhere. I'm going back and get the other seven"; [laughter] ... but the rest of them stayed, you know. So, I got the fourteen that wanted to get out because I knew what the heck was going to happen when they got drunk. So, anyway, I thought I did; and then I'm wondering to myself, "I didn't have to do that. What was the matter with me?" Maybe I ... was all backwards even then or something, but, no, I mean, somehow, I was just freshly in the service; and somehow I knew what was going to happen there. So, they were going to have to be pretty strong to get away from them. ... Anyway, the seven [fourteen] of them who wanted to come had a chance; and I took them, and that was unusual for me. I usually would have stayed out of it and just forgotten about it; but somehow I knew that I should go and get them, and so I did; but ... that's not even on the script, I guess.

SI: Were the men who threw the party Navy personnel?

JH: Oh, yes. No, they had a ship's company there. The men on our ship weren't invited, just the girls. [laughter] So, every guy had about four girls, you know, or five or six maybe; but it was quite a thing.

SI: Can you describe what you saw in Japan, the scenery and so forth, beginning with when you left your ship?

JH: I was amazed. It was ... a very, very well developed city, marquees, advertising things, like Broadway almost, lovely buildings, people scurrying back and forth to their work. They were ... very work oriented, the Japanese; and they proved that to us by outstripping our car manufacturers, you know; and I could see why, being a small nation, they still decided to take that part of the world over because they really were that good; and they had excellent transportation services, and the city was absolutely a city. I mean, it wasn't just a hovel or a dump or anything else. It was a modern city.

RF: How soon after the war ended did you visit Tokyo?

JH: Just a couple of weeks, a few weeks, right after.

RF: Was the city largely destroyed?

JH: Oh, well, let me tell you something, ... when you got on the train down at Yokosuka and came north, all of a sudden you're opposite Yokohama; and you look out and, "Where's the city?" no town. In other words, from the rail line west, the city was nonexistent. We had blown it off the map. ... As you looked, carefully, ... as the train would start up and all, you'd have to hold on to one of those poles or whatever they had, ... you could see the outline of every city block and street for a mile. ...

RF: There were no buildings anymore.

JH: Nothing. You could look across the whole thing, like a field, and we had leveled ... them, and not with the atomic bomb, either. That was something else, but that ended it in a matter of a

few days, that just did it; and thank God because they had estimated we were going to lose I forget how many.

RF: A million men, I have heard.

JH: Well, that's a pretty high estimate; but it could have been right because if these people fought as courageously behind each of their buildings; you know, the Germans were fighters, believe me, always fighters, and like the Italians acted as though they wanted to go home. They didn't want to fight, really. They were tough. You'd never want to take a swing at an Italian. I mean, he's liable to kill you; [laughter] but ... their heart wasn't in the war. They're lovers or something, [laughter] or they're artists or something. I mean, I don't know how to describe it; but the Germans ... were fearsome. I mean, they were fierce. ... You know, bless their hearts, I mean, I'm glad they're not our enemy anymore; but if they were any bigger, we would have had just twice as much to do; ... but they were meticulous like they kept every record. That's probably what killed all the leaders. They told of all their missions, you know; but, no, ... the Japanese fought like hell. My first experience was when we hit Guam and got the girls off I took a little tour around, and all I could see were banana trees; but there was a compound filled with Japanese prisoners, and I walked over to it, and I had my .45. I never went anywhere without that damn .45 because you never knew. I mean, I thought, "I'd probably get killed, but I'll take somebody with me if I have to." I'm over there, looking, just to see what they looked like. ... They needed shaves, a little bit. Their hair was not cut right. They looked like cavemen in these cartoons you see or something. ... They were short, but like wrestlers or something. They came to the gate, the fence, they had a fence; and they stood there, "Rahhhhhh," like this, you know, shaking the fence. They wanted to kill me, and here I am with just a damn wire fence there. So, I thought, "Well, you know, what am I doing here? I'm just getting them excited." So, I turned around, did an about-face, and I walked away, and I never went back. If I'd pulled my gun, maybe somebody would have put me in jail for inciting a riot or something so I didn't; ... but I had my hand close to my pistol in case one of them broke through. I'd have to nail him. ... I shouldn't have been there in the first place. They didn't like being on exhibit ... I'm sure; but when I got in the subway train, that came back to me. All of a sudden, when the door shut, I realized, "I'm surrounded by Japanese soldiers"; ... but they were so calm. They acted like they'd just come from Columbia [University] or some other place, some other school; ... and it was the most unique experience I had because our sworn enemies to the death were so glad to be there; they didn't care what happened. They just were glad to get home. They, too, were glad to be out.

RF: You brought up the atomic bomb before. Today, many people, I am sure you know, who never fought in the war ...

JH: ... Say we did it wrong?

RF: Right.

JH: Let me tell you something; I would probably not be here if I had to land in Japan a few times.

RF: I do not think that they understand the times.

JH: No, oh, no. You've got to be careful about that; ... don't let some of these pacifists sway your clear thinking. I'll tell you the truth; I voted for Franklin Roosevelt in my first election. I voted for a number of Democrats. My dad was so Republican. I didn't talk about politics much, but I vote for the person; like, in my hometown, if I like somebody, I don't care if he's a Democrat or a Republican I vote for him because I think he's a good man. I do have to think that I like George Bush, I don't know, but maybe everybody doesn't like him; but I think he's trying hard, and I don't know what the other fellow would have done had he won it. I don't think he's going to run again; but ... I think that Harry Truman could size that up faster than anybody. ... He was in the infantry. ... I guess he was in the artillery, I think, in World War I; and he didn't like war, and he knew what the hell can happen to you. ... I was so grateful when ... we dropped it; and then, when the second one dropped, I figured, "They have to quit now"; and sure as hell they did. I was in San Francisco. ... I mean, what a place to be; it turned into bedlam. ... Well, I don't know, I guess I didn't get into enough of the war with you. I will say, too, you never had a feeling that you were completely safe until it was over. You got ... so [that] you were constantly on guard. ... Always the war was uppermost in your mind. You woke up every morning to revile, and you went to bed wondering if you were going to get torpedoed or anything else. ... It isn't a vacation at all; but once it was over the world was ready for it to be over, and that was evident. ...

RF: After three years in the service, what was it like getting back into civilian clothes and going back to your normal life?

JH: Oh, well, I tell you, when I left, we were "Joe College" types. I mean, we had a lot of fun. ... I had a Model A Ford, and it didn't have a rumble seat. It had a trunk. So, Dave Kingston would get in the back with a blonde; [laughter] and we had to ... take a broom handle, put the damned thing up like this so [that] they could look out, you know, and you had a lot of fun back there, and I had a girl up on the front seat with me. Then, when we rode in Dave's Model A, he had a rumble seat so I was in the back with a blonde; and he was up front with somebody else. ... I was on the lightweight crew at Rutgers. ... I went to Jamesburg High School, a small school out here in the country at that time, and I was on the tennis team. We didn't have a football team. I would like to have played 150-[pound] football because I could run. I could really run; but ... anyhow, I didn't go out for 150. I should have probably, but I didn't. I don't know why, but I guess somebody like my father, told me ... to use my brain, not just my head, or something. I don't know what it was. ...

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

JH: ... Well, let me tell you, I think it didn't take long to realize the war was over. The world needed peace. We saw young Queen Elizabeth marry and so forth, and the whole world was in need of a rest and a party; and it didn't take long to get back ... into the swing of things. I hardly ever missed a football game. I never missed a football game when I was here if I could help it at all; and we never had much of a team, you know; ... but we were glad to see us play against Lafayette, Lehigh, in that group. They were our big competition. We always played Princeton and lost. ... When we beat them about four or five times in a row, they quit. [laughter] They

beat us for about a hundred years before they quit beating us ... but we had a good time. We had a good time. ... It didn't take me long at all; but my mother said to me, "You are so much older than when you went in," and I said, "Am I?" I said, "I don't notice that," but I took girls more seriously when I came back because I had told one where to go, sort of, [laughter] just before I went overseas; and the girls looked pretty good to me after being out there for three years; and, you know, I had a lot of respect for them. I thought ... they were the best thing that God ever put on the Earth, you know. ... So, I was just glad to be home, and I kind of savored every minute of it. Let me tell you, everywhere I went I just felt kind of grateful that I could do it, and I had to bury one guy, and I had seen a lot of other ones get hit.

RF: You were free from those heavy responsibilities you bore.

JH: That was it. I felt relieved that I could just be myself. ... The first thing I did my mother wanted me to go to church with her the Sunday that I got home; and I did, but I put an old suit on. I wouldn't wear my uniform, and she was heartbroken. She wanted everybody to see me in my uniform. Well, maybe about a month later, I kind of put it on one time ... when we had a little party or something, just to show everybody what it looked like, and then I quickly put it in mothballs. I just gave it to the museum in Freehold as a matter-of-fact. I had it all these years. I don't know what I did with my ribbons. I don't know, I think I put them in some kind of an envelope, ... one of these things you fold up; ... and I've got to go through my desk and everything else now to find the stupid things. I said to them, "Oh, I'll go to New York and buy a new set." "No, we want your old ones, you know. We want your old ribbons." Tom Blanchet is a guy, who, if he has uniforms, [should donate them]. ... Maybe he gave them to his children. I don't have any kids, and so I gave mine to the historical association. They were glad to get them. They said, "You know why?" I said, "Why?" They said, "Not only are they authentic, but we know you. ... Now, we're going to tell everybody whose uniform it was." So, I said, "Well, that's nice." ... It was good to see them again. ... The only thing that fits is the tie, I think; but I lost a little weight anyway but not much. ... Somehow I didn't feel like going from day one today. Is that okay with you?

SI: Yes.

JH: You had it anyway. ... The thing I wanted to really be sure was said was that it wasn't a useless mission. I had the feeling, when I came home, that I never put my foot on the sand after all my work and practice and everything and readiness. ... They never let me put my foot on enemy sand. The troops that I went in with, the war was just over. The people didn't know it, but I knew it and so I felt badly about that, and I carried that with me, and it must have come out in my last interview. ... The moderator said to me, "Did you ever land at all anywhere?" I said, "No." "Oh," so then he went on with some other thing, and so ... I thought to myself, "Well, you know, that isn't it. Every last guy who was in that operation did his part. He was exposed to danger. We all could have gotten killed in a minute. We were surrounded by the damned Japanese in their territory." ...

RF: Also, your mission was not to land. You completed your mission.

JH: Well, we saved lives up north. Oh, yes, oh, God, because they told us about it.

RF: The men landing up north knew that.

JH: Oh, they knew, they knew. They told us about it later. "You guys drew them all down," and so they were able to get in. Nobody got killed on the beach much, you know, maybe a couple, who knows? Maybe a sentry shot somebody or something; but they went in, and they got in safely. So much so that they took half the darn invasion fleet and went somewhere else with them. ... What I really needed was to reassure myself that I wasn't a goof-off, a little bit, because I was there. Let me tell you, I was in a lot of it that I had no control over, you know; but, the worst experience that you can go through is a typhoon. The enemy is miserable; but a typhoon is damned dangerous, let me tell you, and one of our best admirals took his fleet right into one. I forget which one it was now, oh, God. ...

SI: Halsey?

JH: Halsey ... one of the greatest. My father-in-law served under Halsey right after World War I. He was too young to go in with World War I. My father was in World War I, but he was like ... a machinist's mate; and ... his unit was sent out to sea in Brooklyn and Pelham Bay in New York, and he wondered why he wasn't chosen to go. His supervisor said, "Brad, come over here." He said, "You know, we're not going to let you go." "Why?" He said, "Because we'd have to train somebody else that knows as much as you do. We've got to keep you here on the base to teach," and so he was crushed. ... When I went overseas, he sent me a little letter; he said, "At least one of us made it," you know. So, that was kind of interesting. ... When I got home, he said, "Tell me a few stories"; and I couldn't talk at all about it. I don't know why, but I wasn't that full of talk just yet; and so ... I said, "Well, it wasn't much, Dad. ... We did what we were told, you know; and I was glad to come home." So, he left me alone; and then later on he got to looking at *Victory at Sea*; and they said that Okinawa was the toughest battle of the war for the Navy. He came to me and said, "You son-of-a-gun, you were in a tough battle"; and I said, "Well, it was, it was tough; but I guess I was in a pretty safe spot." So, I ... couldn't get into it much. It was a long time before I wanted to really talk, you know.

RF: You just wanted to get back into the swing of things.

JH: Glad to get back. I wanted to forget it. ... I just wanted to become a person again, you know; and Rutgers helped me that way, but I noticed that with so many of us coming back "Joe College" kind of got lost a little bit for a few years. Don't let that happen to you, though. Enjoy every damn minute because once you get ... out in the jungle it's a whole different world. You should be in a job that you like otherwise it's not worth it. ... If you want to teach, don't worry about money. Money will come. Enough to live on will come. Enjoy what you're doing because ... I've seen people die from just being in the wrong job. ... It's not worth it. We always had good professors here though, ... when I was coming through. We had an old guy named Agger, who taught economics. Some guys came into class one time, early in the year, and he asked them to open their newspapers. "The *New York Times*," he said, "will do fine"; and some of these guys had the *Daily News*, and he looked up and saw the *Daily News* on about six different desks. This old gentleman had gray hair, and he looked like Einstein or somebody. He said, "Boys, do you read the *Daily News* in preference to the *New York Times*?" He was

shocked; and, you know, he never said another word; but I never saw another ... *Daily News* in his class. Now, the *Daily News* has gotten to be a good paper ... but at that time I guess it was sort of in the "yellow journal" category or something.

RF: Lowbrow.

JH: Yes, lowbrow, but "Rutgers men don't read that," he said, "as a rule." ... That was it. He never said another word, ... but I never saw another copy either, you know what I mean? ... It was in Cook House. I don't know if that's still standing on the campus here, but I haven't been around in a long time on the campus. ... My wife and I, I think we'll take one of the tours the next time we have a reunion. So, that'll be good. So, listen, you were good to me. You listened. ... I got the message across that I wanted to let you know that I think, ... and always will, that ... the Okinawa that I saw was a very important mission that was carried off well, and that it did save lives, and it should never be written off like, "Oh, you never landed," or something like that. You can't do that because the men that were there were ready to do anything they were told, let me tell you, and they were capable, too. We were just very fortunate in many ways; thank you.

SI: Thank you.

RF: Thank you.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 4/7/03

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 4/9/03

Reviewed by Betty E. Hurlbert 3/2/10 & 2/26/11