RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD W. LANG

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview on November 1, 2004, with Dr. Richard W. Lang in Point Pleasant, New Jersey, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Dr. Lang, I would like to thank you for taking time today to talk with me. To begin, where and when were you born?

Richard Lang: I was born in Plainfield, New Jersey, on 8/21/22.

SH: Could you tell me a little bit about your father? Where was he from? What do you know of his background?

RL: Yes, my father came from Hungary. He was a textile engineer. He was sent to this country by the Hungarian government to learn our textile method and, after spending a year in the United States, he went back home, and then, immigrated to the United States.

SH: How old was he when he came to the United States?

RL: Nineteen.

SH: Wow. That was pretty impressive, for him to do something like that at his age, right? Did he ever talk about the trip at all? Did he come over alone?

RL: Yes, he did come alone. No, we never really discussed the trip. When he went back, he had to put in his two years of service in the Hungarian Army. After his service is when he immigrated to this country.

SH: He came here before World War I.

RL: Oh, yes.

SH: What did he do when he came here?

RL: He was sent to a textile mill in Passaic, New Jersey. I don't know the name of the mill; that's where he spent his year learning American methods of textile production. They were production mills. In those days, it was silk. There were no artificial fibers.

SH: Did he then continue in that same mill after he immigrated?

RL: No, he didn't. He obtained a job with … Jersey Silk Mills in North Plainfield, New Jersey. They had about four hundred looms, which is, I guess, an average sized mill for this section of the country. He was the superintendent of the mill and ran the mill until it dissolved during the Great Depression. … The production of artificial fibers put the silk industry pretty much at a disadvantage.

SH: Did he bring any of his family members with him when he immigrated?

RL: No, he was single and came by himself.

SH: Did the rest of the family remain in Hungary?

RL: One brother went to England and another went to Germany.

SH: Could you tell me about your mother?

RL: Yes, my mother was born in Raritan, New Jersey. I don't really know too much about her family background. Her mother or my grandmother lived with us for many years.

SH: Did she have an extended family?

RL: No. Excuse me, [my] mistake, she had one sister.

SH: Did they ever tell you how they met?

RL: No.

SH: Do you know when they married?

RL: I don't remember. I didn't know.

SH: Do you have any siblings and, if so, where do you fit in?

RL: Yes, I have two children. I have a son who is fifty-four, who lives in Westfield, New Jersey, and I have a daughter who is fifty-one, who lives in Ithaca, New York.

SH: What about your brothers and sisters?

RL: Yes. I had two brothers who died during the flu epidemic in 1918. Of course, that was before I was born. … Then, my mother had myself, and then, she had my sister and my brother. So, actually, after the death of the two boys, there were three children in the family.

SH: Then, you wound up being the oldest within the household. Where did you grow up and go to school?

RL: Well, I grew up in Plainfield, New Jersey, where I was born. I went to the Maxon Grammar School and the Plainfield High School and, from there, I went to Rutgers.

SH: What were your earliest memories as a young man? What were some of the activities that you found interesting in Plainfield?

RL: Well, Plainfield was quite a very special town in the old days. Of course, it's changed tremendously now. The thing that I was particularly interested [in] is, we lived close to the wooded area and I was very interested in the outdoors and we, of course, played the usual softball, football and hardball. We skated in the wintertime. We played cops and robbers and kick the can, hide-and-go-seek and all the things that children don't even know about today. Of

course, there weren't any television sets and that type of thing. So, you spent your time finding your own activities to participate in.

SH: Was the neighborhood mixed ethnically?

RL: No, not at all. In those days, in Plainfield, it was strictly a white town, except a small area of Negroes who were imported from the South to serve as servants in the big homes. … Of course, that area kept increasing in numbers, but not in size, and, eventually, I think it was [in] 1968, there was a riot in Plainfield, which was a horrible thing. In fact, a policeman was killed, was beaten to death.

SH: I have heard of that. As a young man, did your father teach you to speak any Hungarian?

RL: No, just English [was] spoken at home.

SH: When did you know that you wanted to go to college?

RL: My father's best friend was a physician and anytime that he would come to the house, especially to see my brothers and myself, I'd spend half the time going through his doctor's bag, take things out and put them back again, that type of thing. So, I've always been interested in medicine and decided, at [a] very early age, probably around six or seven, I'd like to be a doctor.

SH: What do you remember about the Great Depression? You spoke earlier about its effect on the mill where your father worked.

RL: Well, … in 1928, I was only six years of age. I can remember overhearing my mother and father speaking, at times, about the difficulty of paying their bills. I can remember, once, the banker came to our house. We lived in a big house in this estate section of Plainfield. He just begged my father to pay the low interest and forget the principal on the mortgage. We always had clothes and such. So, as far as I was concerned, the Depression had no effect upon me. The mill closed at that time and my father went [in]to other lines of work. We always ate well and we always had everything that I wanted. Looking back, … I'm sure my parents sacrificed a lot, which we didn't realize at that time.

SH: Do you know what other jobs your father found?

RJ: My father became a salesman for an engineering company. After several years of that, he went back to [working as] superintendent of a silk mill in Paterson, which lasted, probably, five or six years, and then, he retired, because of age, basically.

SH: How far behind you in age are your brother and sister?

RL: My brother is seventeen months younger. I made a mistake, excuse me; my sister is eighty-five. She is older than I am. My brother is a year-and-a-half younger, so, he's about eighty-one.

SH: Were you a close threesome?

RL: Yes, we were very close.

SH: The two boys are very close together.

RL: Yes, we are very close.

SH: Did you go out playing together?

RL: Not as much playing together, because [there was] almost two years difference in age and, when you're five, six, seven and eight, it makes quite a difference. In those days, we did not play as much together.

SH: Sitting around the dining room table, what were your conversations about?

RL: The conversations were basically about what we were doing, what we expected to do [and] where we hoped to go. … It's simple; we did simple things in those days. My mother would pack a lunch and we'd go off into the wooded areas. A lot of times, we'd drive to areas in Pennsylvania and have a picnic lunch. … It was always by a stream, where you could go swimming in the stream and that type of thing.

SH: Did you take any vacations or trips?

RL: Yes, we used … to go to Maine, Wilton, Maine, in the summertime and it was on a great lake and there was great fishing, swimming, canoeing, the usual things and tramping through the woods.

SH: Did you take friends along or was it just family?

RL: No, just family.

SH: Was your father able to go at that time?

RL: Yes, he was able to go. Interesting enough, my mother's sister died in childbirth; she had a little girl. My mother took the little girl in and she lived with us all her life, and … was as much to me a sister as my natural born sister.

SH: How old was she? Where did she fit in?

RL: She was about six years older than my sister.

SH: That was very kind of your parents.

RL: She was a great gal.

SH: How important was the church in your life? Were you involved?

RL: My life [with the church] was not very important at all. It was important to my mother, not very important to my father. …

SH: What about politics? Did you discuss politics at the table?

RL: Not very often, but I knew my mother was a Democrat [and] my father was a Republican; … [this] led to disagreements at times.

SH: What were their thoughts on Franklin Roosevelt, the New Deal and his attempts to pull the country out of the Depression? Were those discussed?

RL: That's part of the discussions. Of course, my mother thought he was the savior for this country and my father was not so sure and felt that such a liberal would be a real problem in this country.

SH: When you were in high school or younger, were there activities, such as Scouting, that you were involved with?

RL: Yes, I was in the Boy Scouts and attained the rank of Life Scout. I would have gone on further, but I went to high school and sort of became interested in girls and had no time for Scouting any longer.

SH: You spoke about having a very early interest in medicine. Were you able to do anything in high school that pointed you in that direction?

RL: I just took the pre-med course[s]. I was a member of the Biology Club. I was very interested in gymnastics. I tried out for the swimming team, but I never made it. We had a leader's club at the YMCA in Plainfield, which was run by a physician who had graduated from Springfield College, which is a physical education college. … He had started a junior leader's program there, which was a national program, and I was very involved in gymnastics. So, four afternoons a week, we would go to the Y and practice our gymnastic routines, and then, every year, we'd have a big affair where we show our skills and have dances and that type of thing.

SH: Were you involved in anything other than the Biology Club in high school?

RL: No.

SH: Why did you pick Rutgers?

RL: Well, I picked Rutgers, at that time, because, financially, things were pretty difficult and I took the exam for the scholarship and was awarded the scholarship.

SH: Good. Many people that we have interviewed have mentioned how important the State Scholarship was.

RL: That was very important.

SH: Did you come to Rutgers beforehand. Were you interviewed? Did you come down on a tour? Was anyone from your school, their older brothers or someone else involved at Rutgers?

RL: No, never did.

SH: You just came down the first day.

RL: Yes.

SH: Where were you housed for the first year?

RL: I commuted back and forth.

SH: You drove yourself.

RL: Yes, I did that for three years.

SH: Were you involved in any other activities on campus?

RL: No.

SH: You went right into the sciences, the pre-med program.

RL: The reason I didn't become involved was that, on weekends, I worked delivering milk on a milk truck and that was a Saturday and Sunday job. I started with rowing and had to drop it, because of [that]. I wasn't very good at it, either, and I couldn't get involved on weekends.

SH: Had you worked at the same job in the summers in high school?

RL: I worked at the same job. There was a farmer that had a farm in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, and he had his own Jersey milk cows. … He would farm his land, … grow his feed. … He had his own milk house and, finally, turned it into a pasteurizing plant. Originally, milk in New Jersey was raw milk, and then, of course, the State passed the law of pasteurization. … I used to work summers and weekends on [the] farm. In the summertime, I would drive the milk truck. I did that seven days a week.

SH: When you came to Rutgers as a freshman, were you part of any initiations by the sophomore class?

RL: No.

SH: Were you part of the mandatory ROTC?

RL: Yes, for two years. I wasn't particularly interested in it.

SH: Were commuter students exempt from mandatory chapel?

RL: Yes.

SH: I know that was also a place where they disseminated information and bulletins.

RL: Yes.

SH: Can you tell me what you remember about the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

RL: I remember, we were all listening to the radio, December 7, 1941, and heard the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I couldn't believe it. We weren't quite sure where Pearl Harbor was at first, until they started to explain that it was in the Hawaiian Islands.

SH: As an incoming freshman in 1940, Hitler had already taken over Poland. With your family's Hungarian background, how aware were you of what was going on? Was your father in communication with family members?

RL: Yes, my father had a brother in Hungary, a brother in Germany and a brother in England.

SH: Was he hearing from them?

RL: Yes, they were in touch regularly. My dad used to take trips to Europe to see his mother and he'd stop in England and Germany and see his brothers.

SH: When he came back, did he talk about things? You came to college in 1940, but were there conversations about what was going on in Europe?

RL: His trips stopped before 1940, before the war.

SH: There was really no insight.

RL: I never really heard any insights. …

SH: When you came back to campus that Monday, after the bombing on Sunday, what was the reaction of the students that you saw?

RL: Well, everybody was very excited and riled up, not quite knowing just what to do. … Some would say, "I think I'm going to enlist right away," and others would say, "Well, I'll wait," but it kind of quieted down right away, as I remember.

SH: Do you remember hearing President Clothier address the group and make that suggestion?

RL: No. I don't remember that.

SH: Which course of action did you plan on following?

RL: Do my pre-med.

SH: Just keep right on.

RL: Keep right on.

SH: The draft was in effect then, so, you had to register on your eighteenth birthday. Were you given assurances that you could continue in school?

RL: They had a special classification for pre-med students and, as long as you maintain[ed] your grade average and were accepted into a medical school, you were exempt at that time.

SH: When you were at Rutgers, who was the person or the professor who was most important in your career?

RL: Dr. Thurlow Nelson, who was a grand gentleman; he was a wonderful man. … Every noontime, he would take his little shell and paddle up and down the canal. He was a great man to talk to. He was a very fatherly figure to me and I was very impressed with him. Interesting enough, I was just an average student, but, when I applied to medical school, I went to New York University College of Medicine. There were only two students in our class that didn't have interviews at schools. We were admitted just on the basis of Dr. Nelson's recommendation.

SH: Congratulations. Was he the biology professor?

RL: He was a professor of biology.

SH: Do you remember any of the other pre-med students and where they went?

RL: It has been so long. It's over sixty years.

SH: Did you finish your four years at Rutgers or did you go on to New York University?

RL: No, I finished three years, because I was asked by Dr. Homer Smith, who was the leading kidney physiologist in the world at that time, to come and work in the laboratories at NYU.

SH: This was in your junior year at Rutgers.

RL: This was after my junior year. So, I had a choice of doing that or staying on, completing my fourth year. I decided to take the job, which was very helpful. I took care of the animals that they were experimenting on and it was a very interesting experience. At that time, if you completed your first year of medical school, you were then awarded your degree at Rutgers. I knew I was going to get a degree.

SH: Where were you physically at NYU? Which part of the city?

RL: It was on 23rd Street and First Avenue, which is right across … from Bellevue Hospital.

SH: What was a typical day like for you? Do you relate now to the stories we hear of no sleep?

RL: Not … so much in the first two years. When you get in the clinical years, you'd be in classes during the day and be in the wards nights, and classes the next day.

SH: After studying under the gentleman who was the leading kidney specialist in the country, did you continue in that field of study?

RL: No, he was a physiologist. The first year, physiology was one of the four main courses that we had to take and he had done all the primary work in the urea clearances and such of the kidney and it was all pioneering work; it was very interesting. … After my first year, I had no contact with that department again.

SH: When did you pick the specialty that you went into?

RL: I think in my fourth year, when I was at the clinics and on the wards at Bellevue and … was exposed to obstetrics. It was the first time I became very interested in obstetrics.

SH: This would have been in 1947.

RL: It was 1946.

SH: As the war wound down, what were your thoughts about it? Had your brother been involved in the military?

RL: Yes, my brother, at eighteen, was a draftee into the Army. My sister was a nurse and I was a medical student. They made him a medic and he was in the 33rd Division, 136th Infantry, in the Pacific and had a very hard time. He never speaks about the war; he never talks about it.

SH: Did he go on to school?

RL: Yes. … First, he went on to Seton Hall for a year, and then, transferred to North Carolina State in textile engineering and he graduated as a textile engineer and worked for DuPont all his life. He started in the nylon mills in Maryland and, after a few years in the different mills, he got more into the marketing end and he became the marketing manager for Zeepell at the end.

SH: You said that your sister was a nurse. Was she involved in the military?

RL: She was an Army nurse and was a first lieutenant and stationed in Atlantic City. I forgot the name of the hotel; it was turned into a hospital for the boys returning from the European Theater. She was in the service for three years.

SH: Stateside.

RL: Stateside, yes.

SH: Do you think your brother's experiences as a medic in the Pacific led him away from following in the medical profession?

RL: He never had any interest in medicine and he was more interested in doing what my father did. … That, I think, is what shaped him into the textile engineering field. I'm sure what he saw in the [war], as a medic in the infantry, quickly changed his mind about being a physician.

SH: Were you ever involved with the treatment of returning veterans or anything like that?

RL: No. Of course, when we went to medical school, you had to become involved with either the Army or the Navy. I became a midshipman in the Navy and the Navy actually sent us to school for about three years. You had a choice of the ROTC in the Army or the midshipman program in the Navy.

SH: Did you have to go for any training or was it just a title?

RL: We went over to Columbia University for about half a dozen lectures in military courtesy. That was it. [For] the Army, there was a full colonel at the medical school in charge of the Army group, because it was much larger, and they stood formations morning and evening and march[ed] and that kind of thing.

SH: How was the death of Roosevelt taken within the medical school?

RL: Never discussed it, personally, that I can remember.

SH: Was there any confidence or lack of confidence in Truman's ability to lead the country?

RL: Not in my mind, no, not at all.

SH: Having a brother in the Pacific, how aware were you of what was going on with the war on either front?

RL: Well, very much aware in the Pacific, because we corresponded frequently, once or twice a week for the couple of years that he was out there. I had a lot of friends who were in the European Theater and I corresponded [with them]. … Most of them were in the Air Force, but most of our letters were not so much about the war. A lot of them will tell you what they have been doing, within reason in what they could say, but, mostly, it was more about the things we had done and hope to do in the future.

SH: Were these friends from Rutgers, high school or your community?

RL: Mostly just Plainfield people, no, not from college.

SH: How did rationing affect you as a medical student?

RL: Gasoline rations?

SH: Yes.

RL: Well, the food rationing, my mother took care of all that. We never seemed to want for anything, so, obviously, it was adequate or she did a good job of securing things. The gasoline rationing was a little difficult, but, as a medical student or pre-med, you were able to get the necessary gasoline and you had coupon books. So, that wasn't really a problem. It was enough for doing what you had to do.

SH: Did you continue to commute by car into the city?

RL: No, I lived in New York City. At that time, New York University didn't have dormitories, so, you had to find your own residence. … I lived in 30th Street and First Avenue, which was only five or six blocks away from the college. We had a fifth floor walk-up and a roommate; a fellow I met in medical school and we lived together there for three years. In our fourth year, we got a job giving OB anesthesia nights at a private hospital for room and board, because the war ended. This would make it a little easier on our parents, for we got our free room and board.

SH: What about the blackouts and other things that were taking place around the country? Did that bother you?

RL: Didn't bother me. It was all part of what you had to live through. No, it was no problem.

SH: You just took it in stride. What about the music? What did you do for entertainment?

RL: Well, there are always girls. We did the usual things we always did. We'd go to the movies, dances and picnics, that type of thing, which we did before and did afterwards.

SH: When did you finish with medical school?

RL: I graduated in 1947.

SH: Can you tell me how your career progressed from there?

RL: Yes, I came back to Plainfield for [a] one-year, rotating internship at Muhlenberg Hospital, for two reasons. One, I wanted to practice in Plainfield. … To practice in New Jersey, you had to have a year of rotating internship. Number two, the hospital, in those days, was run by doctors and, if you did not intern there, you did not get a hospital appointment. So, there were two reasons.

SH: Did you stay there then?

RL: Then, I went to Long Island College Hospital and I stayed there for a year. … My father became ill. He had a major heart attack and things were difficult, financially. So, I had been asked by a doctor in Plainfield to join him in a group practice, with the idea of doing most of the OB work. So, I left and did that. That was in 1949. … Two of my real good friends joined us, so, we had four real good friends practicing in Plainfield. It was really, at that time, the general practice. The older gentleman, who I started with, did the surgery. I did most of the OB/GYN. One of the other fellows was a pediatrician and the other fellow did most of [the] family practice. … I was there for two years. You had to join the Reserve when you left the service and I was in the Air Force Reserve.

SH: How long was that commitment to the Reserves?

RL: Well, I don't remember any time. I think it was just an open commitment at that time. So, after two years, I was called. In fact, three out of the four in the office were called up. One was in the Navy when the Korean War first started, the Army was very short of doctors and he was a Navy doctor assigned to the 25th Division in Korea. He had a horrible time. He went all the way to the Yalu River, and then, they were pushed all the way back. The other doctor went to Sampson Air Force Base and I was sent to Germany.

SH: Can you talk a little bit about that? What were your feelings at the time?

RL: Well, I've been married and I had a son who was a year old. I was happy that I was going to Germany. I remember, I was inducted in July of '51 in Mitchell Air Force Base, New York, reported to Camp Kilmer in August and was sent from Camp Kilmer, by troopship, to Bremerhaven, Germany. From there, I was transferred to the 495th Medical Group in Wiesbaden, Germany, which was the general hospital for England, Europe and Africa. It was really a plum assignment. … Even though my status was OB/GYN, the OB/GYN service was full, so, they assigned me to the general surgical service. I was there six months and I spent my six months doing appendices, hernias, gall bladders and that type of thing. It was very interesting. It was a great town to live in, beautiful country. Even though it was six years after the end of the war, a lot of the damage was still present.

SH: Were you able to have your family there with you?

RL: No, my family was approved to meet me in the first weekend in January of '52. … On Christmas Eve, I was transferred from Wiesbaden, Germany, to Casablanca, French Morocco.

SH: This would have been in 1951.

RL: We arrived about eleven o'clock in Casablanca. I was dressed up, as you would, with dress blues and regular black shoes, and the fellow that picked me up had muddy flight boots on and dirty khakis and a muddy shirt and the jeep was a mess of mud. I was being stationed at the 30th Medical Group, which was the hospital for the air depot wing, which was forty miles north-east of Casablanca, in a place called Nouasseur Air Force Base. It was a base that was run by the French in French Morocco. In those days, … it was guarded by the French and Americans had the privilege of operating in their base. When I arrived, the base was just under construction. In

fact, the thirteen thousand-foot airfield, landing field, was under construction at that time. We lived in what we called Dallas huts, which were plywood and screened units that they could be attached together. The screens are closed, because it could be very hot during the day in Morocco. You're in the desert [and] it could be 110 out there. There's always a breeze. … As long as you wore a hat or helmet, you're fine. At night, it could, in the wintertime, be very cold. It was quite a swing of temperature.

SH: You were still a Navy doctor.

RL: No, I had transferred from the Navy Reserve to the Air Force Reserve. The main reason is, I tend to get seasick quite easily. I didn't think I'd do too well.

SH: When did you ascertain that? When did you decide to go from Navy to Air Force?

RL: Well, that was after medical school. I put in a request and requested a change in the Reserve assignments. The reason I was transferred to French Morocco was that they were going to bring in dependents. They were building five bomber bases and an air depot wing. This was part of SAC, which was Strategic Air Command. I'm convinced this country thought that we were going to war with Russia, because they had air bases in Thule, Greenland, and through Europe, all through the Mediterranean and the Far East and just surrounding Russia with all these bases. In a way, it was kind of frightening to think that, here, we're just [finished with] a war and they're getting ready for the next one. They were going to bring dependents in for the Air Force personnel and they needed an obstetrician/gynecologist, so, that's why I was transferred. I lived on the base and, in about two months time, I was able to get the paperwork changed and fly my wife and my son over. I found a beautiful villa in Casablanca. We lived in town and we had an Arab girl who took care of our son during the day. We didn't even have a telephone service in Casablanca at that time. There was a local telephone service, but nothing out to the base. So, anytime they needed me, they would have to send a staff car with a driver forty miles to pick me up and drive me back. … [In] the time I was there, they never did get the telephone system set in.

SH: How many dependents were there when you got there? Were there any at that point?

RL: Oh, yes. There were probably at least a hundred, maybe two hundred dependents in all, but all of them had to get their own quarters, because the dependent facilities on the base had not been built at this time, they all lived in surrounding towns. [The] majority lived in Casablanca. I had a car and I drove back and forth. I enjoyed my duty there. They were just starting to build the hospital, so, I was involved in planning the hospital and stocking the OB/GYN ward. I planned the architectural plans; … we had two labor rooms, two recovery rooms, plus, a twelve-bed ward, two delivery rooms, plus, the utility room. I designed the layout, and then, I ordered the equipment for the entire floor and it was a very interesting experience. I remember, we delivered our first baby, which had to be delivered by Caesarian section, approximately two months after I arrived. So, that was probably in March of '52. We had a pediatrician come in at that time, so, he would take care of the babies. Every morning on the base, you had a sick call for the military and we'd take care of that, and then, in the afternoons, we'd do rounds and do our surgeries. If the patient was in labor, of course, I'd be there until the patient delivered. We

had Army nurses who were very [good], Army nurse anesthesiologists who can give saddle block anesthesia. Actually, it was quite sophisticated and we did very well. If we had a problem, we could always ship the patient by air to the 495th in Wiesbaden. We only had to do it a couple of times in the almost two years I was there. That's the extent of my [service]. …

SH: Were there any natives that you needed to take care of?

RL: Well, the extent of the native people would be the workers that worked for the Air Force. For example, in our clinics, they usually had French and Arab women that did the paperwork and such, girls who clean[ed] the floors and that type of thing, if they became ill, they would go on sick call. We would take care of them and, when the airmen became involved with a French girl and decided they would like to marry one of them, they would have to bring her in and she'd have to have a complete physical and gynecological exam, which I did, and that was about the extent of my exposure to the local populace. We had nothing to do with the French Army. They had their own medical facilities, yes.

SH: Was there any time that you ever went to any events where you interacted with the French?

RL: No, none at all. There was not a very good feeling between the French and the Americans. It obviously exists to this day. I can remember driving to the base and you suddenly find a long line of cars and the French, … I don't know for what reasons, would close the base down and we'd sit there in the sun for maybe an hour, two hours, until they decide to open it up. Maybe there's a legitimate reason for doing this, I don't know.

SH: What about living in the village? Did this give you a chance to interact with any of the people in the community or was it almost like an expatriate thing?

RL: We were strictly expatriate[s]. As I said, the French were not friendly.

SH: Was there a lot of socializing going on, being so small a group?

RL: Yes. There was socializing and we socialized, the ones who lived in Casablanca. You had cocktail parties and cookouts. …

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SH: Please, continue.

RL: I was particularly unhappy with the French. This is a personal thing, but we had rented a villa in 1951, we paid seven hundred dollars a month. As a captain in the Air Force, my pay was one hundred dollars a week, plus, one hundred dollars a month medical pay. My pay was five hundred dollars, [from] which they took out insurance premiums and such and, for this place, I had to pay seven hundred dollars. You couldn't be too choosy, because there weren't that many places available and she was not, it happened to be a woman that owned it, this French woman was not very pleasant. I didn't speak any French. My wife, Lois, spoke fairly good French and they could correspond, but, if something went wrong, she always kind of blamed it on us and

was always slow to have it repaired, which always annoyed me. Fortunately, I had been in private practice from ‘49 to ‘51, two years, and accumulated some money, and was able to make out all right.

SH: I wondered if the military helped to subsidize your housing.

RL: You get an allowance. We could buy gasoline at the base for ten cents a gallon, a bottle of liquor was a dollar, a case of beer was a dollar and food in the PX was very inexpensive. Food in the French market was very expensive.

SH: Was there any travel back and forth to the States? Did anybody come to visit you or did you, your wife and son go back home at all?

RL: Yes, my sister flew to England to see her uncle, and then, flew to Casablanca and spent a month visiting with us. … Then, Lois and myself took a month’s leave and traveled through Europe. Well, occasionally, there’s a fellow who I knew from Plainfield who was a pediatrician and was on an Air Force tour and landed in French Morocco at the airfield. There was a call from the flight line saying there was a Captain So-and-So there to see me. So, I went and saw him. We spent a couple of hours talking. That was the extent of it.

SH: Was there any schooling for your son?

RL: No, he was one-and-a-half, no schooling. They did have a school on the base for the children.

SH: Are there any other stories that you remember, any incidents related to your practice or your interaction with other Reservists and those who came through the academies?

RL: No, the officers that we had were mostly returning vets who were either recalled because they were in a Reserve unit or found the life as an officer in the military was better than what they could find in civilian life and came back to the service. They were all very nice people and they were dedicated to their work. Basically, it was a good group of people and we found them entertaining.

SH: When you were recalled, did you know for how long or was it for the duration of the war?

RL: We weren’t told, just recalled.

SH: When did you find out that you were going to be ending your stint in Morocco? Did that also coincide with ending your career in the military?

RL: Yes. We received notice that I was [to be] sent home and discharged in March of ‘53, approximately six weeks before I received the notice from the Air Force command that my tour of duty would expire, and I think it was the 15th of March, but I was to remain in the Reserve. I was in the Reserve for another three or four years.

SH: Really?

RL: It was in [the] inactive Reserve. I didn't have any obligation and, one day, in the mail, I received a certificate saying I've been discharged from the Reserve.

SH: How did you get your dependents back to the States? Did they come with you or separate?

RL: We all came back on the *Maurice Rose*, which was a troopship. Lois was pregnant with our daughter at that time. … It was kind of a rough trip and [we hit] a tremendous storm in the North Atlantic. … We left from Casablanca. Even though the days were sunny, the ocean was plenty rough. I didn't like it very much.

SH: Who was more seasick, you or your pregnant wife? [laughter]

RL: I think everybody [was], except she had a better reason than I did. [laughter]

SH: What did you find to entertain a young lad such as your son for that crossing? It had to still be almost a week, right?

RL: It was ten days. Well, the most important thing for Ricky was to go to the dining room three times a day. He was two-and-a-half years old. So, I did have to get dressed, put on a uniform, take him to the dining room, but they had programs on the boat for children and that type of thing.

SH: Was it a straight crossing from Casablanca or did you pull in to other ports?

RL: No, the trip had gone from New York, England, Germany, Italy, French Morocco, and then, back to New York. So, we were on the last leg.

SH: I am going to take a wild guess and assume that you did not entertain any thoughts of staying in the military.

RL: No, they tried to entice you to do that. They said they would make you a major and that type of thing. No, I wasn't interested in the military, not as a career.

SH: Were you able to come right back to your practice?

RL: Yes. By that time, two of the fellows who left were back, so, I just stepped into that practice again.

SH: I wanted to back up a little bit and ask where you met Mrs. Lang.

RL: Oh, Lois and I were both born in Plainfield; we lived about three blocks apart. My best friend lived across the street from me. I would frequently see Lois as a young child. I've known her all my life practically and just would say, "Hello," and that was it. One day, I was driving through town and I looked; there's this good-looking gal walking up the street. That was Lois.

So, I called my buddy and said, "Hey, how about getting me a date with Lois?" which he did do. That was the beginning. It was so good; we have fifty-four years together.

SH: Congratulations. That is wonderful. Did you continue in the same practice?

RL: I stayed there from '53 until '59. A good friend of mine in Cranford, which is only ten miles from Plainfield, was doing OB/GYN and he had gotten so busy that he wanted some help and he talked to me about coming in to practicing with him, which I did do, I stayed with him until he passed away in 1973, and I continued working there until I retired myself. I never took another partner. I was sole OB until 1990, until I retired.

SH: What do you see as the best change for your branch of medicine? There had to have been wonderful progress made in many areas. What do you see as the most important?

RL: Progress in my field?

SH: Yes.

RL: Well, of course, the first early thing that was the most important thing was the RH factor and being able to determine the factor, and then, learning how to develop antibodies for it and how to do replacement transfusions on babies. That was the biggest change for many years. Of course, antibiotics were progressing and we were not losing babies and mothers as frequently to infection. I think that's one of the things I'm most proud of; in all the years, in delivering approximately six thousand babies, I never had a mother die and I have been very proud of that. One thing I've always done, anytime a patient went into labor, I always went in the hospital and stayed with her. A lot of doctors, … especially after we had developed residency programs from Rutgers, a lot of doctors go back to the office and let the residents check the patients or just let the nurses check them and, when they think they're ready to deliver, they'll call. I never did that. Probably, that's why I had a good practice. I always sat with the patient, if she was there for two hours or twenty-two hours, and I would cancel office hours. Medicine is all changed; it's altogether different today. I always call the patient back anytime a patient called in. Of course, the technical gains have been tremendous, but the handling of patients and the legal problems in the practice of medicine is so horrendous. I would not advise anybody to go into medicine. I have a grandson who graduated from the Naval Academy last year and he's in flight training. He spent a year in Pensacola and he's now in Texas, just ready to start as a jet [pilot]. He wants to be a jet fighter pilot and he's just starting his jet pilot training … and he talks about [how], after his commitment, he'd like to go to medical school.

[TAPE PAUSED]

… I forgot to mention that, when I first arrived in Casablanca, they had no dependent facilities at the hospital, so, I worked in the French hospital for six months and did my deliveries and surgeries. There's a minimum amount of surgeries to be done, but the French obstetricians only come in for the complicated cases and the normal deliveries were all by the [midwives].

SH: Were they French or Arabs?

RL: No, these were French. No, they were just part of the community. This is a private French hospital.

SH: Were you working only with the military dependents?

RL: I was only working with military, Air Force dependents.

SH: Were you ever asked to consult on any other cases?

RL: No. Well, I was never asked. One thing, I didn't speak French and I guess they never needed it and they probably could have gotten the obstetrician that spoke some English. No, it never occurred, but it was kind of interesting, working in a French hospital, [to] see how they do things.

SH: Thank you for sharing that. That was a great story. Are there any other stories that you would like to share?

RL: Nothing that I think of now. Of course, in my age, at three o'clock in the morning, I'll think of something.

SH: Are you involved with Rutgers at all?

RL: No.

SH: Have you come back for any of the reunions?

RL: No. I contributed a block of stock to them this year to repay for my education.

SH: They have a great scholarship program.

RL: When you don't live on the campus, you don't make great friends, and so, I never really had much of that close a relationship with Rutgers because of that.

SH: Before we close, would you like to talk at all about your family? You did mention your grandson, who finished at the Naval Academy.

RL: I could say something about my granddaughter. My granddaughter is a junior at William and Mary; she graduated from Westfield High School. She's a great lacrosse player, started every game down there as a freshman. She hopes to go into teaching and she is taking teaching courses and [would] love to teach and coach lacrosse. As I said, my grandson is in the Air Force. My son, Rick, worked on Wall Street for many years. He now works at home and my daughter lived in Virginia for many years, married and divorced without children, and worked in the insurance industry and now lives in Ithaca and has her own service business in Ithaca, New York. That's about all there is of the family.

SH: That is great. I thank you very much.

RL: You're welcome. [I hope] you make something with all that mush.

SH: I think you will be quite pleased to see what we have. Thank you again.

RL: You're welcome.

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

Reviewed by Ronald J. Butkiewicz 12/14/04
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/17/04
Reviewed by Richard W. Lang 1/19/05