RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LOUIS POKORNY, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Louis Pokorny, Jr., in Greenville, North Carolina, on August 21, 2008, with Shaun Illingworth. Mr. Pokorny, thank you very much for having me here today.

LP: Oh, you're welcome. …

SI: First, could you tell me where and when you were born?

LP: I was born in New York City on November 21, 1921. My mother, Barbara, and father, Louis, lived in Astoria, Queens when I was born and I lived there for four years. … Then, the family moved to Ronkonkoma, Long Island, which is about fifty miles east of New York City, and my [family lived there] all the years I was growing up. My father continued to work in New York City and commuted daily from Ronkonkoma on the Long Island Railroad. … He had a good job all during the Depression years. He was a factory superintendent in a loft factory, [a factory located in a loft, in] downtown Manhattan, around the Canal Street area. He left home in the morning, I never saw him. During the week, he got home at seven o'clock. He worked half a day on Saturday, which meant he got back [at] about three o'clock in the afternoon. So, we didn't have much time on weekends together. … My parents were both born in Austria-Hungary. My father was born in Bohemia, which later became part of Czechoslovakia, and my mother was born in the eastern part of the Austria-Hungary Empire. It was a predominantly Hungarian section. She was German and there was an enclave, I guess, of Germans, small German towns, in that part of Austria-Hungary. … It was a farming community and she was the oldest daughter. Her mother died when she was quite young. So, she didn't get to go beyond six years of schooling, and then, dropped out of school to, basically, take care of the household, and her younger brothers and sisters. … Her father remarried and, when he remarried, she took off and came to the United States. … She spoke German. My father spoke Czech, and some German. They both came to the United States around 1911.

SI: They both would have been in about their early twenties when they came over, or late teens.

LP: My mother was older than my father. She was a year-and-a-half older than my father. She was born in 1892. He was born in 1893, and both were still teenagers. My father was in a technical, I guess, equivalent of a high school. He didn't finish. … He was taking different trades and he was competent in machine shop work when he came to the United States and, after he got here, … he went on to become a tool-and-die maker. … My mother came to the United States and she had other friends here and she was working as a live-in domestic for a family in New York City. … They didn't meet until 1919, and they got married in 1920, and so, growing up, … I didn't hear a foreign language spoken in my house. … My father was very patriotic before he became a citizen, and, if a friend [would] come to the house [and if] they would want to speak Czech, he would admonish them and say, "Well, you're in America now. You've got to speak English." … He was drafted in World War I, and he could have refused the draft, but … he went in. I don't know the exact dates, but I don't think he was in very long. … He went to basic training at Camp Upton, on Long Island. … Growing up, he used to take us there every once in awhile and they had a tall fire tower that we used to climb up, and, of course, there was nothing there. Fields and the roads were still there. That is the site of the Brookhaven National Laboratory, [a nuclear research facility established in 1947]. … Ronkonkoma was a small town

and the elementary school that I went to went from first to eighth grades. We had four rooms, with two classes in each room. There was the principal and two teachers, each teaching two grades. … When I graduated from the eighth grade we had nine boys and two girls. Growing up, I was always short for my age and, when I look at the eighth grade graduation photo, there's a couple fellows that were a full head taller than me. … One of the girls was very short and her nickname was "Mousy," but I was a little shorter than her. I didn't grow up until about the sophomore year in high school. Ronkonkoma … was a summer resort. There's Lake Ronkonkoma, [the largest lake on Long Island], which, now, is not what it was when I was growing up. Long Island's all sand, and it was a spring-fed lake with no outlet, or no inlet, really, and, during the '30s, the water table was very low. So, it was big, large [lake], white, sandy beaches all around the lake, and it had about a three-mile circumference around the lake. It was not quite, almost round and it was formed … during the glacier era and it was dotted with swimming pavilions, all the way around. … So, growing up, I literally grew up in the lake, [laughter] but, during the summer, there was such an influx of people, on weekends, particularly, that we were able to use the lake during the week and left the weekends for the visitors. This was a destination before they built Jones Beach. [Editor's Note: Jones Beach State Park opened to the public on August 4, 1929.] So, I remember, growing up, there were a lot of buses [that] would come out on weekends from New York City, and a lot of people had summer cottages. So, we had a big influx of people for two months a year, but, then, for ten months, it was very quiet. We didn't have a high school in our town. We went to Sayville High School. Sayville was about five miles south of Ronkonkoma and there were a lot of small towns around that sent their students into Sayville High School, and I think there was either six or seven small towns that sent them in. … The high school, for four years, had about four hundred students and my graduating class was about a hundred. … Growing up, there was not much work during the Depression for teenagers, and, why, some students who had an opportunity to work dropped out when they were old enough, so that they could help their families out. … One of my best friend's father was a well driller and all of the water, back then, was all groundwater, and so, he dropped out to help his father, and this was typical. I didn't know anyone in high school who had an automobile of any kind, and our mode of transportation was bicycles, and I didn't get my driver's license until after I graduated from high school and I was seventeen. …

SI: When you say nobody had a car, do you mean your classmates or their families?

LP: No, … none of the teenagers had cars that were available to them. When I got a license, then, I … would help by driving the family car once in awhile. I had a younger brother, John, who was five years younger and a sister, Barbara, who was ten years younger. … My brother had skipped a grade in grammar school and, later on, when my wife grew up in the neighborhood town of Lake Ronkonkoma, She, also, skipped a grade, … I think, during the Depression years, part of it was to keep the cost of teachers down. [laughter] … So, John was four years behind me and, in 1938, the firm that my father was working for … decided they couldn't exist in New York City any longer and they bought a mill up in northeast Connecticut and they wanted him to go up there and run the mill. … Ronkonkoma was in the country, but when we went to look at it my mother, said this was really out in the sticks, [laughter] and so, he went to look for another job and he found a job in; no, I can't think [of it]. It was right outside of New Brunswick.

SI: Bound Brook?

LP: No. It was right there, south of New Brunswick. …

SI: South Brunswick?

LP: No, It was Milltown. During the 1930s, he was working for a company in New York City that was producing metal compacts for women, lipstick cases, cigarette lighters. … It was a big business. … They produced it for cosmetic houses with some customers in Paris and London. All of that was made from brass. So, with the onset of the buildup for defense, the brass dried up. The company in New Jersey was doing the same things and he … was in charge of their factory, in the producing of their tools and dies and the manufacturing [of] the product. … The company was Metalfield; that was in 1938. I graduated high school in '39 and my brother graduated from the eighth grade in '39. My sister was still in the lower grades. … So, he had a friend in Bound Brook who also worked for Metalfield, and he would stay with them during the week. He'd leave on Monday morning and stay with them Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday night, and then, Friday night, come back to Long Island, and he did that for a year, until I graduated high school, and then, the whole family moved to New Brunswick. … We rented a house there, and then, that's when I … started [at] Rutgers. … Back then, nobody started looking for colleges until they were out of high school. [laughter] … In later years, when my children were going to college, it was completely different. I wasn't sure that the family could afford me to go away to college. As I say, there was very little opportunity or money, and so, … I was fortunate I went to Rutgers. The summer of 1939 I went to Rutgers to take the equivalent of [the] SAT, I guess it was, and I was fortunate to be accepted. … The first year, I was accepted as an out-of-state student, even though I lived in New Jersey. We lived one year in North Brunswick, and then, we rented a house on Hamilton Road [Street], about three miles from the college, and so, I was able to commute by bus, most of the time, to school. … Once in awhile, my father was able to go to work with a friend who worked in the same factory as he did and I would be able to take the car on days that my mother didn't need it. Just regressing for a minute, my mother and father both grew up in the Metropolitan New York area, I mean, not grew up, but … that's where they lived [after] coming to the United States. So, we didn't have a car. My father didn't even learn to drive until we moved from New York out to Ronkonkoma in 1926, [laughter] and then, … I remember, my mother tried to learn how to drive on the first car. [laughter] … She never mastered it, but, in 1931, he got a new car, a 1931 Graham-Paige, and she was able to learn how to drive on that, and the car that I learned to drive on was a 1935 Dodge. … Anyway, so, the first year, I was in Rutgers as an out-of-state student. … Between the freshman and sophomore years, that summer, I was able to work in my father's factory, for about six weeks. …

SI: Actually, before we get more into Rutgers, can I ask some questions about your life before Rutgers?

LP: Yes, yes.

SI: First, when you were at Rutgers, you became an engineer. Did that desire to become an engineer come out of your high school education or something even earlier? Where did that come from?

LP: I guess from my father. I wanted to be an engineer before I knew what an engineer was, [laughter] … because, right from the onset, when I was small, I used to really love playing with Tinkertoys and Erector Sets and model trains and a lot of that stuff. … Later on in high school, I decided I wanted to become an aeronautical engineer, and there were very few colleges offering courses that lead to that. One of them was Cornell, [but I] couldn't afford to go to Cornell. … Besides Rutgers, I was considering Rensselaer [Polytechnic Institute, a private research university in Troy, New York], but, once I was accepted at Rutgers, then I took that. I had other friends who lived on Long Island who went to Brooklyn Polytech. The main interest I had in aviation was that I had two uncles who were excellent craftsmen, and one of whom had worked in a wood boat building factory in, I think it was in Brooklyn, and he was hired by Grumman Aircraft when they were building seaplanes. [Editor's Note: Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation, headquartered in Bethpage, New York, was a primary producer of both military and civilian aircraft in the early 20th century and was most famous for its naval fighters.] … They hired him to take charge in building pontoons. … The other uncle was proficient in metalwork, sheet metalwork. … Grumman, first of all, their planes were wood construction and fabric wings and like that, but they hired him, basically, to work on the cowlings for the engines, and then, later on, when they switched to building planes from aluminum, they [had him apply his metalworking skills to the skins]. So, both my uncles had major positions, in the Grumman plant, and that was [in] Bethpage. That was about halfway between Ronkonkoma and New York [City], it was about twenty-five miles, and both of them, my one uncle was in charge of building the wings on the TBF bomber, [a torpedo bomber flown by the US Navy and Marine Corps], from World War II, and the other uncle was in charge of one of their satellite plants in a different town during [the war]. Then, [I] had other friends who worked there, and it … seemed to be destined that all the relatives would go that way. In growing up, I had another good friend whose father was in charge of the engineering at Grumman. … So, I had kind of an inside track. In-between my sophomore and junior years at Rutgers, I had a job at Grumman, working in the factory, on different parts in constructing the plane. … Then, they told me that I'd have a job in engineering when I graduated, but between, when the war broke out, in 1941, Rutgers decided that all of the engineering and science students, chemistry, physics students would go right on through without any more breaks. So, our class graduated in January of '43, and … we were all given automatic deferments, if we didn't [enlist]. Some of the fellows had signed up to go into the service and some of them even left to go into the service before the ceremony, graduation ceremony, but we were given a year's deferment and I had a job waiting for me at Grumman. [When] I was at Grumman, … there were many young fellows leaving to go in the service and I decided that I would see if I could go in, but … to go in as an officer would have meant that I would have had to sign up for a definite period of time. I forget, back then, it was three, four years, or whatever it [was]. I didn't want to do that, and so, I volunteered to be drafted to go into the Navy, and did my [boot camp] in Sampson, New York, … which was up in Central New York, in the Finger Lakes. … After basic training, they sent me down to Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland, on Chesapeake Bay. [Editor's Note: Patuxent River Naval Air Station, the US Navy's center for testing and evaluating naval aviation systems, was created in 1943. In 1945, the school that would become the US Naval Test Pilot School was established at the air station.] … I spent the rest of my time in the Navy there. … That base was predominantly testing all of the experimental aircraft that were coming out of different manufacturers, and the Navy would review them all and do all the test work, and they wouldn't go into production until

the Navy approved it. … So, I worked in the engineering office and we were in a hangar … on the second floor, with big windows, overlooking Chesapeake Bay, an excellent location, but, being in the service, I don't know if we appreciated it that much. [laughter] … The captain of our unit had offices back away from the water, [laughter] … I was in armament test. … They had armament test, they had flight test, and then, they had the equivalent of electronics, which was really radio and communications. … There were the three basic sections, and each one was in charge of testing the new planes and equipment in their area of expertise. … Naturally, when we got planes in, we stripped them down to just put as much armament on it as possible, [laughter] and flight test wanted as much gas tanks as possible, so [that] they could fly as far as possible, [laughter] and this is the way it went. … Even though I was an enlisted [man], I was there [only] a short time out of boot camp that I got a ranking. … We had something like a hundred officers and three hundred enlisted men, and there were only a couple of seamen. Everybody else had a ranking, [laughter] and all of the enlisted personnel were mechanics and other personnel that serviced all the planes, … in my division, serviced all the guns and the ammo and everything related to armament. … That was about sixty miles south of Washington and the Navy was on a four duty rotation schedule, where it would go by days and by weekends. On the weekends, we would have … one weekend off, from Friday night to Monday morning, and then, the next week, we would be on standby, where couldn't leave the base. The third week, we would be off from Saturday night to Monday morning, and then, the fourth weekend, we would be allowed to leave the base locally, but not have the weekend off. So, I was able to get home every second week, and the Navy ran the busses, which were old school busses. … They would take us to the Pennsylvania Railroad Station in Washington, [DC, Union Station], and we would catch a train from there, and the trains that I would catch … ran like clockwork … between Washington and Penn Station in New York. We would catch the train at six o'clock on the nights we were going and it would … pull into Penn Station, New York, [at] exactly ten o'clock, and then, I would catch a train to Long Island on the Long Island Railroad. There was about ten minutes in-between trains. [Editor's Note: In 1941, a typical train could travel between New York Penn Station and Washington, DC, in three hours and thirty-five minutes to four hours.] … I was in the Navy two years, and … never missed that train to Long Island. The Long Island trains were different. [laughter] They were suffering from the Depression and the years and … they had an electric train that went out to Jamaica, in Queens, and then, they switched engines to a steam locomotive for the rest of the way out on the island. It … took us about an hour-and-a-half from Penn Station in New York to Ronkonkoma, and … so, I was able to get home often. … Well, maybe I [should] kind of finish one topic, … then, regress for other things.

SI: Sure.

LP: But, anyway, by that time, I was going pretty steady with my wife, and so, I would get back home almost midnight, either Friday or Saturday night. She would meet me at the station. Then, we'd go out, [laughter] and usually get home after three o'clock in the morning. We didn't want to waste the weekend. [laughter] If it was Friday night, we'd be out again on Saturday night, and then, I would get a train at about eight o'clock from Long Island and a train [at] about ten o'clock out of Penn Station, but the train and the equipment going back to Washington, … it was kind of, I guess, older, and, sometimes, I thought we were riding on Civil War equipment. … Going back to Washington, … I even remember some of the coaches had wood seats in them and they would be traveling at night. … Most of the freight trains travelled at nighttime, so, they would

put us on sidings to allow the freight trains to go by. So, when I got to Washington, and by the time I got to the base, it was time, … for reveille, [a bugle call used to wake up soldiers]. [laughter] … I was traveling all night long on Sunday nights, … but, also, because of the rotation of duty, … if I was off on Friday for the weekend, I would usually have, a duty watch from midnight to four AM on Thursday, and then, when I got back, it would be the same. I would be back on duty again for that Monday night. So, I often say that the Navy taught me how to go without sleep, [laughter] and, of course, having a weekend off, you didn't want to waste any time. … My wife went to the same high school I did. It was Sayville High School, in Sayville, Long Island, … but she was three years behind me, but I didn't know her in high school. … I met her on the Long Island Railroad, because, when she graduated, in 1942, … then, she went to a business school and became a secretary and got a job for the Bank of New York … on Wall Street, in New York. … She commuted to New York, and then, when I graduated, I started commuting on the Long Island Railroad also, and I would go as far as Bethpage, where Grumman was. She would go on into New York. So, I met her on the Long Island Railroad. … [During the war], there were so few fellows around and all these girls. [laughter] … I remember, before I went in the service, I was dating three different girls, [laughter] and my wife, Ruth, was one of them. Her maiden name was Ruth Kramer, and then, I was dating two other girls, but, then, after I got in the service and we started writing to each other, and then, when I would get home on weekends, I'd see her, [that] kind of set the pattern. … We got engaged in December 1944 and got married on June 30, 1945, while I was still in the Navy. … The Patuxent River Naval Air Station had originated as a naval unit in Norfolk, Virginia, and they were organizing, … basically, the operation while they were building the base in [Patuxent River], Maryland, and then, when it was finished, they moved everybody over to Maryland. … They had very little housing for either officers or enlisted personnel. I had a very good friend who was also enlisted in the engineering [section] and he had worked for Ford Motor Company, but he was married when he went into the service. … So, he and his wife had transferred from Norfolk to the base in Maryland and he was able to get a housing unit for them, but it was so limited. … Because that area had also been a summer resort, there were some cottages for rent during the summer months, and then, [I] had another friend who was married. He was able to bring his wife down for the summer months and they rented a place outside the base. … It was a brand-new base, so, we had a brand-new barracks facilities and it was very comfortable. One thing about being in the Navy is that I always had clean sheets, a bed and a nice place to [sleep], you know. [laughter] … I never got out on a ship and, being in the aviation division, I never got on a plane, either, [laughter] except, once, I hitchhiked a ride from Patuxent River up to a Navy airfield … on Long Island, up to Floyd Bennett [Field, home of Naval Air Station New York].

SI: Floyd Bennett.

LP: Yes …

SI: When you enlisted in the Navy, were you already in line to go into this type of work or did it just work out that way, that you were assigned to it?

LP: No. Well, I was planning to come back and go to work for Grumman again, which I did, when I was discharged … in March of 1946. … I only worked for a short time at, about six months, Grumman, and my father asked me to join him in his business. … Well, I told you, he'd

worked in this factory in New Jersey. … They were having so much trouble with getting brass that he left the company in 1942 and he and another man started a tool-and-die manufacturing business in Newark, New Jersey, and they were doing contract work for tools and dies for the defense industry. … Then, they decided to split up that business in June 1943, and, because my parents kept the house on Long Island and … after my brother graduated from New Brunswick High School, they decided to move back to Long Island, … about June of 1943, and my father formed his own business, … the Louis Pokorny Tool and Die Company in Ronkonkoma, on Long Island. Later, we changed the name to Louis Pokorny Company, Inc. … I had the one uncle that I said had wound up in Grumman because of his woodworking abilities. He had worked in this boat company in Brooklyn, but, then, for a period in-between, the commuting got [to be] too much for him. He and another friend opened up a Texaco service station and repair shop and they had a large room in that building and that's where my father started his business. My brother John was also in the Navy. He got in at the tail-end of the war. They sent him out to the Pacific and he was on a repair ship and, for most of the time that he was out there, he was anchored five miles off the coast of Beijing. [laughter] … So, I think he got to shore once or twice, and that was probably as a shore patrol, [laughter] and he says it's so far out, they couldn't see land, but they were there to make repairs for the ships that were there. So, when he was discharged, he was working with my father before he went in the service, and then, came back and he went to work for [him] again, and my father convinced me to change from Grumman. … That was the nucleus for our business. My father had a good friend who was in the upholstery business, and he had lived in Queens, in New York City, and he was working as an upholsterer and the company he was working for were making convertible sofa beds. … Then, he started his own factory out on Long Island, not too far from, a few miles, … where we were, and he was making all furniture out of wood, and then, one of the things that he made was a bed that had a spring that rolled out from underneath and the seat cushion turned over and became a mattress. … When I was discharged, my wife and I found a two-room apartment and we bought one of those beds from him. It was really a sofa that turned into a bed, but the only moving parts were four casters. [laughter] … One day, he came to my father, said, "You know," he said, "you've been working in metal all your life and, when I was with this other company, we made convertible sofa beds," and he said that they were buying the folding bed mechanism from a company in Chicago and there was nothing available. So, he said to my father, he said, "Why don't you take a look at this? … You know, you might be interested in doing something with this." So, my father asked me to come and look at it with him. My brother was still out in the Pacific. … So, we looked at this bed and we saw immediately that there was room for some improvements, and so, we set out to make a prototype and applied for a patent and got a patent. [laughter] … It was just something that … you'd be able to fold up, sit on, open up and sleep on, … but it didn't do much more than that, but that was in late 1946. … In 1947, we started making them for this friend of ours. I think we probably made about … a thousand in 1947, but it wasn't long before we really had problems manufacturing that. So, we built a five-thousand-square-foot factory, and, later, expanded it to ten thousand square feet. Then, we built another factory … that was twenty-six thousand square feet, and we built another factory, twenty thousand square feet. Then, we sold some buildings and bought another factory, twenty thousand square feet, so, [the firm grew] over the years. … With all the people being discharged from the service, we had no trouble finding labor, and we couldn't invest in the real sophisticated, new equipment. We bought a lot of used machinery to start off with then. … So, the early years were very labor intensive, but, over the years, we gradually improved the manufacturing setup. … We were

never really … one of the largest companies, but in the area of specialization, we did become a key player in the field. … Eventually, we had to give it up, because we were basically in the wrong part of town and the family and everything was out on Long Island. Everything we purchased, all the steel we purchased, all the supplies we needed, everything, had to be brought in through New York City, and then, all of our product had to be shipped back the other way, and so, shipping was very expensive. The business no longer exists, primarily due to competition. Initially, we had competition from North Carolina, … but, later on, after I was out of the business, my nephew carried on and he was getting competition from overseas. … We couldn't ship beyond approximately three hundred miles and, now, they're shipping things competitively as far away as China. … Anyway, so, we very gradually built the business up and that was our main product line, and we … also made roll-away cots and different kinds of flat bedsprings and bunk beds and a whole lot of other things, but it was all metalwork.

SI: You would make the components that you would sell to other factories and they would put them into, say, a sofa.

LP: Yes, yes. … So, our product never had a product name on it, because it was always a component part of [the product of] the people that we did business [with]. Are you familiar with Castro Convertibles?

SI: Yes.

LP: Yes, well, we did a lot of business with them, and Bernie Castro really hit it big when, … [in] the early days of television, he decided to advertise on television, and that really took off. Well, Castro was buying about one-third of his finished products, from this friend of ours that we were supplying the mechanisms to, and Castro set up a factory in New Hyde Park and we were supplying some of the bed mechanisms for his factory. He was also buying these mechanisms from a company in New Jersey, and they were in … Paterson, I think. Memory fails me, [laughter] but, anyway, and then, he was buying additional ones … from someplace in the Midwest, I think Chicago. Eventually, he got very nervous about not controlling the manufacture of the metal folding bed, and so, he set up his home plant … in New Hyde Park, to manufacture metal products, and we kept supplying special items for him, that they felt that they didn't want to make themselves. Anyway, … we got to the point where we were making connections with other metal manufacturing companies, and in different parts of the country. … We would ship them parts that they would assemble to complete the product. The process we devised was to assemble the mechanism for each side and then connect these assemblies with cross members to complete a folding bedspring. … For these other companies, we would assemble sections and palletize them, and then, ship them, by truck or, in some cases, by rail, and the people would complete it at the other end. … One of the companies we were selling to was the Hickory Springs Manufacturing Company in Hickory, North Carolina, and, eventually, we decided we just couldn't compete on Long Island any longer for that product, and so, we decided to discontinue the manufacturing of that particular line and sold the tool and dies … to Hickory Springs and they took over the major accounts. … Long Island started getting so much high-tech industry coming in, and we were definitely not high-tech, although our manufacturing process was quite sophisticated. One of the reasons why we were successful was that my father was always in an industry that mass produced metal works that had to be very precise, so that it was

completely interchangeable all the time. … When we started manufacturing these things, he took that same approach, and so, we were manufacturing beds that were completely interchangeable with parts and we tried to keep the tolerance to plus or minus ten-thousandths of an inch on any distances between linkages and other parts. Our competitors, when we started, a lot of them were welding these frames together. Well, there were certainly no interchangeable parts then, and each bed kind of worked different than the others. One of the major sofa bed manufacturers was Simmons, and, at that time, and they did everything. They manufactured [every part], from the wood and the metal products to the upholstery, and so, this was the kind of competition we had, but, then, we had some pretty good large upholstery manufacturers that we dealt with, but, anyway, eventually, we had to give that up. I left the business in 1996 at age 75 and after 50 years. … My brother was in business with me, but, unfortunately, one of the things [was] that he died very young, of a brain tumor, and my son Bob was in the business with us. … When he was looking for a college, I said, "Well, you've got to look at Rutgers," and so, he applied to Rutgers and to Lehigh and to MIT. All three accepted him, but he decided to go to MIT, and got his master's in mechanical engineering. He was with us about twenty-five years, then, decided to go back to school and, now, he has a doctorate in computer science, [laughter] … anyway, and my brother's oldest son, Jonathan, … came into the business also. … When I decided to retire and my son Bob left to go back to his education, Jonathan took over the business, which, by that time, was greatly downsized. We had three factories and we sold off two of them, and so, he was just down to the one factory, and then, eventually, the competition, I guess, got too tough for him. He had to give that up and completely closed down, two years ago. … So, of course, that has nothing to do with [the] Depression years, [laughter] but that's where we stand today. Meanwhile, my wife and I were married while I was still in the service and she worked for awhile, after I got out of the service, and our oldest son Bob was born in September of 1947. His name is Louis Robert Pokorny, but my father's name was Louis, my name was Louis, so, … we named him Louis in deference to my father, [laughter] but, right from the beginning, his name was Bob. We called him after his middle name. Then, two years later, we had another son, who was James "Jim" Pokorny, and Jim went to Syracuse. I forget; I don't think he even applied to Rutgers. He wanted to go to ski country. [laughter] He did apply to Dartmouth, but it was so difficult, at that time, they didn't accept him, but he went to the big party school of the East. [laughter] … So, he graduated with a degree in mathematics from Syracuse and, today, he's working for American Electric Power, at their main headquarters, in Columbus, Ohio, and my daughter Carolyn, "Carrie", was born then, in 1952. … She wanted to become an artist, and I remember, when she was looking at colleges, we were taking her all over the countryside, but they had such a comprehensive art program in the high school that she went to that, [as] she was going to go look at the college facilities, she said, "Gosh, I had all of this stuff in high school." … She did consider Douglas, but she wound up going to Bridgeport University, in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and I don't think it's there anymore. … I'm not sure, but, at one point, I think they sold out to the Japanese, … but I wouldn't even know if the name is still retained. … It was on Long Island Sound, directly across from Long Island. So, she could go back and forth by ferry. … She got married when she graduated, in 1975, and her husband … was part of our family almost. [laughter] When she was young, he was my youngest son's best friend. … He had a job teaching in a small college in West Virginia. It was Salem College, in Salem, West Virginia, which was … about sixty miles south of Morgantown. … While he was there, he was working on a doctorate degree in industrial safety management, and he got his doctorate at University of West Virginia and he went on then, working. He started working for

American Electric Power, as a safety manager in their field operations, which was mostly coal mining. … Eventually, he went from there to getting work teaching in Indiana State, in Terre Haute, and then, he had a friend who was here at East Carolina University. … By that time, he was looking for another position and, through his friend, he came down here and was able to get established at East Carolina University. … Unfortunately, he … came down with colon cancer, died [in] 1999, at age fifty. … My wife and I moved here because of the family, they were down here, and they had two girls. … We moved down here. The two girls went off to college, didn't come back, [laughter] and my daughter was the art teacher in a middle school here and she decided, it's now, I guess, almost six years ago, … that she wanted to become a Lutheran minister. Our family was Catholic, but she'd gotten very involved with Lutherans in Indiana and decided that she would do that. She dropped her [teaching], changed careers and went to a seminary in Philadelphia, and, now, she's just completed one year as a minister in … Spencer, North Carolina, which is about, maybe, forty-five, fifty miles north of Charlotte. … So, I'm here alone for quite a few [years], because my wife died three-and-a-half years ago. After we came down here, she came down with Alzheimer's and … we had some rough years and she died quite suddenly, but she had other major medical problems. … So, I'm here alone, but, over the years, I've built up a network of friends. …

SI: That is good.

LP: But, I don't know, is there anything that you think I skipped here?

SI: Do you want to take a quick break?

LP: Yes.

SI: All right.

[TAPE PAUSED]

LP: Yes.

SI: I want to go back and ask you about your early days at Rutgers. You were living in New Brunswick at the time, right?

LP: Yes. The freshman year, we, the family, rented a house in North Brunswick, and then, they rented a house, for the rest of the time I was there, on Hamilton Road [Street], three miles outside of New Brunswick, three miles from the college. … In taking [the] engineering course that I took in mechanical engineering, it was a very structured course. … In fact, I think I had two electives in four years, and one of the electives I took was astronomy. … They had a small observatory on the campus, … but the astronomy was a lot of mathematics. [laughter] … The other elective I took was differential equations, [laughter] … which was kind of tough, but I really loved math when I was young. [laughter] I found out, later, that I had to acquire a lot of other skills to be in business for myself, but, so, the curriculum was tough and was like, probably, twenty-five hours of class work each week, and we had classes on Saturday morning. … The classes started at eight o'clock [AM], … eight to twelve, and then, we had labs in the

afternoon, from one o'clock on. … The thing is, living off campus like that, I didn't get too involved with campus activities, and a lot of my friends were also commuters. My best friend in college, … his name was Joe Burns, and he commuted from Trenton, New Jersey, and he dropped out. He didn't finish. … I'm trying to think now if he dropped out after two years, and then, came back and finished, but he dropped out and came back again. … He was a good athlete, but he didn't get involved in sports in college, because, just, the curriculum, he said, was so tough. I had three friends on the crew, who were engineers, and how they managed, I don't know. [laughter] … It was Al McClees and Chris Maggio and, now, who was the other one? No, I can't think of the other one.

SI: Was it Finley?

LP: Yes, Ray Finley, yes, and Chris Maggio went off, stayed in the service and became a general [colonel]. … There were very few engineers who were able to spend the time to get involved in sports, and/or other types of activities. … I loved football. I think I went to as many football games as I could go to, and kept on doing that after I got out of college, … but I followed the crew. … Whenever they raced in the Raritan River, I'd be sure to … watch the crew, and I remember going to one crew race on Carnegie Lake against Princeton. … My mother was not exposed to any kind of college activities before I went to college and I remember dragging her along to Princeton to watch the crew race, and, oh, did she get excited, because Rutgers won that race. … I think it was the first time they ever beat Princeton. [laughter] … Then, I went to a couple of track meets, and that's about all the sports I'd be able to get to. The biggest social event that we had was the Junior Prom, which was for the class ahead of us, but that Junior Prom was in, I think it was in, 1941.

SI: 1941.

LP: Yes, and the Gene Krupa … Orchestra was playing and he … hadn't been around too long, because he was playing with Benny Goodman, I think, before that. [Editor's Note: Benny Goodman was a famous clarinet player and bandleader.] … The one thing is that since I didn't go to high school in New Jersey, I didn't have a network of friends my age in New Jersey, and, every chance I got, I would go back to Long Island for a weekend. … As I say, the first summer, I worked most of the summer in my father's factory, and then, I went back to Long Island for the rest of the time then, and the second summer, I worked at Grumman Aircraft and spent the whole summer on Long Island. … Then, after that, we didn't have any breaks until we graduated …

SI: Do any of the courses or the professors stand out in your memory?

LP: Yes. My favorite professor was Jerry Slade. He was a brilliant man, [laughter] gosh, … but, when the war broke out, at the end of my junior year, he and several other professors [left]. … We had a theoretical academic and technical curriculum through my junior year, but, then, … a lot of those professors left to start work … in defense. … They [the Rutgers College of Engineering] then went out and they hired retired people who were from, mostly, like, … engineers who were working in the field. … One of my professors, who I really … learned a lot from, which I was able to use later in business, was George Morrow. He was the retired president of Corning Glass Works, and he had a son who was the same age as me who was going

to Cornell. When his father came to teach at Rutgers, his son George transferred to Rutgers and graduated then in my class. … Professor Morrow taught engineering economics, which [was] one of the courses that I really made a lot of use of, later on, and then, we had another professor, and I forget what his name was. He … came in from the field of heating and air-conditioning, which was, basically, almost a ground-floor industry at that time. I remember, the State Theater, in New Brunswick, was air-conditioned and that was one of the first buildings that I remember being air-conditioned. Anyway, he was talking about how he had installed water lines at a certain depth in the ground for his home and, [by] circulating that water and extracting the heat from the ground, was able to supplement his heating system. … Just this past week, I read where this is a big, new industry, [laughter] … but, so, it was things like this that were taking all this theoretical stuff and showing us the practical application. … So, it turned out that it was an excellent time to go through Rutgers, because I think that if it was normal, I probably would have just had another year of all this theoretical engineering, with very little practical application, and so, that worked out great, yes.

SI: Looking back, did you find that the first few years of theory were also useful?

LP: Oh, yes, yes. I had, now, I forget [if] it was one semester or a full year of surveying, and I could have gone to work as a surveyor out of college. … I had engineering drafting for a whole year, and that was also something that I [made use of in] full application all the years I was in business, but there were a lot of things that I could have used that there was just no room in the curriculum for, and that was the business courses, you know. The only one they had was engineering economics, … but the other courses were all heavily loaded with engineering and that was it.

SI: What did you think of the facilities available to engineering students at Rutgers?

LP: When I went there?

SI: Yes.

LP: Well, they had just gone through, as I said, like, all those Depression years, so, they didn't have the latest in technological equipment and stuff like that, but it didn't matter, because the technological advances were probably just more sophistication of the things that we were working with and using. … Anyway, I found, later on, when I would tell people I graduated from Rutgers Engineering, it was highly accepted as being an outstanding engineering school, and so, that was fine. … Do you have any other specific questions, yes?

SI: I have one or two more about Rutgers. You were there when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Do you remember that day?

LP: Yes, yes, very specifically, yes. … I had an aunt and uncle and two cousins [who] came to visit us that weekend. … My aunt and uncle and my mother and father were home that afternoon and I, and my brother and sister and my two cousins, went to the movies, and I used to know, remember, the name of the movie theater. I guess, I think it was on George Street, and they stopped the movie and they announced that any military personnel in the theater should report

back to their bases immediately, and that's all they said. … So, we got out of the movie and, on the way back home, we turned on the car radio, and then, we found out about Pearl Harbor. … Our parents, of course, were just so busy visiting, because they didn't get together that often, that they didn't know anything about it until we got back home. … Of course, it was only radio, you know, and then, after that, everything unfolded. … Of course, things were very uncertain for quite awhile, but, then, as I said, one of the decisions that Rutgers made right away was to have the engineering and physics, chemical students, go right on through to graduation without a break. … Yes, that was a very distinct memory with that happening, yes.

SI: Do you remember being angry or afraid or excited?

LP: The first thing, I didn't know, and I think very few people knew, where Pearl Harbor was, knew it was in Hawaii, but didn't know much about it. … Maybe my parents were much more concerned than I was, you know, but I was still a teenager … and this was not an immediate threat to me. [laughter] … My brother was five years younger, my sister ten years younger, didn't affect them, … and I grew up not knowing any grandparents. … My extended family were all aunts and uncles and my cousins. … They were the only family that was close by that Sunday and, of course, then, they headed back home. He was one of the uncles who was working for Grumman at the time, but, … if he expressed any particular concerns, my memory fails me completely on that. At the time, very few people realized the gravity of the devastation at Pearl Harbor.

SI: Had you followed the news of the war in Europe and Asia before Pearl Harbor? Were you concerned about it before Pearl Harbor?

LP: Yes, … well, to quite an extent, because my father was very interested in what was going on in Europe. … So, I, in that respect, … stayed abreast of it. … I found that, to do a conscientious job in college, it was kind of overwhelming, because I remember, I'd come home in the evening, we'd have dinner and the family would converse. They would go to bed, and then, I would start working on homework. [laughter] … Just one comment, in the high school, because of the Depression, I guess, mostly, we had four subjects each year and I wanted to take typing and the typing [class size] was very limited. … I was after the principal. I said, "Let me take typing," and he said, "Gosh, we have the business students who are taking typing. We only have so many typewriters," and so, finally, I don't know how he worked it, but he finally got me in to take typing. … I was typing the day a hurricane hit Long Island. Sorry to wander back and forth, but the thing is, we were up on the third floor and we were on the east side of the building, and the hurricane, that morning, it was kind of very humid and overcast, and we went by bus to the school. No one was predicting any [hurricane], even a storm. … They didn't have that kind of sophisticated [prediction system]. Back then, the reports, as far as hurricanes and storms, were from, maybe, ships that were involved or, like, down here, in North Carolina, from the Outer Banks. So, we didn't know that there was a hurricane going on and those mechanical typewriters are pretty noisy. … After the typing class, which was the last class of the day, we found out that the trees were being toppled over in the back. So, they rushed us out to the buses to get us back home. … We got back home. A short while after that, the storm was over and the sun came out. It was a dead calm. … I remember, my cousin, Larry, we had heard that there were a lot of trees [that] fell down around by the lake. So, we decided to get on our bicycles and go see what

happened. [laughter] … We must have gotten no more than a half-mile from home, because the lake was about a mile away, got about halfway there, and the wind started blowing from the other direction. So, we turned around and we barely got back home and it was howling again, and then, later on, we found out we were in the eye of the hurricane. … [Anyway], being able to take that typing in high school, that, I found, was the most important, useful skill that I had in college. I typed all my reports, … and it also forced me to be more accurate and I think that that added to my [grades], how well I did in the subjects. … So, anyway, talking about the different subjects at Rutgers, I had a smattering of a lot of different things, as I said. I had surveying and engineering drafting and we had some courses in chemistry and physics, of course. I … wasn't exposed to calculus in high school, so, calculus was something completely new to me when I got to college, … but I was able to utilize, directly, some of the courses and lab work that I did in college when I got into business. We built our own tools and dies. We heat treated our own steel for die work and things like that, and so, a lot of that was from direct experience in the labs and things like this. So, that worked out well. As I said, you know, we didn't have the best equipment, but it was just the degree of sophistication. The operations were basically the same as you would be doing if you had better equipment in college to do it, but, even so, Rutgers had an excellent reputation … in engineering, as they still do.

SI: You mentioned that you were interested in aeronautical engineering. Was there an aeronautical engineering course at Rutgers?

LP: No, no. So, I just took a general course in mechanical engineering, which I basically, somewhere along the line, I guess through my Grumman contacts, [they] said that that would be the best thing to take. Then, when I got to Grumman, I found that there were very few engineers who actually had experience in college with any kind of aeronautical engineering. … They had graduates from Cornell who had experience in that, but, then, also, I found out that working at Grumman engineering was … not much of direct aeronautical engineering as such. The Navy Bureau [the US Navy Bureau of Aeronautics] would furnish them with the information on the structure of the wings and the ailerons and rudders and things like that. … They would then transfer that information in designing the planes, and I was a junior engineer by then. So, my work was different. … [I was] a junior engineer in the design of the landing gear and … got involved with the design of the release of the tail hook with a cable, … that went to the cockpit, and the pilot actually had to pull the cable to release the tail hook when they landed on the carriers. … It was an F7F, which was a twin-engine fighter. I worked on that plane at Grumman, worked on that plane in the Navy, … and I don't think they ever got it into operation as a fighter, but, anyway, they had me design the cable to release the tail hook for that plane. [Editor's Note: The Grumman F7F Tigercat was designed and built during World War II, but was not used in combat by the Navy until the Korean War.] … I had to find some way of getting that cable from the cockpit to the tail, because, when I went to different people, they were installing gas tanks and radio equipment and all that, [laughter] they would put it against the bulkheads, and then, I would have to figure out how to get around it. So, that was an early experience, [laughter] but I was able to do that, basically, from the year of engineering drafting I had, which had taught us how to do projections and three-dimensional [drawings], work with three dimensions. … I was able to determine what angle a cable was approaching a bulkhead, and then, what angle it had to have departing to go to the next bulkhead, and I had to then provide a

pulley at the right angle at that bulkhead, so that … it would move freely, and I was able to do that fairly easy, but I don't know about today. [laughter]

SI: You had to really work with all these different departments.

LP: Yes, yes, and, basically, [at] that time, the work was in progress. So, most of the time, it was just working from blueprints of what they were doing.

SI: What did you do for the summer that you worked there while you were still at Rutgers?

LP: … Well, I was in the factory, just helping to manufacture parts for the plane assemblies. … They would … give us a print, … and it was just sheer volume of people that was able to [produce so much], because they didn't have any real sophisticated methods of manufacturing back then. … That was in the Summer of '41, before the war broke out. … They had to make all the parts that would go into a plane and I remember making brackets and things like that. … From just sheet metal, you'd have to cut the shape, and then, if it was a bracket that had to be bent, you had to bend it. … In order not to stress it, … they had us bend it over a form that, in a vise, … would give us the right bend, so that it wouldn't stress the metal and so that it wouldn't fail later on. … Then, you had to drill holes that were either for rivets or bolts, and they had to have a certain tolerance, using certain drills, … but the most important thing was that it had to be filed and sanded down, so that there would be no cracks in the edges, and so, … as I say, it was very slow work. … Then, later on, that was [when they were] working on the first fighter plane, the F4F [Wildcat, a carrier-based aircraft], the plane that was really the workhorse in the Pacific; … was it Ford? I guess it was Ford [that] had the assembly plant in Linden, I guess it was, and they got all the prints for the plane and they were manufacturing that plane, … that fighter plane, in Linden. … They were able to set up and mass produce them. So, they were really coming off the line much faster than Grumman ever did. … My father, at the time, when he moved to Long Island, he started doing some special die work for Grumman. They had big hydraulic presses where they would form sheet metal into different shapes, for the fuselage or the wings or something like that, and he had a contract to manufacture form blocks for them. They were big blocks of masonite, and then, they would be shaped … with the right shape, and then, they would use those forms to stretch a sheet metal over the top to get the special shapes, … but, as I said, it went very, very slow. … So, they just hired as many people as they could and, of course, there were a lot of women working in the plant, because they're doing detail work, like electrical wiring. … One of the courses, or several courses, I took at Rutgers was … actually in different mechanics and linkage design, and that is something that I utilized all the time in business. That … came in very handy, because … the business we were in required a lot of engineering, particularly linage design, even though … the final product was not very sophisticated, but getting to that point was. … We had to completely change designs all the time. … The sofa beds followed the design of upholstered furniture and the upholstered furniture people would come to us and say, "Well, this is what we want to do this year; how can you put a bed in it?" [laughter] … So, that's what we had to work with. … Initially, the … board going across the front of the sofa was split in half, so, you didn't have to really lift the bed up high [to] pull it out. So, you could do a lot with it, but, then, the industry decided that the front of the sofa should be one board completely upholstered and you had to lift the bed out from in the seat. So, that required a lot of sophisticated linkage to do the job, and then, working with spring balance … to

design that so that it would be easy to operate and lift out with a mattresses inside of it. I mean, that took some engineering to do. … So, these were courses that I was able to use directly. I was even able to utilize surveying, which was like a supplement. … So, in the course of business, I even had to help design a factory, conveyor lines and things like that. … All of that, I could relate to courses I took at Rutgers and the engineering books that I had, and so, that worked out. The only thing, some things I couldn't relate to courses I took, was when I had to deal with corporate structure and income taxes [laughter] and the different kinds of law and contracts and labor negotiations and patent law, and all of those things I had to learn while I was in business. So, it's things that … they just couldn't squeeze in the tight curriculum that I had at Rutgers. [laughter]

SI: Going back to Bethpage and Grumman, in that year or so that you were there, can you tell me more about the different jobs that they gave you and what the challenges were there? You told me about the cable for the one plane, for the tail hook.

LP: Yes. Well, when I came back out of the service, I was in engineering, in the landing gear division, and it really wasn't much of a challenge there, because I wasn't at the stage where I was primarily in a design section. What I had to do was relay the basic design information into engineering drawings that produced the product, and so, … that was it. One of the things [was], they had another friend of mine, who happened to be the son of the head of the engineering [division] at Grumman, and he wound up at Patuxent River also, his name was Joe Novak, and Joe and I were in the same division and worked in the same engineering office, in the Navy. We worked together at Grumman, we wound up together in the same place in the Navy, had the same weekends off and everything else. [laughter] … They had the two of us lay out the basic center section of the wing, the shape … where the wing attached to the plane, where it folded, and that had to have a certain contour. Well, they were having a tough job in the factory of really reproducing that from the information from the Navy Bureau. So, they had the two of us work on it and they developed a process where they took these large sheets of aluminum and painted them white. … Then, they had us lay out the basic wing structure and contour from information from the Navy Bureau, and then, we had to spot on there where every hole and rivet and everything else went. … Then, they photographed this thing, and then, they were able to produce it full-size, so that the factory could manufacture the section accurately. Before that, they were having a tough job of trying to get accuracy in putting the plane together. So, that was one of the big things that I got involved in, and the rest of it was mainly transferring basic information into working parts. … I wasn't there long enough to really get involved beyond … that type of engineering. … When I went [to] work with my father then, I had to do all kinds of stuff. … I developed manufacturing processes to manufacture the things that we developed, and, because it was technology that you couldn't sell, we tried to keep a lot of the things we developed secret from our competitors. [laughter] There were two big things that bothered us, diverging, again, away from [the time period], but one of the big problems we had was noise. … We were riveting everything together and, as I said, our competitors, back then, in the early days, were welding beds together. … We were riveting everything together, and, that way, everything could be interchangeable, but [the] riveting, we were doing [it] with pneumatic hammers and, of course, that was noisy. So, we were trying to figure a way to do it [quieter]. They had pneumatic squeezers that would squeeze rivets, but we were using quarter-inch steel rivets. There was nothing on the market that would handle that. … My father and I had to go down to

Atlanta, Georgia, to a company which had been producing these metal beds, the same as we were, but they wanted to give it up and buy parts from us, … but they were still producing some of these and they had to assemble everything. So, we got down there and they had a couple of these pneumatic air squeezers that would squeeze quarter-inch rivets. … They bought them from a company in Chicago that went out of business, but they managed to get a set of blueprints from the company in Chicago, and they said to us, "Well, we have the prints for this, but we don't know how to make it." [laughter] … So, my father looked it over, he says, "Oh, we could do that." So, they said, "All right, you take the prints," and they said, "Build so many of these for us and you could have it then." So, we did that. Then, we started building that, and, man, that really cut down on noise, tremendously, … because, then, there was no more hammering, except we had big power presses. … That was intermittent noise. You know, it wasn't a continuous thing. … One of the other things that I remember developing was, we had these flat, steel springs and we would stretch them out, and then, attach them to the frames on the side with the small helical springs and, to start with, we had to pull those into place and stretch them out and hook them in. Well, it took a lot of strength and some people just couldn't do it and others would, you know, be pretty tired by the end of the day. So, I was working on that and I developed a little hand tool, which was like a buttonhook, like they had back in the late 1800s, or something like that. … It would be just a rod with a little drilled in hole at the tip of a curved rod, and made from tempered steel, so that it would be hardened, and a little handle on it. … We put the rod through a loop on that spring and hooked the end of the helical spring into the little indentation in the curved rod and just pulled it, no effort at all, and the spring snapped into place. … That, we tried to keep confidential from our competitors for a long time, and there were other little things like this that we thought up, that were only useful for us, and so, it wasn't things that we would have applied for a patent. … A lot of things, particularly with linkages and things like that, were directly related to courses that I took at [Rutgers], and even with things like heat treating, although my father, I learned more from him, I guess, than I did at Rutgers, [laughter] in that respect. … You know, there were definite things that I did use directly. Of course, as I said, there were a lot of things you run into in business yourself that you would have had to take all different kinds of other courses that covered that.

SI: To talk a little bit about your time at Patuxent River Air Station, what was an average day like there?

LP: Well, we … had a new barracks complex. As I said, it was like there were three basic test units, and then, … they also had stationed on the base a unit that was responsible for the Navy airline. … Not to fly passengers, but … they had planes that flew up and down from North America down through Central America, down as far as Tahiti, I guess. … They worked on a regular schedule, and they were one of the units on our base, and then, we had, as I said, armament test, which I was in, flight test, and then, they had the other one, which was radio and electrical, and we would go by bus, in the morning, to the hangar area. They would bring us back to the … barracks area for lunch. We had an hour for lunch, and then, they would come back at the end of the day, and then, as I say, I had to … stand guard duty. Everybody had to stand guard duty, didn't matter what your rank was there. [laughter] The officers, … everybody was rotating. There was no urgency that superseded guard duty. … [Sometimes], they wanted somebody in the barracks to be awake all night. So, sometimes, it would be four hours a shift in the barracks and, sometimes, in the winter months, I'd be standing with the wind howling off the

Chesapeake Bay. They had a guard outside of every door, at the hangars, … and it was a four-hour watch, and then, they would come to relieve you, just about before the four hours was up. … Usually, just before they relieved you, or when they came to relieve you, they would want to know if you wanted to have coffee. Well, that Navy coffee was strong. As I say, if you had a watch that came off, like, before midnight or one that ran … until four o'clock in the morning, that was the end of sleep for the rest of the night. [laughter] … Then, when we first [were] doing the outside guard duty, they gave us loaded pistols, and I don't think there was anybody who was able to shoot a pistol. [laughter] … I remember, later on, when the war started tapering down, then, they started bringing in some younger fellows. They had some young fellows that they put on guard duty, and I remember one guy from Texas and one guy from Georgia … got into an argument and started shooting at one another.

SI: Really?

LP: So, then, they took the bullets away from everybody. … We were right there on Chesapeake Bay and, gosh, … you know, it could have very easily been [raided]. They had a fence around the property, but the fence … ended at the water, and they had … something like five miles of waterfront that was along Chesapeake Bay and Patuxent River, and I often thought, "Gosh, … they had guards along the fence, but there was all this waterfront, that there easily could have been somebody come ashore," you know. … They did come ashore up in Long Island. [laughter]

SI: Yes. [Editor's Note: Mr. Pokorny is referring to the landing of four German saboteurs, via submarine, near Amagansett, Long Island, New York, on June 13, 1942.]

LP: But, anyway, that's basically how a day went. … One of the things, … even though I was in a pool in the engineering room, all different officers had these different projects they were working on. They could come into the engineering [office] … for help in making working drawings of whatever they were working on. Well, most of my time, I was working for a Marine major, not a naval officer. … He came from Kentucky and he was working on guns. … At one point, when they were having all these problems with *kamikaze* attacks, he came to me. … I, the Navy Bureau in Washington, and everybody that was involved in armament was trying to come up with a defense against *kamikaze* attacks. So, he came to me and he says, "I would like you to design something for me." He says, "I'm going to get a hold of a machine-gun turret that is mounted on the back of a truck, and I want you to," he said to me, … "take that turret and change it from four machine-guns to six cannon, and design the things … to hold all the ammunition boxes on the turret." So, I went to work on it and, eventually, we got it finished. I was working with him and working with the machine shop and we got it finished. … It was, I think, in January of '45 that they brought a landing craft to our base and they loaded all the different people that were going to be involved in testing this and other anti-aircraft armament. … They took the landing craft out to an isolated island, and then, they were going to set up all the stuff and fly drones in and see how effective the firepower was. Well, he said to me, … "You've been doing all this work; I'd like you to come along." So, I said, "Fine." So, instead of going on the landing craft, he requisitioned a Chris Craft, something like a twenty-five-foot Chris Craft, and so, he and I [went]. He had two Marine sergeants working for him. I don't know what they did. I think it was [that] they had been out at Iwo Jima and I think it was just rest-and-recreation for

them, because I don't know what they ever did. I have no idea what they did. So, anyway, so, I went out on the Chris Craft and we got to that island and they were testing all these different things, and this turret was [the] most effective of the items that they had out there. Well, at the end of the day, … I got bumped from the Chris Craft. I could have gone back on the landing craft, but they were looking for volunteers to take an open personnel boat, back. It was a wood boat, fortunately. It had an open compartment up front and it had an inboard engine. … I think there were probably about eight of us, because it was a pretty good-sized boat. … So, we figured we'd get back to the base in something like an hour and that landing craft was going to take several hours. … It was a nice, calm day and it was fine. So, we start back, but just before we started back, the cook on the landing craft handed us a great, big can. … There had been a slow leak in the front compartment. He said, "Here, in case you need to bail." The pump to bail it wasn't working. So, we started out and I settled down on the engine compartment. It was nice and warm and [I was] leaning against a bulkhead. All of a sudden, sailors were shouting and everything was breaking loose. The front of the boat, the waves had built up a little bit, the front of the boat dove into a wave and water started coming in over the front. There were three fellows sitting up in front and they jumped in the back. The propeller was out of the water. The one fellow, the pilot, shut the engine down, and there we were, pitch-black, drifting in the middle of Chesapeake Bay. … Then, there were very few outdoor lights that you could spot, but … one fellow had a large signal. He was a signalman and he had brought a flashlight along, a big, big flashlight. … So, we look around and we were drifting in the shipping channel. He started signaling "SOS" at every light that he could see, and attracted the attention of a tugboat, that was towing two barges from Baltimore to Washington. They were coming down Chesapeake Bay, and then, they were going to go back up the Potomac River, and, finally, attracted their attention, and the captain had to drop the [barges]. He came alongside and took us onboard. He wouldn't tow the boat. [laughter] He was mad as could be then. … So, we got aboard. It was a, I think, Standard Oil [vessel], if I remember, the tug was pretty big. … The shipping channel was about five miles off of Patuxent River. He didn't have a radio, and so, he blew his whistle, twice, I think, from five miles out, [laughter] and kept on going. So, we settled down for the night, had a great dinner, better than the Navy ever fed us, got up the next morning and we're going up the Potomac River. … [At] the Dahlgren Naval Base, [the the US Naval Proving Ground], in Virginia, … they had a section being patrolled by Navy boats, to keep commercial or private boats away from the base, and … we saw them and we waved and got their attention, and they came alongside. … We had to jump from the tugboat to their boat, because the tugboat captain wasn't going to slow down for them, [laughter] and [the Navy boat] took us into the base there, and then, the commander there called the commander of our base. They sent a plane over to pick us up and bring us back, [laughter] but, in the meantime, at daybreak, they had planes out looking for us. One of my friends, who volunteered, [laughter] said, "I was there, up in that plane, freezing, and we're looking for you [laughter] and you're having a nice, comfortable ride in a tugboat and a nice dinner and breakfast." … They found the boat washed up on a deserted island. So, they were ready to report that we were missing, until [they discovered our whereabouts]. So, that was my one and only experience on a boat in the Navy, [laughter] but, oh, there were other things. … Back then, the USO … would come in and bring shows, and I remember one show where Bert Parks [a TV host, known for hosting the Miss America Pageant] was the master of ceremonies, and they had formed a band to play pop music and they would play in the different mess halls at times. We had a movie theater and we had a big rec. hall, with

bowling alleys and pool tables and ping-pong tables. There was a lot to do, but, still, you were in the Navy. [laughter] So, you couldn't get a full appreciation of all that.

SI: How did the enlisted men and the officers get along?

LP: We got along great, because, … out of the four hundred personnel in our unit, two were regular Navy, [laughter] and everybody else, it was "civilian in uniform." … The commander of our unit had been a test pilot, and I think the only way the Navy attracted him, because he was a little older, … was to make him a full commander, coming in. … Oh, there were two others. We had a Navy chief who was … making the Navy his career, and we had one warrant officer who was full Navy, … but everybody else was [just in for the war]. So, we got along great.

SI: There was no real line between officers and enlisted men.

LP: No, no, not then. The only formality was the enlisted men had to address the officers by their rank. Maybe onboard ship there was, but, I don't know, it probably wasn't even onboard ship, either, because, you know, particularly if they got into a war zone, everybody had to help everybody else. … So, that was good, and then, there was one officer; we had an officer in the engineering room and we had one fellow who was enlisted, and they had both worked for, I'm trying to think of the aircraft company in Baltimore, Chance Vought? Maybe it was. [Editor's Note: Glenn L. Martin Aircraft was located in Middle River, Maryland, outside of Baltimore.]

SI: I am not sure.

LP: But, they both worked for the same company, and the enlisted man had been the other fellow's boss, [laughter] and they both wound up in the same place with reversed roles, [laughter] and I used to get a lift with the officer to Baltimore, sometimes. … So, I mean, it was very good, and we had some wives of Navy personnel [who were] … working in the engineering office, and we had a couple of WAVES also, at that time. … It wasn't very formal but you had to adhere to the hours and the duty hours and everything else like that. … We had one fellow who was a seaman and he never got any further than that in the two years that I was on the base there. He was a storekeeper striker. … The storekeepers were in charge of all of the Navy equipment, and so, they were the only ones who didn't have any kind of guard duty, and then, the two winters I was there, each winter, they sent him down to Florida, to storekeeper's school, and he never passed it. [laughter] … He was the one who used to organize card games on payday [laughter] and sent home bundles of money, a real wheeler-and-dealer; he had a cushy life in the Navy.

SI: Do you think he was deliberately failing, so that he could stay in that cushy position?

LP: Probably, [laughter] probably, yes, and so, he had to flunk, with a vacation in Florida for two years, [laughter] and then, I had one other friend … [who] was in the engineering office, and he came from Parkersburg, West Virginia, and he had been in the Navy for; well, I don't know if he was regular Navy, now that I think about it. He might have been regular Navy or maybe he came in at the early part of the war. … While I was there, they'd made him a chief and they said, "Well, you know, as a chief, [you have to do sea duty]." They shipped him out onboard a ship. He'd never been out onboard a ship before that. So, he was very worried about, "What's going to

happen?" because he didn't know anything about being on a ship, and, now, he was a chief, you know. I guess the thing is that as long as he knew what to do, that was all he had to know. I had other friends that used to commute back and forth with us up to New York. They came from around New York City, New Jersey, Brooklyn, and Long Island.

SI: Did most of the men in the unit have that background of having come from the aircraft industry?

LP: No.

SI: Okay.

LP: No, but those of us in the engineering [office] did, yes. No, except for one of my best friends, [who] worked for Ford Motor Company, and, as I said, he was in the Navy before I was and he was the one who was able to bring his wife down to the base. … After discharge, this friend of mine from Long Island that was there with me, he made a career at Grumman and wound up, … he was project manager for one of their airplanes when he retired. This fellow from Detroit, he went back to work for Ford Motor Company and he wound up … in charge of … all of their sheet metal production. … There was a reunion for the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the base, and I got word of it, and these other two fellows, also. So, there were the three of us, and then, the one officer from Baltimore who was an engineering officer, and there were four of us and our wives as well as [the other base veterans], but it was a small group. We went back down to the base and we had spent the weekend down there and had a tour of the base and a lot of other things, but this other fellow, … who was the officer from Baltimore, he wound up doing engineering and he had retired by that time and he was doing consulting work. … When we came down there, the engineering office that we had, now, the commander of the unit [laughter] had that space, because it was the most ideal space in the building. There were a lot of women working on the planes. It was completely different there. … There was a marina on the Patuxent River, where Navy personnel could keep their boats, and their sailboats, [laughter] and everybody left for the weekend, except … they had one quarter of the crew stayed on duty for the weekend, so, it was completely different after all those years. … Is there anything else? …

SI: I just wanted to ask one or two more questions about that area. You mentioned that you were in armament and there were these other departments.

LP: Yes.

SI: Each department would kind of put their own interest first, such as, armament would say, "We have to put more armament in," flight would say, "We have to put more fuel tanks in."

LP: Yes.

SI: How did you rectify that to make the final product?

LP: Well, I don't know. That was the hierarchy, … you know, the top officers. … I was working at Grumman on that F7F fighter. It was a twin-engine fighter and it had the center part

of the fuselage extended out between the two engines, and I worked on that plane in the Navy, also, and our commander was a test pilot. … Just one incident that happened while I was there is that he took [out] the first experimental plane. He took it out to fire the guns over the ocean. The guns were mounted underneath the cockpit and the gas tanks were in the nose of the plane, in front of the cockpit, and there were big tubes that they fired through, from the guns, that went through the fuselage and opened up at the front end of the fuselage. He started firing the guns and the bullets started tumbling in those tubes and he shot himself down.

SI: Really?

LP: Pierced holes in the fuel tanks and he had to bail out. Well, then, after that, everyone went to work on rearranging and moving the gas tanks [in] back of the cockpit [laughter] and the guns up front. … Basically, what happened is, … in armament, we would mount guns wherever possible and reduce the amount of weight that they could take in gas, but they never did get that approved for production. … I think, they had one squadron on the West Coast that was used for reconnaissance, and they never got it developed as a fighter, but [you] ran into things like that. Like, the first pure jet plane that I saw was a German Messerschmitt [perhaps a Messerschmitt Me 163 *Komet*, although this was a rocket-powered fighter] that they captured and brought to our base, and it was a relatively small plane and it had a triangular-shaped fuselage, like this, with the wrapping around the cockpit on top, and it had just the one jet engine in the tail. … They also had a big, wooden plane that was built in Canada that had one cannon mounted down the middle of the plane, [laughter] and there were a lot of different [exhibitions]. … You saw a lot of different planes that were experimental or … were in the process of being fine-tuned.

SI: When they would bring in something like this German plane, was it just for you to see?

LP: Yes, yes.

SI: Would you study it?

LP: No, personally, I was not involved. I assumed it was so the Navy … would get an idea of what is going on, and I think that that plane, or planes like it, may have wound up in one of the [air museums], like in Dayton, Ohio, they have a big aviation museum.

SI: Air museums.

LP: And I've seen the same plane there, not *the* plane, but, you know, the same model, yes.

SI: Wow. A lot of these experimental planes did not go anywhere, so-to-speak.

LP: Yes, right. They, you know, … never did get approved, and maybe the war ended and they just stopped working on them. …

SI: Were there any, that you remember, that did get approved and went into action?

LP: I don't think [so]. You know, my memory fails me, because I was basically … assigned to do most of my work on that F7F, and I can't remember that. After the war ended, … they were trying to keep us busy and everything, and there were a couple of incidents, that they used to have these big air shows with different demonstrations, and we were up there [watching]. Our offices looked over the Chesapeake. Well, they had … a seaplane base and where seaplanes had wheels on them. So, they could come in, and then, they could come right up on the ramp in front of the hangar, and they had a big show of armaments one time. … Being not that far from Washington, all the Navy brass would come down. Well, we're watching … what's going on from the second floor window there and they were going to demonstrate a missile, that it was something that was about, maybe, no more than about fifteen inches in diameter and about ten feet high, and they had it mounted on the pad in front of the [reviewing stand]. A plane was going to pull a target and they were going to demonstrate how they could hit that target with the missile. [laughter] So, I think it was, probably, again, the officer in charge, I think, decided that since it was his project, instead of letting the junior officer, who really knew what was going on, [laughter] handle it, he decided to do it himself. Well, they fired it and the missile started to raise slowly and, all of a sudden, it got up in the air, probably about a hundred, hundred-and-fifty feet, and it does a loop. [laughter] Well, by that time, you're seeing all these admirals and everyone running for cover, [laughter] and it did a loop and dove into the bay, [laughter] and that was the end of that thing. … Then, another time, one officer in our unit was demonstrating how the guns were set up to fire through a propeller. So, he had a gun mounted and had a mockup of a propeller. [laughter] … They go to fire the gun, only somebody forgot to put the pin in the front mounting. [laughter] So, the gun starts firing, [Mr. Pokorny imitates the gun firing], going like this. [laughter] Again, everybody's diving for cover, but he managed to stop it before it turned around and was firing the other way. … There were a lot of different things like that, and we did have one tragedy. One test pilot was killed in the two years that I was there, and he crashed into the bay, but, otherwise, … much of it was routine, but if you can call it routine. They used to bring the planes out on the tarmac, tie them down, and shoot over the bay. They had a restricted area where they could do this, but, in wintertime, sometimes, they would tie them down in the hangar, open up the doors and fire out over the base from inside the hangar, and nobody then was too worried about earplugs or things like that. [laughter]

SI: Do you remember where you were when you heard about the end of the war?

LP: Not specifically, because … I know I wasn't up in New York that weekend. I was on the base, and I think I got back up to New York the next weekend. … My wife was working down on Wall Street then and she said that as they got closer to the end of the war, they were saving all of these [piles of] shredded paper and she … worked in a high-rise building. … She says, "When the war ended, they dumped all of that confetti [laughter] out over the streets." … No, I was on the base, but I don't remember specifically. … Even though it was good news, you know, they didn't stop everything to celebrate. They just went on with the [routine], but, so, anyway, … any other things that you want to cover?

SI: Is there anything that I missed or that you would like to add to the record?

LP: … As I said, [in] the Depression years, most of the people that I knew had some employment, one way or another. … A lot of the men did commute, by train, to jobs in the

aircraft factory or into Brooklyn, or New York City. … Where I was, the town I was in, the area I was in, had been subdivided in the 1920s, into half-acre plots and everybody had built their houses set back, maybe, something like thirty, forty feet from the street, and their backyards were like a farm. [laughter] … A lot of people raised chickens and they had grape arbors and fruit trees and vegetable gardens and stuff like that, and my father; well, his brother-in-law lived in town and helped us out a lot. … We had a grape arbor, that we must have had, like, a hundred foot of grape arbor, and they would harvest the grapes. … My mother would take the grapes and make grape jelly from it and my father would make wine from the grapes, but there was also a relative in town who had a fruit and vegetable store. … He would get daily shipments from as far away as California, by train, and he would get California grapes and the men in town would mix that with their own grapes to make wine or jelly or whatever you were making from it. … So, it was a time when everybody was "make-do" and we weren't near the stores, but they had a lot of merchants who came to the house. We had daily delivery of milk and bread. … In the early part of the '30s, everybody did their own laundry, but, then, later on, towards the end, they would have laundry service, where they would pick up the laundry. I remember, it was a brand-name cake company that had trucks going around from place to place.

SI: Was it Entenmann's?

LP: No, Entenmann's, … that was near where we were, but it was before Entenmann's. … I think they were in Commack, but … I forget what the name was, no, but Entenmann's was … about fifteen miles away. … I remember going there with my mother, sometimes, to do some shopping, but it was really too far away, and, in the early days, we would get ice delivered to the house, before my parents had a refrigerator. We would burn coal, and everybody on Long Island had basements. Like, here [in eastern North Carolina], you can't have a basement, … but we had a basement and they would shovel the coal in on slides from the truck into a bin in the basement. … Eventually, my father changed that to oil heat, but there were so many services, people coming to the house, or you could call up and they would deliver, you know, from a butcher or a grocery store, something like that. … The nearest shops were a mile away, or some could be two miles away, but it wasn't that easy. … As I said, we, and all my friends, didn't really have a rough time during the Depression. Prices were so reasonable. In the '30s, they were stabilized and the people who were real well-off, when the Depression hit, they could manage. My wife's mother and father, had a delicatessen in Queens, in New York, and, in 1932, he was forty years old. He died of an infection and left his widow with three children. My wife was the youngest. She had two older brothers, and they had a summer place out in Ronkonkoma. … After a year or so, they moved out to Ronkonkoma and winterized the house, and she had enough assets that she … was able to make it through the Depression until her sons were old enough to go to work, and they had some help. She had friends who worked, as a couple, as caretakers on an estate on the North Shore of Long Island. They weren't allowed to have children. So, their daughter lived with my wife's family and they paid her, for board. She was able to get through the Depression because things were stabilized and she had been pretty well off when the Depression hit. … I didn't know any people who [were] really in dire straits, because, as I said, … if people weren't growing their own produce, there were all these farms on Long Island and they could buy things very reasonable. … My mother had all these preserves in the basement that she would preserve and it would last … until the next spring. Like, tomatoes and jellies were the thing that I remember the most.

SI: Did you have to do a lot of chores around the home and garden?

LP: Well, … it was my job to dig my mother's garden up, only she grew very few vegetables. She'd grow mostly flowers. She loved flowers, [laughter] and I had to dig that up every year. I had to mow the lawn with the hand mower, but it was a small mower. … My father had a hedge around his property and I had to trim the hedges, but there wasn't too much in the way of chores, … but we had a great life, with that lake being there. … It was flat on Long Island, except we had one hill that was about two blocks long and we had … a lot of snow in the winters and most of the roads were dirt roads then, except, the roads where the houses were, and so, in the wintertime, … we were involved in sports. We had our sleigh riding hill and the lake would freeze up and we would go ice skating and play ice hockey, and the winters in the '30s seemed to be more severe then. … My daughter is out in Spencer, near Salisbury, and there's the North Carolina Transportation Museum. … Now, it's about two months ago, I was out there with them. We went to the Transportation Museum and they had a 1930s school bus there, and I looked at it, I said it was exactly like the first high school bus that I had. They had bench seats that went down each side and just a long bench down the middle, with no back on it, and that was it. [laughter] That was the bus that [I took to high school], the first bus that I remember.

SI: Wow.

LP: But, [in] the elementary school, nobody had busses. They had to walk. … I said our mode of transportation was bicycles, wherever we went. One of the things [was], we … could not really take that much activity with the high school, because it [was] far away and had one bus that went there in the morning, came home at night. … My cousin came to me, I guess it was [as] we were maybe just starting the second half of freshman year, and he said to me, "I'd like to start a newspaper." I thought it was a great idea, and his grandfather, who had died by that time, had, next door to him, … a chicken coop, and so, we decided to start a mimeographed paper and the chicken coop was our office. It was primarily aimed at teenagers and we published that every Saturday, and we started printing that and selling it for a penny and we would print, eventually, about a hundred every week and distributing it ourselves around the town and [with] some of the other fellows. We took on ads from … some local businesses, which really paid for the ink and paper, [laughter] because we didn't make any money on it, and that was it. We kept that going until we were, I guess, like, halfway through our senior year in high school, and so, that was it. We called our newspaper "The Readit."

SI: Wow.

LP: … And my cousin, [after] high school graduation, was accepted at [the] school of journalism in Syracuse, but he couldn't afford to go and he was very good at [drafting]. We had some drafting course in high school, but the teacher didn't really know much about drafting. … He was very adept at that and, with his connections, between his father and other friends, he decided to work for a year and he went to work at Grumman … in the drafting room, and then, the war broke out and he never did get to go to college. … Then, after the war, he got out of the service, he started going nights and, eventually, he got his degree, and then, an MBA and he got a real estate broker's license and also a notary public. [laughter] … He was always getting

involved in different kinds of activities, and he had some great things. [During World War II], he wound up in [Asia], was sent to India, and then, crossed across India into Burma, and then, eventually, he went back to, I don't remember, one of the Pacific islands, and was in the staging area for the invasion of Japan when the war ended. … Before both of us went into the service, … they had a flying club at Grumman, where … a lot of young people, fellows, girls, were taking flying lessons. … They were only able to fly out of the Grumman field and he … started taking flying lessons. … using a Piper Cub. One of the girls one day was taxiing across the field, ran into a cement lawn roller [laughter] and tipped it up on its nose, broke the prop and damaged the cowling and the tip of the wing, and they didn't know what was going to happen with it. So, he bought the plane, but his father, as I said, had this building that had been a former garage. So, he loaded the plane up on a flatbed truck and brought it out to Ronkonkoma and put it in this building. … Then, he and I helped his father, we were, probably, more gophers than anything else, repair the plane, … but, by that time, they'd restricted private flying on Long Island. So, he had the plane taken back to an airfield, not the Grumman field, but another field nearby, and had to have it inspected, and then, he couldn't fly there. … He got a hold of one of the Grumman test pilots to fly the plane, and got permission from the Civil Air Patrol, to fly the plane Upstate New York, to a location east of Poughkeepsie, there was a farm that they mowed in two different directions and that was the runways. [laughter] I think the longest was about a thousand feet, the other one was about six hundred, or something like that, and so, I started taking lessons along with him. … Both of us got to solo that summer of 1943, … but, then, I went into the Navy and never got back to it, but … he had had a lot of business skills. He'd taken business courses in high school and he wound up, like, the company clerk, … but, every time they would be in a non-combat zone, they would fly these twin-place single-engine planes that they used. It was before helicopters. They could land in short distances and they would use them for reconnaissance or, sometimes, to take wounded soldiers out of combat areas and things like that. … If they weren't in a combat area, they were only too happy to let him come up and fly. So, he was very proficient in flying and he was only out of the Army a couple weeks when he got a pilot's license, but, then, when he was getting ready to marry, his wife wouldn't marry him unless he gave up flying. [laughter] … I never went back to pursue it again, but I always loved flying. … Over the years, I had experience with [different types of flying]. My wife and I took a balloon flight in Napa Valley, California. … One nice experience was flying in a glider, [laughter] … you sit up front and [the] pilot in the back, but you have a set of controls, too, and I told the pilot that I had flown Piper Cubs and had soloed. So, he let me handle the controls, but the thing is, you went up to a certain height, released from the tow plane, [laughter] and then, gradually, as you descend, you have to keep descending all the time. You have to watch the altimeter, that you don't get into a stall position. … So, I asked him, I said, "You know, part of the training … with Piper Cubs was doing figure eights," where you would go up like this, and then, come around and go back up the other way. So, I said, "Can you do that?" He said, "Yes, we'll have to get up some speed." So, he put it into a steep dive, got it up to speed and he stood it on end, and the cockpit came right down from here over [to] the tops of those chairs, and you looked straight down, down there, [laughter] and that was exciting. … So, I always looked for things like that. My wife and I took a helicopter down into Grand Canyon, when they still allowed that, [laughter] and always loved to fly, but I was up in New York now and it's not that enjoyable flying … these days anymore.

SI: Commercial airlines, yes.

LP: Yes. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: During the break, we were talking a little bit about your teenage activities in Ronkonkoma, around the lake.

LP: Ronkonkoma, yes. The lake was surrounded by these bathing pavilions, and they had big sandy beaches, but, in the evening, all these pavilions would have jukeboxes. … It was the height of all the Big Bands and, besides … all the local teenagers from surrounding towns, there would be the teenagers from all those summer people who were spending time in the area, and, every night, … it didn't cost much to feed the jukeboxes, [laughter] basically, if you had a big crowd, if everybody contributed a nickel a night, it would provide a lot of music and dancing. … Since it was a pavilion, with sandy beaches, there was a lot of sand on the floor, [laughter] … but [it] didn't make any difference. We had great times, but, also, every once in awhile, we would go into New York City and go to places like the Paramount Theater, or Radio City Music Hall, where they usually had Big Bands and other stage productions in-between, [during] the movie breaks. That's when Frank Sinatra was real big. … We didn't get into New York City very often. I remember going to a couple of ballgames and the Brooklyn Dodgers playing in Ebbets Field, and then, every once in awhile, it was probably a school-sponsored or maybe … a church-sponsored trip in to see different [attractions], like going to a museum or to the Bronx Zoo or Coney Island, but teenagers were pretty well restricted, because, as I mentioned earlier, very few people had access to cars. … I myself didn't get a driver's license until I was seventeen, out of high school. I don't know, I think that would cover some breaks there.

SI: Yes. You mentioned how, at Rutgers, you did not have time for clubs or sports. Did you have time for that in high school? Did you get involved in things?

LP: No. Well, the high school was five miles away

SI: Yes, the distance.

LP: And there were a few fellows from my town who played baseball or football, but they had to walk. They would stay after school for practice, and then, they would have to walk back home, and then, it was five to seven miles. So, you know, you hear about all of these people saying, you know, "When I was young, I had to do so much walking," [laughter]. We actually did, but … I guess we were getting a lot of exercise, with riding bicycles everywhere or walking, and never realized that we were in a training program. [laughter]

SI: What about other local activities, like the church or Boy Scouts, things like that?

LP: … Well, I was in the Boy Scouts and we had different regular activities, and then, once a year, we would go camping for a weekend, at the Baiting Hollow Boy Scout Camp, and we would go off season. We would go, in the fall, and then, we would have the place to ourselves. … We would take about three cabins. … The churches, the fire departments and the American

Legion, everybody would have some kind of a fair during the summer, and I used to help out with the church fair. … Then, they had a bingo during the summer, one night a week, and I would help out with that, and the fire departments, each one had … one day where, I forget, it was probably around the Fourth of July, when they would have a big parade, but, then, each fire department would have their own fair. … There were two towns, Ronkonkoma and Lake Ronkonkoma, and each one had a fire department, and the American Legion would have a fair. So, there was always something, in the summertime, going on. [laughter] … I'm trying to think if there was any other activity. In our town, in Ronkonkoma, there were a lot of people from Hungary. We had quite a mix of people in the area. There were Germans and Hungarians and Italians, and then, several other, smaller amounts of other ethnic groups, like my father was Czech. … Now, what was I going to say? [laughter] Oh, that Hungarian people built a small hall and they formed what they called the Hungarian-American Literary Society. They basically set it up, to start with, to help people learn English. They used to have a big dance, a harvest festival each fall, and everybody in town would turn out for that, because they would have a Hungarian band. … Hungarians who had it would dress up in Hungarian attire, and I remember going to that when I was real small and they had a great, big cloakroom and all the kids would be running around. … When we got tired, we'd lay down in the cloakroom, while the party went on. [laughter] … You know, it was only fifty miles from New York, but it was a completely different kind of atmosphere, and people would make their own entertainment. … Some of the pavilions had, … I wasn't old enough to go there, but, when I was younger, they would bring in some entertainment, and I remember [American comedian and actor] George Burns talking about the times that he would come to Ronkonkoma to perform. [laughter] … Besides the pavilions, they had some clubs, around the lake, but not on the lake itself, and they would sometimes have, these different shows that would come in. … I remember one pavilion where, … once, during the summer, they had a big amateur contest where people who would do singing and dancing. [laughter] So, as I say, everybody was devising their own entertainment. … The war that was going on in Europe … did not really affect [us] and did not have people [concerned]. I don't remember my parents being overly concerned about it, except my father … said they felt they were fortunate to have been able to come to the United States and not be there in all that turmoil. My father said there were rumblings back when he decided to leave and come to the United States. My mother came through Ellis Island. She had friends here, but, … if you came here and you had somebody who could vouch for you and meet you at the boat, you didn't have to go through Ellis Island. My father had an older sister who was here and he had studied some English in school, but he told me that his sister used to … send him New York City newspapers, and so, he was able to study it and know a little bit more of English when he came here than most immigrants. My mother didn't know any English when she came over. … We lived in a town, as I said, with a lot of different ethnic people. There were a couple of old Long Island families in town, … names like Hawkins and Newton, old English, going back to colonial times, but, then, we had a lot of Germans, Hungarians and Italians, and there was a big Greek family and a couple of isolated people, like French. … So, it was quite different when I got here to North Carolina. [laughter]

SI: Given that there were all these different groups on Long Island, were there any pro-German groups, or the *Bund*, or pro-Italian or Fascists?

LP: Yes, not in my town, but in Yaphank, which was very close to Camp Upton, they had the German *Bund* and they had a camp set up there, but they were far enough away that [you] didn't hear much about what was going on there.

SI: Okay.

LP: … I forget when they disbanded it. It was probably with the outbreak of the war. … There were no Italian groups, but that I remember, but, as I said, it was far enough away that you didn't even hear much about what was going on.

SI: Is there anything else you want to add to the record?

LP: Can't add to it now. No, I think we've covered a lot.

SI: Thank you very much. I appreciate your time and hospitality.

LP: Oh, you're welcome, yes. I'm glad you finally caught up to me. [laughter]

SI: Yes. We have been waiting to interview you for a long time.

LP: … When was it that I filled that first thing out? Was it '95?

SI: 1996 or 1995, yes.

LP: … If we'd gotten together then, I probably would have remembered a lot more than I do now.

SI: No, you remembered a lot.

LP: Yes.

SI: Thank you very much.

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

Reviewed by Victoria Raab 10/7/09
Reviewed by Katelynn Dickstein 10/7/09
Reviewed by Maria Juliano 10/7/09
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/19/09
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 10/29/09
Reviewed by Louis Pokorny, Jr. 4/1/10