

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES F. RICHARDS

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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Stephen McNulty: This begins an interview with Mr. James Richards on November 9, 2007, in Andover, New Jersey, with Stephen McNulty and ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Thank you so much for having us here today in your lovely home. Mr. Richards, could you tell us where and when you were born?

James Franklin Richards: Crystal City, Texas, November 28, 1924.

SM: What was growing up in that area during the Depression like?

JR: We thought it was okay. We managed very well. There wasn't much of anything that you could do otherwise. Money ... had much more buying power than now. You could buy a loaf of bread, like, for eight cents and all, ... but we had fun. I had, of my immediate family, my brother, Earl, my sister, the oldest, Eugenia May, and myself, and my youngest sister, Dorothy. But, I had a stepbrother, Bob, Robert Wilson, ... of course, we all grew up together. He was my brother, he was the oldest brother. My sister, Eugenia, was born in 1920 and Bob was born in 1921 and my brother, Earl, was born in 1922, of course, myself in 1924, and my sister, Dorothy, in 1928.

SH: That is a house full of little kids. [laughter]

JR: And we had a lot of fun. ... My stepfather, especially, he was much oriented toward children. ... He had a tent, a very large wall tent, and we would set this up someplace, and that would be there until we decided we'd move it somewhere else, and just draw the string shut. There wasn't [any] trouble with pilfering or anything. Everybody was very much honest. The houses weren't locked. We would come home, sometimes, and the smokestack was working and we'd go in and the dinner or supper would be nearly finished. ... The people who had come would go in and fix everything up for us, mostly kinfolk. ... The boys, we would keep the table supplied, meat-wise. So, that was a saving. We all were very good rifle shots, and we also did fishing and gigging and [caught] frogs, that sort of thing.

SH: Is gigging frogging?

JR: Gigging is, [with] a gig you used ... for frogs, this would be, usually, a three-pronged fork with a long handle, you threw it like a spear. Well, I had a thirty-five-pound, lightweight bow and arrow. So, I'd take a broadhead and drill two holes in it, close together, and my father, my stepfather, had saltwater fishing gear and all, and I'd take two large hooks, straighten them out, cut the eye end off and insert them in this broadhead. ... Then, I would drill sideways with a hole that would enter half on the one side and half on the other, put a pin in and pin it over. This would keep it from pulling out, and with this rig, I increased the range. You had to be pretty close with a gig, but, with the bow and arrow, ... maybe, [from] twenty, thirty feet, I was pretty dead on, you know, and [could] take a frog, the bullfrogs. ... Crystal City is in a bayou-type country, and the bullfrogs, especially, get very, very large, and we ate another frog, which was a leopard frog, which they were pretty nice. They were eleven or twelve inches, usually, [in] length, if you spread it out, but a bullfrog, you picked one up, now, you had some weight in your hands. When they're sitting, they'd be this broad, this tall.

SH: We are talking, like, twelve inches-by-eighteen.

JR: What is, the bullfrog? Oh, a bullfrog, some of them would go almost, oh, a good eighteen inches, two feet sometimes, on a really big one, if you stretched it out. ... Underneath their mouth, [the throat area], is a white membrane, they blow this up when they're singing, [laughter] and that was real white. Well, with ... a light, and my stepdad had rigged up a light with a car battery, and you'd go along the shoreline, you know, looking, and, here, this would show up real bright and that's what you aimed for. ... We kept the table [stocked] with, oh, birds or deer meat, ... we didn't eat the possums. We ate raccoons.

SH: Did you really?

JR: Yes. ... The possum, I had too much familiarity as to where you would find them, [laughter] ... and squirrels and ... fish of various kinds. We used to take our; we had this little cartop boat that my stepdad had provided. ...

SH: Flat-bottomed?

JR: Yes, and it was just a pram. It's blunt on both ends, and we would [get in], the three of us, and we would go down the river. ...

SH: Which river are we talking about?

JR: Well, ... there was a bunch. Anywhere you traveled then, from Crystal City, it wasn't very far to walk, but the Nueces was the main river that traversed there, about two or three miles out of town, ... but you'd go down the river getting squirrels. ... When they hit the water, why, you paddle real good, before they get saturated, you know, and we could collect a pretty good bag of squirrels that way. Cleaning them was quite easy. We rigged up, in the washhouse, which was near the house, and, on a shelf, ... we put two nails up from the bottom and you put the legs, stab them onto the nail and you cut the squirrel around the middle, the skin that is, and you take the skin off one end, turn it around, take the skin off the other end, and ... with three of us working, why, we could go through a dozen or two dozen squirrels in just a little while, cleaning.

SH: How was this cooked? Did your mom make a stew?

JR: She used them, ... stew, fry them, and I never ate a roasted one, but a stew-type thing. ... Squirrel stew is really good.

SH: Is it really? [laughter]

JR: Yes, and my mother was an excellent cook.

SH: How do you cook the frogs?

JR: Usually, they fry them, and, if you order one in a restaurant, why, that's the way you'll get it. Most likely, it's fried.

SH: Stephen and I have to say, we have never ordered frog, or squirrel. [laughter]

JR: Well, if you fry them, you'll be a little leery about it, because they'll twitch ... around in the pan when you fry them. [laughter] If our take was low one night, or something, and we only had a few, why, we'd skin the whole frog and you'd ... have the four legs and some meat in the carcass, and you'd get all of the leg meat. When you cut the leg off, you cut them around the middle and you sometimes leave some of the flesh in the frog. But, we did very well on meat and birds. The meadowlark, around the house, they were thick. They're in big flocks, and my brother, Earl, especially, he was a very excellent shot and, with .22s, ... he would sometimes take out the cartridges he wanted. My mother had an old-fashioned sewing machine, as well as she had a Singer portable type of sewing machine, but, in this old-fashioned machine, you know the little drawer that tilts down? ...

SH: Actually, I do.

JR: Yes. We would ... keep our ammunition there. We'd buy this, mail order, from Montgomery Ward, and it would cost, like, a dollar-and-ten cents for a carton of ten boxes, [of] which there's fifty, in each box. ... So, we had plenty of ammunition, but he would just, sometimes, count out what he wanted and that's all he would take with him. ... He would bring back that many birds, minus maybe one or two shells, and he would only shoot them in the head, because, if you shoot one in the body, you've just about lost it, [laughter] and so, that worked out very well.

SH: Could you go back a little bit and talk about your mother and your father and their backgrounds?

JR: Oh, back before, yes. Well, my mother was of Dutch-German extraction. My grandfather, her father, was a man by the name of Hidy. He was a descendant of a Hessian soldier who had deserted and stayed in America after the Revolution. [Editor's Note: Hessian soldiers were German mercenaries who fought for the British during the American Revolution.] ... He was a farmer and he had a very large farm in Ohio, and my grandmother was a Dutch lady from Holland, and so, my mother was, you might say, [of] German extraction, very much, and she was an excellent cook. ... My grandmother had taught her, my mother told me when she was six years old, my grandmother gave her a piece of fabric to make a dress for herself. ... After she had made it, she had to wear it. My mother learned well and was an excellent tailor and seamstress, ... this enlarged our earnings, because she made clothing for a lot of the better-to-do women in the town. ... She would draw on a piece of paper, usually a paper bag, a brown paper bag spread out, or a white paper bag ... spread out, and she would keep drawing ... whatever the women wanted, you know. ... Especially, back then, why, women wore lace around the cuffs and lace around the neck. This, my mother would make by tatting, ... but, when she had finally decided on the design, ... she would draw sketches for them, and, when they'd finally decided on a design and the trimming, why, my mother would make the dress for them. I don't know how much she charged for this. ... For me, when I was about five years old or so, ... from one of my

father's old, castoff suits, she made me a double-breasted suit with a vest and two pairs of pants, and that didn't last long, of course. I was growing, you know, [laughter] but it was very [nice], I thought, and, when I was in school, why, I could, for thirty cents, ... get two yards of shirt material and my mother would make me a shirt, and they fit, where store-bought shirts would not fit you, maybe, around the collar or anything, or lay like. These would fit perfectly, front and back. ... For trousers, there was a tailor in town, whom I used to throw papers to and became acquainted with, and, for two dollars, I could get enough, ... oh, an end piece or something, and my mother would take this and tailor me a pair of pants. Well, later, when I was at my father's and working, ... he paid me fifteen dollars a week, plus kind, and Harry Melby was the tailor, a good friend of the family, and he made me a suit, double-breasted, two pair of pants. ... When I was there for the fitting, I was wearing a pair of trousers my mother had made. Well, Harry was busy measuring and all and this, and he said, "That's a nice, well-fitted pair of pants." I said, "Yes, it should be. My mother made it." Well, boy, he really looked it over then, ... I got that suit for sixty dollars.

SH: Oh, my.

JR: ... He was a very good tailor. He made a very nice [suit]. I lost the suit during the war. ... My sister, Dorothy, was at home and that suit was material, because they couldn't buy material, [they] used up whatever clothes I left at home, making over to [new clothes]. ... My dad was in World War I. He was a pilot, a fighter pilot.

SH: Really?

JR: ... That was in the beginning. That was his entry, and, when he was finished training, why, ... a bunch of French officers came over to check out the cadets. ...

SH: Where was he training? Do you know?

JR: Yes, in San Antonio, at; what do they call that? It's a big base, [South San Antonio Aviation Camp, later, Kelly Air Force Base]. ...

SH: We can add that later.

JR: Yes, and this was just, at that time, ... a big field. There were no runways or anything. You just landed whichever way the windsock told you to land. Well, ... when it was his turn, with this check-out fellow, ... the officer rode in the front cockpit. These were (OX5s?), Canadian-built aircraft. The Jennys, [the Curtiss JN-4s], they wouldn't fly, because they were too dangerous. They were in crates around the field. [laughter] ... [They] did firing practice at targets on the ground and made whatever maneuvers the guy wanted and all. ... He said, "Everything went very well." He said, "I was real pleased with myself, so, I came in for the landing," and he said, "Touchdown was real nice, and then, I waked up in the hospital." [laughter] It seemed the wheels fell into a bad place and it flipped and broke up, right where my dad was, but the Frenchman, he was up under the wing and protected pretty well. He ... wasn't damaged, but Dad was in the hospital for awhile. ... So, during that time, the group that they had come to checkout shipped out. Well, my dad, when he got out of the hospital, why, he had

been helping, during his training, with the director of the first Signal Corps Band. It was being formed at that time. Well, it's still the national band. ... My dad could play or teach just about any of the instruments, wind instruments, and all, he was his assistant and that's what his title was. He was a captain when he was discharged, and his uniform was not military. I mean, I've seen this uniform, which, of course, he kept, but it was white, gold trim. ... Oh, it's a very fancy thing, but that was some of his dreaming up and that's what they did. ... The bandmaster, the fellow that was in charge, well, he had a very fancy rig. ... So, when he was discharged, that was his discharge rating. ... He was a lieutenant, first, and then, he was a captain before he was discharged.

SH: Did he stay right there in El Paso?

JR: ... That was in San Antonio.

SH: In San Antonio, that is what you said. I apologize.

JR: Yes, and, during this time, while he was there, why, he met my mother. My mother was going to college and she was also a pianist. From age six on, she was a pianist. ... I don't know how they met, but he had a little jazz orchestra that he had started ... amongst his fellows in the band, and they would play around for their dances and things, in the military. ... While he was there, he started a driverless taxi, business, the first that I ever heard of. This [was] in San Antonio, and that's what it was called, the San Antonio Driverless Taxi, like they have rental outfits now. ... That's what he did. He rented vehicles for GIs and all, just like they run them now. Well, he, himself, ... liked racing and that sort of thing. ... He married my mother there, in San Antonio.

SH: Was your father from Texas?

JR: My father was born in Colorado, Breckenridge, Colorado, ... in 1899.

SH: Were they miners in Breckenridge?

JR: Oh, yes. ... The whole Colorado Rockies were mining, and would you like a little information about his childhood?

SH: Sure, because, then, we can meld them together now.

JR: Okay. Well, he was nine years old when his mother died. We found [out that] she took ill. Why, then, they needed medicine. Why, the only place they would get the medicine was down at 'Frisco. This was Breckenridge. It was up river. That was the Green River, and he would ice skate, in the winter, from there, down the river, to 'Frisco, and back, to get the medicine for her, and then she died. ... My grandfather, he was a mining engineer, and it was shortly after this that ... he moved to Nevada. ... My dad, of course, and I don't think he finished anything more of schooling while he was in Breckenridge; he was apprenticing with the blacksmith. ... When automobiles came along, of course, that blacksmith was the natural to be the dealer for such things. Well, my dad, he learned to drive very early. ... When he was about eleven years old,

why, he would take the train, the narrow gauge, down to Denver, about eighty miles away, and he would drive the new car back to Breckenridge. ... That's how they would acquire their vehicles. ... In other words, you couldn't ship them on trains and all back then. They didn't have trucks or anything, either, to haul them. A lot of potential investors were in the mountains, all the time, looking for places, ideal places, to be a mining enterprise or whatnot, ... they needed transportation and they would come to the blacksmith and he would send my father, age eleven, and he would drive them. Well, cars then were not too sturdy. ... My dad would have all the parts and stuff he thought he needed, extra, along with him, and he had, also, the tents and cooking gear and everything, which he thought he might need.

SH: Oh, my, he was taking them out overnight then.

JR: Oh, for good periods of time, and where they were going was not really the best, as far as roads or terrain was concerned. So, like, if they broke an axle or something, why, he'd fix it right there and he would set up the tent and he would cook their dinners, or their meals, at eleven years old. So, he was a pretty self-sufficient-type fellow when he was very young. Well, they moved to Nevada, to a place called Round Mountain, and my granddad was mining engineer, for the mine. ... On one occasion, there was a festival in Goldfield, Nevada. ... The main town, actually, in Nevada, at the time, biggest town, this town had over twenty-five thousand people and there was a stunt flyer at this show and Papa was very keen[ly] interested. He didn't get to fly with the guy or anything, but he, the guy, showed him all around his airplane and that lit the fire in Papa's head [about flying] and later, then, why he went into the ... first Signal Corps cadet training in San Antonio, Texas. That was where the air arm was of [the military], at that time. So, Goldfield, that was the name of the town.

SH: Goldfield, okay.

JR: Yes, very large town, had a large hotel, old-fashioned, of course, but I've seen this. I've been in this hotel, when I was stationed in Tonopah, which was not far from ... Round Mountain. We would always know we were near Tonopah if you see the steam columns rising, making clouds. ... That was at Round Mountain. There was a hot springs there. My dad said they used to picnic there a lot. ... The meats and all, you [would] take them in a bag, a mesh bag, and hang them in the hot springs, that's how you would cook them. ... In the wintertime, when I was there flying you'd see the steam clouds. ... It wasn't very far from the Tonopah Base. ... My dad, then, after the war, he still had this business in San Antonio. Well, he had a racecar built. He liked road racing and he had one built, custom engine and all.

SH: Wow.

JR: ... The car had room for two, side-by-side, the one for the driver and one for the mechanic and map fellow. ... For three years in a row, he was the Southern Circuit Road Racing champ.

SH: Really? [laughter]

JR: Yes. ...

SH: Was this after he met your mother?

JR: ... Well, they were married ...

SH: Married at this time, okay.

JR: Wait; he got married ... there, at wartime. ... Well, my sister, Eugenia, ... was born in 1920.

SH: Okay. That is right. You did tell us that.

JR: But, after she was born he had a hole cut. This [model] had a tail on them, like you see in old racers and cars, and he had a hole cut in there and a seat built and upholstered, and that's where they would carry my sister, Eugenia. [laughter] ... He used it for pleasure, the racecar, and they would be quite a sight, motoring about the town or country. [laughter] ... He sold his business in, oh, somewhere between '20 and '24 and bought a dealership, Chevrolet dealership, that is, he installed one. He built one, at Crystal City, where my mother was from, originally. ... He got rather well-acquainted, during his rental car business, with General Motors, that's what cars he was using, in his driverless taxi business. ... Crystal City didn't have a Chevrolet dealership at this time, and so, he built one, with General Motors, and he was running this when I was born. So, I was introduced, very early on, with garages and stuff. Well, this went on for awhile and General Motors, then, they wanted Dad to be a field representative that would go into these small towns and build a dealership, on somebody else's money, of course. ... Then, he would show them the ropes of running the place and all, and then, we would move the next school [year], summer. When we were out of school, we had moved to another town and do the same thing over again. That's how we wound up in Lordsburg, [New Mexico]. ... There was a man who had a freight business, a motor freight business and wanted to start a dealership. When he was building this dealership, he had to build buildings then, because there wasn't anything suitable otherwise. So, Dad ... oversaw the construction of the building, and then, installed [the dealership]. Fowler, his name was Fowler, Fowler Freight. ... About this time, the Great Depression set in, ... while we were in Lordsburg. Well, the field people were the first that General Motors would be cutting off. So, Papa was out of a job. ... At about this same time, a man by the name of Oleny, Claude Oleny, he wanted to buy [the dealership]. He had a freight outfit, too, and Fowler's location would be ideal for him, but there was, of course, the dealership. Well, he had ... no familiarity with dealerships at all, but he bought the place and my dad ... operated the shop, the garage. So, they went along for a few years, until Claude decided that wasn't for him, but he retained the part of the installation that was the freight business, the docks and the warehouses and offices, stuff like that. ... My dad, then, had bought the whole thing from Claude, in the dealership. So, my dad, then, became the dealership and the garage owner and all, and that's when I come into the picture. ... I would be in the shop, cleaning parts and keeping the tools in order and all that sort of thing. ... The shop was only about two blocks, or less, from the grade school where I was attending. ... Well, during this time, [with] World War I fellows and the hard times coming on, ... they [the government] passed a bill that our veterans could get a square mile of land and so much money. I don't know how much money they got. They had to improve the land. ... Like, they had to fence it, build a dwelling on it and that sort

of thing. Well, Papa, he did this, took this homestead. It was the Homestead Act of that era. ... Eventually, we moved onto the place. This was twenty-some miles out of Lordsburg.

SH: Was this still in Texas?

JR: In Lordsburg, New Mexico.

SH: New Mexico, okay.

JR: [Yes], and we moved onto the place. ... My mother's a very adaptable woman. She's very proficient at a great many things, and the building was a small, little building. It had two rooms. The one room was a kitchen and eating [area], the other room was a living room, sleeping room, and so forth. ... It had a pitched, metal roof, corrugated metal roof, and the workers, in building the place, put steps nailed across two of the studs. The studs were open in the living room part. Just boards, tongue-and-groove boards, ... on the kitchen side. On the living room side, they put a ladder, nailed a ladder onto the studs. ... They floored the space up above, and so, my brother, Earl, and I, that was our bedroom. You could almost stand up in the middle, to get dressed, and then, we had pallets on either side on the floor. ... Back then, apple boxes were made of wood, very nice boxes. They were dovetailed like this, all around and all. They were a nice, solid box. So, I stacked two of these boxes up on the living room end of ... my space and that was where I'd keep my clothes and stuff. Well, I had learned to read, by this time, in school and all and I was very fascinated, especially with history. ... Mother gave us each a candle, one of the white ones. She got these by the cardboard box and, once a week, we each got a new candle. Well, Jeanne and Earl, Dorothy was quite young, ... but Jeanne and Earl would give me their stubs when they got a fresh one, so that I had plenty of candles. ... I would read then, when I was in bed, and, while we were there, ... we would go to work with my dad, had to go to school, which was early, and then, when we got out of school, we would go to the Berrys'. ... That was their last name and they were the keepers of the prison, the jail, ... which was in the basement of the courthouse. Well, also in the basement of the courthouse was a library, the only one in town. So, it was real handy, and there was a book of history. This was about, oh, ten or twelve volumes on one shelf. Well, in the course of time, I read through that. This was very, very ancient history all the way up to; I don't know how far it went up. ... This was fascinating, and the upshot of it all was my eyes were suffering from it. So, eyeglasses, well, I didn't need them, except [for] reading, and playing and all, and we played pretty hard and baseball and whatnot, and, of course, I would then put them in my pocket. Well, then, after sitting down on a pair a time or two and having to buy new ones, then, I decided maybe it's all right without them. ... My eyes, actually, after I [got] older, they improved very much.

SH: Really?

JR: Yes. So, I didn't wear glasses for a long time, after that, but we had a lot of fun there. Those were real fun days. The antelope would come to the house for water. ... On this tin roof, they had gutters that led to the sides of the house. They drained into wooden barrels on each side and that would catch ... the rainwater. This would supplement our water on the place, because, when they had built all this, then, they drilled the well and the well turned out to be copper water; poison. So, they had already built the water tank, elevated. ... Dad would hire tank

people who hauled water for such a situation, and they would come, once in awhile, to fill the tank overhead. But, every night, Dad would [bring]; when, in the morning, my mother set out the empty five-gallon galvanized tins, and he'd bring them home full of water. That was for cooking and drinking, but emergencies; if you wanted your hair washed and whatnot, why, you could use the rain drippings, and the antelope were very quick to find this. ... I remember, one day, especially, we were outside. ... I was in a high chair and Mother was cutting my hair and a group of antelope came up to the house. ... They stopped short, and, pretty soon, a doe, they would send a doe out and she would go up and drink her fill, and then, she'd go back and they'd send another up, another, another, and that's the way they would get their water. [When] we were in the yard, when us kids were playing outside, they didn't bother [going in turn]. They would go ahead and get their drinks. [laughter] One thing that was a fun time there was, my sister, Eugenia, she was the oldest and she kind of nursemaided all of us. With ordinary, English-type walnuts, you could split them right on the seam and you clean out all the membranes inside and you have a shell for; you can do whatever you will. Well, we would, after a rain, especially, ... she would take us, Earl and I, and we'd go out from the house, and especially where the water flow had been, around bushes and whatnot, and you'd find little drifts of debris. We had a couple of magnifying glasses, like you use for reading glasses, and we would find a place and you'd get down on your hands and knees and look in this and you'd find very tiny, little plants. Well, with your pocketknife, or with a sharpened stick, ... you'd lift out the dirt a little with the plant and you'd put it in your shoebox. ... When you get back to the house then, you, with tweezers and with sticks, you would build, inside this half shell, you would make your little garden. ... You would water this with an eyedropper, with a little water and all, and they'd grow and we'd watch them grow with our magnifying glass, and some of them even ... would have a flower. ... Well, of course, they all probably did, everything has a reproducing system, and that was a real fun thing. In hunting, of course, we were hunting there, too, ... the day we were moving, we stopped by some friends and they had sheep and angora goats and they raised their own sheep dogs. They had a new litter, and so, they gave us the smaller one, that's the one we chose, and we called her Stubby. Well, she grew, right away, into a very nice dog, and the shepherd, sheep dogs, [are] a very smart strain that has been developed among those people, and Stubby just knew about everything, without too much from us. Well, we would go hunting and my brother, Earl, would get on one side of a sand draw, a little, small sand draw, and I on the other, and he would send Stub out and she would go upstream, of the sand draw, of course, there was no water, and then, he would signal her and she'd cut in and she would come down just bushes-to-bushes, bushes-to-bushes, down that streambed. ... If there was a prairie hen, and that's usually [the case], we would hear her, that's why we would choose that draw, here, that prairie hen would come with the neck real high and just struggling, and that was an easy shot. [laughter] ... They weren't real plentiful, ... but we could hunt it that way and Mother would make a supper out of it.

SH: Amazing.

JR: Yes.

SH: How close was the school to your homestead?

JR: Twenty-three miles to town.

SH: You would go into town with your dad and ...

JR: Come home with him. ... There were the Berrys. Wallace was his name, and I don't remember her name, but they gave us, during that time, a black Russian hare. It was small. This rabbit kept growing. That's the largest rabbit I've ever seen in my life. ... That's the only thing I know, is black Russian. That's the breed, but it was totally black, not a speck of any other color on it. I should relate something else here. My mother took pneumonia bad while we were there, and so, she was put in a hospital in town and one of the three sisters, ... that should come into the story later, but she was a seventeen-year-old girl, and she came and stayed with us children and fed us and made [things], and she was a delightful person. ... I remember, one day, her making divinity, [a nougat-like candy], for us, and that was [our] first introduction to it. Well, we didn't have electricity and she made this with one of those hand mixer things. ... She told us to be very careful, because she would have to pay a lot of attention to what she was doing in order to make it. Well, she did. It was very nice, a real treat to us kids, but ... my mother wasn't doing a whole lot better, nor [showed] improvement or anything. ... The hospital was a railroad hospital, but Dr. DeMoss, ... he had been sent from New York. He moved there because of his health problems, which they improved, and he established his work there. He was our doctor and he had his own little clinic at his house, just next-door, and so, my dad went to see him. The railroad doctor that was attending my mother was not too attentive, I guess, and my dad was worried. So, he went to Dr. DeMoss and Dr. DeMoss went with him to the hospital and examined my mother. Well, he didn't make any bones about it. My dad picked her up in his arms and they exited the hospital, took her to Dr. DeMoss's place. Dr. DeMoss was somewhat crippled up and he couldn't do a lot of that sort of thing. ... There, at his place, why, my mother very quickly got well and it was shortly after this, I guess, we were there at the homestead. ... You had to be there for either a year or six months, dwell on the place before you get title, and I think it was a year.

SH: It was.

JR: Well, it wasn't much after that that we moved back to town, and the house that we rented was sort of on the bank of what they called the "Big Ditch," which came down through town. There was a little ditch, also, but the "Big Ditch" was a big ditch, and we were right near there. ... There was an alley between the houses and that was the walkway for most everybody. Across the alley, a Chinese family moved in. They had two older [children], a girl and a boy. Robert was his name. I don't remember [hers], but (Dong Lee?) was their ... name, Robert (Dong Lee?), and we would go to school together. They were older than we, but they were new, ... [and] they were very bright. They had been schooled in China. ... We would walk the alley and they would, each day, ... when they left home, ... have an egg with a hole pierced in it and the contents stirred up inside, and they would eat this on the way to school. They offered us children [some], but we always found us [laughter] a way of excusing ourselves. ... The miners and cowboys would all come to town on Saturdays and, of course, they would all have a big bash and they would be walking the alley ... and in "that state," of course, in the wee hours, probably. ... So, on the way to school, we would very often find coins and whatnot. One time, my brother found a five-dollar bill, and that would supplement our candy money. [laughter] ...

SH: Seriously.

JR: Yes. ... Stubby and the black Russian were good friends.

SH: Thank heavens. [laughter]

JR: ... After we had moved back to town, the rabbit was getting very large, but, when he wanted outside to do his thing, he would go on to the screened porch and make [Mr. Richards imitates a rustling noise] on the floor, so somebody'd open the screen door for him. When he'd come back, he'd ... give you the signal on the screen. When he wanted a drink of water, he would go to the sink, and the sink, [in] an old house, was free standing, and he would go to the sink and he'd stand up with his paws on the sink. Now, he was that big, and then, he would pound on the floor with his rear feet. You'd go give him a drink of water. ... Stubby, when the two of them were outside, we always had a big, huge pile of firewood and they would play, sort of a hide-and-seek thing. The rabbit chased the dog or the dog chased the rabbit, you know, and ... very amusing for us children. ... I was eight years old, third grade, and my mother and father divorced. The lawyer, he took each of us children, separate, one at a time, and he says to me, "Where do you want to live, with your father or with your mother?" I told him, "Both." Well, they finally settled the issue. A year with Mom, a year with Dad, a year with Mom; well, we were trading kids every summer. I didn't see a whole lot of my older sister, Jeanne, during these years, because we were switching. ... Brother Earl and I would be together, and Dorothy [was] too young. She never did. Well, once, she did, but that was later. ... We would take the train, go to Lordsburg. When we'd get time to switch again, we'd take the train back. ...

SH: Where was your mother living?

JR: Crystal City.

SH: Okay, and your father was in Lordsburg.

JR: Yes. My grandmother had had a house built on her property, and that's a whole story we won't get into, but that's where we lived, there in Crystal City. Us boys, ... during the summers especially, why, we'd hire out, ourselves, to some farmer or rancher or somebody, to make extra money. My mother was the distributor for our county of the ... welfare-type thing that FDR installed back then. (*Boates?*), that's the Spanish word for, "Groceries." She was (*boates?*) distributor for the whole county.

SH: Was this a county position or a federal position?

JR: ... This was a federal position. She got fifty-six dollars a month. That was pretty good, for the times.

SH: Was this going on between 1932 to 1933?

JR: ... '33 is when we moved back to Crystal City, so, it was from then. She knew various people, and then, she supplemented that with her dressmaking and we took in washing. ... Us

boys would do the washing and the girls would do the ironing, and so, there was extra money there. ...

SH: Was there ever a time when the four of you were able to be together with either parent?

JR: Yes. I was at my dad's from freshman year and, when I went back, I told Dad, going back, [that] I didn't like Lordsburg High School at all, and I told Dad that I wanted to stay in Crystal City and get my diploma. Okay, well, Jeanne was still alternating, but I was at home then, with Mother, when she [Eugenia] was at home for that year. So, we got acquainted pretty good. ... Of course, ... growing up together, we were acquainted, but I was around her at this time, and she ... had graduated and she was a very efficient person. She typed, on old-fashioned typewriters, about ninety words a minute, and she could take dictation with both hands. She was left-handed, and, of course, in school, they forced her to use her right hand. So, she became proficient with the right hand, and I have seen her demonstrate, occasionally, as an amusement, when we'd have a bunch together, and, with a pad here and a pad here, pen in hand, someone dictating, slowly, and she was writing them both.

SH: Oh, my word.

JR: And then, she could read them both to you, shorthand, which I thought quite a feat, you know. [laughter] ... I didn't know shorthand at all. I didn't have that in school. ... While we were there, ... my sophomore year, in Crystal City, [I] got hooked up with Francis. His first name was Francis, French people, and he was the paper distributor, but he also had a bicycle shop. So, he fixed me up, ... with a route, throwing papers, and the first route was only thirty-five papers. ... He fixed me up with a bicycle, and so, I began throwing papers. Well, they moved, and he had sold out to a woman, and so, I was working for her. Well, when fellows would either graduate, move away, or something, there'd be another route open. ... It wasn't but a short while, I had the whole town, for the *San Antonio Express* and the *San Antonio Evening News*, both papers. The *Evening News* only came out in the morning. Isn't that silly? and the *Express*, then, was morning and evening. So, I would throw the two. Most of my customers ... wanted the *Evening News*, because it had the sports. It was really a sports paper ... but no Sunday issue, just six days, but the *Express* had a big, fat Sunday issue. That was a plague. The bicycle was an old service bike. It was a used bike. ... I had ... the paper carrier made for the back. The ones you buy at the store were just pressed tin, and paper bags, weighted, would tear that up in just a little while. So, I went to the blacksmith and he made me one, all welded up out of iron rod and braced off of the axle. ... For this I got the biggest bags I could get, made the rack big enough for them, and a canvas cover fastened on the front board across, and this [was ideal] for in the rain; I could close it off. ... I pedaled, I had a little counter that was mounted on the hub, counted miles, and I rode at least fifty miles every day, on that heavy, old bike. So, I was developing some pretty good legs. [laughter]

SH: You think so? [laughter]

JR: And I had, at first, ... Double Eagle Goodyear tires, wide tread, and this was on the front and the back. Well, this made it kind of not as responsive with your hands free, because I'm folding papers, you know.

SH: While you are pedaling, you are folding the paper.

JR: Yes, and I fold the paper, this went over and this would lock them, so that you have a sort of a triangle thing. It's dished somewhat. Well, this was very aerodynamic, and so, you could throw them to good targets. ... One house, in particular, was a Baptist preacher's home and orange trees on either side of ... where the walk went up, so that it concealed the porch which was my target. ... I learned, as soon as I was approaching the drive, ... I would come under the edge of the orange tree, I would fling it and it would go up and into the porch.

SH: Just the perfect little roll-over.

JR: Yes, and I could see, as I passed by, if it landed where I intended it. If it should miss, why, I could stop and go take care of it, because I always delivered my papers in the dry, rain or shine. Well, this day, I'd come up, made my pass ... the same, and, as I passed by and could see the porch, there, beside the door, sat his mother, in a rocking chair. Oh, it didn't strike her; it hit the door beside her. Of course, it startled her pretty bad. [laughter] I had to apologize for that, but a few little incidents like that would go on, you know. One delivery was a second-story apartment. Well, I could throw that one and it would land at the door. ... When it hit, I know. Well, this particular morning, it was a heavy paper, like a Friday. Well, I tossed it and, crash, I hear glass breaking. Well, they delivered milk, [in] those days, in glass bottles. Well, I went to apologize. ... They said, "That's all right. That's all right." Everybody was very friendly to me. So, I got by that one. [laughter] On another occasion, I delivered to the hospital, there in Crystal City, and there were two entrances. They were both on the same side of the building, but, the main entrance, and then, there was another entrance toward the back of the building; this was [for] nurses and deliveries and stuff went there. Well, I would throw this paper and it would [land] right up against the screen door of the place. Well, this particular day, it went above. The bottom of the screen door is about a foot high or so. Well, instead of hitting the board, it went through the screen, which was a pretty old, rotten-type screen, and down the hallway, which the door was open, because of the heat, and so, I had to go up. [They said], "Well, that's all right. That's all right. The screen needed replacing anyway," you know. So, I even got by on that one. [laughter]

SH: Talk about delivery, right to the office. [laughter]

JR: So, one other incident was, ... I played in the band, [the] high school band, and I played trombone, my father's old trombone. ... This was a specially made instrument my father had built by F. E. Olds, the old man. F. E. Olds did this himself, of the Olds Music Company. ...

SH: O-L-D-S, right?

JR: O-L-D-S.

SH: O-L-D-S, okay.

JR: ... Yes, I believe that's the way it was spelled. ... It [the trombone] had special bore on the tubing and the bell was six inches, instead of seven inches, like all [the rest], and it was silver and had no supports, except where it joined the tube at where the mouthpiece area was, so that it was a very ... melodic instrument, took very little air to operate it. You could hold it in your lap on pauses in the music, and you could feel it responding to the music.

SH: Really?

JR: Yes. It was a very nice instrument. Well, we had a picnic ... in our senior year, and we went to the ... Happy Hollow, on the Nueces River. At that point, the Nueces is very slow and, at that particular point, it's about sixty feet deep. Well, there were several small rowboat-type things. ... We were all swimming and having fun and everything and cutting-up. That was the undoing of it, but we'd dive out of the boats and all. Well, this particular girl, one of my classmates, ... she dove off, but she came up under one of the boats and, of course, ... it made a noise and all. They heard that. So, they began looking for her. Well, we didn't find her. So, the divers came from town, with the regular, old-fashioned diving suits, and they began searching. Well, they loaded us kids all up, took us back to town, and they found the girl. She was hugging a tree, underwater, like, as if she thought, I guess, it was something. ... That didn't make a very pleasant outing out of that. Oh, one other incident, I guess; on my stepdad's father's farm ...

SH: Your mother has remarried.

JR: Oh, yes. She remarried when I was in fifth grade in Lordsburg, during that time, but, when I went home it was my first introduction to him. My mother had been giving music lessons to his only son, Bob, and that's how they got acquainted. Well, she eventually married him, and he was a grand guy. I really liked him. ...

SH: You were talking about an incident. You had told us about the girl.

JR: Oh, yes. ... My stepdad, he had a four-wheel trailer. (That's why we would load up all our gear when we knew we were changing the tent location.), but he had been a restaurant owner in Detroit, and, when he and his wife divorced, he came to Crystal City. ... He had a Duesenberg, open touring [car], at the time, and that was a pretty nice rig. ... Because of experience on the ship home, he was cooking for the fellows and all, but, during the war, he was ... an artillery battery commander in the war. ... When that got destroyed, he was a driver for a general, the guy who was in charge of the war over there. ... When the war was over, they were sort of stranded. ... There were farm fields near their camp and they would [be] denuding the farm fields of cabbage, and other stuff that was the really principal thing they had to live on. Well, there was a supply train that came right nearby, and so, they got the idea they would go and ... they'd hop the train while it was moving, and the trucks would drive along the side, and they would break open a car and get grub. [laughter]

SH: There is more than one way to get your supplies. [laughter]

JR: ... They wintered over that way, and then, when they did get transportation to the ship, he volunteered for the kitchen, because he liked to eat, and so, he worked in the kitchen as a cook.

... In Crystal City, ... he and Mother bought a restaurant, a little hamburger joint, downtown, right downtown. ... "The Red Onion," but it was just short orders and the hamburgers, and so, the boys would help out, you know, washed, wait, anything. ... Later, then, he sold this and he bought, with a partner, the Triangle Inn, which was where highways came together, just at the edge of town, and this was a German-type pub. ... The men [who] were regular customers had individual steins, which they [kept] on shelves behind the [bar], and outside was a beer garden. With the shrubbery and everything, there were little table settings, you know, around all, so, it's kind of semi-private like. ... During this time, the Wiley's, who were neighbors to us in town, had two daughters and a boy, R. B. Wiley, and the oldest girl, she was waiting table at the Triangle Inn and Bar and it seems that she and the other partner had this thing going. The partner and his wife lived over the restaurant, the wife got wind of this, of course, and, in the course of time, why, she was waiting and she saw her, Ruth Wiley, go upstairs, while, a little while later, he went upstairs. So, then, she went upstairs and she found them in bed together. So, she, quietly, with a twenty-five-caliber, automatic Colt, goes up behind them and shoots him in the back of the head. Well, she then was the owner, half-owner, of the place. So, my stepdad, sold out to her. That's when he went to the Red Onion, the burger place in town.

SH: The woman was not convicted of killing him.

JR: Oh, no. My high school history teacher urged all of us to go to the courts as often as we could, he said, "To see how America functioned." He was an American history super-buff, and so, I did this, and I went to four or five of them, anyway. ... There were feuds going on with some of the families, one killed on one side, the (Butlers?), and one on the other side, and neither one of them were punished. ... No hanging or nothing, and, with her, then, that was justifiable homicide in Texas. There's nothing, no questions asked. I mean, they just take a statement and all, but that's justifiable homicide there, and no repercussions from it with her. That's still on the books, but it's not enforced. [laughter] ... When we set-up our tent, on either a river or a lake or wherever it was, we had a four-burner wood stove, we had beds and a table, and the stove was outside. We had about a couple of sticks of chimney and, when we would leave, we'd put the bucket over the chimney, to keep the rain out, but my stepfather, when he was with us, he was a showman. Now, he could make a pancake to fit the skillet, hold this, when it was ready to turn, flip it up in the air and catch it again, not damaging the pancake. When it got ready, cooked on that side, why, he'd take a plate and he'd flip it in the air and put the plate under it. [laughter] He was a grand guy to me, and with all of us. So, we had a lot of fun that way. Now, I guess I'll relate an incident that puts me in a pretty bad light. I wasn't too much of a goodie, goodie guy, back then, anyway. ... In algebra class, and you remember those seats, old-fashioned, you have an arm with a place to write and all, and the girl in front of me was Mary Jane. ... I'll think of the name later. She wore her hair [in] great, long pigtails. She could sit on the end of them, and this particular day was; you know the slats on the back of the [desks]? One [pigtail] was on through the slat and the other was on top. I tie it in a knot. Well, Mary Jane was a quick, sort of nervous-type, really, and, when the teacher asked her something, she jumped up out of her seat. Of course, she snapped back into it right away, and the algebra teacher was my coach. He said, "All right, Richards, that'll be ten laps." So, after school, I was running laps. Well, that's two-and-a-half miles and I was beginning to get a little winded, and there wasn't a soul in sight. So, I run over to sit on the edge of the bleacher. I hadn't much more than sit down and the coach shows up. He must have anticipated I was going to do that very thing.

SH: He knew how far you could get. [laughter]

JC: And he said, "That'll be five more, after you finish those." So, I had five more laps. ... I didn't do anything like that again. I was too little for football, but I came out, and so, in scrimmage, ... our gear was not all the best anyway, but the ball was a fumble. Well, what do you do? You dive on it. So, I did, but one fellow from either side of the team was running for the ball. Well, when they got there, they were kicking at it and my head went right in-between. Well, I came to with a fellow on either side, walking me around the field, and the coach came to me and he said, "Richards," he said, "either your paper's got to go or football's got to go." Well, it was no contest. [laughter]

SH: You kept the paper route.

JR: Oh, yes, ... but I was too little anyway. Remember, this was junior scrub team. This wasn't the varsity, and that was my venture into footballing. I guess it took about three scrub practices before I went out.

SH: Were there other activities that you were involved with in high school?

JR: Yes. I ran junior track and I played baseball, junior baseball, and, in track, I did very well against my kind of competition, which was slow, but I had legs and I had wind. I could run all day. I could have run marathons, like they do now. ... Usually, a mile was all that was required, and, in baseball, I was over in right field. That's the weakest place in the game, and the track around the field, there was a cable, a metal, ordinary cable, that was suspended on boards or posts around the field, that end, where the bleachers were, just on either side, in the more or less central area. ... I'm playing in that area. That's where the baseball court was, and this one day, it was a real high fly and the sun was just in the wrong place. So, what do I do? ... You naturally run right to where the ball's going to land, right away. Well, I'm holding my hands up this way, glove in hand, and, when the ball came down, which I couldn't see, because the sun was shining in my eyes, [it] struck me in the forehead, I had backed up. ... I didn't know I was right near the cable, but this flipped me over the cable. So, that was one incident in my baseballing, but I kept baseballing all through my [school days], in junior baseball, and we were pretty good at it, as a team, with the other teams around the county.

SH: You had talked about being in the library and having read all of the history books, but were you still interested in history when you got to high school? Was that a subject that you liked?

JR: ... Oh, my, yes, yes, and (Graham?), Mr. (Graham?), was our teacher. ... In college, he had been a star basketball player, big, tall fellow, well-built man, gentle, soft-spoken. ... The first day of class, he drew our attention to a wastebasket right by the door. He said, "That's a depository for your gum as you come into class." ... He was very calm. He wasn't loud or anything. In correcting, he wasn't at all. He's just very calm. Well, you had a steno pad and that was to be your main book. We had a history book, too, but we weren't in it very much, because he lectured. We had to take notes, and he would sit on the edge of his desk, which was just about the right height for him, and lectured to us. ... Once in awhile, we'd go in [the] room, get our

pads out, ready, you know, and he'd say, "Oh, you can put your pads away." He said, "We're not having history today," and he would relate some incidents or show us a movie or something, ... and take our mind off things, I guess, or to ... relax us more. I don't know what. He did this several times during the year and, for our final exam, "Write the Declaration of Independence." That was our final exam. Well, it turns out that he and one of his college buddies, they were both great history buffs, American history, and his college buddy was a professor down at Princeton, here in New Jersey. ... They'd collaborated on a book, back before this, of American history, and it was dedicated to people who hate history and this is the most interesting book you'll ever want to read. Well, the school had a leather-bound copy that he had given the school library. ... One day that winter, it snowed and he came to school dressed in his suit and his bowler hat. He always wore this bowler hat. Well, us kids we were having a ball in the snow and it was, oh, about so deep, you know.

SH: Really? That was a big snowfall for Texas.

JR: Yes, it doesn't snow there. It's a winter garden. We raised citrus fruit and winter vegetables, but it snowed, and it had snowed once before. My mother had a picture of [her] holding me in her arms as an infant, the year I was born, the winter I was born. ... That was some years later that it snowed again, and, when Mr. Graham arrived at school, we were ready. We ganged him, down into the snow, took his bowler hat off and filled it with snow and pulled it down over [his head]. He had a ball with us.

SH: Did he really?

JR: Yes, he did. He was a great guy. [laughter]

SH: I thought you were going to be doing laps again.

JR: Oh, no, he was a wonderful fellow, yes, and I played tennis. He was the instructor, and he could serve a ball and, when it struck the court, fuzz would come off of it. He had a powerful serve. I never did get to doing that, but I got to where I could play tennis. We had six courts at school, so that we could handle a tennis class and that was fun. In the band, [we had a mascot]. At my grandfather's, my stepdad's father, at his farm, I was hunting one day and I went down and the fence was mesh with a strand of barbed wire up above, and I crawled over the fence and was going out in the woods. I came across a Javelina sow and, in Texas, these are pretty big critters. Well, behind her was a whole string of little ones, ... and so, when she appeared on the trail, I jumped into thorny brush. ... There's a thorn bush [that] grows in big patches down there, and that's about all that you see, is just the thorns. If you looked where the thorn joins the stem, there'll be two little, sort of round [things]; that's the leaves. The thorn bush itself is green, and it does the same thing as the leaf. Well, I jumped up in this thorny bush. My Levis was all I had on. ... She came up the path then, and she looked at me, didn't pay any [attention], didn't do anything. She wouldn't come in the brush, I guess. ... She went on. Well, about the ninth pig that went by, I stepped out and grabbed it. That thing squealed. So, I'm back into the thorn bush, holding this squealing pig, because she turned immediately and came back, and she looked around, but she didn't come in after me. So, when she left, then, ... I thought, "Boy, this is my chance," and the fence was right nearby. So, I ran to the fence and threw the pig over, and then,

I crawled over the fence. Then, I had to catch that pig again. [laughter] Well, I went to the house with the pig and took it back home to Crystal City. This was in Carrizo Springs, or near Carrizo Springs. Carrizo Springs was thirteen miles, across the bayou, and so, I went back in Crystal City then made a pen for him, and would feed him scraps. ... We were getting spinach scraps from the cannery; you get where they cut the [stem]. They used to harvest the whole plant, and, when they were packing it then, they'd cut off all the stem part, and ... you could have them for free and we'd feed them to the chickens and all. Well, he liked that real well, too. ... By school time's start, he was beginning to [grow], he was, oh, about so high.

SH: Two feet.

JR: ... The saddle maker in town made a harness for him. Underneath the band hall was a bus garage, and I'd tether him down there, to start with, and get him used to the band music and all. ... Then, when we thought he was getting far enough along, a young girl would lead the pig ... behind the drum major ...

SH: The drum major.

JR: The young girl would hold the [pig] with the leash, and he just kept straining at the leash, ... oh, just like he was marching, and you could almost detect a smile on that critter's face. [laughter] Well, this got to be quite a symbol that year. That was my senior year in school. ... That was senior year and after school let out, I went off to my dad's, my mother and my stepdad moved to San Antonio. War was up, you know, and my mother took a job as a secretary in Normoyle Ordnance Depot and my stepdad was manager of (O4A?) and (O4B?) at [Kelly Field, perhaps warehouse numbers]. There's that field again, where I was talking [about my father training in World War I], but it was a supply depot and he had large warehouses, several of them. [Editor's Note: Normoyle Ordnance Depot or Camp Normoyle was located adjacent to Kelly Army Airfield (later Air Force Base) and was annexed to the field in 1945. It was later known as East Kelly.] ... We lived on Ada Street, 123 Ada Street, off of South Flores Street, just around the corner. ... There was a little garage, detached, way back in the yard and a clothesline in the yard. Well, one day, ... it turns out, while I'm away at my dad's, the pig, ... had a pen, but he'd had the run of the backyard during the day, usually. Mother was out hanging clothes, ignoring the pig. Well, he was beginning to get tusks by this time and he had no provocation; he came up and practiced on my mother's leg. She had to have this surgically taken care of, and so, when I came home, they had had barbecued pig, and that was the end of the pig. [laughter]

SH: To back up, if we could, I am thinking of your history teacher and the casual conversations that he would have to break up his lectures; was he talking about current events, what was going on in Europe, what was going on in the Far East?

JR: Not usually, it would be something totally detached. One time, I know, it was Marine pictures under the [water]. It was a film strip and the people swimming around in their gear and all, and taking creatures, lobsters, crabs, that sort of thing, and eels. ... That was very interesting, but it would be something just as interesting, very interesting things.

SH: In a relatively cosmopolitan part of Crystal City, how aware were you of what was going on in Europe? I know you had a paper route and you were involved at school.

JR: Oh, yes. I had a picture, I may still have it, amongst [my collections]. I have some collections, small, but of stepdad's father, and several of ... his children, which were all grown men, and they would be hovering around the radio, listening to the war news. ... It was there that ... they learned of Pearl Harbor.

SH: What do you remember about that? Where were you when you found out about it?

JR: Pearl Harbor?

SH: Yes. You would have been a junior in high school.

JR: No, I was a senior, out of school. I was at my father's.

SH: You were at your father's.

JR: So, I graduated when I was sixteen.

SH: Okay, you snuck that in on me.

JR: ... Back then, you know, they used to put you up a grade instead of making a special class for advanced students. Now, they have special classes for people who [are] moving up, but, then they would shift you to another class, above, you know. That's no good at all, because you're the runt in the class, [so]-to-speak. ... You don't have any interaction, to speak of, with the class. There was one other girl in the same boat with me and she had been done this way. Well, we were two runts in the class, and this was sophomore, junior, senior [year], and all. ...

SH: What year did you graduate?

JR: 1941, in the spring, May.

SH: In the spring. From there, after your graduation, you go to your father's.

JR: To my father's, and I'm there when the war was declared, and, oh, there are some big stories there about us that could be related, but that's all in my childhood. You still want [to hear] some of that stuff?

SH: That is up to you.

JR: Well, ... my brother was there. ... He graduated a year before I did, my brother, Earl. ... I used to be two grades ahead of him, but I was, at that time, one grade ahead. ... We kept the shop and did teardowns and all for Dad, but Dad gave us "the Goat," we called it, and this had been a demonstrator. It was a 1938 Dodge, which, by this time, of course, there was two or three years old, ... but this one hadn't sold and it'd been kept around for a "go here, go there"-type

[vehicle]. It's a four-door sedan, Dodge. Well, he gave us that to play with, because he had gotten a new set of instruments, like they use in laboratories, for diagnostic work, and with it came a fellow to instruct us in the use of all these. There were seven individual units, and he stayed at the house, and then, at the shop, he was teaching my brother and I. He, himself, was a speed boat specialist. I mean, that was his hobby, fast hydroplanes. ... He was informing us, along in the course and all, of how you improve the operation of a vehicle or an engine, and he taught us how to rebuild a voltage regulator. It was a new thing. ... You only found them on trucks at that time. The others had a cutout on the car, at best, a two-relay relay-type voltage control, and he even taught us to make the gauges. He said, "Oh, you can buy them, but, then, we can make them a lot cheaper. Take a small piece of tubing and a drill bit the right size, and one on one end and one on the other end, so [that] this end's a go and that's a no go, when you're setting up the particular relay in the regulator." ... It was interesting, very interesting, ... but "the Goat," after he had gone and all, ... Dad had said we could practice on that then. Well, we took the engine out, and that's where we started, and stripped it all down and, on the block, ... this was a flathead engine, ... valving in the block, and we would cut the valves, inlet valve area, we cut this out with a hand lathe that was used to insert rings, hard rings. Where you have a damaged seat, well, you can bore it out with this and press in this seat ring of Stellite and face it and you have a new seat. [Editor's Note: A seat, in this instance, is the surface on which the valve rests when it is closed, forming a seal.] ... Well, we used the same thing, only we put it down, and then, with burrs and hand drills, we would grind out the openings in the inlet, from the side and from the top, so that we figured we'd gotten about as much extra room in the inlet portion of the engine as we could. ... We installed valving from the six-cylinder Chrysler engine on the inlet valve, which gave us more intake, and we tuned up the carburetors. We made all the changes and all that this fellow had suggested to us, and, oh, my, it did very well, and Papa was very pleased; when we finished, ... we went to a picnic, up in the hills, and then, he began driving it more and the performance was [excellent]. We really had it right on the ball. We even rebuilt the distributor, too. We had the charts, of course, because we had a new, for the time, distributor machine, and we could set up the advance on the distributor according to the book. ... A new one was never right, ... [if] we were on a major tune-up, that's the first thing we would do, is set up the distributor. Well, we had done that on this one. Well, it would get about twenty-seven miles to the gallon, which, at that time, was very good, on the road, and it had plenty of power for the hills and all. Papa was very impressed. That summer, 1942, he closed the shop, he didn't leave it open, ... gave the mechanics a bonus and all, and we went to Colorado to visit kinfolk, in "the Goat." We didn't take one of the new cars. ... This made him more impressed, ... on the hills and all; we still got excellent mileage and everything. He was really impressed with it. ... We were up there for several weeks, and visiting kinfolk, and we got back to Lordsburg, then that's when I decided to move to San Antonio, back to my mother's. In Lordsburg, on the draft, it was getting close to my time and, on the draft, the local fellows were going to the artillery or to the infantry, and I wanted the Air Force. I had been building model airplanes from way back, in my [childhood] and all, playing with [them]. ... So, at my mother's then, this was kind of late August, I guess, and, in the *San Antonio Express*, there was a notice that they were accepting seventeen-year-olds to take the entrance exam. ... Then, when they received their notice, they would be inducted into the Air Force, and that looked real good to me. So, I went down, took the exam, passed it, [with a] 183. ... We're starting into the war years now, and, when I reported, the induction center was Fort Sam Houston. So, I reported and there were not many Air Cadets there, candidates, so, we had to wait until they'd built up enough for a

trainload, for a single car on a train, before they'd ship us out. ... During this time, my grandmother, I got word from my family, my grandmother was ill and not expected to live. So, I went to the Sergeant Major and asked if there wasn't something they could do, that I could go, because the family wanted me to come and I wanted to go, and he said, well, ... there was no regulation, at this point, that would cover me for a furlough or anything. So, he transferred me to inactive duty. So, I was free to go to Grandmother's. When I got there, I took the bus, ... they told me that she was not at all responsive and couldn't talk. ... I went into the room and she was there with her eyes open and she saw me, and I could tell she had recognized [me]. She reached her hand out and grabbed mine, very firm, strong grip, but she never spoke a word. Next morning, she was dead, and so, when it got time for me to go back ... to the base, Margalee Deal, my cousin, and Bob Deal, she was married to Bob, they had a ranch, a very large ranch near Dilley, Texas. So, they were going to take me back to San Antonio. Well, we stopped at the ranch for the night and this was a very large spread. There were ... twenty-five hundred acres of it in cultivation.

SH: That is big.

JR: Yes, and the rest of it was given to ranching, and there was quite a lot of the rest of it. Most of the lowlands, it was brush country and big, old mesquite trees, regular Texas. ... So, in the course of the evening, after we arrived at the ranch, Mickey, that was her nickname, showed me her chaps, brand-new chaps, and then, there was a story with it. She was helping with the roundup one time and her horse bolted after a stray and she went under a limb of one of those huge, old mesquite trees. She got a very large thorn in her thigh and it broke off inside, the mesquite tree thorn is quite adverse to your system. Even a small one embedded makes a sore. Well, this thing was broken off down inside, had to be removed surgically, and the ensuing inconvenience and pain, and whatnot, convinced her, then, that maybe it was time to get chaps. Bob had been trying, all this time, for her to get chaps; oh, they were too awkward, and she didn't like that.

SH: They are hot.

JR: ... She had a new pair, brand-new pair. ... So, they took me, then, on back to my mother's. ... I reported back to base, and it was some days, yet, before they had a carload. So, we shipped out for Miami Beach, Florida, one car full of cadets, trainees, and one car full of fellows who couldn't write or read. Now, that eliminated you from the draft, being [illiterate], but you could volunteer, and these were volunteers. ... The Army had a special section for this, special training and all, would teach them to read and to write and give them training in some trade. ... These people, that's what they were wanting. These were guys that, for one reason or another, had been isolated and had not learned to [read or write]. ... I grew well-acquainted with one of them, ... after we got to Miami, and he had been a shepherd for his father. He didn't get to go to school at all. He had to tend the sheep by himself, out in the woods. Well, someone had, along the way, ... given him an old accordion, one of the big ones, and he had patched this thing up, with whatnot at hand, until it would play again. ... He would contrive tunes and all. He didn't read music or didn't know music, you know, but he could [sing]. He had a voice. ... He learned that accordion. ... They were very plaintive tunes he would play, you know, but he did very well and I ran across him later. Well, he'll come up later, but, in training, there in Miami, why, we

were barracked, billeted, in hotels. ... The Army had taken them over. Mine was the Tropics Hotel, and the drive, ... I don't recall the name of the drive that goes just behind. There's a whole row of hotels along the beach. Well, there's a street right behind, Collins Avenue. We were right across the street and this was a fairly-sized hotel, pool, of course, in the back, and the fellow I was billeted with was a permanent party fellow.

SH: Was what?

JR: A permanent party man, you know, and he had been a writer for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and other associated magazines. Well, he, in his spare time, was keeping up his work, a typewriter always rattling, whenever he wasn't otherwise occupied, and he was a real swell guy, didn't smoke, didn't drink, and he knew all the fine restaurants in town. If you went with the fellows, you went to some place that really had a bar, you know, [laughter] and it was about all there was to it, but this fellow, he didn't drink, ... and so, I had a good deal here in getting into food. Now, I had quite a lot of spending money, because of my work with Normoyle Ordnance Depot. ... I was working in a print shop seven days a week, and as much extra time as it took. Fellows were always coming and going, and, when the last fellow, other than myself, [left], I had the whole print shop to take care of.

SH: This is before you enlisted. Is that right?

JR: No, it's while I'm waiting.

SH: Oh, while you are waiting, okay.

JR: Yes, I got a job whenever I had signed up and all, and it was at the Normoyle [Ordnance Depot], started in as a messenger, but, now, I'm in the print shop, and I had one press, rotary, multilith, made the page size like a smaller section you find in the newspaper, one fold, you know. It's like a half-sheet folded and, on this, we printed the weekly newsletter. ... (Stoddard?), I think his name was, was the major in charge of the personnel section. ... Anyway, he was the fellow in charge. ... In his office, they made up the paper.

SH: Public relations?

JR: Yes, public [relations], that's it, yes. Well, the multilith is a rotary press and it has slotted drums, and these have a sort of a T-shaped slot, and the type is bronze and it fastens into these slots. Well, in the Major's office, they had two typesetting machines. Now, this, the drum, goes down and there's a typewriter keyboard and the type is in slots up above, funnels down to an arm, and this arm is put into the slots. Well, the girls made up the drums and delivered it to me. Well, I would print them then. If you had a picture insert, or anything, why, they had drums that were not all slotted, but you could ... put slots, fasten them on to the drum from inside, in sections. Well, you'd make out a section for the picture and the photo department would make up a zinc halftone and mount it, so that it could fasten it on to the drum. That's how we put pictures in, and this had a standard ink distribution system, lots of rollers, ... you used paste ink, just like, I guess, they still do that, but the paper was in rolls and it was across the aisle way from the press, and the paper went from here up overhead and down into the press, so that you had

headroom in the aisle, this all built in [the] framework and all. Well, you have tinsel everywhere, because of the static electricity, and so, mischievous me, you know, and the girl, ... dark, almost black, haired lady, very curvaceous girl, very pretty, young, well, she would bring the stuff to me for the mimeograph. ... That was the only mimeograph, model 100, ... on the place, so that ... all the special orders and stuff like that, I had to do, too. Well, she would [walk], from her office, down this aisle way, under the paper; well, if you just flipped the tinsel down, so [that] it's not touching the paper, static electricity builds up. Well, I did this one day, when I was expecting her. The scream brought everybody in the building there. [laughter]

SH: Her hair stood straight up.

JR: And I didn't do that anymore, but, oh, one day, on the mimeograph, and I was wearing a tie, long tie, everything, dressed, white shirt, and I'm leaning over to check registration. "Zip," my face hit the stencil and tore the stencil, and, of course, my shirt and me, well, I was inked up, and, after that, I wore a bowtie. [laughter]

SH: Safety standards.

JR: But, then, before I had left the place, why, the load was getting too heavy, and replacements were hard to come by. ... By the time they were looking for a job, they were being drafted, and so, they sent some girls and they brought more, oh, about seven more, mimeographs into the different areas, which I had been doing their mimeographing, and I gave the girls instructions on using them and all. So, that relieved the load a whole lot, [laughter] and then, I got my notice and everything went from that. So, I'm now back in Miami Beach and the first thing they did [was a] complete physical. Well, I'd had physicals before, ... when I entered, but was [in] top shape, but in this, boy, they were pretty thorough, and I passed everything fine, except my eyes. "The exophoria of twelve exceeds the divergence angle of eight," that's what the guy said to me. That didn't mean a thing to me. [Editor's Note: Exophoria is a tendency for the eyes to deviate outwards.]

SH: Nor me, either. [laughter]

JR: I said, "Can you explain what that is wrong with my eyes?" He said, "Well, ... the exophoria twelve exceeds the divergence angle of eight." He said, "Do you still want to fly?" Well, at the beginning, he didn't. He said, at the first exam, he told me, "Take a pencil, or your finger, and any time you have a little time, why," he said, "bring that to your eye, keeping constant, intense focus on it," he said, "and, at the end of your training, then, why, we'll check you out again, see ... how it's going."

SH: This is going to strengthen the eye muscle that you need.

JR: [In] some way, I guess. I think it's something to do with depth perception or something. ... We went all through training and we were billeted in the hotels and we did calisthenics on the beach. We did drill on the golf course, or what had been the golf course, and, for gunnery practice, they trucked us out from town to some place. It was right on the ocean. We were shooting out over the ocean, and so, when we finished, ... [we] went back through the whole

physical thing again, still no change, and the guy said to me, said, "Do you still want to fly?" I said, "Well, that's why I joined up with this outfit," and so, he said, "You have three choices." He said, "You could be a radio operator, flight engineer, or an armorer." So, I chose flight engineer. They trucked me off to Mississippi, Gulfport, Mississippi, and to mechanic's school, engineering school. This was a very excellent school. Oh, that was really good. People talk about military training, but I've seen both sides of the story, and every school I was in was super and to the point, and that one was very excellent. ... [We] received training on the whole thing, the whole aircraft, and even to repairing the airplane, the whole airplane, we got training in.

SH: Did anybody come with you to that school that you had met in Miami?

JR: No, no. All my acquaintances there were new, but ... everybody got along real well, the GIs. All GIs are pretty uniform, and I finished there and they shipped me to Las Vegas, Nevada, for gunnery training. Las Vegas, the training was primarily Sperry turrets and handhelds, upper and lower turrets, and we had ground training, ground [firing]. First, it was shotgun. ...

SH: With clay pigeons.

JR: Yes, yes, teaching lead. You had three rounds, every day. That's seventy-five birds; seventy-five shots, not birds. You didn't break all of them, usually. ...

SH: You must have been super at that, with all of your practice growing up.

JR: Yes, yes, I was tops in shotgun, for the class of twelve hundred.

SH: Wow.

JR: And the next was ground firing, machine guns, and then, we shifted to turrets. ... In the shotgun, I should have mentioned that after your clay pigeon, normal skeet-type thing, why, you switched to a vehicle which had a cage mounted in the front, about waist high. They closed the gate on you and you're standing in this [cage], and the fellow standing next to you [is] feeding the ammunition. ... The course was twenty-five shots, one circuit, and, as you drove along, a bird would come out from somewhere hidden. You didn't know which direction, of course, or anything, but you had to break it. We did this three rounds a day, seventy-five rounds, every day for a week. The shotgun, handheld, was for a week, seventy-five rounds a day. From then, we went to a turret-mounted shotgun and they had turrets set up, ... with a shotgun mounted in it, and the fellow beside [you], he's feeding the ammunition in it. Well, the birds came over a high fence, and then, after you did this for some time, the birds came out of a sixty-foot tower, and so, you shot that with the turret-mounted shotgun, and then, we went to the "Omni Theater" [a reference to modern OMNIMAX or IMAX format film theaters], I imagine that's probably where they got the idea. This, I don't remember what they called them, but they had a number of these buildings, and these were spheres, round, and inside, there was a central section here and they had six gun positions in each one of these buildings. ... There were seven ... projectors that filled the screen, which was all the inside of this. It took seven projectors to cover the screen, and that was synchronized, the guns were synchronized, ... with the pursuit passes that were being made across the screen, to register hits. ... So, you're shooting ... at simulated fighter

passes, which were actually photographs of a fellow making a fighter pass on you. So, you're learning, ... when an airplane, a fighter, is shooting at you, his course is fixed. In order for him to keep his guns bearing, he's fixed, sweeping around you, and so, you learn ... shooting in this area, and, I guess, ... I think Omni only has three screens, but we had five, five projectors on the screen. ... Then, we had our decompression chamber, which is a simulated altitude flight, and this was just a big, long tank with seats on either side, a bench. Well, for the anoxia mission, [which] was right at the last, ... they took us to a simulated altitude of forty-three thousand feet, there was a doctor in with us, as well as the instructor. So, one at a time, we practiced there using the walk-around bottle and whatnot, but, then, for the anoxia, one fellow at a time, with the instructor and the medic, [with his] doctor's bag, he's standing by, so, you remove your oxygen mask. ... You have a knee pad to write on, and you're to write, "Mary had a little lamb." So, here, I start out, "Mary had a little lamb." I was doing very well. In fact, I had a heightened sense of alertness. ... Then, here's somebody fumbling me up and putting an oxygen mask on me and everything. I said, "What's going on?" I said, "I'm fine," and the instructor told me, "Look at your knee pad." Well, it started off just fine and it wound up this way, until it went off the page, [laughter] and this was a real lesson well learned, well learned, and beneficial. ... When you're really getting that sense of heightened alertness and all, take a look at your fingers, and, if your fingernails are turning blue, get oxygen right away, even though you think, "Boy, now, I'm really [alert]," but that's to alert you to have a look. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: For now, we are going to end the interview with the promise that we will be back to continue Mr. Richards' story, beginning with the decompression chamber. This concludes this portion of the interview.

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

Reviewed by Carolyn Christiano 2/4/09
Reviewed by Jessica Ondusko 4/18/09
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/8/09
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 6/8/09
Reviewed by James F. Richards 7/6/09