

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH T. SALERNO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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MONROE TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY

MARCH 28, 2007

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Michael Perchiacca: This begins an interview with Mr. Joseph Salerno on March 28, 2007, in Monroe Township, New Jersey, with Michael Perchiacca and Shaun Illingworth. For the record, we will begin with where and when you were born.

Joseph Salerno: I was born in Newark, New Jersey, on March 10, 1925. I was born in the very room that I ... ended up growing up in, because, at that time, a midwife came in and helped my mother through the birth. I was the youngest of four boys in our family.

Shaun Illingworth: What do you know about your family's history, beginning with your father's side?

JS: Starting with my father's side or mother?

SI: Either one.

JS: Well, my mother, I'll start with my mother, because, being an Italian family, we were really a matriarchy and she, in her own way, "ruled the roost," even though my father, when it really came to a major decision, he would be the one. ... They both were born in San Costantino de Potenz, Italy, and my father had been a soldier in Italy during the war with Libya, Tripoli. [Editor's Note: Mr. Salerno is referring to the Italo-Turkish War, fought from September 1911 to October 1912, between Italy and the Ottoman Empire.] ... When World War I broke out, they recalled him, and he and about two or three of his buddies decided, hey, they'd put in one war, and so, they did what I would have done with my son during the Vietnam War. [laughter] ... We would have sent our son to Canada. ... He and his buddies got on a ship and headed to Argentina, and he had served an apprenticeship as a tailor. He was a tailor by training and trade, I guess you'd call it profession, in those days, the idea was, as long as you could do something with your hands, you're always going to earn a living. ... So, he became a tailor in Argentina essentially to miss the Korean War; pardon me, World War I.

SI: The First World War.

JS: Meantime, my mother had a sister in Newark and she [his mother] had three young boys, and so, she decided they were going to come to the United States. See, we weren't in the war yet. She came over in, I think, 1917, in steerage, through Ellis Island, and they were sponsored by ... my aunt and her husband. He was a garbage man in Newark. In those days, ... their job was to go into the yards with a hook. They'd pull the garbage cans out for you and that was one of his jobs. Then, it was a steady job and they ended up [with some capital]. He bought a six-family tenement house in Newark, and that was at 240 Sherman Avenue, [laughter] and so, that's where they were housed, [in] one of the smaller apartments, where my mother and her boys settled in. ... She went to work across the street at the Dura Lamp [Dura Electric Lamp Company], and for the boys, things were so [tough] at that point. This was [when the] war was just breaking out and all, which didn't affect them, but the kids, my three older brothers, the closest to me was my brother Pat, he was about seven, eight years older than me. So, my brother Nick was a year older than him and my oldest brother, Pete, he was, I guess, seven years older than them, whatever. He was the oldest. ... They would go down to the Newark railroad yards and pick up coal, because those steam engines all used coal. Very often, they would drop coal

along the tracks. I mean, they'd [his brothers] pick up the coal and bring it home. ... They had a pot-bellied stove and a cooking stove in the kitchen; that's how they sort of went through the winter. There was no centralized heating or anything, and, after I was born; ... oh, well, by then, my father came over. My father came over from Argentina and, because of his background, ... he would have had trouble coming through Ellis Island, being, I guess, a deserter in Italy. So, he came here first class from Buenos Aires and, of course, that brings you right to shore, and he came into the country direct, not through Ellis Island, [laughter] and he went in [to find work]. He opened his own tailor shop, which didn't work out, and then, went to work as a tailor with a firm in Irvington [near Newark, New Jersey] called (Levi?) and Fiorito, who, as an aside, had a son, Ted Fiorito, who led a band during the Big Band era, if that means anything. ... Anyhow, it was hot in those summer days, with no air conditioning and minimal fans and what-have-you. My father got on a stepstool to open a transom, fell off the stool and got hurt, and then, for some reason or another, it affected his eyes. He couldn't go back to tailoring with poor eyesight, so, my mother opened a little business, on Miller Street, right across the street from the school I was attending, Miller Street School, and she would make sausage and hot dogs. ... [The] business did all right, well enough to support us, and then, she moved to a bigger store, and then, ultimately, they went back to the house I was born in, which they still owned, and converted the living room into a store, and then, ... the kitchen was behind the store and we lived upstairs. ... When I say "lived," we had bedrooms and a bathroom up there and [it would] be [that] the kitchen was the family [center]. That was the kitchen and the living room, dining [room]; you name it, that was it. The family grew up with that and, let's see, what else can I tell you about them? ... They spoke a dialect of Italian which is called Albanese [the Arberesh language], not pure Italian, because they came from up in the Apennines Mountains ... in Potenza, and it was really an offshoot, a combination, of Italian, Greek and Albanian, and that was the language I grew up with in the house. English outside, but, in the house, it would be that, and, oddly enough, my mother ran a business [speaking] half-baked English, got by. Nobody could cheat her for a penny and she never had a day in school. You know, in Europe, [in] those days, women didn't go to college, pardon, to school. My father had four years of schooling and, in those four years, he could keep up with all the ... high school work I had. You know, we often discussed current events, history, and he helped me with Latin and Spanish courses. So, it was a totally different thing, but, anyhow, what he ended up doing is helping my mother in the store, so-to-speak, even though he had been injured. ... I don't know what else I could tell you about my parents [other] than that, or add to it, unless you want what they went [through] later on in life. ...

SI: We can come back to that, but, first, I want to back up a little and ask a couple of questions. Did your father ever talk about his time in the service in Italy?

JS: He was a tailor in the service and he served in Libya. So, he wasn't a line soldier. ...

SI: Did he tell you any stories about being in Libya?

JS: No. He very seldom talked about his war experience, I guess mainly due to the fact that the less said [the better]. You know, I didn't really find out the whole story about his taking off from [Italy] to avoid World War I and all until I was much older, and so, I'm talking in retrospect here. We didn't discuss any of that.

SI: Did he ever talk about his time in Argentina?

JS: Oh, yes, Argentina, he liked Argentina and he got really very good at Spanish. ... That's one of the reasons I took up Spanish as one of my languages in high school, but, again, in those days, as you know, things were a lot different. ... No matter where you went, you had to learn the local language to get by or you just didn't exist. ... As I found during the war, too, it wasn't that difficult to learn the words that you really needed, you know what I mean? Like, even when we went back to Italy, on a visit, I knew enough to ask, "*Quanto costa?*" ["How much is it?"], to the taxis, before I'd get into one of them, [laughter] but, no, he never talked about his war experience, [but he] talked about [how] he wanted his kids to go into tailoring, which, of course, they avoided like the plague; not for me, but my older brothers. With me, I was going to be the educated one, the baby, and that was when they felt more [financially] secure, but, if you want me to go into the Depression days, I could go into them.

SI: What are some of your earliest memories of growing up in this environment you described, of Newark, on Miller Street?

JS: I think, in my mind, growing up in Newark at the time that I grew up in, I couldn't have asked for a better place to grow up in. We lived on a block where ... we had a single-family house, with a store in front of it, but most of the other houses were either three-family houses, vertical, or six-family tenements, and so, we had a lot of kids right on the one block. ... So, you never had to worry about being lonely growing up and there was always a mob of us together, going to grammar school and the high school. In fact, in high school, it began to filter out a little, because some of the kids went to Eastside, which was a technical high school, others went to Southside, like I did, which was up the hill, and ... we all ended up playing ball together. We had a neighborhood baseball team, we had a raffle to get our uniforms, and people supported us. No adult supervision; it was all that we kids did it on our own, and then, when we went into high school, of course, that's when we got involved with adult supervision, but, while I was a kid, we went to sandlots on our own. We played with [homemade equipment]; baseballs were rolled with tape. We played football on the streets with newspapers that we folded and taped up and that became the football [that] we'd toss and play football [with], right in the street, such as "two-[hand] touch." ...

SI: Do you remember other games where you used your own materials to play?

JS: Well, we played ringoleaveo, tag, ... hide-and-seek, all these, kick-the-can, those kind of games, anything that, you know, didn't take money to operate. Then, the big game we really enjoyed, as we got a little older, and I think even [in the] early years of high school even, ... was where we'd get on the street and have three guys on each team. One was the infielder, one was the middle-fielder and one'd be on the other sidewalk. ... You'd take this ball, like a tennis ball, but it had pimples, a pimple ball, you'd hit the stoop with it. ... If you got it past the first guy, it was a single; you got [it past] the second guy, it was a double; if you hit the far sidewalk, you got a triple; if you hit the house, the tenement on, the other side, that was a homer. In the meantime, you're trying to catch these things. That game, I really enjoyed.

MP: Was your neighborhood in Newark considered the Italian section?

JS: No. Oddly enough, we weren't in the Italian section. My *paesans* [a slang term for friends used by Italian-Americans], our group, basically lived along Sherman Avenue. Hunter Street was an offshoot of Sherman Avenue, but it was primarily a Polish neighborhood. ... I should say more Russian, because they'd bring in buses for outings, and we'd even go on them, but my immediate next-door neighbors were immigrant Greeks. ... My immediate neighbor to the other side was a Jewish family. He owned and ran an ice-and-coal business. ... As a kid, three and younger at the time, he had horses and a stable in the back and I got locked in there once. I remember that, and they were going all over looking for me and I was locked in the stable with the horses, and then, later, he got a Mack truck after that. ... I always remember, it had solid tires, but, when you were walking across the street, ... you didn't worry too much about cars, because they didn't move that fast, but you ... had to make sure you didn't step in the horseshit, because that was [everywhere]. The peddlers would all come by selling vegetables or selling dry goods, collecting junk. Also, there'd be a guy [who would] come along with a wheelbarrow [who] would sharpen the knives, etc. These are anecdotes; you know, it's hard to imagine those things today, but the services came to you, and they'd even sell kitchen utensils. ... My mother'd pay a quarter a week until it paid off one pot. Then, the guy'd sell her another one, [laughter] a toaster or something, and this is the way life existed in those early years. ... As I moved to high school, it began to change, ... but, let me tell you, many a Jewish kid went to Rutgers with his father peddling on the streets of Newark. ... This is how they were putting kids through school and I remember different kids that were going to Rutgers whose fathers were peddlers.

SI: Did you have electricity in your home?

JS: ... Electricity was just coming in, because the gas line things [gas lamp fixtures] were still in that house on Hunter Street. They weren't used. We had electricity. Most of the wires were exposed, [the] switches were clip-on type [boxes]. ... As far as baths go, it was the kitchen sink until they put in, in our house, a tub and bathroom. ... As a kid, I remember having the pot, ... naturally, in the second floor room, because the actual toilet was in the basement, and then, my father converted one of the rooms into a bathroom upstairs, ... with the bathtub and everything else. ... Later on, we installed one of them circular showers over the bathtub, but that was all during my early years. My older brothers had a lot to do in that. When I was about three, my father wanted ... to move near the school, for me, and so, they bought a house on Vanderpool Street, facing Miller Street School playground. ... That's where we went and that was a bigger house and we had three bedrooms upstairs. ... My older brother had his own room, then, my other two brothers had to share a bedroom with me, but, once my brother Pete got married, then, it was two of us in there and my brother Nick got the single room, and the parents had the major room. ... The bathroom was right off the kitchen and that had a bathtub and a commode and sink, and the big thing, you know, as my wife points out is that the family always got together. Every weekend, we'd go to my aunt's house, the one that had ten kids, and all the *paesans*, you know, the *paesans* from their Italian village that were here, on Saturday night, would all congregate there and they'd drink and they had cracked nuts. ... I remember, in kindergarten, I'd come back with what I'd learned in kindergarten and put on a show for them, you know, [act] like a "choo-choo" train and stuff like that, and this went on. That was the social life, ... meeting at my aunt's house, and they drank. Everybody made their own wine, and I could truthfully say

my father could drink his wine, but I never, [not] one day ever, saw my father drunk. ... We'd have to walk from ... Bigelow Street, Bigelow and Sherman Avenue is where my aunt lived, to Sherman Avenue and Vanderpool Street, is where we lived, and that's, I'd say, a good [half?] dozen blocks, and you could walk that any hour of the night and [have] no problem. My aunt would come to visit, same thing; they'd just walk the streets, never had a problem. I mean, it's amazing, when you think about it. Our immediate family, even after the brothers married, would gather at my mother's house for a complete Sunday Italian dinner. Until age took over, my wife did it for our family.

MP: Do you remember any festivals or parades in Newark from when you were growing up?

JS: Well, yes. Yes, see, we had a lot of parades in Newark and that was one of the things you did, because you ... didn't have money like you do today. That was a big thing. You'd go down to Lincoln Park, watch the World War I guys march, or with the Catholic Church, had their Holy Name march, parade, I should say. ... In fact, my father, when Roosevelt got in with the NRA [National Recovery Act], my father was among the pushers for the union and he had me parade with him in the NRA parade in Newark, and then, they went to the Krueger Auditorium for a big show and everything. [Editor's Note: A large NRA parade was held in Newark on September 7, 1933.] I remember, he took me to these things. So, I saw the labor unions organize in Newark.

SI: Which union was he involved in?

JS: The one the tailors are in, [laughter] whatever that would be; garment workers, maybe? could be, yes, and it was doing all right, because, apparently, especially, you know, ... during the Depression, they ended up with the two houses, but they couldn't pay the mortgages. ... What they did [was], the one mortgage was held by a building and loan, down on Ferry Street, and the other one was held by a judge in Newark and they settled just for the interest, all through ... those early years. ... So, my father would take me, I was a little kid, so, he'd take me wherever he was going, and we'd go to the Ferry Street [office] to pay the building and loan the interest, and then, we'd go up to this judge's house and pay him and that's how we did [it. In] the meantime, I decided never to become a landlord, because my parents rented the house on Hunter Street out and people'd move out at night, they'd leave the house a mess. I remember going in once and the commodes were just filled with, you know, feces and everything. ... I remember telling my wife how we never want to be landlords and she concurred with me. That's why my folks finally decided the best thing to do was just to go back to Hunter Street and my brother Nick moved [in] when he was married. ... He moved into the house on Hunter Street initially, and then, we exchanged houses. When he moved out of Vanderpool Street, then, we sold that, but that's how we existed ... during the Depression. Fortunately, being a tailor, he [his father] worked, and then, my mother had the store. So, we sort of never had to worry about food on the table, always had food. We had, not a volume of clothes, but I always got an Easter suit every Easter. That was a big thing in those days, just to have a suit. So, we survived the Depression all right, but one of our big [meals], I still remember, our big meal was pasta and, on Fridays, it would be mashed potatoes with onions in it and tomato sauce and a loaf of bread. I could live on that today, [laughter] with a glass of wine.

SI: Did you have a garden for growing some of your own food?

JS: My father always had a fig tree and, when we first went into Vanderpool Street, he had a big garden, with corn and everything, but what he did [was, in] the area he used for a garden, he decided to build three garages to rent out. I guess, in his own way, ... he was a die-hard Socialist, politically, but I guess he had enough capitalistic ideas, because he built three garages with the idea of renting them out, and he did that. So, then, we didn't have a garden, so-to-speak.

MP: It seems the Depression did not really affect your family. Did it affect your neighbors?

JS: Oh, we, all of us, no one really, I could say, other than one guy, really had it good. That was (Dicky Seratelli?). ... Well, I'm talking about as we were growing up, in the Hunter Street neighborhood more than anything else. Most of us, you know, where we'd ride used bikes, put bikes together ourselves, (Dicky?) was one of these guys that always had a new bike and everything else. ... His father would bootleg coal from Pennsylvania, and was a union organizer. Then, he ended up as a big wheel with either the AF of L [American Federation of Labor] and CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations].

SI: CIO.

JS: He was a CIO organizer and, I mean, he was a tough guy, and so, you know, ... they weren't hurting for money. You know, if anybody's going to get the brand-new corduroy outfit, (Dicky?) had it. ... Unfortunately, he got picked up, made the front page of the *Star-Ledger* [the Newark area newspaper] and, of course, it was [embarrassing]; didn't bother us at all, but I think it bothered his wife. She felt bad, but, in the meantime, later on, and I'm talking about after the [Korean War], I was married at the time and we had our own family and I didn't see him anymore, but the father was [killed]. They found ... his Cadillac on the Garden State Parkway, doors open. He wasn't there and nobody's ever found him since. So, he lived on the edge and the rumor was that, you know, when they put up the garbage incinerator, you know, where they burned all the garbage, and mob people often disappeared there.

MP: Incinerator?

JS: Incinerator in Newark, they figured that's what the mob did, ... but, you know, I'm just talking.

MP: Did you notice any elements of organized crime or corruption in growing up in Newark?

JS: Well, take one of my cousins, because I'm talking about ... during Prohibition, a *paesan*.

MP: Right, bootlegging.

JS: Yes, well, he wasn't a bootlegger *per se*, but he removed trash and all, and he would move all the bottles for them, [because] they had the bottles. ... His son, my cousin, he was another kid that always had money, never had a problem, because there was money to be made that way. ... It seems most of the people that had money, they weren't people from Wall Street, they were people that ... were connected with some type of illegal activity, let me put it that way.

MP: Back then, that was a way for neighborhoods to take care of themselves, right?

JS: Well, I'll tell you, the way we took care [of ourselves], the other thing that took care of us, I had a cousin, "Policy Pete," we called him. He was another Salerno. He was my father's nephew and he was our district leader, and you would never hurt for coal. If you needed coal in the house, he made [sure], he'd go to City Hall and you got the coal. I mean, ... they talk about all the corrupt politics in those days, but those ward healers, they took care of the people and that's how they got the votes. ... You know, all of a sudden, we went into this big deal where we're going to refine everything and correct these evils and whatever and stop this picking politicians in a backroom with guys smoking cigars. ... In my estimation, now, as I look back on it, I'm saying to myself, "Maybe if it had been a little more non-corrupt, that was far better than what we have today," because, now, everything, the millionaires, the super millionaires, in my mind, run this country, and there, here, you've got the choice; you could take Bush or you could take Kerry [the two candidates in the 2004 Presidential Election]. ... You know, personally, I didn't think either one were any good. I voted for Kerry. Why? because I think Kerry still represented, in my mind, a party that represents the ordinary person, ... and I'm not a capitalist, so-to-speak, [laughter] I don't have any capital that way to talk about, whereas the Republicans are basically more oriented towards Wall Street, but that doesn't mean I haven't voted for Republicans. I'm an Independent, technically, you know, legally.

SI: Was Newark dominated by the Democratic machine at that time?

JS: Well, ... by ethnicity; in Newark, we had three major ethnic backgrounds. You had the Italians, you had the Irish and you had the Jews. As I was growing up, the Jews were led by Ellenstein [Meyer C. Ellenstein, Mayor of Newark (1933-1941)], the Italians by Villani [Ralph A. Villani, Mayor of Newark (1949-1953)], and the Irish by, oh, cripes, he came to my mother's wake; Carlin [Leo P. Carlin, Mayor of Newark (1953-1962)], I think. ... That's how the votes went and how they would align would decide who would win and become mayor, and I always remember this. [laughter] Naturally, our man was Villani. So, the deal was in between the Jews and the Italians to skirt around the Irish and get the majority on the city commission, and then, the commission would pick the mayor. So, the deal was that, ... they got together, Villani would become mayor. ... I guess he was already mayor. So, now, the votes come in and Ellenstein [had] come in first and Villani second. So, the deal was that ... Villani was supposed to become mayor. Ellenstein says, "I got most of the votes." So, now, he wanted to be mayor. So, then, the skirmish started. So, the Italians made a deal with Carlin and they squeezed Ellenstein out, and then, that changed, I think, four years later and Ellenstein got it, [laughter] but this is the way politics [unfolded]. [Editor's Note: Vincent J. Murphy served as Mayor of Newark from 1941 to 1949.] Politics were not Democrats or Republicans. ... That wasn't what the votes were based on. I'm talking [when] I was a kid; this is before I was voting. You know, I was old enough to know it was going on, and we would wear pins and all that type of stuff. I hope that gives you something new. I don't know.

SI: Yes, it is a slice of life from back then. You were young when Prohibition ended, but do you remember what Prohibition was like?

JS: Oh, yes, I remember that well, because where we lived, there were taverns around and this is at the nearby corner, this is during Prohibition, they're not supposed to be. You know, they were illegal, but they existed. ... The kind of hooch they used, ... we'd be on our little tricycles, you'd go by and, next thing, you'd see some guy sprawled on the sidewalk, you know, with vomit and puke, everything, around, because those [men, when] they got drunk in those speakeasies, they just took them out and left them on the sidewalk, and so, we would see that. ... You'd see delivery of hooch. You knew it was Prohibition, but I guess the police in the local area were just blind to it, ... or paid off, whatever. I mean, I could never say it, but I'm rather sure that's what was going on. ... You know, my father made his own wine and all our *paesans* did, and then, that was the big deal, compare the wine. Who had the best wine? Well, you know, "I got the best." "Who's got the best?" I remember, [laughter] when my brother Pete married his Viola; he married a girl, by the way, in Newark who also was a Salerno, but she was a real Italian Salerno, not [born in America]. ... Her father died and left about, oh, I don't know, eight or nine tenement houses in Newark, right near Central High School and the Newark College of Engineering. ... So, Viola, she got one of the tenements, which, of course, then, my brother ran. ... Each of the children got one from that, and my brother Pete was the big [landlord]. You know, I remember him, all the bathrooms in these tenements were on the back porch and they had a lot of black tenants and they weren't paying the rent. So, my brother Pete, compared to the others [his in-laws], my brother Pete figured out why. ... "You can't wait until the end of the month," he said, "because they get paid every week, on Friday." So, who do you think was in the hallway of the tenement house every Friday? Waiting on the stoop was my brother Pete, because he worked the [factory line]. ... He left Western Electric, went there, ... and he was getting his rent weekly. So, he survived. Next thing you know, he was buying his brother-in-laws out and sister-in-laws, and he ended up with the houses and, later on, this is shortly before he died, he sold that to the Newark College of Engineering and Newark-Rutgers. ... They converted them into school rooms and fraternity houses. So, there's a connection with Rutgers for you.

SI: That must have been in the late 1940s, early 1950s.

JS: We used to call my brother a "slum lord." [laughter] Yes, late '40s, early '50s, I would say, yes.

MP: Did you have any specific chores around the house while growing up?

JS: My mother spoiled us, basically. ... Like I told you, the garbage men would pick up the garbage in the back, bring it to the [front]. All I had to do was bring the garbage can in to the back, that's all, because they'd leave it in the front. I had no specific chores. No, my mother did it all. She did the family laundry, she did the cooking. That was her pride and joy, to do the cooking, ... and the men sat back, I mean, to be honest with you. ... Even when my mother ran a store, she still ran the family, as far as eating, and she would pick out the clothes. She had a little [method]. I remember, say I needed an overcoat; she'd take me down [to] the lower end of Market Street, first thing in the [morning]. She wanted to be the first customer in these, like, haberdashery stores or whatever, and she'd go in ... and she'd start dealing with the owner. ... I always remember, I wanted this coat, but she said, "Come on, we're going, Joe," and they'd [say], "Wait, Missus, wait." [laughter] So, after we got the coat, at the price my mother wanted, ... I

said to her, "We weren't going to get the coat." My mother said, "No," she said, "they never let the first customer get away," she said. [laughter]

SI: That is smart.

JS: So, this is the way things operated in Newark. Then, the auction house was down Market Street, near Mulberry there, where ... you had all these things. ... Newark was a wonderful city to grow [up] in, for a basic background, and I do think, in its own way, it helped develop good citizen-soldiers, because you have to learn to live on your own two feet and with your own wits.

MP: You said the three main ethnicities were the Jews, Italians and Irish. Did you notice any African-Americans?

JS: Oh, yes, they were right around the corner [from] where I lived, yes, oh, yes.

MP: Was there any racism?

SI: Did all the groups get together?

JS: No, never black and white. You know, oddly enough, ... you reflect on that. Even in high school, we played football, baseball, [too, but] football primarily is what I think of, we had black kids on the team and, as soon as practice was over or school let out, they'd go in their social set, we'd go in ours. The whites used the front door of Southside High School, when I went to school. There was a side entrance and that's where the blacks congregated. I came back to practice teach there in 1948. Now, we're talking from '43 to '48. When I got back, the blacks were at [the] front door and the whites were using the side door, in that span of time.

SI: Was that just something that developed naturally or were the African-Americans told, "You have to use the side door?"

JS: No, no, this just evolved, you know, with the numbers change. That's all, yes, because Southside even became Shabazz [Malcolm X Shabazz High School] now, you know.

MP: Did you notice more African-Americans moving into Newark, the different sections?

JS: Well, they were moving in, but not into my immediate neighborhood at the time. They were around the corner. In fact, there was a woman around the corner [who would] come into my mother's store. She was well-made, nice, dressed up, and she was like a madam with her three daughters, right around the corner and you just accepted these things, you never even [knew a difference]. ... Wherever I lived in Newark, I had black neighbors. When I lived on Vanderpool Street, there was a guy, a mover, two houses away. He was black and he owned his house. When my mother moved to Wright Street, because she needed a bigger store, and that's when we decided, she moved us again, we lived behind the store and the (*baccahous*?) was on the porch again. ... I had to go through that and I'd go to my [old house], to [Vanderpool Street], where my brother and sister-in-law were living, for a bath once a week. Saturday night was the bath

night, because there was no bath there, and then, ... that house, we had black neighbors upstairs, two levels of blacks, and we played together, had no problem. ...

MP: I guess the stereotypical view is that there were always separate neighborhoods and that blacks and whites did not associate with each other.

JS: Like I said, [the] only time in my life where I associated, say, on a one-to-one, friendly basis with the blacks is when we lived on Wright Street, and that was about two years. ... Oddly enough, to show you how well we got on, my brother Pat had an ice business, bought a truck, got his truck, and he couldn't meet the [payments]. Next thing you know, I come home from the movie, we used to go to the Saturday matinees for fifteen cents, I come home, my mother's crying. There's a picture of my brother with a bunch of guys that are going on the Italian liner *Rex* to fight for Italy against Ethiopia [in the Second Italo-Abyssinian War]. Now, you know, we were living in the midst of a black neighborhood at the time, because that Wright Street was black. No one said nothing; we played together. ...

SI: What was the reaction to Mussolini and his campaigns within the Italian-American community?

JS: Well, see, in our [family], among my *paesans*, now, I can't go by the Italian neighborhood, because you had big Italian sections in Newark, but, in my particular location, they never talked politics, I think. You know, they were more concerned about right here and now. We didn't, at that point, never thought we were going to get in a war over there, you know what I mean? So, that was them, you know. They fought their verbal battles. So, you know, it was all remote. We never [thought about being drawn into world affairs]. You know, in those days, I still remember my godfather saying, "Oh, someday, we're going to go to war with Japan." It's like we talk now, about, "Someday, we're going to go to war with China," you know, like following World War II, "Someday, we're going to go to war with Russia," but Mussolini never, to my knowledge, ever came into a conversation at that time. ... Later in life, after my brother had gone over to Italy, really to get away [from the debt]; my father paid off his debt, to protect his good name. They faithfully paid for that truck until it was paid off and sold. Then, what the problem was, [was] getting my brother back home and they used this Italian lawyer, (Manisi?), who probably helped him. He, ... my brother Pat, was always one step ahead of trouble, or got into trouble, never mind. He got picked up for something one weekend and, when we found out, my father found out he was in jail, ... they wanted to bail him out right away, because they said these Irish cops beat the Italian kids with rubber hoses, wanted to get him out as fast as possible. [He] went to my godfather, who loaned him the money, went to (Manisi?) and got him out on bail. ... Oddly enough, he's the one brother who became a police officer and all that, when he came back from World War II. World War II, they put him in the MPs [military police], so, with that background, he went in[to the police force]. Shows you how things work out.

MP: At the time, were the police there mostly Irish?

JS: At that time, yes, oh, yes, they dominated.

SI: When did your brother come back from Italy?

JS: He came back and we were living on Hunter Street, so, I would figure about [1938]. ... I think he went there around 1936. He came back here before [World War II]. So, I'd say around 1938, he came back.

SI: Okay, before the War in Europe started.

JS: Yes, then, ... around 1939, we started the draft and he was among the first drafted. [Editor's Note: The Selective Service Act of 1940, passed in September 1940, required all twenty-one to thirty-five-year-old males to register for the draft, beginning that October.] ... He became a citizen and got drafted, got called in, and like her, like my wife's brother, both, as soon as they hit twenty-eight, they let them out. ... This was just before Pearl Harbor; it was in 1941, I'd say around September, October, in there somewhere. Her brother, I think, got back in November, altogether a month [before Pearl Harbor]. ... When the war broke out, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, I would have said "Japs," normally, but it's for the record, "Japanese," ... he got called back in, just like my brother-in-law did, and he ended up, as I say, ... then, in the MPs [military police] and became a non-com [non-commissioned officer]. You may know, that's when they were expanding, to bring in the young "cannon fodder," like me, that was going to follow, and Helen's brother became a second lieutenant in the Ordnance. So, that's how that all worked out, but getting back to the way [things were], talking about how family stuck together, my godfather, without hesitation, loaned my father the money to get my brother out of jail, before they could do him any harm.

SI: Was your godfather a member of the family?

JS: Oh, yes, he married my aunt's daughter. ... He came from New York, but he also was ...

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

SH: Please, continue.

JS: Yes, he was also an Albanese-American. You know, his family [and mine], they knew one another. [In] those days, this is almost like an arranged marriage when he got married. In fact, my brother Nick, when he got married, he went to Brooklyn, again, with the idea of an arrangement. ... He spotted this one girl, who was a *paesan*. He said, "Well, I'll go talk to the [family]." They arranged for him to go to Brooklyn to meet the introducer and family, was supposed to go there on a Sunday, and this, [laughter] another *paesan*, who lived in the same house where his future wife lived, he had a barbershop on the first floor and they lived on the third floor. Vera's family lived on the second floor. He was called, their name was Breschia, and he was related to my mother and he said, "Okay, when Nick comes over, I'm going to bring him home." Well, they conspired on their own. So, Nick goes over and he says, "Oh, come upstairs." He said, "We'll go over later," to whoever's house it was. He said, "This is the Laico Family." He said, "This is Vera." She had been born in San Costantino, but came here at a young age, and they said, "Oh, sit and eat." [The] next thing you know, they never got to the other house. My brother Nick comes home late at night, tells my parents, he said, "I think I found the girl I'm going to marry." They all thought it was this other girl and he's talking about

Vera. Well, my mother said, "Who's Vera?" They were like, "Oh." [laughter] That changed everything. So, then, he would, to court her, ... go to Brooklyn every week, but he could take her to the movies, had to have her in by nine o'clock. [If] they got home after nine o'clock, he wouldn't let them in. I mean, [to] show you how [it was]; you know, we're talking about adults now. He was working for, at the time, Bamberger's delivery service. That was before they contracted it out, but this is the way life was then in our little community. ... My godfather married Rose the same way; it was an arranged marriage. Everybody stayed in the enclave. My brother Pete broke out of it, and, of course, my brother Pat and, of course, by the time I came along, this had all been spread. There was ... none of that anymore, but, no, arranged marriages were common for the generation ahead of me.

SI: We talked about the reaction within Newark about what was happening overseas. Do you remember, within the German community, if there was any kind of *Bund* activity, or was that mostly in Irvington, in that area?

JS: No, ... not really, amongst the [kids]; by the time we got in it, we were very pro, you know, American now, the kids. In fact, our biggest fear, which is crazy now, when I reflect back, was that the war was going to end before we got drafted. You know, we were afraid that we were going to miss the war; that was the big thing with [us]. ... Some of the kids were doing so poor in school, like Artie, Charlie, [that] they enlisted. They wanted to go ... in the service. They quit high school and went in, and that was the way that we existed in those days.

SI: You do not remember reading about any *Bund* marches or anything like that.

JS: Oh, yes, yes. Well, you'd see it on the news, in the ... movies, the Metro News [Heart Metrotone News?], and there were big *Bund* activities right here in New Jersey, you know, that I never saw at the time. I happened to [learn], later on in life, people would point out, "This is where the *Bund* was," and all that, down there, I guess Jackson, New Jersey, south of Jackson, in that area, but there was no big German community in my immediate area. Like I say, I happened to be in an area that was more mixed than a straight neighborhood. You know, like I say, it was mostly Russian in our immediate area, and there was a sprinkling of Italians and my *paesans* would drift along towards Sherman Avenue, and a sprinkling of Jews and, again, the blacks, sprinkling of blacks, too, nothing predominant, and "*Americans*," as we used to call them. They were the kids [who] their parents were American. [laughter] ... We considered the Irish [to be] Americans, actually.

SI: Did your parents encourage you to hold on to your Italian identity or did they want you to become Americanized? Did they teach you the language, that sort of thing?

JS: Well, ... it's not that they taught me the language, that's what we spoke, and ... I'd go to my aunt's house, same thing, you know. She would speak Albanese, so-to-speak, ... and I was pretty fluent in it. Now, I can't even remember a word, but, in those days; they say, later on in life, that's all I'll say, I guess when I become half-baked, [laughter] I don't [know]. ... Right now, it's hard for me to recall any of the words, but that's because they're all gone. ... No, they weren't strong on those things. You know, they sort of let you go [your own way], as long as you didn't step on them in any way or never degraded them or allowed them to be degraded in any way, and

we accepted [it], you know. Everybody had it. You know, the Russians were first-generation, you know what I mean? So, you know, everybody was talking half-baked English anyhow, ... you know when the old-timers, when they'd go to the store, when I was a clerk in the A&P. See, to go to work, you had to have working papers, unless you were sixteen, you know, I wasn't sixteen. So, I changed my birth certificate from five [1925] to three [1923], so [that] I could get a part-time job in the A&P, and that's how I ended up [there]. ...

MP: That was your earliest job.

JS: Yes. Well, I sold newspapers, you know. ... In fact, I sold extras when the war broke out. I always remember that, get a nickel from everybody for a three-cent paper.

SI: When Pearl Harbor happened, you were one of the newsboys.

JS: No, no. This is, I'm talking about when the war [first happened], '39. No, when the war broke out in Europe [the attack on Pearl Harbor], I was a junior in high school, I guess, or a sophomore.

MP: Do you remember when you first heard about Pearl Harbor?

JS: Yes, ... it was a Sunday afternoon. Me and the guys had gone to the Adams Theater in Newark and we saw; I'm trying to think who was the bandleader. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Okay, we are back from our lunch break. For the record, thank you both very much for a wonderful lunch. Before we left, we were talking about Pearl Harbor and you were saying that you were in the Adams Theater when you heard the news.

JS: In the Adams Theater in Newark, and I'm trying to think of the name of the bandleader. It was, you know, a name band at the time; Tony Pastor, and the song they were featuring, and I think that was one of his highlights, was, "Sam, you made the pants too long. You put the zipper where something else blew off," [the song *Sam, You Made The Pants Too Long*]. [laughter] ... [I] got home and I went upstairs and I turned on the radio and, all of a sudden, they're talking about, "Pearl Harbor'd been attacked. We're at war." ... I remember coming downstairs and saying, "Hey, we're at war," you know, like a cheerleader, the dumb kid that I was at the time, was sixteen. ... You know, my mother got startled; she started crying right away, like, she knew, "This is nothing but trouble," and that's how I found out about Pearl Harbor, when I came home from the theater. ... Then, all the guys got together and we're all, "Who wanted to go the next day to enlist? Who could?" you know, [of] the guys that were eighteen already.

SI: Your brother had just come back from the Army at that point.

JS: Right. He was home already, yes. ... He got called. You know, he knew he was going to be recalled, but, then, he got his orders and he went to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. I remember, that was his first duty station.

SI: How much of a shock was Pearl Harbor? You mentioned that your uncle had said, "We are going to go to war with Japan someday," but was the attack out of the blue?

JS: Yes, well, see, because, at that age group, you really don't pay that much attention to ... what's in the headlines, you know. Here, we had no idea about the oil embargo that was prevalent, we had no idea that Japanese emissaries were talking with our State Department. We had just finished the football season and who was in the basketball? ... you know, talking about the next school year ... and who liked what girl and things like [that]. You know, this is what teenagers did, you know, and it sort of hit us like a rock out of the blue, but we always felt, "The United States above all," you know what I mean? So, this immediately erupted, you know, a patriotism that is beyond description. I mean, there was no [dissent], but we're brought up with it, you know. The school system, when I think back now, we knew about Nathan Hale, that, "I regret I have but one life to give for my country." All these things were in our mind. I don't know if kids have that today. They say they don't, but we did, you know. We knew all about [Commodore Stephen] Decatur and the pirates, Tripoli pirates, [referring to the First Barbary War], which have significance now and, yet, ... I don't think my grandchildren have any idea about it, but we had it and it was, you know, because it started from grammar school. I mean, it wasn't something you learned in higher education or anything else. It was there, it was part of the American heritage and, as soon as we knew we were at war, we shifted from being a bunch of shiftless teenagers to kids with a purpose, that we're going to go fight for our country.

MP: Prior to Pearl Harbor, were you aware of the Nazi invasion of Poland?

JS: Well, we knew the Germans had invaded Poland, because, I told you, I sold extras that day and made extra money, you know, ... never thinking that we were going to become part of this whole picture. You know, in those days, there was a lot of isolationism. ... You know, when they talked about how the Nazis were abusing the Jews, hey, you know, you sort of heard it, and even though you were in the midst of a lot of Jews, like I did in high [school], even they didn't talk about it. The only guy that I recall talking about it was a soda fountain [owner], a guy who owned a soda fountain store. ... He would bring it up, as if, you know, "They got to do something about this guy Hitler, will ya?" You know, we figured, "He's like;" you know, you're talking about Mussolini, "Mussolini, Hitler, that's their problem over there. We don't [care]. That's not us," never realizing we were going to become part of the picture. So, you sort of just shut it out.

SI: You were still in school for another two years before you went in the service yourself. How did you see your neighborhood change in that time?

JS: Well, all of a sudden, every neighbor was putting up a big banner on [the street], you know, from one side of the street to the other, "Support our neighbors that are in the war," things like that, and our street had one, too, and I was there when they put it up. I was still a civilian, but I remember when I was leaving to get drafted, noticing it, you know, that was [there]. Each neighborhood was supporting their own.

SI: Did most of the guys who were eligible in your community go into the service?

JS: Yes. Nobody tried to [evade the service]. You know, it's amazing, when you [think about it], not one person tried to avoid being drafted or enlisting. In fact, the one guy I know, who it broke his heart, they drafted him, Chester. He was a very frail kid and they drafted him. ... You know, he went to Fort [Dix], he couldn't even peel potatoes, ... didn't have the [strength], and, you know, they gave him one of these discharges. I don't know what kind of discharge, but that's one of the most broken-hearted kids I could ever remember in my life, that they sent him home, he couldn't serve. Yes, it was a totally different [attitude].

SI: You remember seeing him come back.

JS: Oh, yes, he came back to the neighborhood, but he was a dejected individual, because, you know, who ever thought that the Army would turn you down?

MP: Did you feel obligated to serve?

JS: I just felt, you know, we accepted it, it was a fact of life. That was your job, ... or expected of you. I shouldn't say your job; it was a thing you did by being an American, turn eighteen, go fight for your country. Like I say, our biggest fear was that ... the war would end before we could get into it. I never knew what was lying ahead of me. [laughter]

SI: What about things like the blackouts and air raid drills?

JS: Oh, those I remember very well, because, see, I'd just started Montclair in, you know, what? February of '43, and I was commuting. So, now, they're going to have the test blackouts and I've got big exams coming up. So, we had sort of a walk-in closet in my bedroom. I rigged up my desk light in the closet, and we're talking [about when the] weather's getting warm now, you know, you're talking about moving into, what? April, I guess. I set that light up, closed the door, [sat] down in my BVDs, studying for my exams. I did it for at least three nights, ... because, otherwise, you know, there was no way I could keep the lights on, yet, I have to study. So, we went through that quite a bit. In fact, in Newark, they set up these big searchlights, you know. [They] really thought the war was that imminent then, that they were going to come over and bomb us, these big searchlights with Army units, you know, search-lighting the skies. So, it was very obvious we're at war. We went down the Shore and we got on the boardwalk; next thing you know, the Coast Guard's challenging us. At night, I'm talking about.

SI: How would they challenge you?

JS: What were we doing there? What's our business ... at the boardwalk at that hour of the night? ...

MP: Where exactly down the Shore did you go?

JS: Seaside Heights. That was our high school hangout.

SI: How often would you be able to go down there?

JS: I spent a vacation down there the year before. We spent a week, and then, almost got a job calling bingo, but my mother wouldn't let me stay. [laughter]

MP: Were you ever worried about U-boats [German submarines]? Would you see the Coast Guard patrolling?

JS: No. The thing that got me hot down there is, they had a pavilion you could dance at, and, here, I'm dancing with a girl, these damned Coast Guard kids, they'd cut you and they'd take over. You know, they'd [say], "I'm a big deal." So, we didn't like them too much.

SI: What about Army personnel or other military servicemen in Newark? You mentioned that there was this Army unit in Weequahic Park, I believe.

JS: Weequahic Park.

SI: With the searchlights. Did you notice more of a military presence?

JS: Well, what happened [was], they converted Weequahic Park into a military installation, with a hospital. It was supporting the Newark Airport, because, see, the Army ... Air Corps took over Newark Airport, and that's where a lot of them were billeted and they had a hospital there. In fact, when I came back from Europe, that's where I went for my outpatient treatment.

SI: Would there often be GIs in your neighborhood on leave?

JS: Always, always somebody. Like, [when] I'd come home on leave, there was always somebody else on leave at the same time. So, we'd go out bar hopping together.

SI: I was wondering how the neighborhoods reacted to having all these GIs around, not GIs like you, a son returning home on leave, but somebody that was attached to the hospital there or the searchlight unit.

JS: They never came ... into the neighborhoods. They went to Downtown Newark. The big hangout was the Casablanca Bar. That was, you know, a big, round bar. If you're going to try to pick up girls, you went there, and that's where all the military guys [went]. When you're on leave, you went there. One night, I'd go to the Wigwam, which was the church hangout; the next night, I'd go to the Casablanca, which was, "try if you can." [laughter] ...

SI: I have read stories about towns like New Brunswick and Newark, where there was a sudden influx of GIs.

JS: Especially, yes, see, New Brunswick got them from Edison [Camp Kilmer], I guess, and then, they'd come into town. Newark, Downtown got them, naturally. You know, that would draw [them], just like New York City, but not in the neighborhoods.

MP: Was there a sense of tightened security?

JS: At the bridges, yes, you had the Home Guard. At every bridge, there'd be one of these guys, you know, they'd volunteered for the [service], they call them the Home Guard. I guess, now, they'd be part of [the] National Guard, and one of my friends, (Georgie Parks?), went into that, figuring; you know, guys tried to pull angles. [laughter] He thought that'd keep him in the States. Well, what he ended up doing [was], he shot himself in the toe, so, he got out of something, but I remember this [other] kid, (Werner?), he decided he's going to join the Coast Guard, because the Coast Guard is the Coast Guard, "We only guard the coast." Well, he ended up on D-Day [the Normandy landings on June 6, 1944], taking them troops on shore. [laughter] So, these things go on, you know. Some people think they'll outsmart the system; you don't outsmart it.

SI: You mentioned that, amongst your friends, you were worried that you would not get in soon enough, but were there guys who wanted to, maybe, get some education in first?

JS: The group I was with was not educationally oriented. I was among the few that really wanted to go to college. I took college prep; most of them took business or something else. You know, they weren't [college oriented]. In fact, as I say, a lot of them dropped out along the way. They were marginal. For whatever reason, I don't know.

SI: What was high school like for you, particularly since about half of it was during the war?

JS: I'd say, ... you know, the best years of my life were in high school, because, all of a sudden, you find your identity. ... I got involved with school plays, I got involved with the football team, so, it gave me a little bit of status, and I think, you know, it makes you feel good, in those years. ... No, I enjoyed my four years in high school. ... You know, even before the war and after the war [began], ... I can't say that it wasn't really, the prime years, of my youth. I flunked Latin, and the reason I flunked Latin [was because] I had an eye on this girl, and I was always marginal in Latin. I wasn't that good. ... In the same room I studied Latin, I had study hall in that room, and the girl I was interested in at the time, (Anne Marie?), she was sitting in my normal Latin seat. I mean, to show you what a dumb-ass a kid, a young male, can be, I drew the picture of a tombstone on the desk and I said, "Here lies the body of Joe Salerno, who died waiting for the Latin bell to ring," something to that [effect], mainly to impress this girl. I didn't realize, of course, it impressed Mr. (Packard?), too, who was the Latin teacher. So, like I say, I was marginal, I didn't get the benefit of the doubt. So, see how women can do you in, even at that age? [laughter]

SI: What subjects were your favorites, or of the most interest, something you thought you would go into?

JS: Well, I had a teacher named Mr. (Kirk?), and ... I had him for Problems of American Democracy, I had him for American History IV. ... Because of him, I got really involved in these things, and I wrote some good papers for him. ... I had no idea of going to college yet. [As I was] getting ... ready to graduate, and my English teacher, Miss Wauch, she's the one that had me in the school plays and everything, she just, I think, in her own way, she thought the world of me, she says, "Joe, what are you going to do now when you graduate?" I said, "I'm

going to take a job and wait to get drafted." She says, "You know, you ought to go to college." I said, "Who's going to take me for college?" You know, here it is, you know, we're only a few months away, and I didn't have those kind of grades. I just felt I was marginal. She said, "Why don't you put in for it?" ... because she said, "What would you like to do?" and I said, "Well, I'd like to be a football coach," and things like [that], I said, "and teach history." She said, "Well, good, go to a teacher's college." So, I got applications, the brochures from Montclair and from Trenton [State, teacher's (or, earlier, normal) colleges in New Jersey], because I wanted phys. ed. as a minor. That's why I didn't want Panzer [College of Physical Education and Hygiene], because I didn't want phys. ed. to teach phys. ed., but I wanted phys. ed. as a background for coaching. So, when I got the brochures, and I'm looking at what it cost to go to Trenton, which meant I had to board at Trenton, it was too far to commute, I could go to Montclair and my parents would only have to pay fifty dollars a semester. That's for all [of it]; could you [imagine]? I mean, now, you don't get a credit for fifty dollars, but that was for the whole kit-and-caboodle for the first semester. So, I told my folks, I said, "Look, I put it [in]." So, I filed and ... she recommended me and sent the application out, and they called me in. See, in those days, you had an entrance exam. You didn't have SATs. So, I went out, spent all day on an entrance exam, and then, we sweat it out. ... Of course, I never realized why my mother really wanted me to get in college. She thought me getting into college meant I would never have to go to war, you know. They thought that would do it. Well, it was a Saturday when the mail came in and there was this little letter. It was just a little envelope, one of them regular [ones], from Montclair. You know, nowadays, if you get accepted, it's a big, long one; the little one notified [me] I'd been accepted. ... Well, of course, my mother did an Italian *tarantella* [an upbeat Italian folk dance] there, right on the floor, and that's how I ended up going to college, major in social studies, minored in phys. ed. ... The semester was going to end around the end of May and I was drafted on May 21st, so, ... basically, I got credit for the semester. So, I went into the Army, with one college semester behind me, and I took the Army aptitude test and I got a very good score on that. I'm trying to think what it was, because one of my company commanders, later, wanted me to retake it, because I was two points away from being eligible for West Point [the United States Military Academy] and he was a West Pointer and wanted me to go. I think it's in that thing of mine. ... You know, they earmarked me right away for the Army Specialized Training Program, right from Fort Dix.

SI: Before you were drafted, did you think about entering a program like the Navy V-12 [a college-based officer training program], or its equivalent in the other services?

JS: I did look at the Navy V-12, though, one of the problems I had, you know, we're talking about air [military aviation] and I didn't have the eyes for it. I knew, right off the bat, I could not get into either ... Army Air or Navy Air, because they wanted 20/20 [perfect eyesight] and I couldn't. Size-wise, I was perfect, because they wanted, you know, smaller body sizes, especially for fighter planes.

SI: Did you consider enlisting in the Army Air Corps or the Navy?

JS: No, I never thought of enlisting. [laughter] Well, it wasn't a question [of] I didn't think about it; I knew it'd never get past my parents.

SI: Okay.

JS: Yes, no, I knew my [mother]; I mean, she would move heaven and earth to keep me out of the Army, which I couldn't understand, but she knew, from Europe, how rotten wars could be. ... We had no idea. Our knowledge of wars was at the cinema and, you know, we always win. ... I'll never forget that one, [when] I ended up walking out of that pine woods [in the Battle of the Bulge] with the arms behind my head and I'm saying to myself, "This is a [mistake]. [laughter] ... How could we, an American, be doing this?" because, you know, we're always winners. We're "John Wayne." [Editor's Note: John Wayne was an American movie actor famous for his masculine roles, often as cowboys or soldiers, where the "good guys" always triumphed.]

MP: Did a lot of people that you knew enlist right away?

JS: Only one, (Artie Shine?). He was the only one, but he was having real trouble in school. ... So, this was his way out.

SI: What do you remember about that first quarter at Montclair?

JS: Well, I got involved with the baseball team, and, see, I look at it now as, in retrospect, the only reason they accepted me is that there were so few men around to select, secondly, I made the varsity baseball team, again, because there's so few many guys competing, and that's who I met, you know. I met guys from the baseball team, basketball team, etc. In those days, [for] commuters, there was one room for the men to socialize in [and] there was another room for the girls to socialize in. So, you'd go into this men's room and you'd get to mingle with upperclassmen and joke around during your free periods, in-between scheduled classes. ... I ran into guys, you know, that were in the ballgame bit. ... There was (Al Isler?), who was an All-State pitcher. So, [if] he wanted to [practice], I would catch him, you know what I mean? you know, after school. So, we ended up with the team and I got my varsity letter in baseball in college, during my freshman year, and I ended up passing everything except biology. ... The biology teacher [penalized me] because I cut his class the last day and he saw me out in the amphitheater from his window. So, he gave me an incomplete. Other than that, I passed all my courses, and then, when I came back, the courses I took at Alabama were credited to me, which helped me, and I graduated in '48, which wasn't too bad.

SI: By that point in the war, there were not that many men on campus.

JS: At Montclair? no, same thing, like everywhere else.

SI: Was it mostly guys in a similar situation, who were just waiting?

JS: Well, see, as soon as I went up there, their last class that had enlisted in the Reserves to stay out as long as they could were called in, and they were guys that I knew, too, ... you know, [Nathan] Nate Weiss and these guys. Nate Weiss, incidentally, ended up being the president of ... Kean [Kean University in Union, New Jersey], yes, but he was one of these Enlisted Reservists that got called in at the time, and I stayed on, because, you know, [I] still hadn't turned

eighteen. Once I turned eighteen, I had to go to the draft board and that was it. See, I could have appealed it and [asked] to finish the semester, but I knew I was going to finish it anyhow, so, I figured, "Why bother?"

SI: At any point before you went into the service, did you do any war work, such as working in a factory, perhaps during the summers?

JS: No, A&P, that's the only place I worked. That was to get pocket money; that's all.

SI: Do you remember the impact of other home front issues, such as rationing?

JS: Oh, yes, that became ... part of living at the time. You just accepted it, you know. I think it was one pair of shoes a year, these different things. ... When I'd come home on leave, I'd have to go down to Newark, the office there, and get the coupons, ration coupons, for my folks, so that they could get extra food while I was home. I didn't have a car, so, I didn't have to worry about get[ting a] gas allowance, and, in Newark, who needed a car? You had the busses [that] took you all over.

SI: It was mostly about food and different things you could not have.

JS: Yes, and I didn't need clothes, because [the] Army provided us with everything.

SI: Your parents never talked about one particular thing that was more difficult than the others.

JS: They never complained.

SI: Your mother still had the store then.

JS: Yes.

SI: She never had problems getting food supplies for that.

JS: If she did, she never complained to me about anything. See, she made her sausage and hot dogs and the high school kids would come down and that kept the store going. That was the big thing. ...

SI: Were any of your high school activities curtailed? For example, could the football team not travel for games?

JS: No, we took our bus trip. Of course, you played [local teams]. You know, our furthest games from Newark were Nutley, Elizabeth. So, it was all within that range of one or two counties, and never had a problem getting a bus. Although, we, on our own, the guys from the neighborhood, we decided, one day, we're going to rent a horse and wagon to go to the game, and we did that, got caught in the rain, but, you know, we would do, like, crazy things that, like all high school kids would do.

MP: You were drafted after your second semester at Montclair.

JS: First semester.

MP: What were your feelings then? Were you excited?

JS: My friends were already in. Most of the guys I knew were already in. So, you know, I couldn't wait to go, I'll be honest with you. The only one that wasn't anxious was my mother. My father was like a non-entity in all this. You know, thinking back, he sort of was in the background.

SI: Where did you go first? Where were you inducted? What was that whole process like?

JS: Well, I went to [the] Peshine Avenue School [in Newark], that was ... the draft board, from there, by bus, to the, I guess the induction station, and then, they put us on [a bus], got us together with others from other draft boards and bussed us down to [Newark] Penn Station. We boarded a military train that had come in from New York. They had the guys from New York in part of the train, we had cars for us, taking us down to Fort Dix. First, the MPs were on there, [saying], "Do you have any dirty pictures, anything?" ... I don't know what else they were after. "You've got to turn them in now, because, if you show up at Fort Dix with these things, you're going right in the slammer," things like that, you know. So, you knew right away, you're in the military and you weren't the boss anymore. ... We got down to Fort Dix, disembarked, and, you know, the guys that'd been in the Army for two days, with the, "Oh, wait 'til you get the hook," [referring to worn-down needles used in administering vaccination shots]; you know, right away, people become, solid Army men within two days. They're ready to abuse the next guy, if you know what I mean? So, that was it. So, I was assigned to a barracks. I went down. My family had had a family party for me the night before, and I had a money belt, [a belt with special compartments for hiding valuables], and, as you know, [from] gifts, eighty dollars. It's the most money [I had carried] at that [point]. I never had that kind of money, ... you know, under my control. I get down to Fort Dix, get into the barracks, and there were double bunks. ... There was an older guy under me, some Italian guy, by the way, probably from the ward in Newark. [laughter] He said, "Oh, if you're worried about your money," he says, "you know, I'll take care of it for you." I said, "No, I'll take care of it." [laughter] Well, because of what he said, I don't think I slept all night. I had my two hands on that belt and I was holding that money, [laughter] but, then, guys moved in, he moved in. Next thing you know, there's two rooms at the end of a barracks for the non-coms. So, this one guy who was in charge, ... automatically, you move up to be in charge, so, the guy in charge of us says, "Hey, Joe, come on, move in here." He says, "Now, you're part of the cadre." [laughter] So, once I moved, that was, like, you know, within a day after that, I was on orders to go to Camp Wheeler, Georgia, [a US Army facility for training replacement infantrymen during World War II].

MP: What were your first impressions of basic training at Camp Wheeler?

JS: You know, it was all, like, an experience. ... I caught ... KP [kitchen patrol, mess hall duties] right at the beginning, but this goes with the territory. You know, I'd write back to these people at college and like, here, I had a raincoat that was too big for me and it rained. ... You

know, so, I write a letter back and say, "Yes, they gave me a raincoat where, when it rains, I get in the gutter and the water comes right into my pockets," you know, things like that. It was all fun and games, initially, but, you know, [I was] an eighteen-year-old kid; what do you expect? You know, we had yet to even see a gun, if you know what I mean?

SI: It sounds like you adjusted well to the Army, living in a barracks and eating Army food.

JS: Yes. I think the hardest part of the whole thing is when they put you through the process where you're going to get your shots. ... Now, like, they change needles. In those days, they didn't. You know, you'd go through a line and the medics would hit you on this arm and then the other arm. Now, you know, both arms are immobilized, and, now you'd already be through the area where you got your [equipment]. Now, they're telling you to carry two barracks bags to your [barracks], you know, and, I mean, it was a long walk. ... That's when you really knew you were in trouble, and that was the highlight of misery at Fort Dix.

SI: Then, you went to Camp Wheeler.

JS: Camp Wheeler, yes. That was an overnight train ride. ... Having been a history major, so-to-speak, I was fascinated by it, to see these old buildings that were, like, you know, half torn down, you know, along the route, and you'd get amazed. You'd figure, "Geez, I wonder if this was here during the Civil War." You know, you'd see these names that you'd only heard about when you studied the Civil War. So, that fascinated me more than anything else. You know, I didn't want to go to sleep, I wanted to see, [yet, there] wasn't much to see. What I mean [is], like, I remember pulling into Johnson City, Tennessee, and the train line goes right through the main street of Johnson City. You know, I was amazed. Who ever [thought] that something like that could be? and these were the things I was more [interested in]. It was like an extension of education to me, I think, at the time. ... Then, we got to Macon, Georgia, that's where Camp Wheeler was located, and [we had] to wait for trucks to pick us up.

MP: How long did your basic training last? How long were you down at Camp Wheeler?

JS: Thirteen weeks, [at the end of which we were] fully capable. When we completed basic training, we were ready to go into battle. That's the way they trained you at Fort Dix; pardon me, at ...

MP: Camp Wheeler.

JS: Camp Wheeler, and, you know, right from the bat, they said from the start the theme was, "You either learn to kill or you're going to be killed," and this was the theme, and, you know, everything was premised on that. ... The only thing that offset it is that, right from the start, our company commander, Captain (Swisher?), got us all together and he says, "You know, you're the most lucky bastards that ever hit the Army," he said, "because you're all pre-earmarked for the ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program, for training academically-inclined soldiers] Program," and then, we had to pick what specialty we wanted. ... They had either medicine, engineering or military law. Well, [of] the three, I picked military law, and, oh, a couple of weeks after I'd done that, I get called into the office and this major [was] telling me, "Military

law has been cut out." See, that would have been, to me, all I could envision, [was] that I'd be in an Italian village like the governor, you know, [laughter] and he said, "They cut out that. So, it's either medicine or engineering," and I'm trying to evaluate, in my mind real quick, which to pick. So, I figured, "I'm not for [becoming] a doctor. Who the hell could learn all that stuff?" I thought engineering'd be easier than being a doctor. So, I picked engineering, and that's where I went. I ended up going to basic engineering in Alabama [at the University of Alabama].

SI: What was the physical training ...

JS: The one thing they did do, I'm going to stop you right here, I get called out one day and I have to go see an Army ... major in intelligence. ... He's got me in there and he says, "Look, you're of Italian extraction. Your parents came from Italy." He said, "Who are your loyalties with?" I said, "With the United States." He said, "Well, would you have any hesitation to fight against the Italian Army?" I said, "None at all." I said, "They mean nothing to me," but it shows you how much they looked into this thing. You know, I often reflect, I said, "Wonder what they would have done if I'd said I had a hesitation." [laughter] I guess I would have been facing Japs before I knew it. [laughter]

SI: What was the physical training like at Camp Wheeler?

JS: It was hard, but, let me tell you, when you're eighteen years old and you've been in athletics... you used to wonder, "Why [do] we have to do these exercises? You know, my muscles are in good shape." Now, I realize [why], but, no, the physical activity, I think the hardest thing we had to adjust to is the long marches and chiggers; never knew what chiggers were. So, me and this kid from New York, we get to a bivouac area and we're hot. You know, down in Georgia, it's hot in, we're talking about, what? June, July and August. So, this was our first bivouac, and our sergeant had told us, "Be careful of the chiggers," you know, and we didn't pay that much attention. We were hot, took off all our clothes, laid on our blanket. ... Man, we were so bitten by chiggers that, from then on in, never again did I [make the same mistake]; get into an area, sweat, be uncomfortable, stay covered, but that's the way you learn. ... The other thing I learned, you know, learned the hard way, was the Sergeant said, "When you set up your pup tents, out in the bivouac area, make sure you don't set them up where, if it should rain, the water would accumulate." Well, we didn't [know]; how did we know, in the city, where the hell water would accumulate? So, we see a nice spot. He's from New York City, the Bronx, all together, and I'm from Newark. We picked this nice, flat spot, you know. There's a slope coming down, figured this [was nice], and it rained and it was a creek, and so, we got flooded out. So, then, we learned. I learned, then and there, where not to put a pup tent, but, you know, to me, that's the best way to learn, I guess, learn in basic training. Then, I knew better after that.

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

MP: This continues an interview with Mr. Joseph Salerno on March 28, 2007, in Monroe Township, New Jersey, with Michael Perchiacca and Shaun Illingworth.

SI: We were talking about your training in Camp Wheeler. How did the drill sergeants treat you?

JS: We had a Sergeant (Baker?), a Southerner. He was career Army, rough in his own way, you know, but he loved to pull fast ones on us. ... Again, I guess this is all part of the Army regime. I remember one, he said, ... "Instead of going on an overnight march, who'd rather stay on the grounds and do KP?" Smartass Joe, I figured, "What the hell? I don't want to walk all that. I'll stay and I'll do the KP." Once we got assigned to KP, they called off the march, you know. Things like that, he'd pull. We pulled things on him, too. ... You know, he got off to get married, and ... we'd have to sweep the barracks out every day. So, some smartass decided, "Let's..." and we swept [the dirt] into the Sergeant's room. Well, when he got back, let me tell you, we really caught it. I mean, he had us out there doing push-ups and hop and jump and everything else. So, you know, it was like a two-way street, the way you learned to get adjusted in the Army infantry, you know. They made you feel that this was the varsity, the infantry, and everybody else existed just to support you, which is true. ... So, you know, they instill this sort of team type of thing ... and we worked as a team. You know, you operated in an infantry squad, basically, and the squad is built up into, like, three-man teams, basically. ... You know, you learned to exist with this and how one arm helps the other. ... You know, like, they break you into these shoes. You know, I never realized the first march they did with brand-new shoes, they watered down the shoes. I mean, that was amazing to me. He poured water on all our shoes. So, then, when we took a three-mile march, three or whatever, the shoes took the shape of our feet. So, these are just little anecdotes. ... Then, we went on a rifle range. I never made expert, but I was a sharpshooter, which was the "in-between" range. ... I took to it. You know, to me, map reading and all these things, they [were easy]. So, when I ultimately ended up in an outfit, I became, like, sort of, the guy next to the platoon leader. I was his messenger, you know, and I had been an assistant squad leader, and all these [things]. I took to the infantry at the time, but I was young. By the time I got called back [for the Korean War], I didn't want any part of the infantry.

SI: Your next stop was the University of Alabama.

JS: Right.

SI: What was that like? Where were you housed?

JS: ... They had, it was almost like a military barracks. ... Some of the guys were in the actual dormitories, but I happened to be one of the units that was in a little offbeat [building], and it was built like a barracks, essentially, one-story. ... [I think], years before, a lot of ROTC people used it, and we had a quadrangle, you know, where you formed up for reveille and retreat. ... We had a Captain (Roundfield?), as Southern as the day he was born, and I thought he was about eighty at the time, but he had been recalled. You know, they had a perfect job for him right there on campus, serving as a company commander for ASTP soldiers. ... Can you think of anything better than being in uniform, on a college campus, getting paid, you know? You know, my parents gave me a dollar a week when I was at Montclair. Here, I had fifty dollars a month, you know, [before] whatever they took out, and it was good living. You know, we'd go out, my group, after retreat, go out for dinner. Of course, we'd pull fast ones even then, you know.

When I think about it, there was a place to go for dinner and we'd go sit down and have dinner, and then, we'd go to the men's room. Then, we'd come out and sit at the counter, have coffee and pie, and then, go out and just pay for the coffee and pie. So, even then, we were connivers from the city. [laughter]

SI: At both Camp Wheeler and the University of Alabama, how did you get along with people from other parts of the country, like the South and the Midwest?

JS: Great. I roomed with a guy from Indiana, a guy named (Carl Schaefer?). I don't think he survived the war, because I haven't [been able to find him]. ... When we moved up to Camp Atterbury [in Indiana], he went into Cannon Company, [an artillery component of infantry regiments]. Every time I tried to check, I can't find anything about him after the Bulge, after the battle, but ... I knew guys from Virginia, Massachusetts. You know, you sort of all blend together, you know. Jersey was, you know, there was something about Jersey. You know, it used to fascinate people, I don't know, down South, anyhow. Like I told my [wife], you know, you'd go to these sororities, they said, "Joysey," you know, as if you're something special. ... No, you know, to me, I thought we got along without any problems.

MP: Did you notice any racism while you were stationed at Camp Wheeler?

JS: Well, I'll tell you the one thing that happened to me. In Camp Wheeler, ... they had black troops there also, under training. ... We're on a road march, and we're taking our break, the hourly break, and a black unit was a little behind us. ... All of a sudden, a black kid comes up to me and he said, "Joe." Well, this is a black kid that lived in my neighborhood. You know, we'd talk, you know, because I was friendly [with him]. In fact, I had lost my high school graduation ring and he found it for me and brought it to us. So, we're talking. Well, I caught hell from the Sergeant for that. You know, "What are you talking to him for?" I said, "Geez, he's from my neighborhood." "Well, down here, you just don't talk to the blacks," you know, that type of stuff, but the other thing [was], when we moved into Macon, Georgia, on the trip, the one thing they pointed out, the MPs pointed out right away, "White soldiers, do not go into a black neighborhood. If you go, ... you'll be arrested." So, you know, right off the bat, you knew there were two distinct neighborhoods in Macon, Georgia. ... When you were in the downtown area, I don't recall ever seeing blacks on the street. Maybe in the working areas, they were [there].

SI: Do you remember seeing signs, such as, "Colored Restroom?"

JS: Oh, yes, that you saw, yes.

SI: Did you find that unusual at all?

JS: But, you just accepted it, you know. For some reason or other, [I] never questioned it; you accepted it. I mean, it's a shame to say, but that we did. We just never gave it a second thought. I mean, now, you realize that some people had to suffer under that, but, you know, ... for some reason or another, you never associated suffering with it. You just assumed, you know.

SI: What was an average day at the University of Alabama like, both the classes and the military training?

JS: Well, first thing in the morning, you would have reveille, just as if you were, you know, in Camp Wheeler. Then, you'd break out and you'd march to the dining hall for your breakfast. They always wanted to serve you grits, and I never [liked them]. I ate grits once. That was enough for me, and then, you come back to your quarters, you get your books and all and you'd line up with your group to go to class, you know. ... They always had an acting squad leader, so-to-speak, that would take you. We'd rotate that, and then, we had our own, each barracks had their own, touch football team. We'd play one another, and, come to think of it, we didn't really go into town. You know, to us, the social life was right on campus. They had Saturday night dances, they had the different, you know, things going on on campus. One time, we did go to Birmingham. We rented a car and went to Birmingham, and I'm trying to think what was distinguishable [about that]. ... That's when we first noticed the signs, you know, "She may look clean, but..." you know, ... on the poles. You'd see that all through town; found out later, Birmingham was one of the biggest VD [venereal disease] towns, but, you know, the Army said that about every town you got near. So, I don't know how much, ... you know, really to put into that now, in retrospect, but, at that time, it was impressionable. ... Every Saturday, you know you were going to see a VD film. So, that was sort of part-and-parcel of the whole thing, even on campus, but I remember, we went in to Birmingham. ... We had a hotel room. There were about six of us in one room and we meet this guy who wanted to buy us drinks and all that, and then, find out later, he was a homosexual, and we didn't find that out until he came back to the hotel room with us. You know, we're acting up and the "house dick" [the hotel detective] comes in. He says, "You're making too much noise," and he spotted this guy. He says, "You, out," and, you know, we were [asking], "Why you chasing him?" "We don't need homos around here," or something like that. That, I [remember], you know. That's just an incident I recall, but ... the only other time I went into Birmingham was when we're going on leave. ... We rented a car that we could drop off in Birmingham, and that's where we picked up the train to come north. So, you could also pick it up at Tuscaloosa, [a city in west-central Alabama], to make a connection, but the timing wasn't right and we couldn't get our passes until 12:01 [AM], January 1st. You know, that was the timing of it. So, we have to wait until then. Once we got, you know, our furlough papers, then, we jumped in the car and went up to Birmingham. ... Like I say, we didn't stay there extra long, put in, I guess, two semesters, to February, March. So, you had two semesters. ... They didn't have it like [most colleges], you know, where we have a half a year each. They had, like, three months was a semester.

SI: How intense was the classroom work?

JS: If it was intense, we didn't feel it, because, you know, our minds were sort of [elsewhere]. We just did enough to pass, you know. It's the first time I really got into a situation where you had the tiered lecture hall, you know, for physics and things, you know. You'd have your lab, but, then, you'd have the lecture hall. Well, you know, at Montclair, you didn't have anything that big. So, that was a unique experience for me at the time.

SI: How did you take to the ...

JS: And, thank God, I learned [physics]. To me, physics is one of the most important things I ever studied.

SI: How did you take to the engineering training, since it was different from your educational background?

JS: Oh, yes, well, that's why I say physics really fascinated me. I didn't get along good in the chemistry lab, but physics, I [excelled in]. ... I wish I had paid a little more attention in geography, because I had a good geography teacher and I let that go by, because, in retrospect, she was really giving us a lot of good information. ... I wasn't sitting in the right place. You know, sometimes, if you're not sitting in the right place in a classroom, you can do yourself in. If you're up near the front, with the right kind of people near you, [you will be okay], but, if you're sitting towards the rear and you got a *kibitzer* [a Yiddish term for gossip] near you, you're in trouble in class. You know, I should remind my grandkids of that, "Watch out who you're sitting next to."

SI: Did anybody wash out of training, where they could not pass tests or keep up academically?

JS: Oh, yes, we had different guys leaving for [different reasons]. You know, one guy left because he was allergic to wool. Once we got into winter uniforms, he couldn't [get into his]. They had to let him go. Well, I mean, another guy left to go in the Air Force [Army Air Corps]. ... We had one guy that might have flunked out, that was from Brooklyn College, and that's about all that I [recall], maybe one, other than that, but, don't forget, ... the people they picked for this program were, you know, ... people [who] they knew were going to meet what had to be met. It wasn't every [GI]. You know, like I say, I had a 132 on my IQ, which, in the Army, that was considered good. I don't know what the hell it is nowadays, but ... this was the caliber of people that they put in there. ... They have to have some sort of a background for it, because they just didn't put everybody into it. I know people that tried to get in. In fact, I had a neighbor up the street, he passed away, ... but he tried to get in, couldn't get into it, and he was a Rutgers man, by the way.

MP: When your Army Specialized Training Program was completed, is that when you entered the Armed Forces Information School?

JS: Oh, after that, yes.

MP: What was that about?

JS: The Armed Forces Information School was during the Korean War.

MP: Okay.

SI: Okay, we will get to that. You went through two semesters at the University of Alabama, and then, they announced that they were going to close the program.

JS: Right.

SI: How did you and your fellow cadets receive that news?

JS: You know, there was very little, if any, disillusionment. For some reason or another, we just accepted it, that, now, we're going. You know, "This is what we're in the Army for." You accept it. ... I don't recall anyone, really, you know, getting ill, not ill, but, you know, unhappy about it. The order comes in, you know, that's it; you just accepted it. I don't know whether it was our juvenile age or what, but, ... when you figure we're nineteen, I guess, at the time, ... it's not like we felt that this was a bitter pill, you know. "So? It's over, that's all. You know, we had the playground, now, we can play hero to the girls," or something like that, you know what I mean?
...

SI: That was when you went to Camp Atterbury.

JS: Right. ... This was in around March, and some of these Southern boys never saw snow. Just as we got to Atterbury, it was snowing. So, you know, we thought that was a big joke, that this is the first time they ever saw snow, but, you know, that was really about it, you know. If anything, the guys from Indiana [were] very happy we're going to Indiana. So, we figured it was a good deal, too; get out of the South. We'd been down there enough, you know. Go in the Midwest, and there were supposed to be good leave towns, the Midwest girls [were] supposed to be pretty and all that stuff. You know, that's what you think about at that age. ...

SI: When you arrived at Camp Atterbury and joined the 106th Infantry Division, were they in training there?

JS: They're just coming in. They're just coming off Tennessee Maneuvers, [large-scale military exercises in Middle Tennessee], and they had just [finished]. They were coming in at the time, actually, while we came in, and we went into what they call their replacement company and [were] waiting to be assigned to a specific unit. ... You know, I think we stayed there for, while it's snowing and all, about three or four days. Then, as the Army usually does, they wait until after dark to say, "Okay, now, we're taking you to the regiments for assignments." So, you know, I went with the group to the 423rd Infantry [Regiment] and, you know, we had to wait outside and they'd process you one at a time. ... You know, I look back and I say, I knew how to type, and what else did I [hide]? you know, that I wouldn't tell. ... I never told them I could speak a foreign language. In retrospect, I should have told them. I probably would have been thrown in a different kind of assignment, but I didn't, because, again, we were among the *gung ho* crew. We wanted to be with the varsity. The varsity was the fighting men, and so, I went in to be interviewed and they went, "Do you know how to type?" "No," I said, "I'm not that much of a typist," and so, they want to know if I wanted to go in the weapons or rifle company. I said, "I prefer rifle company." You know, I didn't like the idea of mortars. See, I used to work with them. They weren't my thing, and I didn't like the machine gun as much as I [liked the rifle], "Just give me the rifle." So, I was assigned into Company B, me and about six other guys. ... We came in at night, went to sleep, and we're sleeping with, not battle-hardened, but certainly maneuver-hardened veterans, and we no sooner got there and they got put on orders to go on replacement overseas. So, the old-time [crew], including the lieutenant, within days, were pulled out and we replacements came in with the cadre that had been there. ... We went through an

entire, you know, like, a basic training refresher, about maybe three or four weeks, and so, then, we went on all of a sudden unit training, which I had never had before, ... and then, regimental combat team training. ... By that time, I'd impressed the Company Commander, because they have to pick certain people out to go take special map training and I was one that they picked, and I ended up with the highest score in the whole division on map training, "city boy," map training. [laughter] I always kid her about it, and so you know, he became well aware of me then, so that, now, they were getting ready for the next call-up of replacements for overseas, you know. ... We're talking [about when] they're getting ready for D-Day, which I didn't know at the time. ... Even though they couldn't promote me, because promotions were frozen, they gave me a squad leader MOS [military occupational specialty], which meant that I wasn't among the group to be called out, because the non-coms, they wanted to keep as cadre. ... So, I missed that one, and then, we brought in another new batch. Most of these guys were Air Cadets that were coming in, and I helped train them. ... It was around this time where the Company Commander wanted to know if I wanted to go to OCS [Officer Candidate School], or to take that test over again, because, if I could get 135, then, he could put me up ... for West Point. I said, "I'm not interested in West Point," I said, "but I am interested in OCS." So, okay, ... we trained another batch and, now, they got pulled out, we got another new [batch]. Now, we're talking about, really, except for a handful of the non-coms, and even the officers changed on us, we went into, you know, the final test before going overseas for a division. ... We had trouble qualifying our officers, and we ended up, finally, qualifying them. ... I was picked out as the enlisted representative for my company to speak to ... the War Department people [who] would come down and make sure the division was ready to go. You know, every company had to have somebody, and whatever they asked me, I answered right, apparently, because the Company Commander was happy. ... Then, we just waited, you know, and, in September, and I'd say, for us that had been there, we'd been really fully trained, you know, up to [the] regimental level. ... We go into town and these girls we knew, at these dance halls, [said], "You guys are going to go overseas to Europe." I said, "What are you talking about?" "Yes, our father is an engineer on the railroad. They're alerting the railroad to get the railroad cars together." So, we go back to camp and damned if, Monday morning, they don't tell us, "Everybody's restricted. We're alerted to go overseas." They knew in town before we did, and so, you know, we have to stay on camp, got issued all [these things], had to make sure we had our weaponry and all our equipment, and then, we went out in phases to Camp Myles Standish in Massachusetts. ... From there, they took a train down to New Jersey, which broke my heart, because I knew home wasn't that far away, and then, we have to take a ferry over to New York and board the *Queen Elizabeth*, and then, the rest is history. [Editor's Note: The RMS *Queen Elizabeth* was used as a troop transport ship during World War II.]

SI: We have a couple of questions about the period prior to going overseas. You mentioned that you had some interaction with women in town. What was the relationship like between you and your friends at Camp Atterbury and the local townspeople?

JS: Oh, they took to us like we're their children. ... You know, they wanted to have you [over] for dinner. It was our town. In fact, ... when our division got wiped out, they mourned more than anybody else, as an entire community. To this day, it's recognized that they suffered, because they knew everybody. We paraded in Indianapolis, you know, all these kind of things.

SI: Would you go and meet people in bars and restaurants?

JS: USO [clubs]. [Editor's Note: The United Service Organizations, or USO, is an organization that provides recreation and entertainment to servicemen and women.]

SI: Or in USOs.

JS: Went to [the] USO occasionally, there was bars, there were dance halls, you know, all kinds.

SI: What about going from being in this ASTP unit to then being thrown in with the infantry unit? Was there any initial friction between you and the guys that had already been there?

JS: No, you know, they were [amiable]. You know, I remember, one of the guys was going on leave and needed a shirt and he was my size, you know. So, I loaned him my shirt. You know, this was right at the beginning. I remember the first day, though, the first sergeant comes in, he says, "Hey, how about you new guys? Who wants to do guard duty today?" ... We figured, "What the hell, you know? Okay," [laughter] and, like a silly ass boy, I said, "What uniform?" He says, "Just wear your fatigues." Sure, we're carrying the "garbs;" that was the guard duty. We were up in a garbage truck, picking up the garbage cans, you know. [laughter] So, you learned how to deal with these guys.

SI: There was none of that, "Oh, you college boys..." that I hear of sometimes.

JS: Not really, you know. I don't ever recall anyone ridiculing me about being a college boy or anything else. I guess not. First of all, they knew I was a city boy and there were a lot of city boys, you know, and, especially in an infantry squad, you know, we're in squads at the time and you just [bond fast]. ...

SI: It sounds like your training was very effective and you felt like you were well prepared.

JS: I felt that way, yes. In fact, you know, talking about blending in, ... we had a regular Army sergeant, from Rock Hill, South Carolina, [William N.] "Red" Ussery. He was a heavy drinker and gambler and he took an affinity to me, to the extent that he knew I watched what I did with my money. So, he knew he couldn't hold on to his money. He'd get paid, you know, we got paid once a month, and he'd be broke, you know, within days. So, he said, "Joe, would you hold half of my pay and don't give it to me?" "Okay." So, I did. I put it in my wallet and, you know, he wanted a drink. So, he comes begging me and I wouldn't give him his damn money. I remember, one night, I was in town, I come in, he's sleeping in my bunk, waiting for me, because, you know, the non-coms, they have their own rooms. I wouldn't give him his money, and then, his wife came up to see him, you know. I met his family and everything else, yes, but he was just one of these Southern rebels that could [drink]. You know, he couldn't avoid drinking, regular Army, but that's why I say ... I never really recall anybody, you know, being, you know, bullish about, you know, "You have an education," you know, because, I'll tell you, when you get in[to] an infantry squad, that education don't mean a hill of beans. It's your weapon and how you team up.

MP: Were you involved in any activities on the base? You said something about baseball.

JS: No, I didn't play baseball on the base, no. They did have a team, but I knew I wasn't capable, and it wasn't one of my interests at the time. I figured I had enough, I was doing my training, and then, [I would] relax. Even then, I liked to take a nap in the evening.

SI: You mentioned that, eventually, you became the platoon leader's messenger.

JS: Yes.

SI: Was that at this point or later on?

JS: Just as we're getting ready to go overseas, you know. We're preparing, when we had these, you know, maneuvers, to clear, make sure the platoon leaders could clear. See, like, I was one of the most experienced ones in the company, so, when our platoon leader passed, [Sterling R.?] Garwood, a couple of the others didn't. So, they would set up special platoons to help these guys pass, you know, and I would do that, too, but, yes, I became the liaison between the Captain and my platoon leader, and I ... essentially got along very well with the Company Commander.

SI: Which was somewhat unusual in the Army; when you say, "Get along," was it strictly professional?

JS: Oh, I don't mean socially; professional, strictly professional. No, no, there was a distinction. ... That's where I began to realize I wanted to be an officer.

SI: You could see that the officers lived a little better.

JS: Without a doubt.

MP: Was there a sense of resentment towards officers?

JS: Just that was a part of life [that] you accepted. ... You know, they talk about, during the, what was it? Vietnam War, "fragging;" you know, you never heard anything like that during World War II. You accepted this was the way the scheme was, you know, it was a pyramid, and you accepted it. ...

SI: It sounds like the officers took care of their men.

JS: Well, you know ...

SI: Did not abuse their privileges?

JS: I don't think so, no, no. No, Garwood, particularly, I thought he went out of his way to protect some of the guys in combat, that I recall. Of course, he got in trouble with his hierarchy, but, with the men; ... he was [only] a nineteen-year-old lieutenant at the time, maybe twenty.

His father was a brigadier general and he was like a typical kid. He thought he was going to run the whole Army, and I remember, I had to; ... you don't want to talk about combat yet, or you do?

SI: No, go on.

JS: Well, he wanted it. ... See, we were on this one hillside and he felt, "Well, we should be taking that other hillside." Well, you know, that's not a prerogative given to lieutenants, [laughter] but, he told me to go back and tell the Company Commander, "I want to move our platoon up there, so [that] we have better positioning. You know, we have to go through a valley." So, I go back to the Company Commander and I said, "Lieutenant Garwood says he wants to [take the hill]," and I showed him on the map, right. [The Company Commander said], "You go back and tell him that, the last I heard, General [Dwight D.] Eisenhower's still running this goddamned war." So, I went back and I told him, I said, "General Eisenhower's still running this goddamned war, Lieutenant," [laughter] and that was it, but we went out on patrols together.

...

SI: Okay. Getting into your overseas service, can you tell us about the voyage over on the *Queen Elizabeth*?

JS: Well, that was interesting, in the fact that, you know, I never realized how big a ship could be. You know, we have to walk [aboard], here, we're carrying two big bags on our back, rifle, full field packs, and you've got to go up this spiral [staircase]. ... One level, there'd be a band playing, another level, there'd be Red Cross workers wanting to give you a cup of coffee. Well, who the hell could stop, you know, pick up a cup of coffee, when you're trying to manage all this on your back? So, you know, nobody was really taking the coffee, but [we] went up about eight flights. Then, we got on shipboard and, on shipboard, the first night, ... almost the whole platoon was put in one stateroom, and you sleep where you can, and, the next night, you alternate. You've got to sleep on the promenade deck. ... So, you had your sleeping bags, that's what you used, and you had to eat that British food. Well, that's the worst damned food in the world and you'd have drills every day, but the ship would zigzag and we had this guy, MacDonald, who to me, God rest his soul, he died in prison camp, he was one of the best personalities I ever met. He always managed to meet people that could do you a good deed or something, and he met some of these British ...

SI: Sailors?

JS: Well, I wouldn't call them sailors; they worked on a ship, you know. ...

SI: Merchant Marines?

JS: I guess they were, and so, through him, these guys took us down into the bowels of the ship, you know, and you went into the [engine room], where the engines were, and then, we went out in the back, where there was another little deck where they threw the garbage out. See, garbage [was] just thrown out and you could see how the ship was zigzagging, and we met a stowaway. One of the British guys was supposed to be on another ship, missed his ship, so, they stowed him

away on here, you know. ... Right now, in retrospect, I say to myself, that guy could have been a spy, as far as I know when you really think back, but he was a limey from the word go, you know that (might have been?). I'm just saying that these things were going on even in the midst of the war, but these [are] little sidebars, you know. ... So, we got to meet the guys who were manning the ship and everything else. The only adverse thing was the food, but anyhow, they had a PX [post exchange], but you only could buy candy by the case. So, I bought a case of these peanut butter cups. So, that was my meal. I'd eat that throughout the voyage.

SI: What was going through your mind in terms of, now, you are heading into the theater of war? Were you thinking about that at all?

JS: Not at all. We just accepted this was [the case], but we did think [the] war was coming to an end. ... For some reason or another, we're all of the opinion, "This war is going to end before we get involved in it," you know, even though we're moving right into it, but, at that particular time, see, we landed, oh, let's say around near the end of October, I guess, or in that vicinity somewhere. In Scotland, we took a train down to Cheltenham [in County Gloucestershire in England], and that was where we were initially billeted and the regimental headquarters [was located]. Then, they took our company to go to; boy, these things used to be second nature to me. All of a sudden, [I have trouble recalling]; it's in my write-up, but, anyhow, we had to clear up, you know, clean up, a British military camp for our artillery battalion that was coming in. They hadn't come in yet; it was Gloucestershire [Gloucester?]. So, our company, just our company, went there and our job was to clean up the place and get it ready, and here we are, what? in a company, you might figure 250 men, something like that. About two miles from us, we had four thousand WAAFS from the British Women's Air Force, [the Royal Air Force's female auxiliary]. ... That was their boot training camp, and you've until ten o'clock, you know, in their pubs, and I think you could stay in the pubs until eleven o'clock. I think they closed around eleven. ... We got that camp ready for them, and then, we went back to Cheltenham and lived in Quonset huts on a big estate. [Editor's Note: A Quonset hut was a prefabricated steel structure often used during World War II as barracks.] ... The officers lived in the estate, we lived in the Quonset huts, and we'd have to do our drills out on the field where the cows were. So, that means you have to drill right with the cow poop. [laughter] I don't know if you've ever seen cow poop, you know, it's big, black mounds, and here we'd be, you know, lined up and, if you've got [bad luck], if you happen to be there, you stepped in it [laughter] and stayed in it until [ordered to move]. ... Then, we got [word], now, that we're going to go on the Continent, and the first night, MacDonald again, God bless him, he found a door in the wall of the estate and he said, "There's a pub up the [road]." So, we snuck out, went through this door, went up to this pub, and here were these Englishmen, playing darts. So, we ended up playing darts up there and getting to meet the Englishmen. There were about five or six of us and, you know, that was like a sidebar. After that, we were given passes into town, the town, you know, it's like visiting any town. So, you look at the highlights, you know, they were nothing noted to see, and we got alerted to leave. ... It was on Thanksgiving Day, I think, because we got our turkey dinner while we're on the run and we had to carry all our gear to the train station and we took a train, trains, I should say, because we went in a series, to Southampton, and then, they put us in a big warehouse. [Editor's Note: Southampton, in Southern England, was used as a port of departure to supply troops in France during World War II.] We waited, you know, God knows how many hours, to get assigned to ships to cross the Channel, and I'd never taken these anti-seasickness

pills, never. They'd talk so much about how rotten the [English] Channel was, I figured, "Well, I'd better take one." It's the only time I ever got seasick, crossing the Channel. ... You know, it was uneventful, as far as any enemy action, and we landed at Le Havre, couldn't go ashore, because ... everything was too messed up. ... Sometimes, you know, again, we had to wait and they brought a landing craft over to the ship. [Editor's Note: Le Havre, France, was a large troop replacement depot in France during World War II.] We ... climbed down to the landing craft, the landing craft took us ashore and, from there, we were marched from Le Havre, for, I don't know how long, maybe five, six or seven miles, it was a long walk, into an open field, where we're supposed to set up our tents. ... Our barracks [bags], you know, our duffle bags, hadn't arrived yet. We were there and, smartass me, I hadn't packed my tent pegs, had the tent half, but not the [pegs], in my pack. So, me and this kid, (Hart?), are putting up a tent. I don't have my [pegs], you know, for one [side], so, we had just one side of the tent, and then, it started pouring rain. ... We had some hell of a time in there, trying to keep dry and keep warm, too, because it was getting cold, and so, we set up a little fire in our helmet, you know. We had those little; oh, I don't know what you'd call them. They had a little candle in them. That's what we'd warm our coffee up with, and we'd warm up the tent. [Editor's Note: Mr. Salerno may be referring to canned heat.] Next day, fortunately, our bags came in and I got my other half and we got the tent up, but we stayed there for [awhile]. Oh, we did training from there, it was all muddy, and [we were] waiting on orders, ... you know, [to see] who we're going to support, you know, who we're backing up. We are now in 12th Army Group Reserve. That was [General Omar] Bradley's unit, which meant we could have either gone with General [Courtney Hicks] Hodges, First Army, or with [General George S.] Patton, Third Army. So, when we got word that we were being assigned to Hodges, First Army, you know, he was an infantryman, Patton was armor. Well, we knew Hodges had more empathy for the foot soldier. Patton had no [empathy], for you know, "Foot soldiers, to keep up with the tanks. Run if you have to," you know what I mean? So, we were so happy that we got assigned to Hodges. Then, these Transportation Corps trucks came in and took us across France, up into the combat area, you know, through Belgium, and we bivouacked in an area just behind this [area] west of St. Vith. ... Then, it snowed. All of a sudden, we're in all that kind of stuff, and I can't recall how many days we were doing that. [Editor's Note: St. Vith, Belgium, was a transportation crossing that was fought over during the Battle of the Bulge.] All I know is that I went to church services, came back from church service, [found that] one of the guys from battalion, while we're at church, had shot himself, killed himself, didn't [make it], you know. These things ... the idea of going to the front, ... I guess, threw him, but, then, we moved up by truck. ... I remember, it was early in the morning when we got aboard the trucks. I'll always remember one thing and, to this day, I don't know why, but, all of a sudden, I got sick to my stomach and, you know, I didn't think I was afraid, but ... I guess, subconsciously, I really was, but, you know, fortunately, I got over it. I didn't have to puke or anything, but I was nauseous, and we went [forward], you know. They took us up to, you know, right up into the [line], you know, our line of defense to replace the Second Infantry Division, foxhole for foxhole, emplacement for emplacement. ... Being [that] I was one of the first guys at the head of the platoon, Lieutenant assigned [me], you know, told me to go with the BAR guy, me and Owens, "Snake" Owens. He was from North Carolina. He was a BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] man and we got one of the first assignments, in a two-man foxhole. ... The thing that stands out, you know, now, ... we're just around December, you know early December and the snow's cracking and, you know, to me, that's a German coming up. I mean, you're just that tense, and the idea was, there was two-man [teams] and the way the ...

SI: Hold that thought. ...

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

SI: You were talking about when you first got in the line. The snow was cracking.

JS: Oh, yes, you know, that would make you think that that was a German coming up at you or something. ... Of course, the Second Division had really made these foxholes into something worth being in, compared to what you usually get. They had put logs over it, to protect from, you know, overhead incoming artillery, and it was big enough where you had a little area to lie down in. So, one could lie down while the other was on watch, but the idea was, "Snake" Owens was going to do the watch and I was going to sleep. Well, you know, you can't [sleep], not when you're first up there. So, we're both up there and, you know, you get to the point, initially, that you feel so secure in that hole that you're saying, "Let somebody come, just so I get my baptism of fire," [laughter] you know, and then, we got relieved after, you know, X number of hours. I don't know who could keep track [of] the time? and I got back. You know, what happened is, we were right in the Siegfried Line and our platoon headquarters was a Siegfried Line pillbox, [a concrete gun emplacement], and that's where ... we had bunks in there and they had a little pot-bellied stove, and just to, you know, the side of it was a little outhouse. [Editor's Note: The Siegfried Line was a defensive system established on the western border of Germany.] When I say outhouse, it was just somewhere you could sit, you know, not that you had an enclosure or anything, and let's say, like, the interior of an outhouse, and I have to [use it]. So, I went there, you know, and I [begin], you know. Pants are down, I'm defecating, and, all of a sudden, it's like the whole [world], everything's shaking. "What the hell is that?" Then, it dawned on me; artillery was coming in and, here I am, in an exposed position, December, with my bare ass hanging out, you know. I grab my rifle, my pants are down around my knees and I run for, you know, ... the pillbox, and the Lieutenant and the guys are right [in] the entry way, laughing their heads off, because, here, I'm running that way, [laughter] while the artillery's coming in. That was my baptism of fire, over a damned slit trench, ... but, you know, in a way, it sort of broke the ice, because, you know, everybody thought it was so damned comical. ... Then, from there, we [were] assigned, who'd go to the pillboxes or who'd get, you know, being part of the inner unit, not in the squad I was, be part of the group that'd protect the pillbox around the clock, and that's where we sat for a few days. ... You know, the Germans would send patrols through and we'd get into skirmishes with them, and then, you know, if they couldn't penetrate, they'd pull back, you know. ... Then, you know, at night, the sky would light up like it was daylight. Everybody was sending up flares and we had one squad in a pillbox that was down the valley and that was ... sort of like our listening post down there. That squad was down there, near an intersection, and we had to replenish it every night. So, we'd alternate squads and, you know, the Lieutenant and I'd go out with them, when we're exchanging this way, but, you know, once that sky'd light up, you have to stop dead in your tracks, because, if there's any movement, the enemies on the other slope could pick you up. ... I'm trying to think, ... let's see, the 16th, yes, the night of the 15th ...

SI: Everything you were talking about was in the week or two prior to December 16th.

JS: Just a few days before.

SI: Okay.

JS: Okay, we're talking now, let's say, now, I'm bringing you up to [December 16, 1944]. We were there for a few days, we'd go back, getting rations, getting supplies. I remember, on one occasion, I went back with a guy named Gordon Pinney to pick up, I guess, grenades at the time, I'm not sure. ... It was one [place where], I remember, the Second Division messenger told me, "Be careful at this crossroad," he said, "because, on a clear day, an enemy sniper can pick you up," and I forgot. So, we're coming across this roadway and, all of a sudden, my helmet gets shot off my head, and so, you know, Pinney and I, we drop everything and jump into a ditch. Oh, he went one way and I went the other. That's right, I went back, he went forward. In the meantime, my helmet's out in the middle of the road. So, now, you know, I didn't know how the hell to get my helmet. I got scared. ... I was afraid to make a move and, finally, I decided, "Well, good, bad or not, I've got to take a shot at this, because I can't stay here forever." So, I jumped up, kicked the helmet ahead of me and got to the other side of the road, and the webbing, he had shot the webbing on my helmet, and that was the first real, well, second real scare. The other first one was earlier, and, you know, this reminds me, the Germans would come in at night. Now, we didn't realize until later, when we went back to visit, that a lot of these Germans were coming [through our lines]. See, their wives who were in Schonberg, in that area, living. They'd come home, for; ... what do they call it in jail when they go and they have a night of intimacy? [conjugal visits]. ... In other words, they were going home and making out with their wives, so-to-speak, and, here, we thought we're so damned good, but we found out later, they were infiltrating our lines. You know, we got a few, but a lot got through and their wives were right there in Schonberg, you know. See, that was the part of Belgium that, apparently, went to Belgium as part of World War I, but they're really Germans, and that, we're in that. That's where our lines were. Isn't that funny? I can't think of the word, but, then, around, let's see, the night of the 15th, the Company Commander come in to our platoon, you know, headquarters, to get a briefing, look around, and I guess it must have been really the morning of the 16th, because, when he got ready to go back to his company CP [command post], and this is after ... he let Garwood know he's not running the war; ... you know, we had guys wounded. I had to bring them back. You know, one of the first guys that we got wounded was a piano player, and where does he get wounded? in the hand, blew off half of his [fingers]. You know, I mean, it shows you just how fate is. We had a Hawaiian, Sergeant Kokomo, got hit, you know, and I have to bring these guys back to the company CP, and then, from there, the medics would take over, but, anyhow, on the morning of the 16th, the Company Commander, I've got to bring ... the Company Commander back to his CP. ... Just about the time we left our platoon CP, all kinds of artillery starts falling, and we're in a pine woods, you know, and this is the worst place to be under artillery, because, you know, shrapnel it sprays, but, fortunately, we managed to get back to the company CP when the artillery was coming in. ... The CP has, you know, its protective barrier, too, guys protecting it. ... In this particular case, a guy named Wagner, and, you know, he gives us halt, the whole bit; we've got to give the password. We give the password, and then, he gives the counter password, and I forget what they were at the time. So, we advance, you know, we come in, and there he is, with a hand grenade, and he had let the pin go. So, you know, now, he's holding the live grenade, the grenade without a pin (he had discarded it). So, the Company Commander tells me, he says, "Here, take Wagner and get rid of this thing

somewhere where it's safe." Well, now, artillery's coming in, we were in a pine woods. So, I'm looking for a place for him and, you know, I come near, there's like a gulley, and I told him, I said, "Paul, don't throw it, roll it down here, and then, let's, you know, drop to the ground," because I knew if he threw it, ... if it hit a tree, it'd come right back at you. It was a dud. It fizzled, which didn't hurt me at all, but, then, I had to get back to our platoon, which I did, and we had no idea that this was a massive, all-out attack. We thought it was just in our sector. ... At daybreak, we find, you know, all of a sudden, there's German infantry, like a patrol, advancing on our position and they start coming up the hillside. ... Of course, we had troops in that, you know, one squad to the left in that one pillbox and we were [here], so, we had positions by the pillbox, and we start firing. They were getting, you know, firing from the flank. So, they withdrew, pulling back some of their wounded with them, and so, we figured we held the day. We thought we were doing all right, until, ... then, we found out, from the Lieutenant, you know, through the sound-powered telephone [field telephone], which, incidentally, were constantly interrupted by Germans speaking on our sound-powered telephones, ... that we were surrounded. Well, we thought they were talking about our battalion only. I figured, "Well, we held here, but they went through," we heard Bleialf, [Germany], which was, you know, a main road [junction]. It went right behind us. See, where we were located, there was only one bridge to get out to St. Vith from where we were, only one bridge in, the same bridge out. There was no other way, because you had the Our River [there]. ... So, then again, word comes to us that the Seventh Armored Division's going to break us out. [Editor's Note: The Our River in Luxembourg and Germany was captured by the Allies during the attack on the Siegfried Line.] Well, I've got a cousin in the Seventh Armored, "Boy, great, they'll get us out." Well, then, we find out, ... I didn't find out until much later, there were two regiments surrounded. We thought it was just a battalion. Two full regiments, you're talking, you know, like seven thousand-some men, maybe eight thousand. The Germans had infiltrated around us through AVW to the north and Bleialf to the South; well, maybe I get north and south [confused], I don't know, or east and west, whatever it was, and they were closing in behind us. You know, in other words, we couldn't get out. So, initially, the idea was, we would hold our positions, we had one reserve battalion that would advance, form a perimeter, and the Air Force was supposed to drop supplies, ammo and supplies. Well, the weather was so bad that couldn't happen. So, then, the word [came down], we ... finally pulled out of our positions, with the idea that we're going to have to do something and set up our own perimeter with the rest of our own regiment and the other regiment right alongside of us. I'm trying to get [the time straight]; this was, we pulled out on the 18th [of December] and what happened [was], I'd been up all night, running messages and all. So, the Lieutenant told me, finally, on the morning of the 18th, he said, "Joe, grab a bunk in the back of the pillbox, get some shut eye," which I did. So, I don't know how long thereafter, this Sergeant Ussery comes up to me, he's shaking me, he said, "Come on, get up." I said, "Get the hell out of here. The Lieutenant says I can sleep today." He said, "Well, you can sleep," he said, "the rest of us are pulling out." Then, it dawned on me, what he said. I said, "What?" Well, I get up and I see the platoon's lined up to leave. So, I grab my pack and my rifle and we're pulling out of the position, and we took the rear guard of the battalion. ... Meantime, we left the squad down in that one pillbox I was telling you about. So, when the [regiment moved out], ... the lead company, which was C Company, at the time, ran into hostile fire. So, it stopped the movement, as you know. ... We were the rear guard. So, Garwood pulled me and Snake, it's always me and Snake, it seems, we got pulled back to be the rear guard, to alert them in case the Germans were coming up our rear, and he said, "I'm going down and get that other squad and bring it back." ... So, you know,

me and Snake, we're searching around, expecting any minute some Germans were going to show up, but they didn't and Garwood got back. ... Still, there was action to the front of us that we were unaware of and, finally, we start moving again and, now it's starting to get dark. This was a full day, where we ended up with a skirmish, found out we're fighting one of our own battalions, you know, ... because you get into the maze of small-action fire. ... We have to stop again and it was now twilight, you know, it was getting dark. ... I was assigned now to the Company Commander and he told Garwood to take his platoon up on the high ground flanking us, to provide cover from the side of the column. Well, then, he gets word that we've got to start moving again and he tells me to go get the platoon, you know, bring that Second Platoon in. Well, I go up there in the dark to find Second Platoon; can't find it. So, now, I start worrying, you know, "What am I going to do?" ... You're supposed to stay quiet. How could I stay quiet? and I'm saying, "Garwood, Garwood, where are you?" Fortunately, there were no Germans up there, because I finally came back, "I can't find the platoon." Well, Garwood had come down the other way and he was there already. He had the platoon back in the column. So, then, we took off again and we'd have to [set up] with roadblocks. You know, in route, me and a few of the guys had to set up a roadblock, in case tanks were coming at the intersection so that we could protect the column. Fortunately, nothing [happened]; you know, our column got to where they wanted and relieved us and we came back up and we ... get a march up to a big hill. They've got the hill number; I can't even [remember]. You know, those things evade me, but we get up to this hill where the regimental commander is forming up the regiment, as best as he can, and I go back with my platoon, which was near our company headquarters. I figure, "If I'm going to spend the night, might as well spend it with the platoon with the guys I know," and I didn't think I could sleep on that hard ground, but I slept, because, [the] next thing I know, I wake up hearing guys trying to dig in. Well, it was hard, you know, winter hard ground. There also were roots, everything. It's hard to try to dig in. In the meantime, this kid, Healey, who was in the platoon, he was one of the new guys, he was a smartass and he decided to drop his entrenching tool. Now, what we kept, ... if anything we kept, was our entrenching tool and our weapon, and the bandoleer of ammo. Well, he had no entrenching tool. So, you know, he wanted to borrow it. So, well, what are you going to do? You know, you bitch at him and everything else, but, ultimately, we all shared the tool with him. At first, we didn't, because ... there was no incoming fire, but, then, all of a sudden, the "eighty-eights" [eighty-eight-millimeter German artillery] start coming in. ... Boy, now, we're really trying to dig and we're sharing with him, but it did no good, because you just couldn't penetrate that ground. ... Our first sergeant, Sergeant Beers, he was regular Army, and he always used to complain, ... we'd take our helmets off in training and he'd say, "You keep your helmet [on]." Well, now, he's running there like a berserk madman, you know, where we're [digging], saying, "I guess I don't have to remind you guys to wear your helmets today, do I?" Shells are coming in from all over, and he's, oh; [laughter] I figure he either was being heroic or he'd lost his marbles, you know. In the meantime, guys were getting hit, there was all kind of turmoil, crying, praying, whatever you want to call it. ... Our regimental commander was having a meeting with his battalion officers, three of them, and our battalion commander got killed, [Lieutenant] Colonel [William H.] Craig, [listed as killed-in-action on December 19, 1944]. ... You know, when you think of the echelon of command, now, this is going to create a crisis, because, now, his second-in-command has to come and find out what's going on, take over. ... Then, we get the order to pull out and we pull out from that area and we go into another area where we're stopped again and it's near an open field. ... This battalion S-3 [the operational assistant for the battalion commander], his name was Jones, I

mention him in here; he wrote a letter. In fact, I've got a copy of it. He was the commanding general's son, incidentally, both West Point graduates. ... As the messenger, I'm with the Captain, and he's telling them that we're going to attack the bridge at Schonberg and take it, with the idea that that would then ... provide the breakthrough for the regiment, our regiment, then, the following regiment, to break through Schonberg and get back to St. Vith, where the division was. Well, they had to pick the lead company. Well, C Company had been more or less knocked out the day before, A Company, they couldn't find, and D Company was the weapons platoon. I don't know if you know, in those days, that's the way a battalion was set up; D Company had the heavy weaponry. So, they were of no value to us at the time. So, our company ended up as the lead attack company, and so, we're moving on for the bridge toward Schonberg, and all I remember [is] that the cooks had set up these big thermos pots with pancakes in them. So, I grabbed a couple of ... pancakes, you know, without syrup, just something to eat, and we're on a road march toward Schonberg, in through these pine woods, and then, we come to an opening, you know. We're on a slope and, logically, there should have been scouts out, but, you know, that, somebody didn't think of [sending] the scouts out, the best I can figure out, because, next thing you know, B company, Meanier, the company CP; ... group flanked by our second platoon' Cassidy's Squad. I was right next to a guy, again, Snake, he's always next to me in combat, it seems, and the Company Commander to my left, and we come out of the tree line and right in front of us is a German antiaircraft outfit digging in to our right front and the bridge is over to the left. So, you know, we try to duck back into the woods, and then, all hell breaks loose, and they start direct fire on us. ... You know, we tried to find whatever ... gullies we could find to [take cover in], and then, to our, let's see, left front was the bridge. The right front is where the German supply column is coming up with tanks. They open fire on us. So, I don't know how long it took, you know. We tried to fire back, when ... you're firing like for affect, you know what I mean? They've got these antiaircraft, thirty-seven-millimeters, coming right at us. In fact, this kid (Everhardt?) was next to me, his leg went flying, you know, things like that. Ultimately, we [were] just, just overwhelmed, you know. There was nothing we could do, and the Germans come out on the road and they said, you know, "You either come out or we're going to kill you right now." Well, that was it; our company was wiped out.

Helen Salerno: It's a good place to stop.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Okay. We have just come back from our little break. Thank you again for the coffee and cake. Do you remember your first combat action, aside from the artillery bombardment at the pillbox?

JS: Well, yes; you mean actual rifle fire?

SI: Yes.

JS: That would be when the Germans attacked our front.

SI: Okay.

JS: When they came to our front, we were, as you know, in a skirmish line, but we had, like, a parapet [wall-like barrier], and so, we could really pick them off. They were trying to, you know, pull, oh, the typical infantry maneuver of fire-and-movement, you know. ... They'd try to move to wherever they can get some cover. ... I don't think they ever got within fifty yards of us, before, you know, we caused them enough damage that they pulled back and took their wounded with [them]. As far as I know, we didn't kill anybody. During the day, you know, when we would be on, you know, I'd call it the picket line, the Germans'd be on the other side and, you know, you'd see them and take shots at them. You know, that was from day one, because, you know, we had vision where they were and they had vision where we were and, if you saw any movement, you'd fire at it, you know. Whether you hit anybody, you know, when you're talking about two hundred yards, it's hard to really know. You know, as I indicated, at the time, you know, for some silly ass reason, you wanted to kill, you know. I guess that was, you know, ingrained, but, now, when I look back, I wish to hell I never had; that I didn't, I should put it that way. ... You know, as soon as I came [home], you know, the first thing out of, you know, your relatives' mouths is, "Did you kill anybody or did you hurt any[body]?" I didn't want my mother to have to live with that. So, you know, I started right out and said, "No," but I know I fired and did hit people. ... Now, in old age, oddly enough, it's not the fact, you know, about hitting someone there as much as I think back to ... the way my family was so overjoyed when I came home and I wonder if I caused any grief to some German family. ... You know, that's the way war is, I guess, but, you know, it does bother you as you reflect on it, now in old age, that you could have caused people misery, and I'm just against war. I'll be honest. You know, to me, I've learned, from World War II, and particularly with Korea, that, in the long run, old men are going to sit around the table and settle it anyhow, so, why burn up all this youth and all this wealth when, ultimately, you're going to sit at that table and settle it, in one way or another? ... You know, you take in Korea; it's a perfect example. We went through all that, guys really being chewed up and, you know, I saw war from a different perspective as a staff officer in Korea, because, you know, I had a desk with an inbox and an outbox. ... Now, I saw that, what that guy in Paris did when he got an inbox [memo] about the casualties in the Bulge. I was one of the casualties and all he did is initial it, put it in the outbox, and that's what I did in Korea, and I'm saying to myself, "It's so disturbing that we don't just let the old men get together," you know, like, that's why I feel Bush [George W. Bush, the President of the United States of America] was wrong in not wanting to sit down with foe alike, because that's who you have to settle with. ... You give a little, they give a little, "Let's settle this thing without chewing up the youth," and that's what, you know, just bothers the daylights out of me, because it's so frustrating, you know. The more I think about it, as time went on, the very guys we're fighting against, now, you'll meet them at different reunions, where they plan them [jointly]. ... There you are, you're talking to these people and you find out they were nothing more than you, citizen-soldiers. They did their duty, you did yours, and, you know, that's where there was more compassion then. Now, you've got the professional soldier. I don't know if they have compassion, but the citizen-soldier had compassion on both sides. ... You know, if you saw a German was wounded and hurting, was there, you got a medic for him, you know what I mean? ... You didn't just shoot him out of this world, and they did likewise too. ... Where I saw real brutality, you know, as a prisoner of war, is how they handled the Jews, you know, at this work [site] where we were, but, you know, there, again, that's not [war]. You know, I'm talking about a combat situation when I talk about war. I mean, that was abject cruelty, I mean, for whatever reason, you know. That, you can't justify,

just like I don't know what we're heading into with religious wars right now, because they change the complexity of things, but I'm talking about country against country. We should have a better way of going about it.

MP: I have a question about the Winter of 1944. On the record, it was one of the coldest winters of all time.

JS: It was.

MP: Could you elaborate on that? For example, was visibility a problem?

JS: Well, you know, again, I'm talking about my youth. Don't forget, we're talking about a nineteen-year-old kid; I turned twenty in prison camp. I had on two pairs of long johns [underwear] in combat and my ODs [olive drabs]. I always kept an extra pair of socks in here next to my chest and under the shirt, you know, so [that] I could change them, and that was the big thing there, [that] infantry you always have a change of socks.

SI: When you say, "In here," do you mean against your body?

JS: Against my body, you know. They'd be under my shirt, next to my underwear, you know, long johns. I had a field jacket, wool shirt, and we had a woolen sweater, head piece, that fit under the helmet, over the ears, so [that] the ears stayed warm. We had, you know, gloves and, fortunately, I'm trying to think what the Germans took from me; they might have taken my gloves, I think, I'm not sure, because I got hit in the hand ... just before I got captured. It was this hand, so, I didn't have that glove. I used to keep this [hand] in my pocket, but that was the gear I had. It was cold, you know, especially when they were marching us back, you know. We walked almost two hundred miles, from sun up to sundown, and it was brutally cold, you know. At night, you either slept in an open field or in their barns. ... Sometimes, they'd put us in these big barns and we'd sleep or, you know, spend the night. Then, in prison camp, when we got captured, they took the metal helmets from us. This is when I got back to their rear area; not when we were first captured. ... We kept our helmets until after we marched back through Koblenz to XII-A, you know, a prisoner of war camp in Limburg, Germany, and they kept us in tents there and, from there, we're put in boxcars and sent to POW Camp IV-B. Of course, the boxcars are a story onto themselves, because ... Americans kept strafing and bombing them. Even our trains got hit. Fortunately, my car didn't, the box car I was in. When we were at IV-B, they issued ... overcoats to us. Well, this was a joke, because it was like a spring coat that they issued that wasn't, you know, ... worth anything, and that's when we had to [work]. You know, once we went on a work command, or they called them *arbeitskommando*, we worked outdoors and it was cold. Of course, ... we had these big drums that you'd make a fire in, and this one German guard thought I was Jewish, I guess because of my nose, and every time I'd go near the fire, he'd rifle butt me away, and I'm trying to figure out why, you know. "What the hell's he got against me?" and one of these guys, you know, he says, "He's calling you a *juden*." He said, "You know what a *juden* is?" I said, "No." He said, "*Juden*'s a Jew; he thinks you're a Jew." "Oh," I said. ... I said, "*Nichts juden*," and I undid my pants and I ripped out my penis, to show him I had a foreskin. That's how I got close to the fire. Then, he said, "Ah," he said, but, up

until then, he wouldn't let me near the fire; "*Nichts juden.*" So, you know, these are just little anecdotes, I guess.

SI: Before you got into combat, did you ever think about, or was it ever a concern for you, how you would react once you were under fire, or did you not think about it?

JS: I don't know, just part of your training, and I think moving as a unit helped, too, because I think guys suffered more that were replacements, because you don't have any friends nearby, you know. You're going in single "O" and the old-timers wanted nothing to do with you, because ... they figured, "I don't want to get too close to you," you know, "That'd be another guy I have to grieve for," or something like that, but we went in as a unit. So, you know, you take some of the guys I was closest with in the platoon, the first night in captivity, you know, somehow, we drifted together, and so, we're together on the march, essentially. ... Then, when we were at IV-B; the British ran the prison camps for the Germans, you know, because they were in the war a long time. So, you know, they became sort of the, oh, I guess, the "housekeeping corps" for the Germans. You know, the [German] officers would run the camp, but the British would do the administration and management for them. So, this British guy, you know, made an announcement that, "You're going to go out on work details. If you want to stick together," he says, "you've got to volunteer together." So, the six of us wanted to stick together, so, we volunteered and we did. We went together to this place near Limburg; no not Limburg, you know, Gleina, and we were assigned,. We worked. We lived in Gleina, in this little lager, you know, that area. ... We walked about five miles to get to the work plant, which was called Ot Buelitung, was a benzene plant, as they called it. The Air Force had just bombed it out, to the ground, you know; everything was [destroyed]. ... When we came there, there were all kinds [of prisoners]. They had thousands of prisoners there. ... You know, the closest thing to it, I don't know if you know it, [it is] called the Bayway Refinery on Route 1, ... it used to be Exxon, I don't know what it is now, but ... a big place and they had, like I say, thousands of slave labor, including us and the British, where we're the only actual soldiers. [Editor's Note: The Bayway Refinery is an industrial crude oil receiving facility in New Jersey.] The others were Jewish political prisoners, Czech political prisoners, what was it? Serbs, because I remember, in fact, some of the Serbs were with them, were even guarding us at a time, at times we had Russians guarding us too, [like] that one army of Russians that gave in to the Germans. So, you know, you're really mixed up there, and we would work. You know, they'd ... march you out before dawn and bring you back after dark and they had these German engineers, pioneer troops, they called [them], and we'd get a job like taking the mortar off of bricks, so that they could rebuild, things like that. ... As I indicated, you saw what they did with the Jews. They got the worst end the stick no matter where they went, and, not with us, they got the [worst jobs]. [laughter] However, none of the Germans wanted us to be on their work [details], to be their work helpers, because they'd say, "*(Americanish nichts arbiten, scheiße, scheiße, scheiße?)*." "They never want to work. All they want to do is shit, shit, shit," because what we'd do is say, "Hey, *(Postin, kronk?)*," you know, "Go." So, we go to a bomb crater, pull down our drawers, cold as it was, and then, we'd sit there and BS with one another, until they come in and start swatting us to get back to work, but that was [how we acted], you know. So, we made a game even out of that, when you stop to think about it. ... We got to a point where they said, "Well, now, it's ready to start pumping again," and they told us, "We're going to go in on Easter Saturday," for a half day, just to do the last clean up, and then, they were going to take us and give us a shower. In

retrospect, I'm glad I never got the shower, because I heard about their showers, but what happened [was], just about noontime, the sirens go off. ... Whenever there was an air raid, they'd put us into the side of a mountain [that] was all dug out. That was the bomb shelter. It was ... big. Well, when we came out of that bomb shelter, that damn plant was right back down to where it was the day we first showed up, [laughter] and just like somebody told the Air Force, "Now, it's ready," and they bombed it out. Well, who was their instant target? the only Americans around, 120 Americans. They beat the living crap out of us that day, because, you know, we got blamed for everything that, as they call them, the "*flieger* gangsters" [American bombers] did. Not too long after that; now, that was Easter Saturday. The one day off we had was always Sunday. They gave us Sunday off and that was the day we'd have to bring our mattresses out, our mattresses of ... straw, out to get aired, and I don't know if it was the Monday, when we went ... back to work, but none of the Germans were there. ... All of a sudden, a guy comes by on a bicycle, he was one of the German, pardon me, one of the Jewish kapos; ... what did they call them, you know? He had a [arm]band, because he was presumably, you know, more like a turncoat, you know? ...

SI: A *kapo*?

JS: *Kapo* might be a good word, I guess that was it, and he's telling us, no, he said, "The Germans are under attack at Seitz, so, they're not coming." So, our guards, then, put us on the road to take us back to the *lager* [camp], ... where we're in prison, and then, the American Air Force start coming up, P-47s, [P-51s?]. They didn't know we weren't soldiers. So, they start strafing the roads. You know, we're scattering off of the road, ... to steer clear of it, and we finally got back to the *lager*. ... Next thing you know, we start hearing artillery coming in, and so, the Germans offered, you know, to take us, as they put it, to a "safe area," and we figured most of us didn't want to go. We said, "We're staying right here," and they got a group, maybe about forty or fifty guys went with them; never heard from them again. They took off, we stayed, and I start shaving. I figured, "Well, when I meet the Americans, I'm going to be clean-shaven. I want to look like a soldier." Well, I got halfway through the shave and the artillery start coming in, practically to our compound. So, we head downstairs into the barn where the cows and pigs were, and the cow, one cow, there were chickens, down in that barn, and the artillery's coming in. ... The cow's trying to get under me and I'm trying to get under the cow, [laughter] you know, this is the background, and then, it ceased and one of the German farmers comes down there. ... Apparently, his barn or house was on fire and he wanted us, you know; ... I don't know, Germans have a way of talking that can irritate you, and he wanted us to go up there and help him put out the fire. Well, you know, he had about a snowball's chance in hell of any of us going to help him. So, then, he finally took off in disgust. Well, we got together with the British that were there, too, and, now, it's a waiting game, because, you know, we could hear the battle going on. ... Then, gradually, as time went on, around early afternoon, there was a main road leading down and our tanks were up there on the main road and an infantry squad start coming in. ... You know, we had passed the word, "Don't surprise them. They're going to shoot at you," figuring, you know, you're a German. So, we'd stand behind our door and, you know, just about [as] they got on it, to cut the rope to open the door, and they took one look at us, and then, they got into a panic, going after the German guards who stayed with us. ... There was one little sergeant from New York, a little, short guy with a .45, "This is the way you treat Americans?" and he took this one guard and he was ready to shoot him and all of us [yelled],

"No, no, no, you can't do that." [laughter] ... So, he didn't. They had to move on, and so, they armed us and gave us the town, "You're the military government. Do what you want." ... Naturally, they're moving on and all we did [was], we went to the baker and we made the baker and his daughter and wife and had them start baking bread, all through the night, bringing it [to] us, there was like an inn. We made that our head[quarters]. ... We stayed in the inn while the Sixth Armed moved on and we spent the night there. ... In the meantime, the Germans were bringing the bread to us, you know. That was coming in. You know, you can only, no matter what, no matter how hungry you are, eat so much bread, and our tanks had set up a flank. You know, they were out on the flanks, protecting the area, and what was I going to say? Oh, the next morning, the medics came in and, taking one look, he goes; you're emaciated and I had already, you know, been wounded. I got hit by a rifle butt for talking back to a German officer, and their medic, which was a French internee, sewed up ... the wound, ... but got me back, you know, when I came out of, you know, being knocked out or whatever. ... Anyhow, I had that, and the medics took over and they evacuated us through medical channels. ... Oddly enough, [when] we went, the very same squad that liberated us, they got shot up down the road, they were in the ambulance going back through medical channels with us. ...

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

MP: This continues an interview with Mr. Joseph Salerno on March 28, 2007, in Monroe Township, New Jersey, with Michael Perchiacca and Shaun Illingworth.

SI: Please, continue.

JS: Now, one of the things I wanted to point out is, when the Sixth Armored came, went up to the main road, they were moving ahead, the column stops. There's a jeep right near where I'm on the side of the road, and I look at the driver, I said, "Geez, it's Larry Emmons," a kid I played ball with in high school. I mean, out of fifteen million people under arms, to meet, to run into one another, and he wanted to give me a bottle of Calvados [French apple brandy]. You know, that's [powerful]; I said, "Larry, give me a D bar, a chocolate bar." He gave me a whole case, you know, a case of D bars, and we shared that, but I don't know, I never heard from him again. I don't know if he survived the war. I tried to locate him through the Sixth Armored Division locality indicator, nothing.

MP: Could you describe the actual living conditions in *Stalag* IV-B? What were the rooms like? What did they feed you?

JS: We're in a, ... it used to be, I guess, a dance hall for the Germans in that hamlet, because it had a little stage and an open area and there was a pot-bellied stove at one end, you know, ... maybe two-thirds of the way down. Unfortunately, I wasn't near that, and we had, ... where I was at, double-decker ...

MP: Bunks?

JS: You know, bunks, just wood slapped together with straw mattresses, and slats across the bottom, which, maybe, that's why my back kills me to this day, but they issued us one blanket,

which was paper thin. ... The way we would eat [was], they gave us a dish and a spoon and a cup and we would get fed. In the morning, they'd bring in a vat of ersatz coffee, which I couldn't stand, so, I didn't drink it. It was like colored hot water, if anything, and, in the evening, we would come in, back, and they would give us a loaf of bread, for eight men, and this was that sawdust type [of] bread and we had to slice it. So, we divided up into eight-man teams. ... How we would work it is, you know, we had devices that we made into knives and, you know, we learned, as we went along, that whoever cut the cake, ... cut the bread, ended up [with less]; you know, sometimes, they'd cut it crudely and they'd have the crumbs for themselves. So, we set up rules. The guy who cuts the bread would be the last to pick the slice. The guy who's going to cut tomorrow, he gets the crumbs. So, you know, you cut that bread like you were, you know, a master butcher. You wanted to get them as even as you could with as few crumbs as possible, because you'd be the guy to miss out, the cutter, and then, you'd rotate this, and that's how we cut the bread and that's what we lived on. Once a week, they'd give us a spoon of jelly and ... you'd get a bowl of soup; I'm sorry, oh, how could I forget the soup? Turnip and kohlrabi soup, really, ... to this day, I can't stand a turnip, and I don't even know what a kohlrabi looks like, and I know she never brings them into the house. ... That was our daily ration, and so, naturally, you know, before you know it, you're down to eighty-five pounds without knowing it, but we'd steal. We'd steal on the run. In other words, if we saw any crabapples or anything along the road, you grabbed them. A chicken happened to come across our path and some of the guys grabbed him. They were plucking him while he was still alive, and then, when we got in the *lager*, you know, they cooked him up, and I didn't get a part of that, but things like [that], and then, when we're on the road march, going in, you know, when we're first captured, where they'd stop, you'd find their cellars where they had their potatoes and we'd eat their potatoes raw, but, other than that, there was no eating.

MP: Was there disease, in your sleeping quarters?

JS: Well, I ended up with yellow jaundice [a discoloration of the skin], a lot of yellow jaundice, but, fortunately for me, when we got liberated, it was, you know, soon enough where they treated me in a hospital and I ended up okay, but ... I was yellow, yellow face, urine, had all that, and that was spreading around the *lager*.

MP: Did they keep the Jewish POWs separate from you?

JS: Oh, yes. Helen wants to remind me, we were being marched back; you know, to show you, talking about citizen-soldiers. We'd stop on the road, you know, like, say, on Hitler *Strasse* ["Hitler's Street"] even, and there'd be an elderly woman in the way. She'd open her window and give us water, and, you know, the feeling was that she's hoping somebody did it for her son over here, I guess. So, that's the difference between a professional army and a [volunteer one]. They were citizen-soldiers, too, ... when you look back on it. ...

SI: What was the long march back like?

JS: That was cold and miserable. You didn't eat. Now, we ate; like I say, I got captured on the 19th, I wasn't fed again, other than finding crabapples or something along the road, until Christmas Day. ... Then, they put some kind of, like, a (watered down?) soup into my helmet

and that was the nourishment that I got, didn't get anything other than that until we went to Limburg. See, at Koblenz, they marched us into Koblenz with the idea we're supposed to get fed in Koblenz, and, when we got there [Koblenz], they were going to put us in a big warehouse. ... all of a sudden, some German guard stops, said, "No, no." They were at, like, an apartment house building, two of them, side by side, made us go in there and take all the furniture out and put the furniture in the warehouse. Now, there were just blank rooms, and that's where they put us, billeted us. All the furniture [had] been taken out. Well, the next morning, the American Air Force comes over and starts bombing Koblenz. Of course, we're in these rooms. You know, the one thing, if you're in a room with glass, you want to ... get immediately under, you know, so [that] the glass pours in and misses you, ... so, you don't really see what's going on, you know. ... You'd see these bombs were dropping. ... I guess they had five-hundred-pounders or whatever, one-hundred-pounders, maybe, because you could see the shape of the whole thing, but, when it was all over, we looked out. Most of our buildings were just hit, you know, cursory hitting, they weren't [wrecked], but the warehouse was wiped out. Just, you know, I mean, when you think about the chances of fate in combat, had we been in there, all of us would have been wiped out, because those buildings were just demolished completely, all that furniture [demolished]. The furniture would have been safer for that officer [if] he'd left it in the apartment houses, but, again, we didn't [get fed]. You know, getting fed was one of the last things that ... we were able to get until we got to the prison camp. ... There, again, we got on a routine of, you know, ... again, the British were setting it [up], we'd get the soup and bread.

SI: Were you ever able to get Red Cross packages or anything like that?

JS: Got one Red Cross parcel, on March 10, 1945, and the reason I remember that, and we have to share it one-to-ten, I think, ten of us had to share the one parcel, and the reason why [was] it was my twentieth birthday. So, these guys in the *lager*, they all shared my birthday. ... What the Germans did, so [that] you wouldn't try to escape with it, they used a screwdriver and put a hole in every can, so [that] nothing could [be saved]. You know, it had to be consumed. ... They had cheese in it, they had a little six-pack of cigarettes, and I wasn't that heavy a smoker, then so, I traded it off for food, liver pate, of all things, and I haven't had it since, but I had it then, liver pate, and, trying to think, there was a can of something, you know, maybe beans or something, but only once.

SI: On the march in, did anybody die from the conditions?

JS: ... Oh, yes, not only were they killed, I'm sure they shot several of them, because, you know, ... if you're going to drop out, there was no way they were going to take care of you, and they said they would shoot you. ... I started [at] the front end of the line, but you'd hear these shots towards the rear.

MP: Did anyone try to run or escape, either on the march or while you were in camp?

JS: If they did, I don't [know], not in my immediate group, you know. The only guy, you know, Lieutenant Garwood said he tried to hide. You know, see, along the side of the road, what they had in Germany [was], because of the American Air Force strafing trucks and all, they made like

a V-cut foxhole. So, if, you know, you could, you'd jump in there. Garwood tried to hide in one, but they got him. In fact, I tried to hide in one, but didn't stay very long.

SI: Did you ever give any thought, at any point, to trying to escape?

JS: ... Well, it was wintertime. We planned that we would; if anything, our plans were to try to escape once the weather got good. The only guy among our group that tried to escape was Gordon Pinney, and he took off one day and got to a railroad crossing. ... The guy that was, you know, handling the railroad crossing, sees his coat, the coats they gave us had a red mark on them, which was the mark that you're a POW, and they grabbed him right there and brought him back. Then, ... you know, some other guys tried and they'd send these dogs out, what do they call these dogs that sniff? bloodhounds, to try to find them. Usually, they didn't get very far. It was wintertime. It's hard, because you can't get shelter. ... One of the breaks I had was a French internee who had a way, you know, he had his run of the [camp], he could go in there, so, he'd get food and bring us some extra food to eat. He sort of took an affinity to us.

MP: Do you know how the Jews were treated?

JS: Miserably.

MP: Much worse than you?

JS: They would pee on them. You would see [that], you know, and that was common. They thought that was a big joke. They would slap them around over the least little thing. We traded with them, once, with the idea they'd get us bread, and we salvaged something. ... We wanted the bread, and I guess, I don't know what the hell we're [trading], somebody was negotiating with them and got caught. We never saw that Jew again. ... You know, when we got back there, the guards were down on us. We got back to camp, we thought we're going to get in trouble, and he said, "Understand one thing while you're here. You can take anything you want from a Jew, but don't ever trade with him, because you'll get punished," and that was [it].

MP: At this point in the war, were you aware of the concentration camps?

JS: No, ... you know, two things, but [we] weren't aware of that, and one thing I was aware of [was] that, you know, American newspapers, I guess you call it propaganda, were saying how Hitler was hurting the nuns and the priests and all, you know, and all that. What shocked me is that, at every main intersection, there was a statue of the Blessed Mother with a kneeling thing [kneeler]. So, you know, I shouldn't say everywhere, but quite often, we're on a road march, you'd see that and it sort of surprised me that that could be going on in Germany. So, apparently, it wasn't as bad for, say, the ... Catholics as we were led to believe, but we certainly didn't know about the Jews as bad as it was. We knew that they were down on the Jews ... and, you know, based on what you saw in the movies, you felt that they would imprison them over the least little thing, but you didn't know they would imprison them just for being a Jew, and that's what it came down to.

SI: Were the guards *Wehrmacht* or were they SS?

JS: They were *Wehrmacht*, the guards that we had, yes. No, in fact, fortunately, I was captured by *Wehrmacht* and not SS. Up the road, the guys were captured by the SS and they're the ones that got [killed] at Malmedy. [Editor's Note: In the Malmedy Massacre of December 17, 1944, over eight American POWs were executed by SS troops in Malmedy, Belgium.] We're only about, what? nine kilometers away from that. No, they're *Wehrmacht*, and, like I say, they're, most of them, draftees. Now, our guards were guys; you know, we had "Limpy," guy'd been shot up in Russia there. He was a bastard, real mean son of a gun. Then, we had "Pop," he was an old guy, who, cripes, reminds me of, now, what I'm like, and he didn't, you know, ... want to hurt anybody. Limpy, he was mad at the world. The least little thing, he'd swat you, he'd take your food and stomp on it, just so, you know, [to] make you miserable.

MP: Did you recognize any SS? Did any of them come through your camp?

JS: Not in the camps that I was at, no.

SI: It was regular *Wehrmacht* who were mistreating the Jews, urinating on them, and so forth, or do you not know?

JS: Well, I wouldn't know; maybe they were. You know, I don't know who was guarding the Jews, now that you mention it. You know, it may have been SS, but, you know, there were so many different uniforms, it's hard to tell, and I wasn't looking at, you know, their "merit badges" or whatever you'd call them. So, they may have had SS; chances are, they were. I don't think *Wehrmacht* took care of them, yes, because the Jewish camps were probably manned by SS.

SI: Were there any Jewish-American soldiers with your group?

JS: Yes, yes.

SI: How were they treated?

JS: Well, when we first got [captured], I had one guy in my outfit, and he was with us at IV-B. ... You know, the British said, "If you're Jewish, let us know. We'll arrange to make sure you're safeguarded, because, you know, Germans don't like Jews," but we told Al, we said, "Look, don't tell them you're a Jew and stick with us," and, you know, the more [time passed], he said, "They're only going to find out later from my, you know, ... dog tag. Maybe I'd better go." Well, from what we learned later, we never heard from him again, but he may have ended up at that Berga Camp. [Editor's Note: In January-February 1945, hundreds of American POWs, those with Jewish last names, last names believed to be Jewish and "hard cases," were segregated and shipped out of *Stalag IX-B* to Berga Concentration Camp for forced labor in a nearby mine. They received treatment on par with the abuses suffered by the Buchenwald inmates who toiled alongside them. Twenty-one percent died before the POWs were recovered by the Allies at the end of April.] So, the British didn't help him at all, but he's the only guy in my outfit that was Jewish at that time.

MP: Were the Jewish soldiers marked differently? Did they have the Star of David on them?

JS: [Editor's Note: Mr. Salerno seems to have misheard the question, believing he was asking about the Jewish slave labor camp inmates.] ... Yes, yes. They all had that [Star of David patch] and ... they had striped summer wear in the wintertime. ... You'd see a father, grandfather and a grandson, all together, and the father is trying to help the other two, you know, and they'd be carrying these big cables, I mean long cables, thirty yards, forty yards long, to put them in place, you know. ... Everything was human labor and you'd see this, you know, young, strong guy trying to help, I guess, his father and his son. ... You know, you'd see the thing, you know, because the son was smaller, no, and then, if they dropped out, they'd hit them, swat them, pee on them, you know, anything like that, think nothing of it, but, see, your own guards, once you got to this worksite, they turned you over to the inside forces, you know what I mean? So, that's why I say, if they were guarded by SS, they were probably all goofing off, you know what I mean? somewhere else, waiting for the end of the day.

MP: Were the *Wehrmacht* the ones watching you while you worked?

JS: Well, they were pioneer troops there, and civilians, you know, that were masons and tradesmen, that knew what to do about putting up that plant again, and you worked for them. You had; well, no, I shouldn't say [that]. Our guards stayed with us, now that I think about it, because it was his job to keep us in line for the pioneers, yes. So, no, the guard would go with you. I'm wrong there. So, they could have had; you know, now that you mention it, maybe I should have looked for the black uniform or something. I never even gave it a thought.

SI: You could see the Jewish group right next to you.

JS: Oh, they sometimes worked on the same detail, oh, yes, no. That's how we got to mingle.

SI: You could actually mingle with them

JS: Yes.

SI: They were not on the other side of the site.

JS: No. On certain jobs, we met, you know, like, especially on the cement detail, you know, where we'd, you know, put cement in the bucket, and then, you'd, with a pulley, bring it up to where the pioneer troops were. I remember working on an assignment with a Jew there.

SI: How did the Air Force bombing make you feel, after you had completed the plant?

JS: Eh, you know, you can't help but [feel that], you know, in our own way, we had pride in the fact that it got bombed out. You know, that said so many things for us, and, you know, they could only beat you so much, you know what I mean? ...

SI: How bad was the beating that day?

JS: They kicked us, shoved us down to the ground, you know, things like that. You know, if they drew blood, it was very little.

MP: Would anyone attempt to fight back or resist?

JS: Only once did I try to fight back; I got whacked in the head. You know, you're down to an emaciated weight, you know. You just take it and go down. You're better off hitting the deck.

SI: All of your guards were older guys.

JS: Yes. Well, ... no, some were, you know, wounded guys that had been [given light duty]. Most of them, though, all come [from being], you know, wounded on the Russian Front. One guy showed us pictures, that he had been in Paris, you know, showing us the naked French girls, things like that. He was a nice guard. Of course, sex was the last thing on our mind. All we worried about was food. We'd come up with more [recipes]. At night, we'd talk and we'd come up with these recipes, a Milky Way in a milkshake and, you know, that kind of stuff. [laughter] I get sick thinking about what we were dreaming up, but, see, then, you get so; in a sense, you get hardened to the environment. When the British were coming over, on night raids, they would offer [to], you know, take us to the open fields and that would be our so-called "bomb shelter," figuring they're not going to bomb an open field. If anything, they'd bomb the hamlet, but, you know, you get to the point, you're so dead tired, ... you know, you just stayed in your sack and took your chances.

SI: How was morale? Did you think you were going to survive this? Was there hopelessness?

JS: Always felt I was going to survive it, but I felt like I was in purgatory. That's the only way I could describe it, because I had no contact with my family for the first time in my life, no contact with my friends. You were living, like, in a netherworld. You knew nothing and no one was telling you anything, really.

MP: Did you have any sense of time? Did you lose track of time? Did you have any idea how long you were there?

JS: Well, no, you knew where Sunday was.

MP: Okay.

JS: You know, once you got to be [on a work schedule], ... you know that was [it], because you knew that was your day, and so, you sort of lived the week for Sunday.

SI: Were there any kind of activities or anything you might call recreation?

JS: You were so dog tired by the time [you finished]; you know, like I say, as spring was coming in, the days got longer and they worked you the full time. In other words, ... it's not that you started at eight o'clock and ended at five. If day was breaking at seven o'clock, let's say, they started you out at six to be at the worksite at daybreak, and you'd work until it got dark.

SI: While working on the plant, did you and your fellow Americans try any kind of sabotage or anything like that?

JS: There was nothing really to sabotage. You know, what are you going to do, break a brick in half? ... They'd put that up, too. ... We weren't in any critical thing at all. Wherever the critical areas were [in] the Benzene plant, I never got to see. I don't know ... what they had there, you know, pumps or whatever. I never got [there]. They would give us assignments, like, you know, here, some silly ass fool wanted us to push a locomotive out that had been stuck in this one area. Well, no matter how many men you put trying to push that locomotive, it wasn't going to move, and he'd bitch like hell in German, but we were [too weak], you know, but this is the kind of assignments we had. We weren't [high-ranking]; you know, everybody says, "Give them your name, rank and serial number." You know, for a PFC, they couldn't care less what the hell you're going to tell them other than that.

SI: Was there any kind of interrogation, when you were first captured or first processed?

JS: No, the first processing, they took our money. ... Being typical, you know, they brought us back to this one area, [laughter] they took our money, wanted our name and the amount, and, you know, we're looking at them; as if they're going to give it back to us, [laughter] you know, but this shows you German efficiency, I guess. [laughter] Why they did it, I'll never know, but I never really got interrogated, other than the first night, you know, there, where the guy says, "Got to count who's in this barn and, if the count differs, for every one missing, ten are going to be shot," that was it, and, after he said that, I went to sleep. ... Then, they woke us up, because they captured more and they needed an area for the officers. In the meantime, they'd built a big barbed-wire enclosure adjacent to it and put us outdoors, you know, in the enclosure, grassed in there. That's where I ran into these other guys from my outfit, Pinney and [Fontaine C.] Forbes, [Donald L.] MacDonald.

SI: You mentioned that your friend MacDonald died in the camp.

JS: Pneumonia.

SI: Okay.

JS: He went a little, now that I think about it, he was going a little batty, too, because, you know, most of us were thinking of surviving, so, you know, we [did well]. I had my socks. Remember, I told you, I kept them two pair of socks? So, I got away with them, but the Germans gave us, like, a square piece of cloth for socks, and I made, like a, what do you call it, babushka?

HS: Yes.

JS: To cover my ears. You know, so, we looked like a mess. ... You know, we're an ungodly sight to look at and, all of a sudden, MacDonald, the guy, he says, "You've got to look like American soldiers," and he took everything off and, you know, other than [the uniform]. He's

going to march like a soldier. One day; next thing you know, he ended up with a cold, pneumonia, ... but I think he was starting to flip.

SI: Were there other cases where you saw people starting to lose it?

JS: Well, I saw one guy, when we're being marched in, there was a big guy, about six-foot tall, and, you know, he's behind [me as] we're marching in. You know, he started, "I don't know how you little guys are going to make it." Who the hell was paying attention? I didn't know the guy. He was just another guy, but I ended up at the same work area and, oddly enough, he was the first guy that died. ... You know, the way we look back on it now, he needed a hell of a lot more calories to survive than we did. You know, [he] was a big guy and I always [remember], you know, I didn't fit into anything, but the poor guy was dying and there were guys circling his bunk there, where he was at, trying to figure out what they could use, you know, to wear. So, shows you, survival goes to the survivor, I guess, but I always remember him saying, "You little guys'll never make it," and I was determined this little guy was going to make it, if at all possible.

SI: You showed us, before we began taping, a postcard that you were allowed to send.

JS: Yes, I had one.

SI: Was that the only thing you were allowed to send out?

JS: That's the only one I ever got to send out, yes. This is XII-A, remember; that's the first. This is when the Americans retook it, but that's the entrance to the camp at XII-A.

SI: It is dated January 9, 1945. Can I read it?

JS: Yes, go ahead.

SI: "Dear Folks, I hope everyone at home is fine, for thanking God I'm well and uninjured. Find out from Red Cross what you can send me and send all you can. Don't worry about me, for I'm being treated well. Give my love to everybody and my best to Pat and Nick. Write me regular, send me a box and please don't worry about me, Joe." This was sent to your home at 29 Hunter Street.

JS: Yes.

MP: Was there any censoring?

JS: That's why I put there, "I'm being treated well," because I figured it wouldn't go through otherwise. That's all my folks had on me until they found out about me being a prisoner of war. What's that, hon?

HS: Telegrams, telegrams.

JS: Oh, I'm showing it to them right now.

SI: This is a telegram from Western Union, from the War Department, dated April 11, 1945. "The Secretary of War desires me to inform you that your son, PFC Salerno, Joseph T., [is a] prisoner of war of the German Government, based on information received through Provost Marshall General. Further information received will be furnished by Provost Marshall General, J. A. Ulio, the Adjutant General."

JS: What's the date on that?

SI: April 11, 1945.

JS: And I got liberated on April 14th, and here's the thing that they really, you know ...

SI: This one is dated January 11, 1945. "The Secretary of War desires me to express his deep regret that your son, Private First Class Joseph Salerno, has been reported missing-in-action since 21 December in Germany. If further details or other information are received, you will be promptly notified. (Dunlop?), Acting, the Adjutant General." You also have here a picture of the railcars you were transported in.

JS: You can have that, by the way.

SI: Thank you. Can you describe what it was like in the railcars?

JS: Yes. ... We had one little bucket that would serve as a latrine. They had us packed in there, I'd say, oh, I'd say almost seventy guys. You had just room to practically stand and squat. There was no [room] and you just [made do], you know, and you weren't fed in there and you were subject to air raid attacks, constantly. In fact, I got to meet a guy from New Jersey that was in another outfit, 28th Infantry Division. He died recently, and we were in touch on and off, Bill (Messler?), and he was with the 28th Infantry Division. ... It was a stinking, horrible experience and, yet, again, you'd figure, in those tight quarters, there'd be fights or something. No, it's peaceful, good troops.

SI: Do you know if ...

JS: This is the key.

SI: "The key to POW Camp *Lager*, Gleina, Germany, Winter-Spring '45, where I was held, twenty-five slave labor captive." You told us, before the tape started, about the key. What was the significance of the key?

JS: I grabbed that as my souvenir.

SI: Okay.

JS: Of the *lager*, and this is the dog tag, the POW dog tag.

SI: This is more like the German-style dog tags, [one piece designed to break in half, rather than two tags].

JS: Yes, see, like, we have two, but they break them in half.

SI: "*Stalag IV-B*."

JS: That was my ...

SI: Your number was 315963.

JS: And this is what I had to pray with.

SI: Rosary beads.

JS: One, what do you call it? ...

HS: Decade.

JS: Yes, one, yes, one decade, is it?

HS: Decade, I think. ...

MP: They stripped you of your dog tags, right?

JS: No, I had my dog tags all through.

SI: Do you know if you had any long-term effects due to your imprisonment?

JS: Oh, yes. I had, you know, immediately, I was diagnosed with; oh, what do you call it?

SI: The yellow jaundice, or something else?

JS: Well, I had that. I was service-connected [with] that, I had digestive problems, all of which I got service connection for, my complete digestive track, anxiety reaction, and then, depression. So, I'm an eighty-percent disabled veteran and, you know, actually, considered a hundred percent now. So, no, I've been under long-term care ... either with the VA [Veterans Affairs] or out of the VA, but I've been under some sort of medical attention since World War II. When they called me back for the Korean War, you know, when they called me in for the physical, I said, "Look," you know, when we were all done, I said, "By the way, you know, I'm a disabled veteran. I'm drawing VA compensation." "Oh, we're glad you told us." I thought they were going to tell me I couldn't go, you know, they couldn't have me. They said, "You've got to make a choice." I said, "What are you talking about?" He says, ... "You can't draw two federal paychecks at the same time. So, you either take your VA compensation or you take your second lieutenant's pay." Well, you know, I was getting about forty dollars of VA compensation. There was no doubt what I was going to choose. So, they recall me and I did all right [for] most of it,

but I did have, you know, a couple of problems when I was in Korea. ... I was taken care of, but, then, when I came out, I got back on the VA rolls and they increased my compensation.

SI: Other POWs I have talked to have said that people did not want to hear about their problems at first.

JS: Well, nobody; you know, really, after World War II, I don't think anybody talked about the war, ... because, you know, you ran into this situation that, you know, we had fifteen million people under arms, I think. When you really look at it, the wartime situation; see, it's different now. They contract out to Halliburton now for support. In those days, we had a Service of Supply. They did all your rear echelon [duties]. So, for every guy in combat, there were nine guys supporting him, no matter where they were at. So, you know, when you come out, you didn't have that much in common with the other guys, you know. How the hell are you going to talk about the war? You know, so, you sort of just kept your mouth shut, you know, you figured [was] the best thing, you know, like, most of the day. I remember this one guy, (Sal Cantena?), was in the Eighth Army [Air Force], ground crew, you know, a good baseball player, played baseball for their [team]. Well, you know, we get back to the States and, you know, he's telling me, "Oh," he says, "you know, one day, they ran short of a gunner," he said, "so, I went up." He said, "I shot down that Messerschmitt," you know, and I'm saying; you know, when you're getting that bullshit around, you figure the best thing [is to] keep your mouth shut, let it [go]. So, you know, you just let it ride after awhile. Every once in awhile, you'd run into somebody that shared your kind of experience and you might chat with him. You know, secondly, you didn't want your family to know. You know, I remember when I woke up, you know, the first night, ... morning, I was home and there's my mother, searching my body, to see if I had any wounds I didn't tell her about, you know. You didn't want her to know what you went through. So, you know, you sort of just let everything drift, and then, you got involved. You know, you had a life to live, ... you'd have to study, then, you know, you get married, you got your kids.

SI: What about the VA? Did you find them supportive or not?

JS: Very, yes. Well, yes, see, I worked for them. I made a career of the VA, when I came back from Korea. I went to work at Lyons, in their rehab units, and then, I got into, you know, more like hospital administration, because she kept pushing me, because, you know, she didn't want to live on just fifty-two hundred dollars a year. ... No, I made a career of the VA and set up a sheltered workshop up at Lyons, you know, to get patients out. ... [In the] meantime, I had access to all the care I needed, because it was right there.

SI: Do you have questions about the camp?

MP: What were your feelings when you finally knew everything was over, when you knew you were liberated? I imagine you were overjoyed.

JS: Yes, you're out of purgatory, you know. You knew, you know, you're back with your own and, you know, we came back through the hospital channels. You couldn't ask for, you know, better treatment than that.

MP: Did you have a sense of, "I have been through the worst?" Did you think it made you stronger?

JS: I don't know if it made me stronger. I knew that I was hoping to never have to relive it again. You know, as you're going through it, it's a lot easier than when you reflect back on it and you say, "Jeez, but for an inch." ... You know, there's so many of those little [incidents] where, just by an inch or so, you survived. Think of the guys, you know, different guys ... in that POW camp, what they, you know, some of them, went through.

SI: Not so much in actual numbers, but would you say many guys did not make it?

JS: Well, I'd say, when I was in POW camp; we had black guys, by the way, as prisoners. They were artillery.

SI: Really?

JS: Corps artillery, and one of them, you know, died. We usually had one guy in what they [called a] pantry; that was the morgue. You know, a guy died, they'd leave him there, it was cold, until they could process him. ... The reason I remember this black guy so much is, ... one day, ... I guess one of the bomber pilots had to get rid of [his] bombs and just dropped one in that hamlet. It dropped right where that so-called pantry was, and the poor guy was dead, but blew him apart, but we always had somebody in the "freezer." You know, I called it the "freezer," and we would bury him just in an open hole, you know, ... put like, what do you call it? a shroud around him, put him in the ground, by the side of a highway. Then, we told the American authorities where to find them, but I'd say we started with about 120 and we might have well ended up with about maybe 105, something like that, over that period of time.

SI: Were the African-American soldiers treated any differently by the Germans?

JS: No. You know, if anything, they sort of inquired a lot of them and they would talk more with them, I guess trying to find out if they were mistreated over here, I don't know, but, no, ... they were friendly with the blacks. It was only [a few], when I say two or three is all we had in that 120.

SI: Did they sleep in the same barracks as other Americans?

JS: Oh, yes, same, you know, bunk tiers.

SI: There was no racism.

JS: And even the Southerners that were with us; no, you know, you had your own [problems], that was the [thing]. You know, all of a sudden, you had ... other problems that you were [dealing with]. ...

SI: I just want to go back to the story, which I think happened before you went in the camp, that Mrs. Salerno brought up during the break, about trapping the sniper.

JS: Well, yes, ... like I say, this sniper was taking shots at us and we saw where it was coming from. ...

SI: Was this the same sniper who hit you?

JS: No, no. This was in Brandscheid, [Germany], and so, we went in in a night patrol and booby-trapped the stove, because we knew he was turning that on, you could see the smoke, and whether he got blown up or not, we ... never heard from him again after that, that particular sniper.

MP: You were wounded when they captured you, right?

JS: Yes, hand wound.

MP: It just happened.

JS: The German medics took care of it. ...

MP: You did get treatment.

JS: ... Well, it wasn't true [treatment]. All they did is, they used tape and taped, you know, my hand up, but, then, I lost a glove. [laughter] That bothered me more.

SI: How ...

JS: See, the other wound is when I talked back to that German officer, the head wound.

SI: How did you wound your hand?

JS: Shrapnel, yes.

SI: Was that when the American artillery was coming in?

JS: No, no, this is theirs. ... No, the shrapnel hit me when we're [under attack], before I got captured.

SI: Okay.

JS: I assume it was shrapnel; it could have been debris, anything that, you know, cut. Didn't embed, that was the big thing.

SI: Can you tell us what the process of going through the hospital channels back to the States and your treatment was like?

JS: Yes. Well, when I first, you know, came back, ... I went to a clearing station at; let's see, by air, they evacuated me from Germany by air. I got to a clearing hospital in, I guess it was Rouen and, from there, I was put on a train, hospital train, and taken to Commercy, France, and hospitalized at the US Army 50th General Hospital, which ... had taken over some French military barracks and they had their own, you know, compound in the center. ... You know, they had a lot of German POWs work in the camp, as, you know, laborers. ... They were getting their three square meals a day and they had regular mattresses, like the troops. Well, when we came in, you know, the RAMPs, the Recovered Allied Military Personnel, and they saw the shape we're in, they went into all these German barracks, you know, where the Germans were kept, took their mattresses out, cut them down to two meals a day, just, you know, in retaliation for what treatment we were getting. ... I had a jokester with me and we had a German hat, you know, big "S"-es; I guess it was an SS [*Schutzstaffel*] hat. We're on, you know, like [the] second floor. He goes to the hallway, ... and they're down there raking, or doing whatever they are doing in the compound. [laughter]

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

JS: As I was saying, they were raking and cleaning up the courtyard and he gets to the window, with this hat on his head, and he's talking in German to them, [Mr. Salerno mimics a German accent], "Ten-shun, ten-shun, we've come back. We've taken over. Drop the shovels," you know. [laughter] They're looking at him; at least they're smart enough not to believe him. ... That was the joke of the whole time there, but, no, ... what happened [was], when they saw us, it changed the way the entire American Army treated its POWs, didn't mistreat them, but stopped mollycoddling. In other words, they got to know they were enemy personnel, just like we did. The Germans made it very clear. You know, as far as I'm concerned, they didn't go out of their way to mistreat me, but they made sure, I was the enemy and the [message was], "Step out of line, we'll kill you."

MP: Did you have any contact with the German POWs?

JS: Over here?

MP: Over here, yes.

JS: I wanted nothing to do with them. No, ... French people took care of most of them.

SI: How soon were you able to get back to the States?

JS: Well, because I had the jaundice and hadn't, you know, put on weight, they didn't want to bring guys like me back home too early. ... I got liberated on April 14th, I entered the hospital system and got back to the States on July 4th. ... On that hospital [ship], you know, it was like a Liberty ship/hospital ship combined, that must have been at least ten days at sea, to get back. So, you know, from the hospital at Commercy, they put me on a detail, about six of us, ... to go to Camp Lucky Strike for transshipment to the States. ... We had to go through Paris and we had to change trains in Paris, go from one train station to the other. It's the first time I ever went "over the hill," [absent without leave], because Paris was, you know, the epicenter for leaves and

rehabilitation leaves and all that. ... As long as you're in uniform, they had a kitchen going all night long, they had a transient barracks where you could get a bunk to sleep. So, we spent an extra night in Paris and, you know, I got to see the [Seine River], you know, we went up the Eiffel Tower, as far as we could go, things like that, and never got in trouble by coming in a day late.

MP: Was the city itself mostly intact?

JS: Yes. I think they declared it an open city, if I remember right, and saw the French models, you know, being posed while they're photographing them, you know. That's supposed to be a highlight of the adventure.

SI: You went to Camp Lucky Strike and you were there for awhile.

JS: Couldn't have been too long, because, you know, there, we had, like, eight-man tents that we're staying in and, you know, they had the portable showers, and we're living like regular GIs again. ... I can't think of anything else about that. You know, they put us on orders, you know, to go up to Le Havre and ship out. ... I'd landed at Le Havre and ended up leaving from Le Havre.

SI: Did the war end while you were there?

JS: War ended while I was hospitalized, yes.

SI: Was there any kind of celebration or reaction?

JS: Oh, yes, the French people come up and serenaded [us]. They came in that courtyard with a band and all the people are singing to us, cheering us. No, we were treated royally. No, the French were real good to us, at the time. Now, see, they were inland, too, and I think, you know, there's a lot of French that got mad about it, [that] they were mainly around the port areas that got bombed out, you know. They suffered just like the Germans did, I guess, but, in Commercy, which [was where we were hospitalized], they treated us royally, but they always wanted to give us Calvados and I wouldn't drink it. ... Bread, I liked their bread, but their Calvados, [I] took one drink of that once [and] that was enough; burn your insides out. [laughter]

SI: By the time you left Europe, had your health recovered significantly, or how did you feel?

JS: Yes, I would say so. I came home, you know, came in at Virginia; I forget the name of the camp now. ...

SI: Patrick Henry?

JS: [Camp] Patrick Henry, right, and, from there, you know, I called home, [said] that I was back in the States. They [the military] sent me up to Fort Dix, where I got, you know, uniforms and everything, and my orders for, you know, a sixty-day convalescent furlough, plus, then, at the end, two weeks ... for rehab at Lake Placid. [Editor's Note: The Lake Placid Club in New

York was taken over during World War II and used as a rehabilitation center.] ... I took the train from Dix to Newark. I call my brother. He says, "You wait at the station for me." So, I went and got a haircut while I was waiting and came home, to an overjoyed family.

SI: What was that like, to see them after everything you had gone through?

JS: You know, the feeling of elation, because, you know, you can't help [it], back there, you wonder if you're ever going to get back. ... You know, all my relatives, that became [the meeting spot], once the word got out. So, all them were over. Meantime, my best first cousin, Packy, he got wounded at Metz, [the battle for the fortress city of Metz, France]. So, he was a paraplegic and I didn't know it, but he was in the Seventh Armored [Division] that I thought were going to come in to relieve us. So, of my entire group, a lot of guys got, you know, shot up, but nobody got killed, I don't think, nobody killed; wounded, yes, but not killed.

SI: When you first saw your parents and your brothers, did you notice a difference in them?

JS: Well, the first thing out of my brother Nick, who was in the Marines, you know, he was the oldest of the three that got called, when he comes in, he says, "Oh, you know, you might have thought you had it bad; nothing like Parris Island," he says. [laughter] I mean, to him, he never left the States, but, as far as he was concerned, Parris Island was worse than any experience you could have. He was a bullshitter, like all Marines, but that's [neither here nor there]. [laughter]

SI: Did your two older brothers who were married go into the service?

JS: Only one. My real oldest brother, he didn't go in. He worked for Western Electric [Electrical Engineering Company], but ... he had a family. He was past the age, I guess, but my brother Nick had a family, he got called in, was put in the Marines, and my brother Pat, he was the one recalled, so, he was in before me.

SI: Had he returned to the United States by the time you came home?

JS: Yes. He came home before I got home, because he was escorting a prisoner back to Fort Leavenworth. ... When the war in Europe ended, or wherever he was on, ... they cancelled his orders to return to the Far East and he went to Fort Dix and got discharged. So, he was discharged before me. I got discharged in December; he was discharged while I was on convalescent leave, I guess.

SI: At that point, you just got right out of the military; you did not join the Reserves or anything of that sort.

JS: Not at that time. I didn't join the Reserves until I got that Reserve commission.

SI: Did you go back to college right away?

JS: ... That's an interesting point you bring up, because ... the family got together and [were] all wondering what I was going to do and, you know, my mother was all pins-and-needles. They

don't know what [to say], you know, but one of my cousins [said], "What are you going to do now, Joe?" [I] said, "I'm going to go back to college." Well, my mother kissed the floor, you know. She was so happy that I decided I was going to go back to school, and that's what I did. I went back up to Montclair and re-enrolled, started in January. I commuted for awhile, and then, I found out that I couldn't stay with my buddies from Newark anymore, because they were over there drinking a lot. ... One weekend, I was with them and bar hopping and we got in one bar, got into [trouble], you know, a fight started, and he called the cops. So, we ... jumped in the car and we missed getting locked up by inches, I guess, and I told my mother, I said, "Mom, ... if I don't go to campus and live, I'm just going to get in trouble and never [graduate]." So, that's what I did. I packed it up and went up to campus. I lived off campus in a private home for awhile, until a room became available, and then, I went on campus, but the government; I was a service-connected veteran, so, I got a little better ... than the GI Bill [the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944]. Like, I don't know, let's say the GI Bill paid your tuition and whatever and they gave you maybe, like, a stipend of fifty or sixty dollars a month. As a disabled veteran, I got 113 dollars. They paid for my dorm and everything else.

SI: Were you able to become more involved with student activities, considering you had the GI Bill and now lived on campus?

JS: Oh, yes. I became class president, vice-president of the student government, you know, the fraternities we had. I tried to go back to playing ball, but that just [was not in the cards]. I didn't have the physical capability or anything. So, I went into more student government and politics, writing a column for the newspaper, things like that. I got, you know, very active, as far as activities on campus. It was a beautiful school at the time. You got to know everybody. It was small enough [that] you got to know everybody.

SI: Did you stay in the same career course?

JS: Yes, yes.

SI: At that time, you still figured your career would be in teaching.

JS: Teaching and coaching, at the time, but I found out very early, you know, that, with practice teaching, that I didn't think I would be happy confined to a classroom. ... So, then, I started thinking of school administration. In the meantime, it was a rough time to get a regular job, so, I got a job, you know, ... in the Newark system as an assistant coach. ... What are you showing him?

HS: The show.

JS: Oh, when I was in the [college], I played [Benito] Mussolini there.

HS: Yes, and, over here, here's the other things that he was in. We keep everything.

SI: Yes, this is a very nice scrapbook.

JS: Yes, you know, I was involved with the theater group on campus. ...

SI: You joined Kappa Delta Phi.

JS: Yes, yes, that was the honor society, right, and *Who's Who*. Everybody, you know, you make a big deal of this *Who's Who Among Students*, and I find out what it really is, just [to] sell you a book. [laughter] They've got *Who's Who Among POWs*, too; keep throwing it away. [laughter]

SI: Do you think it was helpful to get very involved in school, after what you had been through?

JS: I enjoyed it, yes. It's like becoming a kid again, you know, rebirth, and I'll tell you one thing, ... the veterans, we all, really, became good students. For some reason or another, we could center on it better.

SI: Were most of your classmates veterans?

JS: Not most of them, but a good percentage, and the ones I recall, you know, the ones who were there with me before.

MP: Do you feel that you grew as a person between the completion of your first semester at Montclair State University and when you returned?

JS: Oh, yes, totally, because the others ... seemed to be so young in, you know, comparison to the [veterans].

SI: Did you socialize or become friends with any of the guys who were not veterans?

JS: Oh, yes. In fact, to this day, I'm in contact with, well, one of them. The others have been passing away; well, two. Charlie (Faranella?), he was in my major [education] and he ended up being a Class of '48, as an example, and there was my roommate, Tommy (Regan?). ... You know, they were non-vets and they were some of my closest friends. Come to think of it, ... of the group I really socialized [with], I was the only veteran, I think, now that I think about it. They kept me young at heart, I guess. [laughter]

HS: (Lancelato?) was not a ...

JS: (Lou Lancelato?) was not [a veteran]. He became a veteran later, during the Korean War.

SI: Did you talk about your experiences in college, amongst your friends?

JS: Where, at college? I don't recall talking about it even once.

SI: Are these plays?

JS: Yes.

SI: In one, you are dressed up, as you said, like Benito Mussolini.

JS: [Benito] Mussolini, wearing, what? an SS outfit? [laughter]

SI: Yes, it looks like that.

JS: I kept giving a speech, "*Mare Nostrum*," you know, that's what ... [Benito] Mussolini kept calling the Mediterranean [Sea], "His sea." So, we had skits. ...

SI: That is great. These are very nice photos.

MP: What year did you graduate from Montclair?

JS: '48, June '48.

SI: Between graduation in June of 1948, and then, the Korean War breaking out two years later, what did you do in those years?

JS: Well, like I said, I started out as a permanent substitute and an assistant coach in Newark. To get a job in those days in there, ... that was the *crème de la crème* of getting a job, was to get [one] in the Newark system. So, you have to get into politics. So, I ended up joining the campaign of a guy, [Salvatore A.] Sal Bontempo, at the time. The year ... I was involved with him, he lost, but he won after I was in the Korean War. [Editor's Note: Salvatore A. Bontempo was elected to the Newark City Commission in 1953.] He won the next time, but, then, it was too late and I needed a job while the campaign was going on. So, ... at Newark, the Census Bureau was conducting, you know, surveys of businesses and I got a job with them as an enumerator, and then, they needed somebody to be a technical supervisor, to give training to run the census in 1950. So, I became the technical supervisor for Union County and that's when the war broke out, the Korean War. So, before I knew it, I was recalled. I'm back in the military. So, that was, you know, in-between; it was a short period of time. So, I never got that job in Newark.

MP: When you were recalled for the Korean War, you said you were made a second lieutenant.

JS: I was a second lieutenant in the Reserves, yes. I went on duty as a second lieutenant, right. Then, I became a first lieutenant.

SI: You told us earlier about how you ended up as a Reserve officer, and then, about Korea. I will ask you to repeat it again on tape. How did that all come about, your application for OCS, before the other events took place?

JS: Before, yes, that was during World War II, but those orders were interrupted because of the war, you know, military action. Actually, when I put in to get my medals, right, this would have been around '47, I was still in college, and that's when I was notified that, with the medals, that I could apply for a direct commission, in that my orders were interrupted. ... So, I filed for it and

went to New York, was interviewed, got a commission, never attended a meeting, nothing. That was just something you put on a shelf somewhere, and then, the war [the Korean War] broke out and I got called back in.

SI: You took your commission in the Transportation Corps.

JS: Yes. Well, you know, ... I liked their job. They took you to battle, they didn't stay in the battle, they brought you back home. I figured, "That's for me."

SI: Was part of your motivation for wanting to become an officer influenced by the way you saw officers treated in different arenas, for example, in the prison camp?

JS: Not in prison camp; I'm talking about [the] Army in general.

SI: Just in general, okay.

JS: Yes, because, all I know is, when our company got shot up and broken up and we were up at the side of the road, you know, they took our captain immediately separate from us. You know, they had their own *stalags* where they kept the officers now. We assumed they got plush treatment, but not all of them. ... Some of them really caught hell in their prison camps. ... No, I just felt [that in] the Army, in general, you know, there's a real caste system, when you talk about being an officer and being an enlisted man, and, you know, right down to the fact that, as an enlisted man, you live in the barracks, as an officer, you got a room, you know what I mean?
...

MP: The benefits were clear.

JS: And the money.

SI: Once you were recalled and put back into the service, your first assignment was in Newark, New Jersey, at the induction center.

JS: Yes, induction and recruiting. In the morning, it'd be recruiting; those are the guys you'd swear in this way, "Raise your right arm and say it after me," you know. In the induction station, they just had to take a step. That put them in the Army. That always stuck in my head.

MP: Did you have any idea that you would be sent overseas to the Korean War?

JS: Well, ... I knew I wasn't going to stay at Newark. That was a temporary thing. ... The Transportation Corps Headquarters was at Fort Eustis, [in Virginia], and that's where their basic training center was, and I knew, with my background, that's where they would send me. ... I thought they would just keep me there. I never expected that they were going to send me out for thirty days to learn about trucks, and then, send me overseas as a truck officer, but, you know, that's the way the Army operates. They make you an expert overnight, but, then, like I say, I got pulled out of the pipe anyhow, pipeline. I ended up in Eighth Army Headquarters, and then, Far East Command.

SI: Were you still living at home when you entered the Korean War or did you have your own place?

JS: Yes. No, I was at home.

SI: How did your mother react to you being recalled a second time?

JS: My mother became immune to these things, because I got recalled, my brother got recalled in his outfit, you know. I mean, she became immune to all these things after awhile. [laughter] ... I told her, when I was going overseas, just to [calm her], I said, "I'm going over to Japan to set up a radio station." I told her that to keep her calm. I never thought I was going to Korea. [laughter]

MP: How did you receive the assignment to be a public relations and historic officer? Did you volunteer?

JS: Well, as an additional duty, that they kept developing, volunteer. See, when I was at Fort Eustis, I was a company officer, and then, the regimental commander needed someone. He was the club officer. He needed someone, you know, to set up a festive occasion and wanted rules for the pool and, I don't know, we were having coffee or something. He said, ... "Can you write up [the rules]?" I said, "Okay, I'll [do it]." So, I wrote up something for him, and then, he said, "Well, you know, we've got to run games." Well, I didn't know I was going to get stuck with the whole thing. So, you know, I'm setting up these sack races and all of that for the officers and their kids and, well, that made the Colonel very happy. Next thing you know, he needed an athletic and recreation officer and I got that job. That took me out of the company. I became a staff officer, and then, the athletic and recreation officer left, so, he tagged them [those] duties on to me, too. So, you know, I ended up with the whole ... enlarged section, became first lieutenant, and then, he got called overseas and ended up in Korea as the assistant to the Chief of Transportation [Corps, Major General Frank A. Heileman]. Well, they ... had a historic officer that was leaving. The historic officer ... did the history file and the PR [public relations] work. So, when he saw me in the pipeline, he told, you know, the Chief of Transportation, "Here, this guy can handle that job." So, I'm in the pipeline and we're coming up from Pusan, [also known as Busan, in South Korea] to Taegu [also known as Daegu, in South Korea], and they called my name out to go to Eighth Army Headquarters. I said, "Uh-oh, this is where I get thrown back in the infantry." That's the first thing that came to my mind, because there were a bunch of infantry officers with me at the time. Instead, they pulled me out to go into headquarters, and that's how I became [Colonel Howard] Malin's right-hand man. He ... took me right with him to Tokyo. ... You know, so, I did all right.

MP: Did you work closely with the commanding general?

JS: Yes, [James] Van Fleet, [Commanding General of US Eighth Army and United Nations forces, succeeding General Matthew Ridgeway in 1951], and then, it was Mark [Wayne] Clark in Japan.

SI: What were your daily activities like in that position?

JS: Well, I had standing orders, you know. I could travel any [time], like, constant, and I could just go to the airport and jump on a plane, go wherever I wanted. I could pick up a phone, get a jeep and driver. So, I had no problem. So long as I had my .45-[caliber pistol] with me, I could go anywhere. ... All that transpired in the Transportation Corps Headquarters, all the movements by rail or truck or sea. In fact, even when they were considering bringing in a nuclear weapon, a cannon that would fire a nuclear weapon, we [would] have to judge whether the roads could handle it, that went into my [file], all these things. ... I would put them together and make up a monthly report, footnoting everything with the documentation, you know. So, every month, I was putting out something about that thick that would go to the Eighth Army Historic [Historical] Section. ... In-between, I'd write up PR releases, you know, who got a medal ... or, like, here, when we were going to celebrate the thirtieth [tenth?] anniversary of [the] Transportation Corps, I wrote a major, you know, article for *Stars and Stripes* [the US Armed Forces' independent newspaper] in the Far East Command about all the things the Transportation Corps was doing, and it ran, you know. What's the matter?

HS: That's it. That's your article.

JS: No, this is ...

HS: Oh, this is the trucker.

JS: I'm talking about a newspaper. You know, it's a big centerfold, with pictures, and then, we went on, you know, Armed Forces Radio, you know, the whole bit, you know, like a PR person, but, like I say, ... when I was at Fort Eustis, they had sent me to the Armed Forces Information School [now the Defense Information School, which provides training in public affairs]. So, that was my background in PR.

MP: That is what I wanted to get to.

JS: See, that was a unified command, an admiral ran that, and that was at Fort Slocum, [New York], beautiful duty, you know, right in the city, jeez, and don't think I didn't try to stay on the faculty there, [laughter] if I could've, but no way. ... That gave me a background in PR. So, you know, that was part of the stepping stones, and it helped me all through my [life]. You know, nothing in World War II that I did helped me career-wise, in civilian life. There's no place for an infantryman, but any management skills, administrative skills, all came from the Korean War, because I was exposed to it and did it, you know. I had my own section. ...

MP: In Korea, I think it is safe to say that you were your own boss, with the freedom to act as you wanted.

JS: Yes, based on, you know, the needs of the Chief of Transportation.

MP: Can you describe your living quarters, as an officer? Did you live in a tent?

JS: No, we lived in [buildings]. At Taegu, ... there was a university down there that we had taken over, so, we did live in what I'd call, like, a barracks-type arrangement. You know, it was a big room and we each had our own bunk and we had, you know, like netting around, because the mosquitoes were so bad, but liquor was [available]. We all had our own bar, you know. You buy everything by the bottle when you're [an officer]. You get your monthly liquor ration, and so, we all [drank liquor]. You know, that's when I started with [cocktails]. We'd have cocktails at night. You know, this is headquarters living, you know, things, like I say, when you're in the line, you don't know [that] there are guys in the Army getting paid what they do back in headquarters. You think everybody's like you, you know, running away from rifle fire or something, but, you know, [I] lived pretty good and had the run of Korea. I'd go up and visit different [installations], go up to Seoul, [capital of South Korea], visit our Transportation units up there and, you know, get stories on them, then, feed them to the newspapers, you know, things like that, ... you know, one of the guys, write him up, send it in to their hometown [paper], and I had my own couple of typists that did everything for me.

MP: That is what I was going to mention. Did you have assistants under you?

JS: Yes, I had whatever I needed there, ... and the big thing was the latitude of transportation. Then, when I went to the Far East Command, I went to Formosa, [also known as Taiwan, an island of the Republic of China], Hong Kong, Philippines, Okinawa, everywhere, so that, you know, really, I can't complain about my Korean War duty. ...

MP: Did you have any contact with the Koreans?

JS: Oh, yes. Oh, I had a Korean houseboy that did my laundry and all that. You know, all the people, ... you know, like in the kitchen, all the waiters and waitresses, were all Korean, and I can't say that we ran parties for them or anything like that, but I did get connected with an orphanage, with Korean kids, with American and English sisters [nuns]. Even German sisters were in that order. ... We'd go visit there and see the kids and bring what we could to [them], you know, candy or stuff like that, because we had access. That's about the only, you know, community thing that I'm aware of.

SI: Can you give us more examples of the kind of stories you would be covering and putting together while in Korea?

JS: Well, say, I'm trying to think, on, say, moving supplies up to the front, ... the routes they would take, how they would package these things, because ... Transportation Corps is responsible for bringing them up to corps area, and then, from corps, they go into division, but, you know, that, the corps, had their own transportation then. So, you know, we had a network and that would change. ... You had studies going on; like, now, on the railroad, they had one line that went north to south and, you know, I'd write up or arrange [an article], you know. I'd go talk to the commander and the people in their outfit, [about] what, you know, they were doing, who they were, a lot of them, if anybody distinguished themselves, where they were from, then, I'd get that written up. Oh, the big thing, this is when I was in Japan, ... the first thing that we did was, you know, when they were talking about an armistice, which, that's where it started, it's still the same thing, in Panmunjom, [a village between North and South Korea where the

armistice was signed], the first thing they were going to do is, they called it Operation: LITTLE SWITCH, exchanging the wounded prisoners. Well, I was sent over from Japan to coordinate all the transportation activities for that, and that included arranging helicopters for the photographers from *Life* Magazine etc., arranging for a club railroad car on a siding for them to live in, you know, the reporters and all that who were covering it. That was all my responsibility, at the time, and then, I was there, naturally, and I went up with them. I've got pictures of that somewhere, too. ...

HS: You've got them right here.

SI: Did you interact with any of the prisoners being returned?

JS: No, they were processed right through the hospital channels. They were debriefed, you know, by intelligence people, but I didn't interact with them. My interaction was with the civilian reporters that were covering [the exchange].

SI: What was the relationship like between the civilian reporters and the military at that time?

JS: Very good.

SI: Very good; friendly?

JS: Yes. Even in Headquarters, there was no problem, not where I was concerned, anyhow.

SI: Where did this occur, at the Far East Command or in Eighth Army Headquarters?

JS: Both, both, because they were involved with Eighth Army and, a lot of times, I'd have to arrange transportation for them, if they wanted to go to a certain sector, and, of course, ... a lot of them were connected with our embassy there, too.

SI: Did the LITTLE SWITCH operation take place when you were in Japan?

JS: I was already in Japan for LITTLE SWITCH. I just went back to cover [it], you know, ... do those arrangements.

SI: When you were in Japan, you were still focused on the Transportation Corps.

JS: Oh, yes, only at different levels, that's all. ... In Korea, it was strictly within Korea. When I was in the Far East [Command], it covered the entire Far East, west of Hawaii, you know. ... Hawaii was a separate command.

SI: Did you work with either intelligence officers or someone involved in censorship to determine what could be allowed in a press article and what had to be omitted?

JS: No. ... Anything for PR, I sent to the Public Information Office, Eighth Army. They cleared it and sent it out. ... By the time I was involved, it was a static front. We weren't dealing

with [large advances]. You know, by that time, it had stabilized and the front stayed more or less static, and we had the force to do it and they didn't want to go any further than the ... 32nd Parallel, if I remember right. [Editor's Note: The 38th Parallel North is the approximate location of the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea.] ... Then, the idea was to try to get a settlement, you know, settle the score. ... Nothing of, you know, a sensitive nature was involved in anything I put out. ... Most of the stuff I put out was patting the Transportation Corps on the back, "They're moving so many tons of ammo, so much of this, you know, bringing replacements up," you know, these kind of things.

SI: When you put an article together, I would imagine you were very general, for fear of writing something that could be of use to the enemy, for example, when writing about bringing in supplies.

JS: No. ... There was nothing of that. ... See, at that time, the Army Air, [US Army Aviation] you know, up until that point, it was under Ordnance [Corps] and, during the Korean War, it was brought under the Transportation Corps. So, you know, we were bringing [in] all the aircraft that was in [theater] under an umbrella of the Transportation Corps. So, we're setting up a new section in the headquarters and things of that nature, but nothing that I, during the Korean War, handled would have [been of] any help for the enemy.

SI: Okay. Any there any other questions you want to ask, Michael?

MP: I assume that your time in Korea went a lot smother than your time in World War II, in terms of encountering any major problems.

JS: No, to me, it was, you know, ... a highlight of my life, because it gave me a lot of training that had a value to me the rest of the way. ... I met nice people. In fact, I even ran into my former company commander over there, the guy, ... James D. Moore. He was a major at that time, in the officers' club. It was, you know, like night and day, the two services, you know. One was right in the heart of things, you know. ...

SI: Earlier, you established a connection between your time in Korea and World War II; for example, the fact that, in Korea, you were checking the casualty lists.

JS: I know, always had empathy, though, because, boy, I know, and that's what I'm saying, there's a big difference when you're on line, ... on a combat unit, and no different today.

SI: Did you see other officers who did not share the same empathy or did not keep that in mind?

JS: No, everybody did, you know. Everybody essentially was doing their job, what they were trained for, and, you know, in the Army, particularly, you know that the infantry is your "queen of battle" and everything is geared to keeping them in action and supplying them in action and getting everything up there. So, you know, you just sort of fall in line with it. Even in Korea, it was strictly like World War II, a Service of Supply. We didn't have contract labor, like they do now.

MP: Had a majority of the officers you encountered in the Korean War been involved in World War II as well?

JS: Well, they all basically had been through World War II.

MP: Through World War II.

JS: Even the ones that stayed on and the ones that came in, like, a lot of us came in. ...

MP: Did most of them have experience from World War II?

JS: Oh, yes, oh, yes, without a doubt. In fact, a lot of the enlisted men, when I first came in, were Reserve officers. ... While I was there, they were moving from being sergeants to picking up their commissions again, because there was a downsizing after World War II and they stayed on active duty as enlisted men, even though they were Reserve officers.

MP: How long did you serve in Korea?

JS: Let's see, I went over, I left the States in, let's see; ... oh, boy, let me reconstruct that. I know it was in the spring, I guess ... I might have been over there for, let's see, '52; I'd say a little over a year that I was over in Far East Command, yes, a little over a year, because I spent one Christmas over there. I went over in April of '52 and probably came back home in November of '53, something like that. I think that's all in that outline I gave, that.

SI: Yes, sure. Can you describe how you came back from Korea and where your life went from there, in terms of staying in the military or not?

JS: No, once the war was over, I was ready to come home and I came into California, and then, flew commercial and ended up at Edison, Camp Kilmer. ... While I was there, they were processing me to be discharged, they wanted to give me part-time duty and I says, "You kidding? I live in Plainfield." My family was in Plainfield at the time. So, I said, "I'll check back with you," you know. ... I went into Plainfield, bought a car, and then, start[ed] going back. I stayed at the camp when they needed me, you know, because I had like, little, I forget what they call these little courts that you have to [sit on]. You know, somebody'd go over the hill and they needed an officer to give him ...

SI: Court-martial?

JS: Give him a summary court-[martial], you know. So, you'd ... pull little odd assignments like that, until they processed you out.

SI: Did you ever give any thought to staying in the military? Did you have that opportunity?

JS: Well, I did, for awhile, but, you know, once the war started, you know, I didn't think that was, you know, my forte at all, you know. So, I didn't really think about staying in [and] making a career of it.

MP: Were you ready to get back to civilian life?

JS: Yes. You know, my brother was clearing the way for me about a job with the VA, because he was there and he [was] talking to the hot shot over there. ... So, you know, I sort of figured, "Well, I'll get into, you know, not into teaching, but into something, you know, rehab work or something of that nature." That's what I did. See, I wanted to keep the time, the military time. I have seven-and-a-half years. ... It worked towards my pension. See, if I went to work as a federal civil servant, that time counted towards a pension. So, you know, when I retired, I had all that time; all my Army time, from both wars, counted. So, I retired with almost, just about, forty years of service, a nice pension.

SI: You were telling us at lunch about how you met Mrs. Salerno. Could you tell us again for the tape how you met, through the Veterans Affairs hospital?

JS: Yes. She was the secretary to the assistant director and I was being processed through personnel. I was in recreation and I had transferred in there from East Orange for a promotion. ... I'd go up, you know, to fill out the papers in personnel and I'd sign one and pass her and she said, "Come on in," [Mr. Salerno mimics their conversation]. So, I go back. Next day, I come in, they say, "They want you in personnel." Well, it was the same form, but the second sheet had to be signed. So, I don't know who she was in collusion with. ...

HS: I had friends.

JS: What?

HS: I had friends.

JS: ... Every day, I'd have to sign a piece of paper, that I could have signed probably [all at the same time] ... and there she was, [saying], you know, "Oh, come in." [laughter] I said, "Jeez, the assistant [director might not like it], you know." "He doesn't mind," she [said]. Then, one thing led to another and that's it. I'd finally signed all the papers. [laughter]

SI: Can you tell us more about your job at the VA?

JS: Well, I started out in East Orange as an educational therapist, and then, they had a RIF, ... reduction in force. ... I had just started there, so, I was up for grabs, but, as a veteran, non-veterans had to go before me. So, there was, say, a job I was qualified for in recreation. So, this guy, (Dennis?) wife had the job and I supplanted her. She didn't like giving it up. [laughter] So, I ended up in recreation at East Orange, as a GS-5 at the time, you know. [Editor's Note: GS refers to general schedule, indicating the level of knowledge and experience needed for employment.] ... So, I wanted a promotion and Joe (McClune?) was the chief of special services. He wasn't about to give me a promotion, for whatever reason, saying, "No, we only have so many sevens [GS-7 positions]." "Okay." So, I heard about a GS-7 up at Lyons. I put in for it, and that was in recreation. ... So, I went up, you know, took the job up at Lyons and got my seven. ... Then, I met her [his wife] and, of course, I'm working a lot of evenings. So, when

we were, you know, recently married, that got to be annoying. So, there was an opening in corrective therapy, which I was qualified for. ...

SI: Sorry, hold that thought.

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

HS: Okay, I don't know if you're familiar, ... these are the V-letters, V-mail, [Victory mail, letters sent between the United States home front and soldiers abroad] that they sent during World War II. ... Here's Mark Clark and there's Malin and all. ... I don't know if anybody showed you those. ... We threw [them] away, you know, in our family, but his brother saved them, so, I confiscated them. They checked to make sure there's nothing of any interest to the enemy. They're all individual [the letters].

SI: We are looking at the scrapbook again and some V-mail.

HS: Did other people show you that?

SI: I have seen it before.

MP: I have never seen it.

SI: The Rutgers Oral History Archives did an exhibit, about two years ago now, where we put a lot of V-mail on display.

JS: ... I was telling you, I went into corrective therapy. Then, that was working days and I had to wear a white uniform. So, she'd have to, you know, take care of that for me. ... Shortly thereafter, a job as chief of athletics opened up in recreation, which would have been another promotion. I don't know if it was an eight [GS-8] or a nine [GS-9], whatever, I went up to something, and I put in for that and they wanted to bring in a guy. You know, the chief of special services and recreation wanted to bring in some guy from Washington State, I think, and our hospital had to pay for the transportation to bring him here. ... Of course, she [Mrs. Salerno] was one step away from the hospital director. ... I'm sure she had something to do with it, because they're having a staff meeting and the hospital director says, "We're going to pay transportation to bring a guy up from Washington when we got somebody qualified on our own staff?" He says, "It's nonsense," and that was how I ended up getting that job. I think she helped.

HS: No, that's too much credit. I don't think so.

JS: Well, anyhow, I became chief of athletics, and then, they revamped. I became the assistant chief of recreation and I think, at the time, I was a GS-10, I guess, right?

HS: Yes.

JS: And then, they wanted to set up a sheltered workshop and the coordinator of rehab medicine, that's the chief non-doctor in all of rehab, he, you know, checking the different credentials, saw that, for a short period of time, when I got out of college, I sold vacuum cleaners, door-to-door. So, he says, "Well, you've got a little sales experience." He said, "You know, we want to set up a sheltered workshop and it's going to involve salesmanship, going to companies, trying to subcontract work." He said, "If you make a go of it [and] become a section chief, you'd be a GS-11." [I said], "Okay." Well, I was determined. So, I went on temporary duty to set up this sheltered workshop and I have to start from scratch. I have to give it its name. So, you know, I wanted something that would be catchy. So, I spent all weekend trying to come up with a name that could also be an acronym. So, I come up with SCOPE, Simulated Conditions of Practical Employment. I got the print shop to make up brochures, you know. ... These were all mental patients, long-term mental patients, we're dealing with, and I go out in the field, trying to drum up work. ... They gave me a therapist from manual arts and two, you know, like industrial crewmen or whatever; they used to be detail. They'd run patient details. So, I had a staff, I was ready to go. I went out and I'd start searching companies around, in Newark and wherever, to get work. Well, I ended up with the American Tag Company first and they had different tags and they wanted to package them in some way and, you know, they'd come along. So, they brought up those and we started the clinic, and then, I start bringing in other work. One of the [jobs was], it was not real jewelry, but chains, to cut them to length, put these end pieces on. That was with an outfit in Mountainside. You know, I'd get a different lead and I'd follow up on it. Then, I got one guy in Newark, [laughter] he used to advertise X-ray eyeglasses. Well, I looked him up, and, well, it sounded good to him. ... These were cardboard glasses. You put a feather in there, a chicken feather, and you look through and you think you're seeing bones. Well, the idea in the magazines is, you know, all of a sudden, you're going to see a naked girl through this, I guess. ... Anyhow, we start doing that job. Then, I went to an engineering firm that was doing a lot of setting up, ... what do you call it when you bundle wires and put them on a [frame], you know, solder them into, you know, like a frame? ... [It was] really a component for computerized mechanical engineering. ... So, we start doing the soldering. He'd deliver the parts, and another guy used to make pallets. He would send up pallets. We'd work on the pallets, re-nail, put them together, so [that] they'd be strong; so, all these little odd jobs. We made a success of it and, you know, I'd go around to the local chambers of commerce and talk, you know, because then I had something to talk [about], and I'd get more work in. ... In Plainfield, they made me an honorary member of the chamber. ... Then, Dick (Hall?), who was the coordinator, he was going to ... retire and go to work for the county government or city government in Somerville and the job of coordinator became available. So, I put in for that and [it] took awhile, but I got it, and so, then, now, I'm talking about; oh, wait a minute, I ended up being a thirteen [GS-13]. ... Doctors weren't even, at that time, retiring as good as I retired from that position, and that's how I escalated. ... Then, what happened [was], once I became the coordinator, my part-time duty, all the while, no matter what job I had, was to be their PR [person]. So, then, when I became coordinator, the director named me, to meet every morning with him as the hospital's public relations director. So, I had a dual function. That's how I got the thirteen [GS-13]. Right, I was a twelve [GS-12]; once I added that, I was the hospital coordinator of all the rehab clinics, which included OT [occupational therapy], PT [physical therapy], see, all of them were under me, and I also did all the hospital public relations, and that's what I retired from. ... The best thing that ever happened to me was the guy I didn't vote for, Ronald Reagan. Twice, I didn't vote for him, but he brought in the ... when you evaluate an employee and base his salary on it?

SI: Yes, worker assessments.

JS: Well, whatever. You know, in other words, you'd set up a plan, your goals, they'd approve it and, if you met these goals, you'd get a salary enhancement.

SI: Yes, incentive increase.

JS: Incentive increase, yes. In the meantime, I had reached the highest level of a GS-13, but, now, with these incentives every year, because they liked what I was doing, I was getting big increases, like three, four thousand dollars. At the time, that was big money. ... You know, once I got the kid through ... Princeton [University] and everything, I figured, "Hey," I told Helen, I says, "You know, Helen, we're going to have to decide, do I die in a job or do I retire?" ... When you reached forty years of service, you never can increase your retirement, that's the [limit], and so, I gave up the incentives, but, ... like I say, I was very fortunate later in life. [laughter]

MP: After your retirement, were there any hobbies or activities that you did in your spare time?

JS: Well, you know, I always had a flair for writing, for one thing. So, I got involved with that a lot, but ... one of the reasons I wanted to get out of work [is], ... they were bringing computers in. I didn't want to be involved with computers. I figure I'd [not do well], but my son, after I was retired, he wanted to give [me one], you know. He got together with my wife and his sister, said, "We've got to get Dad a computer," and Grandma [Mrs. Salerno] said, "No, he wants no part of that." Joey says, "Look, he's going to get bored stiff. We're going to get him a computer," and I wouldn't even bother with it for the longest time. ... Then, she had an operation.

HS: (Hand?).

JS: And, you know, I have to stay home, take care [of her]. So, in the meantime, I start looking at the computer. ... Let me just go back a bit; just before, I told my daughter, "Tell your brother to come in and get that damn junk out of here within two weeks or it's going to be on the garbage heap." Well, in the meantime, Helen was laid up, so, I'm home. So, I go there. This is back when [we were] using DOS [Disk Operating System] and I start messing with it. ... My son said, "Anytime you have a problem, call me up." [I said], "Okay." So, little by little, I got involved in the thing and I always remember my daughter-in-law telling me, she says, "You know, Dad, you're getting interested in these computers." She says, "It's going to cost you nothing but money," and how true it was. Boy, I'll tell you, but I'm involved in it full tilt and I put out a newsletter for my retirement group. I'm on a telecommunications committee that I chair here in the community. So, I put out newsletters, things like that.

MP: Do you belong to any veterans' associations?

JS: Oh, yes, American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Ex-POWs Association [American Ex-Prisoners of War Organization]. [Editor's Note: Mrs. Salerno prompts him.] Oh, well, this,

he said after I retired, hon. You're talking about when I was Little League coach and Pop Warner and all that stuff. You know, I was on the Board of Education in South Plainfield and all that, but that was before I retired.

SI: No, that is fine.

JS: ... Now, I just sort of get involved, but at a low level. To me, I'm at that age in life where I'm a half-a-day man. This is the longest day I've had in a long time. I usually have lunch and that's it for me for the day. I work in the morning. Hey, computer's work. [laughter]

SI: Is there anything that we have not covered?

JS: I think you plucked me clean. [laughter]

SI: Is there anything else that either of you can think of that we should put on this recording?

HS: Well, I don't think [so]; it's primarily him. I mean, I come in on a very ancillary thing, not really. I could tell you about what the VA was in 1944, if that would be of interest.

SI: I thought we would come back and do another interview.

HS: Oh, all right.

SI: We talked about coming back, which would be good.

HS: Oh, you want to come back for lunch? [laughter]

SI: I will say on the record, again, lunch was very nice; it is worth coming back for. If there is nothing else that you want to put on the recording, then, we will conclude this interview. Thank you very much for a wonderful day and a great interview.

JS: ... You're quite welcome.

MP: Thank you.

HS: In fact, I learned a few things.

JS: Yes, ... I remembered things that I'd forgot.

HS: He has a tremendous recall. ...

SI: This concludes our interview with Mr. Joseph T. Salerno.

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

Reviewed by Rebecca Mamone 2/21/10

Reviewed by Richard Lin 2/21/10
Reviewed by Dion Fisco 2/21/10
Reviewed by Joseph Dalesio 2/21/10
Reviewed by Oscarina Melo 2/21/10
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 9/8/10
Reviewed by Joseph T. Salerno 10/4/10