

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN E. SKINNER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. John E. Skinner on October 27, 1995, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Steve Gillen: Steve Gillen.

KP: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. You have strong roots in New Brunswick. Your father moved to New Brunswick. Do you know why?

John Skinner: Uncle Sam brought him here. He was here, he was stationed for a period of time over at Raritan Arsenal, during World War I, and that's how he met my mother.

KP: At a dance?

JS: Yes.

KP: Was she a New Brunswick native?

JS: Yes, her origins were in New Brunswick.

KP: Was your father drafted or did he enlist?

JS: He enlisted, I believe. That, I'm not that sure of, but, I think he said he enlisted.

KP: Did he serve overseas?

JS: No. ... He spent most of his time over at Raritan Arsenal and Camp Upton, on Long Island. He was a mess sergeant. He used to starve the boys. [laughter]

KP: Did your father ever join the American Legion?

JS: Yes.

KP: I take it that he was very proud of his military service.

JS: Yes. We all are proud of our military service.

KP: If your father had not met your mother, he might not have settled in the area. Did you get the sense that your mother ...

JS: Oh, yes, that's the reason. Of course, he stayed here, yeah, because, as I said before, in our conversation, his origins were in Connecticut, ... but, he stayed in New Brunswick, because he met my mother and married her, and I'm here. [laughter]

KP: Your father was a butcher. Did he own his own shop?

JS: No, no, he worked for someone. He managed ... the shop, you know.

KP: Did he ever own his own shop?

JS: No.

KP: Since you grew up in New Brunswick, what are some of your earliest memories of living in the city?

JS: Well, [that depends] on how far back you want to go. Your memory becomes a little hazy. Probably, my original memory was ... my first day of school. Of course, they didn't have kindergarten in those days and my mother tells me I cried like a baby. [laughter] ... No, I remember going to school and the closeness of the associations in New Brunswick. That's absent today. I mean, we had a very close-knit neighborhood. Everyone knew everyone else. ... Of course, an awful lot of my early memories are associated with the University here, because I only lived two blocks away from Rutgers gym, the old Rutgers gym. ... We spent, many a time, sneaking in to watch basketball games, or they played lacrosse up here at Neilson Field, and we used to go up to the guys. I remember Joe Barile, from Bound Brook, who was an excellent lacrosse player. Joe used to let us carry the bags, so [that] we could get in the door, and ... the men from Rutgers used to look the other way, and then, I can remember, we were sneaking into Rutgers Gym [by] sliding down the coal chute. It was heated by coal and, in fact, one time, one of my friends broke his arm going down the coal chute. We'd go down the coal chute, and you'd walk up into the stands, and everybody'd be staring at you, and, of course, we were kids, we couldn't understand why. We were black from all the coal and everything else, but, ... that was a fond memory. Then, of course, when they built the stadium across the ... [river], we used to hop the fence to get in and watch. In fact, we snuck in the first time that Rutgers ever beat Princeton in football, when Art Gottlieb threw that pass to, I think it was, Joe Varju, ... '38, was it? something like that, but, as I said, a lot of the old memories we used to have [are of Rutgers athletics]. They used to play baseball at Neilson Field. ... Of course, in those days, when we were growing up, it was [the] Depression and no one had any money to buy balls and everything. ... We used to form a relay team; ... guys would hit a foul ball over the fence and we'd grab it. ... Of course, the managers'd chase us and grab us to try to get the ball, and, when they'd catch one guy, we'd throw it to the next guy, and that's the way we were supplied. Of course, we played, lived up in Buccleuch Park, playing baseball ten hours a day, I guess it was, or football, whatever the season.

KP: You got your baseballs by catching foul balls.

JS: Yes, that was one way, and then, of course, you know, when we weren't lucky, ... we'd tape up all the old balls with this old-fashioned electrical tape. If you hit it a good whack, you could see the tape unraveling as it comes along, like a rocket with a tail, but, no, that was the source of supply.

KP: You mentioned that you lived in a close-knit neighborhood.

JS: Oh, yes, yes.

KP: Who lived in your neighborhood? For example, how many Irish, Italians, or Hungarians lived there?

JS: Well, it was mixed. Hungarian was [predominant]. ... Two of my closest friends were Hungarian. They were American born, they born here, but, their parents came from Hungary. Another one was German, another was Irish, I'm half-Dutch and half-Irish, so, it was a general makeup of all ethnic groups, but, then, we had the black fellows that used to live down the street by the firehouse, and we used to play ball with them, and they would play ball with us, and right across the street, down a couple houses, there was a black family. So, it was a general ethnic mix. We used to play ball in the park, Buccleuch Park, in the league and we'd play against a black team called the Kansas City Monarchs. ... We had fights, but, it was nothing. I mean, you know, the next day, you'd be out there, palling around with the guys again. It was just, briefly, of the moment. So, it was a complete mix.

KP: When did the Kansas City Monarchs come to New Brunswick?

JS: Not the Kansas City Monarchs, [the] New Brunswick Monarchs.

KP: Okay.

JS: New Brunswick Monarchs. They were named after the Kansas City Monarchs and they had some real good ballplayers on there. They were good friends of mine. ...

KP: What year was the big game?

JS: Oh, it was all big games, ... two or three, four times a year, we used to play ball, and that was back before the war. ... We played some after the war. ...

KP: Sports were very important to you when you were growing up.

JS: Sports was very important to me. Even after, when I was going here, I played a little ball at college, and then, you'd go out on the side, and you'd play ball. You'd get fifteen bucks a game. My name used to be (Utlowski?). See, you wouldn't play under your own name or anything like that, but, these stores would sponsor teams, and they'd need ballplayers, and they'd pay you five or ten dollars, but, sports was a very important part of my life; it still is.

KP: What do you remember about going to school? You were very upset on your first day of school.

JS: Oh, well, no, I remember going to school. It was a very nice relationship. We used to walk, well, from Wyckoff Street up to St. Peter's in New Brunswick. ... Later on, in high school, one of the guys got an old car, I think the floor was out of it. We used to all pile in that and drive to school, but, our association with school was another thing. It was very close-knit. Now, to give you an example of what I mean, my wife, I guess it was last Friday, ... she had her fiftieth anniversary, high school graduation, and you walk in there, and I know most of the people, because

I went to the same school as my wife, and it was ... [as] if you had just left them two days ago. You pick up the conversation. You might not have seen these people in thirty years or something like that. So, it was very close-knit. The school was small. It was a Catholic school. ... Everyone knew everyone else. In fact, one of the gals that graduated from high school with my wife taught two of my daughters and lived next door to us. So, it was a nice intermingling of people.

KP: Several people I have interviewed who grew up in New Brunswick have told me about New Brunswick High School as a regional high school.

JS: There was no regional school system in those days. In a sense, well, no, I'll amend that, because you can say it was regional, but, it wasn't regional in name, because St. Peter's was sort of regional, because kids would come from Bound Brook, Rahway, because they didn't have ... all the different high schools, the number of high schools, they have around here today, and I think Brunswick High encompassed North Brunswick and Milltown, and a couple of the other surrounding ... [areas], but, they weren't regional in name.

KP: However, you did have farm kids from outside the city in your classes.

JS: Oh, sure, they were farm kids. They'd come in. I think that, probably, Brunswick had more farm kids than we did. A lot of the kids that ... I was friendly with and I went to school with, they came from Rahway, and they used to commute on a train, or they'd hitchhike in from Dunellen. I don't know if you want to call Dunellen a farm town. It was kind of rural in those days, ... and Bound Brook.

KP: You stayed at St. Peter's for all twelve years of your primary and secondary schooling.

JS: Correct.

KP: How often did your family go to Mass? Did they go to church every week?

JS: Let's put it this way, we're not acting Catholics, we're participating Catholics. We go every [week] and I still do. ...

KP: The Church was very important to you.

JS: Oh, sure, it still is.

KP: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

JS: ... Oh, I can remember going out in darned socks and pants [that] were repaired, but, we were fortunate, probably, [more] than some of the people, because my dad was ... in the meat business. We might have eaten hamburger instead of steak, ... but, we were quite fortunate. ... We were poor, we didn't have [much]. ... I mean, my father used to have to save to buy coal to heat the house, just like everyone else.

KP: Did your father remain employed throughout the Depression?

JS: Yes.

KP: How did your neighbors fare?

JS: Well, ... it was sort of a split. Most of my neighbors, I think, were quite fortunate in this respect, that they didn't make much money, but, they didn't lose their job. Some of my friends, I know [that] their parents were out of work, and they used to go down ... to the train yards and cuss at the engineer, and they'd throw coal at them. I mean, that's where they got their coal, but, the engineers knew what the kids were doing. They'd collect coal in a bucket, and they'd go home and put it in the furnace, but, I would say that we were fortunate, compared to some people. Some people really had it [bad]. I mean, you take some of the (OPs?) and stuff like that, we had nothing like that. We were quite fortunate.

KP: Did your family own a car in the 1920s?

JS: My father never owned a car in his life.

KP: Really?

JS: No, [he] ... doesn't even know how to drive, never got a car, never had an urge to get a car. My oldest daughter's the same way, the one that works down here. She doesn't have a driver's license, thank God. I mean, I got some of these gray hairs when I tried to teach her to drive, [laughter] but, no, my father never had a car.

KP: While you were at St. Peter's, did you expect or hope to go on to college?

JS: I hoped to go to college. It was a question. I knew it would probably be a long affair. If Uncle Sam didn't come along, I'd have to go out and work, because my [parents] ... didn't have enough money to send me to college.

KP: Did your parents want you to go to college?

JS: Yes, yes. My mother was very much in favor of education, so was my father. My father said [that] if I ever became a butcher like him, he'd kick me right in the butt. ... He did want me to go to college, if I could make it.

KP: Was it difficult, economically, for your parents to put you through Catholic school?

JS: They didn't have tuition in those days. It was part of the services offered by the parish. ... At that time, their expenses were nil, because they had mostly nuns. I think, probably, the only lay-teachers, I remember, it was Bud Murphy. He was football coach, and baseball coach, and history, and PAD, and, you know, "Principles of Democracy," and so on. ...

KP: Otherwise, your teachers were nuns all the way through.

JS: Oh, yeah. They were very good with the ruler, too. Not like this, [a light smack]; you'd have to make a fist and they'd whack you on the knuckles. [laughter]

KP: It sounds as if you felt the ruler once or twice.

JS: Yeah. We used to have a nun by the name of Sister Katherine. She was quite a big woman, and we were from a section of town they used to call "the Bloody Sixth," the Sixth Ward, and they got that name ... prior to my generation. ... One side of the Sixth Ward was Irish, and the other side was German, and my grandfather used to tell me, they used to meet at Easton Avenue and have brick fights or fights and stuff like that. [laughter] I don't know whether that's true or not, but, that was the story. That's why we used to call it the Bloody Sixth, but, anyway, we had a nun by the name of Sister Katherine, who was sort of [an] overseer, and, let's face it, I wasn't the most prompt individual. I used to get to school a little late, because you'd fool around on the way to school, or you'd get in a fight, or ... something like that. ... She'd be waiting there, and she'd give you hell, and you'd have to put out the hand for three whacks, but, I'll tell you, if anyone messed around with her boys, they were in trouble, boy. ... I felt sorry for the girls, because she used to stick up for the boys something awful; the same way with our high school principal, Sister (Bonita?), ... God rest her soul. We used to call her "the Fish," but, she was a good gal. She was tough, very tough, I mean, discipline. That's one thing we had in the school was discipline. We wouldn't have fooled around, like they do today. I'm not downgrading today, it's just a different generation, but, they enforced discipline. ... We had, sometimes, fifty to sixty kids in a class, no messing around, boy, because they instructed, and, if you had a little disagreement that the nun couldn't handle, Bud Murphy would come in, the coach, he'd come in and take care of you. ... He was an ex-pro boxer in his younger days, and he was a tough cookie, and he looked it, too. He had a bent up nose. He was a great guy, though. I'll tell you what kind of a guy he was, he used to get the athletes from New Brunswick High more scholarships than their coaches at Brunswick High did. ... He just lived for the kids. I don't know how many times, I understand, that Rutgers offered him a coaching position, but, he wouldn't go.

KP: He was very loyal.

JS: Oh, very loyal.

KP: Academically, how well did St. Peter's prepare you for the Army Air Force and Rutgers?

JS: Very well. One thing I found, and it's the same way with my son, who attended, well, all my kids attended Catholic school, but, they teach you how to study. I mean, a lot of kids have problems of the adjustment from high school to college because they don't know how to study, and I think that's one of the main things that I learned at school, was how to study, and you had to study. You had to do your homework. If you didn't, you'd be up the creek, so to speak.

KP: You were so pleased with your Catholic school education that you sent your children to Catholic school also.

JS: Oh, yes, ... all my kids attended Catholic school because of my experience. ... In fact, two of my daughters graduated from St. Peter's, also, and then, I was transferred to Long Island, and my third daughter went to school over there, and then, my son, he went into an all boys school that was taught by Franciscan brothers. ... He didn't want to go, because, ... when I was transferred and he moved over, he went to public school for a few grades. ... Of course, he had formed new relationships, and so on, and so forth, and, when it was time to go to St. Anthony's, he was reluctant, but, he tells me, every time the subject comes up now, he says that that was the greatest thing that ever happened to him, and it's because ... he had the same type of relationship that I experienced. Everyone knew everyone else, and they taught him how to study, and you didn't jock around with those guys. They were tough. One of them was an ex-steel puddler from Pittsburgh, used to work in the mills. ... At the indoctrination, when the freshmen class came in, you'd visit all the teachers, and I remember sitting in a class [next] to Brother Zip, they called him, and one parent asked him if he has any disciplinary problems, and you know the long robes they wear, ... he put up his hand, and he had forearms as big as my leg, he said, "No, I don't have a bit of problem at all," but, no, ... as I said, I tried to, maybe I was wrong, I don't know, but, I tried to give my kids the same experience I had, because I valued it.

KP: As a child of the 1930s, how much did you know about world affairs?

JS: Not a hell of a lot.

KP: Did you ever read the newspaper?

JS: Occasionally, but, most of my reading, I'll be honest with you, was to see what Lou Gehrig did. You know, I wasn't cognizant then. Let's face it, today, ... the kids are much more aware, or they should be, anyway, I don't know. They have more information at their beck and call. We were a bunch of naïve individuals. I mean, we weren't aware of the general things that the kids of today are aware of.

KP: Did you ever hear about the Spanish Civil War?

JS: Yes, oh, I've heard of that, yeah.

KP: When you were growing up?

JS: Yes, yes, sure. I'll amend that; let's see, after I got up to, say, seventh and eighth grade, then, I did read more of the papers, because my father used to ... push [me] a little bit to read, and my mother ... always forced me to read, and, to this day, I read constantly. I'll watch television, but, I'll do more reading than I watch television, and I think that's developed from the earlier days.

KP: Did you have any sense that the United States might enter the war before Pearl Harbor?

JS: I don't recall any particular feeling that we were going into the war. It's kind of hard to remember that far back, but, I don't recall any particular feeling that war was imminent. No, I can't

say I did.

KP: How did your father feel about Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal?

JS: Well, he wasn't particularly fond of him. He [was] old-fashioned, ... very conservative.

KP: How did you feel about Roosevelt and the New Deal? Did you share your father's feelings?

JS: I shared my father's feelings at the time. Naturally, it's handed down. I thought that some of the things he did, especially, we used to see all the waste and everything with the WPA and all the various programs, but, as I said, we were naïve in those days, and ... who the hell cares? We wanted to know whether Gehrig or somebody hit a home-run. That was our big thing in those days. [laughter]

KP: Did you ever go to any games?

JS: I went to quite a few. In New York, you mean?

KP: Yes.

JS: Yeah. In fact, I was at Lou Gehrig's [ceremony], ... the day he retired, when he had that [ceremony]. I don't know if you've ever seen it on television or in the movies and that was a very moving experience, to see a man like that, because, you remember, ... Gehrig was a big man. In fact, ... when he used to play ball up here, he played for Columbia University, I think you're aware of that, he was saying that he hit the longest home-run that was ever hit up there, but, anyway, in a row in back of us were two guys, they looked like they were big truck drivers, and, if you want to see two men bawl like they're babies, they were ... really moved. It was a moving experience, I mean, because you'd see him in your mind, before the ceremonies began, you would picture Gehrig belting a ball out of the park and running, and so on, and so forth, and then, when ... you see him have to pull himself up by his hands to get out of the dugout, it was a very sad thing, because, in those days, what did he have, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, or whatever it was, something like that, no one knew what that was. They didn't have any idea. ... As I said, I still have little black and white pictures at home [that] I look at occasionally when I reminisce, but, I can still picture it in my mind, right now, as I'm talking to you, Kurt. I went down with, ... not my father, but, the father of one of my friends. ...

KP: Did you ever go on vacation outside of New Jersey?

JS: Not out of New Jersey. Well, we went to Connecticut, up there, for vacation. We went down to the shore, Jersey Shore. That's about the extent of my travels. We never, say, went to California. We couldn't afford it. We were poor and didn't know it.

KP: You enlisted in the Army Air Force. Were you interested in aviation?

JS: Oh, sure. I, to give you a little history, ... thought, maybe, [at] one time, I was going to be in

the military. I took the West Point exam and I flunked it. I had flat feet and they wouldn't pass me in those days. This was when I was a junior in high school and, as soon as I graduated, I enlisted in the Air Force. I think I was, I don't know, sixteen or seventeen.

KP: You would have liked to have gone to West Point.

JS: Yeah, well, I'll tell you, ... at that time, I was sort of leaning towards a military [position], but, also, ... the fact is, it's a free education, and I think that was probably one of my biggest motivators, [laughter] the free education.

KP: Concerning your interest in aviation, did you ever go out to Hadley Field and watch the planes take off and land?

JS: Oh, yeah. ... I used to have a bike and my friend and I, we used to ride [out there]. He didn't have a bike, I had a bike, and he used to ride the handle bars, and ... we'd ride from Wyckoff Street out to Hadley Airport, and we would wash airplanes for a ride, and we were very frequent visitors out there. That's the first time I was ever in the air and I used to look forward to it. The Bell Telephone [Company] used to keep their Ford Tri-Motor out there and one of my wife's distant cousins, actually, it was a cousin of her mother, was known as the black sheep of the family. He was a pilot, and he flew ... the first airmails, and he used to always stunt over town, and, ... see, I didn't know my wife at the time, but, I used to watch him, and I can remember him buzzing the house. He used to go with a girl that lived across the street from me, and he'd come down, he'd almost hit that chimney, and he was ... [flying] the old Meyers, in those days. You flew by the seat of your pants. I mean, you had a compass and that's about it, but, I was always interested. I made model planes all the time. I was always interested in aviation.

KP: You had flown in a plane before the war.

JS: Sure, I had my first airplane ride ... with a fellow by the name of Clarence Chamberlain; I don't know if you [know who he is]. Well, if you read the history of Lindbergh's flight, you'd know that there were two or three others over there at Roosevelt Field in Long Island that were competing to get off first, and Clarence Chamberlain was one of them, but, he cracked up, and so did Admiral Byrd, who was the other one, he had a Ford Tri-Motor, like Bell used to keep over here, and he had problems with it. ... When Lindbergh took off, I mean he took off, and they were having pretty lousy weather, but, he took a shot, and he beat the other people, ... but, Clarence Chamberlain was a well-known airman in those days. He had a reputation, because, you know, there was a lot of barnstorming in those days. ... I had the first ride. He'd come over here and, I think for a buck or something, he'd give you a ride around town. He had an old Curtis Condor, which was one of the original transport planes. It was a bi-plane, but, it was a transport. It had the capacity to hold ten people or something like that, but, that was my first ride.

SG: We were discussing the composition of your neighborhood before and comparing it to the state of New Jersey's cities today. Would you say that the community was more closely knit at the time of the war?

JS: You mean rioting and things like that? What exactly do you mean?

SG: Along those lines.

JS: No. We had a lot of disagreements. I mean, you know, as I said, our particular neighborhood was not so ethnic in nature, singly ethnic, because, as I said, it was Hungarians, Irish, German, but, New Brunswick, in those days, was ... divided into certain areas that were recognized by ethnics. We lived here; ... by Rutgers was more or less Irish, with a few Hungarians in there. Across Easton Avenue, they used to call it, as I said before, Dutch Town; that was German. You go further up on Somerset Street, and Louis Street, and Suydam and all that area, that was all Hungarian. Those people were all brought over by Johnson & Johnson, from Hungary, for the purpose of working in the factory, and then, you go a little bit further down Somerset Street, towards Franklin Township, there was a Polish section there. You go across the other side of town, it was Italian, over at St. Mary's Church. So, it was divided in that manner, but, as far as having riots and things like that, oh, hell, we had fights and everything, sure, but, nothing like today, nothing at all. ... In our neighborhood, we had Mr. Vanliew, who was a black and lived down the street. We had, I can't think of the other fellow that lived two doors down from us, another black family, and then, further down, we had some more black people, so, it was intermixed. ... We never had the problems [where] they called us honkies and we called them niggers and things, no, we didn't have that. We had disagreements, we had fights, but, they were fights that ... normally occur with kids growing up, playing ball, you know. Somebody will slide too hard, or hit him when he's out of bounds, or something like that, but, ... no riots, I mean, not in my generation, anyway. I don't know what they had before me. ...

KP: Where did you enlist? What was the process like for you?

JS: Yeah, well, I enlisted here in town. Down at the post office, they had the recruiting station. ... I took the physical over at the same place, same doctor that gave me the West Point exam, and he passed me for the Air Force. There was a war on then. When I tried for West Point, there was no war on. They were more stringent. Well, my feet weren't actually completely flat at those times, but, he says that, as I grew, because I was growing, I wasn't that big when I was in high school, ... most of my growing was when I was in the Air Force, he said, "You're going to become weaker," and he says, "You're not going to be able to be a gravel pounder," as he put it. He says, "But, as far as qualifying for the Air Force," he said, "There's no problem." ... I mean, we had rigorous PT in the Air Force.

KP: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

JS: I was home. I think it was around eleven o'clock, I guess. I guess we had just gotten back from Mass, and, in those days, you had to fast before going to communion, and we were probably sitting down and having something to eat when it came over the radio.

KP: How shocked were you and your family by the news?

JS: It was a shock. It was a shock to everyone. I don't know of anyone who wasn't shocked,

because they never anticipated [that], ... and the whole atmosphere of the country, as I said, ... the people, I think, were naïve. They weren't as cognizant of world affairs and the average person, I don't think, ... ever expected Pearl Harbor like it happened. I don't know of anyone. I mean, everyone I've talked to [in] my generation and my parents' generation expressed [it] the same way, I think.

KP: How soon after Pearl Harbor did you enlist or begin to consider enlisting?

JS: Well, Pearl Harbor was in '41 and I graduated in '42. ...

KP: Shortly after graduation.

JS: Yes.

KP: How did your parents feel about your decision?

JS: Well, my mother was very, very anxious. My father understood. In those days, ... our classes at school, our year of graduation, all the boys, I mean, there was nothing else that you considered. You wouldn't consider anything else. That was your duty, to go into service. ... One of my best friends was a Marine, the other guy was in the Navy, and I went into the Army, another guy went in (with me?), so, they never thought of goofing off or trying to avoid the draft, at least the guys I palled around with, anyway, and I would say that probably ninety-five percent of the people of my age felt the same way. They just wanted to go into service and, let's face it, a lot of us ... weren't exposed to the world or anything like that. If we didn't go into the service, we probably wouldn't have been to half the places we've been.

KP: During the Spring of 1942, between Pearl Harbor and your induction, do you remember doing anything to help the war effort as a civilian?

JS: Oh, sure, yeah, you know, you'd collect this and collect that and have the drives. That's about the extent.

KP: Did your father join the Civil Defense?

JS: No, he didn't, because he used to work with ... Camp Kilmer, when Camp Kilmer was established, and he used to do a lot of work for them over there, supplies, and so on, and so forth, because he helped supply Camp Kilmer.

KP: With fresh meat?

JS: Fresh meat and stuff like that.

KP: Camp Kilmer was a major staging area for the US Army during World War II. With all of those GIs suddenly in the area, what impact did Camp Kilmer have on New Brunswick?

JS: It ... had a tremendous impact, economically. ... One of my father's friends, he made a fortune. He had two or three saloons in this town and he made more money than Carter had pills,... but, anyway, economically, it was a big impact. The whole character of the town changed with the influx of so many soldiers, because New Brunswick was a small town and it wasn't a cosmopolitan town as it is today. My wife ... was going to school and working at night and she said she never had any problem walking home or anything like that. The soldiers were pretty [restrained].

KP: Were there ever problems with drunk and unruly soldiers?

JS: Oh, sure, there was drunk and unruly soldiers downtown, of course, yeah, oh, yeah, sure. I mean, let's face it, those guys, I mean, they're human, they're just like anyone else, and they'd get bombed and have a fight or something, you know. ... The MPs used to rap them in the head or do something. ... Sure, there were things like that; ... see, I left, but, I don't know whether there was that much antagonism between the civilian population and [the military]. I'm sure there was, because most camps do, ... especially [in] a small town. If the military overwhelms you, there's got to be a feeling of antagonism of some form or another, because it's a different [dynamic]. You have to clash, just like ... where I live now, Bucks County. That was a rural [area]. Now, you get the old timers, "Goddamn place is building up, ruining everything," you know, [laughter] and that's the same effect that a camp would have, Camp Kilmer would have, you know.

KP: Where did you report once you had your orders?

JS: I left out of Newark. We went on a train, from Newark, we went down to have that really tough [training]. We had really tough basic training in Miami Beach, [laughter] living in a motel, I mean a hotel. No, we went down, we took a train from Newark, I think it took us about three days to get down there. ... You'd have to pull aside [for] every important shipment, more important than us, and I can remember doing KP on the train, and that was my first exposure to KP, was on the train, but, that was all right. You got good food. You could always eat better than the other guys. So, we took a train, and I can remember going past Washington, DC. The lights were still on down there. There was no blackout or anything. ... I remember seeing an interview on television ... from a German U-boat captain, and he says that the East Coast lights ... used to provide a nice background, but, then, we went down, we reported to Miami Beach, and they lined us up down there. ... I remember the first experience of aircraft; we were standing in formation, and I looked up, and there was a F4F Grumman fighter and a P-40 Army fighter, and they were dog fighting up there, and they collided, and that gave us pause. The guys bailed out, fortunately, but, they were horsing [around]. They shouldn't have been, but, they were horsing around, but, that was my first exposure to [aircraft].

KP: It is interesting that you mentioned that. I have surmised, from other interviews, that no one really knew how dangerous aviation training was in World War II.

JS: ... I'll tell you, we felt more comfortable overseas, as far as the mechanical condition of the aircraft was concerned, than we did in the States. Those guys overseas used to treat us like a baby, ... and you'd come back with flak holes or bullet holes in it, why, they'd chew you out, "For crying [out loud], what're you doing with my airplane? Look at this; I gotta patch that thing. That wasn't

like that." They used to mother the planes. Most of the guys were like that. I'm sure there was exceptions, but, all the people I've [had] contact [with], the ground crews, they were great, overseas. In the States, it was not as close a relationship. I don't know, but, we felt more comfortable with the [overseas ground crews].

KP: You are not the first person to say that. I was surprised by how fond air crews were of their overseas ground crews. The fliers really had a lot of respect for the mechanics.

JS: Oh, sure. Those guys used to put a lot of hours in, in all kinds of weather. I can remember, we were ferrying a plane over to Africa, and ... we landed up in Newfoundland, and it's cold as the old ... proverbial mother-in-law's kiss. ... Out there, we were going to take off in the morning, and I can remember, ... that one engine, [the] number three engine, wouldn't start, and I can remember those guys out there in the freezing cold and sleet, and they didn't like it, I'm sure, but, they stuck right to it and got the thing going for us, and we took off and went to the Azores. I mean, it was a long hop over water, but, ... I would say they were great, I really would.

KP: Front-line ground soldiers often hold a lot of resentment for the rear echelon personnel. I was surprised by the fact that there was very little resentment for ground crews, because they were also out of harm's way.

JS: No, no. Well, they're out of harm's way, but, without them, you wouldn't be nothing. I mean, you'd be dead. I mean, you'd get up there and the engine would quit on takeoff. I mean, listen, they were under-powered enough and you see what happened when planes take off. I can remember, one time, a plane took off, and they had what they called a runaway prop, and they threw it, and it cut right through the engine, cut out the tires, and, of course, the plane crashed. ... I wasn't flying that day, and we all ran over to try to get the guys out, but, it was on fire, and we couldn't, and the bullets were starting to pop, and, I can remember, I think ... three or four of us had to hold the chaplain down [to] keep him from going in that fire. You couldn't get near it. ... It blew up, and the guys were all killed. ... That may sound like a contradiction, but, accidents do happen. I mean, you can't be a hundred percent perfect, but, those guys were very, very thoughtful and caring about their aircraft. ... In fact, I think there was a lot of competition between the ground crews, that, you know, "I do a better job than you," blah, blah, blah.

KP: You mentioned the chaplain who wanted to risk his life. What was the relationship like between the chaplains and the men?

JS: Very good, very good; very good relationship. ... When we were in Italy, we took over an old Italian airfield and, fortunately, we had barracks. We were living in tents for awhile, but, then, we took over the airfield, we had barracks, and the chaplain slept right next door. You'd go in there, you'd have a crap game or poker game, there's the old chaplain, right there. [laughter] ... He had a dog, and ... the nickname of the dog, or the name of the dog, was "Flak," after the ack-ack. ... He was always scrounging rides with the guys. In fact, the CO caught him trying to get on a mission. ... When they'd test a plane, he'd go up, and he'd take the dog with him, and he had some kind of an oxygen mask, I don't know how he did it, ... and the dog would just sit there, and he'd enjoy it.

...

KP: Was your chaplain a priest?

JS: No, this guy was an Irish minister from Boston and that's almost a contradiction in itself.
[laughter]

KP: Was he a Protestant?

JS: ... Yes, he was a Protestant. I think he was Episcopalian and ... he always used to tell us, "I'm gonna get you Catholic boys. ... I'm gonna bring you back." No, he was a great guy. I mean, over there, religion, I mean, he would conduct Catholic services in the Catholic chapel and conduct Jewish services. You know, they all knew the routine.

KP: Did you attend Mass regularly?

JS: Yes, we were able to attend Mass. In fact, we used to go to town a lot. ... Over in Italy, especially, they had these beautiful churches, gorgeous churches. On the outside, they looked like, "Blech," but, you go in there, it's gorgeous. You wouldn't know what they were saying, because they'd say it in ... Latin, of course, the Latin, but, I mean, ... what they used to call a sermon, in those days, it's a homily now, but, you wouldn't understand what they were saying, but, you could follow the Mass because, then, Latin was the universal language of the Mass, and I had four years of Latin, and I could read and speak fairly well. I mean, I wasn't fluent or anything, but, I could follow the Mass. ... There were times when you're flying that you couldn't go, but, I did as much as I could.

KP: When you were stationed in Italy, did you ever visit the Vatican?

JS: No. That's one thing I regret. In fact, we had R&R. ... We were going to go up to the Vatican after they captured Rome, and then, we had a big deal, we were going to go to the Isle of Capri for a rest period, and I think we'd just got off the boat when the guy said, "All right, boys, throw your stuff back on. You're going back," and ... we had to go up and bomb. I don't know, the Germans had started some offensive or something. So, we really didn't get to the Isle of Capri. I didn't see that much of Italy. I was in the southern part of Italy, in a little town called Manduria, which is down by Taranto, the port down there, and most of our missions, we'd fly right across the Adriatic, up through where Yugoslavia and Italy meet, [near Trieste], and go across. ...

KP: Just to discuss your training a little further, you were shipped to Miami Beach, which is not a bad place to train. Before you enlisted, you had not really traveled much outside of the New York-New Jersey area. What did you think of the train ride?

JS: It was an experience, you know. You look around, but, of course, in those days, everything was military, but, it was a novel experience. As I said, we were so naïve in those days, it was pitiful. My kids of today knew more when they were ten years old than I did when I graduated from high school, I guess, but, anyway, it was a novel experience. We enjoyed it. We were impressed by Miami Beach and, as I said, we lived in a hotel. ...

KP: Did you have any hopes of becoming a pilot?

JS: Yes. I washed out of school. I got caught dog fighting.

KP: Really?

JS: They washed me out. I was fortunate. The guy I was fooling around with wound up in the infantry, but, I was lucky. I got the radio school. I washed out.

KP: At what level were you washed-out? You had gone through basic training.

JS: Well, see, what they did is, ... you'd go to Miami Beach, you had your basic, and, you know, you'd learn to handle a rifle, a pistol and a Thompson. ... Of course, an awful lot of it was devoted to physical training, and then, after that, you went to college. ... A lot of the colleges were conducting, just like Rutgers had the ASTP here, the Army Special Training Program, and you'd go there for a few months, and you'd start your flying there. They'd take you up in these old [planes]. I was flying in a Taylor Cub. ... Out there, it was in Ohio, I don't know if you've ever heard of Hiram College, it's a little school in Ohio, I think there was about 450 people, including the cats and dogs, in the town, nice, little town, and we were very fortunate, because we had the local women cooking for us, and it was all home-cooked meals, and our CO was a hell of a good guy. He says, "If you're not satisfied, ... you don't have to get up. You don't leave that table until you're full." Of course, none of us were satisfied, because, right after you'd leave, you'd go to a formation. So, we'd all stay and eat like hell, because we wanted to miss the formation, of course, but, then, you start flying out there, and we were flying out in these, it was a Taylor Cub, as opposed to a Piper Cub, and they were these little put-puts. They had about sixty-five horses, and I can remember flying out there, one time, and, all of a sudden, I got in the middle of a storm, and I didn't know where the hell I was, and there was a lot of turbulence, and so on, and so forth. I saw a hole, and I landed in a farmer's field, and I sat there, and ... you didn't open the door this way, that they fold down, they were folding doors, and ... I saw this thing coming across the field that looked like the biggest wolf I ever saw. It was the farmer's German Shepherd, and he was barking, and the farmer says, "Don't worry, son, ... he won't bite you." I said, "Well, you tell him," [laughter] and I put that door up, and I happened to be only about a half-a-mile from the airfield, and I got my fanny chewed out for that. "Oh, I couldn't see," I said, "I'm not going to mess around up here," but, that's ... when you started.

...

KP: You were out there alone.

JS: As I said, those things, they are nothing to fly. You take your hand off the stick, it'll fly right along itself. [laughter] ... It had so much wing area that it was almost a glider.

KP: How did the dog fight and your elimination from pilot's training come about?

JS: Well, you fool around there, you're out there, and you're flying, and you get on the other side of the mountain from the airfield, and you start fooling around. I mean, everyone did it, but, we just

happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and the instructor caught us. ... We came down and he said, "Bye-bye, boys." He was a tough son of a gun. He was a civilian. ... They had civilian instructors in those days. I just got kicked out. ... I was very devastated, of course, you would be, what was I? seventeen, eighteen years old, something like that, but, you get over it. I called home, my father said, "Look, ... what's to be is to be," and that was the way it was.

KP: Do you know what kind of pilot you would have been, fighter or bomber?

JS: Well, of course, you ... wouldn't know at that time. ... They'd assign you something, probably. ... I had no idea.

KP: How many men were washed-out? You mentioned that this other guy ended up in the infantry.

JS: Well, ... what happened is, I think, that they were trying to cut down the number of applicants. ... Just like the arm, one end of the stick didn't know what the other [was doing]. ... I mean, they had more guys enlist in the cadet program than they could probably handle. I'm saying that to soothe my feelings, [laughter] but, there was a heavily washed out [rate]. Now, if you were in the Southeast Training Command, I understand that they didn't have as high a washout ratio. So, I guess it all depended on the circumstances.

KP: However, you were not alone.

JS: Oh, no.

KP: Some of the veterans that I have interviewed remember many men dropping out, but, others do not recall any wash-outs.

JS: Well, see, as I said, I think that they were oversupplied with cadets, so, that was the nature of the game here.

KP: How long did you have to wait before you were reassigned?

JS: Well, ... they brought you into a hall, and I guess they looked at your record, and I don't know how they picked me to go to radio school. I think I had a choice; no, wait a minute, I'm sorry, I had a choice to go to radio school or to flight engineer school and I took radio. Then, I went up to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and, ... in those days, you could tell [when] you were almost five miles away from Sioux Falls, [when] you'd get near, 'cause they had a lot of meat packing. You could smell it in the air, [laughter] but, it wasn't that [bad]. The people were great. They were great people up there, very friendly. You used to be able to hitchhike all over the area. They'd pick you up and [ask], "Where are you going?" and they'd go out of their way to take you there. I was in a barber shop, one time, up there, and ... I liked to hunt and fish, and, you know, I don't know whether you're hunters or fishermen, but, [if] you hunt, you know that South Dakota was the pheasant capital of the world in those days, and, in those days, there was no one there to hunt. ... You walked across the field, the pheasants'd get up like blackbirds, and I was talking to this barber,

I was getting a haircut, and we got to talk about hunting. He says, "You like to hunt?" So, I said, "Yeah, yeah," and he says, "Well, why don't you come down to see me?" I said, "I don't have a gun." He said, "Oh, take my son's gun," [laughter] and we went out hunting. ... They were very, very congenial.

KP: It sounds like you really enjoyed seeing the different regions of the country.

JS: Oh, yeah, I did, I did. ... I think I hit just about every state in the Union, flying over and landing, ... in your training, and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed various parts of the country, just for what they were, because, as I said, I never had been anywhere before that, and it was an education for me.

KP: You mentioned that, in Hiram, Ohio, the mothers of the community cooked the meals. How much contact did you have with local civilians?

JS: A lot of contact. How can I explain it? because they don't have anything like it today, but, Hiram had the little soda fountain store, combination drug store with the soda fountain and the old wire chairs, and that was sort of a meeting place. ... You'd meet the girls there, or you'd meet what civilians were around, you know, the adults [would] be coming, ... and, as I said, the people were very friendly, always struck up a conversation. We had quite a bit of contact. In fact, they'd invite you home to dinner.

KP: Did you receive a number of invitations?

JS: Yes.

KP: How long did your radio training last?

JS: Jeez, I don't know. ... [laughter] I really don't know, to tell you the truth.

KP: Was there a large gap in time between radio school and basic aviation?

JS: Yes. See, you go to radio school, and then, you go to gunnery school.

KP: Where did you go to gunnery school?

JS: Yuma, Arizona, hot, hot, hot.

KP: You really visited many different climates.

JS: Yeah, contrasting. Up at South Dakota, you know, that wind [would] come down off those flats up there, from the prairies, and it'd get cold, and they used to burn that soft coal that stunk, you know. I mean, it had that peculiar odor, as opposed to hard coal, and then, you'd go down to Yuma, Arizona, and, my God, it got so hot down there, you couldn't take off after eleven o'clock in the morning, because they had macadam runways, and they were using [B]-17s as training ships and little (Beech?) crafts, I think, initially, but, if you go to come in to land, it'd be soft, and you're liable

to lose your undercarriage. ... You'd take off and you'd go all day. ... We had "What's-His-Name" for our PT officer, Donald Budge, remember him? I don't know if you remember. He was a world champion tennis player, and he'd come in there once a week and lay out the schedule and say, "Okay, boys, I know you'll do a good job," and you wouldn't see him 'til the next week. He'd be up in Hollywood. He was a character, nice guy, but, you know, he was never seriously involved in the PT training. He was in name only. We had another guy that was a pilot, he was a ... Hollywood actor, you wouldn't remember the name, ... Gene Raymond, husband of Jeanette McDonald. He was there. ... We didn't care to fly with him too much. He wasn't the best pilot. He had bumpy landings. He was all right. He'd come back in one piece. ... Any landing you walked away from, in those days, was [a good one].

KP: You felt that any landing you could walk away from was a good landing.

JS: Yes, right, yeah. I mean, they're not sophisticated, as they are today.

SG: Did you train on .50 caliber machine guns at gunnery school?

JS: That was the ultimate weapon, but, ... what you'd do is, you'd start out with shotguns, and they had a track, oval in nature, and they'd have pickup trucks, and they'd have mounts in the back of the pickup trucks, with the shotgun right to the mount, and they'd have a machine gun site, and you'd go along the track, and they would change it all the time. They would have certain points where they would release the birds, clay birds, and that's when you started to learn to lead, but, I did hunting before, and so, it ... would come naturally to you after awhile. The only thing you had to acclimate [to] ... would be pushing that thing around, but, the .50 caliber was the ultimate weapon. Then, you'd go up and you'd fire at a sleeve. They'd be towed and your ammunition would be all color coated, and, that way, they could say, "John Jones had so many hits," and, "Skinner had so many hits," like that.

SG: Did you have to use earplugs while firing the .50 caliber machine guns?

JS: No, because you generally would have your earphones, on your helmet. You'd have a leather flying helmet with built in earphones.

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

KP: In basic, pilot, radio and gunnery training, what were some of the backgrounds of the men you trained with?

JS: All backgrounds, it was very, very mixed backgrounds. One guy was a cowboy, another guy was a drugstore clerk. It was all varied backgrounds. ... A lot of them were students, like myself, you know, young guys, just got out of high school, and some were college guys. ... I had a guy that was in gunnery school with me, he had ... 2200 hours on a Catalina flying boat. He had a hell of a time talking the Army into sending him to pilot's school. ... I don't know why, but, he flew up in Alaska, for a civilian outfit, and he finally got into [school], and I think he got into the ATC, they called it, Army Transport Command, in those days. ... You had all varied backgrounds. You had

guys that were roust-about and steel puddlers. ...

KP: It sounds as if that was part of the appeal.

JS: Oh, yeah. We had one fellow who was in there, I can remember him, he was a very, reserved, refined individual, and he came from a wealthy family in Massachusetts, and he was studying to be a concert pianist, and he'd go into the rec hall, after hours, and he'd play, you know, concert style music, and one of the guys [said], "Why don't you stop playing this?," and he'd say, "Oh, you mean you'd rather have this?," and he'd start "boogie-woogie." That guy could play the piano. I mean, he could play "boogie-woogie," in those days. ... I can always remember him, and I think he was killed, I'm not sure, but, ... as I said, it was just along the trail. Once you get out of all the training schools, then, of course, you're all split up with the different crews. Sometimes, you may go together, and, sometimes, [not], but, my crew was composed of a lot of guys; they had fifty-five, I think it was, crews to fill out a compliment in Pueblo, Colorado, and they needed fifty-six, and my pilot, I was very lucky, he had, already, a tour. He had flown overseas, and he was going back, and my co-pilot was an instructor pilot, and, I don't know, he got in trouble or something, but, he was one hell of a pilot. ...

KP: Your pilot and co-pilot were very experienced.

JS: Oh, yeah. They were [great]. We were very [lucky], and my tail-gunner had flown a previous tour in B-25s, ... and I was the baby, myself and Tufferd, he was the ball-turret gunner, he was a young guy, like me, but, the other guys, ... the flight engineer was experienced. Well, I guess our waist-gunner, he had just come out of gunnery school, but, we were very fortunate, because that means an awful lot over there. ... When we reported [in], we arrived at our ultimate destination overseas, as you know, all the experienced crews come up there and start telling you war stories and everything else, and, when (Jonesy?) took his coat off, he had, I think, ... three Purple Hearts and all that garbage there. The guys like that. He led them along for awhile, and then, he took his coat [off]. ... It was funny, but, no, we were fortunate in having experience. I felt very fortunate.

KP: What motivated your pilot and the other gunner to serve out another combat tour of duty?

JS: He probably got bored. (Jonesy?) was a cowboy from Texas, and he used to tell a story that the ... reason he joined up was because the sheriff was after him for knocking up the sheriff's daughter, and that's why he joined the Air Force. [laughter] I don't know why he joined. He was quite a guy and ... he was the kind of guy that craved excitement.

KP: He enjoyed it.

JS: If you can enjoy something like that, yeah, I would think so. He was a guy that was foot-loose and fancy-free, to use an old-fashioned phrase, and I think he probably did enjoy it. As I said, when he finished, when we finished up, he had a total of five Purple Hearts. He had three before he went over and he got two with us. ... I mean, he obviously had to enjoy it, because it's no fun getting hit. I mean, that's something that you don't do on a volunteer basis; you're just in the wrong place at the wrong time, but, he did enjoy that, "Putt, putt, putt." He was a funny guy, in this respect; he was

one of the best guys I ever knew in the construction of model airplanes. ... We were over there, he had a kit shipped over to him, and he built a gasoline model, and we used to have the colonels and the generals down at the other end of the field, helping (Jonesy?), always giving him advice on how to fly. He said, "Aw, you don't know what you're talking [about]." He'd tell them, he wouldn't give a damn, he wouldn't give a damn. He wasn't nasty, but, you know, he was just, I don't know how to describe the fellow; he just had an attitude that everyone liked (Jonesy?). I mean, the CO, ... they never said, "Sergeant," he was always, "(Jonesy?)." "Is (Jonesy?) going to fly his plane today?" or this and that, ... as I said, but, he was one hell of a good guy. He could probably hit a dime and give you a nickel change with that machine gun. He was good, better than me, that's for sure. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you had a lot of confidence in him.

JS: Yes, I did. We had a lot of confidence in the whole crew. We had our bombardier, [who] was very good. He was so good that we started to fly, together with the pilot's experience, ... lead a lot.

KP: That meant that you had a higher degree of responsibility.

JS: Yeah, oh, yeah, ... 'cause they'd drop on the lead plane. ... Some people have the impression [that] ... each individual [bombardier] aimed to bomb themselves. They always dropped on the lead plane, and, of course, I was the lead radio operator, being in the lead plane, because of them, not because of me. ... As I said, with the pilot's experience, ... our pilot was extremely experienced; he was a lousy instrument pilot. When we had to fly instruments, we let (Nobby?) do it, the co-pilot, 'cause he was one hell of an instrument [pilot]. So, they complimented each other, but, Pappy, as we called him, ... you'd fly formation, and, when we first went over there, of course, we were an inexperienced crew, and, when we first started flying as a crew, because, when you first go over there, they split you all up, all the ... so-called "skill positions" that you have, pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer, me, the bombardier, and the navigator, they'd fly with experienced crews for a few missions, but, anyway, when we start flying as a crew, and you'd fly formation, ... you'd have the wing of the plane and the tail section, and ... I'm telling you, he wouldn't be five, ten feet away. "Get that goddamn wing outta here," but, he could fly like a rocket. The only thing, of course, turbulence, he'd be affected by turbulence, but, he was a hell of a pilot. I thought he was excellent.

KP: Most air crews were close-knit, but, it sounds as if your crew was particularly close.

JS: Yeah, we were close, we were close together.

KP: Did you go on leave as a crew?

JS: Sometimes, sometimes. You know, we were a close-knit crew, but, we each had our own thing to do, too. I mean, we weren't close a hundred percent of the time. We each had our own thing to do, and, sometimes, you'd go with this guy, or you'd go with that guy, or you'd go by yourself, or some of the other guys you know from [the unit], ... but, we were very close in the air. I mean, we were one cohesive unit.

KP: You joined your crew in New Mexico ...

JS: No, Colorado.

KP: How long was your shakedown period in the United States?

JS: A couple of months, I believe. ... You'd to take off, and you'd practice formation flying, and then, you'd take off on solo hops, and you'd bomb this railroad yard, you may bomb a railroad yard in El Paso, or somewhere up in the upper reaches. Crazy (Jonesy?), one time, dropped a .50-caliber block out to see if he could hit something. He was nuts. [laughter] Thank God, no one was hurt.

KP: Was the ammunition live?

JS: No, it was the block from the machine gun, the firing block. He had taken it out. He was unique, I'll put it that way. ... He probably went home and got hung or something, I don't know.

KP: This was ...

JS: The tail-gunner, yeah, he was a very unique guy.

KP: Where were the pilots from?

JS: The pilots were from New York.

KP: Both of them?

JS: One was from New York City and one was from Upper New York State. The bombardier was from Wisconsin. I think the navigator, our regular navigator became ill just before we shipped over, had appendicitis, so, he didn't go over with us, we had a substitute, and I think that he was from Michigan. The flight engineer was from South Carolina. Tufferd, ... the ball-turret gunner, I think he was also from Michigan. One of the other guys was from Utah. I was from Jersey. I'm trying to think where the other guys were from, but, they were ... mostly a mixture. I mean, they weren't like you would find in the infantry, you'd have a Jersey regiment or a Pennsylvania regiment. ... There were from all over the country.

KP: Your crew was very diverse.

JS: Yes, we were. We were diverse in backgrounds and everything else. ...

KP: Had any of your crewmates been to college?

JS: The pilot and the bombardier. The bombardier was a pretty good basketball player. We used to play a lot of basketball together, but, I think they were the only two, maybe the navigator, I don't know.

KP: Your crew was very young.

JS: Yeah, myself, and the ball-turret gunner and the waist-gunner were probably young, just about starting to shave.

KP: How old was Pappy, the oldest member of your crew?

JS: I think he was in his late twenties. I mean, anything over twenty in those days was "Pappy."
[laughter] I mean, what the hell? you know, that old guy, how times have changed. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned earlier that you often played cards in-between missions.

JS: Cards? Well, we did play cards, we shot crap, we played ball, you'd do everything. Of course, you'd still go to school, and then, you'd have training missions, and ... we used to fly up along the Adriatic Coast, and they had a target range set out on the ground, made out of some kind of brick or something, and you'd fire your machine gun at that, I don't know what the hell good that would do as far as air-to-air combat, but, I can remember, one day, we were flying up there, and we saw this Italian fishing boat, and we buzzed it, and the prop wash flipped it. [laughter] Man, we heard about that, but, no one knew who did it. [laughter] Crazy (Jonesy?), one time, we were coming back from a mission, I don't know what got into him, he just had these fits, and he saw this Italian car or something, they had gas, I don't know whether it was a civilian vehicle, he says, "I'll bet you I can put a .50 caliber about twenty feet behind him." "Ah, you're crazy (Jonesy?). You couldn't hit [that]." Of course, you know, you egg him on. "Vroom," you want to see that car [take off]. [laughter] He was crazy. He could have hurt the people. We were stupid, really stupid things you do. You don't think. That was stupid, really, but, he was just like [that]. You'd never know what he was going to do next.

KP: Many air crew veterans have told me that, although it was against regulations, their pilots often trained the other crew members in rudimentary flying.

JS: Oh, yes, ... I often had the controls and they'd be back shooting the machine gun.

KP: Could you really be that interchangeable?

JS: Well, in a pinch, yeah. I'd probably get lost, but, [laughter] no, you could handle it, handle the aircraft. ... That wasn't required, I mean, it wasn't regulation. In fact, it's against regulations. It used to be myself and the flight engineer used to do most of the [flying].

KP: It makes sense. If the pilots were killed or wounded, you could at least crash-land the plane.

JS: Oh, sure, I can remember that occurring, with other crews, not to us, but, ... to other crews, that the guy flew it back, one of the crewmen flew it back.

KP: Crewmen actually used this training occasionally.

JS: Oh, yeah. I can remember, we had to make a forced landing at a B-17 base, and ... and this B-17 came in, and they had a USO show going on at the same time, and this guy came in, noisy and erratic, you could tell, even to this day, you can tell from the sound of an aircraft what kind of plane it is. The other day, I was out cutting the lawn, and I could hear this, and I said, "Oh, it can't be." I looked up, there was a B-17 flying over, but, you can tell, but, anyway, this [B]-17 came in, and there was a nine or ten-man crew, and there was only one guy that wasn't hit. ...

KP: Nine crewmen had been hit.

JS: Yeah, and this guy, ... I don't know what position he was, but, he was an enlisted man, flew the plane back, and it was very fortunate. So, it does happen. I mean, that's not an isolated case. It happened quite often.

KP: The enlisted men would take the controls.

JS: Sure. What the hell? You're going to go up there whether you've ever tried or not; you're going to try to get back, 'cause that would be your fanny if you don't. So, it did happen. It never happened in our crew.

KP: You mentioned that your gunner was awarded several Purple Hearts. Was he the only member of your crew who was wounded?

JS: No, I think the bombardier and navigator. I was never hit.

KP: How serious were their wounds?

JS: Well, fortunately, none of ours were quite serious. It's humorous, in a way, (Jonesy?), we used to have flak helmets, you know, like the pot, and you were supposed to wear them when you get into an area of [combat]. ... Most of us put them on. We had flak suits, which weighed a ton, but, (Jonesy?), "Ah, they don't [work]." He wouldn't wear his, and we were going after a target, what the hell was it? I don't know, I think it was probably Vienna, because ... I think they said they had 1200 flak guns over there, they found after the war. ... You've heard the expression, "Get out and walk on it," well, that's the type of ride, and we heard back there, "Son of a bitch," and, "I'm hit." So, I went back, ... 'cause I wasn't at a gun position that day, we were not flying lead, and there's (Jonesy?), and the blood was pouring down. I thought he was going to die, but, it just creased the top of his head, because he wouldn't wear his helmet, and, you know, when you get a head wound, it bleeds quite a bit, and the only thing, then, he started getting a little groggy, and he said, "Those sons of bitches, look what they did to my head." I don't know if you've ever heard of Wings cigarettes; that's what they used to give you over there. Oh, God, I didn't smoke, but, it was a god-awful thing, and he used to smoke. There was blood all over and he was cursing at the Germans for messing up his cigarettes. ... We ascertained that he wasn't hit that bad, so, ... we had these big bandages, big, huge things, and we put it over there, and this one was pink, and we tied a big, pink bow under his head, and, when we landed, he was still in the turret, he became all right, but, we wouldn't let him take the thing off. I can remember, one black fellow was working on the edge of the field, and he looked up at (Jonesy?), and (Jonesy's?) face was still a mask of blood, and that guy,

his eyes just turned white, and we were laughing like [hell], and (Jonesy?) was swearing, because he was a little guy, we wouldn't let him do anything, 'cause we were holding him down, making him wear that thing, you know, and, man, he never heard the end of that, "The Pink Bow Kid," [laughter] but, he was fortunate, [because it] just went across the top of his head.

KP: He was also very lucky.

JS: Yes, he was. As I said, he was born to hang. ... We were flying, one time, and the oxygen mask froze to his face, and he pulled it off and took the skin off with it. ... As I said, there was a guy that was born to hang, if you'll pardon the expression. ... You know people like that yourselves. I mean, they get into scrapes and do this and do that, but, somehow, they muddle through, and he was just that type of an individual.

KP: How frightening was your first mission?

JS: Well, I'll give you an example, I don't know if you've ever heard the expression, "Put a laundry mark on your undies," [laughter] shit scared, in other words. I was scared. Anyone who says they're not scared is either a damn fool or [a liar], because ... it was a so-called "milk run," supposedly, we went into Yugoslavia, and we were going after, they had a small refinery there, and, ... as I said, this is when you were flying with another crew, not your regular crew, and I was manning the waist-gun, and you look out, and, although they brief you and tell you about what's going to happen, as far as flak is concerned, and they tell you that you're going to be mesmerized, you laugh at them, until it happens, and that's the truth. You stare, and you just can't comprehend that that little piece of black smoke can blow you the hell out of the sky, and I was the same way, and, as I said, I was flying the waist-gun, and I looked out the window, and I see this plane next to me start to roll in. He got hit, and then, I tried to crawl into my helmet, and then, the realization hits you, because, as you said, we were very, I keep using the word naïve, but, we were; we were very naïve, and then, ... I don't know, you were probably more apprehensive when you first started off on your first mission, until you see something like that, and then, you became damn scared.

KP: You had seen accidents during training in the States.

JS: Oh, sure, yeah.

KP: Did, or could, your training really prepare you for combat?

JS: I would say, probably, from a mechanical [perspective], operation of your equipment, your guns, somewhat, to a lesser extent on the guns, but, mentally, you're never prepared for it, and there's nothing like experience. I don't care how much training you have. ... You can practice all day until you get out there and you throw that pitch in that ball game, you know. There's nothing like experience. Compared to what the fellows are today, we were poorly trained. I mean, they're really trained today. We couldn't compare. Our training, in those days, couldn't compare to what they go through today. They're real, pros today. ... I mean, let's face it, you were faced with a situation where they had to build up their forces and do it rapidly, and they did the best they can, I'm sure, but, you're always learning something as you [go along].

KP: Did you sense that when you were going through it or are you just reflecting?

JS: I didn't know enough to sense that when I was going through it, until I was in combat, and then, you realized that, "Well, maybe they should've done it this way." That's why they take a lot of guys, when they come back out of combat, and make them instructors, to improve constantly. I'm sure the guys that followed me were better trained than me and I was better trained than the guys that preceded me, so, it was a constant method of improvement, but, no, ... we had to learn as we went along.

KP: You are the first person to mention being mesmerized by flak.

JS: Yes, because the Germans, I don't know whether you think this, or most people think this, is [that] they aimed individual[ly]; they don't. The only exception to that is when they had a radar, but, most of your big targets, they threw up what they called area barrage. ... I'm sure people have told you this from other interviews. When you start on a mission, you hit what they call the IP, initial point, and that's where you start your bomb run. When you get on that, you've got to fly straight and level, so that the bombardier actually takes over control of the plane, and the Germans know where you're going to fly, and they'd throw up every gun ... at your altitude, and they had radar. Well, it was a primitive form of radar in those days. ... It would be called an area barrage, and you'd have to fly through it, and you'd look out there, and you wouldn't think you'd be able to get through it, but, you do; I mean, some here, some there. You get through it, but, ... as far as being mesmerized by flak, that was in the initial stages. ... I mean, I stood there and watched it, like an idiot. ... They told me it was going to happen and I didn't believe them. I was a smart-ass kid, in those days, and I didn't believe them, you know. I thought I knew all the answers and I didn't. I mean, I just stood there, and then, all of a sudden, as I said, when the next plane got hit, then, I tried to crawl into my helmet. ...

KP: Did you encounter any fighters on your first mission?

JS: Yeah, we encountered a couple fighters. We didn't have it as rough with fighters as the fellows ... coming out of England.

KP: When were you flying in combat?

JS: '44-'45, and we didn't have it as rough as the guys coming out of England. ... Flak was our big problem, until the jets came, the German jets.

KP: You encountered some jets.

JS: I saw that flash go by. They said it was a German jet, and we tried to hit it, but, they were going so damn fast, I mean, but, they weren't that frequent, but, they did come through, and ... what they did [is], if you had a sloppy formation, they'd go right through the middle of it. ... I mean, they weren't experienced. Some of them, those pilots, were experienced, the jet pilots, but, the average fighter pilot, you could see the techniques going down, because ... of attrition.

KP: You noticed this during your tour.

JS: Yes. Well, see, we ... engaged German fighters, but, not to the degree of the guys coming out of England, and I think that ... they probably had a lot more than we did.

KP: What was the hardest and/or scariest mission that you remember?

JS: There was a few of them. ...

KP: You can tell me about more than one.

JS: You know, when you look out the window and your windmills are stopped, that's scary, and that's happened a few times. You have to feather an engine or two, and the B-24 wasn't known for its ability to fly on two engines, but, as I said, thank God, we had an experienced pilot, and, probably, ... the scariest mission, or the mission you were concerned about, was when we went and bombed up in the Alps. We had to fly over the Alps, because the Germans used to bring the guns up into the mountains, and we might be at 25,000 feet, but, they'd be, say, 12,000 feet below you. ... One target, Linz, I think it was, ... they had a jet factory we were trying to get, and they would be almost firing this way, [at a shallow angle], instead of up, this way, and ... you were very concerned about that, because they would take a toll, and they were rough sometimes.

KP: Some veterans have told me about seeing only a few planes go down, while others saw entire squadrons be decimated.

JS: Well, I think that varied according to the target. Now, as I said, I know, on one mission, in fact, my father had cut it out of the paper before my mother saw it, [laughter] I think we had fifty percent losses and things like that, and, other missions, you'd have a milk run. As I said, we did not have it as rough as the Eighth Air Force, I mean, let's face it, I'm not going to tell you any war stories. Those guys, they had it rough.

KP: When you returned to Italy, how many planes would not make it back?

JS: As I said, it varied. ... Sometimes, you would fly a formation, it all depends [on] what kind of formation, a box formation you'd fly. You would have maybe nine [planes], sometimes half of them wouldn't come back, or, sometimes, they'd all come back, sometimes, you'd lose one or two. I can remember flying over Vienna, as I said, that was very heavily defended with flak guns, I don't know why, I was at the waist for some reason, maybe it was one of the earlier missions, but, I was at the waist-gun, and I was kidded about it ... for the rest of my service career. I called out, "Here comes a [ME] 109 at nine o'clock." It was a damn B-24 that was hit, and the silhouette, just at the time I saw it, was spinning in, and it looked just like a fighter plane making a pursuit curve attack. So, it varies. I couldn't say that, give you an average, maybe one, two, three out of nine or ten.

KP: That is still a pretty high casualty rate.

JS: Yeah, yeah. Maybe I'm a little high, I don't know. As I said, it depends upon the targets. Some targets, even the small targets, if you ... hit a target, and I'm talking strictly flak, because that was our biggest problem, ... that had German regulars at the flak guns, it was tough. They were good. If you hit a target, say you go over to Romania or someplace like that, ... or Yugoslavia, where they had some of the natives of the country there manning the guns, they weren't as good.

KP: You could tell the difference.

JS: Oh, yeah, sure, you could tell. I mean, those German guys would be right on the money. Well, sometimes, too, the Germans used to take captured aircraft and fly along parallel with you, and they'd call down your speed and your altitude. ... I'll tell you a story, we had a CO, he was a little bit [of a] (Jonesy?) type, ... and he came after the crew next to us, and he said to the tail-gunner, "Go back to your tent," they had tents in those days, and he flew the mission as a tail-gunner. He wanted to see what it was like. ... He was very concerned with his guys. Another time, we were on a mission and we went up to, I guess it was up around Germany somewhere, I don't know, Munich or something, but, anyway, as I said, the Germans did capture aircraft and [they would] fly them up there, and we see this P-38 sliding in toward the formation. Hell, they weren't supposed to be there and anyone that points their nose at you, you shoot. So, we started shooting, and he got the hell out of there, and, the next day, the guy that was briefing us, because we were flying a mission the next day, he says, "Guys, if you see a P-38, make sure you identify it. The CO almost had his ass shot off." [laughter] He was that type of man, ... I'll tell you, he was a real good guy.

KP: The fact that he flew as a waist-gunner ...

JS: Tail-gunner.

KP: Excuse me, tail-gunner. In the Navy, an officer would not have done that.

JS: The Navy is a different breed of character.

KP: Yes.

JS: Well, you see, I don't know what it's like today in the Air Force, of course, but, in those days, very informal. I mean, my pilot was a captain, but, he was "Pappy." You'd never call him, "Captain, sir." Of course, maybe in a formal situation you might, but, it was always nicknames. Everyone had a nickname. ... Well, I can remember, you know, they had an officers' club in the town and they had the enlisted man's club. Well, Pappy used to take his bars off and go to the enlisted man's [club] and go drinking with us. He was that kind of a guy. So, we were not formalized.

KP: You did not have to deal with a lot of rigorous military protocol.

JS: Chickenshit. [laughter]

KP: Paul Fussell has written an entire chapter on chickenshit, but, you experienced very little of it.

JS: No, the Air Force, no, we had very little of that. One time, I got chewed out, it was one of the few times, over there, you walk around, and I was wearing a pair of moccasins, and I had ... a pair of flight coveralls on, and I had my old baseball cap from St. Peter's, I told you I played ball up there, and I'm walking, ... I was coming back from radio school, I had a pair of earphones, and this staff car comes up there with a two or three-star flag on it, and, hell, we never bothered saluting any cars and everything else. ... It stopped, it backed up, the guy in the back rolled the window down, he called me over, and he said, "Son, what army are you in?" Christ, there's a goddamn three-star car standing in front of me, [Mr. Skinner stammers], "American Army, sir." He says, "Well, act like it. You're not dressed like it. I thought maybe you were a damn German," and he rolled up [the window]. It was Jimmy Doolittle. [laughter] ... Have you heard of Jimmy Doolittle? He was visiting his friend there. I'm sure he had a big laugh, because the look on my face must have been ridiculous, because he scared the hell out of me, but, that was the only type of [reprimand], and I'm sure he did it [as a gag].

KP: That was the only time that you encountered that.

JS: One time, my crew was flying, I don't know whether I was sick or got hurt or something. I didn't fly with them and they had to make a forced landing at one of the adjacent airfields. I went into the flight office and I said to the guy, I said, "Hey, [have] you got any jeeps around or anything?" He said, "Look out there. If there's one out there, take it. I don't care." It was the CO's jeep. I swiped the CO's jeep. Boy, did he wait for me to come back, but, he was a good guy, as I said. He chewed me out a little bit, but, said, "Get the hell out of here." [laughter] He was a good guy, because I went down to pick them up, that was the object of the jeep, but, he was a good guy.

KP: He cared about his men, apparently.

JS: ... Yes, he did.

KP: Many veterans say that they enlisted in the Navy or the Air Force because they wanted nice cots to sleep on and better food.

JS: Oh, sure.

KP: Was that the case?

JS: Oh, food, I don't know, it was pretty good, but, I'm sure it was better than the infantry, the infantry fellows, and, as far as the accommodations were concerned, we'd live in tents for awhile, but, nothing like a foxhole. I mean, there's no comparison between the life that those guys went through and, no matter what war, the GIs, or the grunts, or whatever you want to call them, they had the rough part, the rough living.

KP: Did you feel that way at the time?

JS: Oh, sure.

KP: In terms of creature comforts?

JS: Oh, creature comforts, sure, you realized that at the time. We weren't that naïve, I mean.

KP: You were based in Italy for most of the war.

JS: Yeah. I was in Africa a little bit, but, that was just to ferry planes around. I didn't do any bombing there.

KP: How long were you in Africa?

JS: About three weeks.

KP: You were not there for very long.

JS: No, thank God.

KP: You did not care for Africa.

JS: Not the part that I saw, anyway.

KP: Where were you based in Africa?

JS: Well, we went into Casablanca, and then, we went into Tunis. ... We were flying from the west coast of Africa over to, I guess it would be the northeast coast, or north coast, and we were ferrying a plane, and six of us took off, and we got caught in a typhoon. When they realized there was a typhoon coming, they gave us a recall, [but], we didn't hear it. Our pilot, we got down on the deck and flew most of the way on the deck. Three of the planes cracked up. We were the only one to get through and the other guy heard the recall. We didn't even hear the recall, because of the, I don't know if anyone has ever mentioned St. Elmo's fire?

KP: No.

JS: Well, it's an atmospheric condition. [Do] you know what it is?

SG: I have heard the term before.

JS: What it is, in those days, of course, you had props, and it was an electrical condition, and you'd look out, and the airplane is completely lined with a blue light, and the props, around the circumference of the props, is all blue, and it knocks out all your [radio]; not physically destroying it, it just disrupts communication. It's a phenomenon of nature. I don't know what the correct name is for it, but, we used to call it St. Elmo's fire, and that's what happened. We didn't have any communication, and, as I said, we had an experienced pilot, thank God, and we came through. We made it, but, that was an experience. That was as scary as some of the missions, I'll tell you.

KP: For Navy veterans, typhoons were really the scariest thing.

JS: ... Oh, yeah, it scares the hell out of you, because you're so helpless. That's the same thing when you go on a mission, whereas, probably, flak is psychologically more scary than a fighter, because, when you go on a mission and the flak comes up, there's not a goddamn thing you can do about it. A fighter, you can at least shoot back and release your tension, and the same thing [here]; you can't do a damn thing about the typhoon or a hurricane, no matter what it is. You just have to sit there and take it and that's a lousy feeling. That's like someone beating the hell out of you and you can't fight back. It's the same thing.

KP: Your plane was often the lead plane. Was there ever the urge to release the bombs early?

JS: There was always the urge, but, we never did it.

KP: Really?

JS: Hey, listen, when you see that damn stuff coming up or the fighters, well, the fighters didn't come after you over the target, because the flak would be coming and they'd break off, but, you could see all that damn flak coming up, you'd say, "Let's get the hell out of here," you know, but, we didn't.

KP: Really?

JS: Of course, I didn't have any control [over that], the bombardier would be the [one], but, he'd often said, "Jeez, I wish we could've got the hell out of there early," because you'd come up, you can't do anything about it. You just got to go in on that bomb run.

KP: During the war, did you know how well your missions went?

JS: During the war, we thought we were the greatest thing to come down the pike. Of course, later, results weren't as favorable as we thought, but, we thought we did a hell of a good job, and we thought we'd demolished targets, and then, you only learned you'd have to go back and hit them again, but, ... they used to have the old saying, "You could drop a bomb in a pickle barrel." Well, that was a lot of bologna .

KP: Was it only after the war that you learned that the bombing was not as accurate as originally thought?

JS: Effective? Yes, it was after the war.

KP: However, during the war, you believed it was all right.

JS: We thought we did pretty well.

KP: Were you ever disappointed that it was not as accurate?

JS: Oh, sure, oh, yeah. Well, I'll amend that statement. You know you didn't do well when you had to go back and hit it a second time, but, on a whole, we thought that the bombing was a lot more effective than it proved out to be, and, sometimes, the guys would toggle late on a leader and spread the bombs from hell and breakfast and all over, but, we thought we did fairly well, but, after the war, we learned that we weren't as effective as we thought we were.

KP: Combat airmen lived in a surreal world, because, one minute, you were in combat, and, the next, you were back on base.

JS: That's right. Oh, yeah.

KP: Was it difficult to move from safety to danger so quickly?

JS: You'd have to crank yourself up again. I mean, ... after you progress and progress, it gets hard to crank yourself up again, especially if you're going on a rough one, you know it's going to be rough, you'd have to get cranked up again. ... Then, when you start feeling sorry for yourself, you'd just say, "Thank God, I don't have a rifle in a foxhole."

KP: That gave you some measure of comfort.

JS: Oh, yeah, especially in Italy. Those guys in Italy, they had to climb those damn mountains with the mules and the rain and the mud. ... The other guys had it just as rough, but, it just affected us more. We knew that the guys were down there. ... You take around Anzio, for Pete's sake. I mean, those guys, they were there, going up that hill, trying to take Anzio I don't know how many times, and then, rain, and they'd be muddy, and, as I said, if you start feeling sorry for yourself, you'd think of those guys, and there were the guys who were hitting down there, you know, landing an invasion up there at Anzio. So, ... they'd pull you back down to earth a little bit.

KP: Did you ever worry that your bombs were hitting civilians?

JS: ... You thought of that.

KP: Did it ever cross your mind?

JS: No, it crossed my mind, but, it wasn't an ultimate concern, really, because, one of the reasons, this is my own personal viewpoint, I can't speak for anyone else, but, one of the fellows I was in training with flew out of Italy. We were corresponding. There were a couple of the guys that I knew that were in the same outfit. He got shot down over Germany, and one of his crewmen, when they landed, ... a civilian stuck a pitchfork in him, and, ... oh, Curly, Curly Owens, when he was coming down, ... they were shooting at him, as he was coming down in his parachute. I figured, if they're at war, ... it's just something that you have to put up with, but, that sort of soured me on feeling any sorrow.

KP: How concerned were you about being shot down?

JS: Oh, sure, you were concerned. I mean, when you get ready for a mission, they brief you, they give you scrip, they give you maps for the underground. You had to make sure you destroyed them.

...

KP: Were you given any survival materials or training?

JS: Oh, sure. ... For example, they used to tell you that this certain priest in this certain church in Munich was part of the underground. He'd hide you in his cellar. You know, guys had come back.

KP: How many came back?

JS: Well, there was a few of them. I mean, it wasn't a great number, but, I can't tell you the exact number or anything, but, they did give you who to contact, and they'd brief you in that respect.

KP: I do not think, just from the interviews that I have conducted, that the Eighth Air Force did that.

JS: Well, as I said, I couldn't speak for them, but, they did have contacts underground. ...

KP: You had the sense that, even if you were shot down, they wanted you to get back, if you could.

JS: Oh, yeah, yeah. I had that sense. I don't know whether it was wrong or not.

KP: Did you carry a weapon?

JS: Yes, [a] .45, carried in a shoulder holster. I carried a .45, and then, you also had a hunting knife strapped to your parachute, because, when you bail out, you get hung up in a tree, you can cut your risers. They were the two weapons you had. I don't know whether I'd take on the German Army with my .45. [laughter] I mean, I qualified as expert on a .45, but, if the guy's more than ten feet away, you might not even hit him, because that thing bucked like anything, and they weren't too accurate. ... The slide used to wobble. They weren't accurized, but, we did carry [them], more for effect, I think, ease your conscious.

SG: Did you fly any missions in support of the Battle of the Bulge?

JS: Yes.

SG: Really? I have read that the weather really hampered air support during the attack.

JS: That was one of the reasons we came back from, remember, I mentioned the Isle of Capri.

SG: Right.

JS: The Battle of the Bulge, actually, ... I don't know this, from what I read, there was actually two Battles of the Bulge, the one that's the most publicized, and then, there was one in the southern part of France, and ... I understand they lost more men down there in that southern part than they [lost] up there. One of your celebrated alumnus from Rutgers, here, good football player, Vinnie Utz, lost an arm in the Battle of the Bulge.

KP: Everyone from the Class of '42 has a story about Vinnie Utz.

JS: Oh, he was a character. I didn't know him. I mean, he was one of the guys that, of course, preceded me, but, I knew him, 'cause when I was a kid, I used to watch him play football, and he lost an arm.

KP: Did the Fifteenth Air Force raise the minimum number of missions while you were there?

JS: Yeah.

KP: What was the initial minimum?

JS: I think it was thirty, I'm not sure of that, I think it was thirty. A lot of times, you'd sign over to stay with the guys. Now, when we came back from overseas, we all signed up to go to the Pacific as a unit.

KP: Really?

JS: We did some flight testing while we were waiting to get a B-29 and they dropped the atomic bomb.

KP: How much of a shock was the dropping of the atomic bomb?

JS: Well, we didn't know what the hell it was. I mean, today, everyone knows what an atomic bomb is, but, you've got to imagine that we equated destruction, or the power of the bombs, with what we used, and to realize, I mean, really know what destructive power the atomic bomb was, was pretty hard to comprehend, until ... quite a bit after the fact, but, I know we were all very happy that they did drop it, because we knew we weren't going to go over there and get shot at again.

KP: You were all sent to the Pacific. Could anyone in the crew have gotten out of the Army Air Force at that point?

JS: Yes, oh, sure. In fact, ... I was an instructor for the Chinese Air Force after the war, and I went back to Colorado, at Pueblo, the same base I left from, and they had some of the Chinese Nationalist Air Force there, they were training the bombing crews, and that's what I wound up doing until I got discharged. It was a nice experience.

KP: You were active until the very end.

JS: Well, I ... came back before the war in Europe was over, right, and you'd finish up your tour and you'd come back, but, because I was waiting for some of the other guys to finish up, because of the procedure of having the so-called skill positions do missions before you finish up, before the other people, so, you wait for them to come back, and that's why I had an odd number, and then, you came back, and, as I said, we were going to go over to the Pacific, and then, ... I wound up an instructor for the Chinese Air Force. ... Where was I? ... I forget where I was when the Pacific War [ended], and the Pacific War ended in August, and, as I said, I was probably finished, and, let me see now, I was still an instructor when the war ended, and then, ... they started to discharge [us]. ... They had a point system, I guess. ... I had points, and, ... I got out early, October, and they gave you the choice of whether you wanted to be discharged in Manhattan, Fort Dix, or Sioux City, Iowa. So, I took Sioux City, Iowa, because, then, they'd pay you *per diem*, to travel, and, of course, you know, you could travel cheap on the trains in those days, and you always had a few bucks left over. I had a funny experience, I don't know if you're interested, on the way back.

KP: Yes, please.

JS: I was riding on a train, and, of course, I was wearing a Fifteenth Air Force patch, and this big fellow was sitting across from me, he must have been about, I think, when I looked at him, when he first came after me, he must've been about six-foot-seven. He said, "You were in the Fifteenth Air Force?" I said, "Yeah." He was an infantryman and he says, "Were you flying on such-and-such a day?" and I said, "Yeah." He said, "Were you flying in a certain place?" and I said, "Yeah." That's where he was. I thought he was going to [kill me], ... because I know we killed some of our own men that day, because we had a special mission where you bomb blind. To deviate a little bit, they had underground people on the other side, ... in back of German lines, and what they did, they set up panels, right across the whole perimeter of Italy. It was this big, I don't know what the hell they were made out of, but, you could see them from an altitude. We were down at low altitudes, but, they had it set up where they had the course, they had a big arrow where you fly, that's your course. If you went to the right of the course, I think they had a triangle, and, if you went to the left, they had another figure, and this was one of the early days, and, on the other side, behind the lines, they had an underground guy sending out a radio signal, and you'd have your GCA, one of the instruments, and, when that flicked, you dropped your bombs, so, your drop was blind. This was in case it was clouded ... over, and we did that, but, unfortunately, something got screwed up. They started an offensive, ... and we killed a couple of guys, and I thought he was going to beat the hell out of me, because he was a big guy, and he says, "Let me buy you a drink," and he shook my hand. I said, "Why? What happened?" He was laying out there, wounded, in no-man's-land, when we came over, and the Germans had been ready to go out and get him, and, when the bombers came, they ran back into their foxholes. ... I thought he was going to wrap me up. He was a big sucker. [laughter]

KP: How many combat support missions were you sent on?

JS: We didn't do too many of them, but, in certain situations, we would become a supporter of combat, but, most of ours were strategic. ...

KP: How much contact did you have with either the natives of North Africa or the Italians?

JS: North Africans, I didn't have too much contact; the Italians, you had more contact. We became friendly with some people. ... We used to call them, making fun of our English brethren, we used to have an Italian batman, you know, like the English officers had. ... We had a guy that used to take care of our barracks. He was a major in the Italian Air Force. ... He could get you anything, he was a real scrounger, and we had very close contact with Fernando, and you'd have contacts in the town, but, I don't know whether I would say I ever became fast friends. Now, a friend of mine, I went to high school with, he was also in the Fifteenth, he was shot down, and he became very friendly [with some Italians]. These Italian people hid him away from the Germans for, I guess, a month before he got out and he became very friendly with that family. In fact, he went to Rutgers, too, and we graduated [together]. Initially, we were going to go back to Italy together to meet the family, but, I became engaged instead. I didn't have enough money to go back over. I had to buy a ring. So, Joe went over to see the family, but, I never became that closely [attached].

KP: Where did you go on leave?

JS: Well, most of the time, we went to Taranto, which was down the road. You hitchhiked down there. We were fortunate. We were able to scrounge up an old German motorcycle. The co-pilot, he was a good motorcyclist, and we'd have a side car, and a bunch of us would pile in the side car and go to town like that, scrounge gas. We used to use gas to heat ... some of the barracks, too. ... We used to make homemade stoves. You take an old oil tin, cut it out, and then, you'd go down to the junk yard, and you'd get copper tubing, and you'd pinch it, and then, you had this hundred and some octane gas drip. It was stupid. We'd burn ourselves up, but, we used to use that to heat [the barracks], and, sometimes, ... in the middle of the night, you'd run out of gas, so, you'd go next door, and you'd steal, "Slurp," siphon it out of the guy's [tank] next door. I used to do that to the chaplain. [laughter] Poor guy was frozen. Then, one day, I was out there, siphoning ... the gas out of his tank, and he came up, and he said, "Well, how you doing, John?" "Blech." You ever swallow 100 octane gas? [laughter] He laughed, though. He knew what the guys were doing. As I said, he was an A-1 guy. ...

KP: How would you rate the medical care and the flight surgeon?

JS: Well, I would say it was adequate. I never had that much to do [with it]. The only thing I had was in Africa. I had, I don't know, a bunch of teeth filled, and they had to hand drill them, in those days, and that was a pain. ... They were supposed to have taken ... care of that before we took off and we took off in (Lawrence?), Kansas. In fact, I can remember it to this day; I was sitting in a dentist's chair, and I had, you know the leather jackets they used to wear? I had one, and the dentist was trying to buy it off me, and ... the Duke-Ohio State football game was on. I could remember listening to the game, and I was back in the chair, and he said, "I'll give you twenty-five bucks for it." I said, "Nope." He said, "I'll give you thirty-five." I said, "Nope." He said, "You know, I can lean hard on this drill," [laughter] but, I wouldn't sell it to him, 'cause he would die for one of those jackets, you know, nice goatskin, or calfskin, or whatever, depending on what you got issued, but, I still have an old one. I can't get in it, but, I still have an old one. [laughter]

KP: In terms of getting dates ...

JS: Getting what?

KP: Getting dates. Being in the Air Force, did that give you an advantage with women?

JS: I'll tell you what, no, I wouldn't say so.

KP: No?

JS: No. I didn't mess around with the girls too much. [laughter] I don't think it was an advantage, maybe some guys thought it was, I don't know.

KP: When you were attached to the Chinese Air Force, what was it like to train foreign airmen?

JS: Oh, it was a very, very good experience, because I can remember sitting ... in the mess hall, over the table, and the other fellows would be over there with the Chinese/American dictionary, and I'd be on the other side with an American/Chinese dictionary, and they were trying to learn, and I was trying to learn, and they did a much better job than I did. I became quite friendly with one fellow, a guy in particular, and, as you probably know, the Chinese are probably the top Ping-Pong players in the world, and I used to consider myself a pretty good Ping-Pong player, and, ... after chow every night, we'd go play Ping-Pong, and he'd wrap my fanny good. I mean, he could beat me with his hands [tied behind his back], but, his one aim in life, they didn't allow them too much freedom to go to town, and they were going to allow them to go town, I think, the next to last weekend in training, and the one thing he wanted to taste was corned beef and cabbage. Now, why? I don't know. So, he says, "Well, we're going to play a game for corned beef and cabbage and the winner [loser?] treats," and I won that game, but, ... he threw that game. God, I couldn't beat that guy in a legitimate [game], but, he wanted ... to treat, because, you know, he just wanted to treat, because he knew he was going home, and I corresponded with him for awhile, but, then, the letters came back, ... because the Communists took over, and I don't even know whatever happened to him, but, it was ... very good. They had a different outlook on life. If you know what a B-24 looks like, it had bomb bay doors that slid up. ... It only, supposedly, had a certain capacity for weight on the doors. You'd be flying at 20,000 feet, and those guys would be standing on the door, and you'd try to tell them to get off. ... They could've went right through. I remember, one time, one guy got out of the picnic, ... I don't know where his mind was, he walked out and he walked right into the prop, ... cut his head right off. They just had no ...

KP: In training?

JS: Yeah, in training. ... I don't know whether it was 'cause of the language difference or the environment, I don't know what it was, but, sometimes, their mind was a million miles away. Maybe mine would be, too, if I was that far from home. ...

KP: They were really far from home.

JS: Oh, yeah.

KP: Did you give any thought to staying in the Air Force after the war?

JS: No, I hadn't. [laughter] ... What they did, when they were discharging you, they'd ... call you all into the meeting and give you the pitch to stay in. ... I was very wrong when I was young and I said I might have a military life, because, although we were very informal and everything else, it still ... was compartmentalized, "Do this, do that." I had it. I wanted to get home.

KP: It sounds as if the Army Air Force suited you better than the Army or Navy would have.

JS: Well, you'd adapt no matter what service you were in, but, I enjoyed ... my experience in the [Army Air Force]. I wouldn't want to go through it again, but, I say, honestly, I enjoyed it, except [for], you know, certain things you wouldn't want to go through again, but, it was something that I couldn't have done at that stage in life unless Uncle Sam did it. ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. John E. Skinner, on October 27, 1995, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

SG: Steve Gillen.

KP: You witnessed several crashes. Many of your comrades never made it back. It seems as if you were able to cope with these losses better than most.

JS: Oh, really?

KP: Some men, even to this day, are still torn up about what they saw.

JS: Are they? Well, I guess they would be. I mean, each individual [is different]. ... I don't know why; ... I mean, it bothered me, no question about it. I mean, you feel it, but, ... it was part of life as it existed in those days, and you had to accept it. ... One of the missions I was flying, early mission, we had a bombardier and a navigator, and the navigator was a very high strung individual. ... He was a real gentleman, we'll put it that way, of the old school. In fact, I think he was an instructor, pre-war, at Brown University, and we were going over the target, and, as you know, the bombardier leans over his bombsight, and the flak was medium. ... All of a sudden, the bombardier fell over. There was a hole like that, right in the middle of his forehead, he was killed, and it hit the navigator, and he just, well, to use a slang phrase, went off his rocker, and you had to restrain him. ... 'cause he had flown a few missions, I guess that he just reached the point where he just couldn't take any more. Now, other people, they wouldn't be concerned about something like that, but, they'd adjust. So, each one has to treat it in their own manner. ...

KP: Did you ever see any cases of shell shock where men could not bring themselves to fly again?

JS: Yeah, yeah, but, they weren't as violent as he was. I mean, he was really raving and everything.

Usually, they get this, the shakes.

KP: It was more a matter of degree.

JS: Yeah. They'd get the shakes, and they couldn't function, but, they weren't as loud, or raving, or demonstrative. They just sort of ... withdraw in their self, and you could see, their hands would be trembling, and then, of course, they'd get grounded, because it's no good. I mean, I know I never looked down on them. I mean, a lot of guys were saying, ... "That's a lot of bullshit. There's no such thing as being shell shocked."

KP: However, you were aware of the problem.

JS: Oh, yeah. When I think about that initial experience with this fellow in the plane, because, as I said, it was on one of my earlier missions, exposed me to that fact, ... you knew it could happen. ... Otherwise, I might have been as nasty as some of the other guys were.

KP: Did anyone ever go AWOL?

JS: Not really. I know guys that went over the hill temporarily. I mean, I used to do it. I'd be out in South Dakota, and I'd get a pass for a hundred miles, and I'd hitchhike and get a train, and I'd come home. [laughter] ... I'd have to be back Monday morning, and you'd have somebody cover for you, but, that's not desertion, of course. [laughter] You know, you just take a little advantage of the situation.

KP: An Air Force veteran who lived in the Dakotas once told me that he flew his plane home one time.

JS: Oh, yeah. ... What you'd do is, you'd go to the flight office and you'd bum rides. In fact, I almost was involved in that plane that crashed into the Empire State Building.

KP: Really?

JS: Yeah, I missed the ride. It was coming back and, thank God, ... but, you'd go there, and they were very good about that. They'd pick you up. You'd probably ride in the hatch or somewhere or fly a turret position. If it was a bomber or if it was a transport, you'd sit on the floor or something like that. I mean, guys flew all over the country like that. It was a good deal. They did it in Europe, too.

KP: Were there any superstitions about being aboard a plane?

JS: Oh, yeah, there were some superstitions. ... What the heck? (Jonesy?) used to have a superstition. What the hell was it? I remember, we used to always kid him about it. ... He used to get in the turret and he used to do something with his guns. ... He'd take the block out and everything else and put it back in, but, he would never fail to do that, and we asked him why he did that. He said, "I don't know. I just don't trust people," but, it was like a guy, if you play baseball,

you know, when you walk in from a field, ... you never step on the foul line, or some guys'll never walk in from the outfield, unless, they touch third base or first base, and that was his superstition. ... I don't know, I wouldn't call this, myself, having a superstition, but, I always blessed myself before I went into the air, but, I wouldn't call that a superstition.

KP: Would you have liked to have gone into aviation after the war or was that just not in the cards?

JS: Well, what happened is, after the war, my life became concentrated. I mean, I got out in October, I started college in November, and [I] didn't have any money. I mean, we weren't paid until, I don't think I got paid until the following March, you know, the GI Bill. In fact, we had to go up to Lyons. They had all the records up at the Lyons Veterans' Hospital, and I walked in there, my buddy and I, [who] I said was in the Marines, we drove up there, and we go in there and told them what we want, and the guys are looking. They had their records in a wastepaper basket. ... They're all screwed up, but, no, I can't say I was going into aviation. ... As I said, I got tied up at college, and then, I graduated one week and got married the next, and then, the kids came along, who the hell had time? and then, I got associated with my company. ...

KP: You had gone through Catholic school throughout your childhood. Rutgers, after World War II, was more of a state university.

JS: It wasn't a state university.

KP: Yes, it was still a Dutch Reformed college. Did you consider going to college elsewhere?

JS: Well, I did. ... Another friend of mine went out to Notre Dame, and I was thinking about going out there with him, but, the transition between discharge and starting school was rapid, and I was tired of being away from home, so, I decided to stay home. ... You know, I was acquainted with Rutgers, I grew up here, and I just didn't want to travel. I didn't want to go away from home again. Maybe if I had a longer length of time, between [situations], I might have, I don't know, but, that was my reason; I didn't want to go.

KP: Were you pleased with your decision to come to Rutgers?

JS: Oh, yeah, yeah, I enjoyed Rutgers. I had a lot of fun at Rutgers. I enjoyed it. I'm never sorry I went to Rutgers.

KP: You mentioned that you played sports.

JS: Yeah. I wasn't very good. ... [laughter] I played a lot of sports, mostly baseball, and I played a lot of tennis.

KP: One thing that strikes me about the Class of 1949 is the fact that you had veterans, in some cases, battle-hardened veterans, and you had eighteen and nineteen-year-old kids fresh from high school. How well did the two groups interact?

JS: Well, mostly, ... you'd get along, because ... most of the guys would be with you know, like goes to like, and, in those days, as I said, we were only sixty guys who started, and my ... living two blocks from the Rutgers Gym, you know, you'd go home, but, it didn't bother us. ... I don't know whether it bothered the kids or not, but, there's only one time that we had any interaction, [which] was when we were going down, what's that hall down there, [on] the corner of Somerset and College Avenue? They just redid it.

KP: Winants Hall?

JS: ... Yeah. Well, in those days, they had these ... coat hooks to hang [coats], I mean, it was a real old-fashioned building, and we were going into class one day, and this kid popped in, an ASTP popped up, said, "Look at the 4-Fs." The war was over then, how he came up with 4-Fs, I don't know whether he was drunk, ... I don't know why he did it, but, this one fellow I was with, he was a big fellow, and he was a Ranger, and he went into Normandy, and he had a metal plate in his head, and he didn't like anyone calling him a 4-F, and he went over there, and I thought he was going to kill the guy. What he did, he picked up the young man and you know the web belts that you wear? He hung him on a coat hook and turned around, went like this, [smacked his hands together as if finishing a task], and walked away. [laughter] I thought he was going to punch him, but, he didn't. I guess he caught himself, but, he was a tough cookie. He went through a hell of a lot. I mean, as I said, he was a Ranger, he went up that, what was it? Cape-du-Hoc, [Pointe-du-Hoc], or whatever it was, climbed the mountain.

KP: Normandy?

JS: Normandy, oh, yeah, and he got hit. He had a metal plate in his head. We told him, if we put any magnets ... in the lab by him, he'd screw it up, but, that was the only thing ... I've ever had, any interaction, not me, personally, but, he did.

KP: There was some tension.

JS: Yeah. ... As I said, these weren't the local kids, the civilians, these were guys that were in the ASTP, and they were wearing uniforms, and they were part of the Army.

SG: Being from New Brunswick, did you ever feel tension ...

JS: You mean guys that were from other than New Brunswick?

SG: Yes, from people that were better off.

JS: Tension?

SG: Well ...

JS: No, not really tension. There were certain fraternities that we used to say were a pain in the ass, [laughter] but, that's about all. ... As I said, you've got to remember, the guys that I went to school

with were advanced. I mean, they weren't like kids coming out of school, you'll pardon the expression, like you, [Steve Gillen, an undergraduate]. We had gone through various experiences which matured us a lot faster than we normally would have been. ... We probably had a different outlook on life and this guy, say, for example, that hit Normandy, ... that fraternity wouldn't worry him, after all he'd been through. ... No, you might say that they were a pain in the ass or something like that, but, no active tensions, as far as conflict or fisticuffs.

KP: Many GI Bill students have commented on attempts at class hazing, which was quite common before the war.

JS: Oh, yeah, they tried it, 'cause we were the first class after the war, and they had the freshmen dinkies in those days. That was stopped real quick, [laughter] had enough of that crap, 'cause we got hazed in the Air Force. ...

KP: Were you hazed in the Army Air Force?

JS: Oh, yeah, we went through basic training, and then, we went up to, I told you, ... Hiram College. ... They had an awful lot of hazing, the upperclassmen, and they hazed the hell out of the incoming class.

KP: What were the commanders' attitudes towards hazing?

JS: As long as it was in line and didn't become over-violent. It was mostly chickenshit hazing, "Recite this," or, "Brace," "Eat a square meal," like they do at West Point. ...

KP: It was not physical or violent hazing.

JS: No, no. He wouldn't put up with that, and the guys, ... I mean, some of them were a real pain in the ass, but, most of the guys were pretty regular guys, and they did it, and they'd laugh, and then, after ... a certain period of time, you're through the hazing week, and you'd go out and have a beer with some of them, but, there wasn't violence.

KP: Did you ever have to go to chapel, which I believe was still mandatory at that point?

JS: Oh, sure, we went there. It didn't bother me. It was something you had to do. We all took Professor McKinney's music class, because we all could sleep in the back of the classroom, and he'd pass you anyway, [laughter] so, he was a "good guy prof." He was an institution around here, in those days. I guess he was there, I don't know how many years, I guess he wound up [with] forty years or something, but, we all used to take that, and he used to see the guys [sleeping], and he'd turn the volume up, but, ... it was all right.

KP: You listed Professor George as one of your favorite professors. He has been quite popular among the alumni I have interviewed.

JS: Oh, Prof George, oh, he was a unique man. ... His classes were always very entertaining, but,

it was educational, too. I mean, he knew how to put a point across, and he did it in a way that the guys accepted, because, let's face it, now, we had another guy that was teaching down here, and he was an ex-GI, he just got out of the service, too, and he started about the same time as we did. We'd cut class, we'd go down to CT, [Corner] Tavern, for a beer, and who would be sitting down there? He'd cut class, too. We'd all have a beer together. [laughter] It was just one of those things, but, ... I had a little Japanese professor, I can't think of his right name. ... He was Doctor, ... I can't think of his name, but, anyway, we used to tease him, 'cause he was very hard to understand, but, he was a good guy, and he'd be very patient with us, we were probably a bunch of wise guys, but, he was very patient with us.

KP: You mentioned that there was more give and take with the professors at Rutgers. In high school, you were very deferential to your teachers, although that could have been because they would wrap your knuckles.

JS: You were deferential and respectful, but, you were very close to them. If that sounds like a contradiction, it isn't, because, any time you had any trouble or any problems or anything, you could always go to the sister. They'd ... sit there and listen to you. As I said, I'll give you an experience, one of my friends [who] I went to high school with ... became a priest, and we had this principal, Sister Bonita, and she was well-known throughout the Diocese, which was, at that time, Trenton Diocese, and everyone knew her, everyone deferred to her. I mean, she was a big (mahuff?), even the bishop, and she was going to some kind of an occasion, I don't know what it is, and (Carny?), ... that's the guy that graduated from school with me, was working as an aid to the bishop. So, she gets out of the car, they had a chauffeur, they chauffeured her up, she was getting well up in years, but, they used to defer to her anyway, she gets up, and the bishop goes over to take her in, and she walks [by him], "Hey, (Carny?), now, are you behaving yourself?" I mean, that's how close she was, and she'd do anything for the students, but, the poor bishop's standing there with egg on his face as she walks by him. [laughter]

KP: After serving in the military, even though you were respectful of your professors ...

JS: Oh, we were respectful.

KP: There was much more give and take.

JS: Oh, sure.

KP: However, you were not intimidated by them.

JS: Oh, sure, ... don't forget, we were more mature than your average college student, in those days, and a lot of our teachers, professors, instructors, whatever you want to call them, were our contemporaries. I mean, they were ex-GIs, too. This guy, as I said, used to cut class. He was a machine gunner in the infantry, I think. He was a corporal and manned a machine gun over in France. ... Some of the instructors we used to get, they were a pain in the ass. I mean, you had to run into all different types of people. We had one particular instructor, ... he was a Marine drill sergeant and he was chicken. I mean, ... we had these big classes, you know, ... a lecture hall, and

he'd be up there, lecturing, and he'd turn around to write something on the board, and one guy yells out, "Give me liberty or give me death," the old saw. "Who said that?" "Patrick Henry, you dope," [laughter] you know, things like that. We'd antagonize guys like that, but, guys like George, [no], but, you knew certain guys, and they wouldn't take anything from you either. That's the only guy I can even think of.

KP: Many of the alumni were quite impressed with their instructors at Rutgers.

JS: Oh, yeah, they were ... good teachers and down to earth. ... We enjoyed class very much.

KP: How crucial was the GI Bill to your prospects for going to college? When did you learn about the GI Bill?

JS: It was very crucial. If I didn't have it, I'd probably have to be working and [it would] take me ten years to get through, very crucial. Of course, you learned about the GI Bill when you first came back, because, as I said, I was discharged in October and started in November, so, I was well aware of it.

KP: Why did you choose business as your major?

JS: I don't know. I originally started out in engineering, because ... I always liked to do things with my hands, and ... I could do math, and then, all of a sudden, I was going to be a civil engineer, and, I don't know, I just ... said, "I think I'm making a mistake," and some of my friends were in business, and we were talking, ... and I said, "You know, that sounds pretty good," and I took that route, and I'm glad I did. I probably would've been a lousy engineer. ... So, I got into business and I enjoyed it.

KP: How did you meet your wife? It sounds like you met her when you returned to New Brunswick.

JS: Well, she's a New Brunswick girl, too. She went to the same school, only she was a couple of years behind me. Well, I knew of the family, I didn't know her personally, and, as I said, I played a lot of tennis, and we used to play in tournaments, up in Buccleuch Park. We used to have county tournaments, and my wife was going with my doubles partner, and one of my other friends bet me five dollars I wouldn't ask her for a date, and I needed money, so, I asked for a date, and that was it. [laughter] I mean, we got married. We've been married now, I guess we were married in '49, so, that's forty-six years now.

KP: Your fiftieth wedding anniversary and your fiftieth class reunion will be coming up soon.

JS: Yeah, that's right, Rutgers. That's right, it'll be coming up faster than I'd like it to, [laughter] I guess, but, no, that's the way. As I said, I knew of the family, 'cause everyone knew each other in the Sixth Ward, but, she was from a hell of a lot wealthier family than I. I mean, her father was a chemist and he had his own laboratory in New York. In fact, he was the one that, have you ever heard of the Borden Brown Cow?

KP: Yes.

JS: ... The chocolate-covered ice cream popsicle. Well, he was the one who perfected that. ... When we first got married, we moved into the family [home]. ... He had passed away. He wasn't there when we were married, and I remember going down in the cellar, and he had a workshop and a lab down in the cellar, and cleaning out some of the stuff down there. I came across the bottle dated 1920 something, dish detergent, long before they even had it. Another thing, he had rubber backed rugs, they never had them in those days. He had perfected it. He had the ersatz eggs, you know, the fake eggs. ... He was a hell of a scientist, but, a lousy business man. That's what my mother-in-law used to say and she was a bacteriologist, too. So, they were from a scientific family.

KP: You really married ...

JS: They lost all their money in the Depression. [laughter] I told my wife I married her for her money, but, I got screwed, because they lost it all. [laughter] They lost ... quite a bit in the Depression. They lived right up there on Easton Avenue, one of the big houses across from Buccleuch Park.

KP: How did you get your first job after graduation?

JS: My first job out of college, I mean, there was a depression, I mean, recession, if you remember, in '49. Jobs were [scarce]. I had one job offer to go with Armstrong Cork, but, I had just gotten married, and it would involve me covering about twenty-eight states or something. I said, "The hell with that." So, I had a friend of mine, and his father had a printing business, so, I took a job with him, in the interim, as office manager. ... That was my first job, and then, after that, I had another friend that was with General Motors, and, through word of mouth, I [heard] they were expanding, and I went in, and I got the job with them, and I was with them until I retired.

KP: What positions did you hold at General Motors?

JS: Oh, anyone that starts at GM starts out as a collector. ... Part of my war experience, or military experience, helped me, because, at that time, as you know, Korea was [on], and Camp Kilmer was quite active, and we used to get what we used to call 582s, which were assignments from other parts of the country of GIs that'd buy a car in California, use it to drive to Kilmer, and then, take off and wouldn't pay you. You'd have to go find him. So, it gave me access. I knew how to grease the skins, because ... one of the other finance companies were stupid. They'd repaid the car, and [they] drove it out of Kilmer without going through the provost sergeant, and then, the Army wouldn't let us in, and so, I went over there one day, I started out as a collector, and, because of my background, I knew ... there's always a way to operate. So, I asked to speak to the provost sergeant, not the provost officer, and he consented. He was a big provost sergeant, and they wield a lot of power, more than the provost himself, and I got to talking to him, we got talking, GI talk, you know. Then, he says, "Well, ... maybe I'll let you in. You seem like a pretty good guy." I said, "Yeah, we get along." So, we wound up, I used to grease the guy, I used to buy him a bottle of Old Grand Dad a month, [laughter] and, when you take a car out, you had to have someone drive, and I'd try to hire

him as much as possible, so, he made extra money, and that's how we'll get with Camp Kilmer. ... Your question was, "What did you start as?" You start out as a collector, and then, you progress up. I was a branch manager at the end of my career, over in Long Island.

KP: Did you like working for GM?

JS: It has its ups and downs. [laughter]

KP: I was in Detroit recently and I stayed in a hotel across the street from GM World Headquarters.

JS: Well, you know, in those days, when you were working for the corporation, this was the finance division, now, you spent a lot of time, because it was so busy, things were progressing so fast, you just couldn't get your work done, and you'd work at night, and you'd go in and ask the old man for a little overtime. He'd say, "What's the matter, don't you like your job?" I mean, there was no such thing as overtime, but, now, today, of course, anything you work, you get, but, ... there was a lot of camaraderie with the men together. We'd go out, and, I remember, when I was on the desk, my next step up after collector, I got a call that these people we were looking all over the country for had turned up in Cape May Courthouse. So, one of my friends called in, I said, "Come on, George, we're going to go out and look for cars." He said, "Where are we going?" I said, "Meet me downstairs." So, he meets me downstairs and he said, "Where are we going?" I said, "We're going down to Cape May." He said, "Holy Christ, ... I wouldn't have answered the phone if I knew." [laughter] ... So, we went down there, and we swiped the car out of the side of the house, and, as we were driving out the driveway, the lights came on, a guy comes running out with a shotgun, but, we didn't stick around. [laughter] We took off like a big bird. [laughter] So, ... [with] that type of experience, you develop a relationship that's pretty good with the guys, and we were very close, and all of us were all contemporaries. We were all ex-GIs and had a lot in common.

KP: Did you ever discuss the war, either in college or with this group of ex-GIs?

JS: Oh, yeah, you'd talk about it, but, you'd mostly con each other. You don't talk about the nitty-gritty, most of the guys, unless, you get a few brews in you, get serious, and somebody mentions about somebody getting hit or something, then, you'd talk a little bit, but, most of the stuff was the humorous things that happened in the service.

SG: What did you think about the Korean War and the United States's involvement?

JS: I used to be really teed off. You'd go in Kilmer, and you'd talk to the guys, especially you'd talk to the guys that were in the Air Force, pilots and stuff like that, and they'd sit down, and ... you'd either go to an officers' club or go drinking with them or something, and it was very frustrating for them because ... the Chinese would fly over the border with their MiGs and they'd go after them. They're supposed to stop at the Yalu River, but, sometimes, they did, sometimes, [they didn't], but, the majority of them did, and that became very frustrating, and what I think about the Korean War [is], I think the guys in the Korean War got screwed good, I mean, as far as recognition, what they did. I think they were really screwed, I mean, as far as the people recognizing them. That was a tough war and it was tougher, in many ways, than a lot World War II was, I mean, with that territory

and terrain and everything. It was pretty tough, and ... I think that they should have ended it, the police action, and I think that is a partial cause for what happened in Vietnam. If they had ended that war in Korea, I mean, really ended it, ... we might not have had Vietnam, because, I don't know, ... you're in history, you've probably read more about it than I did, but, I understand that the only way that Eisenhower could get them to the peace table was [to] tell them, "If you didn't come, we're going to drop the big one on you." Now, I don't know if that's true or not. To me, Korea ... is like going into the World Series and not having Maddux and Glavine pitching for the Braves. I mean, your hands are tied behind your back and that's no way to fight a war. If you point a gun at a guy, you should shoot him. Otherwise, don't do it, and that's the way I feel about it. ... That's it.

KP: Did you have similar views on Vietnam?

JS: Yes, I had similar views on that. I think, ... to be personal with Jane Fonda, I think her actions were disgraceful. I'm probably a lot more mature and I'm not as vehement, but, I never thought [much of that Commie traitor]. ... I remember, I taking one daughter down to St. Francis Nursing School, she was applying to be a nurse, and she was in for an interview, and this black guy was there. He was a master sergeant, and he was over in Vietnam, and we got talking. Of course, you know, you just talk, "Where are you from? What outfit were you with?" and so on, and so forth, and he's telling me the experiences over there of going down in these villages, and these kids come up, and [they're] shooting at him, and then, you shoot down, I mean, you had to shoot to save yourself, save your life, and then, being vilified for it. He was very, very disturbed about it and I don't blame him. I mean, now, my oldest daughter, ... I call her 'the squirrel,' but, she's a typical '60s kid, so, she might have a different attitude about it.

KP: What do you mean when you say that she was "the typical '60s kid?"

JS: Well, you know, even today, ... I don't know, she's probably the smartest one of all of them, as far as her IQ is concerned. ...

KP: Was she against the war in the 1960s?

JS: Well, she wasn't old enough to be really involved in that, but, you know, the dress and philosophy, and ... she still goes to these, ... she calls them concerts. ... The other night, last night, I guess it was, she went down to, what the hell's the guy? Robert, ... it was in New York.

KP: Robert Plant?

JS: Plant, yeah, that's the guy. ... I don't know one from the other. When you get past Glenn Miller, I'm in trouble. [laughter]

KP: Since you mentioned Glenn Miller, did you ever see any USO shows?

JS: Yes, we saw them. We didn't get the quality of US[O] shows that they did in England, but, we saw US[O] shows, and the guys were giving their all, giving their best, and we had them in the States. I can remember climbing up a telegraph pole, watching Tommy Dorsey out in South Dakota

or someplace. You know, we did. We did see USO shows. ... They were enjoyable, even though the talent wasn't probably the best, but, you know, over there, we probably weren't the best either.

KP: When did you join the VFW and the American Legion? Did you join right away?

JS: No. I guess it was a few years after I got out that I joined. I'm not a member now.

KP: You have not kept up your membership.

JS: No, I didn't continue it. I'm not a joiner, really. I'm probably an odd ball, in that respect. I don't have many organizations, to be formalized. I don't know whether it was because of being in the service, but, I hate anything formalized, that you're required [to do things]. That's why I enjoy retirement so much. I took early retirement, because, you know, I can get up in the morning and do what the hell I want. I don't have to report here and report there.

KP: Having said that, one of the things I have read about GM is that it was a very structured, very formal company.

JS: Oh, yeah, very structured, very formal. Well, when we started out collecting, a remedial job in the corporation, we all had to wear suits and ties and hats, and, boy, I mean, it was almost a dress code, and the old man would check you out. If you didn't have the hat and he didn't like it, he'd tell you about it. So, yeah, it was very formalized, structured, in those days, and it became less so as time progressed. They used to say that they had so many fannies to fit the seat that if a guy died, ... it didn't turn out that they were as smart as they thought they were. I mean, they had to do an awful lot of reorganization to get back on their feet, but, ... GMAC always made money, regardless of the corporation. We always made money, 'cause they became less structured and more lenient and allowed us to finance other than GM products.

KP: Do you think that your end of GM adapted more quickly than the rest of the corporation?

JS: In some respects, yes; in other respects, no. As far as going modern with computers, we were late in that, but, as far as expanding and trying to get business, ... they had a rule, at one time, if you went in to see a dealer, we used to train dealers in selling stuff and things, and a representative from the corporation was in the office, you were not allowed to go in with him, because of the consent decree that was signed in the '30s, when the Justice Department went after GM, Ford and Chrysler. They all had their own finance companies in those days, and Ford and Chrysler ... diversified and sold out, one was Commercial Credit and Universal CIT was the other, but, GM fought them, and signed a consent decree, ... and this was one of the stipulations from the consent decree, and we were not supposed to fraternize with the corporation in the presence of a dealer, because that would be coercion, and that was prohibited by the consent decree. ... Now, hell, that's all out the window. I think it started with the advent of Reagan, I mean, when was he, '80?

KP: 1981.

JS: '81. ... If you'll notice, now, you have dual advertising in a lot of advertising. GMAC

advertises, "You're leasing with," the ads for Chevy or one of those, but, in those days, that was strictly taboo.

KP: GM took a lot of hits in the 1970s and even into the 1980s. Being on the inside, did that surprise you?

JS: Yeah, it was somewhat of a surprise. Then, you became used to it after a while, but, as I said, it didn't effect us as much as it did ... the other members that worked for the corporation, because we expanded. We expanded, we financed real estate, we financed 747s, coal apparatuses, so, we diversified.

KP: Did you have a hand in that diversification?

JS: Yes.

KP: What were some of the things that you financed that you probably never expected to?

JS: Well, we financed, what you call it? Some of them were airplanes. I'd finance airplanes. I never expected that. I financed boats, which they do now regularly. ... Another was ... an apparatus where they transport coal from the mine into the hoppers, it was a big, huge thing, we did that, but, ... if anyone had told me, ... when I started, that they would be into that, I would [have] said, "Aw, you're full of soup." [laughter] You know, it got so that you had to look for those avenues to make yourself profitable, and then, ... because the automobile field business was up and down, as you recall, you'd have a lot of dealers [go] belly up. That was a problem, I mean, when they convert cars and you don't pay for it, it runs into millions of dollars.

KP: In Long Island, after you retired, there was a big scandal.

JS: John (McNamara?).

KP: Yes.

JS: You know John? He's a good friend of mine. [laughter]

KP: I have only read articles about him.

JS: Oh, that son of a bitch, excuse the expression, ... was like King Midas. He touched that desk and it turned to gold. ... I'll bet you he'd ship five thousand cars a year to Saudi Arabia and all over there in the Mid-East, and that's where he got ... with the trucks, the pickups. ... I handled John, I handled his account, I mean, I was very friendly [with him]. I played tennis with him, golf with him, but, I knew he was a sharpie, ... 'cause Long Island and New York is a different world, I mean, than, say, rural New Jersey. You've been to New York, a different set of rules apply. When I first was transferred to Long Island and I got my own branch, one of the dealers came in to me and he says, "Well, what do you need? You want a broad, I'll get you a broad. I'll get you this, I'll get you that." I says, "Get the hell outta here. You're talking to a farm boy. ... We don't do those

things like that,” [laughter] and he laughed. You know, he knew that was it. I know the guy, my predecessor used to take him up on that, but, that's another story, but, anyway, I was brought up to be strict, a little bit more strict than him, but, anyway, they have a different set of operations, and you talk to someone, I had one dealer that every other word was, well, I can't use it on the thing, but, “F--- you,” and like that, and, if you didn't talk back to him in kind, he wouldn't respect you, so, you adapt yourself in that way, but, John (McNamara?), he really was an operator. He was a smart cookie. He didn't have to do that. I think he did that for the excitement, the challenge.

KP: It was not just a few million. It was huge.

JS: Yeah, the president of GMAC was fired for that, and, in fact, the manager over there, at the time, I trained her, ... I didn't do a good job, I guess, [laughter] but, anyway, she, at one time, was my secretary, and then, we got into this program where [we] were adapting females, affirmative action, whatever you want to call it, and she's a very smart girl, and she got to be branch manager, and she just didn't, I don't know, he probably conned her or something, I don't know what happened, ... because I had already been retired.

KP: You are not surprised that he could pull it off.

JS: No, no. ... What he did, I'll tell you what kind of a guy he was. He'd sell all those cars to Saudi Arabia and he couldn't get the money back in the States without getting nailed for taxes. So, if you'll recall, at the time, the oil/gasoline/fuel problem, as I said, John was a smart cookie, he went up to Germany, and he converted all his cash that he had in the German bank, and he purchased stoves, wood burning, coal burning stoves, free-standing stoves, inserts, brought them into the country. ... He had a big facility out there, and, ... in addition to his warehouse, he must've had ten tractor-trailers filled, up to the ceiling, and he made a bundle. He made a fortune out of it. He was always looking for angles, and, if you recognized John was that kind of a guy, hell of a nice guy, oh, nice guy, but, he just looked for the angles, and you just had to watch him, that was all. ... As long as he knew that you weren't going to let him get away, [that] he couldn't con you, you'd get along with him fine.

KP: It seems like your successor did not follow that.

JS: Well, evidently, I don't know. [laughter] From what I understand, it was a pretty intricate program. He set up his own ... phony dummy corporation in, what was it? Indiana or Illinois, that was supposed to be putting bodies on the thing, and he had those motor homes, he went into that, and he made a lot of money on that, but, you just had to dot the "I" and cross the "T" with him. ... He turned state's evidence. I don't think he ever went to the pen. I don't know what happened to him, because there was some politicians involved out there. I think he turned state's evidence, but, they closed him up. ... Well, that was after I retired, but, even prior to that, we had a lot of dealers bellied up. ... I had one, two, three, four, about five of them. One guy, it was about three o'clock in the afternoon, I was sitting there, and I got a telephone call. The guy says, "Do you finance XYZ Pontiac?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "Well, you better do an inventory." I said, "Who is this?" "Never mind, ... I'm just telling you." We went down there and there was \$1,800,000 worth of cars missing. They were all on the docks in Elizabeth to go to Saudi Arabia. So, I went down to see

him. He says, "Well, I got a letter of credit." He brings out his letter of credit. I said, "This goddamn thing is obsolete. ... It's bad, it's no good," and he bellied up. ...

KP: Did you get the cars before they were shipped out?

JS: Yeah. We lost a lot of money on that, though. It cost us I don't know how many thousands of dollars. We had to pay bribes to get the cars off the boats. You went legal, but, you also had to grease the palms of the longshoremen, because, you know, the cars get lost, or this and that. It cost us a lot of money, both official and unofficial, but, we took a bath on it, because those cars were special order. They were odd ball cars, and they weren't, ... you know, readily acceptable in the American market, and all the cars that go over there, they have their catalytic converters taken off, to adapt it over there.

KP: You had to reinstall the catalytic converters.

JS: Yeah, but, you ... had to do that to sell them, because they wouldn't be acceptable, but, that's money; it costs you money. So, you figure the amount of money you lost on the note itself, plus, all the additional expenses, we lost a lot of money.

KP: In other words, dealers are really ...

JS: Some of them were.

KP: Some of them could really cause you a lot of trouble.

JS: Oh, yeah. Some of them were and some of them were very honest people, just like any other walk of life. You have bastards in everyline.

KP: You ended up in Long Island. Where else were you a manager?

JS: Mostly in Jersey.

KP: You found a sharp contrast between Long Island and New Jersey.

JS: Oh, yeah, different way of doing things, yeah, and, don't forget, Long Island, we were about sixty-five, seventy miles out from the city, but, still, most of those people are transplanted city people, and they had a New York way of doing business, and, you know, every time you turn around, the hand's out for a buck. ... We were into a meeting in New York, this was when I was in Jersey, and we went out to have lunch, and a friend of mine left the money, left what we thought was an adequate tip, and this waiter yells, "Hey, guys, you forgot your change." Danny says, "Oh, so I did," and he took the money, walked out, and the guy didn't get a nickel. I mean, that's the way you do business in New York, smart-ass. He thought he was a smart [guy]. He thought he would embarrass us to dig in for the money. ... Fortunately, Danny was a New Yorker, and he knew how to deal with it, but, it's a different way of life, and then, again, you have other people that are just like people here. Of course, this is becoming more citified, urbanized. [laughter]

SG: That it is. I am pretty much out of questions.

KP: Yes. This has been a lot of fun.

JS: ... Oh, I enjoyed it. You know, it's been a long time since I've talked about some of the things like that. You recall things and, probably, you screw up some of the things you're talking about in the proper sequence, but, it was fun.

KP: Yes. I often have questions that pop into my head out of sequence.

JS: Yeah, sure.

KP: Even I realize that.

JS: Oh, sure, you think of some things after the fact, so to speak. ...

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