RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH BERT TRYON

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEWED CONDUCTED BY

SANDRA STEWART HOLYOAK
AND
SEAN D. HARVEY

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
MAY 20, 2000

TRANSCRIPT BY

G. DOROTHY SABATINI

Sean D. Harvey: This begins an interview with Bert Tryon on May 20th, the year 2000, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Sean D. Harvey and ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak. We'd like to thank you, Mr. Tryon, for taking the time out of this reunion weekend to sit for this interview. To begin the interview, I would like to ask you to tell us where you were born and when.

Bert Tryon: I was born in Union Hill, New Jersey. Union Hill is now Union City. The schools were up there, up in Union Hill, all schools right on up through high school, after high school, Rutgers. I entered Rutgers in 1926 and graduated in 1930 with a degree in Bachelor's of Science and Civil Engineering. ... Subsequent to that, I went to work on construction work, engineering. The first major construction job I started, in October of 1930, was on the George Washington Bridge. Subsequent to that, I have worked up and down the East Coast, most of the time with an engineering outfit Parsons-Brinckerhoff, where we have been involved in, well, heavy construction, roads, bridges and what have you, most of the work with Parsons- Brinckerhoff. However, that was subsequent to World War II. Prior to World War II, the major portion of my experience is out on the construction work on the George Washington Bridge, some laboratory work for the Port of New York Authority, and then a rather long period of time where I had done nothing, during the Depression. So, back in about 1936-37, I went back to work with the Port of New York Authority in the inspection division. I left them to go to work with the Port of New York Authority ... until I think about 1938 or '39. I left the Port Authority for another job, and on this other job, I wound up being called to active duty in the Corps of Engineers for service in World War II, which had not started at the time I was called, on June 1, 1941. I had taken correspondence courses at Governor's Island and received a commission as Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers in 1935. I had been kicked out of ROTC at Rutgers because of flat feet, but, since I liked the Army, I got my commission through Governor's Island. That, in effect is very brief resume of what I was doing prior to the World War II episode.

SSH: We'd like to ask you to tell us what your father's name was, where he was born. Do you remember what year?

BT: [laughter] There I'm a little bit embarrassed because I think he was born in North Carolina. He died when I was twelve years old. He was an accountant and worked for the New York Central Railroad. My mother was a substitute teacher in the Union Hill school system, and carried on holding our family, consisting of myself and two brothers, holding the family together until my two brothers finished their schooling, and I wound up finishing my schooling down at Rutgers.

SSH: Your mother worked as a teacher?

BT: No, subsequent to my father's death ... I don't know exactly how it happened, but she wound up in the secretarial end of schoolwork. She wound up as assistant to the principal, and she carried on that particular job until the time that she retired, which was, I'll be darned if I know exactly when. She is also deceased, of course. She died ... eventually it was a heart attack. My father died of typhoid fever.

SSH: I want to ask you to tell us a little bit about what Rutgers was like when you came here and how you came to come to Rutgers?

BT: Well, I graduated from high school the highest boy in the class, beaten out by three, four, five females. I was offered a scholarship, the Reverend I. W. Gowen Scholarship, at Rutgers University. ... I also was given an opportunity to attend Stevens Tech in Hoboken. Stevens Tech did not involve any scholarship deal. Rutgers, if I attended Rutgers, did have a scholarship. ... Rutgers offered any kind of course that I wanted.

By the way, my high school work was varied mainly because my mother [was] insistent that I do meaningful work, so that I was eligible to enter any college in the area. ... I always had an idea that I was going to be going to college and would like to be in engineering, particularly on the construction end. ... fortunately, I have been able to do just exactly that.

SSH: Did you work in the summers between the school terms?

BT: Oh, yes. After school and Saturdays, I worked after school and Saturdays even in high school. ... When I was in college, I worked in the baggage gang on the New York Central Railroad. ... I worked in the post office in the holiday seasons.

By the way the Gowen Scholarship was a four-year scholarship, amounting to a total of 1,000 bucks. Two hundred dollars for each of the first three years, and four hundred dollars for the last year.

SSH: It's kind of a shock to Sean to hear those figures. [laughter]

BT: So, things have changed a great deal, [laughter] in that respect. ... When I entered Rutgers, I decided that I would come down here and I would … stay down here. I would not try to commute from Hudson County because the commutation was nowhere near the same as it is now. I came down here and found a rather small college that we considered was growing too fast. If I remember correctly, the student body totaled about 1,200 at the time. ... It had grown. It had doubled in capacity in the five to six years prior to my arrival. ... There was a very considerable amount of protest being raised by people because it was growing too fast. It was growing out of proportion. But the changes in the place are really amazing, the complexity of the courses and the complexity of the structure. I'm talking now about the educational structure, administrative structure. Absolutely and completely amazing. I come back, look around the place, I don't recognize things anymore. I recognize Winants Hall. I recognize Old Queens and that just about takes care of things. The old gym burned down when I was here. The new gym was constructed across the road. The dormitories were constructed. ... We never had any idea, at the time we were down here, that anything like this was more or less in the books, or possible. ... Now when I look back at it, I think it's really amazing the changes that have occurred. ... It's amazing how the college has grown along with it. The college always did have a good reputation, but the college has an exceptionally good rating right now. I was mixed up in the several of the things that I have done afterwards in the hiring personnel for Parsons, interviewing

people. ... I found out during the course of that, that Rutgers rated very well. ... The graduates of Rutgers seem to be pretty well down-to-earth, which impressed me very, very much.

SSH: When you stayed at Rutgers where did you stay?

BT: The first year I stayed at Winants. After that I hooked up with a fraternity, a local fraternity, Phi Sigma Tau, which later became Tau Kappa Epsilon. Tau Kappa Epsilon is still functioning here. Regrettably, the induction of Phi Sigma Tau and Tau Kappa Epsilon happened on reunion weekend in 1930, so I have very little ... bonding at all with TKE. ... Yet, TKE has a very good reputation also.

SSH: Who was your favorite professor? Your favorite subject is another question.

BT: This one. We had three professors, Lendall, Johnson, and Stevenson. ... My favorite professor, subsequent to graduation, [was] Johnson. Johnson was far and away the best of the three. I can very clearly remember Johnson standing in front of the class of students and informing us with a completely straight, completely serious mien, that, "Gentlemen, I want you to know that for at least a year after you graduate and are employed by a firm, you will be of little or no value to that firm until you become acquainted with that firm and its methods and procedures. We will teach you, here at Rutgers, where to get information, how to look for information, but we cannot guarantee that you are going to fit in with any organization that you happen to hook up with." In other words, you can figure a year of adjustment, and of course, we thought that Johnson was, well, a little bit less than nice. Because he was a little bit blunt. ... In looking back, Johnson was far and away the best of the three.

SSH: Who was president of the university when you were here?

BT: Oh, you think I can remember? Clothier.

SSH: I just want to ask you about mandatory chapel. Was that in effect when you were here in 1930?

BT: No.

SSH: You didn't have to attend every day for an hour.

BT: No. No, that had been discontinued a year or so before I came down. ... Chapel was more or less optional, and to start off with, I was not very religious then and I'm not very religious now, so there was no particular hardship. The first year, it seems to me, my recollection is that we had one day a week that we had to go to chapel. My sole recollection of that was that a bunch of us used to get together and have a little bit of a betting game going about who was going to speak the longest. ... A minister by the name of Demarest was the one who was doing an awful lot of the talking and we were making bets about how often he would whistle his "Ss". ... As I say, as far as religion was concerned, I was not very much inclined to be that way. I was not a very good student either.

SBH: What was life like in Winants for you at that point, because back then the post office was in the basement and so was the dining hall?

BT: Yes, the dining hall was in the middle. ... Winants was separated into, probably still is, into three separate segments; middle and either end. Each segment was wide open, all the way up to where they had the winding staircase with the side staircase up the thing. And one of the favorite tricks ... [was to] fill a paper bag with water and dropping it down and see if it would catch some character down below. ... I know the time that I was here they were changing the front of the building. The front of the building, at the time, had, in fact, little bits of inserts, so, or the reverse of inserts, because there were holes in the front of the building. See, it would give you a little bit of window space for this particular section. ... When I came down here, they had filled that thing up and finished the roofs. So, that Winants, prior to the time that I was here, had three different segments in the front. Now, it has only the one solid front. The dining hall was set up in the middle.

... The complaint was exactly the same then, as it is now, that they think that every once in a while somebody goes out and finds a dead horse someplace for you. [laughter] ... The food, I don't recall anybody ever dying. [laughter] ... As the health of the group thing was reasonably high. The water at the time, I don't know what the deuce they've done to the water system here in New Brunswick since, but I know at the time we were down here, the New Brunswick water was just about as bad tasting as anything that anybody had ever seen anyplace. I guess I had some water that was worse over in the Philippines, but things were a little bit on the weird side.

SSH: What about activities? What were the social activities like at Rutgers then?

BT: Well, again, I was a little bit of a, sort of a mouse. I think I weighed all of about 130, 135 pounds. My height was tremendous, five-foot-four and a quarter in my bare feet. I was not athletically inclined, and in racing with my brother, for example, my brother could always out race me. He was much faster than I. In other words, I was not very fast. I was not too agile. My basketball playing was really a little slow because [of] my agile self. If I tried baseball, I would be very, very fortunate if I hit the ball past the second basemen. ... In other words, I was really not much of anything.

I wound up president of the Engineering Society. I don't know why, but that's about the only extra curricular activity that I did. ... Most of the people in my fraternity figured that I was a little bit weird because I spent more time reading books then, not textbooks, reading novels and junk mail, or junk books. [I] had my nose glued to those most of the time, but I did graduate.

SSH: Did you spend any time going over to NJC?

BT: No. As I say, I was pretty much of a mouse. ... Of course, I didn't have any money because when I was down here I used to think that it was something of an event ... if I had a quarter in my pocket. I was reluctant to go out and break the quarter, because there was very, very little money. Well, as a matter-of-fact, the Depression was just about, not started, not all the way on, but the

Depression was there. ... There were not many people down here who had a great deal of money to toss here, there, or anyplace else.

SSH: What was the reaction to the stock market crash while you were here at Rutgers?

BT: I don't think there was any reaction. None that I noticed. ... I don't think, at that time there was that much interest in the stock market. The people of college age were not at all interested. In other words, this was something happening someplace else. It didn't effect us directly.

Of course, the first job that I had when I got out of college, I was paid 100 bucks a month. ... For your information, the biggest check I ever got in my life was the first check I got for the first job I had, and that was something less than a week's pay. It was a partial check. ... That's exactly how things were as far as money was concerned. Now, there was not much money going around.

I remember one of the boys in our fraternity used to get along [and] feed himself. He did not eat at the dining table except once in a while, he would get a job at the dining table working, because he happened to be one of the athletes. He was a cross-country runner. ... He would feed himself, I believe, on one 5 dollar coupon book a week. He would feed himself a week on five bucks.

SSH: What was the rivalry between Rutgers and Princeton at that time?

BT: We didn't like the So and So's. [laughter] ... It's a funny thing. I have known quite a lot of Princeton men and found them to be very nice people, but collectively, [grunts]. Now, ... maybe there's something wrong with me, I don't think, but I feel very much the same way about West Pointers and Annapolis people.

... My theory, which again is not, [laughter] shall I say, "well understood," but my theory is that when somebody goes to one of those academies, it probably holds true for the Air Force Academy as well, when they go to the academy, they go through a thing where they have come from a normal set of circumstances, normal communication with people and with their peers, and that sort of thing. When they get up to West Point or Annapolis, they are in a group, a separate, complete group from everybody else. They have a lot of servicemen around helping them, servicing them, and what have you. They have a lot of hired help running around servicing them. In other words, they are in effect, thoroughly and completely being taken care of by somebody else. ... I think after four years of that, see, they have completely lost the common touch. Not all of them, but too many of them.

[laughter] ... I can remember one time, this fellow happened to be a West Pointer. He was hired by Parsons after the war. He came into a job and was working on this project as office manager or something like that. ... I had reported back to this job from another job where I had been the resident engineer. I walked into this place and this character kept on addressing me as "Tryon." It happened once or twice and I said, "Just one short minute." I said, "You can either call me 'Mr. Tryon, or you can call me, 'Bert.' Don't call me 'Tryon.'" In other words, he had been a Colonel, and this was the way he had been addressing subordinates. Now, I don't know whether he considered me a subordinate or not. I didn't care whether he did consider me a subordinate,

which really didn't bother me an awful lot, ... I just didn't like this particular attitude. ... It happens a little bit too often, with these birds. Say I don't like West Pointers. I don't like them.

SSH: You had mentioned before about working on the George Washington Bridge. What were some of the most memorable incidents that you remember working on the George Washington Bridge? There has to be some good stories there.

BT: Well, a fellow named Censullo, X. F. Censullo, Xavier Francis Censullo, later on went into the Navy, got out as a commander, I guess, maybe a lieutenant commander. ... Anyway, Xaffy and I walked across the bridge before the bridge was finished. We walked across the steel see he lived in Jersey. I lived in Jersey. We didn't do it often, just once or twice. We have climbed up and down the cables when the cables were being placed we climbed up and down the thing. I worked on the New York approach.

And as I say, speaking of stupidity, this is another one of my favorite counters. If somebody hands you a stupid order, "The best way to handle the damn thing is to obey it stupidly." ... I tell them exactly how this happened.

The Philippines campaign had a general named Innis P. Swift, the commanding general of I Corps. Had his bivouac area set across the road from where our bivouac area was set. Now, Swift [was a] West Pointer. We had a rather small unit commanded by a full colonel, a graduate of West Point. I think he was the class of ... 1930. A guy named Klinke who was a real dilly. Klinke came up and hooked up with this outfit. He decided this outfit had been overseas quite a bit of time was not GI enough for him and they should do close order drill before they went out on their assignments in the morning. Now, these men were going out on engineering assignments as reconnaissance, see, in a combat area. So, they started out, they broke up the outfit. They had three working platoons out there and commanded each by a sergeant. ... Anyway, they were out in a comparatively small area and, of course, ... they were running into each other and all sorts of things. The company commander came up to me practically crying, he was so thoroughly mad and disgusted. He said, ... "What the hell?" ... I was standing there on a little bit of a hill looking this over and laughing. Irving came up to me mad as hell, because I was laughing about that. [He] didn't know what to do. I said, "Look, Stuffy," I said, "You get a command like that, you obey it stupidly." I said, "You tell these guys, they want close order drill, you give them close order drill. You take them out and you march them alongside the road and when you pass General Swift's living quarters," I said, "When you get up alongside that, you give them 'to the rear march', and you tell them to sound off, and 'sound off loudly and clear'." I said, "When you get past general Swift's quarters, you give them 'to the rear march' and when they come back 'sound off' again."

They went up and down a couple of times and in very, very short order we got an officer on horseback from General Swift's headquarters, "Cut out that goddamned nonsense." [laughter] ... This stuff like that happens all over the place. ... We were getting ready to go into Japan on the Olympic Operation. Now, this was part of the work I was doing at I Corps. In very, very minor capacity, after all I was only a major, and they had characters up to lieutenant general fooling around with this stuff. So, we were getting ready to go in, and our whole water supply company,

... their equipment was pretty badly depleted. In backwashing their pumps and filters, they had cleaned that up and had lost a lot of the sand, so we needed filter sand. However, we had been told that when we went into Japan, we were going to be running into a bad condition on the water supply. We had to look out for a bacteria called (shistomazya?). I don't know how to spell it, but it's nasty stuff. ... What we had to put in our filters, instead of sand, we had to use Fuller's Earth. Oh well, this outfit we had taking care of the water supply for I Corps, had seriously depleted all their filters. So, I put through, as being the supply officer for corps, I put through a requisition. Get a reply, "Don't have any Fuller's Earth? You have to use filter sand." I said, "Okay, give me filter sand." "We don't have any filter sand." "So, what the hell am I supposed to do?" He said, "Make it." My commanding officer, Klinke said, "Make It?" I said, "Where the hell am I going to get the proper screens and everything else of the right size so that I can make filter sand?" ... It had to be a certain gradation and what have you. So, I started in the whole routine again. I got exactly the same answer. I said, "Okay, well, get rid of the filters. If you can't get me the stuff to take care of them," I said, "Give me new filters?" "Oh, we can't do that." "Why not?" "Your filters are in good shape." Army. "The filters are in good shape. ... All you need is sand." So, there we are running around. So, I finally wound up sending a detail down to Manila and we stole them. So, we got sand filters down in Manila..

We had another situation happen with ordinance. We were operating up there in the Philippines, operating with two and a half ton trucks acting as our prime movers for our trailers. ... Our table of organization required that we have four ton trucks. Only there were no four ton trucks available. That's when we left the States. This was early on in the operation. I said, "Okay. So, get me bigger ones." "We can't get bigger ones. We can't give you anything bigger than what's authorized." "For Christ sakes," I said. "What am I supposed to do?" "Well, you have to use the two and a half ton trucks." This is prior to the Olympic operation. We start hauling this stuff off the mountains, over in Japan, and they would break down and they'd become inoperative for a long time. Can't help it. "We can give you two and a half ton trucks but you can't get anything [else]." ... Well, I found out that the Army had changed their artillery set up so that instead of using some six ton Macks as the prime movers for their artillery units, they had turned them in and ... wound up using half tracks. ... All of these six ton Macks had been turned in.

... I found out about it because I put an officer down at each one of the three bases in the Philippines up in Luzon. ... I told them, "If you see any trucks coming into this place, any four ton or bigger trucks, let me know." So, I got word that we had these six ton trucks turned in and I started hollering and yelling all over the place. ... I finally went over the heads of Corps, right to Sixth Army Headquarters. ... Sixth Army Headquarters released the six ton trucks to me. Now, they didn't have enough to supply all of the units, but they did have in the neighborhood of about three quarters of what we wanted. ... They were going to let the six ton trucks sit there. Nobody else had any call for them. ... I got all sorts of reprimands from the brass. ... Where did I get the nerve? How did I happen to put an engineer officer down there to keep an eye on the ordinance? I did get promoted. [I] got to be a major. [I] got a Bronze Star ...

SSH: Did you go through the Panama Canal with your group?

BT: No.

SSH: How did you get to the West Coast then? By train?

BT: Train. We stopped off at a place in Missouri for a little bit of an indoctrination into the real army, as far as ... shooting a gun and what have you.

SSH: You had said you worked at Parsons after you graduated from Rutgers. After that, you began working at Fort Monmouth, that's where you reported?

BT: Yeah.

SSH: Can you tell us a little bit about what you did at Fort Monmouth and what it was like when you got there, and when you left, and have you been back?

BT: Well, I got down there in the early part of June. I was in a very, very peculiar sort of a spot, because I was a separate officer, attached to Fort Monmouth only for maintenance and quarters. In other words, Fort Monmouth had no jurisdiction over me. ... In other words, if they put out orders about their officers not supposed to leave the base. If I wanted to leave the base, I left the base. They had no control. So, I was ... a little bit of like a wart on somebody's back, because they had no control over me in that particular respect. I had civilians working for me on what, of course, was engineering contracts or construction contracts. I had my own motor pool and all that sort of stuff. ... They used to have the MPs come to me and ask to borrow one of my vehicles if they wanted to use an unlicensed or unmarked vehicle for surveillance purposes.

So, in other words, I was there, but not a real integral part of it. The base was really a very thoroughly and completely established base. ... We came in and started putting in all of these barracks and all of this other stuff. We put in the water supply system. We put in sewer disposal plants, and we put in a big hospital. ... We made an awful mess of the place. ... The government took over a golf course, and we went across the road and built another post over there, which also caused me some trouble because the orders that I had, that I was supposed to get an approval of what's being done at Fort Monmouth from the commanding general at Fort Monmouth. ... They now had a commanding general of this particular base over there. ... As far as the Signal Corps was concerned, this commanding general there was under this commanding general. ... This general was the one to whom I was supposed to go to report. Burkenhoff, or something like that, was the general over there. This guy, given a direct commission as a general from AT&T or something like that, was the commanding officer of the place. He wanted to have a post office built out at this place. I didn't have any instructions from anybody to build a post office. ... I did have instructions that I was supposed to drill a couple of wells, because the water system had to be, more or less, beefed-up a bit. So, I had a contract for that and I had the well driller come in and start to drill a well. By a peculiar coincidence, it happed to be exactly where this general wanted to have his post office. ... I hadn't told the general about the well, because a little while later, I get a telephone call from the general's assistant, full colonel, who I knew from the bowling league, that the general was very, very pleased to see his post office being constructed. I said, "What post office?" He said, "Out there." ... I said, "For your information, that isn't a post office that's being constructed, that is a well being drilled." So, the guy said, "Oh!" So, he

wanted me to come out and see the general. So, I go to see the general. ... He marches me into the general and introduces me as the area engineer and, as I say, I am not under his control at all. ... He's giving me merry hell because here it is, on his particular post. 'Cause after all, he's the commanding general. "Sir, my orders are that when I get instructions to do some construction around here, the plans for that particular construction are to be approved by the commanding general of Fort Monmouth." ... I said, "Sir, my orders are ... " [laughter] The guy's steaming. As I say, I was really not a very good officer, because I didn't particularly give a hoot. [laughter] ... It didn't sit too well with an awful lot of people in the army.

SSH: I could imagine. Where did you go from Fort Monmouth?

BT: After Fort Monmouth, I went cross country and then on down to the southwest Pacific in Leyte.

SSH: Where did you embark from, on the West Coast?

BT: I think it was from San Francisco. ... When we came back, I worked down there on the *Lurline*, or its sister ship, or I came back on the other ship. ... So, I went one way on the *Lurline*, [a Matson Line ship], and I came back on the other sister ship. When I came back, we came back to Tacoma. Then I came back across the country by rail.

SSH: Do you remember anything about your trips across the country? Had you traveled much before that?

BT: The only traveling I was doing had been around the East Coast. On quite a lot of these things, actually, I had not done an awful lot of stuff because the only work I'd actually been doing was on the George Washington Bridge. So, everything was local around that area. It's subsequent to the Army that I've done a lot of traveling around, again, mostly up and down the East Coast. Norfolk, Virginia. The Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike. ... Baytown Tunnel, down there in Houston, Texas. A harden facility in Pennsylvania. ... So, I did quite a lot of travel afterwards, but not before.

SH: What were your ocean trips like going over to the Pacific? What were the trips on the ships, the troop ships like when you were going over to Japan?

BT: Well, again, I was going down there as an officer, so our ... being handled was very, shall I say, prosaic. Crowded, yes, several officers to a stateroom. ... The ship just went on down there because they had no destroyer escorts along with us because ... we knew that we could outrun any submarine and we came awfully close to destroyer speed. So, I think it was really quite comfortable. The food was lousy. Of course, all the food on those things are steam cooked and the stuff all tasted like mush ...

SSH: Was it a regular Navy crew on board?

BT: No, no. I think they probably did have an armed crew aboard for a gun. We were pretty much restricted to certain areas of the ship. In other words, we were not wandering around all over the place. ... If I remember correctly it took us something like twenty-three days. That was a long trip.

SSH: Did you have to stand any kind of duty, or watch, or anything?

BT: No. No. No.

SH: What was a typical day like then on the ship?

BT: [laughter] Boring. Not only boring but, well, to give you an idea just exactly how bad the thing was, when we went over to this particular island, in Biak, I had been traveling across the country for and ... on leave, change of station leave. I had gone from Fort Monmouth, I had about two weeks before I had to report into the West Coast. Twenty-three days to go there down to Lae, several days of Lae, several days more ... back. By the time I had got off to Biak, see, I had been away from Fort Monmouth for somewhere in the neighborhood of about three months, during which time I had done nothing, but sit. ... I had this little session of the infiltration business out there in Missouri someplace, but I was in really very soft condition. ... Even when I was back there at Monmouth, I did nothing at all requiring any physical exertion. So, I was really very soft. We get up to this place and while we were at Biak, we got word that the Japanese fleet was coming down and was going to bomb us. ... Our intelligence people said the Japanese fleet was coming down there and that information indicated that the Japanese fleet, or the Japanese headquarters, had arranged for a coordination for attack between the land forces that were still there, which outnumbered the Americans by the way, and the Navy. ... So, they moved us back over these three rises. Now, I had a pair of shoes, did not have any cleats on them, very soft. Now, these are what I call normal type of work shoes, but if you ever get out into a jungle or into any kind of a park, and you are trying to climb over tree trunks, rotted vegetation or anything like that and you do not have cleated shoes, you be very, very careful, because your footing is very uncertain. Now, as I say, I was in very poor physical shape. When I got up to the place where we were going to be bivouacked for the night, I was thoroughly and completely pooped. I don't think I was ever that badly worn down, before or since.

Now, another thing that was funny, again there are funny episodes in the Army. I wound up in the States in a company. ... I left the company very shortly afterwards. I was in charge of a group of men, twelve total, twelve enlisted men. We wound up company C way up at this particular end of the position up in Biak. ... We were very much afraid that the Japanese [weren't] bluffing. We wound up at the end as a flank company, and I wound up as the flank platoon in this company. I was on the extreme end. ... Then, they send word that I should set up outposts. One there, one there and one there.

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

... That's now three. So, here I was. Three men out here, three men out there, three men there. My reserve, three men, me. [laughter] ... They also said I should not sleep, they should sleep in

groups. So, here I was, now what do I do, go up and tap one of the guys on the shoulder and say, "Please sleep with me." ... He might get the wrong idea. [laughter] So, here I was sleeping on the ground with these three guys a little distance away from me. ... I'd taken a .32 Colt automatic along with me. I had a bullet in the chamber. ... I woke up during the middle of the night and I hear a little bit of rustling off the side and I'm all ready to let somebody have it and it was one of the men, one of the three. ... Of all the silly things. "Set up a *reserve*." A reserve of three guys. [laughter] As I say, the silliest damn things happen.

Of course, up in the Philippines, another one of these. I have a rather ridiculous sense of humor. ... I was out on reconnaissance, one man with me with a bucket. I have a carbine, a company officer at that time. We were riding along a concrete road, a two lane concrete road to find out if it had been damaged or disrupted by the Japanese, or by our own people going up there. ... Anyway, we're going along this road, came to a curve in the road. As we were going around the curb, an MP steps out from behind the thing. "Stop." So, we stop. It's trouble. He says, "there's a roadblock up ahead." "Oh?" So, I stand there, and all of the sudden, this roadblock comes out, and it happened to be a tank affair, or should I say, it's a track vehicle, ... but a tank without the turret on. It had one of these retractable 105 mm guns. ... Some captain hops out of this blooming thing, breathing hard, see, and starts saying, "Men, we're going to go through." ... They all pile back into the blooming thing. I say, "You mind if we go along?" "No." So, I get in the car. He, again, had been reading a book or something like that. He said, "We'll give you more fire power." So, he puts one of his men in the Jeep with me, see, in the back seat, with an automatic rifle. Me, I'm up in the front with a carbine, loaded and ready to go. My driver, ready to go, see, and the driver's so scared, he was driving between the tracks. The driver, see? [laughter] ... We go up to the place. I see absolutely nothing. ... The gun, 105, that's coming up every once in a while and shooting off into the bushes. There was a hell of lot of noise and all that sort of thing. We get up behind the thing. The thing stops. Everybody gets out of the thing.[panting noise] "Boy, that was hot." I say, "Hot? Nonsense!" ... The nearest thing, I think it was probably a mortar, hit somewhere in the neighborhood of maybe a quarter of a mile away, see, definitely wasn't aimed at us. It was aimed at somebody, but not us. ... Well, somebody asked me the other day, "Do you ever remember being scared?" Frankly, no. I don't ever remember being scared ...

SSH: You had mentioned movies before we had started the tape. Did you ever see a movie of World War II that you thought was accurate, or fairly accurately portrayed the war?

BT: No. They have been accurate to a degree, but practically every one of them has to be exaggerated ... for effect. For example, ... you never see a squad in the Army where everybody is exactly alike. No. Most of the squads, everybody in the squad is exactly alike. ... That is not good showmanship because you have a movie squad, and you're going to have one character of one type there, and you're going to have another character of another type there, and another character of another type there. Now, I don't care whether in these things, whether they're colored, or whether they're Chinese, or whether they're gay or whether they're straight, or whether they're what. You never see that kind of a mix up in the Army. ... Yet, in every movie you'll see that. Now, as I say, and also, you'll never see in the Army, at least, in my experience, you'll never see a continuous system of crisis as they run into the Army. The Army is nothing

but a long series of sitting and waiting for something to happen. Now, again, my orders in here, indicate that I was, my unit was listed as combat troops. I never saw a live Jap other than a prisoner of war. The only Japs that I saw were dead, and I didn't see many of them. So, an awful lot of this stuff. As I say, I have a peculiar sense of humor. An awful lot of this stuff, see, newspaper stuff, these accounts of Vietnam, Korea, and all this. I know that these things happened. ... They did. They were very, very nasty, but the number of people to whom these things happened were nowhere nearly the tremendously big percentage that they show in the movies.

... World War II, for example. They tell the people terrifically big casualties, see, as if this was something. Hell, all you have to do is read history. All you do is read about the Roman legions. There was this thing they had on television the other day about this one Roman legion, not one Roman legion, three Roman legions were cut off and wiped out. Gone. Now, a legion was a thousand men. Three thousand men. They said they had something like thirty survivors. We never had that high a percentage of casualties. We didn't have the high percentage of casualties that we had in the Civil War, see, but they've exaggerated so darn much. ... I keep on telling people, see, I bore them to death. I say, "Don't believe everything you read in the paper and believe only about half of what you see." ... I say, "Everything you read in a newspaper is written by an individual and everything an individual writes is going to reflect to some degree his opinion," see. ... It is not necessary, or should not be necessarily accepted as strictly unarguable truth.

SSH: When you were crisscrossing the South Pacific, going to the different bases and things that you had, did you have any interaction with any of the other countries' forces like the British or the Australians or French?

BT: Very, very, very little. We had one Australian officer, I believe he was a major, who was attached to I Corps as a liaison man. I knew him to say hello to him and that's about all, because there was very, very little contact, see, between those people and the working groups. In other words, he would be strictly up at headquarters. Now, while I was at headquarters, I'd be at headquarters only for a couple of minutes and then I'd be gone.

SSH: What about any of the natives that inhabited these islands. Did you ever see or have any contact with them?

BT: Oh, yeah. Once in a while we'd see them. The thing that really amazed me while we were on New Guinea, 'cause, see, [laughter] I won't say it's funny, but the darn thing was very, very noticeable. We were riding along this one particular road, see, and we saw this family group, and the girl, ... it's hard to judge their age because they develop so fast, but she was probably somewhere between fifteen and eighteen years old. She was very, very well developed. ... The family group, noticeably, they saw an Army vehicle coming up this way, and very noticeably separated so that the girl was over here on this side of the thing, and the family group was between the girl and us. It was noticeable, but not too obvious.

... We very seldom saw natives. When we got into the Philippines, see, after we had the Japanese pretty well knocked down, we would run into the, shall I say, the natives. ... There I have a little bit of funny stuff. I had a sergeant in the outfit, named Madden, big character, probably in the neighborhood of six-foot-four, 230 or 240 pounds. We put Madden in charge of a group of natives who were doing some work. We had the natives going out and doing pick and shovel work, cleaning out ditches and what have you. We put Madden in charge of this one particular group of men that had been previously ... handled by a sergeant named Baldwin. Baldwin's crew didn't seem to be showing much progress. So, they pulled Baldwin out and put Madden in charge. [laughter] Riding on the road in my Jeep, I go past this road and here's Madden with this gang of guys working and once and a while Madden would get behind one guy and haul off and boot him one, right in the butt. He practically drive them half way across. ... I ask, "What's going on?" "Nothing." "What did you do that for?" "Well, it's the only way to let them understand is that they'd better keep going." ... Baldwin had been handling them as if they were, shall I say, reasonable individuals and what have you. See, Madden was working under the assumption that they had something to do and they damn well better do it or this is going to happen.

Now again, getting to my own stuff, most of my work in engineering has been out on construction where I've been dealing directly with contractors. Well, you've got to see that. That was a present given to me by a contractor on the Jersey Turnpike.

SSH: Oh, wow! A beautiful watch.

BT: Did you read the inscription?

SSH: I'll have Sean read it for the tape.

SH: It says: "The Toughest Bastard on the New Jersey Turnpike."

BT: [laughter] ... Madden was following the thing that I had been doing practically all my life. When somebody gets out of line, see, I belt them. Now, I do not physically belt them, in most cases they're contractors, see, where I belt them is in the pocketbook, see, because if a guy doesn't do what he's supposed to do, see, and I get a little bit irritated about it, see, he suffers ...

SSH: Well, just tell us what your most memorable memory of World War II is for the tape.

BT: ... I think the thing I remember about the stuff is the absolute and complete stupidity of the setup in so many cases where things have been permitted to happen and go on just because somebody has not taken some initiative and done what had to be done under the circumstances. ... There's really nothing that's particularly outstanding, that's just a whole series of episodes. ... There's nothing that I really (understand?).

The one memory that I have which really is outstanding, but it isn't an action memory, but the sight of the old battleships at the harbor up there in Japan when our LST came in there and all these old battleships were there. That really did impress me because if you ever wanted to see

something which looked awfully, awfully ugly, and awfully, awfully business-like, all you had to do is go slowly past the front of a series of these big so-and-sos sitting there with these sixteen inch guns staring you right in the face. ... I remember that. The rest of the stuff, no, not too clear.

SH: You mentioned, at one point the movement once you got to New Guinea the back and forth to (Biak?) and (Lunese Island?) and how that really wasn't too well arranged, either. Could you maybe talk about that a little bit more?

BT: Talk about what?

SH: Well, once you got to New Guinea, you said you had to go back and forth between islands. You began to mention it before we started recording. I thought you could talk about it a little bit on tape, your feelings about the movements you had to go through.

BT: Nothing new. You would just hop in an airplane and you'd go. Hop in an airplane and come back. See, the movement of a lot of the movements I did when I was down at New Guinea working on that thing, were out on the inspection of engineering units that were being prepared for the island hopping operations that come up. ... I was supposed to go down there with a crew of a couple of men and check the outfits to see the condition of their equipment, the condition of their training, the condition of the morale, the whole setup and making necessary recommendations. Some of the recommendations I made were not very good. ... I remember one time I went down to a place and saw that the commanding officer of this battalion had pulled an awful lot of his high ranking non-coms. He pulled them out of their jobs that they were supposed to do and formed a marching band. ... So, he had his marching band practicing for four hours a day, instead of these guys going out and doing what they were supposed to do, getting ready for a war.

SSH: In your activities during World War II, what was something that you did that you were the most proud of?

BT: [laughter] I don't know. There wasn't anything that I did that I was particularly proud of. [laughter] ... No, there was not an important anything. I thought, see, I told you on the phone, I said, "I think my particular tour of duty in the Army was very, very prosaic."

SSH: For the man, Bert Tryon, graduate of 1930, from Rutgers, in this career that you've had, what are you most proud of?

BT: Oh, I'm very proud of having been mixed up in an awful lot of very, very, very important construction projects. The George Washington Bridge, the New Jersey Turnpike, the Garden State Parkway, the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike, the tunnel under the Houston Ship Channel. I was mixed up in a very minor sort of a way with the Chesapeake-Norfolk Tunnel Crossing. In other words, there have been some very, very, very big jobs, see, that have been very necessary to the whatchamacallit, development of an area. ... I think, when I look back, I look at them and say, "Well I got a part of it."

We go riding up the road. [We] go across sections of I95 coming up here, sections I was involved in. ... I can remember looking at some of these things in here. I can remember certain things that happened that were not very good on certain of these structures. ... Nothing that I would go out and start to 'hoop and holler' about.

SSH: Do you have any advice for someone who's getting ready to graduate from Rutgers?

BT: The one piece of advice I think I would give to somebody, and I'm talking now mostly about engineers. Do not be too anxious to get yourself into jobs which are above your capacity. ... Your capacity should be determined by the amount of experience you have had and the situations to which you have been exposed and with which you have had to ... cope. ... I was talking to several people during the course of time when I was interviewing people. We went through a period where everybody who came into the office to talk to me, left the impression that they wanted to start as the vice president. In other words, they didn't want to ... go through the basics and find out what the basics needed. ... What was needed on the part of the people doing the stuff. Because you cannot tell people below you what to do and how to do it unless you have done it yourself. Very simple.

SSH: Well, thank you very much.

BT: Oh, you're very, very welcome. ... Thank you. You've been very, very patient. As I say, I very seldom get people trapped into listening to me. [laughter]

SH: [laughter] We enjoyed it very much, thank you.

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

Reviewed by Randy Mitchell
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 1/2/01
Reviewed by Bert Tryon 7/01