

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN WICKLEIN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

EXETER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

DECEMBER 28, 2015

TRANSCRIPT BY

YAQARAH LETELLIER

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview session with John Wicklein, in Exeter, New Hampshire, on December 28, 2015, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here today.

John Wicklein: You're welcome.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

JW: I was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, on July 20, 1924.

SI: What were your parents' names?

JW: My mother's name was Katherine Wicklein. Her married name was Katherine Wicklein. Her maiden name was Katherine Miller. My father's name was Raymond Wicklein.

SI: Now, starting on your father's side of the family, do you know anything about the family history? How did the family come to the United States?

JW: Yes. My father's family came to the United States in 1732. They came from the south of Germany. The progenitor, who was Johan Georg Wicklein. He had three sons. One of them stayed in Reading, and was the person that I was descended from. The other moved to Pittsburg. A third moved to West Virginia. The man who moved to West Virginia, or that family, changed the name to Wickline, W-I-C-K-L-I-N-E, because it was easier to pronounce.

SI: Your family had been in Reading since the early 1700s.

JW: Yes.

SI: Wow.

JW: They're Pennsylvania German, as you can gather.

SI: Do you have a sense of how the family progressed in that area? Was there a family trade? Were they farmers?

JW: The only part of it I know is that my grandfather, whom I never saw, was a foundryman. He established the Wicklein brass foundry in Reading. I don't know the people before that, what they did, what their jobs were.

SI: Your mother's side of the family, do you know about their family lineage?

JW: Well, my great-grandfather raised my mother. My great-grandfather came from Baden-Baden in Germany in 1879. He had worked in Germany as an ornamental iron worker. So, when he came here--he came to Reading because, I guess, there were friends there. He told my mother that he left Germany because the Prussian soldiers were so vehement and they would push him off the sidewalk if they were walking along.

Then, he knew that he would be drafted into the Prussian Army. He was intending to go into the priesthood. His sister and he lived on a farm. Their parents both died. He just wanted to leave the country. So, he got a ship out of Rotterdam, I think, and came to New York, found an apartment in New York, where his sister got ill of pneumonia and died. He had some contacts in Reading, I guess, and so, he moved there and set up an ornamental iron blacksmith shop, that he had all his life, until he died.

SI: Was he still alive when you were born?

JW: No. No, he wasn't.

SI: Do you happen to know anything about your grandmother on that side?

JW: No, I don't. I'm sorry, I do. My grandmother's name was Eckert. She married a second time. Her husband had died by that time I was born. She lived in Reading with her sister, my great aunt. I was the first grandchild, so, she was very caring for me. So, I got to know her very well.

SI: Was she the only grandparent that you knew?

JW: Yes.

SI: Did she ever pass down any stories of the family to you?

JW: No, she didn't. I don't have good stories.

SI: Do you know how your parents met?

JW: I think I do. My mother was in a choir in the Presbyterian church. The Presbyterian church in Reading had a good basketball team. My father was a very good athlete. He joined the Presbyterian church so he could play with that team, and he did. So, they met somehow through the church.

SI: Do you know anything about your father's early career, what he did for a living?

JW: Yes. There were three Wicklein brothers who became the owners of the foundry. The two elder brothers somehow got into a fight with my father, or my father got into a fight with them. They bought him out for three hundred dollars. The foundry went on, right through, until my oldest uncle died about 1950. He still owned the Wicklein brass foundry. My father worked in a number of brass foundries, becoming a foreman, and then, a foundry superintendent. He spent most of my young life in a foundry in Newark, which is the reason we moved to New Jersey when I was six years old.

SI: Are you the oldest in the family?

JW: Yes. I have a sister Nancy who is three years younger than I.

SI: Did your mother ever work outside of the home?

JW: No, she didn't.

SI: Do you have any idea how far your parents went in their education?

JW: I think they did not finish high school. I shouldn't be certain about my father because he played on the Reading High School football team. He told me about playing against Jim Thorpe from the Carlisle Indian School, and how Jim Thorpe was such a tremendous athlete. In those days, when you were playing football, you weren't stopped until they actually pinned you to the ground. He said that they would get Thorpe underneath a pile and, suddenly, they'd find he was out the other side and running to the goal line. That's a good story he had of that, but I'm not dead-sure that he finished high school.

SI: Was he in the service during the First World War?

JW: No, during the First World War, for some reason, you were given a deferment if you had a baby or if a baby was on the way. They were about to have a baby, so he got deferred from service and went to work on a shipyard in Philadelphia, or just off Philadelphia, called Hog Island. So, he never saw service.

SI: What happened with the baby?

JW: The baby died in childbirth. Then, he told my mother he never wanted to have any more children. So, I didn't come along until 1924. I guess my mother persuaded him that she wanted children, and so, it happened.

SI: You lived in Reading until you were six years old.

JW: Yes.

SI: Do you have any memories of what it was like living in Reading?

JW: Yes, we bought a house right outside of Reading, in a town called West Lawn, and that's the place I moved from. I started first grade there. There was no kindergarten. In the middle of first grade, when I was six, my father got a job as a foundry foreman in Newark. So, he moved us to Roselle, New Jersey, which he could commute from.

SI: Was Roselle similar to Reading?

JW: No, not at all. It was purely residential, suburban residential. It was right next to Elizabeth, New Jersey, that was the big city, which was about the size of Reading at that time. Although, Reading has diminished in size, tremendously since then, because all the knitting mills moved south and took away a lot of the population with them.

SI: You would have been moving just as the Great Depression was coming into full effect. Do you remember its impact on the area?

JW: Yes, 1931. It had an impact on my father because he lost his job. The foundry closed down. He was in very bad shape, looking for a job. Well, I knew because he came home one Friday afternoon, and said that, after six months being out of work, he had gotten a job as a foundry foreman in another Newark foundry. My mother told me later that they were down to their last five dollars. My father had said on Monday he was going to go and apply for welfare, which bothered him a lot, as you can imagine, in those days. So, he didn't have to do that.

SI: Could you see it affecting your larger circle of friends or community?

JW: No, the community was all in bad shape, I think. I think most of the people on the street had jobs. A close boy friend of mine lived two doors up and his father was a lineman with Esso Standard Oil. It was Esso in those days; now, it's Exxon. So, he had a good job all during the Depression. Some others must have had jobs because I didn't hear that story, unless we just didn't hear about it. But I played with all the kids in the neighborhood. It was that kind of neighborhood, that as soon as you were home from school, you were out playing with other kids.

SI: How would you describe the neighborhood in terms of ethnic mix or economically?

JW: It was white, Protestant. We had a Catholic family next door to us. That was unusual for the area. There was a Catholic church in town, so there must have been enough Catholics for them to continue a church. But, it was lower middle-class. We had single-family homes, separate homes. I guess I didn't think much, except being very happy playing with the other kids.

SI: Was church very important to your family growing up?

JW: There was some importance. My father was a Mason. In West Lawn, he taught a Bible class in the Lutheran church there. Of course, Lutherans were very big in Reading. We weren't Quakers, but we were Lutherans. I went to the Lutheran Sunday school. Then, when I came to Roselle, the nearest church was a Methodist church, and so, we joined that, the family.

My father and I would normally go to church on Sunday evenings. They had Sunday services in those days. My mother didn't go to church. If we had Sunday dinner or we came home from Sunday school, she had made the dinner. That's my recollection of that. Well, we were Protestants, but it wasn't a major thing in our lives.

SI: Were you involved in any organized activity centered around the church, such as athletic leagues or youth groups?

JW: Not until I got into high school and met a gang of people who were members of the Presbyterian Church. There were lots of activities there and they were my friends. I took instruction in Presbyterianism and joined that church. One of the real draws for my gang was a

bowling alley that they had in the basement of their recreation hall. The whole gang of us went every Saturday night bowling, and then, out to get sodas, downtown at a soda shop.

SI: Were there any other activities, like Boy Scouts?

JW: Well, I joined the Boy Scouts. My father didn't want me to. He had heard or observed that the Boy Scouts, when it was first set up, before World War I, trained with rifles. He thought that it made them very eligible for being drafted and put into the Army. He just didn't want that at all. Of course, Boy Scouts changed by the time I got into them at a young age. But, he wanted me to get into DeMolay, which is a Masonic offshoot. So, when I was fifteen, I quit the Boy Scouts and went into the DeMolay. I did that until I graduated from Roselle, which was called Abraham Clark High School.

My outside activity was mostly in the high school. My gang was all in the newspaper, and so, I got into the newspaper pretty early on. And I was in the debating club. Then, I became news editor of the paper. My gang was one year ahead of me in school. So, in my senior year, I became editor of *Abraham Clark News*. I had wanted to become a journalist for as long as I can remember, certainly back as long as fourth grade when I was writing stories for the Washington Elementary School paper, *The Cherry Tree Times*. I got interested in news and public affairs because my father and mother always listened to Lowell Thomas at six o'clock at night, from the time I was six years old. At first, I wanted to be a news broadcaster, I think, but, then, I liked writing and just worked into it that way.

SI: This leads into one of my other questions that I often ask about what was happening in the world and the nation. It sounds like you pretty were aware of Franklin D. Roosevelt's programs.

JW: Yes, yes. In fact, we had a mock convention in second grade. My family was Republican. I was the Republican chairman of the party in the second grade. I remember that. So, I started collecting all the buttons and artifacts that go with the campaign. There was a store downtown with Roosevelt buttons, and the other was for [Alf] Landon. I still have some of them.

SI: Your family being Republican, were they anti-Roosevelt?

JW: I didn't hear that. In fact, in 1936, my father voted for Roosevelt. He felt that nothing else would do but putting in somebody else who would try to get us out of the Depression. I don't really know if he went back to voting Republican. I'm not sure about my mother either after that.

SI: Were they involved in supporting local candidates?

JW: No. No, they didn't get involved in anything like that.

SI: Were you able to see any of the New Deal programs in action in your area?

JW: No.

SI: No Works Progress Administration projects?

JW: We knew them, of course. There must have been plenty of people in my town that got into the WPA, but I didn't know about them.

SI: Did any older brothers of your friends go into the Civilian Conservation Corps or anything like that?

JW: No.

SI: Did you follow international news as well?

JW: Well, certainly when it looked [as though] we were getting into the war. I knew about Hitler. I became very avidly interested. In 1939, then I was [in] ninth grade, when the war started. I used to have maps on the wall following the advance of the Germans through France. That I was very much interested in.

SI: Do you remember discussing with your family whether you thought America should get involved in the war?

JW: I don't remember specifically, but I think they both wanted us to stay out of the war. I think that was the overtone of that, that we shouldn't get involved in foreign wars.

SI: Were you aware of things like the German-American *Bund* activity or people supporting Mussolini before the war?

JW: No, not at all.

SI: Tell me a little about your schooling. It sounds like you got into writing and journalism very early. Would you say that you were encouraged by any teachers to go that route?

JW: Well, I had some good teachers. I had an eighth grade teacher who taught English. She taught diagramming of sentences, and that helped me enormously in grammar. I've often thought, "I wish the children today were taught diagramming of sentences." So many children, including my own, didn't know grammar the way I would liked to have had them. Of course, you get a lot from reading, but not entirely. I had a physics professor. I just liked the subject. I didn't feel I was going to go into it. I thought he was a very good teacher and caring about his students. Those were, over the years, my two favorite [teachers].

The man who was the advisor to the school newspaper was a man named Shannon. He also taught English, but he wasn't very good at grammar. [laughter] We all knew that. It was sort of a joke. He was good enough. He did all the things you needed to do, the mechanics of the paper, keep it going. I'll just tell you one thing. A boy stood up in class--I had him in class, also--he said, "Well, now, use 'Washington' in a sentence." Mr. Shannon said that. The boy said, "Well, I guess I can't." He said, "Well, Washington is a verb." [laughter] I stood, like a damn fool, and I said, "Mr. Shannon, I Washington, you Washington, he, she or it Washingtons."

He said, "Oh, no. It wasn't a verb." [laughter] I don't know what got into him. That was the extent of my English teaching in that class.

SI: You went to Abraham Clark all through high school.

JW: Yes.

SI: What year did you graduate?

JW: 1942.

SI: Right as World War II began.

JW: Yes.

SI: Before the war began, before the attack on Pearl Harbor, were you always thinking of a career in journalism? What were you thinking for yourself in the future?

JW: A career in journalism.

SI: Did you think you would go to college?

JW: Yes.

SI: First, what do you remember about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

JW: Well, I was doing math homework. I had a desk up in my room. I always went up there to do homework. I had my radio on, listening to some music, at the time. They broke in about noon, I think, on a Sunday, December 7th. They broke in and said that they had a news bulletin and said that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. I was stunned. I ran downstairs. My mother and father were home, and I said, "You know what? We're at war," and told them the story. That was my recollection of that.

SI: You mentioned that your father did not want you to get involved in the Boy Scouts. Do you think that they were pacifist or they just didn't want you getting personally getting involved in anything military?

JW: I guess they weren't. They weren't pacifist in the religious sense or anything like that. I'm sure they just didn't want to see me go to war.

SI: Did you start talking about what might happen to you in the war at that point?

JW: I didn't. I don't know why I didn't. I followed it very closely, as I said. It was interesting news. So, I followed it and knew everything that was happening.

SI: Did you have to sign up for the draft right away?

JW: Yes, I had to sign up for the draft. When I was seventeen, I had to sign up for the draft. I'll tell you how I got into the Navy. Let's see. When I was seventeen, I was still in high school. I wouldn't have been drafted at seventeen, but there was a local draft board and I went before them and I was classified as a 1-A. That meant as soon as I became eighteen, I would be drafted and probably go into the Army immediately from that. I felt that I didn't want to go into the Army. So, I had a great interest in airplanes.

By the way, I've written a memoir, or I'm writing a memoir. I've just been through all this history in the memoir. I haven't finished it. I started it about four years ago. I should have started it twenty years ago. So, I'll just write it until I die and see what's there. I'm writing it because my children and grandchildren have asked me to talk mainly about my career. And so, I'm doing that. I'm not writing it for publication, but anybody can see it.

Anyway, I became very much interested in aircraft carriers from the time I was--I don't know--seven or eight. I knew about Billy Mitchell trying to convince the Army that you had to have aircraft carriers, that whole story, and followed any stories I could find about it. As a seventeen-year-old, I think it would be great to become a flyer on an aircraft carrier.

When the time came, my parents were saying, "Why don't I just wait it out? Maybe I won't be called up." I said, "I'll be called up immediately." I said, "I'm 1-A and in very good health. I will go into the Army." So, I said to them that I wanted to become a Navy flyer. My mother just thought that was awful because she didn't believe in airplanes at all. We argued about it, and I don't know how long we argued. There was a program in which you joined the Navy. I think it was called the V-1 Program. You joined the Navy and spent a couple semesters in Navy training. It was still in college. Then, went off to a naval air station to be trained as a pilot. That's what I wanted to do.

The point was, until I was eighteen, they had to sign off on my doing something like that. My mother and father just didn't want to sign off on my going through it and becoming a pilot. So, I had a fallback and I said--that might have been a V-5, I don't remember, but there was a V-1 Program that I could've gotten into that I would have stayed two semesters and got into midshipmen's school, and then, spent four months in midshipmen's school and got a commission in the Navy. So, they finally backed down and agreed to sign up for that. So, that's what I did.

SI: Was that V-12?

JW: No.

SI: No, that was different.

JW: Yes. V-12, I think you could stay in school four years.

SI: You had this debate with your parents and were looking at the programs. How long did that process take before you actually went in?

JW: I was allowed to have one year at Rutgers after I signed up, not in the Navy service. Then, I was sent for two semesters to the University of Pennsylvania, in which I took Navy courses, spherical trigonometry, which I never used, and physics, which I wouldn't have taken otherwise, and some other things. I could take other courses at the University of Pennsylvania, too, which would get me credit when I came back out of the service, academic credit. So, that's what I did.

SI: When were you at Rutgers?

JW: One year, 1942 to 1943.

SI: The Navy didn't say you had to take certain courses. You could take whatever you wanted.

JW: Yes

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

JW: Yes. I had a history and public affairs professor, who was a Socialist and very much interested in politics, and so on. I got a good grounding in actual politics, much more than you got in a civics class in high school in those days, because you came out of civics class and you didn't even know that there were politics factions. They were so afraid of saying something politically that would get them in trouble with the local board of education that it wasn't real. This man, whom I respected as a teacher, made it very real to me, the politics of life, and so on. He was about the only one that, I think, stood out at Rutgers.

SI: Do you happen to remember his name?

JW: No, I don't. I'm sorry.

SI: Was it Professor George?

JW: No, Professor George ran for Congress. He never made it, did he?

SI: No.

JW: But, he came into that class and talked a lot about it. Of course, he was a Democrat and he said, "You should all become Democrats." I remember that. [laughter] He was very vehement about it and sort of funny. I wonder what kind of Congressman he would have made, but that was interesting.

SI: Did you live on campus or did you commute?

JW: Yes. Hegeman dorm.

SI: This was the first year of World War II. Rutgers changed a lot during the course of the war. What was it like during that period? Were people leaving all the time?

JW: Yes, yes. There was an ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] corps on campus, too. We saw them in uniform. I kept up with the war and all the things that were happening. Aside from that, I don't know that I knew much about any war or antiwar activities on campus.

SI: Do you remember any social activities or campus life?

JW: Well, we had a lot of social life in the Hegeman dorm. I couldn't afford to join any fraternities. I was pledged to Phi Gam, or I mean, they would've pledged me because I knew the financial manager of the fraternity, because he lived in Roselle and he had been in the school paper. He was several years older than I. He said they would like to have me join, but my family and I could not afford the fifty dollars to join, so, I didn't.

SI: It sounds like there were social activities in Hegeman Hall.

JW: Well, in the dorm, I learned how to play bridge. There was one guy that was a fanatic at bridge at that age. So, we did that and we did that and a lot of other college kid stunts. So, no, I don't recall any other social activities that I got into.

SI: What would be a stunt?

JW: Well, there was one guy who took a lot of ribbing from people. There were fifteen people in the dorm and three levels. Well, they were separate houses. Do you know that setup?

SI: In the quads? Yes.

JW: Is it still that way? A guy named Vinny was the dorm ...

SI: Preceptor?

JW: Preceptor, yes. He was pretty much a champion wrestler. I don't know if he knew about this, but he might have. We took all this guy's furniture. We had single rooms. It was amazing. He took all of the furniture out of this fellow's room and set it up in the john, and, of course, waited around until he came home and found it. Like I said, a lot of kid's stuff. [laughter]

SI: Could you see other ways that the war was affecting Rutgers? The ASTP was on campus, people were leaving for the service. Was there any rationing?

JW: Well, my folks had rationing. No, that was after the war. I was going to talk about the rationing of gasoline. We didn't have a car. But, the food rationing I knew all about because, usually, I went home every other weekend to my family in Roselle. I'd take the Pennsylvania Railroad to Elizabeth, and then, a bus to my house in Roselle.

SI: Do you remember any ways your family tried to cope with the rationing?

JW: I don't know any special way. My father liked steak and that was very hard to get and I guess that cost you a lot of points. She somehow managed the rationing points that we did have steak every once in a while. That's about the only thing I remember exactly.

SI: Was your father's job affected by the war at all?

JW: Yes, well, it meant that he got a better job. He became a foundry superintendent in a foundry in Newark. Then, during the war, he got a job as a foundry superintendent in a large foundry in Detroit that was making some war equipment that you'd make in a foundry. He told me the thing he did there that he was proud of was setting up a production line, which wasn't routine in a foundry in those days. He stayed there until the war ended, and then, I think the whole thing collapsed. He was out of work then and came home.

He wanted to set up a foundry of his own--this was after the war. I had saved up five thousand dollars from my service. He dragooned me into putting that money up with what money he had and setting up a small foundry in Cranford, New Jersey. He was not a businessman, which was unfortunate for him, because the foundry was okay, but he just wasn't able to sell very much and it went bankrupt. He just had odd jobs from then on until he died in--I'd have to look that up. I don't have that in my mind.

SI: Did your mother get involved in any home productivities?

JW: No. She was a housewife and that was her job.

SI: Going back to Rutgers, did you take any journalism courses your first year?

JW: Yes, there was a Journalism School there at that time. I think we got into it in freshman year--yes, I did--and took all the journalism courses I could take. Professor Dr. Merwin was the director of the Journalism School, at that time.

SI: Was Jennings still there?

JW: Yes, he taught me a lot.

SI: What was your take on the Journalism School?

JW: Well, it seemed to get me what I needed. I had no other schools to compare it with. It was interesting because it was probably one of the few schools in Rutgers that had some women in it, because the women who were going to be journalists came over from NJC [New Jersey College for Women] and were in classes there. I think I got a good grounding in journalism. I was certainly sorry to see the Journalism School be discontinued.

SI: Did you do any work with any local papers?

JW: Well, back in high school, I talked to the editor of the *Roselle Spectator*, which was a weekly. I was interested in the high school football, our football team, and I told the editor that I

would like to be the paper's correspondent to all the Roselle football games. He agreed that'd be a good idea. He wouldn't pay me, but I would get stories in the paper.

My only perk was that I told him I have to have a press pass. So, he wrote out a letter saying I was the correspondent. When I would go to Cranford or someplace, I'd show it at the gate. Usually, although there was some reluctance, I could talk my way in. So, I got in free to all the games that season, that year. That was the only thing I did for papers. At Rutgers, seems to me that I was going to get into *The Targum* just by the time I was leaving. I just didn't remember doing any stories for *The Targum*. I remember talking to the editors there and maybe I did a few stories, but I can't tell you exactly about that.

SI: After the spring 1943 semester, you were in the V program down at the University of Pennsylvania. What was a typical day like down there?

JW: Actually, they organized it like a ship. We had to stay on the ship, except from noon on Saturdays until--I don't know--eight o'clock PM, or maybe it was midnight Sundays, and we were in uniform. I lived in a dorm with a quad. It was somewhat like Hegeman, only it had different--in a long dorm--side-by-side entrances. You were in there with maybe twenty-five others on three floors. I guess I just had one roommate. That's right.

As I said, I took those Navy courses. Then, I talked to the editor of *The [Daily] Pennsylvanian*, which was--I guess it was still a daily, a daily paper. I talked him into--I showed him some columns I wrote, humor columns, and asked if I could write a humor column once a week, on Fridays. He bought the idea. So, the whole time I was there, I wrote this humor column. I hesitate to think what it was like because I don't have any copies of it, at this time. But, I got into *The Daily Pennsylvanian*.

SI: Were there other contingents there besides the Navy trainees?

JW: Yes. Naval ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] was there. They stayed in four years. They had some intensive Navy training. So, they got a commission at the end of four years. They didn't go to midshipmen's school.

SI: Was there any interactions with the civilians at the university?

JW: No. Well, I mean in class because we had civilians in class. But my interaction was with my roommate or with other guys in the dorm, or something like that.

SI: I have heard from others who were in similar programs that they would really try to wring people out who could not keep up with the classwork and the tests. Do you remember that being that intense?

JW: Well, I didn't think it was very intense until I got into midshipmen's school. They scared you as you came into that. There were eighteen hundred who started that particular class that would be in there for four months. They said, "There will only be twelve hundred of you when we leave here. That's all who'll graduate." In other words, "We'll flunk six hundred out," and

they did. That was a concern. I wasn't much concerned because I usually had good grades and not much trouble with academics.

SI: What about physical work? Did you have a drill sergeant who would lead you through calisthenics?

JW: That's right. I don't think we did that, but we had a drill once a week because Rutgers being a--what's the title?

SI: A land-grant school.

JW: A land-grant college, sure. Had to have a contingent of soldiers. What was that called?

SI: ROTC?

JW: Was it ROTC? Yes, it might have been.

SI: Yes. The Army ROTC.

JW: Yes. So, the only thing I remember doing that was drilling. I don't remember their putting--well, we had gym that I recall, but it was more the academic gym classes. So, no, I don't recall that that did. At midshipmen's school, we had a tremendous program of gym, and so on.

SI: Where was the midshipmen's school?

JW: Columbia.

SI: You are there for four months. Was there any specialization or was it just general officer training?

JW: Well, it was general there, but when I was about to graduate, they had an assignment officer interview every cadet. I said I wanted to be on a PT boat. I've forgotten the--well, I couldn't have gotten into the aircraft anyway. I had that in mind because the PT boats had only two officers, the captain and the [executive officer]. So, if you were a new ensign, you went and became an executive officer on a PT boat.

The guy just laughed at me. They had run me ragged, down to a hundred and eighteen pounds. He said, "The engines would rattle your kidneys out of you." He said, "None of these people--they have to be a hundred and seventy-five pounds or more to get into a PT boat, because that was the reason, that the engines were so powerful that you couldn't stand it if you weighed less than that." I said, "Well, I want a small ship." He said, "I'll find a good place for you." Very shortly afterwards, he told me that I would get destroyers, and that was fine.

Then, because I had this background of communication work or journalism work, they decided I would be a communications officer. They sent me right out of there. Before I went to my ship, they sent me to Harvard. Harvard had a Navy communications school, sort of like the

midshipmen's school. I was sent there and spent four months there before I was assigned to my ship. I became a communications officer. That was the credit you got for going through that program. I learned all about Navy communications, codes and ciphers, because I'd be handling codes and ciphers on the ship, and all the other means: flag hoist and signaling, and what-have-you.

And they taught me how to type. That was a good thing to learn. I took typing in high school, but I was very poor at it. I barely got out of high school because I could hardly pass the typing course. Every day, we went to a typing course, because they knew we were going to have to do lots and lots and lots of typing for reports or typing up messages that we decoded, and so on. So, I learned to type in the Navy, which is an interesting thing.

SI: They taught you how to use the cipher machines that would decode the five-letter groups.

JW: Yes, yes. The main machine was called the ECM, Electric Cipher Machine. That I got the bare knowledge of at this communication school, because that was top secret and I had to have top secret clearance. I remember my parents telling me that they heard that my neighbors had visits from FBI officers going around asking about me. I got the clearance then to become a communications officer because I saw all top secret communications that came in that had to be decoded when I got to the ship.

SI: You had been commissioned at the end of the program at Columbia.

JW: At Columbia, yes. I was commissioned lieutenant--I'm sorry.

SI: Ensign?

JW: An ensign. I became a lieutenant at the end of the war, JG [junior grade].

SI: Do you remember the month that was? It was in 1944.

JW: Yes, it was October 1944.

SI: That was October, and then, you went to Harvard for four months. So, you would have gotten out to the fleet in January.

JW: February.

SI: What ship were you assigned to?

JW: *Kenneth D. Bailey*. They had to use the *Kenneth D.* because there was another ship called the *Bailey*. It was a new ship and we put it into commission.

SI: You are a plank owner.

JW: Yes, yes.

SI: Tell me a little bit about shaking down the ship and what that process was like.

JW: That process was taking the ship down to Guantanamo Bay and spending, I think it was, six weeks on shakedown working with submarines, and working other ships. Later, our main job was working with carriers to pick up flyers who crashed their aircraft into the sea. Anyway, I went aboard as the assistant communication officer. Then, there was a communications officer. My battle station was at a big tub that had a director that controlled the forty-millimeter guns at the aft part of the ship. That's where I went at general quarters, until I became communications officer, whose station was on the bridge, but that was long after the war ended.

SI: Had you had much gunnery training in midshipmen's school or elsewhere?

JW: [laughter] Not much. I think we spent a week training on--they were called Quad 40s, the ones at Little Creek, Virginia. I was sent to Little Creek, Virginia, for that. I had a crew, the same crew that would be with me on the battle station.

SI: Were there any complications during the shakedown cruise?

JW: No, not at all. I was also sent to firemen school, in which we had to go in cement block houses and put out oil fires. Then, as a finale, they sent us into one of these cement buildings that was on fire from gasoline. We had to put out a gasoline fire with spray nozzles, which I had no idea until I got there that that's the way you would do it. There was a lead man on the hose. Then, the officer stood right behind him. There were about four or five behind us to carry the hoses into the [building].

What it was, the bottom of the building was covered with oil, water but covered with oil. We were on gratings, just like you would be on a ship, metal gratings. Then, the flames would come up from there. You had to go in and put out the flames. That was exciting, but I did it. Everybody did. Of course, they had to.

SI: When you first got on the ship, what was a typical shift like for you?

JW: Well, the first was that I had to stand junior officer of the deck watches at sea and officer of the deck watch at the--I don't like to lose these things, but I do--at the quarterdeck, which was the place where the gangway went over it, right in the middle of the ship. I stood deck watches around the clock, depending on the shift. Then, I had charge of the radio shack.

There was something called the fox schedule, and that was a schedule that went to all ships in the Atlantic. It was encoded. I had to be working in a small cubicle with the ECM machine. I had to break the opening words of the message and that was mostly padding, because they learned that the Japanese would try to break a code if you put the ship's name and call letters. You had to make up words, put on padding on the first part of the message. Then, I went through that, and then, I was able to see if any of those messages were meant for the *Bailey*. When they were meant for the *Bailey*, then, I broke that completely and typed them out and took them to the

Captain. That was the daily routine of the assistant communications officer, the one who did all that. And then, I ran the code shack.

One of the things I tried to do was--one of the seventeen-year-old enlisted men who took down the code got seasick as soon as we weighed anchor. He couldn't stand it. The radio room was very hot from all the radio tubes that were in the different radios. He actually went on watch with a bucket because he knew he was going to throw up. I went to the executive officer about that and I said, "We can't have that. This guy is suffering." The exec. agreed and we put him in for a transfer, but the transfer didn't come through for six months, until he got transferred to a shore station. I felt awful about that.

The men I worked with were very good guys. I liked them. I worked with the first class quartermaster, and I worked with the chief radio man, and the chief signals guy. What I felt, as a twenty-year-old, and then, twenty-one-year-old ensign, that the best I could do is find out all I can or get all the help I could from the chiefs. I think that stood me in good stead because none of the men were up in arms against me. They all called me "Mr. Wick," which they shouldn't have done. They should call me "Mr. Wicklein." Then, my other officer candidates called me "Wick." That's the first time I was called "Wick" for a nickname. I never had a nickname of "Wick" after that, either.

SI: Were most of your fellow officers also graduates of the 120-day school?

JW: Yes, yes. Let's see. Was it four thirty? Yes, four thirties. Yes, they were. There was one man, a lieutenant, a full lieutenant, who had come up through the ranks. The captain and the exec. were Annapolis officers, but that's all the Annapolis people. We were all Reserves, except the captain and the exec.

SI: Do you think there was any friction between the Annapolis men and the Reservists?

JW: No, there didn't seem to be. The exec. was a very low-key guy. Some of us officers--I didn't--teased him about being a trade school guy--a trade school graduate, that was it. But, no, I didn't find any real trouble with it. There were twenty-one officers on the ship. That meant that there were four or five lieutenants, full lieutenants in charge of all the guns. Then, a full lieutenant was the communications officer. The supply officer was a lieutenant, but he had taken a totally different course. He wasn't in Annapolis. He had been in a business school before he got into that job.

In my division that I was running was the medical department. It wouldn't have been on a larger ship, but they had to put it somewhere and they put it in the communications department. We had corpsmen and a doctor who was a lieutenant. I had to sign off on their booklets, in which they worked out different problems and had to write out their solutions to them. I had to sign off, but I said, of course, the doctor had to do that. That was understood.

The doctor, for some reason--well, I know the reason. The Navy was very strict about who was a line officer. I was a line officer or a deck officer. The doctor couldn't be in command of

anybody, not even the men who worked for him. Although, he was in charge of them, but the Navy makes you follow routines. So, I had to sign off for them.

SI: After the shakedown cruise, where were you sent first?

JW: Sent to Brooklyn Navy Yard to get some new air search radar in, because we knew we were going to go to the Pacific eventually. Although, the ship was serving with the--what happened was, we were serving with aircraft carriers who were in the Pacific Fleet. We were in the Pacific Fleet, too. Although, we were serving in the Atlantic. We were going to get those air search radars so when the invasion of Japan came, we would be a radar picket ship. We would be a radar picket ship, which would go between Okinawa and the mainland of Japan to pick up flights of *kamikazes* coming in from the mainland, and pick them up on our air search, and then, signal the other ships in the area to standby for it. Of course, that never came about because the bomb was dropped and that ended the war.

What we were doing before that was going to Guantanamo with an aircraft carrier. Our station was always to the rear and to the right of the carrier, then, there was another destroyer forward of the carrier and to the left. So, if a plane would splat into the ocean, the combat information center on the carrier would, if it was beyond our sight, give us coordinates. We'd just turn the ship out and go out and find the people. If they went in flat into the sea in a fighter plane, they had thirty seconds to get out. They could usually get out. They had a small rubber raft, very accessible, because, sometimes, we'd find pilots sitting in their raft.

Then, there were bigger aircraft--there were bombers. They had three men in it. They had a little more time to get out. But, if a plane went in at an angle, they went right down with the plane; there was no hope for them. I was watching a plane on the aircraft carrier *Princeton*. I was the assistant junior officer of the deck at the time. We looked ahead at the carrier and we saw a huge tower of black smoke go up because, in those days, for the catapults, they used black powder. Somehow, a whole case of black powder blew up under the pilot and the plane and killed the pilot.

Then, another time, a plane came straight in and didn't figure the angle right. Instead of getting up here to get on the flight deck, he smashed into the hangar deck. Luckily, his plane didn't explode, but he was killed. I was thinking that my mother had good ideas [laughter] after I saw what was happening on the carriers. It would've been exciting, but very dangerous. It still is to this day, I'm certain.

SI: How long did the trip from Brooklyn Navy Yard to the Pacific take?

JW: Four days to Guantanamo.

SI: Just to clarify, did you make it out to the Pacific?

JW: No, the atomic bomb hit, and then, they transferred us to the Atlantic Fleet. After the bomb hit, I was in for another year. You've heard about the point system of getting out. I didn't get out until July of 1946.

SI: The pilots that went down that you would rescue, it was just training missions that they were going on.

JW: Yes. I don't know if all times, but these were new carriers and, sometimes, they would bring out a whole squadron, or several squadrons, from Pensacola. Their last flight training was at Pensacola. Then, I think they had to learn to land on an aircraft carrier on a converted merchant ship up in Lake Michigan. Then, they were sent to Pensacola for final training. Then, they were flown out to the carriers at sea and they landed on them. They were new flyers, so, there was likely to be more crashes than experienced pilots, I'm sure. Of course, they had experienced pilots in their squadron as well.

SI: Would your ship actually bring these guys aboard?

JW: Yes, we'd bring them aboard. Then, we'd come alongside the carrier and put over a breeches buoy. That was a buoy that had sort of a pants with legs in them, although you were going across on a line. It was a tradition in the Navy--well, on the destroyers anyways--that if you picked up a flyer and put him across, if you saved a flyer and put him across, they would send back a big container of a hundred pounds of ice cream. We couldn't carry that much ice cream. That was a little bonus for picking up a flyer.

Most of them that were able to, as I say, pancake in were all right and coming aboard. But there was one man that had been injured in the crash and was bleeding when he came aboard. They took him into the ward room and the doctor was there and worked on him. He came around all right. We kept him several days, or I don't remember how long exactly, before we were able to put him across to a carrier.

SI: How many of these trips would you estimate you made between the New York area and Guantanamo?

JW: I made four total, including our shakedown cruise.

SI: Did you get to go into Cuba at all?

JW: Yes. After the war, they had launched a much larger carrier called the *FDR*. I guess the admirals decided they were going to put on a show for Congress because they were afraid the Navy would be cut back drastically. So, they assembled a fleet, an Atlantic fleet--as I told you, we were now in the Atlantic Fleet--out of Guantanamo, sailing out of Guantanamo. They assembled twenty-one destroyers, four anti-aircraft cruisers and three carriers, including the *FDR*. What was your question? I'm sorry.

SI: You were telling me about the *FDR*.

JW: Oh, did I get to Cuba?

SI: Yes.

JW: Well, after that, we sailed up to just off of Virginia and had maneuvers there. Then, they flew a lot of Congressmen out to the *FDR*. They showed them all the good things we were doing as a fleet, I suppose. We all thought that. We didn't check it out, but that's what we thought, we were a demonstration fleet. That was changed then. They reorganized it to be the Eighth Fleet in the Mediterranean. I don't think we had a named fleet there before. I'm not sure.

Anyway, two destroyers, my destroyer and another one, were invited by *FDR* to join us on a ten-day R&R [rest and recuperation] in Havana. So, we sailed into Havana and put up at docks there the three ships. Then, we went ashore on Havana for R&R. Of course, all the men did, too. I got to see the Morro Castle. [laughter] Yes, it was pretty interesting. I got to see the bar that--

SI: Ernest Hemingway?

JW: Yes, that Hemingway lived near and patronized all the time.

SI: Were you off the ship before it went to the Mediterranean?

JW: Yes.

SI: Were you on the ship when Franklin D. Roosevelt died?

JW: No, we were forming up the ship when FDR died. I'm trying to think how it worked. We moved the crew up to Brooklyn from Norfolk. I was in a BOQ [Bachelor Officer Quarters] in Norfolk when FDR died. Yes, that's right.

SI: Was there any reaction around the base or for you personally?

JW: No. I don't think we knew much about Truman at all. We knew that he had taken over as President. I guess, we wondered what kind of a President he would be.

SI: When the war ended on V-J Day, when the bombs were dropped, what was the reaction on the ship? Where were you?

JW: Well, my ship had come back to Brooklyn Navy Yard. I had been standing watch a week before that, I guess, at the quarter deck. I collapsed. The doc happened to be aboard ship. He came up and put a thermometer in my mouth and found out I had a hundred and six temperature. He said, "You're going over to Brooklyn Naval Hospital." He had an ambulance take me to the naval hospital. They found I had a strep throat. That was the early days of penicillin. They gave me shots of penicillin and, overnight, my temperature dropped down to normal. But, then, I had to stay in the hospital for, I guess, about a week.

During that time, the bomb was dropped. This was in August of 1945. There was another man from my ship who had an illness and was in there. He came into my room and said to me, "Well, I guess the war is ended," or, "The war's going to be over." That's what he thought. He was a

lieutenant. I guessed that, too, but, then, they dropped the other one and Japan surrendered. That was the end of the war.

SI: How much longer after V-J Day did you have to stay in the Navy?

JW: A year.

SI: A full year.

JW: Yes.

SI: You were on the same ship the whole time.

JW: Yes, on the same ship. I got out on, I think it was, July 1, 1946.

[TAPE PAUSED]

The very next day, I registered at Rutgers. Because I wanted to get out as soon as possible, I took as many courses as I could that summer. Then, I had another two semesters, a full year. I made up all the courses [from] the time I was away, and then, graduated in '47. I would've graduated in '46.

SI: It sounds like they probably counted all your credits from the University of Pennsylvania.

JW: Yes. Yes, they did.

SI: Did they give you any general credit for being in the Navy?

JW: No. Not that I know of. No.

SI: How had Rutgers changed? What was different about coming back with all the veterans and the GI Bill students?

JW: There was more of a dedication to get through it and get out. I don't think there was much "rah-rah" feeling from the veterans I knew, who were coming back. They stopped having the fraternities during the war, didn't they?

SI: I think they used them more for housing than student life. They were around in some form.

JW: When did they reinstate the fraternities? I'm just trying to think. I don't remember fraternity life at all in the years I came back.

SI: I don't think it totally went away, but it was very much subdued because of the war and the influx of veterans.

JW: Of course, it was growing then. Of course, it was growing to a huge amount over the years.

SI: Did you find being in classroom full of veterans was different from just being with the students that you had been with before?

JW: I don't think so. I do think that there was more of real determination among the students not to fail courses. In other words, take the whole thing more seriously. It certainly was my feeling. I think everybody wanted to get out and get on with a career.

SI: Did you live at Rutgers at that time?

JW: No, I didn't. I lived in a rooming house with a friend of mine who had gone through service in the Army in India. He was a high school friend of mine. I came across town to classes.

SI: Did your roommate also go to Rutgers?

JW: Yes, named Harold Harris. Just died last year.

SI: At that time, were you looking at furthering your education or did you want to go right out and get a job at a newspaper?

JW: What I wanted to do was graduate from Rutgers with my degree. It was an unusual degree. I don't know if you know about it. I haven't really researched it. It was a Litt. B. instead of a BA [bachelors of arts degree]. It was the equivalent of a BA. For journalism students, you were given a Litt. B.

Then, I wanted to go to Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, if I could get in. I applied and I did get in. There was only sixty-five in the graduate school at that time. Now, there are two hundred and twenty in the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. That was a good year, a very good year for me because we put out our own newspaper, and critiqued it, and had lots and lots of reporters come in to talk to us. We had several professors from *The New York Times* coaching us on reporting and teaching. That was a good year. I liked that.

I had met my wife before that. I met her just before I graduated from Rutgers. She was at NJC. Myra Winchester, her name was. Her father was head of the Physics Department at Rutgers. Both of us got into Phi Beta Kappa. There was a Phi Beta Kappa investiture dinner, or something like that, at Rutgers. A friend of mine, another friend who was a high school friend, had been in the same house at NJC with Myra, my wife. She said, "Look out for Myra." She knew she was going to be at this dinner. She said, "Maybe we could have a double date if you want to do that." I saw Myra, but I was too chicken to go and talk to her. My friend Elizabeth Carow set up a double date for us with this fellow Harold Harris. We went on that. Then, I single dated her several days, and, three months later, we were engaged.

She was at Eastman Graduate program at Eastman School of Music in piano. She had to go through that year and I had to go through the Columbia year. We planned to get married right after we finished those years. That's what we did, on campus at Wood Lawn. [Editor's Note: Wood Lawn Mansion was the home of Colonel James Neilson and was given, at his death, to the

Associate Alumnae of New Jersey College for Women. It currently houses the Eagleton Institute of Politics.]

SI: You attended Columbia from 1947 to 1948. What stands out about what they taught in the classroom? Was it more focused on the practice of journalism?

JW: Yes. Much more. Because at the undergraduate level you were really taking a liberal arts program. The journalism things were attached to it. You got a full liberal arts education. But there, it was professional. We went out and covered stories all the time and came back and talked with professors one-on-one, and edited the stories and rewrote them, that kind of thing. Once a week, someone in public life would come in and have a lecture. Then, we would cover the lecture. Eisenhower was President of Columbia at that time. I remember him coming in and talking to us. [Thomas] Dewey came in, a lot of people like that.

It was good practical work, I felt. I thought it really did prepare me for getting a job on a newspaper, which happened. I then got a job on *The Newark Evening News*, mainly because, I think, the professor who had taught in the Rutgers Journalism School liked what I did. He was the feature editor of the old *Newark Evening News*. I talked to him, and then, applied. I got assigned to the Elizabeth office. We had fourteen reporters in the Elizabeth, New Jersey, office, and I was one of them.

SI: That would be unheard of today, to have multiple offices and so many reporters.

JW: Yes.

SI: What was it like being a reporter then? What was your beat, so-to-speak?

JW: My beat, to start with, was the towns of Linden and Rahway, which was down the Pennsylvania main line there. I covered those towns and got into some good stories. The Esso refinery, there was a big explosion there. That was in Linden. I had to go there and cover it.

I went in the main entrance and the PR guy was there. I said I wanted to go out into where all the tanks were. He said, "No, we're allowing nobody to go there." I said, "Well, have there been any deaths or any injuries?" He said, "None that we know of." I just wouldn't take that, and so, I drove around the perimeter, which had a chain-link fence there. I found a hole under the fence. I scrambled under the hole and got to the tank that had exploded that was now laying on its side; it had shot way into the air.

I was talking to a fireman there, who was working on putting it out. It had been pretty much been put out by that time. He said, "Well, there's a dead guy in there." I said, "Oh, is that right?" So, I then went out and went to police headquarters. I asked, "Is there a death?" He said, "Yeah, they just reported a death there." The PR man wanted to cover it up as long as he could and I don't know why. Anyway, I had a story without the PR people.

There were some other good stories there. After that, the Singer Sewing Machine Company went on strike for seven months in Elizabethport, New Jersey. There was a Communist

electrical workers' union there. They called them out on strike. So, I covered that strike for seven months and covered the end of it. I've just been writing about it in my memoir. That had a lot of consequence to the area, so that I had a lot of page one stories out of that. Then, as a consequence, they promoted me to cover the Union County Courthouse, which I did.

SI: Can we talk about the strike for a minute?

JW: Sure.

SI: How long did it last?

JW: Seven months.

SI: Seven months. Was it violent? Did it get violent?

JW: No, it didn't, but they were picketing the whole time.

SI: Obviously, today, journalism can be biased. From what I understand back then, papers had more of a stated slant. Were you being encouraged to portray the strikers in a certain way?

JW: No. I had no instructions whatsoever. *The Newark News* was straight that way, and so was *The New York Times* when I got there. Most newspapers are that way, although there might be some criticism. People misunderstand the difference between the editorial page of the newspaper and columnists in the newspaper, who are allowed to express their opinion. But the reporters are still not expected--so far as I know and I know a good bit about it, because I became a writing coach.

I was the director of a mentoring program for journalists at Ohio State until 1989. Between then and the next ten years, I went all over the country and was a writing coach at thirteen newspapers. The last seven years, in addition to going around the country, I was the writing coach at *The Washington Post*. That was in the '90s, through the '90s. I felt that the reporters that I coached felt the same way I did, that you kept your opinions out of it.

That was a pretty big thing in Columbia Journalism School or any journalism school that tries to inculcate that idea, to keep your own opinions out of it. I found whether the reporters were conservative or liberal, they had the same feeling about it, if they were good reporters. I found a lot of good reporters. I coached three hundred reporters and copy editors altogether in those tours. I know pretty much about the papers across the country.

SI: There was no anti-Communist slant to covering that from any angle.

JW: No, but the people who worked there got a real anti-Communist feeling because the strike went on so long. Six months after that, they reorganized, or organized, and there was a competing non-Communist union of electrical workers. They voted out the Communist union, six months later, and voted in this non-Communist union, which I covered, too.

SI: Then, you are promoted to the county courthouse.

JW: Yes, in Elizabeth, which is the Union County Courthouse. Yes, that was fun. I enjoyed that, covering all sorts of strange trials, and so on.

SI: How long was both the first job, covering Linden and Rahway, and the courthouse job?

JW: I guess the Linden/Rahway was almost two years and the courthouse was a year, with the Singer strike segued in-between there.

SI: Do any trials stand out in your memory?

JW: There were some interesting trials, but no smashing, nationally-interesting trials. I got to know Cliff Case, who was then the Representative for Union County. I got to know him pretty well. I wrote some stories about things he was doing. Then, he became a Senator. He was a good guy. I liked him a lot.

SI: I am just sort of remembering this vaguely. Did he get in trouble with McCarthy around that time?

JW: Cliff Case?

SI: Yes.

JW: I don't remember that.

SI: He and McCarthy were enemies.

JW: They might have had an argument because he would've been very different from McCarthy, that's for sure.

SI: I wondered if that got into the stories at all.

JW: I was at *The New York Times* when McCarthy was in full flight. Actually, I was on the national copy desk at the time of his death. I edited his obit and wrote the headline on the page one story on his death, which was a satisfaction. [laughter]

SI: In-between going to *The New York Times* and the county courthouse job, were there any other assignments?

JW: Yes, I decided that I wanted to get into New York. The whole time, from the time I graduated from Columbia, I kept in touch with Robert Garst. Robert Garst was one of the teachers at Columbia. He was the assistant managing editor at *The New York Times*. About every six months, I would send him some articles that I had written, first from *The Newark Evening News*. Then, I became the news editor for a McGraw-Hill magazine called *Electrical World*. I sent him articles that I wrote for that, too.

Finally, they said they had a job for me. The job was on the obituary desk, which also edited all the cultural copy. That was the reason they asked me about--I had published some short stories. They asked me about--well, I don't know--cultural things when I was interviewed. They decided that I would be spending most of my time editing the Sunday drama section and the daily reviews of all the reviewers: Bosley Crowther, Brooks Atkinson, Olin Downes on music, and so on. So, I spent a year on that. Then, I got moved to the national desk, which was more of my interest because of national news and public affairs. Between the two desks, I spent four years on the desk.

Then, I wanted to become a reporter again. I felt that was really my calling. I finally convinced Clifton Daniel, who was an assistant managing editor who supervised the assignments, that I wanted to be a reporter. He said, "Well, we're covering religion in rather a patsy way." He wanted somebody to be covering religious news as all the things that were happening in religion, like the Civil Rights Movement. A lot of denominations were very active, either for or against integration. He asked me to give him a memo on that and how I would cover the beat if I got into that beat. So, I did, and he liked the ideas that I had. I was transferred to the city staff, but with the commission to do that kind of reporting. There was another religion editor who covered the nuts-and-bolts of religion.

The first thing I did was go to the South and spend six weeks, on and off, writing a five-part series on the church and segregation in the South; what the denominations and churches were doing either to promote segregation, like the Southern Baptist Convention, or working hard against it, like the United Church of Christ. That ran on page one for the whole thing. Then, that sort of got me into political reporting, because the Kennedy election came along and, of course, the religion issue was so important in it that I spent a year, actually, covering the issue in the campaign.

Because I was doing that and traveling all over the country--well, one thing the *Times* had been doing was, in previous years, they had teams go into each section of the country in September to try to analyze what that section would be going for in the election. This year, they decided not to use teams, but take specific reporters to do that. So, they asked me to do the Midwest, spend two weeks in the Midwest and try to get around to different towns and try to figure what was going on. They didn't have me do the ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: During the break, we were just talking about bad weather on the ship. Go ahead with the story ...

JW: Well, we were sailing in the Atlantic outside of Halifax. We ran into a tremendous storm that was going to last a couple of days. We were heading, again, down to Guantanamo to act as plane guards on a new carrier. All the officers and men, or a lot of the men, but every one of the line officers who could stand watches on the bridge, were sick in their bunks, except for the captain, the exec and I. For a day, we alternated standing deck watches on the bridge with nobody else--all the enlisted men, the helmsperson, and all the other people, who were normally

on the bridge, but for twenty-four hours, I stood watches eight on and sixteen hours off with the captain standing watch. The captain and the exec never stood watches; that was normal that they didn't [stand] watches.

It was so bad that when you went out on the flying bridge, people manning the telescopes on each side of the bridge, even though we had radar and you could only stand out there for fifteen minutes--well, I'm taking this back to another time that we were in a bad snowstorm and you wore foul weather gear, but you also wore a face mask. You stand out there for fifteen minutes in the snowstorm and the face mask was totally covered with ice, because the destroyer really is low down in the water. The water would come up over the bow and spray would smash into your face. It would freeze instantly on you.

Anyway, we got out of the storm and people started getting well again, well enough to stand watches. Normally, it took four days traveling at fifteen knots to get down to Guantanamo. That's what we did. You were asking me if we had bad weather. That was the worst I saw. We had what they called a clinometer, which told you how far the ship rolled. It rolled sixty degrees on that trip, I remember. But it always came back.

When you're in your bunk, the bunks lay athwart the ship. So, your head was up here and your feet were down here, and you were going like this. I guess it was lucky it wasn't this way because we would have rolled right out of the bunk. [laughter]

SI: I have heard from so many sailors that a bad storm can be worse than combat.

JW: Well, I never got into combat, so I don't know.

SI: They say you can lose the ship easily in a storm.

JW: Well, of course, you could have lost it. Four destroyers--I guess it was four. [Admiral William] Halsey lost four destroyers during that typhoon in the Pacific because it just turned them right over.

SI: Going back to your career at *The New York Times*, what year did you start there?

JW: I got there in 1954. I had worked at McGraw-Hill for several years. I got there in '54 and left there in December of '62, and covered the religion beat, that kind of coverage, and then, got into political reporting because of it, the whole time I was on it.

What happened was that when I took that job, I wanted to be a political reporter or a general assignment reporter. I told that to Cliff Daniel. I said, "Could we make a deal that I would be in this beat, doing the kind of coverage you wanted, covering it as politics and sociology, covering the religion beat? After that, I'd like to have an assignment as a general assignment reporter on the city staff," which was run by Frank Adams, or a beat, another beat. He said, "We can set that up," because he wanted this and he wanted me to do it. So, he got together with Frank Adams and me, and Frank agreed that he would do that. But, because I was assigned to Cliff Daniel's group of correspondents, Frank Adams got his back up.

Twice, while I was doing this reporting, he called me up to the desk and said that I had been personally--let's see what said--personally disloyal to him. I said, "Well, I don't understand how I could be personally disloyal," because as soon as I'd get back from a trip, almost as soon as I get back from a trip, Daniel had another assignment that he wanted me to go somewhere else and cover something. Of course, those two assignments covering the Midwest and the South, I was under the instructions of the national editor. So, Frank Adams was just an angry man. He had been a wonderful reporter on the city staff, but he never should have been a city editor. Everybody hated him. I think that can be verified. It was true. He had no idea of how to handle men.

I'll tell you an incident about Frank Adams, which will explain part of what I did. Frank required you to come up to him at the end of your shift. You would walk up usually, if you hadn't gone out on assignment, at five o'clock. You had to walk up to him. He would say, "Goodnight, Mr. Wicklein." That was "getting a 'good night.'" One of the reporters had, for some reason, walked out of *The Times* and gone home in Long Island. Frank said, "Where's this reporter?" One of the assistant city editors said, "Well, he just walked out. He didn't come up for a 'good night.'" Frank Adams said, "Get him on the phone." He got the guy on the phone. He said, "I want to see you here as soon as you can get in." This guy came back to the *Times*, and when he came up to Adams, Adams said, "Goodnight," and sent him off. That was the type of man he was.

Well, he reneged on the promise that he had made. I had been working on the Kennedy election for a year or more--that, plus going to the South on that series and some other things. So, I'd put in more than my two years. So, I went up to him. I reminded him of that promise. He said, "As far as I'm concerned, you're going to stay in the religion beat the rest of your life, Mr. Wicklein." I was shocked. I was upset. I was very upset.

So, I went to see Turner Catledge, the managing editor. I told Daniel, but I don't think he wanted to meddle in the city desk. They were at odds all the time anyway. Anyway, I thought, "Well, I'll take a try at the executive editor Catledge." I went in to see him and he said, "Well, I don't think that Mr. Adams has any ideas of making changes in your situation." And that was it. I felt I had to leave *The Times*, which made me sorry, but nonetheless, I just wasn't going to work under Frank Adams, who had welched on his commitment to me.

So, Dick Shepard, who was the assistant--not features, but I guess, television editor--I forget, but he was in the features department and we were friends. I had edited some of his copy when I was on the obit desk. He said the new public television station, WNET, was about to set up a news department and they needed a news director. He knew the--I'm trying to think of the general manager's name. It was Dick. [Editor's Note: Mr. Wicklein is referring to Richard Heffner.] I'm sorry, I don't have it--"is looking for a news director." He said, "Why don't you apply?" And so I did.

So, that's how I got into television. He hired me. The wonderful thing about that: on the Friday that I left *The Times* was the day that *The New York Times* went on strike, the first of the big newspaper strikes in New York. I was on the phone to Dick and he said, "Well, I want you to come in tomorrow and by Monday, I want to set up an hour-and-a-half news program on here." I

thought to myself, "Well, how am I going to do that?" Well, I had a whole lot of friends who were working on newspapers, at *The Herald Tribune*, *The Times* and at *The World Telegram*. I knew a lot of good reporters.

So, I spent Saturday calling up these reporters and asking them if they would be willing to cover their beats by coming on air and reporting them live during this program. They were happy to do that. They were delighted because it kept them in their beats. So, we set up this news program that we called *The World at 13*. We paid them twenty-five dollars a time, for each of these stories. I hired an anchor. Joe Durso covered sports for *The New York Times*, and somebody suggested that Joe was very articulate. I talked to him and hired him. It turned out that Joe knew everything, absolutely everything. Not only sports, but everything else. He was a perfect anchor for the program and I installed him in that.

Then, I asked Harrison Salisbury to come in and anchor the program on Friday and do a commentary, and he did. I asked the chief labor reporter, whose name you wouldn't know, but I can't bring it up right now, to come in and do the alternate Fridays, and do a commentary. So, that went on to the end of the strike, which lasted about three months, I guess. Then, we changed the program, called it *The World at 10* and made it a half-hour program, in which I had the same anchor and some of the same reporters coming in doing it. Also, we also had a feature section, as well, at the end of the program.

I continued that until the news director at Channel 7 News asked me if I'd come over and be the producer of the evening news program, because he said, "I like what you're doing and how you're covering the news for 13." So, I went and did that. That I did for three years. That was interesting, covering daily news for that program.

Then, Fred Friendly had wanted to set up a public television news network, because he had left CBS because CBS wouldn't let him put on a very important Washington hearing because they wanted to rerun some silly thing. So, he quit and he went to the Ford Foundation. There, he had access to some money, and so, he decided--the way this started, he never admitted he wanted to have a news network, but we felt it after I started this thing. He set up what was called *The Public Broadcast Laboratory*. It was to be a ninety minute program. Then, I think the second year, was a one-hour program. It was a magazine program. It gave CBS the idea for *60 Minutes*, I've heard people tell me.

Anyway, we set it up and he hired Lewis Freedman, who had been a producer of many feature things, plays and things like that, to do the cultural side of *The Laboratory* and me to handle the news and public affairs side. That I did. We set that up and I supervised a number of documentaries over the two years that it was on air. That was an interesting job. Of course, as lots of things happen, Fred Friendly got into knock-down-drag-out fights with Jack White, the president of National Educational Television. The second year, we became a part of National Educational Television. They couldn't agree on anything.

Finally, Ford Foundation knew about this and decided, well, they weren't going to fund this *Public Broadcast Laboratory*, this program, for another year. So, they made a deal in which the main producers of *Public Broadcast Laboratory* went over to Public Television, and I was made

Washington bureau chief for Public Television. But, that ran out when the money ran out, because Ford was putting the money into moving these producers over. I think Fred must have put that in the works; there was no good reason why they should do it. But, we produced some good things for the year I was doing that.

What happened next? I don't know who put me up to this, but the Riverside Church was going to change their public [radio] station into a commercial station, focusing on public affairs. Somehow, my name came up and they contacted me. I took the job of general manager of the news station, the commercial station, and vice-president of the station. We put on an evening news program for ninety minutes, and a morning news program. The rest were talk shows on various kinds of subjects that we wanted to cover. Because it had had jazz as an overnight when it was a public station and I liked jazz, I decided I wanted to keep it that way. So, we kept the overnight programming as jazz.

I thought we did good, hard news. I hired some reporters and producers. I thought we had a good time with the radio station. I took a whole-page ad in *The Times* that said this is going to be First Amendment radio. That was the theme of the station, that people were going to say what they wanted to without censorship. We did that for the most part.

I wouldn't even allow the engineers to bleep ordinary words that would have been bleeped on other commercial stations, if it was in the context of the story that people in the field--our people wouldn't do that, but if they were interviewing somebody, we wouldn't do that because I thought it was silly. But the engineers were very scared of that because of the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] regulations. So, I arranged that all the producers who were not engineers, but producers of each of these programs, would take a course and become third-class radio engineers, which they did. So, they signed off on all those programs. Nothing ever happened, but it was interesting.

SI: What year did you start working with the radio station?

JW: '70 to '74. Then, I was offered the position of Dean of the School of Journalism--well, the public communications school at BU [Boston University] and I moved from the radio station. We weren't making much money. The board of trustees wanted to change the station to all jazz, and I certainly wasn't going to work for a station that was all jazz because I was so interested in news and public affairs. The board of deacons of the church felt that this was a contribution to the community, and the community included Harlem.

They wanted to continue it, but the money men, who were on the board of trustees, they had said to me--when I first came there, I said, "Well, I want some kind of commitment because we can't produce a profit in any short length of time. I want a commitment for five years that we would run, basically, a news and public affairs program." They said, "Sure, we'll do that." But, then, they got antsy when their own investments went down the tube or something like that. They said, "Well, we've got to do something." They told me, "We've got to do something to make more money." The thing to do is to turn it to all jazz. Well, there was another all-jazz station in the town and I didn't think that was going to go. As a matter of fact, it didn't go. A year later, they sold the station.

Anyway, then, I was interviewed by a search committee, including John Silber, the President of Boston University, and was hired to run the School of Public Communication, which had a broadcast journalism department, a communications department. That's where I went next and was dean of the school.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JW: All right. That's terrific. I'd like to do that. In the meantime, I will send you a vitae, so you'll have an idea of what is coming next.

SI: Thank you very much. Is there anything you want to add to this record? Do you want to finish the overview or save that for next time?

JW: Save it.

SI: Save it. Okay. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

JW: Well, I like the idea. So, I'm happy to contribute.

SI: Very good. Again, I'm excited to continue. I appreciate your volunteering. Thank you very much.

JW: Good.

SI: Let me conclude.

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

Transcribed by Yaqarah Letellier 3/14/16
Reviewed by Molly Graham 12/10/2017
Reviewed by John Wicklein 7/15/2018