

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK WIDOWSKY

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

MOLLY GRAHAM

and

TYLER CHASE

and

TIMOTHY DEBERRY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSE BRADDELL

Molly Graham: This is an interview with Jack Widowsky. Am I saying that correctly?

Jack Widowsky: Correct.

MG: Today is Tuesday, October 28, 2014. We are at Seven Fernwood Court in East Brunswick, New Jersey.

JW: Correct.

MG: There are three interviewers today. There is me, Molly Graham.

Tyler Chase: I am Tyler Chase.

Timothy DeBerry: And Timothy DeBerry.

MG: Can you tell me where and when you were born?

JW: I was born in Newark, New Jersey, September 10, 1922.

MG: What was growing up in Newark, New Jersey like?

JW: Well, it was very nice. We had a wonderful school system. The high school I graduated from in 1940, was rated one of the best schools in the country. Shortly after, I did not decide to go to college at the time because right after that, the war started. I figured it was time for me to either wait to be drafted or enlist, which I did. I enlisted, and I was sworn into the United States Air Force on October 22, 1942, and called into service on January 30, 1943. Something very interesting, you wouldn't believe this. The first place I went to was basic training. Where? In Atlantic City, New Jersey. The Air Force had taken over all the old hotels down there. It was basic training. I got plenty of splinters from marching on the boardwalk and plenty of sand in my shoes from doing calisthenics on the beach but that's where we started. Should I just continue?

MG: I was going to ask about your parents. They both immigrated here.

JW: Yes.

MG: Tell me a little bit about the family history starting on your father's side.

JW: My father was a baker, and a good one. We always talk about his apple cake. He made an apple cake that was out of this world. It was so good. Once he came here to show Sherryl how to make it. If you had a piece of that, you'd flip. You'd say you never had anything like that before. My mother was just a housewife, but during the war, what she did to keep busy, she went to work as a salesclerk at a bakery shop where my father worked as a baker. My father was not educated, but my mother was out in Michigan when she came here--in Detroit, around that. I think she attended Michigan State University for a while, but then things change. I'm not really that familiar with it from there.

MG: Your father was born in Krakow.

JW: Right.

MG: Do you know anything about his life there?

JW: Nothing. Nothing at all. Never saw anyone. Nothing.

MG: Where is your mother's family from?

JW: Vienna, Austria. The only thing about her parents was she always had a picture on the [inaudible] of her mother, my grandmother. That's the only one that I ever saw. I never met anyone. I never saw anyone. I think, if I remember correctly, her father passed away when she was young and there was nothing there. What my mother did--my mother and father did--she had three brothers with their wives that lived in Austria and they managed to bring them all, all six of them, to this country when the Nazis actually invaded Austria, and made it rough for the people there. It cost them a lot of money and a lot of work. My mother used to go to New York, to the different embassies there and it took time, but she fortunately brought them all over to this country.

Sherryl Kaufman: Daddy, Mommy wanted to add something.

Florence Widowsky: I want you to tell about your mother's three brothers.

JW: That's what I'm telling them. A funny thing, a story that I always tell. My first uncle, her first brother that came here, they had to ensure that they'd have something to do, not just bring them in and go on unemployment. This is just a little funny part of it. He came to live in our apartment. I had to give up my bed. I slept on the couch. That's a little joke I had. I don't know if it's interesting to anyone or anything.

FW: Well, it's a memory.

JW: What?

FW: It's a memory.

JW: Do you have a question or do you just want me to talk?

MG: I was curious what years they all came over.

FW: '39, around there.

JW: '39 the first one came.

SK: When did grandma and grandpa come over?

JW: A number of years after that. Gradually, he managed to bring his wife over. Then they brought the other two in a succeeding year or two. They had their own professions and they made out all right. They're educated people. They did fine.

MG: For the record, can you talk about what was going on in Poland and Austria at that time that made getting out important?

JW: Well, my father came from Poland when he was a young man, so I really don't know anything of why he came here. I know my mother came here when she was a young girl. I think she went to an aunt in Seattle, Washington. Stayed there. Then she went to Detroit, stayed with another aunt. Then she came to this area here. I guess they met and got married.

SK: So you don't know why Grandma (Hilda?) left? Do you know why she left?

JW: No. I don't know.

SK: Was there anti-Semitism then?

JW: No, she was a young girl. She was a young girl then.

SK: That was probably in the teens.

JW: There must have been some there. It wasn't just when the Nazis came in, they were thrown there, but I never heard anything about that.

MG: About how old were they when your parents came over?

JW: Beg your pardon?

MG: About how old were they?

JW: I really don't know. They were young. Florence, you wouldn't know any--?

FW: No Jack. I'm listening.

SK: I'm guessing it was probably in the teens, because my father's older brother was born in 1920. They were probably married around 1918. If they were in their, let's say, early twenties then, they probably came I would guess between maybe 1910 and 1915. I would guess. They were old enough to come over alone. So they were probably teenagers, right? Does that make sense?

JW: I have to say one thing about my father when he worked in the bakery. We always had food on the table, even during the Depression because he always had a job. I know my mother used to give neighbors bread and food that weren't able to do things--some friends that lived in the same apartment building there.

MG: Do you know how your parents met?

FW: Well, an introduction, friends. Somebody must have introduced them.

SK: I think that was a common thing then.

FW: Possibly another baker.

JW: My brother would've remembered. Harold would have remembered.

MG: Did you live near the bakery where your father worked?

JW: Yes.

MG: How close?

JW: A block and a half, walking distance.

MG: I'm curious about the bakery. What did it smell like? What kind of foods would you get there?

JW: Well, it was a regular bakery. I always had a fresh roll for breakfast, because the bakers were allowed to get a certain amount. He worked during the night. He was home before I got up and I went to school. I always had a nice fresh roll for breakfast with cream cheese. I like cream cheese.

MG: Did he cook any Polish pastries?

JW: No, he didn't do any cooking. As a matter of fact, he [inaudible] my mother--I don't know where she learned, but she was a very, very good cook. Right, Florence?

FW: Right.

SK: Potato soup.

JW: After my mother passed away, and my father was alone, he picked up certain things that she used to make and cooked it. It was very good. Like stuffed cabbage. You like stuffed cabbage?

MG: I will eat anything.

JW: Out of this world. He just did it to occupy his time.

MG: You were pretty close in age to your other brother.

JW: Two years difference, yes.

MG: What would you do for fun, you and your brother?

JW: Well, the thing is, right where we lived there was a playground from the grammar school. I used to go there and play softball a lot. I'd go to the gym and play basketball. My brother had his friends. When he got older, and he had his friends and a couple of them had cars in the summertime, and they went to a pool swimming or a lake or something, my brother always made them take me along. They bought my lunch for me, too.

TD: Did you ever work in the bakery when you were young?

JW: No.

MG: You did not have to help out?

JW: No, it wasn't his bakery. He worked for someone. Well, I'll go back further than that. Years ago, before we came to Newark, we lived in Liberty, New York. He owned a bakery with a partner when I was about three years old. That's up in Liberty, New York. He supplied all the

hotels, all those hotels with stuff there. I don't remember anything about that, but then I think he had trouble with his partner and they just sold out. Then we moved to Lynbrook, Long Island. He had another bakery there. He also had a partner and the same thing happened. There were problems between them and they sold out. That's when we moved to Newark. That was about 1927, because that's about when I was five years old [and] I started kindergarten in Hawthorne Avenue School. The school is still there.

MG: Do you ever go back to Newark?

JW: Yes.

MG: How has it changed?

JW: Bad. As a matter of fact, when we got married, we had an apartment in Newark. Then afterwards, we bought a house in Hillside, which is next town, small house. We moved out of there. What else? Then we moved from there, and bought a house in Union, sold that house in Hillside. I went back there a couple years ago, and it was an old small house, but my father-in-law--Florence's father was a carpenter and he fixed it up. He modernized the kitchen, finished the basement, everything, made it really livable. One day, I rode by there and the place was burned down. I got sick to my stomach, because that's where we raised Sherryl and her sister was born and raised.

MG: What kind of a city was it during the '30s?

JW: Newark was the largest city in New Jersey. It was a very developed city, very industrialized and commercialized. In downtown, there were a lot of large office buildings.

FW: Department stores.

JW: What?

FW: Department stores.

JW: Department stores.

FW: Bamberger's.

JW: Bamberger's. You know Bamberger's?

SK: The predecessor of Macy's.

JW: Macy's bought them.

FW: Used to be Bamberger's. It was a huge department store.

JW: Hahne's, which is a store.

FW: Kresge's.

JW: What's the other one?

FW: Kresge's.

SK: Ohrbach's.

JW: Ohrbach's.

FW: Klein's.

JW: Big, big department stores, like you see in New York City today. It's a very, very, large town and very progressive.

MG: Tell me about the neighborhood where you lived. What was sort of the ethnic makeup? Were there other Polish families there?

JW: No, it wasn't Polish. It was mostly Jewish families in the area. That neighborhood built up so. That was the last area in Newark that built up. That's when they built Weequahic High School, because they needed another high school in town. That was the newest one in town. Because if not, we had a long four or five miles to go to high school. Wasn't so good. But I'll tell you one thing. The high school that I went to was about a mile away. I walked back and forth every single day. No school buses. [laughter] I still say they spend an awful lot on school buses and that, that should be spent for education. Most of the people, the children that went to the school, were local. Some of them, older boys being police boys, crossing guards, which I was one of. You had a corner to help. There were no busses. They walked to school, too. That's what it was years ago. I had a big metal badge on my left arm.

MG: Did that make you feel important?

JW: No, not really. I'm just saying. It's joking. The only thing that I feel that I did important--I was honored and privileged to be part of the atomic bomb.

MG: Yes, and we are really looking forward to talking about that. You said there was always food on the table, but were you aware of or impacted in other ways by the Great Depression?

JW: Not really. Only in seeing that people were not being fed. That's why my mother helped these people out, because we had [food] and they were willing to share. I'll tell you another thing that you might not believe. My father was part of the union. He had a permanent job. He worked six days a week in his bake shop. That was a permanent job. Off one day. But there were bakers that didn't have a job. So, these union men, what they did, they gave up one of their other days to the fellows that didn't work. Absolutely unheard of in this day. In other words, if you weren't working, you worked this place one day, here, all of that, but at least you worked. Unheard of that they gave up [a shift]. You never heard of anything like that.

MG: There was a nice sense of community.

JW: Yes. That's it. You hit the nail right on the head there.

MG: Can you talk to me about school and your favorite subjects and teachers?

JW: Well, I always liked history. That was the number one thing. I think math came in after that. I liked math too, because it's always solving a problem. I liked trigonometry the best. You fellows take trigonometry? No? Yes, we just did problem that [inaudible] you had to [inaudible] and all of a sudden, you came out equalizing that.

MG: There was a formula.

JW: Yes. Sine, cosine, tangent, cotangent. You must know.

MG: It has been a long time.

JW: A little longer for me. [laughter]

MG: [laughter] Are there any teachers that stand out to you?

JW: Yes. My French teacher and I can't remember--

FW: (Lowenstein?), Jack?

JW: (Lowenstein?), that's right. Doc (Lowenstein?). We called him Doc Lowenstein. I don't know why. That's what we called him.

MG: Maybe he was a doctor.

JW: I think he was a doctor of languages. That's right. That's what it probably was. We didn't call him Mr. Doc. [laughter]

MG: Were you involved in any extracurricular activities?

JW: Well, I played on the basketball team. I played a little bit of baseball, not too much. I couldn't hit a baseball too good. [For] recreation, we played a lot of softball. In those years, I don't think you fellows, or you would remember, the softball is about nine inches. We had a bigger one like this. Did you ever see those?

TC: Yes.

JW: With the seam on it? Oh, you did? They still have that? Really?

TC: Yes. Well, I play softball a lot at school, intramurals.

JW: I didn't know they had those anymore.

TC: Yes. They're the size of your hands.

JW: I thought they just had the regular [size]. This was a bigger one with the seams.

MG: Maybe they are bringing it back.

JW: There wasn't much else to do around in those years. Go to the movies every Saturday afternoon to see the serials, *Tarzan*, and all the rest of them. They had the serials. Do they still have those? Those serials in the movies?

TC: No.

JW: Well, every Saturday afternoon had a little--we had a theater right near us, too.

MG: Before the movies would play, was there any sort of updates about what was going on in the world and the war in Europe?

JW: We had a radio. We used to listen to the radio. There wasn't any television there. I think I followed it. I was interested in that. Because it was part of history. I had relatives there, too. You have more of an interest there.

MG: Do you remember when your household got a radio for the first time?

JW: No.

MG: Do you remember which shows you listened to on the radio?

JW: *Amos and Andy*.

FW: *The Shadow*.

JW: *The Shadow*. "The Shadow knows." Remember that? Did you ever hear that? You ever hear of *The Shadow*, that program? "The Shadow knows." Real deep voice. Let's see. What else was there?

FW: *The Lone Ranger*?

JW: *The Lone Ranger*. Sure.

FW: Was that on the radio?

JW: I think they were, yes. The Lone Ranger and Tonto, and that same type. I can't remember the names.

MG: What were your plans for after high school?

JW: Well, what I thought I would do is one of my uncles, my mother's brother, that came here, opened a candy factory. I liked the idea about getting involved in that, which I did in later years. That's about all that I thought. I never gave a thought of going to college. Why? I don't know. I never wanted to go after I got out of the service, which I could have, because of the G.I. Bill you could have gone free. Training as a navigator, I went to so much school that I had it to the top of my head. Even overseas, they constantly were retraining us on different things. Then, I met Florence. That was my best choice. [laughter]

MG: You graduated from high school in 1940.

JW: Correct.

MG: How did you spend your first year out of high school?

JW: First year out of high school, I went to work for Westinghouse, the lamp division. They were calibrating--not lamps. I'm sorry. Meter. They were making meters, and I was working on the calibration of the meters. That I did until I went in the service, because I can still remember myself when--I had enlisted. I waited to be called up. I can just remember and see myself walking, going into work that day, going to my job, walking down the steps to the office to tell them I have to leave. They compensated us with something, too. What, I don't remember, but for a certain amount of time.

MG: Was this while you were in the service?

JW: No, for going in. For leaving, they compensate us for some amount of money. I don't remember. It's just something that sticks in my mind.

MG: Were you walking to work?

JW: No. Took a trolley car. I remember the number of it, too.

MG: How much did it cost?

JW: A nickel?

FW: What? I didn't hear the question.

JW: Trolley cars. How much was it?

SK: How much did it cost?

FW: It was five cents.

JW: Five cents. I was quite a distance. It was quite a distance.

MG: What number trolley was it?

JW: Number 27, Mount Prospect. I don't remember a lot of things. [laughter] Is this being recorded?

MG: It is, but I can pause it, if you like.

JW: No. What do you do? Just get it--?

SK: Daddy, you want some water?

JW: No.

MG: I am okay. Thank you. Do you have questions about family history?

TC: Actually, yes. What was your relationship like with your older brother?

JW: Very good. We always got along. As a matter of fact, we always got along until the day he passed away. How long ago? Three years ago, Florence?

SK: No. More like eight years ago.

JW: I even said to my wife the other day, "I miss Harold."

SK: I always remember them being very close as grownups.

MG: Well, that's good. Do you remember where you were when you found out about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

JW: No, I really don't. I'm trying to think of where, but I don't know where.

MG: That is okay. Can you tell me more about how you spent the year before you enlisted? What was going on in the world? What was going on in your life?

JW: Well, there was trouble in Europe for years. I knew eventually that I have to go. [If] I waited, I would have been drafted, but I wanted to go into the Air Force, become part of the Air Force, which I did. Europe was in a turmoil, an absolute turmoil, because there was war going on. Although, in that time, we weren't participating yet. You mentioned Pearl Harbor. I was in Pearl Harbor. Not at the time [of the attack].

MG: You deployed out of Pearl Harbor. It was a stop along the way, right?

JW: Yes. Well, as a matter of fact, I was in Honolulu six times.

MG: Not a bad place to be six times.

JW: Well, five of the times, we just flew, landed, refueled, and took off. Once, I stayed there for a day, and stayed over. I still say I'm still sorry that I didn't stay longer, because that's paradise. Have you ever been there? It's paradise there--the weather and so forth.

MG: It is on my bucket list.

JW: Yes? Okay.

MG: It is.

JW: Well, I have a bucket list that I was never able to do. I flew over Japan, but I always wanted to go there, which I didn't. I always wanted to go to Australia. Why? I don't know, but it's still in the back of my head. Did you ever go to Japan, any of you?

MG: No. I have been to Europe a couple times.

JW: No, I've never been out that way. That's what I say, people say they always--that way, that way, that way. You say you've been to Europe. People coming from Europe--say from England to the United States--I think now is about a five-hour trip. People complain to me they have jetlag. I laugh at them. Do you know how many hours we were in the airplane sometimes? Fourteen, fifteen hours at a time. There wasn't a hostess serving us champagne. [laughter]

MG: There wasn't even a bathroom.

JW: You want me to tell you how?

MG: Do I need to turn this off? [laughter]

JW: No. I'll tell you exactly what it was. For the men, they had what they called a pitot tube. Just went right out into the air. Then they had a little pot [inaudible] the pot. [laughter]

MG: Tell us more about being sworn in and why you chose the Air Force.

JW: I just had a desire. I wanted to fly.

MG: Had you ever flown before that?

JW: I had never flown before. Never had the opportunity. I never did, but we had Newark Airport right by us and I remember when I was in school when they first built that. I guess it was my English class. My teacher of that class came around, she gave us an assignment. She wanted us to write an article about the building of Newark Airport. I won't tell you what I did. Should I?

MG: Yes.

JW: I refused. So she took a ruler cracked me across the knuckles.

MG: How come you refused?

JW: You know what I did? I took the ruler back and hit her--

MG: You must have been in big trouble.

JW: No. It was just forgotten.

MG: How come you did not want to write that paper?

JW: I don't know. I just didn't feel that I wanted to do it. Sometimes you have a desire to do something and sometimes you have a desire not to do something. I don't know. Maybe I didn't like the way it was presented to me. So, that's what happened.

MG: Were you a troublemaker in other ways?

JW: No, no. I really wasn't, honestly. I swear I wasn't.

MG: I believe you.

JW: I was really a good boy. I respected everybody because that's the way I was brought up.

MG: Good. Where did you go to enlist? Do you remember where you signed up?

JW: The post office in Newark, they had an Army recruiting station there--an Air Force recruiting station there.

MG: Did you sign up with any other guys?

JW: No. As a matter of fact, I'll go a little back before that. Before I enlisted in the Army Air Force, I wanted to enlist in the navy and become a navy pilot. I went down to the same recruiting station. They had a Navy recruiting station in Newark--this is right after the war started. I took a test. They [said], "Okay. You'll hear from us." They sent me to New York City to a recruiting station there. I remember I was sitting there and there were three offices with three officers in each one. I think it started with ensign or lieutenant, and then a commander. You had to be interviewed by each one. I was actually interviewed by the first one, and the second one, and then I went in the third one, he was interviewing me. Then, how he put it, I really can't recall. He turned me down. I remember I was heartbroken. "Why?" "We don't have to tell you. Out you go." I was very, very disappointed right after that. Then, I went to the Army.

MG: What do you think the reasons were?

JW: I think one of the reasons was that I wasn't a college graduate.

MG: What did you do next?

JW: Then I went to the Air Force, and I enlisted there. Thank God they took me.

MG: Did you have a different experience in signing up?

JW: No. One more thing, which I say--I said I didn't go to college, which actually isn't true. I did go to the University of Vermont because from the time when I was called up, they had a tremendous backlog of people waiting and they decided--when I say "they," the Air Force decided they didn't want them hanging around. They wanted them in the service. I went to basic training. Then they established what they called a college training detachment all over the country. I was sent to Burlington, Vermont, University of Vermont. I went to school just as a freshman for six months.

MG: What was that experience like?

JW: I loved it there. It was beautiful up there. I went there, it was in January. Snow over your head, but you didn't mind the cold because it was a dry cold.

MG: What classes were you taking at the University of Vermont?

JW: Regular courses as a freshman. They did that just to keep tabs on everyone. They had so many.

MG: What I think will be interesting in this interview, is to kind of trace all the different coincidences or paths that brought you to where you were, because there are so many other assignments you could have been given.

JW: Yes. Well, I'll continue with the story from there. From there, I went to Nashville, Tennessee, where they had a classifications center, where they classified you as to send you to pilot, navigation, or bombardier school. Of course, they ask, "What was your preference?" I said, "Navigator." But of course--what they did, they sent me to pilot training. I went to pre-flight in Montgomery, Alabama, where they try to teach you how to become an officer and a

gentleman. Then, I went to Decatur, Alabama to Primary Flying School, and I washed out. [laughter] Thank god they sent me to navigation school in Monroe, Louisiana, where I went through, passed, became an aerial navigator and a second lieutenant.

MG: Is that Selman Army Airfield?

JW: Yes, Selman.

MG: Yes. Can you talk a little bit about that place?

JW: Oh, that was a wonderful experience. I loved it there. We were treated--Selman Field was a private--it wasn't run by the army. It was actually a private field. The best part of it was a dining room. We sat six or eight at a table with white tablecloths, waited on, the best food you could ever want. Not like Army chow. It was nice there. One more thing about that--I want to go back up to pilot-- not Selman Field--Decatur, Alabama. One day, I was sitting on the flight line waiting my turn to get up. A friend of mine was sitting next to me. We were talking, waiting our turn. He was smoking a cigarette. I had never, never remembered, snatching a cigarette when I was [inaudible] when I was a kid. But he said, "Here. Try it." So, I tried it. I took the cigarette and I could just see myself--I inhaled and I got dizzy. I took the cigarette and threw it away. I said, "I'm next up." But strangely enough, I started smoking. I smoked up until about twenty-five years ago. One day I was riding along [in] my car, I took the cigarette and threw it out the window.

SK: Dad, it was long before that. It was in the '60s. I remember when you stopped smoking.

JW: Yes. Well, maybe more. But the funny part of it is--what I did for a living for many, many years, which we'll get into, I sold cigarettes as a wholesaler. People said to me, "You don't smoke. You hate cigarettes. You're trying to stop, but you're selling cigarettes." Well, my answer was, "If I didn't sell them, someone else would sell them." That's part of making a living. All right. Continue. I got off the track a little.

MG: I am wondering if you could just describe yourself at the time you enlisted.

JW: Well, I don't think I was much different. I might have been a little too heavy, because of good food.

SK: Do you want to see a picture of him in the Army?

MG: I am wondering if you can describe that for the audio.

SK: That's the book we had made for your ninetieth birthday party.

JW: Yes.

SK: Remember (Mickey?) put it together this book?

JW: Yes.

SK: You might want to take a look at this.

JW: Yes. I forgot about that.

FW: We have one.

JW: Yes.

SK: Here's a picture in his uniform.

MG: So handsome. [laughter]

JW: [laughter] Let's see if there's anything good in here to show you. [inaudible] That's me. That's my granddaughter. She's the one in college. That's my grandson. That's my daughter. That's his girlfriend. That's our great-granddaughter. There's my grandson and his wife, same baby. They're both doctors. See if I got me here.

MG: I see you here.

JW: Yes. See Luke. All this is later. That's my daughter with a baby. That's Amanda, the one who's getting married. The other granddaughter's parents. That's Sherryl's older son. He's the one that's out in California. That's Alex's wife and her father. That's (Mickey's?) sister. See if we could find one of me. (Mickey?) and Sherryl, they made sweatshirts [for] everyone. That's me [inaudible]. See it there? That's my niece, Florence's sister's daughter. That's the daughter-in-law of my oldest and best friends. Here's the whole [family].

MG: Is that everybody?

JW: That's everybody here. He's down in Virginia. He's a computer whiz. That's Alex's grandmother there and me again. That's it I guess.

MG: Yes, that's lovely.

JW: You want a look through the book?

TD: Thank you.

MG: I want to talk more about training. Did you first go to Atlantic City?

JW: That was the first place.

MG: Tell me about that adjustment, being away from home, the schedule, and things like that.

JW: Well, of course, we were regimented there. I wasn't used to anyone really telling me what to do all the time, because I was brought up properly. My parents brought me up properly and I knew what I had to do with the time to do it. They were a little tough on us, just to get us into the swing of things. One thing that I believe--this is a personal opinion--I think every boy and girl in this country should be in the service for one year. You know why? They will learn how to depend on each other. That's what they were trying to do the whole time, but I don't think we'll ever see it here. [laughter]

MG: Talk to us a little bit about the men you were training with? Were they from all over the country?

JW: Well, I was in a lot of places all over the country. Well, we saw Atlantic City, Vermont, Nashville, Decatur, Alabama, Monroe, Louisiana, Fairmont, Nebraska. That's where our crew was put together, the 393rd Squadron. That crew, we were originally eleven and I'll give you the reason why at the end it was nine. We were eleven members, the crew, and we stayed together from that day on until we were discharged, which was absolutely fantastic. I'll give you the reason why they were eleven and then to nine, because if you're familiar with a B-29, in the back there were two gun turrets. Those were eliminated, so we didn't need [those] ones to man. Oh, and I forgot one place. Fort Myers, Florida for aerial gunnery school because originally we started B-17s. The navigator manned the top gun turret. The navigator and the radio operator. So I went to Fort Myers, Florida. Then, where'd we go? Then going overseas, we went to Sacramento, California. That was the shipping port there. Honolulu, Kwajalein, Johnston Island, two little islands, and then to Tinian and the Marianas. Now, Tinian was the smallest of the Marianas. It was about twelve by four miles wide. They had four parallel, eighty-five--the configuration of the island made it feasible for them to put four 8500-foot runways. It was the busiest Air Force base in the world. You go to that. Now if you could imagine--it was all B-29s then. Their tail was higher than this here. When a mission was going out--all around these four strips were taxiing strips. You see these planes all. You look up and all you see are these big tails. Unbelievable. It's a sight that you'd never see again.

MG: When did you first hear about the Manhattan Project?

JW: I don't know when. All I knew was Silverplate. [Editor's Note: Operation Silverplate was the research and development of modified B-29s that could carry an atomic bomb.] That was a code word.

MG: Tell us about that.

JW: I could get anything. When I first heard about Silverplate is when we were in Fairmount, Nebraska as a crew, the 393rd Squadron. We were ready to go overseas to Europe to the Eighth Air Force. One day, our squadron had received orders to go to Wendover, Utah. We didn't know why, what, anything. We got there. There were other people there. We were brought in a big room. That's when Colonel [Paul] Tibbets came in and lectured us, and told us the whole story. We're going to do something that's going to end the war, which we did.

MG: What was your assignment before this briefing? Where were you thinking you would be sent?

JW: Truthfully, if I went to Europe, I don't think I would've gotten back. Too many planes were shot down. You see, I watch it there. Too many. That's my feeling a long time. As far as later on is concerned, we never--and I don't think any of us--ever encountered any flak in any of our missions or any Zeroes on any missions. The whole squadron came through unscathed, except me. We were in an airplane accident that I'll tell you about later, during training.

MG: In your training before you went overseas, were you dropping those pumpkin dummy bombs?

JW: They were dropping pumpkin bombs. One of the main places was in Inyokern, California. It was a Navy base there. I'll tell you about that. We had to stay over a few days. They treated us like kings; waited on at the tables. We were dropping dummy pumpkin bombs for ballistic checks. I don't know how many missions. I might as well get into where I was injured. One day, we were on a trip. It was a long range navigation trip from Wendover to LA [Los Angeles], to San Francisco, back to Los Angeles. It was a night mission. Naturally, one of the things we did was shoot the stars. Everyone uses the wrong terminology. They say we used the sextant. A sextant was not used in the air. It was an octant. The difference is with a sextant, if you're in a ship, you can see the horizon. You had to measure the horizon with the angle of the star or planet. Of course, at night you couldn't see the horizon. In the octant, there was a bubble. There was an artificial bubble that simulated the horizon and that's how we shot the stars. So this one day I was shooting the stars. I don't know if you're familiar with--there's a tunnel from the front to the back. Are you familiar with it? Right in the front of that tunnel was a little dome where I got up, looked through that tunnel, and shot the stars. Well, I finished doing what I had to do, laid down my octant in the tunnel, went back to my desk, started working it out, and all of a sudden our co-pilot said, "Hey Jack, come on up here. There's Alcatraz down there. It's all lit up and everything." So, I got up. I kneeled between the pilot--I remember this--I kneeled between the pilot and co-pilot, and saw the lights. The next thing I remembered, our co-pilot and engineer were sitting on me with an oxygen mask on my face. I don't know how much time expired. What happened [was] where I was sitting, there was a gun turret here. I always sat with my legs out there, but that gun turret was taken away and a cover was put there, was either soldered or bolted. We were at 32,000 feet under pressurized--we didn't have to use oxygen masks. All the pressure inside was much greater than it was outside. That cover blew. If I was sitting there, I would have [been] sucked out without a parachute. Luckily, I was up front. What happened, there's a tremendous change of pressure. My octant came flying by, hit me in the head, and knocked me out. That's why they were sitting--and lack of oxygen too. A funny thing. Right behind my position was a warmer for our dinners, because we were out so many hours. That day we happened to have spaghetti and meatballs. That was sucked out. It landed on a car in Oakland, California. There was an article in the newspaper, which I still have, "What's the Air Force dropping meatballs?" [laughter] I was actually the only one that was ever injured. I have two scars there. So, the pilot--we went down. They landed some place in San Francisco under extreme difficulty because the air was shooting up. Right across, where this opening was, was the radio operator. [inaudible] It was Lloyd Reeder. "Hold on. Hold on." They landed, and they took me to the hospital, and stitched me up. We spent a day, and then went back to where the plane was. They put a plywood cover on, and we flew back under low altitude, where we didn't have to pressurize.

MG: Did flying change for you after that?

JW: No, not really.

MG: When did that happen? Was that after the war?

JW: No. While we [were] still in training, while we were still at Wendover.

MG: Can you tell us again about what Colonel Tibbets was telling you?

JW: Well, first of all, there was a big sign that was put up. "All you hear here, stays here." They told us, "You don't discuss anything with anybody in any other section. You don't tell your wives, your girlfriend anything you're doing. Even if you're flying on a practice mission from Wendover to Los Angeles and back, or in Inyokern, California. Nothing." They had a lot of Secret Service people snooping on us, following us. They caught a couple guys in town. They ended up in Alaska.

TC: Wow.

JW: They're saying not bad, but just a little bit. They ended up in Alaska, a couple fellows. Everyone knew what we had to do, because we realized--at least I did--I know if we were dropping these big monstrous bombs, single bombs--because it was a special bomb bay, too. It was just one hook in the middle, not rows of hooks to release the bomb. So, we let well enough alone. [Did] what we were supposed to do.

SK: Dad, do you want some water? Water?

JW: Yes, a little bit.

MG: We can take a little break if you would like.

JW: You got seltzer?

SK: I think so.

JW: Okay.

SK: Want some seltzer? Guys, would you like anything?

TD: No, thank you.

SK: You sure?

JW: We knew what we had to do. See, that was the training we received. That's why I say if everyone had that training it might be a different world, because what I see going on today is terrible. I'll give you an example. Sherryl's sister, my younger daughter, she was divorced when her boys were four-and-a-half and two. They were brought up right. She worked. She took care of the house. They didn't move from their desks until they did their homework. Like I said, the older one is a doctor, and the other is a computer whiz. But what I see with some people today and kids--like we had an incident in a doctor's office last week with [inaudible] my wife. I couldn't believe how they talked to you. I don't know if she was a nurse, maybe half a nurse, separate. I can't believe it. I always said, when a kid is born they don't know anything. It's what you teach them. Sherryl too, with the kids.

SK: Here you go.

JW: What is it?

SK: Seltzer.

JW: Did you want some?

MG: No, I'm okay.

SK: Did you want anything? You sure?

TD: No, thank you. I am good.

MG: Yes.

SK: Okay. Please help yourself to some fruit.

MG: Thank you.

JW: Thank you. Thanks Sherryl.

MG: Can you tell me about your impressions of the South at that time? Did you see a lot of segregation?

JW: There was a little racism there. Not that I could recollect any particular incident. But they were brought up differently than we were here. They lived differently. Their attitude was completely different than ours. I can't really cite an example, but that's always been in my mind that the way they acted there, it was different. They were brought up differently. I think it still is. Did anyone win the Civil War? [laughter]

MG: What other sort of memories or stories stand out from your different training experiences?

JW: Well, we worked very hard during training. Mostly, our flights were at night. Our hours were just crazy. Even the missions that we [inaudible] most of the missions took off at two o'clock in the morning. I remember one--let's see. Where was this here? One practice mission that I enjoyed. You ever been to Puerto Rico? I flew over Puerto Rico. We went from Wendover, to Puerto Rico, to New York City, back out to Wendover [in] one night. That's some long trip.

MG: How long did that take?

JW: I don't know. It had to be at least twelve hours. Our crew was very compatible. We helped each other out. One of the main things the navigator had to find out was the wind direction and wind speed, right? Well, had what they called the drift meter, which we cited down into the ground, picked up an object, and there was a scale there you can check. I won't go into detail with it. But the bombardier also had to know the drift, so I always got him to double check me. We had no problem. We were very compatible. As a matter of fact, I told some of the other fellows, that I did that. They said, "Oh, that's a good idea." So everybody [inaudible] the whole squadron. I incorporated a new thing. Once in a while I got up in the co-pilot seat and flew the airplane. [laughter] Just for fun. But the pilot was always there.

MG: What the feeling of flying, being in the sky for the first time?

JW: Well, the first time I was up in the air [was] in Decatur, Alabama. I was taken up by--it was a small airplane. It was a Stearman biplane. I didn't do anything. He took me up, did loops,

came down, I got out, and I threw up right alongside the plane. I wasn't used to that, but he just wanted to give me an idea what we had to go through. That was the only time I experienced any [air sickness]. Oh, there was some time when we were in from the--well, one more experience there. That last mission before the end of the war, the last one I spoke to [you about] before--on our way back, we flew past Okinawa and there was a typhoon there. We flew past through this typhoon. I couldn't put my dividers or pencil down on the paper. We were buffeted. So you got a little woozy. There are certain things in life that you remember. That was seventy years ago and I remember it. I can just see myself, my hand going up and down. But we made it all right. They were good airplanes. These planes were fabulous. In that book, there's something there that was in each airplane. I got to give credit to the ones that built the plane. Well, there's a gold plaque in there--if you want to look through it you can--stating that the ones that built the plane built it for our safety and all that. I just want to prove to you that I was in Honolulu.

MG: Were the B-29s modified in order to accommodate the atomic bombs? They were changed a little bit, the Super Fortresses?

JW: The only thing new is the bomb bay. It had one big hook, that's all, not a regular. The bomb bay door was pneumatic. It just opened immediately, not gradually.

MG: For faster deployment of the bomb?

JW: Yes. Well, they opened the bomb bay door and the bomb didn't drop right then. They had to line it up at a certain distance. I'm not familiar with that because a certain distance before they--that's me on a Quonset hut, relaxing. We made it nice. We put an awning up. We had lounge chairs and everything.

MG: Was it important to have moments of levity like that?

JW: Oh, absolutely. You had to. You had to unwind. Yes. You couldn't go under pressure. That's why I say and I feel those fellows that got off those landing crafts at Normandy, they had to have a lot of guts. I've seen it many times on television, or you see them go in there, and I say, "How did they ever do it?" You never saw any of them had to be pushed off. They all went. They knew they had to go. I'm looking for one picture here if I can find it. All right. I won't bother with it. I won't take your time.

MG: When was it that you had that assembly at Wendover, in Utah?

JW: The first time, when we first got there and stuff. It might not have been the first day. It might have been the second day or something.

MG: Was that early in 1945?

JW: Yes. Because we went overseas June 6th, and we were there about six months.

MG: Were you aware that you were going to be involved in something so historically significant? What was that feeling like?

JW: Well, we knew we had a lot of hard work to put in. We were just determined to do it. We just had to get a mindset that nothing would deter us from doing our job. That was my feeling

and I certainly feel that was most of the feeling of the other fellows, too, because that's the only way you can do it. You have to have that determination and don't let anything distract you. That's the way I am still today.

TD: Do you have any idea as to why your crew was chosen to participate in this mission?

JW: The crew or the squadron?

TD: Your crew, specifically.

JW: Well, let me go back a little further. From Fairmont, Nebraska, when I said they took us out, the 393rd, and moved us to Wendover. The reason they did that, we all from one, but we found out they said we were the best trained crew at that time, and brought us to Wendover. Overseas, who picked out who goes where? Well, in each mission, there were seven airplanes, although in Nagasaki there was only six. So who picked them out and said, "You're going to do this, you're going to do that," I don't know. It was on the bulletin board, and we were briefed, and I'm sorry I didn't bring those flight plans [inaudible]. On the Nagasaki, what we-- there were three advanced weather planes; one for the primary, two to the secondary targets. There [was] the *Enola Gay* with the bomb. There was a photography ship [to] fly alongside and an instrument ship to record the explosion. Plus, a seventh one, which we were, to go and land at Iwo Jima, which was approximately halfway between Tinian and the Japanese islands. The reason we were there [was] as a backup plane for the *Enola Gay*. If they encountered mechanical difficulty, they were going to--oh, we landed there, we were put right at the end of the airfield under heavily armed guard. We couldn't leave there. No one could come near us. There were armed guards all around us. The reason we were there was as a spare plane. In case the *Enola Gay* encountered mechanical difficulty, they were going to land on Iwo, transfer the bomb from their plane to ours, and take our plane. What they also had to do, they built a bomb pit with a hydraulic lift because that bomb was so big it couldn't be loaded conventionally. You know, usually the way they did, they rolled the plane over the bomb and they lifted it up, but it was so big they couldn't. So it had to be put in the pit. The plane went over the pit, lifted it up in there. There's a little funny story with this, too. We couldn't leave there until the bomb was dropped and he turned around and went back to Tinian, which is about a three-hour trip. So when they landed, we got the okay to leave there. By the time we got there, we missed the beer and hot dog party. Everyone was in bed. [laughter] They had a big celebration there, which we were the only ones that weren't there. We missed the beer. What anything else? Did that answer your question?

TD: Yes, absolutely.

JW: I don't know how they picked. They just picked.

SK: Excuse me. Daddy, do you need to eat now?

JW: What?

SK: Jack is a diabetic.

MG: Yes. Let's take a break.

SK: Do you want to take a break and eat?

JW: No, I'm all right.

SK: No, no. You feel all right now, but if you don't eat, then you won't.

JW: I'm fine. I have to eat at a certain time.

MG: So let's take a break. This is a good time.

SK: Take a break.

JW: I'm diabetic and I have to eat at certain [times] and take my pills.

MG: That is important. We will pause this and take a break.

[Tape Paused]

JW: Colonel Tibbets was a tremendous attraction. When he was alive, he used to go to this air show in Reading [Pennsylvania]. He was over where you were, and I was over here with this fellow, this fellow next door, and he had a table with his wife--myself, and two other fellows--he was selling the books and other little things. People came, they were wound around the block waiting just to say hello, just to shake his hand. After he passed away, Dutch Van Kirk, he was his navigator, he went to some of these shows. He had a big attraction because he was aboard that airplane.

TD: Is your plane still around?

JW: What?

MG: *Top Secret*.

JW: Look in here and you see everything. Like I told you, I showed you back there, everything is there.

MG: Is it in a museum?

JW: There's only two planes that are still there. [Editor's Note: *Top Secret* was scrapped in 1954.]

SK: Daddy, do you want to take a break and come in the kitchen?

JW: Just one second. I'll be right in. The *Enola Gay* is at Dulles Air Force Base in a special hangar with some other planes there. I've been there. I've seen it. *Bockscar* is in Dayton, Ohio at the Air Force Museum. I've been there too. That's the only two. It's in the back someplace, under where they show you all the airplanes.

MG: Could you take us through a timeline leading up to the first bomb mission?

JW: Well, we were on the island of Tinian. We had some practice missions. There was an island--I can't think of the name--northeast of Tinian that we just bombed with regular dummy

bombs, actually, few of them, just to practicing navigation and so forth. Then, we had some regular missions to fly on. One of the towns was Ube, U-B-E, and then Koromo, where we bombed the Toyota plant. People get a kick out of that. I think it's the bestselling car in the United States. You notice how it's spelled. They spell it Toyoda, D-A at the end. See in the book?

TC: In the book, yes.

JW: That was a person's name. Yes, that's his name. Of course, we didn't know anything about it at that time. In between missions, we really had an enjoyable time on a paradise island. First of all, the chief who was in control of the mess, he went out and traded different things. We had steaks, melons, and everything. We were fed good. Not only that, we didn't go to bed at eight o'clock. We stayed up late. Sometimes we'd just sit around talking and talking, eleven, twelve o'clock. He'd come out with a big frying pan, maybe two feet big, make scrambled eggs for us, bread, coffee and a little snack. He was terrific. We had a very nice beach there that the Seabees dug out. We just go to the beach. We played softball, just to keep busy. You couldn't just sit around. There were also different classes that we had to take. They were lecturing us on different things that we had to do and so forth. Of course, we knew it all, but they had to repeat it. See, that was a good way that the Army did; they kept repeating it and repeating it, the same thing. If it didn't stick here, you had to be pretty stupid. No, I'm serious. That was their theory, repeat, repeat, repeat. In between, we just tried to keep busy. As I said, we ate well. We played, our games. Sometimes we'd just sit around and relax, which you needed too.

MG: You were going to tell us earlier more about your crew.

JW: Well, as I said, we got along very well. We stayed together for the whole period of time. There are only two of us left now. The other ones have passed away. I'm in touch with some of the wives--our copilot and our pilot's wives. They're still alive. One of them is in Washington, D.C. The copilot is out in the Midwest. I got to tell you a story [about] what happened to him. His name was Jake Bontekoe. She called me about two years ago to tell me Jake passed away. What happened, he wasn't allowed to drive anymore. She drove. They had a small truck and they went shopping. She drove and he sat in the car. He wasn't all there. He sat in his seat. She took the key and put it under the seat. She wanted to hide it. Lo and behold, he must have seen her do it. He slid over, took the key, drove some place, [had] an accident, and killed himself. I don't think there was ever a harsh word said between us. As I said, I know between the bombardier and the navigator, we had to work together. I couldn't have dropped the bomb with a bomb site, but he could have done some navigation. One of the main things with navigation was we had radar. That was good. That's the radar, right here. I looked in there and there was a radar operator in the back and he [inaudible]. This is close quarters.

MG: Can you tell me about the dynamic on the plane? How did you communicate with each other?

JW: We had an intercom system and certain procedure to get anyone. You try to move around a little because of long flights. You couldn't just sit there. I couldn't sit there. They couldn't sit there. There was a little bit of room here to stretch around. You couldn't go too far, but at least you got up and moved your legs and all. Then we had to take time for dinner, which they did.

Those meals were good. Like I told you about spaghetti and meatballs that dropped on the car in Oakland, California. We got on with the other crews, too. When we first got to Tinian, we lived in tents with wooden floors. Our group took over an old Seabee unit with Quonset huts. We had nice beds. They were made beds with mattresses and all. Three full crews slept in each--I'm talking about the officers now--in each Quonset hut. We all got along very well. We used to have bull sessions, too. Besides reviewing what happened, missions that we flew before. Excuse me. Sherryl?

SK: Yes?

JW: The coffee I left, you still got it there?

SK: Yes.

JW: Please. These girls take such good care of me.

MG: Yes. You are lucky.

JW: Are you kidding?

SK: How about some water or the club soda? You just want the coffee?

JW: Yes, I rather have the coffee.

SK: Here you are.

JW: Thanks. Even the girls too, my granddaughters.

MG: You have a great family.

JW: We got lucky.

MG: You said you started with a crew of eleven guys?

JW: Started with eleven. Two were eliminated because the side gun turrets were eliminated from our plane, so we didn't need anyone to man those gun turrets.

MG: Can you tell me a little bit about the pilot?

JW: He was a very experienced pilot. He had flown on sub patrol in the south Atlantic before he became--I don't remember which plane they were using, but then he came to the four-engine plane. Very nice, and very friendly, very cooperative, as everybody was. We got along. It was just like a family, really a family. We lived together. We ate together. We fought together. We did everything together. I forgot about a side trip. One of our trainings was going to Cuba. We stayed at a field outside of Havana, San Antonio de los Baños, and we had a ball there. It was so nice. The Hotel Nacional, that was the place. The reason we went there [was] to get long range overwater navigation training. Unfortunately, we completed everything so fast. We got home too soon. We wanted to stay. I'm not a liquor drinker. The only thing I ever liked was beer and I can't even have that now because of the alcohol. But the liquor down there was as cheap as could be. The fellows used to buy cases of liquor [to] put in the plane. Being we were

Silverplate, we didn't even have to go through customs on the way home. If you did, all the other guys--the other squadrons went there too, but they had to stop at customs and inspection in Miami. They had to pay whatever duty is on, but they weren't allowed [inaudible]our plane. It was really something like, I can't touch you. No one could touch us. When we were at that spare plane, they had an armed guard circling around us, but I didn't feel important about it. No, I didn't. I just took it as it came. All I say is I don't feel important about it. I just feel privileged and honored that I was able to do it, because we saved thousands of lives.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about how the war was changing in the Pacific towards the end of the war?

JW: Well, of course, by the time we got there, we were winning and we were bombing these plants. There was very little resistance. I think it was just the stubbornness of a few Japanese that were--[Hideki] Tojo--that wouldn't quit before, because they were warned before the bombs were dropped by leaflets. [Editor's Note: Hideki Tojo was a Japanese Army general and Prime Minister. He served as Prime Minister from 1941 to 1944. At the end of the war, he attempted suicide but did not die. He was charged with war crimes and executed in 1948.]

MG: Tell us how that worked.

JW: Well, we had nothing to do with it. We didn't do any, but they dropped leaflets warning the Japanese public that something big was going to happen to them--you ought to surrender. You give them a story. You're not winning. We took all the islands. They were island hopping. We took this--Kwajalein, Johnson, Iwo. There's that one island, I can't think of the name.

TC: Okinawa?

JW: Well, Okinawa too. One of our practice places was--there was a small island south of Tinian, maybe about twenty [inaudible]. It was a tiny island. I don't think anyone was on there. We went there, just dropping practice bombs.

TC: You were talking about the Japanese leaders. How did you view the Japanese people, overall? What was your impression of them?

JW: Well, I had no good feelings about them. Look what they did. What I say is Pearl Harbor.

TC: Was there a lot of propaganda? Did you see a lot of propaganda?

JW: Oh, absolutely. I'm sure. You had the radio and newspapers and everything. You knew what was going on. They were very cruel to prisoners of war. They didn't sign the Geneva Convention. Maybe they did and they broke their promise. Look at what's-his-name, the senator that was a prisoner

MG: John McCain.

JW: McCain. I don't know how he ever lived through what he did.

MG: Where were you when you found out about the war ending in Europe?

JW: I guess we were in Wendover. Yes. We figured well, there's still a job to be done. We had nothing to do there. Like I said, when we finished our training in Fairmont, we were supposed to go to Europe to the Eighth Air Force. Again, I say I really had felt I was ready to go and all but I really didn't think I'd ever get back.

MG: The Potsdam Declaration was sort of the opportunity for the Japanese to surrender then.

JW: Well, that's what I mean. They wouldn't. Even when the Russians invaded them in their northern islands, they didn't. That was their mental attitude. Everything was like you say. They whipped everybody up into a frenzy. They hated the Americans. What started it all? Because we put an embargo on them, oil and so forth. Everything they have there had to be shipped in. They weren't growing any food, anything.

MG: Was it difficult doing your practice runs, your practice missions, without giving away that you were going to drop an atomic bomb?

JW: No, no. It was just a job that we had to do. We knew we had to do it and we knew there was a purpose to the practice missions. We wanted to become perfect and we did. The only way you can do it is repeat, repeat, practice, practice, because as a navigator, you could figure out the wind direction is north coming from a 180 degrees at twenty knots per hour. Two minutes later, it could be coming from 180 degrees with half, so you had to figure all that out, because that's what moved the plane back. So you had to be on top of it every minute, and no let up. Like I said, I was glad I got the bombardier to help me because any help that you got was beneficial.

MG: How did you determine the targets? I know there were number of cities--

JW: We never determined. I never knew. It was given to us. The word was up on the bulletin board. Again, I'm sorry I didn't bring those--there was always a briefing before the mission, and then the pilots, navigators, and everything had separate meetings before we were handed these things. You would enjoy looking at these.

MG: Well, maybe we can bring it for next time.

JW: Oh, yes. That's right. Good.

TD: What was the primary target on the Nagasaki mission? You said that you were not able to.

JW: Kokura.

TD: Kokura.

MG: Because of cloud cover--?

JW: All right. That's another story. Okay. They had three advance weather planes. The primary target was Kokura. The bombardier was told, "Do not drop that bomb by radar. You have to see visually by using the bomb site." Well, when they got off at the rendezvous point by the coast of Japan, the *Bockscar* was there. I think it was the target--no, no, the instrument ship. They were waiting for the photography ship. They kept circling, and circling, and circling, consuming gasoline. Plus, when they first took off, they knew that there was one of the spare

tanks, the pump wasn't working; five hundred gallons were useless, but they knew that when they [inaudible]. They circled, and circled, and circled, until finally the Navy commander that was there, that was the--what was his position? He was a weaponeer. [He] said, "We have to go." They went to Kokura. So by the time they got there, it was cloud covered. They circled three times from different angles, consuming their fuel. Then the Navy commander said, "Go to the secondary target." By the time they got--our report was that it was clear, one hundred percent clear. By the time they got there, it was cloud covered. So they tried a few runs and they were going to drop the bomb by radar. The story is in the book there too, by Kermit Beahan. He said they were going to drop it by radar. But as they were making the bomb run, he said, "I see an opening. I see it." They bombed visually, but theoretically the bomb was dropped not even close, but it still did the job. The pilot of the plane was our squadron CO. I still say, he didn't follow orders. If it wasn't because the atomic bomb, that bomb was dropped, the war was over, they would have court martialed him for what he did. Oh, so they couldn't get back. They landed on Iwo Jima. When they landed, one of the engines conked out because of lack of fuel. Another five minutes they would've crashed.

TD: Why was it necessary to bomb using the bomb site, as opposed to bombing by radar?

JW: Well, it's more accurate.

TD: More accurate. Okay.

JW: Hopefully, if they did the job right. No, we bombed by radar. I was part of that because [I told] them where to go. We practiced and all that. Oh, I forgot one place that I was at--Colorado Springs to learn how to bomb by radar. Colorado Springs, they had a tower. A navigator was up there. They simulated a flight, and we dropped by radar. That was nice out there. Oh, that was beautiful. I met a few girls out there. They had a little house out in the mountains. Beautiful. You ever been out there, around Colorado?

TD: Yes. It's very cold.

JW: Where? Colorado?

TD: Jackson Hole actually.

SK: Jackson Hole is Wyoming.

TD: Jackson Hole is Wyoming. All right. My mistake. I'm sorry.

SK: It's cold there.

SK: Once you're out that way, it's all cold. [laughter]

MG: I know there was a little uncertainty over the detonation of the atomic bombs. Were you confident that they would have the desired effect?

JW: Well, I didn't know anything about it. They never told us, but I guess they experimented in the United States, the bomb went off, and they were satisfied that it would be. Otherwise, I don't think they would have gone ahead with the mission. They gave the okay to the President, and he

gave the okay to do it. Otherwise, I don't think they would have done. You have no idea how many scientists they had on different phases. Just triggering they had physicists doing it. [Albert] Einstein told President Roosevelt, you better start doing it. [Editor's Note: In August 1939, Physicist Albert Einstein wrote a letter to President Roosevelt about the possibility of making an atomic bomb. This encouraged President Roosevelt to begin the Manhattan Project.] You know that, don't you? He told President Roosevelt start trying to get it, because the Germans are doing it. You can be sure that if the Germans had it or the Japanese had it, one of our cities would have gotten bombed for sure.

MG: How did the bombs get the names Little Boy and Fat Man? [Editor's Note: The "Little Boy" bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and the "Fat Man" bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. The bombs possessed different shapes and had different trigger mechanisms.]

JW: I don't know. The shape of it. Here you can see. I guess so. I never heard of anything on it, but just the shape of it.

TC: Did you see the explosion at Nagasaki? Did you see the explosion?

JW: No, no. We were far gone. All we had to do was get there, give our report, turn around and get back.

MG: You were on Tinian on August 6th, for the first bomb?

JW: I was on Iwo Jima.

MG: Iwo Jima?

JW: Yes.

MG: Can you walk us through that day? What was that day like?

JW: Okay. Well, as I said, we always had an early briefing. We weren't told anything. I'm not sure of this, but I think we were given instructions to take off--we were the first ones to take off--and instructions where to go. Not on the ground. We went to Iwo Jima. The pilot had the sealed instructions. That's where we went. Like I said, they anticipated everything in advance, had the bomb bay, the hydraulic pit. Oh, and I forgot something. See, these things come in my head. In 1998, Fred Bock, one of the airplane commanders, decided that some of us guys should go back to Tinian. He contacted us, whoever he wanted, and I got the letter. I said to Florence, "What do you think?" She said, "Go." I made a trip back there. That was awesome. The people, they couldn't do enough for us. I don't know if it was religion or whatever. They were Chamorroans. When the Japanese took the island of Tinian, they moved all these people to the Caroline Islands. They brought Korean slave laborers in there to tend the fields, the sugar cane fields, for sake and all. So naturally, when we came back there, these people were back. Then they came back. They couldn't do enough for us. It was such a nice time, really. They took us around. There was a bus that took us around to the different places. They said, "Well, here's where the movie theater was." But it wasn't there anymore. "Here's where this was," and it wasn't there. I think it was August. It was very hot there, very hot. I can't take hot weather too well. A few of the times when we were out of the bus, looking around, I had to go back in--it was air conditioned

the bus--to cool off. But that's why I was on Honolulu so many times, back and forth, and back and forth. What else?

MG: Going back to August 6th, when did you find out that the bomb was dropped and detonated?

JW: We heard it when President Truman broadcast it on the radio. We heard the same thing.

MG: Were you on *Top Secret* or *Lagging Dragon* for that mission?

JW: We weren't on *Top Secret*. I think it was *Lagging Dragon*. Our plane was idle. It could've been an engine change or something. Both missions we didn't fly on--both atomic missions. I keep saying it's all in the book.

MG: We will have to get our copy. What took place between August 6th and August 9th, for you and then in the context of the war?

JW: Well, we were waiting. I'm trying to think. I think, we just went through our regular routine, hoping that we would hear something. and all there was was talk about Hiroshima. We got together with fellows that did see the explosion, telling us, and hoping that they would surrender. But the next thing I know, up on the bulletin board, mission August 9th, these planes, these crews are assigned.

TD: How come you never flew your plane *Top Secret*? Well, how come you did not fly for either of the missions?

JW: We flew it on the other missions. It must've been out for a maybe change an engine or something. I really don't know. I don't think it was ever discussed. I don't really remember it. I feel bad that we didn't. I would've liked to fly our own plane, but you take it as it comes.

MG: Tell us about what happened on August 9th, the second atomic bomb mission.

JW: Well, again, we flew to Nagasaki. We wrote the weather report. Had the radio operator signal back all clear here, whatever it is, and we headed back to Tinian. We knew what was happening and we didn't think it would be Tinian. We thought it would be Kokura, but later on we found out what happened. So our chests stuck out a little bit. [laughter] No. I'm just kidding.

MG: How soon after August 9th did the Japanese finally surrender?

JW: Well, as I said they didn't surrender. On August 12th, the largest raid went out from the Marianas. Every plane that was available on the island went out. Strangely enough, our target was the Toyota plant and then we came back. That was August 12th. I think they surrendered the 14th. There was a crew that went back to the United States--one of our crews--to pick up the elements of the third atomic bomb. There would have been a third one.

MG: I know they were prepared to make more drops in the coming weeks.

JW: Yes. I don't think there was any more, that they had anything prepared close to being used, but there was a third one on the way. So they never came back. They were there. I don't know

if I said this before. After, when the Japanese surrendered, we had a vacation there. The weather was beautiful there. We went to the beach in the morning and played softball there in the afternoon. Then we hung out at night like a vacation. The weather was gorgeous. Couldn't want any better.

MG: What does it feel like to participate in the ending of a world war?

JW: Well, I still think about it. Many times it comes to my mind. I see something on television. I see these pictures. I go to these air shows. I speak to some of the fellows. We still think about it. It's something for posterity. It'll never leave your mind. Again, I say I was honored, honored and privileged to participate. It was just the luck of the draw. Maybe we did such a good job they picked us out. Well, we did, because I remember our crew--any assignment that the whole squadron had, we finished first. As a matter of fact, there's one picture in there, crew of the week: our crew. The first one. After that, they didn't do it. There's a picture here [in] the book. Where did we go? We went somewhere. Where did we go? Wait a minute. Oh, I know where we went. We went to Washington D.C. because that's where the pilot lived. So we had to go to where he flew plane. So we got that as a prize, crew of the week. What did we do there? There was something there.

SK: Molly, do you think we should start winding down?

MG: Yes. Do you guys have any last questions for today? Then we can pick up here next time.

JW: Oh, okay.

MG: This has given us so much to think about. I have about a million more questions I think. So I really look forward to the next session.

JW: I'm glad to do it.

MG: Well, this has just been such a treat and honor to talk to you.

JW: Did I do all right?

MG: You are doing great.

JW: Tell me the truth.

MG: How am I doing?

JW: You're terrific. No, I just felt that I wanted to do it right. I didn't just want to come in and blabbermouth at anything.

MG: You're doing great.

JW: I wanted to do it right. I don't know. Sometimes I don't remember what I ate yesterday.

MG: Well, I know it is a lot of work to tell these kinds of stories.

JW: No, but most of these things here is something that just stuck in my mind and they'll never leave.

MG: Well, if in between today and the next time we meet, you think of things, just jot it down, and we can revisit that.

JW: Okay. Yes, I will.

SK: Daddy, either jot it down or tell me. I'll jot it down.

JW: Yes. Okay.

SK: If you think of some things, tell me. I can email Molly in advance.

MG: That is a great idea. I'll turn the recorder off. But I really want to thank you for your service and your time today.

JW: You don't have to thank me. I'm glad to do it.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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