RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK M. WILLIAMS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Jack M. Williams on November 10, 1995 in Stillwater, Oklahoma with Kurt Piehler. I guess I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents.

Jack Williams: Okay.

KP: Your father was originally from Pennsylvania.

JW: Right, yes, my father was a coal miner in Pennsylvania in the Scranton Wilkes-Barre area, northeastern Pennsylvania. ... And then ... I had a mother and she died when I was seven, in 1928. ... I had a sister that was four years older than I was, and her name was Doris and she ... ended up ... in a state institution, and finally passed away some years ago. So I'm the only survivor of that family.

KP: I mean, being a coal miner is a rough life.

JW: Yeah, it really was a rough life. And it's interesting that you should ask about that because this was not something that you're aware of at all. But when my mother died in 1928, and I was seven years old, ... apparently she was the stronger one of the family, so my dad really didn't know what to do with a couple of kids, without a wife around, this was in ... 1928. So my sister and I bounced around for, oh, a couple of years living with relatives. Then, in 1929, there was a family living in Upper Montclair, New Jersey, by the name of Wright, W-R-I-G-H-T. This family had three children of their own, but they were in the habit of taking children for two weeks every summer, kids ... on the streets in New York City. They would take them to their summer home which was at Point Pleasant on the Jersey shore. And they would just give them two weeks vacation before they had to go back on the streets. And so, through an aunt in Bloomfield, New Jersey, my aunt found out about Mrs. Wright. We eventually called her Mother Wright. She found out that maybe she would take my sister. So she took my sister, Doris, in 1929, and, for two weeks, because this was a nice thing to do. And then, she went back, and the following year they said since Doris went, we'll send Jack next time. And so the next year when I was nine years old, I think it was the 5th of July in 1930, ... I went there for ... two weeks. Now keep in mind that at that time child labor was okay in the mines, and I was supposed to go into the fifth grade in school, but I was supposed to go to work in the mines instead. And, I, of course, had no way of knowing. I don't know how a nine-year-old child, how he thinks, but according to Mother Wright, I went for two weeks and at the end of two weeks I went to her and knew that I didn't want to go back to the coal mines. This was in Upper Montclair. And so I said, "Well, if you keep me," keeping in mind I had nothing, "If you keep me, I'll make good." Which I still think today is a pretty interesting way of negotiating with somebody because it puts all the pressure on yourself. So I guess I'm still working at it. But the thing was that ... she didn't decide, she called in the other kids. Now in the meantime, she'd already taken in one child, a girl, plus her three, so the parents did not decide. They said, "Do you want this kid?" Now most families today would not want any other kids coming into their family, but, in this particular case, for some reason, they said, "Yes." And so I went with them for two weeks, and at the end of that two weeks they decided to keep me, and I never went back. And I've been gone ever since. That was back in July of 1930, I guess it was.

KP: And it's really almost, I wouldn't say sheer luck, but pretty close. I mean, these sets of circumstances. Have you ever wondered about them?

JW: Kurt, it's absolutely amazing. My wife does a better job of telling the story, probably, than I do, because ... [I've] told it so much, and I have some supporting things here which you'd be glad to know about. I just happened to bring some things along. But anyway, the result was that I went to live with this family as a foster child. I was in the fifth grade of school in ... Upper Montclair, and then went to Montclair High School. In Upper Montclair, way up on the hill was where the Gilbraith family lived; they were the famous, time control, time management people, the Cheaper by the Dozen story. Jane and Bob, which are the twins and I graduated together in 1939. I was just looking through some old material last night, and it turns out that Mrs. Gilbraith spoke at our 1939 graduation at Montclair High School. The Wrights kept, otherwise, I might have gone to the mines. So I spent the next seven or eight years with the Wrights. Mother Wright was an author, she wrote a book, she ... actually wrote an article about me published in Reader's Digest in 1943. "He Adopted Us," was the title, and I have a copy, which you can have, with me. ... We've used it in business for years. And it mentioned that I went in the navy and that sort of thing. But then she was also an author. She ... taught short story writing; she was a graduate of Vassar; she taught at Columbia University; worked at the Washington Star newspaper-- a very talented woman.

KP: And Upper Montclair was a very, sort of wealthy area.

JW: Yes for some people. Mother Wright was a sailor. She was short and heavy, but she was a sailor, and she loved to sail, and she taught all of us to sail. And I still sail. ... I have a boat here in Oklahoma City, and I've been racing it for years.

KP: So you went from this rough and tumble coal mine town to totally Upper Montclair.

JW: To an opportunity type of thing. In other words, it was a door [that] was opened up, I would say. So she wrote a book, and that book was called Room For One More years ago, and I'm Joey in Room for One More. And, in fact, at our alumni reunion meeting that we had back at Rutgers, I loaned a copy of the book to ... somebody who wanted to read it, and I'd given a talk there, on the story. That's why I was in New Jersey. I was active in sports in high school and what not, played football, ... not top line football, but just sort of sand-lot football, but ... I was a pole vaulter on the track team, believe it or not. I'm 5'4" and I pole vault almost twelve feet with a bamboo pole. So, anyway, it was fun to go through that sort of thing. So, none of my family had ever been through high school, none of them had ever been to college, and here I was, you know, given all the chances.

KP: How much contact did you keep, say with your father and with other members of your family?

JW: Not very much because, at the start, nobody really knew what their feelings were, you know, about-- I had no way of going to be with them, but I'd probably visit with them once in a

while, it was pretty much up to the Wright family. But when it came time to go to college, I didn't have any money. This was in 1939; you just didn't have a lot of money. ... And I was not a great student, I was lucky to get through, I'm sure, but through [an] assistance program I was able to get some support to go to Rutgers. And so when I ended up getting to Rutgers, I was in the School of Business Administration, and ... I was on the track team there and got my numeral on the track team and went on to oh, let's see, I was a Lambda Chi, stayed, lived at Winants Hall, you know, freshman year, down there on campus. But we go back periodically, but that's really what the story is. There's a lot to tell about the Wright family, because they gave me really a life when you stop to think about it.

KP: I mean, I just imagine, in terms of travel and in terms of just circles they were in. I mean here you have a college educated woman when women didn't really go to college and ...

JK: Yeah, yeah, it was pretty, it was quite, quite interesting, really. I think I was probably not, I never was a ... mechanical-type person. I was more of a feelings person probably, which is probably why I'm in what I'm doing now and have been doing it for 43 years. But, ... you know, my interests, things that happened with them, that never would have happened otherwise, I was only ten years-old ... or nine, I guess, when I went to live with the Wrights. And one day, ... the radio was on and somebody was playing, you know, "America, My Country 'Tis of Thee," and I had never had lessons in my life, and I went over and sat down at the piano and started to play this just from having heard it on the radio, picked it out. And I continued from there, and Mother Wright was smart enough, her talent was really in seeing what a child's natural interest was and then encouraging that, developing that, not what she wanted to do, but what they were capable of doing. So it was always kind of a challenge, and so I ended up and I had eight years of piano and three years of organ and minored in music at Rutgers, and to this day I still play the piano. I played ... yesterday noon for about 50 women here in town to entertain them while they were all having their anniversary luncheon. But you know it's this kind of thing.

KP: You wouldn't have had that in Pennsylvania.

JW: No, never. I did find out that my mother had played the piano and my father had played a little bit, but I never knew about it.

KP: You did not own a piano in Pennsylvania.

JW: No, and I didn't have ... any way, it was going, living with the Wrights that opened up just all kinds of opportunities for me.

KP: Did you travel at all when you were growing up?

JW: ... Well, only down to the shore and back because we really didn't have, you know, ... that was enough. ... We'd go to the Jersey shore the day school was out, and we didn't go back home until the day school started--I mean in September. We had three months of solid six hours in the ocean everyday ... surfing and sailing and doing all that sort of thing. So that was really to me a great experience, and I miss the ocean out here in Oklahoma, as you can imagine. But, in fact,

this is a strange country out here. When the navy shipped me out here, and I guess we haven't gotten to that point yet, ... I'll leave that out for now, but the point is that it's the people out here are so genuine, and, of course, you've been through the experience of the last year with the bombing and what not, and the response of the area. It's a feeling, caring area-- it really is. And it's just not hard-nosed, it's the result of that, ... we've had some problems, you know, business-wise out here, but they're coming around, but it's going to take a while. Anyway, that's what happened in New Jersey, ... I give Mother Wright and the family credit for giving me a life.

KP: Mother Wright sounds like this very dynamic figure. What about her husband?

JW: That's a very interesting question. We call him Pop Wright. Pop Wright was a chemical engineer, graduated from Stevens Tech. He was an inventor and he invented a variety of things. He invented something called the Wright Cord Filter which was used in water purification plants all over the United States. But back in the '30s, you couldn't keep your patents, everybody would steal them. I mean, there was no protection like you have today with some of your patent laws. So he lost that. He would work in ... New York City, commute to Montclair everyday and then on the weekends in the summer, he'd come down to the shore. He was a great golfer, believe it or not and he played with a single club, ... with an adjustable head on it, and I never was much of a golfer, but he played in the '70s at the Montclair Country Club, years ago; I mean fifty years ago. He really knew what he was doing. But he taught us some things. He was the one that knew the math, and I wasn't good at math. But he was the one who taught things like, when you play golf, never up, never in, or you got to go for where you're trying to get to. So you don't hold back. So he supported us in different ways. When it came time for me to go in the navy, I did not want to go in the service, particularly. I didn't like the idea of being killed; it just didn't appeal to me. I didn't like the idea of being tough because we were raised to be kind of, you know, gentler type people, really. ... But he took me aside one day, and just said, "Look, you're gonna have to face up to it, ... that it's gonna either be them or you." You know, ... he tried to help us see the need for a change in attitude.

KP: It is interesting that you should say this, because it is a natural reaction often that you do not want to go out and kill people. But, I imagine coal towns as being a very tough place, and Upper Montclair as being a very genteel place. I mean, did you notice that shift?

JW: ... Well, I could notice the shift, except for the fact that I was only eight years-old, or nine years-old, and at that point you don't even pay any attention to it. ... That's a copy of the book of which I'm Joey, now you can, ... you see, it's all out of print now. So what we've been doing is loaning them to people and letting them read them and then return them, and I've got them all over the country right now. As you can see, the book is <u>Room For One More</u> by Anna P. Rose {Mother Wright to me}.

KP: So I can read this and return it.

JW: You could do that, if you would do that, if you would like to do that ...

KP: That would be great.

JW: At our alumni dinner in 1993, I reviewed this book, and the story, and I gave them all a copy of this right here. And that's the article out of Reader's Digest in 1943. It's on the reverse side of it. It tells you, you can tell where it was in '43. But ... you can keep that, that's yours. But the book, take your time with it, we're not pushing it, but it may have some interest, you know, somewhere.

KP: No, I mean it's very intriguing, because you're the second person whose told me about a book they've appeared in.

JW: Oh, really?

KP: Someone from the post-war class has had a similar experience, a dean wrote a book and ...

JW: ... You might check when you get back and see if the library has a copy. I never gave them a copy. We have copies here in this library here, in our church library. We have a couple of hardbacks left that were kept back. We kept some for the kids that were autographed. But if Rutgers doesn't have one, I'd be tempted to give them one of our copies.

KP: No, I'll definitely check and make sure.

JW: But I think that would be, that's something. If I got back there next time, I was going to do it, but you might want to check.

KP: I will definitely check.

JW: You can be the, you know the conduit, to getting something like that done.

KP: It seems like Mother Wright and Pop Wright had a very, sort of egalitarian relationship. In an age when a lot of husbands had very narrow mindsets, his wife really had her hand in a lot of different things.

JW: Oh sure, she was involved in everything. She taught, taught everybody. Well, her main thing was character, I think. Now, she was kind of a heavy-set woman. She wasn't a great housekeeper. We had a black lady that came in and kind of helped out with things, even in those days. Mother was a writer ... and she taught short story writing in the schools there in the Montclair area. But the interesting thing about the story is not me. The key is the little boy standing there, and that's the crippled boy. His name is Jimmy-John, and he came to her from an orphanage, the Montclair orphanage, downtown Montclair, after I had gone with her. He was wearing braces, he was ten years old and the kids were teasing him, and he would take off a brace and beat the kids with the brace, which didn't go over very well with the kids or people down there, so they called Mother Wright and asked if she could take this kid that was a real problem. He had nine operations for polio on his legs the first ten years of his life. And she went down and took a look at him, and so she decided she could handle it. ... Just to show you how this works, she brought him home. Mother Wright had three children of her own. She had a

daughter who was a year ... younger than I was, she had a son who was about five years younger than I am, and she had a little one called Teensie or Eensie. And then they had Carolyn, who is Jane in the book, who was taken from a divorced family ... the year before I went with them. But interestingly enough, ... the boy that's five years younger than I am, her boy's name is Tom, he's Tim in the book, but Tom, for some reason or another, had an interest in ... medicine, or appeared to have, and so he took over ... with Jimmy-John, the crippled boy, and worked with him, and in six months, he had him riding a two-wheel bicycle, no more braces on, and massaging and putting hot packs on. Mother Wright really encouraged this. Well, for the last 35 years he's been an outstanding physician in Falls Church, Virginia, right outside Washington. Tom was the chief of surgery at the Georgetown Medical Center for years. He's the youngest one they've ever had. So everyone that Mother Wright kind of gets her hands on, they seem to do well.

KP: What happened to everyone in the family? You mentioned two of them?

JW: ... Well, her daughter's name--in the book they call her Trotty, but her name was Anne--but we call her Trot. She was a year younger than I was. ... During the war, ... she went to Vassar, and then she went in the Coast Guard, WAVES, Women's Corps. And then she ... got married to a space engineer down ... near Cape Canaveral, Wallops Island, Virginia, and ... she died of cancer, the cancer ate through her back, her spine. So she died some years ago. But that's the girl in there that's Trotty. ... Well, anyway, then there was, you know about Trotty, you know about Tom who became a doctor, and you know about ... Eensie, whose name was Ellen. She, a little tiny thing when I first knew her, I mean, she might have been a year and a half old, or two years. She's been married to a Episcopal priest for a long time, and they're retired up in New Hampshire, I believe it is, or Maine maybe. ... Then Carolyn, who was the first foster child, she was kind of a teenager, and the book goes through all the problems she had raising a teenage girl back in those days. And she came from a divorced family in Philadelphia. After she was raised, she left, ... she got married, had two girls, got divorced, went back to Philadelphia. And then there was Jimmy-John, and then myself. Well, when Pop Wright died, I was the only one that went to the funeral. When Mother Wright died, I was the only one that went to the funeral. When Trotty died, I was the only one that went to the funeral. I felt that was really my family, my home. I mean, I didn't just come there for a short time, I came there forever you might say.

KP: You stayed very close to them.

JW: I tried to do that, yeah, and that even created some problems in our married life sometimes in that that family came ahead of my own married family, because the obligation was so much stronger, see. But, you know, ... you kinda live with three families. You live with your own family, you live with your foster family, you live with your married family. But I never underestimate the power of an eight-year-old or a nine year old child. They have more sense about what's right and wrong, or what they need than probably anybody else, and I always support every child that I can get close to, this sort of thing. Anyway, and, of course, during being raised there, Mother Wright was very strong on character and training, and Tom and I were Eagle Scouts, of course, and our friends were Eagle Scouts there. One of my best friends was John Whitehead who went to Montclair High School, but he also ended up being assistant secretary of ... state for the last couple of years under Bush. But, ... and they were close friends

of ours. But ... New Jersey, of course, was where I had really got all of my training, all of my schooling.

KP: Well the Montclair school system was a very good school system.

JW: It was a great school system, I mean, you know, sure I had things that I would never have had otherwise. I had ... five years of Latin or something like that, three years of Spanish, so many years of French. I mean they really emphasized that side of the training.

KP: And it seems like you really enjoyed the languages.

JW: Well, yeah, and, when I came back to Oklahoma, then I wanted to finish up my years, and they said you don't have enough credits to go to Oklahoma because you've got to have a lot of science. Yeah, it was just, that was one of the problems you get onto ... in those days, there were different parts of the country emphasized different things. But New Jersey was, you know, really where I learned an awful lot. And I mentioned to you earlier about character, because I think it has a lot to do with what we're talking about. Pop Wright was very strong on honesty and integrity. Mother Wright, ... she had a fit if you lied, or if you stole something, you know. The kids were afraid to go by the local candy store and steal something. But, before you got home, the owner of the store had called her because they knew her, and she'd meet you coming in the door and turn around you and walk you clear back to the store, and you'd have to put it back and then do some kind of service. She was strong that way, she was very strong.

KP: It seems that she had a very forceful personality, and that not too much intimidated her.

JW: Oh absolutely. I agree and even if this [is] on the record, I do not like a dominant woman, and she was as dominant ... as could be, you know. And so ... I just don't like a dominant woman. But that's just, you know, ... that's the way thing were. But if you don't have that direction, if you don't know where you're going, how are you going to get anywhere?

KP: It seems like your natural father didn't have that direction. He would not have been able to give that to you.

JW: No, he couldn't have done it, there's no way. I mean, he had all he could do to just hang in there. And so my sister, like I said, after she had gone for the two weeks, she ended up going in a mental institution and was a working patient over the years before she died. Of course, we kept in close touch with her. But you know, we, Margaret and I, we have two boys and we have seven grandchildren, and, in fact, one of them is here on campus right now, over here at the PKA house, and I'll probably see him later on this afternoon. But I think that everything that, well I might say one thing about it because it's a little bit in the book. But I'm, by nature, not much of a, I'm a competitor, but I'm ... not a bloodthirsty competitor, let's put it that way. I feel like there's, you can compete on what you know and what you can do, ... rather than with a threatening situation. But when I was growing up, I was probably eleven or twelve years-old, or whatever, you know how kids are, they'll try to work up some kind of a deal on somebody, and I guess they picked me out as being kind of a, oh, a softy, I suppose, in school. And so our group, that ...

lived in the same neighborhood, ... one of them decided they'd have a boxing match in the garage and upstairs, and they had a mat up there. And they decided that I should box and they should put me in the ring with this guy who really knew how to box, or at least he knew how to throw his hands around. I knew nothing about it, absolutely zero. Now remember, I had been learning how to play the piano. I hadn't been doing any boxing, even though I had been playing football. And so ... I was excited, I thought, "Boy, how nice to be picked out for this kind of a deal." So I went back to Mother Wright and I said, "Say, by the way, I'm going to be in this boxing match." And she went right through the ceiling and said, "You're going to do what?" Now she ... weighed about 160 pounds ... probably 5"4' or less, quite husky, quite husky, you know, ... she's as dominant as could be. Anyway, so she said, "No, you're not either." ... And I said, "Yeah, that's what they want me to do." And she said, "Well, you're going to get killed; literally you're going to get killed." And I said, "Oh, in that case I don't want to do it." And so she said, "Oh, yes you will do it because you told them you'd do it." Now we get to this business of her...

KP: And you had to keep your word.

JW: Right. This is where a lot of it started. And so anyway, so I said, "Uh-oh." And she said, "Well, come here, I want to show you something. I want to show you how to defend yourself." Now here's this mother ... gonna teach her child how to defend itself. And I'm sure she whacked me at some time in the process. I was used to, you know, I mean that is, she's the kind that would shove you if you weren't there. ... She'd see you got there. But anyway we were, ... she had a pantry there in the kitchen. You remember the old fashioned pantries where you had your shelves of food and then you all had your pots and pans hanging on the wall? It was a nice place to keep all your stuff. So, she stood there and said, "Put your hands up." So, I put my dukes up. And then she said, "Take a swing at me." Now, you know, I'm sure I'd been wanting to do it for years, but, you know, I just couldn't believe I was going to get a chance to do this. So I guess I must have swung at her. Next thing, last thing I remember was pots and pans come flying down on the floor of that pantry. And I was on the floor. She knocked me right down on the floor just [as] hard as she could hit me. And my nose was bleeding, and I got up like whoa, I was bleeding to death, you know.

KP: So, basically she knocked you out.

JW: Yes, ... she just sat there, she said now that's the way it's going to be in this boxing match, ... just so your aware of it, but don't ever sign up for it again. Well, I went to it and got, this is the treatment I got. I had a bloody nose, and I really got clobbered. But she taught me a lesson, you know, if you're going to say something, you're going to do it. And I think that perhaps my personality today-- I built a practice with New York Life as an agent, a sales agent for 43 years, and we're still doing business with people that we did 40 years ago. And we still have insurance in force that was written 40 years ago. So where the market today sometimes is changing constantly, people buying and selling, we've been able to hold what we have, you know, fairly well. And I think a lot of it is because of the promises we make. And so I promise people I'm going to be there if you need me, so I've got to be 130 to do that. But, anyway, I'm --

KP: Yes, but it seems that you've tried to incorporate a lot of her lessons, she was very influential.

JW: ... I think there's a lot to that. I mean, ... that's the reason I feel an obligation to her. Because, like I said, she gave me a life, they gave me a life. But anyway that's, that's ...

KP: Just one or two more questions. What religion, what church did they go to?

JW: Okay, good, I didn't mean to take over the conversation. That's just such a unique story that everyone hasn't heard, maybe it's a chance to hear it. Originally, in Pennsylvania, I believe, we were Congregationalists. I think I was christened in the Congregational church. And then I was raised ... with the Wrights, and the Wrights were Episcopalians in New Jersey, so I became an Episcopalian. And there, ... I sang in the boys' choir and the Scouts were there, and I played the chimes and you know, the bells and that sort of thing. But then after, I guess I was probably confirmed in the Episcopal Church. And then when I ... met my wife, then it all changed because she was ... a Baptist. And then we ... moved to Corpus Christi at one time, and became Southern Baptist. But I never became a real Baptist. ... She thinks it's because I was afraid of drowning in there. But that wasn't it at all. Anyway, I just didn't, I didn't like the, you know, the come on down front and join up today kind of thing.

KP: The Episcopal church, particularly in Upper Montclair, is very austere.

JW: I agree, it wasn't ... I like the Episcopal Church because I like the process that you go through. It's set. In other words, you know, you have certain things you do. It's kind of like the Catholic Church in that regard. If you're going to develop habits, one way to do it is to do the same thing over and over and over. ... Today for instance, we're Methodists, and that church says you can do anything you want to do, practically. Well, that's fine except that some people take it literally. But we have, we became Baptists and Southern Baptists, went back to, ... went back to New Brunswick to finish up college, became Baptists there in that little Baptist church on that road ... that goes out west. It heads west right from downtown, it's the road that goes by where the old hotel used to be.

KP: Yes.

JW: Right out there it's right on the left hand side. Anyway, from there, because then I went with a different job and ended up going to Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh area and became Presbyterians. So then, we became Methodists in Oklahoma. So the answer to your question, we've been about everything, I think. I have.

KP: In terms of dealing with the Great Depression, the Wrights realized that everyone was not doing as well as they were, that they were fairly well off.

JW: Well, yes and no. ... It was adequate, let's put it that way. Pop Wright was, they were working. They had bought the property before the Depression, that is down at the shore as well as their own home. ... Let's see. But they were adequate. But it wasn't fancy. But we were

probably middle-of-the-road, but in a nice part of town. We never wanted for anything, I didn't want for anything. I didn't know what it was. You know, ... I was so happy to be where I was, it wouldn't have made any difference what I got. Because I really had an opportunity that very few people ever get, as a child.

KP: How did the Wrights feel about the New Deal, and about politics? Were they Democrats or Republicans?

JW: Well, that's a good question. I think that Pop Wright was a Democrat. Well I'm sure he was because they, when it came election time, they had a donkey there at the house. And we rode the donkey around the house. I ran around the house and got thrown clear off it. But yeah, I'm pretty sure they ... were pretty much Democrats. I, from the time I was able to ever even think about voting, I've been Republican. I've never changed, never will change. But, in fact, in Oklahoma, when I came into Oklahoma in 1952, you couldn't vote in the primary because there were no Republicans in the primary, they were all Democrats. This is a powerhouse area out here as far as historical powers for politics, very strong. But we're finally getting turned around a little bit now. But they ... were politicians, I mean they were strong, they didn't go out, ... but in terms of their beliefs, I think they were probably pretty pro-Roosevelt type people. ...

... You asked about travel. Well we didn't really get to travel, but we got an awful lot of incentives to want to travel. We spent at least one ... day, maybe two days a month in New York City because we were only twelve miles from New York City. And Mother Wright would see that we would go in there. In our classes in school, we were studying Egypt, we would go in and go through the tombs and what not, you know, there in the [Metropolitan] Museum. And I developed a great interest in ancient history, the Tigris and the Euphrates Valley, and the Abyssinians, and all those people. I mean, I just really thought that was really great stuff. Well just to tell you how that works out, after having been there and been exposed to to good history, having been exposed to good music, we'd go there and go to the opera. And we'd go to Radio City Music Hall and see the shows there. I can remember going to the Paramount Theater with Frank Sinatra on stage and Tommy Dorsey's band and that kind of thing. I also remember in high school, our little group, because I was crazy about ... well, when I was, just to show you how these things turn out, when I started to study music I was real serious, I really wanted to be a concert pianist-- I really did. And then when I got to be about fourteen, I got to be interested in girls and that changed the whole deal. ... I could play popular music, and I would play the popular music and so they would invite me to their parties, and I would play for their dancing. But I'd also let them spin the bottle, ... with the result that they thought I was somebody who should be at their parties. ... Since then I've done a lot of ... playing in that environment, which is an entertainment type thing.

KP: But you originally envisioned being a concert pianist?

JW: I would like to have been a concert pianist, yes. But then, when it got out, you know, ... playing for dances and things like that. Then I became, and, of course, my wife and I ... have always been ... good dancers and we were dancing a long time. But the thing I was going to mention to you, we'd go to New York and have this exposure ... to good music, and to opera and

everything like that. And so about twelve years ago, Margaret, my wife, which I can tell you a little about later, but Margaret and I and some other friends took a twelve day cruise out of Athens, Greece and went through the Greek Isles, went down to Crete, the old Minoan civilization, went to Rhodes, went to Egypt, went to the Pyramids, rode camels to the Pyramids, went to Israel, stayed three days there, went to many different places, went to the Island of Rhodes, went to Ephesus, went to Istanbul, Turkey. So really, ... I've got to give Mother Wright credit for having encouraged an interest in this sort of thing. And so ... I love to travel-- I really do. My wife has arthritis pretty bad and she can't move as fast as I do, so we haven't done as much lately. But we went to Reno last week. We'll be going to Orlando in January for a New York Life meeting. And then I've got a friend that has a charter service--one of my clients--sailboat charter service out of the west coast of Florida, and so we'll go out with him for a day on the Gulf and then go to St. Augustine and spend four or five days in St. Augustine, Florida. But we do that sort of thing. But all of that really came from having been raised with the Wrights. There's nothing that I really, you know, started myself. Somebody else gave me a shove and I ... overcame inertia and started moving, I guess, and did it. But it's, it's been a marvelous life, really.

KP: Did you work at all while growing up in high school? Did you have any odd jobs?

JW: Oh yeah, yeah. I worked at a clothing store, men's clothing store, ... in Upper Montclair for a number of years. When I got into high school, of course, I worked at the city library, you know, and some of those government programs where you got reimbursed for certain work that you did. I think I worked at the YMCA in the summer. But, and then I had some other, ... you reminded me of something I forgot about. The fellah who developed the first television did it out of his garage in Upper Montclair, New Jersey. What in the world was his name-- because he was one of the early television ... makers. ... I remember working in his garage just, whatever it was, taking pieces and throwing them in ... one box into another box.

KP: I cannot think of it.

JW: Well, he and other famous inventors started in little garages in the Montclair area.

KP: It is interesting that you mention you were really surrounded by a lot of people who either growing up became very influential or who at the time were very influential, which must have given you an ease in dealing with people from a lot of different circumstances.

JW: I think this is probably true. But there is another thing, too. You know, very few of us ever have the privilege of growing up in another family. I mean, we grow up with our own family, and we expect to inherit things, we expect family to look after us ... whether you're twenty or forty. In foster families it's different. They have you just for a time, then they let you go. ... You have no inheritance, you have no ... continuing association, unless you want the association. In other words, we don't have an association now with the Wright children because they have already gone off, you know, in their direction. My wife would really like to have been closer to them because she was raised without a family. She just had her mother and no father and, I mean, her father died when she was young, no brothers or sisters. So she kind of ... hangs on to

whatever I had. So the Room for One More and the family and all mean ... a lot to her. Now one thing on Room for One More, in 1950 when the hardback ... book came out, I think it's 1952. Warner Brothers produced it as a movie. And Cary Grant played Pop's part and his wife ... played Mom's part. And then they take all the children and, mind you, they were a combination of, Tim and I did certain things, we didn't do certain things. But it starts off pretty much with this scene here with Jimmy John at the Montclair ... Orphanage, and then they're showing her looking down saying that she'll take this kid that's been raised wrong. Well, it still comes back on TV. It was scheduled, in fact, it was on two weeks ago ... on the Family Channel and I didn't find out about it until two o'clock and it was on at twelve. ... We've made copies of it and all.

KP: My wife and I will have to rent it sometime.

JW: Yeah, it's ... not even available for rental, I don't think.

KP: Oh, really.

JW: ... We've tried it here, but you can check around. If it turns out that you can't find a copy, let me know and I'll mail you one and you can mail it back. We've done that all over the country. But they did make a movie out of it, and so it's kind of interesting. And that's a different background than you would have for a lot of people, maybe, that you interview. But I really feel like my military experiences were certainly a reflection.

KP: Well, we are almost up to the military. I guess the question is Rutgers, and why Rutgers?

JW: Yeah, that's a good question. Like I say, it came time to decide and Mother Wright had ... gone to Vassar ... and Pop Wright had gone, ... was a chemical engineer, so they believed in education. Rutgers was certainly a near ... school and probably was a more reasonable ... school to attend in terms of cost. So, I'd say, ... when we got some scholarship help that was what helped us to do it. Of course, once again, I'm riding the surf boards, see, the surf carried me, I'm not saying I going to go here, I'm going to go there ...

KP: So really it was the Wrights that really steered you to Rutgers.

JW: Yeah, right, absolutely, I mean, I didn't really have any say so over it. I didn't have any money. I went there with nothing, I probably would have left there with nothing. But, no I think that they probably-- I imagine that Mother Wright probably checked around. She's the one that made these decisions. I'm sure she looked to say now what can we, where can we get some money to send this kid to college? You know, and maybe Rutgers might have had an assistance program even more than perhaps this scholarship.

KP: There is one question left, back to your Boy Scouts days, did you get to go to the National Jamboree in Washington?

JW: Yeah, ... I did as a matter of fact. I went to, in fact, the first year, you know, it was canceled because of the polio epidemic. And so then we went the next year. And so then, I went the next

year to Washington, and then Tom went, and he went, I think Tom went to France, I believe. And, then, of course, our sons, our older son who is an attorney, he went to Valley Forge. ... Our other son decided he needed some recognition, and so he just got within one merit badge of Eagle and quit. So he didn't want to, he'd just as soon be known for not making it, as making it. He was a '60s kid, a great kid, but a he was a '60s kid, and he's doing very well now. But ... see scouting, especially Eagle Scouting, and, of course, I spent time at Camp Glenn Gray you know, being a counselor and adviser and all that.

Another job I had when I was at college. This was that I went up to, can't think of the name, it's on a river just up in the northeast corner in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, it's up there, even before you get to the Delaware River. It's right up there, but there was an old, old hotel up there. And they were recruiting college kids to go up there and work, and you know, we'd go up there early and paint, paint all different things. ... In addition to my odd jobs up there, ... the fellahs jobs were to entertain the women guests. And we had a lot of fun entertaining the women guests up there. That was a job that we had when we were in college.

KP: So you had that job for the summer?

JW: Oh, the summer yeah, just went up there for the summer, but it was ... something to look forward to, because it was almost like a vacation. But then we waited on tables and you know, did things like that. You know how those old fashioned hotels were.

KP: Which no longer exist; it was a very different world.

JW: Oh, absolutely, there's nothing like it anymore at all, anywhere. ... But anyway, ... I don't know of anything else, ... to tell you about what happened before going to Rutgers. One of the things I remember about going to Rutgers, which absolutely blows my mind, and like I say, I have a friend that's my best friend here in Oklahoma City who was a graduate of Rutgers, but he graduated from Rutgers-Newark after I did, of course, everybody graduated after I did. This is kind, that's just the way it is. But you know where Winants Hall is?

KP: Oh, yes.

JW: You can understand this very well. This fellah and I get together and we sing "On the Banks" and things like that. We have a good time, you know, just really for our own little group. But I can remember as a freshman back in 1939, you ... wore little beanie hats and ... you had to run between classes. There were a number of rules you had as freshmen. And one night I think it was, I'm almost sure it was a night, they decided ... they'd get all the Winants freshmen with the little beanie hats out on that north side of, you know of, ... looking at the thing it's on the right side, right on the edge there of the building. And we were gonna, we were supposed to sing, this was going to be a special sing along. So we sang, we sang, "On the Banks of the Old Raritan." You know, "where had she not stood since the time of the flood," and what we didn't know is that there were two guys up on top with a 50-gallon drum of water. And they dumped that thing over and hit us and I'll never forget that as long as I live. Do you believe that? But, ... nobody had any idea that that was going to happen. But anyway, ... you developed some friends there,

relationships. I worked there at college, you know, in the cafeteria there, in fact in Winants Hall. That's where I worked-- lived upstairs and worked downstairs. ... And I think, I helped out, you know, where I could, because you ... had to earn some money there doing something, you couldn't make it--

KP: You saw Rutgers both before the United States entered the war, and after all the GIs came back. You were one of the returning GIs. Before the war it was a much smaller place.

JW: Oh yes, absolutely. It was much more intimate, I'm sure, then, compared to afterwards. Of course, afterwards a lot of guys were older, just like I was, and a lot of them were married, like I was. I was married in the service. ... You end up taking care of your child or taking care of, you know, doing schoolwork and that's about it. There wasn't a lot of time for play after the war. A lot of time for play before the war. I spent a lot of time over on the women's campus as a matter of fact, as an undergraduate. It seemed like an appropriate place to be. I had some great friends over there.

KP: You had mentioned that you were a Boy Scout. But you also, you didn't come from a rough and tumble world. In fact, your one boxing match, you were ...

JW: Yeah, that's all I came from.

KP: How did you feel about taking ROTC?

JW: Well, yeah we just had basic ROTC. And once again that was one of those things. You were told you were to do it, you know, it wasn't ... a choice. Most of my life, in the developmental stage were never choice[s]. I never was ... [asked], "Do you want to do this?" It was more a matter of, "This is what you're going to do because." And I responded to that by feeling, "Oh boy, I'd better." I always had ... the feeling that if I didn't do what I was supposed to do, I'd probably go back to Pennsylvania. It was always kind of like--

KP: Really? That hung over you?

JW: Yeah, I think it hung over me all the time. There's no question about it. And it was a ... sword that she had that she could use. She didn't use it, but I mean, ... it was there.

KP: It seems that it was more in your head?

JW: Yeah, ... it was in my head, that's absolutely right. And that's the reason that even as a child I could get in trouble real easy. But just before I'm about to get canned, I straightened up and get out of it. And I spent a lot of my life doing that, even to this day. You know, I mean, it's the ability ... to realize you're going down the tube and you're going to have to stop it, right now. ... So I can do that, it's good.

KP: Did you think of staying in advanced ROTC?

JW: Never did, never occurred to me at all. I didn't really like the military. I didn't like anything at all. You see, I told you earlier, I don't like dominant people. ... The military, they're dominant people. They tell you what to do, and you have to do it. And when I was in the service, I was telling them what to do and they had to do it. ... But ... I didn't have a flare for the military. As a matter of fact, I probably, either like or unlike a lot of others, really didn't want anything to do with the war. I didn't want to be a hero, and I sure as hell felt like a coward. But what happened was, in December 7, 1941, one of my fraternity brothers and I were at Giants Stadium in New York City that Sunday watching the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers play football, play pro football. We were just, for some reason or other we'd just gone in that day, didn't know a thing about Pearl Harbor. All through the game they kept announcing, "Colonel so and so report to your regiment. Colonel so and so, report to your regiment." I had no idea what they were talking about. We came out, and if you've been in New York City, you know the Daily News, banners like that, the guy standing there in the crowd coming and all you could see was: "Pearl Harbor Bombed." And then this friend and I, like a couple of jerks, I guess, decided we'd stay in New York City that night and see what happened. Well, of course, ... there could have been some type of attack on New York City, but we didn't know that. But then I went back to school, and that was in December, I guess, of '41. .... At that time I was taking CPT program, the Civilian Pilot Training Program, there at the field just north of New Brunswick. And my instructor, now I did this, ... this is dumb, you do some dumb things, but I thought, well if I did that, you know, then I wouldn't have to go to war. But what happened was, that a lot of us when we heard about Pearl Harbor decided there was no future for us at school. We didn't know what the future was, so you kind of lost your incentive. So there wasn't, I suspect, there were not a lot of good grades during that next semester.

KP: I have actually heard some funny stories along these lines.

JW: Yeah, I can believe it. You don't, you really didn't feel like you were, ... they were coming up with their, you're supposed to enlist or they're going to conscript you and all this selective service. So this is really, this is crazy, this story will blow your mind. So I decided you only had to take flight training. I mean that its just there with the CPT program. And ... my instructor was a Polish cop. He was from somewhere over towards the ocean area there. But he is the only, I've never, before that time I'd never heard a Polish person swear in Polish. He could swear like somebody I have never heard before or since. And I know he was swearing; I could just tell by his expression. And he got so mad at me from time to time that it was almost inconceivable. And ... we were flying little Aeronca coupes, side-by-side, and ... if you've ever been out to that field, or if you had been, there were snow fences out there at that field. They still have them, I suppose. So when the wind blows that snow it keeps the snow from blowing all over the fields. ... But those planes did not have any brakes on them. The only way you could stop them was to turn the ignition off. And so I did my solo, and when I got through with my solo, he's over there a mile and a half away, I swear it must be that far. It's cold and I'm up against this fence because I couldn't turn around, I just couldn't get, the wind just wouldn't ... let me. So I cut it off and he walked clear across that field and he was so mad, he swore at me, "God!" I said. So finally he said, "Get out." And he said, "He would put me in the right side, instead of the left side." He got in the left side, he turned it around and he took off and for 30 minutes he did everything he could to make me sick. ... I finally had to open the door and I lost everything I ever had. He was just

letting me know that that wasn't what you were supposed to do. Well, what I didn't know at that time was, as soon as I got my license, of course, the army and navy said, "You've got to come with us, you don't have any choice." Well ... he had been in the navy, in fact, he was in the naval reserve program.

... I had tried the army and the army had said, "You're too small, which was probably true, I was 5'4" ... 150 pounds, maybe. But I decided I'd try the navy, and this is a story that the navy doesn't know, but I'll tell it to you here. You can have it in your ... archives forever. But the navy board, cadet selection board, was in New York City, down around William Street somewhere, probably south. And so I went in there just to sign up, to see what's going on. So they said, "Well you'll first have to have a medical examination. So they put you in line with all these guys, and they run you through, check you over to see if you're just basically eligible, even medically, before they go through the rest of the deal. And so I went through and the corpsman took my blood pressure and said, "Your blood pressure is too low." It was like 99 or something or 100 or something. And I said, "Well, what do I have to do to get it back up?" Because at that point ... I wanted to get in something. I didn't want to be selected and sent to some army trench somewhere. I'm trying to do some planning here. So ... he said, "Well go home and eat raw liver." Now, I'm not making this up, this was true. And kids will do anything. So I went home and for two weeks I tried to eat raw liver. If you've ever eaten raw liver, you cannot get through at all. I mean, that's the darnedest thing in the world, I don't believe anybody even said it. Anyway, I came back two weeks later, went through it again, and there was a certain doctor and the corpsman said, "Your blood pressure is still low." And so ... I started leaving and he came over and said, "You really want to get in the navy?" And I said, "Sure, I want to get into the navy." He said, "I tell you what you do." He said, and this is true in New York; it still is, I guess. But all those cafes that they have, they're combination bars, they're bars and they have sandwiches and food on the bars, and ... you climb up on a relatively high barstool. He said, "When you get through eating, have ... about two or three ... shots of bourbon and come back on over here, and we'll check you again this afternoon." And so, and I had not been a drinker, mainly because I didn't care about it, but I didn't even have any money; I couldn't afford it, for sure. But that day I go over there and I climb up on the barstool, and at 5 foot 4 [inches], you've got to climb up on the barstool, and had ... a couple of sandwiches, and then I went ahead, and I had two or three ... shots of bourbon. I dropped off the barstool, staggered out of the place, went across the street, went upstairs, and went through the line, and there was a different doctor on the line. ...

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

KP: So this doctor passed you?

JW: This different doctor just passed me.

KP: He didn't even know you had been there.

JW: Didn't even know I had been there, I mean, ... yeah, right. And so I suspected that, and I still have reasonable blood pressure after all these years.

KP: I have interviewed people who have expressed annoyance because they did not get into aviation, particularly when they were rejected because the bite on their teeth, or some other thing that did not seem relevant to aviation. They would go, I don't understand what this has to do with flying.

JW: ... I understand, I was just lucky to get in. I don't know why, because I was still small, anyway.

KP: A few questions about Rutgers and pre-war. One of the things my students in my class do is they look at the Targums and write a paper on a semester's worth of Targums. And one of the things that's sort of striking in September of 1939 when you came in. President Clothier gave a very long talk, and was in favor of isolationism and sort of said, "We need to stay out of this." How did students feel about the war as it was progressing before Pearl Harbor, or how much, in a sense, did you follow the war and know what was going on?

JW: Well, a couple of things, I think that, I think we were ... probably following the war, but not really feeling we'd be involved in the war, particularly. ... I can remember more ... in the economics classes that when we were studying you know, the Keynesian theory or something else, ... money supply, there was always somebody that would stand up and say, "Isn't there a better way of doing this?" And they always ended up being Socialists, you know, ... Communists. They were on campus, I'm sure. I didn't know who they were or what they were about. But I would always take it with me that there was always somebody who didn't think the system we had was working. They wanted to find fault with the system. As if, you know, there was maybe a better way to do it. But I don't even remember any conversation particularly, and certainly the classes didn't have any particular concern about what was happening, you know, internationally, or whether or not we were going to be Isolationists, or whether we were going to be, you know, going to do something about it. It never occurred to be in my wildest dreams that I would be involved with the Japanese.

KP: So in other words, Pearl Harbor really came to you as a surprise.

JW: Complete surprise, absolutely. I was, ... you've got to remember that, unless you're really involved in, either from a historical perspective or you're actually discussing it in class. And we didn't discuss it in French, we didn't discuss it in Spanish, we didn't discuss it really in economics. I don't think we discussed it in political science. I mean these things were not major issues, even though maybe internationally they were, you know, generating major issues. ... I've done a lot of reading, of course, about the history up to Pearl Harbor and all that sort, ... and my son has a great interest in that sort of thing, too. ... I think that it was a complete shock to me ... because I had not even anticipated having to be in the service. ... Sure, I had the two years of ROTC. If something could turn me off, that could turn me off real quick. But I was more interested in football, you know, and track and girls and this kind of thing, which you normally do, hoping you'd get through subjects.

KP: It sounds like a simple question, but did you read the newspaper daily while you were at college? If you can remember.

JW: Probably only if there was one around. I mean, ... you didn't go after it, look for it, unless there was something that had to do with your studies. There was the Targum, you know, which you'd ... probably pick it up and see what the schedule was. ... If there was any movement toward, towards war. Of course, ... you've got to keep in mind that there was already a war going on in Europe.

KP: You have given the impression that it seemed very distant to you and most of your classmates.

JW: ... I would say to me it was certainly a distant thing, and I was, you know, shocked all to pieces because, and I don't say this to indicate that I'm a coward in my thinking, but I certainly wasn't aggressive about wanting to put myself in harm's way. I mean, I really did not have any interest in that. And I probably could have even been a Clinton probably, ... I could have gotten the hell out of this thing. But that ... was not the way it went. And I think one thing I maybe learned because I am adaptable, which I had to be as a foster child. And I certainly ... had to do in many other circumstances, that that probably allowed me to make the transition. There's also another thing, I don't know about you or not, but I tend to be a trusting person. Well you have to be, when you don't have anything, you have to trust somebody. And I had a tendency ... to be trusting when it came to [the] military. In training I never figured a guy would kill himself as well as me if we were out flying together. I just didn't think he'd do it. And so I would let him kind of be in charge and responsible for it. When flying alone, sure, I was my own, I knew that. But ... I have a tendency to trust people and in my business today I do trust people. If that trust is betrayed, it's done very seldom. But ... I mean that's part of life. But ... I think, maybe some of that was a reliance that I had on Mother Wright and Pop Wright. I thought they would not, you know, direct me wrongly even though I had the desire that a teenager has to oppose the powers that be, then as well as now.

One thing, just to give you an idea, once again, this just occurred to me. Mother Wright was so, so tough about being deceitful that on Sunday afternoons she would lay down on the sofa, put her glasses up in her hair, you know, like some of the gypsy women do, and just read the Sunday paper, you know. Well, I had to get my math work done, this was like maybe seventh grade, you know, or something like that. ... Well, you probably don't remember because you're not my age group, but, they had [a] thing called the Lennis pads which were nothing more than math books where you just added up columns of figures and that was your homework. Well, I mean that was what you took home. And you had to have them all lined up and you turned them in Monday morning. I'm over here, across the room, clear across the room, at an old fashioned telephone on a stand, one of those, you didn't crank it, but I mean ... it stood up high. And I wanted to get out and play because we had some guys who were out there wanting me to get out and play. So, in my great ability to overcome tough situations, she had a list there, near the telephone book, of all of her friends, all the numbers she calls. And at that time we used like 5253478. And so I went down filling all these telephone numbers on this sheet. I said, "I'm through." And she said, "Okay, let me see them." ... Took them over there, and she looked at them; she began to

recognize the telephone numbers. And I turned around and she got up and threw that thing as hard as she could across the room at me and hit me right in the head to let me know that wasn't the way you're supposed to do it. I never got out that afternoon; I spent the rest of the time adding up figures. But that's the kind of training that I had. And, once again, I go back on it and say, she was not the hugging type, she didn't hug you. She loved you by seeing to it that you were protected. That was the ... the old English style.

KP: Would she give you praise for what you had done?

JW: Yes.

KP: She wasn't cold in that sense.

JW: No, she was, she was praiseworthy. ... She encouraged you to do what you could and do well at and she supported you in whatever you did. She just wouldn't stand for nonsense. As a swimmer--she was a great swimmer--she developed lifesaving techniques in the ocean, in the surf, which the Red Cross took and acquired and used. And she taught us how to rescue people on surfboards and things like that. ... She had natural buoyancy she was like a great big barrel out there just bouncing around, and you'd go out and put your hands on her shoulder, catch your breath and swim back to shore. But she loved to sail, and so a lot of the things that she instilled in us early on ... I tended to pick up. So my life is really influenced more by the association with the Wrights than it was before the Wrights. A lot of people can think back to when they were five or six years old, I don't have many memories of that.

KP: It almost seems like you want to, I wouldn't say block out, but that's not the part you want to dwell on.

JW: Yeah, you don't block it out, it's there. But, I mean, ... as a child I was interested in knowing more about my mother, and I think that's what we're getting into now. Because [on] the Williams side of the family, people had died and had left me things that were on my father's side of the family, grandparents, great-grandparents, things like that. So I have an interest in that area. John, our older son, is very much interested in what I've done. And ... he's interested in my family, in my family's side. But anyway ... Mother Wright ... was such a strong influence. But, once again, she wasn't the hugging and kissing type, and I think I probably would have enjoyed that. That's just me, I mean, some don't. I'm pretty much of an up front guy. I try to treat people the same socially as I do in business, or ... you know, in church or religion, what not. I don't have any problems with doing what's right. I heard someone at the insurance meeting not too long ago, where there'd been some bad things being done, you know, by people, and his comment was, "There's no right way to do a wrong thing." And I thought, "Boy, isn't that interesting." And there's a lot of that going on, you know.

KP: When we get to the insurance end of it, I'll ask you a few questions because ...

JW: Okay, but I'm just saying that, in my life, there's no right way to do a wrong thing. That doesn't mean that I don't do something wrong, but I feel like hell after I've done it. I have a

conscious. But that pretty much brings me up to, probably, now [the] only thing I'll mention to you is after I left the Wrights, you know, and went to college, and then Jimmy John, he went to college, he went to Springfield also, he went to a world jamboree, and the crippled boy went on to be ... an Eagle Scout, so we were all Eagle Scouts.

KP: The Boy Scouting movement was very important to you.

JW: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. It was the most important thing we were doing, and that was a good thing for me, that it was that way. But then, oh, ... after we left, and the war was over, she took in another child. And he was a White Russian DP-- displaced persons. Both his parents were killed in White Russia. And he was about, I think he might of been, 8, 9, 10, years old, or something like that. And that was the time when all these wealthy families in this country said, "We'll open up our houses to these kids." It's kind of like somebody that hadn't eaten for five years, and you're suddenly feeding them cake, they're going to throw it all up. Well, this was not the environment for them, they needed to come over to a place ... that they could adjust. They couldn't make the adjustments. And so this one particular kid went after the people with a butcher knife, and so they tried to find some place [where] they could place him. And, believe it or not, they came to Mother Wright ... because she had a reputation for having taken in kids and what not, and so she decided to take him. And she took him, and he went after her with a butcher knife, but she fixed that. And she handled him real well. Well, she ended up, he got changed around, got a new direction for himself, she got him through school, college. ... His name was Albert. She took him to her house and she wrote a book about him. And that book is called <u>The Gentle House</u>. And we have a copy of that, too.

KP: I'm curious, Mother Wright's papers, did she give them to a historical society?

JW: I don't have any idea, we never ...

KP: If you ever can find that out, I'd be very curious to learn about it.

JW: ... We never got any, ... you know, as a foster child, I never got anything at all. I brought her things. I brought her an abacus that I picked up in Japan when I landed there one day. But never anything from her, if I'm aware of those things. Her kids might have them; her sons might have them. I have letters from her, of course, you know which expresses her interests from him, from Pop Wright as well, to me. But you would enjoy that story. This boy ... came from a family in Russia where they did very fine craft work, I mean real detailed work. And ... when the painters would come and paint our house, our big house, he would go around after the painters and tell them they didn't paint underneath the sills, you know, point it out to them. ... And they hated to see the kid around. ... So what do you suppose he's doing today? Well, when he finally grew up, he got off on his own, he ... was repairing furniture in Mount Vernon. And, for the last eight years or ten years, he's been taking care of furniture, at what's the place south of Washington?

KP: Williamsburg.

JW: Yeah, Willliamsburg. So he's in charge of the Williamsburg replacements, or at least he's on the staff there that does the replacements. And he's made some wood things for us and sent them to us. So we go to see him when we go back to Williamsburg. He's married and has kids, too. So it's been a very successful ... story. But that ... brings you up to after the war. But I just wanted you to know that. But the other book is called The Gentle House.

KP: Was Mother Wright active in any children's relief organizations, children's aid societies?

JW: ... I don't know that she was ...

KP: Because she really seemed to have had a real interest in children.

JW: Yeah, I think she was really more involved, ... she was interested in children that she could handle, that she could direct, she could control, she could move, that she could love in her way, okay. But not necessarily relief organizations. They would come to her with a problem child, for instance. Originally, back when I went with them in 1930, there was what they called New York Herald Tribune Fund or something, that had been set up to take care of kids that were on the street. And it was through that fund she got to take the children that she did every year. Incidentally, one thing, just to show you also how her teaching methods were. Her teaching methods were, when we would go sailing, she would still bring these kids down from New York. See, after I was there, these teenagers would come down for two weeks ... at the shore. And we'd take them out sailing, and we sailed cat boats at that time, and they usually had, you know, wooden masts and wooden boons on them, and they're pretty heavy. But you had to kind of stoop down when you ... came about because the sail would come over pretty fast. So we knew what was going on, but nobody else knew what was going on. And she'd take these kids, ... when they get there they were still throwing their weight around, and they're at the start of the week, and they won't listen to her, what she's got to say and pay attention to anybody at all. So she'd take them out the first day in the sailboat, and the wind would be blowing pretty well probably. So she'd say, "Ready about and everybody down on the floor." Down, on the cabin floor, because they were just [an] open cockpit-type thing. And, of course, we would get down pretty flat, these other kids would just stand up. She'd say coming about, ... they wouldn't pay attention to her at all. She'd say, "Get down." The thing would come around and wipe them right off, right off the boat, right into the water. And we'd grab them and pull them back aboard. And they looked pretty sad compared to where they were before. Nobody said a word. Next time that she called out, coming about, they were all face down on the floor. Now you can't tell me that they didn't learn something there that they took back, when they went back to New York City and the streets. [laughter]

KP: She was not adverse to giving the lessons of hard knocks.

JW: Yeah, and I think that she taught obedience, you know. Yeah, she wasn't adverse to hard knocks at all. I mean, she didn't hit the kids. ... She might whack you across the head if you did something that really was kind of out of line. But another thing that she did. She expected you to do what she told you to do. I'd come home from Scouts when I was a young Scout, maybe eleven years old or something like that; I loved to stop, ... if the New Jersey Symphony was

rehearsing, which it did right up the street from where we lived at Mount Hebron Junior High School. And so we would, a couple of us would go in and sit in the back row. Well she knew what time we were supposed to be home from Scouts. And I loved to go there because I loved the timpani, and I loved to see the kettle drummer play, I just could stand up and cheer when the kettle drummer starts in. But anyway, ... this other kid and I are right in the back row. And, all of the sudden, this hand grabs me by the neck, and I never weighed very much anyway, lifts me up out of that seat. And I turned around and here's that specter. She's got on her nightgown ... with her overcoat on top of her nightgown and the nightgown underneath her coat, and [she] dragged me home. And I'll tell you, we weren't doing anything wrong, but see, we hadn't ... done what she told us, that was to come straight home. And that was important to her, which was true. ...

KP: It was not so much that you were at the symphony, it was that you had not come home?

JW: Yeah, right. I mean she loved the idea of the symphony, that was great. I was exposed to Yehudi Menuhin when he was a child playing ... and all that. ... We were exposed to really high level of education, a ... broad-based education, really, when you stop to think about it. It wasn't a lot of nonsense; it was good, good education. To this day I love classical music; in fact, I listened to it coming all the way over here in the car. But, I guess that's because it's part of my being. But I wanted to mention that to you because that's in her personality. She ... caused me to probably survive the war.

KP: How did you get into the civilian pilots training, what brought about that?

JW: Well, I really think that--and I'm serious--I really think that came right after, right after the Pearl Harbor deal in New York City.

KP: So you enlisted after Pearl Harbor?

JW: Oh, yeah.

KP: Not before, because a lot of people enlisted before.

JW: No, I didn't know a thing about that. All I knew was when Pearl Harbor happened, I went back to school and got to thinking that, boy, I'm going to be inducted into the service here pretty soon; we're at war. And I thought, "Well, what can I do to keep from going to war?" That's what went through my mind. And ... this was dumb, ... but this shows you what happens to you. I thought, "What can I do that wouldn't take a lot of effort?" I didn't want to study anyway, it was just that attitude. ... There was a notice that said you could get credit for a CPT course for the next semester. Which would run, you know, January through June in ... '42. So that's when I signed up for that. And I was just signing up for the second semester, you know, of the year, along with other things you were taking. And this was just an optional course. I don't think it was a credit course other than the hours that you put in. And so that's the reason I did that. ... But my intention was if I did that, at least for six months they're not going to get me. But the six months, ran out and then all of the sudden it was a different ball game.

KP: I have to ask just a few more stock questions, which I have asked everyone I have interviewed before the war.

JW: Ask me anything you want.

KP: What is Dean Metzger? Everyone has a Dean Metzger story, or at least some recollections on Dean Metzger.

JW: I remember Dean Metzger very well. I never had any personal contact with him because I was never involved, you know, with that. I think he was, to my knowledge, he was ... kind of strong, you know, ... if I remember correctly, he wasn't ... the kind ... soft, compassionate type. [laughter]

KP: I have heard so many stories of Dean Metzger that I feel like I know this man.

JW: Yeah, I mean, I did not know him well because when you don't have any, you're down at school, you're studying, you're working, maybe you're in a fraternity or something like that. You don't really have, and you're in sports, you don't have a lot of time to get involved in maybe that area. I mean be involved with the dean. Because I was doing other things.

KP: So you sort of stayed out of trouble.

JW: ... I think so. I didn't have enough money to get into trouble because it usually took some money to do that. But I didn't have any desire to get into trouble. ... All I was doing, ... all I was doing was, once again, following the track that somebody put me on. The Wrights put me on the track to a college education, knowing it was needed, probably, for the future, not having any idea what the future was. I just followed that track.

KP; You lived in Winants your first year, including your getting soaked. What brought about your joining a fraternity?

JW: I really don't know, but I suspect that I was probably, you know, somebody came after me that was there. And I don't have a lot of friends, we have some friends ... that we still are aware of and we go back to, to reunions and what not, and some of them died. ... I don't know why I became a Lambda Chi. I know Lambda Chi is not on the campus anymore now, but. ... I'm just not real sure; I think that you didn't join in your freshman or sophomore year anyway, I don't think, or maybe at least the freshman year. I suspect that they, ... somebody probably invited me because I was on the track team, or I ... played 150-pound football, that's what I played, and I played first string on that, I enjoyed that. Did you ever see anything about 150-pound football [at] Rutgers?

KP: When I first came to Rutgers, because I got my doctorate at Rutgers, they still had 150 pounds and then it was phased out when I was in graduate school.

JW: ... That was a great thing for the guys that were small. You couldn't weigh over 150 pounds, but they had the darndest league. You know, they had Yale, and Cornell, and Harvard, and Navy, and Army. You know, I can remember going to all those places and playing. But then we had only eight men on a team, and you had to be real fast because otherwise you're dead. I mean, if a hole opened up, you're gone. But, so I think I probably was approached by somebody, probably in a fraternity. ... In addition, ... I had to work, I couldn't ...

KP: You worked all the way through college?

JW: Oh, sure. I mean I had to work full-time especially at the fraternity to pay for the fraternity, for meals and things like that. Yeah, ... and I've stayed, you know, over the years I've stayed in touch. I've been alumni adviser to the Lambda Chi fraternity, down at O.U. ... But not for the last ten-fifteen years, I haven't done much with it. And also at OCU in Oklahoma City. But you know with Rutgers off the campus there, ... I think they're going to get back, but I think it's going to take a couple more years probably. But ... they've established an excellent national program, an attitude program which really precludes anything like that ever happening again. There's no way it could happen again, and the national is so strong on this that it just amazes me. In fact, our son that's the attorney, is also the national vice-president of the Pi K A's and he went through here at OSU and he's also the head of the Board of Regents at Oklahoma City Community College and has been for ten years. But they tend to get involved. But in answer to your question, I think probably that was the reason I got into ... Lambda Chi. Of course, I didn't do anything with them when I got back and finished up school because I was married.

KP: You mentioned a Spanish professor Dr. Paine was your favorite professor. It seemed like you really like Spanish quite a bit.

JW: Yeah, I did at the time. I don't anymore, I mean I don't know anything about it.

KP: You mean you don't speak it.

JW: "Como esta?" And I'm through, you know. I don't speak Spanish now. But ... having had a lot of Latin it was a little easier for me to kind of get in and understand the languages a little bit better, I think, probably. But Paine was, he was a little round, short fellah, a little mustache, Mexican type, you know, bald head. But ... I just seemed to relate to him. Maybe it's because I was in [the] Spanish Club or something like that, you know, and he was in charge of it. Or I was in the Latin Club. I think I attended, I was a little bit of a joiner. ... I like to be part of a group. I'm not a loner, per se. I'm a loner in my business practice because ... I built a practice on what I would do, what I could do. But I'm in life insurance. I'm the past president of the Life Underwriters Association, past president of the CLU Association, past president of the Estate Planning Council in Oklahoma City. And today, I'm the national representative for Tulsa and Oklahoma City on the CLU programs. But I ... still keep active, you know. ... But I have a tendency to want to be, I feel like I can be bigger by being part of something than I can by being alone. And I usually take leadership roles if I get the chance.

KP: You mentioned that you are a life-long Republican, and I just can't resist asking, do you remember when Wendell Willkie visited the campus in 1940 at all?

JW: No, because, ... now let's see, '40. I probably don't remember even though it might've happened.

KP: Because I know it left an impression on a lot of people.

JW: At that time I wasn't really, see, I never voted until I went to college. So I really didn't have any position, didn't take a position at that point. So I don't remember. I mean, I know of him and what not, ... but I don't remember him being there, no. Only thing I remember ... is my graduation in 1948, when Dwight Eisenhower was our ... keynote speaker. Other than that, I don't really remember a lot.

KP: One of the things that a lot of people in both 1942 and 1943 have said, is that after December 7, people just started drifting away.

JW: Oh yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, there was ... either they were going into the service or they had lost their incentive. And I'd say that's maybe, I think that's the reason I took the other deal. I was just buying time to keep from going.

KP: One of the things that I learned the quickest in doing this, and I don't know that historians make as big a deal of it as they should, is really how dangerous aviation was in the 1930s and 1940s. I mean you're lucky to survive training in some ways.

JW: Oh absolutely, yeah, that's what I say. See, when you go in the service, especially the navy, military service, all of the needs of the service is what determines what happened. And fellahs that were really qualified that should have been flying, never got to fly because the service didn't need them. And then all of the sudden, they feel like they're going to have a lot of losses in the invasion of the Marshall Islands, and what do they say? We want everybody you can get your hands on. So then all of a sudden, they were recruiting more and more people while, it turns out, they don't need them. So then, they cut it back again. And my track apparently, was I just hit at the time when they were needed because, by nature, I probably would not ever have been a pilot. I wasn't the kind that, that wanted to fly particularly, I didn't care about it. I wasn't a risk taker.

KP: A lot of guys who wanted to fly had gone to Newark Airport to watch the planes. You had never gone to watch the planes?

JW: Well, I watched the planes, but you know, I ...

KP: But you never had that burning desire to fly?

JW: That, no. That was not part of me at all. And the very fact that I could stop flying 50 years ago and still be interested in flying. But I don't have that driving desire to have to fly. I'll fly with friends, you know, and you know, maybe help them out or something. But no, I think that

back in those days, that, well, you could look at the casualties that you had, even in combat that we had. At ... our squadron reunion out in Reno two weeks ago, there were three less of our crew there that were there this time, than were there last year, and we didn't have many to start with. I mean that many, we had 34 all told there, but ...

KP: After you passed the physical, this was in what time of year again?

JW: This was in the summer of ... '42, yeah. I would say that probably in August, I would suspect. That I probably went in then. And then ...

KP: Where did you report to initially?

JW: Well, that was the thing. The navy was not organized. I don't know about the army, but the navy was not organized. They didn't have any idea, ... you've got to remember naval aviation was really under kind of a cloak, and nobody was wanting to pay any attention to them. And they suddenly realized they ... were building carriers, and they had to get people trained. So they did not have a planned program. But they had arranged--this is interesting--they had arranged with various colleges to start kind of a CPT/Naval program. So what they did was, they, first of all, took me in as a seaman second class; I was an enlisted man. And that was the only thing they had. They didn't pay you any money, but, I mean, they gave you the designation. Instead of getting 35 bucks a month I mean. So then ... I got assigned to Renssellaer Institute up in New York State-- Troy, New York, ... probably in August, I guess. And ... there were a group of us from all the United States, apparently, which showed up at this school. They were going to have courses. Nobody really knew what they were doing. The uniforms were just any khaki uniform, army air corps hats, with navy uniforms ... little propellers on the hats. But they provided you with room and board, and you could fly up there at Troy Airport. So we were getting advanced flight instruction over what we had down at New Brunswick. And we were flying, what the hell was it? It was a low wing Ryan. And the only problem with it, it was a two seater, front and back seat. The only problem with the Ryan was that ... the engine was a gravity-feed carburetor. Which means what? If you get upside down it's going to stop running, and it did every time. And you'd pull up into a loop and that thing would stop running. And the only way you could start it was to dive it and get the propeller to windmill and then get it to start again. And there're a bunch of hills and lakes and ponds up there in that area. And I remember diving one time trying to start it, you know, straight down. I think ... the altimeter was at 800 feet when it finally started. But, ... while we were up there, they said that we had been promoted within about a ... six-week period. We had been promoted to aviation cadet at 50 dollars a month, but no pay. In other words, we would get just the room.

KP: So you were in the military and not getting paid?

JW: Right, oh yeah.

KP: And you were on military discipline, the whole--

JW: Oh absolutely, yeah. It was crazy. ... They were so confused they didn't know what they were doing.

KP: The army program was very well-organized.

JW: Not the navy in 1942, heck no. Not, not until probably in September. By the time September rolled around, ... then I got orders with pay. And ... I was shipped from Troy, New York, from Renssellaer, to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, ... to pre-flight school. This is where they changed you from a nice guy to a tough guy. This is where they ... taught you how to treat other people, as far as being tough on them because most of us were, you know, just college ... juniors, ... a pretty nice bunch of guys. But, you'll never believe this. We went down there on trains, got off trains, got on buses. We apparently went out to the campus, and as I got off the bus, you would not guess who met me getting off the bus. Harvey Harman. The whole Rutgers football coach and staff were assigned to the University of North Carolina-- the pre-flight school. They were in charge of the training down there. So here I am, of course, he didn't know me from a hole in the wall, but I mean at least you'll look up and see your head coach sitting right there at the ... bottom of the stairs. So anyway, so I went, and this was an experience for me because you've got to remember, I came being, you know, kind of a nice guy, quiet guy, don't stir up any more storms than you have to, always figure a way out. ... And I'm a defensive person as a result of that, which has saved my fanny many times in the service. But, anyway, so they're there. So then, you've got to remember now, these guys, non-military, they'd never really had much military training. They just went to a class and ate a meal or something up in Troy.

KP: Did you do any close-order marching at Troy?

JW: No, very little of it, if any.

KP: So it was really just flying.

JW: Yeah, the flying and the uniforms and going to classes and what not. ... What they were doing was keeping the suspense until they were ready to start the program. This happened all over the country. Interesting point now, inject ... another whole thing, you don't even know about this. George Bush, he got to Chapel Hill three weeks before I did. He was in the battalion before me. I didn't know this until the middle of last year. Anyway, so ... he's there, and he may have been there the same time I was because ... the battalion was there about eight weeks. So anyway, the idea, my concept of pre-flight school. That was where they taught you to be tough when you were a nice guy. Do you remember hearing about Gorgeous George, he was a wrestler way back in the '40s?

KP: No.

JW: Big gold hair, ... huge guy. His biceps were bigger than my stomach, went clear around my waist. And they had him there to teach Jujitsu. You know, I can remember him putting a hammerlock on me and I'd just relax, ... I couldn't do a thing with this guy because I figured he wouldn't kill me. ... That was ... one of those things where if you trust the guy you're not going to

get killed. ... Anyway, we had him there, ... that was where we got introduced to ninety day wonders, I'm sure you've heard of the ninety day wonder. I mean, those are the fellahs that are second lieutenants or ensigns in the navy, that have ninety days training, no military experience, but ninety days training. And they're in charge of all these recruits coming in. Well ...

KP: Basically they had been in the class before in a sense.

JW: Yeah, ... but they, you know, they can be a real pain. I mean the guys, the recruits didn't like them at all.

KP: Did you have any Annapolis men there that you knew of?

JW: Not there. Well, down the line we did have, of course, but not there. ... Anyway, they had, what you did was you ran an obstacle course, for instance, maybe twice a day or something like that. But the rules were that if you fell, of course, you had to get up. But if your friend--you know that's your roommate, that you're rooming with--if he fell you had to keep going, you couldn't help him up. You had to run over him if he was down, in other words. And you couldn't help anybody else. They were rough; they wanted everybody to really get tough. ... They played pre-flight soccer. You've never heard of pre-flight soccer. But pre-flight soccer is where you get in the game. and you not only kick the ball, but you knock the guy down that ... had the ball. I mean that's just pre-flight soccer. Well, that was where we got back at the ninety day wonders because they would be out there and be playing. And everybody would be just getting right on the ninety day wonders.

KP: Was there any hazing going on?

JW: I wouldn't say there was any hazing at that point. This was a matter of survival; I mean, this was a training survival program. And they were just, this was between getting you up to the point where you had to be tough, expect tough treatment, because, you know, we were a bunch of pansies. Let's face it. And this was before you went to flight training. So anyway, they'd put you in boxing rings. Shades of going back to Mother Wright. [laughter] Boxing. They put gloves on you and they'd have a referee and all. And you had to box, usually with your roommate, the guy you got to face. But you had to box until one of you started bleeding, and when one of you started bleeding, then they'd call ... the fight. Well, there really wasn't much fun, I never enjoyed swinging at a friend of mine.
But, ... another thing about why I may be a little bit hesitant about getting people to swing at me. When I was a kid, back when my mother died, we bounced. Doris and I bounced around from house to house, now this is true. We were down there in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania living with her cousin. He didn't want us there, didn't like us there. We were going to school, he would ... meet us at the gate when we came back with a baseball bat. And he would swing at me, you know, just mad that we had to come back to his house. I guess today you would probably call that abuse. [laughter] But anyway, at that time that was all that there was. So we didn't stay there too long, we left it. But I developed a real fear of anybody raising their hand at me. I couldn't play baseball because anybody raise their hand, you know, swung a bat or throw a baseball, I had an awful time getting used to baseball. And today I will cringe if somebody raises

a hand-- I'll cringe. I'm all right after I've cringed. I mean I'll go after them, but at that point, I'd just, ... kind of cringe. In fact, Mother Wright's and Pop Wright's daughter, Trotty, that's in the book, that died, she'd get up on top of the roof and throw balls to me down in the yard so I'd catch 'em to learn to catch the baseball. I mean it was all kind of interesting things they'd. Or they'd teach me to, for heights, I hated to climb heights, I was scared to death of heights. How could I fly still being scared to death of heights. But I ... had to learn to climb up trees, you know, and a result is a lot of that training kind of paid off later on. But going back to Chapel Hill, after we got through, then I was transferred to an E-Base, which is a primary flight school. And that's where Oklahoma comes into this.

KP: Before we leave Chapel Hill, one question is, can anyone wash out of this training? It seems that some guys might even deliberately wash out.

JW: I don't think you could wash out. You'd probably get killed, but you wouldn't wash out.

KP: So you didn't look around, and some guy just disappeared.

JW: No, I don't think so. ... For one thing, if you run all day. If you were up in the morning early, we were probably running also, you know, ten miles or something like that. And you can imagine who they put at the back end of the line and the tall guys at the front. And I'm running like hell trying to keep up with these guys. I've never in my life ever got to where I, where I was setting the pace; somebody else was setting the pace. But I don't think there was any matter of, of getting out at that point, because you really didn't have any choice. You get six weeks of training. If, I suppose, at that point there were guys that didn't exemplify, you know, what was maybe demanded, maybe they were resisting all the time or, you know, opposing the authority. And they may have decided that they really shouldn't go on to flight training. That's a possibility, I mean, I don't know that for a fact.

KP: But it was not a common occurrence?

JW: I don't think so, not at that point. But from then on, I mean, it did get to be a real, real deal. It was a matter of survival.

KP: And I guess another question, though it does not seem that you got any chance to get off Chapel Hill, the base. What did you think of the South from what you got to see?

JW: It was a great college [town]. ... Only one Sunday, I got to go into Raleigh, you know, see the town. But the university is a great university; it was even then. It was a beautiful area, a pretty part of the state. But once again, see I'm on this track. The navy says, you go there, I go there. I mean, I ... handled the navy better than a lot of guys did because they would resist. I didn't resist unless my life was at stake. Then, if it was threatened, I'd resist all to hell. But ... [laughter]

KP: So you were sent to Oklahoma, probably one of the crucial things in your life.

JW: It would have to be. Consider somebody from Pennsylvania/New Jersey, not knowing anything about the West at all. And when they said, you know, you're being assigned to Norman, Oklahoma, I had absolutely no idea what was going on. I envisioned Indians, cowboys, you know, this kind of thing.

KP: Also comes to mind is the Grapes of Wrath. Had you read the novel or seen the movie?

JW: I hadn't paid any attention to the Grapes of Wrath. That was in the '30s, you know, and ... I was wrapped up in too many other things. I was really not a man of the world, or even a child of the world. I was just doing my thing, in my little blob of ink, ... I went right along with it. But no, I didn't have any, I didn't have any feelings at all. In fact, I thought it was, you know, this is crazy. And I've told my friends out in Oklahoma, because the weather changes so fast out here, I've told them this before and it's funny as hell. ... I said that Norman, Oklahoma was the only place I've ever been in my life where ... you could stand in mud up to your knees and have dry sand blowing in your face. ... That's the way the weather changes; it's that quick. From hot to cold, you know a 40 degree ... temperature change, no wind to 40 knots or 50, like we had yesterday. But, anyway, so I got shipped out ... there. And that was ... the E- Base. We were flying what they called Stearmans or Yellow Perils or N-2Ss is the navy designation on it. And we just went ... through about two months of flight training. I guess it may be more than that because we got there, I think, in November, probably was when we got there. And, of course, they have those training bases out there because the weather is relatively good over the year. It'd be windy, it's always ... blowing out there. It had to have been sometime the latter part of November, probably, or middle of November.

So we started flight training. Flight training, before I tell you how I met Margaret. Flight training was with these bi-planes. You've seen them; they still fly them at air shows. We call them the Yellow Peril. ... You'd sit in back and you know the instructor sit in front, and you ... have ground courses that you take, and you had your flight syllabus. You had to put in so many hours before you could, you know, if you could solo. And ... I had another problem because I was short as well. ... Sometimes I couldn't reach the pedals all the time, so ... I had a parachute ... and I'd put a cushion behind me. And when I'd get up in a loop the cushion would fall out, and I'd be standing there hanging on the damn strap, you know. And they used to laugh and said they couldn't even see my head coming in sometimes from the roof. "Who was flying the airplane?" But I guess I survived on that. But we did, there we started to lose guys. I mean they either were killed, you know, by crashing.

KP: How many crashes, do you remember?

JW: Well there were a lot of crashes around. I didn't have any. But ...

KP: Did you see any coming in?

JW: Oh yeah. Sure, you'd see that happen. They'd just spin in, you know, or they get too slow, or they'd lose power and have to go in somewhere else. And down there you didn't have a runway, what you had was like a blacktop area, sort of like a parking lot, a huge parking lot, so

everyone was coming in every direction. You know, generally the same direction, but it wasn't as if you had white lines to go down. But that really ... was where I learned defensive flying, and even defense driving. Today I'm a very defensive driver. But defensive flying is when you anticipate. The navy's attitude was the minute you take off, expect the worst, always. And the instructors proved that. We never took off and we'd get up 100 feet, and the instructor would pull the throttle. And say you got it, you know. You had taken off, what are you going to do about it; where are you going to go? Well, of course, there were fields around there, ... but you had to look for a place. So, since then I have never had any problem about planning ahead. So I plan ahead. I'm always looking when driving; I'm looking half a mile ahead to see what's going on. And that was the way I flew, and that helped a lot, you know, in combat, too, because it was defensive. I mean, you were anticipating what someone else is going to do and try to do it. And I'll tell you about that later. But ... anyway we had flight training there and it was an interesting time. ... Some of these guys had either wanted to fly or had been pilots and they were gung ho. The instructors were very, very tough. Their job was ... to wash people out, and so ... you'd have check rides, you know, and you'd either get an up or you'd get a down. And if you got a down, well then, of course, you were out, you were out of the program. That's why I say at that time probably everybody in the program was going to get onto the next stage because unless you just trained yourself, they needed you to get trained, I mean that's what it amounted to. And then when they had plenty of people in that pipeline, then they would cut back in the number going to those E-Bases.

KP: And the washout rate rose?

JW: Yeah, then the washout rate would go up. Even though you were a great pilot, you'd do everything right, but you'd still get a down, which could make it kind of rough. But once again, it's the needs of the service that cause this. So anyway, ... we were fortunate, and then we survived. Well, that was ... probably in the early part of November. In December, the early part of December, ... they had a trolley car that ran between Oklahoma City and Norman. It's called the inter-urban. They still have a restaurant with all the pictures in it in our building, as a matter of fact, of the inter-urban and all that stuff. There're restaurants around me. But, anyway, this was an old-fashioned trolley car that ran from Norman, 25 miles up Oklahoma City, and out to some of the other outlying areas. ... Another navy cadet and I decided that we'd go to Oklahoma City to see the bright lights on liberty, the first liberty. This is probably after about four weeks they let you have liberty. So this is the early part of November. So we went on up to Oklahoma City. What I didn't know, of course, was that Margaret was living at the YWCA in Oklahoma City and working there for a food broker. She was from Altus, Oklahoma, which is the southwest corner of Oklahoma. And she'd been there a couple of years, I guess. And so, when we got to Oklahoma City, we decided, in fact, where we got off the inter-urban, which was ... the main stop, there was a hotel right across the street, the Biltmore Hotel, which has since then been destroyed, taken down. And we thought, "Well, let's go over there, and see what the action was over there." Well we get over there and find out that the army air corps from Will Rogers Field is having a dance that night. Now we're two navy cadets in white uniforms with all these army air corps officers ... at Will Rogers Field ... It's just amazing what happens. Margaret ... had been invited, she and this girlfriend had been invited to go to the army air corps officers dance to be hostesses. ... And it was cold, you know, and getting wintery and what not. So we walked in

the lobby and we were ... trying to figure out some way of getting into the dance, see what was going on because there were women everywhere. And finally, I said, "Let's ask those girls over there." So we went over and, of course, one was short and one was tall. I said, "I'll take the short one." And ... we just ... asked them. We said, you know, "Is there any chance we could get in with you, when you go in?" And they went into the cloakroom apparently and talked about it, ... because we figured we'd take them and ditch them and find someone we really wanted. [laughter] And so, anyway, if you could just see the picture of this, I'm sure it must've been something. Anyway ... they went to the cloakroom, and they got together and they said, "You know, those guys want us to take them in, what do you think?" So the girl, I guess they had been in the other-- girl said, "Well, I guess that'll be alright; we'll just take them in, and then we'll ditch them." They had it all figured out, they were going to get rid of ... [us] the minute they got in there. So they came out and said, "Yeah, that would be okay." So we went into the dance. And, of course, Margaret being from Oklahoma, she didn't dance like I did, a man from New Jersey. You know, I was used to ... doing the Swing and the Lindy and all that kind of stuff.

KP: So you did all the dances, the modern dances.

JW: Yeah, oh yeah, ... but she wasn't used to that sort of thing. She was a Baptist. plus. And so ... finally, we were trying to dance, and finally, she said, "Would you take me over to the side and let me sit down because, you know, I can't dance the way you do." And I said, "That's okay, I'll teach you." So we spent the rest of the evening teaching her. Well, ... we had a great time that night, as you can imagine. Then she went back home. She went to her home in Altus. Before Christmas, we went back. ... Just to show you how these things work out, we went back to Norman. And then ... I came back into the city ... just before Christmas, I guess it was. Margaret usually comes in ... on the bus, but this time she came in on the train, because it had [been] snowing and her mother ... thought it would be better to come on the train. And so I had gone up there, let's see ... I had gone up there to meet another girl that was coming in, that I was dating down at OU. She was in Alpha Chi, as a matter of fact; I even remember that. And I was going to meet her, but I didn't know Margaret was coming in at all. And this friend of mine, you know, we went up there together. ... He runs into Margaret; I didn't see her. And Margaret, just trying to be friendly says, "Have you seen my friend, Jack?" And he said, "Oh he's over there waiting for Mary Jane." ... That's kind of how it got started. And then when I'd found out that's what he'd told her, then I got on the phone real quick and told her that it's a lie. I didn't have to, but I did apologize, you know, and all that kind of stuff. And one thing led to the other, ... you know, we kept in touch, we dated a lot while I was up there until we got to, I think it was March. In March I was qualified. Incidentally, one of the guys that always gave downchecks to everybody--we called him Maytag--because he washed everybody out. ... So we went, anyway, ... I left in March and went to Corpus Christi. I go down to Corpus Christi and George Bush is about three weeks ahead of me down there, too; he'd gone to a different E-Base. And then we went through the flight training. I flew ... AT-6s down there with some SNJs, the navy called them, which is sort of an advanced trainer at that time. And there were a lot more casualties there. ... You see more crashes ... because you have higher-speed aircraft all the problems with that. And you know by that time you're firing machine guns, and you're doing a lot of things. Anyway, I finally graduated and got my wings, my navy wings on the ... first of July, 1943. Bush got his wings June... 7, 1943, same place. So we were both down there at exactly the same time, same training.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Jack M. Williams on November 10, 1995 at Stillwater, Oklahoma at Oklahoma State University with Kurt Piehler. You were mentioning, at the end of that story and it got cut off a little by the tape ending.

JW: ... I was just saying that was the time Torpedo 8, the squadron, navy torpedo squadron. It was in the Battle of Midway, you remember, and they lost, they lost everybody, only one survivor, sole survivor, who, incidentally, I've met and have his book and a lot of things. The navy let you ask, sign up for what you wanted, but I hadn't ... learned by that time that they always gave you, ... not what you asked for, but what you didn't ask for. I never had figured that out, so, ... I figured that I'd ask for flying boats, you know, something that was safe. I could just cruise around the coast. And then I put down torpedo bombers last. It didn't take very long for them to send me to torpedo bombers school in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. So they had a navy base there in Fort Lauderdale which is now the airport in Fort Lauderdale. Bush was down there at the same time I was, again; we both went there.

KP: And you have only lately learned that now?

JW: Yeah, I just ... heard about it in the last two years because he, he wrote a book called Flight of the Avenger, and it's the story of his navy training and experiences, and I bought one for myself and one for each of our kids. And in that he documents, and now I've gone back through and told the kids ... where I was at the same time he was. So it's kind of interesting because it identifies a spot.

KP: And it was only when his book came out that you realized how closely your navy training paralleled Bush's.

JW: Oh yeah, I didn't know a thing about that at all. Yeah, it's amazing ... and I have his video. ... But, anyway, ... we went down there, and we did some rather interesting flying. You've got to keep in mind that when you come to a combat-type training, all those planes were single seat as far as the pilot goes. You did have a gunner, a Turret gunner, and you had a radio-radar man down underneath where the bombay was. And I flew TBF's, which were Gruman Avengers, they're made by Gruman. They're also made by Martin, at one time, or our big General Motors might have made it; they had the TBF and the TBM. But they were, they called them the Turkey, because it looked like a turkey, but they were the largest navy carrier plane ... at that time. They were 57 feet wide, I think, the wingspan on it. But the wings folded like a bird. And if you've seen pictures, you know, I'm sure you have, on video or whatnot, of World War II operations, a lot of those were ... ships that I was on. And I'll tell you about those in a minute. Anyway, so our job down there to train in Fort Lauderdale was to learn how to fly these things. But they didn't ... have any instructors. You couldn't have anybody fly with you, you had to fly alone. So what you'd do is you'd watch a film, a training film, that told you what it's supposed to do, ... how to take off, how to land. And then you had a manual that you could read. So you'd go down to the end of the runway, first time, and you would look at your manual and figure out if you've got to

... spread your wings. You'd spread your wings out, lock them, check your mixture, check the RPMs on the prop and all that kind of stuff. ... But nobody's sitting there like they had up until now, being sure that you're not going to, you know, crucify yourself. So, anyway ... and then you take off and take it up in the air. When get it up pretty high, because you don't want to screw up, you try all these things that you saw in the film to see how they work. And that plane dropped like a rock if you got too slow. It'd just go "whoosh," just like that. But it was a very stable plane as far as that goes. It was a safe plane; it came back, you know, with big holes, not mine, but big holes in the plane, the wings, ... and managed to survive. All the water landings--apparently guys did real well on water landings. But it was a very heavy plane, had a big engine on it, a huge engine. But it was quite heavy, and on carriers, of course, you would either deck launch it, which means you ran the length of the deck, take off, or you would be catapult launched, which means it just pushed you up to your flying speed in, maybe, a matter of two or three seconds, or something like that, which is pretty fast. But that's further down the line; we're still trying to get qualified before we get assigned to a ... squadron. This is the last step before the squadron, you see. So you have to be qualified; so we did a lot of flying down there. One thing that a lot of people don't realize, and it really happened in Fort Lauderdale, is that some crazy things can happen. And one thing that happened to a guy right in front of me. He got ready to take off, but he hadn't spread his wings; he had them folded back against the plane. It doesn't fly very well ... like that, naturally. But I called him; I was right behind him, tried to tell him that he hadn't spread his wings. They had a red light flashing from the tower saying, you know, you usually give them a green light to fly. The radio must have been turned off or something. He just started right down the runway and right off the end of the runway. ... He didn't fly anymore; he was going out of the program at that point, but it was certainly something to watch somebody trying to run that thing down the runway. Anyway ... down there we did anti-submarine patrol because being right on the coast. We would go clear down to the Bahamas.

KP: And you would patrol for U-boats.

JW: Yeah, that's right. ... That was our main [mission], you know, other than learning how to fly formation and do things like that. We would really do anti-submarine work.

KP: Did you ever find any?

JW: I never found ...

KP: Or anyone in your squadron?

JW: I don't think we got anything on the East Coast. I mean, we never really found any there. There were some, I'm sure, that were found. But when you're in training like that, they don't; you usually have an experienced leader that keeps you from getting lost. And, of course, you know there's that story of all those TBFs that were lost down there.

KP: Tom Kindre, another CPT, he got lost, I mean he literally got lost on his qualifying flight.

JW: You can do that.

KP: And now with modern aviation, it is hard to get lost.

JW: Yeah, it's hard to get lost. I was a lot more comfortable flying over water than I was over land. You know, I could, I could fly compass headings and intercept a ship that was going somewhere like that. But the minute I got over land, I got lost. I'd have to follow a railroad track or something. But anyway that's another story. But after we got through down there, ... you know, you went through all the training, typical advanced training. Then you had to be assigned to a squadron. Bush went to ... VT-31, I think, on the East Coast, ... and then, they were assigned eventually to a ship, a CVL, a converted cruiser, ... but he went aboard that. I forget the name of it, exactly, right now. But anyway, he went aboard that and they trained as a squadron. My story was different-- it would have to be different. I was assigned to VT-21, Torpedo 21 in San Diego, California, North Island, actually, which is an island that the navy base is on. And we were there, I was there from, I think got out there probably in ...'43, maybe ... September, or maybe October, whatever it was. No, I know what I did; I didn't tell you the whole story. It's funny how these things come back to you. Another thing that most of the guys did.

When we left Fort Lauderdale, I knew we had to be trained to go to the squadron, and Bush did and I did. We went up to the Great Lakes, to where NAS Glenview was, right north of Chicago. And ... the navy had converted ferry boats into carriers, and whether you have that story anywhere at all, that's just something else. This is a crazy story. ... In fact, I've even got a video of them, where they actually did the flight operations up there. So I went up there with all the pilots, went up there. We all had to go up there and qualify. Now this was in, I think this was in late October. It was cold. I was wearing my navy summer flight suit, jumpsuit, that's all I had. And our job, ... first of all they had taken all of the armament out of the planes because they didn't want to lose them. They thought if it went in the water they'd lose all the armaments. They took the turrets out, they took everything out that you didn't need, the armor plate, everything came out of it. So they were like a kite, they were light. You know, ... they didn't change the engine up front. It was still 1750 horsepower, so you know the thing would almost jump up in the air. And so, you'd come around and once again we'd have practice carrier landings, you know ... on the beach, as we'd say, on the ground in Fort Lauderdale and also at Corpus [Christi].

And those are just short landings. You're just coming down real, real low. And then, ... they'd make a carrier deck laid out, and you'd have a signal officer that signals you what to do, so you know that. I mean, you've practiced that somewhat. So we did that at Fort Lauderdale. So when you get out there, you know what you have to do. I mean, you've just doing what you did on the land. So the carriers come along, you know; we'd just come around and they give you a cut, ... cut your throttle off, ... go down and land and you have a hook. The hook picks up the wire and the wire is under stress and tension and slows you down. And they'd back you off and ... release the hook. And then, they'd put you back. These were real small ferry boats, only 700 feet long, I think, but they had converted them and took ... all the top off. ... It's just like a flat, like this table top right here, that's all it is, ... they were called the Wolverine and the Sable, I believe, and there might have been one other.

Well, anyway, so then you'd get ready, and I looked out to the side. Now this [is] just to show you how you can really screw up and survive. A plane with an engine in it has torque, which means what? It means that the plane has a tendency to go to the left. So whenever you take off you use a right rudder to turn to the right, or you use a right trim tab to offset the torque, so you can go straight; that's fine. And that's what everybody did. But on this particular one it had to be different. Keep in mind now this plane is just about as wide as the deck, 56 feet ... wide and there ... couldn't have been three or four feet on each side of that thing. There was no island or anything ... like a carrier's; it was just flat like this table top. So this guy starts winding me up, and I looked over at the side, and he had on a parka, a winter parka with a big fur hood. [laughter] And here I am, you know, with my summer flight suit on. Well, what I didn't realize was, I had used full left trim tab, instead of full right trim tab, so instead of it just normally going this way, it would want to go like that, which was disastrous. Well, he gave me the signal to go, and I let off the brakes with full power and that TBF turned 45 degrees to the left. It didn't even start down the flight deck. It went right over the side, and that deck was only, less than thirty feet above the water line. And they said later on that they didn't see me until I was half a mile up ahead, so I must have been in the water all the way out there. So you have too little, you have your flaps down when you take off, and your wheels of course, go down. So if you left your flaps down, of course, the plane drops. You see that when you're flying commercial, you know, they take their time. So fortunately, you can hold your flaps down, press the other lever and your wheels have come up. Apparently that's what I did just automatically by training, because, you know, when you take off, that's what you have to do until you get enough altitude to let your flaps back up again. So, apparently, I got down pretty close to the water and I must have either had my propeller in the water or I must just of been just right almost in the water. And clear on out, came around, picked up a "roger," came around, and landed again, got in and landed, and I was soaking wet. I won't tell you what from, but I was soaking wet with that summer weight suit on. I would [have been] just sweating something awful, I'm sure. You know, scared to death at what happened. Anyway ... that was probably the worst thing that I ever had happen to me in the war as far as survival goes.

KP: I mean, you could have just drowned.

JW: Yeah, I could have been through; I could have been through then, absolutely. But, ... that's just one of the problems of training. Nobody else has tried that, not before or since, and probably not very many people know about it, until now. But anyway, ... after that, then ... I had my orders from there, from Glenview to San Diego. And, of course, I stopped in Oklahoma City on my way there to see Margaret. So we get out there to San Diego, I mean, I get out there to San Diego. And ... I'm flying in the squadron, you know, doing all the things, you know, getting ready, because ... the squadron is going to be assigned probably to a ship. And this was in December. Well, since I was carrier qualified, after all, I'd been up in the Great Lakes, I assumed I'd be there, you know, for quite a while. So ... in December I called--I think it was early in December; it might have been the end of November--I called Margaret one night from the bar in the officer's club at the urging of my executive officer, saying, "Why don't you call Margaret and ask her to come out and get married?" He said, "I'll even provide you with an engagement ring if you need one of those."

KP: An executive officer did this for you?

JW: No, he didn't really do it, but, I mean, he said he would. ...

KP: But he encouraged you?

JW: Yeah, he encouraged me to get her out there, you see, to get married.

KP: Why this interest?

JW: I don't know. I mean, I guess he figured, well, he was married at that point. He just figured a guy ought to be married and this was a good time. We'd stay there and be stable, and she could stay in San Diego. Well, she tells it much better than I do; in fact, it's a scream when she tells it. You'll have to [ask her to know] what really happened because when I called her from the officer's club ... and she didn't answer, I called the YWCA; she wasn't there. ... Now why you do things like this, Kurt, nobody knows. So I called her mother. Now I'd just met her mother, once or twice in Altus. ... She was a wonderful country woman, you know, pioneer type, alone raised her daughter. Could lay concrete sidewalks, repair cars, you know, farm, do anything you want her to do. ... She was just out of this world. Anyway, I called her and I said, "I want to marry your daughter, and the daughter doesn't even know about it yet." And I said, "She's not at home, or something." And she didn't know what to say, so ... it left that there. So the next day, I called Margaret again at work; she's working for this food broker. And Margaret, if you ever meet Margaret, she's still, you know, she's very official, she's been doing office work and administration probably for maybe 50 years, and she's good, but she's very official, and she doesn't want anybody to know ... what's going on privately. So when this phone call comes in, ... her boss is in his office, and she's saying, "Yes," and what not. And I said, "Will you come out and get married?" ... And only Margaret could do this. She said, "Well, ... I don't know, ... it's maybe, yeah, I'd like to, ... but maybe about 90 percent." Now since that time, I understand that is kind of like being 90 pregnant, I don't think that happens. You either get all the way in and they say, "Yes, I want to get married," or ... anyway she didn't. She said, "Well I think that ... I'll call you back, but there's probably a 90 percent." So she leaves the phone and ...

KP: So she told you 90 percent?

JW: Yeah, she told me 90 percent, see, which I ... still haven't figured out. But she, anyway, so she hangs up, and she immediately goes down the hall to a girlfriend that's down there, this girl who's a real close friend of hers in church, and they were there. And she said, "Guess what, Jack just called me and he wants me to come out to San Diego to get married. What do you think we ought to do?" And Margaret was hoping that the girl would say, "Well ... let's wait until the war's over; you shouldn't do anything like that." ... Margaret had never been out of town in her life probably, or she might have been to Dallas one time. But she never ...

KP: She really had been in Oklahoma all her life.

JW: Exactly, she'd been in Oklahoma all her life. ... But this other girl instead of discouraging her, says, "That's a great idea, why don't we go and ... I'll be your manager." And these two kids end up getting on a train and going out to California and they miss connections; they have to ride in mail trucks. It's in the wintertime, and they get there late. I mean, it's just a real wild story which Margaret does a good job of telling. But in the meantime, though, after she talks to her friend, she sends a telegram to me, care of the squadron. And she says, "Darling," whatever it was, "The answer to the 64 dollar question is, `yes,' making the other 10 percent. Will arrive at a certain time, Santa Fe Station in San Diego." Well, what I didn't know was that it went through the censor and the whole squadron had heard it before I even ... was aware of it. They read it out loud to the whole damn squadron. So you ... we've really had a strange story of our lives in the military. Anyway, ... so she's coming out; I want her to come out because I'm carrier qualified. I'll be here for, you know, six months anyway. She comes out; we get married. We have a one night honeymoon down in La Jolla, ... navy honeymoon, married in a little chapel out ... on Coronado Island. You've heard of the Del Coronado Hotel out there? Well, it's right down the street from that. And we lived out there in Coronado for about six weeks. In January, six weeks.

KP: You were expecting six months.

JW: Yeah, I was expecting six months. Six weeks! I'm out flying one afternoon, and I come down, and I find out from the squadron that they had just gotten orders that they had to transfer six of their pilots up to San Francisco to COMAIR West Coast to go out as replacement pilots for the Marshalls invasion. ... They thought they were going to lose a lot of pilots up north, and they were leaving; it was leaving from Hawaii. So my name was called-- one of the six. And so the next day we left, and Margaret went with me. We just rode the train up there; the other five guys went along. One of the guys was knitting; he was a pilot that knitted, ... great poker player, and he knitted. I could have died every time I watched him knit. [laughter]

KP: He would be on the train knitting.

JW: ... Yeah, it's crazy, I mean, we had some really weird, because he was killed in Guam, but, I mean, it's just, you have all things going. But anyway, and one of the fellahs that was there ... I had, he ended up in our squadron, ... well, I'd seen him just ... when we left there, he was one of our five. We ... we were both in the same ship together. ... We left the ship in '44, and I never saw him again. He's from up in Montana or somewhere. Two years ago we were at a meeting in St. Louis-- squadron meeting--three years ago, and he came up to [me]. This tall guy, real tall, came up in front of the hotel and looked at me, and he said, "173690." I said, "How in the hell would you know that?" because I didn't even recognize him. He said, "Because I was 173689. ... I was just ahead of you all the way through flight training and all the way through the squadron." But, anyway, that's just an aside, but he was one of the six. So, anyway, so Margaret and I left with the group and we went up to, up to San Francisco.

We got into Oakland, and the other guys checked in, and they knew we were staying at an old beatup rat type hotel that was available for us, my wife and I. And we thought, you know, it would be a few days. We had our orders, ... my orders said 24:00, which is midnight, okay? The other guys orders said, 24:00 midnight, but they showed up at 10:00 that morning at ... ComAir

West Coast, because there was a jeep carrier gonna leave with 500 pilots on it, as replacements, jeep carrier. ... Anyway, I'm the only one now that's not around. At 1:00, they call the hotel, one of these guys called the hotel, and they said, "Jack, don't report-- you're supposed to report by midnight, but they made a mistake." And they said, "The ship is leaving in twenty minutes." So all of those guys got on that ship, and they were on the sea for five or six days and went on to Pearl Harbor, sick as a dog.

Well, Margaret and I stayed there, and I checked in that night at 10:00, and they said, "Where have you been?" And I said, "Just waiting, waiting to check in." And he said, "Well, the ship already left today." I said, "What do I do now? " And he said, "Well you have to stay around and get air transportation out." And ... Margaret and I stayed there at ... this beat up old hotel. And ... like I said, she's never ... been out of home very long. And it was quite a thing. We finally got a penthouse, but it was on top, but it wasn't a penthouse, it was just a mess, and I had to sleep with my cut-down bayonet on my pillow and everything else, ... because you never knew what was going to happen. So anyway, we finally got her a better room, and I left. We stayed there, checked in everyday from Wednesday till Monday. Monday morning they said, "You have air transportation out tonight, at six o'clock from Treasure Island." That's the time when Pan American was flying those huge flying boats, with six engines, you know, great big flying cruise-type things. ... Pan American had just been taken over by the navy, just two weeks before. And so they, they said, "We have transportation for you on this Pan American flying boat." Now, I'm an ensign, I had not had much experience in the navy. ... We got ready to ... go on that thing, and ... this really happened, and nobody else has had this experience in the navy. When I got on, and this was strictly for VIPs-- admirals, captains, marine generals, everybody like that was going, and a couple of, you know, Pan American employees. Waiting to get on that plane, ... just like they had the regular expensive travel, sterling silver tea service out, cookies, everything. I mean, ... you can imagine what these guys on the carriers were doing going out there. Anyway, here I am sitting here as an ensign being treated like a king, absolute king.

KP: You got the full service.

JW: I got the full service, and all I can say is that I'm still on this track, you see?

KP: Because a lot of guys have complained about, who described going on transport ships as being treated as cargo?

JW: Oh yeah, ... here I am, you know, just right off the boat. You didn't have seats like they have now. What you had ... as when you stepped on from the side was a living room-type thing, and you had sofas, you had easy chairs. And I started to sit. The steward told me to sit down, and I started to sit down here, and I sat down on the sofa. I looked up and right over my shoulder was a big bowl of fresh fruit. I still remember that, just as clear as could be. This was ridiculous, over the side they had a place to eat, you know, I mean they had ... set up the little booths there. Anyway, ... I didn't have any problems, but some of the generals, a marine general, one marine general, ... I think he threw up. He got sick because he was afraid we were going to run into a destroyer taking off because we took off under the Oakland Bay bridge. I thought we were going through it, too. ... But we missed it, went on out. And Margaret stood and watched in San

Francisco-- watched the plane leave, and she saw it leave and go out heading west. Well, it was so rough going out there, so rough because they went at low altitudes. Prevailing winds are from west to east at altitude, east to west down low. So it was all over, 1500 feet, everybody getting sick, I was getting sick, throwing up. I finally went to the head, navy for bathroom. About the third time, I guess, some guy came up alongside of me, put his arm around my shoulder. It was the captain of the plane. He said, "Don't feel bad son. ... I've been doing this for fifteen years, and I just got sick, too." It was awful;, you have no idea how bad it was. So, anyway, ... they served meals, you know, that's fine, and everything was done by rank. And, of course, I was last. I was even after the Pan American civilians at this point, being an ensign. So it came time ... for sleeping. Keep in mind, now, they had berths on these things so it was just like a Pullman berth. And there was, they had enough space, I think, like for ... sixteen or eighteen people, which meant that I didn't get a place to sleep. So I slept on the mail bags in the mail room with my navy coat over me, slept on my navy ensign officer's cap, which was all right. I get out there, we get out the next morning, and they still have their curtains pulled because they don't want even these leaders of all the armed forces seeing what's going on out there. It's kind of dumb.

But, anyway, they land at Pearl Harbor and at Ford Island, and they were going over to another location. And the navy captain, bless his heart, said to me, ... "Where're you going?" And said, "Let me give you a hand getting to where you're going." He realized I didn't know what I was doing. And so ... I wasn't trained in protocol, on who gets in first, ... so he had his captain's gig there-- this is not a made up story, this is true, believe me. He had his captain's gig there and we get out right off the plane, walk over to this captain's gig and he has his sailors there, you know, they're in charge of his gig being, his boat. ... And I thought, "Gee, what do I do? Do I get in first ... or does he get in first?" ... I get in first, and he gets out first. That's just the way the thing operates. Well, we get over there and he has an old Ford station wagon, and he said, "I'll take you over to ... COMAIR Pacific." ... But then, I had a problem. Do I sit in front, ... or do I get in back, see, and let him sit up there? Well, he worked that out, you know; he got in back and I sat up in front. But I'd never been trained in that.

KP: It's interesting that you say that because, doing this project, I have discovered that protocol very much depends on what branch you were in. In the army air corps no one [would] probably have cared. I mean, there was a great informality.

JW: Oh yeah.

KP: And the army, it varied on the branch. I mean, in infantry and battle it could be extremely informal in a sense, whereas other parts of the army could be extremely formal. But in the navy, what's striking, particularly on the larger ships or on land, it could be rigidly isolating, horrible. I mean there's no question of ...

JW: ... Oh yeah, yeah. And particularly in our squadron because we were, as pilots, remember now, we were trained not as a member of a regiment. ...

KP: Or a ship.

JW: Right, I mean, we were ... our own responsibility, and we were part of a nucleus, a small nucleus. Guys, many of them had trained together, so they were real close together. Whereas ... the masses of them, it was a different matter. So ... our relationships were different. I mean, you know, we were friendlier perhaps, because we had people to look after, I mean, I had a crew, ... they were my responsibility. I mean, this kind of thing. Anyway, so we get out there, and they put me in ... what they call a CASU unit, which is a carrier-servicing unit. And then, I find out that the fleet left the day before, that I was supposed to be a replacement for. The ... whole fleet's gone. The other guys are still at sea. So in about three days 5 or 600 pilots show up there that are not needed. Now what are you going to do with them? So that's when I get transferred over to Kaneohe Bay ... on the other side of the island on Oahu and go with VT-1, which is Torpedo One. And they're organizing their group. And some of their group are down operating off Makin Island, and they're coming from different places. And so I end up joining Torpedo One, ... as a replacement pilot. And once again this is like a foster deal, you see. In other words, I wasn't part of the original group, I'm an additional one that came in. And even today when we go to our reunions, there are about five of us that were replacement pilots. The rest of them were all trained together, and for a while, they didn't even know who the hell we were. ... All we saw was when they were in the ready room, and you got in your plane, and .... you were flying together, but you never knew their families; you never knew anything about them.

KP: Whereas you really knew the first group that you trained with very well, but then you got broken away from them.

JW: Well, and we didn't even know them well, see, because we were only there for three months. I mean, and the wives weren't even there. ... They were getting ready to go aboard carriers out there. So I never really spent any time training with the squadron, knowing the families at all. I say, I didn't there, but we did on another cruise. But, anyway, the result was we stayed there. Margaret's at home now. See, we've just been married six weeks; she's at home all by herself, working in the supply department of the navy there at ...

KP: So she stayed in California.

JW: She stayed in ... Coronado and worked out at the navy base ... on North Island.

KP: Where did she live? Where did you live on Coronado?

JW: Well, we just had an apartment, kind of an upstairs apartment, ... in Coronado near there's a ferry. If you've ever been out there, there's ferry [that] goes across, ... you couldn't get there, except by ferry to the island. There was no bridge or anything at that time. But we ... stayed there, and the girl that came out to be Margaret's matron of honor, she married the guy that she wanted to marry who was out there. And he was in the navy, but later on they get married after I'm gone, and live in the same house there that we were in. But we, Margaret and I've been out there within the last few years. In fact, our squadron's going to have a reunion in San Diego next year. But we went by the house that we lived in, took pictures and what not. It's a historical monument now, this house; I guess because we were in it. I don't know why, but anyway, it's one of those old, old, old deals that was ... bought and owned by some navy sea captain.

KP: So your home is still there.

JW: Yes, our home is still there, yeah. And ... we stop to take pictures of it and what not. It's been kind of interesting to do that. But anyway, we didn't have a lot of time ... to spend there. ... I went out after ... VT-1 finally got organized and they got ready for the big, you know, battle back in the Pacific. ... After the battle of Midway, ... they were very short on carriers. And so they were waiting for some Essex class carriers to come out and one of them was the Yorktown. See the original Yorktown was sunk, the CV-5, at the Battle of Midway. Then ... there was another one that was on the ways. It was an Essex class carrier that they decided to rename. ... I think it was the Bon Homme Richard originally; they named it the Yorktown, CV-10. And, of course, Eleanor Roosevelt, you know, ... dedicated it when it was launched. ... You've ... either seen the movie or heard, called The Fighting Lady, which ... was narrated by Robert Taylor. But anyway, that's the Yorktown, that's the ship I was on. So I actually served on the Yorktown for about three months in combat.

And the Yorktown formed an association in 1948 so they could continue to meet the people who were on it. And ... that was the year that I just got out of Rutgers, and I happened to be in New York City. I was working for AT&T and saw this notice that Yorktown was having an organizational group, alumni association, and they couldn't find--I found out later--they couldn't find a place that they could afford to, where they could drink beer. So Rupert's Brewery made it available to them. So I just went to it and recently we've had, you know, they have a big picture and all and everybody in it, that was at the original one, they gave us plaques because we attended the first reunion, and I've been a member ever since 1948.

KP: And you have been going to the reunions.

JW: Of the Yorktown, itself. And, you see, the Yorktown--most of them were scrapped--the Yorktown is in the water, in the mud, really, but it's in the water, at Charleston, South Carolina. The state of South Carolina bought it for a dollar, ... twenty years ago, moved it down there. And it's a national shrine; it's a museum. It has memorials to all the other carriers that have already been destroyed. It lists all the people that were killed in all those different carriers; it's a fantastic program. They have over a million people a year that go to it, and, if you ever get a chance, ever, you must go to it. ... We go there about every other year in October, when we have our reunions. And ... there's pictures of our squadron in there, of course. In fact, ... one of the chairs has been bought in my honor ... in the theater that they have, where they show the Fighting Lady movie. And ... we ... took almost our whole family; we took nine of us last year.

KP: Let me ask you some questions about the Yorktown.

JW: Yeah, this is the key. ..,

KP: This is what you have been trained to do. I have some basic questions about the ship and your relationship with the ship's crew. I have been to the Intrepid in New York Harbor.

JW: Right, it's the same class.

KP: One of the things that is most striking about the Intrepid is that the hangars are huge, and very impressive, but the rest of the ship is very cramped.

JW: Yeah, [there's] not a lot of space.

KP: Not a lot of space, even for the officers.

JW: No there wasn't. ... It was ... basically designed to get 'em in and get 'em out. I mean it wasn't a ... plush living area. I brought some things along which you may be interested in. Even though you can't see them on the tape we can talk about them. This is the ... cruise book of the Yorktown, the whole thing. This is Jacko Clark, who was our skipper, who was born in Oklahoma and what not. ... I've been giving these things to the kids lately. ... Let me just put those over here.

KP: I don't want those to blow away.

JW: Yeah, it will. But what I want to show you, because ... these are all the people who were on the ship, the executive officers, Jacko Clark, who was an admiral, one of the outstanding carrier admirals in the whole country. ... Different ones. This was Arthur Radford; he was the admiral in charge of the Task Force, which was 58. Then, this was one of the other ones; then, this was Jacko Clark who was mostly part Indian. And, I just finished reading his book called Carrier Admiral, and my son's reading it now. This was our skipper when I was on board.

KP: Captain Ralph Edwards Jennings was your skipper.

JW: Yeah, he was our skipper. You see, the ship ... was out there for quite a while, but the air groups had such high losses that they had to replace them about every two or three months, even less than that, in our case. So we were only out there ... from June until the end of August.

KP: And then they took you off.

JW: They ... took us off and put ... another group on there. We were Torpedo Squadron One. And we were in the first battle of the Philippines Sea against the Japanese fleet, the Marianas Turkey Shoot.

KP: You were in the great air battles of the later part of the war. The Marianas Turkey Shoot was one of the crucial battles of the war.

JW: Right. That was more for fighters than anything else. I mean, but we were on the ship; we were operating off the ship. And we were-- our squadron and our air group really--we supported the invasions of Guam, Tinian, Saipan, Palau, Peleliu, ... all of those things. ... Once again, now, the way I tell this, is I'm on that surf board, see; somebody shoved it, and I just went along with it. I mean, ... this is the story, ... I didn't oppose it, I was just there. Had I opposed it, I probably

wouldn't be here so, you know, who knows? Anyway these are just some of the different people that we've known. And that, of course, is a picture of the ship. And you see that ship ... on the Fighting Navy movie.

KP: One of the questions regarding aviation and about ships is that they are very cramped, and they is also a need for a lot of discipline and order.

JW: Oh, absolutely, yeah. I agree, yeah. ... We had a marine detachment on board to maintain discipline because, you know, if, if somebody really acted up, you don't have time to sentence him. What are you going to do with him? I mean the brig just gets so full. So, ... I can't say exactly what they did to him, but they usually didn't come home from the cruise.

KP: In terms of the ship, a lot of people in the navy said that it's much more comfortable, at least in terms of the food and some of the other necessities.

JW: Oh, yeah.

KP: What do you remember about your meals on board?

JW: Well, how lucky can you be, you know, with the other guys eating out of ... ration cans on the beach? And we're having, of course, we had too many ... powdered eggs, we had too much ham. We had ham, I guess, for 102 days, I think one time. But it seemed like it. But we ate very well. We were very well served. I mean we were the elite really as far as ... treatment goes.

KP: Would your food be better? As an officer you are eating in the officer's ...

JW: See we had what's called the officer's mess, and then you have the enlisted men's mess.

KP: Now, is your mess separate from the regular ward room?

JW: Yes. Well, no. The ward room was the officer's ward room. You'd have your ships officers would eat there; your pilots would eat there. Then you had your enlisted ... men's mess in which our crews would be part of, and the ship's crew as well.

KP: So you would eat with the sea officers? They didn't separate the pilots and have the pilots eating separately?

JW: No, no, no, no. We were, the officers were all together. These are pictures on the ship itself, actually. ... Air Group Five was aboard before we were. And then, these are some combat shots taken, you know, during the ship's operation. You see that one? ... If you've seen the movie, the one that is coming in very, very low, just barely crosses the stern of the ship. And over here is my group. See Air Group One, that was our group, that was what I was in. And that was what we did, that was the number of planes shot down, number of ships sunk, bombs dropped, thing like that. And I think I got an Air Medal, you know, for sinking a ... bombing freighter at Chichi Jima. And it was burning when we left it. Might tell you something about

that later on. But this just shows you when we were aboard it, some of the activities you asked about, what they did. That's my squadron, that's the ship, you know, just different type of activities that they had aboard the ship.

KP: Now were these the ship's stewards, these group of black sailors?

JW: It's possible. They probably were, I would think they were. You know that ... was a normal type thing to happen. They could have ... even been marines, some of them could have been marines. But when ... we would go down south to replenish or go to Majuro or somewhere like that.

KP: Is this one of the beer parties? Did you have any beer parties while you were on the Yorktown?

JW: We never had any beer parties, particularly on the Yorktown. When you come down from a strike, it was sort of automatic ... for the doctor to give you a little three-ounce thing of bourbon, and I would collect them. So when we had a break in action we could have a party or something.

KP: Some of the fondest memories of sailors is their beer parties. The pilots are this separate class that got to drink.

JW: See it's different. You don't have an officer's club on a ship. Now when it comes to getting at shore, then beer parties, sure, that's what everybody goes to [at] the officer's club. When I was in VT-21, ... that's where I was the night I called Margaret, in the officer's club at the bar. I mean, that was just sort of normal, but on the ship you don't have that at all. ... See, earlier, we always made pre-dawn strikes, so we'd be up at 4:00 in the morning and we'd take off at 5:30 when it was dark. The reason is you wanted to hit your target coming in out of the dark; they couldn't see you. So, ... and you learn a lot of habits and discipline and that, too. I mean, I can get up. I don't like to get up, but I'm an earlier starter. I mean, I can get up and start running, I may fall in an hour, but Margaret ... she can't get up and get started for two or three hours, but then she may be up all night long. And these are just more pictures of the ship itself. It's kind of interesting what happened.

KP: You mentioned that you would get this bourbon and, even occasionally, have a party on board. What did you do when you were not flying, or you were not being briefed for a mission?

JW: Well, you usually, when you're on the ship, if you're in combat areas, ... you know, you're usually doing something. You're either in the ready room, that may be a time ... to rest.

KP: But if you're in a combat area, you're really spending most of your time in the ready room if you're not sleeping.

JW: Yeah, I think so; there's not much [to do]. Oh, you may go to the ward room or something like that, have coffee or read. They had a library there. They had a piano. I'd play the piano from time to time, you know, just for fun. But you've got to visualize that the reason those guys

are there is just to fight a war. I mean, they're there to take down an objective so that somebody else can go; they're there to shoot down a Japanese plane; there to ... sink ships; there to destroy anti-aircraft guns, bomb runways, and, you know, you could be making a couple strikes a day. So by the time that ... you get up, and you make a strike, come back and you were debriefed, I mean, you report what you did, what you saw, [and] all that sort of thing in your ready room, and then you have lunch, and then you have more briefings about the next one if you're going to go out, you go out again. Well, you know, by the time that's all over, you come back and debrief, you're all ready, after dinner probably, to hit the sack because you're going to have another early start tomorrow. Now they may ... pull out of that area, and you may not be flying. If your squadron is flying, you're flying. If they were not to be flying on one particular day, then you know, you're free; they probably have volleyball games. ... They may have movies, they were usually not good movies. But they were old movies, you know, and it was the typical type of thing that you had.

KP: Of course, you do not have a lot of recreational options, too.

JW: No, there's no recreational options. This is interesting and I'll tell you more about that later-- prisoner of war camps.

KP: Did you ever go to services aboard the ship?

JW: Yeah, we had services every Sunday morning. We had a Catholic chaplain on board and we had a ... Protestant chaplain on board.

KP: And how many pilots, pilots--and air crew--would go to services? Would you see the whole squadron, or a whole chunk of the squadron, or more?

JW: You probably saw a good many of them, I guess. ... The memories I have most clearly, probably, are of burials at sea. Now, you normally would have your ... simple services on Sunday. Or you would find that there would be services the night before an operation. In other words, if we were going to, say, make any strikes on Guam, before the invasion, before we actually got up close enough to make our strikes, the chaplains would have services for people. And he would pray for the safety of the pilots and crew and the ship's company and all that sort of thing. It was ... a pretty nice thing, but when ... we lost some of our planes, and we lost quite a few of them. ... Some of them were lost in the water; we never did recover them. But if they crashed on deck or something like that, then watching them do the service, standing there, ... I was kind of moved by that, you might say. Especially when the weighted sack goes over the side.

KP: How did you feel about that? I mean, you lose a lot of people you know.

JW: Yeah, ... you see, fortunately, once again, I wasn't close to the squadron when we started. So it wasn't the same as if you lost a guy that you grew up with and practiced with and drank with every night or something like that. When I first went out on the Yorktown, naturally I was an ensign, so I was one of the junior officers. So they had what they called "junior officers country,"

which is up in the ... the forward part of the ship. See, the JGs and above, the lieutenant JGs ... shared a room, which is fine. But the ensigns all ended up, and they were kind of like, you've seen the enlisted men's quarters, I think, and they are really snug and tight. ... The "junior officers country" was the same way. They were a little better mattresses, a little better, but they were still hung, like maybe 5 or 6 high. So you'd have to climb up to get on the sixth one. And we had a plane on the ship which was called a SB2C, for a while. That was a Curtis Hell Diver, it was a dive bomber. We had a lot of problems with it. The dive brakes weren't working properly. I think it was in five or six weeks, there were five or six guys over my head who went straight in in those things. I mean, they were there one morning, and they weren't there that night. I mean, it was just that way, week after week after week. They finally withdrew the planes, put the SBD's back on board. I can remember that in officer's country. I didn't know the guys, but I just knew that they weren't there anymore.

... We had some ... interesting experiences, ... the crew reminded me of it-- one of the guys that flew with me, last week. We had taken off the Yorktown, we'd made a strike on the Bonin Islands, you have ... Iwo Jima here, Chichi Jima up north; it's called the Bonin Island group. The Bonin Islands were ... owned by Japan. ... We knew nothing about what they had. ... I started to make a run on Chichi Jima, and our job was to go in. Well, if you can picture; ... this is water here, a neck of water, and here you've got an air field, and here you've got military installations. You have freighters tied up, unloading, and they were using it as a staging base so that they could resist the invasion of Guam, okay. So our job was to go up there and knock out the freighters and whatever else that was around there. But we didn't know anything about the islands. ... Normally, you know, you would have a chart, a map that would tell you what the island looked like, where your targets were. Mine set on the lower left hand corner of just the outline of the islands from the National Geographic Magazine, 1936, can you believe? That's all we had to go on, they didn't know anything about it. ... So anyway ... all of us pushed over, and in the navy, you know, you hear of the army air corps will go in at 15,000 feet and drop their bombs. The navy goes in and they dive down, and they'll either go in as a dive bomber, they'll go 90 degrees straight down, or they'll glide bomb. Well, the torpedo bombers were glide bombers, we didn't drop torpedoes as much as we dropped bombs. So we'd glide bomb. We'd go down in a glide, maybe 45 degrees or something like that.

KP: So you really got close to you target.

JW: Oh, yeah, we were right on top of them. See, as a matter of fact, ... our job was to skip bomb these bombs into these freighters. Well, you've got to skip bomb from 50 feet, or as low as you can get. And the skipper, ...he died last year, but he was a fantastically fine guy. ...

KP: Walter Henry was your squadron skipper.

JW: He was our skipper, this is our executive officer and this is the air group commander. ...

KP: Dean Peters was your ...

JW: Yeah, ... I thought he was air group commander, but he may have been ... Fighting Ones' commander that they shipped over. But this guy was here last year in Reno, nice guy. But anyway, ... the skipper weighed a lot. He weighed probably 280-300 pounds, and I don't weigh that much. But we went down together, and the only reason I figured he beat me down was that he weighed more than I did. Those planes were redlined; they had like about ... 280, 260, and mine was about way past the redline, and I don't have any idea how fast we were going. But, anyway, we got down there. We got down there with about 100 or 200 feet off the ground and dropped the bombs, and they skipped right off the docks, practically, into the freighter, and then they would blow up inside the freighter. But what we didn't realize, what we didn't know was out there was the anti-aircraft fire. These things were all out there like a shooting gallery, and they all started to shoot at us, and we had about 80 planes, all in a coordinated attack. And we were all within 200 feet of each other going out here with these people shooting at us. And I didn't realize until I got out there, and I even knew better, but I didn't think about it, but I kept seeing these red, little red balls, you know. ... Afterwards I realized that there was just one of those for every five. So there was five times as much as we actually saw. Well, going out, this guy reminded me last week, he told ... my sons this last year in Charleston, because I hadn't told him about it. And he said, he was ... flying radioman, and he said, "Everytime there was a burst, a black burst of anti-aircraft fire, I would turn into the burst, just automatically." I guess subconsciously I figured, hell, they weren't going to shoot the same place twice. So if they hit one here I'd go here, if they shoot there I'd go there. And it worked.

KP: And you did it automatically?

JW: I did it automatically.

KP: Because that is something that ...

JW: Yeah, I was, it was a challenge to me. I thought what the hell, I'm not going to get-- anyway, and this is an interesting story, because it fits in with George Bush's story; all of this, is tied in together. We go out of that thing, and we get out of there. And one of our planes gets shot down in there. So the other, I'm glad I didn't know this at the time. Everybody else went back, except one other plane and myself, and we stayed around because we had the section leader, probably, and myself. We stayed around to ... to call for submarine and rescue sub to come and get a dumbo in there, a flying boat, because the Japanese were coming off the beach, coming out to get Keeler and his two crewmen. And they were all right. ... In fact, we dropped them another life raft that we had in the bomb bay. And we stayed around, and we stayed around and stayed around and, finally, we were getting low on gas, and we still had 200 miles to get back to the ship. And so, finally, we had to leave them. When we got back to the ship, it was getting dark, and they picked us up, and we landed. And they told me to ...

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

KP: So you ran out of gas.

JW: Well, they told me to move up on the flight deck, and as soon as I hit the throttle, why, it stopped, which meant that there wasn't any gas left, so we were pretty lucky after about a four or five hour flight to do that. Anyway in the meantime, ... Keeler is back there, ... and he gets captured, and the crew too, by the Japanese. And we found out, about seven years ago, that the Japanese cut their heads off and ate them; they cannibalized. ... And that was brought out in Bush's book because he was shot down at the same place. He was shot down in ... September of 1944 at Chichi Jima Harbor, same strikes that we were in. His were in September, and he was rescued by a submarine.

KP: If you were shot down and you survived the crash into the water, how much assurance did you have, how much hope did you have that you would be rescued by a submarine or by airplane?

JW: Well, you hoped you would, but probably not very much. And the reason is, you see, at that time, we didn't have helicopters for rescue. You had to get somebody that was on, either on a station, you know, like a lifeguard station they called it, on a submarine ...

KP: So they did have patrol perimeters for submarines.

JW: Well, yeah, they were developing, you know, rescue systems. And they had what they called the "lifeguard system," and that consisted of a designated submarine, and you knew where the submarine was located, and you knew where the dumbos were supposed to be, the flying boats, and ... you could call them. You had a certain channel that you called them on, which we did, of course. But, the chances of ... them being in any more than one spot are not good. You could have demands for their services all over, ... not just in that area. But ... that was a real serious problem. If you went down, you know, if you got ashore, maybe you could save yourself, protect yourself, but you didn't have much chance, unless you went in making a landing or something of that nature, or if you, maybe, got hit and came back and had to make a landing in the water you could get rescued. Yeah, I saw a real close friend ... go in off the bow. I was about to take off right after him, and he lost power and went right in. ... Both of his crew got out and I watched him try and get out, and he couldn't get out, and he sank right there [with me] looking at him from the ship.

KP: And there is nothing you could do.

JW: There's nothing you can do, no ... And this is the reason why you can't prey on this kind of thing, people who do, you know, get in trouble. I can remember, ... once again, ... that I'm doing the job of the place that I was put to be there. So anyway, the Yorktown had a fantastic reputation. It ... it was the finest carrier probably ever in the Pacific, had the best reputation. It got, of course, the presidential unit citation for its operations. It was better maintained and it just is a fantastic ship. And ... I have a lot of videos, I have a lot of books on it and things of that nature.

KP: Two questions regarding combat. How scared were you when you were actually under fire-- your first mission when you actually made contact with the enemy?

JW: Well ... that's a good question. Let me just show you right here. Here I am right here. ... This was our squadron, and here's some more; there may be some more ... pictures. ... I made copies of this recently for both our boys because I knew that they'd probably want them. ... This is where the guys had their wives with them, that we were involved with. That's why I say we were stepchildren, or foster children, whatever you want to call it.

KP: Their wives were with them in Hawaii?

JW: ... I think the ones you saw in Hawaii probably were local girls. These were probably taken on the east coast because they were trained in Florida. And that's the skipper; he was there and she was there. ... Anyway, you were asking that question about combat.

KP: Although you had a lot of training, and you can crash, but you do not have a lot of people shooting at you.

JW: ... I can honestly say this, that the first strike we made, on Guam, which was the first island that we went after, our job was to go in there and drop bombs on the air strip, knock out anti-aircraft positions, things like that. ... I can remember, just in the group, just flying parallel to the island, at about, oh, maybe 10,000 feet, the whole group had been going to get ready to make our run. And I can remember looking over there and wanting to throw up something awful. I mean, and I had the dry heaves. I literally could not; I had breakfast, but ... it was a nervous thing, and I thought, "My God, I'm going to get killed!" That real[ly] went through my mind; that was the one thing I didn't want to have happen. Whatever my life held, I sure didn't want to get it there. But as soon as we turned, and they gave the signal, everybody pushed over, and they started to pick up the anti-aircraft fire, I forgot all about that. And I suddenly found myself in competition with the guy that was shooting at me. And it was a whole different world. That's why I say I can, once I get started, I'm all right. ...

KP: It was more the thought of it than ...

JW: Oh yeah. I just think it runs in our family. We have sensitive stomachs, I guess.

KP: Another question. One person I just interviewed recalls how he was told in training that he would be mesmerized by flack for, like, the first minute or two until they really realized what this was. When you first experienced flack, what was your impressions of it?

JW: Well, see, the difference between us and the air force was that the air force had to fly through it; we could fly around it or under it or over it. In other words, individually, I never thought about the fact that it would kill you, I mean ... the thought never occurred to me. I knew what it was ... if somebody shoots at me and there's burst here, and I go for it, then I'm not worried about what's in it; I'm worried about the next damn thing coming up.

KP: It sounds like in some ways you had much more control than the Flying Fortress.

JW: We had more independence; we had more flexibility. We could literally fly ourselves out of situations and often did. Whereas we weren't dropping, you know, a mass of bombs, we were dropping individual bombs on selected targets from very low altitudes. Yeah, that's a very good point. ... I had a new gunner come out, one time; he ... couldn't have been more than seventeen years old--[his] first combat mission--and he said, "What do I do?" ... I said, "Well if you see somebody shoot at them." But I said, ... "I'll tell you what, if you see ... anything unusual out there, just let out a yell, so at least I'll know and ... maybe I can take some evasive action, if that's what it is." Well, we got pushed over in a dive at about 12,000 feet, and that kid started to scream, and he screamed all the way down until we dropped our bombs and went on out. After we got back to the ship I said, "What in the hell was going on? What were you screaming about?" And he didn't know what he was saying, he said, "Well there were these little black bursts up behind the plane. ... They were right by our tail about 20 feet behind. They went (----------?) all the way down." And I told him, I said, "Well that was anti-aircraft fire." And he requested to be transferred, and he was; they let him out of there. ...

KP: He really could not take it?

JW: And plus the fact that had I been a half a second slower-- see, that Jap didn't have me on radar; he had me on manual and he was just trying to follow me down--but he was just a half a second behind, otherwise we wouldn't be here today. So that's ...

KP: You had a lot of close calls.

JW: Probably, but I didn't think about it as close calls at the time. I was more interested in the objective. I learned flying off a carrier, especially landing [on] a carrier, you've got seven wires. And I don't care what wire I get as long as I get a wire. So, if I clear the stern of the ship and get a wire, that's great, and that's the way I feel even today. As long as I can survive a situation, that's fine; it doesn't bother me. The fact that I went through it is not as important as where I ended up.

KP: You had a gunner and a radioman.

JW: Right, I have not been able to keep up with the gunner, who was up in New York State. We did for a while, but then we lost track of him. But the radioman I still keep in touch with. He didn't come to our meeting. He's up in Portland ... in Oregon, has a farm, a red-headed kid, or was a red headed kid.

KP: You got to know them fairly well.

JW: Yeah, ... he I knew--he and his family. As a matter of fact, it's a very unusual family. After we came back off the Yorktown--this kind of gets intermixed now-- ... those of us that were the so-called step kids, the replacements, we organized the new squadron. So now we were, I was a JG, you know, we were the guys with experience. So now we were the leaders of the squadron, and so we reorganized the squadron, but we had to train. ... I didn't know this until, I've been

reading a lot of stuff lately. We were really training for the invasion of Japan, ... so we had winter flight training.

We were training in Alameda, California, which is right next to San Francisco, between San Francisco and Oakland. And we went out to Fallon, Nevada for winter flight training. While we were out there, it was Thanksgiving, and my wife was living in Alameda, I guess, at that time. But this radioman of mine and his wife were out there living in a shack. I told somebody about this at dinner the other night, ... they wanted to be together, so they had this little ol' shack. They had a pot stove in the shack, and that's the only way they kept warm. And so she said that ... "She was going to be fixing Thanksgiving dinner; would I come and have dinner with them?" Which I did. And she had cooked a turkey on this pot stove out in the middle of a desert in Fallon, Nevada. And I was their guest for dinner. So it was kind of interesting. And, of course, he came with me all the way through the second tour and came out of it okay.

KP: So you in a sense, were on the ship, your squadron got taken off.

JW: Yeah.

KP: And you were reassigned to start a new squadron.

JW: Right. So we organized a new squadron with the same number, VT-1. See, when ... the Yorktown came back because it had taken a bomb and ... we needed new aircraft and some new personnel and things. So they went back to Bremerton, Washington, which is where they do a lot of shipbuilding. That was its home port. So they wanted to redo that. And we came in there, and then we all left from there, climbed down the side of the ship actually on ... these rope ladders they got, like the marines use, ... went on over to Sand Point Naval Air Station and picked up some planes.

KP: You mention your ship had taken a bomb. Were you on the ship when the bomb hit?

JW: ... Let's see, I don't believe that I was on it ... when it took the bomb. It was a 500-pound bomb, but I think it was when somebody else was on it before, ... and they needed to do some repair on it or something like that.

KP: Where you ever aboard the ship when you were attacked by Japanese aircraft?

JW: Well, yeah, of course, we were on the ship. ... You'd see that all the time.

KP: Yeah, but sometimes you could be in the air and the ship would be attacked.

JW: Oh yeah. No.

KP: What was it like to be taking ...

JW: ... It's ... pretty treacherous really, it's scary. But ... I had more of that on the next ship that I was on, rather than on the Yorktown. See, the guys, most of the guys on the Yorktown didn't go out again, except for the five or six of us who reorganized the squadron. We got new fellahs and went out. But ... we went out on the Bennington the second time, which is an Essex class carrier also. And we operated, actually, the last three months of the war in '45. We operated over Japan every day. I was making strikes on Kure Harbor, shipping, air fields; we'd make strikes up on Hokkaido, ... I mean, the China side of Hokkaido. But our job was to go in and destroy airplanes, and we were really taking them out on that. But they had this group of planes that were doing the kamikaze attacks, and they were coming off Okinawa, which is why they were wanting to invade Okinawa. So ... they were coming in, and we had a lot of those; we'd see them come in. And ... they'd dive on your ships; you could see them coming down on other ships. ... This happened more off the Bennington. That was Task Force 38.1, whereas, the one we were on, the Yorktown, was 58.1. At that time, they would have fighter cover. They'd keep fighters up, ... fighter patrols around to try to pick up enemy planes when they were coming in, ... and that was a tough job. But then, in '45, they had developed a system of the destroyer guard. They put them out 50 miles out around the fleet. ...

KP: Which was very hazardous for the destroyers.

JW: Damn right. It was hazardous for the planes coming back because, see, when we came in, they had, ... from the start, they had what they called IFF-- identification friend or foe. And ... you had to put that on with the idea that ... if you're not identified, they're going to shoot at you. And so we always had to have that on when we were coming into the fleet. But in '45, we not only had to have that on, but you had an approach sector. And your approach sector was in fifteen-degree segments on the compass, and it changed every twenty minutes. So that, if ... you came in sector where you hadn't changed, and you had to keep a close check on this thing, then they would shoot at you. ... Hell, I'd come in ... any number of times and ... there'd be a black burst up there, and I'd say, "Oh hell, wrong damn sector." ... So we'd go around and come in another sector.

KP: Navigational aids then, compared to what we have now. It was really tricky.

JW: Oh yeah, the system was-- see another thing you had radio silence, absolute radio silence. When we were on the Yorktown, you could not call in even if you were in trouble.

KP: So if you were going to go into the drink ...

JW: Yeah, but it's even worse than that. You'd take off here, your target's over here and you're here, and you're taking off. You fly to your target, and they say, "Tell you what we're going to do, we're going to meet you over here, you know, when it's over." So you rendezvous after your strike and you head to this point. But that's not what they did. They said we need a rain squall ... and they go over here. Now they're nowhere near the rendezvous point. You got a whole air group, I mean, a whole big 80-100 planes all showing up, some with problems, some not, and nobody's around. You can't get any signal. So you have to do a square search. So they do a square search. A square search is you go a certain distance this way, then you go a little further

that way, a little further that way, a little further that way. You keep making like a maze until you finally pick up their signal, they happen to call a "homing signal." And then you can home in ... on it. They have all kinds of ways of getting you back, but ... flying in the navy and flying over water in a land plane has to develop a certain amount of ability, trust because you're depending on what? You're depending on compasses, depending on radios, depending on advice from others. ... And you will find that a lot of astronauts, for instance, are navy people, they were naval aviators, they weren't army air corps aviators.

KP: Now that I think of it, in fact, I think of most of them as being navy.

JW: And it's the training. I mean their training is entirely different. Anyway ... we operated, like I say, over Japan. I took what they call an air-sea-rescue eight-man life raft. And my job was to follow these hundred planes going in on a strike mission in the Sea of Japan, whatever they were going after, a lot of different places. And near ... Kure Harbor area, near Hiroshima, but we didn't know anything about that. We had orders not to touch Hiroshima, ... if our target was closed in, not to touch it, but we didn't know why. And--

KP: Did you wonder why?

JW: Hell no! ... I never even thought about it. I was following these hundred airplanes. There were more than that probably. And my job was after they went down and made the strike was to go find somebody that was shot down and was in the water in a life raft and to drop them this bigger life raft so that they could survive. And, then, give him instruction on how to get out because they were in a situation where, usually, it was a long arm of land, and they had to get out to sea. I would call ... the submarine rescue, ... so we did that, and I came back late ... it was getting downright dark when I got back, and I was anxious to get aboard. So somebody picked me up, and I landed. It turned out to be [the] Hancock instead of the Bennington, ... and I landed on the wrong carrier. And somebody said, "Aren't you glad we didn't say, `ah so!'? "...

KP: Was that the only time you landed on the wrong carrier?

JW: Yeah that was the only time that I did that-- that one time. I had about 67 carrier landings, I guess, probably.

KP: You had been on two different ships. What were the differences between the two?

JW: Absolutely. They were like the difference between day and night. The Yorktown was, like I told you earlier, it was a wonderful ship, well trained, good attitude.

KP: You seemed very close, you stayed close.

JW: Very close together. The ship operated as a unit well. And everybody that's ever written about it, I mean, all the other admirals, captains, every one of them say it was the outstanding ship, probably, in the navy during World War II. Just because of that attitude and everybody came aboard expected that. And if you have a chance, look at that Fighting Lady movie again

because you really will enjoy it. You will relate to what I'm telling you. ... When it came to going out on the Bennington, and the Yorktown had [been] ... tremendously successful, you know, [as a] result of everything it did. No accidents, I mean to speak of. If a bomb went off, or if there was something rolled on the deck, there was always somebody ... going to grab it [and] throw it over the side before it went off. I mean, it was this kind of thing, really looking after the ship, ship oriented. ... We picked up the Bennington in ... I guess ... it was about June of '45. It was ... off Samar in the Philippines. And ... a lot of us had gotten flown over there, picked up aircraft and flew them aboard the ship. ... We had trained at Maui at ... Kahalui Naval Air Station, which is the airport now, if you fly into Maui anytime. And we've been back there a number of times. ... That was our training ground after we left the States, before ... we went out aboard the ship. So the general feeling was, you know, we were going to be out there and supporting the attack on Kyushu, which would be the invasion of Japan, but we weren't thinking of that, you know, we were just out there doing our job. Well ... the ship itself, the skipper was not really loved by everybody. He just wasn't, he was hard-nosed. ... There was a lot of friction on the ship, ... the skipper of the Bennnington. There was a lot of hard feelings that the thing was wrong. They just didn't like him, we didn't ...

KP: Was he very petty?

JW: Oh, I, no. I think he was more, just ahh, maybe like a tyrant more than anything else. I mean he was going to be in charge of everything, and he probably didn't want to listen to anybody. He wasn't a team man, I would have to say, probably.

KP: How did it compare to the Yorktown?

JW: The Yorktown was a team-- team operation right from the word go; marvelously sensitive people involved in it. You should read, you know, about the Yorktown sometime. We've got histories of them; I've got books on the Yorktown. You need to go to Charleston. Believe me, you're missing something.

KP: But the Bennington; you have a terrible skipper. It sounds like, not terrible in the sense that he did ...

JW: ... Keep in mind now that we're an air group. We're an air group, we're not ship's company. Okay? But our relations with him were not good. That time, when I came back and landed on the wrong carrier, to give an example. ... They came under attack immediately when I got there, so I had to spend the night there. And the next morning or later that night, I called, had them call ... the skipper of the Bennington and ask him if I could get deck launched, ... get catapulted and get over there. I wanted to land over there. I guess that was after when I first landed, when I first landed the evening before, before they got under attack. And ... apparently he said, "No." In fact, he said, "What I want him to do is." He said, "I want you to launch tomorrow morning at about 5:00. Let him do anti-submarine patrol for about five hours." You know, I mean that was, that was just the attitude that he had. ... Then, of course, they came under attack, and I just stayed there. But that kind of went through the ship. That ship eventually was the one that had the steam catapaults blow up on them. Do you remember, later on? They had nothing but problems.

They killed like twelve or fifteen men, not during the war, but it was after the war. But while we were ... off Okinawa, we were in a typhoon, and you've heard about that.

KP: A lot of people have said that typhoons were more frightening than the enemy.

JW: Oh, they're terrible. But I was on the Bennington in the typhoon off Okinawa. And you got to understand this. The flight deck is 70 feet above the water, okay? We were taking green water over the flight deck, not white water. Green water. 70 feet. This thing was riding up 70 feet and down 70 feet. And I stood in the catwalk, and I could still remember seeing us do that. ... Cruisers were disappearing in these troughs, ...
three destroyers sank. I mean, it was ridiculous. I was standing on this catwalk and I heard, "SNAP!" ... I looked over at the thing and here was a F-6F Hellcat that had snapped one of its tiedown cables, snapped the other one and went whoosh, right over the side. Planes were flying off the deck, it was a mess! The water coming up hit the flight deck and snapped the flight deck. And so the Bennington ended up with about twelve or fifteen feet of its overhang of the flight deck down, hanging down. And you couldn't launch aircraft that way, see, because ... that's the area where the catapults are ... that you need to get off. So later on when the weather cleared up, for a while until they got it squared away, they launched them sailing backwards. The ship backed up, you know, you back up about ten-fifteen knots and you got a 30-knot wind ... across the stern and the ship got planes going 25 or 35, 40 miles per hour, you know, you've got enough to go up in the air. Anyway, that was an unusual thing, but this is getting down toward, of course, the end of the war. We did not know about the atomic bomb explosion.

KP: Well, no one did.

JW: In retrospect, we do remember that just before it happened, and ... we were operating over Japan making strikes on Tokyo, Yokohama, all this area. Got a picture right here of some runs we made on a battleship ... that was just sitting there at the naval dock because they didn't have any, anyway to go. They had no people, they had no planes, they had no ... ships that could move. They were in, you know, big trouble, but they weren't giving in, apparently. You know, I mean they were still decided that they were going to continue it anyway.

But we saw a number of, looked to me like Chiang Kai-shek, which were Chinese officers on the ship, you know, as if maybe they were ... coordinating something or wanted to be involved in, whatever was gonna happen. And then we were ... for two weeks we'd been dropping bombs. I'd been dropping bombs on a radar plant in the heart of Tokyo from 800 feet. Just going in, and one of the guys that comes to our meetings, he didn't get there this year. He got shot down in Tokyo Bay and got home before we did. But anyway, ... we were making these strikes every day and dropping bombs, and whatever you could. So then, ... we made a strike, and we were at 12,000 feet, just getting ready to push over. Must have been, could have been 300 airplanes. Sort of like, we call it an operation tin type. In other words, it was kind of like something for the newspapers to show, influence them and what not. We'd been doing the same deal every day. There wasn't anything standing in the center of Tokyo. But, just got ready to push over, and we got ... a radio announcement ... that said, "Jettison your bombs and return to base." Now here we are, right at the heart of Tokyo Bay, just getting ready to push over, so we turned around, all of us

turned around, jettisoned our bombs, started back to the fleet. And I turned around, I told my, called my crew, and I said, "We're going home, get behind your armor plate." I turned around and looked back, and here were the American pilots, Corsairs, Hellcats, all over the sky. You tell an American the war's over, and he's gonna celebrate. You know, it would never occur to him that the war was still going on. They were all over the sky. I don't know how many of them were shot down by Japanese fighters. ... They were not protecting us as much as they were just really celebrating is what it amounts to. But anyway, we got back to the ship and the ship stayed there and operated. See, the bomb's already been dropped now. So we just ... did sort of utility type things.

And one thing that was fun that I did. I guess, I should put it in my history. Those of us that were involved probably thoroughly enjoyed it. But a navy captain on the ship was assigned to be a ... naval aide to our ambassador to London. And so he had to be flown in to a coastal naval air station which is right there by the water. And, of course, ... the thing hadn't been signed yet, but, I mean, he needed to get in there. So, there were still some Japanese around, I'm sure. But anyway, there were two torpedo bombers, myself and section leader and four corsair fighters, two on each side, and we went in and landed, let the fellow out, and I got ... probably should have been blown up. But I got out and walked in a building there and picked up an abacus. Should have been booby trapped, but I guess they didn't have time. Anyway, and I'd given that to Mother Wright, but then I never saw it again after that.

KP: So you actually landed in ...

JW: Oh yeah, landed in Japan, ... just between the time they said they were gonna surrender and the official surrender.

KP: The actual Armistice?

JW: Yeah right.

KP: Have you ever been back to Japan?

JW: No, I haven't. ... But anyway we ... took off. You know, the six planes, okay? Keep this in mind, we'd been at sea a long time. We'd been 106 days, I think, at sea or something like this. And so we started to fly at about four or five hundred feet ... right up Tokyo Bay, and all of a sudden, without any instructions, all of us turned and made a big chandelle turn. ... Everybody saw something. And they all went clear around without a signal, went down. They all ... put their flaps down, got down as slow as they could go. Got down to about 50 feet above the water. Just slow, ... just dragging the water. There were about 40 or 50 Japanese young girls in the water with bare from the middle up. And that was all that was out of the water. And I thought I would die. Those guys will never forget that. You've gotta remember that they'd been at sea a long time. But that looked awfully good probably at that point. That's the humorous side of the war. But anyway, so we went back.

... And this is another thing. And it's true, we'd got a picture of it. You've seen the flyover of the Missouri ... and all the planes, 1000 planes. Believe it or not, I'm number two plane of the whole damn deal, and ... my plane's circled in the picture. And the guy in front of me, I thought I was first, but I saw him at the reunion last year. He's down in Pensacola, now. And he said, "No you weren't; you couldn't have been first, ... because I was ahead of you, because I was taking the pictures."

KP: So your got to do the flyover?

JW: ... Our squadron ... headed the whole flyover, the whole deal. Well, then we stayed around after that about two or three weeks. And our job was to fly to prisoner of war camps. So we went out to the mountains in Japan, and they always had a prisoner of war camp at a mine, right at the base of the mountain. And our job was to find these camps, and then we had, they'd made up little kits, you know, little packages, which we would go over real low and drop them with the parachutes on them-- medical supplies. And you'd see all these guys out standing there, you know, glad to see us probably get there. There was quite a number of us that did this. Sometimes the supplies would drop outside and the Japanese would pick them up. So then we ... had to take Corsairs with us and have them strafe along side as we went in and dropped. But the problem was that you, they, were at the base of the hill and you can't get down to [a] real low speed and come in towards the hill because you could ... never get the hell out of there again. So we had to either come down the hill or we had to come in from the side and then slide across and do it. Well, one time when I went in, we had message drops which were nothing more then [a] little cloth thing with sand in it. You could put a message in it and drop it on a ship or somewhere without having to land. ... So .. we had one of those. So I wrote a note that said, "To all you wonderful allies and GIs, ... glad that we're here," and what not and wrote my crew's names and addresses and my name and address on them and dropped it into the compound. That Christmas I got cards from all over the world. And so did the other guys.

KP: Did you keep them?

JW: Yeah, I've got them. And I've got one from a colonel of the Royal ... Medical Corps, Whitehall, London, England. And he said, "That if you come to London, ... be my guest." We went over there about five years ago, and, of course, ... he'd died or something. We couldn't find him. But I'd brought one letter along with me. You might want to see it. ... This is from a fellow in Brooklyn. It's kind of interesting. ... He was a prisoner of war.

KP: "Dear Williams, I am on my way home after being a POW in Japan and I feel I must ... write to thank you and all of the other pilots of your squadron for what you call an unusual assortment of things, which you so kindly dropped on our camp. Number 8, Kosaka, on Sunday August 26th. You could have no idea how useful everything was, and how much joy they gave everyone in the camp. It was indeed a godsend from heaven. It answered, it arrived just at the right time when we were in want of everything. I cannot describe the joy and pleasure it was to see our American brethren circling above our camp, and I sincerely trust that you and your copilots are now safely back in USA. My address in England will be Lt. Colonel C.O. Schacklton RAMC care of (---------?) Glenn Mills, Wilkesbranch, Kirkland House, Whitehall

SWL. Should you ever be in England, I would be delighted to have the opportunity of meeting you to thank you personally on behalf of the whole camp for your great mission of mercy. Sincerely, C.O. Schacklton at CHMS Suffolk, October 25, 1945." So you must have really felt like they really appreciated what you did.

JW: Yeah, that was the best part of the war, I mean that was my highlight of the war because I would have been the kind of guy to end up in there anyway.

KP: A lot of pilots have remembered their mercy drops. Let me ask this, throw this theory out. You were very conscious of destroying things, but this is where you're really helping someone.

JW: Yeah, right. Oh, I agree, ... when you go back, Room for One More in the story, and all that, and the Wrights. Really, I told her before she died, I said, "There's no way in the world that I can ever thank you." I said, "All I can do is do something for somebody else." And I suspect that's a kind of motivating base for me. So I get my kicks out of doing something for you. I mentioned to you that I played the piano. Well, when I play the piano, I play because you enjoy it. Not because I enjoy playing. If what I play you enjoy hearing, or something has some meaning to you, then I enjoy it. I played at the Million Dollar Round Table insurance meeting in Toronto about four years ago with 3000 people. And ... I've played in Europe at different hotels when we've been traveling and things like that. But anyway, the point is, my personality requires that I do something for somebody else. And if I were not in the life insurance business, I would have been in the ministry, I'm sure, because I have to pay something back.

KP: You seem to like insurance a great deal.

JW: Oh, yeah, it's fine. All the friends I have are clients in insurance. I mean, that's the reason I never can retire. I mean I've gotta be around as long as they ... let me. But anyway, I thought that would be interesting to you. The only other thing that I brought along ... my log book. And my son wants a copy of this, naturally. ... But it does have some interesting things in it. ... It shows you where you were and all of you're flying that you did.

KP: We would appreciate it if you could make a copy of it for us, I'm sure.

JW: Yeah, I know. ... If I do it with John, I'll have to do it for you people. But, this is just like the training part of it. Then you get in, you know, to '45, and of course, I stayed in the navy, see, after the war was over.

KP: You stayed in for quite a while.

JW: Yeah, I stayed in for ... two years.

KP: And you thought of making the navy a career?

JW: Yeah, I think I probably at one time did. But then there were, the opportunities weren't really there. But what I was gonna show you was here, see this says, "Strike Recall Syn pack," which was, of course, commander ... in chief.

KP: Now this was on August 15th that your strike was recalled.

JW: Yeah, right, yeah. See as soon as they dropped the bomb, as soon as they'd said, ... they'd settled, then, they, of course, they stopped. ...

KP: It is an obvious question, but what did you think of the Japanese since you were flying very high?

JW: ... I had no problems with that at all. ... An aviator doesn't see them. And you know that they're diving. You also know that they're diving on your ship and they're shooting at you. So I don't have any feelings for the Japanese. I accept the Japanese on whatever his basis is, ... not where he came from, not who his parents were, but on who he is, as far as that goes. And I don't have any problem with that.

KP: It sounds like you were also more detached being in the aviation.

JW: Absolutely.

KP: Whereas, on the ground, it is very hard to detach.

JW: Well, yeah, if a guy is coming at you with a bayonet it's a lot different between that and maybe shooting at you from a thousand yards away. No, I agree with you.

... For instance, you were asking about parties. ... See this was the group that went on the Bennington, but it was the second group out, okay? I didn't tell you about the skipper, because I didn't like the skipper. ... He was a real pain that man, he was an academy man. ... This was the skipper of the torpedo squadron that we organized and went on the Bennington in 1945.

KP: The one that you did the training with.

JW: Right, we did the training with.

KP: He was an Annapolis graduate?

JW: He was an Annapolis graduate, and ... he'd had a tugboat for a couple of years or something like that, and he went through flight training--no combat experience at all--and they assigned him to our squadron. Well, you can imagine there was, we knew things about combat that he could never know. And there was a certain amount of ... distrust and things like that.

KP: That's interesting to say. What did you learn in combat that you could not get from a textbook or training? What did you learn to do that they did not tell you in training?

JW: Well, I think that it, when I say ... in combat, because you're going out to combat again, there's certain things you have to do. There's a need to, you know, to develop, you know, support for each other, team spirit, ... you need to be very much aware of the fact that ... your life's at stake, that you've got people depending on you, that it's not a "me" business; it's an "us" business to survive. And he just had never learned that ... he was one of the ... academy boys that decided that he was going to make a name for himself, which he did. ... He and I were, I was flying on him, we had to ... made a strike over ... the western side of Japan, ... on a city, a town, and we were supposed to rendezvous at sea about, oh, maybe three or four miles out of anti-aircraft fire anyway. And so we made our strike, and I started to circle, and he stayed ... over the target area, which I thought was kind of dumb. So I headed on out and was going to go to the rendezvous point, and he said, "Get back in here," ... where he was. And I didn't want to get back in there because I could see they were shooting, you know. ... So I refused to come back in there. I stayed out there, and he was mad as hell. So when we got back to the ship, why, he chewed me out real bad, said [that] when he tells me to do something, I'm supposed to do it. I said, "Not if somebody is shooting at me ... and is going to hit me and when we're told to be somewhere else." And I said, "Go take a look at your plane." And he had shrapnel on the bottom of his damn wings, but I was supposed to sit there and wait while he gets shrapnel in his fanny. It just didn't work. So anyway, he didn't like me after that. And he gave me, ... not a good fitness report. I mean, it was passable, but not good, which it should have been. He did not understand that he could use the experience and the strength of those that had already been out there to make him a better skipper, better for everybody. ... Apparently, ... he never learned that at school.

KP: A lot of people who were in the naval reserve, like you, were struck at how rigid some academy people could be and also how academy people viewed themselves as the natural leaders of the navy.

JW: See, as a result ... of being in our group and we trained .. out in Fallon, Nevada and out in Alameda and what not. ... With that kind of leadership it's, you know, how do you describe a guy like that? ... You've seen these bullies, you know, the big bully, he doesn't really, ... he's got all the answers, but he's not really a member of the team. ... He's strictly out on his own. Well I think a lot of ... that happened, and the result is that when they tried to reorganize Torpedo Squadron One, like we did the First Torpedo Squadron. We're still having reunions after 20-25 years. ... The other groups tried repeatedly to get together, and nobody really wants any part of it. In the meantime, the skipper has died, you know. But the point is that there wasn't that relationship there. I mean, ... because your skipper, your leader is the one's going to determine how it goes, it's like a coach.

KP: So it sounds like the two squadrons were night and day.

JW: ... Yes they were. ... And the kids in the squadron were great. I mean, they were good as far as I was concerned. We got along well, but we really didn't have the feeling towards the skipper that we should of had.

... I'll just show you real quickly. This is the flyover, see? This is the surrender here, and this is where we were, see, at different times. This is our yearbook for the squadron. It shows you what we did, and who we were with; all the strikes we made at these different locations. One, I think I was about over here, ... this, of course, is ... Bill Halsey. This is taken out in Fallon, Nevada. ... And then my crew in front here, ... and this is another picture here of the whole group. ...

KP: It has been over 50 years.

JW: Yeah, ... that's just to show you the other side of the thing. When we were in ... winter flight training, one of the boys was going to get married. I don't know how, this guy right here, he's in the dog house ... and the other guy can't find him. But this is me playing the piano, at this ... bachelor party they were having at the officers' club. ... This is me right here. I had more to drink than I should have had that night, but.

KP: It sounds like you learned how to drink in the navy, a little bit.

JW: Well, you have to do that, I mean, after all. I don't now, but you had to then. ...

KP: Did you smoke at all in the service?

JW: Never smoked. ... I smoked a pipe one time to keep warm on a ship when it was cold[er] than hell; that's the only thing. [laughter] But ... this fellah right here, he got married. ... Well, he was in a section next to me. ... We were diving on a battleship ... in Kure Harbor, and he was here going down, and I was here going down, and I looked up, and he got hit with a phosphorous shell, and it just ... peeled back his wing, ... and he went straight in. ... So they went all the way in.

KP: Did you ever encounter fighters?

JW: I never had any, ... not that I'm aware of. If I had any fighters after me, I was gone, I was out of there. No, I never had fighters. ...

KP: Because I imagine when you were in training, '41, '42, that was the real fear.

JW: That's right it was a fear, it was a fear for us, too, and that's, see, that's why we had. And that's another thing too, believe it or not, we, of course, had fighter squadrons and ... they did weaves, back and forth over us, you know, going into the target and coming back. They protected us, ... they would pick up fighters, but they didn't get into where we were. ... When I first went with New York Life, I went to a meeting a number of years ago. I went to a meeting in New Orleans, I think it was, and ... it was a national meeting. And I happened to talk to some guy, and he said, "What did you do?" And I said, "Well I was a naval aviator." And he said, he was a naval aviator. And I said, "I was on the Yorktown." And he said, "I was on the Yorktown." "You're kidding; you're with New York Life." And he said, "What squadron?" And I said, "Torpedo One." And he said, "Well, I was in ... VF-1." I said, "You mean to tell me you were flying fighter cover for me all that time?" And he said, "Yeah." Name was ... Arthur

Abrahamson and ... he was the president of the National Association of Life Underwriters a few years ago, with 150,000 members. Great guy! And we've been buddies ever since. But here he was, ... another guy, ... and the picture is over here.

Another guy, believe it or not, when I had lived with the Wrights in New Jersey, at the shore, where we swam at the shore, it [was] called ... Beacon's Beach, we'd go over there and there was a kid there that lived there, about my age, whose family owned a store in town. And we'd swim together and surf together. And so help me God, he ends up on the Yorktown, in Fighting One, and Duberstein's his name, and he was flying the same damn time that I was flying. ....

... Anyway, on this thing here, I'm actually Johnny in this story, I'm Joey in the book and the movie, but Johnny here. She wrote it anonymously because she didn't know what my family would say because she talks about, you know, see I was apparently arrested for derailing a freight train and other things when I was a kid.

KP: Really?

JW: Yeah, you're going to get a kick out of this book. Anyway.

KP: This is when you were in Pennsylvania?

JW: Yeah, ... I can't tell the whole story, I guess, literally. But this on the Bennington, is that still on?

KP: Yeah.

JW: On the Bennington, these are just some combat pictures. The squadron did a good job, but one of the things that was interesting here. ... This is the ready room ... over here, and this was one of the prisoner of war camp[s] that we dropped at. But then, see this is the flyover and it says here, Torpedo One and all the planes over the Missouri.

KP: Oh, so this is your plane?

JW: Yeah, right. So that was quite an honor, ... an experience. At the time, we didn't realize what we were doing.

KP: Did you know the surrender was going on when you did the flyover?

JW: Oh yeah, ... sure that was all planned. This is the guy who got home before we did. ...

KP: How did he get home before you did?

JW: Well he was shot down, taken prisoner and two weeks later, they let him go. The navy shipped him home, but this is kind of interesting. This is the ... Bennington yearbook, kind of like the one you saw on the Yorktown. It's a little bit different. And it's just a different world.

The plane I flew first was like this, Torpedo One. ... And like I said, .. I enjoyed the Bennington part more, because of finishing up the war, and being involved with the prisoner of war camp and all that sort of thing. But the Yorktown has always kind of been ... our first love, and Margaret loves Charleston, South Carolina, so it's an excuse to go there. But you need to go there with your interest in this thing.

KP: No, I definitely will, because I have been to the Intrepid, and that actually has helped me, in terms of questions to ask.

JW: You are going to get, a whole different world when you go down there, I'll tell you. Not only is it a museum, but they made ... what they call the Arlington of carrier aviation. So all the ships that no longer are in being, that were sunk or dismantled, ... there are bronze plaques put there, and they list on everyone one of them the names of all the people that were killed on board-- I mean, all the ship's company and everybody. And then, now the way it is, if you go there to visit, and you have, like, say your father was on one of those ships, and he was killed, then they have a special folder for that ship and they ... have a list of all the people that were killed, ... it's a copy of what's on the ... bronze. And then they give you that, but they also give you a pass to go aboard the ship for the rest of your life. They have a lot of good programs down there, lot of scout programs. They actually have scouts come down there and spend a week at a time, and troops and things like that. ... It's a great opportunity, but anyway, the Yorktown ... was really the high point, you might say. But when finally the war was over, then everybody got out, but I needed some money to go back to Rutgers to finish up, that was in ...'45.

KP: But you had the GI Bill.

JW: Right, I had the GI Bill, and I needed that, but I was also married.

KP: And you figured that would not be enough.

JW: That wouldn't be enough, so I stayed in the navy for two more years, to '47. Most of that time I was at Corpus Christi Naval Air Station, where I'd gotten my wings. ... I did some work in the Link trainer unit, which ... shows you how it is when you're flying on the ground, with the Public Works Department. It's anything to put in time and just to keep your flight training, so. But ... when that was over, I just went back.

KP: It sounds like the peacetime was also a bit frustrating in the sense that ...

JW: ... They didn't know what they wanted to do. The peacetime navy wasn't prepared for, well, nobody was prepared for demobilization. I mean, who are you going to keep around and what's your future needs, and all that sort of thing, in the service. No, I had no interest in the navy, and I go back to ... the way it started. ... I get orders from somebody says you're going to go here, and then somebody else says you're going there, and I continue to go here/there. ... Why was I not afraid of flying off a carrier, for instance, when I was afraid of heights and things like that? Because it never occurred to me to be. You know, that's true, ... somebody asked me the other day, "Weren't you afraid to fly?" I said, "Nobody ever told me that I couldn't, so I did it." And I

think that's a good way to, I think that's a good thing for life. You have a lot of experiences if you take that approach. Then, if you say, "Well, I can't do that or this," you limit yourself. And I encourage others in the same environment. ... But I enjoyed my time in the service to the extent that you can enjoy your time in the service, during that time.

KP: Some guys say they enjoyed their time in the service, but they never saw combat, and I thought, well, of course, you are going to enjoy your time in the service.

JW: We had good times when we weren't in combat, you know, we had great parties. And that last squadron, the one that went on the Bennington, before we left, we had a big party the night before we left to go out to get the Bennington. And there was, not my wife, but there was some other girl in our group, some wife ... they had a little bulletin they put out, you know. And they said, ... oh, incidentally, they called me Bubbles. And they said, "Betty and Bubbles were poured into the jeep last night." But the way ... Bubbles happened, and ... because the only ones that call me Bubbles are the squadron, was that we were off ... Honolulu on anti-submarine patrol, just looking for them. And I see all these bubbles in the water, and I think I got me a submarine, so I call down and I said, "There's submarine down there, you know. ... I want permission to dive on it." Somebody called down and said, "No, that's just bubbles, that's a whale blowing it's top." So ... I got me a whale. So ever since then, I go to meetings and these guys, it's always Bubbles. In fact, even some of my friends in the insurance business know me as Bubbles, which is kind of a strange deal. I've told you a lot more probably than you expected to hear. But I don't know what else to say. I guess if there's any other questions that you have in mind.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Jack M. Williams on November 10, 1995 at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma with Kurt Piehler. You came back to Rutgers even after all of the GIs came back in 1946 and 1947. What were some of the immediate things that you noticed changed, besides the fact that all of your classmates had graduated?

JW: I think the fact that a lot of them were older, ... I guess they'd come back. ... I don't know how to answer the question, I mean, because I ... didn't have any real ... strong feelings about it. ...

KP: You were married now.

JW: Yeah, ... if you remember now, I've belonged to different families, I mean, it seems like I've been a member of a lot of things, but never really had deep roots. And when you are only in school for three years or two and a half years, you know, plus some time of doing what you want, you don't really get your roots in that deep. And then, when you come back and you're married and spend a year, and then you go out in the work force, it's been hard for me in Oklahoma to be a strong supporter. I am, as far as the alumni goes, ... but, ... we contribute, you know, and we're interested in football games, and we'll try to watch the Rutgers-Boston College game, you know, and things like that. ... And that way I'm interested in it. And, if we go back there, we like to go

visit. We have our classes always wanting us to visit with them when we come back. We try to make, we've made the 50th reunion, and I guess probably the 55th will be coming up before too long. '43 and '55, that'll be '98, won't it? So I'm sure we'll go back for that. Now ... I don't know, I can't tell you much; I'd only spent a year.

KP: And you did not live on campus?

JW: Now, that's right, I lived in town there, Woodnor Court. No, we lived out on Codwise Avenue.

KP: Did you have a hard time getting a place to live?

JW: Yeah, I think we probably did. Yeah, ... we had a rough time. That's on (Jerome? Kern?) Street now, you know what they call it, ... who's the fellow that wrote the Trees?

KP: Kilmer, Joyce Kilmer

JW: ... Joyce Kilmer Blvd. or something, ... that's where we lived. ... It was hard getting a place. We got a place where the landlord was upstairs, he and his wife, and they weren't real nice to my wife, and pounded with a broomstick ... on the ceiling to aggravate her, on the floor. ... You know, ... and we had our first child there. And I left there, ... I had left Rutgers and, like I say, I went with AT&T in New York.

KP: How did you get your first job?

JW: Well, I think it was probably through the employment office there at the university. This was a strange problem because this was right after the war. I was chosen as one of the twelve graduates to go with AT&T in New York City in the Long Lines Division. They were from all over the United States. ... I had to commute an hour and 45 minutes each way, every day, from New Brunswick. I had to take the bus, take the train, took the subway, I mean, and then walk to get to work every day. And it was quite a pain. At the end of the year, all I was doing during that year was working in the Long Lines Division which was putting up radio relay towers. They were getting into the thing we have a lot of now, ... this cellular type of thing, but with them, it was long distance. And making up a glossary or something, nothing very important. But the problem was that all of the leaders that were there had been there during the war, and they were union people. And ... their middle management people were union people, and they did not want to promote them up into the executive ... level. And that was what this whole program was [about], a junior executive training program.

KP: So, in other words, because of the war, they had some older workers who had been in the union and just sort of filled in.

JW: Right, and they did not want to move them up, and so they hired all these young college graduates.

KP: Why the resistance? I mean do you have any sense that, because it's sort of intriguing that ...

JW: Yeah, the resistance was that they felt like ... we were going to take their jobs. ... For instance, when I was in the navy, I could talk to the admiral and feel very comfortable about it. The first day, when, ... after I had met this head of the department, was one of these guys kind of ... wore ... the green hats, you know, the shade and all that nonsense. Strictly an accountant; I was in the accounting department. And I wasn't an accountant, anyway. But I'd ask him, like, in the elevator I'd ask how his golf game was or something like that, and he'd say, "None of your business." Or something like that. ... I mean, ... he felt that ... he didn't want to be that close to these guys. These guys were ... probably going to be a hazard for him, you know, for moving up. So, at the end of the year, eleven of the twelve were asked to resign, including me. And the only guy that got to stay-- his father was president of Southwest Bell. So, that's the true story; that really happened. So I left, unfortunately, I'd left in '49, which was a recession year. ... Also, my wife was expecting our first child in three or four weeks, which wasn't very good. And I didn't have a job.

But I had an aunt who had worked with Thomas A. Edison. ... She knew him, had actually worked in his laboratory, and they had a division in West Orange that was their battery division. They sold ... automotive batteries, and spark plugs, magnetos, and all that. And so, through her, I got a job as a salesperson traveling over New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, selling automotive batteries and spark plugs and magnetos. And my office looked right down on Edison's laboratory. And so we've had an interest in Edison, you know, through the years.

KP: Oh yeah, and Rutgers has the Edison Papers.

JW: And it just, yeah, I had just been reading some of their stuff of what they're doing.

... But then, our child was born, and I was gone, out of town, all that sort of thing, which is another story. But then ... Edison transferred me out to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania--Butler, actually, north of Pittsburgh. And, after I was out there about a year, ... the division was going broke, I guess because I was in it, and so they decided to terminate it. So I was out of a job in 1952.

KP: So, you have really had some rough moments.

JW: So anyway, here we are in '52. Well, I had to either go back to New Jersey where I didn't know anybody because I'd been gone. See, I didn't belong anywhere. Or ... go ... out to Oklahoma, which I didn't know anybody. Margaret's boss was the only person I knew out there. So I went out there, and, through him, I managed to talk to a banker who managed to suggest New York Life or something like that. And I ended up going with New York Life. Didn't know anybody, started from scratch in 1952. So, it's been a good life ever since.

KP: But it's been rough going.

JW: Let me tell you another thing that happened, now that you got me into this. ... When ... I was living with the Wrights-- you've heard of the Hindenburg and the disaster--we were involved in that, too. The way we were involved is that ... the trip before it came over and exploded, Pop Wright went to Germany on it, turned around and came back on it the same week. He went over and back within four days. When he came back, we were at the shore, at West Point Pleasant. We went over, we met him, and we went through it. We climbed up on it, went in where they had all ... tables set up where you just looked out over the ocean and what not. They had linen tablecloths and at every person's seat was their name embossed on linen napkins: Herr Von so and so. I still remember seeing those things. Chairs, they'd made everything out of duraliam which was aluminum and something else. You could just lift the chair up with your hand. I lifted the baby grand piano with my hand, and just could not believe that. They were so far ahead of everybody in some of those metallurgical fields. Anyway, the next trip when it came over and exploded, there was a German family on there, named the Doehners, D-O-E-H-N-E-R-S. There was a father, electrical engineer taking himself, his wife, his teenage daughter, and two little boys about three years old to Mexico City. They were being transferred; he was changing jobs. ... When the thing exploded, the daughter and the father were never seen again. The mother had the two children by the windows. They were all looking out the open windows. And she told these kids, she lifted them up to the window and told them to jump. ... Our kids would not do that; they'd grab you around the neck and you'd have to all go. But, anyway, they jumped. Apparently they were down quite close to the ground and when they did, a water tank burst over them. And the woman got out with some burns. Both the boys had both their ears burned off. They took all three of them to the hospital one block from our summer cottage in West Point Pleasant. Tom, who's the one that's the doctor now, took an interest in these kids. And he'd take them crabbing and fishing, and that's how he got ... kinda got his start and interest in medicine. All these things just tied in together. So we're involved with the Hindenburg Disaster.

KP: I'm curious in the Hindenburg, that Pop Wright had gotten on the Hindenburg and gone over to Germany.

JW: ... Yeah, well, see, he was, this was back in the early '30s ... he was an inventor. Remember I told you he was an inventor. And he developed the right cord filter that they use in filtration systems in major cities, even today, in their filtration department[s]. But he'd lost out on it because of the way they stole patents. But he had an interest in German, you know, engineering-type things. So I think that's the reason that he [went]. But ... they invited him over there, and he went over there and back in the same week. But since then, of course, I have a great interest in the Hindenburg, and I've got books on the Hindenburg and everything ... I can get my hands on the Hindenburg. So I've had kind of ... a broad spectrum life, you might say.

KP: I guess, it's funny, my ties to Oklahoma because in college I worked for an Oklahoma Congressmen, Mike Synar and my wife grew up in Tulsa and went to OSU.

JW: Well, Mike Synar's brother was a law partner of my son, John. He's not with him anymore, but he was with him.

KP: But Oklahoma's changed a bit from when you were both here in the navy, but also when you started your business in the 1950s.

JW: Yeah, it's unreal what's happened to it.

KP: For example, the Democratic Party dominated; like most of the South, it was a one party system.

JW: The one good thing about Oklahoma is the people move at a slower pace, I mean, than they did in the East. They talk more slowly, they just move slower. And ... laughingly tell people that Margaret and I used to go to the movies and I would laugh fifteen seconds ahead of everybody else because they were slower at getting the damn humor. ... And I've slowed down. I've had to slow down my speaking. But, I would say Oklahoma, you know, ... has always been a very friendly state. It doesn't have a lot of industry; it has a lot of service-type businesses. It had ... an economy that was based on agriculture, banking and oil, all of which went down at the same time, which caused us to go into a dreadful depression. And ... it ran at least ten years long.

KP: It is interesting, because I remember working for Mike Synar in the early 1980s and I had even toyed with the idea of coming to Oklahoma to go to law school. And Texas, too, has also experienced boom times, and the Northeast was very stagnant in the late 1970s. But I remember my jaw just kind of dropped in the early 1980s when the oil market just kind of collapsed.

JW: It was a mess.

KP: It was very tough when you got started in business, but were the 1980s very tough for you?

JW: Well, they were tough. We did real well when the boom was on. You know, ... but I decided during the boom that I would do work with the people that serve the oil industry and not the oil people themselves. And it turned out to be the right thing to do because our business came down, but it didn't disappear during that period. So we've been very fortunate. I mean, ... for instance, we're working now because I like to work. Don't have to work, it's been financially successful. ... I really appreciate the fact that you were willing to come over here, and I don't mind coming over there. I've got to get back to get to a church Sunday school class party by 6:30.

KP: I have only got one more question, do you wish any of your sons had served in the military? Especially giving how important the military was to your life.

JW: I would say no. There was a time when our younger son ... could have used the discipline of being in the navy for a while. You know, just to find that there's a right way and a wrong way to do it, rather then working the wrong way seemed like all the time. But, ... both of our kids are pretty independent. They really didn't have any desire particularly, and I didn't ... come out of a military environment. I was merely one of millions of Americans who'd happened to serve during a war period. So I really didn't preach or talk about the military. In fact, John didn't know much about it until, really, we'd gotten out here, and he's gotten older, and he's gone to the ship

now, and he really wants to know all about it. So I give him books on Admiral Nimitz or somebody else for Christmas this year. I mean it's ...

KP: So it seems you are almost glad that they did not serve in Vietnam.

JW: Oh, absolutely, ... there's no sense in that. That's not a necessary risk, as far as I was concerned. We shouldn't have been there anyway, but we were. Once there, I wanted us to win the damn war and get out of it. ... You know, I wasn't opposing it, I was for implementing it, very positively, but no, I didn't encourage them. I ... wouldn't encourage them now, particularly. I worked with the military a lot when I first got out and went into the insurance business.

KP: You stayed in the reserves, too.

JW: Yeah, I stayed in the reserves, and then I ... wrote a lot of life insurance on military people--navy. We still do. I mean, we still keep them as clients, but ... it's been a good life, and a lot of it has come out of, see, if it hadn't been for the military ...

KP: Well, you would not have met your wife.

JW: Right, and all these things wouldn't have taken place. See. So my whole life, after leaving home, had really been geared to Rutgers and the military because Rutgers led to the military.

KP: Well is there anything I forgot to ask?

JW: I don't think so because I've got a feeling I've covered a lot of ground with you.

KP: Thank you very much.

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

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