

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN F. COLEMAN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

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HO-HO-KUS, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. John F. Coleman in Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey, on January 25, 2008, with Shaun Illingworth ...

David Fulvio: ... and David Fulvio.

SI: Mr. Coleman, thank you very much for having us here today.

John F. Coleman: You're welcome. Glad to have you.

SI: Thank you. To begin the interview, could you tell us, for the record, where and when you were born?

JC: Yes. I was born April 10, 1919, in Brooklyn, New York, 117 Jefferson Avenue, which was not the most cheerful block. It was a bleak-appearing block and, in the middle of the block, there were two apartment houses, which were typical of Brooklyn, four-story apartment houses. We lived in the third floor, in the rear of the building, and we had a three-room, coldwater flat. I had an older sister, who was three years older than I, Rita, and then, years later, five years later, a younger brother came along, Alfred, and then, we moved.

SI: What were your parents' names?

JC: My father's name was John and my mother's name was Sarah, Sadie.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your father, where he was from, what he did for a living?

JC: Yes. My father, ... his father came over from Ireland. My grandfather became a merchant. He became a buyer of dry goods, of silks and fabrics, for the various New York department stores, and my father was brought up in Brooklyn, he went to prep school in New York City, to Xavier, and I think he went on to college. I'm not sure, and he was a salesman for a silk firm and he traveled around the country. So, he would be away for [long periods]. In those days, you traveled by train and, to get across the country, it would take you four or five days, and he would go from New York to Boston, to Chicago, to St. Louis, to San Francisco. So, he'd be gone for a couple of months at a time, and then, come home again. So, that was my father.

DF: How often did he travel?

JC: Again, I'm not quite sure of that, David. I would think he did it quite often, maybe at the changing of the seasons. ... In the dress business, there's a spring collection, there's a fall collection, and that he traveled at least twice a year, I would guess, maybe three times a year. I'm not sure of that, because, again, I was very young.

SI: Did you have to take on more responsibilities, since your father was not home a lot?

JC: Oh, no, not at that age. I'm talking, like, I can remember my first day in grammar school. We went to a parochial school. My mother walked me to the school. Nativity was the name of the parish, and, in Brooklyn, everyone knew neighborhoods by parishes, and this was the

neighborhood that we lived in. It was, really, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and I can remember, I went into this classroom and it was taught by a nun, 1-A and 1-B. There were probably, oh, sixty kids in the class, boys and girls, and I knew that I wasn't comfortable. I didn't like it and I guess I stayed in class about an hour and decided that I had it. ... I left the class and walked home and my mother was rather surprised, took me by the hand and walked me back to school again, [laughter] and I stayed in that school until about the third grade. ... Then, we moved to a new neighborhood, ... up to Prospect Place in Brooklyn and, again, into an apartment house. The treat was, we had heat in that apartment house. We had a four-room apartment, in the rear again, on the third floor, and I started school at a parochial school called St. Teresa's. ... It was an all-boys school and next-door to it was an all-girls school, and I started in the fourth grade, I guess, and I went through that until the eighth grade. ... From there, we moved across the street, to another apartment house. Now, we had five rooms, we're getting up in the world, and we stayed there and I remember fondly my days in grammar school. ... You know, I laugh now, the kids, the grammar schools are crowded if they have thirty kids in the class. We had fifty, fifty, sixty boys in the class, and with one little nun controlling the class, but you didn't fool around, because she would get you to the front of the room and you'd get your knuckles cracked or she'd grab you by the tie and bang your head on the blackboard, and she kept control of the classroom. Generally, there were three positions for your hands; your hands on your desk, your hands on your head or your hands behind your back. That way, she could control the class. She knew where your hands were, [laughter] ... which is so different than today, and I remember, when I was there, in those days, we had the freedom of the streets and we played in the streets. We played games in the streets, played stickball, punch ball. In the winter, we played hockey, with roller skates, ... again, out in the street. ... I guess I must have been about ten years old and I found out, ... I walked, oh, maybe a half mile, and I found the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, and then, I was so excited. This was my first exposure to the wilderness, [laughter] trees, a lake. There was a little Japanese house there I used to play cowboys and Indians around and I enjoyed that so much. ... Another experience I had, when I was about ten years old, I got violently sick and I was sick for about three days and my mother finally called in the doctor. ... This was unusual, ... the doctor coming to your house, and [I] don't think he ever came to my house before, except when a kid was born. ... He found out that I had appendix [problems] and he thought it could be ruptured and he told my mother, ... "If he didn't get to the hospital, the kid would be dead in three hours." I remember him saying that. So, they rushed me off to this little Swedish hospital in Brooklyn, and, why, I think of the modern hospitals today and this was a little, two-story, French, Victorian-type house, right on the corner of Rogers Avenue and Sterling Place. ... After I was operated on, I was in a room on the first floor. There were trolley lines. One trolley line ran straight and another trolley line came along and curved around that street and it would lose its overhead electric connection, and the conductor would have to get out and put it up. ... I could always hear the trolley cars, all day long, while I was in that hospital, and I was there for about two weeks and, when I came out, things were very different then. ... The doctor made me wear a corset and, for a year, I couldn't play with the boys. I couldn't play any of the street games and I had to sit on the apartment house porch, watching the other kids play, and I would be sitting there with the girls, talking to the girls. So, that was my exposure. When I graduated from school, from grammar school; oh, again, just to give you [some background], these were the Depression years and things were tough at times. My father lost his job and he got another job and he went to Europe for awhile, as a buyer, and then, he came back again. ... The silk business, which my father was in, sort of went down the tubes when rayon came into the

picture and people couldn't afford the expensive silks, again, the Depression years, and it was a different time. ... On the corner, in Brooklyn; Brooklyn, like Manhattan, the streets are rectangular ... and the small end of the street is a very commercial area and the long end of the street is a residential area and ... I can remember standing on the corner, with my friends. ... Well, there was all stores on the short end of the street, on Franklin Avenue, and, on the corner, there was a store with glass windows on both sides of the street and a door in the front. ... The windows would be all painted with whitewash and a cop would be there on the corner, spinning his club, and this was (Gallagher's?), the speakeasy. ... On Friday and Saturday night, you could hear roars, singing and whatnot, and the cop would be there, just swinging his club. Everyone knew it was [a bar]. It was the times. Around the corner, there was a shop where they sold malt and hops, so [that] you can make your own wine or your own beer, and the grocery stores were different. You'd go into the grocery store and you'd go to the counter and you'd order and the clerk, ... with a stick, he'd take something off and put it on the counter and get your order together. ... Then, he would get out his brown paper bag and jot down the price of every item, and then, add it up, ... and then, give you what the cost was and you'd go home, so unlike today. ... We would travel on the train, go to Coney Island, where the subway was five cents. So, it's over two dollars today, I think, and it was such a different time.

SI: You mentioned that, in your first apartment, it was a coldwater flat, and then, you got heat.

JC: Heat, yes.

SI: What about other things in the apartment? Did you have electricity?

JC: Oh, yes, we had electricity. All these apartments, they were pretty much the same. They were typical of Brooklyn. There's a lot of them. ... You go in and [there were] marble hallways, marble stairs going up. There'd be six apartments on each one of the floors, five in the first floor, and they were almost cookie cutout. I mean, they were very similar. So, the apartments, they were very livable. They still are, today, even many, many years later, and I'm trying to think what else might be of interest to you.

SI: You mentioned that a lot of the neighborhoods were built around parishes.

JC: Oh, yes.

SI: Does that mean that most of your neighbors were Catholics?

JC: Oh, no, no. It was very definitely a mix. There was a public school and a parochial school and the kids were mixed. We played together. I had Jewish friends and I had Italian friends and Irish friends. ... It was a mixture and we all got along, played together and never had any ethnic or racial problems at all. ... Looking back, it was a fun time. At the time, it was kind of tough, because, ... I tell my kids, like, today, I can't stand bread pudding, because, when times were tough, I ate an awful lot of bread pudding. ... My mother would go and buy day-old bread and get some fruit and make it up and that would be our meal, and we lived very simple. I'm trying to think of some highlights. ...

SI: What were some other ways that your mother would stretch a dollar?

JC: Oh, yes, she would, and I can remember, ... I would go out, in the morning, with a pail to go to the grocery store, to get a quart or two quarts of milk, and I would go to the bakery and I would get a dozen buns, and I remember this so clearly. We had a German bakery and it would cost me fifteen cents for a dozen buns, and I think of what I pay now; I think I paid seven dollars for a coffee cake today. So, it was different. ...

SI: You told us about your father before; what about your mother and her family?

JC: My mother was a very interesting, lovely lady, and she was an orphan. Her mother was killed in an explosion when they were building the New York Subway out in Queens. ... Her father was a railroad man and, evidently, I suspect he might have had a drinking problem or something, and he had three kids. My mother was the youngest and he gave the kids away to family members and my mother, he gave to a friend, and she never knew [her family]. She didn't know her father and these people that brought her up used her like Cinderella. They used her as a [maid]. She only had a third-grade education. ... After the third grade, they sent her out to work in a sweatshop, making gloves, and they would give her a nickel a day. She could either ride one way and walk home [or] she'd have to bring a lunch. ... She had a tough upbringing, and she never knew she had a brother and sister and she kept the name of the family that had adopted her. ... Just about the time she was getting married, her brother came and found her. ... Then, she realized she had a brother, ... an older brother, and an older sister, which was, I think, ... wonderful for her, and so, my father met her and fell in love with her and they got married and that was it, yes.

DF: How old were they when they met?

JC: I'm not sure of that, but I would say they were in their early; she must have been about eighteen and nineteen and he probably was in his early twenties, maybe twenty-one, twenty-two, something like that, I'm guessing.

DF: Did they just cross paths?

JC: They met at a party, I'm told, a party, and, from there, fell in love. ...

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

JC: Not until my father died. When my father died, then, she worked outside the home, but she used to work in the home. ... She'd make flowers, paper flowers, to sell, and stuff like that, for church fairs. ... No, she was pretty much at home, taking care of the three kids. ...

SI: What about involvement in the community? Were you or your parents involved in community activities, clubs, that sort of stuff?

JC: My father belonged to the Elks Club, I know that. He was, and I guess he used that when he was traveling. My mother was a church goer, ... my father, for that matter, too, but, no, I can't think of any club affiliates or anything like that, no.

SI: Did you become involved in the Boy Scouts or anything like that?

JC: No, I didn't become involved in Boy Scouts. I found [that] I couldn't afford a Scout uniform. [laughter] I couldn't, ... and, anyway, the Scouts were not active in the neighborhood. ... We didn't have that. ... The Scouts were not active in the church and we didn't have any organized thing like that, but, again, we didn't need it. ... Today, the kids, I have grandkids in town here and they spend more time in the house, with television and with games and computers; we were always outside. I mean, I don't ever remember having friends in my house, to play with me in my house. The outside was where we played. We played on the roof of the apartment house, we played in the basement, we played in the street, we played in the park, we played football [and] ... baseball behind the Brooklyn Museum. ... Somebody had a ball and we had a bat and we'd play baseball. You'd knock the cover off the ball; you'd get friction tape, you'd put it around there and keep on playing until you knocked the friction tape off. ... You know, you didn't need much to play in the street. All you needed was a broomstick and a Spalding and you're in business. ... If your friends weren't out at the time and you were by yourself, or one other friend, you'd play stoopball. You'd have a ball, one kid would stand out in the road and you'd bang the ball off the curb or off the house and the ball would go there and you had different ground rules for that, you know, yes. So, that was pretty much my youth. ... When I graduated from grammar school, my father was in California at the time, because I remember getting a telegram from him, and I didn't have enough money to go to private school. So, I went to a public school in New York City, in Brooklyn, Boys High, which, then, was a very high standard, academically, and I was taking, you know, a general course, Latin, mathematics, science, ... all the stuff, and I lived on New York Avenue then. We moved from Prospect Place. After I graduated from grammar school, we moved from Prospect Place up to an apartment on New York Avenue and President Street and went to what they call the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, and I would walk to high school, which was about, oh, over a mile away, I guess. ... Well, at first, when we went to high school, ... my first year in high school, they had us go to an annex on Lewis Avenue, an old, old building, because the high school was overcrowded, and then, eventually, we went to the high school on Marcy Avenue. ... I guess I was in ... my senior year, starting my senior year, and my mother got ill and she had to go in for an operation and, at the time, things were rough in the family. My father was trying to make ends meet and having all kinds of problems. My sister was working and my mother, she was operated on and she came home and she needed nursing attention. So, we couldn't afford a nurse and we didn't have anybody, and my sister couldn't afford to give up a job, because we needed the money, so, I quit high school in my senior year. ... I took care of my mother during the day and I registered at night high school, Washington Irving, over on Sixteenth Street and Irving Place, in New York City, and got my graduate degree from night school and continued nights at NYU, interrupted by the war. ... While I was in high school, I worked, on every weekend, as an usher in one of the large theaters in Brooklyn, Loew's Pitkin, which was in the Jewish section of Brooklyn, in the Brownsville section. ... You know, in those days, they had palatial theaters, and I know, I'd have to go to work, I'd have to put on [a uniform]. I looked like a Marine. I had blue pants with red stripes down [the leg], I had a red jacket, white shirt, dickey with a blue tie, and I would have

to escort the people down the aisle. ... People, in those days, didn't necessarily come in at the beginning of a movie. They came in any time they wanted and you'd bring them to their seat and they'd stay in the movie until that part of the movie came up again, and then, they'd leave. ... On a Friday night or a Saturday night, you'd get the people and they'd stand in the rear of the theater, stand behind the seats, in the partition there, and you'd have them behind a velvet rope. ... When two seats would open up, you'd let two people come out ... and you walked them down the aisle, and you'd get awfully tired, because that aisle would get higher and higher coming back each night. So, I did that, and then, after my mother got well again, I got a job ... through my aunt. My aunt was a dressmaker at Hattie Carnegie's and Hattie Carnegie's was the high-class couturier in New York City that made and sold clothes to the very, very wealthy people, and she had ... a shop on 49th Street, between Park and Madison, and I got a job there. I was just turning seventeen, I guess, and I was in the shipping room there, a menial job, and she had places on Fifth Avenue, up on 54th Street, and another place on 39th Street, I think it was, just off Fifth Avenue, and I'd be a runner, carrying boxes back and forth between these places. ... In those days, they, Hattie Carnegie, ... in this shop, had a beautiful showroom and she had models and the models would model the clothes for the rich people, and they were young, good-looking girls. ... Carnegie had a gay designer, Mr. John, and Mr. John was something and I always liked him. ... I remember coming in one day and ... he had one of these models with just the little panties on and he's dressing her, ... designing a dress, draping clothes around her, and I decided, right then and there, I wanted to become a designer. [laughter] ... You know, I wasn't happy in that job, but getting jobs then, ... it was a difficult time. This was the Depression. ... Going from work, going on the way home, I'd met a friend that I had double-dated with my cousin and he was going to college and he had a summer job, or he had a job, and he was leaving the job to go to college. ... He worked for an insurance company and he was leaving the job and I said, "Where do you work?" He told me where the job he was quitting [was] and I said, "Well, fine, I'm going down there and apply for it." So, he said, "Go ahead." So, I went down and I applied for this job in this insurance agency, which was down in Lower Manhattan, on Cedar Street and William, and I got the job. ... Again, it was a menial job, but I felt I was with a corporation now and maybe I could somehow get a future out of it and, again, it was, more or less, [as] a runner. ... In those days, they ran things between businesses and I was a runner and I was a general office boy, I guess, at seventeen or eighteen. Where other guys were going to college, I was still doing menial jobs, but I would go out at my lunch hour and I would try and go to an employment agency, but, in those days, in the employment agencies, I remember one, (Alberta Smyth?) down there, and she had a place on the second floor. ... There were quite a few employment agencies and there'd be lines down the street. ... You'd get on the line and you'd wait and wait and wait and you'd finally get upstairs and there'd be somebody there to interview you at a counter, and they're, you know, [asking], "What's your background?" ... Really, my background was not much to hire me [on], and so, ... I'd get awfully discouraged, but I'd keep on working. ... When I started, I was making fifty-five dollars a month, and that was working five-and-a-half days a week and, well, it only cost me a nickel ... each way on the train, which wasn't bad, and lunch, I could bring my lunch in, ... or you could probably get lunch for fifteen cents. ... They really had a restaurant down there, the E&B, [Exchange Buffet], they called it, "Eat It and Beat It," and you could go in there and you're on your honor, and there were some days I would cheat, and then, when I had money, I would make it up and pay them back what I owed them, [laughter] and it was a very, very different time. ... I met my wife in this particular firm that I worked for, which was Myrick Agency, Mutual Life of New York; it's MONY now, [now part of AXA

Financial, Inc.]. ... What was nice about working in that place was, there were a lot of young people, young clerks and whatnot, who worked there, and we had a lot of socializing. We had a softball team and, in the spring and the summer, we'd go out and play other offices in softball and the girls would come along. We'd have a picnic or something and, oh, about this time, I got exposed to my military career. ... In Brooklyn, we had the National Guard. There were two National Guard outfits close by. One was the 106th Infantry and the other was the 101st Cavalry, and I always thought the cavalry, they looked smart in their uniforms, I thought I'd like to belong to that. I didn't know how to ride a horse, but I figured I could learn. So, that, I found out, was rather a closed club. You had to be invited into it. ... Through my sister, who ... her boyfriend or somebody knew somebody, I got invited and I had to go before a board and I passed the board, and then, I had to go for a physical, and then, I was concerned, because I had a weak eye, a weak right eye, and I thought, "Oh, I'm not going to pass that. I've got to pass the physical." So, I go in, [in a] big gym, you're bare-assed, the doctor looks you over, you know, checks you in, and then, "Read the eye chart." So, I got the card and I put it over my poor eye and I read twenty-twenty, and he says, "All right, now, the other eye," and I went down, I changed the thing and I just put it over the same eye, and they never noticed it. [laughter] I read twenty-twenty again, and then, I was in. ... I guess I was about nineteen years old, and I went out to the riding academy the first day. ... They asked me whether I was ever on a horse. I said, "No." The only horses I saw were pulling grocery wagons, the (Dugan?) wagon or the coal wagon. So, they said, "Well, this is a horse. Now, you get on it. You mount it. [Do] you feel comfortable?" "Yes, yes, I feel comfortable." "Well, good luck," and, with that, they hit the horse with a broom in the ass [laughter] and the horse took off like a bullet, and with me around its neck, you know. [laughter] ... Finally, the horse calmed down and I calmed and I started my career in the New York National Guard, and I found that, really, I enjoyed that so much. I wound up in what they called a machine gun troop, which was a thirty-caliber, water-cooled machine gun, and we were broken down into squads. A squad would consist of six enlisted men and the one corporal, and you had, each squad had ten horses, a horse for each man to ride and three pack horses, which you carried the gun and the munitions on, and we would go [out] on two nights a week. There were rumblings of war in Europe then. Hitler was beginning to feel his oats, and so, people were taking their training rather seriously, and we trained once or twice a week at the armory, and then, the weekends, ... we had a big riding arena, and I think it was the second largest in the nation, and they'd have polo games in the nighttime, and indoor polo, they played. ... I learned how to ride a horse. The first thing they did, [when] they taught you how to ride, you had to ride bareback first. You had to learn how to feel the motion of a horse and, ... after that, ... you would ride two abreast, in a column of twos. One fellow would hold the reins of your horse and you were both bareback, but you had to pull your hat, they had these campaign hats, you had to pull your hat over your eyes. ... Then, when they would go through the various gaits, from trot to gallop, swing left, swing right, ... you had to get the feel of the horse. So, you really learned how to ride a horse, and the money, we got paid a dollar a drill, but we never got the money. The money went to our club. We had a clubhouse across the way, which was a lovely clubhouse, and a redbrick building, nice, nice place, and we'd go there after and have Trommer's White Label Beer, ... after the ride. ... It was good. For fellowship, it was great and the club owned a hundred acres, oh, more than a hundred, 150 acres, I guess it was, out in Huntington, Long Island. ... They had cabins out there and, in the summertime, if you could afford it, you could spend a week out there ... and get breakfast and dinner for fifteen dollars and you could ride all day on a horse for fifty cents. They charged you for the horse ride. Well, I

couldn't afford the fifteen dollars ... to go away for a whole week, and I didn't have the extra time, because the time we got off, ... each summer, you'd go away for two weeks. One summer, we went away for five weeks; we went two weeks and three weeks. As I say, that was in 1939 and we would go on maneuvers, and the last maneuver we had was up in New York State and we maneuvered against the First Armored Division. This was the First Armored Division ... out at Fort Knox, in Kentucky, first one the country had, and it was interesting. ... I was up there and ... there's certain dates you remember, and this date was ... September 1, 1939, and that was the day that the Germans marched into Poland. ... Right away, we knew the British and the French were going to go to war and we knew, ... even though Roosevelt promised to keep us out, and the nation really didn't want to go to war, because ... we had such a terrible experience after World War I, the nation was not ready to get into a European war again. "Let them [fight]," ... but, that date, I do recall, and so, I stayed in the cavalry and I guess it was at the end of 1940, there was talk that the National Guard was going to be nationalized and that they were going to be called up for active duty, for a year [of] training. ... At the time, my sister was now married and away from home, my father had died, and I was the only one at home that had a job. I had a younger brother, five years younger. He was still in school. So, I said, "I can't afford the [year of service]." Twenty-one dollars a month, they were paying us at the time, as a private. "I can't afford to go away for a [year]." So, I applied for a hardship discharge from the National Guard. I and several other fellows did the same thing, because ... a lot of people had the problem, and I remember what a sad day it was when I went down there, ... I guess it was the very beginning of January 1941, when all my friends in that unit went away, up to Camp Devens, Massachusetts, and I was really brokenhearted, because I really loved the cavalry. I loved the guys I was associated with, yes, but, you know, you had to do your duty at home. So, I stayed there.

SI: Before we move on, can we ask a couple of questions about the cavalry?

JC: Yes, please.

SI: When you first joined in 1938, was it more for the fact that it seemed like a neat thing to do?

JC: Oh, yes, yes, strictly a fun thing.

SI: You were not thinking about the possibility of a war.

JC: Oh, hell no, no.

SI: Obviously, we switched from horse cavalry to armored cavalry. Did that happen during your time?

JC: Yes. ... Well, that happened when they were away at camp, ... when they were up in Devens, and they decided [then]. At first, it was obvious, in Europe, the Germans just went right through the Polish Cavalry, the horse cavalry, and the cavalry, in this modern day, ... just is not a fighting machine. It just can't hold up. The cavalry was really mobile infantry. That's all it was, and you can do the same thing with trucks today and all kind of motorcars. ... They fought [with] some cavalry in the Philippines, when the Philippines were invaded, but, again, no, can't compete against a tank.

SI: I am trying to get an idea of what the attitude was of the cavalymen toward this major change.

JC: Oh, ... they all hated to see the horse go. Sure, I mean, the horse was fun. ... I'm sure, I wasn't there when they went, but I talked to all my friends and, sure, they were all brokenhearted, ... because cavalry was a great part of the Army. In West Point, they were still taking riding lessons, and all the Army posts around the country, and all the National Guard posts, they had polo teams and they had, active, in the summertime, when we were out in Huntington, they had a polo field out there and they played polo out there. ... We had, the 101st, I guess we were Squadron C, in Brooklyn, and Squadron A was on Madison Avenue and 80th, something like that, 80th Street, and they had their own club and they had a club up in Rockland County, the way we had one out in Huntington. ... They had a polo team, we had a polo team, ... Governor had a polo team, in Governor's Island, they had one in Fort Hamilton, West Point. They [were] very active and every Army post had a polo team, you know, and, even after the war, the Army still, in many posts, ... tried to keep horses, but that disappeared, yes.

SI: When you were on maneuvers with the First Armored Division, you said it was interesting. I was wondering what was interesting about it.

JC: Well, all the maneuvers were very interesting. This one was, you know, ... we were really in the [field]; ... well, in all the maneuvers, you're always in the field. You have field exercises, and this particular exercise, we had against the tank, but, besides that, we had infantry companies, infantry regiments, and it was a regular army field maneuver, and one of the things was how fatigued you got. ... We came down, the whole outfit came down, with terrible cases of dysentery, you know, and you're riding a horse and you want to get off the horse and take a shit, but, no, you've got to keep on riding, you know. ... You were fatigued, you know. For two or three days, you didn't sleep, or you slept on the horse as you were riding along, or some damned thing, you know. ... It gave you a taste of, perhaps, what the real thing might be like, you know. ... I can't describe to you; you know, we'd set up in positions with our machine gun and, you know, cover a road, or something like that, and the tanks, some tanks, would come along and we'd have to pull up the gun, pack up the horses, go galloping away to another position, you know, ... but we weren't shooting live bullets. ...

SI: Did you have the proper equipment?

JC: Yes, fortunately, in our particular outfit. The National Guard in the nation didn't. When they went on their big maneuvers, in 1941, when they went down South and whatnot, they found out that, you know, they ... didn't have artillery, they didn't have the proper equipment. We had, each fellow was armed with the old [1903] Springfield rifle. We had a .45-caliber pistol and we had a thirty-caliber, water-cooled machine gun, and, by the way, we fired them, you know. ... In the armory, we had a range and we'd fire the .45 and fire at targets and you'd get used to that and, out in the field, ... when we were on maneuvers, we'd have a chance to fire on the range with our Springfield rifles, yes. So, we were pretty well equipped for our outfit, but I understand many of the outfits were not.

SI: They would have broomsticks instead of rifles.

JC: That's what I understand, but, yes, I never saw that, but that's what they tell me, yes.

SI: This unit had kind of a gentlemen's club quality.

JC: A gentlemen's club, that's exactly what it was, yes, very much like, there was another outfit in New York City, the Seventh Regiment, on Park Avenue. It was in the same category as that, yes.

SI: Your background was more working class, and it sounds like some of the other people were also.

JC: Our background, in the 101st, in Squadron C, was more working class. In Squadron A, they were much more [well-off]; they were like the Seventh Army [Regiment]. They were much more financially well-to-do people, I would say, yes.

SI: Okay. After you applied for this exemption based on the financial hardship, what happened then?

JC: ... Well, then, you know, I kept on working and carrying [my household]. ... Then, my sister and her husband got a house in Bogota, New Jersey, and I was having difficulty carrying the house in Brooklyn and my sister's [family] had got a big house in Bogota and she invited my mother and I and my brother to come live with them. So, we packed up and we moved over to Bogota. Now, I was not too upset by that, because I was in love with a girl who lived in Teaneck and Bogota's the next town and this was the girl I eventually married anyway. So, I was glad to go over there and I kept on working. I registered and the draft came along. I registered for the draft. I got a number. ... I got called up in the end of [1942]. Oh, I remember Pearl Harbor Day, which was December 7th, wasn't it?

SI: December 7th.

JC: December 7, 1941. I remember, ... it was a Sunday and I was going to my girlfriend's house, Eleanor's house, in Teaneck, and she'd met me at the door and she said, "I just heard," and she told me about Pearl Harbor, and, right away, I said, "Oh, boy," you know. I knew my days were numbered, and I got called up at the end of 1942 to report as of January, the beginning of January, January 3rd, or whatever it was, in 1943, you know. So, I went to the station in Ridgefield Park and I went to Camp Dix. I came home on a furlough and I had the most miserable [illness]. I came down with bronchitis and I was miserable, and I said, "I'm [not going back]." So, I decided I would go AWOL [absent without leave]. So, I went AWOL for three or four days, got a doctor's note, because I was in bed. I was feeling so sick; went back to camp. They didn't miss me. I was just one of the millions, and I got sent out to California. I wound up in Tarzana, in Southern California, on the Edgar Rice Burroughs' Estate, in a training camp there, sort of a "repple-depot," and I got sent to the 603rd Antiaircraft outfit [603rd Coast Artillery Regiment (Antiaircraft)], defending Los Angeles, which was a sweetheart of a job, and I reported. I went to the headquarters in Burbank and they sent me right away out to Battery D,

which was a ninety-millimeter antiaircraft gun battery in North Hollywood. Now, that's a nice place to fight the war, and we had the gun battery. It was in a park, a little park or a lot, and four hundred feet away was a housing development, all these little houses, and, here, we have guns, big gun batteries of four ninety-millimeter guns, and the guns are dug into the earth, like trenches. The guns are in these big trenches and, in the trenches, dug down into the dugouts, under the ground, we lived [in] wooden bunks, and that was where we were supposed to live. Now, I came in, I'm a New York City boy, and I ... wound up in this outfit, which was a National Guard outfit that had been federalized, and they were all from the hills of North Carolina. ... They all had a very heavy accent and they spoke very, very slowly, and I was speaking with a New York accent, a Brooklyn accent, speaking fast, and they all kept on saying, "Slow down, boy. Slow down, boy," [laughter] and I kept on saying to them, "Get the mush out of your mouth, fellows. Get the mush out of your mouth," [laughter] but we got along fine and I was only there a short while and I got called up to ... the battery headquarters. A battery is when you're [in] the artillery, and they said, "You're wanted in headquarters. So, we're putting you on detached service," and I went up to headquarters and they were starting the insurance program and, somehow, because I had worked for an insurance company, they thought I'd be the expert. ... They put me on assignment where I was going around to each of the places in the regiment, describing the program, the insurance program, and I did that for a couple of weeks. It just took me a couple of weeks to do it and I came back, and I liked being at headquarters, and I was approached by one of the chaplains. He wanted me to be his assistant and I didn't feel worthy of being a chaplain's assistant, but they were just starting up Special Service and there was a young officer there, he was a great guy, and he and I, we got along pretty well. ... So, he says, "Why don't you be my assistant?" I said, "Great. I don't know a thing about it, but, boy, I'll go, okay." So, I became the assistant to the Special Service officer, and our job was to arrange entertainment for the troops in our regiment. Now, in the regiment, we had these antiaircraft, heavy, ninety-millimeter guns spattered around the city, and we had it on top of the [factories]. There were a lot of aircraft plants in Southern California and we had forty-millimeter guns on the roofs around the aircraft plants and they were all camouflaged, and then, on top of the hills, we had these big, powerful searchlights, you know. We were waiting for the Japanese to come and attack Los Angeles. Well, it turned out to be a sweetheart of a job and I really thought I had the best job in the Army, because I would drive this fellow around and this fellow was connected with the industry and he was known everywhere. ... His name was, oh, jeez, Bob; ... I'm trying to think of his name right now. It'll come to me in a minute. He was a great guy and he was the kind of an officer, when you'd salute him, he'd wave at you. He never took Army life serious and he was good-looking. ... I would drive him to the various movie studios and, at the time, the movie studios were off limits. They had no [tours and the] public weren't allowed in the studios and whatnot, but he'd just come up to the gate and [you would] hear, "Hi-ya." "Hi-ya." They all knew him, and we'd go into the studios and he'd say, "Jack, it's ten o'clock now. I'll see you at three o'clock, back here at three o'clock." So, now, I'm in the studio and I'm just walking around the studios, say, at MGM, MGM in Culver City. The studio is maybe, almost, like a half-mile long, this big, white building, and there's one set after the other and I would walk and I would watch them shoot movies, and everyone was so nice to me, because I was in uniform and they all wanted to be patriotic. ... I had some wonderful, wonderful experiences, and we would go to all the different studios. ... For example, I was in one studio I was going through; I don't know whether it was Paramount or Fox. I don't know. I can't think [of it] now, but Red Skelton, and

what was the swimmer's name, beautiful girl, the swimming champ? She was there, but Red Skelton ...

SI: Esther Williams.

JC: Esther Williams, yes. ... She was in this, whatever this movie was, and Red Skelton, he sees me, they're shooting this scene, and he stops, stops, and he comes over to me and he does the drunk act for me, right there, you know, by himself. [laughter] ... The people were so nice, and the stagehands, and there were, you know, lighting guys, the guys that put up the scenery, the painters and whatnot, they had so much idle time on their hands, ... while all this is going on, and they always had a bottle. They would offer you a drink of something. I didn't drink at the time, ... not during the day, when I was on duty, ... but everyone was so pleasant and it was just a wonderful, wonderful experience. ... Oh, where headquarters was was interesting; we were on [E. J.] Lucky Baldwin's Estate. ... Lucky Baldwin's Estate was in Culver City and it was high on a hill, high on a hill, and, to go up, you'd go up this winding road, through, he had avocados, ... all these avocado trees going up there. ... You'd get to the top and on the top of this hill was a Spanish mansion where the Colonel lived, and then, on the corner, at the edge of the property, was a barracks where we lived, but you could see the whole surrounding Los Angeles from the top of this hill and, looking down from the top of the hill, we looked right into the backlot of MGM. On the backlot of MGM, and the backlot of all the studios, Fox and whatnot, is a world unto itself. It's a big, big area and you have all kinds of scenery there, where they shoot scenes of castles or French streets or cowboy towns, and we'd look down on all that scenery and I had the opportunity of going through it. ... Dick (Bradfield?) was the officer, and he often [went home]. I would drive him home. He had a beautiful wife. He lived in town, in Culver City, and then, I'd take the jeep and the jeep was mine, and I had a pass. I could go around town. ... MGM, there was a little alley on the side of MGM, wide enough for one car to drive down, and there was a side door to MGM and across the alley was a door to a bar room, and there was a little bar/restaurant there and, in the studio, ... they didn't drink, even at the cafeteria, no drinking. They were all business, but you could go into this little bar and, in the evenings, many evenings, I would go downtown and I would go into this little bar and just sit at the bar and have a beer, and people would buy me beer and I would see some of the very famous actors. One guy I got very familiar with and [who] was really nice to me, became a good friend, was John Hodiak. ... John Hodiak was an actor at the time and I remember, ... at the time I met him, they were making the picture *Lifeboat*, and he invited me, it was at the Fox Studio, ... over for lunch the following day, or something. So, I drove over there. I got permission and I drove over and he introduced me to the cast. I sat in the dressing room of Tallulah Bankhead and talked to her, and she was cursing away like a trooper, [laughter] and I sat down and I had lunch with the whole cast, William Bendix, and I don't know who the others [were]. ... One guy looked like Abe Lincoln; I forget what the hell his name was, but I remember ... the magic of the movies, and it was crude in those days, but it was still magic. I can remember seeing the moving picture, and, in the boat, you see ... this [scene] in the rear of the boat, and the sea is rough and water's splashing over them. I'm watching them shoot this scenery and they've got a screen behind [the boat], they've got a half a boat and it's on a rocker, but behind it is a movie screen, with a projector off [to] the side, projecting the wild ocean, and there are three guys with pails of water and they'd throw the pail of water in there. ... Then, when you see it in the movies, you know, you think [of] them out there in the wild boat, and then, they had a big lake and they had the little

model boat going across there, with a blue sky. I mean, the tricks they used were great, even watching them. So, I did that for [awhile]. ... The first time I got a pass, and when I went into Hollywood, I was so excited. I mean, you know, we thought, back in those days, Hollywood was it. I mean, ... we didn't have TV, all we had was radio, and any of the girls who wanted to get into the theatrical [arts], you had Broadway or Hollywood. You didn't have Las Vegas. Las Vegas was nothing then. In fact, I remember going through Las Vegas on the train and it was just a little, crummy place for the steam engine to get water. ... I'm losing track; what the hell was I saying? Oh, I went to Hollywood. ... The town was loaded with beautiful women. All the girls in the country who wanted to get in the movies would come to Hollywood or they would go to Culver City, and you'd go into a pharmacy, or you'd go into a bowling alley or a cleaners or what[ever], and they're all lovely, lovely, young girls. That was a great place for a young man. Unfortunately, I was engaged before I went into the service. I had no money, because I was sending money home to my mother. ... I didn't take advantage of all this beauty around me, [laughter] not that I had the opportunities, but it was interesting and I did this for about nine months, I guess, eight or nine months, and then, they realized they didn't need anti-aircraft around LA anymore. The Japs were not going to attack LA. ...

DF: Were there any false alarms?

JC: Yes, we had one false alarm, but, you know, ... it was a false alarm, [laughter] yes, but, no. ... Then, we had a lot of drills, you know. We'd take those ninety-millimeter guns and they'd bring them up the coast, and then, fire them out over the ocean and bring them back and put them back in place, but I was not a gunner then. I was just enjoying my [detached service]. Oh, now, what I would do, also, I would get a two-and-a-half ton truck; my job was to get entertainment for them. I'm talking about myself, but I had to ... get entertainment for the troops. So, I would get the movies and distribute movies and projectors around through the outfit, and I would also arrange for dances. I would ... bring a jukebox up and put it in one of these stations, one of these flashlight stations, out somewhere on top of a mountain, and go over to UCLA with a GI truck and load the truck up with girls from the [university] and bring the girls up to the [station]. ... Generally, it was funny, because the boys, as I said, were all, [it] seemed, from North Carolina and they're all country boys, and they'd all sit in one spot of the barracks and the girls would come in and they'd sit in the other part of the barracks, and to get them together, to dance; after awhile, you broke the ice, but, for awhile, it was rather difficult. ... So, dances and movies, and then, I'd arrange for people to come up and entertain them, too, because a lot of people wanted to do something for the soldiers. So, we always arranged that, ... but, then, all good things came to an end and I had a chance to go with the brigade. This officer, who I worked with, was going to go to the brigade headquarters, which was right in the middle of LA, and he offered to take me along. He said he'd send me to ... Special Service school, wherever the hell that was. ... One of the things you want in service, you liked to be part of a team and I had become part of the team in this headquarters group. They were all my friends and I didn't want to [leave]. It was like when I was leaving the cavalry. These were my friends and I wanted to stay with them. Even though he offered adventure and something new, I still wanted to stay with them. No, I decided I'd stay. So, then, ... they broke up the guns, and then, we went out to Sepulveda and we camped out there, and then, we went to camp in Inglewood, by Mines Field. ... Now, it's LA International Airport. Then, it was just a little Army airport, Army airfield, and we camped there for awhile. ... I was engaged, as I told you, before I went into service. Eleanor

and I wanted to get married, and so, I said, "Well, I'll get a furlough, I'll come home, we'll get married." So, I didn't have any money and I had to borrow money. I had to borrow a hundred dollars to get my [fare]. I got my hundred dollars and some other money I had and that was enough to get me my train fare and some pocket money and, again, I got a fifteen-day furlough and, in those days, it took four-and-a-half days, it still does, probably, by train, four-and-a-half days to go across the country. It was four nights and three days, or four days and three nights; three-and-a-half days, I guess it was, four days. ... I got home and I was home a day and we were going to get married the next day. Now, getting married was difficult, because we had to please our parents. My mother was a devout Catholic and she wanted me to get married in the Catholic faith. That wasn't too important to me, but I wanted to keep her happy. Now, her folks, her father and mother, ... [at] first, when she talked about marriage, they were not happy, [at] first, because ... her father was a Mason and he was, I have to tell you, he was [from a] German background and I'd say a little narrow-minded, ... and her mother. ... They warned her, "Look, you're marrying an Irish Catholic boy. You're going to wind up with twelve kids and a drunken husband." So, they weren't happy with her marrying me. So, we ... did a lot of compromising. ... To keep my mother happy, the day we got married, we went into New York City and we went on to; I'm trying to think. There's a church on 31st Street, ... St. Francis, St. Francis of Assisi, and we went in there. [Editor's Note: St. Francis of Assisi Church is on West 31st Street in Manhattan.] We got married. We had my sister and my brother-in-law with us. We got married in the backroom of the church, kept my mother happy, had lunch, took a bus, didn't have a car, bus back to ... Teaneck, got married in the church ... in Teaneck, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, kept her folks happy. ... Her father threw a very lovely reception, after, up on the Heights, somewhere, overlooking the river, and then, it was time to leave and, again, I had no money for a honeymoon. So, my mother had gotten an apartment down in Brooklyn Heights. She had a small, two-room apartment, and she said, "Look, I'll go live with your sister and you can have my apartment for your honeymoon." So, now, somebody gave us a lift to the ferry at Weehawken. Now, remember, this is your wedding; so, we took the ferry over to 42nd Street. I had to get to Brooklyn. Now, I looked for a cab. There were no cabs. So, I had to take a bus from the ferry, across 42nd Street, to Times Square, the cabs there, got a cab. "Where are you going?" "Joralemon Street, Brooklyn." "I'm not taking you. Can't get a ride back, can't get a fare." Gasoline was [limited by] rationing. I went to three different cabs; three guys turned me down. Now, I could have reported them, I guess, but I'm a soldier and I'm going away again. So, I said, "Eleanor, we've got to take the subway." So, we took the subway. [laughter] This is our wedding night. We're taking the subway back to Brooklyn, have to walk to my mother's place. So, it was a very interesting [night], and I told her, I said, "When I get money, I'll really treat you to a honeymoon, but, right now, this is a pauper's honeymoon." [laughter] ... So, then, I went back to California, ... looked like we were going to stay there for awhile. So, I said, "Do you want to come out? I'll get a place to live." ... Down the road apiece was a big, old, rambling house and it had an apartment in it and it was being vacant at the time, and I said, "Hey, I can get this apartment, if you want to come out." So, she said, "Sure." So, I got an apartment in this house, and I'm laughing. ... "Eleanor," I said, "it's a condominium. You're going to love it." [laughter] At the first floor, you come in, there's a kitchen, stairs [to] upstairs and, on the second floor, there's a little bedroom with a window and there's another little room, and I didn't tell her that, in the hall, to go to the bathroom, on the first floor, we had to share the bathroom with two other apartments. [laughter] So, she arrives and she found out what life was about. ... She stayed out there for a couple of months, and then, we were pulling camp. We were going to

go to Camp Haan. We were breaking up. ... We were going to go to [the] infantry. So, she returned home and, from Camp Haan, we went to Camp Phillips, Kansas, and we went into [the] infantry. ... I became part of the (37th?) Infantry and we went through field training. I'm doing all this field training, and then, you know, the magic of the Army, you don't know how things happened. All of a sudden, I get called in to headquarters, and [they say], "You're being transferred to Camp Forrest, Tennessee. You're going to go to;" you know, you get old, you forget words. ...

SI: Signal Corps?

JC: I was going to go to the Signal Corps, yes, but I was going to go to school for; I'm trying to think of it, God. [laughter] I was going to work on codes. ...

SI: Cryptography.

JC: For cryptography. So, they sent me away. So, I wind up in Camp Forrest, Tennessee.

SI: When you went to the camp in Kansas, what did you think? You had been in the cavalry, you had been in this rather comfortable situation in Hollywood, then, all of a sudden, you were thrown into the infantry.

JC: Well, you know, I liked the field. ... I liked being [outdoors], playing games, playing war games out in the field. I enjoyed that. I didn't mind it. Of course, I didn't like the idea of [being an infantryman]. I knew what the hell [I was in for]. When the infantry goes into battle, it's the worst place to be. I mean, ... it's a horrible place to be, but I wasn't thinking of that at the time. ... It seemed all right, but, then, when I went to Signal Corps, it was just the opposite. Camp Forrest was like West Point or so, I mean, you had to be in dress uniform all the time. We marched. You went out at reveille and ... you marched, and you marched here, marched there, and you stood out for retreat again. Everything was by the book, ... and it was like [a military academy]. I didn't enjoy it. I didn't enjoy it at all, but I was learning how to make and break codes, but, then, it came [to a point where], I was homesick, too, and I missed my wife, ... they asked for volunteers for overseas duty. All of a sudden, they needed volunteers and, why, ... they're coming to a school where they were training guys and they were asking for volunteers for infantry replacements, I guess, but, ... to volunteer, you'd get, if I remember it, a ten- or twelve-day furlough, and, boy, I could see my wife for ten or [twelve days]. ... Why, I volunteered right away, and so, I went, came home, ... to Teaneck, and had time with my wife and we went down ... to the Jersey Shore for awhile, and then, I had to depart again and I went, again, got orders, and it was the only time that I got orders where they gave me accommodations, a Pullman. So, I had an upper bunk on the Pullman train and, again, crossed the country, and I went to Camp Beale, which is up in Stoneman, which is Camp Stoneman, I guess it was, Camp Stoneman, Camp Beale, something, out near Marysville, California. [Editor's Note: Mr. Coleman trained at Camp Beale, now Beale Air Force Base, near Marysville, California, before being assigned to Camp Stoneman, in Pittsburg, California, a staging area for overseas deployment.] ... I knew we were going overseas and, at the time, they were emptying out the guardhouses, too, and I knew, from where I was, that we were going into the Pacific and the only thing I knew that was going on in the Pacific at the time was Guadalcanal. So, I figured we were going in as infantry

replacements for Guadalcanal. ... When I went across the country, I was a corporal. [Editor's Note: Mr. Coleman gets up to retrieve a photograph.] ... You're looking at a guy that's eighty-eight right now, but this is me when I was a corporal. So, I was young, you know, twenty-two years old, something like that. So, they gave me two privates to take with me. ... We had a Pullman and the two privates; are you familiar with Pullmans, the old Pullmans?

SI: Yes, the more luxurious cars.

JC: Yes. You have, downstairs, the bed is a little larger. Upstairs, it's a little smaller. The two privates, they had to sleep in the lower bed, together, you know. In the Army, they discouraged this stuff and, here, I've got two guys sleeping there and I'm sleeping upstairs, by myself. So, when we got out to California, I got their orders and I gave them their orders to report to camp, and I said, "I'm going AWOL." I said, "I'm going AWOL for a couple of days, because I know I'm going overseas and I don't give a damn. I want to see San Francisco." I'd never seen San Francisco. So, I took time off, ... all by myself, and I toured San Francisco, up to the Top of the Mark and [the] St. Francis Hotel and all that. ... I can't say I had a great time, because I felt sad, but I wanted to see the damn place. Then, I reported back to camp. They never missed me, you know. So, I could have been gone for a week or a month, I guess, [laughter] but, again, and before you know it, they put me on a ship. ... They put me on the Holland America *Noordam*, and the *Noordam* was a ship, ... it's Holland America Line, and, normally, it would run between Europe and the Indies. ... It was both a passenger ship and a freighter and we were down in the hold, and I remember leaving San Francisco. We left San Francisco. I remember going, I was up on the deck, under the Golden Gate Bridge, sailing away in the nighttime, seeing the city behind me. The city was dark, though. All the things were dark at the time, you know, because they had a blackout along the coast. ... I was on the ship for eighteen days, I think, and, again, thinking we were going to Guadalcanal. Instead, ... at the last minute, they told us, "New Guinea." I didn't know much about New Guinea ... up to this point, and nobody was [talking about it]. New Guinea wasn't getting much publicity, but it turns out that the fighting on New Guinea was perhaps even more desperate than what was going on in Guadalcanal, except that the Marines had better public relations than the Army had, but most of the major fighting was over when we got there. ... When we landed, which was rather interesting, we came in and on the coast, as we're getting off these landing crafts; oh, ... while we were at sea, we had a couple of submarine scares. We weren't in convoy. ... They thought this ship could go fast enough and it was loaded with guys out of the guardhouse. So, I guess the Army felt, "What the hell? If they torpedo the boat, we lost a bunch of bums anyway," [laughter] but we had a couple of submarine alerts and it was funny, because it's a Dutch ship and all the commands are given in Dutch. ... All these guys are running around, there's a gun in front of the boat, to man the gun, you know what I mean? ... You don't know what the hell's going on. All you know [is], somewhere out there, they think there's a submarine, but I loved being on the Pacific, because the Pacific Ocean, when we were there, we were fortunate, it was like a lake, and the Pacific Ocean has the most beautiful sunsets. God, their sunsets were absolutely God-in-all-its-beauty, I mean, and, also, it was interesting, at nighttime, to see the phosphorous water, by the ship. When the ship would cut through the water, the water would just be all like lights shining on it, and flying fishes. The Pacific was beautiful, but, anyway, we got to New Guinea and we're landing. It's in the evening and, on the shore, I said, "Holy shit, I don't believe this." It was like a Hollywood spectacular. There, on the shore, was a tribe of natives. They're all bare-assed natives. They're standing there

with shields, spears, bow and arrows, bodies painted all over, big bushy hair, red. I couldn't believe it, and this was just a typical native tribe in New Guinea. New Guinea, I found out, is the second largest island. It's fifteen hundred miles long, forest right down to the water's edge. It has a ridge of mountains that runs the spine of the island, about six thousand feet high, with peaks as high as thirteen thousand feet. ... It's a wild, wild place. ... I grabbed these. ... Every now and then, I want to show my kids. This is the type of natives that I ran across. The tribes were all different, but these are typical of what you see in [New Guinea]. ...

SI: Okay, we are looking at copies of *National Geographic*.

JC: Yes. These are typical New Guinea natives, and these are head hunters. We hit places where they never saw a white man before. We hit places where they were amazed when they saw a wheel, never seen a wheel before. When they see airplanes, they think they're wild birds. I mean, it's a crazy, crazy [place]. There are three hundred different languages spoken on the island. ... I think of the island as I ... think of Bergen County, all these little jungle enclaves; all these natives, they had their little settlements and each settlement would go to war with the other settlement and ... their purpose of going to war was to steal pigs or steal women, and/or some grievance they had. ... Well, anyway, we get there and they sent us to a "repple depot" and, again, this is a replacement depot. You're going to be reassigned and I was living in tents. You know, you have the barrel of water in the front. You ... wash your clothes there, in the barrel. It's primitive and the first thing the guys do, the first thing they do is, ... they set up a still and they get yams and some fruit, and then, they start brewing liquor, the kind of guys I was with. Oh, then, I get an assignment and they send me off. I'm going to an infantry outfit, I think the 93rd, or something like that, and I get up there and I report to the headquarters, with my orders, all by myself, and the officer says, "What the hell are you doing here?" ... "I'm assigned here." He says, "This is an error." He said, "You don't belong here. This is a black outfit." I was being assigned to a black infantry outfit, the wisdom of the Army. [Editor's Note: The 93rd Infantry Division, an all African-American division, fought in New Guinea.] So, I stayed there for several days, before they could arrange to transfer me back to the "repple depot," and then, I got assigned to an infantry outfit, which was part of the 32nd Division, and I was only there a short while and another order came through and I was being assigned to the Signal Corps, again. You know, the Army has what they call ... a MOS, military occupational specialty, and, somehow, they decided I was a Signal Corps man. ... They were just forming the Eighth Army. It was just being formed in New Guinea and I was being assigned to the new Signal Corps that went with the Army headquarters. Prior to that, it was the Sixth Army that did all the fighting in New Guinea, under General [Walter] Krueger, and the fighting in New Guinea was really bloody. When MacArthur ... escaped from the Philippines, he went to Australia and he set up his [headquarters] in Australia and his staff was, more or less, like a country club staff from out of the Philippines. ... They stayed far behind the lines. ... At the time, his command consisted of some Australians, under, I forget the general's name, [Field Marshal Sir Thomas Albert Blamey], and two infantry divisions that were just coming into New Guinea at the time. I think it was the 41st and the 32nd and they were both National Guard outfits and they were both raw. They had no experience, no experience in jungle fighting at all, and jungle fighting, ... it's a specialty, and these boys were thrown into this situation and they weren't equipped. In New Guinea, we never had enough. ... Especially at the beginning, they had nothing. ... They had no artillery. Their arms were basic. They had the Springfield rifle. Their clothes, ... they had the light uniform,

but you don't want to wear that in the jungles, because you stand out against all the greenery. Well, they wanted camouflage. So, they camouflaged [them]. They threw the uniforms into a dye and the dye became impervious to moisture, so that when the guys put these camouflage uniforms on, they couldn't perspire. They would perspire inward. Well, the one thing about the jungles is, the jungle would [produce] jungle rot. Everything rots, and these poor guys, ... the temperature goes [up to] 115 degrees, you know. It gets hot in that damn jungle. ... They all came down with jungle rot. You know, your skin rots away, ... your leather rots away, and they threw these guys against the Japanese, who had already been there, who had already fortified the jungles, and these fellows were not in a position to really fight these fellows, because they'd actually come in and they'd lure the Americans on and they'd be behind them. ... They had all built these fortifications out of logs and metal and camouflaged them beautifully and, at Buna, ... MacArthur was trying to push this outfit and this outfit was getting its; the 32nd was getting really beaten horribly, ... but MacArthur, he finally got this General [Robert L.] Eichelberger, and Eichelberger, his orders were to push the Japanese into the sea. So, he kept on, and he didn't know anything about jungle fighting. He just kept on pushing these troops. ... They finally conquered and they finally won, but ... one outfit, one regiment, for example, had eighty-eight percent casualties. Now, that's an awfully high casualty rate. These boys were being killed left and right, and Buna was such a bloody battle. We lost several thousand men there, you know, ... but, when I came, this was all over. So, the only thing we were doing in Papua was, really, we would go out on search parties, looking for Japanese and whatnot, because there were a lot of stragglers, and we caught some. ... I was rather surprised to find, you know, we always called them, "yellow bastards," but we were more yellow than they were, because they had us on Atabrine, because we were concerned about malaria and we were taking these Atabrine tablets, and these Atabrine tablets, they turned you yellow. ... As I say, we wound up more yellow than the Japanese. So, I stayed in Papua for awhile. ...

SI: Were these patrols when you were still with the infantry or after you were in the Signal Corps?

JC: No, I was [in the Signal Corps], but they were short of men. They are using us every way.

SI: Okay. You were in the Signal Corps, but you were still going out on patrols.

JC: Still going out on patrols, yes, and laying wires, ... Signal Corps business, for communication, laying wires in the jungle, but it was interesting. ... You know, we would run across some of these settlements where these head hunters lived. I remember, I came into this one clearing and there was this little hut and, around the hut, hanging off the hut, were all heads, but they were all shrunken, all shrunken heads, and these were people that the chief had killed, evidently, and [were] trophies, you know. ... Down there, there were no large animals as such. There were kangaroos. I got scared a couple of times. I [was] walking along a path and, all of a sudden, out of a brush, a couple of kangaroos jump out and start [hopping]; oh, jeez, my heart jumped in my throat. I thought it was Japs at first, and snakes, God, the snakes, all kinds of snakes. I killed, with one of my friends, we killed, I don't know whether they're boa constrictors or anacondas or whatnot, but this snake was longer than this living room, a big body, rounded, you know, and killed it. Natives came along and cut the skin down, and we thought they wanted the beautiful skin. They wanted the meat. They took the meat, chopped the meat. They walked

away with the meat, left the skin there, but there were all kinds of snakes, God, snakes everywhere, snakes that could run faster than you could, and rats. God, they had rats there that were bigger than cats. They're loaded with rats. ... The only other animal I saw down there, they had boars, pigs, ... and beautiful birds. God, there were more birds and beautiful colored birds and whatnot. ... Some of the fellows made pets out of them. I don't know how they did it. I never did. ... So, it was just an interesting country. So, then, all of a sudden, we were called up, at the last minute. They were out in the harbor. ... They were getting an armada ready, all kinds of battleships and cruisers, and we got called at the last minute and we got assigned to a Liberty ship. ... I was part of the 4025th Signal Detachment, ... whatever that means. That's the big group, and then, I was part of [the] 304th Signal Battalion that reported to that group. ... Our battalion, we got sent on this Liberty ship and, again, we didn't know where the hell we were going and we slept on the hatch of the Liberty ship, in the forward part of it. ... They built a trench in ... the front on the boat, along the rail, with a two-and-a-half-inch hose, and, if you had to take a crap or anything, you sat there, with everyone watching you, with the hose running down and washing the thing, and we had C rations. We had enough for one day and we went to sea and we were at sea for a couple of days and we ran out of food. We didn't have any food and we didn't know where the hell we were going. ... We went up to Dutch New Guinea. ... New Guinea is divided in half. Half of Papua belongs to Australia, control [was] under Australia, and Dutch New Guinea was part of the Indonesian part of it, Indonesian land, and we went into an invasion there, at Hollandia, and, again, it wasn't much of an action. The Japanese took off and we stayed in Hollandia. ... We went up into the mountains and up at something called Lake Sentani and, again, it was interesting there. The natives lived out on the water, on huts raised above the water. The women would dive in, go under the water, come up with a fish in their mouth. They would catch fish with their hands and their mouth, different.

SI: This landing was at Hollandia.

JC: ... Yes.

SI: Had the area already been taken by the time you got there?

JC: No, no, we took it, but, again, not much resistance. I mean, with the force that we had, we overpowered them and they took off in the jungles. You know, everyone takes off and, once they get in the jungles, it's hard to find them. ...

SI: In an operation like that, would you carry a rifle?

JC: Oh, yes, oh, sure, a rifle was always ... part of you. ... It was a rugged country, rugged. I mean, I can remember being on patrols up there in the nighttime. Oh, what New Guinea had, every night, it seemed, torrential rains, I mean, rains like you never [saw], and the roads; well, there were no roads. ... We made the roads. There were no roads. The engineers would come in and plow a trail and that became the road. ... I can remember ... driving along some of those mountain roads, right on the edge of the mountain, with the sea way below, and that rain coming down and you're in an open truck and you're driving along with your lights dimmed, because [of air attacks]. It was sort of scary. ... So, we stayed ... up in there for awhile until the Sixth Army had invaded, the Philippines, at Leyte, and then, we were called up to reinforce the Sixth Army,

the Eighth Army. Oh, while we were in the Eighth Army, MacArthur came down. ... After the area was secured, he decided he'd make his headquarters there and, again, they built a rather palatial building for him, a one-story building. Then, MacArthur and his staff came in down there, and then, we were put on a troopship and we went up to the Philippines, and we went up in a convoy. ... Being in a convoy, these Navy convoys were really impressive, because, ... you know, just as far as you could see, there were ships all around and aircraft carriers, and I used to like to see them. They'd go off at dawn, take off at dawn, and, especially, they'd take off at sunset, too, because, evidentially, that was the time that the submarines would, evidently, have their best opportunity of striking a fleet, and then, we came into Leyte. ... We set up a headquarters there, near Tacloban, and then, from there, we were sent out on various missions. The Philippines were a thousand islands and there are a lot of main islands. Just to give you some idea, because I can't otherwise describe it to you, I took this map, I found this map, and I had it here. These are the various invasions. The blue lines are the Eighth Army.

SI: Okay.

JC: And we would go out with the Eighth Army and I would go out on some of these [invasions], not on all of them, ... too many, but our unit would go out and would participate in these various invasions and some of them would run across, you know, some strong fighting, and others, they'd take off into the jungles, but the Japanese, as a rule, ... they were taught to fight to die and they ... didn't give up very often or very [easily]. It was rare when you took prisoners.

SI: Can we leave this open over here in case we need to look at it?

JC: Yes, sure, yes. ... We stayed at Leyte for awhile, and then, as time came along, ... we didn't hear of the atom bomb. I think we might have heard about it; we didn't know what the hell it was, but we did hear that something went on. ... Then, I think it was about August 12th, we heard that the government made a strong approach to the Japanese, "Surrender or else," you know, and, on August 15th, the Japanese offered to surrender. [Editor's Note: The terms of surrender were finalized on August 19th. Initial US troops, 168 men, landed at Atsugi Airport, Japan, on August 28th.] ... I was on Leyte at the time and the fleet was out there and we were near the shore, and it was like Fourth of July. Everyone went wild, shooting up the sky. The artillery on the ships were firing, everybody was firing; it was exciting. Now, in the meantime, I had been working in the headquarters, outside of the code room. [In] the code room, we had the SIGABA machines, and SIGABA machines were the code machines. ... Everything would come in in code and it would be deciphered, and then, it would passed out to me. I'd be the editor and I would make arrangements to make this distribution, G-1, G-2, G-3, G-4, wherever the damn stuff was going, and what we were doing. We were getting ready for the invasion of Japan at this time and the traffic was tremendous, because, when you move an army, man, it requires a lot of stuff. I mean, just the groceries that go with it, the toilet paper that goes with it, the stuff that goes with an army is [tremendous], medicines and the troops and whatnot. ... We were getting ready. This was, I think we were getting ready in the fall, if I'm not mistaken, to hit the lower Japanese islands, and it was going to be the Eighth Army. So, it was interesting to see all this traffic coming through and realizing that you were part of it, hoping that you weren't going to be in the first rows, but you're seeing what was going on. ... Then, when the Japanese surrendered, the story we heard, the Japanese public itself, it was such a shock to them that we

decided that we weren't going to go in the first day. We were going to give them time, a week, I understand, and then, go in, so that the public could accept this whole change in their life. ... Our group, we got called up and [they] said, "Hey, you're going in with the first troops to establish communications." So, we got ready and we sailed and I guess it was at the end of August, I think it was, we came into Tokyo Bay. We came in. I was on the Navy ship, a transport ship, and we were met down in the harbor by a tug and a Japanese climbed aboard. He was the pilot and he took us up [in the harbor]. ... Now, at the same time, the airborne troops [11th Airborne Division] were going in and their job [was], as you go up the harbor ... to go to Tokyo, you've got to go up a long harbor and, first, you come to Yokohama, and then, Tokyo, and there are mountains there and they have been heavily defended. ... The airborne troops, their job was to make sure they took the firing pins out of all those big guns they had there, because there were a lot of, you know, wild-eyed Japanese who were not too happy with the surrender. ... So, we went up the harbor and we landed. We came into Yokohama waterfront. We came into the dock and, at the dock, there's a rather tall building, tall, almost looks like a church, tall tower, and it's a narrow building, and that was the custom house, we were told. ... We came to the dock and the pilot got off and we got off and we were taking over that building. That was going to be our headquarters, where we were setting up our communications for the Army, and we went in there, and then, we had the opportunity of going out into the town. ... Once we got beyond the first block, the first two blocks, I'd say, the town was leveled, burnt, burnt to the ground, and the only thing you could see, they had all this wooden stuff that was burnt, were steel safes, a lot of steel safes, evidently, from the merchants and whatnot. ... There wasn't a Japanese in sight. The town was deserted. ... The only Jap we had seen was our pilot, and it was a little eerie. ... Then, [we] walk down along the waterfront and, as I say, [on] the waterfront, ... the Grand Hotel was still there and the Grand Hotel was, it seemed to me, if I remember correctly, ... a two-story marble building, and that's where MacArthur was going to when he came in. That's where he was going to make his headquarters. Well, in a couple of days, the Japanese started coming back into town and, in the meantime, we'd set up our communications, and we were told to stay out of Tokyo. Tokyo was still off limits, because they felt the people still had not accepted, gracefully, the surrender. ... When we read about it in the history books, later on, we realized that they tried to overthrow the Emperor and everything like that, you know. So, one of the funny things was, a couple of days later, ... I was going down, I went into the Grand Hotel. I had to go to the bathroom. ... I went into this large room, big bathroom, big as this first floor here, and all marble, very lovely, stalls on either side, ... but no toilets, you know. There's a hole in the floor [by] your feet, and so, I dropped my pants and do my duty and a little Japanese young lady comes in. She looks at me and she bows to me, and I'm in no position to bow, and she takes the stool across the way. Then, she pulls up her drawers and she's doing her thing. [laughter] ... You know, being an American, you're a little uncomfortable with this, but that was their customs. They thought nothing of it. [laughter] Toilet habits were just a natural function, and then, I guess I was in Yokohama a few days and I still didn't have anything really that required my attention at the headquarters. So, I said, "I'm going to try and go to Tokyo," and I talked to one of my buddies. He says, "Okay, I'll come along with you." So, we slung a rifle over our shoulders and we went into town, and there was a train that ran from Yokohama to Tokyo, one stop, and the train was running and we got on the train. ... Oh, the Japanese, the few [people on the train], they got out of the car when we got in and we went up to Tokyo and we ... got out at the station and we started walking across. We're walking down the street and, as we walked down the street, with people coming towards us, they'd walk out in the

road, walk out in the road, and it was getting a little uncomfortable, and then, I passed some women and they, the women, spit at me.

SI: Really?

JC: Defying, yes, yes, and I thought, "Oh, shit, you know, this is not nice." So, then, we went a little further and there was a movie house. We went into the movie house, to see what [is playing]. We walk in the movie house and all the lights went on and they turned around and there's two GIs, and the people in the movie house, they see us; everyone gets up and walks out, and I got the feeling, I said to my friend, "You know, I think we are in over our head. I think we'd better get our asses out of here, because something's going to happen to us that we won't be able to handle." [laughter] So, we didn't stay there long. We went back, and it was an adventure.

SI: Was that before the surrender ceremony or after?

JC: After the surrender ceremony, I think. I was never quite sure what the date of the surrender is; I'm not sure what those dates were. I am assuming it was after.

SI: Do you remember the ceremony itself, when they signed it on the *Missouri*?

JC: No, no, I don't. I read about it after the war. [Editor's Note: The surrender ceremony took place on September 2, 1945, aboard the USS *Missouri*.] ... MacArthur finally came in and he said, "I'm going in the Grand Hotel in Yokohama," and then, eventually, he went up to Tokyo. ... You know, I went up to Tokyo several times after that and there were no problems. ... Japan then and Japan now, night and day, you know; this was the old Japan, the old custom, where the women wear kimonos and that, little slippers, and they walked behind the men and they carried the parcels. The men didn't carry the parcels. [The] man was always dressed up, but Japan was really down and it was sad, in a way, because, ... once we got established and the Japanese came back into town again, they were starving. They were hungry, and we'd set up our mess. We'd set up in a silk factory. So, I had my quarters in this little silk factory and, when we'd get done with our mess, we'd bring our canteens out; not canteens, but our mess kit. ... We had a garbage pail and you'd empty your mess kit into the garbage pail and you'd go [over] to boiling water and clean your mess kit and go on. Well, the Japanese would line up behind the garbage pail, in a big, long line, controlled, and one Japanese, when we'd get done, people would come up with their little plates and he'd dig in, in our garbage, and that's the way they were eating and they were really quite desperate. Well, you'd go into Tokyo and, you know, in Tokyo, most of Tokyo was burned to the ground. The commercial center, where the palace was and where [architect Frank Lloyd] Wright ... built a hotel there, which was a very modern hotel, ... that had all been spared, but the residential section was just burnt to the ground. ... They say that in this firebombing, over a hundred thousand people died. More people died in the firebombing than in the atomic bomb [attacks], and the people jumped into the river and boiled in the river, boiled alive. I mean, the fire, the flames were so great that there was just a firestorm and it was just terrible. ... These people, you know, they had been taught, the women; first of all, if we had a landing, it would have been a terrible, terrible [event]. We would have lost so many men, because the Japanese, they were dedicated to fighting to [the] death. The women and children were given ... these pointed sticks, and the men, and everyone was going to fight. ... The coast

is a very rocky coast and it's not a coast that you'd land on very easy, and the Japanese had kept back a tremendous reserve of *kamikazes*, of infantry and of Air Force planes, ready for the invasion. They were ready for us, but those two atomic bombs, they really did the trick. Otherwise, there would have been a bloodbath. We would have lost, I think we would have lost, thousands and thousands of men, yes. ... Another interesting experience I had, I had a little Japanese girl there who took care of my quarters. I was a sergeant then and she was a pretty little girl. She was, I don't know, maybe fifteen, sixteen, something like that. I'm guessing her age, and we were giving them jobs to do. ... I had a picture of my wife, Eleanor, on my; I had an orange crate, that was my night table, and Eleanor on it. ... She'd always referred to her, "Your *geisha*, your *geisha*," you know, had to be my *geisha*, and so, one day, she invited me out to come to her house, meet her family, and she lived on a farm outside of Tokyo. So, I figured, "Okay, ... this is an experience. I'll go out there," and I went out there, this one evening, by myself, and it was a little farmhouse and I took my shoes off, took my boots off, and went into the house. ... There, in the living room, was one of these low-set tables and around the table was her father and her brother and [they] invited me to sit down, and [the] mother and she stood behind to serve us, you know, and they served us some tea and stuff, and then, they came out and ... they gave me two eggs, sunny side up, and a pair of chopsticks. Well, boy, if that wasn't a disaster; I set the American cause back twenty years, because I couldn't handle chopsticks, and especially with two sunny side eggs. [laughter] So, that wasn't the best dinner that I ever went to. ...

DF: Were you able to communicate with them?

JC: With the girl; no, ... in sort of pidgin English, you know. ... They didn't speak English and the girl, she knew a few words, but it was interesting. ... The Japanese, you know, ... to your face, they were very polite. They're bowing all over the place, you know. ... I think they got used to us after awhile. ... After that, I had accumulated enough points overseas, it was time to go home. So, they sent me to ... their replacement depot, which was the Japanese military academy. We were sent up there, which was a beautiful, beautiful [complex]. It was like our West Point, beautiful grounds, beautiful pine forest around there, and we got there ... [the] day before Thanksgiving. We were going to have Thanksgiving dinner there, and everyone pulled duty there, and so, I saw my name of the KP list. ... We went into this kitchen and it was a tremendous commercial kitchen, built for feeding the troops, the Japanese trainees, and they had these big steam boilers, beautiful, stainless [steel] steam boilers. I think they had three of them, if I remember correctly, and ... we were going to have turkey. ... You know, there were thousands of guys there, ready to go home. So, I had a detail of men that would handle the turkeys and they came in crates. They were frozen. ... We broke open the cases, and then, one of the privates or corporals, whatever he was, came to me, said, "Sergeant, look at this," and there's a frozen turkey and there's shit coming out its ass, frozen, says, "What are we going to do with these?" ... I said, "Take the paper off; into the steam boiler. Everything into the steam boiler. [laughter] ... It's all good." [laughter] We didn't have any turkey that day, the detail, but I'm sure everybody had [some]; I'm sure the "giblet gravy" was great. [laughter] ... After that, they sent us to the troopship and we came home. ... We were on a Navy transport and we hit a typhoon and we rode the typhoon for about three days. We went the northern route, up around Alaska, came down, and we didn't eat on the ship, because they couldn't man the kitchen, because of the outrageous seas, and everything was roped. You went around the ship holding

ropes. If you went to the toilet, went to the head, as they called it, you had to go on the ropes, and we ate raw apples, stuff like that. Then, we wound up in Tacoma, Washington, and then, we stayed in camp there for awhile. I remember getting a pass in Tacoma, which was not the greatest city at the time, and then, a four-day trip across the country on a troop train, to Camp Dix, California, [Fort Dix, New Jersey], and I got a pass and got home before my discharge. I arrived home Christmas morning. That was perfect timing, opened the door and came into the house, Christmas morning. Everyone was glad to see me and I was glad to be home and the war was over for me.

SI: Was that a surprise for your family?

JC: Oh, yes, yes. Well, Eleanor didn't expect me and, in fact, Eleanor was sick at the time. She had bronchitis, and so, I came home to a very sick wife, but I was glad to be home and everyone was glad to see me. My brother, while I was in fighting and sweating in the jungles, he was freezing. He was over in Italy. He was in the Fifth Army, in the artillery over there, and he had a very, very rough time. He came out of the war, [but] the war was rough on him. ... He fought up to [Monte] Cassino, and then, after that, he went into the invasion of Southern France, and then, he was hospitalized after that. He had combat fatigue. So, that was my war experience. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Thank you, on the record, for the lovely break.

JC: Yes, yes.

SI: To touch on some of the things you did with your unit, could you tell us a little bit about what a typical day would be like, how you would get these assignments and what you would do in the Signal Corps?

JC: Well, as I say, I was sort of a grunt. I would do whatever they told me to do, [laughter] and the assignment would come and the sergeant or the lieutenant in charge of the group would come, say, "Hey, we've got to move out tomorrow. You've got to be ready at such-and-such a time and have the equipment [ready], and we'll mount up, and then, we leave at that time." ... If it was one of these operations where you went out on one of these minor invasions, you'd get on the ship with the troops and they would land first and you'd go ashore and, as they're battling their way in, you'd set up communications back with the headquarters. They had radio, and, as I say, ... if necessary, we had the code machine with us, to use that, which we rarely did have to use. ... We'd string field wires to the command post and back to our operation, and that was pretty much what we did, yes. Back in headquarters, as I told you, the typical day was, you'd get up in the morning and you'd report to the coding room and the fellows would be on the SIGABA, taking in the things, breaking down the messages, and then, my job was to edit them and send them out, and, as I say, I was a grunt. ... If I had to lay wire, string wire, I'd pull the rope, you know, expose the wire, and I would do whatever I was told to do.

SI: In the areas where you were, would you say that there was an actual frontline or was it more that the enemy might be out here or might be out there?

JC: Well, in the operations, we were always behind the frontline, wherever the hell the frontline was, but, in many of these operations, you'd have to, you know, chase the Japanese into the bush or into one of these little towns that they were at, and [that is] pretty much it.

SI: You talked about going out on patrol at night.

JC: When I was ... in Papua, Papua New Guinea, yes, yes.

SI: Okay. Was that with the Signal Corps or with the infantry?

JC: No. At the beginning, when we were in Papua, they used us as infantry, before I actually was assigned to the Eighth Army, and we'd go out on patrols like that, but, again, as I say, the major fighting was done and what we were looking more for was the stragglers, yes.

SI: What was it like to be in the jungle at night?

JC: Not nice. [laughter] ... You try not to go in, in the nighttime, into the jungle, ... because it's hard enough to find somebody in the daytime in the jungle. You wouldn't want to do it in the nighttime. So, in the nighttime, you'd stay put, yes. ... In the nighttime, where I would be doing something is when we had guard duty, or something like that, around the perimeter, and there, we would, you know, be out there in the nighttime, yes.

SI: Would little noises cause a stir?

JC: Oh, sure, sure. ... Well, first of all, the jungle was pretty noisy in the nighttime. You'd have the birds ... and, as I say, you'd have the torrential rains in the nighttime, which would be a sound in itself, beating against the trees and the bushes. ... I can't really give you any exciting stories about the nighttime in the jungles. I mean, all I can say is, nighttime in the jungles would be scary, yes.

DF: I take it there were no encounters with the Japanese at night.

JC: Not with me, no.

SI: Did you actually ever encounter any Japanese troops?

JC: Oh, yes, yes, we did. We encountered stragglers, yes, and they surrendered and we took them in.

SI: Were you ever in a situation where you had to fire your rifle?

JC: No.

SI: Not just aiming at somebody, but perhaps firing into the forest or the jungle where you thought there might be enemy forces.

JC: No, ... really, I don't recall ever doing that. I always had my rifle with me, but I never had reason to use it, in which I was very fortunate.

SI: What about air or artillery attacks?

JC: No, no. We had some artillery attacks at some of these landings, but nothing major, yes.

SI: Were there any losses in your unit?

JC: No, not that I'm aware of; losses to illness, yes, jungle rot and stuff like that, yes.

SI: You mentioned during the break that you became very ill.

JC: Yes.

SI: Could you tell us a little about that again?

JC: Well, again, we were out in the jungles and this was, I guess, in Papua, and then, we were pretty much in the jungles and we were kind of concerned that there were Japanese near, but all I know is that I got very, very ill and, as I say, I came down with this fever. ... Hell, a lot of guys were coming down with malaria. I thought I had malaria at first, yes.

SI: You mentioned that they could not even figure out what it was.

JC: No, they couldn't.

SI: How would you rate the medical treatment available to you?

JC: Oh, I'm sure the doctors were great, I'm sure they were. I don't think there were enough of them and, you know, the facilities, as I say, ... we had a tent out in the jungles and they had just GI cots and some bamboo sticks around the cots and you threw mosquito netting over them, and the damn rats would run under the bed and they'd gnaw through the mosquito netting. They're always a problem, but ... I guess they gave me some antibiotics [at some point] into this and just rest. ... Within a week, I was back on duty again, yes.

SI: Were there any problems with people who could not handle the stress of being out in the field, that sort of thing?

JC: Fortunately, I didn't have any experience with that, but I'm sure there was a lot of that in the infantry, yes.

SI: Okay, but not so much where you were.

JC: No. We had it relatively easy, compared to the infantry.

SI: Just to ask some questions about your standard of living in the field, can you tell us about where you would sleep, what you would eat, how often you would get food or a chance to rest?

JC: Well, you know, it always depended upon the situation at the time. If you're in camp, you'd live in a tent, you know, and you'd have cots. If you're in the field somewhere, you'd sleep on the ground. ... We had ponchos, you know, and ... you'd use that in the nighttime, when it was really pouring rain. You'd cover yourself with a poncho and ... you'd lay your head on your knapsack and lay on the ground and that was it. ... That was rough living. You always had your [rations]. You know, when you're in the field, you had these K or C rations with you. You ate those, and you squatted and did your duty ... wherever you needed to do it. [laughter] ... I always found that funny, and especially in the Philippines. You'd be squatting there and down the path would be the women in the rice fields, you know, working in the rice fields, and, hey, you're, like, taking a crap. ... You become basic, you become sort of animal-like. Then, I always remember, ... talking animal-like, in Japan, I always remember, one night, I was in Tokyo and I passed one of the major theaters. ... The theater let out and everyone rushed to the curb and everyone was taking a leak, on the curb. Here, this is a major city, like, can you imagine Rockefeller Center or Radio City Musical Hall, everyone coming out, standing on Sixth Avenue and taking a pee, or the women squatting on the curb? ... I said, "Ah," but they thought nothing of it. I mean, ... now, I'm sure things are different in Japan today, but this was Japan 1945. It was different.

SI: Do you think you had adequate rations?

JC: Oh, yes. ... I told you about the time we were on the ship. For two days, we didn't have any rations, but, otherwise, and we were in the midst of plenty, because we had all these battleships and big boats around us, with all kinds of rations. ... The crew that were on this [ship], it turned out it was a munitions ship, they wouldn't give us ... any rations because the captain said he didn't know where he was going to be assigned to next and he just had limited rations for his own crew and he wasn't going to take care of the Army; let the Army take of ... themselves, you know.

SI: What about the equipment that you needed for the Signal Corps? Did you have what you needed?

JC: Oh, yes, yes.

SI: You mentioned that you did not have to use the code equipment too much when you were in the field.

JC: ... That's right.

SI: Was there a reason for that?

JC: There was no need for it. They didn't want to put anything in code.

SI: The Japanese were not monitoring codes.

JC: Or, it wasn't that important.

SI: Do you feel like, working in communications, you may have known a little bit more about what was going on?

JC: Generally, the average GI never knew more about what was going on [than] fifty yards around him. He knew everything that was within fifty yards around him. Otherwise, he didn't know what the hell was going on. I know, when I first landed in New Guinea, I felt so helpless. I felt the war was going so badly for us and we were three thousand miles or more away from Japan; I thought we would be there for twenty years. I really did. ... It was kind of a hopeless feeling. I didn't think that we would do as well as we did do, and, again, that was because I knew everything within fifty yards of me, but I didn't know, overall, the big picture and I never did. The only time I knew the big picture was when I was back in headquarters, in the code room, and you'd see all the traffic coming through and you could read what was going on and realize that we were getting ready for an ... operation or something like that, yes.

DF: Did you ever receive news of the progress in Europe?

JC: ... Yes. When we got up to Leyte, they put out a ... little paper, one-page paper, *The Octogram*, they called it, and they would have news and whatever was coming in over the wire, and they would put it in this little newspaper. So, we would know some things that were going on in Europe, yes.

SI: Did they have *Stars and Stripes* or just this other one?

JC: Every now and then, I would see a copy of *Stars and Stripes*, but that was not the [norm], just pretty much this. I could show you a copy of it, if you'd like to see it.

SI: Sure.

JC: I'd have to go upstairs.

SI: We do not have to do that right now.

JC: Okay.

SI: In both theaters, there were local papers like this.

JC: Yes. This was a local one, "Octo" was named after the Eighth Army, yes.

SI: Yes, but *Stars and Stripes* seems to be less ubiquitous in the Pacific than in Europe.

JC: Yes.

SI: What about correspondence with home? Were you able to get good mail service?

JC: No. ... We had V-mail, you know, these little letters, and they had to be [censored]. Supposedly, they would be sanctioned by [your officers]. Your officers would read them, and then, send them on home. No, the mail was not great, especially in New Guinea, the mail was terrible, and the food, you talked about food before, when you're in base camp, the food was a lot to be desired. The bread was always moldy. I mean, you'd find there's always bugs in the bread, baked into the bread. ... You'd get a lot of powdered eggs, or the other big dish, when you were in a base camp, would be "SOS," yes, which was "shit on the shingles," [cream chipped beef], yes, you know, and that was pretty much it. We never really got good food in New Guinea. Most of the rations we were getting would be coming out of Australia, yes, because the European Theater was being favored and everything was going to the European Theater. That was where the priority was and we were, more or less, in a holding action, that was the idea, until they could get Europe under control. Then, they were going to go in the Pacific, yes.

SI: That has been talked about a lot afterwards by historians, but, at that time, did you feel like you were getting second best?

JC: Oh, yes, definitely, oh, yes. You chew on some of those hard New England biscuits, but, you know, funny, I was with the Australian troops for a little while in New Guinea and they were nice to be with, and they would always have tea in the afternoon, tea in a mess cup, General Blamey, yes.

SI: You mentioned how it was nice to be part of a team and you had been with a team in California. Were you able to reestablish that bond?

JC: Oh, yes. ... Once you became part of this 304th group, you know, I got friends again and you became part of a team again, yes.

SI: Just from listening to you, I get the impression that you were sent out to do a lot of things by yourself. Was that the case?

JC: Oh, no, no, no.

SI: You always went as a group.

JC: Always a group, yes.

SI: You would go out to lay wires with other people.

JC: ... Yes, just part of a group. I was a grunt and, whatever they told me to do, I'd do.

SI: What did you think of the officers in the unit?

JC: They were fine. ... I didn't have any great relationship with any of them, yes.

SI: Was it a situation where they did what they were supposed to do and they left you to do what you were supposed to do?

JC: They told us what to do and we did it, yes, yes.

SI: Do you feel as though the officers got any special privileges where you were?

JC: When we got up to Leyte, they did. In New Guinea, they didn't, because there were no officers' clubs or anything, but, when we set up a base in Leyte, near Tacloban, they ... set up an officers' club somewhere. We didn't have an enlisted men's club, ... but [those are] minor things. All you wanted to do was get the goddamn war over with and get home, yes. One of the things that was difficult was getting beer. I had a friend of mine, he was a buddy of mine, and he came down. He visited me in New Guinea and he was an officer in the Air Force and, jeez, I'm out in the middle of nowhere. We're in a base camp. ... I've got to entertain him someday, and I had to go out looking to buy beer, and I bought beer. It cost me fifteen dollars a can, but, to entertain my friend, I went to that expense, but beer was very, very scarce, yes. [laughter]

SI: Did you do any trading with the Navy or any other forces?

JC: No, no, I didn't have that opportunity, yes. You know, if you were near a port where the Navy was, I'm sure you'd have those opportunities, but I was never near a port. We were always inland somewhere.

SI: What about rest and relaxation opportunities? Did you have any entertainment when you were in the field?

JC: When we got up to the Philippines, yes. ... Once, I think they put on a show for us, yes, at Leyte, when Leyte was safe, yes.

SI: Was there any big name entertainer there?

JC: ... I think it was a USO show and I think it was *Oklahoma*, if I'm not mistaken.

SI: Okay, it was a play.

JC: Yes. It was the only one that I was exposed to.

DF: Was that just the only opportunity you had to see a show or was that the only one you chose to go to?

JC: No, that was the only opportunity I had, in Leyte. When I got up to Japan, I had time on my hands, I went to see the, what are they called, *Toboki* players or whatever? ...

SI: *Kabuki*.

JC: *Kabuki*. I saw one of their shows, but I was on my own, you know. Then, when I was in Japan, I had some time to myself and I went down to Atami, which was a seashore resort, and went down by train, and the trains are funny. You know, the Japanese would be hanging on the door of the train, on the outside and whatnot. Train's going fifty miles an hour and they're hanging on the door, but, looking back, it was a great experience, but that's about all.

SI: Do you feel as though they got you home within a reasonable amount of time? Were you anxious to get home?

JC: Oh, sure, I was anxious to get home. First day the war ended, I went, "When do I go home?" you know, [laughter] but, no, I think I was very fortunate. They went by the point system. You build up so many points. If you were in an active combat area, you ... built up these points, and then, I had enough points so that I got home rather early. I got home and, as I say, ... they were processing me out in November, because I had Thanksgiving and I went through the process, and, by the time I got home, [it was] Christmas Day. A lot of guys, you know, stayed in until some time in '46, yes.

DF: Was your sense of time distorted while you were overseas? Did a year feel like a year or a week like a week?

JC: Oh, yes, sense of time.

DF: Did you lose track?

JC: I lost track. You lost track, really. You didn't know which day was which day. All days were alike.

DF: Did you feel as though you were gone much longer overseas than you were?

JC: Possibly, looking back on it, possibly, yes.

SI: How do you think your morale was in general, when you were overseas?

JC: Well, one thing, as I told you, when I first got into New Guinea, my morale was pretty low, because I thought, "God, I'll spend the rest of my life down here in this goddamned jungle," and I didn't know whether we were going to win or not, because, you know, as I say, ... as an enlisted man, you have a very limited view and no communications with the outside world. So, all I was, I was lost in the jungle and I didn't know. I thought I'd be there a long, long time, and my morale was low. After awhile, it picked up, once you start being active and doing things, ... and once you realize that, "Hey, we're on the move." ... By the way, I had a chance, when I was ... in New Guinea, I began to say, "Hey, this is for the birds. I'm going to go to OCS [Officer Candidate School]." So, I went in, I went to my company commander, and I said, "Hey, I've got the points and whatnot. I'm applying for OCS," and he says, "Okay," and he says, "but you realize, OCS, if we put you through, you're going to go back to Australia and you're going to be in Australia for awhile. ... You'll probably stay in for three years." I said, "Fine, okay," and then, I found out we were going to move out to [go] up to the Philippines. I said, "Hey, forget it.

Now, I'm moving forward," and so, I [figured], "Forget about OCS. I'll just go ahead ... with the troops and go on to Japan." ...

DF: If you had gone to OCS, would you have had to stay in Australia long after the war, for a year or two after the war?

JC: That's what they were telling me. I don't know whether that was true or not; I don't know.

DF: That was probably the discouraging factor.

JC: Yes, yes.

SI: Was there ever a moment when you were afraid for your life, or something that vividly stands out in your memory when you think back on the war?

JC: Yes, a few moments, yes. They're hard to describe, though.

SI: Were they triggered by specific things that happened or were they just feelings?

JC: Things that could happen.

SI: Okay.

DF: From what I understand, your family was fairly religious when you were growing up.

JC: Yes.

DF: Did you maintain strong convictions of faith while you were overseas?

JC: Yes. You know, as they say, there's no atheists in the foxhole, or something like that, and, if there were a church service, I would go to a church service in the field, and, again, they would be in the field. There were no churches.

SI: When you were in the Philippines, did you get a chance to interact with the civilians at all?

JC: Oh, yes, yes, ... when I went into Tacloban. ... That's where MacArthur put up his [headquarters], became his headquarters for awhile, and there ... [had] been a lot of fighting in Tacloban before I got there. ... I remember going into their marketplace and seeing all their meats hanging up there, and flies all over and whatnot, and you say, "Jesus, what a way to live," you know, and I got to talking to the men and to the women and whatnot, yes. They were glad to see us, yes.

SI: Did you ever go to church in the Philippines? I know there were a lot of cathedrals there.

JC: No, I never did. No, I didn't see any cathedrals where I was.

SI: Maybe not cathedrals, but churches. It is a Catholic country.

JC: Yes. No, I didn't see any.

SI: After you were back home, did you ever feel like you had any lasting effects from the war?

JC: No.

SI: That it in any way changed your life?

JC: Oh, I think it changed my life. I think it gives you a degree of self-confidence, you know. If you got through this and all the crap you went through, why, you should be able to get through all the crap in civilian life. [laughter] So, no, I didn't have any mental effects after the war, that some of the guys from the infantry went through, and I appreciate what they went through, yes. No, I didn't; I was lucky.

SI: You came home on Christmas Day 1945.

JC: Came home Christmas Day.

SI: What happened to you after that?

JC: Well, after, let's see, I was discharged, I think, three days later. I think they mailed the discharge to me, if I remember correctly. I don't think I went back to Dix. ... When I had left, I was working with the United States Rubber Company, which, by the way, has gone out of business [in the] years since, but it used to be a big, big rubber company. ... I was in their, what they called their mechanical goods section, selling conveyor belts, fire hoses, rubber goods, and I was a clerk, a sales clerk, indoors. ... When I got back, I had a job waiting for me and I took a month off, after I got back, just to get used to civilian life. I think it was a month. Maybe it was a couple of weeks, I'm not sure. I took time off and I went back to work. ... I didn't want to work in the office. I wanted to get outside. I felt, you know; I found offices too confining. So, I tried to get a sales job and, unfortunately, there were many, many young guys like myself that were coming back to the United States Rubber Company and they had many, many capable guys and there were no openings in sales. So, I started looking for another job, but, in the meantime, [I was] working. On my lunch hour, I'd go out, look for another job, or I'd write for another job and whatnot, and, at the time, I tried to buy a car. Oh, when I came back, you know, when you were discharged, I think they gave you three hundred dollars. I'm not sure of that. I think they did.

SI: Mustering out pay?

JC: Mustering; I think it was three hundred dollars. I'm not sure. They gave you something, but I had no money. My wife had saved some money, because I was sending money home to her and to my mother. I didn't have much for myself. So, she had saved some money. She had been working, and we couldn't get a place to live. So, I lived with her parents in Teaneck. We had a room, a bedroom, and I wanted to get our own apartment; no apartments were available.

Everything was in short supply, because, during the war years, they weren't building cars, they weren't building houses or anything like that, and all the guys coming out had the same demands I had, and there were more demands than capabilities of fulfilling them. I went to buy a car and they said, "Well, what do you got to trade in?" I said, "I got nothing. I just want to buy a car." [laughter] Oh, no, they want a trade-in, so [that] they could get two deals for the price of one. That wasn't working, and then, I saw an ad for the Quaker Oat Company, as salesman, and they would provide a car. So, I ... applied for that and I got the job and they gave me a brand-new Chevrolet, I guess the equivalent of an Impala, or something like that, and I had the car for my own use. ... I was to sell in the North Jersey territory, which was great, but I just couldn't see myself spending a lifetime selling groceries, going to grocery stores and selling Quaker Oats and Aunt Jemima's Pancakes and stuff like that, working through a distributor. ... I worked there for about, oh, a month or so. I did real well, you know. They were pleased with me and the US Rubber Company contacted me again and they said, "We'll offer you a job at a much higher pay [rate] than what you were getting, in our international department. You might have to go overseas, and would you be interested?" I said, "Sure." So, I gave up my car and went back to New York, Radio City, right in Radio City was the office, and I worked there for a couple of years. ... By then, I had found an apartment in Englewood, in a two-family house, and Eleanor was pregnant. We were having a child, and I had a chance to go overseas, but I didn't want to go overseas at the time, because where they were sending me was [still under] rationing, and I said, "With a baby, you know, we're just bringing a baby into the world, I want to make sure the kid can get everything he wants," and so, I turned that down. ... Then, the rubber company, I had made some friends in the rubber company, and in their electrical department, where they sold electrical cable. They approached me and they offered me a sales job, "Would I be interested?" and I said, "Oh, yes." So, I was going to be outside again. So, I took that job and I made a success of it. I did real well. ... Eleanor and I, we finally got enough money, and I guess it was with the GI Bill, four-percent mortgage, we bought our first house in Fair Lawn, and that was 1950, 1950 or 1951, somewhere around there, and I had a pretty successful career. ... You know, I was doing very well with the rubber company. I got a bonus every year, and then, Kaiser Aluminum bought us. ... I was going to quit the rubber company, but they encouraged me to stay on and I stayed on with them and I finally got into management and I did pretty well there. I stayed there until I retired. I took early retirement in 1983 [1982], yes. ...

SI: Did you work after that?

JC: After that, no. I've been retired now for twenty-five years. I've been a bum. ...

SI: Was it 1983?

JC: '83, yes, sixty-three years of age.

SI: Okay.

JC: '82, I was sixty-three years of age, yes.

SI: Did you make any other use of the GI Bill, besides the mortgage?

JC: No. The only thing I took was the GI mortgage, yes. Four percent, that was great, yes.

SI: You mentioned you had three daughters.

JC: I have three daughters. They all went to college. They all are married. I have five grandkids. I have a daughter [who] lives in town here. She [was] brought up [in] town, she lives in town. She's got two children. She's doing very well. I've got another daughter, lives in Glen Rock, which is the adjacent town, and then, I've got a daughter that lives in Rye, New York. So, we're very fortunate. That's why we ... took a place [here]. We were down in Florida for ten years, with a condo, ... which we used in the winters, you know. We gave that up because we like the beach, but the beach didn't like us. After awhile, the sun was too much for us. We started getting melanoma and whatnot. ... So, we sold the place, and here we are.

SI: Do you have any other questions?

DF: How old are your grandchildren?

JC: My grandchildren, ... my oldest daughter has a girl that's, I'm guessing now, give or take a year, about thirty-two, and she has a son about thirty. My daughter in Glen Rock, she has a girl about twenty-eight, and my daughter here, she has a boy that's thirteen and a girl that's eleven, and they're like a second family to us. ... I told the little girl, well, maybe four or five years ago, I guess, Eleanor and I were talking and she overheard us, and I said, "You know, maybe we ought to sell the house, Eleanor, and go move to a condo," and the little girl got very upset. She said, "Look, this is my house. You can't sell it." [laughter] So, it's like a second family, yes, and the kids were interesting. The boy, her son, thirty-year-old boy, he [was] brought up in Rye, New York, and he went to; oh, what's the prestigious girls college up in New York State? ... God, again, I forget names.

SI: Cornell?

JC: No, no, no. ... Well, anyway, he went to college up there and his mother gave him a guitar and the first year, he did real well. In the second year, he got into a band and he got kicked out of college, because he ignored his college, and then, he went back, on his own. He finally got his degree, and then, he got his master's and he's working as a teacher in New York City now, teaching in the Bronx, in a tough neighborhood, but he loves it, yes.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the tape?

JC: No. Is there anything that you [want], other questions you have?

DF: I have one more question. Did you keep in contact with any of your fellow servicemen following the war?

JC: For awhile, I did, and then, we drifted apart. They're all in other parts of the country, yes, and we were in a small unit. It's not like ... a regiment or anything like that, where you had these major reunions. We didn't have anything like that.

SI: Did you keep in contact, through the war, with the people you had served with in the 101st?

JC: Oh, yes, yes. They were my boyhood friends, yes, and one of them, one of the privates with me in the machine gun troop, ... went on to become the Governor of New York ... State, Hugh Carey, [Governor of New York from 1975 to 1982], yes, and Hugh and I were buddies. ... A lot of my friends, I kept in contact with, yes, but the trouble is, when you reach my age, you run out of friends. You've got more dead friends, by far, than you have live ones, yes.

SI: I meant to ask this earlier, but, when you were called back into the service, did you ever try to get back into the 101st Cavalry?

JC: Well, by then, the 101st, they used the training and the experience, most of those fellows went on to OCS and ... it was used as a cadre to training troops. In other words, their experience of a year in service ... was used. ... If they didn't go into OCS, or in the Air Corps or something, and they stayed in as enlisted men, they were used as sergeants, training somewhere, somewhere else, yes, and a lot of them died. A lot of them got killed in the war. They weren't as fortunate as I, yes.

SI: Thank you very much.

JC: Thank you.

SI: We appreciate your time and your hospitality, and thank you for your service to our country.

JC: You're welcome, glad to have it all behind me. [laughter]

SI: Some of it does not sound too pleasant.

JC: All-in-all, I was very fortunate, yes.

SI: Thank you very much.

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

Reviewed by Brian Dib 4/8/09
Reviewed by David Kelley 4/8/09
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 4/14/09
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 4/18/09
Reviewed by John Coleman 4/25/09