AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN H. COOK

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. John H. Cook on April 23, 1998, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and …

Richard Boniface: Richard Boniface.

KP: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your father, William B. Cook …

John Cook: Yes.

KP: … Who was a member of the Class of 1908.

JC: Well, not of [the] Class of 1908, he was Class of 1910, I think, but, he was in the college, [Rutgers College], and then, in 1908, while he was an undergraduate, he started teaching at the Rutgers Prep School and wound up teaching there until 1939, when he retired.

KP: Did he ever graduate?

JC: No, he didn't graduate from Rutgers. He got a degree from Columbia. He was on the gymnastics team in Rutgers, while he was an undergraduate here, and I've read some of the newspaper accounts of him, and the accounts would say, "Of course, in the event on the rings, why, Cook won, as usual." [laughter]

KP: Which subjects did he teach?

JC: Mathematics. I had him myself, as a teacher, for a couple of years.

KP: What was it like to have your father as your teacher?

JC: Well, it was not really tough, the fact that he was a family member. … He treated me just like any other student. He had my oldest brother for four years, he had my other, next [oldest], brother for one year, and he had me for two years, and he just made it tough for us. We had to measure up. I'll never forget the one occasion when I came into geometry class, and he asked me, or trigonometry class, rather, to put on the board … the law of sines, and I didn't know what it was. So, I passed and he said, "Okay, you come back [this] afternoon for a detention period." Then, when they put it on the board, I said, "Oh, that's what they mean by the law of sines. I knew that," but, I didn't know it by that name, so, I still had to pay for it. [laughter]

KP: Your childhood was rooted in the local area. You were born in New Brunswick and you attended school at Rutgers Prep. However, your family had a relationship to Hancock, Massachusetts.

JC: Yes, indeed. That was … my mother's family home. My grandfather came over from Ireland in 1858 and the family home was up there. We still own the home up there in Massachusetts, in Hancock, now, and, when my mother and father were married in 1912, they came down to New Jersey to live, and we lived here. … My oldest brother was born in Hancock. My mother went home for that, but, the rest of us were born in New Brunswick, and we lived
here until 1921. Now, I said [that] my father taught until 1939, but, he took a year off. He actually quit in 1921 and went back to Massachusetts. … He always really wanted to be a farmer. He'd been a farmer as a boy, and he liked farming, and he planned to lead a farmer's life, but, after one year [of] farming in Massachusetts, he and my mother decided that that money wouldn't put four kids through college. So, in addition to that, the headmaster of the prep school, his name was William Kelly, came up late in the fall of the year [and] tried to talk him into going back to teaching. So, finally, in '22, he went back, but, the family lived there, in Massachusetts, until 1924, and he would commute, and our moving, often, was dictated by my oldest brother. He graduated from the grade school there, where his aunt was the schoolteacher. He was only ten years old when he graduated from the grade school, but, then, he entered the prep school, so, we moved back to New Jersey, so that he could be a student in the prep school, until he graduated from the prep school in 1928. Then, we moved back to Massachusetts, because he attended Williams College, up there in Williamstown, near Hancock. We lived there for four years, until he graduated from college. Then, we moved back to New Jersey, and, at that point, my mother and father lived in the dormitory, instead of living in a private house, and my other brother and I were dormitory students at the school. My brother had already graduated from a public school upstate, but, my father thought he needed more schooling, and he was also a little young. The oldest brother had gone to college at the age of fourteen. My parents thought, "Maybe that was a mistake." So, they held him back for a year and he was sixteen, well, actually, he was seventeen, I guess, when he went to college. I graduated then, that year, and, … also, I was just fifteen, and they figured I was a little too young, so, they kept me another year in the prep school, and I really appreciated those years I had in the prep school, too, the best training I think I ever had. Then, in '34, … I went to the college, … but, the family home, as you say, is still in Hancock, Massachusetts, and my mother was there when she died in 1965.

KP: Your story brings several questions to mind. First of all, why Hancock?

JC: Well, that's where my grandfather lived.

KP: Do you know why he settled in Hancock?

JC: No, he came … in 1858. I haven't any idea why, … no.

KP: What did your grandfather do?

JC: My grandfather was a farmer. Is that what you mean?

KP: Yes. He was a farmer.

JC: Yes. He was only fourteen when he came over. He came with an older brother, and the older brother died well before the turn of the century, but, he lived there as a farmer, and he met his wife there in … 1872. I keep starting to say, "Nineteen," I forget to go back to the 1800s, and her parents came over from Germany in the early 1840s, and she was born in this country, and they married in 1872. They were married fifty-six years before she passed away, but, the home has always been there, ever since 1858.
KP: How did your father wind up going to college at Rutgers?

JC: Oh, … his older brother had gone to Rutgers University and became a minister. My father would come down to visit him, on occasion. … My father also went to New Paltz Normal School [Editor's note: The New Paltz Normal School eventually became the State University of New York at New Paltz] and graduated from there in 1906 and that's where he met my mother, incidentally. They were fellow students there and, in coming down to visit his older brother, Henry Cook, … his older brother talked him into enrolling at Rutgers to become a student here. So, that's how he got started here, and, also, one of his faculty members from normal school, a fellow named Scudder, was, at that point, headmaster of the prep school, and he's the one that recruited him to teach at the prep school. I remember seeing a picture of my mother and father's graduating class from the New Paltz Normal in 1906, and I looked at it, I didn't know what the picture was, I was a young boy, about ten years old. I looked at the picture, and I said to my mother, "What's my sister, Mary, doing in that picture?" 'cause she was the spitting image of my mother. …

KP: You mentioned that your father's older brother studied to be a minister at Rutgers. Was he a Protestant minister or some other type of minister?

JC: No, Protestant. My father was a Protestant when he married my mother and he was a Protestant. … He eventually became a Catholic, but, only the year before he died. He was, at heart, I think, a Catholic long before that, but, he actually was baptized Catholic only the year before he died. He taught in a Catholic school, [in] his last few years, down in San Antonio, Florida. They used to go down there for the winter, and, while they were there, there was a church there, where my mother was very fond of the pastor there, and they had a girls' school there. My father got started teaching there and he liked it very much. … He had a heart attack in, I'm a little hazy on the years, now; I think it was about 1950. He had a heart attack and he missed a year. He couldn't teach for one year, but, he vowed that he would go back and teach again, and he did go back and taught again, but, he taught in the year '52 [to] '53, but, in '53, they went down to Florida again, but, he had a heart attack again on the way down, and, … well, he lived until the following January, but, he was unable to teach after that. He was fond of teaching, even though he loved to be a farmer. In fact, when he retired, in 1939, he went up to Massachusetts, and worked as a farmer up there, and liked to do that, and continued working like that until the war years. One of his former students, actually, the son of the fellow who had been headmaster at the prep school, remembered him well. He was the president of the Board of Education in Madison at that time and they were short on teachers. He told his board, he said, "Now, I know a fellow who's retired now, but, I think I can talk him into coming down to teach for us." So, he drove up to Massachusetts, talked to my father, and talked him into coming down to New Jersey. So, he taught in Madison, then, for another five years.

KP: That is very interesting. It sounds as though your father was a born teacher.

JC: Yes, he was, but, in fact, I'm on the, well, … phone-a-thon, for example, every year for the prep school students, and I always call the ones from the years 1940 and prior, and, every time, I'll call a strange person that I haven't talked with before, I'll say, "My name is John Cook," and something. "Are you the son of Doc Cook?" … "Oh, yes." "Gee, I remember Doc Cook." He
was greatly remembered. In the years that he was there, he had at least three of the yearbooks that were dedicated to him. ... I see a few of my classmates now who were students of his and they always speak very highly of him.

KP: By being involved with the prep school as the child of a faculty member and a student, you were a part of the Rutgers community before most alumni, because the prep school was right off of College Avenue.

JC: It was up on Somerset Street, yes.

KP: It was at the heart of the campus.

JC: It was part of the University at that time. ...

KP: Yes, the prep school was part of the University until 1956. What are some of your earliest memories of the prep school, both as your father's place of employment and your school?

JC: Well, I started schooling up in Massachusetts, had my first year up there, with my aunt as teacher, but, then, I came down here, and I had four years of grade school in the elementary school, but, I left here. ... I remember, for example, ... in the second grade, down here, the first year I was in the elementary school, I met a friend of mine, Pete Krauszer, this was 1924, and, until I graduated from college, he was my closest friend, but, from the day I graduated from college, I never saw him again.

[Interviewee's note: This interview took place in 1998. At that time it had been sixty years that I had not had any contact with my best friend from grade school. In fact, I had been told by other school mates that Pete had died more than fifteen years earlier.

One day in July of 2000, I received a telephone call and the caller said that if I had one thousand guesses I would never guess who was calling. I said that I would need a hint. The caller then said, "Well, mebbe if I gave you a hint you might be able to guess who this is." At that I said, "Pete Krauszer!" I said that because "Mebbe" was Pete's nickname for me.

Pete had tracked me down through the alumni office of our prep school. I had been, and still am, very active in the alumni affairs, and my name and picture had appeared in alumni publications.

Since that time, Pete and I have spoken on the phone a few times, and we have exchanged letters. We never met again face-to-face. Then in June of 2002 one of my letters was returned to me from the nursing home in Maryland where he had been staying. I called his daughter on the phone and learned that Pete had died in May of that year.]


JC: Never. No, see, after I left, I graduated in 1938, and, first, I went down to Florida for a year to teach school. Then, I went into New York City and worked in New York City and I didn't come back, for example, to a Rutgers reunion until 1948. Now, I don't know where Pete was at
that time … and I didn't see my fellow classmates from the prep school, either, for many years.
It wasn't really until about 1983 that I got involved with the prep school again, all of those years.
I was away from it, but, they had, I'm trying to think of his name now, not Deiner, something
like that, that was the … head of the alumni relations in the prep school, and he worked hard at
crunching former students. He got in touch with me and got me involved and I've been
associated with the alumni organization ever since then. For a number of years, I would write
the letter to the "old guard," all of the members of the classes of … fifty years and more, telling
them to come back. This year, I wrote one … only to my own class members, though. We're
having ours in late May. … One of my sad experiences at the prep school, we had an
organization, I don't remember the name of it, but, we used to meet about once a week and have
a gathering, and individual students would read a poem, or recite something, or recall some
experience, or something. I was a member of that for years, but, this one time, I had a teacher, I
won't mention her name, but, I didn't care for her too much, but, she was kind of rough with me,
and it came up the morning when I was supposed to give this presentation of my own, and I
hadn't cleared it with her. I'm supposed to perform it for her before I do it in the auditorium
there, in the … assembly room, and she was kind of rough with me about that. "You can't let it
go to the last minute. I've got other things to do. I can't do this kind of stuff late. What do you
want to do? Do you want to drop out of the club?" So, what did I say? I said, "Yeah, I want to
drop out of the club." I was a nine-year-old boy, eight years old, I guess, at that time. So, I
dropped out of the club, and I resented it and regretted it ever since, but, I felt that I was forced
into it, not that she was trying to force me out, but, her actions led me into it, and I felt very
unhappy. I never forgot that, but, I had a lot of happy experiences there, too.

KP: It sounds like you made a number of good friends.

JC: Yes.

KP: How would you compare your experiences in public and private school?

JC: In terms of academic education? Well, … I had grade school with my own aunt as a
teacher, and my mother's family and my father's family, they were all teachers, and my mother's
family were all good teachers. In fact, there were nine in the family and the older sisters were
the teachers in the one-room country schoolhouses where their brothers and sisters attended, and
my aunt, who was my teacher, was a very good one, and she worked us hard, and, in fact, she's
the one who pushed my cousin and my brother, and the rest of my brothers and sister and myself,
through at a fast pace. In fact, I went up there in April of 1928. I'd been in the fifth grade in the
Rutgers Elementary School. I stayed there for the balance of that year and one more year and
she got me out of the eighth grade by the end of that time. … I think I got a good education there
from her, but, I can compare my high school education with the Rutgers Prep School education a
lot better, in that, at the high school level, I was there for three years, and I was a lazy student in
those days. … Many times, … I'd carry … my book bag home at night and take it back again the
next morning, never open the book bag while I was home, but, still, I managed to get by and get
on the honor roll all the time up there. I remember, Frances Goodermote was a classmate of
mine and the two of us were always competing, who was going to be the head of the class on the
next monthly report and so forth. So, I got by rather easily, but, when I came to the prep school,
we … lived in the dormitory. We had study periods. We had lesson assignments. We had to
measure up to them, and I learned to work hard as a student, and I think I studied more and learned more in those two years at the prep school than I did in the three years I did in high school. In fact, when I came down here, I'd had certain math courses before I came, including geometry, and … I'd had trigonometry, but, I didn't have solid geometry in public school, but, my father had me repeat trigonometry and … plane geometry, and, also, take solid geometry, and, also, repeat a course in algebra, while I was under him as a student, and the courses that I took under him were not a snap course just because I'd already had it. I still had to buckle down and I felt that the education system, particularly for the dormitory students, was a wonderful experience for them. I carried over the experience into my freshman year in college and worked pretty much the same way in my freshman year in college, but, by the sophomore year, I sort of slipped. [laughter]

KP: Where were the Rutgers Prep dormitories located?

JC: Where the college library is now.

KP: Okay, where Alexander Library is now.

JC: Yes, it's up there on Hamilton [Street]. It was actually George Street. [Editor's note: Mr. Cook is referring to what is now the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum and Library, located on the corner of George and Hamilton Streets. The college library was located at this site until Alexander Library was constructed in 1956 on College Avenue, near Richardson Avenue.]

KP: How many students lived in the dormitories?

JC: Well, let's see, living in the school, I would say there were, maybe, fifty, but, we had four dormitory houses called Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, and, on some occasions, the Alpha House wasn't even occupied. It was just empty, but, when I was a student there, my father was in the Beta House, and they had other teachers living in the Gamma and Delta. … During my time, I've lived in each one, Alpha, Beta, Gamma; I never lived in the Delta House, though. … There was a large, white house on … that's Huntington Street next to it, isn't it, I think? and that was where the headmaster lived. [Of] course, all of those dormitories are since [torn] down, and even the headmaster's house is down, now, but, after Kelly left, in about 1934, … well, my father was acting headmaster for the balance of that year, but, then, the following year, a new headmaster came. His name was (Boocock?). I was no longer a student at that time, but, he and his wife lived in the Beta House. They didn't live in the headmaster's house anymore. … I'm rusty in trying to remember whatever happened to that house, whether people lived in it or what. I don't know, but, we had some nice times there. We had to live up to certain standards. I'll never forget, one time, in my senior year, when my brother was still there, a bunch of us were downtown on a Saturday evening. We'd gone to the movies or something like. We didn't all go together, but, somehow or other, we congregated late in the evening. We had to be back to the dormitory to check in by eleven o'clock or you'd get demerits, if you were late, one demerit for five minutes, two demerits for ten minutes, and so forth, and right on up the line, but, the seven of us met up with three friends who lived in town, who had a car. A car, that was something in those days, you know, 1934, '33, rather. So, we were riding around in the car, ten of us, … in and around the car, some of them riding on the running board and so forth, hanging onto the
hood. … Something I found [out] afterwards, the Parker Home was up there, you know, on Easton Avenue, and it was there at that time, they had elderly people there, and someone else, I know now who it was, it was also a prep school student, but, a town boy, lived over in Highland Park, he and [some] friends of his were riding around town, whooping it up and making a lot of noise. So, the Parker Home called the police, and the police came, and they found us, a lot of people in one car. We were not making any noise, but, … [since we had] so many people in one car, [they] picked us up and took us down to the police station, got our names and everything. We got back to the prep school ten minutes late. It was ten minutes after eleven when we got there. We each got two marks, the seven of us did. If you get three marks, you're "on bounds" the following weekend. No one of the seven of us got another mark that week, though, but, my father went down and talked to the police chief, or somebody, in the courthouse about it. We had to go to court on Monday or Tuesday. So, we went down on that day, and we got a good reprimand from the judge, but, … he let us off. Actually, we hadn't really done anything, except [have] ten people ride in one car, but, at that point, I didn't know what the cause of it was. I learned, a few weeks later, what had actually happened. So, that was just one of the experiences that we had.

KP: What would you do for fun as a child and a teenager, particularly while you were at Rutgers Prep?

JC: For fun, as a student you mean?

KP: Yes.

JC: … I played a lot of tennis and went swimming in the summer. Now, they had just at that time built the new gymnasium and … I spent the summers here, for many years, even before that, starting in 1931. We spent the summers down here, because my father was busy recruiting students, and, after the gymnasium was built, my brother and I would go to the gymnasium, swimming, every afternoon, practically, and I played tennis with a lot of friends around here, … up in the Buccleuch Park. They had courts there and I played. They had courts by the gymnasium and I had a number of friends around town that we met up with. … Well, one of the pleasures that I had, you asked about this one, this was in the mid-30s, one time, Pete Krauszer and I got in a little kayak that he had and we paddled our way up the Erie Canal, [the Delaware and Raritan Canal] I don't know how far up, way past Bound Brook, went up and spent the night in a cornfield up there, alongside the canal, and it wasn't very comfortable, sleeping in the cornfield, and the mosquitoes were pretty bad. We couldn't rest, so, we finally got up and tried to look at our wristwatch and we didn't have a flashlight or anything. So, we … look at our wristwatch, … not wristwatch, in those days, pocket watch, it was, … with the light of the moon to see what it was. It was either two-thirty or ten minutes after six. We weren't exactly sure which one it was, turned out [that] it was two-thirty, and we decided, "Well, what will we do? We'll just sit here and look east until we see the sun come up, and then, we're going to get in the kayak and row back again." So, we sat there and sat there for the longest time. Finally, I got tired and I stood up, and stretched, and turned around, and faced right into the sun, behind us. You know, that canal takes quite a bend as it goes around up there and we hadn't realized it. So, we were looking in the wrong direction, but, that was one of the experiences. Pete and I, also, later on, he had a driver's license, he got his father's car, and we drove down to Point Pleasant
and went swimming on the beach there. Anybody could walk in at that time and go swimming. Then, we went down into the area which is now, I guess, [the] Ocean Beach area, with all of the cottages, but, it was just marshlands and plenty of mosquitoes. We tried to sleep on the beach there, but, the mosquitoes were terrible, and we finally got up about two o'clock in the morning, got back in the car, and drove up to Point Pleasant, went in swimming again on the beach at about three or four o'clock, then, finally, went back to the car, and slept in the car 'til daybreak, and, finally, came home again, a bunch of wild experiences like that, I'll tell you.

KP: Did you go to the movies often?

JC: While I was a student in college, I went too often, yes, but, they had double features in those days, too, and, on one occasion, the worst occasion of all, my roommate from college and I saw four movies in one day. We saw a double feature in the afternoon, in one of the theaters, the Rivoli, perhaps. Then, we went to the Opera House for a single feature at seven o'clock in the evening. Walking back to the dormitory, we passed the Strand Theater, and they had a feature in there, so, we stopped in and saw that one at nine o'clock, but, as a college student, we spent an awful lot of time walking, from the dormitories, we lived in the quadrangle, … over to NJC campus to a girlfriend's and pick up [our] dates, then, walk them back down to the center of town, go to a movie or something like that, walk them back to the campus, then, walk back to our campus. So, we did a lot of walking. That was good for us. You do that these days?

RB: Sometimes, it is not the best idea to walk from campus-to-campus. [laughter] Do any movies stand out as your favorites?

JC: Well, yes. I remember, for example, Mr. Deeds Goes to Town. Do you remember that one? I've seen it on TV more recently and another [one], I just happen to remember the name of it, I think it was George Brent and somebody named Beverly Something-or-Other, [Beverly Roberts], God's Country and the Woman. I saw another picture with Lionel Barrymore and some kid, I can't remember the name of it now, but, I saw an awful lot of movies, and one thing I did, for a couple of years, I would start in January and keep a diary. My aunt was always after us to keep diaries, but, my diary amounted to what movies I saw that day and so forth, a few other experiences that are in there. I still have them. I've looked back at them, found some rather interesting recollections of things that took place, but, I did keep a record, and, generally, it'd run up to about the end of February, and I'd count up, at the end of February, and found that I'd seen about sixty movies already, and then, I'd get lazy and stop keeping the diary, but, a couple of times, I've tried to keep a diary since then, but, it always fizzled out, until, when I retired, I said, "I'm going to start keeping a diary," and that was, let's see, about sixteen years ago. I've kept one ever since, every day.

KP: Did you ever see All Quiet on the Western Front?

JC: I'm sure that I saw it when it came out. I've seen it on TV since then, the one with Lou Ayres, yes. … Oh, another movie, I remember The Ten Commandments … and we saw Doug Fairbanks, Sr., in the Black Pirate. I remember that one.

KP: You can probably remember the transition from silent movies to talkies.
JC: Yes, right.

KP: How strange was it to hear the actors speak?

JC: It was, … to me, a little impressive, at first, to be able to hear the sound on there and I remember a comic strip, one time, I read about Jimmie Dugan, Reg'lar Fellers. … Someone said, "My uncle takes me to the movies. We go to the talkies now," and, well, a lot of people resented the talkies. "Well, doesn't your uncle resent the talkies?" "Oh, my uncle doesn't mind; he's deaf." [laughter] … We saw Lon Chaney, saw him in some movies. I saw him in the Hunchback of Notre Dame. I saw him in the Phantom of the Opera.

RB: You mentioned your roommate before; were you talking about William Chichester?

JC: Yes, right.

RB: How long were you roommates for?

JC: For three years, but, then, in the fourth year, his brother moved into town and had an apartment, and Willie lived with his brother, and I got a room in a house only a block away from there. Then, I stayed friends with him for many years. In fact, he was the best man at my wedding, I was best man at his wedding, but, then, he moved out to Okalahoma, … after the war, … moved out in about 1948, I guess. He moved out there and I saw him, face-to-face, only once since then. He was passing through New York in about 1957. … I think he'd been upstate. He was working in the Pentagon building. He stayed in the military after the [war]. He was called back in during the Korean War and, after that, he just never got out. He stayed in and he … had been up home for some personal business. He was on his way back to Washington. He stopped in New York City. He gave me a call, in my office, and asked if I could meet him. So, we met up in Penn Station for an hour or so and chatted a little and I've never seen him since then. I've corresponded with him, sporadically, for many years. I talked with him by phone, one time, when I was out, on business, in California. My brother-in-law lived there and he had talked with Willie on the phone a couple of times. So, he called him on the phone, and I chatted with Bill on the phone at that time, but, then, after I retired, I started doing a lot of letter writing, and Bill was one of the guys I wrote to quite regularly. I call him Bill now; he was Willie all the time that I knew him, but, his wife called him Bill, so, I shifted to Bill, and I corresponded with him regularly. … He just died about a year ago. In fact, I got a letter from his widow last June. I saw the return address on the letter, Lois Chichester. I said, "I'll bet that's bad news." … I opened it up, and she said he passed away on the 15th of May, but, we wrote letters back and forth. In fact, I guess I was about the only fellow who really stayed in close contact with him. … I don't know, did I give you any information on him or not? but, he was retired from the military in 1960 on one hundred percent disability, and he was housebound ever since then, but, … he was an avid reader and letter writer, and he used to write to the editor of the newspaper, and he'd read the newspapers, and he would send me clippings of various things, and he loved to get the letters that I would write to him, but, then, his eyesight began failing, and I had to send my letters to him, when I'd print them out, I'd print it on my computer, write it on the computer and print it out, I had to do it doubled-spaced. Otherwise, he couldn't read it. … So, he got a lot
of letters from me, I got a lot of letters from him. His wife wrote to me and told me that I was
the most faithful one that had stayed in contact with him. So, I stayed in contact with a number
of different people by letter, many of them 'til the end. Do you know the name Dr. McGinn,
used to teach English here at the college? … He was a teacher in the prep school when I was a
student there. He taught me English, then, he transferred to the college in about 1936, and he
taught there until he retired, and I can't, offhand, now, tell you what date that was, but, let's see,
… he was born around 1905 or so, so, he retired, maybe, in 1970 or something like that. Then,
he went to teach down in Georgian Court College, and a couple of other teachers, one teacher, …
Emmanuel Salas, who taught Spanish over at NJC, was all teaching at Georgian Court College,
and another fellow, Grove, (Marmaduke Grove?), was a teacher there. So, he was friendly with
them, and these other two were residents where I lived, in Applewood, and they're both dead
now. They both died about seven or eight years ago, and, when they died. Doc McGinn came up
to the funeral home, to visitation hours, and I saw him there. I'd also seen him, on occasion, at
the prep school, and, in fact, I went back to one reunion, they'd called a bunch of people together
around 1985 for some gathering to sponsor some alumni activity, I met some people, and I spoke
with them, some, I'd known before, some, I hadn't seen before, and this one fellow didn't look
too familiar, and I said, "And what class are you from?" and he turned around, looked at me, and
he said, "Why, John Cook." When he spoke, instantly, I recognized Doc McGinn, but, what
brought the subject up in my mind is, one of my classmates was Bob Howard, and I
corresponded with him regularly, and he came up and saw me a couple of times. I saw him
down in Florida once, but, then, … he wrote to me, and he suffered a stroke, and I corresponded
with him after that, and then, his daughter wrote to me that her father had had another bad stroke,
and he couldn't do anything at all for himself. He could only have letters read to him. Would I
please write letters and get his classmates to write letters? So, I recruited all his classmates and
one of them was his teacher, Doc McGinn. So, McGinn also wrote him letters, until he died. In
fact, I'd … send him a letter, a full-blown letter, at least once a month, and then, every week. I'd
just send a little card, "Thinking of you," or something like that. One day, I got a telephone call
and it was from his daughter in Florida. She said, "I want to tell you, my father passed away
yesterday." I said, "Oh, gee, I just … put a card in the mail to him just yesterday." … "You
know," she said, "We just got it, but, he'd passed away," but, then, later on, I got word from
friends of Doc McGinn. He had to quit teaching, oh, about five years ago or so. His health was
bad and he moved down to Florida to be near his son. Then, I got word that he was in very bad
shape and going. So, again, I wrote to my classmates, saying, "Please, write letters to Doc
McGinn." So, I wrote to him, and then, he went that same way as well. Another person I was
very fond of, a fellow who was the president of our company, Metropolitan Life, he retired in
1972, I guess, and I thought very highly of him, and he lived in Madison. I was living in
Morristown, after I retired, and … [I] found out that he'd had a stroke, and he was in the hospital
in Morristown, so, I went over and visited him in the hospital, and, as I walked in, he said,
"There comes a familiar face," and I shook hands with him, had a nice chat with him, and I didn't
see him again until about … four to five years ago, but, I corresponded with him regularly. He
moved up to Connecticut, to a nursing home, and he deteriorated, sadly. He was confined to a
wheelchair for the rest of his life, but, I wrote to him regularly. Finally, in 1993, I got a chance
to go up through Connecticut, and stopped in, and visited with him, and had … about a half-an-
hour, very pleasant visit with him. Then, I kept on writing to him, but, then, I got a little careless
with my writing. One time, I wrote, I said, "Gee, I just found out [that] it's been four months
since the last time I wrote you a letter." Then, I perked it up a little bit, so [that] I'd get one out
about every couple of months. Then, I got a letter from his daughter saying [that] she was so appreciative of those letters, because it was the one thing that he'd look forward to, when she could read a letter to him, a letter that I'd written. So, after that, I wrote a letter every couple of weeks, but, he just died, oh, last fall sometime. ... I was lucky that I saw his obituary in the newspaper on a Monday morning. He'd died the prior Friday. They were having the services Monday afternoon in Madison and I read it in the newspaper Monday morning. I was able to get up there, Monday afternoon, for the services, but, what disappointed me was, I was the only person from Metropolitan Life there, [he was] past president and wound up vice-chairman of the board.

KP: No one could make it.

JC: Well, ... no one was there. Maybe they didn't have time and didn't know, but, I spoke to one of the people, shortly after that, in the company and said I was disappointed at that, and what she said to me was that, "Well, it's a different ballgame, nowadays. Retirees and veterans don't count in the company anymore. It's only the young blood." So, it wasn't that way when I was there. They always used to refer to it, did you ever hear the expression, "Mother Met?" 'cause the industry talked about "Mother Met," Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. They mothered all their employees, and it was that way, but, it's changed. I mean, it's changed in industry in general, I guess. ...

KP: However, you had the sense that the company was looking out for you.

JC: Oh, yes, indeed. Yes, in fact, in those days, ... well, for one thing, when I went to the company, one of their boasts was, "We have never fired an employee for lack of work," and they didn't expect that they ever would, and we never did that until, it was in about the, oh, let's see, I'd say it was in the late 1970s or 1980, before they ever reached a point where they had to take that kind of an action, and, I remember, the part that hurt me was that I worked in the actuarial department, and I was the first one in the actuarial department who had to fire employees, ... I wound up firing three, because of lack of work. We came up with a notice in April; if they couldn't find placement in some other part of the company by October, there were about five or six on this list, they'd all be gone, a particular function, we were going to discontinue it, and they had six months notice on this. ... Then, of those, one of them took voluntary retirement before the six months were up. In fact, these were all, not ancient people, but, they were people who had worked as young girls in the company, got married, raised a family, and then, came back as adult employees when their children grew up, and networked in the company, after the children got out. So, they were all in their sixties or so, and two of them did get placement in another part of the company, but, I had three of them left, and, on the day that was to be their last day, it hadn't really hit them hard until that day, and they came into my office at about nine-thirty, wanted to see me. I had a meeting at ten o'clock, not of my own, but, a meeting of about ten other people, that I was to be one of ten, at ten o'clock. So, I said, "Well, I can talk with you for a half-hour, but, I have to go at ten o'clock," but, they started talking with me about the hardship, and the emotional aspect of it, and so forth, and so forth. So, I just missed my meeting. I stayed and talked with them for an hour-and-a-half and tried to give them my side of it and the company's side of it. They were kind of bitter at the moment, a little unhappy, but, that was their last day, but, we had what we called "veterans' luncheons," where people would come back, once
a year, for a veterans' luncheon. If you had more than twenty years service, you'd get together for this luncheon with all the other people. When they came back again, every one of them said, "You know, I couldn't have been happier. Since I retired, everything's been great." ... So, it worked out.

KP: They had been with the company for over twenty years.

JC: Yes.

KP: Going back to your childhood, obviously, you were very young during Prohibition, but, do you have any memories of or did you know of any local speakeasies?

JC: ... Yes, I knew of them, I'd heard of them, and I personally was never in one. For one thing, I didn't drink until, oh, I was a senior in college, I guess, before I ever had beer. You're not supposed to have it, because I was only nineteen then, but, the beer was legalized, I guess, in 1933 sometime, and, at that point, I was only fourteen years old and [had] no thought of myself drinking, but, ... a sister and a brother, who were in New Brunswick, I know that both of them had been in speakeasies, and my sister even told me the name of the place, somewhere down close to the river, not at Burnett Street, but, down in that area. It was a famous place, apparently. It had a name, and she'd speak about this place, and others that I know of, like, I knew people over in the company who had been working there, started working there in the 1920s, they knew of speakeasies in New York City, but, I personally never went to one.

KP: You do not remember any specific locations.

JC: Well, my sister told me where it was, and I knew when she told me, but, this is sixty years ago. ... I just know it's down in that area below George Street, toward the river someplace. ... Gee, [there was] something else I was going to mention about it, but, that escapes me right now.

RB: When you went to the taverns as a senior, where did you go?

JC: ... There was a place called the Spinning Wheel and there was another place called Al's Tavern. I don't know if it's still there. Well, this is what I was going to mention. There was a drugstore, called (Kaufman's?) Drug Store, on Mine Street and Easton Avenue, and, I think, right across the street from it was Al's Tavern, and, I remember, I went in Al's Tavern with my older brother, who was, at that point, well, let's see, I was nineteen, he was about twenty-three, and we went in for a beer, and the bartender served a beer to my brother, the two of us were standing there together, ... and I asked for a beer, and he said, "Well, I don't know whether you're twenty-one. You don't look twenty-one," and ... I told him, "Well, I am," and he turns to my brother, standing next to me, he says, "Do you think this fellow looks like twenty-one?" My brother, all he said was, "Well, I ought to know; I'm his brother." "Oh, well, in that case," so, he gave me the beer. [laughter] Then, we went out to places, out in, I don't whether it's in Plainfield, ... a place called the (Cayenne?) Château, went dancing and drinking out there. We never drank extensively, to excess. I mean, two beers, I think, was probably more than I would handle.

KP: How did the Great Depression affect your family?
JC: Oh, we were very lucky on that.

KP: It sounds as though your father was always employed.

JC: Yes, he had good, steady employment there, and … it affected an awful lot of people, and I personally never really suffered from it, and, because of that, I never really appreciated it as much as those who did experience hardship from it. … I was lucky that I had a place to live, I had clothing, I had food on the table, and I had money for recreation. … One of the things that I have looked back on and think it was a mistake of my youth, … well, of course, I was kind of young when I was down here, I was thirteen, fourteen years old, then, finally, in college, I was in my teens, … upper teens, but, I never worked during the summer, never got employment during the summer. One thing, I guess, my parents may have thought is that a lot of people needed the employment to get by and why should I deprive somebody else of a job? That may have been a reason, I don't know, but, I've looked back, and I've often felt, "Maybe I would have been better off if I had worked during the summer," but, I played during the summer.

KP: What did you do during the summers?

JC: Oh, I had no problem taking care of [that]. Well, one thing, I read extensively and I would play tennis. I played tennis twice a day, and I'd go swimming in the gymnasium pool, and then, I'd pal around with, … not classmates, because my closest friends weren't classmates in those days, they were the ones that I'd met while I'd been in the grade school, and I played around with them, and, like I say, reading. You know where the town library is, out on Livingston Avenue? and the dormitories were up there near Huntington Street, and it's a fairly long walk down to that library, but, I'd go down there in the mornings sometimes, take out a couple of books from the library, take them back to the house, and, by late afternoon, I'd take one of them back. You were limited to two books out of the library at one time. [I would] go back to the library in the late afternoon and exchange it for another one. Then, there was a used magazine store that was down on George Street, just below the railroad track. Now, in those days, used magazines were used magazines of stories. They weren't picture magazines, photo magazines, and there was one magazine in particular my brother and I used to get, (Billy West?), Wild West Stories. We'd get six of them for a quarter. You'd buy those, we'd buy six for a quarter, take them home, my brother'd take three, and I'd take three, and we'd read them and exchange them, then, read the exchanged books. Then, you'd take them back to the store and you could turn them back in again for ten cents and buy another set. So, we bought a lot of used magazines, a lot of library books. I read every book Carolyn Wells … ever wrote on murder mysteries and a lot of other mystery story authors, Earl Derr Biggers, oh, Edgar Rice Burroughs, read everything I could get my hands on from him, and … boys books, like, The Boy Allies, and Tom Swift, and those books, never read The Bobbsey Twins, though. My sister did, but, I didn't.

KP: Were you ever a Boy Scout?

JC: No, because, up there in Massachusetts, we didn't have any. I knew very little about Boy Scouts. My sister was a Girl Scout for a year or so, here in New Brunswick, but, I was never a member of anything. My two sons were Cub Scouts, but, they never went into Boy Scouting.
KP: What did your parents think of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal?

JC: My mother and father were both rabid Republicans, and they were opposed to Roosevelt and said a lot of things about him that criticized a number of his programs, and, naturally, I can't help but be influenced by [the] things that I've heard from them. I think I've put my own mind to analyzing it since that time, though, and … I'm still, let's say, "anti-Roosevelt," I suppose, because I'm Republican. I voted for a Democrat for president, I think, only three times and, one of the times, I regretted it afterwards. I voted for Johnson, because I was afraid that, what's his name out there?

KP: Barry Goldwater.

JC: Goldwater, would get us into war. …

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

JC: … But, I didn't want Johnson to think he had a mandate to do whatever he wanted to. Then, … on the second term of Bush, I voted for him his first term, but, the second term, I voted for Clinton, because I'd had twelve years of Reaganism, and I didn't want another four years of it. So, I voted for Clinton that time and, I surprised myself, I voted against Bob Dole, because I was a little annoyed with Dole/Gingrich. So, I voted for Clinton again.

KP: However, in many ways, you are a traditional Republican.

JC: Yes, right.

KP: Growing up, what kind of career did you envision for yourself? Did you want to become a teacher, like your father?

JC: As I was young, I didn't give too much thought to it. … I just sort of assumed, "Well, I guess I'll become a teacher," and never considered much about it and didn't even take any action until my sophomore year. After my sophomore year, my father spoke with me and said, "Well, what are you going to do?" I was registered Liberal Arts at that time, majoring in mathematics, and … he said, "Are you going to be a teacher?" I said, "Well, yes, I guess I will," and he said, "Well, you'd better do something about it." So, that fall, I went back and I changed my registration to the School of Education, majoring in education and graduated that way, but, I never taught in a public school. I never needed a teacher's certificate, after that one year down in Florida, getting seventy-five dollars a month, teaching school down there, then, getting a chance to work at Metropolitan Life for thirty dollars a week. In fact, my brother was already there. … Well, another part of my history, … I was in the ROTC in my last two years and graduated, would have had a commission, but, I was only twenty years old at the time. So, I didn't get the commission and didn't actually get it until, I had to be twenty-one, … 1940, but, while I was down there in [the] Florida Military Academy, I got enamored with the military again, and I was young enough, then, still, to enter West Point, and I felt [that] I wanted to go to West Point. So, I had family connections that could get me an appointment, but, by that time, it was around, oh,
late fall of 1938, ... the people that my uncle knew said, "Sure, I'd be glad to give him an appointment, next year, but, I've already given up my appointments for this year." The next year, I was too old and I couldn't get in. So, those other friends told me, "Well, if you want to get into the Coast Guard, I can get you into that," but, I didn't want anything to do with the Coast Guard. Then, my brother, who was working at Metropolitan, said, "If you want a change, why don't you try actuarial work at Metropolitan?" So, I came up at Christmastime, for vacation, stopped in at Metropolitan Life, filed an application. They said they would hire me and I said, "Well, okay, but, I've got a contract until June, but, I think I can break the contract at the end of the semester." They said, "No, don't break it; go finish your year, and then, come back." So, I went, and I finished the year, then, came back in the summer of '39 and started working at Metropolitan, and I stayed there ever since. ... Metropolitan, also, when I first came back to work, they gave me a physical exam, and I failed the physical exam, ... but, my aunt's doctor examined me, and he wrote to the company, said, "I suggest that you give him another try, give him another exam." I went back, and then, they passed me the next time, and I worked there ever since, but, the next thing that happened was, I finally got my commission in 1940, when the draft started. When I was called up for active duty, though, they gave me a medical discharge. ...

KP: You were called up in 1940.

JC: No, not until 1942. I was called up in '42.

KP: After Pearl Harbor was attacked.

JC: Yes. The war started there in December of '41. They called me up in March of '42, but, gave me a medical discharge. Then, I had to register for the draft, and, in January of '43, the Army said [that] they weren't concerned about my health, so, they took me in, and that was the saddest part. ... If I'd never been in the ROTC, or if I'd kept my mouth shut when I got in the Army and hadn't told them I'd been in ROTC, I would have been a lot better, because I went into this tank outfit, and, actually, I didn't belong. I was an outsider, because everybody there were mechanics, and truck drivers, and things like that, and I didn't fit in with the social style of the people there and with the mechanical skills and so forth, but, in addition to that, the outfit just kept me [doing busywork]; all I got was KP and latrine duty for the first year, because, [they said], "Well, you don't belong here." See, we filed an application for reinstatement of the commission. That started in about March of 1943 and lasted for two years, always bouncing back between our outfit and the Pentagon, until, finally, the report came back, "Well, it's more than five years since he graduated from college, and he hasn't had any military experience, so, the application is void," and, at that time, I didn't want it reinstated, anyhow, but, they kept me there, just as what you call an "overage," the overage in the assignment, and grade, and so forth, just hanging on until things would come through, and I just did odd jobs, until the end of a year, and then, they shipped us overseas. ... Once you got overseas, everybody stayed right where you were; you don't do anything different. ... Actually, I'm glad of that, though, because, ... my first wife, she always said, "Whatever happened, it was all for the best," because I came back in one piece, and, when it was all over, ... at the end of it, in 1945, I just got discharged in November '45, and, when I came home, I said, "I don't care about the past experiences or whatever I might have missed out on; I'm glad the way it finally turned out." ... One of the things [was] that I had been in C Company, which was a line company, initially, but, in
November of 1943, I didn't like the idea of doing nothing at all, and I got ahold of the battalion personnel officer, "Can't I get an assignment to do something?" So, he said, "Well, we can use another person in the personnel department, in the service company." So, I transferred there. The fellow who took my job in C Company was killed the first week we were in France. So, it could have been me. …

KP: Going back to your days at Rutgers, you were in ROTC for the mandatory first two years.

JC: Yes.

KP: Why did you decide to enlist in the advanced course?

JC: Well, for two reasons, because I believed that somebody should prepare … in case there's any need for an army. Of course, we had things, like, Hitler was making noise at that time. Now, this was only in 1936 when I signed up for the advanced course, and he didn't really get too troublesome until about 1938, but, it wasn't that I was concerned about Hitler specifically, but, just [that] the country should have a military. Now, another thing, I can't ignore this, when you got in the ROTC, you got paid, too. I think it was something like twenty-one cents a day, or twenty-five cents a day, or something like that. … but, I also figured, "Well, suppose anything happen, I'd just like to be an officer instead of an enlisted man." So, I signed up.

KP: Did you think, at the time, that the United States could be involved in a war?

JC: At the time I signed up, no. I didn't think it was imminent.

KP: When did you begin to feel that a war was likely?

JC: Well, 1938, I guess, was the first time I had any serious concern about it.

KP: During the Munich Crisis?

JC: Yes, and going into Austria.

KP: Were there any pacifists at Rutgers? Were there any peace rallies in the 1930s?

JC: Yes, yes. I don't remember them by name, but, I remember, they had a big rally one day, and it was the VFW, the Veterans of Future Wars, and everybody cut class this day. So, I cut class that day, too, so [that] I didn't have to go, [laughter] and it turns out that the class I didn't go to was a chemistry lab class, and, … in the first semester of chemistry, I got a "1" as my grade. The second semester, … the grade came out and I got a "7." So, I go check, "What's this?" "Well, you missed this one chemistry lab and, until you make that up," "7" meant incomplete. I don't know what the numbers mean today, "But, until you make this up, you've got a '7.'" Well, … I couldn't make it up during the summer, I don't know what would have happened, but, then, I got word, before the fall semester started, [that] they had relented, and they forgave that omission, and I got my grade. I don't remember what grade they gave me, but, the … first term,
I was a "1," exempt from the final examination. … What grade I got in the second semester, I don't know, but, I'd been doing pretty well in chemistry.

KP: Do you remember anything about the Veterans of Future Wars?

JC: Just that they had that big rally that one day. Really, I don't remember much more about it, either. I know, in one of my history classes, I had an assignment to write a paper on Communism. … I had to go to the library to get things and it went on … the record as taking out certain books on Communism. Whether it was because of that or not, I don't know, but, at one point, I got a letter in the mail inviting me to a Communist rally down in the, oh, … the athletic building, near the State Theater.

KP: The YMCA.

JC: Yes, the YMCA Building, yes, it was down there, … but, I happened to be up in Massachusetts at the time of that, and I couldn't go. I might have attended, if I had been here, and maybe I might have gotten myself into trouble, I don't know, but, I had no sympathy with Communism, but, … [I might have thought], "What the heck? Go and see what it's all about," but, apart from that letter that I got from them, … I never had any contact with Communism, either.

KP: You mentioned that Professor Morris was your favorite professor.

JC: Yes, yes, indeed.

KP: What do you remember about him?

JC: Well, he was an excellent teacher, that's the first thing I remember about him, and … another thing I remember about him, he also taught my father when my father was a student here, and my father'd told me stories about him. One of the stories [was] that his name was Richard Morris, but, colloquially, they referred to him as Dickie Morris, and my father told me that, one time, he was standing up in the math building, which used to be, in those days, right across the way here, second floor, and it was the first day of classes in the fall, and he was out in the hallway, in case there were any stray freshman … coming along, not knowing where the classroom was. Sure enough, some freshman came bounding up the steps and saw him standing there, and he says, "Hey, can you tell me where I can find Dickie Morris?" and he says, "My boy, you have found me, but, call me Richard," [laughter] and he had another favorite expression. If you showed up late for class, you'd walk in the class and [he would say], "Here comes the late Mr. Cook," things of that nature. … He'd ask you some question about a mathematical theorem and, if you made a guess and you got it wrong, and then, you tried it again and you got it wrong again, he'd say, "The first time you hit him, you missed him. The second time you fired, you hit him right where you missed him the first time." … He taught some good classes, and I remember one class that I wanted in my junior year, signed up for a course on the theory of numbers, but, there weren't very many math students in our class. In fact, in our freshman year, we started out [with] about four hundred students and we started in Kirkpatrick Chapel. Then, they split us up; Ag students go here, and engineers go there, and various things go here, there,
and everywhere else. Then, all the liberal arts stayed there in ... Kirkpatrick. "Now, those who are majoring in English, go here. Those who are majoring in languages, go there," and so on. Finally, "All of those who are majoring in mathematics, stay in Kirkpatrick." So, by the time they got through, myself and Abe Gelfond, along with Dickie Morris, were the only three left in Kirkpatrick Chapel; we were the only two [students]. Then, in my junior year, I signed up for a course in theory of numbers, but, there were only three students who showed up for the course, and they decided they couldn't afford to give the ... [class] for only three students, but, luckily, I was able to get it in my senior year. It wasn't Morris at that time, it was Stark. Professor Stark gave it. I had him. I had Stark for a couple of other courses. I had a fellow named Bunion for a course or two, but, I also had Morris for a couple. So, I enjoyed all the math courses that I had. ... I came back once, in 1945, after I got discharged from the Army, before I went back to work. I came back to the campus, just to come down for a day, see who was around, and, one thing, I talked with Dr. McGinn by telephone. I couldn't see him personally, but, I got him on the phone and spoke with him, and I stopped in, I talked with Professor Stark, and, in talking with him, I told him about how I'd worked at Metropolitan Life, and I said [that] I was very disappointed when I started to find out [that] so many of my co-workers had taken math courses that I had never had. I said, "We didn't have those courses when I was a student here," and he disagreed with me, violently. He said, "Oh, no, we had those courses." He dragged out the book and he showed it to me. He said, "These courses are offered," but, what he didn't say was, ... "They're offered, but, you sign up for the course, and you don't have enough students for it, and they cancel the course." So, I never had anything in statistics. ... I sadly regretted that. I've enjoyed statistics since, and, in fact, since I retired, I started teaching statistics up in the County College of Morris, but, I taught there for a few terms, and then, when I moved down to South Jersey, I had to quit. In fact, I still had a month to go on my contract, and I was commuting a hundred thirty miles, round trip, every day, leaving home at six o'clock in the morning to get up there, to complete the term, and I'm sorry I couldn't continue teaching it. I'd like to teach it today, if I could.

KP: Have you thought of approaching a county college in your local area?

JC: ... While my wife was still living, I didn't, but, when she passed away, then, I approached Brookdale College. For one thing, I'd seen a newspaper quotation from the president of the college, how ... he's very sad that they've had to cancel so many math courses, "Cause I can't get enough math teachers for the students. I can't give them the math courses." On top of that, I had a friend who was quite influential in that area, a classmate, actually, and he got an endorsement for me from the County Freeholder, and I filed a letter. ... As references, I gave the president of the Metropolitan Life [Company], I gave the pastor of my church, and I gave the head of the math department of the college where I had taught, filed an application and waited a long time. Finally, I wrote a follow-up letter and asked about it. "I haven't heard anything." ... I wrote it to the president. I got a letter back from the head of the math department, a very brief letter. He says, "We have all the teachers here that we need for our regular courses and the summer courses are always filled by the regular teachers teaching during the summer," end of case. So, I gave up. I haven't tried it again.

KP: At Rutgers, you were very active in athletics.
JC: Well, no, I wouldn't say that much. I was on the cross-country team and the track team for several years, but, the one sport that I was most active in was wrestling, and I got started in that by accident, because … my roommate and I would go out in the gym, and we'd tussle around on the wrestling mat while the wrestling team were there, but, we didn't participate at all, but, I was the right weight, and, one day, the wrestling coach, Coach (Cann?) was his name, got ahold of me and said, "We have a meet with Princeton coming up this weekend, and our 126-pound wrestler is injured, and he can't wrestle. Can you just come out and see me on the mat," and he says, "Not to try to win the match, … just go down there and lie on your stomach for ten minutes." … It's three points if you lose a decision, it's five points if you lose by a fall. So, he said, "Just lie on your stomach for ten minutes and save us the two points." So, I went down to Princeton and laid on my stomach; … well, actually, the first two minutes you're up, that's freestyle. Then, I managed to stay away from the guy for two minutes. Then, you get two periods of four minutes each, where you take turns, and I was on top of him at the start of the four-minute period, but, he soon got away from me, and then, I stayed away from him for the rest of that four minutes. Then, in his four minutes, I just laid flat on my stomach. … He tried, but, he couldn't get me turned over, so, I saved them the two points. Then, after that, … I went out for the team in earnest and wrestled in my junior and senior years. Our best coach, though, was Sheppard. He came in in my senior year and he really made the team. The wrestling team had only started in the early 1930s, and Cann himself was an excellent wrestler, he was an Olympic champion, amateur champion, but, he was not that good a coach for people who weren't already good wrestlers, but, then, we got this Coach Sheppard, and he taught you the fundamentals and drilled you hard. I'll never forget, one day, he put me on the mat there, … I was so tired and exhausted at the end of it, I went down to the locker room, I sat down on the bench, and I just cried, 'cause I couldn't keep myself from crying, but, he changed my style of wrestling that day, so that the last couple of matches that I had, in fact, the next match that I came back, I won by two falls, and then, after that, I was able to take the guy down and win outright. So, he really made the team. In fact, he wrote me up in the yearbook. He said, "The most improved wrestler on the team was John Cook."

KP: You were an accidental wrestler. You had not wrestled before.

JC: No, no. … In my sophomore year, I filled in to save them the extra two points, and then, for the last two years, I went out for the team. Now, they start in high school.

KP: Yes. Rich and my other students have examined issues of the Targum from the 1930s and 1940s. Most students were impressed by the social life at Rutgers in those days. You alluded to this earlier, going to Douglass, the great dances.

JC: … Well, they had, always, the Freshman Ball, the Soph Hop, the Junior Prom, and the Senior Ball, and they had a Military Ball, too, I think, and … I did not dance, though. In fact, the first one that I went to was in my sophomore year, and I went only because my brother had a girlfriend in Washington, who was a twin, and he wanted to invite her, but, she couldn't come without her sister, who had to have a date. So, guess who had the date? [laughter] … So, I had to borrow ten dollars from the student bank in order to take her to the Sophomore Hop, I think it was, or something like that.
KP: No one has mentioned the student bank. Who ran the student bank?

JC: It was students of economics. They ran it themselves.

KP: You could borrow money from the student bank.

JC: Yes, you could borrow money. … There was an interest rate attached to it. I don't remember what the rates were, but, it was reasonable, fairly reasonable, and it was for the economic experience of the students who ran the bank.

KP: You have been a part of the Rutgers community in New Brunswick for a long time.

JC: Yes.

KP: A lot has changed since the 1930s. What have been the most dramatic changes?

JC: The most dramatic change is that the college used to be on Queens Campus. Now, it's across the river. [Editor's note: Mr. Cook is referring to the expansion of the Busch and Livingston Campuses in Piscataway, on the opposite side of the Raritan River.]

KP: Could you describe New Brunswick and the world you remember? For example, there was a large Hungarian community in New Brunswick when you were a student.

JC: Well, I remember, … I believe it was called the Sixth Ward, where I lived. I lived in a couple of different places. I lived on the corner of Sicard and Senior Street. Then, I lived up on … Richardson Street, and I went to St. Peter's Church, and that was pretty much a Catholic area in there. Now, this is just a personal observation, but, my mother had four children, and my oldest brother was attending the prep school. My sister and two brothers and I attended the elementary school. The elementary [school] was co-ed, at that time. The prep school was not, and we were all in private schools, and all the Catholic mothers around there kind of shunned my mother, "You should be sending … your children to a Catholic school," and my mother was kind of upset about it. I remember that she went to see the pastor of the church there, … St. Peter's, and asked him about it, and … she explained the circumstances, "My husband teaches in the Rutgers Prep School, and we get free tuition for the students in the private school, and my neighbors tell me I should send them to the parochial school," and [she] said, "What am I going to do?" and his answer was, "What else would you do?" So, we stayed where we were. … As far as the atmosphere of the town, … well, it struck me, this is my impression of it, now, I thought of it as a very clean town, neat town, nice people, but, even in the 1960s, when my son was here as an undergraduate, I thought, especially over in the other end of town, it was kind of even a dangerous area. I don't know if it is today or not.

KP: What did you think in the 1930s?

JC: [In the] ’30s, I had no concern about anything. Now, in the 1930s, the slum area of the town was Burnett Street, but, … it wasn't a bad place, really. It was just not the nicest looking place. One of the things that [I remember is], we had vaudeville in those days, of course, and, at the
State Theater one time, one of the troupes passing through, a fellow and a girl, they're having a chat about various things, and she had some perfume, and she said, "Here, smell that perfume," and he said, "What's that?" and she said, "That's Evening in Paris," and he said, "Here, smell this." She said, "Whew, what's that?" and he said, "That's one night on Burnett Street." [laughter]

KP: There were a number of movie theaters in New Brunswick.

JC: Yes. There used to be one called the Bijou Theater, down there on George Street, and the Opera House, and the Strand, and the Rivoli, and the State, but, then, the Bijou was torn down, oh, around 1930. Then, they built the Albany, while I was a college student, I think, and then, the others were still here when I graduated from college. So, at that time, they had the Albany, the Rivoli, the Strand, the State, and the Opera House, but, then, one by one, [they closed]. The State, does that still function?

KP: Yes. It is mainly used for concerts and plays. Occasionally, they will show movies there. It has been refurbished nicely, if you have not been there.

JC: Well, I haven't been in it since 1963. I went in there at that time because it was my twenty-fifth college reunion. I came down for the celebration. We had a banquet afterwards over in the … hotel across the street from it, and, after I left there, I'd been drinking beer all day, I'd driven down from North Jersey, and I said to myself, "I'm in no condition to get in the car and drive home, now." So, I stopped into the State Theater and I saw Dr. No, [laughter] the first James Bond movie, and a couple of months later, my wife and I had to be up in Hartford. I had a meeting … [with] one of the insurance companies up in Hartford and she went up with me. So, to kill the time, she went to a movie house and guess what she saw? Dr. No. [laughter]

KP: You did not join a fraternity.

JC: No, but, … they tried to tell me that it's cheaper to join a fraternity, but, the fact of it is, it was not cheaper to join a fraternity. Although my father had us [in school] without tuition, he had four kids in college at the same time, and it was a drain on the finances, so, we couldn't go overboard on anything, and we lived in a dormitory. …

KP: You had free tuition to Rutgers.

JC: Yes, free tuition to Rutgers, to the prep school and to the University.

KP: Was that the main reason why you came to Rutgers, or was it simply …

JC: No, it was finances. We never considered anything else, because it was free. I don't know, if … I were a different student and didn't have free tuition, whether I would have considered going elsewhere. [Of] course, one thing would be, "Where would you live?" and you'd have to room [somewhere] if you went out to the University of Illinois or something like that, but, the expenses of living elsewhere [would be problematic]. As far as getting admission to another college, that was no problem. We never considered that as a problem, because, [in] the history
of the prep school, and I don't know how it is today, but, in the day when I was a student at the prep school, there wasn't a college in the country, except for Princeton, Harvard and Yale, that wouldn't accept a student on the recommendation of the prep school. If they were graduated from the prep school with a recommendation, you're in, but, those three wouldn't take anyone without college boards.

KP: Which three would not take you in?


KP: Otherwise, you could have gone to any other school.

JC: Any other school in the country, with a recommendation from the prep school, you could get in it.

KP: Without taking the college boards?

JC: Yes. I never took [the] college boards.

RB: You mentioned that you did not join a fraternity.

KP: No.

RB: Did you ever regret not joining a fraternity?

KP: No, not really. In fact, on two occasions, ... two fraternities pressured my roommate and myself to join, and even forced a pin on us, a pledge pin, ... which we took home for Christmas vacation, and then, took back at the end of Christmas and said, "No, we can't do it," but, I never regretted that I hadn't been a fraternity member. May I ask, are you?

RB: No. I am not sorry, either. [laughter]

JC: Yes.

KP: We usually ask about the role of fraternities on campus. It seems as though the fraternities really dominated the scene. Fraternity men were the Targum editors, the class officers, the members of the student council, and so on.

JC: ... Yes, that's right. That's true. Now, I was not active in undergraduate activities, and that's another thing, as I look back on it, I think it was a mistake on my part, but, again, ... even though they kept me back a year, I was still only, just turned, sixteen when I came to college, ... and I was just young, just living my life and going along. I'd go to classes to do what I had to and that's about all. So, if I had thought with a mature attitude, I would have participated in more activities. In fact, my classmates, now, I'm active, now, in ... not only the prep school, but, even in my college class, and the ones that I deal with were the ones who were more BMOC in my undergraduate days, and they're still active; some of them, who have since passed away, Jack
Anderson, you, perhaps, know of him, and one of our classmates had been … president of the Board of Governors or something like that, and others of them, Ridge Moon, he and his father before him, Jack Everett, "Spinny" [Walter] Burger.

KP: How useful was your ROTC training?

JC: By the time I got in the military, you mean, in the Army, in '43?

KP: Yes. You went through the basic course, which, I have been told, amounts to a lot of marching and reading manuals, but, you also went on to advanced ROTC.

JC: You had classroom instruction about, … like, combat, field activity and combat activity, "How would you line up your troops for this action?" always dealing with the troops of the size of a company or less. … One of the things that I remember that they told us, I remember the names of some of our instructors, Colonel [Major] Croonquist, his [son], … incidentally, is one of the alumni of the prep school that I deal with, occasionally, and … Major Kellogg, and Captain Kline, and so forth, but, one of the things that they told us when they'd start out with something [was], "How would you handle this?" and if you'd use anything that you would call strategy, but, strategy is for armies. Tactics is for a company. … I don't remember, now, the details of our classroom activity now, but, we had classes where we had problems assigned, but, everything, of course, was infantry, and, when I got in the military, I was in tanks. So, … my past experience served me in bad stead, rather than good stead, because everything I'd learned about marching had been changed. They didn't march the same way they did when I was a student. … Orders, for example, "Parade rest," was a particular order where you dropped one foot back, you turned your rifle, and held your hands like this, but, "Parade rest," became something like this. So, I was always doing the wrong thing, until I learned what the right thing was to do.

KP: Did you go to summer camp in Upstate New York?

JC: Yes, I did, up in Plattsburgh.

KP: How did you become interested in going to West Point? Had you always wanted to go to West Point?

JC: No, it's just that … I was teaching in a military academy in Florida. … It was military there, and then, I got to thinking, "Well, gee, I've got a commission in the Reserves already," but, also, I was then realizing that there were a lot of things I could do at the educational level. I could get additional education, beyond what I already had, and another thought I had, this is, maybe, a little selfish thought, too, I thought to myself, "Well, gee, here I am, I'd be one of the oldest, as an undergraduate at West Point, and … my wrestling experience was not too good, and, if I went to West Point and got on the wrestling team, I would have had a couple of years experience, and I'd have age on my side, and maybe I could do a lot better on the wrestling team." All of these things added up. So, I decided, I got the bug, and I wanted to go to West Point.

KP: How did you get the job at the prep school?
JC: You mean at the military academy?

KP: Yes.

JC: Through an agency. In those days, you registered with an agency, and you paid a fee, I think you paid five percent of your first year's salary, for getting the job, and what actually got me the job, though, was not so much the agency activity as it was that there was a family friend. … It was in St. Petersburg, Florida. Now, he taught in the junior college in St. Petersburg, Florida, and he was a personal friend of the military commandant at the school. He put in a good word for me and that's why they gave me the job. Now, I happened to be up at [the] University of Vermont in summer school at that time. I was taking a course in biology, and I went there for that, because I was to teach … biology, physics, and chemistry in this school, if I got the job, and I hadn't had biology since my freshman year in high school. So, I went to brush up on biology. While I was there, I got a telephone call that they offered me the position. So, over the phone, I accepted the position in Florida. I got back from the end of the summer session and my father told me that Dickie Morris, the math professor here, had contacted my father to say, "I've got a job teaching math for your son in Keyport High School this fall, if he can come and sign up for it," but, I'd already committed myself. Now, that's another thing; if I'd taken that job in Keyport, … really, as I started, I wanted to teach math at the university level, that's what I really wanted, and if I'd had an opportunity, really, to get into the academic teaching of it, and one of the things [was], in this military academy, I was teaching a subject I didn't want. I was teaching science, where I preferred math, and I had a student that was a thorn in my side, and he caused so much pain for me [that] I was kind of glad to get out of teaching when that year was over.

KP: Why was he such a pain?

JC: He was a troublemaker; … it's hard for me to identify what it was, but, I know I just suffered experiences while he was in my classes. [laughter]

KP: We all have one of those students.

JC: Yes. My other classes were not bad, but, … I had, I think, something like two physics and two chemistry classes. I wound up not teaching biology at all, but, just two physics and two chemistry classes, and the other three were okay, but, that one with him was a pain.

RB: You got married in-between your graduation and your induction into the service.

JC: Yes. I started working in Metropolitan in 1939. Then, in 1940, my college roommate lived in Montclair, New Jersey. I came over to visit him one day, on Saturday. I was going back to New York that afternoon. He said, "Oh, stay on over here and stay for the night, and I'll get you a date, and we'll go out together." I said, "No, I want to go back." Well, he twisted my arm and talked and I said, "All right." So, then, he started placing some calls and all the girls that he called already had a date that night. He said, "Gee, they've all got dates." … Then, he said, "Well, there's always Eddie's sister. I'll give her a call." So, he called Eddie's sister, and she didn't want to go, because she'd been in the city that day, she was kind of tired, but, she agreed to
go, and I went on that date, and I was sunk from the minute I saw her. Then, a year later, ... and that was in June of 1940, and then, September of '41, we got married, and, at that time, of course, the military was a threat, but, I had no concern, because, "If I get called in, at least I'll have an officer's salary, not a private's salary." It turned out [that] that wasn't the case, and then, the ... following July, we had our first son born, and so, when I got called into the Army, I had a wife and a child to support on a fifty dollar a month salary.

KP: You were a pre-Pearl Harbor father.

JC: Yes, but, I found out, ... we inquired about that, and the answer came back that anyone who got married after May of 1940 was not considered married, 'cause, in May of 1940, Roosevelt had declared a national emergency, so that if you got married after that date, how many kids you had didn't make any difference. You know, [General Lewis B.] Hershey, who was the head of the draft at that time, he boasted loud and long that no pre-Pearl Harbor fathers had been inducted, yet. So, my wife wrote to him and said, "How come my husband's in the Army?" She got an answer, that we weren't married. [laughter]

KP: This is out of sequence, but, you mentioned that you were interested in teaching on the university level. After you were discharged, did you consider going back to school on the GI Bill for a Masters or doctorate in mathematics?

JC: No, because I was then, already, working on the Society of Actuaries, which is somewhat related, similar, ... it's additional education, and it's direct financial reward, if you get your fellowship on it, and our family was increasing rapidly. So, we wound up with seven kids and I had to work. In fact, ... I took two breaks from my study for my fellowship. From 1947 to 1953, I concentrated on working instead of studying. Then, after that, I got my, what's called associateship, and then, I took some years off, until 1959, and, in 1959, I came home from work one day, and, twice a year, they'd have promotion announcements over at the company, I'd come home and say, "Well, they had promotions announced. Joe Blow just got promoted, and Jim Brown, John Smith," and so forth, and she said, "You know, every time that happens, for the next day or two, there's no living with you." She said, "I want you to buckle down and get your fellowship, get that passed." So, I said, "Okay." ... It was Columbus Day, October 12th, and I said, "Okay, next year, I'll start," and she said, "No, not next year. You start this year." So, I started, and I worked on it, and I got my fellowship, and then, I got my financial reward later on. By that time, my kids were mostly all out of college. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned that you believed there was a need for the United States to have a stronger Army in the 1930s.

JC: It isn't that I thought that it should be stronger; I think we had something or other like a 125,000 thousand ... [soldiers] at that time, something in that magnitude, and I wasn't concerned that that wasn't enough, but, I felt ... that we should maintain the military, and if nobody goes into advanced ROTC, where's it going to come from? So, that was one thought. There ... were really three thoughts. There was that one thought, the other thought about, "Well, if I should get into the military, I want to go in under the best conditions I can get," and the third was, in those days, twenty-five cents a day was a lot of money.
KP: What was your opinion on the 1940 draft, the peacetime draft, which was fairly unprecedented at the time?

JC: Yes. Well, when we started the draft, of course, the war was already on in Europe. It started in '39 and I just felt that it's necessary. …

KP: Since you came from a Republican household, how did you view Franklin Roosevelt's actions in 1940 and 1941, the peacetime draft, the Lend-Lease agreements, and so on?

JC: Let's say, I approved of the draft and I approved of the Lend-Lease. In fact, I think, … in my opinion, let's say, that there are some things that he did which maybe were illegal, or unconstitutional, or something or other, but, I think, in my opinion, it served a good purpose, and it was the proper thing to do, I think that it was necessary. … I have heard one story, you've probably heard the story, that, … at the time of Pearl Harbor, … Roosevelt, or they put the name to Roosevelt, or somebody, led us into Pearl Harbor deliberately, in order to arouse the public, and I find that hard to believe, but, it was a story that was not prevalent at the time. It came out much later.

KP: After the war.

JC: Yes. It started up long after that, and one of the things, of course, that did happen at that time, in fact, there's something in the newspapers recently about it, about the treatment of the Japanese on the West Coast, and, even recently, there was something about Japanese down in South America that were shipped up the United States. The interesting part about that is that I read a book recently called … *Snow Falling on Cedars*, which happens to feature the Japanese families who had been involved in this, and, in talking with our group, we have a literary group, once a month, they get someone to report on a book, and I mentioned that I'd read this book, and I'd be willing to report on it, in talking with the leader of the group. I think I'm supposed to do it at the end of next month, now. I said, "You know, it's a story about a murder trial, but, the book, really, is not about a murder trial. The book is about prejudice. It's about the treatment of the Japanese, and, also, the prejudice of the Japanese against the ones who imposed these [restrictions] on them, and other kinds of prejudice as well. It's just prejudice of an individual, because his girlfriend married somebody else, and things of that nature, but, it's a book about prejudice. The story happens to be a story of a murder trial, but, it's this Japanese business," and, in reporting [on] it, I told the leader of the group, I said, "When I report on it, I'm not expressing any personal opinion about the Japanese internment at all, … whether it's good, bad or indifferent. I'm not taking sides on that," but, for your information, … I'm sympathetic with the Japanese who experienced it, but, on the other hand, I don't think that it was a sinful thing to do. I think it was a step that was taken as a precaution. … Let's look at the other side of the coin; suppose it hadn't been done. Suppose [the] Japanese … had conspired and caused something in the West Coast similar to Pearl Harbor. Then, how would you feel about the fact that we didn't take the step? It's unfortunate that people suffered as a result of the war. A lot of people suffered as a result of the war. We lost a lot of men, killed in action, as a result of the war. We had a lot of people who survived the war, but, they suffered many inconveniences because of it, and it's just the price that they had to pay.
KP: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

JC: You mean the moment?

KP: Do you remember that day?

JC: Oh, yes, indeed, but, it was a Sunday, of course, and I was, at that time, studying for these actuarial examinations, and it was a Sunday afternoon. I sat at my desk, studying, and my wife was taking a nap that afternoon, while I sat there studying. Later on, I turned on the radio, and I heard the radio report of what had happened, and then, then and there, in fact, I sat down, and I wrote a little note, addressed to Roosevelt, FDR, … not intending to mail it, but, just putting thoughts on paper, about the circumstances and starting out saying, … let's see, in '36, I was not eligible to vote. In 1940, I'd voted against him. In 1936, I … wasn't eligible to vote, so, I didn't vote, but, I was opposed to him in 1936, but, I'd voted against him in '40, but, on the other hand, "We're faced with a national emergency," and so on, and so forth, and my wife was expecting a child at that time, and I said, "I'm ready to go and serve my country." I kept that locked up in my wallet for over a year. Then, when I went into the Army, in January of '43, I was cleaning out my wallet and my wife saw the note for the first time.

KP: Do you still have the note?

JC: Oh, no, I threw it away. In 1943, I threw it away.

KP: You had been called up in 1942 as a Reserve officer.

JC: Yes, that's right, and I was called up to go with the, I think it was the 76th Infantry, the New York Division. It went down to Africa. I had a friend of mine who went with that division, but, as I say, I failed the physical exam.

KP: Why did you fail, if you do not mind me asking?

JC: Kidneys, my kidneys. … I haven't had any serious trouble with that in all my life. … They were afraid I had nephritis. It's a kidney disease, but, that's something which, if it does hit you, I was then in my early twenties, and, if it did cause me any trouble, it probably wouldn't cause me any trouble until I was fifty years old anyhow, but, actually, here, I'm eighty years old, and I've never had any trouble with it, yet. So, if kidney disease gets me, well, then, [I guess the Army was right]. I've also got prostate cancer, but, the doctor tells me that I'll die of something else long before the prostate ever causes me any serious trouble.

KP: Your story is interesting because it documents the fact that the Army relaxed its standards as the war went on. In 1943, this was no longer a concern.

JC: Well, I don't think it was a problem with enlisted men in '42, either. It's just that the military didn't … want me as an officer. They'd take me as an enlisted man, but, not as an officer. Now, whether it's because it was higher pay for an officer or whether because an officer could become
incapacitated and couldn't lead his men, I don't know what it was, but, they didn't want me. …
When I was finally discharged on the 16th of November in 1945, they gave us a big pitch about
signing up in the Reserves, "It's a wonderful thing." I kept my mouth shut, and I didn't say a
word, but, if they'd forced me to say something, I would have said, "I wouldn't touch the
Reserves with a ten-foot pole." … I wanted no part of it. I'd had all I wanted of it.

KP: Were you disappointed that you had gone for advanced ROTC, received your commission,
and then, been rejected as an officer?

JC: Yes.

KP: This continues an interview with John H. Cook on April 23, 1998, with Kurt Piehler and …

RB: Rich Boniface.

JC: … I felt very disappointed at that, but, according to Army regulations, I could apply … to be
reinstated in my commission, and, initially, it bounced back and forth, for various reasons. [Of]
course, they kept failing me on the physical for the first six or eight months that I was down in
Texas. Now, … another part that I should explain about it is that I was drafted in January, went
out to Camp Upton, spent a couple of weeks there, then, they put us on a train. We rode [for]
three days, down to a place in Texas where the outfit was just organized, and … they'd convened
there, but, on the train, actually, the day before I got on the train, I got sick with a respiratory
infection, and I was very sick on the train. I almost died on the train, I think, but, I got down to
Texas. As soon as I got down there, I was put in the hospital for five weeks, and I spent my first
five weeks of basic training in the hospital, and, when I got out of the hospital, the first week that
I got out, … I got out on a Friday, and on a Monday, the battalion was to go on a three-day
march. So, the first sergeant said to the company commander, … "Well, now, Cook just got out
of the hospital. He can't go on that. We'll leave him behind. There's a rear guard for the
battalion area." The company commander says, "The hospital discharged him for full duty. He
goes on the march with everyone else." So, I went on the march. I did the first two days all
right. The third day, we marched all morning, and I got very tired at that, and we sat down for
lunch, and then, we marched in the afternoon, and we were going through the woods, and over
streams and brooks, and fallen trees and things, and I fell about three or four times, and, finally,
one time, I fell, and I got up, and I said, "If I fall one more time, I can't get up on my feet again.
I can't make it," but, I managed to hold out until we got back to the barracks, but, then, … the
point is, the basic training was all over, all of the assignments of the outfit had been completed,
and I never had any of the training … of any of the experiences there.

KP: You never really went through basic training.

JC: No, I did not have it. I had the march, the three-day march, at the end of it. …

KP: Were you ever given any rifle instruction?
JC: Well, we did that afterwards, ... like, I fired all the weapons. In fact, I was the best in the battalion on the Tommy gun. ... Well, we didn't have M-1s, but, I was the best on the M-1, at six hundred yards, up at Plattsburg. ... We used Tommy guns, pistols, and .30-caliber carbines. ... I did fire those, but, all the training, like, for truck driver training, for tank drivers, for machine gunners, for radio training, or anything like that, all of that examination testing and training, took place before I joined the outfit. All the assignments were filled. So, that's why I say, I was overage. I was just an extra man hanging on there and they didn't worry about me, because, "Well, we don't want this guy, anyhow. He's going to be transferred out when he gets his commission reinstated." ... I hoped that I would have gotten a chance to do something else, like, go to Officer's Candidate School, go to some other training program, but, in all of the time we were there, only three men ever got out of the outfit, 'cause the commander had a tight rein. He wouldn't let people go. ASTP came along, and they tested us on ASTP, and there were only six of us in the battalion who got, ... they had a cut off score of 115. Only six of us beat the cutoff score. My own score was 164. Another guy got 148. Three others got about around 120. Those three went to someplace in New Mexico, to an ASTP program; the others of us, ... we never did, and that was the end of it. My AGCT [Army General Classification Test] score was the highest score in the battalion, too, but, ... I never had an opportunity. Oh, I applied for meteorology school. That's another thing my brother was in. They put a notice on the board, "All those who want to apply for meteorology, go to battalion headquarters." So, I go to battalion headquarters, "I want to apply for this." "What is it?" "Meteorology." "Meteorology? What's that? No, forget it." So, nobody was getting out of that place. They wouldn't let them out.

KP: Was Colonel Donaldson the CO?

JC: Yes.

KP: He was determined that no one would get out.

JC: Well, now, I don't know if that was he, personally, or not, but, it was the headquarters policy that nobody would get out. He got killed in August and Colonel Fann, no, it was Major Fann, took over as colonel and ran the outfit for the rest of the war.

KP: After you were drafted, you reported to Camp Upton, New York.

JC: Yes, right.

KP: How long were you stationed there?

JC: I stayed there about two weeks.

KP: You were just waiting to be shipped out.

JC: That's right. Now, most people didn't stay two weeks, and the fact that I stayed there two weeks meant, to me, "Well, they're having a little difficulty placing me," and I always wondered, and I still wonder to this day, why in the world they ever sent me to a tank outfit, but, I was the
only guy in our company who had a college degree, and I think there was one guy in one of the other companies who had a college degree, and that was all. They were laborers.

KP: Where were the men in your unit from?

JC: Oh, … half of them were from [the] New York area and the other half were from Illinois and Indiana.

KP: It sounds as though they had lived very different lives from yourself. You had attended prep school and college.

JC: Yes, that's right. In fact, … they were kind of a rough-and-tumble outfit, and this one fellow in particular, … he was my nemesis at one time. … We had some problems there, but, he loved to fight. The best thing in the world was to go into town, and get drunk, and get in a fight, and … we had a fight. I happened to be charge of quarters that day, and there was … a rock throwing fight between [the] 749th on one side of the company street and the 747th on the other side, so much so that I strapped on the pistol belt, with a loaded pistol, to go out there, but, fortunately, by the time I got there, the battalion guard, with loaded rifles, came out and broke it up. … In talking with this one guy, who was the instigator of it, that we discussed, I said, "You should save that fighting for when you get over in Europe against the Germans," and he said, "Oh, that's the greatest thing of all, to have a nice fight," and he said to me, "You know, you never belonged here. You're an outsider. You don't belong in this outfit in the first place," and I said, "I agree with you. I don't," and it was that. … The outfit itself, today, the survivors of it, they're a bunch of nice fellows, and I didn't mention anything, I think, in this paper that I sent to you, but, we have a 749th Tank Battalion Association, with reunions; used to be every two years, now, it's every year. … We had our last reunion in Columbus, Ohio, last October, and I was a member of a committee to study, "Should we continue to have an organization or should we set a termination date, say, in the year 2000? We'll disband or what have you." I campaigned for having an indefinite termination date, continue as long as we can continue to function, and I gave them a little talk at the reunion meeting, and I apparently swayed a lot of people, 'cause they voted unanimously to keep on going as long as we can.

KP: It sounds like some people changed from the days when you knew them in the unit.

JC: Oh, yes. … They were a bunch of rowdies, and I wrote home to my wife, while we were over in France, at one time, I wrote a lot of letters to her, and I wrote from the heart, directly what I thought, and one of my emotions, at that time, was, even though … I was only, maybe, a mile or so from the actual frontline, that it was an area where you felt safe, and I told her. I said that we had a lot of people killed in that first month in action and I told her that it made me feel guilty. It made me feel like I should just grab a rifle and go out there with them someday, whether I came back or not, but, I also said that, you know, these are a bunch of people, I said, [that] I wouldn't want to associate [with] them in civilian life, when I get back, after the war is over, but, right now, they're the guys that are standing between me and the Germans, and they were a bunch of rough-and-tumble guys. They were good soldiers.

KP: They were hard on each other when they fought, but, they were also hard on the Germans.
JC: Yes, they were good fighters. They did a good job. I also wrote home, at one time, to some friends, and, well, I was, at that time, what you'd call a T-5. That's like a corporal. I said, "I'm just a corporal and I'm not getting sergeant stripes." I said, "It doesn't bother me one bit, because I know too many guys who made sergeant one day and made KIA the next day," 'cause the toughest job in the tank is the tank commander, and that's the sergeant sticking his head up out of the tank. ... So, now that it's all over, I'm glad that I didn't do it.

KP: You never went out and fought in a tank.

JC: I never fought in a tank. I rode in them in the States, but, I didn't fight in a tank. ... My particular weapon, do you know what a bazooka gun is?

KP: Yes.

JC: I was the bazooka gunner in our group. We had a group of twelve enlisted men and one warrant officer and I was responsible for the bazooka gun. Fortunately, I never had to fire it, because I'm afraid, the way it banged around there, if I'd ever had to fire it, I think it would have blown up in my hands, and we had ... a bazooka team, down in Camp Bowie, Texas, [that] were killed when the bazooka gun blew up when they fired it in practice. So, I was lucky [that] I never had to use it.

KP: You were stationed in the United States for a year.

JC: Yes, we went to Texas in, well, it was late January, I guess. I was drafted on the 9th, so, we went down on about the 23rd or so, late January. We formed the unit, and we stayed there until around September, and then, we went to Louisiana for maneuvers, had a couple of months of maneuvers in Louisiana, then, we went to Camp Swift, in Texas, for about another month, until we were shipped up here to, no, ... Camp Upton was where I was drafted. It was Camp Shanks where we were [sent for] our port of embarkation, came up to Shanks in New York, and we shipped out from here, then, over to England, in February of '44. It took us fourteen days to cross. We landed at Cardiff, Wales, and went to a place called Hereford, in England, and stayed there, and we were there at the time of D-Day. ... Although I don't know this for a fact, I assume, I have reason to believe, that we would have been in the invasion, on D-Day itself, but, at that time, our colonel was in the hospital with a respiratory infection, and he got out, and then, ... in late June, we drove down to Southampton, and boarded LSTs, and went across the Channel, and landed. ... B Company landed on the ... 29th of June. The rest of us landed on the 30th of June. By that time, Cherbourg was pretty safe, but, I remember, though, that when we first got there, we had to cross a pontoon bridge, across a little river, and one of the MPs there said, "You know, the Germans have got all of these bridges zeroed in on. They're firing shells at it all the time. When you cross that bridge, don't waste any time; get across fast." So, we did.

KP: You were, as you mentioned, "excess." You were to serve as a replacement in case someone was killed.
JC: Well, I suppose I would have been if I'd stayed that way, but, by the time we went overseas, when I transferred, in November, to Service Company, I transferred to a position where there was actually a position that needed to be filled, but, it was a position to be filled by a private, and I had a T-5 stripe. So, I was overage in two ways, then, 'cause I was overage in grade, but, they didn't take my stripes away from me.

KP: What was your position?

JC: My position [was] clerk-typist.

KP: Which types of documents did you work on?

JC: Well, my responsibility was that I had all the personnel files of all of the officers in the outfit, and I maintained all of their files, made up their payroll statements, kept their records and their 201 files, [DA Form 201, service records], and I also kept all the general files of the battalion, and, I remember, … I had a box, oh, … I'd say about two-and-a-half feet long, letter-sized files, filled with all of the documents and various things that we had to take, … keep them filed away, have available, and we got into France, and, after our first week in France, we had some KIAs, and the personnel officer got ahold of me and said, "Now, you've got to give me all those reports on the letters of … condolence," [pronounced KHAN-dole-ents], … and I said, "Condolence? What do you mean?" "I gave them to you back in England, the letters of condolence," and I struggled for the longest time. He was talking about letters of condolence, [pronounced correctly]. [laughter] So, I had the instructions for letters of condolence that we would write to families and anything that came from Army Headquarters or from Washington, like the Articles of War. I filed all the Articles of War and things like that, file clerk, basically, you might say.

KP: You were reading most of the battalion's correspondence. In fact, you were probably typing most of the correspondence.

JC: Yes. We didn't have an awful lot of correspondence at that time. I did more correspondence after the war. I was down in Delta Base Headquarters. There, I worked in a typing pool, where I was just waiting to get shipped home, … and this was Delta Base Headquarters. They had a lot of correspondence. … We had to type up all of those. They'd write handwritten notes and we'd type it up for them. One of the things that I've got, my discharge papers say [that] I was discharged from the 66th Infantry Division and the reason for that is that … you get transferred to an outfit that's coming home. The 66th was being disbanded, so, I transferred to that, and the first place I met the 66th Infantry was in a staging area in Arles in the summer of 1945, and I thought that they were a bunch of guys that sort of thought they had won the war. Later on, I found [that] there was another part to the story, that on Christmas Day in 1944, they were crossing the Channel, and their ship was sunk, and they lost a large portion of their personnel on that. So, they were never committed to frontline action, but, they were committed to a holding action back along the coast. I understand [that] there was a nest of Germans that never gave up, so, they were holding them, but, then, I met up with them later on, when I got transferred back to them, and one of the interesting things there was, … when we were transferred to them, on about the 1st of October, they were shifting people out and people in and getting all the casualty
reports, people going to the hospital and everything. Every unit had to make up a morning report. … Now, once, I tried to figure out how many morning reports [there were], it must have been at least fifty morning reports … for an infantry division, and I had the responsibility of checking every morning report, to make sure that they had accounted for everybody that had to be accounted for in their outfit, and I did that for a month, before we came back to the States, and one of the things that I noticed on that was, the casualty lists were extremely high at that time, but, you know what it was? It was individuals going to the hospital with venereal disease. There was an awful lot of that.

KP: You noticed that.

JC: I took note, 'cause the report would come through the hospital report, "So-and-So, venereal disease," etc. It was phenomenal, the number of them transferred [to the hospital].

KP: It sounds as if you were surprised by the venereal disease rate.

JC: Well, I was, yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JC: It was off while you were out.

KP: Did I miss something?

RB: Yes.

JC: Do you want me to tell it again, tell him what I told you?

KP: Yes.

JC: Well, a couple of incidents, one I was just mentioning, that we were stationed, after the war, in the summer of ’45, in a little place called Le Pontet in France, but, our job was to patrol a large section … of the oil pipeline coming up from Marseilles into Germany, and French people used to tap that pipeline on occasion, and our armed guards walked that line, and, during the course of that time, … our armed guards, I'm guessing this, may have killed as many Frenchmen, in the summer of ’45, as we killed Germans in the last … month of the war, and, as a result of that, … our patch that we wore on our shoulder, our distinctive patch, got to be a hated symbol in [the local] towns, and I'd told Rich [about] another incident, where one of our men had gone into town, because he got a letter, in the summer of ’45, from his family that his brother, in the Pacific, had just been killed in action there. So, he went into town, and he got drunk, and went to a brothel in France, and got in a fight with a black person there, and got stabbed to death by the black person. So, the family lost two sons in a short space of time, but, … we'd had fights in England. We'd lived near Hereford and because of the fights between the blacks and the whites; the military was segregated, but, we went into the same town. Because we had fights in the town, they finally broke it up so that the whites could go into town on certain days and the blacks on the other days, and there was another town, nearby, where, if you couldn't go to the one town,
you could go to the other town, but, there was a lot of fighting against the blacks in England, but, then, when we were in the south of France, there were [other] occasions, because of this hatred the French had for our patch. There was more than one occasion where the blacks in town would fight side-by-side with the whites against the French, who were after our tank battalion men.

KP: It sounds as though you would order the French to stop and they would ignore you.

JC: Well, yes. Now, I personally didn't walk the pipelines. I saw … some of the people who were walking past. I saw the pipeline itself, but, no, … I guess, … one would fire on the other. I don't know who fired first, but, there were some Frenchmen killed.

KP: That is very interesting. How did your unit manage in England? You were in with a hard drinking, hard fighting lot.

JC: A lot of our fellows were pretty hard drinking, yes, and … we had a lot of hard drinking in France as well. … One of the experiences, … again, it's a pet peeve of mine, I told you [that] I kept the officers' records. I had to maintain all those records, and there was one occasion where, I'm not going to mention any names, but, one officer, who was officer of the day, … with a guard, and it was nighttime, and … he was, well, not blind, stinking drunk, but, he was under the influence, and another officer was approaching, and he calls up to him and says, "Give us the password." The other one says, "Beats the hell out of me. I don't know what it is." He said, "Well, I'm afraid I'm going to have to shoot you, then." He pulled out his revolver, and the revolver discharged, and he hit him in the arm, and he says, "Did I get you, partner?" He says, "You sure did, got me right in the arm." Well, I personally filled out the report on the record, because I was told to, it was, "Officer was injured by accidental discharge of his weapon when he was cleaning his revolver." Now, shortly after that, one of the enlisted men discharged his rifle, accidentally, while he was cleaning it, and he was going to be court-martialed. Well, one of the majors of our outfit said, "If you court-martial that fellow, I'm going to blow the whistle on this other incident." So, they killed the court-martial for the enlisted man, but, that's why, … I have to admit it, I'm, frankly, anti-officer, because of my experiences, that being one of them.

KP: That is a great story, because it illustrates that, in history, not everything written down on paper is true. Some historians are skeptical of oral history, but, this clearly illustrates its usefulness.

JC: That's true. Just because it's written doesn't mean it's true.

KP: One of the men I interviewed, a sergeant who served as a clerk, wrote the after-action reports for his unit and he sort of knew what the higher-ups wanted to read.

JC: Yes.

KP: Did you feel that way about your reports? You mentioned the shooting incident. Were there any similar incidents?
JC: Well, one that I recall, we had one enlisted man who was a very valiant guy, worked hard, did a good job, but, you know what battle fatigue is, you've heard of it? and then, late in the year, I don't know, November or so, … he was just suffering from battle fatigue, and he was told to take his tank, and go out, and lead the platoon, again, for action, and he said, "I can't do it. I can't go today," and the threat was, they were going to court-martial him for desertion, or something or other like that. Well, it didn't materialize. He was not court-martialed. In fact, … there were, subsequently, a couple of others. I remember, one of the sergeants … told me the experience himself, that he was out there on-the-line one time, this was around October or November, and he pulled down inside the tank, and he turned to the guys in the tank with him, and he said, "You guys are going to think I'm yellow," but, he says, "I can't stick my head over the top of that thing anymore. I can't do it again," and he was relieved of duty. Now, … he told me, himself, the personal experience of it. … "There came a time when you've just had it. It isn't that you're yellow or scared, but, of course, you are scared, but, you just can't make yourself do it." …

KP: How prevalent was battle fatigue in your unit?

JC: Well, in the early days, like, in the first week or two that we were there, I remember a couple of dramatic cases. One guy was so scared, … there was shelling and we were in foxholes, that … he couldn't stay … in his foxhole. … He was running, wild and crazy, around the area. We had to ship him back. He was really a mental case, under those circumstances. We had one lieutenant who went out with his platoon in … the first night in battle. … Well, he found out then that he just couldn't cut the mustard. He was too scared to do it and he apologized to the men. He says, "You guys'll think I'm chicken, but, I just can't take this," and he was relieved. … Now, those are two that I had personal knowledge of, and we, perhaps, had a few more, but, I know that, by the end of the war, … in May of 1945, we had classification records, and, see, I worked in personnel. … We have access to all the classification records there, and I can't tell you the number now, but, we had a large number of people who were classified, "Unfit for active duty," for combat duty, and I knew personally and was associated with some of those [men], in particular, one fellow. We were in a place called Crimmitschau … for a period of time and I associated with him; we went around together. One thing about him was, we'd walk down the street together, we were always armed, even after war, … we had armed weapons with us all the time, and his attitude was that [if] any German citizen, civilian, was standing there in his way, he'd just knock them out of the way, walk right through them, but, he couldn't go into battle again. He'd had a good combat record while he was in battle, but, [he] couldn't keep it up. There were many that were like that. Some, they were excellent fighters, but, there came a time when it's just not there anymore.

KP: You mentioned that you were not far behind the line.

JC: Yes, we were, typically, a mile or two behind the line.

KP: Still, while you were behind the line, you were not that far away from the battle.

JC: Well, if there's a breakthrough, you're in for trouble, and we thought we had it one night, too.
KP: When?

JC: This was about some time, I guess, in July of '44, and I remember, one of the things, … from the sounds of it, it seemed [bad] to us. We all went to our foxholes, got our rifles and [got] into our foxholes, and it sounded as though they were just in the next field. You've heard of the hedgerows of France, have you? … little, small fields, with hedgerows between them, and it sounded as though, … just over the next hedgerow, they were coming right at us, and I said to myself, "Now, why did I pick this spot for my foxhole? I'm going to be the first guy they meet when they come over that stone wall," but, [it] turns out, they weren't there. … The only close exposure to it I actually had was when we had airplanes going overhead, strafing or something or other like that, but, a lot of times, shells would go over, and, … of course, those shells … would land for miles. They'd hit you there. One night, [while] on guard duty with another fellow, Smitty and I were on guard duty one night, … we played "Jack in The Box," in and out of our foxhole, all night long, I think. … When we were in Luneville, I remember that we were in the town, the tanks were arrayed on a hill just outside of town. I could see the tanks lined up in battle array, but, that was the closest I ever got, physically, to it. Otherwise, I felt safe in the place where I was.

KP: You never had any close calls.

JC: No. The closest of all was when they caught us in convoy, a couple of planes going overhead, strafing and dropping bombs, but, … their accuracy wasn't very good. Their bombs landed in the field. They didn't land in the road. … Although they strafed the whole convoy, I don't think they hit anybody.

RB: Your unit was attached to Patton's army.

JC: This is while we were with Patton, yes. When we first went in, Bradley was the only one there, with the First Army, but, then, Patton came over, and I don't remember the date that he came over, but, he formed the Third Army in France, and then, we transferred to the Third Army, and we went, with Patton, up to Belgium, and, at that point, Clark came in, in the south of France, with the Seventh Army. So, we were pulled down to the south, and joined up with the Seventh Army, and worked with them until the Battle of the Bulge, and then, they pulled us up to the north, on the southern flank of the Battle of the Bulge, and we worked with the Ninth Army for the rest of the war. So, we were with the First, Third, Seventh and Ninth Armies and about a dozen different infantry divisions, went in with the 79th Infantry Division, first, and stayed with them until they were pulled back out of the line. I don't know if they went in on D-Day or not, but, they'd been in there quite early. In fact, they had had a tank battalion with them that was decimated when we got there and we replaced that battalion. They told us [that] we wouldn't last long, either, but, we lasted 194 days before we got pulled back and relieved for a time, and we also served with … the 44th [Infantry Division]. … I don't know if they list all the ones in here or not. This is the book that I told you about. Served with seventeen units, it says. I don't know if they have them listed in here or not. I don't think they do, but, we have something; here, this shows them. We served with the 79th, and the 83rd, and the 44th, and the 100th, and the 70th, and the 63rd, and 71st, 65th, and 76th, with those different divisions. We were always with the Eighth Corps, all the time, never with any other outfit. This is a map. …
RB: Does this trace your route across Europe?

JC: Yes, that black line traces our route, and, as I mentioned, did I put it on that paper there, that we were the first tanks across the Seine?

KP: Yes.

JC: On the east bank of the Seine? … Well, A and B Company crossed the Seine on the 20th of June; the rest of us crossed on the 21st of June. The engineers built a pontoon bridge across on the 20th of June and, by the 21st, we were all on the other side. The Seine … has kind of a loop, like that, and they built a pontoon bridge here, and we took over this area and came into this area, and we were there, and, while we were there, … for several days, the German aircraft were trying to bomb that pontoon bridge, but, they never got it. They lost a lot of aircraft in trying to get it, though. Oh, this thing here, … I put this on because this is, not the insignia, but, it's a little memento of our outfit, the 749th Tank Battalion, Normandy Invasion, 1944.

KP: Your unit went through France to the Belgian border, and then, went through Germany to near the Czech border. How were relations with the French and German civilians?

JC: When we first went in, … in July, let's say, of '44, … it was not too friendly, really, because the landscape was pretty much destroyed, bombing, oh, and the towns. I've got some pictures of towns that [were] just rubble. The town is just nothing, La Haye DuPuits, in particular, the first town we went through. It's nothing but fallen down buildings there, and a lot of the French people were rather bitter, because they'd been leading a fairly peaceful, country life, during recent years, and, now, we had all this bombing preparatory to the invasion, and then, the invasion, and all the destruction that had gone on while we were there, and there was a lot of bitterness on the part of the Germans, but, later on, we met a lot more friendly people; by the time, say, for example, … we pulled back, after the crossing of the Seine. When I say, "We," I mean the group of men that I was with. We'd been following right with the troops, … right close to them, all the way through, but, at that point, they pulled us back to division headquarters, and division headquarters, then, was in the town of Dreux, and we spent quite a bit of time in Dreux. They had a cathedral there, I remember, too. … Being a Catholic, I didn't get to Mass too much during that summer, but, while we were in Dreux, I was able to go to the cathedral, to Mass, a very impressive cathedral there, and, in different places, we got to meet and talk with people who lived there, but, the best of all, when we got into Alsace-Lorraine territory, in December, we'd put up in houses. During the summer, we'd live outdoors, on the ground, but, then, in the winter, we moved into houses. … In fact, in my broken German, I'd say, "(Haven sen Zimmer for de Soldaten?)" I guess they could understand what we mean and we got rooms for the people to live in. … We lived in one house, a few of us, in the front room of this house, a bare, wooden floor, we slept on that floor, but, this family had three daughters, Margaret, Marie, and Matilda, … very nice people. The mother and father were nice, and the three kids, they were about four, and six, and ten years old, and we got very friendly with them. We stayed there for three weeks or so, and the kids all spoke German, the parents spoke German, because they were of the era of the First World War, and their training had been German, but, the in-betweens … spoke French, but, these kids, four, six, and ten, spoke only German, but, they got to know one thing. We had
one fellow with us, (O'Neill?) was his name, and Margaret, she wore droopy drawers, and they kept sagging down, and O'Neill kept saying to her, "Hey, Maggie, pull up your drawers." Well, Maggie knew what they meant, so, she'd hoist them up, and they'd droop down, and we had quite a time with those people. … In fact, the ten-year-old, Matilda, got a crush on me and she was sorry to see me go. She gave me a big kiss when I left. I often wondered, in those days, about getting back to see those people, but, I didn't have a mailing address or anything like that. …

KP: It sounds like you would love to see this family again.

JC: Yes, I had fun with them, right.

KP: What about the German civilians, while the war was still on?

JC: Well, I didn't see many Germans. While the war was going on? I don't know that I saw any. The places where we went, they weren't, … not even civilians, … because we didn't get into big places, particularly in Germany. … Finally, toward the end of the war, we got into Limbach, and I was there at the time the war ended, and then, we went to Crimmitschau for a time after that, and, there, there … [was] sort of a semi-urban area, and we walked around. In fact, one of the things, … a friend of mine and I were walking around one day, and a fellow was out in his garden, working in his garden, and he spoke to us in English. So, we stopped and we chatted with him. I find out that he was a fellow who had worked in the circus, as a dwarf. … He was in … the Wizard of Oz picture, as one of the little men in that picture. We had quite a discussion with him.

KP: He was a German.

JC: He was a German, but, he had served in that picture, but, he was back in Germany, and he lived there in Crimmitschau, at that time. So, we had quite a chat with him. He told us his experiences in the movies, and in the circuses, and so forth. It was interesting just to meet someone who could speak English to us and speak to us civilly and we got along all right with him.

KP: Were some of the Germans not as civil?

JC: Well, I didn't meet that many of them. I went into the taverns and had drinks there, but, I didn't really associate with them much, but, some of our people did. They met with them and got what I might even say was friendly, but, … in the summer of 1944, I'd made a solemn vow to myself, … at one point, and I never forgot it, to this day, and I've, maybe, kind of, regretted that I made it, but, I said to myself, "I will never, in my life, shake and take in friendship the hand of a man who bore arms against the United States," because of some of the things that had happened. We'd had some experiences that [were] very disturbing. For example, in July of '44, when we were there around the Cherbourg area, … we had sniper fire that we dealt with. … Our colonel, like I say, was killed with sniper fire, … and one of our captains was seriously wounded with sniper [fire], was in the hospital, came back, later on, only in order to get killed, eventually, on a tank, but, the snipers would fire until they'd use up all of their bullets, then, come down out of the tree and surrender, and I don't know, … it doesn't make you feel good.
KP: Did you ever directly witness a sniper attack?

JC: Not directly. There was sniper activity around us, so that we crawled under the trucks of the outfit, with our rifles ready to defend ourselves, and, I remember, O'Neill had his rifle aimed, more or less, in my direction. I told him, … "O'Neill, aim that in the other direction," but, I never personally saw any sniper taking action, taking fire, no.

KP: You only heard the stories.

JC: I heard these stories, yes. From the companies, we got the stories.

KP: What was a typical day like in the field?

JC: What, for me?

KP: Yes.

JC: Well, we did clerical work. You'd set up your typewriter on a tree stump, or wherever you could, and we had to type up payrolls, for instance. We had to enter service record entries. We had to take care of personnel files, and write letters, and do whatever we could, and we did an awful lot of moving. Sometimes, we'd move two or three times in one day, and, occasionally, we'd move forward, and then, we'd move back. Then, we'd move forward again, to the same position again, something like that.

KP: You did not work in your trucks.

JC: Oh, no, we didn't work in the truck, no. …

KP: You set up …

JC: Wherever you could. Yes, you'd work in the field, somehow or other.

KP: Did you have tents?

JC: We had pup tents, but, we seldom set up the pup tents. I used my pup tent, oh, a couple of times in July. I used it again, I remember, in August, but, that was all. It was a rare occasion [that] I'd use the pup tent.

KP: How did you keep the paperwork dry?

JC: Oh, in the rain? Well, you didn't work; you didn't get your papers out during the rain. Now, we didn't have that much rain. … We had rain the second night that we were in France, I remember. I learned, at that point, … don't try to keep out of the water, just lie down in the water, get yourself wet, and then, lie there, and then, don't move out of it, 'cause if you move out of it, you get cold, so, just stay in the water until it's morning, and then, you get up and dry
yourself off, but, … in the summer of '44, we didn't have much rain. We must have had some, but, I just don't have much recollection of it.

KP: I take it that you worked on the paperwork from sunrise to sunset. Did you do any paperwork at night?

JC: No. Well, when we got to … Luneville in France, in September, … oh, I think we stayed [for] almost two months, in one building, and that was a big building. … One of the infantry divisions, I've forgotten which one, their headquarters was there, and the whole headquarters was in this one building, about a six-story building. We were on the fourth floor of it and we had one room where we did work. Now, it was beginning to get dark early at night, then, and we had no artificial light, but, we would, individually, write home for candles. … You'd write a letter home for candles and it might take you three weeks to a month before you'd get it, 'cause your letter had to get home, then, they had to get the candles, they had to ship it over. It'd take a long time to get it, but, a candle was a prized possession. Now, we would write personal letters at night, by candlelight, but, we didn't do our, what I'll call, "office work" at nighttime. We worked during daylight hours only, but, … it was seven days a [week]. I mean, there was no such thing as Sunday versus Wednesday or anything like that, or not even any such thing as Christmas Day versus Thanksgiving Day, or anything. Every day was always the same, but, I remember, … when the war officially ended for us, on the 8th of May, and the following Sunday, we were close to another tank destroyer outfit, personnel unit, and on the Saturday, the personnel officer of the tank destroyer outfit said to our personnel officer, … "Well, you people aren't going to have your people working tomorrow, are you?" "Why not?" "Well, it's Sunday tomorrow." "Oh, yes," he says, "Of course we won't work tomorrow." [laughter] That's the first time we got a day off from the day that we got into France.

KP: You never had any leaves or forty-eight-hour passes.

JC: … No, I did not, but, we had a limited arrangement. We had one man from the battalion who got a furlough to go home to the States. The battalion was given one furlough to go home to the States, and this was in, oh, around November or so of 1944, but, the man who got it was one that we had picked up on transfer, and he'd been overseas for three years. … We'd been there less than a year at that time. So, he got a furlough to go home, and they had a limited number, and I don't know how many, but, I think you could count them on the fingers of one hand, … people who got a three-day pass to go down to … Nice, I think, on the Mediterranean. I know one of the guys. I saw him out in Ohio, here, a couple of years ago. I asked him, I said, "Didn't you get one of those passes to go down to the Mediterranean?" He said, "Yeah, I did." I remember when he went. You know, cigarettes were currency in those days and, when he left, I gave him a carton of cigarettes, 'cause that was worth, in our time, … only about, I think you could get about sixteen dollars for a carton of cigarettes. My brother was over in France. He wasn't drafted until, really, after the war was over, but, he went, and he served. He was over in Germany. He said a carton of cigarettes was two hundred dollars while he was there.

RB: Did you smoke at the time?
JC: I smoked, yes, but, I sold a carton of cigarettes only once, and that was because … we'd gone two months without pay, and … I was broke. In fact, … while we were in England, I had a balance of pay transferred to come home, because, in gambling, I won money all the time, playing craps and poker, and then, the biggest thing was, while we were in France, we played pinochle more than anything else, and pinochle is more a game of skill than poker is, and I cleaned up at pinochle. So, I didn't have to draw any pay, and I sent all my pay home to my wife, but, then, playing poker, I had a wicked night in March. I lost unmercifully at poker, and it took me two months before I could get back onto the payroll again, to get … any pay. … It was after the war, we're on our way down to the south of France, and I hadn't had any money, and I was broke, nothing, anything. A fellow comes along; he was looking to buy things. I had a carton of cigarettes and no prospect of getting any money. I sold a carton of cigarettes for sixteen dollars.

KP: That was good money in 1945.

JC: Yes, it was. We had a number of other people that I knew; for example, when I was in Marseilles, I spent a month there, and we stayed in a big barn, so-to-speak, there was a big canvas drop that separated our part of the barn from the other side, and a bunch of Frenchmen were there, and, every noon hour, things would break off, and [there was] no business activity. The French would be up at the top of that canvas, talking about people and bartering for things. Somebody'd, say, hold up a pair of Army boots, "How much for those?" A fellow would say, "You speak, Joe." So, then, somebody would say, "I'll let you have it for eight hundred francs," or something like that. Then, there was a lot of bartering that went on there, but, I personally didn't participate in it. I sold that one carton of cigarettes, but, don't tell anybody that, 'cause I don't want to go to jail. [laughter]

KP: How much would you win in gambling? What were the stakes?

JC: Well, it wasn't big money on an individual game. They had some big games in poker, but, I didn't play in those. I played in one, just one day. That was unlimited, no limit poker. I'd just played one game in that, and I almost won big, but, instead, I lost big. So, I never participated in that again. I'd play in limited poker. … In the States, we'd play five and ten-cent poker, or, in England, we'd …

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

JC: … Whose skill is going to win? I just wound up winning all the time. I also happened to be lucky at dice, and that's not skill, I was just lucky, but, so, I won a lot of money in England. I started to get lucky the day that they froze furloughs in Camp Shanks; … we got a notice. When we first got to Shanks, I got two chances to go home and visit my wife on a twelve-hour pass, overnight, from six pm to six am. I was home twice. Then, the next day, I wanted to go, but, they froze all furloughs at that time, or all passes. Then, I started playing poker, and, all of a sudden, I started winning, and I won from then on.

KP: How difficult was it for your wife to manage by herself, especially since you were only a corporal, not an officer?
JC: Yes. Well, she was able to go back with her parents and live with her parents. … I had, let's see, actually, the Class F allotments, where I give twenty-two dollars, the Army gives twenty-eight dollars, and, also, for a child, the Army contributed thirty dollars. Initially, it was twelve dollars, but, they finally upped it to thirty. On top of that, my company started a program, about a year later, where anyone drafted and serving with children in the family, they had a formula where they'd give you something. My formula turned out to be fifty dollars a month for her.

KP: From Metropolitan Life?

JC: Metropolitan Life paid fifty dollars a month to my wife, while I was in service, for the last couple of years.

KP: The "Mother Met" slogan was not just rhetoric.

JC: … No, it was true, absolutely, yes. The story was, you get a job in the Metropolitan in those days, and just don't spit in the president's eye, and you've got a job 'til you retire. I remember telling my father, at one point, I was making, then, thirty dollars a week, … "You know, Dad, … as long as I don't foul up, I've got a job at thirty dollars a week for the rest of my life." [laughter]

KP: Your son was born in 1942.

JC: Born in '42, yes.

KP: Then, you went into the Army.

JC: Oh, yes. … He was six months old when I left, and I saw him, I had two furloughs to see him, but, then, I didn't see him again until he was about three-and-a-half, and that first day when I came home, his mother had him all prepared to greet me. She went down to Camp Dix, in New Jersey, with her brother to pick me up and bring me home. … I had a little toy for him, an Army tank that I bought in the post exchange that I was going to give him, and he came out of the house when he saw the car come in the driveway, and I got out of the car, and he ran back into the house and went into the kitchen, under the kitchen table. So, I went inside the kitchen and I said, "Well, Johnny, I've got a present here for you." Well, that got him out. So, I gave him the present.

KP: He really did not know you.

JC: No, … he had no memory of me at all.

KP: How did that work out?

JC: We adjusted very well, I think. I remember one little thing was that he and his mother lived in a very small room, oh, it was about half the size of this room, I think, with a little, three-quarters bed and a crib in there, and … he slept in a crib until he was four years old. We bought a house, but, we couldn't move into it for six months. So, he still slept in a crib and that first
night I was home, … his grandmother, … my mother-in-law, couldn't stand a child crying at
night. … She said, "I have to have my sleep." If he cried, Blanche had to rock Johnny and keep
him quiet. So, he was used to being rocked to sleep every night, and I came home, and he
wanted to be rocked to sleep at night. So, I said, "Okay, I'll rock you to sleep tonight, Johnny,
but, you're a big boy now, and you have to go to sleep without being rocked to sleep at night,
but, this night, I'll do it." So, that night, I rocked him and he went to sleep in my arms. I put him
in the crib. The next night, we went upstairs, and we put him in the crib by himself, and he
stayed there, and he went to sleep.

KP: Really? There were no problems.

JC: No problem with transition, but, then, my wife and I slept on the three-quarters bed, which is
smaller than a single bed, really, and, with the crib in the room, you could hardly walk around in
that room, for six months there, until we were able to move in our house. Then, we moved into a
nine-room house, and we had the one son, and, a couple of months later, my daughter was born.
Then, we had empty rooms in the house for a long time, but, we finally filled them all up.

KP: Did you buy the house on the GI Bill?

JC: Yes, we did, yes. In fact, that was the best single investment I ever made in my life, buying
that house. My wife had been telling me, when I was overseas, "We've got to buy a house when
you come home." I said, "No way can we buy a house, because," I said, "you know, you can't
get a house for less than four thousand dollars, and how can I pay the mortgage on a four
thousand dollar house?" So, when I got home, we bought one for, let's see, $8,750, which was,
at that time, … still a fairly high price. You could get a lot of them [for] under ten thousand,
then. They didn't get up over ten thousand for a couple of years. … We bought that house, and
then, twenty years later, we sold it and bought another, much bigger house, and then, lived in that
one for eighteen years, and then, when I retired, we sold that and moved to Morristown, to an
apartment.

RB: Where was your first house?

JC: The first house was in Bloomfield, New Jersey. The second house was only a block-and-a-
half away, but, we lived on the town line, across the street was Glen Ridge, and we moved up to
Glen Ridge, and it was only a block-and-a-half, but, it was a lot different atmosphere. For one
thing, every house was seventy-five feet set back, … by town ordinance, and the houses were
much bigger and much more expensive. … We had an eleven-room house, with four bathrooms
in the second house. The one we had initially was nine rooms, but, it had only one bathroom.

KP: You mentioned that you would be assigned to guard duty. How often would you pull guard
duty?

JC: Well, … we did it either every day or every other day. … Now, your guard shift would be,
if you got only one-hour guard, you did guard every day. If you got two-hour guard shift, it was
every other day, but, guard duty started at dusk and lasted 'til dawn. So, that was all summer
long; you had guard duty every day.
KP: You had guard duty even when you were set up in buildings.

JC: No, [not] after we got into buildings, because, then, we were typically much farther behind the line.

KP: However, when you were in the field, particularly that summer …

JC: Yes, that summer, there was guard duty all the time.

KP: When you were in the field, moving rapidly, how often would you get a hot meal?

JC: Not very often; I'm trying to think. Now, during that July, … what we had, practically all the time, did you ever hear of ten-in-one rations?

KP: Yes.

JC: We had ten-in-ones. … Actually, ten-in-ones are really five-in-ones, but, there are two packs of those in one container, so [that] one big container is enough for ten people, but, we … had thirteen in our unit, so, we would get rations for fifteen on one day, and rations for ten on … alternate days, and we'd get these rations. Everything was cold, but, you could cook it yourself, if you wanted to build a fire. For example, we had bacon in there, it was very good bacon, and we'd fry the bacon, … and we made coffee for ourselves, instant coffee. That's where I was introduced to instant coffee, but, everything else that we got that way was cold. The only time that we got hot stuff was when we would get near the company commissary, and then, if we got fed by them, well, one thing, we'd get a GI can of coffee, and, you know, a canteen cup is pretty good. It's over a pint-size, I guess, isn't it? … Generally, … when we'd meet and eat with them, I'd take a canteen of coffee to eat with my meal, another … canteen cup of coffee to take with me, afterwards. Now, coffee was supposed to be rationed, except that my understanding was that the frontline troops got a concession; we got more coffee than the rest of them did. So, we had all the coffee that we wanted and I sometimes felt I ruined my stomach with all the coffee that I drank there, 'cause, … with the unit, I'd have two canteens cups of coffee, three times a day. So, that's an awful lot of coffee.

KP: Yes. [laughter]

JC: … As far as the routine day, … you were busy, a lot of [the] time, moving, and packing, and unpacking, and you don't unpack carelessly, because you've got to be able to pack real quick and move out, if you have to. So, we spent a lot of time on preparing to move, and moving, and waiting, … hurry-up-and-wait, you know, that sort of stuff, but, then, when we had time to do things, we had chores that had to be taken care of, and we worked, like I said, dawn 'til dusk, seven days a week, … right straight through, on paperwork.

KP: You mentioned that, at one point, you were assigned to a bazooka unit. When did you serve with that unit?
JC: … When we were in England, going into France, I was assigned the bazooka. "You take the bazooka." So, I had that all the time through, right up until May.

KP: In other words, while you were a clerk-typist …

JC: Yes.

KP: … If the need arose, you would …

JC: If anything happened, then, I would grab the bazooka. … You use a bazooka against the rear end, the engine, of a tank and it'll knock it out. It's a powerful weapon.

KP: Fortunately, you never had to use it.

JC: I never had to. We had one fellow in our outfit, though, who was transferred out of our outfit, and I lost him, but, I read about him in the Stars and Stripes magazine, later on, at the time of the Battle of the Bulge. He was doing clerical work, someplace or other, in division headquarters or something like that. With the breakthrough there, they had to call on anybody and everybody, and he was called, and, because he had tank experience, he was put into a tank, and they wrote him up, about his experiences in fighting … in the Battle of the Bulge, and he was sort of … enamored with it. He wanted to keep on going; at least that's what the article said, but, when the time comes, if you have to, you do it.

RB: Did you ever have any experiences with captured German soldiers?

JC: Well, we saw scads of them. We'd see tons of them, but, they'd be marching back. Like, our own outfit, we captured a total of something [like] twenty thousand prisoners during the course of the war, but, we'd see large numbers of them, maybe by the hundreds even, marching back that had been captured. … The one thing that impressed me about them, most of the ones that I saw, they were kids, they were babies, but, … many of them, I don't think they were twenty years old.

RB: Did you and/or your comrades react in anyway upon seeing these young soldiers? Was there any sentiment expressed among the soldiers?

JC: Sympathy for them, you mean?

RB: Yes, or an appalled feeling about fighting them.

JC: … No, I don't think so. I think that most of the fellows, especially in the line companies, … roughly about half of the personnel, we had about eight hundred men in the outfit, probably about four hundred were active linemen, … in the line of fire and exposed to fire, and I think all of those [thought] they were the enemy, period, that's all. … Personally, … I was impressed when I saw so many young people, but, I didn't have any great emotional attitude or reaction. We had some prisoners of war that were down in Texas when we were down there. They'd been captured in Africa and were brought back, and they were in our place, but, … the ones that we
had, they were more hardened soldiers, I would say. They were very adamant and strict. They'd stand ridged, straight back. They'd be in a truck; they'd be riding around. They wouldn't sit and relax in the truck. They'd stand up at attention while they were riding along in the truck. They were the supermen. … Seeing that attitude didn't make me feel sympathetic toward them, either. We didn't see many of those, but, we did see some of them, prisoners of war, down in Texas, but, the ones we saw in France, that so many of them were so young, it was impressive.

KP: Did you ever encounter any displaced persons while you were traveling through France and Germany?

JC: Well, you mean like concentration camps or something?

KP: Yes. I have also been told that the Germans scattered slave labor camps around the Third Reich. Did you encounter any of these facilities or inmates?

JC: … Well, no, personally, I did not see them or talk with them, but, our outfit did. … We liberated prisoner of war camps. In fact, two of our own men were in a prisoner of war camp that we liberated, and there were concentration camps … with people there, and the thing that I remember distinctly about is that we were told that there were a lot of women there, younger women, as well as older women, but, they were told, "Now, these women, they'll do anything for food and things, and services, but, don't have anything to do with them, because they're all loaded with venereal disease."

KP: This was at a displaced persons' camp.

JC: Yes.

KP: You were in a support unit. Did you ever feel as though there was any resentment directed toward you by the men on-the-line?

JC: Well, you mean the service company members who did not [serve] on-the-line?

KP: Yes.

JC: No, I didn't feel that they resented us.

KP: No. Frontline soldiers often resent those stationed in the rear. Were you close enough to the front to avoid that feeling?

JC: Well, I think that they felt that we were close enough, [that] we were part of them, … even though we weren't right out in the tanks, on-the-line.

KP: You really were not that far away.

JC: Yes. We were a unit, together. I don't think they resented us, not to my knowledge. The worst resentment that we had, this is a separate experience, it's written up in that book there, too,
one time, going into … August, we were going along, and there was a tank destroyer outfit that was near the same area where we were, but, there was a breakdown in communications, and neither one knew the other one was there, and one of our tanks knocked out one of the tank destroyers and killed two of the men in the tank destroyer. … Later on, a month or so later, a couple of my friends and I met a couple of fellows from the TD outfit that had had these two men killed and they were very bitter against us, because of these two men that had been killed. That was a different type of circumstance, though.

RB: Did your group suffer many friendly-fire casualties?

JC: … No, we did not, but, I'm afraid that our own troops [may have]. See, we would go up in support of the infantry, and, oftentimes, we would be behind them and firing over them, and there were several occasions where the tank commander would have to tell the gunner, "Raise your gun. You're firing into the backs of our own troops," but, I'm not going to say that we killed some of our own, but, I'm not going to say that we never did; we might have, but, we never, to my knowledge, … suffered any friendly-fire casualties of our own.

KP: You mentioned that you did not get to go to Mass very often. How often would you see an Army chaplain?

JC: Well, we saw one before our … step-off day. … We went into France on the 29th and 30th of June, and, on the 1st of June, … a chaplain came and said Mass. … We were out in the field, of course, and I was surprised to see the number of people that attended that Mass that never went to Mass when we were back in the States anywhere, and another thing was that, during the service, in the homily, he said, "Now, I'm going to give general absolution to everybody here, and you can all receive Communion during this Mass, and then, I'll hear confessions, right afterwards," and I was surprised to see how many people lined up for confession after that. The next day, we had a jump-off. We started our combat activity. Then, after that, I would say that we got two or three occasions, I guess, I remember. There was one occasion where a priest was with us for a period of two or three days, and he said Mass every day there, but, it was very infrequent that we would get a chaplain coming through for Mass, and almost every Mass that we went to was [at] a local church.

KP: Were there any Protestant services?

JC: Gee, I don't know. I never thought of it, not to my knowledge.

KP: Did you have any idea of how the war was progressing or how much progress your unit was making? You were in a support service and you were handing official paperwork.

JC: Yes, well, … what I had, in terms of what was going on, was not from the paperwork but from the information, oral information, you'd get by word of mouth, from the people coming back. In the month of July, things were very rugged. It was a tough time there. … Something else, though, that I was able to observe, just part of it, myself, July 26th was the big breakthrough day, [Editor's note: Operation: COBRA, the breakout of the bocage at St. Lo] and I saw more bombers, … our airplanes, that flew over from England, … dropped their bombs, and flew on to
Italy to land, bombers coming from Italy, flying over, dropping their bombs, and going to England to land. I saw more bomber planes going overhead than I ever thought I would see at one time. It was amazing, that one day, and we made quite a breakthrough that day, and I know that … the enemy soldiers we captured that day told the interpreters, … "You know, you guys waited too long after the artillery bombardments and everything, because everybody was just totally out of it, … with such heavy bombardment. If you'd come right in instantly, nobody could have done a thing. They were all discombobulated," but, there was, maybe, an hour's wait or something or other like that. They began to function a little better by the time we moved in, but, we did breakthrough at that time, and, prior to that, it had been touch and go; go forward, and then, you go back, then, you go forward, … and it was rough going there for that time. Then, we raced. Patton was there at that time and we raced around. You've heard of the Falaise Gap, where they went around there, trying to close that gap?

KP: Did you know about the Falaise Gap or why you were racing around?

JC: No, I didn't know the details of it. No, I did not, but, I knew that we were racing real fast and going along many miles in a single day. … Our supplies, sometimes, would get a little short there, but, I learned, afterwards, Patton had made arrangements that supplies would be brought in by air and dropped for us, but, then, well, things went along. Then, finally, came the crossing of the Seine, and then, we raced across [France] after that, up to Belgium, and that was, I mean, a hundred miles a day while we were going up there, and then, things, at that point, were rather quiet, until we got pulled down to the south, went down to hook up with the Seventh Army, and then, we got stymied around Luneville for almost two months, had a tough time of it there. We finally broke through. You've heard of the town of Bitche? That was a terrible place to get through, and we broke through there, but, then, the Battle of the Bulge came, and we had to pull back and go up north. Then, we had to come back again and go through Bitche a second time and I remember my notes to myself. It was when we went through Bitche the second time; I could still see the old tanks that had been left there from the first time we went through. Oh, one of the items that I brought with me was a little … biography that I wrote for myself, autobiography, of the individual days, from the day I went in the Army 'til the day I got out.

KP: You kept this diary during the war.

JC: No, no, you couldn't keep it then. I reconstructed it … after the war was over. I reconstructed it from the morning reports.

[Kurt Piehler and Rich Boniface examine the autobiography.]

KP: On the 13th of March, 1945, you wrote, "Wear ties, boys." What did you mean by that?

JC: … Oh, yes, "Wear ties," 'cause … some general came into the area where we were. … We didn't wear ties. … You were supposed to wear your steel helmet all the time. Now, that's just for your own protection, but, some general came along and was court-martialing anybody he saw that wasn't wearing a tie.

KP: Patton was legendary for that kind of by-the-book attitude.
JC: No, this wasn't Patton.

KP: It was another general.

JC: It was another general. … In my interpretation, he wasn't a frontline general, 'cause we didn’t wear ties from the time we went into France. I know one of the things we did [was], when we first went into France, … we're given barber equipment, for ourselves, to take care of our own barber needs, and so, I, along with almost everybody else, we just shaved our heads completely, not shaved, but, you know, … clippers clean over your head, right down to a stubble, and what happened was, the first night, I slept, and it was summer, it was warm, but, the nights got cold, and my head was cold. So, the next night, when I went to sleep, I put on a wool net cap, and I woke up the next morning, and I had a headache, because that cap pulling on your scalp constricted the scalp. So, after that, I didn't wear the wool net cap. I just suffered with the cold until my hair grew in. I remember, Wiehouse, he had his head clipped and … he was sleeping underneath a truck when some shelling came in. Everybody hopped up to go to their foxholes. Wiehouse hopped up and he hit his head on the drive shaft of the truck. I think I may have put it in the report there, someplace or other, I don't know. His bald head hit on the drive shaft of the truck.

RB: What happened to him?

JC: Oh, nothing, just bruised him, … nothing serious. Later on, he did himself up good, though. He had too much to drink, and he carried a pistol that he wasn't supposed to carry, but, he had a pistol, and he was messing around with the pistol. He discharged it, accidentally, fired through two of his fingers, inside the leg of one of his friends, and out the other side of the leg, and into the other leg of the friend. So, both of them went to the hospital.

KP: In one entry, dated after the war was over, you mentioned softball.

JC: Yes, right.

KP: How often did you play softball?

JC: Well, after the war, we played softball quite often. … The one thing that we had to do after the war, when we were in the south of France, we had to exercise every day. … We were in houses down there. For one hour in the afternoon, we had to go out and either play volleyball, or softball, or something like that, but, … while we were in Germany, we did play softball, and we even had a battalion softball championship, and our outfit of twelve enlisted men won the championship, but, later on, we played one of the other companies in a grudge match, and we lost sadly. Well, the thing that won it for us, really, was, we had two good pitchers on our softball team and that's what will do it for you.

RB: Did you ever actually see Patton?
JC: I personally did not, but, the line company men did see him, in England, before we went into France. He gave a talk to them about … getting over into France and one of the things he told them was, …"Now, if ever you're in convoy, moving along, and enemy planes are overhead, strafing, if you get out into the ditch to hide, it isn't going to do you any good, because if I come along and see you in the ditch there, I'll kill you myself."

KP: What did the average soldier think of Patton at the time? Now, he is a larger-than-life figure.

JC: Well, of course, he had a bad reputation from his experience in Africa, where he slapped a soldier in the hospital, but, apart from that, the people thought of him as a blood-and-guts, gung ho, good leader and general.

KP: Some people have mentioned the slogan ...

JC: "His guts, but your blood."

KP: Yes.

JC: Yes, well, I don't think that was true, necessarily.

KP: In other words, it sounds as though he was fairly respected by the men on-the-line.

JC: Now, … of course, our men had contact with him at that meeting in England. Then, we were under him for a time in France, but, while we were under him, they didn't personally see him, but, the feeling about him was, "So, he was the guy in charge? He seemed to be doing a good job."

KP: Did you or your comrades have any opinions, positive or negative, about other generals?

JC: Yes, and I think it was [the] 44th Division, but, I'm not sure. … One of the generals in … one area, they felt that he had misused the Army in coming through and had caused a lot of casualties that were unnecessary. I'm not clear on details. Now, I don't remember the details. I knew more about it at the time, but, I remember that there was that attitude. … That was around September or so, September, October of '44, but, they felt that his handling of this one area was improper, and, partially, they felt, maybe, that his reason for doing it was because, if he won it that way, it would be more glory and honor for him, turning out that way, but, they felt it caused a lot of casualties unnecessarily. That's the only bad feeling that I ran into.

KP: That you detected.

JC: Yes.

KP: Is there anything that we forgot to ask you about the war itself? You mentioned showers in your account. How often could you take a hot shower?
JC: I got one in September. I don't think I'd had one before that.

KP: Since June?

JC: Yes. Now, we got to bathe in a helmet, you know, and, on one occasion, we were near a river, ... not a wide river, it's a river not more than, say, thirty yards wide, but, we're able to go in, swimming, and wash in the river, but, apart from that, it was September [that] we got [showers]. It was a shower in a town, and I think it cost us ten francs, or something rather like that, too, but, another thing about ... when the weather got cold, I'd put on long johns. We had two sets of long johns, and I wore those for a time, then, I'd change and put the second pair on, and then, in December, we were in this house with Margaret, Marie, and Matilda, and, on the stove in that house, with a pail of water, I was able to put the long johns, two sets of long johns, in there and wash them, get them washed and dried, and then, I wore them until spring, when it got warm enough that I didn't have to wear them. ... I remember one thing I told my daughter, my very literal-minded daughter. She was only about eight years old at the time, I guess, and I said, ... "You know, in December, I got a chance to wash my long johns, take them off and wash them, and, when I did that, I found a pair of summer underwear [that] I thought I'd lost last September," and she looked at me, and she says, "Well, couldn't you see them when you went to the bathroom?" [laughter] but, it is true; I wore summer underwear under my long johns. In fact, in ... [that] cold weather, I wore everything. I wore my ODs, I wore fatigues on top of that, and covered myself over, at night, with my Army overcoat, my blanket on top of that, and [I would] still freeze to death at night.

KP: The winter of 1944-5 was particularly harsh.

JC: Well, we had some cold. When we got into the coldest weather, I was able to be indoors. From Christmas on, I was indoors all the time, but, I was out on guard duty, one day, and I think we had, maybe, two-hour guard duty or something like that. We were guarding a town. We had three posts in the town and the relief came along. They were supposed to come along and pick each of us up, and I stayed there, and I stayed for the longest time, and nobody came. They were half-an-hour late. So, finally, I walked around to the other side, to see if something was going wrong, and there were the three of them, all gathered together. They'd seen two of them and sent them back. They forgot about me, and I was so mad at that time, but, also, my feet were so cold, I thought they were going to drop off. So, I didn't waste any time. I just went back to the place where I was living, went indoors, went to bed, and got my feet warmed up, but, my feet were so cold that time. I'll never forget that.

RB: Did you get frostbite?

JC: No, I didn't get frostbite. I was just cold, that's all.

RB: Was frostbite common in your unit?

JC: No, we didn't have any. We had more, not exactly trench foot, but, we had a lot of athlete's foot. People wouldn't wash their feet. They'd have trouble with their feet.
KP: How many men were in your service company?

JC: I'd say 170 or so.

KP: What were some of the duties they performed?

JC: Most of them were truck drivers, 'cause we had a lot of trucks for carrying equipment, … and maintenance, the battalion maintenance.

KP: Repairing the tanks.

JC: Repairing the tanks, right.

KP: Was the kitchen a part of your unit?

JC: Well, each company had its own kitchen.

KP: The kitchen was part of the companies, not the entire battalion.

JC: Yes, that's right.

KP: Were there any other support functions?

JC: Well, now, this one unit, this personnel unit that I speak of that I was in, was actually made up of people from different companies. There was one man from each company. There was one from Headquarters, one from A, B, C and D, and Service, but, nobody from [the] medics. The man who had Headquarters Company also had the medics. … He was the company clerk for Headquarters and medics, and, in addition to that, we had a morning report sergeant, and a classification sergeant, and a clerk-typist, like myself, and the tech sergeant, who was in charge of the outfit, and we also had the battalion mail clerk and a truck driver. Of those, let's see, we had Headquarters, A, B, C, D, and Service, we had six of them who were from the companies and the other six of us were from service.

KP: How did you get along with your sergeants?

JC: In this outfit, we were all very friendly; the tech sergeant in charge of this one little group, very friendly. Now, there was bad blood between two of the individuals, and, on one occasion, this was actually after the war had ended, we were over … in Limbach or Crimmitschau at the time, I think in Crimmitschau. … Every enlisted man got a bottle of cognac, the first time we'd ever gotten any liquor, really, and a couple of them got drunk on it, and a couple of the guys that had some resentment, they got in a fight. … The tech sergeant that was in charge of us, … he got into it, first, trying to break it up, and then, got involved in fighting with them, and he got a nice black eye himself, but, apart from that, he was [friendly]. Gee, now, I can't think of his name. That's funny. It'll come to me later, but, we got along, very friendly, very well together. … It was not like the rough first sergeant stories that you hear. He wasn't, technically, a first sergeant, he was a tech sergeant, and he was a good worker. He was a little man, and one of the
things was, when we got into a place where we got indoors, we had a latrine there, outdoors, you
know, an outhouse, and he took a pail of water and a scrubbing brush, and he went and he
scrubbed off the seats out there himself, got it all cleaned up, but, after he did it, he said, "Now, I
don't want anybody going out there and standing on your boots on the top of it. Everybody sit
down on it," 'cause, otherwise, when we'd go into a strange place, you wouldn't sit down on it,
because it would be all too dirty. You would just stand and straddle it, like a slit trench, but, in
the field, we used slit trenches, if we were in a place long enough, but, when we got to towns, if
they stayed in a place where they had a latrine, [we would use that]. Of course, I remember
when we were in … Limbach, I guess it was, … we were in this big building, they had an indoor
latrine there, and we had it in Dreux, when I went to a tavern there as well. The latrine was a
hole in the floor, like that, with pedestals. You stand on it, you face it and aim through it, or else,
you turn around backwards and squat down, and you hit it, and so, we used those when we were
in that building, but, otherwise, most places we had outhouses, though. … One little detail, you
might not think of this in advance, but, there's a very important piece of equipment. You keep
your toilet paper in your shirt pocket. … They would pass it out in packages. … With your ten-
in-one rations, you'd get a package of toilet paper. So, you take one of those and keep it in your
shirt pocket, because, wherever you go, there's no paper available for you. You've got to have it
on hand to use it. So, you always had that in your pocket.

KP: I have never thought to ask anyone about that. You are the first person to bring that up. It
must have been obvious to every soldier.

JC: Well, everybody who's there knew they had to carry toilet paper. So, I carried it in a little
pouch, … right in my shirt pocket, you know. It just fit in there nicely.

KP: Did you ever encounter any British or other Allied troops?

JC: Not exactly. When we were heading toward Czechoslovakia, we got pulled back, in order to
avoid making contact with the Russians, and, shortly after that, I saw a couple of Russian
officers in our mess hall one day, having a meal with the officers of our outfit, but, apart from
seeing them there, that's all.

KP: You never had any contact with the Soviets.

JC: Not personally, no.

KP: You never met your counterparts.

JC: No, I did not. I saw these two, I was in the same room with them, but, I didn't talk with
them, and they didn't talk with me.

KP: After V-E Day, did you expect that your unit would be sent to Japan?

JC: Oh, yes. In fact, we were prepping to go to Japan. In fact, that's one of the things that I got
involved in, because, although, as I say, I was clerk-typist, after the war, I got moved up to the
position of classification sergeant, but, they couldn't give out promotions anymore. They froze
all promotions. So, I stayed at my level, but, I served as classification sergeant, and, initially, I had the responsibility of transferring out all of our high-point personnel, you know. Anybody with over eighty-five points was shipped home and discharged, and we had some with … 120 points, some of them, but, a number of them we shipped out, … and we started shipping in low-point people, because we were going through the Suez Canal to the Pacific Theater of Operations.

KP: There would be no stopover in the United States.

JC: No, no, yes, at least that's the story. That's what it was.

KP: I interviewed someone from the Class of 1949 who served with one of three units sent directly from Europe to Asia that actually made it to the Pacific before V-J Day. That was unique, because most units were supposed to rotate through the United States.

JC: … Well, our understanding was [that] that's what we would do, and we definitely were preparing to staff up with low-point personnel, and [we] shipped out all of our high-point personnel, and that gave a heavy burden on me, as classification sergeant, to keep up with all the records of these people going in and out, but, we no sooner did that, and then, the atomic bomb came along, and then, the end of the Asian War, and then, we reversed directions and started shipping out all of our low-point personnel and taking in high-point personnel. Then, I had the heavy work again. Then, finally, in September, I got transferred down to Delta Base Headquarters, 'cause, then, I was a low-pointer. I was only seventy-five points, and … you needed eighty-five, I think, to get out, and the modal score for our outfit was sixty-three, and I had the same sixty-three points, but, I had a child, and that was another twelve, gave me seventy-five, but, we transferred down to Delta Base, … about a dozen of us, and we stayed there for about a month. Then, I got transferred to the 66th Infantry, which was coming home, and they were shipping out their low-pointers and taking in high-pointers. So, then, I got involved, once again, in keeping track of all of the people coming in and out, but, here was a whole division, instead of just a battalion. So, I worked hard that month, too, and one of the interesting things about it was that they set the limit at that point. They had a recount, after the Asian War ended, and you got a new ASR score. My score went up to eighty-three. … They were taking anybody who had seventy or more on the ship to bring them home. Less than seventy stayed in Europe. Now, one fellow, on the night before we boarded the ship, a friend of mine came to me and said to me, … "You know, John, they're shipping out everybody who's got seventy or more points and keeping everybody who's less than seventy," and he says, "Now, I've only got sixty-eight points. Should I say anything?" I said, "Keep your mouth shut." So, he kept his mouth shut. [laughter] … He got on the boat and he came home. Whatever happened after that, I don't know, but, at least he was in the States.

KP: Let him figure that out.

JC: Yes, and I will say that, after I got back to the States, I had no problem. … I didn't like military service all the time, particularly the first few months [that] I was in … KP, latrine duty, all that sort of stuff, but, I had no difficulty in the States. We came back to Kilmer. I was there only a day, and then, they shipped us down to Dix, and I was there and [had] no chores. They
didn't assign heavy responsibilities to us, just kept us in the barracks, and, finally, you wait for your name to get on the list, and I got on the list. Friday, I'm on the list, I'm supposed to get discharged on Monday, but, then, there's some remark about it in there, at the end, I got scratched.

KP: Yes.

JC: Yes, 'cause, ... again, the kidney problem came up and they felt they couldn't afford to discharge me. So, they put me in the hospital for a couple of days then. In fact, I went through physical exams even over in France. They sent me back to a field hospital for another physical exam, to see if I could pass the requirements. They kept examining me all the time, but, then, I got scratched off the list, and, finally, I got back, went to the hospital, got out of the hospital and back to the barracks again, and the day that I got out of the hospital, they discharged me, after breakfast, or, rather, I missed breakfast at the hospital. I went back to the company and they'd had breakfast already. I went to the mess hall; they wouldn't give me anything. So, I went to another company. I said, "I just got out of the hospital this morning. They shipped me out without breakfast and my own company won't give me any breakfast. Will you give me something to eat?" So, they gave me a meal there, but, the interesting part about it was this, then, I finally got discharged that Thursday, but, ... when I was drafted and went down to Texas on a train, on the way down to form the 749th Tank Battalion, I got sick. I went on sick call. Two other men went on sick call. ... One of them was Henry Chin, the other fellow was another Chinaman, his name was Woo-Ho or Ho-Woo, I never knew which ... was first and which came last, but, they were both in Headquarters Company, and they were with me in the outfit in Texas, and over to England, and France, and Germany, and everything, and down to the south of France; we stayed in the same outfit. I never had much contact with them, because they were Headquarters Company, and I was Service, but, we were in the outfit together, but, then, I didn't really think much of them, and then, I transferred out in September to go to Delta Base, and, eventually, I got down to Shanks [Fort Dix], and the day before I get discharged, I come back to a barracks, a barracks of maybe about fifty men in the barracks, and who was in the same barracks with me but Woo-Ho or Ho-Woo, or whatever his name was. He was in the process of being discharged, too. So, we meet again.

KP: What do you recall about your voyages to and from Europe?

JC: The first one, over, was a little rough, in terms of sailing. It was in the North Sea, going up north, and it was February, and the water was rough, and it was a big convoy. It was the biggest convoy that they had had, up to that time in the war, and we had to go at the speed of the slowest ship. We, personally, were on the Santa Paula, a Grace Line ship, and my own group, there were twelve of us in one room, one stateroom, made up for a man and his wife, but, we had twelve of us in that room. It was luxurious accommodations, compared to the rest of them. Most of them were down in the hold, where the bunks were stacked up six or eight high. ... Most of the people got awfully sick, and one of the men in our group got sick, and he crossed the ocean in his bunk. He laid in his bunk all the time over, and he vowed, "When the war is over, I'll take my discharge in Europe and stay there for the rest of my life," but, I, ... personally, didn't get seasick. I had a little uneasiness one night, but, otherwise, it was all right. ... Like I say, the air was cold, the water was rough, and there was a lot of spray when you go up on deck.
... My sailing home was very good, but, I was apparently lucky, because a lot of people coming home at that same time had bad experiences, and I heard that some of the Liberty ships even had troubles where pieces of the ship would fall off and soldiers even got killed with things hitting them on the deck. Now, we came on an Italian ship called the *Hermitage*, and it carried about six thousand troops on it, and I was ... not in a stateroom. I wasn't out-of-doors, I was under an overhang, but, I was up on the deck, and ... they had bunks about three or four high, but, I was comfortable, and our sailing was not too unpleasant. It took us a couple of weeks to cross, when we went in '44, but, we came home in ten days, and we sailed right across, and the sea was very calm.

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

KP: This continues an interview with John H. Cook on April 23, 1998, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

RB: Rich Boniface.

KP: You were saying that you were on guard duty on board the ship.

JC: Yes, four hours on and sixteen off, so, you didn't get the same hours each time. One time, I had guard duty from two to six and, at the end of ... my shift, at six o'clock, ... the sun was just coming up. I went out on the stern of the ship, and nobody else was around, and the water was so calm, and the sun was just coming up, and there was a track of the sun, all the way from the ship right up to the horizon of the sun, and it was such a beautiful sight, and I said to myself, "Boy, I've got to go sailing on the ocean when I come back and get into civilian life," but, to this day, I've never done it. ... I would have done it with my first wife, but, we never really had an opportunity. We tried it a couple of times, but, it didn't work out. Then, with my present wife, she gets seasick and she can't travel on the water. Her sister travels. In fact, she's going on another trip this September, but, Alice says [that] she can't take it. She gets violently seasick, ... but, I enjoyed that trip back.

KP: Were you expecting to resume your job at Metropolitan Life?

JC: Oh, yes. I had no thought of anything other than that. I had to go back, in order to support my family. I couldn't think of trying to make another career for myself at this point.

KP: What type of job did you leave and what type did you come back to?

JC: The identical job, the same place, in fact, the same notebook that I'd made for myself, that I left there when I went in the service, they gave it back to me when I came back. I wrote up certain notes for the job that we were in. In fact, ... I was in a small outfit at that point, only about fifty people in the actuarial department. Our responsibility was calculating dividend scales for the company policies, printing up all the books and everything, handling individual special cases, and I knew more about the details of that job than anybody else in the unit. I'd written up a number of guidelines for the use of it. So, when I left, they used that. Everybody took
photocopies of it, but, when I came back, they returned it to me, and I stayed in that unit until 1963 and worked in that unit until that time. I was the head of the unit from 1953 on.

KP: Where did you transfer to?

JC: Well, the job that they put me on, at that time, we were just getting going strong in what they called [the] consolidated functions plan, doing everything by computers. So, the actuarial department set up its own department, a new unit that they started up, to work on [this, the] consolidated functions planning unit, and I was put in as the head of that unit.

KP: You mentioned that you were very involved with computers.

JC: Yes.

KP: I should really let Rich ask you about the early computers.

RB: When did you first encounter computers in your professional life?

JC: Well, the computers themselves we got in '54, but, I got involved with punch card calculators, IBM punch card equipment, in '51. … Are you familiar with them at all? Do you know the 604 Machine?

RB: Not really.

JC: It was a programmable machine with sixty program steps, … does a lot of operations. I cut my eyeteeth, and I learned programming with that machine, and we … had to do a lot of work. In fact, we had the most complex 604 board that anybody that I ever met had ever seen, … for one of the jobs that we had, and I had to revise that job for some special provisions that we introduced when we started paying dividends on disability waiver benefits on our policies. The 604 capacity wouldn't handle it directly and I had to … devise certain things, and write extra steps, and rewire the job to handle that particular job. IBM, … at our request, then, put out a new machine. They added another … set of five pilot selectors. We had only ten on it. Normally, they have five, but, they had ten on ours, but, because I needed another one, they put another five on it for us, and, with the extra pilot selector, then, you could handle it … with a lot more ease, the job that we had, but, I learned programming with the 604 Machine. So, I was able to do anything, like, sorter, collator, reproducer, 604, those four machines, I worked hands on to get a lot of work done. I had a team; … one of my teams was punch card operations, and they did most of the work, but, some of the special jobs that I had to control myself, I did it. In fact, I was there at the company, one time, after midnight, still working on the 604 Machine.

RB: Did the machines breakdown often?

JC: No, not very much. They worked pretty good. Now, we had a Burrows Machine that I did not personally use, but, a unit that I dealt with, I had to supply data to them for their machines, and their Burrows Machine was getting old. Because of its age, it was breaking down. Now, this goes on a little farther, this goes on to the 1960s, the mid-1960s, and we were programming
to take care of, by Honeywell equipment, … the jobs they were then doing by Burrows, and their concern was, "Will the Burrows last long enough until the Honeywell would take over or not?"

Well, they finally managed to squeeze by.

RB: How long did you use the IBM machines?

JC: Well, I used them until around 1960 or '61 or so. Then, … we also had a fringe application with Univac. … You know what machine language is; you're familiar with, like, Cobal, Fortran, etc.? We had some of our own languages that were purely Metropolitan. One of them was called the Metropolitan English Language, [that] was the name of it, and we had another one [that] we just called the worksheet program, and I wrote certain programs for the worksheet program to process various things. They had special jobs they wanted to get done in the premium unit, and we calculated the rates for them on that, but, when they were trying to bring this off on us, I was a great IBM punch card guy. I was in favor of that, but, this other one, when they gave us the worksheet program to do a job. … Just for a test case, I had a job where I had to do something, now, if I'd had a reproducer, collator, just a reproducer and collator, [and] a sorter, for three hours, I could have done the whole job myself and finished it, but, instead, I wrote a worksheet program for it. … I kept a chart of that, from day one until it was finished, and I kept a record. Now, I wrote it in one day. … First, you have to give it to the unit typist to type it up. Then, you get it back and you have to proofread it. If there's a typing error, then, you have to send it back and get it corrected. Then, you have to send it to the compiler, and, if there's an error in your program, then, it's bounced back as an error in the program, but, actually, they had an error in the language itself. The fellow who wrote the language had to correct some errors in it. I wrote some things in there he wasn't anticipating, wasn't prepared for, and he had to revise it. … Saturday and Sunday, that's two days, no progress on it, and then, Tuesday and Wednesday, they were revising the worksheet program, the compiler, and then, it was back being complied, and then, I got it back to run, and so forth. By the time the job was done, it was sixty-one days, and I wrote my boss a long, detailed memorandum about what had happened, and I said, "Now, it took me sixty-one days to do this. With a sorter, collator, reproducer, I could have done it myself in three hours, in an afternoon. Why should I go for the worksheet program?" … Well, it turns out that that was right. Then, another fellow explained it a different way. He said, … "These machines, you program the machine to pass the milk, and it may take you a month to get it to pass a glass of milk, but, once it starts passing it, it'll pass it faster than you can drink it." So, later on, they were very important to us. We couldn't live without them, now.

RB: They kept the worksheet program language?

JC: Oh, yes, they kept it, but, then, that was not the mainstay of it. That was just within the actuarial department. We, later on, switched to other equipment, to Honeywell, and then, later, to IBM. … I believe they probably do everything at IBM, now. It was all IBM when I was doing it when I retired. … The big thing that was the salvation of the job, from my point of view, was when they had remote terminals, where you could get, so-to-speak, hands on operation yourself, because, before that time, you had a project you're working on, and, … for three years, I was working with the coordination department on this consolidated functions deal, and I had a bunch of programmers working for me, and you'd work on a project, work it up to a certain stage, and then, there was a … high turnover among personnel. Then, a guy would quit the
company, leave, and go someplace else, somebody else had to come in, and take over, and handle the project. … By that time, there had to be certain changes in it, but, by the time you revised the program, sent it into the computer to get it compiled, send it back again, coordinate it with the other programs, and review the documentation, get it all set, the thing would sink of its own weight, but, you'd just, practically, never get anything done. … When you got to the point where you could feed it into the computer and straighten it out right there, hands on control, and start it functioning, that's where you came to the point where you could really make progress.

KP: When did you finally reach that point?

JC: I'd say that was in the late '70s. I don't remember the exact date.

KP: Really, that late?

JC: … When the 370 Machine came out, that was the big breakthrough.

KP: Did you see any dead ends in the use of the computer or lessons learned?

JC: Well, lessons learned. Now, one of the things [was], this we learned … by evolution, so-to-speak, to backup, [to make] arrangements for backup, because, initially, you'd start a job, and then, in the middle of the running of it, the computer would go down. Now, the Univacs, they would go down quite often. In fact, you never wanted to count on more than forty-five minutes [with a] Univac running, because, if it would breakdown, then, everything you've done is lost. So, you've got to start all over again. So, don't plan for more than forty-five minutes on the Univac; … [if] you'd get an hour out of it, you're lucky.

KP: An hour out of a day?

JC: No, an hour each time, … and then, if it'd breakdown, it'd be up and running again in no time at all, but, you've lost what you did, and you'd have to start over again. So, they'd find out, "Well, we put it on the computer and we lost it, so, we'd better make two copies of it before we feed it in, so [that] we've got another copy to start with," and then, they … just gradually worked, by various stages, until, "Well, we'll have another backup copy that's someplace else, and then, they'll keep a hard copy record, so [that] if the tape doesn't function, well, you can always type it up again from the hard copy record. Well, then, let's keep a photocopy of the hard copy record up in Iron Mountain," and the various stages of progression. They went through various stage after stage. … The fellow who was in charge of our whole computer operations for the whole company, he was the guy who wrote the one we called the Metropolitan English Language Program himself. I was talking with him about my experiences when I was working with my own private computer, after I retired, and I told him about how I'd done certain things, and one of the experiences that I had was that, … if I'm running a job that's running a long time and you have a thunderstorm, why, you may get a power surge. … [If] your computer goes down, you lose everything. So, we had a thunderstorm coming up, so, I said, "Well, I'd better take a readout here," 'cause, routinely, … I'd take a readout, at least once a day, and then, I'll take a read-out now, before the thunderstorm builds up, and, as I started to get the readout, then, a flash of lighting came, the computer went down, and I lost not only the one I was trying to readout, but,
the one that was already there, that I'd had from the day before. So, that meant [that] I had to go all the way back to square one and I lost about two weeks' work. I had to go back and reconstruct. So, then, I decided that I would always take a readout with a backup. So, when you take a readout, if you lose it while you're reading it out, then, you've got the backup that's still there. I was talking to Burt Neff about it, and I'd described to him the various steps that I'd taken, and then, he said, "You know, you're describing to me exactly the same steps we were taking in the 1950s and 1960s over in the company, experiencing these things and providing for additional backup to protect us," but, backup is very important, and documentation is extremely important, and the documentation is just what nobody wants to do. They all want to write a program and make it run, but, don't write up the documentation; that's too laborious.


RB: Oh, absolutely. I am in a software engineering class now and no one wants to provide any documentation for their programs.

JC: Do you have any personal experience, can you tell me, do people provide documentation today or don't they?

RB: You have to. If you want to write a program and sell it, you have to have some documentation for it, although the trend these days is to provide more of the documentation in what they call "online," to provide less printed material as documentation, but, to offer more help support.

JC: Well, of course, what I was thinking of is if you have to make a change in the program, whereas that was the one problem we had all the time in Metropolitan. We always had to be making changes and, if they're not documented properly, then, it's just next to impossible to move into that program and find out how to change it.

RB: That is also true. One of the topics we are discussing in class is designing programs in a modular fashion.

JC: Yes.

RB: Each person, working on each module, is supposed to keep records on how it works. Later, when we want to make changes, it will be easier to edit, or if someone else wanted to make changes.

JC: Yes. I have programs of my own where … I've put them together in modules, the modules, I've written years ago, and, at this point, I don't remember how the module works, but, I know it does it, though. I know [that] when I call this one up, load such-and-such a thing, it does just what I want it to do, … and I have a hard copy printout of it, and I've got it … on the disk, and I can see what the steps are, but, the really valuable [thing] is, I do have the hard copy record of it. So, I can always look at it and see what the steps are, but, … if I need to do that, as I've had to do on occasion, then, I've got to sit down and study, "Now, why did I do this? Why do you work it
this way?" and it's a lot of hard work to go through and, from the program steps, to understand why you're doing it just that way.

RB: It does slow you down a bit, but, it is invaluable later on.

JC: Yes, yes.

KP: Were there IBM machines at Metropolitan when you first started?

JC: They had punch card equipment there, but, they weren't very powerful. We did have a multiplying punch, where you could feed cards through and it'd take a number from one field in the card times a number in another field and put the product in a third field. I remember, I was quite impressed with that one, 'cause I did some work on that in, oh, about 1940, ’41, I guess.

KP: I imagine that, before the computer technology existed, there was a much greater need for manpower.

JC: Oh, yes, indeed, yes. Well, you take the function that I was involved in for so many years, [it] was the dividend function. Now, we had a unit of fifty people whose job it was to calculate all the values. Now, we're talking about thousands and thousands of values, for policies issued way back to 1892 up to the present day, and hundreds of plans in the force at all times, and different ages, and circumstances, and so forth, calculate all of those values, and then, get them all typed up into a book, and we had to do this every year, typed into a book, and printed, and distributed, and they would go to units of about, I would say we had, roughly, a dozen sections. We called them renewal sections, and each renewal section handled a certain portion of the country, and, in that section, they had, basically, two types of clerks. They had premium notice clerks, who would type up premium notices for the policies, these were all done manually, and mail out the premium notices to all of the people in their area, and then, account for the premium payments when they come in, and another set of clerks would calculate the dividends for the individual policies and post them on the records, and you had a dozen sections like that, … divisions, called renewal divisions. … Well, there were actually three different divisions with about four sections in each, and each section would have, maybe, fifty to a hundred clerks working on these things, and those things just don't exist today, and, if we had to function the same way, with clerical help, with the variety of insurance products that they have today, they couldn't live, manually. You couldn't do it anymore today. You wouldn't have the insurance products that you have today if you didn't have computers to handle them.

KP: You think that the multiplication of insurance options is due, in part, to the fact that the computer technology can support those functions.

JC: Yes. You couldn't have the options that you've got today if they didn't have the technology to handle it. … You can say, … "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" I'm not going to say positively, but, certainly, the computer technology sort of fostered the growth in the variety of policies, and plans, and benefits.

KP: How eager was the company to embrace the computer? Did you have any struggles?
JC: Yes. There were two factions. There were those who were for it and those who were against it. … I won't say that the ones against it were sticks-in-the-mud, because they were good, sensible people, but, they didn't really have the vision to see the future, that it was a necessity, that it had to be. … I remember, particularly in one case, and I'm trying to think what year it was exactly, well, it was about 1967, … I'm not sure which year, exactly, maybe '66 or '67, that the chairman of the board of our company gave a talk at the officers' luncheon, and we had an officers' luncheon once every month, all the officers in the home office here, that live in this area. In those days, most of them were here in the New York City area, and we'd meet once a month, and we'd have a dinner. We'd get certain reports given to us on the progress [of things] and various other details. Then, the chairman of the board would talk about various topics, and, one day, he got up, and he talked about one topic, and I remember almost his exact words. He said, … "Now, there's a lot of argument about the way that we're going into computers these days and that we should or we shouldn't go into it," and he says, "Let's get one thing straight, we're in computers in a big way and we've got to be in it. We've got to keep on this way, so, we've got to make it work." … He made it clear, at that time, that it was an absolute necessity, that we had to have it. There were people who were still fighting it. … They were going back to the old days. One, Sam Kulman, would always bring up the circumstance, "Well, I remember the case," he said, "where the undertaker," funeral director rather, "was coming along. He parked his hearse right outside the Metropolitan Building. He said, 'I'm not going to go a step further until this guy gets the proceeds of his policy and pays me for the funeral.'" So, he said, "Now, you can't do that with computers." Well, that was Sam's point of view.

KP: Also, the early computers, by our standards, were very unreliable.

JC: Well, for long-run operations, yes. It was very powerful, though, in what it could do and, when they first brought it in, the first thing they did was to give a demonstration for the officer in charge of the unit, called the Actuarial Univac Bureau. I, personally, had charge of that unit for a couple of years, later on, but, they had him down there to show him. … He was a mathematician, but, he was not a computer man, but, he said, "Now, we're going to show you; we'll take a number like," you know what factorials are? One times two times three times four times five, and so on. He says, "Well, we're going to calculate factorial ten thousand for you," and he said, "Boy, that'd take him forever, sitting down with a desk calculator to do it." So, they hit a button and, bingo, here's your answer. So, he was impressed.

KP: What was your last position with Metropolitan?

JC: The last position was [in] what they called Underwriting and Mortality Studies. … You know, every life insurance policy has to be underwritten, so, my unit set the rules for the underwriting standards. We did not underwrite individual cases, although we did special underwriting cases, such as hang gliders, or something or other like that. Specific individual cases would come up about the special circumstances, and we'd give them rulings on those, but, we'd set standards about how many points you would assess for a person with a history of gall-bladder surgery, or something or other like that, and studying the … mortality experience of medical impairments and longevity of the various classes of business. … I, personally, then, was in charge of inter-company studies as well. … The industry had a committee. I was the
chairperson of that committee. ... All of the companies in the industry would pool their data to get what the mortality experience would be for various kinds of things, and one of the things that I personally did was, I put out the first, and, as far as I know, the only, study of what they called substandard mortality experience. It was published. It was in the days when they were having fights about the restrictions on underwriting, and the anti-discrimination, and so forth. ... It was a demonstration to prove that, when the insurance companies assess a risk as a two hundred fifty ... percent mortality, that that was a pretty good assessment, and experience would bear it out. So, we put out that study in the, oh, let's see, when was that? that was in the late '70s, sometime, and then, setting the standards for what mortality rate we would expect from a new product coming in, like, when we came out with various options. We had things we called automatic offer, and we had cost of living riders that were attached, and so forth, and they wanted to know, "Well, how much is this going to cost us, in terms of mortality claims, if we issue these?" So, I'd give them the projections on it and tell them, "Now, this is what I project and expect it would be," cause, at this point, they're just taking my word for it, because they hadn't done it, yet, and they'd say, "Well, that's what Cook says it's going to cost," and, to my good fortune, I found, before I retired, we already had the experience coming in, and I remember my boss reporting to his boss, saying, "Well, I just want to show you that things are falling right on target, just the way Cook projected," but, Underwriting and Mortality Studies was the name of the unit and the experience that I was working on.

KP: You really enjoyed your career at Metropolitan Life.

JC: I did, very much.

KP: Were you looking forward to retirement?

JC: When the time came to retire, I did. In fact, what I did was, my normal retirement age would have been in May of 1983, but, in about April of 1981, my youngest daughter graduated from college the year before, and, ... also, a lot of new products were coming along, and, when I started out and the computers were beginning, it was a new thing. I had a lot of future ahead of me, and I welcomed the challenge on it, but, they were starting out with universal life and things of that nature, and I was near retirement, and I didn't welcome the challenge of it so much, and I felt, "Why struggle anymore?" So, I went to my boss and I told him, I said, "How much advance notice do I have give you if I'm going to retire?" He said, "Well, your kids are all out of college, you've had over forty years of service, you've got your maximum pension," he said, "you could retire tomorrow, if you want to." I said, "Well, I wouldn't retire without giving you a year's notice, at least," and I said, "I'm giving you that notice now." So, in May of ... '82, I did retire, but, I remember, though, we had awful job getting somebody to replace me. They started getting a replacement for me way back in the mid-'70s, and every time I'd get one, he'd be with me for a year or two, and then, they'd transfer him out someplace else, and I had a half a dozen guys [that] went through the thing. Then, finally, they brought up another replacement for me, and he stayed with me, and he did actually replace me then, at the time that I retired, but, I couldn't walk out when they had no replacement ready to jump in. I told one of my managers the same thing. ... His two sons were high-ranking officers of the Prudential Insurance Company and he always used to say, "As soon as my sons get to make more money than I do, I'm going to retire." I told
him, he had a big unit, about three hundred people underneath him, I said, "Walter, don't you retire without giving me one year's notice [of] when you're going to go."

KP: You mentioned earlier that you are writing letters and finally keeping a diary. What else have you done in retirement?

JC: Oh, boy. Well, you know what CCRCs are, Continuing Care Retirement Communities? I live in one. There are about nineteen of them in the State of New Jersey now. … In my own outfit, I've served twice as president of our local residents' association. I've chaired just about every committee that we have. I'm currently, and have been ever since we started, the chairman of what we call our Residents' Assistance Fund Committee, a member of the Assistance Fund Review Committee, to review requests for financial assistance from residents, and I'm just recently appointed to a newly formed committee called the Political Awareness Committee, and, for the last seven or eight years, another fellow and I in our outfit formed a state organization of CCRCs, and he served as president of it for the first couple of years. I served two years as president of it, from 1994 to '96, I guess, a couple of years in there, and I'm still very active with it now, and there's a national organization just starting up, and I'm on the board of directors on the national organization, and I'm dealing with the president of that on a lot of legislative matters. In fact, … we had a telephone conference call on Monday with the people from California, people from Florida, people from Maryland, … North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and so forth. He tells me there's a situation, … what we call "return to home." If a person is insured by an HMO and goes from an acute care facility to a nursing home, if that nursing home is not licensed with or contracting with the HMO, they can't go there. They have to go to one the HMO will authorize. Florida has already passed legislation saying that any resident of a CCRC must be allowed to go to his home facility when discharged from an acute care facility. New Jersey has pending legislation on that, and I'm working on that pending legislation today, but, Senator Mikulski, from Maryland, is presenting, next Tuesday, legislation in Congress, … federal legislation, mandating the same thing, but, before presenting it, she wants some case histories of people, and, in our conference call, we could only come up with one from Florida, and I had one that I could tell about. So, I got the details of that on Tuesday, and, on Wednesday, well, I started on it on Tuesday, but, they didn't get it to me until Tuesday night, and I was away all day Wednesday, but, Wednesday night, then, I called the president and relayed it to him, and he said, "Well, … you'll probably hear from Mikulski's office for some more details about it." … The point is, I'm involved in these organizations, especially legislative matters involving our own CCRC, involving CCRCs in other states and at the national level, etc., for various other reasons. … We've already worked in the State of New Jersey and we got legislation to forbid municipalities to make tax assessments against any … nursing home facilities. Now, our living quarters are taxed, but, our nursing quarters are not. Now, some municipalities had been taxing nursing quarters all along, but, since that legislation was passed, they can no longer do it, and that legislation was passed because … our group mounted a campaign of about two thousand letters to the legislators, pushing for the signing of this, and we have other things that we've worked on, this "return to home" is one, and our bankruptcy act is another one that's currently pending. The private contracting for Medicare is one that we're working on, and a couple of others that are in the middle. We're active in that area.

KP: It sounds like you have been very active. You were also very active in your alumni affairs.
JC: It's too active. [laughter] I can't keep up with that, can't keep all the balls juggling at one time. ... I try to deal with my prep school. I deal with my college; I'm supposed to be vice-president of my college class for the next five years, and I've got all this letter writing that I do, and I've got some, ... I'm heavily involved in statistics that I do, private research work of my own, and I can hardly keep up with those. I write a schedule for myself by the month. I've got it scheduled right out for the next ten years of what I've got to do each month and I'm just gradually keeping ahead of it, though.

KP: Who are you doing the private statistics research for?

JC: ... Most of it's for myself, but, occasionally, I stumble across something which I share with other people. ... One of them I had published in the *American Mathematical Monthly*. I've had another one published in the *Society of Actuaries* publication. ... Others, I deal, though, with friends of mine, a friend out in California, who was my boss for a number of years, and I correspond with him and talk with him by telephone quite often. He called me on the phone just last Saturday to ask me, "Who was the guy who said, 'I should have stood in bed?'" and I told him it was, do you know what it is? Do you know the Max Schmeling-Joe Louis boxing bout in 1938?

KP: Yes.

JC: ... When Schmeling was knocked out in two minutes of the first round and his boxing manager said, "I should have stood in bed," [laughter] but, I couldn't think of the manager's name, but, John thought it was a baseball manager. I said, "No, it was the boxing manager." So, I deal with him and he has other friends; ... we exchange ideas on various projects. One thing that interested me very much, I've run into a situation where I have difficulty, if you know anything about statistics, that you have problems about means, and variations about the mean, and then, samples and variations of sample means, etc, but, I had never been able to run across anything about the variations of the standard deviation of samples, and I was looking through all the literature I could find, and I couldn't find any. ... I talked to one of our residents. He wrote a textbook, in 1959, ... that included that very same thing. It's a very comprehensive statistical textbook for engineers and he loaned me a copy of the book. It's out of print now, but, it has a chapter in there on the confidence intervals for variances. So, I found that very helpful to me.

KP: How did you meet your second wife?

JC: She was a resident there and ... I've known her ever since we moved in. Well, I moved in in May, she moved in in September, but, what really happened was, ... I'm a member of a lot of groups in there, one of the groups, ... we had a line-dancing group, and a singers' group, and so forth, and she was in those, and then, one time, the chairperson of our activities committee, I was, at that point, president of the residents' association, and she got ahold of me one day, and she says, "You know, John, I'd like to ask you, I'd ask Walter Neidhardt, but, I'd rather ask you first, if you can do this. We're going to have ... a Halloween party at the end of October, and I'd like to get a couple of the residents to dance a waltz together, and [I] wondered if you would dance a waltz at the residents' meeting, at that party?" I said, "Oh, no, Edna, I can't do that. I'm
not a dancer. I can't do that," and she [said], "Oh, that's too bad. I was hoping that you and Alice McHale would be able to dance." I said, "Alice McHale? I could dance it with her, 'cause she's a good dancer." So, at that point, … she arranged it that we would dance. This was the beginning of October. So, they had ballroom dancing every Wednesday, and I didn't go to the ballroom dancing, but, I started then. "Well, you better go and practice up on it, learn to do ballroom dancing with Alice." Boy, she is a dream to dance with, I'll tell you. Unfortunately, she can't dance anymore, now, but, at that point, we got acquainted dancing there, and I danced with her until the October party, and I kept on dancing with her, and then, … I woke up to the time, one day, that I realized that, all week long, … while I was enjoying myself every Wednesday evening for an hour, from 7:30 to 8:30, … all the rest of the week, I was waiting for the next Wednesday to roll around again. So, finally, we hooked up and we got married.

[laughter]

KP: How long have you been married?

JC: It'll be five years in a couple of weeks.

KP: Five years in May.

JC: It was interesting, the way I let my children know, because I have a family reunion every year, and, in those days, it was always on Super Bowl Sunday, and … Alice and I had made our arrangements, well, we didn't have the date set or anything, but, we were planning to get married in May, and we'd met in January, and I had all the family there, about thirty-five, forty people there. … The close, immediate family is twenty-four, but, then, I have nephews, and nieces, and so forth, and cousins. Well, … I started to talk to them. I said, "I wanted to talk to you a little bit about your mother," and I talked to them about her for about ten, fifteen minutes or so, telling them about how unhappy I'd been since her death. She'd just died the year before and one of the things I said was, "Now, just last Christmas here, … I went to Mass at Christmastime and, during the Christmas Mass, … I was crying so hard, I had to bite my lip in order to avoid crying out loud," and I said, "Now, after I've told you all of these things, you're going to find it hard to believe the next thing I have to say. Well, the day after tomorrow, Tuesday evening, I have to meet with the pastor of my local parish to arrange my wedding plans." Boy, eyebrows went up and jaws hit the table, and then, I told them, [for] about ten minutes, about Alice. I said, "Now, after I've told you my story, who wants to be the first to congratulate me?" Gee, they all rushed up and they were just as thrilled as they could be. They didn't know Alice from Adam, didn't know anything about her, but, they met her after that, and they've taken to her very nicely. … I always thought that was a wonderful experience.

RB: Where do your children live now?

JC: Well, I have one in Virginia, outside of Charlottesville. I have one in Delaware, outside of Wilmington, near Newark, and I have five that are up in North Jersey. One is currently in Bloomfield, two are in Morristown, one is in Morris Plains, and one is in Wharton, near Dover.

KP: One of your sons, John R. Cook, went to Rutgers.
JC: Yes.

KP: He also served in the Air Force during the Vietnam War.

JC: Yes. He graduated from Rutgers in ’65, and he immediately signed up in the Air Force, and he spent four years in the Air Force. … He started out in the States, had training. He had studied both Russian and German in college and, when they got him in the Air Force, they sent him to Indiana, … I think it was Indiana, for about a three month special training course. … When in Rutgers, he managed to cram four years of college education into five years, [laughter] but, when he went out to Indiana, studying Russian, he graduated valedictorian, had to give the valedictory address in Russian. Then, he went down to Texas for a period of time, then, finally, shipped over to Germany, and was in Germany for a year or so. Then, he came back for a furlough, then, went back to Turkey for another year or two. Then, he shipped back from Turkey and got discharged and his function in the Army was to be on the radio and monitor the conversations of Russian pilots who were flying in the area, to record what they were saying.

KP: How would you have felt if he had gone to Vietnam?

JC: Very unhappy.

KP: Your older son also went to Rutgers and another son went to Rutgers-Newark.

JC: Well, … the one went to Rutgers-Newark for a year.

KP: Excuse me, actually, I meant your daughter.

JC: Oh, the daughter, yes, the two daughters went to Rutgers-Newark. … Well, in those days, I couldn't afford to send them to a boarding school and they went to Rutgers-Newark. In fact, he started at Rutgers-Newark, and then, after a year of it, he pressured me so hard, I agreed to [send him elsewhere]. I was thinking I'd let him have a couple of years in Newark, and then, maybe, send him to the [New Brunswick] campus for a year or so, but, he wanted to come right away, so, he came down, and we managed to squeak by. …

KP: Were you glad that a third-generation of your family continued at Rutgers?

JC: Yes, I was pleased. Rutgers … was economical, for one thing, but, I was pleased with it. … I had another daughter that came to Cook College for a couple of years, but, she dropped out in the middle of her junior year and quit; later on, went back, after ten years, with a couple of kids, and got her degree from Montclair State, but, she dropped out, but, then, the next daughter, … well, one started out in Montclair State, but, she dropped out after a couple of months, and the last daughter, we sent her down to Delaware, partially because we felt that it was good for her to get away from home. She was very much of a shy person, a homebody and so forth, and it was a good experience for her, and, when we took her down there to start the first day, we left her, she was … enrolled in the agricultural [course], as an agricultural major. It was the worst mistake she ever made. She transferred, very shortly after that, to math. She was a wiz at math, … but, we left her on the front steps of the Ag building, and we came home again, and I was expecting
to get home and find a telephone message for me, "Come and get me," but, she stuck it out. She stayed there, and she graduated, and she met a Vietnamese boy down there, who'd just come over from Vietnam, and, in 1982, they got married. They've got five children now. Now, she lives down in Delaware. My wife hated the trip, on the New Jersey Turnpike, down to Delaware, and we were running down there all the time to see Mary, and, when she graduated, "Boy, no more of that." She came home for two years, and then, she married Tuan and moved to Delaware, and, now, it's down to Delaware, on the Turnpike. I have to go down there again on the 10th of May.

[laughter]

KP: Is there anything that we forgot to ask you about? Did you ever join the American Legion?

JC: Well, literally, I did, because, as soon as I got back, a friend of mine, who was in the Legion strong, signed me up. I got back in December of … '45. He signed me up, but, I never went to a meeting, and I was a paid member for 1945. In 1946, I was an unpaid member. In 1947, I was no longer a member.

KP: You have gone to reunions of your ...

JC: … Of my outfit, yes, and one of my buddies from the Army learned of the reunions because he was an American Legion fellow and he learned of it in an American Legion publication. So, that was only in around the 1980s that he learned about it. I'd lost contact with him, but, then, I finally went to a reunion in 1990, up in Rochester, and saw him for the first time since he and I were the only two of our whole outfit who wound up on the Hermitage coming home together, unless Ho-Woo was on there and I didn't even know it. … So, I left, parted with him in Camp Kilmer in November 1945, and never saw him again until 1990.

KP: Had you stayed in touch with anyone from your unit before the reunion?

JC: Yes, one, a fellow named Bernie (Duck?). … I stayed, not in close contact with him, but, I saw him a couple of times, once, down in Washington, once, up in New York, when he stopped in to see me, and we corresponded [with] Christmas cards.

KP: It seems like you got reacquainted with a number of people through the reunions.

JC: Well, then, I met a lot of people that I'd known during the service, of course, and many of them were from companies; like, the line company men, I didn't know too well, but, I knew the C Company men, because I'd been in that company for a year, but, the B, C, and D, I didn't know well, but, then, I met them out there … at the reunions that we'd gone to, and, now, I can say I'm close friends with all of them.

KP: Your initial impression of the company was fairly accurate, that they were a hard fighting group. You felt isolated, because you were the only college graduate.

JC: Yes, I felt [that] I would not want to socialize with them in civilian life. I didn't like their attitudes and lifestyle, but, I found out that there were some guys, take Harvey Showalter, who was with me all the time, and another guy, D. W. Smith, they were a good, honest, clean-living
couple of guys, but, after all, … these were young people, most of them. They were only drafted at eighteen or nineteen, and they were out on their own, and they drank freely, and they went for women freely; their morals were not anything that I would admire. There were some of them there, married men, who took their rings off when they went overseas, … but, Harvey, and Smitty, and I, … we seemed to be the unusual ones, as far as that goes, but, as I see them now, there weren't too many of them married. The ones who were married, … mostly, they were older ones. … We had a few of the cadre outfit who were up in their upper twenties and … even into the thirties, … but, most of them married after the war, and they've led nice, stable lives, with fifty-year marriages and so forth, and … they are very upright people in responsible positions in civilian life, too.

KP: Did any of them go to college after the war?

JC: There were some of them. I can't tell you how many, but, there were some.

KP: Yes, I was just curious, since you mentioned that you were the exception at the time.

JC: … There were some. There was a number; I can't really give you any idea [off] how many, though. I remember, one fellow, … this is a little different, but, he got shot up bad, in the face, in August 1944, and he … was shipped out to England, and then, he was in reconstructive surgery for a long period of time, and you see him today, and he looks perfectly normal, but, he practically lost half of his face, but, they reconstructed it for him.

KP: It sounds as though your unit had reasonably good medical care, from your personal experiences.

JC: Yes. …

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

JC: … When they got in combat, they had a lot of attention [that] they had to give to their men, and the men got pretty good attention. … We had, I would say, very few men who would be wounded on-the-line, and get back to a hospital, and die after they got back to it. If they got back to a field hospital, they probably made it.

KP: That must have been very reassuring. If you were wounded, there was a good chance that you would make it.

JC: Yes, yes. Most of the ones who … were killed were pretty much killed outright.

KP: Thank you very much. We really appreciate your coming up to the University and sharing your stories.

JC: Well, you know, at first, when I heard about it a couple of years ago, I thought to myself, "Well, they don't want to hear anything about me; I didn't have a very glamorous experience of it," but, I can tell you about some of the things that other people had done.
KP: We really appreciate it.

RB: It was very interesting.

KP: Also, Rich is involved in computer programming.

RB: If you have anything else that you would like to show us, we can keep going.

JC: Let me see, … oh, here it is. … Well, I brought some pictures, but, … you wouldn't be interested in really looking at those. One of them is a picture that was taken [when] we had our first reunion in 1948, in New York, and I have a picture of the guys at that reunion, and then, I have a picture of our company taken in Texas and the company taken in England.

KP: You attended the 1948 reunion.

JC: Yes. I'll show you the top of my head. … There, that's the top of my head and that's Tom Kelly, right there, near me. I'm near him because he and I worked in the same company together. In fact, he worked in my unit for a time. … I can recognize some of those people, not too many of them, though. That looks like Captain Marcinkowski, there's Lieutenant (Wilhelm?), there's Tommy Harmon, Ed Harmon, not Tommy, Ed Harmon, a few other isolated people, but, I took this picture with me to one of our reunions, and many of the people at the reunion were able to identify ones in the picture. … (Pringle?), I recognize him, (Nolan?). … We had our reunions every two years since then, but, we changed it a few years ago to make it … once every year, because not enough of us live to go two years at a time. We're getting on in years now. I'm one of the old guys of the outfit, because, when I joined the outfit, I was twenty-five years old. Most of them were about twenty.

KP: Yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JC: Let's see what they are. Well, that's a picture of myself in the south of France. I was a skinny guy in those days, a picture of one of our tanks, some of our guys in the outfit. … That's a picture of me, up on top. …

KP: Do you remember where this was taken?

JC: Yes, it's south of Avignon.

KP: Okay.

JC: I've seen it in the encyclopedia. That's how I know.

KP: Yes, it is very famous.
JC: I can't think of the name of it now, but, I'm up on top of that bridge, and there's some pictures, oh, some guns, covered, but, I saw some pictures of ruins in here. Oh, that's kind of dilapidated. That's a broken down bridge. Here's buildings torn down, rubble.

RB: Who took these pictures?

JC: I don't know who took them. They were taken on our way back from Germany, down to the south of France, after the war, but, we saw some of these things when we first crossed the Ruhr into Germany. … There was terrible destruction there and there was terrible destruction in La Haye DuPuits, when we went through that town. There's a picture of the autobahn in Germany. We didn't have roads like that in the United States in those days.

KP: To you, this seemed like a vast highway. Now, this does not hold salt to the New Jersey Turnpike.

JC: It impressed me very much when we got on it ourselves.

RB: How did you come by these pictures?

JC: Well, I got them before I got discharged. I met with fellows and they had pictures. We exchanged pictures, like, that picture of myself. I didn't have a camera, but, somebody else took the picture and gave a copy of it to me. I even have, on the back of this, who some of these people are. ...

KP: "At GI Joe's, between Nancy and Dijon."

JC: … On our way down to the south of France, yes. That's Saponas in the middle, and O'Neil, and Smitty, Horhman. So, I just dragged these out this morning to look at them and see what they were like. I take this with me every time I go to … one of our battalion reunions. Everybody else has pictures. They drag them out and we exchange views and discussions. One of the comments [was], we talked about "battle fatigue," this book that was written has a story in there, includes the report about So-and-So, I've forgotten his name, who was relieved and sent to the hospital on battle fatigue, and one guy, Ed Harmon, objected strenuously. He said, "That should be deleted, because that's a disgrace to put that in there, about the guy having battle fatigue," and the fellow who was [sent back], he was there, present, he says, "I don't mind anybody knowing it. I had it. So, I had battle fatigue?" and our national administrator at the time, he was up in the front, speaking from the podium, and I'll never forget his comment, he said, "You know, actually, I can remember a couple of times when I was pretty nervous myself," [laughter] and I thought that was an understatement.

KP: I hope you are coming to the Rutgers reunion this year.

JC: Yes, it'll be … my sixtieth, so, we're set for a big time, although I'm afraid that we won't have as many as I would like to see.

KP: My students are all looking forward to the parade.
JC: Oh, yes. Well, I'll be carrying the … flag for our class, the Class of 1938. I've carried that, … oh, about every year for the last twenty years or so, except, on our fifty-fifth, I was sick, and I couldn't make it. So, I had to miss that one, but, otherwise, I've carried the flag, and so, I come on occasion. ...

END OF INTERVIEW

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/11/03
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 3/14/03
Reviewed by John H. Cook 5/8/03