

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LEON I. KATZ

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

and

SUSAN YOUSIF

and

PETER ASCH

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

JUNE 15, 2005

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Leon I. Katz on June 15, 2005, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth ...

Susan Yousif: ... Sue Yousif ...

Peter Asch: ... Peter Asch.

SI: Mr. Katz, thank you very much for coming in today.

Leon Katz: You're welcome.

SY: Can you tell us when and where you were born?

LK: I was born in Plainfield, New Jersey.

SY: Can you tell us about your parents?

LK: My parents both emigrated from Russia, actually, when they were quite young, around eight or nine or ten, thereabouts, and I have two sisters. I also had a twin brother who died at the age of about eighteen months. So, I never really knew him.

SI: Which sections of Russia did they come from, roughly?

LK: I really don't know. I would think it's the Ukraine, that particular area. ... They both came over separately and they met in the United States. They ... didn't know each other at that time.

SI: Do you know the approximate year when they came over?

LK: I would guess ... around 1900.

SI: Did they come to the same area of the country?

LK: Yes, yes, actually, they met in New York City and they obviously grew up in separate households. I don't know exactly ... how they met and how they married, but that was before my time, obviously.

SI: Did they ever offer any explanations for why their families immigrated?

LK: Oh, I think if you read a history of the time, ... there was a tremendous amount of immigration ... from Russia. ... I think everything was poor over there and this was, like, "the Promised Land." ... They were very lucky they did, considering the consequences of the Holocaust, much later on. ... They were both Jewish, as I am Jewish.

SI: Did you ever hear any stories, perhaps from your grandparents or other relatives, about the *pogroms* or life in Russia?

LK: No, other than it was very poor and they wanted to get out. ... I don't know what the circumstances of my mother's immigration [were], but it seems to me, I recall that one of my grandparents stayed there for a while, then, they came over later, after they were settled, but the whole family came, the grandparents and all.

SI: You do not really know how they met, other than that they were from the same area.

LK: No, I don't know how they met, other than that. They lived in Brooklyn, that area there, and I assume they just either met in school or [for] whatever reason. I have no idea.

SI: Do you have any idea of what their levels of education were?

LK: Not much, just grammar school. That's about it.

SI: Do you know when they got married?

LK: I really ... don't know the exact date. I would assume, ... my father was probably eligible for the First World War and, probably, they married around that time. He never was conscripted or anything. He never participated in that, but he should have been around that age ... and was exempted; for what reason, I don't know.

SI: What did your father do for a living?

LK: Well, he started out ... as, literally, a pushcart peddler. ... He got involved in selling floor coverings and things like that, from a pushcart. ... My mother helped him, also. Obviously, they had met before that and [had] gotten married and she helped. ... From there, he moved ... to opening up his own floor covering store and he involved his brother. ... We had a whole family business, including my grandfather, his father. So, we all, they, became part of the floor covering business. In fact, one of his brothers is right here in New Brunswick; he became a councilman here, I think, in Highland Park. ... We settled in the Newark area and he settled in New Brunswick. ... Another brother settled in Plainfield and I think it all started when my grandfather came over. For some reason or other, I recall [that] they had a farm out in Succasunna, New Jersey. So, from the farm, they ended up with the pushcart, and then, opening stores and becoming quite successful, especially my uncle, ... who's from New Brunswick. ... Like I said, he was a councilman, I think, in Highland Park. ... [He], I guess, still has family here, yes. He's dead now.

SI: Your family had relocated to New Jersey before your father became a pushcart peddler, before that business developed.

LK: Well, they were obviously brought over by their parents. ...

SI: I meant from Brooklyn to New Jersey.

LK: They looked for opportunities. ... They were pushcart peddlers in New York, but they looked for opportunities in, I guess, Newark and thereabouts, [which] was ... a growing suburb,

if you want to call it that, and so, that's where they all ended up, in New Jersey, ... from Brooklyn.

SI: You were born on January 1, 1926.

LK: '26, in Plainfield, New Jersey. ... That's where one of the stores was. ... One of my uncles ended up in Plainfield. We started in Plainfield, then, moved to Hillside, New Jersey, actually, first, Newark, and then, Hillside, New Jersey.

SI: What was the neighborhood in Hillside that you grew up in like?

LK: Very suburban, very nice, very quiet, mixed people, ... Jewish and Christian and not too many ethnics at the time, not too many blacks or Oriental or anything. It was just a very quiet, nice neighborhood. It was nice growing up there. I had good friends out there. ... In fact, one [friend] I remember, I just communicated with him after many, many years. ... He moved out to California someplace. He sent a nice letter back, and then, the relationship ... ended. We didn't continue to communicate.

PA: Your family owned a small business; did that shield them from the Great Depression? Were you aware of the Depression?

LK: Actually, we did pretty well during the Depression, because it was a family-run business. ... I guess all the brothers did the same thing and there was enough [money] to [make ends meet]. ... You didn't need a lot of money in those days. ... We lived in Hillside, New Jersey, where I grew up, and it was a very nice place to grow up. ... I would even say that we were probably, not affluent, but ... more comfortable at that time, because it was the Great Depression. ... I never remember having to suffer at all, ... as a child growing up.

PA: Was most of Hillside living comfortably?

LK: Yes, ... very blue-collar, but it was comfortable.

SI: Did you see any of the images that we commonly associate with the Great Depression, like people standing in breadlines or selling apples on the street?

LK: No, I saw none of that, probably didn't even know there was a Depression, at the time, because I was very young. ... I went to the first grade in Newark, New Jersey, and then, we moved to Hillside. So, I was in [the] Hillside school system from the second grade up until my junior year, and then, unfortunately, we moved, so, all the credits I had in Hillside, I didn't have in Newark, because I only went to Newark, Weequahic High School, for one year, but I met good friends there, too. So, I wasn't totally unhappy with the move.

SI: What were your main interests in high school and grammar school? What did you do for fun?

LK: In those days, you played a lot of street games. ... I remember playing touch-football in the street. I remember playing hockey with roller-skates and whatever. ... I had a close friend, that we had, not physical games, but, like, we created a little newspaper ... between ourselves. ... It's kind of ridiculous, because, at that age, we were near a railroad tracks and we used to count the trains, and so, the feature article was, "240 cars passed on a train through Hillside, New Jersey," [laughter] ... but it was creative, growing up. ... There were a lot of guys who played hoops, ... people had basketball nets attached to their garages and whatever, and so, ... [there would be] roller-skate hockey and a little bit of softball and whatever. It was nice. I had a good childhood. I wish I had seen my parents more, because I did not get instructed; ... I wasn't shown any goals, whatever. I sort of grew up by myself, because both parents worked in the store. That was the secret to ... their comfortable living, is that both parents worked, not [like] today, where you have a housewife. ... I was really brought up, pretty much, by a day maid and I would see my parents at night, that's all. ... They worked at least six days a week, sometimes seven. ... That's the way the '30s went for us.

SI: This may be jumping ahead, but did they encourage you to go into the family business?

LK: No, no, they didn't encourage me. ... I sort of was casual about the whole thing. I didn't think about it too seriously and that probably had something to do with some of the choices I made later on, which are not bad, but I would have preferred a little bit more supervision at that time. ... I got my supervision from friends. ... I had one friend whose parents were fairly affluent. I used to spend a lot of time over their house. ... Actually his ... mother taught me how to play bridge at that time, so that I found a substitute mother, basically, in that particular case. Some things I regret, some things I don't. I turned out okay, but I regret ... not having a little more supervision.

SI: What about your schooling, in both Newark and Hillside?

LK: ... I did well and I was due to be sports editor of the newspaper in Hillside and I gave up ... some extracurricular activities because we moved to Newark. ... I maybe should have protested and said, "I want to stay in Hillside," but I went to Weequahic High School for one year, my senior year. ... I had very few credits that I came with, and so, I kind of regret ... that I didn't come with my being ... sports editor of the school newspaper and some of the other extracurricular things that I did. ... I started over again in my senior year. In fact, when it came to the yearbook, she said, "You have nothing here ... to submit," so, she said, "Why don't you write an article for ... the graduation class yearbook." ... So, I wrote it and she gave me a full page on it. It made me feel a little bit better, [laughter] that I had participated, yes.

SI: It sounds like you were always interested in writing or journalism.

LK: In those years, yes, in those years, but, then, things changed. ... When you go to college, you think, in those days, being a doctor was the supreme thing and your parents always encouraged you ... to be it. ... So, I always thought that I would become a doctor, because that's what ... some of the more successful people that I knew had become, doctors. ... I entered as a pre-med here, but a fraternity brother of mine taught ... physics and I was terrible at physics. I ended up by getting a, I forget now; what's the equivalent of a "D," a "4?"

SI: I think it was a “4” back then.

LK: ... Yes, and the rest of my courses were okay, but it was, like, a blot on my record. ... I kind of said, “How am I ever going to get into medical school?” because it was very, very difficult in those days, especially being Jewish; it was even worse. ... So, I didn’t really think I was going to make it. ... What I did do is, I finished four years of pre-med, which turned out to be a waste. ... It was so much physics and anatomy and chemistry, whatever, and I never used it. ... I always had that mental blot on my memory and I had a lot of friends who didn’t do any better than I did. In those days, you had to go get ... a BS degree or whatever. ... You went back to school. ... One of my very close friends was ... in [an] honor society and he didn’t get in, ... sort of disheartening, if you’re a pre-med and you’re going to apply. ... I applied to one dental school and I didn’t get in and I just gave up on it. ... Another fortunate thing is, I met my wife, who went to NJC at the time. So, I was involved with her and ... [I] didn’t think too much about pursuing the medical career, anyway.

PA: You mentioned that being Jewish might have affected your chances of getting into medical school. Did you ever encounter any anti-Semitism in Hillside or at Rutgers?

LK: No. Well, I knew about anti-Semitism and I may have heard a word or two, especially growing up in Hillside, which had a Jewish section, but, like, seventy-five percent of it was ... very blue-collar. No, I had good friends in all areas, but, of course, I knew about it. If you’re Jewish, you know about anti-Semitism, ... I mean, even today. ... I’m grateful for my education and I’m grateful ... for living in nice towns and cities. I’m grateful for having met my wife and we have a very good marriage. ... Things worked out well, but, when you think back through the years, ... the paths that you did or did not take, they’re kind of on your mind all the time. ... We’re talking about taking the A-12, B-12 [US Navy V-12 Program test]. ... Actually, I enlisted, I wasn’t drafted, and, when I enlisted, it must have been a mental block that I just did not bring that paper with me that showed that I had done well ... on the A-12 [V-12] exam. ... Whether I would have gone into ... [the] V-12 Program, ... you don’t know; ... I could have. I think they had took some ... [out of the program at] the time of the Bulge and whatever. ... There were other people that were pulled out of ... some of those programs and went back into the infantry or wherever they came from. ... I’ve had a lucky life and some steps I wish I had taken, some steps, maybe I wouldn’t have done as well if I had [taken them]. I’m not unhappy.

SI: Did your religion play a big part in your life when you were growing up?

LK: ... It was a very Jewish area in Hillside where I grew up and, if you’re surrounded by something like that, you don’t think about it. ... It’s just part of your life. ... My parents were not religious. They started out being religious, but, then, they got so involved with the work space and everything else that they really didn’t force religion. ... It wasn’t until I became thirteen and realized that other Jewish boys had become *bar mitzvah* and I literally said to my parents, “I think I should be *bar mitzvah*. ... It goes with the territory, it goes with the religion,” and they didn’t object and I got a crash course in it and I was *bar mitzvah* in Hillside, New Jersey. ... I felt good about it. ... Then, later on, when I came to Rutgers, ... I sort of revived the whole thing. ... That’s when, actually, we got Eleanor Roosevelt to come to the campus. I

didn't do it personally, but I was part of the group that did it. One of our guys went to New York City, got an appointment with Eleanor Roosevelt and got her to come to Rutgers. It was quite a coup.

SI: Yes, I have heard about that in other interviews, that she visited Rutgers in the late 1940s.

LK: Yes, well, that was part of my fraternity group. ... That's another sad story. I don't know if you know that, but that will come up later on, I guess.

SI: Since you brought up Eleanor Roosevelt, what did both you and your family think about Franklin Roosevelt and his Presidency?

LK: Loved him. Yes, he was our god. ... It's a similar situation going on now. I mean, I don't know that it's appropriate to bring up politics. I won't bring it up.

SI: That is fine.

LK: Well, the way we're all crazy about Franklin D., that's how much we hate our current President; not hate, ... that's a strong word.

SI: You have strong feelings.

LK: Yes. I just think he's so bad for the country. I'm scared to death about what his legacy is going to be.

SI: I have heard that small business owners sometimes had problems with Roosevelt. Did your parents ever talk about any of his policies?

LK: Our kind of business, in those days, was so [small], we're like working people. ... My parents were at the store from nine o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock at night and ... they'd come home to sleep, and then, be home on Sundays. They weren't open on Sundays. ... It was a real work ethic there, at that time, and there were no benefits. ... Whatever you made, you made. ... I guess Social Security just had started around that time, whatever, but you're on your own and [it] didn't cost much to live in those days. I mean, [if] you made fifty dollars a week, you were a king.

SI: Did Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies have any impact on your life? Were you or anybody that you knew involved in any of them? Did you see the CCC or the WPA working in your town?

LK: No, no, because they're city people. ... The WPA was ... work projects that were created. I mean, it was wonderful for the country, ... but, because my parents had that work ethic, I never worked as a kid. ... I was just at home, that's all, growing up and playing with the neighborhood kids. ... It was a different society. ... I guess you can say it's sort of like a European ethic. ...

SI: Had you traveled much outside of the Newark/Hillside area before you went to Rutgers and went into the service?

LK: Not in those days we didn't, but, ... since I've been married, ... we've been to Europe several times, been to Israel a couple of times, been to ... Asia, Vietnam, that section of it, just as a vacation, a chance to sightsee, whenever.

SI: Before going to Rutgers and entering the service, was your world centered around Hillside and Newark?

LK: Yes, yes. I mean, we took vacations. Actually, my parents never drove. ... To go any place, we had to have somebody [drive]. In fact, there were people that worked for us that would come along as a chauffeur, just to take us. ... The place we would go to would be New England, someplace like that, or Canada, whatever, we didn't do much traveling.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, were you aware of what was happening in Europe or Japan and China?

LK: No, no. That's unfortunate, because, ... especially the Holocaust, ... nobody knew about it. ... What came out, later on, was such a revelation that you [said], "Could we have done something differently if we had known, encourage them to bomb the railroad tracks or something like that?" ... Whether Franklin D. Roosevelt was responsible for that, I don't know. The good that he did will long live after him. If he did some bad there, obviously, it's water over the dam and it's too bad. ... We had relatives that moved to Israel, a relative of my mother's, I guess. ... I met them once, when we went over there on a trip, but I never ... stayed in touch with them. ...

SI: In the 1930s and 1940s, were you aware of the Zionist movement?

LK: ... Of course, yes, yes, but, well, in the '30s and '40s, probably not. ... You became aware of it after the State of Israel ... was established. There were people that were [aware]. In fact, ... when I came here as a freshman, my first roommate, his parents were very involved in the Zionist movement. In fact, even then, I didn't know that much about it. All these things, I learned later on. I'm trying to think of his name, but I can't think of it. ... We roomed together right here, in Winants. ... No, this is not Winants. ...

SI: This is Van Dyck. Winants is up the hill. Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked and when you heard the news?

LK: I do remember, very distinctly. I lived in Hillside. It's funny; we lived on a dead-end street and the house that we lived in, actually, was a rental. We rented it from somebody who lived in back of us, who was fairly affluent. ... I remember when I heard the news, [at] like eleven o'clock in the morning or something. ... I was young. ... I didn't know the full impact, but I knew that something very serious had happened and I just walked out [of my house] and I walked up the street with my friend, Ray (Schultz?), a good friend, not Jewish, and that's a fellow I wrote a letter to after maybe fifty years, because I heard he was out in California now, and I don't remember discussing it with him or not, but I remember the day very vividly. ... I

don't remember much more about it other than I knew something serious had happened. I didn't know how it was going to affect me and whatever and I was still young at the time. I was, like, thirteen or thereabouts. I didn't jump on a horse and run off to the fray to fight ... for democracy and liberty and whatever, but it caught up to me at the age of seventeen.

SI: Do you remember if there were any initial fears of air raids or an invasion?

LK: I guess, probably, it must have run through. Well, yes, there was the Japanese problem that occurred later on. ... They were worrying about [Japan] bombing the West Coast, and so, they put all the Japanese in internment camps, which was a terrible thing, in retrospect, but I didn't feel it. ... In fact, I do remember the *Hindenburg*. You know what the *Hindenburg* was? It was an airship. It had nothing to do with the war, but it just so happened [to be] in that same area. It literally came right over Hillside, New Jersey. I could almost reach up and touch the *Hindenburg*. ... It was so big and massive in the sky there, because it's a balloon. It didn't have to be [like] an airplane and have to fly way up high, and then, of course, then, it burned up. I don't know if that was the same trip or not or that it was a previous visit, but, anyway, that, I remember. I remember walking down that street after the war [began] and I also remember ... walking down that same street, that dead-end street that we lived on, and remembering the *Hindenburg* coming over. I don't know where it went to. I guess it went down to ...

SI: Lakehurst?

LK: Yes, Lakehurst, yes. ...

SI: This may be irrelevant, but I have interviewed other Jewish veterans who remember the *Hindenburg* flying over. They say they saw it almost as a symbol of oppression, a huge balloon with a big Nazi *swastika* on it. Was that on your mind at all?

LK: ... No. I don't remember it. Yes, I knew it was German, ... but I think it was before the war. ... Obviously, it was before the war, couldn't [have] come over afterwards, so that it was just a country and I didn't know much about anti-Semitism in those days. Most of it, I learned later, I read about it, whatever. I lived a sheltered life.

SI: In the months and years before Pearl Harbor, were you aware of the German-American *Bund* or the America First movement?

LK: I knew about them, yes. I knew about them and it was abhorrent. ... What I read about it, what I knew about them, what I knew about Nazism in those days, I knew it was bad, but I'd led a fairly sheltered life up until that point, so, it wasn't preying on my mind. I didn't rush off to go to war, ... as a thirteen-year-old, because of it. I did that later, as a seventeen-year-old.
[laughter]

SI: How did the war begin to affect the Newark area? I know that they put searchlights and gun emplacements in Weequahic Park, for example. How did you see the effects of the war in your area?

LK: I think I remember, like, the blackouts or something or other like that, but it really never really affected me personally, that I can remember. I mean, you knew it was on, you knew it existed and you didn't have that sense of dread, for some reason or other. Now, when I see what's going on now, in Iraq and whatever, I mean, I get sick, but, in those days, it was something that happened. [Editor's Note: Mr. Katz is referring to ongoing US military operations in Iraq following the 2003 War in Iraq.] ... You had a sense of optimism, that, "We're going to win." ... If Germany [had] got the atom bomb before we did, ... when you think about it, in retrospect, what would life have been like? ... I mean, we were very, very lucky. ... I hope we're as lucky through this administration. I hate to keep bringing up politics, but I'm just scared to death with this guy, [George W. Bush], not that he's evil. He's just stupid. I don't think he reads a newspaper, God; go ahead. [laughter]

SI: Did the war have any effect on your high school, perhaps the older guys went off to the service or they introduced cuts in your programs?

LK: ... No, no, because you're with your contemporaries; none of them was affected. ... As I told you, I went to Hillside High School for three years, and then, graduated [from Weequahic] in my senior year ... and my grades were pretty good, I guess. I don't know whether I did well at Weequahic in my senior year or [if] it's just my carryover grades from high school, but I finished, like, fifteenth in my class, which was pretty damn good, because we had a very, very high scholastic rating. ... Other than Fred (Fitzsimons?), I don't think there was another Christian in the whole school. [laughter] Funny, it was a very, very Jewish area and competitive. ... I never even applied to another college. ... I just figured, "I'm not going to be around." It was a big mistake, because, ... after the war, you couldn't get into another college. There were so many applicants that ... all the registrars, whatever, whoever is responsible, said, "Go back to where you started." ... It was so easy to go to Rutgers. I mean, you didn't even have to send in an application or anything. [I] almost literally went over there and just signed up.

SI: What were your first days at Rutgers like?

LK: Well, I was young and ... apprehensive, I guess. ... There were only two hundred people on campus at that time and, fortunately, having gone to Weequahic High School, there were a lot of people I had met in school who also ... went to Rutgers because [they also reasoned], "We're not going to be around. We're going to be going into the service soon. We might as well go someplace close," and whatever. I was fifteenth in the class. The one who was sixteenth was a friend of mine, applied to Princeton and got in. ... You think, "Boy, I should have ... tried harder to get into [another school]," but I didn't know anything about good schools [or] bad schools in those days. ... Now, it's a symbol of status or whatever and it's also [that] a better school got you [into] a better post-graduate school, too. So, once again, I [think about] paths taken, paths not taken or whatever. ...

SI: You took the test for the V-12 program when you were in high school, then, you enlisted. Was it a case where you enlisted and they said, "We will not need you for a few months," therefore, you decided to go to Rutgers? How did that happen? When did you enlist and when did you go to Rutgers?

LK: Well, first of all, I think I was supposed to take the A-12 paper with me. ... I think it must have been some sort of an inner block, that I couldn't find the paper when I went off. ... I literally got on a bus, went down to Newark, to the train station in Newark, and got on the train and went down to Fort Dix and I did everything by myself. ... I left that paper back home. ... I was interviewed. ... He said, "What were you at Rutgers?" I said, "I was a pre-med," and they put me in the Medical Department. I never touched a gun while I was in the service. I never had basic training. I had medical basic training, which was mainly physical fitness, and that was about it, but they never ... gave me a gun. I never knew how to fire [a gun]. I've never fired a gun in my life, ever. I wouldn't even know how to. [laughter]

SI: You enlisted while you were at Rutgers.

LK: ... Yes.

SI: Was it in the middle of the semester or at the end of the semester?

LK: ... I don't know how I did it, but I got called up. ... At that point, I should have brought that A-12 exam with me, but I didn't, and then, I went, had this interview. ... I must have looked very young and scared and helpless, [because] he put me in the Medical Department, anyway, instead of putting me in the infantry. ... I should be grateful for that, because I survived the war, and it was a tough period. There were a lot of people being conscripted and [it was] kind of like going over to Iraq now. ... They were in the Reserves and they end up being over there and dying. So, that could have happened [to me]. I was lucky.

SI: When you were in high school, did you take any other tests in addition to the V-12 exam?

LK: That's the only one I remember, the A-12, B-12. ... After I was in the service, I took, I guess it's an intelligence exam. ... Maybe it was the A-12 something or other, because I must have ... hit it very big, because ... I was in Fort Lewis, Washington, at the time, and I applied to Officers' Candidate School there, ... on the basis of this exam that I took, that I hit [the mark]. ... I was so naïve. Unfortunately, because of that, they asked some questions about what I read and what I didn't read or whatever, etc., etc., and I came out [looking] so immature that even I knew that they wouldn't take me to be an officer at that particular time. I was seventeen years old and I just never had an adult who guided me. ... I had older sisters, but nobody ever guided me. So, I just was immature, I think, but I survived the war. ... I ended up on Tinian, where the *Enola Gay* took off [from] with the atom bomb. ... That's my claim to fame during World War II, that I was on Tinian when the war ended, basically.

SI: I have always been interested in how the war permeated every aspect of American life. For instance, normal high students do not have to take tests for the Army. Were there other ways that the war effort infiltrated your high school? Did recruiters visit your high school?

LK: No, no, ... I don't recall that at all.

SI: Were there extra physical training classes?

LK: Yes. They would put a name to something, “pre-induction exercises” or something like that. Everybody accepted the fact that they were [destined for military service]. Later wars, I have children that avoided going into the service, especially my oldest son, who really drove his temperature up or something or other like that, [so] that he wouldn’t be [drafted]. ... They were a lot smarter than we were. We were jingo[ists] and we couldn’t wait to get off to the war, to fight Fascism, to fight Hitler, to do all ... these things. ... That’s what made me enlist. I said, “Well, if I’m going to go, I’ll do it now ... and help to end the war,” yes, whatever.

PA: Earlier, you mentioned that you did not see the war as something you would be involved in at the time of Pearl Harbor. At what point did that switch over to where you felt you needed to enlist and that you needed to play a part in the war?

LK: ... I was like thirteen years old when the war started and, of course, you start reading about what happens and, by the time I was seventeen, I couldn’t wait to fight Fascism and fight Hitler, to make the world safer for democracy, whatever it was. I was very idealistic at that particular time.

SI: Do you think this urge to enlist arose from peer pressure, the movies or others forms of propaganda?

LK: No, I think it was all inner motivated. ... I mean, it was a good era, because everybody was on the same side. I mean, it was a war and there were terrible things happening, but you felt good about yourself. You felt that, “I’m doing something constructive.” ... Maybe it’s retrospect, I don’t know. I don’t know how bad I may have felt in those times, but I didn’t have that angst that I have right now, quite frankly.

SI: When you came to Rutgers in September of 1943, about halfway through the war, what was the campus like at that point?

LK: This is the campus. [laughter] This was the campus, this and ...

SI: This, meaning the Voorhees Mall area.

LK: Yes, like a mall, right, and then, the library was over there, adjacent, right here?

SI: The Zimmerli Art Museum was then the library.

LK: Yes, the old library, yes, whatever. ...

SI: The Bishop Campus was a little further down College Avenue.

LK: Bishop, yes, and I was a preceptor in the taller building. ... I guess it’s Ford. Is Ford on College Avenue?

SI: Yes. It is right in front of this building, Van Dyck Hall.

LK: Yes.

SI: There was also the Student Union.

LK: No, it was definitely a dormitory. ... There was no campus across the river and there was no stadium over there. All those came later.

SI: Were there many students on the campus at that time?

LK: Two-hundred, thereabouts. [laughter]

SI: What was the student body like at that time?

LK: People like me, and we joined a fraternity. ... Actually, we didn't have a house. We rented a house. ... I don't know if it's going to come up later, but, when I was overseas, there was a tragedy [a fire] in the house. I don't know if you knew about it. ... The principals, I knew all of them, the girls and the fellows, and I remember reading about it, I think it was in *Stars [and Stripes]*.

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

SI: We were discussing your fraternity. You pledged to Sammy [Sigma Alpha Mu] before you went off to the service.

LK: Yes, and a lot of my friends from high school, also, [along with] a couple of seniors, ... some of them were 4-Fs and whatever, that were still on campus, and other people like me. We had a nice group. I [still] see them all, not all of them, but I see many of them still to this day. I've been playing bridge with, I guess we were five; now, we're not even three. One became a doctor and he's very, very sick right now and it's too bad.

SI: At that point, the fraternities were struggling just to stay open.

LK: Yes, yes. There were very few on campus.

SI: What attracted you to Sammy, as opposed to the other fraternities?

LK: We're very ethnic. People gravitate to their own. ... Basically, it's a Jewish fraternity, and then, I made good friends, which, as I said, I've carried [on] with them for my whole life.

SI: I have heard about the fire from others. It seems like the news spread very fast, even to those of you stationed overseas. You said it was mentioned in *Stars and Stripes*. How did other people hear about it? Was it through correspondence?

LK: Yes, yes. I may have heard about it ahead of time, but I definitely saw it in print someplace and I don't remember where it was. ... I know I was overseas and I don't know what sort of newspaper I read. I certainly wasn't getting the *New York Times* over there, so, I just assumed it

was something like *Stars and Stripes*, whatever. I have no idea. I was surprised [that] you heard about the fire, though. Really, you've had that many interviews that there are other people who ... invoke it?

SI: A few people have talked about it, such as Bart Klion, and I have read about it in some of Stanley Klion's letters, but it has been mentioned in a few other interviews. I have seen the Rutgers publications that covered the story, the *Targum* and the *Rutgers Alumni Monthly*. It seems like it was a very shocking event for the time.

LK: Yes, it was a terrible tragedy, because they were such innocents, all the people involved. I knew the women, I knew the men and ... they were like me. They were very naïve, whatever, and I'm sure that the girls were up there in that third floor bedroom and they locked the door behind them; guys didn't even [try anything]. In those days, you didn't even know what to do with your; excuse me. [laughter] It's not like the free society we have today.

SI: Were you involved in any other activities that first semester, anything extracurricular?

LK: ... The first semester, there was nothing going on here on campus. There were no ball teams, no nothing and it was a very short period of time. I graduated ... from high school in June and I was gone by the following January, February. So, it was like six months and it revolved around the fraternity and you went home for the weekends, too, and I'm trying to think of anything else that happened. I reclaimed some of my religiosity, ... but I don't recall whether that came after we came back, when Eleanor Roosevelt came, or [if] it started then. I don't remember when the Hillel came to Rutgers, whether it was in 1943 or after I came back.

SI: I think it was after the war.

LK: Yes, I think maybe after we came back, but I don't know how we ended up getting; oh, well, it was after the war when Eleanor Roosevelt was there, okay.

PA: Did you interact with the women on the NJC campus?

LK: At that time, no, but I met my wife when I came back from the service. I met my wife at the Jersey Shore and I knew she was at Rutgers. In fact, I dated one of her friends, and then, her friend turned me over to her. ... She always said [that] she saw me on the beach, at Loch Arbour Beach, down there, that she knew she was going to marry me. I don't know whether she really [knew] or was [just] saying it; I don't know. Well, for whatever reason, but, anyway, I was dating one of her friends, and so, she turned [me] ... over to my wife, which was very fortunate, a fortunate thing for me.

SI: Was it a difficult transition for you from high school to college-level classes?

LK: Terrible, terrible. I'm so sorry I ever took those classes. I should have dropped them, especially physics. I may have mentioned it earlier, and he [my teacher] was a fraternity brother of mine and, probably, he would have given me an F, but I don't know if he did me any favors by giving me a D. It sort of ruined everything, as far as being a pre-med [was concerned], but I

just was stubborn about it and I figured I'd keep trying, and then, when I finally finished, I applied to one dental school. I didn't get in. I guess I wasn't really that *gung-ho*.

SI: Did you have to take ROTC while you were here?

LK: No.

SI: I have heard that things were very hectic at Rutgers during the war, with the advanced schedules and so forth. Do you remember that?

LK: Yes, everything was accelerated. That's what I resent, that I took a physics class that I should never have taken. I mean, it was so far over my head. ... Mathematics was not my forte to begin with. I was good in ... psychology, for some reason or other, which is another story. There will be an anecdote later on. [laughter]

SI: Did you work at all while you were at Rutgers for that first semester?

LK: I was a preceptor at the camp. What's the name of the camp? I can't remember.

SI: Raritan Arsenal?

LK: Yes, whatever. ... I'm having a problem with names, ... goes with the age. Anyway, I forget what the question was. ...

SI: Before you went in the service, were you working?

LK: No, I didn't have a part-time job, although my father was in the floor covering business and ... I worked summers with him, or for him, whatever. It really wasn't a big job, but I just sort of became indoctrinated to the business life.

PA: Several interviewees have mentioned that the academic atmosphere was less serious because everyone knew that they were going off to the service. Did you find that to be the case?

LK: I guess they may have felt that way, but, by taking pre-med and having to take the courses that I took that ... first year, they were tough, especially physics, and they had something [else], pre-induction English. [There were such] fancy names for some of these things, but, no, I tried to be a serious student. I wasn't as serious when I came back, because I sort of got involved with my wife at NJC and I didn't think I had much of a chance of getting into medical school and I just took a flyer at one dental school. ... If I'd pursued it, I probably would have gotten into a dental school, later on, but, then, I was involved and I knew I was going to get married at some point. I just kept postponing it until she graduated, yes.

SI: You enlisted in the Army and were assigned to the Medical Corps. Were you assigned to the Medical Corps when you were at Fort Dix or at a later time?

LK: At Fort Dix, they sent me to, actually, Camp Grant, Illinois, [which] was a medical training camp; not entirely medical. It was a regular camp with everything, but the group that I was in was called the Medical Department, not Medical Corps. I think Medical Corps is for the officers; the Medical Department's for the enlisted men.

SI: Were you being trained to become a medic or some sort of technician?

LK: I don't know what the end result would be, but, at some point, ... I thought I was going to be a doctor at the time, or, ... subliminally, I thought I was going to be a doctor, and I had the opportunity to get some advanced training and I figured, "It can't hurt." ... They sent me to Walter Reed Hospital ... and I spent three months there, maybe. I can't remember how many months, maybe about three or more. It was wonderful. I was right in Washington, DC, and, ... actually, they assigned me to some civilian hospitals there. I think Georgetown was one of them and I literally was, well, on some occasions, riding in an ambulance with them. So, then, I got some good insights there. Another hospital was a mental hospital that I worked at, began with a G, Galla-something-or-other. ... Oh, I literally worked on a ward. ... I got some good medical training; too bad I never became a doctor as a result of it. I got that, and then, from there, I was assigned to a general hospital and the general hospital was assigned to Tinian, where I ended up, and, there, I was ... helping with construction work, to build the hospital. Then, fortunately, the *Enola Gay* dropped the bomb and we never had to complete the hospital. ... We were building the hospital, and then, we expected that would be [used to treat] the first wave of [casualties] after the invasion of Japan and they're expecting numerous casualties. ... Fortunately, it never happened and I met some nice people there, too, a couple of nurses. They were nice.

SI: What did your basic medical training at Camp Grant consist of?

LK: Physical, nothing medical, that I can recall. I think, probably, instead of handling a gun, I handled a litter, something very, very, very basic. You didn't need any instruction for it, whatever, and then, I presume it went on. Other people stayed there, but I was promoted to Washington, DC, after they gave me the opportunity to become part of advanced training. So, when they were going through basic training, I was going through hospital training, basically. I lived right at Walter Reed Hospital, very, very nice there.

SI: Did you have any problems adjusting to the regimented lifestyle of the military?

LK: No. I was a very good kid, very obedient, very docile. If the Sergeant said, "Boo," I cringed, but I was a good student. I tried hard and, I remember, the Sergeant-in-charge. He put on an atmosphere of being tough, [but] he really wasn't. He was a nice guy. He pointed out ... to this other guy, who was sort of a shirker, "Why can't you be like Katz? Why can't you do the push-ups?" [laughter] or whatever we were doing at the time. I was a good soldier.

SI: Did they do that right away, to try to intimidate you or show you the hierarchy?

LK: It wasn't the infantry. ... I think it was a much softer form of basic training, a lot of trying to get you into shape, basically, [was] what it amounted to, hikes, formation, whatever. ... I don't remember much more about it, other than that, and I wasn't there that long, maybe it was a

month, before I got transferred. Then, I had the three months in Washington, DC, if it was three months, and then, from there, God, I went all over the country. I went to Camp Blanding in Florida, I went all the way out to the West Coast, to Fort Lewis, and then, came back again, and I went to Louisiana. I got around. I mean, I went back and forth across the country, and in a short period of time, too. I don't know, somebody wasted a lot of mileage, because I don't know why I went from the East Coast to the West Coast and back to the East Coast again, and then, ended up by being shipped out of the West Coast again.

SI: What were you being trained to do in this advanced medical training?

LK: I presume I was going to be a, not a corpsman; ... I was one step above carrying a litter into combat. I'd never handled a gun, even. I couldn't even defend myself. So, obviously, the powers-that-be decided that I was destined to be in the medical field in the Army and I was not going to be on the frontlines. I was going to be someplace in the back. I mean, they couldn't send me over. ... I'd never fired a gun when I was in the service, or a rifle.

SI: Were you assisting doctors?

LK: Yes, I was in the operating room, yes. In fact, when I came out of the service, [as] part of my bridge game, we had one doctor who was a friend and he knew ... of my experience and he was at Beth Israel Hospital in Newark. ... We were playing bridge and he got an emergency call. The game had to break up. He said, "Do you want to come with me?" I said, "Sure." I scrubbed and I assisted in the operation of this kid who ... had something very unusual. I can't remember what happened. It had something to do with his penis or something or other. I don't know what it was, but whatever. That, I'll never recall.

SI: Did your military experience influence your aspirations?

LK: Well, that was the path that I was on. I didn't pursue it seriously enough, obviously. I was hoping, probably, subliminally, that I was going to get into medical school very easily. I guess because I ended up going to Rutgers and meeting my wife and whatever, I just did not have that incentive anymore and I had a business that I could fall back on, which probably was another factor. ...

PA: Did you ever consider staying in the military and completing your medical training?

LK: No, I never considered it, but, if I had pursued the A-12 program, some of those things may have come to fruition. ... Once I ended up as an enlisted man and whatever, that's something I've always thought about, whether [if] I had pursued the A-12 area, what would have happened? Where would I have gone? ... First of all, I wouldn't have come to Rutgers. ... My brother-in-law also was in the A-12. I didn't know him at the time, but he ended up in A-12, also. He ended up in Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, and then, when he got out of the service, he got accepted back to U of P. ... He has had a very successful career, also by accident. In those days, your future was determined something by fate, rather than what you did yourself, paths taken, not taken. Some you regret; some, you say, "I was lucky. It has not been written, yet."

SI: Do you remember any of the procedures that you assisted in?

LK: Well, I worked in the operating room. I handed utensils over. I didn't do suturing or anything like that. I did catheterizations. That's about the extent of it. ... In the operating room, you have a scrub nurse and you have the other kind [of nurse] that just handles the instruments that are not sterilized. So, I did those things. ... At these civilian hospitals, well, that's where I did this, some of these things, catheterizations, whatever; the guy that I catheterized was a soldier. That wasn't there [in the civilian hospitals], so, I did it, somehow or other, in the service, I can't remember.

PA: When you moved around from hospital-to-hospital, did you move as part of a team or were you sent off as an individual to where you were needed?

LK: You're talking about the civilian hospitals or the Army?

PA: Throughout your training. Were you with the same group of guys throughout?

LK: Oh, no, no. I was an individual at that particular time. I didn't go over to that group with any of my associates at basic training. I was individualized. There were two other guys that flunked out of medical school that they threw into our group, I guess probably not to waste the training, but they were at Walter Reed, in my class. So, they were people with some sort of medical attachment and I don't know whether the person who interviewed me ... in New Jersey at whatever [knew about my background]. I just think he was sympathetic to me and decided to keep me out of danger or something or other. ... I don't know how I ended up there, but that's what I did.

SI: How often would you work at these hospitals? Was it a long shift?

LK: Yes, probably just like eight hours or whatever. I don't remember it that well. ... It was intertwined with ... some textbook work, also learned about the arteries and the blood and the diseases, etc., etc., most of which I've forgotten.

SI: You mentioned that you also went on ambulance calls.

LK: Yes. Well, that's at the civilian hospitals, when they assigned me to [them]. There were three hospitals in Washington, DC, at the time; ... one was a psychiatric hospital, one was a medical. ... Georgetown is the one that I rode [in] the ambulance [for], not too often, but several times.

SI: Did you perform any first aid?

LK: No, no. ... I never got to that point, to be a corpsman or something, ... [where] you would insert the breathing tube and things like that. ...

SI: Injections?

LK: I gave shots, but I don't recall whether I gave ...

SI: IVs?

LK: I don't think I gave IVs.

SI: What did you do at the psychiatric hospital?

LK: Made friends with some of the loonies. [laughter] It was a ward; it was strictly ward work. ... You wore your hospital clothes and whatever. You were there just to keep order. That's all.

SI: Did you have to wear a uniform at this time or just medical scrubs?

LK: No, no, no uniform, just wearing hospital clothes all the time. I had uniforms [for] when I went home on leave or something like that. When I went into town, I would wear my uniform.

SI: At this time, you were working more like a civilian. Was there any military protocol?

LK: No, there was no military protocol. Even at Walter Reed, there was no military protocol. Every doctor's an officer, even though I presume that they had their insignia on their whites, but I don't remember. You knew enough to say, "Sir," or whatever. ...

SI: Where were you housed when you were in Washington? Was it a military facility or did you live off base?

LK: No, we lived right at the hospital. ... It's not like living on a ward. There were facilities there. I know that I was right on the avenue, too, and I remember jumping over the fence and going to a little store there and I bought some bottles of milk or something or other. I had an interesting episode with another woman out there, which will be another story. It was exciting.

SI: What was Washington, DC, like during World War II? From what I have read and from what others have said, it sounds like it was very exciting. The city was growing rapidly.

LK: Yes, it was, basically; it's grown so much since then, but everybody's in uniform. There was a USO there and I was there and I came out and ... the USO was built right alongside of a park. ... I didn't know [that] the park had a reputation, because I went in there and I was sitting there, on a bench, and a lieutenant, or I forget what his rank was, came over and sat down there, "Hi-ya, soldier, how are you?" The next thing I know, he had his arm around me and I got scared to death. [laughter] I had never met a homosexual in my life before and I said, "Excuse me, sir. [laughter] I have to go home. I have a girlfriend at home," whatever, and I ran away from him. Exciting period.

SI: I am a little confused. Were all of the hospitals that you worked at in the Washington area?

LK: Yes.

SI: When they sent you to Forts Blanding and Lewis, what were you doing there?

LK: Nothing medical. That's when we formed the 410th General Hospital, where we organized the hospital: the officers, the technicians, the one optometrist, whatever. We were going to be a general hospital. All this was ... to prepare for the invasion; I don't know if they were preparing for the invasion or just creating the general hospital, but, at some point, the general hospital was going to be assigned to Tinian and we were going to build a hospital there. ... We were going to accept the casualties coming back from the invasion of Japan. That was the intent. ... To form the hospital, they got optometrists and opticians and surgeons and doctors. ... At that point, when I was on Tinian, we had nurses and doctors, whom we became friendly with, but I didn't even work in the hospital, because the hospital was just a base hospital, at that particular point. So, I was doing construction and almost got killed. ... It was a rock crusher. They were loading rocks up on top of a hill and I was down at the bottom of the hill. One of them hit me on the head, but, [laughter] fortunately, it was a small rock and I ended up by getting stitches from my own hospital, but that's an aside. I feel I'm talking an awful lot.

SI: That is what we want. [laughter] If we were talking more than you, then, we would not be doing a good job. You traveled pretty extensively in the service. What were your impressions of the different areas that you visited, like the South or the West? They were quite different, at that time, from New Jersey.

LK: Yes. Well, I was at Camp Blanding and I used to hitchhike over to ... this resort town, whatever, and I was on my own, pretty much. You got up for reveille or [to] do whatever you do. You ate in the barracks. You had the weekend off. ... St. Augustine, that's where I used to go, and it was nice. ... Then, I ended up in Mississippi and I was invited to somebody's house. It's a Jewish family that lived in Mississippi. ... At Fort Lewis, in Washington, I was right underneath the volcano and that was pretty much like basic training, went out on bivouac and [we were] doing a lot of things like that. It was cold and dark. That's where I applied to Officers' Candidate School, where I had the tough interview. They wasted a lot of money sending me all around the country. I did a little bit here, a little bit there; all of it, I assume, was pointing to being part of the general hospital and we would be on Tinian and that's when we would really face the war. ... Literally, I dodged the bullet, in more ways than one.

SI: Which port did you leave from? Can you tell us about the voyage to Tinian?

LK: ... We left from ... Fort Lewis, Seattle, [which] is the departure point, and it was a long time. They're very slow troopships. ... I don't know if we stopped in Hawaii or not and, of course, there were submarines. There's always the danger of being torpedoed or something like that, and then, I ended up on Tinian and that's where I started to do some construction work, ... until the hospital was ready.

SI: What were the conditions like on the ship and the troop train?

LK: Well, when you're young, nothing bothers you. You slept, like, three high in these cots and the food was okay (on the train); ... if you feed so many people at one time, everybody walks all

the way to the end of the place and they turn around and they go back through ... where they're serving the food, in the middle, and you go all the way through and eat. They were very well-organized. They fed a lot of people, not like sitting at a table and being served. You're eating buffet style. [It is] an experience.

SI: Was your ship traveling alone or was there a convoy?

LK: Oh, I do remember ships. I think maybe we did go in a group. I don't remember anymore, but I do remember seeing ships on either side.

SI: Did you have any kind of construction training once you got to Tinian or did they just throw you into it?

LK: No, they just threw us out there to do basic [tasks]. I don't know what I was doing underneath the rock crusher, quite frankly, but I did get hit by a rock. I may have been raking or who knows what.

SI: Were you working with the Corps of Engineers or the SeaBees?

LK: With the Corps of Engineers. Actually, I also did work with the nurses, for one reason or other. ... I was working in the operating room there, also, I did have contact with them and there were some nice women there.

SI: How soon after you got there was the bomb dropped and the war ended?

LK: I can't recall the dates.

SI: Was it a matter of months?

LK: It had to have been months, but I remember the Miss America Contest, at the time. When is the Miss America Contest, [do] you know? ... I remember, I can't think of her name, [Bess Myerson]. I remember her because she's the only Jewish Miss America that I know of. I forget what her name was. She went on to Hollywood someplace and had a mixed career. These stories can't be very exciting, [laughter] considering ... that some of the people you've interviewed, obviously, had been in the frontlines, had been in combat. They were pilots or aviators. I mean, I lived a life behind the lines.

SI: Most of the people we interview were behind the lines, working in base facilities and that sort of thing. Each story adds something to the overall picture of America at war. What were the living conditions like on Tinian?

LK: Barracks life. Tinian is an island next to with caves and, supposedly, there were still some Japanese hiding out in the caves. It never became a real problem or issue. ... It's sort of an interesting island, cliffs on one end, and that's, supposedly, where the Japanese were holding out. There was a lot of loss of life in conquering Saipan and Tinian. We became the next echelon to prepare for the invasion of Japan.

SI: How many people did you interact with in your area of the island?

LK: Not many. I mean, we were the 410th General Hospital, so, we had only the personnel of the hospital, at that time, and we were not at full strength. ... Then, there was the airport and the road that ran the length of the island, with the cliffs on the other end, which, supposedly, maybe, had some Japanese still holding out, but it was not like Saipan. ... There was some serious fighting on Saipan, but the serious fighting took place when they took the island, not while we were there.

SI: The B-29 base was open and operating.

LK: Yes. In fact, I took a joyride, not in a B-29, I think it was called the Liberator [B-24]. I had free time, obviously. So, I went over to look if they're going up, for whatever reason. They just went up, circled around a little bit. It's the first time I'd ever been in an airplane, quite frankly. That was sort of exciting.

SI: What else did you do to pass the time when you were not on duty?

LK: I read. They had movies that [they] showed outside on benches. ... Of course, when rainstorms would come, the rain would come in, you'd get up from the bench, put on your parka, and then, sit down and watch the movie in the rain. I wasn't there that long. I was only in the service two years and three months, all together, [even] with all that traveling I did around the country. So, I probably was overseas less than a year. Fortunately, the war ended.

SI: How did you find out about the atomic bomb, since you were on Tinian, the *Enola Gay's* home base?

LK: I guess the next day. Certainly, they didn't put up a [sign]. It's funny. I had guard duty that night and it's the first time I was ever issued any sort of a gun. They gave me a sidearm, a belt with a pistol in it. ... I don't think, at the time, I knew why they were giving it to me. I just, maybe, thought it was part of the routine, but I had never carried a gun, or worn a gun or done anything with a gun, up until that point and all I had was this pistol in a holster, which I probably wouldn't have known how to fire, but they gave it to me, ... loaned it to me. [laughter]

SI: Were you surprised by the dropping of the atomic bomb? What was your reaction?

LK: I guess [I was] happy. ... Life goes on. You pick up the newspaper, you read the paper and, even then, you read the Army newspaper to find out what was going on. ... If you're not in combat, it's very impersonal. It's like civilian life. ... In a war area, you don't have all the, excuse the expression, ... chickenshit stuff, the saluting and this and that. Everything was much more informal. You can address an officer, you call him, "Sir," or whatever. ... I was in contact with the doctors who were officers, but they're doctors, basically, not officers.

SI: What did you think of your officers overall?

LK: Well, the one who assigned me when I was at Fort Dix, I have to be very grateful for [him], because he saved my life, probably. The basic training officer, I liked, because he compared me to this goof-off that was alongside of me. He said, "Why can't you be more like Katz?" and the medical doctors who were officers, I liked. I liked the nurses, who were officers. I had good relationships with all of them. [I] supposedly was going to have a date with one of them, but I didn't get back to the US in time.

SI: Were there any regulations against fraternization between enlisted men and officers?

LK: This was [when] the war was ending and I was from the East Coast and she wanted to have someone show her around New York City or whatever. I was seventeen years old.

SI: Can you tell us about the process of coming back from Tinian? Was there any of that sentiment of, "The war is over. We should get back home right away?"

LK: Yes. There was a pecking order for how much service you put in. I had no feeling about it whatsoever. It was a life experience. ... At the time, I was too young to think about some of the aspects about it. Here, I saved the world from tyranny, I saved humanity, I did all these things, if I wanted to magnify it or something, but I was just a kid. ... They put me there and I did what I was told and, when I got out, I went back to civilian life. That's it, had no intention of staying in the Army, although, every once in a while, something like that pops through your mind. You see people who are happy in the service. ... I didn't have any great aspirations at the time. I had that lingering six months at Rutgers that I was sorry I ever started, but, otherwise, the other side of the coin is, I made many good friends, I met my wife, I survived the war and, now, I'm basically a happy person, other than my memory. [laughter]

SI: Do you think the service was a maturing process for you?

LK: Yes, it helped, yes, obviously. I mean, thank goodness you don't have the opportunity to do something like that, but it's a life experience.

SI: When you came back to Rutgers, was it still a small university?

LK: Still small, yes. It was growing and they used the fort out there. ... I felt like a big deal, because I was a veteran coming back, but I was a veteran among veterans. ... I got involved with the fraternity. I became the president of the fraternity. Then, I realized, "I'm still an undergraduate." Then, I decided, "It's ridiculous. I'm not going to be ... an ex-president at the fraternity." That's when I became a preceptor. ... I said, "Gee, I've got to have some [experiences for my] résumé," and I went out for 150-pound football. ... I had little experiences. I was on the Inter-Fraternity Council, met other fraternity members. I don't know how it is today, but you're just involved with your own fraternity. The inter-fraternity stuff ... did not exist. ...

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

SI: This continues an interview with Leon I. Katz on June 15, 2005, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth ...

SY: ... Sue Yousif ...

PA: ... Peter Asch. How did the transition from the service back into a scholastic atmosphere go for you?

LK: I had no problems. I didn't even think about it. ... You're happy the war has ended. You go back to civilian life. I really have no other comment, other than going back to the same theme of choices not taken, choices that you did take, what would you do differently? I'm balanced. I think I did pretty good. I did not satisfy some of my aspirations, but I think I've been very lucky. I've met good people along the way and I met a fine woman, whom I wouldn't have met, and so, I think I did well. Financially, I'm okay. I've been very, very cautious and I regret not having been more aggressive at some point. ... I don't even know if I can advise my children on how to be more aggressive. I have a younger son who is almost like a clone [of me] and he's very happily married right now and he took the same path that I took. He went to MIT, which [indicates that] he was a good student, ... but he's very, very conservative. My oldest son is a romantic, I guess. ... He became a psychologist, a doctor of psychology, but he's got a lot of interests. He paints and he's a good athlete and he's somewhat opinionated, which he's entitled to, but he's his own person, whatever, and my daughter, ... I can't say she sowed her wild oats, but she went off to the University of Colorado. ... After her freshman year, she went up into the hills and she lived in, basically, a shack, while she was going to school, and she found a boyfriend there, ... which we were not very happy about, but she came to her senses and she came home. ... She got a job and met her husband, got married. ... Even with my children, nobody was a clone of me, except, maybe, my younger son, somewhat, but he is smarter than I am. He went to MIT. ... He's got a good job now. ... He was not too aggressive, but this is probably part of the path that I criticize myself for, but, [in the] meantime, the path took me to this person, who was Leon Hess, who owns Hess Oil, whatever. ... We're friendly with him and, when he heard my son was coming out of MIT, he said, "I have a place for him." So, he never applied anywhere else. He just went to Hess Oil. He got a good job with Hess Oil and he's still with Hess Oil. It's [been], like, nineteen years, yes. He'll never be president of Hess Oil, but he's happy. ... He married and he has two girls, which are incredible. The older one, ... she's applying to college now, she got over 700 on all of her SATs and she plays the piano and she sings and dances and does all sorts of things. ... The younger one is entirely different, but, also, ... she's still in the ninth grade, but she got seven A-pluses and one A on her report card. [laughter] ... I have all these things to be proud of, some of them that I've done on my own and some of it, I've been lucky. ...

SI: Yes, you have so much to be proud of.

LK: Yes.

SI: I wanted to ask you more about Hillel. In particular, can you tell us how the Eleanor Roosevelt visit came about? What did she speak about? What do you remember about that?

LK: I don't remember what she spoke about. It came about because we were trying to establish a Hillel on campus and I don't know whether the rabbi was here at the time, but, somehow or other, we were together and we were the only Jewish fraternity on campus at the time. ... So, I assume that he approached us and a fraternity brother of mine [said], "We've got to do something to start off with a big bang," and he came up with this idea of getting a speaker, somebody important, and I don't know how her name came up. He said, "Give it a try," and we got on a train and went to New York City, where she was at the time and got an interview with her. She was gracious and lovely and I don't remember what she talked about, quite frankly. It's so long ago, and then, I became active there, in the Hillel, but it motivated me. ... I had a very minimal Jewish education; after I came back, I became active in the synagogues that I joined, became friendly with the rabbi on a personal basis, and then, I drifted away from it again. Now, I still pay membership dues, but I've drifted away. ... I'm proud of my religion, but I don't go for the ritual anymore and I think that I'm an ethical person. I certainly would not do any harm to anybody and I support the causes that I believe in and contribute whatever I can. ... The Eleanor Roosevelt story is a vignette; that's all I can say. ... She didn't make it a point of visiting Rutgers every year or looking anybody up. It's just something nice that happened.

SI: That was a big name to bring to the University.

LK: Yes, yes.

SI: What was Hillel's mission at the time? We actually passed Hillel on the way here. Peter was telling me a little bit about it now. What was it like back then?

LK: Yes. Well, there was no Hillel. It was just being organized and we were in town. ... Where's the Hillel now? Do they have their own building here now?

SI: Yes, they have a building on College Avenue. It is actually around the corner from our office in Bishop House.

LK: Yes, I think I remember meeting in town. In fact, I remember taking some classes there, because I was very deficient and I renewed my ability to read Hebrew, and then, when I became, later on, ... active in my synagogue in Asbury Park, I had to coerce the rabbi to form a private class and with a few women myself, and ... it was very nice. I learned a lot in that time. I learned how to read and translate Hebrew. We were literally translating the Bible.

PA: You mentioned the Zionist movement earlier.

LK: Are either one of you Jewish?

PA: I am Jewish.

LK: Oh, you're Jewish, yes.

PA: In a past interview, another person mentioned that the Zionist movement did not necessarily get along with the Hillel. The people in charge of the Hillel were not pro-Zionist.

LK: Well, I told you, I met one of my roommates, when I came here in 1943, directly from high school. His parents were very, very active in the early days of Zionism, actually, the creation of the State of Israel. ... He was very conversant with it and I heard stories. I heard about the early days of the State of Israel. ... He became a Sammy and he was part of the fraternity, but ... he kind of disappeared. ... What was your question? You wanted to know how it started.

PA: How did the Hillel interact with the Zionist movement?

LK: ... In that time, we were in town and it was in an office upstairs and I remember taking Hebrew lessons from them and we met, socially, with the people from NJC. ... Does anybody still refer to it as NJC?

SI: No, it is Douglass College now.

LK: Yes, yes. Anyway, I remember it very vaguely now and they're still a factor on campus, I assume.

SI: Yes. They are actually a pretty big group.

LK: Yes, well, that's good. Yes, I get literature from them in the mail. ... I can be proud that I was in on the ground floor.

SI: In your fraternity, when you were president, what issues did you have to deal with?

LK: ... First of all, the house had burned down which we rented, and then, when I came back, friends of mine and some of the alumni were instrumental in buying a house on Hardenberg Street. ...

PA: Somewhere behind Easton Avenue?

LK: Yes. We got a house there and it wasn't the greatest house in the world, it was off-campus, but on the other side of Easton Avenue, and we fixed it up. ... My parents were in the floor covering business; I remember bringing down asphalt tile, laying a floor in the basement, and we lived in the house. It was a small house. It was crowded, but, when I came back to the [house]; well, a couple of weeks ago, we had a meeting of alumni from there. ...

PA: The Rutgers Living History Society Annual Meeting on May 13, 2005?

LK: Yes. ... One of the kids in the house, I mean, he was a skinny, little kid in 1949 and he was at the event there, where we had the dinner. He looked up to me, because I was a veteran and I had come back from the war; and here's the little kid; now, I look at him, he's a lawyer and he's taller than I am and he was happy to see me. It really made me feel good. I felt I had some part in his maturation process, because I was a big deal upperclassman when I came back. ... He joined the fraternity maybe a year or two afterwards, not right when I came back, but there are

some positive consequences and I'm happy that I was involved with the fraternity, happy [that] I made good friends.

SI: What was it like to have this mix of veterans and kids who were fresh out of high school in the classroom or the fraternity house?

LK: Actually, my experience started earlier.

SI: Hardenberg Street?

LK: Not Hardenberg. It was the first house. It was the Phi Gam House that the fraternity rented in 1943, when I first came here. It was a nice house, right on the corner, and that's where the fire took place. ... The people that I first met there, they were people that were upperclassmen and probably 4-F and whatever. So, we had a mixture of older fellows there, and then, us, people who had just come in from high school and whatever, and then, of course, we disappeared, and then, we came back and we became the upperclassmen. So, we always had a mixture of seniors and juniors. ... I guess, now, everybody's the same age, so, you didn't have that mixture. ... We had hazing in those days and we had some brutal [experiences]. I got paddled, I'll tell you. We've done away with that, but, I mean, you felt macho when you got paddled. It didn't bother you. Nobody got hurt from it, but some of the kids resented it.

SI: Did you have a pledge for veterans, so that they did not have to go through the hazing? I have heard that some fraternities would take in veterans without hazing them.

LK: Yes, well, I was a veteran. ... Actually, I wasn't hazed when I came back, only before. When I came back, ... I wasn't part of that. I was hazed as a freshman, in those few months, and I don't remember paddling after that, but some of these guys, they got a lot of pleasure out of it, but they were upperclassmen. We looked up to them there, literally. Some of them may have even been seniors. One of them went on to become a doctor, I know.

SI: We talked about the 150-pound football team earlier. Did you enjoy your time on the team?

LK: Yes. Actually, another member of the house ... played high school football. ... In fact, two of them [played] and they went out for the team and I said, "I think I would like to have something on my résumé," and I thought I was a good athlete. I really wasn't that good, but I thought I was and I ended up by being fairly large for 150-pound football. I must have weighed 155 pounds or whatever. ... We went to the US Naval Academy and I remember getting off [the bus] and some of the other football players, when they saw me come down, [said], "Boy, they are big." [laughter] It made me so proud that somebody looked up to me, that I was so big, compared to them, but we all weighed about the same. Maybe I looked bigger at the time and it was a nice experience and I wanted something on my résumé, anyway, because all I was involved with here was the fraternity. ... We won a couple of games, played Princeton. ... I'm sorry they don't still have it. I asked you about it. You said it had something to do with that Title IX. Yes, yes, I liked having it on my résumé.

SI: What did being a preceptor entail? What were your duties as a preceptor?

LK: It was an easy, easy thing. I got free lodging [is] what it amounted to, but it was very little to do, just make sure you keep order in the house. I was preceptor out there at the camp, and then, I had to serve some time there, and then, they brought me in; I'm trying to think of the high-rise that's right at the end of the, it's like on a strip of land, Douglass?

SI: Cook College? Busch Campus?

LK: Maybe Busch, I don't know. There's a separate building, right here. ...

SI: Maybe Demarest Hall.

LK: ... I'll pass it on College Avenue. Really, it's not important.

SI: It might not be there anymore.

LK: No, it was a solid structure, whatever. I'm having a problem with my memory. ... I'm surprised I'm able to dredge up all that I'm dredging up.

SI: Was it a part of the prep school or was it a part of the college?

LK: Oh, no, it was definitely part of the college.

PA: Did you have to write up reports on your students? I came across a couple of reports written by preceptors.

LK: No, no, nobody ever asked me to. It was just, mainly, keep order in the house or whatever and that's all, for which I got free lodging. At that point, ... I had already been president of the fraternity and I was just like a fifth wheel in there. ... I didn't need to live there anymore, somebody else could have my room, and it was a nice change for me.

SI: We discussed how you tried to get into dental school. Did you then go into the family business full-time?

LK: I took a job first. I wanted to do something on my own. I became a medical detailer. ... You're like a salesman. ... The medical company that you belong to [or] the drug company that you belong to, they bring out these products and they have to be introduced to the doctors. So, you would take your car and you'd take your samples and you'd go sit in the waiting room for the doctor to see you. I presume it's a lot more difficult today and I think that it'd be too labor intensive. ... I was working for fifty dollars a week or something like that and it was a beginner job. ... My claim to fame was, ... I walked into a doctor's office and the doctor was sitting there and I told him, "I represent US Vitamin," that was the name of the company, "and we have these products," and I said, "This one is for pernicious anemia." He asked me to tell him about it and I detailed him. That's what the expression was. I detailed him about the benefits and the whatever and whatever and I walked out. ... I said, "Okay, I got some satisfaction of [the fact that] at least he was interested in what I was saying," and then, the next time around, up near

Englewood, ... I stopped into the pharmacy at the hospital and I told them about the products that we sold. They said, "Oh, you're the guy," and I said, "What do you mean, 'I'm the guy?'" He said, "Dr. So-and-So came in and insisted upon this thing that you're selling," and he said, "I didn't have it in here, on hand. I had to go out and buy it, retail, for him. [laughter] He wouldn't accept anything else." So, that was the highlight of my sales career.

SI: You must have been a good salesman.

LK: Yes. [laughter] Then, I decided I was going to get married and I couldn't afford to keep that job. So, I went to work in our family business. ... I worked for a year in Newark, and then, we decided to open another store in Asbury Park. So, I went down there and I opened up the store and I've lived down there ever since. Then, I ran the business. We had ... four stores, all together, and I circulated, ... but I still retained Asbury Park as my home base. ... I went to Newark at least once or twice a week, by train, and did the advertising and stuff like that there, and then, another generation came into the business. My sister's son came into the business afterwards and they took over the operation up in North Jersey and I just stayed in Asbury Park, and that's my career.

PA: How did you meet your wife? What was her background?

LK: I met her on the beach in Asbury Park, at Loch Arbour. She claims she picked me up and it was mutual. ... I knew that she was at NJC. ... Actually, I dated one of her friends, and then, her friend became serious with somebody and I think she asked her friend if it's okay. I don't know who contacted whom, but the word got back to me that she was interested. ... We had a very tempestuous courtship, because ... we were both at NJC and she was still dating other people and we were on again, off again. Anyway, we finally decided to be on again, and then, we got married and we have a very good marriage. My competition disappeared. [laughter]

PA: What was she studying at NJC?

LK: Liberal arts. She's very smart. ... She was basically a housewife, we had children, she became a travel agent, ... a part-time travel agent, and she's become very good at bridge and she's ... looking for, like, three master points and she'll be a; I forget what they call it.

SI: Master bridge player?

LK: Yes, yes, there's a name for it. ... As you know, it's the names that are throwing me, but, anyway, I'll think of it. A life master, I guess, and they get gold points and we had children and our children are reasonably successful.

SY: I have a question about your training. Did they train you to deal with the incoming wounded on a psychological level?

LK: ... No, we never got that far. ... At Walter Reed, I had contact with people who had mental problems and whatever, but it was all like being in school. It was not dealing with real people. I could walk away from any of those people, like when I was on the mental ward, for instance.

There was a great movie, goes way, way back, but I forget it. I can't think of the name of it, but, gee, that was a great movie. Maybe it'll come to me.

SI: Was it about World War II?

LK: No, it was about a mental ward and the guy ...

SI: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*?

LK: ... Yes, absolutely, thank you.

SI: Yes, that is a great movie.

LK: Yes, thank you for bringing it up, [laughter] because I never would have thought of the name, but I remember it so distinctly, because ... I was in the same type of a ward for a little bit, and then, I saw the movie later on, yes, good movie.

SI: What were the attitudes at the time towards mental casualties? Was it treated as a legitimate problem?

LK: Are you talking about the mental ward ... or are you talking about something else?

SI: Were the people in the mental ward soldiers who had been shell-shocked?

LK: No, no. I had nothing to do with them. This was a civilian hospital. It was more like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, but that's where I was for a month, and then, I spent a month in each one of these hospitals. I know one was a Catholic hospital and all the nurses wore robes and I rode the ambulance at times.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to put on the record?

LK: No.

SI: Is there anything that we skipped?

LK: I'm still not sure where all of this is going to lead to. I hope it's going to be edited. [laughter]

SI: Yes. You will get a chance to edit it as well.

LK: ... I took my watch off. I've been here a long time, haven't I?

SI: Over an hour.

LK: Oh, yes? I thought it was even more than that.

SI: If there are no other questions, then, we thank you very much.

LK: Okay, thank you. I feel like I've been at a psychiatrist's office. [laughter]

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

Reviewed by Thomas O'Toole 10/4/05

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 1/24/06

Reviewed by Leon I. Katz 3/3/06