

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN A. LAWRENCE, II

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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BRICK TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Ronald Butkiewicz: This begins an interview with John A. Lawrence, II in Brick Township, New Jersey on November 29, 2004 with Ronald Butkiewicz and ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Mr. Lawrence, thank you so much for taking time to do the interview today. To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

John Lawrence, II: Yes, I'm one of those few people that have to admit I was born in Newark, New Jersey, back in 1922.

SH: [laughter] Well, thank you very much. To begin the interview, please tell us about your father's background, as I understand he was a Rutgers alumnus from 1909.

JL: Yes, '09. He was an engineer and so I followed, because I really had no idea what I wanted to do or anything else.

SH: What was his family background? Was he from New Jersey?

JL: He was, yes. My mother and father were both born in the Essex County, Bloomfield, in Newark.

SH: Did he encourage you to come to Rutgers?

JL: Not exactly, see, I was brought up in Connecticut and when I graduated from high school, I entered Yale, but there were four of us riding in a Model A Ford and I didn't like that ... and when my admittance came through for Rutgers, I said goodbye to Yale, New Haven, and [was] on my way to New Brunswick.

SH: Could you tell us about your mother and her family background?

JL: Yes, my mother was a teacher. She graduated from Newark Normal School and then got her graduate work at Columbia.

SH: Were you raised in Newark or were you only born there?

JL: Oh, no, just born there.

RB: How come you were born in Newark as opposed to Connecticut?

JL: Because my father was in construction, an engineer as well, and ... they were doing a job up outside of Hartford when the Depression came and that's where he got stuck ... we were stuck. [laughter] Everything closed down in '29, so, therefore that's where I was brought up just outside of Hartford.

SH: Did you have other brothers and sisters?

JL: Yes, I had three sisters.

SH: Were they older than you?

JL: Two were older and one was younger. We were all three years apart. My oldest sister was Phi Beta Kappa and, as I say, I was never a candidate for it and it was always brought up. ... She was in teaching and she became ...

SH: Was she an administrator in the school?

JL: ... Yes, she was the assistant, what have you, of the grammar schools.

SH: Did your family give you a hard time about not being Phi Beta Kappa?

JL: No, no, no. We just used to kid about that, more or less a joke.

SH: [laughter] That is good news. What are your earliest memories growing up in Connecticut?

JL: I don't know, I guess, just starting grammar school because ... we were out in Cleveland and I went through kindergarten in Cleveland and then that year we moved and moved up to a town, Wethersfield, just outside of Hartford, and that was where [I entered] first grade, in Wethersfield.

RB: Did you have any hobbies as a child?

JL: I played football and what have you. That was another humorous thing at Rutgers. At Rutgers, the ... freshman football players were all the same and I'm not very big, anyway, I remember going out after the freshman year to the varsity and Harvey Harman was the coach and he put his arm around my shoulders and he said, "Shorty," he said, "the 150-pound team is over there." [laughter] So, that's why I ended up with the 150-pound team.

RB: I noticed that you were an Eagle Scout and therefore a Boy Scout as well. Was that a hobby you enjoyed?

JL: ... Oh yes, I followed through. It was one of the things, I say, the World's Fair in '39, we went in for a couple of weeks we acted as guides and what have you.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Please continue telling us about going to the World's Fair in New York.

JL: I'd say in '39, as a Boy Scout, our Scout troop went in and acted for a week, we stayed there, acted as guides for various people going to various ... well, to see various fairs over there. See, I'm fishing for words. [laughter] I was a professional engineer and ... in the end I was doing work as an expert witness in court, but I ... reached a point where I had to start fishing for words and so I had to give that up.

SH: Strokes can take away that ability.

JL: Oh, it takes away a lot of abilities. [laughter]

SH: Tell us then, if you would, about your time in the Boy Scouts. Were you in the Boy Scouts only in Connecticut?

JL: Yes. Just through my high school years right up to well, 'till 1940 ... when I graduated from high school.

SH: When you were in New York, being a guide at the World's Fair with the rest of the Boy Scouts, where were you housed, did you camp out, or were you in a hotel?

JL: No, they had a campground for the scouts and ... we stayed in there. ...

SH: Were these Scouts from all over or just from the Northeast?

JL: Well, at the time, it was only ... we [were] out of [the] Hartford Council that week. I imagine other weeks they had them from other areas, or what have you.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RB: How did the Depression affect your family?

JL: Yes, I say I was a Depression baby ... a Depression child, that's why, I'm left-handed, but I ... actually played golf and baseball and all because [laughter] ... [I] couldn't afford left-handed gloves. You had to use what they had and so that's why I got to doing things right handed at the time, but I'm a natural left-hander.

SH: That's interesting. You explained how the Depression affected your father's business and how as a result you wound up staying in Wethersfield. What did your father find to do during the Depression?

JL: Oh, he was on WPA [Works Progress Administration] ... I remember those that Franklin Roosevelt had, the NRA, the National Recovery Act, and my father worked as an engineer of that. It wasn't much money, but he fed the family and he put all four children through college. ... My grandfather [graduated from] ... Princeton. He wanted me to go to Princeton. He was gonna put me through, but when my father said he'd put his own son through, so ... I'm just as glad because Princeton would have been a caste system and I was not of a family of much funds, or anything, so, I'd have been on a lower caste. I had to work for my meals, you know, wait on tables, or what have you. You just don't do that in Princeton.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: You explained that your father was a part of WPA work. Was there any discussion in your family about Roosevelt? Did they approve of the New Deal? Were they Republicans or Democrats?

JL: They were Republicans, because I remember my grandmother calling up my father and telling him to vote Republican ... I forget which election it was, but you weren't beating Franklin Roosevelt. He was in doing a very good job. He was bringing the country back slow but sure.

SH: Where were your grandparents?

JL: They were here in Jersey, one set; my father's family was from Bloomfield and my mother's, they were in Newark.

SH: Did your parents ever talk about how they met?

JL: Yes, down at the shore in the summer. They were from ... Ocean Grove.

SH: Even though you were growing up in Wethersfield, Connecticut did you get down to Jersey to see your grandparents often?

JL: No, not often, [but] occasionally, because that was quite a drive then. Today it isn't with all that superhighway, but then you had to go down through Danbury, all the way through Bear Mountain. It seemed to take almost a full day just to make that short trip, while today ... a couple of hours [and] you got it made.

RB: How important was religion to your family?

JL: ... They're Protestant ... well, we went to Sunday school and ... I was not too religious afterwards.

SH: Did you go to the same school as your two older sisters?

JL: Yes, Wethersfield High School.

SH: At that time, what were some of the activities that you were involved with in high school?

JL: Well, as I say, I played football and baseball.

SH: Did you have any academic subjects that you really enjoyed or excelled at in high school?

JL: No. I wasn't much of a student. I went because everybody went to high school.

SH: [laughter] Did you have jobs after school?

JL: Yes, I used to ... mow lawns and what have you. ... Oh, close by, there was a family that had a couple of goats and I would take care of the goats and what have you, you know, just to earn ... whatever spending money ... that I needed.

RB: Did you have to give up any of your money for the family or you were allowed to keep all of it?

JL: No, no, I didn't have to give any up to the family.

SH: You explained that your mother had gone to Newark Normal School. Did she teach while you were growing up?

JL: No, but she was an English teacher ... and my oldest sister was an English teacher, so that they constantly were correcting my English. [laughter] They didn't allow us to stray too far.

SH: [laughter] What was your principal chore as a young man around the house?

JL: I didn't have too many. I mowed the lawn and shoveled the walks in the winter because we had more snow up there than they do here. That was about it. ... My father [would] order wood to come in ... the logs were much longer so that they had to be sawed, so I did that. I sawed the wood for the fireplace, and what have you, and the house we lived in didn't have any upstairs heat, you know, the way upstairs was heated [was] you had registers in the ceiling and then the heat rose up through it that way.

SH: Did your family ever travel on any kind of a vacation other than to come down to visit your grandparents?

JL: No, what my father used to do ... he'd take us up to Cape Cod right as soon as school let out. We'd stay there till it opened up, again, on campgrounds so that we tented all summer.

SH: That must have been interesting especially for Boy Scouts [laughter].

JL: ... Yes, I used to, well, I'd put on a pair of shorts and that was all I wore all summer [laughter] and I used to tan. Well, of course I did too much of that working in construction, that's the reason I had the various whatever you call them.

RB: Was your father a veteran of World War I?

JL: Yes.

RB: Did he ever talk much about his experiences in the war?

JL: No, except, well, that was an entirely different war than the one we fought here. They fought in trenches.

RB: What exactly did he do in the military?

JL: I don't know. I just know he was in the service.

SH: He was overseas in France?

JL: Yes.

SH: Was your father much older than your mother?

JL: No, they were, I'd say about the same age, because, [as] I say, it was a summer, that's when they met, and what have you; they were summering about the same time. So, I don't know exactly what it is, but they were roughly the same age. My father [was] a little older; a year, two years older.

SH: Tell us please about coming to Rutgers and what you remember about Rutgers. Had you been to Rutgers before you came down to school?

JL: I came down on what they called, I don't know if they have it anymore, prep school weekend. See, he was a Deke [Delta Kappa Epsilon] and my grandfather was a Deke so, I guess, they wanted me to be one as well.

RB: Did you want to be a Deke?

JL: Yes, I'm kinda glad. I had an interesting experience. I went on convention once in New Orleans and I was assigned to the table with the Bush boys, all of them ... and I tell you, I think, the most popular one and has the best, well, just easiest to get along with, [is] his brother, Jeb. I think he one day will become or go for president. He's now governor of Florida.

RB: Did you get a chance to talk to the Bush brothers?

JL: Oh, yes. No, I stayed at the convention. I was at the luncheon table, or at the same table, we ate ... they were all Dekes.

SH: So, you stayed involved with your fraternity for quite a while.

JL: Well, ... this was just after graduation so that, I'm really not that involved, I shouldn't even try to think I am. [laughter]

RB: When you applied to Rutgers it sounds like you were interested in engineering already. When did you start getting interested in engineering?

JL: No, just because my father was an engineer ... and as I say, I didn't know too much about it.

SH: When you came to Rutgers that first semester, did you go right into the Deke house or did you live in another building?

JL: No, I lived in the quadrangle. I went into the Deke house in my sophomore year.

SH: Where did you live in the quadrangle?

JL: Pell Hall.

SH: In Pell Hall, who were your roommates, do you remember?

JL: Yes, Kenny (Coffey?) was; he played football [and] he was from Buffalo, that area. I remember, I don't know, I'm trying to think of his name, Mason Gross. He was president and in our twenty-fifth reunion, he had come around to the houses where we were and he said, "Any son of a Rutgers graduate will be admitted into Rutgers." So, Howard Crosby was then dean and he'd been our preceptor my freshman year, I told him, I said, "Eventually, when my son graduated from high school, I told him, I remember[ed] what Mason Gross said." "Oh yes," he said, "John, I remember, send in ..." So, I had it sent in, and he called back and he said, "John, we're admitting him. So, save a place at the table for Thanksgiving because he'll be home for good." [laughter]

RB: Did you have to go through some sort of initiation process for the fraternity?

JL: ... Yeah. Well, it was, I guess, typical hazing. Just everyone went through it, so, I went through it.

SH: Were you an officer in the house? You also talked about waiting tables.

JL: Yes, ... I ended up as the president of the house, but that was just as the war was breaking out and ... the house was actually just almost completely dissolved by the time I finished with my being president.

SH: What did you have to do to accommodate keeping it open as the war built up? You are on campus in 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

JL: Well, yes, ... '42 was when ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: What do you remember about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

JL: Oh, I was at a football game in New York, the Polo Grounds between the Giants and the Dodgers that Sunday, and I just remember them saying "Colonel So and So," they're over the PA system, "report to your base." I didn't know until we were in the subway coming back to Penn Station and they were talking, [and] said, "Pearl Harbor." I said, "Where is Pearl Harbor?" I had no idea where it was. [laughter] I didn't even know it was in the Hawaiian Islands.

SH: When you were coming back on the subway, were you with Rutgers men and had they gone to the game with you?

JL: Yes, a couple of fraternity brothers.

SH: Do you remember who was there?

JL: Gee, I think probably (Jack Everett?) was there. He was killed in action in the war ... and, no, I'm not just sure ... three or four of us went.

SH: What was the reaction on the subway when you heard this?

JL: Just people were talking. They were saying Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese and, as I say, I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. I didn't even know what it meant.

RB: What was the reaction of your friends who you were with?

JL: No, they didn't know where Pearl Harbor was either.

RB: So, everyone was basically confused.

JL: No, probably, they just thought it was somewhere in the South Pacific and it didn't mean anything to them at all.

SH: Prior to this, in '39, when Hitler began to move in Europe, was there any discussion on campus? I realize you have not graduated from high school yet at this point.

JL: No, I graduated in 1940. No, just I remember that was when Kate Smith sang, because it was our class song, *God Bless America*. I remember the preamble to that, it's all about, but anyway, no, it really didn't mean that much to me, Neville Chamberlain.

SH: Was there any discussion about the attacks on England?

JL: No, even Hitler didn't mean that much to me. One of my good friends, and I kind of roomed with him for a while, he was different [in a] fraternity, Bob Vande Weghe, his brother had swam in the 1936 Olympics. So, he had a very [nice] framed picture of his brother getting his silver star from Adolph Hitler.

SH: A silver medal?

JL: ... A very close thing, I told him, "Gee, don't have people see that." [laughter] He had it hanging on the wall.

SH: What was the reaction when you all came back to campus the next day? President Clothier called you all together in the chapel to talk with you. Do you remember that day?

JL: Yes, vaguely, but as I say, it was still didn't mean that much. Until actually ... Roosevelt was asking, he ... wanted a declaration of war, and I will always remember that only one person voted against it, one senator, Jeanette Rankin. That's when, pardon me for saying it, that's when I felt that females shouldn't be in Congress, or what have you, but that's a very masculine thing that I should not have felt that way, but I did for the longest time. I have a friend of mine that is very up in ... and I'm gonna have him check this out because my grandfather, who I'm named

after, I'm John Anthony Lawrence, II, I remember being a young boy, he'd take me through the streets in Bloomfield and everyone called him Governor, and I want to find out if he had run for governor, or what, so that I can have him track that down.

SH: That would be interesting family history to hear. [laughter]

RB: At what point did you start getting involved with the war effort after Pearl Harbor? Did you start thinking ahead about going into the service?

JL: Well, as I say, I wanted to get in to what everyone did. Everyone was joining, it wasn't like now, or what have you, when nobody wanted to go in the service. I went in, to Newark, to the South Orange Armory and enlisted in the Army Air Corps, now that was then the Army Air Corps, and I had the two years of college they required and I wanted to go to flight school and oh, yes, I got all accepted, but I was only twenty years old and I needed parental consent and I couldn't get it. My mother wouldn't okay it. [laughter] So, it was back to the ROTC.

SH: ROTC had been mandatory for the first two years at Rutgers.

JL: Yes, yes.

SH: Did you go into advanced ROTC?

JL: No, I didn't. I got in the Advanced ROTC, see, the war was kind of ... oh, getting stirred up when I graduated from high school, so, that summer I went to the CMTC camp, Citizens Military Training Camp, up in Devens, Mass[achusetts] and, because of that, I got accepted in the Advanced ROTC, in the infantry. ... Then because they suddenly got a Signal Corps and all engineers were taken out of the infantry and put in the Signal Corps, which I was very unhappy with. So, as I say, I went to OCS [Officer Candidate School] finally. It was through ROTC that I got into OCS and when I finally got commissioned, I was, I don't want you to think now that I'm a bigot, I am not, but I got assigned to colored troops and ... at that time it just wasn't my cup of tea. Eleanor Roosevelt was saying to mix the troops all up, so I volunteered for the Airborne Infantry, and wow, I got POM-ed [Preparation for Overseas Movement orders] immediately. That was the end of my stateside work. I was overseas.

SH: Can you explain to Ron what airborne infantry means?

JL: It would have been the paratroops, because I was infantry ROTC, except when I got into Advanced ROTC and then it was the Signal Corps. I didn't like the Signal Corps at all. What they were doing is, all engineers or engineering students in the infantry, they took out [and] put it in the Signal Corps.

SH: Did the ROTC Signal Corps become at Rutgers part of the ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] program?

JL: Yes, we were in the ASTP, but ... we were separated from it. We were ... going to class, and all, and working toward our degrees and we, eventually, went through OCS because of it. The ASTP was there then, but we were separated from that.

SH: Were you going to class in uniform?

JL: Yes. We were in uniform.

SH: Did you eat and live separately as well?

JL: No, we were housed together. We stayed, we and the group I was in, ... in the old, what was the name of the poet that wrote *Trees*, "I think that I shall never see..."

SH: Kilmer?

JL: Yeah, ... we stayed in his house, which was right across from the, are you familiar with Rutgers? Right across from the College Avenue gymnasium, but that's all torn down, they built ... both the library and the dining hall.

SH: Brower.

JL: Yes.

SH: What types of social activities were going on at the Deke house at Rutgers at this time? Was anything curtailed?

JL: No, but they were joining up. In other words, at that time it was not popular to stay home. [laughter] It was just everyone wanted to get into the service, so, that was the way it was.

RB: You must have been relieved to be in uniform then while you were going to class.

JL: Well, we got into the ASTP before we went in actually to camp, and all, and that was, yes, we were in uniform going to class.

RB: How did you feel when you were not allowed to finish your degree before you were forced to go full time in the military?

JL: No, I wanted to go in to the service. I was glad that we did ... finally get in.

SH: Was it hard to go to class knowing that the war was going on? Do you remember having difficulty concentrating?

JL: No, it was not that hard because I was never the best of students. I was what you call a marginal student. I just did enough to get by. I just did enough to get a degree. I wasn't sure I was gonna get a degree. [laughter] You know how they roll it up and they give it to you, well,

by the time I finished, what's his name, Eisenhower, was sent back here [as] president of Columbia and he came in and gave us our degrees.

SH: That was in 1948.

JL: Yes. '48-'47 and went out in '48, I guess.

SH: When they closed the ASTP program at Rutgers, did you have to go to basic training at all or did you go straight to OCS?

JL: Oh, no, we had to go through basic training. ... We had two groups, we had an infantry group, ... which Crandon Clark was in and those boys, and [I was with] the Signal Corps. At Signal Corps everything we did was at Fort Monmouth. They all went to Hunter ...

SH: Alabama?

JL: ... It was right on the tip of my tongue.

SH: McClellan?

JL: That's where they went to basic training, but we all went to OCS, at Fort ...

SH: Benning?

JL: Fort Benning and we went through at Fort Monmouth.

SH: Did you volunteer for airborne at Fort Monmouth?

JL: Yes. After I graduated from OCS, I got commissioned and, as I say, I got assigned to a black heavy construction battalion, and I don't like to think I'm a bigot, but I did feel strongly I didn't want to stay in it. So, maybe [because] I was the youngest officer in the battalion and they made me the VD [Venereal Disease] officer. That was rather disgusting of them ...

SH: Where were you stationed at that point?

JL: At that point I was at Camp Charlie Wood [Camp Charles Wood], which was outside of Fort Monmouth ... boy, the minute I put in for transfer, they POM-ed me ... that's Preparation Overseas Movement.

SH: How long were you at Camp Charlie Wood?

JL: Well, I got out of OCS in August and I was there till maybe late November.

SH: Can you tell us anything about having been the youngest officer and your duties as the VD officer?

JL: Yes, well, it wasn't ... well, you know, what they do there when they, because being with the colored troops about seventy-five percent of them were, had some sort of VD. We'd have to take them down for food training once a week to get whatever shots they needed.

RB: How was it that you were assigned to be the VD officer?

JL: No. [laughter] Oh, yes, at any time you're going to ... oh, it was always the youngest officer in. For instance, when I got into combat, finally, they made me the demolition officer.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Please tell us about your experience as the demolition officer in combat.

JL: Demolition ... yes, and it was up to me then to either explode or render any ... unexploded bombs or anything else, I had to go in and render them.

SH: After Camp Charlie Wood, where were you sent?

JL: What?

SH: When you received your POM, where did you report to next?

JL: Oh, well, I was sent overseas then.

SH: From where did you leave?

JL: I left from Miami, Florida. We flew ... hit Bermuda, then the Azores and, finally, to Casablanca where ... and then assigned from that. I was going to be assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, this is before the invasion, but then I got changed because of my, I'm trying to think of the word ... because of my (MO?) something or whatever. They sent me to the Asiatic Pacific, CBI [China Burma India Theatre] is where I ended up.

SH: You had already gone all the way over to Europe.

JL: Yes, I'd gone over there and then from that, and it was an interesting trip, going to the Asiatic Pacific, because we flew low across the desert and we saw Irwin Rommel's, all his armor that ran out of gas, and so we had a little, it was interesting watching the way ...

SH: Where did you begin your flight to go over to the Pacific?

JL: At Casablanca.

SH: How long were you at Casablanca before they shipped you out?

JL: Oh, a month, six weeks, because we didn't know whether we were going for the invasion, this was before the invasion, we didn't know whether we were going there or to CBI, [which] is where I ended up.

SH: Were you ever sent to jump school? Did you have any paratrooper training?

JL: No. No, I was, oh, I'd say, six weeks or so overseas and I got my orders [to] report immediately to Fort Benning, the jump school there, the paratroops. Then, he said, "Oh, no, you're not going anywhere, you're staying right here." [laughter]

RB: What was the transition from student to soldier like?

JL: No, everyone was doing it so, as I say, I didn't mind it at all. I had, as I say, ... as soon as I graduated from high school, that summer I went to the CMTC, the Citizen's Military Training Camp, so that I was aware of what the military [was like].

SH: When you were in North Africa, in Casablanca, do you have any stories about that?

JL: Oh, yeah. Just, as I say, going into ... I'm trying to think of the word ... the market places and all that, it was interesting.

SH: Did they let you have free reign or were you restricted to certain areas?

JL: No, no. I was ... waiting for assignment actually there, so that I was able to travel wherever I had to go and I had a sidearm with me all the time so that ...

SH: Did you travel alone or did you have someone with you most of the time?

JL: No, most of the time I was alone because ...

SH: While you were waiting for your assignment, were there others that did not know where they would be going next?

JL: Yes, ... there were others the, same way, at the camp in Casablanca.

SH: Did you see any of the other allied forces there, the British or Australians, at that point?

JL: No, I saw ... some Australians, a few of them, but I didn't ever get to mix with them too much.

SH: How unusual was it to travel by air to North Africa as opposed to proceeding in a convoy?

JL: They just needed us ... I'd say [I] got in one of the C-54s, that was a four motor bomber ... there were a couple of motors in the plane and us, say maybe ten or twelve nurses ... and I was the only male, so, it was interesting.

RB: Did you have any preference as to which theater you were sent to?

JL: I wanted to go to the European ...

RB: Why?

JL: I didn't particularly want to go ... into the jungle and I was in CBI and ... that's China, Burma, India. I had a whole ... afternoon with the Lord Louie Mountbatten up in Myitkynia, Burma. We were in the Officers' Club together. He was interesting to talk to, but then he got assassinated in Ireland later [August 27, 1979].

SH: What was your discussion about with Lord Mountbatten in India?

JL: No, it just about where he was from and I was from. Because my mother had told me that, when I was in England actually for a short length of time, she told me, I remember ... took me to dinner, she said, "I want you to remember you're of English extraction." So, when I got home I said to her, "Don't ever say that again." [laughter]

SH: Why? [laughter]

JL: Oh, they're the strangest people in the world. [laughter] They wear their clothing ... you know, their wool sports coats and all; they just smelled of cigarette smoke, and everything else. I don't think they ever sent them to cleaning. [laughter] They're a strange group.

SH: [laughter] Were you in England before the war with your mother?

JL: No, while I was in Casablanca, I made several trips over there.

SH: Did you really?

RB: Why did you go there? Was it a vacation?

JL: Well, I'd been sent over there in, around the Liverpool area ... and then I'd get sent back. ... They were saying that we were needed more in the Asiatic Pacific, when we were at that time.

SH: What would you do when you would go to Liverpool from Casablanca? Did you have an assignment or were you delivering something?

JL: No. I just was going to be assigned there, but then I eventually got sent to ...

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

RB: Side two, tape one.

SH: Please continue talking about being in England. Did you see any of the devastation of the bombs?

JL: No, no. As I say, I didn't ever get to London. ... I was wondering whether or not, I can't come up with his name ... I looked through there, he's in my class, but he isn't in that book, that's the one where when we go back to reunion, they gave it to us and [it] told [about] everybody in your class where they were and if they were still alive, and what have you. ... This one fellow, ... I had his name last night, I was laying in bed and just as clear, he was flying the B-29s and I was in Okinawa, we were waiting for the invasion of Japan, and I'd meet him at the Officers' Club and he'd tell me about how many thousands of tons of bombs they dropped on Mitsubishi, the large Japanese arms factory, tons, and I always wanted to see him and tell him, "Well, you didn't do enough because now all I see on the highway are Mitsubishi cars." [laughter]

SH: You will have to remember to tell him. [laughter] Tell us about flying from Casablanca, low over the desert, what was the route that you took?

JL: We went to ... our next stop was Cairo and we stayed there, oh, I'd say maybe ten days, two weeks, stayed in the Shepard Hotel, [that is] where I used to go, that was the one that Irwin Rommel said he was gonna stay in but he never quite made it. [laughter] Then from there, we flew over ... the biblical Garden of Eden, where the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers joined into India, Karachi, India, and I stayed there for, oh, maybe a month and then I was assigned and sent to Calcutta and assigned to, and I did remember the number, 3105<sup>th</sup> Heavy Construction Battalion, and we actually maintained communications along the Burma Road and what have you. ... We were also assigned on occasion to Merrill's Marauders and Vinegar Joe Stillwell. He was our commanding general at the time.

SH: What were your duties specifically?

JL: Heavy construction, we were maintaining communications ... actually along the Burma Road, but, see, there were no great forces of Japanese, but they were there.

SH: Was there any interaction between your forces and the Japanese? Were there snipers?

JL: Yes, mostly snipers, and what have you. ... I was fired upon in that, you know the war was over in the end of August, and I was still fired upon outside of Myitkynia, Burma in January, because they had so many of these Japanese contingencies that just weren't in contact with their ... They didn't know the war was over and they were still firing.

SH: Please tell us about your first impressions when you got into Karachi, India.

JL: The first thing is the smell, mother India, wow ... there was an odor there that was just, and it stuck with me all the way through the Asiatic Pacific.

SH: What were some of the things that you remembered that were difficult to overcome?

JL: I don't think I had anything difficult to overcome. I was young enough; I adjusted to whatever there was.

SH: Were you bothered by the heat, the pests, or the snakes?

JL: No. ... Snakes, I was driving my jeep once when I was down there, I remember, and I suddenly has to go to the bathroom and I saw a little patch of bamboo trees, so, I stopped the jeep and went in there and I lowered my pants to go to the bathroom and I just heard a little noise behind me and I turned around; there was this big king cobra. [laughter] So, needless to say I pulled my pants up and took off.

SH: [laughter] Do you have other stories to tell? [laughter]

RB: Any stories that are dramatic, scary, or funny?

JL: No, I mean ... they're the same stories that everyone else had, so ...

SH: Where were the men that you were working with from?

JL: All over, and I remember ... my platoon that was assigned to me, they have some thirty year olds and I'd complain that I got a bunch of old men here working for me, thirty years old. [laughter]

SH: Were you well supplied with equipment?

JL: Yes. They were the ... everyday they came in with more ammunition, food, and picked up any casualties we had. We'd call them the weapons carriers. They'd bring the weapons in during the morning, food, and what have you, then, take any casualties out with them.

SH: How far were you from the nearest camps or base? Did you move often?

JL: Yes, well, as I say, most of the time, up till the end, it was all along the Burma Road ... and I know the spelling is entirely different, but ... I was operating out of a town called Myitkynia, it was at the road head of the Burma Road. I know Myitkynia is spelled very differently, M-e, I don't know, but it was just I ... had to spell it that way.

SH: Did you run into any other Rutgers men?

JL: No, actually I didn't. When I came back I saw my roommate, Lou Angelilli, he was in there. [As] I say, when ... the war was over, I never saw Lou. I had always meant to talk [to him] about where he was, and this and that, but then he died finally. I never did get to see him again.

RB: How did your parents feel about your being in overseas combat?

JL: Yes, when ... the war was over and I didn't have enough points to come home right away, I took that picture, and I had that picture taken in Calcutta, and I sent it to my mother ... I always had it and I have it up there because I had hair in then, I had a crew cut. [laughter]

SH: Handsome man.

JL: I don't know about that, but, anyway ... in the beginning I used to, when I was actually operating in the insurance field, I ... had that there and I'd say, "that's when I had hair." I was very cognizant of being bald.

SH: How did you spend Christmas when you were in India?

JL: There wasn't much of a holiday, it really wasn't. Everyone was the same way, we just drank a little, I'd say, more than a little. [laughter] No, I know those holidays they were, that's when I missed it most, you know.

SH: How many people were in your camp? Was it a large camp?

JL: No, basically ... the 3105<sup>th</sup> was housed in, just outside of Calcutta, but I'd ... go back there maybe once a month or so, and it was just a camp there. ... There wasn't much going on when you got that far back in India, but further up, Vinegar Joe Stillwell, he was sweeping the Japanese out of Burma ...

SH: Did you meet him?

JL: I didn't meet him, but I had been to the Corps V, the headquarters. No, I didn't actually meet him.

SH: Did you meet any of Merrill's Marauders?

JL: Well, I didn't meet him, but I was back to I Corps and at a meeting that he was having, or he was conducting, because he was out to drive, he wanted those Japanese out of Burma, and he put them out, too, except for the isolated few here and there, but there were no big camps or anything.

RB: Did you feel like the CBI theater got less attention at home than the Pacific theater or the European theater?

JL: Did I what?

SH: Did you think that the CBI was kind of the neglected theater of the war?

JL: Yes, it was not a glamour theater of the war and that's why, when the war was over, we were just, we didn't have enough transportation. We used to think, "Dear Mr. Truman, why can't I go home? We had conquered Burma, Berlin, and liberated Rome." ... We had to wait.

RB: Was it common that there was a lack of resources in the CBI Theater?

JL: Yes, well, yes, there were just so many, they only had these small transports that they were ... what did they call them? I forget, but they just didn't have the transportation to get you home. They[re] were so many ... I remember I was in my last post where I was in Okinawa and we were there for the invasion of Japan and, I'll tell you they gave us these courses in kill or be killed and they said, "You're going into the home land of Japan and ... don't waste ammunition on the women and children," and, boy, I tell you they had me fired up that way because all they did ... in showing you the "kill or be killed series," they showed all of the atrocities of the Japanese troops in China and wherever they were so, I was fired up. I wish I hadn't been now, when you think about it years later, well, unfortunately ...

RB: Did you feel you were well supplied with food to eat?

JL: Yes, we had these C rations and the K rations. The C rations actually came in little tin cups and the K rations were in wooden boxes about the size of the old Crackerjack boxes. They'd always have a pack of cigarettes, three cigarettes, in it. I didn't smoke so I was able to trade those off.

SH: [laughter] Were you sent from the CBI, from India, to Okinawa?

JL: Yes, but I was in no combat in Okinawa ... by then they'd pretty well cleaned it. I was in the staging area for the invasion of Japan; fortunately it didn't happen.

SH: When did they pull you out of India to go to Okinawa?

JL: Oh, I'd say... it's either July, or late June, or July, about then, that's when they were assembling the invasion force.

SH: Did they fly you there from India?

JL: Yes. Yes, that's one thing about it, they had the old C-46s, C-47s, those are the two ... the workhorse of ... World War II.

SH: Did they fly everybody that was in your group?

JL: No, just ... certain ones of us, certain ones that had duty and whatever. Oh, I don't know how they arranged it but they were just sending those of us that had been in ...

SH: What were you going to be assigned to do? What was going to be your responsibility?

JL: Capture Japan. [laughter]

SH: [laughter] Single-handedly.

JL: We didn't have to do it. Harry dropped the bombs. [laughter]

RB: How did you feel about the atomic bomb?

JL: Oh, I was ecstatic. We really had quite a celebration. It was hard to believe when they began telling us about them.

SH: When you heard that the bombs were dropped, did you have any idea of the magnitude?

JL: Yes, the enormity, or whatever you want to call it, it was just unbelievable that they could bring a nation to surrender just so quick.

RB: Besides the snipers that you mentioned, did you have any other direct combat experience?

JL: No, that was mostly it ... in other words, there were no Japanese units or battalion, or what have you, and ours the same way. No did never have that, but I did have my little combat time so ...

SH: You were on Okinawa and the bombs were dropped, where did they send you next?

JL: Then, I got sent back to Calcutta because I didn't have enough points to go home, so, I went back; I became a courier officer then. In other words, stationed in Japan, ... I had his name last night, the general that I was assigned to [General Neyland?], he had coached the University of Tennessee and they named the stadium after him there, but he liked the girls, so, he used to send me away to get various things for him.

SH: Was this in Japan or in India?

JL: India.

RB: After the atomic bombs and the war was pretty much over, were you excited to return home?

JL: Yes, I kinda wanted to go home, but we were having a good time.

SH: As a courier officer for this general, what were some of the things that you were making sure got back and forth?

JL: Well, no, ... by then, as I say, the war was over so there was nothing secret, although we did have briefcases ... handcuffed to our wrist. ... He was the strangest thing, as I say, and damn it all, I had his name last night [General Neyland?], but anyway he sent me once to Shanghai to get a pair of black silk stockings. He had a couple of lady friends, I guess. Well, I'm sure he didn't want it himself. [laughter] But anyway, that was the type of thing. By then there was nothing essential for, the secrecy was gone, any communications they wanted they radioed back and forth. So, we're just waiting to go home.

SH: What was your transportation was when you were to come home?

JL: Yes. I say there, I say I got fouled up. I was in Calcutta and being an officer I was able to say where I wanted to be separated from the service, so most of the boats going out of Calcutta were going into the West Coast, to (Murraysville?), California Separation Center. So, that's what I said, I wanted to go to the (Murraysville?), California Separation Center. "Fine," as an officer you could sign. Well then there's one of the first boats that went the other way, went through the Mediterranean, and I actually, I got out of the Camp Kilmer here, and I had to go and get separated in (Murraysville?), I had to be a troop officer of a troop train. I had to go, that's where the government went, so I went out there and I got separated from the service.

SH: So, you came back through the Mediterranean, to Camp Kilmer, then you wound up having to take a train all the way back to California? [laughter]

JL: Yes, [a] troop train. Feeding only, put a big garbage can and that was ... we ate.

SH: Were you in charge of troops that were going back to (Murraysville?) like yourself?

JL: Oh, yes, for troops that were being separated.

SH: How long did it take you to come back from (Murraysville?)?

JL: No, I got separated virtually right away and I got, through the Army Air Corps, I picked up flights ... you know, going short hops at a time. I was able to ride in them. They were pretty decent, too. They'd get you on a plane going at least in that direction; wouldn't go all the way of course.

SH: You talked about getting mail and information fairly regularly. Were you a good letter writer?

JL: No. [laughter] Letter writing was censored anyway, so, you have to put, "somewhere in Burma."

SH: Were you writing back to someone special in the States or just to your family?

JL: No, I had a girlfriend. We had talked about getting married, but I wasn't that interested in it. but anyway ... so when I went home I was gonna surprise her and I found out she was. yes, inviting me to her wedding. [laughter]

SH: [laughter] You did not receive the "Dear John" letter?

JL: No, I didn't get it. In fact, I still got her picture I bring with me ...

SH: When you came to Rutgers, did you have a lot of interaction with the women at NJC?

JL: Yes, I used to go with them, but ... I don't like to say it, but we were more interested in the town girls. There was a place, do you anything about NJC?

SH: A little.

JL: We used to go to the CI, not the Corner Tavern ... on that far end of town ... by Douglass Campus, there was a little saloon we used to go to.

RB: Could you talk about the Black Fifty?

JL: The Black Fifty? Well, they were mostly the infantry ROTC, but we were all good friends. They were the infantry and why they were called the Black Fifty, they went ... by train to basic training down in Georgia and when they got there, when there were troops [they] were sent by train, you got shunted off the mainline and anytime ... any trains were coming you got shunted aside and in those days they were steam engines and when they got there ... through the infantry boys, not the Signal Corps, they ... had all soot, and what have you, on them and the sergeant they went to, he called them the, these were the dirtiest bunch of troops that he'd ... seen ... and then they took the name of Black Fifty and they took us in because we'd all been together so ...

RB: You've been involved with the Black Fifty unit ever since.

JL: Yes, yes, we are. I know at the next reunion the Black Fifty is going to ... it's not a five year reunion of ours, so, we're just gonna meet in a wave and the rest of the class ... there aren't that many in the class now anyway.

SH: When you came back to Rutgers, it would have been in 1946.

JL: When I came back, yes, I came back in '46, [I] started, I remember ... when I came back from California where I separated out there and I came in, I got to Camp Kilmer. It was a Friday night; I was dirty, dirty clothes and every thing. I must have smelled of something terrible. So, I went, being an officer I was able to get out of the camp, I went over to, they were having ... some sort of a weekend party at the Deke house and I went there in all these dirty clothes and smelled and they were all clean and dancing with their young ladies friends. [laughter] Oh, well.

SH: [laughter] Did they let you take a shower?

JL: You should have mentioned that to me then because I needed it. [laughter] No, I didn't take it then ... there was much beer to be had and I was quite a beer drinker. [laughter]

RB: Were you ever interested in staying in the military or were you ready to get out?

JL: No, I wanted to get out. ... See, I was an ROTC officer, we were in the Officers' Reserve Corps, and I got called back to Korea, but I was working on the [New Jersey] Turnpike. So, that was considered an essential military road and, I mean, their base is eighteen inches of crushed stone so I got declared essential. I didn't have to go to Korea.

SH: What was different about Rutgers from when you left in 1943?

JL: Well, I go back now and sometimes I think I'm in the Asiatic Pacific theater [laughter] because there seems to be more Asiatic pupils, an awful lot of them. I guess, they're probably a little smarter than most of ours, I wouldn't say smarter, but I think they probably applied themselves more than the rest of us do, or did.

SH: When your group left Rutgers and the ASTP program closed down, you went to Fort Monmouth. There were very few students on campus at that time, but when you came back in 1946, there was a huge influx of GIs coming back on the GI Bill.

JL: Yes, there were ... I remember coming back into the Deke house ... I was going into my senior year, last year, just pushed everyone aside that was in there until all of us had gotten rooms, and what have you.

SH: Did the Deke house open up its doors to those who needed housing?

JL: Yes.

SH: Until you all came back.

JL: Yes ...

SH: Is that when you were the president of the Deke house?

JL: No, I was president of it ... right after Pearl Harbor. I was president when everyone was going.

RB: How did you feel about the other students who were not veterans? How did you interact with them? Was there any kind of friction?

JL: No, I don't think so.

SH: Was it tough going to school after having been in the military with somebody who is right out of high school?

JL: Well, see, there were only four of us in the civil engineering and all four of us were veterans so that, well, we went to the same classes together.

SH: Were the sophomores coming into the Deke house mostly young men or had they been veterans as well?

JL: Oh, there were a number of veterans ... We had a pretty big casualty list. All good men, too. I know ... when I first got back, going in, you begin saying, "How about So and So, and So and So and So and So?" They tell you who wasn't coming back.

SH: Were there any services of remembrance?

JL: Yes, there were. We had our library room in the Deke house, we had on the wall [all] of ... those that had been, well, there were casualties and, gee, there were an awful lot of them.

SH: When you came back, how long did you stay in the Deke house?

JL: Just one year. I only had one year to go and I had, while I was in the ASTP, I had taken a few courses that were applicable to my getting my degree so that I had a fairly easy time of it.

SH: Did you get involved in any other activities on campus when you came back as a veteran?

JL: No, I just was having a good time. [laughter] Because they had, under the GI Bill, we had something like fifty dollars a month to spend ... in those days that went a long way, especially when I was drinking ten cent or fifteen cent beers.

SH: [laughter] Did they reinstate the military ball and the senior prom?

JL: Oh, yeah ... we had that ... prior to going in the service, I was on the sophomore hop, on that committee, so ...

SH: Did you ever have any interaction with Dean Metzger?

JL: Dean Metzger? Oh, yes, Dean Frazier Metzger. He used to walk from the Old Queens down College Avenue there and he ... always seemed, we were coming in with a barrel of beer, or something, and he'd be walking ... [laughter] He was a fine gentleman, though. He knew what was going on. He turned his back as long as there's no damage done, or what have you.

SH: Everybody seems to have a Dean Metzger story so that sounds about right. You talked about Mason Gross also. Were there other administrators that you interacted with?

JL: Well, Howard Crosby, as I say, he had been the preceptor in our dormitory when I was a freshman. So ... when he got out he became Assistant Dean and, finally, Dean of Men. Howard, I was always able to get to him, you know, if I had a problem I go right to Howard.

RB: Did you have any favorite professors?

JL: Well, we only had two. There was one Professor Johnson; he was in bridge design. I remember ... one Saturday, we had Saturday morning classes in engineering, this one time in my sophomore year going up to, no, it was freshman year, going up to Providence to play against Brown, the freshman team, and he never forgot that. Even when the war ... I came back ... "Well, Lawrence," he said, "you went to Providence to play football." [laughter] "No," I told him I'd be in class on Saturday morning.

SH: [laughter] How about a favorite professor that you liked?

JL: Yes, there was a fellow, Joe Cejka. We used to kid him about ... we had a song, I don't remember, [singing] "Oh, I'm the guy who flunked out of college, oh, I'm the guy who ended up

digging a ditch, son of a bitch, Joe Cejka the guy." Yeah, Joe Cejka. He'd go to the blackboard, you know, look out, "Oh ... you ought to see that!" He'd just describe the females, or what have you out there, all of us just sitting here at the desk, nothing we could do.

SH: [laughter] When you were getting ready to graduate, did you know where you would be working?

JL: Yes, I had a job. I'll tell you almost everyone in the class had a job by then.

SH: You mentioned earlier that Eisenhower was giving out the diplomas the year that you graduated. How did it feel, having been in the military in World War II, receiving your diploma from him?

JL: Well, you know, I stopped for about thirty seconds and I just made mention, oh, about being in the, not with him, but I said I was in, and what have you, and he then looked at the diploma and ... he saw the name John Lawrence, "Yes, John," maybe thirty seconds we spoke and I know my mother said, "What were you and the general talking about?" I said, "Over old times." [laughter]

SH: [laughter] That must have been quite an honor to have been on the same stage.

JL: Yes. He is one of the men I really appreciated that I shook his hand. He and John McGraw, John J. McGraw; he was manager of the New York Giants.

SH: When did you shake his hand?

JL: Oh, when I was ten years old, my grandfather took me one Sunday into the Polo Grounds. I was only ten years old, 1932, I always remember that, too.

RB: Was it very hard to find a job after you graduated?

JL: No. I'll tell you one thing, The College of Engineering at Rutgers is good ... when I became unhappy with one job, that happened several times, right away I'd call the office ... I had another job immediately. ... Well, when I say immediately, within a week or so I was able to straighten things out a little.

SH: When did you meet Mrs. Lawrence?

JL: That was when I came back from overseas.

SH: Was she a Rutgers woman?

JL: No, no. ... Actually, I didn't start going out with her till my mother began pushing me a little bit, not directly, but she'd tell my sister, Margie, who was the next one older, that Mother wants you ... thinks you should get married. Well, most of my friends were getting married then so, I finally decided I might as well.

SH: Now was your mother still living in Wethersfield, Connecticut?

JL: Wethersfield, yes, oh, yes.

RB: Why did you choose to stay in New Jersey? Was that because of your job?

JL: Well, I got my first job here, but I liked the Jersey Shore ... we used to get these busses that come down on Saturday or Sunday, or what have you, swimming, and I just decided some day I'm gonna live at the Jersey Shore. So, I did. 1957 is when I got back here for full time.

SH: You talked about working on the Turnpike. What are some of the stories from that adventure?

JL: Well, the Newark Interchange, we had worked on that in class, in highway construction, and right away I saw portions of it that I had actually designed and what they did was, apparently, sent them down to the State Highway Department and they did use students; we actually designed some of their interchanges and things like that. I recognized that right away.

RB: Was that one of your most proud achievements?

JL: The what?

RB: Was that one of your most proud achievements, working on the Turnpike?

JL: Oh ... I enjoyed it. We had to go through the Newark dumps there and we'd find several bodies, people used to dump them, that's where they place[d] them, in the old Newark dumps.

SH: What are you most proud of for John Lawrence?

JL: Now? All the things I'm not proud of. Oh, I don't know. See, right now I'm on my way out, which there are a few things I want to do; I just want to get in that car and start moving again, so, we'll see.

SH: Good luck.

JL: Yes, I'm proud of; I sired two sets of twins ... I remember, the doctor is a friend of mine, socially, he'd say, "You better stop or you're gonna put the Dionnes [the Dionne quintuplets were born May 28 1934 in Ontario, Canada] out of business." [laughter]

RB: Can tell us a little bit about your children?

JL: Yes, well, I don't know too much about them. I wanted every one of them to get a college education. Now that I've got four grandsons, I'm making sure each of those get into college. ... One of the twins is a professional, oh, Lord, something, CPA [Certified Professional Accountant], whatever that is.

SH: Do they live around here?

JL: No, she lives outside of Jacksonville.

SH: Oh, in Florida. Do any of your children live around close by?

JL: Yes, ... one of my daughters lives up here in Ocean Township.

SH: How many children do you have?

JL: Three girls... actually, we had two sets of twins, as I say. The second set didn't survive and then the first set, one of the girls ... just couldn't adjust to life ... so, I'm making sure that her son gets through college.

SH: That is great. The interview will now conclude unless there is something we forgot to ask you or a story you'd like to tell us.

JL: No, I probably have a lot of stories I'd like to tell you, but they're not just jumping out at me. The minute you walk out the door I'll have something ... [laughter]

SH: Do you have any other questions Ron?

RB: No.

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

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