

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH MUELLER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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WESTWOOD, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Allison Mueller: This begins an interview with Joseph Mueller on April 15, 2005, in Westwood, New Jersey, with Allison Mueller ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: ... and Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Thank you Mr. Mueller for taking time to talk with us today.

Joseph Mueller: My pleasure, believe me.

AM: Okay. I would like to start by asking you when and where you were born?

JM: I was born on July 7, 1921 in a little town called Rochelle Park, just down the road from where we're sitting about five miles.

AM: Do you have any memories of your childhood? What was the town like that you grew up in?

JM: It was a small, little town, Rochelle Park, I imagine. I was born there in '21, and there were possibly, maybe, eleven-hundred people. It was wide open. It was a big, open country; there was no Route 4, no Route 17, and no Route 80. We could walk out the front door with a shotgun in our hands and go hunt rabbits or go out fishing in the Saddle River; we could do whatever we wanted to do and there were no restrictions. We could walk for hours in the woods, which is now all homes.

AM: Can you tell me about your father and his background?

JM: Yes, my father was of German and Swiss parentage born in this country. They came out of New York City, like most people have moved out there, because years ago they advertised in a German paper and a lot of the German people read the paper in the city and moved to our area. His parents were very nice. I didn't get to know them very well. I think they died before I grew up to be old enough to really appreciate or begin to appreciate my grandparents, so I never really got to know them. ... He also, like myself, was a salesman. He started working, when I knew him, or remember him, he worked for Davis Baking Powder, people that made Coco Malt. He was a traveling salesman. He used to ride all around New York and New Jersey and he was quite a guy.

SH: What did he sell?

FM: Davis Baking Powder ... and Coco Malt. It was a chocolate mix, like Bosco, only it was a powder, not a fluid. ... He had a little old car with a business coupe, a little Model A Ford. He used to take us with him, once in a while, and on Sundays he'd take the back out, we could all sit on the trunk. [laughter] I had two other brothers and that was our Sunday afternoon. We'd ride to Bergen Pines, which is about two miles right up the street, big trip. [laughter]

SH: What were the Bergen Pines?

JM: Bergen Pines, at that time, we used to call it the Happy House, years and years ago. ... It was where infirmed people, with a little bit twisted up, lived there or stayed there, but it was a big place, and it's still there today and it's a lot bigger right now because they put a bigger Veterans' Hospital over there. It's quite a change; it's all progress. It goes from nothing to, not a metropolis, but a pretty fairly-sized institution over there right now. ... That was the big trip, Sunday afternoon ride.

SH: Now were you visiting someone?

JM: No, just for a ride, you know, it's like driving, coming down from the Delaware Water Gap to New Jersey.

SH: You said your grandfather was of German Swiss extraction, were his parents here in this country as immigrants?

JM: I don't know, I really don't know. As I said, I don't know that much about my father's folks. All I know is my pop was born here. His parents evidently came over, they might have come over on the *Lusitania* or something else like that, because I do remember they made a trip once back to Europe, the parents, my grandparents. So it was quite interesting, but that was typical, I guess, it's a typical young family starting to grow in this country.

SH: Did he serve in World War I?

JM: No, he was lucky. He got out; he didn't have to go. ... [He] had a couple of kids then, my two brothers were born prior to that, and, no, he didn't go in the war. He almost went in the war.

AM: Can you tell us a little bit about your mother and her background?

JM: Yes, my mother is a different story. She came from an old, real United States family ... My grandfather came out of Vermont. He was with the Morgan people, not the JP Morgans, the Morgan's Riflemen, go back into the Revolution, and he was a real Yankee. His wife, Maggie, was Irish, Maggie Leary. ... They also came out of the city, but they were both, I'm almost positive, both were born in this country. I know my grandfather was. So is my grandmother? I couldn't tell you, one or the other, all I know is she was real Irish, because with a Leary, made her a real Mick [slang for Irish].

AM: Can you tell us about your brothers?

JM: Well, I had two brothers. I had, my older brother was Kenneth, he was four years older than I was, and Clifford was two years older than I, and then I came on. Which one do you want to talk about?

SH: [laughter] Well, I want to back up just a little bit. Do you know the story of how your parents met?

JM: How my parents met? I wish I could tell you, but I can't, because later in life they separated. "Oh, my God," we say, "Dad left." So we never got as close as we were as a family. They never talked too much. My mother and my father were, at that time, what you called with "the swinging group." They used to love to dance and they'd go out and my mother played the piano; they had a quartet. They always fooled around; they did a lot of singing. We had them in the house, the quartet would come to the house, and they'd have somewhere to go. They were quite a young mixing group and they moved with a very fast crowd. They used to go to Canada [and] sneak back booze during Prohibition, you know, stuff like that. They were a little bit, yes, they were fast movers, I guess, it would be the proper word.

SH: You mentioned knowing your mother's parents a little bit better. Did they live in the same area?

JM: As far as I know, my grandparents never really had their own home. They lived with my mother's sister, out in Long Island, and everywhere my mother's sister went, the parents went. So we would visit them at Long Island, out to Patchogue, and that was a monthly trip to go out to visit the grandparents. Eventually, they came to live with us for a little while, and they went with the others, but they were strictly Long Island people and they, just as I said, finally, they just like faded away. I think I was in the service when they both died, to tell you the truth.

AM: Your mother played the piano; did she teach you how to play the piano?

JM: No, I heard enough kids getting screamed at when she was teaching them, so I had no inclination. ... Now, I realize I should have learned how to play at least a harmonica, or a guitar, or something, but, no. She gave lessons for years and she turned out some very good students and I was proud of what she could do and the kids were all good pianists when they got finished taking lessons from my mother. But we used to sit on the stairs and listen to her holler at the kids when they taking lessons. [laughter]

SH: Where was her training from?

JM: I'm sorry.

SH: What was her musical training?

JM: Mine?

SH: Your mother's.

JM: Oh, I don't know where she learned. ... She wasn't what they call a real natural pianist. She had to practice; she just couldn't sit down and play the piano, but she had to learn the music and after a while, naturally, she could play without the music. ... There are some people that can just sit down and play the piano. They can't read a note of music.

SH: Can you tell us a little bit about your growing up? You talked about the trips that you took to Bergen Pines. Can you tell us about school and what was of interest to you, or not of interest?

JM: [laughter] ... My interest was always getting outside, but it was really an interesting education. When we started in Rochelle Park, we went to kindergarten at Becker's House on the corner of Passaic Street, which was her own private home. We had one room with long desks where you sat across from each other. The bathroom was upstairs; there was a little thing on, a red and green light on the door. If you wanted to go up, you put the red light on ... That was the beginning of our training and then we had the school that started with the first grade a little bit down the road, which they just recently demolished. But prior to our going to that school, they built Midland School Number One, which is the one that's now standing and it's quite a school. School to me was, like most of my life was, basically a pretty good time. I wasn't very studious, but I managed.

SH: Were you an athlete?

JM: Not in the real sense of the word. I did everything to keep my body in good shape, yes. When I was in high school, I threw the javelin, I pole vaulted, and things like that. But basically, as I said before, our lives, we were more or less, the three of us were dedicated to the outdoors. We were hunters and we came home from school and we went hunting. We didn't have time for baseball or football. We picked up our shotguns and went out, and we trapped muskrat in the river. We didn't get involved too much. ... Actually, I kept joking, I told everybody I majored in physical education, as I took PE three times a week. [laughter] But the rest of my subjects, I wasn't quite that enthusiastic.

AM: Did you go to school all those years with your brothers? Were you very close with them?

JM: Yes, they were all, well, they were always ahead of me by two years, so by the time we went to the new school ... it's very difficult to, you know, just put it in one spot, but my brothers were in school, in Midland School, but we used to walk home for lunch. ... Then, we go off to Fairmont and then Hackensack High, there wasn't that much closeness out of the house. Home, we were very close, but someplace else, they had older friends. I had my friends. They had their friends, so we kind of split in different directions, but we always hunted together.

SH: Did you ever have a teacher who said, "You are acting just like your brother?"

JM: No, no, no, my older brother was quite a student. As a matter-of-fact, they were both pretty good students and it was just not my nature to be like that. I liked to look out the window.

SH: What are your memories of the Depression or the stories that you heard?

JM: Do you know what oatmeal is?

SH: Yes.

JM: How would you like that for your main meal, for breakfast? [It had to] last you all day long. Peanut butter and jelly for lunch. On Sunday, if you were lucky, we got a wing of a chicken, because there were five of us, my mom and pop and the three kids. But Sunday was a

big day, it was chicken and if you had company, you didn't get a wing. You just ate the vegetables. But the Depression was, for us, not a bad thing. I mean, we never were hungry, but we never got too much to eat either, so you did with what, you know, ten cents worth of soup really went a long way.

SH: How was your father's work in sales affected?

JM: He worked, let's see, we never got a package, nobody ever brought us a bucket of food. We always ate; he worked. Yes, he did travel because people need to bake. That's what they were doing, more baking. They were baking all the meals. They were baking bread, with Davis Baking Powder, making pie, whatever they wanted to make. So we weren't the best-dressed kids. I mean, if I had a hole in the bottom of the shoes, so did everybody else. Because if you found you a dime, you were rich. I can remember when a nickel would buy all the big ice cream cones. In those days, you ride on a subway train for a nickel, if you wanted to go, but everything is relative. At that time you didn't have the nickel, didn't make too much difference.

SH: Was your family Democrats or Republicans? What did they think of FDR's politics and policies?

JM: I believe my family was more or less independent. They voted for whomever they thought they would want to have as president. I think they voted for Roosevelt. I don't know if they voted for Truman. I don't know if they voted for Hoover. I don't know, but they would vote for the person that they wanted, not because somebody said. You don't like what that guy said, you forget it.

SH: Were they involved in politics locally?

JM: No, local politics, to me, was not a big thing, but we had, in Rochelle Park at that time, we had one family that ran the town for years, the Meeken's family. They were either the mayor, or the chief of police, or something and you went more or else with that. There was no pressure to do anything. I guess if you didn't want to vote, it's like today. How many people don't vote today? If you didn't want to vote, you didn't show up.

SH: What about the church? Were you involved with the church at all?

JM: Yes, I sang in the choir. My mother played the organ; I used to sing at Midnight Mass. That's when I could sing and my mother could still play. Yes, we used to go to the church ... when they had church outings or picnics or something. The little church right on the corner of Terrace Avenue, New Rochelle Avenue there, and, yeah, we spent quite a bit of time in it. We all were, at that time, good Catholics and we all put that as our religion.

AM: Did you have to work part-time jobs during high school to help support your family?

JM: Oh, yes. ...Everybody could get a job. Yes, ... I lived right across the street from a group of stores. We had Abbot's Bakery, I worked in the bakery shop and then we had Jack's Fruit Store. I used to drive their truck, when I was fifteen or sixteen, down to Newark and go to the

market and pick up vegetables for him. I always had something to do, and later in life I had other jobs [that] were more interesting than that. I always liked to be around people.

AM: You mentioned a nickel for the subway ride. Did you get to travel to the city a lot, to New York?

JM: Not when I was a kid. When I went to work, when I ... came out of high school, everybody went to work. We didn't go to college, we could have, not really could have, we would have tried, I guess, but ... at that time money was more important to the immediate problem than higher education.

SH: Both you and your brothers were contributing to the family by working after school?

JM: Oh, yes. ... We started working; we all traveled together on the same bus, so it was quite a group.

SH: As tough as things were, your family never suggested that you stop going to high school and go to work?

JM: Oh, no, no. By the time I was in high school, my other two brothers, I guess, were almost out. The oldest had ... gotten a bank job. He worked, went right into work for Chase Bank, in the city, and the other one went to work in the *Herald Tribune* and the pay was nothing and I went to work, I got \$15.00 a week, commuting included.

SH: Did your mother hold onto the money purse or were you in charge of your own money?

JM: Money! [laughter] Whatever we got went in the pot. ... You had to entertain yourself; you had to find something to do, which, we could do that, the kids don't seem to be able to do today. Today, children have to be told where to go, what to do, and how to do it. We can just walk out with a couple of guys and grab a baseball and play a ballgame, or football, or whatever it happened to be. We never had baskets or a basketball. We didn't see a basketball 'til we got to high school. We never knew what a basketball was. I mean, it was like being kinda far out, but it wasn't that far.

AM: You went to work and your brothers went to work. When did Cliff enter the army?

JM: Oh, Clifford, the navy. Well, we all got excited when Pearl Harbor came on. He was working for the *Herald Tribune*, but he was also in the Naval Reserve and when we heard about Pearl Harbor, it just so happened that one day we were all out horseback riding. We didn't know the war had been started 'til we got back home and he was called up immediately. He went right up to ... it may have been Newport, and he immediately he went on. He went to school for a little while and after that he went up to Iceland. He was up in Iceland. He was up in Iceland flying these PBYs [Patrol Bomber Catalina] on anti-submarine patrol and mostly convoy duty, and that's all documented in his library and a book he's written and his flight logs that he had. ... He went right away. Four or five days after Pearl Harbor, I went down to 93rd Street in the city, I wanted to be a pilot and I failed the physical. I had high blood pressure. We had had a big

party the night before. [laughter] So, I think we were all slightly stuffed with booze, and when they took my blood pressure, ... had high blood pressure, but that was the beginning. Kenneth went, I was still working, Kenneth went less than six months later and he went in the Navy, too. He went down to Florida. He had good duty. He ended up as a bombsight instructor for his class and he spent the whole war in the Hollywood Beach Hotel in Fort Lauderdale ...

SH: Please tell us how Cliff wound up in the Navy Reserve coming out of high school.

JM: He just joined up, just like you do in the National Guard. He went into the Navy and he was ... I'm sorry, go ahead.

SH: I was going to say, did he talk about why he decided to do that? Was it because of what was happening in Europe at that time?

JM: It might have been. He was interested, we were all a little bit, well, everybody was upset with what was going on in Europe, and there was nothing we could do actually, until something happened. ... When Pearl happened, he was ready to go. He went and, I guess, he was about twelve to fourteen months flying up there and then they went down to Africa on the *Able Mable*, which was a seaplane tender that took care of the airplanes for the invasion of Africa. ... He came back to the States and he, I met him when he came back, I was in Florida in radio school, and he came back for flight training. He and I were based at Jacksonville.

SH: Oh, really?

JM: Well, as a matter-of-fact, when I first went down to Jacksonville, my other brother, Kenneth, was there. He gave me a pair of salty dungarees, nice and old looking, so I wasn't a scrubby kid just coming in with brand new blue pants. Yeah, we were lucky. ... Except for Clifford's demise at the end of the war there, we were together in the service, so we made it out quiet nicely. Ken and I used to walk to the beach every Sunday, and Cliffy and I used to go at dating out on Saturday night; two different brothers. [laughter]

AM: Why did you choose the Navy? Was it because of Cliff?

JM: Because both of them, yeah. Cliffy told me, he had a famous statement. He said, "If you're in the Navy, you'll always eat well, and if the boat sinks, you don't have to worry." So that was true, the Navy always had, even in England, we had American beer, good food. Did I show you? ... I think I had that menu.

AM: Yes, you showed me.

JM: I had a menu someplace, of what we had on Thanksgiving. We ate just like we did at home, turkey dinner, wasn't bad. ... My boys, well, Jimmy went in the Navy. Well, Cliffy went in the Air Force, our two kids, during the Vietnam War, so we've been kinda involved with what happens in the service.

SH: Let's go back, you graduated from high school in ...

JM: '39.

SH: '39, there was no draft at that point, so ...

JM: No, not 'til the war.

SH: You just immediately went to work.

JM: I was not really drafted. They had a, what the heck did they call it? See what happens when you get old, you forget. You could pick your service, you were selected, oh, Selective Service, so I picked the Navy. I hung out as long as I could. [laughter] I was embarrassed. There was nobody left in town. I was the youngest old man in town.

SH: You talked about one of your brothers being on the *Herald Tribune*. Was he a reporter?

JM: No, well, at that time he was young.

AM: So your brother, Kenneth, went to junior college for sometime after high school.

JM: Yes, Kenneth, yes, Bergen County, when they first started over there, the Bergen Junior, Bergen Community, whatever it was. He went there for one year, I believe, or a better part of a year, but then he really got involved in his job, but he kept moving up. He kept going to night school. He went to night school, I think, until the day he retired. He was still going to school because they were getting a young group of people in, and everything is changing in business so rapidly that Kenneth decided he'd have to keep up with the crowd, so he kept going to school. He spent years, actually, as long as I can remember; he kept going to night school on and off.

AM: Was he studying finance?

JM: Yes, ma'am.

AM: For the bank?

JM: For the bank, yeah. He had a very nice job when he left.

SH: It was Cliff who went to work for the *Herald Tribune* then.

JM: Yeah, Cliffy, yeah.

SH: What was his job with the *Tribune*?

JM: At that time, they were just, as I said, it was new; they were young. They used to call them runners or copy boys; they'd run around with different stuff, and whatever, to different places, but he wasn't there that long because, actually, when December the ninth, or December seventh, it wasn't long after he started working.

SH: You said that you were out horseback riding, the three of you. Tell us how you found out the news. How did you hear about it?

JM: When we got back home, on the radio, we had heard about it. We came back late that evening, not late, but ... probably around suppertime, when we had the news on that the war was declared. That's how we knew, and Clifford took off that night. He left.

AM: What did your mother think about all three of you going off and enlisting in the Navy and serving?

JM: Well, at that time I think it was, actually, it was a thing we had to do and we did it. We all wanted to go, let's put it that way. She didn't want to be a Gold Star mother with three kids in the service. So the thing about it, I think a lot of people forget, that everybody went. In that small town, I can name four or five families that had three boys go, and even in Martha's case out here, her brother had a couple of kids, he went. Her brother-in-law had a couple of kids, he went. It was the thing to do. Everybody went in and if you didn't go, you were drafted. I mean, let's put it this way, you had to go.

SH: The brother who was in the Reserves, Cliff, had he gone to basic training and things before?

JM: That was all part of their training when they started out. When you were there, in the Reserves, he had a once a month meeting ... They taught them how to handle guns, they taught them a lot of basic things ... review, [he] just went out to a Navy boot camp or whatever.

SH: Was there anything in the high school that had prepared anybody? Were there high school ROTCs?

JM: Well, we had that, but I don't think anybody was really expecting it to happen the way it happened; out of a clear, blue sky, boom, and you went.

SH: What was the discussion at school like the next day? You were still in high school.

JM: Well, everybody, like I said, all the young kids that were old enough wanted to go immediately after Pearl Harbor. ... Being in high school, no matter how, I mean, they knew how old you were, it would be very difficult to tell them you were seventeen or eighteen if you're only fifteen. A lot of them tried and a lot of them got away with it, but I don't know, it was just something that ... It was, the war started, period.

SH: How did the administration and the teachers talk to you that first day back? Did they have a convocation where everybody came together?

JM: No, I don't remember any meetings about it. I'm sure it was well discussed among the faculty and everybody probably got a little bit of it in their class everyday and didn't even realize that you were being preempted on ... what was going on. At that time, don't forget, what we had

were radios, a lot of people didn't have radios, old Majestic radios and that was all you got. It's not like today when you get twenty-four hour a day news on television.

SH: What about your brother, Cliff, who was working for the newspaper? Did he have to work extra hours? Were there extra editions put out, or do you remember anything about that?

JM: No, I don't. I don't think so. Of course, when that all happened, he took off. On December the seventh, he left. He was out of work and whatever happened after that ...

SH: I'm thinking of the wrong brother.

JM: You think it's Kenneth.

SH: Right. Okay, I'm sorry.

AM: When did Kenneth leave after that?

JM: I guess, Kenneth left about, maybe six months [later]. As I say, the older you get, the more you forget. I would say about six or seven months after that, he was gone, and I was home with my mother, because my father was gone by then. He had gone, out.

AM: Then, when were you sent to your basic training?

JM: I went in, well, I was hanging around for years, I guess, it was February of '44, '43, '44, '45, February of '43, and I took off then. Went to ... boot camp, and that's where you do your boot camp, five or eight weeks, or whatever it was. ... Then I put in for the same thing my brother, Clifford, had had with radio, aircraft radio, and, luckily, I was accepted and I got to go to radio school in Florida and that's where Kenneth was, when I went down there. He left and he went down to Fort Lauderdale, to the big hotel down there. I know, it's not bad duty, I don't think. [laughter]

AM: What was boot camp like?

JM: Boot camp is, I think, everybody should get a little of something like that because you learned what an order is. You follow orders, or else you pay the penalty, and I think discipline, in my own estimation, is something that everybody should have, but, evidently, today you can't discipline anybody. You have to sit by and watch them do what they want. No, we had lots of, we had an old, what they did in boot camp, they took people that had been in the service and even if they were just seamen or first class petty officers, they made them your instructors and they were tough. ... We all slept in hammocks hung up in the second floor of the barracks and if you had some guy, or a couple of guys, [who] were, for discipline, if you had a couple of guys that were talking, or yakking it up and something like that, or trying to smoke a cigarette, they'd break out the whole floor. You get dressed, you picked up your seabag, and you marched outside, two o'clock in the morning, or whatever, and you don't do the same thing, you know, a couple of times in a row. You learn it's much better to shut your mouth and listen to the boss. That's discipline. They didn't beat us. [laughter]

SH: Did you swim? Did you know how to swim?

JM: Oh, yeah. When we were kids, oh, that was another job I had, a locker boy in Arcola Park and we had an Arcola pool down there and we'd get [jobs as] locker boys. We cleaned the floors and opened lockers for people. That's where we all went [and] learned how to swim and dive. We could dive before we could swim. We used to dive off and swim underwater to the side because we couldn't swim on the surface. [laughter]

SH: I was just going to ask more about your boot camp. So you went in the wintertime?

JM: Yes, February.

SH: In Providence, Rhode Island?

JM: Newport.

SH: Newport, Rhode Island. It's still not like going to boot camp in Florida; it is pretty cold.

JM: Yes, they had, like I said, they had their regulations. We have to strap, we strapped our bedding everyday on the railing outside, tied down with a line, but not in the bad weather, but your bedding went out on the deck, right on the railing, around the thing on the second floor. That was discipline. You used to fix up, you had to pick up the butt patrol, you go around and pick up garbage when you had the assignment and you learned to do what you were told or else, and there was lots of or else's.

SH: You talked about trying to get into flight school and the problem with the blood pressure. Were there any other parts of the Navy programs that you tried to get into?

JM: No, after I failed that blood pressure physical, I just said, "Well, I'll sit around. If I'm not good enough for them, more or less, they've got two of us." One, you know, [what] was supposedly the mainstay of the family, because I was home with my mother I was the provider, not much of a provider, but, anyway, that was just one of those things that I said. "Well, when they knock on my door," I said, "Fine, I'll go." But, as I say, once you fail out you feel like a fool, you know. It's something you live with [until] the day you go back in.

SH: When you came out of boot camp were you sent immediately to Florida?

JM: Yes, we got ten days home, came right down home here. Then we had a leave and then, yeah, went right down to radio school.

SH: When you came back on leave, did you stay in uniform? Was that something that you did?

JM: That's a very good question. I don't remember. I don't know. I'm sure I didn't run around town in my uniform, no.

SH: Because I thought maybe ...

JM: You had to travel in it, but I don't think you had to wear it around the house ...

SH: I just thought maybe the girls were ... [laughter]

JM: Radio school. I was lucky down there, too. I ended up as section leader; I had twenty men under me. I was, as I said, I was pretty, at that time when I went in the service, I was older than a lot of guys, so they said I'd be a boss, so they made me a section leader. I had twenty guys to take care of. ... It was a very good, very good training. You had gunnery school, you had all kinds of training for getting ready to go out and do something.

SH: And the gunnery school, too, was in Jacksonville?

JM: Went to Yellow Water, it was very close. They had gunnery school; they had bomb school; they had schools for everything, but they were all in there ...

SH: When did you know that you were going to be assigned to aircraft?

JM: Because I took aviation radio school, ARM, [Aviation Radio Man].

SH: Okay, because you were just saying radio school, I wondered where ...

JM: Well, once we got in ... that was Jacksonville Naval Air Station, that's it, you're in the Naval Air Force and you didn't know what you were going to do. You could run into a TBF [Torpedo Bomber] as a torpedo bomber radioman, or this little thing, he was the greatest little plane they ever made. [Mr. Mueller is referring to a photograph]

SH: That is called a ...

JM: Catalina. ... They called it the "Ugly Duck," but you could cut both ends and then you could land without any engine. You could glide, they had such a big wing, you could do just anything. Ever watch a big, old buzzard? Like a big old buzzard, just drop your engines and fly around. So it was one of the very safest aircraft. It was slow. We could fly over fourteen or fifteen hours a day at eighty-five knots and take it nice and easy, a hundred feet off the water, on air sea rescue, or search, and stuff like that.

SH: When was the first time that you flew? How far into your training were you?

JM: They've tried to incorporate the whole thing together, radio school, and then you'd go over to the naval base where we had about a dozen Catalinas with these things. These were not amphibious, the ones that I flew in. It was strictly a floatplane, that's what you took your training in, and we used to fly, everybody trained at the same time, the pilot, the navigator, the radiomen, the ordnance men, the mechanics. We were all [together] and often, sometimes, we had two guys for each job and they were to go flying out over the Atlantic Ocean around, around Cuba and come back. You'd fly maybe three or four hours and they would change positions, the

second pilot would take over and the guy on the right seat would go to the left seat and the navigator will take over from the other navigator and the radioman would take over, so two guys were learning the job on each flight.

SH: Now would this be the crew, or were you just training?

JM: This was just in training. You didn't get assigned to like, that came later. ...Of course, at that time we knew we were gonna be in Cats because we took all our training in Cats. The other guys went to torpedo bombers. Some guys went to SPD [School of Professional Development] dive bombers school and then you knew that was your ... Then I say I was lucky because I thought I'd end up [going] into a torpedo bomber because they had not much room for a radioman and you sat over the tail with a machine gun and I didn't particularly care for that one. I'm very happy where I ended up, flying in one of these.

AM: What was your training like at gunnery school? You had hunted in high school, so you must have been pretty prepared. Were you more advanced than some of the guys you were with?

JM: Well, yeah, we knew guns. We knew safeties and we knew when they were loaded, or when they were not. You know damn well you don't point it at anybody. But when you go from a shotgun to a .50 caliber machine gun, there's quite a bit of difference. [laughter] Those .50 caliber guns were quite powerful and we did quite a bit of training. There's a lot of training on .50 calibers. You started off with .30 calibers, which were smaller, and you went up the scale and then we stopped at .50 because that was the heaviest gun that our aircraft carried. Just like everything else, when they do a job in the service, they're not fooling around. You learned or else you go to someplace else; you'd be a stoker on the destroyers. [laughter] ... We weren't privileged, but we got the best of everything. We got very, very good training. When we left gunnery school, we knew what to do. We knew the capabilities of the gun. We knew with this gun back here [Mr. Mueller is referring to a photograph], you could shoot the wing off, the wingtip off the aircraft. These were all free-mounted, they weren't selected guns. It was a free-mounted, swinging anyway you want, up or down, and if you came too far forward you could shoot your wingtip off. You could also shoot off the tail.

SH: Did anybody do that?

JM: No, no, that's why we went to school. [laughter] We've had them flipping, we've had them come down, you know, on the water. You have to drop the floats down on the wing when they land on the water. We used to land on our belly and on the end of each wing the floats drop down. One guy dropped his float down and he dipped the float in so deeply that it ... busted the plane in half at the blisters. See, there's one on each side, and that's the weakest part, then it snapped. It wasn't too nice.

AM: Was that the only accident that you remember from training?

JM: No, we had another guy, none of the boys I knew, but we had one guy who was in a vertical bank and he wasn't up high enough and he tried to pull out of the bank and he came down and he

went right into the ground. He didn't roll up enough; that was pretty rough. I think that was the only crash we had, a real crash, that involved anybody in all of my training.

SH: Was it difficult to be in training yourself and also to be in charge of a twenty-man unit?

JM: No ... actually, I was thinking about that last night. We had discipline and the guys listened to you and if they didn't, they had the same problem that you would have from a Master Sergeant. As a matter-of-fact, we had one guy named (McLahey?) and he was just dirty and he cost, one time he cost our whole twenty-one guys the weekend leave because they had seabag inspection. They had bunk inspection, no wrinkles in the sheets, just like the Marines, and he wouldn't take care of himself, so we took him in the shower and gave him a GI bath with brushes and we never had a problem after that.

SH: With what kind of brushes?

JM: Scrub brushes. [laughter]

SH: You talked about the old chiefs that trained you in boot camp, like drill sergeants in the army. Who was doing the training when you were down in Jacksonville? Were they Navy Reserve? Were there civilians involved?

JM: No, no, we had no civilians at all. All of our trainers in the radio school were radiomen, rated. They could be first class radiomen. ... Then you went to gunnery school; we had a gunner. No matter where you went, each one was the best in his group to be the leader. We had no civilians at all. The basic training, basically in radio school, all you learn was code and hours and hours of code. "Dah, dah, dah, dit, dit, dit."

AM: Do you still remember some of that?

JM: Oh, you never forget. You never forget that stuff. [laughter]

SH: When you would take messages like that and they came in that fashion, did you also decode them? Did you forward it on? Were you only doing this for ...

JM: Basically, when we started out, it was just learning the ABCs. "Dit, dah, dit, dah ..." and you heard it often enough that, yeah, it was drilled into your head. You want to learn something? Listen to it four or five ... We used to sit and watch the sweat dribble off your arms sitting in radio school taking code, but you learned it, or else. Like I said, the only thing to do, either you did, or you didn't.

AM: How long did you stay in Jacksonville?

JM: Oh, I'd say I was there for quite a while. I guess, eight or ten weeks in radio school alone and then we went into operational training and we still, they tried to mesh them together, so it was A, B in school, then you go on. You never seem to be, you never finished taking code, once you started. That was very important. Procedure, everyday I had to plan for everything.

Everything had to be done their way, the full length of time, I don't [know], but I enjoyed it because, as I say, we got to the beach on Sunday

AM: With your brothers, right?

JM: ... Yes, the Punta Gorda Beach. We used to go out there; walk the beach all day; walk back and go into the hotel in Jacksonville for chicken in a basket, that was the Sunday night special, and then back to the beach in the cattle car.

SH: Were there any other activities that you can talk about?

JM: ... Fun and games. [laughter] Yeah, when Clifford was there we used to double date. We knew a couple of nice young ladies that were around. They were very nice gals and we used to go out with them. I don't remember dancing or anything. We just ride around, walk around town, I mean, that was a big night to get off. You're off the base and you go walking. They were nice kids ...

SH: Was Clifford an officer?

JM: No, he was training. What he did, he had the option. He felt that he had come up through the ranks and he maintained his position as a regular Navy man. He ... wanted to be, he knew ... he had all the stuff to be an ensign and he finally did say, "Okay." I think Mom made him say, "come on." He was walking around in his regular sailor suit, but he had a set of flight wings, regular wings, he was a pilot, test pilot, so he finally accepted and he finally got his uniform. I'll show you some pictures after.

SH: I wondered if he got you into places that you would not normally, as an enlisted man, have gotten into when you were in Florida.

JM: No, I don't think, there's not much they can do that way. I mean, if it was an officers' club, it's an officers' club. I don't think they wanted too many seamen running around in the officers' club. That's high class.

SH: Please continue telling us about some of the things that you did in Jacksonville and incidents that you remember.

JM: Well, that's all I remember, basically, we did. Like I say, weekends my brother, Kenneth, when he was there, we walked the beach. We walked on to Punta Gorda Beach. We started walking south and when we got half [way] the day was shot, we turned around and walked back, and went into the town and had our chicken in a basket and went back to the base. With Clifford, he came and we went to the beach, but not that often, and we just hung out together, but there was nothing special. The USO [United Service Organization] dances, we never mixed with that, we never got into that cycle or circle of people. So we always stayed pretty much together. Yeah, that was about it. There wasn't much, nothing exciting, just learning. I think the big thing was to learn, which was difficult for me.

SH: As your training is coming to an end, and you talked about how it had been so incorporated that you are coming out really prepared, did you have an idea where you were going to go?

JM: Well, there again, the Navy was very liberal in a way. They said, "Would you want to go to the West Coast?" And, "Would you want to go to the East Coast?" So I said, "I'd prefer," with my family right here, so we didn't know where we're gonna go, so I said, "Well, if I have a choice, I'd take the East Coast." That's when I ended up with Pier 92, which was a holding area or a staging area. You still didn't know where you're gonna go.

AM: Was that in New York?

JM: Yeah, right at 52nd Street and we stayed there for quite a while, not a long while. I think, I went off on weekends from there, but when we were there, I was on shore patrol. I'd go out in the evening with a .45 hanging on your hip and, you know, a billy club. It's a great place to do shore patrol, in New York City, because you never knew what the hell was gonna happen. Pier 92 was, I guess, it would be best to describe it as a "hell hole," because they had so many people stuck in the pier and they were all waiting to be transferred to some place and nobody knew where they were going. So it was quite a, it was a lot of fun, a lot of second-guessing. We were there, I don't know how long I was there, but over a month or more, and the *Queen Mary* and the *Queen Elizabeth*, the big British ships, used to dock down at Pier 84 and when they docked, they knew they were picking up all the soldiers that were going over, and sailors, or anybody, right back over to England. So one night, either the *Mary* or the *Elizabeth* was docked down there and one night they broke out, they broke out about a hundred of us. They said, "Pick up your bags, we're leaving." "Hot damn, we're all going on the *Queen Mary*." So they put us on busses or trucks, we called them cattle cars. It just doesn't seem right; I mean *Queen Mary* is only four blocks down the road here. That's when we shipped out; we didn't know where we were going. We ended up in Brooklyn and we got into an LST. This was on my mother's birthday, on February the 28th, and we got into an LST. We knew nothing about where we were going or what we were going to do, but an LST, as you know, is a landing ship tank. They carried trucks and tanks and they also put a LCI, a landing craft infantry, strapped on the upper deck and there was about a quarter of an inch bulkhead, welded. There were no bolts and nuts; everything was welded, so we did nothing. ... What the hell we're gonna do?

SH: This was February '44?

JM: No, '43. We went in '43, so we started out and we went from New York to Boston, waited over there for a while, a couple of days. Then we went from there to Halifax, Novo Scotia and from there we built up a convoy. But the funny thing was, when we were in Halifax, getting everything together like that, they gave us leave and you went back and you can use a telephone to call home, collect. So you'd have to tell the operator where you were. [laughter] "I'm in Halifax, Novo Scotia." So, anybody that didn't know where we were, knew where we were. It was quite a trip. That was almost a month at sea. We picked up seventy merchant marine guys with one ammunition ship and sixty-two LSTs. Then we started out going across the North Atlantic. We were out about two days, this is in the middle of winter, and the North Atlantic is treacherous. Ships from the previous convoys started coming back because they hit such foul

weather. Everything they had lashed on the decks, so we turned south and way down, I don't know how far south, but we knew we came up ...

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

SH: You were telling us about how ...

JM: Okay, we came up out of the southern Atlantic, not really the southern, but the mid-Atlantic in the middle of February. Actually, we were almost into March and proceeded north into, we ended up in Swansea, Wales. That's where we finally docked our LST. Now aboard our LST, we had about twenty other aircraft mechanics, photographers, radiomen, all destined for Dunkeswell, Devon, which we didn't know where that was, but it was fun.

SH: Did you know at that point you were going to Dunkeswell?

JM: Not 'til we got off the boat, or off the ship.

SH: Before we get to Dunkeswell, please talk about the crossing. You talked about the weather sending you south to the Azores and across, what about the German U-boats and were there any sightings? What kind of escort did you have?

JM: Well, we had, you never saw your escorts, really. The only thing that really concerned us, mostly, we had one big ammunition ship that always sailed well behind us and well to the south of us. It didn't stay close to the convoy, and I had another break, when you go to radio school, you also learned how to use blinker, so I had a lot of time. I had the opportunity to sit up in the crow's nest with the blinker and on an LST blinker it's very difficult because, an LST being flat, it doesn't cut through the water, it rolls with the water, so it's either down, or even, or down. Now, if you're trying to send blinker at that little spot over there and he goes down and you go up, they have nothing, so the biggest, the most important message you ever had was with IMI [repeat], makes me repeat. We got a lot of repeats. But it was another experience, but I just loved that outside feeling, to be out, and on the LST, as I did, we had the LCIs strapped aboard. Every morning, fully dressed, out on the LCI doing exercises, an hour every morning you did your deck, so they kept me in good shape. The Navy was very taking good care of you and we ate well, like I said, 'til we started running out of food because we were gone almost thirty days, from New York to ports, into Halifax, but it was another nice trip. I said I enjoyed it, we didn't hit any real bad weather, but an LST is like a cork, it just goes where the water goes. [laughter] Don't go through it.

SH: Any seasickness?

JM: No. For some reason, I don't know, I sometimes feel I'm immune to a lot of things. We had a lot of seasick boys, yeah. We had boys lying in their bunks throwing up in their helmets for a couple of days, a couple of nights, but it's almost like being on a sailboat. If you ever went sailing and you want to get seasick, go on a big sailboat; take a three master trip out in Hawaii, or something like that, you'll get sick, and if you don't, you're lucky.

SH: You talked about trying to keep your eye on the tanker that was south and behind you. How close was the nearest vessel? Were you just riding on the waves?

JM: Well, I think that was in the plan, but you have to remember all [the] boys that were running these LSTs [had] just brought them down the Mississippi River. A lot of the full captains, well, they weren't full captains, but they would be, actually, captain of the LST, but they would be a lieutenant or a lieutenant JG [Junior Grade], might even be an ensign. We would wake up, almost every morning we'd wake up and we would be very close together, all the LSTs. [laughter] They like to see each other, or whatever it was. [laughter] During the day, they were always well separated. I don't think we had any distress call or anything. No, see, our convoy was never attacked. It was a big convoy, a hundred and some odd ships, a lot of men, a lot of merchandise, and at that time that's when the, well, I think the German Navy about then, they decided to get knocked apart. They were hitting them pretty good. I'm trying to think ... the *Bismarck* and all that. For one time, you know, the Germany Navy controlled the North Atlantic with their big battlewagons, ships and *Graf Spree*. The *Bismarck* was the big one. They said it was unsinkable, but they finally sank that, too. No, we had no problems, and then when you got close enough, we'd have air cover.

SH: You talked about being able to go up in the conning tower.

JM: Crow's nest.

SH: Crow's nest

JM: Oh, you're married to a sailor.

SH: Submarine.

JM: Oh, okay, God bless him. There's a man with guts. I'd never go there. [laughter]

SH: Men talk about being really bored and some of the things that they did to entertain themselves. What do you remember doing?

JM: Well, as I say, we did exercises in the morning; you had your meals. We were not assigned to do any duty because they had a crew of their own on that LST, but they didn't have a guy that could take blinker, that's where I fell. As I say, I spent a lot of time up there. Actually, I don't [know] if they slept. It was never really comfortable on deck. I mean, you didn't have a lounge chair or anything. You hang on the rail and ... we rode very close to the water. They were not high draft ships. The LST didn't look like it was very far, when [you] looked over the railing from the side.

SH: Did people play cards? Did they gamble?

JM: Oh, yeah, we played cards. Nobody had any money so you couldn't gamble. Thirty bucks a month, ... if they could catch you you got paid, whatever it was. It was quite an experience. I

think it was one of the more thrilling parts of my so-called career in the Navy, was that trip because you didn't know what the hell was gonna happen.

SH: Were the people from all over the place?

JM: Oh, yes, yes. A lot of Rebels, most of my good friends were Rebels, came by the Carolinas, got a lot of boys from Carolina. Got a couple from Maine that I can remember, the photographer, (Jeffries?), Johnny (Jeffries?), from Boston. Yeah, they were pretty well, but mostly from the East Coast. I think the boys had their own problems in California, San Diego, or whatever down there, really.

SH: So what do you remember about Swansea?

JM: It all happened in one day, we got in; we got out. We didn't know how, what money was worth, we had to take it in, you know. We didn't have pounds or whatever, we had American dollars. We went to a little train station there, got on the train, that's where they had the train doors come out the side, you know, it's not like our train. It's like each guy has his own little booth, six or eight people, and that same day we got on a train with our sea bags and we got picked up by ... they looked like Army trucks. ... The Navy carried all of us who wanted to go and took us into the Dunkeswell, Devon, where the airbase was. ... The air station was actually run by the British. We never took over the control tower. The British would not relinquish that. They gave us [nothing], I think probably charged us rent, for the airbase. I wouldn't be surprised because I knew when we went with the LST our anchor hooked on a big piling and ripped it out and they came down and, I think, they gave us some bills for the piling. [laughter] That's what I heard, but I wouldn't doubt it.

SH: Where is Dunkeswell, Devon? Where on the coast of England?

JM: Well, it would be on the southwest, just over the moors from Plymouth. If you know where Plymouth is, you just go over the bump. It's just a little ... nothing. If you went, I don't think I ever took liberty there in Dunkeswell, because you went to Exmouth or Taunton or Exeter or towns on the coast. There was always more to do on the base than to do in the little rinky-dink town and some of them were pretty big, but the British sailors didn't particularly care for the American sailors, like it was stealing all their girlfriends. They didn't like that.

SH: Were there any altercations that you remember? Did you get shore patrol again?

JM: No, I don't think, I swear to God, I'm trying to remember, I do not remember taking leave to go ashore.

SH: So no one had to tell you how to interact with the local citizens?

JM: Oh, I think we all know how to interact with them. They didn't like us, we didn't care for them, you know, I'm not gonna make believe. [laughter]

SH: What was your next duty station?

JM: My next duty station?

SH: Did you stay there the whole time?

JM: That was it. This little bird right here, that's the picture of the plane I went on.

SH: So the whole time you were there you literally stayed on the base at Dunkeswell, Devon.

JM: That's right.

AM: Is that where you met your crew?

JM: My what?

AM: Your crew.

JM: Yes. These guys, all these guys wherever they are, Doty and Russell and these are the four guys that I was with [Mr. Mueller is referring to a photograph of his crew]. Jake was the mechanic, Russell was the gunman, ordnance man. I was the radioman, and this guy wanted to get out of the service. [laughter] He tried to get out, he wanted to, he charged like he was nuts, Russell, this guy.

SH: Was he successful?

JM: No, he finally, they finally sent him back to the country. Who was that guy in television who was always trying to get discharged?

SH: The guy that was on M*A*S*H?

JM: Yes. [laughter] He didn't quite go that way, to put on skirts, but he would have sworn he was gay and he was as regular, as tough as nuts, [but] he said, "I had enough of this," whatever. But that was where, I say, actually I didn't get into anti-submarine work, as such, because we had two established squadrons of B-24s and they were anti-submarine. But they did all their work at night, because, during that war, the submarines had to come up every night [to] charge the batteries. These B-24s had what they called the big leer light hanging on the wing, that they [used when they] picked something up on radar. They used to go down to the Bay of Biscayne, that's where most of the activity was. They'd pick a submarine up on radar, then they get closer, and then they turn on this light. It was the most brilliant, I mean, it just lit up the area, and they could see the conning tower. They had to, as I say, they had to surface to recharge their batteries. They killed a lot of them on the water, on the surface, and, as I said, I didn't fly the B24s. But to confirm a sinking, if they went in and dropped the depth charge, and they saw the damned thing sink, they'd have to have some part of it to prove that they had sunk it. The B-24 cannot go anywhere near the water, they'd go "pfft," so I never knew if they sank any or what. ... They had two big squadrons on there; they were very good, young pilots. That's what I said.

That's what Joe Kennedy was doing over there before he got killed. This was more or less the base taxi.

SH: Really?

JM: We flew people anywhere they wanted to go and when any big brass came into Prestwick, we'd go pick them up. Well, we'd fly them to their destination. ... It was a good job. We didn't fly that far and it was a good crew. We had a lot fun and, actually, I called it a taxi service. They used to laugh at me, but that's what it was. It was good duty. [laughter]

SH: Can you tell us about some of the brass that you picked up at Prestwick?

JM: Well, the most important guy that I remember was young Joe Kennedy. We didn't know who he was or whom he was and he went in and we picked him up one day. He was at the base somewhere; we didn't know him. I didn't know Joe Kennedy from anybody else. He and another young guy by the name of Wiley got aboard, same old story, we didn't know where we were going. The pilot knew where we were going, he took off, and that's when we flew him up North and we landed in that little base, still don't know what the name of it was, one of the secret operations. ... I finally found out who he was, but two days later, two or three days later, went back and picked up all their personal gear, because that's when he and Wiley had taken off. Now I'd read three different stories. Somebody said he flew out in an old B-17; it was stripped down so they could bail out. The clipping I have said they were in a B-24. The B-24, according to what I read, was loaded with Navy ordnance, full, high explosives, about as high as you could get. The idea was very simple. He and Wiley were to take the plane off, get up to a certain height; a British Mosquito which was a night fighter, was to take over, to radio control the aircraft, just like the kids on this little [toy]. Unfortunately, during the transmission, or whatever it was supposed to be, the plane exploded, completely blew up. ... The idea was, originally, they were gonna take these; now there's another story. One story said they were gonna go to a big missile launching site. Another story said that they were gonna go into submarine pens in Brest and the only way they could get the submarines was to fly right into the side of the cave, in the hole, but that was the intent, but it never happened because the plane blew up. ... As I say, we went back and picked their stuff up, and that was the end of that plane. So there were lots of things that happened.

SH: Did you bring their things back to Devon?

JM: Oh, yes, we brought that, like I say, we're a taxi service. But there was always somebody coming and there were always people ... One time they were refueling a Wellington, a British bomber, that's what they used to do, divert and land on our field and that caught on fire and it started burning and it blew completely, blew up, but there were two young guys and one of them was very seriously burned. ... We flew him to a little hospital. We landed in the field, not an airport, just a field, where they were de-mining the field because they had mined all the fields with anti-personnel mines, so that in case the Germans landed, they'd be just like [in a] minefield. Mining anything, there'd be no way to walk.

AM: He was Royal Navy, right.

JM: ... No, he wasn't one of us. Wimpy is a Wellington; it's a fabric airplane. It wasn't steel; it was fabric, just like they make a model airplane. But things like that we did. We always had something to do. There was always somebody going someplace, so it was interesting.

SH: You talked about the mission that Kennedy and Wiley went on and how it was a secret type of mission. Were there other ones that were tried?

JM: Not that I knew of. That was the only time I heard. I'm sure ... they've been working on it for years, just like the British learned how to skip bomb so they could blow up dams. They just fly in low and drop the bomb and it would skip, skip across the water, and "pop," because you couldn't drop it directly down to do any damage, with a big dam it didn't [work], just like dropping a torpedo, but they used skip bombing. No, I don't know ...

SH: That kind of training was done there?

JM: No, they used different aircraft than ours. ... The British had quite an air force and they spent a lot of time developing all these certain ways to do things that had never been done before.

SH: What about the coming invasion in June of '44?

JM: For us, that was a quite a sight. I'll never forget that. We were actually asked not to go up in the air by the Air Force, the Army Air Force. They didn't want any more planes in the air. ... Prior to that, every aircraft in the Allied Forces had stripes painted on the back, or right along the fuselage, black and white stripes, for identification purposes. Every aircraft from the Allied Group, as far as I know, had invasion stripes. On D-Day, it seemed like hours and hours [of] aircraft flying over our base, C-47s towing two gliders, riding high in the back, and they just seemed to keep coming and coming and coming. It was amazing, you know, watching them, but they didn't want us to fly up there because there are enough airplanes; they had enough planes in the air, so we didn't go. We thought we might be able to go out, [if] somebody [was] shot down over the Channel, so we'd be able to fish them out. "No, no, just stay ashore."

SH: Before the invasion did you perform any sea rescues?

JM: No, no, as I say, we were not, fortunately, we never lost any of our B-24s on service. That was basically the whole idea, but we [were] just, as I said before, [a] taxi, a nice little taxi service. "If you want to ride, we'll take you."

AM: When you were in the air, did you notice the destruction of the cities? Of London?

JM: Not so much London. With every small town, [a] good part of it was damaged in one way or the other. They had their own problem. Every town had a church right in the middle and the town was built around the church and in the middle of the town was this big thing sticking up. That's the best thing in the world to aim a bomb at, so, yeah, if you wanted to just literally bomb,

... like they did, they just want to wake people up and scare them to death. That's what they'd do; they'd aim at the church and bomb the hell out of it.

SH: Once the invasion took place, did you keep up with the progress that was being made?

JM: We didn't do that until later in the war and then they would fly you into France, but by that time I had been shipped back home. I came back in '45, I guess, early in '45, got discharged in Thanksgiving Day in '45. Yeah, I went back. But they were flying. But they went from big Catalinas to a little goose, the Grumman Goose [G-21A] they called them, little twin engine. They just ... spend a lot of money, a lot ... on gas. You can only take a couple of people. In this thing, you could fly as many, as I say, ten or twelve people, but they had a little Grumman Goose that used to fly into France, but I wasn't involved in that at all.

SH: Prior to D-Day, were there any training exercises that you were part of?

JM: For D-Day? No, just the fact to stay out of the air; that was our training.

SH: Months prior to that, were there training exercises?

JM: No, we didn't notice anything until, actually, as I say, Dunkeswell was a little isolated. I guess it was a farm village. I never went into the town of Dunkeswell, as such, except whenever they picked us up. No, we had nothing to do with the invasion or pre-invasion, as far as I know. What they told our boys in the B-24s may have been an entirely different thing, our two B-24s ... but they didn't participate, I don't think. They didn't do any bombing or anything like that. We were strictly anti-submarine and they [were] held for that job.

SH: You talked about the base being very inclusive and having everything that you needed. What facilities were there for enlisted men like you?

JM: You mean like a gymnasium and stuff like that? Well, it was very simple. It was a simple base. ... The crews like us, we had our own Quonset huts, that's all, a coal burning stove in the middle. It had a little hospital, what they called a hospital, it was a Quonset hut. Everything was in Quonset huts, no prefabs, better roof, but I don't think, really as far as ...

SH: Did they have a club for you?

JM: The officers had their club. They had an officers' club; we never went into that. We had our own way of entertaining ourselves. We had jeeps that we used to use to meet the ... aircraft coming in and in the evening, just before dark, we'd sit a guy on each bumper, on the front, with a .45 chasing rabbits, trying to shoot rabbits riding on the bumper of the jeep. ... If you have a little, I don't know, imagination or luck you can always find something to do. You don't have to be entertained by somebody, I don't feel, but I've been wrong before.

AM: Before this interview, you mentioned that when you had been flying over the Channel, or over the Atlantic, you saw whales.

JM: Oh, yes, well, ... you see, you know, you could see everything, but, I hate to say this, we target practiced there. But you just have to fire your guns, whenever you went out, just to make sure they worked. [laughter] [If] you saw something you might pop a shot at it. Don't waste too much ammunition, but make sure the gun works.

SH: Did you have to return to the base without any ammunition?

JM: Oh, hell, no. No, as I say, we never fired a gun in self-defense or ... we just didn't. Warm them up that's all; make sure they worked. That was as far, no, it was quite a nice trip.

AM: Were you still in contact with your brothers while you were in England?

JM: Well, we always managed to keep in touch. We had letters; I had letters from Clifford and letters from Kenneth and my family. We had a kind of system going that we would try to write our mother almost everyday. It was like a tradition that we, as long as we could, we would try to get a letter off somehow. Yes, we were pretty close. Of course, you didn't get your mail everyday either.

AM: The other men that you were stationed with wrote home to your mother, too, right?

JM: Yes, yes.

SH: Did she send care packages?

JM: I don't remember getting packages, but we must have gotten them. I remember getting packages in Florida and putting them in your locker and then open it up, your lock, and the cockroaches would run out ... [laughter] No, they weren't too big on care packages, I don't think. Like I said, in the Navy ... [it was] not like being in the ditch like these guys that they crawl around in ditches, in muck and mire, in the South Pacific, in trenches. We always had a bed. We always had a meal. We had a good mechanic, he kept the airplane flying and a couple of pilots and ...

SH: How close were you to the pilots? How much spit and polish was there?

JM: After a while, we had one young guy, the guy was Jack Bent; he was close. He was a regular guy. He was a regular sailor that came up through the ranks and got a commission as an ensign and he was a co-pilot and he was very nice to the guys, because, after all, you have to. The pilot has to be friendly with the guys that would keep an airplane up there. He's just flying it. There's a lot of guys behind him making sure that the engines still run. He can't do a damn thing about it, but the guy that puts the gas in the tank and the guy that makes sure he's got enough. Yeah, this guy Jack Bent was young, a lot of fun. He was a great guy. ... Marion J. Simpson was a lieutenant commander, he was old, grouchy, but he did his job. ... As long as the young guy was with him, we didn't really care. But Jack was funny. Sometimes when we come into Dunkeswell, Devon, of course, ... we could land because we had wheels. We had an amphibian. ... He used to leave the wheels up and put the floats down and he'd come in with the

floats like he was gonna make a landing with the floats, and the British guys in the tower would be shooting off flares. [laughter] It was a good time.

AM: Did you and your crew stay together throughout the whole time that you were there?

JM: Oh, yes. We had the same guard duty. Yeah, we [would] all hang out together, like I say, we didn't go down, what the heck. But whenever our plane went out, Jake was the mechanic, I was a radioman, Doty was a gunner.

SH: Whatever happened to the guy who wanted the section eight?

JM: I don't know whatever happened to Russell. I figured he had enough time to get out. You know, you did eighteen months, at that time it was a year and a half, and then you came back. I think, he hit his eighteen months and he came back. I don't know what happened to him when he got back in the States. That's another story. [laughter] Well, that's the way it goes.

SH: When you were sent back from England to the States, do you remember when that was?

JM: Well, I got out in '45, that would be probably in the summer of ... I went down to Norfolk, Virginia, CASU [Carrier Service Unit] 21, which we used to install aircraft ... rather, radios into the new fighter planes. They had a F8F, which was a small fighter plane, and we used to handle their radio work, but this was just installation. We didn't do anymore flying.

SH: Where was this?

JM: Norfolk, Virginia and we could spring a weekend from down there; we could come home on the train from Norfolk, which we did every time we had an opportunity; we'd come back up.

SH: When you came back from England, what was the transportation?

JM: Oh, that was a nice ride back up. Good thing you mentioned that. What they called a C-4, it was a great big, I guess, you'd call it a freighter. It seemed like it had three decks, but it was a mixed conglomeration of people. It was the Navy, it was anybody that wanted to come back from Europe, and it was packed with people, and you had to stand up to eat, if we did eat, and we hit rough weather. We stood almost still off the Carolina Coast with another convoy and it was an old tub, I thought, and it was a ... different style of living from being with just the Navy guys. A lot of cold, complaining, everybody bitching and crabbing, and stuff like that. Anyway, it was what, seven or eight, no more than that, I guess, it was about a ten day trip back and I don't even know if we left from, somewhere in England. You just pack your bag and go. I forget. I don't know what port we left from, but it was a rough trip back, a lot of rough weather, a lot of sick people, and the crummy old, I called it a crummy, old ship, according to Navy ships.

SH: Had the Army men that were coming back been in combat?

JM: Oh, yeah. We had a lot. We had wounded guys, we had guys, yeah, we had a mixed crew. Like I say, anybody that wanted to come home, it all depends who you were, or what you were

doing. How they assigned you to what ship, I don't know how all this happened. All I knew is they said, "Pack your bag, you're going home," and they took us to some port and [we] got on and ended [up] in New York.

SH: What month of '45 was this? Do you remember? Was the war over in Europe at that point?

JM: Yes, they had, let's see, where was I when they bombed Hiroshima, Nagasaki? I guess, I came back over, I got discharged in November, so I was back here five or six months, that would be, maybe, April.

SH: So the war in Europe was just winding down?

JM: Yes.

SH: It wasn't over yet?

JM: I think it was over. I think that it had been over and then they were getting ready for the final, big bomb, I believe. I do think I was in Norfolk when they dropped the big bomb over there, Nagasaki, yeah, I'd have to settle for that. Like I said, my memory is not too good.

SH: [laughter] That is quite all right. On the ride back, on this freighter, did you find something to do, as you had on the way over?

JM: No, absolutely nothing. You can't get up on deck. ... It's a funny thing. I don't remember going up on the deck. Either the weather was inclement or horrible; you didn't spend much time on the deck and I know they said, somebody said, that it was leaking down below. There was quite a bit of pandemonium; we wished we could get into port, and then, as I say, we had a storm off North Carolina, around Cape Hatteras, I guess, before we came up. It seemed like we stood still for three days and the guy that was captain of the ship that we were on, he wanted to leave the convoy and they said, "No way, you ride it out with the rest of us." So, we did.

SH: Did you come into Norfolk or did you come into New York?

JM: Came into New York City.

SH: Did you get a leave?

JM: Yes, I got off the boat with my seabag, almost got in a fight on the subway because I hit somebody on the head with my seabag, some commuter. [laughter] Yeah, I knew where I was going when I got on the subway, so I knew how to get over from New York. Yeah, that was it; we came into the city.

SH: So in other words, this commuter was not appreciating your [being in the] service?

JM: No, he thought I was joshing him. I don't know if you ever carried a seabag with it, but you had to strap your mattress on top of the seabag, so you had about ninety pounds lashed up on your head and when you get in the subway, you don't have much room and you don't carry it like a pocketbook, you carry it on your shoulder.

AM: How much time did you spend at home before you were sent down to Norfolk?

JM: Probably ten days. They usually give you a ten day leave. Yeah, it was ten days. Then I went down to Norfolk, got that duty and then, as I said, we could come home from Norfolk, once in a while on weekends because they'd give you that. We were on night duty; we worked nights so it gave you a better chance for time, so we could have another almost full day because you didn't have to report back 'til four o'clock in the afternoon for your duty. That was quite a trip.

SH: Were you stationed in England when Clifford was killed?

JM: Yes, I got all that. Everyone here [knew he] was killed. I got a letter from the commanding officer telling me that they were doing the best they could to find him, but they were sure they'd be able to find him. ... He was on a strafing mission in an F6F fighter and they were going in about two-hundred, well over two-hundred miles an hour. From what I understand, the tail surface ripped off the plane and he went in at 240 or 250 [mph].

SH: You talked about him flying into Iceland, was he still in the European theater or was he in the Pacific?

JM: He did both; he did the war on both sides. He did the war in the Atlantic, oh, I guess, fourteen to eighteen months, came back to the States, got his commission. He was flying [off the] vessel *Wasp*. I have his flight log and, telling me how many strikes they had, and the whole story and then just one day it stopped. But he had done a big job over on this side, with the more important over there, flying convoy escorts, but he wanted to be a fighter pilot and that's the way he went. He was young, very young.

AM: Can you tell us some more about his missions and what you know from his flight logs?

JM: Well, it's typical, you know, you're off and you go in and you're strafing. Guam, he listed all the places they strafed, but then we were going back, repossessing what had been taken away from us. So with a fighter like that, at that time, they pretty well controlled the air. They could do pretty damned near anything they wanted. They'd shot the Japanese Navy airports up pretty well and now it's a matter of getting back our own property, so they were quite often on strafing missions. That was basically ... I don't believe he was ever, actually had a fighter, a real fight, dogfight, because, at that time, I don't think there were that many Zeros and Migs left up in the air. It was quite an interesting life he had, too, of all of us.

SH: He was flying off the *Wasp*?

JM: Off the *Wasp*, yeah.

SH: When you were in England and he was still in the European theater, did you get to see him?

JM: No, he left. The only time I saw Clifford is when he was training. He had come back from Iceland, took a training in Florida and I met him in Florida.

SH: Then you went to Europe ...

JM: Then I went that way and he went the other way. That's when we separated and my other brother just sat in a hotel. [laughter] What duty!

SH: At least one of you got the good duty.

JM: Oh, yeah. I could do it again, but then I always try to enjoy life. It's too short to be miserable.

SH: When was Clifford killed?

JM: ... In August of '44. Yeah, I was overseas; I was in England when he died.

SH: You just got a letter?

JM: Oh, no, you got, all his medals came back and a big commendation from the President and, you know, all that stuff that goes with it.

SH: Did it come to you or to your mother?

JM: My mother got all that stuff and I have it all now, one of those things.

SH: You talked about being so insular and isolated in Devon ...

JM: Dunkeswell, Devon. ... It's like Kinderkamack. [laughter]

SH: You talked about some of the different missions and the taxi service that you had. Were you ever, at any point, thinking that you were going to change duty stations when you were in England?

JM: I was under the impression that we had the only naval air station overseas in the European theater, combat theater. That was it. ... I don't believe, sometime they may have put up a little naval base of communications, or something like that, but as far as I remember and I know, we were the only naval air station. Like I said, it was still a British, we just flew off Dunkeswell.

SH: I'd like to pause the tape now and look at some of the photographs and things that you have and then we can turn it back on and talk a little more.

JM: Yes, sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

AM: How long had you stayed in Norfolk after you returned to the States?

JM: About five, I believe about five months, before I got discharged and then that was the end. [I] came up to Lido Beach for my discharge and they sent me home because it was the day before Thanksgiving, and then I went back out after Thanksgiving, finally got discharged.

AM: Were you able to spend Thanksgiving home with your mom?

JM: Oh, yeah. That was it; that was the first time in a while. ... I found the Navy quite nice.

SH: Had your brother that had stayed stateside, had he been discharged by that time?

JM: The funny part is my brother, Kenneth, that was down at the hotel down there, after the war was actually over, they sent him out to Guam. [laughter] He sat at Guam with his carbine shooting at beer cans, that's how he ended up. ... I got out before he did.

SH: I would assume with the point system, because you were overseas you would have been ...

JM: Yeah, something like that. I don't know what the formula was, but I know I was out before he was.

AM: And when did he come home?

JM: Good question. I don't really know ... banging around, I don't know.

SH: Did you ever contemplate staying in the military?

JM: No, absolutely not. As much as I enjoyed it, I don't like people telling me what to do, let's put it that way, never did. That's why I was a salesman. [laughter]

SH: Did you ever think of using the GI Bill?

JM: We did once, finally, under the GI Bill we bought a house in Maywood, our first house \$7500.00, and it was an old house. If you wanted hot water, you built a fire in a pot belly stove in the cellar. No electric heat or no gas heat. [laughter] You build a wood fire in the cellar and then you got hot water, but it was nice, it was a good start.

SH: When you first came out, did you start looking for work immediately?

JM: I went back to work for the same company in the city. I started working with the textile lines. It was a real Jewish outfit, very well known in the furniture business. They called themselves the Shelton Looms and I'd started there when I got out of school in '39 and they kept my job open when I came back and in the city. ... I was at color matching and all that stuff, as far as quality and stuff, for the merchandise and they said, they had three branch offices on the

West Coast: San Diego, San Francisco, I guess, it was, maybe, Seattle, and I chose San Francisco. So I came home in November and April or May I went out. I said, "I'm going out there." I had never been to the West Coast, so I went back out there as a salesman, selling furniture upholstery, which is a very good job and I was out there four months, five months. Martha came out from New Jersey; we got married out there. That was a very good job, but we decided after a year and a half we wanted to come back, so we came back to Jersey, moved in with my mother for a while. By that time we had one boy and she was pregnant with the next one and it got to be quite a job trying to put pieces together. I worked on that ice truck selling ice. I worked in a gas station, kept the family together. Finally, [I] got a job with Leggett & Myers, selling Chesterfield cigarettes, going on the retail trade, crummy job, hated it. You always felt that somebody was watching. I put a year and a half in there and quit because I didn't like that. I never liked that feeling, that I was being watched. If they don't like me, to hell with them. While I was in California, an old friend of mine met me at Keysaw Stadium and he was gonna come back here and go to work for Minnesota Mining. So I told him if he ever had, it's a good company to work with, if he finds out anything [to contact me]. So it wasn't long. When I was still working with Leggett and Myers, he wrote me a note when I was out in Florida, not Florida, I was out in Ohio with Martha and her folks. He wrote me out there that they were looking for salesmen in the tape business and, as I said before, that's when people, they didn't know what Scotch tape was. You know, you had a little signage, "Stuck without water" because everything else was glue activated, water activated. So, I went in and applied for a job at Springfield in New York. Fortunately, that guy that was gonna hire me, Jack Young, had worked for RJ Reynolds and he knew what it was to work in the retail business, talking to these retail people, so I was hired as an experiment. They hired ten guys and I was the only one [who] hadn't had a college education, but I had years, a couple of years of experience selling, at that, that's a tough lot. Retail sales is tough, believe me, and I was with them from '48 to '88. It worked out and the way it was all put together, when you started with the company, I had a multifaceted test, your likes and dislikes, questions and answers, same question five different ways. You know, "Do you like girls? Do you drink? Do you play golf? Do you love family?" All the important stuff. "Do you want to travel?" And I said I didn't want to travel; I never left. I had offers to go in different divisions, but I just didn't want to travel with my family, so I stayed home and loved every minute of it.

SH: How did you meet Mrs. Mueller?

JM: I'm sorry?

AM: How did you meet your wife?

JM: Oh, I knew her for quite a while. We didn't get along well. [laughter]

SH: You knew her when you were in high school.

JM: Yeah, vaguely. She was a cheerleader; I remember her. I knew her brother very well; we played ball; knew the family because in Rochelle Park, they came back from Ohio, they lived there. We met there. She went out with all of my good friends, my buddies, and I went out with all her good girlfriends. ... I went out with her friends and she couldn't stand me, so, I guess,

after the war, something happened. She said I changed. I became a gentleman. I wasn't rough, I was a gentleman, so that's how we really got together. We've known each other for years. I knew her father and her mother. In a small town like Rochelle Park, you know everybody [that] walked on the street, so that's how it all started. It was a short ... a very short courtship. On Thanksgiving, she came out to California when I was out there.

AM: Can you tell us about your wedding?

JM: Oh, it was terrific. We had lots of bridesmaids and everything. [laughter] Well, we were out on the beach swimming one day, not really swimming. You didn't swim too much in San Francisco, the water was always cold, but the beach was beautiful. [laughter] Oh, anyway, we're at the beach and she had come out and we'd taken all these tests and all that stuff you need and I said, "Well, we passed all our tests and all that, I think we ought to get married." So we went home, we got dressed; we looked in the phone book for the Reverend, some Reverend. We needed somebody to marry us, so we found a guy, Reverend Ingstrom was his name, somewhere in Frisco. So we went over and got married. He married us and his wife was the witness and, of course, \$5.00 and it was a fantastic wedding because it's lasted for fifty-eight years.

SH: Congratulations.

JM: [laughter] No gowns, you know, but that was about it. It's been quite a marriage.

SH: When she came to California, were you planning to get married at that point?

JM: No, not really. Were we planning to get married when I went to California?

Martha Mueller: Yes.

JM: When I went, "Oh, that's swell, you got the ring." You better sit down.

[TAPE PAUSED]

AM: Now joining the interview is Mrs. Martha Mueller. We were talking about your wedding.

SH: How did you meet this gentleman? [laughter]

MM: He had a girl, one of my best girlfriends was his girlfriend, and I used to go out with his friend, his best boyfriend. Somehow or other, during all this ... they were here and we all got mixed up and he came back from the service and he and his former girlfriend had a to-do and so he was free. ... My friend, I don't know where he went, he went someplace. So we were kind of almost complete opposites because I'm very [organized] and he's very, whatever at the moment. Anyway, he got the job in California and he kept writing letters, you know, "Come back out, come on out." Anyway, I settled up everything and went out; I flew out.

SH: Had you been working in the States during the war?

MM: Oh, yes. I worked for a chemical company and ... I was working in the payroll and private, I don't know, we had some kind of a big chemical that we had. We had to be very careful with it, and I did all that private work.

SH: Were the chemicals part of the war effort?

MM: Yes, I did do that and I got a little bored with that after awhile, too. By that time, all my pre-boyfriends knew that I was involved with him, so I was doing nothing. There was nobody too much home ...

AM: Before this interview, you have talked about being a member of a women's group and when soldiers came home ...

MM: Oh, yes, oh, yes, that was one of the things. A women's club in Hackensack, New Jersey had a group of women who decided that they would take young ladies off to this hospital, by the pier then, where the boys would come in and they were going ... back out, and so they, on a Friday night or something like that, they would get a bus and we would take the bus from Hackensack to wherever that place was over there and we would get all gussied up. They took about twenty of us, I guess, and our job was to keep and make the boys happy by going, after they were in the hospital, and ... we would go ...

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

AM: We are speaking with Mrs. Martha Mueller at this time. Would you please continue telling us about your experience in the women's club?

MM: Oh, okay. The women's club decided that they wanted these young girls to go up to the camp, Camp Shanks, and we would get all gussied up, and dressed up, you know, with high heels and the whole thing. ... Our thing was to, if the boys were able to dance, we could dance with them, or we could go around to the different rooms and write letters for them, or just talk to them because they were ill. ... One night, we had a very nice time. One night they took us up and the boys were all ... in very good condition with the big clodhopper boots, you know, and we, of course, had our little high heels on and our silk stockings and all this. Well, let me tell you, ... my feet killed me when I got out of there because they were dancing it up like they were never gonna come and dance again, and they didn't care if they walked on your feet, or up to your knees. [laughter] Those clodhoppers, [the] things they had on their feet. We went home, some of the girls were crying. But, anyway, it was kind of sad when you went into the room to be with them because sometimes they would just roll over. They wouldn't even look at you and then you'd get one that you ended up almost crying [with] because he was so homesick and he knew he was going overseas again. So you kind of had to, you know, talk to them, tell them, "Can I write them letters? Can I do anything for you?" ... That was one of the things, but it was a long time waiting for the war to be over. Everybody was gone.

SH: How often did they take you there?

MM: About every other Friday ... night, or if there was a group coming in, the girls, they'd call us ...

SH: Was this chaperoned by the women's club?

MM: By the women's club in Hackensack, yes. That was about that and then the rest of the time, as [far as] being home, we just waited for the boys. ... When they would come home, they would be happy to be home. They would take us any place we wanted to go, or do, and, finally, this one got out of the service ...

SH: Between the two of you, did you lose any of your friends in the war?

MM: Let me think. A lot of them were injured ... and a lot of them that came back, with what you call, moods, moody, and wouldn't talk. A lot of them would not talk, but they were all so happy just to get home and I think that they put a kind of racket up for a while.

SH: Did the town of Rochelle Park do anything when the men would come back? Was there ever a parade of any kind?

MM: I don't think so, not that I remember.

JM: ... All they ever did down there, as far as I was concerned ... all I could remember was that they put up a beautiful plaque, you know, with all the names on it. ... The thing that always impressed me was the fact that they had so many families that had three or four sons in a little town like that and, as Martha said, the town was empty. I think we had two or three 4-F guys left; we know there was nobody there and the 4-Fs are still alive.

MM: Yes, they took my brother and my brother had two kids. My brother-in-law had two kids. They took them both, both of them. One was in Ohio and then my brother was in New Jersey.

SH: How did your family come from Ohio to New Jersey? Is that where you were born and raised?

MM: I was born in Ohio, yes, and my father was one of ten and my mother was one of nine and when they started to look for more money because there wasn't money in Ohio to be made, unless you were a very, good farmer. ... Little by little, my father's family kept coming to New Jersey, his brothers and sisters, my mother and my dad moved up there and that's how I got there, too. ... I was born in Ohio and came up, I guess, I forget how old I was when they moved North.

SH: What is your first memory of Mr. Mueller?

MM: He's a pain-in-the-neck. [laughter] He was [an] honest-to-God-pain-in-the-neck.

JM: Could you believe she had five kids? [laughter] I was a pain all right. [laughter]

MM: ... His brother was worse because I used to ride the bus to New York ... going to the city and, of course, I was dressed for my position and ... I used to wear a hat. In those days, you wear a hat to work in the city. His brother would get on the damned bus ...

SH: Is this the brother who is going to the bank?

MM: Yes, after me, he would get on the bus and [he] never went past me that he didn't knock my hat off. [laughter] That was his brother, Kenneth.

JM: My mother wanted Ken to marry her. [laughter]

MM: ... We would have killed each other had we married. This one is very easy going. He's a very easy-going person, but his brother was a pain in the you know where. It was just his way of getting attention, I guess, but I didn't think it was so funny; I had to get dressed again. ... His girlfriend got involved with somebody else, this girl that he had been going with for years, yes, years, and ...

JM: I got a Dear John letter. I cried all the way to the next month. [laughter]

SH: Did the Dear John letter come to you in England?

JM: Yes, England, broke my heart, never been the same. [laughter]

MM: Well, anyway, his mother, from the time, we always used to go to their house, and she always used to say to me, "I'm saving you for one of my sons," just like that, and I said to her, "It will never be Kenneth." ... That's how we got together. His girlfriend got engaged and then I was still going to see his mother. We used to go and talk with his mother and everything.

JM: ... You tell the story all the time now that you make it sound like I got married to you. All her friends swore to God that was the biggest mistake she'd ever make, getting married to me, and all her friends that made that statement had been divorced and married and divorced and married ...

MM: That's because they didn't get me.

JM: Oh, I didn't know that. Oh, well, I'll shut up then. [laughter] All right.

SH: How uncommon was it for a woman in the mid-forties to travel to California?

MM: It was very uncommon. [laughter] It was very uncommon. My mother ... and dad were living in Ohio, at the time, so I had gone back there to be with them before I went on to California.

SH: Did you quit your job in New Jersey and then go to Ohio?

MM: Yes, I went to Ohio and stayed with my mom and dad and then I went out to get married.

SH: When you quit your job here in New Jersey, you knew you were on your way to California?

MM: Yes, yes.

SH: Had he proposed yet?

MM: I guess he did. In fact, yes, because ... he asked his mother to get the jeweler. His mother was a friend of a jeweler, would she please get him to make a ring for me. So that's it; that's how I got the ring from him, which I can't find.

SH: He gave you the ring?

MM: No, no. His mother got it and I had it and then ...

SH: She gave it to you?

JM: She got it from a nice Jewish jeweler. Julius Steinberg was his name.

MM: So I did have a ring. I figured if I lost out, I had a ring. [laughter] ... When my mother me put on the airplane to go out to him ...

SH: You flew to California?

MM: Oh, I flew by myself out to San Francisco.

JM: In a D-C3 [twin-engine airplane].

SH: Now that is ...

MM: Gutsy, but I'll put it right there, it's a little gutsy. If you get some gutsy you know where you got it from. [laughter] ... I had a wedding gown; I had a wedding dress; I had the whole thing.

SH: You took it with you to California?

MM: Oh, yes. I took that all with me to California and the people said, "What are you going to do if you get off and he's not there?" And I said, "I don't know, just walk around, see what I can do and get back on the next one going back. What else can I do?" But he was there. ... To cut it real short, so ... he had a motel, hotel for me ... So, I guess, it was about the third day I was there, right?

JM: ...

MM: ... We had to wait, up to that time. We were on the beach, in the first place ... I had all strictly summer clothes. But, anyway, so we were on the beach and he said, "Let's go get

married. This is stupid.” So I said, “We can’t do that.” “Yes, you can, I got it all fixed.” I said, “Would you mind if I go home, go back to the motel and take a shower and put my clothes on?” “Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I have time for that.” So, unbeknownst to me, he had gone and gotten the papers and he had gone and spoken to this gentleman and so we go. We got married. Everything is fine, she’s singing away [from] her heart, and we were married. So we go the next day, “We’re gonna go on a honeymoon.” I said, “Well, that’s nice, very good. Where are we going?” “We’re going to the mountains.” I said to him, “I don’t have any clothes for the mountains. I only have shorts and shirts.” We had to go to the store, we buy this pair of pants, work pants, and he said, “Is that enough?” I said, “It depends on how long we’re staying in the mountains. [laughter] Are we staying there a week, or are we going for two months, with one pair of pants?” But anyway, that’s it; you can cut all this stuff out, because you’ll think she was just about as nutty as he was. [laughter] But we’re very happy together and we’ve had a wonderful, wonderful life together. He’s been very helpful ... and very patient with all my moods because I can get a little moody, once in a while.

JM: You have to tell them that we’re going to the mountains, but we didn’t really know where we were going and we went down to the Greyhound bus station. ... We went to one of the starters at the station and we said, “Where would a nice place be to go for a honeymoon?” So he looked around, he said, “Oh, Lake Tahoe.” “Fine. Where the hell is Lake Tahoe?” [laughter] Well, anyway, at that time, when we went, we went to Lake Tahoe. There was one little building on the lake, on the westside of the lake, which today is now a gambling section. Out there the whole thing is built up, you know better than I do. ... Then we went bicycle riding. [laughter]

MM: Yes, we’re on [our] honeymoon now. You’ve all been married, you know, the first few days after your marriage, it’s really fun to go on a bicycle. [laughter] “I’m fine, are you okay?” “I’m fine, oh!”

SH: Did your work know that you had gotten married?

JM: Oh, yes ... As a matter-of-fact, my boss out there came out to the airport, brought me out to the airport to pick her up, but I think what’s the funniest ... it’s really sad when I think about it, ... it’s nice and everything, but when she came out there and she was real gutsy because I had a room ... about half as big as this, in a boarding house with three other guys ...

MM: Not in the same room.

JM: Only when I wasn’t there. [laughter] Let me finish my story, will you? [laughter] Anyhow, that was it, and that was how we started our life, in a one room. We had to share a little table and that was it, 311 Cornwall Street. It was right up near the Keysar Stadium, but that was our beginning and she had enough guts to come out there. ... We cried looking for a place to live and cried when we couldn’t buy flannels to make pajamas and stuff for the kids, because she was pregnant ...

MM: It was during the war, you know, right after the war, and you couldn’t get fabric and you couldn’t get stuff. So, I found out how very good he was there, too, because we finally found some fabric and I cut out, you know, those little long sleeve things that the babies wear, but I

didn't know how to do the sewing machine. He stitched them up. [laughter] So we made all these little things. But the funniest part was that, of course, with the other boys; there were boys renting rooms, too, and we were sharing the bathroom. ... That was all right and then, finally, the lady who ran the place, I guess, she realized I was pregnant because I was waiting for all the boys to get out of the way so I could go throw up in the morning, and then because I'd have to go up for my breakfast ... She finally said to me, "Sweetheart, I understand your problem and you can have your breakfast in the kitchen with me when you get up and the boys are all gone," which was very good. We met very nice people all around, thank God. If I can't do it, he does it.

SH: How long were you in California before you came back? You said a year and a half.

JM: Yes.

SH: How long before you were able to find a house? I understand it was very tight.

MM: ... Housing. We lived with his mother for quite a while.

SH: No, I meant in California. When did you move out of the home you were just describing?

MM: ... We did find a little apartment, finally

JM: Underground.

MM: [laughter] It wasn't underground. ... He had to, before I would move in, he had to go in and scrape gum off the floor. They must have had a kid that threw gumballs or something up at the ceiling, and we had to ... really clean it up. But there are a couple of older ladies there who were very good to me. They were very nice, you know, because I was young, new with the babies. I didn't know anything. In fact, ... what I found out [was] my problem was ... I went to the library because your mothers didn't tell you anything in my day. Just said, "Just watch what you're doing." What was I going to watch? [laughter] What is there to watch? I didn't know what I was supposed to watch. I didn't know I was supposed to watch those numbers ... right? So I went to the library and spent the time there and I looked it all up, what happens about pregnancy, and I learned the whole thing. ... When he came home I said to him, "You know what my problem is? I'm pregnant." [laughter]

AM: Did you have two children in California?

JM: No, we had Clifford and then she was well on her way with Jimmy because they were eleven months apart. Those were the Irish twins. [laughter] We had to go someplace.

MM: ... That's the way we started off and, thank God, we've been blessed. We've been blessed with very good children.

SH: Then, you came back to Rochelle Park

MM: Came back to Rochelle Park

SH: And then you stayed ...

MM: Lived with his mother until, oh, Lord help us ...

JM: Until we couldn't stand it anymore.

MM: Well, she had another baby.

JM: Then you had a baby, Jimmy.

MM: We had Jimmy, then Danny.

JM: Then we bought the house in Maywood.

AM: Was that with the GI Bill?

MM: Yeah, with the GI Bill, thank God for the GI Bill. It helped us get our little house and that's how we got started, but, oh, my gosh. My brother was always around to help me, too. You know, like the rest of the family, all were very, very good to be behind us. We always knew we had somebody behind us. Just like when we went to buy the house, my brother took me to see this house and he said to me, "You got any money on you?" And I said, "No, I don't. I only have a couple of bucks." So, I got the face from my brother, he's so good though, and he said, "I'll see if they'll take a down payment from me for you." He said, "Get this house now." So I said to him, "All right, do [as] you think," you know, we went through the whole thing. I said, "Yes, I think we can handle that." So, he went and he put the deposit down. When we came home, I said to him, "I bought a house ... in Maywood." Well, my brother came, he was a painter, God rest his soul. He repainted the whole house. His brother came and they cleaned up all the yard and everything there. It was a nice, cute, little house for us; it worked out well.

AM: Were you working with 3M at that time?

JM: No, I ... was still working with William Meyers, the job I didn't like, that's why I quit, but it was the only thing we could do. We needed to get out of my mother's house, frankly, to someplace where we could have our own because we were on, you know, in California we got on by ourselves and we just wanted to get away and be by ourselves. So no matter what there was to offer, we said, "Well, we'll give it a shot," and it worked out. Then we worked our way up 3M and we got the other place in Emerson and we were up here on Parker Drive and a place in Florida besides, so we've come a long way from nothing.

SH: When you were in Maywood, did you have the other three children?

JM: We had, what it is, we had two downstairs and one in the attic. Yeah, we had three children. [laughter] We didn't know where to go with ourselves. We put them wherever we could. They were pretty fast. Then we needed a bigger place. [laughter]

SH: So you have three sons and two daughters?

MM: Oh, yeah, yeah, and they are all very, very good. We've been blessed; we've been blessed. The families have been very, very good to us.

JM: There's a typical example, sitting right at the table with us [Granddaughter Allison Mueller]. Who could ask for anything better than that?

MM: Not in my opinion.

JM: Yeah, right, you're darn right.

SH: Now did you at any point ever work outside of the home?

MM: Did I? I don't think I did. Look at him, look at me. Work? After we had the children?

JM: She was, of all the people we knew at the time, she was the only woman that never worked, her whole life, and I always said, "If you have five kids, you don't need to work. You've done your job, baby. That's enough." [laughter]

AM: You were doing well in your job, right, because you received some awards and merits from 3M?

JM: Oh, yes. That was a real good job. As I said, ... they give you the ammunition, they tell you what they would like, but what they really like is numbers at the end of the year, and when it gets down to the very end of the whole thing, they don't care how you get them. They'd like to feel that what they told you to do got you the numbers, but as long as you had good numbers, then you had no problem. I, fortunately, had a couple of accounts. One account wanted to be the biggest wholesale stationery in the country and he had the desire to get big. That was Jerry Weiner, big in New Jersey office supplies. They were one of the biggest around here and I got along so well with their salesmen that we worked together. "Why would you want to work with them?" They just kept growing, from when I took the account over, they were doing about forty thousand dollars, then when I left they were over to ten million dollars and still growing, and when you have an account like that, you can't help but be in ahead. ... This Optimum Club that we had, out of the top ten percent of all the salesmen, we had about 130 salesmen at that time in our division, and the top ten would get, ... a little clock in there and it was your first prize. They gave us a little bitty clock, about that big, that was the first prize and after that it was two weeks in Hawaii, cruises in the Caribbean, I mean, first class. ... They had it for seven years and I got [it] five times, I was in the top ten. ... It made it nice and it was a job I loved to go to work. It was fun; a lot of nice people. But when things are going well, and you want to get out of bed in the morning to go to work, you know, you got a pretty good job. ... The other job I had I hated to go to work because I always felt that somebody was watching what I did. I didn't like it ...

MM: He likes to do everything his way.

[laughter]

JM: Well, that's why I retired because they wanted you to have a phone in the car; they wanted you on the computer; they wanted to know where you were every minute; and then I couldn't get home in the afternoon, if I wanted to watch a ballgame, or something. ... Then they got technical. I'm not a technical person. I mean, we can't use a microwave. [laughter] We have no microwave. I wouldn't know how to turn on a computer, and I was selling floppy disks and stuff like that, because our business kept growing more and more away from tape, overhead projectors. They kept adding to the line. I didn't mind it, but when I was selling the stuff I didn't know what the hell to do with it, I felt that I was getting too old and I was sixty-seven when I quit. Anyway, so I had two golden years [with] all that social security money. [laughter] But it was a good job.

SH: Have you had any other passions besides your work?

JM: Oh, yeah. We traveled all over. There's a map of the United States back there.

MM: All those little dots.

JM: That includes England, Ireland and Scotland. We went back over to where I was with the Norwegians and I had Alaska, Hawaii, plus anywhere we wanted to go we went and we got a nice little home in Florida, where our actual home is, in Florida. ... That's going next; we're gonna rid of that ...

AM: The hurricane ...

MM: We got blown.

SH: Did you really?

JM: So that goes next.

AM: You enjoy bird watching, too. Is that something you do a lot?

JM: Oh, yes. ... No matter where we go we look at birds. The cardinals were back again yesterday. The old lady living next door said, "Oh, I'm so happy you're back. I haven't seen a bird." We put the birdbath ... I just love to get involved, still outdoors.

SH: Did you coach your children in sports? You talked about liking sports.

JM: Well, let's see, yes, I was an umpire, yes. ... Well, we took them out. I took them all out playing ball. I took them up, well, basically, we started when they were young, hunting ... My feeling today is that everything is overdone, over-coached. You take your kid, this big, and you put a fifty-dollar uniform on him and he doesn't know what the hell he's doing. He's not having any fun. If he strikes out, they give him hell. The idea of the sports, to me, is fun, it's fun. But today's kids, I don't think it's fun. [I] took the boys hunting, got them all shotguns, they still go

together, they hunt turkey and deer. They go up to Salmon River for a week together, the three boys, and they go fishing for salmon up in Pulaski in New York. They deer hunt; they use muskets; they use bow and arrows. They're still close and the girls live in the same town together. Yeah, we've been lucky, like Martha said, we've actually been blessed. ... Like we go to a ballgame, even now, today, or like last night, [to a] Confirmation, more than half the family was there for [the] confirmation, you know, no matter what happens. Thanksgiving and Christmas, by God, and just an occasion where somebody is gonna have a group over; it's a party.

MM: We get such a big kick out of big Timmy. Timmy O'Brien plays first base; he's a big kid; he's a nice kid. He calls me grandma. [laughter]

AM: A friend of my brother.

MM: A friend of Luke's.

JM: Everybody calls you grandma.

MM: "Hi, Grandma, are you warm?" "Are you warm enough today?" "Sure you're warm enough today, Grandma?" I said, "Yeah, I try to keep warm." The kids are very good. Fortunately, the girls, everybody in the family is pretty much athletic, I think. Don't you think so?

JM: Volleyball champions, our baseball champions, and all that. Now, we got the Irishmen coming up, Erin's gonna run now. She's a track star, she can run a like a deer that kid.

SH: What about the Vietnam War? What were your thoughts on that?

JM: Well, ... it was a lot of thought because our oldest boy, Clifford, was over there for a year and a half when he was a staff sergeant in the Air Force. ... His job was guarding all the airports and, especially, when they were retreating, we were pulling back out of there, he was in charge of a lot of the airport protection. ... Jimmy, our other son, he was on a missile cruiser; he was in the Navy, so our thoughts were pretty much involved with Vietnam. It was just like my mother was with World War II. Fortunately, we had nobody old enough to go to Korea, and then Vietnam. So, yes, we've been involved quite a bit with war, as such. I don't like war, but I think sometimes you just got to have them, otherwise, they'll walk all over you.

SH: Did you have any other questions?

AM: No, I don't think so. Is there anything that we left out that you would like to talk about?

JM: No, I could talk all day, but that's enough. [laughter]

SH: What do you think of your experiences in World War II? You lost a brother and, as you said, your mom had three sons serving. You talked about the change that your wife saw in you

when you came back, but for you, personally, how do you think that time in the service impacted your life and the man you are today?

JM: Actually, being in the service? Oh, I don't know. I don't think it changed me that much, except that I never liked to be told what to do, but you learned what to do when you were told. I still don't like to be told what to do, so I don't think it changed me very much. But I think we all get a little bit smarter and, you know, how to play the game. If you can't win, you don't fight it too bad. If you think there's a chance, you ... give it hell, try to get your point across, I guess, is what I'm trying to say. ... No, I don't think it actually had, but then again, when you just listen to what I said about this whole thing, as far as my actual experiences in the war, it was never really a war, except you didn't have home-cooking. You didn't have a nice bed, little things, but there was no ... I mean, I can feel for these kids. I had friends of mine who came out of the navy with Halsey's fleet over there, they were on general quarters for weeks, at GQ, and they never really got into bed; they come home a wreck. Even Clifford came out of Vietnam a different kid than he was when he went over.

MM: He was changed.

JM: ... My part, as I said, except for the niceties of home-cooking, and a nice bed, and all that stuff, it was three years out of my life, but it wasn't too bad.

SH: This concludes the interview and thank you very much.

AM: Thank you.

JM: When do I get paid? [laughter]

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Reviewed by Allison Mueller 9/05
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 10/05
Reviewed by Joseph Mueller 08/07
Reviewed by Elaine Blatt 9/07