

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH HOLZER

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview on August 5th, 2008 in Palisades, New York with Joseph Holzer. I thank you very much for taking time to talk with me today, Mr. Holzer. To start the interview, could you tell me where and when you were born?

Joseph Holzer: I was born April 8th, 1925 in Austria.

SSH: What town?

JH: Punitz, P-U-N-I-T-Z.

SSH: Before we talk about your experiences as a young man, could you tell me a little bit about your father and his background?

JH: Well, my father was a veteran of World War I in the Austrian Army. After he came out of the Army, [he] became a businessman. He didn't do very well until [Adolf] Hitler came into Austria. Then we lost everything. We had to go. We came here as refugees.

SSH: How old were you?

JH: We left Austria in 1938. I was thirteen years old. We went to Lisbon, Portugal. We stayed in Lisbon, Portugal for twenty-two months, then we came here to the United States. We came here on May 28th, 1940.

SSH: Let's back up and talk a bit about your mother's family and her background.

JH: My mother was Hungarian; she was born in Hungary and her family came from Hungary. My grandmother and some of my aunts and uncles were in the Holocaust and they lost their lives, but we came here, my whole family, my two sisters and my mother and dad. We came here 1940.

SSH: Do you know how your father and mother met?

JH: Well, they were distant cousins, maybe third, fourth cousins removed, but my mother had the same last name as we did, except it was spelled, instead of Z-E-R, [it was] Z-S-E-R. That's the Hungarian way, but I guess the families knew each other for years.

SSH: When you left Austria and went to Lisbon, it was just your father and mother.

JH: And my two sisters.

SSH: And your two sisters. Did your father leave behind an extended family?

JH: Mostly all of them lost their lives.

SSH: No, but was there more members of the family who also wanted to leave or decided not to leave?

JH: No, there wasn't such a thing as decided. If you could leave, you left, but we did have some family, they just couldn't leave at that time.

SSH: Is that it? As a thirteen year old that must have been very difficult.

JH: Very stressful because my father was my hero, and the Gestapo came in and they interrogated him. It was just a terrible thing, but thank God we came out of it alive.

SSH: When the Gestapo came, did you realize how in danger you were?

JH: Sure.

SSH: How soon? You were just a very young boy,

JH: See, at that time, when [Hitler] came into Austria, he didn't right away take all the people to the concentration camps. It was maybe in 1941. No, I'm wrong.

SSH: Before this.

JH: He came in '38. They started really taking them away in '39. They picked them up from the street, anybody Jewish. They pick him up and throw him--nobody knew what happened to them. They just plain disappeared, but thank God we weren't there. We left there. Hitler came into Austria in March 12th--I still remember all these things.

SSH: I love it.

JH: We left in August of '38. We were lucky at that time. We went to Italy. From Italy, we took a ship to Portugal. Who arranged all that? The Gestapo. They made us leave and they arranged all the things. I don't know. We just lucked out. Then, we were in Lisbon for twenty-two months. My aunt lived here in the United States, was here for years and she knew--

SSH: Your father's sister.

JH: My father's sister. She made arrangements with a nice gentleman. As a matter of fact, they sent us the papers to guarantee--over a million dollars they guaranteed for us to come here. We still didn't know. We had to wait twenty-two months. Then, we came here in 1940.

SSH: Before we talk about the trip here, tell me how your family gathered up. You said the Gestapo arranged for you to leave.

JH: Yes, yes.

SSH: What was your father's business?

JH: My father had a grocery business, and we had a restaurant/bar, and he also had a big farm. He was well-to-do, my dad. One day we were well-to-do, we had servants, and the next day we had nothing; we were paupers. That's it. That's what happened, but we had our lives; that was the main thing.

SSH: Were your sisters older or younger?

JH: My mother had the three of us in thirty-one months. My oldest sister was thirty-one months older than me and my younger sister, sixteen months older than me. So we were very close.

SSH: It's like having triplets. [laughter]

JH: Just about.

SSH: Your sisters would have been sixteen.

JH: Yes, about that. My oldest sister was about fifteen and my younger sister was fourteen.

SSH: Was this something that you talked about with the family as you prepared? How quickly did this happen?

JH: What happened, we went from our hometown to Vienna, and a young man came a few weeks after that. When we left, he came to Vienna and he said that he wanted to buy all my father's property. My father knew him since he was a little boy. He knew he didn't have the money and we wouldn't have gotten the money anyway. So, my father said, "You know what? Go back and tell the Gestapo--let them do whatever they want to do." He went back, and I suppose that made him mad or something. They came, they took away our passports, and they arranged all the things [for our family] to get out of the country. It was a lucky thing that they did.

SSH: Why would your family be in Vienna? What made you go to Vienna?

JH: Because we were told to leave our home.

SSH: You were told to leave.

JH: Told to leave our home and we had to get out within, I don't remember exactly how long, but my mother had a brother in Vienna and we moved in with them. They had a two bedroom apartment with ten people living there; it was terrible. Then we left from there and we went to Lisbon.

SSH: Did you have money that got you from Vienna to Lisbon?

JH: They arranged [it]. They gave us the money.

SSH: Really?

JH: Yes, they gave us the money. They gave us, I don't know, a certain amount for each person, but then when we came to Lisbon, we were poor people. The Jewish community, they fed us and arranged for an apartment for us and and they paid for everything until we came here.

SSH: You said the Gestapo came to your home in Austria and talked to your father. Did they take him away or did they talk to him right there in front of you?

JH: No, right in front of us. Another thing, my father--there were five brothers and they were in World War I, all of them, and one of them got killed, one of his brothers, and he had a gold watch with a chain, beautiful gold watch. He was very close with my father and he wanted my father to have that watch. He says, "Something happens to me, the watch is yours." So, the guy, the Gestapo, goes over to him, "What is this?" My father says to him, "This is my brother; he got killed in the war and he left me that watch." [The Gestapo] took the watch and put it in his pocket.

SSH: Do you think--?

JH: People don't know--

SSH: Do you think because your father had served in the military--?

JH: It had nothing to do [with it]. They didn't believe him. They said Jews weren't in the Army. My father was a captain in the artillery.

SSH: Your father, you said he had the other four brothers that were still living.

JH: Yes. No, no. One of them got killed in the war and another one--he had two brothers in Hungary; they moved from Austria to Hungary. One of them had a big job and the other one was in Budapest and he had a decent job, too. So, they moved to Hungary and they [were] lost in the Holocaust, both of them.

SSH: It was your father's family who went to Hungary that was lost.

JH: Yes, two brothers.

SSH: I wondered if your father had talked to his brothers before he decided--

JH: Couldn't get in touch with them.

SSH: Who did you go and say goodbye to, as a young boy of thirteen?

JH: When we left there?

SSH: Yes.

JH: There was nobody there. We were lucky to stay together and try and get out. That's the way they sent us away. People used to come back from the United States from our town. They made some money over there and they worked here as whatever. They came back, they had some money, so my father used to exchange their money for them. We had not too much, but there was a few thousand dollars. Somehow, my father hid that money to go over the border, but if the Gestapo would have caught us with that money, it would have been gone. So, my mother was so nervous, but we had a man, an Austrian guy, he was our guide and he took us from Austria to Italy. When we came to the border, the Gestapo was right there. So, he went out and he offered them cigarettes, and he says "These people have nothing, absolutely nothing. Everything was taken away from them," and they left us alone. Everybody wasn't an anti-Semite; some of these people were very nice. They were Austrian people and they didn't want to be Nazis.

SSH: How did you come out? Did you come out in a car? How did you travel from Vienna?

JH: From Vienna we went to Trieste, Italy by train. Italy and Austria have a border together. So, we went to Trieste. From Trieste we went on a ship called *Vulcania*, nice ship, and from there, we went to Lisbon, Portugal. We stayed there.

SSH: Were you worried when you were going across that border into Trieste? Do you remember how you felt or what you were doing?

JH: Well, I was nervous because I saw my mother was nervous. She was pale, like this here.

SSH: White.

JH: Sure. She was scared to death.

SSH: Did they tell you children what to say or not to say?

JH: We were all smart. We knew exactly what not to say and what to say. You had to get smart in a hurry. You had to grow up in a hurry.

SSH: Did your sisters have boyfriends or people that they left behind?

JH: At that time? They didn't have boyfriends.

SSH: Had you been in school before this?

JH: Sure.

SSH: Going to school and doing everything?

JH: Yes. Sure.

SSH: What were your plans before this happened?

JH: I tell you, I always wanted to be a veterinarian as a young kid. After I came out of the Army, I just didn't feel like going to school that much anymore. You know what I mean?

SSH: Were your sisters in school and studying as well?

JH: Yes.

SSH: What did your father say about his service in World War I? Did he ever talk to you about it?

JH: He was a prisoner of war in Russia. He was captured. 140,000 men were captured at one time. He was in Siberia and he met a Jewish man also in the Russian Army, and that man was in charge of the horses, the Army horses. They were all male horses and they had to be castrated in order to keep them from getting too slow. They used to have to exercise the horses and ride them. My father was a terrific horseman.

SSH: Really?

JH: Yes. He got in with this man and he rode the horses. Then finally, they transferred this man back to Russia, to the Ukraine, and he took my father with him. Ukraine is next to Austria, so my father escaped.

SSH: Really?

JH: He escaped. He came back to Austria and they sent him to the Italian front.

SSH: For escaping in the Ukraine. He came back.

JH: No, you see what happened, that happened in 1917. In 1917, there was a revolution in Russia at that time, and so everything was crazy and he was able to escape. [Editor's Note: From 1721 to 1917, Russia was known as the Russian Empire and it possessed the land which is now known as modern day Belarus. Tsar Nicholas II stepped down from power after the Russian Revolution began in 1917. After several years, Russia would become the Soviet Union.]

SSH: Did your father come to the Ukraine with the gentleman?

JH: Yes. Otherwise he would have been in Siberia; he couldn't escape.

SSH: That's what I wondered. Both your father and the Russian were in Ukraine. That's a great story.

JH: And I remember all these things.

SSH: I'm so glad that you're talking with us. This is wonderful. Was he a farmer before he went into the Army?

JH: They had five sisters, but two of them were home. When all the boys went into the service, my two aunts were home and my grandfather, at that time, you are sixty years old, you're an old man. You know what I mean? I'm eighty-three; I feel I'm a young guy. Everything went kaput. When my father came home, there was nothing. He worked very hard. He bought forests, chopped down the woods, and then sold the wood. He dealt in horses. He bought horses, sold them. Sometimes we had about fifty, sixty horses. But he did okay for himself, had to work very hard. Then the Gestapo came and took it away.

SSH: How much luggage did you bring with you to Vienna?

JH: As much as we could carry. You could take whatever you could carry, that's it.

SSH: How long were you in Trieste?

JH: In Trieste, we were about, I would say, about three, four days, until the *Vulcania* left. Then, we went to Lisbon.

SSH: Were you concerned while you were in Trieste that you would be sent back?

JH: No, no. Not at all. Italy, at that time, they were allies with the Germans, but they didn't bother the Jews that much. I mean Mussolini was no good, but nothing compared to [Hitler]. [Editor's Note: Fascist Benito Mussolini was Prime Minister of Italy from 1922 to 1945.]

SSH: When you went to Lisbon, as you said, the Gestapo had made all these arrangements, so obviously, the Gestapo know where you are in Lisbon.

JH: Yes, but Lisbon, Portugal was a neutral country they didn't go in there, thank God. We were next to Spain. That time was a civil war in Spain. There's all these things.

SSH: I had wondered if there was anyone in Portugal that your family knew.

JH: We went there as strangers, couldn't speak [the language]. I came to the United States, I spoke German fluently, because Austria. I spoke Hungarian and I spoke Portuguese, like I speak English, and I forgot that language because you don't practice it, you forget, but German and Hungarian I still speak that.

SSH: In almost two years that you were in Portugal, in Lisbon, did you go to school? What did you do? What were the activities?

JH: I didn't go to school there. Didn't go to school there because we couldn't do anything. You weren't allowed to work. You could go into business, but you weren't allowed to work, but we were supported by the HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] and that's how we lived.

SSH: The--?

JH: Jewish organization.

SSH: Called what?

JH: HIAS.

SSH: HIAS.

JH: Yes. That's how. Then, we came to this country here and we had family here, but nobody supported us. We went to work right away. We never took a nickel from this country.

SSH: How did you get the information that you were going to finally be released or get to leave Portugal?

JH: See, what happened that time was a lot of anti-Semitism, in the American Consulate, too. This was one guy, he didn't want to give out no visas to the Jews. All the Jewish people got together, they said, "How come this guy is not [giving out visas?]" So, what happened, they sent to the State Department a letter with all the signatures on there and they recalled this guy, but he didn't want to come back. He committed suicide over there in Lisbon.

SSH: Really?

JH: They had a new consulate, and about a month later, we got the visas. Yes.

SSH: Was there any thought that he was trying to extort money?

JH: No, he's just one of those rednecks. You know what I mean? But, thank God, we got this guy. The Jews, there are a lot of smart people amongst us and they signed a letter to the State Department, and that's how we got here.

SSH: What did you do to keep busy?

JH: I met a salesman, and he was a nice man and he liked me. I carried his suitcase. I carried his suitcase and he used to give me a couple *escudos*. This amounted to maybe twenty-five cents, [laughter] but it was some money. I earned some money. My sisters, they became nannies. They were teaching them German. There was rich people in Portugal. It was either rich or poor; there's no in between, no middle class. They earned a few dollars.

SSH: What about trying to learn English?

JH: No, when I came to this country, I didn't speak a word of English, but the next day, I had a girlfriend. [laughter]

SSH: I suspected that might be true. You waited for your visas, as you said, because this gentleman kept stonewalling all your efforts to do this. How much time did you have to know that you were actually getting on a boat and going?

JH: Well, we made arrangements right away. It so happened it was so close. We went on a Greek ship and it was the last crossing from Lisbon to the United States, or it was the last ship because it was 1940 and [Hitler] invaded Poland in 1940.

SSH: September 1939.

JH: Yes, '39. September 1, 1939, he invaded Poland. The submarines were starting to get active, so we just happened to come here in time.

SSH: On this Greek ship, was it mostly Jewish refugees?

JH: No, no. A lot of Greek people on there. It was the *Nea Hellas*, called the ship. There was mixed--not too many Jews. I mean, as many as could come from Lisbon, that had visas at the same time. They came, but there [were] a lot of Greek people on there. As a matter-of-fact, I met a guy and he taught me a Greek song I've forgotten. [laughter] We used to sing in Greek.

SSH: How did the people treat you on the ship?

JH: Very nice, yes.

SSH: Very nice. Just paying passengers--

JH: Yes, very nice. Can't complain about that.

SSH: Was there any thought while you were in Portugal to go somewhere besides the United States?

JH: No, no way.

SSH: I mean to South America or to Canada?

JH: No, there was a lot of people that went to Cuba. The Jews went all over the world, China and the Philippines. When I was in the Philippines, I met people there. I heard them talk German. I knew they were Austrians because we have a different dialect. You know what I mean? So, I went over to them and I spoke to them. They looked me, I was a soldier, American soldier, and they said, yes, they came from Austria. They told me how they came over to China. It was all over the world they had to travel to get to one place. It was amazing.

SSH: It really is. On the crossing then, you learned to sing a Greek song obviously with the Greek person on board. What else did you do? What do you remember about the crossing? Were you excited?

JH: Yes, I loved it. As a matter-of-fact, I went on cruises all the time.

SSH: Had you ever been on a ship other than the one from Trieste to Lisbon?

JH: No, the first time I was ever on a ship when we went down [on] the *Vulcania* from Trieste to Lisbon. I got so seasick. We had to go through Gibraltar and those two oceans met, and it was terrible, awful.

SSH: That is what I hear.

JH: So, we were all laying in a cabin and my mother was sick and my sisters and me. My father came down and he says to me, "What are you doing there? Come on, let's go eat breakfast." I said, "Daddy, I'm sick." He said, "Come on." So, I got up and I came near the dining room. I said, "Oh, I'm so, [sick.]" He said, "Put your over your [nose]." I did that, so now I start eating. Would you believe that I never again got seasick?

SSH: That's amazing.

JH: Never again.

SSH: That's the first cure like that I've ever heard.

JH: Yes, I never got seasick. We went to Japan and we went through the China Sea. We hit a typhoon on the flat-bottomed ship and our ship was tossing up and down, and I didn't get sick. [laughter] I was so hungry that I went to the kitchen. It was on a Tuesday, I'll never forget. We had Boston beans. I got a mess kit full of Boston beans. I went up on the deck they wanted to throw me overboard. [laughter]

SSH: I can imagine. The smell, if someone is seasick like that. That's amazing. To back up a little bit, you talked about being excited, but your family were all so ill from being seasick.

JH: Oh my god, they were terrible sick. My mother, they didn't want to let her off because she looked altogether different than her passport picture. They looked at her: two different people. She was so sick for a week. Poor woman.

SSH: Where did the ship pull into, New York?

JH: We landed in Hoboken.

SSH: Hoboken.

JH: Hoboken. It was May 28, 1940. It was a hot day. Oh, it was hot. My cousin came and he said, "I'm going to get something to drink." I said, "Okay." He went and got a Coke. He handed me the Coke. I took a drink of the Coke. That was the first and last time I ever drank Coca Cola.

SSH: Really?

JH: I very, very seldom drink soda. If I do drink soda it might be ginger ale, but never cola. "How do you drink that?" Never drank it again.

SSH: Who met you in Hoboken?

JH: My aunt, my father's sister, and we went to Maryland. We stayed in Maryland there. We rented a house. First, we stayed with my aunt for maybe two months. She had a big house.

SSH: What did she do here in this country?

JH: Her husband worked. He was a foreman in a cement factory. He wasn't Jewish, but he knew my father from years back when he was a boy. There was no such thing in our town where we were. My father was very good to everybody. People needed help, he was the one that helped them. My uncle, he was very nice to us. He treated my father like his own brother.

SSH: Whereabouts in Maryland, do you remember?

JH: Hagerstown, Maryland.

SSH: Hagerstown.

JH: Yes, that's about seventy miles from Washington, seventy miles from Baltimore, West.

SSH: How religious was your family in Austria?

JH: My grandfather was a very religious man, but my father--we were not too religious at all. As a matter-of-fact, I remember my father used to smoke cigarettes. One Saturday, we were walking to the back of the house. We had stables back from the house about maybe five, six hundred yards. We're walking back to the stables because one of the horses just foaled and I wanted to see. We were walking back and my father was smoking a cigarette. [You're] not supposed to smoke on a Sabbath. You know what I mean? That's a terrible thing. So, I happened to turn around and see my grandpa. I said, "Daddy, grandpa is behind." [He] took the cigarette, like this. [inaudible] My father was already forty years old, but my grandfather was a very religious man.

SSH: Were you bar mitzvahed before you came?

JH: No. I was supposed to be bar mitzvahed in April and Hitler came in March.

SSH: I just wondered.

JH: But I go to services every Friday night.

SSH: I was just curious if they had been able to do that at that time.

JH: No.

SSH: You came from Hoboken by train or car to Hagerstown?

JH: By car, yes.

SSH: What was the first thing that you did? What other memories do you have of that?

JH: Well, the first thing I know there was--next door, just before I went into the house, I looked next door and I see a beautiful girl my age. I said to my uncle, "Boy, she's pretty." He said, "Stay away from her." When he told me that, I said, "No way." [laughter] So, the next day I met her. He didn't want me to go with her, said, "She's no good." She was all right with me.

SSH: Did your father find employment right away when you came to Hagerstown?

JH: Not right away. Had to wait for a while. He had to go to work in a factory. He didn't speak English. He made a few dollars. My sisters worked and I went to work, too.

SSH: Where did you work?

JH: First thing, I had a part time job in a gas station pumping gas, nineteen cents a gallon.

SSH: Tell us about it. Now gas is over four dollars. What did your sisters do? Did they work in a factory as well?

JH: Yes. We all did. Then after I worked there, then I went to work for this guy, (Mr. Reuben?). He sent us papers. He had a department store in Hagerstown. Once I started learning English, I went to work for him and stayed there.

SSH: Why was it (Mr. Reuben?) who sent you your papers, rather than your sister?

JH: My aunt?

SSH: Yes, I meant your father's sister. I apologize.

JH: My aunt, she didn't have the means. You had to guarantee a certain amount of money and he guaranteed \$519,000 dollars at that time in 1940. His brother-in-law, Mr. (Greenwald?), they were partners in the department store. He guaranteed \$600,000 dollars. So, between the two of them, over a million dollars, which at that time, like ten million today.

SSH: And it was just for your family?

JH: Yes.

SSH: There were no others that they were sponsoring at that time.

JH: No, no. Just us.

SSH: How did you learn to speak English? What method did you use?

JH: I don't know. I picked it up within six months, I supposed. I spoke with a little accent. You know what I mean? Then, when I went into the Army, I only spoke English. A lot of times I said something and it didn't come out so good, so they would laugh. I said to one of the guys, "What are you laughing about? Why don't you correct me when you do that?" I said, "If you go to my country, I'm sure you wouldn't learn it as quick as I did."

SSH: Did your mother have a profession?

JH: She was a hausfrau.

SSH: Hausfrau.

JH: She did everything. We always had maids. She worked hard to raise us--I mean, three kids within two and a half years.

SSH: That close together. When you came to Hagerstown, your father was working in a factory. Did you both your mother and father learned to speak English as well?

JH: My mother, every Sunday she used to read the newspaper, the funnies. They spoke pretty good. They learned pretty good. I mean, they had a heavy accent, but they understood everything and they could speak English. We only spoke English in the house.

SSH: Really?

JH: Yes. They didn't want to speak anything. They wanted to learn how to speak English. What happened, my father, in 1932, he wanted to come to this country.

SSH: He went where?

JH: He wanted to come here.

SSH: In 1932?

JH: Yes, because he was thinking about tearing down the house and everything and rebuilding everything new. He was talking to my mother and he said, "You know, I'll leave everything the way it is and we'll go to the United States." My father was a big shot. He was a big man in town. She says to him, "You know, over here, you speak the language. You go to the United States, you wouldn't know how to speak English. You wouldn't be what you are here." "You'd be a dummy," she said. So, he listened to my mother and we stayed, but if we would have come here probably would have been a rich man here because he was a very highly intelligent man, my father.

SSH: What did he do after working in the factory then?

JH: He got hurt and he went on disability. He couldn't go back to work anymore.

SSH: What year was that that he got hurt?

JH: It must have been around 1950.

SSH: He worked ten years in the factory.

JH: Yes.

SSH: What do you remember about the young people that you interacted with and what they knew of the world and what was going on in Europe? You had lived it firsthand.

JH: Well, they knew that what was happening. I had a lot of friends, not Jewish. A lot of gentile friends I had. I had a couple of Jewish friends also. As a matter-of-fact, one of my friends, he was a naval officer. Jack Grossman was his name. He got killed in the war, but I had a lot of friends. I had a couple of people--another one got killed in Europe.

SSH: This is before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

JH: I came here a year before Pearl Harbor.

SSH: You had an experience that none of them had. Were they curious about what you were telling them of what was going on?

JH: Yes, sure. They were very interested in it. They all were different than today. They knew already what's happening with Hitler and the rumors they heard with the Jews and all that, so they knew a little something.

SSH: Did they? Okay.

JH: Yes.

SSH: You were in Hagerstown when you first heard of Pearl Harbor?

JH: It was a funny thing. It was Sunday morning. After I had this girlfriend there, we moved away. I met a cantor and he had a daughter, [laughter] so I was her boyfriend. I was already sixteen then. In 1941, I was sixteen years old. I went to visit her. So, I came to the house and cantor was very nice to me because I was nice, and he said, "Did you hear what happened?" I said, "No. What happened?" He said, "The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor." I looked at him, I said, "What's Pearl Harbor?" I didn't know, so he told me. Then, I got really anxious to become eighteen now because I want to go in the Army.

SSH: What did your mother and father think of that?

JH: That I want to go in the Army?

SSH: Yes.

JH: My mother didn't like it. If she would know what I did, she'd turn over in her grave because when I was eighteen years old all my friends were going in the Army and I was left alone. I was dying to go in the Army.

SSH: What were you doing at this point? Where were you?

JH: I was working in a department store for (Mr. Reuben?).

SSH: That's what you'd already started.

JH: Yes, yes. I went to the draft board. Naturally, you had to register when you're eighteen years old. So, I went to the draft board and I told them that I would like to go in the Army. "How come I'm not going?" They looked up [and said], "You're not a citizen." I said, "Well, I know people that are not citizens, they go in there." "Okay. You want to go in the Army?" "Yes, sure." So, the FBI came around to the neighborhood, they came to the store, they find out what kind of guy I am. I got good reputation, so about two weeks after they came, I got a letter from the President of the United States and I went into the Army. If I would have told my mother--because I could have stayed out. Eventually they would have taken me, but I could have stayed out another six, seven months. I never told her that I did that. So, I went in.

SSH: The factory that your father worked in, what were they producing? What were they manufacturing?

JH: I think they were making labels that you put in--it was a label factory, weaving. I think that was what they did.

SSH: Your mother was still a homemaker at this point.

JH: Yes.

SSH: What were your sisters doing?

JH: My sisters also worked. I don't remember anymore what they did, but they were working. I forget what they did.

SSH: When were you inducted?

JH: August. As a matter-of-fact, August 11th will be--I was eighteen--sixty-five years--

SSH: Yes, it will be.

JH: --sixty-five years that I went into the service. Would you believe that? I'm such a young guy.

SSH: You are. I can testify to that. The audio tape doesn't show how young you look. Tell me where you went for your induction.

JH: I went to Fort Lee, Virginia. From there, they interview you--what branch of service you want to go in. I worked in a department store. I said, "I want to become a quartermaster." So, they put down quartermaster, fine. Three days later, I go outside and I looked at the bulletin board. You had to look at the bulletin board if you're shipping out. Sure enough, my name was on there. We went on a train in St. Petersburg, Virginia and I was wondering where the hell I'm going.

SSH: St. Petersburg, Virginia. Okay.

JH: The sergeant went through. I said, "Hey, sarge, where are we going?" He says, "Fort Knox." "Fort Knox?" I said, "What do they train there?" He says, "Armored force." I said, "What's that?" He says, "Tanks." "Tanks?" I said, "I can't even drive a car." He says, "Well, they're going to love you because the guys that drive cars, they think they know everything." He says, "You're going to be the best tank driver in the United States Army." Believe me, I was a good tank driver.

SSH: [laughter] That's funny. You had never driven a car before.

JH: No.

SSH: That's great.

JH: I drove a little. My uncle used to take me for a drive here and there, but I didn't know how to drive.

SSH: Where did you do your basic training then?

JH: Fort Knox.

SSH: Everything was in Fort Knox.

JH: Yes.

SSH: When you went from Virginia to Fort Knox you went by train, obviously.

JH: Yes, by train. Yes, troop train.

SSH: Were most of the people from Virginia that were on the train?

JH: No, no. Well, the surrounding [area], Maryland. I was from Maryland--Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia, those states there.

SSH: Did they ever ask you about your citizenship?

JH: Well, they knew. What happened was this: after I finished basic training, we came to Fort Meade, Maryland. That was our embarkation center there. You get shipped out from there. Fort Meade, Maryland is about twenty-five miles from Baltimore. One day, they told us to be ready at a certain time, they're going to pick us up, about twenty guys, and take us to Baltimore. They took us to Baltimore, went to the courthouse, we raised our right hand--there's four of us--and we were American citizens. I got my citizenship papers with my Army picture on there. [laughter]

SSH: That quick, right?

JH: Yes.

SSH: Tell me about basic training in Fort Knox. What was that like for you?

JH: I want to tell you one thing. I loved the Army.

SSH: Did you really?

JH: I loved every minute I was in the Army, combat and basic training. When I went in, I made up my mind that I'm going to be a terrific soldier, which I was a good soldier. Never had a bad day and my captain and everybody they all liked me because I did whatever they told me to do. First, we took infantry training. You have to do that. You got to be able to go through combat. In case your tank gets disabled, you have to be able to fight on foot. Then, they start training us on the tanks: drive a tank, drive a jeep, a truck. Drove everything, but tank was my main thing. On my discharge I got light tank driver. After basic training was seventeen weeks, we went to Fort Meade, Maryland.

SSH: Did anybody give you a hard time because you are Jewish?

JH: One guy. I almost murdered him. I hit him so hard and he fell back. I was laying on my bed and he called me a Jew bastard. I said, "Don't you ever call me that again." He jumped on me. I grabbed him and I hit him on the forehead. I was a strong kid, through basic training and you're hard like a rock. He fell back and hit his head on the bed, steel bar. I got scared to death. I thought he was gone, but thank god he came back. The sergeant, I told him what happened. He said, "Well, serves him right." They revived him and he came back.

[Tape Paused]

SSH: When you were in basic training, did you have any thought as to which of the theaters that you wanted to fight in, European or Pacific?

JH: I wanted to go to the European Theater. This was what happened. I came to Fort Meade, Maryland, where you go to Europe. One day, I had a pass, a weekend pass, and I went home. It was only seventy miles from Fort Meade. I went home and when I came back, the captain called me in and he gave me the service records for six men. He put me in charge and he said, "These guys are going with you to California, Fort Ord, California." I said, "Oh, I'm going to the Pacific." So, I got the papers and they had Pullman [cars], where you can sleep. We got on the train in Baltimore and I showed we got Pullman tickets. He said, "Forget about it. No Pullman." I said, "But we got the government ..." "Don't mean nothing." So, we went and the guys said, "We'll you're in charge." I said, "I went and they said, 'No Pullman.'" Then we came to Chicago and I tried again. "No, nothing." We had to sit up; took us five days to go from Baltimore to California by train.

SSH: And no Pullman cars.

JH: No, but it was lucky; after Chicago, somehow it was nice and there wasn't that many people on the train, so I had two seats. I think we came to Wisconsin somewhere and then a Marine sergeant comes on, a woman, a girl.

SSH Really?

JH: Yes. Beautiful. She goes over to me, she says, "Are these seats taken?" I said, "Yes, now they're taken." She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, you're going to sit here, right?" She said, "Yeah." [laughter] I had a good time with her, fooled around a little bit. It was okay.

SSH: Was she being transferred out to California?

JH: Yes, she went to San Francisco to the naval base there. The girls didn't fight like today. They had officer jobs.

SSH: She was traveling alone?

JH: Yes. No, there might have been another one, I think, but she was the better looking one. So, I made a date with her. I met her once. I was born the first day of Passover. We were out in Fort Ord and for Passover, the first day we were there, they made a dinner for the soldiers from Fort Ord. So, I went and I took a couple of my friends. They weren't Jewish, but they didn't care; you fed them. I was talking to one of the girls that was serving us, and I said, "Today is my birthday. I'm nineteen years old today." "Oh, really?" She turned around. I don't know where they got the birthday card, but they gave me fifty bucks.

SSH: Oh my word. Really?

JH: Fifty dollars collected from all the Jewish people. [laughter] Fifty dollars was a lot of money.

SSH: Yes, it was.

JH: So, that fifty dollars, I put it away right away. Then, I learned how to play poker. We were playing in the barracks and I had never played poker, but I had good card sense. I could pick up. I played in Austria. I played the Austrian games. So, I learned how to play poker and then we went on a ship. It was only twenty-four soldiers on that ship.

SSH: How did that happen?

JH: Yes, we took our tanks over. Had twenty-four soldiers, twenty-four sailors, and the rest were Merchant Marines. The merchant Marines were making good money.

SSH: Do you remember the name of the ship?

JH: No, it was a liberty ship. I don't know. I don't remember anymore. It was a liberty ship. The food was excellent. We ate whatever the merchant Marines ate: pancakes in the morning, eggs, whatever you wanted. So, one day we were sitting with a couple of soldiers playing poker, five cents. One of the Merchant Marines came in, he says, "What are you guys doing?" I said, "You see, we're playing poker." He said, "That's crap." He didn't say crap; he said something else. So, I said to him, "What are you talking about?" He says, "You want to play poker?" I said, "Well, we're playing poker." He said, "Play with us." I said, "What kind of game?" He said, "We play poker, but no limit." No limit you bet whatever you want.

SSH: Oh my word.

JH: I had fifty bucks. I said, "How the hell am I going to play with these guys?" I said to my friend (Schaefer?), Jewish guy, had a money belt all the time, I said, "(Schaefer?), you got a couple of bucks?" He says, "Yes." I said, "I've got fifty. Give me another fifty." "Okay." So, he gave me the money. I sit down and started playing, got a big hand, the first big hand, [and] won right away. You ever play poker?

SSH: Yes.

JH: We played closed poker. You get five cards and if you want to buy three cards, you know. So, I had three five's to start with. I buy two cards and I got another five, so I had four five's the first hand. I won that hand. We were on the ship thirty days to go to New Guinea. By the time I got off the ship, I had eight hundred dollars.

SSH: Oh, my. I guess you really did learn how to play.

JH: Eight hundred bucks. I gave my friend (Schaefer?) sixty dollars. I gave him ten dollars. [laughter]

SSH: Did you send the eight hundred home? What did you do?

JH: No, I sent some of it home, but we played a lot. In New Guinea, we didn't fight; we were just laying around. And it rained. I was there seven months, rained every day. Oh, the mud.

Oh, my god. We played poker there. I made money. I had good time. Tell you the truth, I loved every minute I was in the Army.

SSH: The twenty-four guys that were with you, where were they from? Were they still now predominantly from that same part of the country?

JH: No, no. They were southerners and from New York. It was all kinds. Once we became attached to our company--we went there as replacements and they were from all over.

SSH: Were these brand new tanks that you're taking over?

JH: Yes, sure.

SSH: Did you do any kind of training or physical training on the passage over?

JH: On the ship?

SSH: Yes.

JH: No. We had to stand guard. We had to pull guard duty every night.

SSH: Was there any incidents while you were making the crossing?

JH: No, no. I tell you we were just one ship. There was no other ship, just us. It took us thirty days to go from San Francisco to New Guinea.

SSH: Did you stop anywhere along the way?

JH: No, it was straight in the Pacific. We zigzagged. You had to be up and watch for submarines, but thank god we didn't have no incident. I got there thirty days and stayed there for seven months.

SSH: Which part of New Guinea?

JH: I was in Milne Bay, New Guinea. I was there, I don't know how many, a few months, and then went to a place called Finschhafen. From Finschhafen, I went to Oro Bay.

SSH: When were you assigned to a unit? You went over as a replacement.

JH: Yes.

SSH: What were you assigned to?

JH: We were assigned to 44th Tank Battalion. Most of the time we were attached to the 1st Cavalry Division. Then from Oro Bay, we were supposed to get a furlough to Australia. I was over there, so I was looking forward to that because everybody came back [saying], "Oh, the

girls.” You’re you kids, you know what I mean? But in two weeks, I’m gone to Australia. So, all of a sudden, they cancelled everything, cancelled the whole furlough. Nobody is going on furlough. We went to the Admiralty Islands. From the Admiralty Islands, we were on a ship. Eighteen tanks were on there. It was ship called landing ship dock [LSD]. That ship sank down, took on water, and the little boats, assault boats with one tank each--LCMs [landing craft mechanized] they called them--they went in there. We backed in because we had to pull out. So, we went to invade Leyte Island, Philippine Islands. That was October 22nd, 1944, we invaded there. You ever see when [General] Douglas MacArthur walks on to--did you ever see that?

SSH: Yes.

JH: I was a hundred yards away from him.

SSH: Really?

JH: Yes.

SSH: How many times did he make that walk?

JH: I only saw him one time. He made that one time, but he was right there, I mean, MacArthur was a tough guy.

SSH: What did the troops that you served with think of MacArthur?

JH: He was a great general. He was in charge. We had a guy by the name of General (Walker?). He was in the 8th Army. He was in charge of the 8th Army. I was in the 8th Army. Then we invaded Leyte Island. From Leyte Island we invaded Samar. From there, then we came back to Leyte, and from Leyte [inaudible] on the ship again to invade Mindoro. Only my company went because we were light tanks. So, we went to Mindoro. They didn't expect too much opposition there. The only time we would have to get off [was] if the infantry ran into machine guns. Then we'd get off and knock them out. But on the way there, we played poker on the deck. So, I had to go to the bathroom, but you didn't go to the bathroom; you go to the railing and you do it over there, standing there. I didn't expect anything. There's not too many ships, maybe forty ships. *Nashville* was the main ship; it was a cruiser.

SSH: Which one?

JH: A cruiser.

SSH: Which ship?

JH: The *Nashville*.

SSH: The *Nashville*, okay.

JH: I'm standing there, doing my thing and all of a sudden, out of nowhere, a kamikaze comes into that ship. Oh, my god. I diddled all over myself, I got so scared. It was just awful. The ship didn't sink, but it had to turn around and go back, and a lot of boys got killed on there.

SSH: Were you able to rescue anyone?

JH: Well, we couldn't go. We were on an LCT. It was a different ship. We had no rescue thing.

SSH: Did you turn around?

JH: No, no. We did go in.

SSH: Oh, you did. I misunderstood.

JH: Oh, just that one. Just the cruiser had to turn around; they were disabled.

SSH: I misunderstood. I thought you said you went back.

JH: No, no. The fleet went in there. But they came in and we didn't have to get off. So, I didn't have to do any fighting in Mindanao. Then we came back and we went to Luzon. That was the main island.

SSH: When the troops landed in Mindanao, where did you go from there?

JH: Mindoro, I meant to say.

SSH: Mindoro, okay. So, from Mindoro, did you go back?

JH: Yes, we went back to Leyte Island. We were anchored for about a day, until they secured the island. Then we went back to Leyte. From Leyte, I don't remember exactly, it was, I think, in January we went to Luzon. That was the main island. We came to Luzon, I think, on the second day of the invasion, my battalion. Then, in Manila, the Japanese held 3800 allied prisoners, civilians in the University of Santo Tomas. So, we got orders to make a flying column and go into Manila--we were two hundred miles away--to rescue those prisoners because the Japanese threatened to kill them. So, no fighting. We go right through the line, right into Manila.

SSH: You're driving your tanks.

JH: Yes, yes. It took us about two days. We got into Manila and I was in the lead tank. The platoon sergeant was a staff sergeant and I was in his tank. See, when you go into combat ,your platoon sergeant is number one and the lieutenant, which is a platoon commander, he's number five. See? You're number one, he's number five. So, they said, "All right." We came to Santo Tomas and I was driving the tank. He said, "Okay. Now ram the gate down. Knock down the gate." It's a big steel gate there. I hit that gate there. I couldn't budge it.

SSH: Really?

JH: [laughter] It wouldn't budge. So, they called up a medium tank and the medium tank knocked it down. [laughter] I hit that thing so hard, but we got the prisoners out, thank god. [inaudible]

SSH: Did you meet any of them or see any of them?

JH: Yes, sure. They were all skinny, terrible, but they were so happy to see us; they were kissing us and hugging us.

SSH: Is that where you ran into the German-speaking soldier?

JH: No, no. Manila, we demolished it.

SSH: Was this the first time that you were in combat in your tank?

JH: Yes, sure.

SSH: In Leyte or in Manila?

JH: Leyte was the first time we made an invasion. In Samar, we went in, but it wasn't too bad. Manila was rough, but then we had a little rest. They pulled us back after we secured Manila. We came back, and that's when I ran into those people.

SSH: In Luzon?

JH: In Luzon, Manila.

SSH: Right, I understand. Did they pull you out of Manila after you rescued the prisoners or did they leave you?

JH: No, we had combat in Manila. Some place we had house to house combat.

SSH: You were involved in that?

JH: No, we were in the tanks. House to house combat infantry, you know. We fired into those home, but then we came to a place; it was a hotel and we got orders not to fire into that place. We didn't know why, but there was about twenty-six Japs in there. So, the infantry had to go in and they had to get them out. It was house to house combat. We're sitting in the tank like in the movies, watching how they're killing. They killed about maybe twenty Japanese, a couple of our boys, too. It was so hot. In an hour they were laying, their eyes swollen. It was just awful. You know it didn't bother me that time. It was funny. If I would see that today I would pass out. At that time, like nothing. They trained you like that. They say, in case one of your buddies falls, just step over and keep on fighting. That's what they tell you.

SSH: Did you figure out why that hotel was not--?

JH: It belonged to MacArthur. He owned that hotel.

SSH: That became his headquarters then?

JH: I don't know where he went, but that was his hotel. We found out later. "How come we couldn't fire in there and get these guys?" "No, no. This is MacArthur's hotel." He was a big man in the Philippines. He was like a dictator there. From there, after we did all the fighting and liberated the Philippines, we were supposed to go to Japan, invade Japan. Then we got new tanks again and we were down at the beach ready to load to go to Kyushu Island. That was the southernmost island of Japan, Kyushu Island. Then, we heard they dropped the atomic bomb. "Oh, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima." "What's the atomic bomb?" "It destroyed the whole city." "Oh, really?" But the Japanese still didn't give up, so then they got Nagasaki. After that, they gave up and we were happy because they said that they expected to lose a million people going in and I didn't want to be one of the million. I didn't want to get killed. So, then thank god that they gave up, but then I went to Japan, into Tokyo, traveled all over on Uncle Sam's money.

SSH: You said that you were getting ready to load. Was that in Manila?

JH: Yes, in Luzon.

SSH: In Luzon you were loading. How long before you were then sent to occupation duty in Japan?

JH: September 2nd, I went into Japan.

SSH: You were no longer a tank driver.

JH: No, no more. We guarded the warehouses. We used to pull guard duty on the warehouses. I was there four months. After that, we went home.

SSH: How did the Japanese treat you?

JH: Very good. Yes, we had no problem. You know you get scared in there. In the beginning, I had to go for a haircut. So, I had a friend of mine and I said--(Inman?) was his name. I'll never forget. Big guy with a bad eye. I said, "Do me a favor? You come with me. I'll get a haircut." I said, "Have your gun ready. In case the guy makes the wrong move, shoot him." [laughter] But he treated me nice.

SSH: Where were you housed when you were in Japan? Did you have barracks?

JH: We were housed in an airplane factory. It was nice, but I was never so cold in my life. You come from the Pacific in September, it was like over here, but our blood was like water. I was

freezing. So, we're shooting crap one night and I won a duffle bag full of money, yen, a load of money. I said to myself, "I got to get a sleeping bag or something because I'm freezing." It was canvas cots; the cold air would come--so, I go to the sergeant there, he was in charge--

SSH: The quartermaster?

JH: The quartermaster's, the warehouse. I go to him. I said, "Listen, you got a sleeping bag?" He looks at me and says, "What are you? Crazy? What the hell do you need a sleeping bag for?" I said, "Well, I'm cold." He said, "We don't got no sleeping bags." I said, "Listen, it's worth quite a few yen to me." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Whatever you want, I'll give you. I got plenty of money." "Let me check," he says. He went in and checked; he found a sleeping bag for me.

SSH: He just happened to have one.

JH: Yes, he gave me a sleeping bag. I had it for about four days. Somebody stole it. That was it.

[Tape Paused]

SSH: You were talking about being so cold as part of the occupation forces and how you had gotten a sleeping bag.

JH: And somebody took it away. Four days I had it and it was gone. What can you do?

SSH: What were you told as to how you were to interact with the Japanese as someone who is guarding warehouses?

JH: Actually, they didn't say anything to us. We knew what we were supposed to do. If somebody comes around, you ask them to stop. If they don't stop, you shoot them, but we had no problem in Japan. They were [inaudible]. The people were very nice. Like I said, when I went to get the haircut the guy treated me royally, nice. I was there four months and that was it.

SSH: I want to back up to the beginning, when you first get to the Pacific and into New Guinea. Did you offload the tanks and do any kind of training? What were you doing when you first got to [inaudible]?

JH: We didn't do any training in New Guinea.

SSH: None?

JH: No.

SSH: Were the tanks--?

JH: No, we were fully trained soldiers. We knew our jobs. In New Guinea we just laid around and played poker and go to the beach. We used to go to the beach. Beautiful day and there wasn't a cloud in the sky, nothing, clear and beautiful. You lay there--oh, wonderful. Fifteen minutes later, the rain came pouring down. It was unbelievable.

SSH: You had such an adventure, and I don't use that word lightly, to be able to escape from Austria to Italy to Portugal to--

JH: United States.

SSH: The United States and then to Maryland. You had really done a lot of traveling.

JH: Oh, yes.

SSH: How was it to travel across the United States? You were in charge of these men.

JH: Yes, it took us a long time, four or five days, but I enjoyed it. Listen, you're eighteen, nineteen years old, nothing can hurt you. When I came here, people said, [inaudible]. I get used to everything. Always did. I just make up my mind; that's the way it's got to be, that's the way it's got to be. I don't make myself miserable. I like living and I like talking to people. That was my job. I was in the supermarket business. People used to come to me, I was manager. Sometimes they go to my boss and he says, "You go to Joe. Joe will talk to you." And I liked it. To this day, over here, all these people all like me and I get along with them good.

SSH: That's great. In New Guinea, did they offload the tanks? Did the tanks stay on the ship?

JH: No, the tanks went to a different place.

SSH: Okay. So, you're basically just there, nothing to do?

JH: There was no tanks there at all.

SSH: Nothing that you had actually worked on.

JH: No, no.

SSH: When you moved to those different bases in New Guinea, what were you doing?

JH: We didn't do nothing. We just played poker, that's all.

SSH: Did the USO come there?

JH: USO came there. They came there a lot of times. I had a girl there. She was beautiful. She played ping pong with me. I'll never forget the first time I saw a girl, a white girl, in four, five months. You see a girl and you go wild. [laughter]

SSH: Do you remember her name?

JH: No. She played ping pong with me. We had the girls there, the natives. The natives were disgusting. Oh my god. You couldn't tell the difference between a man and a woman unless they turned around facing you. They all looked the same. When they turned around they had nothing on, just like this. They came with little shells, beautiful shells, and they wanted to trade us. They want (lab-lab?). What the hell is (lab-lab?)? We didn't know what (lab-lab?) was. Finally, we found out (lab-lab?) was a mattress cover. We carried mattress covers. Every soldier had a-- we didn't have no mattresses, but we had mattress covers. The reason we had that: in case you get killed, they put you in the mattress cover to bury you.

Shaun Illingworth: When you were in New Guinea they never sent you out on patrol or anything like that?

JH: No. We had guard duty, but no patrol because New Guinea was secured. Before I got there, maybe two years before, there was the 32nd Division, they secured New Guinea. New Guinea was a tough place to fight. To this day, I don't like to fly, because when we went from Milne Bay to Finschhafen by plane in one of those boxcars we called it and you're strapped in. I had a friend of mine, he was a little older than me, he was about thirty-two years old. I was sitting next to him. He says, "Hey, Joey. If we go down over here, nobody will ever find us." We were flying over the jungle. [laughter] I was a kid. "What the hell are you scaring me for, you stupid?" From that time on--I mean, I fly. I was married, used to go to Hawaii on vacations, but I was never crazy about flying after that. Now I don't fly no more, that's it. He tells me a thing like that. He said, "If we go down, nobody will ever find us." [Nelson] Rockefeller's son was in New Guinea. He got lost that time years ago. They never found him.

SSH: Was that very common to transport soldiers by plane in that part of the world at that time?

JH: That part of the world, yes. You had no other transportation.

SSH: What was going on in Finschhafen that they were sending you up there?

JH: I don't know. Just took us away from Milne Bay, maybe made room for other guys. It was a muddy place that damned Milne Bay. I think back the first day I got there--I was never homesick.

[Tape Paused.]

SSH: We're talking about Finschhafen and why they sent you there.

JH: Well, I don't know. They just send you there, that's all. Then, you go to Oro Bay, and then to the Admiralty Islands. From there, we invaded Philippine Islands from the Admiralty Islands. It was eight hundred ships.

SSH: What was that like to see that many ships? You had gone over alone when you first went to New Guinea, just you and twenty-four guys.

JH: Yes, just a liberty ship, that's all. Such a tremendous big ocean; we were the only ones on there. But it was nice. We ate good and we had a swimming pool. It was nice. When we crossed the equator, you had an initiation. I had all that. Editor's Note: In naval tradition, a pollywog is a sailor who has never before crossed the Equator. Upon crossing and taking part in the line-crossing ceremony, the sailor becomes known as a shellback.]

SSH: Did you get that?

JH: Yes.

SSH: Was it the Navy guys that initiated you or was it the Merchant Marines?

JH: I don't remember. I really don't remember who it was anymore, but I know that they initiated us.

SSH: Shellback Association, I think it's called. The Shellback Association.

SI: King Neptune and all that? [Editor's Note: Neptunus Rex, or King Neptune, is the presiding officer of the line-crossing ceremony.]

JH: Yes. I went through a lot. I went through a lot.

SI: Shaping up for the invasion of the Philippines, what was that like?

JH: Shaping up, we were on the water. First of all, you go in and they bomb for five, six days, day and night. When the ships get a little closer, the battleships are firing for another ten hours. Then finally, you go in. See what happened with us, we were on that landing ship dock with eighteen LCMs on there. Each one held one tank. So, when we went in, they let you off about seven miles from the beach. You come out and they take you in. There's one sailor on there; he steers that boat in. So, when we got in, we hung up on a sandbar-like and he couldn't take us all the way in. They had to let us off about a hundred yards from the beach. So, come off. At that time, I thought I was gone, because the tank filled up with water. It went down. Oh my god. I stepped on the gas. When it hit the bottom, I stepped on the gas as hard as I could and the tank came up like a little submarine. [We] made it and water came out. We got onto the beach. But when we got off that boat, I thought that was it. First of all, I couldn't swim. Besides, you couldn't get out of the damn tank.

SSH: How many were in the tank besides yourself?

JH: Four. It was four of us together. It was the driver, the assistant driver, the gunner and the tank commander. Four of us in a light tank. In a medium tank it was five. You had the driver and assistant driver. You had a gunner and a loader and a tank commander.

SSH: Was it at this invasion that you saw the kamikaze?

JH: No, no. That was in Mindoro. In this here, when we went into Leyte Island, I didn't see too many planes. It was one or two Japanese Betty bombers, but we had P-38s at that time and, as a matter-of-fact, I saw one P-38 drive a Betty bomber right into the ocean without firing a shot. [Editor's Note: Betty Bomber was the American name for the Mitsubishi G4M bomber in use by the Imperial Japanese Air Service. P-38 is a fighter aircraft built by Lockheed for the American Army Air Force, it's full designation is the P-38 Lightning.] It was amazing. But once we got in, there wasn't too much resistance going in on the beach. We didn't lose anybody, no tanks or anything. We lost a few infantrymen, but we went right in. We took the airport in Tacloban, Leyte Island after we left MacArthur. But it was fun. I got pictures, somewhere I have, that I took with a Filipino family. We had one incident in New Manila. It was a nice, beautiful neighborhood. We drove down the street and we came under a tree, and all of a sudden, you couldn't see a thing. The leaves were coming down and there was a big explosion. I'm sitting under the damn tree and it was just awful. So, they called us back to back up, so we backed up and a medium tank came down. The medium tank comes to the same spot that I was on and it blew up. The tank blew to pieces. The turret flew I don't know how many hundred yards away. I said, "Boy, I was just there." There was a captain, an engineer captain. He was on the same ship as I was coming over. I said, "Captain, what the hell happened? I was just there." He says, "You weren't heavy enough." The Japs put a depth charge that you use for submarines. They buried that underneath there and I wasn't heavy enough to set that thing off. I was sixteen tons and the other guy was thirty, and it blew them up. All the boys, I knew every one of them. That was something, I'm telling you. That's close calls, but thank god, I'm here.

SSH: You said you were ordered on this lightning entrance into Manila. Can you talk more about that, how that came to be and what your orders were?

JH: There was a flying column they called it. It was two hundred miles from where we were to go into Manila to rescue all those people. There was only about twenty-eight--I think it was twenty-five, twenty-three, something like that in the twenties--Japanese guards in there. We had a little colonel, he was about 5' 5", smart as a whip. He should rest in peace; got killed. He negotiated with them. The Japanese said they would leave if we would guarantee the way back to their own lines. He said, "Sure. We'll go out. We will take you back to your own lines and let you go." Meanwhile, he organized the Filipino guerillas, you know. When we told him we're going to let him off so-and-so, the Filipino guerillas were there, killed everyone of them, the Japanese. We got the people out. So, that colonel, he was a sharp guy. You had to have your sleeves down because there were mosquitoes and all that, and he had his sleeves rolled up. One of the guys says to him, "Well colonel ..." [The colonel said] "I want you men to keep sleeves down." [Someone] says, "But colonel, you've got yours up." He says, "Don't do as I do. Do as I say." [laughter] That little guy was tough. Then, when we went to a place called Gapan. That was after Manila. There was a bridge across the--it was pretty high that bridge and the Japs were firing as we go, so he told us to go back. He went with a jeep. He went with a captain, his assistant and they went into this town, Gapan. All of a sudden, we hear firing and machine guns, and we went in after them. The colonel was gone. They killed him. The captain, we picked him up. He was in a hole. He had thirteen bullets from his knee up to his--but he survived, thank god. So, we picked up the colonel, we put him on my tank right by my sponson there, and we went back over the bridge. Going back, the Japs were firing machine guns and, all of a sudden, I reach back, I feel something warm. I said, "Oh, god." I pulled my hand: full of blood. I said to

the tank commander, "Hey, French. I think I'm shot." He said, "Ah, the colonel is bleeding on you," like [it was] nothing. "The colonel is bleeding on you." [laughter] I'm telling you.

SSH: You had said things that would make you pass out now, you were just quite--

JH: Yes, it didn't bother me. You see, when we fired into Manila, they were shooting maybe seventy-two hours of firing and people were coming out, young guys carrying a mother with an arm missing or something, it was nothing. It didn't bother you. I couldn't see these things today or even after I came out I couldn't. I didn't like that kind of stuff, but at that time you're so brainwashed you don't care.

SSH: Do you remember your colonel's name, that died?

JH: No, I don't. I remember my captain because he was a good guy. The colonel I don't remember because I didn't have too much to do with him. He was the battalion commander. But the captain was Captain (Kenny Haldeman?). He was such a nice guy. We went into Manila that time and we stopped there. The Filipino standing there, "Victory Joe, Victory Joe, Victory Joe." The captain comes out. He comes over to my tank, he says, "Hey, Joe. Were you ever here before?" I said, "No, captain. I was never here." He said, "Well, everybody seems to know you." [laughter] "Everybody seems to know you," he said. I liked him a lot. He was a good guy.

SSH: You said you had run into some people.

JH: Yes.

SSH: You said that you spoke with other people who had escaped from Austria and Hungary.

JH: Yes, and were in the Philippines. One time I was walking and I hear people talking in German. I knew right away they were from Austria because it's a different dialect. I go over to them and I started [talking]. "Oh, yes. Thank god we're here." They had also problems with the Japanese, but somehow they were hiding somewhere and the Japanese really didn't care whether you were Jewish or not. They didn't know about those things, but they treated everybody tough. The Filipino people they treated--they were terrible people. When they had the war with China they killed the Chinese people by the millions, shot them down. Before they started Pearl Harbor, they invaded China and they killed the people--unbelievable--shot them down, killed them like animals.

SSH: What were the people doing that were from Austria? What had they been doing in the Philippines?

JH: I don't know. Somehow they lived. They survived. The Jews survive anywhere. They did all right. After we got there, I guess maybe they went someplace else, but the Filipino people treated them--probably hid them from the Japanese.

SSH: Did the Filipino people treat you well?

JH: Oh, my god, yes. They were very happy to see [us], because the Japanese treated them like slaves. The Japs were not--actually, they say the Japanese are cruel. We weren't so nice either; the American soldiers, the Southerners, they were rough people. The Filipinos brought in a Japanese prisoner one time. From my company, I knew the guys--I went in the back and they had him dig a grave. They wanted to cut off his ears and torture him. These are mostly Southerners, I want you to know. I said, "What are you guys doing?" "Ah, they do it to us." I said, "It doesn't make it right to do that to this man here." I said, "He's defenseless. He can't do anything." Finally, I talked them into it. You had to be careful how you talk to them because they could kill you, too. They let him go, not let him go, but we took him to headquarters. Otherwise they would have tortured him to death. They don't care. They didn't care. They were rough.

SI: Was it unusual to take prisoners?

JH: No, it was very unusual because the Japanese didn't surrender like that. If they did, you had to be very careful, because once [inaudible] they always were boobytrapped. They blow themselves up and take you with them, so you had to be careful. First of all, I had no occasion to take any prisoners because I was in a tank. We used to use flamethrowers on them and everything. We had a flamethrower in our tank.

SI: Was your tank equipped with a phone in the back so that infantrymen could be in contact with you or did you have a way of contacting infantry?

JH: No, we didn't have that. We had the intercom system. We could talk to each other or to other tanks, but not to the infantry. Maybe the battalion commander has that. When we went someplace, we always had infantry on our side, because the Japs would come up with mines and stick it onto your tank and blow you up, blow it right through. So, we, most of the time, had infantry walking next to us.

SSH: What was the interaction between enlisted men like yourself and your officers?

JH: In combat it was a different story. They didn't like it if you call them, "Sir," because in case the enemy [hears that], they want to pick off the officers. But, you see, the American soldiers were trained different than all the others. The American soldier was able to survive without an officer. He could take his own command. He had to learn everything. But with the Germans, they depended on their officers. The Japanese depended on their officers. You know what I mean? We did too, but not as much. We were a little more independent.

SSH: Did you have any interaction with any of the other allied forces?

JH: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. In New Guinea, we had Australians. I was in this country not that long. One time I was walking past a couple of Australians: "Say, mate, you want some tea?" I said, "I don't know what the hell he's talking about." "It's tea time." I said, "What are they talking about?" He says, "They asked if you want some tea." [laughter] I thought he was talking a foreign language.

SSH: Did you ever run into any African American troops?

JH: No. I tell you, because we were segregated, there was no such thing. But coming home from Japan, I was on a troop ship with about a couple of thousand men, so we had bunks, they were four high, and I was in the third one. In the fourth one was a black fellow, a very nice guy. I used to talk to him all the time. One night, we were shooting crap in the bathroom, in the head, and he won a couple of thousand dollars. I didn't see him after that. A couple of those guys, they don't care, they must have grabbed him and took his money and threw him overboard. I never saw him again.

SSH: Do you remember his name?

JH: No, I don't remember his name anymore. I must have called him by his name. I don't remember what it is. It's a long time ago.

SSH: Do you know what he did in the war? Where he was assigned?

JH: No, we were just going home. We went to Fort Lawton in Washington State and he never got there. They didn't know. Nobody knew about him. He was gone and that's it. "Missing in action."

SSH: When you were in the Pacific Theater what were you hearing about what was going on in Europe?

JH: Well, they used to have newsletters, what's happening in the invasion of June 6th, 1944. We heard all that. As a matter-of-fact, my oldest sister's husband was in that invasion and he was on Omaha Beach, the worst one. In the first day he got shot in the neck. He was lucky; he fell and there was a medic right next to him, and he stabilized his neck right away because the bullet was so close to a vein. He was okay. He got a little faulty speech, but so what? You are here. It was very close. Omaha Beach was murderous.

SSH: Was she married to him at that point?

JH: No, no. Not yet, no. But he was a lucky guy. A very nice fellow, my brother in law. He was this close.

SSH: Did you ever entertain the idea of staying in the military? You said you really loved it.

JH: I loved the Army. It was a funny thing; I wanted to stay and yet I was afraid of my mother, because she wouldn't have liked it if I would have stayed in the Army. Maybe that was a good thing because I was four months short of my twenty-first birthday when I came out of the service on January 6th. I came out in '46 and I wasn't twenty-one until April. If I would have gone and signed up for--they asked me to go and sign up for Reserves. I said, "I'm going to think about it for a while," and I never did sign up. If I would have signed up, I would have been in Korea, because I was young.

SSH: When you came back what were your plans? What did you think you would do?

JH: I tell you the truth, I didn't know what I was doing. What did I do when I first came out? I went back to work with (Mr. Reuben?). I had a little girl trouble all the time. I like girls. It wasn't my fault. [laughter] So, then my mother--they used to call up all the time: blah, blah, blah, all kinds of stories they would tell my mother. My mother, she thought I was the worst guy in the world. So, my sister lived in New York. She got married and she moved to New York, my younger sister. So, my mother said, "Why don't you stay with (Hilda?) for a while?" So, I came up here to New York and stayed here. I got married. I met a girl. I had a couple of girls. One girl followed me up here. It was terrible, but then after I got married I would behave myself.

SSH: Oh, good. Glad to hear that. You said you worked in the grocery industry.

JH: I first worked in the garment industry, in the embroidery business. I was in the embroidery business, but it didn't turn out so good. Then I went to work for a firm called Rosenstock. They manufactured boys and infants' wear. I worked there for a while and they were training me to become one of the managers. Then, they opened up a factory in North Carolina. I was down there for a while and my wife didn't want to move down. She says, "I don't want to move down to North Carolina. There's no Jewish communities down there." She was used to living in New York, so I had to listen to her. I went into business with my father in law, in the fruit business. Then, I went to the supermarket business. That's how I made a living. I never became rich, but I did okay.

SSH: What was the grocery store? What was the name of the grocery store?

JH: The last one was Key Food Supermarkets. I was the manager there and made a nice living. I had a nice guy and he took good care of me all the time because I took care of him. When he went away, he didn't have to worry; I took care like it was my own.

SSH: Good. Before we end the interview, is there anything that you would like to tell us about World War II that we didn't discuss in more detail?

JH: Well, I think I covered mostly everything. We saw a lot of combat and it was enough for me. I tell you the truth, the only time I got scared was when we got on to Leyte Island, got under the water, but otherwise, it never entered my mind that I could get killed. Never thought of that. Not once did it enter my mind I better watch out. Like, we went one time to a place called Fort McKinley, that was right outside of Manila, and there was a lot of Japanese there. We got them, we captured their warehouse. They made a salad and it was in a can. I opened up that salad--I was out of the tank and I was sitting in a little ditch and eating that salad. All of a sudden, the mud flew off, the sand and everything. They were shooting at me. Oh my god. I said, "What the hell is going on?" So, my tank was a little [far away]. I couldn't get into the tank. I'm laying there and finally, one of the guys from the other tank, he moved in front of me. There was just enough--now I couldn't get into the tank because I'm too heavy, but the driver side was a little hole just to fit in there. I jumped up there and I went into the tank. It must have taken three and a half seconds. I said, "I'll never eat a goddamn salad again." It was delicious salad, very good. It wasn't funny at that , but I was quick.

SSH: Did you receive any decorations for your service?

JH: No, but when we picked up the colonel, the sergeant got a Silver Star. I got nothing and I was out there with him, but he was nice enough. He put my name [in] that I deserve something, too, but they didn't give me anything. I could have gotten a Purple Heart at one time because I got a [inaudible] shrapnel splint. I got hit over here and it got infected. I was afraid to tell them that I was hit with a shrapnel because they could court martial you. They said, "What happened over there? I said, "Well, we were playing ball and I went like this. I hit my cigarette and I burned myself and got infected." I lied. The guy says to me, "Well go back for light duty." I said, "What kind of light duty? We are at the frontlines. There's no light duty over there." But it went away and that was it. If I would have said I was hit with a shrapnel splinter, they could have court-martialed me.

SSH: Why?

JH: Because you're a GI; you're government property.

SI: Because you hadn't reported an injury.

JH: Yes, sure.

SSH: Because you hadn't reported it.

JH: Yes. You got to report all that stuff. You don't own yourself. You belong to the government. GI, yes.

SSH: Were there any other incidents of anti-Semitism? You said you only had the one time at Fort Knox?

JH: Once you're in the Army, they're your buddies. But only in the beginning. Afterwards, it wasn't that bad anymore. You got along with everybody and they liked you. A lot of these people didn't know what a Jew was. A lot of these guys didn't know. We had one guy from the South, he didn't know what a Jew was. As a matter-of-fact, I was talking to him one time and [it] came up. He said, "The Jews ..." I said, "(Jenkins?), did you ever see a Jew?" He said, "No, not really." I said, "You know (Schaefer?)?" He said, "Yes, I know Schaefer." I said, "You know (Barton?)?" We had about four or five Jews in my company. He said, "Oh, yes. I know." I said, "You know me, right?" He said, "Oh, yes. Sure." I said, "I'm Jewish, too." He says to me, "Really? Every one of you guys are better looking than me." [laughter] I said, "Well, what did you think we look like?" He said, "I don't know." So, that's what it was. A lot of people down South didn't know what a Jew was.

SSH: In any of your interactions with all of these different people, did you ever run into--you talked about the USO being in New Guinea, but what about chaplains? Were there any interactions with chaplains? Did you have a chance to attend services or anything?

JH: Well, we didn't really, but there were chaplains over there, they had services. I never did go to one, but they did have, yes. As a matter-of-fact, one time I ran into a chaplain in Fort Knox. I was standing and waiting for a bus. All of a sudden, a beautiful girl walked past me. I turned around, looking and looking. Saw a chaplain--I didn't know he was a chaplain. He said, "Hey, soldier. Do you know it's a sin to undress a girl with your eyes?" [laughter] I had my comeback as, "How about with your hands?" [laughter] I saluted him, he was a captain. He walked away. I saw the cross over here and I knew he was a chaplain. He was smiling and he walked away. [Laughter]

SSH: You said girls got you in trouble a lot from the very beginning. Thank you so much for taking time to talk with Shaun and me.

JH: I hope it was interesting enough.

SSH: All right. It was wonderful.

SI: It was very interesting. The part I was in for sounded very interesting.

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Reviewed by Molly Graham 1/10/19

Reviewed by David Holzer 2/19/2019