

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN P. LAURIELLO, JR.

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. John P. Lauriello on September 9, 2013, in Westmont, New Jersey. Is this also Haddon Township?

John P. Lauriello: Haddon Township, yes.

SI: Haddon Township; with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much, sir, for having me in your home.

JL: Oh, you're welcome, my pleasure.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

JL: I was born in 1923 in Philadelphia, Southwest Philadelphia.

SI: All right. What were your parents' names, for the record?

JL: The first names, my mother's name was Addie Mae and my father's name was John.

SI: Okay. Can you tell me, starting with your father's side of the family, what you might know about the family background, if there was any immigration history there, that sort of thing?

JL: Yes. My father was born in Italy and he was here--he came over--when he was, like, four years old. It just turns out--I didn't realize it until a couple years ago--that I'm a first generation descendent. It's hard to imagine that you're a first generation descendent, but I am. That was his side, a wonderful, large, Italian family, marvelous, absolutely marvelous. My mother was from Georgia. I think she was basically English. Her name was Powell, but that was the combination that produced me and my sisters.

SI: Do you know when your mother came up from Georgia?

JL: Yes. She came up around 1910, probably.

SI: Did either of your parents ever tell you why their families moved to this area?

JL: Yes. Well, the ones that came from Italy came over because the conditions weren't all that good over there for eking out a livelihood. So, they came here. That was that one and the ones from Georgia came here because the head of the family, which was the father, worked for the railroad, I guess Georgia Railroad. Through some freak of nature, he got run over by a train. So, that was kaput, and then, they, the whole family, moved up here. They moved to Philadelphia, down to Ninth and Federal Street, which is a congregating point in those days. My mother and her mother and the brothers opened an oyster saloon and my father lived right around the corner from it. He used to go there, because he was a big oyster man, and that's the way it happened.

SI: Wow.

JL: Yes.

SI: Do you know approximately when they got married?

JL: About 1918. My mother was only sixteen when she got married.

SI: This area where both your mother and your father lived, did it have a particular characteristic? Was it mostly, say, Italian, or something like that?

JL: It was a mix, mixed neighborhood. The people right next door to us were Italian, and then, right down the street, I remember, there were Irish and you name it. It was a mix.

SI: Yes. What did your father do for living?

JL: He worked for a company called J. G. Brill Incorporated. They used to make trolley cars and trackless trolleys. In fact, he was instrumental in designing and building the first trackless trolley in Philadelphia. That was like a trolley car, only it didn't run on rails. It had pneumatic tires and stuff like that, but they had the trolley up above for the power. They called them trackless trolleys, which was obviously the proper name for something like that. Then, he went into the food hauling business for the A&P. You heard of the A&P?

SI: Sure.

JL: Yes. He was a produce hauler for them and I used to go with him once in a while, heavy work, but really nice.

SI: When he was working for Brill, what was he doing specifically? Was he manufacturing the cars?

JL: Manufacturing, layout and assembly.

SI: Okay. When did he make the switch from Brill to A&P?

JL: Oh, I guess around 1923, something like that.

SI: Okay, around the time you were born.

JL: Yes.

SI: Where do you fall in the birth order in your family?

JL: I was number two. I had an older sister, myself, and then, two younger sisters and I'm the only survivor; all the sisters are gone.

SI: Your mother's family had this oyster saloon. Did that business continue on for a while?

JL: I'm not too sure. I never really got into that. I was young at the time and I think it just disappeared. They got married and moved to a different section of the city and it just disappeared.

SI: Did your mother continue to work outside of the home after starting a family?

JL: No. That's another reason why it disappeared, I guess. She undertook to be a housewife and raise her children and she did a good job of it, too.

SI: Where is the section that you moved to?

JL: Southwest Philly, Woodland Avenue, along Woodland Avenue, 65th and Woodland Avenue, if you're familiar with that neck of the woods out there.

SI: Not too much.

JL: Okay.

SI: Roughly.

JL: All right, but it was called Southwest Philly and we stayed there. I went to grammar school there. Just when I finished the eighth grade, we moved to South Philly. That's where my father was from, and my mother, too. I mean, they migrated to South Philadelphia. I spent the rest of my Philadelphia time in South Philadelphia. I went to a school called Southeast Catholic, which is at Seventh and Christian Street. There, they had Southeast Catholic. They had West Catholic. They had North Catholic. They had Roman--quite a few of the schools around--but, anyway, I went to the Southeast one, down Seventh and Christian, a very, very good school, taught by priests--tough, I can say bastards.

SI: You can say whatever you want. [laughter]

JL: Yes. Oh, God, the first day of the freshman year--the second day of the freshman year; nothing can happen to you on the first day, unless you trip down the steps or something like that--but, on the second day, they're looking for homework. If you aren't really familiar with the rules and regulations, like anything goes--down there, anything didn't go. Two fingers got into your collar--we all had to wear shirts and ties and jackets in those days; there was no cutoff jeans--and he'd pick you right up out of the seat, one hand, this guy, "Big John," Big John Zilinski. He was about six-foot-four, big man, and he'd pick you right the hell up out of your seat with two fingers. "Where's your homework, Doc?" [Mr. Lauriello imitates stuttering.] "I don't have any homework." Next thing, you hear, "Slap, slap, chop, chop," and that was the last time you ever showed up without your homework, because it only got worse from there.

SI: Wow. [laughter]

JL: I saw him KO [knockout] a student.

SI: Wow. Was it all boys?

JL: Oh, yes. This very same priest, this Zilinski, he had a flair for the dramatics. He's reading Shakespeare and his voice is rising and falling with the character and all that sort of stuff. He paused, all of a sudden, and this one guy in the classroom uttered, "Do tell." Oh, my god, that was like the start of the Civil War. [laughter] "Come up here, Doc." Everybody was "Doc;" stood him against the blackboard and he put his two big hams up and he says, "Which one do you want?" The guy couldn't back out, so, he had to pick one. So, as soon as he picked it, it came across--he went down in a heap. He just slid down the wall, wound up sitting in the front of the [class], but that guy later became a doctor.

SI: Discipline has its advantages. [laughter]

JL: Oh, and my opinion is, that's what's missing today. They talk about money, "We need more money." No, you don't--you need discipline.

SI: Going back, before you got into high school, can you tell me a little about these neighborhoods that you lived in, in Southwest and South Philly?

JL: Yes. They're all nice, well-organized neighborhoods, yes, I mean, never any problem. We lived adjacent to the lot of the one school I went to and, every summer, they had a carnival and I used to help them set up. They used to have the dance floor under the stage in the auditorium. You'd open the doors and pulled those sections of wooden flooring out and a bunch of guys would grab it--kids--would grab them, take them up the steps and put them all together out in the lot and all that kind of stuff. It was very, very nice.

SI: Were you doing that because you were in the school or because it was a job?

JL: No, I was in the school. I went to the school. I went to that grammar school and that was all, like, 1934, '35. I graduated there 1937, that grammar school.

SI: During that time, obviously, it was the Great Depression. Could you see the impact of the Great Depression on the areas you lived in?

JL: I think I did, yes. I remember, you could hire a painter to paint your house for twenty-five cents an hour. Some of the expressions in those days were, "The war is over," because the prices were so high. I remember my mother saying that many times, "Doesn't he know the war's over?" I remember when Prohibition came in. I remember when Prohibition went out, the celebrating in the streets, because that was all a big thing in those days. [Editor's Note: The era of Prohibition began on January 17, 1920, with the enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, set in motion by the Volstead Act. It ended with the ratification of the Twenty-First Amendment to the US Constitution on December 5, 1933.] That was a good intention that went awry, as far as I'm concerned, Prohibition. These goody-goody--what do they call them?

...

SI: The temperance movement.

JL: Yes, the bighearted people who think they're saving America and saving the country--what a fiasco that was. All that did was created gangsters and crime and, like, [Al] Capone and all those people, "Machine Gun" Kelly and all them. They're all products of the Prohibition era. As soon as that thing went, all the gangsters went with it. They were gone.

SI: Yes. I am curious, since you remember Prohibition, do you remember there being speakeasies in the area?

JL: Oh, absolutely. I remember, well, again, right around the same time, when the vets from World War I were having a hard time surviving, they were standing on a corner in the cold weather, like, just before Christmas or something. They had these crates of apples and they would pick an apple out of there and use the green paper that apples used to come wrapped in--you've probably never seen one--but they'd take them like this and use that wax paper and rub them up good and get a good shine on them. A nickel, they'd sell them for a nickel, and then, right alongside there would be a guy selling pencils, all that kind of stuff, all eking out a living, because, as far as I remember, there was no welfare. If you didn't work, you didn't eat. It wasn't like today; you make more money by being laid off than you do working, yes.

SI: In your father's job with A&P, did he ever get cut back in his hours or was it always pretty steady work?

JL: No, he was a contract hauler. I mean, he had a contract with the company and they were always busy, because A&P was big in those days. We used to go all over. Like, we'd go to Scranton, all around the eastern part of Pennsylvania. We used to come over here to Jersey and deliver here. In fact, I remember a place right here in Haddonfield, where I can remember, like yesterday, us delivering a load of stuff to the front of that A&P, on Kings Highway in Haddonfield. Every time I go by there, I said, "I remember, like, sixty or seventy years ago, delivering a load of stuff there." My father gave me hell because I was unloading the stuff and I put the fish alongside the vegetables, that, according to him, [led to] intermingling aromas and stuff like that, but watermelons by the hundreds off the truck, twenty-five-pound bags of potatoes, used to shove them. When I went with them, there'd be three of us on there, the driver--he had a driver--and he was there, and then, I was there. We'd set up a chain and just shoot these twenty-five-pound bags and, after a while, you get to the hundredth bag, that's a lot of weight you've been moving. I'll tell you, it was fantastic. That's when I was convinced that exercise is the secret to longevity.

SI: Yes. How old were you when you started doing this?

JL: Oh, like, fifteen. It was nothing official.

SI: Sure.

JL: I'm just helping my father on the truck, that's all. I enjoyed it and we used to shoot the shit--well, here we go again.

SI: No, that is all right. [laughter]

JL: Yes, and there were a lot of funny little things. Like, if we had yams on, we'd put a couple yams on the manifold of the engine. By the time you got where you were going, like upstate Pennsylvania, those yams were cooked to a T and we'd have the hot yams. When we hauled the watermelons, all of a sudden, we'd be unloading the watermelons and somebody would holler out, "Oops." That meant one of them dropped and they used to be big watermelons in those days, like about this. Now, all you see is, like, bowling balls around, but they were big ones. When that watermelon hit the deck of the truck, the big heart would come flying out and that thing would be this big in itself and about that big around and sweet as sugar. That's the only part we'd eat, because we were high on the hog. We had a hundred or more of [the things] or we could go sort of one at a time, but it was stuff like that. We'd arrive in Lancaster, up in Pennsylvania, just like when the crows were crowing and the sun was coming up and you get that little fog in the valleys as you go up and down the hills and all. It was beautiful. I mean, I just remember it like it was yesterday.

SI: When you were helping your father, was it during the summers? Would it interfere with your schoolwork?

JL: Usually during when the school was out, in the summertime, yes, and then, I helped him when I came back from the service. In fact, I was working in the RCA when I finished high school. I went to work in the RCA and I would go with him on the truck. By seven o'clock in the morning, he would deliver me to the RCA building and I'd go in there and work the rest of the day in there.

SI: What did you do at RCA?

JL: Lab tech. I worked in the Advanced Technology Labs and I had my hand and brain into just about everything. We were, like, a central location. Being in there, we were associated with what they called the engineering lab, central engineering. In there, they didn't produce any products, but all the people in there were experts in their field. Like, one man was an expert on adhesives, one was an expert on grease, lubrications, one was an expert on paint, metallic. Anything [that] you wanted to know, if you were there long enough, you knew who to ask and how to ask, and you knew who the bullshitters were. I used to have a habit, that people would be talking to me and I'd be going like this [pretending to twist something off his ears] and they'd say, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm loosening the shit filter." [laughter] In other words, let them know that I could separate the chaff from the grain. Being in that section and being exposed to all that stuff, I don't want to brag, but I was, like, an expert in all the fields--vacuums, noble gases, cold liquids, liquid nitrogen, liquid helium, all this stuff.

SI: Were you working at RCA while you were still going to school or was it after you graduated?

JL: It was after, yes. I went over there--what?

Katherine Lauriello: I was just going to mention it--maybe it would be worth mentioning--your experience in cryogenics and that the University of Pennsylvania wanted your work in their museum and, also, the Mars program.

JL: Oh, I was going to get into that, yes.

KL: It goes on forever. [laughter] It's good stuff.

SI: Good.

JL: Oh, yes. I was there for forty-two-and-a-half years.

SI: At RCA?

JL: Of course, yes.

SI: When you went to work there after high school, was that in Philadelphia or was it across the river?

JL: Camden.

SI: Camden, all right.

JL: Yes, and that was interesting, too. You're talking about the conditions in those days. Now, I lived in South Philly, like I said, because I told you we moved there. I lived up around 23rd and Moore. That means nothing to you, but, anyway, 23rd Street had a trolley car going north--the numbered streets in Philadelphia go north and south and the named streets, like Dickinson, Reed and Wharton, they all go east and west. So, when you get on a trolley car--and they had trolley cars on them also--but the numbered streets would go north and they'd make a couple of winds, the bends in the street, and they would eventually wind up at Front and Market. Then, you go down the hill and there was the river and the ferry. You get on the ferry and go across and walk down about a block-and-a-half and there was the RCA, #17 Building, which is the one I was working in when I first started there. The significant thing was, for fifteen cents, you rode from Moore and 23rd--23rd and Moore or 24th and Moore, whatever the street was--but you'd ride from there all the way down to Front and Market and back again for fifteen cents. It was seven-and-a-half cents a ride and you'd get a token in exchange for your fifteen cents and use that coming back at night. The ferry was two-and-a-half cents to go across as a pedestrian. So, you'd give them a nickel and you'd get a coin back, which was about as big as a nickel, which you used for the return ride. At the top of the hill, before you went down to the river, when you got off the trolley car, there was a stand that sold hot dogs, orange drink--fifteen cents. You got a hot dog and a glass of orange [drink] about this tall. So, fifteen [and] fifteen is thirty, so, for thirty cents, you got transported all the way from where I lived, all the way over to the RCA plant, and you got lunch on the way--amazing, right?

SI: Yes. [laughter]

JL: Yes. I was only making eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents a week, but, with that eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents, you were a king. Newspapers were two cents. A loaf of Italian bread was a nickel. You go to the movies, twenty-five cents at the most. You could take a date out for a buck. You go for two fares to the movie and go out to the ice cream parlor, which you did in those days, instead of going to the tap room or something like that. You went down, had a sundae or a milkshake or something like that, but a buck was a buck in those days; you could do a lot of things with it.

SI: Before we get into the 1940s, I wanted to ask a little bit more about your youth in Philadelphia.

JL: Sure, go ahead.

SI: You come from a family with Southern and Italian roots.

JL: Right.

SI: Were there any traditions that were kept up in your household, in food or language or religion, that come to mind?

JL: Well, I would like to say this about that: I leaned to my father's side. In fact, I didn't like my mother's side. I never wanted to see them. In fact, I hardly ever did. She used to beat me with a broomstick when she was going to go to see her sister and mother up in North Philadelphia. I said, "I'm not going," and then, the broomstick'd come out and I'd be like this, "Bang, bang, bang." "I'm still not going," but, in the end, I went--over my objections, but I went--but his side was marvelous, absolutely marvelous. I just loved them, every one of them. He was one of nine and I had thirty-five first cousins, just on his side.

SI: Wow.

JL: And my sister was the oldest and I was the second oldest, but, then, she passed away, like, about twenty-eight years ago. I've been king of the roost ever since myself. In fact, I just celebrated my ninetieth birthday and my son, my youngest son, put this thing on for me. They had it at the American Legion over in Oaklyn. You probably know where that is.

SI: Yes.

JL: In fact, if you've ever been inside there, you see at the end of the hall, they have a big picture of the flag raising on Mount Suribachi from Iwo Jima. By coincidence, they just happened to have that in there. That's where they held the party for me and, like, a hundred people arrived. Most of them were my family, but, then, there were a lot of friends. I'd say maybe twenty-five were friends and seventy-five were family. I had one uncle that had the seven boys from Wildwood and they were all there, and one girl, she was there, and all the rest of the cousins were there, everybody that heard that good old John was going to have a party. Not me, I wasn't having it. My son put it on for me. In fact, I was very deathly sick. I almost died. In fact, I did die. On the 28th of January, this past year, I was dead on the operating table.

SI: Really?

JL: And they brought me back, yes.

SI: Wow.

JL: So, you're talking to a rejuvenated person. [laughter]

SI: I would not have been able to tell that. You seem very lively.

JL: Well, I'm just getting over it.

SI: Yes.

JL: We're digressing.

SI: You have got that Marine spirit.

JL: Yes. That's another whole phase--oh, God, but what else?

SI: You were close with your father's side of the family. Were there Italian traditions kept up in your family?

JL: Oh, yes. Like, one of the traditions was dinner on Sunday at two o'clock. That's all I remember, two o'clock dinner on Sunday, the meatballs and the spaghettis and the lasagna, all that stuff. I loved it and I still do. When people say, "You going to the restaurant? Let's go to the Italian restaurant," my stock answer is, "Is there any other kind?" Really, I mean, that's the way I feel about it.

SI: Yes.

JL: The greatest of everything, the tradition, all the sculpturing that was done in Italy over the years. Like, my uncle from Wildwood was a master builder and his sons are all master builders. I did most of the work in this house and the wife always looks around and says, "It's just in the blood," and it is. We get together and have a good time, wonderful. I can't emphasize it enough, how wonderful it is. In fact, I was just talking to a girl cousin of mine who just turned eighty and they had the same thing for her. It wasn't quite as elaborate as the one they had for me, because who the hell turns ninety anymore? Anyway, she was talking to us the other day and she was saying, "Don't you agree we have a marvelous family?" I said, "There's no need to even mention it." I said, "It just goes, understood, that it is a marvelous group."

SI: I was also curious ...

JL: Oh, and the wine.

SI: Go ahead.

JL: The dago red. My grandfather--Christ, he used to drink--he used to make this wine. He used to make, like, four and five barrels of wine and he'd give some of it away, but most of it, he drank himself. Now, he was about four-foot-eleven and he used to drink this wine and get red as a cherry face. He'd been known to fall down the cellar steps. On both of his cheeks, he had, like, embedded coal right in under his skin, because, in those days, it was all coal-fired. If you fell down the cellar steps, you usually wound up with your face right in the pile of coal dust. [laughter] Some would get embedded in the skin and he had that, and then, he had what I call "fringe benefits," hair around here. The top of his head was bald and he had this white mustache--oh, marvelous. Did you see *The Godfather*?

SI: Yes.

JL: The scenes when the old man got older, you see him walking around his backyard with the fig tree?

SI: Yes, with his grandson.

JL: Yes, and with a rope tied around his waist for a belt. That was it. My grandfather had fig trees in the backyard and you'd see him with the rope around--it was absolutely just like it was a carbon copy--putting the tar paper around the fig trees and wrapping them up tight, to protect them from the winter and all that sort of stuff. He'd make this wine and get ossified and, every Friday night, it was his habit to come home with a chicken. This one night, they couldn't find him. "Where's Poppy?" "Can't find him." So, a couple of the boys went out and they came across a store front that had these iron doors opened up from the pavement. I forget what they called them. There's certain names for them, and then, very steep steps--not steps, like a ladder. Anyway, he's down there. He tripped and fell down this damn hole and he laid down there with a chicken under his arm. So, they drug him out and took him home. That was another success story, but it was all that kind of stuff--very, very good life.

SI: Did you have any family members who had been in the service in World War I?

JL: No. My father hit it in the middle.

SI: Growing up, since you went to Catholic school, was the Church important in your life, the Church or religion?

JL: I'm sort of an odd duck. I look at things for what they are. Going to the Catholic school--the grammar school didn't bother me, but, when I was in the high school--I thought we were spending too much time in the chapel and not enough in the classroom. Every time we turned around, we were over in the chapel and that sort of turned me off. It started the turn off process and, today, I haven't been to church in years. In fact, we had an interview around here by the Bishop, I guess, or whoever he was, the Monsignor, and he came around. This was maybe quite a few years ago and our oldest kids were still here. They were, like, nine and ten, eleven, something like that. He started out with them, "You go to church every week?" "Oh, yes," and

all that sort of stuff. He asked the wife, "Oh, yes." "And how about you?" I said, "No," and he said, "What seems to be the problem?" I says, "Well," I said, "I find a lot of problems." I said, "The biggest one in my mind," I says, "is the way the Church embraces these people in Hollywood that run around getting banged everywhere you see. They're getting banged and, all of a sudden, they decide to get married and the Church takes them in with white veils on." I said, "When you're banged, you're banged." So, this is probably very, very crude, but that was my feeling towards the Church. "I think it was outdated, outmoded. Like, having large families, that was fine," I says, "in the days of the farmer, but it's not fine now, where you have to go out and earn a livelihood for every member of your family." I said, "I think the thinking is entirely wrong," I said, "and another thing, the last time I went to church, I was a little bit late." I says, "It was raining and I ran up the church steps." I says, "The son-of-a-bitch closed the doors in my face and I banged on the door and they wouldn't open them." I said, "I got in my car and I said, 'That was the end of that.'" So, he left and he said, "Well, maybe I'll come back again," he says, "and maybe I can convince you of what two thousand years of the Church is teaching." I says, "Maybe you can," I says, "but I doubt it." So, that was the end of that.

SI: When you were in high school, what were your favorite subjects? What interested you the most?

JL: Physics, I loved physics. In fact, I tell my grandchildren and my own kids, to take physics. I says, "Because that, to me, opened up the whole world." You just knew how everything worked and I've always been pretty understanding as it was. I could figure it out. I used to be able to just look at something and figure out how it worked. If something was wrong with it, I knew how it should work and took steps to put it back the way it was. Usually, it was good. One of my crowning achievements, where we had a doorbell here, a "Bing-bong, bing-bong," how ever the thing went, but it had four different chimes, and then, two chimes for the back door and all that sort of stuff--one day, it broke. I got in there and looked at and it was quite complex. I figured out exactly how it worked and fixed the piece that was broken and put it back up again, and, "Bing-bong, bing-bong," there it went. You could regulate the speed of that thing, the tones, everything. It was all done with a dashpot. You know what a dashpot is?

SI: No.

JL: Okay. The dashpot is like a cylinder full of oil and they'll have a piston in there that goes up and down. Now, the piston's got, like, two holes in it. When you hit the button, then, you energize the electromagnet, will pull it up, because a large port opens. It skims through the oil real fast and it exchanges it, but, when it comes down, that one closes and the little one opens and it comes down. So, it goes, "Droop," and then, hooked to that, on the outside, was the contacts. So, it would go up, you wouldn't hear anything, and, when it came down, this thing would go, "Ding-ding, ding-ding," as it came back down again. Getting that thing together and getting it full of oil again and adjusting the things, I thought that was pretty good. That's my thing.

SI: When you were growing up, did you do a lot of repair work or were you interested in cars, hobbies that supported this interest?

JL: When I came back from the service, I started in earnest. I was a little bit older, a little bit wiser. I knew what I liked to do. Like, the job I had in the RCA, if circumstances would have been different, I would have had that exact setup in my cellar. That's how much I enjoyed it. It was always reaching for the next step and how to solve this problem--never did the same thing twice. Like I said, it was the Advanced Technology Labs for RCA in Camden. I did a lot of these things you see today, masers. I was out at Goldstone, out in California, the space agency out there [NASA's Goldstone Deep Space Communications Complex]. I was to NASA, down in Virginia. In fact, they just launched a rocket from NASA at Wallops Island [NASA's Wallops Flight Facility]. I worked down there. I used to be in charge of a helium refrigerator, which used to drive the temperature inside this refrigerator down to, like, 450 degrees below zero--know how cold that is? That's about two degrees above absolute zero and absolute zero is the point where all molecular activity stops. I've seen that. I've seen evidence of that, where bubbling has taken place and, all of sudden, it becomes quiescent. Nothing's moving. You wouldn't even know there was anything in there, it was so still, but that's the way they define that point--4.2 degrees. Well, zero Kelvin is the point--at zero Kelvin, that's like 450 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, but the point of all molecular activity ceasing is called the Lambda point. We used to be able to pump down to that. That's vacuum pumps, like I said, all our helium gas, nitrogen gas, liquid helium. There's a lot of things you probably aren't interested in and I don't know whether you want them. I don't want to go off the track here.

SI: No, I definitely want to cover your career in depth later on. You came of age in the late 1930s, early 1940s. Obviously, there was a lot going on in the world.

JL: 1941, I graduated high school and I was eighteen.

SI: Were you aware of what was happening overseas, with Hitler's advances?

JL: Yes.

SI: What did you think at that point? Was it something you and your friends talked about often? Was it something conscious in your mind?

JL: Oh, yes. Well, we used to get the *Philadelphia Daily News* and they used to have articles in there, like, almost every day. They'd talk about the activities of the Nazis, what they were doing over there and they were interesting. I used to read them. It was sort of a slow thing. It didn't bother me directly, as you know, and you just knew it was going on. You figure, hopefully, that it would straighten itself out, just like now--well, I keep digressing. In those days, I guess it sort of just worked on you slowly. You became aware of what was going on and nothing really hit home until they bombed Pearl Harbor. Now, speaking of the family again, I was at one of my aunt's, one of my father's sisters, in South Philly, when they bombed it and the news came over the radio that they had just bombed Pearl Harbor. [Editor's Note: Japanese forces attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, thrusting the United States into the Second World War.] The first question was, on everybody's lips, "Where in the hell is Pearl Harbor?" That shows you how naïve people were. See, nobody knew where Pearl Harbor was, but, then, we essentially found out where Pearl Harbor was, and then, Roosevelt came on

and announced that we were at war with Japan--with "The Empire of Japan"--which is a revelation. It was all downhill from there, but it got damn exciting.

SI: At that point, you had been working at RCA.

JL: About a year.

SI: After Pearl Harbor, did you start thinking, "I want to get into the service?" What were your ideas at that point?

JL: Well, I'll tell you, my folks were divorced and it wasn't an easy life in those days. See, everybody's life is different. When I finished high school, I started to tell you a minute ago, I went over to RCA's employment office, not on my own, but I went over there at the invite of a friend of mine who had been working there. He had been laid off and he was going over to collect his check. So, he says, "Do you want to take a ride over to Camden?" "Camden. Where the hell's Camden?" That's the way--you kept to yourself. It was all neighborhood activity. So, anyway, I went with him over there and I'm sitting in the employment office and he's up at the desk signing out and stuff like that. I just decided to go up to the desk and see if they had any jobs open. So, I was eighteen. So, they said, "Yes. We have a night shift job in the plating department, as a plater's helper." I said, "That sounds good to me." I never had a buck in my pocket. So, that's why I went for that and that's how I started. I started on night shift, eighteen years old on night shift, and it was lousy. I really didn't care for it that much. So, I enrolled in what they called the Television Training Institute in Philadelphia. I went there and learned to read schematics and the wiring, soldering and chassis fabrication and all that sort of stuff. Then, I went and applied to the wiring section and presented my credentials. They hired me. So, I went from, like, forty-five cents an hour to eighty-five cents an hour in one jump, and from night shift to day shift and from the stinky plating department into a nice, brightly-lit place, where they played nice music all afternoon. So, it was a step forward and that's where I was when I finally left and joined the Marines. One of the fellows down there, one of the supervisors who was very helpful to me--because I had just left, and then, I went back and I was gone maybe a day or two--he says, "They have you go in to personnel?" I said, "No, not yet." I says, "In fact, I wasn't going. I'm just leaving." You're young and full of piss and vinegar. So, he says, "What you want to do is go over and sign out officially, through the personnel office." So, I did--best advice I ever got, because the RCA had a policy that they would pay you the difference between what you earned there the last month and what the military was paying you. So, after about a month in the service, I got this check for a couple hundred dollars. That was a lot of money, but the reason it got that high is they liked me there. I was capable. I was doing repairs and everything else, mechanical repairs. Like, [if] the tuning condenser and the receiver was faulty, you had to take it out. Now, it wasn't all that easy. You had to get special soldering irons and twist the tip of it around, so [that] it'd go down around this thing and it'd come up in there. I was able to do all that, see? So, I used to work overtime--I used to wire during the day and do the repairs at night--and I accumulated a lot of money the last month that I was there. In those days, by those figures, it was a lot of money and I got the difference between that lot of money and the fifty bucks in the Marines. I sent that home to my mother, who promptly spent it. [laughter] When I came home, I didn't have a suit to wear. She gave away all my clothes, but let's go on.

SI: Would you say that what you were working on at RCA at that point had any kind of military application?

JL: Absolutely.

SI: Under contract?

JL: Absolutely, yes. I remember the RAK and RAL--they were two of the model radios that we were building. Again, I was always intrigued by things. When you turn a dial to tune something, you go one way, and then, when you come back the other way, it doesn't pick up immediately. There's what they call a backlash and I was looking inside one of these radios--I didn't do this. I was looking inside there and I saw these two gears that were being driven by the tuning knob. They were two gears, up like this, and they had slots in them, both of them. At the end of each one of those slots, they had, like, little projections and hooked into those projections were little coil springs, one on the top and one on the bottom. Those springs put pressure on those two gears and kept them apart. So, when the other gear was down the bottom, engaging it, there was no backlash. So, I says, "Huh, that's pretty damn clever of these Chinese," but that was just one of the receivers, but I worked on, like I said, the RAK, the RAL. By coincidence, I was on the production line then, when they were going by. That must have been thirty years later. I was working on masers and we were in the frequency range of either the RAK or the RAL. The boss of the section says, "I'm going to see if I can get a receiver that covers this range." He got the damn receiver and he brought it in and it was one of those radios that I had worked on in 1941. I took the cover off. I said, "See those blue wires?" I said, "I probably put those on there, just put two blue wires on this socket," the old routine, but it was interesting.

SI: Were there ways that you could see the war having an impact on RCA at that time?

JL: Oh, yes. They had the multi, I guess, million-dollar contracts and they had the spirit of the thing. They worked on the proximity fuse. "Madame X" is what they called it. That was the name of the thing. It was secret. What that Madame X was was a proximity fuse. You know what that is?

SI: Yes. It detonates the bomb when it gets to a certain height.

JL: Within a certain altitude. It doesn't require impact. They had "B," Morse code "B"--"Ba-bi-bi-bip"--they had that stenciled at all the corners, in the street. That stood for, "Beat the promise." So, I guess most of their work at that time was defense work.

SI: You went into the Marine Corps fairly soon, but, in the time that you were still there, could you see more women coming in to work there?

JL: There were more women, yes, and I often wonder what happened to them, because they were all four or five, six years older than me. Like, I was only eighteen, but I remember dating some of them. They were, like, twenty-six, twenty-eight years old.

SI: Was there any resistance to women coming into the workforce?

JL: Oh, no. There wasn't any of the crap that we have today. There wasn't any of it. Like, it may shock you to know that even the word "teenager" is a word that was invented after World War II. There was no teenagers. I can get into all this stuff later on, but there were no teenagers. The boys, in those days, you wore knee-high socks and short pants, and then, when you got a little bit older, and during the wintertime, you wore knickers. When you were, like, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, then, you got your first pair of long pants, but, now, kids are born in long pants. Those knickers, they're a thing to remember. They used to be made out of corduroy and that corduroy's ribs. When you walked, your knickers whistled as the knees passed each other. You go, "Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh." So, there's another thing. If I'm too wordy, let me know.

SI: No, this is perfect. Before you went into the service, what kind of things would you do for entertainment? Were you into sports, either playing or watching, or music?

JL: Well, we did the regular little things that little gangs did on the corner. We played half ball. You ever hear of half ball?

SI: No.

JL: You don't know what a five-cent rubber ball is.

SI: Like a Spalding?

JL: It was a hollow ball. It was just a shell of rubber full of air and we used to cut them in half and use a broomstick for a bat. If you ever try it, you'd be totally intrigued. You hold the thing like this--see, I can still do it--and you swirl it, something like a Frisbee. You could get that thing to rise or you could get it to turn on its side and curve, curveball, a riser or a drop ball, something like that. You swing with the broomstick and you'd hit it out, and then, you had certain marks in the street--over this was that and like that. Another game we used to play was called fungo. That was with a regular baseball and a regular bat and you would hit that up against a building, up against a wall. You'd have designated marks, whether it was a homer or a triple or stuff like that, and you'd keep at it. You'd hit a double, and then, you'd hit a homer, "Well, you got two runs," stuff like that, all that kind of crap. I used to play basketball in the armory, nothing official, like, when I finished high school, no, nothing like that. I was going to the Television Training Institute, like I said, and then, working in the RCA. Oh, when I got that job, the guy just said "I have this opening in the plating department." He said, "Bring your lunch and your birth certificate the following day." So, I did and I worked that night.

SI: You said the working conditions were not very good in the plating area.

JL: Oh, it was steam coming up from all these vats, and then, the ones with the chemicals in had an odor added to the steam and water all over the place. It just wasn't a good place to work.

SI: Were there any accidents?

JL: No.

SI: Was there a union in RCA at that point?

JL: Oh, yes, IUE, Electrical Workers of America, and then, later, I went into Professional Workers of America, or something like that. Then, they had one for the engineering group also. So, there was, like, three different unions. One was Local 103, we were Local 241 and I think-- ASPEP, that was the engineering union--I forget what their local number was. I'd like to say this, too, about the unions now--like, I'm very opinionated. Now, the unions, in the beginning, I thought they were really great and they were. On the whole, they were really great, but I went to a couple of the meetings and I got so disgusted in there, I said, "Never come back," and I never went back after that. My conclusion was that the real purpose of the unions, as far as I was concerned, it protected you from a whim of your immediate supervisor. If he got up on the wrong side of the bed in the morning, he'd come in with a double cross on his face. If you were the first guy he ran into, you could be in deep crap, but that protected you from that. I mean, these raises and things like that, different conditions, they're all secondary. As far as I was concerned, that was a protective measure. There's always somebody that you don't like and there's always somebody that doesn't like you. So, that protected you from that.

SI: Going back to the war, why did you choose the Marine Corps?

JL: More or less as a challenge. I knew enough. I used to have all these little things, like, "The Army doesn't go anywhere unless they have all their nickelodeons with them and stage shows." I said, "When the Marines go in, they go in with their M-1s and it's all-business." The Navy, I couldn't see myself walking around with a pair of bell-bottoms on. The Navy, I concluded, was probably the greatest service to be in educational-wise and conditions. They had good meals, they had a good place to sleep, but the one thing against it was, I didn't want to see myself get caught like a sardine in a sardine can going to the bottom of the ocean. I said I wanted to have at least enough freedom that I could run if I had to. So, all those things added up. I went into the Marines and loved every minute of it.

SI: Did you enlist with anybody else, any friends?

JL: No, all by myself.

SI: All by yourself. Tell me about the process of getting into the Marine Corps, what that entailed?

JL: Yes. I went down to the Customs House on Second and Walnut and laid out my bid to go in. They're all "mightier than thou," looking at you, "Well, let's see, you've got a little bit of an overbite there," and all that sort of crap, said, "Well, let's see what happens." So, anyway, I negotiated that. It was paperwork, a little bit of paperwork at a time, physicals--and I'll tell you one thing those rascals did, you had to be almost perfect in those days. We didn't have anybody with glasses, there was nobody with flat feet and there were no physical detriments at all. Everybody was in damn good shape, but the thing I remember was, when you're going through these physicals, they'd say, "Sit on the bench." In there, would you believe it, they had these marble benches and they were cold, man. [laughter] When you sit down there, bare-ass on a cold

marble bench, it's cold, but, anyway, what those rascals did, they'd walk you all over the place, all around the room, "Sit here. Get up and get on a scale," and do this and all that sort of stuff. Then, at the very end, like putting the shoe on a horse, they walk over and they'd lift your foot up like that and they'd look. If there was dirt in your arch, you were rejected, because they didn't have to ask you if you had flat feet. They had it, all they needed, right there with the dirt in the arch. Then, the hearing test, they had a tuning fork and they'd get in back of you and you had to tell them when the fork was humming, when it wasn't, which ear was it behind and what scale it was--no, no [laughter]--but I went all through that kind of stuff, the colorblindness and eye charts and all that sort of stuff, and basic physical strength, dexterity and all. Depth perception--you had these two strings and you had to adjust them until the thing on the end was perfectly parallel to where it was supposed to be. It was quite strenuous and it was good. I passed them all and the funny thing was, I was enlisting and the guys in my neighborhood, they were all trying to avoid the draft. They were getting drafted left and right and I was still home. The reason for that was, the response to the Marines was so great that they couldn't take everybody at one time. You'd get a letter and say, "Report to the Customs House on a certain day." So, you'd report and they would say, "We have so many available that the only ones we're taking are the ones that are outside of a fifteen-mile radius." That's what they did and I got sent home, like, two months in a row. I enlisted in October and I went back in November and got sent home. Then, I went back in December--the 15th of December--and they swore me in that time, but I still went home again. Then, I got a notice, right after the 1st of the year, to report again. After a while, it becomes old hat. [laughter] So, in the beginning, I'd have a little something, a little coffee and doughnuts night before, something like that, before I was leaving, with the family, but, after a while, we didn't even have that anymore. You're just going. So, I went and this particular time we went, they took us down to the 24th and Walnut--like I say, you're probably not familiar with Philadelphia--but there was a train station at 24th and Walnut, in the Center City. That's where the Baltimore and Ohio ran. They took us down there, down the steps off the bridge and it was all red bricks, the platform and all that sort of stuff. So, they put us on the train and the Sergeant said, "You guys are lucky. You're going down South, where it's warm." This was in December. No, January, it was the beginning of January. December, I got sent home again and, beginning of January, I got accepted--sucked in, [laughter] so-to-speak, yes, the big vacuum cleaner in the sky. So, he said, "You're lucky. It's nice and warm down there." So, down we go and that was an interesting thing. Everything was interesting; to me, it was.

SI: Please, go into detail.

JL: Yes. It was very, very interesting. Let see, we get on the train and, like I say, we're going where it's warm, but, to jump ahead, I say I spent some of the coldest days of my life at Parris Island, unbelievable, but, before we got to Parris Island, every so often, we switched trains. Now, we started on a reasonably decent train up here, in Philadelphia. We'd go down to a ways, like, Washington, D.C. We switched over to another train, which was an older train. Then, we went down further, went to an older train, where they had these woven seats, like some kind of straw, something like that, and in the middle of the car would be an oil heater, for heat in the train. It was cold in there, but, anyway, we got down to Florence, South Carolina, and they stopped us for breakfast. So, we go into this restaurant--and we're all Northerners. So, we go in. There's, like, scrambled eggs and we'll say there was a little bit of bacon--I don't know what the

hell was on the plate, but there was something like that--and there's this little pile of white over in the corner. You know what that was.

SI: Yes, grits.

JL: Grits, [laughter] yes, but nobody had ever seen grits or even tasted them. So, the funny thing was, when we left, all the plates were empty except for the little pile of grits. Every plate went back with a pile of grits on it. Anyway, we went out and they got on the trains and the train quality deteriorated all the way down. We finally got down to Yemassee, which, as I remember, was, like, the last land base you were on before you went across the little bridge onto Parris Island. So, we get off the train down there. Now, they have all kind of crazy things, like, they show you buses, the recruits getting off at the yellow footprints. Have you seen that?

SI: Yes.

JL: We had none of that. We had none of that, none, no frills. You just got your ass off and you were in the Marines, because that's the first thing they said. They got us in a half-assed platoon, still in our civilian clothes and everything, when we first got there. You're going in the truck, over the little bridge, and these people all around, civilians and all, are hollering, "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry," [laughter] which is funny in itself, but it was good. Some guys were sorry, but not me. I enjoyed the whole thing. We get down there and the first thing the drill--the DI, they're called DI, drill instructor; DI and PI, one of those things--but he said, "From now on," he said, "your soul belongs to the Lord," he said, "but your ass belongs to the Marine Corps." That's the way it was and they were strict, but, as long as you accepted that, you had no problem. It's the people that were obstinate and defiant, they're the ones that got into trouble. Like, later on, when you had a mail call, the instructions were, you were in a platoon--now, you're a little organized. You've got your uniforms and everything else. You've got your dungarees and all. You're in uniform, everybody's squared away. If they called your name, you drop out the back of a platoon, double time, down around, come up, pass him, grab your letter, go back around, then, get in your place in the platoon again, see? We had one guy that refused to do that. He would just saunter out the back and saunter around. Well, then, he got the double time--go around the platoon for the entire mail call--and, sometimes, they were lengthy. They could last an hour. It's a long time to be double timing--and the senders and stuff like that--but, as far as PI is concerned, now, PI is an experience all by itself. I give little talks and I started around 1995. I got, again, sucked into this thing of giving talks to different people. I've given talks to the Haddon Township Historical Society, I gave talks to the Cherry Hill Rotary Society--twice to one, once to another one--I gave a talk to the Over-65 Club in Haddonfield. I go to the middle school here in Haddonfield and I go to the Haddonfield Memorial High School. I've given quite a few and I enjoy it. I have my own way of doing it and I'm going to tell you about that. Anyway, getting down to Parris Island, this brings up one of my talks, which I call "The Bubble of Pain," and this is all my own origin. I describe what happens to you. You get down there and you're in civilian clothes. The first thing they want to do is get you converted from civilian clothes to the military things. So, they take you down to what they called the quartermaster and he issues you the things. So, you get set up. You get your clothes. You take off your other stuff. You're in your military things. The first thing that happens to you is, your feet develop blisters from marching with the new shoes on, the new boondockers. They were great shoes

once you got them all worn in and got some calluses where the calluses belonged. [laughter] Then, they were fine. So, your feet are hurting. I'm not saying this is the exact order that things occur, but, then, they take you down to the sick bay and you get shots in both arms. Now, you've got sore feet, you've got sore arms. Then, you get your M-1 rifle, which was, like, eleven pounds, and you put that over your shoulder. That's dead weight. Your shoulder on this side's double sore. Then, they put a helmet on your head, which is several pounds, and your neck gets sore as hell. You can't believe that little bit of additional weight could actually have that effect on you. So, you've got double shoulder, you've got your feet, you've got your neck, and then-- this is the beauty--oh, a funny thing, they issue you a "piss-cutter." You know what a piss-cutter is? A fore-and-aft cap, that's the military cap, pointy on the front and pointy on the back. Like I say, it's either a fore-aft cap or more affectionately known as a piss-cutter. You put that on and, when you have hair like yours--in fact, I use this also in my little talks, when I go to the high school level, junior, middle school. Usually, you get a little fat kid in the front row. He's maybe twelve, maybe, or something like that, with a big crop of hair. I describe the haircuts down at Parris Island and I look at him. I said, "They could have all that hair on the floor," I said, "in about four seconds," [laughter] but they would give you one of these things. This has to do with the haircut. They issued you the piss-cutter and you put it on your head and it's all over, like a swivel joint, because it's lubricated by all this hair. So, you wonder, "What the hell? This thing won't stay on my head." So, they take you down to the barbershop and, like, four swipes with the shears and you haven't got a hair on your head. You go like this with your [hand]--[laughter] it's a hell of a shock. You've never had that before. You go like that, "Oh, my god," but you put this piss-cutter on your head, now, you can't move it. It's like a Velcro patch. You put it on there and, "Bonk," locks right on. It's not going anywhere from there on out and that's the way it worked out. I wore a brush haircut the whole time I was in there. In fact, I kept it for many, many years when I got out, but the coup de grâce was, they--oh, before we went in there, at the Customs House, they said, "We want you to go down and go to your local dentist and get every cavity in your mouth filled." Now, in those days, people had cavities because there wasn't all this dental hygiene that we have today. You brushed, but there's all these chemicals they put in the water and stuff like that, but, anyway, we did have cavities. So, I went. I got all the ones filled. We go down there and wind up in the dentist's office. Now, they must have had a dozen dental chairs with dentists, assistants and everything else. They could run a platoon through there in probably a half an hour. It's, like, twelve in a chair. It was some number of ...

SI: Roughly.

JL: A multitude of chairs, in other words. Anyway, what they do--you won't believe this--but they take their little pick and their drill and they go through and they pull every filling in your mouth out. Now, think about that for a minute--and some of them were pretty big cavities, yes. So, all the fillings are out, you're sitting in the chair and the dentist is up there mixing up some amalgam. The son-of-a-bitch assistant, he's got this air thing, cold air. He's got your mouth open, propped open, and he's squirting all these cavity openings the whole time this guy's up there mixing up the amalgam. So, I remember looking up and, son-of-a-bitch, [laughter] that's painful. That is very painful, but, then, eventually, they got them all filled up again. You go marching out, like "Johnny goes marching home," but I never had a toothache the whole time I was in there and nobody else did, either. They're all the pluses. You look at these things, you see--nothing like being in a foxhole with a guy with a toothache. I can't even imagine it, but they

lasted and they lasted for years. In fact, I may even have one in my mouth now, after all these years. So, that's basically PI, and then, of course, you got your drilling and your close-order drill and your marching--what the hell'd they call it?--something of arms.

SI: Manual of alarms.

JL: Manual of alarms, marching manual of arms. As you march along, you keep shifting the rifle from one position, right shoulder to left shoulder and all that sort of stuff. You learned about the M-1. You had to memorize the serial number of the M-1, how to take it apart and put it together blindfolded. You name it. They were very tedious with their cigarette butts--no cigarette butts on the deck; everything was a deck--that had policed the area. You go around with a stick, a broomstick, with a nail on the end of it and pick up the butts and all that sort of stuff, but it was sort of funny. I remember, when we first got down there, then, in those days, they had this crazy damn cadence they marched by and it was a language all onto itself. You had to learn it or you didn't know from shit. Like, "Rear harch;" know what that would mean?

SI: No.

JL: That means, "To the rear, march," and one guy took him up on it. He didn't go to the rear march and the DI come up, running up to him, "Did you hear what I just said?" The kid says, "Yes. You said, 'To rear harch.'" [laughter] He says, "No, I said, 'To the rear, march,'" and he says, "No, you didn't. You said, 'Rear harch,'" something like that, but, anyway, that was a very rare occurrence. You didn't argue with the DI. What the DI said was gospel and that's the way it was. This one [day], very early in our training down there, maybe the second day, second morning or the third morning, something like that, "Fall out." We were in Quonset huts and there was, like, sixteen guys to a Quonset hut, double bunk beds all around the thing and a little door, and they were up off the deck about this high, like, it was a step, and then, down.

SI: Yes, three feet.

JL: When they said, "Fall out," they literally meant, "fall out." They gave you, like, three seconds to get out of there. Everybody's pushing and people are falling out the front door and landing on their face in the sand and all that sort of stuff. So, you finally get out--and you do it two and three times. If it wasn't fast enough the first time, you did it again. Everybody goes back in. He comes charging out of there. It was a riot. Anyway, we finally get out, we're lined up and I remember this one in particular, "Left face, right face." You can understand that, and so, we do a right face and we go marching off. It's, like, four o'clock in the morning. It's dark. You can't see what you're walking on. This guy's shouting the goddamn cadence that you can't understand and we're going to the mess hall, "Double C Café," which we called the "Cockroach Café." So, we're going there for breakfast. Oh, this was after the trip to the dentist. So, I don't know what day it was, but it was early in the training. So, we go marching up there, make a column left and, still, you can't see where the hell you're going. The lights they had then, they were, like, pumpkins. They were orange-colored and they didn't do much illuminating. So, we get down there to the mess hall. We march in and the breakfast for that morning is cold cereal. So, they dragged the containers of milk off the loading platform, they bring it in ice cold, like I

said, December, January. So, they give us corn flakes, cold milk and the spoons--the utensils that we used down there, the spoons were like this.

SI: Big.

JL: They were like shovels. When I came home, I couldn't believe a teaspoon when I saw it. I thought it was an article of interest, just for playing with, [laughter] stuff like that, but, anyway, you get this big shovel. You come up with a whole load of corn flakes and cold milk. Well, when that hit that silver filling in the teeth, almost everybody in there put their head right through the roof. It was screaming, yelling. You could imagine. You ever have that sensation?

SI: Yes.

JL: Imagine it.

SI: Your mouth, yes.

JL: On about twelve or fourteen teeth, unbelievable, but that was some of the stuff. Like I say, when we left there, it was just a question of getting off the island. They basically gave us a boot in the ass and said, "You're finished." Now, I found out--in fact, it was about three years ago--I found out from a guy in the [Marine Corps] League that they took pictures of all the graduating platoons. He's telling me, "Call this number and talk to this person and they'll send you a picture of your graduating platoon." I said, "I don't think so." I said, "I don't remember any pictures being taken. The only thing I remember seeing is boondockers coming at us and, 'Get on the train and get out of here.'" I called down there and I got a very nice woman and I explained who I was. I said, "I was in Platoon #7, Sergeant Settser." I say, "It was in January 1943." She says, "Just a minute, sir." She came back in about twenty minutes and said, "There is no record of a Platoon #7." [laughter] I says, "Thank you very much," and I knew that. I didn't recall any pictures. They weren't doing that in those days.

SI: How many weeks was boot camp at that point?

JL: Twelve. I got off of there in March.

SI: I know, in training, they focus a lot on marksmanship.

JL: Yes.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

JL: Oh, yes, I forgot all about that, yes. You go to the range. You're up there a couple weeks. Before you go to the range, you go to a different, smaller range and you fire a twenty-two. That's not too bad, twenty-two. I never fired a rifle in my life, but the twenty-two wasn't all that bad, but, then, you get up to the regular range. Now, we're going to fire the M-1 and you fire a little bit, and then, you qualify. They have certain days you qualify. Now, when I got up there, when we were just snapping in a little bit--they call it snapping in. All these expressions come

back to you. It's like zeroing your rifle, so [that] you hit what you aim at, one of those things. I was down in the prone position, going to squeeze off the first shot of an M-1 in my life, and my trigger stuck. So, the DI--they're always on top of you--they walk right on your elbows. You're down there, your elbows out, they put their boondocker and step right on your [elbow], pin you to the ground. He said, "Why aren't you firing?" or words to that effect. I says, "My trigger is stuck." I said, "I can't move it past a certain point." "Goddamn it." He reached down and fires the damn thing. All I did, I took up the slack in the trigger. There's a little bit of slack, and then, you hit the firing mechanism, and then, it fires, but that's all I did, I squeezed. They emphasized, "Squeeze off," and all that sort of stuff, squeeze the trigger and off it went. Then, after that, I was fine and I used to develop my own technique. There were so many targets down at the butts--are you hearing these things for the first time?

SI: No. I have heard some form of them, but I want to hear your experience.

JL: Okay, but the butts, there were maybe thirty, targets and they were all on wooden frames, controlled by ropes, where you could run this thing up with the target on it, and then, you'd hear a firing. If you're working the butts, when you're down there, you hear a "whack." It's like a twenty-two going off and that's when the thirty-caliber's going through that paper. Then, you pull it down, see where the mark is, run it back up again, and then, you had signals on the end of rods, which you shove up, one bull's-eye, one ring, two ring, three ring, etc., and so forth. Then, after they marked that stuff, you pull it back down again and you would glue a patch over that hole, which was about like this, and you'd glue that. You put glue on the back. Now, the glue, I imagine, was flour and water, or something like that. That's what it looked like. Again, coming back to the temperature, it was very, very cold. In fact, it was so cold that it would freeze that glue mix-up. By the time the guy would take the glue pot and go from one end--no, he would take the hot water pot and go down and put some water in each of the glue pots, there was about thirty of them--by the time they got down to the thirty one, the first one was frozen again and this was no kidding. They had trouble patching these targets up, but that was that. When I was firing a line, I was, like, number four or number six from the left-hand end. The reason I mention that was, that makes it easy to count. You're so far back, it's hard to pick out your target if you're at the middle of the thing. [If] you're fifteenth from the end, how in the hell could you look up there and see a bull's-eye this big and know that that's your target. If you don't fire on your target, you don't get credit, one of those things, but, fortunately, I was down around number six, something like that. So, when I got down and got the sights on, I could take the thing and just move it up and count up six and that was my target. I made out very well. I've got my medal hanging in there on the wall for that. The Reising submachine gun, I used that. The BAR, I used that. In fact, we were at two different places firing those automatic weapons and, in both places, the officer who was in charge of what we'll call the butts again, where the targets were--now, these targets were like figures. The original ones were round targets. These were silhouettes of men. Two different times, they come up and he was, like, "Who's firing on six?" I'll use six again, because I used it once before. You don't know what to say. You don't want to admit to anything. One rule of the Marine Corps is, you don't volunteer for a damn thing and you keep your eyes on your own plate, make sure you sail a smooth course. Both times, finally, "Ah, it was me." They went, "Very good, very good." He says, "You took the whole throat out on this one and you took the whole heart section out on that one." So, that's fine, was glad to hear that. Then, we're on hand grenade practice. When they gave you hand-grenade practice, it wasn't all

lip service. What they did, they lined up, like, ten people in a trench and they gave each one a number, one to ten, and they showed you where the target was, which happened to be an ammunition case, a green thirty-caliber ammunition box, empty. They put that up there near a tree and they said, "That's the target. That's where you want to throw your grenade when we call your number." What they did, they would take a grenade, pull the pin, release the handle and throw thing, and holler, like, "Number four." Whoever was number four had to run there, grab that grenade and throw it the hell over the hill and jump back down in the hole again. So, there we go, "Number one; number eight; number six," all that sort of bullshit. So, all of a sudden, he calls my number and I run up, grab the grenade and throw it over the hill and I hear hollered, "Goddamn it." "Oh, what did I do now?" The grenade I threw went right in the ammo box and blew it up, [laughter] one shot in a hundred thousand, right? There it went. So, those are some of the pleasant things you remember.

SI: How did the men in your platoon get along?

JL: Fine. I would like to talk about that, too. In those days, boys were men. When we went through Parris Island and, later, training for weapons, for communications, for any type of a thing that you got put in--and, by the way, I never saw a single guy from my platoon at Parris Island after we left the island. They just scattered you all over the place. Some of the guys went to the First Division at Guadalcanal. Anyway ...

SI: You were saying boys were men.

JL: Oh, yes, thank you. Each one learned his trade and knew how to perform the duties he was required to and respected the other people for what they had to do. That's where we got along. There were no boys. There were no whining eighteen-year-olds or nineteen-year-olds. There was performing men--flamethrower operators, BARs, risings, anything you want to mention, mortars. They knew their job. We all knew our job. I got put into communications and I went to radio school and learned to be a field radio operator. Everything is funny. Everything is a story. This is very interesting. You go to radio school--are you familiar with this at all, radio school?

SI: No.

JL: Okay. They have these tables. They're like long cafeteria tables and they're called four-word table, six-word table, eight-word table, all the way up to eighteen-word table. So, they start you off on the four. When they teach you the code, they don't teach it to you like, "A, B, C, D," in order like that. They teach it to you in blocks, certain characters. It could be, "A, J, Q, P," or something like that. They may teach you that group and they'd send these things, but, anyway, we'll just say they send you a "B." You find out a "B" is, "Bah-bip-bip-bip." So, then, you say, "Bah-bip-bip-bip. Oh, that's not bad," but, at the four-word table, you only get four words a minute. Every fifteen seconds, you get another word--another letter. So, they give you the "B," and then, they'll give you the "Q," "Dah-dah, dit-dah." You go, "Dah-dah, dit-dah. That's not too bad." So, then, after he gives you the five that you're going to have, introductory, he'll say, "Bah-bip-bip-bip," and then, you go, "Bah-bip-bip-bip. That was 'B.'" Then, you go, the next one was "C," the next one was "J;" so, you write them down. After everybody successfully

negotiates the four-word table, then, you go to the six-word table. Now, you've got [Mr. Lauriello imitates rapid Morse code.] "Uh-oh," you can't count. They call that counting at the four-word table, see. You can't count anymore. It's too fast, but you can hold out until you get to the eight-word table. Then, you've got [Mr. Lauriello imitates very rapid Morse code.] Forget it, man, you're not doing anything. Everybody goes back to the four-word table. When that happened, I said, "Oh, my god, me and the whole class is going to flunk this thing just as sure as you're born. Nobody's going to learn this shit," but, then, we start off all over again, four-word, "Bah-bip-bip-bip. That's okay." All of a sudden, the damn, like, curtains opened up and you could hear a symphony going--you hear the violins and everything else. This is my way of describing what happened. All of a sudden, they're playing your tune. You understand it. You knew every damn thing that's coming over without having to count. From there on, you go up to the eighteen-word table, a breeze. I still remember, to this day, at seventy-some-odd years--sixty-eight years, something like that, maybe even longer than that, because I always count from the end of the war, but this was in 1943 [that] I learned the code.

SI: Seventy years.

JL: And I still remember it. In fact, just the other day, my daughter was just here. She wanted me to write the code down for her. I said, "Yes, give me a pencil and paper." I sat down and wrote the whole damn thing out for her--numbers, abbreviations, everything. Now, anybody--you ever had the code, did you?

SI: I have never studied it. I am familiar in general.

JL: Yes, but that was a funny thing--[Mr. Lauriello imitates Morse code.] That means, "Would you kindly repeat everything?" and then, when you used to hear [Mr. Lauriello imitates Morse code], that means, "Would you kindly repeat all after..." Sometimes, it would be the address at the front of the envelope; in other words, "Repeat everything after the address." Holy crap, you want to knock somebody's teeth out, one of those things, but I'd gotten to the point where I could just walk by a group that was practicing and hear everything that was going on, one of those things. Then, after I finished there, I got sent to what they called the Radio Material School.

SI: Where was that radio training school?

JL: New River in North Carolina, Camp Lejeune, and they sent me out to Omaha, Nebraska, where I lived in a Y. A group went out, a group of sixty, and we were the second group that went out there and they had three groups at one time, so, MTD 1 and MTD 2, of which I was a part, and then, MTD 3. We were all out there together, and then, they would drop one off when they finished and they'd bring MTD 4 in, stuff like that. That was to learn how to repair all the equipment that we used at that time, the radio transmitters, receiver transmitters, telegraph, and you learned to be the switchboard and telephone [operator] and how to receive code over aircraft noise, stuff like that. They'd mix the signal in the earphone and stuff like that, but I think I finished first in that class. I liked it. I liked everything.

SI: Do you think your background, working at RCA, helped you in these training courses?

JL: I think so. I never did anything about it. I never asked anything. I just got assigned. In there, they put you in the casual company, like, when we finished the field operators' thing. They put us in the casual company, and then, every day, they'd have a notice on the bulletin board, who was being transferred out and to where.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Go ahead.

JL: Oh, yes, I saw my name on the board and, next thing you know, I was on a train out to Omaha, Nebraska. We're out there for thirteen weeks and that was very interesting, also, and we lived right downtown in the Y. We had our own floor and we ate at the Y. We marched through the streets, going to the school and coming from it. The course was very all-encompassing. It was very, very nice.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JL: You ready to continue?

SI: Yes.

JL: Okay.

SI: You were in Omaha.

JL: Yes.

SI: Did you get a chance to interact with some of the local civilians?

JL: Oh, yes. We had, like, Saturday and Sunday off, if your grades were good. Like I said, I was doing very well, so, I had no problem with that. I used to go over into Iowa, Council Bluffs. There was a golf course over there. I didn't play golf, but I went over there for other reasons and that was nice. There was a night club called The Cave, right downtown, and it was on the bottom floor--in fact, it was down a flight--under the Hill Hotel. They used to refer to it as "the Cave Under the Hill," which I thought was pretty good, pretty clever, but that brings up another thing there. When we were getting ready to leave there, we got notice that, like, twelve o'clock, the train would be leaving from the station, but we were free up until that time, make sure we're back at the Y. That went off all well and good, except that when we got back to the Y, they said the train departure was going to be delayed for, like, four hours. So, we were free to go again. So, we went again and this was my undoing. [laughter] I went back to The Cave again and got goddamn plastered. I didn't know it at the time, but I got back to the Y at the time I was supposed to be, but I went in to use the head. While I'm in there, somebody else comes in and uses the shower and they've got this hot water, steam floating all over the place. Well, that's the thing that did me in. I went in, I staggered into my bed, into the bedroom that I had been using, and got up on the sack. I took my watch off and put it on the chest of drawers and, the next thing I knew, I was in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Somebody had come in and found me there and

carried me down to the train, put me in a Pullman berth and away I went. Like I say, when I woke up there, my watch was gone. I had forgotten it completely, but the interesting thing there, too, is, I repaired the equipment out in California, at Camp Pendleton. When we got into combat, there's really no need for any electronic repairmen, because the thing's either working or it doesn't even exist anymore. So, I traded in all my tools, which I didn't have, for my carbine--I had a carbine at that stage of the game--and became a frontline man, for thirty-seven days.

SI: You got out to Camp Pendleton. Do you remember approximately what month that was?

JL: Out of Camp Pendleton?

SI: No, when you first arrived there from Omaha.

JL: Oh, yes, September.

SI: September 1943.

JL: September '43, yes. They were just forming the Fifth Marine Division. Our group got out there and we basically became the nucleus for some of these things. I became the nucleus for the 27th Marine Regiment, and then, they just kept filling in and filling in. I stayed in the Fifth Division, 27th Regiment, my whole career.

SI: How long were you at Camp Pendleton before you shipped out?

JL: Like I say, we got there in '43 and we left in 1944, approximately June or July of 1944. We shipped out of San Diego, on a ship called the [USS] *Custer* [(APA-40)]. I ran into a guy in RCA, later years, that was a crewman on the *Custer* that used to transport the Marines from San Diego to Hawaii. So, I was probably on his ship when he was on it.

SI: What was your mindset at that point, when you were leaving the United States for overseas?

JL: Nothing. It was all adventure. I've said to people--I have a couple of grandchildren now that are out in California and stuff like that and the mother's, "Geez, I wonder about how they do this?" "Don't worry about it," I said. "If you've got the right frame of mind, home is where you are, not where you want to be." I never gave a thought to anybody. It's probably selfish and all that sort of stuff, but I hardly ever wrote a letter. I hardly ever got any letters. People, later on, when I went to conventions, said, "We used to be sorry for you, because you never got any letters." I said, "It didn't bother me one bit."

SI: Aside from repairing equipment, what did you do in California to prepare to go overseas?

JL: Well, I could say go up to LA and go into the taprooms up there and getting bombed and all the other things that go with it; had a great time in LA. That was wonderful. Oh, one thing--to get to LA on our liberty, we had one of the guys in our group, was older than us, older than the main group, and he had a convertible Pontiac, cream color. We used to pay him something like seventy-five cents to get transported from Camp Pendleton to LA, which was about eighty miles,

but, coming back--this is the interesting thing. Oh, I used to go to a place called Keith Jones. It was a nightclub up there, in downtown LA, marvelous, oh, God. I shiver to think about it. [laughter] Anyway, to get back to Camp Pendleton, all you had to do was report to a place called Pershing Square. That was a regular park, downtown LA, and the Marine Corps would have their green buses lined up all along the sidewalk there. All you had to do was show up and holler out what regiment you belonged to, "27th," and somebody would grab you and throw you on the goddamn bus and, hey, you go to sleep. Next thing, you wake up eighty miles later, you're at your area at Camp Pendleton. You were back home again. So, it was a hell of a life, let me tell you--carefree life, devil may care, all that kind of stuff. Did you get that feeling from the other people you talked to?

SI: It depends.

JL: Okay.

SI: Some people, certainly. For others, maybe there was some hesitation about what they were about to get into.

JL: Oh, about the war? yes.

SI: Yes. It depends on the age. Usually, older men, people who were then twenty-two, twenty-three, tended to think about that more than people who were eighteen, nineteen, twenty. You went over on the *Custer*. What were the conditions like on the ship?

JL: You've got a good memory. What was it like on the ship? crowded. The first couple days we were out, we ran into some rough weather. The mess hall was at the fantail. That's the back end of the ship and we had these long tables, again, like, similar to what we had in the radio room. It got so rough that you'd be standing--you stood up to eat--and your tray and everything would slide down away from you. Then, all of a sudden, it would roll the other way, come back, and you'd catch something on the way by. You'd look in your cup and it would be going like this and all that good stuff, but, basically, it was crowded. You had to wait in line for everything. There were some hijinks on there, like some of the crew members--stupid asses; see, I'm not sure. No, this was a different trip, but, on this particular trip, this one swabee was up in the mast and threw a wrench--the guy on the deck threw the wrench up to the guy in the mast--and the guy misses. It comes down, he hits one of our guys right in the head, took him down to the sick bay. That was awful. Another dumbass--I mean, I have to tell it like it is--he's, like, four decks down in the hold. They have the covers off and there's a block and tackle down there. Well, he stands on the block and tackle and he's pulling on the rope and he pulls himself up four decks. He gets up to the top and steps off the block and he went over backwards. He went to the sick bay. He went down four decks and landed, basically, on his head. So, my reaction was, there, always make sure you fall on your head--that way, you can't get hurt.

SI: [laughter] Was he drunk?

JL: No.

SI: Just fooling around.

JL: Smart ass, trying to show off, I guess, in front of us land-lovers. That was probably his first trip.

SI: I know there was a training area on Oahu. Was that where you were sent?

JL: No. Oahu is one of the main islands. That's where Honolulu is. We went into the big island, big island of Hawaii. Our training camp there was named after one of the operations in the Pacific, Tarawa ("TARA-wa") or Tarawa depending on how you want to pronounce it, yes. That's where we went, but that, again, is an interesting thing. We arrived. First of all, the scenery, when we pulled into Hilo Harbor--that's a little town at the southern end of the big island of Hawaii--we pulled into Hilo and, off a distance, you could see the sun beating down, you could see little green patches of farmland, the little houses with red, silver and green roofs. It was absolutely gorgeous. So, that was that. That was gorgeous. They take us ashore and we're sitting around alongside the road, sitting on our helmets, on our packs, the same way you [always did]--you're into bored mode. You're waiting for the next mode of transportation. The camp was, like, sixty-five miles away, up between the two volcanos, Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea. We were up almost between them. We were up so high that, while we were training, periodically, a cloud would come down the company street and obliterate the whole damn thing. You had to sit down on the side and wait for the cloud to go by before you could resume your activity, because it was, like, in a heavy fog, one of those things. The interesting [thing] I wanted to mention to you was the way we got up there. The people that were in motor transport went in their trucks and their jeeps and all that sort of stuff. We were foot-bound. So, we had to go by some other method. So, they said we're going to go by train. So, I hadn't been on a train since I went to Parris Island. No, that's a lie. When I went from Omaha, I was on the train, but, anyway, we get down to the railhead to get on these trains. Basically, there's no trains there, but, when you're there for a while, you start studying it a little bit, you say, "By God, there are trains here." They're flatcars--no sides, no railings of any sort--and they pile us on these things and they line us up down the center of the car, front to back on the cars and two rows. Then, you get back-to-back, and then, you squat down, pack-to-pack, and you pull your knees up under you, under your chin, and your feet are about eighteen inches from the edge of the flatcar.

SI: Maybe a foot-and-a-half.

JL: About that, yes. So, then, we start, not too bad. People are throwing fruit--typical Hawaiian thing. "Oh, this is great. We're going." So, we start picking up a little bit of speed. We started going up the hill and we lose the fruit on the side. Now, we're moving along. All of a sudden, we go into a tunnel that's cut into the side of the mountain, okay, fine. Now, we're getting cinders on us. We're getting ash, regular smoke. The things are rattling back and forth. This is a narrow-gauge railroad. So, we've got all these adverse things happening. All of a sudden, we shoot out--we're on a trestle. From, like I described before, where you're sitting, you can't see anything past the edge of that car. You couldn't see the trestle we're on, you couldn't see anything. All that foundation was below your line of sight. So, you see these mountains off in the distance and nothing but space in-between. Now, these guys on the other side are starting to push. They want to get away from what they see and they're pushing us closer to what we don't

want to see. [laughter] So, "Stop the goddamn pushing," and we finally got it under control and nobody pushed anymore. We did that, like, three times, into the different tunnels and out. Every time we came out on the trestle, we were higher than we were the last time and, finally, the last one that we came out on was a curve. We get out on that damn thing and we're going up in a curve and the train stalls. Now, we're sitting up there in the middle of nowhere--like I said, you can't see over the edge. You'd think if you step off of that car, you're a goner. There's nothing in the world going to save you. You're dead ass. So, they backed the thing up several times, would bang into the couplings the way that trains do, and then, bang into the couplings forward. Then, finally, we made it up there and we spent some happy months up there at Camp Tarawa, but getting there was a hair-raiser, let me tell you. In fact, I called my friend. I was going to give a talk on that, but I said, "I'd better check my facts." So, I called this fellow. He was in Lancaster. He was one of the guys that was in my tent. I said, "Mort," I said, "do you remember the train ride from Hilo to Camp Tarawa?" and there was a long pause. He says, "Jesus Christ," he said, "do I remember the train ride?" [laughter] He said, "I thought I was going to die. It was like a flying carpet."

SI: Once you got to Camp Tarawa, what did your training there consist of?

JL: Well, I broke into the maintenance of the radio equipment that we [had]. They all broke down, sooner or later, but, if they broke down due to natural causes, you could fix them. Capacitor would go out, the resistor would go out, you replace it that way, but, when it got blown apart, like I said before, it was all over. So, I was mainly into that and that is where we got introduced to the Navajo Indian Code Talkers. They called out the company together--we were sixty guys in our company and we were six guys to a tent. So, we had about ten or twelve tents, including the officers and the NCOs and all that sort of stuff, and I was in number four. The name of our street was called Lackanookie Avenue and I was in tent number four. When they brought the Indians in, they called us all out and they introduced us to the three Indians. They told us what they're going to do. Having been over the course many times--not with them, but with others--you figured, "Yes, this is what we're going to do--we'll see it when we see it," one of those things, but the guys were absolutely fantastic. You can't believe what a job they did. The three of them were put in the tent right next to me, tent number three. I had a very good relationship with them. In fact, I did favors for them. I was a corporal at the time and they would come to me for little favors. I don't know why, maybe because I was in the tent next to them. I don't know, but one of them played the trumpet, I found out. He'd come to me, told me he played the trumpet and one of the guys in my tent played the trumpet. So, he wanted to know--this Indian wanted to know--whether he could possibly borrow my friend John's trumpet to play. He said, "I've got my own mouthpiece." He said, "I would appreciate it." So, I said, "I'll see what I can do for you, Paul." His name was Paul Kinlacheeny and I got him the trumpet and he played and that was nice. We used to hear him play at night, and then, he'd bring the trumpet back and my friend John would play. My friend John would, once in a while, substitute for the bugler. When the bugler was incapacitated, he'd run out there and blow Taps or blow Reveille or something like that, whatever was required, but the Indians were marvelous. They increased our communication time by a hundredfold. If we were going to send a message, somebody would write the message in English, and then, you would take it over to certain people. They would run it through a machine called the Hagelin [a cypher machine]. That machine was all set up with dials, so that when you put in your stuff, it came out as an entirely

different alphabet. Then, when it got to the other end--it had to be transmitted into the other end and our messages would have all the encoding and decoding instructions up at the top--they would take and reset the machine. Then, when they punched in all this crazy shit, the message would come out, but that would take a minimum of a half an hour. These guys could knock it off, like, in twenty seconds, because they were all bilingual. You'd give the thing to them, they read it English and talked it in Navajo. On the other end, immediately, you'd hear, "Roger," come back, in English. Somebody asked me if I ever learned any of it. "No." "How would you describe it?" I says, "It was a series of grunts, groans, farts and belches." I says, "I couldn't put them together," but it was marvelous to see what they did.

SI: Was there any secrecy involved?

JL: That was top secret up through the Vietnam War, I think. You weren't allowed--even the Indians were told you were not to divulge what you did. That was the only unbreakable code in World War II. They had them in Europe, too, but they broke them. The Navajo Code was a code within their language. It wasn't just their language--they had invented a code in there. So, even if another Navajo intercepted it, they could not interpret it. So, that's pretty damn secret. You'd hear, "Belch, belch, belch, fart, fart, fart." "What does that mean?"

SI: Did they tell those of you who were attached to them, "Do not mention what you see here, do not talk about our methods?"

JL: Yes, we were all told. Well, only the communications people knew about it. The other people had no idea. I talk to people over here at the League. They had no idea what the Code Talkers were about.

SI: You said most of your day was spent repairing equipment.

JL: Yes.

SI: Did you go on maneuvers, that sort of thing?

JL: Oh, yes, and a couple of funny things happened. I was very proficient at that and, once in a while, people from other battalions would come in--some of the officers would come in--they'd have their little (62 radio?) that went on the fritz and they would bring it in. This is sort of funny. This one officer brought it in one day and the radio's dead. I said, "Well, come back in a couple days." So, he left it and he came back in a couple days and I've got the radio up on the counter, playing. "Oh," he says, "I see my radio's fixed." I said, "Well, not really a hundred percent." I said, "I have to wait for the ionosphere to shift." I said, "If that shifts and it's still playing," I said, "then, I'll give it back to you." So, "Okay," second louie. So, he leaves and he comes back in about a week later. He says, "What's happening?" I said, "The ionosphere hasn't shifted yet." This went on for, like, three weeks. [laughter] Finally, one time, he come in, he says, "Fuck the ionosphere." He said, "I want my radio right now." So, I said, "Okay, here it is. If it breaks down, don't blame me." [laughter] To me, that's funny.

SI: It is a funny story. You trained with the same unit for quite a while.

JL: Yes.

SI: What did you think of your immediate officers and those further up?

JL: Okay. They were okay. There was the same camaraderie there, too, that there was respect, mutual respect. These guys knew that they were nowhere without us and, basically, we were nowhere without them. So, everything was cordial--it was military. That's the one thing I'll tell you about the Corps--everything in the Corps was "A," "A," "A." You knew where you stood, you knew what to expect and you got along. The Corps, I don't know whether you realize it or not, but that's the only branch of the service where there's a real camaraderie. If you find out that a guy was in the Corps, you just talk to him like you knew him for forever. I was up to my oldest daughter's place in North Jersey and she was having trouble with her heater. The guy from Public Service came out and I had my car parked in the driveway. He saw my Marine Corps emblem on the back. When he came in, he asked my daughter, he says, "Who was in the Marines?" She said, "My father, and he's here." So, I talked to him for a while. The whole heating job was on the house, new this, new that and he went overboard and put extra things in. Many, many things like that have happened. Me and my friend just got our meal paid for over at the Legacy [Diner]. We got our meals paid for the other day. We had our red hat--we wear our red hats over there, our special red hats. Somebody in there saw that and they picked up our tab. It's interesting. It's nice that it does happen once in a while. Another thing, my sea bag got lost when we finally came home from occupying Japan and I never did get it. Certain things, I liked. Later on in life, I slowly developed, basically, a love for them, like those dungarees that we had, the herringbone dungarees, beautiful. I didn't have any of those. They all got lost in my sea bag. So, I was in my barbershop one day and I had my hat off, on the rack, while I'm getting the haircut. So, when I got done, I'm coming over to put my hat on and there's a guy sitting there. He said, "You were in the Fifth Division?" I says, "Yes." He said, "My father was in the Fourth." So, the Fourth and the Fifth are the ones that took Iwo Jima. So, we got talking. I sat down, I was talking to him. I said, "The one thing that I regret is that I don't have any of the herringbone dungarees." He says, "Just by coincidence, my father's got about three pair at home." I said, "That's very, very nice." He said, "I'm sure he'd be willing to give you a pair." I said, "Are you kidding me?" [laughter] So, he says, "No." He says, "When I go home," he says, "I'll talk to him." He says, "I'll get a pair for you." I didn't get the pants; I got the jacket. Later on that day, he comes back to the barbershop, delivers the jacket and my barber goes right past my house on the way to where he lives and he dropped the thing off. I didn't even have to go back to the barbershop. One guy took it to there, and then, he took it here, and I still have it. It's in a place of honor. It's not a brand-new one. I mean, it's a typical dungaree jacket, worn many times, washed many times, little threads hanging out from the buttons, stuff like that, neat.

SI: The esprit de corps goes on forever.

JL: Oh, it's on forever, oh, yes, absolutely, yes. There's many things that happen. In fact, I always say, "Good things do happen once in a while," like that barbershop thing was a good thing and getting treated, many times, in the restaurant was a good thing. I get treated more like an icon now. Like, do you ever hear of [US Marine Corps Medal of Honor recipient] John Basilone?

SI: Yes.

JL: They're having a parade up in Raritan. I'm going to be up there for that. I'm going to be taken up by one of my comrades from the League. I haven't been driving for almost a year now, because I had eye trouble or cataracts and stuff, which I'm getting straightened out now, but I go up there, ride in the car and stuff like that.

SI: That is great.

JL: And talk to John's brother, nice. I was on the beach with John, see? That's what puts me in there. I'm one of the rarities. I go up there and I was at Iwo Jima, on the beach with their favorite son at the time. So, as soon as they hear that, they go nuts.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about your time at Camp Tarawa.

JL: Yes.

SI: Do you know approximately how long you were there?

JL: Well, I said, like, July of 1944--I know exactly when we left, December the 31st, 1944. That's when they took us down and loaded us on the USS *Rutland* [(APA-192)] and we didn't know where we were going, but that was the beginning of the Iwo invasion. We went onboard ship there, sailed out of the harbor at nighttime. We went over to Pearl Harbor and waited for other ships to load, and then, we ran a couple of maneuvers off of Maui. Then, eventually, after so many weeks, we got underway for the broader Pacific Theater and we sailed on for a while. We went to Kwajalein. Then, from Kwajalein, we went to Saipan and, from Saipan, we went to Iwo. That whole trip was fifty days. That is a long time on a troopship, fifty days, elbow-to-elbow, waiting in line for everything that you want to do. It's just miserable. You live in the cargo holds, converted cargo holds. They put [up] what they called sacks, I called them racks--in fact, I called them drawers. It was like sleeping in a drawer, a shelf. Interesting thing is, like I say, in addition to being on the thing for fifty days, elbow-to-elbow like that, when we were at Saipan, one night, some barges came out and they had these cargo nets full of food. They hoisted them up on our deck. They put the lights on in the rigging and it was like a carnival night. They called our outfit, the outfit that I was in, to unload the cargo nets and put the stuff where it belongs, the food, be it storage, refrigerator, wherever it goes. So, I told you about the Indians, right, back there, and about Paul, that I had done several favors for him. He sort of followed me around all the time. Wherever I was, Paul was there, when it was appropriate. While we were taking on the food, we were unloading the net and I looked up and there's Paul. He's bending down, picking stuff out of the net also and he holds this can of sliced peaches up. Without even saying a word, we just said, "That's ours." So, he took it down, on the way down to where we were going to stash it, and hid it in the framework of the ship, in the "I" beams someplace. He wanted to eat that thing like every night after that and I kept telling him, "No, let's keep it, keep it until we really need it." I said, "Besides," I said--after the lights went out

that night, after all the food was loaded, the PA system came on and they announced that twenty-five percent of the food that came onboard was unaccounted for and they wanted it coughed up. "We're going to put out all the lights in your [area]--you could return the food," [laughter] but none of it ever went back. So, the day that we're going over the side, Paul's there. He's right on my left-hand side and he said, "John, I've got the can of peaches in my pack." I say, "Very good. Maybe tonight will be the night that we'll need them." Anyway, we go over the side and we land. Within thirty seconds of landing, he was shot, right through the ribs, and killed. When I looked down at him, his eyes were all glazed and everything, just that fast. I never saw people's eyes glaze that fast, but he had gotten shot. I checked him. He'd gotten shot right through the ribs, in one side and out the other, probably took out both lungs and the heart in one shot. Well, I wanted to go back a little bit. I always find that when you read history books, they give you an account of combat, a certain campaign--nobody ever tells you how these young kids got there. I always made a point to tell them how they got there. I says, "From my own personal experience," I said, "first of all, you've got to envision fifty days on a troopship. It's enough to drive you nuts." I used to stand up on the bow all the time and hang on to the flagpole and go up and down. Sometimes, like, it was a thirty-foot drop. You'd come to within three feet of the water coming over the bow, but it would always stop. Then, we'd go up again, and then, you could see back along the keel of the ship. When the bow goes down, you could feel the screws out, vibrating the whole damn ship until they get back in the water again. "So, you spend fifty days on a troopship, which is a campaign all of its own," I said, "but, then, one of the most interesting things is, how do you get from the ship to the beach?" I said, "Everybody knows you go in a landing craft," I said, "but have you ever been fishing, deep-sea fishing, bottom fishing, and you go up and down and you get seasick?" I said, "Nobody ever mentions that." I said, "You get in this landing craft and, if you pull away from the main ship, which is, like, a steady platform out in the ocean, it doesn't even move, but you get rocking up and down, side to side and everything. Then, all the landing craft aren't filled at one time. You've got to wait for them all to get loaded and, while they're waiting to get loaded, you go out and you form what they call an orbit, out in the clear area, in-between the anchorages of the ships. You're going around at low idle. You're just about moving. You're going fast enough to get the fumes from the diesel engines. Now, you're going up and down, side to side, you've got the fumes from the diesel engines over your head, you've got the guys that are throwing up from getting seasick and you get the guys that are pooping their pants for no other reason than they're either excited or the steak and eggs that they served you about an hour ago are laying heavy on your system or something like that, see. So, you've got to picture yourself now going around, like, from three-quarters of an hour, an hour, under those conditions, up and down, smoke, puke, poop." I says, "Then, finally, somebody gives a signal, and then, the engines rev up and they get into a line. Now, you're going in and you're sort of recovering from the hardships of before. The fumes are gone, the up and down motion's gone, most of the puke's gone. So, you're recovering a little bit. Now, you hit the smoke screens that you have to go through, and then, you come out the other side. Now, you see the object of your affection, the island. So, you land there and, if you're lucky, you get up on the dry sand. Now, you've got sulfur fumes, you've got gunpowder, you've got dead bodies, which gets more intense as the days go on." I said, "These are young boys." I said, "I don't want to call them kids," I says, "because there are no kids in the Marine Corps." Like I told you before, I said, "They're all men. They know their job and that's the way they behave. After going through fifty days on the ship, through that hour-and-a-half, because it takes a while to get into the beach once you start going, too, an hour-and-a-half, like a cork, with all

kind of unpleasant odors, you land on the beach, you get more unpleasant odors, you're getting shot at, people are getting blown up in front of your face--these young men are expected to get into a line in combat and mow the enemy down and take an objective." I said, "Think about that. That's all before the fight even starts, yes, and then, you have all your equipment. You're loaded down with your helmet, your cartridge belt, your canteen, your extra magazines for the rifle, your rifle, all that crap. You're loaded down--first aid kit, gas mask. It's a real riot." I remember, after Paul got shot--in fact, before he got shot, I was standing with him. I have a picture in here I can show you. I just got it from a guy the other day, just by coincidence. He came, he gave me this picture. It's from 1945, Marine Corps files, but we landed alongside of a Japanese ship that had been run up on the beach. I think it was probably caught in the open water and probably damaged and they ran it for the beach, rather than sink. It laid over on its starboard side, about forty-five degrees, and had these old smokestacks pointing up at a forty-five-degree angle. Now, we landed just to the north of that, which would have been the starboard side of that thing. Paul and I walked up to the front and we're standing there and everybody else went up and laid on that sand pile, as you've probably seen pictures of, all the terraces of black sand, but, then, Paul gets shot. Oh, he says to me, "What are we going to do now, John?" and I said, "Well, let me check." Like I said, he was always with me. I liked him. He was a nice guy. I said, "Let me take a look up here to the north and see what's going on." I wasn't moving from my position. I just turned my head and looked. I was going to turn back to him and say, "I guess we'd better join the guys." That was what I was going to say, but, when I turned back around again, he wasn't there. I looked down and he was shot, killed right on the spot, I guess. He never got to use the code. He was, I would say a minute, max, he lived on the island, but I left from there and I got up the terrace myself, a little bit to the south of where all of our guys were. I'm nuts. I shouldn't have done it, but my theory was, I always thought, I said, "He probably got picked off by a sniper in that boat," the one I told you about. I said, "If he got him, can I be far behind?" So, I got the hell out of there and I ran up and I run smack into this gigantic concrete bunker, with a big hole in the lower left-hand side. All these dead Japanese are laying around the outside. So, I checked them, with my bayonet out on my rifle. I checked to make sure that none of them were playing possum. Then, I ran up ahead and I see this Marine laying there in the prone position. So, I went up and fell down alongside of him. "Hi, Mac;" everybody's "Mac." I said, "How you doing?" He said, "All right." I says, "Where's the frontline?" He says, "Back there about sixty yards." "Hey, what the frig?" I says. "It's back there about sixty yards." I said, "What the hell am I doing up here?" So, I work my way back and got up to the top of the terrace, but I didn't go back down again and I stayed up there until the rest of them came up. Then, it was a case of working our way across the island. In the meantime, all hell broke loose. I just termed it as "death from the sky." They were up on Suribachi, they were up on the high hills to the north and they were pouring this stuff on top of us, which was machine-guns, mortars, artillery and proximity fuses. They were shooting the proximity fuses and they were exploding above our heads. So, we had the artillery shells raining down, the individual mortar things coming down, the machine-gun fire coming down. You were lucky--it was like running in a hailstorm across an open field and trying to get to the other side without getting hit with a hailstone, which was quite impossible. I managed it. I don't know how, but I managed it. We're working our way around spider traps. Did you hear of spider traps?

SI: Yes.

JL: Fifty-gallon drums with the Nips inside?

SI: Yes.

JL: Okay. We ran into those, had to clear those.

SI: How would you do that?

JL: The guys in the back would see them when they lifted the lid, because you wouldn't see them. They'd be off the beaten path, if there was a beaten path, and they'd have them camouflaged with the shrubbery, so that they blended right in. You couldn't tell, but, when they thought that everybody has gone by, they would raise the lid. When that happened, then, all hell broke loose for them and that was the end of them. There was a couple in some trees and, later on, they got them out of the trees by bumping them with a tank. They'd hit the base of the tree and cause a resonance, which would fling them out like a slingshot, pretty good for us, not too good for them.

SI: When you hit the beach, how long had the invasion been in progress?

JL: That was it. We were the first wave. I told guys, I said, "When we got there, the beach was absolutely pristine. There wasn't a sand particle out of place, a grain. There wasn't a grain out of place. We were there." The tanks didn't come in until later, way later. I understand--I [was] just reading an article--I read *Red Blood, Black Sand*. You ever read that, by a guy named Chuck Tatum?

SI: Yes.

JL: I knew him and he was a close friend with John Basilone. We were all basically on the beach at the same time; not all in the same outfit. There's all many outfits, but everybody lands in the first wave approximately the same time. So, we had no trouble getting to the beach. We went right up, right on the sand. We didn't [have] any obstructions underneath there. So, that was a blessing, and then, we had a device called a "soup kitchen." I don't know if you know what that is.

SI: No.

JL: It's a trailer made out of, like, angle iron, like you see on a bed. It was equipped with two pneumatic wheels, big tires, with the stem coming out the front. It's about a four-feet-by-four-foot metal box, with a snug-down top on it, so [that] it's waterproof. In our particular case, we had our spare parts in there--wire rolls, batteries, radios, all that kind of stuff. It was all in there. Our orders were, when we hit the beach, the ramp goes down and me and Paul, up at the front--we were at the front, right by the ramp--we're going to grab the handle and steer it and all the guys in the back are going to push. We're going to go thirty yards inland, and then, leave it. Well, we come the hell off the ramp, and then, the wheels went in up to the hubs. It wasn't going anywhere. So, we just dropped it right there and that's all she wrote for that cart. I saw that cart

later, in pictures, of other pictures that newsmen took there, combat photographers took. I saw my cart. I call it "my cart." I saw it where somebody else had moved it. I could tell it was the one because it was right near that boat that I told you about. There's the boat, that's where we came off, there's the cart, right there.

SI: You did not have your equipment. You went on the line for thirty-seven days. Was that the moment when you could not do your repair work anymore?

JL: From the first instant, you couldn't do it, from the first instant. I never repaired a thing on the [island], never, never.

SI: You were carrying a carbine with you.

JL: A carbine, yes. Most of the communications people had carbines. They were good little rifles. They were smaller, lighter and they had much more firepower. They had twice the firepower of the M-1. You're not looking for accuracy when you're in places like that--from the hip and let it spray. Then, I was going to say another thing. The first night we were there, finally, after all that stuff goes on, all strange to us, we got in where we wanted to be, right at the foot of Motoyama #1. That was the number one airfield. There was three airfields there, in the various stages of construction. The first one was operational and we were right at the foot of that, the first airstrip of the first airfield. In fact, that's where Basilone got it, right there. They dropped the mortar practically in his dungaree pocket and got him and, like, three or four of his guys that were with him, but that's right where I dug a hole, later on in the day. They said, "Dig in for the night." So, I start digging and I'm right at this forty-five-degree hill. All of a sudden, over all the noise--and the noise, all this time, is horrendous. I didn't mention the noise, unbelievable. It's like a pyrotechnics thing, Fourth of July at the grand finale, where they keep blowing these things up. It was like that, constantly, all day long, starting in the morning, like four o'clock in the morning, when we first got up. That's all we heard going in, in the landing craft. You could hear the sixteen-inch shells going in. They sounded like a train in the sky going by, but we're on the island and I got this spot right at the end of the airfield. I'm digging a hole, and then, I hear my name being called. "Over here." I had been assigned to a hole with another guy and he already finished his hole. So, he says, "Come on over here and join me." I said to him, I said, "Are you goddamn nuts?" I said, "You're right out in the middle of the area. You're going to get yourself blown up," but, finally, I got talked into it and I went over there. About twenty minutes later, this young kid--he was a kid--he comes running over with a telephone, part of a radio. The only thing that was on that thing was about a three-inch length of wire that had been shattered, all ragged edges, and he was with two other guys. They were in the group called message center. They were a center for handling the messages and stuff like that. They had received a message and gave it to this guy, who was a runner, and he ran out to give the message to the Colonel. This, I found out all this later. These guys finished my hole, the one that I had started, and they were in there. When he came back from delivering the message, a mortar or something had landed right in that hole, blew the radio to pieces and both of the guys, made them into hamburger. When he came over, that was the first attempt that anybody wanted me to repair something. So, I took a look at that. I said, "Screw that. Nothing you can do with that thing. That's a goner." That's the way the rest of the campaign worked out, peripheral defense every night. We didn't take our shoes and socks off for thirty-seven days, nothing. We

shaved twice. Like, about the fourteenth or fifteenth day, we got orders to shave. You know why? to make it easier for the medics, in case you got hit in the face. How do you like those apples? It was no beauty contest. In fact, when the thing was over, most of the outfits had been taken off the island already, like around the 26th of March or something like that. We left the 27th of March. They marched us back from the north end of the island--we had been up there and we had been assigned the line. We were at the line they were going to hold and all that sort of stuff for the night. Me and this guy, John, we're together. We were together the whole time and we're making preparations for the night. It was getting ready for dusk and we're putting wires up, telephone wires, and we're hanging ration cans on them to rattle and stuff like that. It turns out, when it got dark, these P-51s, who had been established now on the first airfield, were taking off right over our area and we were up high. The north end of the island was all these rocky cliffs. I said to John, again, observing, I said, "These bastards," referring to the P-51s, I said, "they're going to smear us all over this goddamn rock tonight. If one of them misjudges the height of this hill," I says, "we're going to be part of the hill." I said, "If that doesn't get us, they make such noise on climb out that the Nips can come up here with a tank and we'll never hear them," one of those things. I said, "Everything is against us. We've got to be in here and hope the hell it goes right." So, it did go right, fortunately. There was no activity at all. It was a long, drawn out night. Next day, we're rounded up and we're taken down to the south end of the island. It's over, right--now, to this day, I don't know how we got to the south end of the island. I know we didn't ride, because there's no vehicles. There were some trucks on there, but they could only go in certain places. So, I assume we walked. We got down to the island--down to the southern end of the island, near Suribachi--and we were allowed to go into the cemetery. You ever see pictures of the Fifth Division cemetery on there?

SI: Yes.

JL: Very, very moving. So, we walked around in the cemetery for a while, and then, we came out, and then, the next thing was to get showered and get back on an LST, to be taken out to the troopship, to be taken back to Hawaii. We were supposed to go to Okinawa, but we were so badly shot up that we would have been ineffective. So, we were shipped back to Hawaii. We got back near Suribachi, like I said, and we went to the cemetery. Then, it came time to get cleaned up. Now, this was interesting--take off all your things that we had on, thirty-seven days. So, they were probably ripe, but there was no problem with us, because we were all thirty-seven days into it ourselves. [laughter] When they brought us back, I'll bet those guys that were back, like the cook and bakers and the guys that worked in the mail room and anybody [that] did anything but the combat, probably wondered where the hell we came from, because, at that time, we probably had a seventeen or an eighteen-day beard, dirty as goddamn all get out. We come straggling in, like a bunch of retards, and then, we start the process--clothes off, weapons off and stacked up, helmets. Everything was separated, cartridge belts and all that sort of stuff. The Seabees [US Navy Construction Battalions] had built a walkway that came from the ocean up onto the sand. It was a couple of feet off the ground, maybe about this wide, so [that] you wouldn't fall off it. They had this pipe that ran along the right-hand side with all these showerheads in. So, when you're all ready, you go up the steps at the end--I referred to it as "the gallows"--up the gallows. Then, somebody would hand you saltwater soap. You've probably heard about that, too, which wasn't worth a shit. It didn't do anything for you; then, off comes the soap. You get under the other heads with the clear water--cold saltwater. So, anything feels

good at that stage of the game, right, because the temperature wasn't too bad there. So, all of a sudden, I'm in the middle--I'm right in the clear water thing, I'm finished with the soap--and I hear all this goddamn shooting up the island a little. It wasn't too far up. Here, 350 Nips that had been bypassed came through the spot that we were the night before. If they would have come through there, we'd have been gone. We'd never have been able to take care of 350 of them, swinging swords and everything else, but they are coming down the island. They had just gone through the area where the pilots were--the P-51 pilots, they were on the west beach. We came in on the east beach. They were on the west beach and they had their tents set up. They were in there on their cots, no guards. The Nips came down through there and chopped the tents down and made mincemeat out of a lot of them, and then, came on down. They were going to go on down to the southern end of the island, but the same cooks and bakers and everybody that had nothing to do with the combat all had their rifles. In the Marine Corps, every Marine's a rifleman. You've heard that before, right? So, they formed their lines and a couple of officers took over the thing and they mowed them down, killed them. Then, you holler out your size, "Five M." That was my size. So, I got a five M skivvies and five M dungarees and boondockers, ten-and-a-half, double E. I got all those things on, and then, marched out and got on the LST, through water, after getting all cleaned up and washed, into the surf with our brand-new boondockers on. Of course, that didn't mean crap to us. We're glad to get out of there with our life.

SI: Can I go back and ask some questions?

JL: Yes, but, then, we stayed on that LST until it was loaded. They took us out to almost the same spot that we got into the LCVPs to come ashore. They anchored in almost the same spot; go ahead.

SI: You describe this awful situation where you were being fired on from both the mountains at the north and Suribachi. Suribachi ...

JL: Fell.

SI: It fell within three or four days after the initial invasion. Ra

JL: Yes, yes.

SI: What were those days like for you?

JL: Total hell, total hell. We didn't move very far from where we were. Another thing I wanted to mention, that we weren't used to, when night fell the first day, all of a sudden, the Navy started launching flares and they lit everything up. We had no night for at least five days, maybe even longer than that. I forget the exact number of days. The disadvantage of those--there's advantages and disadvantages--the advantages, you could see what was going on, but the disadvantage, you could see too much of what was going on. Anything that had a vertical vector cast a shadow and, as these flares would swing, you'd see these shadows moving around. A bush would be moving around. So, the light was just enough so [that] you could see something moving, but you didn't know what it was. That caused a lot of confusion. Then, on top of that, I

think two days later, we got one of the most horrendous rainstorms I ever was in, in my life. You just laid up there all night long, in the prone position on the first edge that was feasible. That rain just hits you and went down the hollow of your spine and ran right off your body. Then, you didn't dry out for three days. Then, as soon as I dried out, I tripped and fell into a foxhole and there was, like, four inches of water in there. So, here I go again, another three days to dry out. So, there was some expletives, like, "Goddamn it, here I go again," but I made it.

SI: It must have been difficult, if not impossible, to sleep under these conditions.

JL: Oh, it was, it was.

SI: Were you able to get any sleep during that time?

JL: They'd give you, like, four hours on and four hours off, but there was always something going on to wake you up and stuff like that. There was two men to a foxhole, for psychological reasons, and you'd understand that if you was ever there. There's nothing worse than being alone in a dark hole on a black night, not knowing who's ten feet away from you with a rifle aimed at you. So, it was morale support and you would switch off, supposedly.

SI: What about food?

JL: Food? They issued us K rations. The rations changed as the time went on. We started out with Ks, we went to Cs, and then, later on, there was what they called ten-in-ones, but we had K rations. There was a little box, like popcorn. In there, they had, I think it was, like, a little tuna fish can of cheese for breakfast. They had--no, that's wrong. They had ham and eggs, scrambled, for breakfast. Then, they had cheese for lunch, same cans, and then, for dinner, they had stew, if you want to call it stew. It was all cold. You ate it the way it was and you were glad to get it, but, early on in the campaign, I was being fired on by a machine-gun. I could see the things coming right at me and there was a hole alongside me. So, I made a dive for the hole and escaped the machine-gun, but, when I did, my helmet come around on the chinstrap, somehow, and caught me right across the front teeth. I didn't find out until months later that all four of my front teeth were cracked. There was a white line--I guess we were back in Hawaii when I found out. I look in the mirror. I was shaving or brushing my teeth or something. "What the hell is that?" and that's what it was. I tried to claim that through the VA [Veterans Administration]. They said, "You can't supply any evidence that it occurred in combat." So, my reaction was, "Where the hell do you think it occurred? How many people have four front teeth cracked?" Oh, but what I did--number one, you drank your water out of canteens and you filled your canteen from those five-gallon fuel tanks. You've seen those. They were green and they had handles on top and a spout, but those tanks had been used for fuel oil. So, the water that you used tasted like fuel oil, but that's all you had, but, then, out of the K rations came little containers of lemon powder for making lemonade. So, I used to put one of those things into my canteen. So, I put the lemonade in to camouflage the oil, so [that] it tasted more like water. Then, I got the cereal--some of them had instant cereal, like shredded wheat, only ground up finer--and, when you put water on it, it swelled. So, what I used to do, I used to have a little package of that in my dungaree pocket and, periodically--I could still do it, it's the way I did it then--put my fingers in like that and get a little load, like a steam shovel here, and shove it in my

mouth and take about three drinks of--well, I don't whether it was water, oil or lemonade or a combination of all of them. I'd swallow that and that would swell that stuff up during the day and I went like that. I must have lost fifteen, twenty pounds on that operation. My military weight was 178. When I went to PI, I went down to 168, the first half. In the second half, I came back to 178. In the first half, when they issue you the clothing, the blouse and all, it came to here, like this, and I said to the Quartermaster, "It doesn't fit." "It will." Sure enough, when I left PI, that thing buttoned with no trouble at all and the same thing with the rest of the stuff, but I think I must have lost, like I said, twenty pounds there. I was 178 and I must have been, like, 158 when I came off. We were like spiders. I'll bet there wasn't a pound of fat in the whole division. Another thing the Corps does is, they very carefully and silently weed out the people they don't want in a combat outfit. You don't even know they're missing until they're missing. You say, "What the hell happened to Charlie?" "He's not here anymore." When they get you down to where you're going to invade something, you're like a spider. Like I said, you're down to your fighting weight.

SI: Can you describe what your mindset was after five or seven days of fighting on Iwo Jima?

JL: Nothing, nothing, nothing. You sort of go into--I wouldn't say a numb mode--but you're so used to your surroundings that what happens [is], nothing bothers you. I know I was fired on many times and a puff of sand would come up right alongside you. You knew somebody took a shot, but they missed. I remember one in particular. I bent down to pick up something, like this, and the damn thing went right past my leg and my arm and put [up] a big puff of smoke. I looked and moved on. The important thing was, they missed. You sort of--you get a callousness about you. You accept things that you normally wouldn't accept. Like my oldest daughter, when I got home, she was taking her bicycle off the curb here one time and the back part of the front fender caught her under the big toe and pulled her toenail half off; well, maybe even more than half off. She came home, the wife's frantic, she's crying, the baby's crying, all that. So, I just reached down, pulled it and pulled it right the hell off. I mean, to me, that was nothing. Now, if the whole leg was hanging off, maybe that'd be different, but I saw that, too. I saw piles of bodies where they piled them up like cordwood. I think it was four, three, two and one. There was, like, ten bodies. You wouldn't actually see the bodies, you'd see the boondockers sticking out or a bunch of the hair out the other end, the heads and stuff like that. Then, trucks would come around, when it was feasible, and they'd load them into these four-by-fours. I guess you heard of them, the big military trucks. They'd load them in there and haul them away to the cemetery.

SI: Do any other memories stand out from that time, the last thirty or so days of the battle? You were slowly progressing up the island. Did anything change?

JL: One thing that stands out, about the second day, when we finally got up on the main airfield, the Motoyama #1, we came across a pile of pictures of nude women. Now, I don't know where they came from, but, to my way of thinking, that could have been a beautiful trap. Everybody stands around looking at these pictures and a machine-gun opens up and takes them all out. So, the little orders I gave, "Get the hell out of here." That's like when my second Indian Code Talker got his foot taken off. I was checking the--that's the other thing I did, checked, in the daytime, to make sure that the networks were all up and running and stuff like that. They're

sitting in this shell hole and, while I'm up on top of the shell hole, looking down in there, I see these blasts of sand coming, walking toward that shell hole. In other words, they're artillery shells. They were landing short, but they were adjusting and they were walking like a big Cyclops. I just hollered down, "Get the fuck out of that hole." I said, "There's shells coming down. They're going to be right on top of your hole within fifteen, twenty seconds." So, everybody got out but the Indian. The Indian got his foot blown off and he got discharged. I never saw him again. We had three of them with us. One of them survived and he was to our conventions a couple of times and I saw him. He just passed away lately.

SI: You still did communications work, even though you lost your equipment and Code Talker.

JL: That's what I was supposed to be doing, yes, but there was so many other things to do.

SI: Were you able to call on either air or naval gun support directly?

JL: No, other outfits did that.

SI: Was the Japanese Air Force any threat to you?

JL: They came up over a couple times. That's a hell of a feeling, too, to hear the bombs coming down. You could hear the motors. There were no jets in those days. We had no helicopters, no jets, and you could hear the planes. You'd hear the synchronization of the engine way the hell up there, and then, you could hear a bomb coming down. You don't know if it's going to hit you in the head or not. That's a hell of a feeling.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JL: Well, are you ready?

SI: Yes.

JL: Okay. Well, after we got back to Hawaii, I had an interesting little thing. Again, I was in repairs. One of the guys had an automobile radio, which was practically worthless, because you had to have a battery to operate it. So, he asked me one day if I could convert it to 110-volt operation. So, I could and I did. I returned it to him and he has it plugged in there one night or one afternoon, whenever it was, and, over that, we got the announcement that the A-bomb had been dropped. [Editor's Note: Hiroshima was the target of the first atomic raid on August 6, 1945. Nagasaki was attacked on August 9, 1945. V-J Day was declared on August 14, 1945, in the United States and August 15, 1945, in the Pacific.] We were loaded aboard ship again immediately and taken to Japan to occupy. So, we occupied the southern island of the Japanese Chain there, Kyushu, at a town called Sasebo. There was several other little towns that we occupied, also. In fact, about ten or fifteen years later, I was sitting in my parlor one day and I heard them talking about some doctor over in Fukuoka on the southern island. I said, "Oh, my god, Fukuoka." I said, "That was one of the cities that we occupied." He had trained a monkey to get dogs, or something like that, out of cages. I don't know if you ever heard of that or not, but that was his big feat. He'd send the monkey over to the cage and he'd come back with the

dog, one of those things, but the important thing was, it was a familiar thing. So, I was there for about four months, I guess. They issued us little booklets, phonetic pronunciation of Japanese words, and I did pretty good with that, too. I used to be able to go downtown and talk with the Japanese. It was fun, but, then, we came back and I was discharged in January 1946.

SI: During the occupation of Japan, did it seem odd at first to be among the Japanese after fighting them?

JL: Yes. The first wave of that doubt came over when we got to the harbor at Sasebo. The Japanese pilot came out and got on our ship to guide us through the minefield. That was the first uneasy feeling. I'm pretty sure most of the guys felt the same way, too, but he got us in all right. Eventually, when the time came, he got us out all right. Having associated with the people, my conclusion was that the average person, just like the average person in this country, is a fairly decent human being. They were just led by their warlords. Anybody who wasn't familiar with the people themselves only know them as people that were dictated to by their warlords, like Tojo and the rest of them people there, but the average Japanese person was a nice, considerate person. They had very nice customs. I was very fortunate to see their customs. I'm not saying I agree with the customs, like, women walk four paces behind the men, stuff like that. It was nice to see it actually happening, but I'm not sure, like I said, I approve of that. I wouldn't want that over here. They'd run up and open the door for you if you're going in a building. The women run up, open the door for the men, was one of those things. Again, coming back to this electronic repair business, I guess I had a pretty good reputation, because I used to be able to get things done. When we got to Japan, this one warrant officer said, "I want you to go out and see if you can do a couple of things for some of the people in the neighborhood." So, the first one was at a hospital and I went down to the hospital. They had this EKG machine that hadn't worked in years, I guess since the war was on. "Want to fix my EKG machine?" So, I did. When I left, they wanted to give me an EKG, a free EKG. I said, "Yes, all right, *lie*." That means, "No." I said, "I don't need an EKG." At the time, you're invincible. "I don't need an EKG." Then, I went another time to a convent. I kept thinking of rectory; I said, "I'd better not be in a rectory." It was a convent. They were actual Roman Catholic nuns. They had the habits on and all and they had a refrigerator that didn't work, which was out of the question. Of course, they had no AC. They had a couple of other little things in there, which I was able to take care of for them. They were very grateful and they gave me a parasol and they gave me two sets of Buddha dolls, a fan, nice things. When I got back to the base, that gunner that sent me there asked me what I got and I showed him what I got and he took the better dolls. In fact, I have the remainder of some of them in here. When I first got back, my sister saw these Buddha dolls. They're not elaborate, but they're nice. She asked if she could have them for a while and I said, "Yes, you can have them for a while." The next time I saw them, she was moving and they were on the bottom of a carton, with other things loaded on top of them. Man, I was mad, let me tell you. So, I got the parts out and put them back together again and I have them in my curio. I'll show them to you in a minute. Like I say, they're nothing to brag about, but they are nice. I got little--oh, and they gave me six sake bowls. You forget some of these things, but the Japanese experience was nice. My conclusion was that we would never have trouble with the Japanese people again and I think it's worked out.

SI: Did you only stay on that island or were you able to go up to Honshu?

JL: No, those islands, they say they're islands, but they're big. Our division stayed down below. We were something like eighteen miles from Nagasaki and I didn't go there, either. You just don't do things like that, if you've got any goddamn brains. You don't go walking into a radioactive area and say, "Oh, that's [nice]." Oh, I remember something happened, really, really pissed me off. When we got there, we were like the first ones there. We went into the docks and a couple of us were left down on the docks to look after our equipment that had been unloaded. Down there, there was a couple of Japanese men, dockworkers, and they had, on their arm, a black band or whatever it was--either white and black or black and white letters. It said, "Dockworker," in English, and it was funny. They were doing everything they could to get on the good side of us, because they found out that we had, "*cigaretto*," and, "*chocolato*," out of the rations and we'd give it to them, no problem, M&Ms, but, then, they'd go, "*Chi-chi*," tits, "*Chi-chi*," and they go, "*(Omango?)* and *bobo* [sex]." They're telling us all these things. It was kind of interesting.

SI: Were there other duties that you had on a daily basis during the occupation?

JL: It all depended on where you were. It all depended, yes. Sometimes, you'd be walking around the streets with a rifle slung over your shoulder, stuff like that. I had charge of some of the work parties. I remember one work party in particular--and the work parties were the returning Japanese soldiers. Now, the civilians, I guess I was referring to the civilians before, nice, nice people; I think their military were indoctrinated by the assholes over there, but they came back and they got a little bit obstinate. So, I had this work party and I wanted them to put a couple of boxes up in a truck. You're at a disadvantage, too. The language barrier is there. You learn some words, but you don't learn every technical word, like, "Put this box," how the hell do you say, "Box?" Who knows? I don't know, but they refused to do it. So, what do you do? So, I went in to the gunner, the same gunner that sent me to the hospital, and I said, "Gunner, I've got these four Nips out here." I said, "I wanted them to put something in the truck." I said, "They don't want to do it. What do you recommend?" He said, "Kick them in the ass." I says, "Okay." Somehow, I kicked them in the ass, and then, they put the boxes in the truck. Then, another funny thing happened. I had a box out--it was some of our stuff--wooden boxes that'd been nailed shut, and I said, "Open," wanted them to open the box. They worked and they labored and they worked and they tried to get this box open. They finally got the lid up about this far across one end. The other end was on there. So, like I said, we were spiders then, young and strong. I used to lift train wheels during the occupation duty. So, I go over and put my fingers in under the lid and one pull and ripped the frigging lid right off. That was impressive. That got me a lot of gigi points. Next time I told them, "Take the goddamn lid off," they knew that they'd either take that lid off or I'd take their lid off, one of those things. I did several things over there, which were quite impressive. Like, when we were in Hawaii, we were in a tent and I got a couple of the wiremen to run wires down the whole line of tents, ten of them, and I hooked them all up to the Sergeant Major's radio. He had a radio in his tent. Nobody else had one. So, unbeknownst to him, I went back and put a certain little network in back of his radio, so [that] he'd have to put his volume control up higher. When he did, he drove our line down there and all of our tents had music, whatever he had on. We had no control, but it's better than nothing. When we got to Japan, I found a wall clock, like what they call a school clock, with a pendulum and stuff like that. So, I converted that into an alarm clock and I put it in our little barracks. Me and another

guy, we had our own little barracks all to ourselves, our own little sleeping room. I made an alarm clock out of that thing, so [that] it'd go off every morning at seven-thirty, and that worked out well. Then, I made a phonograph pickup out of an old telephone, one of the old type, on the wall, you crank with the speaker sticking out, like you see in the '30s, over here, in the movies.

SI: Yes, the RCA symbol.

JL: Yes. So, I made that, and then, took the mouthpiece off and converted it to a pick up and a piece of wood with that head on the end, with a bag of nails on the other end for a counterweight, and it used to play the records. It was good. It was a carbon button. It wasn't so bad.

SI: The Fifth Marine Division suffered, I believe, the highest casualties of all units involved. How did that affect your individual unit? What was the process of rebuilding like in Hawaii?

JL: Everything is very silent. It just happens. You get new people in. You don't even give it a thought. "This is Charlie." "Hi, Charlie." That was it. They were in there. They weren't there before, but they're there now. Likewise, other people disappeared and you'd ask, "Where's Charlie?" "Charlie's not here anymore," and you build a crust around you. Like I said, things that normally would affect you don't affect you anymore. A case in point, one of our guys, who was a troublemaker, always in trouble with something, he went down to Hilo one time. Next thing I hear, he's in the hospital, because he's on the second floor, at a party, and did something to cause trouble and the people threw him out the window. So, about a week later, a guy comes up into the area--not Hilo, he's up into the camp area, Camp Tarawa--and he says, "Mac, hey, Mac," he said, "do you know (McAllister?)?" I says, "Yes." He says, "How is he?" I says, "Oh, he's fine." He says, "Where is he?" I says, "He's in the hospital." He says, "What's wrong with him?" I said, "Well, I think he's got a fractured skull, a broken arm and about four broken ribs." The guy said, "Jesus Christ. I didn't ask you whether he was dead," he said, "I asked you how he was," but that's the way you get. "He's okay. He's not dead."

SI: When you came back to Hawaii after Iwo Jima, roughly how many people had to come in to bring you back up to full force?

JL: We had about one-third. We lost about thirty-three percent. The whole operation lost thirty-three percent and that's a misleading figure. That is a misleading figure because they're giving the causality rate based on the entire amount of people that were on the island. If you think about it for a minute, that's not a true measurement. The people that were in the combat outfits, they're the ones you want to measure and some of them had, like, ninety-eight percent casualties. So, depending on where you were, some people had ninety-eight percent replacements, some people had fifty percent replacements, but the overall average was, like, thirty percent. We lost, basically, a whole division. We went in with three divisions and lost, basically, one of them. Oh, another thing I was going to tell you--these various little things pop up here. The technique--now, I figured this out for myself and, later, I heard other people mention it as a confirmed fact--when they decided we were going to go into Iwo, they put, assigned, three divisions, Third, Fourth and Fifth. Now, they designated that the Third Division was going to be in reserve and the Fourth and the Fifth were going to do the assault. Now, just like this tripod here, here's the Third, here is the Fifth, because we were on the left, and here was

the Fourth. Now, that's three divisions, two assault divisions, one reserve division. In the division, there were three assault regiments. We were the 26th, 27th and 28th. I was the 27th. The 26th was in reserve. The 27th and the 28th ran the assault and that's why I say I was in the first wave of the first day, see? Our 28th Regiment is the one that put the flag up on Suribachi. That was, like, the 23rd of February, something like that, but, now, in all truth, I've said this before, the flag raising at Suribachi was a non-event. To us, it was a non-event. I was up far enough north on the island by the 23rd--we'll call it the 23rd--but I was up far enough that the flagpole was about this tall.

SI: A couple of inches.

JL: Yes. The flag was a little thing, like this. You could see it flying, you knew it was up there, but it was a non-event. We had more shit going on than we could handle and it wasn't quite proper to turn around and clap because the flag went up. The thing with them people down there, they thought it was an event. They thought the war was over. They had no idea. Most of those guys in that group, they were killed before the operation was over. There were two flags. I guess you knew that, and that caused a lot of confusion, which it never should have done. There's too many smart asses involved in the chain, too quick to jump to conclusions. I'm getting tongue-tied here. It was only done because the first flag was too small and the bigger flag was ordered up. [Photographer Joe] Rosenthal just happened to be there. Everything was coincidental. In fact, even when they interrogated him about, "Did he pose the thing?" the first answer out of his mouth was, "Yes," because he thought they were talking about a different picture, the one afterwards, where they're all standing around after the flag had been raised. I don't know if you ever saw that one or not, but it showed all the guys that were in that detail, but only six of the guys actually raised the flag. When you've got twenty thousand guys in a division, six aren't very many. It's hard to get your hand on that flagpole if you're one of twenty thousand. So, that's the way it went, but it was a nice picture and it was wonderful, in fact, but, like I said, we never even knew it was taken until several weeks later.

SI: As you were going through, suffering tremendous casualties, did you always have corpsmen with you?

JL: Yes.

SI: Tell me a little bit about the relationship with the corpsmen.

JL: It was just a fine relationship, that's all. In fact, one of them was coming to our conventions after the war was over, long after the war was over. They did their job, just like the Navajos did. Well, like I said, everybody did. It depends on what little individual thing you were in. Like, one of the flag raisers was a corpsman.

SI: If you were on the line and somebody got wounded near you, would you try to do any first aid on them or did you just leave them for a corpsman?

JL: Leave them for the corpsmen, but depending, again, on the circumstances, because we all had sulfa packs on our cartridge belt. So, if it looked as though you could do something, you

would do it, but, in most cases, you were just exposing yourself to be killed, because, as soon as you stopped your motion, you were a target. [Editor's Note: Sulfonamides are a group of drugs used to kill bacteria. Powdered sulfa drugs were included in US Armed Forces first aid kits during World War II for use in preventing the infection of wounds.] Something you probably don't know is, by the time the Iwo Jima Campaign was up, we had developed a little safety feature for the corpsmen, also. We called the corpsmen, "Tallulah." We didn't call, "Corpsman," we called, "Tallulah," because the Japs can't say "L," and, if you heard, "Tah-ruh-rah," come up, then, all hell broke loose. So, that was a wise move. Now, you don't hear that mentioned too much. I just know about these things because I was there.

SI: You mentioned earlier that you had this problem with the spider traps. Were there other Japanese booby-traps or techniques that you came across that you had not been prepared for?

JL: Oh, yes. The island basically was hilly. The only area that was reasonably smooth was the one we came in on, and then, you had to get over the sand terraces to get up to that elevation, but, once you got up there, it was fairly smooth. Because of the rough area, they would take their tanks and bury them. They would dig a hole in the rocks and actually shove the tanks in there. I don't know, really, how they did that. It's not an easy feat, but they would put them in there and the only thing that would be sticking out a little bit would be the muzzle of their gun. They could blow a whole outfit away and you wouldn't even know they were there. So, that was another one and they went into the bushes and all kinds of things, any devious thing you could think of was done. You had to really watch yourself. The caves, you knew about the caves, loaded with caves.

SI: Were you involved in clearing out any caves?

JL: Oh, yes.

SI: How would you do that?

JL: Well, you'd use whatever you had at hand. The first thing you'd give them was a couple of rifle shots, and then, you'd maybe hit them with a couple of grenades, and then, you'd give them a shot of a flamethrower. If that all went well and you're still maneuvering around and you had a tank available, preferably with a blade on the front, they'd run or they'd give them a shot, maybe, of flamethrower from the tank. Then, they'd bring a bulldozer in and bulldoze the hole closed and that was like a permanent seal. There's a lot of material there when that all came caving down and closed the hole up, but they had other exits. I remember, one time, early on in the game, somebody exploded a red smoke grenade in one of the entrances and, about a half an hour later, there was red smoke coming out all along the cliff.

SI: Towards the end of the campaign--they may have done this all along as well--were you facing more and more desperate tactics, like *banzai* attacks?

JL: Well, like I said, that 350 on the last night that we were there, that was a bad one. There weren't too many other ones. They were expecting them all through the campaign, but there were very few, very few. They were waiting for us to come to them, because I understand that

the commanding Japanese general issued the orders that *banzai* was a waste of life and waste of ammo. "You wait for them to come to you." Then, their motto was to take out ten for every one of them, take out ten of us. It was interesting. I mean, one of my favorite lines when I give my lectures is, "You could get hurt there." That was sort of an offhand joke.

SI: Physically, at the end of the campaign, how would you describe yourself? You said you lost a lot of weight.

JL: Yes.

SI: I am guessing you had fatigue from not sleeping too much. What else?

JL: Well, exercise, little to eat, a lot of exertion. You're always moving, always going up hills, climbing up sheer cliffs and stuff like that, and it wasn't easy. They say "little island"--a little island, if it's about four miles long, is a hell of a big island. You get out and walk in sand for four miles and you've really done something. In fact, if you aren't in shape, you're not going to even walk those four miles.

SI: Did you ever face any shortages during the combat phase, ammo, food, anything like that?

JL: No, not even the food. The rations always managed to get to you. Oh, another interesting thing is, I jumped in another hole at another time and I found a gunnysack down in there. In the damn thing was four cans of sock-eyed salmon, which must have been used for the dogs, the devil dogs [Marine Corps K-9 units]. That was their supply. In fact, that was better than our rations, because I liked canned salmon. Well, I found those things, "Oh, my god, what a bonanza this is." So, I got it up and looped it around my cartridge belt and I carried that thing. I ate one can a day, because you have your mess gear with you and you have your fork and your spoon and your knife is all in the mess gear. So, I just kept the fork in my pocket. We had these little can openers. Did you ever see the little can openers, the little tiny thing? Later on, they called them P-38s. My daughter was in the Army and she just mentioned the other day, "P-38." To us, they were can openers. Like, later on, you hear the Marines, the ground troops, referred to as "grunts." We never had any grunts. The name wasn't invented yet, but, anyway, I opened a can of salmon, I'd knock that whole damn thing off, fifteen ounces. I'd knock that off all at one time and that would hold me for a whole day. Then, when I ran short, I resorted to my shredded wheat with the aviation fuel for liquid. It was sort of funny. Now, this guy here, this book that I told you about, the *Red Blood and Black Sand*, I told you, I know the guy that wrote it. He's out in California now, Chuck--he mentions those things. He mentions the gasoline-smelling water and all that kind of stuff. He mentioned something else, too, that I made note of, but I had never heard before, but he mentioned it.

SI: Do you think there were any other lasting effects from your time in combat?

JL: Oh, definitely, oh, definitely. I know that. I know the wife put up with a lot of shit. The main thing was the--I guess you can't even hear this, can you, if I talk too low?

SI: Do you want me to turn it off?

JL: Oh, no. I mean, it's not even recording.

SI: No, it is recording. It is a good microphone.

JL: Oh, okay. The callousness and not being overly concerned about little, insignificant things that happened and seeing things for what they were--if you saw a piece of polished brass, you knew it was polished brass and it wasn't gold, one of those things--and maybe a little bit of crude treatment of people and stuff like that. When I first went back to the RCA there, I remember some guy was giving me some bullshit one day, and I had just gone back, and I told him, I said straight, I says, "Watch yourself." He was a little bit older than I was. I said, "Watch yourself." I said, "You don't know who the hell you're dealing with." I didn't mention it to him, but I was just out of the goddamn trees. It wasn't that long. He kept up with the bullshit. So, one day, very quietly, I just went over--you ever see these big poles they use to open the windows, like in the old school days and stuff like that? There was a pole like that for opening the windows in the RCA. I went over and got that goddamn pole. I went right in and I pushed him back in the corner and I put the thing right against his chest. I said, "You bastard," I said, "you say one more goddamn word," I said, "and the end of this thing's going to be against the wall and guess how it's going to get there." Then, he continued with some more shit later on. So, I just picked him up by the goddamn collar and drug him across the floor by his heels. This was all bad shit. I shouldn't have done this, but that's what I did, anyway. That was my way of thinking in those days. I pulled him across and I took him into the boss's office and threw him right across his desk, the boss's desk. I said, "Now, tell Joe what you just told me," and he wouldn't say a word, but that's the way you are.

SI: Let me pause for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You said you got discharged in January of 1946.

JL: Very good, yes.

SI: Did they send you back to the East or were you discharged in California?

JL: It's an interesting thing--everything's interesting. They brought us back from Japan. By the way, when we went to Japan, from Hawaii, our sea bags went to the States. We went to Japan. Then, they found out their mistake, and then, by that time, I had enough points to be discharged from Japan. So, I came to the States and my sea bag went to Japan. The result was, I never saw my sea bag again, and then, I got kind of salty. You know what salty means? That means you're a member of the group now and up yours and all that sort of stuff. You weren't afraid of anybody anymore. I'm here and I guess it was about six months, I got a postcard from the Marine Corps stating that they found a sea bag, I guess down in Bainbridge, Maryland, that had my name on it. If I could identify the stuff in there, they would send it to me. So, this is enough to piss you off. So, that's just the way I reacted. I said, "Knock off the bullshit." I said, "If there's a sea bag with my name on it," I said, "it's got to be mine. Kindly forward." All they sent

me was my writing gear. They kept everything else, all my spare greens, spare khakis, dungarees, boondockers, skivvies, socks, everything. They kept it. I was fit to be tied, let me tell you, yes. I've had a lot of nice experiences, like I told you. Well, first of all, I just dropped out of the circuit after I got discharged, no Reserves, no nothing. I said, "I'm lucky I made it this far. I don't want to press my luck," one of those things. So, I just dropped out of it. In about 1995, that was fifty years later, because it all broke up in 1945, I start getting these phone calls. The wife would answer the phone and I'd hear her say, "Yes, yes, yes, yes." It was always four yeses, and then, she'd hand me the phone. Well, after the first time, I knew what was going on. The first time was this guy, Mort Caplan, the same guy I called to refresh my memory about the train ride. He's on the phone and [asked], "John?" I said, "Yes." He said, asked, "Were you in the Marines?" "Yes," and then, he'd ask the wife, "Is he there now?" and she'd say, "Yes." He says, "Can I speak with him?" and she'll say, "Yes." [laughter] That was the four yeses. So, then, he gets on the phone. He says, "Guess who this is?" I said, "I have no idea in the world who this is." So, this one particular time, he says, "Well, just think back." He said, "Who was the best-looking Marine in the Corps?" I says, "You mean there was two of us?" [laughter] That's what I said to him. He said, "Ah," and they start laughing and stuff like that. He identified himself, but he told me there was going to be a meeting in Washington at that time to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the flag raising. Since that was our outfit that did it, we were very partial to that. So, I went down there and, when I got down there, they have a reception room in there. They have these placards in the vestibule, or whatever little room it is there. They have the 26th Marines, 27th Marines, 28th Marines, and then, when you come in, you sign according to which outfit you were in and you put your room number down. I went down, I signed in on 27th and, bigger than shit, I see these other three guys. Well, two of them were in my tent in Hawaii. That's another thing. We were six guys in a tent when we first got to Hawaii from San Diego and we went through the Iwo Campaign. I only saw one of them, the guy I was a foxhole buddy with for the whole thirty-seven days, never saw the other four or I never saw any of the other guys. We were just isolated, by ourselves. We were given orders by other people. When we got back to Hawaii, went back into the same area, went back into the same tent and got my same sack back that I had before we left, six of us were in there, the same six guys. We all survived. It was amazing--probably the only tent in the whole thing that all six guys survived. So, anyway, we go to Washington, under those directions, like I told you, the flag raising anniversary, and there's three other Marines from the 27th there, of the company that I was in, and two of them were from my tent, unbelievable. I mean, I opened it, and then, I couldn't find them. I went down and I'm looking at it and I found their names on the board and I couldn't find them personally. So, I marked down their hotel room number, and their phone number and went back upstairs again, where my wife was waiting. I got on the phone and I called them. Each one I called said, "Oh, he's not here now. He's down in the lobby looking for somebody." So, I said, "Oh, they're probably down there looking for me," see. So, I said, "Well, I'll tell you what," I said, "I'm in room so-and-so." I said, "Seven o'clock, have them come over." I said, "I have a bottle here." I says, "We'll have a snort." So, seven o'clock, there comes a knock on the door and, unbelievable, when that door opened, there's these three guys I hadn't seen for fifty years. It's like ghosts out of the past. I recognized every one of them, of course, because I knew who they were. I knew who they were, but they were still like ghosts out of the past. They came in and we had a couple snorts, and then, we went downstairs and continued the business, but, from there, I found out that the division was holding yearly reunions. That year, it was going to be out in St. Louis, Missouri, during February. It's always in February. So, the

three of us had been in contact by now. So, we said, "Why don't we try to find the other three for the Missouri conference and it'll be a nice get-together?" So, we did. We found them. When we went to Missouri for that convention, all six of us and the wives sat around a table and had dinner for the first time in fifty years; unbelievable, right?

SI: Yes. I cannot believe everyone from that tent survived.

JL: Yes, they did.

SI: It is amazing.

JL: In fact, four of them are dead now. That was in 1995, but, since then, four of them have passed away. It's me and Caplan. Those are the only ones that are left.

SI: Are there any other vivid memories of your time in the service that stand out?

JL: Absolutely, but I'd rather have this thing off.

SI: Okay. [laughter] What about anything from your time on Iwo Jima?

JL: Well, the only thing I say, looking at it as a whole, a whole experience, it was the best experience of my life. Has anybody else told you that?

SI: Some.

JL: Yes. Having survived--I mean, it took a lot to get to that point--but that was good. I'd survived their disciplinary action at Parris Island, the rest of the time in the Corps. I survived two of their very stringent military schools, combat; survived the occupation duty in Japan; the long fifty-day tour on the boat, but I'm a survivor. Having done that, it's a hell of an experience. I would never trade it to anybody else, wonderful, and I've got nothing to say but top praises for the Corps. I mean, even today, these kids that go in--I just talked to my cousin's son. I don't know what that makes him--it's a nephew two times removed or something like that--but he's in currently. He was to the party for my cousin--that was his grandmother. She was eighty. He was there and we were talking and he's, I don't know, twenty-one, twenty-two, something like that. He's got about another six months to go before his four-year term is up, but he just felt the same way. He was to Afghanistan and Iraq and places like that. It's a whole new world. I mean, we established that. Even these guys I belong to the Marine Corps League with, I'm by myself. When they talk about the AK-14s [AK-47s and M-14s] and stuff like that, I have no idea what they're talking about and the different techniques. I think I insulted an officer. [laughter] We had dungarees. They were not camouflage dungarees. They were the straight herringbones. Now, we camouflaged our own underwear out in Camp Pendleton. We had all white skivvies and T-shirts and white socks. One day, we marched outside. That's the way you do things. You marched outside. You got these fifty-gallon drums, all full of water and dye, but, in the tanks, they're all black. So, it looks like you're full of water, you can't really tell, but twist dye. You put the thing up and you twist it, and then, dump it in the black dye, you take it out and you've got all kind of black spots. Then, you twist it again, you go into the green dye. We dipped it into

the black dye, the green dye and the brown dye, which I think are the same colors they have on what they call cammies. So, we're down at one of the conventions for the flag raising down in Washington, and this supply officer came over, sat down at the table I was at. He's talking and he's talking about the M-1. Now, the M-1 has long been out of use. So, I said to him, "You knew about the M-1?" [laughter] big shit. So, he said, "Yes." He said, "I know about the M-1." I said, "Do you know how to convert the M-1 from a semiautomatic to a fully automatic?" and he says, "Yes, I know how to do that." I says, "How do you do it?" He says, "You grind down the sear." I says, "Very good." I says, "That's the way you do it." So, then, he's telling me, and then, he's talking about these cammies. We didn't have those, see. They're all new to me, cammies. He put on his cammie, cammies, cammies. He kept mentioning cammie, and then, I said to him, "What do they wear when they go to bed at night, pajammies?" Oh, God, that did it. [laughter]

SI: Was he on active duty now or a more recent veteran?

JL: I think he was still in. So, he was much my junior. Oh, another thing, it's got nothing to do with World War II, but just recently--now, I told you I was sick. I had a leaking aneurysm about nine years ago. You know what an aneurysm is?

SI: Yes.

JL: Yes. Well, if you get them, they're bad enough and, if you get it repaired and it springs a leak, you're in deep shit, also. They give you about two minutes to live. This wasn't a full flow leak, but it was bad enough to where I was dead on the operating table in January. They brought me back again, but there was a lot of problems after that, too. So, that was January 28th and this convention in Washington was the 19th of February. I had paid up everything, hotel rooms and all that kind of stuff, and there's no way I'm going to [go]. Of course, I couldn't even stand up, let alone go down there. So, I sent my son, Paul. Everything's paid. I said, "Take you and your family, go down there," I said, "and enjoy yourself." So, they did. His son, who was thirteen--it was at the Marine Corps Museum in Triangle, Virginia. You ever been there?

SI: No, I have not.

JL: Okay.

SI: It just opened a couple years ago.

JL: Yes. It's a nice place.

SI: It is in Quantico.

JL: They call it Triangle, but it's basically the same place, but, anyway, they went there. It was either there or at the banquet on Saturday night. The tour to the museum's on Friday, and then, they have a banquet on Saturday. So, it was at either one of these places. T--that's T for Talon, that's my grandson, he was thirteen--he went to see General James F. Amos. You know Amos, the Commanding General Commandant of the Marine Corps? Talon went up to the

Commandant and told him that his Pop wasn't able to come down, but he had a birthday card, which I didn't know he had. My birthday's in March, right after that, see. So, he said, "I'm wondering whether you would sign this card for my Pop." So, he did. He took the card, sat down at the table and signed it. Then, my daughter-in-law took a picture of General Amos signing the card and he sent one of the coins. You ever hear of the coin thing, where the officers ...

SI: Yes. It is your unit coin. You give it to somebody as an honor.

JL: Yes. He sent me a coin. He put it in T's hand. He shook his hand and he says, "Feel that?" and T said, "Yes." He says, "You hold that." He says, "When you go home," he said, "I want you to clasp your Pop's hand just the way I'm doing yours and pass that coin to him. He'll know what it's all about." So, he did that. The little bugger came back and he passed the thing to me. I was impressed, needless to say. Then, the Commandant took notes of when my actual birthday was and sent me a correspondence on my birthday, signed by the Commandant, beautiful. There aren't too many people of my status that had that kind of honor.

SI: That is great.

JL: That all happened just this past February. I'll show you the things. They're in there.

SI: To conclude this session, after you got out of the Marine Corps, what did you see for yourself in the future? What were your immediate goals to get back into civilian life?

JL: Very good, very good question. Well, I came out, like I said, in 1946, early in '46, and things were pretty good, prosperity-wise, jobs-wise and stuff like that. The big companies gave you your job back when you were discharged and that happened to me. I had ninety days to make up my mind, whether I was going to go back into the Corps or whether I was going to get myself a job. So, I think I was, like, three days short of ninety and I finally made up my mind. I went back to the RCA and got enlisted and started back in the RCA again. They also continued your time away as countable seniority. So, I went back there with, like, over four years of seniority as a brand-new employee, basically. That helped me out later on. I was also entitled to go to school for four years, because they gave you time spent in the service plus a year. So, if you spent three years minimum in there, you're entitled to four years, but things were good. My folks were divorced and my mother was having a hard time. So, I went back to work, like I said. My mental picture was, "I'll go to work for three or four years. In the meantime, the economy's going to cool off, and then, I'll go sit in school," okay, but that never happened--best laid plans of mice and men, right? So, that didn't happen. Things continued to get better. We had a little bit of a recession around 1950, but I had enough seniority to hold me on. I couldn't dare think of giving up the job, because we were, I wouldn't say in dire straits, but we weren't all that good, either. So, I stayed on and in 1940--no, not 1940. No, I was forty-six. I forget what the hell year it was. It must have been 1950 or something.

SI: 1969?

JL: Somewhere around there, but I went over and took the examination and entrance exam at La Salle. It was in the summer and it was hot. I think it was a two-night or a three-night exam. When I got out of there, I said I had two kids, I had the house and I couldn't afford to go to work all day long, and then, go sit in school at night--tough, too tough. Besides, this is a big effect, I wasn't down at their level. The teachers are going to tell me to cut a picture out of a magazine and paste it in a book? I told them to go screw themselves. "I'm past that stage, buddy," because I had cousin, was in Drexel at the time, and I'd go out to visit him once in a while and he's busy in magazines, cutting out a picture of this, a picture of that and pasting it. I said, "Holy Christ," I said, again, "I'm past that stage."

SI: I am going to conclude for today; thank you very much. I look forward to coming back and interviewing you about your career at RCA and your later life.

JL: Okay. That'd be fine.

SI: Thank you very much, sir.

JL: Oh, you're quite welcome.

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Reviewed by Molly Graham 4/1/2014  
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/9/2014  
Reviewed by John P. Lauriello 9/9/2014