

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH TROMP

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Joseph Tromp on August 9, 2005, in East Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Mr. Tromp, thank you very much for having me here today. To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

Joseph Tromp: I was born in Brooklyn on February 3, 1926.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents, beginning with your father?

JT: Okay. My father ... came from Aruba and my mother was Puerto Rican and we grew up in the slums of Brooklyn. I went ... all through grammar school in Brooklyn, and then, when I graduated, I went to Haaren High in Manhattan, and then, the war broke out ... when I was fourteen. ... Then, when I was seventeen, I didn't want to go in the Army, so, I went down to the Marine Corps and enlisted the day before my eighteenth birthday. ... The next morning, I left. I just came home and told my mother ... that I had enlisted and I was going and I left the next morning for boot camp. ... I went to boot at Parris Island. Let's see if I can remember the [platoon]; Platoon 127. ... I went through boot and, from there, I was shipped to Camp Lejeune. [At] Camp Lejeune, I went into advanced training and, from there, ... they put us in "tent camp," and they called it tent camp, but that was at Hadnot Point in North Carolina, [Cherry Point, near Hadnot, North Carolina], and then, when we finished that, we went out to Oceanside, California. We were shipped out to California by train. We went all the way across the country and, there, ... we boarded the ship and ... it took us two months to get to Guam. ... Before that, I trained as a mortarman and a rifleman and that's what I was, [what] my trade was, and then, it took us two months to get across the Pacific, because we kept dodging the Japs. Can I use the word Jap?

SI: Go ahead.

JT: Because it's not a nice word now, but they were Japs then and, to us, they'll always be Japs. So, it took us two months to get to Guam. In the meantime, we ... shipped out to ... Pearl Harbor, and then, from Pearl Harbor, we started hopping across the Pacific and it took us two months, dodging the Jap subs, until we got to Guam, where we joined the Third Marine Division. ... We trained there for a couple of months, and then, they told us that we were going to go out [and] we were going to hit an island and they didn't tell us what island it was. They don't tell you that until ... you're there. So, ... we sailed from there in a convoy, and then, we joined A Company, the 21st Marines, Third Marine Division. We just woke up one morning and there was about five hundred ships all around us and around the island and the island was Iwo Jima and they held our division out at sea. Every night we would go out to sea and the next morning we would come back in and one morning we came back in and they were ... taking Mount Suribachi. ... You have heard of Mount Suribachi, haven't you?

SI: Yes.

JT: ... I saw the flag go up.

SI: How did that make you feel?

JT: Good, and then, the next morning we boarded the, what do you call the barges?

SI: Higgins boats?

JT: Higgins, yes, and it took us in and we got there and it dropped us off right in front of the first airfield. The first airfield had been taken by the first troops that went ashore in that first day. In the first day they landed, ... we had six thousand casualties right on the beach. The Japanese had owned that. They had twenty thousand Jap Marines there and they were dug in. They had it for twenty years, so they had it well-fortified. So, I mean, they could shoot at us from any angle, and, oh, we landed there on the beach. We had to spend the night on the beach and when I woke up the next morning, there's a big tank going over the top of us, one of our tanks, going over onto the first airfield, and then, the rest is, we advanced and we went through minefields that had been marked for us already and we went up into the caves. ... Where we were, we could see the end of the island and the Japs were bombing us and our own artillery was bombing us. We were caught right in the middle and I saw dead Japs all over the place and I saw dead Marines all over and I saw the P-47s that came in and strafed for us and we fought there for, I don't know how long we were there, but it seemed like it was forever and I remember one night, ... well, I can't explain to you, I was under fire and mortars were dropping close and you know when a mortar hits, it hits, the fire goes up, and then, it spreads out. Well, I had mortars drop next to me and they didn't do me any harm, but they killed the people around me, the guys, ... and then, I got blown up and they sent me to the back. ... This is over a period of two weeks, I think, and I got sent to the back. ... We had taken the first airfield because we needed that for the bombers that were, the B-29s, that were coming back from bombing the Japanese mainland. ... We had taken that first airfield and I saw the first B-29 coming in for a landing there, you know, it had been shot up and they had to come down to ... land. They had to have someplace to land, ... and then, we were evacuated from there. We were flown from there to Guam and on Guam, they put us aboard these hospital transports. ... We flew to Guam and we spent a couple of weeks there in the hospital, and then, they put us aboard a transport and we were going to Hawaii. ... We crossed the Pacific again and when we got to Hawaii, they separated the ambulatories and the badly wounded and the ones that were hit pretty bad. They put us aboard ship and ... they gave us the good news, we were heading for home. ... I was out there for about a year and ... when we came back I spent some time in the hospital, the naval hospital in San Francisco, and then, they put us aboard a troop train and sent us to a hospital ... closer to home, so that we could get passes to come home. I was sent to the naval hospital at Newport, Rhode Island and, from there, I was discharged to go back to duty when I was okay. They said to me, "Well, you're going back to duty," and I reported to the Philadelphia Navy Yard, after I had my thirty days leave, and, from there, I was shipped back to Camp Lejeune, again, ... and we went through training again and we were getting ready to ship out again for Japan. We were getting ready for the invasion of Japan ... when they dropped the A bomb and that ended the war. Now, after that, I didn't have enough time to get out so I was shipped to Camp Perry, Virginia, Williamsburg, Virginia, to GCMP [General Court-Martial Prisoner] camp. We guarded the GCMP prisoners. You know what a GCMP is?

SI: No.

JT: ... These guys, these are long-time prisoners and that's what we were guarding, our own prisoners, and I was a guard there. I did guard duty there. I became a company clerk and I used

to ... move prisoners from one prison to another, ... until 1946, and then, ... they sent us to Bainbridge, Maryland, for discharge and I was discharged from Bainbridge, Maryland, came home, and that's it.

SI: Would you mind if I asked you a few questions?

JT: Go ahead.

SI: You mentioned that your father came from Aruba. Did he ever tell you why he came to the United States, or anything about his life in Aruba?

JT: Oh, yes, yes. You know, when my father was born, he was born in 1894, ... life was very hard for them there. ... He went out to sea and that's how he met my mother, in Puerto Rico, and they came here ... around 1916, yes, about 1916. ...

SI: Was he in the merchant fleet?

JT: Yes, ... in the merchant fleet. Then, when the war [World War II] broke out, you know, this was during the Depression, or, rather, when I was born, just before the Depression, and I grew up in the Depression. ... During the Depression, my father worked as a cook in; ... do you know anything about Brooklyn?

SI: Not too much.

JT: Well, he worked in the hospital as a cook, and then, he left that job, because it didn't pay anything. Well, nobody was making any money then and he went to work ... as a longshoreman and he spent the war working as a longshoreman. ... As the ships came in, they cleaned them up and loaded them, or unloaded them, and they went out again. ... Then, when I came home, I came home in '45, after Iwo, when we landed in San Francisco, I came home on leave, and then, I had to go back again. ... That's my military service.

SI: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

JT: ... Pearl Harbor, I was fourteen years old. I was in school. ... I didn't even finish grammar school when Pearl Harbor was bombed. I was in junior high and ... New York was a beautiful place then. During the war, it was a great place. ...

SI: What made it so great?

JT: Everything, Broadway. Well, Broadway, ... today, it's not like it used to be. You see those pictures of the end of World War II, Broadway?

SI: Times Square.

JT: Yes. ... Ask your questions now.

SI: Do you remember anything about how the war changed Brooklyn or New York in general?

JT: Give me that again.

SI: Do you remember how the war changed your neighborhood in Brooklyn? Were there blackouts and rationing?

JT: Oh, yes, yes. We had rationing. We had blackouts. We had wardens patrolling the streets, but, to me, that didn't mean anything because I was just a kid, and I left when I was still a kid. ... The day I was eighteen, I was in the service already and, when I came back, ... a lot of the guys were gone. They had been killed, all the kids I grew up with. You know, they all, we all, went into separate services, like, ... my brother went into the Army and he went to Europe. No, first, he went to Africa, and then, he ... made the invasion on Sicily, and then, they went up the "Boot" into Italy and he got wounded ... at Anzio Beach and he was shipped back here and he was discharged. ... My brother's friend, he joined the paratroopers and he went to Africa and he was captured in Africa by the Germans and they shipped him to Italy and ... he escaped and fought with the, what do you call them?

SI: Partisans?

JT: Partisans. All during the war, he fought in Italy with the partisans and, when the Americans marched into Rome and we took Rome, he came out and left the partisans, and then, came back to the 82nd Airborne, yes, the 82nd was in Rome, too, but he joined them, but he fought in Italy for three years with the partisans. ... He's the guy that ended up in Hollywood and he was a big hero. Some of the guys that I grew up with, my one friend, one of the guys, he was in the Army and he jumped with the 101st and he was a machine gunner and, the next time I saw him, he was on crutches and they had given him the Silver Star. He was a machine gunner and the Germans were attacking and he held them off and they shot him up and the doctors told him that he would never walk again, but he did walk. So, you never know about war.

SI: Did you have any other brothers and sisters?

JT: I had a younger brother, but he was too young to go ... in the service.

SI: How did your parents react when you told them you were going into the Marine Corps?

JT: They cried. My mother cried and my father cried, but I didn't want to go in the Army, so, I went in the Marine Corps and I'm proud of it. ... You know, if I had never gone to war, I would never have known anything but the slums, but, when I went to war, when I went into the service, I saw how other people lived and I made up my mind that I wanted that and, when I came back, that was my aim, to get out of Brooklyn and have a house of my own. I got it.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about Parris Island? What was it like there?

JT: Parris Island? That's ... boot camp. You go there for three months of boot and you never leave it. You never go out on leave. You never go to the ... "slop shoot" [military slang for a

bar or tavern]. ... You march, the way you've seen boot [camp]; you ever see a boot camp picture, a movie? That's just the way it is, and nothing but training. ... Oh, I went to Parris Island in a zoot suit and they crucified me. [laughter] I was a zoot suiter; they crucified me, those guys. You're not a Rebel, are you?

SI: No.

JT: Because those Rebels, they crucified me. [laughter] They hated the Yankees. They still hate the Yankees. ... You know, when it came time to leave [the Marine Corps], if my parents ... weren't getting old and they needed me, I would have stayed in, because they offered to keep us. You know, they asked us if we wanted to stay and I said, "No, I have to go home." ... I saw how other people lived. You know, I thought that Brooklyn was the world before I left Brooklyn, but that's a big world out there.

SI: What else do you remember about the different men that you met in the service?

JT: Oh, yes. ... I met all kinds of people and I learned about other people. ... When we went to Guam and we landed on Guam, ... the first thing we were looking for was girls, ... three thousand guys that hadn't seen a woman in, it took us two months to get there, and we were out at sea all that time. ... The girls, the native girls, were beautiful. ... I wasn't lucky enough to get to Hawaii or any of those places. We just went directly out to the Pacific; so, ask your questions.

SI: You mentioned earlier that boot camp was very tough. Was it like in the movies, where the drill instructors would yell at you?

JT: Oh, yes. ...

SI: Do you remember any of that? Do you have any stories to tell about boot camp, the drill instructors, and so forth?

JT: Oh, yes. At boot camp, it was real tough. ... We'd march all day, drill all day, train all day, and then, ... we had to be in bed, we had to be in our bunks, by, the lights would go out at nine-thirty and we were up again at three-thirty. ... From three-thirty, we'd get up and we'd go out and run. We'd run for an hour in, you know, it's real fine sand there, it's all sand, and we'd run for an hour, and then, come in and get ready, get dressed, shower and go for breakfast, and then, right after breakfast, we'd come back and we'd go out and start drilling. You go out and drill, or else, you'd go on; oh, we were there two weeks and they took us on a twenty-mile hike with a full pack. ... That's all, it's not jungle, it's just swamp, and then, we went to the rifle range. ... We started on carbines, then, ... I had an M-1. I was issued an M-1. My rifle was an M-1, and then, I trained on the mortars ... and I was like a gunner on a mortar. I used to feed the mortars into the tube.

SI: What type of mortar was it?

JT: I trained on sixties and eighty-ones. ... Well, we trained on a lot of weapons. My favorite was the Thompson, Thompson submachine gun. I loved that weapon. It just fit in my arms. ...

I tell you, I fired [everything]. Then, they had the BAR, the Browning automatic [rifle], and those were the ... weapons. Oh, the carbine, I didn't like the carbine. It had no firepower and I was pretty good with a bayonet. I cut a guy's "piss cutter" [overseas cap]; we had ... our hats. We used to train with the bare bayonets and we'd practice against each other and I went like this here and I cut the guy's hat right off of his head. [laughter] He cussed me out; he cussed me out good. ...

SI: At Camp Lejeune, was it the same kind of training?

JT: No, that was advanced training. There, we went out in the field and we did go on night maneuvers and stuff, and then, we bivouacked. We lived in pup tents. You know what a pup tent is? a little tent, two to a tent.

SI: Was it difficult for you, coming from Brooklyn, to adapt to life in the military?

JT: Well, it was something absolutely new. ... I mean, it was hard, ... because they don't baby you, not in the Marine Corps. They don't baby you at all. You either make it, or you end up in trouble, and we had guys that killed themselves.

SI: Really?

JT: You [would] find them hanging out in the head; you know what the head is?

SI: Yes, a bathroom.

JT: ... [In] the Army, they call it a latrine. They'd go out there and hang themselves and we used to ... have to fight each other and it wasn't by weight, it was size, because, you see, as big as you are and as small as I am, they'd put me up against a guy like you.

SI: They would deliberately mismatch you.

JT: Yes, ... and then, the Marine Corps, their training is very hard and a lot of guys can't make it, but I remember, one time, on a twenty-mile hike, the DI; you know what a DI is?

SI: Drill instructor?

JT: Yes. ... My tongue was hanging out and the DI would look at me and say, "You little twerp. What the hell's keeping you up?" My tongue was hanging out, but I wouldn't give up, because, if you dropped, they'd just walk over you and they'd leave you there, and the ambulance comes up behind the column and picks up the guys that ... have, you know, passed out, because it's hot down there. ... I went there in February or March ... and that's winter and we had field jackets and we put the field jackets on in the morning and, by noontime, we had to take them off, because ... I was in South Carolina. It was so hot. ... You toughen up. You either get toughened up or ... a lot of guys ... were discharged from there, but I was in there [the Marine Corps] for two-and-a-half years. ... When I went in there, I weighed 155 and, when I came out of boot, I weighed 135, but I felt like a million bucks. The training was good. ... The food in

boot camp was not too good. ... If you want to eat good, you join the Navy. The Navy's got food, fresh milk, fresh eggs. We lived on dehydrated eggs and Spam for six months ... in the Pacific and we ate out of rations in the Pacific, never got a good meal until I came back to the States, and everybody eats the same, as far as the enlisted men go. I don't know what the officers do, because they don't [eat with the men].

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SI: Please, continue. You were saying that the officers and the enlisted men did not mix.

JT: No, no, no. The only time you spoke to an officer was when he spoke to you.

SI: It was very regimented.

JT: Oh, the whole thing. The NCOs, they had separate tables. An NCO is anybody from a corporal on up, and then, the staff NCOs, and then, the officers ate at separate tables. We ate in the same mess, but ... we were all separate. ...

SI: Did that loosen up when you got overseas or in combat?

JT: Oh, yes. When we got to combat, all our officers wanted to be buddies. ... You weren't allowed to salute them in combat, because that's what the Japs used to watch for. If they saw anybody saluting, they would shoot the guy that he was saluting, ... and then, you never called them, "Lieutenant," or anything like that. They all wanted to be called by their first names, because, out there, they were just as scared as the rest of us. I saw one officer crack up. He was dropping some grenades ... down a hole where the Japs were [and they] wouldn't come out, and then, they started dropping mortars on us and, all of a sudden, he got a wild look and he disappeared and [I] never saw him again. I'd seen, you know, guys [crack up], like, ... one day, we were ... sent out on patrol and we had to go down and clean some caves out and the Japs were shooting at us. ... We couldn't see them and the guy next to me, he was closer than we are here, and, all of a sudden, he grabbed his head and he pulled off his helmet and a bullet had gone through his helmet and just clipped his ear and it went out the back. That guy, I didn't see him after that. ... Then, at night, when we went back, they would take roll call and they'd call, "Joe Blow, Joe Blow, Joe Blow," and somebody would say, "Well, he didn't make it. He's dead." So, that's how they used to take roll call every night, and then, when we got into [combat], we had a buddy. Everybody had a buddy and we'd dig a foxhole and ... we'd get in that hole and we wouldn't come out of that hole until daylight.

SI: There was no moving at night.

JT: No moving at night, because they used to shoot flares all night over our heads and we'd do the same to them and, if you stood up, the Japanese had ... a way of attacking at night and we used to have machine guns in the perimeters ... for crossfire and we were able to call for, you know, mortar fire. ... They asked for volunteers for flamethrowers, because the Japs would kill those guys as fast as they got up there. The snipers would be watching for them, because they did a lot of damage, flamethrowers, they would fry those guys in their caves and they were dug

in, ... [had been] there for twenty years, so [that] they had everything zeroed in [on] the beach. This is the way the caves were and they had the guns, their heavy artillery, in the caves and they could roll it out and roll it back in and ... we bombed Iwo Jima for seventy-two days by air before we went in. They figured, "Oh, it's going to be a snap," but they didn't know that ... their guns were portable and they could roll them out, and then, roll them back in and all the [aerial] bombardment and the naval bombardment, and all of that, didn't touch them. They were dug in there for twenty years before we got there.

SI: During the time that you were in reserve, on the ships, do you remember seeing *kamikazes* attacking the fleet?

JT: ... No, no. We didn't have any *kamikazes* there. No, the *kamikazes* came in on Okinawa. They didn't have *kamikazes* in Iwo Jima. They had aerial fights. I saw aerial fights, but no [*kamikazes*]. Laying in my foxhole, ... that's what you could watch when you couldn't move. One time, we were being bombarded and I jumped into a crater and I was in there all by myself and I felt something come down and it hit me across the face, my face. It was a spent piece of shrapnel; it grazed my face, like that, but that's the only time I was caught in something like that. ... One time, I'm laying in a foxhole, not in a foxhole; I was laying under a rock, like a table, a rock was here and I had jumped under it, ... because of the fire, and a sniper had me in his sights. ... Every time I moved, he'd shoot at me and he hit the top of the rock. For a whole day, I was like that, until it got dark and I was able to get out of there.

SI: On Iwo Jima, you were a rifleman. You were not involved with the mortars at all.

JT: I was trained on the mortars, but, when we hit the beach, I was a rifleman and you learned to shoot everything. The only thing I didn't fire was the [machine gun]. I wasn't a machine gunner. ... When you opened up with a machine gun, you've got so many minutes to move, because the Japs are very good with their mortars and they would drop those mortars right in on you. ...

SI: What do you remember about the first time you were in a combat situation?

JT: What do I remember about it?

SI: Yes. Most people tell me that nothing prepares you for being in combat.

JT: Well, ... you learn under fire. Nothing can prepare you for [it]. Oh, they put you through an obstacle course. In the obstacle course, you crawl under fire and they fire live ammunition over your head. ... You're crawling on the ground and they're firing right above your head. If you raised your head, you're going to get it shot right off and you have to run the whole course and you crawl on your stomach and your elbows and your back under barbed wire and stuff like that. ... That's the only time I was under that kind of fire, but, ... one night, I was laying in the foxhole and I fell asleep and I had a dream and I dreamt that the Japs were attacking and I looked up, I could look up, and I'd see the Marines running back and forth, lobbing grenades, and, the next day, I saw that exact same thing that I had seen in my dream. I saw the Marines that were fighting up on ... the ledge and they were running back and forth, lobbing grenades, and [it was]

the exact same thing that I saw in that dream, and then, when I came home, I used to have a lot of nightmares, but every guy has that.

SI: When you were wounded, were you hit by a mortar or something else?

JT: Well, I was wounded, but I was blown up. I had a concussion. ... When I was being discharged, a guy says to me, "Do you want to put in for a pension?" I said, "No," and he says, "Well, I'm going to put you in anyway," and they gave me ten percent, because I can't hear too well now. ... The concussion broke my eardrum. ...

SI: You joined the Third Marine Division. Which unit within the Third Marine Division were you assigned to?

JT: ... The unit? Oh, I was in A Company, the 21st Marines, Third Marine Division.

SI: When you joined them, were they a unit that had already been through combat?

JT: Oh, they had been through [combat]; this was halfway across the Pacific. The war started in '41 and I didn't go in until '44. When the war started, I was fourteen years old.

SI: Had the men in your unit been at Guam and other battles?

JT: Oh, yes, yes. They had been on Guam and Saipan and Tarawa and Guadalcanal, but, you see, after a battle, ... they send you to a camp, and then, they break you up and they put you in different divisions again. ... This one guy I met, he was on Guadalcanal and those battles there in the beginning, and then, he was in Hawaii and, when they shipped out, they had broken those outfits [up] into the separate divisions, you know, they used them to train the guys coming in.

SI: What did these combat veterans teach you about what to expect or what to do?

JT: I didn't meet any veterans. I met guys ... that had landed before me and they told me ... what to expect and they would warn me about different things.

SI: Like what?

JT: What to watch out for, not to take any chances, you know. You learned fast. I knew what to expect, but, you know, when they're hitting you from all sides, ... you know, there is no set line, ... like, in World War I, they used to fight from trench-to-trench. Well, this was you're out in the open. This was all jungle stuff. When I got to ... Guam and we'd go out on a hike, you'd kick up a boot and it would be some Jap's leg in it. There was blood all over the place, and then, every night, the Japs would come over to bomb Saipan, which was the next island. They thought that Saipan was where we had all the troops, and we didn't. We took Saipan from them, and then, they moved out, see, and we were on Guam and they had so many casualties there and we came in as replacements. So, when we came in, the guys, ... they'd come around with Jap rifles and Jap bayonets and Jap stuff to trade. They were looking for food, because you never get enough food in the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps believes in keeping you lean and mean.

The meaner you get, the better they like it. So, it took me a long time to get used to [it]. I'd come home and I couldn't get used to being home. I kept wishing I was back there and some of those guys would come back to the States, I met some, and they couldn't wait to go back to the Pacific. You could call them Asiatics; so, you never know.

SI: When did that feeling go away?

JT: Does it go away?

SI: When did it go away? Does it go away?

JT: Oh, it took a long time. It took a long, long time for it to go away. Some guys that I knew still had nightmares, ... like, when I was in the Philadelphia Navy Yard and we were all shipping out again, they had some of the guys that were still having [nightmares]. ... We'd sleep in the barracks, some of the guys would still be having nightmares. ... I met this one kid, he was a runner for the colonel in his outfit and he met up with a Jap out there in the field and the Jap was going to raise his rifle and he raised his and they went at it with the bayonet and he stuck his bayonet in the Jap, and then, it got stuck in the Jap and he couldn't pull it out, so, he had to shoot it. You shoot it out, the recoil will pull it out, but that's a terrible thing. A guy's hanging on your bayonet and you've got to pull it out and, if you can't, [you shoot it off]. This kid cracked up. He did. The last time I saw him, he was in the ... Philadelphia Navy Yard. I don't know what happened to him. ...

SI: What did you do after you came out of the service?

JT: When I came out of the service? ... You know, they used to have a club they called the 52/20 [Club]. You ever hear of it?

SI: Yes.

JT: Well, most of the guys didn't do anything, but I started looking for a job right away and I got a job with the VA [Veteran's Administration], but I couldn't stand that kind of work, typing some kind of tags, and I couldn't stand that, so, I got another job in an office and I couldn't stand that, either. ... Oh, while I was in the service, my mother and father bought a place out here in Jersey and, when the war was over, they moved out here. I used to come and see them and I thought the Indians were still running wild around here. [laughter] I had my K-bar. I always had my K-bar on me. I still carried my K-bar. ... I was allowed to keep that. You know what a K-bar is?

SI: Yes, it is a knife.

JT: Yes.

SI: I have read that many veterans carried a weapon with them even after they were out of the service.

JT: Oh, yes, yes, and I always wanted to have a weapon here, but my wife says I was crazy. I'd probably shoot her. [laughter] So, I could never have a weapon, but, yes, I always wanted to. Most of the guys that I knew had guns, but I couldn't. I wasn't allowed to have one. ... We've all been here [for] so many years, you know. The kids grew up here, Sherrie Ann grew up here. When we bought this house, I had three kids, three daughters; no, I had two, Sherrie Ann and Linda, and then, we had one more, Tina, and we all grew up here, and then, we finished the upstairs. That was the kids' [space] up there. I figure, one of these days, I'm going to sell this house and become a beach bum, finish out my days and live on the beach.

SI: Is there anything that you would like to talk about further?

JT: You got any more questions? Ask away.

SI: It is interesting that you said that the Southerners crucified you for being a zoot suiter. The zoot suiters have become famous in the last few years.

JT: The last few years?

SI: Yes, in the last ten years.

JT: No, we were famous in the '40s.

SI: Yes, but there have been several movies, for instance, made about them.

JT: Oh, yes, the movies. Yes, I used to have the long hair and these padded shoulders and the peg pants. Oh, I was a teenager.

SI: Did you go to clubs where swing music was played?

JT: Oh, yes, yes. ... When I was going to high school, we saw all the Big Bands on Broadway. ... At least once a month, we would play hooky and go on down Broadway. I saw Frank Sinatra, I saw Glenn Miller, I saw them all. Even now, I have records of them.

SI: There were famous incidents in LA where the police and the zoot suiters clashed. Did you have any trouble with the police or anybody else who resented the zoot suits when you were a teenager?

JT: ... Oh, when I was a teenager? No, I didn't go for that stuff. ... All the guys that I grew up with, they're all dead now; either the cops killed them or they died of overdoses. ... I had a lot of respect for my father and I ... can honestly say, I can swear on a Bible, that I never even smoked the weed, not once. I never smoked marijuana. I didn't get mixed up with coke. I didn't get caught up in any of that stuff and, yet, the guys I grew up with, they all went into it. ... It was a way of life out there.

SI: That was something that you wanted to get away from after the war.

JT: Yes, yes. ... When I came back from the war, I was a changed person, but, even before I went in, I never did it. ... We used to go ... into Richmond when I was at Camp Perry. We'd go into Richmond, to, they called it the CO Club, and it was like a USO and you danced with the girls and ... you'd leave. When I was at Camp Perry, there was William and Mary there. William and Mary College was a girls' college and you could go and date a girl there, but you had to be investigated. They would check your background ... and they would check ... you out good before they allowed you to date one of the girls there. ... Even there, guys used to go; I knew one guy that dated this girl from William and Mary. He went through all that rigmarole and he dated her and he shacked up with her and he came back and he had the clap [laughter] and he got it from a girl from William and Mary. So, they fixed him up and he went right back to the same girl and came back with another dose. He did that three times before he learned his lesson. ... When you go out with a girl, in fact, when I came back from overseas, they put me into the; you know what a BAM is?

SI: No.

JT: A BAM was what we called the Women Marines.

SI: Oh, yes.

JT: They called them "Broad Ass Marines" and they put us in the BAM barracks. They had moved the BAMs out and, on the wall, when you went down the steps, there was a big sign, a big poster. It says, "If you have to have sex, have it with a serviceman." ... Out there at Camp Lejeune, you could go out, but there's no place to go and, one time, we went out, I was with this other Marine, and we bought a bottle of wine, but you ... couldn't drink it. So, he was with a BAM and they picked him up; you don't want to record this.

SI: Is it okay if we record it?

JT: You can delete it when you type it up.

SI: Okay.

JT: Yes, this was at Jacksonville. We bought a bottle of wine. They'll sell you the wine, but there's no bars, so, we had to go out into the boondocks, and the three of us went out in the boondocks and, pretty soon, the MPs [military police] came along and they turned the lights on us. We weren't doing anything; we were just sitting there, out there in the boondocks, drinking the wine. So, they told us to start moving. They told us the other MPs, the SPs, were coming. That's the shore patrol, and then, we had MPs that did the same thing. ... In the Marine Corps, it's very easy to get court-martialed. One time, I did ten days at hard labor in the Marine Corps. ... I was eighteen years old, so, I wanted my mother to know where I was at and I wrote it to her in Spanish and I didn't think anybody could read it. [laughter] We were fooling around in the tent and I picked up my mess gear; oh, a guy hit me, you know, fooling around and I picked up my mess gear and I threw it at him and he ran out of the tent and I go out to pick up my mess gear and there's this second lieutenant, no, first lieutenant, he was my lieutenant, and he says, "What's this?" ... He says they had picked it up, and picked my letter out, and they gave me ten

days of hard labor, cutting jungle with a machete, for writing to my mother ... where I was. They took me up before the Major and he called me a spy and he says I was a spy, you know, and he crucified me. He says, "Now, we're getting ready to go," ... the division, "so, I won't give you a general [court-martial]." If I had gotten a general, I would have been in jail for five years, but he says, "I'm going to give you a deck." He says, "I'll give you a deck court-[martial]." ... He gave me a thirty-six dollar fine and ten days in the brig, cutting jungle ... with a machete. So, that's the only brig time I ever had.

SI: Did you have any problems as a result of being accused of being a spy? Did anybody hold that against you?

JT: No. ... That's the lowest court-martial you can get. ... They used to send us out on work details, you know, and ... we lived on Spam and dehydrated potatoes for six months. So, one time, they sent us on a work detail. I wasn't there, I was in the brig, but they sent the guys out and they sent them out to the SeaBees, [CBs, construction battalions]. Now, the SeaBees lived like kings. They get everything. That's part of the Navy and they [the Marines] found some candy and they broke open some boxes and filled their pockets up with candy. Well, while they were working, they took off the jackets, their blouses, they called them. ... While they were working, this lieutenant, or whoever it was, went through all the pockets and ... any jacket that had candy, when they came back, they were court-martialed. ... When the guys came back to get their jackets, they put them on, and then, they were arrested. So, when I came out of the brig, ... every guy in my tent was put in the brig for ten days, because they had candy in their pockets. One thing about the Marine Corps, ... they always used to say the Marine uniform was "chickenshit" green. ... You know what it is to say [that] an outfit is chickenshit? ...

SI: All rules and regulations.

JT: It's just like being in Annapolis ... or West Point; everything has just got to be just so.

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

SI: This continues an interview with Mr. Joseph Tromp on August 9, 2005, in East Brunswick, New Jersey. Please, continue.

JT: In boot camp, if one guy fouled up, the whole barracks paid for it and they used to get us up at three o'clock in the morning, if one guy screwed up, and have a field day. Now, what they called a field day, you empty out the barracks, we lived in alligator huts, you empty out the whole barracks and you hosed the barracks down and you got sand from outside, with bricks, and you had to ... scrub the whole barracks, the whole floor, and then, hose it down and clean it up and bring everything back in, at three o'clock in the morning, and then, at four, four-thirty, you had to be back up and out. So, if one guy screwed up and we all had to pay for it, then, that guy was in trouble. They used to catch him in the head and beat him up, or something like that, and the DIs encouraged us to do that. ... We had to keep each other straight, because, if one guy screwed up, the whole barracks had to pay for it.

SI: How would they screw up?

JT: Screw up? like, if they sneaked out and went to the PX. We weren't allowed to go to the PX, except when they told us we could go. If they screwed up and ... sneaked out and went to the PX, then, the whole barracks had to pay for it. ... If one guy screwed up, the whole barracks had to pay, was punished.

SI: You were put into Company A just before the invasion of Iwo Jima. Were you able to form friendships and a bond with the other men before going into combat?

JT: Form ... friends?

SI: Yes, unit cohesion.

JT: ... Oh, we had a buddy system, but the only guys that I remember were the guys that I was stationed with in boot camp, or the guys that I was stationed with at Camp Perry. ... [At] Camp Perry, it was all together different, like, ... at Christmastime, they gave half the barracks time off and we had the other half. ... We used to go into town and buy beer and wine and bring it into the barracks, because there was just us, and, one time, one Christmas, we went into town and brought back beer and wine and the guys that were coming in, ... we were drinking there and that's the one time that I got drunk. Oh, one ... other time I got drunk, on Guam; they gave us a month's ration of beer, which was a case. Each guy had a case of beer, and that's hot beer that was laying out in the sun all day, and that's the first time in my life that I got drunk and I remember hanging on to a coconut tree. I was puking my guts out and, the next thing I knew, it was daylight and I woke up and my beer was gone. They drank my beer and drank everybody else's beer and they're all drunk. That's the one day that whole company street, it wasn't a street, ... we're out in the middle of the jungle, ... they were all drunk, and that's the only time they gave it to us, because they usually give you two bottles of beer at a time, but, this time, they gave us a whole case of beer each. I guess they knew that we were going to go on; ... they gave us that because we were getting ready to go ... to Iwo Jima. ... Then, when ... we were being evacuated, they flew us off of Iwo Jima and we got on the plane and some of the guys were bleeding, but these guys, ... what do you call them? transport pilots, Air Transport [Command], they pulled out a couple of bottles and they passed them around to the guys that were on the plane. ... Whenever there was a big show, or like the USO used to come, or the Red Cross used to come, they had parties; that was only for officers, no enlisted men. So, there's a lot of class discrimination in the Marine Corps, like, I wasn't allowed to be buddy-buddies with [an NCO]. ... I was friends with a guy that was a sergeant and, one day, I called him by his, I forget what his name was; let's say Harry. I says, "Hey, Harry," and the company commander heard that and he went out over there and raised hell with that guy, and then, he had to come over to me and say, "From now on, you call me, 'Sergeant.' You don't call me, 'Harry,'" and they had separate tables, like, [for] the NCOs, all non-commissioned officers, but, if you were a corporal, you ate at a certain table, or a sergeant and staff sergeants, and then, the officers. They had waiters and we had to wait on them. I was never on that [duty], but that's the way it was. ... The Marine Corps is very class-conscious and even the black Marines, they had black Marines, but they were in a separate camp and they were never allowed to fight on the frontlines. They only used them for labor. Now, it's all together different. Now, there is no class; I mean, they aren't in a separate camp, the black Marines.

SI: Did you ever talk with any black Marines or get to know any of them?

JT: No, no. ... I saw them, but I never ... knew them, never knew any. I see them now, but I didn't know them then.

SI: Were most Marines Southerners or was it a mix of men from all over?

JT: What, in the Marine Corps?

SI: Yes, of the men you knew.

JT: The meanest ones were the Southerners. They're just born mean. You're not no Southerner, are you? [laughter]

SI: No.

JT: You don't sound like one. Yes, they're just naturally born mean.

SI: You mentioned that the Southerners crucified you for being a zoot suiter. What did they do to you?

JT: What?

SI: When they found out that you were a zoot suiter.

JT: Oh, when I went there with a zoot suit? They danced around me. [laughter] The DIs kept walking around, the drill instructors. ... That's me and they kept walking around, inspecting my zoot suit and my long hair and talking about me, and a guy says, "Will you look at that?" and they were all Southerners. "Will you look at that and look at that," and I said, "Oh, man." ... That's the last time I wore a zoot suit, never wore a zoot suit again. ... When I got out, I was more conservative. [laughter] ... Yes, in fact, a couple of years ago, I went to visit this doctor I was working with at Squibb, who is living in Virginia now, and ... my daughter and I ... were looking for antiques and we went to this shop and the guy still refers to me as that. He says to me, "You damned Yankees, you damned Yankees," and I wasn't going to call him a Rebel, but I did. I says, "Okay, Reb." They're still fighting the Civil War there.

SI: At any other time in the Marines, did you have any problems because you were from the North?

JT: Oh, yes.

SI: Perhaps because you were part Hispanic.

JT: No, no, no. ... You were either a Yankee or you were a Southerner, a Southern gentleman, but ... I went with a bunch of guys from Brooklyn to there and they hated us. They didn't hate us, they just tore us apart, but we were buddies by the end of boot camp.

SI: We skipped over your career. You said that you worked in an office and could not stand it. Did you go to Squibb from there?

JT: No. I came out to Jersey and I got a job ... on Jersey Avenue [in New Brunswick] in a factory, and then, I worked there for a couple of years, and then, ... my sister got a job at Squibb. ... Her husband was working with me ... in Triangle Cable and he got a job at Squibb. ... My brother got a job at Squibb. ... This was during the Korean War and my brother wanted to; ... if you wanted another job, you could bid for it, and they told him if he wanted another job, he had to bring in his own replacement. So, my brother says to me, "Why don't you come and work at Squibb?" I said, "Oh, okay." ... So, I went there and I worked there for forty years, forty years, until 1990. In 1990, Bristol Myers bought Squibb and, by then, I was a professional and they called us in one day and I was working at Squibbmark now. They called us in one day and they said, "We own you guys now. We own you and we don't need you." They closed the plant. We had started a new plant and they called us in and they said, "We don't need you guys anymore." They said, "That's it, don't even go back to the plant, don't even go back." So, the guy that was the plant manager, he says to me, "Joe, you come with me." He says, "I'm taking you because I know you." I broke him in when he came in to work at Squibb on the lines and he was plant manager by then and he says to me, "I want you as a personnel manager," and he says to me, "You come with me." He says, "What do you want to do, Joe?" I said, "Well, I'm sixty-four-and-a-half. I might as well retire." He says, "Okay," and he says, "Here, here's a package for you," and they gave me all my medical, ... they gave me everything. I got all my medical insurance for life. I got all my medicines for life. I got two pensions. I get one pension from being a professional and one from being an hourly [employee] and they gave me eighty-three thousand dollars severance pay. So, here I am; I don't have to work. All my hospital bills are paid. I have insurance for that. I've got ... United Health Care and I've got Medicare, not Medicaid, Medicare, which I pay for, but that's all I pay for. ...

SI: Have you used the VA at all? What do you think of the VA?

JT: The VA? I've never been to the VA. ... They send me a pension and I still have it, but ... they never called me in and I've never been there. I belong to the DAV.

SI: How long have you been in the DAV? Did you join right after the war?

JT: ... You know what DAV stands for?

SI: Disabled American Veterans.

JT: Yes, and there's one right over here, around the corner here, on Cranbury Road, and they come and I give them my dues and I have my card and that's it. ...

SI: Is there anything we skipped or anything you would like to talk about further?

JT: No, no. I think ... you got it all. Do you have any questions?

SI: I think you covered everything. Did you receive the Purple Heart for your wounds?

JT: I got the Purple Heart. I didn't get the Purple Heart. They never sent it to me, but I had a ribbon.

SI: Did you receive any other awards or decorations?

JT: Well, just the Pacific Theater [Medal and Ribbon]. No, I didn't get the Silver Star or any of those, although I met guys [with them]. I met a guy that was sixteen years old and he had ... won the Navy Cross already.

SI: Do you stay in touch with anybody that you served with?

JT: Have I kept in touch? In the beginning, I had a guy from Boston that I used to meet, not meet him, used to write to him. His father was a detective up in Boston and I met another guy, he lived in Washington, DC, and we always said we were going to get together, but, you know, they went on to college and I never did. I was too busy trying to make a buck. ... We bought this house in '54. In '54, I bought it under the GI [Bill] and it cost me eleven-five and I could get three hundred thousand for it today. ...

SI: It is a very nice house. Is there anything else you would like to put on the record?

JT: That's it?

SI: Yes.

JT: Okay.

SI: Thank you very much.

JT: Okay.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 9/26/05
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 9/30/05
Reviewed by Joseph Tromp 10/13/05