

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES T. WELLS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. James T. Wells on April 23, 2004, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Spencer Scheffling: Spencer Scheffling.

SI: Mr. Wells, thank you very much coming to Rutgers today.

James Wells: I'm glad to be here.

SI: You have traveled a long way.

JW: Three hours, not too bad. [laughter]

SS: To begin, where were your parents originally from?

JW: My father was from Kentucky and my mother from New York City.

SS: Did either of them have any immigration history?

JW: No. ... My father's family came to Virginia in 1630 and I have all that genealogy ... in my papers, which I'm very proud to have.

SS: Do you know what both of your parents did for a living?

JW: Yes, my mother worked for a magazine called *Vanity Fair*, I don't know whether you've ever heard of it or not. ... He worked for the Westinghouse Corporation.

SI: How did he make his way to this area from Kentucky?

JW: Well, he went to World War I. First, he went to Washington, DC, to go to school there, to a place called (Bliss?) Engineering School, and, when he was there, he signed up with the Army Reserve, ... make a little money on the side, and, the next thing he knew, Woodrow Wilson declared war and off he went to France. [laughter]

SS: Which branch of the service did he serve in?

JW: He was in the Army.

SS: Did either of your parents go to college?

JW: Only what I mentioned, ... he went to an engineering school in Washington, DC. ...

SI: Did he ever talk about his experiences in France?

JW: Oh, yes, yes, quite frequently.

SI: What were some of the stories he would tell you?

JW: Well, ... the only thing I really remember was that he was in a hospital in France, in Paris, when the Germans started to bomb it, *via* artillery, and he got up and put on his clothes and said, "I'm getting out of here," and they tried to stop him and he wouldn't stop, got out, but he didn't have a tough time of it, as far as I can tell.

SI: Was he in the trenches?

JW: No, he was in the Quartermaster [Corps].

SS: Were your parents religious?

JW: Religious? Well, we went to church.

SS: Which denomination were they?

JW: Presbyterian. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: What did your mother tell you about her work at *Vanity Fair*?

JW: ... I remember her telling me that Robert Benchley, Dorothy Parker and Robert Sherwood worked there and she was awfully interested in them.

SI: What did she do at *Vanity Fair*?

JW: She was a secretary and one of those three persons got fired [Dorothy Parker] and the other two walked out in protest. She remembers them walking out the door.

SI: Did she work there before you were born?

JW: Yes, yes. I was born in the Bronx. They were living there then.

SS: How long did your family stay in New York?

JW: Oh, not very long, because they then moved to Philadelphia, where he was the vice-president of the Popsicle Company; remember Popsicles? [laughter] and then, we moved to New Jersey, because he got a job with Westinghouse in Newark.

SI: Was he involved in engineering during this entire time?

JW: Yes, yes, he was.

SI: You mentioned that he had some college-level training, but was he mostly self-educated?

JW: I would say so, yes. The school he went to was an engineering school in Washington and I don't think they had any liberal arts. No, he was self-educated, primarily.

SS: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

JW: No.

SS: You are an only child.

JW: That's the trouble, [laughter] made me think I was the most important person in the world and that's not good. [laughter]

SS: What was your neighborhood like as a child and teenager?

JW: It was quite rural, as a matter-of-fact. There were fields and streams where I used to go fishing. It was a very pleasant neighborhood. It's not anymore. I came through Rahway on the way up. I wouldn't recognize the place. [laughter]

SS: Was your neighborhood ethnically diverse?

JW: I would say so, yes. ... A good friend of mine was graduated from Rutgers. His name was Charles Sloca, you ever hear of him? His mother and father came from Russia, Ruthenia, [western Ukraine], you ever hear of that? I never did and he said ... he didn't really speak English at all until he went out on the streets and learned it from people on the street. I remember him making a speech one time, in about eighth grade or something, he kept [saying], "Dees, does and youse guys." Now, he was ... a president of a college later on in his life. He did very well and I correspond with him, which is very pleasant, and another friend was William Hasbrouck. He graduated here, *in absentia*, in 1943 and he ... died a few years ago, young.

SS: Do you remember how the Great Depression affected your family?

JW: Yes, I do. First thing I remember is that my father had to take a salary cut, which was almost devastating. Everybody took salary cuts, and then, I remember, vividly, being down in the town of Rahway with my father ... when Roosevelt closed the banking system, remember? You don't remember [laughter] and he met a friend of his who tried to get money out of his bank and couldn't, because they were closed, obviously, and so, my father loaned him some money, to get by for a week or so, and ... he was able to do that because he had his own expense account.

SI: He never lost his job.

JW: He never lost his job. No, he retired from that at sixty-five.

SI: Did your mother ever work outside of the home after you were born?

JW: ... Not until World War II came along. She then had a job in some aircraft factory somewhere, in charge of their tool shop, and then, after that, she was a demonstrator of washing machines and dryers for Westinghouse, but, no, not in my early life; she did not.

SS: Do you remember what kind of impact the Depression had on your neighborhood?

JW: Not in any vivid manner, no. I can't remember.

SS: Which grammar schools did you go to?

JW: The ones in Rahway, yes, and the high school. I graduated in 1939.

SI: What were your favorite subjects in school?

JW: Well, I liked English and history, but I was not a good student.

SI: Were you involved in sports or other activities in high school?

JW: I didn't do sports ... there, at the high school. I was more interested in going to dances and meeting pretty, young girls and there were lots of them.

SS: Did you have jobs during high school? Did you work a lot?

JW: I had jobs, yes. I worked at the Mosquito Extermination Commission, Union County, and I made about eighteen or nineteen dollars a week, which I was very happy to get.

SI: What did you do there?

JW: ... We carried tanks of oil on our backs, with a squirt apparatus, and I went around, just killed mosquitoes ... in their pools of water, fascinating job. [laughter]

SS: Do you remember what your family thought of FDR and the New Deal?

JW: My father hated him. I think all businessmen did, at that time, for some reason or other. I thought he was wonderful myself and my mother was fascinated by him. She thought he was the best man that ever lived and I agreed with her. I wish we had ... someone like that now. Of course, you like Bush a lot.

SS: Well, my family is Republican, so, I lean that way a little. [laughter] Was your family Republican or Democrat?

JW: Democrat, yes.

SS: Did your parents hope that you would eventually go to college or was it more of an expectation?

JW: I think it was a hope, yes. ... I had been such a poor student in the high school down there that I had to go to prep school, over here at the Rutgers Prep School. [Is] it still there?

SI: Yes, but it is further down on Easton Avenue.

JW: Yes. So, I went there ... and I was admitted into Rutgers in 1940. ... I remember, very well, the headmaster's name was Stanley Shepard, [Jr.], and he went across the street and talked to the dean of admissions, whose name, curiously, was Martin Luther, not Luther Martin, Martin Luther, and I was in and I was very grateful to him for that.

SI: You spent that year, 1939 to 1940, in prep school.

JW: Prep school, yes.

SI: What was the prep school like?

JW: It was a very nice school ... and they had very good masters. I enjoyed the whole experience.

SI: Was it a mix of "better off" and middle-class kids?

JW: I'd say "better off" and middle-class, yes, yes.

SI: Did most of the prep school students at that time go on to Rutgers?

JW: No, they didn't. As a whole, I think, ... some of them did, of course, but most of them went elsewhere. ... I haven't kept track of them. That's a little bit too far back.

SS: Did you live in New Brunswick while in prep school?

JW: Yes, I lived ... right down Easton Avenue, did you say?

SI: Yes, now it is on Easton Avenue. From what I remember, I believe that Rutgers Prep was located over here on the corner of Hamilton Avenue and George Street then.

JW: I think so. I think I went past it on the way in, yes, and I played football and basketball and baseball, all of which I enjoyed a lot. I was very good on athletics. I can even remember some of the coaches' names, but not right now. [laughter]

SI: In that time, did you start to build a relationship with Rutgers? Did you visit the campus or go to the sporting events?

JW: Yes, yes. I used to work parking cars at the football stadium, for which I earned two dollars, on a Saturday, and, with that two dollars, I could get a date at NJC, as it was then known, and take a young woman out to a movie and go to a place called the CT. ...

SI: The Corner Tavern.

JW: Corner Tavern. Oh, my God, is that still there?

SI: Yes.

JW: ... A glass of beer, at that time, was ten cents, I think, and a movie was a quarter. So, I ... could have a good time on two dollars and I married one of those girls. [laughter]

SS: Did you work while you were going to Rutgers?

JW: No, I did not. Well, what I did, I worked in a camp in Maine in the summers, if you call that a job.

SI: What kind of camp was it?

JW: Well, it was a boys camp, up in Bridgeton, Maine, on a lake called Long Lake, and it was run by a graduate of Rutgers whose name was George Kramer. He'd been ... quite a well put together man who played football here.

SI: Had you done much traveling before going to Rutgers?

JW: Well, we used to travel to Kentucky to see my grandfather. He had a tobacco farm there and I always enjoyed the farm a lot, because there were cows and horses and chickens, lots of fields to roam around and I could go hunting and shoot rabbits, which I regret, but that was about a thousand-mile trip in a car. In those days, that was a long trip. It took us three days to get there. I remember, there were no bridges over the rivers. We had to go across the Ohio River in a flat boat of some sort, a barge, but that's about the extent of the traveling that I did, other than going up to Maine to this camp.

SI: What differences could you see between Rahway, New Jersey, in the 1920s and 1930s, and Kentucky?

JW: Kentucky, in the '20s and '30s, did not have electricity. They didn't get that until ... some government project down there.

SI: The Tennessee Valley Authority?

JW: Tennessee, TVA, that's right, thank you, and they finally got electricity and telephones. That was a great transformation for them.

SS: You majored in journalism, correct?

JW: I did.

SS: How did you decide on that?

JW: Well, I liked to write and I thought that would be an interesting occupation ... to be in and I thought that up until, ... one time, the journalism professor announced, in class, that the *Rahway Record* was looking for somebody to come down and be a reporter intern and I went down and they gave me a job. Mostly, it was rewrite, but, from time-to-time, I would go out on stories and I met a reporter from the *Elizabeth Daily Journal* and I said, "How do you like being a journalist?" He said, "Oh, it's wonderful. I make fifty-five dollars a week."

SS: That was a lot back then, right?

JW: Yes, but, ... right then, I said, "That's not for me. I'm going to get into something a little bit more munificent."

SI: What kind of stories did you cover?

JW: Anything, local stories. A man ... had carved a statue out of a stump of a tree and I wrote that up and got a by-line for it, which was the first by-line recognition I ever got for writing, and I liked that a lot. I enjoyed writing.

SS: How did you decide to pledge Delta Phi?

JW: I had ... a friend who was a member, a brother, and he was from Rahway. His family ran a flower farm, florist, there, and he invited me over for dinner one night and it went from there.

SS: Was that in your freshman year?

JW: Yes.

SS: Did you pledge the first or second semester freshman year?

JW: I'm not sure. It probably was the second semester.

SS: How did the fraternity benefit your college experience?

JW: Not very much. Well, I liked meeting the other men who were there and I remember one fellow, whose name I cannot remember, who took a test, an examination, one time, and he kept going like this, [sticking his head] into his coat, and ... the professor stopped. He went back and said, "What do you got in your coat there?" and it was a Tom Collins. He was drinking Tom Collins out of a straw. [laughter] ... By and large, I would say they were all well-rounded young men and it was enjoyable being with them.

SI: I get the impression that the fraternities were the moving force on campus in those days. They controlled many of the social activities.

JW: I think they did, yes. I did not like the, what did they call it, when they got new members and they put them through some sort of ordeal?

SS: Hazing.

JW: Hazing, yes. I didn't partake in that. I didn't want to.

SI: Were most of the Delta Phi brothers involved in one particular thing, like the *Targum* or an athletic team?

JW: Yes, one of the members was an editor of the *Targum*, Anthony Antin, ... or Antinozzi. He changed it to Antin; you ever hear of him?

SI: Yes.

JW: Yes, they were ... very active in all sorts of activities, a good bunch of young men, and I'm sure they all made out well in life.

SI: Like you said earlier, NJC played a big part in your social life at Rutgers.

JW: Yes, yes, yes. I met quite a few young women over there, one of whom later married the governor of New Jersey, Hughes, Richard Hughes, and then, I met my wife-to-be over there, but we didn't get married until after the war.

SS: How did you first meet your wife?

JW: A blind date. ... We went to some[place], used to be called the Clay Pits, around here somewhere, went over there for a picnic of some sort and I was sitting in the front seat of the car with her and she asked me who I was and what year I was in college and I said, "I'm in my freshman [year]." She said, "Oh, you look like a senior," and so, I admired her very much for that. [laughter]

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your journalism classes? I am always interested in that. I have heard a lot about Professor Jennings.

JW: Yes, Jennings. Who was the other fellow? ... Well, whatever it was, I liked it very much and I scored a huge score one day, because my wife was then working, ... we were married when I was still going to college, and she was working at BBC in New York and there was a program that she had something to do with ... and she got me an interview with one of the ... participants in this quiz program and that created quite a stir, when I brought back that interview. I'll think of his name tonight and I'll call you. [laughter]

SS: Was your future wife active in any campus organizations?

JW: Yes, she was. She sang in the choir and she was in the Honor Society and she was an actress. She always wanted to be an actress and she was; ... after we were married, she did a lot of acting and she appeared in quite a few productions, over there and over here, yes.

SS: Do you remember your first impression of her family?

JW: I thought they were a nice New Jersey couple. [laughter] He worked at Public Service.

SI: Were you involved in any other social activities? Were you in the choir or anything like that?

JW: No, I was not; I did not join things in those days, before the war or after the war. No, I did not. I was not a joiner.

SS: Did you think that the campus was generally conscious of the war before the attack on Pearl Harbor?

JW: Very much so, very much so, yes. I remember talking to several senior men at that time and they were furious that ... this country seemed to be tending in the direction of a war in Europe, yes.

SI: Was there a general pro-isolationist feeling or was it just a few people?

JW: Just a few. I don't think they were isolationists, no. ... Most of the men I knew were quite eager to go into the service. I don't know why, but they were. Well, a lot of people were like that in those days. They were very patriotic, ... especially against Hitler. Of course, the Japanese attacked us, as we all know. That changed a lot of minds.

SS: Do you remember where you were when you first heard about the attack?

JW: Yes. I was in that chapel, [Kirkpatrick Chapel], right across the [street]. ... It was a requirement to go to chapel so many times a month and, on December 7th, Norman Thomas was speaking there and I wanted to listen to what he had to say and he spoke that day, I remember clearly, about the necessity for this country to stay out of ... that war and we came out of the chapel, got in the car, turned on the radio and there was the news of Pearl Harbor.

SS: What was your immediate reaction?

JW: I was mad. I was not glad.

SI: Before that, had you thought that you might have to serve in the military? I know there was a draft on then.

JW: There was a draft on, yes, and I supposed that, ... one day, I would be drafted, but that didn't bother me very much. I would have gone gladly.

SI: What did you know about what was going on in Europe and Asia before that day?

JW: I knew that ... the Germans were persecuting the Jews. I knew nothing about Asia. The first time I was really cognizant of what Japan was was at Pearl Harbor. I couldn't believe that

they would be stupid enough to attack the United States, but they were and that was their downfall.

SI: Was there a lot of paranoia in the area right after Pearl Harbor?

JW: Paranoia? I would say anger, yes, and a desire to get even, quickly, and everybody ... that I knew was a New Dealer at heart and they thought Franklin Roosevelt was the best thing that had happened to this country since Abraham Lincoln or Thomas Jefferson. He was adored by many people, a lot of people. Anything he did was [great] and he did a lot of wonderful things. ... I still think that he was the best president we've ever had. No, there was no ... paranoia, but there was anger.

SI: Did you notice any Civil Defense activities soon after?

JW: Yes, yes, there were. There were what they called air raid wardens, volunteers who would go sit in ... the steeples of chapels or churches and watch for German planes. How they expected them to fly here, I don't know, but there were, yes, ... air raid wardens. Mother worked for Bundles for Britain, I remember that very well. It was a very upscale and patriotic time.

SI: How soon did the war start affecting your life, in terms of rationing and things like that?

JW: Immediately, but I don't remember any incidents of rationing. I was here in college at the time, so, ... I wasn't aware. ... I know there was gas rationing, but that was about it.

SI: Were activities cancelled or curtailed at Rutgers as a result of the war?

JW: No, I think everything went on as usual, as far as I can remember, and you'll have to realize that that was a long time ago.

SI: Within your fraternity, were people saying, "We should run down to the recruiting office right now," or, "Let's wait and see where events take us?"

JW: I don't think there was any great rush. People, the men that I knew, wanted to finish up, get their degrees, and then, enlist, if they had to, or be drafted, if they would be, but, no, there was no rush to the colors, that I remember.

SI: Did the administration try to guide you in what to do?

JW: Well, I remember a couple of talks by then President Clothier. He had been in World War I and I remember one remark. ... He was telling us about his experiences and he said, "This must seem like the Peloponnesian War to you," and it did. World War I was way back. You remember Robert Clothier? You ever hear of him?

SS: Yes. I have read plenty about him in the other interviews.

JW: Have you? A nice man.

SI: One of the dormitories by our office is named after him.

JW: Is it?

SI: I think it is the largest freshman dormitory. ...

SS: Do you remember anything about Dean Metzger?

JW: Oh, yes, I remember Dean Metzger very well, because, when I went up to leave college, to join the Marines Corps, he cried, yes.

SS: I have heard that he was not as popular as President Clothier.

JW: I didn't know that, no. I was very touched by his emotion at that time.

SS: How long did you remain at Rutgers before you decided to enlist?

JW: Well, I finally enlisted on the 9th of October in 1942 and the reason I did it was because I saw a movie called *Wake Island* and I ... read, later, that there was a great upsurge in the Marine Corps enlistments after that movie came out and that's why I did it. I looked at that movie and say, "Boy, I've got to get in that outfit. That seems wonderful."

SI: Was it the mystique of the Marine or anger?

JW: It was the mystique of the Marine Corps, yes, and they have a hell of a mystique.

SS: Did you enlist with any friends?

JW: I went down with a friend of mine, who was not in college. ... He didn't pass the physical, and so, there I was, off by myself, yes. I think I went to a recruitment office in Perth Amboy, of all places, but I was not sworn in until a later date, in New York City, just before we took a train down to Parris Island.

SS: How did your family feel about you joining the Marine Corps?

JW: My father was very emotionally upset. He cried and he said, "I hope you know what you're doing. I hope you know what you're getting into," and I said, "Oh, sure, I know what I'm doing," but I didn't; of course I didn't. My mother, ... she was always a very cool lady, she didn't seem to get very upset about it. I think she was glad. Why, I don't know, but I think she was.

SI: When did your mother start working in the tool shop?

JW: I'd say about 1944, don't quote me on that, though.

SI: After you went into the service?

JW: Yes, after I went into the service. She might have thought that she had to do her bit.

SS: How did Nancy react? You had been dating her for a while before you joined the Marine Corps.

JW: Yes. ... Her father had been a Marine in World War I and her brother was about to enlist in the Marine Corps. ... I think she was sorry to see me go, but there wasn't anything that could be done at that point. I was signed up and on my way. She didn't react in any visible way that I can recall.

SS: Was it difficult to leave college or were you excited to get into the service?

JW: I was glad to get out [laughter] and do something new. I remember, just before I enlisted, I was sitting in a class, ... a history class, and we were about to start studying Mayan Civilization, I think that's in South America, and I said to myself, "What am I doing here, studying about the Mayan Civilization? The whole world is going up in flames. It's ridiculous." So, I decided to get out.

SI: I have heard other interviewees say that if you were not in the service, you would be picked on or singled out. Did you experience that before you enlisted?

JW: Yes, a little bit. Once, ... at the Corner Tavern, which you tell me is still here, I went into the men's room and I was standing next to a soldier and talking to him and he said, "How come you're not in uniform?" and I said, "Well, I'll soon be," but I don't think there was ... any derision of civilians who weren't in uniform, on any scale.

SS: You then took a train down to basic training at Parris Island.

JW: Yes, I did.

SS: Did you think that you were prepared for the challenge? Was it shocking for you?

JW: It was shocking, because, when we got off, at a place called Beaufort, South Carolina, there were some enlisted men there to greet us. They were drill instructors and they greeted us with all sorts of obscenities. I remember, specifically, they had some trucks there for us to jump up on and they called us, "Get up on those trucks, you shit birds;" [laughter] what a greeting.

SS: Kind of a rude awakening.

JW: Yes. It was a rude place.

SI: What was your time at Parris Island like, particularly the first few weeks?

JW: Well, it's tough getting used to military conduct and drill and all that, but I've always remembered it as a fairly pleasant experience.

SI: Were you there in the winter or the summer?

JW: Summer.

SI: I have heard that it was pretty inhospitable.

JW: It gets pretty hot. It is; inhospitable is hardly the word. I wonder what happened to all those men I was with. Probably, a lot of them got killed, I'm sure of it, and I would have been killed had I not been lucky enough to be selected for officer training and ... that was just a quirk. I happened to be standing on the end of the line of a squad, because I was the tallest, and a captain ... came up and asked me ... what kind of education I'd had and I said, "Three years of college," and they took my name. The next thing I knew, I was having a physical examination and they found out that I had second-degree flat feet. He said, "But I'm going to pass you up, because we need officers out there." I should have said, "Thanks a lot." [laughter]

SS: In basic training, did many men drop out of the program or did everybody make it through?

JW: Everybody made it through, sure. You couldn't drop out. How are you going to drop out? You swore. ...

SS: Did anyone drop out of officer's training?

JW: Nobody could drop out.

SS: It was not allowed.

JW: No. Some people were kicked out, but not many. Most of us made it through.

SS: How long were you at Parris Island before heading to Quantico, Virginia?

JW: ... I think it was twelve weeks and the stint at Quantico was about twenty-six weeks, I think. First, there was an officer candidate's class, and then, you were commissioned and sent to a Reserve officer's class.

SI: At Parris Island, the hard-hitting training and the heat are well known, but perhaps the most well known aspect is the indoctrination and instilling the mystique of the Marines. Can you talk about those efforts?

JW: Yes, I can. I remember, distinctly, being told, ... well, two things I remember. One is that Marines never retreat. Well, that's a bunch of crap. They do and ... the second thing I remember distinctly was that somebody told us, some sergeant, he said, "You know, it's been proven that one Marine can take care of nine Japanese soldiers;" no, can't do that either. They were very full of themselves and tried to fill us with that same fullness. ... It was very grim

visaged people, with their chin in and their chest out, strutting around, and I suppose that is good. I'm sure it is, because it did instill in us a sense of the dignity and heroism of the Marine Corps, which was a good thing to have. I'm sure it resulted in a lot of ... unnecessary deaths as well. I'm not an ... admirer of the military, especially the ones I see on television these days. ... They're all the same. They've got these grim visaged looks and, "We're going to see this thing through," you know. So, they gave us a great buildup. You felt that you were part of a military service that was exceptional and we all bought that one hundred percent. I know I did.

SS: Did you find the officer's training program to be as difficult as basic training?

JW: In some cases, it was more difficult. There was a lot of technical information. It wasn't just marching up and down all the time, other than firing machine guns and mortars and learning military justice rules, regulations. It was more ... like being in college than Parris Island was, yes.

SI: Were most of the men that you trained with from all over the country or were they from a specific area?

JW: Most of them were from the East, around here. A fellow I came to know, his name was Bill Campbell, William Campbell, he was in the same OCS and Reserve officer's class that I was and we went overseas together. Unfortunately, he was killed by friendly fire and, when I was coming back to the States, I told myself that I must go see his mother, who lived in Highland Park, but I couldn't face it. I know she'd cry, she would have cried, and I didn't want to look at that.

SS: While you were in the officer's training program, were you anxious to get overseas or were you comfortable where you were?

JW: I was comfortable where I was, but I knew that I would go overseas. Everybody went overseas. They all went to the Pacific. There were no Marines ... in the European Theater; it was all Pacific, what they called the Asia-Pacific Theater.

SI: Were you indoctrinated to hate the Japanese? Would they show you films or anything like that?

JW: No, I don't remember that particularly, but there was enough talk about it, certainly, but I came to hate the Japanese later on, despised them, because they were trying to kill me and I didn't like that, but, no, there was no indoctrination to that effect.

SS: Where were you sent after you graduated from the officer's training program?

JW: California, Camp Elliot, near San Diego, which was ... a stopping off place for people on the way to the Pacific, and I was given command of a company and we boarded ship, the MS *Weltevreden*, I will never forget that name. I think *Weltevreden* probably means world traveler or something like that, maybe, in Dutch. It was Dutch, of course, and we went to New Caledonia, which was a replacement depot.

SS: On the survey that you filled out, you wrote that you were in Quantico in 1944, and then, the next thing I see is Guam in 1944.

JW: Noumea, New Caledonia, was in-between.

SS: What else happened between officer's training and Guam?

JW: Well, I went to New Caledonia, and then, I became part of a replacement draft to go up to Guadalcanal, where the Third Marine Division was. They had just returned from the campaign in Bougainville and the first man I talked to when we got ashore in Guadalcanal, they gave us a dinner, was a man named Herb Krindler. He and his brothers ran Club 21 in New York and he had graduated from here and we talked about Rutgers and he said to me, "I'm glad to see you," and he said, "When this war is over, please come to my place in New York, 21, and I'd like to buy you a drink," and I did that, about 1962, [laughter] and he bought me a drink.

SI: Did you run into any other Rutgers men in the service?

JW: Not a one that I can remember, not a one.

SI: What were you doing on New Caledonia, training?

JW: ... As I say, it was a replacement depot. We didn't do much. We kind of sat around most of the time. We would go to Noumea, because ... there were hotels there and bars, things to look at, things to do, like that, but, no, it was like a vacation. ... One thing I do remember, if you want to hear an anecdote, one of the enlisted men came up to me one time in New Caledonia and declared, he said, "Lieutenant, I've changed my mind." He said, "I've decided to become a conscientious objector," and I treated him scornfully, to my shame, and said, "There's nothing I can do about it and nothing you can do. It's too late. You're on your way into combat somewhere," and I wish I hadn't done that, but I did it and I'm sorry. I don't know what the hell I could have done about it. Once you're in the theater of war, it's too late to become a conscientious objector.

SS: Was your first experience with any kind of combat on Guam?

JW: Yes, it was, yes. We went ... from Guadalcanal up to the Mariana Islands, where the battle for Saipan was taking place, and we had to go back out to sea for four or five days, back and forth, a one hundred miles west and one hundred miles east, until, finally, they said, ... "Okay, we're going to land on Guam," and off we went.

SI: Since you were Marines, you obviously must have been in the first phase of the attack.

JW: It was, yes. We landed ...

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

JW: ... Battalions and the artillery fire on the beach was very heavy and frightening and, I remember, we were supposed to go to an assembly area, which I knew, by the map I was carrying, where it was, and, on the way, I started counting the men in my section and discovered that ... I was shy two men. So, I went back to look for them and I found the two of them in the bottom of a shell hole and they had pulled some palm fronds over their heads [laughter] and I said, "Come on, guys, we can't do this," and up they came. I hope they made it through; I don't know.

SI: How much had you trained for an amphibious landing before that?

JW: Quite a bit. ... We made practice landings on Guadalcanal at least twice, that I can recall, and there were lots of route marches through the jungles in Guadalcanal, which was a beastly place. We did a lot of training. I had what was called a .60-mm mortar section and we did a lot of practice firing of those. I don't think I could do it now, but, I remember, we got pretty good at it.

SI: How long were you with your men before you went into combat?

JW: ... On Guam? I was with them continually.

SI: I am sorry, I meant before Guam, when you were assigned to them.

JW: Oh, yes, at least three months, I'd say.

SI: Okay, there was time to ...

JW: I got to know them well, yes, and, luckily, I had a good platoon sergeant, whom I can't find in any records anywhere, he must be dead by now, and he was a great help. I think he ran the platoon more than I did.

SI: Was he career?

JW: No, no, he was just in for the war.

SI: Were most of the men that you encountered career Marines or wartime enlistees?

JW: Well, I'd say from the rank of major on up were career officers. ... Most of the junior officers, like myself, were in what they called the Marine Corps Reserve and they looked down on us. We weren't really good Marines, we were Reserve officers.

SI: That was a palpable feeling.

JW: Yes, yes, it was.

SI: Did they give you the least desirable assignments?

JW: They sure did. I remember, [the] colonel that commanded our battalion was always giving me [duties] which I thought were dirty jobs. He sent me out on a patrol, one time, on Guam, with about fifteen enlisted men and the most notable thing we did on that patrol was to find a cave full of sake and Japanese scotch. We only had it for about an hour, because the division rushed up a platoon and took it away from us immediately, but I managed to sequester a huge bottle of sake, which I'd never tasted, rice wine. You know that?

SS: I have never tasted it myself.

JW: Don't bother [laughter] and I carried it around in my pack for maybe four or five days, until it got too heavy, and drank from it, occasionally. Liquor is a great help in combat, and then, I threw it away, but, yes, ... I was given what I thought were undesirable assignments. Why, I don't know, but I was and I've carried a resentment of that man ever since.

SI: How did actual combat compare to your training? Did you feel that you were prepared?

JW: I was not prepared for it. It's hideous. I remember the first attack we made against the Japanese on Guam clearly. ... When you're in combat, you're in a state of great fear all the time, which verges on panic, and I rushed out ahead of every guy. I think I was the first guy in the whole battalion over this hill and toward another hill that we were going to take and ... we didn't take it. ... We got pushed off, but I do remember one small, little incident. When I got to the top of this hill and I tried my radio, to get back to the mortar unit, it wasn't working. I saw this rather deep hole and I jumped in it and I landed right on the back of another Marine. He must have been scared to death. [laughter] No, ... combat is a very, very trying experience. It's fear. You're trapped inside a battle. There's nowhere to go. You can't go back, because you were told not to do that, and you can't go forward unless they tell you to attack and, if you go forward, you're going to get shot at and that went on every day for a month, until we finally got to the end of the island and this colonel, my old friend, told me that I was to take a patrol down this steep cliff and see what was down there on the beach. I went down with about thirty enlisted men, a rifle platoon, and we got into one hell of a firefight with the Japanese who were down there and it was a very precarious position, because we couldn't get back up the hill and they finally had to send landing craft in to take us out. ... We picked up a lot of wounded that day. I think some of them were killed, as a matter-of-fact.

SS: How confident were you serving under General "Howling Mad" Smith?

JW: "Howling Mad" Smith, [laughter] well, he was a typical braggadocio, bravura general. He thought that Marines could do anything and, unfortunately, they could, and so, he was my idea of a motion picture Marine general, chest out, "Charge." ... Nobody liked him. I ran into him, unfortunately, strangely, one time at a cocktail party in San Diego, before I went overseas, and I came around a corner of a room, bumped into him and the only thing I remember was, I apologized profusely, "Excuse me, General, I'm sorry." He just went by as if I weren't even there.

SI: Considering this encounter on the beach, did you ever feel as though the higher ups were making bad decisions and you had to pay for it? Was that a good situation that went bad or was it a bad decision?

JW: No, I never felt [that]. ... I knew that they were good commanders and that they were doing the best that they could, ... under the conditions we were under. No, I had no resentment against them. ... I didn't want to be there, of course, but I couldn't go anywhere, so, I had to stay and do the best I could, but, no, I had no resentment against them, no feeling that they were not good.

SI: Perhaps that somebody's ego or career aspirations got the better of them; they wanted to take that hill no matter how many men it cost?

JW: That's possible. It's pretty hard to know that. ... You'd have to be able to jump into somebody's mind to know that. I don't know, I doubt it. ... I think they were good men doing their jobs as best they could. ... They were not careless with manpower and they ... didn't push us into situations that were untenable. They did the best they could. I admired them.

SS: I have read that Marines carried a lot of equipment in the initial stages of the attack on Guam. Is that correct?

JW: Yes, it is. I think I read somewhere, I think it's true, about eighty pounds, including an M-1 rifle and a pack, grenades, other equipment, flamethrower, yes, it was a lot.

SS: Did you find it was too much? Did it start to wear you down a little?

JW: I was tired all the time, but I never attributed it to that. I just thought it was fear creeping through my body. No, no, they didn't, I don't think so.

SI: Was it difficult to conceal your own feelings in front of your men?

JW: Yes, yes, it was. ... That's a very big factor in combat. I think that most men who are in combat, ... they're as afraid of showing their own fear ... as they were of the Japs. ... So, I was more afraid of showing any hesitation or fear or confusion. I didn't want to do that, because ... peer recognition is very important to people. It was to me, I'm sure it was to others and you can't always ... act as if you're in complete control of yourself. I remember, some of the men in my section, after that first attack we made, said, "Boy, we saw you running. You were going like a deer," and I was, but it didn't bother me too much, but I think showing fear or hesitation or confusion in front of your people that you're supposed to be in command of is a great fear in many officers', junior officers', minds. They don't want to ... show their fear to anybody. It's a sign of weakness, I presume.

SS: You said that the combat was intense for the first month on Guam, correct?

JW: Yes, it was.

SS: How long was it before it started to cool down?

JW: Well, I told you about that ... patrol I took down. ... That's when it was over. They declared the island secure. So, it was about, you asked me how long before the battle was really over? I'd say about a month and two weeks.

SI: There were also US Army units on Guam.

JW: There were, ... an outfit called the 77th Infantry Division, yes. Maybe you'll run across some of them.

SI: We have.

JW: Have you? I'll be damned.

SI: Yes, they spoke about working with Marines. Do you have any stories about working with Army personnel?

JW: No, we never worked with them. That's one of the things the Army doesn't do; I mean, the Marine Corps don't work with the Army. They were looked down on as not very competent soldiers. No, we didn't work with them.

SI: You never observed if they were or were not competent soldiers.

JW: I never observed them, no, I didn't. They were apart from us, doing other things.

SI: From all of the interviews that I have done with Marines, everyone says that the Marines like to be self-contained. They wanted their own air support, their own artillery, and so on.

JW: Yes, that's right. ... Yes, yes, we had a lot of air support, which was very welcome. I remember them flying over our position and dropping bombs. They'd seem to drop the bombs in back of us and, thank God, the bombs would go over ... and we had our own artillery, which misfired on several occasions and landed right in the middle of us, which is not a pleasant experience.

SS: Combat ended pretty much after a month-and-a-half.

JW: Yes.

SS: What went on for the rest of your time there?

JW: We went back into a bivouac area, and then, we did patrolling through the jungle areas, to see if we could find any Japanese strays and there were a lot of them. They were living up there in the jungle and eating coconuts and what rats they could catch or what they could steal from our supply dumps. We did about, oh, a couple of weeks of patrolling.

SI: Do you think that the Japanese resistance on Guam was as stiff as on Iwo Jima?

JW: They were very good soldiers. ... One particular instance that I recall with great horror was what was known as a *banzai* attack. ... On Guam, they came running at us one night, about eleven o'clock, and it lasted until four or five, almost to ... sunrise the next morning, and they were screaming and yelling. Some people said they could smell liquor on their [breath]. I mean, they had been drinking before they came over and I do remember one Japanese soldier standing on the top of this ridge that we were defending. He had his hands up in the air, like he was going to go to a party, like he was having one big hell of a time. He knew he was going to die and I think that's why they did it. They wanted to join their ancestors. That was the great thing with them and the *banzai* attack was a suicide attack. It was just like the *kamikazes*, except it was on land. They would do anything to kill us.

SI: Did you encounter any booby traps or things like that?

JW: A few, yes, poorly constructed, yes, especially in the jungle areas. You'd find trip wires across the trail, attached to grenades. I don't think they would have fired if we'd tripped over them, but the Japanese, to get back to your previous question, are excellent soldiers and they're willing and prepared to die at any time. They were at that time, anyhow.

SI: Did the enemy get close enough for you to see them?

JW: Well, that's a strange thing. Most instances, most of the time, you never saw them at all. They were dug in, waiting for us to come to them, which is why we took so many casualties, and I don't think I ever saw [any], except for this guy standing up and moving his hands like he's going to a party; I never saw a Japanese standing up. Some of them got trapped in back of our lines, I know that, because one of them, who was trapped back there, was trying to crawl out in back of our lines and a couple of Marines shot him, but, no, I didn't see many of them.

SI: Were there any false surrenders?

JW: Surrenders, false?

SI: Would they pretend to surrender, and then, ambush the Marines taking them in?

JW: I don't remember anything like that, but I do know that, unfortunately, some Japanese soldiers did surrender and were killed by us, just because we hated them. I never saw it happen, but I heard of it. No, there were no false ... surrenders, no. They don't surrender.

SI: Among the Marines, was there a take-no-prisoners attitude?

JW: Yes, yes, there was, kill, kill, kill.

SI: You were with the mortars.

JW: Yes.

SI: During a battle, would you be up on the frontlines or a little further back?

JW: A little further back, by about, maybe, fifty or sixty yards, but that didn't help a whole lot, because they would attack us with a deadly weapon they called the grenade launcher. They would be up in the line, just ahead of us, in front of our frontlines, and they would fire, in unison, grenades and they'd land on our positions, "Boom, boom, boom," right down and they'd start back, "Boom, boom, boom," and you'd lay there for hours, shaking with fear, thinking, "What if one lands in my hole?" and I do remember one grenade landing right on the rim of the foxhole [that] I was in and it lit up the entire foxhole as if somebody had taken a camera [picture]. They were good.

SI: Most of the fire you came under was artillery and the grenade launcher type attacks?

JW: Yes, and, when, ... in this *banzai* attack, they drove us off this hill, ... they took over our machine guns and shot at us with those.

SI: I have read about stress in combat, that some men get worn down by the constant artillery attacks and so on and others have an immediate reaction, they freeze up during their first exposure to combat. Did you see any of these different kinds of reactions?

JW: Yes, I did, I did. ... I remember a good friend of mine, coming back from this attack I mentioned a few moments ago, sobbing and crying and he was gone and ... I think that I suffered a ... little bit of combat fatigue, as it was known in those days. You can't be in combat for, you know, a month at a time and not start to suffer from it. ... I heard on the radio this morning, as I was driving ... down here, there's a lot of that going on in Iraq right now.

SS: By the time you left Guam, in August, did you feel that the island was secure?

JW: Yes, it was, sure.

SS: How did you feel about leaving the island in the hands of the Army?

JW: I was very happy to leave it. [laughter]

SS: What happened during the next six months?

JW: ... As I say, we did a lot of patrolling and training and ... getting ready for the Iwo Jima operation.

SI: I get the impression that, before an operation, the Marines would give you a lot of information. Is that true?

JW: Sure.

SI: They really tried to educate you about what was going to happen.

JW: And it was not always correct. I remember, off Iwo Jima, we were getting ready to land in a couple of days and we had huge maps, ... topographical maps, ... and the general opinion seemed to be, amongst the commanders, that it was not going to last very long, because the Navy had been shelling it for a month at least and the Army had been bombing it and they said, "Nobody will be left alive on that island by the time you get ashore;" wrong.

SI: In these briefings, did they explain to you why the island was important?

JW: No. I didn't even know where Iwo Jima was, geographically. It was only, I think, 650 miles from the Home Islands. I didn't even realize that and that was probably my fault, more than anything else, and I did not know why we were going there. It was an ugly, rotten, useless looking island, but I know now, of course, they needed it for air[fields].

SS: Do you think that your outlook on the whole war changed after your first combat experience?

JW: Yes, it did. I didn't want to go into it, any more combat. I was scared to death. I'm not really reluctant to say that. I think it's a universal feeling, but what are you going to do? There I was, in this Third Marine Division, we were going to land on Iwo and I couldn't say, "Hey, count me out." ...

SS: I read that the trip to Iwo Jima took something like nine days.

JW: It was, yes, about that. Yes, there were three Marine Divisions, the Third, Fourth and Fifth. The Fifth Marine Division came from Hawaii. They had a longer trip. Third came from Guam, of course, and I don't know where the Fourth came from. Yes, it was a huge convoy.

SS: What did you do on the ship for those nine days?

JW: Looked at the ocean, nothing.

SI: How well supplied was your unit in the field?

JW: Well supplied? We were very well supplied. They even managed to bring up hot meals to us, on occasions. I can remember it well, because they served us hot oatmeal with canned milk, which I still like. [laughter] ... No, there was no shortage of anything, ... except water on Guam. We had a hell of a time with that, but the food and the ammunition, everything was there, beautiful job.

SI: As you took casualties, how did the process of getting replacements and integrating people into the unit go?

JW: Yes, I well remember getting these replacements for my outfit and talking to them. They'd just come straight from Parris Island, God knows what happened to them all, and they integrated very well. They were ... proud to be with us, I think, and they liked talking to the guys who had

been in combat, "What is it all like? Tell me what it's like." I remember asking the same thing when I got to Guadalcanal and talking to some of the officers who'd just come back from Bougainville. ... My company commander told me, he said, "Oh, we've been in combat. It's not so bad," [laughter] "not so bad." No, there was no problem with replacements.

SI: Did the replacements come in after the combat phase or while you were still on-the-line?

JW: Both. ... In Iwo, they brought in replacements directly from the States into Iwo and ... they would land on the beach and they'd be in the frontlines the next morning, scared to death, I'm sure. That's a terrible introduction.

SI: Did they have draftee Marines at that time?

JW: Yes, they did.

SI: Was there any reaction to that?

JW: On whose part?

SI: On the part of Marines, like yourself, who had enlisted. I have heard that there was some animosity.

JW: No, no, they were all men, just like we were. Nobody resented that at all. They died just like anybody else, in huge numbers. The division I was in, I read, later on, seventy-five percent casualties on Iwo and the other divisions were about eighty-five percent. That's a hell of a lot of casualties. There are twenty thousand men in a Marine division, you take seventy-five percent of that, it's a lot of men.

SS: When you reached the waters surrounding Iwo Jima, the Navy bombardment was still going on, correct?

JW: Yes, yes, battleships, cruisers.

SS: For a few days?

JW: Yes.

SS: After all that, did you think that the battle would be as intense as it was?

JW: I didn't think it was going to be that bad. ... I remember, when we were landing in our LCVs, you know, the Higgins Boats, ... the Japanese were firing what they called proximity fuses. Proximity fuse explodes when it gets ... within a certain distance of an object and they were exploding right over our heads and I remember thinking to myself, "Boy, these guys have learned a lot since the last time." Yes, there was a lot of activity and I remember watching the underwater demolition teams going up to the beach and getting hit. ... The carrier *Saratoga* was hit by a *kamikaze*. There was a lot of activity.

SS: Were you sure that your division was going to be called in?

JW: We were initially in reserve. The landing was on February 19, 1945, and we could not even get ashore until the 22nd, because the fire was so intense on the beaches. So, the first day, we just kind of circled around on our LCVPs, then, we went back aboard ship, but, on the 22nd, we landed and, when we were landing, or about to land, just before, I was sharing a stateroom with four or five other second lieutenants and one of them pulled out a bottle of scotch or bourbon or something and said, "Would anybody like some liquid courage?" and so, we all stood around in a circle and drained this bottle. ... [When] I landed on that beach, I was high as a kite.

SI: You mentioned earlier that drinking was a coping mechanism.

JW: I think it is, yes. It depresses the fear.

SI: Was there anything else that men would do to try to cope?

JW: Not that I know. You mean from a substance of [some] sort? No.

SI: No, anything at all. Would men become more religious?

JW: There were religious services held on Iwo by Marine Corps chaplains and they were always well attended. I think people get very conscious of religion and God when they're about to go into combat and they go and pray, whether they believe it or not. I remember crouching in my foxhole and praying and I'm not a ... religiously oriented man, but I was praying just in case there was a God, that he would get me out of here. I made some outrageous promises to him or her, whatever entity it is, none of which I kept, of course.

SS: When you landed on the 22nd, was the beachhead secure at that point?

JW: There was still fire landing on the beaches and there were what they called beachmasters instructing us where to go and how to get off the beach, but ... all the boats, or many of the landing craft that we came ... on into the beach, were stranded there, because they ... couldn't back up. You know, the sand on Iwo Jima was black volcano ash and you could hardly walk in it. So, the tanks and the boats got [stuck], they were stranded there and they were there until the end of the battle. One good thing about that island was that, if you had some can of beans with you or something, some C ration of that sort, you could dig a hole in the ground, put the can in there, it would cook. So, that's the one nice thing I remember about that island. It was an active volcano, Suribachi was.

SS: Were you carrying a lot of equipment when you first hit the beach, not as much as Guam?

JW: Not as much as Guam, for some reason. No, I don't recall it being an odious thing. ... I just had a pack and a rifle, ammunition belts, with canteens on it and ammunition. No, I did not. ... Some people, evidently, have mentioned this to you.

SS: Yes. I was reading one of the other interviews with a man who was on Guam as well. He complained a lot about the equipment.

JW: ... Yes, I can understand that, especially people who are carrying machine guns and mortars, other tools.

SS: How soon after you landed did the combat begin? Was it as soon as you walked on the beach?

JW: As soon as we walked on the beach, yes, yes, and ... I think we captured the first airfield, Motoyama Airfield #1, and, not long after that, I was detached from my duties with this battalion and made a regimental liaison officer between my battalion and regiment and what I did was try to keep the map up-to-date of where everybody else was and where we were, and then, show it to the battalion commander the next morning and, one night, I was back there, if you want to hear a war story, I was in regimental headquarters, in a cave somewhere, and the adjutant came up to me and said, "You're going back up to the frontlines, aren't you?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, as long as you're going back up, you might as well take the attack order up tonight and give it to the people on-the-line." So, I started out at about ten-thirty or eleven o'clock that night. It was the blackest night I've ever seen in my life and I could not see where I was going. I said, "Which way is the frontline?" He pointed his finger up and he said, "Up that way," and it took me until sunrise the next morning, maybe five-thirty or six o'clock, to get there. I finally found a lieutenant I knew and a couple of enlisted men sitting on a little hillock, the first friendly people I'd seen all night long. I was stumbling through this darkness, no stars, no moon. I couldn't see where the hell I was going and, ... very frequently, I'd hear the safety on a rifle being pulled, you know, so, he could fire it and it would be some frightened Marine or Navy person or whatever and he'd yell out, "Halt, what's the password?" and I'd give him the password and I said, "Thank you, where's the front?" and he'd come out and show me where. That must have happened four or five times that night and any one of those guys could have plugged me, ... but that was just an incidental.

SI: In that job, would you have to go to the front often?

JW: Every night, yes, as frequently as I could make it. Yes, I enjoyed being back at the regimental headquarters. They were out of danger completely.

SS: Your regiment conducted the assault on the second airstrip, correct?

JW: Yes, 21st Regiment.

SS: There were tanks involved in that assault.

JW: There were tanks, I remember the tanks. I don't know whether they were involved or not. I'm sure they were.

SS: How good was the support from the Navy?

JW: It was as good as they can do and ... they did a great job. The trouble was with that was that your friend, Holland Smith, "Howling Mad" Smith, wanted it to continue and they wouldn't do it. He said ... they were needed up off the coast of Japan for another assignment. So, we had to land with what Smith thought was not an adequate preparation.

SI: Did you land before or after Suribachi was taken?

JW: Before, but, ... Suribachi, I was about a mile ahead of ... them, the Marines on Suribachi. I can remember, I was crouching in a hole, a foxhole, and somebody near me said, "Hey, look, there's the flag," and so, I got up and looked at it and said, "Oh, yes," and I jumped back in the hole immediately. It meant nothing to me, but, for a lot of people, it meant that the campaign was over, but it wasn't. ... It hardly had begun.

SS: How long was it before you had some sense that the Marines were gaining the advantage?

JW: Well, I think the whole thing lasted at least a month. It was into March, after the first week of March. ... Some friend of mine, named Paul (Connelly?), was in charge of a patrol or something and got down to the northern edge of the island and I remember talking to him. He said, "It's all over. We've got them all," about a month. ...

SS: That was when Nimitz declared the island officially occupied.

JW: Yes, I think so. Yes, we all went and looked at the cemetery and got back on the ship and went back to Guam.

SI: You kept updating the map for the rest of the campaign.

JW: Yes.

SI: It seems as though that job would give you a bit more perspective than the average Marine.

JW: I think I did, yes. I knew where everybody was.

SI: What did you learn from that job?

JW: That it was going to be a hard, tough battle. I mean, ... you'd draw a line on the map and, the next day, it would be fifty yards ahead of that. I remember, ... one battalion commander reported back to the regiment, he said, "My troops advanced steadily. Today, they moved from the back of their foxholes to the front of their foxholes." It was a long, tough, arduous, dig-'em-out campaign. They were so well entrenched. They had been working on it for years and they were dug in like it was the Holland Tunnel, ... with apertures every place. They had everything covered. ...

SS: You stayed until July, is that correct?

JW: No, I left in March.

SS: You went to Guam after that.

JW: Went back to Guam.

SS: How long did you stay on Guam?

JW: I don't have that information. I can't remember. I'd say about four or five weeks, more training, more training, and, of course, they were getting ready to occupy Japan at that time.

SS: Do you remember hearing about V-E Day?

JW: Yes, I do, yes, and I also remember when Franklin Roosevelt died. There were many dewy-eyed Marines walking around. Yes, the victory in Europe, ... that was a great happening.

SS: Did that boost your morale?

JW: Well, I knew that we were getting ready to land on the Home Islands of Japan and I knew that would be a disaster. So, I wasn't ... very upbeat about the whole situation.

SS: Do you remember where you were when you first heard about the atomic bomb being used?

JW: I was home in Rahway, New Jersey.

SS: You were back by then?

JW: I was back. That was August, I believe. Yes, I was back. I remember reading the headline, "Equivalent of 20,000 tons of TNT," yes, and the war was over. No, no, wait a minute, I went back to the West Coast, after being home for a week or two, and the war ended then, when I was back on the West Coast.

SS: You left Iwo Jima and went to Guam, stayed there for a few weeks, and then, went back to the States.

JW: Back to the States, yes, and then, back to California, when the war ended, and I was very glad that it was all over; ... make sure you get that down. [laughter]

SS: You were discharged as a first lieutenant in New York City.

JW: Yes.

SS: Was that before the atomic bomb was dropped?

JW: After. ... I was discharged in January of 1945, the equivalent of an honorable discharge. I resigned my commission.

SI: I am guessing that you did not give any thought to staying in.

JW: Not a moment, not a moment, no. I was very exhilarated by getting out of that outfit. I wanted no more Marine Corps and I don't want it now. I'm not thinking about going to Iraq. [laughter]

SS: What was the first thing you did after being discharged? Did you see your family or go to see Nancy?

JW: I was home when I got my discharge. Sure, I saw Nancy, and then, I decided to come back here and ... finish up my last year.

SS: That was almost immediately afterwards.

JW: ... Yes, quick as I could get here.

SS: Did you find it difficult to adjust back to civilian life?

JW: No, I did not. No, I got right into the swing of things.

SS: Did you feel any kind of alienation from the people who stayed at home, as compared to those who were sent overseas?

JW: ... Yes, I think so, yes. I resented people who had not been in combat. ... They couldn't help it and there were lots and lots of people [who] didn't get in combat. Yes, I did, but I don't resent them now. My resentment has long past.

SS: You were married in 1946.

JW: Yes.

SS: That was soon after getting back home, correct?

JW: Yes, and I was back here, completing my education.

SS: What prompted you to get married?

JW: What prompted me?

SS: Yes. How did you make that decision?

JW: Well, I thought that'd be a nice way to reenter the real world.

SI: Was your decision to get married affected by the war? Did you decide to wait until after the war or was it just not the right time then?

JW: ... Well, I was not around to get married. Well, I just wanted to get married and start living a real life and, I remember, I was taking a course here, in zoology, after we got married, and I was not doing well. I remember, one of the things we had to do was trace the digestive system through a frog. I just couldn't get that. So, I went to the instructor, who was teaching the course, he was a veteran, and I said, "Look, I'm married, my wife is going to have a child, I've got to get a job and get out of here." He said, "All right," so, he gave me a 4 and I got out; thank God for him.

SI: How well did Rutgers welcome veterans back?

JW: They were magnificent. They were very welcoming. Everybody was welcome. The professors were glad to see us and said so. They treated us very well. They were all gentlemen.

SI: Did you go back into journalism?

JW: I started out to do that, until I met this reporter who was only making fifty-five bucks a week, and I decided, "I think ... I'd like to try something a little more munificent." So, I started with RCA Victor in Camden, in their advertising department, and then, I went from there to various [jobs]. ...

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

JW: ... Somebody told me some of them are very touching, people weep.

SI: Yes.

JW: I can understand that.

SI: Sometimes, people have not spoken about these things in fifty years, sixty years.

JW: Yes, it's hard to relive those old experiences, especially if doesn't cover you with glory.

SS: When you came back to Rutgers, did people tend to talk about the war or were they quiet about that and trying to move on with their lives?

JW: They talked about it. We had a bunch of flyers at the Delta Phi house, where I was, and they talked about their flights over Germany and having to abort their missions and land in Switzerland and all that sort of thing. ... You know, people tell war stories. When you get a bunch of veterans together, they trade stories.

SS: You wrote on your survey that you used the GI Bill for an education and a mortgage.

JW: Yes.

SS: I am guessing that you used that to help pay for Rutgers.

JW: Yes, I did. I did indeed. I think that was one of the best things that ... this government ever did. I don't know how the hell I would have paid for it. My father didn't want to do it, I know that, yes, and mortgages. I've had several mortgages and lots of houses.

SI: Were you worried about getting back into the job market? I have heard that there was practically a job depression in the late 1940s.

JW: No, I was very lucky. I was working at RCA Victor and they changed advertising agencies. They went from one to another and the advertising manager said, "How would you like to go and work at this new advertising agency, because you know about records and they know nothing about it?" I said, "Good, yes, I'd love to do that." ... It was easy and, after that, I just changed on my own. There was no depression in jobs that I remember.

SI: Also, the advertising industry itself was booming at the time.

JW: It was, it was. ... I used to work on automobiles a lot with the J. Walter Thompson Company. I knew nothing about cars. I don't know how they work, but that didn't seem to make any difference and ... I remember the Mustang; when that first came out, I was writing all those ads, had a wonderful time. I used to go out to Detroit and drive the new cars every other week. I liked it very much. It was a very exciting place to work, industry to be in, and it paid well. So, I ended up as a vice-president and creative director, which I still wish I were.  
[laughter]

SI: What were some of your favorite campaigns?

JW: Well, the Mustang. ... At one agency, I worked on ITT, International Telephone and Telegraph, and they were a bunch of rascals. They were always bribing somebody or influencing somebody to do something. I remember, the advertising manager at ITT showed me a cancelled check for ... one hundred thousand dollars that they had given to Nixon. The business world is not entirely clean, as you may have heard.

SI: Do you think that your military experience influenced your career or your later life?

JW: I don't think so. ...

SI: No? There was nothing that you learned then that you applied later in life.

JW: No, except to stay out of combat; no, not to try to be funny about this, but, no, there was no long term [lesson]. ...

SS: When you graduated in 1947, did you have the sense that Rutgers was starting to change and become a larger university?

JW: I didn't notice a thing. All I remember is a very hot day in the gymnasium, where we got our diplomas, and Bernard Baruch was there, adjusting his ... hearing aid, so [that] he could hear

what was going on, and he turned it off mostly, so, he didn't even want to hear it. ... No, I had no idea. It's changed a lot since I last [saw it], obviously. It's a different place.

SI: What was it like to go to class with a mix of veterans and kids right out of high school?

JW: You know, when I was here, I think there were no kids right out of high school. Yes, they were all veterans. ... All the students were wearing old uniforms every day, so, there was not much of a mix, that I remember. ... They were speeded up courses. The joke was that if you dropped your pencil and leaned over to pick it up, you'd lose four months. [laughter]

SS: You mentioned that you had a baby on the way.

JW: Yes.

SS: When was your first child born?

JW: '47.

SS: Had you graduated by then?

JW: Yes.

SS: Did you go straight into the workforce?

JW: Yes, I did, started with RCA Victor down in Camden. He is now an Internet journalist. You got a computer in here? He lives out in Los Angeles and he writes about films and Hollywood. He has a wonderful time. He goes to film festivals everywhere. Last year, he was in Paris and Cannes, went to Switzerland. He has a great job, I'm jealous and he's just written a movie, which he's going to produce himself.

SS: You wrote something about the Grey Advertising Agency. Was that your second job?

JW: Yes, it was.

SS: What did you do in this job?

JW: Well, I was a copywriter. I was working in the outfit I just mentioned; the advertising manager at RCA got me to go to that agency, because I knew the record business and they didn't. My God, did I put that in? [laughter]

SS: Yes, it was on the survey. You also listed the DM Agency.

JW: ... Direct Marketing Agency, yes.

SS: You were the vice-president of that.

JW: Yes, I was. That was in Stamford, Connecticut, an entirely different way of advertising. It's amazing; ... I mean, advertising is buckshot. You're aiming at everybody, but direct mail goes to somebody, but you have a good idea that they're going to buy it and it's a remarkable business. You might think about going into that; think about it. You'd like it. It works. It's amazing how it works, if it's good, if it's well done, of course.

SI: A large number of the journalism majors we have interviewed found careers in advertising and public relations.

JW: They did?

SI: Why do you think that is? Is it just a natural fit?

JW: Well, it was money and it's enjoyable work. I always enjoyed ... writing ads and doing direct marketing, direct mail, because I could see results almost immediately and you'd win prizes for this and that and the other thing, get promotions, get bonuses, more money, salary. It was a good job, a good profession to be in. I'd advise you to go into it immediately. [laughter]

SI: You mentioned business improprieties earlier. Within the advertising industry, have you seen a shift in ethics?

JW: I've seen a change, not in ethics, but I think I've seen a change in ... direction. It's unfocused. ... You don't sell. They put up pretty pictures of girls in bikinis and the idea of advertising is to motivate somebody to buy something. ... I don't read any ads that are any good anymore. They're just soapsuds, so, maybe I'll go back and teach them all what to do.

SI: It is all image.

JW: It's all image, yes, no substance, that's right, exactly.

SI: Did you do any TV work or just print ads?

JW: I was ninety percent print, but I did do some television, ... but I did not enjoy it. It was a very loose limbered medium. In print, you can take time and describe a product and what it can do for you; television is all, you know, cars racing down the road. I don't like it very much and I didn't like it.

SS: Looking back, how do you feel about World War II as a whole?

JW: ... Well, it probably was a necessary war. I mean, we were attacked. You can't just go to the movies that afternoon and forget about it and we did a great deal in Europe to help depose that awful Hitler. I think it was probably necessary. It was necessary; I'll take out the probably.

SS: How do you feel about the atomic bomb now? It was very beneficial at the time it was used.

JW: At the time, but I regret that it had to be used and I'm sorry it was. I think it was a barbaric thing to do. I think we could have come to some sort of an end in Asia without using it. I regret that it had to be hundreds of thousands of people burned alive, a terrible thing to have to do. I read a book about Henry Stimson [Secretary of War]. ... The decision to drop that bomb was reached over lunch, in about twenty minutes. Not much thought was given to, "What else can we do?" Once they had it, they used it and I blame Harry Truman for that. I think he was a bad president. I don't think Roosevelt would have done it.

SS: How do you feel about the way that the bomb affected world politics for the next fifty years, the ensuing Cold War and whatnot?

JW: ... Yes, I was convinced that we were going to get bombed and I didn't know what I was going to do about my children, build a dugout in the backyard or what. Well, it started the ... whole Cold War. ... Stalin got it and I'm almost convinced that, one of these days, a major city in this country is going to take a hit. Then, it's going to be our fault, because we opened the genie's bottle, unfortunately. I hate to say that. I do think that's going to happen, especially with Bush. He'll do anything to get reelected. I don't like George Bush.

SS: What were your thoughts on the Korean War? Did you have any motivation to rejoin the service?

JW: No, I didn't. I was scared to death they were going to call me back. I think that was a useless war, also, almost as useless as the war we're in now [the war in Iraq].

SI: I read the segment you wrote in the *Class of 1944 Military Book* and you mentioned that bringing up the war is like post-traumatic stress disorder.

JW: Yes.

SI: Is that something that you have suffered from?

JW: I think so. Yes, I do, I do. I think a lot about my experiences in that war and I think it depressed me a lot and I have a feeling that ... it took a lot out of me and I ... never fully got it all back and there was a lot of post-traumatic stress syndrome, yes. I think a lot of people have it, unfortunately.

SI: Is it something that is constantly with you or does it come in waves?

JW: Oh, it's waves; it's not always with me. At times when I see John Wayne on television, I get mad at him. I start thinking what a nasty, rotten person he was. It just comes and goes. It's not a constant thing, no.

SI: Things trigger it?

JW: Things trigger it, like today. Well, you spent a lot of time with me. [laughter]

SI: Is there anything that we did not cover or anything else that you would like to say?

JW: Who is that picture up there?

SI: Those are the faculty members who founded the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis.

JW: Did they? Now, I see.

SI: This is his office, Spencer's professor.

JW: Yes. What is his name?

SS: John Chambers.

JW: John Chambers. Well, they look like good people.

SI: Yes. They are all ten years older now.

JW: Are they?

SI: I think that was taken in 1991 or 1992.

JW: So, that would make them, what would you say, eighties, high eighties?

SI: I will not say how old they are on tape. [laughter]

JW: Isn't that funny, that ... age is a subject that's glossed over? I mean, nobody brings it up, except where I live. It's full of old people and they bring it up all the time. I have people who are over a hundred. ... Well, I enjoyed this. I'm glad you invited me down, thank you.

SS: We are glad you came.

SI: Thank you. We know it is a sacrifice to remember these things.

JW: Not much. Oh, no, that's all right. You did a good job and I thank you for it. ...

SI: Thank you for coming. This concludes our interview with Mr. James T. Wells on April 23, 2004, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and Spencer Sheffling.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/9/04

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/19/04

Reviewed by James Wells 8/4/04