

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK WIDOWSKY

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Molly Graham: This is an interview with Jack Widowsky. The interview is taking place on December 12, 2014. We are at 548 Olive Terrace in Union, New Jersey. The interviewer is me, Molly Graham, and I am accompanied by--

Daniel Maio: Daniel Maio.

Jack Widowsky: Okay. My recollection is we left for overseas to the island of Tinian on June, in 1943. I think it was '43. We got there, settled in. Before any of the atomic missions, we flew on a few other missions with large ten-thousand-pound pumpkin bombs. One of the towns that I recall that we bombed was Ube. The last one, after the missions, strangely enough, that was the largest raid that went out of the Tinian Islands--the Marianas I mean. Our target was Koromo, Japan, and we bombed the Toyota Auto Works. That was the last one. In between of course, [were] the atomic missions. One day, on August 5th, we said there's going to be a briefing, and this is what we're going to do, [what] we're trained to do. Our crew was chosen to be the backup plane for the *Enola Gay*. So we were the first ones to take off. We landed on Iwo Jima, which is about halfway from the island of Tinian to Japan. When we landed there, we were ferried over to a certain section of the island. We were under heavily armed guard. We were there in case the *Enola Gay* encountered mechanical difficulty, then we're going to land on Iwo Jima, transfer the bomb to our plane, and take our plane. They were even prepared. They had a bomb pit with a hydraulic lift there, because the bomb was too big to load conventionally, walking the plane over the bomb. So they had to lower it in the pit and raise the hydraulic life there, but thank goodness they didn't have to avail themselves of our airplane. The only bad thing about it is after the bomb was dropped, we didn't even know about it. We heard it on the radio. We were tuned in. We couldn't leave there to go back to Tinian until the *Enola Gay* landed there, which is a good three, three-and-a-half-hour trip. By the time we got back, we missed the beer and hot dog party, and everybody was sleeping. So that was on the first mission. Then, all of a sudden, three days later, we said there was going to be another one. We were chosen to be the weather plane, the advanced weather plane in Nagasaki, which was the secondary target. The initial target actually was Koromo, and there was a lot of wasted time getting there because they had to wait until one of the planes--to meet up. By the time they got to Koromo, the weather was just bad for dropping. Their orders were to drop the bomb visually, not by radar. So they decided to head for Tinian, which was south. By the time they got there, it was pretty well covered, but the bombardier said he saw a hole in an opening in the clouds and he let go of the bomb visually. That was that, and then two days later, the Japanese surrendered. As I said, it was just something we didn't know what it was, but we know that destruction was massive. But we still saved thousands of American lives, which was important because there were thousands of GIs on Okinawa, ready to invade Japan. That's that part of it. [laughter]

MG: Do you think another bomb would have been dropped if they hadn't surrendered?

JW: Well, two of our crews went back to the United States to pick up the components of a third bomb. They never even took off to come back, because the war was over, but they would've dropped another bomb. Like I said before, some people say to me, "Do you feel bad about doing a thing like that?" So I said, "I don't feel bad. I was happy we did it, because if the Germans had it or the Japanese had it, they would've used it. They would avail themselves of it." As a matter of fact, the Germans were really investigating it. Professor [Albert] Einstein alerted

President Roosevelt to the fact that we should get into it. Like the saying goes, if there wasn't a Pearl Harbor, there wouldn't have been a Hiroshima.

MG: Has it been revealed since how close the Germans came to the atomic bomb?

JW: No, I have no idea. No, because I didn't know anything about it until after bombs were dropped. Then shortly after, we came back. Well, we spent some time on Tinian, as a matter of fact. It was beautiful there. The weather was nice. We spent about a month there and had a ball. Every morning we went to the beach, had a swim. Went back, had lunch, had a softball game in the afternoon. After dinner, we saw a movie and went to bed. That was our routine for a month. It was like a vacation. The weather was magnificent. Then we came home. Then, forget about anything else.

MG: Do you think that month off, that time you had, felt nicer because the war was over and you could finally relax?

JW: Well, certainly. Look, I came home and I got married. [laughter]

Florence Widowsky: He found me.

JW: A few months later.

MG: Are you able to describe the physical destruction that took place after the atomic bombs were dropped?

JW: The only thing I saw were pictures. A few people went there, but I didn't go. I would have liked to have gone. There are two places that I still would love to go to in this world, Japan and Australia. You don't always avail yourself of everything.

DM: Were you told anything beforehand about what the destruction would be or you had no idea?

JW: I had no idea. We had no idea that it was atomic energy. We knew it was something different, because right from the start we knew there was a special bomb. It was a very, very well kept secret. They had FBI agents and undercover agents around all the time. They followed some of us. Even when we were in Wendover, we went into Salt Lake City on the bus, they followed people around. They caught a couple people just mentioning we're doing something special, [and] out they went. They ended up in Alaska, because they didn't want anyone to put two and two together that something special was going on.

MG: You had said last time that the assignment went up on the bulletin board and that's when you knew what was going to take place. Were you kept under wraps from when you saw the assignment to when the mission was complete?

JW: Wait, I don't understand. What do you mean Molly?

MG: When you found out about this mission, you said this went up on the bulletin board. So I am wondering if from when you saw the assignment on the bulletin board to when the mission was complete, were you kept under wraps?

JW: We still didn't know what it was. We found out same as the rest of the world. President Truman announced it on the radio that it was that, but by that time, we knew there was tremendous damage done to the Japanese, unfortunately, but they started it. Well, they started it for a reason, because we placed embargoes on them for oil. Everything that the Japanese had-- they don't grow anything. Everything had to be brought in. There was an embargo.

MG: The atomic bombs had both a physical impact, but also the idea was to have a psychological impact on the people of Japan. Can you talk a little bit about that?

JW: Well, I imagine it did have--I never spoke to anyone. As a matter of fact, a number of years ago, there was an article in the *Ledger*--I should have brought that down; I have it. There's a woman that lives, I think, in Edison, a Japanese woman that lives in Edison that was in Nagasaki. They wrote the article, putting us together there, but people say, "You want to meet her?" I have no desire to meet. I don't think she would want to even see me either, because I would imagine any Japanese person that spoke to me and knew I participated, they would have some resentment, even though they ended up all right. Look [the] Japanese are our allies. I don't know if I mentioned this before. I'm a stamp collector. On the 50th anniversary of dropping the atomic bomb, the post office department wanted to issue a commemorative stamp. [Editor's Note: In 1994, controversy arose between the United States and Japan due to one of ten stamps that were previewed by the Post Office to commemorate the end of World War II. The stamp possessed the *Enola Gay* and a mushroom cloud, commemorating the atomic bomb. President Clinton asked the Postmaster General to change the stamp. It was changed to an image of President Harry S. Truman.] For different incidents they issue commemorative stamps. The President put a stop to it because he didn't want to insult our Japanese allies. Someone put out some fake stamps and I got a hold of some. I don't know. Do you know what a first day cancellation is? Put a stamp on an envelope with a picture of the situation. I have a few. I gave them away. At that time is when I went back to Tinian and I had the post office department in Tinian cancel that stamp. I got it around someplace. I'm not quite sure where it is, but I wouldn't give it away for [inaudible] give it to Sherryl or my other daughter, or my grandchildren. I don't know how to split all these things up. I got five grandchildren, two great grandchildren, and two on the way. So, they'll just have to do it themselves. What I would do with that, I would give it [to] Arlene and her sister. Let them do it.

MG: Before we move on and talk about the end of the war and what happened afterwards, I am curious if there is anything that you left out from your service because I think it may get overshadowed by this huge mission.

JW: No, I think we covered everything the last time. Of course, I was overwhelmed just like anybody else would be because I didn't know anything about it. I knew something big was coming, how big, I had no idea. As I said [about] these other missions that we went [on], we dropped ten-thousand-pound bombs. They were quite destructive because I remember I mentioned to you, one of the towns we dropped a bomb [on] was Ube. I don't remember what it was, but as a navigator I had a drift meter where I could sight down and look on the ground. I saw that bomb explode. The destruction there, on the ground at that moment, [was] horrendous. If it was a special bomb, it was going to do tremendous damage.

MG: When did you finally grasp the significance of what had happened?

JW: Well, as I heard it on the radio with President Truman. We didn't know what to say. We looked at each other. "What is it? What is it?" We wanted to get back and learn more about it, and hear more about it, which we did. They really didn't tell us any scientific specifics, but they said the damage was tremendous. If this doesn't do it, they don't know what will end the war, which was true. Just three days later another one went. Before the atomic bombs were dropped, there were some B-29s that flew over Japan, dropping leaflets, warning them that something is coming, to make the people aware that something big is going to happen. It's too bad so many got killed, but that's life.

MG: Did anyone explain radiation to you or nuclear fallout?

JW: No, not really. They said what it is. A lot of these people actually got burned by the radiation. Even in some of the book--not in that book, in some of the other books there, they show pictures of radiation there. I got a few out in the car that I [inaudible]. But that's what I do. I go to air shows in Reading, Pennsylvania. Teterboro has one, Greenwood Lake Airport. They have something right in town here. It's not really an airshow. It's just some fellow rents tables and invites people. You have to pay for the tables that have a lot of memorabilia. There's a lot of German uniforms being sold, but you have to be careful with all those things. They might not be originals. They're made later. You got to know. But I go. It's right over here. Every couple months I go there. I enjoy going there because I like to talk about it and I like to inform people what happened that aren't aware of it. You'd be surprised. Maybe I told you this, Molly. At one of these shows, a fellow came up with his son and I could tell he was high school age, a nice young man. He's asking me questions. As I said, I'm glad to answer any questions anyone asks me. After he finished, I said, "All those questions you ask me, the answers are in the book." Well, this is not the story--he made his father buy him a book. But I said, "Don't they teach you in school there?" They don't. They absolutely don't. I don't understand it.

MG: It is too bad, but I am glad you're keeping these stories alive.

JW: Well, another thing, too. Like me, when I went to high school, I loved history, American history. The first day in class when they issued the book, I took that book home and read it from cover to cover. Not an assignment. I just read it because I liked it.

MG: Then Jack, what is it like to be a part of such a huge moment in history? When people read about World War II, they read about the atomic bombs.

JW: Well, as I always said that I was honored and privileged to be able to participate. It was the luck of the draw, although the reason they picked out the 393rd Bomb Squadron [to] become the flying unit of the 509th [was] we were the best trained at that time. We were ready to go to Europe. We were just about ready to go to Europe. We were flying B-17s. They, all of a sudden, one day said, "Pack up. We're going to Wendover, Utah."

MG: Do you know if the nerves were much higher on those missions because what if they crashed with the atomic bomb on board?

JW: Well, depends upon where they crashed because, believe it or not, the island of Tinian was the biggest, the largest, and busiest Air Force base in the world, on a small island, twelve by five miles wide. They had four 8,500-foot runways. It was just the way the island was laid out that

they could do that. I don't know if I showed you, there's a picture in the book there. [inaudible] When the mission was going out there it was absolutely unbelievable. Did you ever see a real [B-29]? The only one that's around is the *FIFI*. Did you ever see B-29? [Editor's Note: The *FIFI* is an operable B-29. It is operated by a group known as the Commemorative Air Force. Decades ago they restored the aircraft and it travels to different air shows where people can buy rides.]

DM: Not in person, no.

JW: The tail is massive. When you saw all these airplanes coming from the taxing strips from every angle of the airport going to these runways, it's just massive. Incidentally, you see that. Take it out. Take a look at that.

DM: Wow. That is really cool.

JW: My son-in-law gave it to me, Sherryl's husband, for a birthday.

MG: That is nice. What else do you want to tell us about your crew, the 509th?

JW: Well, we started and got together in Fairmont, Nebraska. As I said, that's where we're training in B-17s. We stayed together for the rest of the war. As a matter of fact, there were eleven of us originally, but two were eliminated because our planes were specially built. The reason [was] that we didn't have any side gun turrets, so we didn't need gunners there. The reason they did that, had all the gun turrets special built, because we could attain a greater speed. There would be less resistance. Even the Jap Zeroes couldn't climb as high as we could and if they did they couldn't maintain the speed that we made. Those are the fifteen special Silverplate planes. [Editor's Note: Silverplate was the codename for the project that built the modified B-29 bombers that could carry an atomic bomb. The bomb bays and engines were modified.]

MG: Do you remember all their names?

JW: Certainly do.

MG: For the record, can you tell us?

JW: Our airplane commander was Charles McKnight, co-pilot Jacob Bontekoe, flight engineer George Cohen, radio operator Lloyd Reeder, navigator Jack Widowsky, radar operator Bill Orren, and the tail gunner--I forgot his name--(Donnie Cole?).

MG: Very impressive.

JW: As I said, we stayed together for the until we came home. When we got home, we went to Roswell, New Mexico and we didn't see any flying saucers. Everyone discharged and off we went. As a matter of fact, there are only three of us still alive out of the nine. George Cohen, the engineer, (Donnie Cole?), the tail gunner and assistant flight engineer, and myself. I've seen them a couple times at the air show in Reading, Pennsylvania. Did you ever go to these air shows?

MG: I have not yet.

JW: Remember we got to send Molly--

FW: [inaudible]

JW: It's the first weekend in June. I'll let you know. I'll send you a card. You'll leave me your address and everything.

MG: Of course.

JW: As I said, there's one right over here in Teterboro, and up in Greenwood Lake. All over they still have them. They bring the old veterans together for people to come and see, which is a good thing. Just let the people know what went on and remind them. It's a funny thing too--it's amazing how people come there to buy things. They got wads of money. It's unbelievable.

MG: Well, I don't know if I will be one of those people.

JW: No, no. [laughter] I'm not trying to sell you a bill of goods or anything.

MG: When did you tell your children about your involvement in World War II and what happened?

JW: That's the toughest question you asked me.

MG: We can come back to it.

JW: I don't know. I don't think I really could answer that question. I don't know when.

MG: I wondered if they learned about World War II in school--

JW: They learned in school.

FW: They all had to interview you. All of them had to write up a report for school. They interviewed him.

JW: Oh, yes. Well, they did.

FW: Amanda did a good one.

JW: As a matter of fact, I think I told you this, Sherryl's daughter, the one who got married, she wrote up something--I still got a copy of it--in college, I think it was. She interviewed me, asking me questions. Of course she got an A-plus on it, but the professor wrote--

FW: I think it was high school. It wasn't college.

JW: Oh, it was high school. That's right. In East Brunswick. The teacher said, "Aren't you lucky to have a grandfather that did that?" I got a copy of it. I guess, they were wondering. There were always pictures around and books around. I got a little office room upstairs where I have these things. They saw this when we were quite young and I'm sure they asked questions and I answered, depending on what age they were. You can't tell them [inaudible] all that destruction.

FW: Tell us again about that month you had off in Tinian, and what you would do for fun.

JW: Oh, well it was really paradise, like they say Hawaii is. The weather is beautiful, mild, not too hot. Got up in the morning, early, had breakfast, and they fed us pretty good. The Seabees made a beach. We went down to the beach and just lounged around, went in the water, spent the morning in the water every day and then came back and had lunch and rested. Oh, we took a nap after lunch. That we had to do. Then we went out to a ballfield and played softball for the rest of the day. Came back and had dinner, maybe changed clothes, and went to a movie. They had the latest movies there. They had a regular movie theater. Then we went to bed, and that was about a little over a month. It was like a vacation really. We just had to put our four hours flying time in to get flight pay. Flight pay is fifty percent of your base pay that we got. You had to get it in every month.

MG: When did you go home?

JW: I guess, sometime in September, middle of September, came home. Where'd I go to? Dix or Wrightstown? I don't remember. I was discharged. I came home.

MG: How did you get home? Did you fly home?

JW: Oh, yes.

MG: You flew into D.C. first?

JW: No, no, our own airplanes. We had to bring those planes back.

MG: How did you get out to Roswell, New Mexico?

JW: With our own plane we left. We left it there. From Roswell, I took a commercial flight home.

MG: What was it like to be finally on American soil?

JW: It's good to be home. It's good to be an American. Anyone that doesn't value that--like my father was born in Poland and he came to this country. If he ever heard anybody say anything bad about this country, he said, "If you don't like it, why don't you go back where you came from. Because where can you get it better--the opportunities, my god."

MG: Did you have the option of staying on with the 393rd and continuing the atomic testing?

JW: Well, I signed up in the--no, I couldn't stay.

FW: Inactive reserve.

JW: The inactive reserve. Then I was called back in Korea, 1951.

FW: '50, yes.

JW: Sherryl was one-year-old. I was called back and I went down to Fort Dix to be examined to go to Korea. I couldn't pass a physical. I had hurt my back at work, so I couldn't pass the

physical. So they discharged me. I signed up because I figured it was my duty to sign up. If anything ever happened, I wanted to go back in the same position that I was because I loved what I did. I absolutely loved being a navigator. It's a certain feeling that you had when you're a thousand miles away, you tell them where to go and you see it right in front of you at the time you tell them. There's a good feeling there. There are a lot of things that could throw you off, but that was just navigation. Now, I guess I lost my job. You got the GPS. I have one too.
[laughter]

MG: You were a human GPS for a long time.

JW: Yes. As a matter of fact, I think the airlines have two GPS's, one mechanical and one electrical, in case one goes out of whack. That's what they have. It's amazing to me. Then you can always get a MapQuest on the computer.

MG: When you got home, who did you first see and where did you first go?

JW: When I got home? Who did I first see? My parents.

FW: I was going to say, your mother.

JW: My mother, yes.

FW: I don't know. I wasn't there.

JW: No, you weren't there.

MG: You weren't in the picture yet? Florence, do you want to come sit down?

FW: No, that's all right. I was in the picture, yes. We corresponded a lot.

MG: We skipped over that. So you had met before you went overseas.

FW: No, when he was in the service.

JW: I'll tell you the story of how we met. I was home on leave one day from where?

FW: Didn't you finish cadet training?

JW: When I finished navigation school, that's right. Before I [was] assigned to Fairmont, Nebraska. Some of my friends were home at that time, and they wanted to go to New York. They said, "Let's get a date," and so forth. I didn't have anyone at that time. I went over to visit a friend of mine's parents--one of my real, real, good friends and his parents. They were very friendly with them. I'm just telling a story about [how I] have no date. Then he said, "Oh, I've got someone for you. Florence lives upstairs. She's home because she had her appendix out. I'll bring her down and you'll meet her." That's how we met.

FW: And we went to New York. The car was crowded; I had to sit on your lap.

JW: Yes, yes. [laughter]

FW: I guess that did it.

JW: So we went to the--

FW: Latin Quarter? Where'd we go?

JW: The Latin Quarter, yes, New York City.

MG: Well, it sounds like a great first date. [laughter]

DM: She literally fell into your lap. [laughter]

JW: [laughter] Yes, we got some pictures. I don't know where. I know there's a picture from there someplace around.

FW: Yes, at the nightclub.

MG: And what did you guys like about each other?

JW: What did we know? Nothing.

MG: What did you like? What did you see in each other?

JW: I don't know. I guess we're just made for each other. Sixty-eight years we're married.

MG: That's amazing.

JW: I got to tell you about someone. You see that little girl there in the middle?

MG: She's adorable.

JW: That's Sherryl's daughter. Did you ever see her today? They adopted her when she was this big. How is she? Eighteen?

FW: Yes, first year of college.

JW: Nineteen. She's going to Boston College now.

FW: University.

JW: No, Boston University. At the wedding she had a long gown on. I couldn't take my eyes off that girl, because I just see her as a little baby coming in here. She's such a good girl. I don't know what else I could tell you.

MG: What was Florence doing during the war?

FW: Working, secretary.

JW: What?

FW: She asked what I was doing during the war. I was not Rosie the Riveter. No, I was [a] secretary.

MG: Where were you working?

FW: Well, I worked for an insurance agent. I worked for insurance adjusters.

MG: Were you nervous about Jack while he was overseas?

FW: No, I didn't know what he was doing there. We corresponded. He didn't say anything about what he was doing there, just that he was lonesome. [laughter]

JW: For you.

FW: Well, sure. [laughter] Yes.

MG: How soon did you guys get back together after you came home?

JW: Immediately. Then we got married. I came home. When did I come home?

FW: When did you come home?

JW: Yes.

FW: You said September, but I don't think it was that early.

JW: No.

FW: I think it was January.

JW: Well, wait a minute. Oh, yes. Yes, that's right.

FW: You were gone in September.

JW: The war was over, yes. January. That was '46, and then we got married that year in November.

FW: Yes, then we got engaged in April of '46, and got married in November.

JW: Yes, I didn't get home until January '46 about. Then we got married in November.

MG: Tell me a little bit about getting into the swing of things. Did you find a job? Where were you living?

JW: Well, I had a job waiting for me there. I worked for my uncle and aunt in candy manufacturing. I worked there for a number of years, until they actually went out of business. I got a job with a candy wholesaler, selling candy to retail outlets. I did that until I retired last year. Well, that company was sold. I was with them for about seven years and then they were sold to another company. I was with them for sixty-three years. Basically, the reason I left at that time--they sold the part of the business that I was in to another company, and the other company, they would have been good to work for. I have no problem, but I figured that after sixty-eight years working there and [at age] ninety-one, I think it's time. I think it's time, but I really miss it. I miss it because I know I did a good job. I took care of my customers like they were my friends. I didn't try to sell them anything, over sell them. If they needed help on any

suggestions and so forth, I did it. One thing I always liked to do in this business around holiday time, twice a year, before Christmas and before Halloween and before Easter, we used to have a candy show in our office. We had a display room, and I used to setup the whole thing with all different candies, different things that we had. We ran [it] for a week or so. We had customers come in from all over, and we sold them candy. It was a very big thing in our business.

MG: What's your favorite candy?

JW: Well, we used to sell a chocolate bar made from Holland, Van Houten, a solid chocolate bar. They made a milk chocolate, a dark, and some other flavors. I liked milk chocolate. That I always liked. I can't have it because I'm diabetic. I don't think it's around anymore anyhow. But if I wanted to eat something, I wanted to sell a piece of chocolate, I wouldn't eat it. I would have Nestle chocolate.

MG: Let's back up a little bit. Where were you living when you came home from the war?

JW: In Newark. I lived in Newark. That's where my parents lived and then when we got married, we found a small apartment in Newark. After a short time, we bought a house in Hillside, next town. After that, and the kids went to school, and high school there, and so forth. Then when they were out already, we bought this house here in Union about thirty-eight years ago. We're really around this area our whole lives.

MG: Can you tell us a little bit about your wedding day?

JW: Well, we had a very small wedding. We were married in Rabbi Prinz's study in B'Nai Abraham on Clinton Avenue in Newark. The only people attending there were our parents, my brother, Florence's sister, and her niece. I don't think anyone else was here. Florence would remember better. That's where we got married. A small wedding. We went to some nice restaurant for dinner. Then we went to New York City on our honeymoon, a two-week honeymoon. I'm trying to think. There was a show that we went to that was supposed to be the biggest thing. Was it Eddie Cantor's show? We didn't like it. We walked out on it. Florence will remember. Then I started working. Didn't even have a car then. I used to walk to work. It was about a mile and a half, but that's nothing. I was used to it. I walked to high school back and forth every day, a mile. No school buses then.

MG: Was it up hill both ways?

JW: No. [laughter] Straight. But maybe I'm wrong on this. This is not for the recording or anything. Every place you go, all day long, you see school buses. Why don't they use some of that money for school for education? It's unbelievable, and crossing guards. You know who was a crossing guard when I went to school? Me. They had a medal really. I was there in different places crossing guard. Well, the thing is a little different then. Like grammar school or any of the schools, you went to the closest school where you lived. Now they go all over the place, but you go in the town of Newark, someplace up here on Morris Avenue where they park the buses--I can't believe how many there are, but I guess that's progress.

MG: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill at all?

JW: I did. I'm sorry I didn't go further today. Didn't go to college. I got a different job for a little while in training and so forth, but not very much of it. I still regret that I didn't go to college after, but that's what the circumstances were at the time. You went along with it. That's it. What was that show that we went to on our honeymoon that we didn't like? Eddie Cantor?

FW: That we walked out on?

JW: Yes.

FW: *Carousel*. You didn't like it.

JW: Not *Carousel*. There was another one. Oh, yes. *Carousel*, that's right.

FW: We walked out on that.

JW: But we did go to some show of Eddie Cantor didn't we?

FW: I really don't remember.

JW: You want a drink of water?

MG: I'm okay. Would you like anything?

DM: I'm fine. Thank you.

MG: I have a note here and forgive me if we already covered this, but you were injured in a plane accident.

JW: Yes.

MG: Was that before, that was during or training or afterwards?

JW: In training. When we were in Wendover, we went on a long range training flight from Wendover, Utah to Los Angeles, up north to California. We were supposed to come back to Wendover. It was a night mission, too. It was actually navigation. Now, as I had told you, these were our training planes. These were not our regular planes yet. So they took the gun turrets off, the lower and upper and welded, or bolted a cover there. When we were flying on our way to San Francisco, the copilot called me up. He said, "Jack, come on up here. Look at Alcatraz island down there, all the lights." So, I went up and kneeled between the pilot and copilot and all of a sudden the cover of the turret, right alongside of where I sit--and I had my legs out there. I would have been bye-bye. Blew. What knocked me out was a lack of oxygen. Right past where--like there's the pilot sitting and here's the navigator seat. Right up here in a B-29, there's a tunnel that goes to the back. You can crawl to the back. Right up there, there was a Plexiglas opening where I used to shoot the stars and I left my octant right there. Well, that came shooting through like a gun and hit me on the head and knocked me out.

MG: Yes, now I remember.

JW: Well, the pilot landed in San Francisco. They took me to the hospital, stitched me up, and kept me there overnight. They put some plywood cover on the plane. The next day we flew

back at low altitude. The reason it blew [was] because we were pressurized. Now, when you pressurize, they simulate a certain altitude where you can breathe without oxygen and usually it was like at eight thousand feet, but we were at 32,000 feet, so the pressure inside was so great it-- "whoosh." They call it explosive decompression. I didn't have my parachute on. One more funny thing, too. When we went out on these long missions, it was twelve, thirteen hours so they had to feed us. So they always had a big box like this, a warmer, food warmer, and they had trays of food. That night it happened to be spaghetti and meatballs. That blew out. That somehow blew out. The next day, the Oakland paper, which is right next to San Francisco, there was a little article and it said, "What, is the Air Force dropping meatballs?" [laughter] I got that article too.

DM: I actually had a question about the war, if that is okay.

JW: That's all right. I'll tell you anything.

DM: You talked last time, I believe, about how you had a dislike for the Japanese or some of the soldiers did just because of Pearl Harbor and the way they were treating POWs.

JW: Yes.

DM: I was just curious, since you have relatives from Poland and Austria, how you felt about the Germans at the time.

JW: Well, we didn't have a good idea about what the Germans did to the people. I happen to be Jewish. What they did to all the Jews there--

DM: When did you find out about that?

JW: What?

DM: About the Holocaust and everything that was going on.

JW: Oh, yes. When I was a kid really, because my mother was from Austria. She was here when she was a young lady, but she had three brothers that still lived in Austria.

FW: Vienna.

JW: Right? In Vienna.

FW: Yes, Vienna.

JW: Three, yes. They were all married. Between my mother and father, they managed to bring them all over here, to this country. You had to substantiate that they have something to do. You just couldn't bring anybody in. My mother used to have to go to New York to do it and everything. They brought them here, all three of them. Should I tell them where I slept? No? Okay. [laughter] I won't tell that one.

MG: During World War II, when did you find out about the atrocities and the Holocaust?

JW: Oh, well we knew it [inaudible]. We had radio. We had newspaper. We knew what was going on. Absolutely. Look, in 1939--what was it? September 1939 they invaded Poland, right? That's when it started. [Editor's Note: Germany invaded Poland September 1, 1939. This is marked as the beginning of World War II.]

DM: Did you have a desire at all to want to fight in Europe instead of in the Pacific because of that?

JW: No, not really. I don't think I ever gave it a thought. I enlisted, I was called up, and went through the training. Wherever they sent me was fine. I had no choice.

DM: That's true.

JW: As a matter of fact, you say about choice. I enlisted in the Air Force as an aviation cadet. I went to Atlantic City for basic training. The Air Force took over all those old hotels there before, and I did plenty of marching on the boardwalk and calisthenics on the beach. Then I went to Nashville, Tennessee. They had a classification center where they tested you, whether you wanted to be a pilot, navigator, or bombardier. You put in a request. I put in navigator, but in their infinite wisdom I guess they needed more pilots. They put me through and put in pilot. So, they sent me to pilot training and I washed out of pilot training because I had no desire. It's not an excuse. It's just a thing that--in Decatur, Alabama. Then, luckily, they sent me to navigation school in Monroe, Louisiana. I guess they needed pilots then and they had to fill a [spot].

DM: Army needs first, yes. [laughter] Did you guys call yourselves the Air Force at the time or was it the Army Air Corps?

JW: It was Air Corps then, I think, and now it's Air Force. They changed that because it was part of the Army, really. Then they separated the whole thing. As a matter of fact, one disappointment that I had--I tried to go to West Point when I was out of high school. Didn't know anybody, nothing. I went all over trying. They turned their back on me. But that's the way it worked out. You take it as it comes. I was fortunate I was out at Colorado Springs, by the Air Force Academy during some training at one time, which was nice out there. That's nice out there. You ever been out there?

DM: Not yet, no. I have a couple buddies out there, yes.

JW: Yes, beautiful out there. I went to there. They had what they called--there was a training, a navigator's training. There was a big tall building. It was like a [inaudible] trainer for a pilot, a pilot learning. They had simulated missions there. Oh, was that beautiful country there. That's the only time I've been out around there.

DM: Do you have any memories of any sort of Anti-Semitism while you were in the military?

JW: Yes. In Atlantic City. A friend of mine, his brother was with me down there and his brother--that's Sam [inaudible].

FW: Yes, I know who you're talking about.

JW: His brother worked for the police department. He was a little older. I don't know what he did actually, but he worked for the Newark Police Department, a psychologist or something like that. So we were in one of the hotels in Atlantic City--I'll tell you a little story about that too after. I guess we had some free time. We were walking the halls. Sam, he was older than me. He played professional basketball. They had professional basketball teams around there. He was terrific. So we're walking down the hallway, and a couple guys come up to us, "Hey, come on with us. We're going to shave that Jew boy's moustache off." You know what Sam did? "Whack." He knocked him cold. We walked away. That's a true story, honest to God. Basically, that was the only thing. Maybe you heard a word here and there, but you just passed it off. The funny thing is this hotel that we stayed in--what was the name of that hotel?

FW: Knickerbocker?

JW: The Knickerbocker Hotel. It's a small hotel off one of the side streets there in downtown. Many years later, Florence's organization [inaudible] was running a weekend in Atlantic City. So we went. We go in, and we check in, and I walk in this lobby, I looked around. "I know this place." All dressed up and everything, but I know this place. So I went and checked in. I said to the desk clerk, "Have you been here long?" "Oh, thirty some odd years." I said, "Did this used to be the hotel Knickerbocker?" He looked at me, he said, "How the hell do you know?" [laughter] Funny things like that happened. But can I tell you anymore funny stories? No, not right now.

MG: If you think of them, let us know. Dan, did you have other questions about Jack's service or World War II?

DM: Those were most of mine I think.

MG: I wanted to ask about your life as newlyweds.

JW: What do you mean?

MG: Things that stand out to you after the war and in the beginning of your marriage.

JW: Well, we had a pretty good life, I think. Had two wonderful daughters. Really couldn't want any better. Our grandchildren are just fabulous. Oh, one thing, too here. At the wedding, there were two of my brothers' sons that live out in Long Island that I haven't seen in a long, long time. I spoke to them. They couldn't do enough for me--two boys. They both happen to be podiatrists because my brother was a podiatrist. Well, one is a podiatrist, one is something else.

FW: Chiropractor.

JW: Chiropractor. But my family, couldn't ask for anything better. The kids, they were brought up right and their children were brought up right. I'll give you an example of our younger daughter, Sherryl's sister. She was divorced when the boys were four-and-a-half and two. They lived outside Philadelphia, had a house there. She worked. She took care of the house. I made her pay off the house. She took those kids. They sat at their desk. They didn't move until they did their homework. She helped them and all that, and everything. Well, the older boy is a doctor, and the other one's a computer whiz, [laughter] because she took care of them.

MG: When was Sherryl born?

JW: 1951.

FW: April 4, 1950, 5-0.

JW: '50. 5-0. '51 is when I was called back, yes. Arlene was three years younger.

FW: Yes.

JW: Right?

FW: Yes.

MG: What was it like to be a father for the first time?

JW: Oh, thrilling. I hung around the hospital. They chased me home. We don't know. I went over to my mother's house and that phone rang. I think I knocked it off the pedestal. [laughter] I ran over. Oh, I brought my mother and your mother over too, didn't I? And you hollered at me? You remember? [laughter] You remember these little stupid things. How old are you?

MG: I'm thirty.

JW: And you?

DM: Twenty-six.

JW: Yes?

DM: Yes.

JW: You don't mind me asking do you?

MG: No, no.

JW: I'm just going over things in my mind.

DM: Did Newark change a whole lot while you were overseas?

FW: Not then.

JW: No, not really. No, that was [inaudible]. Listen, I went to Weequahic High School. Do you know of it?

DM: I've heard of it.

JW: 1940 I graduated. That was a new high school in Newark, because that area, in the Weequahic section built up and they needed another high school. That high school was one of the highest rated high schools in the country at that time. Another thing, too. The house that we bought in Hillside, a couple years ago I rode by there, and it was burned down. Could get sick to my stomach, because not only was it a small house, it was an old house. My father-in-law,

Florence's father, was a carpenter. When he had some slow times, he finished the basement, paneling, did a new kitchen with new cabinets and everything. [inaudible] it burned down. I don't know if anything was ever done with it. But Newark was a great town, great in those years. Look what they had in Newark, downtown Newark, all the department stores, Bamberger's, Hahne's.

FW: Kresge's.

JW: Kresge's, downtown Newark.

FW: Ohrbach's.

JW: As a matter of fact I just saw that--do you know Broad Street? Do you know downtown Newark? That old Hahne's building on Broad Street? I saw something in the paper there. They're doing something. They want to build condos and offices there. The building is still standing there.

MG: Can you talk about how Newark has changed up until today?

JW: Well, I don't know. I don't have nothing to do with anything there. As a matter of fact, one thing, too, we used to have trolley cars in Newark. I had a job when I first got out of high school at the Westinghouse Lamp Division on Orange Street. I used to take a 27 Mount Prospect trolley back, almost door to door. You ever ride a trolley?

DM: I haven't. I didn't know Newark had them, actually. That's really cool.

JW: Right?

FW: Yes.

JW: Trolley car. It has the wires up there.

MG: When did you get your first car?

JW: When I worked for a car dealer, a Dash. It's the first car I got. I don't remember what year that was. I don't remember what year that was.

MG: Did the Red Scare affect you here in New Jersey? Was it something you were aware of? [Editor's Note: The Red Scare is the hysteria associated with the perceived threat of communists within the United State in the post-World War II Era. Historians also refer to this era as the McCarthy Era as Senator Joseph McCarthy accused many people of being communists and adding them to black lists.]

JW: Yes, well, we thought about it. Didn't like it. We lived fine. We didn't need anything like that. We were, this is a democratic republic. What more could you want? What more could people want? I'll tell you another thing, too. You talk about Communism, share this, and share that, and share things. I'll tell you a story about my father. My father was a baker, okay? He worked for a small independent bakery that had a store and a bakery--retail store they had in that. He was part of a union. He worked six days a week. He's off one day. There were some men

that didn't have a job. So, what they did, the union men and my father, they gave up one of their days. Say you weren't working, one day you'd work here, one day you'd work here. Unheard of, right?

DM: Yes.

JW: What more could you want? Thankfully, during the Depression, we always had bread on the table, always. We lived in a six family house. We always had bread and food. My mother used to sometimes give some of the neighbors in that house, that the husband wasn't working, she'd give him food. So what do you need Communism for?

DM: Obviously you were willing to go and participate and fight in Korea.

JW: Yes.

DM: Would you have been as equally as willing to fight in any of the later conflicts like Vietnam or Iraq?

JW: Yes, absolutely.

DM: Yes.

JW: Well, you know what they wanted me--as a matter of fact, they were looking for navigators for the B-52s. That's just my feeling. This is my country.

MG: Maybe it's just in retrospect, but I feel like things were changing so quickly during those years in terms of technology.

JW: Oh, listen. That's advancement. Things change. You name it and it has changed. Even cars, what they have in cars. Do you know how to drive a stick shift?

DM: I do. It's been a long time though.

JW: Really? [laughter]

DM: Yes. [laughter]

MG: What about getting a television in the home? Do you remember getting a television for the first time?

FW: Not right away.

JW: Not right away.

FW: We couldn't afford it.

JW: We had a small [television] about this big, but what a change that was. Anytime of the day, you're not doing anything, you turn the television on. Not that we watched that much. I watched sporting events, but the main thing is we watched *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune* at

night. That's what we like. We catch a movie once in a while. We'll just scroll through, maybe watch something for a few minutes. Originally we had a radio, and we could play a radio.

MG: Were you aware of the movements of the 1960s, the social revolutions that were taking place?

JW: Not really, no. I don't think so. I just went along with the times, that's all. Oh, another thing too that might be of interest. When I was younger and that, Saturday afternoon went to the movies, young kids. The serials--had to go see the serials. You ever see any of them?

DM: I've seen clips, yes.

JW: You had to see the next serial, but Saturday afternoon the place was mobbed [with] kids my age. I used to participate in basketball and softball with some friends. I'm just trying to think of some things you might be interested in.

MG: Well, all of it is interesting. It sounds like life was more simple back then.

JW: Well, I don't think people worried as much then as they do now. Maybe there's too much freedom.

MG: I think there are a lot of choices.

JW: Yes. Yes, that's a good way to put it. Well, that's all right. That's a democracy, but some people, I think, take advantage of it

MG: How did you feel when about the Vietnam War?

JW: Well, I felt that we should help the people. I felt very bad when these veterans came home and they were treated [poorly]. I'll never watch a Jane Fonda movie. [Editor's Note: Jane Fonda is an American actress who was against the Vietnam War. In 1972, she traveled to Hanoi, North Vietnam and posed for a photo sitting behind an anti-aircraft gun wearing a North Vietnamese helmet.] What a disgrace. What a disgrace. She finally apologized afterwards. I don't accept her apology. Now I'm just expressing my feelings.

MG: That's okay. Can you talk a little bit about your involvement with the Army Air Force Historical Association?

JW: Oh, yes. Well, I'm not involved too much. They have different affairs, which we don't go to. It's too much for us. We can't handle it. But I'm glad to be a member of it. There are certain things that we do. If I could help them in any way, I do. They go to all these air shows, too. It's a good thing. It's a very good thing that they're doing. They help people out too, which is nice. I'll remind you of this show. You'll enjoy it, Molly.

MG: I would like that.

JW: I know you will. Reading is really the biggest and the best one. It's not far from here.

MG: No problem. I will be there.

JW: You travel, right?

MG: Yes. I am in my car all the time going to interviews.

JW: How did you get these different people to interview?

MG: All kinds of ways. I give lots of talks around New Jersey. We let people know how the process works, what oral history is, and why this is so valuable and urgent. Sometimes people come up to me afterwards and say, "I think I'd like to participate." Or often, like in your case, the child of the veteran or the person being interviewed contacts us.

JW: Yes, well Sherryl's [inaudible].

MG: Family members realize that you are holding these memories and stories. If we don't get them recorded, we potentially lose them.

JW: There's no question about it. No question about it.

MG: I think people should see oral historians like they see doctors.

JW: Yes. I'm going back to that book again. This fellow, how he put that book together is absolutely unbelievable. He was nothing. He just decided. He's a historian, and he just decided to attach himself to the 509th. He goes all over the country to air shows, gun shows. There's a lot of gun shows around, too. Tulsa, Oklahoma. I think, Louisville, Kentucky he goes--where he sells the book. As far as I'm concerned, you can throw all the guns in the ocean.

MG: Yes. I will probably skip the gun shows.

JW: But they sell them. It's legal to sell [some] places. There are plenty. They have hundreds of people selling it.

MG: Yes, what better way to tell history than through the voices of those who experienced it. I think that's what we are doing here. I just have a few more questions, but if things pop up to you, please feel free to share them.

JW: That's what I'm doing, Molly.

MG: Looking back on your life, what has sort of stood out to you or what have been some special moments?

JW: Special moments? My wife and my children, and my grandchildren. No doubt about it. I couldn't have done it without Florence. My children, they're good to us and they're just fine people. The other kids are, too.

MG: Can you say again how long you have been married?

JW: Sixty-eight years.

MG: What is the secret? Dan is married. I am about to be married. What is the secret?

FW: Luck. Luck that your health holds out.

JW: Well, like I said, when our great grandchildren were born, I told a few people. I said, "We're lucky to be alive to have great grandchildren."

MG: How do you think you are different because of your World War II experience?

JW: I don't know.

FW: How are you different because of World War II?

JW: To tell you the truth, I don't know how to answer that question.

MG: This was a really momentous thing in history and in your life and I did not know if it changed you in anyway.

JW: Well, I can say one thing though. By being in the service, I learned to respect people and depend on people. I still say this, that every young man and every young girl should put one year in service because they will learn how to depend on each other. Not just for shooting or anything like that, but you learned to depend on each other and respect everybody. Because when that sergeant gets up and says, "You stand at attention," you're going to stand at attention. You're going to learn to listen. That's about it. That's the only way I know how to answer that one.

MG: Am I missing anything?

JW: Not that I can think of. Florence, you know anything that we missed?

FW: No. You're very thorough.

MG: Dan, do you have any other questions before we wrap up?

DM: I think he answered pretty much all of mine.

MG: What might happen is we leave and then think of five things we wish we would have talked to you about. But, I can always come back and we can follow up. I think I have asked all the questions I have, but I want to make sure there's nothing else.

JW: There's nothing else I can think of at the moment. The head doesn't work as good as it used to.

MG: Yours is working pretty well. I'm impressed with your memory.

DM: You got a better memory than I do. [laughter]

JW: Well, these are things you don't forget about. You don't forget those things. Let's see. There's something I was trying to think of.

FW: I think you covered most of your time in the service.

JW: Yes.

FW: That's it.

JW: Do you want to look through the book there a little bit?

MG: Sure, sure. Well, I will conclude this interview then, but if there is something else, I can always turn the recorder right back on. But this has been a real treat.

JW: This is a real treat to do this, because I wanted to do this because I don't want people to forget. This is for posterity.

MG: I agree. Well thank you so much for your service and your time.

JW: Unfortunately, years ago, there weren't the facilities to do what you can do now to record these things.

MG: Yes, I hate to think of all the stories that have been lost because someone did not do something like this.

JW: Yes. How many have you really interviewed? You got a lot? Just a round figure.

MG: We currently have about fifteen hundred interviews in the Rutgers Oral History Archives collection.

JW: Really? Have you gotten from all services and all varieties?

MG: Yes. I've interviewed a lot of World War II veterans.

JW: Good variety too? Good.

MG: Korean, Vietnam, even Iraq and Afghanistan.

JW: Really?

MG: Yes.

JW: Yes. Well, that's another sore subject with me. I'll give you my opinion on that, too. I think we should bring all our fellows home. If those Afghans want to blow up cars, let them blow themselves up.

FW: There are a lot of Holocaust survivors who allow themselves to be interviewed. They go around the schools and talk. So, kids today should know.

MG: Yes, I think that's really valuable. We have a couple Holocaust testimonies in our collection. I think it's really important.

JW: But how could they not teach about this in school?

DM: Unfortunately, a lot of the schools do not cover wars so much. I know in my public school, personally, we covered the Holocaust in depth, but the actual war they kind of glanced over.

JW: Where did you go to school?

DM: In Mount Olive in Morris County.

JW: Oh, yes.

DM: Not too far from here.

JW: That's all right.

FW: Jack, you get annoyed when it's the anniversary, August 6th and 13th, and there isn't a word in the newspaper about it.

JW: Another thing that bothers me, too. You take a holiday like Memorial Day. Now, there's a real significance for Memorial Day, right? We're honoring the dead, right? Well, I object to all these stores opening, having these big sales and all. Stay home and respect the meaning of this holiday. That's just a personal opinion, but I guess the green overcomes everything else.

MG: Yes, unfortunately.

JW: Yes. You sure you don't want a drink, Molly?

MG: I am okay, yes.

JW: Yes? Want a drink?

DM: I'm good. Thank you.

MG: Well, thank you so much. This has been a real pleasure. I will look forward to when we can go to an airshow together.

JW: Well, I'm expecting you to be in Reading.

FW: He's going to look for you.

MG: Yes, it's a date.

JW: I've been whiny about it.

MG: I will write my address down. But for now, I will turn this off.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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