

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral history interview with Julian Jones,
Signal Corps Civilian, SCR-268 1941-42,
By Tom Hanley, NPS intern, Monmouth University
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Transcribed by Tom Minton, NPS 2008



Julian Jones in WWII



Julian Jones at his drafting desk, Camp Evans 1972.

Hanley: This Oral History Interview of Julian C. Jones is taking place on May 15th, 2004, at the National Park Service Headquarters, at Sandy Hook's Fort Hancock, in Middletown, NJ. I'm Tom Hanley, and I'll be conducting the interview. Good afternoon, Julian.

Jones: Good afternoon, Tom.

Hanley: Now, I've got a couple of questions first, that we just normally do, that have nothing to do with military service, but just background information. Where and when were you born?

Jones: Ah, (laughter) I was born outside of Egg Harbor City, New Jersey on July the 12th, 1920. That's in South Jersey.

Hanley: Did you attend high school?

Jones: Yes, I did.

Hanley: Which high school did you graduate from?

Jones: Well, I graduated from Irvington High School, in Essex County, about 1937, I think it was. We had moved up to North Jersey in the meantime.

Hanley: Was your father or your grandfather ever in the military?

Jones: My father was in the National Guard here, years ago, but not in the Regular Army.

Hanley: Where and when did he serve in the National Guard if you can recall?

Jones: When did he serve? I think it was in Brooklyn. I couldn't tell you when. I have pictures at home, when they were taken when they were in the field training you know, in the summertime.

Hanley: You were a civilian worker at Fort Hancock. How did you come to get involved at Fort Hancock?

Jones: My father was pushing me to ... I couldn't go to college. We didn't have any money. So, at the time, there was an ad in the paper, an article, that they were starting a training program. So and I went down to apply for it. And it was in the Newark College of Engineering. And at night they called it Newark Technical School. So, I applied, and I was accepted, and I went there. I went four nights a week from 7 to 10 (p.m.). And I think I went from, I had it down here somewhere, about 8 months. From May or June to October I think it was. And we covered a lot of things. I've got some of them written down here, do you want that now?

Hanley: Sure, go right ahead.

Jones: Well, first was drafting work. And I had a lot of drafting and mechanical pointing in high school. And I always liked it, so it was, it fell right in with a lot of the work that I was wanting to do. And the work that we, the schooling, was in drafting and shop work, which included welding, machine shop, and forging. And, so I learned a little bit about welding. I did some welding in the school, and forging. I made a nice pair of chisels, hard and everything. And they liked them so much they kept them, (laughs) the instructor. And then we also did some shop surveying. This is surveying with a transit. And locating machines and stuff, something in the building. So we were introduced to surveying, not that we were surveyors, but we were introduced and knew what to do.

Hanley: And you used all that preparation for your work at Fort Hancock?

Jones: Well, what happened, near the end of the course, they had a big bulletin board down in the lobby of the school. The school was located on High Street in Newark. And we were told there's a list of job openings, and that you probably wanna apply for 'em. Why, go down and take a look. So, I did go down, and I saw this, and it seemed like it was a good thing, and I wrote and applied for it. And they sent me a card to come down to Fort Monmouth for an interview. So, now, at that time, I didn't even know where Fort Monmouth was. I knew where this was. I knew where Sandy Hook was. So, I did come down and I had an interview, and I was accepted for a job as an apprentice draftsman. Which at that time paid about, I think \$1,200.00 a year. And, I had the option of starting the work in Fort Monmouth or out here. But, I was taking the interview in Fort Monmouth, and I thought, 'Well, I know what this looks like, I'd think I'd rather come out here' because I knew what the area was like. So this is where I started.

Hanley: What was your start and your end dates at Fort Hancock?

Jones: I started here on June the 9th, 1941. And after about a year here, they moved our part down to Camp Evans in Belmar, Wall Township. So I moved down there. I worked down there. That was about, I would say about a year, went down there, I think, the following fall.

Hanley: Now as you said, you actually knew about Fort Hancock before you came here?

Jones: I was, I worked here, about a year, before they moved everything that we were doing to Camp Evans.

Hanley: Okay, but before you even came here, and got involved in anyway, did you know anything about the existence of Fort Hancock?

Jones: Well, I didn't know what I was gonna do, if that's what you're asking.

Hanley: No, I mean did you know that this was here?

Jones: In fact, they were, at the introduction to coming to work here, it was impressed upon me about secrecy. And that I was not supposed to tell anybody where I worked or anything like that. And, a little bit along that line, I was, one time, when I went home, I went to, you know, all these neighborhoods in the city, they got a candy store on the corner. So, I went into the candy store for cigarettes or whatever, and the woman who ran it, owned it, she asked me what kind of trouble I was in. And I said, ya know, I says 'I'm not in any trouble. Why, what's the matter?' She says, 'The cops were in here asking about you.' So, and the things they asked, I says, 'Oh, I think I know what that's all about.' So, what it was, was a check, security check that I guess the FBI got a hold of the local police and said 'check this guy out' and so on and so forth. But, my parents didn't know where I worked. I never told them. They didn't know what I did, but there again I never told them. And I used to like to read the "Popular Science" and "Popular Mechanics" magazines. So, one day, I picked one of these up and I'm paging through it, and lo and behold I see a picture of a 268. Now the 268 was a radar set, was probably the first ones that they built and this is what we were doing here and making drawings on, for other ones they were going to build here. They were testing them out, down here. So...

Hanley: Before you came down here because you prepared for it in Newark, did you know exactly what job it was that you were going to do here at Fort Hancock?

Jones: No, I didn't know what the job was. I knew it was, drafting was involved, that's what I applied for.

Hanley: And I think you already stated it, but one more time, what was your title?

Jones: I was an apprentice draftsman. I think that's all it was. Apprentice draftsman. I don't know whether it was mechanical or not.

Hanley: Was there a certain name of your department, aside from your title, was there an overall name for your unit?

Jones: Well, I worked in the, it was, this was an RDF Laboratory. That stood for Radio Direction Finding Laboratory and that was part of the Fort Monmouth, and that was SCEL, Signal Corps Engineering Laboratory. And, the people I worked with, the drafting room, I think it was just called, the Drafting Room. And they had two sections in there. One was Development and the other side was Production. Now, this is Development when they are making drawings for new items, and then Production, after this is, after everything has been tested and done, and they are gonna let it out to manufacture, they make production drawings. That's about as close as I can remember, to explain that.

Hanley: Now, what type of job did you do after leaving Fort Hancock?

Jones: After leaving Fort Hancock?

Hanley: After you finished up your work here and your work at Camp Evans afterwards. When you were done with military work, with the drafting?

Jones: Well, I continued working for the Government, and I had 37 years in. I retired in, now, 37 years includes the time of sick leave that was left over, that was added onto my retirement, and I retired from the Hexagon in 1977 or 78. So, and in between there, I had military service, too, which was over three years.

Hanley: So, you started off here out of school, and went right through and made a career out of it?

Jones: Yeah, well, as I worked here, and the more you do, the more work you, the more things you do, you become experienced. And we had in-house courses too, to take, which I took. So, I did learn a lot, and I stayed, and the more you stayed, you know, the more you learned. And, this was just starting off here. And of course I stayed with it. And we got a lot of training. Played around and I became involved in the Space Program. And we did a lot of things with that. I got two awards on that. And we developed the tape recorder that we put on the Atlas Missile in 1958. (Project Score) And that broadcast President Eisenhower's, he was President at the time, and he broadcast a Christmas message that was taped and put on that missile on the tape recorder. And that went around the world. And, at certain times it was activated. We developed an endless tape in there, that it would run off of the outside or the inside of the reel, and go back on the other end. It was continuous.

Hanley: It was on a missile, you say? Was it orbiting? How did it work?

Jones: It was on the Atlas Missile, which went around, yeah, sure, it was orbiting.

Hanley: So, it was orbiting the earth and broadcasting President Eisenhower's message?

Jones: Yeah.

Hanley: Wow.

Jones: 1958, around Christmas time, was when that was done. And one time, years later, when I was down in Washington, and they toured this, they have a building for, the title was "Space ..." pertaining to space, and up on the wall was the, not the whole tape recorder, but the outside of it. And I knew what it was and I showed it to my wife. And last year, I was, not this past year, the year before, I was down for my Armored reunion, was in Augusta, Georgia, at Fort Gordon I believe, and that's now the head of the Signal Corps, and they have a museum there, and Dorothy and I were going through the museum, and lo and behold there's my tape recorder with the power supply up on the, yeah, that was quite a thrill. I wish I had a camera with me. I would have taken a picture of that. Yeah. So...

Hanley: You've obviously done a lot of stuff, from just starting out there you went all the way...

Jones: Oh yeah! Well, you see, you know if you are interested, and I always liked the work, there was always something new, and that's the way it was.

Hanley: Now, while you were here, you working a couple miles out from the Fort. They didn't actually let you in the Fort, correct?

Jones: Yeah.

Hanley: But did they? From talking to other people who were working with drafting, I know that a lot weren't actually allowed in the Fort where we are right now. Were you allowed in the Fort?

Jones: I really had no, I guess I was, but I really had no reason to ever come out. I may have been out here once or twice. I think one time I came out to see if I could buy gasoline. They did have a gas station out here.

Hanley: The pump still exists, actually.

Jones: Is that right? I think I did, but other than that, there was no reason to come out here, because that would have been about three miles, actually, to get down here.

Hanley: Was there ever an alert of a possible enemy attack?

Jones: Not that can I can recall, no. I remember when they had firing practice here. And they had both anti-aircraft, the plane was towing a big target, and they were firing at that. And then the big guns were, I dunno if they were 8", 10" guns? And they used to fire over our head, and I mentioned this to different people, in fact I saw a picture once. If you were in the right spot, you could actually see the shells. They were big shells. And the target was way out, a floating target, I guess.

Hanley: If there was, and obviously you said there weren't, but if there ever was the chance of an enemy attack, was there a special plan in place. Like did you have a bomb shelter to go into or anything?

Jones: Not that I can recall, no.

Hanley: All right. You were a civilian worker here. Did you work with military personnel as well?

Jones: Did we what?

Hanley: Did you also work with military personnel?

Jones: Well, we had officers who were in charge of that. I have some names written down here, that I remember. The Bird Colonel, he was in charge, he was Rex V. D. Corput.

Hanley: How would you spell his last name?

Jones: C-o-r-p-u-t. And then there was a man, he later become a, got a commission. I think he was an R.O.T.C. man, was Paul Watson. He was a Colonel too, but he was a Lieutenant Colonel. And some of the other ones, I don't remember. There were other officers here, Lieutenants and Captains and so on. As a matter of fact, there was a Captain who worked here, and I remembered him from here. And I moved down to Wall Township, and then I went in the Army. And I was in the Army maybe a year and half, or two years, and I went out to California for desert training. And in the process, we went to a place in the... what was it? It was a signal depot, and I met this Captain, he was out there. And I remembered him from here.

Hanley: Where did you live while you worked at Fort Hancock?

Jones: Well, in the beginning, I commuted. I drove everyday from my home in Newark. And that was about, I did that for about six months.

Hanley: That's a lot of driving.

Jones: Yeah, well, it wasn't bad. It was, well we only had one car. And fortunately the way the time worked out, my father worked in a place in, it was Kelly Press. And Kelly Press made printing presses, but he didn't work on that. He worked on, they were making, they were putting things together on small tanks. So he worked there, that was in... near Elizabeth, by... Elmora. He worked. So that was on the way. And his hours were 7-5. My hours here were 8-3:30. We worked 4, 5 and half days. 39 hours a week. So used to take him to work, drop him off at about quarter to seven in the morning, and drive right down here. And I got down here at about quarter to eight. And then I'd leave here at 3:30. And I'd pick him up at 5 o'clock, and then we'd go home. So, I did that for, well, I know it was through the summer. And then finally, there was a man who got a job here, in the drafting room, and he was from out of state, he was from Utah, and he rented a house down in Avon. It was a big house, and there were four of us, that worked here in the drafting room, rented a room with him, and he used to drive us to work, so it worked out pretty good, a good deal. And, well, then we moved down to Evans, so with fuel, it was a real short drive for him.

Hanley: While you were still out here, where did you eat?

Jones: Where did I eat? Well, we used to have breakfast and lunch, a woman, his wife used to give us lunch, and then when we went back home, we used to eat at the diner, sometimes in Asbury Park or Belmar.

Hanley: Did you eat breakfast and lunch here, on the premises?

Jones: No, we used to bring our lunch here. They used.... I'll tell ya, there was a couple of fellas that had a milk. One was Jimmy Ronan, I forget what the other was, two Jimmies, they used to have the milk brought in, and they used to sell you the milk. You know, containers of milk. But other than the food, no, we didn't have any food that I can remember. On paydays, we used to go out to Sea Bright to cash our check, and we'd generally grab something to eat down there. There was a couple places to eat.

Hanley: Were there any social activities that you took part in out here?

Jones: They had some beach parties out here, but unfortunately, I wasn't able to attend them, because I had commitments. I couldn't stay. But they did, I was talking to a friend of mine the other day, Peter Kennedy, who maybe you interviewed, I dunno.

Hanley: Yes, I did.

Jones: You did?

Hanley: Mmhhh.

Jones: And he, he was talking about the beach party out there.

Hanley: Did you ever attend any religious services at the Fort?

Jones: Religious services? No.

Hanley: Now, we have a lovely natural environment out here that's very much the same as it was in the 1940's, did you ever go out to the beach?

Jones: Did I ever go out to the beach?

Hanley: While you were working here?

Jones: Oh yeah. I worked out there. I did, well, when you're an apprentice, you know, they put you to work on all kinds of things. Whatever they need done. Radar was in its infancy then, and we had a set out on the beach. And they were constantly trying to make improvements on it and so on. We had an original set. Was a 268, and that was on a four-wheeled trailer. And at some period of time, somewhere along the line, they had tests on it. So, they used to hire, I think, it was a Stinson aircraft, and a civilian, and he used to come out of Red Bank Airport. And he would fly a big triangle. And he would start... now, there was two lightships out here, the Scotland Lightship, and the Ambrose Lightship, and I think the Ambrose was the furthest one out. I'm not sure which was which, but that would be out at the end of Long Island, and he used to fly a triangle from Deal, out to that light, one light or the other, and back, to Coney Island Gas Tanks, and then go south again, back to Deal. Made quite a big triangle. And the radar was tracking him. It was a nice sized plane, so it was a nice target. And they'd track him. And they'd have, and as the radar moved to track him, there's a slave, they call it comparator, and

that's hooked up to it, so that when that moves, the comparator moves the same way. And there are dials on the comparator that, there's two men on there that used to call out the like the azimuth that angles this way and elevation this way and range, and I forget which ones now, raised it, but it was interesting. But they would call 'em out. And I had a clipboard and I'd write this stuff down. And after the test was done, I'd go back in and I'd plot these things on a graph. And then they were able to see you know how the test was going.

Hanley: So your visits to the beach were more for work than for recreational purposes?

Jones: They were what?

Hanley: So, your time at the beach was more work than recreation.

Jones: Oh yeah.

Hanley: Now, did you ever go to New York City at all from here? I know you lived up in North Jersey, so, did you ever take any excursions to New York?

Jones: On the job?

Hanley: Um Mhmm.

Jones: Not from here. There were things I attended that was pertaining to the mechanical aspect you know they used to have shows, they were commercial shows, I forget where, there was a big place up there we used to go, and we would get the, we were allowed to take the time off to go up. Spend the day. I can't think of anyplace else.

Hanley: Did you work with any females or minorities?

Jones: Yeah, sure. During the war, we had, while I was still here, we had quite a few females working in drafting. And there were, I would say a fair amount were black. In fact one, who was a regular friend of mine, Olive Jackson, and there was another fella, he just recently passed away, in the past year, named Bob Ferrell. He lived down in Brielle. In fact, he taught some classes that I took, and he was the teacher, Robert Ferrell, very nice guy. He had a master's degree.

Hanley: How would you spell his last name?

Jones: F-e-r-r-e-l-l. Robert Ferrell.

Hanley: Would you say that this was a fun, or boring place to work?

Jones: Was it fine or boring?

Hanley: Fun or boring.

Jones: Oh, it was a very good place to work. Of course, there's... you're always gonna find people that get a little bored or something, who don't like the job. And I had one fella who was given a promotion. He didn't like what he was doing, and he finally came back, and I phoned him, we were friends for years, I said, 'Ya know, if you don't like this as bad as the way you act, why don't you treat it – see if you can find something else in the same organization, because there's...' I forget how many people they employed, they probably employed about seven or 8,000 people, the biggest employer around at that time, I don't know what it is now...

Hanley: Not as much.

Jones: There were a lot of people employed. There was always, in fact, I had one fellow who worked there in the drafting room, he got a job on the Post, in the real estate section. What he did was he made a list of all the housing that was available to the G.I.'s when they came in from other posts. And he would find them apartments and so on and so forth. So, (inaudible), he loved it.

Hanley: Did anything especially humorous ever occur while you were working here? Any funny stories to tell us?

Jones: (Laughs) Well, we did have, we used to have messengers that delivered the mail, personally delivered the mail from one place to another. And at one time, and this fella, he happened to be, he was young, he was pretty gullible, and somebody sent him out one time on the beach. And he was walking up and down on the beach you know, looking around, looking around, and one of officers saw him, so the officer went out and asked him, 'What are you doing out here? I noticed you walking back and forth.' He says, 'I'm waiting for the air mail.' Well, somebody jokingly said, ya know, 'Go out, and they're gonna drop a bag of mail to you.'

That was one thing, another thing was, we had a fella in the drafting room, and at one time, they got a piece of, well, they used to do a lot of work in like schematics and that, in ink. They would first do it in pencil to make sure everything was alright, and then they would do it ink because it was more permanent. They drew it on board, so you could see down there more, but they had – somebody got a piece of black plastic, and it was probably this black (referring to the table) and it was very thin, only a couple thousandths (of an inch) thick, and it was cut kind of funny. So he left to the bathroom or something, and he left this board, and they had an ink bottle, they planned this, they planned this ahead of time. And you always took, when you were working in ink, you had like a little eye dropper, and you filled the pen, you know? So they had the little ink bottle, and it was laying on its side, and they had it glued to this thing, and it looked like, when they put it up on top of the board, and it was a big streak of black, and they had that right on this drawing. So when he come back, of course, it's glossy, it's shiny, (chuckling) and from a distance, not too far away. It looked like somebody upset the ink bottle, and the ink ran all over his drawing. And when he came back, oh my God, he almost died! (laughing) That was funny.

Hanley: That's a great practical joke to play on somebody. I'll keep that in mind for next April fool's day.

Jones: Well, we had a boss, and he always said, "A little bit of merriment takes the edge the work sometimes," and he never said much about it, you know, he said it's good to break things up a little bit, and then get back to work. That was about all we had, that I can remember.

Hanley: Did you keep in touch with anyone from Fort Hancock?

Jones: Did I what?

Hanley: Did you keep in touch with anyone you worked with out here?

Jones: Yeah, well, yes, I, a friend of mine, I put his name on that list, Jack Connolly, and we were pretty good friends, and I still, his wife just passed away, a few months ago, and we keep in touch. I thought about contacting him for this, but I don't know. I will contact him. And Peter Kennedy, of course I see him, I just talked to him, from the other night, he's out in California. And he came back, and I had called and left a message, and he called me the other night. I dunno, who else...? That's the only two I know of. I do... I see a fellow, he belongs to my NARFE chapter I belong to its NARFE, National Association of Retired Federal Employees. We meet once a month. And this fella there, Sam Adler, he's our legislative officer, and one day we were comparing the time we knew each other, and it dated back to 1941. He worked out here. Yeah. In fact, he was an electrical engineer, and he had a lot of electrical drawings. A lot of these people who worked on the board were engineers, and then they graduated, when the openings came up they moved out into engineering jobs. Like Pete Kennedy, he finally got his degree, and he moved out, to other jobs. He was an officer during the war. He got a commission. And another man who has since passed on, Pete Cavriottes (spelling?), and he was an engineer, graduate engineer degree, and he worked there, but then he moved out, too. As everything expanded, they were kind of in on the ground floor, and they got these jobs. There's another fella I remember I worked with, his name was Paul Pague. And he was from, we had a lot of people coming from all over the country, and he was from Texas. And I saw his name in a magazine one time, and he was the author of some big article. I forget what it was about. But I remember him.

Hanley: My final question: What stands out in your mind the most about Fort Hancock?

Jones: Well, I always thought this was a, historically, it's a terrific place. You know, they made it a National Park, and you get a lot of people down here. I just always liked it. I've been up here quite a few times, just drive around, and walk. Last time we was up here, this past fall, but I don't know what else I can say for it, it's a, the last time we were up here, a teacher had a class out here. Remember? (Speaking with Mrs. Jones) And they

were writing, and the kids were writing down comments about what they saw and so on and so forth. (Inaudible conversation with Mrs. Jones, about school group).

I think it's a nice place, really. I really think they should, I know it takes a lot of money to up – to keep it up and everything, but these buildings, I think, should be preserved as much as they can. I went to Twin Lights one time, they got a nice little museum up there. I dunno, is that light still working?

Hanley: It's used, it's not actually used for ships, it's more ornamental, but the light still shines.

Jones: Well see, that's the highest point on the coast between Maine and Florida, and of course years ago, ya know, that was a beacon for, so was these light ships, which they don't use anymore, they're gone. One's up at the South Street Seaport, you ever go up there? New York?

Hanley: Mhmm, I didn't know there was a lightship up there, though.

Jones: Yeah. Well, maybe it's gone now, but the last time I was up – (recording terminates mid-sentence).

END OF INTERVIEW