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Carl R. Cogar

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Carl R. Cogar

INTERVIEWER: John H. McNeely

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Artist.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Autobiography.

1 hour(3 3/4 tape speed); 30 pages.

Carl Cogar
by John H. McNeely
September 15, 1973

M: You were born in Clarksburg, West Virginia. When were you born there?

C: Fifteenth of November, 1921.

M: And your father had a business of some sort?

C: Yes, my father was in the restaurant business before the Crash. That took care of him, along with a lot of other people.

M: In 1929?

C: 1930. See, I was the oldest. There were five children in my family, and I was the oldest one. Of course, I was born in '21, and in January of 1930 my mother had her fifth child and died two weeks later. And within a month after that, my father lost everything he had in the world. His business, of course, went under, and the banks closed, and what he had in the bank he couldn't touch; so it just wiped him out. He was only 30 at the time.

M: How did you all live, then?

C: We couldn't have if it hadn't been for his mother, my grandmother. She took all five of us. She considered my mother to be her daughter, really. Mother asked her, on her death bed, to take the baby, who was only two weeks old. Grandmother told her she would take the baby and all of us, because we weren't going to be separated. So my grandmother and her daughter, my father's sister, Aunt Inez, lived together in the old family home and they took all five of us and raised us.

M: And they had some kind of a business?

C: No, they didn't. They had very little in those days. My grandfather had died years before--he died when I was six months old--but my Aunt Inez was an employee of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in the freight office. She was all her life. She was a long ways from wealthy, but she had a steady, reliable

income for those days. We got along, and that's about all.

M: You went to the schools there in Clarksburg?

C: I went to lots of schools in lots of places. The year my mother died, I lost track. I really can't remember how many schools I was in in the third grade. We would be in one place and mother would become ill and have to be hospitalized, and then they would take us children someplace else and so on. But, yes, I went to the public schools in Clarksburg and graduated from Washington Irving High School there, a year later than I should have. I painted so much I fell back a year. I graduated in 1940 and it should have been '39. (Laughter)

M: In your early life, your parents must have moved around.

C: They did, because of my mother's health. I started the first grade in Clarksburg, but my mother became ill and my father's uncle, my great uncle, was a wildcat oil man in Oklahoma. He was aware of my mother's condition and they thought that the climate would be better for her in the West than it was in West Virginia. So we went out there and lived there for a while. But it didn't work--it worked exactly the opposite. My mother got worse, so we went back to West Virginia and stayed there until her death.

M: How did you happen to get interested in art?

C: Actually, John, what we just talked about is in a way how I got into art. You see, my mother died when I was...well, I was nine in November and she died in January. The following summer during the school holidays, the summer vacation--I always loved to draw--I was up on the corner of a street in our neighborhood which is a beautiful street, all lined with big beautiful shade trees on both sides, and it's paved with red brick. One of these eastern old-time streets, a lot of old houses, it's full of character and beautiful. I was up

there sitting on the corner at the curb and the mailman was coming down the street delivering mail, with a big leather bag on his shoulder. He wore a blue uniform, as you may recall. I was kind of struck by this and I had a box of colored chalk. I had typewriter paper and a lead pencil, and with the paper and pencil and colored chalks I was sketching the street with the mailman coming up, making the deliveries of mail in his blue uniform and the sunlight falling through the trees and the shadows and all this sort of thing--in, of course, a very uneducated way. But while I was doing this a man that I didn't know at all was leaning on the mailbox and watching me. When I got through--I had a cigar box with all these crayons in it--he said, "You want to sell that?" I was flabbergasted, you know. I couldn't believe that. He said, "No, I'm serious. Would you like to sell it?" And he reached in his pocket and took out a silver dollar. I didn't see very many dollars, silver or otherwise, and to me it was a miracle that he said, "I'll give you this." So of course I let him have it. It was just another little doodle to me, and he gave me a dollar for that. Then later, a very short time later, he made himself apparent to my grandmother and he took an interest in me and the fact that I enjoyed drawing. My family had known his family, but I didn't realize it. This was Professor Davis, who was a professor at Princeton. He just kind of guided me; when he would be in town, you know, he maintained a studio there. When he wasn't in Princeton, he was home in his studio; and when he was home in his studio, I was there, from then on until I was eighteen.

M: His name was Davis?

C: James Davis. He is a magnificent human being and a wonderful artist, he really was. Now the last 20 some-odd years, I'm sure, in his life he has done little or no paintings that I know of. He has spent that time working

with color motion pictures. For a long time, he was an assistant or adviser of some sort with the motion picture studios in Hollywood, and would go out there frequently to help with their color work. But he's also produced great numbers of what he calls art films. And he has won awards at, I think, Venice and other places where they have big national film festivals for these things. They're very beautiful. But they're totally abstract.

M: He's still alive, though.

C: So far as I know. The last I heard from him was about a year and a half ago. He's a very old man now and he has few relatives who care whether he lives or dies. He's an old man, he never married, and he was thinking of coming out here. He thought perhaps the climate would be better for his health. But I was afraid. He has been used to a very metropolitan situation all his life and I was afraid that if he came out here to our more provincial community, he might be very miserable and miss a lot and really be worse off in the long run. I wrote and explained that, but I told him he was welcome to come at any time and stay as long as he wanted before he made his decision. I haven't heard a word since. I don't know if I offended him; I hope I didn't. But I just don't know.

M: Did he have students in his art studio there at Clarksburg?

C: Oh, yes--you say students? What he really had there was a group of the local people who were very interested and loved art and wanted to become more proficient in it. Honestly, it was more a thing of the great man comes home and we all gather around him. (Laughter) Really, I think that describes the attitude and the situation. It was never on a basis of, "Well, pay so much money, get so much time." Never. He said as much time as he had available and you wanted to spend on it, and it was all on a very wonderful basis of

communicating with one another and giving and taking from each other. It was a fabulous experience, really it was. I was fortunate, very fortunate, to be taken into this group, especially when I was...well, what was I? Nothing but a neighborhood urchin, really. All of the rest of the people were in their 30's, 40's, and 50's at that time.

M: They didn't teach art in the high school, did they?

C: No, there was no art at that time in the high school. They did have what they called Art--it was kind of a joke in my memory--in elementary school up through the eighth grade and junior high school, but that was the end of it. And it wasn't really art. It was the usual stuff with crayolas and little half-can water colors and all this business.

M: So you think what you really got initially in art was from Professor Davis?

C: I know it was--he and his associates. When he was in Princeton and wasn't in his studio at home, he would turn me over to some of these other people that worked with him there in his studio, and I would work with them.

M: Did he have fame particularly as an artist himself?

C: Yes, he did, he certainly did. But when he began the photography thing and so on, of course that kind of waned. I sat and watched it wane for years, because he just _____.

M: What he did was teach you landscapes?

C: No, he did everything. He worked in a manner...I find it a little hard to describe. It had a very definite cubistic influence. He was a very capable painter and a very capable draftsman. He could draw or paint you or anything else exactly as you are, but he did not often do it that way. He instilled so much of the way he felt about his subject into his work /that/ at times it became, you might say semiabstract. And a lot of this I didn't understand

at first, but I did, of course, later. My first work was, of course, much an imitation of that because I was studying and trying to become as much like him as I could. I found this is a natural relationship between instructor and student. But also later I grew away, I grew much away, from that early training, but everything I've done since is based upon it.

M: When you finished high school, what did you do then?

C: Oh, when I finished high school, I left home! Most all of the family were opposed to the idea of my becoming a painter. This simply means you're going to starve to death. Now had I been willing to go and become an attorney or an engineer or a physician or anything of that sort, they would all have been right behind me. But I wasn't. So I left when I was 18, and I never did go back except maybe two or three days, maybe a week at a time at most for a visit. I went to Langley Field, Virginia, with what in those days was the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics; nowadays they call it NASA. I went down there as a model maker to construct wind tunnel models of aircraft for test purposes. I had done a lot of modeling as well as painting. I was always fascinated by airplanes and flying--always have been and still am. So I went down there on that job. I stayed there three or four years. But in the meantime I kept a studio going down there and I had lots of portrait commissions in Virginia, I did a lot of painting. I didn't do any teaching, but I did an awful lot of painting.

M: What is this Langley Field close to?

C: Hampton, Virginia; Newport News. Hampton now has practically become part of Newport News; they've just grown together.

M: Well, it's close to Norfolk.

C: Just across the bay from Norfolk and Portsmouth.

M: You worked, then, making these models but you were also painting--had your own studio.

C: Oh, yes.

M: Was that when you had the experience you told me about once, painting the general?

C: Yes.

M: Maybe you'd rather not...

C: I would rather not! (Laughter) I didn't have a bit of trouble painting the general; it was his wife that tied me up in knots.

M: That must be getting close to the Second World War.

C: It wasn't only very close to it, it was in it. I was really torn apart psychologically, because this job that I had at Langley Field--and why in the world I got it I'll never know; surely there were many more people better qualified than myself for this--but I did and I got promotions regularly and it was a fine job. And that hurt me, it really did, because here I was, I was the oldest in my family, and my younger brothers were in the Service and I had no say in it at all. The government gave me an indefinite deferment because they considered the work I was doing--I got tired of hearing it--what they called "indispensable to the national defense." But I knew that they had a barn full of fellows that could do this work, and they did. But every one of that barn full was on the same deferment. I had trouble sleeping at night; I did, really, because I felt so guilty. I ran away from Langley Field, actually ran away on two different occasions and went to Richmond and enlisted in the army. But both times it happened this way: I was only there a couple of days and went through the routine physicals and all that, and they put me on a bus and sent me back to Langley Field. (Laughter) But I had already enlisted before they

were aware of what all this was, and so they put me in what they call the enlisted reserves. So I was in the enlisted reserves on inactive status, assigned to do this work at Langley Field on the same civil service grade that I'd always had and the same nice pay I'd always had. But finally I solved the problem--I got roaring drunk and just flat committed all kinds of mayhem, and left. I got no arguments. I just drifted right on off and I was a buck private in the infantry. (Laughter)

M: Did you live on the military reservation?

C: Oh, no, we had a pass and they were very strict. We had to pass in every morning and out every evening. But I lived in Hampton, I lived in the town of Hampton.

M: You rented there.

C: I rented, yes.

M: You rented a house?

C: No, no, I didn't rent a house. I lived in several different places there, because I needed space for the painting thing, a studio. And I lived several different places. Some places I boarded with a family and just rented a part of their upstairs and so on. Other places I just ate in the local restaurants and rented a good portion of the second floor. That, most of the time, is what I did. The place I was at the longest was Newport News Avenue in Hampton, Virginia--a grand older couple whose family had all grown up and left and they had this great, big, huge house. The top floor was never in use at all, so they just rented me most of that--well, to myself and a painter friend of mine who also was in the same condition. He painted and he worked at Langley. So we took this as a studio-apartment; he had his bedroom, I had my bedroom, and we each had this area that we shared for _____.

M: When you ran off and enlisted, where did you go to enlist?

C: This might sound silly to you--I don't remember. I had been through that mill so many times it is very vague in my memory now just exactly which place it was that I finally did go in. But I'll never forget this: I was sent to Fort Meade, Maryland--Fort George Meade. The first few days there I was very sure I had made a bad mistake. I wound up on permanent K.P. and I have never enjoyed kitchen work, and I was up to my elbows in hot soap suds from reveille until long after retreat every solid day. (Chuckles)

M: Maybe they were trying to break your spirit.

C: No, they did this to everybody, some menial job or another. We were actually in the Service but they hadn't issued us uniforms yet or anything. And they simply kept us there until they had cut orders and assigned us to a definite military post for basic training. So we were only there just a very short time. Then I was /sent/ to Fort McClellan, Alabama, for infantry basic training. And the rest is not worth really hardly talking about; I went through the same doggone routine every other dogface went through. But I loved it--I really loved every minute of it. I loved marching and walking for 30 miles on forced marches, I loved every minute. Nothing but beautiful blue sky and green hills and trees and creeks and rivers and lakes and ponds. I was in hog heaven in the infantry, until I found out there was an airborne infantry; then that was for me. I was in England at that time. Then I took airborne training and transferred in from straight infantry to airborne infantry. And that's the way I went through the war myself, in combat.

M: You went to England?

C: Yes, we went to England, but we weren't there too long, about six months, I guess. Maybe not even that long, it's a little vague. But I know it was

lovely and warm and sunny when I got there.

M: You don't remember where in England?

C: Oh, in several places. But the place we stayed the longest was at a place called Chisledon Barracks, near the town of Swindon, England. From there, though, about Christmastime, it was when the "Bulge" developed, when Von _____ came crashing through our lines and then we were immediately flown across. I had one experience there that was tremendous, and I'll never forget it. We went in airborne and we were the first Allied troops to pierce into Germany proper. And if anybody doesn't think that was an experience, they have never lived through a thing like that. It was a combination in my mind of the most explosive and the most horrible--but at the same time I cannot deny my adrenaline was going right through the top of my head and it was the most dramatic and exciting experience of my entire life. And oddly enough, in spite of the death and destruction and the very close calls I had myself, I hate to admit to it, but in retrospect I know I enjoyed it. And I did--I always enjoyed physical combat.

M: Now these airborne troops, they were taken in in planes?

C: In gliders, and in parachutes; both ways. An airborne invasion is a combination, or at least it was in those days--a great number of the troops went in by parachute and a lesser number went in those old Waco gliders. And this was out of necessity because we had a certain amount of reasonably heavy equipment--anti-tank mines and jeeps--that were too heavy to parachute in with the equipment we had in those days. So they took those and enough troops to put them into operation in gliders. And I went in then on a glider. I'll tell you, I would have a lot rather jumped in; a man on a parachute is a very tiny target. That great, big, slow, cumbersome, lumbering glider loaded with

explosives is one hell of a sitting duck! Ours was blown to pieces and fell out of the sky and I'll never know how we weren't wiped out. But not a single man on that glider was injured and I don't think there was a square foot of fabric on there that wasn't punctured.

M: The glider did land, though.

C: You could call it that. It came whirling and twisting down out of the sky, hit the side of a dyke, and slid down across the green grass with half of one wing gone.

M: You must have been in the midst of hostile troops.

C: Oh, I hope they tell you we were in the midst of hostile troops--yes, sir! They never knew exactly where to expect it but they knew it was coming someplace, sometime. And they had all kinds of traps for these gliders. For instance, they had poles similar to telegraph poles or telephone poles stuck all over the landscape that was flat--anyplace that a glider could land. And between these poles were strung steel cables, and from these cables hung anti-tank high explosive mines. Can you imagine what happens to a glider when it runs into one of those? And the glider itself was always loaded with hundreds of pounds of high explosives. It was quite a show! It was really quite a /show/!

M: A lot of your friends were probably killed.

C: Yes, there were many. There was a boy from Wheeling, West Virginia, which is a town just 50 miles from my hometown. Of course, because we were close neighbors at home, we had kind of made friends in the Service where, you know, you had buddies. We were running together--he didn't land in the same glider I did, but we made contact on the ground, and we were running crouched over with our rifles. There was a nest (we knew this, we had spotted this

machine gun nest) and we were running crouched low and deftly so that bullets went over our heads to try to take care of this machine gun nest. His body just came in two pieces right beside me. A German machine pistol fires much more rapidly than a machine gun. When one of those is leveled on a man and the trigger is pulled, it fires so rapidly that it just has about the same effect as a huge saw. This I will never forget. Of course, this was a horror, but the bottom part of him--I know we were running--the bottom part of him took six or eight steps before it fell over and the top part was laying behind where he was hit. Many people wouldn't believe that, but it's true.

M: It seems like when you get in fixes like that, that fate intended for you to live.

C: That's exactly what we'd been taught to believe, and accept it we did. When you went into the airborne in those days you were psychologically screened. It was drill, drill, drill, drill-- kill, kill, kill, kill. But at the same time [we were taught] that death really is not anything to fear, because if it has your number on it, it's going to, and if it doesn't, it won't. Fatalism.

M: Did you hesitate when your friend was killed?

C: [You] can't hesitate.

M: You keep on going?

C: You bet you keep on going! Yes, John, you keep on going.

M: And then did your outfit overcome this...?

C: Yes, very quickly. Oh, not just that; that little machine gun nest was nothing. That was just one little thing. We were completely surrounded. This is the way it works when you go in airborne--you are completely surrounded by the enemy, on all sides. Then what you do, you keep pushing and shoving and pushing and shoving till you get a spearhead going. Then you're relieved,

usually within two or three days, because you have opened up a corridor, then your relief troops can come in behind you. Of course, this was at Wesel, right on the Rhine River. And while we were fighting and pushing inward, inward, into Germany proper, the engineers were working like mad to draw a bridge across the Rhine behind us so support troops could come in. So, this only lasted a period of two or three days until we were relieved. Of course, we went ahead and fought, but it was nothing so very heavy.

M: You continued on, then, for some time.

C: Yes, we just kept going. That was in March and we were pulled out, as I recall, in May.

M: And went back to England?

C: No, we didn't. We stayed in Germany for quite some time. They didn't have military government at that time, of course, so they took our outfit and broke it up--what we called busted it up. Certain of the men, including myself, were given certain sectors of Germany proper which we maintained. Well, it's a one-man group, because the place was crawling with hostiles and with displaced persons, many of whom were starving. You see, they had camps full of people from all over Germany who lived in prisons. They were all just turned loose and didn't know where to go, where to get food--it was really a terrible situation. So they split us up and we were scattered across the countryside with our own sectors, /in/ contact with our headquarters, trying to maintain some kind of order until they could get in there and get a military government going.

M: I know while you were in Europe it wasn't a favorable time for tourists, but did you ever get to see any of the museums or great works of art?

C: Oh, you bet I did. John, I don't know, I guess I'm a politician. But I always

tried and I always succeeded to meet local people and to get myself in their good graces, and then to use them to my advantage, to blurt about it; I did. Yes, I got into places that were closed up during the war. I didn't see anything like all they had because they were in vaults and buried underground, but I did get to see many things that hardly anybody ever did get to see. This was true in France, it was true in Germany. I can't even recall all the places.

M: Manuel Acosta was in the Service at that same period, and over there when you were. He told me of going to various places like the Louvre. It was open but they had most of the paintings put away.

C: When I was there, the Louvre wasn't even open--but I got in. (Laughter)

M: Is it true that most things were taken down?

C: Yes, the walls were pretty well stripped. But I did get to see...of course, nothing like what they have permanently in the Louvre, but I did get to see more than I had time to absorb and it was a tremendously educational experience for me.

M: It excited your interest in art.

C: It did, yes. But even better than that were some of the people I met there. During this time in Europe I was, I think, probably the luckiest G.I. that was in Europe because I met, purely by accident, in Germany, a very wonderful painter whose name I do not wish to mention because his son is an American citizen now living in this country and I don't want to embarrass him. His father was on the Allied blacklist through no fault of his own. This is a man whom I admired and who taught me a lot while I was living in Germany. The only reason that his name was on the Allied blacklist--and he was imprisoned later--the only reason was that Hitler preferred his painting, and he did a lot of

work for old Adolf Shickelgruber and this got him on the wrong list. But I knew the man, and I did know him quite intimately for a period of a few months. He was in fear of his life, because he knew this. But in all honesty, his sympathies never were Nazi. He was what he had to be at a time in history when there was no choice if you wished to survive.

M: Hitler, I guess, preferred very realistic painting.

C: Extremely. And Hitler's taste was very poor. But this man was a magnificent painter--trained in Munich, of the so-called Munich school. He was a very wonderful painter but he could do these things that Der Fuehrer admired, and so of course he did.

M: Did you go to Munich?

C: No, I didn't bother. This wasn't anywhere near Munich. It was a little bit--ty village that I found him. It was an old place that had been a blacksmith's forge. He was kind of holed up in there--it was in the wintertime. He was kind of holed up in there, actually hoping nobody would find him or know who he was if they did! But I was there and I poked around these things, and I needed some charcoal briquets. I had a place I'd taken over for /my/ quarters. Fortunately, it had a stove but I didn't have anything to burn in it.

PAUSE

C: As I said, I needed the charcoal briquets and there were very few places that had any fuel. Down by the edge of the village, in a low place not far from the river, there was an old forge. It had been a blacksmith's forge sometime past when /they/ used a lot of horses. And there was smoke coming up from it. So I figured that where there's smoke there has to be something burning.

So I wandered through the snow down there and there was an old white-haired man. He was awful square--typical Teutonic, what you think of as an old German. He spoke a broken English and I spoke a fair German, so we could converse very well. I asked him if he had charcoal briquets, and he did have. I don't know where he got them all, but he had charcoal briquets; and I traded some rations--food--to him in return for some of these briquets. Then I used those up and I needed some more so I went back. And he needed food desperately, so we worked out a little arrangement. I kept him supplied as best I could with foodstuffs and in return he kept me supplied with something to keep me from freezing to death in the room I was staying in.

I discovered purely by accident and by nosing around... One time I went down there and he wasn't in sight, but the front of the place was open. The big, heavy wooden door was just hanging on its hinges. I just swung it open and I went in, he wasn't there; I didn't see him anyplace around. I called and got no answer. So I started looking around in some of the other rooms. There were other little rooms that had been kind of living quarters. They were stacked with paintings--gorgeous, beautiful, powerful paintings--and painting equipment, all of the things that an artist would use. In one of the back rooms he had torn out part of the roof and gotten some old material of some kind--I don't know what it was, plastic or glass or what--and laid it over the top of it and then put some heavy timbers so the wind wouldn't blow it off. But it allowed light to come through the ceiling and he was painting back there. And it was fabulous painting.

In just a short time he returned. At first he was furious that I had intruded, so I kept reassuring and reassuring. I went back up to my room and got some things. Of course, I had sketched and drew and did a little thing

everywhere I went. I went up and I got some of these things and took them back and showed him some to convince him that we had a mutual interest. Well, I managed to get myself in his good graces again and I spent every minute I could possibly spare day or night down there in that place with him. I learned a lot more about painting from him, and of course a lot of inspiration. He was a wonderful man to me, just had nothing but wonderful things to give.

M: What sort of subjects did he paint?

C: He painted everything; he painted me. He painted me three or four different times. And he painted the landscape around there and he painted some of the horrible situations. This was shortly after the worst of it. Just whatever impressed him, he painted. But he painted very boldly with a big brush, loaded with paint--very striking, powerful work; very, very powerful, full of character. I'd never seen anything done quite that way, and it really made an impression.

M: How was he living?

C: A bare existence, just a bare existence. He had no food, really, except like everybody else, he got what he could steal. That's the way it was there, then. If you couldn't scrounge it and steal it, you died--unless you could make friends with some American G.I. Now you get the picture? (Laughter)

M: Then you were slipping him some food?

C: Of course! I gave him all the food I could possibly give him! I had more food than I needed to really maintain normal health--all Americans do, whether they know it or not. Even in a combat situation, we had more, far more, than those poor people had. Yes, I could share what I had with him, and I did. And I was more than repaid.

M: All during your experiences over there, your health was vigorous?

- C: Oh, yes, I'll say so, except for one little case. I got amoebic dysentery, and it still flares up once in a while. But I got that because I did something that I knew better, but I did. I was so thirsty. It was something like 30° or 40° below zero and everything was frozen, there was no water, and we had run out of a supply of drinking water. The only thing we could do was melt snow or break ice or something. So I found a stone trough beside a building that had frozen, but I could see that there was still water in the lower part. So I took my bayonet and an axe and hacked a hole in the ice and got myself a drink. And boy, did I pay for that drink! I contacted amoebic dysentery right now, and I thought and wished that I'd die.
- M: You'd think the cold would have killed them.
- C: You'd think so, but it didn't. That was very common. Of course, we were told it would happen if we did things like this. But you know, you did it a few times and nothing happened, you got away with it. And then you did it the one time and you didn't get away with it.
- M: I guess the thing you'd have to do would be to boil the water, wouldn't you?
- C: Yes, but...I didn't. (Chuckles)
- M: Did that knock you out for long?
- C: Not too long. It knocked me out for a while, but not too long.
- M: They didn't have antibiotics yet, did they?
- C: They had sulfa drugs. We were always filled with sulfa drugs--given great, big, huge pills as big as silver dollars, I can remember.
- M: They make you sick, too.
- C: Almost. But it doesn't matter what we did. We all violated the rules, and you do pay the price, including myself.
- M: You stayed there in Germany some time.

C: Yes, I stayed there for quite a long time. I can't recall exactly, but I know it was summertime because from there I went to Le Havre, to Camp Twenty Grand. They had Camp Lucky Strike, Camp Twenty Grand, and so on--tent cities for the American troops where they were quartered and waiting to board ship. We were sent there, and it was hotter than Hades. In the meantime, I spent quite a bit of time back in France.

M: You got to go to Paris?

C: Oh, yes, I spent a fair amount of time in Paris. But that wasn't where I really got it. I loved Paris--oh, boy, did I love Paris! Beautiful, beautiful Paris, beautiful, beautiful girls, and every one of them anxious and eager to do anything she could for the American G.I. in return for a few chocolate bars or cigarettes or maybe a dinner of some kind. Back home they called it being in hog heaven. (Laughter) But the best of France wasn't in Paris. It was in the area around Nancy for me. Nancy and Lunéville were little towns--well, they're cities--I think they're probably 20 miles apart. But it was in that area that I stumbled onto a French painter, French impressionist, that had another tremendous influence on my whole life. That was a man named Georges Lanneux. And I found him accidentally. He didn't live too many years after that. He was a marvelous artist, but he was a health food nut--first one I ever met--and he died because of it. He was as thin as a rail. I'm sure he must have been six feet tall and I bet he weighed every bit of 80 pounds. He would take nothing in his body, either solid or liquid, except a cheese made from the milk of a goat, and the milk of a goat, and French fambrouge (?), vin ordinaire. That is all.

M: Wine and cheese.

C: Wine and cheese--and goat's milk. No breads or grains of any kind, nothing. I don't know where he got onto this. But he died just a very few years later

from malnutrition.

M: I think the milk would have given him the nutrition.

C: Well, if you think about that diet of his, you'll find it was very lopsided. How long can a grown man continue to maintain good health on that kind of diet? By the way, it included more of the vin ordinaire than it did of the goat's milk or the cheese. (Chuckles) He could drink wine just like it was water.

M: You studied art with him?

C: Yes, I did. As I say, he was an impressionist. He as a young man had studied with Pissarro, who was the dean, of course, of the French impressionist school--as a very young man. And he was an old man when I knew him.

M: When you finished with him, you were back in Le Harve.

C: Yeah, after that I went back to Le Havre. I thought it'd never come, but finally the ship arrived. That was quite an experience. They loaded us on this LST. Of course, they'd move very slowly anyway--the Queen Elizabeth passed us about four times coming and going on round trips and we're just still plugging along! But about mid-Atlantic, almost exactly midpoint in the Atlantic... As you may know, someplace on board ship they have a map and they plot the ship's course so that the people on board can get some idea of where they are and you can follow the ship's course every day. Well, just about mid-Atlantic it stopped. Then it started slowly, slightly backwards. A propeller fell off the thing, right almost exactly mid-Atlantic.

M: It had only one propeller?

C: I don't think so, but I'm not sure. But this is what they told us had happened. Whether it's a fact, I don't know. But I know that we sat there for a solid week, just bobbing like a cork. And transatlantic traffic, both ship

and air going both directions, passing us like we were--well, we were--sitting still. And we'd lay there in the hot sun--oh, and it was blistering hot on that steel deck--and watch those other ships go by, holler at the men if it was close enough, and they'd holler back. Oh, we felt like we'd been deserted and abandoned! But after about a week, some kind of a boat came out from... I don't know where it came from--someplace in Britain, I guess--with a repair crew and divers. They fooled around there for the better part of two days. Then all of a sudden we took off and came on back. When we got on that boat we were not coming home. That was after VE Day, but it was prior to VJ Day. And what we were scheduled to do was to go to the Pacific and help wind up things over there. But because we were delayed, VJ Day happened while we were still in the Atlantic Ocean, so they changed course and brought us into New York. I think we must have been about the happiest boatload of guys that ever disembarked. We didn't know we were coming home.

M: From New York where did you go?

C: Oh, I came on back to West Virginia. You know, everybody gets a leave as soon as you get back. I don't remember, I think it was a 30 day leave. During that 30 days I came back and married the girl I'd been writing to.

M: Your wife is a native of Clarksburg?

C: No, she is not. She was born in Pennsylvania--Pittsburgh--but she was raised in Salem, Ohio, a little town about 20 miles from Youngstown. She was in the Army Nurse Corps, you see. At any rate, we were married right as soon as I came back from overseas. And then I decided that I would remain in the Service in the regular army. I did until 1952, /when/ I resigned from the Service.

M: Was your rank always the same?

C: Oh, no. You know how it is--you bounce around like a cork, rank-wise. I never bounced down too hard; I skipped some ranks on the way up, but I never got too far. As a matter of fact, I didn't want to! I was having too good a time, and I was doing what I wanted to do and I was able to live the way I wanted to, see the places I wanted to see. If I had had too much more, that wouldn't have been the case--I would have had responsibilities and assignments that would have inhibited me. Really, that's why I stayed in, so I could do these things.

But anyway, I had some bad experiences, and I don't really want to go into them too much. But I became unhappy in the Service and simply resigned. I wanted to be a painter, nothing but. I'd always been a painter--no matter what I did, it was painting first. And it was getting to the point where this wasn't going to be possible. And other reasons also. I wasn't in any trouble in the Service at all or anything of that sort, but it just wasn't my bag anymore and I resigned. I was regular army so I had the privilege of resigning. That's what I did--resigned at Fort Bliss. And the rest of the story I think is fairly well known. I've been living and painting and teaching in El Paso and this area ever since. That's since 1948 that I first arrived. I came out to Fort Bliss in the Service in 1948. I didn't resign from the Service until '52. But I was teaching at the time, while I was in the Service.

M: Teaching art?

C: Yes. I had a few students there.

M: At Fort Bliss?

C: No, no--I had a studio in my home on Grant Avenue, right across the street from Manhattan Presbyterian Church, at 2829 Grant. I had a studio in the

basement and I had 15 or 20 students, I guess, about two evenings a week. I'd take half of them at a time--I usually had 10 or 12 at a time. That's as many as I could handle in that space.

M: That was while you were still in the Service?

C: I was still in the Service. I laugh now in remembering back. A lot of my friends--some of them are still here, some have passed on, but they were friends at the time--they used to refer to me as that upstart from Fort Bliss. (Laughter) Because I was always trying to shake them up, you know. I knew that some things needed to be done in El Paso. I knew we needed a museum and I knew there was a lot more to this than just having a show down at San Jacinto Plaza once a year. Really, that's how the El Paso Art Association started. We started with four people in 1948.

M: Who were these four people?

C: That was LaVora Norman, who has left El Paso many years ago; and Mrs. Enid Alden; and my dear friend Dick Licht, the architect, who died a few years ago; and myself. Now, that was the very nucleus, and that was in 1948. We had the first Sun Carnival Show up at the old El Paso Tech building. That's where I met those people. And then we got to talking, you know, wouldn't it be nice if we could do this on an organized basis. Then, right away, within a week, we had people like Eugene Thurston and Lewis Teel and so on, and they were eager to go. And so we did--we formed the El Paso Art Association in Mrs. Alden's living room. And as you know, they still have an El Paso Art Association, except I think it has three or four hundred members. And I think you know also that we do have a very fine museum. All of those things came to pass, and I can remember participating in and watching the whole thing. It's a happy thing--it's a very happy thing to watch and to remember.

M: You think the Art Association helped get the Museum?

C: I don't think so, I know damn well that it did! I was personally involved in it. And again, I would rather not go into that because there are people in the area who are unaware--and I want them to remain unaware--of some of the ramifications and some of the things that took place that...well, I'll put it this way, shouldn't have but did. But the thing succeeded anyway, as planned, so let's leave well enough alone.

Anyway, I have lived here all this time since, I have reared my family here, and I haven't the slightest desire to ever leave. This area has everything I want. It has been good for me and it has been good to me. Every day of my life here I have contact with people that help me in my own development. And there isn't a day, I don't believe, that I don't receive inspirations from the countryside, from the whole world here, that is what I need to keep my furnace going. Everybody has a furnace, you know, to keep you going, especially if you're involved in a thing we think of as creative. It's amazing how much fuel it takes to keep that thing going.

M: You mean the motivation?

C: I mean the motivation, yes.

M: Besides this German artist and the French artist you discovered, were you able to do any formal art training at art schools?

C: Not one minute, and I've very grateful for it. This friend Davis that taught at Princeton told me very early indeed that I must make up my mind whether I wanted to be what he called a creative fine artist or whether I wanted to be an instructor in a school system. That's what he considered himself to be. He said they are not the same thing, that training you receive in a university has nothing to do with creative fine art whatsoever. As a matter of

fact, it can be the death of it. He explained the reasons why and he resigned from Princeton because of this very thing, many years ago.

You see, in any teaching institution there is such a thing as organization and there is such a thing as discipline, and submission to authority. Of course, there is in any _____, but not to the degree... Well, I'll put it this way. He told me--and I found he was right--if you want to really learn and you want to develop strictly as a creative fine artist, you must spend all of your life if you possibly can on that, not on unrelated things; and you cannot dissipate your energy. You've got to know yourself and know the world around you and be responsible. Painting is communication, you see. If you do that, you will never be an instructor in a public institution because you won't be qualified. But if you decide that you wish this for security or for whatever reasons, then go the other way--go to college, go to the university or the art school, and graduate, get a Master of Fine Arts degree. Then you can do that. But you will find that you will have neither the time nor the energy to do the thing you really want to do. And if you want to really be a creative fine artist, your whole life must go into that. And that's the way I went. All I know in the way of techniques and philosophy, too, I did not get from so-called formal instruction in any institution. I got it the way Jimmy advised me to get it, from him and from others as well. You simply get with somebody who is grand and good and great and knows their business, and you stay with them as long as you can. You soak it up, you ask questions, you watch, you look, you listen, you become one with, and you'll learn it. And that's the only way I've ever learned anything. But I have not got a single credential, /nor do/ I have the least desire for it.

- M: I know they have art schools in the big universities, but I was thinking more of places like the National Academy of Design.
- C: I wouldn't waste my time. I would not. I have been to and visited, I have even been offered some teaching positions in some of these so-called art institutes. Some of them are big, multi-million dollar affairs with big budgets and all that. But I do not agree with anything in their whole philosophy or their methods of operation. And I will not submit myself to that. I'm constitutionally unable to.
- M: Of course, some artists could go and study--not seek a degree, just study with one of their teachers in a particular area.
- C: Well, that's right, there's nothing wrong with that, but I never did it for one simple reason. It's a terrible thing to say, but I have yet to meet an instructor of painting in any university or art school that I've ever seen who had what it took and I wanted to learn from. It's that way. That sounds like a terrible conceit; and it isn't really that, and I don't mean it that way. But the best artists I have never found in an institution. And the ones I wanted were the best I could get.
- M: You feel that you learn more from a practicing artist.
- C: Absolutely. And that's the only way I've ever learned.
- M: Sort of apprenticeship.
- C: That's right.
- M: You spoke of an art museum at Clarksburg.
- C: Oh, no, not a museum. That's a gallery. What it amounts to is they have an art group there much like the El Paso Art Association but smaller, because it's not a very large town--it's only about maybe 30,000 people. But they have some very dedicated people that have been for years and years and years.

They bought an old home and converted that into their art center. They have a gallery there and conduct these affairs much like in El Paso, an organized art group.

M: They sell their pictures there?

C: Yes.

M: And maybe have some classes?

C: They do that, yes. But I haven't been there for the better part of thirty years.

M: Could we talk about Urbici Soler?

C: Yes, I knew Urbici. I knew him in a casual way for a long time before I really knew him at all well, but I admired him tremendously. I still do, I think he was a wonderful man and I think he was a wonderful constructor of sculptures--he was a good sculptor. I had had some sculpting and carving as an accessory to my painting with some of the painters I've worked with--some of them insisted we take some sculpting. But I didn't go too far into it. I had some free time, so I decided I'd go out to...well, in those days I think you called it the College of Mines, and talk to Urbici. So I did, and he was great--he was just wonderful. He told me that I could come into a night class that they had there--I guess auditing, without actually enrolling in college. I could come out there and just for a small fee I could join this class at night (I think they met once or twice a week) and he would help me in sculpture. And he did.

I remember one incident that was fabulous. It's kind of telling on yourself, but I don't care--I'll tell on myself. I've been a painter for a long, long time and I've done an awful lot of portraits in years past. So they put a girl up there on the model stand and he said, "Now do her head." And

here was a garbage can full of damp clay, classroom clay. "Make an armature and do her head." So I made an armature and did her head, and he said it looked just like her, it was a good likeness. And I did it in an hour, and hell, the other students hadn't even piled all the clay on their armatures yet. So I was feeling pretty good.

But he said, "But it doesn't look like a sculptor did it, it looks like a painter did it. Now forget what you know about painting and let me teach you something about sculpture." Boy, he did--we tore it up and started over. When I finished it the second time, he came over and looked at me and said, "Oh, you fool, you fool, you fool!" I said, "What's the matter?" Everybody else was standing there looking with wonder on their face, you know. He said, "Let me tell you something. One of these days you might maybe decide to be a great sculptor instead of a painter. And you might get commissioned by the government to do maybe Justice up on the Supreme Court Building." He said, "If you do her like that, the orioles would build a nest in her nose and be swinging in the breeze." How do you like that? Right there, that was his way of telling me that a piece of sculpture should have continuity and there should not be holes in it. And I've never been able to forget that, and every time I see a piece of sculpture I look to see if it has a flow in continuity of all parts, or did he leave holes in it. (Laughter) I remember that about Urbici more than I remember any other single incident. I didn't go too long--it was a relatively short time, and I don't even remember how long. He didn't live too long after that, as a matter of fact. I don't know, a couple of years or so.

M: Carl, how did you get interested in jewelry making?

C: Oh, that's a crazy story, too. I've always had a hankering to try things

that I've never tried before. In 1948 when I first came to Fort Bliss, I hadn't brought my family yet. My wife was back at home with her folks, pregnant with our second child, so I was there alone. I had weekends free, and I found an old, old man way up around 80 that had palsy. He had a jewelry company and he had orders he couldn't fill. And it was important to him; it was all he'd ever done.

So I found it out and I propositioned him. I said, "You teach me this trade, I'll work for you for nothing." And I did for about a year. I spent every weekend and every night and every moment I had for a while. I let painting drift for a little bit and I went down and I concentrated on this. That old man taught me an awful lot, like stone-cutting, goldsmithing, silver-smithing, and so on. He didn't live long--he died in a couple of years. And I've done it ever since.

M: You don't remember his name?

C: Yes, his name was A. D. Hudson. He had a little bitty place in an old store building right across the street from the Armed Forces Y on San Antonio Street, about a block from the railroad depot. He lived in the back. A wonderful man, but just a poor little old fella. He had this shop and he had a few things he could do, and it meant a little bit of income and could keep going. But he just couldn't do it alone--he was too old and shaky.

M: He made jewelry on order for people, was that it?

C: Yes, and he cut stones. He had a big outfit, a huge thing there for cutting and polishing stones. I think it was one he'd built for himself.

M: He had the equipment.

C: Yes, he had the equipment and he had the knowledge, but he had shaky, old man's hands that couldn't do what his mind told him.

M: So his mind told you.

C: That's right. That's the same way I learned to paint. (Laughter)

M: You've kind of specialized in opals, haven't you?

C: For a while I did, but not entirely. I worked with all kinds of gemstones. I've done lots of emeralds and sapphires and rubies and diamonds, but I do have a huge collection of opals.

M: Do you make jewelry on order for people?

C: I do on occasion. If it appeals to me, I do. If it doesn't appeal to me, I don't--because I don't have to. I do it because I enjoy doing it. If I think I will enjoy it and if they're happy with what I turn out--fine. Otherwise, I could care less. Painting is my thing, really. The main reason that I stay with the jewelry is because I'm self-employed, I have no retirement income or any kind of insurance at all except what they call Social Security, which I do not believe in. I also know that my money is worth less every year due to this terrible inflation. It's getting worse, it's not getting better. So money really is of very little value to me just to save it for its own sake, but gems and jewelry increase in value.