

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Reserve Project

Naval Reserve

O.H. 188

JOHN J. LESKOVYANSKY

Interviewed

by

David Arms

on

June 5, 1975

JOHN J. LESKOVYANSKY

John Joseph Leskovyansky was born on March 28, 1925 in Senecaville, Ohio. He attended St. Mathias schools and graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School in Youngstown, Ohio. After serving in the United States Navy during World War II, he attended Youngstown College, Ohio Northern School of Law, Western Reserve University and the University of Alabama. He received his juris doctorate and held positions in the city of Youngstown--Assistant Prosecutor, Assistant Law Director, Municipal Court Judge and is presently a judge on the Court of Common Pleas, Domestic Relations in Mahoning County.

Judge Leskovyansky is involved in numerous organizations in the area. He and his wife, Ethel, are the parents of four children and the judge enjoys fishing and hunting.

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN J. LESKOVYANSKY  
INTERVIEWER: David Arms  
SUBJECT: Naval Reserve, education, World War II  
DATE: June 5, 1975

A: This is an interview with John Leskovyansky for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project by David Arms at the Naval Reserve Center at 315 East LaClede Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio on June 5, 1975 at 6:35 p.m.

Judge, could you just give me some of your family background? Where you were born, brought up, education?

L: I was born in Senecaville, Ohio on March 28, 1925. I was educated in the Youngstown School System at St. Mathias School for the first eight grades. I attended high school at Woodrow Wilson High School here in Youngstown on the southside. From thence I went to the Navy. I count that as part of my education really.

I served during--in the last war that we won--that was World War II. Upon discharge from the Navy I came home and signed for studies at Youngstown College; at that time I had the idea of someday becoming a news-reporter of all things, simply because I didn't think I'd last long enough to become a lawyer. From there I went to Ohio Northern School of Law for one year. At the end of my freshman year I came back and finished law school at Youngstown. Since that time I have attended a number of legal seminars and I have also given a number of them. I took a number of courses at Western Reserve University, the University of Alabama and a number of other law schools with legal background. I suppose that's a summary of my education.

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A: What is your present position?

L: I am Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, Division Domestic Relations, Mahoning County, Ohio.

A: And how long have you had this position approximately?

L: I've been in it since 1978. Prior to that I was Judge at the Youngstown Municipal Court, being appointed Municipal Court Judge in December of 1961. I have been acting in a judicial capacity ever since then.

A: When you joined the Navy back in the big war, could you just give me an idea how you went about that? What did you do?

L: Well, first of all, prior to my graduation from Woodrow Wilson High School, I attempted to enlist in the Navy. I went down to see a chief, who listened to me talk about the fact that one of my uncles was a chief. I was close to graduation and I got probably some of the best advice that I ever I got from this chief who said, "Son, you belong back in school. Let me call up the high school." They came down and convinced me I should go back to school and finish up, which I did.

But at that time, I was drafted. Each one of us, as we walked up to get our diplomas, walked up with the greetings in our pockets. Nine days later we went to Akron to be examined for processing.

When we arrived there I insisted that I wanted to sign up USN rather than USNR because it was my desire to be an old career man in the Navy. I never could see how I could afford to go to college and law school and I thought this would be a fine way of doing life. I enlisted into the Navy there, USN, and was subsequently sent to Great Lakes for boot training. From Great Lakes I went to the Navy Pier in Chicago for aviation mechanics training from which I later withdrew. I was subsequently sent to Motor Machinist Mate School, which I proceeded to graduate from at Navy Pier and then went down to Camp Lejeune, New River, North Carolina. It seemed the Marine Corps needed a little bit of help and us Navy boys down there to straighten them up a little bit.

From there I was sent on various transfers until I was sent aboard a mine sweeper at Little Creek, Virginia.

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There's a story I have to tell you about that amphibious training. I really didn't do too much training because somebody discovered that I knew something about rigging. I had worked in the steel mill while I was going to high school and it was there that I learned about rigging. So I was busy replacing engines in landing craft, driving the crane around the base, operating and directing motocrane and being the rigger director.

An interesting thing, this motocrane travelled around the base. One day we had a hurry-up call to go on the other side of the administration building. A four-striper, a captain, sat upstairs and saw this big boom coming towards him at what he thought was a terrific rate of speed. We were, at that time, regulated to what I supposed was 15 miles or 10 miles an hour. My recollection gets a bit hazy--this was in 1943. He saw this big boom coming in that window and he kept hollering and hollering till he got Lieutenant Duhamel, who was our officer in charge at that time. He said, "I want that pilot in front of me now." I happened to be the guy that was operating it. He accused me of operating at about 35 miles an hour, but the whole rig wouldn't even go that fast. Nevertheless, I was restricted to base for the weekend.

But somewhere along about Friday afternoon at 4:00, Lieutenant Duhamel kind of talked to the four striper on behalf of a nice little third-class motor machinist and the four striper said, "I guess maybe I was too tough on that kid. Let him go." (Laughter)

From there I did go to a ship station, USS YMS391, which I picked up at Puerto Rico. We travelled around various places in the Caribbean doing patrol duty, escorting some of the big ships as they were coming down on their shakedown cruises, chasing a few subs around and getting down to Trinidad on a number of occasions. We did sweep some mines too. We came back to the States, west coast, and eventually our ship went to the Pacific.

While in the Pacific, we were declared essential for clearing all the mines from the harbor at Einewetok, where Operation Crossroads was to be had. So I stayed a few extra months there because we were declared essential. There are a number of other things I could say, but basically that's my Navy career.

A: When you got back to the States you changed your mind about staying in the Navy? Is that it?

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L: Yes. I saw the advantages of school and decided that I should go back to school. I had gotten myself worked up to first class and I obviously could have made chief. But it was one of those things where I realized that my limitation was, if I were successful, to be a warrant officer. I would like to have become an officer as I suppose most young, ambitious men would. This was the only way to satisfy an ambition, so I decided to go to school.

A: So you got out of the Navy and you went to school. You came back to Youngstown, is that right?

L: Right.

A: Now how did you join the Reserves?

L: I joined the Reserves when I was being discharged at Great Lakes.

A: I see. And why did you do that at that time?

L: Because I was convinced that it was a good thing, it was a necessary thing. At that time rendering service to your country was looked upon with admiration rather than, perhaps as it is now, with some degree of degradation. I think this is wrong, but I'm merely trying to assess the current feeling of the people.

A: When you joined the Reserves there in the Great Lakes, when you got back to Youngstown, what did you do then?

L: Oh, I started to work and went to school. Eventually, I was asked if I wouldn't participate in some active duty. My first active duty in the Reserves was to go on recruiting duty. I went to Pittsburgh, then Canton, and back to Pittsburgh again. I believe I had three months or so of active recruiting duty. I simply left because I needed to go to school and it was time to do that. So I came back and worked and went to school.

A: Did you join up here in Youngstown with any Reserves?

L: Yes. This station in which we sit now is the end result of a group of Reserves, first under the leadership of Commander Stansbury. I'm sure since you've heard about the fine gentleman--may he rest in peace--who was charged with the obligation and duty of putting together a duty station here in Youngstown. A number of us met at South High School and just talked about things, generally until we could get things squared away. At first there was no distinction made between officers and enlisted men. We were just simply trying to get a unit together.

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One of my friends, Ray Horvat, was probably very instrumental in seeing that I stayed because everybody needs a buddy to encourage them every now and then. He and I had gone through grade school and high school together. He had succeeded in qualifying for V-12. I did too, but I flunked out one time because of a tonsillectomy infection that I had when it was time to go to school. Ray went on from there to Northwestern and got his degree in electrical engineering. He's now on the east coast running his own electrical consulting firm. So I had a buddy and we did go, we did attend.

Eventually the idea of a station here was brought forth. There were a lot of things to do in order to have it become a reality--some political, others economic. Of course, the economics were taken care of very handily. I participated and took active duty then to move in here. I supposed that's about the time that John Ferranti whom I understand you've interviewed previously-- Chief Ferranti and Chief Yeoman came to active duty when we opened the station. When we moved in here it was dirty, filthy and crummy and we started out from scratch-- cleaning and fixing. It's nice each time I come here to see the change which time has wrought.

So then we actually did begin the real ideas of reserve activity with instructing younger men, recruits. At first it was the same old story. We drilled in the main drill hall and that was about what it consisted of. But as we moved in more of the technical things which we needed perhaps in my field of motor machinist mate, obviously it was of more interest for people.

I can recall one of the days when I took the crew through letting off and getting underway aboard ship. To a group of boys who had never been aboard ship, who had never been to sea, I think they got as big a charge or as great an experience out of it as I did by going through it again after so many times.

I'd want to say that, perhaps, the reason this place really took hold and a lot of activity really went on was because we inaugurated a social activity program. I became quite involved in that and a number of our local leading citizens were involved as well. Attorney Buzz Covington, his brother, John, and Attorney Horace Tetlow were very active in the program and there were about six of us who really kept some social things going. I think this program was the determinative factor in this ship, or station as I suppose you now call it, being accepted in the community. I want you to know that

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people on this street were very reluctant to have us come into their neighborhood and at first there were a lot of nasty things said. Some nights when we came here for drill duty they tried to chase us off the streets through various parking regulations which were designed to leave us with no place to park. But it's all in the past.

A: Okay, could you give me a little more of an idea of some of these social activities in which you organized or things like that.

L: We had an annual dance--that was our big thing. Eventually, though, this was all swallowed up by the Reserve Officer's Dance or Reserve Dance. I think as we moved into that some of our identity was lost and some of the unit cohesiveness, I suppose one might say, disappeared. It was a grand idea, maybe, to do that once a year, but I, as well as most of us, thought that we should continue with our own Reserve Dance. One of the big innovations that we had at the Reserve Dance was that there was no distinction made between officers and enlisted men and you were able to sit and drink with whomsoever you chose. But our first dance, as I recall, was at that time and still is, held at the outstanding place to hold a dance--the Stambaugh Auditorium. We made it a real dress up affair. Our ladies all came decked out as well as any ladies anywhere in this world. We had a really good time.

We also had weiner roasts and hamburger fries for the units, and we had stags for the fellows. At that time a lot of the guys weren't married yet and we had activities planned for singles as well as family and girlfriend activities.

A: How were these financed?

L: We financed them on our own. There was no ship's assistance in those things.

A: Was there admission charge or was it done by raffle?

L: No sir, no raffles. We decided what an affair would cost. Eventually we built up the same way as you would aboard ship from the ship's store. You'd have "X" number of bucks hanging around and you would use this. We'd always try to have a few dollars left over to kick off the next affair but basically it was handled just as any other place, any other group that people



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would belong to would do it. They decide they're going to be sociable and they kick up a kitty and work up an affair and everybody scrounges around--if you'll pardon some of the language--to find the cheapest and the best way to do things so that everybody has a good time.

We tried to keep as many people involved as possible, give everybody a chance to work that wanted to. Obviously that's what made the affairs successful.

A: Were these run by the units or just a bunch of the guys got together or how did these come about?

L: It started out by a number of fellows hanging around out here in the hallway and talking about it. I can't recollect clearly but I think that we became an ad-hoc committee, in effect, and the CO said, "Well gee, that's a good thing, you guys go ahead." I think he appointed one of the officers to be in charge. Buzz Covington was the guy who was in charge, but he didn't make himself "in charge." Buzz made himself available and didn't run rank on the guys. I think if some guy had run rank it would have flunked right then and there, but he never did and the social affairs really made the thing go.

A: How long did you stay in the Reserve Program?

L: I stayed in the Reserve Program until my period was up. My enlistment period expired while I was away at school at Ohio Northern Law School. Lieutenant Field, who incidently was one of the first duty officers here, signed my discharge, which I received two days before I received a welcome to come back aboard if I so chose, for the Korean action. But I had already been discharged and I called my wife and told her what happened and she said, "No, no, no, no. You stay in school and you get through law school and you do your thing that way."

I had contemplated returning to duty a number of times and each time they tried to recruit me I had to think of what my best interests were. After I graduated from law school and became a lawyer, to be perfectly frank with you, I thought it might be non-conducive to my best interests in business and professional life to be an enlisted man. That's probably the biggest reason why I never came back to Reserve activity.

A: So this was approximately what? 1951?

L: Yes.

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A: Now, when you attended meetings here at the center, you were first class at the time, did you normally run a program of some kind or did you come under somebody else? How was it organized when you did your job?

L: As a matter fact, in its infancy it seemed that whoever was willing to do, did. And after I got enough things together I ran a class on the General Motor's diesel engine. We had to show these boys an engine, and so we found an injector some place and told the boys about it and some of its component parts. And my argument was, for our section--we didn't have a chief motor machinist's mate on board at that time--we had a chief machinist's mate. I was the only motor machinist really fluent and conversant with the diesel, its principles, capabilities, functions and use and so on and so forth. Its construction. So I tried to get something into the boys hands and into the mens hands who were here that they could actually feel. They knew what an injector was, but until they saw it and saw the component parts, they didn't understand how the duece it worked. I insisted that we got some of those things.

In my own particular section I did that and I know some of the other guys did the same thing. First Class and Chief really went out and initiated some of their own programs and the officers were very cooperative. We got some of the things we needed and at least in our section, most of the officers had very little, if any, instructing to do. The leading men really did it--that's the Navy way. First Class and Chief took care of things.

A: In the infancy stages here, how was it organized in that area? In other words, who did you report to? A division officer?

L: We had a division officer.

A: I see.

L: Yes, there were three divisions. Gosh, I can't remember the numbers. They're probably the same ones right now.

A: No, they've just recently changed them.

L: I read that. You're right. I read someplace that there was a change. Is there a 106?

A: No, there's 115, 114, and 113--113 came from Warren was the story.

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L: Okay. Nevertheless, we worked on the principles that you point out as the organizational factor of a division. We did have a division officer and he largely let us do what we thought needed done.

A: So when your training here was completed or you had carried out so much training here, did you ever go on two weeks active duty for training or anything like that?

L: No, as I pointed out, I did my active duty here on two occasions simply because I was in a position to be able to instruct, whereas most of the other fellows weren't and they did take active duty away from home. I certainly kind of wished I had gotten go do that but-- if you'll pardon the expression--I kind of got conned into saying, "Well, listen, why don't you stay here and do this over here."

Well, the other thing was, we did a lot piping and wiring and making an engine room for people to have something to work on. One of my two week's duties was to rig up an engine room so that the boys had a real view of what an engine was like.

A: Could you be a little more explicit on that? There isn't an engine room anymore.

L: There isn't an engine room anymore, you're right. Well, we had an engine, we had compressors, we had sump pumps on our fuel tanks, our oil tanks. I had some cutaways, as I recall, for shaft packings. Whatever we could, we improvised. But anyway, in that room you got the definite feeling that you were a Navy engine room. We had the stripes on pipes to show fresh water, sea water, fuel oil, the various things that you see in an engine room. It was really interesting; and when you walked in there you actually got the psychological feeling that this is an engine room. That was our idea, so I gave up a two week period of training to try to accomplish that.

A: Now did you start from scratch?

L: Absolutely. A clean, bare room was what I started out in. The room that I got for my group, I can't remember what we called it, it was a section. I had to go scrounge up. Actually we stole some chairs from somebody else and we started with these chairs. Now by the time I left here, that room looked and sounded like an engine room. I got a great deal of satisfaction from that, but

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I had to leave.

A: Did you get any financial assistance from the center, from the Navy? How did you get the packings and the valves and everything to cut in half?

L: Largely Navy. We could ask for things and we could get them. And those things that we didn't get, it was the old story about scrounging again. And most of us worked in steel mills and various places where some of these things were available. If you walked around and said, "Hey listen, up at the Naval Reserve Center we need this or we need that." At that time again, I'm repeating, it was popular to be with servicemen and they were willing to give us things. And industry, I can't now recall, but some sections of our industry gave us things, actually real good brand new things, for people to work on and to understand.

A: So would you say really that the Naval Reserve was accepted in the communities back in those times?

L: Oh yes, yes. Eventually we were very much accepted, as you are now. But at first, it was very much hated by this neighborhood.

A: Do you think that was overcome by the people or just by time?

L: I'd like to think that we who were participants at that time did this. I think that along with our conduct-- and I want to point out the fact that we told the people this was going to be the cleanest place in the neighborhood. Of course, the Navy way is the clean way and that was one of the things, I think, they first appreciated. Now remember, you see nice grass here now. Buddy, when we started....

A: It was what? An open field? Is that right?

L: An open field with mud and stones and what have you. And a lot of times when you came in for drill in that hall, it sounded like you were on a gravel road because of the mud and junk that got tracked in there.

A: Did Reservists like, do the lawn work and the landscaping?

L: I can't remember who did the landscaping. I think it was partly guys on active duty that did that too. Almost everything that I can recall about the beginning at this station was done by people who did active duty working to make it become a reality because funds, although there were funds, they were not what you might say, plentiful. There always is a real fight for what you wanted, what you'd like to have, and what you were going

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to get.

A: Well, Judge, I have no other questions really that I wanted to bring up.

L: I'm sorry I talked so much.

A: No, really, the part there about the social part was very interesting. I hadn't gotten quite that information. I'm glad you brought it up. Is there anything else that you can think of that you could add to light, or that I have forgotten to ask you or anything like that?

L: No, other than I could tell you--of course, you people do it now--when we had our first open house here, that was a real doosey. We finally found out that we didn't have any money for anything. And everybody chipped in for Kool-aid or whatever it was that we gave away. I don't think we even had doughnuts. We had our wives bake cookies and whatnot, but we had something to give them as they came through, something to munch on and something for them to stand around and talk with so that they had a reason to be interested, and hanging around, and seeing. We could tell them a little bit about ourselves and about our program. And when some of the people did have a chance to meet us, then obviously we put our best foot forward. Why, I think that kind of helped the community too. We made a great big deal about making sure that the neighborhood here, the people in this neighborhood, had a specific invitation to be aboard. That was interesting.

A: Well, thank you.

L: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW