BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: George Lehleitner, 79, retired New Orleans businessman

"So it was a rather shocking revelation to me to learn for the first time just what the realities of territorialism were and so I was able to work up a pretty good peeve because of it. And yet I thought because it was so obvious that it was an injustice, and the injustice was so huge, I felt that Hawai'i not only deserved statehood, but if they [U.S. Congress] wanted to retain credibility with the other nations of the world, they better get this potential monkey off of their back, and stop treating American citizens and American taxpayers as second-class citizens."

George Lehleitner was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1906. The son of German working-class parents, Lehleitner worked as an office boy and machinist apprentice after completing elementary school. Later, he prospered as the owner of an appliance and flooring business.

Lehleitner served in the navy during World War II. He later visited Hawai'i and returned to the Mainland convinced that martial law and territorialism were injustices to Hawai'i's people.

He became a tireless statehood advocate for both Hawai'i and Alaska. He spent long hours, at his own expense, lobbying members of Congress in Washington, D.C. Many credit Lehleitner for playing a major role in achieving statehood for the two territories.

Lehleitner still resides in the New Orleans area. He was honored in 1984 in Hawai'i and Alaska as both states observed their twenty-fifth statehood anniversaries.

Tape No. 12-1-1-84

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

George Lehleitner (GL)

August 20, 1984

Mānoa, O'ahu

BY: Chris Conybeare (CC) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Can you tell us when you were born and where you were born?

GL: Yes, New Orleans, 1906. And the location was a little section of the city known as the Irish Channel. Principally got its name because when the Irish fled Ireland during the Potato Famine, those who came to New Orleans chose to live immediately adjacent to the railroad and the river because they were ill equipped to do anything except manual labor. And the railroad lines ran parallel to the river, so they didn't have far to walk to go to their place of employment. Maybe a second consideration was the fact that that section of the city also had two breweries, and they didn't have to walk too far to get to that.

WN: What were your parents doing?

GL: My parents were of German extraction. Both of my grandparents had come over as German immigrants right after the Civil War. And because my grandfather, paternal grandfather, was a cabinetmaker, he felt, as German parents in those days were inclined to feel, that they should determine what their sons' occupations were going to be. And my father was consequently advised--in fact, told--by his father that he was to be apprenticed out to a cistern maker. And the reason being that cisterns were the source of all drinking water in New Orleans because the Mississippi River water wasn't fit for drinking without extensive filtration. He wanted my father to be associated with [the] woodworking industry but felt that because everybody had to have cisterns, a cistern maker would be a person who was more constantly employed than a cabinetmaker. And so, cistern maker he became. Lo and behold, just about ten years after he'd completed his apprenticeship, had gotten married, begun to raise a family, the public health authorities found out that the mosquito was the carrier of both malaria and yellow fever. So, the next rule was that within five years, all cisterns had to be dismantled, and during that time the city was to build a water supply system. And we made the change, but it put my father out of work, so the only thing available to him at that time was a job of warehouseman. And so that was his occupation, and it continued to

be as long as he worked.

CC: How were the relationships in the Irish Channel between the different ethnic immigrants? Were there---was there a conflict? Was there harmony? How did the Irish, the Germans, and those folks all get along?

GL: Well, all of the residents reflected the different waves of migration from Europe. The Irish were among the earlier ones, and hence, the name of the area in which they lived. But subsequently, the Germans came in just before the Prussian-French War, because all of the German youngsters were being conscripted to go into the Army, so my grandfather bugged out and decided to migrate to the land of opportunity. And he also decided he wanted to live in the same Irish Channel area because it was more economical. There were low-income---there was plenty of low-income housing available. Maybe the breweries had some influence on his decision, too, because being German, that was his favorite beverage. Beer wasn't sold in bottles at that time. That is, not to local residents. You went with a tin bucket, and put it under a spigot, and you bought a bucket of beer.

WN: What was it like for you growing up in that neighborhood?

GL: Growing up in that neighborhood wasn't too bad. There were occasional conflicts between the German residents and the predominant Irish. But because the Irish were so predominant, the Germans thought it was the better part of valor to get along with their neighbors. So, there weren't too many fights. And then, the next wave of migration was when the Italians began moving in from Sicily, primarily. And I didn't get into too much trouble until they came along, because when they were added to the Irish, who were practically 100 percent Roman Catholic as were the incoming Italians. And they were buttressed by the French who lived in the same area, not too many of them. Why, the poor German Protestant boy got the short end of everything. But it was---still wasn't too bad. There weren't any gang wars of the type that you occasionally hear in some of the Eastern cities. There were individual brawls. And there was a wide alley behind the school we attended, the elementary school which was just a few blocks away. And if you had any differences, it was agreed that after school was out you'd meet in Division Alley and settle your differences there. So it was all pretty well organized when I came onto the scene and all I had to do was follow the pattern.

CC: How about relationships with Black people? Were there Blacks living in that part of the city, or what kind of contact did you have with the Black population?

GL: The contact was on a limited basis because the only Black we had was the lady who came to do general housecleaning once a week and whatever other chores would be done. She worked by the day. There were a few Black families living nearby, and there was no problem. The feeling toward the Blacks by the people living in that area at that time--perhaps because all of them were poor, although none of us realized that we were--

was very close to the feeling that prevails in Hawai'i between the Caucasians and the non-Caucasians now, except that there was a sharp division line as far as schools were concerned because they were not permitted to attend the same schools. They had their own separate schools. So there wasn't the sense of fraternity that existed in Hawai'i. But likewise, there were no real deep antagonisms. I can't ever recall having gotten into a street battle with a Black boy. They were pretty decent fellows, and there were really no confrontations. All of that came later.

CC: How about as you were growing up? Did you decide to follow your father's choice of career or did he pick one for you as his father did for him? How did that work out?

GL: Well, there was still enough German influence in my father where he decided that the wisest thing for a father to do was to pick out the occupation his son was to pursue. So, when he completed elementary school, he had wanted to be a machinist, but his father vetoed the idea because of the cisterns being in common use. And the irony of it was that when I finished elementary school, my father did the same thing to me. The fact that I didn't want to be a machinist was completely besides the point. I was told that until I was sixteen I could get any job I cared to but once I reached sixteen--because that was the minimum age for apprentice employment in what was looked upon as a hazardous industry in those days--I was going to be assured of an apprenticeship with the Illinois Central Railroad. And that's the way it turned out. So, I had no voice in the matter at all.

CC: Did that mean that for economic reasons you also had to leave school and started working early?

GL: Oh, I---yes, I began working as soon as I completed elementary school. And I daresay that 90 percent of the kids in the neighborhood went to work when they finished elementary school.

CC: So it was necessary really early to support the family. Everybody helped . . .

GL: Oh, yes. My own father's family had, in addition to myself, another brother and three sisters. And I was the eldest, so it was my responsibility to go to work as soon as I finished elementary school. And the same thing applied to my sisters, my three sisters. My younger brother by that time, there wasn't the strain on the family, the economic strain of low income which had existed when I finished elementary school, because my father at that time was making fifteen dollars a week as a warehouseman and I was able to make five dollars a week as an office boy ~~in the two-year period between finishing~~ elementary school and going to work as a machinist apprentice. So I was able to add thirty-three and a third percent to the family income. By the time my brother came along--he was the youngest of the youngsters--the feeling had pretty much changed, and he was sent to high school. But he was the only one of the five of us

who did have the opportunity to go to high school.

CC: You think these experiences helped you later on, to get to the matter we're going to be talking about, in terms of understanding relationships between different groups of people and things like that . . .

GL: Yes, I think so. Because having grown up in a neighborhood with Italians who primarily were from Sicily, and a few French, and all of these Irishmen, while all of them were Caucasians, there were some basic differences. Other than that is one I mentioned, the fact that ours was the only Protestant family on the block. All of the rest were devout Catholics, one substantial difference. And there were other differences. And of course, as I'd said before, there were some Black families living just about a block away. And this gave us an opportunity to see something that I think some of the better off families couldn't see. And that was that, fundamentally, there wasn't any basic difference between the Black youngsters and the White youngsters, other than the fact that the law said they had to be segregated insofar as school was concerned and they had to sit at the back of the bus, streetcar, and so forth and so on. But insofar as contacts with them as human beings, why, yes, it decidedly helped.

CC: How about the transition . . .

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: . . . Illinois Central Railroad. For how many years did you work as a machinist?

GL: Two years as a machinist apprentice. And then, a nationwide railroad strike came along and because all of the work crews were unionized--although I wasn't a member of any union--because all of the craftsmen were union members, those of us who were in the lower echelons were terminated for the duration of the strike. And the strike was very long lasting. And as a consequence, I came to the conclusion that in the first place, I didn't know how long they were going to be out on strike and there was no income coming in; and in the second place, I didn't want to be a machinist anyway. So this was a good opportunity for me to break. And this occurred when I was eighteen, because I worked during my sixteenth and seventeenth years. I was serving the first two years of a four-year apprenticeship. So I never did get beyond those first two years in the machinist craft.

And I had developed over the years, by means of phonograph because the radio hadn't come into the picture yet, a rather deep interest in good music, probably traceable to the fact that one of the teachers in school was a music appreciation teacher and she knew how to get the message across. And it caught on with me. And so, my choice, when I made the decision at eighteen to find some other employment was, well shucks, I like music so why don't I try to get a job with a music store? And I did. I went to the largest music store in

town and made it through the first interview, but when I had to get into the office of the president of the company with all of his paneled walls and plush seats and so forth, why, I was terror stricken. And I'm sure it was the most atrocious interview. Because I had applied to him as a salesman in the department that sold phonographs. And to get to the end of a very painful interview, he said, "Well, son, I'm going to give you a piece of advice. And believe me, you may not agree with me now, but I have your best interests at heart. My advice to you is, as soon as that strike is over, you go back to the railroad and complete your apprenticeship." Well, I appreciated his advice and at the same time, I was irritated by it. But fortunately I realized what my deficiency was, because if I was going to sell anything, I couldn't stutter and stammer through each contact I made with a prospect the way I had stuttered and stammered, and hemed and hawed through this interview with the president of the music store. So, seeing that I had a great deal of stage fright on that occasion and lacked--for probably a number of reasons, schooling being one of them or a lack of schooling. I decided to try to correct it by going to work first as a door-to-door salesman.

And one of the ads in the local paper was from a company called the Real Silk Hosiery Mills. And they only sold silk hosiery to women by means of these house-to-house canvasses. And the only thing I needed to qualify for that job was five bucks for a sample case deposit to make sure that when I quit I'd bring the sample case back. And so, they gave me a job. No reason why they shouldn't, because they had nothing to lose by it, it was strictly commission. I collected a 15 percent deposit on any order and that was my commission. So, I spent a full year going door-to-door selling women's hosiery and it was a very substantial part of my education, not for the least reason that one part of my territory involved what was then in New Orleans, the red-light district. And it was part of my territory and I had to serve it, so I tried to, but didn't succeed because they weren't interested in putting the cash out. They wanted to barter. And so that didn't work, and I simply struck that part of the territory off of my list thereafter.

And after a year of that, why, I had lost some of my extreme self-consciousness. I haven't lost it completely yet. And I still wanted a career in selling musical instruments. So, I was determined I was not going to go back to this bird who had rejected me the first time out. And so, I went to his competitor, the second-largest store in town. And he took me on rather promptly. So, I became a salesman of phonographs.

And by that time, radios were just coming on the market. And I soon learned that selling radios was a very wearying experience because those initial stations, in the first place, you could only get reception on the distant stations at night after the sun went down because they didn't have enough oomph, enough wattage, to break through the effects of the sun's rays. So all of your demonstrations--and no set could be sold without a demonstration because the average person who came in to see about one had never heard a radio play

other than perhaps in a neighbor's house at night--so the demonstrations were made at night. And all of the sets were battery operated. So to conduct a sales demonstration in the home, it was necessary that you go to the house during the day, lug this rather substantial and very heavy radio up to the house, and get it into place. And then you had to put up a temporary antenna, so that meant you had to get on a stepladder and string some wire along the eaves to serve as an antenna, and then lead the wire in through the screen, and then you were set up to give a demonstration.

But there was one other hardship that for me had to be encountered anyway, and that was that these were the days of Prohibition, and practically everybody made home brew. And home brew beer was something to behold and something to taste. And everybody had a different recipe for his brew. So, once I was set up to give a demonstration about eight o'clock when the dinner was finished and all the dishes were put away and I wanted to begin the demonstration, the householder said, "Oh, wait. You're going to have to have a brew first." And so, bring out some bottles of this vile stuff, and then you are on the horns of a dilemma. Because if you told him you didn't like it, you could strike him off of the list as a prospect. And if you told him you did like it, you were going to get another second bottle. And then a third bottle. And so, by the time you had finished three bottles of the beer that must have had somewhere in the neighborhood of a 20 percent alcoholic content, you were darn near crocked. But you didn't mind whatever problems that came up then and occasionally you sold a radio, but it was much easier to sell phonographs on the floor or through house-to-house demonstrations. And I did that for another two years. This was 1925 and 1926.

And one day I had the chore of demonstrating a new model phonograph to the ladies of a women's club, the Orleans Club, whose membership was pretty well restricted to the female members of the Four Hundred in New Orleans. And I had by that time worked out a presentation that got me by because there's ever so much music that has a real story behind it if you just would dig it out, and you can hold an audience's attention pretty well. So this demonstration was a horrible experience because for the first time in my life I had to put on a full dress suit. Tails and collar and everything else. And without my knowing it, the boss had tipped off the representative for the Southern area from the Victor Talking Machine Company of this demonstration, and he said, "Maybe you'd like to attend." So this chap did and he melted into the audience, and apparently, he was somewhat impressed, because after the demonstration, next day he came around and asked my boss's permission to offer me a job with the manufacturer in their record sales promotion department. And the boss gave his permission because he said he didn't want to stand in my way of anything that represented an astonishing promotion, because the job paid forty bucks a week and I was only making twenty-five with the music store. So, I then went with the Victor Company and was with them in record sales promotion until RCA bought them out in 1930.

And when RCA bought them out, General Sarnoff who headed up Radio Corporation of America was convinced that radio was going to render

obsolete the record industry so the RCA saw no reason for keeping record sales promotion specialists. So, out again. And I had, by that time, contacted enough wholesalers of the Victor machines in the area that was my territory because I had to be on hand when the visiting artists like Paderewski and so forth and so on came to town to see that the retailers were informed about it in advance and stocked up on the records of this particular artist. And then after his concert performance, because he was a Victor artist, I had to invite him out to dinner. And so, it was very interesting and I loved the work. All phases of it. But man proposes and somebody else disposes. So I found myself out on the street again in 1931. And no prospects of a job then because this was the depths of the Great Depression, and so the only solution that I could see that was practicable was to go into business for myself. So, made the necessary arrangements to go into business for myself, and did, and that was the end of the story of my commercial life.

CC: How did you decide what business to go into, and what was it you started doing?

GL: Well, the fact that it was the Great Depression had a lot to do with that, because it was obvious that we weren't making any headway fast economically in correcting the things that were responsible for the depression. And I remembered that there were two products that in 1929, 1930 and 1931 had shown a substantial sales gain over the preceding year despite the fact that it was a deep depression. And those items were radios and electric refrigerators, because both of them were new items at that particular time. Radio was particularly new because by that time, they had done away with the batteries, and the radios were electrically operated. So all you had to do was to plug into a socket and stations were bountiful. There were enough local stations. And the networks had been organized. NBC and CBS. Later on, the government broke up NBC's network up into two parts, the red and the blue network. And one remained the NBC and the other became the ABC.

I frankly had no desire to go into business selling radios, so I chose the electric refrigerator, which was then in its infancy, and managed to sell the idea that there was business potential for a distributor of electric refrigerators to one of the merchants I previously had been calling on. And he agreed somewhat reluctantly to go into business with me on a partnership basis where I would supply, supposedly, the know-how, and he would supply the money. One of the reasons he was selected, perhaps, by me was the fact that he was on the board of directors of the largest bank in New Orleans, a bank that had the strength to survive the banking holiday. And my arrangement with him was that he was to put up in cash his part of the partnership's interest, 50 percent, and I was to put up my part by taking what little cash I had managed to save and adding to it money that I borrowed from the bank with his endorsement. So he was on the hook for the whole works regardless of whether part of it was in my name . . .

CC: I think we're at the end of this tape, too, so.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

GL: . . . that was very helpful, and I had a rather voracious appetite for books, so a number of them were books on Hawai'i. And so, my interest was stimulated.

CC: Do you remember which books on Hawai'i were the first ones you came in touch with or some of the more notable ones?

GL: Gosh, it would be difficult to say. I know some of the books that impressed me, but the sequence in which they were read . . .

CC: Now, which ones impressed you?

GL: Don Blanding's writings, for one. He wrote, as you know, several books of fiction on Hawai'i and several books of poetry. And then, I think that [Ralph] Kuykendall at the University had written his first history on Hawai'i and there were a number of others. I don't recall the sequence in which they were read.

CC: From a Mississippi River town, did you ever read any of Mark Twain's . . .

GL: Yes, yes.

WN: Did you read just about Hawai'i or is there any reason why you read so much about Hawai'i? Or did you just read a lot about different places?

GL: No, it was a rather broad reading program because, as I said, I realized from early on that I was going to be handicapped because of my lack of formal schooling. And one of the best ways of compensating for that was to take this correspondence course in English which was very good. But an even better way of doing it was to have a good healthy reading program, which I constantly pursued, and deferred marriage until the later years.

CC: How did you actually get here, though, after all this--some reading and all that--what steps actually brought you to Hawai'i itself?

GL: All right. Well, I mentioned I had established this particular business, and lived in a nice section of town. And my next-door neighbor was a man who wore a naval uniform. He was a commander and he had been sent down by the Navy Department to set up in New Orleans, which was headquarters for the Eighth Naval District. And the Eighth Naval District covered the entire Southland. And his responsibility was to recruit civilians who were qualified by virtue of the work they were doing, men who could pass the physical examination and be commissioned as reserve officers in the Navy. And as [he] and I became better acquainted, invariably, every weekend on Saturday night I would join him for a number of pre-dinner cocktails. And

so, he dredged out of me this experience that I had had a few years earlier with the Victor Talking Machine Company covering identically the same area as the Eighth Naval District with these musicians who were appearing in concert and so forth. And he said, "Well, doggone, you're just the man I'm looking for. Because I can hold down the office in New Orleans, and interview the people who come into the office, and handle the correspondence. And I'd like to send you out into the outlying territory and have you do the recruitment of reserve officer applicants in the outside area."

So this was about 1938, I guess. And I brushed him off. I said, "Frank, I have a relatively young business. And I have an obligation to build that. And in addition to that, we're not at war."

And he said, "Oh, but we're going to be. It's already started over in Europe, so we're going to be dragged into it." But I was still reluctant, and I finally made him a proposition. I said, "Well, I tell you what, if we ever get into war, why, you wave your finger and I'll come." And Pearl Harbor day came, and I was on a train headed to the Northeast to attend a convention of the Armstrong Cork Company whose products we were handling. And after luncheon, seated in the club car, the news came over the club car radio that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. And I looked at my associate who was making the trip with me. And I said, "Walter, I'm in the Navy now. You're going to have to run this pickle works that we have down in New Orleans." And I told him then of my commitment. And when I got back to New Orleans why, I was promptly examined and signed up, and found myself in the Navy doing the work that he had outlined. Well, after about six months of doing that, I felt that was a hell of a way to fight a war in the Navy, anyway, and asked for permission to request training for sea duty so that I could be qualified to go to sea. And he gave his permission. Came through approved by the Navy Department. So I took a year of training in which they attempted to crowd four years of Annapolis into one year of civilian training. That was the hardest work I've ever done in my life, trying to absorb that stuff. And as you can imagine, with an elementary school education. But somehow got through it and was assigned to a ship.

And quite frankly, the reason I had applied to the Navy rather than one of the other services was the belief that that was my best chance of seeing Hawai'i. And lady luck sure wasn't sitting on my shoulders, because when my orders came through after the training period, I was assigned to a ship in the Atlantic Fleet. But in the later years of the war, I was transferred to the Pacific, wound up as the commanding officer of a troop ship that participated in the landings at Okinawa. And because we were a troop ship, I had orders to stand by to bring to Pearl Harbor the first load of POW's taken on Okinawa. So, that meant ten more days ~~at anchor and whatever misery the kamikazes~~ could deal out at that particular time. And I was darn glad when the contingent came aboard and I could haul anchor and get the devil out of there. So, my orders were to take them to Pearl Harbor for internment. And we went into Pearl Harbor in the morning at daybreak. And by afternoon, all of the POWs had been out loaded and

the new passengers had been loaded aboard to carry someplace else. And we slipped out of Pearl Harbor before sunset, so I never did get to see Hawai'i. And I became so darn frustrated with that experience that I resolved that first thing I was going to do when I got out of the Navy, assuming I did, was take a long vacation in Hawai'i. And I didn't get out though, because having a transport meant that this was one of the ships that still had work to do after the war. So I didn't get out until a year and a half after the war had ended in the Pacific. And so in May 1947, I lit out for Hawai'i.

And you were asking a while ago which books I had read. Well, one of the books I had read was written by Dr. Stanley Porteus who was at that time the chairman of the Department of Psychology at the University [of Hawai'i]. And he wrote a book called Calabashes and Kings. That gave a pretty good background to anyone on Hawai'i. I enjoyed it. And I sent him a note, and told him how much I enjoyed it, and congratulated him on it, and that if I ever got to Hawai'i which I intended to someday, I'd like to meet him. So he very promptly wrote back and said . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

CC: Were people talking then about Hawai'i as a state or the problems Hawai'i faced as a territory? Were you introduced to those things right away?

GL: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, one of the persons Dr. Porteus introduced me to was---he said, "Because of your interest in Hawai'i, I'd like to introduce you to my son Hebden who is president of the Senate." And so, I met Heb and when Heb saw that I had a deep interest in Hawai'i, he introduced me to Sam King, who was governor. Sam King, in turn, introduced me to somebody else, and so on and on it went down the line. And in that month's visit in 1947, why, I got to meet a lot of the folks in Hawai'i who were interested in statehood and doing their best to push it. And the reasons they were pushing it shocked me. Because I frankly, while I knew that Hawai'i was a territory and not a state, I didn't realize what the implications were. And to get it right from the horse's mouth and have them tell me that because they were a territory and only because they were a territory, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i was put immediately under martial law and remained under martial law even after the war with the Japanese had moved far to the west and there was no further logical probability of an attack from any Japanese plane or ship. And they told me of the inequities that had happened.

I was introduced to Garner Anthony. And Garner filled me in from a legal standpoint on some of the cases that had infuriated him. And

on the fact also that during those early days of the war, because the writ of habeas corpus had been suspended, the military was judge and juror.

And he told me of an instance of some elderly lady who had sold a bottle of Coke to a group of soldiers attached to one of the bases. And these fellows took it outside, took the bottle of Coke out, and probably drank most of the Coke and put whiskey in the bottle and drank it. Got into an automobile accident and the police wanted to know where they had gotten the contents . . .

WN: This is the story that Burns was telling.

CC: See, Burns tells the story as if you were in this.

WN: It was your sailor [who was involved].

GL: No, no, no.

WN: Oh, I see.

GL: No, this was not so. The individual was not attached to my ship. Was a soldier attached to one of the Army bases. And this woman who had sold a Coke to the man was judged to be guilty and she got three months in jail for having sold them the Coke to use with this bottle of booze that they carried. And that infuriated me to no end. And so, there were numerous stories of that kind that I picked up during that time and came to the conclusion that it was high time that I spent some of my time doing some civic work and this was something that caught my fancy and became involved in it. And I thought at the time, shucks, the case for statehood for Hawai'i is so clear-cut and the people were so obviously ready for it and the country needs it, because here we were, had just gotten through fighting a war, presumably to retain our own freedom and to restore it to other peoples from whom it had been taken. And what were we doing? Why, hell, we were denying a half million people in Hawai'i the basic rights. And if you deny them the right of a vote in the Congress on how their tax money is going to be spent and if you pick up their sons, and fathers, and brothers in the draft and you don't give them the right to elect their own governor, but you instead send a political appointee from Washington, that's a lot more raw than dumping some tea in the Harbor of Boston in 1775 and refusing to pay for it. So we were actually saying out of one side of our mouths that we were fighting a war to assure the maintenance of our own freedom and restore it to others and, yet, out of the other side of the mouth we were telling 500,000 Americans, all of whom were good loyal citizens, that we were going to impose taxation without representation and even worse on them, and we did.

So it was a rather shocking revelation to me to learn for the first time just what the realities of territorialism were and so I was able to work up a pretty good peeve because of it. And yet I thought

because it was so obvious that it was an injustice, and the injustice was so huge, I felt that it was going to be an easy matter convincing the Congress that Hawai'i not only deserved statehood, but if they wanted to retain credibility with the other nations of the world, they better get this potential monkey off of their back, and stop treating American citizens and American taxpayers as second-class citizens.

CC: Okay, we're going to have to stop here and change tapes.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

CC: Go ahead. Why don't you pick up with your question.

WN: One of the things that opponents of statehood used was that Hawai'i was a very multi-ethnic---the population of Hawai'i was very multi-ethnic. I was wondering how you felt about it. And what, the things that you kind of said in Congress to combat that.

GL: Well, that was no, as far as I was concerned, no handicap because one could find plenty of evidence in states that had had a long and illustrious history where men other than Caucasians had been citizens. But the biggest single argument, or rather the biggest single club to batter down that argument came, it seemed to me, in the fact that the FBI wrote a letter about 1947 to a member of Congress, if I recall correctly, in reply to his inquiry to the effect that throughout World War II, there was not a single case on record of any citizen having done anything that could be even remotely called treasonable. And then, when you had on top of that, the fact that Hawai'i's population at that particular time was about 40 percent of Japanese descent, 40 percent AJAs, that in itself, it seemed to me, and I so presented it to the members of Congress I spoke with, was a strong case.

But the icing on the cake was the record of the 442nd and the 100th, where they came out of the war with the most fantastic record of any military unit ever in the history of the United States armed forces. Because, as you'll recall, one of their distinctions was the fact that when other Army units in France were unable to spring the--I think it was the 36th Regiment of Texas--out of their entrapment. Because of the heavy losses that the would-be rescuers had suffered, they asked for volunteers. And every man in the 442nd volunteered to tackle the job. And they broke through. They got the 36th Regiment out, although the number of Texans who were still alive at the time were lesser in number than the total number of casualties the 442nd had undertaken to rescue. And when you can present bonafide evidence of that kind to a congressman, unless he is so prejudiced and unless he has some hidden objection that he has not stated publicly, its difficult to see how a man in Congress would not--or would want to say, well, this is potentially a hotbed for Communism and for disloyalty.

CC: Okay, the Communism issue . . .

GL: Yes.

CC: . . . another one. A number of these weren't stated. Some were.

GL: Yes.

CC: But I know the Communist issue did surface because of people like Joe McCarthy and others.

GL: Yes.

CC: What was the role of the IMUA organization in Hawai'i in terms of feeding that particular mind set and how did you try to overcome it? I know that you had to deal with that as a factor on the Mainland. How important was IMUA to the climate that was. . . .

GL: Well, they were a nuisance, without a doubt. Because the charges, if you have an opportunity to read any of their surviving literature, the charges were wild and most of them were baseless. But at the same time, you have to bear in mind that the members of the Congress were a long ways from Hawai'i and relatively few of them in those days had traveled to Hawai'i and were intimately familiar with Hawai'i and its citizenry. So there was some problem there, but as I said, when you are able to go to the Congress and show them that throughout the long period of the war there hadn't been a single record of treason or anything that bordered on treason by any resident of Hawai'i and could back it up with the gallant performance of the 442nd, you were able to get over that.

The only ones you weren't able to do anything with were those who had already made up their minds that they were going to oppose statehood come hell or high water. And the bulk of those, not all of them, some of them like Congressman [John] Pillion in New York, was a strenuous objector. Another one was. . . . One of, or several of the congressmen from Massachusetts. And their reasons were entirely different. They were afraid, with good reason, that if Hawai'i became a state, Alaska would become a state soon thereafter, and the state of Alaska would be more of a threat to their fisheries industry than would be the case with Hawai'i that had a relatively limited fishery industry whose catch was pretty much just consumed locally. But I think the basic fundamental reason it took so long to get statehood for Hawai'i--you might say Hawai'i and Alaska because, after all, they came in bang, bang, one on the coattails of the other--was the fact that the average Mainland American, whether he was in the Congress or out of the Congress, had no deep interest in the cause of statehood for Alaska or Hawai'i. In other words, they were too deeply concerned about matters that impinged directly upon them, and their representatives in Congress reflected the same thing.

But there was another factor that I think the people of Hawai'i lost sight of. When everybody in this room went to elementary school and high school, you opened a history book and a geography book, and you

looked at the map of the United States, and what did you see? You saw forty-eight compact, contiguous states that completely filled in the space from ocean to ocean. Or, as the song says, from sea to shining sea. And from the Dominion of Canada to Mexiço and the Gulf of Mexico on the South. And subconsciously, there was drilled into your minds as a consequence of seeing that map consistently in school or seeing it in places of business that this is the United States, and geographically, its destiny is complete. There's no room for any more states. Canada certainly isn't going to give us any of their territory to create a forty-ninth state or a fiftieth state, and we don't want to take it from Mexico because of the reaction that would have on worldwide opinion. So this is the United States, these forty-eight states. And there were forty-eight states, and then <u>pau</u>.

CC: Didn't that actually. . . . I know that you did some research or had some research done about how states actually came into the union.

GL: Oh, yes.

CC: And so, wasn't that part of your sales job--was to explain to people how distant territories, in fact, were admitted to statehood?

GL: This is correct.

CC: Maybe you could explain a little bit about some of the things that you would explain and what you found. California as an example and . . .

GL: Yes, California, and my own state of Louisiana was an example in point. Because when Louisiana came in in 1912 [1812], it wasn't contiguous to any other state. Nearest state was Tennessee. And when California came in in 1850, the nearest state was Missouri, and that was over a thousand miles to the East. So, non-contiguity was all bunk. But nevertheless, when a congressmen opposed, he knew damn well that if Hawai'i were admitted, Alaska would be bound to follow because the whole argument of non-contiguity would collapse then whenever the first one was admitted. He knew that when those two territories became states and every member of the Congress looked upon it as not a single admission but the admission of two states. There wasn't a member of the Congress that I ever talked to who had the slightest doubt that after the first of the two states came in, the other would follow on its heels. In fact, Leo O'Brien, who was the floor leader for both the Hawai'i bill and the Alaska bill, when asked, well, what's the significance toward Hawai'i of Alaska's admission, he said, "Well, its just the significance of a needle, a threaded needle. You push the needle into a piece of cloth. And first the needle goes through and then the thread follows. In this case, Alaska is the needle and Hawai'i's the thread." And so, every congressman knew, or he didn't know but he was convinced by the logic of the situation that you couldn't bring in one without soon thereafter bringing in the other. And so, they looked upon it not in the light of two additional senators in the Senate, but four

additional senators in the Senate. And four was twice as bad as two. And all four of these votes, they knew, would be liberal votes that would support such things as civil rights legislation. This is what the Southern group were afraid of. And with just reason. Because I don't think Sparky and Danny have ever cast a vote other than for legislation of that type. And the same thing for the two senators from Alaska. All four of them were Democrats. All four of them were liberal. And so, they were correct in their fear. But they were incorrect in denying statehood because they knew they were not being fair; they were committing a grave injustice to the citizens of Hawai'i and Alaska by their opposition. They lacked the guts to state that they were opposing Alaska and opposing Hawai'i because they knew or they were convinced that those four Senate votes would be for liberal legislation. This was their real reason. Because all of them were deep, dyed-in-the-wool ultra conservatives with the exception of a few whom I can tick off on the fingers of one hand.

CC: Who were some of the. . . . We talk a lot about the Southern opposition to Hawai'i and Alaska's statehood, but there were some advocates in the South . . .

GL: Oh, yes.

CC: . . . in Congress. Who were some of those, just for the record so we . . .

GL: Well, I would say, unquestionably, because of the value of the services he rendered, Russell Long from my own state. Because Russell went so far as to come over and visit Hawai'i on his own, not with the Congress paying the bill, on his own. And I had the privilege of accompanying him on that trip. He came over to serve as the speaker of one of the Democratic conventions of the Democratic party. And I made the trip with him and offered my services as a free guide to the other islands, the neighbor islands. So he willingly stretched out his visit from three days to two weeks. And we made Kaua'i and Maui and the Big Island, and he returned to Washington with not the slightest doubt that justice was on the part of Hawai'i.

WN: I read somewhere that Senator Long was ambivalent or not too sure about statehood. Or in fact, some---I read where he was actually against statehood before making this trip to Hawai'i, and then he returned in favor of it. Is that true?

GL: He was not on record as being opposed to Hawai'i, but there was some question in his mind about the wisdom of it. And I felt it was tremendously important to make that trip with him. Because you have to start with somebody.

CC: You had some others, too, that were from the South . . .

GL: Oh, yes.

CC: . . . that became pretty staunch supporters.

GL: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Estes Kefauver. Estes got out of a sickbed in order to cast his favorable vote for the Hawai'i statehood--one of ~~the earlier Hawai'i statehood bills. And~~ Spessard Holland of Florida was another staunch supporter. And Ralph Yarborough of Texas was still another. But when you have said grace over those four men, you've about had it. One of the Alabama senators was a lukewarm supporter. I think he cast one vote for and that was it. But with the exception of those men, and those men were a distinct minority, because there were twenty-six senators in the thirteen Southern states. And when you took the four who were consistent supporters out, that still left twenty-two opponents.

CC: Okay, let's stop here and change tapes. Because the next question I want to ask you, we'll get into something that should not be interrupted.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

[Discussion is centering around Senator Lyndon B. Johnson.]

CC: But for Alaska statehood, he wasn't even there, right? Didn't he . . .

GL: He wasn't even there in the Alaska vote. And this is . . .

CC: That was the crucial one.

GL: You're 100 percent right. That was the crucial vote, not the Hawai'i vote. Because had Hawai'i gotten in first and Alaska would have come along, as Leo O'Brien said, as the thread following the needle, the crucial vote would have been Hawai'i. But the crucial vote was on Alaska when Alaska came in, and Lyndon simply wasn't there. He found some urgent business that required that he be in Texas.

CC: So your view, basically--and we're on the record again, now--your view, basically, is we should look at the voting records.

GL: My opinion is, when the question comes up, look at the voting record. Because that can't be denied, and that's available through the Library of Congress at any time.

CC: What kind of activities did you actually undertake during this period. Speak to groups, go visit congressmen personally? What kind of things did you personally do in this campaign over this twelve-year period from the time you were here till the time you saw Alaska and Hawai'i get admitted . . .

GL: Nothing radically different than things that a professional lobbyist would have done, not that I'm classing myself as a professional. But I mean, if you engage a professional lobbyist, he would have done all of the things that I did, which was to seek audiences with the members of the House and Senate, and try best to clear up any reservations they had on the subject. The hard dyed-in-the-wool

antis weren't worth wasting any time with because you knew darn well you're not going to change their position because the reason for their opposition wasn't what they stated publicly, which was principally non-contiguity. But the reason--the real reason was the fact that they were convinced that both Alaska's and Hawai'i's senators would vote for civil rights legislation. And that was it--pau. And so, you couldn't change them. There was no way of changing them.

WN: Did they ever ask you who are you and why you are doing this?

GL: Oh, yes. Sure, sure, sure.

WN: What did you tell them?

GL: I told them why I was doing it. Because I was very deeply convinced that the best interests of not only Alaska and Hawai'i required it, but more important than that, as a American, I felt that the best interests of the nation demanded that they be admitted and that we stop treating as second-class citizens the peoples of Hawai'i and Alaska. Because after all, we had fought a revolutionary war for the very things that Hawai'i and Alaska were asking us--or asking the Congress to do. And that is, to put an end to taxation without representation.

CC: Now, you, I know, were a proponent of something called the Tennessee Plan.

GL: Yes.

CC: And I know that you presented that to Alaska, and Alaska heard you out. What about with the case of Hawai'i? What was different about Hawai'i or what happened when you tried to. . . . Did you ever try to advance the Tennessee Plan with Hawai'i's leadership in terms of a strategy for statehood?

GL: Yes. I did, and the story there is simply this, Chris. You have a man in Honolulu who is the real unsung hero of the statehood fight. And he is Dan Tuttle, who was at that time a professor of--during the statehood battle--professor of political science at the University. He and another political scientist by the name of. . . . Not Mackin, some similar name [Norman Meller]. In any event, he, as I understand it, he assigned the task to Tuttle. Tuttle with his staff did an excellent job of research on the question, how did the other states, after the original thirteen formed the union in 1789, how'd the others get in? Certainly, some of them must have encountered problems similar to those that Hawai'i and Alaska were facing. So, Dan Tuttle did a remarkable job of research that showed that there were seven states that had come into the union after the original thirteen without permission of the Congress. And the first one to do it was Tennessee, which was the reason I gave it the name the Tennessee Plan to the strategy they used. Had to have some name, and because Tennessee used it, why, it became the Tennessee Plan. And ever since then, I've

been hounded by historians saying, "Hey, I can't find anything in the records about--in the past--about any Tennessee Plan." Well, they couldn't because there didn't exist a Tennessee Plan until. . . . And all it was was a name that had been given the strategy that Tennessee had used. And the strategy was very simple. The Tennesseeans, being to the west of the mountains that separated the eastern border of Tennessee or delineated the eastern border of Tennessee and the western border of North Carolina. In those days, because all heavy loads had to be carried by oxen, the task of carrying commerce over mountains that had no roads just trails was a very arduous one. And the men in the Congress were simply convinced that, hell, Tennessee will never amount to anything commercially because it's too difficult to have commercial contacts with them. And Tennessee had petitioned the first three Congresses, after the Philadelphia convention and the federal constitution was enacted, had petitioned the first three Congresses, and Congress had simply ignored them. They had the necessary population, because one of the requirements for statehood was that a territory had to have 60,000 people. And another requirement was that they had to be governed by a constitution that was republican in nature, and they didn't have that. So, the Tennesseeans, after three frustrating efforts, said, "Well, we're not getting anywhere at all. These birds won't even answer our letters."

And so, they called a constitutional convention themselves. And the constitutional convention met, drafted a darn good constitution. And the constitution was placed before the people for ratification, they ratified it, and the constitution met the requirement of a republican form of constitution. Republican in the sense of being suitable for a republic--Republican party didn't even exist at that time. And so, they had the constitution ratified. And right after the ratification of the constitution, they called an election for the election of members of the House of Representatives and the Senate of the state of Tennessee, and the election of a governor, and the election of two men who would be the state's first representatives to the [U.S.] House from Tennessee. They had to convene a legislature because under the Constitution in those days, the senators were chosen by the state legislature and not by popular vote. So they had to go through with the creation of a state government in all of its forms, which they did. And so, the legislature selected the two senators, the people at large selected the two representatives, and they selected the governor of the state. And the governor equipped these four men, one of whom was Andrew Jackson, with credentials and a letter of introduction to the president of the Senate and the speaker of the House of Representatives which said, "We do not wish to create the impression that we're coming to you hat in hand, begging for admission to the union. We believe that this is our solemn entitlement under the Constitution of the United States. Because in no other way can we satisfy the conditions of the federal Constitution. So, we do not come with hat in hand. Neither do we come as intrepid party crashers. Instead, we come to you as American citizens who simply insist that you give us our full entitlement of rights as American citizens."

And doggone it, they landed in Washington---not Washington, Philadelphia because the capital was still in Philadelphia. And they caught the capital by surprise. There was tremendous amount of news coverage in the newspapers of the day, not only in Philadelphia but the other principal cities about, some of it praising them, some of it condemning them for a brash action. But nevertheless, they got on the front page of the paper. And then, these four men set about contacting the then sitting senators and representatives. And what would you do if you were a senator or a congressmen, and you knew that most of the legislation that you were going to have to get through to satisfy your people back home in your state or your district was going to have to be voted upon by the members of the House and the members of the Senate? So what these [Tennessee] fellows did was simply call on the individual senators and congressmen and say, "Senator, we don't wish to have you feel that we're doing anything brash. And we're not going to ask you to do anything except search your own conscience and study our credentials. And if you see fit to support our bid for Tennessee's admission into the union, this is one thing you can be sure of: the four of us will never forget that favor."

WN: I know . . .

GL: Period.

WN: . . . Alaska did it, but why wasn't Hawai'i required or asked to do the same thing?

GL: Hawai'i didn't want to do it. Hawai'i felt, for many reasons, that. . . . Well, they felt they were going to be able to get it without it and that it was risky to take a chance on offending members of Congress. Those were two of the reasons given, and there were several others. But the sum total answer was that Hawai'i didn't want to do it. And when in the Eighty-fourth Congress a statehood bill was defeated in the House for the first time, to me, that was a clarion call for drastic action because once a bill is defeated in Congress, with very few exceptions, it's going to be a long time before that same bill is permitted to be put on the calendar again. So, it just seemed to me that there was no choice but to go to Alaska.

And the Alaskans, by the way, had already decided to hold a constitutional convention in December 1955 and January, February, and March of '56. And they elected the same number of delegates to their convention that had been elected to the federal constitutional convention. So, as soon as those fellows were having their election for delegates, I was on the road to Alaska, and I got there when the votes began coming in. I contacted the various members of the--who were going to be delegates to the convention, not all of them, but most of them--and outlined what Tennessee had done and told them I saw no reason why the same tactic wouldn't succeed for Alaska that had succeeded for Tennessee. So, when the convention convened, I got an invitation to come up and present the program to

the entire convention. And I did, and they asked me to remain behind as an honorary member of the convention and to sit with the committee that would have to draft the necessary ordinances to cover the Tennessee Plan, which I did. And when that was completed, they were presented to the constitutional convention, and the constitutional convention voted unanimously for Alaska to do it.

CC: Do you think that helped Alaska's position in terms of one of the reasons why Alaska should have gone first or why Alaska and Hawai'i's, the bills were split? Was Alaska in a more favorable public attitude do you think?

GL: No, no, no. No. I would say, there was no difference in the acceptability to those who favored statehood or the non-acceptability in those who objected to it. You'll find that the votes in the Senate were virtually the same on Alaska and Hawai'i, and virtually the same people opposed Alaska who had opposed Hawai'i.

CC: So it didn't really make a difference then, if Hawai'i had gone first or Alaska went first?

GL: Not a bit--in my opinion, not a bit of difference. No, not a bit of difference. Because that wasn't the issue. And the reason Alaska went first was because Alaska wanted to try it. And Hawai'i didn't. That's the long and short of it.

CC: Do you have any more?

WN: We only got . . .

CC: We're running out. I think we need to get onto . . .

GL: Now, I would like to complete what I started to say before. We were talking about Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon Johnson--and I wanted to make this completely clear--while he had not previously been a supporter of statehood, he did support it in the Eighty-sixth Congress when the Hawai'i bill did get through. So, Jack Burns's statement that his friend Lyndon Johnson backed him up and saw to it that the bill cleared the Senate was absolutely true. And Lyndon Johnson did vote for it on that occasion. But Lyndon Johnson was among the absentees on the Alaska bill. And the critical bill was the Alaska bill. Because if Alaska hadn't gone through, I deeply believe there wouldn't be any statehood--perhaps, not even today--for Alaska and Hawai'i.

CC: Okay. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW