RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE BERSE BERKE

FOR THE

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins our second session with Dr. Berke, on the 24th of September, 2010, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. When we left off yesterday, we were talking about your family being here in the States and you being over in Korea. This is a good place to start talking about your experiences in Korea.

George Berke: Oh, yes, good morning. We flew out of California and the people I was with, we were all recent graduate pilots. We were in a [Lockheed L-1049] Super Constellation and, the first day, we flew to Hawaii. Then, they were in a hurry to get us there, because, just like at the end of World War II, people were coming home from Korea and everybody was short. So, then, our next stop was Wake Island and, there, we actually saw the gooney birds that were famous for that spot, and then, from Wake, we made it to Tachikawa, Japan. Of course, for all of us, this was our first notion of Japan and, immediately, I was amazed at, at that particular time, all the men wore white shirts and black trousers and we towered over them. At five-foot-eight, I towered over the Japanese and the women were still mostly in kimonos. It was really beautiful and it was this sort of, like, a storybook land there. They had trolley cars and it was easy to get around. We didn't stay there long in Japan, but we were told that you could drop your wallet in a trolley car and it would be returned to the base before the end of the day, that whatever the Japanese had been like, they were extremely honest. There was no crime and there was a wink--the women didn't have Western attitudes towards sex. So, a lot of the bachelors took advantage of that. So, then, we flew in a C-47, a "Gooney Bird," to our base in Taegu. When I landed there, I was really depressed. Of course, it was wintertime and everything seemed to be dirt and, of course, the smell was terrible. That was based on the fact that the Koreans had no access to chemical fertilizers. So, they used human waste. That was their main way of growing anything, and so, all the fields were full of it. It was a part of Korea which lasted for many years, that I've heard other people, subsequent to my stationing there, still complaining about that. You couldn't get away from it [laughter] and I remember getting a haircut and, like, I'm saying, "Gee, I can't believe I'm in this kind of a hellhole here." The barber said, "No, sir, not at all. Colonel (Egan?) is a great commander and this is a good wing," and I thought, "Well, if I got that from the barber, there must be something to it." [laughter] The barracks we had were from the Japanese and, to make yourself a part of a quarters, you went out and there was plenty of lumber around from shipping crates and you made a desk or you inherited one from somebody that was pretty good. So, we made our own bunks there and there was a concrete floor, which was swept daily by our houseboy, Kim, and then, the squadron operations room wasn't much. So, we got a new commander there and he said, "Let's fix this place up," and so, by the time I left, we had sliding doors for the maps and a good briefing room and we had built our own squadron bar in one of the units. So, in the year I was there, things got fairly comfortable. During the war, the runway, as such, was made of PSP, we called it, pierced steel planking, [also known as Marston Matting]. It dragged up on the brakes, and so, the people flying combat, especially in the early parts of the war, had a tough time getting off the ground. There was a little ridge at the end of the runway they called "Bust Your Ass" and a "Flight Leader's Notch," that indicated that the flight leader took that and the wingman was on his own. [laughter] By the time we got there, again, it was a concrete ten-thousand-foot runway, and so, consequently, we really had no trouble taking off and landing.

SH: Which group were you assigned to in Korea?

GB: Okay, this was the 58th Wing. I was in the 58th Group and the other group was the 474th Group and we all flew F-84Gs, and so, there was about 150 of them on the base. It was quite a strike force, actually, by this time, and we were on sort of wartime status. We always had alert aircraft. It was only six months into the armistice and there were lots of incidents going on up front, in the line. So, we were never in a relaxed state the whole time I was there, actually, and my squadron commander, Taras T. Popovich, was a well-known and a notorious, actually, pilot, who, during World War II, he was training in a P-40 unit, which was our least capable aircraft, but a Navy Corsair pilot came in one night bragging about his plane and Popovich says, "Well, I'll meet you in the morning. We'll see who's got what," and he spun this young man in and he was killed. So, that was a black mark against him, but he was famous for taking a flight up to Alaska and, with the runway slick and no place else to go, making sure that, on his radio, got everyone in his flight into the snow without damaging their aircraft. So, he had lots of things going for him, but he knew how to run a squadron. So, when you started off there, you were in sort of a baby situation. They knew you could fly the airplane, but you got extensive tours, make sure you knew where the frontlines were, where the DMZ [demilitarized zone] was and how to get back to the base. We did maneuvers there that I've never done anywhere else, that we could go from one river to the next, have no radio contact with anybody, be under the weather and still find the base. So, it was very good training and the final exam was a night flight leading the squadron commander, and so, you took off in formation. My commander was sitting there, right on my wing, and I flew the route that we had briefed and I was very smooth. [laughter] Every time you looked over, there he was, but nobody said anything back in those days, very little radio traffic. So, if you said something, like, "Gear up," you got a click. That was to acknowledge that he heard you; you put the gear up. So, this whole silent, dark--Korea was the darkest place in the world, as far as I know. There was no lights from the ground whatsoever. If there were any kind of light in the homes down there, they didn't show out, and so, it was completely dark. There was no sign of a light at night there in Korea, but, so, I landed safely and he did, too. So, I was accepted into the squadron and we still had some fellows there who were in combat. So, we had some experience there and the first thing that happened to me was, the Colonel, Pop, noticed that I was a Rutgers English major and he directed me, he said, "We need to get the regulations updated. The first thing I want to do is, what happens if we have a casualty?" I says, "Okay." So, I got into the Air Force regs and in the Fifth Air Force regs and I drew up a plan of what to do if we had a casualty. A couple of days later, one of the pilots, in a night formation, got vertigo of some sort and he did bail out, but our escape systems back then were very primitive. He wasn't able to deploy his chute, and so, he was killed and he was a very well-liked pilot, but, as soon as I heard that there was an accident and who it was, I immediately went into his bunk and started gathering all his stuff, which is what you're supposed to do. Well, his friends just jumped me, they really did, and it took some--I forget, somebody said, "Wait a minute, leave him alone, because he's just doing his job." That was a hard thing to do and I had to go through all his letters and anything that was slightly suggestive, throw it away, and make sure there was no prophylactics and all this kind of stuff that we send home. So, that was my first duty in the squadron, which was rather unpleasant but necessary, and then, soon, the group commander got to know me. He was another kind of leader that I never saw in my subsequent career, for a group commander. He's World War II and he was a pioneer in jet flight and we could do things with our F-84s that I never knew you could do and he showed us how to do them. He picked me as the group flying safety officer and, when we had the group meetings, I would do presentations, recent accidents or what not to do or any way to keep the people informed. I got a very good

reputation for that. So, when the last combat veteran left, I was given A Flight and I was about three months out of flight school and here I was, a flight commander. For one reason, I was older than most of the others and I was considered mature and one of the reasons I was mature was that I'd had a serious accident. For most young people, they're immortal and what my accident did for me was, "No, I'm not," without stinting on my ability to perform the mission, but I was always conscious that, "Be on the right side of things and don't do anything crazy." Since we were all kids--it was sort of like going back to doing the blood--we made our own rules about how we were going to fly and how we're going to lead. One of our rules was, if you didn't like what the leader was doing, you could leave the formation. You could also come in to the ops officer and say, "I don't want to fly with him ever again," and that would be honored. So, this was sort of a foundation for the rest of my flying career and some of these things conflicted with what was going on or expected subsequent, like ten years later, but we had to count on each other and trust each other, because we were always practicing for wartime. We'd go up to the frontlines and fly up around there and we would always fly in any kind of weather and we learned how to get ourselves down. There were mountains surrounding the base and we quickly learned how to do that and, when people came to visit us, they were kind of green in the fact, "How do you guys do this every day?" but it was the kind of thing that we practiced. We were able to do it safely. So, things, crazy things, were happening, though. I mean, there was an enormous amount of drinking and everything. Booze was twenty-five cents a shot, plus what you [drank], and so, we could also buy it wholesale to stock our own bar and there was always ruckus songs. One particular Armed Forces Day, we were going to take the whole group over to Itazuke Air Base, Japan, and do a flyby and come back and we could do that. The Sabres, everybody [knew] was the greatest airplane, but it didn't have the range of ours and it's hard to describe, that we were all drinking most of the night, and then, the commander said, "No, we're going to do a group formation." [laughter] We staggered out to our airplanes--and I say everybody. I say, "I wasn't hung over--yet." [laughter] We took off with forty-eight airplanes and got over to Itazuke okay, but the question was when you're going to do a 180-degree turn with forty-eight airplanes? It was just a melee, is all I can say. [laughter] We finally got ourselves back together again and came in a landing and another great forty-eight-ship formation. Our leader's call sign was "Wonder." He was "Wonder 1," and he'd say, "Taegu Tower, Wonder 1, marshal forty-eight." We had a bunch of old incendiary bombs that they said, "We've got to get rid of these things," and so, the group commander managed to find an island--and it was approved by the government--that we could drop the bombs on this island. [laughter] So, anyway, we're flying along around forty thousand feet, going to this place, and one of our pilots, he was flying an airplane that had been repaired for battle damage and a wing replaced. Well, apparently, the wings weren't aligned correctly and, as he fell behind a little bit, as he accelerated to catch up, he reached the critical Mach on one wing. We saw him do a barrel roll across the whole formation and disappear in the clouds, going straight down. When he finally managed to control the airplane, he was about twenty thousand feet and the tremendous forces, it'd blacked him out and it had wrecked his aileron control. Both ailerons were sitting up and the plane was kind of a mess and our group commander talked him--from leading his formation that we were still flying in--talked him back to landing, just such great leadership and calmness. He just calmed him down and told him what to do and, just by radio, got him safely back to the base. So, anyway, there's a break in the clouds and there's an island and he goes, "Wonder 1, going in," and so, one by one, we're all rolling in, [laughter] going to drop these bombs, and I was way back in the back. By the time I got there, I saw people running and I said, "We're either at the wrong

island or they're smugglers." [laughter] I don't know if Colonel Williams ever heard anything about that or not. So, as far as the 84G goes, I had a very good time with them and it was competent. I was a flight commander and I had people under me. One of them was a Mustang pilot from World War II, but he was at the end of the war, and so, he didn't get commissioned. [Editor's Note: "Mustang" is a military slang term for an enlisted person who becomes an officer.] So, I outranked him also, but I knew better than to act big about this sort of thing. Once again, we all cooperated and we had an enjoyable time, but Colonel (Egan?), our wing commander, and Colonel Williams, the group commander, they were a little peeved that they were still flying straight-wing 84s. They heard that one of the Sabre wings was disbanding. They were going to Okinawa to fly a different version of the 86, the Dog version, for interceptors. So, they were going to distribute their aircraft to the remaining 86 groups there and they had enough pull, (Egan?) and Williams had enough pull, and said, "We want those airplanes for the 58th." They were only enough left for two squadrons, and so, they selected the 69th and the 310th to get these 86s. So, we had what they called an FTD, field training detachment, come in and discuss the aircraft and how it sort of worked. In fact, I don't know any unit that ever did an in-squadron transfer like ours, especially from this kind of an airplane, a subsonic airplane, to the F-86 Sabre, which could do anything. [laughter] So, I got the job, for the group, to develop the questionnaire that a pilot had to get a hundred percent on before we'd let him fly it, had to know everything about the aircraft. So, I did the research, and then, the biggest thing I did with that questionnaire, which I still have, is, "What are the big, major differences between the two aircraft?" That was, when you'd go from one to another, you tend to keep the habits of the old one and it really wouldn't do here. So, I would stress that and we had classes on it, and so, it was the 51st Fighter Interceptor Squadron that we're replacing. So, we went up to the 51st and they had a week's worth of training for us, with two flights a day. So, the first day we went out was rather annoying. They knew that in the F-84G, the speed brakes that were used to control the descent were under the aircraft and it was very poor design. When you put them down, you were pitched up. So, we all had very strong right arms and, anytime we put the speed brakes out, we'd stiffen our right arm on the stick, because we knew that that's to keep it level, and then, that was a point of honor, that when you were in the flight and you put the speed brakes down, that nobody got out of formation, because you were holding the stick. They knew that and the 86 had no such problem. It also had much more powerful controls. So, here we are flying and the first thing they say is, "Speed brakes out." Our arms go forward, and then, we realized that and our arms come back and, "Bang," it's called a porpoise--you're banging your head against the canopy. So, when we landed, they went out there and said, "Well, who had the most paint on their canopy?" to award the prize to our rather heavy ops officer at the time. That was really annoying, and then, their whole attitude toward us was sort of like that, so that my second flight, the guy I was with decided to give me a scissors, which was the way, in an 86, you always got behind the other person. For some reason, I couldn't tell you exactly why, I got out of that immediately. I just turned upside down and watched him do that, and then, flew right back on his tail again. These guys were just trying to make fools of us. So, the next morning, this is Tuesday, Colonel Williams comes in and says, "We're going back to K-2 [Taegu Airbase]," just like that, on our third flight. [laughter] I knew, when we landed, I was going to be an instructor and a test pilot and I thought, "Gee, we're kind of short of information here," but, anyway, he was tired of the way we were being treated. So, we got into our new airplanes and we flew them down to K-2. [laughter] The next morning, I was briefing somebody and I was on their wing. All you could do is be there and help people, because you weren't in the cockpit with him and

that was their first time in it, just like ours. So, we managed to transition everyone and we only had one very minor accident, because of a colonel in our control tower thought he was coming in too fast, when that was true if it was an 84, but not for the 86. He made him go around and the guy banged the airplane a little bit, but that was it for two squadrons. So, I started then a career as a Sabre jet pilot and somebody snapped my picture when I landed and I sent it home and my wife was very jealous. She said, "I've never seen you that happy before," [laughter] because now I was flying *the* airplane, *the* fighter. I've written a couple of articles about it. The airframe, it was really exquisite in terms of the way the canopy was designed, the cockpit was designed. You had very good visibility in all directions. You could spot enemy aircraft or anything else very easily, the controls of the heat and vent, you could defrost. You didn't have to worry about going too fast, like you had to worry in the F-84, and you didn't have to worry about going too slow. A lot of aircraft in those days, and especially in later years, if you got too slow, you got in a flat spin. You either had to bail out or you would crash with the [earlier] airplanes, but the 86 had no bad habits that way. The problem with it was that the inner workings were 1940s/early 1950s technology, and so, we had copper tubing and that had to be put at certain torque levels. If the mechanic put it too tight, it would break and, if he put it too loose, it would come loose, and so, there were all kinds of serious emergencies that happened with these airplanes that didn't get into the literature of the MiG Alley and fighting the MiGs, all those adventures that you read about. Nobody discusses the fact that your electrics could fail, your hydraulics could fail, without any damage by enemy action. So, we were aware of these problems and it plagued the 86s. Today, when you see them flying, I can assure you that all the plumbing has been redone to current standards, yes. [laughter]

SH: During the supposed ceasefire, did you encounter MiGs there?

GB: Nope, we never did. One of my classmates, Jim McInerney, I don't want to get into his story too much, but he was a big man, a general's son, and so, he was always punching above his rank and experience. He took a squadron commander on a tour of the frontlines and took him over the lines and, when the flak was blasting, managed to escape, but they took him off flight status and put him on the football team in Itazuke. So, he was behind us in rotating out, and so, the next year, he was escorting one of our reconnaissance planes and a bunch of MiGs came up and flying alongside of him. As people I know said, "Well, he just decided that they were being aggressive and he went in and shot one down." [laughter] He's famous as getting the last MiG and he retired as a two-star general. [laughter] No, I never did see one, but we were ready.

SH: Were there other UN forces with aircraft there?

GB: The British had aircraft there, yes, their first jets, but they were death traps. [laughter] We were just--I mean, we didn't have that many. I think we had three wings and, of course, we only had two squadrons at Taegu. So, I could talk about all my close calls with the airplane. A couple are rather unique. I was flying along with just about the last checkout pilot, and we did this on a scale of our best to barely competent. [laughter] So, this fellow was one of the barely competents--not all fighter pilots are great fighter pilots--and he was going rather slow. We were doing a cross-country around Korea and I was telling him, "You're going too slow, speed it up," because vaguely, in the back of my mind, it was one of the problems with the 86, that if you were flying slow for a long period of time, the oil would pool in the back of the engine and you

wouldn't have enough to operate the plane. The second time he slowed down like that, I had a flameout, and so, I had a flameout at forty thousand feet, which you lose all your cabin pressure. The first thing that happens is, you're sitting on a dingy and there's always residual air in a dingy, even though it's flat, and so, that residual air comes up at that altitude, thin air, and pushes you up against the canopy. We all had a little Japanese souvenir samurai sword here--we called it the "dingy stabber." Yes, I pulled that out and just right between my legs, pow, and so, then, I was back in my seat. The oxygen system is giving you pressure air, because, at that altitude, regular oxygen doesn't get into your lungs enough. So, immediately, I put the airplane in best glide position and speed and I thought, "Oh, this battery isn't going to last. I'm at forty thousand feet. By the time I get down, my battery's going to be dead," and I looked over and I saw I was right over K-2. So, I just dove the airplane down to twenty thousand feet. By the time I pulled out, my engine was spinning fast enough that all my pressures and electricity and everything was back on, and then, I noticed it was, of course, winding down. I said, "Oh, okay," and then, I hit the air start button and I was back in business. So, when I landed, people said, "Well, gee, we've got to find out what happened to you." I said, "Well, I'm pretty sure it was the fact that we were flying too slow and my oil was pooling in this particular airplane." "Well, we're not sure about that, and so, it's got to go back to Japan. It's got to go back to;" (Suiki?) was part of the field in Japan where we did our maintenance. Nobody wanted to fly it and I said, "I'll take it." [laughter] I said, "I'll be glad to take it," because, as far as I was concerned, I knew what the problem was. They wouldn't even let me put my gear up. I had to fly to Japan with my gear down [laughter] and, of course, nobody could find anything wrong with the plane and I eventually flew it back. I think it's time I should talk about my experiences in Japan, in this case. My college roommate, in my sophomore year and junior year, Herb Cohn, was drafted, like most of our class, and he was put into Graves Registration. He occupied out of Japan and, during his tour, he happened to go to the library to get books out and the young woman there spoke English. He was quite taken with her and vice versa, and so, Herb and Yoko were married and they were living in Kokura, Japan. I managed to find this out and I managed to be able to communicate with him, and so, whenever I'd go to Japan, I'd try to get to Herb and Yoko's. So, the first time I did that, I was introduced to the Japanese culture at the time. The first thing, of course, was the bath. Outside the house was a stove and Herb would light the stove. Then, you'd come in the house and, in the bath part of the house, you had this large tub that was steaming hot and, of course, before you got in it, you cleaned yourself, because you dipped water out of it and they had soap, and so, you didn't go into this dirty. That was because everybody in the family, men first, women second, [laughter] would use this. So, you cleaned yourself first, then, you soaked in the hot tub. So, that was [nice], and I got a kimono. I still have a collection of kimonos right now. I became enamored of kimonos. I really love kimonos, especially Japanese kimonos, and then, the next thing was, "We want you to taste raw fish." "Raw fish?" Yes, nobody ever heard of raw fish. I don't know of anybody ever eating raw fish. [laughter] Okay, this is 1954, and so, we start into Fukuoka. Yoko is looking and she goes right into the kitchens of these restaurants, "No, no, no. No, no, no," and, finally, there's a little stand--what I remember, in the States, was like a Nedick's stand, but nobody knows that now--and there were stools and a counter. It was the sort of thing, if you ever saw--I'm trying to think of the movie, Harrison Ford. I'll get it. That's the trouble with these things, I've got to remember something on the spot, right. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Colonel Berke is likely referring to the film *Blade Runner* (1982).] So, there was a counter and the sushi chef would put the sushi up and you would take it. Now, sushi was a finger food. That's why it's so hard to eat sushi with chopsticks, because the Japanese, maybe

they do today, but, back then, no, it was finger food. If you think about it, it makes sense, because you weren't supposed to shove the whole thing in your mouth at the same time. There was a little water trickling down on this side of the counter and, since sushi is sticky, after you had one, you would rinse your hands in it. Even now, most sushi bars, there is a slanted refrigerator case and I have asked the Japanese chefs, "Do you know why this is slanted?" They don't know. They don't know. I said, "This used to be where the water would run down," and I tell people, "I've eaten sushi for fifty years. You know anybody like that?" [laughter] "Well, how are you going to choose your favorite?" I said, "Don't tell me." He says, "Okay." So, I went through these and I said, "This one here's my favorite." "Well, that's eel." So, now, eel is my favorite. Of course, eel is cooked--you don't eat the raw eel. Well, maybe that was why it was my favorite. [laughter] So, I was introduced to the hot bath and kimonos and sushi, and then, another episode, when I was walking the streets of Fukuoka, I went up to a movie house. I saw the billboards outside of it and there were these guys in big, long robes and huge swords and with scowling looks and topknots in their head. I said, "What in the world is this?" and I had nothing else to do and I said, "I'm going to go into this movie." So, I went into the movie and I was completely baffled--of course, it was Japanese--and I was completely baffled for about twenty minutes. I had no idea what was going on, and then, suddenly, I started to get what was going on and I got the plot and the rest of the movie was absolutely gorgeous and fabulous. When I came home, I said, "There's this incredible Japanese movie, got to see, if it ever comes over to the States." When it came into New York, I went in to see it again and I got it in tape and I got it in DVDs and I got in super whatever--I saw [Akira Kurosawa's 1954 film] *Seven Samurai* when it came out, in Japanese, and it is some experience, I might tell you. [laughter]

SH: Were lots of Japanese going to the movies then?

GB: Yes.

SH: It was popular.

GB: Yes, oh, definitely, Japanese cinema. That's one of the surprises.

[TAPE PAUSED]

GB: We're going to be here all week. [laughter]

SH: Please, continue.

GB: Is this any good, all this stuff?

SH: Of course. You were able to go on R&R.

GB: Yes.

SH: With a classmate.

GB: Yes, well, my flying classmate. He was up in Suwon, but I showed him his picture--they would stop at K-2, because they're so short-range. When they'd come from Japan, they'd get some more gas to go up north. I knew these guys from flight school, and so, like I say, we were neighbors at Hondo and we witnessed this horrible wreck together at Williams. Then, he went to Nellis to fly Sabres and I went to Luke, but we were there at the same time. So, always, if I could land at Suwon and I'd come in, "You're always welcome here," have a drink or have whatever. Okay, so, I want to talk about my R&R, too. It's another part of the Japanese culture.

SH: Please.

GB: Are we on? Well, so, after about six months there, you were given an R&R in Japan, and so, I arranged to meet with Bob Winger in Tokyo. Most of the guys, I mean, they stayed in Tokyo. We had taken over lodging there, so, that didn't cost anything. They loved the steaks at Suhera Steakhouse and what we know today as Kobe beef. There were thousands of women around. I said, "Bob," I said, "my buddy Herb Cohn said we should go to Kyoto, and then, to Lake Biwa, Biwako," and Bob was an extremely kind, sensitive fellow. He agreed, "Okay, let's do that," and we both had wives. We were going to keep each other honest, which was really tough, I'll tell you, beautiful girls and they were always clean, [laughter] but whenever one of us would weaken, the other'd say, "Now, remember…" "Yes, okay, right." [laughter] So, we arrived in Kyoto. It was a very hot summer day and it was late when we checked into the hotel there and they said, "Sorry, but the dining room's closed by now, but our grill is open." So, we went up to the grill and somebody said, "Would you like a beer?" "Beer? Japan? All right, yes, let's try it." So, we got an Asahi and you can imagine, our eyes bugged out, "This is great. The Japanese make good beer? Whoa, this is something else," and then, we go up to the--it was a bar. There was this huge pot of boiling sesame seed oil; this is tempura. The chef would dip a shrimp in, just like that, just whips up there, "Oh, potatoes," whoosh, boom, anything you want, "What is this? This is incredible." Of course, I've never had tempura as good as that, because people don't use sesame seed oil, but that was revelation number two. So, touring Kyoto, Kyoto, of course, had such history that we didn't [attack it]--it's the one place we never bombed--and it's just gorgeous, no other way to explain, the temples there. I took all kinds of pictures I still have, and then, we went up to Biwako and the Armed Forces had taken over a resort there. The food was what they called C ration, which didn't mean it was in a can, but it was food from the United States. We went sailing. They had a nice lake there and I was introduced to sailing. Bob knew how to sail and I still have a sailboat now. [laughter] I saw a little notice at the front desk at Biwako, (Becan?) Restaurant, and I said, "Hey, Bob, there's a Japanese restaurant connected with this place. Why don't we try it?" Okay, so, we signed up and they said, "Show up at seven o'clock." Of course, back then, we were all in uniform and this limousine pulls up, with a chauffeur with a cap, and I was reminded of the Green Hornet right away. [laughter] This is the kind of atmosphere we were in. We got in the back seat and, soon, we were climbing up a mountain, a mountainous road, with many twists and turns and twists and turns. Finally, he pulls up and here is this--I don't know how to describe it. It's this lovely place; I can't call it a restaurant, it was a place. It had a tree growing through the roof. Two lovely young ladies in kimonos were waiting for us, ushered us in, shoes off and we put on these cotton booties, but it was chilly. There was a charcoal grill that the seats were centered around. You put your feet up against it, for warmth. We knew enough to order sake and I knew enough to order sukiyaki and, of course, this went down very well with management and I knew the word. I would say,

"*Gohan*, (*dach san*?)," if we wanted more rice. So, pretty soon, of course, these young women, they were trained to react with customers, and so, they were having a good time and giggling and whatever. We were pouring down the sake and the sukiyaki was cooked right in front of us and they showed us how to do this and that, the raw egg and the whole thing. It was just an incredible experience. So, finally, at the end of it, the owner came out. I don't want to call her a madam or something; that was not the case. [laughter] She said, she spoke enough English to know, "You were such good customers, I want to give you a special treat," and so, we go back into this place, into the quarters. We're going a couple of turns and she takes us to her bedroom. There is a black-and-white TV on and she sits us down and it's *The Lone Ranger*, the funniest thing, because the Lone Ranger and Tonto don't say a heck of a lot, but, to the Japanese then, it was going a mile a minute, "Yes, *kemo sabe*." This was her treat. We looked at each other, we were just dying of laughter [laughter] and we thanked her very much. They called back for the car, and then, we went back and, of course, it's an unforgettable experience. That's the only way to describe it. [laughter]

SH: The Lone Ranger rides again.

GB: So, one day, I was on a single flight. We tried to fly in pairs, but, when there's not enough airplanes, you go by yourself. I was doing a frontline support, which you go up to the frontline and one of our officers there, on the ground, he gives us a mission, a fake mission. We'd do it as if we were working against the enemy. So, I was coming back and, as I let down, at about five thousand feet, I got a tremendous earache. We always came back, since the 86 was so short-legged, we always came back with five minutes' fuel. I couldn't figure out what to do. You do the Valsalva move--you hold your nose and blow--and nothing would break through this. Now, we talked about this, in the bar and whatever, "What would you do?" Well, they'd say, "If you keep going, your eardrum's going to bust and you'd probably never fly again." So, the question was, "Well, if you took your dingy stabber and stuck it in, whether that was just enough of a nick that that could be repaired." Something in the back of my mind, having to do, I think, with my flameout, prompted me to push the throttle forward and point up. I climbed to forty thousand feet with the last of my fuel, and then, I rolled the plane over, so that it would start falling. I took off my oxygen mask and I hit the switch to dump the cabin pressure immediately to forty thousand feet, from our usual pressurized cockpit of twenty-five, and then, everything came out of my nose and mouth, splashed all into my instruments, snot, I have to use that word. By this time, the plane was pointing straight down, which is what I wanted, and I would do Valsalva maneuvers and I kept clearing my ears and clearing my ears and clearing my ears. I put my oxygen mask back on, I called the tower, just like normal, [laughter] "I'm coming on initial." I was doing about eight hundred miles an hour. [laughter] I come in and made a pattern and landed and managed just to get to my revetment and shut it down. I told my crew chief, "I'm going into ops." I said, "I'll come back and clean this up and you don't have to do that," and then, I was called in later. They said, "We've never put so much fuel in an 86 before. You didn't have anything left." All I said, I said, "Nobody would believe this, what I did." I said, "Well, I was up at the frontlines with the troops and I kind of overdid it. That's why I came in with so little fuel." [laughter] This is the kind of thing where I talked to people, when the Air Force got so bureaucratic, you couldn't do anything without calling headquarters and calling the command post. I said, "If I'd have called the command post and said, 'What do I do?' what would they have told me? They certainly wouldn't have told me to climb to forty thousand feet, dump the cabin

pressure and blow this stuff out of my nose and my ears by air pressure, the residual air in my head as opposed to the no air out there, 'Shoolp.'" I said, "You've got to know what to do. [laughter] You can't call the command post." So, I always was annoyed about that aspect of the Air Force. Another episode that was very tough was, I took off in a functional test flight, which is, any time that any maintenance is done, an experienced officer should fly the airplane to make sure it's workable and, in this case, there were several incidents. This particular one, I had just taken off and I was climbing out. I'd reached about 250 knots and there was a large explosion, "Ka-boom," and I thought, "Oh, my God, the engine's gone." I looked down and the escape system in the 86, you were recommended to be at two thousand feet before you tried to bail out, because you had to stop, somehow stop, the seat spinning, you had to unhook yourself from the seat, you had to find your ripcord and pull it. None of those things you do today. It's all taken care of automatically, but, back then, that was it. So, I couldn't do that and I looked down and there were rocks. "What am I going to do with this airplane?" I called the tower and told them I was going in, and then, I noticed my engine was at idle and it was still running. It suddenly flashed on me that when I heard this big bang, I had pulled the power back. So, I cautiously advanced the power and the engine came up just in time, and so, I started flying again, turning back toward the base. Soon as I got back up around 250 knots, it started shaking. So, I slowed it down. I figured, "Okay, I've got a good engine. Something's wrong," and I came around and I declared an emergency and I landed. Then, the tech sergeant who was our chief of maintenance--I don't want to get into him, but he was not very good [laughter]--he comes along in a jeep and he is laughing, "Ha, ha, ha." This is the funniest thing he ever saw and I'm going, "Jesus Christ, I almost died and this guy is laughing." Well, there was a big panel just after the cockpit that was missing and they had worked on something in there and, apparently, gone to lunch with just putting a couple of connectors on for this thing. Once I'd gotten up to speed, the air pressure in the airframe blew it out and there was this big hole behind me--that was the bang and that was the vibration. So, I should have inspected the airplane closer, but you don't expect that. The rule in any maintenance is, you either do it or you leave it open, you don't do it half, but he was that kind of a line chief. He just wasn't very good and we had to suffer this guy. I had other incidents I won't bother about, but that was part of the problem of having a squadron conversion, that we didn't get enough trained people to maintain the airplanes. So, the last--well, let's see, that was, yes, the kind of thing, being hard to explain--we were going to have a flyby of sixteen ships, the first time to the base, to show that we had sixteen ships. We had one airplane to test fly and one of the problems with the F-86 is, occasionally, somehow, fuel got into the air conditioning system. Jet fuel is not very nice to be inhaling and, even with an oxygen mask, your eyes, I was up there and my eyes were going. I said, "You cannot fly in a sixteen-ship formation with this airplane. It's dangerous." So, I come down, here's everybody waiting for me, all the brass. Here comes Berke in the last airplane. I put it [down], I says, "Ground this airplane." "What, for fuel was in the cockpit?" "Yes." So, then, even our tech sergeant, when he went out to check the airplane, said it was serious, but that gave me an out. "This guy," [laughter] I was not on the team, see, and I have had several escapades about safety and the last one was in Vietnam, where I believe in that, that's what you do. People that have to fly these high-performance airplanes ought to have a safe airplane. I was threatened with court-martial one time for red X-ing an airplane. I can get into that later, but that's what I do. When I find that something is unsafe to fly, then, I say, "Don't fly it." So, my last, almost, episode with [the] 86 was the last flight before you go home. They took the tanks off and you could go supersonic and you went up to forty thousand feet and you dove it straight down, full power, and you made

sonic booms for the base. So, I walked out to my airplane and my famous line chief tech sergeant comes up to me and says, "Sorry, sir, the plane's out of commission." I thought, "Oh, no, he skipped me again." I said, "What is it this time, Sarge?" and he says, "Well, we just got a TWIX. We have to check all the wing bolts, because there's been some problems and this airplane has a cracked bolt." I thought, "Oh, my God, if I'd have taken that up and gone supersonic with it, the wing would have come off." [laughter] I'm slightly superstitious from there on in. Any squadron I was in, "Okay, sir, this is your last flight." I said, "No, it isn't. Good-bye. [laughter] I don't take last flights."

SH: A good precedent. Did you know where you would be assigned next before you left Korea?

GB: Oh, yes, yes. I was going to be assigned to Alexandria, Louisiana, what was then England Air Force Base. They had two groups of F-86s and that seemed to be a normal progression for me. I'm trying to think of how I got home. Yes, I'm pretty sure it was in a DC-7 and it was a very high-powered [plane], the last of the high-powered prop, commercial airliners. That thing really, really went fast. [laughter] Back then, we got first-class seats, where, now, admirals can't get first-class seats, and free drinks and, "Welcome back." We landed at Newark Airport and there's my folks and my wife and my new daughter. It was kind of strange, because my wife says, "Well, you're not paying attention to Jenny," and I said, "Well, gee, I've been away for a year [laughter] and I have this beautiful woman here." So, anyway, it was hard getting back. One instance in Alexandria, we went to a party at the officers' club, and then, she found me behind the bar, on my back, drunk and singing dirty songs. [laughter] "What has happened to my husband?" she said. I also weighed a very nice 135 pounds. I had filled out, and so, I was a changed man in many ways, but not in particular. The interesting thing, part, was that when I came on to the base, it was evening, I dropped my wife off at--we didn't have motels then, I'd found a rooming house--and I started along the line. There were all these nice, checkered-tail 86s and that was the 366th Group and I was in the 401st Group. As I turned the corner to the 401st Group, I said, "Oh, my God, here are these ugly airplanes," and it was the F-84F, Republic's newest version. I realized that I was back with a Republic [laughter] and I had flown my last Sabre flight. That was a real disappointment and I will be talking for some time about my experiences with the 84F.

SH: This was not the type of aircraft you had been flying. Was this like downsizing?

GB: No, no. It is hard to explain. It was faster, it would carry a lot more weight, it would take more battle damage. We called it "the Super Hog." The 86 could use a five thousand-foot runway very casually. We were taking all of the seven-thousand-foot runway we had to get off the ground. It was very difficult to handle with any kind of wet runway. They would go off the runway. We were losing airplanes right and left that way. So, they came in faster and they took a lot faster to get off the ground and they were under engine-ed, which was a problem, in those days especially. Our planes had been sitting at Republic Aviation without engines, because the original engines were British and, when we started making them, the specs weren't as tight as with the handmade British engines. Also, a flight of the early models had been flying in Texas and, back in those days, as I said, we flew in groups. They were forty-eight of those and they weren't in a thunderstorm, but they were in the part of the air around the thunderstorm that was super cooled. The planes that went through that, it shrunk the spinning parts of the engine and

they failed. I think it's about fifteen of those airplanes crashed. We still had a lot of World War II pilots, especially the leaders, and they're used to bellying in and you can't belly in an F-84 and survive. Many of those were killed bellying in. The people that bailed out did, I guess, pretty well. But that incident meant that they even put more clearance in. They cut down the specs in the compressor of the engine, and so, we had even less power. While this was happening, all the planes were sitting there, hundreds of them, because we made thousands of airplanes back then. [laughter] They were sitting there on Long Island, waiting for engines, and, of course, a lot of the critical parts of the plane were sitting there. They were failing, and so, what we got were airplanes that occasionally would just have a problem somewhere in it. I did articles on this airplane and, in 1955 and '56, both the F-84 models and the F-86 models had an average of one accident a day. Now, these were not fatal accidents, but aircraft, major accidents. So, I really feel like a survivor. [laughter]

SH: I can see why.

GB: Yes, you haven't heard anything yet. [laughter] Give you an example--there's a major from another command wanted to get checked out in our squadron there at Alexandria. So, he took off for his first flight and he hadn't been off very long and the tower called my commander; we were still there. They said, "Oh, he's had a hydraulic failure," and this model of the 84F, fortunately, had a method of controlling the airplane when you lost the hydraulics. It was considered too heavy or something or other--they stopped doing that for any aircraft. We lost so many pilots, especially in Vietnam, with hydraulic failure from missile strikes, where if they had this little motor in it that the 84F had, they could get back. Just one of the terrible mistakes that were made about this kind of thing, years later, but, anyway, he could fly this airplane, but wasn't approved for landing. We were standing out on the ramp where we showed him how to get in and start it up and the next thing you know, boom, here he comes. [laughter] He lands right next to us.

SH: Lands the plane?

GB: No, himself, no. See, we had a lot of swamps there. So, what happened, if you were going to get out of an airplane, you aimed it to the swamps, and then, you bailed out. Major Ruby, my squadron commander, says, "Well, I know what happened to you. It was the aileron sensing valve. See, look at your boots--you see the hydraulic fluid on your boots? Well, when you were sitting there, that line is right there in the cockpit and it busted." [laughter]

SH: Was that the time to debrief a guy?

GB: [laughter] It sounds ridiculous now, but the plane itself, in order to support the weight, the tires were inflated to three hundred PSI and that made them very stiff. On a wet runway, and they weren't very wide, on a wet runway, they would hydroplane and this is where we found out about hydroplaning, and ABS wasn't around at that time, either. So, the pilot lost control. This one time, we had a squadron commander that everyone admired, but he turned off the runway a little too fast and it was a little too slippery and one wheel caught. It twisted the airplane and it twisted the landing gear out of that wing, and then, when his other gear hit the dirt, it twisted that one. So, he had a double wing change and he was gone the next day, but this is a serious

problem. When my wife and I went back to Wright-Patterson, it was to talk to my lawyer, it was raining there when I was on the base and I saw these 84Fs come in and turn off halfway down the runway. I said, "Wait a minute," stopped the car. I walked in and I said, "I saw you turn off halfway down the runway. How did you do that?" He says, "Oh, we fan the brakes." "You fan the brakes?" "Yes, bing, bing, bing, like this. Don't you know about that? We did a report," and I said, "No, never got down to the working level." So, soon as I get back down there, I talked to the wing commander and everybody, I said, "This is what they do at Wright Field." Now, that was sort of a manual ABS, you see, and that stopped the problem, of course.

SH: Did it ever get out to the rest of the people?

GB: [laughter] No. My career there was interesting but disappointing. I disappointed them and they disappointed me--it was mutual. Of course, I was no longer a flight commander. I was way down the list, because I was in units that had lots of captains and more experienced people than me, that it was an anomaly to be doing that sort of command in Korea. So, I was pretty far down the totem pole, but I saw some things that really ought to be fixed up. We did a lot of temporary duty there. This has annoyed me, because I had just gotten back from a year with separation from my wife and kids, but we were always going someplace. We were up at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and there was this nationwide, or at least half the country, eastern half of the country, event that the Army and the Air Force had set up. It's called Operation SAGE BRUSH [from October 31 to December 15, 1955] maneuvers and it was the first [examination of] how the first use of atomic weapons [was] going to affect the way the Armed Forces worked. So, since we had fighter-bombers, the 84F was a fighter-bomber, they designed a bomb that could be carried by the 84F. It was a two-thousand-pound atomic bomb called a Mark 7. We only had the grossest of mockups, but one of the Tactical Command's generals came by and they said, "Okay, you guys, we're going into a new business. Instead of trying to shoot down a MiG, you're going to get the whole wing." That was supposed to interest us and, of course, it certainly didn't. We were fighter pilots. We wanted to go man-on-man with somebody. We don't want to drop a Hiroshima bomb on them, but, then, that turned out to be the way, the kind of operation I was in for quite a few years, but, anyway, we did these mock maneuvers. So, the first day, we were waiting for orders to take off and, no, the umpire said, "You did a big mushroom cloud, a small mushroom cloud." The umpire says, "No, you've just been bombed." They were just starting missiles back then, cruise missiles. I don't remember the name of it. "No, it came over here at such-and-such in the morning. You're all gone," and then, the other side, same thing. So, there was no Air Force. So, the Army was doing their maneuvers and we're saying, "Where's the Air Force? Where's the Air Force?" We're saying, "Put the Air Force back in business, put the Air Force back in business." Okay, so, "Okay, Air Force is back in business." This happened, I think, here's the third time, I remember the third time--we were going to really fix them now. We were going to deploy to a civilian base, in around someplace in Arkansas, not an Air Force base. So, we were in a flight of four and it was really tough. We were up half the night getting our planes ready, because we had to do our own maintenance. [laughter] We were sleeping on the desks and we were supposed to take off, I think it was six, when the phone rang. The phone rings at ten o'clock. We wake up, of course, because we were up until one in the morning. We wake up, "Wait a minute, sun's shining. What's going on? Hello. Oh, okay, we're all dead. Well, how did that happen?" "Well, they mis-targeted. They didn't hit the Air Force base, they hit this one," [laughter] but the point was, in a nuclear war, it was going to last a day. I don't

know how much effect this had at the higher levels, but it sure had an effect on us, said, "What kind of business are we in right now? I mean, this…" Other people, when I met in other bases in my career and I'd mention Operation SAGE BRUSH, everybody would get this look on their face, "Oh, yes, that one," but it certainly had an effect on us and I'm sure it had an effect on the upper ranks, how this was a whole new game.

SH: How did things change when it became so obvious that nuclear weapons were the doomsday weapon?

GB: Oh, I will tell you.

SH: What about your family?

GB: What about my family? What about my family? We were all dead. I can get into that, because, on our base in England, at the very end of our strike forces, we had over a hundred hydrogen bombs in the woods--and the wives knew it [laughter]--and we were a prime target for the enemy. Now, I'm jumping ahead, but, yes, it was deterrence and I'll get into that here, because that's what we worked. We worked to deter and we were proud of the fact, if there were enemy agents around, we wanted to show them they didn't stand a chance. We were very aggressive about that.

SH: Really?

GB: Yes. [laughter]

SH: I am of the generation of, "Get under your desk."

GB: Yes, "duck-and-cover," right. [laughter]

SH: The futility. It is always interesting to hear when it dawns on a person such as yourself, a pilot or a SAC bomber pilot, "Oh, my God, what is this? This is how it will be?"

GB: What I was doing, I was sent to squadron officers' school. It was a three-month and it was a very good command move and I could take my wife and daughter. We rented an apartment there and it was a really good school. We had a lot of interesting things and you met a lot of interesting people. I took a B-36 pilot up in the back of a T-33 and he's amazed, "You found your way back?" [laughter] without all the goodies they had on a B-36. I bought--I had it for a while--I had the first short-block '55 Chevy, four-barrel carburetor. I talk to people that know cars and they drool, that car. [laughter]

SH: "Why do you not still have one?"

GB: Yes. [laughter] One of the interesting things was, well, like, when I got back, I had just pulled into my driveway and one of my squadron mates that lived in the neighborhood came over and said, "We're going. The F-84Fs are grounded again and we have to go to Chaumont to pull alert, France. So, we're going down to Eglin [Air Force Base in Florida] for a month to re-

checkout in the F-86, and then, we're going six months over to France," and I said, "The hell I am." [laughter] I mean, I'm only about four months out of Korea and I'm not going on a seven-month TDY. I can't remember exactly how I got out of that one. On the next deployment, my wife was pregnant with our son and I got out of that deployment. The situation with Tactical Air Command, back then, was terrible, same kind of problems. We didn't quite have enough people, and so, as soon as you got back, maybe you could take some leave, but there is always a squadron ready to go and a squadron over there and a squadron with about half to a third of its people. Under this kind of regime, as soon as people could get out, they got out, and, of course, we were always short. One of my associates that played a certain part in my life, Ralph Maglione, he had got himself assigned to fighter personnel in the Air Force. He would tell me, "I don't know what to do. I can't get enough people to staff it, so that people don't just quit," and this is what's going on today in the Army, of course. The times just don't change and all these rotations. Of course, there, we didn't have combat. All we had over there, as far as I can [tell]--I have one picture I treasure of rainy Chaumont and an F-84 and you can tell his engine's going, because the mechanics are holding their ears, because it had a horrible noise when it was in idle--was boredom. My favorite author, James Sarter, he was in the Guard and he wrote at least one novel about that, being over there. So, I didn't terribly want any part of it, and so, I got the reputation of not wanting to be a TAC fighter pilot. So, one of the things they did for me was, they assigned me as a borrowed pilot for a high flight transfer of new factory F-84s over to Europe, since we had arranged we're going to be the first unit that ever tried to do this in March. So, we were preceded by F-100s that were going to the United States Air Force over there, while we were flying planes for NATO. The flight I was in was to go to Belgium and we were going to land at Brussels. That was our end point. This was a very interesting part of my life, because we had gone from picking up the planes in Georgia to Dover, Delaware. We stopped at Dover because the F-100s were snowed in in Goose Bay, Canada, which was our next stop, couldn't take two groups of forty-eight, because that's how we flew, in forty-eight. So, we were sitting around and, I remember, you asked about bands. [laughter] The "Dootle Town Pipers" that was up there, we were listening to them, but, anyway, one day, the boss said, "Hey, we've got to fly these airplanes. They're going to fall apart." So, I said, "Okay." So, I got my best buddy, Larry, and I said, "Get on my wing and I know the area around here." So, I can't remember if I called my uncles or not, but their Berse Brothers was across the street from a Methodist church and down the street from the Presbyterian church that had a pretty high spire. In New Jersey, especially Westfield, trees all over. We were going--I was probably somewhere over the [Raritan] Bay--and I came down and I found the church and we were doing about five hundred. I just come right down, lower and lower, lower and lower. We skimmed right over Berse Brothers, pulled straight up and got the hell out of there. [laughter] My family was just nuts. They just were so proud. They couldn't believe it, that little Georgie was doing something like this. [laughter] So, this is another one of my stories. They call it, I call it, a high flight. Finally, all of a sudden--well, let's see, no, see, we had a Ferry Command Pilot and they were always the flight leader. They had done this many times, and then, there were three of us borrowed pilots. We came from other 84F units, and so, we had to depend on these guys. Well, anyway, they were stationed in Dover, and so, he said, "My wife and I are inviting you three over. We're going to have spaghetti and wine and play poker." So, we, all right, have the nice spaghetti dinner and we're drinking the wine and we're playing poker and I am steadily losing. "Gee, whiz, I'm going to be in Europe and everything," because, in those days, [no] credit cards, you had only what you had, and so, at about one o'clock, no, no, not that late, around midnight, I said,

"Come on," I said, "look, take me home. I'm just about out of money. I just can't do this anymore. It's not right that I lose all my money here." "Shut up and deal, shut up and deal." Somewhere around three-thirty, I had won everybody's money, [laughter] yes, everybody's money, got into bed, then six o'clock, "Quick, quick, get dressed, we're flying." [laughter] We had to put on what we called "poopy suits," meaning an exposure suit that you climb into, and we show up at briefing, "The F-100s are grounded. We have to go today." "Where's our flight lead?" "Oh, he's sick." So, we didn't have a leader, [laughter] a coward, and you couldn't do anything. There was a sandwich machine, but you had no spit [laughter] and water didn't seem to help. I'm saying, "How the hell am I going to survive this?" We crawl into the airplanes, start them up. Once again, it was forty-eight--no, minus one. [laughter] I remember flying over Boston and this is March and there was snow on the ground and everything, and then, I'm saying, "This is really interesting." [laughter] We land at Goose Bay and the thing about snow up there, at least it was, it was cold enough that it wasn't slippery, and so, landing in snow didn't turn out to be much of anything. Then, we parked the airplanes and I think, "My God, we did this," two hours sleep and I was still loaded with wine. [laughter] We stayed there a couple of days, to make sure that we had the weather we needed. All the other airplanes had to stop at Narsarsuaq in Greenland and it was a pretty tricky place and we didn't think 84Fs should really go in there. So, we were going to overfly them and go directly to Keflavik, Iceland. So, we took off and flying over the Greenland Ice Cap, if there isn't one left, it was a gorgeous day and brilliant. Two of the planes had low oil pressure and they did go into Narsarsuaq and the rest of us, as we were approaching Iceland, we were in the clouds. So, we were flying a tight formation and we had to get in. So, we did and we landed and one of our leaders knew Iceland very well and there was this party with these Icelandic Airline stewardesses there. A more gorgeous bunch of girls you've never seen in your life, and so, we had a dance and I was picked out by the prettiest girl there, Etta. She could tell me, she could tell who I was, and I wasn't one of these horny guys. [laughter] So, she was dancing with me, getting really close, pressing her breasts up to me and really getting me excited about all this, and then, she took me out the back way to meet her boyfriend. He had a pickup truck and we arranged, the next day, to go sightseeing. [laughter] Pretty soon, I became notorious in the whole forty-eight group--and this is my program, right--they said, "Ha, ha, ha, look at George. He's got the prettiest girl in Iceland, but she don't fuck." [laughter] Well, I said, "I don't care, I'm having a ball." I've got a lot of money and I've got a guide. We drove around and I saw a lot of things about--Iceland's a very interesting country and I had a really good time there. [laughter] Then, the next thing we did was to fly to Great Britain and, with our range, it was really an easy flight. As soon as we entered Scotland, we started getting bounced by the RAF [Royal Air Force], all kinds of RAF fighters, all the way down to RAF Station Bentwaters, where we were landing. They were just having fun with us and, of course, we couldn't do anything. We just had enough fuel to get back to the base and, when we landed there, there was a part of the runway had been burnt when somebody was unable, felt they were unable, to take off and punched their tanks off and they burned. It burned a fair amount of the runway. I mention that because it comes up later in my life, something like that happening. So, we land and they really don't have a place for us and we were in a sort of decrepit enlisted quarters and beds with springs and all. So, that was a great way to end our high flight, too, but the next evening, the 81st Wing there had invited the Treble One [111th] Squadron of the RAF, which was near there at Wattisham, to a dining-in [a banquet]. I was there at the club, standing at the bar, in absolute amazement at what went on at an RAF dining-in, all

the drinking contests and the soccer with wastebaskets. They just pretty much destroyed this room.

SH: Did they use peashooters?

GB: [laughter] No, but they had all these games and they all involved drinking and getting drunk. The next morning, everybody fired up, all the base people and the RAF guys fired up, and they had this big rat race [mock dogfighting] up there. I said, "This is where I belong, right here, not back at Alexandria." So, our leader shows up and, now, we're going to go to Belgium. "Well, that's not far, so, don't fill the tanks," and so, we take off from Bentwaters and we go down to North Foreland there, over Dover, where we get clearance to go to the Continent, through France control. He's climbing up and he's climbing up at a very high angle of turn and there's hardly any lift when you have your wing down like that. I'm saying, "Jesus." The next thing I knew, my tanks are empty, my drop tanks are empty, and, now, we head for the Continent and it's what it was in the '50s, very gloomy and very little visibility. Then, the leader comes on the radio and says, "Does anybody know where we are?" [laughter] [Editor's Note: Sandra Holyoak coughs.] Sorry to choke you--it sure choked us. Here, we'd come all this way and we were running out of fuel and we were lost somewhere in Europe. So, I don't know whose idea it was, says, "Everybody spread out until we just see each other," and we flew along and one of the guys says, "I see an airfield." We all came together and, by God, it was Brussels. [laughter] We landed like nothing'd ever happened. So, we stayed at the Metropole and I keep reminding anybody listening, we were in uniform. So, what our leader always did was drink beer, drink beer, then, order hamburgers about ten o'clock. So, I said, "No, I'm in Brussels, I'm not going to do that." So, I went down to the grill room for lunch and this is a very swanky place. They pulled out the table and you sit in the bank head and they come here. The Maître D' comes up to me and he says, "Ah, yes, sir, you like hamburger, beefsteak?" Remember my French, right--I said, "No, (*le specialty de la maison*?)." [laughter] He gets taken back. Then, he gets a big smile on his face. I'm trying--the things I had are common now, but, then, they weren't--I started out with a quiche, and then, I had some kind of fish, and then, I had veal, some kind of veal. Then, I had my favorite dessert now, is--God, I don't know why I get these blanks when I know exactly what I'm talking about--the custard …

SH: Crème brûlée?

GB: Yes, crème brûlée, with the appropriate wines. So, me and the Maître D' really hit it off. [laughter] I mean, we surprised each other. It was a fabulous lunch, introducing me to a lot of things that I never had before, and then, we got the word that there is a strike at the airport or the airline, and so, we were going to go out of Paris. So, we took a train down to Paris. Back then, we were in NATO and France was in NATO. So, there was a hotel set aside for us and, once again, "No, we're not going to have beer." I tipped the--all of a sudden, I think I need a drink or something. [laughter]

SH: The valet?

GH: Yes, the bellhop. I said, "We need a restaurant, Left Bank. Get us a taxi." "Yes," me, and the leader was going with me, since I was now doing the French. So, the four of us went out, a

Left Bank restaurant, just like what you think, checkered tablecloth, Beaujolais, and I was teaching the guys French, "Hmm, (*uncredble le Beaujolais*?)." So, we were all drinking and having a good time and, now, we're going to go to the Crazy Horse Saloon, which was famous for naked ladies, but very high class. So, we drop off at the Crazy Horse Saloon and we're sitting at the bar. There are--I can't remember, is it one or two men?--and then, this gorgeous woman and the way she was made-up, she was either an actress or somebody, really, definitely top. I start talking to her and, like, I've got my wings on, and so, she's interested in me. I'm going on like better than English with her. We were arranging, "Let's meet," and the next thing I know, I am tipped off the barstool, completely, and I'm caught by two of my guys and they're carrying me out the door. There's a taxi running with the door open and they shoved me in. He said, "Lieutenant," the leader, he says, "Lieutenant, you're out of your league. Didn't you see those guys with the guns under their arms?" [laughter] I said, "No." He said, "We did and they looked at us." I said, "Oh, my God, that's too bad," actually tipped me right off the barstool, threw me into the cab, took off.

SH: Saved the day.

GB: And so, going back to Rutgers again, that French was in there someplace. [laughter]

SH: Thank heaven for it.

GB: Yes. Can we have a break?

[TAPE PAUSED]

GB: But, I'll finish this.

SH: Sure.

GB: So, anyway, the next night, we were at Orly, that's where the French Paris Airport was at that time, and we boarded a Boeing Stratocruiser, which was essentially a B-29 with a much deeper fuselage. It was an extremely comfortable airplane. Of course, we still had our parachutes, we had to bring our parachutes back, and so, it was pretty obvious who we were. After we took off, you could go up and talk to the pilots, and then, the stewardesses, as we called them then, asked us if we'd like to go down to the bar, because there was actually a circular, little circular staircase and a bar down [below].

SH: In the 1950s?

GB: Yes, and they all came down and, oh, yes, with all the little bottles, "Have you ever tried this or have you tried that?" [laughter] We just had a wonderful time there. It was just so great getting all this attention and everything and all these free drinks. Really, that was the finish of the trip. After that, we went back to Alexandria. I got a bottle of bourbon and I went to this chief sergeant major of the wing and I says, "I want the next assignment to the 81st Wing at Bentwaters," because I knew that that came occasionally, because we're flying the same airplanes. By that time--well, not quite at that time, but soon, shortly thereafter--the squadrons

were so annoyed with me, because I always found a reason not to deploy, that they sent me up to group. By this time, I became the group training officer and I started doing things that I thought ought to be done. Instead of calling people in one Saturday a month for ground training, I briefed them on how to do this. We had lots of days when we couldn't fly on account of the weather and I said, "This is a 'you call, we haul.' You're down, assemble your guys and we'll do it, right there," and so, I saved a bunch of Saturdays. I also figured out how to fly the airplane better than the flight manuals. I could take it off at the designated numbers, most people didn't, and I could land it slower than just about anybody else. My friend, Larry Wistner, we worked on this together, because the plane had, as you were slowing it down, a tendency to wiggle. We didn't want to do that, right. One day, I wanted to say, "What happened? What would happen if…" and it just wiggled down through five knots, and then, steadied again. I said, "Oh, my God, I got ten knots slower that I can use." I also figured out how to land it with the electric motor, safely. So, when my assignment came, I was very well prepared in the aircraft. In fact, since I was in group there, a lot of the planes were abandoned, because the other people didn't know how to fix them and the pilots had to take an airline home. I had some tools and, most of the time, it was just minor things. I would take an airliner up there and I would fix the airplane and fly it back. So, I was kind of my own person while I was up in group there.

SH: Were you still stationed at Alexandria?

GB: Yes, well, no, the group headquarters was.

SH: Okay.

GB: Okay, and we did one deployment to Barksdale, I remember, and I was driving back with a lieutenant colonel and he was giving me advice. He said, "George, you've just got to go overseas. You can't keep doing this, for your own good," and he didn't know that I had this thing in with my group sergeant major. [laughter] So, when I got back from one of my trips, this lieutenant in the squadron was almost in tears, he said, "Oh, my God, I've just been assigned to England and my wife doesn't want to go. What am I going to do?" I said, "What? What?" I went up to the group sergeant major, "What in the world happened?" He says, "Sir, you were gone and I had to fill this thing." I says, "Well, what if I got him to decline and I'll take his place?" He said, "Well, that will work." So, I come up and I says, "Lieutenant, how would you like to trade me for that?" "Oh, yes, sir, I'd be glad to do that, yes." So, there, I got my assignment, and then, the guys who knew everything said, "The headquarters is at Bentwaters, but the place to go is Manston. It's the greatest base in Europe." "Oh, well, that sounds like good advice. That sounds like good advice." "Bentwaters is out in the sticks, Manston is in Margate, Ramsgate, near lots of nice, interesting places. They've got movies, they've got restaurants and you live off base," oh, he goes; so, okay. So, in those days, we went by ship. So, by this time, I had to wait until my newborn son was six months before we could go and, as soon as that happened, we went. Of course, I had my four-barreled Chevy, which is not going to do much good in England. So, I had to sell that. [laughter] So, we were on Governor's Island--that was where you went to process--and there was a woman's Air Force [serviceperson], a nice young lady there, in the personnel, and I said, "I'm assigned to RAF Bentwaters, but that's just the headquarters. I understand that the 92nd at Manston is a better place to bring a family and everything," and she said, "Oh, sure, fine, done," but communications, back then, weren't like

they were [later]. So, now, I had my orders changed to RAF Manston and this was October of '56. The seas were rough and the *America* was not that great a ship. My poor daughter couldn't figure out why she could never stand up, because it was going back and forth and back and forth. You'd sit down and you'd have a martini and all this good food and, all of a sudden, you'd say, "Wait a minute." [laughter] So, it wasn't a very pleasant crossing, and then, we were in Southampton in what were kind of temporary quarters and it was chilly. Back then, the British didn't have any central heating or anything like that and you had to get used to all kinds of different things, like Aladdin heaters and gas fires and all that. So, we finally got on the train and I recognized the engine, Battle of Britain--I was a train buff--and we pulled into Victoria; no, excuse me, it was a bus to Victoria Station, and then, a train to Margate. As we pulled into Margate, the housing looked very Dickensian, is the only way I can describe it. My wife said to me, "Where have you brought us?" and we were assigned to a little hotel on the seafront. There was a very kindly major there who knew his way around and he was waiting for his wife to come over, I think, something like that. We had gas fires and everything, trying to keep the kids warm, because there was a gale blowing and it blew right through the windows, I mean. So, I was taught how to use the phone box, and so, I would put in my pennies, and then, push button B and I asked for RAF Manston, yes, and the 92nd. I'd say, "This is Lieutenant Berke. I'm coming in and I want to report in." "Oh, call tomorrow," and the next day, "Call tomorrow." I said, "Listen, my daughter's ill. I'm out of money. I really need to come in." "Call tomorrow." It's about the third day when I called, they said, "Have the taxi drop you off at the RAF mess and Lieutenant Wellbaum will meet you." Okay, so, I got dressed, in my trench coat and hat, went up the street, taxi to the RAF Manston and there comes Lieutenant Wellbaum in his Beetle. All the pilots had Beetles and he wasn't a pilot, though, he was the admin officer. He said, "Okay, I'm going to take you to squadron. We are a tenant on this base. There's two 86 squadrons here, to intercept, to provide protection, and we are in what we call 'the loop.'" So, we were driving down there and there's a guard shack and barbed wire. We drive in and I am stunned beyond belief. This is a reinforced squadron and they had twenty-eight aircraft and, as we're driving down the line, each aircraft had an air policeman with a rifle, a German shepherd dog, an atomic bomb and a cage outside with the nuclear part of the bomb, twenty-eight of them, as we drove around. I am, "What the hell is going on?" This is October, late October 1956--what's going on is two things. One is the Russian takeover in Hungary, or, actually, the Hungarian Revolution, at that particular point, and the Suez Crisis. Eisenhower, President Eisenhower, put all forces on max alert. [Editor's Note: Beginning on October 29, 1956, Israel, aided by Great Britain and France, invaded Egypt with the goal of eliminating Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and returning the Suez Canal to Western control. The Americans, Soviets and the United Nations pressured the invading forces to abandon their campaign in early November 1956. Beginning on October 23, 1956, Hungarians revolted against the Communist government installed by the Soviet Union after World War II. Following an invasion and brutal occupation by Soviet forces, most resistance ceased by November 10th.] I was suddenly in a strike unit with the real thing and Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Willsie, the finest commander I ever had, and that speaks highly of him, because I had some great commanders, "Welcome, Lieutenant;" oh, Wellbaum was telling me, as he brought me, "The reason we didn't know who you were [is], we're on high alert here and here's this guy coming, nobody knows who he is, and then, there's Bentwaters saying, 'He's missing.'" [laughter] It took awhile.

SH: Bad luck.

GB: "How did you get here?" "Oh, some WAF on Governor's Island changed my orders for me." "Well, welcome." So, the Colonel says, "Call your wife. You're going to be here a few days. There's cots up in the hangar. You're here now and, if we're launched, we'll give you a mission, take airplanes that aren't combat ready back to the West Coast." So, then, the Colonel, everybody's got their flight suits and their G suits on, he gives a speech and he says, "War isn't that bad. I had a pretty good time in the war," but he says, "The Ruskies, you don't have to worry about them." He said, "We were up there with big Ed and flying around Yugoslavia and here come the Russians and we just tore into them. They were easy. [laughter] So, don't sweat it." Then, when that eased, because we were saying, "Who the hell are we going to bomb, Buckingham Palace?" really, it was one of these situations where--well, this is why France got out of NATO, because the French had 84Fs and they were going to bomb the Egyptians with them and the Sixth [US] Fleet intercepted them and turned them back. That's when [French President Charles] de Gaulle decided, "I've got to do something about this. We've got to have our own aircraft industry." So, that was responsible for the French aircraft industry. So, he took me around the squadron and showed off--we had extra airplanes, we had a hangar with enough parts to build another one, we had extra wings, we had our own air police, we had our own cooks and we had our own bombs. Lieutenant Colonel Willsie could bring the bombs out and, if he said, "Go," we were going to go; didn't take very long before that was all changed, very strict rules, all along the line, but, at that point, this was the first. We and the 20th at Wethersfield, we were the first two atomic wings in Europe and we were the NATO strike force, because we were out of range of the Russians--Soviets, better word. Back then, they had to come over with bombers. We had not only our own fighter interceptors, with the RAF, but the warning time was sufficient that we could be going before they got here and we were very proud of that. At that point is when my life started as a bomb commander, as it was known. For example, we had stages. Even at that time, we didn't have our own facility, but you were on the hook at certain times. You were always at home, and then, if you wanted to go, say, shopping in Canterbury, well, you had a whole bagful of pennies and, every hour, you would call up the squadron. Somebody was always on duty and you'd just say, "Hi, this is George, everything's fine." "Fine." You'd call up every hour that you were away from your own telephone. This was the very first start, tenderfoot kind of way to keep people in, but you were suddenly [on call], and for the rest of my seven years in England, I was always under some kind of constraint as to where I am and how available I was.

SH: You were stationed there for seven years, continuous.

GB: No, no, [laughter] though I had more time in the 92nd than anybody else, any other pilot. That's my beloved squadron, starting off with Colonel Willsie. It was raining one day, fairly hard, and he came in with his trench coat and said, "Howard," that's our ops officer, says, "we're going to launch the squadron." We're all playing cards, smoking, playing cards. "What'd he say?" [laughter] We had a little board with pegs and he had a number, oh, I guess a name, and he'd put the names in, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, four flights of sixteen, and I'm the last. I'm the newest guy--not only, I'm not new, but I've been accepted. The two guys that followed me ended up in the commissary. Colonel was very strict about competence. As I just mentioned, with great pride, I really knew that airplane. "Well, they're kidding, but that's all right." [laughter] So, we go out to our airplanes and, since this was a strike force, there were

speakers on every revetment. Then, so, everybody would sit there, and then, the speaker'd say, "Start your engines," and so, everybody would start their engines the same time. We start taxiing, "It looks like we're taxiing, okay," and so, the Colonel takes us out, all sixteen, lines us up on the runway. I say, "Well, that's fine, ha, ha, ha," and he says, "Red Leader rolling." [laughter] We had about a three hundred-foot ceiling and maybe a mile-and-a-half, two mile visibility. So, there goes one and two, three and four, five and six, seven, eight, along, and, finally, fifteen and sixteen, and away we go. The clouds, usually, in England weren't that thick. So, we broke out, and then, the leader goes in a turn and everybody goes inside, and then, lines up, and then, lines up and lines up and lines up--you can't see this in the microphone. [laughter] So, finally, we got sixteen, and so, we fly around a little bit, and so, then, he instructs the controllers down below how he wants to do this, get us all down again. So, they do it. So, the first flight of four peels off and goes down, and then, the ground controller has the first two break off on a base leg, and then, the next two. So, then, the first two come in to land, the second two, by this time, the next four are in, and, in just a few minutes, all sixteen of us are back on the ground. The way that solidified confidence and morale in the squadron, it was just amazing.

[TAPE PAUSED]

GB: Okay.

SH: Please, continue.

GB: All right. Well, the necessary thing, if you're going to be a bomb commander, is to get qualified in what we called nuclear delivery and, with an underpowered aircraft like the F-84F, we could just carry it. To get off the ground, we used JATO [jet-fuel assisted take-off], which is rocket assist. We didn't have to practice that, but I did have to practice our two delivery methods, which was a high-level dive-bombing and over-the-shoulder delivery that required that you approach the target at five hundred knots, which is almost six hundred miles an hour, at a very low altitude. Then, you have a special gyro system and it's very precise and you track a very precise parabola and, at the top, the bomb is released, continues going up. You nosedive, and then, escape. We needed thirty-five thousand feet escape distance and, presumably, then, the bomb tumbles over and comes down. Our target requirement was nine hundred feet and, at this particular time, we had many brand-new bases in the French protectorate of Morocco, at that time. They were for SAC strategic bombers, at that time the medium B-47s. They could deploy to these North African bases and strike targets from the south of the Soviet Union, which was their mission. One of these was Nouasseur, which was right next to Casablanca, and so, we would operate from there. About ninety miles south in the Moroccan desert, a ring of rocks was constructed with a nine hundred-foot diameter and a little tower in the middle signifying the target. So, how would we do this was that we'd go in pairs and we had little ten-pound iron bombs, which were supposed to mimic the trajectory of the real thing, and it had a little shotgun shell in it, and so, when it landed, there was a puff of smoke that came up. Your wingman or leader would be up there observing and scoring you, call your score in on the radio, back to headquarters, and then, you'd swap positions. That's how we did that. So, my first flight to Morocco, of course, I was a wingman and we were loaded up with three tanks full, which was our maximum gross weight, take off. In England, thank goodness, we were always at sea level and it was always fairly cool in Great Britain, back in those days. So, we had enough thrust to

make a reasonably good take-off there and I cannot forget my first view of, as we come over into Spain, and then, from Spain, you can see Gibraltar and the Straits, and then, you can see Morocco. About the time we got to Gibraltar, we're about out of fuel, but we were so high, we could cut our engines down to idle and we could glide down pretty much to Nouasseur. It was staffed by Berbers. If you wanted a hamburger, you got a Moroccan Berber hamburger, [laughter] but it had several great attractions. One was the beach at Casablanca, the hotels there and the world's most famous whorehouse, the Sphinx, and so, it was a very enjoyable place to go. I got myself qualified there. At the time, our briefing for Morocco was pretty stark, that we had to be really careful, that, there, a couple of pilots had crashed into some sort of housing, whatever, there. "You know what they do there? They cut off your balls and sew them in your mouth and that's how we find you, and so, don't crash into Moroccan houses. By the way, the local sheikh has horsemen patrolling the range," as we called it, "and, if there's shepherds or anything on it, they wave white banners and we're not supposed to bomb." At that, everybody laughed. There were always sheep and shepherds on the range and nobody ever saw a horseman. So, now, I come back and, now, I am a certified bomb commander, but I'm still the last man. So, my target is a very inconsequential field someplace in Czechoslovakia, but, one day, the phone rings. We had a very nice system set up for scrambling people, alerting. The first person, as soon as you got the [order to] go to the base, you handed the phone to your wife and got dressed. She had the phone tree and she called the next two people and this just went down. In just a few minutes, everybody was alerted, and then, you see all these headlights converging on the base from the outlying towns. We would form up and we had to dress in our exposure suits, which took a while, and then, we were all sitting in our airplanes. Now, this was an operational readiness inspection. It was called by the Headquarters of Third Air Force to test our ability to assemble and launch on time and there were three squadrons in the wing, us at Manston, and then, the 91st at Bentwaters, and then, there was the 78th Squadron, was at another satellite base at Bury St. Edmunds. So, the three commanders were very competitive on this, see who's going to [assemble the fastest]. So, as we were sitting in our cockpits, ready to go, all strapped in, all we had to do is hit the start button, Colonel Willsie was right at the end of the taxiway where we'd go on the runway with his Austin-Healey. He used to say, "The signal to abort is when I drive my Austin-Healey down and block the runway." That was our no-go, see, [laughter] but there he was, and so, we got the start signal. Now, I have written about this rather extensively, okay. We got the start signal and I was surprised that I end up number three to go out, but there's two very competent, experienced guys ahead of me. The first guy, he's waved away because he got a cut in his tire. He must've run over a rock or something. The second, they couldn't hook up the JATO; the electric thing didn't work. They moved him over. The Colonel is now looking at me, jumping up and down and waving and waving. Well, I didn't want to tell anybody, I had never yet made a JATO take-off, and I was actually, probably illegal, or the squadron was illegal, but what are you going to say? "Hey, it's time to go." [laughter] I closed the canopy, "Put me in, Coach," right. I go screaming down the runway and [think], "Oh, yes, the JATO, JATO, JATO," this dark panel, still dark, everything's black. I push this button, I feel, "Vroom," okay, there we go, yes, right, and then, I'm going down the runway. I'm going down there, I'm saying, "This isn't going very well," and I'm thinking about the guy at Bentwaters that pickled his tanks off and they had to close the base for a while and all that. I'm carrying a shape, it's blue, this is just concrete, but anybody would know this is supposed to be an atomic bomb. I'm thinking all these thoughts about, "What are my options? Drop it, pickle the tanks?" and we had a very sensitive airspeed indicator. It was just creeping up and here comes the end of the runway and there's a

barrier across it, about as high as a tennis net. Of course, it was meant to stop decelerating airplanes. There's no way it was going to stop me. I suddenly saw the magic number and I pulled back as hard as I could. [laughter] I just skimmed over the fence and I'm just sinking down into the fields and it is such an uncomfortable sensation. This plane is not going anywhere. It's not going anywhere but maybe a mile an hour is all it's gaining on me. I'm just going like this and I can't move the stick. I still have the gear and flaps down. Well, if you pull the gear up, it causes drag. Well, soon I got enough air speed that I can cut that drag. So, I get the gear up, but I am now going down the main street of Ramsgate, England. [laughter] I'm level with the bell tower. It says six o'clock, full blast, as noisy an airplane as you can get, [laughter] and, finally, gained enough speed to get the flaps up. Then, I turn, I climb and turn like this. I go over the Goodwin Sands, where we're supposed to drop the JATO. I pushed the JATO. I said, "Wait a minute, that's the button I pushed on the runway." [laughter] Oh, my God, I was swearing at myself, "You're going to be counting cans in the commissary. You dropped your JATO on the runway." [laughter] So, I said, "Oh, well." I called in, right away, to the command post and we got it off first, okay. What we did is very interesting. We set up our target patterns to the Iron Curtain.

SH: You went ahead with the mission.

GB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. I was in fine shape now and we go right up to really close to the border and try--we wanted to scramble the Germans and everything else, because here we come, the whole wing. Then, we all turn around and go back. Now, so, "Oh, my, oh, my," I come in, land and the ordnance sergeant comes up. He says, "Sir, that was really interesting. We saw you drop your JATO and we had to clear the runway. So, we got in our six-by and we ran down there and we grabbed it. There was so much static electricity, it knocked us all on our ass." [laughter] He says, "We finally picked it up and got it out of the way. So, well, the Colonel wants to see you." "Yes, no doubt." [laughter] So, I climb out of the airplane, I go into the Commander's office, "Yes, sir." I don't know what to do. He says, "George, you got me in a lot of trouble today," and he's trying to keep a straight face. He's trying to keep a straight [face], I get that--he's not yelling, screaming or anything, "You got me in trouble today." He says, "After you took off, after we launched," he said, "the base commander called me into his office. He says, 'I have a lot of trouble here with the fishermen, because you drop your JATO in the Goodwin Sands where they fish and it gets caught in their nets. I have to pay all kinds of compensation. Now, you told me that your boys can't take off without JATO and I saw one do it this morning.'" [laughter] He busts out laughing and I started talking about, "Well, it was black and the switches," and so, I left it at that. It was a good bar story. It was a good bar story for years and years. I got in my seventies and I said, "Wait a minute, I haven't really looked into what was going on with that man." Okay, he's there in his Austin-Healey. He's the commander. He launches me, all right, anybody looks at the records, right, whatever, and the next thing he knows--and Manston had a hump--so, he sees me drop the JATO, and then, he sees me go over the hump. This is the end of his career. He has to tell a young widow with two kids that her husband burned up or he has to tell the Air Force that the end of the runway is in flames or that a shape went scattering into the British fields, [laughter] something, and then, nothing, nothing, nothing, and then, finally, he sees me come up. I said, "At that point, I'd saved both our lives."

SH: Because he let you, who was not qualified, go?

GB: Well, he didn't know that, you see, but I'm just talking about when people start investigating, right, "Let's look at what happened here," yes. I mean, he had to be aware of things like that. It would have been a real tragedy for everyone and I'd somehow made it. When I mentioned before that I had really learned the aircraft, part of the problem was, I was on my own a lot in Alexandria, because nobody wanted me, because I wouldn't go overseas, [laughter] and I taught myself all kinds of things and that had to be there. For one thing, I knew I could get more thrust if I turned the air conditioning off, because that was part of the bleed air. In other ones, we had screens in front of the engine to keep birds and foreign objects [out] and I opened those. Every one of these things gave me just a little more power.

SH: You made it.

GB: I made it. Shortly thereafter, they closed Manston and I was wondering if that was part of it. [laughter] Nobody went up to me and said, "You woke up that town."

SH: I was just going to say, never mind the fishermen. How long were you in England then? Where did you go next?

GB: Oh, I had many more adventures, I'm sorry; that was just one. I haven't had my real adventure yet. My real adventure was the second time that I went down to Morocco. We briefed for a regular mission and my wingman was Lieutenant (Cook?) and everything was fine. I had the squadron commander's airplane and, let's see, my model is rigged up this way, yes. It's a beautiful model. That's the bomb. That's the commander's airplane, the 877; that's me in it. It's a fabulous model. People made models for me based on my service. They just said, "You flew that airplane, I'll make you a model." So, I was then first and I did my dive-bombing and that didn't mark; so, I don't know, something wrong with the bomb. So, I came around as usual and I start my run. I'm doing five hundred at fifty feet and I'm passing shepherds and sheep, because it was very normal. When I got to the pylon, I started the maneuver. I punched the button to get my gyros up and I started pulling back and there was a huge explosion and my engine was running at eleven thousand RPM. It just came apart, came completely apart in the sense [of] hot metal went to every fuel tank, cut my radio off, not that I needed it. Ernie (Cook?) was screaming, "Get out, get out," but I never heard that and I didn't need him to tell me. Every light was on in the cockpit, the horn was blowing, because I had pulled the power back, which I always do when there's something, a bang, right. [laughter] I had just managed--I had enough energy, even though the plane was in flames, no power was coming out of it--to get up fairly high. I was glad, in retrospect, I was in the commander's airplane, because the ejection sequence worked. The canopy came off, I came out, the seatbelt came up and it pulled the parachute and I was floating in my parachute, at around nine thousand feet. Everything's very quiet then and I can see Ernie circling around and he's yelling on the radio to get me help, but the only real help was at Sidi Slimane, one of those rescue amphibians, which has wheels, and they had jumpers in it. So, that was some time away. So, I'm floating down thinking, "Wow, this is incredible. What happened? Wow, the thing blew up," all this kind of stuff. I hear this boom and I look over and the village of El Borouj, my plane hit right in the middle of it and finished blowing up. There was a huge smoke cloud, and then, I could see people running and I figured, "This is it for me. Ain't no way I'm going to survive this," and I was trying to figure out, "What could I do?"

Well, there ain't much I could do. Then, as I'm coming down, very slowly, I said, "Let's get down here, let's get down." I was figuring, "What am I going to do?" Well, I had my big Randall knife. I said, "Well, I could take a couple of them with me, maybe, I don't know." I just [thought], "This is it, this is it, definitely." I was very relaxed. I mean, I gave up and I was always, not always, but, in retrospect even, people said, "Oh, you're a candy-ass. You had your chinstrap on." That was the thing--you never fastened your chinstrap if you were sharp. It always dangled, but I had mine buckled every flight and I was not a jumper. I didn't know how to do anything. I hit kind of backwards, splat, and I'd kept, of course, my helmet on and I hit a rock and it split the helmet. I deflated the chute and I looked up to heaven and I said, "That's twice." [laughter] I rolled my chute up and here comes these--I can see these people coming. So, I take my knife and I zip up the pocket and I'm standing there. All of a sudden, here comes three guys on horses and he comes up in front of me and, like you see the Lone Ranger, he wheels up, the horse goes up like this and comes down. He gestures, "Get in back."

SH: Oh, my word.

GB: Well, you know something happened, Sandra, because I'm still here. [laughter] So, I hand my chute to one of the guys and I had a dingy, came with me.

SH: A what?

GB: A dingy, that we always sat on a dingy. I handed the dingy to the other guy and I think my helmet, too. I got on the back of the horse and very heavy wool, not too pure. [laughter] So, I grabbed this guy and we start off, but he's going right for the village. Smoke's coming up and I'm going, I go, "*Je ne suis French, Je suis Américain*." I knew they hated the French and he's going, "Um-hmm," okay. Now, here's Colonel Willsie coming out; he's going to show these guys, flight of four. [Editor's Note: Colonel Berke imitates a fly-over.] Well, I thought I was going to die on the horse, because they scattered the horses and I was holding on to this guy, "Go away, go away," show of force. [laughter] So, they finally, after [they] go back, they got Sidi Slimane, so, the SA-16 [Grumman HU-16 Albatross] is on its way. It's about an hour away, and so, I'm kind of on my own.

SH: The Colonel just flew the plane down as a show of force.

GB: Yes.

SH: Where did you and the three horsemen go?

GB: Well, we're still going toward the village, yes. So, some people started getting to us and this guy pulls his knife, "Get out of here," and, pretty soon, we come riding in, parachute, dingy, me. Now, I have to say this, I mean, I didn't know a lot about Arabs, but I know enough. The first thing is, you never show cringing or fear and I was numb anyway. I just sat up and we enter this walled house, got me off, opened the door. It was just one long room. It had wooden benches along the side and, at the very end, had a carpeted seat and he put me in there and set me down on the carpet seat. I said, "Uh-oh, I'm a guest." Can you believe that? I don't know what happened out there, obviously, terrible, but, now, I'm a guest and you hear this all the time,

"(Osama bin Laden?) is our guest, someone is our guest. We never betray a guest." I knew enough to know that I was the guest. So, then, the elders come in and they're all talking about this and they're going, jabbering around. They're pointing up in the sky, they're pointing up at the sky and this. They're looking at me and it didn't take long to figure out that--well, I'll tell you what the Sharif told me, anyway. Then, a T-33 from the base came over and they were looking for me. So, I went outside and I had a rescue radio--it didn't work [laughter]--but I had a scarf, I'm waving the scarf. So, they come back, "Oh, well, he's okay so far," and then, the others left, and then, the real guys came in who run things, could tell that. They were going through the same thing and for the elders--by the way, a little absent-minded, I had two packs of Pall Malls, not one. So, I was handing out cigarettes, "That's very nice," and so, I had another pack for these guys. One of them, he's feeling my leg. I thought, "What's this about Arabs?" and he says, "Grenades?" I said, "*Oui, oui, grenades*." "Go, go, this guy's grenades, grenades." So, everybody's going, "Great, great, great," and so, I'm starting to enjoy this. [laughter] I try to remember the exact sequence. I have a tape of me doing this. I did this as a show in a place in Arizona where they have gambling. My cousin got me there, said, "Back to the '40s, you're in a show." So, I did a show there on this. So, now, there are the people really coming. So, I go out the door and here's the SA-16, has finally arrived. They dropped smoke and they come around and two guys jump out, into this mob, they do, and they land right inside, roll over, come out with forty-fives, like this, two guys with forty-fives. I mean, I can't imagine what it took to do that, no knowledge of what's going on, a huge crowd, two guys with forty-fives. I said, "I don't know what's going on out there. Could you find out and tell me?" "Yes, sir." They go, I never saw them again. I never found out. So, I have to get this all in sequence. Another thing was, a Morris Minor, just like mine, comes bouncing across the desert. A Moroccan civil servant gets out and he can speak English. I can't remember exactly what we chatted about, but I said, "Tell them that Uncle Sam will pay," and he got on top of his car and this crowd is growing, out in the middle of nowhere. All of a sudden, we've got hundreds of people there. In Arabic, he tells them and this big cheer goes up. Then, a light plane lands with our tech rep and a couple of other people. I've got pictures of that; everybody's having a ball. So, we're going to find out what happened. So, the next thing came was the Sharif and the Sharif, he was about my size. He was dressed in precious metals. His buttons, button holes, everything was either gold or silver. He had an honor guard and they had seventeenth-century matchlock, emblazoned ceremonial guns. They were gorgeous. He comes up and he shakes my hand. He speaks English, he said--I can't remember right at this point exactly what he said--something like, "You are blessed to survive this," and then, a helicopter came from someplace. I've got all kinds of pictures of that, too. I told them to give the silk to the women in the village and, by this time, I understood that there was just a couple of donkeys, or a donkey and a camel, that was all, plus assorted damage to all the parts on the roofs. I got in the helicopter and I came back to the base. I was slightly banged up but nothing to speak of, and then, I got the word that, the next day, they were going to have a feast in my honor. I said, "No, you guys go." I said, "That's one too many for me. I'm not going to push my luck any further." [laughter] So, Frank Brouy next day, tells me how no one was killed. It seems that the French were training with T-6s, the American T-6s that they had, and the T-6 has room for a thirty-caliber machine-gun that fired through the prop. As part of their training, they would come over to El Boroj and strafe it and the people there had developed shelters. Whenever they heard the French coming along, their machine-guns, they went into their shelters. Well, as my plane, everything was burning on it, every tank and all the ammunition was going off--I mean, it wasn't shooting through the guns, but it was bang, bang,

bang--they all hit their shelters. Have you ever heard anything like that in your life? That's how I survived, that's how they survived. After that, my whole life changed, really. I figured I was living on borrowed time. I had no regrets, whatever happened after. Really, it was profound, [laughter] as you can imagine, if you can imagine being there through that, but I have to stress that your adrenalin kicks in and you're a different person. I was standing there up straight when that horseman came, I got on there, I didn't [hesitate]. I got off the horse, I was friendly with all the people there. I got into it, enjoying it, when I realized I was a guest, that nothing's going to happen to me. [laughter] The ridiculous part of it came a couple of years ago when there was an event around Reston, [Virginia], and the Moroccan ambassador was going to be there. I dressed up in my best dress, with my medals and my name tag. At the particular time, I went up to him and said, "Do you know my name?" I thought he'd know my name. He said, "No, I don't." [laughter] I said, "Oh," but that was some years later. I've always felt like I really should go back there.

SH: You introduced yourself to the Moroccan ambassador.

GB: Yes. [laughter]

SH: Did you tell him what had happened?

GB: I don't think I did, I just asked him if he knew about me and he looked very puzzled. I said, "Okay." [laughter] We were soon, the French were--Mohammed V kicked the French out and we went with them, all our brand-new bases and everything. I still have a commemorative coin for his coronation, which I don't know what it's worth now. I carry it with me whenever I fly, even when I fly little Cessnas. I always have …

SH: Whose coronation?

GB: Mohammed V. [Editor's Note: Mohammed V ruled as the Sultan of Morocco from 1927 to 1957 (except for a period of exile from 1953 to 1955), when he took the title king, which he held until his death in 1961.] I have it. I'll bring it next time; I have it in my suitcase. Yes, so, then, we moved all our gunnery to Wheelus in Tripoli and that's another kind of story there.

SH: How long did that process take, from when you crash landed there? Did you crash land if you came down the same time the plane did?

GB: No. You just crashed. [laughter]

SH: You just crashed.

GB: Yes. Oh, it was very shortly thereafter. The next time, yes, the next time we rotated down, I know that's right, because they were closing the Sphinx, and so, it was probably about three months later that we all had to leave. We were very sorry about the whole thing and they were glad to get the French out of there. So, that's where they've been since, and so, then, we had Wheelus. Of course, well, you saw some of those pictures. We had a great beach at Wheelus. In fact, we were one of the first Americans to snorkel, because Tripoli was an Italian colony and

there still was a lot of connections with Italians. Italians developed the snorkel system and we were snorkeling before anybody back home, because it was lovely, too. They had great reefs and all kinds of fish and things to see there. That was nice. It just didn't have all the entertainment and history of Morocco with America. Then, the next thing that happened, let's see, I had my third son and my wife got quite ill and almost died. So, we had to live through that part.

SH: Was she being treated by British doctors or Americans?

GB: A British doctor saved her life, actually. The Air Force had bought an airplane called the [F]-101 Voodoo as an ill-fated kind of escort for B-36s. Now, a B-36 could fly for thirty-six hours and a 101 could fly for two-and-a-half hours. So, it was a rather fanciful idea and McDonnell built about--I think it was eighty-seven, was the initial contract. [Commanding General Curtis] LeMay in SAC said, "We don't want these things. Get them off our budget, give them to TAC." So, they were given to the unit in Austin, Texas, Bergstrom. The 101 went on to become famous because it was so voluminous that you could put in all kinds of cameras and other sensors in the nose, and so, it became a reconnaissance airplane. You could extend it for two seats and it became an interceptor in the Northern Tier. So, the plane was successful in that way, but it was unsuccessful with four twenty-millimeter guns and a radar up front. The Air Force always had a lot of brainy people in there and these guys thought about this and said, "Well, we can't do anything with the guns." So, they put an advanced communications device called TACAN [tactical air navigation system] in one of the gun bases and the guy said, "There's only one hard point in this airplane. That's between the two tanks, but we can put a nuclear weapon in it." So, they went into the radar system and they modified it with some lines that represented the various pull out points, if you were locked on to a target. Suddenly, we had an advanced strike fighter, and so, we were going to transition from our 84F, which could hardly get off the ground, to a 101, who could get to forty thousand feet in two-and-a-half minutes. It was a high-performance airplane and it held two thousand gallons of gas.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Here we go.

GB: Well, before we went over to the States to transition into the F-101, we were drawing down our targets coverage in NATO. One of the unbroken rules of anybody that's engaged in atomic nuclear activity is the two-man rule. You never do anything by yourself. I was amazed and shocked to find, one day, that we were down to one airplane on alert, that is sitting with a Mark 7 bomb attached to the aircraft and a cage holding the nuclear element alongside of it and a pair of gloves and a rod to stick it into the bomb. It was guarded, once again, by an air policeman and a dog--one airplane and one pilot. Our communications system at that time, everything was in transition, was rather primitive. We had a little code with this that didn't amount to much and, when the phone would ring, you would answer it and we'd swap codes back and forth. It was, "Yes, everything's okay," and then, I would go back out to the airplane. Then, I thought to myself, "All I have to do is tell the Corporal here that I'm getting launched and put the bomb together and take off." There was nobody to stop me. He wasn't going to stop me. So, I'm thinking, "This is really crazy," but, once again, we had what we called a program, that it's supposed to--you'd be evaluated psychologically--and maybe it worked, because nobody did that,

but I still think back at that and say, "How did anybody allow that to happen? [laughter] One plane, one pilot, one bomb." So, I wanted to get that into the mix. We transferred to Texas. Now, at that particular point, everything broke down in the squadron. We had people who didn't have enough time left in theater who were going to leave, we had people who were junior, too junior at this point to fly a plane like the 101, but, especially, we had all the people in Texas who outranked us. It was their wing and this was going to become our wing, but I was back down to just another squadron pilot at this point.

SH: Was the 101 introduced while you were in England or was it just in the States?

GB: No, it was just in the States. All of them were in the States and everybody loved the airplane. If they needed any parts or whatever, they would fly to Ogden [Hill Air Force Base in Utah] and pick it up and go back. So, I remember, our ops officer, Doug, said, "This is the safest airplane in the world, in the Air Force, and anybody who has a problem with it is a fool." So, we all enjoyed it immensely. The only thing was, it had some flight characteristics that would get you in trouble very fast and it was called "pitch up." Essentially, it was just too big and the wings were too short to be any kind of a fighter aircraft, but it was a perfect bomber, because we had radar, which is very good. It was a very good radar. It was an original kind of thing, the way you could tune it in yourself and you could navigate with it. You could go at night, day, rain, shine, snow with this aircraft and it could penetrate all the way up to almost the Russian border, much less the satellites. We picked our [targets]--most of our targets were in East Germany or Poland. At the time, we were the only ones who could reach them. The Soviets considered this a very provocative airplane. They had published magazine articles in their Air Force about it, which we got a hold of. We felt very proud of ourselves. We had a great time over in the States. We actually ended up in George Air Force Base in California and we took over a whole motel and a lot of people had a lot of fun over there. So, when we came back, we flew just about all the airplanes in one formation and we took off from [Warner] Robins, Georgia, in the dark, because we wanted to land in Spain in the nighttime--in the daytime, excuse me. It was just Spain that we went to--but we had two refuelings after we took off. During the first refueling with the pipe on, Lieutenant Baker's airplane, the refueling probe cracked. Of course, he didn't know that, and then, when we were coming in to the Azores, he plugged it in and it broke off. Paul was really a great pilot and really a great guy, but he was disinclined to call attention to himself is all I can say. Instead of telling Colonel Willsie, who was on his wing, and Colonel Willsie was fueling at that point, he said, "I didn't want to bother him." So, he just broke off and headed for the airfield, Lajes [in the Azores], all by himself. He was somewhat disoriented and the first time we knew about it is when we heard this mayday call from him. We're looking around, "Where is he? Where did he go?" So, he was very foolish, but, when he saw that he was running out of fuel, and then, he was over the city, he refused to bail out. He did something we didn't think was absolutely possible. He bellied a 101 into the runway and stepped out of the airplane. The plane was later crated up, shipped back to McDonnell and rebuilt, but that was the most amazing thing. [laughter] So, we sallied on from the Azores and I was rather notorious. I called my leader, Bob Robinson, and I said, "Go over to another frequency," because I didn't want to talk to the whole huge flight. I says, "I think we're south of course," and the flight leader had gone over, too. "Goddamn it, Berke, we are not south of course." [laughter] We were south of course. That's my Norse in me. We had to turn north. Nobody ever said

anything about that, but it was, "Goddamn it, Berke, we are not south of course," because no one flew out there. [laughter]

SH: It was the plan to fly south, of course. [laughter]

GB: Yes, but, now, instead of a two thousand-pound, maybe twenty-kiloton bomb, we had a two thousand-pound, one-megaton bomb. So, we were really in the city-busting business, or whatever else we were going to target, and everything became much more serious, of course. By this time, we had special alert hangars and we started having quarters, we started having a mess facility there, decent beds, double fences, floodlights. We were really getting into the business in a serious way.

SH: This was in …

GB: This was in Bentwaters.

SH: Bentwaters, okay. You were bringing the aircraft back to England.

GB: Yes. So, we had two squadrons at Bentwaters and the 78th was now at Woodbridge, which had an F-100 squadron from the 20th Wing. So, we had four squadrons, four nuclear squadrons, in an area that one bomb would have taken out all of us. [laughter] We had plans, "Get your wife to know how to get out of here in a hurry. Once the thing goes off, they've got to just throw the kids in the car and head out of here." Things were really serious at that time. Unfortunately, suddenly, taking the 101s from Texas to England, they started breaking down, short circuits, things like that. Parts were now hard to get; they had to come overseas. The system wasn't really working. So, we had a terrible time keeping planes in shape and keeping them in the air.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Ready?

GB: Yes. There was a series of events that would work for a tragedy, except this was a common fighter pilot and not some general or whatever. Yes, he was a fellow I'd flown with frequently, gone on the high flight with, whatever. He's just what we called a fighter pilot, nothing special about him and nothing bad about him. We were down at Wheelus and he was dive-bombing--we even dive-bombed the 101--and, as he pulled out, something rather incredible happened to the aircraft. Instead of pulling out normally, it swapped ends. Of course, blackout, the force pulled the wheels right out of the wheel wells, to wheels down, knocked the radar dome off, made creases all underneath the aircraft and failed several hydraulic systems. When he came to, he realized that his plane was out of control and he deployed the drag chute, which is what you do in that situation, and that gets the plane out of its spinning. He resumed flight and he had the gear down and that was it. At this point, he had no flaps, no drag chute and only emergency brakes. What should have happened, and he had a very experienced leader with him, the idea was, "Get him back to the base." He didn't even make an emergency call until the very end. I was in the ops shack with our squadron commander, Adrian Drew, who was a famous test pilot and he was also a Thompson Trophy winner, very highly qualified man. We got in the jeep and

we saw Bill come in. Of course, you have to come in very fast when you've got no flaps, and then, he had no brakes. So, he hit his emergency brakes and that ground the wheels down, which were magnesium, and they burst into flames and the plane was sliding all over the place, finally came to a stop. He got out but incredibly shaken, because what had happened? The wing safety officer was there and I was always his assistant. For one instant, we seemed to see that the system to keep the controls under whatever airspeed the airplane was might have momentarily failed. When he started pulling back against what was supposed to be a lot of force, it just went all the way and that's all we could think of. He had no recollection of anything. I even suggested hypnosis. "Well, we can't do that." I think they can now, but, then, "Couldn't do that, no." The amazing thing was, the company said this wouldn't, couldn't, happen, [laughter] plus the evidence. We showed them the radar dome sitting in the desert and all the evidence at the airplane and they took no interest in this at all, "Couldn't happen." People started looking funny at Bill, as if there was some way he could've done it, which was impossible. There's no way he could have done it, but this is a kind of a shadow over him. So, a couple of weeks went by and he had recovered his sensibilities enough to start flying again. So, the squadron put him with our most experienced check pilot to fly his wing, see how he's doing, and I was up in the tower. I was the tower officer that day and people were kidding me in that morning about, "Your guy's going to take off again." I'm saying, "This is really unfair." So, they get on the runway and they roll for takeoff and I have a little note, but I'm logging them off. The tower sergeant says, "He's on fire." I look and there's smoke coming out of his airplane, because the tower NCO is following his orders. He hits the siren button, telling him--oh, they switched to departure control--"Get on the horn to departure control." Okay, departure control, "Oh, the fire's out." All right, they're coming back and my phone rings and it's Doug, the ops officer, said this, he said, "We've got some bad news." He says, Fabian," that's the fellow who was on him, "is under the airplane and the fire impinged on the tire on the right wing, which blew the tire, and the tire took out all the hydraulic systems for flaps and whatever." They tried to blow the gear down with the emergency and there was so much debris in there, it wouldn't. So, he had nose gear down and gear down on this other side. By this time, all the colonels were coming in. I was, at the moment, in charge and they asked me what was the possibilities. I just flipped in the book and said, "The plane is uncontrollable, couldn't land it, can't pull the gear back up. Try to belly it in, it was just going to tumble." So, this Colonel Bell, I remember [him] saying, "Captain, I'll take over now." "Right, yes, sir," and so, they were trying to figure out what to do. One of the things influencing them was that an F-100 had taken off from Weatherfield, or, yes, from Wethersfield, not too--oh, no, excuse me, Woodbridge, yes, it was Woodbridge--just a week or two before. A maintenance error, there was a nut not tightened enough on the afterburner and, as he was accelerating out, the back end blew off. Well, anybody that knows that kind of an airplane, there's absolutely no control. All your hydraulics go in an instant, everything. So, the pilot bailed out and just managed to survive, at low altitude. Well, the old airplane went out and across the highway and ran into a post office and candy shop run by two little old ladies. Of course, the British are saying, "Well, how come he didn't avoid this, do all that? That was what you're supposed to do." They didn't get the idea that he had no control of that aircraft once that happened. When the back end blows off, it's just the end of it. So, the whole Third Air Force was under a great deal of pressure--from the public, not from RAF or anybody like that. They knew that he had no alternative and, if he'd had stayed in the airplane, it would have done the same thing. So, they wanted to make sure that this 101 didn't have any problems. Well, one of the things they asked me is where our area for disposal was. I told them there was some swamps

and they said, "Okay, what we're going to do is have a controlled bailout," and so, okay, we're going to run this from Woodbridge. Well, John Trobaugh was the wing accident officer. Like I said, we had investigated the previous one together, at Wheelus, and we were a pretty good team. So, we got in his car and we drove over to Woodbridge as fast as we could. They were doing this from the radar van there. The colonels walked in the van and shut the door on me and John, which was not a good idea. Previous to this, by the way, I had run a survival sort of training for our pilots on the North Sea. I had personally gone to an RAF course in cold-water survival and I just didn't mention it. We had a special personal equipment parachutist guy. He was the top, top, top enlisted man you could get for this kind of job. We put up a demonstration for my pilots and I had an ambulance running and it was a little cove on the North Sea. I had somebody in our poopy suits out there floating very carefully, no problem. So, what happens, though, if you don't happen to have one of those on? So, Sergeant Dicky jumps in--and Bill was there and we were all watching this--and he's giving his lecture. He's in the water and, okay, here's the dingy. "Now, you take the narrow end here," just as he's just talking, like I am, and he throws himself in, only he doesn't make it. He goes off the side. Well, yes, sure, now, the next thing you know, he tries again, I say, "Pull him in." It's that fast, that fast. We pulled him in, threw him in a heated ambulance and people got the idea, "If that kind of a guy can go down just like that…" but Bill was going to land in the land and the airplane was going into the North Sea. So, John and I have our ears pressed against the van and we can hear the radio going. They're doing a countdown, "Five, four, three, two, one. Oh, his canopy didn't come off. Well, try the manual. Ah, yes, right, he got it off now." I'm pounding on the van, "Turn him around," I'm yelling as hard as I can. They're not paying any attention. This guy's going a couple of hundred miles an hour. "Well, he got a good chute. Oh, he's over the water. No problem, we've got two RAF helicopters standing by." Bill inflates his dingy, gets in, good. Here comes the first RAF helicopter and they lower a sling, horse collar, and Bill has two little balloon things. They were not the regular "Mae Wests;" these were superior, in the sense that they had more floatation, water wings kind of things. They were inflated also. So, he gets in the horse collar and they start pulling him up. By this time, John and I are in the ops shack, so, we're right on the radios there and Doug, he's got a look on his face like, [grim]. Then, all of a sudden, there's this incredible jabber from the RAF guy, "Quick, do something, do a guillitine." "What was that? What was that?" "Oh, we had to cut the cable. We had to cut the cable. We couldn't pull him up. Oh, and by the way, he lost one of his supports, but he's back in his dingy. He's okay." The other guy says, "Okay, well, I'll do it." The other RAF helicopter, without thought, comes over, lowers another horse collar. Bill gets in, same thing, scramble, scramble, "Quick, cut the collar. Wow, God, that was awfully hard on him. He lost his other support, but he's back in his dingy." "What are we going to do?" "Well, we have a speedboat in Felixstowe." "How long is that going to take?" "About an hour." "Well, launch him." So, here comes this speedboat from Felixstowe. In the meantime, we are sitting there--you can't believe the gloom there is. The wives are all--and his wife, they just had a baby--they do that, they just gather around, "Can I make tea?" this kind of thing, and looking for this blue car. So, I'm talking about testimony now. So, here comes the Captain, speeding along. He's been doing this, completely qualified officer rescue, everything else. He pulls the boat up and throws Bill a rope, which you don't do. Bill leans over, grabs the rope and he's gone. Well, Captain gets two divers, two divers go down. They can't believe what's going on; they can't believe it. "This would never happen in the RAF." He's still got his parachute on, several tons of water. They cut him loose, bring him up, but they can't revive him. So, we have a little postmortem right away and the RAF guys can't explain

whatever got into them. "You know, all we do is rescue stranded yachtsmen, and then, we have a chance to get a pilot. We completely failed." So, they said, "The next time this happens, we're going to send a winchman down, because you guys don't have the kind of parachutes we have, where you just turn a knob and push and it's off."

[TAPE PAUSED]

GB: The launch captain was the most depressing. He said, "I don't know why I did that. I don't know why I did that. That is completely against common sense and the rules. One, you don't throw somebody a rope--you go get him." So, this whole episode, starting with the Wheelus thing, you just had to say the gods were against him. Nothing worked for him, nothing worked for him at all. Of course, this has been seared in my memories and this is such a part of it, the idea that everybody was so focused on getting the canopy off, they weren't thinking about--why was I the only one who said, "You've got to turn him around and start all over again?"

SH: They were not listening.

GB: Yes. That, really, we were down on account of that--I mean, just so many things were wrong. "Why did it burn in the first place? Why didn't his canopy come off?" "Well, the plane was in maintenance and, when it goes into the hangar, you disassembled the ejection seat and for the canopy," and then, whatever they did, they left something loose in the fuel line. So, everybody was to blame for this, everybody in the whole command, chain of command. Everybody messed up on it and left Bill out there. So, at the moment, I would say there's so many impossible things that happened in life. In the '80s, I was consulting in Orange County and I liked to eat in Newport Beach. I went into this restaurant and there was a newsstand and it had a fairly recent issue of the British newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*, I liked to read. I said, "Oh, by gosh, yes, I'll buy this *Telegraph*," and I started reading it. I read it and I see, "Deaths in the North Sea," and I'm looking, a Phantom, something happened to a Phantom. The two pilots bailed out, the sea was rough, the RAF came, they sent down a winchman and they all three perished. I wonder what the odds of me reading that [are]. Sometimes, you get a funny feeling, you know what I mean? I got it right now, just talking to you about that.

SH: Of all the days, of all the headlines.

GB: Yes, of all the newspapers, of all the times. So, I've helped people who compile these sorts of things. There's a museum now in Bentwaters of all the 101 crashes. They were considerable and people died. One pilot lost control coming in. They didn't have a road around the runways and we always had to wait for the planes, and then, cross. There were two wives waiting to go see their husbands and this guy crashed through them, and then, went into the hangar where the husbands were. It was a wonderful airplane in so many ways, but, if you got slow in it, it just went crazy. It just flipped all over the place. Nobody ever designed an airplane like that again. Adrian Drew was the Air Force test pilot on it and, when McDonnell finished testing it and turned it over to him, the first time he went up, he was at forty thousand feet and he was pulling hard and it flipped over and over. He managed to save it and he tells the story, "I landed and I went into the McDonnell office and I said, 'There's something about this airplane you're not telling us.'" We were all aware of this "pitch up" and I wasn't ashamed to say I never pushed that

airplane. A lot of people did--you could tell when they came back with a drag chute gone that they'd pitched up. I said, "I see no reason. My job is to get to a target at low level, high speed, and not to go flitting around trying to chase somebody, because this airplane won't turn inside anybody," but, I mean, I had a lot of fun with the airplane. I mean, I certainly wasn't afraid of it, but a guy who's considered our best pilot, he started having failures. It was because they put hydraulic pumps up for low bids and the original bidder didn't win. The pumps that came were starting to come apart and, when they would, the pieces would go from one to the other. Pretty soon, you'd lose control of the airplane. Well, Sterling Lee tried to bring it in and he almost made it. He was about three seconds from the runway when it went [Colonel Berke makes a zooming noise]. Another good friend of mine just made it. His system failed as he touched down--yes, how close can you get? So, the whole fleet was grounded and we re-plumbed the whole thing and it took months. Then, once again, [laughter] I was called over to wing and [they said], "Berke, we understand you have an administrative officer AFSC." "Yes, sir, what's up?" "Well, we want to give the wing adjutant emergency leave. His father's seriously ill and it's three months before his rotation and we'd like you to take the job." I said, "Yes, sir," and everybody else was grounded and, suddenly, I was in the base flight. [laughter] Though, I would be flying our pilots around in a T-33, because I was now a base flight pilot. So, these kind of things happen, [laughter] but we pretty much turned them around. I've had some interesting adventures in them since, including when I went back. My wife and I were heading to London and, on the overpass, over the tracks at Ipswich, the personnel officer was coming the other way and he said, "Oh, George, oh, George, oh, I was going to get to you." He says, "You've got to go to the University of Wisconsin and here's your orders. You've got to get accepted." Well, what had happened is, even back when we were at Manston, Bob (Winger?) had come through and he was assigned to Spain. He always got very good assignments. He said, "We're starting an Air Force Academy and I was wondering if you'd be interested. You've got a degree from Rutgers in English," and I can't remember whether he said it or not, but it was very obvious that they wanted to staff with West Point and Annapolis graduates and none of them were English majors. Bob said, "If you're interested, I'll put your name in." "Sure." This was in the '50s, and so, I said, "Sure." What had happened, I figured somebody broke a leg, something, because I was told, this was July, I was told to get myself into the University of Wisconsin by September. [laughter] We weren't due to rotate out of there until October. So, I started writing letters and I asked for admission. I said, "I'm ten years out of Rutgers, but I've kept up in this and that and I would really enjoy going to University of Wisconsin. I'd be serving my country as a faculty member," and all this kind of stuff--maybe the fix was in, I don't know. [laughter] The next thing I know, I'm accepted, and so, now, I go from nuke alert to student, [laughter] if you talk about somebody who was kind of confused. I won't go through getting my family settled and all that, but we found a lovely place in Winona Village, and we had a great year there. There's always an officer there who was kind of in charge and I think, mainly, it would be if somebody got sick or died or something like that, but I went up to him and I says, "Well, how do I report to you? When?" He says--he looks at me kind of funny--he says, "I don't do that. [laughter] Just go to school." I was so used to being on the hook, this or that, being on the phone. So, we lived across the street from a man in photography who later became quite famous as an editor and all. I believe his name was (Goldberg?) now. This is 1960, I'm talking about. He had somehow got an East German woman out of the Soviet influence, a really nice girl, and so, he invited us over for a party and drinks and all this. Here's this lovely girl and my wife and I there, and so, we start talking, "Oh, you're from there? Well, yes, that's a nice beach, too, yes," [Colonel Berke

imitates conversation], going back and forth all about the place. The only time in our whole marriage this happened--we get into bed, I get a nudge, "Was that your target?" [laughter] "Yes, that was my target." So, I would like to spend a couple hours talking about my English major in University of Wisconsin. I still have my papers. It was a unique experience for my instructors. They had never had someone at my age who'd been in fighter squadrons. My view of human nature was entirely different from the kids that just got their bachelor's--and my papers reflected this. [laughter] I don't mind saying it, I was beloved there, for several of my teachers. They really appreciated my insights into Shakespeare and [John] Wilkes. I did a real interesting paper on Wilkes and the Hellfire Club. Back then, you had to have special permission to go into the library to dirty books, *Fanny Hill*, which came out, published it. So, I did my paper on *Fanny Hill* and John Wilkes and the Fourth Amendment. [Editor's Note: *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, also known as *Fanny Hill*, was written by John Cleland in 1748.] Anytime I hear about problems, searches and seizures, I say, "Look at this country and all the towns the colonists named after John Wilkes. You've got Wilkes this, Wilkes this, Wilkes this--that's the guy who got the Fourth Amendment, because the British seized his stuff looking for stuff, trying to find something subversive." So, that was kind of a revelation and the fact that I had gone that deep into regency. I really enjoyed it there, but there was one terrible problem. At that time, every person looking for a master's in English had to take Old English, and so, I walk into this class and everybody in the class knew that. They all knew enough Old English to get started. I had no idea. [laughter] It was a different alphabet, different sounds. I told my wife, "I can't do any things I like. I've got to keep trying to learn this language." I think we mentioned about my French, [laughter] language is one of my things. It was going on and on and on and on. There was this young woman who was teaching it. I saw my career going down the tubes here on account of Old English and my enjoyment of this curriculum. There is no way out, but, anyway, I said, "Okay," I told my wife, "we're going to do something here." So, I invited her to dinner. I gave her a really nice dinner and I explained my position, what I had to accomplish and what I had to achieve and that I really needed help to get Old English out of the way. She nicely agreed and I started going in for extra help until she got too bored. [laughter] I passed the course. Naturally, you had to have a "B," but, after that, it was smooth sailing. When I was awarded my degree in one year, which I'm very proud of, then, I asked to go back, go to the Academy. They said, "No, you don't come here until the fall." So, I had the summer off, and so, I stayed there and I took a marvelous course on Milton. I never thought I'd like Milton. The teacher was on General Patton's staff in the Third Army. [laughter] You talk about an interesting guy, and he wore a beret from France.

SH: Really? [laughter]

GB: He had a Croix de Guerre and all that. Oh, I mean, he started off with that, assigning things up, down, and sideways. After about a week to ten days, maybe, in the course, he said, "Okay, now, folks, we've gotten rid of the tourists, let's go to work." [laughter]

SH: Well put.

GB: Well put. [laughter] After that, we just had a wonderful time.

SH: How long had the Academy been open when you went down there?

GB: Well, they had a rump Academy down at Lowry, trying to create a first class. They had NCOs there and everything in, but Bob (Winger?), yes, he was there in '60, I think it was the second year of the English Department that I showed up.

SH: Had they finished building the Academy by then?

GB: They were still having trouble with the chapel leaking, but pretty much, yes.

SH: Did they have good housing for families?

GB: They had good housing for families. The housing for families was, yes, very good. The problem was putting it there. I mean, it's at seven thousand feet. First of all, you had to get acclimated to that and it was tough on kids. They got strep throats up the kazoo, I mean, because they would dry up, their throats would dry up. It's so dry up there, and then, you never knew what the weather was going to be. One of the parades in June, graduation parades, it snowed. [laughter] I mean, it's just this crazy place, because it had this up slope, it was so high. So, any time any moisture came in from the east, it turned into snow. I enjoyed my work, I enjoyed my colleagues, especially. We would spend most of our days just chatting about this, that and the other thing, and then, we'd do our coursework, correct our papers at night at home. We enjoyed each other and experiences we had and things we were doing in class. Oh, we were taking all these wonderful courses we were doing for the cadets, for the first year, and anything you could think of that you wanted to do, the Greeks, the Romans, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jacobean, Elizabethan, eighteenth century, American, Mark Twain, "Let's do this, that and the other thing." Then, [the] department head got a note from the dean, "You guys are not paying your way. One thing I need for these engineers is how to write," because we had a freshman English program, but that's freshman English, it's not how to write. We had heard about, I think somebody was down in Florida, had a thing called technical writing. So, we got together and [said], "Well, why don't we do technical writing?" I said, right away, "Yes," I said, "I think that's a very good idea, because I'm used to technical manuals all the time and any other pilot was. They're well written and we get the information from there and I think we can put that into a course." So, I did, actually, the first coursework and I have it in this thing. [laughter] That was fresh in my mind, exactly how I did this, but I set up problems for what I thought different cadets would want, some for pilots, some for missiles, some for civil engineers and all that. I did different problems and what they had to do was, I gave them the information, they had to take the information and turn it into some kind of a plan. It worked. Then, we revised it the next year and, pretty soon, I say we were the ones who developed tech writing. At the end of the tours, all my colleagues had doctorates there; they went to Denver. By the time they left, at Rensselaer, Minnesota, Georgia, I forget where else, they all became department heads. I found teaching it to be utterly boring and I was not interested in it. In the second place, I wanted to go fly. So, my interest was to get back into flying. Now, while I was there, we had the summer off and, well, what are you going to do? I said, "Well, we were talking about good writing; let's try to do something." Well, the first thing I tried to do had nothing to do with writing and that's why I got to it. I tried to get into jump school, and then, the next summer, I said I wanted to stay current in the 101, and so, I got--the Academy had a lot of push at that time--I got assigned to Shaw Air Force Base. I knew quite a few of the people there from Bentwaters. This was a recon group, but I got a couple of flights,

not much, and so, I said, "Ah, this is not working. So, what I want to do is do some writing." I found out that special projects at White Sands wanted--I could be an editor for the first ever investigation of ballistic missile anti-ballistic missiles. Part of it was run by what they called the Project Paperclip, which were German scientists that they had scooped up, and they were living in White Sands also. I put my family up in Cloudcroft and that was a lovely little place and they had ponies and all kinds of stuff. So, they had a good time, and then, I had a good time. I worked with a fellow from MIT as to, "Well, what would an interceptor be like and what would it have to do?" At that particular point, based on our detection at the time, and I'm talking about '63, '64, somewhere in there, it had to be an atomic warhead on our interceptor missile. So, well, that meant it had to go off pretty high, but, unfortunately, even then, they were well aware, and maybe we had them ourselves, I don't know, of various spoofing devices that a warhead had available, like little jumping jacks and balloons, all kinds of little debris that goes out there and masks the actual warhead. So, this was a secret report and I enjoyed working on it immensely. They'd say, "How do we protect New York?" "Well, in order to get right at the correct altitude at the correct time, we have to leave the ground at Mach 4 and we would blow out every window in the city," yes. So, we, they, concluded that it was not feasible at the current technology--here we are, forty some years later, still fooling around with it. "We're going to get it next year." [laughter] So, you're talking to the guy who was the ground floor of this.

SH: You dealt with how the Algerians were trying to get rid of the French. When did Vietnam and what was going on over there with the French hit your "radar scope?"

GB: Oh, sure, yes, thank you for bringing that up. Let's go back to Korea.

SH: Okay.

GB: 1954.

SH: Okay.

GB: Famous year for the French. [Editor's Note: In 1954, Vietnamese forces defeated French military forces at Dien Bien Phu, signifying the end of French colonial rule of Indochina.]

SH: Yes.

GB: We got an alert order, the 69th and the 311th, the two Sabre squadrons. We got an alert order, "Pack your boxes." We had CONEX boxes, we called them, you put all the spare parts and stuff and stuff and stuff, "We're moving to Vietnam, to support the French." We were all packed up and we had our routes, and then, the word came back, "Eisenhower says no."

SH: This was …

GB: '54. I said, "Well, Ike saved my life, I guess." [laughter] I don't know.

SH: Did any American aircraft or anything go?

GB: Well, not with American pilots. We gave them a lot of planes. The problem was, the reason we didn't go, there were "no suitable targets". The Vietnamese had their guns in caves, can't drop a bomb on a cave, and there was jungle all over the place. No, there was just no--they had no Air Force that we were going up against. Somebody did an analysis and said, "Mr. President, why should we get involved? We can't do anything about it anyway."

SH: That kind of went away. When did you hear of Vietnam again?

GB: In the '60s, because …

SH: I was wondering, when you got to the Academy in 1960; no, you were in …

GB: Yes.

SH: Wisconsin in 1960-1961.

GB: Yes.

SH: The Fall of 1961, you were in the Academy.

GB: Yes.

SH: Was that on the radar then?

GB: No. What was happening was, I'm trying to think of my friend, Bob Robinson. He was a perfect, proper gentleman pilot, was very knowledgeable, very cultured, a very Catholic family, flying, none better. I became quite attached to his friendship there at Bentwaters. He left Bentwaters and [took] an assignment at Union College in New York State, as what they called PAS&T, right, Professor of Air Science, whatever. He was a great musician and he either formed a choir there or took over the choir there and he was famous for his *Georgia on My Mind*, his arrangements for that. I met him somewhere in New York State. He still had his Morris Minor and he was towing a sailboat that he'd bought in Holland. I bring this up because I had my big Jag there and I was saying, "I wish I had a sailboat like that." He says, "Well, if you had a car like mine, you could have a sailboat like that." [laughter] I'm sure he was beloved there and, when he wanted to go to Vietnam, the only aircraft that were available to him were propeller-driven ones, the A-1 [Douglas A-1 Skyraider]. I'm almost positive this happened while I was at the Academy--I lost a lot of friends while I was at the Academy. That plane is a two-seater, side-by-side, the A-1, and so, the instructor and a student. For some reason, I don't know any of the facts, but two instructors decided they were going to have a little rat race and they crashed together. I mean, I even wrote a poem, I said, "Why Bob Robinson isn't on the Wall, because he was just as much a victim of Vietnam as anybody else?" So, that's the first time, really. [Editor's Note: This crash took place on June 24, 1965.]

SH: Where was the crash?

GB: Oh, it was down at Eglin.

SH: It was at England.

GB: No, Eglin Air Force Base.

SH: Eglin, I am sorry.

GB: Yes, training, training everybody to go overseas, yes, senseless, senseless, senseless. I mean, I have a whole litany of senseless deaths of friends. In Korea, we had two World War II, and, now, capable jet pilots, I think they were both captains. We were all kids, even though I was about twenty-six by then, but, I mean, compared to them, we were kids. One was in the Yellow Squadron, one was in our Blue Squadron, (Glenn Olmore Paulson?), and they decided to go up and have a rat race themselves. They were on the tower frequency and what you do when you're going to have something like that, you start off even. How do you start off even? You come at it like this, and then, you break and see who can get on whose tail. The last word they heard from him was, "Well, any way you want it," and they hit each other at five hundred miles an hour each. We just lost two experienced guys in the stupidest way possible, right. I mentioned (Sterling Lee?) going down with that one, my buddy who crashed when I was in the hospital. I had another friend, radar ran him into a mountain in Vietnam in the weather, just completely crazy stuff.

SH: When you were at the Academy, were people starting to talk about Vietnam then?

GB: No. The biggest thing in our life was Kennedy's assassination. [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Friday, November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas.]

SH: Okay, I wanted to ask about that, too, and the Bay of Pigs.

GB: Yes. Oh, well, I can talk about that a little bit, but the Kennedy [assassination], we were listening to it on the radio as it was going on. One of our most prospective guys said, "He's dead." Well, we were all hoping. He says, "No, I can tell from this that he's dead." Now, we all loved him. We all loved him. I'll tell you, a couple of years before that, okay, let's call it '62, because I'm at the Academy, the 81st Wing's having a reunion in Nellis, Las Vegas. Well, we still fly at the Academy and we have the use of the T-33s. The wing was very active back then. So, I fly to Nellis and we're having a wonderful time. We're having drinks, this and that, and we're waiting for one of our most famous guys, Walker Mahurin. He was a World War II ace who was shot down in Korea, who kind of disgraced himself by saying things publicly that a good POW doesn't say. He had to live that down, but he was back in the good graces. So, he was flying from California. He's going to give us an address and he somehow had this 1920s P-26 Peashooter, because those airplanes didn't have any heat or anything. So, he flew over the mountains and he comes in. He says, "I'm still freezing from this," this great thing and all that, he said, "but I want to tell you guys something." He said, "I just left JFK and he was with Marilyn," and we just cheered. [laughter] So, he was our kind of guy.

SH: What was the reaction in 1963--you were at the Academy, teaching--that Friday afternoon?

GB: Oh, I'm just saying, there's no way to describe the devastation. He represented everything we thought. Well, we had to forgive him certain things, but that was in the background. He appointed a SAC guy as head of Tactical Air Command. He thought maybe we had to shape up or something, I don't know. It was the beginning of the end of the fighter pilot's dream, because we weren't meant to be bureaucrats and we had to operate on our own. Even when I write about this and I talk about it, I mean, especially in any novelistic thing I do, that's it. You're up there by yourself and you have to make the decisions and you're pilot in command. That's just as true in civil aviation. I teach my kids and older men and everybody else, "I've got to teach you how to be pilot in command, because, when you're up there, I don't care what anybody tells you, the airplane is your responsibility."

SH: What about the Cuban Missile Crisis? [Editor's Note: In October 1962, the United States demanded that the Soviet Union remove its nuclear missiles from Cuba. The United States placed a naval blockade around the island nation, creating a tense standoff between the superpowers that many feared would lead to nuclear war. The crisis was averted when the Soviet Union agreed to remove their nuclear missiles from Cuba in exchange for the United States removing its nuclear missiles from Turkey.]

GB: Well, I mean, that, the Air Force was so proud, we had--the Academy probably still attracts people that tell about current events or whatever, something they were doing. So, this general comes in, he's all very proud, "We had so many airplanes there, there was no place to park," and this and that and this and that, this and that, with slides and what we could do and blah, blah, blah. Then, when all the cadets left, I went up to the General and I said, "It looks to me like two MiGs could have wiped out the US Air Force with a couple of napalms." You know what his answer was? "They wouldn't dare." How's that for strategy? [laughter] "They wouldn't dare." Yes, well, we're lucky they didn't dare, but it was completely ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. I said, "I would've liked to have taken that target on." So, that's my answer to your question about that. [laughter]

SH: The Air Force felt they were left out.

GB: I have no idea, at that point, what those kind of people thought, nor did I care--to me, they were all idiots. [laughter]

SH: You had just come from England, continually on alert. Now, you were in the States, going to school. That must have been a strange place to be, as a student, while this is going on.

GB: Oh, well, I took a course in national defense policy there at Wisconsin and the man who taught it briefly had a high position in the government and I guess he was just too smart or didn't fit in. He didn't last too long, but that was a wonderful course. Of course, I was a source for a lot of it, my knowledge of our war plans and things of that nature. That was very involving, actually, but I had a course in *Hamlet* at the graduate level, a whole course, yes. [laughter] I mean, I'm an English major, right, so, I wasn't worried about the things you're asking me. I mean, I was just in there with both feet. When the paper I wrote on Chaucer only got a "B+," I actually almost attacked my instructor.

SH: [laughter] That is what you said.

GB: "Where do you get the idea that this idea, which no one has ever come up with except my professor at Rutgers, [laughter] that this deserves a "B+" when you're giving "As" to these kids who don't have an idea in their head?" "Well, we go for complete work and something that's," how did he put it? "controversial, no, we don't." Oh, well, see, I never got on a faculty after the Academy. I had no desire to, I never wanted to. When I got my doctorate, I never taught with the doctorate. I strictly was a consultant and that was always an entrée into whatever, "We've got Dr. Berke here," that sort of thing, but I had no desire ever to be on a faculty. [laughter]

SH: Leaving the faculty at the Academy, did you have a dream sheet filled out? How many years were you at the Academy?

GB: Well, the usual tour is three years. For some reason--I don't quite remember and it's probably in my notes here--I was getting a bad reputation there with the assistant department head, who we were waiting for Colonel (Moody?), was at Cambridge, getting a PhD from Cambridge. Since I thought this was all very unfair and since Colonel (Moody?) wasn't there, when he came back, he says, "Well, I hear you're," I forget how he put it, but I wasn't fitting in. I said, "Well, sir, I'd like another year then," and I have my OERs [officer evaluation reports] from the time. By the time I left there, I was very highly thought of, in that one year, because I had a different leader and he saw what I was trying to do or was doing and he commended me for it. We were friends for years after that, actually. So, I can't describe it right now, but I wanted to leave the Academy with the idea that I had made a contribution, because I felt I had. My last summer, I went to Boston and a very influential general was there. He wanted somebody to teach his staff at Hanscom Field, which was an electronics systems division, how to write and I still have the manual I wrote for them and it was published. He was very pleased with it and my family was very pleased. They were at the beach in New Hampshire and it was a great use of my time. I got a lot of satisfaction out of it, too, because I enjoyed doing it. Anytime I write for anybody, I always interview the people who are going to receive it and get a slant on what they do and how they want to express themselves. So, by that time, I had, "Here's what you do for an executive summary and here's what you do, where you put all the data, and then, here's the body of your report." So, what I was thinking of was, I called Ralph Magglione, as I mentioned, once again in my life, and I said, "Maggie, I want to get back in fighters." He says, "Well, George, I can put you in the A-1 prop, but I can't get you into the transition for the Phantom, because you've been out of fighters for four years." He says, "However, the 81st is going to get Phantoms soon, but they still have 101s and there's no school for 101s. So, I could assign you to the 81st, [laughter] as another Briar Rabbit in the briar patch." "Oh, that's the only thing I can get, right. Well, I'll just have to accept it." [laughter] So, that's when I got my second tour and what they usually suggested, since I knew the 81st was going to get the Phantom--and this is another sad part in my career--I asked for the tech orders, which you could do, when I was at the Academy. At that time, especially, we could get anything we wanted and there was a coterie of fighter pilots there. I would call them advanced fighter pilots. In fact, I found a position I did for a fellow named Riccioni. He developed a new way for the F-100s to fight and Dave Carson was my buddy, who worked for me in the English Department; he was a radar fighter pilot. He flew air defense, and so, we got the specs on the Phantom and what it could do and what it couldn't do. It couldn't do a lot of things, because it wasn't designed as a fighter. We developed

a tactical use of it and, when I was assigned to the 81st, in advance, I sent it in. They asked me what I wanted to do and I said, "Well, I'd like to be in Stan/Eval, because I'd like to work on and help develop tactics." It seemed like people completely forgot or ignored the fact that I had four years there in that mission. The wing commander there, a very famous man, was highly insulted. He said, "Is this English teacher trying to tell me how to fly a fighter? We're not going to have him in this wing." So, he had my assignment transferred to Headquarters USAFE in Wiesbaden, a desk job. Well, the Academy had some really powerful people in personnel and they did some research and they said, "He can't do that." It's all to do with per diem rates, [laughter] yes, per diem rates, but, about this time, the wing commander got fired anyway. So, the new wing commander came in to transition there at Tucson, into the Phantom, and I flew down there from the Academy. I said, "Colonel, I'm kind of under a cloud here, but I want to get back with the 81st Wing," and he said, "Well, how would you like to go back to your squadron?" I said, "Yes, if I could go back to the 92nd, that would just be fine." "Okay, well, we'll do that. We'll put you in the 92nd, and so, get rid of this, fine." The idea was, a lot of people, take your family down to Tucson while you transition in the Phantom, and then, everybody moved to the station. I thought that was not the way to go. So, I said, "Let's go to England, let's find a house. Let's get you settled, and then, I will go back to the States and transfer to the Phantom. In the meantime, I will be flying the 101, which is what I want to do." By the time I got back to Bentwaters, I was there the last night before most of the squadron left for the States and the squadron commander was a big, bald, cigar-smoking guy who kicked wastebaskets, apparently--that was the thing he's noted for. His pilots loved him and they all left and I was the squadron commander of what was left. The people that were left were the people who weren't going to go to Davis-Monthan. They were getting out of the Air Force or they weren't selected to fly the Phantom or something like that. Here I was, finally a squadron commander and, here, I'd come right out of the United States Air Force Academy and I look around and I look around and I look around. I go to the deputy wing commander, Ray Melton, and I says, "Colonel Melton," I said, "this squadron is not prepared for the Phantom. Nothing has been done, nothing," and this guy got a promotion to colonel. He looked at me and he says, "Well, George, fix it." This is the start of my third year of relationship with him, and so, I said, "Okay, I need a photographer." I went around and, like, for the mechanics, a latrine was a pipe with a regular Army helmet down there. [laughter] We were going to double our [contingent], because you have back-seaters, double our squadron, no plans for a new building, maintenance, same way--nothing, nothing was done. So, I'm a tech report writer, with pictures, and I did the whole thing. Now, there was a change of command, this and that--I never got credit for that. I saved the squadron right then. When we came back, there was facilities for everybody, this and that, but I was very proud of the fact that I had managed to do that. It was utterly necessary and I was so annoyed, "Why did this guy get a promotion and think he was so great when there was no preparation for the guys when they came back?"

SH: Right.

GB: I don't know what that would've been like. There was always a problem with the Phantom with storage space, this and that and the other thing, even, in years, we were storing stuff under tarps and all, because the money wasn't there. I mean, I can talk about the Phantom, great airplane, whatever--it just about ruined the Air Force. The whole idea, the Navy--it was a Navy airplane in the first place, it had a Navy mission, it was really great at that, couldn't be beat. The Navy put a radar operator in the back. The Air Force decided, "Oh, well, since we go long-

range, we need two pilots." Well, immediately, we had a pilot shortage. Every squadron that converted from the F-100 to the Phantom was short of pilots. It went from one to two--you'd think, no, you didn't think--and not only that, but it had advanced radar, it had, for the F-100 squadrons, it had two engines, instead of one. Everything was doubled for a single fighter like the F-100 and there were F-100 squadrons throughout the world. Every time they'd convert to the Phantom, you had this thing going on, and so, suddenly …

SH: You would think it would only take one.

GB: Yes. You'd think this would be well-known, "Oh, yes, we had a pilot shortage," but nobody said, "Why?" or, "How did we happen to have a pilot shortage?" We didn't need two guys in the back and they hated it. They hated being back there and a lot of fighter pilots didn't want anything to do with that, "I'm the pilot, I'm the guy, I'm the front seat. I don't need that guy in the back and I don't care about him." I had no problem with that, especially since I picked good guys. I'm jumping ahead of my story here, but here it was that it was going to be fought like an F-100 and it wasn't. I was still convinced that somebody would listen to what I and my colleagues had developed. As I say, I'm not talking about any guy on the street. My colleagues and I, we were highly qualified to think about these sorts of things. So, anyway, here I was, with the squadron commander, and then, we had no targets, because everybody's gone. I could do anything I wanted and I just had so much fun with the 101. I would go over and buzz the RAF bases and they'd all come up after me and I'd come around--I just had more fun. [laughter] I got used to it and we were going to be the last flight of 101s back to the States. We were going to Kentucky.

[TAPE PAUSED]

GB: [Editor's Note: The recording picks up with Colonel Berke reading.] "Heading for Spain, in our Atlantic crossing to take the last Voodoos back to the States, my flight lead this day was my assistant, Al Martin. We joined the last of the 78th Squadron birds at Morón Air Base, Spain, near Seville. This would be our jumping off base for the trip, the Air National Guard base in Louisville, Kentucky. I'd gotten about twenty-five hours by then, but it was agreed that, though I was the ranking officer in this deployment, having the least recent Voodoo experience, I would fly wing."

SH: Excuse me, the Voodoo is the new Phantom that you are bringing back.

GB: No, this is the 101.

SH: This is the 101 you are bringing back.

GB: Yes.

SH: I see.

GB: Okay, right. "We arrived Friday the 29th, took in a bull fight on Sunday and we took off with a great anticipation Monday morning. Al had somehow arranged a hot date in Philadelphia

the next day and talked of nothing else all weekend. We joined with our SAC tanker at the west end of the Azores and Al slid in under for his boom refueling, takes about ten minutes to put 2,500 gallons in a Voodoo. Then, it was my turn. I flicked my switch to open my receptacle and slid into position. 'Door's not open,' said the boom operator. 'Check your circuit breaker,' said Al, a bit peeved. Well, of course, I knew where the circuit breaker was; sometimes, one had to pull it if one couldn't get a disconnect, but it was in it and I cycled it for good measure, flipped the switch a few more times, negative function. 'Tap it,' I told the boomer. 'Not supposed to,' he answered. 'Please try,' I begged, suddenly aware that I was going in the wrong direction. I felt the boomer scrape the nozzle across my door, 'Negative.' Well, that ripped it. Neither one of us could proceed alone and I was already turning back to Lajes Field, about a hundred miles astern. Al put out speed brakes and lit his afterburners as he sought to reduce his weight for landing. I landed light and he landed heavy. We had not enough crew day left to fly back to Morón. My door opened on the ground, but they always worked in the warm. It was while cold soaked at minus fifty-five centigrade at thirty-five thousand feet that any corrosion or moisture caused problems. Memorably, we went to the base theater to see *Help.* It was the first time I had seen the Beatles and I have been a fan ever since. Tuesday, we flew back to Morón. Wednesday, Al led a flight of four, of which I was number four. My element lead's canopy seal blew out on climb out, so, I had to abort with him. Al flew on, still miffed about his missed date. Things were getting tense. Ready or not, SAC was leaving for home Saturday. Any planes not gone by then would have to fly back to England. Their pilots would miss their place in the Phantom class. I had already suggested that instead of the tankers taking off an hour ahead that they leave with us and that we attempt to hook up as soon as we were at altitude. That way, a plane with a malfunctioning door could land back at Morón and not lose a day at Lajes. Sure enough, it happened again to someone and he did save a day. The base at Morón was just a reserve strip used for transatlantic crossings. It was nothing there, nothing to do. The officers' club was one room. We were thoroughly bored and sick of the place, as you shall see. [laughter] On Saturday, there were four of us and two spares. Our leader, from the 78th, was the incomparable Julius Jayro. I was once again number four. It was a day of firsts and lasts. It began raining hard. I was standing under the nose wheel well, waiting for the rain to stop, so [that] I could preflight the plane for overwater flight. I had packed my bags in the Voodoo's generous ammo bay, along with a quart of Chevas Regal, the better to cool it for consumption on landing. [laughter] The rain, if anything, increased. I heard engines. Surely, SAC, the most safety conscious of commands, was not taking off in this. Well, yes, they were, ready or not. I glanced at my crew chief huddling next to me, 'Is she ready?' 'Yes, sir, you can trust her.' So, for the first time in my life, I climbed in without a preflight--open canopy, hook ladder, jump in, unhook ladder, close canopy, box lunch on console, struggle into parachute, hook snap to D-ring. The Voodoo didn't have a rocket seat, so, one had to have some speed and altitude for safe ejection. Designed for high-speed escape, it had a two-second timer on the automatic seatbelt mechanism and a two-second timer on the automatic ripcord. This four-second delay gave you a chance to slow down before the chute blossomed. It was much too slow for low-altitude escape. So, a fix was a simple lanyard from the chute timer that one hooked to the manual D-ring on the left side of the chute. Thus, when the seatbelt opened, the falling seat pulled your chute open directly, okay. Engines started, we check in. Spare Number Five says, 'No, Number Six can't start.' Well, that's cutting it thin. It's still pouring, but I can see our two tankers take off in clouds of spray. Number Five now claims to have a problem. So, there are four of us and we take the runway. Lead and Two roll and Number Three and I follow at the standard five seconds. Speed

clears the windshield and we see Lead and Two outlined against a towering cumulus. My element leader keeps the burners cooking. He wants to join before Lead penetrates the cloud. My mind goes into overdrive. We're passing four hundred knots. I have a low-speed lanyard hooked, can't let go of the stick, so, I maneuver my left hand off the throttles and unhook the snap from my D-ring. Blast, it's hooked around my gloved finger. I am trying to shake it off when Number Three suddenly realizes that Lead is in the cloud. 'AB off,' he transmits and I lunged for the throttles pulling them aft. I hear and feel the faint ticking and acknowledge that the snap around my finger has pulled the chute timer. I feel the pins on my back let go and the pilot chute springs past my helmet. Now, in the cloud, there is a crash and I am suddenly blinded by the light of a thousand flashbulbs. I bank away from Number Three and get on the gauges when I can see again. Peeping through the cloud into brilliant blue sky, I find my element leader and I see Lead and Two and even two tankers. The accompanying static on my radio turns out to be Number Two, who has a blown canopy seal. Lead has signaled him that his transmitter is out. Number Three chimes in that the lightning hit him directly and cracked his bulletproof windshield. [laughter] I sheepishly admit that my parachute is slowly filling my cockpit. Not five minutes airborne and all four of us have unserviceable aircraft requiring landing as soon as possible. What to do? I give Number Two the benefit of my research on how B-29 crews over Japan plugged bullet holes in their pressurized cabin. He found the leak and plugged it with his cheese sandwich. Now, the lead element had a good radio. Looking back, Morón was covered with towering cumulus; ahead looked clear. Number Three suggested, if we didn't fly faster than 220 knots indicated, he thought his windscreen would hold." To this day, I have no idea where he came up with this number. "That would give us 420 knots true airspeed at altitude instead of 480. The slower speed would magnify the effect of any headwinds. I stated that I didn't relish bailing out in the middle of the Atlantic anyway, 'So, let's go.'" [laughter] So, it was a lightning strike, right in the middle of us, direct lightning strike on Number Two's aircraft, [laughter] or, excuse me, my element leader, Number Three. "We caught up with the tankers and each took some fuel. As far west as Lajes as we dared, we filled up again and bade our tankers *adieu*. Now, we had three hours plus to our next rendezvous with tankers over Bermuda. Forecast winds were light, but there was no way of knowing then. The Greeks would say I was in the lap of the gods. I had a lovely feeling of serenity as I stuffed my chute behind me and ate my cheese sandwich. Jay's radio came back on. After about two-and-a-half hours, we had a discussion. Bermuda hadn't shown up on our radar. We decided to try and get the tankers to come for us. They said, 'Sure.' Soon, contrails above us announced their arrival. 'Hold steady,' they called and timed their turn to position directly in front of us--what service. Soon, we were full again, with Bermuda passing under us. Then, the coast appeared. We had an embarrassment of fuel. Deep in our ninth hour aloft, we reached Louisville. 'Let's make it look good,' from Jay. He called Standiford Tower, 'On initial.' We broke and turned, nicely spaced on downward. Jay called, 'On final, wheels down,' and Standiford Tower replied, 'We don't have you in sight.' There was a pause. [laughter] Jay called, 'Going around, rejoin.' Tower again, 'Maybe you're at Bowman Field, the commercial terminal. Just continue on the runway heading and you'll find us.' We were staggering back into echelon formation when it was time to pitch again, making a less pretty approach than previously. [laughter] Nobody disgraced themselves on landing and, as I parked, I couldn't wait for the National Guard crew chief to bound up the ladder. I nonchalantly handed him my rolled up parachute, [laughter] enjoyed the look on his face and descended the ladder, opened the ammo door and took a healthy swig of my super cool whiskey. [laughter] Though I passed it around to my appreciative friends, a picture taken at the time

suggests I had the major share. After noting ten hours in flight log, we cleaned up and repaired to a Polynesian restaurant, all the rage at the time. As we were marveling at the day's events, we suddenly noticed that my element leader had quietly put his head down on his beef with snow peas and was fast asleep." [laughter]

SH: Good story; there is a lovely color photograph to go along with this story. [laughter] Shall we end this session?

GB: Yes.

SH: Thank you again. We will see you on Monday.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 2/25/2015
Reviewed by Molly Graham 4/7/2015