

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE S. FISKE

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with George S. Fiske on August 26, 2008, in Williamsburg, Virginia, with Shaun Illingworth. Mr. Fiske, thank you very much for having me here today.

GF: Well, you're welcome. Glad to have you here.

SI: Thank you. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

GF: I was born in Ventnor City, New Jersey. That's right next to Atlantic City, and that was back in 1923.

SI: What were your parents' names?

GF: My parent was George Fiske, he was George William Fiske, and I'm George Samuel Fiske, yes. I was named after his father. My mother was Mildred, and they were married and they had four children. I was the second one. They had two girls and two boys and we lived in a very nice section of Ventnor City, which is about a block-and-a-half from the beach. So, we spent a lot of time on the beach when we were growing up.

SI: How did the family get to Ventnor City?

GF: Well, let's see, my father was born over in Vineland. My grandfather, his father, had come over from England and had met my grandmother, who lived in Vineland, New Jersey. They were married. They had one child, one son, my father. ... My grandfather was killed. He wrote for newspapers. He wrote special articles for newspapers, and, while running for a train one time, he fell and was killed by the train. My father was around eleven years old at the time. So, my grandmother had to go to work and she went over to Atlantic City, which was the "big city" in Southern New Jersey at that time. ... My father stayed there for a year, with cousins and an aunt, to finish grammar school, and then, he went over to Atlantic City with his mother. He eventually ... went to work for a real estate firm and he took some time off to go into World War I. He served in the Air Corps, which was then part of the Signal Corps, in an airfield, Orly Field, over by Paris in France, and, when he came home, he went back to the real estate business with the same firm and, eventually, became a salesman and a partner with that firm. So, he was in the real estate business in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for many years.

SI: Did he ever tell you any stories about his time in France?

GF: Oh, yes, he told us stories about his time in France, mostly had to do with ... eating with the French as often as they could; better food. [laughter] He was a sergeant. He was a clerk in the ... squadron over there, and he rather enjoyed Paris, when he could get in there, but he didn't have any serious conflict at any time [with] ... the enemy, but it was a big freedom for him. Being in the Army was important to him at that time. He was a sole son, his father was dead, his mother relied on him, he had to go work early; he got away from everything like that, had a different kind of life for awhile, and it was rather important to him.

SI: After the war, was he active in veterans' affairs, such as the American Legion?

GF: He joined the American Legion; he never went.

SI: Okay.

GF: [laughter] Yes, he didn't do that, but, during World War II, he and another man used to patrol the streets of Ventnor. They had people doing that, you know, civilians, because of the blackout situation. As you probably know, we started the war with Atlantic City still all lit up and the Germans took advantage of that, because all the ships leaving New York Harbor and heading south were silhouetted against those lights. Many of them were sunk by German submarines. So, then, they finally got wise and ordered blackouts and everybody had to make sure that there wasn't even a crack of light coming out by a window at night, and these men went around to make sure that that was the case.

SI: Did your mother ever work outside the home?

GF: Not while we were growing up, but, ... later on in life, when we were all gone from home and my father's partner had died and my father was in business alone, my mother went up to the office and worked there with him, keeping the books.

SI: What are some of your earliest memories of growing up in Ventnor City? What did you do for fun? What kind of a city was it?

GF: Well, it was a great city to grow up in. Of course, we had the beach, and, as youngsters, we could be down there all day long, but it was a nice area, nice houses all around. It's built on what I call a big sand dune. It's like the Outer Banks of North Carolina, just one long stretch of sand, but it was so built up, you wouldn't know that until you got down on the beach. We had streets and curbs and lawns, and so forth, and every lot was filled with a house. Atlantic City, of course, was very densely built up, with stores and houses and apartment buildings and hotels, lots of big hotels, but it was a great place. The Steel Pier was a wonderful place to go spend the day. It was a good family town at that point. Today, it's a gambling town. I don't like it at all, but it was a great place back then, and Ventnor was strictly residential and we had the beach. Right down from where I lived, a half block away, was an area set aside, a whole block there, with tennis courts and another little area they built up. They filled it in with the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. They built a bulkhead halfway back from the beach to the main street and filled that in with sand, and then, they built a lawn on top of it. I guess they wanted the lawn to stay and my friends and I thought it was a great place to play football and softball and, for a long time, the police would come along and chase us off, but they finally relented and let us play there. So, that was handy, and I liked playing tennis at the tennis courts. That was another place. ... On the other side of the island from the beach was a part of the inland waterway. It was a thoroughfare. We called it "The Bay," but it was the thoroughfare, and, for a couple of years, I had a little boat in there, a little flat-bottomed rowboat, and had a little outboard on it, and that was fun. So, my recollections of Ventnor are very pleasant. Even [in] Atlantic City High School, I had a good time. I heard somebody mention once that going to high school was a miserable time, and I said, "Gee, I had a good time in high school."

SI: How did the Great Depression impact your family?

GF: Well, I guess we were sort of in the middle somewhere. You know, Atlantic City was built up with a lot of big houses. ... Usually, especially the area where we were, the southern part of Atlantic City and part of Ventnor where we lived, they were two-and-a-half-story houses. The basements had to be halfway out of the ground because of the high water table, and so, there were, sometimes, rooms in the basement. Well, life, at that time, meant people didn't travel as much. In the summertime, people from Philadelphia, and some from New York, would come down. They either owned a house down there, which they closed up during the winter, or they rented a house. My father rented lots of houses in the summer. People would rent a house and they'd bring the whole family down. The man, the father, who worked in Philadelphia, would work there all week and come down on a train Friday night, go back on Sunday night, but that was the vacation then. Many of them had servants, even in the Depression, and ... these houses were built with rooms on the third floor, you might say, or the attic area, or in the basement, for servants. So, it was a whole family with servants coming down, and there were many of those throughout the island. You wouldn't know, looking at Atlantic City and Ventnor, in the summertime, when it was filled with all those people, that there was a Depression going on, because there were still some people making some money, or they couldn't afford to do this. ...

SI: There was not a drop off in people renting the houses, that you noticed.

GF: Wrecking the houses? No, no, there was no drop off there. The houses stayed in good condition.

SI: I meant renting the houses.

GF: Renting, oh, yes. No, no, they rented houses. Most of them were filled during those years, at least the years I was really aware of it, the latter part of the '30s. Yes, the Depression was still going on, but we had people going down. We had Cadillacs parked around there, down by the beach there, yes. As I say, you wouldn't have known it. We did have people who lived there all year round who were working for the WPA. They did some of that work on the beach there. ... They were glad to get that job, because, for the people who lived there, sometimes, the jobs weren't all there. Many of them worked for the hotels, and so forth, but we had many people in town there who needed jobs of that kind. Atlantic City had them. Atlantic City had a couple of sections there. There was an area where black people lived ... and there was another area where mostly Italian people lived, but these people worked in different jobs and many of them worked for the hotels and the other businesses around town. There was no great, big industry in Atlantic City. Anything industry, any manufacturing at all, was very small. It was mostly a service area, the stores, hotels and businesses that could serve them, such as my father's real estate business.

SI: As a teenager, did you have any part-time jobs or summer jobs?

GF: Yes, I did, eventually, I went to work. A friend of mine was always working at some place and he got me a job one year. ... Well, I started working for a milk company, ... driving a truck, delivery. This is when I was finally seventeen years old and had a driver's license. Before that, I didn't work. Some of my friends who were a little older did. They also drove trucks. ... Yes, I

worked there. Then, I went to work for a hotel for a few weeks, running an elevator, and that came on during the time when the ... Miss America Pageant was going on. You know, they had it every year in Atlantic City and they'd get it in September, trying to extend the season, when people would normally go home. Then, they ... took a week off for this big pageant, and so, I ran an elevator there for a little bit. Then, I went back to school, and, the next year, I was in college by then, I got a job with the Coca-Cola Company, the distributor there. That was sort of a prized job and it was a little hard to get employed there at times, but, now, the war had started. The Air Corps was moving into the hotels. The town was jumping because of all of these soldiers there. I started working [there] because my father's business partner was in Kiwanis and he could talk to the manager of the company and get me employed. So, I worked in the plant for a bit, loading and unloading trucks as they came in. Well, that was interesting, because I got really interested in it, you see, especially when the drivers came back, they used to like to take ... the empty cases off their truck and put them on a conveyor as fast as they could, hoping to jam it up on the inside against the poor guy who was working on the other side of the wall, having to take these empty cases and stack them up in piles, up, oh, seven feet high, but I found, if I stood in the right spot; I wasn't ever big, but I was lanky, and I had a stretch. I was five inches taller than I am right now. I could stretch a bit. So, when they came down, I could just plant myself in the right place and swing those cases one after the other, and they could never jam them up on me, and I had fun doing that. [laughter] Of course, it was hot where I was working and I was usually soaked in perspiration at the end of the day, but it was noticed, I guess, by the manager. ... When things got busy and his men started to be drafted and he had to have them replaced, I took over a job that a salesman had, drove a truck around, delivering Coca-Cola and sold it, and that was a prized job. My friends didn't have a job that paid anywhere near that well, but some of them, then, learning what I was doing, came up and looked for jobs, and, of course, they started putting Coke machines in the hotels for the soldiers there. So, they got jobs going out, loaded up with a truck, and going out and carrying cases of Coke in, in a dolly, and loading these machines all day long. It wasn't nearly as glamorous as the one I had, but that's the kind of a summer job I had, and, after that, I was in the Army.

SI: To go back, what can you tell me about your education in Ventnor City and Atlantic City?

GF: ... Well, it was very good. Ventnor had a good school system, and, you know, we benefited by that. I know we were taught by very good teachers, because, at that time, it was [the] Depression and you had to be good to get a job as a teacher. So, they had a good pick of teachers. I had an English teacher, a man who was really [just] out of college, but studying law, and became a lawyer. We had good math teachers there, in the lower grades, up through eighth grade, and we learned a lot that stuck with us. Especially in English, I can still remember some things there, although I'm not an English kind of a major. I turned out to be an engineer, but it was a good education, very good there, and then, we went to Atlantic City High School. Atlantic City [High School] served Atlantic City, Ventnor, Margate and Longport. These were towns on the same island, as well as some town on the next island called Brigantine, and we all went there together. We could walk up. Usually, my father dropped us off in the morning on his way to the office, in Atlantic City. We could either walk home or take a trolley home. The trolley was right outside the high school, and it went down the street. It was very nice and we could buy tickets and save a couple of cents a ride. It was normally seven cents a ride, but we could get tickets for a nickel, big savings back then, you know. [laughter] ... You start to remember some funny

things about that, but some things aren't so funny, I guess. Sometimes, my friends would like to stop a trolley at night and, when the one guy was out there waiting for the trolley, another fellow would run out from the bushes and pull the rope off the back, which meant it ... disconnected the electrical connection. So, the trolley couldn't go until the driver got back and readjusted that. That was supposed to be fun, I guess. One time, no, I had a friend who was trying to save money. Things weren't [too flush]; you know, we all didn't have that much money during the Depression years. So, ... in the summertime, ... when the weather was good, quite often, the back window in the trolley car would be open, and he learned he could run up there, throw his books through the window and climb in and save the fare, until, one time, he threw his books in and the window was closed. It didn't work so well. Another time, somebody found a little handle that would open the door and he kept that. When he wanted to get off, instead of going up to the front of the car, he opened the back door and went out. The poor conductor, driver, had to come back there and close it again. So, we had little pranks like that going on, but, generally, we had a good group of people. We didn't have a problem with crime, down in Ventnor anyway. There might have been some more in Atlantic City, where the population was a little different, but those who managed to live in Ventnor were more students, like this fellow who ... got in the back window. You know, he came ... out being one of the best brain surgeons in the City of New York.

SI: During your time at Atlantic City High School, were there any particular courses that guided you or interested you in reference to engineering?

GF: Yes. Well, ... my mother's sister, my aunt, was a teacher and she helped guide us in what we were going to do. In high school, we had the two college preparatory courses, the classical and the technical. In the classical, you studied Latin, for instance, and, in the technical, you studied some sciences, biology and general science, the first couple of years, and she suggested that I take the classical the first two years, and then, switch over to the technical course, when I would pick up physics and chemistry. So, I did it that way. I guess, as you might say, I broadened my education, although I couldn't tell you much about Latin today, except, "*Et tu, Brutus?*" [the words spoken by Julius Caesar to his assassin and former protégé, Brutus]. [laughter] ... We had good teachers there, again, and, you know, that was different from today, at high school, I think. The men teachers wore suits and ties, the women teachers wore nice dresses, and there was a discipline maintained there that was pretty tight. We didn't have a lot of vandalism or problems that way. When they came up, we had a stern vice-principal who immediately took care of things. So, it was a pretty good life, even though it was a crowded school. We had about thirty-two hundred students there and we marched from one class to another. So, I don't know that any class, particular class, stood out. I just generally liked the mix of things. I figured I was heading somewhere for engineering, and eventually did.

SI: Was it expected of you, by your parents and teachers, that you would go on to college?

GF: Yes, yes, it was. My parents had four children and it was [the] Depression years, and, of course, my father's income did fall off, but he did manage to keep busy. ... We weren't nearly as bad off, as a family, as some other people around town, but, yes, they expected that we would go to college, and we all did. We all went to Rutgers.

SI: Yes, I noticed that.

GF: You did, all right. [laughter]

SI: Your sister went to NJC the year before you did.

GF: My sister did. My sister, Mildred, went up there a year before I did. Then, I went up the next year, and the following year, my other sister went. My brother was about five years behind me. So, he started when I was in the Army.

SI: Was it just the fact that your sister went that made you want to go to Rutgers?

GF: No, no, I thought about something else. I thought about taking aeronautical engineering. I liked airplanes, and it seemed to me the best place for that was Georgia Tech, but that was a long way away and I wasn't really sure that that's what I wanted. When I found out more about Rutgers, that they had a mechanical engineering course, I figured I could always take that. If I wanted to get into aeronautical engineering, I could do that later, because it's closely associated with mechanical engineering. So, I went to Rutgers. It was appealing, and [I] took mechanical engineering.

SI: Before we start talking about Rutgers, I wanted to ask about the late 1930s. Obviously, a lot was happening in Europe and Asia, even before the war broke out in 1939.

GF: Right.

SI: Were you following world events?

GF: Yes, in the news, yes, we were. We didn't have television then, as you probably know. We had newsreels and we went to the movies. You would usually get one main feature and some shorts, probably a comedy of some kind, maybe. On a Saturday afternoon, we would go and see a serial, like a Tarzan serial or a western, and then, there was always the newsreel, which wasn't very appealing to a lot of young people, you know, when we were in grammar school, and so forth, but what we did see then was the German Army marching. ... Of course, they had this goosestep and they had hundreds of men marching by us, where they would show us those things, followed by tanks, and it was scary. We thought, "Eventually, we're going to have to go fight these people, and they seem so well-trained and it's going to be tough to beat them," and, as I say, ... for people our age then, it was scary, but that continued through high school. We saw those things then. So, we did know what was going on over in Europe, yes.

SI: Was there a discussion amongst your friends or family about whether we should side with the Allies or just stay out of the war?

GF: Well, we didn't talk about it much. As you probably know, we were an isolationist country at that time. People just didn't want to get involved. They thought, "We've got this big ocean protecting us on both sides. We don't need to get involved. We don't need these countries over there." It was a shortsighted thing. You can certainly look back on it now and see that, but, still,

people just didn't want to get involved in a war and they didn't want to have anything to do with it. ... I think Wendell Willkie, [Republican candidate for President], ... made some feature of this thing when he was campaigning in 1940 against [Franklin] Roosevelt, and he called for "one world." ... People just didn't understand that at the time, but you can look at it now and you can realize that we don't live in one city or one state or one country anymore, we live in one world. We can't get along without the others and we have to take action. We're taking action in Iraq. A lot of people here don't like that, but, from my point of view, if we can make Iraq into a democratic nation, with a capitalistic form of government, eventually, that will spread throughout the other countries of the Middle East. It's not going to happen fast, but it will happen over time. ... Look what happened to Russia, how within its own [country], within the United [Union of] Soviet Socialist Republics, all of these different entities that had been brought together suddenly broke up and become separate entities once again, and the people did that from within. ... I think the same thing could happen in the Middle East, a similar thing, and I think it's a good thing that we're there.

SI: What can you tell me about your first few days and weeks at Rutgers? What was it like to go around campus?

GF: Well, of course, it was entirely different when you lived at home. I hadn't been off of Absecon Island, except to go visit a friend who had a house on a lake on the mainland. [laughter] The mainland is what we called solid ground. In-between that and the sand dune on which we lived was a lot of marshy swamps, but I'd been concentrating there all my life, and, now, I was away in a different part of the state, one hundred miles away from home. It was exciting. It was nice to be there. It was all new, and bewildering at times, but, you know, I started Rutgers in September of 1941. That was just a few months before Pearl Harbor and the start of World War II for our country. ... Rutgers, at that time, was a small private school. We had, what? thirteen hundred men, and less than a thousand women across the other side of town [at New Jersey College for Women]. Coming from a high school of thirty-two hundred people, that was small and it was nice. It had the nice, old campus, Old Queens Campus, and I lived in a rooming house. There were some people who rented out their houses and I had a room, and they had two other men who lived in there, too. ... During that fall year, we did some things. ... They seemed to tell us that we should be going out for some team or so. Maybe I was naïve, but I got the impression that we were all supposed to try out for some kind of a team or athletics, you know. Of course, not everybody did, but I thought about it. ... You know, I'd played touch football a lot with my friends in high school, on that field I told you about. That was in the fall. In the spring, we would play softball, but I never went out for any high school teams. Now, all of a sudden, I'm supposed to be looking for a team of some kind and I thought [of] cross-country, in the fall of the year. ... You know, I'd run a little bit on the football and basketball, baseball, [activities]. I'd never run any distance, probably never more than three blocks at a time, and, here, I went out for cross-country, which means I had to run three miles at one time, but I immediately liked it. Of course, my muscles weren't used to it. My legs tightened up in the first few days and I would still go out and run, but the calves of my legs were sore. I was limping around the campus at that point, but I managed to run, and we had an old coach there. He'd been quite a runner in his own career, his own time. He was an old, older, man at this time. He lived in the New York Athletic Club, in Manhattan. He took the train down every day, walked down to Buccleuch Park, where we ran, and he'd be sitting on a bench there. Well, he did meet us in

the gym and talked to us. He was always giving us pep talks about what a great thing this running was for us and what we would become if we stuck with it, but he would wait for us and we would run down there. Well, I didn't get started in this thing until a little later than most people did; I had delayed it. So, I'd only run [a few days]. I got out there and ran a couple of days and I managed to keep up with people, at least not the first guy, but some people in the back, and he thought that was good. So, after only two or three days of running, ... I learned we had a meet coming up with Princeton, down at Princeton. He said, "I'm going to take you to Princeton." So, I went along with the team. I think I was the last Rutgers guy to finish, but I did beat out ... one Princeton man. [laughter] We got sort of lost on the trail, going through the woods, I think, but it was good experience. I enjoyed it. The more I ran, the more I got enthused about running and the competitive spirit seemed to arise in me. So, I kept doing it and I managed to be the fifth guy on the team finishing, and the first five people counted in the scoring. So, as a result of that, I got my numerals for running on the cross-country team. You didn't get letters as a freshman back then, you got numerals. You had "1945," because I was originally in the Class of '45, started in '41. So, that was a good thing for me, yes.

SI: As an entering freshman, were there any hazing rituals or things the freshmen had to do?

GF: Well, we had to wear the little hats, the little dinky. ... What did they call them?

SI: Dinks or a dinky.

GF: Dinks, that's what it was, yes. Yes, we had to wear those around for awhile, and that's about all. It wasn't much of a hazing, really. It wasn't long [before] I was rushed by a number of fraternities, and this close friend of mine, we started kindergarten together, we lived not far away, he went in and immediately went into the Deke House, because his brother had been a Deke. So, he could immediately go in and live in the Deke House and, looking things over, I liked the place, too. So, I pledged the Deke House and, eventually, became a member there and spent the rest of my years living in the Deke House. So, I lasted a year-and-a-half before I was drafted. Do you have a question before that?

SI: Did you immediately enroll as a mechanical engineering major?

GF: Oh, yes, yes, I did.

SI: Why did you choose mechanical? You mentioned that you were interested in aeronautical engineering.

GF: Aeronautical, right. They didn't have aeronautical engineering at Rutgers, closest thing was mechanical engineering. So, I enrolled in mechanical engineering, yes.

SI: What do you remember about any of the professors or courses from that period?

GF: Well, one course stands out. I had some good professors, but, you know, some sixty or seventy years later, I can't remember the names of these people. [laughter] ... It was interesting. We had most of our classes in the Engineering Building. So, for the time that I was there, I went

to the Engineering Building, back and forth. I wasn't active in other things on campus but the fraternity and engineering. ... I can remember one course to tell you about. You know, we had a lot of different courses and some were interesting and some weren't so interesting, but we had to cover a wide range of things and we had laboratories associated with them. I remember, in the strength of materials laboratory, I got the job of working a brand-new machine, which, in effect, pulled rods apart, or compressed concrete, and we would do that until the rod either stretched and deformed and broke or the concrete smashed it. I got to operate that big machine, had a big wheel on it. So, I felt sort of special there, because a lot of our equipment was old and this was new. We had one course, called "Analytical Analysis," and I thought of it as, "The Mystery Hour." The man who taught that was a Professor [James J.] Slade, [Jr.], I can remember that name. He had sort of reddish hair and a big mustache, and he always came in a few minutes late, after we were all seated in the class, waiting for him, and he would walk in the room, give us a quick nod and mumble "hello" or "good morning," something like that, pick up the first piece of chalk that he saw in the tray, walk to the far side of the room and start writing on the blackboard, and he could fill up the whole blackboard with equations, and giving us a little explanation of it verbally as he went, but not much, and we were supposed to know what was going on here. I don't think anybody did. [laughter] We took tests. He marked on a curve and he always handed the tests back the highest mark first to the lowest. So, the longer you waited for your paper to come back after the test, the worse you knew it was going to be, but, then, I sort of caught on to something. When he announced there was going to be a test, he would then give us some kind of a review. He would put these equations on the board, and I learned to write down the whole thing as he was going. I didn't know what was going on, but I wrote it all down, and then, I memorized it. When I went in and we took the test, ... it was the same thing. So, after that test, when he handed out the papers, mine was the first one. I wasn't that great a student, but, here, I got the first mark there. As a result of that, I got a "2" [equivalent to a "B"] in the course, and I don't know a thing about it. He was a very brilliant man, but he had a hard time letting us absorb his brilliance.

SI: One thing I have heard from other engineering students is that, as the war progressed, many professors were being pulled out of Rutgers and put into the war industries and being replaced with people who were practicing engineers. Do you recall that at all?

GF: No. I don't think I lost any teachers that way, not the ones that I had. They stayed there. We had an upperclassman, sometimes, who filled in for some instructions in the lab, lab work. Somebody who'd been doing particularly well might be doing some lab work with us, but not classroom teaching. The teachers were there, the professors themselves did the classroom teaching, and we didn't miss out on things like that, but, of course, as the war went on, we started to leave.

SI: Were you on campus the day of the Pearl Harbor attack?

GF: Yes, yes. I started in September 1941 and ... that day was a Sunday, of course, yes. By that time, I was pledged to the fraternity, to Delta Kappa Epsilon, and I would go over to the house, meet with a few fellows, and we heard on the radio that day. We were there, sitting around the living room, thinking about what our lives were going to be like from then on. ... You know, as time went on during that year, and it started the next year, in my sophomore year,

it was a question of where we would go. My roommate was suggesting we ought to get into something. "Maybe the Tank Corps," he thought, oh, this, that and the other thing. I had always wanted to fly airplanes. As I told you, I liked airplanes. I thought, "This is my chance to fly an airplane." However, my eyes weren't good enough. You had to have 20/20 vision to be a pilot, a copilot, a bombardier or a navigator, the four officer positions on a bomber, and my eyes just weren't that good. So, I didn't enlist at anything, I stayed in there, getting as much education as I could before they drafted me, which I knew they would, but I thought, certainly, when I was drafted, I would be put into the Army Air Corps. I was just the right kind of person for it. I knew that; they didn't know that. When I was drafted, I went to Fort Dix, along with a number of friends of mine who were called back from other colleges by the draft board at the same time. ... I don't know, I always thought that somebody who had been in the Army for three days had been given the job of assigning positions to newer people ... and he must have seen the word, "Engineer," that I was taking [engineering] in college, and he saw this other word, "Engineer," it was a combat engineer battalion being formed, and he must have thought that was a good combination. So, that's where I went, the combat engineer battalion, for basic training. [Do] you want to continue with this or go back to Rutgers?

SI: What do you remember about ROTC at Rutgers?

GF: Oh, yes. Okay, well, that was just something we had to go do. Every week, we had to go march and we went to classes, of course. Every Tuesday afternoon, we had to be all dressed in our uniforms and go out on the drill field for two hours, and it was infantry ROTC, and, for a guy who's interested in flying airplanes, infantry ROTC wasn't that interesting. My sophomore year, they put all engineers into the Signal Corps, because they added that, Signal Corps. Before that, they had only infantry, and they added the Signal Corps; they put us in that. So, for half a year, I was in the Signal Corps, and they had, you know, Army officers teaching these classes. They sent in a new second lieutenant to teach us in the class and, you know, it's interesting, years later, after the war was over and I was on duty, ... waiting to go home, I was in a prisoner of war camp. It had been a German prisoner of war camp and, when the war ended, we just turned it around and put the Germans inside. At the gate, one day, this officer was coming out, as I was on duty at the gate. I had to let him out and I looked and it was that same man who had been our professor at Rutgers in the Signal Corps, and he was still a second lieutenant. ... Poor guy, he saw me look at those bars and he was embarrassed, but I guess he was just in one of those positions where he didn't get promoted. Quite often, that's dependent upon where you were and with whom you were, whether you got promoted or not. That's just an aside, but, yes, I never got far enough [along] to get into Advanced ROTC. Those who did, of course, went on and got commissions and went in to serve as officers.

SI: Since you were an engineering student, did you ever have the option of taking a deferment?

GF: No, no, that never came up. None of us did. The only way you got out of being drafted was ... if you were in the upper classes and in the ROTC, or if you managed to enlist, before you were drafted, into an officer training course of some kind. Quite a few of my friends, fraternity brothers, saw the option of going into the Navy V-12 Program as a good thing, which [it] was, if you liked that. If you liked being in the Navy, you enlisted in that thing. I had people in my same year, sophomores, they enlisted in that program, they went off to college for a few more

months, to some other college, someplace, for some training. I guess they went through sort of a boot camp training, and then, they were commissioned. It was a rather easy way to get a commission, and they were ensigns in the Navy.

SI: You talked about how you got into this combat engineering battalion, because the person just saw the two words and associated them.

GF: That's my guess, yes. [laughter]

SI: Can you tell me more about the actual process of getting into the military, like where you actually went? Did you have to take a physical or any types of tests?

GF: Okay. Well, your hometown draft board called you in, when they thought of you. They needed so many men and they went over things. As I say, when I went, they got me at the end of my first semester in my sophomore year. They called me in ... to be drafted, and, when I went home, I found several of my friends, from other colleges, had been called the same way. We went up to Fort Dix. We got a physical examination, we were sent home for a week, we got on a bus again, ... early one morning, by the city hall, and went back up to Fort Dix and were sworn into the Army. Then, after a day or two there, ... we got our assignments and ... that broke us all up. We went in all kinds of directions, and mine was to this new, brand-new, combat engineer battalion, down into Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

SI: Was it a difficult adjustment to go from civilian life to military life?

GF: Oh, yes, quite a bit different, yes. Of course, I'd had a lot of close-order drill in ROTC, ... so, it [was] a little easier for me than for some of the people, but we lived in sort of *Hogan's Heroes* [a 1960s television comedy sitcom set in a German POW camp] type of barracks down there in Fort Jackson, had a little coal stove at each end of the barracks, which didn't do it much good at all. ... They gave us two blankets and, of course, we had these heavy overcoats and we slept under all of those things at night, tried to keep the fires going, but it was cold. It was February and it was cold and uncomfortable, and we had to go out and march a lot. That seemed to be the first thing you had to know. You had to march and march and march until it became part of your life, but, without it, you looked pretty sloppy and disoriented. So, it was important to go through a lot of close-order drill.

SI: Was the training at Fort Jackson mostly physical or was there weapons training involved?

GF: Oh, yes. We eventually got into all of that. Yes, we learned to fire lots of different kinds of weapons, yes, rifles. Of course, we didn't have M-1 rifles to begin with. Most of the fellows did, yes, and I did, too, to begin with. They were coming out then; earlier people had not gotten it. I went back to a Springfield, the 1903 Springfield, the bolt-action one. I became an assistant squad leader. This was a new outfit and they had to get some new noncoms [non-commissioned officers], of course, and I became one of them, but, because I had this position, I had to be able to fire a grenade launcher, and the only ones they had then would fire only from an '03. So, I had to give up the M-1 and take an ... '03, for that purpose. At that point, I could see I was going someplace. It started to get more interesting once they gave me a noncom position.

SI: When was that?

GF: Well, it was getting toward the end; we had a longer basic training than the infantry. Theirs was three months, ours was four-and-a-half months, because we had to know everything the infantryman knew, but we also had to know other things. We had to learn to build bridges, lay minefields, dig up minefields, do a number of things of that nature. This is the engineering part of it. So, we took a longer period. ... They told us we would get no promotions until basic training was over, but they changed that, and those of us who were going to be the noncoms were promoted to PFCs. ... We anticipated that, once basic was over, we would be advanced to sergeants, but, yes, we learned to fire a lot of things, machine-guns, rifles, ... bazookas. Yes, we got those. We learned to throw hand-grenades. We went through pretty rugged training. As it went along, we had to build different kinds of bridges, pontoon bridges, [a floating bridge], and a trestle bridge we had to put up, [used for mountains or floodplains]. It was interesting work. It was hard work.

SI: Did most of the men in your training unit come from similar backgrounds, such as having some college experience?

GF: No, no, the other way around, and you'll get to that in a minute here. Many of them, well, I know there's a young fellow in my barracks, ... slept not far from me, he couldn't read or write. He was an Italian fellow. Another Italian man became very friendly with him and he would write the letters home for this fellow and read the letters that he got from home to him. We had other men who came from Brooklyn, [the] Bronx, and so forth, Hoboken, New Jersey, who were manual workers, not skilled at all. One, supposedly, was a rigger, I remember, and he didn't know much about rigging at all. I knew more about knots from my days with a boat and in Boy Scouts than he did. ... The officers we had were new officers. We had a first lieutenant for our company commander, which is usually a captain's job, and I think he had just been promoted from second lieutenant and given this job. The other men were fresh out of OCS and were second lieutenants, and we had a pretty good one, and he was looking around. ... He found in me some things he didn't find in some of the other people, I think. I can remember, he tried to teach us knot-tying. He showed us the usual way of tying a bowline knot. I don't know if you're familiar with that or not, but there's a little story about a rabbit going in a hole, and so forth. Well, I had learned to tie a bowline. I thought it was an excellent knot, and I could do it without having both ends of the rope, just one end of the rope. He handed me this piece of rope, asked me to put it around a horizontal rod that was in front of us. As I walked up, I formed it. I got up there, threw the loop over that, put it through here and, here, pulled it tight. It happened that fast. He looked sort of amazed. He went up and looked at it. He said, "That's right." So, that impressed him, I think. ... Anyway, I was getting bored with all this marching at times. I thought, "Well, gee, maybe I'll join the motor pool." I told the sergeant that. I went off to the motor pool. I sat around with two or three other guys for a couple of days, doing absolutely nothing. A sergeant would come around [who was] in charge of the motor pool and look at us and not give us anything to do. We weren't getting anywhere there. ... That was boring. I even thought, maybe, being a bugler would be more interesting. They gave us a bugle and sent us off into the woods. I know nothing about music. I couldn't begin to blow a bugle. I was just looking for something different. I came back from that and the sergeant, our sergeant; we had

two sergeants in each platoon. These were older men who had been in the Army for awhile. They were the cadre. He would see what I was trying to do, get more interested. I think he talked to this second lieutenant and, between them, they gave me this job. ... I was in the supply room one day, for some reason. This lieutenant walked in; he said, "Fiske, from now on, you're second in command of the Second Squad." That was my knowledge of being promoted, and then, the sergeant, when I'm out walking from that, he said, "Well, how [do] you like this job? Is this any better?" I said, "Yes." [laughter] ... So, there was some interest in this thing. Well, going that way seemed to be interesting to me, and here's where some more of this background of the other soldiers comes in. I'm thinking, "Well, now, I'm going to be a noncom here. That makes life interesting, and this is a lot better than being just a plain infantryman, or in chemical warfare or in a lot of other places," and then, I read about the ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program], where they're sending people back to college. ... I thought, "That sounds interesting, too," but I also read that the Air Force was now taking men who didn't have 20/20 vision, but had something like 20/50, vision corrected to 20/20, for bombardiers and navigators, not for pilots or copilots, but I thought, "Gee, maybe I could get into that. At least I could fly, that way, in an airplane." So, I ... couldn't do anything until basic training ended, and I'm thinking, "Where should I go? Should I try to get into the Air Force, that way? Should I try to go back to college in ASTP, get more education paid for by the government, or should I stay here and be a noncom?" Well, right after basic training ended, just a day or two, a handful of us got called into the mess hall one night and the officers all came in and they looked at us and they said, "You're going into the ASTP." They didn't say, "Do you want to?" There was no choice there. You see, the corps commander in that area decided that anybody who met the requirements for ASTP would go. Now, you had to have a high school education and you had to have an Army test score that was higher than that required for OCS, and they just pulled those people out. ... As I say, there was just a handful out of a whole company of, what? 180 men, maybe in our company, more like 150 or [1]60, and the rest of them weren't qualified. So, that was what the Army was like at that point, but, you know, later on; well, we'll get to that story later, I guess. After they closed out the ASTP, they sent us all into the infantry. ... When we went into the ASTP, we had to give up any rank that we had, any stripes at all. We had tech sergeants and staff sergeants all of a sudden becoming buck privates again. We were all equal, of all equal rank, and, of course, all equal pay, at the lowest pay scale. So, when they ended [the ASTP], they sent us all to the 100th Infantry Division, the whole group of us at the Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina. What were there, about eleven hundred men? ... The 100th Infantry Division had just finished its maneuvers in Tennessee. They'd been activated about two years before. Now, they were ready for combat, but what they did was, they took out most all of the privates, sent them over to Europe, to be replacements for other divisions which had lost men, and they were thinking, "Gee, the 100th'll never go overseas now. They've lost all of these men, thousands of them." Well, they sent ASTP students in there. We were all privates. That was easy. They needed privates in the infantry. So, eleven hundred of us from the Citadel went there, and then, they came in from other places. All told, in a division of fourteen to fifteen thousand men, five thousand of them were ASTP guys. Now, compare that to that other outfit I was in. So, we had a pretty high IQ division. ...

SI: Going back, how were the nine months at the Citadel?

GF: At the Citadel? Well, the nine months at the Citadel, the Citadel was a military college. They're "the West Point of the South," had a lot of Southern pride there, and we went in. ... They sent us off to the Citadel, which was a STAR unit, which meant something like testing and replacement, or reassignment. They tested us again, giving more, something like IQ tests, for the first couple of days, and then, they usually shipped out a whole bunch of men to some college campus. Well, we got there later in the program and it turned out we were the last ones to be so tested. So, those of us who were going to stay, which was most of us, we stayed right there at the Citadel and started classes. So, we marched to classes. We got up every morning to a bugle call, we got dressed, we assembled. The Citadel, as you may not know, the quad, the dormitories were quadrangles. They had rooms all around the edge. When you went out of your room, you walked out into an open balcony. It had a roof over it, but it had an iron railing in front. You looked over that iron railing into an open courtyard. So, in the morning, we would go down, we would assemble in the courtyard, by platoons. We would march into the mess hall, we would march out of the mess hall. We would be dismissed to go to our room. We would form again, into formation, and march to classes and march back again. ... We were subject to Army discipline, but, also, cadet discipline. We had to do this marching. That's the way they did it in the Citadel. I've heard that other ASTP units were more casual than that, in different colleges. However, that's what we did. ... Of course, we took turns, some of us, at being platoon leaders, for a week or so, and then, I had a chance to do that, too. Going into the mess hall, now, this is the Citadel now, a Southern college, they were used to this sort of [thing], once they got into the mess hall, they sat down at these long tables and we were served food by waiters, with white coats on. I'm sure that that didn't exist in ... a lot of other places where ASTP was going on, but we were treated that way and it was sort of fancy. We had a couple of hours off in the afternoon. That's about all. We had physical training. They had a gymnasium there, they had a swimming pool, they had a great, big parade ground, they had a track. So, we went through different kinds of physical activities. They even had large rowboats. We could go out and row as a group, you know. You had about eight men rowing, in each boat, and we did that in the Ashley River, because we were right close to the Ashley River, right alongside of it. It was nice in Charleston. Charleston was a beautiful, little city then, beautiful city, still is, had all these old houses with walls around the yards, and I used to like to go out on a Sunday afternoon and walk through that old neighborhood. That was down at the southern part. It was quiet, peaceful, not many people on the streets. As you moved north a little bit, you got into the business section and, there, it was crowded, a lot of activity going on, people leading their normal lives, shopping, and so forth, and there were movies and things like that. ... We could get off. Every Saturday morning, we had a parade, on the parade ground, and, if we had been good guys all week, we could get a pass and go out Saturday, maybe you could get an overnight pass, too, and stay out all day Sunday, or go back out separately on Sunday, and we used to go in town and do things in there, go to movies, walk the streets. ... It was pleasant, certainly a lot different from sweating or freezing in the regular camps, like Fort Jackson or Camp Gordon. We had moved from Fort Jackson to Camp Gordon, Georgia, during our basic training.

SI: Before you went in the Army, had you been to the South before?

GF: No, as I say, I don't think I'd been off of Absecon Island, except a few miles away. No, I'd correct that; we went to Philadelphia. We would do some shopping in Philadelphia, as a family. My parents would drive to Philadelphia. That was the biggest city nearby, and we did take a trip

once, down into the South. We went to Washington, [DC], we circled back through Gettysburg. My parents took us on that trip, once, and they took us once into New York City, to see things there. Interesting note there, while we were there, they were thinking of things for us to do and they thought, "Well, ... we'll take them on a tour of an ocean liner, might be fun." So, they arranged for us to get onto an ocean liner and take a tour around and see it. It was called the *George Washington*. It had been a German liner. When we got started with the war, [World War I], it was in New York Harbor. So, the United States took it over and it was used as a luxury liner, through the 1930s, and then, it became a troopship. When I was going overseas, we marched over to the docks. We took a train up to Hoboken, we got on a ferry, went over to the docks, got onboard ship, and the ship that most of our number ... in the 100th [boarded] was the *George Washington*, [laughter] same thing, only, now, ... the staterooms were gone. It was converted for the troops.

SI: In general, what did you think of the South at that time, during the war?

GF: The South was quite pleasant for me. I was in two big cities, didn't get into Augusta, [Georgia], much, where Camp Gordon was, but we weren't there too long. We got shipped there toward the latter part of our basic training, and then, I went from there to the ASTP. I was in Fort Jackson, [which] was near; ... what the name of the big city? Well, it's there, [Columbia, South Carolina]. My senior memory isn't so good.

SI: You can add it later.

GF: Yes, I'll get it later, but Charleston, as I say, was an interesting city. We liked that. So, my impression of the South was good, except for the fact that I had a dickens of a time getting on a train to go home. You know, we didn't have airplanes flying then. We had trains, and the trains were crowded and they had to give way to troop trains quite often. Sometimes, we would be down at a railroad station, waiting for a train, to get on it. It would sail right past us, wouldn't even stop, and, when we did get on, people were standing in the aisles. All we could do was join them. I don't think I ever had a real seat, except once, when two girls took pity on me and one sat on the other's lap and let me sit down beside them. Sometimes, we were sitting on barracks bags or suitcases, whatever we could get onto. ... That's the unpleasant memory, was traveling on the trains. [laughter] They weren't very comfortable, but, otherwise, I liked the South, yes.

SI: Going back, all of a sudden, you were out of the Citadel and put into the 100th Infantry Division.

GF: Right.

SI: Was there any disappointment, bitterness or anger?

GF: Well, when we went into this ASTP Program, we thought it was something very special, that we ... had what it takes for it, and we knew the requirements were outstanding and we thought, "Certainly, we're heading for something, a better life." We certainly expected to become sergeants. I mean, if you stop to think about it, they had thousands and thousands of these men in there, campuses all over the country; they just didn't have room for all those

sergeants. As I say, ... when we left, they needed privates. We were all privates. It took a long time before they had openings, because they kept the sergeants in the 100th. So, where they had spaces were for privates. So, even though we were sort of an elite group, we were still privates in the infantry, but, you know, I meet with these people every year now and see what they've become. I'm going to go down in September, to Raleigh. We have a reunion every year, the 100th Infantry Division, and the numbers keep dwindling, but we still get several hundred people there, but we include families now, wives and children, sometimes, and you see these men; they became college professors, doctors, lawyers, pretty important people, well-trained. They all went to college on the GI Bill and made good use of it. I could tell you a story later, when we get into it; I'll save it for that.

SI: How much time did you have to train with the 100th Infantry Division before you were shipped overseas?

GF: Well, let's see, we went there around April of '44 and we went overseas in October of '44.

SI: There was an ample amount of time to get acclimated to your unit.

GF: To get adjusted, oh, yes. I think they made sure of that, yes. Yes, they put us through training and we went back through training again, infantry training. We had some of it in the Corps of Engineers, but we went through everything again. In fact, they instituted ... the Expert Infantryman's Badge about the time we were going there, right after we moved there, and they picked one guy, a tech sergeant, a platoon sergeant, from some company in the 100th, and he became the first man to receive an Expert Infantryman's Badge. [Editor's Note: The Expert Infantryman's Badge was established in 1943.] To get that badge, you had to go through several days of testing. You went through a combat kind of course, where you had to go through as though you're going through the woods and, as you're going, these "enemy soldiers" would pop out at you. They were silhouettes of men, fastened in trees, for instance, and somebody would release a catch and they would pop out at you. You had to immediately dive for the ground, behind a tree, and then, fire at them and hit them, and that's one part of the test. You had to go through this business of crawling out of a trench under barbed wire, and right above the barbed wire were real, live bullets from machine-guns firing over you. If you stood up, you could be hit and killed, but that was part of the training. You had to crawl through the dirt, under ... all this barbed wire for several yards, twenty, thirty yards. I've got a story about that, too, later. Yes, you were tested on first aid. Anything at all that a soldier had to know, you were tested on it and you had score well. You had to run a footrace in a certain amount of time. So, it was physical as well as mental, and they tried to pick people out they thought were going to pass and I went through that program, and I still wear, on my Purple Heart uniform, we have a uniform, I'm in the chapter of the Purple Heart Association, I still wear that Expert Infantryman's Badge, along with the Combat Infantryman's Badge. So, I thought that was harder to get than it was to get a Combat Infantryman's Badge, but, yes, we went through that kind of training. It was pretty rough training, but it was necessary training.

SI: What do you remember about the process of going overseas and getting ready?

GF: Well, we just know that ... we were suddenly called to go out on a bivouac one weekend. We had to go out there and sort of fight another troop, another unit, you know. We were divided up, red team and blue team and things like that. We had to go through that kind of training and we figured that's getting us ready for something, and it wasn't long after that [that] we got the word that we were going to go overseas. ... We eventually got on trains and went up to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, right near Rutgers there, and we were there a couple of days. I still had two sisters at NJC, saw them. My parents came up, on a Sunday afternoon, from Atlantic City, and we were all together for a day there before I went off again. We weren't supposed to say what we were doing or where we were going. Of course, they knew. I wouldn't have been there otherwise, and they put us on a train, shipped us over, put us on the ferries and took us ... to the docks. We got off at the docks, got off of the ferry, and went right into a troopship. So, we didn't see anything of New York, and then, we sailed overseas. We went in a convoy with a lot of other ships, and an escort of destroyers, and so forth. We had some bad weather. A lot of us were seasick; I'm one of them. I didn't have a pleasant journey going over or coming back. [laughter]

SI: What were the conditions like on the boat?

GF: On the boat? Well, crowded; you know, you had bunks ... that they had built in these holds. They had built-in bunks that went up four or five high, right up to the ceiling, crowded against each other, narrow aisles. We were in there pretty tight. You went into a mess hall, if you felt like eating, and you got something to eat. Most of the time, I stayed on the deck. I had a book, what was it? *The Yankee From Olympus* [by Catherine Drinker Bowen]. Anyway, I read the book, leaning ... by the railing. ... I was less inclined to be seasick there than I was inside. So, that's the way I spent my time, trying to avoid being seasick. It seemed to me it was rough all the way over. When the ship went up and down like this and rolled at the same time, it was more than I could take.

SI: What was going through your mind as you were heading towards the inevitable combat?

GF: Well, at that point, we were just one group of men going someplace, yes. We knew we'd get into combat, but ... I don't think we were really thinking about it. A lot of guys were playing poker, doing things like that, just sitting around, talking, reading. Yes, I don't think we were particularly worried, at that point, about combat. We landed at Marseilles, [France]. Marseilles' docks had been damaged. By that time, we were in October 1944, they had landed in Marseilles. They'd come over from around Italy and landed there and moved on up, and, of course, ... D-Day had occurred some months before and ... our armies had moved across France. So, we went up the Rhone River Valley into the Alsace-Lorraine area, that last section of France next to Germany, and you want to hear more about that? ...

SI: Where did your unit go into the line?

GF: On the line?

SI: What was that like, getting put on the line?

GF: Well, we just went in and took up positions that had been held by soldiers from another division. I think we relieved the 45th Division on the line, and we just moved in and took over their positions there. Now, I was in what was known as the Headquarters Company, Battalion Headquarters. You know, in a battalion, we had three rifle companies, like the First Battalion, A, B, C, and Company D was a heavy weapons company. They're still infantrymen, but they had water-cooled machine-guns and mortars. These were heavier weapons to carry than a rifle company had. In a rifle company, probably the heaviest weapon they had was a BAR, the Browning Automatic Rifle, usually assigned to some big, tall guy who could carry it, but the others were heavy weapons. Then, along with those four companies, there was a Battalion Headquarters Company, which consisted of four sections. There was an intelligence section, only a few men, that was supposed to be gathering information about the enemy. There was the communications, they handled the radio and ... telephone, so that the commander, the battalion commander, could call, talk to company commanders, and then, there was an antitank platoon. They had three groups of men, each with an antitank gun, fifty-seven-millimeter, and their job was just what the name implies. They set up positions with their guns. The fourth was the ammunition and pioneer platoon, and that's what I was in, and it was really like a junior combat engineer battalion had been. So, we were doing something of the same things there. So, we weren't frontline infantrymen. We were right behind them, most of the time. We were still subject to all kinds of enemy fire, mortar fire, cannon fire, small arms fire. You know, many times, I heard bullets whistling right past my head, but we operated in that kind of company. Later on, some of our guys were in heavy combat; when the Battle of the Bulge came along, we were very defensive, firing all kinds of weapons, acting strictly as infantrymen.

SI: What do you remember about your first few days in combat?

GF: Well, I don't know, we ... were sort of going from town to town. Because we were slightly behind the lines, we sometimes got to sleep in a Frenchman's house at night and we also spent time in foxholes. ... We were in the woods most of the time. Our outfit, in general, was going from one town to another, but we started going from one hill to another. It seemed to me we were always going up a hill, because it was a mountainous region. It was the Vosges Mountains of Alsace-Lorraine, and so, we were out in the woods, heavily wooded hills, with valleys, little villages in them, and you had to take each village, clean out the village, and then, we could come along and spend a night in the village, sometimes. We had a truck; our platoon had a truck. The antitank people had three trucks. They had one for each gun. They towed the guns behind the trucks until they got to a position where they had to set it up. We drove in our truck with picks and shovels, in case we needed them, and we did, at times. ... They carried our bags with them. When we had to go out and work, do something, we did it without carrying packs. We had bedrolls instead and, usually, at night, we're right out in the woods someplace. The truck would come up in the dark, dump all the bedrolls, which is usually two blankets and a shelter half, on the ground and you groped around until you found one. It didn't matter whose it was, just any bedroll, and you just slept. If it was quiet enough, you slept right on the ground and, if it was under fire, you slept in foxholes, and we were under fire a lot. Germans always seemed to know where we were and they had ... the best gun in the world, at that time, the eighty-eight millimeter. They used it on their tanks and they used it as an artillery piece. That's what ... eventually got me, but, yes, I remember, one time, we had these bedrolls. I usually bedded down with one guy named Doc Robinson. There was another guy named Doc Emerson, but Doc and I

would usually get together in a bedroll and, one time, it was so dark in that woods, you couldn't see your hand right here. There was no moon or anything. It was really pitch-black. We were just groping around and talking quietly, because we didn't want sound to carry to the enemy, and we had been told that somewhere nearby were some bedrolls. So, we walked around until we started tripping on them, because you couldn't see the ground. I pick one up and say, "Hey, Doc, I got one." We went over by a tree and laid down. It snowed a little on us that night. We'd usually take off our boots, take off our jackets, throw our jackets on top of us, field jackets. We tried crawling into this bedroll. Actually, it turned out to be a one-piece thing of some kind. We didn't know what it was. We squeezed ourselves in there and we couldn't get all the way in. I found a piece of canvas; I put my head on it. During the night, I would wake up. My feet were wedged against his and against the side of this thing, so, my toes were curled. After they started to ache, I would say, "Doc, we've got to shift," and he said, "Okay, one, two, three, shift," and we'd turn to the other side, get a little relief. We were just jammed against each other in this thing. Well, when it came morning, we found out that this was one of these new bedrolls we'd heard about. They were sort of a dummy-shaped bedroll for one man. You got in the thing, you zipped it up and it had a hood, that I used [as a pillow], over your head. The only thing open was your face. Yes, one man, and there were two of us in there, trying to sleep all night, you know. That's one of those little interesting things that sort of stick with me. Yes, some things I remember, yes.

SI: What were the main obstacles that you would have to deal with in this period, that they would call your unit in for?

GF: Yes, I missed a lot of this thing, because I got wounded fairly early, after about six weeks in this thing. We would have different duties. Sometimes, there weren't many tanks in that area; sometimes, they would get in there. One time, a tank was riding in front of us as we were driving in the truck to a different area, and we were on the side of a road. You know how you got a big, steep hill? Sometimes, when it's coming down like this, they would cut a road out of the side, and then, the hill would continue like this. Well, they had a tank on that thing and it took up the whole width of that road and, one time, the left side, where the tank had been right on the edge, that dirt gave way, and the [tank] toppled down to a lower level, upside down. The tank commander, a sergeant, had been riding with the hatch open and he's standing up. They did this when there was no combat. He could guide things better from up there. Well, of course, the poor guy got pinned under there. His crew got out through a different hatch. They were looking [to get him out], and we got stopped and called up there with shovels and picks to see if we could help. Well, meanwhile, they got another unit with a truck with a winch and they were trying to lift it up, enough to get that man out, and they finally did, and one of his men crawled under, dragged him out, took one look at this guy he knew so well, turned away sobbing. We had gone up there to help. We'd get into things like that, from time to time.

SI: Did he survive or was he already dead?

GF: Oh, no, no. He was dead. That's why the guy left him there. He'd been crushed. Yes, we got used, after awhile, to seeing guys dead after a heavy barrage, cannon fire, something. There'd be an American soldier there, had been near us, lying dead. One time, I was in a jeep, we were behind things, the line of fire, at the front. We were moving up to do something. I was

in the back left side of the jeep, driver and the sergeant up front, another guy or two beside me in the back of the jeep. We went around a little road. ... We were on a hill like this and there was a valley here and ... the road went around the edge of the valley, like that, and right back there was a farmhouse and some guys had been in that farmhouse in the morning. ... We were heading there, but, as we made that corner and turned that corner and started down that road, we started to get fire from the farmhouse. Evidently, the Germans had moved back in and these bullets were whistling right past our heads. The driver put the thing in reverse and went back as fast as he could, and I'm leaning like this, because it was one of these roads cut like this and I'm just about missing that dirt on the side there of the road, but we had those little incidents, interesting little incidents, occurring from time to time. Yes, I was lying on the ground, behind a log, with bullets whistling past here, and mortar fire was from here to across the street. We just stayed up. We didn't even fall on the ground after awhile, but you got to know ... by the sound of the shell. If you could hear the shell whistling for quite awhile, you'd know it was going past you. If it was a short whistle, "Boom," then, you had to hit the ground fast, and that's what happened the day I was wounded.

SI: It sounds like you were under a lot of fire from long-range weapons, like artillery and mortars. Were you ever in a situation where you had to fire back?

GF: We didn't get into that much while I was there, no. I was under small arms fire, yes; we didn't have to fire back much. I avoided that, not purposely, but that was just the way we were assigned. We didn't get into that much, until the Battle of the Bulge occurred. You know, the Germans surprised us with a big, major thrust, up ... in Belgium. What isn't as well-known is that they were ready for another thrust down in our area. You had the Seventh Army down here [on the southern flank of the Allied advance], the Third Army here [in the center], the First here [on the northern flank]. The First got hit with the Battle of the Bulge. The story goes that Eisenhower [Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower] called his generals together and said, "Who can get up there?" Now, most anybody with a division wanted several days or a week to get back up there. [General George S.] Patton was the next one down and, of course, Patton was Patton. He says, "I'll be there in three days." Eisenhower said, "Go ahead," and he made it. He took his whole ... army, the Third Army, and moved it right on up into the Bulge area. Well, that meant that the Seventh Army, our army, had to spread out to cover the area that he didn't. ... Then, the Germans counterattacked with another group. They had SS troops and other troops, *Wehrmacht*, come in against us, down here. To me, it was like a pincher movement. They were up north, planned, and they were already planned to move down here, but they got stopped at the Bulge, and then, they still continued with this. This is only a few days after the Bulge, Battle of the Bulge, and, by that time, I had been wounded. [Editor's Note: Operation: *NORDWIND* began on January 1, 1945, and was officially over on January 25th.] So, I was waiting in an airfield to go back to England and I got back there. I don't know if you know the story, but the weather was very bad in December, in that Bulge area, and they couldn't get air cover, and [there was a] big overcast, for days and days. ... Finally, on Christmas Eve, the weather cleared up and that allowed us to go from an airfield, where we'd been for about two weeks, to England, but it also allowed the planes to come in from England, the bombers, the fighters to strafe, and so forth, and ... help those guys in the Bulge area. Right after that, the Germans attacked down below in what they called Operation: *NORDWIND*, for "North Wind," and that was our area. You don't hear about that. You've probably never heard of it, no

publicity. The Bulge got a lot of publicity, we didn't get anything, but it was a similar kind of attack and they pushed our guys back a couple of towns, and there was one town of Rimling, in France there, where our outfit, our battalion, put up a big, strong resistance. I had six guys, most of them from my platoon, my squad even, who went up with two light machine-guns and held a position against the enemy and, for that, they all got Silver Stars. We had a guy, the sergeant of that antitank platoon, who was all over that town with his men, couldn't use the antitank guns. He was just going with small-arms fire, rifles. He would go right up to a building and yell at the Germans to come out, and they came out and surrendered, and he went all over town, firing at them. He had his men going. They were really using small arms in fighting the enemy from building to building and he was with another sergeant, ... one of his sergeants. He heard a bullet whistle past his head and he turned to the other guy to say, "Boy, that was close," and the next one went right through his head and killed him, but, as a result of that, his actions that day, he got the Medal of Honor. [Editor's Note: Tech Sergeant Charles F. Carey, Jr., 397th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division, earned the Medal of Honor for his actions in combat in Rimling, France, on January 8 and 9, 1945. He was killed in combat on January 9th.] He was one of only three in our whole division to get the Medal of Honor, but he was in our company. So, my company saw a lot of action, but I missed most of it, yes. In a way, I wish I had been there; in another way, I'm glad I didn't. You know, I might not be here talking to you today. ... When I was wounded, I was lucky that way, too.

SI: Can you tell me about the day you were wounded? What exactly happened?

GF: Well, yes, we had been moving through the mountains. We'd spent the night in this tiny, little village and we had a CP there, the command post. The battalion commander was there. Some of us had moved up on the top of the hill. There'd been a little dirt road going up this way; the valley was here, there's a hilltop up here. ... The dirt road went up this way, and right up there, overlooking the village, was a church. The graveyard was on a forty-five degree angle, going down to the village. The road kept going that way, down to another valley and up onto another hill across there. Well, on the top of this hill, we gathered right in front of that church, maybe thirty people, that morning. We were waiting for the battalion commander. He wanted to know what was going on in the fighting in the next town, where we had some rifle troops, ... a rifle company fighting. They'd been there a couple of days. When he came, we moved out through the woods, toward that town. After awhile, I was sent back to battalion headquarters with a message and ... I was told by my platoon leader, second lieutenant, that I would meet two other men from our company on the way and I was to stop them and take them back with me. They weren't needed up there. Well, as I approached that church; I was walking through the woods. As I approached that church, I saw them. They had just come up the road. They had stopped by the church and [were] looking around, I guess trying to get their bearings, which way to go, and they saw me come through and we met on that dirt road. ... I'd just got through telling them to go back with me when we heard the first shell, and it was just a short, "Wheee, boom." We immediately dropped to the ground. Now, the road was tree covered. The trees went up over it, because it was a heavily forested area. So, every shell that came in, it was a tree burst. Now, it hit the tree branch and [would] break and send fragments all over. Well, we were right on that little dirt road. It couldn't have been much wider than this.

SI: Three or four feet?

GF: A few feet, yes, just enough for an old wagon to go up. That's all they had. They didn't drive cars there. They had wagons drawn by either horses or cows, and we dropped down there, and then, the next shell came in and the next, and I could tell, by the timing, that it was one gun firing as fast as they could reload it. So, I waited for the next shell to come in, because I had looked around. I was under my helmet, as far as I could go. I looked around and I saw this little ditch, over toward the church side of the road, and I thought, "Well, every little bit helps." So, when the next one hit ... and it exploded, I jumped up, spun around, so [that] I was facing the gun, and I dropped into that ditch. Well, it must have been the next shell or the one after that when I got hit, scratched the boot of my right leg down by the ankle and it cut my leg a little bit there and, on my right; another piece went right through the calf of my left leg, felt like somebody came up behind me, hit me with a sledgehammer. Well, after six rounds, the thing, the shelling, stopped and I yelled over to these two men. I said, "Are you all right?" and they said, "Yes." I said, "Well, I've been hit." So, by this time, we were just off the road, we got in the trees. They came back with me. ... The trees were hiding us at this point, because I could determine now that that valley I told you about, the Germans must have been on that hill across the valley. They had either moved in with a tank or an artillery piece. If they had been there earlier in the morning, they could have fired at thirty men. Now, they were firing at three. So, anyway, I got my first aid kit out and there's this fellow saying, "George, take your pills, take your pills." We had sulfa pills to take then. We had sulfa powder to put in our first aid kit, to put on the wound and wrap it up. So, they got me bandaged up and this same fellow, Bill Ostrowski, said, "George, we'll go down and get a jeep for you." I said, "Oh, Bill, we don't want a jeep up here. That's just going to attract more attention." I said, "I'm going down with you guys." So, I got ... my arm on both shoulders of both men and we started to move down the hill. Well, we were in the woods a bit, but, still, they [the Germans] must have detected our movements, because they fired in six more rounds. Nobody got hit this time, but, now, we were down below the crest of the hill, we're getting out of sight and we could continue on down, and this fellow, Bill, picked me up. He said, "George, I'm going to carry you. It's faster." He was a big, husky fellow. He threw me over his shoulder, carried me down the hill, put me in a jeep and they took me over to the CP tent and I waited there for an ambulance, but, you know, that fellow, Bill Ostrowski, went to college after the war on the GI Bill. He never got to be a private first class, because thousands of us didn't. I finally did, but not everybody could, of course. There were just only so many openings for noncoms. So, all of these ASTP guys were mostly privates first class. He went on to college, became a lawyer, then, a judge, and spent the last, I don't know how many years, of his career sitting on the Supreme Court of the State of New York.

SI: Wow.

GF: Yes, and, as a young guy, he's the guy that was with me as sort of the platoon clown, because he always liked to tell jokes and laugh at them. ... He carried me down the hill and that's what happened to him. We had another guy who became a big surgeon down in Florida, another guy became a nuclear physicist, who had been in the communication platoon, nuclear physicist down at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. We had people like that, ASTP guys, who moved on [to great success]. We had a good group of people, and it's nice to go back and see them today at these reunions, but, anyway, that's what happened to me. I got into an ambulance, finally, went to the City of Nancy, where there was a big hospital. The French had had it before the war, the

Germans used it during the war, then, we moved in and we were using it. ... We took men from all of that area that went into there for operations, and then, from there, they went to this landing strip out in the woods. I spent about two weeks out there, because the weather was so bad. This was the Battle of the Bulge time. We were on litters. Litters were set on little sawhorses off the ground, about this far, close together, in tents, on the side of an airfield. Once planes came in, the planes, these C-47s, would come in carrying supplies, then, they would load up. They had these straps that could come down and hold litters, about three or four high, and a nurse would come in on each plane. They had a pilot and a co-pilot and a nurse. We had one navigator for three planes. The other two followed the first guy, first plane. We were going to go back to England. They sat there for all this time, because the weather was so bad. They couldn't take off with one navigator and have the other two planes follow; they'd lose sight of them. So, we had to wait until the weather cleared, and that didn't happen until ... December 24th, the day before Christmas. So, I spent Christmas Eve in a hospital somewhere in England. I don't know exactly where, north of London, I was told. At that point, I got to shave. I had this great, big beard by then. [laughter] Anyway, ... the pilots and the nurses would come in and talk to us from time to time, trying to keep us cheerful. One time, they loaded us in the plane, we took off, circled the field, came back. The weather had opened up a little bit, then, it closed in. So, we finally got out on the 24th. We just stayed there about a day, ... and then, we got on a train and moved up to an area in the woods outside of ... Birkenhead, England, which is right across a river from Liverpool, and they had set up this nice Army hospital, a bunch of new buildings, one-story buildings. Each of them was a ward, covered and connected with a sidewalk, with a roof over it, and that's where I spent several months.

SI: How long did it take for you to recover from your wounds? How did your wounds affect your mobility at the time?

GF: Well, first of all, we thought it was quite an honor that the Germans would waste twelve expensive shells on three men. [laughter] ... Yes, my wounds, I had something about the size of a quarter, a hole, right through the calf of my leg. Fortunately, it didn't hit the bone. Now, I don't know, I'm not big, and how I could get a hole that size through there without hitting one of the bones, I don't know, but it happened that way. So, I was very fortunate, really, but, of course, it cut the muscle and it took a long time to heal that. ... All told, I was away from my outfit five months, but I spent a couple of months in that hospital, two to three. ... After two-and-a-half months, I was shipped to a rehabilitation place outside of Leamington Spa in England, and that was an interesting time. By now, I could walk around. In the hospital, I couldn't walk at first. I eventually got some crutches, so that I could stand. I knew that if I could just keep working; some doctor was trying to push my legs straight one time and I was resisting, because the muscles were still growing together and tight and I couldn't straighten out my leg, but I knew that if I could get up on crutches, eventually, and let the leg hang, eventually, it was going to get straightened out and I could walk, and that's what happened. ... I got a whirlpool bath and that kind of treatment there, and then, we went to this rehabilitation center, but, by that time, I was walking normally and we just did some normal duty. It was interesting, though. There was a Red Cross place there that you could go to and sit there and read during off time. They just kept us training, but I think it was this way; most of us there had been wounded and we had been with an outfit and, by that time, we had a liking for that outfit and the people we were with. So, in a way, we wanted to go back and join them, but, at the same time, we knew they were still deeply

involved in combat, and I think the worst part of combat was, in our case, especially, we were behind the lines a lot, when we had to go up to the lines, where the bullets were going around your head, and so forth. Just the thought of going back up was scary, more scary than when you got up there, because, when you got up there, you were in a certain frame of mind. You just kept down low, and so forth. The thought of going back was scarier, I thought. ... So, here were these fellows in this rehabilitation center, thinking, on one hand, they wanted to go back and be with their friends and help, doing what they were doing before; on the other hand, there was this trepidation, and I think they [the rehabilitation] were trying to overcome that by making it as unpleasant as they could there, so that you would choose to go back. You'd be happier going back than you would be staying there, but there was this Red Cross building where you could go and get away from it all. The Red Cross girls had activities going on for you, as well as making doughnuts, and one thing I liked about it was, on the weekend, say a Saturday, they might take a bunch of guys out for a bike ride. They had a bunch of bikes and one girl would go along with us. So, we could drive through this beautiful countryside with these tall hedgerows along these country lanes and we could go to places like Kenilworth, where there were the ruins of an old castle. We could go to Warwick, there's a castle there, but it was used by the War Office, but they would take us there. We could sit down in a nice, little tea shop and have tea. It was sort of pleasant on those weekends. Country rides on the bike, I liked. So, we were there for a few months; not a few months, I guess few weeks. I must have been there for four weeks or so. Then, I was ready to go back to my outfit. They gave us a seven-day delay en route, which means we have seven days to do whatever we wanted around England, and then, we had to report to a particular city, to a shipyard, where we'd get onboard a boat that would take us over to France. So, I had already been able to go over to visit Oxford for a day. So, I went to London for three days, sightseeing there, went up to Cambridge for a day, and another place we were close to, which we got to once in awhile, by bike or by bus, was Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's hometown, and there was a theater there that was putting on productions. This is wartime, but they still put on these productions of Shakespeare's plays. So, I went back there for the last couple of days of my pass and saw three plays. I also got to go out in a little rowboat, that I could rent, on the Avon River there. Then, I went down and reported to a ship, got onboard the ship. We sailed out at nighttime, went across the [English] Channel to France. We got off at France. By this time, you know, ... by now, it's April of the next year, that's right, and we had to cross France. Well, our troops had been fighting in Germany by this time. My outfit had been in there. They'd crossed the Neckar River and had taken a town, [Heilbronn, Germany]. It was slow moving. We were a troop train and we had to give way to other trains with ammunition, supplies, and so forth, and we just sort of poked across the country, and we were doing it in these same cars they had during World War I. They were called forty-and-eights. They were baggage cars, but they could carry forty men or eight horses. Well, forty men jammed in there, I'll tell you, was no pleasant trip. They had a little straw, I guess, on the floor and they would stop off, and so, we could get out ... and stretch, but sleeping at night was a problem. You'd lie down with your head against the wall, but some guy that was across [from] you had his head against the wall and there wasn't room enough for all these legs. So, you would start off all right and be quite comfortable, but, after awhile, you'd wake up with this awful leg ache and you'd realize that the four guys had their legs on top of yours. So, you would struggle to pull your legs out and pile them on top of the other legs and go back to sleep again, and then, your legs would work their way down the pile. We eventually got there. We stopped and ... we were in a camp of buildings on the edge a farmer's field, way out in the middle of nowhere in

France, just below Luxemburg. Nearby was the Maginot Line. So, we got to go down into the Maginot Line. You've heard about that, of course. That was interesting, to get down in there. It was like a hotel down there, different levels, different rooms, and, of course, this train ran through on the lower level, went the whole length of the Maginot Line, which went from these other countries, like Luxemburg and Belgium, on down to Switzerland. You know, you asked about the town of Bitche. ... I was wounded on the movement to Bitche. I was only a few kilometers away, and we put up a big fight there to take that fortress, which was a tremendous thing. It had walls, some of them as thick as this room, and, as I understand it, P-47s had dropped bombs on the top of this thing and they just bounced off. It was tough, but, then, they had ... incorporated this in the Maginot Line, this old fortress. Nobody had ever taken that fortress in the hundreds of years it'd been there, but, all around it, they built these new little forts, you know, the kind of things where they had gun emplacements built into the earth, facing in all directions. Generally, the Maginot Line had been built with the guns facing Germany. All the Germans had to do was go around behind. There were no guns facing the other way, but, then, they had machine-guns that would pop up out of the ground, in these little things they could turn around. Anyway, I get the story, because I wasn't there, but our guys managed to get into these fortresses, and then, work their way into the main fort, and then, take that fort, and they were so enthused about that, I guess, after the war, but, during the war, they created this Society of the Sons of Bitche. Of course, the Americans pronounced it a little differently. It's spelled like B-I-T-C-H-E, and it was pronounced "Beach," over there, but we didn't pronounce it that way. So, anybody who was involved in the fight toward that ... became a member of that society, and I've got a card that says I'm a member.

SI: Where was the unit when you rejoined it?

GF: Where was the unit when I rejoined it? Somewhere in Southern Germany, around Ulm, U-L-M, or in the little towns around there, and then, I was in that train moving away from that camp, going into Germany. I was around Worms, Germany, when we got the word that the war had ended and the Germans had surrendered, and then, I got to go back to my outfit by truck from there, and that's where I joined them. ... We moved to some other locations, some other towns, as they started to divide up the land for occupation, between the British and the French and the Russians and the Americans. ... An interesting thing in there was, in one town, where we were situated for just a short time, we were taking over land occupied by the French. Well, of course, the French and the Germans didn't have a great love for each other at any time, and especially right after this war, where France had been occupied by the Germans, and this German family came to our unit seeking protection. They lived on a farm out by themselves, outside of this town, and they were looking for protection from the French. So, I was assigned to go out there, with this man who was in my squad. I acted as a squad leader from time to time. I was sent out there with him to protect the Germans, our enemies, from our allies, the French, because all they could envision was drunken Frenchmen coming up there and shooting them and stealing their car and other things. They pushed the car way down into the woods. They showed us where it was. They had dogs. They said, "If the dogs bark, that's all you need to know. You can get up and help us." They gave us the best bedroom in the house. They tried to serve us food, but we had food coming in every day, and we were only there for a day or so, but the thing was, because we were now moving into the Army of Occupation and the Army was trying to control things, they collected all of our ammunition. So, they quickly sent us out here without any

supplies. I had a carbine; so did the other fellow. We didn't have one bullet between us to protect us [or] these people from the drunken Frenchmen. [laughter] Fortunately, the Frenchmen never showed up. If they had, we would just have confronted them, let them know, "We're the Americans. We're here, we're in charge, good-bye." That's what we would have done. We certainly didn't want to shoot them, and we couldn't have if we wanted to, but they were probably still armed. Anyway, that was an interesting thing to me. That man I was with could speak a little German, from his knowledge of Yiddish, and he was the guy who became a surgeon down at Tampa, Florida, after the war, and he still comes to the reunion. In fact, he was president of the reunion at one time. ... Out of our company, we've had three men who were president of this association [the 100th Infantry Division Association]. Every year, we get a new president. ...

SI: Do you want to take a quick break?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Go ahead.

GF: All right. So, after the war, now, we're moving into this Army of Occupation. We split up the areas between the different countries and we were in Southern Germany, the Bavaria area. We were located in a town outside of Stuttgart, Leonberg, and we operated from there. While we were there, we got word that our division was going to go to Japan. So, at this time, they finally decided to start filling up the positions in the Army. They had people like me who were private first class acting as squad leaders. So, they decided now to promote us. So, some people got promoted before me. ... Because I had shared this job with another man, all the time I had been away, there'd been another man acting as squad leader. So, they had to choose between one or the other, and so, we were a little late, they promoted some guys one month, but skipped us, and, finally, the next month, I was told that I was going to be the squad leader. They were trying to get ... all the positions filled properly. I was going to be the squad leader, because I could get more out of the men than the other guy could, and so, I was promoted to corporal and told that the next month I would become a sergeant, because that's what a squad leader is supposed to be. However, during that month, we dropped two atom bombs on Japan. Now, there was no need for us to go to Japan anymore, because Japan surrendered, and promotions stopped. ... From that point on, it was just a matter of when we would go home, but we were still in the Army of Occupation. We got points assigned to us, depending on the length of service and awards, and so forth, and those with the most points would go home first, and then, we were assigned, a unit was assigned, a certain point range. In our unit, I just missed out, by one or two points, going with my unit to go home. So, I was assigned, like a lot of other people were, to other units with different point categories, but, while I was still with my outfit, we patrolled the roads of the towns around us. I would go out, as a squad leader, ... with a jeep with a driver and two other men and cover a certain area, and we did that a couple of times a day and at night. Generally, it was quiet. The Germans knew we were still around, because they saw us every day. They had rules they had to follow. They had a curfew at night; they had to be home before a certain time. Well, one time, I wasn't on patrol, another man was in charge of the patrol and, when he was out there, he saw a motorcycle coming toward him, and it was after curfew time. They stopped the jeep, they got out. They had rifles. We were armed at this point. They told this man, they signaled to this driver, to stop. He swerved around them. One man took aim, and it turned out

there were two men on the motorcycle. Our man took quick aim at the man and fired. The bullet hit the back guy and killed him and it turned out, right at that point, the driver was trying to turn into a farmhouse driveway. He probably thought [that] if he could get there, he'd be all right. Anyway, we had incidents like that occur. This man was killed. I have a strong feeling that we covered some of the expenses, the United States Army, for, maybe, his burial, because, right after that, when it was my patrol, I had to stop at the town nearby where this happened and go to the mayor's office and get some papers. I did that. I parked the car in the town square, one of those little town squares with a fountain in front of it, and the mayor had an office in the building. There were buildings all around, but his office faced the town square. I took another man with me and we walked up the big steps and we met in the hallway. The mayor came out of his office, a secretary came out of her office. She had a bunch of papers. ... They couldn't speak English, I couldn't speak German, so, we just sort of nodded at each other. I took the papers and left, short conversation. That was my feeling, that we did that. After that, I went to, actually, a camp. I changed outfits. ... The outfit I went to, on the point count, was guarding this prisoner of war camp. Remember, I mentioned I met that lieutenant, and it was a barbed-wire fence around a bunch of *Hogan's Heroes* types of barracks and, every day, we would go in and count the men in there, to make sure that ... they had the same count, and then, we had these towers around the place. Up on each tower, a wooden tower, they were a five-sided thing, you could throw open a big hook and two sides would fly out like this, and there was a machine-gun, a light machine-gun there, and you had a 180-degree field of fire along the barbed-wire fence. It was a double barbed-wire fence. Across the little road from there, there were some brick buildings. We slept in one, two others were fenced in, and this is where they had women in camp, in prison. I think it was the only prison camp for women that we had, that the Americans had, and there, you had an open platform to be on, no roof over your head. It was the same kind of a platform, but it was open, and you had a Thompson submachine-gun, ... because they had no other light machine-guns set up there. So, I was on duty. When we went into this thing, we had people of all ranks and from all outfits. It was done on a point basis, so, there were all kinds of people mixing together and, when you were new, you served as a private of the guard, even if you were a staff sergeant. I was only a corporal, I never got beyond that, as I told you, but, after awhile, I served in the towers first and on that platform one night, and then, I got to be corporal of the guard. Now, I could be in that little guardhouse and I could make a patrol, once in awhile, from one tower to the next, to make sure the guys were still awake and everything was all right. Now, our guys were casual, you know, but the people who were going to relieve us, as we came near the end of our time, were Serbians and they were full-time Army guys. They were rigidly disciplined. They had a first sergeant; they saluted him. We, of course, would not salute a sergeant, but, when I made my patrol around ... then, at night, with Americans, ... I mean, I'd shout up, "Everything all right?" "Yes, fine." When the Serbs took over the towers and I was still the corporal of the guard, as I approached each tower, as I left one tower, the light, the searchlight from the next tower, would come on me and follow me all the way to that tower, and then, I knew the guy was awake. [laughter] So, then, I would go to the next tower, and I got the same searchlight treatment, all around the camp. They were alert, very alert, all the time. Our guys, I would say, were alert but casual, you know, and I can tell you about that story, too, in a minute. Then, ... the last night I was there, I got to be sergeant of the guard at the women's camp and, while I was sergeant of the guard, sitting at a desk in this place, sitting across from me, watching everything I did, was this [Serbian] sergeant. He had all the stripes he could possibly get, like a master sergeant in our outfit, big, burly guy, stern, never saw a smile on his

face, but very alert, very intent, watching me. Well, of course, I had a little problem. We would go into this ladies' camp twice a day. We would count all the women. They would assemble in a hallway, and it was an open hallway, like this, went around here, rooms all around. It's quite a lot like that quadrangle at the Citadel, except it was all enclosed. I would have men counting, the ladies would count, and there was one person in charge of each room. She would give a count on a piece of paper. Our man would take the piece of paper, he would count, to make sure his count matched that count. Then, he would give all the pieces of paper [to me]. I would go back and I would put them all together, add them all up. Well, I added and added and added and I was always one short. So, I called the officer of the day and the company commander got on the line. He said, "Sergeant, get them all out for another count," and the two officers came over to observe while we counted. They weren't experienced in this counting. They didn't know [what] it was all about, but they were going to observe; they were responsible. I called up the woman; we had a German woman in charge inside. She had a room of her own. She was connected to us by telephone. I called her up and told her to get the people out for another count. Well, she started to protest. I said, "Get them out," and we went over and we counted again. ... This time, I looked carefully. I noticed, when I was checking, in the one room, the woman who was taking the count was newly assigned and ... she counted all the people in there, but she did not include herself, and that's where the shortage occurred. So, anyway, that was my last day on duty there. Another sergeant, a Serbian guy, took over after that and we Americans moved out. Now, it was an interesting town to be in. It was right outside of Ludwigsburg and there was a big palace in town and we got to go to that while we were there, but, from there, I went on up to Antwerp, waited around for awhile, playing pinochle with a bunch of guys, killing time in tents until we finally got onboard ship and came home. Now, I talked about the casualness. I'm going to cover one thing here to get over about our guys, but there was a man whose father was in our outfit. He was a medic in our outfit, and this man [the son] went to West Point and became, later, an instructor at West Point and spent his last time on duty, before he retired, at Fort Monroe, right down the road from here. He wrote a book. He was a lieutenant colonel at that point. He wrote a book, and I think that it was an enlargement of his doctoral thesis, and he wrote it and he called it *When the Odds Were Even: [The Vosges Mountain Campaign, October 1944-January 1945]* by Keith Bonn]. ... It was about our fighting, in the early days, in the Vosges Mountains of Alsace-Lorraine, and, here, we could use no tanks. The Germans, as you probably know, had a much better tank than we did, but we didn't have tank against tank. We had infantryman against infantryman, and we were winning, and his point was that, in such a situation, when the odds were even, the American soldier could win because the American soldier ... did not have to follow a strict regimen of what he did, [as opposed] to what the Germans did. The American soldier could think for himself, every man could. Whatever position he was in, he could think about where he wanted to go from there, stay undercover, to accomplish the task he had to do. ... Because of that, even though he wasn't as rigidly trained and he didn't act as rigidly trained, he was more casual whenever he could be casual, he could still win, because, when it came to the fighting, he knew what to do and he could do it. Now, that's a side point. We got to the point where I got home. I went back there; I had a few months off. I got back in March. I had finished a year-and-a-half at Rutgers. I'd had some credits, I guess, built up that helped me, because I wasn't a great scholar. At the Citadel, I became much more of a scholar. I couldn't do anything but study. At night, we were in our rooms. We couldn't go from room to room, we couldn't have big bull sessions anywhere, except during that afternoon period. At night, we had to study. So, we studied and I learned more about how to study at that point, and, of course, I

was repeating a lot of stuff. So, I did quite well at the Citadel. Anyway, I went back to Rutgers. I had two-and-a-half years to go, but I went in summer school. I started that first year in summertime, and I could take only so many courses. I couldn't take, really, engineering courses. I had to take other courses and use them as electives, but I did that for two summers in a row, so that, in two years and two summers, including the two summers, I finished. So, I went back in '46, started in the Summer of '46, and I finished in the Spring of '48. So, I then became the Class of '48, instead of the Class of '45. So, that's when I finished Rutgers.

SI: Were you able to get a job right away? I understand it was difficult to get a job in 1948 and 1949.

GF: Well, it wasn't that difficult. People came to the campus for interviews. They were looking for people. Yes, there were a lot of people going to work, but it was hard to get a telephone line, for instance. It was hard to buy a car when you first got back, because the car manufacturers were making tanks, but they finally got back into production, and, eventually, they got caught up. So, we had times like that. Housing was a problem, too, for you had all these men coming back from the Army, many of them getting married, wanting to live someplace, yes, but I went to college instead of looking for a house. My parents still lived in the Atlantic City area, and so, I went back, lived with them, went to college, lived at college, lived in the Deke House at college. ... When we were about to be graduated, in the last semester of our senior year, we had people coming to college, companies sending men to interview and, if we were at all interested, we had a list of who was coming, what companies they represented. If we were at all interested, we could sign up and get an interview, and so, I was interviewed by the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company, which sounded interesting to me. At the time, I was really thinking about sales engineering, but, at this point, I was so, well, I say introverted, that I didn't think sales was a proper thing for me. So, I went to work for the telephone company. They offered me a job and I took it, New Jersey Bell Telephone Company. I went to work in Northern New Jersey, out of the Orange office, Orange, next to Newark, and I worked for them for a couple of years, before I finally switched over to a division of General Motors where I could get some training for sales work, sales engineering, which I thought I would like. ... I spent the rest of my time in sales engineering and I moved from General Motors to the heating, ventilation and air conditioning industry, which I found very interesting. ... It was varied. I wasn't working at a drawing board all the time, but ... I did do some drawing. I could go to a company that's interested in air conditioning, because, at that time, not every building was, and I could survey their building, measure it, and so forth, go back and draw up some preliminary plans and put together a proposal. I'd gather some prices, I would size the equipment, gather some prices for the equipment, and the piping and ductwork, and so forth, and present a proposal to them, and they got other proposals the same way. Later, it changed. More people, more engineers, got involved in doing just design work, so that we had engineering companies who worked for the architect who was designing a building and they would do the engineering for the "mechanical work," as they called it, heating, air conditioning, plumbing, and so forth. ... Then, those of us in the contracting business had to bid on what we thought a plan-and-spec job [might cost], several of us all bidding on exactly the same plans and specs, and, of course, it was almost always the low bidder [who] got the job. [laughter] So, the fun was gone and, actually, it was still interesting, but it was tougher to get a job that way, because you had to be low. ... People who hadn't bid for awhile, who hadn't had a job for awhile, were trying to keep their good men, and so, they would

bid low, right at their cost at times, in order to get the job and keep their company going and their men employed, but it was still a varied kind of work. I dealt with engineers and, sometimes, the owners and presidents of companies, and it was just interesting work for me. So, that's how I spent my life, ... as a sales engineer.

SI: I know you have to go.

GF: Yes.

SI: Do you want to say anything else, anything about your family, perhaps?

GF: Well, I met a girl. [laughter] Yes, after I got home ... from the war, in '46, I was waiting to go back to Rutgers. My younger sister was being graduated that year. She had been with a roommate that she had met her freshman year. She'd been assigned that way, and it had been a good assignment. They got along very well together, and that roommate was Lois Jackson and, as she was being graduated, she asked me to go to the senior prom with her, her senior prom with her. I was home by that time, from the college. We had had a few dates my sophomore year, when she was a freshman, but she also dated other guys and she started going with a guy who left college to become a Marine lieutenant, and so, we weren't going together at all at that point. After I went with her to her senior prom, we started going steady and we did that throughout my college [career], the rest of my college time and the first year or so that I was working, and then, we got married, my sister's roommate. In turn, my sister married my roommate. So, we just swapped roommates.

SI: Who was your roommate?

GF: My roommate was Cliff Kingston. He was a Deke with me, and he'd been in the Navy and he hadn't gone to Rutgers before. He started Rutgers after he'd served in the Navy, on the GI Bill, the way many other guys did. Guys who couldn't go to college beforehand suddenly had the chance to go, after they'd served, because of the GI Bill.

SI: Actually, I interviewed Mr. Kingston.

GF: Mr. Cliff Kingston, you did?

SI: Yes, about five years ago.

GF: I'll be darned.

SI: His brother, David, was also interviewed by the program. I did not do that interview.

GF: Oh, that's right, yes, a fraternity brother of mine. They're both in the same fraternity. Also, Jack Hurlbert, did you interview him?

SI: Yes, I interviewed him.

GF: Yes. Well, Jack and Dave were roommates in the Deke House, yes.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add?

GF: No, I don't think so.

SI: All right. I appreciate you giving me so much of your time. I know you have a busy day today. Thank you very much.

GF: Right.

SI: Thank you very much.

GF: Oh, you're welcome indeed.

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

Reviewed by Steven Park 11/25/09
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/7/09
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 12/12/09
Reviewed by George S. Fiske 1/3/10