RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM S. GILLAM

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

G. KURT PIEHLER
AND
ROBERT COLANDRO

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TRANSCRIPT BY

ROBERT COLANDRO
AND
ANDREW NOYES
AND
G. KURT PIEHLER

Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. William S. Gillam on April 3, 1995 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

Robert Colandro: Robert Colandro.

Kurt Piehler: I guess I would like to begin by asking about your father who was a Quaker. Was he a practicing Quaker?

William S. Gillam: No.

KP: No.

WG: His mother was Catholic, and he was brought up and went to Quaker meeting and went to Mass in the Catholic Church. ... What he was in the end, I couldn't tell you. My mother was a Presbyterian. I was brought up as a Presbyterian and still a dues paying member of the Presbyterian Church.

KP: You said your father, growing up, attended Quaker meeting, but he did not attend Quaker meeting when you were growing up?

WG: No.

KP: One of the central tenets of Quakerism is non-violence and passivism. How did your father feel about war?

WG: I don't remember anything to lead me to believe that he felt any different than the fathers of many of my friends. He never, to my recollection, expressed any more aversion to the war than others felt.

KP: Your father did not serve in the First World War. Was he exempted from the draft?

WG: I really don't know. ... He was born in 1886. He was more than 30. But he wasn't married until 1918, so I really don't know.

KP: You don't know what the story was with him. Your father had a remarkably long employment record.

WG: He started when he was fifteen years old. He lived in Mount Holly at that time and took the Pennsylvania Railroad to Camden and the ferry across to Philadelphia.

KP: And he worked for Penn Mutual all his ...

WG: All his life, yes. All his working life. Which was almost 50 years, but not quite.

KP: And what types of positions did he have with the company? What did he start out at fifteen and what did he retire as?

WG: Well, I assume when he started he was a office boy. I don't know ... what he made. And ended up, he was assistant manager of mortgage loans. So he really wasn't in the insurance business at all. He was in the real estate business. And, of course, his most important functions were during the Depression when the Penn Mutual took over ownership of a lot of properties. And they had to manage the properties. I'm talking about hotels and apartment houses and things. Not so much residences as far ... as I recall, at least that he had anything to do with.

KP: So your father had to travel quite a bit?

WG: He traveled quite a bit, yes.

KP: In the Northeast or all over the country?

WG: Well, in the Northeast, really.

KP: You mention that your father had to travel and the real estate end became more important in the Great Depression. How did the Great Depression affect your family? Did your father stay employed throughout the Depression?

WG: Oh yes. And he had ... to take a cut in salary, but he was still well off, considering, under the circumstances. He was able ... to put me and my two brothers and sister through college starting in 1936. And, you know, my recollection is that there were lots and lots of people that wanted work of any kind and so, if you needed something done, you could get it done cheaply and easily.

KP: Your mother went to college.

WG: Yes. And, you know, interestingly, Swarthmore is a Quaker college. But she was Presbyterian; my grandfather was an elder in the Presbyterian Church, and I don't know how she happened to go to Swarthmore as opposed to the University of Pennsylvania.

KP: Women did go to college in your mother's generation, but it was still not the norm when your mother went to college. Do you know why she went to college? Did she have any career aspirations?

WG: I don't know of any. I really don't know.

KP: How did your parents meet?

WG: I really don't know that! I know he met her while she was still at Swarthmore and visited her out there. And then they were married shortly after she graduated.

KP: Your father did very well in business with only some high school. Did he have any regrets that he was unable to go to college?

WG: Oh, I'm sure he did, but he never, never expressed it. He did--I guess I didn't have this in ... [the pre-interview survey]--he did take some evening courses at University of Pennsylvania. That was before he was married, and I don't know exactly how much he did. [laughter] [What] I do know is that for years after I spent a year at the University of Pennsylvania, I got nothing from them, and he continued to get material from the Pennsylvania Alumni Association.

RC: You grew up in Merchantville. Is there any particular memories of the town that strike you?

WG: Well, as you know, I now live in Metuchen. And one of the reasons I picked Metuchen to live in is because it's very similar to Merchantville. Metuchen is completely surrounded by Edison Township, which was mostly rural when I started living there. Merchantville was surrounded by Pennsauken and Delaware Township, which is now Cherry Hill, which was mostly rural at that time. ... So the town was small. Both towns were well built-up. Both towns have very little industrial or commercial activity at all. So they're very similar towns.

Now, that leads us into my uncle. I don't remember what I put down there, but Lawrence Gillam was Class of '15 at Rutgers and, at the time that I chose to live in the Metuchen area, he lived in the Metuchen area. And he lived there for a long time. He was at one time, I think it was 1940, he was the President of the Rutgers Alumni Association. And the fact that he had gone to Rutgers was a very important factor in my deciding to go to Rutgers. And he was also a member of the Zeta Psi fraternity, which led me to that. Whether you want to get into fraternities, but I gather that fraternities are not in very much favor here at Rutgers today. And I don't think they have ... any real place at a University like Rutgers.

KP: But fraternities were very important for you. I notice in your account that the fraternity tie, especially in the service, you were able to meet a lot of people that way and get support and to help others in turn.

WG: Well, even ... then in 1936 to '40, [in] the Rutgers student body, there were a large number of commuters you really didn't get to know, so that your friends in the fraternity and other fraternities were those that you knew.

KP: You mention that you grew up in a small town. What did most people do?

WG: Most people--I don't know about most--but a lot of people commuted to Philadelphia. I mean, Merchantville is closer to the center of Philadelphia than many parts of Philadelphia itself. And the transportation ... was good. There were trains that you took from Merchantville into Camden, then you took the ferry, and then you either walked or some other means of transportation.

KP: So most were like your father, they were professionals working, doing office work in Philadelphia.

WG: A lot, yes. I mean, there were a lot of them that worked in Camden, too. Camden at that time was the home of Campbell's Soup, the home of RCA Victor, and it was a good city.

KP: Growing up, did you spend a lot of time in Camden and Philadelphia?

WG: No, not really, being so close. I mean the fact that we were in another state, of course, Camden was close by but, no, I didn't spend much time there.

KP: Growing up did you have any part-time jobs in high school?

WG: Only selling the Saturday Evening Post, Ladies Home Journal and Country Gentlemen, which were publications of the Curtis Publishing Company. That's the only part-time job.

KP: It sounds like your parents had an expectation that you and your brothers would go to college. Was this the case?

WG: Yes, yes. And I suppose my mother's influence was, although I'm sure my father wanted that to be the case. Now, Larry Gillam, Class of '15, was my father's younger brother, and my father helped financially put him through Rutgers.

KP: So your father was very close to your uncle, to his younger brother, it sounds.

WG: Well, there are two other uncles. One lived in Burlington, and one lived in Mount Holly and they were all close. And I was close to them, too.

KP: What did your uncle do for a living?

WG: Which one?

KP: The one that went to Rutgers. The Class of 1915.

WG: He worked for the Metropolitan Life. ... And he was in the mortgage loan department, too. I assume that when he graduated from Rutgers, my father's influence led him to that. He had gone to Rutgers as a member of the College of Agriculture which at that time, the tuition was less than for Rutgers College or the College of Engineering. And he was interested in farm mortgages at the Metropolitan.

KP: What do you remember about the schools in Merchantville? How good were your teachers? How well did they prepare you for Rutgers?

WG: It seemed to me you have no basis for a comparison, really. It seemed to me it was good. I mean, there were some teachers that were not so good, and some teachers were the better, and you could distinguish between them, but as far as comparison with anyplace else, I know not.

KP: What expectations did they have for their students in terms of how many did they expect to go on to college from your high school?

WG: Well, I don't remember the exact numbers. I would, you know, say more than half. I mean there were three courses of study at the high school. One was college preparatory. One was general, and third was commercial. And I think about a half would have been college preparatory. And, you know, some of them were able to go to college, commuting into Philadelphia to the University of Pennsylvania or Temple, Drexel, so forth.

RC: You went to high school from 1932 to 1936. Were you worried that when you went on to college and possibly afterwards with the Depression that you might have a tough time finding a job?

WG: Oh, yes. ... I think, I mentioned in there that [at the] Plattsburg Barracks, there were others that talked about it, and we observed that the life of army enlisted men, at that time, it seemed like a pretty good life to us. [laughter]

RC: Did you have any idea of what you wanted to do while you were in high school, of what you wanted to study in college? Did you know early on?

WG: Well, if it had been up to me, I think I would have majored in mathematics. But my father said, in effect, "You get a degree in mathematics, what can you do?" What you can do is teach it. And no, I had no inclination to ... be a teacher. So I majored in business administration and took more math courses than most business ad. majors.

KP: Had you thought of going to anywhere else besides Rutgers?

WG: Well, yeah. Swarthmore. I'll tell you about that too. Went out to Swarthmore and talked to the dean and [he] was told that I was the President of the Student Council. And he says, "Oh, a lot of people come here President of the Student Council." Came up here and talked to Dean Metzger and he seemed impressed by the fact that I was the President of the Student Council. That had a lot to do with it.

KP: So you did not get as much of a welcome at Swarthmore?

WG: No.

KP: But it sounds like your mother would have liked you to go there?

WG: Oh, I'm sure she would of, yes.

KP: Your mother, did she work outside of the household at all?

WG: No.

KP: Was she active in any organizations, volunteer organizations? The Red Cross or any church organizations?

WG: ... Not very much. I mean, you know, I was born a year after they were married and my brothers a couple of years later and so forth. So she devoted herself to the family. With the Depression ... she always had, as long as I can remember, domestic help of one kind or another. ... But still, I mean she had her hands full.

KP: When you say she had domestic help, would your help live in or would it just be on a daily basis?

WG: No, just on a daily basis.

KP: And to help out cooking or cleaning?

WG: Yes. ... I mean really, those two things, cooking and cleaning. As long as I can remember, we had someone come in daily to do cooking, and, if they did cleaning, I really wasn't much aware of it.

KP: Was your help black or were they white?

WG: Mostly black. Merchantville had two black communities. Neither of them was in Merchantville. I mean, one edge of town was in Pennsauken Township and another was in Delaware Township.

KP: But they worked in the various homes of people. So your mother was not unique in having help? Did a lot of your friends have help work in them?

WG: No. I mean, you know, Merchantville was really a pretty affluent town. Not as affluent as Haddonfield and Moorestown, but, still, there were few poor people in Merchantville.

KP: So it sounds like in growing up in the Depression that the Depression, you were aware of it, but it was not at your doorstep, it was a little bit distant.

WG: That's correct.

KP: The Depression really affected Camden and Philadelphia and other places.

WG: ... That's correct.

KP: Had you traveled much before coming to college or during college?

WG: Yes, I don't know about much. Every summer for a number of years, we traveled by car--New England, New York State and Pennsylvania. Not further than that. And stayed at tourists

homes. In those areas, you could stay at tourist homes for a dollar a person a night, and they were nice places.

KP: So you have very fond memories of family vacations where you would drive in the summer.

WG: Well, yes. [laughter] When you look back on it, at the time, we, my brothers and sister and I, ... we weren't very enthusiastic about it. [laughter] ... Spent a lot of time riding in a car.

KP: When you came to Rutgers, what did you expect Rutgers would be like? It sounds like your uncle probably talked a good bit about it.

WG: Well, yes and no. I mean, actually, by that time, he was living in Metuchen, and I was living in Merchantville, and I didn't see that much of him. So he really didn't try to talk me into Rutgers. Didn't even try to talk me into being a Zeta Psi. It just, the "Zetes" got my name through him. I spent my freshman year in Hegeman Hall, ... although I had visited the "Zete" house as a senior in high school, and they tried to pledge me at that time. And I decided that I wanted to see what it was like. And, well, I did.

KP: In reading newspaper accounts, Rutgers was hit fairly hard by the Depression and you had mentioned the commuters. We have read that a lot of students had a tough time going to school and that it influenced the atmosphere of the school. Do you have any recollections of the Depression at Rutgers?

WG: Not much more than just the very existence of it. I mean, there were a few in the Zeta Psi fraternity that were there only by virtue of waiting on tables and so forth. But, as I say, I didn't really have much contact with these commuters. Now, my cousin, Lawrence Gillam Wire, Class of 1940, his parents couldn't have put him through Rutgers except he lived in Metuchen at my Uncle Larry's house and commuted from there. So he was a commuter that I had some connection with. And he was a member of Zeta Psi and so forth. But other than that, I really, the commuters, some of them you met in classes, but that was it.

I had a letter from Bob Dixon, Reverend Bob Dixon, who was a member of the Class of '40, who went on to what we called "Holy Hill" and became a minister. And I think he lived here as an undergraduate. I'm not sure how that arrangement took place. Anyway ... he came to our fiftieth reunion in 1990, and I had a letter from him recently in which he said he decided not to come to our 55th because he found that the class was now being run by the fraternity men. And he was right, and I didn't appreciate that. I mean as far as the active group that you met ... at our meeting, and a few others that were not there, most of them, I think all, except one, were fraternity men. Now I don't recall exactly what proportion of the Class of 1940 were in fraternities. I could go through the yearbook and make a count and figure it ... [out]. But, I mean, there weren't an awful lot of students, members of my class, who lived on campus who were not members of a fraternity. There was Ford Hall, and there was Winants Hall and, as I say, Bob Dixon lived up on "Holy Hill." And I think over at the College of Agriculture there were places where some of them lived at that time. But if you exclude the commuters, I mean, it must have been 75 or 80 percent who were in fraternities.

KP: So pledging for a fraternity was very important, it sounds like, in finding a good place to live.

WG: It's just like, I mentioned in particular in terms of signing up for the senior R.O.T.C., it was the thing to do. And, you know, as far as I was concerned, I mean, coming to college involved belonging to a fraternity.

RC: How did you come to join the debating society, Tau Kappa Alpha?

WG: I took a course in public speaking, ... and Professor Reager was head of public speaking and the debating team and so forth. And I guess he talked me into it or influenced me or whatever. And the way he ran it was pretty informal. ... But the biggest part was the debating trips that you got to travel around and visit other colleges. ... The debating was pretty informal. There were no winners or losers or anything like that.

KP: So you were not judged, you did not have judges?

WG: You just debated, that's all. ... And you socialized with the debaters from the other colleges.

KP: How many people would come and listen to you debate?

WG: Very few. And those that did were other members of the debating squad or team or whatever.

KP: Do you remember any trips in particular you took with the debating squad?

WG: Oh yes. Arthur Talbot, who's Class of '40, who was a Zeta Psi, had a car, and I took two debating trips with him and a few others in his car. One up to New York State and one out to Michigan and Ohio and so forth. And ... one of the trips to New York State, Bob Gaynor, who was at, I guess he was at the meeting, anyway, he's on the Board of Trustees, the Rutgers '40 Board, he's a judge, he was on a debating trip with me.

RC: Do you recall specific topics that you debated and was there anything that you particularly remember?

WG: I'd have to think it out. One, I forget exactly what ... the terms of the debate were, but had to do with neutrality ... and the Lend-Lease and that sort of thing. And Professor Reager suggested ... that we depart from the standard position on it and take the position that America should exercise its right of freedom of the seas and so forth and so on. And we took that position ... in the debate, and the other team didn't know what to talk about, they weren't prepared. They were prepared for the standard position. I really don't-- there were other topics and I really don't remember.

KP: From 1936 to 1940 we look back, and it's now the era of the rise of Hitler and Japan preparing for war. In fact, there's a fighting a war in China. How did you and your fraternity members and other Rutgers students view the whole coming of war? Did it seem so obvious then as we see it now?

WG: No! We ... didn't really think about it. ... I think the Depression was much more significant and in our minds. And, you know, the possibility of getting a job. ... I was interested in the political situation ... in this country. And I was interested in math and statistics, ... and the Gallup Poll, at that time, was well known. It had predicted [the] Roosevelt-Landon [race in] '36. ... And so I went down to Princeton and got a job at the Gallup Poll when I finished Rutgers. And I worked about six months there. And then, as I said ... in my account, I wanted to try and find out where I stood as far as the army was concerned. I went into Camden where the officer [who] was in charge of me as a Reserve Officer and inquired, and, as a result, a couple of weeks later, I got orders. So then after I get out of the army, I went to the University of Pennsylvania for a year under the G.I. Bill, and also under the G.I. Bill, second semester, I was an instructor. Two classes, ... in elementary business statistics. And then I went back to work for the Gallup Poll for three years.

KP: I want to talk a bit about the Gallup Poll, but I guess one question I had is on the R.O.T.C. The biographical account we read, it seems like you enjoyed R.O.T.C. training.

WG: Yeah, yes. I mean, ... the class aspect of it was very simple. I mean, it didn't require a great deal of preparation and we had drill once a week ... and went up to Plattsburg for six weeks, and that was a very interesting experience. I mean, I had been to summer camp as a boy, Y.M.C.A. camps. So, in one sense, it wasn't much different than that. I guess the biggest difference was the weapons training at Plattsburg.

KP: In your account you are looking back on your training, and you recall the attention to close-order drill and also the sort of attitude sometime expressed, "Do as I say, not as I do," particularly from the R.O.T.C. officer who gave you a long lecture about the importance of legibility of signatures, and then he signs you off a pass, and his signature is totally illegible. Looking back on your R.O.T.C. training, how effective was it when you would later have to do the real thing in wartime? What would you have changed and what did you think was very good?

WG: The close-order drill was completely irrelevant. [laughter] I guess that ... the topics covered in the classroom were of some help. But, again, as my account, you know I ended up in the army for two and a half years doing civilian-type work behind a desk. And then, when I did get called to active duty so to speak, they sent me to the Infantry School for three months, and that was a horse of another color.

KP: So in a sense, it was at Infantry School you really learned what you needed to learn.

WG: Yeah, ... in one sense. I said, I mean, I was a civilian working in ... an Army uniform at Fort Benning. And then in the middle of '43, I got into the army.

KP: When you stayed at R.O.T.C., which was very competitive, because a number of people would not get to stay in for the third and fourth year from what I have been told.

WG: That wanted to?

KP: That wanted to. That not everyone who applied was able to stay in.

WG: I'm not aware of that being the case. I mean there were a number ... of "Zetes" who got in, and I don't know of anyone who wanted to that didn't get in.

KP: How many in your fraternity did, in fact, go on to advanced R.O.T.C.? Do you remember?

WG: The number, ... I would say about a quarter. I mean, you know, I could actually go back to the yearbook and check it out, but. ...

RC: You were a captain in Company D in R.O.T.C. How was that selection made? Did that come from the commander of the R.O.T.C.? How did you become a captain?

WG: ... From the professional officers on the staff. Not the student officers.

RC: They made that decision.

WG: And, you know, I don't know how they did it. What they took into account, I suspect a lot of it was just academic record, and my academic record was good.

KP: In fact, it was a very good record. You were inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, which is not an easy task to do, both then and now. Living in a fraternity, I guess one question that's come out is, do you remember your initiation ceremony?

WG: Yes.

KP: What pranks or prank did you have to do? Was there anything memorable there?

WG: I think by the time it got around to us, and again this is tied into the Depression, most of the so-called hazing involved work around the house. Physical work ... in fixing up, preparing, polishing the house and, you know, ... for a week. "Hell Week" they called it. We were kept up most of the night doing that kind of thing.

KP: Another thing that Bob has actually been struck by in reading some of the back issues of the Targum was how much of an active social life there was at Rutgers at this time. For example, there were a whole series of balls, most notably the Military Ball, but there were just a range of dances.

WG: Junior Prom, Senior Prom and, I forget, there were others, too. There were some members of the Zeta Psi fraternity that were very much involved in that kind of activity. I wasn't. I didn't attend any of those balls or hops or anything. I was a very young and innocent college student.

KP: Did you date many women from the New Jersey College for Women?

WG: No.

KP: So it's really not until the wartime that you really started dating a lot.

WG: Right. I mean, in spite of what I said about my father's economic position, I felt, again, others grew up in the Depression, too, but I felt that I should be very conservative in spending money, and I spent what money was provided me very judiciously. .... I guess I didn't mention this, the "movie labs." At that time there were five movie theaters in downtown New Brunswick and often at lunchtime somebody would suggest a certain picture down at a certain theater, and we'd take off for what we called "movie lab." [laughter] And that was really, that ... and cards were my principal entertainment ... at college. There was a bridge game going on at the Zeta Psi house starting right after lunch every day of the week, and people would move in and move out. No poker that I can recall ever being played.

KP: So you had to wait for poker until the army.

WG: Right.

KP: You mentioned that Professor Houston Peterson was your favorite professor. What made him your favorite professor? What do you remember about him that sticks out?

WG: I don't know. ... He just, he was more humorous, more erudite than any other. I had him for logic and philosophy. ... First semester logic, second semester philosophy, and I think most ... of my fellow members in Zeta Psi couldn't understand why I was taking a course in logic and philosophy. ... Did you know Houston Peterson?

KP: No, no I didn't. You mention that you were impressed by Dean Metzger, especially when you came up here. Do you have any other recollections of Dean Metzger?

WG: Oh, yes. Our housemother was related to him somehow. But in any case, the main thing, as far as I was concerned, is [that] at the end of ... my junior year, some members of the graduating class of Zeta Psi had a party in the Zeta Psi house with women, which was against the rules. As a result, we were placed on social probation my senior year. And we were on social probation the whole year. And I was president of the house for the whole year. And one of my duties was to report to Dean Metzger every week to tell him what was going on at the Zeta Psi house. And so, I mean, we got to be friends. As far as you can become friends with the dean of men.

KP: Many people we have interviewed have distinct memories of chapel, both the weekly chapel, and for those who lived on campus, Sunday chapel. Do you have any recollections?

WG: Well, I recall having to go, and I found it boring most of the time, but they had speakers, like Norman Thomas, every year, ... I think, when I was in college. And other speakers who were as interesting as he was. Not the ordinary run-of-the-mill thing that you expect from preachers.

KP: In 1936 when you came to Rutgers, what was the feeling for Roosevelt or Alf Landon? How many students wanted Landon and how many people wanted Roosevelt? Do you have any recollection?

WG: Well, I was absolutely amazed at how much support there was for Roosevelt on the campus. Not much in the Zeta Psi house, but other than that and in the classrooms.

KP: In other words, people in class would bring up who they supported, and you were surprised at how many people wanted Roosevelt?

WG: Yeah. I mean, you know, it wasn't explicitly [stated], but the whole attitude.

KP: How did you and your father feel about Roosevelt? It sounds like you were a Landon man and then for Wilkie in 1940.

WG: Yes. I mean, you know, I wasn't really much for Landon ... as an individual. He was the Republican candidate that's all. But when it came to Wilkie, that was another matter.

KP: A number of people I have interviewed remember Wendell Wilkie's visit to campus was one of the highlights for a number of people. But you did write in your autobiography that you have a very distinct memory of listening to Wilkie's convention.

WG: Yes. Well, I mean, as I say, we were at Fort Dix for two weeks and, other than the Officer's Club, there was nothing to do in the evenings, except listen to the radio. We lived in tents but you could have radios there. And that was a very vivid memory-- the Republican convention in Philadelphia. To carry that through, I'm still a Republican, but I've voted for Democrats at all levels from president down to the local level from time-to-time. My father said that one time--he's talking about presidential election--he voted for one Democrat for president, Woodrow Wilson, and he regretted it ever since.

KP: What about your mother? Your mother was also a Republican.

WG: Yes, but I don't think she thought very much about politics or the political situation. I guess her parents, my grandparents, I guess, were Republican, although I don't really know.

KP: You mentioned you were interested in the Gallup Poll Organization. In fact you worked for them. What sparked your interest initially?

WG: Well, the combination of politics and numbers. Statistics so to speak. Now, I ... took a course in elementary business statistics here at Rutgers. Again, the other members of the Zeta Psi, "What do you want to take a course like that for?"

KP: So you had this interest in polling even before you graduated. And how did you make contact with the Gallup Poll Organization?

WG: I just went down to Princeton. ...

KP: You just...

WG: Knock[ed] on the [door]. ... I don't recall. I probably wrote a letter and got invited down. I don't recall that.

KP: But you really sought them out. You didn't respond to an ad to them.

WG: No. I remember going down to Princeton and being interviewed down there.

KP: And that was your first job after graduating?

WG: Yes.

KP: Did you consider yourself lucky to get a job, in a sense, in the area you wanted to?

WG: Yes, yes. I think so. Actually ... I did this pretty early on ... in the spring of my senior year. I think the only, well, two other things. ... I went up to the Prudential and had an interview and looking back on it, ... I wonder what would have happened if they had given me a job that would have affected my career very much. I also took a government examination for junior statistician and did very well and I'm sure-- I do know that shortly after getting at Fort Benning, Georgia, I got a letter offering me a job at ... some camp in New Jersey that I had never heard of. And I forget exactly what it involved, but, anyway, I wrote back and said, "I'm sorry I already have a job with the government."

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KP: When you started working for the Gallup Organization, polling was still, in many ways, in its infancy. And in fact there had been a major debacle in 1936 with the Literary Digest's prediction of Alf Landon triumphing over Roosevelt.

WG: Yes. I mean, at that time, you know, the Literary Digest carried out all their interviews by telephone. So they only got people who had telephones, and, at that time, everybody didn't have [a] telephone by a large measure. And, whereas, the Gallup pollers went out and knocked on doors to get, and my first, well, during that period from July '40 till December '40, I didn't work in the office; I was an interviewer out in the streets. ... A group of us went all over New England and Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey interviewing people.

KP: Looking back, it sounds like it must have been, it must have been fascinating to get to know people in different parts of New England and New York region.

WG: Yes.

KP: I mean much better than just driving through with your folks.

WG: Oh, yes.

KP: What did you learn doing the polling, about America and about people and about certain issues?

WG: ... I just had more contact with people, who didn't have much, than I had ever had in my life. I mean, Merchantville, I didn't have much contact. Rutgers, I didn't have much contact. One that sticks out in my mind, interviewing a woman who had some kind of job in a factory ... and said, "If that other guy," meaning Landon, "got in, I wouldn't have a pot left to pee in."

KP: Did you have a better sense of why Roosevelt did so well after working for the Gallup Organization?

WG: Oh, I think so, yes. Of course, looking back on it, I reject the idea that he got us out of the Depression, except by getting us into the war. And the war got us out of the Depression.

KP: If you had not been called up by the army, would you have stayed in the Gallup Organization? Did you see that as a promising career?

WG: I think so. I mean, you know, after I got out, spent some time at the University of [Pennsylvania], I went back. And, I mean, I had no commitment with them at that time, I went back. I mean, I had the opportunity to stay on at the University of Pennsylvania as an instructor and, as I said in my account, I couldn't see being an instructor, knowing only what I knew from books. So I went back to Gallup ... and was given a job in the office doing statistical work.

KP: Is there anything else you remember about your polling with Gallup in 1940, in terms of the types of questions that they were asking?

WG: ... At that time, because we were in the election campaign, most of the questionnaires were very short and dealt principally with who they were going to vote for.

KP: People are now deluged with pollsters and others asking them to participate in surveys. In the early 1940s did you find that people were more eager and more willing to talk with you as a pollster than they might be today?

WG: I don't know. I mean most of them were easy ... to talk to. We had a canned spiel and one of the things, "We don't want your name, just your opinions," and that really sold most people.

KP: Did any of your polling deal with America's foreign policy?

WG: Yes, yes. There were generally a few questions about that.

KP: What sense did you have about America's attitude towards going to war in 1940, especially Lend-Lease?

WG: I guess it was sort of mixed. Although, ... I don't feel that many people felt very strongly one way or another about it.

KP: You were in the reserves and you were going to be called up. How did you see the direction the country was going? Had you given it any thought, that soon you were going to be in it?

WG: ... I really didn't think we were going to get in it. Why? I don't really know why; I didn't think, so. But, I mean, even when I got called up for a year's active duty, I thought I was going to get out at the end of a year. ... Now, I think we should have universal military training. I think everybody physically able to perform some kind of service ... should do it. Now, neither of my sons served. They were of ... age at the time of the Vietnamese War. The older boy had a low number or high number whichever it was, but he had really no chance of being drafted. And the other boy was in college at the time and was deferred. By the time he finished college, ... it was over.

KP: When you said you see the need for universal military service, where did you come to this view? Was it as a result of World War II?

WG: Yes, I think so. I mean, you obviously have read "The Good War" book by, what's his name?

KP: Studs Terkel. I guess since you mention Terkel, what did you think of Terkel's book? It obviously was inspirational for writing your own story. Did the wars described in there match your own experiences?

WG: Yes, except of course, I learned a lot more about the home front ... [than] I had, you know, in two-and-a-half years at Fort Benning. And I didn't know anything about what was going on in the rest of the country. I really didn't. I mean, you know, the civilian population around Fort Benning, Georgia, was not typical of the country at all.

KP: Had you traveled at all in the South before you went to Fort Benning?

WG: Only as far south as North Carolina. My cousin Larry Wire, his sister went to Duke, and we went down there to visit her in-- I don't know if it was '39 or '40.

KP: And your brother and sister went to William and Mary. How did they arrive at that school?

WG: I don't know. My brother, my younger brother, ... was the first one, and he was responsible for picking it out, and I do think my father objected. I mean, Williamsburg was too far from Merchantville. ... But then, after he had been there, why it was easy for my sister, too.

KP: To convince your father?

WG: Yeah. My sister met her husband at William and Mary. He was a Canadian, and he was a tennis player, and he was there on a tennis scholarship. And later, he was good enough to become a member of the Canadian Davis Cup squad. Which doesn't mean he was very good compared to U.S. Davis Cup ... members, but he was the best that Canada had to offer.

KP: What did you think of the real army and the South? What were your initial impressions?

WG: Well, the army, ... I expressed some of this. You know, when I arrived at Fort Benning, I ended up being assigned to the ... 24th Infantry which was a regular army organization, and I was impressed by the way it worked. But I didn't spend much time with the 24th Infantry, although, all the time I was there. I was aware of the 24th Infantry. And, of course, ... the black--colored we called them then--soldiers. And the Reception Center had staff with blacks and some whites. And I learned a lot about the situation in the South involving blacks and whites. ... But I really, was in a sense, amazed at how well they got along in this Reception Center.

KP: Did that come as a surprise? It almost sounds like you were surprised given the segregation out there.

WG: Yeah.

KP: What did you think of the segregation that you saw because it was both on the base and off the base? Did you have any thoughts at the time?

WG: Well, I certainly disapproved, but I didn't feel strongly about it. I mean, after all, in Merchantville we had segregation. And the blacks worked as domestic servants or they had menial jobs. Unless their name was Jersey Joe Walcott, whose real name was Arnold Cream, who lived in what we called Matchtown, which was Delaware Township at that time.

KP: You mentioned that ...

WG: ... We had one black in the Class of 1940, Ernie Baxter, who I really don't know much about him. Where he came from? And he died very early, and I don't think it had any connection with the war. So I really don't know much about that.

KP: It sounds like you were very much impressed with the black unit you served with. One of the things you note was the spit and polish, that it really had a commanding presence at close-order drill and at official ceremonies. You also mention in your account the role of the sergeants. You singled out one sergeant-major. Any other reflections on the way the unit operated?

WG: No, I ... can't think of anything more than what I said in my account. I mean, the Reception Center was a different matter. I mean, there we had some black sergeants, but they were subservient to white sergeants and white officers. And we had no black officers.

KP: You were processing both white inductees ...

WG: No.

KP: Just black?

WG: Just black.

KP: Just black inductees. And what was the rejection rate? Do you remember? Or, by the time they got to you, they were already processed into the military? Or did you process people out of the military?

WG: No, I think they all had been accepted. Now I don't remember what process they went through before they got to us. And maybe there were some that were rejected for physical reasons because ... they were given physical examinations as part of the first part of their processing.

KP: So your processing did not include rejecting people?

WG: Well, ... it may have, but I wasn't involved in it in any way. I'm sure it would have been for physical reasons.

KP: What were your specific duties as part of the processing?

WG: Well, for the first part of it, I was in the insurance section which we prevailed upon them to sign up for life insurance. I would suspect that most of them didn't have any idea what it was all about. Very few of them said no.

KP: Well, you mention that often their sergeants made it clear that they did not really have much of a choice in the matter, even though it was optional.

WG: And, you know, in retrospect, I think it was undoubtedly a good thing that they were prevailed upon to take life insurance. But then I got transferred to the quartermaster section where we had a building where they were processed and issued uniforms. And I was involved in contact with the post quartermaster and getting the items that were needed.

KP: I have often heard from people who have gone through induction. One of their complaints was that they get ill-fitting uniforms, especially initially, and things don't match.

WG: I'm sure that was the case even with these blacks. But I think they probably were better fitted and had better quality clothes than they'd ever had in their life-- most of them.

KP: But I sort of raised that question because you're on the other side of it. You're the person trying to order this equipment, these supplies, this clothing and fit people. From your perspective, how difficult of a job was it?

WG: Well, there were black, noncommissioned officers ... who handled it and ... they measured the inductees. ... We even had a ... group of tailors ... to make alterations to fit unusual, you know, most of the people could be fitted with the ... standard sizes, so forth.

KP: So from your perspective, you tried fairly hard to get enough of the right sizes.

WG: Oh, yes.

KP: Would you ever run out of particular sizes?

WG: I don't think so. I mean, ... we maintained quite a stock on hand. And then the post quartermaster was a half a mile away, and we had, you know, when it was busy, why we had daily truckloads of uniforms and equipment delivered. I'm sure there were cases where we ran out of sizes. But, of course, the blankets were a uniform size.

RC: You went in, I believe it was in June of 1940 that you were commissioned as a second lieutenant in the reserve, and you went on down to Fort Benning. So you were actually in the Army just prior to Pearl Harbor and the war. You must have noticed the transition to wartime status from the time that you went previous to ...

WG: Well, I mean the first year I was at Fort Benning, Georgia. I mean, you know, we had Wednesday afternoon off, Saturday afternoon, all day Sunday. And came Pearl Harbor and it changed. And then we were on duty 24 hours a day, seven days, nah, that's not strictly true, but basically, yes.

KP: In fact, you portray in your account in some ways, that 1941 until Pearl Harbor was a very relaxed year.

WG: Yes.

KP: In part with a lot of social activities.

WG: Right.

KP: It sounds like you dated quite a bit in 1941. That you had a lot of time, in part to do it, and the pay was reasonably good and your expenses low.

WG: You know, looking back on it, 125 dollars a month and I thought I was rich. ... You know, you really didn't have any place to spend the money. I mean, except on the post where there were things that were very inexpensive.

KP: It also sounds like there were not very many places to go.

WG: You know, Columbus, Georgia and Phoenix City, Alabama were not very nice places. They catered to the enlisted personnel, really.

KP: When you were inducting people and processing people, did you have any observation on how many black inductees knew how to read and write in 1940 and 1941? Did you have any sense? Were you surprised that large numbers of people could not read and write?

WG: ... I can't give any kind of number. ... My recollection is that most of them could sign their name and could read basic instructions. I mean, certainly nobody read War and Peace or anything like that. Well, I say that, but I mean, there were a few of the non-coms that had attended universities in the North.

KP: You mentioned that in your autobiographical account.

WG: ... And I don't know just how they got picked for their duty in the Reception Center. But I think the fact that they attended college was a very significant factor.

KP: Did you get to know any of the noncommissioned officers well? And did you ever stay in touch with any of them after the war?

WG: No. ... And get to know them well, not really. I mean, when you're working with somebody for several years, you think you know them, but you don't really if you don't have any social contact. Now, in the Reception Center, most, I think I mentioned this, most of the officers were southern. And, you know, I learned a lot about Southerners from that. What did I learn? I couldn't tell you, but I mean.

KP: What did you like about the South, and what did you dislike? Or what did you like about Southerners and their customs, and what did you dislike? Was there anything that sticks out? Did you enjoy the food, for example?

WG: No. [laughter] ... Not the southern variety. Black-eyed peas, grits. But, ... I ... [wasn't] subject to very much of that. Of course, everything was fried. I guess, you know, I became aware very quickly that Southerners were different. You know, it's interesting, I think, when, oh, you don't have the maps. One of the maps that I have in here-- I've got Plains, Georgia circled. Plains is not far from Columbus. And I think I understand a little more about Jimmy Carter from having lived down there for two-and-a-half years.

KP: Really. What do you understand better, do you think?

WG: Well, their attitude. One of the girls that I didn't even mention in [my account], ... a civilian girl from Columbus. I got invited to have dinner with them Sunday. And I can remember, I forget who were there, father, an uncle, whatever, trying to convince them that they were more Republican than I was. Which was the truth. I mean their attitudes were more

conservative than mine were. I mean this is over and above their attitudes toward Negroes. It's their economic attitude. But, nevertheless at that time, they were committed Democrats.

KP: Which really struck you as odd, that loyalty to the Democratic Party. Even though they were politically much more conservative.

WG: Right.

RC: You mentioned in your account about your assignment with the troop trains. So you did quite a bit of traveling on those. Anything in particular about that?

WG: Well, I got to see as much as you can see from a railroad train-- parts of the country that I hadn't before and haven't since, for that matter. I mean, for example, ... we went to Deming, New Mexico, which meant we went all the way across Texas. And there wasn't much to see, but I saw it. [laughter] And I got to Denver and the Rockies and Fort Francis E. Warren, Wyoming, which was out in the plains so to speak. I got to see New Orleans. Stopped over there several times.

KP: I was quite amused when you talked in your account about being in Paris, Texas. And when the movie came out on Paris, Texas, you were quite amused, it sounds like.

WG: Yes, I think I said in there that I had not seen the movie. But I did, later on, see it. Maybe it was on television, whatever. And I'm not sure that my conclusion is correct. Why the movie was named Paris, Texas?

KP: In traveling to these different parts of the country, did you have a greater appreciation, in a sense, for the United States? But also for where you came from? Did any parts of the country particularly appeal to you that you saw? It sounds like some of the places you have not been since and are glad you have not been.

WG: ... I don't think I can recall visiting any part of the country that I would have any interest in visiting again.

KP: Looking back on it now, how ready did you think the United States was for war in 1941? What did you think at the time and looking back on it, how prepared or ill-prepared were we? Were you confident, say, in 1941 when you were in the military?

WG: No, not in 1941. In 1943, ... my experience with the Infantry School and the Officer Candidate School and so forth, ... impressed me very much. I mean, it was assembly line education, but, I mean, as I said in there, during that period, a class of officer candidates was graduating every day. And a new class starting every day. It was tremendous.

RC: When the war breaks out, Pearl Harbor, you mentioned in your account you were sitting in a car at a polo game listening to the radio. Did you basically know at that moment that you were going to be in for longer than you thought?

WG: Well, you know, before that I had actually received orders extending my term for a second year. And I guess on December 7th, I realized that I was in for the duration. I really had no idea what the duration was.

KP: You mentioned that you had gotten your orders extended for a second year. How did you feel about that? Did you think this was unfair and that you served your year and wanted to get out or had you just accepted it as is?

WG: No, I didn't think it was unfair. I guess because it was completely expected by that time.

KP: One of the things I have read was that there were a lot of enlisted men, especially from National Guard units, who were called up and those who had been drafted for a year in the peace-time draft, were really discontented being in the army. That they really did not see the purpose for this and wanted to get out. Did you sense any of that?

WG: No. You know, of course, I was associated with these black inductees. I think the black noncommissioned officers in the Reception Center were probably very pleased with their existence. That may not have been the case, and maybe I think they should have, but I really sensed that they were.

RC: In the first year or so of the war, the news obviously was not good for the United States. What was the information like that you received about the various campaigns and our losses?

WG: Not much. I do not remember having access to a daily newspaper at that time. Maybe I could have, but I don't think I did. So I guess all the information I got was from the radio, which was something less than you can get from the radio, today in terms of world events. [laughter] Mostly what you got on radio down there ... was country music, which was my first exposure to country music.

KP: And what did you think of it?

WG: I didn't think much of it at the time. Now, compared to some other types of music in vogue, I prefer country music.

KP: What kind of music did you like listening to?

WG: Oh, the big band sound. ... I think, I don't know whether that's history or sociology or whatever, but it seems to me unusual that this music that was created in the 1940s has lasted. And in certain areas it's gaining more respect among young people, like my son, who is eclectic in his appreciation of music. I mean, he goes for rock and roll and everything, but he is very much impressed with a lot of the big band music.

KP: It sounds like it surprises you a little.

WG: Yeah. ... Even Frank Sinatra, of whom, I'm not particularly impressed.

RC: You mentioned in your account about some of the dances that they had on post, in particular, one where I think it was General Patton in attendance.

WG: Oh, yes.

RC: And that Patton had a particular type of music he preferred. You did not have a chance to speak with him, I gather, because you did not mention it in your account.

WG: No, I never spoke to him, but, you know, I was right there, and he was right there. And the occasion upon which he raised some objection, I was not there. And I don't know how he raised the objection. All I know that I was told, ordered, whatever, to make sure the band did not play real jazzy type music or fast music when he was there. And I went with them out to the Second Armored Division Club, and there were no problems. And I don't know that he would have raised any objection if some of the music that they played was not to his liking. I don't recall him getting up and dancing.

KP: It sounded that the social world of the army has some certain unique qualities, one of them is assigning someone to make sure that the band plays the right music for the general. And you mention the segregation of housing, the colonel's housing. As a sort of civilian in an army uniform, what did you find particularly odd about army social life? Is there anything you liked or did not like? It sounded like you had a lot of dates, that you were able to date a lot, but it sounds also somewhat regulated and structured.

WG: Well, that's true. Well, that ... didn't ... bother me ... at the time. You know, having just come out of four years at Rutgers, where life was regimented to a degree, compulsory chapel attendance and other things, it didn't seem that different. The only big difference, I lived in a building that was unfinished on the inside, you know. Not like a fraternity house.

RC: Was there any rapid expansion at Fort Benning while you there, in size and construction?

WG: Yes, although I really was not kept up to date on it. I mentioned that the Second Armored Division and the Fourth Infantry Division, I think, were like about five miles from the main post in two areas. ... So, you know, on a daily basis I wasn't aware. The other thing that was closer was the paratroops. And that was the start of the paratroops in there. Relatively small group, a couple of battalions at that time, at Benning. But, ... certainly the Infantry School was expanded. As I mentioned, this class, and we're talking about 300 in a class, maybe not that many, you know, starting everyday ... and graduating. And I mean that was just the officers' candidates. I went through the school in Officer's Basic Course which was essentially the same course as the officer candidates were given. The same instructors, everything was the same. And ... that was right on the main post. And, obviously, there was some expansion there. You know, the Reception Center originally was quartered in an old building ... and tents. And then, they built all these new buildings for the Reception Center which was barracks for these inductees and so forth. So, you know, obviously there was a lot. But, ... I think, you know, I wasn't impressed

that it was so tremendous and that was partly because I wasn't very much aware of what was going on out in the boondocks, so to speak.

KP: Were the facilities adequate? For example, did the Officer's Club become more crowded? Did the PX become more crowded? Or were the facilities able to handle this influx?

WG: The facilities were able to handle it, yeah. That kind of facilities.

KP: In interviewing several people who were stationed at Fort Benning, or went through Fort Benning, they had mentioned that the paratroopers were a tough lot and often got into trouble with the MPs, and there would often be fights between the paratroopers and other troops there. Were you aware of this problem at the time?

WG: You know, we were aware ... that the training of the paratroopers was much stiffer ... than the training at the Infantry School. But I didn't have much contact with them. I mean, they had an Officer's Club and I attended it several times. But you didn't see them elsewhere on the post ... very much. I mean, they were in training and they were in training.

RC: Did you ever consider joining the paratroopers?

WG: No.

RC: You mentioned in your account when you went through the Officer's Basic Training that some of the people, or you had come in contact with members of the Class of 1943 from West Point, and that they had a reaction. Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

WG: Well, again, I mean, they were in a barracks right next to the one I that I [was] ... in. But we didn't have ... much contact with them. I mean, in the morning we got up, we went this way, they went that way. Not because they were different from us, but they were a different class. And their schedule and our schedule were different. I honestly don't remember having come in contact with any of them at the Officer's Club, although they must have been there.

KP: Was there any tension or trouble between the black enlisted troops and the white troops?

WG: Not that I was aware of.

KP: Never any fights between the two or other incidents?

WG: No, I mean, you know, as far as those at the Reception Center ... [are] concerned, they were, you know, under wraps, so to speak. They didn't have privileges to enable them to go into Columbus or Phoenix City or anything like that. And then there was the 24th Infantry which, they were regular army, and they were disciplined, I'm sure. If there were any troubles it was taken care of. But I was not aware of any.

KP: Earlier in the interview, you almost made it sound like it was strange the way the Army kept you in this desk job for the length of time it did. Did you think that at the time?

WG: Yeah. But I didn't make any effort to change it. ... I suspected if I had that, I could have gotten out of it.

KP: Had you learned not to volunteer from the previous effort when you wrote to them about the reserves?

WG: [laughter] I guess, yeah.

KP: Because someone else I have interviewed had said he learned very quickly not to volunteer. He made a similar mistake, and I forgot the assignment. When it was determined that you would go into Officer's Candidate School for Infantry Candidate School, were you surprised it was Fort Benning, that you, in a sense, didn't have to go far?

WG: No, no. I mean, Benning was it as far as the infantry was concerned.

KP: You mentioned that you had really learned more in those several months than you did in all of your four years of R.O.T.C.

WG: More about the military.

KP: Yes, about the military, in particular being an infantryman.

WG: ... Oh, yes.

KP: What were the most useful things they taught you about your training? My impression is that most of the candidates you went through with were just recently arrived in the military, whereas you had been in the military quite a bit.

WG: ... I think as far as the kind of thing that went on at the Infantry School, I was no different than anybody that had just come in. I mean, I had been a civilian in uniform for two-and-a half years.

KP: What did you learn? What skills did you learn and what were the most effective parts of your training?

WG: I don't know.

KP: Looking back when you were in combat, what did they teach you right and what did you think you wish you had listened to even more carefully in terms of use of weapons.

WG: ... You know, ... all I can say is that combat was completely different ... than what I expected from the training. There were a lot of aspects of the training which had no application

to what I was involved in. ... Actually, ... I think that the training at Benning was more directed towards what I was called upon to do with the 99th Division in Paris, Texas, Camp Maxey, where we were training enlisted men to be soldiers.

KP: Less as a junior officer in an infantry company.

WG: Well, in a combat situation where it just was completely different.

KP: What did you expect in training that combat would be like, and what was combat actually like?

WG: ... I expected it to be much more intense and much more, everything close together. But it wasn't. I mean, you know, there was nothing like the World War I trench warfare, I mean, although we had the hedgerows ... in Normandy which could have easily degenerated into a trench warfare kind of situation. But, I mean, partly because of that, boy, I mean, you didn't know what was going on a hundred yards away.

KP: Had any of your instructors at Fort Benning seen combat?

WG: I don't know. I suspect there were some, but not many. ... They knew, what they knew, from books and from similar instruction. I'm sure that many of the instructors ... became instructors after having gone through the school. And, you know, I complained, when I went to the University of Pennsylvania, about instructors who knew nothing except what they had learned from books. And I didn't want to be that kind of instructor. But I don't think there was any choice as far as the Infantry School is concerned. I mean, hopefully, they had officers with combat experience who instructed the instructors, but I don't know that to be the case.

RC: You finished up your infantry training and then you mentioned you went to the 99th Infantry Division. You did some training in Louisiana on maneuvers. What did you think about that?

WG: Well, ... it was rough. The physical conditions there were rougher than they were in Normandy. I mean, the lack of water, dirt. I mean, that part of Louisiana is not the nicest part of the country, I'll tell you that. I mentioned, I think, that the wild boars that were ubiquitous. But I guess most of the civilian ...

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

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