RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM GREENBERG

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with William Greenberg on May 14, 2005, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak. First of all, Mr. Greenberg, thank you so much for taking time out of your busy Reunion Weekend schedule to sit for the interview. To start, can you tell us where and when you were born?

William Greenberg: I was born in Rockaway Beach, New York, on August 30, 1922. However, that was not my place of residence, even though I was a child. My mother had me down there because her parents lived there and it was convenient. It was in the summertime and a lot cooler than Hoboken, New Jersey, which is the town I was raised in.

SH: That is interesting.

WG: I was a graduate of Demarest High in mid-term 1939-1940. I applied to Rutgers and I was rejected, for reasons unknown. However, my father, who was a truant officer in the public education system, was involved in the politics of Hoboken, which were then staunchly Democratic, and he was outraged. To make a long story short, I not only was then accepted by Rutgers, but I had a partial scholarship. … As I remember, the tuition in those days was two hundred dollars a semester and I had a hundred-dollar scholarship. In addition, through my father's influence, I got an NYA job, the National Youth Administration job, similar to the WPA of the Depression years. … I think they paid me fifty dollars a month. … I was in charge of a basketball program in some local public school in New Brunswick and, if they offered me twenty dollars, I can't tell you where or whatever. Originally, after the outbreak of World War II, I enlisted in the Army Air Corps, anticipating becoming a pilot. At that time, I was in my sophomore year. … I was called up to the ROTC office by some major, whose name escapes me. I know his associate, Major Johnson, but this major said to me, "Mr. Greenberg, we're enlarging the Advanced ROTC Corps and we'd like you in it." I said, "I'm sorry. I've already enlisted in the Air Force." He said, "I'll take care of that." So, I said, "That sounds fine to me." So, I signed up for the Advanced ROTC, … I believe, a group which consisted of about fifty people. Now, you see the beginning of the Black Fifty. I think we were called to active duty some time in '43. … We were assigned to the ASTP, the Army Specialized Training Program, and I was then living in the Phi Epsilon Pi house. I was a fraternity member, but we all moved into one of the dorms, the Bishop dorms, near Bishop Place. We continued our education and, I think, some time in late '43, we were summoned to active duty and sent to, what? Fort McClellan, Alabama, a group of fifty, for basic training. … We commingled with students from [the] University of Mississippi, Mississippi State, a few from the University of Pennsylvania, a few from CCNY in New York, but Rutgers provided the bulk. … This included our backgrounds of whether we were studying for history or engineering or whatever; we were all in the infantry basic training. At the completion of three months of basic training, we were sent back to Rutgers, because they, apparently, didn't need us at that time or they had no room in OCS. We continued our education for a period of time, and then, we were separated. The engineers were sent to New Jersey, to Camp Monmouth, to become Signal Corps officers and the balance of us were sent mostly to the infantry training school at Fort Benning, with the exception, I think, of "Shorty" [Robert A.] Wirth, who had a bum knee. They sent him to Fort Knox to become a tank officer. I think Livy [Livingston] Goodman was taken out for some

reason or other and went to someplace else to become an officer. We were at Fort Benning. Of course, the war was on and, I guess, in June, or July, rather, of 1944, those of us; we all graduated, by the way. I don't believe any Rutgers man was thrown out for incompetence. Several had some difficulties, but they overcame them. … We were commissioned second lieutenants and at least two of us were married at that time, including "Fritz" [Frederick J.] Kroesen, and I think there was one other chap married, but I don't recollect who that was. I was then sent to Camp Livingston, after, I guess, a two or three-week leave. … Everything was done alphabetically; so, therefore, I went to Livingston, to the 86th Division, and I was assigned to [the] 342nd Infantry and further assigned to A Company. Robert Hess, a classmate, and I were assigned to A Company. He was then assigned to Second Platoon and I became the Fourth Platoon, or weapons platoon, leader. For your information, a weapons platoon consisted of two .30-caliber light machine guns and three light sixty-millimeter mortars. We had several other Rutgers people. One in particular was [Richard M.] Hale, who was assigned to D Company, which was a heavy weapons company. … [William H.] Huber was assigned to K Company. … One or two other Rutgers people were interspersed into the 86th, but I don't recall their names. So, I was close, all through the service, with Hess, certainly, and Dick Hale and Bill Huber. We became pretty good friends over that period of time. We were in training for about two, two-and-a-half months at Camp Livingston. … We received orders to pack up the division and move to Camp San Luis Obispo, which is midway between LA and San Francisco, for amphibious training. We were to later find out, after the war was over, that we were penciled in as the lead division for the invasion of Japan, which was like a suicide note to virtually all the officers and so forth. Judge Huber discovered this when he was called to active duty in the Korean War. He was assigned in Fort Benning. He had nothing to do except sit in the library and read. At any rate, we were in San Luis Obispo and we trained down in San Diego. I remember going over a division lecture of all officers by President Roosevelt's son, Jimmy, who was a colonel in the Marine Corps. [Editor's Note: At this point, Shaun Illingworth cleared his throat.] Just what you did there, Shaun, you cleared your throat; the Colonel, opening his remarks, told the whole audience to stand and clear their throats, so that there's no interruption during his speech. He did. "Okay. So, don't clear your throat again." [laughter] Very well done, Shaun; at any rate, now that they had sent us cross-country, and I will tell you how long it took us to get there, the Battle of the Bulge came about, early in '45, and Eisenhower immediately decided he needed two or four more divisions. The 86th was immediately told to pack up. We headed to Boston on I don't know how many troop trains and it took us ten days to get there. We usually stopped someplace … and our troop train consisted of the First Battalion. The entire battalion was on one train. … My company commander, at that time, was Captain John (Mitchell?), a wonderful man. He was in his early thirties, which was very old for an infantry officer, and he smoked cigars constantly. He was of Arab descent. His parents were immigrants from Lebanon. He's just a wonderful man. I'll tell you what I thought on the troop train, because that's part of the lore of being in the service. Captain Mitchell, even though he was not the ranking captain, was the ranking officer on the troop train and was designated as the troop commander of the train. We were out for about three or four or five days, I forget which, and Mitchell and I shared a private room. There was always a car for the officers with rooms. The enlisted men were piled about fifty in a car and they had … bunks, four high, and they had one aisle on the right or left side. It was like a cattle car. That's what they referred to it as. … Mitch and I went to sleep. Of course, I had the upper, naturally; he was the captain, I was a second lieutenant. I've just fallen asleep. About eleven o'clock at night, there's a rap on the door and Mitchell says, "Who's that?"

and a voice said, "Sergeant So-and-So, sir. I have a problem." Mitch says, "Tell me about it in the morning." … The Sergeant says, "It can't wait." So, Mitch reaches out and opens the door and says, "What's your problem?" … I forget the Sergeant's name, he was in our company, and he said, "Sir, we just caught an officer stealing money from the enlisted men … in one of the cars." Mitchell was out of bed in two seconds and he shouts at me, "Get up, get your pistol on," and we did. Now, we raced behind the Sergeant. … If you can visualize [the compartment, there were] six bunks, four or six high, here and crouched in the corner of one is a man and there's enough light to see the light shining off his captain's bars and Mitchell and I recognized him immediately. I'm standing behind Mitchell and Mitchell says, "Who's that in there?" He said "This is Charlie (Ponal?), John. You know who it is, goddamit." Mitch says, "What are you doing there?" He blabbered something. Mitch says, "I understand you've been lifting wallets." What he was doing was, when the guys went to sleep, they hung their clothes on the side and he went down lifting wallets and taking money out. He'd lost a lot of money in poker that night. So, Mitch says, "Come on, Charlie, come out of here." Charlie says, "Look, Mitch, don't give me any baloney. I rank you." In other words, "I have a higher rank than you as a captain." Mitch says, "I don't give a damn, get out here." … He says to me, "Put this man under arrest?" So, Ponal says, "Greenberg, you're not going to do that." I said, "I do as I'm told, sir." So, we arrested him [and] took him out to the officer's car and notified a Major (Hall?), who was a West Pointer. He was on the regimental staff. He was in our troop train, but Mitchell was the commander. So, we woke Hall up and Mitchell told him what happened. … Hall looked at us like we were crazy. This is [not] something that happened very often, so, Hall said to Mitchell and I, "I assume you put him under arrest?" … I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Good." So, he went over to the door where Ponal was in the room and said, "Ponal, you're not allowed to leave. I'm posting an armed guard here. You stay in there." To make a long story boring, when we got to Camp Miles Standish, which was outside of Boston, Ponal was taken off the train and that's the last we ever heard of him. We heard later … that, by the time they got around to deciding the court-martial, the whole division was gone and there's nobody to testify. They didn't take any depositions or whatever. So, that's the last we heard of Ponal, so much for that. We're now on the *John Ericsson* and the officers had the luxury of selecting who they wanted to bunk with in the first-class cabins. … Huber and I, … Bill Huber, who was a classmate, a fellow second lieutenant, we decided to bunk together. … I never saw Huber at any meal, because Huber didn't eat for ten days. He was seasick from the moment we got on the ship until we got off. … When he gives you his recollection of what happened, I want you both to remember that. He was as sick as a dog, poor fellow. At any rate, we had an uneventful trip. It was very rough going out of Boston Harbor. It was in January and a northeaster was coming in. … The *Ericsson* was a large, Swedish Line ship and it was tossing around like a Yo-yo. We went in a convoy with about two destroyers, maybe four destroyer escorts and so forth. … To my recollection or my knowledge, we never had any difficulty. … We landed in Le Havre about ten days later, maybe eight or nine, I'm not quite sure, and, from Le Havre, we were staged at, I want to say Camp Lucky Strike. They had given all the depots cigarette names over there. The Army always had a habit of giving names for anything. Now, I read from my diary of PFC (Peterson?). He writes, "Small lights, poor food and so forth." He was an enlisted man. They were all down in the hold and, let me tell you, the quarters down there were pretty, pretty raunchy, I mean, three thousand men on one ship. The entire regiment was on the ship. Going into Le Havre, we noticed badly smashed docks and hillsides. Of course, that was right near the sea on D-Day. D-Day was just north of Le Havre, but, I imagine, the Navy pounded the heck out

of Le Havre. We then went into camp. … To jump ahead a little bit, we went by truck convoy to Cologne, which was about a good day's travel. … By that time, the Third Army had surrounded the Rhine area. … We were on the Rhine River, in an old Ford factory. I then became assistant company commander. We needed one more officer. My company commander relieved his assistant, primarily because he didn't know anything about the infantry; he was an antiaircraft officer. … Earlier that year, they had decided that they didn't need all the antiaircraft guns on the West Coast. … They had hundreds, or thousands, of antiaircraft officers to do something with, so, they made them infantry officers. At any rate, we saw some action in Cologne. We put patrols across the river. I did not participate, because I stayed with the Forth Platoon, which was a support operation with the machine guns and mortars. We only sent infantrymen over the river, in lots of two or three, in small boats to do some reconnoitering. One incident I remember, we were visited by Lieutenant General [James] Gavin, who was a commander of a corps, basically, of armored [airborne?] troops. … He was one of the highly recognized names in World War II and he visited our company headquarters. We just chatted. I can't remember how the chattering went or whatever. We then went from town to town in, basically, mop-up operations. By that time, the Germany Army was fairly well disorganized, but they would leave sporadic groups who, basically, had their very effective artillery, the ninety-millimeter cannon. … When cannon fire is effected, you can hear the "pop-pop" of the guns. However, you couldn't hear a ninety-millimeter being popped and, all of a sudden, "bang" and [it] hits right there. We went from the Third Army to the First Army to, eventually, the Seventh Army, which meant nothing to us. This is all paperwork up at the top. … This is now March and April. We just traveled as a unit, so-to-speak. … We wound up in a town called Ingolstadt on the Rhine [Danube] River. At that time, the Rhine River had not been crossed. … They decided the 342nd Infantry, led by A Company, would make the initial crossing, make a night crossing, of the Rhine River. So, Mitchell instructed me that he would go on the lead boat, for which he got the Silver Star, and I would go on the last boat to make sure everybody was in. We loaded, I think, six boats, manned by [the Army] Corps of Engineers with their paddles. They didn't have outboards in those days. … The Rhine River was not very wide. I would say … maybe three hundred yards wide at that point. Ingolstadt, incidentally, was a walled city on the Rhine River. … That's where the First Battalion received its heaviest casualties, so-to-speak. We were shelled late one afternoon by, it must have been four or five ninety-millimeters, and three officers were killed and about ten enlisted men. … I was at the point of where the shelling was coming in. … We heard "pop," quick and everybody dove. I chose to dive on the ground. Two officers from D Company, which was Dick Hale's company, jumped into foxholes. They were killed with direct hits overhead. I was not hit. I went back and got first aid, because I didn't know they were dead and the men were bleeding. That was the most severe combat I personally encountered, oh, [there were] one or two others. … That, as I say, was on the Rhine River. That night, about six-thirty, we loaded up the boats and Mitch pitched off and I stepped into the last boat and I looked around and some enlisted man, unnamed, I didn't know who it was, said to me, "There are too many people in this boat," and, with that, gave me a push into the Rhine River, Danube, full field pack, helmet, carbine, the whole nine yards, and I went down, over my head, and came up. Two guys pulled me out and, of course, half the guys were laughing, but I think they were laughing out of fear, because nobody was very happy about going across the river late in the afternoon or early evening. We got across to the other side and we met resistance. … We had to form a perimeter and the whole outfit, A Company, was on alert all night. … We ran across two or three contingents of young people who had been recruited into

the army as the Germans disintegrated, fourteen, fifteen-year-old kids. We found four or five of them dead and captured about, maybe, twenty, thirty of them. From that point on, we pushed on in and went across the bottom of Bavaria. Somewhere along the line, we freed a Romanian prison camp. It consisted mostly of Romanian troops that were being disciplined by the German Army, because, when the Germans used all their satellite countries for troops, none of them responded very well, Italy being the foremost shirkers, so-to-speak. The Romanians were not much better. They hadn't been fed properly in weeks. There were some refugees, Austrian or German, I'm not quite sure, and they were maltreated. … So, our division was given notice that we would be credited for freeing up prisoner of wars and refugees. We were in a little town in Austria, I think the name was (Purten?), nothing much to speak of, on V-E Day and that was the end of the war in Europe. Now, there is one town, and I can't recollect the name, unless I referred to [a map], it's really unimportant, where we had the pleasure, so-to-speak, of duty, of cleaning up the town. There appeared to be, like, a company of German troops and some heavy weapons, tanks. We were on the top of a hill and we went down the hill and that was where Bob Hess, my fellow Rutgers man, was badly wounded and I took over his platoon temporarily and Bob never carried a carbine. He always carried a rifle. He always thought it was much better. By the way, he was one heck of an officer. The men respected him greatly. … We went down and I came very close to doing something that I'm happy I didn't do, because I'm sure I would have regretted it. When we got down in the town, we captured, maybe, fifteen or twenty or thirty Germans. The townspeople came out and they were very happy and there's a little commotion in the schoolyard and I went over with a couple of men and I said, "What's going on here?" Well, they had a guy back in the corner and they were indicating to us that he was a *Gestapo* agent and a member of the *SS*. … I had Hess' rifle, but I also had a .45 and I took my .45 over and I went up to him. My first instinct was to shoot him. … Then, I thought secondly about it and said, "Hey, I'd better not do that," and I didn't and I'm so happy I didn't, because it's something that I could never erase from my mind. We had other incidents. We never won any battlefield stars for cleaning out half the German Army, but we did our job in mopping up. … The day after V-E Day, Captain Mitchell called me in to his headquarters and said, "How would you like to go to Paris for three days?" I said, "I'd be delighted." To make a long story short, I got a three-day pass to Paris the next day, took an overnight train, the trains were running, it's unbelievable, and stayed at a hotel in the (*Palace de l'Opera*?), where the opera house is, in the big square. … There's a hotel right there. In fact, there was a fire over there a couple of weeks ago in Paris and quite a few refugees were killed; that was the hotel. In those days, the Army had taken it over and had nothing but Army officers staying in it. I had three lovely days in Paris, and then, went back. It didn't take very long for the Army to decide that General MacArthur was yelling he needed more troops. … Lo and behold, the 86th and, I think, maybe, the 83rd Division were ordered to pack up immediately and back to Le Havre we went and guess what? We went back to the States, landed in New York. My parents were on the pier, because my father had knowledge that the division was coming in. … One of the asides, we're on a small vessel. It wasn't as big as the *Kungsholm* [the original name of the *John Ericsson*]. I think only my battalion was on it. At any rate, as we came up New York Harbor, my battalion commander, Colonel Aasen, A-A-S-E-N, from South Dakota, was standing on the top deck. … He had quite a few of us around him and he said to me, he always called me Greenhead, not Greenberg, "Greenhead, tell us about New York. You come from around here." Well, I came up the harbor; you know, I don't really recognize anything and I mentioned Staten Island on our left. He said, "That's about the third time you told me that was Staten Island." He said, "I don't think you

know where you are. I don't know if you came from here." I said, "You're probably right." [laughter] Of course, I never heard the end of that and we landed on Pier 57 in the Hudson River. Sure enough, my parents were there waving. Of course, it didn't mean anything; we immediately went down to Fort Dix by truck. … The next day, we were all given leave, a thirty-day leave. At the end of thirty days, I took a commercial train, or regular train, down to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, in the middle of nowhere. … That was July, hot as heck down there, and we're no sooner in Camp Gruber, after unpacking the whole division, it was very cumbersome, [that] we get orders to pack up and they're shipping us out to the Pacific, immediately. So, on the troop train we get and it takes about seven or eight days to get to San Francisco. Incidentally, we left from Boston out of Camp Miles Standish. I don't know if I mentioned that. … Now, I'm struggling for the name of some camp outside of San Francisco where they staged the division to go out [Camp Stoneman]. We're loaded onto the troopships in the harbor and guess what? V-J Day comes, but the division sails anyway. Now, this is like the sail to nowhere. We're in the Pacific Ocean for, approximately, five to six weeks. Nobody wants us. The war is over and what do they need an extra fifteen thousand men to take care of? We wound up in Ulithi. Have you ever heard of Ulithi, the largest single natural harbor in the world? It's in the Marianas. We sat in the Ulithi harbor about a week. They then sent us up to the Philippines and we're offshore on Leyte and we landed in Batangas. Batangas was a wide-open rice field and it was the rainy season. … We pitched a division camp, fifteen thousand men, in a rice field, pouring rain. We were there for about a month and they decided to repatriate, I believe it was, the … 38th Division, the Ohio National Guard, back to the States. So, we moved into Manila and took over their camp. … My regiment wound up in Marikina, which is a suburb of Manila. I was there until the following May. … I told you the incident of my being promoted or not? I was a first lieutenant and the rank rate for infantry company commander is captain. Hess was gone; he had been wounded. Huber, Dick Hale and one or two other guys, we were all first lieutenants and, by that time, all company commanders. … I got a call in the orderly room one day, strangely enough, from the Manila Hospital, who had a patient by the name of Robert Wirth, Lieutenant Wirth, who was a classmate in the Black Fifty, … who was in the Tank Corps. … He had some ailment with his knee or something. I never did find out. To make a long story shorter, we went to the 342nd Infantry … private officers' club to have a few drinks late that afternoon, early evening. … One thing led to another and we were being entertained by [John] "Bucky" Pizzarelli, who was in my regiment, who was a world-renowned guitar player, still alive today. … He was eighteen years old, but had played for Vaughan Monroe. You might remember him [Sandra]. You certainly would not [Shaun]. Vaughan Monroe was a Big Band [leader] in New York, nationwide, and Bucky was a guitar player. At any rate, Bucky played at the club. … After a few drinks, I said to Shorty, "I think it's about time to get going." "Okay." So, we walked out the front door and the front door was always guarded by a sergeant with a rifle, because it was a private club, and there were Third Air Force lieutenants arguing with this guard and they wanted in to the club. … The guard said, "I'm sorry, sir. This is a private club for the 342nd Infantry. You can't come in." … With that, one of the Air Force lieutenants said, to no one in particular, "You're nothing but a bunch of dirty Jews." Shorty Wirth, who was an Episcopalian, I believe, says to me, "You're not going to let him get away with that, are you?" and pushed me right into this chap. … If you offered me ten million dollars, I couldn't tell you his name, because I never did know. … The next thing you know, we're down in the mud of Manila, wrestling, slugging each other, and I wound up on top. With that, I was pulled off by fellow officers and they were very complimentary. … I showered and changed uniform and

dropped Wirth off at the hospital and went back to my camp. At seven o'clock the next morning, as I walked in the orderly room, my First Sergeant said, "Lieutenant, sir, Colonel (Triplett?) wants to see you immediately in regimental headquarters." Well, I got in the jeep and went up, went through his adjutant and the adjutant said, "Go right in." … Triplett always sat in his office with his overseas cap on and tankers, as you may or may not know, always wore them on the left side. Most officers wore them on the right side. … He sat in there. He was a rather large man. He was new to the regiment and he said, "Greenberg, I understand you had a fight last night." … I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "I understand you won." I said, "I think so, sir." He said, "You're now our captain." [laughter] So, I was promoted, on the spot, and I get [in] the jeep, go down. … I walked in my orderly room and guess what? There's a set of captain's bars sitting on my desk. The First Sergeant knew what was going on; they always did. At any rate, about a month before the date that most of us were going to be discharged as single officers, there was a whole routine of things you had to qualify for to go home. … I don't know if Dick Hale was in the group. I know Bill Huber was. At any rate, a month before that, I knew when I was going home, like, let's say May 1st. In April, I was called in to the regimental headquarters and told that I would take a contingent of thirty-five officers, … I was the ranking officer, to a camp five, six miles away where the Philippine Army was being reconstituted. … They had three divisions prior to World War II that were wiped out. … Now, the war is over and they're going to reconstitute the Philippine Army. … Typical Army incompetence on certain things, they decided to get thirty-five officers from the 86th Division, but they don't specify what the return date is. So, the 86th Division took the next thirty-five guys who were going home and sent them to the Philippine Army. I get there with all the papers and I presented [them] to a colonel, who was the regimental commander. … He takes one look at it and I will only tell you what he said, but it wasn't very complimentary. He said, "They sent me thirty-five guys who are only here for thirty days." I said, "I think that's right, sir." So, I became, for two weeks, a battalion commander. It was simply paperwork, but it was all over. … A couple of weeks later, Bill Huber and a few other Rutgers men, Bob Gardner, whose name I haven't mentioned before, and a couple of other guys, we all got on the same troopship back to San Francisco. … That was a quick trip, … only took two weeks, and, when we got there, the train ride to Fort Dix took about two weeks. So, I spent almost a whole year traveling at government expense, got back to Fort Dix, was discharged and went back to Rutgers under the GI Bill. I ran into Dean Curtin, an assistant Dean of Men, and he said, "How would you like to manage the student union?" which was the old campus Kappa Sig house on the corner. We passed it this morning. It's now a parking lot. There was a big fraternity house there. Rutgers took it over during the war and made it into a student union. … I had a private room and bath and I was in command of the student union, for which I did nothing. Again, [I] got an NYA job. I was making more money there than I made when I finally went to work. That was a pleasant experience. … I spent a year on the campus and, here I am, fifty, sixty years later. Now, I'm sure I've left out a lot of incidentals, but they're incidentals.

SH: Please, tell us about your father and where he was from.

WG: My father was the son of immigrants from Lithuania. He was born in Brooklyn, New York. … He moved to Hoboken, New Jersey, when he was a young man. I don't believe my dad ever went to high school. He was literate. He was highly intelligent and he served in World War I in the Navy in … Point Rockaway, New York, which is not too far from where that jet

went down after 9/11, not 9/11, somewhat after. [Editor's Note: Mr. Greenberg is referring to the crash of American Airlines Flight 587 on November 12, 2001, in Rockaway in Queens.] Dad, at a dance one night, met my mother. She was about six, seven years younger than him. … Her father had a moving van business in Rockaway. … Her father and mother both came from Dutch extraction. Their name had been Prinz, P-R-I-N-Z, in Holland and, when her grandparents immigrated to this country, they changed their name to Prince. At any rate, they got married down, in December of '21, I believe, '20 or '21, in Rockaway. … Dad, by that time, had secured a job on the Board of Education of Hoboken to become a truant officer. … I might add at this point, his best customer over the years was Frank Sinatra. … He busted Frank Sinatra every day, five days a week, for being a truant. Frank Sinatra's parents, his father was a fireman and his mother was a midwife, … I never met Frank personally, but my father knew him very, very well. [laughter] My family was of modest means. My dad, I think the highest salary he ever earned was fifty-five dollars a week. They had an apartment in Hoboken. … For the most part, he always had a second job to supplement his income. … He was a fine man. I had a brother, eight years younger than I, born in 1930. … He managed to pick up all the family ailments. He had Parkinson's, cancer, ankylosis of the neck, which meant his neck was frozen in a position and it's non-operative. I don't know how to best describe it, but it's not terribly painful, but he couldn't turn his head. He found it difficult to drive. At any rate, he died about nine years ago, after receiving one of the first brain operations here in New Brunswick, at the Robert Wood Johnson Hospital, by a surgeon who pretty much invented this … operation and we got to him through a cousin of mine, who was a doctor in Lock Haven, [Pennsylvania], a young cousin. … I flew my brother up here and, two weeks later, they operated on him and it was successful. They stopped his dyskinesia, which is shaking. So, he had a year of life that was useful, and then, the cancer killed him. … He was my only sibling. My father died of a heart attack in 1962. … My mother died, we think of a heart attack, when she was eighty-six years old and she just went one afternoon, with no suffering, which was a blessing. I have two sons, fifty-two and fifty-three. The older son lives in Lake Worth, Florida. He's been married twice, unsuccessfully. … He has a very fine position; he's a co-publisher of a series of magazines like [for] the Chamber of Commerce, *et cetera, et cetera*. My younger son lives in Tampa. … He was a sportswriter. … My son, Peter, never graduated from college. He went to Bridgeport University for one year, and then, dropped out. My son, Don, who had some problems [like other] young men in that era, went to the University of South Florida in Tampa and received a degree and became a sportswriter and, ultimately, wound up working for the *Orange County Register* in Orange County, California. … He's basically a basketball writer. He covered the Lakers and was a good friend of Magic Johnson and all those guys. About eight years ago, he always had his summers off, because it was between seasons, and he became a very good golfer. He's now about a two handicap. He decided he had enough and he retired, but he fell in love with Scotland, he used to spend his summers there and, particularly, with a little town in North Scotland, (Dornoch?), and he bought a home over there. … He spends six months in Scotland and six months in Tampa, but he was married to golf. … For his fiftieth birthday, his older brother gave him a cruise, a Caribbean cruise, … for a week and, of course, you know what's coming. He gets on the cruise, he says, "I don't want to meet a bunch of old bags on the cruise." … He didn't foresee the fact that he would meet the most delightful young woman, from Saginaw, Michigan, married, divorced, two children, and he was, as they say in the trade, smitten. They got back to Fort Lauderdale on a Saturday and, the following Friday, he was on a plane to Saginaw for the weekend. They were married a year ago April. They're living in

Tampa and he is a changed man, … just an unbelievable story. We have no grandchildren. We have two adopted, I guess, not really, [they are] her children, … and I don't think we'll ever have any grandchildren and the only solace in that is, it makes estate planning much easier, okay. … Mr. John Pearson, of course, has entered the scene. I didn't need his help, but he offered me help any way, and so forth, and so on. …

SH: Why did you come to Rutgers? You spoke about getting the scholarship.

WG: Well, I had been accepted to William and Mary, of all places, and one or two other small schools and Rutgers. First of all, Rutgers was convenient, living in Hoboken. We didn't have a car then, but it was something about it I liked. I had a cousin, who has given his oral history, Herbert Bilus, B-I-L-U-S. He's my first cousin. We were sort of raised together in Hoboken and he was Class of '42. He and a fellow by the name of Dr. Silberberg; I don't know if he ever gave [an oral history] …

SI: He did.

WG: He did?

SI: Seymour Silberberg.

WG: Seymour, yes, Sy, commonly known as "Slush," because he was very accommodating, "Slush Pump." [laughter] Rutgers attracted me and I came down and, in that I was a late acceptance, I could not get a dorm room in Bishop [Winants?]. So, I wound up, in my freshman year, living in the "Zoo House." Are either of you familiar with the Zoo House? The Zoo House was next to St. Peter's Church, right across the street from the campus. …

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A ----------

SH: Please, continue.

WG: Okay. The Zoo House consisted [of], I think it was a three-story building and must have had, like, ten or twelve rooms. I only discovered today that Dr. [John] Pino lived in there in his freshman year. … We have no recollection of knowing each other then. A couple of other people were in there, [Santo] Paterno and another wrestler on the Rutgers Wrestling Team. My roommate was a real quiet fellow from Queens, New York, by the name of Herb Abrams. … I don't know if he was ever in the service. Herb and I lost touch with each other after our freshman year. I don't think I ever saw him or spoke to him again. In my second year, I moved to the Phi Ep House. I had pledged Phi Ep in my freshman year and I lived there for my sophomore and most of my junior year. In the Phi Ep House, I had roommates. One's name is Harry Mackler from Lambertville, New Jersey. He's dead. … The other was a fellow by the name of Norm Ginsberg, who was a rather stocky man. He was a guard on the basketball team, very good basketball player. … We had a very nice class. I made a lot of lifelong friends, people like Fred Pressman, who died several years ago. Fred was in the Army, but I think it was before you began collecting oral histories. Fred was Barney's in New York, you know, the men's clothing store. Barney Pressman was his father. … Then, there was Mel Grossman, who

became Mel Grayson. His father owned a big hotel in Lakewood. … My brother-in-law, Arthur Katz, was a member. That's how I met my wife, through him, and a lot of other people, but I made a lot of friends on campus, like Bill Huber, Shorty Wirth, Fritz Kroesen, I knew all these fellows. … Rutgers was a small college. Now, I may be incorrect, but, I think, there were only 1500 total students on campus, no women. Women were all over in the "Coop," as they called NJC. So, when you walked down College Avenue, you pretty much nodded at everybody. It had, I think, seventeen or nineteen fraternities. … The fraternities pretty much controlled the class hierarchy, the president, whatever. … I was elected secretary-treasurer of the class, I think, in my sophomore year. It was a lot of work involved, which was absolutely nothing. I don't think I ever went to a meeting or anything. It was a very small camaraderie group. The Corner Tavern was sort of a hangout. All the fraternities lived on that end of town. … Al Strickland's, up on Easton Avenue, Mine and Easton, was a place, Al Strickland's Bar and Grill. That was sort of the hangout for the fraternity group that was on the other side of town, other side of College Avenue. I didn't quite finish my third year when, of course, we were called to active duty. … I made it a point, I had decided that, when I got out of the Army, I wanted my degree. I was told it was important in business that you have a college degree, which I did. Not many of my classmates came back. None in my fraternity house came back for their degree. Why? I don't know. …

SH: What was your favorite subject? What was your major?

WG: My major was history and political science. Professor [Edward] Burns was my primary professor. … There was a chap, very young chap, by the name of [Richard P.] McCormick. It seems to me the name is familiar. [laughter] He wasn't even an instructor. He was a graduate aide or something. I think Dr. McCormick was the Class of '38. So, he would only have been in his middle or late [twenties]. … The Bishop House was dominated by a loud, bombastic history teacher by the name of [Lewis E.] Ellis. His classes had like twenty or thirty people in them. Conversely, Professor Burns only had about four or five. He was a very scholarly, quiet, astute man, whose major function in life was, he became a debunker of President Lincoln. … I don't know what he had … against President Lincoln, but he made you understand he didn't like him. … When I came back, I had the privilege of enrolling in a class taught by Dr. Gross, Mason Gross. … I must admit, when I was in the Dean's office or wherever I was, filling out the courses I wanted, of course, I needed fifteen credits, I think, I took "Music Appreciation" with "Skip" [F. Austin] Walter and a couple of other courses I knew were shoo-ins. … I needed one more and I see this course, something in philosophy. That sounded easy, and so, I signed up for that. I went to my first class in that course, which was held in Van Nest, on the first floor, and, I think, there were four other students in it. Now, mind you, this is after the war and there comes Mason Gross, a big man with a mustache. … From the moment he opened his mouth, I knew I was in trouble. I didn't know what the heck he was talking about. "Philosopher," blah, blah, quoting this guy and that guy, whatever, and I'm sitting there, you know, smiling. About a week goes by and, I think, I had two sessions a week and, at the end of the third session, I literally bumped into Professor Gross walking down College Avenue. He said, "Oh, Greenberg, I want to talk to you. When did I lose you?" Oh, he'd given us a spot exam. I said, "You never had me." He said, "I'll tell you what. Show up a couple of times, now and then, keep your mouth shut and you'll get a C." I said, "Thank you, sir." [laughter] … I had sort of the same

arrangement with Skip Walter. See, I can say this because they're both gone. [laughter] Did you know Skip?

SH: Just by reputation.

WG: He used to sing and it was a snap course. You got an A-minus for coming in and listening to records. … I don't remember what else I took. My experience at Rutgers was a happy one, a pleasant one, very economical, because, when I came back after the war, I became head of the Student Union. They gave a house and a shower, a private bath, for nothing and I was in charge of the Student Union. There was a housemother there. She came in in the morning. She took care of everything. I got the free room. My fraternity gave me free meals. I had my GI Bill. I was living in the lap of luxury. I bought a brand-new car with the money I had saved in the service and my father took care of that, getting the car from the dealer. So, I enjoyed my return, being a veteran. … Also, in retrospect, I met all the nice guys. I met a lot of nice people in the Army. I kept in touch with Captain Mitchell, who died, oh, ten, fifteen years ago, because he was considerably older. In fact, I went out to Arizona twice to visit with him and [I] kept in touch with all the people I was associated with at Rutgers through the Black Fifty. … It gave me a good education. It taught me a lot and it was a pleasant experience.

SH: You talked about your father living in a very Democratic town. Did he approve of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal programs?

WG: My father would have committed murder for the Democratic Party. Does that answer your question? [laughter] My father was a ward captain in the district, with the voting, and, in those days, I guess they had it for many years, when you voted, you voted on a ballot and you turned your ballot in to the captain, who stood next to the ballot box. … He put his hand on it, like this, to tear off a strip. The minute my father put his hand on your ballot, he knew who you voted for. He felt the impression. Now, assuming you were an employee of Hoboken, New Jersey, in any capacity, schoolteacher, policeman, fireman, whatever, and you voted against the party, I guarantee you that by nine o'clock the next morning, you no longer had a job, okay. [laughter] My father lived and died for the Democratic Party. … I went to Franklin Roosevelt's first inauguration in 1933, with my father, and the school principal, Saul (Gottlieb?), and his son and we drove from Hoboken to Washington. We stayed in some rooming house. There were no motels in those days and we stood in the rain on March 4, 1933. The inauguration was held in March in those days, not as it is today, in the driving rain, and we must have been a quarter of a mile away from where they inaugurated Franklin D. Roosevelt. As that ended, we trudged over to the car and we drove non-stop back to Hoboken. We spent one night in a rooming house someplace around Baltimore. Yes, my father would have committed murder for them, but they always respected him. He was the one who got me into Rutgers after I had been rejected. … In those days, I think the tuition was two-hundred dollars a semester. I had a one-hundred dollar County Scholarship, and then, the NYA job, … among other things. Everything in New Jersey, at that time, was political. It's no different today and you know something? It's no different wherever you go. We're down in Florida a long time now, maybe there are bigger crooks around, but you'll have to point them out to me, other than some of the people we deal with. That's the way of life in a democracy.

SH: Was your mother involved in politics as well?

WG: No, no, my mother was very docile about it, probably would have done something to upset the marriage. My mother was a highly intelligent woman. She only had one sister, who had no children. … As it stands today, I have nothing but cousins. I have no siblings left, no aunts and uncles. My last aunt just died two years ago in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania. So, I have about four or five cousins. I stay in very close touch with them, Herb Bilus from Bloomfield, New Jersey, who grew up with me in Hoboken. Did you do his interview?

SI: No, he was interviewed before I came on the project.

WG: Oh, okay.

SI: He was interviewed in 1998.

WG: There were three grandsons. My father's mother only had three grandsons. One was in the Air Force, Herb was in the Coast Guard and I was in the infantry in the Army.

SH: Could you tell us about the reaction on campus when you heard the news about the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor?

WG: I was actually in Bound Brook, New Jersey, where my grandparents lived. … They were people of very modest means and we heard about it on the radio. My parents had picked me up that morning at the fraternity house. We went to Bound Brook to see my grandparents. So, we jumped right in the car and drove back to New Brunswick. … Sunday afternoon, late in the day, the house would normally be very quiet. Most of the guys were home or would come back late in the day. The house was packed, because the minute we heard about Pearl Harbor, everybody headed back to their fraternity house. … The feeling was, "Hey, I'm going to enlist tomorrow morning." Everybody was going to get a gun and whatever. Of course, the euphoria quieted down, but I think I enlisted in the Air Force within a couple of weeks. My feelings at the time were of outrage and there was no question. You know, there had been serious questions about the war in Europe and Roosevelt's being involved and whatever, but, when they bombed Pearl Harbor; of course, we didn't know how badly we were hurt that day. I don't think Washington knew, but, when it all came out, you felt no other way. If a person was a pacifist, I think they kept their mouths shut for the time being. … You know, they lined up outside the enlistment offices by the boatload, by the boatload.

SH: What was the reaction from the campus administration? Was there a convocation?

WG: You have to understand that Bob Clothier was president of Rutgers when I came down here. … He came from a wealthy family in Philadelphia, [the] Strawbridge and Clothier clothing department store. I don't know if it's still open or not. These were very quiet people. There was no meeting or anything. In fact, if you worked on campus and you didn't say something to somebody, you'd know nothing. No, there was no town hall meeting. In those days, Rutgers was like a small school. The whole administration fitted into the one building. I mean, there was no such thing as, like, the Rutgers Foundation or anything like that. It was a small, Dutch

Reformed college. They were still very conscious of their heritage, a very quiet place and no student demonstrations, no student this or student that. You went to college, period, and you were lucky to be here.

SH: As a political science-history major, were you talking about what was going on in Europe from 1939 on in class or in the fraternity or at home?

WG: Well, in those days, the college students, in my opinion, weren't the kind you find today, who are on top of everything. They want to be heard about every issue and whatever. In those days, not so, I don't think, and, oh, sure, you talked about it, but the war had been on for so long that it became mundane. It didn't seem to affect the United States and there was the terrible campaign against Roosevelt being, you know, a God-knows-what. … It wasn't like today, where you have conservatives and liberals and independents, whatever. … Things were a lot quieter, believe me, in those days than today.

SH: Was anybody talking about America First?

WG: Oh, Lindbergh had the America First program and, you know, they had it. The Nazis met in Madison Square Garden and they gave the Hitler salute. … Everybody didn't accept it, may not have liked it, but there weren't big clashes. There was no demonstration in New Brunswick and one in Princeton, whatever. The biggest concern of Rutgers students, in those days, was playing Princeton in some athletic event. … Of course, a remark, I went to a pep rally, the only one I went to, on Winants' steps there; it was the night before the Princeton game and somebody was agitating the group. … He said he had just come back from Princeton and they announced the Princeton-Rutgers game and somebody in Princeton said, "What are Rutgers?" That was about the extent of the concern. That, of course, got the team angry, but they couldn't do anything about it. Even in those days, Rutgers was not a superpower.

SH: You talked about your fraternity, but what other activities were you involved with on campus?

WG: Oh, I was an assistant manager on the baseball team, for which I got my numerals, 1945. I still have my sweater. I must admit, it's difficult to put on, kind of small. I became president of my fraternity. I was a member of the Scarlet Key. I was secretary-treasurer of my class. I was considered the politician by my Class of '44 fellow fraternity brothers. None of them wanted any part of those things. I did all those things. … As I say, my parents came from very modest means. My father's salary as a truant officer, up until the time he retired, tops, was fifty-five dollars a week and, for that, my father always had a second job. It was like living in small towns. … All of Hudson County was the Democratic stronghold of New Jersey. I don't know if you ever heard of Frank Hague. Frank Hague was the political boss of the state and Frank Hague was notorious for making a remark one time. You weren't allowed to dance in public in Jersey City. Did you ever know that? It was against the law. So, somebody challenged him on it and they said, "You know, Mayor Hague, it's against the law." He said, "I am the law," and that was the headline, you know. Now, one story about my father and Frank Hague; a year after Frank Hague died, my father was retired by then, they probated his will and he left an estate of fifteen million dollars. Now, this was like forty years ago; that's a lot of money. … By that

time, my mom and dad had moved to White Plains, New York, when we were living in Scarsdale. … They came over [to] the house one Sunday, as they always did, because they wanted to visit the grandchildren. … My father and I were sitting in the den alone and I said, "Dad, tell me, they just probated Frank Hague's will and he went to work for the City of Jersey City at age seventeen. He became mayor and retired, never made more than sixteen thousand dollars a year." My father said, "Yes." I said, "How could he leave fifteen million dollars?" My father said, … "He was very frugal." [laughter] Now, I had too much love for my father to challenge that. I said, "Oh. Now, I understood." You asked me about my father and the Democratic Party. Now, I've told that story so many times, my wife takes a gag out when I start to tell the story. [laughter]

SH: Where did you meet Mrs. Greenberg?

WH: Her brother was a Class of '44. He was an "Aggie" [College of Agriculture student] at Rutgers, a fraternity brother. … Her nickname was "Sis" and I met her a couple of times, down here, you know. She was five, six years younger than me and that was a big gap in those days. … It wasn't until the late '40s, … '49, '50, that a group was going away for a weekend and I asked her to go with me. She accepted. We started dating. … We got married about a year later. You know, in those days, you didn't get married in two days. We had, as I have told you, two children. My wife is an avid professional photographer of, basically, wildlife. In fact, this week, she's up in St. Augustine. There's an alligator farm there and she will take photographs of a few alligators. She's had photographs published in virtually every magazine you can think of. … She's excellent and she's very good at her work and I am completely supportive of her, now that I'm unemployed. … She's just a lovely lady. … We've raised two very fine children, who are most attentive, and, for that, I am most grateful, because I know [of] a lot of cases where, you know, the kids don't talk to mom and pop [for] one thing and another. One of our sons calls us every morning, without fail. The other one, the one who … just got married, he calls us regularly. … He wasn't so attentive when he was single. I guess Barbara Ann Greenberg has laid the law down on my son, Don, for which we're grateful. [laughter] I was very successful in business. …

SH: After you came back to Rutgers, did you change your major?

WG: I came back and I graduated in June of '47. … I had a cousin who was an attorney and his father was [the] attorney for a company by the name of (Schenley?) Cigars. I'm sure you've never heard [of them]; they went out of business many years ago. They had, like, two, three-hundred cigar stores in New York City, sold all kinds of tobacco. At any rate, they controlled a company by the name of Park and Schenley. Park and Schenley had originally … owned a property on 57th and Fifth [Avenue]. … They had a huge candy store and whatever and they got into the liquor business, Park and Tilford Distillers. … I went to work for them in the production department for about five years. … When I started dating Phyllis, her father was in the corrugated box business in North Bergen, New Jersey, very successful. … To make a long story short there, just before we were married, he wanted me to go into the business. I said, "No," I didn't care to. So, when I came back from my honeymoon, the Schenley family made it easy for me; they fired me, because I had taken two extra weeks on my honeymoon. … They knew of Mr. Katz and they felt I was no longer a trusted employee. So, that's how I got into the

corrugated box business. We ultimately sold out to the Mead Corporation, Mead Paper. … My two brothers-in-law left the company and I stayed and, ultimately, became a regional manager in Mead and was then recruited by a company by the name of Thatcher Glass, who made glass containers. You know Owens-Illinois? similar to Owens-Illinois, liquor bottles, milk bottles, basically beer bottles and so forth. … I went to work for them as executive vice president in charge of sales. Several years later, the president took another position and I was promoted to president. … I ran that company for about eight years. We had five thousand employees, five hundred administrative and forty-five hundred hourly workers. … I retired in the end of 1983. By that time, the company, which had been owned by Dart, D-A-R-T, Industries; Justin Dart was a big politician in the Republican Party. He put Ronnie Reagan into office. … Then, Dart was taken over by Kraft Foods. So, I was a head of a division reporting to the chairman of Kraft Foods. He, then, decided to spin us off and a Wall Street brokerage firm bought us out. … I worked for them for about a year or two and I figured, "I've had enough," and I retired. … I've done fairly well with all the stock options and stuff like that and, in those days, you could do anything you wanted to in big companies and there was no whistleblower on Wall Street like there is today, not that we did anything wrong. … I was sixty-three years old. I've been retired ever since. We live down on Marco Island in South Florida, Southwest Florida, and we traveled extensively, until I ran into some medical problems, which make traveling not impossible, but a little difficult for me. I'm on dialysis and I've been on dialysis since August and, wherever I go, I have to have dialysis. I can't take a week off. So, yesterday, I was at St. Peter's Hospital here and they were very nice. I'm very appreciative. When I get back Monday afternoon, I'm back on my schedule down there, but it's three days a week, about three-and-a-half hours on and off and whatever, no pain, and they just have to clean your blood, because your kidneys, in normal function, clean your blood. … If your kidneys shut down, you either go on dialysis or you die. Dialysis was only invented, so-to-speak, in 1947. So, prior to that, anybody who had it, you said goodbye.

SI: Can we talk a bit more about your military career?

WG: Yes.

SI: We have heard many stories about the Black Fifty. I was wondering if you could tell your version of the story of how you guys were named. I have heard about Pappy (Vopat?) and the strenuous training you went through.

WG: Pappy, you heard that?

SI: Please, tell your version.

WG: Okay. Well, let's see; when we were called to active duty in Fort McClellan, we got on busses, well, we got on a train here in New Brunswick, and went down to Fort Dix. … The next night, I think, the fifty of us got on a wooden car with wooden seats, not cushions, wooden slats, and we were hauled down to Fort McClellan, I think it took … at least a day, by a steam locomotive. … In those days, when you were behind a steam locomotive, you got nothing but soot, because it burned coal. So, we got in to Fort McClellan, we got off the car and we lined up and I guess we had khakis on and we were all filthy. … A little old buck sergeant, three-striper,

comes out and I forget his name and says, "You look like a bunch of nothing but dirty niggers." In those days, that was not an inappropriate adjective. The word nigger was not as it is today, it's a no-no. … That's where the word Black Fifty originated. Now, somebody mentioned to you before, Lieutenant Vopat. He was from Chicago, as I remember. He was not my platoon leader, but he was a martinet and a very strict guy. He used to have a riding whip with him. He was a pompous rear-end. … We went through a pretty rigorous basic training. One of our lieutenants was from Mississippi, ROTC. … A lot of our basic training guys were from the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State and they knew him as a friend, but he made it pretty clear [that] he wasn't their friend, you know. He tried to be equal with everybody. You know, we thought the things we went through, like marching up Banes Gap, we used to take seventeen-mile hikes as normal routine, we used to think those things were pretty tough, but pretty hilarious. You look back on them, what were they? They were just one instrument to make you a better soldier and a better person. I had no problems in basic training. I was a little concerned about my ability on the target range, because I had a tendency to flinch when you shot the rifle. … I worked hard at it. … I was concerned, because, well, I'm getting ahead of myself, if you went to OCS and if you flunked any segment, you were out, I mean, automatically. You were "boarded," as they called it; you went before a board. The board met every fifth and eighth week in the thirteen-week training course. … I was concerned that, when I got to OCS, that I would not have a satisfactory target shoot. So, whenever I could, I would try to go out and practice. … I overcame my flinching, which kept me in OCS. I also must admit at this time, I was concerned about my mathematics tests. I was never very good at math, but, like all things, the night before a "GT," as they call it, a graded test, somehow or other, Class 340, which I was in, got hold of the previous tests and we, you know, scanned them. So, I had a very good memory and, I remember, the last test I looked at, there were twenty questions, multiple choice. The next morning, [I] walk into the classroom, the test is slapped down on the desk and we're given fifty minutes to answer the twenty questions. I looked at it and I went down the whole thing and I got a hundred on it. I had memorized all the right answers. [laughter] So, when I saw that test, I knew I was going to get commissioned. Now, we had some guys, … Rutgers men, who had pretty tough times. One or two were boarded and they did the unusual; they came through a board satisfactorily. In other words, they had to convince, like, four or five officers that they were capable of becoming second lieutenants. … As I say, we were funny, Class 340. There's a friend of mine down at Marco Island, played golf with him, he's a retired chairman of the board of Nestle Company, a rather big job. Over a drink one afternoon, it turned out [that] he was an instructor at Fort Benning as a first lieutenant. … He said, "What class were you in?" I said, "340." He said, "I was there." … I didn't remember him and he didn't remember me, of course. So, it's a small world.

SH: Do you have any stories about going from Hoboken, New Jersey, to Alabama?

WG: Oh, you have misgivings about going into town and keeping your mouth shut, because Anniston, I forget the name of the town; we didn't get in to the town very much to begin with. Yes, you were apprehensive and somewhat cautious. You didn't want to be a loudmouth and get involved in a fight or something silly like that, as my friend Robert Wirth took care of for me. Anniston and, when we went to OCS, Benning was outside of Columbus, and these were redneck towns, very difficult … for us to assimilate. They didn't like us and we, basically, didn't like them. It comes down to that. So, you just kept your distance. Today, [it is] somewhat different.

I mean, when I got into business, particularly with Mead and even with Thatcher, I went down to Louisville quite a bit and Cincinnati, lived there for two years, and Miami, we had a box plant in Miami. … As you got older, you learned to assimilate things. … Looking back on the war years, the South was the South and don't let anybody tell you that they welcomed you with open arms. They did not, they did not, certainly, and we weren't too happy with them, either. For instance, I don't remember any real Southerner in our freshman class here, come to think of it. There might have been one or two, but I didn't know them. Most of the people in my freshman class were from New Jersey. You know, it was not a state school then. It was state-supported, to some extent, but Rutgers was a small college.

SH: You talked about your odyssey in the Pacific, having been deployed before the bomb was dropped and how no one would accept you. How did they supply you, with so many thousands of men on board the ship? How did you take care of them? What were the conditions like?

WG: Well, on both trips, to Europe and to the Philippines, we lived in the lap of luxury. We had a private room. On the trip to Europe, believe it or not, we had waiters in white jackets working in the officers' mess. The officers' mess was where the first-class dining room was and the waiters had white gloves. The troops, as troops usually are, were fed out of the soup kitchen. If you don't like it, what are you going to do about it? That's the way things were. That's what Peterson talks about, when he went to Europe on the same ship we did. … If I had had a better roommate than Huber, I wouldn't have heard all the vomiting at night and retching. You might mention that when you talk to him. [laughter]

SH: Were these African-American stewards?

WG: Oh, no. The other thing [was], the Army was segregated. The only black troops we saw were truck drivers. All the truck drivers were black. All the mess attendants were white. We didn't have any black help doing the kitchen [work]. I guess the troops were not desegregated until Truman. I'm not quite sure of that. … The only blacks we saw were truck drivers. Now, we never saw [them, but] the Air Force had some black squadrons, one or two. … There was an infantry regiment in Italy that was all-black. … Well, wait a minute, I guess there were black engineers working with the Corps of Engineers, doing work on the docks and things like that. … Blacks were second-class citizens. Now, in our freshman class, I don't think there were any more than two or four black students. One's name was Harry and I don't remember his last name. I'm just guessing there were four. You may know more about that than I do, but I just don't recollect [them]. Fraternities did not take any blacks. In fact, fraternities were segregated. There were three Jewish fraternities on campus, Phi Ep, SAM and TKE. Phi Ep is gone. I was a Phi Ep. … Our house was at 4 Mine Street, the house with four white pillars. That was our fraternity house and we lost the house after the war. They had a mortgage and so on; I don't remember why we lost it, but it disappeared. The University bought it, took it over, but the campus was, for all intents and purposes, segregated. I don't believe there were any black professors. I wouldn't think there were, no, no.

SH: Was there any sense of anti-Semitism? You talked about the segregation of the fraternities.

WG: It was accepted, the fact that fourteen fraternities took only Christians. For instance, my roommate at the Zoo House, Herb Abrams, was not Jewish, but, because of his name, no fraternity rushed him. … The Jewish fraternities just ignored him, but the Gentile fraternities ignored him because they thought he was Jewish. So, he used to complain to me. I said, "Look, Herb, I can't help you." One anecdote about Herb Abrams, as I say, after my freshman year, I never saw him again, never talked to him, about ten years ago, and I knew that he went to work for Bankers Trust of New York as a vice-president and he retired. I heard that through the Foundation. … He lived down in Sarasota. … One evening, I get a call, "Bill Greenberg?" "Yes?" "This is Herb Abrams." I said, "Oh, how are you?" He said, "What's new?" I haven't seen the man in forty years, he asked me, "What's new?" [laughter] I was so stunned, I didn't know what to say. He and his wife were in Naples for a day or so and he just thought he'd call and say hello and that was the last I heard of him. I haven't heard from him since. His wife passed away, I know that through, again, … the Foundation. Is there anti-Semitism on the campus? sure. I'm sure there was anti-Semitism in the administrative office. Dean Metzger was, I considered, an anti-Semite, just from the way he talked to you, talked down, and he was the Dean of Men. … I believe he was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. You can't forget the fact that Rutgers was a Dutch Reformed university; anti-Semitism, sure there was.

SI: Did you have to go to chapel services?

WG: No, I was tipped off … that I had my rights, even though, in those days, you had some rights, that as a Jew, I objected to the so-called interdenominational service, but you had to go to the Dean. So, I went up, went in the Dean's office and, when he asked me what I wanted, I told him I wanted to be excused from Sunday morning chapel. He said, "Why?" I said, "Because it's against my religious beliefs." That was it. He signed the paper. All my fraternity brothers would have to get up every Sunday morning to go to chapel at ten o'clock [laughter] and they hated me for it. "How did you know what to do?" I don't know. I think my cousin, Herb Bilus, told me, yes.

SH: What about anti-Semitism in the military? You talked about the one incident where you told me your friend, Shorty, pushed you.

WG: Oh, well …

SH: Were there others?

WG: I never felt any discomfiture in my military service, with any of my company, my platoon or my fellow officers, no. Again, the Army had a certain, tremendous amount of camaraderie and things like that, … you didn't talk about them. You did not talk about them. I mean, sure, there were certain guys who didn't like me and I didn't liked certain guys, but that's normal.

SH: You spoke of your father's devotion to Franklin Roosevelt; how did the troops react when you heard that he had died?

WG: Roosevelt? We were in the southern part of Germany. Frankly, Sandra, there wasn't much reaction. You know, … we considered him an old man and all you had to do is look at his

picture in the paper or on newsreels and you knew he was not well. I mean, he looked sick and what was the reaction? "Who was Harry Truman?" that was the only reaction, you know.

SH: Did anyone question his ability to be the Commander-in-Chief?

WG: Right, right.

SH: Was it just something that you accepted and you kept right on going?

WG: Exactly. There … [weren't] any demonstrations or meetings about it, … no such thing, took it in stride. We were more concerned about when the war was going to be over and how soon you were going to get home. … There wasn't any unhappy feeling. I listened to Colonel Jacobs yesterday [at the Annual Meeting of the Rutgers Living History Society]. Were you there when he spoke? … It seems to me, there's a different situation in Afghanistan and Iraq, as compared to Vietnam, because even I began to realize that the Vietnam situation was hopeless. … I was helped in that opinion by someone who knew. … My sons and I used to argue about Vietnam, because they were of draft age, and it wasn't until somebody straightened me out that we put that to rest. … Again, the whole thing in Iraq is, don't forget, we have a professional Army and there's a big difference between people who enlisted and people who are drafted to fight. … That's the basic difference.

SI: I have a few questions about being in Europe.

WG: Sure.

SI: What was it like to be in charge of men in general, but particularly in combat situations? How much time did you have to create a bond with them? How did that happen?

WG: Well, in our case most of the enlisted men in the 86th Division were ASTP students, virtually all my platoon of forty men, except with the non-commissioned officers. My non-commissioned officers had been in the Army for two or three years. My enlisted men, privates, PFCs, were basically all college students. So, you had a two-tier elevation to make, so-to-speak. …

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO----------

SI: This continues an interview with William Greenberg on May 14, 2005, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

SH: … Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

SI: Please, continue. You were talking about the split between the ASTP students and the non-commissioned officers.

WG: Right. Non-commissioned officers had been in the Army longer. They were in a position of responsibility and you handled them that way. With the ASTP privates, they were generally

much better educated than all the non-coms. For instance, I stayed friendly with two or three of the non-coms; one has just passed away. He went back home, became a postman, you know, worked for the government. The enlisted men were generally bright young people. There was no feeling of dissent or unhappiness. We all knew we had a job to do and you just did it. How you motivated them, you had to show your men your willingness to put your courage on your sleeve. If you showed any weakness, you immediately lost the respect of the men under you. It's just that simple and, as an officer, I always kept that in mind. I had to be one step ahead of them, not to prove anything to them, but to make sure I had their backing, whatever I did. Now, as a weapons platoon leader, I did not go on patrols. For instance, one of my fellow officers, Jim Henry, who is now an MD in Texas, he came from the University of Texas. He was an ROTC student. Jim took a patrol out, I think it was across the Rhine River, yes, it was and there was a mix-up. … There was a lot of gunfire exchanged and, to this day, Jim Henry is convinced he killed one of his own men. He has never been able to get that out of his system and, putting myself in his boots, I can understand that. I mean, that's something [where] you just don't say, "Gee, it didn't happen." Now, again, I go back to Private Peterson, my correspondent, so-to-speak. … He was in that platoon. He is convinced Henry did not kill him and he has tried to convince Lieutenant Henry of that, but to no avail. So, there are all kinds of little incidents that happened and you see bravery in a lot of men and you see weakness and, in some cases, you see absolute cowardice. … For instance, I had a fellow, I remember his name, (Kidmer?). He was in the mortar squad. … He came from California, I don't know what school he was in, UCLA or something like that, a very nice young man and [he] performed very well. … We were in the Philippines and I was the company commander and I went in the orderly room first thing in the morning. One of the sergeants came in and said, "Captain, we have a problem with Kidmer," I forget his first name … and he was in the Fourth Platoon tent, down the end of the street, company street, and I went in. He was sitting on the edge of his bunk and he was staring straight out and he had a glazed look. He was gone. … I took one look at him, I wasn't a doctor … and I said, "Oh, boy, get a corpsman down here." So, they brought a corpsman down and they packed him right off to the division infirmary, never saw him again, until after the war. They sent him home. … He told me, because he became [the] head of a big library in Los Angeles, very, very bright guy, … over a drink one night out there, or I guess it was in, we had our reunion in Phoenix, Arizona, where Captain Mitchell lived near, before he died. … I sat down with him and I said, "Tell me what happened." He said, "Bill, I don't know. I suddenly went blank." He said, "When I got back to the States, I was in a train, on a troop train, going from San Francisco to LA, or vice versa. … I kept looking out and I thought the Germans had won the war and I saw all German troops on the side of the railroad. It shows you how nuts I was." He said, "[I] just lost complete control and it was that way for about six months." Now, you get a lot of that. You know, you read stories about Patton slapping the troops. He didn't mean to hurt them, he was trying to slap them out, but he couldn't do that. … He should have known better, but you constantly thought about [it]. Oh, [to] give you another example, Bob Hess was a rather ungainly looking guy, heavy set. … When he ran, he lumbered, you know, and the Second Platoon didn't think much of Bob Hess. I knew that, you know. You could feel it instinctively. We got into combat. Bob Hess was right out there with the rifle. He was a combat leader, for which he got the Silver Star, and that's the difference. You never know; nobody knows how they're going to react when they're under stress. I think that's the best way to answer it. Obviously, our troops responded well. I'm sure there are a lot of signs of cowardice. I'll tell you one other anecdote. We had another lieutenant, [his name] was Arthur Boudman, B-O-U-D-M-

A-N, he may still be alive, I don't know. He had Indian heritage, American Indian heritage, and he was a warrior. He couldn't wait to get to Europe to kill the Germans. When we were out in San Louis Obispo, he was in charge of the boxing team. Now, we get to Europe. … I don't know the incident, oh, I know, yes, Captain Mitchell called Boudman in. … He wanted Boudman to take a three-man patrol across the Rhine River and Boudman refused. He said it was suicidal. Well, you don't do that in the Army. So, Mitchell was outraged and smart enough to say, "I'm going to sleep on this." The next day, Boudman gets wounded and he's taken out. So, Mitchell said to me, "Solved my problem, because," he said, "I had no choice, but to have him court-martialed." Now, after the war, A Company had three or four reunions, thanks to Private Peterson, one or two in Arizona, one in Omaha and another one in Council Bluffs, [Iowa]. … There was a little fellow by the name of (Martinelli?) from Chicago, he was a rifleman, and we're sitting at the bar, you know, and he says, "You know, Cap, I shot the son-of-a-bitch." I said, "What?" He said, "When Boudman got wounded," he said, "I regret I didn't kill him. I only wounded him." … I didn't know whether he was telling me the truth or not. To this day, I'll never know, because he died. So, you had cases like that, you know. He's telling me something and I've had other guys; we don't have any more reunions, because we're too old. Probably half the company is dead, at least, maybe more, because we had guys in their late twenties. I was twenty-one … when I was an officer, but … most of the sergeants were in their late twenties. In fact, our company first sergeant was about thirty-one-years-old. The company commander was thirty-two, but you go to these reunions and you don't know who to believe. Maybe they're trying to impress me, maybe they're trying to impress themselves, who knows?

SH: Where do you feel that you were in the most personal danger?

WG: The time I got pushed into the … Danube River. I thought I was gone, because I wasn't a great swimmer. In fact, I could barely swim and I go down with my Army boots, my helmet, my pack, my carbine and a pistol, because Mitchell insisted that all officers in his company pack a .45, in addition to the carbine. The carbine was not a very effective gun. It was too small and it didn't have enough firepower. … I thought I was gone for, maybe, five seconds, and then, when two guys picked me up and the water poured off me, I knew I was okay. Oh, the other time was that same day, when we were in Ingolstadt, when the ninety-millimeters were being pounded in and we lost four, I said four officers, I think I was right. I know one was in Dick Hale's company. He went to Drexel in Pennsylvania; why would I remember that? You know, sometimes, you remember things, … unbelievable. I felt I was lucky then. I could have been killed like that. The right thing was to do what they did. They all jumped in the foxholes that had been dug that morning. I went down on the ground. Foxholes offer no protection against an overhead burst. … This river was tree lined, so, when the artillery shells came in, they hit the trees and they were what we called tree bursts, "boom," like an umbrella. … I don't know how many were killed and wounded, but it was rather substantial. That was the worst action I personally saw, in maybe the space of twenty seconds. Oh, one other thing, when we were in the Philippines, you know, it was a question of who you were going to play volleyball with that day. In fact, I played my first game of golf at the Wack Wack [Golf &] Country Club. [laughter] It's a famous golf course outside of Manila. If you remember, Corregidor was an island and, remember, Corregidor was cleaned out and so forth. I was called up to … regimental headquarters and told I was taking the company to Corregidor, like, a week from Monday for one week as the guard company, strictly ceremonial. So, I informed the non-com officers and the

other officers and we packed up like we were going somewhere. We were going to Corregidor. We went over there by boat. … I had very nice quarters and that used to be a haven for colonels and generals and Red Cross girls, friends [going on] holiday, you know. … We set up camp. Mind you now, we have all our rifles and weapons platoon had the mortars, the machine guns and pistols, but no ammunition, no ammunition. [laughter] About two months after we were there, we had a lovely time for a week, six Japanese surrendered who had been living on Corregidor since … we conquered the Philippines, but they didn't know the war was over. … These guys were loaded with everything, guns, ammunition. Two or three of them could have killed my whole company. All they had to do was attack us, but they were hiding way out in the woods. [laughter] That was the time I was the most nervous, when I heard about that. We could have been killed, you know, for no reason at all, Corregidor. … The other very important part of being in the Philippines for a year was, we went to Rizal Stadium almost every day. … What took place in Rizal Stadium? baseball games. All the big leaguers at wartime were in the Army. For instance, we had Kirby Higbe, who was a pitcher for the Dodgers, Early Wynn, who was an All-Star pitcher, and they formed the Manila Dodgers and they played all visiting teams from the States, seven days a week. … All you had to have was a uniform to get in for nothing. So, there was a baseball game every day in Manila. That was the light side of being over there.

SI: Did you go to any concerts or theatrical productions in Manila?

WG: The only things we went to were movies at night and, boy, the moon looked like it was sitting right on the top of Manila. For some reason or other, I guess because of the area we were in, the moon seems much bigger than it is here. No, they didn't have any things like that. Maybe the USO came over once or twice. By the time they hit where we were, we were getting fourth rate shows that nobody paid any attention to. We built our own bar on our company street. … We served hard liquor and the powers-that-be in our division felt it was better to let the guys, the enlisted men and officers, drink there, rather than go into Manila and get in trouble. … On opening night, we had General [Harris M.] Melasky, our division commander, and his staff and our regimental commander, they're all in my new club.

SH: Was this a club just for officers?

WG: No, no. This was for the A Company people only, officers and enlisted men.

SI: Going back to Europe, one thing that came out over and over again in Mr. Hale's interview was just how good the Germans were at taking advantage of natural defenses, rivers and so forth. It was always a problem of rooting them out of wherever they were.

WG: Well, the Germans were tenacious and we didn't fight any prolonged, protracted actions. Most of our actions were quick and sporadic and came to a quick conclusion. … They were good. I can't say that if I had been there on D-Day or something like that, the situation would have been a lot different. … Very frankly, by the time we got into it, I guess even the hard-nosed Germans knew they were licked. We were then fighting the war on their territory. Don't forget, I said we went into action in Cologne, so, we were in Germany now. It's not fighting in France or Russia or something like that. I never did see any Russian troops over there. They always seemed to be just a hop, skip and a jump away.

SH: What about fraternizing? What were the rules? Were they enforced?

WG: Well, very frankly, we moved so fast, we didn't have any time to try to romance the local tootsies. I remember, one of my sergeants was, shall we say, overaggressive with a young lady. One of the other sergeants says, "We've got a problem. Our friend is having some fun up the road." I said, "Tell him to cease and desist. I don't want to hear any more about it." … That was the end of that. My three nights in Paris were most delightful. The French were, of course, overly enthusiastic about what we had done, as compared to the French today. … No, I don't remember any real serious problem with the fraternization. Captain Mitchell was tough-talking; every fourth word out of his mouth was a four-letter word, but I remember our chaplain saying, "When Mitchell utters a four-letter word, it's okay." You know, there were certain people who can cuss politely and nice and Mitchell was one of those. [laughter] Our chaplain's name was (Ruppa?). Why would I remember his name? Again, you remember some things and not others. Any regrets? Lucky that I came out with [myself intact]; we had six officers in the company and four were wounded. Mitchell and I were the only two and I always accused him of being in the back bunker in the company headquarters. He said, "What the hell? You were still with me." I said, "I was behind you." [laughter] … Four of our officers were wounded and, fortunately, none were killed. … Well, Bill Huber lost his company commander, Captain (McAllister?). … I would say, in the First Battalion, we had about eight or ten officers wounded. None were killed, but it's a matter of luck. Bob Hess was the most seriously wounded. He had his hand mangled up and … I think he had one wound in the stomach, but he recovered from that, but we never did see him until after the war, came back here to a reunion. … In my company, we lost about six men [who] were killed and about fifteen or twenty wounded.

SH: Did you have to write letters back to their families?

WG: No, that was taken care of by the chaplains. When you're in combat, you don't have time to do that, because you're always on the move. I think the Chaplain Corps took care of that.

SI: When you were in the field, did you feel like you had enough supplies, in terms of food or ammunition or anything you needed?

WG: I never recall any shortage of ammunition, tank support, artillery support, food; maybe it wasn't so good at times, but you really didn't care. … Alcohol was always a big problem. You were always on the lookout for it and, when you're in France, you drank calvados. I don't know if you've ever tried calvados. It's like a brandy made out of apples and it's really deadly. … Don't forget, our troops were all, as I mentioned before, mostly ASTP students. They were eighteen, nineteen-year-olds, so, alcohol wasn't a big problem for them, because they weren't used to that. … Other than the Boudman incident, I don't ever remember any disobedience or I don't ever remember someone refusing to do something. If they did, I didn't know about it. Maybe they may have done it with a sergeant. Our sergeants were pretty well trained. In fact, they were excellent.

SI: Did you have to censor the mail or did you have someone to do that for you?

WG: … I never touched anything. Those were things that I just never knew about. Somebody took care of it and it wasn't my business and they didn't tell me to do something, so, I didn't bother to say, "You want me to do something?" You never volunteered in the Army; that was a basic rule. Don't volunteer for anything, you get enough to do. [laughter]

SH: When were you first aware of the labor camps and the death camps?

WG: … We ran into that Romanian Army situation and it was pretty pitiful. They were in a stockade camp and they were the prisoners. … They obviously hadn't eaten well for weeks and you could smell it a mile away. I never saw a true labor camp, you know, with refugees and things like that, like Auschwitz and places like that. That Romanian one was the only one we ran into. Now, you have to understand, my company was A Company, if we were moving here, C Company, over here, might find something completely different, yes.

SH: How do you think World War II impacted the man you are today?

WG: Well, I have to thank God for having opportunities. … You know, I don't consider myself the brightest guy in the world. I was lucky. I was lucky to be alive. I made a lot of good friends. I had opportunities in business, which I took advantage of. … I'm eighty-two years old now. I don't have much longer to go. … I'm thankful for everything that's happened. I have no complaints and I thank my University for being helpful and I respond accordingly with the University, as well I should. … How do I feel about things? I'm a lucky man, okay. I hope you people have as much success with your family as we've had with ours. … As I mentioned before, I know so many cases where fathers and mothers don't speak to their daughter or their son-in-law, you know, or something like that. We haven't had that and we have a very close-knit family. So, that's the conclusion, I gather, of the [interview].

SI: Is there anything else you would like to put on the record or anything you think we skipped over?

WG: No, … I'm sure there are certain things, in retrospect, I'll say, "Why didn't I say that or that?" but I've told you about my experience with Robert Wirth; I consider that the funniest experience in my service. … Too bad the little runt isn't alive, [so that] I could really take it out on him, but he's gone. In fact, I asked Fritz Kroesen today whether he has talked to Mary Wirth, who's Bob's widow, and he said they exchanged Christmas cards for a long time. Then, she stopped and he figured that's the end of that. He [Worth] lived out in Massapequa. He originally came from a suburb, … from New London, Connecticut. … I'm sorry to see Dick Hale go, because Rutgers didn't have a bigger booster than Richard Hale.

SH: Your class is really something.

WG: Yes. We've raised more money than any class, which is unusual, and I guess the war had a lot to do with it. It formed a camaraderie that we wouldn't have had otherwise. … It was just the right time and the right glue was there to bind us together.

SI: Did you start having meetings as the Black Fifty right after the war?

WG: We've only had maybe three or four in all these years. Yes, that's about it. … Sandy DiAntonio was our first president, I think, but I haven't heard much of him lately. You know, you don't know if this guy's alive or that guy. Does that name ring any bell, Sandy DiAntonio? That's an unusual name. … As I mentioned to Sandra on the way over, it's awfully strange there isn't one Signal Corps officer who attended this meeting, because the fifty guys, originally, were half Signal Corps and half Infantry, but those guys seem to have evaporated. Sandy … was a Signal Corps officer and Chuck Weiner. Well, he died. …

SH: Thank you so much for taking time today to do this interview.

WG: Well, thank you, and I appreciate what you've done. Are you going to send me a tape?

SI: We can send you a copy of the tape, if you would like.

WG: Yes, would you do that? I'm sure I didn't say anything I want to edit. …

SH: Again, thank you so much for taking time to talk with us today.

WG: Okay.

SH: This concludes the interview.

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

Reviewed by Sue Yousif 6/28/05
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 9/19/05
Reviewed by Phyllis Greenberg 2/5/07