

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH BENJAMIN GULKO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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This begins an interview with Mr. Benjamin Gulko on April 27, 1997 at Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

Chris Greer: Chris Greer

Kurt Piehler: I guess I would like to begin by asking some questions about your parents, beginning with the reason why your parents immigrated to the United States.

Benjamin Gulko: Well, my parents were born in Ukraine, Russia and my mother didn't want to have a family in Russia. She had no use for Russia, and she forced my father, so to speak, to come to the United States. After he was here a year and half or so, he had accumulated enough money to send for her passage, so she came to the United States. They lived in New York ... he had no use for Russia ... he came over in 1908. No, 1909. She came over a couple of years later.

Chris Greer: Did your father tell you about his initial experience in America or did he ever talk about that?

BG: Usually, they stuck together because of the language. They were always, in those days, they didn't come in and get an apartment. They became roomers with some family. Sometimes it was a relative, or sometimes it was (*landsmenschaft?*). Then, they would go to work either for someone they know from the Old Country, or someone they knew from the Old Country who was working some place and they would get a job in that same place. My father was a carpenter/cabinetmaker, and he went to work in a factory making store fixtures. Then, I don't know what happened. He went out to Ohio, to Toledo, and I know he worked at what they called the Willys Overland Automobile Company ... and in those days, there were floorboards in the cars [made] of wood, and the doors were wood-framed doors with metal over them ... and he either put the wood framing together, or he put the floorboards in. That's what I understand, the work he did at Willys Overland. Now, Willys Jeep is what remains of that company, because the Overland name you didn't hear after about '26 or '27.

KP: What do you remember about Toledo when you were very young? You were born in Toledo.

BG: I remember the downtown section. I remember a library not far from home. I remember trolley cars, and I remember, as a matter-of-fact, the house that we lived in, I understand that's park land now, so-called park land. There were alleys in Toledo where they picked up the garbage and all that. Cars went to the garages. Across the street were houses, but on the other side the alley was a hospital, a Catholic hospital. I understand that now, the hospital came through where the houses were. They took up, I think, that half side of what was known as Vermont Avenue. The front of the hospital was on Cherry Street. Cherry Street was a very wide street and when they re-paved that street, they had the trolleys running, but the street was so wide that they did not have the trolleys running in the middle of the street. One set of tracks ran along the curb on one side, the other was maybe forty feet away, or something, so that it wasn't parallel

in that they were side by side. That's how wide the street was. Those trolleys took you downtown and the downtown section was along the Maumee River.

CG: So, you lived in Toledo, in 1929 after the Crash. Did you start school in Toledo?

BG: I went to grammar school in Toledo. I went up to the sixth grade, I think, and I went to grammar school in the Bronx, and then I went to high school in the Bronx. I graduated high school in 1936.

CG: Do you remember much of Morris High School, your high school?

BG: Yes, it's still there.

CG: Have you been by there?

BG: No, I wouldn't go by there. I worked in New York for a good number of years but I never had any desire to go up there, and I've seen on the news, every once in a while, there's a shooting, or a knifing, or a demonstration. I have seen the side and the front of Morris High School. It is still the same, it's a Gothic building.

KP: Did your mother work after she got married? You mentioned that she was a seamstress sometimes.

BG: Yes, she worked. She worked during the Thirties.

KP: Did she work in the Twenties when you lived in Toledo?

BG: She only did seamstress work at home because, in Toledo, there were no facilities at which she could go work. She worked at home. She was a dressmaker. She would make dresses and do alterations, or whatever she could find. Whatever would come her way, so to speak.

KP: In the Thirties, did she work outside the house? Did she work at a factory?

BG: Yes, she worked in the garment factories in downtown New York and she did what they called finishing work ... buttonholes, the finer handwork on women's attire. She worked at places where they made what they call 'suits.' So, the pockets had ... different fancy finishing work. After I went into the army, in Miami, Florida, I found out, when I came home that she got a job doing the same kind of work at a coat factory. In Miami, Florida, that's when I found out she went to work there, then all of a sudden, I was notified that she no longer got any allotment. I couldn't figure out why, then I found out that because she went to work she had an income so they cut the allotment, which was bureaucratic.

KP: Did she keep working or did she go back to taking the allotment?

BP: Who knows. Well, by the time I got home it was all over.

KP: Oh, okay.

CG: When you moved into the Bronx, did you move into a Russian community?

BP: No, there was no Russian community like there is today. We moved into an apartment house and it was a mixed community. That neighborhood, it wasn't predominately Jewish, they had everything there. They had churches and synagogues, they had everything.

KP: Growing up, how observant was your family?

BG: Not very.

KP: Did you belong to a synagogue?

BG: They didn't have any money to belong to a synagogue.

KP: Did you keep any kosher laws?

BG: Yes, that my mother kept.

KP: So you kept separate meat and dairy dishes?

BG: Yes, never any not kosher food. Everything was bought from a kosher butcher. Passover was observed ... everything was observed.

KP: When your father came back from Toledo, came east again, where did he work in New York?

BG: Well, for a while there, he worked in different places, furniture, one thing or another. Then he opened up a little shop of his own, doing furniture repair in the antique section of New York ... 51st Street, 53rd Street, 49th Street, Lexington Avenue, 2nd Avenue, 3rd Avenue, 1st Avenue, all the up and down 3rd Avenue and 2nd Avenue, there were antique stores. People would bring in stuff from England and from France. A lot of the stuff they brought over, they bought fairly reasonable. Some were antiques, but I think some was more second-hand furniture ... but that stuff had to be repaired and refinished and all. In between, he made his own stuff and he needed to make it to order, or somebody would need closets made for their apartments. He'd make closets. He tried to make a living. In the Thirties, it was kind of rough.

KP: How tough was it for your family?

BG: Very tough. We had nothing. Believe me, we had nothing.

KP: It sounds like your father had a hard time paying rent for shop by all the moves you made. Shop is tough work.

BG: No, well, he paid the rent for the shop. This was a cold-water, walk-up. No heat. The only thing that he got from the landlord was the space and water. So it wasn't that expensive. Where he was at, the last shop he had was under the 3rd Avenue "El" [elevated train]. Finally, the "El" was taken down and those buildings became one tremendous office building, so he couldn't rent enough space to put a garbage can in for what he was paying rent for that place.

KP: How long did your father keep his shop, to work as a carpenter?

BG: I guess he closed-up around 1958. I was living in New Jersey by then. I would go into New York once in a while to his shop ...

KP: Did you or your brother help your father out in his shop?

BG: I did, occasionally, I would help. I would do a little bit. My brother, no.

KP: Did your sisters learn any seamstress work with your mother? What was the expectation for you and your brother and sisters regarding college or regarding education? Were your parents hoping that you would go to college?

BG: Have you ever heard of Cooper Union in New York?

KP: Yes, it's the last free college in the country.

BG: At the age of sixteen, my brother took the test for Cooper Union and he was admitted. He applied for the school of architecture ...and he was going to Cooper Union. Three months before he graduated high school, the principal called him in and said, "You're going to have to quit Cooper Union." My brother said, "Why?" He said, "You can't go to two free schools at the same time." My brother told him point blank, "Morris High School is city-supported. Cooper Union is private endowment." The two schools had nothing to do with each other, but the head of the physical training department heard about it and went down and he more or less threatened the principal that he'd report him to the higher-ups downtown. So, he withdrew his demand that he quit ... and my brother graduated Cooper Union. My oldest sister had one year of the University of Toledo. Then, when it came time for me, there was just no money.

KP: Did you try to get into CCNY?

BG: Well, I tried to get into Cooper Union. CCNY, no, because at that time I had to go work. Whatever I earned, I had to, because it was part of the help. I wasn't like someone I graduated high school with ... he couldn't even get a twelve dollar a week job ...and he told me his family said that, "if you can't get work, go to college." He signed up for CCNY. He was forced to go to college and I didn't go.

CG: Were you upset that you had to put college off for a while?

BG: No, there were completely different social requirements then.

KP: Before going on about your first job, I wanted to ask a few questions about growing up in the Bronx and your high school. One memory I always ask anyone who grows up in the Bronx is, my wife works in the Bronx Zoo, I'm wondering if you ever went to the Bronx Zoo growing up?

BG: I went once, but today I think they have it as school trips. In those days, I don't remember them having trips. It would become a problem because of the fares, even to go by subway and bus and all that. They were only a nickel and a dime, but people did not have the nickel or the dime.

KP: What did you do for fun growing up? Did you go to movies at all?

BG: Movies, that takes money.

KP: What about playing? Did you play any games on the street?

BG: Oh, you played in the schoolyard. You played handball, stickball in the street, but I was not that athletic that I would get into the good teams. Even stickball on the street, there were good players and bad players.

CG: Were you in any clubs in high school or athletic teams?

BG: I don't know if your parents are supporting you through college, or if you're working your way through college, or what. It's a completely different, indescribable set-up.

KP: You mentioned that you were brought up in a very mixed neighborhood, did everyone get along with each other, or did you have bullies out there to compete with?

BG: I don't, nobody ever bullied me. We had Irish in the neighborhood and Italians. We had everything.

KP: There were no rivalries between different groups?

BG: I don't recall. If there was, it didn't affect me.

KP: You mentioned on your pre-interview survey that your father was a Democrat. What did he think of the New Deal?

BG: He didn't talk about politics much, but he voted. I know he voted, and all that. I know he voted Democratic. Some of the things that Roosevelt put into effect helped business, helped revive some of the things that people were coming in from elsewhere to buy in New York. There were some people from New Orleans ... they would buy reproduction furniture and ship it back to New Orleans. So, that brought ... more money to start circulating and business picked up.

CG: Does that mean your mother's money from the government increased?

BG: No, no. As a soldier, you got thirty dollars a month in 1943, and you could make an allotment of twenty dollars a month to be sent home. Not the government's money, it was your money ... and you got ten dollars a month in your pocket to pay for your laundry. They didn't give you your laundry for nothing, you had to pay for your laundry. Once you went overseas, you worried about that yourself. You either did it by hand, or tried to get new clothing issued ... but, that was not government money, that was your money. It was an allotment.

KP: What did your father and what did you think of your role in the war?

BG: We didn't talk politics.

KP: Really, no politics?

BG: No, and even then politicians are politicians.

CG: Do you remember hearing of Hitler coming to power or the Nazi party during the 1930s.

BG: Also that was in the papers, you couldn't help but see it and read it and know it, and all that. We talked about it, but anybody that was really active were those people who were politically active, who belonged to organizations, and people who had money to spare. So when you work for eighteen dollars or twenty dollars a week, it's not yours. You have to help to support others. I had younger sisters ... I had to help support them. These things you ask questions about, "Did you do this or did you do that?" I don't think it was the norm for every man. Just like today, how many families help refugees in Bosnia, or refugees in Africa, or anything else like that? I don't think there's half as many activists now as you had during those years when you had Communism or Socialism. It was ranked then. You hardly hear of it today. They had a piece on Channel Thirteen about the Abraham Lincoln Brigade that went into Spain [1936-37]. I don't know if you could get a brigade to go anywhere in the world today. Maybe you could tell me that I'm wrong. I don't know. You wouldn't have the idealists that would go for it today.

CG: You think that the country is not as idealistic as it was back then?

BG: It's not the country, it's the people. The country did not send the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. As a matter-of-fact, the country didn't want them to go. When they came back, for a good number of years, the country was following them with the FBI, because these were members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Well, it's only recently that they've taken the communism title off of them. McCarthyism wasn't the only thing.

KP: Did your family speak Yiddish around the household?

BG: In the early years, but afterwards, with all of the children speaking English, they spoke English.

KP: What was your first job after high school?

BG: After high school?

KP: Actually, maybe I should preface that. What was your first job before graduating high school?

BG: After high school, I got a job for ten or twelve dollars a week. Then I went up to fifteen dollars a week. The last job I had in New York City was for a hat-jobber. I said I was going to Florida. He said, "What are you going to Florida for? I am going to take you out on the road and teach you to be a hat salesman." I said, "No, you can't teach me to be a hat salesman." I went to Florida. That was 1938.

CG: You went to Florida. Why did you go to Florida? Just because you wanted to go? Or was it due to extenuating circumstances?

BG: No, family. I went to Florida and I got a job there. It was cheap wages. When I went to the boss and told him that I wanted a raise, he looked at me and laughed. He said, "Saturday you're finished." The Florida season was over. He said, "I don't need you anymore." That's how you got laid off.

CG: Did you live in Miami?

BG: Yes. I lived in the city, not on the beach.

CG: How was Miami? I know it was not as large as it is today, but how was it in comparison to New York?

BG: Compared to New York. New York is still as big as it was in those years. What did they have seven or eight million people then? I think they still have seven or eight million people. No, Miami, Florida and Miami Beach ... Miami Beach was busy in the season. In the summer time it dropped dead ... there was very little doing on the beach. Now, they have many more people on the beach in the summer time than in those days. The city had trolleys running through the city. You didn't have them going out too far, but you had trolleys running from downtown, out to Coral Gables, out to 36th Street across to Miami Beach. You had trolleys on Miami Beach at that time. So, it was a small place, so to speak.

KP: Where did you work in Miami? What were the different jobs that you had?

BG: I worked for the laundries, a couple of different laundries. Then I worked for Railway Express. You see, Railway Express in those days was a good paying job. It was a union job and you had railroad retirement benefits, you had other things that you didn't have at a regular job. The pay scale was a lot better than the ordinary job.

KP: How long did you work for Railway Express?

BG: From '42 to '48, except for the time that I was in the military.

KP: Was that your first union job?

BG: Yes.

KP: What union was it?

BG: Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks.

KP: Were you active at all in the union?

BG: Just to go to meetings. The union had meetings and if you had a grievance, if you went to the grievance committee, they took it up with the terminal agent. It wasn't that the union was afraid to go to anybody to take care of a grievance, but you had seniority rights and other rights. They took care of it. Whatever the union contract called for, they took care of it. Even though it was in a southern town ... but they still took care of things. There were no problems.

CG: You just mentioned that it's a southern town, did the people have a certain attitude towards you because you were from the North? Were there any tensions?

BG: No, I believe that you are getting me into politics now. I believe that in the South, much more than in the North, I may be wrong, but I believe that the working person had a hell of a lot less rights ... that the employer could control the worker more to his advantage than elsewhere. It was sort of, "Hey, I am the boss. I am entitled to do what I want to and if you don't like it, go ... " I think it was a carryover from when the bosses were owners of the slaves.

KP: Did you notice any differences between when you lived in Toledo, New York City, and Miami? What were the differences between those three places? You mentioned one that the differences were in the relationships between the employers and the employees. Were there other differences that you noticed?

BG: Well, there were other differences, in that when I first went to Miami, Florida, in 1938, there were the black areas, the white areas, the blue-collar areas, and there were signs up on many buildings restricting clientele, and things like that, which you don't see today. It was a segregated town, it was a bigoted town.

KP: I have heard that the South was, particularly before World War II, a very anti-Semitic place. Did you ever encounter any anti-Semitism in the South?

BG: Oh, I encountered it, not a hell of a lot, but I encountered it with a couple of people. You hear stories about some small towns in the South where there were only one, two, three, or four Jewish families. When you talk to some of the people that were not Jewish in that town, they felt

very close or friendly to these Jewish people. There were others that felt the opposite way. This is, I think, as far as I am concerned, the same thing today ... but they don't come out and tell you out front. I'd rather they told you out front. Okay, let's get on to when I was drafted.

KP: Before we get to when you were drafted, where were you when Pearl Harbor occurred?

BG: I was in Miami, Florida.

KP: Do you remember what you were doing?

BG: I don't remember.

KP: Did you think that after United States got into the war that you would enlist, or would you wait for your number to come up?

BG: I had a mother and sisters to help support. My younger sister was still going to school, high school. I had a situation where I had to stay home as long as I could. When they drafted me, I went. When they drafted me in 1943, I was sent to Camp Blanding, Florida for the examination and all that. Then, I was sent home for a week to close up my affairs. Guess what the affairs amounted to?

KP: Zero.

BG: Zero. Then I went back to Camp Blanding, and we were shipped by train, troop trains, not passenger trains, troop trains, from Camp Blanding, Florida. This group went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri because they were activating a new division, the Seventy-Fifth Division, so we were all put into that. That was in May of 1943. That took care of basic training and all. When we got a pass, we went to St. Louis, because that was the big city. There weren't too many places to go around there, so we would go to St. Louis. I went go there three or four times in the time I was at Fort Leonard Wood. From Fort Leonard Wood, we went to Louisiana on maneuvers. That's an experience, because you are out in the field all the time. You were working on what they 'call problems.' You're moving through the woods and swamps and everything, of Florida and Texas ... down in Port Orange, Texas. From there we went back up into Louisiana, and maneuvers were over ... and went to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. We were there a few months ... a few weeks. Then we were sent to Fort Meade, Maryland. Meanwhile, we were all broken up. You don't go as a unit. You go as replacements. From Breckenridge, Kentucky it was not the division that was sent to Meade. It was just replacements to go overseas.

KP: How did it make you feel to be trained as a unit and be sent over as a replacement? Would you have rather gone over with the people you trained with?

BG: Well, you always feel that you want to go over with those people. Once you're in there, you learn that things don't stay the same, there is no such thing as "Hey, this is for life." Things change, you're in, you're out, faces change, officers change, men change. Some people make close friends. I was fairly friendly with one fellow. When we were in Camp Kilmer, before

being shipped overseas, we'd get passes to go into New York. I'd say, "Come on, let's go into New York, off to my brother's house. He lives in the Bronx." We'd have dinner up there, go back down to 42nd Street and all that, then catch the bus and go back to Kilmer. Then we got separated. He lived in Nebraska. After I got home, I wrote a letter, in his name, to Coldridge, Nebraska. Never got an answer. I don't know if his family didn't want to answer, or he didn't want to answer. I had other friends who have fifty year friendships with men that they were in the service with ... that they write, when they go on a trip near their house, they would go out of their way to see him ... but I didn't make that kind of friends.

KP: Although you never found out what happened to that one friend that you had from Nebraska, you don't know whether he survived the war, or not?

BG: I have no idea.

KP: What was your basic training like?

BG: Well, I was in the infantry. The basic training was daily drills, daily lessons, and going out on what they call bivouac. You went out on the firing range to fire your rifle. You went out on marches, twenty-five mile marches. You trained. You went into the room where they had the tear gas to test your gas mask. Those kind of things ... training, basic training.

KP: What was your drill instructors like?

BG: They were like the rest of us, they were in the army.

KP: Were they regular army or were they drafted in? Did you have an old, grizzled veteran who trained you as a drill instructor?

BG: There was a first sergeant, he was regular army but that was about it. They didn't have enough men to be regular army. These guys may have been in two or three years, but they were volunteers, or draftees from '40 or '41. They were a bunch of young men, too, who may have only been in for two years. The only older ones we had, they brought in from Iceland in what they call a Cadre. They were going to start another division. These men had been in Iceland for a couple of years. They were more trained, but not combat, but they were trained. They were the mess sergeants, supply sergeants, and the motor pool sergeants, and all the top-notch guys.

KP: You were in an infantry regiment. Did you hope you would get another assignment in your additional induction? Did you hope you'd get an additional specialty?

BG: No, didn't even think about, because not much of that was done. They'd go over the records and possibly find somebody with a background that they might use for something else. I didn't have that kind of a background. We had one fellow in the outfit who had been a school teacher in Maine. We had a number of illiterates who couldn't read or write, so they started classes, and he was the teacher ... and he fought like hell. He tried to get into another unit that was just into teaching. He would not be in an infantry company anymore ... and they absolutely refused.

They said he had to teach what they asked him to, but they wouldn't change him. He had to teach what they asked him to.

KP: They wouldn't change his specialty. Where did these classes take place? Was it Breckenridge, or Leonard Wood where these classes were?

BG: Leonard Wood, because they had men who couldn't read letters from home, or couldn't write letters. Certain fellows, that's what they did, they'd write letters for them, they read letters for them ... unbelievable

KP: I have also been told by some people, they used the term Hillbilly Country. They really never had shoes before?

BG: I don't know about that.

KP: You encountered a lot of people in your unit who couldn't read or write?

BG: Not a lot of people, there were only a few, but because the unit was made up of people from all over the country. A number of us came in from Florida. There were a bunch of nineteen-year-olds that came from Boston ... all Italians and Irish that came from Boston. They had some from other parts of the country. It was a mish-mosh.

KP: How did everyone get along together?

BG: They had to get along all right.

KP: Well, they had to, but, I am sure that there had to have been tension at times.

BG: There is always tensions. The wise guys and the dumb guys. There's always tensions. Don't you have it right here in school?

CG: Yes.

BG: Yes, thanks for admitting it.

KP: What about KP [kitchen patrol]? How much KP did you do in training?

BG: Not much, the normal. I did KP whenever it was necessary. I don't know whether it worked out to once a month, or what it was, I don't remember, but I did KP.

KP: What did you think of army food?

BG: Well, the army food was all right except for one incident. Do you know what headcheese is? No, it's gelatinized pig ears, pig snouts. They take off meat, cook it and make it into gelatin. Some places they call it scrapple.

KP: Oh, yes, I have heard of scrapple.

BG: Some places they call it headcheese. One day we got our bagged lunches. We were going out on our 'all day problem.' When we got ready to eat we had slices of wet bread because the gelatin had melted. Then we found out that they had headcheese. The officers went back and raised hell. It went all the way up to the general, who ordered that it never be served again.

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BG: The army quartermaster said, "Well, the army had to buy it, because the civilians wouldn't buy it." Stories, true or not, I don't know. All I know we never saw that again.

KP: Probably because your officers didn't want to eat it.

BG: Well, none of the officers went to bat for us. Well, when they went to bat for us, I think, they were going to bat for themselves, too. I don't think you separated it.

CG: What were the primary staples of your diet?

BG: I don't remember what I ate yesterday, and you want me to remember what I ate fifty-three years ago?

CG: How about once you got over there?

BG: Over where?

CG: To Europe, was there a lot of food over there or was there a shortage?

BG: Well, you ate powdered eggs, powdered milk. The food was army issue. Once you got over to France, then you started to carry E, C and K rations. Then they also had what they called ten-in-one rations, which is a box a little bigger than that briefcase. It would have ten men's rations for a day. It would have thirty meals, so to speak, in there. Some of them had a pound can of bacon, and ham and eggs in cans, and different things like that. One of the men had a Coleman burner, and they had a couple of little pots and frying pan ... ten men would sit in one place, if they had the time to cook this up. This was the ten-in-one rations. They didn't have too much of that because it took too much effort.

KP: After basic training, when you went to Camp Breckenridge, what did you do at Camp Breckenridge?

BG: Sat around, because we were finished with the maneuvers. We were waiting, what to do? We didn't go anywhere. The closest place was someone had a beer joint, gambling hall, down the road a bit ... where I went once. I didn't have any money ... I might have bought a beer or two, but there were some fellows had money and they played the crap tables.

KP: How much gambling went on? Were there cardsharps?

BG: The only gambling I really saw was on the ship going overseas. They were shooting craps, playing cards, because they had nothing to do all day. They didn't have any money, so they were doing it with cigarettes. First, they started out betting packs of cigarettes, then when they were smoked up, they started betting single cigarettes. After a while, all they had were the papers because the tobacco was falling out of it ... fun. We made our own entertainment.

KP: How useful, after being in combat, when you look back on your training, how effective was your training, particularly your maneuvers? How well did that prepare you for combat?

BG: Well, we didn't get much information, really and truly. We moved, more or less, blindly. You only knew that you were in trouble when you heard guns being fired, or when you heard shells coming in and exploding ... but your training was to hit the ground and dig a foxhole. Those things came in handy, but if you forgot about it, you led yourself into getting hurt. You had to be very careful. No matter what the training is, I saw too much of just being in the wrong place. No matter what training you had, we were in the wrong place. If you were walking along the road and you're spread, your training is 'spread out.' Then the Germans would shell you, and you'd see the shelling on this side of the road and this side of the road, this side of the road and this side of the road. They'd bring the shells right down. They'd have the coordinates and they'd move the shells right down the road. If you were standing when one of those shells went off nearby, it could be either a wound, or killed, or nothing. You had no control over it.

KP: It sounds you felt like you didn't have a lot of control, so you don't know who you are, in a lot of ways?

BG: No, to me, I'd say it's just luck. I have this thing here ... This is all about the 101st, but I didn't join them until they were already in combat. This is when they left Massachusetts, because the Twenty-Sixth Division was a National Guard outfit. [goes through papers] It's in here somewhere. How many men they captured, how many men they lost, dead. [reading] "The 101st Regiment was 166 days on the line. The division was altogether 210 days. Killed in action, 1700. Wounded, almost 12,000. Non-battle over 6,000." That was in ... six months, seven months ... hard to say. I think it's just luck.

CG: I don't know if this is true, but I've heard people say that in combat they can distinguish between different mortars incoming by their pitch. Is it true?

BG: I don't know ... because, to me, where I was, I don't think that they had much mortar fire. They had more eighty-eight's and things like that ... more big shells. Mortars were not that much. I don't think we fired too many mortars. It wasn't ... very little static ... you'd be there a day or two, then move. You'd be there another day, or two, then move again. So mortars, I don't remember that much. I know that there was mortar fire, but I don't remember that much.

KP: You would be, ultimately, in three different positions. One for a very short time. You would start with the Seventy-Fifth Division, then the Eightieth division for a short time.

BG: Yes, that was just for a week or so.

KP: What were your impressions of the Seventy-Fifth division?

BG: A division is what, about 16,000 men. You're one person, you're a pickle out of sweet relish. You can't ... what can you be? How much can you remember? Your participation? Some things are so fleeting.

KP: But you didn't think your officers in the Seventy-Fifth Division were less competent?

BG: What did I know, they were officers. They were trained. They were graduates of OCS, or whatever it was. They had the authority like the rest of them. Now, some of them were a pain in the asses and some were very nice.

KP: The ones that were pains-in-the-asses, are there any incidents that you remember?

BG: No, it's just that they rubbed you the wrong way whatever they said or did. You couldn't answer them, because they were the officer.

KP: Do you remember, a lot of people I have read, or talked about, talked about the chicken-shit that they had to put up with. Do remember any particular incidents that usually occurred in training, or while going overseas?

BG: Well, no. It was the policing the area for match sticks and cigarette butts and checking the barracks for dust. Sometimes they were just looking for something to take away your pass ... that's all. That, I think, happens today. You saw the Marine Corps, where they were pinning those things on the guy. I didn't see any brutality like that.

KP: Going overseas, you went over as replacements. You had no idea where you were going. You were in France, but you had no idea where you would end up at.

BG: One time in Fort Leonard Wood, I was on a shipping order that went to the West Coast ... and they picked up some guy that was somehow a something in St. Louis or somewhere around there. They brought him back to the Fort Leonard Wood, and it was either stand court-martial, or be put on the shipping list. The lieutenant came to me and said, "I am taking you off the shipping list," and said, "We are taking you off the shipping list, we are going to put So and So on it." I said, "Okay" I wouldn't have said, "No," because I was going with the flow. Whatever happened to me, that's what happened. So, they put this other guy on the shipping list, and they wound up on the islands. When we went, when I shipped, went ... to Fort Myers ... then we went to Patrick Henry, Virginia because they made a mistake ... and from Patrick Henry, Virginia we went to Camp Kilmer. Camp Kilmer, I was there for a few weeks, it wasn't overnight. I was there for a few weeks, then they shipped on June 6th, I think. I got on the ship in New York. We

went on a about a 110 ship convoy to England. I went through replacement camps, a couple of them, before I went from Southampton, by ship, to Omaha Beach, and from Omaha Beach, we were trucked to the other side of St. Lo. St. Lo was leveled. It was just a pile of rubble. That had happened the week before. Then, we got on a train and we went through Paris and we got down near Verdun ... they took us off the train there. From there, we stayed around until they assigned us, first to the Eightieth, before they took us out and into the Twenty-Sixth. The Twenty-Sixth had lost a bunch of men and they needed replacements. Their first batch of replacements, in one of these things, was 764 men. I think I was in that first batch, I am not sure. That was around or after October 15, 1944.

KP: You were in Camp Kilmer a while, what did you do? It sounds like you were waiting.

BG: You don't do anything. You try to occupy yourself. Sometimes, you go out and play ball. Not too many of us had money to shoot craps or play cards. You tried to keep yourself occupied while you're waiting for the time for the next meal.

CG: Did they have you doing any drills during this time?

BG: No, because you were not a company. You were a group. You could be like a company, but it could be 500 men, and they would call out men every few days and they would ship them out, because they called on your military spec numbers. Mine was 345, which was a truck driver. When the first little camp I was in, in England, they brought a bunch of fellows in about six o'clock in the evening ... and they fed them and then they assigned them tents. At about two or three in the morning, the whistle blew and they started calling names. These guys had just come in that evening, they were out there with flashlights, they rolled their packs ... and they were told to leave certain stuff, and we had clean M-1 rifles and had zeroed them in. We were lined up and handed them over to these men. They were going, immediately, to France. They shipped them out in the middle of the night like that. When you talked to them, these men were runners, scouts, sharpshooters, all front-line training. Now, others didn't have those spec numbers. They took two, three, or four weeks before they were pulled out.

KP: So your spec number was as a truck driver, did you drive a truck before the war? With Railway Express?

BG: Yes, with the laundries.

KP: So you drove a truck?

BG: Yes, I didn't learn on a car, I learned on a truck.

KP: I got the sense that your family had owned a car from your memories of the travel aid.

BG: I went to work for a linen supply laundry and the fellow that I was a helper ... well, I got the job because he lived in the same apartment house that my mother lived in. My mother asked him if he could get me a job, because I was looking and couldn't find a job. So, he got me the job

and I was his helper ... and while we were driving on the outskirts of Miami and different places, he would teach me, then he would let me drive ... He let me drive until one day, and I was driving through Miami, about eight blocks from the laundry, and somebody saw me and they got ahold of him after we pulled in. I stopped and he took over the wheel. Then we went to the loading dock. Somebody told him, "If that happens again, you're fired." That was the end of my driving, but by then I'd learned how to drive.

KP: So, for your next drive you drove a truck?

BG: The next job, I drove ... was for a bakery and they had a little Willys delivery truck. A little Willys, that was small trucks.

KP: Well, you learned how to drive on a big truck?

BG: I learned how to drive on a big truck. In those days they had Dodges and ... this other company made big commercial trucks, too, tractor-trailers and all that.

KP: Was it a Mack truck?

BG: No, not Mack. It was a smaller truck, but Dodge, and Chevy, and Fords ... International ... it was an International truck. The International truck was a bigger truck. Well, that's what I learned on, trucks.

KP: Did you get any training for driving trucks in the army?

BG: Yeah, I had a driver's permit for up to two and a half tons trucks, you know, the big four by eight six-wheelers, big trucks. You had to go out and drive it over the course. You had to drive it up a wet hill. You had to know how to take it, whatever terrain they wanted you to take it through ... and then when you passed it, you got your army driver's license. They had checked off Jeep, this, that, and the other thing, whatever they had checked off.

KP: Where did you take this test? Was it at Leonard Wood?

BG: Yeah, Leonard Wood.

KP: Did you ever drive a truck for the army?

BG: Well, I drove the truck a few times when the outfit was moving out. You see, the regular company didn't have anything that big. They had a quarter-ton truck, that was their biggest truck. The antitank company had a quarter-ton truck to pull the antitank gun ... but then when the outfit, the bulk of the outfit, went to Louisiana, some of us were held back, and we went around the different areas picking up the equipment that had been left behind and taking it to the quartermaster. That's where they sorted it out, either reprocessed it, or put it in a junkyard ... and by then, I drove a big truck for that, for those collections. Overseas, I didn't drive ... Oh, I had a ton and a half truck in the Eightieth. That was a disaster, because I was assigned to the company

and the lieutenant said, "Okay, you drive the truck," but they already had a driver, and that caused so much dissension, so finally I went to the lieutenant and I said, "You put me in a spot. These men don't want me to drive their truck. They've got their driver." So, he went to the sergeant and said, "No, he's assigned to drive the truck." It was very, very unhappy.

KP: The driver felt that was his job?

BG: No, the sergeant wanted his friend to drive the truck. That was his friend. Then about a week, or so later, they took all of us out. They said they put us in the Eightieth division by mistake ... because if this sergeant complained about me driving, it meant that they didn't need a driver. There were other companies, platoons, that had extra men. They really didn't need all of these replacements. So, they pulled them out and put them in the Twenty-Sixth. In the Twenty-Sixth, I started driving the Jeep, and then St. Patrick's Day, March 17th, 1945... the major asked me, "Can you drive us?" I said, "Yeah, that's my army spec number." He said, "All right, I can't find my driver, you drive." So, I drove this major. The next day, the driver came back, he caught up with us. The major said, "No, I couldn't find you when I wanted you, good-bye." So, I became his driver. How things happen, you don't know. Who would know? From then on, I drove him through this task force that went through southern Germany. About, I don't remember the exact time, the colonel went on rest and rehabilitation to the Riviera. His Jeep driver didn't have an officer, and this major said, "I'm taking Macroconis and Jeep." The driver's name was Macroconis. I said, "Okay." So, I got a different major. A week later, this Major [Joseph] Boucher was killed ... and if I had been there, I could very well have been killed, too, because he was ambushed. Very peculiar. He had pulled off the road, and the road was just loaded with American equipment and the flags were flying, the white flags, and some German shot from the woods and caught this Major Boucher right in the chest and he died within twenty minutes ... but I would have been right there because the Jeep was disabled, too.

CG: So, he was by himself?

BG: No, the driver, when he heard the shot, hit the ground. The driver was outside the Jeep, and this major was always on me about not getting out of the Jeep, because if he wanted to go some place, he wanted me sitting in the Jeep so we could go right away.

KP: Where did you first see combat?

BG: The first day I joined the A company of the 101st infantry, shortly after October 15, 1944. They assigned me to that outfit. The truck dumped about ten, or twelve, of us off, and the two of us were left after they spread the guys out ... and the other guy went into the mortar platoon and I was assigned to machine gun platoon. That's my first experience with a machine gun, thirty caliber air-cooled, with a spare barrel and cans of ammunition and bazooka ammunition.

KP: You hadn't been trained on those weapons, so in a sense, you learned on the job?

BG: Yeah, I learned on the job.

KP: How long did it take you to pick up?

BG: Right away, it didn't take long, because that was a very, very instructive day for me. That day the company lost three officers, two company commanders were killed, and one combat fatigue that one day. When you see that all going on, you learn fast.

KP: How did the officer get killed?

BG: I don't know. He had shook our hands and welcomed us to the company, then he took off with his messenger runner. The next thing we heard, an hour and a half or two later, was that both of them were dead. They assigned another officer and company commander and we were still going up through this wooded hill. All of a sudden, he came running down the hill yelling, "I can't take it, I can't take it." So, they appointed another officer and we kept moving and about six o'clock, or so, just as it got dusk, a runner came back and said the officer was caught in cross fire, machine gun fire, and wounded. We had to go get him. That was the first time I saw what you call a rifle-litter. You take raincoats and button them together, you put rifles through the sleeves, and six of us went out and picked him up and brought him back. We couldn't move him off the hill and through the woods, and he died during the night. That was three officers in one day. After that, things were a little easier.

KP: The officer that had battle fatigue, what happened to him?

BG: I don't know.

KP: They just got him out?

BG: I had a first sergeant go bad. He was talking big, big, big. Telling the men to "keep moving." Then, it didn't take long, I said, "Where's the sergeant?" They said, "Oh, didn't you know? He went nuts, they sent him back with combat fatigue." That's the last we heard of him.

KP: Were there any other cases of battle fatigue?

BG: Those are the only two like that. They had one place in France where one of the fellows, the guy happened to be sharing blankets and shelter halves with me ... and it had been raining. In France, it was muddy, and raining, and all that. He was sick. He got up and he begged, "I want to go out, but I can't." So, they sent him back. That was sickness. He said, "I don't want to leave," but, he had to. You see things like that, too.

CG: To change the subject for a second, before you said you went through Paris?

BG: The troop train pulled into the station and they said, "Nobody get off." But, fellows wanted to eat, so they built little fires in the walkways, and I had to go to the bathroom, so I climbed the fence and went to the bathroom. That was the first time I saw European toilets. You want me to describe a European toilet to you?

CG: Sure.

BG: Okay. A European toilet, and this is in the Paris station ... it's a big washroom. They have tanks on the wall, with water, and a pipe leading down to the floor, and they have a hole about this big in the floor. They have two feet carved out in the floor. You put your feet on these two feet and you squat over the hole. When you finish, you pull the chain. They didn't have any toilet bowls. That was the first time that I saw it. I saw it afterwards, but that was the first time. We were only in there for a few hours, then they pulled us out. I think they went in there to change engines, or something.

CG: This wasn't too long after the liberation of Paris, was it?

BG: I couldn't tell you.

CG: That was the end of August.

BG: This was around September.

CG: Now, how were the communication lines? Did you hear what was going on elsewhere in the war?

BG: No, they didn't give you ... Once in a while, you got a *Stars & Stripes*, but very seldom because you were front line, and they didn't bother sometimes notifying you. We heard when Roosevelt died. Everybody heard that, it went through everything. Other than that, you didn't hear much.

KP: You didn't hear much even when you were driving for the major, that still didn't matter, did it?

BG: No, no. We'd pull into a village. We'd go to the *Gasthaus*, a local restaurant, or bar. We'd hang blankets for blackout and the company officers, A company, B company, C company, they would come in and they would go over what they had, but I was privileged for that. I would go in and help them and all that, then I say, "You want a drink?" and I'd put a bottle ... because I liberated whatever I could, and I had the jeep to store it in. I'd give him a bottle. That was the only time an officer would have a drink with me. We'd each have a drink, and I'd leave the bottle. I never heard what went on, you never heard. Nobody heard.

KP: Your major wouldn't chat with you in the jeep about this is where we're headed to?

BG: I was a PFC [Private First Class]. I didn't expect it, I was a PFC.

CG: Did you hear about the liberation of Paris, now this is before you were on the frontlines?

BG: No, at the liberation of Paris, I was ... on my way to France, most likely. When you are in those camps, you are in limbo almost. Some people would tell what they heard, everything, well, maybe they did.

KP: What did you expect combat would be like? Did you have any fears?

BG: I had no idea what to expect. All I know was that once I got into combat and saw the shell holes and the broken-up buildings, and some of the places where you saw dead soldiers, or dead civilians, or dead horses ... the Germans had horses and wagons when they ran out of gas. The Air Force would strafe it and the horses would run off into the field and be killed. The people, who were so hungry, they'd come walking and sort of half-butcher what was left.

KP: Your first experience of combat on the first day sounds really, really vivid. Was that the most dangerous incident that you ever saw, where you were most directly threatened? Would there be other days where you'd have a really close call?

BG: Yeah, there were other times, like I told you, when we were walking along the roads and there were Germans shelling along the road. About a quarter mile up the road, there was a Jeep pulling a trailer that was on fire because it got a direct hit. We got through the little town. We went up on a hill. There were dead Germans laying around. In the morning, we didn't know what we were going to wake up to. We went on a patrol one night, and went behind the Germans. We were walking along the road, you could see the wires that the Germans had laid for communications, and you see where they had pits dug out so they could set up the machine gun. Then, we said, "Well, they must have left," because everything was quiet. It was dark, and we were moving on the road, when all of a sudden we heard jingling. We all went into the ditches, and a group of about twenty German soldiers went by us. Nobody made a move, because we were only about ten or twelve. We stayed there until it got light. When it got light, we went the rest the way ... We came back to where we left the company the previous afternoon, and they had already moved out, so we had to go find them. That's scary, what if someone had sneezed, or coughed, when those Germans went by? What's the most exciting thing? I can't tell you.

CG: Could you tell about November 21, 1944, the day when you were awarded the Bronze Star?

BG: Yeah, I can remember that. We moved into a little village the night before. We didn't realize, it was dark, the morning, when we got up, and went outside, there was an American tank with a hole in it, like this, in its side. It was parked along side of a telephone pole. The telephone pole had the spikes that they climb up, and on one of spikes was the brass shell ... one of the rounds that had been in the tank. It had been blown out of the tank and it was wrapped around the spike, it was caught in the spike. Then we went and turned to the right, and there were two other American tanks knocked out. So, we crossed to the creek, and there were GIs laying there, from the day before, wounded and dead. While, we went out there, some rounds had been fired, and the company's radio man ... the battery had been destroyed. So, the officer asked me to go back to the village to get another battery, and tell them that the wounded and dead out here ... to send the medics and ambulances. So, halfway back there, there was an open field

with one, a little tree in the middle of the field, and suddenly, the tree starts looking like it's got Christmas tree lights on it. I hit the ground. The German .20mm had been firing, and they called in a plane, and the plane knocked that battery out. I got up and I went down to get the battery for the radio and gave them the message. I went back out, to where the men were, and there were more men wounded. If I were there, I could have been wounded or killed, too, or not hurt ... I don't know ... But for going to the village and being fired on like that ... I didn't learn about the Bronze Star until up in Luxembourg, on the Bulge. The company clerk came up and told me, "I put you in for the Silver Star, but the allotment was used up already. So, I put you back in for a Bronze Star." So, I said, "Okay, whatever happens." Then, I didn't find out about it until about April. Then, they awarded all of these citations to whoever was still around to get them. That's how I got the Bronze Star, not the Silver, the Bronze.

KP: What was the most dangerous thing that happened to you in combat, or during the war? Was there any really close call where you felt you almost didn't make it? It sounds like from the first day you saw combat, you almost didn't make it.

BG: Things were happening around me, not to me.

KP: A bullet never just missed you, or a shell never did come particularly close?

BG: Well, there were a couple of little things with shrapnel, but, thank God, I wasn't hurt.

KP: Your helmet was never dented?

BG: I had a little bit of that but it was very minor, so I don't even consider it as anything.

KP: How accepted were you by the people in your unit [as a replacement]?

BG: As a replacement in combat, you're more or less separated. The only time you might come together is when you pick up your rations in the morning, because they bring up cases of Cs and Ks, and they'd say, "Measure rations." So, you would have to go get them and carry them yourself, and there would be days where that's all you had. I had fellows around me who were too lazy, too disoriented, or whatever ... and they'd be hungry in the middle of the day, and they'd come and ask you for something. So, I got to the point where I just tell the fellows, "There are the rations. If you don't want to take them, don't ask me. They're there for you to take today." You really don't get close to people, because they keep changing. Men get sick. A regiment is a what ... a division is 15,000. You figure, sick, wounded, killed, they had over 100% replacement, so you're always meeting new people. You get close, in that you always look out for each other, the guy next to you, but other than that.

KP: Did you have a buddy that you were particularly close to?

BG: Well, just this one fellow after we got to the Bulge and all that. Then, we got to working together. He was not exactly a buddy, but we looked out for each other ... we worked together ...

-----END OF SIDE TWO TAPE TWO-----

KP: What weapons did you have against the enemy?

BG: At that time, we didn't have weapons. We had just regular weapons. We sort of attached ourselves to the battalion medics, because they would bring in prisoners and we would try to interpret and ask them questions, as much as we could. They didn't bring in too many. Now, he [Joe] spoke much better Yiddish than I did. He arranged for the two of us to work together. So, I didn't question it.

KP: But you obviously understood ...

BG: I understood enough to know what was going on, but you really ... The only time I saw more German prisoners was in northern Luxembourg. There was a village town of Clerf, (Clervaux?), and they were bringing German soldiers in then ... But at that time, they were very sick, and hungry ... and there were some young kids, about sixteen or seventeen years old. They were crying that they were sick and wanted something to eat. The next time I saw a lot of prisoners was when the war ended, in Czechoslovakia, and they were running away from the Russians. We had hundreds and hundreds of them in this little town in Czechoslovakia ... and they stayed with us. They set up camps for them, and slowly they processed them and sent them home.

CG: Did you see any of the Russians ...

BG: Yes, I saw the Russians.

KP: Before talking about the Battle of the Bulge, I would like to ask you some questions about creature comforts. You mentioned about rations. How often would you get a hot meal on the front lines?

BG: On the line, not too often.

KP: Less than once a week?

BG: I don't remember, but, not too often.

KP: What about a shower and changing your uniform? How often did that occur?

BG: They had "shower heads," as they called them, and I only went to one. There was snow on the ground and it was cold. I don't think I had taken my clothes off for six or seven weeks ... and they said, "There's a 'shower head' and the truck will take you there." You know, out of the whole bunch, I don't think there were more than ten of us. We got on the truck and we went to the shower head ... They had a quarter master set up in a building and you went up to the window and told them what size pants you wore, what size shirt you wore, what size underwear you wore, and they'd issued you either new or refurbished clothing. The shower head was in a

"Y," so that you would undress in the leg of the "Y," go into the other part and take the shower, then you come back out. When you came out of the shower, there was a group in the other leg ... they would go in. They had this thing pumping water out of the creek and heating it, and spraying it through the shower heads. The water coming through was more like a leaky faucet. You did what you could. At least, you got clean clothes.

KP: Did you ever go to religious services either before going overseas or while you were over there?

BG: Yeah, I went to religious services in the States. That was the only bone of contention I had with some of the young fellows from Boston. I went to the sergeant and said, "I want to go to religious services tonight." Friday night was barracks night. "But, I don't want to go without doing my share of the work. What do you want me to do to consider it my share of the work?" So he told me. The next morning I heard, "You didn't help us." I said, "Hold it. The sergeant said if I did this and this and this and this, he would consider it my share of the work. There are thirty of us on this floor. I did more than a thirtieth of the work, but I'm not complaining. I did work. I didn't walk out of here without doing something." I told the sergeant to straighten them out, "because next week I'll go without doing any work, and you can't do anything about it because orders came down that you can't keep people from going to religious services." So he straightened them out a little bit.

KP: When you got to Europe did you go to services at all? Did you ever encounter chapels at all?

BG: No. We were a front line outfit ... and anything you did, you did on your own.

KP: Did you ever say prayers for any fallen soldiers?

BG: I wasn't brought up to go to synagogue and say kaddish for anyone, because there was no one in my family at that time. It wasn't something I was familiar with. You prayed for yourself.

CG: Did you celebrate Channukah ...

BG: No. There weren't enough people around for us to celebrate Channukah. After the war, a few of us got together for religious holidays, but it was hard. You had two men here and two men there, two men there. To get them all together became an effort.

CG: Were you ever rotated back after being on the front line?

BG: Well, from my company you keep moving. You go in, and they pull you out, or you're a reserve and something happens, and you go in. They rotate the companies within the battalion. Then, they rotate the battalions within the regiment. You're not on all the time. You don't stay on the line all the time. Maybe the Russians did.

KP: When you would go through areas with a lot of civilians, how often would you get to sleep in a house when they were commandeered?

BG: Not too often.

KP: Even in Germany?

BG: We commandeered one house because nothing else was around. Everything else was burned down. We were sleeping in a basement of that house. They were using what they called "artificial moon spotlights" off the clouds, and we would be in the house on guard duty just listening. You didn't look out the window because there was a wall there. It was all shot up. We didn't commandeer houses too much.

KP: You mainly slept on the ground in foxholes?

BG: Yeah, wherever you could.

KP: The winter of 1944-45 was one of the coldest winters in Europe for over a hundred years. How did you stay warm during that long stretch on the line?

BG: Well, we were up by the Bulge. There was a tanker guy, who was looking for combat boots. Somehow or other, I had gotten ahold of an extra pair of boots that happened to be his size. Tankers had coveralls, blanket-lined, canvas on the outside, very heavy, very warm, so I swapped the boots for the coveralls. I put on those coveralls and they were very, very warm and then you wore clothes. I had a regular undershirt, a sleeveless English wool undershirt. Then I had another American GI's ... it was an undershirt, but it was more similar to what people today buy with logos on. Anyhow, then I had a regular shirt on, then I had a jacket, then an overcoat, so there were plenty of layers ... and you had the gloves, which you had to have. That was it.

KP: How many in your unit were afflicted with frostbite or trench foot?

BG: I don't know. I had trench foot. There weren't too many, but I had trench foot. They knew what it was. They'd wash your feet with boric acid soap, and then they'd put plenty of Vaseline on and they'd coat the inside of your shoes with Vaseline and that was it. You'd walk for a few days, slipping and sliding around in your shoes.

CG: Was trench foot very painful?

BG: It was painful, but you could manage.

KP: You said you didn't know a lot about what was going on. When did you think the war would end? Were you hoping to be home by Christmas, or the end of the year?

BG: Well, we knew the war was ending because we were moving so fast and they were giving up. We knew the war was going to end, but when, we didn't know. When the war ended, I was in Czechoslovakia, so there wasn't a hell of a lot further that they could run.

KP: In December of 1944, how surprised were you at the Battle of the Bulge and by the German offensive?

BG: Well, my group was in Metz, France at the time, because they pulled us off the line and sent us to Metz for recuperation and replacements. We needed a lot of replacements ... and there was one fort that still hadn't surrendered; Fort Jeanne D'Arc. Some of the companies were put up around Fort Jeanne D'Arc, just until they surrendered, and they surrendered not long after we got there ... and then the Bulge broke and they pulled us out of there, put us on trucks and sent us to Luxembourg. The trucks drove constantly, no stopping ... and they finally dumped us off at the edge of a woods in Luxembourg, and said, "We don't know where the Germans are. You're going to have to go find them." It was late in the afternoon, so the officers said "Okay, we'll settle in here for tonight and we'll start out in the morning." So they took our shelters out, and blankets, and we laid them on the ground to sleep. We woke up in the morning with this much snow on us. That's when it began to snow, that night.

KP: So you had about eight inches of snow on you?

BG: I don't recall how much it was, but there was snow on you ... and from then on, it was snow ... and that was brutal because there was no place to go, going through the woods and all. You never knew what was going to happen. That's where you really saw the effects of the Bulge. They had American howitzers along the road, blown apart ... and then they started to bring the dead out, in big truckloads, frozen. You knew you were in a place where a lot of things had happened. The Twenty-Eighth Division had been in Wiltz, Luxembourg, and the story was that the band and all the other Division Headquarters outfits were given weapons to go out and set up a perimeter. There were GIs that were wounded, that the civilians had taken in to help. There were some kind of tunnels around there, where they had kept wine. They had these tunnels with American soldiers in them, and the civilians took care of them. When the Americans finally pushed through and took back the town, the civilians brought the American soldiers out. So, the civilians did a lot to help.

KP: In your unit, during the Battle of the Bulge, what kind of combat did you see? Did you make contact with the enemy the next day?

BG: I don't know exactly, because something could happen within 200 feet of you and you wouldn't know. They did make contact. We finally moved into an area where Joe and I were in the village, in this little town of Beigny, and the companies were up on the hill. You would hear, "You know So-and-So? He got killed, and So-and-So, a sniper got him, and So-and-So was wounded." They'd bring guys into the aid station and they'd take care of them, and then send them back to the general hospital. We knew what was going on, but if you're a couple of thousand feet from something, or half a mile, then you don't know.

KP: Did you start working at the aid station?

BG: I didn't work with the aids people, I just stayed around them, because that is where the wounded would come in, or they would bring the Germans in. That was after we got into Luxembourg.

KP: Did you guard the German prisoners?

BG: They brought back one officer into Bevigny. Joe and I took care of him. We guarded him, and then they sent up somebody to take him back to the Division. That's the only time I saw Joe really mad, because he heard that this officer had killed one of our men, and nobody had told Joe. If they had told Joe, he wouldn't have kept him prisoner. He would have killed him. He said so himself. He was questioning him, and the guy would not answer. Joe took his helmet off and hit him, and the guy still would not answer. If Joe had known he had killed one of the men, he would have killed him. He would not have thought twice. He was a tough little guy.

KP: Did you ever see a German surrender and get killed as a captive?

BG: No.

KP: Did you know at the time of the Battle of the Bulge about the massacre at Malmedy?

BG: No. Like I told you, if something had happened about 100 feet away you wouldn't know it. It could have happened last week, or two weeks before, you wouldn't hear. Very, very seldom would you hear what went on.

KP: What about the German infiltration of English speaking groups? Did you know about Germans disguised as Americans?

BG: No. By the time we got up there, even a couple of days later, there were other units ahead of us. We had to come up from Metz. They stripped a lot of Patton's army.

CG: Did you encounter any concentration camps?

BG: I don't recall anything. I know after, as we were moving, we passed work camps. I did not pass any of the hard-core concentration camps. There was one area we passed through where people were laying in the fields and along the roads with striped uniforms on. I had no idea whether they were work prisoners, or concentration camp prisoners. I was told, at that time, that the SS had emptied these places and chased the people out onto the highway to slow the Americans down ... but, instead, the people did not want to do that so they ran into the fields, so the Germans shot them. There were others who were so weak that when they go to the road, they sat down along the road, and I saw some of them died there, because of malnutrition ... But prison camps or concentration camps as such, no. I saw work camps ... a few.

KP: When you were on the line, how often did you shoot your rifle?

BG: I never fired.

KP: Why?

BG: Because I never got close enough to something to fire.

KP: What about the men in your unit, how often did they fire their rifles?

BG: Only if they had to. We were never that close. Maybe A Company did. Once I was at battalion headquarters, we were never that close to see anything. When A Company was in Luxembourg, where the men got killed, I know they were firing at people. We were too far away to fire, especially in the hilly countries.

KP: Even during the Battle of the Bulge?

BG: Never close enough to fire.

CG: In S. L. A. Marshall's book *Men Under Fire* statistics were mentioned that only twenty-five percent of infantrymen actually fired their weapons. Do you think that this is an accurate statement?

BG: To me, it may very well be a good figure. You know, you fire your rifle you have to see something, and the Germans used machine guns and artillery to prevent you from getting close enough to see their fire. You did not want to get close enough to see their fire. The bulk of the dead and injured, from anything I've heard, had been from artillery, then the other thing is sickness.

KP: Did you ever get sick all while you were on the line?

BG: Only with my feet, trench foot.

KP: You never had fevers or anything?

BG: No.

KP: The war, as you remember, was very slow ... you only moved a few hundred feet a day ...

BG: No, it went quicker. You could be a few days of just moving slowly, then, all of a sudden, the Germans would pull back, and they would move you up faster.

KP: By March and April the war was going faster.

BG: Then we were moving every day. We were pushing every day. We took, what they call, the back roads. I understand, the armored division went on the main highways because the tanks

could go on those. Some of the back roads we went through, you would think you were going through the Poconos.

KP: How often would you encounter resistance in March and April? You mentioned this one person who was killed ...

BG: That was something that was totally unexpected, because the flags were out all over and everything was bunched up. It was totally unexpected. Whoever fired those shots was one individual; it was not a group. I heard of someone that was killed the same way, a month or two before. The soldier was going to give up, he was going to take him prisoner. Then all of a sudden the soldier shot and killed him. This was not far from a concentration camp, right outside a concentration camp. That's why I say, "It's luck."

KP: What did you think of the Germans as enemies? Did you have any ambivalence about fighting them, especially after discovering the concentration camps?

BG: It was before that. They started a war. Who wanted a war? They were responsible for a war. The Japanese were only a catalyst for the United States, as far as I am concerned. Eventually, the United States would have gotten into the war with Germany. I believe, they couldn't let all that continue. They could not let England just go under. It just was not politically correct.

KP: As a Jewish soldier, did you ever fear what would happen to you if you were captured by the Germans?

BG: Well, I knew it wouldn't be good. There was one fellow from Columbus, Ohio, I don't know whether he was Greek Catholic, but his brother was in intelligence, and his brother told him, "On your dog tags, have them put a 'P' not a 'C,'" because they put your religion on your dog tags ... your name, your serial number, your tetanus shots. In the early ones, they put your address, but they then they didn't want you to go overseas with that, so they issued new ones with name, serial number, tetanus shots, year, and religion, either 'C,' 'P,' or 'H' ... and he had a 'P' put on his ... and he said, "Why did you have an 'H' put on yours? Why didn't you have a 'P' put on it?" I said, "Because I don't know what the hell is going to happen."

KP: Did that make you pause to think about putting a 'P' for your protection?

BG: It makes you think about it, but to do it is another thing.

KP: Who was the last person you heard about getting killed during the war?

BG: You now, I have a piece here. Some reporter from the *Star Ledger* called me. He got my name from the Twenty-Sixth Division, 101st Infantry alumni. [Quoting from the *Star Ledger*] "Eight GIs from the 101st Infantry Regiment were killed in a massive explosion of German origin, in Pernak, Czechoslovakia on May 8, the first full day of the cease fire." He asked me about it. I said, "I had no idea, I never heard of it."

KP: Because you were not near it?

BG: I wasn't near it. I did not know if somebody got hurt in the next village, or in the same village we were in, unless I happened to be there, or unless it was necessary for them to tell me. You just didn't hear it, or if you did hear, you did not pay attention.

CG: You in Czechoslovakia on Armistice Day. Were you happy when you heard the news?

BG: Oh, yeah. Everybody was happy.

CG: Did you celebrate at all?

BG: We had nothing to celebrate with. I guess, there was a little German aid hospital there, and somebody went in and asked for the alcohol. At that time they called it "buzz bomb juice." That stuff was some kind of synthetic alcohol. I don't know what it was ... but a couple of the guys they drink anything. So, they drank it, and it made them so crazy. They would take a drink of water and they'd would get drunk all over again. I wouldn't touch that stuff ... but that was their celebration. They went crazy with that junk. There was just a couple of them ... not many. Everyone was so happy, and relieved, they just relaxed ... But then we got busy because the next day, the Germans started running and they came in convoys. The first convoy, they came in, had a couple of American Air Force men on it. I think they had been knocked down over the Ploesti oil fields. These guys said, "The only reason they brought us was for safekeeping, safe passage."

KP: Did they tell you anything else about being a prisoner?

BG: No, because as soon as they were identified, communication was immediately with division, and, immediately, they sent an ambulance to come and take them ... They didn't have to stay there. You couldn't get next to them to talk to them, there were so many others around. The officers were questioning them.

KP: You also worked with displaced persons when you were in Czechoslovakia.

BG: Not in Czechoslovakia, but in Linz, Austria. I drove an officer, who arranged for sending displaced persons from that area to their homeland, whether it was Poland, or Hungary, wherever it was. He would make the arrangements. One time, I went with him to a camp, and people were sitting, terrible looking, with crutches and all, and he did not say anything to me, and I did not find out until weeks and weeks afterwards, that the place we had gone to and those people were all out of Auschwitz, and places like that. I read stories now about Patton setting up camps for these people from concentration camps, and turning around and putting White Russians and others in charge of them ... and those were the most anti-Semitic people in the world. Now we had White Russians in the area, and they used to cry because the American army would round them up and send them back to the Russians ... Once the Communist Russians got ahold of them, they were dead ... The Communist Russians considered White Russians traitors. But this refugee thing was ... we had to send them by train. There were Linz and Enns, and Enns was a

railroad bridge going across the creek there ... and next to it was a motor bridge. So, we would load up the trains on our side, because the Russians were across the river. In Linz itself, there was a big bridge going across the Donau River ... and the Russians were on the other side. On the American side, there's a picture there of an excursion boat ... that was a river cruise boat that went up and down the river. I heard, one night the Russians came over in a couple of rowboats and were going to board that boat, and take it back to the Russian side of the river. Whoever was on that boat drove them off, and then they took that boat up river to where there were Americans, we're on both sides of the river. They tried to steal the boats. In Czechoslovakia, they came in and took all the German trucks that they wanted. The American army let them take them. When we sent these refugees, Mark Clark and the Russian general agreed there would be two trains a day, and how many people ... These are European freight cars, the old First World War cars, what they called "forty and eights" ... forty men and eight horses. These were filled with ... there were a couple of trainloads of Hungarian soldiers. The Germans had the Hungarian soldiers in their army, but they only used them for repairing railroads, and stuff like that. The Hungarian soldiers had their families with them, and they had their bedding, and all that. I went to one place where we interviewed them, before we arranged for them to move ... They had sod houses out in the field, and there would be three to six families in each big sod house ... with no walls inside, just the [outside] walls and a roof, with sod this high on top of it. Because they had been there for a couple of years, they had all their bedding. Their sheets and bedding were white as snow, everything was so clean. When they went to Enns, to load on a train, they loaded all their personal effects. So, if the floor of the train was here, the bedding was up this high, and the people were on top of that. The first train we loaded was an engine and nine or ten cars. One car had a couple of American soldiers going along as guards ... the rest were Hungarians. When we went across the bridge, the Russian officer on the other side, wouldn't let the train through. He said he didn't have any orders. Our lieutenant said, "You did get orders. These are the orders; two trains a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon." "No. I don't have any orders." So they had to communicate with Clark, and Clark communicated with the Russians, so then in the afternoon, finally the Russian officer in Enns said, "Okay, one train, "this is the afternoon ... "one train." Here we had two trains they were loaded already, because we didn't expect something like this. So, the lieutenant got a bright idea. "Put the two trains together. Make one train." A couple of weeks later, the train comes back, and the officer went crazy ... he goes screaming, "Where's my train?" He said, [Russian officer responds] "We got a train." "Yes, but it's only one engine and ten cars, but that train I sent had two engines and twenty cars." ... They stole a whole train.

CG: Was there a lot of tension over the train incident?

BG: No. There were other tensions. Some Russian officer had gotten killed by a GI, so in Linz they had a trial. Every morning a busload of Russians would come across from their side to our side, and somewhere else they had the trial, and every evening they would go back across. I don't remember what the outcome was. They had this trial ... the Russians wanted these GIs punished for whatever was done to the officer. What happened, I don't know ... I don't know if they had to put those guys in jail for life, or whether they won out ...

CG: Did you personally have much contact with the Russians?

BG: In Czechoslovakia, I was driving a jeep and I had an officer who loved to go to Russian occupied Budweiss, in Czechoslovakia. It was Russian controlled ... and the Russian soldiers were going around ... we weren't carrying weapons, but they were going around with their machine guns. Their machine guns were ones with round drums of ammunition ... they didn't have the clips. This officer wanted to go visit the Russians. So we went. No maps or anything, but we knew the direction. When you came to the border where the Russian army was, there was a woman guard ... She looked at the papers. Now they had a flag, and she'd go through the business with the flag, then wave you on. We got to Budweiss ... and that's a railroad town. We went to the railroad station, and went into the bar and there were Russians and civilians. Nobody wanted to talk to us. The civilians can't talk to you. They don't even want to serve you. I had a list of chemicals to get from the pharmacy, because someone was going to develop some of the pictures we had taken. So, I said, "Let's go find the pharmacy." We found the pharmacy at dusk. The guy at the pharmacy was scared. He was so scared. I gave him the names. His store had rollaway shutters ... he pulled down the shutters, got the chemicals all together, told me what it was, turned out the lights, and lifted the shutter to the doorway, and chased us out. So then the officer wanted to speak with partisans. We went to a place where there were partisans. It was a small hall-like place ... he is drinking, I'm not drinking. I don't drink that much, and I wasn't going to drink and drive in the dark. So, he's drinking with these people and he's arguing with them about who won the war. These partisans were getting a little upset. I could catch the drift of it. I grabbed this officer and told him, "If you want to go back, fine. If you want to stay here, fine. But I'm going, because I am not going to let you get them mad and let them kill us. I am not dying for you." When he heard that, he got back into the jeep and we went back to our area of Czechoslovakia. Then I went to the captain ...

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

BG: I told the captain that the people did not want to bother with this, because he's telling them how America won the war for them. They don't want to hear that. They suffered a lot these years and the people didn't want to hear that. They [partisans] lost people in the war and suffered for years. I told him I did not want to go back there anymore. So that was the last time I went to the Russian section.

KP: So the captain actually heard you out? You were a private and you asserted that you did not want to take the officer there anymore?

BG: Oh, yeah. I think he did not really know what was going on. When I told him about it, then he realized what was happening. The army did not want that stuff going on. They didn't want anything to turn into an incident. They had enough incidents without having something like that ... But then in Linz and Enns, when the Russian officer would not let the train through, I had to drive the officer into the Russian area, to the place where this Russian officer was. He went in there and talked to him, and when he came out I took him back. You did not see civilians working there, just Russian soldiers. You knew it was Russian soldiers because they all wore overcoats that had no hems on the bottom ... they dragged down at their ankles. Only Russian soldiers, no civilians in that area. I guess, so many miles from the river, back into the Russian

held territory, they did not allow civilians. In Enns, they picked up a Russian soldier on the American side. How he got there, nobody knows ... and he was drunk as hell. He got over to the American side somehow, drunk as could be. When he sobered up, they got in touch with the Russians, to come and get him ... and he begged and begged, "Don't do it. They'll kill me." He begged them. They wouldn't listen. So, they took him to the American side of the motor vehicle bridge, and said, "Okay, go." The Russian officers met him and took him back. As soon as they got to the other side of the bridge, on what is called "solid ground", they started to beat the hell out of him ... and he had begged them, "Don't, they'll kill me." So that is my association with Russians.

KP: How much contact did you have with the Czechoslovakian civilians? You mentioned that you went to the Russian sector ...

BG: Well, Czech civilians, we lived in the village. I had a room in this little house. Actually, there was one big room that the family had, and there was this room to the side. I think it was some kind of store at one time where they might have sold something. They had hay up in the attic, and they had a couple of goats. This man and his wife and a son of about twelve ... they fixed up a straw mattress for me and I slept in that room. We talked to civilians. I told one civilian that I wanted these wooden shoes. They told me where to go and I went to this farm, and it was an itinerant shoemaker ... He went from farm to farm ... and they supplied the wood and he had the chisels and everything else. So, he made me a couple of pairs of wooden shoes. [To Ralph Gulko, his son] Did you wear one pair? They [my sons] clacked around the house with them ... my older son, most likely. Other than that, if you ask the civilians for something, they did not have anything. They looked for you to give them something like cigarettes, candy, chewing gum, or any canned goods you didn't want to eat. They were looking for you to give it to them, because all they had were potatoes ... and a few other things like that.

KP: How much fraternization went on between American soldiers and the women, either in Austria or Czechoslovakia?

BG: Really not that much. There was some fraternizing going on, but most of them were told to steer clear. A lot of these women had not had medical attention for years. There were so many different men going through these areas that you didn't know what you could catch, between lice, crabs, gonorrhea, syphilis, and who the hell knew? For the most part, only the horny ones ... and there were horny ones.

CG: Did you encounter or hear about the black market at all?

BG: Well, the black market ... in Linz there were young fellows who would come from Vienna, and other places in Austria, and they would have the money sewn into their jackets. They would buy cigarettes. For a carton of cigarettes you would get twenty, thirty, or even forty dollars of occupation money. That was the black market. Then there was the black market if somebody had a girlfriend ... he would try to get rations from someone and give it to her.

CG: What about medical supplies or anything of that sort?

BG: I wasn't associated with anything like that.

KP: What did you think of Germans and Austrians, in light of the concentration camps?

BG: I had no feeling for them. I did not want to bother with them. The civilians themselves did not like it when females talked to American soldiers. I got acquainted with a young girl, just talking to her, in her office, and I saw how the other women in the office reacted to her ... They didn't like it. To them, any woman that went with an American soldier was a loose woman. They had so many millions of their men killed, that after the war ... it wasn't anything for them to have two or three women for every man. One American soldier, he was with a German woman, and her husband was released by the Russians. He came home, and the story I heard, was that he was emaciated, he looked like hell ... and he came home, knocked on the door and his wife opened the door, and the story is, she told him, "Go away. I have a prima American," ... a healthy American. She doesn't want a sick old German, who just got out of a Russian camp. She chased him away.

KP: Where did you hear that story?

BG: In Austria.

CG: What else did you do besides working with displaced people?

BG: Biding my time.

KP: After VE Day, did you have enough points from occupation duty to go home or were you destined for Japan ?

BG: Well, after we moved out of Czechoslovakia, we moved into Austria, to what had been a German artillery range. We set up tents there, and we were going to take training for Japan, but in a few days that was over with, so, that was when we were sent in for occupation duty. The points system ... I had to wait till I had enough points to be sent home. I think I had about eighty-five points ... and everybody was scrounging every point that they could. They would come up with stories of where they had been to get another five points, because they wanted to go home. Finally, when my number came up, they attached me to the Fiftieth General Hospital, to do paper work ... and they moved us by truck, into this town in France. It was a school building, and the next morning they began to process us. Then we moved by train to Lucky Strike ... We were there for a couple of weeks. Then they moved us by train to Le Havre, and from Le Havre, they put us on the *Lacrosse Victory Ship* ... 2,000 men. It took, I think, nine days from Le Havre to Staten Island. In the middle of the trip, a big ocean liner goes [makes wooshing noise] ... left us standing there. We were jealous of this big ocean liner ... That's how I came home, to Staten Island.

CG: How did you spend your nine days at sea?

BG: Couldn't spend them on anything. You just had your breakfast, and your dinner ... and they gave you a half pint of milk for lunch. Everything was limited, because they had a couple of hundred extra men on the ship that they had not planned on ... One outfit was begging to go home, and they told them that there was no room. So, these fellows said, "We don't want bunks. We'll sleep on the deck ... We'll sleep on our duffel bags." So, they let them get on ... But when you are bringing food from the United States to Europe, and this happened to be a ship outfitted to take German POWs that were in the United States, back. I don't know if they took any back, but the ship had the signs, and all of that ... so, it had been used for that ... to take prisoners back to France, and take GIs back to the United States. So, they had to load the food on at Staten Island for the round trip ... you never knew if the food would last. Then, they threw a couple hundred extra men on. Then, when the ship docked in Staten Island, you could have outfitted another outfit with all the stuff that was left behind ... blankets, and coats, and everything else. These guys were so anxious to get home, that they just dropped their stuff. My brother had been in San Diego, he was in the Navy ... and they would bring these D.E.'s in to decommission them ... the D.E. would tie up, and everyone on board was discharged, so they took them out to the Navy base and discharge them ... there would be stuff left on those ships. He said, "We had to take clothing off, and pile it on the dock ... and then they took it in trucks, and incinerated it." They wouldn't let anybody take anything. He sent his daughter a set of toy dishes, a tea set, he found on the ship. The people would bring stuff, and they were so desperate to get home, that they would just leave it. You see that flag, I sent that home.

KP: Where did you find the flag souvenir or capture it?

BG: That was after St. Patrick's Day ... in a town we stopped in, and there was a railroad yard filled with freight cars. A couple were filled with big truck tires. I noticed this guy running through there with something, and I went looking, and there was this railroad car that was open, and had these long, black, tubular things, and there were flags in them with these long poles ... so, I took out two of them and tore the flags off of the poles, and I took the tops. That flag has the eagle sitting on the swastika. Well, that was the top of the pole ... and that was heavy metal and I had that ... and I had another flag that was black, green, and white with a leaf on it. This major, when I got back to the jeep, said, "What do you got there?" and I said, "A couple of flags I got out of the boxcar." Some officer he was talking to was standing there, and he said to this officer, "You got a flag like this?" and the officer said, "No." So, he took one of the flags and threw it at him, and said, "You got one now," ... that was the black, green, and white one. So I lost that flag.

KP: How much liberating of stuff went on as you were going through Germany and Austria?

BG: There was not much liberation of stuff, because how the hell could you move it? This flag, I carried it a week or two, then I sent it home. It was hard to send away things. It was hard to get boxes ... when you're a front line outfit, hard to send it back. There was one guy sent a package home, and I sent a package home ... all of sudden, I was called to the CP. [I said] "What's wrong?" "You are sending silver beads home. You are looting." I said, "I didn't send any silver beads home, I am not looting anything." "Show me what you are talking about," because they had the box there. The Germans had, the flat tin Prince Albert cans of pipe tobacco or cigarette

tobacco ... it came in a flat can with round edges. They had this, and in it was a chain for cleaning the rifles ... and between each link of the chain was an aluminum bead. Whoever opened this package in a postal inspection outfit, who knows how many hundreds miles away, never saw a German rifle cleaning kit. It was a chain, the brushes, little pads and oil ... no beads. So, I said, "There are no beads. It's a rifle cleaning chain." So, I packed it back up, and sent it ... and this time it went through. Another fellow sent a package with a couple of little silver cups. So, they asked, "Where is So-and-So?" and I asked, "Why?" They said, "Well, he sent this package that's got this silver in it." I said, "Well, you have to go to the cemetery for him. He got killed out on patrol." They gave him a couple of doses too much of morphine and it killed him. So, that stopped that. The looting, how are you going to send it home?

KP: Did you ever see anyone take watches off German soldiers?

BG: No. They didn't have it any better than we had. I didn't have a wristwatch, that I remember.

KP: How good were the medics and the medical care?

BG: I think they were good. It depended on where it were, how long it took you to get to the medics, or how long it took the medics to get to you.

KP: Of the medics assigned to your unit, were you impressed by them?

BG: From what I saw. As I said, I didn't actually see that much actual blood ... because like I said, if it did not happen next to you ...

KP: After the war ended, did you ever get any leave or passes to do any sightseeing? Did you get any passes to see Switzerland or Vienna?

BG: I never got that kind of pass.

KP: You never got to Paris?

BG: No, but I went up to the lake area ... Mundsee Sea ... I went with this woman up to the farm house of her husband's family. She had these linens up there, that she wanted to bring them back. So, I went up there. I got a ride in the jeep, but I couldn't catch a ride back. So, we're carrying these big bundles of linens, and we had to go to where they had trucks ... They loaded us up, and we got on the truck and they took us to the rail station. Then you had to pay. They didn't want to take me ... She had to fight for them to take me. They wanted it only for civilians ... "Let the American make his own way." So, then we got to the railroad station and got on a railroad that was going from there, into Linz, because the Linz railroad station was operating again ... and we got in the railroad station, and the car was jammed ... completely full ... and [we] stood at the end of the car in the vestibule, so to speak. She was telling me, "Don't say anything." I kept my mouth shut, because she was apprehensive, because the way that the men were looking at us. We got to Linz, got off the train, and took the stuff to her house and I said,

"Goodbye." I don't want to get killed. People don't realize, they had gone through brutal years and it had left them with a certain sense of ... bad stuff.

KP: When you were in Austria you got the sense that you were occupiers?

BG: Yes. They didn't like the control that was placed over them. There was this bakery, and they were baking breads, and it looked like the kind of bread that I would like to have, because I did not have decent bread. It was a very dark bread. So, I bought one. I could see that some of the people did not like it, that the baker sold me one. Underneath, they accepted you, but they didn't like you.

KP: You mentioned you stayed in Austria in this former artillery camp. Did you stay there the entire time during occupation duty?

BG: No, we moved out of that range ... off that property. We went to Linz. There was no occupation there we were taking training there.

KP: In Linz, where did you stay?

BG: My company was in Enns ... they were staying in a schoolhouse. That's where the kitchen was, and where the mess hall was. I was staying in Enns part of the time, and in Linz part of the time. In Linz, there was a two story barracks type of building that had offices. So, another fellow and I had one of the offices ... we had cots in there. I stayed in there, because I had to have a place to sleep ... But I didn't leave anything, anywhere, that could have been stolen. You couldn't leave anything ... People would take things. They were liberating from each other.

CG: What did you think of the atomic bomb, when it was dropped at Nagasaki? Did you hear about it right away?

BG: All we heard was that the war with Japan was over ... VJ Day ... that's all we heard ... We didn't have to worry about going there [Japan].

KP: How often did you write home or write to your brother?

BG: ... Twice a week, he [son, Ralph] has all of the letters that I sent to my brother.

KP: Did your brother write to you?

BG: Occasionally ... I have never been a person who corresponds too much ... but during the war you got lonely, so you wrote ... You wanted to receive a letter.

KP: Did you ever think about staying in the Army? Did you get the lecture about re-enlisting?

BG: Did your mother drop you on your head as a baby?

KP: It is a standard question. A lot of people have described the lecture.

BG: Well, yes ... and I said, "No way." I wasn't re-enlisting, or I wasn't even going into the reserve. When I went back to Miami, Florida, there was this man, who was a top foreman at the Railway Express ... and he'd been an officer during the war. I think he was a lieutenant colonel at this time ... and he was a hotshot officer in the National Guard in Miami, Florida. A couple of the men had joined ... They came to me and I drove out to the armory on one of the nights that they were meeting ... Before I could even get up close, there they were in close-order drill. I looked at that and went over and talked to the guys, and the guys said, "What about it?" I said, "See them? I gave that up the first day they put into close order drill." I would not join for anything in the world. I never went back to the National Guard armory. You want an answer? You got it?

KP: When did you learn about the GI Bill?

BG: I knew about the GI Bill.

KP: Over in Europe?

BG: No, I had learned about the GI Bill when I was discharged. After I got discharged, I also learned about how to buy a surplus jeep, or something. You applied, get a number, then when they have sale you get a notice. I got this slip, and went up to Atlanta, Georgia, and I bought a surplus jeep and trailer in Atlanta, Georgia, and drove them back to Miami. I also knew about the GI Bill, because one of the men I worked with, he went to school for insurance ... and this guy, Beyer, became an insurance broker and quit his job.

KP: At Railway Express?

BG: Yes. Railway Express was a union. If you went to school full time, on the GI Bill, you'd notify them what school you were going to, what courses you were taking, and you could go on a leave of absence. So, as long as you went to school on a GI Bill, you could retain your seniority. The first three years I went on the GI Bill, I retained my seniority ... and I said, "I'm not going back," and wrote them a letter to take me off the roster.

KP: How did you come to New Jersey?

BG: Oh, come on. What's the biggest motivation for a man to change his domicile? A woman.

KP: How did you meet your wife?

BG: A friend of mine [in New York] gave her my address and telephone number, and she went down there on vacation. I met her ... I don't know if sparks flew. That's how I met her.

KP: What year did you meet her?

BG: '47. We came up in May of '48 ... We decided that we would get married. I went home, and came back in August to get married.

KP: That was when you enrolled in Rutgers?

BG: Yes, I knew that I wanted to protect my seniority, in case anything happened, so, then I enrolled in Rutgers, even though I hadn't matriculated at that time, till I got my degree. I had to take a language.

KP: You started at Paterson, which is a branch that no longer exists ...

BG: They were holding it in public schools, and in old high schools. There were all kinds of junk ... the calculators and everything was all second stuff.

CG: So there was no set campus, or buildings, that were exclusively for Rutgers-Paterson?

BG: They had this one grammar school, that they had the second and third floor ... all of these little seats. Then, they moved downtown to the old Central High School. When I graduated, there were twenty-three graduates from that Paterson branch, twenty-two males, one female. She was not a veteran. There were some that were regular students. The bulk were veterans. There were really no kids. Some of them formed a fraternity and asked me to join. I was working six or seven days a week. I said, "I'm sorry, fellows. I don't have time for it." They were talking about meeting ... after class they go in and sit at a bar, and have a meeting and drink for a few hours. I couldn't do that. If I did that, I could not come in the door.

CG: So you lived in Paterson, went to school in Paterson, and commuted to New York?

BG: Yes. I was commuting to New York. That created a problem. I had an understanding boss, but my first class was at 6:30. To leave New York, and if I got caught up in traffic ... by the time I got home, got my books and took a bite to eat ... a couple of times I was late. I failed an English course, because I was absent three times. I told the professor that I commuted from New York. One of them, I came in at about a quarter after seven, and I didn't want to disrupt the class. He said, "You should have come in. I would have marked you present. But you were absent three times, so I have to fail you." I stayed in the class, and a fellow from Maywood was in the class with me, and we both did homework together ... at his house, or my house. All the papers, all the tests I did ... if you saw all the homework books turned in ... he gave him the good mark and failed mine ... and you could've read both of them. They were so close together. So, he just didn't want to pass me, because I was absent three times, and the rules said, "Three absences, fail." That's what happens when you go at night and work all day.

CG: How long did it take you to get your degree?

BG: Well, I didn't take full credits. I took nine credits per semester. I graduated in '56 ... eight years.

KP: It must have been a long eight years since you were working full time and going to school.

BG: Oh, it was a long eight years. I wanted to quit any number of times ... but the registrar would say, "Come on, give me the schedule for next year. You'll worry about it in September," ... But once I started, I didn't want to stop. I just would get tired at the end of April and May. I would leave work as early as I could, because I didn't want to be late. It took me eight years, because there were a number of credits where I had to matriculate and repeat. So, it should've taken me about seven and a half.

KP: At the Paterson branch, what majors could you select from?

BG: They had a bunch of them. Mine was a bachelor of arts, in accounting. I don't think that they call it that anymore.

CG: Why did you major in accounting?

BG: I was interested in it, because I figured it would be the best for me. I went to work in a place in New York where I took care of the books. That's what kept me on the job, and gave me the pay ... because I would be the one to talk to the postal inspectors, labor inspectors, the liquor authority, and the federal tax people, because my boss was chicken. I took care of the books, the daily cash, the payments, the payroll ... the whole works.

KP: Were there any teachers that you remembered who were very interesting?

BG: I don't remember their names, but they were very nice people.

KP: Were the teachers full time or part time?

BG: The last year I had ... business accounting, or municipal accounting ... It had to do with setting up budgets, and where the money came from. I don't know where this man worked, but he must have had a very good accounting job ... but I think this field of accounting was new to him, because that was the only time I had a professor that sounded, at times, like he didn't study the book himself the night before. That was a tough course, because the way they switched the money from one account to another ... and budgets for this and budgets for that, and where are they getting the money from, and how is it going to be spent? It was a little bit rough for me. I swear to God, that professor, if he did not read the book the night before, he was hung ... but he laughed about it. I think this man was given a course that was out of his field.

KP: You joined two veterans organizations.

BG: Jewish War Veterans, I joined many, many years ago. When I was living in Florida, I went to the American Legion Post that some of my friends belonged to. I went to the post, and it was nothing more than a big bar party. They were all sitting there drinking and carrying on. I said, "This is not for me. If I was going to drink beers, I would go the place across from the platform from work where we drink a half dozen beers after 4:30, before we go home. That is for me, this

is not for me. If this is the main thing for the American Legion, then I don't want it." So, I didn't join the American Legion. When I came to Paterson, my wife had friends who were members of the Jewish War Veterans. So I joined, but I never went to one meeting. I am strictly a dues paying member. I think that post is out now. My brother-in-law, when he went to Pennsylvania, joined the American Legion. He was very, very active, but I never went to one meeting of the Jewish War Veterans ...

KP: Did you ever go to a reunion?

BG: Yeah, I went to one reunion, in Boston. I went into the reunion, and I did not know anybody. So, I found out who was running the reunion, and he was at the bar, and I went up to him and introduced myself and told him I was a new member, and what company I had been in ... this was the whole regiment, with about eighteen companies. He said, "Oh, the table over, down at the end," and he turned around and kept on talking. I found the table that they said was the First Battalion Headquarters and A Company. There were some very nice people there. Then I went around afterwards, and looked for the medics. I asked them about this medic that I remember ... and they knew him. So, one of the men gave me his name and address, Max Miller. He lived not too far away. When I called him he remembered me. He said "You're the guy who brought the case of liquor." I said, "No, I brought the case of sardines." We went to this warehouse and at the warehouse, I found a case of ...

-----END OF SIDE TWO TAPE TWO-----

BG: So, I liberated the sardines.

KP: You liberated the sardines.

BG: Well, I liberated plenty of brandy, and stuff ... he remembered that I had brought in the stuff ... and I didn't get to see him. At this meeting, at this reunion, I got very disillusioned, especially my wife ... she went with me. It was a very, very right wing group, for some reason, and they were honoring somebody, and he was making a speech, and talking about some kind of a demonstration at a Catholic church ... and how he and his men ... he had been in the police department ... how he and his men went in and broke heads, and all that stuff. Everybody was clapping. My wife said, "This was not a group for us," because they were a very bigoted right wing group.

KP: When did you go there?

BG: About five years ago. They kept sending me letters for annual dues, so, finally, I got disgusted a couple of months ago, and I wrote out a check. I said, "This is for five years. Don't bother me anymore." It's only two dollars a year, a big shot ... ten dollars. They send out a couple times a year. They send out a letter of who is sick, who's died, who's this ... but you see, it's not a combat veterans outfit anymore. It wasn't really to begin with. It was a veterans organization of anybody that had been a member of the Twenty-Sixth Division, Massachusetts National Guard, called the Yankee Division. Anybody who had been in the National Guard,

could have been before World War II, during World War II, or after World War II. They list new members ... now the whole thing, the alumni association exists, but the division, and everything else was wiped off the map. I don't think that they'll have any new recruits from the YD National Guard.

KP: When the Korean War came along, did you think that you would have to go back, even though you weren't with the reserves?

BG: No, because I went in at twenty-five, in the army, and came out at twenty-eight. By that time, I was up in years and I was already married. So, I didn't expect that they would call me. If they called World War II veterans, they would have called those that did not have families.

KP: What did you think of the Vietnam War?

BG: I felt, and always felt, that if the French couldn't make it, then the Americans had no business going in there bailing out what the French couldn't take care of. I always felt that way. I also felt that they shouldn't have gone into Grenada, and other things ... and they only did a half a job going into Saudi Arabia. They say that not too many got killed over there, but now all these guys are becoming sick .. and they are saying that it is not from there. But who the hell knows what type of bugs are there and what chemicals around? Nobody knows ... They scream around here that this area is cancer. Why? Because they have five cases of cancer in the last ten years, within this twenty block area, so there is something in this area causing cancer. They are sending these men over to Saudi Arabia, and dozens, and dozens of these men come up with neurological sicknesses. They say, "Oh, it couldn't have been from there." Okay, enough said.

KP: Okay, one last question. Is there anything that we forgot to ask?

BG: I really don't know.

KP: This may be addressed to your son, when did you first start talking about the war, what did you tell your son when he was growing up about the war?

BG: Just a few things here, or there. I never hid it from him. I am not like some people I know. There is this friend of mine. He would never talk about it, never talk about it. Then in the last couple of years ... his wife told me just a few weeks ago, when I told her about this. She said, "Lenny would never talk about the war, never." Well, he's dead a year now. She said, "About a year before he died, he started to talk to his grandchildren about different things," and his daughter said to him, "Poppy, you never talked about it to us, about this. Why are you telling him these things?" He said, "I don't know. He just asked me questions and I am talking about it." He knows about the two trains and that it was stolen, he knew about those years ago. I never told him stories about meeting women, because I didn't.

Ralph Gulko: Can we go off the record?

BG: Yeah

TAPE PAUSED

KP: This concludes an interview with Benjamin Gulko, on April 27, 1997, with Kurt Piehler and ...

CG: Chris Greer

KP: ... At Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

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

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