RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM F. GUTTER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW BY

KURT PIEHLER
and
ELAINE BARRETT

GREAT NECK, NEW YORK
NOVEMBER 16, 1995

TRANSCRIPT BY

KAREN AUERBACH

Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. William F. Gutter on November 16, 1995 at Great Neck, New York with Kurt Piehler and …

Elaine Barrett: Elaine Barrett

KP: I guess I would begin by asking you to talk a little bit about your parents and growing up in New York, in Jamaica.

William Gutter: Well, I was born and raised in Jamaica, Queens. It was quite different, later on, and still is, I guess, but that's where my roots were. My parents' roots were there, too. They go back many years. 1911, I think, they were married. And they moved to Jamaica shortly after, and I was born there in 1922 and went to Jamaica High and then wanted to go to college in New Brunswick. I wanted to go to Rutgers. And I was having a tough time because, being out of state, they were giving priority strictly to the [Jersey people]. But I had a couple of good friends and was able to speak to Harold Hoffman, who had just finished as governor over there in Jersey, and there was a furniture dealer in Perth Amboy, (Albert Leon?), who was, for a long time, known there, and they put in a good word for me. But came time, I was already enrolled at, matriculated in Hofstra, and that was new at the time. I was going to this new school on the Island, but not willingly, when they called, and, at the last minute, by chance, a place opened up at Rutgers which I accepted and I said "Yes," and I was on my way the next day bag and baggage.

KP: Why Rutgers? How did you ...

WG: That's a good question, how? I guess because my dad knew some people in New Jersey. I ...

KP: Had you visited New Jersey a lot growing up?

WG: Yeah. We had visited some, yes. And it just interested me. I was down there, I had shopped a lot of colleges, too. I didn't just say, "Hey it's gonna be this one or nothing." I went, I saw a lot of the schools. Either they were too big or they were too small, or something like that. When I got to Rutgers, hey, this was just a nice size. It was a nice little school on the banks.

KP: Really, you picked ...

WG: …Picked size. My son did the same thing to me when he ended up at Union College in the '60s and '70s. He didn't want it too big and too small, and I was pushing Rutgers, quietly, but pushing it. And, oh, it [was] too big, and he ended up at Union, which was a much smaller school and he had a good education there. He was, he was interested in engineering. And that helped, that made me decide the school that had engineering. I knew Rutgers had a, for him, for me, I wasn't gonna be an engineer. I was just going to be history and poli sci and probably gonna be a lawyer or something like that. Which was dispelled, I never did go to law school.

KP: Your father went to college in an age when very few people did.

WG: Yeah, City College.

KP: He must have been very bright to get into City College.

WG: Well, Dad was a knowledgeable person that, I think he was fortunate enough that he came from a good background, that they pushed the idea that he's got to go to college. I mean, and that was rare in his day and age. But, and I don't know how much good use he put it to. He just went out and went selling, same thing I did. What, I followed him on that.

KP: Do you know how he got into the furniture business?

WG: I'm trying to think, how. You know, I really don't have a handle on that. I know I got into it because I got out of the service and, hey, there was nothing waiting for me anywhere and I had a wife and the baby came a little later, but there was the wife to take care of. And so I said to Dad, "Hey, you got a spot?" And he said, "Yeah, if you want to start upstate New York?" I said, "I'm off. Tell me when." And we moved up to Rochester, lived up there about two years or so, and then we came back to New York. My dad passed away in, around 1950, I guess it was. And they, factory, a couple of factories asked me to take over the territory that was Dad's. So I moved back here and never moved farther away from being out in Long Island. We, from Jamaica, we migrated, well, we went to a garden apartment in Flushing and then moved further out the Island and settled in Great Neck in an apartment. And then we had a small house and then a big house, and that was too big, so here we are in this apartment, which we've been now, twenty years here in this apartment.

KP: Oh, that's a while.

WG: Yeah, well, this is a very comfortable apartment. We got a, if it was only nice weather, we have a deck out there that we use to entertain. It's just lovely. It's the whole length of the apartment and it's, and it's hidden by the trees, pretty much, and everything. So we use it for cocktail time and then come in and have dinner in the house. It's, we don't have to worry about the bugs chasing us. It was, it's been home to us for twenty years, twenty-two years, maybe.

KP: Your father, did he own his own business or did he work for someone?

WG: He was a manufacturer's rep, so he didn't really own his own business. His own business was in his hat or the set of pictures he had. And basically, I did that. I did go into a little bit of distributing, where I did own my own business, but it was a negligible part of the overall picture.

KP: So you worked mostly on commission.

WG: Yeah, mostly on commission.

KP: How did he fare in the Great Depression?

WG: He kept his family together and I never worried particularly about it until I, it was fait accompli, where everything was fine. But he managed to take care of the family, and when I saw what it meant, as far as being a rep, I liked the idea of nobody hanging over me or something like that. Of course, you can't do that today. I retired from the factory that I've been with the last twenty years. And it meant really nothing to them one way or another. I mean, times have changed. I mean, there was usually a very close relationship in the furniture industry. I won't speak for other industries, I really don't know. The furniture industry had a, more of a family type set-up, as far as, factories were small, so it was the original owner who owned the factory and he made friends with the salesmen and they became part of his family. And you mentioned about the problem with blacks and etcetera, we had the same thing, only more so. I guess, Navy, I remember distinctly we had problems aboard ship. This was a ship we were putting together. It was the third on line, so it was the *Independence* and then the *Princeton*, and then us, I believe. So they were still hammering themselves together. But one problem that came up was separate quarters for blacks, and you had a mixture. You had the people who were a little more liberal and understanding about this thing and they were saying, "What's the problem?" And then you got the others, "Oh ..." The rednecks, I needn't explain any more on that. But, they finally reached a compromise kind of thing, where they were, we put some blacks and whites in the same compartment aboard ship.

KP: And that was viewed as sort of an experiment?

WG: Oh, that was considered quite a step, in, even in the days when World War II was on. I think World War II did a lot to eliminate that problem. And, but it existed. It was very blatant.

KP: Did you ever have any incidents aboard ship between black and white sailors that you remember?

WG: Slight ones. Nothing that really became any tremendous proportion. I remember one of the ways the white boys used to, we used to have to go, we generally sounded general quarters, and you were assigned which side of the ship you're supposed to go aft, and which side you're supposed to go forward. And some of these guys would purposely take the wrong one, so you were really charged at the guy and wait until you hit a, where you came through a hatch and, wham, you know, and knock him flat on his fanny. And just keep going, you know, blatantly on, and you couldn't argue with that after the general quarters was secured. But those kind of things, and there were incidents like that. Oh, I'd say, not frequently, but we had incidents. Not frequently, no.

KP: Your mother, she stayed at home? She ...

WG: Lillian Gutter. She was four feet, ten inches and a half, weighed ninety-eight, no, ninety-four pounds and drove, one of the first women in the city of New York to drive an automobile. In fact, in those days, the car had a crank. You didn't have a self-starter. And here she is, holding a crank, and [it] never bothered her because there was always somebody who would come along and see her in distress and give her the crank to get her started and get her home. The only thing

she feared were the tunnels. But outside of that, she had, she, New York taxi driver? She wasn't afraid of him. No, she was quite a gal.

KP: So, I take it your mother was something of a character?

WG: Well, no, she wasn't a, I wouldn't call her a character. She was just a little more interesting about certain things than others. But, no, she went out and played bridge with the girls and mah-jong and everything that was faddy in those days. And but the car thing, she was one who drove while the others didn't. And she was able to pick them up and drive them places and things like that. And the funny part of it is, I pushed her into giving up driving, and she was evidently ready for it, because she didn't object. And she was only sixty-two. And I was able to take the, and I took the car from her because I was worried about her being, driving alone at age sixty-two. So I say, here I am, well beyond it, and ...

KP: Your mother lived to be quite old.

WG: Mom lived to ninety-four, I think it was. You talk about age, speak to my wife. She'll tell you what age is, as far as family is concerned. God, she has a mother who will be, what is it, ninety-nine, hon, right? Ruth?

Ruth Gutter: What?

WG: Ninety-nine, mom's gonna be?

RG: What?

WG: Mom.

RG: What about her?

WG: How old is she going to be, ninety-nine, right?

RG: Yeah.

WG: And her father gave up driving at ninety-seven and passed away a couple of weeks later. So talk about age, there's the one to talk to.

RG: Yeah. You don't end up with a good quality of life. That's no good either.

WG: No. My mother-in-law is in, over in Jersey, in an apartment all by herself. And well, now we've got help in there, but she was living alone and wanted it that way. And she's pretty, well, legally blind. She can get some vision but she's legally blind and deaf, as well, and, it's not a good ...

RG: But her mind's 110 percent.

WG: Yeah, yeah. Her mind is sharp as it comes.

RG: Makes it harder for her, though, because she knows what's happening to the body.

KP: Was your mother active in any organizations, any synagogues?

WG: Oh, yeah, she was, they founded, Mother and Dad founded, were one of the founders of Temple Israel of Jamaica, which was originally on Hillside Avenue. And then they moved up, further up the hill, but they were original in that and active in communal affairs that way. Both of them, Mom and Dad.

KP: How observant was your family?

WG: What?

KP: How observant was your family? Did you observe any kosher laws?

WG: No.

KP: So you were very Reformed?

WG: Oh, yeah. In fact, we founded, Temple Israel was the first Reformed congregation. I think it was one of the first on the island, not just in Jamaica. And, yeah, that was, that was, but there was no Reformed. In fact, I was bar mitzvahed when I was thirteen, not because I really knew one word of Hebrew. I didn't. But, we were one of the first Reformed congregations to recognize bar mitzvah. And our temple was anxious to get somebody up there and I was taking some courses at temple which were, not Hebrew or anything like that, just taking courses. And they started teaching me some Hebrew, that I would know enough to recite the ...

KP: Yeah.

WG: The baruchs over the Torah. And, which they pushed me through, and I did, not understanding a darn word of it, to be honest with you. But ...

KP: Is it fair to say that your parents expected you to go to college?

WG: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I really, I really had hopes to go to Michigan, because I thought I would take law out there, and we had friends of the family in Detroit and they were pushing us. They [said], "Let him come out here." But, no, I couldn't get into Columbia. I wanted, that was [my] second choice.

KP: So Michigan was too expensive or too far?

WG: Too far. Folks weren't going to let me. And I think, well, the expense I'm sure entered in, but it didn't come up as a ...

KP: You can't afford this.

WG: No.

KP: Your mother and father wanted you a little closer?

WG: Oh, yeah. Sure they did. Sure they did. In fact, they loved the idea of Hofstra. They figured I was gonna commute.

KP: What about the public schools you went to? How well did they prepare you for college?

WG: I'll tell you, the New York City school system, in those days, was one of the greatest preparations you could have for college. In spite of the fact that probably the small percentage who went. They had a great, I got to Jersey at Rutgers, I was rooming with a bunch of pre-meds, and I had no interest in medicine at all, but I knew more about their freshman courses than they would possibly learn at the time. And they used, I used to tutor them.

KP: You were history ...

WG: I was history/poli sci. I was not too attentive to my, sure, I got my B+s, high Cs, but I didn't push, overwork myself.

EB: I see your parents were independents, politically affiliated with the independents.

WG: Yeah, we leaned to the Democratic.

EB: Oh, okay. So did they like Roosevelt and the New Deal?

WG: Oh, they were, my father, he was a proponent of New Deal and Roosevelt, like anybody I've every seen. No, he was, we were a little on that lean. I mean, I would, I'd break ranks going to somebody else when I thought the person itself warranted it. But out of choice, they would pick Democrat nine times out of ten.

KP: How did they feel about LaGuardia?

WG: Oh, they liked him because, well, there were some terrific blows to the Democratic party down there, with Jimmy Walker and Boss Tweed before that. Well, no, Jimmy Walker was, I mean, that guy was stealing them blind, so he couldn't have left a very good post. But LaGuardia came along at just the right time. I mean, he, he captured their imagination. How much he really did, I don't know. But ...

KP: Being in Queens, I can't resist asking. Did you go to the World's Fair of '39?

WG: Oh, I sure did. I went dozens of, we used to get these passes, I think they were twenty-trip pass or something like that, and I was down in school and [they'd pick] me up and I'd go over there. I loved going over there. That was great. First of all, it was a short bus ride from our house to the Fairgrounds. And it was so convenient and there was a lot to see, the Futurama, the General Motors exhibit, things like that. There was just so much to see there. It was really worthwhile.

KP: In high school, did you play any sports or join the Boy Scouts?

WG: I joined the Boy Scouts. I wasn't, I'd lost interest in it. We had a lousy, what I thought was, a lousy troop. I mean, I know it was a lousy troop. So I really went, I think just a year or less. Sports, I was one of those kids, in those days, who were rapid[ly] advance[d] as far as education was concerned. I was pushed through so many combined classes. And that was very, I think they needed seats, not that I was getting that much more than the other people. But we, I didn't, so I was really underdeveloped athletically and physically and, I guess my mind was coping with the grades that I had to get to stay in. So I had really, I was ready to graduate high school and I hadn't had my sixteenth birthday. In fact, I stayed an extra six months taking commercial courses just because no college would take me in [when I was] under sixteen. And ...

KP: So when you went to college, you were quite young.

WG: Yeah, sixteen. I graduated, when I was looking at the Navy, I graduated when I was 20.

KP: Johnny Melrose was similarly that young. He was, I think he said he came to college when he was sixteen.

WG: Sixteen. Now, I was a little older. Sixteen, late, instead of, not sixteen yet. But, so it hampered my, in fact Ruth has often said, she thinks if she had met me, well, we met the start of my second year, I was a big shot sophomore, and Ruth came down to school with her roommate. [Her] roommate introduced, or knew one of the fellas I knew, and they introduced us. And Ruth said if she had known me a year before, she probably never would have dated me because I was too short for her. Those played very important factors, at least in those days. I don't know if they're still are number one criteria for today with gals. But I imagine they still feel, they want the masculine, unless they've done otherwise.

KP: You mentioned you had come to Rutgers knowing you wanted to be history/political science. And it sounded like you wanted to go to law school.

WG: I had an uncle who was a lawyer who discouraged me.

KP: Really?

WG: He said, "You're too honest to be a lawyer." And, anyway, war came along, so I had that. And then I was thinking of maybe I'd go back to school, [but] by that time, I was married and I

was, we would have a baby shortly, so I figured, no. So that's when I went to my old man and said, "Hey, I want to go into the furniture business."

KP: So if the war hadn't come along, you may well have drifted off to law. It almost sounds like ...

WG: I might have.

KP: Yeah. You mentioned Professor George was one of your favorite ...

WG: John J. George. He, "Those that don't know beans from split popcorn about …" Oh, I remember John. He gave me more of an education in his classes than anything I took at Rutgers. He was, John J. George was really a character. But he taught you. He said, "Good? Good for whom? Good for what? Probably good for nothing." And that's the kind of way, homespun philosopher, you know? Like a Will Rogers type. But, I learned a lot.

KP: Yeah, because for a number of people, he's been one of the popular professors.

WG: Of course, I never checked with anybody about that.

KP: Yeah, he was among the ...

WG: He was, he was a character all by himself. I remember the other history professor that made an impression on me because he was so dull, was a Professor Ellis. He remembered right out of the textbook. He had a memory, I don't think he had to even look at his notes. He had the same, but everybody would be sleeping by the time he was [done]. And the funny part is, I could tell one story about that. I guess it was senior prom. He insisted we have classes the day after. We, so we all decided, well, we're going to come in our tuxedos. So, I was one of the few who said, carried it through. I come in and I'm ready to fall asleep right there. He takes one look at me. First smile I saw in him in all, in the years I had courses with him. He said, "Well," he said, "We used to do that when we, when I was in school, but I haven't seen one of them since." But Professor George was the guy, though. He was terrific.

KP: You were fairly active an athlete when you were in college.

WG: Not really, I did some fencing and freshmen 150 football. I weighed about 135 soaking wet, so I could do that. And, then I got too heavy for it and too light for football, so I went to watch. I saw Rutgers get the new stadium in 1938 and start them on a career that was, still hasn't gone anywhere.

KP: But you remember the Princeton-Rutgers game.

WG: Oh, sure did, that was the game. That's when we beat 'em. 20-18. See, I even remember the score. I'm a football fan. I really enjoy football of all sorts. College, pro, even high school.

KP: Did you remember Dean Metzger? Do you have a ...

WG: Dean Metzger was always the caricature. I mean, that's what you remember [about] Dean Metzger. Whether he was good, bad or indifferent, I really wouldn't know.

KP: You didn't have very many dealings with him.

WG: No, I was good enough that I didn't have to get called to his office. Or I blamed somebody else good, well enough, I don't know which.

EB: Did you participate in any the war efforts, like the blood donations or the victory book campaigns?

WG: Well, blood donation, yes. Who was it? Dorothy Thompson came down and spoke to the student body one time and I got active in that group. And that was about it. I didn't really get over involved. I was, I joined, I was a Phi Ep. And our, my feelings about fraternities at that time, I felt it enhanced my living down there a lot. And even though I was basically against the concept of fraternal organizations, with, hey, here we go denying people again, and stuff like that, but, it meant a lot to me when I was down there. So I was very active in their activities. I was, I remember, I was, the Scarlet Key, I was elected to. So, that was my big claim to fame.

KP: You had lived in a dormitory your first year?

WG: Oh, yeah, first two years.

KP: Where did you live?

WG: We lived, I was telling, I lived at the Leupp, the first, that was practically brand new at that time. And we were, I was a freshman quartered there. Sophomore year, I had to get out, and my roommate, a fellow by the name of, who's deceased, Roy Howard, I don't know if you had him on your list or anything. Roy and I roomed together as, at ...

KP: Winants?

WG: No, not Winants, it was ...

EB: Ford?

WG: Ford Hall. That was right across from where the old DEK house was.

KP: Yeah.

WG: I say the old because I don't know if any DEK house is still there. You had the corner building [that] was a fraternity that was bought by the, the building was bought physically by the school and I think they, did they take that down?

KP: Yeah, that building ...

WG: Still there.

KP: Yeah.

WG: I remember the guys used to go up there to steal the psych exams. Go look in the wastebasket to see if they, it was run off on the mimeograph machine. And then everybody used to pay a certain amount to look at them.

EB: What was your pledge period like? Did you have a lot of hard things to do?

WG: They still had pledging where they [had] paddling as part of the ceremony and stuff like that. In fact, who was just kidding me, Cliff Weitzen, do you have his name? Well, he wouldn't be, he's a tennis player, and I don't think he was in the Navy, maybe he wasn't even in the service. Cliff, he was a couple of years after us, and we had a fellow in between, Shep Sewich from Perth Amboy. Sewich, you should know. He was an athlete, he was a tennis player, he was a basketball player. And we were just down ten days ago, down in Florida and we had dinner one night with Cliff and his wife. And he says, "First, I got a message for you." He says, "Sheppy is still complaining that the paddle you used was the worst one of all the places." I said, "It didn't teach Sheppy any civility, did it?" So that was, that takes care of that.

KP: You mentioned that the fraternity enhanced life for you. In what way?

WG: Closer relationship with guys, and if you had a problem, there was, you got brothers to work it out with. They didn't just fall prey. And we had an open door. We didn't go out soliciting, I don't think, well, we didn't have to. We were one of the desired fraternities of the, of that period and, of course, the DEKs were the gentile fraternities. They were considered, I guess, pretty much tops, weren't they, in that period? And it was just, it was that, I didn't feel superior to anybody. In fact, we gave an ultimatum when, the boys up from the Leupp. We had about four or five of us who, before they opened up, where you had the period to go chasing pledges, etcetera, we got quite friendly. So by the time they started this pledge period, we got together and we were gonna all join one fraternity or not join any. And to show you how strong that bond is, there's still four of us, five of us, one just died last week, Benji, but the four or five of us who are [alive are] still friendly. And, in fact, I stayed with Art Roth down in Boca West. They moved down there permanently. They're living down there. And we're very close and, thank God, the wives kept close, because otherwise it probably would have never materialized. And so we, that's how ...

KP: You stayed in touch ever since then?

WG: Ever since then. As I said, I mentioned about Art. There were other Rutgers guys down, like Bernie Ralston, [who] was in the Pacific, and you mentioned who else?

KP: Herb Gross.

WG: Herb Gross. That's right, he was a Marine.

KP: Yes. And John Melrose.

WG: Yeah, Johnny Melrose, I remember. But I remember him more from college than I do from ...

KP: Yeah, he was very proud of being an independent.

WG: Where was he at, in the war?

KP: He was in the Navy. He was on the destroyer.

WG: You mentioned that, that's right. Destroyer.

KP: How did you feel about chapel? People had all kinds of opinions on both Dean Metzger and chapel.

WG: Didn't, they didn't require us to go, and I didn't go. That's how I handled it.

EB: Do you remember the mandatory gym that started that semester? You had to take that to graduate. Physical Education class.

WG: Oh, wait no, we had an Army requirement, we were part of the ROTC. And I remember something required on that. But I don't require, recall a required gym.

EB: Yeah, I read that in *The Targum*. They had just started it that semester. They started requiring physical education credits for graduation.

WG: Oh, I guess it was really no problem. I had the credits because the team, I belonged to a team. You got credits for that, I imagine, in fact, I, even to the point where I got past being a substitute on the fencing [team]. And they kept me on as a manager. So I used to look after the foils and the sabers and (?), see that everybody got theirs before they left the meet, and that was about it. But I don't remember anything being onerous like that, but I guess some of them found it that way.

EB: You mentioned you were in the history and international relations club. Do you remember any memorable speakers from that?

WG: Not really.

EB: No.

WG: Not really, no. I really can't recall.

KP: But Dorothy Thompson left an impression.

WG: Yeah, well, she was a little bit on the liberal side. And getting a liberal down in Rutgers was pretty good in those days.

KP: Well, that was, although people have said that Norman Thomas was a regular. I've read that ...

WG: Oh yeah, he was. I don't think I heard him there. I've heard, heard him speak many times, and thought very highly of him. But I also felt that Roosevelt stole his thunder. And so I really didn't hear anything new from Norman Thomas, although I had very high regard for him as far as a person and his thoughts and he was a good man.

KP: You mentioned ROTC. And what do you remember about your two years in ROTC?

WG: "De da da da da, de da da da da." That's about all I remember. I remember we had these 1907 rifles that, with the bolt action. And we used to have to assemble and disassemble that. And all I knew was I had to get into something other than the Army or I'm going to be in the infantry when they hear I took this course. Or the field artillery. So I quickly signed up in the Navy and got into the V-7 program.

KP: So taking ROTC taught you not to be in the infantry.

WG: I was a born coward. I wasn't going to take any, I felt that the infantry was the surest way of getting your head blown off.

KP: And how much of that did you know before you joined the ROTC and how much was learned at ROTC?

WG: I think I knew it before. We had to take ROTC. We didn't have any choice. Now, I didn't continue it. And as soon as I was able to get out, I did. And that was after a one-year requirement, I think it was. But, no, I had no desire to be. We had an old Army guy who was going to teach us what it's all about. So you listen to him one hour a month, I think it was, or two hours a, I forget how many, often. But that's how the Navy got me.

KP: You mentioned Rutgers was a conservative place. How did most students feel about the coming of war, before Pearl Harbor, say between 1939 and 1941?

WG: There was some. But there was, it really was not high on the agenda of problems. We were more worried about the freshmen getting paddled or something like that. I can't really say that, there was some groups that started. They were very minor, and if you asked me to name one, I don't think I could. And on both sides. I mean, they were, well, there were some that were, I guess, should have been over there helping Herr (Schickelruber?), and there were others who

were just gung-ho to go. I know we were all, when the war broke out, then, we were all anxious to go. I can remember the Sunday night when we were, nothing was doing on campus that weekend, so I think everybody had headed to the hills, and I took the train home. And on the train back, of course, this was the big excitement. We're at war. And Monday morning, everybody was crowding near the radio to hear Roosevelt declare, actually, it existed. And we decided, "Well, let's go down to Washington and see what's going on for ourselves." So, we knew a few of the boys down at Penn Dental who were, started, they had, did pre-dent[al] at Rutgers and a few of them were very close friends [of ours] from Phi Ep. So we call 'em up and say, "Hey, we're coming down." We're about five, six of us, no, more than that. I think we ended up with about ten of us piled into this, two friends of ours, Sy Silberberg and Harold Bush. Harold Bush is deceased. And we call them, "We're coming down." And we drive down to Philly, spend the night there, and Tuesday morning, we're in the halls of Congress very early. And the biggest disillusion of all, I mean here it is, war has been declared, you'd think it'd be frenetic in the Congress. They're arguing whether the Conservation and Domestic Allotment Plan should be extended or not. This is some farm thing for the subsidized farms they had that were still alive in the far West. And nothing about the war. Nothing. Didn't even look like anybody gave a damn or what. But that was, it was too early for the bills to filter down from committee to take action. What a disillusionment that was. I mean, God, we went back, we had gone down there for… Oh, yeah, we stopped at the congressman of New Jersey, don't ask me who he was by name, I couldn't remember, and he came out to say hello to his good constituents and telling us that the best thing we could do for the war effort is go back to school and finish. This is in December, and in May, we were finishing with school. So they pushed us along to finish. I mean one or two, some of the guys skipped out and went in right away. But we waited until May. And then I was, the day after graduation, I went looking to see if the Navy would take me in. Which, they turned me down in the Navy air force, but they did take me in, in the V-7 program.

KP: And you had problems because of astigmatism?

WG: I had slight astigmatism in my left eye. I wasn't wearing glasses for the time, at that time. But I had eyes that would have been good enough, but they, I guess, didn't have enough slots to put us into it at that point. But anyway, when I saw what the Navy pilots went through, landing and taking off on ships, I was glad I didn't get accepted in that program.

KP: Did you know how dangerous naval aviation would be?

WG: I had some idea, but, hey, you're going to be macho somewhere in your life. They say, "Jeez, that Navy thing looks like the thing for me." And, as I say, when I was, I wasn't on ship too long, when one of my, in fact, I was unusual. I got assigned to a, what are we running out?

KP: No, no, no, just…

WG: I got assigned to a room aboard ship with pilots. Now, they don't usually put the crew, even in the offices of a, together. It's just an unwritten rule. There's too much trauma to a person's mind if they live with those pilots, because they come on with such bravado and they

are, they've got as much chance to get through a war, I think, as a man on the moon. Some of them did, but their risk was tremendous. So when you lived with them, you start to feel for every one of these guys. And Jesus, sure enough, you're down in your cabin, and one of the boys that walked in, "Well, Chuck didn't make it today." And that's it. And I said, "Oh, my God, that's what we have to face as a pilot." So I was pretty happy, I guess, I didn't get to be a pilot. But it was traumatic to the mind, I'll tell you, to see those boys.

KP: So you got to know a lot of them?

WG: Oh, I got to, well, like our, the Flight 24, they were named after our ship number. They were, I got to know those the best. They were, oh, about thirty-five, forty guys. The greatest guys you ever want to meet, you know? And one by one, they were, and not just in combat, they were sometimes lost in ordinary operations. Break a tail hook and go right into the barrier and crack up, catch fire, bing, stuff like that. And one thing I did do, I got to be, I took a course, a couple of courses before I went to the ship. This was in December of, wait a second, no, it wasn't December, it was September of '43, I guess that was, wasn't it? What was it, '42 was the ...

KP: Yeah, you graduated in September of '42.

WG: '42. So I had to wait to be called for the V-7 program. So I went to a camp, a kid's camp, to be a counselor, next, right next to Ruth, with the girl's camp. I got the boy's camp. And figured I'd stay there as long, waiting for my orders. This was in July, June, end of June, beginning of July. And I almost made it through to September, but I think I was called in just a week before the end of camp. And I left to go to the Navy. And ...

KP: Where was the camp? It sounds like it must have been a very ...

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

KP: The camp was a Y camp?

WG: A Y camp of Jersey, the boy's camp was Cedar Lake, I think it was, and Nah-Jee-Wah was the girl's camp, I think. And it was in a lovely spot. It was a great camp and it was, you got a bunch of nice kids there. They were and some were, but it wasn't a rich man's camp. They roughed it a bit. And it was great. I got to know them all, and they got to know me pretty damn well, and they, oh, they made such a fuss over my leaving to report to the Navy. And, yeah, that was one night I can remember. I should say I can't remember. We celebrated that one. Yeah. So, I left from home, got home to get my change of clothes, and went off to, did my Navy, first training in Great ..., not Great Lakes, Abbott Hall, they called it, in Chicago. It was a Northwestern University dorm in downtown Chicago that was available for us, it became Navy property. Used us [for] guard duty. Standing out on Michigan Boulevard with people going by and people having drinks in their hand, enjoying their, and it was Chicago Avenue there, a bunch of pubs and restaurants, some good, very good restaurants, some very good pubs. But you'd be standing, marching up and down, "Somebody's going to steal a building?" you know. I mean, and these gals would come up, "Oh, isn't he cute?" You know? "Hey, watch it." And so we put

in, we became the ninety day wonders, even though it took 120 days, because I was in Notre Dame for thirty days before. That's where we did our apprentice seamen training.

KP: But first you were in Northwestern?

WG: No, first I was in Notre Dame.

KP: In Notre Dame.

WG: Then we came up to Chicago to take over for, become cadet midshipmen.

KP: So you initially went to apprentice seamen training?

WG: It was an abbreviated thing. It was a thirty day deal.

KP: So what did you learn at Notre Dame in the first thirty days?

WG: How to tie a knot. No, we learned quite a bit. We learned, they taught us a lot about protocol. We had some real Navy guys down there who gave us some good instruction about, "Keep your nose out, keep your mouth shut, and your ears open." I mean, that was the best advice you could get in the Navy.

KP: Well, the Navy is very, it's been interesting, when I've interviewed people who have been in different services, that the Navy was among the strictest of the services, that they were very dedicated to protocol. The bigger the ship, the more protocol.

WG: Right. That's where, see, I was on a flat top, which is, in fact, from the *Belleau Wood*, which was a small flattop, but still with the fast carriers. It was a cruiser hull they converted, they really operated quite well. The, I forget what I was thinking, I'm trying to get two thoughts out at once, that's why. The Navy was a very tight ship as far as … And, oh, that was it. Being [that] I was going to a big ship and it was a new one, every regular Navy guy is busting his butt to get a duty like that. When I told them I was going to the *Belleau Wood*, a new ship, "How'd you get that?" I got it for one reason. When I finished my training in Chicago as midshipman, they had a couple of Navy men come down to interview, 900 cadets he's going to interview, but he narrowed it down. And it took quite a while before I realized what, on what criteria he chose, because this was for bomb disposal training. And he made it sound like the most desirable thing you could possibly do with your life, would be to get into bomb disposal. So me, "I'll take a shot, what the heck." And was, I didn't want to get on landing craft, or something like that. I figured I wanted to get on a decent ship, if I can. So I got on the, all of a sudden I'm named as one of twenty-eight people assigned to bomb disposal training. We came down to Washington D.C. from Chicago. We went through this bomb disposal course. What it was, was practicing taking a, getting a bomb that did not explode, to get it out of the way. There are a number of factors which I won't go into.

KP: What were some of the ways you were taught to get rid of a bomb?

WG: Yeah, well, you get rid of it, right. Well, if you're in the middle of Washington D.C., you don't get rid of it by exploding it. That's what you've got to avoid. And if you want to live, you gotta learn to do that, too. We, twenty-eight men, took the course, twenty-seven finished.

KP: What happened to the one who didn't?

WG: I don't know, because they didn't, we had a standing thing, that, hey, you can't afford to flunk a course. One miss, you're dead.

KP: When you practiced, did you practice with live stuff?

WG: Well, we went, well, no. We went to Virginia. They had explosives training down there. And there, we'd blow up things to our heart's delight. Take a stick a dynamite and put it on a branch, a tree, and blow up that, you know, this kind of thing. But to get us used to handling explosives. And, so we did, actually, we didn't do it on the Washington base, no. What we did is, they had dummies or ones they had retrieved and they, we had different methods depending on the type of operation it was.

KP: Now would you learn how to disarm a bomb so it wouldn't explode?

WG: We were very successful, at that time of the war, to do exactly that. There were certain things, and then they started being cute, both the Germans and us, making little devices to, hey, if you try to disarm this bomb, this other device will go off. Once you make a turn like that, you're committed and that bomb will go off. So you learned how to try and do it without doing it. And sometimes it was a matter of, all you have to do is put a pin in there, like they had [on] a hand grenade. If you could put a pin back in there before they release it, so if you got a bomb, if it was a bomb, you gotta get down close enough [so] you could shove the pin in.

KP: It doesn't seem like the job was for the faint-hearted.

WG: No. But that was the other thing. We were sitting around one night, these twenty-eight guys, trying to decide how the hell they chose us. Out of 900 guys, they picked us. So one of the, one of the interviewers who, his name was (Draper Kauffman?). He was [an] admiral. He was, I think his father was an old Navy man in Britain, and he was a Naval Academy, trade school boy, as we called them. And he came by, so we say, "Hey, what was the ..." Well he, "You guys seemed to have a little more moxy than the others, you had a little more not caring, or you tinkered around with an automobile." I had a '31 Essex I used to fool around with when I was home, and things like that. "That you guys know what you're doing." And he said, "We checked over pretty carefully." Well, as I say, twenty-seven out of the twenty-eight passed and I really don't know what flunked the other guy out. I think it was just a matter of somebody in the family was afraid he was going to be in over his head.

EB: Was anyone injured during that time of training?

WG: Injured, yeah. But it was a plank of wood or something like that that did it. Nobody, nothing really exploded, no. No.

KP: You mentioned that a lot of the backgrounds of the guys were, they were tinkerers and they, I wouldn't say happy go lucky, but they were ....

WG: Yeah, that's right.

KP: What else about their backgrounds? Were they from all parts of the country, or were they from ...

WG: Yeah, they were [from all] parts of the country. There's one fellow, I mean, I took [him] home with me, over one weekend. We didn't get very much time off, but when you did, you took advantage of it. So, one weekend I took this Walt (Hilker?), his name was. He was [from] California. And another guy from the Ozarks or something like that. In fact, well, I didn't really, it's just another story that reminds me of something, another story. A young seaman, second [class], aboard ship. We got hit by a kamikaze and we had given instructions to this kid, this kid's name was Thomas Edison (Alford?). That was his name. It was his family given name. They called him Tom, but Thomas Edison (Alford?) was his name, and we had taught him about bombs and things like that and, this was nothing to do with the bomb disposal training. We were on ship now, the *Belleau Wood*, and he was assigned from boot camp right to the *Belleau Wood*, so he was prime meat to be educated and I didn't think he really had enough sense to come in out of the rain. And we got hit, and we're, rear end of our ship was aflame. And we had, below the deck on both sides, a ready rocket storage. This was a place where they put a rocket in, to put it onto a plane that's right above when it's ready to take off or close to it. And they'd shoved the torpedo or whatever it was, in. Usually, it was a torpedo bomb, it wasn't a real torpedo. And the flames were pretty heavy back there, and there were a lot of guys lost. And I say, "Oh, my God, that ready rocket storage can go any minute," I said, "They got to get somebody down there and make sure that no flame," [but] nobody's around, everybody's fighting fires. So I decide I'll go and look. And I get there. And there is Thomas Edison Alford spraying down the torpedo, these bombs, with water spray and cooling 'em down just as nicely and as perfectly as anybody could have done. I said, "Tom, if you were a girl, I'd kiss you." And I said, "Just stay with it, babe, you do just, keep doing what you're doing." Because I had visions of this whole end of the ship getting blown off. In fact, the part further back was pretty much disaster bound. I mean ...

KP: Did you teach him a lot, or did he just know to do this?

WG: We taught him, no, he, I don't know how much we actually taught him. In fact, it probably was a chief petty officer who taught him. We ...

KP: But you had the sense that he really didn't know very much.

WG: Oh, yeah. Well, that, anybody, well, I wouldn't say that, because I may have [made] different demands on him than somebody from Arkansas or something like that. But he was doing the right thing. And it was, I said, jeez, I put him in for a Silver Star. No, I put him in for

a, yeah, a Silver Star. Oh, no, I put him in for a Navy Cross. The Navy knocked it down to a Silver Star. But boy, I'll tell you one thing. That was one proud day of mine when they presented it to him and I was still aboard ship. I said, "Tom, you deserve that and better." And he should have. If he was a trade school boy, he would have gotten that Navy Cross. But they save those for bigger and better.

KP: Well, it's interesting because a lot of people have said that there was a real division between the Annapolis people and the ones from the Naval Reserves.

WG: Oh, God yes. Oh, yes.

KP: That they were two separate navies.

WG: Well, it wasn't quite that bad aboard. I didn't find that on our ship. In fact, I got very friendly with a couple of regular Navy guys over the years there. I mean, on ship and off ship, I mean. But most of them were just bucking for, they didn't want any competition if they could avoid it, that's all.

KP: It's a question I should have asked earlier, but why the Navy and why naval aviation? I get the sense that it was partly because you wanted to avoid the infantry, but were you interested in the sea, were you interested in aviation, or was it more ...

WG: I was interested, but when I saw what happened as far as the Navy's concerned, I figured, the heck with it, I'll see if I get in this V-7 program and become an officer aboard a ship and, thank goodness, that's what happened to me.

KP: So that had a lot of appeal, being an officer aboard a naval ship.

WG: Well, it had more appeal before I served than after I served.

KP: What did you expect and how, I mean, you mentioned it had more appeal before, what did you learn about the Navy?

WG: Oh, it's, well, a lot of it. I go back to one fellow who was a graduate of the Naval Academy, and he and I became friendly down in Williamsburg, Virginia. We were waiting, this was, actually, this was after the war ended, I think it was. Yeah, and, but it applied to before. He said to me, "Bill, how come you don't want to stay in the Navy?" This was after, you know, when they were after you about staying in and stuff like that, that's another story. And he says, I said, "Look," oh, God, what was his name? Bob, not Bob, all right, I forget his name right now. I'm trying to think of it and tell the story. But anyway, I'll come to his name. He said, "How come you don't want to stay in the Navy?" I said, "Look, this, let me put it this way to you. There's one position open, there's two guys looking for the spot, you and I. Ed, which one of us is …" Ed comes to mind, that's his name, "Ed, which one of us is going, we're both equally qualified? I'm not saying I've got more experience," I had, I was at sea, he wasn't, and everything else, but I said, "The one job, there's the two of us, who's going to get the job?" He

said, "Yeah, I suppose you're right." I said, 'You know goddamned well I'm right." And that was the truth. I was, I told the, we had a captain, putting the ship into, this was the *Midway*, which was at the end of the war, when they put that, that was a big sucker. Oh, was that a ship. I would have felt a lot safer in that than I was, than I was in my *Belleau Wood*. But some of those got it, too. But anyway, *Belleau Wood*, *Midway* I mean, was the ship that, what hull is that, the *FDR* is of that hull.

KP: I know there's the *Essex* class, but I don't know the other ...

WG: Today's *Essex* class, there's, the *Essex* had a couple of different classes.

KP: Yeah, I always hear of the *Essex* class carriers in World War II. But that's the only class I know of.

WG: No, this one, I think, they never got out, unless they got to, when they got down to Trinidad and Gulf of [Peri?] in Trinidad and had some, whatchamacallit, (?) that was a good one, that was a shake down, they went down there, Trinidad. Gulf of [Peri?] was a nice protected harbor down there, you didn't have to worry too much about subs, German subs or anything. So that's about it.

KP: How well did your training prepare you to be a naval officer, both the general training and then the very specific bomb disposal?

WG: Well, the specialty was, take to it as much as you could know that you could, and the thing is, the only thing about that, that was a matter, too, that you were gonna have to keep up on that, because that was changing jobs overnight. I mean, they were coming out with different things to try and trick you into blowing yourself up, and, I don't mean our people, I'm talking about the Germans, about us. And we were doing the same to them, I mean, they'd put in devices that, when you start turning, nothing happens, everything's fine, and then you get a little more confident, there you go. That kind of thing. The rest of it, well, listen, it's hard to say. It was war time. They had to get a lot done. I don't think I was as prepared as a trade school boy by any matter of means, but I didn't have to be. I mean, they, they had to know, if you got a, whatchamacallit, taking a sighting and you had to know how to interpolate, you had to take math to get, you can go to any machine on the ship and get the same thing. They had it all over, they had them all over. I mean, but this was the kind of thing that I was missing, and outside of that, listen, I was aboard, I got aboard after, I don't know, ninety, no, that's not, more than ninety days, I guess. It was my first ship. And they, they didn't prepare you for that. I mean, I was told to go up and take the watch up in the, guide the ship in, thank God I knew what I was doing, but, I mean, the first time I was up there, there's, I'm a, I'm a lieutenant junior grade, I wasn't even an ensign, I was already a lieutenant junior grade, and here I am running the ship, and the captain says, "Hey, if something comes up, come down below, just give me a toot," and I said, 'Aye, aye, sir." That's it. And ...

KP: For a lot of naval officers who were deck officers, that's a very memorable thing, being in charge of the ship, because you are literally responsible, I mean, the buck really stops with you.

WG: Right. It reminds me of the story about the apprentice seaman standing his first deck watch with a officer on the bridge of a ship and they got into this situation that, what, what kind of work is there involved as an officer or with this job. So the apprentice seaman looks and, he talks to the, he says to the officer, "Well," I'm killing this, I'm killing this story. Oh, there was, the captain, the admiral, and the deck officer, were on deck with this apprentice seaman or seaman second, and they were discussing about the kind of work involved for each one of them. And the admiral, who was [an] older man, he says, "Oh," he says, they were talking, oh, they were talking about sex, on the bridge, and the captain turns to the officer who was a lieutenant, he says, "How do you feel about sex?" So, he says, "Oh," he says, "I feel it's about forty percent work and sixty percent pleasure." So he turns to the captain, he says, "How do you feel?" The captain's older, and more mature, and he says, "Oh, I'd call it about seventy percent pleasure and thirty percent work." And they call the seaman second over, and they say, "Son, what do you think about sex?" He says, "Well, if you promise there'll be no retribution if I tell you what I really [think]." They said, "You speak your mind. We really want to hear how you feel about sex." He looks around, and he says, "Well," he says, "I think it must be all pleasure," he says, "because if there was any work involved, you guys would be having me doing it for you." So that's that, they're, that's the kind of preparation you need to stand night watch on the bridge.

KP: How often would you have watch?

WG: Oh, it varied. I didn't have it too much. I was involved more with the hull department, repair work, you know, etcetera. So I didn't stand it as regularly as some of the guys. I remember one incident, though. We had gotten hit by a kamikaze, as records show, and everything else, and Bull Halsey was then in charge of our squadron. You know, they went back and forth, depending on who was, Spruance was one, and Halsey was another, and Mitchner was it, and they'd go back and forth. So we get hit with this kamikaze and Halsey was in charge of the carrier groups at that particular point. So I'm warned that he's coming aboard sometime and the captain knew, evidently he was a little sleepy, he said, "Look, I'm just going to lie down in a bunk downstairs." Just below, which was right below the conn, it's only a couple of steps down.

KP: Yeah, no, I've seen it on ...

WG: So I said, "Okay." He says, "You take," we're at a on a, watchamacallit, we're not at a dock, we're at anchor. And so we, he [Halsey] comes stomping aboard his ship. His boat pulls up, barge pulls up next to our plank and he doesn't wait for anybody. I had told my, the other officer who was supposed to be with me. He was down there on the flight deck where you get off your ship or on it. And Halsey doesn't even stop to let it, he just [goes] up the hooks and I, I'm the next barrier. So he says, "Where is it? Let's go." I try to get the captain, he's already, he's probably still sleeping. He's already ahead, ten feet ahead of me. I said, "Sir, wait." He says, "I can't wait. I haven't got time." He looks at it, he says, "Goddamnit." He knew immediately that it wasn't going to be repaired there, that we're going to have to go back to Pearl Harbor or, more likely, the States. Well, we were just glowing about that, I mean, he, so I couldn't wait for him to leave the ship. He never did talk to the captain. The captain came up and he just rushed by him. And, I bet it wasn't ten minutes later, the notice of, we get

instructions to weigh anchor and head back to the United States. And getting, the Navy wants so many officers and so many crewmen to transfer to one of the other ships where they had some casualties, and outside of that, get on your way. Well, you want to hear a ship that was excited. They were just, they were doing the jig and everything else. Oh, boy, they couldn't believe it. We'd been out there over two years without getting back, so…

KP: So you, was this your one dealing, I mean Halsey was a major figure in ...

WG: Oh, yeah, that was my one dealing with anybody major like that.

KP: But it was a very memorable…

WG: Oh, well, as I say, he just brushed past like I didn't even exist. And he did the same to the captain, so I didn't feel so bad.

KP: But it sounds like Halsey lived up to part of his historical reputation. That was the impression I've gotten of Halsey ...

WG: That's why I thought, that typifies Halsey.

KP: You mentioned the *Belleau Wood* was a new ship, a new ...

WG: When it was built. I started with it at the New York Shipbuilding in Phil..., in Camden. That's where I went as a pre-commissioning officer.

KP: What do you remember of the *Belleau Wood*, starting with its captain ...

WG: The captain I could talk for a half hour about, no, seriously.

KP: What was his name?

WG: Alfred M. Pride, and ...

KP: Captain Pride.

WG: And he was a terrific guy. He, first of all, he was not a trade school boy. He came, he was a mustang. He came up from the ranks.

KP: Which is a rare …

WG: Rare, particularly for a pilot. And he became an admiral very shortly after this. And, but he was, when, I'll, after World War II, we had a little incident at Quemoy/Matsu, I don't know if you remember that, with the Chinese, the Channel Islands there between Formosa and mainland China.

KP: Yes.

WG: And we promised protection for the Chinese boats. He was ordered by the Navy Department to be the captain to, to, general, the admiral to run the operation to prevent the Chinese from overrunning those islands. Well, he was on the cover of *Time Magazine*. And I'm going around and I'm saying, "Jeez, if there ever was a time I could be happy about us intervening in something, they got the guy who's right for that job." He can, he's quiet, laid back, very unlike a Halsey or something like that. But I had only the utmost of respect for him and thought so highly of him. I was fortunate enough to get the orders, as they came aboard, for him to become an admiral. He was sleeping and the radioman brought it up and I said, "Do me a favor, don't give this to the Admiral. I will take it down." So I go down and I knock on the door. "Who is it?" I said, "It's Lieutenant Gutter, Admiral Pride." He opens the door, he says, "What did you say?" I said, "Congratulations, Admiral Pride." Oh, that was such a thrill for me, to be able to do that for that man.

KP: You were the first one telling him he made admiral.

WG: Yeah, yeah. Oh.

KP: You mentioned he was a cool and calm ...

WG: Very. Not typical.

KP: Really. He ...

WG: I don't think so. I mean, I didn't meet all the admirals, God knows, but ...

KP: Well, how did he compare to, say, the Annapolis officers that were a part of the ship? Admittedly, they were not captains, but they ...

WG: I don't think any of them had the stature that he did or the, no, the knowledge, I think, that he had been, as I say, he can go back, to, he died about, less than a year, just about a year ago, I guess it was. And I was very unhappy about that. But he was laid-back, as I said, but he could, oh, he could handle, measure a situation.

KP: What about the rest of your officers? The ones that you worked with most closely, what do you remember about them?

WG: Oh, they were a mixed lot. There were some great guys there, there were some awful putzes, I mean, excuse the French. But ...

KP: What about the executive officer?

WG: We had the first, well, the first one was, no, it wasn't the executive officer. He became the executive officer. He was an alcoholic. Naval Academy, but passed over, so, even the Navy

must have recognized that he wasn't all good, and I guess they were gonna find a spot for him somewhere. Some of these, I wish you'd bleep some names maybe.

KP: No, you don't have to use names. Don't feel obligated to use names.

WG: Because, I'm trying to think of what else.

KP: Did you have any officers that were either very good at their job or very bad?

WG: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, you had both. You had both sides of the coin, I'd say. Some were really pathetic. I, one, no name, a Naval Academy graduate, who, if we were in a battle situation and we were called to battle quarters, where you come and you sit on your ass and you wait for something to happen and you don't know what's happening up, up above and everything, this guy would be sitting, reading a box top from a box of, of cereal, and that's all he could find, find his interest, as, and a commanding officer of this group, I mean not just an officer with some rank, he was supposed to be in charge of this group. So, that's one extreme. And then the other extreme, as I said, Admiral Pride. You can use his name any time.

KP: What about your specific duties aboard the ship, you were the bomb disposal ...

WG: I was involved, well, I was, that was extra duty. I mean, that wasn't a full-time duty. I'll never forget, one night, we were on exercises, and they opened up a TBF bomb door and this bomb comes rolling out on the deck at, [I] get a call, my one night to sleep in, and jeez, they give me a call to come out. It's now eleven o'clock, half the night's shot, and I go out, and "There's a bomb." So I said, "Do me a favor, take this chock," you know, the wedge that they put on the wheels, I said, "Put it under it, and tomorrow morning, load it in the first TBF that flies out of here and let him drop it, will you?" And the captain calls up, "What's the story with the bomb, Gutter?" I said, "It's taken care of, Captain." But, no, some of them are, as I said, you run the gauntlet in something like that. Some of them were very bright, some very astute, and some of them who really had the Navy at their mind. I mean, they were really hoping that there would be a future for them in the Navy. I got called down every other night, or every night, every day, when we were, the war had ended and we got a new ship [that] we're putting in commission, this *Midway*, and the captain, the guy who was his assistant is, well, I guess he was second, second, yeah, I guess he was the executive officer, was a Chicago lawyer, but I had befriended him. He and I were good buddies, and he was very bright, nice guy. And the, evidently the captain recognized it, too, because he didn't scratch his fanny without checking with this friend of ours. And he, he would call me, he says, "Look, the captain's gonna to take you over the (griddle?) tonight. He wants you to stay in.'' I said, "He could offer me fleet admiral. I want out." And sure enough, he, oh, he pulled different tactic. He turns to Ruth, he says, "Can't you persuade your husband to stay in the Navy?" I said, "Get her out of here as quick as I can."

KP: While you weren't interested, at least, it must have been very flattering of the fact that they really wanted to keep you, I mean, because there were some guys, who I'm sure they wanted to get rid of.

WG: Well, I don't know how much is that, and how much was the matter, hey, they've got ranks that have got to be filled, they want to get these assignments done, I mean. But, oh, I can't say it wasn't flattering, but I said, "Hey, not me." I put in that, what was it, thirty-three months or something like that. I said, "That was long enough." And when they, and then, oh, did I get upset. Did you ever notice that, did you ever know the difference between the point system in the Army compared to the Navy?

KP: No.

WG: It was an entirely different thing, but nobody knew that to begin with. When the, they released the points for the Army, for their system, it would have taken me twelve years or longer to get enough points to get out of the Navy and, well, we found out that it was an entirely different system, so I got out very much in a hurry. But when I saw that point system in the Army, I almost died. Oh, my God.

KP: So you read the newspaper and saw that?

WG: Yeah, jeez. That frightened the hell out of me. You might, this is our, this was sent to me, oh, a while after, this was showing, our, just the *Belleau Wood*, this was *Belleau Wood*, that's what you asked about a launching, that's when she was ...

KP: You were there at the launching.

WG: Yes, yes, I was at the launching on that.

KP: As a new ship, in a sense, you're creating the ship, how did that process go, creating a new ship?

WG: Oh, that's trouble. That's trouble, because particularly, you're in a situation like I was, all right, you go to a normal commissioning of a new ship, there's certain men, they're going to have a lot of new men, but they're also going to have a lot of experienced men. When they got to this, they didn't have a lot of experienced men. Most of their experienced men were under the water at Pearl Harbor or out to sea there. And so they, they had trouble getting, and when we got out there, the mistakes that they created were…

KP: What were some of your initial problems, especially on the shakedown cruise?

WG: Well, locking something that shouldn't be locked, unlocking something that shouldn't be unlocked. All, all crazy things, I mean …

KP: Did you have any Marines aboard?

WG: Yeah. We had a good Marine detachment. And they were already reg … they had put in their time in training. They were down and out, they had, some of these guys had been at Guadalcanal, etcetera.

KP: … In battle stations ...

WG: Oh, here.

KP: Oh.

WG: This is with the *Philadelphia*, in Philadelphia for the, the ship commission. [Reading} "The Navy appointed as its first skipper Captain A.M. Pride, a veteran pilot who won his wings in the other World War. One of the capable men in the Navy, Captain Pride had demonstrated his ability by climbing through the ranks from machinist mate third class to captain." And then they went on about the executive officers, et cetera. But, boy…

KP: That, that's quite an accomplishment. Yeah, I mean, that's ...

WG: There was another captain. Stump, Felix Stump. He was also a mustang and he was made admiral right after Pride, but Pride got it first.

KP: He was the first mustang to make ...

WG: To make admiral. I think he was, anyway. To me he was, anyway. And this, this is the, when the kamikaze hit us. Here's the back of the ship and here's the, see, we had loaded planes back there. You see, can see, I think there were, oh, there were, I don't know how many planes. And then it blew up in there. And it took, here's some of the dead being committed to the sea.

KP: Was the kamikaze attack the scariest thing that happened or were there other ...

WG: There were other attacks that were frightening.

KP: But were ...

WG: But this was, "Hey, this is it." You're fighting for your life. You got no place to walk. You know, I'm tired of this stuff, you go to another ship there, you know? And I fought fires from, what was it, nine in the morning 'till ten, eleven at night, 'till we finally got them all out.

KP: Did you ever fear that you might lose the ship, that in fact you wouldn't be able to contain the fire?

WG: We were worried about that, about containing the fire. No, we could contain the fire but we didn't know if the ship would be seaworthy enough to take, be able to navigate, back even to where Halsey came from, I mean, so ...

KP: In terms of the Marine detachment, what were their, in battle state, what were their duties on board, beside the brig? Did they man any guns or ...

WG: Oh, yeah, they had a gun mount and, boy, they took pride in that. They'd show up the sailors like nothing, nothing flat. They'd keep their part of the ship clean and, etcetera, and then they'd, the brig was a small part of it. They, any time the captain was going ashore, they always had a contingent of mustang, of marines going with them.

KP: In terms of your duties, you mentioned, you did actually very little bomb disposal. What else would you do aboard?

WG: Oh, I had other duties as far as, construction repair, I mean ordinary everyday duties, of replacing equipment, this, that and the other thing. Training, making sure they're up-to-date on their training manuals, etcetera ...

KP: How many men were you responsible for? And where did you fit into the chain of command?

WG: Well, I was just a, a full lieutenant which is, in Army vernacular, I guess, what am I, a major or something like that?

KP: Yeah, I'm not quite sure, but probably, yeah.

WG: Not a, yeah, I think that's what I was. But, so that's about where I fit. And then I was given, I started off as a ensign. I had a minimum amount of guys and, all I used to do then is say, "Chief, do this." I mean, that's about as much as I knew. I had a good chief, a chief who was really a savvy guy, and I didn't try, I said, "No B.S., no nothing. When I ask you, it's because I really don't know." So he says, "Don't worry," he says, "I won't let you fall on your face." And he was that way. He was ...

KP: You had a good chief starting out.

WG: Yeah, oh, yeah. That was all important, believe me. I had been warned of that early on.

KP: In training?

WG: Oh, sure. Yeah, that was, that was the frightening thing. There were others. I remember that day as clear as hell. These are the guys, coming in at us, where, and all of a sudden, we got 'em. He was coming, skimming the water, that was the favorite way to come in, low on the water.

KP: Which battle was that?

WG: I don't think that's a battle. I was just, it was during this Cruise Four, which was the Marshalls and Kwajalein. It might have been before Kwajalein started. And they talk about it here.

KP: Actually this tape is almost, I'm going to just ...

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

KP: This continues the interview with Mr. William F. Gutter on Nov. 16, 1995 at Great Neck, New York with Kurt Piehler and …

EB: Elaine Barrett.

KP: With regard to your crew, which was a very large crew, you're dealing with a crew that you had to direct, guys on the bridge, you had the people you directly supervised with the chief. Any thoughts about them? You had mentioned the one you had put in for a Navy Cross from Arkansas, but any other characters on the crew?

WG: Oh, yeah, there were the ones that were interesting as far as that's concerned. I had more medals given out there, different commendations, etcetera, to keep up the morale and stuff like that.

KP: Did you ever have any problems with crew members and ...

WG: Rarely. I would say that it happened and it happened to me, and, I scared 'em. I remember one time, it was the black guys who thought they were going to run down the wrong way to get to their post, not realizing that an officer was coming along, and that was me. And I didn't bother hitting them or striking, I wasn't going to strike them or anything. I just took my .45 and said, "Look, let's not have any more of this." And I just put it back in my pocket and went past them. And boy, I think, they almost turned white, I mean. But it just put a little fear in them. No, I really didn't have any trouble. I had more trouble with some of the trade school boys.

KP: Really, the Annapolis?

WG: Yeah.

KP: What would you have trouble with, what were some of the issues ...

WG: Oh, just plain (?), I mean, you go to a, watchamacallit, a ship's officer, the non-commissioned officer, to get things done and these guys [trade school boys] tried, tried to throttle them everywhere along the way, and they're [the non-commissioned officers] their best weapons, there was the chiefs and the bosun's mates and the, this, that and the other thing.

KP: Where some of the Annapolis people wanted to do it ...

WG: Yeah. Their way.

KP: Their way. And it sounds like the formal way.

WG: Yeah, yeah. Of course, of course. [Reading] "The following executive officers had served with the *Belleau Wood*:" they got two, four, six, Bobby (?), he became, oh, he got a command of a ship, Richard Lyons, he got stateside duty. Miller got a ship. Dole got stateside duty. (Ballinger?) I didn't know, he was, he was evidently already back. This is very interesting, some interesting things. I'll have to reread these myself someday.

KP: Being aboard ship, one of the things that I can't resist talking to Navy people about, but I took a tour of the *Intrepid* about two years ago …

WG: Oh.

KP: … And what shocked me, even about the *Intrepid*, was how, except for the flight deck, how cramped ships are, even for the officers.

WG: They are.

KP: I mean, enlisted men particularly, but even the officers, there's not a lot of room.

WG: No.

KP: … And you were at sea, you mentioned, for twenty months.

WG: Never seemed to be a factor.

KP: Really?

WG: No, no. There was some, when they, the worst thing was collecting 'em up after a shore leave, when you had some time, they got back to, not to the States, but when they got back to port, where they had some drinks and chased some gals, and then to get 'em back to ship. Some of these guys, there was one, bosun, chief bosun's mate, who I was quite friendly with, and I leaned heavily on him for duties. Nicest, soft-spoken guy you ever want to meet, except when he went ashore and had a drink. He became a wild man. He really did. Nine times out of ten, Shore Patrol had to bring him back to the ship. And, I used to beg him, I said, "Please don't. We got a busy time ahead of us." Didn't make any difference. He would get himself bombed. Man.

KP: How about the food? How was the food?

WG: We will not discuss the food. The food was, I guess the best they could do.

KP: Because the Navy ...

WG: Don't forget, a lot of these things, you take the food today, compared to the food then, a lot of the things that we have to preserve food today, weren't even thought of in those days. They never dreamed they could do [that]. And, so, I really, I can't fault them on it. I realized that. I hated it, I mean, I could starve, except for the food packages my folks used to send and their … I

had, one Christmas, mail came late, it all came at once, and a bunch of mail comes, with gifts of, what, cakes, the fruitcakes and all that, and I didn't like fruit cake and I had about twenty-five of them and I had, I kept giving the guys time out to leave the ship for fourty-eight hours. We were at one of the ports where there was some little activity, so, we, I lined them up. I called each one by name, as they came forward I handed them a cake. A fruit cake from so-and-so, all, all mine, I mean these were all my cakes, and, thank goodness, I had enough for every one, and not enough for me to keep one myself. And, but, we had other things, I got other things. But I, listen, I remember there was some good restaurants in some of the places, when we got to Hawaii and the West Coast, but ...

KP: But ...

WG: I prefer to remember those.

KP: There's a lot of people who sort of pride themselves in that they ate fairly well aboard ship and that was one of the reasons they ...

WG: Oh, compared to a guy who, even on a destroyer, I mean, they, they welcomed chow from the bigger ships, always. I mean, we had ice cream. We never ran out of ice cream. We had meat and, some of it was processed meat, but we had meat. I never particularly cared for the Spam, but we didn't have it that often. So I, once in a while, I could put up [with it]. But, no, we, the ship, the destroyers, when we had, they loved to get duty on, following the carriers around, because if we lose a pilot, our pilot goes in the drink, I don't mean lose him, in the drink for some reason, they go in after him, and when they bring him back, he got, they give him ice cream and cake and everything that they might want. And so the destroyers were out to get anybody before they even got wet.

KP: But I've learned from a number of people that there was a lot of trading, it was sort of was the unofficially way of getting things done.

WG: Yeah, well, we used to, we used to, the oil that came along side with tanker ship, when they would refuel at sea, and here, you're handing oil through big things through the (?) and trying to keep your ships from hitting each other, and making sure. But still, hey, you trade it off, you gave 'em some ice cream and you did this for them, and they gave you, they got some good addresses in Hawaii or something like that. It was, oh yeah, trading off is a big, big deal.

KP: It sounds that you have very fond memories of your ports of call.

WG: Well, not really.

KP: Really? But it was very memorable, that you had to round up the crews.

WG: Oh, yeah. Well, I didn't have, I didn't have to do it but I did it because I wanted my boys back and I didn't want them to have to go up the captain's mast and be penalized for what they, they deserved some sort of a playing around.

KP: What was your first reactions to combat, when planes were actually attacking? Are there ...

WG: No, let me see, now I'm going to disturb your taking everything down by script and everything. I have, this is, I call this my Silver Star. It's a Bronze Star medal, but I got it for doing the duties of a group where the head, who had nothing to do with it, got a Silver Star because he was a captain.

KP: So he got the Silver Star and you got the Bronze.

WG: Bronze, right. In fact, I had been told all the way up through the captain, that I was getting the Silver Star. So I was a little bit disappointed, but in the end I figured, that's typical Navy. You know. They need it, I don't. This, I finally find found out, last night, where I had this in this apartment.

KP: This is your ...

WG: A little note. If you'll notice, I, very often, have a little remark about why do we have awards and things like that.

KP: [Reading] "September 1, cross the equator, force effected landing on Baker Island."

WG: Yeah, Baker Island. There was nothing there but gooney birds. And they, we sent down a, I don't know how many, carrier, you mention that, yeah, I got the list of carriers.

KP: [Reading] "Received reports that *Yorktown*, *Essex* and *Independence* hit Marianas at about eighty to eighty-five percent of installations. At 1400 hours, fighters from P, shot down Jap enemy. Also reported was that force hit Marcus Island."

WG: Now this was a, we were scared stiff. This was our first operation and we, we were spotted by a Jap plane. And oh, boy, we were first, were we going to be in trouble the first day? I hope our guys can shoot those 40mm. This was the kind of thing, you were scared stiff. That's why they gave us an operation like this. It's our first physical, actual combat. Let me see this, our cruiser, our carrier…

KP: Oh, [Reading] "On September 3, TBF crashed on takeoff. Depth charges went off, killing two men and crew. Pilot (Omark?) saved on September 3 ..."

WG: Yeah, Omark I knew well.

KP: [Reading] "0230, unidentified plane caused us to go to general quarters."

WG: Here. [Reading] "Manual station communication …," this is our first cruise, Cruise One. [Reading] "In company with the new *Lexington* and *Princeton*, we soon were cutting through the white choppy waters of the Atlantic." Oh, this was going out to Pearl. Here, [Reading] "we,

August 25, we departed with the *Princeton* and supporting vessel on our inaugural assignment covering the amphibious forces occupying Baker Island. This is a tiny island southwest of Pearl and was needed as a fighter base to disrupt Jap raids and patrols out of Tarawa and Macon. Although the Japs had no garrison on Baker, we expected trouble and airborne opposition to our occupation. To our utter amazement, the operation opened without incident on September 1. While other, while covering this occupation and waiting for the Army squadron of P-40s to establish itself, we spent two weeks churning around the island, crossing the equator on every swing, thirty-two times to be exact." So we had the Pollywog ceremony of King Neptune come aboard, and they wanted to do it thirty-two times. These poor guys wouldn't have been alive. [Reading] "And that's, there were no Japs on Baker, but there were plenty on the Gilberts. The Gilberts marked the limit of the eastward advance of the yellow tide and it was here that we would have to start pushing them back. The invasion itself was still several weeks off when, on September 16, after moving west from Baker, we took our first crack at Tarawa. It was at Tarawa, major Gilbert (atoll?), that Air Group 24 received the first introduction in striking Jap bases and utility facilities, machine gun nests, fuel dumps, barracks, anti-aircraft placement, shore defenses, elements to be wiped out before the Marines charged the shore." And then here's about the Pollywogs. That's, they have the pictures of them on deck, getting the treatment, see, because the ones who had been on previous flights on, not on our ship, 'cause it was new, but others, they had qualified as, what do they call them? Of the Neptune's realm and … Yeah, like these guys are, supposedly, and they say on the uniform, "Jammed us paint brush with more vile vitamins down the pollywogs throat. Busy barbers made bad haircuts worse." And they did crazy things like that.

KP: Well, this is probably one of the few times where you have sort of a you can do whatever, like ...

WG: Yeah, well, we were in safe water. We were covering control. Here, Wake Island was, too. That was the, here, this was the *Lexington*, the *Yorktown*, the *Essex*, the *Independence*, the *Belleau Wood* and the *Cowpens*, so there were three small carriers and three large carriers. And October 5, October 1st through the 3rd, 11th, that was the whole thing. Macon and Kwajalein. Cruise Three. November 10 through December 9, 1943. Here's Tarawa and Kwajalein. Cruise Four. January 16 to February 4. Two new carriers, the *Intrepid* and the *Cabot* joined us.

EB: Did you encounter a lot of bad weather when you were out there?

WG: No. The Pacific is really, what they say, it's pacific. It's entirely different than the ocean here. We hit a, we had a, watchamacallit, they call it a hurricane down there, no, they call it typhoon there. We hit that and that's rough either place, but overall the water was like a lake in comparison to the Atlantic. It was calm, pretty calm. Let's see. Truk, Saipan and Tinian, there's a plane that, fouled the deck, crashed in the side. This one, I remember so distinctly, we had the air, we got too close, they had gotten in under our radar screen and we were firing at them and, fortunately, oh, a couple of hundred yards away, they finally got 'em, blew 'em up. But boy, we threw everything including the chef at them.

KP: How many times would a fighter attack you directly? How many times did they get close enough to really ...

WG: We rarely had it. We never really got too much in the way of small arm fire back. I mean, we, they, we got some pretty decent size shells, but it wasn't a matter that they came around and came again. We wouldn't know, probably, whether we got 'em the first time, whether he's coming back to us or whether he's gone off to get some more ammunition. You don't know.

KP: Okay.

WG: Let's see. New Guinea.

KP: You were telling us about the incident, you never did tell us about the incident of how you got the Silver Star that turned into a a Bronze Star.

WG: That was fighting the, the fire that the kamikaze ...

KP: That's how you got the ...

WG: Yeah, yeah. I mean, that's when it, yeah, that was, that was the end of April, no, end of September, I guess it was.

KP: You lost a lot of men in that?.

WG: Oh, 200.

KP: How did that affect the crew? That's a lot of people to lose.

WG: Well, they were pretty mesmerized by it, but the whole idea, at least when we came, after a week or ten days, we found out we were coming back to the States, so that helped cure them of their trauma, of seeing so much. But they saw a lot, experiences you don't even like to talk about. Most of them were killed because of the flames of that. They show 'em here coming into Pearl for a time out. A lot of these guys I don't recognize because they were on the ship that, that came after I got my blessed orders to leave.

KP: How many flight crews did you see, how many wings were on board when you were there?

WG: Well, let's see, there was the, they list it somewhere. No, this doesn't show, it just shows the cruise numbers. Okinawa, that was a bitch. Kamikaze, this is the one that ...

KP: So you were hit with the kamikaze early in the war?

WG: No, there was a couple [that] got hit before us.

KP: But ...

WG: It was, yeah, it became a way of life after ...

KP: I mean, how much of a shock was it to know a plane was deliberately trying to run itself into you?

WG: Well, you didn't even have time to think of why. I mean, you look and you see this thing and it's skipping over destroyers, it's skipping over cruisers, it's coming right at you. In fact, my nerves were getting shot, where I figured every one of them was gonna come right at me. Not at the ship, me.

KP: Where were you when the kamikaze hit the plane?

WG: I was midships. In other words, it hit the rear end, where I used to stand watch before. And that's another thing that shook me up, when I realized, I found a guy dead right where I used to be. And I had been switched about thirty days before.

KP: So if you hadn't been switched you probably would have been doing watch there.

WG: Yeah, I would have been, just, you might have found some ashes or something like that. Yeah, that's when we got hit. General quarters, Mitchner, yeah, they got it all there. Yeah, we, we thought we could have possibly lost the ship that day, when it was at that stage.

KP: Nearly ...

WG: Yeah. So we really got it.

KP: Well, I've been told by Navy people that fighting a fire is a difficult thing aboard ship.

WG: Oh, yeah. First of all, you don't get any water through your water mains unless, usually your integrity is shot as far as that's concerned. So that's the one chance of, and then you've got pumps to try and get sea water and just feed that up and hope that'll do it for you. And a lot of cases it did.

KP: How much do you think that it was good leadership that prevented your ship from being inoperable?

WG: We needed, we, we needed certain equipment that, it just wasn't, the Jap didn't get, know he was doing such a good of job. He was just trying to hit that target.

KP: Yeah.

WG: And ...

KP: But do you think the crew, the crew aboard your ship, really had done certain things right in terms fighting the fire?

WG: Oh. Yeah. Oh, yeah. We did what we could. I mean, you try to rescue some guys who were behind the burning area there, and 40mm's are going off just from the heat of explosion, things like that. It shows (*Ulithian Homebound?)*, that's with the hole in the rear, yeah. You can see there's still, you got the hole back there.

KP: How many bodies were recovered of the 200?

WG: I'm not positive how many.

KP: Did you bury them at sea, though?

WG: Most of them, yeah, yes. Oh, yeah. We couldn't carry them back stateside

KP: Did you have chaplains aboard?

WG: Oh, yeah. We had a chaplain. And ...

KP: Protestant, Catholic?

WG: He happened to be Catholic. Happened to be a hell of a nice guy, and he loved to argue religion

KP: Really.

WG: Oh, but we did it in a good way. You ...

KP: And he conducted the services for the burials?

WG: Yeah. Yup, oh, here is heavy weather. This is the storm. Yeah, here we, in a heavy sea. And we worried in a heavy sea because we were top heavy. And we knew it was built top heavy. And we were so afraid that thing was going to go right over.

KP: When you went through a typhoon, were your fears justified? Was it a close call?

WG: Not that close. It was, they just had to, oh, here's the story. *Pittsburgh*. [Reading] "Call the flag Romeo, this is Barbaria, my bow just carried away and is floating down the portside. Am dropping and went back into the storm." So he's going to get his stern back, forward. Yeah, the flight deck came up like a toboggan, like this, on that ship. Well, the *Pittsburgh*, I think they lost that. They didn't find very many people after that one. All right.

KP: You ...

EB: I'll ask a question. Do you remember a naval personnel bulletin called *All Hands*? In one, it was November '44, I guess, it said that experts said that Japan wouldn't fall for a year and a half to two years after Europe. Was that the consensus on your ship, that it would be a lot longer in the Pacific?

WG: We figured we'd be longer than we were. A heck of a lot longer, because we saw what they were doing to keep a little sand spit and life was unimportant to them and their philosophy of things. So, we figured, "Oh, we got a couple of years yet." "The Golden Gate in '48" was more thought than [fact].

KP: You mentioned that you were at sea for a long time. How did morale wax and wain, when you keep a crew out that long?

WG: Oh, yeah. I don't know what kept them going. We didn't have the psychiatrists and everything worried about it like they do today. And yet, they survived. Some of them didn't. We had some guys go off in a straitjacket because they were loony and ...

KP: Were they just sailors or did you have any officers that ...

WG: Oh, we had officers, too.

KP: What would trigger it? Was it a battle or was it just ...

WG: Just all of a sudden, they're, "What are we doing? Where are we going? They we're not getting anywhere, or what." It's ...

KP: So it wouldn't necessarily be battle that ...

WG: No, not battle fatigue or anything like that. Some of them got seasick and some of the Academy boys, too, got seasick.

KP: Did you ever get seasick?

WG: No, I was, I remember once or twice, not feeling particularly like eating a big lunch or something like that. I would take it easy on that, but, no. I got seasick, once, when I was fishing with my uncle. Right in Rockaway Inlet. Yes, thank God that was the only time I ever did.

KP: And that was before the Navy?

WG: Long before, I was just a kid, about fourteen years old. Yup.

KP: You mentioned that you lived with the pilots and got to know them.

WG: Well, in that one …

KP: That one, one ...

WG: Yeah, period. Most of the time, I lived with ships officers.

KP: Did you get a better appreciation of what pilots went through. What were they like? You mentioned that they were very cocky when they first got on board.

WG: Oh, yeah. Until some of the cockiness disappeared with the loss of a good friend or a buddy or something like that. Sometimes it took that and sometimes they just, hey, they're bored or what. But it wasn't an easy job. It wasn't an easy job for them.

KP: I just interviewed a naval aviator, and one of the things that I took from that was that naval aviation was just very dangerous, even in training.

WG: Oh, yeah. As I say, it wasn't in combat.

KP: I was thumbing through your book and you're constantly referring to incidents of planes missing the deck or crashing on the deck.

WG: Yeah, there was. I think we lost as many, or maybe more, pilots from ordinary operations than we did from actual, actual combat. Now a lot of this, they took in as combat losses but they were, it wasn't an easy period.

KP: After your ship got sent back to the States for repairs, what port did you put into?

WG: Well, most of the time, we had to come back to Pearl.

KP: Yeah, but after you were hit by the kamikaze, you were …

WG: Oh, the kamikaze, we went to (Ulithe?), I think it was, and that's where they gave us the, what we needed to get back to the States. We stopped, I think, they stopped at Pearl Harbor for a provisioning or something on the way back.

KP: Because you got, you got married while still in the service

WG: Our, I got married, I guess it was. Was it '44, I think it was '44, no, it was '44. I better remember. What happened was, that was, that was when we got hit. And the air group came in ahead of us and I, one of my ex-roommates was coming in with them. And I said, "Call Ruth and tell her we're going to have a wedding on the 10th of, what was it? 10th of December." We couldn't, because her cousin was gonna, was getting married that day, so they, we all had to go down to Richmond, Virginia, and ... So we made it the 13th of December. So, I remember, because that's our lucky day. And so it's… Any other?

KP: If it hadn't been for your ship getting hit, you may well not have gotten married that day.

WG: That's right. Oh, I think very definitely. We wouldn't have gotten, we wouldn't have gotten back to the States at that point. Or, if we got to the States, it would have been a real turnaround, quick, where they do what they do, can do, in San Francisco and shove you right out.

KP: Did you ever go back to the *Belleau Wood* or was that ...

WG: No, once or twice, I saw I was in a place where I thought maybe we could get to, but I was never was able to. So I never ...

KP: And it said you were assigned to a new carrier?

WG: Oh, well, that happened, yeah, the *Belleau Wood* was, I was off the *Belleau Wood* and I was assigned to carrier gas handling school to learn, because I was going to the *Midway* to be a ship's, watchumacallit, fireman.

KP: So you were going to have a new responsibility.

WG: Yeah, but the war ended so it, now, I just had to talk 'em into giving me, I had enough points to get the hell off. I came up in New York, here the harbor, we stood in the harbor there for, Truman reviewed the fleet and I was expecting I would be able to get off as soon as Truman got off. [Nope]. I had to go back down to take the ship back down to Norfolk and then I could come back on my own.

KP: When did you get discharged?

WG: I got, well, I actually, my actual discharge didn't come 'till a year or two later but I was released from ...

KP: Active service?

WG: Active duty in December.

KP: December of '45.

WG: '45. Right.

KP: But you would have liked to have gotten back out on August 15 if you could have.

WG: Oh, yeah, very definitely.

KP: Did you actually go to firefighting school?

WG: Oh, yeah.

KP: Yeah, how was that training?

WG: We did it in Philadelphia, in July. And if you ever want to take a, it felt cool going into a fire. Boy, that was tough.

KP: Where were you when the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

WG: I was at carrier gas handling school in Newport, Rhode Island, and one of the guys was very cognizant of what it was all about. I hadn't heard a word about it. And this guy says, "Well," he says, "this'll bring us to the end much quicker. It'll be over real quick now." "Ah, come on, I've heard that line, a, superbomb, what kind of a superbomb? You kill a couple of more Japs," I mean. He says, "No," he says, "This is really, really a superbomb. It's going to make a big, tremendous difference." Well, when they announced what it was, I couldn't conceive of it even. I probably still can't. But that was, it wasn't a happy period. It wasn't a happy period.

KP: So you saw a lot of things that were really hard in the Navy, I mean a lot of terrible things happened, in-between some good things.

WG: Oh, yes, certainly I remember the good things. Always remember those. But it wasn't an easy time. Let me see if Ruth needs anything. Excuse me just one second.

EB: Did you attend any of the Saturday night smoker boat boxing matches, do you remember that at all?

KP: Did you have any boxing matches?

WG: No, we didn't have 'em, even. We didn't even have 'em. Had a movie or something like that and that was it. They never had any. And, I think, once, we saw Bob Hope from a million miles away or something like that. Mostly movies was recreation, and drinking, if there was available, if we could get ashore, then we could drink or otherwise, occasionally we used to smuggle, when they started to allow the ship to have beer on it, that you could take it ashore and drink it ashore, you weren't allowed to have it on the ship. We were able, occasionally, to get some, and then it was a matter of chilling it. Well, your CO_2 fire extinguishers are carbon dioxide and that makes wonderful ice, so we'd get a milk can, put cans of beer in it and shoot the … And some of the beer would get so cold, it was actually freezed, the beer. And I had, these things were all around the ship. They were, oh, in every compartment, they had one, at least, depending on the size, how many they had of these CO_2 extinguishers. So we used to have parties up in officers quarter, area, and there was one particular extinguisher that was right where it should be for us to use. So we would use that first, and it would always be cold and I'd have a, and then the beers were expired. They were used. Cans went overboard. So, this one shipfitter I had, he was in charge of them [extinguishers]. The only way you could tell they were not, or used, is by weighing them. They, if they weighed, weighed right, they were filled. Otherwise, they were empty. So this shipfitter used to complain to me. "Mr. Gutter," he says, "Something's wrong." He says, "This extinguisher, I keep replacing it each time I come up, and each time it's not. [And] I got to do it again." I said, "(Radado?), don't worry about it. Just fill it."

KP: So you'd occasionally have some beer in officer's country?

WG: Rare. That was rare, that was ...

KP: But it sounds like it was quite memorable, the few times.

WG: Oh yeah, it was a lot, oh, lot of fun.

KP: In terms of your various ports where you did, you mentioned you stopped in Hawaii a lot, which sounds like it was a treasured place to stop, where else where else along the Pacific would you put in, for either beer parties or,

WG: Oh, larger atolls. I mean, we were down, well, it would be more than atolls, we were down Esperito Santos, we were to New Guinea, in Hollandia, but like Kwajalein or, I can't even think of them.

KP: When you got off ship, what would you do? Did you ever meet, for example, people who lived on different islands, or did you just mainly go to the Officers Club or ...

WG: Usually that's what we did, if we had an Officers Club that we could go to, we went. I would, in Hawaii, I looked for people, I had people to look up and I would seek somebody out outside to get away from the ship for a while. But these atolls, they all looked the same. God, there's nothing there. And when they allowed you to start bringing beer over and even opening up a club. I mean, it was quite a thing

KP: You traveled a lot with the Navy, I mean both in training in the United States and always going on your little cruise up the Pacific under less than ideal circumstances. Had you traveled much before, before the Navy?

WG: Well, we weren't stay-at-homers. We traveled. Not exotic trips, I mean.

KP: Yeah.

WG: I mean, this was considered so exotic, going to the South Pacific, you know? If you listened to *South Pacific*? "South Bali High," I mean.

KP: You did say you had been to California before the war.

WG: Yeah, I did. And that's about it. Was there, you had some more questions or is that one it?

EB: I don't have any more right this second.

KP: Were you tempted at all to use the GI Bill to go to law school? Did that thought cross your mind?

WG: It crossed my mind but I did not, I used it for becoming an interior designer and I think I got more use out of it than I probably would have as an attorney.

KP: Where did you go to school for your interior designing?

WG: Up in Madison Avenue, in New York, 515 Madison Avenue.

KP: What school was that?

WG: New York School of Interior Design. (Sherrel Witting?) was the man who was in charge of it and was very well known as a designer.

KP: Did you go full time or part time?

WG: Part time. And full, no, I went full-time, part of the time.

KP: Did you every use the VA mortgage?

WG: Yeah, my first house, I guess it was.

KP: You never joined any veteran's organizations, or did you?

WG: I did later on, I was never a great believer in the, watchamacallit, American Legion and, as a result, I really didn't, I donate to the DAV and a couple of other things that come, occasionally, come through on it. But I wasn't enjoying it, I wasn't looking to get myself involved. I was busy, traveled a lot so I was away from home a lot. I wasn't looking for ways to get away from the house.

KP: Did you ever go to any ship's reunions, or stay in touch with people?

WG: Not really, no, I, I'll tell you, my fiftieth college reunion was the closest I came to having a ship's reunion. There were a couple of guys there, as I said. There's Bernie Ralston, who's out in California. He showed up and, then there was a couple of others who were there and, my, my bunch from school days was there, Dr. Art Roth, and Sy Silberberg and Herb Bilus. These guys, they were so, we had our own reunion, really. We used the reunion in New Brunswick as the excuse, it was the catalyst or whatever. But, oh, we had a great, lot of fun, but we just made our own fun. In fact, it got so that so many of the guys wanted, "Hey, let us sit at your table today." "Hey, we haven't got room."

KP: Neither one of your two children served in the military. Do you wish they had, or do …

WG: No, no.

KP: Had you thought of staying in the Naval Reserves?

WG: No. Absolutely not. I was quite emphatic about it. I didn't want to stay in the Navy.

KP: How did you feel about the Korean and Vietnam Wars that came later? Because a lot of the guys told me they fell for the pension, they wanted the pension.

WG: I didn't. I didn't stay around for any pension or anything like that. I, no, I was afraid, when Korea came along, that maybe I'd get picked up on that, because I had gone for my Reserve sort of late, because, I forget what the hell the reason was, I think it was something, they were just, oh, I think it was with my qualifications, they felt I should be around to call. They didn't call me, but they worried me.

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

KP: Is there anything we forget to ask you about World War II, about any of your experiences at Rutgers?

WG: I can't think of any. I mean, if you came up with them, I'd say yeah, but I'm sure there are. But, no, I'd say it's pretty comprehensive.

KP: Yeah, well we've appreciated it a great deal.

WG: Me, too. Same.

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

Edited by Dennis Duarte 6/27/00
Edited by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/10/00
Edited by William Gutter 7/25/00