RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GERALD MERKLE

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH
and
MICHAEL TIETJEN
and
HANS ZIMMERER

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Michael Tietjen: This begins an interview with Lieutenant Colonel Gerald Merkle in Hillsdale, New Jersey, on October 25, 2004, with myself, Michael Tietjen …

Hans Zimmerer: … Hans Zimmerer …

Shaun Illingworth: … and Shaun Illingworth. Colonel Merkle, thank you very much for having us here today.

Gerald Merkle: You're welcome.

MT: If you could, sir, please tell us a little bit about what your life was like when you were growing up. I believe you were born in Oradell.

GM: Born in Oradell, New Jersey, attended the Westwood schools, met my wife in high school. We were high school sweethearts and had a great childhood and wonderful parents. No one could have … had a better home than I had and I'll never forget that. My parents are dead now, … but it was a great life. I had nice time in high school. My wife and I went to the Methodist church in Westwood, besides being in high school together, and so, we got married May the 7th. We're jumping ahead here. After I came back from overseas, we got married, May the 7th, 1944, and we've been married for sixty years.

SI: Congratulations.

HZ: Congratulations.

GM: Thank you, thank you. Unfortunately, in 1950, my wife had polio. Our daughter was about six years old at the time and my wife was also pregnant at the time. She was paralyzed from her neck down and, believe it or not, she was in her eighth month and the baby was born, a boy, born regularly, perfect condition, and we were very lucky. So, as the time progressed, she went from a hospital bed to a wheelchair to crutches and, finally, she came out with only her left leg being paralyzed, I mean, not too good, and so, she was that way for many years, until about, I would say, five or six years ago, when she got post polio syndrome. That means that the muscles that were taking over for the muscles that had contacted the polio, well, now, they were weakening, and so, now, she's in a wheelchair, she uses a walker, … but, all those years, she was a homemaker and … brought the kids up and did exactly everything that she was supposed to do and did a good job.

SI: Can we go back to your childhood? Could you tell us a little bit about your parents? What did they do?

GM: Yes, … my father was a railroad conductor on the Erie Railroad. My grandfather was an Erie Railroad conductor, also, and they were hardworking men. They were very dedicated. They were the type of people that, in the winter, when they found out that there might be a snowfall, they would get on the train, here, in Westwood, at the time, and go up to Spring Valley and be there, so [that], in the morning, they would bring their train down and would be ready … to pick up the commuters, very dedicated. I doubt very much if you have people … as dedicated

as that today. I mean, they're hard workers. … For some reason, they took him [my father] off the passenger service and put him on freight and he wasn't a young man then and that was … hard work, but he stuck it out, then, got back on to the passenger service again and did what he had to do. My mother was a homemaker. She stayed home. She took care of me and the house. We had a house in Westwood and I can still see my mother shoveling coal. We had a coal furnace. She would shovel coal and all the other things that, today, what do we do? We go the wall [laughter] and we just flick a switch for air conditioning or flick a switch for heat. … So, they were good people, very hard working people and good people. It's sad to see what goes on today in our country, which is a wonderful country, and what's going on is unbelievable, unbelievable. So, what can I tell you?

SI: Did you live in Westwood because it was close to the railroad?

GM: Yes, … I think that's why … we lived in Westwood.

SI: Was there a major facility there?

GM: Well, Hillsdale was the stopping spot, in the beginning, for the trains from Jersey City. They had a turntable there. I used to go up with my father and help push the engines. They take this big engine, put it on a turntable and about four or five people could just push that engine around, face it back toward Jersey City, unbelievable, unbelievable, [laughter] and then, my dad would take me up to Spring Valley and let me ride in the engine, where the engineer was, and I had many happy feelings about that. They were great people and, yet, they had very little formal education. My mother and father, I bet, didn't go beyond elementary school and, yet, they were good people.

HZ: Did they have a lengthy marriage?

GM: Oh, yes. Now, let's see, I think we have here when my folks died. I don't recall.

SI: 1955 and 1956.

GM: Yes, my father died first. He had a heart attack, and then, six months later, my mother died. … She had Parkinson's disease, … but they were married for quite some time. Offhand, I don't recall. You might have the dates in there, but I don't recall.

SI: From 1912 to 1955.

GM: Yes, … people died young in those days. I mean, they don't last as long as I do, [laughter] they do, today. I'll be eighty-three on December 1st.

SI: Congratulations. Was your father in the union with the railroad?

GM: … Oh, yes, they were union people. They were Democrats. They were union, even though; well, I shouldn't say that, really. I think that my mother was a Republican and … maybe my father was, too, but I know my grandfather was a staunch Democrat, being a union person.

… We're registered Republicans, but we are independents. You know, I'll vote for the person I think is a good person, a good man. I don't believe in these titles, Republicans and Democrats. I think we should have good people.

SI: Do you remember any union strikes when you were growing up, railroad strikes?

GM: Yes, I know that, probably, my grandfather would go on strike. Whether my dad did or not, I don't know. Of course, being a strikebreaker is not the best thing. Sometimes you can get hurt, but, fortunately, … as far as I know, there weren't any problems.

SI: Was working on the railroad back then a more dangerous job than today?

GM: Well, yes, I mean, today, you've got these new cars and you've the engines that go both ways and, in those days, they had the old coal-fired engines and, you know, the train never leaves the track. … I've been on the train, when I used to commute from here to New York City, and, at times, we hit a car or hit somebody and you can't say it was the fault of the railroad, but it was dangerous, you know, compared to, say, being an accountant or a lawyer or a dentist or something like that.

SI: What was your neighborhood like and what did you do for fun?

GM: We had a nice house on Roosevelt Avenue in Westwood and we had a dirt road. We, the kids and I, we'd go out and play with our little trucks in the dirt in the road and we played cowboys and Indians. … When you came in here, you crossed a little bridge down here. So, when we were, I guess, teenagers, we would take our bikes, ride up to Hillsdale, buy a pack of cigarettes, [laughter] go down, smoke them under the bridge, and, before we went home, we'd wash our mouths out with the water, [laughter] which was clean then, and, I mean, that, to us, … was a big thing. Today, probably taking dope would be the big thing, but we never had anything like that, never, not in our high school. … I suppose we had one or two girls get pregnant at the time, but nothing other than that.

SI: Was Westwood a working class neighborhood?

GM: Yes, I would say so. Westwood's a lovely town. Did you come through the main street of Westwood? You know, you came up the Garden State Parkway, right, and then, you came down the hill and around, right straight through. That's a lovely town, Westwood, always been a nice town. I'd say middle class people live in Westwood.

SI: How did the Depression impact your family and, also, Westwood?

GM: Well, fortunately enough, with my father and grandfather working on the railroad, they had a steady job and steady income. So, I can't say that the Depression impacted upon myself. I was a kid. I mean, I didn't bother about those things. I had clothes to wear, I had food to eat. As far as I could recall, my parents weren't in dire straits at all. At that time, it probably was good to be union people, because you had a steady job, but our family, as far as I'm concerned, did not have any problems.

HZ: Do you remember people asking for food or any kind of donations from your family?

GM: Well, when you're a kid, … this doesn't mean anything. I mean, you don't think about these things. You're out playing with your friends or you're out doing something and I know that my mother would take clothes and give them to some people and probably canned goods, too, I guess, but you never thought about that.

SI: Were there any hobos coming through on the railroad?

GM: Well, I suppose … there were hobos. [laughter] I don't know. I really don't know. …

SI: Were many people in Westwood affected by the Depression?

GM: I really don't know. I mean, I was a kid. I wasn't concerned with that. I was just concerned about having fun and playing with my friends and doing the things … that kids usually do. That's about it.

SI: You went through the school system in Westwood.

GM: Yes.

SI: What stands out about your years in the Westwood school system? What were your favorite subjects? Did you play sports?

GM: … No. [laughter] I had asthma as a kid, and so, therefore, I could not play any sports, but I liked history. History was one of my favorite subjects and we had nice teachers. It was a good school system. … It was a nice place to grow up and I enjoyed my school years. I always kid everybody, telling them that I flunked kindergarten; I had to stay back one year. [laughter] Nobody could believe that. That was because … I was sick most of the first year, [laughter] with my asthma, but, eventually, I outgrew the asthma, … but I still didn't participate in any sports.

SI: What about clubs or extracurricular activities?

GM: Oh, HiY, yes, I was in the HiY, I was in the band, played the drums in the band, and what else? They were small classes, nice time to grow up. I tell you, … I've had a wonderful childhood, a great family, very supportive, a nice girlfriend. [laughter] Oh, she gave me a hard time at times, believe me. … She didn't want to have anything to do with me. … The first time that I asked her out, she went home to her mother, … my wife was a sophomore at the time and I was a junior, and she said, "This guy asked me out. He wears glasses," [laughter] but we had a lot of fun. You were talking about Pearl Harbor?

SI: Yes.

GM: I always can remember that. My present wife and I were driving up in Park Ridge at the time. We had the radio on and we heard about Pearl Harbor and I'll never forget that, the same

way when John Kennedy was assassinated; always remember where I was. I was in the bank, sitting at a loan officer's desk, trying to get a loan, [laughter] and then, they said he was shot. I didn't believe it. I couldn't believe that could happen.

SI: How did you react to Pearl Harbor when you heard the news?

GM: You know what I did the next day? I went down, this shows you how stupid I was, I went down and tried to join the Marines. Thank goodness they wouldn't take me, because of my glasses.

MT: Did you go down with friends of yours?

GM: Yes, a bunch of us went down, oh, you know, *gung ho*, "We're going to [be Marines]." That's the best thing that ever happened to me, that they didn't take me.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, had you known anything about what was going on in Europe or Asia? Did you follow the news?

GM: Oh, I'm sure we did. I mean, we were, what? seventeen years old then. Just like now, you can't get away from it. Every time you turn on the TV set, you know what's going on.

HZ: Did you see it on the newsreels?

GM: Oh, sure, sure, yes, yes.

SI: Do you remember if there were any discussions before Pearl Harbor about whether we should get involved with the war or stay out of the war?

GM: Well, I recall President Roosevelt saying, when he was running for reelection, "I promise you mothers and fathers that I will not send your boys into the European conflict," or words to that effect; six months later, boom, Pearl Harbor. Now, I have my feelings about Pearl Harbor and, when I express my feelings to my children, they can't believe it. My feelings are this way; Germany and Japan were at war against the world. I'm Secretary of the Navy, right? I put all my ships in one spot. Does that make sense?

SI: No.

GM: Why would any sane person, when a war is going on, put his navy, the Pacific Fleet, in one spot and they knew darn well … something was going to happen. My feelings are that President Roosevelt needed to get us into [the] war. In the first place, he told the British, well, we had given the British, what? fifty or sixty destroyers, anyway, told the British … he was going to help them. There was a great anti-war sentiment in this country. Okay, so, now, … you've got to provoke the populace in some way to get them all stirred up, so [that] … they'll say, "Okay, we've got to go to war." Now, … a lot of people don't believe this and I could be all wrong, but this is my sentiment. So, you saw, you know what happened. I mean, it's … probably a good thing we did get into the war, let's face it, but I'm sure we could have gotten in some other way,

without destroying seventy-five, eighty percent of our Pacific Fleet and killing three thousand boys, but that's politics.

SI: When did you start to think about this? Was it at that time or afterwards?

GM: Well, I guess, over the years, I've been thinking of this. I've read books. There was one book I read, *At Dawn We Slept* [by Gordon William Prange, Donald M. Goldstein, Katherine V. Dillon], and … that pretty much tells you what … went on. We had broken the Japanese code. We knew the Japanese fleet was … on its way somewhere. What is it, General [Husband E.] Kimmel and Admiral [Walter] Short? …

SI: Admiral Kimmel and General Short.

GM: Yes, Kimmel and Short, they were the scapegoats. It just so happened that General [George] Marshall, who was Chief of Staff at the time, couldn't be found for hours during the Pearl Harbor [attack]. … A lot of important people that would have to make decisions … weren't around. … Even Douglas MacArthur, one of our famous generals, along with Patton, they're my two favorites, MacArthur and Patton, even General MacArthur was caught flatfooted and that's hard to believe, because he was a great general. … He was first in his class at West Point. I don't think anybody, even to this day, has the grades that MacArthur had and "Old Blood and Guts" Patton, you know him. [laughter] He didn't take any sass from anybody. He got himself in more hot water, oh, God, but, see, these are the people you need in … wartime. I know, we're rambling all over the place.

SI: No, that is fine. You graduated from school in 1940.

GM: That's right, high school, yes.

SI: What were your plans at that point? What were you doing?

GM: Well, when I graduated, I had a low draft number. I didn't volunteer. After the Marines said, … "We don't want you," I said, "Okay, then, you've got to come and get me." So, I got a nice letter from President Roosevelt, "Greetings, we want you." [laughter] So, there was no point in going back to Rutgers, because, at that time, no one was exempt. It wasn't like the Vietnam War, where the college boys stayed in college and the poor kid that couldn't go to college had to go over to Vietnam. So, I didn't know when I was going to be called. I knew my draft number was low and it would only be a matter of time, then, I would be called. So, I did odd jobs. I went down to Wall Street. I was, like, a runner on Wall Street, and then, I got my calling card and I will say that the year … of ROTC that I had at Rutgers helped a lot. That was my favorite subject, by the way, ROTC. [laughter]

SI: You were at Rutgers for a year before you went into the service.

GM: Yes.

SI: In New Brunswick?

GM: Yes, Hegeman Hall, the Quad. … My room was, I think, 103, [laughter] faced the Raritan River, nice. Have you guys been in the Quad at all?

SI: Our office is in Bishop Hall, adjacent to the Quad.

GM: Yes. I'll never forget the time that; well, I don't want to get into that. [laughter] We guys used to do some funny things. Doug McCabe was one of my good friends and, if it wasn't for Doug, I probably wouldn't be doing this [interview]. He kept after me. You know Doug?

SI: Yes.

GM: Yes, swell guy.

SI: What was your freshman year like? Was there any hazing in the first few days?

GM: Oh, not really, not really hazing. We had to … wear our little dinkies, you know. I remember, I had to learn the *On the Banks* song and it was interesting, never been away from home before, so, it was really interesting. … I had a nice dorm and a nice room and … it was a very good experience. I liked Rutgers. At that time, it was a small school. Now, I go down once in a while to the football games, I can't believe the campuses, good grief. When I was there, there was Rutgers College and NJC and all the boys from Rutgers would go over to NJC and chase the girls all over the place. [laughter] Now, I guess NJC is Douglass, right?

HZ: Yes.

GM: Yes, it was nice then, small, really good school. Now, it's too big, too big, jeez.

HZ: In that one year that you were at Rutgers, you took ROTC. You were also a Delta Phi pledge in that first year as well.

GM: Yes, yes. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You entered with the Class of 1944. Do you affiliate more with the Class of 1944 than the Class of 1954?

GM: Oh, yes, yes.

SI: What led you to Rutgers, as opposed to another school?

GM: I really wanted to go to Annapolis, but, I guess because of my eyes, I couldn't get in, plus the fact, … at that time, and I guess even now, you've got to be appointed by one of your state's Senators or Congressmen, but I don't think there were … any other schools that were really involved, to tell you the truth. In those days, … not that many people from high school went to

college. … Today, you've got to go to college. In fact, if you don't have your Masters, you're out of it, you know, unfortunately, and the cost of schooling today; … we have three children, two girls and a boy, and our youngest daughter, her kids, … our oldest granddaughter is now a senior at Pascack Valley High School, which means that she's going to be going to school next year. So, they're looking at some of these colleges and I just can't believe the expense. I don't know what they're going to do. Even Rutgers today is, what, it's twelve, fifteen thousand? I mean, you've got the tuition, you've got … everything else and there's always an extra charge someplace. So, what do you guys do? Do you take loans out or what?

MT: Loans or work.

HZ: A combination of the two.

GM: You work down at school?

HZ: I work at home and I commute to Rutgers.

GM: Really? Jeez, I can remember the time that Rutgers didn't have enough facilities to house the freshman class and, if you were within fifty miles, you had to commute. You remember that?

SI: Was that when you first got there?

GM: No, no, no, this was a while ago, before they built enough facilities for … the freshmen.

SI: I did not know about that.

GM: That was years ago. Well, they couldn't accommodate everybody. So, if you lived fifty miles from the campus, then, you had to commute, but, today, I guess they've got enough facilities for everybody.

SI: How did you get interested in Delta Phi?

GM: Well, you know, when you're a freshman, you're, what shall I say? courted by these fraternities and I was invited to go to dinner with them and to go over to their house and everything and … that's how it came about, because I had friends in Chi Psi and Delta Upsilon. I don't know whether you have a DU house on the campus anymore. Do you?

SI: I am not sure. The house may have burned down.

GM: No, I'll tell you what happened. My son-in-law went to Rutgers, Class of '68. He was a DU, right, and they were caught. They really had some real bad hazing, not while he was there, but subsequently, and I think they revoked their charter, because I can see the DU house now. … In fact, the Delta Phi house was in back of DU. DU was right on College Avenue, or was on College Avenue. I don't know what's in there now.

SI: Was it on the corner of College Ave?

GM: No, not on the corner. It was in the middle of the block. It had big pillars.

SI: Was the impending war and the war in Europe discussed on campus at all?

GM: Oh, I'm sure it was. I recall [that] the Republican …

SI: Wendell Willkie.

GM: Willkie, yes, Willkie, stopped at the campus one time and gave a speech and I know that any number of us attended that speech. Unfortunately, Willkie lost, as you know. Things might have been different if he hadn't, but, yes, there was quite a bit of concern as to what was going on in Europe and, you know, just like today, you heard about it on the radio and you knew that, sometime or the other, something would happen that you might have to be involved.

SI: Did you work at all when you were at Rutgers?

GM: No, no. I had a freebie. [laughter] That's a good thing, because I wasn't the greatest student. I had to work hard.

SI: Was the transition from high school to college a bit of a leap for you?

GM: Yes, I thought so. I always said that I didn't think the high school taught us how to study. I mean, a perfect example is OCS. OCS, to me, … it was hard, but the way they worked it, you had thirteen weeks; each week, you had a different subject for the full week. Saturday morning, you had an exam; that was it, finished. Next week, you go on to another subject. I mean, it was a concentration, and then, it was over with, whereas in high school and college, you have, what? four, five, six different subjects all going at the same time and it's rough. You should know, right? [laughter]

SI: Can you tell us about the process of actually entering the military?

GM: Yes, well, I got the notice, went down to Newark for a physical and it was a joke. It really was a joke. … Anyway, everybody passed the physical. So, then, they gave you two weeks to settle your affairs and get ready to go. So, I don't know why, but, since I … [was] probably the only college boy from Westwood to go … with the contingent and since I had ROTC, I was put in command of the group to go down to Fort Dix, which didn't mean a thing, just meant I had all the records. [laughter] I just hand delivered the records down to the guy down at Fort Dix and it was kind of rough. Outside of … going to Rutgers, I had never been away from home. … You're thrown in with all these people and some people are nice and some people aren't so nice. … Mainly, what we did at Fort Dix was take tests to see where we were going to be placed. So, after about two weeks, we were given our assignments. I was going to antiaircraft basic training in Camp Stewart, Georgia, right in the middle of the Okefenokee Swamps. [laughter] Oh, God, it was awful. It was so bad, I'd call my mother and I said, "I don't care what you do, but get me out of here. [laughter] Call our Congressmen, call our Senators, just get me out of here."

Anyway, she couldn't do that. So, I got a call from the first sergeant one day and he said, "How would you like to go to OCS?" I didn't know anything about OCS. So, I said, "Sure." I figured, "Anything to get me out of this place." So, after basic training, I was shipped up to Camp Davis, North Carolina, that was the Antiaircraft OCS, and we got there and … I'll never forget the first time we all got together. I guess it was a class of about five hundred and they did the same thing like they do in college. You know, you're sitting as a freshman and you're sitting in, say, the chapel, and they say, "Okay, look to your right, look to your left; some time down the road, one of you are not going to be there," and they did that same thing at OCS. So, it was quite a difference from basic training. We had nice accommodations and we had to do everything by the book, had to learn how to make square corners on a bed, make your bed. … The first time we made our beds, when we came in from doing some sort of exercise, every bed was torn apart, which meant we didn't make it right. I enjoyed … OCS. I particularly enjoyed the drilling; that, I really liked. … You had to keep your mind on what you were doing. Every Monday, at five o'clock, at reveille, you would … be out on the tarmac there, in formation, and they would start reading, alphabetically, those who had not passed … the week before and you just hold your breath. [laughter] After they got over the Ms, you breathe, but that was interesting. For thirteen weeks, we did that, twelve weeks, but I really enjoyed the discipline there. … Well, once you become an officer, it's like day and night, day and night. I really enjoyed it.

HZ: When they read off the names of those men who had not passed, where were they sent?

GM: … Wherever they came from, yes.

HZ: They were no longer officer candidates.

GM: No.

SI: What was the washout rate like?

GM: Well, … this is just off the top of my head, if we started with five hundred, we probably ended up with 150, probably for two reasons. Number one, it was early in the war. They needed officers fast, so, they would pick, not anybody, but those people that had fairly decent grades on their placement tests and, of course, some of them, see, I was lucky, I got through it; … I was never that good in algebra and, in antiaircraft, believe me, there's an awful lot of algebra, [laughter] but it just shows, when you have motivation, what you can do. I was motivated; I would never go back to Camp Stewart, so help me.

HZ: Was Camp Stewart still hot in September of 1942?

GM: Oh, yes, it was hot, buggy and muggy. We would go down to some little river or something; there'd be alligators and snakes and, oh, jeez, it was awful. You take a nice boy from Westwood and you put him in a swamp? You can't do that. [laughter]

MT: Was there ever any intermingling with the townspeople near Camp Stewart?

GM: Hinesville. There was a little town outside, created by the camp, called Hinesville. It was the most ridiculous thing you ever saw, shacks, chickens running [around], pigs running all over the place, a dirt road. The first six or eight weeks, you were not allowed out of camp. Then, I guess, we were allowed to go to Hinesville, which you could walk out the main gate and there it was, and then, eventually, you were allowed to go to Savannah and that was really something, [to] go to Savannah, Tybee Island. …

SI: At Camp Stewart, was it infantry basic training or antiaircraft basic training?

GM: No, every soldier that goes into the service, no matter what branch you go into, you're basically an infantryman. … You are taught and given infantry tactics, rifle range and all that sort of thing. So, if the event ever happened that they needed people, they'd take the cooks out of the kitchen and put a rifle in their hand and they're supposed to know what they're doing. Everybody's an infantryman. … The ROTC in Rutgers was infantry [training].

SI: Was it physically intense at Camp Stewart?

GM: Oh, yes, they'd get you up in what looked like the middle of the night, about four or five in the morning. You'd stand out there and they'd call out names, and then, you'd have about fifteen minutes to get ready and you'd go to the mess hall. …

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GM: The first march we had, I think it was about a ten-mile march, with full pack, and, of course, we were young. We didn't mind. A couple of our officers, they were a little older; … we didn't see the company commander for a week after the march. [laughter] He had gotten blisters on his feet, but it was strenuous, but you were young.

SI: Do you remember your drill instructor? Was he the stereotype you see in the movies, yelling and berating you?

GM: No, nothing like that. … You know, the United States didn't have much of an Army [at the] beginning of World War II. They had to start really building it up, so, they took these people that were in the Army at the time and made them noncommissioned and commissioned officers and some of these guys were … something else again. Some of them couldn't even pronounce your name, but, then, if they saw somebody that they thought was pretty good, they'd put him on KP. I can remember, one time, I had to spend a whole weekend out … at the ammunition dump and it wasn't much fun. Some of the things that, you know, I have to laugh at today, I can remember, … one time, being on KP and, you know, we had the supper ready and, just like the Army, who comes in, just before feeding time, but the exterminators? and they're blowing this stuff around and there are bugs flying all over the place, in the food, outside the food. Ten minutes later, they opened the doors, so [that] the guys could come in and eat, typical Army. [laughter] Then, one time, a couple of guys caught an alligator and they tied him outside the mess tent. Oh, they used to tease that alligator; I'm telling you, if he had ever gotten loose. [laughter] Then, there was a guy who didn't want to go overseas. So, he takes an M-1, puts it to

his leg and … pulls the trigger, thinking he's going to make a nice, little hole, blew his foot off. He didn't go overseas, though.

SI: Was that at Camp Stewart?

GM: Yes.

HZ: Did you see that during basic training at Camp Stewart, people trying to get out of the Army?

GM: Oh, I was so tired after every night, I couldn't stand to know what was going on, not really. I'm sure it was, yes.

MT: While you were in Camp Stewart, Georgia, and OCS in North Carolina, did you notice anything as far as race relations or segregation in the Army or in the town?

GM: No, not really. Our unit was pretty ninety-nine percent white. I think what they did was, I think, at that time, they segregated the minorities into their own units. I know, when I was in Fort Knox, with the 453rd AAA, [pronounced "triple-A"], there was a black unit up there, commanded by a white captain, and they were all together in one [unit], but they did have white officers. … I mean, I went to school with some black boys. They were the nicest boys you'd ever want to know. I didn't have any prejudice. It's only, I guess, when you get down South that they had prejudice and maybe they had a reason for it, but we didn't have it up here, not to my knowledge, anyway.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit more about the different subjects you studied each week at OCS?

GM: Oh, yes, … we studied gunnery. I remember, we had to, how do I put this now? You see people on the street looking through these instruments; do you know what I'm talking about?

SI: Surveying?

GM: Surveying, we had to do that. … At the time, with the .40-mm antiaircraft gun, we had a director. In other words, you'd have horizontal and vertical and one guy would be on one machine and the other guy [on the other] and, like, … you'd have a tow target, a plane would pull a tow target. You would aim the director at this target, tow target, and then, your gun would fire and, if the two people were in sync, you'd hit the target. I have a book inside. … Do you want me to get the book?

SI: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

GM: 43rd Class; that was the graduation exercises. Here we are, Ninth Battery, 43rd Class; there I am, right there. … These were our officers in the Ninth Battery. I think this guy graduated from Princeton.

SI: Robert Baldwin?

GM: Baldwin, yes.

SI: Were they also draftees?

GM: I don't know. That, I don't know.

SI: What did you think of the officers you encountered?

GM: … They were great, very nice, very good. I thought there was something in here. …

MT: Were there any other Rutgers guys there?

GM: Not to my knowledge, no, not that I know of. … Camp Davis is outside of Wilmington, North Carolina. For the thirteen weeks, I stayed right on camp. I didn't go any place. All I did was study and study and study. Here's pulling your bed apart and, everyplace you went, you marched in formation. Here are the barracks.

SI: Were most of the other soldiers around your age?

GM: Yes, within …

SI: A year or so?

GM: Yes, some of them were a little older.

HZ: Were the men from all over the country?

GM: Oh, yes, yes.

HZ: Did people from, say, the South stick together?

GM: No, it was a mixture of everybody. Although I do remember, in our basic training, we had a lot of boys from West Virginia and that area; boy, could they shoot. [laughter] We'd go out on the firing range, boy, they would be hitting the target all the time. That's the .40-mm we had, antiaircraft gun. Now, those can be used as antitank guns, also.

SI: I am more familiar with high altitude antiaircraft gunnery, setting up patterns to intercept bomber formations. Were they training you to do that or to go after individual planes?

GM: No, we were .40-mm. We had the lower flying planes, you know. You'd have to have the big guns, like this one, this baby.

SI: The .90-mm.

GM: Yes.

SI: Did they teach you to aim at an individual plane or did you set up a pattern of fire?

GM: No, how you would train is, you'd go out on the firing range, you'd set up your guns, you'd set up your directors, and then, a plane would fly over with a target trailing and you would … try to hit the target. I remember, one time, down at Stewart, the plane went down. They claimed, … somebody said that they fired on the plane instead of the target, but the Army said no, that they ran out of gas. [laughter]

HZ: Does a tow target mean that they were towing …

GM: Yes, towing like a sleeve, yes. "There are a wide variety of (pretenses?) to antiaircraft warfare to be learned, the height finders, (transit traverse?), sound detectors, searchlights, many more," and … you had to get into all of this stuff.

TM: How much training did you receive before they put you on the larger guns? Did you have to qualify with smaller weapons or were you just thrown into the big guns?

GM: No, no. I was able to fire a quadruple-mounted .50-caliber. That's where you get in under the gun, and then, the four guns [were] there and that was fun. [laughter] Of course, you were a sitting duck, because you were in this tight compartment and you had to wiggle out of it, but you had a lot of firepower there. Yes, we shot everything … from a .45 automatic pistol to a .30-caliber carbine, an M-1, a machine gun, .50-caliber. That was fun, going out on the range, a lot of fun. Of course, you all know about Maggie's drawers. Any of you take ROTC?

SI: No.

GM: No? You don't know what you're missing. [laughter]

SI: Did you find you were a good shot?

GM: Yes, I made expert … on the .30-caliber carbine, yes, even though my right eye was the bad eye. [laughter] … I had a cataract operation two years ago and that's improved my sight quite a bit.

SI: You mentioned earlier that, in basic training, there was this everyone-is-a-rifleman mentality. Was it the same in officers' school?

GM: Well, no, once you got over your basic training, you had that training. You didn't go over it again.

SI: What I am trying to say is, since you would later transfer from Antiaircraft to Transportation, was the OCS training applicable to all branches?

GM: Well, no, it was just like [being] a salesman. A salesman can sell anything, if he's a good salesman, whether it be motor oil or computers. Once you're an officer, you're supposed to be able to do anything.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your graduation day and how you felt?

GM: Oh, that was a great day, because, every Saturday morning, you would watch this group of guys in full dress march down to get their commissions, to get their gold bars, and you're thinking, "Gee, we have ten weeks to go. Are we going to make it?" Eight weeks, five weeks, four weeks; once you got down there by where it was only a week or so to go, you were pretty sure that you were going to make it, because they'd already started measuring you for your uniform and everything, the (pinks?) and greens. That was a great day, boy, and the first thing you do is, after you get your commission, you go back to your barracks and the first sergeant is standing there and he takes … your first salute and you've got to give him a buck. [laughter] Yes, that was one of the highlights of my life.

SI: Did any of your family members come down?

GM: No, no. … I came back and my present wife and her mother and my mother and my aunt met me at … Pennsylvania Station, and then, we went to … the Grill Room of the Hotel Taft and my wife and I got engaged at that time.

HZ: What was the correspondence with your wife like while you were in basic and OCS? Did you write lots of letters or make many phone calls?

GM: Oh, yes, oh, yes. You must remember, we were high school sweethearts, and so, even though we did have our breakups and things, … it worked out and … it was January 23rd, I think, was the graduation. Wasn't it January 23rd?

SI: 28th.

GM: 28th, was it?

MT: This says the 28th.

GM: Yes, 28th, January 28th, '43, and we were married May the 7th, '44.

SI: Did the war influence your plan to get married?

GM: Well, it did, because we were supposed to get married in November of 1943, but, then, I had gotten orders to go overseas. So, we had to defer that [the marriage] until later on, plus the fact [that] her father, who had been in World War I, did not feel that we should get married, because of the possibility that something might happen. So, he wasn't in favor of it, not that there was anything personal in that, but my wife's mother was my favorite, … or I was her favorite. So, we got married.

HZ: Your father, being a veteran of World War I …

GM: No, my father-in-law, because, in World War I, my father and grandfather were in an exempt business. They were in the railroad and the railroads were taken over by the government, and so, … therefore, they did not go into the service.

HZ: Was your father-in-law a little bit of an isolationist, being a veteran of World War I?

GM: … You've got a good point there; he … probably was, yes.

HZ: He knew what combat was like.

GM: Yes, oh, boy, did he. That's why I say I feel odd sometimes, because my experiences were nothing like some of these boys that were in the infantry in World War II, that really, really saw action. I didn't really see any action to speak of, compared to, I'm sure, some of the stories you've heard from others. I mean, if you ever go in the service, try to stay out of the infantry. [laughter] …

SI: Did you know that at the time?

GM: Oh, yes, [laughter] … and another thing, you never volunteer. The only time in my life that I volunteered, and it was a good thing, … I went from Antiaircraft to Transportation Corps. That was a good move. At first, I didn't think so, because, when we did it, this friend of mine and I, … they were just opening up, … starting an Army Transportation Corps and they needed officers. So, we volunteered. We were down there at Camp Davis, North Carolina. My outfit, the 453rd, was, at that time, ready to go overseas and they had an excess number of officers, and so, the CO of my outfit said to me, and, now, this is a stupid question, he says, "Do you want to go overseas with us?" "Uh-uh, no way." [laughter] So, that's when I was put in a pool. When you're put in a pool, you've got to be careful, because you're in a pool of officers and, if the 53rd Infantry, perhaps, needs some officers, they can pick you. You've got to get out of that pool. So, this other guy and I from the 453rd, we volunteered for Transportation Corps and, within two weeks, we were up at Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation, which is Newport News, Virginia. Two weeks later, we're on ships going overseas. We're saying, "Holy cats, what are we doing?" [laughter]

MT: You went over in a convoy.

GM: We were on a Liberty ship and there were four Army, there were two officers and two enlisted men, and there was a Navy gun crew of four, two officers and a couple of men. The funny part of it, they had a stupid .50-caliber on the back of the Liberty ship that couldn't sink anything, you know, and here, in our Liberty ship, which was the *George B. McClellan*, we were carrying the first B-29 crews that were going to Karachi, India. The planes were being flown out of the West Coast. We were taking the personnel over to Oran, North Africa, and so, our job was, we were the liaison between the captain of the vessel and the commander of troops. … I mean, we had our own stateroom. We ate with the officers of the ship, not down below with the poor guys down in the hold. We had a fairly good deal. So, we get over to Oran and we unload

these fellows that are going to take a British or French ship through the [Suez] Canal to Karachi. I'm in the officers' club in Oran one night and … I look up the stairs and who's coming down the stairs but my family doctor from Westwood? [laughter] Would you believe that? He was a flight surgeon and he was going to India, also. … To tell you something even stranger, I'm standing onboard our ship and we're taking supernumeraries up to Naples. So, these guys, they come over the side of the ship and here comes a guy from Westwood High School, honest to goodness, what a small world. So, we took … them up to Naples. They were going to eventually go to Anzio Beachhead and we unload them and Naples was in a mess. The Germans had just left and, oh, they left it in a mess. The poor people had nothing to eat. It was awful. So, then, we get orders to go back to Oran. So, we formed in a convoy and go down the Mediterranean to Oran and we get to a certain point and I'm up on the bridge, just watching things, and the Captain's up there. He's a British captain. So, he tells the guy that's steering the ship, he says, "Pull out of the convoy." I mean, the Mediterranean was mined by the Germans. "Pull out of the convoy." We pull out of the convoy. The destroyer escorts that were surrounding us, they flash, "Get back in line." The Captain says, "Don't bother, keep going." So, here we are, going by ourselves, … headed for Oran. Then, the next thing, … the destroyer escort said, "You don't get back in the convoy, we're going to fire on you." I'm thinking to myself, "Oh, my God, this is awful. I can't believe this. This is not happening." [laughter] So, now, we keep going, hell bent for election. Fortunately, … our destroyer didn't fire on us. We get back into Oran. The Captain's called up. Boy, he's really given the business and told, "You're going to go right back to the United States." Isn't that terrible? [laughter] So, we rejoined the convoy. We're an empty ship, have nothing on it, and we go right back to Hampton Roads. So, we get into Hampton Roads in the … later part of April and I call my wife up and say, "When can we get married?" and she checked with her mother and my mother and we checked with the church and [she replied], "May the 7th." So, that's how it happened. So, then, we went on our honeymoon to Ocean Grove and, because of gasoline rationing, you couldn't go too far. So, we … came home. I went back and I thought, "Surely, I'm going to be put on another Liberty ship and I'm going overseas." We get down and back and I went in to see the Major and he says to me, "Gee, Lieutenant, you just got married. Would you like a job in the port?" "Are you kidding?" Just like the guy that said, "Do you want to go overseas with us?" [laughter] "Sure, I'd love a job." So, I stayed in the port from then on, went into different divisions. I was in Ordnance, and then, in intelligence security and that was interesting, too, where, at one time, I was at Camp Patrick Henry. They had a German prisoner of war camp there. … The fellows that they put in Patrick Henry were not the real diehard Nazis. So, I was in charge of a section of the camp, which meant that I had to make an inspection with the German sergeant every day, and then, if anything came up that … needed to be taken care of, that was my responsibility, but, I'll tell you, these guys, they made us look like I don't know what. They are soldiers. The way they marched, the discipline, they were unbelievable, because, when they got off the ship, before they went to Patrick Henry, they had to go through a line where they had to be searched and so forth. An officer has to be searched by an officer and so forth and I was very impressed with the way they were trained, and then, when I got down to the prisoner of war camp and had to make the inspections, boy, they were unbelievable. You'd go through those barracks and the first sergeant would call to attention and, boy, they'd snap, "Hup-to," and, gee, … they took lumber and stuff that we would throw away and they built themselves, like, a day room, absolutely unbelievable. I've got things here; I've got a little chest for jewelry that they built for me and, one Christmas, they took part of their rations and made a

lovely cake for my wife and myself and my wife says, "Do you think we really should eat it?" [laughter] but that was quite an experience. Then, some of the men they used as waiters in the officers' club and I'll never forget the time that my aunt and uncle came down with friends of theirs who were Germans. So, we're over at the officers' club for dinner. So, this lady, when she found out that it was … Germans waiting on us, she started speaking to him in German. Oh, boy, that's not a good idea. [laughter] Poor guy, you could tell he was very flustered and I'm glad nothing happened. Anyway, as I say, I feel that my experiences in the service were nothing compared to these boys that were in the infantry that really saw action. …

SI: You were with the 453rd Antiaircraft for almost a year and you had several postings in the South. Can you tell us about Fort Bliss and Fort Knox?

GM: … After I graduated from OCS, I was stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas. I went to Fort Bliss, Texas, … on my own. I went from here to Chicago, and then, took this very nice train from Chicago down to El Paso and, when we got there, we were assigned to a new unit called the 488th and they … didn't even have their cadre in yet. It was just the senior officer and a group of us. So, the CO said, "Look, there's no point in you coming in every day. Just call in and we'll tell you when this cadre comes in." So, a group of us went up to New Mexico and got us a nice hacienda there and, oh, we were living like kings. Finally, one day, about … maybe two weeks [later], I got a call from the CO. He said, "Gee, … Lieutenant, you're not even going to be with us anymore." He says, "You've been reassigned to the 453rd." They're an outfit that had been down there for quite a while for training. They were already set to go and one of their officers was, I don't know, transferred or something. His name began with M and, for some reason, they picked [another] M, picked me, and, just to go back a little ways, in North Africa, General [Lloyd] Fredendall was in charge of the campaign there and Rommel was kicking our butt like mad and … there was a place called the Kasserine Pass and Fredendall fed our tanks through the Pass and we were slaughtered. Rommel just killed us. So, the Army, then, what did they do? They brought Fredendall back, put him in Fort Knox and they said, "Well, we've got to have better communication between the Antiaircraft and the Tank Corps," because … Fort Knox was tanks. So, the 453rd, being one of the top units down in Fort Bliss, they were picked to go to [Fort] Knox to represent the Antiaircraft, to work with the tanks, … and then, I got into the 453rd, went to Fort Knox. We were the only antiaircraft unit in Fort Knox and we put on a terrific display for President Roosevelt one time, when he came down, and it was … a very good unit. They really did a good job. So, after being at Fort Knox, then, we went to … the Tennessee Maneuvers and we were in Tennessee, oh, I would say, oh, a good eight weeks, I guess, at least, eight, nine weeks, and, at that point, they decided, "Okay, this unit is ready to go." So, they sent us back to Camp Davis, North Carolina, not only being the OCS, but, also, for the AA units that were ready to go overseas. … That's where they got all the equipment [and] were ready to roll. That's when we went down to Davis again, at that time, and then, I left the 453rd, but … the maneuvers were great, because we were flying all around the places in Tennessee, Murfreesboro, and then, on weekends, you could go into Nashville. Oh, one nice thing about when I was in Knox, people that we knew in Westwood moved out to Louisville. He was with Palmolive Peet and he had a son and a couple of little girls. So, somehow, they read in the local paper, that they must have gotten the Westwood paper, that I was stationed at Fort Knox. So, they got in touch with me and, every weekend, then, I went in and visited with them in Louisville. It was very nice, and then, when the Kentucky Derby was on, he was able to get us

in the Palmolive box and we saw the forty-third running of the Kentucky Derby, where Count Fleet won the Derby. That was great. … Then, in the Tennessee Maneuvers, you'd get a chance to have a break, now and then, and you'd go to the neighbors', a farmer, and the farmer's wife would cook up this chicken for you. Oh, it was good. You'd give them a buck or two and they'd give you a pile of chicken, a lot better than the Army food.

SI: Were people pretty hospitable wherever you went?

GM: Oh, yes, very much so, very much, yes. … All sorts of things were going on. I was walking through a park in Murfreesboro one day and there was a lady feeding her baby, right in the middle of the park, I mean breastfeeding, and that, to me, was unbelievable. [laughter] Another time, we were roaring … down this road with our .40s and there's a woman sitting on the grass, going to the bathroom. She's waving like mad. [laughter] …

SI: How complicated was it to maneuver through the different types of terrain?

GM: Well, I mean, we were … very flexible. You saw the type of gun that we pulled with the trucks. So, we could move pretty fast and set up pretty fast, also, and so, there's no problem there at all.

SI: In-between transferring out of the Antiaircraft and being assigned to the *McClellan*, you were stationed in Hampton Roads for a while. Were you just waiting?

GM: Not too long. … Well, we were actually in, I would say, school, telling us what we had to do or what our responsibilities were as officers on this ship. Mainly, it was just liaison between the captain of the ship and … the commander of troops and there really wasn't much to do of anything, anything to do. We hit some pretty bad storms. The convoy was spread all over the place. We had destroyer escorts. Every day, you'd hear about submarines. Whether they were true or not, I don't know. …

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

SI: Could you please elaborate on what the liaison work entailed? What were some of the problems that you had to deal with?

GM: Well, I mean, the fellows down below, … they had bunks about six high. They lived in terrible quarters. It was crowded. The sanitary conditions were not the best. They had to cook their own food down there in the mess. They had their own mess people. It was not very pleasant, but there wasn't much that could be done about it. It was too bad.

HZ: Being an officer, did you ever experience any animosity?

GM: Oh, you mean fragging? [Did] anybody try to frag me? [laughter] I don't think I'd even know what a grenade would look like. [laughter] No, I had more trouble with some of the officers than I did with the enlisted men. This one fellow that was with me, he and I did not get along too good.

HZ: Was he of equal rank?

GM: No, he was a first lieutenant, I was a second lieutenant. I had more camaraderie with the Naval officers, two nice guys, that we got along well together, and, as I said, it was a joke, the type of gun we had to protect ourselves, a .50-caliber machine gun. [laughter] Oh, it was awful.

SI: Was the crew British? You said the Captain was British.

GM: No, the Captain was British, but I would say the crew was probably American Merchant Marines. You never saw the Captain. He stayed up in his cabin, except when he went up topside.

SI: Did you ever find out why he left the convoy?

GM: Never did, never did, unbelievable.

MT: You said that you got along well with the two Navy officers. Was there ever any inter-service rivalry between the Army and the Navy?

GM: No, we kidded each other, but, no.

MT: Was it common to have a British captain in charge of an American crew? Was that commonplace?

GM: I would think so. I mean, we were on that ship and these Merchant Mariners were being paid good money. That was a hazard zone and most of our guys weren't getting that much at all, you know.

SI: Did that cause resentment? You were all in the same danger.

GM: I don't know. There was talk about it, but … I never saw any fights or anything like that.

SI: About how many people were on the ship when you went over? Was it a hundred, a thousand?

GM: … I wouldn't say a thousand. You know, these Liberty ships were not that big. Some of them broke in half, you know. … Some of that weather out there in the North Atlantic, in the wintertime, that's brutal.

SI: How did you pass the time on this voyage?

GM: Reading. [laughter] I read more books; they had a library.

HZ: Before you disembarked from Hampton Roads, did you get the *Stars and Stripes*? Was that heavily read in your unit?

GM: Oh, yes, we all read *Stars and Stripes*, yes.

SI: The ship arrived in Oran. How long were you in Oran for? Was it a short layover?

GM: Well, we discharged the aircraft boys, and then, we took on these, what did I say? supernumeraries, all sorts of people. They were going to Anzio. … I guess we were there at least a week.

SI: What was it like? You had never been out of the country before.

GM: No, no.

SI: What was it like to be in North Africa during the war?

GM: It was interesting. You'd go down into Oran and they had the American officers' club there, they had the Red Cross. I'll never forget, if I went into the Red Cross, I'd have to buy my coffee and donuts. Would you believe that?

HZ: My great-grandfather did that when he was a doughboy going over to Great Britain. He mentioned the same thing. He had to pay for soup when he got off the boat.

GM: Yes. You didn't go too many places alone. You wanted to stay with a group, because we heard that … some of these Arabs were not too friendly and they used these Arabs to load and unload the ship. Boy, they'd come on and … you'd have to watch yourself and watch your [stuff] or they'd steal you blind, and then, there were always the little boys, the little kids down on the pier as you get off, if you wanted to go into town. They were always willing to show you where their sister was, [laughter] cigarettes, anything.

HZ: Do you think they were pretty much indifferent as to who won or do you think they were more favorable to the Allies, as opposed to the Germans?

GM: I think all they wanted to do was to get what they could for themselves and I don't think they cared one way or the other.

HZ: When you were in Naples, did you have that same feeling about the Italian people or were they definitely glad to see you?

GM: … The Germans had just left Naples. Naples was in a shamble. The only people that could get off the ship and go into the headquarters was if you had to deliver something. I had to deliver the manifest, so, I got off the ship, took a jeep up to the headquarters, delivered the manifest and came back, … did not talk to anyone. All I know is that at every evening, the cooks on our ship would put out our garbage on the pier and these poor devils would come down and they would go through that garbage. … It was sad. They didn't have anything and, boy, if you gave them a pack of cigarettes, that was wonderful. They could do all sorts of things with cigarettes and, when you're laying out in the harbor, waiting to go in for a berth, there'd be these

little boats that would come with natives and Italians and … they would be asking for cigarettes. …

SI: How long were you there in Naples Harbor?

GM: Well, we weren't there too long. There was an air raid one night, air raid sirens one night, but nothing happened and they had to get the ships in and out fast. So, we weren't there more than maybe two or three days, I guess, at the most.

SI: When you began working at Hampton Roads, you mentioned that you were in the Ordnance Corps before you went to the POW camp.

GM: Ordnance, right.

SI: What did you do there?

GM: It was usually administrative work. My job was, we had all these ordnance manufacturers, I guess you'd call them, and we would have to keep inventory on the different types of ordnance and what we needed and what we didn't need and that was my job, set up schedules and things like that.

SI: Did you have to deal with civilian contractors and laborers?

GM: Well, … in our Ordnance Department, we had a captain, a first lieutenant, myself, a sergeant, then, … one or two girls that were WACs and a couple of civilian girls in the group.

SI: When material came in, were you dealing with civilian munitions manufacturers?

GM: It was all Army. I guess the Army took over all of the ordnance depots all over the country.

SI: By the time it reached you, you were not dealing with a contractor.

GM: No, no.

SI: Then, you were assigned to the POW camp.

GM: Yes.

SI: Did you ever get close to any of the prisoners? They made you the cake.

GM: Oh, no, you don't get close. I mean, … you're here and they're there, no, no fraternization, absolutely not.

SI: Did they just do this for you because you were in charge?

GM: I guess. Well, I didn't give them a hard time, for one thing, and I didn't have to, because they were very well disciplined. I was very surprised myself.

SI: Do you know if they were Afrika Corps? Had they been captured early in the war?

GM: They could possibly have been, because I know that, at the end there, when … the war was almost over, they were told, most of them were told, [that] they were going back to the sector that was being administered by the Russians and, boy, they were very, very unhappy, very unhappy.

HZ: How many POWs were you in charge of at Camp Patrick Henry?

GM: Well, I was in charge of a compound; I don't know … how many barracks that included. I don't know. All I knew was that their first sergeant, I mean, I didn't have to do anything. He had them so well trained … that all I had to do was make the inspection and, even with white gloves, you couldn't find any dust.

MT: Did that surprise you? Did you have a certain attitude going into it?

GM: No, it didn't surprise me, because, when I was first on the line, as the prisoners came in, before I was even assigned to Camp Patrick Henry, just to see them march from the ship into the warehouse and to be checked out, you could tell [that] they were very proud people. You wouldn't know that they were the defeated enemy. [laughter]

HZ: Were their officers kept separate from their enlisted men? You mentioned the first sergeant. Were there any lieutenants or colonels or anything like that?

GM: Oh, in the prisoner of war camp? No, I think they segregated [them]. I think the officers were sent to another camp. I think the highest ranking officer was the first sergeant.

HZ: Did you have to speak German?

GM: No, I can't. [laughter] They spoke English.

SI: Were there new prisoners coming into the compound or was it pretty much the same group?

GM: When I was there, it was pretty much the same group, because the war was starting to wind down then and they had a fairly decent life here. They behaved themselves and we didn't require [them] to do anything. I mean, some of the stuff I see today, I can't believe. I can't believe what … we do to these prisoners. You know what happened over in that prison camp; I mean, come on. We're supposed to be civilized, aren't we? I know they do … things that are not good, but why put yourself in their position? I would hate to be in the service today, fellows. I'll tell you right now. [Lieutenant Colonel Merkle is referring to the Baghdad Abu Ghraib prison scandal in which Iraqi prisoners were abused by US military police.]

SI: Would the guards ever get rough with the prisoners?

GM: If they did, I didn't see it. No, I don't think so.

HZ: Did they ask you about how things were going in the war?

GM: No, no, the only exchange was between this first sergeant and myself, not with anybody else. If a prisoner had a problem, then, the first sergeant would bring him in and we'd discuss it. He would be the interpreter, if the fellow couldn't speak English.

HZ: They were not allowed to do the *Heil Hitler* salute to each other.

GM: Oh, no, no. That was a no-no.

SI: Do you remember any instances when they would bring somebody to you with a problem?

GM: No. The only one I remember was, this one guy came in and he was crying his eyes out. He said he didn't want to go home. He didn't want to go … back to the Russian Sector, because he knew what the Russians would do to him, and I felt sorry for the guy. I mean, I know he was our enemy, but, hey, I don't know, nothing I could do about it.

SI: Were they allowed to receive mail and send mail out?

GM: Oh, yes.

SI: I was wondering if you had to censor it.

GM: No, I don't recall having to worry about that, no.

HZ: Did you have to worry about following the Geneva Convention in the ways of treating POWs?

GM: No, because we treated them very humanely and they didn't give us any problems, none whatsoever.

SI: By the time you left, in December of 1945, were they already returning them to Germany or were they still there when you left?

GM: Let's see, was it December '45? Okay, okay, so, at that time, … if I recall correctly, I was not with the POW camp at that time. I was over at the Norfolk Army Base. So, I had left that, … because, at the time, I could have … gotten out of service, but I wanted to stay in. In fact, I was willing to stay in the Army, except my wife said, "You stay in the Army and I'm leaving. [laughter] So, you've got to make a choice, either me or the Army." … We were making good money and we were doing fine. We had a nice apartment … outside of Newport News and our little girl was with us and we were having a good time. So, I said, "I want to sign on for another six months," and they were closing down part of Hampton Roads, so, they shifted a lot of the stuff over to Norfolk Army Base. … For the last six months, I was at the Norfolk Army Base. I

had nothing to do with the POWs, but, at the time I left, they were getting ready to ship some of them back, yes.

SI: What were your other duties at Norfolk in that last six months or so?

GM: Oh, I think that's when I was with intelligence security, over there. I'm pretty sure that's what it was.

SI: What were your duties there?

GM: Oh, well, everything was winding down. They had excess amount of everybody [that] they didn't know what to do with. So, they gave me a desk and I would write up a daily report as to what was happening in the intelligence security section for the day before. It took me about fifteen minutes and I took the rest of the time for myself, [laughter] but the war was over and things were winding out.

HZ: Being in the Norfolk-Hampton Roads-Newport News area, did you see a lot of ships being sent out to sea?

GM: Oh, yes, well, you know, Norfolk is a big Naval base, one of the biggest on the East Coast, if not the biggest outside of Mayport, Florida, I guess.

HZ: Were they any of the bigger ships, say, battleships?

GM: Oh, yes, yes.

HZ: Do you remember any specific ones that you saw?

GM: Not that I'd recall, no.

MT: Was there any anxiety, after the war in Europe ended, about the invasion of Japan?

GM: Well, we were all frightful that this would continue, because it would have been a terrible, terrible thing. No, I think Truman did the right thing, believe me. Sometimes, you've got to do what you've got to do. I know it was a horrible thing, killing all these innocent people, but it's either them or us.

SI: Do you remember any celebrations for V-E Day and V-J Day?

GM: Oh, yes, oh, my goodness, yes, oh, boy, and how; what a celebration. I think everybody got a little happy. [laughter] One nice part about being stationed in Hampton Roads is that, every Sunday, my wife and I would take my little girl and we'd go up to Williamsburg and I don't know if any of you fellows have ever been to Williamsburg, but … it's a wonderful place. You really should go. Even in those days, back sixty years ago, it was nice. Today, it's even nicer. Williamsburg, Yorktown, Jamestown, it's a nice area, very nice.

SI: Did they keep those things up and running during the war?

GM: Well, the Rockefeller Foundation, they built Williamsburg, or rebuilt it, and it was only limited, what they could do during the war, but it's a great place. … When I was in the Reserve and we went down to Eustis, which we went down mostly to Eustis, because of it being the headquarters of the Transportation Corps, I mean, we'd go up to Williamsburg all the time. The College of William and Mary is right there, nice area, … great place.

HZ: Was your wife living with you on base there?

GM: … Oh, yes. We had a nice apartment on the James River, right outside of Newport News.

HZ: You were allowed to live off base.

GM: Oh, sure, yes, because they didn't … have enough BOQs to … take care of all the officers in that area. So, therefore, you could live anyplace. When I first got down there, I lived with a family … right on the Chesapeake Bay and I had a bedroom with them and they were very, very nice people, very nice to me. Then, eventually, my wife came down and we got a house, a small house, that we lived in and she got pregnant, she got sick and we had to bring her home, and then, I went back and I was able to get an apartment in a house in Newport News, on the James River. … Eventually, it was owned by Colonel (Towler?). One day, I found out that the owner of the house had died and Colonel Towler and his wife and daughter had bought the house. So, we were sold with the house. [laughter] Colonel Towler was a doctor. I guess he had retired. So, he had to interview me, to see what kind of a man I was. So, he was a great old guy. [laughter] … So, he said, "Well, you know," we had R&R down there, every Wednesday afternoon, "and I'd appreciate it if you'd take my daughter over to the officers' club and let her swim in the pool. She hasn't much to do and she needs a little R&R." So, that was my assignment. [laughter] To protect myself, I took my friend with me, the guy that volunteered for the Transportation Corps. So, he and I would take this kid over to the pool and she wasn't a kid. She must have been about fifteen or sixteen, something like that, and so, when my wife heard I was babysitting, she didn't like it too much. [laughter] I said, "Don't worry, I'm not doing anything with a colonel's daughter, believe me." [laughter] …

SI: I have heard that it was difficult to find housing during the war. There were many shortages.

GM: Well, yes. One thing about Hampton Roads, there was a lot of transients, people coming and going all the time. So, the people down there were very hospitable and opened their homes to you, … which was nice. As I say, my service experiences had been rather good. I still think about the poor guys in the trenches and the infantry and the boys in the airplanes. So, the four years I was in the service, why, in most part, it was a good experience. So, I stayed in, put … sixteen years in the Reserve, and so, when I became sixty, I started drawing my pension and, well, I've been retired from … my civilian job for seventeen years now. … 1981 is when I started drawing my pension from the service and there are a lot of things that are good about it. We can go up to West Point, to the officers' club or to the PX or to the commissary. … I can get my prescriptions through the Army. I just have a nine dollar co-pay. What else? … Besides Medicare, I have what is called Tri-Care, which is also a Department of Defense program, that

covers my wife and myself for anything that Medicare doesn't pay and for catastrophic insurance, all free, didn't cost me a penny. So, I know my wife, at first, did not want me to join the Reserve. She didn't want it. It was one of the few times I went against her and, fortunately, it has paid dividends.

SI: Were you ever concerned about being recalled to active duty, particularly during Korea?

GM: No, because I was in the 370th Transportation, Major Port. Now, you've got to have a pretty big war before they're going to call a major port. No, no, we were never considered for Korea and Vietnam, no.

SI: I would like to talk a little bit about Rutgers.

GM: Well, my experiences down at Rutgers were good. I enjoyed it. We enjoyed going to the dances and going to the football games and didn't enjoy going to … class so much, [laughter] but that's a great place, the campus, and New Brunswick is … all right, but Rutgers is a good school.

SI: Are you talking about before the war?

GM: Well, I'm talking [about] before the war, yes. Anyway, when I got back from active duty, my wife and I, we came back and we had to live with my in-laws and I went to work for the Seaman's Bank for Savings, 74 Wall Street, and I was a bank auditor. … I worked there about, oh, six or eight years, I guess, a nice outfit, enjoyed the work. I particularly enjoyed the people that I was with, but I wasn't getting much money. I had a child, and then, we were going to have another one, and so, I left them and I went with an outfit called Greenwood Mills in New York City. I was with them about five years, I guess. That job, I didn't care for too much, and then, a Colonel Turner, who was deputy chief of staff in our Reserve outfit, he had his own company, with several partners, called SST Corporation. … The unit would meet once a week and, since he lived in Norwood, sometimes, he would drive and I would ride with him and, sometimes, I would drive and he would drive with me and I got to know Colonel Turner pretty well and he got to know me. So, one day, he said to me, "Gerry, … you know, we're going to have an opening. Our controller is going to leave. … Would you like the job?" So, I'd have to go in and talk with his partners, "Sure." So, we came to an agreement and I went to work for SST and I was there thirty years and left them, retired in 1987. I was controller, and then, I became treasurer of the company and we had, actually, two companies. We had SST Corporation and we had the Schmitz, Schoenwaldt & Turner Company. [laughter] … We dealt in chemicals and pharmaceuticals, bulk, selling agents and importers. We didn't manufacture. We brought the chemicals and pharmaceuticals in bulk and we sold them to the American manufacturers. … By being selling agents meant that, where we got the materials over in Europe, Hoffman-La Roche, Pfizer or Merck, in order to get those materials, would have to go through us, a beautiful set up. Those partners made plenty of money, believe me. [laughter] You wonder why your pharmaceuticals cost so much? I know why, [laughter] but, anyway, I liked the job. They treated me very well. I was happy, stayed with them for thirty years. I could have been there … today, but, you know, I got to be sixty-five and I said, "Hey, look, take my 401(k) and run." [laughter] So, I left. I retired and never expected to live this long, seventeen years as retired. It is wonderful, absolutely wonderful. It's one of the greatest things that ever happened. I've been

very, very fortunate in life. I have no complaints, none at all. If I had to do it all over again, I would do it. I've got a wonderful family, a wonderful wife. Our son-in-law, W. Scott Butler, III, Rutgers Class of 1968, graduated with an Electrical Engineering degree, served in Vietnam as a Captain in the Fourth Infantry Division. He was awarded the Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, Army Commendation Medal and Vietnam Campaign Medal. Scott passed away on February 11, 2003, at the age of fifty-seven. Now, I have a daughter, Pam, … who lost her husband. She lives up in Connecticut, Farmington, outside of Hartford, and she has a daughter who lives in Woodbury, which is about forty-five minutes away from her, her husband works for GE and my oldest daughter, the one that lives in Farmington, has a daughter and two sons and … we have two great-grandchildren. We have a little girl and a little boy and we have a son who lives … outside of Poughkeepsie, he has three children, then, we have the youngest daughter, … lives in Hillsdale, she has two children, the oldest one will be ready to go to college next year. You think you can get her into … Douglass or not? [laughter] So, that's the story, fellows.

SI: Thank you.

GM: It's probably been a long, rambling, distorted thing. …

SI: Most interviews are like this. We try to keep it chronological, but we often jump back and forth.

HZ: I just have a couple of questions.

GM: Sure.

HZ: You went to Rutgers on the GI Bill in 1948 and finished up in 1952.

GM: Right, yes.

TM: While you were working on Wall Street, you went there at night.

GM: That's right, at night, yes, yes.

HZ: You lived in Westwood with your in-laws.

GM: No, my in-laws lived in Hillsdale, … and then, we got an apartment right up the road here, and then, we wanted to eventually build a house. So, I … went to my parents and said, "Hey, can you help me out?" [laughter] So, with their help, we built this house or had it built and we've been here ever since.

HZ: Was there a housing boom going on at that point, because of all the children being born? How was this area changing?

GM: Yes, there were … a lot of houses built, yes, but we like this area and we had been born and brought up here, except my wife was born in Brooklyn. So, she came out here when she was

five years old. She just celebrated her eightieth birthday on October 5th. So, she's been here quite a while.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to put on the tape?

GM: No, I'm very happy that you fellows came. I appreciate it.

MT: Thank you for having us.

GM: As I say, I'm sometimes a little reluctant; in my service years, … nobody, that I know of, ever shot at me and, thank God, I never had to shoot anybody else either, compared to some of these guys that I'm sure you've interviewed. …

SI: Only ten percent, at the most, were in any kind of combat. Therefore, we interview about as many combat veterans and many more in logistics or the Quartermaster Corps or other branches of the military.

GM: Yes, I see. So, I hope I haven't wasted your time.

SI: Not at all. We are trying to get the whole story.

GM: Yes.

HZ: Do you still keep in touch with anyone that you served with?

GM: Oh, the 453rd. Oh, yes, I'm an honorary member of the 453rd alumni. I can show you a hat [that] they sent me. I don't like to wear it, because it shows all the battles they were in and I wasn't in their battles. [laughter] Oh, yes, their ranks are getting depleted. People are dying off. …

HZ: Is there a local VFW around here?

GM: I'm past commander of the Westwood post, VFW Post 130. They're failing. Everybody's dying off. Younger fellows don't want to join … these posts. You can't blame them. In fact, I'm afraid our post is going to have to sell their post. They'll have to sell the house and you can't get anybody to do any work. Nobody wants to be commander anymore or vice-commander. … You know, nobody wants to work. We're getting too old. Nobody wants to go out at night and go to a meeting. I can't. I can't leave my wife alone too long. I mean, she can get around and take care of herself with a walker and wheelchair, but God forbid if anything should happen, if there's a fire, you know, plus the fact [that] I don't want to go out, go to a meeting at night, sit around with about eight or ten guys, discussing what? nothing, really. Everybody's got a different opinion, "Well, we should do this." "No, we're going to do this." [laughter] I can do that at home.

SI: If there is nothing else, thank you very much.

GM: You're welcome. Did I tell you my son was in the Navy for four years? He was on a destroyer escort, the USS *Dyess*, during the Vietnam War and, fortunately, he was sent over to Europe.

SI: Did you want him to go in the Army?

GM: No. I said, "You're going in the Navy, buddy. [laughter] You're not going in the Army and you're not going in the Marines. You're going in the Navy."

MT: Was he drafted or did he enlist?

GM: Well, here, again, he had a high draft number, and so, I said, "Look, you're going to have a choice. You and I are going down; you're going to join up in the Navy." He wasn't too happy about it, but he signed up. He was called. One of the worst days of our lives was when my wife and I took him down to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where he left us to go up to Great Lakes Naval Air and he was in the Navy for four years, came out an electrician's mate, first class, or something like that and it was good for him, because, then, when he came out, he went to Bergen Community College, finished … the two years there, came out … on the dean's list. Now, this is a kid that was not a good high school student. Then, he went to Fairleigh, graduated from Fairleigh Dickinson, on the dean's list. So, we say the Navy was the right thing for him, not that he was ever a discipline problem, he wasn't, but it gave him confidence, which he lacked, and he did a good job. He's now national sales manager for Curtis Instruments. He's got a very good job. So, sometimes, you have to guide these kids, can't let them just go off on their own, right?

SI: Okay, thank you.

GM: You're welcome, thank you.

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

Reviewed by Michael Tietjen 12/1/04
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/24/05
Reviewed by Gerald Merkle 7/8/05