RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE WRAY THOMAS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. George Wray Thomas on October 7, 1995, in Haddonfield, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Alaina Chip: Alaina Chip.

Richard O'Connor: Richard O'Connor.

KP: I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents, who met at Wanamaker's, correct?

George Wray Thomas: That's correct, 1903. In fact, my wife just wrote an article that's been published. Wanamaker's have changed their name, and she wrote quite an article that some of the local papers published, and, in the years gone by, on the lecture circuit, she used to talk about John Wanamaker. So, she's deeply in love with John Wanamaker. We spent a lot of time going to visit his home in Cape May and other things.

KP: Why did your parents choose to work at Wanamaker's?

GT: I have ... no idea. My father came over from England in about 1902 and that was the first place he went to work. My mother was born in Virginia, but, the family moved up to Philadelphia, because her brother was a vice-president of Standard Steel. … Wanamaker's was the largest department store in the area, and she had no formal education, other than a clerical background, so, she went to Wanamaker's. ...

KP: Your father was born in Wales. Why did he emigrate to the United States?

GT: He always said that he came because they were so poor. His father had been a coal miner, and they weren't making much money in Wales, and he saw no opportunity there. So, they left for the great United States of America.

KP: Did the rest of his family come over?

GT: His brother, his mother, his sister, the family came in total.

KP: Why did they settle in the Philadelphia area?

GT: As I said, because my mother's brother had this job in Philadelphia. So, they moved very near the Baldwin Locomotive Works, also in Philadelphia.

KP: How old was your father when he came to the United States?

GT: He was, let's see, about twelve years old.

KP: Did he ever hope to return to Wales?

GT: Oh, no. He was very glad never to go back to Wales. In fact, he never returned to Wales.

KP: Did anyone else in the family ever return to Wales?

GT: None of them ever went back to Wales. They found it so much nicer at 101 (Miflin?) Street, Philadelphia. [laughter]

KP: How long did your father stay with Wanamaker's?

GT: He stayed with Wanamaker's until about 1935, and then, because of age and, oddly enough, a merger of a couple companies, he was let out. So, he went with Rose Greeting Card Company, which had been supplying Central News Company, where he worked with greeting cards. So, it was a logical move.

KP: How long did he stay with that company?

GT: He stayed with Rose until 1939, and then, ... he was diabetic, like me, so, for health and age reasons, that was it.

KP: Did your mother leave Wanamaker's when your parents married or did she continue working there?

GT: No. She continued working for about two or three years. As was true back in those days, as soon as you had a baby, you quit working, and so, she only was at Wanamaker's for three or four years at the most.

KP: Did your mother ever work outside of the home after she had children?

GT: ... When I went away in the Army, in '42, she went to work for a local pen company and she was a part-time worker and part of the World War II, "Come back and help us out," movement. So, she did work a part-time job until 1945.

KP: Did that company do any war effort work?

GT: Not that I know of. It was Ester Brooke Pen Company, which was a fairly well-known company. I assume that they had government contracts.

KP: It sounds like the Great Depression hit your family hard. Is that an accurate statement?

GT: Yeah. The story I like to tell is, we lived in Haddon Heights and our rent was twenty-five dollars a month. We couldn't pay it, so, we moved to where we could pay fifteen dollars a month. So, I lived in four different places in Haddon Heights and that was all part of my father losing his job, ... primarily, yeah.

KP: How long was your father unemployed? How long did his transition between jobs take?

GT: Very, very briefly, a year maybe, not that much.

KP: It sounds as if it was tough going for your family, particularly when he lost his job at Wanamaker's.

GT: Yeah, it was a difficult year. In fact, it was difficult all along those times.

KP: You were attending Haddonfield High at the time.

GT: I graduated from Haddon Heights High School in 1938.

KP: In high school, when did you know that you would be going on to college?

GT: In my senior year, I took a test that they gave in New Jersey then for scholarships and I won a full-time, four-year scholarship to Rutgers. So, from 1937 on, I knew I was going to college.

KP: Before that, had you given college much thought?

GT: No. Financially, it didn't enter my mind and ... it didn't even seem in the books. The only break was, I'd learned about this full-time Rutgers scholarship and that's what saved me.

KP: Your brother went to college. How was he able to afford his tuition?

GT: Yeah. Well, my brother worked, and was a part-time Penn student, and never did get a degree, but, the money he earned working at Strawbridge and Clothiers' went fully toward his education. We were fortunate that my sister married a fellow with a few extra bucks and my brother-in-law helped bail us out by paying rent and contributing to the welfare of the family.

KP: Before coming to Rutgers, what kind of a career did you envision for yourself?

GT: I was always interested in journalism, back even in eighth grade time. On the high school paper, I was a reporter and ended up editor-in-chief. Journalism was right from the start. I never switched from any other interests.

KP: You always wanted to go into journalism, correct?

GT: Yeah, and everybody in the family was in that. I have no reason why that was the case.

KP: Were your parents encouraging of your aspirations?

GT: Totally encouraging, because, in 1939, I told them that I would not go to college, and work, and give them money, and my mother and father sold what insurance policies they had and whatnot, because they felt very strongly for and were totally supportive of my going to Rutgers.

KP: Did you consider any other colleges besides Rutgers? Did the state scholarship make Rutgers your only option?

GT: ... That was it. I did not look anywhere else at that time.

KP: What kind of a community was Haddon Heights when you were growing up?

GT: Oh, Haddon Heights is a delightful town. I'm a very conservative person and ... there's no alcohol sold. It's a very, very conservative town. I happen to like to play sports, and they were totally supportive of my baseball and basketball activities, and I became a teacher's pet, 'cause I was a fairly good student, and so, my Haddon Heights life, until 1935, I lived there fifteen years, was totally a delightful time of my life.

KP: Despite the Depression, it sounds like you have very fond memories of your childhood and education in Haddon Heights.

GT: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. We ate every day.

KP: Did you work at all while you were in high school?

GT: No, no, not to amount to much. I was a proofreader for a weekly newspaper, probably made a buck-and-a-half a week, no big deal. ...

KP: What did you think of the journalism department at Rutgers?

GT: Oh, I thought it was excellent. I wasn't smart enough to go into chemistry. I found that out because I worked in the chemistry lab at that fifty cents an hour opportunity I had then and I found out that my math was not the greatest. So, journalism was easiest for me, and, ... plus, there were nice people in the classes, and the couple teachers we had were kind, and gentle, and the type I like very much.

KP: Before the interview began, you told us that, even though you had a scholarship, you still worked a great deal. Where did you work? How many hours would you work in a week?

GT: Well, I worked, like, about five hours a week in a chemistry lab, cleaning up the place. I worked about ten hours a week on the *Targum*, the newspaper, as the proofreader, and then, Mr. Anderson paid me well. So, I had those two jobs, but, ... I don't know, an average week would be thirty hours, I guess.

KP: You proofread?

GT: For Thatcher Anderson, yes, and I proofread the *Targum*. A lot of guys who worked on the ... *Targum* got nothing. I worked on the *Targum* and got, I don't know, seventy-five cents, eighty cents an hour.

KP: You also mentioned that you sent money home to your family. How much would you send home each week?

GT: Yes. Oh, not a great deal. I'm talking about, as I remember, $12.50 a week.

KP: Is that how much you sent home?

GT: Sent home. That was standard, 'til my senior year, and then, because I was house manager at the fraternity and didn't have to buy meals at all, 'cause I earned that, I probably got up to twenty, twenty-five dollars a week for six, eight months.

KP: You also joined a fraternity. Why?

GT: ... Well, I joined the Phi Kappa Alpha fraternity because I was invited [laughter] and dormitory life didn't appeal to me. You didn't develop the strong bonds, the strong friendships. You had no organized social activities and I guess they're all the main reasons I joined the fraternity when I was a sophomore.

KP: Which dormitory did you live in?

GT: Pell Hall. Is that still there?

KP: Yes.

GT: Still there. In fact, I formed a basketball team with Pell Hall and ... all of us bought shirts with a big "P" on them, which I have photographs of. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed college a great deal.

GT: The answer is a modified yes. You know, when you have to work and you can't go to this or you can't go to that, I couldn't join this club, it hampers your experience. I went out for basketball as a freshmen, and I probably could have made the squad, but, it also would take away opportunities for earning money. So, it was satisfactory.

KP: What did you think of your fraternity?

GT: Oh, great, a great group of guys, yeah.

KP: What was your initiation like?

GT: Well, ... we lived right across the street from the Dean, and so, our initiations were very quiet, nothing exciting at all.

KP: Your fraternity was right across from Dean Metzger.

GT: Yeah, that's who I'm talking about, [laughter] College Avenue, a wonderful guy.

KP: Most of the people I have interviewed have told me a few stories about Dean Metzger.

GT: Mine were all good. When I was a freshman, at the end of the first term that I had done history, I had gotten a D in it, and so, the Dean called me over to talk to me about it, very nicely, and I explained that, because the teacher and I didn't agree on many things, ... the teacher got even with me by giving me a poor grade. ... What's funny, two of the fellows in the class with me were football players who I tutored and both of them got Cs. [laughter] I still love history, but, that's the only place in the world that I know of that I didn't get a fair shake.

KP: You mentioned that you disagreed with this professor. Do you remember who it was?

GT: No, I really don't. ...

KP: Do you remember why you disagreed so much?

GT: Well, I think it was because, at that time, I was a very, very conservative person, and he was a liberal, and, now, of course, I'm a very liberal person, but, back when you're eighteen, nineteen, you know, you're so smart. ... [laughter] That was the main reason.

KP: How did you feel about Roosevelt and the New Deal when you were eighteen and nineteen?

GT: I came from a family that were very Republican. We used to kid that, if my dog ran to be president, as long as he was on the Republican ticket, we'd vote for him. [laughter] Now, I've since, like so many other things, changed my mind, and I look at FDR as one of the greatest presidents we ever had, but, back during that period, I did not.

KP: You were probably a strong supporter of Wendell Willkie in 1940.

GT: ... Oh, yeah, and Harold (Stassen?). Does that mean anything to you? While I was at Rutgers, I was ... able to be with Harold Stassen, and there were eight or ten of us in a room, and I think I was the only one that was such a strong supporter of him.

KP: You mentioned that you became more liberal over time. When did your views change?

GT: … I'm going way later, after the Army, after I got married to an extremely liberal woman. [laughter]

KP: How did the student body at Rutgers feel about either Roosevelt or Willkie?

GT: I think most of us were Republicans and conservatives, but, you know, I was an extremist. I was dumb.

KP: You mentioned that you really enjoyed your journalism courses.

GT: Oh, yes.

KP: Why did you enjoy them so much?

GT: Well, you're pretty much on your own. Jennings, who was a chief professor, was a wonderful guy, and the assignments he gave were always interesting, and I learned more from his classes than from any other teacher I've had.

KP: Did you hope to become a reporter after graduation?

GT: Oh, yeah. ... Well, I had a relative at RCA Victor in Camden in the communications area, and I had worked toward working for him, until December 7th, '41, and that kind of got changed.

KP: However, you had made some plans for after graduation.

GT: Oh, yeah, yeah.

KP: You mentioned that you were very conservative. Between 1939 and 1941, how did you feel about Roosevelt's policies and the coming of World War II?

GT: ... I thought, then, it was a crime that we got involved. Now, since I've watched old movies and read a lot about FDR, I realize that it was inevitable that we get in the war, but, if you'd asked me in '39, and '40, '41, why, I was opposed to FDR. In fact, my brother-in-law wanted to kill me. I probably shouldn't tell you this story, [laughter] but, I came home from Rutgers one day, I don't recall the background, but, I said, "Hitler is a great man." I prescribed to most of Hitler's philosophy of bringing back Germany to be a power, and, of course, I was very wrong, which I learned quickly as I got in the war.

KP: Between 1939 and 1941, you did not see Germany or Japan as the threats that they were.

GT: Oh, no, no, no.

KP: From your perspective, it only seemed as if Hitler had taken a bankrupt country and turned it into a strong country, correct?

GT: Correct.

KP: How did the rest of your classmates feel? Many of the men I have interviewed remember a feeling of unity on December 7, 1941, but, most have forgotten the debates that occurred before Pearl Harbor.

GT: Yeah, well, I have to be careful what I say here, because you're taping it, but, in my class, there were, generally, sixteen, eighteen fellows, and eight or nine of them were Jewish boys, and that had a great influence, I guess, because I knew how they hated Hitler, and most of them are still my friends. In fact, Mort Lichtman, from Washington, writes to me regularly, Clark Gutman from Chicago, and others.

KP: I interviewed Clark Gutman.

GT: Did you interview Clark?

KP: Yes.

GT: Okay, he was a good friend. So, I'm not anti-Semitic. It was just, at that time, I was more interested in Germany returning to its place in the world. My wife is of a German background, so, that influenced me, later, of course.

KP: You had a lot of empathy for Germany at the time. Where do you think it stemmed from? What did you know about Germany at the time?

GT: Oh, at that stage, nothing.

RO: I saw soccer listed underneath your name in the 1942 Yearbook.

GT: Yes.

RO: Did you play soccer?

GT: I played soccer only one year. ... I wasn't very good and, secondly, it cut into my earning opportunities. Now, what I'm happy to say, now, is, I have three grandchildren, they're all here today, the only thing in life worth thinking about is soccer, ... but, my soccer was very limited, strictly because of the need to spend time earning a few bucks, rather than enjoying it. Plus, I wasn't very good. I have to be first team, you know, to be happy with anything. ...

RO: Was that your favorite sport, besides basketball?

GT: Oh, yeah. I enjoyed soccer very much. Now, my favorite sport was basketball, but, I enjoyed soccer. ... I still think soccer is a great game. I'm happy to see it in the high schools around here, replacing football, pretty much. The football has gone down and the soccer competition is wonderful around this area.

RO: You were also in the Scarlet Key.

GT: Yeah.

RO: What was that like?

GT: Well, the Scarlet Key were official hosts and ... the school provided us with nice, gray coats with an insignia on them. One of my fondest memories was going to the New Brunswick Railroad Station and escorting Norman Thomas up to the gym. Now, see, there's part of my Socialist background, I guess.

KP: Norman Thomas was a regular speaker at Rutgers.

GT: Oh, then, yeah.

KP: What did you think of Norman Thomas at the time?

GT: Brilliant.

KP: However, politically, you disagreed with him.

GT: I disagreed, but, ... his charm was overwhelming. He's a charming man.

KP: You sensed that even through your limited contact with him.

GT: Oh, yeah, yeah, spent an hour with him is all, probably.

KP: Another frequent visitor to campus was Paul Robeson. What did you think of Paul Robeson at the time?

GT: Well, I never saw Paul Robeson. I totally dislike classical music, and even though Robeson's from Philadelphia and even though he was at Rutgers, I had nothing against his desire to be a Russian Communist. So, I guess I'm neutral. ...

KP: Did you ever hear him perform at Rutgers?

GT: No, no, no.

KP: What did you think of the social life at Rutgers? How much were you able to take part in?

GT: Well, that was limited to our fraternity life, which was very adequate, very pleasant, and then, at the big college dances, I used to work the cloakroom, checking the coats, and then, when we got filled, we'd sneak down and take a few dances, and then, go back to the cloakroom. So, it

was a cheap evening [laughter] with, like, I remember, one night, ... Larry Clinton. I loved his music then. I don't know whether you've even heard of him, but, anyway, he was great, ... but, the social life was only because of the fraternity.

KP: How did you meet your wife? Was it before the war?

GT: No, no, the answer is no. I met her in 1942. The war had started in '41. I had worked at a hotel in Ocean City as a desk clerk and she was a school teacher two years older than I was. She came to the hotel where I was and asked me if I'd get her a job as a waitress. Well, her appearance was such that I would have fired two people to keep her, but, I couldn't do that. So, I sent her to another hotel in Ocean City where I had a good friend, the Flanders, if any of you know South Jersey, know their hotel, but, anyway, that's how ... we met, because of our experience at Ocean City.

KP: You were in the ROTC program. It was mandatory for two years.

GT: Correct.

KP: What did you think of ROTC?

GT: Well, back in those years, it was very boring. We had a very poor grade of instructors and I was glad that I only had two years.

KP: It sounds like you had no desire to be in the advanced ROTC?

GT: No desire, no desire.

KP: Did any part of your ROTC training prove useful to you when you were in the Army?

GT: No, I don't think so, other than I knew how to march, knew left, right, left, right. That's about all. [laughter]

KP: What did you think of chapel?

GT: That's a very pleasant experience. ... We had first class speakers each Sunday and I went with great interest, great enjoyment. I am not a religious person now, nor was I then, but, in chapel, I really liked the people that they brought on campus then. I guess my way of saying it is, I thought the faculty at Rutgers was sub-standard when I was there, but, ... bringing in top flight guests, such as in the chapel, helped.

KP: You felt that you were exposed to many different people and ways of thinking.

GT: Oh, yes, yeah, yeah. They did a good job that way.

KP: Where were you when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

GT: When Pearl Harbor came, I was in Cape May, New Jersey, with a group of high school friends that were staying at a hotel down there just for a nice, pleasant weekend and I had, also, with me my fraternity brother. So, it was a social event and, as soon as we heard about the war, we found out when the next train was to Philadelphia, so that we could go on to New Brunswick, because, at that time, then, I became a very good American. I didn't think anybody had the right to attack us and I was ready to get even with them in whatever way I could.

KP: It sounds like you were all set to enlist.

GT: Yeah. I would have enlisted, yes. Instead, I stayed and worked an extra two months, but, ... I did not regret going into the Army from the very first day. The only sad part was, I had to leave my girlfriend.

KP: You finished out the semester at Rutgers.

GT: Oh, yes, yeah. We had graduation. That was in May of '42.

KP: Your graduation date was pushed up.

GT: Couple months, weeks, ahead, yeah.

KP: You decided to enlist in the Army. Why did you pick the Army? Many people tried to avoid the infantry.

GT: Well, there's a case where, maybe, my ROTC at Rutgers influenced me, 'cause I figured, you know, I was already one step ahead of the rest, I guess. So, there was no good reason that I can think of.

KP: Did you ever consider the Navy or the Air Corps?

GT: Never gave it a thought. I wanted to get in the Coast Guard, and I went to a friend that was a commander in the Coast Guard, and he said, "Well, I'll put you on the list. You're about one hundred," on the list that has one hundred. They only need ten, so, that was a short lived desire. The only reason I wanted to go in the Coast Guard is, I love Ocean City, and the Coast Guard operated out of Ocean City, as well as Cape May, and I was hoping, at that time, to stay ... near home.

KP: You were in Ocean City in the Summer of ...

GT: '42.

KP: Yes. There was quite a bit of U-boat activity off of the Jersey coast at that time.

GT: You know, I have a book here that talks about all of the boats that were sunk in '42 off the coast and I was totally amazed. In Ocean City, I know we took all the lights on the boardwalk and painted them black, the ones that faced out into the water. ... I knew that, I don't know, I just remember, maybe like by eleven o'clock at night, everything had to be totally dark, but, I was unaware of the U-boat activity until three weeks ago, the extent of it.

KP: You did not see any ships off in the distance.

GT: Never saw a ship.

KP: You never witnessed a sinking.

GT: Didn't even know. They kept that a very great secret.

KP: Did you hear any rumors about German landings or activities off of the coast?

GT: ... Not at that time. There's many stories that came later, most of which have been found to be false. There's a beautiful motel in Sea Isle City, and it was once said that a German U-boat captain looked over and saw this land, and, when the war was over, he came over and built this beautiful motel. That story stayed for two or three years, until, finally, it was found that it's so much bologna. [laughter]

KP: The Summer of 1942 was very fateful for you, not only because of the war, but, because you also met your future wife that summer.

GT: ... Right.

KP: Did you begin dating that summer?

GT: Very seriously, yeah. Well, not seriously, seriously, good. In fact, ... I'll tell you, I probably, before I became engaged, had five dates with my ultimate wife.

KP: You got serious very quickly.

GT: Yeah, well, I was ripe for it, you know. When you get to be twenty-two, that happens.

KP: You enlisted in September of 1942.

GT: Correct.

KP: Were you engaged before you went off to war?

GT: No, no. My wife didn't propose to me until Spring of '43.

KP: Were you still in the States or were you overseas?

GT: No. She came to see me at Camp Croft, South Carolina.

KP: Do you have any other memories of the Summer of 1942?

GT: No, just, you know, having a nice girl. ... What else is there? swimming in the ocean, which I love. What else is there?

KP: How many hours did you work per week?

GT: Oh, I had a good schedule. I was scheduled for forty and always worked closer to sixty hours, as you had to in those days.

KP: When you enlisted in the Army, did you know where you wanted to fight? Did you want to fight against Japan or Germany? Did you have any sense of that?

GT: I probably didn't. I guess I had greater hatred for Japan. Pearl Harbor bothered me a lot, and then, my wife was a German, so, I couldn't feel as strongly against them. Her grandfather had been a general in the German-Prussian Army and whatnot, so, no, my hatred was for the Japanese.

KP: You enlisted as a private. When did you decide to go for a commission?

GT: Well, I went up to Fort Dix as a private and probably stayed two or three weeks, and then, I went and saw the Sergeant and said, "Look, I want to be an officer." So, they sent me to Camp Croft, South Carolina, where I stayed until I qualified for Officers' Candidate School ... as an Army second lieutenant.

KP: At Fort Dix, were you just waiting for an assignment?

GT: Oh, yeah.

KP: Had you gone through basic training yet?

GT: No, no.

KP: Did the waiting lead you to apply for OCS?

GT: No, no, no. I had applied earlier in that two or three weeks. They said, "When the next train has a vacancy," 'cause everybody was leaving Dix as soon as they got there.

KP: You were stuck there because the trains were overloaded.

GT: Yeah, correct.

KP: You were sent to Camp Croft for training. Was this your first big trip outside of New Jersey? Had you traveled much before the war?

GT: No. That's the first big trip out of New Jersey, yeah.

KP: What did you think of the trip?

GT: Loved it, ... yeah. Well, I got to Georgia, and then, rode, then, walked in the Red Clay District, during rain storms, and I figured, "Why in the devil did I show the desire to come here? I could have stayed as a private in Fort Dix."

KP: What did you think of the South?

GT: Well, I've changed completely. I wasn't happy ... then. I would have rather been at Camp Drum, New York, or somewhere else then. I've since changed. Most of my friends have all moved to North Carolina, South Carolina, or ... Florida. We visited all of them, and so, my attitude toward the South has changed strongly.

KP: However, you did not think that way during the war.

GT: ... Not during the war, no. I also was delighted. When I had been an officer for two days, they said, "We're going to ship you out," and that was delightful. I figured they sent you to places like Georgia and South Carolina so that you would want to go overseas. So, I went over with great enthusiasm.

KP: How would you rate your training?

GT: Oh, at Fort Benning, Georgia, excellent, very fine officers, very sharp guys, very understanding people. I was very, very fortunate in having first class training at Fort Benning.

KP: You went to Camp Croft for OCS, and then, you went to Fort Benning.

GT: No, no. Fort Benning's the Officers' Candidate School. No, I was in basic training at Camp Croft.

KP: You went through standard basic.

GT: Standard. You had to go through, ... I forget what the time was.

KP: Then, you went to OCS.

GT: Right.

KP: At Fort Benning.

GT: Right.

KP: What do you remember about your basic training, and then, your OCS training?

GT: Well, I enjoyed them, because the fellows we were with, I was with, were all nice, dedicated guys. They were all very pleasant. ... We had a wonderful organization, I think.

KP: Did you even like your sergeants?

GT: Oh, yeah, very much, yeah. ... Some of the movies I see, I sort of laugh at. There was never any bitterness, never any forced marches, never any screaming at you.

KP: You think that the movies exaggerate.

GT: Oh, definitely, ... as compared with my experiences.

KP: It sounds like your training gave you a lot of self-confidence.

GT: I told my wife, well, this comes later, that the training I got as an officer and my life in China was far more valuable than my experience at Rutgers. I matured much quicker, got smarter much quicker. There's no comparison. Rutgers is a dull part of my life, as compared to the military.

KP: When did you have any idea that you were being sent to China?

GT: When the boat landed at Bombay. [laughter] We had no idea where we were going. All I know is, they divided my class of, I think, like, one hundred and sent ninety to Italy and ten to China, and, of course, I was lucky that I got to China.

KP: Why do you say that you were lucky?

GT: Well, my friends that went to Italy, a lot of them were killed. When I went to China, of the group that went, none of us died in the war. The Chinese people worshipped us. So, there were, you know, a limited number, you know. As soon as you go into any town, they go, "(*Ding how?), ding how*." That means, "Very good." So, they were delighted to have the Americans. ...

KP: It sounds like the men in your class who went to Italy were used as replacement officers.

GT: Yeah.

KP: They were not sent to new divisions.

GT: No, no. They were all replacements, I think.

KP: It was lucky that you were sent to China.

GT: No doubt.

KP: What was your trip to Bombay like?

GT: We left from New York by boat, and we went to the South Atlantic, and we went down to Rio de Janeiro, and then, around Cape Horn. ... The reason we were going by ourselves is, there's no protective boats around and we were going way, way out of the German U-boat lanes. So, there was never any fear of being sunk, because ... it took us thirty-one days to go from New York to Bombay, which is double what it could have been if they wanted to get us there in a hurry.

KP: You did not go through the Canal.

GT: That's correct.

KP: You took the long way.

GT: Long way, yeah.

KP: Do you remember the name of the ship? What else do you remember about your long voyage?

GT: Well, we were on the *Mariposa*, that had been like a Cunard, White Star quality boat, and the food was superior. The bunking arrangements weren't the best, but, we all had an individual bunk. We didn't have to share it with anybody. The toilet facilities, being on a quality cruise liner, were great. I liked the *Mariposa* so much that, when we got to Hawaii, in about ... 1980, maybe, the *Mariposa* was sitting there at a dock, and we, quick, grabbed a cab to hurry down, so that I could show my wife and our friends the *Mariposa*. Unfortunately, twelve hours late we were. The *Mariposa* had gone to sea, but, it was a quality ship. Now, I came home on an Navy destroyer and there's a little bit of a difference between a cruise ship and an Navy destroyer.

KP: After being on the Navy destroyer, you realized how good you had had it.

GT: Yeah. [laughter]

KP: What do you remember about the Army destroyer?

GT: Well, it was overcrowded, badly overcrowded, and the food was not nearly as good, and, when we got into the North Atlantic, we got into some bad seas, where, you know, the boat was up like this and down like that. That doesn't give you fond memories, whereas, on the contrary, going on the *Mariposa*, ... I don't remember tilting two inches. [laughter]

KP: Although you were in uniform, you were out of submarine danger for most of the voyage.

GT: Oh, yeah, yeah.

KP: If not for the Army, it would have been like a cruise.

GT: Yeah, oh, yeah. We did. There weren't any girls on board. [laughter]

KP: How did you pass the time?

GT: Boy, you played an awful lot of cards. I played cribbage a lot. I don't know if you ever heard of cribbage. I played cribbage a lot. Now, I'm a very narrow minded person. I did not play poker, but, most all the guys played poker.

KP: For stakes?

GT: Good stakes. In fact, one of the guys in my outfit came to me, at that time, I was a lieutenant, he said, "Lieutenant, would you do me a favor?" I said, "I will do anything I can to help you." He says, "Take this envelope and don't ever give it back to me until we're back in the United States." I said, "I can't do that. Besides, what's so important in the envelope?" He said, "Four thousand dollars," that he won playing poker.

KP: That was a lot of money.

GT: Oh, gosh, yeah.

KP: You could buy a lot with four thousand dollars in 1942.

GT: You could have bought your way out of the Army, maybe. [laughter]

KP: Were all of the officers and enlisted men on board destined for the CBI?

GT: See, in China, we took, for example, ten officers, but, only thirty enlisted men. The enlisted men we took with us were the radio operators. ... We didn't take any infantry.

KP: Did you already have your men assigned to you before arriving in theater?

GT: No, ... when we got to Kunming, China.

KP: You simply had a group of enlisted men going over with you.

GT: Right.

KP: You had no clue about what your assignment was until you arrived in Bombay.

GT: Well, we got to Ledo, in India, and it was just called "the Polo Grounds," and we got there, and, at that point, you know, an American lieutenant came to me and said, "You're going to be assigned to a Chinese division, ... you and two enlisted men," and so, we knew, as we left India, what was in store for us.

GT: What did you know about China before you arrived there?

GT: Well, I knew the guy down the corner in Haddon Heights that did my shirts. I knew zero.

KP: Had you ever taken a Chinese history course?

GT: Zero.

KP: Were you trained at all about China?

GT: Zero.

KP: Initially, how did you greet the news of your assignment?

GT: Oh, you know, a little fear, but, as soon as we got into China, I'll never forget this, when we landed at the airport at Kunming and we got into trucks to ride to what had been the 14th Air Force barracks, thousands of Chinese were lined along the streets and all of them were, as I showed you before, going, "*Ding how*," which is the Chinese way of saying, "Welcome." ... In addition, when I got out into the field with the Chinese Second Division, I had twelve Chinese assigned to guard me. So, when I'd go to bed at night, sleep in my jungle hammock, they were a perimeter around me, and so, you know, I had it better than I ever had it in the United States. [laughter]

KP: You were flown from India to China.

GT: Yeah.

KP: Were you briefed at all before you got to China?

GT: No, it was just what I said. At Ledo, they told me, "You would be with a Chinese division and you're to assist the Air Corps. When the Air Corps, the 14th Air Force, fly over, you put out panels to show where the Japanese were and you put out panels so that they could airdrop food to you." ... We knew that's what we were going to do when we left India.

KP: How long were you in India?

GT: I got in India in November of '43 and left in September of '45, almost two years.

KP: You were assigned to a Chinese division. Was it just you and your radio operator out there?

GT: Yeah, most of the time, yeah.

KP: Where were you sent to in China? What were your initial impressions of the Chinese soldiers and military?

GT: This is southwest China where I was, and the Chinese, of course, are very poor, very ill-trained, they had no adequate equipment, and it became my job to get the officers of the Chinese together, train them, and show them how to fire our various weapons. So, it's by working with the Chinese officers that we got it done. Most of them were very intelligent and alert, but, the troops were poorly equipped, very poorly equipped.

KP: What did you think of the capabilities of the Chinese Army and its potential? Did you think that it could be made into an efficient fighting force?

GT: I thought not, unless there was much, much more support than we were getting. I don't think they could have made it. I think China would have fallen if the Japanese hadn't been knocked out of Burma by the English and the Americans, but, ... the Chinese troops I was with were sad.

KP: It must have been a frustrating job.

GT: Well, it depends on me. Now, I'm not a frustrating person. Many people might be, but, I enjoyed it, because they were so good to me, you know. When people are good to you, you forget anything like that that's not pleasant.

KP: It sounds like you developed a good rapport with the officers that you worked with.

GT: Very good. I liked them so much that I wrote to my mother to buy Army shoes and I arranged for them to be airdropped near (Baoshan?).

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

KP: You mentioned that you had asked your mother ...

GT: To buy high top shoes, and then, to ship them by US Mail. They came into Kunming, and then, I arranged for the airdrop system at Kunming to ... airdrop these shoes to us, and I got all of

them that she had sent, which was, maybe, six or eight pairs, I don't remember, and so, I issued them to my so-called "staff," and I had no worries about friendship after that.

KP: That was a nice gesture.

GT: ... I keep repeating, these people were very, very good persons.

KP: How did they feel about the war's progress? You may not have been frustrated, but, were they frustrated at all?

GT: No. … They were frustrated because they came from Hunan Province, which was quite a bit north, and they were very unhappy to be so far away from home, and, also, in China, there's a lot of language differences. The Hunanese and the Yunanese languages are as complicated as French and English, almost, so that that was a frustration, the language difficulties.

KP: Did they express this frustration through language?

GT: Yeah. They were being fed. ... None of them were that unhappy. They knew that if they were home, they might be starving.

KP: It sounds like you had a lot of independence.

GT: Correct.

KP: How much contact did you have with your superiors when you were in the field?

GT: Well, ... see, I had a radio and I'd talk daily on my radio with a colonel that was back in Kunming. ... The radios were excellent, thirty, forty mile range, so, we had good contact, adequate contact.

KP: How often would you actually see the colonel that you reported to?

GT: Oh, maybe once in three months.

KP: Were you and your radioman the only two Americans out there?

GT: Well, after I'd been there a while, then, they assigned another American officer to be with me. So, ... most of the time, there were two officers and ... two radio men.

KP: Did you ever go up to the front lines with your Chinese division?

GT: Yes. ... We went to the Battle of Tengchong. Tengchong is a city in southwest China of maybe thirty-five, 40,000, and it was important to the Japanese to hold it. ... I helped advise the officers that were close to me, the staff, as to what I thought would be a way to drive the

Japanese out. Now, this was only a three-day battle, so, my combat experience is limited to this three-day battle.

KP: How close did you get to the bullets?

GT: Close to the bullets?

KP: Yes, the front lines.

GT: A hundred yards, I guess.

KP: What did you think of combat?

GT: I'm a lover at heart, so, I was very happy to stay out of more combat, because, at that time, I also knew about my friends that had lost their lives in Italy and whatnot. ... I felt I had too much to go home to and combat would be my least popular thing.

KP: Were you scared at all when you were under fire or were you simply too busy?

GT: ... I think you become too busy. You get excited. While we were in combat, a Japanese plane flew over, with a big, red circle on the side. Then, I was afraid. I thought that he'd be dropping a bomb where I was. That's about the only time I was scared. Just with gunfire, rifles, I don't think I was scared. I would be now, because I know so much, but, I didn't know so much then.

KP: How well did your Chinese troops perform in this battle?

GT: The thing that saved us was, from the other side, out of Burma, the Americans that were in Burma helped from the west and we attacked from the east. Now, the biggest help in the battle were American trained Chinese troops that hit the other side of Tengchong.

KP: Your division had problems.

GT: Oh, well, the only thing that's good, we'd lost relatively few. We lost one of my close friends and that was pretty tough.

KP: You developed some strong friendships with the Chinese.

GT: Oh, excellent, excellent.

KP: How did you speak with them? Did you learn Chinese? Did they learn English?

GT: Well, one of the Chinese ... was called, "(*Foniquan?).*" That means interpreter. So, there's an interpreter assigned to me. We'd sit down together and read that book, I don't have any idea

where I got it from, that had both the Chinese and English, and we'd talk back and forth, and, that way, we picked up enough Chinese. He did better with English than I did with Chinese, because, before he became my *foniquan*, he had been in Canton ... and learned some English, pretty good English, in fact. So, I'd have been lost without him.

KP: It sounds like you picked up quite a bit of Chinese.

GT: I'll tell you one of the funniest stories about that. One of my jobs was to teach the Chinese how to fire a mortar. I don't know if you know what a mortar is. ... Anyway, I had given the lecture ten, twelve times and my interpreter always interpreted it to the troops. So, this one day, I spoke the whole lecture in Chinese, and I went once, shook my head, and said, "What's going on here?" and the interpreter is laughing. He says, "You're speaking Mandarin Chinese, and these guys came down from Hunan, and they don't know Hunanese [Mandarin]." ... So, I learned English [Mandarin Chinese] because of an interpreter, to answer your question directly.

KP: That is a pretty impressive command of Chinese, to be able to give an entire lecture.

GT: Oh, yeah. Well, that's the only thing I could talk about. I couldn't go to a restaurant and order a roast beef sandwich, but, ... I could talk about how you set the mortar, how you drop the shell, how you pull the pin, and I could do all that in Chinese.

KP: It sounds like you spent most of your time training the Chinese in the manner that you had been trained at Camp Croft and Fort Benning.

GT: Correct, yeah, yeah.

KP: Besides mortars, what other weapons did you train them with?

GT: Well, we used, I'm trying to think of the name of the rifle. They don't use it any more. I lost part of my hearing because of it.

KP: The BAR?

GT: A what? It's like a BAR, only stronger, and I taught them how to fire that. ... You know, we built targets a hundred yards away. I trained them in how to change the setting so that the bullet went where you wanted it to go, but, it was Czechoslovakian equipment [a Bren gun?] and not as good as had been made in the USA.

RO: When I was reading through your alumni file, I found a clipping about the CCC, the Chinese ...

GT: Combat Command.

RO: Were you a part of that unit?

GT: Oh, yeah. ... That's a title. First, we went over as Headquarters Y-Force, then, we became the Chinese Combat Command, just a name title.

RO: What role did air power play in your operations?

GT: Well, the Chinese would never have won without the support of the US ... Air Force. General Chennault was in (Yunnan Yi?), which was about fifty miles from me, and we had a lot of radio contact with his sergeant and my sergeant, and we helped in bringing the planes in to bomb a little bit. Most of it, though, was bringing the food in for the Americans and bringing food in and supplies for the Chinese. The bombing would have been ten percent of the air power, I guess. I think the air power had a bigger threat than there was an actual need for.

RO: How did you receive news about the other theaters of war?

GT: The way I learned was, the Chinese general I was with had a short wave radio and I learned that they had bombed Nagasaki because the Chinese general came and told me. I did not know that until then. So, a lot of my information about what was going on in Europe was given to me by this Chinese general, who I saw once a week, once in ten days, and he used to have Tokyo on, and there was a whole station in Tokyo that spoke hours at a time in English, and this general spoke pretty good English, and so, that's how I got up-to-date on the war in Italy and the war in Germany. ...

KP: We read a letter that you wrote to the *Rutgers Alumni Magazine* in which you said that you were glad to receive the *Alumni Magazine* because you had very little reading material in English. Did you receive mail regularly?

GT: No. I just got letters from my wife, ... at that time, my girlfriend.

RO: What were general conditions like for you, in terms of food, recreation, medicine, *et cetera*?

GT: Oh, well, see, for me, most of the food I got was American food and it was good. We went to Chinese banquets about ... at least once a month, and they gave us the best food they had, and that was adequate. What they were smart enough to do was give us an alcohol drink first, known as (*ging bao?)* juice, and we used to have a shot of *ging bao* juice, and then, anything tasted good. A side issue, again, on this was, ... I learned, after I'd been there for three or four banquets, I watched the Chinese who were with me, they'd pick up their little cup of *ging bao* juice, and promptly dump it down into their coffee pot, and put ... an empty thing to their lips. That's how they stayed sober. They weren't consuming any of the alcohol at all. So, I learned that trick, [laughter] but, no, ... the food was as good as you can expect it to be, you know, in the Army. I'm one of the stupid guys. There are a few people that will tell you that the Army K rations were good.

KP: You are not the only one.

GT: Are there others?

KP: One or two other people have said that they liked them, but, most people did not.

GT: I know most people hated them, but, you know, ... you get a little can of peas, add water to them, and they taste as good as the peas my wife could put on the table this afternoon. You got carrots, dried cut carrots, which I love, and you could get those. Of course, you got chocolate bars, which were excellent, excellent chocolate. ... After we'd been out in the field fighting for a while, we'd all come back, or about ten of us got back into a group, and the one fellow with me was a baker, and we'd go buy flour from the Chinese, and he'd make donuts which were as good as Dunkin' Donuts make. ... I guess the best story I could tell you on supplies we got from America is, I didn't smoke, but, we got a carton a month or some allowance, and most of my guys didn't smoke. So, one day, we took nine cartons of American cigarettes to a Chinese farmer and bought a calf from him. We got a live calf for nine cartons and, you know, I asked him why he was going to do this. He says, "Well, if you guys leave us, the Japanese are going to take over and I'll have nothing. At least I have nine cartons of cigarettes," which he could then sell at tremendous prices, but, no, they took good care of us, food-wise. I slept all the time in a jungle hammock, most of the time, and they are ... very, very comfortable. I could, now, go out and tie it between two trees and ... feel good about it. In fact, that used to be how we'd pick out where we were going to bivouac at night. We would set up camp only if there's enough places to hook up our jungle hammocks. The Chinese soldiers all just had bed rolls.

AC: I have read that there was very little recreation in China. How did you pass the time when you were not in combat or in training?

GT: Yeah, ... that's correct, little recreation. When I first got to China, we were in a town called Dali, and we played basketball there, and then, after I went out into the field with the Army troops, we had no recreation for twelve, fourteen months. I also walked twenty-five miles a day, up and down the mountains. So, we didn't need any recreation.

RO: What was the status of your medical supplies and support?

GT: Medical?

RO: Yes.

GT: ... See, with us, we usually had a jeep and, when ... we needed medical supplies, one of us would get in the jeep and ride to the Air Force medical facility. So, we had adequate attention, and then, once every three months or so, they'd tell us to come into the medical department at one of the air fields, and there'd be a dentist there to work on your teeth, and he got power, you know, by ... pumping his foot down.

KP: What kind of care would a wounded or injured Chinese soldier receive?

GT: We had airdropped to us all Johnson and Johnson bandages and whatnot. So, that's what they got. If they got a bullet in them, there wasn't anybody there to dig the bullet out.

KP: Were there any surgeons?

GT: No, no surgeons until you got back to the cities. See, now, the religious people, mostly Germans, had hospitals, like in Bao Song, Yunnan Yi, Dali, all places a hundred miles away or so which did have trained medical people.

RO: What did you know about the political battles within the CBI between General Stilwell and Chiang Kai-shek?

GT: Well, concerning General Chiang Kai-shek, who we all called "Shanker Jack," which isn't nice, but, that's what he was called, we were with the top flight people, like at these monthly dinners I told you about. We'd go into Kunming or Yunnan Yi. Major Wally Wong gave us many dinners and he was very close to Chiang Kai-shek. So, I never saw Chiang Kai-shek. He was in Chunking, a hundred miles north of where I was, but, a couple of military, full generals near me were all good fellahs. Now, I was told, I never saw it, that when they airdropped, for our jeep, fifty-five gallons of gasoline, a lot of that ended up in ... the Chinese cars, not in our jeep, but, so what, the theft was by these guys? I have no idea.

KP: You never saw any signs of pilfering, for example, on airdrops.

GT: Never. When we'd airdrop, well, it could have been, 'cause … we'd usually go to the top of the hill, you know, where you'd have a three hundred feet by four hundred feet or something view, and the Chinese would be placed around the perimeter, so that it's pretty hard for anybody to get in and steal, unless your own Chinese troops were doing it, and I have no knowledge of that. I know that everything that radio said was coming arrived. If they said, "We're going to send you twenty-four packs of K rations," we always got twenty-four.

KP: Did you ever get involved with the supply side of the division?

GT: No, never, no. Mine was mostly combat, direct combat, related.

KP: As well as training.

GT: Yeah, well, that, yeah.

KP: What did you think of the Chinese people?

GT: Well, see, you feel badly, because ... where I was was the worst part of China. Southwest China is nothing but open fields, and they raised cattle, but, there wasn't any industry nearby. It was a farming area. ... That's all I can say on that.

KP: One CBI veteran I interviewed commented on how poor China was. They had thought of themselves as poor when they were growing up during the Depression, however, when they got to China, they were absolutely flabbergasted by the poverty.

GT: I would guess I was blind to that. My attention was strictly ... on the troops and not on that. I'm surprised that you've talked to CBI people. I don't know anybody from Rutgers who ever saw China-Burma-India.

KP: I have interviewed two people from the CBI, one stationed in India and one who was attached to the Air Force. Also, Vince Kramer had a mission similar to yours.

GT: Oh, was he? ... Vince Kramer is a name I know, but, I didn't know him. ... One of my nice experiences in the Army is, I got to chauffeur General Chennault from Bao Song to (Wong Ding?), Burma, for the official opening of the Burmese Road, and I was with Chennault that day, and I can't tell you what a thrill it was to be with a great guy that you hear so much about, and he was just as great to me as he would have been to the President of the United States.

KP: You spent a day with General Chennault. It sounds like you were impressed with him.

GT: Oh, yeah, not just me, but, there were about three or four other Army officers that went with him, oh, yeah.

KP: Was the opening of the Burma Road a big event?

GT: Yeah, well, that's what we were there for. See, we were opening it from the China side to Wang Ding, and then, ... mostly Chinese troops, ... with the help of the Burmese, had opened it from Ledo Road down to Wang Ding, where the Burma Road opened, and so, ... that ceremony happened by 1945. We only did that about three months before I came home.

KP: General Stilwell was, and still is, a controversial figure.

GT: See, he was on the India side. I was on the Chinese side. I never saw Stilwell. Stilwell left a few months before I got to China, so, I've heard these things told about Stilwell, but, I don't know any of it. The only thing I know is what I've seen on TV.

KP: Did you know Wedemeyer?

GT: I knew him, yeah. Wedemeyer is a good friend of mine.

KP: You dealt with Wedemeyer.

GT: Oh, yeah, yeah. He comes here. He calls in about once in six months. Again, I was highly impressed with him.

KP: I get the impression that you have a positive view toward the American effort in the CBI.

GT: ... I think the American effort, with the absence of ground troops, was superior. I mean, the airdropping and the training we were able to give was all first class.

KP: Were you aware of the war with Mao and the Communists? Were you near that area?

GT: No, no. That was quite a bit to the east of where I was. No, I wasn't even aware of it.

KP: Did it ever come up in a staff discussion with Wedemeyer?

GT: No, no, no. ... During my couple of discussions with Wedemeyer, we only talked about, "What are you doing? What do we need to do? How can I help you with your assignment?" We didn't talk about the global war or anything.

KP: When did you become aware of the global war with Communism? Was it after you returned to the United States?

GT: Yeah. I didn't know about it until I was back in the United States.

KP: World War II was hard on China, but, the ensuing civil war was even more difficult for the Chinese. Did you have any idea of what was looming in China's future?

GT: I really don't know. I don't know how to answer that. I guess I was totally selfish, interested only in my own welfare. I have no feeling about the Communist activity in China whatsoever. When I left in October of '45, nothing was known by me that there'd been problems elsewhere in China. I knew that Chiang Kai-shek was not popular with all Chinese and ... that is the limit of my knowledge, because ... General Marshall Wally Wong ... told me that he was opposed to Chiang Kai-shek.

KP: You knew that there was some dissension.

GT: I knew there was dissension, but, the degree of it or seriousness of it, I had no feeling for whatsoever.

KP: It sounds like the fall of China came as a surprise to you.

GT: Yeah, that's a fair statement.

KP: Did you know anything about Mao?

GT: None. No, I didn't know anything about General Mao until I got back to the United States.

KP: You mentioned that you learned about the bombing of Nagasaki through the news.

GT: Yeah.

KP: When you heard this news, did you realize that the war was over for you?

GT: No. It didn't sink through. It did not sink through for two weeks or so before I thought, "Oh, boy, I'm going to go home," but, when it first happened, well, they also bombed Hamburg, and they bombed Berlin, and they bombed London, and they bombed Paris. I just thought this was just another bombing. [laughter]

KP: However, you soon learned that Japan had surrendered. How did that affect your mission?

GT: Well, immediately, they got all the Americans ... and the radio operators that were around in the field and brought us all together for the final two weeks before we were able to return to the United States. So, ... that's all. It was limited, too.

KP: You were pulled out very soon after the surrender.

GT: Oh, yeah. We were pulled away from relations with the Chinese troops completely, yeah.

KP: You did not supervise the surrender of any Japanese forces.

GT: Not a bit.

KP: You stopped working with the division.

GT: No, no, enough of that.

KP: You spent a long time with that unit. How did it feel to leave them?

GT: Well, just like anywhere else, you know, when you meet a group of people, I'm not a very friendly or sociable person, but, you know, I left about six guys that I felt very close to. I used to write letters to them. They wrote them back to me, and then, about '47 or '48, we lost contact, and that's when I realized the Communists had taken over, 'cause these fellows had quit writing.

KP: Did you ever find out what happened to them?

GT: No, not any of them at all, no idea.

KP: However, you stayed in touch with them.

GT: For a short time ... and frequent time, yeah.

RO: How much communication did you have with your family and your girlfriend?

GT: Why, I'll show you the bottom drawer of my closet. I have 350 letters that my wife, ... my then girlfriend, wrote to me, once a day. It'd be funny, you'd be over in China, suddenly, you'd get fourteen letters, because they found out, you know, where you were. She had the same experience back here. She wouldn't hear from me for two weeks, she'd figure I was dead, and then, the postman would come with a dozen letters that I had written. ... I'm very close to my parents, so, my mother, most of her contact was through my girlfriend, but, I also got in touch with her, you know, by mail, twice a month maybe.

KP: Very few Americans, during the war and since, have spent time in China. What did you take away from your experience in China? Did you realize how unique your experiences were when you came back?

GT: No. I still think the feeling that, "I'm alive. I'm going back to ... where I want to be," dominated my thoughts and I erased most of that from my mind. I didn't start to get real interested in China again until all these problems at Tiananmen Square began. You know, it's a couple of years ago now, but, ... there's a long period of time, as far as I'm concerned, China didn't exist. You know, I was unaware of anything there.

KP: You were not that interested in China.

GT: Yeah, I didn't seek out.

KP: Had you thought of making the military a career at all?

GT: Oh, definitely not.

KP: It sounds like you were eager to come home.

GT: Oh, yeah, I was eager to come home. I consider my two years ... of Army experience to be probably the second best in my life, and it did a tremendous amount for me, in terms of maturing me and educating me, but, ... I had no desire to continue. When I got home, you used to have to have seventy-five points to come out, I think it was seventy-five, it doesn't matter, and I had seventy-three, and I thought, "Oh, my God, they're going to keep me two months somewhere in the United States 'til I fill in that time," and I was just delighted when they said, "You can go home. We're not going to hold you to those two months," or whatever it was.

KP: You had gone to school to be a journalist, but, your plans changed a bit after 1945. What led you from journalism to transportation?

GT: Well, what happened is, I had a brother-in-law who was an operating manager for Philadelphia Transportation Company, and, as soon as I got home, within a week, he called for me to come over to see if I was interested, and, at that time, I also had checked with RCA and

some other places, and his offer was so good, financially and in terms of future predictions, that that's why I switched. Now, journalism is a very broad subject and, you know, even as a manager of a company, I considered communications and journalism interchangeable. ... I still was very active ... with communications.

KP: You worked for the Philadelphia Transit Corporation. What was your first position there?

GT: Well, management trainee, which was standard in those days.

KP: You eventually became a depot superintendent. What were your responsibilities then?

GT: Well, there, you had three hundred men and two hundred buses, and you had to be sure you had trained men and proper assignments for the buses, and, when there was an accident, follow up and find out what was the situation.

KP: Did you always work with buses?

GT: No, I started on the street car, and, ... for a while, I had the subway elevated lines, never the trains. The trains came right after I left, to be in part of that company.

KP: You ended your career with New Jersey Transit.

GT: Yeah.

KP: In buses.

GT: Yeah. I was in charge of the buses from Trenton to Atlantic City, ... South Jersey.

KP: That is a large geographic area.

GT: Yeah, a large area. ... I had five thousand employees at SEPTA and about nine hundred at New Jersey Transit, so, there, there was a difference.

KP: What did you find to be most rewarding about working in transportation?

GT: Well, as you can see from my Army life, I liked to be the boss, and wherever I was, at Philadelphia with Philadelphia Transportation Company or South Jersey with the Transit Company, I was the boss. I had to pick up a telephone once in a while, but, I didn't have daily communication in those jobs with a boss that told me what to do, and I guess that's the reason, I could be independent.

KP: It sounds like a lot of that came out of your military experience.

GT: Oh, yeah. That's why I say the military was great for me. ...

KP: Do you think that you would have become this independent if you had been assigned as a replacement officer and placed under tighter supervision?

GT: Nowhere ... near as good.

KP: You would not have developed this flare for being your own boss.

GT: It would have taken me thirty years instead of three years. [laughter]

KP: Was your family surprised at how the war had changed you?

GT: ... I don't know. I can't answer that. Dorothy, my wife, could answer that better, maybe, but, ... I just find that ... hard to answer. See, in 1935, I left home to go to college and, as soon as I was in college, I went into the Army. So, my contact with my parents was severely limited because of these activities. ... No, I think, right from the beginning, my wife knew that I was a little aggressive, sometimes annoyingly so, I guess.

KP: Did you ever have any frustrations while working for either Philadelphia Transit or its successor, SEPTA?

GT: I had frustrations. I participated in many, many labor negotiations with Mike Quill, who may or may not mean anything to you. ... In some of the things I wanted to do, I was held back because of the labor negotiations. I felt that my bosses were more generous than I would have been. At New Jersey Transit, I had no frustrations. My boss was in Maplewood, I was in Camden, and the twain didn't meet a whole lot.

KP: It sounds like you had a lot of autonomy.

GT: Oh, yeah. It sounds like bragging, which it is, but, I'm a good leader. Until I got sick in '85, I was a very strong person.

KP: It sounds like you were very happy.

GT: I lived a very happy life. I wouldn't trade it for anything. I know nothing I would trade it for, 'til I got sick. I've got three kids, nine grandchildren, I see them all a minimum of once a month and some once a week. I have a home. I love this home. You know, I keep telling my wife, "Please, let me die here." She wants me to go to a life care facility. [laughter] I say, "No."

KP: How long have you lived in this house?

GT: Since '74.

KP: None of your children served in the military.

GT: No.

KP: Are you glad that they did not or do you think that they might have benefited from it as you had?

GT: Yes. ... I'm glad that my boy didn't serve in the military. Incidentally, playing soccer at Bucknell is how he got hurt, and so, that's one of the reasons we got a break. He wasn't drafted, but, my son is highly successful. He could buy me out three or four times over. He's an architect and he doesn't have the personality that could adjust. I'm pretty flexible, so, I could adjust to things. A lot of us in this world are not that flexible and I think that makes a difference.

KP: You mentioned that you became more liberal over time.

GT: Oh, yeah.

KP: You were very conservative when you began college.

GT: Correct.

KP: How did you feel about the Vietnam War at the time?

GT: I thought it was a disgrace that we had entered the Vietnam War. I think it's been a disgrace that we got involved in Somalia. Now, my liberal things aren't in foreign affairs, my liberal things are in what's going on in the United States. In other words, I feel very strongly and favorably to the help they're giving to the non-whites and I guess, ... of all of our group, I'm the only one who likes Clinton. All the rest of the people are violently opposed to him. I think Clinton's great and ... I have black friends. Some of my people think it's awful that I have black friends. Some of my best friends are black and a lot of people don't think that that's right. ... I think it's perfect.

KP: How did you meet your black friends? Was it through work?

GT: No. I'm on a hospital board. There are four hospitals we have, and one of the other members of the board was black, and we became very close friends. He had been a freeholder in Camden County also, you know, a bright guy, an intelligent guy, and didn't hate whites, just like I didn't hate blacks. ... We got along extremely well, and then, when I was at Philadelphia Transportation Company, we had a rule, unwritten, that every other person you hired to be a bus operator had to be black.

KP: Was this in the 1960s?

GT: This is, let's see, well, closer to, yeah, about '70, and I didn't object to that at all. Quite a few people thought that was terrible. Now, we did it for selfish reasons. One was that if we went

on strike, we didn't want to be known as the company that got rid of all the blacks. ... You know, seniority is the way you run a strong union company like we had. So, this way, it ended up we never had a layoff, but, ... that's part of the reason we did it.

KP: You mentioned that you feel differently from your friends and many in your generation.

GT: Oh, yeah. ... That's why I told you, I'm the only one that likes Clinton. My wife does, too, so, that's all right. [laughter]

KP: I have noticed that many of the people that I have interviewed have not had much contact with African-Americans. Do you think that this is true of your generation?

GT: No, I don't think so. I agree with what you're saying. One thing that's bothered me about Rutgers is why all these students had all these protests against the president. ... You know, they even fired up again a month or so ago, and the statement he made was wrong, he apologized for it, and why they want to keep beating it over the head is beyond me. So, while I am very understanding, and loyal, and supportive of the blacks, I think they're way out of line in this instance.

KP: You grew up in Haddon Heights, which is very close to Lawnside.

GT: Right.

KP: Growing up, did you ever have any contact with people from Lawnside?

GT: Oh, ... yes. I played basketball with a black player from Lawnside at Haddon Heights High played baseball with ... two or three black boys, because they were always the best athletes, and so, we had a couple black girls at the school, ... which I had no feeling for one way or the other.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 8/30/00
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 10/10/00
Reviewed by George Wray Thomas III 11/00