RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE T. VOLK

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
FEBRUARY 19, 1999

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Holyoak: This begins an interview with Mr. George T. Volk in Tucson, Arizona on February 19, 1999.

SH: I thank you, Mr. Volk, for taking time out for this interview. I would like to start the interview by asking you about your family; your father and mother and your experiences as a young lad growing up in New Jersey.

George Volk: I fortunately had a very close family. I was the middle one, I had an older brother and a younger sister. We've traced the family back. My mother was Irish descent, my great grandfather was German. Every woman … marriage since then was an Irish girl, going back 1830. My mother had TB right after I was born and was away for about two years in a sanitarium, and everybody says that should make me very timid and not outgoing, and people will tell you that's the opposite. Because we have lots of aunts and uncles who were very close, and probably had more attention than we would have had if my mother had been home. She had a restricted activity all her life, though. My brother and I had to help her in the house more than usual, and so forth, but it was a very happy life.

SH: Where did you grow up?

GV: In Pennington, New Jersey. That's, if you drew a line from Princeton to the river, we're halfway in between, to Washington's Crossing. It's a town of 1,500 people, with six churches and no bars. I am Catholic, and in our town, I didn't realize it as much, but there was prejudice, believe it or not. I was a little bit, shall we say, bashful in high school, because I take a girl out, have a nice day, everything was fine. Then I call the next time, it was, "No." It dawned on me later on that her parents, "Oh, well, he's a Catholic, you better be careful there." I still had a great time, it didn't hurt me. I ran a little shopping guide I started when I was twelve years old, sold ads in a little paper, got it printed, took it out, put on the porches. I did that from seventh grade on through high school and made decent money for those days. I had a job in a luncheonette, in a drugstore luncheonette, which was the only one in town, as a short order cook. Because I was able to take over and run the thing in summer when others went on vacation, I was the top earner, since I was part time, I made all of thirty-three cents an hour. You said something about race relations … this town was very Protestant, Wasp-ish, people were very nice, but I remember we had one Jew in town, who was a druggist, and I worked for him, but "he was a good one." He lived in Trenton. The first Jewish family moved in, and the words we got, race relations we have come so far. "Oh, these people, they wash their babies in the sink, they use it for a urinal, and they'd eat out of it, they're terrible, they live like pigs. It's going to be awful what they're doing to the town." Now this is a ten-year-old, eleven-year-old, but you know, some kid in every group is an authority on everything and he was expounding, and it's funny, forty years later out here in Arizona, I happen to mention to a Jewish friend of mine that my daughter was dating a Lebanese, and his wife, these were college graduates and she was probably forty-five at that time, "Oh, my gosh, that's terrible," she said. "Those people, they live ten in a house, twelve in a house, and it's terrible the way they live. They don't know the difference between a toilet and a sink. You ought to break that up, George, that's terrible." I had a good laugh about it. How the world turns.

SH: What did your dad do?

GV: My father was in the car business. He was a sales manager, then got the agency during World War II when the other dealer died, for Dodge, a distributorship, it was. We had sub-dealers, and the times were tough in the '30s but we ate well and we were above average, I guess, income wise. I won a scholarship to Rutgers, a State Scholarship, just on the basis of my SATs. I was not a serious student, shall we say, in high school. I had a lot of other activities and my grades, I just barely got in the upper third of my class. I was worried about getting in, then I got the scholarship because of my test scores. It was a full tuition scholarship, but then they got my father's financial statement and it became a partial scholarship. At that time, I built model airplanes, and ran this paper, worked in the drugstore. We didn't have big sports program, it was a very small high school. The only thing I did, I was on the track team. I probably went to Rutgers because in those days we figured the Princeton people were very snobbish and Rutgers was a more democratic institution, and it was just the place where I thought I would be more comfortable. I didn't know how I'd get into Princeton anyhow, for that matter, or had no money. The big difference between the two schools for me was, in those days, in Princeton you join the club and the club you got into depended more on your father's history and pocket book than what you were. Where at Rutgers in our fraternity, as a Lambda Chi, we had people working their way through and some kids were wealthy, and there was no difference. It was a much better atmosphere. I was not a good alumnus, because Rutgers had the biggest freshman class to date, we were 1,500 students, the school was maybe 5,000 then. I came back after the war and the school was 20,000. It was mass production. I'd had my service, I just wanted to out and get to work, and it was just a job to do. You didn't develop the normal school spirit. I had all that in my freshman year.

SH: What about in your Freshman year, what activities and what did you do? I know you were very active.

GV: Not that much. I went out for, I forget what I went out for, I went out for something, and my summer before school I worked moving furniture for an office equipment outfit. We used to take desks up three or four flights of stairs. They didn't have elevators that would fit, and I had slight hernia and slight fallen arches. The doctor there, the school doctor gave me exercises for both of them and I did qualify for the lacrosse team in the spring and played freshman lacrosse. They had only one varsity, played lacrosse, and that was my only sports activity. I was working part time, all the time, at various jobs. I used my cooking experience and some other experiences, but when I started out, I didn't know whether I was going to do pre-law or business administration. It's funny, my father was pushing me to law, and I was pushing for business. During the war, he bought the business and, of course, that settled that problem. I think the accounting department did more for me than anything else. I lost some school spirit, too, because the influx of professors that we got at that time were socialistic … it was communism and socialism. The teaching became so strong in that respect. Some of the older teachers were normal, and some were conservative, but I had an economics professor who said that the answer to all our problems in the future was the cooperative system. I give the guy credit because I couldn't resist in my blue book talking about the big bad capitalist who's going to do this to the poor little consumer, and so forth. I wrote a very sarcastic paper. He did give me a C on it, anyhow. You may gather I am very reticent about my ideas, but the freshman experience is everything a college experience should be, as I said. We suffered in the immediate post war

years due to the fast growth that was put on by the GI Bill, and it's easy to criticize. I think the school, looking back, did a wonderful job of handling a very difficult situation. They didn't have time to screen everybody that got in.

SH: In your freshman year, did you through the initiation in the fraternity in "hell week"? How was that?

GV: Some kids were very scared about it, to me it was more fun than anything. Yeah, you got paddled, but, I mean, that was macho to take that, you know, and we had fights and brawls and snow fights, throwing water out the windows, and stuff like that. It was pretty clean. We did do some drinking, we had a chug-a-lug contest once in a while on how fast you could down a beer. They line up three or four beers, and how you could swallow fast enough. I never got into that, wasn't any good at that, but we didn't go in and do it for eight or ten beers, you do it for two or three and that was it. We had drinking, but it was pretty much under control. Oh, a couple of times we came back from the bar across town and the driving wasn't what it should have been, but it was not what you hear about today.

SH: Did your fraternity frequent a certain bar downtown?

GV: I can't remember, it's on the south side of town, I can't remember where it was. I, as a freshman … I stopped growing when I was thirteen. I was the biggest kid in the seventh grade and I'm just under six feet now. So, I matured very early, I had a beard early, everything early. I got a big kick because, I was seventeen when I started school, and we'd go down the bar and I would buy drinks for some of the older guys that had a problem getting served. So, at one time that was an advantage. In World War II I passed up a West Point appointment because I wanted to fly in the worst way. I took the aviation cadet test, or took the Navy V7 test, excuse me, first, and they rejected me for allergic rhinitis. I'd been through the board and everything else. So then I waited till I got in the service and took the test again, and our outfit was put on alert before we finished the appointment. I went through all the tests, the board hearing, passed everything. It never dawned on me, when I came up to Tucson, that Volk was also a Jewish name, and the Air Force at that time was the Irish Mafia, and I never realized. Major O'Keefe called us in, myself and another fellow, to tell us that our outfit had been put on alert and that he could not forward our cadet appointments. It didn't dawn on me, till later on, I came out here, and also my brother, later on, had a problem, same thing with the name, and then it dawned on me years later that Major O'Keefe, he said as we were leaving the room, he said, "Oh, by the way, we can get you in the Infantry OCS." Well, at that time, we were killing pilots like mad and the Air Force was scrapping the bottom of the barrel to get people. We were not into the ground war yet and there were plenty of infantry officers. But I didn't put that two and two together until many years later. He probably saved my life because the way they were killing pilots then … So, our outfit was on alert to train for crash crews to pull people out of the plane crashes. We were losing too many people on ground fires on the planes coming back. I was an acting crew chief, I had the fastest crew in the drills, and so forth. Our company and everything was going great, and then at the end, they had a physical fitness test. Well, having just finished a season of lacrosse, I naturally, and Coach Fitz was known for being tough on conditioning. He was later fired from the New Jersey Reformatory in Jamestown, I think it was, for being too tough. So, I was in good shape, so they took the people in the best shape and made them asbestos suit men. Because you

didn't take oxygen into plane crash with you, so you had to use the air that was in your suit and they wanted people who could hold their breath. Theoretically, you had sixty or ninety seconds to get the guy out, or forget it, he's gone. So, I went over in that outfit and took the test again, and passed them all, and then, my test was March 2, 1943 or '44, I don't know, '44, and my papers came back to me, everything had been approved for shipment back to start school. Notation: "Orders from the War Department March 3, 1944, all overseas applications hereby cancelled." They were getting enough pilots from the States in those days, or enough applications I should say, and enough qualified. Then I had been working in a mobile control unit on the runways in England, because there was too much fog on the fields, and I sat in that unit as the special suit man, so if the plane was coming in, I would hear the radio conversation and then jump on the fire trucks as they came past, going down the runway. I don't know, I didn't have too much problem there. We didn't have that big volume of fires, it was no fun when we had one, but I was tired of sitting there, anyhow. In the meantime, I picked up the control tower work. We had trained people in the States for control tower work, on proper procedure, and proper language, and many of them got over there and when you had a group of planes coming in that were short on gas, you threw procedure out the window, and these people, who had been trained on the proper procedure, had a hard time breaking down that training and taking shortcuts. I learned on the job and, so, I got assigned to RAF [Royal Air Force] school for two weeks and learned to become a tower operator, and went into the control tower, this was in England, to Northern Ireland, and, foolish again, I wanted to get into more action, so, I was, actually a friend of my father's was a general, and when in London, I had a wonderful dinner, first time out in, I don't know how many months. He says, "Can I do something for you, George?" "Yeah, the only thing I want is, I want to get down into Germany. I want to be doing something. I'm tired of sitting here at this beautiful base," … and so he got me into a combat strip, in Germany, on the control tower, and we logged as high as three planes a minute touching the runway. It's only a 5,200 foot runway. Because we happen to be the most forward base with fuel supply, so anybody, the ground support troop planes, the fighters, would be chasing a train, or chasing something, and then they'd get half lost and they'd be coming back short of gas. So, we would, many times, get a whole group of planes coming in with maybe ten minutes gas in their tanks, so you got them down quicker.

SH: Where was this at in Germany?

GV: This was at Y72 outside of Darmstadt. Gross-Gerau was the small town, it was near Darmstadt … The tower there was very crude. It was a four-wheel farm wagon, with a canopy in the front. We had four speakers and four microphones in front of you and a switchboard on the side. We controlled all the antiaircraft fire, because we did get an occasional Germans trying to strafe us, but that was not enough to be a real problem. In those days, you know, eighteen years old, "the bullet is for the other guy, it's not for you." I look back at the crazy things we did, I wasn't brave, I can never say I was brave. We just, as I said, "Oh, well, that's gonna happen to him, it's not gonna happen to me." A lot of the bravery, I don't know how they still got troops to go over, like the movie *Galipoli*, but there's a lot of that, too, with young people and we had two section-8s out on that tower in about a four month period. Section-8 being the nervous breakdown … and then on VE Day, about, a couple of us are about ready to go because we were then pulling double shifts. They gave us a weapons carrier and a whole bunch of jerry cans full of gas and we went into Paris for three or four days, and I think I had a good time. Then I came

back, I was transferred to a field in southern France, outside of Marseilles. I had the great privilege of going through Paris on the first postwar Bastille Day, and you want to see a city celebrate, or a block party, that was just wild. Then I operated this field, … the largest field in the world, supposedly, at the time. I was sent there because I could speak some French, from my college courses, because we had French planes, in fact, we had all kinds. We had Russians and Dutch, everything going from Western Europe down into the Mediterranean, or the Far East, Far West, excuse me, passed through Marseilles. Marseilles was, to compliment it, you could call it the armpit of Europe at that time, really the crummiest, dirtiest town anybody ever saw. They had North African troops, and not to be racist, they were right out of the jungle, and, really, they were not at all civilized. Our time was spent playing poker, drinking warm French beer, in our tents. I built quite a tolerance in those days. Finally, the group of us got together and got some war weary, salvaged B-17s, [and] got them running. We'd go through a week or two and try to get a couple that we can start four engines on. Then we'd get a company clerk to steal some passes, and we cover each other every other weekend, to fly down to Nice. We were really a big deal on Nice. Because everybody else, they would get down one trip. It was a rationed thing. Each outfit is given just so many quotas, so many people to send there. Because people went there once, and we had girl friends, we go down there every other week, you know. We were like Generals. When I think we flew over those mountains in those beat up 17s, and I don't think we ever came back with four engines, and we didn't get high enough, there was no place to go, glide to the ocean. We were flying over hills, … and we'd laugh about it. It was just stupidity, really. That's it, and then I came back. I had no problem adjusting, believe me, and went back to Rutgers. I entered in February `45, I guess, and finished up in the spring of '48 and took business administration. The most valuable course I had was Professor Hoegstedt's accounting course. It was probably the toughest one I had, too. He gave me a D in the first semester and I screamed, and said, "I don't think I deserve that," and he said, "Well, you're not doing what you could do." So, I did better, and he gave me an A in the second semester to make up for it. Today, I don't know if you could get away with that, all the reviews, and so forth, they have … but he was a good teacher, and he was very tough, and, as I said, that helped me. I got into the car business and we did very well … we had Dodge dealership, and Chrysler Corporation started going downhill, and in the `60s, from the period of '60 to '63, half the dealers in the Philadelphia region went broke, or out of business … We had been a distributor, we had a group of dealerships that were very close to us, and they made them all factory direct. The factory was saving money, and when this thing went sour, they all went broke and we were competing with factory stores, and the factory was making money on manufacture, so they didn't care about what happened. They could push more cars out and they were dumping cars out for fifty dollars over invoice, and we couldn't do that and make money. So, I had an insurance agency, a leasing company, ran that besides, out of the car agency and we were the first ones in the country to lease out motor homes for vacation trips. So, anyhow, we ran all these things, and I just, finally, laid off the sales manager and the used car manager, I did it all myself. I have a brother-in-law, who was there for a while, and he went and … took a job with the factory to save overhead, and he was operating as a interim manager, working when they take over a dealership. So, it finally got so bad, we bluffed the factory out and told them that we had a new facility, that we would give them first crack at the facility that somebody else wanted it, if they buy the Dodge equipment, which they took. I signed the stocks over to my folks, and I came out here in '64, with six kids, one of my motor homes which, I owed 4,000 or 5,000 on, the house in Bucks County I owed 30,000 dollars on, and signed up for a 35,000 dollar mortgage here. I was down

to my last 2,000 dollars. So, I took a nice stable, guaranteed job, like selling real estate. Somebody said, "How did you sell your first house the first day you had a license?" I said, "You got six kids and three mortgages, it's easy." Then I did very well in that business and in 1966, '67, as I recall, we got into commercial. [We] had some big land sales where there are people here who, lawyers, brokers, people you should know, bought pieces of land to speculate and they say, "Yeah, I'll take ten percent, you take fifteen." They buy it and they got it, put in a joint name of the title company. Then when they want to sell, they had no decision making process, whether it took a 100 percent or fifty percent, nobody knew. Sometimes one guy had not made his payments, because everybody bought on time in those days, because you can deduct the interest 100 percent, and, "What do we do with this fellow who didn't make his payment?" He was at the head of the line when the sale time occurs. So, I got the idea of writing up a syndication agreement, I had a very good lawyer, my best friend he became, who wrote up a four page agreement and just provided that I would put money in with the other people, pro rata, and I would be the sole one to decide when to sell the property, and I could sell it, direct the sale, anytime. It was a very complicated legal thing, but we worked it out so that anybody that didn't make their payment had a ten day registered notice, if they didn't and the others made their payment, they were out. They lost their equity. This worked out as an instant credit check. I ended up doing thirty-odd land deals that way, buying and selling land. A large percentage of my partners, or clients, whatever you want to call them, were lawyers, because they like the way this agreement was written. Then we built the Federal Court House here. We bought a property downtown and the Feds were looking for somebody to build to suit, so we did that. I bought some income properties in Phoenix, a strip center here, and so forth. One of my kids, my oldest daughter, sells houses because she loves it. She is the archetypal salesman, typical oldest child, very, very bright, but very tactical. She can really run the show. The girls in the Junior League used to call her the "white tornado". Then, I have another one who is a mortgage broker in California, another one is a office salesman, sells offices and leases offices for CB Commercial, and then my son, Rick, went to CB years ago and he, I think he was there three or four years, when he started leading the company, and then he trained his runner, who became the second one in the company, so the two of them left and formed the Volk Company. I had my own one-man-band that I was running, so we couldn't have two Volk realties, so I moved in with them. This is his company here, the Volk Company, and he is practically the leader in shopping centers, and leasing, and so forth. I went to a seminar yesterday for the CCIM, which is a professional commercial group, two of my boys were speakers.

SH: That's wonderful.

GV: I am very lucky. I met the right girl in Florida, where the boys are, on Las Olas, in Fort Lauderdale. I was from New Jersey, she was from Indiana. She was dating a fraternity brother of mine. We had a thing in the fraternity that, (he'd met her a year before and they dated for about a week,) with the girls at NJC, and so forth, if a guy said, "I'm gonna put a pin on her, I'm very serious about this one here." "Okay." But, otherwise, every man for himself, and I had dated another girl down there. Mike left, he had to go back, they had a breakdown in his plant. I said, "Mike, anything special with this Carol?" "No, no, no, every man for himself," like that. He went home, and two days later I was without a date … This club we belonged to, a gal came in, the hostess, said, "Carol, there are some new guys in town, I hear Mike is gone, got a date tonight?" "Oh, no." I said, "She's got a date," and running through my head I was going, "Eat

alone," and I just didn't want to do that … So, we went out. That night lightning struck, and the next day I said, "After I married so and so," and she said, "Oh, you didn't ask me yet." "Hey, didn't I, really, ask you yet?" She said yes. That was 48 years ago, and I think it's gonna stick. I still can't believe that happened, especially, we were both from conservative families, Catholic families, and her folks were very conservative, of German descent. Her grandfather was a brew master, her father had an electrical engineering business, and she had a brother and a sister. Her sister and brother are still alive, their spouses had died. Carol is the youngest … and we're still very close and get together frequently. They were out here in January, we're gonna meet them in Florida in March, and so forth. I have been very blessed to have a very strong family, both from my parents, and with my wife and her family.

SH: We need to back up just a little bit. First of all, when you were down in Florida, were you down there as part …

GV: No, it was during the Chrysler strike in 1950. There was a three month strike. I was beating my head against the wall trying to buy used cars to give my salesmen something to do. I was going nuts. … Mike was in the food business, Mike Cordiano and he had set up a new plant, and in those days, the manufacturers used to get, they pulled a trick on you in the food business. They would sell you raw materials on open account, pay you cash, take the stuff out, you're manufacturing for them, and you could have a little business on the side, your own brand. But you got too big, they put a squeeze on you. All of a sudden, they want cash on the barrelhead from the stuff you're giving them. Then they stretch you out thirty to sixty days on what you sold to them, try to squeeze you. So, his plant was not bolted too tight to the floor, they collapse, one corporation, formed another corporation. He had just set up a new one when I got down there. But he had been dating a girl from Detroit, and he went down to patch up his engagement and he got down there, there was no engagement … Then he'd heard about this Carol that he'd met a year before, chased her down, found her, and took her out. When he left, I had no intention of dating Carol or anything else. "Oh, by the way, is this Carol anything special?" He said, "Oh, no. Go ahead." Then the funny thing was, the first thing Carol said, when lightning struck, she said, "What about Mike?" I said, "Oh, he will understand". That was our conversation. It's crazy, we both knew, and funny part about it, I was going up to North Jersey to meet Mike and some other guys … Mike had, in the meantime, decided after he went home that this Carol was something special. So, he had sent a beautiful, gooey Easter card, with flowers, or something … She called him up, we called him up, to tell him, "We are engaged." "Oh, I'm gonna kill him." Cordiano was the name … Italian cook oil company, and so forth. Carol called me up, and she's all scared … My father answered the phone , and I had been dating so many girls out of town, he says, "Who's paying for this call?" … We went on a date that night, it was a long night for me, I'll tell you, because Mike kept making cracks and teasing me about what happened in Florida. The girl I was taking, I didn't want to tell her until we were on our way home, you know, I was breaking up …

SH: What was Carol doing down in Florida?

GV: She drove her folks down. She was an honor student at Rosemont College, was incoming president of the Honorary Society, but she wanted to raise a family and, "Why am I wasting your money here going to college?" They're getting along [in years], "I'll drive you to Fort

Lauderdale for the winter vacation and help around the house, Mother … Take a job." The parents [said], "Oh, you can't take a job, you might take it away from somebody who really needs it to support a family." This wasn't snobbish, this is being good citizens, you know. You do charity work, and so forth. She's never had a W2, and, so, she was down there, she'd driven them down, that's all. She helped her sister-in-law … when they had a baby, she took care of the house and did all those things. She had all that training.

SH: How much longer before you got married after that?

GV: We waited until July, this was in March.

SH: Did you get married in Florida?

GV: No, no. Fort Wayne. In fact, I always say, there was a young priest, very young priest, he just died recently, Bishop Persley that married us. He was a priest and skipped Monsignor, and made him the Auxiliary Bishop about a year later. I said, "He was so good, tie me down." We had a beautiful wedding there. That's our wedding picture. The rosary was one her sister-in-law made, it was fifteen decats. Her sister-in-law went to Rosemont, they didn't meet there, she's ahead of her, and it was just a coincidence.

SH: She's really a beautiful bride.

GV: Same dress my two eldest daughters wore.

SH: I wanted to ask a few questions about, going back to Rutgers as a freshman then. What was your knowledge of the war and what was going on in Europe?

GV: In '38, I was in eighth grade. I said, "What's Neville Chamberlain doing, giving away Czechoslovakia? Peace in our time? He's crazy. You just gave Hitler more people to work with, to slave labor, to get his plant going." We could see it. No, we were very conscious. The public, you know, in 1946, '45, wanted us to go ahead and take care of the Russians, too. That was over simplification. It wouldn't happen that easy, but we could have bogged down just like the Germans did, or Napoleon, but we were aware of this, very much so. At college, we were very much aware of it, all the way through high school. It was on everybody's mind, and most of this, we have the America First-ers, who were, "Forget what's on the other side of the ocean," and they were a minority, a very vocal minority, but they were very much a minority, but they did affect Roosevelt's thinking, and so forth. I think anybody who wants to study World War II has to read, *A Man Called Intrepid* by Stevenson. That's the story of how the British broke the German code and how they knew things were happening, but they couldn't tell the public what they knew. They couldn't let on, that they knew, because then the Germans would know how they got the information. It brings out the things that Roosevelt knew and that Churchill knew, but they couldn't say, and they're trying to mold public opinion when they knew that it was inevitable that we get in. The Japs probably did us a favor in Pearl Harbor, because they woke us up. People were behind it once Pearl Harbor was, that just galvanized the country. There was just no more America First, and anything else.

SH: When you went in as a freshman, did you have any thoughts that you would not be able to finish your …

GV: Oh, yeah. I had saved up in high school. I always had my own job, and my father said he'd buy the books and I had a tuition scholarship, and he said, "Gosh, I didn't know there were so many books in college," but anyhow, I saved up some money, but I knew if I got my freshman year in I'd be happy. As I said, I had already, in fact, when I turned eighteen was when I took the Naval test, in March of '43, because I was planning on that. As I said, out of high school, I was offered West Point, but I wanted to fly, so I didn't want to take the time going through the ground school, of course, at West Point. Again, it probably saved my life, because the death toll of the people who did that was tremendous. We knew all along, and in fact, I had a good scholastic record in my first semester, but the second semester, we had, I think, thirty in the fraternity, thirty to thirty-five, we ended up with like five. The rest were drafted and they went, and each one that got drafted, we gave them a beer party. So, I finished up on probation. In fact, I reentered on probation, and that's when I went out for lacrosse. Well, I'd been sick and lost my legs and I lost a lot of weight overnight … just poor medical service … I came back trying to out for lacrosse and I was just, I couldn't get my legs back. I was just throwing up every other scrimmage, and so forth, and the Dean's office saved me. They came through and said, "Hey, you can't play, you're still on probation." I had dropped that and I was on the Dean's list the next semester. In the spring of '43, "If you're gonna go in, not knowing when you're gonna come back, live it up while you can." I spent my money that I'd saved to have a little extra money … in college … I spent it all, beer, dates what have you, and that was the main occupation in that semester. One thing about the GI Bill, I can remember, there were fellows who were paying their own way, 100 percent, with part time jobs. There was one guy, who was working eight hours a night, working on blood at the laboratory, working on blood … They came back on the GI Bill, which is a wonderful thing, and, I think, they got sixty dollars a month subsistence allowance plus tuition and books. The same one sat around, "How are you going to live on sixty dollars a month?" and so forth. 'The world owes me a living' attitude. "That sixty dollars should have been more," and so forth. When here they're getting an education, and that's all the money that they didn't have and they were doing without that before. Some of them, I don't think did as well scholastically as they did when they were working. I know I did better when I had a part time job, than in that first spring semester when I quit working and just had fun. I had all the time in the world. I got way behind in everything.

SH: In the Scarlet Letter, in your freshman year, it said that your major was history and poli-sci.

GV: Well, I went in as pre-law, I think, that's what they probably called it, yeah.

SH: I just wondered what had changed your mind, I mean, I know what changed your mind. That is what it said in the year book, so, I was just curious, because a lot of people who started out in philosophy, or history, or whatever, came back after the war and were then in business administration.

GV: It always bugged me that people got into business administration and then switched to economics, so that they could skip Professor Hoegstedt's accounting course. To me, I had a terrible time when I came back with analytic geometry because I had forgotten simple algebra,

and I had to go to the back of the book and re-read algebra. I had forgotten sine and all that business, which is like doing algebra and you couldn't do arithmetic, the same thing. For a guy to be in economics without an accounting education was like a guy doing algebra who doesn't understand arithmetic. In economics, you are talking about what comes off the statements and they're very misleading. I mean, the labels from accounting statements, and Professor Hoegstedt, one of the first things he said, "Remember, Anaconda Copper, at one point, was going bankrupt with a 700 million dollar surplus, because a surplus is only an accounting term of the excess of paid in capital over, I mean, profits held back against. It is not a surplus cash." … But I mean, people are taking economics courses that didn't understand this. It just struck me that it should have been required, because accounting courses are tough courses and they just skipped to economics to get away from it.

SH: When you came back to the campus and there were so many returning students and also GIs, did you switch? You originally would have graduated in '46. Do you consider yourself Class of '46?

GV: Either one.

SH: I noticed that sometimes, we find people listed in two places.

GV: Yeah, it's a very confusing situation. Actually some of my best friends were guys in class of '43, '44. They were the seniors when I was a freshman. I mean, a couple of them in our fraternity that they were like big brothers, shall we say, not close, but you kind of felt … and I always [felt] closer to them than I did the ones afterwards, because afterwards, I commuted. I lived in the fraternity in my freshman year, then after the war I commuted.

SH: From Pennington.

GV: It was about an hour's drive, a little less than that, and weather, and so forth.

SH: Do you remember the names of some of your '44 classmates?

GV: Oh, yeah. Dave Luhman, Bob Patrick, and Wilt McKenzie, Stoney Jackson, got Alzheimer's now, he was both. There was quite a few of them were both. I think … he became a Superior Court Judge, and he was quite a lady's man …

SH: There's another Volk listed in the Scarlet Letter. Is that a relation?

GV: Two of them. My uncle, Harry, who is now ninety-two years old, head of the investment committee of an 800 million dollar foundation. Years ago, he reorganized the Prudential Insurance Company, right after World War II. He was in the Lambda Chi. I think he was Class of '28. Then I had a cousin, Frank Volk, who, I guess he was a freshman when I was a junior… right after the war, I was junior or senior, but I don't know what it was because I was finishing up early … but he was a freshman right after the war when I came back, and he was in the fraternity … He's dead. His father gave him a business course, he was a cousin, his father was a cousin. Actually, he was in business with us, and he wanted Frank to run the business, and Frank

didn't really want it. So, after he got married, Frank went back, I think, to Harvard, and got an architect's degree and became an architect did quite well in architecture. Then as I said, he had a heart attack ten years ago. Harry is quite another story from an alumnus standpoint. He really is outstanding. He was president of the Alumni Association at one point. He was one of those that started the magazine, the *Targum*? It was started in the '20s …

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

GV: It was a school magazine. He also, he was working his way through, he started selling silk hose, and he recruited a group of salesmen and ended up sending money home because he did so well with a group of salesmen … He went with Prudential, while he was getting his law degree and he went with methods department. He was loaned, by the Prudential, to the US Federal Government to help set up the computer system for the Social Security, and later, for the National Service Life Insurance. Then after World War II, they did the US Strategic Bombing Survey, and he wrote the report on that, and he had an idea of breaking the Prudential up into seven regional offices … almost separate companies, because they were becoming so top heavy in Newark, and they kind of left that before the war, then after the war, it was while he was in his early forties, 1947, he re-departmentalized the whole company … Redrew the organizational chart and then he was called in to the board of directors … this is kind of interesting … They said, "We're gonna go with your idea of the regional offices. You're getting eleven western states, Hawaii and Alaska, complete autonomy. Go out there and show us how it should be done for a regional office." The whole family was a little bit lead-foot on cars. I still had to have the hottest Mercedes, and they said, "There's one thing. We have seen you drive ..." This is the board of directors … "You've got complete control of everything. There's one provision, you're getting a limo and a chauffer, and you're going to use it …" And he ran with Prudential until … he left the Prudential, after which, they did the whole plan. They followed his plan, even through today. They ran every new regional manager through his office. It was a mutual company, no, stock. So, then, he took over Union Bank of LA, which was a 400 million dollar bank and he built it into a 4 billion dollar bank, and sold to charter bank … then he retired and took over the Weingart Foundation, as a free job, which was a 167 million dollar fund, and he was charged with preserving the capital and spending all the income on charities, in California, which he did. In many years they averaged over seven percent on charities. In the meantime, he preserved the capital, up to 450 million, when he officially retired as chairman about four years ago, four or five years ago. I thought he retired more, but just talking to him recently, I found out, he never tells us this, we find out from third parties … that after he retired, he kept control of the investment committee and the approval of new applicants committee, which is running the fund, really … He still goes to work everyday, he's ninety-two. He has now run the foundation up to 800 million because of investments. He drives from Century City to Bel Air everyday. In fact, two years ago, you know what Newark Airport is? Two years ago, he flew into Newark, rented a car, drove down to visit my brother in Pennsylvania Dutch country, my aunt in Wilmington, Delaware and back, took his car and drove back, when he was ninety, when he did this. The guy they didn't want to drive … He has wrote the whole book in itself, really, his life has been fantastic. He has been a tremendous charity worker and everything else. [He was still chairman of the investment committee at 94, and capital was at 800 million. His secretary was awaiting at his bedside for dictation when he passed away.]

SH: Is your mother still living?

GV: No. Mother had, as I said she had TB and then she had an aneurysm. She was seventy-eight, seventy-nine, something like that … and then my father lived till he was eighty-nine, and he had a melanoma but they didn't treat it properly and it got into his lymph glands.

SH: When you returned from service, you were ill, what was …

GV: No, no. While I was over there, I had a very bad strep throat and they put me in quarters. I had a 105 temperature, not good enough for the hospital, and quarters was a long hut with a couple of tiny stoves, and it's cold. I was told to drink a lot of water and they put some pills there. They were sulfa pills. I stretched one glass of water through a day, and I got the sulfa reaction on top of the strep throat and, so, my playing weight at lacrosse was like 172 or 173, which is where I am now, distributed differently, but I came out 155 in ten days … Because I was going crazy, I don't know if, the medic came in when I hollered about the pain, it was the kidneys and stomach both, back a forth, and I was writhing there, and he came over … my bedmate read the thermometer before he came, "You're 105, a little bit on the high side 105," and he looked, "Oh, doctor will be through in a couple of hours," … I was screaming, so he finally came back with the other guys, "Get him some help." He come in and looked at the thermometer, this time he said, "Ye gads," and ran and got the doctor. They shot me up with morphine and I got through it all right. But, as I said, before I went in, I would buy swimming trunks those days and if I got them big enough to get over my thighs, they were loose in the waist. When I came out, the reverse was true. I used to wear those form fitting, like jockeys, in those days, and I never got the meat back in my legs, because working in the control tower, the army in its infinite wisdom, is being fair, you worked a different shift everyday, which is the worst thing for your system. Your food, everything is messed up, and, so beer was the best thing to keep your health with, regularly, so, and there was no real activity, so I really went downhill physically, and that's why as I said lacrosse, I had a devil of a time … But I'm lucky now, I play golf two, three times a week and tennis a couple of times.

SH: When you were stationed in England and then you went to Northern Ireland, how long were you there for?

GV: Each of them was around eight months, eight or nine months, and then I went down to … in the spring of '45, I went down into Germany.

SH: Did you have any interaction with people in England or Ireland?

GV: Oh, yeah. Interesting thing there … being from South Jersey, we speak the King's English and in those days, I spoke it better than I do now, because I got into the car business afterwards and you couldn't say, "That's a fine piece of work, that car," you had to say, "That's a real good job." I had trouble when I first came out because I was using too much of the King's English on the people coming in, but my grammar was very good, at that time, and in England I sensed "Why is it, out of a group this big, that I get invited to dinner?" … "Well, he had an accent." They associate an accent to people who lived in one neighborhood all their life and never moved out. The cab drivers in London then, can tell you within three or four blocks where a certain

person lives, at that time, because … poor people did not move around … and the people here spoke with Oxford accent or as we speak, the Central Jersey English, which they considered that proper English. So, I was always invited. I had a great time that way. I was invited to homes. The people were wonderful. Ireland was one that I'll never forget because we had British troops there and the Irish hated them, they loved us, and, of course, we had the dates. So, they were mad at us and you had to watch when you left the dance or something like that, on your way home. You could get jumped on … But in Ireland, the small town, if somebody said, "They have a Yank in trouble," boy, they came out. You had help all over the place. We were really kings in Ireland.

SH: Did you use any of your Irish background to soften that up a bit?

GV: No. No. The funny thing about it, afterwards, I dated different girls, I never knew whether they are Catholic or Protestant. In my naiveté, I guess you'd call it, I assumed all Irish are Catholics, but the question didn't come up. I'm sure of one gal … I'm sure, that residing in Northern Ireland, she must have been Protestant. As I said, she didn't know what I was, either. … But the Irish just loved the Yanks. That was a wonderful duty there.

SH: When you were in Germany, were the supplies and the mails still good? I understand in England it was very good, the supplies and mail.

GV: Oh, no. Germany, it was terrible. There was a lot of people stealing on the supply lines. In fact, at one point, the meals were so bad we broke into a warehouse and stole K rations. The guards were ready to shoot at us, if they caught us, but we went, actually stole food. Of course, I had a little German car and we did a lot of things like that, and we weren't supposed to fraternize. It was a sixty-four dollar fine to go out and socialize with the Germans. Actually, it helped one time, it's an interesting story, I was in the control tower, and I have been out with some pals the night before to a particular bar, so they had a forward controller for the fighters, and they were trying to get a hold of them to change targets and the controller's radio went out. So, he called the tower to see if we could raise his group, so I went to their fighter channel, and, luckily, they were high enough, we caught them to tell them to change target. Yeah, Gerry [as we called the Germans], it's something the Germans would do, you see, and, so, I reminded one of them of what he was doing the night before, and he said, "Okay, we got you." The guy at, the controller should have given me an identification, but when he called in the message, it was a hurry-up thing, because the ground support, our troops moved in while they were on their way … Once in a while, when we were in Germany, a sniper got in a shot, but it was a big adventure. I guess, you forget the bad parts, too … But it wasn't so … I was very lucky, I mean. I haven't seen *Private Ryan*, my wife doesn't want to, and I hope I'll get there one of these days.

SH: You said that you wore an asbestos suit when you were a firefighter in England. Did you do this in Ireland, too?

GV: No, in England. I was already moved to the tower when they moved me to Ireland.

SH: How many shifts would you run doing that, with so many planes coming in?

GV: Though, this one in Ireland, there was no pressure. Not that way. This was a support base, in fact, it was more of a test base, where they had some new ideas with their planes. They had two of the … Tony Lavier was there. He became, later, Lockheed's chief test pilot … and it was more experimental. Plus, transshipping planes brought them in there from the States and then dump them and then they flew them up someplace else. The name of the base was Langford Lodge, because it was on Loch Neagh, which is a big lake on the western border of Ulster. Beautiful setting.

SH: Have you ever gone back?

GV: No. Well, we went to Italy two years ago. In fact, the kids, on my wife's seventieth birthday gave her a trip to Italy, and said I could go along. We went there. But I don't have a desire really, and very frankly, I flew a lot, every bit of unofficial flying I could get, I did. Because we were considered a radio operator, we could fly as a co-pilot on bigger planes, on a ferry mission, flew those things around, and I did a lot of flying that way. Also, we had the first ground controlled approach in Europe. We worked and worked on that, practicing with it, perfecting the radio procedure on it. So, I got all the flying time I could that way, as a passenger, of course, and because I always love flying, and I came back, I'd learned to fly in the B-17, I came back and got in a Piper Cub, I was just scared to death … this little canvas thing. I realized that the only way I'd ever fly is if I had a good, strong, twin-engined plane and that was out of my pocket book, so I had to give it up.

SH: Did you take part in any organization when you came back, like the American Legion?

GV: Oh, yeah. I was in the Legion, in fact, Pennington is a very patriotic, 200 year old town. We had the 200 year celebration, and, in fact, the first year I was back, I ran the celebration for them. The Legion assigned me to that job, very proud, I got the Congressman to talk, and so forth. We had a big parade, and went to the cemeteries, and shot off guns and stuff. I was in the JayCees, and helped get the first United Fund thing going … what you called Community Chest at that time … and then the Kiwanis Club, for awhile. We were quite involved in Trenton … my wife with the ladies, and so forth, and we were considered society, so to speak. Our pictures, the kids pictures' ran on Easter … people home for the holidays, that kind of thing. It was a strain. I came up here, got a fresh start, and it's nice being anonymous, and I kind of laid back. I feel guilty that I haven't done what I should here, that way, you see. My wife has been very active, quite active, so she's got done her duty.

SH: Have your children been called to the military at all?

GV: No. They missed all that.

SH: Well, is there anything else that you'd like to tell me?

GV: No. I had a good education. Of course, we have children at ASU, University of Arizona, two at Santa Clara, two at University of San Diego, one at Loretta Heights, up in Denver. I guess, that's maybe it. It's just like, basketball in Tuscon is just it. If you can't tickets, forget it. I get my son's ticket once in awhile, but we followed U of A basketball for many years. We had

the Snowden years, the first black coach, and so forth, and he was doing great, but then he started falling off the game. I had two boys playing high school basketball, JV and varsity. We had four games a week there. So, he gave up our tickets, you see, and because we were very involved that way, at one high school here, we were twenty-five years in the PTA, because our kids were spaced out over twenty-two years, you see. So, that kept us busy … and I started golf when I was fifty-nine, my wife and I started. I tried back in New Jersey. I'd belonged to Trenton Country Club for years, never played because I was too busy raising a family, and I was also very hyper. I came out here, I slowed down, nobody will believe that, but I did. I thought, "Maybe I slowed down enough to play golf now." The thing in golf is patience, you know, and I've almost got there, as far as golf now, but still having trouble with it.

SH: Do you feel like a native, now, here in Tucson?

GV: Oh, yeah. Well, we have two children that are natives. A big laugh. I came out here and told my wife after I flew from Arizona, I went out there I met Pop Abbots, who came out here on a stretcher, fifty years old, and had his skull crushed in a railroad accident and he became, got his health back, became a broker for Horizon Land, got a new wife in Mexico, a couple of teenage daughters and, "Ho, ho, ho, wait a minute, we have six, ha, ha, ha. That's what Arizona does. Oh, no way." So, he came out here and had two more.

SH: I thank you for taking time out to do this.

GV: Everybody likes to talk about themselves, I guess.

SH: You've done a nice job here, and I hope your family enjoys it.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Would you please explain the US bombing survey that your uncle was involved in.

GV: My uncle was the second in command. Franklin D'Olier was commissioned by the government, he was president of Prudential, or chairman, I don't know which. Harry Volk was his executive officer. They went over at the end of World War II, right after VE-Day … in fact, I met Harry in Hamburg and had dinner … to survey the impact of our bombing in World War II. They had psychologists, sociologists, economists, manufacturing people, all kinds of people. The mission was, "Which bombs were most effective?" I don't know how accurate this is, I seem to remember that we spent I don't know how many planes over oil fields in Czechoslovakia during the war, trying to knock out their oil production. We would send over seventy planes and get fifty back, then do it again tomorrow night. A lot of people lost their lives there. They found out that one bomb hit a control center, had more effect on production than the rest of them put together, almost. This was the idea of the survey, but they also, as I said, surveyed the impact on the people, the psychology of it. It's got to be recorded somewhere. That would certainly, in the historical situation, be a wealth of knowledge for you, I would think. Harry is ninety-two. He's now in LA and as I said, he's still active … drives to the office. I've been trying to get him to write some of his experiences, because his experiences beside this were tremendous, as I said, in computers and everything else.

SH: At our last meeting, they suggested that we set up a format to interview trustees and governors.

GV: Harry's business career has been fantastic. His charity career, everything, is just out of this world. He's got a wealth of information. I suggest he make sure he has his hearing aid in, because some times on the phone it's kind of hard.

SH: Could you tell us how many grandchildren you have?

GV: Fifteen.

SH: Fifteen grandchildren.

GV: Yeah. Now, I say fifteen … two adopted. One son married a girl with a nine year old and he never officially adopted her, though we consider her one of ours. Our family is close enough that … she's getting married, she's twenty-one, in June … and we're gonna have 100 percent attendance at the wedding, even though she's not … we consider her a relative. So, I count her as grandchildren. I'm proudest of the fact the way our family is so close.

SH: Well, if there is nothing else you would like to add to the tape, thank you once again.

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

Reviewed by David D'Onofrio 2/25/03
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 3/4/03
Reviewed by George T. Volk 4/3/03