AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES R. GETTY

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

KURT PIEHLER
and
KEVIN KILPATRICK

ROME, NEW YORK
NOVEMBER 14, 1996

TRANSCRIPT BY

G. DOROTHY SABATINI
Kurt Piehler:  This begins an interview with Mr. Charles Getty in Rome, New York, on November 14, 1996, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Kevin Kilpatrick:  Kevin Kilpatrick.

KP:  I would like to begin by asking a few questions about your parents and your childhood in Butler.  Both of your parents were born in Morris County, correct?

CG:  Both of them were born in Morris County, my mother in Boonton, New Jersey, and my father in Butler.  So, they both were natives.  They met at a Knights of Columbus dance, I think, in Boonton, and, eventually, married, of course, and ... I was number three in the family.  I had two older sisters and a younger brother and my father worked for the American Hard Rubber Company.  We went to St. Anthony’s Grammar School, walked.  As my children will tell you, [laughter] “Dad walked eight miles to school and eight miles back,” which, of course, is not true, but, it was about a mile-and-a-half each way on a dirt road.

We had ... certainly not a luxurious bringing up, but, a happy [one].  We had a very good family.  I was the first one in my family ... to go to college.  In fact, my father, I guess, didn’t finish high school.  My mother finished two years of high school, which was about as much as she could do at that time.  ... I’d like to mention this, too.  ... I only went to college for one reason.  I was a good student, but, my family was not wealthy at all and certainly could not afford to send me, but, an English teacher at Butler High School really encouraged me to go out for a state scholarship, and, really, almost, I’d say, pushed me, not just encouraged me, pushed me.

... So, I did.  I took the test and got a state scholarship and my father agreed that he would do his best [to help me].  I think I had to fill out a financial statement at that time and my father, then, was making twenty dollars a week, with four children.  So, he didn’t have an awful lot to spare to send me to Rutgers, but, when I got there, of course, I managed to get a number of different jobs, and, eventually, was self-supporting as far as my food and recreation was concerned, which was very helpful to my father.  ... Anyway, that’s how I got to Rutgers and [it] really was due to this English teacher, ... who really encouraged, pushed me into the state scholarship program.

KP:  In other words, you really did not plan on going to college.  Was the issue discussed in your family?

CG:  No, no.  As I say, ... my father and mother, neither of them really even finished high school at that time.  I don’t think they had a four-year high school, but, anyway, there was no talk about it, and, as I say, my two older sisters were better students than I ... was and, still, they didn’t go, but, I was fortunate in getting that push, and managed to get down to Rutgers, and went on from there.

KP:  You grew up in Butler, which was a rubber town.  Did your father always work at the rubber plant?
CG: Yes, he started there as a young man. I can’t tell you just how young he was, I didn’t know at the time, but, he spent his entire working career at the American Hard Rubber Company and ended up as their purchasing agent in Butler. The rubber companies were Butler. Everybody who lived in Butler worked at one of those factories, either the hard rubber factory or the soft rubber factory.

KP: In fact, you mentioned that you worked at the rubber plant at one time as well.

CG: I was fortunate in getting a job there in the summer, certainly due to my father and his intervention, and, I can still remember, I worked in the laboratory at the American Hard Rubber Company, and my starting salary was thirteen dollars a week, and, after six weeks, I got the tremendous increase to eighteen dollars a week, but, at that time, it was very helpful. I saved my money to support myself when I went back to college. ... It was a good thing for me, to be able to get that job.

KP: Was your father able to continue working throughout the Great Depression?

CG: Yes, he was. We were very fortunate. We ate a lot of bread pudding and things like that, but, no, he worked through the Depression completely. The family was very fortunate, in that he was able to do that.

KP: Yes. That was often very difficult, especially with factory work.

CG: Exactly. I know his brother worked for the Hard Rubber Company, and he was laid off, and I can still remember Uncle Robert working on the WPA.

KP: Which project did he work on?

CG: Oh, they had a lot of different projects around Butler. Some of them [were] just cutting down brush. Honestly, I think some of them were just make-work deals, but, it was a program to help out those who were unemployed, and, as I say, I knew from first hand [experience], Uncle Robert [was] on that WPA thing for I don’t know quite how long, but, then, eventually, [he] went back to work again.

KP: You started in a Catholic school, and then, entered a public high school. Why did you switch to public school? What were the differences between the two?

CG: At that time, in Butler, they had a Catholic, two year high school, but, it was not too well organized and my family felt that I would do better, we would do better, [elsewhere]. My sisters went to Butler High School and I followed them to Butler High.

KP: How would you compare your Catholic school experience to your public school experience?

CG: Well, I really can’t make a comparison, because my grammar school was all Catholic, and, ... looking back, I can’t see there was anything wrong with it. I was as prepared for high school
as the people who had gone to public high school. So, I don’t think that the ... Catholic grammar school was any problem for me, as far as going further, and then, as I say, I don’t think that the Catholic high school really was ... well fitted for a good education, and, eventually, I’m not sure when, but, eventually, it just died out, though the grammar school is still going. As a matter-of-fact, I have a friend, much younger, a woman, who is here in Rome, and, eventually, after we got to know her better, we found out that ... I was from Butler, and [she said], “Oh, I went to grammar school in Butler.” Well, it turned out, she went to St. Anthony’s Grammar School. So, every once in a while, like, we were at a dinner just a couple of nights ago, and we were talking with this woman, and I said, “Well, Debbie and I went to grammar school together.” [laughter] I said to the same school, not together. She’s much younger, of course.

KP: When you were growing up, how many people in Butler were immigrants and how many had been born in the United States?

CG: I’d say most of them were native born. I don’t remember too many immigrants, as such. Now, I’d have to say, ... my mother’s father and mother emigrated from Germany. My father’s family, ... they go back a long way. In fact, if you check into Yonkers, there’s a Getty Square in Yonkers, and my father’s family goes back that far, quite a ways, but, my mother’s family, as I say, [the] mother and father came from Germany.

KK: Your mother was a secretary. Did she work as a secretary while you were growing?

CG: No. As a matter-of-fact, she wasn’t a secretary when we were growing up. She was a secretary ... before she married my father and after she married him, for a couple of years, but, I think, after my older sister was born, she stopped working, because she was working in New York City.

KP: Your mother did not work outside of the home after she had children.

CG: No, except, when we were growing up, my father became a motor vehicle agent in Butler and she ran the office for him. I think he was an agent. ... I’m sure it was, like, a political job.

KP: Was your father active in local politics?

CG: He was, he was. He was a Democrat, and I think he had two terms, maybe, of two years each as motor vehicle agent, and then, of course, he lost out.

KP: Morris County was a very Republican county, but, your parents were Democrats.

CG: Right, and I can remember very well ... the election of 1928, when Al Smith was running against Herbert Hoover, and my father, of course, was a big Al Smith fan.

KP: Al Smith’s candidacy meant a lot to many Catholics.

CG: Oh, yes. Al Smith was a Catholic, and so, was supported, I think, by many Catholics.
KP: What did he think of Franklin Roosevelt in 1932?

CG: I’m afraid I can’t really say. I don’t remember.

KP: However, it sounds like your father was a strong Roosevelt man.

CG: I’m not sure he was.

KP: Really?

CG: Yes, but, I don’t remember ever having any serious discussions with him at that time, when I came home from college, or when I came home from the service, or what have you.

KP: However, he was a big Al Smith supporter.

CG: Oh, definitely. Then, it was a big thing. He would go out and put out posters for him and he actually worked very hard on that campaign.

KP: My stepfather lived in Clifton as a child and remembers that there was a lot of anti-Catholic sentiment and Ku Klux Klan activity. Do you remember any Klan activity in Morris County during the 1920s?

CG: Only, I’d say, at a distance. Very close to Butler is a town called Kinnelon and, in Kinnelon, is a mountain. I say a mountain, I don’t know how [high it is]. As a young boy, it seemed like a real mountain when we climbed it, but, just how tall it was, I don’t remember, but, a number of times, the Ku Klux Klan would put a cross up there and burn it, and that was maybe three miles, four miles from Butler. Other than that, I don’t remember any.

KP: Did you actually see them?

CG: No.

KP: You just knew that they were there.

CG: Yes. In fact, I can remember seeing the thing burning, you know, at a distance, from Butler, but, no, I had no contact. I don’t think we ever had any contact, as a family. ...

KP: You never saw a parade or knew of Butler residents who were in the Klan?

CG: No, no, nor had any agitation by the Ku Klux Klan in Butler.

KK: Were you very religious while you were growing up? Did you go to church every week?
CG: Yes, yes. My father and mother were both quite religious and I was an altar boy. Even in the summer, I used to go up at seven o’clock in the morning, and there was a monastery in Butler, a Franciscan monastery, and so, in the summer, there were quite a few priests there, and they needed to have altar boys. So, we’d go up at seven o’clock on a summer day and be an altar boy for these priests, maybe two or three Masses ... a day.

KK: Were you forced to do that?

CG: No, no, we weren’t forced at all. It’s one thing we seemed to like to do at that time.

KP: Did your family ever listen to Father Coughlin?

CG: Yes, yes, and my father was intense on Father Coughlin.

KP: Really?

CG: Yes, a big fan. Of course, later, he turned out to be a real bigot himself, but, yes, my father was very much a fan of Father Coughlin.

KP: Did you ever get to travel or go on vacations while growing up in New Jersey?

CG: Well, yes and no. We had no extensive traveling. When we were growing up, my father and mother had a sort of a program, at least it was for four years. Each year, they would take one of us, it started with my oldest sister, and they would go to New York City and take the ferry, which ran from New York City to Peekskill. I’m not sure, is that Peekskill?

KP: That sounds right.

CG: Anyway, [they] took this overnight trip from New York City up to Peekskill, let’s say, stayed overnight, I forget what else we did, but, then, came back the next day to New York City to take the bus back to Butler, and one of these years, it was my turn and I went. Other than that, it was mostly day trips. We were fairly close to Green Pond, if you remember Green Pond, and that was a great place to go, and have a picnic, and swim, and [that was] very good, and, every once in a while, I think, as we got older, we would take a trip down to Belmar, at the Atlantic Ocean, Jersey Shore.

KK: Were you close with your brothers and sisters as a child and a teenager?

CG: Yes, I’d say close. I don’t know more than to say close. Yes, we were all very compatible.

KP: Did you ever join the Boy Scouts?

CG: Oh, yes. [I was] very much involved in the Boy Scouts from the time I was twelve and, eventually, became an Eagle Scout.
KP: You were very involved with the Boy Scouts.

KK: You have a fellow Eagle Scout here, sir.

CG: Good for you.

KP: In fact, I am an Eagle Scout as well. [laughter]

CG: Great, the three of us. [laughter]

KP: Was your troop sponsored by the Catholic Church? Do you know who sponsored it?

CG: If it was anything, it might have been the American Legion, and it was an active troop, a very active troop. We did a lot of things, and particularly as we got into the merit badges and what have you, there were a lot of special projects that we did. It was very much a part of my life growing up, yes, and right up into high school.

KK: Did you ever go on any camping trips?

CG: Yes, we had a camp at a lake ... about three miles above Butler, in West Milford. I’m trying to think of the name of the lake. ... I can’t think of the name of it. Anyway, it was a troop camp and we went there for ... a number of summers.

KP: Did you go to the National Jamboree in Washington?

CG: Yes, I did, in 1938. I had a great time, and, of course, I was always a big baseball fan, so, this other fellow and I, [I still] remember, Dick Guenter and I, managed to get a ticket into the All-Star Game, which was held in Washington that year, and it was the year that Dizzy Dean got hit in the foot and broke his toe, and it really affected his career from then on, but, I still can remember Dizzy Dean in that All-Star Game.

KP: Since you had not traveled very much, Washington must have been very exciting.

CG: Oh, very, very, quite a place, and we also went there on our senior trip out of high school, Butler High School, and so, that was another time that I was in Washington. Incidentally, as far as the Scouts, I have to tell you, I’m also a Silver Beaver.

KP: Okay. Scouting has been very important to you over the course of your life.

CG: Oh, yes, definitely. I got involved in Scouting when I came here to Rome, and, eventually, was president of the local council for two years. ...

KP: That is fairly involved. [laughter]
CG: But, over the period of time, [I’ve been] in various positions in the council and in the district. ...

KP: Were you ever a scoutmaster?

CG: Never was a scoutmaster. I was an assistant scoutmaster, but, never a scoutmaster, no.

KP: It sounds like you were a district commissioner and held some other posts.

CG: Just about everything else.

KK: Was your son involved in Boy Scouts?

CG: ... He was. My son is an Eagle Scout, the one who went to Rutgers. My second son never did much in Scouts, I don’t why, but, yes, Chuck was an Eagle Scout.

KP: You mentioned that you had an English teacher who really pushed you towards going to college.

CG: She did, she did.

KP: Could you tell us about her as a teacher?

CG: Well, looking back, I know that she was impressive as an English teacher, and, perhaps, I had some leanings along that way, because I was interested, at that point, in journalism, and ... I worked on the Butler High School newspaper. I was the sports editor, and she was involved in that ... as an advisor, and, I tell you, [she was] just a very capable and likable person and [she] certainly had a great deal of influence on me.

KP: When did you have her?

CG: I think it was at least my junior year when I ... first had her.

KP: It sounds like, until she came along, college was not part of your plans.

CG: Never really thought about it. Looking back on it, ... there weren’t that many people who were going to college from Butler High School, and I suppose because it was not too long after the Depression, and, of course, in ’38, [there] was another Depression. So, no, I’m sure, if it hadn’t been for her, I wouldn’t have gone.

KP: You said that not too many students went to college from Butler. Do you remember how many, roughly? Do you remember anyone who did go to college?

CG: Yes. I can think of three or four, but, there weren’t a great deal.
KP: It sounds like you could count the number on your fingers.

CG: Yes, no, I could be wrong as far as the number. ...

KP: What about your graduating class, roughly?

CG: I’m just guessing, and I’m sure I’m not too accurate in my guessing, but, it wasn’t something that everybody was talking about, going to college. You didn’t have colleges coming, as they come now, to high schools to give you information about their programs and what have you and encourage you to come to their school. Rutgers was, then, a private school, ... but, supported by these state scholarships, and I probably never would have even known about them except for her.

KP: It sounds like your only options were to either go to Rutgers with a state scholarship or not go to college at all.

CG: Yes, the only other inclination I had, and this comes from going to a Catholic School, in the Catholic school, ... as I look back on it, [for] a number of the years, when we had contests in class, it would be Notre Dame against Manhattan, you know, both of them Catholic colleges, Notre Dame against Manhattan, and I was always on the Notre Dame side. So, yes, I was interested in Notre Dame, but, I had no inclination. ... [There] would be no possibility that I would have been able to financially go to Notre Dame.

KP: If someone had given you a lot of money, that would have been your dream choice, to go to Notre Dame.

CG: Right, right. I still have a warm feeling for Notre Dame.

KP: You mentioned that you were the editor of the sports page in high school. Did you play any sports in high school?

CG: I was never a great athlete. I was a skinny, puny, 120-pounds, 110-pounds. ... It wasn’t until, I guess, I was a senior that I ever even got up to 150-pounds. I tried out for football and was a third stringer for a couple of years. I tried out for basketball and made the junior varsity. I was a tennis player, ... varsity tennis, but, in my senior year, when I could have done the most, they gave up tennis. [laughter] I was manager of the baseball team. [I was] always interested in sports, but, ... never enough to really do well at sports.

KP: Did you play any sports at Rutgers?

CG: No, except intramural. I played a lot of intramural basketball. I loved to play basketball, but, never went out for football again. I should have gone [out], probably, for the 150-pound [team]. That would have been [ideal], because I was just about 150-pounds, but, I didn’t, but, basketball, I tried out for freshman basketball and didn’t make it. So, as I say, because I liked it, I played a lot of intramural.
KP: Did you go to any ball games in either Newark or New York?

CG: My father was a big baseball fan, so, we went quite often to New York City, either to the Polo Grounds, to see the Pirates play the Giants, or to Yankee Stadium, to see Detroit play the Yankees. He was sort of [a fan of] both [the] Pirates and Detroit, but, more for Detroit. I became more Pirates and continue.

KP: Why did you and your father root for the Pirates and Detroit, as opposed to the Yankees or the Dodgers?

CG: Well, I don’t know about Detroit, why he was a fan of Detroit, but, I know why [he liked] the Pirates. Paterson was not too far from Butler, and the Paterson Silk Socks first had Hones Wagner as a shortstop, and, when I was, maybe, fourteen, they had a game honoring Hone Wagner at Hinchcliff Stadium in Paterson, I think that’s the name of it, and I was able to run around the field. I’m sure they wouldn’t do it today, but, then, I could run around the field, and I got autographs from Paul Waner, and Lloyd Waner, and Freddy Lindstrom. ... I still got the thing downstairs with all those autographs on it. ... From then on, I was a Pirates fan.

KP: Rutgers, with its Dutch Reformed heritage, was very much a Protestant college. Did your parents have any misgivings about not sending you to a Catholic college?

CG: No, because there was certainly ... no problem as far as religion was concerned at Rutgers and there was St. Peter’s, right across the street ... from Winants.

KP: You mentioned that you wanted to be a journalist in high school. Did you still want to be a journalist when you came to Rutgers?

CG: Yes, I did. I started off in journalism [in] my freshman year. ... I’m surprised I stopped, because it was co-ed. The girls from New Jersey College for Women ... were combined in the journalism classes.

KP: Because Rutgers College was a mens’ college.

CG: Oh, definitely.

KP: Journalism was really the exception.

CG: Right. That’s the only one where you had co-ed classes, but, eventually, I think after my freshman year, I decided that business would be more enticing for me, general business, and so, I concentrated on [that and] actually majored in economics.

KP: Did you still think that you would go into journalism or did you abandon that idea when you switched to business?
CG: No, I think I abandoned it. I do think that the war had an effect on that, too. You sort of lost your focus as far as what you were going to do after college. Particularly as I got into the civilian pilot training, I sort of knew where I was going.

KK: Were you involved with the Targum at all?

CG: Yes, I was.

KK: What did you do for the Targum?

CG: I was a sports reporter.

KK: You still had some interest.

CG: Yes, I had started that in my freshman year, and so, I just continued on. I think I still had an interest in journalism, but, not the strong interest that I had when I first went there.

KK: Did you begin to lean towards the military when you entered the civilian pilots’ training program? Did you have any inclinations that you were going to be involved in the military before that?

CG: No. Of course, I was in the first two years of ROTC at Rutgers, but, I didn’t go on to the advanced. No, I had really no thoughts about the military until, I think, perhaps, the beginning of my senior year. They said, “If you wanted to be in the advanced civilian pilot training, you had to sign up for one of the services,” and so, I signed up for the Army Air Corps.

KK: You signed up because you wanted to continue on to advanced pilot training.

CG: Yes, I liked the flying and ... was particularly interested in the advanced, because that was in the Waco biplane. I had learned to fly in an Aeronca Chief.

KK: I have flown one of those.

CG: Did you? It had a wheel rather than a control stick.

KP: When did you actually join the civilian pilots’ training program?

CG: In my junior year.

KP: It sounds like you thought that the United States would enter the war, eventually, and you were trying to prepare yourself.

CG: Well, of course, the war started in ’39. I don’t know. ...
KP: My students, Kevin included, are required to read a semester’s worth of Targums from the war era. One thing they all comment on is how important football seemed to college life. You must have a lot of memories about Rutgers football games.

CG: Oh, very definitely. My freshman year is when the stadium was opened for the game against Princeton, and it ended up with Rutgers beating Princeton for the first time in sixty-nine years, and it was 20 to 18, I believe the score was, exciting game, as I say, new stadium, and Princeton.

KK: What other clubs were you involved in?

CG: ... I’m trying to think of the name of it. They had a sophomore club, oh, I can’t remember the name of it, but, anyway, it was for sophomores and it was to “look after” the freshman. [laughter]

KP: You were a member of the class discipline committee.

CG: Yes. I’m trying to think of the name of the club.

KP: Was it Crown and Scroll?

CG: No, something like that. ...

KP: However, you made sure that the freshman, for example, wore their beanies and carried matches for lighting the cigarettes of upperclassmen.

CG: Oh, you bet, right. ... We had a cap that we wore that designated, you know, that we were a member of that club.

KP: You did not join a fraternity. Did you want to join a fraternity?

CG: Oh, very badly, but, there was no way that I could pay the dues. So, I was approached by a couple of them. ... Phi Kappa Alpha was up on Union Avenue, I can still picture the house, and I went to a couple of rushes. Across the street from Winants, what was that one? I should know, because, as time went on, I had two or three very good friends who were members of that, and I went to a number of parties and what have you. I could have been a member there, but, again, it was money.

KP: It was money that really kept you from joining.

CG: Oh, definitely, yes.

KP: You did, however, attend your fair share of fraternity parties.
CG: Oh, yes. As I say, particularly the one across the street. As I say, I had at least three or four friends, very good friends, that were there that I spent quite a bit of time with ... over there.

KP: Where did you live at first on campus?

CG: First year, I was in Ford, and then, the next three years, I was in Winants, and Winants, then, was like a fraternity.

KP: In fact, I have interviewed John Melrose and he fondly remembers how you once beat the other fraternities in, I think, a musical competition.

CG: And basketball.

KP: I have not heard about that.

CG: Oh, as I say, the intramurals, we had a good Winants basketball team, and so, Winants, as I say, if I couldn’t be in a fraternity, Winants was the next best thing, because it wasn’t like Ford, where everybody ... was just divided. You practically never saw anybody that was on a different floor, but, in Winants, we had a Winants Club, which was very active, we had parties, dances, and what have you, and everybody knew everybody. Yes, John Melrose, I knew exactly where he lived. [laughter]

KP: Have you seen how Winants has been renovated?

CG: Yes.

KP: It is probably nothing like your Winants.

CG: No. ... Just to give you a little vignette of Winants, the stairwells went around, on both ends, up to the fourth floor, and, of course, then, it was open coming down, and this friend of mine, as I say, one of the four that I’ve been getting together with over the years, he got a bag of water one night, and a professor was walking through, and, “Boom.” [laughter] I still remember, there was a lot of investigation [into] who did that.

KP: Do you remember who the professor was?

CG: No, I can’t.

KP: It was just a professor who walked in at the wrong time.

CG: It was a professor who was really angry, I can tell you that. I don’t remember his name.

KP: I think everyone from the Class of 1942 remembers Dean Metzger.

CG: Oh, sure.
KP: What do you remember about Dean Metzger?

CG: Only that he was imposing. ... You knew he was the boss, but, [I] really never had any close contact [with him].

KP: It sounds like you stayed out of trouble.

CG: Managed to.

KP: Since you were an avid sports fan, you must remember Vinnie Utz.

CG: Oh, sure.

KP: A lot of people seem to have a Vinnie Utz story. Do you have any?

CG: No, I don’t think I have any stories about him. I knew him. I think he was in a couple of classes, but, also, in my senior year, I had two jobs, best paying jobs I had at Rutgers. I worked in the cafeteria practically the whole time I was there, for, I think, fifty cents an hour, and you were paid in food, but, in my senior year, I worked on the training table for the football team, and got to know most of the football players, and, also, worked on the scoreboard for the football games. ... I was in the scoreboard, and this friend of mine, George Pullan, who was also [Class of] ’42, was down on the field, and, ... after each play, he would wigwag me, so that I could put up the right [sign], you know, “Ten yards to go,” and, “Fifteen yards to go. Second down,” and what have you, and ... both of those paid money. I forget how much, maybe five dollars a week or something, but, that was real money, so, they were good jobs.

KP: You mentioned that you worked in the cafeteria.

CG: Yes, as I say, that’s where I also got to know Vinnie Utz a little better, on the training table.

KP: What other jobs did you have?

CG: Oh, golly. I can remember the first one I had was probably the week after I got to Rutgers. It was a restaurant up the street from Winants, on the right. [Do] you know where the tavern is there, the Corner Tavern? This was just down from the Corner Tavern, and this German man was running the restaurant, and he let you wait on tables. Actually, you paid him for your food, but, he would give you a big discount if you waited on tables. So, that was the first job I had. When I was able to go from there to the cafeteria, where I got fifty cents an hour credit, I ate much better. [laughter] I delivered papers. I worked at, I’m trying to think if it was a government program. ...

KK: The National Youth Agency?

KP: You had an NYA job?

CG: Right.

KP: Where did you work?

CG: I worked in one of the high schools at night. They had a basketball program and I was a, what would you call it, proctor?

KP: You were, basically, keeping an eye on the students.

CG: Right, right. I had that [for] a couple of years, always the cafeteria, and, eventually, from the cafeteria, I went into working on the ...

KP: Training table?

CG: No, no. That was only in my senior year. The next best job from the cafeteria was ... waiting on tables for the professors. They had a separate dining room here in Winants and, as I say, you progressed from the cafeteria to waiting on tables in the professors’ dining room.

KP: Speaking of professors, do any professors stand out in your mind?

CG: ... I’m worried about names. Yes, I can pick out one immediately, in history, Prof. George. I remember him vividly.

KP: People have told me that he was quite a character.

CG: Oh, he was, he was, and, really, I always enjoyed his classes and he made it very interesting. [He] had strong opinions, but, also, ... he didn’t knock you down for your opinions. We had a good time in his classes. I’d say he was the number one, that I remember.

KP: When you entered Rutgers, in 1938, it was right around the time of the Munich Agreement, and then, in 1939, war broke out in Europe. What did you think about the approach of war while you were in college? How much attention did you pay to it?

CG: Not too much, really. I can remember the outbreak of war, because my family was down at, I think, ... Belmar. This was in September of ‘39. We were down there on vacation and I think it was on a Sunday. I think we came out of Mass, and, suddenly, I don’t know whether we saw a newspaper, or what have you, that [said] war had been declared in Europe, and it was sort of a sinking feeling. I can remember still, but, after that, as far as the war, I don’t remember anything about it until December 7th, 1941.

KP: It sounds like the idea that the United States would enter the war pretty much came out of the blue for you.
CG: Yes, I’m sure. I read the papers, and listened to the radio, and what have you, but, I don’t remember ... anything striking about anything between that September, ’39, and December 7th, and, of course, I remember December 7th very vividly.

KK: Do you remember where you were that day?

CG: Yes, I was right in my room in Winants, and by myself, my roommates weren’t there, and the radio was on, and, all of a sudden, “Pearl Harbor has been bombed.”

KK: How did you get involved with the CAA? Was the cost of the program covered by your scholarship?

CG: No, it had nothing to do with my scholarship and I honestly can’t tell you. I’m sure it was a government program, because it said ”civilian pilot training.” How I got involved, I cannot tell you, other than, ... as I said coming in, perhaps that feeling that I had been left out in the airplane rides that my younger brother was able to go on. ...

KP: You told us that story on the way over from the airport. There were barnstorming pilots who came around to Butler and you were always sick when they came.

CG: I wasn’t sick, but, this one scare I had when I was quite young, my family was a little more protective of me, I guess, than they should have been, because I never really had any problems. It was a mistake and the doctors must have made a mistake.

KP: Obviously, they did.

CG: Obviously, but, anyway, that might have been it, but, other than that, I can’t tell you. It was probably an impulse at that time. ...

KP: It was a fairly good deal. You got free lessons. Tom Kindre said that the only expense was the price of a pilot’s license, which, even then, was not that expensive.

CG: Yes, right. No, I don’t remember that there was ... any expense involved in it. The biggest problem was getting out to Hadley Field.

KP: Did you have a car then?

CG: ... Well, we did. I say we, my roommate and I had a car. We bought a 1932 Ford for ten dollars off a junkyard up in Bound Brook, ten dollars, and we drove that until, I think it was towards the end of my junior year, when it just collapsed. We turned it in on a 1932 Essex and we drove that 1932 Essex until I finished the advanced, which was after I graduated, but, we hadn’t finished, so, I had to stay down after graduation, but, that Essex kept going.
I can remember, one time, having a flat tire on the way out and fixing it, then, on the way back from Hadley, having another flat tire, and I had to hitchhike with a flat tire into ... New Brunswick, get the tire fixed, and hitchhike back. The other thing was that this Essex used oil like mad and we made a deal with one of the garages down there. ... When they emptied the oil out of the cars to change the oil, they have it in big barrels. ... [The owner would] let us go in and take the oil out of that barrel and we’d pour it into the Essex. So, after I finished the advanced course, it was after graduation, of course, I had to go home to Butler, I took the car down and I gave it to the garage man.

KP: You were enrolled in introductory CAA before Pearl Harbor. Did you have any notion, then, that you would have to serve in the military?

CG: No, I don’t think I really thought about it at that point, particularly in the primary course, and this ... tiny, little Aeronca Chief, it didn’t seem very military.

KK: Were you trained by military pilots?

CG: No, civilians.

KK: How many students were involved in that program?

CG: I’m guessing probably eight, eight in both the primary and the secondary.

KK: How much time did you spend in the air per week?

CG: I can’t tell you that. ... I was looking for my logbook, which I think I had in both the primary and secondary, and I can’t find it, but, I think I had about thirty-five hours, dual and solo, in the Aeronca Chief.

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

KP: Did you do any cross-country flights in primary?

CG: I don’t remember any cross-countries in primary. I’m not sure that I didn’t have it, but, I don’t remember.

KK: I guess you moved on to advanced after you soloed.

CG: After we soloed ...

KK: In the Aeronca?

CG: Oh, yes. I was finished. I got my private pilot’s license after the thirty-five hours in the Aeronca. Then, the secondary was in a Waco biplane, ... 225 horsepower, and that course was primarily acrobatics, and ... [I] really enjoyed it.
KK: That sounds like a lot of fun.

CG: Oh, it was. There, again, I don’t remember if we had any cross-country [flights]. I don’t remember them, but, I do remember acrobatics, acrobatics, acrobatics.

KP: You mentioned that you had to join a service to get into the advanced course. When did you have to make that decision?

CG: I believe it was the beginning of my senior year.

KP: So, you joined the Air Corps before Pearl Harbor.

CG: It sounds like it, doesn’t it? I’m not sure, though.

KP: Do you remember, precisely?

CG: No.

KP: However, by the time you reached the advanced level, you needed to join the Air Corps. It was part of the deal.

CG: Well, I’m not really sure. Someplace along the line, before I finished the advanced, you had to sign up, and ... [it] seems to me that I really applied for Naval [aviation], and, because I had a little tooth problem, the Navy wouldn’t take me. So, I ended up in the Army.

KP: A number of people have told me similar stories about problems with their teeth.

CG: It’s amazing that the teeth would keep you out. As I remember, that’s why I couldn’t get in the Naval Air Corps.

KP: The spring semester of 1942 was altered dramatically by the war. Do you remember any changes caused by the war? For example, the graduation date was moved down.

CG: Other than the fact that I think some people went into the service before they graduated and, maybe, got their certificate, or their degree, in absentia, but, other than that, I don’t remember anything really affecting how we finished our classes in any way.

KP: What was it like to fly a plane? When you started to learn how to fly, most people had not even been on a plane, much less flown one.

CG: Well, it was exciting. I know that. [laughter]

KP: Tom Kindre has a great story about a close call where he misplotted his navigation and ended up over the Atlantic. Did you have any stories like that?
CG: I don’t even remember any cross-country. ... Other than the acrobatics, which I really enjoyed, the only other thing I remember that was interesting about our flying, then, the girls at NJC, particularly on the roof of Jameson, ... used to go out and sunbathe on the roof, and we used to, every once in a while, fly over there, just to go over Jameson and see them sunbathing. [laughter]

KP: Did you ever go out on dates with the women from what was then called the Coop?

CG: Oh, definitely did, yes. [laughter] I could spend quite a bit of time talking about the Coop. [laughter] I’ll cut it down to this point. I met my future wife and she was a sophomore at the time at NJC. I met her at the end of her freshman year, and we went together for the remainder, and, eventually, she married me.

KP: How did you meet? Was it at a fraternity party?

CG: No, it was sort of a funny thing. In fact, they had the Newman Club there, which was the Catholic club, which was a club for both the men at Rutgers and the women at NJC. ... I was a sophomore, so, it would be the end of my sophomore year. They had a party, a dance and what have you, and I went. My wife was not a Catholic, was invited by a friend of hers who was a Catholic, and so, she went to the party, and we danced, and I walked her home, and that was the beginning.

KP: Did you get married during the war?

CG: During the war.

KP: Did you discuss your options, in terms of marrying before, after, or during the war?

CG: [We had] a lot of discussions. We, meaning my wife and I, had a lot of discussions about that and we finally decided that we’d like to do it before. Actually, [as] it turned out, I was married on my overseas leave. We had six days out of Pueblo, Colorado. I came back to Jersey and we were married in ... Paterson.

KP: You were a newlywed couple that was split apart very soon after you got married.

CG: For a year-and-a-half.

KP: What tipped the balance towards getting married during the war?

CG: I don’t really remember that, other than the fact that we decided we wanted to be together, even if it was only for a short time, and that six day leave was tremendous.

KP: How often did you write to each other?
CG: Practically every day, practically every day. As a matter-of-fact, I have to tell you, Charlotte is my second wife. My first wife died three years ago, but, I have, downstairs, a thing about this big. My wife saved the letters.

KP: Your letters home?

CG: Yes, and, [in] just the last couple of days, I’ve been reading them, because I can follow ... my path in training from pre-flight, to primary, ... to advanced, to B-24 transition school. All the letters follow right on through. She saved them all, until I went overseas, and there isn’t a one from when I went overseas.

KP: Really?

CG: It’s amazing, because I wrote practically every day, ... and she saved them.

KP: Up until you went over?

CG: There’s not a one from my [overseas assignment]. There’s a letter on the last day that I was at Lincoln, Nebraska. We took off from Lincoln ... to go overseas and that’s the last letter that she saved, funny, but, it’s interesting to look back on those letters and, as I say, just follow my career right on through.

KK: Did you complete the CAA program before or after you graduated from Rutgers? Did you go into training immediately after graduation?

CG: No. ... I think I finished just before the July 4th holiday, and then, I went in the service. I still remember the date, August 4th, 1942. [I] had orders to go to Nashville, Tennessee, which was a classification center, where they took tests and they determined whether you should be a pilot, or a bombardier, or a navigator, or whether you should become a private.

KK: In taking the test, did it make any difference that you already had pilot’s training as civilian? Did that experience help you?

CG: I guess well enough so that I was classified as a pilot. I was really worried. In fact, [I was] ... just remembering one of the letters about that. One of the tests, they gave you a needle, and you had to hold it in a hole, and then, they’d have, “Boom, boom,” noise, and yelling, and screaming, and all kinds of things to, I guess, make you nervous, and, of course, if you hit the edges of the hole, then, you’d get the big noise, each time you’d hit it, and, of course, with all the noise, I could hit that hole quite often. So, I was really concerned about that, but, other than that, I think I did quite well on the test and well enough, I guess, to be classified as a pilot.
KP: Did you want to be a pilot?

CG: Definitely, oh, yes.

KP: Did you want to be in the Army Air Corps?

CG: Oh, at that point, yes, definitely. I didn’t want to go in the infantry. I didn’t want to go anywhere [else], particularly with the background of flying. ...

KK: Did you want to fly bombers?

CG: At that point, I didn’t really think about it. No, I just wanted to fly.

KP: Initially, did you have any idea of how dangerous aviation was, how high the casualties would be, and how dangerous the missions would be?

CG: None at all, never thought about it.

KP: After your initial training, where did you go to next?

CG: Went from Nashville to pre-flight school at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama, and it was ... fortunate, or unfortunate, ... however you want to put it. It was a course that was supposed to take six weeks. The flying classes in the Army Air Corps were all classified by the year and the month, and ... I started out as ‘43D, which would be April, ... yes, ‘43D, that would be my proposed graduation, if I stayed in, but, in pre-flight school, apparently, they needed to fill up the Class of ‘43C, so, a number of us were put ahead. So, instead of six weeks, we only had three weeks of pre-flight school, and we were advanced to the Class of ‘43C, which was March of ’43. So, then, we went with that class to primary in Ocala, Florida.

KP: From what people have told me, pre-flight sounds like it was mostly learning military discipline and indoctrination.

CG: Oh, yes. It was like a cadet school. See, the upperclassmen were on the lower classmen, until they became upperclassmen, and then, they were on the [new guys]. A lot of drilling, and I can still remember, it was in August, in ... Montgomery, Alabama, hot, and, of course, you drilled with rifles, and, if somebody fell, nobody could do anything. You just left them there and this one day, particularly, there must have been fifty [men down]. When we marched off the field, there’s all these guys lying on the ground, had fainted. It was hot. They had a run there we called the “Burma Run.” [laughter] Hot, oh, God, I was happy to get out of Alabama.

KP: You were happy that you had been accelerated.

CG: Oh, yes, right, very definitely.
KP: Except for Washington, DC, you had never really been to the South before the war. What did you think of the South? You spent most of your time on military bases, but, did you have any contact with Southerners? Did you ever get into town?

CG: No. Talking about Southerners, I think the most interesting experience was, one of my classmates was a tall, blond, good looking guy from South Carolina, Burt Beatty. ... It’s surprising how you can remember some names and you can’t remember [others]. This guy was one of the nicest guys that you could meet, until you started talking about blacks, and then, ... he’d get livid. I won’t even repeat the way he talked about them. It was such a transformation, from nice guy to bigot, but, other than that, not too much that I can remember about Southerners, whatever.

KP: The climate seems to have really stuck in your memory.

CG: Oh, yes, particularly Alabama, hot and humid.

KP: In primary, what type of plane did you fly? What was your training like there?

CG: Flew a PT-17, which was a Stearman biplane. It was almost a replica of the Waco that I flew in civilian pilot training, except for the landing gear. ... The Waco had a wide landing gear, very easy to land. The PT Stearman had a narrow landing gear, made it very susceptible to ground loops, but, other than that, it was exactly the same. I just had a ball. It was so easy, exactly what we’d been doing in civilian pilot training, advanced, acrobatics.

KK: Did cadets wash out?

CG: Oh, yes.

KK: Was there a high wash out rate?

CG: I don’t remember exactly the total, but, I can give you an instance which will give you some idea. I was in a room with four other guys in Ocala. All four of them washed out.

KK: However, you had no problem.

CG: No. I came back one night and they were waiting to be reassigned. They had signs all over the room, “Get Getty.” It was in fun, but, ... all four of them washed out.

KP: Do you know why they washed out?

CG: Well, some people just were [un]adaptable to flying. ... You had to solo within a certain [amount of] time, and, if the instructor didn’t think you were ready and didn’t want to take a chance on that plane going up with you as the only pilot, he wouldn’t do it, but, as I say, it was a breeze for me. I had no trouble, all right on through.
KP: In primary, did you ever witness any accidents?

CG: Oh, yes. We had a couple, particularly from the ground loops, the [PT]-17’s landing gear was so narrow, but, other than that, I don’t think we had any that were planes crashing, mostly ground loops.

KK: Did you always go up with an instructor or did you go up by yourself?

CG: Oh, well, ... I think I soloed after nine hours of instruction and, from that point on, there was sometimes an instructor, sometimes solo.

KK: Did you ever do anything crazy, like buzz a cornfield?

CG: No, no. I don’t think I was a crazy pilot at any time. [laughter] I still enjoyed the acrobatics. I can remember going out by myself and doing the things that I liked to do. I just have one interesting experience. When I was out, one day, doing acrobatics, when I started to go back to the field, it was completely a wall of fog, and, of course, at that point, I had had no instrument training. So, I started looking around for a place to land and landed on a ranch.

You know, that part of Florida had cow ranches. I landed on a ranch, made a nice landing, walked to the ranch house, and phoned the base, and, eventually, ... two instructors came out in another Stairman and we flew back, but, that’s about the [only incident]. ...

KK: Did you ever have an engine quit or have any kind of mechanical trouble while you were flying?

CG: No, no.

KK: After primary, where did you go?

CG: After primary, we went to Shaw Field, South Carolina, Sumter, South Carolina, and, there, we flew a (Volti?) Trainer. We called it the (Volti?) Vibrator, VT-13, had a 250 horsepower engine, had flaps for the first time, and, there, I’d say for the first time, ... I was going to say formation. We did have some formation flying in primary, but, not much. We had formation flying. [It was the] first time that we flew at night. We had a lot of cross-country flying, as I said, instruments. It was much more advanced than the primary, bigger plane, oh, and adjustable pitch propellers, which was new, and that was funny, too.

When they had these cross-country flights, the first couple particularly, a lot of people got lost, including me one day, but, in South Carolina, practically every town had a water tower, and they had the name ... on the water tower. So, you’d drop down, put it into high pitch, or low pitch, I forget whether ... it was high pitch or low pitch, but, as you did this, [the] thing would go, [Mr. Getty imitates an airplane engine] [laughter] and you’d get all these complaints back to the field about their guys zooming ... around the water towers, looking at the name.
KK: You said that you had instrument training there. Was this your first time?

CG: Yes.

KK: What did you use for navigation in primary?

CG: Well, there were certain places where you could home in on.

KK: Right.

CG: But, as far as the instrument flying, it was nothing that was not flying on a range or anything like that. ... You’d put a hood over the cockpit, and then, you’d fly on the instruments.

KK: The artificial horizon.

CG: Yes, needle, ball, and air speed, first. That was the initial thing. You always had to start with needle, ball, and air speed, but, then, yes, the artificial horizon. In the beginning, they’d cut off the artificial horizon, just to make it definitely you, because the needle, ball, and air speed was more reliable than the artificial horizon.

KK: Exactly. We still train like that. How long were you at that base?

CG: ... I think we had seventy hours [of] flying there. We were there from September until the end of December.

KK: Did you ever go up in bad weather?

CG: Well, it depends on what you mean by bad weather, not thunderstorms or anything like that, but, I can still remember the first time we took off. This was [in a] dual-[engined plane]. We took off, went up through the clouds, on the ground, it was rainy, miserable, went up, probably not more than eight or 10,000 feet, maybe not even that, but, we came out above and the sun was shining. The first time we had done that, and, of course, I still remember it. That was quite an experience, that first time up through the clouds, miserable on the ground, sun, blue skies, beautiful.

KK: I guess you really enjoyed flying.

CG: Yes.

KK: After that, where did you go?

CG: Went from there to Moody Field, Georgia, and, of course, before going to Moody, it was a case of them telling you, and I don’t remember other than them telling us, whether they went through anything with us to see what we wanted to do, but, they told us, “You are twin engine. You are single engine.” So, that was when I found out I wasn’t going to be a fighter pilot.
KP: Did you want to be a fighter pilot?

CG: I don’t really know at that point. I think I had an inclination.

KP: You enjoyed the acrobatics.

CG: Yes, right, but, ... I don’t remember too much, as I say, even talking about it, other than finding out that’s where I was going.

KP: From what I have seen of the military, often, if you choose something, the military will give you the opposite.

CG: Yes, as I told you, I don’t even remember if we had a choice.

KK: Did they have any way of selecting candidates for either bombers or fighters or was it totally random?

CG: All I can assume, Kevin, is that ... the instructors got together and they said, “Well, this guy ... seems to have more inclination for single engine.” I don’t know, ‘cause I enjoyed the acrobatics.

KK: Right.

CG: What was the reason? I don’t know.

KK: Did you begin flying multi-engines planes at that point?

CG: Well, at Moody Field, we had twin engine, they were AT-10s. I was trying to think of the make. I can’t. I’ve got it in my notes some place, but, I should remember it, twin engines, and a lot of instrument flying there, a lot of formation, and a great deal of cross-country, and the one I remember best is one that they said, “We’ll go at 500 feet.” Of course, we went on the deck for the whole, I think it was, 300 mile trip and it was great. First time I’d really buzzed and we did it for 300 miles. [laughter]

KK: Sounds like fun.

CG: It was.

KK: Did you do any single engine work?

CG: None there, no, strictly twin engines. ... 

KK: No, I meant, like, when I did my multi-engine training, they simulated one engine quitting.
CG: Oh, yes. We had a lot of that. ...

KK: Did you do any spin training?

CG: I can’t remember spinning in that twin-engine plane. It would seem logical that we did, because you did it in every plane, but, I don’t remember spinning in the AT-10.

KK: What did you think of that kind of flying, compared to flying the single engines you were used to? I guess you were doing acrobatics.

CG: No, there were no acrobatics. I don’t know. At that point, you’re getting close to getting your wings and getting your commission, and I think I was disappointed about single engine, but, you get into the routine of the flying the twin engine, and, of course, two engines is a little different from the single.

KK: Did you do a lot of instrument work?

CG: Instrument, formation, a lot of night flying.

KK: What was the primary navigational aid back then?

CG: Radio ranges.

KK: Okay, non-directional beacons.

CG: Yes.

KK: I do not even turn that instrument on in the airplane anymore.

CG: Yes. I understand that, now, you press a button and it tells you exactly where you are.

KK: Pretty much.

KP: With these instruments, in your era, and you mentioned it already, you could very easily get lost.

CG: Oh, yes. Well, of course, [as] I say, when I got lost, it was when I was flying the VT-13, and you were doing your piloting on pilotage, rather than instrument flying. So, you weren’t really using the radio that much. You were picking out Butler, and Paterson, and what have you, and flying along this railroad, and it wasn’t the more advanced cross-country, where, ... yes, you use the radio ranges and what have you. It wasn’t that long. I mean, I think that 300 miles was probably the most that we did, either in basic or in advanced.

KK: Were you commissioned there?
CG: Commissioned on March 25, 1943, good memory, [right]?

KP: You were really looking forward to getting your wings and your commission.

CG: Oh, sure, very definitely.

KP: Aviators had a lot of status at that time, not that aviators do not enjoy a high status today. However, I get the impression that few things surpassed being a pilot in your day.

CG: Oh, yes, and, as you went through this training program, of course, you developed a feeling regarding the people who flew and people who didn’t fly. The people who didn’t fly were called “paddle feet” and, for the rest of the service, you know, ... the people who flew looked at paddle feet with just a little superiority, you know. [laughter]

KP: I get the sense that people were washing out at every stage of training.

CG: Oh, yes.

KP: They just could not keep up, physically.

CG: Just didn’t stay up with the training, right. One of my best friends, that I was very good friends with, ... well, even in pre-flight school, and then, we went to Ocala, went from Ocala to Shaw Field, he washed out in basic, couldn’t understand it. As far as I knew, ... actually, he had been a policeman in Elizabeth, and he seemed a very capable guy [who] just didn’t make it.

KK: Were you ever worried that you might be in danger of washing out?

CG: Well, in looking over some of these letters ... to my wife, I expressed, you know, “Well, I didn’t do well, today,” in something or other, but, honestly, I don’t ever remember feeling that I was on the verge of being washed out. I always felt I was, if not an average pilot, I was better than average.

KP: Did you have any scary incidents, in terms of weather or navigation, during training?

CG: No, other than that forced landing in primary. ... Well, I almost forgot ... two things in advanced. One, flying dual, coming in for a landing, I think it was a gust that might have hit a wing, just as we were almost on the ground, and we went up like this, and the instructor grabbed the controls, and pulled power, and managed to ... get it back level, and we went around and landed. That was close.

The only other thing I remember is, the last two or three days before graduation, as I told you, I graduated on the 25th, we were trying to make up our hours, and we flew every night, the 22nd, the 23rd, and the 24th, and I think we were getting pretty weary, but, this one night, coming back to the field, I was flying, I mean, it was not [with] instructors, this was solo, the last three nights, and I got vertigo. Have you ever had vertigo?
KK: Yes.

KP: We were just talking about that.

CG: Oh, man. I just didn’t know which end was up. You had to concentrate on the instruments, because, otherwise, you were in trouble, and I managed to get down all right, but, I can still remember that awful feeling, terrible.

KK: I have never really had it in the clouds. I have had some minor cases of vertigo, like when I am fumbling for a map or something, and I look up, and we are in the clouds, and I feel like I am turning or something, but, I am not. Every year, I go to an air show in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

CG: I’ve been there.

KK: You have?

CG: Yes.

KK: Great.

CG: Wonderful.

KK: It is. I love it. Anyway, at the Air Museum, they have a vertigo simulator. They put you in there and spin you around.

CG: Oh, I went in that museum. I don’t remember that.

KK: Well, they had that when I was there, two years ago. Wow. After you come through, they ask you, “Which way do you think you are going? Point your stick in that direction.” You point your stick to the left, but, later on, they tell you that you were spining to the right or you were stopped. You cannot believe it unless you experience it.

CG: Awful feeling, awful. ... I don’t think that I ever had it after that. I might have, maybe in just ...

KK: Minor incidences.

CG: Yes. Particularly as you get into a larger airplane, it isn’t as bad, because the plane is more stable, and you can easily correct, or you can say, “Co-pilot, take over.” [laughter] So, I don’t remember, other than that one night at Moody Field, and I remember that, oh, a terrible feeling.

KP: After getting your wings and your commission, where were you sent to next?
CG: ... I think it was a very fortunate thing, because not all the pilots went there. We went to what’s called a four-engine transition school at Smyrna, Tennessee, and it was just to take new pilots, newly commissioned with their wings, and go into B-24s and fly B-24s.

KP: Where did the other pilots go?

CG: Well, of course, once you were commissioned and got your wings, you were sent all over. There were two other people in my class that went to this B-24 transition school. The rest of them went all over. I don’t remember where the rest of them went. [laughter]

KP: Could they fly the B-24 without that training?

CG: No, probably not, though, when we got into the phase training of B-24s, we ran into people who had never gone to four-engine transition school that had become co-pilots, and then, from co-pilots to pilots in the B-24s. As I say, we were lucky we had this training. We were the first pilots, and no question about it, and had advanced training that these other guys just had to pick up along the way.

KP: Learning from an instructor in an organized manner was the better way to learn it.

CG: Definitely.

KP: How long did your training in Smyrna last?

CG: It was another two months. Let’s see, ... yes, three months, April, May, and June, and then, when we left there, we went to Clovis, New Mexico, and that’s the first time we were in an organization of B-24 bombers, and we were only there probably about a week, and we received part of our crew, some of the gunners, got a bombardier. Didn’t get a co-pilot, didn’t get a navigator, and didn’t get all the gunners, but, at least we started. It was the first of our crew.

As I say, we were only there a week to ten days at the most, and then, we went from there to Pueblo, Colorado, which was the beginning of what they called phase training in B-24s. We had a lot of formation flying, and a lot of aerial gunnery, where they tow a sleeve, and then, the gunners shoot at them, a lot of gunnery on the ground, I’d come down on the deck, and your gunners would shoot at simulated tanks on the deck, a lot of cross-country flying. We had one thing where we went down to Galveston, Texas, and flew over the Gulf ... on the deck. It was fun.

KP: You enjoyed flying a great deal.

CG: Oh, I did, I did, and the biggest thing around Pueblo was that the mountains right in back of the field were 14,000 feet high. ... You’d usually do cross-country to the east and it was all plains, you know, it was 6,000 feet sea level, but, it was plains, level, but, when you came back in bad weather, you knew you had to get down before you got to those 14,000 foot mountains in
back of you. We had a couple of planes, I think there were three, that hit Pikes Peak, out of our group. Other than that, it was not too bad.

KP: You mentioned that, in Clovis and Pueblo, you met the rest of your crew. Maybe this would be a good time to go over your crew, who they were and where they came from, as best as you can remember.

CG: Oh, that’s ... [laughter]

KP: Well, how about we start with your co-pilot?

CG: Well, I’ll start with the co-pilot, ... at least to make some of the more interesting comments about him. We had no co-pilots at Clovis. We had no co-pilots at Pueblo for a while. So, the first pilots had to act as co-pilots for other people. So, you’d usually go six hours as a pilot, and then, six hours as a co-pilot, each day. So, you had twelve hours flying, each day.

KP: That is a pretty demanding schedule.

CG: It was rugged, and we were there at least two weeks, or three weeks, before ... our co-pilots showed up, and the co-pilots showed up very, very disgruntled people. They had trained in single engine, you know, and, at that point, there were P-40s. ... There were no [P]-51s then, but, anyway, they were single engine pilots who wanted to be single engine pilots, had been trained as single engine pilots, here they are, they’re going to be co-pilots in a four engine bomber. You can believe [that] they were about as pissed off as you can get any group. [laughter]

KP: This group was not just one or two?

CG: Oh, no. ... All the pilots had to get a co-pilot and all from the same source.

KP: It sounds like they just took a group from a single engine school and told them, “You are now in twin engines.”

CG: Sounds like it. So, anyway, it took a lot of training to get these guys able to fly a four engine plane, you know. We had gone from single engine to twin engine, and then, had B-24 training. These guys went from a single engine to a four engine and as a co-pilot, too. So, it was a little hairy for a while. They were not good four engine pilots, ... particularly when it came to instruments and formation. Oh, formation, my guy almost killed us once.

KP: It was that close of a call? What happened?

CG: Oh, god, ... I’m trying to think. I think we were flying on the right wing of the leader, or either leading an element on the low right, and I was giving him training, letting him fly the plane from the right seat, and ... we were in a turn, which is always the worst in formation flying, and he’d lost control, and it started to slide toward the other planes, and I just, full throttle, pulled back on the wheel, and we just barely slid over the top of the lead plane, and I mean barely, and it
was strictly that, full throttle and pull back on the wheel. ... I can still remember it. [laughter]
So, anyway, it took a lot of time. He, eventually, became a good co-pilot. He was never going to be a first pilot, that was sure.

You know, some of them, particularly when we got overseas, some of the co-pilots [who] were ambitious and good flyers did become first pilots, but, mine was never going to be a first pilot.

KP: It sounds like the pilots were doing a lot of instructing.

CG: Oh, yes, and this guy became a good co-pilot, but, I would never have made him a first pilot. He didn’t have the personality, for one thing. It’s amazing to me that he got into fighters.

KP: Really?

CG: He was ... not aggressive, laid back.

KP: What was his pre-military background? What had he done?

CG: Nothing much. ... I think he had one year of college.

KP: What part of the country was he from?

CG: Wharton, New Jersey.

KP: He was from Wharton?

CG: Right, not too far from where I was. Of course, I was from Boonton.

KP: Considering the nation-wide pool the Air Corps drew people from, he might as well have been as close as your next-door neighbor.

CG: Yes, that’s true.

KP: What about your navigator?

CG: Well, the navigator, I never really got one. I got one at Pueblo and he was a character from Miami. He was Jewish, which ... had nothing to do with it. His name was Gostel and he was a gambler, golly, particularly when we got to England. Every first of the month, at the officers’ club, everybody got their pay. Many people were at the officers’ club, gambling. Well, he was there, and, some months, he would send a thousand dollars home, other months, he’d borrow from us for the rest of the month. [laughter] Well, he was that type of a gambler.

KP: What was his game of choice?
CG: He was poker, definitely poker, and, as I say, sometimes, he made out, sometimes, he didn’t, but, when he didn’t make out, he didn’t lose anything, he just lost his pay. When he made out, he sent the money home, but, as I say, it was a problem. He was there in England with us about three months, and he developed some kind of a malady, and I’m not sure just exactly what the malady was, and I, maybe, shouldn’t say any more than that, but, he got sent home.

KP: Was it psychological?

CG: It could have been.

KP: It sounds like you did not even want to look into it.

CG: No. He was that type of a character. ...

KP: How many missions had he flown with you?

CG: Two, at the most.

KP: We often see scenes with large card or craps games in war movies. It sounds like that was fairly accurate.

CG: I wasn’t a gambler. [laughter] Anyway, that was my navigator. From that point on, we had a number of navigators. We never really got one assigned to us, as such, for the rest of our tour. ...

KP: It sounds like you borrowed navigators.

CG: Yes. We’d have one for two or three missions, then, get another one.

KP: Did that worry you at all? Would the crew have preferred to have a permanent navigator?

CG: Oh, yes, but, for the most part, you flew in formation. There, you can see those things there. The lead guy was the guy who was doing the navigating. The only navigating that might be done, and that wasn’t too much, was when you’re ... taking off, and you had to get up and get into formation, but, even then, you went by radio. You knew that you were going to form over Land’s End, England, and that had a beacon, so, you just took the beacon, head for Land’s End you’d see the planes, pick out your own group, and get back into where you belonged.

KK: I am sorry to get away from what we were talking about, but ... 

CG: We’ve gotten ahead of our subject.

KK: Yes. How long did it take your squadron to launch all of the B-24s? In that picture, there must be thirty or forty of them getting ready.
CG: Probably, take-off and forming up, at least an hour to an hour-and-a-half.

KK: How much fuel did you carry?

CG: We carried a lot of fuel. We could be up, depending on the bomb load, I had one mission ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Charles R. Getty on November 14, 1996, in Rome, New York, with Kurt Piehler and ...

KK: Kevin Kilpatrick. Did you have any control over when you actually took off, before you got into formation?

CG: Individually, each airplane? No.

KK: Yes. You simply got in line with the other B-24s.

CG: You lined up each [plane], you took off probably [in] about one minute intervals, and just followed the other guy. Again, getting off [the subject], but, the biggest problem was weather. ... When we first started, there were only four B-24 groups and they were all right around Norwich, England. Eventually, in our wing, we had three groups, and there were three other wings, and they were all right around Norwich. When you had weather, you took off and you had sort of a race-course route based on your beacon.

Now, of course, wind might push you one way or the other, but, you still had to home [in] on the beacon, and back and forth, in all kinds of weather, sometimes, and a couple of missions, we had to climb eighteen, 20,000 feet through clouds on this basis. Now, it’s not just yours, but, there’s another base ten miles from you, and another base ten miles there, and another base ten miles there, and they’re doing the same thing. So, ... as I say, there were ... many mid-air collisions based on that. You did the same thing when you were coming home. If it was clouds, you had to let down through the clouds and you did it individually.

KK: Did you have radar or anything like that?

CG: No way. When you hit prop wash, you prayed.

KK: You prayed a lot, I imagine.

CG: Right.

KK: What about icing?

CG: Well, that was the other thing I was going to mention. ... Again, looking through here, this one particular time, we had to climb through 18,000 feet of clouds and what have you, and it was
icing, and I’ve got [it] in the diary there, a couple of times, my controls froze up, which was pretty scary when you’re in intense clouds, climbing. A friend of mine actually went into a spin that day, because he iced up and lost control, pulled out at about 2,000 feet, and climbed back up again, and went on the mission, but, those were the conditions you flew under.

... You had no radio ranges. You had all these air bases, same area, and thirty planes from my base, and thirty planes from this base, and thirty planes from that base, climbing individually up to form up, or try to form up. A couple of times, we never were able to form up.

KK: Because you were still in the clouds at that altitude.

CG: ... I can remember this one mission where we started, [it] was going to be a mission, climbed up to around eighteen or 20,000 feet, got up there, and the contrails would be so thick, from the engines going back, they would form clouds, and we, eventually, kept going up, and up, and up, while the ceiling of a B-24 is around 25,000 feet, with bombs and gas, and so, the mission was scrubbed, because we just couldn’t fly anymore. We’re hanging on the props, but, it was the weather in England. It was not good. I had one particularly scary event. Well, it wasn’t scary at the time, until we got on the ground, but, you’d also get ground fog. You’d come over the air base and you could look down and see the base. When you got down [and] went to go on your base leg, you couldn’t see it at all.

So, they’d get a flying officer up on the top of the tower and he would take each plane and talk them [in], you know. He’d catch them on your base leg. “Okay, now, turn on your final [turn],” ... catch you on the downwind, and then, ... tell you when to turn on the base. Then, he’d tell ... you when to turn on the final approach. Well, when you got around the final [approach], this one day, I did it, and I think we were no more than fifty feet off the ground when there’s the runway over there. Well, a B-24 at fifty feet, you’d take up most of the fifty feet in making your turn, but, we managed to do it and get on the ground, but, ... it was hairy, and this was the weather in England and the way you had to operate.

KK: It became commonplace. Did it bother you?

CG: Sure did, scared me to death. [laughter] No, ... you couldn’t do much about it. You had to just deal with it.

KK: Therefore, the only time a mission would be canceled for weather was if you could not form up?

CG: Yes. That would be about the only one. I think I was on two that were scrubbed because of not being able to form up at altitude. I had two missions where I aborted. You hated to abort. You know, it was not looked on with favor, but, one, I lost all my oxygen and had to come back, and, the other time, I got it in my diary what it was, something I couldn’t do anything about.

KP: Was there a real stigma to aborting the mission?
CG: Oh, sure. We hated to do it.

KK: Even if there was nothing you could do? If you lost your oxygen at 18,000 feet, there was nothing you could do anyway.

CG: Well, that’s it. I came back, but, I didn’t like it.

KP: Were there any pilots in the squadron who aborted frequently?

CG: Not really. Vaguely, I remember a couple, but, not to the point where an awful lot was made of it, but, you just hated to do it. I’ve got one mission there that I was looking at. We started in one plane, and something happened to that plane just before takeoff, and we got out of that plane, got another one, got into the other one, took off again, and something happened. Oh, I know. On the original one, we were taxiing out to take off and we ... had a flat tire. So, we took it back and got another airplane, and then, we took off, and we lost oil pressure, and I went back and landed. By that time, they had fixed the tire on the first plane. So, we went over to the first plane, and took off again, and managed to catch the formation, and go on. ... You just didn’t want to abort. You just hated to do it.

KK: Did you have the same plane for all of your thirty missions?

CG: No, not really. The first four or five missions was one here, one there, a different one each time, and then, I guess because of lasting five missions, I got my own airplane, and I was able to name it, and I named it for my first wife, her name was Katherine, and it was the Galloping Katie. So, we flew the Galloping Katie until about my sixteenth mission, and ... I got a really bad cold, and I was in the infirmary for a couple of days, and another guy flew the Galloping Katie, got shot down. So, then, we flew a couple of other airplanes, and then, my last five or six airplanes, I, again, got another new airplane. We named it Galloping Katie II, which, I think, ... yes, that’s the one there.

KP: This is the Galloping Katie II.

CG: Right.

KP: Going back to your crew, do you remember anything about your bombardier, what his personality was like, where he was from?

CG: Yes. He was from Northampton, Massachusetts. I’d say a real down-easter, great one for the ladies, and a good bombardier. ... He always did well. Of course, in the beginning, we were flying on the lead, and so, he had no real responsibility for bombing, but, our last three or four missions, we were in the lead, and so, he had to do the bombing, and he always did very well. Good fellow, a lot of fun to be with, always very supportive of his pilot. [laughter] I’d mentioned the co-pilot, and the navigator, and Devillers was the bombardier.
KP: When you say, “He was a ladies man,” it sounds like he took full advantage of his Air Force uniform.

CG: I think he did. When we used to go on leave, to London, he always managed to end up with a girl, always. He wasn’t married and, as I say, he was a good man.

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed his company.

CG: Oh, yes, I did. We spent a lot of time together. I think of all the crew or, yes, of the officers, he and I were the most compatible.

KP: What about the enlisted men in your crew?

CG: They were a good group. They really were. Most of them were very young. I always tell this story. The crew was very young. I was the oldest. I was twenty-two at the time.

KP: You were not that old. [laughter]

CG: No, but, as I say, the tail gunner, I think, was eighteen when we first went over, nineteen when he started getting credit for knocking down fighters. The rest of them were in that area, twenty-two, twenty-three. The engineer, this guy here at the end, McCoy, was twenty-five.

KP: Oh, he was old.

CG: Everybody called him “Pop.” [laughter] ... I’m not kidding, because he was older than the rest of us. ...

KP: What was his background, McCoy, the engineer?

CG: Now, you’re asking me something I’m afraid I can’t answer, because I can’t remember each one of them and their background. I remember what they did for us and McCoy had not had very much engineering training. He had gone to engineering school. I said someplace in my notes that I knew as much about the plane as he did when I first got him in Clovis, and that was the truth, but, he learned quickly, and he turned out to be a very good engineer, and we had a couple of instances in flight where we had little crisis in switching gas tanks from here to here, or other things that went wrong, and he was always able to take care of them, a couple of times, having to go out in the bomb bay. ... He was good. He learned. So, I never had any problems [with him].

The radio operator, real good looking boy, pleasant, his name was Merlin Hugge. He had gone to radio operator school and he was an excellent operator and a good gunner. The radio operator, in addition to taking care of the radio, took care of the top turret, and Hugge was a good one. As I say, the tail gunner, this was Cox, he was just a farm boy from Kansas, ... tall and lanky, and he looked, when he walked, like a farm boy, but, as I say, he got credit for three German fighters. There was [only] one other guy in the whole group, in the over a year and two months that I was
there, that had three confirmed [kills] and he and Cox were the only ones that had three. He was very good.

KP: Many gunners never got any, I believe.

CG: Oh, yes, yes. He had three. I’ve got it in my notes. He was a waist gunner. He got one and this guy was ... actually a waist gunner. When we first went over, we had B-24Ds that had a Plexiglas nose and they had flexible machine guns in the nose that the bombardier and navigator supposedly fired. Of course, they weren’t very good at it. [laughter] So, we, eventually, got a B-24J that had a turret in the nose, which made it much better for things coming through, and this guy became the turret gunner in the nose, and he got credit for one. So, actually, I was an ace, three there, one there, and one there.

KP: That is very high, from what I have read.

CG: Yes. As I say, this was the fellow that was killed, shot down with another crew.

KP: When he was killed, how did you and your crew feel?

CG: We felt terrible. We did. Actually, ... he substituted with a crew before we flew our first crew mission. I went on a mission, my first mission. They sent the first pilot with another crew as co-pilot, just to get the first mission in, and I went to ... Wilhelmshaven with another crew, the easiest mission I had, because all I had to do was watch. It was great, but, anyway, that was in November, and our next mission was in December, and, in the interim, (Lennahan?) substituted.

They’d have a pool of gunners down there in the morning. If somebody got sick or what have you, then, they’d pull one out of the pool, and he got pulled out of the pool this day, and, from what we heard, he got caught by flak and the plane just exploded. He was killed. So, that was pretty much it. I can say it was a good crew. ... Sometimes, from what I had heard there, ... some of the guys didn’t get along, and there’d be a lot of acrimony and what have you, but, this crew, they stayed together. ... They liked each other and they certainly worked well together in the airplane, which was important.

KP: Some Air Corps veterans have told me that they got along so well in their crews that the officers and enlisted men even fraternized together. They were very close.

CG: Well, I don’t think we ever did that, as such, but, we certainly got together quite often, and we were always very congenial, but, there was always that separation between officers and men.

KP: For example, you did not break that separation in terms of eating. You did not eat with your enlisted men.

CG: No, no. They all were very respectful of me. No, I don’t think I was a hard ass. ...

KP: You maintained more of a line of distinction.
CG: Yes, and I think they felt that was the way to go. It wasn’t a case of really having to be forceful about it.

KP: The Air Corps, compared to the Navy and the regular Army, was a very informal branch, in terms of protocol.

CG: Oh, yes, definitely, yes. You didn’t go much for a lot of saluting and what have you. It wasn’t more or less informal, but, as I say, certainly, as far as my crew and me, we got along very, very well, but, there was always that [distinction]. Not that I felt I had to be boss, though, in the airplane, yes, you had to be boss, because, sometimes, under a lot of stress, fighter attacks and what have you, people get on the inner phone, and, you know, ... they were scared at times. You had to get them off the inner phone. You had to maintain discipline, because without it, the whole operation of the plane wouldn’t go well, and I think the fact that you had discipline helped them under stress and under attack, and I was scared myself, but, I wasn’t going to let them know that I was scared.

KP: It sounds like you were petrified a fair number of times.

CG: ... I sure was, but, I wasn’t going to let anybody know it. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned that, on the flip side, there were some crews that did not get along.

CG: Yes, my people would tell me, “God, ... let’s not get in the barracks with those guys. My God, they’re fighting all the time.”

KP: Do you think that these internal struggles affected the performance of those crews?

CG: Well, as far as that, it’s hard to say. Unless you’re in the airplane yourself, and hear all the comments on the inner phone, and what have you, you wouldn’t know.

KP: You learned this from your crew.

CG: Yes.

KP: Were you surprised?

CG: People are people.

KP: After your crew was assembled, how did you get to England?

CG: We finished at Pueblo, and, from there, we went to Lincoln, Nebraska, and, at Lincoln, we got all the shots, got all the briefings, and we got a new airplane, and we took off from Lincoln to fly overseas, and we first went from Lincoln, supposedly to Bangor, Maine, but, Bangor was socked in, so, we, then, went on up to Presque Isle, Maine, and, from Presque Isle, we went up to
Goose Bay, Labrador, and, at midnight, one night after a front had just gone through, we took off for England.

... About an hour out of Goose Bay, we ran into the front and the only reason I mention that, it was a little scary. It was at night, of course, and I don’t know whether you’ve ever seen "St. Elmo’s Fire." Of course, we had guns that protruded from the airplane. Anything metal that was protruding from the airplane would have a cone of fire on the top of it, like this. Now, when you’re flying, you’re loaded with gas, you’re starting on a 2400 mile flight, and you’re just out, and you look out, and you see these things of fire on top of your guns, and you think it’s vapor and what have you coming from your gas line, it was scary.

... Other than that, it was a pretty [smooth flight]. We were in weather quite a bit of the time, but, broke out before we got to the Irish coast and got into Prestwick, Scotland, with no major problem. There were two planes that went down that night

KP: From your group?

CG: From our group. We were called a probational group that were flying overseas and there were two [planes] who were lost that night. Nobody knows why.

KP: One of the things that I have read is that, when you were loaded with gasoline and bombs and you had to abort a mission and land, your plane was almost like a bomb waiting to go off. Is that accurate? Did you prefer to get rid of your bombs and fuel before landing?

CG: Well, the two that I aborted, I don’t think that I got rid of my bombs. I came back and landed, but, some people did. When they aborted, they dropped their bombs in the Channel, but, I didn’t. I had no trouble landing. Maybe I’m inspired, I don’t know.

KK: Returning from a mission, were you ever unable to get back to your base because of bad weather?

CG: No, no. [For] a couple of these, I was talked back in, and I had one very bad mission, in that we took off at two o’clock in the afternoon, for some reason, and I can’t tell you what. We bombed a railway intersection at Hamm, Germany, and, really, the flak wasn’t too bad. It wasn’t too bad a mission up until then, but, as we started out ... from Belgium, it got dark, and German fighter intruders followed us, over the Channel and into England, and I forget how many actually were shot down that night by German intruders. We got back, and, because I knew there were German fighters around, I made a blackout landing, but, a guy in front of me was shot down in the traffic pattern. That’s why I made the blackout landing. I had absolutely no lights whatsoever, had just, you know, the lights on the runway, and I didn’t use my landing lights at all. I think I landed about six feet high and used the power just to let it down easy.

... It was a hairy night, because, with these German fighters there, the English were throwing up flak all over the place, and, of course, we’re trying to come in to get back to our bases, and the
flak is coming up over England, these guys are shooting at us from the German fighters, it was a terrible night. Why we took off at two o’clock in the afternoon, I don’t know. It was crazy.

KP: You wondered why they chose that time.

CG: Oh, yes, why two? Usually, we took off at six o’clock in the morning. Two o’clock in the afternoon was certainly different.

KK: You did not have any fighter cover then, either. This was before the P-51 Mustangs were introduced.

CG: Well, the [P]-51s came in about February, ... the end of January, February of ’44, and they really made a big difference in the bombing, but, in that first period, when they came, sometimes they were there and sometimes they weren’t. My worst mission was to an airplane factory in Gotha, Germany. The B-17s went to Schweinfurt, and the B-24s went to Gotha, and we had P-47s in the beginning of the flight, going in, but, then, they left, and we were under constant fire, and I mean constant fire attack, for over two hours.

... We had put up, that day, around thirty planes and we got back with fourteen out of our group. I was ... leading the low, right element. I’m the leader of the first three and him down here. My best friend, actually, was flying on the right wing of the leader, and I was flying under his tail, leading the low right, and, at this one point, there was a wall of .20 mm bursts. They were like fireflies when you saw them. There was a wall of .20 mm bursts between his tail and my nose and, believe me, I wasn’t far from [him], ‘cause I was trying to keep in as close as I could, for two-and-a-half hours. Now, the 51s were there, then, but, where they were that day, we didn’t know. As I say, that was my worst mission, but, we got back.

KK: Did you ever lose any chunks of your airplane to flak?

CG: Not chunks, but, I had a hole about that big in the side of my airplane, and it knocked out the supercharger and two engines, and the inner phone was knocked out, and a piece of flak hit me in the chest, and I’ve still got the piece [at] home.

KK: You still have the shrapnel?

CG: ... We got back, and, of course, I didn’t know about this hole in the side, but, I got back, and, of course, as we came back to the hard stand, taxiing in, the ground crew was all, you know, “Look at this.” Well, I got out and there’s this big hole in the side of the airplane. That was the only big thing we had. We had pockmarks from flying.

KP: You mentioned that the mission to Gotha was the most dangerous mission you ever flew. Was that the closest you came to being killed?

CG: Well, I had another instance where I came just as close, same idea about these .20 mm. You know, the German fighters had .20 mm cannons, and, as I say, when they fired them, they
looked like little fireflies. We had a mission to Aschersleben, and, as we were on the bomb run, I looked out to my right and here were the .20 mm bursts, just seemed to be marching up toward my right wing, and, fortunately, they stopped before they got to the wing, but, again, it was like a wall of them.

... As I looked out, here’s this FW-190 up on a wing. I could have hit him with a baseball, if I had had it, and, you know, he was that close. I could see the guy, his head in the thing. He had come in and shot at me. There’s no question about that. I saw the bursts, and then, [he] just did a wing over and moved out, and I’m saying, “Shoot him,” [laughter] but, those are the two closest. ... I don’t know about any others from the tail that I might not have seen, but, those are the two that I saw.

KP: One of the unique things about the Air Corps is that your enemy was rather distant in many ways. However, you actually saw someone who was trying to kill you.

CG: ... I had another experience ... in getting close to a German fighter. We had gone to Ludwigshafen am Rhein. Again, down in Germany, it was a long flight, and, actually, it was a pretty easy flight, until we started coming out through France and we got over Abbeville, France. I still remember the name. Apparently, at least according to our talk, it was the “Abbeville Kids” that had been a Goering Squadron during World War I, that they still called [them] the Abbeville Kids, and, as we came out, we could look down and see the fighters taking off from Abbeville, and, sure enough, pretty soon, we were under attack from all sides, from the rear, diagonal, but, one FW-190 climbed up, we could see him go past us, and up front, and then, came through the formation, and, [on] the first pass through, he got the leader, [who] just went off to the side and blew up. As he came through, up to the front, he went on his belly and went through the formation. The FW-190 had armor plate on the belly and that’s why he went through upside down. So, he went through, and, as I say, got the leader. Five minutes later, we see him go up to the side, go up again, and come through, and, this time, I was flying on the right element, again. This time, when he came through, I had to lift my right wing to let him through. If I hadn’t, he would have taken my wing off. At least that’s the way it looked to me. I lifted my wing. So, those were about the closest I came to German fighters.

KP: That was fairly close.

CG: Yes.

KP: On your first mission, you were a co-pilot. What did you expect air combat to be like? Was there any way to anticipate what combat would be like?

CG: I had no idea, but, it was the first time I saw flak.

KP: What did you think of flak that first time?

CG: Well, I don’t mean it was that close to me. I don’t think that we got close to any [flak], but, ... you look out, and it’s right out here, and, particularly, the .105 mm [burst] was big and black.
[The] .88 mm [burst] was thinner and not as black. If you were real close to it when it burst, and we were a number of times, you saw the red of the burst. ...

KP: Several Air Corps veterans have told me that the first time they saw flak, they were almost mesmerized by it, strange as that sounds.

CG: I’ve always said [that] I was scared to death of flak until that first fighter attack. After that, I didn’t worry about flak. Honestly, I didn’t worry about flak. The fighters were much more dangerous than the flak, but, the flak was bad. If it hit you, you were dead. You just blew up.

KP: Were the risks posed by the fighters greater?

CG: It always seemed to me that they had a more personal aim at you, [laughter] but, we had a number of planes that were lost to flak. ...

KP: What about your first mission as a crew, with you as the pilot?

CG: ... It was a scary run, in that it was the first mission, and we, again, hit bad weather, particularly over the target. It was one of those where the clouds were so high that you got up to almost your ceiling and, with bombs and all, it was always fighting a spin. That’s what I remember most about that first mission, as a pilot. I was trying to keep the plane ... from stalling out, because we were up just too high, because of weather.

KP: How well did your crew do on the first mission?

CG: When they got back, they were pretty excited. ... You’d think they’d been on fifty missions. I remember them. I guess we all were. "Here’s our first mission as a crew and we all got back safely."

KK: What was the mood after your gunner downed the first fighter? Was there a lot of celebration? Were they screaming over the inner phone, “I got him. I got him?”


KK: Yes.

CG: When we got down, not too much, no.

KP: When did you realize how high the casualties could be?

CG: ... We got over there in September. ... I’m talking about the officers now. We were assigned to a barracks and the barracks had a ... little pot-bellied stove at one end. The senior crew had the pot-bellied stove. We were the third crew down. By the middle of September, we had the pot-bellied stove. Two of the crews that came in after that and filled up the barracks
were lost and one crew was particular sad. This one bombardier, Poser, was scared to death that, ... if they got hit, he would not be able to get out. ...

[Tape Paused]

KP: You were telling us about the navigator who was afraid that he would be unable get out of his plane.

CG: No, this bombardier, yes. As I just mentioned, he was afraid that, if his plane got hit, that he wouldn’t be able to get out. So, it was sad. ... On this one mission, I think it was to Ludwigshafen am Rhein, they were at a point where we could see them from where we were. They got hit by flak, lost an engine, and fell back from the formation. We had German fighters around at that time, and, of course, any straggler was in real danger, and they got hit by German fighters, and the plane exploded.

Whether Poser ever got out is beyond me, but, the navigator, a fellow by the name of Rasmussen, three months later, showed up at our base. He had been blown out of the airplane, ... landed down in France, along with a gunner who also got blown out of the airplane. The two of them met up with French partisans who, through various networks, took them to the Spanish border, and, in three months, they were back at Norwich.

KP: When you say, “They got blown out of the plane,” were they literally blown out of the plane or did they jump out of a hatch?

CG: Blown out of the plane. Rasmussen ended up on the ground in his electric flying suit, which was a light blue flying suit.

KP: He survived the plane blowing up.

CG: He and the gunner.

KP: Did he open his parachute?

CG: ... The parachute opened up by itself.

KP: That is really remarkable.

CG: Oh, it is. ...

KP: You mentioned that you were much more afraid of the fighters than you were of the flak. If you got hit, what was your greatest fear? Obviously, you could get killed, but, were you afraid of being taken prisoner, crashing in the Channel, crashing over England, etc.?

CG: Never really thought about it.
KP: Really? Was the idea just to not get hit?

CG: Whatever. You know, you were in danger anytime you were on a mission. The degree of danger varied from one mission to the next. Some missions were what we called a "milk run."

KP: What were your milk run missions like?

CG: Well, most of them were on bombing these so-called V-1, V-2 sites in France, because, there, the German fighters didn’t seem to bother us. They probably thought it was not worth expending their efforts, and, until the last couple [of missions], the flak was not bad. Apparently, they didn’t fortify them in the beginning, and, later on, they did, but, they were pretty much milk runs. A couple of them, we went in at 10,000 feet, where as [on] the other missions, you’d be at twenty, 22,000 feet.

KK: What did you do at night, when you returned from your mission?

CG: What did we do at night?

KK: Yes. What did you do with your free time?

CG: Spent a lot of time in the officers’ club. When we could, we’d go into Norwich, particularly to take a shower, because the showers at the base were out in the open air, ... with just an overhead thing, and it always seemed that they were so hot. ... The water would burn you, and, if you got out of it, you froze, and, when you were in it, you burned. So, any chance we got, we went into Norwich, and went to the YMCA, and just luxuriated in the showers in the YMCA, but, we did spend a lot of time at the officers’ club, the officers’ mess, where we ate, and they had magazines there and books. It was a place to congregate and see your friends.


CG: It was always exciting to go to London. It was very interesting to see all the different places and we did. When we got there, we traveled around, saw everything we could. The British [were] all very friendly, I think particularly in the, let’s say, ... more countrified places. I say countrified, like Norwich, but, I’m thinking of some of the pubs that were between our field and ... Hethel and Norwich, which was a city, and, there, when you go in, the people were always friendly. I can’t remember any time that they weren’t, to tell you the truth.

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed the pubs.

CG: Well, I wasn’t that big a pubcrawler. They used to call some of these guys “pubcrawlers.”

KP: Did you have pubcrawlers in your unit?
CG: Oh, yes, yes. Not in my crew, but, there were other guys that used to spend a lot of time in the pubs. I would be [there] every once in a while. ...

KP: Were there ever any junctures when morale suffered, either in your crew or in the squadron in general, after particular missions or particular periods of time, perhaps?

CG: Well, after the Gotha mission, the whole group was really down, because we lost a lot of people. ... We had very little fighter protection. ... As I say, for over two hours, we were under German fighter attack. I’d say that was, maybe, the low point, up ‘til then, and I don’t think there was a mission [where] we lost more.

KP: Who was your squadron leader? What do you remember about the leadership on your base and, particularly, of your squadron.

CG: Well, my squadron, I had two while I was flying. One was a Major Conroy, great grin, seemed like a really nice guy. ... You didn’t really have that much contact with him, but, every once in a while, he’d have a squadron or group meeting, but, other than that, ... it wasn’t too close. The other fellow was sort of a ... sour visage, but, not too bad a guy, Jack, what was his name? I knew him better, because the Major was a major when I got there, and a squadron leader, and Jack was a captain, I guess, and I got to know him better than I knew Conroy, but, he was ... fair. I didn’t have any problems. The group leaders, again, we didn’t get to know them that well.

KP: It sounds like you got to know your crew very well, but, you did not know other people stationed at the base as well.

CG: Well, as far as the other crews, my best friend was a guy by the name of Bill Wombold and his crew and my crew got along very well together. They were in the same barracks together. He and his officers were in a barracks next to mine. We were good friends and we watched out for each other. His crew looked out for me. You know, when we were flying, they’d say, “Oh, Wombold’s crew, you know, they’re all right. They’re all right.” They’d keep an eye on you and, as I say, Bill and I were good friends.

I still see him, just saw him in New Hampshire. Another fellow, by the name of Doggert, had gone through B-24 transition training with me, went through the phase trainings in Clovis and Pueblo, and he ended up in the same group. So, he and I, of course, were very friendly.

KP: For the military, that is a very long time together.

CG: Right. He got shot down along about my fifteenth mission.

KP: At what point did you consider yourself to be a hardened veteran?

CG: Never. [laughter]
KP: Never?

CG: Oh, I guess I did. ... Yes, I think once you got through about your tenth or eleventh mission, you felt that, well, you had seen just about everything, so, what else is coming?

KP: When you got to England, how many missions did you think you had to fly?

CG: [When] we got there, we ... only had to fly twenty-five, because, at that point, it was before you had any fighter protection and the loss rate was about forty percent. So, twenty-five was it. They changed it from twenty-five to thirty sometime around January or February of ’44. So, because we had started [already], then, ... they said we had to do twenty-nine instead of thirty.

KP: The number you had to do was raised.

CG: Yes, from twenty-five to twenty-nine.

KP: How did you and your crew feel about that?

CG: Terrible. [laughter]

KP: That must have led to at least some griping.

CG: Oh, yes. There was a lot of griping at that point.

KP: Did you ever think that you were not going to make it?

CG: I’m sure I did at times, but, it wasn’t something you talked about.

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

CG: ... It’s emphasized when you’re under conditions like that. Certainly with me, I know I did a lot of praying, certainly. ... I’m not loathe to admit it.

KP: How well attended were church services at your air base?

CG: Well, I don’t know about the services, but, you had the chaplains who would be available before every mission, and the Catholics would always be taking communion before the mission, and the Protestants, and, I assume, the Jewish people ... would have some kind of service before a mission.

KP: Therefore, it was quite common to attend services before a mission.

CG: Oh, yes, every one.

KP: You took communion before each mission?
CG: Yes.

KP: You mentioned that the showers were absolutely dreadful. How comfortable was the Norwich base overall, in terms of creature comforts?

CG: Well, I think if you compared it to living at home, or living now, it was pretty crude. The bedclothes, I’m not sure how often they were changed. The personal toilet itself, I’m sure I wore socks maybe four and five times a week. I don’t know exactly, but, I know I didn’t change them every day, like I do now. It was great when you were able to take a shower, because, by then, you needed a shower, particularly in the colder weather, when you had a lot of heavy clothes on.

... When you came back from a mission, flying a B-24 was a lot of work, and I know I perspired [while] flying a mission, ... not just flying a plane, but, flying it in formation. I don’t know whether you’ve ever flown in formation, but, ... particularly in one of those formations like that, ... well, number one, you had to keep it close, if you wanted to live, and I say that without any reservations, because the fighters would pick on anybody who straggled.

KP: It sounds like you picked up on that right away.

CG: Oh, yes, after the first fighter attack. [laughter]

KP: Were there any pilots who were unable to remain in formation?

CG: Yes, there were. ... They, sometimes, were very lucky. ... The leader was the only one, really, who was supposed to be talking over the radio at any time, and there were many times when he would say, ... “You’ve got to close it up. You’ve got to close it up.” I didn’t need any urging, [laughter] and I was a good formation flyer, too, so, that helped, but, yes, formation flying, it was difficult.

... As I say, we’re going back to the other question, obviously, particularly on days when it was, say, warm ... on the ground, [it] might be fifty degrees below zero up at 20,000 feet, but, in the summertime, particularly in England, it was warm, and, if you did any flying at all, particularly if you were on a practice mission, and they had a number of them, you’d come back and you’d be pretty wet. Well, you had no shower, except that outdoor shower, [laughter] and you weren’t as careful about your personal toilet as you would be if you ... perspired [now].

KP: Other interviewees have said that flying a plane could be quite uncomfortable. You were in a cramped space, the temperatures varied greatly, and you had many tasks to accomplish.

CG: [I don’t know if it was] uncomfortable. ... The most uncomfortable thing about the flying we did was, [at] about 10,000 feet, 12,000 feet, you had an oxygen mask, and, if you had any long periods, as I say, that one mission, we were ... on oxygen for eight hours, your perspiration, or whatever, your breath coming out of the oxygen mask, would freeze, and, pretty soon, you’d
have a thing of ice that went right on down your front, and, of course, it got you in here. ... You
could always see somebody who had just gotten back, because the indentations and marks from
the oxygen mask [would] be all down your cheeks. Other than that, there were pretty nice chairs,
I should say, in the B-24.

KP: What about the noise?

CG: Well, ... noise, I guess, is relative. I flew a B-25 once. The B-25 has engines that are
almost next to you, the pilot. Oh, what a racket, terrible. Now, the B-24 was never like that. So,
the noise wasn’t that bad.

KP: Did you or any of your crew members ever get frostbite?

CG: No, I didn’t, but, some of my gunners did, particularly the ones who were waist gunners,
because the waist was open, and we had missions where it would be, well, ... [the thermometer]
only went up to fifty below zero, and we went a number of times where it was up at the stock,
where it was more than fifty below zero, and we wouldn’t be surprised, but, those guys were
back there in that open waist (wing?), and, ... yes, they had frostbite.

KP: Did you ever worry or wonder about the targets that you were bombing? Were you ever
concerned that you might be bombing civilians?

CG: You know, I’ve just been reading a book lately. It was given to me for my birthday by one
of my daughters. It’s all about World War II, and a lot of it is about bombing, you know, and
what the British did in World War II, and, of course, they just did saturation bombing of cities,
and ... it got me thinking about the same sort of thing, because we bombed [cities], you know. I
bombed one mission to Berlin, a couple to Frankfurt. We’re just bombing the center of the city.
... Looking back at it, ... I feel badly, yes, at the time, no. At the time, I think we were looking to
survive. We hated the Germans for what they had done. No, I don’t think we had any
compunction at that time about bombing the cities, and, yet, when you read about it ...

My daughter, number two daughter, graduated from Smith, and went to Germany, and married a
German boy, and they live in Hamburg. Well, if you’ve ever read about Hamburg and what the
British did to Hamburg, it’s awful.

KP: What does your daughter do in Germany?

CG: Well, as I say, she went to Smith, and she got overseas with ... their overseas program,
eventually, got a job teaching English at the University of Hamburg, and then, later, got a job ...
teaching English to the executives, and, also, transcribing for them, at an international advertising
agency. So, she’s ... kept quite busy over the years.

KP: I assume that you have been to Germany.
CG: Yes.

KP: Was it strange to visit a country that you had bombed?

CG: Yes, it was. Of course, by the time I got there, ... practically all evidence of the bombing had disappeared. This was three years ago. I hadn’t been over until then, but, my son-in-law, who did a lot of traveling around Germany, took us to Berlin and Potsdam, and, of course, we spent a lot of time in Hamburg, looking around there. We saw the Wall and saw the various things in Potsdam where the conferences had taken place with Churchill, and Truman, and Stalin, very interesting.

The other interesting part of that was that Heiner’s father, Heiner is my daughter’s husband, ... had been in the German Army, and we did go to visit them while we were in Germany, and Heiner said, “It might be a good idea, Dad, if you don’t talk World War II with my father.” [laughter] So, we didn’t talk World War II. At one point, we were sitting, having a cocktail, what have you. He started [saying] something and his wife said, “Shhhh.” [laughter] So, we didn’t get into any discussions. Probably, it wouldn’t have been well.

KP: You mentioned that you hated the Germans at the time. Was this hatred based on the fact that you were constantly losing comrades because of them?

CG: Well, I think the whole tenor of the Nazis. At that point, there was enough information that was given to the American public that, by the time we got overseas, we certainly felt that the Germans were terrible. After all, the First World War had, let’s say, put a lot of Americans to dislike the Botch, but, when the Nazis took over, and many of the things that they did, and particularly the way they invaded Poland and practically annihilated Warsaw, you know, I think there was a lot of feeling against the Germans. We felt it. By the time we got there and had seen a number of guys get shot down that we knew, we weren’t going to like them, that’s for sure.

KP: Did you know of any pilots or crews that just could not take it, psychologically?

CG: ... If it happened, we just didn’t know about it, I think. I don’t know, personally, of any crew that, let’s say, did not make it. There were pilots and maybe crew members who, like my navigator, departed for one reason or another, but, it was done, you know, singlely. It wasn’t a case of saying, “Hey, Charlie Getty’s crew is no good and we’re going to pull them out.”

KP: It almost sounds like people just disappeared. Did you have any idea of what happened to those people?

CG: No, no. You had a feeling that, if they were sick, they were sick. Now, were they sick mentally or were they sick physically?

KP: I do not want to re-ask a question, but, it seems like you were quite empathetic towards whether a person was sick, either mentally or physically, or not. Is this an accurate portrayal?
CG: I guess so. I certainly wouldn’t criticize anybody. It wasn’t an easy thing to go through. When you’re in an airplane and somebody’s shooting at you, there’s no foxhole that you can dive into. You are there and, particularly when you’re in a bombing formation, you’re not going any place. You’re not going this, this, and this [way] to make somebody miss you. You’re in a formation and you’d better stay there. You’re flying, period. ... I guess I can remember that two-and-a-half hours that we were under attack. You felt pretty helpless, because there was no place you could go. So, yes, I don’t ... denigrate anybody that maybe couldn’t take it.

KP: You had a great term for the personnel on the ground. What was it?

CG: Paddle feet?

KP: What was your attitude towards the paddle feet at your base?

CG: ... It was nothing really serious, other than the fact that there was a difference of feeling between people who flew and people that didn’t. That’s all. It wasn’t anything serious, believe me.

KP: Maybe I am reading into this, but, from what I have learned, it seems like many people in air crews would have preferred to be stationed on the ground. They were envious of the fact that they had to fly into combat while the paddle feet remained safe back at the base.

CG: No, and I’d have to say, ... at least on my part, there was no envy. I didn’t want to be on the ground. ... I was a pilot and I wanted to fly. [I] didn’t like to fly in combat, don’t get me wrong, but, I wouldn’t have traded, you know, I’d say after ten missions, [to] go on the ground, no.

KP: What was your relationship with your mechanics?

CG: Got very close. Our crew chief, and he had two guys with him, I’ve got a picture here, someplace, they were, I’d say, like fathers on the ground to us. They were very attentive to anything that went wrong in the plane. Boy, they worked like mad to fix it, fix it right, and make sure it was right to fly. Oh, they were great.

KP: Several people have said that the performance of the ground crews in the United States was questionable, but, once you went overseas, they performed almost flawlessly.

CG: It was. ... They were good, at least our guys were, and I’d have to say that [for] the rest of the group, too. We didn’t have that ... many mechanical problems. Every once in a while, it happened, like the two missions I aborted, but, for the most part, we had ... good planes, and, well, I flew twenty-nine missions, maybe I flew thirty-one missions, I think. Two of them I never got credit for, because we just didn’t bomb, but, no, I never had any major problem.

One mission, as I say, we aborted because the oxygen was out and the other one, I forget what it was. We had one mission where the waist oxygen went out while we were under fighter attack. It was sort of funny in a way, because the other gunners would go and they’d put their oxygen
masks on these two that were down, the two waist gunners, and put it on there just [long] enough so that they’d revive a little, and then, they’d go back to their guns, and we got back that way, and that was one of the missions where the tail gunner got credit for a plane shot down, but, the waist gunners were out most of the fight, because of lack of oxygen.

KP: Because they literally passed out.

CG: Right, and, if the other guys hadn’t put their masks on them for a while, they would have expired without the oxygen. We were at 22,000 feet and you can’t live up there without oxygen.

KP: For them, it must have been very frightening.

CG: It was. They were.

KK: Did you ever have any contact with personnel from the other branches of the service?

CG: Not that I can remember.

KP: Did you have any contact with the RAF?

CG: We had a couple of people on the base who were, I guess, liaison with the RAF, but, I never had anything to do with them.

KP: How would you rate the medical services and treatment offered by your base? In fact, you received a wound.

CG: Well, I didn’t receive a wound, oh, no.

KP: Did the shrapnel just hit very close to you?

CG: Well, it just hit me. ... I had a jacket on and a Mae West, so, all it did was hit. I could feel it, and it dropped on the floor, and I picked it up. [laughter] No, I didn’t have any wounds. As far as I know, it was good medical care. I know, when ... a plane came back with wounded on it, they were out there right away, getting them out, get them on the stretcher, and get them to the hospital.

KP: How good was your food?

CG: The food wasn’t bad. We had a lot of powered eggs and a lot of Spam, and, you know, a lot of people didn’t like Spam, but, I loved Spam. I still like it. [laughter] Oh, no, I can’t complain about the food. ... I’d say, when you get on that subject, ... we weren’t talking about liquor, but, that was the one thing that was a big change from the States, because, when I was in the States, if I drank anything, I drank, well, Seven Crown, or Canadian Club, or something like that, a blend, and ginger ale. That was my favorite drink, I guess, in the States.
Well, there was no Canadian Club around there. You had mild & bitters, you had Scotch, you had gin, and you had rum. [If you had a big party at the officers’ club, let’s say on a weekend, in England, you’d start off drinking Scotch. Within a half an hour, they’d run out of Scotch or they stopped serving Scotch. Then, you’d have gin, until that ran out. Then, you’d have rum and you always ended up with mild & bitters. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you have some pleasant memories of the officers’ club?

CG: Oh, yes, a favorite place. It was, as I say, a place to see your friends, and a place to read, and eat, and do everything, a very important part of the base.

KP: You have a great story that deals with Jimmy Stewart, which we would love to get on tape. How did you meet Jimmy Stewart? What was his command relationship to you?

CG: Well, as I said, after I finished my missions, I was assigned to this wing headquarters, which happened to be on the same base as our bombing group, the 389th Bombing Group. The Second Bomb Wing, at that time, was headed by a brigadier general, a man by the name of Timberlake, who had been on the Ploiesti mission, had been a group commander before becoming a wing commander. The wing was composed of about seven flying officers, who would take the message from the division headquarters [and] put together a mission for the three groups that were in our wing. We had three groups, the 389th, the 453rd, and the 445th. So, I went, as I say, to the wing headquarters as an operations officer after my tour.

About a month or two months after I got at the wing headquarters, Lieutenant Colonel James Stewart was assigned to the Second Bomb Wing headquarters as the ... chief operations officer of the wing. So, we got to know [him], because there were so few of us, ... particularly flying officers. He had been ... a squadron commander at the 453rd Bomb Group, and, at that point, had probably made fourteen or fifteen missions. So, we got to know him quite well, of course.

... The story, the interesting one, about him was this story about when he was assigned as an investigating officer of a major who was court-martial for taking a Red Cross girl on his lap across England and back in a P-47, which is a single seat airplane. When he landed at the air base in Bournemouth, the base commander was in the tower, and saw the girl get off the guy’s lap and get out, and he made sure that he told the major, “Okay, but, don’t you dare take her back on your lap.” Well, the major did, and was court-martial, and Stewart was named the investigating officer, so, he had to fly over from Hethel, which is our base, over to Bournemouth, on the other side of England.

We had, in the wing headquarters, assigned to us, a Canadian Norseman cabin plane [with] about a 250 horsepower engine in it. So, that was the plane that Stewart was going to take and he asked me if I would go with him. So, I [said], “Sure.” So, going across, Stewart flew and I navigated, and we got over to Bournemouth, and he did his business, and we took off from there to go back to Hethel, and I was flying and he was navigating. So, we got about an hour out, an hour-and-a-half out, and Stewart said to me, “Charlie, I think we are lost.” [Mr. Getty imitates Jimmy Stewart] Okay, so, we were not far from an RAF field. So, we landed at the RAF field,
and I ran up to the tower and asked where we were and what was the heading back to Hethel, which we got, and took off again, and we got back to Hethel and landed.

We’re driving back to our wing headquarters and I might say that in the wing headquarters, of course, was only the few officers who were there. We had a small mess of our own. So, on the drive back, Stewart said to me, “Charlie, I don’t think we have to mention this at the mess.” Well, of course, I couldn’t resist and I did. [laughter] So, everybody got a kick out of Stewart’s poor navigation, [laughter] but, he was a good man and easy to know, no put on affairs or what have you. He was a real nice guy.

KP: Someone who served under him when he was leading a squadron said that he lived up to the image that was projected in the media, that he pulled his weight.

CG: Yes, he certainly did, yes. He was good.

KP: When did you finish your tour?

CG: I finished on May 8, ... 1944.

KP: That was a month before D-Day.

CG: Right.

KP: What happened to your crew? We know that you became an operations officer for the wing.

CG: The bombardier went into the intelligence wing, or intelligence section, that was on our base and he stayed there almost as long as I did. The rest of the crew all went home within a month, month-and-a-half.

KP: Did they go into training units?

CG: Most of them went into places where there were B-24s, where they probably could instruct in gunnery.

KP: How long did you stay in touch with your crew after you split up?

CG: I’d say, with most of them, it probably lasted about five years of Christmas cards, and notes, and what have you. With Devillers, the bombardier, it was much longer than that, and where he ended up, I don’t know. I lost track of him. I even went up to, well, ... the city in Massachusetts where he lived, where his old address was. Nobody knew him and I just lost track of him.

KP: What about your co-pilot?

CG: The co-pilot, I never really ... [laughter] I shouldn’t say that. I had no real [opinion].
KP: It sounds like you worked well with him.

CG: I did.

KP: However, he would not have been your first choice.

CG: He certainly wouldn’t have been, but, I had no real connection with him and never really kept in touch with him after the war.

KP: How long were you an operations officer? What were your duties on a daily basis?

CG: ... As I say, the wing took the mission particulars from division. They’d say, ... “We’ll put up so many airplanes. It’s going to go to Berlin. The bomb load is going to be incendiaries. The bomb load is going to be 500-pound bombs.” ... [These particulars came from] the division, which was then composed of three different wings of usually three groups a piece. Then, the wing would say to the 389th, “So many airplanes and this is the bomb load,” and what have you, and gas, and what have you. When I went up to wing headquarters, there was only one operations officer up there, a guy by the name of Bill (Sully?).

... Bill had been working every night practically to put the wing things together. [laughter] So, he gave me about three nights of instruction, and, after that, he took off, and I was there alone [laughter] for about, I’d say, two months. I don’t mean alone. He, every once in a while, would come in and spell me off, but, I learned to put the wing missions together.

KP: You would actually figure out how many planes would be needed.

CG: Out of this total that the division said the wing has to put up, how many to come from the 389th, how many from the 453rd, how many from the 445th.

KP: Were you also factoring in that certain planes needed to be repaired and certain crews needed to rest?

CG: Yes. We’d be in touch with their maintenance department, see how they were coming as far as planes, particularly when you had two or three missions in a row, day after day, because, then, you’d have to take care of the battle damage and what have you. Oh, it was an interesting thing. I enjoyed it.

KP: When you were a pilot, the war centered on your plane, from your point of view. However, now, you had a much wider view of how the war was being waged.

CG: ... Yes, and, of course, one of the most interesting nights was the night before D-Day, when we got the message that we would be flying, probably, two or three different missions that day, supporting the invasion.
KP: It was only then that you knew that the invasion was at hand.

CG: No. Actually, we had a meeting the day before, in the daylight, and we were informed that the invasion was coming. So, that night, I was not surprised when I got ... all the division orders.

KK: Did you ever have any personal qualms about sending crews on particularly dangerous missions?

CG: No. You didn’t know the crews at that time, even in my own group, by the time I got up there. ... I wouldn’t see it, because all I did was tell the group how many planes to put up and they assigned the crews to it. ... I know [that] Wombold, my best friend, didn’t finish his tour until a month-and-a-half after I was up at wing, but, I wouldn’t have known when he was flying. ...

KK: Okay.

CG: It was pretty impersonal. It was numbers.

KP: How long did you stay in operations?

CG: I went up in May, ... towards the end of May of ’44, and I stayed there until December of ’44.

KP: Then, you came back to the United States.

CG: Right.

KK: Were you in the Reserves at that point?

CG: No. When I came back to the States, I was still in the service. ... I got back December 24, 1944, and got home for Christmas and Midnight Mass, December 24th.

KP: You must have felt very lucky to be back.

CG: ... No question.

KP: I mean, the Battle of the Bulge was raging at that time.

CG: Right, on my way home. I was in a convoy [that] took seventeen days from Southampton to New York City, and, of course, everybody on the boat was hoping to get home for Christmas. ... The guys who were on the East Coast did, but, the guys who were on the West Coast didn’t, probably got home Christmas, maybe, or the day after Christmas, but, I was right there, and I landed in New York, and went to Kilmer, and then, zip, up to Butler for Midnight Mass.

KP: You had flown over to England. What was it like for you to take a ship back?
CG: Terrible. [laughter]

KP: Did you get seasick?

CG: No, no, I didn’t. If I ever was going to get seasick, I would have on that, because it wasn’t that large of a boat, and the funny part [was], the officers were in an enclosed room where they also had the tables for eating, the officers’ mess, and, at night, ... the tables and chairs weren’t tied down, and, if you had a bad storm, the things would fly back, you know. You’d go this way and, “Boom,” go that way, “Boom.” [laughter] It was an interesting experience, ... coming across the middle Atlantic in December, but, not too pleasant. I didn’t like it, you know.

KP: What was your next assignment?

CG: ... The head of the wing, ... after General Timberlake came, General Arnold took over, and he had been in the Air Transport Command, and, of course, he’d told us all about it. Well, he was there and [I said], “Well, I’m going home. How about giving me a recommendation to your friends in the Air Transport Command?” So, he did. There was a general up in New Hampshire who was head of, ... they called it the “Snowball,” the Northeast Air Transport Command, ... General Fritz, still remember the name. So, Milt Arnold gave me a recommendation to him, and so, I ... had a leave in Atlantic City, which was great, with my wife, then, went to Presque Isle, Maine, to the Air Transport Command.

KP: Was your mission to ferry planes?

CG: We started at Presque Isle, just flying C-47s, supplying all the air bases up in Newfoundland, Labrador, Greenland. They had a number of them. They called them Crystal 1, Crystal 2, Crystal 3, some of them [were] just for communications, but, anyway, mostly C-47s at that time, but, within a month after I got there, they converted to C-54s, and then, we would fly from Mitchell Field. We’d pick up supplies, medical supplies, any kind of supplies that needed to be ... flown over. We’d fly over the supplies to, usually, Orly, outside of Paris. Then, there, we would pick up wounded and bring them back, and, usually, we’d fly from Mitchell to Newfoundland, Newfoundland to the Azores, Azores to Orly and Paris, sometimes into Iceland, but, it was supplies over, wounded coming back. That was from January until August, 1945. August, we were sent out to Hamilton Field in California, still flying C-54s, and we flew from there to Hawaii, to Kwajalein, Guam, Saipan, Philippines, a hell of a lot of water.

KP: You covered most of the globe in your travels.

CG: Oh, yes. [I] didn’t quite make it around.

KP: However, you came very close.

CG: Yes.
KP: Did you ever consider making a career out of the Air Force?

CG: ... When I was asking about the Air Transport Command, I had [it] in mind that I would become an airline pilot, but, fortunately or unfortunately, whatever [way] you want to look at it, that kind of flying, particularly in the Pacific, so much of it is just, hour after hour, putting it on automatic pilot, and then, sitting there and watching the dials, and I said, fortunately, I’d finished my degree at Rutgers before the war, “I got to see what I can do with this.”

KP: It sounds like you gave it a lot of thought.

CG: Oh, yes. I was tempted. The American Overseas Airline, which, then, was the overseas part of American Airlines, was offering 250 dollars a month to pilots, and I had a number of friends out of Air Transport that did go with them, and ... I was on the fence, but, finally, I said, “No.” I didn’t want to do it.

KP: Did you consider staying in the Air Force itself or did you want to get out when the war ended?

CG: I wanted to get out. ... I don’t think I really thought seriously of staying in.

KP: Did you stay in the Reserves?

CG: Yes, I did. I actually ... stayed in the Reserves for, let’s see, I got out in ... ’46, and I came up here in ’52, and I was in the Reserves still, here, for at least four or five years.

KP: Why did you leave?

CG: I just got too busy. ... I came up here as an accountant, and, eventually, became controller of Revere Copper and Brass, and [with] the succession of jobs I had, it just got to be too much to put the time in, and the other part was that, being in the Reserves here, you didn’t get any flying. It was all ground school and what have you. ... If I had been flying, I probably would have stayed in.

KK: You have six children.

CG: Six kids.

KK: However, only one went to Rutgers.

CG: That’s right. All six went to a different school.

KP: Would you have preferred it if more of them had gone to Rutgers?

CG: Well, my first three were girls, and, no, I wasn’t going to push them to Rutgers or to NJC. ... They all pretty much made up their own minds [as to] where they were going.
KK: It looks like they all did pretty well in school. There are some good schools listed here.

CG: ... Elmira, Smith, St. Lawrence, Rutgers, Cortland, and then, Union. ...

KK: Most of them went to graduate school, also.

CG: Yes. There’s, I think, four Masters and two Doctorates. My youngest daughter just got her Doctorate at the University of California at Berkeley. ...

KP: In what subject?

CG: She’s always been in physical education. That’s the one that went to Cortland. Physical education, at that time, was at either Springfield College, which is still a good one, but, Cortland was the other one, and my daughter felt Cortland was better. She was valedictorian of her class. I was hoping she’d go to Harvard or some place, but, she always stayed in physical education. She got her Masters at Arizona, and then, got her Doctorate at Berkeley.

KP: It sounds like you put a lot of stress on education

CG: Very definitely. I have had friends who have said, “Well, you know, my son or my daughter just doesn’t want to go to college,” and somebody just asked me, “Well, how come all of yours went?” and I say, “Because both I and my wife stressed, right from the very beginning, there was no question they were going to go to college,” both of us, and my children never questioned that. They knew they were going to go to college. In addition, I have to say, one summer, my son worked in the tube mill at Revere, and, at the end of the summer, he said to me, “Dad, you can be sure I’m going to finish college.” [laughter]

KP: How did you end up settling in Rome? There must be a story there. You grew up in New Jersey, went to Rutgers, and earned an MBA from NYU.

CG: ... Well, I didn’t have the MBA when I got out of the service. I finally made up my mind. I was going to get out of the service, and then, what to do? I had majored in economics at Rutgers. You probably won’t believe this, but, looking back at the courses that I took at Rutgers, the one that I most enjoyed, looking back now, was a course in, they didn’t even call it accounting, I think they called it “bookkeeping,” and I said, “Well, doggone, why shouldn’t I go into that?”

My sister worked at the Pequanok Soft Rubber Company in Butler, New Jersey, and it just happened that, when I got out of the service, they were having their audit with a firm called Scovill-Wellington. ... So, she said, “Well, why don’t I introduce you to the auditor and maybe he can recommend you to what you might do?” So, I did. ... I spent one afternoon with this guy, just talking about all sorts of things, but, indicating that, yes, I might like to go into accounting.

So, he was enthusiastic. He said, “Sure. We need accountants.” This was in ’46, when bodies weren’t too prevalent, people still getting out of the service and what have you. [He] said,
“Particularly in the spring, we always need a lot of accountants.” I found that to be true. So, anyway, I went in and I had an interview with ... one of the partners of the firm in New York City. Incidentally, [I] borrowed a suit from my brother, I didn’t have any civilian suits, [laughter] and they hired me as a temporary employee. It’s surprising. If they’d looked at my resume, they’d [have] seen one bookkeeping course. This is in a public accounting, CPA firm. So, I started with them in February of 1946.

Well, as I say, they needed people in the spring, when they were doing all their audits, and tax work, and what have you. Come June, zip, out the door you would go. They really had people by the neck, because, at that point, you needed three years of public accounting experience in order to get your CPA. Came June and “temporary” Getty stayed on, ... eventually for six years.

In the meantime, as soon as I started there, I went to NYU Graduate School to major in accounting. What I learned at night, I put into practice in the day. You can believe I had plenty of incentive to pay attention.

KP: Did you use your GI Bill benefits at NYU?

CG: Oh, yes, definitely.

KP: Did the GI Bill make your MBA possible?

CG: Oh, definitely, sure. I had no money. [laughter] No, the GI Bill paid for my Masters degree at NYU, but, anyway, as I say, the temporary employee stayed six years. Eventually, I was put in charge of the audit of Revere Copper and Brass, and, after a year in charge of the audit, I say "in charge," I was the senior accountant under a partner, ... the second year, I got a call ... from the treasurer of Revere, “Would you like to come to Revere?” ... They offered me, of course, more money than I was making in public accounting. Again, public accounting, then, was not very lucrative. Now, they really go out and they get somebody for twenty-five, 35,000 a year to start.

Anyway, I really thought rather hard about it and my wife and I had a lot of discussions before we finally agreed, because I was working in New York City for six years and New York City was an exciting place to work. I had different places that I was auditing and enjoyed visiting, ... you know, having a variety of different places where I’d go to audit.

... Finally, we decided, “Yes, let’s try it,” and we came to Rome. I came as an accountant, eventually became division treasurer, and then, I was made director of cost control, and then, controller of the company, and, eventually, group vice president. So, I retired. ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Charles R. Getty on November 14, 1996, in Rome, New York, with Kurt Piehler and ...

KK: Kevin Kilpatrick.
KP: You mentioned that Rome was the kind of community where you could be very active?

CG: Yes, and, actually, Rome, at that time, had three major industries, Revere Copper and Brass, Rome Cable, and General Cable, and the people, particularly, who were in responsible positions in those companies, were encouraged to take part in the community and to join the various activities, such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Community Chest, the United Fund, ... whatever. So, it was very easy to get into the various things. I had always had an interest in the Boy Scouts. I became part of the Fort Stanwix Council, eventually became president of that. I got into the Chamber of Commerce and ... eventually became president of that. ... I’m sorry. It sounds like I’m bragging and I hate that. [laughter]

KP: Not at all. It sounds like you got a lot out of your involvement in the community.

CG: ... I enjoyed it. I had a lot of good friends, and I supposed they encouraged me, too, but, I never had any criticism from my company. They always encouraged me to be active in the community. So, all these things just seemed to flow along. I’m still active in the community, now, after all those positions in the past. So, yes, I’ve had a good community life and still do.

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed your business career a great deal as well.

CG: Oh, I did. Going through reciting the various jobs I had, I never got stagnant. It was always something new, a new challenge, so, that makes it enjoyable.

KK: Leaving New York City and coming to Rome was not as bad as you had envisioned it.

CG: No. ... I think the principal thing that made it so easy to come to Rome, not only the community activities, which you couldn’t do in New York City, but, also, the fact that you were away from the commuting. You were away from the traffic. You were away from all those things which are connected with a huge city like New York.

... We have always had a camp. I say we, my wife’s family has always had a camp up in Speculator, New York, and we used to travel there in the summertime. My family would go up there for the whole summer. I would travel from New York City on Friday night up to Speculator. Before the Thruway, it was a six, seven hour trip. Sunday afternoon, [I would] do the same thing, go back.

Rome, New York, is an hour away from Speculator, so, it made it so much nicer there. In addition, Rome is in a tremendous place for recreation. We are an hour from the Adirondacks. We are an hour from the Finger Lakes. We are an hour, ... hour-and-a-half, from the Thousand Islands, all of these places. Rome is a city of 40,000 people. ... As you saw coming in here, if you’re outside the city by one hundred yards, you’re out in the country. It’s a great place to live and ... has been a great place for us to bring up our children. So, no, we’ve never been sorry we moved.
KP: I noticed that none of your children served in the military.

CG: No. They were never even exposed to it. I think Chuck would have been the closest. He graduated in ’74, so, I suppose, up ‘til that time, he was exempt as a college student. He was never drafted.

KP: Did you want any of your children to serve in the military?

CG: I had no feeling one way or the other. If they had to, they certainly would have.

KP: You got to know General Arnold a little bit.

CG: No, this was not Hap Arnold.

KP: This was another General Arnold?

CG: This was Milton Arnold.

KP: Okay.

CG: He had been group commander, and then, I forget just where General Timberlake was sent, but, when he left, then, Colonel Arnold became wing commander and the position of wing commander brought him to a Brigadier General.

KP: I noticed that you joined a few bomber veterans’ organizations, but, you never joined the American Legion or the VFW. You were very active in the community, so, it seems natural that you would have joined the VFW or American Legion as well. Why not?

CG: ... I could be wrong, but, I’ve always felt that they were just lobbying groups and I just never had any inclination to join either one of them.

KP: You were so active in the community, though.

CG: ... I guess I had enough to do without joining something like that. I’ve got a brother who’s always been very active in the American Legion, but, no, I’ve never had any inclination.

KP: Is there anything that we forgot to ask?

CG: Good Lord. [laughter] I said to Kevin before, when you were in the bathroom, “My God, you people must be awfully bored, the way I’ve gone on and on.”

KP: Oh, no, it was absolutely fascinating. It has been a real pleasure. Thank you very much. We really appreciate your time.

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