

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WALTER GUSCIORA

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Mark Weiner: This begins an interview with Walter Gusciora, on April 17, 1997, in Jamesburg, New Jersey, with Mark Weiner and ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

MW: Let us begin by talking about your parents. I understand your father was born in Poland.

Walter Gusciora: Yes, but I wouldn't give the name because it's too difficult, Cisowlas.

MW: When did he immigrate to the United States?

WG: 1913.

MW: Did he ever talk about the old country?

WG: Often.

MW: What did he say? Did he speak fondly of it?

WG: Well, you see, at that time, that part of Poland was under the rule of Austria, and the Austrians, they didn't develop any education system, you see, so that was one criticism of those times.

SH: Did he come over with his family, or did he come over alone?

WG: No, he came over--he's a hundred years old now. We celebrated his birthday in Pennsylvania at a nursing home just recently. What was the question?

SH: Did he come alone, and how did he get here?

WG: He came alone. He was fifteen then, fifteen years old.

SH: Do you remember how? Did he tell you how he came to be able to come?

WG: Well, I think at that time, they left the City of Hamburg, Germany, from Poland to Germany, by way of the City of Hamburg.

MW: Your mother was born in New Jersey, wasn't she? She was born in Elmwood Park.

WG: No, you have it wrong. She was born also in Poland.

MW: Oh. Did she and your father meet in Poland, or did she and your father meet here?

WG: They met here, in this country.

MW: Then, they moved to Garfield, New Jersey.

WG: Right. When they married, they married in Garfield, New Jersey.

SH: Now, when your father came to this country, did he have employment already set up for him?

WG: No, but his first job was to build Army barracks in Singac, New Jersey. I guess it was a time when this country was thinking of maybe becoming involved, maybe, in some war.

SH: Did any of his family ever come over later or had some come before him?

WG: No.

SH: How about your mother? How did she come to come to this country?

WG: She came through Hamburg also, Germany.

SH: Were they sponsored by a religious group?

WG: No.

SH: Did your mother's parents come, or any of her family?

WG: No.

SH: How old was she when she came?

WG: I don't know, and neither does she. You see, in those days, they didn't keep birthday records the way we do today, here.

MW: Why did they settle in Garfield?

WG: Why? Well, usually immigrants, when they came over, came over to an area where there were many of their kind. Garfield was an immigrant colony, so-to-speak, of Polish people.

MW: You mentioned that your father did a lot of jobs. You wrote down on the sheet that he performed a lot of different jobs.

WG: I can't recall any.

SH: You had said he was a carpenter, a butcher, a grocer ...

WG: He was a carpenter, he was a butcher, yes.

SH: He printed a Polish newspaper.

WG: He had his own weekly newspaper in Passaic, New Jersey.

SH: Did your mother work with him on that?

WG: No. He had a grocery store in Garfield, New Jersey. It was a butcher and a grocery store, and he worked for companies like the Muse Company, maybe you know that company, Armour Company.

MW: Were you raised knowing a lot about Polish culture?

WG: Oh, yes. In fact, I won a traveling scholarship to Poland in 1933.

SH: What did you do on this? Tell us more about your scholarship. That sounds very interesting.

WG: Well, I went to visit my uncle, who was a forester, in a very, very, large forest in southern Poland. It was one of those forests that was owned by a nobleman, absentee, who lived outside of the country, and, it was a scary place. There are lots of pines. When you walk through the forest, you get a, "Shhhhhh," [wind noise] and no lights at night. If we ever went anywhere, we had to walk through the dark.

SH: The conditions were a lot more primitive there than what you'd had here in the United States.

WG: No, a forest is a forest anywhere, but, since he was a forester, he lived in a sort of a log cabin-type of home, away from other houses. One time, when I played in a haystack, he warned me about some poisonous snakes that were in the area. He asked me not to play there.

SH: What happened?

WG: Well, I was never bitten, because I paid attention to him.

MW: Were your parents religious?

WG: Not at all. My father was an atheist, just as I am, and my mother was not religious either. That's very unusual for Polish people.

MW: You mentioned on your sheet that you have three sisters. Were they older or younger than you?

WG: All younger than me.

MW: You were the oldest of the family.

WG: I'm the oldest in the family. I'm seventy-nine.

MW: What was it like growing up in the 1920s?

WG: I loved it. The '20s were exciting, whether you're poor or rich. The '20s were exciting. The dancing, like the Charleston, for example, it was great. Oh, I do remember being near the Forstmann-Huffman Textile Company, woolen company. Maybe you know the company, Forstmann-Huffman. It's a very well-known company and they made military uniforms. I was outside with a group of people, about four blocks away from my father's store, and, all of the sudden, there was lots of action. The police, they were swinging their clubs, and I was on my tricycle and I was knocked over. That whole thing, I won't forget.

SH: Do you remember what the altercation was about?

WG: These were strikers. I don't remember if it was a sympathy strike with the Botany Woolen Company or a strike of their own. They were very well treated, the people, the workers they had there. The employer gave them tennis courts, for example, and a lot of good things.

SH: Did your mother work outside the home when you were young?

WG: Yes. She worked also in those textile mills. Those are a primary reason why many of the people came to a town like Garfield, New Jersey, because of textile mills.

SH: Do you remember what kind of hours she had to work? Did she belong to the union?

WG: There was no union, but she worked from, I think, six [AM] to five [PM]. That would be eleven hours, I guess.

SH: Who took care of you children?

WG: I don't know.

SH: You talked about your father's involvement in the Democratic Party. How involved was he in the Democratic Party?

WG: Well, actually, he was for the Republican Party. I have something to say about that. My father would always put something in the store window. For example, when--let's see, who ran in 19--? I can't think of who was running--oh, Al Smith, the Democratic New York State Governor. He ran against ...

MW: Hoover.

WG: Herbert Hoover, yes, and we had a parochial school that was close by and my father put Herbert Hoover's picture in the window. As the children went to school, they would spit on the window.

MW: Did Prohibition affect you or your family at all?

WG: Well, I went to school through gun smoke and came home through gun smoke. Let's see, who are the people that make booze? Bootleggers were around then, bootleggers.

SH: Did you go to parochial school?

WG: Oh, heavens no. I went to Catechism one time. I went to Communion one time only. Only because the people who supported my father's store, they insisted I go to church and I go to Communion. So, I just went one time. I had my first and last Holy Communion.

MW: Did you go to school with your sisters?

WG: No, that's a very sad thing in my family, that times were so difficult. I don't think you have any idea how difficult they were. This was after my father didn't have his business. Then, he went back to Poland for a visit, to visit his family. When he came back, those were most difficult times--two of my sisters had to leave school. They couldn't go to high school. They had to work and, at that time, the pay was ten dollars a week--and ten cents for Social Security.

SH: Where did they work?

WG: They worked in what today we would call sweatshops. You know what they are?

MW: Yes.

SH: Can you tell us the names of your sisters, and where they are now?

WG: Oh, sure. One sister, the second oldest, is Amelia and the other one is Rose. The third one is Alyce. Alyce is the youngest one; she went through school.

MW: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

WG: Extremely so. We were on welfare, and we were all ashamed of that. For example, when I would go to the A&P, we had our welfare papers, what we could buy. One of the items was oatmeal and I ordered oatmeal and the clerk was really upset with me, because--let's see, how many kinds of oatmeal are there? Is there a refined and an unrefined oatmeal? Well, I just said, "Oatmeal," I didn't say, "Oatmeal for a person on welfare," you see, and he was very upset with me, because I broke the rules by saying that. What was the question again?

SH: Different ways that your family coped with the Depression.

WG: By being on welfare, that was one way. That was the main way.

SH: Were there any jobs available at all?

WG: No, although my mother did get work in a textile company.

SH: Did the community work together at all?

WG: No, there's no such thing as a community.

SH: Did you live in a tenement type of home?

WG: No, in the two-family type of home.

MW: Did you support Roosevelt and the New Deal?

WG: Very much so. As a matter-of-fact, I joined the Civilian Conservation Corps. That was another way that I could support my family here, so much. I earned thirty dollars a month and five dollars went home, but, then, I became a supply sergeant, so, I got five dollars extra a month, and I was also a canteen sergeant. The canteen was a place where they played pool and you could buy ice cream and candy.

SH: Where did your service take you with the Conservation Corps?

WG: I didn't want to go out West, and I did have a choice. I wanted to be close to my family. So, I took a camp close to home that was around High Point, Branchville, New Jersey. I was able to hitchhike home, which I liked very much.

SH: What did you do up at High Point?

WG: The men in the field, they built bridges over waterways, when the dirt road had to have a bridge. Our unit built bridges.

SH: How old were you when you were doing this?

WG: Now, I have to think--I think I was about eighteen.

MW: Did you send your money home to help your family?

WG: Oh, yes.

SH: What was the social life in the camps like, in the Conservation camps?

WG: Oh, that was great, lots of dice playing, which was against the rules, of course, and I had these books, which I don't know if they're around today, little magazines called *Popular Educator*. I used to read those a lot.

SH: Where did you go to grade school?

WG: In Garfield.

SH: Did you go to elementary school and high school there, too?

WG: High school in Garfield also, Lincoln High School.

MW: When did you first start thinking about attending Rutgers?

WG: Oh, that was far away yet. Where am I now?

SH: I just wanted to back up to your high school days. Did you work while you were in high school? Were you involved in any activities?

WG: I worked in bowling alleys. I'm trying to fit in something--since my interest was in entomology, I decided to go to Mexico hitchhike, which I did.

SH: This was after the Conservation Corps.

WG: Right, after I left the Conservation Corps. Incidentally, we're meeting this year in Austin, Texas. That's where I did graduate work in entomology and mosquito work. I have to sort things out in my mind a little bit--after all, I'm seventy-nine. Let's see, where are we, I'm in high school?

SH: Right. We're just trying to do a chronology basically, from high school then to the Conservation Corps.

WG: From high school to the Conservation Corps, 1936, yes. It was soon after high school that I went into the Conservation Corps, which, as you know, was initiated by Franklin D. Roosevelt. He's our great hero. His statue will be unveiled pretty soon, in Washington, DC.

MW: You supported Roosevelt throughout his four terms.

WG: Throughout my life.

SH: Under what auspices did you hitchhike to Mexico then, to work?

WG: On my own, completely on my own, something that's scary when I think about it.

MW: What was down in Mexico?

WG: I was interested in a particular group of butterflies, and one of them was in Mexico, which I never found, but that was difficult, hitchhiking in those days, with such poverty. One time, I didn't eat for about three days and I had some macaroni, dried and in the package. I was able to convince the person to let me stay at the YMCA in--I can't remember the town--which he did, but I asked the cook whether he would cook that macaroni for me, but he wouldn't do it. I begged him. After some time, he did, but he wouldn't give me a dish. So, what I did was, I got a chair and I got a brown paper bag and opened that up. I put it on the brown paper bag and I ate with my fingers, like that. Some guy was passing by. He said he couldn't stand watching me, so, he took me to a diner.

SH: When you were hitchhiking, do you remember any of the country or anything that happened between here and there?

WG: Oh, yes.

SH: What did the country look like at that time?

WG: I slept out in the open, on fields that were cut over, perhaps wheat fields. That stubble was not very comfortable to sleep on.

MW: What did your family think of this?

WG: They allowed me that, gave me that independence. I don't know why.

SH: How long were you gone to Mexico?

WG: Oh, just a matter of months. I did work on a foreign cruiser, going down to Mexico--not Mexico, South America. See, since I spoke Polish, they needed about five Americans to work at the bar, where the American passengers spent a lot of time. My pay was eleven dollars for two

weeks, which was not too high, now, was it? I didn't like working for Europeans. They were really mean people.

SH: How long was the cruise then?

WG: The cruise would be, as cruises run today, ten days or so. We went to Venezuela, Columbia, Cartagena. One thing I remember in Venezuela, in La Guaira, I tried to buy some beer, and I said, "*Una beera*." It didn't work. They didn't know what I wanted. You're laughing, so, you know what happened. Well, anyway, I got my beer finally. That's strange, that in every language, it's "*beera*," "*beer*," "*bier*," in German, but the only exception is "*cerveza*" in Spanish.

MW: It was after your experiences in South America and your cruise that you decided to go to Rutgers.

WG: Let me think now. How did I get to Rutgers? I did win a scholarship to Rutgers, but I didn't have enough money to stay there. So, I had to leave.

SH: Was your scholarship from high school?

WG: No, I think about a year after, maybe, it was.

MW: How long did you stay at Rutgers?

WG: About a year, I think, maybe a term and a fraction of the next term.

MW: What was the school like back then?

WG: Oh, there were a lot of things I didn't like, like they wanted me to go to church every Sunday. You know that was how--do you know that?

MW: We study the history of the school.

WG: Oh, amazing. I hated that.

SH: We've had some interviewees say that they at least liked the music or the speakers. You didn't find it pleasurable in any respect. Was it just the idea that you had to go?

WG: The idea I had to go. I don't remember any of the speeches.

MW: Where did you live when you were at Rutgers?

WG: I lived in Garfield and I always had to hitch rides home and back to school.

MW: Did you go home every day?

WG: No. I lived on Easton Avenue.

MW: Where on Easton Avenue? Do you remember?

WG: One of those, I still remember the address, 81. Why should I remember that?

MW: Was it an apartment?

WG: It was a two-story house, and I lived up in the third story, which was an attic. It was terribly cold.

SH: Were you studying entomology then?

WG: Well, I was--when you enroll in a program, you don't study right away the entomological subjects. Where did I go from then?

SH: In the term that you were there at Rutgers, were there any professors that you remember distinctly?

WG: Oh, yes, but I don't remember the names. If I thought about it long enough, I would. They were well-known professors. They had a good entomology department.

MW: Did you think about joining a fraternity?

WG: No, I couldn't possibly. I didn't have the money. I hardly had the money to stay.

MW: After you left Rutgers, at what point did you join the Army? Did you enlist?

WG: Then, I got a job in a textile mill where military uniforms were made. One striking thing about working there, I was always the fastest person. I was extremely conscientious, and, as a matter-of-fact, some of the workers came to me and asked me to slow down, which I thought was very strange.

SH: How aware was the country of the approaching war at this stage then? This would be in the late '30s, correct?

WG: Yes, it would be in the late '30s. Americans didn't seem to be so concerned, in the experience that I had.

SH: Did your family keep in contact with your family in Europe at that time? Were you more aware, do you think, because of your background? I know you said you had gone on a scholarship to see your uncle in the forestry service.

WG: Oh, a traveling scholarship, yes, to Poland. That was from a school, a Saturday language school that I attended every Saturday, from the age of seven to the age of seventeen.

MW: You became very fluent in Polish.

WG: Quite so. I was, in fact, an interpreter on the Polish line going down to the luxury cruises.

MW: It was after you got your job, after you left Rutgers, that you enlisted in the Army.

WG: Yes, it would be about that time.

SH: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

WG: I was drafted.

MW: Was this after Pearl Harbor?

WG: After Pearl Harbor, yes.

MW: Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

WG: I was at home, listening to the radio. It was always very exciting to me to follow the advances of the military.

MW: What was your reaction?

WG: I don't know. In what sense do you mean?

MW: A lot of people remember right where they were when they heard about Pearl Harbor, and they were angry and they wanted to go out and enlist right away.

WG: No, I wasn't swept up in that kind of a stream, but I was involved, of course, in the work effort, which was in support of all the things that were needed for the Army, for example, the uniforms.

SH: What kind of a difference would you say the country's reaction and your involvement in the war effort on the European front, as compared to Pearl Harbor and the Japanese? Was there a sense of heightened militarism?

WG: No, I don't think so.

SH: Just a continuation ...

WG: ... Of events.

MW: How did your family react when Germany invaded Poland two years before?

WG: Well, my father, who was a nationalist, would say--if you remember, the first strike at Poland was at Danzig. The area was called Westerplatte, and my father would say, "Oh, the Poles, they've got hidden places underground," and junk like that, really, from that nationalism would be that type of talk.

SH: Did your mother hear from any of her family?

WG: Yes. There was one tragic event where my uncle fell down into a well and was drowned and they didn't know whether he committed suicide or it was an accident. Oh, I learned a lot of things, what the Polish people did, for example, around Christmastime, the type of foods that they would prepare. It was always fun taking part in those funny customs. For example, in Poland, they would go out and, if a tree, a fruit tree, didn't bear enough fruit, they would take an ax and they would frighten the tree with the ax to bear more fruit. The girls, when they would look down a well, they would say that they could see their future husband in the reflection. Oh, when I went to Poland, at the age of fifteen--I'm going backwards now--I was at a wedding. There, I remember mountains of food on top of the table, and the bridal party would be taken to church in wagons and the orchestra was in a wagon. I could read a lot of the novels, Polish novels. I've forgotten what I'm talking about.

SH: We were just trying to figure out what kind of contact your family was able to maintain with Poland and the Polish relatives during the war.

WG: There was no contact during the war, with Polish relatives.

MW: You said that your dad kept talking about the secret fortifications of the Polish military.

WG: Yes, these were boastful types of things. Of course, you know that Poland was severely beaten by the Germans, but the Poles are proud in that the Czechs, they gave up. The Germans just walked right into Czechoslovakia. The Poles were very proud of the fighting they had done. I think it took place in just one or two months and Poland was beaten. There were stories about Polish cavalrymen on horses running against German tanks. I don't know how true that is.

MW: What was your dad's reaction when Poland did fall?

WG: I can't remember such a specific thing.

MW: How long after Pearl Harbor were you drafted?

WG: I think two years.

MW: You were drafted in 1943.

WG: I believe so, yes, early 1943.

MW: You enlisted as a private.

WG: As a private, yes.

MW: You did your basic training at Fort Knox.

WG: Fort Knox.

MW: What was basic training like? Did the CCC prepare you for that kind of camp and discipline?

WG: Well, in the CCC, we had to march the way they do in the Army, but, then, the public was opposed to that type [of discipline]. See, the public, of course, I'm sure you know, was opposed to the war with Germany, and so, we lost all of our military leaders and we acquired civilian type of leaders. There was one incident at the CCC camp may be worthwhile mentioning. There was a strike. We were eating beans too often. So, we struck and the Captain asked us to line up outside. It was discovered that the kitchen staff was stealing money and that's why we ate beans so often.

MW: Did you get more meat after you struck?

WG: A more rounded type of a meal program.

MW: After basic training, you were just shipped right overseas.

WG: Let me think--yes, soon after, we went to North Africa.

SH: How did you get to North Africa? Where did you leave from?

WG: We left from New York City, from close to my home. From Fort Knox, Kentucky, after basic training, we came to depart from New York City and while our wonderful--who were those ladies that used to hand out doughnuts?

SH: The Red Cross?

WG: Well, anyway, I don't know what you'd call them, but they handed out doughnuts and coffee--the USO people, I suppose--and that voyage was really long and zigzagged, because the submarines, of course, chased many of our US ships. In some cases, when the submarines were around, they would drop the depth charges.

SH: Were you on a transport?

WG: A transport, yes. In the Mediterranean was scary, because of submarines. I don't know why, I always got involved in books, so, I became the librarian on that transport. I remember reading to the guys around me a passage that says, "Look at the friendly sea. Look at that ocean. How it seems to want to shake hands with us as we go by," some stupid thing like that, that stuck in my mind.

SH: What were the guys like? Where were the guys from, generally?

WG: They were from all over the country. There was one fellow from St. Louis, Missouri. They were from everywhere.

MW: How did you feel about going off to war?

WG: I don't think I minded it.

MW: Were you scared?

WG: No. I was concerned about my mother being left behind. My parents were separated at that time. It made it more difficult.

SH: Were your sisters still at home with your mother?

WG: Yes, and that's the reason they had to leave high school and work for ten dollars a week. We sometimes joke about that, ten dollars pay and ten cents went to Social Security.

SH: Did they write you lots of good letters during this time period?

WG: Oh, yes. In fact, throughout the years, people would be handing them back to me. My sisters, for example, they would say, "Walter, I have a bunch of letters." I guess people clean out their houses every once in a while and they find these old letters, and they gave them back to me.

MW: Your first combat action was in North Africa.

WG: North Africa. Well, it wasn't combat, you see, because I went over as an interpreter, Polish language, but there were no jobs there for me, so, I became a machine gunner. We stayed in the

desert. We had a bivouac area in the desert near Oran and there were some incidents that were not too nice. Our soldiers used to be mugged by other soldiers when they would come back to camp from going out. Did I say that right? I don't like to say this, but they were African-Americans. I never had any strong feeling against them, but those are the incidents that occurred. They would hold up our soldiers coming back to camp. Diarrhea was a very serious problem in that area. I don't know why.

SH: Was this mostly an Army unit stationed there, or were there other services?

WG: No, they were set up in the desert area.

SH: Were there any Air Corps units stationed nearby?

WG: No, none, but one very sad thing was that when we were moved and transferred one time, our American soldiers would fire at Arabs in transport, just for target practice. I was with a Texas unit and we had to salute the Texas flag and we had a dirty song, which I couldn't sing, about this, "Deep in the Heart of," something.

SH: What were the Arab transports? This was just the local merchants.

WG: I can't remember who--maybe they were on trains and we were in the desert.

SH: What was the object of your unit? What were you there to do?

WG: Oh, I was with a tank destroyer unit. Now, a tank destroyer unit is not a tank unit. A tank destroyer is a tank, open on top, and it was to destroy other tanks and, sometimes, the Germans are very clever. We were bivouacked in one area--this was in France, this was not in North Africa--the Germans, they would fire their guns in the dark of night. When they heard the ricocheting of the bullets, they knew there was a tank there. Then, they would follow it up with an anti-tank gun. Do you understand? They knocked out about ten or twelve tanks that way.

MW: Did you see any real combat action in North Africa at all?

WG: No, no, I didn't, because we weren't in action. We were just waiting there, waiting for the invasion of Sicily. After that invasion, we invaded Salerno, Italy, and, there, I was under machine-gun fire in an olive orchard. I could see the bullets like that far away from me and I was in a foxhole. The dirt would come up. I don't know why it didn't scare me.

SH: Had you made any fast friends with anyone in your unit by that time?

WG: Yes, but I didn't like them too much. For example, one of the men would be driving in a truck, being transported somewhere, and an African-American would be walking along the road.

This guy would holler there, "Nigger, hey, nigger." That really upset me, and this fellow was the closest guy to me, but I couldn't forgive him for that type of behavior.

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MW: You didn't land in Sicily, you landed in Salerno.

WG: Salerno. That was a few months later, September 1943. We landed in those boats, where the front part goes down, LSTs maybe. They were like eggshells on the water and we had to run onto the shore and German aircraft were above. One moment, it seemed like there was a bomb being dropped close to us and it was a gasoline tank from one of our own planes. We found out later, one American pilot, he wanted to lighten up his load, so [that] he could, presumably, have more maneuverability. That was the reason for that and somebody jumped into my foxhole with me and gave me a little discomfort.

MW: You had to fight your way onto the shore.

WG: Well, not I, but there were others ahead of us; maybe we were day one or day two, maybe. The first night, we were in the dark on the beach and we finally made it to a very famous Roman ruins, Paestum, maybe, if you know that. It was a columnar structure, very beautiful, and we spent the first night there. Then, the next move was into an olive orchard. The situation was sort of mixed. You could have walked into a German soldier anywhere. From then on, it was on the way up, up Italy.

SH: Was the fighting quite intense?

WG: I was with Headquarters Company, so, I was under, say, when German planes were firing at me, I'd be in that kind of situation, but I never fired at anyone.

MW: After you worked your way up Italy, what was next?

WG: South France.

MW: You landed at Nice.

WG: Close to it. I can't remember exactly the point. It was probably a resort area.

MW: Was there combat there?

WG: No, it was a fast-moving situation. The Americans, they moved very quickly and the people were extremely friendly and the weather was beautiful. I remember the sycamore trees, they were all in a row, very nicely. People, as we went through towns, when we would stop, they would want to offer us tea or wine.

SH: Had you had the same reception in Italy from the people?

WG: Yes, but it was more under combat conditions as in France, where the Germans were not so close to us. They were moving up, away from us.

MW: Was your unit involved in any major battles?

WG: Yes, the one at Monte Cassino. You know about that battle? It was such an unusual thing. The Americans were bombing the Cassino in such a very heavy manner, I've never seen this reproduced in any other type of situation, where the air, where you could see the compression of air, the circles. It was just amazing. You understand what I'm saying? The bombing was so intense that the troops couldn't advance on to the monastery, because of all the destruction that the bombing created. The roads were blocked with debris.

SH: You had to clear the roads before you could advance.

WG: Or find another way around.

MW: Were you involved in any battles in France?

WG: There were all sorts of fast-moving type of situations.

SH: Had you always been with the tank destroyer unit?

WG: Yes, always. For example, there was one situation--you know about the Ukrainians who fought with the Germans? I still have some letters even. I've never had them translated. Those are the Ukrainians who thought that if the Germans won, then, the Ukraine would gain its independence and here's where I, over here, get into trouble with American Ukrainians when I mention that. They don't want to hear that.

SH: Where did you come across the Ukrainians who served with the Germans?

WG: Vesoul, France. That's where I picked up letters and the military journals.

SH: How did you come across them? Is that when you were interpreting?

WG: No. These were Ukrainian soldiers who spent a night in different homes, private homes.

MW: Did your unit actually capture any German prisoners of war?

WG: Oh, yes, many of them. In fact, our unit captured Hermann Goering, and I got his socks. I guess my wife, not knowing what those socks were, she probably threw them out, because I never found them after I brought them home.

MW: Did you pull them off his feet?

WG: No. We got his car. It was a--what's one of the best model cars in this country? Mercedes-Benz, he had a Mercedes-Benz.

SH: Can you tell us more about this encounter?

WG: He, Goering, when he was trying to get away from the Americans, he holed up in a castle in Austria and that's where he was captured.

SH: You had gone from France over into Austria.

WG: From France into Germany, and then, into Austria and that's where we ended up, at a brewery. That was, I guess, about May 1945 and, of course, we had all the beer that we wanted. Then, we got an order from top administrations that, "The war is over and we are to pay for our beer from now on."

SH: Going back, were you ever able to use your interpreting skills?

WG: Oh, yes, here and there.

SH: In what instances, do you recall?

WG: When some GI met a Polish girl somewhere and needed some help. We would run into camps where the Poles and Russians and other people were in forced labor, and, when these camps were taken over, that's where I could use my Polish.

SH: You were part of the liberating units.

WG: Oh, yes, I met some. That reminds me of a very funny incident. This was March--sometimes, I remember the dates and, sometimes, I don't--March 1945. We came to a prisoner of war camp where the Germans had Yugoslavs and that's where I began studying the Serbian language. I got lessons from them. One of them served as a consular official in Chicago. Imagine meeting him as a prisoner of war in Germany. One night, of course, we always had to come back home--not home, but to where we spent the night. There was a castle close by where we found out we could get wine, and we had to go through pass our own guards. These were brand-new troops coming from the States. Well, this was after we had the wine, we had to pass through our own guards, and there was a rumor that the Germans were close by and were going to attack us that night. So, that's why they were so touchy, these guards, and we had one of our

men who was so drunk we had to carry him on a stretcher. So, one of those guards just couldn't control himself and he shot into the ground and the guy who was in the stretcher fell off. That's a funny incident. I'll never forget it.

SH: Sobered up?

MW: Do you have any particularly vivid memories of this time? Is there anything that stands out in your mind?

WG: Oh, yes, but they don't fit into our story. I mean, they're isolated. What was that town on the Hudson where they made good cheese? I said Hudson; I meant Rhine. We met some girls who were from a slave labor camp, I guess, and we had parties. One of our jobs was to distribute food to these different camps, slave labor camps. So, we met quite a variety of people. Oh, there was one thing that has always bothered me. Do you know Schweinfurt, maybe, in Germany? That's where they made ball bearings for the German Army. So, our troops, our Air Corps, used to bombard it on a regular basis. One Polish person came to me and he said he knows a German who had killed one of the airmen who was downed at the bombing of Schweinfurt. This German used a pitchfork and he killed that American airman. I didn't know what to do with it, to do something about it, to get the military police and say that this guy murdered one of our airmen. There's a point at the end of the war where things like that were over with. In fact, there's a famous Italian movie on this very subject, where a sixteen-year-old boy tattled on some of the people in town, in his Italian town, and gave away some people to the Germans. There was a question of, "What should they do? Should they turn him over to the [Allies] or should they kill them?" So, I thought about that a great deal, but I never knew what I should do. There are many instances like that in war, that are very isolated and stand out in your mind.

MW: What did you end up doing?

WG: I didn't think that it meant anything anymore. In other words, there was a time where the killing has to stop.

SH: Were you able to help any of the people in the labor camps, other than feed them? What were your other duties, in that respect? Do you remember any of the names of the camps that you liberated?

WG: If I thought about it long enough, I probably could remember some of the German camps, but I can't think of any right now.

SH: Is your most vivid memory liberating these types of camps?

WG: No, because nothing seemed to happen, except that the people were extremely gratified for our liberating them, like those Slavs I mentioned before, the Serbs.

MW: Did you tour any of the camps?

WG: Did I tour any of the camps? no.

SH: After you were told the war was over, what was the focus of your unit at that point then?

WG: I don't know how correct I am, but my impression is that the Americans didn't care very much. All they cared about was a good time. I'll give an example. Since I worked in Headquarters Company, I was acquainted with the type of duties that there were and the soldiers were beginning to be--those that were in the unit a long time--were going back home and we had to be assigned temporarily to different offices in different camps. I was assigned to a particular office and the officer gave me a job, he would say, "Type five copies of that, please." I knew that it didn't have any meaning, but what he was interested [was] in finding--like many of the men--he was interested in finding some German woman that he could become associated with.

SH: How was the morale between officers and enlisted men at that point?

WG: That all depended on the personality of the officers. Some officers were very much liked, others were ignored or even made fun of. I remember one incident that stands in my mind, that one officer said to one of the enlisted men, "Where are you going, John?" He said, "I'm going to the shithouse. You want to come along?" That's putting him down, but this officer was not popular at all.

MW: Were you promoted at all, up from private?

WG: To corporal.

MW: That's how you were discharged, as a corporal.

WG: Corporal, yes.

MW: You were at that brewery in Austria when you heard the war was over.

WG: No. That would have been a good place. I was at a railroad station when we found out the Japanese war was over with. Of course, that wasn't the place to be. Let's see, the end of the war was about May 6, 1945. [Editor's Note: V-E Day was declared on May 8, 1945. V-J Day was declared on August 15, 1945, in the Pacific.] Sometimes, there are situations, what are you going to do? You can yell, "Whoopee," or something, but you're not in a situation that you could enjoy, with a lot of other men, that kind of news.

SH: Before the war was over in 1945, as you were in Germany now and Austria, how were the Americans treated by the people?

WG: They would snap their heels. Germans were used, sometimes, to wash dishes in the camps, and they were very servile. Other places, when we would throw candy to, say, the ladies at the railroad stations, they were very unfriendly.

SH: How were the collaborators treated? Were you ever involved with any of those, as an interpreter, or anything like that?

WG: I can't think of any such situations.

MW: After you heard the war was over, at what point did you capture Goering?

WG: That was in, I think it was in June of 1945, in Austria. [Editor's Note: The 636th Tank Destroyer Battalion, part of the 36th Infantry Division, captured *Reichsmarshal* Hermann Goering on May 8, 1945.]

MW: Did you have any personal contact with him?

WG: No, no, I didn't, except for having his socks.

SH: Did he have any of his bodyguards, and people around him when he was captured?

WG: It was just a small section of one of the units that hounded him and, finally, caught up with him. We have a booklet that was prepared by one of our people, one of our troop members, which records all the battles. It's somewhat all right, but it doesn't give personal accounts.

MW: How long were you in Europe for? At what point did you return home?

WG: October 1945.

MW: When did you hear about the atomic bomb? What did you think of it?

WG: We heard about that when I was at the railroad station in Munich. I don't know whether it made much of an impression, because when someone says we have a very, very big bomb, bigger than a lot of the bombs we had heard about, like the bombs at Monte Cassino--I was quite different from a lot of other people. For example, I would look for monasteries, I would look for these ancient religious books and I would want to go to Pompeii, for example. I've been to Pompeii four times. Probably, nobody else has. As a matter-of-fact, I even asked somebody to drop me into one of those holes. They're still being excavated, even to this day, and, when I was dropped in, there was a huge spider there above me, which made me feel uncomfortable. I asked to be pulled out.

SH: Were you able to go to Pompeii when you were in Italy, during the war?

WG: Yes.

SH: Really?

WG: Yes. We got days off. Four times, I'd say. I've always been interested in history; I guess that would explain it.

MW: Where were you when you heard about Franklin Roosevelt dying?

WG: That, I can't remember. That, I guess, was April 1945.

MW: Do you remember your reaction when you heard it?

WG: No, I can't.

MW: When you returned home, at what point did you decide to go back to school?

WG: I enrolled at the University of Texas for graduate work, and the reason I chose that was because, there, you can do fieldwork throughout the year, in the Austin area. There was a particular species of mosquito that was involved in my work. However, I couldn't afford to stay there long. Three years in the Army--and, before that, I went to Cornell, that's four years--and three years, that's seven years of no income. That was pretty tough to take. So, I had to leave, but, when I enrolled at Rutgers for graduate work, I can't remember, I was employed with state government then. That was in the early 1950s, I guess.

MW: Backtracking for just one minute ...

WG: Sure

MW: Were you in the Merchant Marine?

WG: Well, only that experience I had with the Polish luxury cruise line.

MW: Jumping back to after the war again, did the GI Bill help you?

WG: Oh, yes. I couldn't go without it. Yes, it did.

SH: When you came back to the States, what was your reception like?

WG: It was nothing like what the Vietnam veterans had experienced. It was since we all were released individually, I don't know what happened to other people.

MW: At what point in this postwar period did you meet your wife?

WG: Let's see--I may get clobbered if I don't remember this. Oh, yes, I remember. I don't remember the dates, however. I've been interested in so many things that one of the things I was interested in was gerontology. In Passaic, at some YMCA or YWCA, there was a lecture--I thought there was going to be a lecture. I misunderstood the announcement. I went there and it was my wife's organization, the social group. So, it was a mistake. I met her there and I didn't meet her for another year.

SH: What was the social organization? Do you remember?

WG: It was strictly a social group. It was a Halloween party, I think. My wife is much younger than I am. I would say ten, twelve years younger than I am. I can't remember anything else.

SH: Where did you meet her the next time, a year later?

WG: At one of the meetings. I can't remember anything else.

MW: When you did go back to school, why did you choose Cornell over Rutgers?

WG: Cornell had a very, very good school of entomology. Some of the top entomologists in the world, like Dr. Comstock, for example, were there.

SH: Were you able to get, with your GI Bill, a scholarship?

WG: No, I never applied for it.

MW: At what point did you go back to Rutgers for graduate work?

WG: That was in the late 1950s. See, I was involved, as an entomologist, in the research here on the viruses, on the sleeping sickness viruses. That's what the public calls it. They're mosquito-borne viruses. Maybe you remember some of the outbreaks in South Jersey. So, I guess that was a reason why I enrolled at Rutgers, the Rutgers Graduate School, and I worked on that for about thirty years, in the swamps. Well, I had a nice--I was really fortunate--I had a very nice life, fieldwork, office work and laboratory work, a beautiful change of pace.

SH: Now, was this through Hoffman-LaRoche that you were financed?

WG: Oh, no, I had forgotten about Hoffman-LaRoche. I worked there as a lab assistant.

SH: Your fieldwork was through the Rutgers program.

WG: It was with the state when the outbreaks occurred. The earliest outbreak, I think, was the biggest one, about thirty people died I think sometime in the early '60s or late '50s.

MW: When you went back to Rutgers, how had the school changed since the late '30s?

WG: I didn't have to go to church. Well, it's such a big difference between a graduate and an undergraduate. It's a much more relaxed type of--you're on your own. You study on your own, and you prepare yourself mostly on your own, which is quite different from undergraduate work.

MW: When you were in graduate school, did you live off campus?

WG: Oh, I lived at home, and I had to drive a lot.

MW: Where was home at this time?

WG: Right here [Jamesburg].

MW: Do you keep in touch with any of the people you went to school with, or any of the alumni associations?

WG: No, I don't. Since the entomology group was so small in size before I retired, yes, I did keep in touch with some of them. I would meet them at the Mosquito Control Association meetings, for example. So, I didn't lose contact with them.

SH: Was there any one professor that you remember from Rutgers?

WG: Dr. Crans, Dr. Wayne Crans, Dan Jobbins, for example, who had died, and Ayodhya Gupta, an Indian, Asian-Indian.

MW: When did you graduate with your master's?

WG: I think it was in '72, but you see, I did it on a piecemeal basis, because, while I worked, I attended classes.

MW: Are you involved in any veterans' organizations?

WG: Well, the CCC organization. I've been attending their annual meetings. Our next meeting is in Austin, Texas, this September.

MW: Are you attending?

WG: Yes. My wife and I are both attending. We've attended most of them. They've had meetings in California, at the school at San Luis Obispo, and we've had meetings in Louisiana, Jackson, Mississippi, in Minnesota. That's really a cold place. It snowed while we were there.

SH: To go back just a second, when you came back from the war, how had your mother and sisters fared during the war?

WG: They were all married and had their own lives. My mother lived with one of the married sisters. I was displaced.

SH: You and your wife then had two children.

WG: We have two children. My daughter is a graduate of Douglass and my son, who is, I have to boast a little bit now, is with the State Assembly. He's an Assemblyman. He's a graduate of a Catholic university. People sometimes remark, "Here's an atheist whose son went to Catholic;" he's the black sheep of the family. None of us go to church, except he goes to church. So, we call him the "black sheep of the family." Somebody says, "Walt, well, where did you go wrong?"

SH: His name, Walter Reed. Is this ...

WG: Named after the Walter Reed Hospital. Walter Reed, of course, was a yellow fever fighter.

SH: I wondered if there was that connection.

WG: That connects.

MW: Did you encourage your daughter to go to Rutgers?

WG: I don't remember how that came about.

SH: Is your son a Democrat?

WG: He is a Democratic Assemblyman and he'll be running again this September.

SH: Where is he an Assemblyman from?

WG: Fifteenth District. He has a law office in Lawrenceville.

SH: Did you get involved in any of his campaigns at all?

WG: Oh, yes. I gave him some money.

SH: You said your wife is still working.

WG: Yes, she works as a court administrator in town here. When she comes home from court night, I just don't like to hear what she has to say. She tells me what husband beat up his wife, that sort of thing. I like to hear things about nice people.

SH: Does your wife's family live around here?

WG: No, she's from North Jersey, from Bergen County.

SH: You listed her ethnic background as Italian/Albanian.

WG: Yes, and, when I tried to get interested in what's happening in Albania, she doesn't have any interest in it. I don't know why. I'm very much ethnic oriented, very much so, and, if you are not and I happen to know that you are Welsh, then, I'd want you to be interested in it, too.

SH: How long have you been retired?

WG: Well, let's see, what year is this? I think it's eight years.

SH: Before we conclude the interview, is there any story, or, as you call them, "isolated incidents," you'd like to share? That's what an oral history is.

WG: Something like, "If I had to do it all over again?"

SH: If you'd like, yes.

WG: No, I'm very, very happy with my job. I used to go to work on Monday like going to a hobby, no problem. I would advise everybody to get a job that they like. It's really a pleasure when you work in an area that you're enjoying.

MW: How did you get involved with this oral history project?

WG: I really don't know. Maybe somebody submitted my name. I know some people interested in that Perth Amboy project. One lady, Ila Miller, maybe she submitted my name.

MW: I talked to Ila Miller to get background for this interview.

SH: Are you involved in the Perth Amboy project?

WG: No, but I've attended at least one meeting, but I am interested in a project of my own, but I've lost my eyesight. I'm just almost blind, getting close to it. I'm interested in the submarine warfare off the New Jersey coast. I started to collect anecdotes and there is a German submarine there, they call it "U-Who." It's a play on the names of the submarines, U-boat, yes, "U-Who." No one knows, the Germans don't know, according to stories, what is the name of that submarine. This is how that got started. A friend of mine, he owns a summer home in Stone Harbor, and a member of the family was opening up walls for renovation purposes. There, within the walls, they found--you know those huge slides? I'm sure you're too young to know

about these--of Germans marching and German soldiers and German subjects. I suspect that, since they were hidden in the wall, that they may have been cooperators when the submarines were going back and forth along the Jersey coast. It's sort of, the summer home is near an inlet. There are stories, and I began collecting anecdotes, about people who may have come from submarines. For example, there was one story about some German U-boat person who came ashore and he bought bread at a bakery.

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

MW: You were saying about the submariners who came on shore.

WG: There were many kinds of stories like that. One of them said, told somebody along the shore, that someday, after the war, he was going to buy a motel in that area, a number of anecdotes like that.

SH: You had said there were youth camps for Germans.

WG: One of the top supervisors at the Forstmann-Huffman Company, where I worked, this is a company that made military uniforms, he was fired when they found out he was a member of that group.

SH: How active had he been? How active do you think the groups were?

WG: They were very active.

MW: Did you know the man?

WG: Yes.

SH: When you were working with him, was he very vocal in support of Germany?

WG: Well, he was a top administrator, so, I really didn't have much to do with him, but there was a German in my unit. He was very supportive of the Germans and he would call Roosevelt "Rosenfeld", something like that.

SH: You had talked about the African-Americans. The troops were still segregated at this point.

WG: Oh, yes. That was so upsetting, honestly, and this Texas group, they were very anti. I remember one person said, "I'm no good, but there's no nigger that's better than me," things like that.

MW: When you were growing up, did you have any contact with African-Americans or other minority groups?

WG: In my younger days, before the Army? no, except my father used to fight me. He said, if I'm bad, "I'm going to have a nigger come to you," or something like that. That always made me upset, because the immigrants, I mean, they were the new people here. Even in the Polish community, they would talk about that, they would downgrade the blacks.

SH: What about anti-Semitism?

WG: Anti-Semitism is a very pronounced thing in the Polish community. I asked one of my friends, a lady friend--she's about seventy years old, she lives up in North Jersey, Clifton--I said, "Why were the Poles so much against the Jews?" She said, "Well, when you go to a drugstore, the owner would be Jewish. You'd go to a tavern and the tavern owner would be Jewish. You'd go to a baker and he would be Jewish," and that would be the reason that she gave. I just considered them to be outsiders, even though they were citizens and well-established people. I mean, they were bakers, for example, people who owned bakeries, whose families were established for maybe two hundred, three hundred years.

SH: Did you encounter any of the concentration camps?

WG: No, not of that type that I think you're talking about or thinking about, but the type where the Germans just kept [slave laborers], like that one camp with the Yugoslavs, for example.

MW: Did you see a lot of anti-Semitism or racism in New Jersey in the 1930s, maybe at Rutgers or elsewhere, in the CCC?

WG: There were very few Jews in the CCC I knew, and I wondered about that. I thought, "Well, it's probably because most of the Jews are business-people and, if some Jew needed a job, they would probably get a job with the business." I don't remember a single Jew in the CCC, except the doctor, maybe, that was a resident of the camp. I think he might have been Jewish.

MW: Did you know of any minority students, Jews or blacks or any other significant minority, at Rutgers when you attended?

WG: Oh, yes. There was one from Cuba, whom I disliked very much. Since I had to travel from Trenton to school, if there was a snowstorm, I'd have trouble getting to school, or maybe I would have had to miss class. So, I asked this guy if I could have his notes, which he wouldn't want to give me. So, that's the reason I disliked him. Yet, when he worked on a particular species of mosquito for his project, whatever he was studying, whatever project he had, he asked for my field information on that particular species. So, I wouldn't give it to him, which I think was only right. Don't you think so?

SH: I want to go back and ask one more question. As a young GI, in Italy, tell me about Pompeii.

WG: Pompeii was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life. I was actually thrilled about it.

SH: Did they protect it from bombings? Did they try to?

WG: No, but they're trying to protect it now from decay, right now. Probably, all of that should be enclosed, in some way.

SH: You had said you had tried to look at ancient books in monasteries and things like that. Were you successful?

WG: Oh, yes. It wasn't difficult to go into one of those ancient churches or monasteries and be friendly towards the priest and to give him a package of cigarettes and he'd show the first letter of a tract.

SH: The Illuminations.

WG: Yes. They were absolutely striking. Yes, that wasn't difficult to do, but I regret that, whenever I saw a bombed-out church, I didn't go through some of that and take out some souvenirs, like that long pole that puts out the candle lights. I don't know the word for it. If it's there in the ruins, that would have made a nice souvenir.

MW: Besides Goering's socks, did you bring home any other souvenirs from the war?

WG: Besides the socks, yes. I don't know where they would be.

MW: What did you bring home?

WG: I brought home a manuscript, which gave you the location of different properties in a particular town. It was actually a manuscript, manually done.

SH: What town?

WG: After we landed in Salerno, we went through towns like Caserta and up through Rome, then, up through Civitavecchia. There was a castle, a walled castle, and people live there right to this day. I presume they're still there and it was out in the open. I guess they needed more protection than if it were not in the open. I made friends also and corresponded with them. I brought home a dictionary, an ancient dictionary. I was studying Italian here at Princeton, not at the university, but outside the university, once a week until the professor left. I suppose I'll think of a lot of things and have to call you back.

MW: Did you take any souvenirs from the prisoners your unit captured, any paraphernalia?

WG: No, I can't think of anything, although some gave something to me, but they're not significant. A cigarette case, for example, you put a package of cigarettes in, unimportant things.

SH: Is there anything you can think of that we forgot to ask that we should include?

WG: Nothing really comes to my mind at the moment. I do have pictures.

SH: Well, I would encourage you to preserve those pictures.

WG: I have pictures that were collected, photograph albums that were collected by the Germans themselves. You see, when we would come to a town, we would look for a good place to stay, a good place to sleep, and then, we would look for souvenirs, but some people would say, "That's a heck of a thing to do, taking private things like that," but, when I think of my family, members of my family, and how the Germans burned their houses in Poland, it sort of makes things even.

SH: Have you ever gone back to Poland?

WG: Yes, remember that traveling scholarship I mentioned to you? yes.

SH: Have you gone back since at all?

WG: No, but I wanted to go back on the fiftieth anniversary of the landing at Salerno, which was last year, and then I came down with a very serious problem. It's called "Triple A" in the medical language. They have to remove a section of my aorta, about eight inches, and replace it with a plastic tube. I lost the ability to walk, and I'm still in the final stages of recovery, after the surgery was done in June of last year.

SH: In your service in Italy and in France and across Germany and into Austria, did you meet any of our more famous military commanders?

WG: Oh, of course. General Marshall, he was the most famous, I guess, that I had seen.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MW: Do you have anything you'd like to add?

WG: I like the Italian people a lot, and I made many friends. I corresponded a little bit. After awhile, you know that, when you don't see somebody, what do you talk about then?

MW: When you were in Europe, did you meet up with any British units?

WG: Oh, yes, it was good that you mentioned that. We used to see them a lot. They used to stop along the roadside and prepare tea. Did you know that? I'm serious. They would have these little metal containers and they would prepare tea. It was like a ritual, and I saw Gurkhas. You would see them when you were up in the hills--not really mountains, I guess, big hills maybe--you would see them bathing. They would take a cloth and strip to the waist, even though it was cold. We marveled at that, how they would do that when it was cold. They were supposed to be very wonderful fighters. Of course, I met Polish troops also. I was in a hospital in a resort area near Nice, and there was one Polish soldier, quite badly wounded, and he was very bitter towards the Americans, for no reason. I mean, for his reason, he said we Americans have everything and he was bitter about that. It was envy, pure envy, of course. Those Polish soldiers, they said, "Here we are, Polish, and we have English uniforms, and we were in an accident in Italy." He mentioned a series of things like that. I don't know what else that included and, also, it was in a tiny town in Italy and I ran into something that I guess very few of us have the experience, two Maoris. You know who they are, don't you? The Maoris, M-A-O-R-I-S, these are the natives of New Zealand. I joined them in their drinking session and they got terribly drunk, but they were very nice people. We did see quite a mixture of different ethnic groups.

MW: Did you ever see any Russian troops?

WG: No, never saw Russian troops. One thing, at the invasion of Salerno, I did see Muslim troops. I don't know from what country they were, but they were praying. They'd put out their rugs, their prayer rugs, and they prayed right on the beach.

SH: Did you have any contact with the French troops?

WG: Yes, French troops, but infrequent. The Americans, they didn't care for the French for some reason; I don't know why. The Germans would take advantage of that and they would, in their psychological warfare programs, show some pornographic literature, which they would distribute from the air or whatever other way they did, little cartoon-like cartoons, showing American troops messing around with the French women, to arouse some kind of envy and problems.

SH: Did you have to eat a lot of K rations and C rations?

WG: No, I didn't, because we had wonderful food. The K ration, let's see, that's the one that's like the size of a Cracker Jack [box]. You could easily put it in your back pocket. That was a wonderful ration, so wonderfully packed, but one thing that I hated to see was, it seems that some guys, they didn't care how the food was prepared too much. The C rations, you've heard of those, haven't you? Well, there was one guy in our unit who used to open up those cans and eat right from the cans, those C rations. The C ration was considered one of the lowest types of ration. I couldn't stomach watching that, especially cold canned. Oh, in my unit, there were eight of us in our headquarters unit and my function was to take care of all the military files. So, two of us, we'd switch cooking, two of us took turns. We all tried to outdo one another. Since I had always

had my little handbook of Italian, I would go out and get a couple of eggs, if I could, and onions maybe. One time, I got--I've forgotten the food--but we mixed it with--what is that meat?--flour and cooked it, and everybody enjoyed it very much. We didn't tell them what it was and we were all amazed. One time, the Americans--they're not too sensitive, that includes myself--people around us were very hungry. How could we understand the kind of hunger that they experienced? We made pancakes one time and the lady who's in that same house, she came up to our cooking room and she pointed to it and I think she said, "*Dey Goff?*". I guess that meant "pancake." It bothered us, her coming there, but she must have been terribly hungry. We didn't have the brains enough, I guess, to understand that, the hunger that I've seen. For example, at Pompeii, the Army always provided for us. That was an outing, to go on leave, maybe had two-day leave. So, we would go, let's say to Pompeii, and, on the way out, the Army prepared sandwiches for us, with that beautiful white bread that we always had. There was this turkey wire, this turkey fence wire all around where we ate those sandwiches. The people were pressed up right against those wires. I almost never finished one of those huge sandwiches and I would give it to somebody at the wire and that thing disappeared in a second. So, many hands went through that turkey wire. Some of those fences, for example, where we ate our food, there were so many people against them that, one time, the whole fence went down. People wanted to get to our garbage cans. We had to keep them out, because there would be chaos, you see. The food was excellent, really.

SH: How was the communication? If you were with a headquarters unit, were you part of the communications?

WG: I don't know exactly what you mean, Sandra.

SH: You said you were part of the headquarters unit. Were you able to keep up a good line of communication or was it broken at times?

WG: There was no problem with that. We were in a tank destroyer battalion. There are four units. There's Headquarters and Company A, B and C. They used our unit whenever you hear of what we call a separate battalion. Separate battalions were chopped up, so [that] they could be assigned to one division or another division. Sometimes, we didn't see them too often, the other companies. For example, in Italy, they couldn't use the tank destroyer battalions the way they should be used because of the mountains, but they would use them as artillery, firing over those mountains. One time, we were completely surrounded and I had my container of gasoline. It was my job to burn all of those secret files, so [that] they wouldn't fall into the hands of the enemy.

SH: You had to burn them then.

WG: No. We were surrounded, but we weren't taken over.

SH: That's good.

MW: Do you have anything else?

WG: You said that before.

SH: Well, I think through experience, we find that sometimes we shut the tape off, and some beautiful stories pour out and the tape is finished. So, he's trying to guard against that.

MW: Well, on behalf of the Rutgers Oral History project, thank you very much.

WG: I hope it was interesting enough. It was chopped up a lot, but it is pretty hard for me to remember things in a sequence.

MW: This has been an interview with Mr. Walter Gusciora.

MW: No, no.

SH: Say it, please

WG: Gusciora, difficult name.

MW: Thank you very much.

WG: You're very welcome.

SH: Thank you.

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Reviewed by David D'Onofrio 10/24/02

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 11/20/02

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/14/14