

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GORDON KOBLER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

and

STEPHANIE BONGIOVANNI

and

HANNA SPARKS

STEWARTSVILLE, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

KATHRYN T. RIZZI

and

MARIA GEREW

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Gordon Kobler in Stewartsville, New Jersey, on November 16, 2012, with Shaun Illingworth ...

Hanna Sparks: ... Hanna Sparks ...

Stephanie Bongiovanni: ... Stephanie Bongiovanni ...

SI: Also in attendance is ...

Danae Barretto: ... Danae Barretto.

SI: Thank you, Mr. Kobler, for having us here today.

Gordon Kobler: You're welcome.

SI: To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

GK: I was born April 1, 1922. It was called the town of Newark Valley, New York.

SI: For the record, what were your parents' names?

GK: Irwin Kobler and Anna Millen Kobler.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, what do you know about the family history and where the family came from?

GK: My mother lived in Newark Valley. My dad lived in Wisconsin until he was nineteen, and then, his parents moved to Newark Valley. They were farmers. Why they moved, I don't know. It was two brothers and two sisters that moved to the same area. My dad must've met my mother and they married, and then, I was born.

SI: What kind of farm did they have?

GK: Dairy farm, yes, cattle.

SI: Do you know what your father was doing out in Wisconsin?

GK: They were farmers.

SI: Okay.

GK: Yes, they were farmers.

SI: In Wisconsin.

GK: In fact, he had a team of his own when he was eleven years old, he told me.

SI: What are your earliest memories of where you grew up? What do you remember about where you grew up, the neighborhood?

GK: Well, it was a farming area. What I remember [is], my dad, when I was six years old, for some reason, he gave up farming and came to Montclair, New Jersey, and my mother and I lived with my grandparents. I remember my grandfather whittling wood for the stove in the morning, and then, they'd build a fire. It was an old, big stove with a little hearth and I would stand on the hearth and keep warm. We got a bath once a week, whether you needed it or not. [laughter] I remember going to bed at night with a lamp.

SI: That was in Newark Valley.

GK: Yes.

SI: Okay. That is where your grandparents lived.

GK: Yes. Then, I think maybe six months later, my mother came down with my father and we lived in Greendell, New Jersey, on a farm. Then, I went to school in Greendell. Do you want to know about my schooling?

SI: Sure.

GK: Now or later?

SI: Was it another dairy farm in New Jersey?

GK: Always a dairy farm, yes.

SI: Okay.

GK: Yes.

SI: Approximately how old were you when you moved there?

GK: Six.

SI: Okay.

GK: Yes, came to New Jersey when I was six.

SI: Did you have any siblings?

GK: No. I was an only child.

SI: Tell us a little bit about going to school in Greendell.

GK: Well, I don't remember too much about it, but I went to Greendell. My dad, he didn't own a farm, but he seemed to [think the] grass [is] greener on the other side, so, he moved a lot. So, I moved to Rockaway. I went to the Hibernia School until seventh grade, and then, from then, I went to Denville School for eighth grade and started high school in Denville. They had ninth grade there. Then, in September of 1935, my dad came to Stewartsville from Rockaway. O'Dowd's owned a big farm here and O'Dowd's was a big dairy farm, but they had milk down in Pine Brook, New Jersey. That was where the cows were. So, this farm fed the cattle down there. So, my dad came here, he liked it, so, we moved here. I was here for three years. In September 1938, we moved back to Rockaway. [laughter]

SI: You lived in Stewartsville.

GK: For three years.

SI: The high school was in Phillipsburg.

GK: [Yes]. I went to Phillipsburg High School for three years. Then, I met Doris, my wife, took her to junior prom. Eventually, we got married. Then, we moved to Rockaway, so, I graduated from Rockaway High School.

SI: Okay.

GK: Some of the kids there I had known from Hibernia, so, that was pretty good. Then, in April 1939, my father moved to Hope, to another farm, but he stayed there, farmed all his life, until he couldn't work any longer at that.

SI: You moved around a lot and you lived on a lot of different farms.

GK: Moved a lot.

SI: What was that like for you growing up? Did you need to do a lot of chores?

GK: Well, probably, it was disappointing in a way, but I met a lot more people and it all worked out fine, yes, all worked out.

SI: Did the farm play a big role in your life? Did you have to do a lot of chores?

GK: I didn't care for farming that much. If my dad owned a farm, I probably would've farmed, but, being [a tenant], so, I didn't like that too much. After I got out of high school in '39, I helped on the farm for a while, but, then, I decided I wanted to do something else. So, I got a job in Rockaway Valley, Aircraft Radio. It's out of Boonton and I worked there until I got drafted in 1944.

SI: What company was that?

GK: Aircraft Radio was the name of it.

SI: That was the name of the company.

GK: They made radios for Navy airplanes.

SI: Okay.

GK: I got eighteen months' deferment, six months' delay, but, then, when I went to Newark, they found me; well, I got drafted. Then, I went in the Army on March 30, 1944, day before my birthday. [laughter]

SI: Before we get into your time in the service, we want to ask a little bit more about your education and youth. Growing up in rural areas, were you isolated from folks or did you have a lot of friends around?

GK: The little towns were small.

SI: Okay.

GK: Yes, weren't really isolated. In Hibernia, I walked probably two, two-and-a-half miles to school, dirt roads and stuff.

SI: Were the schools one and two-classroom schools?

GK: Yes, sort of, yes.

SI: Okay. Did you have one teacher teaching multiple grades at the same time?

GK: Yes, but, then, in seventh and eighth, it was different.

SI: Okay.

GK: It was all different, different teachers.

SI: What were your favorite subjects in school? What interested you?

GK: [laughter] No favorite subjects, no. The only thing I had [that I liked was] geometry and the only thing I ever used in that [was when] I was a carpenter. So, the sum of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides--that's how you square a building up. [laughter] It's the only thing that really helped me, right.

DB: Yes.

GK: It's the only thing that helped me.

SI: The Great Depression started when you were about seven or so.

GK: Yes. It really didn't affect us that much, because my dad was a farmer. In those days, they raised everything, everything in the garden, butchered animals. My dad would get a milk check once a month and we would go to the town of Newton and my mother would buy groceries for the whole month, so, bake bread and everything. So, the Depression didn't really hurt me.

SI: Could you see how the Depression affected the rest of the town?

GK: Well, we were, like, in the country.

SI: Everyone was in the same situation.

GK: We weren't in a town. I never really lived in a town.

SI: Do you remember any transients or hobos coming through?

GK: Yes, there used to be--what was the name of those people? They weren't hobos. Well, they might've been, but there was another [name]. What the heck was the name of them?

SI: Oakies?

HS: People that lived in Hoovervilles?

GK: Gypsies.

SI: Gypsies.

GK: I remember them. [laughter] I remember, they wouldn't be called hobos, but they'd stop for something to eat and my mom would always give them a sandwich or something. You didn't have to be scared of them or anything.

SI: Did you have to do any work on the farm?

GK: Oh, yes. I milked by hand even, at different times, yes, whatever farm work, yes.

SI: Did you have any part-time jobs when you were growing up?

GK: No, no. Like I say, we were in a rural area and I didn't have a job. Well, when I lived in Stewartsville, I was a paperboy for a year, knew everybody up in the Heights, eighty people. The paper was ten cents and I made three [dollars and] twenty [cents] a week. I mowed the lawn for a lady twice a week for forty cents. So, four dollars a week, I was making. [laughter] That was good money then.

SI: What would you do for fun or entertainment?

GK: Radio and newspapers. That was about it. I didn't play sports; played softball when I got out of the service, but I was too small for sports.

SI: When you said radio, did you listen to the radio?

GK: We listened to the radio.

SI: Okay.

GK: That's all there was then, radio.

SI: I was curious, because a lot of people were ham radio operators.

GK: No, nothing like that.

SI: Tell us more about what high school was like.

GK: It was good. It was good, three years at Phillipsburg, yes.

SI: When you were in high school, was there a particular subject you liked?

GK: Not really, not really.

SI: Were you involved in any extracurricular activities?

GK: No, no. The thing is, we were, what, three miles from the high school? Today, kids are dropped off with a car. Well, you either came by bus or walked. So, no, I didn't have any other [activities], nothing; used to go to football games, but that's about it, hitchhiked to do that.

SI: Did your family have a car?

GK: Yes, my dad had one.

SI: Okay.

GK: Yes, he had different ones. I remember, when I got my license, he had an old Durant, a stick shift. So, I got my license in Hackettstown. I went there, took the written [test] upstairs in the building. Then, the guy got in [the car] with me and we drove down the street, maybe a block or two. He told me to back in and turn around. I backed in and, when I turned around, I pulled on the gear shift--it pulled right up out of the floor. [laughter] Well, that scared me. I wiggled it around and down it went. He said, "Pull up here and get out." That was it. [laughter] That was the end of my driving test. So, it was pretty easy, yes.

SB: How old were you when you got your driver's license?

GK: How old? seventeen.

SB: It is the same as now.

GK: Yes, I was seventeen in April; I think June, I got it.

SB: Your pre-interview survey said both of your parents were Republicans. How did they feel when Franklin D. Roosevelt came to office?

GK: I don't think they liked him too good, [laughter] but he was a great commander, though.

SB: You think so.

GK: Yes. I can tell you today, I know right where I was the day he died. We had just come back off the front for a day's rest, for a little rest. It was [by] Bonn, Germany. We got packages and I got some popcorn and things. We had a radio and it said that he had just passed away, April 12th, yes, 1945.

HS: I would like to go back and ask about your family. What country of origin does the name Kobler come from?

GK: I guess my father was Pennsylvania Dutch, which probably came from Germany, and I think Mom was Scotch or something. I don't know.

SB: Was your family religious? You were Protestant.

GK: Oh, yes, very religious, both of them. [I became religious in] later life. Well, when I was a kid, I went to Sunday school and all that. My mom was a Sunday school teacher, yes, but my mom and dad were very religious.

SI: Was there a particular denomination they went to?

GK: No, wherever we lived.

SI: Whatever was closest?

GK: Yes. It was Methodist up in Greendell and Rockaway. Well, I don't think they went in Rockaway. In fact, I know they didn't, but, then, we used to go to the Lutheran church here, and then, after I got out of the service, my wife was a Presbyterian, so, I'm still a member there.

SI: Did you get involved in any other activities, like Boy Scouts?

GK: I got as far as Life [rank], Life Boy Scout. That's another thing. When I went to Newark, they said, "You want to be in the Army or the Navy?" I said, "Well, I liked the Boy Scouts, so, I'll go in the Army." [laughter] That was a mistake; well, not really. I'd probably have been seasick on the boat.

SI: Where was the Boy Scout troop?

GK: Right here in Stewartsville. It met in the Lutheran church, Troop 60.

SI: As a youth, did you travel much outside of the places where you lived?

GK: Nope. We never went on vacations or anything. They were farmers, seven days a week, yes.

SI: When you graduated from high school, what did you see for yourself in the future? What did you want to do with your life or career?

GK: Well, in those days, there wasn't too many [who] went to college and, of course, they couldn't afford that. Like I say, I stayed on the farm a little bit. Then, I went down--a friend of mine worked at Aircraft [Radio] that I had known from Denville--put my name in and I got hired. So, that's where I ended up. Then, when I got out of the service, I had no desire to go back there.

SI: Was it difficult to find a job then?

GK: Not really, not really.

SI: Tell us what you did at Aircraft Radio.

GK: It was assembling gang condensers. Now, that's the part in the radio that's all metal things like this, little pieces.

SI: Spirals.

GK: And they've got to be worked together and you had to space them, with a spacer, just a little thing to space them. That's what I did, my part.

SI: When you were working there, the war in Europe had already started. Is that correct?

GK: Yes.

SI: As things got worse overseas, did you see if, for example, they were ordering more parts?

GK: No, I wouldn't know about that, no, but we were busy.

SI: Okay.

GK: We were busy, yes.

HS: I know that you did not join the service until you were drafted at twenty-two.

GK: I was drafted.

HS: Did any of your friends, upon hearing the news of Pearl Harbor, join the service immediately?

GK: Not really, but I know, as I got deferments, these fellows would come back and they'd say, "You still here?" [laughter] made you feel [bad], but, no, I had friends that went in before me, yes.

SI: You and your wife got married during the war, after the war had broken out.

GK: I got married in September 26, 1942. So, it was a year after Pearl Harbor.

SI: Was it difficult to put together a wedding during the war, with all the rationing?

GK: We didn't have too much. We just got married in Mom's living room. The picture's in the front room on the coffee table.

DB: They were married here.

SI: Okay, right here in this house.

GK: Yes, right, the front room over there.

DB: On the other side.

GK: And it was gas rationing, so, my father-in-law had a milk truck and he had, like, a five-gallon stamp. We only got one-gallons. So, he gave me that and, that night, it was raining, we went up to Stroudsburg, someplace, stayed overnight in a cabin, got up the next day and went to Highpoint Monument--so foggy, you couldn't see the monument. That night, we were back in Stewartsville. That was our honeymoon, but we had honeymoons after that. [laughter]

SB: Where did you meet your wife and was there a story behind it?

GK: I asked her to go to the junior prom.

SI: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

GK: I was up at my mom and dad's in Hope, on the farm. It was a Sunday and my mom always had popcorn Sunday nights and it was on the register, had a hot-air register. The news came over, I don't know, six o'clock or so, that Pearl Harbor'd been bombed. That's where I was.

SI: Before that, had you been aware of what was happening overseas?

GK: Not too much, because it's all radio. Yes, we knew what was happening with Hitler and bombing England and like that, but it wasn't like it is today.

SI: Was anybody talking about whether they thought the United States should get involved in the war or if they thought they would?

GK: No, I didn't hear anything about that.

HS: In what ways did the United States' involvement in the war affect your life directly? Did you have to start rationing?

GK: Well, I don't know how it affected my life. After it was over, I was glad at what I did do, because there's a good many fellows [that] didn't carry a rifle, a lot of guys in the background. After it was over, I was happy I was there, because I have a Combat Infantryman's Badge, which I'm very proud of, yes.

SI: Before you went into the service, before World War II, had any of your family members or anybody you knew been in the service?

GK: My mother had a cousin that was in World War I. That's the only one I ever knew about, like, never was discussed much.

SI: You really had nobody prepping you for what you might expect.

GK: No, no clue, no clue. In fact, I was the only one out of my family that went. My cousins, they farmed and I really was the only one. I probably shouldn't have been where I was, because I was the sole surviving son, but I guess that didn't make any difference.

SI: Were there other ways that your life became more difficult as the war went on and the rationing got stricter?

GK: Not really. Just separated from Doris, that's all.

SI: You stayed at Aircraft Radio up until you went into the service.

GK: Until I got drafted, yes.

SI: Did that work change at all, the pace or did they have you work more hours?

GK: We went and had night shifts, yes.

SI: Okay.

GK: Yes, they did, because I know I worked night shifts some of the time, yes.

SI: Did they start bringing in more workers?

GK: It got bigger. They made, like, two shifts, night shift.

SI: Did they start bringing in workers that, normally, would not be working there, like women or other groups of folks?

GK: Not really. I remember one fellow from Morristown, he worked in the same department, he was older and he was a jeweler. Of course, there wasn't much jewelry business, so, he helped in the war effort, I guess, yes.

HS: Going back to high school, you went to Phillipsburg. I know, today, they are a big rival with Easton.

GK: Oh, yes.

HS: Were they still rivals back then?

GK: Still are. [laughter]

HS: Do you still attend the Turkey Game?

GK: I used to. I used to always go to them, but, now, I watch it on TV.

HS: Probably a better view anyway. [laughter]

GK: Oh, yes, you do, you do.

SI: Tell us about the actual process of getting into the military, the physical, where you reported.

GK: Well, before we get to that, going back to the Easton-Phillipsburg game, I moved away in September of 1938. So, Turkey Day football game, Doris and I were going together, so, they invited me up for the game. So, I came from Dover by train into Stewartsville and got off at Stewartsville and Doris and I, her brother and his girlfriend at that time, we went to the football game. The one fellow that was in one of my classes, he was one of the stars. Before the game was over, it got snowing, sleeting, raining. So, we left. [laughter] The next morning, my wife's uncle drove a milk truck with the cans and took them to Clifton, New Jersey, and they took me back home. I mean, there was at least six inches of snow and I remember going up out of Hackettstown, that big hill. It was pretty rough, but they dropped me off at home. That's how I got back home, but, now, there's no trains in Stewartsville at all. So, it just made me think of that, when you said about Turkey Day. [laughter]

HS: Were events like Turkey Day common dates back then? What other kinds of things did you do?

GK: Not really much of anything.

SI: Did your wife work at all in any of these war industries?

GK: Yes. After we were married--well, before we were married--she worked in the pencil factory over here in Bloomsbury. Then, when we got married, she quit that and we moved to Boonton, but, then, she worked at Aircraft Radio also.

SI: Okay.

GK: And then, when I got drafted, March 30th, I had to be in Dover. That's where I went out of. So, my mom and dad and Doris took me, had to be there at six o'clock in the morning. So, then, I got on the bus and, when I left, they had hired a moving van and went to Boonton and brought all our furniture. We moved it up into [this house]--one bedroom was our living room, another room was our bedroom, kitchen table went in there. Then, she went to work up in Belvidere. It had something to do with the war effort. I forget what the name of it was. After, then, we had our children and she went back to Koh-I-Noor Pencil factory. She worked there twenty-seven years, yes. Actually, she worked there three different times, yes. [laughter]

SI: Was she working on the line?

GK: Well, yes. Then, she was supervisor towards the end.

SI: What about getting into the military? Where did you report? Where did you go for the physical?

GK: I got a call to--well, I got my notice--to go down to Newark, to the armory, which I did. Then, when I was going through, they make you put your hands out and this finger here is crooked. [laughter] So, they put me in class 1-A, limited service. So, three months later, I'm back down. The guy says, "Boy, somebody slipped up there." So, "Bam," I'm 1-A [a military classification for draftees that meant available and fit for service] and I ended up in the infantry--that's my trigger finger. [laughter]

SB: It was always crooked.

GK: It was always. When I was eight years old, at my aunt's, I was batting a tin can around--that was my pleasure, right. [laughter]

DB: There you go.

GK: And I cut it. You can't quite see it. She tied--you didn't go to the doctor's or anything--she wrapped it up and I suppose it went crooked, cut a cord, that was it, but it never really affected me.

SI: Once you had that physical and they said you were 1-A, did you leave right from there?

GK: No, then, I got called. Then, I had to report in Dover, March 30, 1944.

SI: Where did you go?

GK: Fort Dix, they took me to Fort Dix. Yes, that's still there.

SI: What was going through your head as you were going down to Fort Dix and going into the service?

GK: Oh, who knows? [laughter] I couldn't tell you. You wonder, you wonder.

SI: At one point, you had to decide between the Navy or Army.

GK: That was in Newark, when they asked me, when they took my physical, yes. I also found out down there that all men aren't created equal. [laughter]

SI: How long were you at Fort Dix?

GK: Well, the first day was Easter Sunday--no, no, it was a Sunday, no, it wasn't Easter, that was another day--got a haircut and got issued your clothes, got your shots. You walked through the door--one guy hits you here and one guy here. Then, you'd tell the other guys, "Boy, watch out for that one with the big propeller." So, anyway, we were [there] three, four days, maybe, maybe a little longer. My cousin from Endicott, New York, he was there. He's a couple years older than me, but he ended up in India. I only seen him for a few days, but, then, we got on a train and nobody knew where we were going. We went out through Pennsylvania and there's a big tunnel out someplace out here. We had the window open a little bit. Oh, man, we got [to] coughing and the smoke was coming in from this tunnel. It's out at the end of Pennsylvania; I forget the name of it. So, we went as far as Indianapolis, Indiana, went south to Camp Wheeler, Georgia. That's where I was for seventeen weeks.

SI: What was the train trip like? How long did it take?

GK: Two, three days, maybe, yes, because they'd pull off and let other trains go through. Then, when we got down South, I remember, we'd pull off and these little colored kids would sing and dance for you to throw pennies out to them. Yes, we'd see them go.

SI: This was your first time outside of Northwestern New Jersey and New York.

GK: Yes, yes.

SI: What were some of your impressions of how different the country was?

GK: Didn't really see too much of it. Of course, when you're in camp, you're out in the boondocks.

SI: How long were you at Camp Wheeler?

GK: Seventeen weeks. Doris came down. She was down, but I only got in to see her during over the weekend.

SI: What is the town closest to Camp Wheeler?

GK: Macon, Georgia.

SI: Okay.

GK: The camp is gone. They did away with it.

SI: Did Doris live in Macon?

GK: No, I was in camp, she was just outside of camp, but two or three of the ladies from Stewartsville my wife knew, they were all together. So, that made it good, too.

SI: Did you have friends from Stewartsville that were in camp with you?

GK: I never really knew them before, but Doris did. She knew them.

SI: She knew the men and the women, or was it just the wives?

GK: Just the wives.

SI: What were these first weeks like, your first exposure to the military and its discipline?

GK: Well, it was rough, but you do a lot of walking and they give you that nine-pound rifle, oh, man, but, then, after a while, it's like a toothpick. Every day, you're out, going, and, sometimes, you'd go out two, three days. We dug a lot of foxholes. We dug where somebody else had and up would come a shower down there, all at once. You'd get soaking wet and, ten, fifteen minutes later, you're dry. That's the way it is down South, but, then, the last end of the basic training was a twenty-mile walk and we walked all night, really. You walk so far, and then, you stop for ten minutes, have a smoke or whatever. I smoked then, too. Everybody did.

HS: How early did your days start in basic training? What time were you up?

GK: What, in the service?

HS: Just in basic training.

GK: Oh, I don't remember, early, early. [laughter] Yes, I don't remember that. I remember, I always made sure everything was spotless when they looked down that rifle, because I didn't want to not be able to go in and see Doris. [laughter]

SI: Okay, real motivation.

GK: Yes, and, as far as watermelons, oh, man, they used to sell them for twenty-five cents apiece, and then, they also had watermelon tents, I remember, big tents with picnic tables and a

salt shaker on it. I guess you paid, like, ten cents for a piece of watermelon. They were great. They were good watermelons.

SI: Do any memories come to mind about your drill instructors?

GK: They were good fellows that had already been someplace overseas and they were good, they were good. Yes, as long as you kept your nose clean, they were good.

SI: What kind of weapons training did you receive in basic?

GK: With a rifle and firing that. I got an awful lot of bayonet practice, where they'd have a big bag or something, sawdust, and you'd run and jab it in and yell. I thought I was going to Japan, but I'm glad I went to Europe, because they [the Germans] gave up. You didn't have to use a bayonet.

SI: What made you think you were going to Japan?

GK: The bayonet training.

SI: Okay, that was the impression, that if you went to Japan, you would be using a bayonet.

GK: Yes, yes.

SI: Did they put cartoons or faces on the bags that you were stabbing?

GK: No, I don't remember that, I don't remember that. One of the worst things is crawling through, crawling on your belly with your rifle, and thirty inches above your head is a machine-gun firing, real bullets, and then, you've got to crawl through this. When you get out, the instructors would look down the barrel of that rifle. There's any dirt, you'd go back through it. So, I remember that. That's one of the worst things. The rest was, you just build up to it, build up to it. You're in shape. You'll get in shape, good shape. Of course, I was only twenty-one, twenty-two then.

SI: Did you become friendly with a lot of the men you were with in training?

GK: Yes, quite a few of them, quite a few of them, but, then, after we left Camp Wheeler, we got all split up, but there was one fellow, he lived right down the street here, Piperata. When he heard about Phillipsburg, he was yelling [to me]--he'd already got there. So, I got to know him. In fact, he was in my platoon. One night or one day, we're standing guard--stand at attention and you can't fall out or anything. He dropped over. He ended up getting [discharged]--there was something wrong with him, like, had a heart condition. Piperato lived down where (Amos?) lived.

SI: Were the men in your training unit from all over the country or mostly the Northeast?

GK: No, from around here, yes. Well, maybe they were mostly from around Jersey, I would say. Well, they could've been New York State, too, because my cousin [was there], but the 95th, they were from the Midwest. They went over as a division.

SI: When you would go off the base and into town, what were your impressions of the local area?

GK: Didn't get to see that much of it, but I think it was there, we used to get a steak and that was pretty good. Like I say, I wasn't off that much, just, like, the weekends and that was it.

SB: Did you witness any discrimination down in the South?

GK: Oh, yes, oh, yes. In fact, all the railroad stations were "colored" and "white." In fact, Doris got on the bus one time to go someplace--now that you asked that--and she goes to the back and the bus driver told her to come up front. So, they must've been discriminating then, too, yes. I mean, I didn't see any of it.

SI: Does anything else stand out from basic training, anything that you remember, later on, thinking, "I wish they taught us this," or, "I am glad they taught us this?"

GK: I guess not, just took every day. That's what you had to do and that was it, a lot of walking, which is good.

SI: Did you see anybody who could not handle basic training, anybody that they had to take out?

GK: No.

HS: Would you say there was a difference between those who were drafted and those who volunteered to join?

GK: I think everybody that I was with were draftees. In fact, I'm positive they were, yes.

SI: Do you know if you were one of the older men in the unit?

GK: No, no. There was one gentleman thirty-eight years old, three children. He should've never been there, Marty Ryan. I'll show you a picture of him.

SI: After you finished at Camp Wheeler, where were you sent next?

GK: Doris and I came back up. I had ten days' furlough, maybe. Then, I went to Fort George Meade, Maryland--for what? I don't know. I was only there a few days and, the next thing, I ended up in Camp Kilmer, New Brunswick, which I knew [meant] Europe, because Camp Kilmer was a Port of Embarkation. So, they used to give me a twelve-hour pass. So, I'd come out, hitchhike home. I could get home before they'd come get me. [laughter] So, I'd hitchhike home, and then, the next morning, Doris and her mother would, about five o'clock, take me back down. I did that for about seven, eight, nine days, maybe. Then, September 16th was my

mother's birthday and Doris and I went up to see them at Hope. They were farming there yet. I remember, Mom had cake and they had milk. We came back down and they took me down to Camp Kilmer and that was it. I didn't hitchhike no more. [laughter] On the 17th, they put me--well, we went across on a barge or something, I don't know--and the *Queen Mary* was there, a big ship. So, I went across on the *Queen Mary*. Am I getting ahead of myself now or no?

SI: No.

SB: What were your parents' views on your going into the Army?

GK: Well, I imagine they were--they never said anything--but I presume, me being the only son, I imagine they were worried all the time I was gone. I really do. I wrote a good many letters, but Mom used to have [to wait. Between] when I wrote it and when she received it, it'd be two, three weeks later. You could be dead by the time the letters ever got there. So, I imagine they were [upset], well, everybody, probably. The thing was, everybody at home worried more, but at least I knew where I was and I was okay, but they had more worry, as much as I did, probably, yes.

SI: Did anybody give you anything to take with you, like a good luck charm?

GK: No, but I had a little Bible with a brass thing on it. Yes, I had that. In one of the letters I wrote, [laughter] I wrote where I picked up two stones I got from New Jersey. I was going to bring them home, but I don't know what happened to them. [laughter] Why I did that, I never knew that. I don't remember that, but I must've.

DB: Must've.

SI: You got on the *Queen Mary*.

GK: I got on the *Queen Mary* and they gave us a bag with shaving [stuff], with toilet articles and a lot of little different things, and we got on the *Queen Mary*. I got on the *Queen Mary* the 18th of September, 1944, and then, of course, kept loading and loading and loading. That night, you could look out a porthole and see those lights. Of course, you're wondering, "Well, where am I going? Where am I going?" Well, everybody else was in the same boat. So, then, the 20th of September, at twenty minutes after seven, it starts moving. When we went out the harbor, you could see the Statue of Liberty. That's one of the worst feelings that I ever had, when you see that waving good-bye, because ...

SI: Do you want to take a break?

GK: Yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Thank you very much for your hospitality. Before the break, we were talking about when you left, when you passed the Statue of Liberty. It was a very moving moment.

GK: Yes. Okay, it took from the 20th to the 26th of September, which was my wedding anniversary. I landed in Glasgow, Scotland. [Prime Minister of Great Britain] Winston Churchill was on the boat with me. I never got to see him, but he talked on the radio or on the loudspeaker, wished us Godspeed. On the boat, there were six of us, we had a stateroom. A lot of guys didn't have a stateroom. Why we did, I don't know, but it was Kursis, (Kerner?), Kitchen, Kobler and the two King brothers. So, we had a nice bed in a stateroom. The *Queen Mary*, they took everything out of it. I actually got sick on it. I was working, getting jellies and stuff out for every day, and I went down in the galley. Boy, the smell of this food and, I don't know, I got sick. Big fifty-gallon drums, I upchucked in that, but that was okay. [laughter] I remember it was rainy and we got off in a big place in England.

SI: Were there any U-boat alerts or anything like that?

GK: U-boats?

SI: Yes, any threats of submarines?

GK: Not that I know of, no. See, the *Queen Mary* wasn't in a convoy. We went all by ourselves, five minutes this way, five this way, zig-zagged, all the way across the ocean and five minutes each way. I don't know, I think they said it takes so long for a submarine to get on you. Now, the *Queen Mary* is a hotel out in someplace in California.

SI: In Long Beach, I think.

GK: Yes. In fact, my son-in-law saw it, said, "It's a big boat."

SI: What was the name of the city where you docked?

GK: Glasgow, Scotland, didn't see anything, it was [dark].

SI: Where did you go after that?

GK: Into England; then, we got on a train. I went through London, that's all I seen of London, just the train, and then, we were in a camp. I don't even remember much about that. We're all replacements, but, on the boat, it wasn't just men, there was a lot of women that were going to be nurses and the rest of us were replacements to someplace.

SI: When you were on the train traveling through England, was it all troops on the train?

GK: Yes, all troops, all troops.

SI: Did you get a chance to interact with any British folks at any point?

GK: No, we're just on the train and, zoom, to a camp. That was it.

SI: How long were you in the camp in England?

GK: Don't really remember that, either. I don't really remember when we got on a boat to cross the English Channel; I don't remember how many days. You want to hear about the boat then?

SI: Yes.

GK: Well, we got on the boat, all of us, and, like, the six of us, we're all together yet, friends and all. It got so rough on the English Channel that--and we were on, I don't know what kind of [boat], some kind of a boat--but these guys were sitting eating around a big bowl and there was boll weevils in the bread. I went to the PX and bought stuff. So, we sat on the boat for three days before we could get off, because it was so rough. So, finally, they put the ladders down and we went down, like they do with ladders into landing craft. Of course, this was in September and it was June when D-Day [happened], but there was still all rubbish around where we went in, went right in the D-Day part. I remember walking up the big hill with my duffle bag and [seeing] the pillboxes and up on the level were big holes in the ground and there were still dead animals laying around. Then, I just kept moving from one camp to another. I don't know who figures it all out, but, like I say, I left the States the 20th of September and I never got to my division until November.

SI: When you were in transit, what was going through your mind?

GK: I don't know, you wonder what's happening next, I guess, yes. We just lived in camp. We had meals and all like that and I guess we'd get out into town in one little town we were in. I remember, another guy and I, just we had a glass of beer, that was it.

SI: Was that in France?

GK: In France, yes, this was France, yes. I remember passing through--well, they moved us with two-and-a-half-ton trucks--I remember going through the City of Saint-Lô, nothing left of it, because Saint-Lô was taken by the Americans, and then, the Germans took it back two, three times. It was all blown apart. Well, you see pictures in my book of it. I mean, Germany's all rebuilt; yes, all blown apart. [Editor's Note: In Operation: COBRA, July 25 to July 31, 1944, the Allies broke out of the Normandy hedgerow country at Saint-Lô. The attack commenced with a massive strike by nearly three thousand fighter-bombers, medium and heavy bombers.] It's a good thing they were stone or brick homes, not like these wood ones here. We'd all been dead, because we lived in a lot of them and slept in the basements.

SI: You went through the wreckage of two big battles before you even got up to the front.

GK: Oh, yes, yes. You wonder what [will happen]. I imagine you're scared a little bit, but, well, you've just got to take every day just the way it comes, I guess. Nothing much you're going to do--you're there, that's it.

SI: When you would go into town or when you went to have this beer, did you ever talk with any of the civilians?

GK: No, never did, never did, nope. Then, finally--you want to know when I finally got to the division?

SI: Yes.

GK: Okay. November 8th, I was in an old schoolhouse. All my friends, Kursis, (Kerner?), Kitchen, Kobler and the two King brothers, we're in this school and this artillery is firing all night long. I mean, you wonder what was happening.

SI: Was this German incoming artillery?

GK: No, it was our troops, our artillery going out. So, the next morning, they started taking the names in order to move on. So, I went to Company F of the 377th [Regiment], Kitchen went to B Company, Kursis went to the Tenth Armored. I don't know where the other three boys went. So, they put me in a jeep and away I go and took me to the aid station. Well, when I'm in the aid station, here comes in a couple guys with Army raincoats on. They're bleeding, and then, I wondered, "Boy, what am I in for?" Then, I do remember that. So, then, they took me to the Captain, and then, he assigned me to First Platoon, F Company. So, we're all talking and I found out then that, when the artillery was firing, my company was on a night attack. Now, why they went on night attacks, I'll never know. That's the only thing that I missed of all of the division fighting, the only night, that night. So, then, I heard about the minefield and I think the Colonel got wounded and, Curt, he brought the fellows back through the minefields somewhere. He was, like, a PFC [private first class].

SI: Can you explain for the record who Curt was?

GK: Oh, well, Curt was a PFC at the time, and then, well, he went to staff sergeant already, three up and one down, sort of the leader, and then, I had also heard that he might be a battlefield commissioned lieutenant, which it did happen, later on. So, anyway, Curt was my one in charge at that time. So, then, they always said, "Get with some guy that's been there and stick with them." So, there was a big guy named Mollohan, big fellow. He carried a BAR [Browning automatic rifle]. Now, that's heavy, fires twenty shells, and he carries seven hundred rounds of ammunition. Well, that was okay, but, come to find out, he was really chicken later on, but that's another story. So, anyway, we're all together there and getting the eats and getting ready and got to meet the fellows. I wonder where that one letter is. You want to turn that off for a minute?

[TAPE PAUSED]

GK: Turn it back on. Anyway, when I joined the outfit, a lieutenant, First Lieutenant Boehm, joined with me, which, later on, he got killed. [Editor's Note: First Lieutenant Howard W. Boehm, 377th Infantry Regiment, 95th Infantry Division, was killed in action on November 28, 1944.] Also, I read a letter from my mother, that I wrote my mother and dad, about a fellow getting a fruitcake. So, this was November 14th, the letter. November 15th, we start out for whatever, the whole column, the whole company. We're, like, five, six feet apart, going down a dirt road. A lot of guys had Arctics. I didn't have Arctics. They didn't have enough.

SI: What is an Arctic?

GK: An Arctic was, like, an over boot, over your shoes, Arctics, they called them. So, I didn't have one. So, anyway, wasn't too long after that, we had to walk through a little stream. I could have any Arctics I wanted, because the Arctics got full of water. They took them off and left them laying on the ground. So, anyway, we're walking down, a whole big column of men, and, all at once, you hear artillery, a shell coming in. Well, that's the first thing you hear. Everybody hits the ground. It was three shells came in, eighty-eights, they were, German eighty-eights. So, I get up, I look around and probably from here to the bathtub laid a guy I stood guard with the night before. He laid on his belly. I couldn't even go look at him. Curt, the Lieutenant later, he said he got hit right in the back of the head, killed him. So, he was the fellow that got the fruitcake in that letter, so, that's why I wanted it. So, then, later on, we got into a little town of Woippy and we carried a pair of socks. Every night, when you got into a little town--we went from town to town, never dug a foxhole. There was a guy named Brooklyn. He would get a blanket or sheets and close up the little cellar windows, because everything up above it blew out, blown apart, practically. Then, we could write letters, eat K rations and stuff like that. So, that's what we did that night, and then, the next day, we got into the little town of Woippy. I remember a shell hitting up above and the bricks getting dust down my neck and Curt got hit in the arm. So, he went back to the aid station, and then, I don't know, a couple days later, it became November 19th. It was on a Sunday morning and we're going to cross the Moselle River, which is about like the Delaware, and we're going to take the City of Metz. So, we're all, a squad of fifteen, twelve, fifteen, like in this house, next door was another twelve; couldn't have church service. So, Chaplain [Albert G.] Schofer, from Syracuse, I think he was, he went in every squad and we had the 23rd Psalm. You know what that is? "Lord is my shepherd; [I] shall not want. Pass through the valley of the shadow of death." Well, we had that. So, then, they're going to lay down a smokescreen. Well, the wind blew the wrong way. So, we get down to the river and, I don't know, twelve guys in the boat--there's pictures in there--we got in the boat and the engineers rowed us across. Well, there's firing, I guess, and some boats made it, some didn't. So, we get into the town and everything calmed down after a while and my leg was hurting a little bit. So, I took my leggings off and it's bleeding. So, I said to Doc Bailey, he looked at it and said, "It ain't too bad." He put a Band-Aid on it. He says, "You can go back to the aid station, if you want." I says, "Bullshit, I ain't going back there. I don't know where I am." I wasn't going back across that river. So, consequently, I didn't go back, which I should've and I would've got the Purple Heart, but I didn't. So, that's why, and my records show, November 19th, where I was. They've got the daily records and everything. So, they're working on it; we'll see.

SI: In this approach to Metz, in crossing the river, you mentioned you got shelled. Did you come up against any German infantry units?

GK: I don't remember. I mean, we were just firing into buildings and our mortars and stuff's coming in, and then, you hit the building. You get inside the houses and all. I do remember going through--of course, I wasn't the one--but it didn't take too long, like the streets and up at the end of the street was a machine-gun, a German machine-gun, and they're firing tracer bullets. You could see them, but, if you'd step out, they didn't show you the one that was, like, thirty

inches high, another [gun] shooting. That would hit you right in the legs, see, but it didn't take long until somebody found that out. Then, we took a lot of prisoners. They gave up and that was the end of that. So, I don't remember an awful lot about it. I must've just blanked it out.

SI: Do you remember the first time you had to fire your weapon?

GK: It was then, in Metz.

SI: How long were you at Metz?

GK: Not too many days, because they all gave up and that was it. Then, we moved on, headed towards Germany. We had Thanksgiving and we got hot turkey and all that. Geez, everybody got diarrhea. [laughter] Yes, well, we'd been eating K rations. One thing with the K rations, there's cigarettes in them. You always looked to see what they are. There'd be three of them, never got Lucky Strikes or Old Gold, none of them. I don't know who got them. Anyway, then, we got going to, I don't know, one other town and I remember going across big open fields. We're firing then and this Lieutenant Boehm that signed this, he went in the same day I did, I think it was, like, the 26th of November, he's waving and they knew it and he got shot. He got killed. So, anyway, then, we holed up in a house. The next morning, Curt and the whole gang of us, we went out across this field. They had already left and I think there was only, like, two machine-guns and very few guys there, just a little holding position, went through the woods. You could look down into Germany, wherever we were, and I don't remember that part. Then, this one fellow, Kitchen, that I mentioned went to B Company, I found out later, B Company, about the second or third day, got surrounded. They got annihilated. He got killed. So, he lasted, like, three days and you wonder why, yes. [Editor's Note: Private Robert H. Kitchen, 377th Infantry Regiment, 95th Infantry Division, was killed in action on November 15, 1944.] Then, let's see, where did we go from there? another little town. Then, we had a couple prisoners. Captain told this one guy to take the prisoner back. Well, he was only gone a couple minutes and I knew darn well he shot him in cold blood. He had to. So, it got foggy and, like, around here even, we have stone walls in the woods, stone fence rows. So, we're down off of this road, a whole company of us walking, two, three feet apart, and it's foggy. All at once, a mortar came in. Well, out of that two hundred men, one guy got killed and it was the guy that shot them two fellows. So, there had to be a reason for that. So, then, we got up into the town and, of course, everybody's got diarrhea. [laughter] Then, the next day, we're supposed to take this apple orchard. So, we start out and I was the second scout. So, like the training, you'd have, like, five or six guys run up, hit the ground, fire, then, five or six go ahead of you. Well, that's what we did then. So, I'm up there and Butler was ahead of me, I was second scout and Mollohan, the guy with the big BAR, he's supposed to be behind me. Nobody's coming. So, finally, Curt came up. He was a staff sergeant then. He comes up and he says, "Where's Mollohan?" I said, "I don't know." So, anyway, that was the end of that. He sent Mollohan--he got rid of him--sent him back to division headquarters, didn't want to bother with him. So, that day, we start, we kept going. There was another platoon ahead of us, but that other platoon got, I think, a couple lieutenants killed, five or six officers wounded, twenty-two guys wounded, and then, all at once, they started dropping mortars there. Well, everybody started running back in the building and I remember laying there on the ground. I can still hear a bullet whizzing past my helmet. I can still hear it. So, I run back in, but I made it and that was the end of that day.

SI: Do you remember where that was near or what you were trying to take?

GK: Oberhouser or something like that [Oberlimberg?], it was, but, then, we were overlooking down into Germany. Right after that, I forget when, we went into Saarlautern. There's lots of pictures of that. That town was all beat up. It was down in Southern Germany, in the Ruhr area, and, like, this expert says about the bad fighting, well, my parents and Doris read that, they know I'm there, but we made it. Anyway, we got into Saarlautern and come in, like, in the back part of it. We were down in the basement and we tunneled through the wall into the other part, and then, this fellow that used to block out the windows, his name was Brooklyn. Well, I called him Brooklyn. He goes out in the back--oh, the whole top of the building was ruined, in fact, the whole town. That was like the City of Easton, Northampton Street. We're on one side of the road and the other side is the Germans and the artillery is going right over the top of us. Brooklyn, he goes out to look at a rabbit coup and the Germans were in the house next door and they killed him. They shot him. We couldn't even get out to him. Later on, they dropped pamphlets and his dog tag number was on it. The Germans got in there during the night and whatever. Then, I remember Curt and I was up on top, up on the top part, and we could hear this German tank--Curt had a bazooka--and the German tank is sticking his head around the corner. Well, Curt shot, but, then, he backed off, and then, Don Belman--his picture is in there, he was from Wisconsin--he's down the street and he's trying to go across the road. We'd seen him go down. So, I thought, "Man." So, it wasn't too long after that that he went back to the aid station, ripped his clothes off. You know there's a cartridge belt with eight clips? The bullet hit the cartridge belt. He brought that clip home, where it was damaged. That's what saved him. So, then, finally, we did get across and they had shot one of our medics dead. I also remember that, one night--of course, we always had somebody standing guard--it was in the morning, I was laying on a potato bin and I think I had a German pistol. This guy's hollering, "*Komme raus, mit hindy ho.*" They're hollering for us to give up. So, then, he was by the front door. I remember these two guys stepped over to the hallway and they emptied two clips through it and he's out there. They let the medics pick him up, but I know I took the pistol and put it in the bin, because I'd always heard, if you got captured with a German gun, they'd shoot you right on the spot. So, anyway, we got across the street and I remember there was a young German fellow with his grey uniform, probably twenty years old, maybe not even that. He was there all night with us. Somebody had shot him when he came down the steps.

SI: He was dead.

GK: Yes, yes. So, that was that part of Saarlautern.

SI: Can you give us an idea of what a typical day during this period would be like? You talked about all of the movements and some of the action in there, but would you get to sleep?

GK: Yes, well, usually every night. I was lucky because I was with Patton and he didn't want--you don't stop at all, you just keep moving--but, like in the City of Saarlautern, we were bogged down. Well, we had to take [it], but it wasn't only us, it was all the whole division there, in different sections of it. Some of it's fighting and, some days, just really not.

SI: Would you be sent out on patrol?

GK: We didn't do too much patrolling, no.

SI: It sounds like you were pretty much always engaged.

GK: Yes, always on the go or just bogged down.

SI: Do you remember working with any armored units during this period?

GK: We'll get to that.

SI: Okay. [laughter]

GK: Yes, I'll never forget them.

SI: Was that after Saarlautern?

GK: That was after, yes, and then, like in the wintertime, while we were in Saarlautern, after we got it cleaned out, there was another city over there called Fraulautern. There, we sort of were in a holding position and it was the Saar River, I think, Germans on one side, we're on the other, our whole company and a few here. I forgot to tell you before, the lieutenants had--Curt became a second lieutenant, battlefield--and whoever was the messenger got wounded or whatever. For some reason, Curt asked me to be his messenger. So, I was with Curt no matter where we were. He was like a brother to me. In fact, I named my son's middle name after him. Anyway, I got to be with him all the time. Wherever he was, I was.

SI: When you were a messenger, did you still carry a rifle or did you carry a pistol?

GK: No, I had a rifle. I had a rifle all the time, but I would have to go between me and maybe the Captain, because we didn't have wires set up, but, like, [when] we were in this holding position, we had wires all around, too. So, we were there, like, I'd say probably a week and we lived right in the houses. The people were gone. Maybe that's where I got that, I don't know, but I probably got it later. Anyway, we got ten-in-one rations. That's when you could cook things and all and, I remember, we had heat. There was a stove and the coal was brick, like our brick, and we'd clean that out. So, every day, the Germans would drop, like, six mortars from across the river. In fact, you could hear them drop them in [the tubes], like a shotgun shell. So, then, they'd bust the wire. So, I'd have to go out and splice the wire going to the Captain or whatever, and then, we'd get dishes out of the people's [homes] and we'd eat on the dishes, throw them out the window. We didn't wash them. [laughter] So, we were there for quite a while and I think we might've been there New Year's, too, at that time. There was snow on the ground. Then, I remember, one time, Belman, the one that got hit, was inside. He and I went down to another platoon for some reason and it was dark, moonlight like, and carry your rifle, swinging, it was rattling a little. Belman's going, "Shh." Then, we're walking along and we'd go down to the other platoon, and then, we'd come back. Now, I've thought, later, that we could've easily got captured. They could've come across at night and we didn't think of it at that time. You get

toughened, I guess, I don't know. So, then, another time, Curt, this other lieutenant called up Curt and he said that they had a package down there, send somebody down. So, Curt says, "Well, you bring it up." He said, "No." So, I forget what Curt said to him and Captain [Edward G.] Horvath must've been listening in. He says--of course, this is a first lieutenant against Curt, a second lieutenant--he says, "Why don't you send somebody down to get the package?" [laughter] So, Curt and I went down with our slings rattling. He didn't think much about it.

SI: At this time, the Battle of the Bulge was happening to the north.

GK: Yes, and we went up to that, at the end of that. We went up; I went up. We weren't in any battles up there, but we got there as it was finishing and we were in reserve. I remember, I was with Bailey. He was with me most of the time, when we bunked together, whatever, but we were, like, on straw with Army blankets and the whole top was gone. It was cold, snow all over the ground. As the snow melted, there'd be dead Germans and it was bad there, but I missed really fighting in it, which I'm glad. We came up from Saarlautern because we were way under strength. Each platoon, like our platoon, out of forty-two, we might've had twenty men left.

SI: That was after about a month of combat.

GK: Yes, yes, but, at night, it seemed that, every night, we would get rations, get our ammunition, our mail and replacements. Then, the next day, by night, some of those replacements were gone.

SI: It sounded like, when you joined the unit, there was a lot of camaraderie. People wanted to get to know the folks who were there.

GK: Oh, yes.

SI: Did that stop after a while?

GK: No, no, all during the whole war, real good friends, yes, real good friends.

SI: What about when new people would come in? Did you keep your distance?

GK: No, no. Some of them were [there] for quite a while, but, then, some, you never even got to know. Like I say, they were gone. Yes, they were gone. Then, after that, after the Bulge, we moved up. We went through Luxembourg. I never did see Luxembourg; we went in the two-and-a-half-ton trucks. I think we got moved to the Ninth Army, instead of the Third, and we were in a town called Millen, Belgium. Now, Millen is my middle name. So, I wrote to Doris, I said, "You know my cousin Freddie? Can't remember what his last name was." [laughter] So, I told her where I was. So, we were there quite a little while. We lived with the French people and we got hot food and we weren't doing nothing, just bumming, and two aunts we lived with. We kept the room clean and everything. Then, one Tuesday morning--now, this is getting into April--one Tuesday morning, orders came down, "Five o'clock, you're going to leave. You're going to get with the Second Armored and you'll be in Berlin for hot chow Friday night." So, all of us get on two-and-a-half-ton trucks, away we go. We get with the Second Armored Division,

eight guys on a tank. So, we start. Well, you've seen pictures, eight guys on a tank. We started, like, from Phillipsburg, [New Jersey], and go down up there, get to the little town of New Village, [New Jersey, six miles away], and a little bit of a skirmish, jump on the tanks, away we go. Somebody else'll clean it up. So, man, we went, like, fifty miles that first day out. "Man, we will be in Berlin for hot chow." [laughter] So, anyway, we kept going, and then, we hit a little town called Paderborn and we hit the SS troopers. They're these young boys, which I was a Boy Scout--I believe in one thing, these kids were raised under Hitler, from a baby, they believed nothing else, right?--but they wouldn't give up. The other guys, they'd give up. They were older men and whatever. So, we hit this little town of Paderborn and we got bogged down at night. In fact, Curt and I were with a weapons outfit. So, then, we finally got back with our group, and then, the next morning, we're supposed to go through across these open fields and there's a little town. Our orders were, "Burn every house and take no prisoners." So, we start and we're along with the Second Armored Division and they're firing into the woods, we're firing into houses. All at once, an antitank gun from the Germans hit one of our tanks. Well, those guys turned tail, went back over the knoll, and there we are, no protection. So, we all ran in the houses, and then, we get in the house and you can see Germans running all around. So, Curt, he's got to go back to the Captain and see what we should do. So, I could still see Curt running back and there's bullets picking right behind him, but he didn't get hit. So, I ran in the house and I ran down the cellar steps--there we go, right. [laughter] I ran down the cellar steps. Nobody's there but two elderly people and she had baked a pie. Well, I took the pie. [laughter] I wondered, the rest of my life, why I did that, but I guess I wanted it. So, anyway, I remember Curt saying to our Doc Bailey, our medic, he says, "You'd better get in the back of us a little bit," says, "Somebody might get hit." We came to, like, a little cemetery wall and I remember going over that and [thinking], "I'm probably going to get hit," but I didn't. Anyway, then, we got in these houses. Like I say, you could see the Germans all over the place. So, we're just sitting tight and waiting and waiting and, that afternoon, we hear this ruckus and here's the 30th Division. They went right down through us and put us in reserve. So, it's just like nothing had happened, couldn't believe it. So, they went on. The 30th Division went to the Elbe River, and then, later on, it's said that they got pushed back. They didn't get pushed back. Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin drew them back and let the Russians take it, because the Russians had all that trouble with Stalingrad, remember? Those Germans killed all those people. So, that's what happened and we didn't get pushed back. So, then, they brought us back into what was called the Ruhr Pocket and, actually, that was the end of my fighting. I was done [in] April and, April 12th, that's when I heard about Roosevelt passing away. Then, there was all these displaced persons. They were Polish and you name it, that the Germans had taken as slave labor. Well, they're just roaming the fields, trying to get what they could get to eat. Of course, we just rounded them up and they put them in a camp and provide them food and stuff.

SI: You mentioned this SS unit. What was it, a training school that you came across? You said it was very young kids.

GK: No, no, they were protecting this town. They were SS troopers. They were protecting the town and they fight to the death. They didn't give up.

SI: They were not teenagers. They were older.

GK: No, they were younger kids.

SI: Younger kids.

GK: Yes, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, and they all wore black uniforms, black leggings, black pants. Yes, they wouldn't give up. Some of them got killed. I remember, one of them was there with a *Panzerfaust*. Now, a *Panzerfaust* is like our bazooka. It's about three, four feet long and it's got a big thing like this on the end, only fires once, but I remember, as we were going through, somebody got him. I don't remember who got him. He didn't make it.

SI: At any point, did you ever face the German Air Force? Were they ever a threat?

GK: Once or twice, maybe, we were on convoy with trucks and they came over, a couple planes. Well, we'd jump under them [the trucks], but that's the only time. Then, in the wintertime, like, when we were going places, these big [Allied] bombers, way up, and vapor trails, vapor trails, really beautiful, then, you could see little tinfoil coming down. That was to knock their radar out, I think. That's where I got this thing. I remember [them] dropping that on us.

SI: That was the German propaganda.

GK: That was a German plane, yes.

SI: What did you think when you got this propaganda?

GK: I didn't really think much about it. I wasn't about to give up. I wasn't going to no PW [prisoner of war] camp. I'll stick it out, been this far. Everybody else was in the same boat. They just didn't think anything about it.

SI: It sounds like you got your rations and supplies regularly.

GK: Every time. We never were without, nope, never were without. I lived on K rations a lot. A couple of these letters, I wrote my mom, probably wrote to Doris, too, that I hadn't had a bath in a month. When I came back home, I had fifteen cavities.

SB: Wow.

HS: Wow.

GK: Had bad teeth anyway. [laughter]

HS: Were you in correspondence with your family throughout this whole time?

GK: Just letters.

HS: Just letters.

GK: Yes. That's all it was and the letters were, like, two, three weeks apart, even getting mine from them. When I'd get them, they'd be a lot at one time, same way with them.

HS: You were a rifleman. What rifle did you use?

GK: M-1.

HS: M-1.

GK: Yes. It had a clip with eight shells.

HS: Were you trained with that weapon?

GK: Yes, from the day they issued it. Of course, it was a different one. Of course, in the States, you always kept them clean.

HS: Right.

GK: Never took it apart overseas. [laughter]

SI: Okay.

GK: No, and then, same way with your canteen and the cup. That all had to be spotless in the States. Well, mine was black as the ace of spades, [laughter] because this little K ration box was wax covered. You'd light that up, and then, of course, this wax would get on the cup.

SI: Did you find the M-1 to be reliable?

GK: Oh, yes, heavy, but it was good. On the History Channel, they had all different rifles and all and I think the M-1 was, like, almost the [highest ranked]. There might be two better than that one that they've found, yes. It was thirty-calibers, the bullets. I had a bandolier around my waist and I had three bandoliers with the bullets, didn't need them all, and two hand grenades in my pocket, never even thought about them. [laughter]

SI: Did you ever use them?

GK: No, I didn't have to use it, no, but I had them. Most everybody that I came in contact [with], they gave up. They didn't [fight]. Like, then, whoever was in front of us was the enemy. We didn't have to worry about it. Today's [wars], it's terrible. These fellows, you could [have] an enemy right next to you and not know it. These guys, it's a shame, really. Yes, whoever was in front of me was the enemy, yes.

SI: Did you ever run into trouble with mines or booby traps?

GK: I didn't, but they did that first night.

SI: First night.

GK: Yes, they did. Oh, another thing, when we were with the Second Armored, the one night, [laughter] we went down this road and they made us walk in front of the tanks. You didn't dare smoke, because you'd see that flame from a cigarette, but I burned my hand many a time. [laughter] Then, when the tanks would take off, ten, fifteen feet of flames would shoot out of the back--yet, we didn't smoke--but they made us walk in case there were mines.

SI: Wow.

GK: Yes, our lives were expendable, I guess.

HS: You said you picked up smoking. Did you pick up any other habits?

GK: I smoked before I went.

HS: Okay.

GK: Yes, yes. Then, I got a chance to go to Paris for seventy-two hours.

HS: Wow.

GK: We must've rode in a truck [for], oh, 150 miles, maybe, and it was in January. It was after the Bulge and cold, real cold. I got to see the Folies Bergère and it was all service guys [in attendance]. I remember this stage and they had this guy talking and he's talking and talking in French. So, one of the soldiers, ours, [said], "*No comprends, no comprends.*" [laughter] So, they opened up the stage. Here's a girl in a cage, don't have much on, right. The guy hollers, "*Comprends, comprends.*" [laughter] You ever hear that one?

DB: No. I thought I heard all of them. [laughter]

GK: So, anyway, it was really cold. I got to see the Arc de Triomphe. That one, I saw it, I was there, the big Champs-Élysées, Notre Dame Cathedral. There's a big rose window, which they took out during the war and placed it someplace, so [that] it didn't get broke, but Paris never got really beat up much anyway, a few shelled places around. I've got a picture in there that I sent home, yes. Then, seventy-two hours [later], that's when we came back and I went through Luxembourg at night, that night.

SI: That was one of the worst winters in European history. What was that like, dealing with the cold?

GK: I thought it was like here. It was like here, cold and snow on the ground, but, like I say, we didn't spend any time in foxholes. Well, we had winter underwear. At that time, we wore the regular OD [olive drab] brown and it was wool, kept you warm. Years ago, I think Patton wanted the guys to wear a tie. They did away with that. I never really got to see Patton, but he

was in Saarlautern. There's a picture in that one book of him, one book I got, but he wasn't right up front.

SI: What did the men think of Patton when you were serving under him?

GK: Well, I don't know that we really thought [much then]. When it all ended, to me, I was glad I was under him, because he didn't believe in stopping, "Keep going," and I think you're better off. If you dig a foxhole, you're in there, where, if you're moving, some other guy's in a foxhole. He ain't going to put his head up when you're firing over the top. We did a lot of that, firing--you didn't even know what you're shooting at. You're just shooting and you've got two hundred men shooting zeros. The worst thing for people getting wounded was artillery shells, shrapnel, wasn't too many [that would] get shot with guns, but I was very lucky.

SI: You mentioned the one soldier who was a coward, basically.

GK: Yes.

SI: Was there anybody who could not deal with the stress of combat?

GK: No, none that I knew close.

SI: Okay.

GK: None that I knew close, nope. I don't know whether he had to go to the bathroom or whether he was scared or what.

SI: Okay.

GK: Everybody was scared, don't get me wrong. I was probably scared a good many times, but you get used to it.

SI: Was there anything you did to deal with it or did it just happen naturally?

GK: I guess, yes. I mean, I didn't get like where I was stressed that I couldn't stand it, just took every day the way it came. The next day, you're glad you're still there. [laughter]

SI: Did you ever go to religious services or talk with a chaplain when you were in the field?

GK: When they had church services. The one that's stuck in my mind was before we went across the Moselle, with the 23rd Psalm. Now, every time when I hear that, I'm there, every time, and that's how many years ago, right, never forget it.

SI: Were there any other close calls that come to mind?

GK: No, not really.

SI: If you had gone one way and not the other.

GK: No, not really. The main close one was when I could still hear that bullet going by and they're dropping mortar shells in, but, no.

SI: Did the Germans ever use "Screaming Mimis" [*Nebelwerfers*] against you?

GK: I don't remember. I've heard of them, but I don't remember. Every night, there would be a little plane. They called him "Bed-Check Charlie." [laughter] It was a little Piper Cub, probably. I don't know.

SI: It would just drop one bomb, to keep you on alert.

GK: Yes.

SI: When you would pass through towns, had the civilians already left?

GK: Yes. They were all gone. I never got into a town--never in Germany was I in a town--the people had all left, every one of them. Of course, at the end of the war, where we were, there were people. You weren't supposed to fraternize, but I remember, Curt and I, they were farm people and we had bacon and eggs, yes. You weren't supposed to, but they were probably people that they were forced into it and that was the way it was.

SI: Did you do any scrounging along the way to get different foods and supplement your diet?

GK: Not really.

SI: Okay.

GK: Not really. A couple times in France, I got into the wine a little bit, but I didn't drink much of it, a little bit. Cognac, I think they called it, yes.

SB: Were you aware at all of the concentration camps or death camps?

GK: I didn't know about it then, but my division did find one. They liberated one of them. I'm kind of glad that I didn't. I really am glad that we didn't, but the 95th did. I don't know whether it was the 378th, but we didn't come across them.

SB: At the time, you did not know how bad it was.

GK: No, no.

SB: It was not until after the war.

GK: We didn't know until afterwards. I mean, we never knew about it even, no.

SB: Were there a lot of Jewish people that you fought alongside?

GK: No. I don't remember that. We had one Indian boy.

SB: Wow.

GK: Yes, he was from Oklahoma. See, my division trained in the States as a division and they ended up out here--what's the one right out here, by Harrisburg?

SI: Indiantown Gap.

GK: Indiantown Gap. They went there as a division, trained, and then, they left there as a division on a boat. They were over there. They went in June, maybe. They weren't on D-Day. Like I say, the only night that I missed of any of the fighting with the 95th was that night I was in that schoolhouse, didn't know it at that time. Then, some of these fellows [were] from the area, Jimmy Kline lived in Reading, Earl Scheidt, he was with me, close, he lived in Kutztown. Of course, the biggest part of the division was from out in the Midwest, most of them, like Curt, he was from Detroit. Belman, he was from Wisconsin. Urban Rothermel, he was thirty-something and he was a milk driver from Canton, Ohio. He came to see me--he had a sister who lived in Camden--after the war, came in '46, '47, I don't know. They're all gone; they're all gone. Jimmy just died, what? two years ago

SI: It sounds like you had a good relationship with Curt, who became your officer.

GK: Yes.

SI: What about other officers that you served with?

GK: No, he was the main one. Yes, he was the main one, because he was the officer of our platoon. Of course, there were four squads in a platoon and ours was, like, a CP [command post]. It would be Curt and me, the medic and the platoon leader, five or six of us, real close. We all made it. I mean, Curt got hit. Belman didn't; he didn't get a Purple Heart. Earl got one. Rothy did, I think. In fact, Rothy got a Silver Star [Distinguished Service Cross] for something he did. I was a big hero. [laughter]

SI: You earned the Bronze Star.

GK: I got that. It tells why. All it says is, "For action against the enemy in Saarlautern." That's all it says. The writing is up there.

SI: Did you receive it during the war or after?

GK: Afterwards, yes.

SI: How long were you on occupation?

GK: Oh, not very long. The war ended, what? May 2nd and we were in a nice town. They had a big May Day parade. I can remember Belgian horses in the parade. Then, the orders came for us to go to Japan. There were four other divisions. So, the orders came to go to Japan. We were in a nice town in France, near Le Havre, and we lived in the houses and kept them clean and all, just waiting, doing nothing. Then, we got on the boat to come back [in] June, yes, June. So, I wasn't there very long, because they were bringing us back to go to Japan.

SI: Was the threat of the Soviets ever discussed?

GK: No, not with me. No, we never talked about it, found this stuff all out later. Oh, this town we're waiting [in] to get on the boat, a fellow, his best buddy got shot. Oh, boy, he hated the Germans. So, this town that we're in, this gentleman, he had to be seventy years old or older, he happened to be still staying there. They must've moved the people out. This guy grabs him right by his tie and, boy, he was really after him. This other guy, he had a pocketknife. He gets a hold of the tie and he pulls it. Well, this poor German gentleman, I'll bet it scared him half to death, but this guy was hanging right on for dear life, and then, the guy runs. I remember that part, but he was, "Death to Germans," because his buddy got killed, but that's the way it was. So, then, we finally got on the boat. It was an eight-hundred-foot Coast Guard [US Navy] boat named the *USS General [W. H.] Gordon*. [laughter] So, anyway, I've got a picture in there--they took a picture of everybody--the other fellow with me is from Newton and I have a butcher's pin on. So, I guess they put it in the paper, because I was close. So, probably other papers had the other people [in them]. So, I worked in a butcher's shop [aboard ship], slicing bacon, and then, I got sick there, a little bit, from the smell of that. So, the Navy fellow, who was from New Jersey, Newark, I think, same size as me, he said, "Hey, do you want to go to the movies tonight?" I said, "Yes." "Come down," he says, "You can put a uniform on." So, I had a Navy uniform on one night, [laughter] because that's the only ones who could go. So, I had a Navy uniform on and went to the movies. Then, I had visions of, like, a big parade and all. We ended up down in Newport News, Virginia, a little colored band playing music for us, but I was happy to be there. So, then, while we're on the boat, they announced that they're going to steer two hundred miles off course, because there's a big hurricane. Well, I don't know what the hurricane would've been, but we went off course. I can remember yet, here were these big waves. We're down inside of it, water all around you. Then, you come up on top and the boat sits there and just shakes. The propellers are out. Well, sailors got sick and I never got sick. I don't know why. So, they threw I don't know how many pounds of food overboard that night. Then, we ended up down there. We came up by train to Fort Dix. I forget, that took quite a little while, too, because they would pull us off [on to] a siding, letting other trains [pass]. We're pulled off on this one siding and there was a big trainload of watermelons, flat, laying there. The door was open a little bit. Everybody's out of the Pullman car, grabbing watermelons. The Lieutenant onboard said, "Hey, look, you fellows, we're not in Germany now. We're back in the States," [laughter] but he let us keep them. We got into Fort Dix. Of course, it's forever getting your pass and I got a thirty-day furlough. I came home for thirty days, and then, I had to report to--I don't remember how we got there--went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for eight weeks' training. Doris came down with me and we rented a little room in a lady's house. (Bud Driver?) and his wife, they paid two dollars extra and had the kitchen. Doris and I had one room and we'd give them a buck to share the kitchen. He knew the guys in the kitchen and he brought [home] butter and steaks. Curt, my officer, he wrote me out a pass; I wasn't even in camp. How [are] you going to train [when] you

already [have] been there? [laughter] So, I was in town with Doris all the time, most of the time. I had to go back a little bit.

SI: Going back to when you came back to New Jersey, what was it like seeing your wife for the first time and seeing your family again?

GK: I just still couldn't believe it, couldn't believe it, open arms, everybody, yes. Then, while I was here, my dad still farmed up in Hope and Doris and I went up and spent the night up there with him. The next morning, my mom said that they had a flood down in Phillipsburg and somebody had drowned. So, we got up and had breakfast and we were going to pick up some clothes and just go down to Atlantic City for a couple days. Nothing like Atlantic City is now. Skee ball was the big thing down there at that time. So, anyway, we come down, I got to Harker's Hollow, a little damage. I go down to Mories Acres, I said, "Boy, we got trouble." So, I got down as far as the old school. Trees were down, couldn't drive down through town and the water in this house was as high as those windows. It happened at night. What happened, there's a railroad culvert up here and it got blocked up with trees and stuff and it broke the water out, made, like, a big flood. At that time, where you come in the side door, that was gone. We had a hot air register between the two rooms. The water came up through that. My brother-in-law lived next door, but he was in the Navy. His cousin, he didn't go to war, he was shoveling mud out of the front door. The refrigerator was on its side, but they knew it was his [home], so, they picked up a lot of stuff. It was bad. So, I went back up and got my mom and helped clean up down in the cellar and stuff. A couple days later, we went. So, then, you got out on the point system. So, after my thirty days, I reported back to Fort Dix, New Jersey. While I was there, I had a class-A pass and I worked in the separation center. I worked on fellows being discharged. So, I had my car down there. Every other day, I'd come back home, go back down. At that time, [Interstate] 295 wasn't there. I had to go through the center of Trenton, but it was good. I knew the route, almost was closing my eyes. This was in, oh, July, July or August. So, I was down there for six months. While I was there, I worked on this one record and it says, "Joe Yule, Jr." Well, I knew that was Mickey Rooney. You remember Mickey Rooney? Well, he's ninety-one years old now. Anyway, he was a movie actor, five thousand dollars a year he got--told all about it. Of course, he entertained while he was there. So, before my wife passed away, Mickey Rooney was going to be up in Mount Airy, but we didn't go because of her. Well, she passed away. In the meantime, we were able to get tickets. I think it was only twenty dollars. So, you [to granddaughter] didn't go, did you? Dawn, Dave and Donna, I think, we went up. Well, him and his wife--he'd been married, what, six, seven times?--she's a lot younger, but they put a good show on. He did some things and he played the piano. Dave went to see the head guy there, because I wanted to see Mickey, see if he remembered about being at Fort Dix. Well, he let us go down, was very few got there, but he gets on one of these little things you ride and he's coming out of there. She's behind him and he's carrying on, madder than heck. Miserable guy, he was. He was nasty with her. They've got a picture of me by him, but that was the end of that. [laughter] So, I never did get a picture.

DB: You never got to talk to him.

GK: Yes, never got to talk to him, but, then, I think just the other day, he was either ninety-one or ninety, ninety-one, I think. Then, I had another friend of mine for years, (Bert?), the first

fellow I met when I came to Stewartsville, he was in the service four years. He got drafted, but he spent time in the Philippines and down in the islands, never was in combat or anything. His mother knew he was coming home and I said to her, "Now, when (Bert?) gets into Fort Dix, you tell him to look me up at the 20th Separation Center," said, "Okay." So, one Sunday afternoon, the Captain says, "Hey, there's a fellow looking for you." Well, here comes (Bert?). It was the day before New Year's, big, long Army coat on, he's yellow from Atabrine tablets, because of malaria. The coat didn't fit him. Oh, man, we met each other with open arms, hadn't seen him in four years. So, I said, "Well, I'm not going home tonight." It was New Year's Eve. No, that was the next night. I said, "I'll get a class-A pass from a friend of mine." So, I brought him home and he got to see his mom for the first time in four years and his sister. Anyway, his brother, one of the first ones drafted, he was at Pearl Harbor when they attacked that, but he made it. So, anyway, I said to (Bert?), "You've got to be ready at five o'clock in the morning, because you're going to start taking tests and all." We got down there and I got him out two days ahead of time, because I could put his records in. So, then, we spent New Year's together out in Wrightstown. We never did see New Year's come in; we're back in camp. It's only right outside of it. Then, the next day, he got out, New Year's Day. I brought him home, but, then, I didn't get out until April 20th, April 20, 1946.

SI: Where were you when the war ended in Japan?

GK: Camp Shelby, yes.

SI: What was the reaction?

GK: Oh, couldn't believe it. I didn't know I was going to land in Tokyo Bay, but I thought, "Man, you get so many days, eventually, one of them's going to get you." So, like I say, Truman dropped the bombs and they split the division up, did away with it. Well, they still have it, but everybody got separated. Some guys had enough points to get out. I didn't, but, getting back to (Mully?), I said, "Make sure I'm on for Fort Dix." That's how I got there, through him. Oh, getting back to Easter Sunday, that was April 1, 1945. Like I say, we'd been going and going, I thought, "Man, we'll be in Berlin." Well, we hit these SS troopers and that was my Easter Sunday, April 1945, my birthday, yes.

DB: Can we pause?

SI: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SB: I have a question about Japan and the war over there. Did you have different views of the German soldiers and Japan soldiers? Did you hear different things about them?

GK: Well, like I said, I was happy that I didn't go to the Pacific, because you have the heat and these Japanese, they were crazy. I probably would've used my training with the bayonet there. I'm just glad I never went there, because I know how they were. Then, I did hear, through *Stars and Stripes* later, that the 95th was going to land in Tokyo Bay, just like an invasion. Even the

women and children were going to be with sticks and stuff, waiting for you, so, it would have been--it was the best thing that happened. Truman, they killed a lot of lives, but it saved a lot of lives. That's the way I looked at it.

SI: You mentioned the one man you served with who wanted to kill Germans because his friend had been killed.

GK: Oh, that one young fellow. He was in my platoon. I don't even remember what his name was.

SI: Were there other men who had that attitude?

GK: No, not really.

SI: Did they hate the Germans?

GK: Not really. I don't know, you just went on. He just sort of snapped, I think.

SI: Okay.

GK: Like, you asked me before about [that] and he probably was one I would say snapped, because of that, yes. Here, this gentleman didn't have nothing to do with it, right. He had a nice suit on, a nice tie, and he just grabbed him, yes. [laughter]

SI: You said earlier that, after your time in the service, you did not want to go back to the same place you had been working.

GK: Right.

SI: While you were in the service, did you start thinking about what you wanted to do after the war?

GK: No, not really, but this is another story. [laughter] From being down at Fort Dix and my dad farmed up at Hope, which is nineteen miles, I just thought, "I don't want to go back there." So, a man owned the farm. He owned copper mines and it was a write-off, I think, the farm was, for the gentleman. My dad worked on a share basis. He got a quarter of the milk check. If he raised four calves, he had one calf. My dad did fine, he did good, but, I mean, farming wasn't for me. So, they were putting an addition on the barn or doing something and Garfield Jones was a big contractor in Newton. He said to my dad, "Maybe Gordon'd like to learn the carpenter trade after he gets out of service." So, I thought about it. I used to like to build birdhouses when I was a kid, do things like that. So, anyway, I get out of service and, at that time, you could get twenty dollars a week for a year. Well, I drew two of them and I said, "Man, I've got to do something." So, I contacted Mr. Jones and he hired me. I think he got me a hammer, a saw and a rule. [laughter] That's what I had to start with. They were coming from Newton down to Hope, which was about the same distance, and I went from here up there. So, I worked there awhile. Then, the man had a daughter. She was a single, only one, child and she married a fellow who became

a doctor. They bought the next farm and they were going to build a house there. "Boy, this is great." So, I'd go from Stewartsville up there. I even helped dig the ditches, by hand, we did it. So, I was in on that right from start to finish. So, then, Jones' brother-in-law was the boss of me, another guy. So, it was fine. I enjoyed it. So, then, we got done with that, and then, I had to drive to Newton. I couldn't find a house to live in. I was here in (Sears?) and I was there, and so, I said to Doris, "I can't do this." In fact, Curt came to see me then. He was still single. '48, I think it was. So, he went with me when I went up and told Mr. Jones, "I can't do it anymore." So, Doris had said to me, right down the street was Frank Stone, which was the local undertaker. He did carpenter work and he had another elderly gentleman with him, did odd jobs and whatever, do everything, did that along with his undertaking. So, I went down to see Frank. "Yes," he says, "yes, I'll hire you." So, I went to work with him and (Burt Weller?) was the other gentleman. He gave up, so, it was just Frank and me. They were building a house down the road. I worked on that. Then, he did, like I say, undertaking work. So, he called me up one night about six o'clock. It was just before Thanksgiving. He said, "Hey," he says, "come on down." He says, "We've got to go pick up somebody." [laughter] I said, "Whoa, I've got to change." He said, "Don't worry about that. Where we're going, you don't have to." So, we went up in the Hollow. This fellow was a World War I fellow.

SB: Oh, no.

GK: Yes. So, I didn't really have to dress up for that. So, we brought him down and Frank says, "Well, you can go home now," because it was just before Thanksgiving. I don't think he wanted me to help embalm him or anything. So, I did. So, then, as time went on, I helped him. In fact, one time, he was sick in bed and we had another undertaker do the embalming, but we, his grandson and I, carried out the funeral and everything. I could've been one and I probably would've done all right, but you'd have to go to college. I didn't have money to go. I had [to] keep going with the kids and all. I helped him and everything, and then, I kept on with the carpenter work. Finally, he gave it up and I went on my own. I had one fellow, [he] and I worked together. My son was a schoolteacher. He helped me in the summertime. So, from 1948 until 1988, I did carpenter work. I've got at least fifty homes that I built, not too many here, but all around. It was all word of mouth. I never had any problems, always thought in the wintertime, "Damn," but I always had work. One fellow, he just passed away this year, he worked with me thirteen years. I built barns, built complete barns. One thing, I ride around and I can say, "Geez, I did that." You go out this back road to Broadway, there's five houses, a big veal barn that they tore down, did away with it, and a lot of things. So, at least I can see what I did during my life. I didn't work in Ingersoll [Rand], just [retire]. So, I've had a good life, really, a real good life. In the meantime, 1951, I got a kidney stone. Whoa, that was bad. They tried to get it and couldn't get it, but I finally passed it. I couldn't do lifting and lugging. So, the guy that had the store out here, he said, "They're looking for a milk truck driver over in Belvidere, dairy." I went out and they hired me. So, I got up at four o'clock in the morning, went with the milk route. Part of it was up to Harmony and around and the next day was over to Easton. Every seven weeks, I had two days off and I enjoyed it. Then, somebody wanted this done, somebody wanted that done and, finally, it got to where I'm working night and day, almost. So, then, the flood came. The flood was in the Delaware [River], the flood in 1955 [August 19 and 20, 1955, as a result of Hurricane Diane], the flood in the Delaware. I had about sixty quarts of delivery up

at Harmony Station where they lost everything. That's why I quit. I gave it up. I had to, I couldn't keep doing it, but I did that for three years, milk truck driver.

SI: Were you doing that while you were doing carpentry?

GK: Well, I started picking up the carpenter work, because I had been a carpenter

SI: Yes.

GK: With Frank Stone, but, then, with the kidney stone, it fouled me up. I couldn't lift. So, I ended up with that. In the meantime, I've had two knee replacements. They're artificial. Three years ago, I had my hip replaced. I've got one more to go. [laughter] My hip, I got the bad one, which nobody knew, so, I have to go every six months. I've got to go next month. They check for cobalt and chromium, where this ball is, and, if I get too much in my blood, then, I've got to have it done again, which my hip don't bother me. Otherwise, I'm okay.

SI: You became a tax collector.

GK: Oh, that's another thing, yes. [laughter] 1969, Marion Fry was the collector. Marion Fry, in fact, played the piano when Doris and I got married over in the living room. She said, "I had heard you wanted to be a tax collector," because Frank Stone was the assessor and he, for some reason, went against Marion. I said, "Well, why would I do that?" So, anyway, she said, "Gordon, I'm going to give it up. So, go see Bob Strunk, get a petition, get it signed with a few people." So, I did. I had to run for four years. A lady ran against me, but I beat her real good. [laughter] So, I got a certificate from Belvidere, from Mr. (Sneider?), who, right now, my clerk, [he] was her grandfather, Mr. (Sneider?). So, then, four years later, I had to run again and nobody ran against me. In 1969, it was all by hand, didn't have a municipal building. People came here. That year, I took in 369,000 dollars and, forty-one years later, fifteen million dollars. That's how this town grew, but you knew everybody. In fact, I knew too much about people. [laughter] People would come here and pay. Sometimes, while I was working, my mother-in-law was here yet, she'd take it. Everybody trusted everybody, never locked the door. You didn't have to, but, today, you do. So, I did that up until 2010 and I could've retired years ago, but I finally decided I would. You can retire and draw your pension from the state, and then, the township can rehire you at fifteen thousand dollars a year. This is what I plan to do. The committee voted, all five unanimous, which they never do--they're always fighting about something [laughter]--to hire me, but they didn't realize that they were hiring me for four years. I knew it, but they didn't know that. So, anyway, I went about my pension and I drew that. I still did [the taxes] by hand, the one year. Then, they wanted to meet with me. So, this one committee person, I met with him. He said, "Now, we're going on computer," which I knew they were going to go, eventually. "We don't want you to do anything. We're doing away with the books. We need you for consulting," because there's certain things. I'm having a tax sale in December, I had to do that, and then, with rebate stuff and people freezing their taxes, I had to do stuff like that. So, it wasn't too bad. Then, they had another girl going to school for it, but they got rid of her. It's been a big story. So, anyway, I was still going to classes, because you had to get, in two years, fifteen credits. The assessor and I always went down to Rockaway and you'd pick up these credits. The one year, I only needed--the year that they decided they were doing

this, they had me back and they said, "Well, we'll pay you five thousand dollars, but you won't be doing nothing." I came home, I thought, "That's a big cut," because, actually, my salary doing it for this town was twenty-six thousand or so. I can tell you this, because it doesn't make any difference. So, I thought, "Geez, that's not much." The CFO [chief financial officer], she was getting a hundred bucks an hour for twelve hours a week, not to exceed twelve hours, and she wasn't doing nothing much. So, I said, "Well, I want to meet with them." So, I met with them. I said, "Grace, did you take a cut?" She said, "No." I said, "Well, I got to thinking about it and I was going to do some things, so, I think I ought to have a little more money." Well, my clerk says, "Tell them you want ten." I said, "Well, I'd like to have eight." So, the eight, plus what I'm getting with my pension, I'm getting a little bit more than what I was getting anyway. [laughter] That's what happened and I'm still doing it. I had to get four credits in, I forget what it was, but they were having it down in New Brunswick someplace. So, (Eloise?) and I went. I got those credits. My clerk, Kim, says, "Turn your voucher in," because it's fifty dollars for your certificate. "We're having a special meeting tonight. Maybe I can get it in." So, I did that and it goes out the next morning. I said to the treasurer, I said, "Did you get my check?" "No." I said, "How come?" She said, "Well, (Marie?) pulled your voucher." I said, "Well, how come?" "Because you didn't get it in in time." See, there was a certain deadline. So, I could see the handwriting on the wall. They thought, "The end of this year, I won't have my certificate, and then, this other gal, that'll be it." So, I came home, write out a fifty-dollar check, mailed it in; middle of December, I got my certificate, good until the end of 2013. That's what I'm doing now. You've got my life history, really. [laughter]

SI: You said you have been a member of the American Legion for sixty years.

GK: Yes, I'm a charter member out there, helped build the building.

SI: What else have you done with the post? Did you go to weekly meetings?

GK: Yes, I used to go to all the meetings. I never took an office, because I did carpenter work and you've got to do something, [but] you can't be doing everything. For all the years that the post was, I put the flags out--the county gives them to you--the Presbyterian, the Lutheran, Bloomsbury Cemetery. There's one on Broadway. I started doing it, my mother-in-law started doing it and she'd go along. In fact, I've got the list in there that they first gave me. There's one cemetery, McKinney, up here by [where] the Broadway Bank used to be. You can't even find it anymore. There's a Weller [Free Church] Cemetery back here; you can't even get back to that anymore. There's a World War II one back there and two Revolutionary, I think, but you can't even get back there. Then, my mother-in-law would cross them off. Well, then, it got to where my mother-in-law got older and [she would say], "I don't think they're here." [laughter] So, anyway, Doris started helping, and then, I did a lot myself. I did it after work. Now, it got to where I just can't do it anymore. I did go along a little bit and they've got, like, five guys doing it now. This last year, I went up with them. I went over to Bloomsbury. I walked along and did a few of them. They're right along the road. I did that. I've been a member of the church for how many years. The Lions Club in Phillipsburg honored me this year for volunteer work. I got a nice plaque. Then, the township honored me; it hangs there on the wall.

SB: You were also a volunteer fireman.

GK: Twenty-five years.

SB: What made you decide to do that?

GK: Well, my brother-in-law was one and I just decided to do it, used to be right over here in the firehouse, right next to this house. Yes, it used to be there. So, twenty-five years with that, and then, I joined the Masons, been sixty years with that. Like I say, I went, but I didn't go that much, like the Tall Cedars, did that, the Legion. That's about it.

SI: You have lived in the same area for so long and have been very involved in the community. What are the biggest changes that strike you?

GK: I guess, well, the amount of people. When [Interstate] 78 went through, a lot of farmers were having trouble with their farm and, [to build] 78, they sold their farms. In fact, this one out here, the one year, we had nine hundred houses, the assessor and I had. I was busy then, but I did it and I collected, like, ninety-seven, ninety-eight percent. I always did and I never had any problem. Everybody knew me. In fact, when they heard I was retiring from it, some of the people were a little upset about it. They [said], "It's not going to be the same." It wasn't, really. I had people come here, Doris and [I], we knew them for years and sat and talked ten, fifteen [minutes], maybe a half-hour. Then, I used to sit out at the township. Taxes are due the 1st of February, May, August and November. I'd sit there from six until eight, probably the least amount of any tax collector in the State of New Jersey, [laughter] but I had a good collection and everybody knew you. In fact, some of the older people, I would look and I'd call them, because it's due a certain day. "Oh, geez, Gordon, thanks for calling." [laughter] It's not that way anymore. So, we had all those houses. That's the biggest change. Some of these places, I used to hunt; that and the tax amount is the biggest change. I don't know if it was for the good. The biggest change is this street. When you get in your car out here, you're going to have to look both ways before you pull out. One day, not too long ago, well, when the weather was good, at ten minutes to five, I think I was waiting for Dawn or something, I started counting the cars. From ten until five after, there were one hundred vehicles, one motorcycle and one jogger. That was in fifteen minutes. What the deal is, with all the shops, coming down [New Jersey] 57 to New Village, I don't know if you're familiar ...

SI: A little bit.

GK: There's a back road that comes down and past us and that's why. It's not from a development back there. It's just a few, but it's constantly that way. You go to turn around up here at the firehouse, you've got to wait. My car is parked in the garage and you go through the alley out here, between Dawn and the other house. There's a truck sitting there, you've got to watch. [laughter] I don't know. I've been lucky so far.

SI: Do you have other questions about the postwar period?

HS: Going back to carpentry, did you use the GI Bill to pay for carpentry school?

GK: Yes, I did. I did use it. We met down in Phillipsburg High School and we went, I think, one night a week. It was fellows that were into mechanics, one fellow was a floor sander, one was an electrician, one was an automobile guy. We all met. Then, we had a gentleman that we were going, like, with the book. We went to (Wannamaker?), he was the principal at the time. Chet (Mann?), who was a good friend of mine--in fact, his nephews interviewed him and me one time on the tape. Chet got shot down. He was a prisoner for six months in Germany. Anyway, him and (Hawkey?), another carpenter, and I, we went to see him and said, "Look," we said, "we didn't come here to learn out of a book--we want to do it. So, why don't we get some lumber and show us how to lay out stairs, rafters?" [laughter] So, they did and they got another gentleman in and I learned a lot from that. Then, I think I got fifty dollars a month, I think it was or so, instead of going to college. It was the same as that. I did use the GI [Bill], yes. Good thing you mentioned that, I didn't think about that.

HS: Did you receive any other veterans' benefits or compensation for your injury?

GK: No, no. See, I never was on sick call.

HS: Right.

GK: I only went on sick call once. I had a terrible toothache. So, the guy with the bicycle [a pedal-powered drill], he drilled it, [laughter] put in a temporary filling. He says, "Come back the next week." I never got it until six months, because I was here, there and all over. I never went back. I had the temporary when I came home, yes.

SI: Were you okay with talking about what you had done in the service when you came back?

GK: Yes. Well, nobody really said much. I've talked like I've talked to you and there's some things that I don't talk about, that I don't even mention, but a lot of these good things and comical things. Danae heard some things today she never heard before, but nobody ever asked me or anything.

SI: Was there any difficulty readjusting to civilian life?

GK: I don't think so, I don't think so, no. I mean, I had Doris and got a job. Years ago, it was altogether different than today. A lot of people, Ingersoll Rand was the big thing and, of course, Bethlehem Steel, but most everybody--I wouldn't say everybody, but a lot of fellows--worked at Ingersoll Rand all their life. It's not there anymore. Before that, it was Edison [Portland] Cement [Company] and the people in New Village, everybody up there worked there. There were a lot of people in Stewartsville. My father-in-law did, too. He worked at Edison as well. In fact, he saw Edison, I guess. No, I don't think I had any trouble adjusting, no, no.

SB: I wanted to ask about the 1960s and 1970s. There were a lot of changes in how people viewed the war and soldiers.

GK: You mean with Vietnam and all?

SB: Yes. What did you think?

GK: I thought it was terrible. I think most people did. I just thought, "Why are these guys there?" When I went there, I knew why I was there. I was there for a reason. If I hadn't been there, you might be here, but you might've been talking German, really.

SB: Right.

GK: That's the way I looked at it, but with Vietnam and these other [wars]--now, Korea, when I got out of Fort Dix, the first thing they asked you, "Would you like to join the Reserves?" I'd had enough. I didn't want it. If I had joined, Kenny wouldn't have been born and I'd have been in Korea, because that's what happened to these guys.

SB: Right.

GK: They were in Korea. So, anyway, that was one good thing I didn't do. Like with what's going on now, I just don't understand it.

HS: Your son ended up joining the service, the National Guard.

GK: My son did.

SB: Right.

GK: Yes, Kenny was in. Yes, he was in the National Guard for quite a while, yes. He was down in Texas someplace for six months' training, basic training. Like I went, I was [there for] like seventeen weeks and he was, like, six months down there.

SI: Did you encourage him to do that?

GK: No, he just decided to, but he was lucky he didn't get shipped out or anything. A friend of mine that was born and raised with Kenny, Johnny Hawk, he lives down the street. He went to Delaware [Valley] College and he learned to become a helicopter pilot, went to Vietnam. He made it through Vietnam, a helicopter pilot, which is dangerous. So, he stayed in the Reserves because he liked to fly. I can remember, I forget where he was out of, but, every Thursday, he'd come over here, around Stewartsville, a couple times. One night, I heard him coming and he came from (Adownstown?). I go out in the backyard and I guess he could see me. So, he puts his big spotlight on the garage. I could've read a newspaper, I think. I think I could've read the newspaper. [laughter] Then, he stayed in, because his dad was in the Navy, World War II. He got out and all and everything and he said to Johnny, "You'd better get out, because everything's going on over there." "Ah." He worked for the county, he'd get a pension, right. He was in the Guard and all this. Would you believe, he got nailed [called to active duty]? He went to Afghanistan for a year, fifty-eight years old.

SI: Wow.

GK: He got back. We had a big parade for him, had a banner. He had pictures over at the Legion one time. Johnny's one of my best friends. He made it. We used to send him stuff and he didn't forget that, either. Doris would [send him] popcorn, "nuts and bolts," it's got cashews, pretzels and some stuff she mixed up. So, yes, he enjoyed it. I found out later that these younger boys, when they went for two weeks to California, training in the desert, when the helicopter's coming, all the sand's coming up, you can't see the ground. You've got to feel. Well, Johnny, he knew a lot about it, he could feel his way down. I think that's one reason he went there, because, in Afghanistan, you can't land. You've got to hover there. In fact, he had pictures, like, where they're hovering, the guys jump out. Now, he's good friends with a guy that's a balloon guy, but he's good friends with another helicopter pilot. Would you believe this helicopter pilot got Johnny to go along with him as co-pilot, they're flying Donald Trump around? [laughter] Imagine that, yes; he flew Donald Trump down to Florida, they did.

SB: Wow.

GK: Yes. In fact, they landed down there, Atlantic City, and somebody asked them about the helicopter. [laughter] Oh, it's a plush one. It's not like what he flew. He's not the pilot, but he goes along. That's great. He's a good helicopter pilot.

SI: Is there anything you would like to add to the record that we skipped over?

GK: [laughter] I don't know. I couldn't wait. I enjoy interviewing [with] somebody, because this is going to be lost some day.

SI: We appreciate you doing this.

GK: Oh, no, like, I enjoyed the young fellow coming and they took pictures, that I interviewed with Chet (Mann?). It was funny, when we were down to Chet's--Chet's a couple years older than me and has three nephews and the one was the clerk in Warren County for a long while, Terry. So, we're down there and it's in the summertime. They're taping it. All at once, a thunderstorm hit and, man, you'd have thought it was an artillery shell. It really was loud on that thing, yes.

SI: Thank you very much. We really appreciate it.

GK: You're welcome.

SI: We appreciate your time and your service.

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Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 4/21/14

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/4/16

Reviewed by Gordon Kobler 10/7/16