

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH LIONEL GREER

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INTERVIEWED BY  
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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Lionel W. Greer on November 13, 2003 [at his apartment in New York City] with Kurt Piehler and ... could you say your name just so the transcriber knows.

ALICE GREER: Alice Greer. (Identified hereafter as ALICE)

PIEHLER: I just want to say that I realized when I was coming to the interview that I've known you off and on for over twenty years. I remember when you first came to Baruch in the early '80s to the Gallatin Papers, interested in volunteering and learning about history. And ... I was so glad you looked me up, because a number of times I had said I had got so many great stories from you, both about World War II and about Seagrams when you used to volunteer when I was there in the '90s at Gallatin and Baruch, I and I was eager to put these on tape and on the record, so to speak, because some have been in my lectures for years, particularly if I might jump ahead, that great story when you talked about the two divisions in World War II, the Seagram's division and I can't remember the ...

LIONEL GREER: Calvert.

PIEHLER: The Calvert division and how they dealt with the liquor rationing. I used that model with my students to talk about the impact of war on corporate America. So, I'm really delighted to be here and I wanted to put that on the official record. Well, let me begin—we're in your office in your home and earlier you showed me some pictures of your family. Could you maybe talk about your family, not only your parents, but also your distant family members?

GREER: Well, the pictures on the wall, my mother's parents, those were taken at a place in Hungary, probably in the 1880s or early 1890s, my grandfather and my grandmother. She died very young around 1897. He remarried almost immediately, because he had seven small children. And he married a widow who had three children and they had four more. So, it was a family of his, hers, and theirs. And the grandmother I knew when I grew up was my mother's stepmother.

PIEHLER: Are they the generation that came to America?

GREER: Yes. He apparently did rather well in Hungary. He was both an estate manager for a wealthy person, a nobleman I believe, and he was an innkeeper. And what happened was that as the older boys reached conscription age, they didn't want to go into the Austro-Hungarian army. And so each, in turn, as they approached fifteen, sixteen, seventeen said goodbye and came to America. And about the time the third or fourth son reached that point, and particularly because there was one son that everybody loved, you know, he was the warmest nicest person, I knew him of course as an older man years later, and he was just absolutely lovable. His stepmother, or his father said, "If Adolph goes we all have to go" shortly after that. The reason I know he was fairly prosperous was, growing up in 1907, at that point my mother was sixteen, seventeen and at that point they didn't go through Ellis Island. And I was puzzled, 1907 ...

PIEHLER: That's the big wave.

GREER: Yeah. And then I stumbled upon a little footnote to history, and that is Ellis Island was only for people who came over third or steerage class, and if you traveled first or cabin class, you were cleared by U.S. immigration on the pier. That's what my mother had been describing all along. So, here they were traveling with six kids, give or take 10 percent and she was pregnant with a seventh. And my mother said they got off the boat, were cleared on the pier by her older sister who was already here and had a baby, who was absolutely indignant at seeing her step-mother so much older than she obviously pregnant, "An older woman like you is not supposed to do that sort of thing." And they got on the 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue L or whatever and rode to the apartment that the older sister had prepared for the family. So, that's how that part of the family came here. My father's family came from a completely different background. My grandfather and three generations stretches two centuries in my family because my father—my grandfather was forty-four years old when my father was born, the youngest of that brood, and my father was forty-two years old when I was born so ...

PIEHLER: So, ... this is in the late 1800s when ...

GREER: Late 1800s. My grandfather, born 1837 in Poland. Shortly after that his family moved from Poland to England, so he grew up in England. And when he was past twenty, for reasons I don't know at all, left his family in Hull, England and came to New York two or three years before the Civil War. Made money in the war as a recruiter of draft substitutes. He was not a citizen so he was not subject to the draft himself. Through the family oral tradition, stories [exist] of his hiding out in the draft riots of 1863, because he was the kind of person who was the target of the riots, and from the old city directories we find that he lived on lower 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue around 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> Street, a very similar address we found in the history books for a draft office.

PIEHLER: Within walking distance.

GREER: Within a block, possibly on the same block. He was a New Yorker, he became active in Tammany Hall politics, was a ward leader. For reasons that aren't clear, he moved the family with the younger children, not the older ones, to Pueblo, Colorado in the early 1890s and founded or led the local Democratic club, the Monticello Democratic Club of Colorado, and we have a couple of letters from the President because he had apparently written on the club stationary ...

PIEHLER: Didn't he get a federal appointment to the land office?

GREER: Yes. He had some kind of federal employment. But in addition to that, looking at the Pueblo, Colorado annual directories, the best reference book before they had telephone directories, we find that he had a clothing store on Main Street in Pueblo. And I found the address and it's now, at least when I was there twenty years ago, a very old business street. I found the building that they lived in about a mile or so away. And I was told by the local people that there used to be a streetcar that connected those two locations. Then they moved back to New York and my father grew up as a New Yorker. And his family, disapproved some of them apparently very strongly, not in a kindly way at all, of his marrying a "greenhorn,"[an immigrant] this young woman who had a little Hungarian accent. So, in a way it was a mixed marriage. Everyone was Jewish, but they came from completely different backgrounds.

PIEHLER: But they were both Ashkenazi weren't they?

GREER: Yes.

PIEHLER: But even with that the Hungarian/Polish that was enough of a ...

GREER: There was a generation difference, they didn't think of themselves as Polish. That's another story, they wanted to be accepted into New York Jewish society. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an extreme sense of hierarchy within that society. At the top were the Sephardic Jews, Spanish and Portuguese and below them were the German Jews and Bohemian, below them were Eastern European Jews, less easily defined, but within the Eastern Jewish, Eastern European Jewish community sensitivity as to whether you were Litvak meaning you were descended from Lithuanian Jews or Galitzianeh, descendant of Galitzianeh Jews. Those in between were the Hungarian Jews who tended to have a very high opinion of themselves. They were much more assimilated into society in Hungary than in other parts of eastern Europe, were fluent in German and from the point of view of families like my father's who thought they were German Jewish because my father's mother's—in a way, boundaries had changed in Europe, especially in Eastern Europe, it's hard to define exactly who one is. In fact we see that my father came from a part of Poland that was Polish at almost any time in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. But my father's mother came from an area that was part of Prussia following one of the partitions of Poland in 1801 or 1798—what there were three partitions? And at some point, her part of Northwest Poland became part of Prussia and remained part of Germany until World War I and the treaties when we divided Europe, around 1919, 1920. So, there was a question of how you were categorized on the social scale, German or Polish. They chose to be German, German was more ...

PIEHLER: That was higher than Hungarian then?

GREER: Higher than Hungarian. And this was—even in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Alice and I were young, you would still hear the older people boasting about themselves or derogatory about you know, "I'm German, he's Galitzianeh, he's a Litvak," you know, things that disappeared over the next generation. And when we refer to them sometimes with our children, they don't know what we're talking about. My wife's family—when her mother and father met "he's Sephardic," "Ashkenazi" there was some of that in the air and that was the 1940s. So even in the 1940s and 50s there was some of that in the air, declining a lot, but ...

ALICE: I think it had a lot to do with the money they had, the education. So, I think it is true, the German Jews did have a good education and when they came over they came over with some wealth. So even though it's snobbish and everything else, it was a little different in the background. Not today anymore. Not even fifty years ago, because the Russian Jews and Polish Jews they all went to college and I say "All" with a capital A.

GREER: Well, I believe Senator [Daniel P.] Moynihan's remark about how he admired the Jewish migrants who got off the boat, got on the subway then went to register at CCNY—that was his own experience too as a son of Irish immigrants.

PIEHLER: Your parents, what were their names?

GREER: My father was Joseph Greenbaum, my mother was Amelia, always known as Molly Greenbaum. I changed the name to Greer in December 1945, the week before I got out of the air force.

PIEHLER: And do you know how your parents actually met? Because they do come from two different sorts of circles.

GREER: They were introduced by my aunt and uncle. This is Uncle Adolph, who I talked about so lovingly before, who was dating a young woman who was part of my father's social circle. Aunt Teenie [Ernestine], that was her, was very much part of the old Jewish community; why was she with a young man who had come over as a boy from Hungary? Because he was just an outstanding guy. And they introduced my parents. Teenie her family knew my father and his family and they introduced my father to Adolph's sister.

PIEHLER: Before I move on to the parents, because it sounds like you knew the uncle that was so beloved by the family, did you know him, was he ...

GREER: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: Could you say a little bit more about him, since Adolph was the adored one it sounds like?

GREER: Very nice guy. A funny thing happened. As a student at the School of Business at City College, in the late 1930s early 40s, there was one class very poorly run, where we were just turned loose on the files of a business that had gone bankrupt some time in the 1930s—a very common occurrence during those depression years—it was a cotton goods importer that had been doing business down in what is now called Soho, but then the importers' business district, 4<sup>th</sup> Street and down around there, and going through these files, with ill-defined—I came across a letter from a customer, to this company, saying that the only reason I will continue to do business with you is that your sales representative Adolph Roth is such an outstanding person. (Laughter) My uncle!

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like he was very charming too.

GREER: A decent human being.

ALICE: Gentle, bright, kind.

GREER: Yes.

PIEHLER: And what was he, sales ...

GREER: He was a sales representative for cotton goods, tablecloths, napkins, any kind of cotton.

PIEHLER: Now your parents' education, I was struck that your mother had elementary education. She did not go to high school?

GREER: As far as I know she did not. I have her report cards from elementary school in what was then Hungary—now it's a couple of miles across the border in Slovakia. She was an excellent student I must just say that. But as far as I can tell, she was very well read, constantly her night table was piled high with books, but I don't know that she had any education at what we would call a high school level.

PIEHLER: I should also put on the record, she was also born in 1890.

GREER: Yes.

PIEHLER: When high school attendance was not as common as it becomes a few decades later.

GREER: That's right.

PIEHLER: And your father was born in 1888.

GREER: 1881.

PIEHLER: 1881?

GREER: Yes.

PIEHLER: Had only some high school.

GREER: Because he was a wild kid. His older brother went on to college, graduated from City College, went on to become a mathematics teacher in high school, didn't like it, and went back and became a doctor; he was a physician. And Sam was probably born—he was several kids older than my father, he was probably born around 1874, 1875 and he probably became a physician in roughly 1900. The younger—and there were lots of girls, but only two boys in the family, the youngest of all the children and the younger boy was my father and he was a wild kid. He wanted to be a professional baseball player and was a professional boxer for a while.... There wasn't much room for school in his thinking.

PIEHLER: So, it wasn't necessarily a question of access ... for him?

GREER: No, that wasn't the ...

PIEHLER: That was not the issue?

GREER: No. He was recruited into his father's business, retail furniture, the business that my father was in, and his resentment about that, I don't think, was not so much that he was working in retail furniture, as it was that he was working for his father and wasn't fully appreciated, that sort of thing. His father was not around because of his political activities; he was a big shot in the Masons, that sort of social ...

PIEHLER: So, your grandfather was quite the ward leader, joined all the right organizations.

GREER: Absolutely.

PIEHLER: And, it sounds like, your father was not of that ...

GREER: He was of the generation where joining a social group, where joining the Masons, was considered to be the norm, and he did not do it because he identified Masonry so strongly with his father's absence, putting it on him as a teenager. So, he wasn't going to join the Masons.

PIEHLER: Sounds like he had something of the rebellious streak in him.

GREER: Oh, very much so. And, of course, he married this Hungarian.

PIEHLER: Your father—because I think you've told me about your father being a furniture merchant many years ago, but this was started by your grandfather then?

GREER: Well, it was a different business. My father did not take over.

PIEHLER: So, it's a different business?

GREER: He started his own. Actually, he worked for some of the very large furniture retailers. Even when I was a kid in the 1930s, 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue from about 116<sup>th</sup> Street to 125<sup>th</sup> Street was furniture stores, both sides of the street. Very large stores, block front, half block front, two floors. And apparently my father as a bachelor, through his twenties and early thirties, made a very nice living as a salesman working in one or another of those stores. I remember his saying that he was a "T-O man," a "takeover man." When another salesman had a customer, who just couldn't decide, might be on the verge of walking out, he would somehow send out a signal for the T-O man to walk out and take over. My father had this elite type of recognition of his selling skills. But he finally decided if he was going to marry this young woman he had to go into business for himself. And he did, and he opened up a succession of stores, sometimes having two or three of them at a time. By the time I came along it was a single store. And his pattern was to keep moving north and the subway lines and elevated lines were extended up to, first to upper Manhattan, and then up through the Bronx. New subway line, lots of new construction, new families, customers for furniture. And it worked out successfully until 1933. He got through the first few years of the Depression and then went under.

PIEHLER: Now you were born in 1923, I guess, your father strikes me—it sounds like he had a great business strategy. What are your, sort of, earliest memories of growing up? At this point where was your father's business and where were you living?

GREER: I was born on 225<sup>th</sup> Street of Bronxwood Avenue in the Bronx. Which at that time was quite rural. A subway line two blocks away on White Plains Road had just been completed up to 241<sup>st</sup> Street. My father's store was, at that time, was on White Plains Road at 217<sup>th</sup> Street. And I have vague recollection of being in it and seeing a furniture store. Nothing as glamorous or well decorated as the furniture stores are today, but for the time it was very nice. But it wasn't big enough for him, and so sometime in the very late 1920s, around 1930, he took a much larger space on White Plains Road between 228<sup>th</sup> and 229<sup>th</sup> Street. And this was a—the first store might have been a fifty foot front, I think this was a 100 foot front. It was a big impressive store. But, we didn't survive the Depression.

PIEHLER: One thing I want to ask about furniture stores, because I hadn't realized this, and you probably have very distinct memories, there was a famous furniture owner who became one of the big postwar chains and it was apparently his innovation to set up, sort of, model living rooms; and I didn't realize how recent that was, because when you go to furniture stores you see the furniture in context, but, I guess, your memory of furniture stores, particularly 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and your father's furniture stores is ...

GREER: I don't remember being in any of those 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue stores, but I think that had—they used that more contemporary way of displaying it my father would have used it in his store on 217<sup>th</sup> Street and 228<sup>th</sup> Street. He did not. It was rather bleak. The furniture in—he didn't call them "sets," he called them "suites" of furniture or a "suit" of furniture, just grouped around, no little carpet, no mattress on the bed, just the bed, a lot of it, good lighting and space, but not decorating. That came later.

PIEHLER: I was struck by how late it came ...

GREER: Probably in the '50s.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and that's when it struck me, I had assumed they had been doing this since time immemorial. And I forget, I don't know if it was Huffman, or one of the other, you know, had the bright idea.

ALICE: Sounds so simple doesn't it?

PIEHLER: Now you mentioned your first house, where you were born, it was 220—how long ...

GREER: Well, I was born on 225<sup>th</sup>; I don't remember that house at all because I was very young. We moved closer to my father's store, to 219<sup>th</sup> Street, which was still the same neighborhood. And then some years later, about the time probably, I was in fourth grade, we moved another few blocks. Those first houses—the first was a three family house, the second was a two family house, where there were tenants. The third house I remember around the time I was ten or eleven years old on 222<sup>nd</sup> Street was what was then a new apartment house. The 1930s, vintage, six-story apartment house was going up all over New York then. The neighborhood then was largely Italian, a minority of German, and a very, very tiny minority of



Jews. The synagogue to which we belonged was not in the neighborhood at all; it was two trolley car rides away, about thirty/forty minutes away in another part of the Bronx.

PIEHLER: You remember which part you would go? You remember the name of the synagogue?

GREER: Oh sure.

PIEHLER: What was the name of the synagogue?

GREER: Beth Israel Congregation of Kingsbridge, Kingsbridge Road and University Avenue.

PIEHLER: So, by Fordham, I guess, it would be?

GREER: North of Fordham.

PIEHLER: North of Fordham?

GREER: Yeah, north and further west. And we had to take the White Plains Avenue trolley, cut over Webster Avenue and down to Fordham Road and change there at the corner of Fordham and Webster for the Kingsbridge trolley, which went up the hill to University Avenue. And people felt safer in those days. By the time I was eight or nine years old—I don't remember why my time schedule would be different than my older brothers, but apparently my parents thought nothing of me going off on a streetcar on the trip by myself. I think I did it more alone than with an older brother.

PIEHLER: So, at a very early age you could, sort of, take advantage of—which is wonderful, because it's easier to go places in some ways. What did you, and how long did you stay in this apartment, this—were you able to stay through the '30s?

GREER: No. I graduated from elementary school in that neighborhood in January 1935. I had taken the entrance exam for Townsend Harris High School, one of the more competitive high schools in New York, which was at that time run by City College and occupied four floors in the City College School of Business building at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue. And so I started there in February 1935—I have to boast—a month before my twelfth birthday. Well, shortly after I started there, we moved to Washington Heights. We moved to 178<sup>th</sup> Street and Fort Washington Avenue in a building which was torn down a few years later to make way for the Port Authority bus terminal.

PIEHLER: I know exactly where that is.

GREER: Yeah. And when you wait for a bus there, that's where I lived.

PIEHLER: That's your old bedroom. (Laughs)

GREER: And that's where we lived until shortly before we were drafted. I lived there, my brothers left earlier. We moved a few blocks away to Bennett Avenue on Washington Heights.

PIEHLER: Now your father, in losing the business, in some ways it's sort of an obvious story with the Depression, when did—the business went under in 1933?

GREER: Yes. And he tried to start it up again, struggled for a year or two. He was a very proud man, and losing the business, going into bankruptcy was a terrible blow to him. He went into depression, his health deteriorated. In the last three years of his life he was just a shell of a person, and he died in 1939.

PIEHLER: It sounds like, and it's a little simplistic, that the Depression almost killed ...

GREER: Absolutely, it was ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, because he died in '39. How did your family survive with the loss?

GREER: It was rough. It was very rough. I had two older brothers, and the best way of illustrating the impact of the Depression on us—we all three graduated from City College, but it took Norman the oldest of us about seven years to do his four year work, dropping out at times to take a job in Connecticut for a year or so, coming back and just taking a few courses evening session, and it took about seven years for him to get his degree. My second brother Jerome took five and a half or six years. And it took me four and a half years, because I did my last semester work in an evening session over the period of a year. Instead of graduating with my class in January of '42, I got my degree in June of '42.

PIEHLER: And that's because you and your other brothers started to work in order to keep ...

GREER: I have had a job since I was about twelve and a half years old. After school I went to work for a jeweler in the neighborhood at St. Nicholas Avenue and 173<sup>rd</sup> Street, did his errands downtown in the jewelry district, which wasn't on 47<sup>th</sup> Street at the time, it was mainly on Maiden Lane and Nassau Street, a little bit on Eldridge Street. Running down with a piece or a link for a chain or a bead for a string of beads that had broken or lost some beads. Every afternoon I'd have ...

PIEHLER: So, after school you would go to ...

GREER: I'd go from school to Nassau Street, to 173<sup>rd</sup> Street bring back the errands I had done last time and pick up the errands for the next day. That was in some ways very convenient, because you were down on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and so you just sort of made a triangle.

PIEHLER: And what did they pay you?

GREER: Three dollars. Three dollars for two or three hours a day, five days a week, and then come in to help around the store on Saturdays for five or six hours. It was a very welcome three dollars, I had some purchasing power.

PIEHLER: But, in some ways, it's still not a lot, even with ...

GREER: And, of course, a couple of nickels for car fare. The subway was five cents and as much as possible I would walk whatever was less than two or three miles and save the nickel. And I did that, working for Abram Antoville for two or three years. My brother Jerry had the job before me. And he had gotten a better job as an errand boy/substitute sales man at the pharmacy, a drugstore on 173<sup>rd</sup> and Broadway. So, I followed him into the jewelry store. When he left the drugstore to get a more lucrative job, I moved over to the drugstore and said goodbye to the jeweler. I remained friendly with him, but I took my brother's job in the drugstore. I kept that from roughly 1936, '37 to 1940. And one day I came into the drugstore and the soda fountain was gone, literally gone. The mess was still there, the accumulated grease over the last thirty years, and Phil Bernstein the bastard who owned the place asked me to help clean up the mess which was a dirty job, and when it was done he said well, "I won't need you anymore!" And paid me off. And I was unemployed for the first and possibly the last time in my life. But I was very fortunate, I went to the City College employment office, and they had just received a request for a night cashier at a drugstore at the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Fifth Avenue Chemists it was called. A guy named Willie Willner owned it and he interviewed me and interviewed an older fellow and called us both back and told me, "You live so much further away, I don't think this job is convenient for you," and because tears formed in my eyes and started to run down my face he said, "but I think you need the job more." And this job paid a big fat fifteen dollars a week. It was from five to one, five days a week and from noon to one on Saturday.

PIEHLER: So, that's noon to one a.m.?

GREER: Noon to one a.m.

PIEHLER: And five to one a.m.?

GREER: Yeah. Fifty-three hours a week. It included dinner and another malted milk later in the evening. I was extremely thin then, so a malted milk meant a rich—you know, mostly ice cream and a little milk, but also one or two raw eggs. And it didn't help much. I remained thin, but well nourished. And fifty-three hours a week, I got fifteen dollars.

PIEHLER: Fifteen dollars.

GREER: That was a lot of money. And as things got quiet in the evening I was able to do my homework.

PIEHLER: You were able to do homework? That's a lot to work and still go to school.

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And what time would be your first class generally?

GREER: If I could help it, ten o'clock. More often it was nine. And the schedule then, at least in City College called for many more hours in classroom than I think is typical in colleges today.

PIEHLER: Because now it's sort of typical one hour for every credit, and if you have a three-hour class it would be sort of three credits roughly.

GREER: Then a three-credit class was at least four hours.

PIEHLER: At least four hours? So, there was much more class time?

GREER: A two-credit class would be three or four hours.

PIEHLER: I just want to go back a little bit about growing up. You're in the Bronx in a neighborhood where it's mainly Italian ...

GREER: Then. Now it's mainly Jamaican.

PIEHLER: Yes. But then it was mainly Italian, a smattering of German, only a few Jews.

GREER: Yes.

PIEHLER: What was the sort of playground dynamic, the street dynamic?

GREER: Well, the playground dynamics didn't affect me very much, because I was a very small kid. I'd been skipped a lot in elementary school. Don't forget ... they didn't think in terms of years, they thought it terms of semesters, and so instead of having enrichment programs for kids who could absorb more, they would skip a half-year. I did that four times in elementary school. I went from 1A, meaning first year, to 2A instead of 1B and a couple of others did that. Whether I missed things in my education because of that I have no idea, but I wound up graduating two years early. And I was only in class with bigger guys. And even if had been in class with my own age group, I would have probably been one of the smaller ones. I grew to average height much later. I think I continued growing until I was nineteen or twenty years old, catching up.

PIEHLER: Although, if you're starting college at sixteen that's pretty ...

GREER: I was fourteen.

PIEHLER: Fourteen? So, you got skipped? Because you started Townsend ...

GREER: Oh, Townsend Harris was a three-year high school.

PIEHLER: So, it's a three-year high school? So, you started at twelve?

GREER: I started before I was twelve, two months before I was twelve.

PIEHLER: I think, particularly for student reading that, you know, particularly if you didn't have a growth spurt, you know, your relative proportion to the other students would have been ...

GREER: I was a little guy. And I remember very often, when they divided up the class I don't know what happened to the girls they went somewhere else, but when they divided up the boys into softball teams, I was the umpire! There was no question, I couldn't play with these big boys, but I could call balls and strikes, and took a beating for it. I learned how to run fast. (Laughter) A very defensive life. So, I didn't go out to the ball field to play with the other kids, because I grew up largely—I paid a price for this. I didn't form many friendships. Fortunately, I had two brothers, one of whom I felt particularly close, even though he was more than three years older than I am. He was my friend.

PIEHLER: So, you really hung out with your brothers when you ...

GREER: I didn't hang out with them, but I could rely, not on the oldest one, he was much older, he was more than eight years older and off in a generation and a different world, but the second one I had more of a relationship with. And I really didn't have other friends.

PIEHLER: Because even though there is a tradition in that era of promoting kids, I've done a number of interviews with people who report skipping grades, it sounds like yours was one of the more extreme cases. You know, when you started Townsend, were you the youngest?

GREER: No. I was the second youngest in my class.

PIEHLER: So, there was someone younger?

GREER: I must tell you Kurt, I graduated 1938. In 2003, sixty-five years later, just a couple of months ago I went to my first class reunion.

PIEHLER: And what was that like?

GREER: It was very interesting. There were eighteen of us showed up out of a class of 199, and among the eighteen was the one fella in the class who I knew all along was younger than I am. And he's a doddering old retired professor of some science, University of Iowa. Many of my Townsend classmates became academicians, retired professor of this, that, and the other thing.

PIEHLER: By the way did you know, I think he went to Townsend too, Milton Klein? He became a sort of early national ...

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

RECORDING NOTE: TAPE ONE SIDE TWO WAS SKIPPED DURING THE INTERVIEW.  
THE INTERVIEW CONTINUES ON TAPE TWO SIDE ONE.

-----START OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE-----

PIEHLER: This continues and interview with Lionel Greer on November 13, 2003 in New York City with Kurt Piehler. And one of the things, I want to ask you a lot, about is Townsend Harris and what would become Baruch, and City College. But a little bit more about the Bronx; what would you do for fun? You obviously—elementary school was the only time you didn't have to work, and your father was initially, at least until '33, it sounds like he was doing quite well, so ...

GREER: We did, especially considering that many people in the neighborhood were hurt by the Depression, starting in late 1929, 1930. Yeah, but I'm not clear on the economics precisely, but I think the Depression really started before the stock market crash. So, the people tend to talk about October 1929 as being the abrupt start of something ...

PIEHLER: But there were signs ...

GREER: There were signs before that. And it didn't hurt us. My father never learned to drive. But he employed a—what do you call—a chauffeur for the furniture store, who drove the delivery truck and handled deliveries, and who when we wanted to go some place had his own car ...

PIEHLER: But you would get driven somewhere?

GREER: Yeah. So, without my realizing it, we lived quite comfortably. Not luxuriously, by any means, it wasn't the modern concept of luxurious living, we grew up in a modest, largely blue-collar neighborhood in the Bronx, but ...

PIEHLER: How many rooms, how many bedrooms did your apartment have? Did you live with your brother?

GREER: Oh, my brother and I ...

PIEHLER: Shared a room?

GREER: Shared a room, yeah.

PIEHLER: Did your mother have any help with the house? Did she have a maid at one point?

GREER: Not live-in, but Tilly Hershowitz was the maid who showed up, I don't know how many times a week, for years.

PIEHLER: And, it strikes me, your family had a phone fairly early.

GREER: I remember when the telephone number had only four digits. Our number was Olinville 2189. Then it became Olinville 2-2189. I don't know what happened to Olinville, but going back into history, a little neighborhood in that corner of the Bronx ...

PIEHLER: Which is funny, because in your own life you've seen that in the city itself you now have to dial area codes, ... so you've seen almost a full progression of the number system. I guess, asking about some quintessential New York institutions, either your experiences of them as a child ...

GREER: The institution I remember most fondly is the local branch of the New York Public Library.

PIEHLER: That's the biggest, you know ...

GREER: That was my home away from home.

PIEHLER: And do you remember what branch you would go to?

GREER: It was—and I'm sure it has long since disappeared, it was on White Plains Road between 222<sup>nd</sup> and 223<sup>rd</sup> Street on the west side of the street, but not directly on White Plains Road, it was set back fifty or seventy-five feet behind probably a retail store. I had to walk up a walkway, a sort of alley, to get to the entrance of the library, which was a building, one very large room. But for a, whatever I was, five, six, seven-year old kid just gotten a library card, it was paradise to me. And I remember an early encounter with a librarian; I had taken out two or three children's books, naturally, and a few hours later I came back. And brought them back for more books. "Well, you didn't read those yet," "Yes I did." I had a dispute. My first clash with adult bureaucracy! (Laughter) I had to persuade her that I had read these books and was ready for another group.

PIEHLER: What about, did you ever go to the Bronx Zoo when you were growing up? Was that ...

GREER: Yes. Yeah. It was not like the zoo today, but a few of the buildings, the core buildings were already there. But it was interesting.

PIEHLER: What about movies? How often would you go to the movies growing up, particularly in elementary school?

GREER: Well, my parents were, I guess, ahead of their time and didn't approve of the movies, but we went to the movies. And, of course, there were many more small theaters in the neighborhood. I remember the Laconia, because that was the next neighborhood up from Olinville, at—oh, where was the Laconia—probably 226<sup>th</sup> or 227<sup>th</sup> Street on White Plains Road. A very small movie that showed only westerns, or at least that's the way I associated it in my memory, the B&B that was on White Plains Road right between 220<sup>th</sup> and 221<sup>st</sup> Streets right in the middle of where I lived. Two of those addresses I described to you. I remember walking past these theaters much more than I remember actually going to them. But there ...

PIEHLER: Did you have any—like, my late father-in-law was a real Tom Mix fan, did you have any—were there any particular types of movies that you remember, either in elementary school or in high school or in the '20s?

GREER: No, the only memory I have, is of my brothers taking me one evening further down to the Allerton Avenue neighborhood to see a horror movie, I don't remember whether it was Dracula, or Frankenstein, one of them. This is probably well into the early 1930s and it really bothered me. (Laughter) I lost a lot of sleep over two nights.

PIEHLER: I guess, what about sports? Yankee Stadium or Madison Square Garden?

GREER: I wasn't much of a sports fan, but my father was.

PIEHLER: Yeah, your father wanted to play ...

GREER: Oh, he was an avid baseball fan. I don't remember, he talked about boxing too. Those were the only two sports that I recall him talking about. He was a New York Giants fan, but at the same time he said, "Root for the Giants, but bet on the Yankees."

PIEHLER: (Laughs) So, he's also a realist. Were there any other Bronx institutions that you would go to in terms of parks, or in terms of, the botanical garden or ...

GREER: Well, where we lived was just one block away from the Bronx River Parkway, the park along the Bronx River, and one of the sad memories I've got—I talked before about not having any childhood friends, I had one, whose name was Ralph Ohrlein. His family owned a hardware store on White Plains Road between 218<sup>th</sup> and 219<sup>th</sup>, and Ralph and I were in 1A together for the first grade and then I was skipped to 2A. And sometime during that winter, that Saturday, my mother wanted me to not play with Ralph and go with her to her Saturday bridge game with her sisters and sisters-in-law and dragged me along. And Ralph went down the Bronx River with another kid from the block, Mario, and Ralph went through the ice and drowned. It was traumatic; it was my first experience with death. It happened to somebody I was close with, and I don't think I ever had another friend to take his place.

PIEHLER: What about coming to Manhattan? Obviously you left Townsend Harris and moved to Morningside, but what about ...

GREER: Washington Heights.

PIEHLER: Washington Heights, yeah. How often when you were living in the Bronx would you come to Manhattan?

GREER: Probably only on trips to visit relatives. Especially my mother's monthly bridge game.

PIEHLER: So, your mother, it strikes me, she was an avid bridge player?

GREER: Very loud. Oh God! (Laughter) Both sisters said to each other after every hand, "How could you lead with that club," gosh.



PIEHLER: Your mother, when she was married, did she work at all when she was outside of the home?

GREER: No, until the Depression when to supplement the income that my brothers and I were bringing in, you know, and my father had reached where the health had deteriorated and he wasn't working at all, she ran a little dry goods business from the house. Selling hosiery and what not to her friends and neighbors.

PIEHLER: Moving, you joined a Reform synagogue?

GREER: Yes.

PIEHLER: How active was your family in the synagogue?

GREER: Oh, they were active. My father was constantly fighting the Rabbi or others on principles, my mother became president of the sisterhood and my brothers and I all were Bar Mitzvahed and confirmed, and I think all three of us, at least for a few years, would each become teachers of ...

PIEHLER: Of Hebrew?

GREER: Not of Hebrew, but of religious studies on the Sunday morning class.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, in your generation, how much Hebrew did you have?

GREER: Very little. Reform Judaism had swung like a pendulum from the period when I was preparing for Bar Mitzvah. We had to learn enough Hebrew to read our portion of the Torah. But other than that, Hebrew was a very small part of the religious service. You still see a contrast between the more modern trend and most modern Reform congregations around here, a few like Temple Emanu-El which ...

PIEHLER: I've listened to their service on WQXR and it's almost all in English.

GREER: It's non-sectarian.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean you can. Well, there's a story I once read about Reform Judaism and it said how once a businessman strolled into town into the Temple Emanu-El on a Sunday, and until I think the Rabbi said something in passing half way through the service and it was only then he realized he wasn't in a church.

GREER: Well, that's a little exaggerated.

PIEHLER: Yeah, sort of exaggerated but there's sort of a ...

GREER: The pendulum has swung much more toward traditional practices in the service, much more use of Hebrew.

PIEHLER: So, in your view this is a Reform congregation that's very Reform, in the use of Hebrew.

GREER: When I was a kid it wasn't "very" Reform it was the norm of that time. And what we witnessed over the last seventy years is a reversal of that trend, but put in a sharper focus by a few holdouts like Emanu-El. And there's another temple in this neighborhood which isn't quite as extreme as Emanu-El, but not ... like the other temples that the family belonged to.

PIEHLER: It's jumping ahead, but I recently read for another press, I read a manuscript of correspondence of a Reform Jew from Philadelphia, and he was—partly because of the use of English, what was striking to me when I read that ... he was so taken aback when he would go to services, of the service being in Hebrew. It just threw him off, and he often would comment at length in this correspondence on this Hebrew. Did you have any experiences like that when you went into the services say on High Holy days, in terms of, by a chaplain, once you got to the service in the air force?

GREER: Oh, well. You see, growing up, although we belonged to a Reform congregation, my grandparents, including my grandfather who lived into the 1950s he was more than ninety when he died was an observant orthodox what would today be called Modern Orthodox, and he was Modern all through his life. But being with him for, say Passover, or with a number of others in my mother's family, my cousin's Bar Mitzvah's, I was exposed to orthodox practices and much more generous use of Hebrew in their services.

PIEHLER: So, it wasn't as jarring when you were in the services.

GREER: No, no, no, I was familiar with the spectrum as a kid.

PIEHLER: No, I mean it was just very striking, because he grew up in a very kind of—his father was a very successful attorney and it was just sort of striking to read his reaction to these services.

GREER: No, I didn't have that.

PIEHLER: You didn't have that? Even though you sort of grew up Reform you had seen enough Orthodox.

GREER: Yes.

PIEHLER: In terms of, particularly in your neighborhood where you are the minority group in the Bronx, did you ever have any anti-Semitic incidents at all growing up, or any incidents at all, particularly in the Bronx?

GREER: Yes and no. There was a—I was usually the only Jewish kid in my class. Not in my school, but in my grade and section. And there was a latent feeling of being made aware of being different. Now as you got into the later 1930s the atmosphere changes, of course, and the

newspapers and the streets there was much more evidence of the activities of the German American Bund, pro-Nazi rallies taking place around the city. My older brother became active in an anti-Nazi group that would go down and break up meetings.

PIEHLER: What was the name of that? Do you remember?

GREER: I don't.

PIEHLER: But he was very involved in it.

GREER: Yeah. And a number of the fellows in the group at the same time joined the Marine Reserve. And these were the guys that were my teachers in elementary school. In fact I'll jump ahead and tell you a funny story about one of them, Gil Schwartzbartl, a big guy, well over six foot and well over 200 pounds, and he and one of his brothers were among those in the that anti-Bund group and became Marine Reservists. And they were called up to active duty very early, possibly before or very shortly after Pearl Harbor, and they were off in the Pacific somewhere getting shot at. They both survived, and in 1945 after I had been in service for almost two years I became a navigator, 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant in the air force, and then I was sent to bombardier and radar school in Victorville, California about sixty, seventy miles outside of Los Angeles. And, come the weekend, we'd get on the road and get into Los Angeles. And one Saturday morning, I got into Los Angeles around twelve and I had a date with a young woman I had met a week or two earlier, and I'm walking through Pershing Square at the Biltmore hotel, and I've been a lieutenant now three, four, five weeks, shiny gold bar, I'm really feeling good about myself and this big marine, I don't know how many, he was a gunnery sergeant with five, six stripes, and a bunch of ribbons on, you know, service ribbons on, steps away from the building and stops me and says, "Hey kid!" I say, "What do you want," "You were in my Sunday school class, with Gil Schwartzbartl!" He says, "Come on, I'll buy you a drink." He picked me up, tucked me under his arm, carried me through the lobby of the Biltmore Hotel to the bar in the far right corner, called over Harry the bartender and said, "Harry, give this kid a drink, he was in my Sunday school class!" (Laughter) He was one of my older brother's contemporaries. My bother kept up with him until they both died some years ago.

PIEHLER: What was your family's attitude in the '20s and '30s toward Zionism? How ...

GREER: It was mixed. It was not completely favorable. And, of course, it was influenced by the attitude of the Reform movement too. On the one hand we had the little blue pushke boxes in the house where you put the coins for the Jewish National Fund to go grow trees or do other developmental things in Palestine, but there was some feeling as to whether this was really right. We should be good citizens of where we lived. And there shouldn't be a need—now this is all pre-Hitler, so the need is not quite as evident. It should have been. We had heard of him. There were reports coming out of the Soviet Union and other places, but there was some hesitation as to whether that was the right way to go. The ideal was if the whole world could be like America without the latent anti-Semitism we had here, which was probably the only reason, the reason I changed my name before getting out of the army so my final discharge papers would have my new name on them. That was all on the assumption that the world would be like it was before I went into the service. Fortunately there's been a significant, not 100 percent, but significant

change in that. The laws have been changed. But there was an element of reserve about enthusiasm for Zionism. Something happened—I don't know whether it was the biannual conferences the Jewish Reform movement had in the United States, but sometime in the late 1930s I guess, with the more apparent growth of Nazism even though the full extent of its evil hadn't been recognized yet, but sometime around 1938 the position changed and the support for Zionism became more unqualified.

PIEHLER: So, your sense was that by the late '30s . . .

GREER: Well, even I should say the middle '30s. Especially living on Washington Heights. Washington Heights became a focal point for the German-Jewish refugee settlement. We used to joke that you'd walk down Broadway some of the stores had signs in the window, "Mann Sprech English Hier." For Germans, the stores would cater to their German-speaking customers, but they also had to speak English too.

PIEHLER: I was going to ask you about that neighborhood, because you were in the heyday of that when it becomes a German-Jewish ...

GREER: And we had—when my older brother went off to Connecticut or some place to work, my mother took in a roomer, a young woman who was literally fresh off the boat from Germany. Her family had gotten an exit permit for her. Now this must be 1937, more likely '38, and she lived with us a couple of years. It was another source of income that we badly needed.

PIEHLER: How, I guess, now you were very young when Hitler comes to power, but you have a brother who becomes very active in the anti-Nazi movement, when was there, sort of, awareness of Hitler and Germany, at least in your chain?

GREER: The name of the order he belonged to was The Order of Americans All.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. Oh great. That your brother was involved in, the anti-Nazi group?

GREER: Yes.

PIEHLER: How aware—when you did you become aware of Germany and the Nazis? Obviously when you moved to Washington Heights you were . . .

GREER: Very much so. Especially after Rose came to live with us.

PIEHLER: Rose would, would she tell you things about Germany at the time? Do you have any memory?

GREER: I don't remember that. I remember her talking about her parents saying goodbye to her on the pier. And she had already gone through a complete body search, but when they had one more chance to hug her, at that point they slipped some jewelry into her dress or someplace so she would have something more than the extremely small money they were allowed to take out.

PIEHLER: One question about your larger family, because you have two different backgrounds, what kind of languages did you hear growing up in the family.

GREER: In my father's family, only English. In my mother's family the women, the sisters . . .

PIEHLER: Particularly when they played bridge.

GREER: Well, there was some cursing in Hungarian. (Laughter) (\_\_\_\_\_?) I don't know what it means, but.... The women would sometimes talk to each other in Hungarian, but otherwise all English. They never talked to the children in Hungarian. I don't know that any of my cousins learned Hungarian.

PIEHLER: Learned Hungarian. And in terms of growing up, what newspaper did your family get? Do you remember?

GREER: We got the *Daily News*, and what became the *World Telegram*, the *World* or the *Telegram* before their merger, but I remember *World Telegram*. We didn't get the *Times* or *Sun* or *Herald* or *Tribune* and we definitely did not like Hearst newspapers, the *Mirror* or the *Journal* or the *American*.

PIEHLER: That doesn't need a lot of explaining. When you moved to Morningside Heights ...

GREER: Washington Heights.

PIEHLER: Washington Heights, excuse me, it's a very long—you moving in when it's becoming a center for refugee German Jewish refugees, you were also a bit older, is there anything else that sticks out about that?

GREER: No, because other than the fact that we lived there and I worked in first the jewelry store then the drugstore, I never became, I never went to school in the neighborhood, I had no friends in the neighborhood and the little time that I had free I never had any money to enjoy. Now right behind us, the space that is now occupied by the Port Authority bus terminal, on Fort Washington Avenue, from 178<sup>th</sup> Street almost to the corner of 179<sup>th</sup>, was a very large YMHA. And every Saturday night there was a dance at the YMHA and the windows in the warm weather were open, and through the windows you could hear all of the music from the dance. And one of the things I loved as a kid in the 1930s without spending any money was to hear the music from the dance from 100 feet away; but I never ever went to one. In fact, I don't think I was ever in that building.

PIEHLER: But you heard the music every Saturday ...

GREER: Every Saturday night.

PIEHLER: And this was the era of big bands.

GREER: Oh yes, lots of loud music.

PIEHLER: Growing up, what music were you listening to as a kid and then as a teenager?

GREER: I don't know, whatever was on the radio.

PIEHLER: So, you weren't a big ...

GREER: No. We didn't buy records, 78s.

PIEHLER: And you weren't a big band ...

GREER: I was conscious of the names, but I didn't have much means.

PIEHLER: Since, particularly on your father's side, they are hardcore Tammany Democrats ...

GREER: My father was. He was a Democrat by birth. Frankly, I'm the same way.

PIEHLER: Oh, I know. To me it's obvious, well let me ask you, there was though the split that ... needed to be healed between Al Smith and Roosevelt when Roosevelt went for the nomination in '32, but what were their attitudes toward Roosevelt? Do you have any memory?

GREER: Oh, he was considered saintly. The flaws that we became aware of subsequently, if there was any awareness of them then they were forgiven, overlooked. And especially having such a wonderful wife as Eleanor. He was ...

PIEHLER: So, Eleanor and Franklin were ...

GREER: They were saints. The fact that he took this adamant attitude about not bombing the railroads to the concentration camps, to death camps, that came out years later, he was dead by the time anyone was aware of that.

PIEHLER: One of the things I'm struck by about the appeal of Roosevelt and I'm curious as to your thoughts on this, I am very struck when reading it, there is a real message in his themes about tolerance and acknowledgement. I mean, this was politics, but I've been struck in reading—I've read a lot of his speeches, you know, [and] Roosevelt in a lot of his gestures really does reach out to American Jews. Is that part of his appeal at the time?

GREER: I don't know. I'm not aware of that specifically. I only had a broader familiarity. Let me tell you, this came home to me forcefully in 1944. I had been accepted for aviation cadet training, but given logistics they had accepted more people than they had room for and they had to find ways ... to do something with us until our turn came to actually get started in the cadet program. And I and a couple of hundred other guys were sent to a small college in Columbus Ohio, Capital University set up by the Lutheran Church, partly for the benefit of children of overseas missionaries, if you were a children of an overseas missionary you were guaranteed an education at Capital University. It was very nice, a very nice small school. It was in the—I think the neighborhood was called Bexley, a nice middle class, upper middle class neighborhood,

reminded me very much of some of our own suburbs with the houses that were built in the 1920s, Norman style. And a local young lady had a photo studio, a block up from Main Street, or whatever that avenue is that goes up past the university, and had a pot of coffee going constantly. So, it became a hangout for us, we weren't called cadets yet we were called "aviation students." And she welcomed us when we were off duty to come in and have a pot of coffee. And one day, four or five of us were just hanging out there, unusual for soldiers then I suppose at that time, to start talking politics. Someone started talking about 1944, "Our President Roosevelt." And this young woman, probably in her later 20s, with fire in her eyes turned around and said if, "If I was in the same room as that man and I had a gun I would feel compelled to shoot him! He's such an enemy of our people!" You know, people in general, the Americans, "a traitor." I'd never heard this kind of anti- ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, you had met a real Roosevelt hater.

GREER: I'd never met one before. I couldn't believe that she was serious, and she was.

PIEHLER: And she was also, it strikes me, a very nice person, so it wasn't just that she was this crank you had met.

GREER: Yeah. That's right.

PIEHLER: So, did you reply, or were you just so dumbfounded you didn't know what to say?

GREER: I'm sure I said nothing; I wouldn't have known what to say.

PIEHLER: Because you were just ...

GREER: If I said anything it was, "Would you mind repeating that please?" I couldn't believe it.

ALICE: You know, I think that many Jews were so pro-Roosevelt because he did surround himself with a number of Jews.

GREER: Yes. Yeah.

PIEHLER: So, that did make a difference.

GREER: Yeah. He had Morgenthau, Secretary of the Treasury, Sam Rosenman was his speechwriter, and there had been a few ...

ALICE: So yes, you did hear ...

GREER: ... yeah, as an advisor. And he also was the head of some commission. There had been a few Jews in high positions earlier, but not many and it was more conspicuous with Roosevelt, especially the Morgenthau appointment.

PIEHLER: That was big, you were very aware of that at the time?

GREER: Very much so.

ALICE: Rosenman. Was it Rosenman?

GREER: The speechwriter, yes.

ALICE: We were very aware of that too.

PIEHLER: Now, another political figure—and this to me sort of stunned me when you told me this at the time, I don't know—I asked you once about Fiorella LaGuardia, and I was sort of stunned because you launched into a big diatribe about Fiorella LaGuardia. And I just remember that you went on and on. I was sort of like—I expected your generation to just—everyone glorified LaGuardia and I guess ...

GREER: The one thing that struck me very more personally than his other very good activities was the fact that—supposedly for financial reasons, but there was always a lot of skepticism among my fellow alumni at Townsend Harris—he cut Townsend Harris out of the budget. Because City College was largely supported by New York City, Townsend Harris was, at that time, part of the City College budget, not part of the Board of Education, and his action was attributed to the fact that he supposedly had a good friendship with the friend who was the founding genius of the Bronx High School of Science. They were just getting Bronx Science School started and it's a marvelous school and it's graduated a wonderful number of alumni, but supposedly he didn't want to compete with Townsend Harris. He did have to continue to compete with Stuyvesant High School, which has an outstanding student body, but he ...

PIEHLER: He wanted to eliminate one of the competitors.

GREER: Right. And they knocked off Harris; the last class graduated around '42 or '43. And at that time, Bronx Science took off.

PIEHLER: Yeah. As I said, it's always stuck with me, the day—I don't remember why we were talking about LaGuardia and you then told me the story of Townsend and I hadn't been aware of the history of it.

GREER: Townsend Harris was revived some 50 years later. It's now on Queens College campus.

PIEHLER: And in the same model as in your day? In the sense of ...

GREER: Well, what many of my fellow alumni found difficult to accept was that it was co-ed.

PIEHLER: So, yours was all male?

GREER: Yeah, in our day.



ALICE: City College was too.

GREER: Uptown.

ALICE: Uptown.

GREER: Yeah, the School of Business was co-ed, although it was ...

ALICE: Well, very, very few.

GREER: Probably a ratio of seven-to-one. But liberal arts and the other uptown schools at 138<sup>th</sup> Street were all male until sometime in the '40s or '50s. But the new Townsend Harris, which is doing an excellent job turning out top-notch students, is co-ed and it's a four-year school, not a three-year. And it doesn't require two languages. We were required to take ...

PIEHLER: You took two languages?

GREER: We had to have a three-year language and a two-year language.

PIEHLER: So, what was your three-year language?

GREER: I struggled terribly with French; I had a lot of problems with it.

PIEHLER: And then the second?

GREER: German. I struggled terribly with German.

PIEHLER: I can relate to the German. I interviewed a retired colleague in Tennessee, one of the things he said—and he also entered Townsend very early, which he said, it's interesting, he said similarly that, sort of, socially it did—he even argued that Townsend, sort of, hindered him, because he was very young, much like you. And he also said that it was an interesting dynamic in terms of the—I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on, particularly the faculty, could you talk a little bit about the faculty at Townsend, your memories of them?

GREER: Well, they were mixed. Some were outstanding, truly inspirational. And some were terrible. Some were there because they had been—especially in the sciences, noted researchers but poor teachers. And so, it was a very mixed group. I told you I just recently went to the 65<sup>th</sup> reunion, and much of the talk had to do with reminiscing about faculty members, and the comments were very mixed, “Wasn't so and so marvelous, wasn't so and so terrible.”

PIEHLER: Well, it's interesting, because he said that on paper it had incredible credentials he remembered, but he said it was very mixed in the classroom that you really did get the academic who couldn't teach very effectively.

GREER: And there was another factor there too that worked to the disadvantage of—you know, in elementary school I was top of the class, there was no competition, that sort of thing, it wasn't like that in high school at all. I was an also-ran at best. Some of these fellows were unbelievably bright. And you'd get into a class, say, discussing English literature with a class of whatever it was, twenty, twenty-two boys of whom two or three are outstanding geniuses and they would carry on a discussion with the instructor that I felt so completely left out. I didn't understand their vocabulary, I didn't understand their concepts, I didn't know what they were talking about. And this would happen to one degree or another in many of the classes. It was a disadvantage being in a class with some of these extraordinarily bright guys, geniuses, true geniuses.

PIEHLER: So, you felt a little bit ahead of—you were trying to keep up?

GREER: And not succeeding.

PIEHLER: It's interesting, because my perception of your going to Townsend, I just think of you as part of that elite at City College, but at the time you felt like you were struggling.

GREER: It was a shock to make the transition from elementary school to high school. College was relatively easy after that.

PIEHLER: So, that was your bigger transition to make, to high school?

GREER: High school was rough, very rough. And compounded with the economic pressures, work pressures after school, not enough time to do homework properly. You know, homework then consisted of doing the assignment, not of really studying and learning of what the assignment was supposed to be about.

PIEHLER: Were you active in any club?

GREER: I just want to tell one more story about the social implications of being in an all boy's school and being very young. I started to have a girlfriend or started to do a little dating just, you know, thirteen, fourteen years old—the juices are flowing you have to socialize to some degree, but not much. But when I got to college, and as Alice mentioned before the City College School of Business, now Baruch College was co-ed. And in a number of freshman classes you were seated alphabetically. And I remember in at least one class, maybe more, sitting next to the prettiest girl in the class. Her name was Myra Graff. Her brother, Henry Graff became a professor of history at Columbia, well known in presidential history. And I sat next to Myra Graff for at least one semester in one class, probably more, and I never could say “boo” to her. I was so intimidated. First of all it was a girl!

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GREER: And I never spoke a word to her. And they made me keenly conscious of how socially awkward I was because of the combination of age and lack of exposure of being with girls.

PIEHLER: In Townsend what type of social life was there? You were working a lot, what type of social life could you have?

GREER: The only—whatever free time I had was probably between classes. I was a volunteer in the public library, not the public library, the high school library, which I got a service pin, (laughter) which I treasure, because it's the one thing I did after class in high school.

PIEHLER: Did you ever go to dances or any ...

GREER: Oh no! I don't think we had them. I don't think the school organized any dances. I don't know whether it was a function of the 30s or a function of a being a boys—and another thing about Townsend High was that it was located on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. Students came from all five boroughs, and at three o'clock, or whenever when we were out of school, we scattered to the winds ... making it more difficult to establish friendships and to learn. A number of my classmates over the years have remained in close touch with each other, some are very good friends. The guy who organized it is actually one of the ...

PIEHLER: Stayed in touch all of these years?

GREER: Yes, yes. And I did not.

PIEHLER: Did you have any—you mentioned, sort of, in these classrooms sometimes you don't even know what they are talking about. What about the politics in Townsend were there some politically active students, or politically conscious students?

GREER: I don't remember the high school, when I went off the college ...

PIEHLER: ... in fact one of the—since we are moving to college, I guess, to make sure I ask you, you have very distinct memories when you were in ROTC and going to City College. So I want to make sure, because I remember your story very vividly on that.

GREER: I started in college in 1938. And the ... liberal thinking in New York at that time was very much ... anti-military, anti-ROTC. But mostly influenced by my older brothers ... they said, "The way things are going in Europe"—and don't forget all this time Spain was in the throes of this terrible civil war—"sooner or later the United States was going to get into—there is going to be a war, the United States was going to get into it, it was inevitable. And you don't want to be an enlisted man, you wanted to be an officer, don't you?" So, they encouraged me to sign up for ROTC.... The problem with ROTC at City College was it was only infantry. And the—it didn't really appeal to me very much. But I signed up for the two years, the first two years, and then dropped it. I didn't go for the more intensive ...

PIEHLER: The advanced ...

GREER: ... the advanced ... third or fourth years, nor did ... my brother Jerry. Now, Norman, the oldest of us, had ... not signed up with ROTC, but he was more involved in—it's still not clear to me, I thought he had joined a Marine Reserve, but apparently he did not, because he was

obviously not called up. He was drafted in ... 1942 and spent three and half years in the air force. My other brother Jerry volunteered the week after Pearl Harbor and went to cadet training in January of '42. And he was in the service over four years. He was fighting. They encouraged me to go into ROTC, which meant ... at least one day a week I went to school in uniform. And that was not a popular thing to do in 1938. It was not a popular thing ...

PIEHLER: Particularly at City College.

GREER: It was certainly not a popular thing in my history class where my instructor was one of the Foner brothers, who's nephew was Erie ...

PIEHLER: Oh yes, yeah Eric Foner.

GREER: Yeah. And I don't know whether—my memory isn't clear, if my instructor was his father or uncle [Jack or Phil]. But they were both instructors at City College, and they made it clear that ... they didn't like to see ROTC uniforms. I signed up for the corps, so I had to wear the uniform. That is the way it was. I don't think I got the grade I deserved because of it. But there the politics had become open and the organizations that were active on campus, American Student Union, one degree of Leftism. And the further to the left were the YPSL's, Young People's Socialists League. And, I don't really remember YCL, Young Communist League, but I'm sure they were there someplace. Exactly where the Foner sympathies were, I'm not sure, but it was the history class in particular, that this was all being encouraged ... to come out. The fact was that whatever their views were, was from their point of view, was Right wing. (Laughter) It's hard for me to believe today. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah, well I think that's also—you mentioned Spain.

GREER: I mentioned working in the drugstore before. Just like the guy who owned it, he had his brother working in the drugstore too ... as an employee. He was a pharmacist. Moe Bernstein, who was a very nice, sweet guy who I have wonderful memories. He was like another older brother to me. He was probably was a little older than my older brother Norman, but more his contemporary. And ... whether or not Moe was really a Communist, we will never know. He certainly harbored left-wing sympathies and it bothered—this is a period ... from around '36 or '37 to 1940, ... and the Spanish Civil War was 1939. Moe's friends, one after another, were volunteering for the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. And his heart was there too. Why he didn't actually pick himself up and go is—still single at the time—I don't know.... He made me very conscious of what was going on in Spain, because he would get letters from Spain from ... some of his friends until they were killed, and then ... I was very conscious of the Spanish Civil War. Completely sympathetic to the Republic side, both with the American ...

PIEHLER: Embargo?

GREER: [The] embargo was sinful, and became more apparent as the ... German activities, German air force support—German military support of the Franco side became better publicized. And still we—Roosevelt stood with his hands-off policy. I think probably ... it was one of Roosevelt's several major errors and sins.

PIEHLER: ... At City College, you were made to feel reactionary.... Looking back on it, how did the student body divide, and how much of the student body—because I got the impression from one person I interviewed who went to City College, he was sort of in the murky middle and he, sort of, [there] was all of this going around in front of him and he just wanted to go to his classes.

GREER: That was largely true of me also. I didn't chose to—I didn't ... take an active ... position on politics, Soviet Union, or things of that sort. It was just the fact that I show up one day of the week in uniform and they labeled me as being one of those. Of course, in 1940 ... once, you know, Hitler betrayed his pact with Stalin and in 1939 he attacked Poland, ... the left-wingers switched overnight from being pacifists to ...

PIEHLER: When the Soviet Union was invaded?

GREER: Sure.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you remember that?

GREER: Oh yeah, it was instantaneous for the change in attitude. (Laughter) The rallies “to help our good friends in the Soviet Union.” It was kind of ridiculous. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You mentioned that college was a lot easier, was an easier transition ...

GREER: Relatively, yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah relatively. When you entered, or I guess, your thinking when you were in high school and college, what career did you—what did you hope to do, I mean, the phrase is what did you hope to do for a living, you know?

GREER: I had made a living, I was definitely ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, and you were already working ...

GREER: I was already making money, because, you know, the need was there. My mother was a strong influence, probably because of the people up there on the wall there—(gestures to family pictures)—strongly influenced, not my oldest brother because he was brilliant, he started college in ... I think 1932. I think he was originally class of '36 and actually got his degree around '40. So in 1932 when he started college things were still pretty good at home, he joined a fraternity that was pretty good.

PIEHLER: Yeah, that's a sign, yeah.

GREER: And he had a nice social life. He was much more social than ... Jerome or I were. Jerome and I were more influenced by my mother's saying, “Look, through the Depression the

one person in the family whose income was not hurt at all was Uncle Joe the accountant.”  
(Laughter) So, we became accountants.

PIEHLER: Because of the example of Uncle Joe? It what was not just an abstract—Uncle Joe managed to stay ...

GREER: Joe did very well his all of his life. He died, oh let’s see ... about seven, eight years ago in his mid-nineties. Still had his accounting practice. He had a computer at home, linked to the computer in the office.

PIEHLER: So, he was still ...

GREER: Filing tax returns in his nineties. (Laughter)

ALICE: Down on Park Avenue.

GREER: He lived a couple blocks from here on Park Avenue near 79<sup>th</sup>, and belonged to an orthodox synagogue. And, I think, ... at one time he was president up on 85<sup>th</sup>, between Lexington and Paris. And that is where they held his funeral. At the funeral these two gray-haired fellows sitting up front just behind the immediate family—you know, it was kind of principal mourners—just stood out in the crowd. I got a hold of my cousin, one of Joe’s sons after the funeral. I said, “Who were those two men. I don’t recognize them.” Oh, he says “Those—they worked for my father, you know for sixty odd years now.” (Laughter) He says, “Well when they came to work, my father told them, ‘Someday when I retired this firm will be yours.’” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, he never retired? (Laughs) That’s a good story.

GREER: I became an accountant and worked ... duing my last semester doing the evening session. I once worked for an accounting firm, that’s another funny story. I think I told you this years ago. I went to work with a nice accounting firm, David Berdon and Company. And I started there the third week in November. Before that I was working for a small guy, a free lancer. I got into a real accounting firm. I was there about a week. I got a phone call from one of my accounting instructors inviting me to come join his firm and to start classes in the evening session. He was a partner in a nice small well-respected firm Apfel and Englander, during the day and asked me to join them. I said, “Well, I’m working at David Berdon, I just started here and I have to give two weeks notice.” So, after I was there one week I gave them two weeks notice so I could join Apfel and Englander on December 15, Monday, December 15, 1941. Well, after working out one of my two weeks notice at David Burton, that Sunday the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. And I went to work Monday morning and ... everybody wanted to hear Roosevelt address Congress, “The Day of Infamy Speech.” And we didn’t have portable radios then, but there was a radio in the office of one of the partners, and he wasn’t there, and a bunch of us, must be ten or fifteen guys, crowded into his office to listen to his radio. And Roosevelt was speaking, and in the middle of it the partner came in the room and said with great indication “What are you people doing in my office?” You have to understand the time, this was coming out of the Depression, people were fearful of their bosses, intimidated by them, and to be

addressed like that where we were trespassing in his office that was upsetting. But these were changing times and someone yelled out “Fuck you!” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I think you said this story in mixed company at the office, yeah. You cleaned it up for me ... so it was much more—you didn’t ... (Laughs)

GREER: But it was the end of an era and the beginning of a new one.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Because I remember, in fact I was going to ask you about that story because in fact, it was sort of, you would never say this to a boss. But for the circumstance ...

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... Was it your sense that this was it, this was your war right away, or did you ...

GREER: Oh sure, because my brother says this was ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, so this was not a ...

GREER: ... I mean, this is why they told me in 1938 to go into ROTC. So, this is almost four years later. But it was inevitable, and Roosevelt knew it was inevitable in all the deals he made with the British, lend lease, the destroyers. It was because it had to happen, and the Japanese merely facilitated the decision making by bombing Pearl Harbor.

PIEHLER: How aware ... were you of ... feelings towards Roosevelt’s effort to aid the allies?

GREER: Completely. I mean as New Yorkers we tend to be internationalists. We know that our fate, our lives, our economy, and everything else are tied up with the rest of the world. We can’t bury our head in midwestern sand... What happens there affects us. And that’s why the sympathy for the Republic ... in Spain as early as ’36 and ’37. Certainly, I don’t know, it was far from universal in New York, but certainly much more prevalent here than it would have been in the rest of the country. Inevitably, we knew it had to be our fight. The existence of fascist dictators in ... Germany and Italy ... was pernicious. You see, as much as I dislike [George W.] Bush—I know this isn’t the thrust of this conversation (laughs)—I find fault with him in so many ways, I don’t criticize him for the idea of going into the Iraq. Assuming his intelligence had been correct—which is a big assumption (laughter)—but if the intelligence had been correct and [Saddam] Hussein had been developing weapons of mass destruction, then his decision to go in was justified. And in a way it plays back into what I have been saying about Spain, and the inevitability of going into the war in Europe once Hitler invaded Poland ... in 1939.

PIEHLER: So, Pearl Harbor, in a sense—the fact we entered the war, this is no surprise to you? About Pearl Harbor ...

GREER: No. The event was a surprise, and the, you know, the military blow it represented, but not the fact that it happened. Something like that [seemed] more likely to have happened on the

European front rather than Japan taking this initiative, that was the surprise, not the nature of the event.

PIEHLER: Before going to war, I just want to make sure we haven't missed anything from the pre-war. You graduated again, you graduated in 194 ...

GREER: I got my degree in June '42. I was supposed to in January '42, but spread my ... last semester over two semesters of evening sessions, doing eight credits each semester.

PIEHLER: And so you got a job, you started working as an accountant?

GREER: Before 1941, while I was still an undergraduate.

PIEHLER: And, I guess ... this is always a hypothetical, if the war hadn't come along it sounds like you would of stayed as an accountant and was the goal to take the CPA exam and ...

GREER: It was, which I did in 1946. Jumping ahead—the requirement then, I'm not sure exactly how it reads today, at least in New York State, was that in addition to your appropriate ... college training you had to take the CPA exam, which I think consisted of four parts, one of which was called practical problems. That, you were not supposed to take until you had completed three years of acceptable experience as an accountant. The other parts you could take earlier. Which I didn't, I took all four parts at the same time. I'm not sure about that, taking the other parts early. I had to have three years experience. Some time in 1946 after getting out of the service I sat down to figure out how much experience I really had. (Laughter) Started working for this little independent accountant ... in September '41, followed by David Berdon, Apfel and Englander, and finally being drafted at the end of March 1943. That gave me a year and so many months. And then coming back and going to work on January 2, 1946, the day after, the week after I got out of uniform—my job was waiting for me when I got back. And the exam was in November '46. Add it all up, it wasn't three years, it was about two years eight, nine, ten, eleven months. (Laughter)

I looked through my military orders, that folder over there that 201 file, and I found that three or four times after becoming an officer in February 1945, I had received routine order: “at the following day or following week I was to verify an inventory at the Post Exchange” (laughter)—the quartermaster they needed to sign off if we had a case of beans what have you. I'm really an excellent file folder and I put all of these orders in my 201 file and I made copies of them and sent them with the CPA application to show that while I was in military service I continued to do accounting, auditing work. (Laughter) Either because of carelessness on their part, or lenience, of the times, they accepted me and I sat for the CPA exam in November '46. I became a CPA and whenever it was, a month or two later, that I learned that I passed and I was now a CPA. And I sat down and I said, “You know, I hate this work.” I looked around for a way to get out.

PIEHLER: Which we will pick up, we will get back to that story. One thing, just before leaving New York of the '20s and '30s, I remember one day you were talking about how New Yorkers dressed in that era. I think you particularly talked about men's hats ...



GREER: Oh very much so, not only hats but shirts and ties. To go to ... work in an accounting office, not wearing a white shirt, it was just unheard of. And, by the way, a work week then was five and half days. Oh, we take for granted now that Saturday for a white-collar worker, Saturday and Sunday are automatically days off. Not so! And I'm not talking only of ... accountants. Office workers generally worked five and a half day week. And for accountants, of course, which is still true today, during so-called tax season ... seven, or seven and a half, eight-day week.... It was quite a shock coming back, I think it had changed immediately after the war, I'm not sure, but whenever the five day week was adopted.

PIEHLER: When you came back the five-day week was no longer the standard it had been?

GREER: I'm not sure when the change took place.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But it was still existing after the war? It was ...

GREER: Only for a short while. The other change in life for the ... CPAs was the fact in those days ... tax return deadline was March 15, and extending it to April 15, and then making it much easier to get extensions. You had to apply for an extension, you didn't have it until you got back your approved form then. Now the accountant files a form for automatic extensions, which immediately sets it up for many more months. But that was unknown then.

PIEHLER: Then you had to really get approval?

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Growing up, how far outside of New York City had you traveled before you entered the service? What is the farthest north and south and west you had gone?

GREER: Before I went to work for the accounting firm, because that broadened the horizons to some degree, my grandparents, my grandfather and my grandmother, step-grandmother, lived in ... South Norwalk, Connecticut. So, I was very sophisticated. I knew, you know, the fifty-mile stretch from here to South Norwalk very easily. (Laughter) But beyond that it was extremely limited. I think once—I don't remember what the occasion was, that one pharmacist who I, you know, I liked so much Moe, took me on an excursion one weekend to Port Jervis, New York and I thought that was terrific. And I don't remember why we went there. Uh, then I had ...

PIEHLER: You took, it sounds like, you took the train out ...

GREER: No, he had a car.

PIEHLER: He had a car?

GREER: Yeah. Uh ...

PIEHLER: Never to Philadelphia, never to the Catskills?

GREER: Yes, I took a job in the Catskills. I took a leave of absence from the different job I had at the time. It must have been the summer of 1940. Yeah, I was still working at the drugstore on Broadway and 173<sup>rd</sup> [Street]. And—I didn't take a leave of absence, I quit, but they as soon as I came back they rehired me. And I went to work for a fellow named Joe Baumol who was in a class two years ahead of me ... at City College and who was a professional photographer. Many years later he had this studio in Jackson Heights, but at that time he would go up the Catskills and he had an arrangement with one of the small hotels in South Fallsburg to use space in the basement as a dark room. And he would go around and take pictures of the vacationers, and so on. And he wanted—I had done—he'd seen me do some darkroom work, you know, as an after school activity at City College and ... offered me the job of being his darkroom assistant up in the Catskills. And we went up there, and the first thing we had to do was to buy the chemicals and then set up the darkroom, set up the space: two barrels and a couple of little shutters, you know, slats ... we used as a table to set out the trays, developer, fixer, rinses, and so on. Now, we had to get the chemicals and I remember we hitchhiked to some place ... fifteen, twenty miles away where the prices were cheaper and bought a supply of chemicals to last the summer. Mixed up a large patch of fixer hypo in concentrated form, and he showed me how we will pour over one pot. We poured over the tray—we had four pots of water, and that will give us whatever we need, and we set up the tray with the developer, and put these large jugs with the developer underneath it [with] the jug and the pictures here, and got the—went out shooting the first roll of film, came back, and said, "Let's develop." And I poured the developer into the tray and put the thing down, poured the fixer in the tray and splashed some straight into the mouth of the developer. I had mixed the whole bottle, filled it, the whole bottle of developer, the summer supply of developer. (Laughter) All the money had ...

PIEHLER: Had just ....

GREER: He fired me. (Laughter) I lasted less than twenty-four hours as a ...

PIEHLER: And so you went back to the city?

GREER: Went back to the city and asked them—went into the drugstore and they said, "Yeah we'll take you back." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, you don't have great stories about the resorts or the ...

GREER: That was my great story. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... That's it. (Laughs)

GREER: I stopped off at an employment agency in South Fallsburg to see if I could get another job as a bellhop or whatever it was. And there was a bunch of more experienced guys hanging around waiting for a job and I heard a baseball game on the radio, a Brooklyn game. It was going into the seventh or eighth inning and so far the other team was hitless and I said, "Boy, it looks like a no hitter." And I almost was lynched, because by verbalizing it I had cursed the team. (Laughter) The next batter up got a hit, and it was my fault.

PIEHLER: So, you really had not left New York basically, it strikes me, unless there is a trip that springs to your memory that you may—you never really left—every trip you had taken you could easily get back to New York easily the same night.

GREER: As far as I can remember.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no trips to Chicago or ...

GREER: No, a cousin—one memorable week, my cousin ... and his wife rented an old farmhouse way up in Sussex County, northwest New Jersey, and I spent a week up there with them, which was a great experience for the twenty-two inch piekerel, they gave me a diploma, very creative.... It was not a very mobile existence until I went to work at the accounting firm, and then ... they had clients through Massachusetts, upstate New York I saw a bit more of the world. I had my first plane ride.

PIEHLER: So, you took your first plane ride before the service?

GREER: Yeah, 1942, DC-3 New York to Albany.

PIEHLER: Any memories of that?

GREER: I loved it. It was exciting.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no it was a very—even through air travel was very different from what we think of it today—you once commented in the office about air travel in that, it's a very different world, in terms of how you were dressed and who you would see.

GREER: 1942 I went with one of the partners to Boston by plane. And this is just three years after the ... hurricane of 1939. And it was amazing looking out the window at the DC-3 flying at whatever it was eight to ten, twelve thousand feet to see the forests of eastern Connecticut and Rhode Island. It was flat for miles.

PIEHLER: And so the hurricane, you were—you could clearly see this hurricane damage?

GREER: Oh, amazing. No, I have a vivid recollection of that.

PIEHLER: Is there anything about the pre-war period, pre-World War II, I have forgotten to ask? I think, you told many of the stories ... that I remember you telling me from the pre-war. Had ... you thought of volunteering right after Pearl Harbor? What were your thoughts about ...

GREER: No, uh Jerry did.

PIEHLER: ... Your oldest brother?

GREER: No, second oldest. My father was dead by that time.

ALICE: No, Jerry is the middle brother.

GREER: He was the middle one.

PIEHLER: Yeah, he had immediately volunteered?

GREER: Yeah. Norman was engaged to be married. He did not volunteer, he was drafted. Jerry went into the service in January '42 as a volunteer, meaning he had gone into aviation, he volunteered specifically for aviation cadet.

PIEHLER: Aviation.

GREER: He went into that program. He never took his final exams at City. He got credit for all of his courses and got his diploma as a January '42 graduate ... without having taking the exams, because he probably was in service by the 10<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. And Norman had already moved out, probably living with his girlfriend, I don't remember, she became his wife in April and he was drafted in June and became a weather observer at the Aleutian Islands, and all of that. And I was living alone with my mother at this point and waiting to be drafted and was sworn in on March 29, '43. And I was given one week to pack up and report to active duty April 5. And that left my mother alone, and I have a picture inside of her. She's got a little bar pin over here and if you look very closely you can see three stars on it. And she was a Blue-Star mother, thank God, she was not a Gold Star mother.

PIEHLER: But ... `she wore the pin as she sent you off?

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Now, I guess the question is, why not enlist or, what was your thinking, or just wait for your number to be called?

GREER: Well, I felt an obligation to stay home with her.

PIEHLER: And so partly it was to take care of your mother.

GREER: Yeah, yes.

PIEHLER: ... You are on the home front for one year, what was New York [like], how was wartime New York different from pre-war New York? ... Any distinct memories about 1942?

GREER: No, I think that—I'm not sure food rationing started. I don't know whether it was immediately after we went into the war or a year or more later. I was much more conscious of it coming home on furloughs and leave as an officer. You know, everything was rationed and my mother had to figure out how to use her rations supplies to feed us properly when we came home. Funny story, I may have told you about my brother Jerry after he became a navigator and assigned to what was first called the Ferry Command, it became the Air Transport Command. And late '43, '44 plans for the invasion of Europe were developing, they had to ... fly troop

carriers DC-3s—called C-47s—to England to, you know, where they were using hundreds for the paratroopers in the invasion. And he was sent from his home base in Dallas to a base in New Castle, Delaware. That was the take off point and it became a regular scheduled thing for about two months. That they would take off from New Castle in a DC-3 and it would stop in Newfoundland and Ireland and so on, you know on the way over, bringing a new plake to a base in England, and then take all of the crews—twenty odd or how many you can carry on a transport—bring them back, have a day or two off, you know with my mother, and then go back to work in New Castle and make another round. And after this, he did this circuit three or four times showing up at home, you know, every week. He was reported to the police as a deserter (laughter) because he was around the house so much.

PIEHLER: And the police came by? (Laughs) You know that is a good story. How did the war change the accounting firm? When you see your fellow, you know ...

GREER: I don't know how it changed the accounting firm, but it changed our mindsets because when we went to work before the war we went to work with a certain element of fear and subservience and rank consciousness. If the boss said, "Jump," you jump. And ... during the war the bosses had to learn to change their manners, because there were severe labor shortages. Whatever accountants—for the first time you start to see women working on the staff of public accounting firms.

PIEHLER: While you're still—that is happening?

GREER: Yes. Yes, they hired—the first one I remember was in 1942, was a woman named Janis Amer. I don't know what happened to her, but she—the firm which, you know, liked to think of themselves as liberal progressive thinkers were very proud of the fact that they were one of the first to have a woman in public accounting in an auditing position going out ... to visit clients.

PIEHLER: So, this was something they were not reluctant to do, they—given the war they decided—they embraced it?

GREER: Well, of course, the war ...

PIEHLER: Yes.

GREER: ... the shortage. I was the second one drafted from the staff, another fellow I run into occasionally, several years older, still around Bernie Barnett was the first one ... drafted. And then it seemed that the staff was going to be picked off one by one. And then Janis was the first, then Betty Rothwax I don't remember the others. And finally when I came back in '46 the room looked different. The staff [were mostly] women.

PIEHLER: What kind of work were you doing, you know, as an accountant in 1942?

GREER: It varied with the accounts, the sophistication of the accounting system in some cases there were true audits and other cases. It was more of a ... taking the place of the head

bookkeeper who summarized at the end of the month, pulling data together. And at least, at that time, there wasn't the clear-cut distinction between the tax staff and the audit staff. When it came to tax season we all just became tax accountants. Now auditors and the tax people work in their department all year round.

PIEHLER: So, you were much more of generalist ...

GREER: Yes. And they did not have any large publicly traded corporations and so we didn't get lost in those huge orders ... that other people, Price Waterhouse ...

PIEHLER: So, you're doing midsize and small companies?

GREER: That's right, and a lot of individuals and investors, a lot of real estate. It varied in that respect. And what made it attractive too was many firms including the one I worked at for three weeks, David Burton which is now a very large firm, not one of the big ...

PIEHLER: No, but I have heard of the firm.

GREER: Much of that work then was in the garment district. Garment district in New York was a much bigger industry, many more companies actually doing manufacturing in the lofts, ... and so many accountants, many hundreds and hundreds of accountants made their living off garment district finance. Apfel Englander did not have that kind—we did industrial diamonds, and machine tools, and real estate. It was quite varied.

PIEHLER: So, in some sense, you got a very varied exposure?

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You mentioned individual clients, did you visit any individual clients in that year ...

GREER: Incidentally the one client I should mention is Theurer Wagon Works on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 56<sup>th</sup> Street. And ... they made truck bodies. You bought your truck from Chevrolet and had Theurer Wagon Works build your body designs for your type of cargo you were going to transport. And they were German. (Laughs) They looked German, the work ... all of the men regardless of—unless they were completely office workers, wore these white cotton coats (laughter) down below the knee, but not all the way. And I was asked to work on that account. "But if you don't mind," they told me in the office we would like to introduce you over there as Lionel Green, not Greenbaum.

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Lionel Greer on November 13, 2003, in New York City. With Kurt Piehler. And you were—the tape just cut you off, so, they said to you they really wanted you ...

GREER: They rather avoided the question of—Interestingly the partners of this firm two Apfel brothers and two Englander brothers?) had been born Jewish. I don't know if any of them were practicing ... Judaism, but ... I don't know whether ...

PIEHLER: They could have actually converted to Christianity.

GREER: ... could have converted. One of them may, but in any event they wanted to minimize—in the pre-World War II atmosphere, they wanted to minimize the Jewish identification with certainly clients where they felt there was a sense of ...

PIEHLER: So, particularly this German firm, which is very German, they just said you would be Mr. Green. And then you said there was another ...

GREER: There was a client—they had a group of consumer co-op societies scattered through New England as clients. Also some farmer co-ops, poultry farms in Massachusetts.... One of them in particular—I was ordered there, I think this was in 1946, and one of my colleagues on the staff was a fellow named Cramer. And the manager of the co-op said “Cramer, Cramer when it's spelled with a K it's usually Jewish, you're not Jewish then, are you?” And he said, “Yes, I am.” And the atmosphere in the room dropped twenty degrees. Does that sort of thing happen today? I don't know, but ... that was still a hangover of the pre-war atmosphere.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I would be very, I guess I would be very surprised if it happened in this greater New York area today. It may happen, ... but you were saying in that this did influence your decision to change your name.

GREER: Oh absolutely. And ... both of my brothers at one point said that they were going to do the same thing and that we would all three do it. Because my father had talked about his cousins changing their names during World War I, because you did not attribute so much to anti-Semitism, but rather an anti-German ...

PIEHLER: An anti-German sentiment.

GREER: And so ... one family of God knows of how many brothers ... I have never been in touch with, became Grahams. And my father had said it wasn't a major issue with him, but maybe he should have got it—that was as much as he talked about it. But it was on our minds through the late 1930s, and while we were in the service we corresponded with each other and we said, “Let's do it.” And at the last minute one of my brothers decided not to, and his son is still Greenbaum.

PIEHLER: Was this your oldest brother who doesn't do it?

GREER: No the middle one.

PIEHLER: The middle brother.

GREER: My older brother ... and I were the ones who did it. I did it in Mississippi and it took about two hours and cost thirty-one dollars and fifty cents. And my brother did it in New York and it took about three months and cost a couple of hundred dollars. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, some things did work better in Mississippi? (Laughs)

GREER: Absolutely! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: In being drafted by early 1943, where did you have to go?

GREER: At the classification center, which was in the building called Grand Central Palace—torn down to make room for another ... large office building at Lexington Avenue between 46<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup>, or 45<sup>th</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup>. They gave us—the first step in being drafted was to get a postcard, which I still have, instructing you to get to a neighborhood physician. I used, actually, Inwood, just above Washington Heights, but it was called a pre-induction physical or whatever the wording is on this little postcard. And what it really meant was that he was going to take a blood test to see if we had syphilis.

PIEHLER: That was ... the extent of the physical?

GREER: That was all it was. And it was my first experience in having blood taken.

PIEHLER: You had never had it taken before?

GREER: No. He put the needle in and I'm watching very closely. (Laughter) And he notices that I'm watching the blood filling up the tube. And he said, "Hey you know that is not borsht." And I looked at him and I passed out cold. (Laughter) There was a more complete physical at Grand Central Palace when we were called down. Early morning I had to meet at the draft board on a Broadway and 158<sup>th</sup> Street. And then we went down by subway to Grand Central Palace and had a physical. I passed the physical. It was a very fast physical. All they do was count how many arms you had and how many legs and noses and if you had the right number you were accepted at that point. A much more ... rigorous examination was the first day at Fort Dix. (Reading) "Notice of Registration Physical Examination December, 1942. From local board Number 65, Room 10, 3785 Broadway, New York, NY, no zip code. You are hereby directed to report to"—and it's typed in—"Dr. Morton Kulick at 570 West 204<sup>th</sup> Street for physical examination at 5:15 p.m. on December 15, 1942. Failure to do so ... result in you being declared a delinquent and subjected to the penalties provided by law. Irving J. Hess, member of the local board."

PIEHLER: This is your notice from your draft board?

GREER: Yeah. That's the pre-induction—that's December.

PIEHLER: Now you didn't think at the time, ... of trying to get a deferment for hardship because of your mother?



GREER: Yes, I did. I applied for it. And was told that the fact that she already had two sons in service, I would be the third, and she would be left alone, was not going to be grounds for support and she urged me to do something about it. And so I asked for a hearing and one of the partners at the firm Howard Apfel, came to the hearing with me and said, “You know we are going into tax season and I’m going to need him badly.” So, they gave me a thirty-day deferment. And so I reported for duty, back to duty on April 5, rather than a month earlier because of Howard Apfel not because of my mother ...

PIEHLER: Not because you ...

GREER: ... but because the accounting firm would need me, and the government needed the revenue or the tax returns that I would be filling out.

PIEHLER: So, for the convenience of the government.

GREER: And so, following that ... blood test, I got this postcard dated December 16, saying that I had been classified 1-A by the local board. And then somewhere here I got the notice to show up December 29. And at the ... Grand Central Palace after the superficial ... physical exam there, there was a ...

PIEHLER: A psychiatrist?

GREER: An interview, the psychologist was part of it. I’ll talk about psychologists in a bit.

PIEHLER: Yeah, okay you have a great story there, which I remember.

GREER: But we went to the desk and a guy said, “You know we don’t have to ask what service to assign you to ...

PIEHLER: “We can just do it.”

GREER: ... “We can do it based on the ... demand, the quotas we were given to fill. But do you have a preference.” I said, “both of my brothers are in the air force, I would like to be in the air force too.” So, he checked something off ... and we reported a week later. Then we were going to find out for the first time which service we were assigned to. Well, we found out I think only after we got out of induction, leaving Fort Dix and wound up a couple hours later in Atlantic City and we were told this was an air force basic training center. But I wasn’t in the air force, I was assigned to signal corps attached to air force. And to this day I don’t know what that means, because this is April and I continued to be signal corps attached to the air force all the time I was in Atlantic City until the last day of July, when they shut it down as a basic training center and used all of those hotels for returnees, a rest and rehabilitation center for people coming back from Europe. And that day when I was shipped out they—because they had to ship the last residue left from basic training, which I was one, they reclassified me as air force.

PIEHLER: So, you reported first in, just so I get the chronology, you report, when you were finally called up, you reported in New York?

GREER: The first time, March 29 you report ... to ...

PIEHLER: To the physical.

GREER: ... to the physical the ... assignment of what service I would be put in, and we were sworn in. As of that moment I was in the army [the Air Force was part of the Army at that time]. But then we were told that you were going to report to your draft board a week from now early in the morning of April 5, and then you will go to basic training.

PIEHLER: And that is when you went to Fort Dix?

GREER: Well, first of all for the next week I went back to work ... because if I didn't work I didn't get paid. (Laughter) I was making, I started at sixteen dollars a week, this was almost a year and a half later, I might have gotten a raise.

PIEHLER: So, you were making sixteen dollars a week as an accountant when you first started?

GREER: Fifteen dollars as a ... cashier at a drugstore.

PIEHLER: Yeah, sixteen as an accountant?

GREER: Yes.

PIEHLER: So, it was a dollar more.

GREER: That's right. Because ...

PIEHLER: This drugstore job was ... with a dinner and the malt was a really good job.

GREER: That's right.

PIEHLER: I mean this was, so you weren't exaggerating about ...

GREER: No, no, no. No, I was bringing home uh, if you multiply that by four and a fraction weeks, I was bringing home more than sixty dollars a week. Our rent for that apartment was probably thirty-eight dollars something of that sort. No, that was throwing a big weight toward ... you know ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. To helping the house ...

GREER: Helping the household. Then to go to that, to fifty dollars a month as a private, that was an economic blow. Therefore, it became important that I become an officer so I could make more money.

PIEHLER: Because how was your mother getting by, now you're the third son in the service?

GREER: Well she got—by this time, my brother Jerry was an officer ... on flying duty, so that was a 50 percent flying duty bonus. He got a 150 dollars a month plus seventy-five—is 225 dollars plus allowances for his own food and lodging, which—an officer gets these allowances and then has the choice in peacetime if whether they want to live on base, off base, bachelor's officers quarters, what have you. But he was sending a substantial portion of his 225 dollars home to support my mother. And I think ... I probably kept ... about ten dollars and I sent forty dollars a month home. Then I became a PFC ... when I finished basic training. I didn't finish basic training, I had an appendicitis attack while I was in basic training after only two or three weeks and that threw me completely out of kilter because when I—the way they handled appendectomies then was very different than today. You weren't allowed out of bed for six or seven days, so the whole convalescence period stretch on for about four or five weeks. You know today, they let you walk out ...

PIEHLER: Today they pretty much ... (Laughs)

GREER: But by the time I got back to full duty, they weren't bringing in any more trainees, basic trainees, because they knew that were shutting the base down at the ... end of July as a basic training center and using it only for R&R. And so, I was on permanent KP. They turned one of the big hotels back into civilian use, the Traymore and for a week, or two weeks, I carried furniture out of ...

PIEHLER: It's interesting, because I once asked you when you were talking about the war many years ago and you basically said I never got deployed. And I think I asked you how much did you have to do with it. And you said, "Only once did I do something consciously." I said, "was officer's camp ..."

GREER: When they finally disposed of everyone, all of the basic trainees and, you know, I told you the residue they shipped about fifteen of us to Scott Field, Illinois to go through radio ... operator and mechanic school. And I became a ROM. And learned that we were going to be assigned to be crew members of Air Force planes. Many of these guys went from there to troop transport and got shot down ... by the U.S. Navy at the invasion of Sicily. But as long as we were going to be air crew—and I was so conscious of the fact that I wanted to make more money and here I am a PFC making fifty-four dollars a month. I became a sergeant, you know, as a radio operator and with flight duty that would bring me up to, oh I don't know, hundred or 110 dollars a month—not as much in the way my brother's making 225 dollars as a lieutenant by that time he was probably a first lieutenant. And so, I volunteered for aviation cadet training. That was the one time ...

PIEHLER: You volunteered ...

GREER: Yes. Other than that I just left it to chance.

PIEHLER: Well, it's interesting, because your story about what happens when you get the appendicitis—because I was, just was so—the air force basically kept moving you around, but it started very early once you got out of sequence with the ...

GREER: That's right.

PIEHLER: With the basic training ...

GREER: I probably had my appendix out before the end of April. I was in the service for less than a month.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. But that was ...

GREER: I was on KP ... on a Saturday. And it was at an officer's mess, I think, the bachelor's office mess and the—I was assigned to be assistant to the dairymen, the whatever, I forget what they call the guy in the kitchen specifically. But he's got fruit, dairy, ice cream all the goodies. And I was his assistant, and I made a pig of myself. (Laughter) You know, I was about as tall as I was going to be, just turning twenty, but I was extremely thin, all of the milkshakes with the two egg yolk did not do a damn bit of good I was 125, 128 pounds. And I really gorged myself. I was sick all the next day. Monday morning fall out for roll call, whenever it was six o'clock, you know, line up in the street in front of the hotel right off the boardwalk and as soon as the sergeant called my name, I said, "Here." I collapsed they got me up to the nearest first aid station, the Hotel, and took a count of white blood cells. He came in and said, you know, he said, "You got an infection someplace in your body." And he poked and he said, "your appendix." But he said, "but the infection isn't quite high enough for them to treat it as an emergency," he said, "which could be a problem for you, because if they treat it with ice packs it could get better." He said, "Has this ever happened before?" I said, "Yeah, I have had ice packs put on it ... a couple times as a teenager." He said, "Well, that's bad, because when you're overseas and you get a real bad attack, you're in big trouble." I said, "What should I do?" He said, "if you want me to go back I'll check the count maybe I made a mistake." (Laughter) So, he came back and said, "You know, I made a mistake." And two hours later my appendix was out, an emergency, I mean ...

PIEHLER: But, I mean, that, in fact he was very correct. If you had been out on an isolated base, or.... I just want to back up a little going back to, sort of, you mentioned being at Fort Dix or reporting ...

GREER: Let me tell you a little story about Fort Dix, because ...

PIEHLER: That's before Atlantic City ...

GREER: Yeah, ... the train took us from Grand Central to Fort Dix. And the tracks in Atlantic City run straight east towards the ocean and the terminal building is not a block or two in from the boardwalk. Get off the train, and say, "Oh, Fort Dix, hey not bad." And they line us up—we didn't know how to march yet. I did because I was ROTC and all of that. But ... "Line up," and [they] made some of us march down to the boardwalk, column left, up the boardwalk to march to the hotel—Shelburne I think was the name of the hotel then—but as we made the column left, the ... ocean, the beach and the ocean are on our right side. And those sophisticates among us, in the groups from New York and New Jersey we had seen an ocean before. Somewhere along the

line they had hitched up a couple of cars that had come down from Wisconsin and they had never seen the ocean before. And so, when they did the column left these guys saw the ocean they broke ranks ran to the rail and said, "Oh look, wow!" It was glorious, the sun shining, early April, and they, somebody in the ranks one of the sophisticated New York or New Jersey city guys were all mixed together and said to the sergeant, "Come on, you know, we want to get settled." Sergeant says, "no, no come on give them a chance. First time you got to be sympathetic. They want to see the ocean let them see the ocean." I thought it was such a beautiful touch. For about ten or fifteen minutes the sergeants just ...

PIEHLER: That's funny. I remember you said that you and your fellow New Yorkers thought these were the biggest hayseeds you know ...

GREER: Oh, they were so far ahead of us.

PIEHLER: That's what you also said ...

GREER: Sex and worldliness, they traveled and all.

PIEHLER: That's what you also said. I mean, you got this first impression which was not ...

GREER: That's right they ... there was a snobbism among the New Yorkers and I have to include the contingents from Jersey City, because if anything my vague recollection is that they were more loud mouthed than we were. (Laughter) Uh, the fellows from Wisconsin as we got to know them were very solid. One of them I remember particularly we moved through radio school and cadet training together Marvin C. Gietzel of Horican, Wisconsin I still remember the Horican High School yell ...

PIEHLER: Oh no, go ahead.

GREER: Olly Olly Olsen, Janny Janny Jansen, Onward, Onward Horican Wisconsin!  
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: Let me—it's ten to two, and it's, sort of, would you like—would this be a good time to have lunch or continue snacking?

GREER: What would you like?

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: So, you have a story that ... your wife has reminded you about ...

GREER: My brother, he was extraordinarily handsome. His uniforms fit him so beautifully and ...

PIEHLER: And he was in a glamorous, I mean the air force was very glamorous.

GREER: Glamorous, they have the ribbons for the various theaters of operation that they had spent time in, the transport command ... navigators wings and he was ... the handsome guy of the family. I grew up listening to my aunts saying, "Oh that Jerry, (laughter) he is really good looking he should be a movie actor." Well two, twice in the service I saw that handsomeness take effect. The first I was telling about the appendectomy in Atlantic City and about that time he was stationed in New Castle, Delaware, not so far away. And he must have been on the phone with my mother who said that I was in the army general hospital in Atlantic City and he got over to see me two, three, four days into my hospitalization. Got there late in the day, supposedly after visitors hours, walking in with this officers uniform on—and these were all air force people, but none of them with wings. That set you apart as being the elite, and so he had no trouble getting up to see me at seven-thirty, eight in the evening. I happened to be alone in the ... hospital room, which was a converted hotel. And for the next forty-five minutes, or however long he visited me, it was a procession of nurses coming in offering us fruit, orange juice, (laughter) "Can I get you something cold? Can I bring you anything? Are you—can I fix your pillow?"

PIEHLER: This had not occurred before?

GREER: Nothing like it before or after he left. The service wasn't so bad, the service remained pretty good. But what happened was after a while he said, "Hey I got to catch the last train back," or however he was getting out of Atlantic City, looked at his watch and said goodbye and about thirty or forty-five minutes later he came in a said, "I want to say goodbye again." And I said yes, "But what are you doing with all that lipstick on your collar?" (Laughter) He was a mess. He had to go straight from there to the dry cleaner. So, that was one time that I saw—the other time I told you I ran into this, uh ...

PIEHLER: The sergeant that who was your teacher.

GREER: Schwartzbartl, yeah. He introduced me to the chief room clerk at the Biltmore, because during the war it was extremely hard to get a hotel room, but once Gil had introduced me to the head room clerk and apparently he was a regular there, I was able to get rooms at the Biltmore as rule. I met a very nice ... young woman in Los Angeles and dated her each weekend I came into town from Victorville. And one Thursday or Friday I got a phone call. It was Jerry. He was on the phone in Long Beach, California at an air base. He had just gotten back from making a delivery run to someplace in the South Pacific. And he had a day or two he could layover before going back to his own base in Dallas. I said, "Great I will see you in town." But I said, "I have a date, you want to see if I could line up a date for you? He said, "Sure!" So I called—I don't remember the young woman's name, (laughs) my date and said, "Hey my brother is in town could you get a friend?" She said, "Yes, I'll try." So we met at noon in the lobby of the Biltmore and there was my date standing with a very attractive young woman. And she—when my date introduced me to her, the woman said, "I understand that your brother has been overseas." And I said, "Oh yeah, he has had a terrible time, he has been overseas for a long time," [three or four days probably]. But, I didn't spell it out she said, "Well, I would really like—you know, I wish I could be more friendly, but I can't stay out overnight, I promised my parents I'd be back tonight." So, I said, "He is going to be very disappointed, because he was really looking forward to being back in America." It was all very much an exaggeration ...

PIEHLER: ... She was wanting her out just in case.

GREER: At that moment I turned around, through the revolving doors coming into the lobby forty feet away, Jerry. I said, "Oh, there is my brother." And she said, "Is that your brother?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Excuse me," and she ducked into a phone booth and came out and said, "No problem." (Laughter)

ALICE: He really was a very handsome man.

GREER: Yep.

PIEHLER: You also said that he had a very hard war. This um ...

GREER: The tension, the tension was terrible ...

PIEHLER: Because while ...

GREER: On the return flights they often were bringing back these war wearies. Bombers that—I don't know why he seemed to be assigned to medium bombers: to B-25s, B-26s. More than the—I think it was more by chance, and they were terrible things to fly. After they got back here they—if they thought it was worthwhile they completely rehabilitated them, but at the advanced air bases they just put them in good enough condition to maybe make the trip back. So, a number of times they had engines quit on them that sort of thing. Disproportionate to the amount of bombers ...

PIEHLER: Well also where he was, this is was when he was flying over in the China-Burma-India, over the hump ...

GREER: Oh, that was a discouraging experience, because they flew tons and tons, plane loads of supplies to Chiang Kai-shek's army and then on the last flight watched the warehouse being burned so that they wouldn't be captured by the communists. And Chiang Kai Sheik is, ever read Stillwell's book?

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. So, your brother was very—he witnessed some of this?

GREER: Oh yeah. It was a completely different war from what I experienced.

PIEHLER: Because initially, in some ways ... [it seemed] a pretty cushy assignment in the first part of the war. You know, he could come home quite a bit. So later he got ...

GREER: It wasn't fun flying the Atlantic. C-47, that wasn't intended for that kind of flight. A C-47s range is about, I don't know, might have been 12-1400 miles, it stretched it with extra tanks to get it as far as Ireland. You see that was also hard, I ...

PIEHLER: Did he ... ever talk about any particularly close calls?

GREER: I think the time he was probably most ... threatened and frightened was in New Guinea going in a B-25 or a B-26 which was a very—probably small, two engine attack bomber and it hadn't been fitted for any armaments, yet that was an advance base being attacked by some Japanese fighters.

PIEHLER: That's a pretty close call.

GREER: Yeah. (Laughter) No he had a very, very rough time compared to all my experiences, which were meaningless.

PIEHLER: Do you want to pause for a second and eat? I don't want to ...

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: Well I figured you, you talked about one brother—I think one thing that if I could, if it's okay—his wife was really never interested in hearing about the war. Your middle brother, is that ...

GREER: I don't know how to explain ...

ALICE: Have you got it on now?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GREER: I don't know how to explain her attitude.

PIEHLER: But would your brother tell you about his experiences? Did your brother tell you about—I mean how do you know so much about your brother's experiences?

GREER: Well, partly because a couple of the stories I told you I was there. Our paths crossed in Atlantic City and in Los Angeles, ... and other times he would reminisce a little bit. And over the years you pick up bits and pieces.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So, when you would talk about it ...

GREER: But ...

PIEHLER: But not much.

GREER: No, no, not a lot, but just enough to pick up these anecdotes. Similarly, with my older brother who married before he was drafted—he married early in '42 and was drafted in probably in June of that year. They settled in California almost immediately after he got out of the service. And so I didn't see him nearly as often as I did my East Coast brother. And ... I would hear only occasionally of his experiences. When he was drafted, he was sent to weather observer school in Illinois and then hung around Walla Walla, Washington and places like that for many



months before he was sent down to the Aleutians. There are two islands in the Aleutians that had been occupied by the Japanese, Attu and Kiska. And I forget which one it was, but he was assigned as an Air Force weather observant to an infantry group that was to be one of the first or second waves on the beach at Attu to recapture it from the Japanese. And one story I remember him telling is the number of casualties that Americans suffered before they found out that the Japanese had vacated the place the day before. The food had been left abandoned and the Japanese had been taken off, but a number of sergeants were shot. American army sergeants were shot by their own troops, and from that the Army learned that the squad sergeants who run the training should not be the ones assigned to lead the troops in combat. Separate them.

PIEHLER: This is an interesting story, which I have never heard of this before. I don't know how widely known that ...

GREER: I don't know whether it is completely accurate either, but ... Norman said that this is what he observed.

PIEHLER: He physically, you mean he actually saw this?

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So, in other words these guys had been training with these sergeants and now they ...

GREER: Were paying them back.

PIEHLER: And they have live ammunition and they're in combat situation, so ...

GREER: They thought they were in a combat situation. It turned out that the Japanese had gone.

PIEHLER: And so what happened afterwards, did he ever say, you know if people got court-martialed or ...

GREER: No, I don't know. They probably couldn't identify the shooters anyway ... They were shooting at a shadow, "I thought I saw somebody there."

PIEHLER: Mm hmm, and a lot of sergeants didn't—so it was really ...

GREER: I don't know whether if there was a lot, but there were some.

PIEHLER: Yeah. No, that's an interesting story. That will be ...

GREER: That was one of his observations as an air force man. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And when—and then what happened to him? Did he stay in Alaska?

GREER: He was—yeah, because this was a very important weather observation. His assignment was to set up a weather station immediately and start radioing weather reports back further east so the air force would have some knowledge of the weather moves in west to east, and so they were picking up the weather information earlier at that point than anyone else was able to register it.

PIEHLER: Now going back to your war.

GREER: My war?

PIEHLER: Your war, your brother is in Alaska.

GREER: I can summarize my war this way. I told you I stilled weighted 120-odd pounds when I went in and when I came home in December '45 I weighted over 180 pounds.

PIEHLER: So, you gained weight in World War II?

GREER: I gained fifty-odd pounds. And my mother immediately put me on diet. (Laughter) She was anti-fat from way back.

PIEHLER: Oh, your mother would now be just, she couldn't believe American society today.

GREER: No, no, she couldn't. It made her sick to look at obese people. I came very quickly down to 160.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. But you had you had been very thin so you ...

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: In Atlantic City ... before your appendicitis—because after your appendicitis everything got throw out of whack, you mentioned marching to the hotels that first time ...

GREER: The usual basic training, learning how to march in formation. Uh, learning how to ... handle a rifle. Go out to the rifle range a place just above Atlantic City called Brigantine where they had the targets set up, so you're shooting through the target into the ocean. And I scored very well with rifle, I was handy with the carbine, you know, I found it so easy and light, and useless in combat, we learned afterwards. (Laughs) Uh, and ... I had a terrible time with the Colt .45 pistol, because it was so heavy and I just couldn't hold the damn thing steady, I wasn't strong enough. And we were taught that almost no one has ever succeeding in hitting an enemy target with a Colt .45. What you do is shoot until your six or seven shots had been used up and then you throw them (laughter) and then it's a deadly weapon. (Laughter) Whether this is true I don't know.

PIEHLER: That's what a sergeant ...

GREER: That's what they said in basic training.

PIEHLER: And you—it sound like, you are getting signal corps, you're more ...

GREER: No, no. What happened?

PIEHLER: Because you say ...

GREER: ... We skipped the three days in ... Fort Dix. We didn't go directly from—I was wrong, we didn't go from Grand Central to Atlantic City, we went from Grand Central to Fort Dix.

PIEHLER: For three days.

GREER: And there you go through a more rigorous physical. You go through the ... tests, the AGCT (Army General Classification Test) and a mechanical aptitude test. Well, I did very well on the AGCT. What surprised me was that I also did very well on the mechanical aptitude; I had no idea. And what I remember, it consisted of: you stand in a little cubicle, and on one wall are assembled all kinds of ... wooden or metal pieces with gears interlocking rods sticking into each other and your instruction, if I remember correctly, going back a few years, was to disassemble it from that wall and reassemble it on the opposite wall. And it was a matter of both getting the pieces to fit together correctly and doing it within the time limit. And I found it extremely simple and I got a very high score. You know, I had high scores on both the AGCT and the mechanical aptitude. And ... the next morning you come down for classification, and it's a big room and at the head of the room there are four, five, or six desks with the nine clowns who are actually doing the classification, and they have a pile of folders in front of them, and they call off your name, you come up sit down and after a very, very brief interview, thirty seconds or whatever it is, they mark down what service you are heading for. You are in the army—and the air force was part of the army, they weren't separate—and so, you're going to be in the army, but where within the army are you going to be assigned?

And I walked into the room and the guy at the first desk over in the corner looks up and says, "Hey Greenbaum, hi!" It's one of my classmates from City College. He says, "Take the first seat, right over there." And he scurries around and he finds my folder on someone else's desk takes it from the other guy, gets rid of the guy he has been interviewing (laughter), calls me up and he says, "You know, I had Bernie Barnett here," you know, I had worked with at Apfel and Englander, and he rattles off this one, that one, he says, "they are all out in Indianapolis at Benjamin Harrison, the finance school." He says, "That's where you're going." (Laughter) I said, "Great." So I shook his hand and said goodbye, and I never saw him again, and I don't remember his name. And I'm called to KP that night and it was a horrible experience: rainy, cold, drizzly night and ... the mess sergeant was bringing coal from the ovens. But he didn't want to burn the coal powder, he only wanted the hard lumps. And I spent the night at a pile of coal, while reaching through the coal with my hands looking for the lumps to pick it out of the powder. This is my second or third night in the army. And it was miserable.

PIEHLER: It sounds like it's a really dreadful experience.

GREER: And they had what they called KP pushers. These are guys who just make sure that the KPs do their work. And he had a knife in a holster stuck in his belt in the middle of his back as though we were some kind of enemy threat to him. But it was—it gave him some symbol of authority over us. It was the most miserable night I spent in the Army. Nothing ... like it happened in the next three years. And I finally got off duty five or six in the morning, fell into my bunk and I may have slept a half an hour, and somebody's shaking me, "Where the hell are you? Your name has been called, you are on a troop train going out in a half an hour." And I had to pull myself out of there, my hands are black, my clothes and uniform was a mess, get on a troop train. Next thing I know we were in Atlantic City where I picked up ...

PIEHLER: Not in Indianapolis?

GREER: No, this doesn't look anything like Indianapolis ... (Laughter) They don't have an ocean in Indiana. I asked whenever I had a chance later on, "Whatever happened to finance school?" "Oh, because," they said, "you are classified to be a communications chief. Signal corps communications chief attached to air force. You'll be whatever a communications chief does ... at an air base someplace." Only within the last five years I ran into a guy who, I think it was in Korea, ... he wasn't old enough to be in World War II and happened to mention that he was a signal corps officer. I said, "What did you do?" He said, "I was a commanding officer of a communications center." I said, "What's a communication chief?" (Laughter) "Oh," he said, "That's a very responsible job." He said, "Without my communications chief—he was the guy who really knew how to run the place. He ran the place he was a master sergeant, a six-striper, and not only gave out the assignments, but when the radio traffic was heavy it was his responsibility to ... give priorities to some messages over others." And I said, "I was supposed to become a communications chief, but I had appendicitis [which] threw me out of wack, never caught up and I ... wound up a navigator." He said you know, "You would have found it interesting." (Laughter) There was a very interesting ...

PIEHLER: Well, because you would have been redoing all this traffic, in part.

GREER: Yeah, where it may have been. So, the reason why I wasn't sent to finance school was because I was too healthy. All of these other fellows had bad eyesight or ... some minor physical handicap. Not enough to keep them out of service, but qualified them for finance school. And that's my career in—thinking I was going to go to finance school for twelve hours.

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

PIEHLER: It's ... striking, which I had not known about the appendicitis, that really does throw you so out of wack in terms of ...

GREER: Had Atlantic City continued to be a basic training center and had they been bringing in more groups of ... trainees, I probably then would have been simply thrown in with the next class. But there weren't any more next classes, because they had stopped the inflow.

PIEHLER: And so, you stayed there for several weeks?

GREER: They didn't know what to do with us. And you know, so just moving things and doing KP and ... spending time working the targets as the other groups finished their training, the guys who had gotten further along ...

PIEHLER: Just waiting for this facility to transition.

GREER: Finally being told ... "You're the only basic trainees left and the whole bunch of you are going on ... the train to Scott Field, Illinois to become radio operator-mechanics."

PIEHLER: And so when did you arrive in Illinois?

GREER: This was ... the beginning of August 1943. And the program went from August up to about Christmas. Sometime during that period we were given the opportunity to sign up for ... aviation cadet training, but were told, "First you finish radio school. We are going to make sure you have qualifications in case ... you don't, you're not accepted or don't complete the cadet training." And so we finished and became—I forget the army service number for a ROM radio operator-mechanic, but qualified ... most of the fellows by then were sergeants and shipped off someplace. And a couple dozen of us, or however many I don't remember, were put on a bus, taken across the river to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, outside of suburban St. Louis and went through the cadet ... testing and screening process. I aced the physical part and then, you referred to this earlier, an interview with a psychiatrist. And he came into ... his little cubical as I recall, and he had my folder, he opened it and he said uh, "Yeah you graduated from college in '42?" "Yeah." He said, "Okay, your done, your okay."

PIEHLER: Didn't he ask you about if you liked girls or not?

GREER: No. No, he didn't. He just said, "You're done," or something like to that effect. And I was remarkably self-confident thinking that, because usually I wouldn't have had the nerve to ask, but I said, "I'm curious about something. You know, I heard that this is very rigorous screening, that you question people closely ... in order to make your judgment as to whether they are qualified to become a cadet and a member of an air crew. And why are, why are you saying so fast that you qualify me?" And I may have said then, or I said somewhere in the course of that conversation, that we had learned that part of our group had gone through this the afternoon before and one of the fellows, with whom I had been friendly, had been rejected. And it surprised me. He was from Philadelphia, I don't remember his name, but he had studied ballet—but you know, that brings to mind to many people the possibility that he's gay, but I had gone to St. Louis with him and, you know, heard the barrack talk and I knew he wasn't. And he'd been rejected. So, I asked the psychiatrist specifically, "Do you know why this fellow had been rejected the afternoon before?" And he said, "Yes, because he was a ballet dancer and, you know, we were concerned about that, whether there would be any crew problems ... because of it." And I said, "But I've known the guy for the last four or five months and I had seen him in St. Louis picking up broads with the best of them." He says, "What do we have to go on? The reason why we spent so little time with you is because anybody who has gone to college, goes through in four years, no interruption, no breaks, doesn't seem to have any problems. What better indication could I possibly have, no matter how long I talk to you, as to your stability? So,

that's why I passed you so quickly." That's what I recall this guy saying, you know, many years ago. I think that was a sense of the psychological screening.

PIEHLER: Actually, I have a friend of mine from college he talked about an uncle who was a ballet dancer who also got rejected.

GREER: Because they don't ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, I think he was even pre-induction, and she says a similar thing about, "My uncle he, you know ended up getting married and he was definitely not gay." I mean, that was ...

GREER: I miss—though I remember back in the barracks when he talked about his skills as a dancer with those heavy army shoes on, you know, those high-cut shoes ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

GREER: Stood on the floor and he jumped in the air and ... 360 degree turns twice, came down at exactly the same spot.

PIEHLER: So, he was quite good? (Laughter) Yeah.

GREER: He did 720 degrees when I couldn't have done 180. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I know. (Laughter) Before talking about ... a being in training for aviation cadet, how—you had been told you were good with mechanical ...

GREER: Well, that's what led to the assignment as a communication chief.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and you went to radio repair school, how ...

GREER: That was no problem. It was simple. Following the schematics. I had some college—you know, physics ... in high school and college in those days is not like physics today, which is now, you know, the emphasis on atomic structure. It's a different science. Then it was much more mechanics and wires to electricity, simple wiring and so on. So, the transition from that to the ... radio school—mechanics taught at radio school—was relatively easy. Part of the final exam at radio school was to simply to take a box apart and put the radio together, you know, the schematics there. It was no big trick. What was harder was learning to take down radio code. You start out at a very slow di-di-di-dat-dat-dat, you know, eight—what they call eight words, eight words a minute, any five letter, a random five letter cluster. And that's a word, eight words a minute is—once you become with any skill at all it drives you crazy to go that slow. And then you go ten, twelve progressively until ... at graduation I think we had to do twenty-four. I could count to twenty-eight. It was nerve-wracking, but you move up from desk to desk and you get it done.

PIEHLER: And this was the first time you—Atlantic City you could take the train home almost if you—Chicago you're actually—this was the first time you really left?

GREER: Not Chicago, Scott Field is in southern Illinois.

PIEHLER: Southern Illinois.

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Um, what was that, I mean ...

GREER: Hey this is new country.

PIEHLER: ... How do you, I mean?

GREER: Just the sheer space of the train ride from Atlantic City. I don't remember, I suppose we changed in Philadelphia, I don't even remember anymore. I remember that for some reason they picked me to carry the papers and the ... scrip on the train for the entire group. (Laughter) I thought that was, you know made me a big shot of some kind. The train ride was pretty awesome.

PIEHLER: Because you had never taken a train ride this long?

GREER: No. South Norwalk, Connecticut. Fifty minutes on the New Haven railroad.

PIEHLER: What did you think of the area of southern Illinois and St. Louis? I mean, you ...

GREER: In St. Louis I had cousin, the same cousin that had the old farmhouse up in Sussex.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

GREER: In the late '30s—at this point he was living in St. Louis. He had an advertising agency. And I slept on their couch on Saturday nights a number of times.

PIEHLER: So you ...

GREER: I had an aunt that lived there.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and ... anything that struck—besides a big country and you had, sort of, some built in family there, anything else that struck you about ...

GREER: Now, don't forget the big insight into the Midwest came back to Atlantic City, with the Wisconsin guys and found that they really weren't stupid farm boys, but they were very sharp guys. Talked softly, talked slowly, but very sensibly. I talked to—back over the years, I had a conversation on that subject specially when I was at Seagrams starting you know national sales responsibilities, and a very bright guy I worked with said that when he got into the army he had

the same New York prejudice, he came out of the Bronx also, and he had that same prejudice about people from other parts of the country until he ran into a guy from Little Rock, Arkansas who turned out to be the brightest, smartest—his name was not Clinton—(laughter) he was the brightest guy he had ever encountered. He came from Little Rock, so he says that was his eye opener.

PIEHLER: When ... you applied, you mentioned earlier, the one thing you did was ...

GREER: I applied for aviation cadet.

PIEHLER: And part ... of that, in fact, was financial?

GREER: Absolutely. I was going to be on a plane, I'm gonna be sitting back over there in the radio operator's seat, and six feet away is another guy making four times as much money. My mother is back there alone.

PIEHLER: Could you talk about being an aviation cadet? Particularly that, and when did you go out there?

GREER: Alright: we were at Scott Field—not Scott Field, Jefferson Barracks which goes back to the early ...

PIEHLER: Oh, that's an old—yeah.

GREER: Well, we lived not in the great stone barracks that we could see half a mile away. We lived in tents, what they called stout houses. It's a six, I think a six men tent with a coal stove pipe. Just a, see this brass stool ...

PIEHLER: Which isn't very big I might add.

GREER: And that's just almost exactly like the—maybe slightly smaller than iron potbelly stove in the middle of this tent.

PIEHLER: This is, sort of, across is probably no more than twelve inches each side. I mean these, this is not ...

GREER: The belly part ...

PIEHLER: The belly part, a little ...

GREER: The belly part is about sixteen ...

PIEHLER: But it's not very big.

GREER: And that's what we had ...



PIEHLER: For heating? (Laughs)

GREER: This is the month of January '44, and that's what we had to heat the tent and that wasn't—the heat wasn't the problem. The problem was this was in a valley I don't know a hundred, two hundred of these things, you know, fifteen, twenty-five feet apart and it filled a valley with a thick smoky smog. Third, fourth, fifth day there we all started to cough and we were coughing up a black phlegm. And we continued to do that while we were there one month. And I would say it took three or four months of coughing to get all of that stuff out of our lungs. It was absolutely dense. That's the one bad memory I have, and the other—one of the lieutenants there was the stupidest officer I had ran into. I talk about this KP pusher that second or third night at Fort Dix. Well, for a month we had a lieutenant who had the same kind of mentality. His responsibility was to make our lives miserable. And ...

PIEHLER: And how did he do that?

GREER: I don't know just, I remember I had some dental problem. I was told by the dentist after he did work ... go back and spend the afternoon with hot compressed—you know, soaking hot compresses and the ... pot of water heated on the stove in the ... tent and keeping it—and the lieutenant saw me there and, "What are you doing here?" You know, "Why aren't you out drilling?" or whatever. And I explained what I was doing, he didn't care. "Out! You don't belong here now." He was telling me "I don't care. You got it in writing?" You know, that sort of thing. When people have authority and they're stupid, they can really do a lot of harm. The guys my brother said, you know, shot on Attu, just that kind of stupid behavior. They grow up without any real authority, maybe with an overbearing father making life miserable for them and suddenly they are in charge of other people. They've got stripes, they've got a bar on their shoulder, and they don't know how to use the authority. They use it terribly.

PIEHLER: It's interesting because, maybe I should—you've probably heard the term, well you have probably used it yourself, your given to cases of "Chicken shit" the term they use.... Are those the examples that stick out in your mind?

GREER: Yes. Because for the most part, most of my experience—all of the rest of my experience in the air force was either boring or was really nice. So, I ran into some really nice people, colleagues, officers. I remember for example, you asked what happened after ... Jefferson Barracks, the next move. We were there a month. Why a month? Because they didn't know what to do with us. It was at that point that the system was backing up. They had accepted too many of us. And so now we are at the end of January '44. Jumping ahead it was six to seven months before they actually got us into aviation cadet training in San Antonio, Texas.... We just had to kill five to six months. We went from—you know, the group was constantly being broken up into some different directions. But I and a group of other fellas, we were sent to Enid, Oklahoma, which is a terrible place to be in the winter. (Laughter) The air base there was a probably a ... basic training, or basic flight school, for aviation cadets and flight training. You go to primary, basic, and advanced, get your wings and, you know, and go over and get shot down. So this was basic, and what were we doing? We go to a classroom a couple of hours and they would teach us ... the mechanics of ... Cyclone engines that they had on these planes, the firing order of the pistons. Varying, you know, things that you can't go through life

without knowing. (Laughter) And it is essential. And then you go out to the flight line in the afternoon and you help the mechanics. One of the things—I don't know why you do it, but when a plane comes in you have to, in the winter, you have to rub some kind of protective coating of oil on the propeller blades.

PIEHLER: It was probably for icing I bet. Was it for deicing?

GREER: I don't know. I don't have the slightest idea. And you couldn't take your gloves off because your hands would freeze. The wind come straight from the North Pole right down to Enid, Oklahoma, it is a terrible place. And they say during the summer the wind carries the sand with it and the wind never stops blowing. It's either blowing ... ice particles or sand. And so you have to do this with your gloves on, and of course, your gloves are ruined, but better than ... losing fingers. And we stood there for hours rubbing the damn thing all over the propeller blades and ... spent two or three months doing that. Enid is due north of Oklahoma City, I don't know sixty or eight miles whatever it is. And I got a weekend pass and I spent my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday in Oklahoma City and I heard my first opera. The Salvatore Baccellone traveling opera company performing *The Barber of Seville*.

PIEHLER: Which is a great opera to see as the first.

GREER: And Salvatore Baccellone had a great reputation, you know, singing at the Met in the '20s and '30s and then went into business for himself with his traveling opera company and it was a great experience. I heard that opera for my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. And the other thing I learned—which came in handy years later when I went to work for Seagram—someone there sat me down to indoctrinate me about the peculiarities of the liquor industry, so heavily regulated, and ... each state under the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment has its own regulations. And at the point, 1956, there were two dry states in the country where liquor is completely prohibited, Mississippi and Oklahoma. And I thought, “Wait a minute, I was stationed in both of those states in the course of my army career, and you can't tell me that they were dry because there was liquor all over the place.” And Enid, Oklahoma if you wanted a bottle of whiskey, you hailed a taxi, and when the taxi driver (laughter) pulled up you said, “I want a bottle of whiskey.” And he said, “You want a quart or a” —not a quart, “a fifth or a pint?” Didn't ask you the brand, because you took whatever he had. And a fifth was eight dollars and a pint was five. And he reached under his seat and there was the liquor. It was all over Enid, as far as I know it was all over Oklahoma City, eight dollars and five dollars, no questions asked. And Mississippi when you get off the base—and I'm jumping ahead now in my chronology, but when we got off the base ... in Gulfport, within fifty feet from the first civilian buildings you pass, as you left the gatehouse, they had taken out part of the front wall and put in a plate glass window and there was a neon sign spelling out “Cocktails.” So, how can you tell me it's dry? (Laughter) Anyway that was my education in ... Oklahoma. We were there, oh, through February, March, I guess. Sometime in April we got orders to go someplace else. We wound up in Columbus, Ohio at Capital University ...

PIEHLER: Capital University.

GREER: ... Capital University. And my title was changed from PFC to ... aviation student. I was told to keep the one stripe on and my pay remained fifty-four dollars a month. And it was

very pleasant, the food was superb. They had these two old German couples who had gotten a contract from the army to take over a cafeteria across the Main Avenue from the campus to feed the 150 or 200 aviation students there. And they did a job there. No period in my life (laughter) ever since have I eaten so well. These four people served us. It was just marvelous.

PIEHLER: That is really not cafeteria? It sounds like this was not cafeteria.

GREER: No. It was good solid German cooking. (Laughter) A little bit of it was familiar, the dishes my father, you know, had gotten my mother to learn making some of it. We ate well and it was very pleasant there and we had ... three hours of class a day. English, ... physics, and mathematics. And they were the elementary high school level. And to me it was frustrating ...

PIEHLER: Because you had gone to elite college and ...

GREER: Yeah, and most of the fellas in the class, a few of them were college graduates, most of them were not. But for most of them this stuff—the teachers were very weak. They were very poor, and I made the cardinal mistake, just—you know in the army your never supposed to do: I argued with one of the instructors. (Laughter) It was an English class and you said—we were talking about rules for abbreviations and punctuation and capitalization. Capitalization is where I got hung up. Because he said, “Of course, you know avenue as street address is capitalized. A capitalize “S” in street,” and so on. But he said, “Newspapers don’t follow that rule.” Newspapers he said, “use a small “a” for avenue even though it is a formal street address. And a “s” street and boulevard and so on.” And wise guy from New York I put up my hand and I said, “Sir,”—being a civilian we were told to call him sir. “Sir, I know that around the country I pick up newspapers what you say is generally, true but that rule is not followed by New York newspapers.”(Laughter) And he said, “Yes it is.” And I said, “Sir, it isn’t.” He said, “you just don’t remember, you take if for granted that is was that way.” And he said, “Talking back to me and I have a civilian equivalent rank of an officer, you are being insubordinate. Go to the commanding officers office and report to him that I sent you.” (Laughter) I got up to Captain Sterling and he says, “What happened?” I said, I repeated the story about the abbreviations. He said, “I’m not familiar with New York newspapers.” He said, “Are you sure you know what you are talking about.” I said, “Yes.” And he says, “Don’t go to class anymore.”(Laughter)

PIEHLER: This, being at Capital, in a sense, the air force was still waiting for the system to work.

GREER: Yeah. Just waiting for the funnel to clear through. The other ... Captain Sterling story I have—because he was wild in contrast to some of these ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah.

GREER: But while we were off duty at night, after dinner, we were allowed to go off base, you know, off this little campus. And there was a ... restaurant with a bar a half a mile up the road. And some of us went over there, I didn’t drink very much at all, I don’t even know if I had a beer or coke or whatever. But across the bar Captain Sterling was sitting by himself having a drink. Respectfully, we ignored him, he ignored us and somebody came over to him and started to

bother him. “You know, why are you here? Why aren’t you overseas? Why aren’t you fighting the Germans? What are you doing around here?” And the guy became obnoxious. And we were quietly watching this and Sterling took it for a long time and finally swung around and hit the guy right on the jaw and knocked him cold. Turned back and said, “Don’t get into a fight. But if you do get into a fight get it over with fast.” (Laughter) There are some great guys that ... you know, you meet along the way. Anyway the memorable thing that happened while I was in Columbus at Capital University was D-Day. You know, we came back from whatever we were doing that day, three hours of class we took, I was cut back to two, and then the afternoons we had to spend time, we didn’t ... drill because we were in the army a year or more. But physical exercise, beautiful tennis courts, played a lot of tennis that sort of thing. We came back to the barracks and someone put on the radio and we listened to the D-Day reports. Happened, you know, hours before the time change. We were here this late in the afternoon and someone started a rumor that turned out to be true. They’re going to need guys back in the infantry. Now we ...

PIEHLER: This rumor starts as soon you, sort of, hear this.

GREER: I’m not saying started at that moment.

PIEHLER: But pretty soon afterwards.

GREER: Or about that time.

PIEHLER: The rumor is ...

GREER: Or maybe—no wait a minute I think my timing is wrong. I think the incident that I’m going to describe happened a week or two earlier. Because what happened was they called—the guys at Capital came from different backgrounds in the military. Well, we had encountered that we, at sometime after being in service, had applied for cadet training going through the process and been accepted and were now waiting. But a number of the guys came out of the infantry. Particularly, the Tenth Mountain Division out of Camp Hale, Colorado, which was a A-league bunch that included one of my classmates from Townsend Harris, a guy who didn’t make the reunion because his wife said he’s, you know, out of touch. But he was a brilliant guy from my class, was one of the ones and one of the few people from class that I saw in these intervening sixty-five years. And he had been ... up at Camp Hale. Now why a group from Camp Hale, who considered themselves the A-league of the infantry would decide to give that up for air force, I don’t know. But we had a bunch of them there. One morning, everybody was called out to assemble ... roll call to make sure everyone was there, and Captain Sterling or someone from a higher level came from some headquarters, regional headquarters, and said, “A lot of you are going into the infantry we need more people in the infantry than we need in the air force right now. When I call, those whose names I call go back to your barracks pack your stuff and be out of here in one hour. The trucks are picking you up to take you down to Camp Campbell, Kentucky.” I remember they specified that’s where they were going. And you’re back in infantry. He read off the names roughly half of the group including all the guys who came from Camp Hale. If you came from air force you stayed in the cadet program. If you came from ground forces ...

PIEHLER: It was ...

GREER: ... back. They rioted, threw rocks through the windows of the dormitory they had to call the military police down from some air base, from the other side of Columbus. Round ‘em up and just threw them on the trucks.

PIEHLER: But they did not go quietly?

GREER: No. They were—because you know what they said, “Will we go back to mountain infantry?” “Nope. You’re not going back to Hale, you’re going back to Campbell.” That was what they couldn’t take. If they had gone back to Hale it would have been bad enough.

PIEHLER: But the rest of you stayed?

GREER: Stayed.... Sometime we went through—there was D-Day and then sometime in July we finally ... got on a train and went down to San Antonio, Texas. And got started in the cadet program. Pre-flight at San Antonio, what they called SAACC, San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. And [we] got classified as to whether we were going to go pilot, navigator, or bombardier training. And ...

PIEHLER: Did you think you, could you—would you have wanted to be classified as pilot?

GREER: My brother had started out in pilot, but he washed out. And ... he’d gotten into basic, he completed primary and went into basic and he washed out of basic. And I don’t know, based largely on his experience, I assumed I would probably—would not I don’t think, I don’t know whether we were asked or not, I don’t remember. But I just accepted it as a fact that ... I would be a navigator. Just seemed to be the natural thing to me. And I found it very easy and very interesting. After completing the pre-flight part of it sometime that fall, I moved a few miles or so up the road to San Marcos, Texas and there went through the second phase of navigation training, you know, flying and I enjoyed it very much. Intelligent officers, and I was in the class of 45-6-N7 ‘45 for 1945, six for the sixth week of the year, I think our graduation ... (Shows photograph)

PIEHLER: It looks like you had people sign your ...

GREER: Yeah. The classmates and I had become friendly with a family in San Antonio and they came up for the graduation. And one of the young women pinned my wings on me ...

PIEHLER: Oh! How did you meet this family?

GREER: Through the Jewish Welfare Board.

PIEHLER: Oh wow, so this is—oh, how interesting. You’ve seen this no doubt (speaking to Alice). You really do save everything. I’m just curious since you mentioned this—is this your first interaction with a Jewish Welfare Board while you had been in the service?

GREER: I think so. I remember ...

PIEHLER: So did they ... just ... say, “Here’s a family that ...”—how did you meet the family? How did they arrange ...

GREER: Well, they had registered ... with the Jewish Welfare Board not in the house proper, but in room attached to the garage behind the house, a kind of a guest room or servant’s room set up. And so they had registered that space with the Jewish Welfare Board as being available and ... they welcomed me to use it on Saturday nights when I had a weekend pass.

PIEHLER: Well, that was very nice.

GREER: Yeah. Mrs. Rosow some thirty years later, she got me in trouble. (Laughter) She was in the real estate business. Had a thick Russian-Chicago-Texas accent. You don’t hear accents like that, we were just talking about that the other day. There is one elderly woman in this building who has one of those old-fashioned Russian accents. They’re so rare now that ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, they used to be very common ...

GREER: Very common and beautiful, you know, something a ... comedian in the early days in the radio that he could really sink his teeth into. (Laughter) But Mrs. Rosow was a delightful woman, very good in real estate business and very warm and hospitable. And in order for me to stay overnight I had to register her as my aunt. You had to stay with a relative, you couldn’t stay—so I registered Mrs. Rosow as my aunt. And the other guys, some of the guys, were jealous. I mean not to the point where they would try to make trouble or anything ... but they were jealous I had a relative and they had to get back to San Marcos, you know, by eleven o’clock, you know, or whatever the curfew was. Well, one Monday morning and couple of guys in my barracks get a hold of me and said, “Boy, we can really get you in big trouble.” They were hitchhiking up the Fredericksburg Road outside ... Lyndon Johnson country, up a little further west of San Marcos, and—you know, he went to college in San Marcos ...

PIEHLER: Oh yeah, yeah.

GREER: At that time it was called Southwest Texas State Teacher’s College. Now it’s Southwest something University. And anyway they were hitchhiking on the Fredericksburg Road and a very nice woman picks them up and says you know, “where are you stationed?” They say, “San Marcos.” And she says, “Oh that’s nice. I know a nice young man there.” And she gives them my name. And they say, “Oh yeah, that’s right we heard he has got an aunt here.” And she says, “No aunt, but I did meet his mother once. I was in New York on a trip with my ...” So, they say— isn’t that nice, your guys are telling me, that’s nice your aunt met your mother. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But ... they didn’t fink on you?

GREER: No.

PIEHLER: No, they were. (Laughs)

GREER: No. I told you, you know they kind of ... (Laughter) Something Alice reminded me of a few minutes ago, you know, I had no ... anti-Semitic experiences when I was in the air force. My friends in the infantry did.

PIEHLER: I know you had also heard some pretty horrible stories.

GREER: I had absolutely none. One of the rare times when the whole question of being Jewish came up was a week or two before we finished navigation school, in other words sometime in late January '45, Captain Kirkpatrick comes over to me, oh no he approached me on a personal basis a month or two before. He was a native of San Antonio. He had been overseas, flew his missions and was back in ... flight or squadron commander at the navigation school. And he approached me ... a month or two before and he said, "Will you be interested in—are you interested in the Mason lodge at all? Do you know anything about it?" I said, "I know very little about it and I'm not interested especially. Why do you ask?" He said, "Because I was going to ask you if would like to go to a lodge meeting with me." I said, "Uh, you know I'm Jewish?" He says, "Yeah, that's fine." He said, "The problem, you know, Catholics have a problem with it, but, you know, Jews and Protestants really don't." I said, "That's true." And then I told him very briefly about my father's attitude towards Masonry because my grandfather spending so much time at it. And he said, "Okay, no problem." But, you know, it was the first friendly gesture. Now a few weeks, month later, two months later whatever, he comes over to me and he said, "Tell me something about yourself." I said, "What do you want to know?" He said, "Did you go to college?" I said, "Yeah. I graduated from college before I came into service." He said, "Where?" And I said, "CCNY." He says, "CCNY." He said, "I was a captain of the University of Texas basketball team that played CCNY in Madison Square Garden in 1940. And they pinned our ears back." Well those were the days that CCNY had a great team. He said, "That was, they were great players." I think, you know, they were better later on a few years later—so good that they could win games and lose the point spread ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, the big scandal?

GREER: So he said, "I ... have to put in a name as the number one cadet in this flight to see who ... from those they will pick the leading cadet of the whole squadron." He said, "I have to pick between you and Hawkins." He said, "Your number one in academics and he's number one in the military." And he said, "You know Hawkins?" I said, "Yeah, nice guy, very good, very nice guy." He said, "He's from Detroit. Where did he go to school?" I said, "I think Wayne University." "That's a Catholic school isn't it?" I said, "I think so." Okay he walks away. Who's name did he put in?

PIEHLER: Probably put in Hawkins? He put in ... (motioning to Greer)

GREER: Yeah. He was a Protestant with a prejudice against Catholics, not against Jews.

PIEHLER: How interesting. (Laughter) Very interesting.

GREER: So really, I don't remember any other incident. I did have a funny thing happen ... when I was in San Antonio the ... pre-flight at the cadet center. One weekend I was walking across a visitor's parking lot, a car pulls up and it has New York plates on it. Four people in it, parents and grandparents of a cadet. And they asked me, "Do you know how to find ...?" whatever the destination was. And, "Yeah, go this way that way, you know, a couple hundred yards. And they looked at my nameplate, you always had a nameplate on, (shows Piehler) this is the one from Scott Field ...

PIEHLER: With your picture?

GREER: Yeah. So, they looked at the nameplate and they see Greenbaum. They say, "Are you Jewish?" And I say, "Yes." "Oh, let me ask you a question. Do you have many problems?" I said, "What kind of problems?" "You know, because your Jewish. Do they pick on you." I said, "No, none." I said, "I have been in the service now for two years and never"—you know at that point I guess a year, year and a half, I said, "Nobody, it has never been a question." "Ah." (Laughter) They were so concerned about their boy and so relieved of what I had to say.

PIEHLER: Before even meeting him they were driving down because they were that concerned about him?

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Oh how interesting.

GREER: I thought of that story many years later when a fellow I was working with—the one who told me about this guy he met in the service was from Arkansas. His father came from Russia as a very young boy, whatever. And my colleague Bernie [Tabbat] told me that he had never heard his father talk about any experiences in the old country. He only knew that his father left his family behind, the only one who came here, and now his father was quite old he started to question him. And at first his father was reluctant to open up, but he said, "Look I'm getting a tape recorder and I want you to talk, not to me, but to your grandchildren and your great grandchildren." And he set the thing up and he said, "Why did you leave Russia?" And he said, "Because I was drafted into the army. They took us away and I had never been away from the little village before and they took us to an army base and they lined all the recruits up in a big square and two sergeants with big wide sabers stood in the middle and they said, "We have the power of life and death over you. We are the rulers of the world and you are nothing. We can kill you and I will show you." And they took a little Jew out of the ranks and dragged him to the middle of the square and beat him to death with the sides of their sabers. And they said, "Nobody is going to say boo to us and you are going to be the next if you don't obey us completely." So, he said he wrote a letter that night to his mother and said, "I'm not going to be able to survive this, I won't be able to take it. I'm going to get into trouble. My mouth is too big, I'm going to run away. Meet me in the town square, not the village, but the nearby town," which his mother had never been to. "Meet me with civilian clothing a week from now," he told her the date that he would be there. Ran away, met his mother in the square, changed his clothing. She took his old uniform and you know to burn and he ... found out how to sneak



across the border and who to see. She had given him all the money she was able to collect and that's why he came to America. So, this is the kind of story that all the generations had heard over and over again. So, they worried about what kind of treatment their children, their boys, were receiving in the U.S. Army or the military here. So, when I told these people—no problem they just couldn't believe the good news.

PIEHLER: Where, in terms of the people, you moved around quite a bit and you met new groups of people in your various—you know, because you are in so many different training units. You are meeting people from all around the country you talked a lot about this sort of your first impressions of the Midwesterners. What about others, from other parts of the country, in particular the—you got along, it sounds like, you got along very well with people you met and visa versa?

GREER: I had no basis to discriminate against one group versus another ... geographically. The vast majority of people I was with were really nice colleagues. Later on, you know, after graduating from navigation school, most of the guys were assigned to crews as navigators. I was one of the few who was sent to bombardier school ... and learned to use radar, the earliest versions of radar. That was in Victorville, California. So, I was there from February to June or July 1945. Again they didn't know what to do with us and we killed a month in Lincoln, Nebraska sitting around going into Omaha for weekends and that sort of thing. And finally we were sent to Gulfport, Mississippi where the crew had—been in crews training for a month or two with one seat vacant in the plane while we're sitting in Lincoln doing nothing, they were waiting for the radar guys.

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Lionel Greer on November 13, 2003 in New York City with Kurt Piehler. I'm sorry that the tape cut you off in mid ...

GREER: In mid-flight. (Laughter) Incidentally we were not supposed to use the word radar.

PIEHLER: Because it was still secret.

GREER: It was, yes, it was secret. It was well known that the British had invented the thing ... and what we were using was an American adaptation of British equipment, but ... even that, we were not supposed to know. We were supposed to think it was American.... We were called Mickeys, Mickey operators. That was the code for ... the radar, the airborne radar. And I never found the word Mickey in use again until just very recently; I read a book about B-24s [that] ... flew out of Italy and there for the first time ... the author refers to them as Mickey. But I was trained to be a Mickey, or to operate the Mickey. We finished our training ... on Friday and were given orders ... to leave Gulfport, Mississippi early Monday morning to head for Kearney, Nebraska to pick up a new B-29, fly it to Hawaii for instrumentation and further orders. Went into New Orleans for the weekend on Saturday and I, for the first time, I looked up some old friends of ... my parents, Henry Weil who had moved down from New York to New Orleans ... twenty years before and now a very prosperous wholesale jeweler. And I went up to his place and he said, "Come on. You are coming out to the house for dinner tonight, but first Truman is

going to be on the radio. We are going to hear him talk in a few minutes.” So, six o’clock Louisiana time, Truman came on the radio and announced that the war was over. I got my order in my pocket. We went out to the Weils and their daughter who was engaged to a guy, or maybe was married already, I don’t remember ... had called all her friends and had a big party. And I got drunk on Old Granddad hundred proof. (Laughter) I was sick drunk I had a room reserved at the Monteleone Hotel and they drove me there and I saw things crawling on the wall, on the floors and I’m sure it was the whiskey. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Because the Monteleone is a very nice hotel. I stayed there in the ‘80s, I think ...

GREER: I called up the Weils and I said, “The place is crawling, I can’t sleep here tonight.” They came down picked me up, took me back to the house, sobered me up and got back to the base Monday morning. Our orders were cancelled. Played poker for the next three or four months, came home in December.

ALICE: How do you like that for luck? (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I just wanted to back up a little, because you said you were stuck up in, when the tape got cut off, you were stuck up in ... was it Nebraska?

GREER: Lincoln, yeah.

PIEHLER: ... Lincoln while you were waiting for the ...

GREER: ... In the meantime the crews—there were eleven people in a ... B-29 crew. The other ten guys were going through all of the training ...

PIEHLER: And you were just stuck up there ...

GREER: We were waiting for orders.

PIEHLER: Literally, it was just the bureaucratic ...

GREER: Those early ... year or two as an enlisted man, my file is very incomplete. I have everything, all of these orders for the officer period, except for the order I had in my pocket ...

PIEHLER: The night you got a little drunk ...

GREER: Yeah. (Laughter) I pulled it out years later to show it to somebody and I was careless. I told you I’m such a great filer, I can’t find it.

PIEHLER: The one ...

GREER: ... the one to me is the most precious. The order that was cancelled Monday morning when got back to the base.

PIEHLER: You were based in the Midwest, you saw a lot of the Midwest.

GREER: My chronology was New Jersey, New Jersey, Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, Ohio, Texas, Texas, California, Nebraska, ... Mississippi and then I went up to Shreveport to be separated from service.

PIEHLER: In Shreveport?

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Now in California, what ...

GREER: In Victorville, bombardier and radar school.

PIEHLER: Okay, so that is where you did your radar training?

GREER: Bombardier and radar.

PIEHLER: How long were you there?

GREER: Oh, from late February to June.

PIEHLER: So, this is the time you told several stories about going to San Francisco ...

GREER: No, Los Angeles.

PIEHLER: Los Angeles, so this is the times were you met your brother and ...

GREER: Weekends ...

PIEHLER: ... the sergeant and ...

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And, and what did you, I'm struck by, what did you think of California? Because it's obviously—how much war related is it that your older brother moves to California after the war? Had he been there ...

GREER: They first talked about moving back to Walla Walla, Washington which they—I've never been there, I can't visualize it, I'm sure the town itself has water, greenery and so on, but the surrounding area is semi-desert. You go further south into that eastern part is outright desert. But they were ... pleased with that. And ... later, I don't remember if he was ever stationed in Los Angeles area, whether his wife—I don't know whether they experienced it at all or were just part of the tremendous migration ... to California that took place in the '40s and '50s. But they were a part of that move.

PIEHLER: But the ... experience of the service, do think that might have had something to do with it? Because you mentioned that they were very intrigued by Walla Walla, your older brother.

GREER: Yeah, I don't know.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you don't know.

GREER: I don't know why. As I say, my contact with him was separated by the distance. I got to know him as an adult much better some twenty years later, when we moved to California for twenty months. And then we saw much more of him. By that time he was divorced. It was also the great American trend.... But he continued to live in California all of his life.

PIEHLER: What about Mississippi? Because ...

GREER: Well, what I had learned was that there was two kinds of Mississippi, coastal ... which was also the part of Mississippi where the drinking was more open and more liberal you know ... different from the uptight inland Mississippi, which I didn't experience. Gulfport was right on the Gulf and ... right now it's—Gulfport is a boomtown with gambling ... and the casinos it's ... it's a little Las Vegas.

PIEHLER: But then it was a little, small little town.

GREER: I didn't see very much of it, because when I got off the base I caught the train into New Orleans which is less than an hour away and ... I spent my time in New Orleans.

PIEHLER: What had to be, it strikes me like New Orleans, or ...

GREER: I hate the climate. It's horrible. But I miss the nice people there and I met a girl, a young woman with whom I really had some serious thoughts for a short while, but recognized our paths were going different ways. She was in medical school and I wanted to get back and get my CPA, that sort of thing. But there were nice people there.

PIEHLER: So, I should say something, because I think, particularly ... for students reading this ... being in the South before World War II or really into the 60s was a very different, I mean—how much air conditioning was there in New Orleans in this period?

GREER: Well, except for public places like movie houses, there was practically none. But let's talk about a different aspect of being in the South. And that is the treatment of the blacks. Two New Orleans incidents come to mind. Well, they happened, overlapped. I met a ... a young woman Evelyn, Evelyn something, she was introduced through the Weils. The Weils were my parents' old friends. I think Henry's older brother Leo was one of my father's closet friends as a young man. So they were, you know, the families went way back. But Henry was a New Yorker who moved to New Orleans probably in 1920s and he was in wholesale jewelry business and he traveled at times with sample cases taking the railroad from town to town calling on the retailers. And he told a story at dinner one night and I had met Evelyn through the Weils' daughter,

Shirley. Shirley introduced me to her friend Evelyn. We were sitting at the table and somehow the subject of dealing with ... black people, Negroes they were called then. I don't remember whether Henry used the word nigger or not, I don't think so, I think he said Negro. He said, "You know at times you really have to talk to them firmly." He said, "I got off the train someplace," he mentioned some stop, "and I had these heavy sample cases and I called the porter over and he," he said, "Let's carry them out and get them in." He said, "Mister those are too heavy to carry out, I'll have to roll them." He said, "I'm in a hurry, you carry them." And I said, "Nigger, pick up that bag and carry it. And that's the way you have to talk to them." And Evelyn lost her temper. She says, "That's not the way you talk to anybody, especially a black." And it turned out that she was, in addition to going to medical school, she was doing volunteer work teaching black stevedores how to read and write. Which for 1945 ...

PIEHLER: She was very liberal. I mean she was very, I mean ...

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: This was ...

GREER: ... I wasn't aware of this, but and they, she got—this young woman what was she twenty-two, twenty-three, got into a hot argument with this, with her host, you know the father of her friend Shirley over how you talk to black people.

PIEHLER: So she was no shrinking violet either, in terms of ...

GREER: That was a side of her I hadn't seen. (To Alice) I don't think you have heard that story before.

ALICE: I don't think so, no.

GREER: I had forgotten it until we ...

PIEHLER: No, that's real ...

GREER: Because you asked this question, you know ...

PIEHLER: That's, what leads to me, actually this is a question ...

GREER: The other point I want to make is that in all my military service, I had absolutely no contact with any black person.

PIEHLER: It was completely segregated.

GREER: Absolutely zip. As an officer in Gulfport you know crew training ... B-29s. I roomed with a Chinese-American officer. That was okay, but black? No. We got along perfectly fine.

PIEHLER: The Chinese officer, where was he from?

GREER: I don't remember. It was only a sort period, a couple of weeks [before] one of us was in or out.

PIEHLER: How striking, you hadn't really left the greater New York area, maybe a little of New England. How struck were you by the segregation signs? Was that something ...

GREER: Maybe it's shameful to say, but you accepted it as the norm.

PIEHLER: You just though, well this is ...

GREER: Yeah.... This is the way it is. These people, you know, have developed this local culture. Yeah, before you go down there you're aware in a vague sort of way. I have to jump ahead and tell the story about the experience Alice and I had together, now this is 1948. We had gotten married early in '48, March. And the job I had then—I had already left public accounting, I was working for a resort hotel, it was seasonal and was shut during the winter. But I was on a year-round payroll, you know, one of the skeleton cadre. And so we were able to take a long vacation. We took a six week vacation leaving ... early November, coming back just before the holidays. We bought a car, our first car and we drove across country, dipping into Mexico for four or five days, Monterey and Saltillo and then on to California, sold the car and came home. The third or fourth night out we stopped in Washington for a day or two to sightsee and went on, driving down through ... I guess, U.S. 17, you know, no interstates then. And we're outside Birmingham, Alabama—maybe Montgomery, but I think it was Birmingham. And there was a violent thunderstorm and it went on all day and we finally pulled off the road, no reservations along the way, not necessary this time of the winter very—cars were not yet in full supply, so always a room where we wanted to stay. And we saw a sign Bluebird Motel. Pulled in, we wanted a room for the night and the black woman behind the desk looked at us, took our money whatever it was four dollars, five dollars, and handed us a key and pointed to a cabin. Two cabins side by side, a metal gate, and then two cabins. And your key opened the metal gates to park the car behind the gate and locked it. And over the bed is a sign that said "Room by the day two dollars, by the night three dollars, weekend four dollars." (Laughter) And during the night we heard some yelling, what may or may not have been a gunshot and some woman screaming at a guy, "Get out of here you son of a bitch before I kill you." Anyway we came out in the morning and we looked around and we realized that we were in a black motel and apparently you were supposed to know that in the South bluebird is a symbol of some kind. I'm not sure exactly how universal that is ...

PIEHLER: But this coding meant nothing to you at the time?

GREER: No. Well, we had a comfortable bed and a good night ...

PIEHLER: Good nights sleep

GREER: ... sleep. But the woman had done nothing, which—she wanted our money she took us.

PIEHLER: Yeah, she didn't say you couldn't stay there.

GREER: No. But we realized ... the following morning that, maybe during the night with all this noise going on by the night—three dollar people ...

PIEHLER: (Laughs) It's also very reflective of traveling before really you had chains like, now it's chain, [but in the 1940s] there is no Holiday Inn there is no chains that we know today so ...

GREER: No, that's right.

PIEHLER: ... traveling was much staying ...

GREER: Had they started the Howard Johnson this year?

ALICE: I don't think so.

GREER: They came later too.

ALICE: I think so.

PIEHLER: ... I think Holiday Inn is really the first in the 1950s.

GREER: Could be.

PIEHLER: Because it's just, you know, we now take this stuff for granted. But this traveling story is just a great story about how ... you stay at these little places and ...

ALICE: We didn't have any idea what it was until we left.

GREER: Left.

ALICE: ... what we had gotten into, and so ...

GREER: And I have always regretted not taking that price sign off the wall. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... There is one story that you—we once asked you about parachuting and you were—you once recounted ... you and your crew were tempted one ...

GREER: Yeah, Gulfport, Mississippi. I had joined the crew and we were flying these missions. Not completely, but largely aimed at catching up with the radar portions of the training program. Much of that consisted of our bombing Hattiesburg, Mississippi (laughter) ... using a camera that was rigged to ... both the bombsite up in the bomb in its compartment and to my radar equipment, which was back in the belly of the plane. I was completely separated from ... the—I was back with the gunners and the flight engineer in the waist of the plane. The other guys were up front. It was connected by a narrow tunnel that I would crawl through, it looked so claustrophobic. But there was also in the bomb bay open, there was a narrow catwalk up the

middle of the bomb bay or around the edge of the bomb bay, I'm trying to remember whether it was ... a B-24 where we trained in California, it was slightly different. And there was a hatch from—because the B-29, unlike the earlier planes was pressurized. So, you get out of the pressurized area you had to go through, you know, an airtight hatch. And there was access into the bomb bay from the front and an access into the bomb bay from where I was in the waist. And on one of the flights—I don't remember whether I was suppose to be dropping the 100 pound cement bombs that had a pound of black powder in the nose—I don't remember whether I was supposed to be dropping it with radar, I think it was the bombardier, a mission for the bombardier, but whatever.

What happened was that we were a couple of miles offshore on a gorgeous, clear day at our normal flight altitude which was I think around 16,000 feet and it just looked like a perfect day for swimming. And this was in July '45. Down below you could see the shrimp boats out between the islands off Mississippi, the coast of Mississippi and Louisiana just a few miles inland. And one of three pound cement bombs, they're on shackles, they have in the cement block two, you know, bolt holes and the shackle comes through the front and the back, and [it's] hanging by these two shackles. And the bomb bay or the bombardier ... the bombsite triggers the release—the shackles open and the bomb's suppose to slip out. One opened, and the other is hanging there and you can't land the plane that way because any jolt as the plane hits the ground is likely to send that bomb off the shackle. The powder in the nose is going to blow up and you're gonna have, you're not going to destroy the thing but ...

PIEHLER: But it won't be a pretty sight. (Laughs)

GREER: I don't want to be there for it. So you got to do something with that. Paul Boyer I think was the bombardier's name. Nice guy, I can tell you, no I don't know, I must be, I'm mixing up with another guy. But anyway Paul Boyer takes a screwdriver and he climbs out onto this little ramp hanging on with one hand and using this screwdriver ...

ALICE: Outside of the plane?

GREER: ... this is inside the bomb bay but the doors are open. And there is nothing, you know, you got your in—just visualize this room, smaller than this room, say, six feet wide, seven feet wide, twelve feet long. These two doors wide open and these rows of bombs were now been released, except for the one that is hanging by a single hook. And he's got to pry that thing off and knock it down and he's only—and below him is nothing but 16,000 feet of air and the Gulf of Mexico. And so I get out more than half way, but still I've got one foot inside the hatch (laughter) and I've got my parachute on, you know, because the—you have your parachute harness on, and it has rings over here, and when you need the parachute pack itself you simply take the parachute pack which has two snap locks on it and you pull it down and it snaps on to the harness. So, now you have your parachute on your chest. So, I've got mine on and I'm holding his, but I'm about two or three feet away from him. And if he starts to fall how do I get my, his parachute over to him so he can snap it on? And the only way is for me to jump after him. Well that's okay for me to do because I've got my parachute on. He can't put his on because he, it would get in the way of his working. But I said, "Hang on there, if you go, I go with you. You know, I'll get the parachute to you." And he worked away and it took two



minutes, three minutes, I don't know it seems like an eternity now. (Laughter) And finally he gets the bomb off and it drops, you know, falls into the Gulf of Mexico and he says, "Beautiful day." (Laughter) He said, "There has never been nicer day for a swim." I said, "You gonna go for a swim?" He said, "You go first." (Laughter) I didn't go.

PIEHLER: But it was, you remember, it was very tempting, it sounds like.

GREER: It was, we had been ... parachute training, and we would come down off a tower ... on a rope, which had some device in on it at some point triggered the opening of a parachute and you know, you drop, and you'd hit the ground and you learn to roll. We'd been through that training and you copy or you—what is it, twenty-two years old, you know, stupid and it was very tempting.

ALICE: But obviously neither one you said "We'll do it."

GREER: No.

ALICE: Interesting. You know, it was tempting but it, you were held back. But my God ...

GREER: For a tower then to infinity, falling ... (Laughter)

ALICE: I don't know but that ...

PIEHLER: I'm curious, you said about childhood ... you really didn't have very many friends.... You had one friend and one friend who died very tragically.

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you had a lot of buddies and friends in the service. Is that a fair ...

GREER: I wouldn't say they were buddies so much in the sense of continuing friendships, because I didn't keep up with anyone I met in the service.

PIEHLER: Afterward?

GREER: No.

PIEHLER: But at the time, though.

GREER: We got along. Because I was very fortunate. Radio school and all the other places, they were intelligent, good guys.

PIEHLER: But, it sounds like, because you have also said [you] also went drinking with them, or you ...

GREER: You know, not as I said. I did very little drinking. But when I got to New Orleans I drank a little too much but until then—that was when the war was over, I think there was—that's a peculiar period. I don't know how to analyze it fully. I suspect that is an element of guilt feeling, that combination of having gone through all of this training, my brothers, and everyone else I knew had been in service, I didn't learn until later the really bad times that some people had, like Alice's brother-in-law in the infantry and some other friends. When we went through the separation center in Shreveport they ask us if we wanted to sign up for the reserve. If I, you know, had not been through this period of guilt, I would certainly have said no. I didn't want any further part of it. I'm unlike my brother Jerry who remained in the reserve. He came out a lieutenant colonel many years later. He got a pension, the whole thing. I didn't have an appetite for that sort of thing. But I said, "Yes" because ... I wanted to have something to show for ...

PIEHLER: Well, to me it's partly a fascinating, ... besides [being] a good story, what is very intriguing about your story is you really had very little to do with this. I mean this was really the air force and it is just the system of you've got fifteen million men and women you're trying to turn into a military and it's going to happen that, you know ...

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... it's just not going to work all that smoothly.

GREER: I'm sure my story is far from unique.

PIEHLER: No, no it's not that unique either.... I have heard in the opposite—I mean, the most extreme case I thought that was completely opposite: this guy shows up at Fort Dix and before he knows it, before he even goes through basic training, he's off in Canada on this base doing construction. So it's a great—in terms of larger context—it's a great story for just showing how complicated it is.

GREER: What were there, sixteen million people in uniform?

PIEHLER: Yeah, and in very quick period of time.

GREER: Yeah.

ALICE: You say that you did sign up?

GREER: Don't you remember, when the war in Korea started I was so worried about being called up ...

PIEHLER: You could have been, yeah.

GREER: ... and I know people who were.

ALICE: But then didn't you—you were not in the reserve after a while.

GREER: I suddenly got a letter—it's in my file ...

ALICE: Right.

GREER: 19 ...

PIEHLER: 1953.

GREER: 1953.

ALICE: Yes, yes.

GREER: Saying you are out of the reserve. You were done. And ... just a year or so before that, a fellow I didn't know then, but ... became very friendly with later MacDonald Flinn, a lawyer, got called back into active duty after he had been flying between air missions over ...

ALICE: But it was Jerry ...

GREER: ... Okinawa and Hiroshima.

ALICE: ... It was Jerry's choice to stay in, you didn't want to.

GREER: But except at that moment at the separation center in Shreveport when they said. "Do you want to stay in the inactive reserve?"

ALICE: Oh inactive, okay.

GREER: I said, "Yes."

ALICE: Inactive. But Jerry ...

GREER: And years later I wondered why did I say "yes."

ALICE: But Jerry wanted the active.

GREER: No.

ALICE: No?

GREER: Well ...

ALICE: It wasn't inactive.

GREER: He was never called to active duty, but he did go to ... drill ...

ALICE: That's right, okay.... But you didn't—you didn't want to do?

GREER: No.

ALICE: That's what I'm saying. It was different then, Jerry signing up.

PIEHLER: Just a few more ... random questions about the service. Did you ever use the USO at all in any of the places you were ...

GREER: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, I have a story that Alice tells me I should be ashamed of.  
(Laughter)

ALICE: It's on tape. Is it on tape?

PIEHLER: It's on tape. If you—this is the one you don't want to ...

GREER: Uh, it was ...

ALICE: I'll judge. (Laughs)

GREER: It was April, May 1943.

PIEHLER: So very early in the service?

GREER: I had my appendix out lying in the hospital ... told not to get out of bed for six days. I, one night I called for a bedpan, they didn't bring it. I walked, you know, by about the fifth or sixth days of surgery, I walked across the rooms of the old hotel that had been converted into a hospital. And the nurse finally showed up and said, "Why did you ring?" I said, "Well, it's not important now, I went to the bathroom. I couldn't wait ... for a bedpan." And they balled the hell out of me, threatening me with court-martial for disobeying orders, you know, the whole hospital thinking there. After that, I think it was two weeks, as an ambulant convalescent then I was sent home for, I think two weeks, of convalesce furlough. And my mother had me back and now with her rations, her limited rations she's got to feed me as well. Uh, (looking in box) I saw it here a minute ago. Ah ha! "War Ration Book Number 2. Lionel Greenbaum, 56 Bennett Avenue." This is after we moved from 178<sup>th</sup> Street ...

PIEHLER: You even have some of the ration stamps.

GREER: How do you like that? I'm looking for a date on it, but I don't see it. But it must have been 1942 ...

ALICE: Maybe on the stamp, is there a date?

GREER: Age twenty, so that means it was 1943. Must have been just a month or two before I went into service. Anyway, home and I went down to the USO, somewhere off Time Square, to get some theater tickets, a theater ticket. And they said they opened up the window at what, ten, eleven o'clock. And I was third in line when I got there the next morning. And the first fellow

wanted a ticket for the show that had just opened up and was a smash hit, *Oklahoma*. (Laughter) The guy in front of me is a British Army sergeant who didn't know anything about any show and turns to me and says, "What's good?" And I don't remember the name of the show, but I said, "That one." (Laughter) And he took that and waited for me and he was shocked when I didn't ask for that. I asked for *Oklahoma* and I got the only other ticket the USO had. (Laughter) They had an allowance of two tickets a day and I was number three in line I got the second one.

ALICE: And this guy is looking for him.

GREER: No, no I took him home for lunch. My mother made ...

ALICE: You took him home for lunch?

GREER: I called my mother she said, "Bring him home." And she made—one of her specialties was waffles, and ...

ALICE: And he wasn't furious that you ...

GREER: Well, how did he know what he was missing out on?

PIEHLER: For all you know the show he went to ... (Laughs)

GREER: He may have enjoyed it more. (Laughter) And my mother made waffles, which was, you know, one of her—she didn't make pancakes, she liked waffles. And he had never heard of waffles. And he was very excited when I told him my mother was going to make waffles for us for lunch. And he took one bite of it and he said, "Yorkshire pudding, that's what this is. Not waffles." The pattern in it maybe ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GREER: ... but he said, "This is ... what Yorkshire pudding is." So I learned from him that Yorkshire pudding is made from waffle batter.

PIEHLER: Oh interesting.... I didn't know that either. (Laughter)

GREER: I have that ...

PIEHLER: On some authority.

GREER: Then we went back downtown, said goodbye, and I went to see *Oklahoma*. And I—*Oklahoma*, I have since learned, has been revived, had opened only about six weeks earlier. So I may claim to be the oldest living something. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... Did you go to any USO shows and such?

GREER: No.

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned in San Antonio the Jewish Welfare Board connecting you with this, this family.

GREER: Yes, it's the only connection I had with them ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. What about ... High Holy Day services, rather, did you ever ...

GREER: Oh, I went to High Holy Day services in ... San Antonio. In fact I have a vivid memory (laughs) of these high heels coming down the aisle, the central aisle, after the service had started thinking, "My God, you ought to be ashamed making so much"—I turned around and it wasn't a woman it was a guy in cowboy boots. (Laughter) He was, he was dressed in a big cowboy hat. He wasn't wearing a yamalka or a—he had a cowboy hat and high heel cowboy boots, and he was just a little late for services. His horse was slow! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Did you ever encounter any chaplains, Jewish rabbis as chaplains at all in service?

GREER: No. Or any other chaplains, I don't recall any contact with any chaplains.

PIEHLER: As Reform, did you follow any dietary restrictions at any time?

GREER: I went in never eating pork, and I learned in the army there are times you are going to be hungry unless you have a pork chop. And pork chops were pretty darn good. So, I ate pork chops. I don't think I touched the bacon and I don't, I don't remember about ham, but I know I ate the pork chops and thought that they were very good. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And how often did you write your mother ... while you were ... away?

GREER: I was pretty good, I was pretty good. And my brothers were too. And they—I don't remember about Jerry so much. Norman was an excellent letter writer. The *Daily News* at that time, and all through the war, would print a letter from a serviceman every day. You know, families were invited to send in interesting letters. And my sister-in-law sent in his letters several times and two of his letters were published in the *Daily News*.

PIEHLER: I didn't realize, that's sounds like a very interesting potential book, those letters.

GREER: I have no memory at all as to what the content of ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah. But they ...

GREER: Jerry would write to me. I don't remember receiving letters from Norman. And he would always give the same advice at the end of the letter. He says, "When you go into town you either," I forget exactly how he put it, "screw or drink, but don't do both." (Laughter) You know advice from big brother. (Laughter)

ALICE: Are you going to delete anything?

PIEHLER: It will be up to your husband to say that.

GREER: No, that I, that was ...

PIEHLER: Some of the, actually it has been interesting, because some of the veterans I have interviewed, and I'm partly editorializing here, some want to clean up the war and often pretend that their generation is somehow different ...

GREER: What are you talking about?

PIEHLER: Just in terms of sex and, sort of ...

ALICE: That's ridiculous.

GREER: That's not so.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no, no, I ...

GREER: Alright, let me go back to an incident that happened in Columbus, Ohio. One of the guys in the barracks—which was a college dormitory we were using as barracks—was from a small city just outside Camp Crowder, Missouri, the ... signal corps base. I forget the name of the town. If we looked it up on a map it's whatever five, ten miles from there. It's where the guys off base went drinking, girls, what have you. And this was a Sunday night in Columbus, Ohio as the guys from the—a day in town, or weekend in town. And if I remember correctly it was very easy to get a weekend pass there, you know, from Captain Sterling. [He] didn't see any sense in making guys go back. And, "How did you make out?" "Oh, great, you know, I had these two women and they shared me." Oh, everybody came in had their great story and what they did. And someone notices that this one fellow was getting very depressed looking. I said, "What's bothering you?" And he said, "I'm just thinking." He said, "The guys at Camp Crowder are coming back to the base ... and talking like this around the barracks and, are they talking about my sister?"

ALICE: Now do you think that this story is fictitious?

GREER: A lot of exaggeration, of course.

PIEHLER: So, there was a lot, clearly a lot of bragging?

GREER: Of course.

PIEHLER: And clearly some of it was misplaced?

GREER: Some was true.

PIEHLER: Some was ... (Laughs)

GREER: There was, for a long time you heard me talk about John Anderson.

ALICE: Henderson?

GREER: Uh?

ALICE: Anderson?

GREER: Henderson, you're right. John Henderson. John Henderson was, by chance, moved along with me on several of these, I think he came from Columbus to San Antonio to San Marcos ... in the orders with me. And very nice, he was a nice looking guy. Not as handsome as my brother, but nice looking, maybe a little taller. Very quiet, and wherever we went there was a woman waiting for him. I forget which base it was at, but whenever we got off Saturday noon or whatever time there was a woman in a car waiting at the base to pick him up and just at deadline time ten, eleven o'clock Sunday night the car would drop him off. Go to another base different woman, different car. (Laughter) And finally we said to him, "Hey Henderson. What have you got? You know, we are seeing you out of the shower, you are nothing special, what is it ... that you attract these woman almost from the moment we arrive at a base?" "I don't know." And we would say, "No come on, come on, you've got to tell us." Finally after a lot of coasting he said, "Well, I guess, I've just got a cute way of getting on and off." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I want to just ask you a little bit about navigating and aviation and—I think one of the things that—now it's ancient history, particularly for the air force and for modern aviation today, particularly in the U.S.—it's very hard for a plane to get lost, but you were responsible ...

GREER: Toward the end, just the last few months they had ... a system installed across the Atlantic and—what the hell do they call it? I forget the name, but ... at any point you could pick up radio signals, which identify the coordinates ... on your map that you were closest to. And it would give you your position within a couple of miles, but not as precise as they give ...

PIEHLER: Oh no. Now it's remarkable.

GREER: Yeah. Your position on that side of the room is different than mine ... with the current equipment. We didn't have that. I saw my brother's charts—my nephew still has them and the same trunk, and my nephew was ... military bug and was a reserve officer in active duty for a while until ... he had a medical problem. But ... I sat with him once and looked at these charts that my brother had used on ... mainly a trans-Atlantic crossing between Brazil and Natal, Brazil to Dakar, Ivory Coast in West Africa. And he was good, he was good. The way on long flights like that where you, except for the very end, when you can pick up local radio signals that you can home in on, more than thirty, forty miles out you have to ... navigate using your other techniques, solar readings, night navigational stars.... The technique was not to try to hit the coast head on, because you always miss a few miles and to try and hit it head on, unless there were distinctive landmarks, you don't know whether you are to the left or to the right. So, we were taught to shoot, let's say to the left, try to hit it ten to twenty miles up the coast so when you get close and you can identify local signals, whether it be radio or visual, then you can know



which way to turn. But otherwise you don't know which way to turn. He was phenomenal. He would—off the charts I could read where he'd set his ... turning point and where he actually hit. And on these long flights and these slow planes he would come in with two, three, four, five miles higher, maybe ten miles, not forty or fifty. And ... it was quite a trick. Nowadays it is ...

PIEHLER: Now, I once had a student fly me in his private, his family owned a private plane, to go up to an interview and I was just stunned at what air—air traffic control comes on and says, “You're dipping a little, you're a little low ... raise your ...” And I'm just thinking, ... having heard a lot of World War II stories, I mean, you really had to navigate, you really had to ...

GREER: We worked.

PIEHLER: ... you could get lost. I mean, you could really—if you don't do it right you are in big trouble.

GREER: Well, and another major problem, I don't know whether it's discussed or ... written about very much, was the pilot. A lot of pilots like Jimmy Doolittle were egomaniacs. And they had been brought up—especially the Doolittle generation—to believe that they could really fly by the seat of their pants. And when the navigator said, “We are so many miles off and we have to turn left,” and they said, “You're crazy, I know better.” And the conflict between pilot and navigator was not unusual. We did not experience this ...

PIEHLER: You didn't, but did your brother experienced ...

GREER: Yes. Some.

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

GREER: I think he was a better navigator.

PIEHLER: And not by going back and going over the chart, you know ...

GREER: You know, one theory was that Amelia Earhart got lost because of it ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. That's ... probably the more probable one.... I'm curious about the time you were going—particularly when you were actually on a plane ...

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... because you had this little hiatus, well particularly in Capital. How ... often would a plane crash at the bases you were at?

GREER: We lost two planes in navigation school.... One was on a day mission, the other was on a night mission. The day mission was ... a triangle flight from San Marcos over San Antonio, down to Houston, up to Dallas, and back to San Marcos. And somewhere between ... Houston and Dallas, I think it was close to Palestine they call it, Texas, ... a pinewoods area, a plane went

down. They had absolutely no knowledge of why it went down, the plane just dropped out of the sky. No collision reported, nothing of that sort. We lost three passengers on that plane. We were flying—at navigation school we flew Beechcraft, pilot, co-pilot, and three seats for students. I don't really know if that plane had a co-pilot—which is used not so much as a co-pilot, but as an instructor—I guess it was an instructor that flew that particular plane and sat in the co-pilot's seat otherwise there would be four aboard. And the other plane, we lost two planes in a night mission in El Paso, Briggs Field, El Paso. Down at the west end of the field just a couple of miles, I don't know how far, it would certainly be more than two miles, but really less than ten miles, there's a cliff.

And when the wind comes from the west, which is the prevailing directional wind, a plane flies—all planes fly down, downwind parallel to the runway, get past the end of the runway and you make a left—crosswind, and you make a left—I'm sorry, the wind was coming from the east, which is not the usual direction there. But this night it was coming from the east, so the plane had to fly downwind heading west, south, and then turning to land into the wind. The plane, you know, even the big 747s land into the wind. So, the wind is coming from the east. One plane in our ... flight flew downwind properly. Made its left, made the second left, and the plane behind it the pilot was worried about the cliff. You could see the cliff in the dark. And he was worried about flying into the cliff, so he cut his downwind leg short, turned too soon in the crosswind, turned in to land, and came down on top of the first plane that had flown further. He had taken a shortcut and overtaken it and came down on top of it and crashed the two planes. So, we lost six more students in that crash. We lost nine.

PIEHLER: And another bases did you have some more losses? Like, in Gulfport did you lose any?

GREER: We saw a plane blow up in Gulfport, it wasn't my class, it wasn't my group, but we were scheduled for an afternoon flight and wandered down to the flight line, you know, just carrying our stuff waiting for the plane to come in, be serviced, and we'd get aboard and fly our mission, whatever it was be two, three good hours. And a plane touched the ground and blew. We don't know why. Those are the only accidents I remember seeing ...

PIEHLER: I guess, one of my last air force questions ...

GREER: A guy in my crew ... the flight engineer, a staff sergeant, lost a finger. It was a fluke accident. Nice young fellow, married wore ... a, you know, nice traditional wedding band narrower than this. And the B-29, as I mentioned was ... the first pressurized plane I believe. And therefore all of the doors were, you know, really airtight hatches when they were closed. He was in the waist of the plane, where I was, where the two side gunners [were] located—I think it was just the four of us back there and the tail gunner was in the back, a couple of blocks back, all by himself. And we landed at the end of the training mission in Gulfport and ... the door in which we left the plane was even aft of the ... pressurized waist section, so you have to go to the waist section into the non-pressurized narrow area and then go down the door, and you're about eight feet off the ground, maybe more, and there is a little metal ladder that's dropped down and you go down the ladder. Instead of dropping the stuff down—he may have been the first one going out, I don't remember—instead of dropping his stuff down and having his two hands free

to hold the ladder, he had his stuff in one hand and had the other hand up holding the top of the ladder, but a hook caught under his ring and he, somehow, stepping down, tried to pull his hand and he slipped off the ladder and fell, about six or seven feet. He wasn't hurt except he left his finger up there!

PIEHLER: Wow. And was he taken off the crew after that? Did that disqualify him?

GREER: Yeah. But this was about the time that training was over, I think it was one of our very last ... [incident] because I had joined the crew only the last four or five weeks before ...

PIEHLER: You were supposed to go over.

GREER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Could you just talk a little about this, your crew? ... Where they were from, and what you remember?

GREER: They were from all over. Somewhere—not in this folder, but someplace I have a photograph of the crew, I have a blow up of it, I can show you, but I don't think it had the names on the front. I have a small black and white 8x10 that listed all of the names Newcomb, First Lieutenant Newcomb, the commanding officer from California. And the guys were from all over ... the country.

PIEHLER: So, your story does fit the, sort of, what you particularly see in movies, you know, people from all over.

GREER: Oh absolutely, absolutely. It's ... I don't remember, I remember better names, I don't remember all the other locations, but they were just as diverse as can be.

PIEHLER: Did you think of using your G.I. Bill at all in terms of going for more schooling?

GREER: Uh, I did and I didn't, you know. A number of my classmates from City College went on to law school. A lot of them became ... lawyers as well as CPAs. And I didn't want to. I didn't, I just wanted to get on with my life and I—you know, I met Alice ... less than two years later ...

ALICE: But I never discouraged you from that ...

GREER: ... No, to the contrary. You asked me a number of times why I didn't. And ... I didn't want to.

PIEHLER: ... Did you ever join any veterans' organizations?

GREER: No. No, I grew up with a strong antipathy to the American Legion, I felt that it was ... misusing its members, you know, the number of members to lobby for ... the elites own special interest, and I didn't want to have anything to do with that. And a lot of other World War II

veterans joined other organizations, you know, not to join the American Legion. So, the American Legion was so domineering by upper-tiered World War I veterans who wouldn't let go.

PIEHLER: Do you know, did you give some thought to joining the American Veterans Committee? Or did you know anyone who joined?

GREER: I would—I'm not a joiner. No. The appeal of those organizations was very small. I was not interested in the social aspects ... or whatever special purpose made them ... a sort of Jewish war veteran, it didn't appeal to me. I didn't want to join any of those.

PIEHLER: Well, when did you meet, meet your wife Alice? Was it while you were still in the service or was it ...

GREER: No, no, no, no. I ... well, I went back to the public accounting firm. I went to work January 2 ...

PIEHLER: You got your job back.

GREER: ... the job. They wanted me and I wanted them. I went through 1946 realizing increasingly that I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in public accounting. Some aspects of it were good, and tax work I didn't dislike. The audit part, ... then more than today, accountants were under great pressure never to forecast, never to look forward, that's not your job, or to look back and ... come February, March, April, May issue a report on what happened last year. Next year, you'll worry about what happens this year. And I had a kind of instinct that I wanted to get more involved in this year and next year, I'm less interested in last year. You know, contrary to ... my appetite for history ... being an amateur historian in business.

PIEHLER: Yeah. No, no, it makes perfect sense.

GREER: And so, ... after I learned that I passed the CPA exam and sometime in the spring of 1947 back in the accounting firm now a year and a quarter or so, I went to one of the partners and said—oh, I know what triggered it: Bernie Barnett, the guy I had referred to before, was made a partner. And he was there a year before me. He graduated from college a year before me and he was quite popular, he should be next partner. And they called me in and said, "You know Bernie is becoming a partner. Just want you to know you're next. In another year, I can't make promises to when, but you're next." And I said, "Oh my God! If they do that I'm really ...

PIEHLER: You're never getting out. (Laughter)

GREER: How can you walk away from the honor, nice prestigious firm that ... they had a reputation, I don't know if it's true or not, but when their name showed up on a tax return the odds of the IRS auditing them went down sharply. I could have told the IRS that there was one partner (laughter) who didn't have the same standards as the others, not just one guy. But anyway ... it really shook me. The thought that in a year or two I would be tapped on the shoulder and invited to become a partner. And I went back and I said, "I don't think this is

where I want to spend the rest of my life. I don't want to go to any other accounting firm, I love you guys you are great, but if a client wants a, you know, an accounting executive what have you, I would be interested." And sure enough within a month or two a resort in Pennsylvania, Tamiment have you ever heard of it?

PIEHLER: Oh yes.

GREER: At that time it was open only ... from Decoration Day until a week or so after Labor Day. But they wanted, not for accounting, but they wanted an understudy to the General Manager so that in five years ... he would ... retire [and] ... someone might take over. And I made a mistake and said "Yes," because it was a real career. And I didn't realize it until six months or a year had gone by. But I started there in ... April '47. We actually moved up and opened up the offices and got the place ready in mid-May in anticipation of Decoration Day weekend. And ... then early in June I came back for a day to put my mother on a plane to visit my older brother in California. I didn't have a car, but I used the bus that ran only during the season from ... the New York office on 15<sup>th</sup> Street ... up through Bushkill up to Tamiment, what they called the Poconos were really not they were the Blue Mountains pre-Pocono area. Anyway, so after seeing my mother off, I came down the next morning to catch the bus back. And while I was sitting in the office ... I noticed somebody picking up an employee pass, and I walked over to the ... desk at the New York office manager to see who he had given the bus pass to, because I thought she was exceptionally attractive. The day that we met—Tamiment Employee Bus Passes June 12, 1947, Alice Ross.

PIEHLER: Oh. I was wondering what that was up there. That's the original?

GREER: And here's mine.

PIEHLER: When did you know it was important to save that?

GREER: Almost immediately. (Laughter) She was, well that's a whole other story. The fact was that I knew I was looking at somebody who just was not like anybody I knew. So, we got married the following March.

PIEHLER: So it was a pretty whirlwind ...

GREER: No.

PIEHLER: Not whirlwind, but ...

GREER: June to March, getting engaged in December, December 26. Maybe by some current standards that's fast ... but it was not ...

PIEHLER: No, it wasn't super fast, but it was—but you also didn't take a year or two to ...

ALICE: No. No it wasn't ... like that.

GREER: No, Alice ... went up there as a nurse. The General Manager's niece—a niece by marriage, was the director of nursing at Beth Israel Hospital. So, she was feeding nurses.

ALICE: Yeah. She said we could ...

GREER: ... would you like to work up at ... Tamiment

PIEHLER: So, even though it was a career *faux pas*, it was in terms of meeting your wife it was a critical.

GREER: No. That was of all the success, the greatest thing that ever happened to me. But—and I mean that literally. But from a career point of view—because, first of all as I got to understand the place more and the relationship between the director—the General Manager we called the director—and the Board of Directors was terrible, and the clashing, and the stupidity—the place was very well run, but the Board of Directors was bad. And I could never—it wasn't for me, and it wasn't the place I wanted to spend a career, and it wasn't the place to raise a family. And so starting, maybe around 1950, I started to get my resume out and around and I got lucky early in 1952: I got a phone call from ... one of my former professors at ... City College, an accounting professor, who was the first acting president of Baruch College broken off from Emanuel Saxe saying he knew of a job in Delaware.

PIEHLER: And this is Playtex?

GREER: Right. And I had the interview and ... Alice cried when we talked about going down to Delaware. And I promised her no more than three years, but I've got to get on a career path. So we went down in March '52 and we were there three years and three or four months. It was terrible, it was terrible.

PIEHLER: You once alluded to—particularly the mosquitoes, I think it was ...

ALICE: Ah!

GREER: Oh, ...

ALICE: They were so bad.

GREER: I remember this nice guy who moved us back, a black fellow, very, just a sweet, you thought he was a sweet guy. He had a van half loaded and he came into the house and I think he started to cry. He said, "I can't do it, I can't finish." "Why?" He said, "The mosquitoes are just eating me up, I can't ...

ALICE: It was terrible.

GREER: And he had to sit and wait, the poor guy.

ALICE: It was so provincial, everybody watched where you were going, what you were doing ...

GREER: Did I tell you any of the stories ...

PIEHLER: You told ... me a little, once you said it was a dynamic company. You sensed that ...

GREER: The company was growing. The work part was fun ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, you said it was ...

GREER: ... I learned a lot, but it opened up, you know, career paths, that part was great. But when you left there at five o'clock you're back in Dover, Delaware, oh boy. We went down—the guy who hired me was a New Yorker who liked it there. He married ... a woman from Wilmington, I think.... He had been a teacher at Julia Richmond High School before he took this job as a controller. And he was so happy to get, you know, a New York trained accountant. He had very good cost accountants who came out of places like Muhlenberg and Lehigh, you know, Pennsylvania colleges that, you know, that are more on the production side. But for the balance-sheet accountant you have to go to New York, City College, NYU to get that perspective. So, he was delighted to have me and especially when he heard Townsend Harris—he hadn't gone to Townsend Harris, but his boss, the treasurer of the company, had. Anyway, ... and he said, "I'll try and get an apartment for you before you get here." When he described garden court apartments—the garden court you can picture it, millions were built all over the country and you know in the '40s and '50s.

ALICE: It was nice.

GREER: It was nice. The entrance to the apartment on this side, this side up a flight of stairs were two more apartments and then the unit, the next unit. And so ... within a few days he called and said, "I have a nice two-bedroom apartment." And Alice was pregnant with our first ... daughter. Anyway we go down there ... the van was loaded and takes off and we were to meet the guy the next day at the apartment. So, we drive down and we get the keys to the apartment and go upstairs and let ourselves in. Of course, there is an empty two bedroom apartment—it's nice at the point, 1952, it can't be more than five, six, seven years old. And there's a knock on the door (knocks). We open the door and here's a thirteen, fourteen-year old kid. And he says my name is Klayman, Bill Klayman—or whatever, it was I remember Klayman. "Hi, how are you." He said, "I have the local newspaper route, you gonna take the Dover newspaper?" I said, "Sure. Sign me up." He says, "Are you going to join the Temple?" I said, "What?" He said, "You going to join the Temple?" I said, "How do you know we are Jewish?" He said, "My father told me." "Well, how does your father know?" "Oh, he works over at Playtex." Alice started crying, "I want to go home." (Laughter) Everybody at Playtex knows that there's a guy coming down from New York and that's he Jewish—the kid standing there and we hadn't moved in yet, we hadn't a stick of furniture in the place.

ALICE: We are especially private.

GREER: I recalled not having any friends ...

ALICE: And it was so ...

GREER: You know, the relationship with Alice, that's much more important.

ALICE: We are loners. And it was just awful to have someone ... know when you're walking out and where you're going.

PIEHLER: No, I can relate much more now having now lived in Knoxville.... I mean, Knoxville is much better than the world you went to, but there's a lot more ...

GREER: The population of this place was only 6,500 when we moved there. It's the state capital, the governor had not moved there, he had a home about forty miles away. They didn't have ...

PIEHLER: An executive mansion.

GREER: No governor wanted to live in Dover .... But then the air base boom—it had been there all along, but now they gave it some new missions that became an air transport center. They bring back all of the dead ... coming back over. And the last we heard, twenty years ago, the population was up to 13,000. (Laughter)

ALICE: But, you know, many people like that, they really feel everybody's interested in what they're doing. And it could be very nice if that's what you want.

PIEHLER: And how, when you left—did you leave Playtex when you came back to New York? Is that ...

GREER: I developed a very close working relationship with my boss's boss, the treasurer, who graduated from Townsend Harris about eight years before I did. And he was unhappy there. And he confided in me that he was being interviewed for a very big job, VP Finance of Seagram. I said, "Boy would I love to go back to New York with you." He said, "I won't hire you or anyone else away from Playtex. I want to maintain a top-level relationship with the Chairman of the Board and I don't want to, I'm not going to steal any of his people. But if you are working someplace else, I'll find you, I'll want you to work for me at Seagram."

PIEHLER: He said ...

GREER: So, that energized me and my searching for a job and I wound up as the assistant to the General Manager of Wright Aeronautical Division of Curtiss-Wright Corporation, very nice guy Joe Miccio, terrible company. I don't think it was his fault, I think it was ... the parent company Curtiss-Wright Corporation's policy of "milk the thing, don't spend money on engineering" ...

PIEHLER: Well you, one of the things ... you have taught me, any lessons of history, in terms of your experiences, was culture. You talked—I've realized that there is a lot of difference in



education; different educational institutions have different cultures. And one of the things you talked a lot about was different corporate cultures.

GREER: Yes.

PIEHLER: And I, I never forget the story you told about your experience with Air France the wrench, the wrench story ...

ALICE: The what? What was this?

PIEHLER: ... the wrench story is a priceless story.

GREER: A letter came into Miccio from the ... Head of Air France in the United States, in charge of maintenance, equipment maintenance, what have you, saying that he had just seen an invoice for a wrench for—I don't know 180 dollars, something of that sort—no, but not that high. The wrench—he said, he went out to see the thing and it was ... a metal bar some thirty inches long to which had been welded a half of a ... nut, you know, to which a bolt is screwed. But a nut had been cut in half, and so that gave you the jaw to fit around a bolt at the end of the stick. And he said, “I can't understand why you charged whatever that number was 180 dollars for what looks like a fifty cent piece of rod and a twenty-five cent bolt cut in half, welding it together maybe will bring it up to twenty dollars, why 180 dollars?”

PIEHLER: For students who read this, that was a huge sum of money then....

GREER: We are talking about 1955, ... very early '56. So multiply to get current terms, I don't know, multiply by something between ten and twenty times. So, Miccio initialed in a corner “Have Greer look into this.” So, I traced it down through this enormous bureaucracy and was referred to a fellow named Karperian, who was head of the standards department. They wrote the procedures for everything that went on in this plant including the pricing. And I found him and he explained what the function of this department was until this point. At that point I was there for about five months or so, I'd see it only as a box on a organization chart. “What do you do here?” And he explained that, particularly because the bulk of the business was with the military, they had to conform to government standards. They had to have their counterpart, internal standards, and that extended into the civilian activities, including the pricing. Now as far as the tool went, he said, when they sell a civilian aircraft engine, and their engines were just at the peak of popularity then, at the end of the piston engine ... age the ... Wright era—Wright turbo compound engine was the ultimate piston engine for Constellations and DC-7s, the last generation of planes before the jets. And a stipulation and a warranty that goes with those engines is that repair work only be done with tools and parts purchased from Curtiss-Wright, right there in the [contract]. And he said, “In this case maybe Air France took that warranty provision a little too literally.” He said, “Because most people don't buy this thing from us.” And we got the order from Air France and he said, “We didn't have ... a work order for making it, or drawings, we had to make this up for them. Now when we make up a part for the first time—there are blueprint charges, engineering charges, standards charges and that all has to be amortized over the first production batch. And because we didn't expect other people to order this we divided the first, all of these make-up costs, let's say for arguments sake, might be a

1,000 dollars we made up six pieces so each piece cost out as 160 dollars, and then we add on profit to that and that's how we got it."

I said, "Fine everything you say is logical up to a point, but the reality is that the damn thing is not worth the 160 dollars, and this a customer complaining." "Oh no, you have to stick to your standards. Once you write a standard you can't allow variance because then you lose control. Anything can happen." So, I went back and I made my report to Miccio and I recommended, I said, "My suggestion to you, Joe is send the guy a letter of apology and send him a letter, a credit for the full amount. A lousy 160 dollars or whatever the figure was, why antagonize the customer." And he said, "No, no. You don't understand that's not the way you ... run this kind of a business. We're not the kind of business to do that. You have to stick to your standards." I said, "I don't understand why." Anyway he said, "That's the way it is. He wrote the letter or I composed a letter ... telling the guy at Air France that that's the way it is. And we got a letter back saying "He's just been promoted, gone back to Paris where he is going to be in charge of all maintenance world-wide and will be a member of the committee that decided on equipment in the future including the choice of aircraft engines. And you may be assured that I will remember this incident in making my choice between Curtiss-Wright equipment and others." And right after that Fread called me from Seagram and said, "You are ready to come over here?"  
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: Because, I remember when you told the story to us a few years ago, you just said that this is the incident and, "I have to get out of here."

GREER: I think I knew it before then, that the place was not for me.

PIEHLER: But particularly this story, I mean, you said it left quite an impression....

GREER: I was so unbusiness like, so foolish.

PIEHLER: Well, I'm almost out of tape for this session, but I do want to—because it's partly World War II, but it's partly Seagram and to me it's such a great corporate culture story and it's also a World War II story about all kinds of issues is—you had told me once that story about the two divisions in Seagram, Calvert and the Seagram. And I guess, where did you learn that story because you worked for Seagram?

GREER: No, but I was curious about how the company got to be what it was as I found it in 1956. And since it's a company and an industry in the United States that was born on a very specific day, December 5, 1933. The day that ... they ratified the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment, repealing the Prohibition Amendment, the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment. That made all alcoholic beverages legal, and the industry got started. Why did these two, then two leading divisions of Seagram, the Seagram division of Seagram and the Calvert division of Seagram develop so differently? And I was curious about that particularly as I learned, looking back through the records and talking to the old timers after all, '33 to '56 ...

PIEHLER: There were lots of old timers there.

GREER: Yes, there were still old timers around who would tell me what happened. Because going into to World War II, the Calvert division was bigger than the Seagram division. And why coming out of the war, immediately after the war, did Seagram grow so rapidly and Calvert did not? And the bits and pieces of stories people told me—and they were participants, so it was firsthand, ... had to do largely with the way the wartime shortages were handled differently by the two divisions. The head of the Seagram division got his allocation from the production people, they would produce everything that they were allowed to produce under the ... inventory restrictions and wartime quotas and available glass, what have you. And he would allocate most of the ... available supply to the various markets according to the size of the market with strict instructions to his regional managers that every little bar and every little store must get a minimum of one or two bottles a month. If there is any left over, he said, “I’m not going to ask too many questions.” The word was, “Take, but don’t shake.” And he enforced the rule that goods be allocated. So even in the 1950s when I started there as I called on retailers and asked about the old days and the history of their stores, they said Seagram was great, “I didn’t get much, but I got a few bottles and I was able to just keep in stock enough and was able to keep the door open and ... I had a few good brand names.”

Well, meantime what was happening at Calvert, the word was “Take.” Who, whichever wholesalers and whichever retailers in the chain of distribution were willing to pay off they got the bulk of the merchandise and no effort was made to allocate even a few bottles to the little people up and down the street. And the two divisions simply parted in their market share, in their growth, in the ... trade scheme, and the way the people were trained in the divisions. And up to the very end, the last—one of the last things I did before I retired in the early 1980s was write a strategic study for Seagram’s liquor division, liquor operations and I had a ... brief chapter there on company culture in which I tried to summarize this. And I strongly recommended that corporate management, you know, specifically the Chairman of the Board, ... make a decided effort to be sure that it was the Seagram culture that prevailed through various reorganizations that had already taken place and that were contemplated. He didn’t see it, he had emotional reasons for not liking what came out of the Seagram’s side, and ... it contributed to what happened in much more recent years, in the last three or four years, when Seagram after merging with the French, Vivendi, sold all of their alcoholic beverage brands.

PIEHLER: No, I mean in some ways your career hits a good part of Seagram’s history and in some ways Seagram when it was on top your career in many ways follows that. Well, one of the things and, I guess, one of my last questions for this session, you even noted, there were other differences between divisions I remember you told me. I think I well ...

ALICE: Pricing.

PIEHLER: Well, also just even ...

ALICE: Oh, not the pricing of them ...

PIEHLER: You once ...

GREER: Yes, because—and they tend to stem from the same roots, where ... the Calvert division—the people trained by Calvert who in the 1990s became the operating heads of the Seagram’s worldwide liquor operation and contributed to many of its problems. Although they were replaced by a much better group at the very end, ... they believed that marketing efforts should be aimed at the large volume retail stores. Don’t waste time trying to develop the bar on-premise business ... and the—in order to be a success with the large stores you have to be prepared to discount heavily. The Seagram division had put the emphasis on the “across the board.” Not ignoring the large stores, by any means, but not doing anything to the exclusion of the smaller stores and, very importantly, the bars—and the bars particularly, because to build premium price brands, regardless of the category—most recently let’s say Grey Goose Vodka has been an outstandingly successful vodka [at a] price which years ago I would have said was impossible. “Twenty-nine dollars for a bottle of vodka retail? Nobody is going to pay that,” because especially in the vodka category where product differences are extremely difficult to detect ... you have to popularize, build the popularity of your brand in bars. Nobody’s going to go into a store and buy something they haven’t tasted or are too familiar with, until they have tried ...

PIEHLER: Particularly premium, I mean ...

GREER: ... at the premium level. So Seagram was successful at building at the premium level, most particularly with the Crown Royal brand. Millions of cases, very high priced for a product which some people say isn’t all that different or better than lower priced ... Canadian whiskies. Whether it’s different or better—subjective matter let’s say. But ... it had to be built on-premise. The Calvert people could never had done that.

PIEHLER: Well, there is one, this is probably be one of my last questions before giving you an open-ended time, but you also once told me a story about different divisions and attitudes about spouses working in the divisions. And I can’t—because you became a manager, or a president, of one division and some people in the division were complaining that their wives might have to work, and you were very struck ...

GREER: Oh no, this was—in the mid-1970s, I became the president of the division of Seagram called the Four Roses Company. And it turned out that the Four Roses Company had a product line that had been put together from two earlier divisions that ... had very different cultures themselves. The key brand, and by far the biggest brand, was not Four Roses, it was Kessler whiskey, which was and is a popular brand in about ten states around the country doing a very large volume there and very little any place else. Kessler was built in bars, working-class bars, blue collar usually, within a mile or two of a steel mill. And those were the people who made up this beautiful Kessler business. And the people who built the brand in those bars where themselves blue-collar types. Four Roses came out of a upscale Louisville, Kentucky company that hired only white-collared types. I brought them together for regional sales meetings when I first became president of the company. I was amazed that there would be two groups of people in the room who didn’t mingle. I had them bring their wives, because after the sales meeting we had dinner together. On the white-collar side the wives and the husbands stood together, talked to each other. On the blue-collar side the wives, kept separately from the men, men and women didn’t talk to each other or socialize in that room. And the two groups kept completely away from each other.... And one of the specific things you are recalling is when at ... cocktail hour

one of the former Kessler men, now part of my Four Roses Company, came over to me and said, “We have to make more money ... because my wife shouldn’t be working, but she is. It is very embarrassing in my community for a wife to have to go to work, it means that I’m not supporting here properly.” I said, “But you belong to a union, you belong to the salesmen union. And they—the contracts say what to pay.” He says, “But you have to do something about it. My wife is working, it’s just destroying me.” On the white-collar side that never would have happened.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean you said it was like even more striking, because the white-collar level spouses at that point were working and you know it was ...

GREER: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: That’s a story that stuck with me and it’s sort of ...

ALICE: I don’t remember ever hearing that.

PIEHLER: You see, I hope you have learned a few things. (Laughs)

ALICE: Oh sure!

GREER: That happened, that conversation took place in Cleveland.

PIEHLER: ... I ask my students what they would do—the Calvert, now I know the divisions—I said, the Seagram’s division—I can never remember the other division—and it’s very curious their answer, because I ask them what would you do in this—and it’s striking how many just want the cash up front. You know ...

GREER: You see, underlining it all is the fact that developing a brand name, in a way, is a beautiful thing, it’s a beautiful art. Because a brand name, Coca-Cola obviously, ... for a hundred years that name ... communicated so much. Four little letters told a whole story of reliability at one time, and low price, availability.... Building any brand name is a beautiful marketing accomplishment. It’s something I really respect, but it’s not done by discounting.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm, no, I would agree.

ALICE: Yeah, that was big thing as far as Calvert and Seagram ...

PIEHLER: Well, I’m almost out of tape literally and I regret punching the other side of it, but I also, sort of, had a feeling that when the sun goes down it’s almost time, it’s time start ...

ALICE: Is the sun down?

PIEHLER: It’s almost pretty much. (Laughter) It’s pretty much—but I really want to thank you this has been really great, and I hope to do a follow-up, because I really do want to ask you about your corporate ... experiences, because there are stories I know I want to ask you, and also I’m

probably going to read a little more about Seagram's history. And I also want to ask you about your involvement as an alumnus with City University, and so ...

GREER: Well, that's the shorter story, because ... I broke off after a while. Something happened, I wasn't happy with ...

PIEHLER: But thank you, thank you very much, also for your hospitality Alice.

ALICE: Next time bring your wife.

PIEHLER: Now we actually ...

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

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