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AN INTERVIEW WITH GORDON R. BEEM

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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Gordon R. Beem on March 28, 2000 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler …

DAVE GORMAN: … and Dave Gorman.

PIEHLER: And before beginning the formal questioning, I just wanted to thank, on the record, Mr. Beem, … retired major of the United States Air Force, for his many generous contributions of books and videos to the library and archives at the Center for the Study of War and Society in honor of his hero, General Thyng. And in beginning this oral history … interview, we want to go way back and … ask you a little bit about your parents, beginning with your father. And in fact, there has been a military connection in your family—your father was a retired sergeant of the First World War. Could you talk a little bit about your father?

GORDON R. BEEM: My father was born in the year 1896 in Summit Station, Ohio, which is just to the east of Columbus. He came from a farm family. His father, Edward Beem, died when my dad was fourteen, and at that point my father became the male head of the family. He had two younger brothers, William and Edward, and of course my Grandmother Beem. His uncles talked to him and told him that they would help keep the family farm together, and it was on that basis that my father continued to go to high school [and] was able to graduate. After he graduated from high school—again, the family still intact on the family farm—he went to a summer school, got himself a teacher's certificate, and began teaching in a one-room schoolhouse out in the area of Summit Station, Ohio. I have pictures of my dad … outside that school, and there are some barefoot kids, as one would expect at that particular time. When the war—when World War I began, there was [a] question about whether or not my father was going to join the army, which he did do in 1917, and became a member of the 130th Ohio Engineers.

Before he went to war, his grandfather, my great-grandfather, who was known in the area as "Honest Ed" Beem, called him in and talked to him about going off to war. And he told my father something that my dad later relayed to me when I went off to war, and I know he did the same with my older brother before he went off to war during World War II. And that is, Great-Grandpa Beem called my dad in and said to him roughly the equivalent of the following. He said, "Ed, there are two things that a man has to do in his life. The first thing that man has to do is keep his credit good." He said, "If you borrow money from a man, and you borrow five dollars from a man and you get five dollars back, you go pay that five dollars, because you may soon after, or sometime after, want to borrow ten, so you got to keep your credit good." He said, "The second thing a man's got to do in life is maintain his self-respect. You've got to be able to look into a mirror, day-after-day, and say, 'With the talents that God gave me, I've done the best I can, and that I have lived up to the expectations of my family.'" With that, my father went off to war. Eventually he ended up in France, with the Ohio Engineers. He was a first sergeant. And I have pictures of Dad, one of which sits in our living room at home, pictured right after the Armistice, taken in the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain, and it keeps my father with me, although he's been dead since 1971.

My mother is also from Central Ohio; she was born in Columbus. Her name was Marie Ritter, and Ritter is my middle name. Mom was born in 1900, to my great—my grandparents. And I

knew my grandparents quite well, although my Beem grandparents, only my grandmother was alive, and I only barely remember her, since I was a small child the only time that I can remember seeing her. But my Ritter grandparents, the last time I saw them was when I went to Korea in 1951, and both of them were still alive at age ninety and ninety-one. My mother graduated from high school in Columbus, [and] worked for the *Columbus Dispatch,* in their classified advertising department, until she married my father, and that was at the end of the war. They met in 1920 and were married in 1922. I have an older brother who was born in 1924, in February, on February 10. I was born February 1, 1927, and my younger sister was born October 6, 1933, and her name is Janet. My brother is Edgar Allen Beem, Jr.

My father, after World War I, worked in the steel mills in Youngstown, Ohio. He was a bookkeeper and a timekeeper, and we lived in Niles, Ohio, where I was born. My brother was born in the nearby town of Warren. In 1925, two years before I was born, a man knocked on our apartment door and introduced himself as a sales representative of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. And what he wanted to do was sell a small industrial policy on the life of my brother. My mother was curious. She invited the gentleman in. He talked to her at some length, and in the course of the conversation, she asked him: how good a job was it selling life insurance? And he went on to explain how well he was doing as an insurance salesman. That evening, as my mother tells the story, and my father reluctantly agreed, the many times I've heard it, when he came home that evening, my mother told him about the salesman who had been there, and she then also said that she had made an appointment for the man who did the hiring for Metropolitan Life, the assistant manager who did the interviewing, to come and see her and my dad. My dad responded in the negative, but in the course of some family discussions, finally agreed to at least see the gentleman, … and so the man came. Apparently he liked what he saw. My father liked what he heard, but he asked my mother a very simple question: "How are we gonna survive, since they only pay fifty dollars a month for the first three months, and we've been living on 90 dollars a month?" My mother said, "I'll go to the butcher and to the bakery and to the grocery store and to the landlord, and I'll try to make arrangements for some credit, because if you … are as good a salesman as you think you can be, after three months you'll begin to get your commissions, and you should do better than we were doing with you as a timekeeper." Thus, my father joined Metropolitan Life in 1925, and he had a career with them that lasted until he retired in 1961. He moved from salesman—route salesman, knocking on doors—to become an assistant manager, where he worked with other salesmen. He then was among the first group of men chosen to be a field training representative, and it was at that point in 1933 that we moved … from Youngstown, Ohio to New Rochelle, New York. My father worked out of New York from 1933 to 1936, received two internal promotions in New York, and in 1936 was named manager of the Portland, Maine District of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. And I can remember where his office was. It was at 465 Congress Street, on the tenth floor of the Bank of Commerce building. The tenth floor had a beautiful corner office that was his, which had a view of Casco Bay, which is the famous bay in southern Maine. Dad was manager of that office until he retired, and essentially from 193[6] until 1950, that was my home.

PIEHLER: I guess several questions come up. I mean, one very immediate one is—your father did very well in the 1930's, I mean, in a depression. I mean, he got promoted and …

BEEM: All of my father's promotions were during the Depression. I have to say that we were very, very fortunate. We were never hungry. And we were, I think, moved from his being a timekeeper, we—the family then was probably in the lower class. We moved into the middle class during my father's years with Metropolitan Life. And it was a comfortable life, as I remember it. In 1940, he bought our first home, and it was the family homestead for forty-nine years until the death of my mother in 1986. So I do remember the Depression, and I also remember how fortunate we were, particularly, I think, when I look back on it and realize the—I remember seeing the WPA [Works Progress Administration], for example, put a sewer in at a street nearby where we lived, and I never realized how fortunate we were until I became a little more mature and began to study history.

PIEHLER: Your father—what did he tell you about his service in France? You told us about the great picture of him in the Pyrenees at the end of the war.

BEEM: They were in—I think—in two campaigns. They were not front-line infantry soldiers, but they were engineers who built the trenches. And he did see combat; that is, they were shelled. Fortunately, he was never gassed, and he was never wounded, but he was with a—I would say, a combat support unit in the engineering company that he was with. He didn't talk a lot about it. He did tell me about some of the cities that he was in, and the one that stands out in my mind is Nancy, France, which is in Alsace-Lorraine, and I visited Nancy during my military career, many, many years later. He didn't talk much about World War I. He was a member of the American Legion. He was not particularly active in the Legion, but he always belonged and occasionally would go to meetings. And the Legion was involved when we buried my dad. They provided the Honor Guard, and I still—well, I … don't have the flag that they had on his grave, since I sent that to my nephew, Edgar Allen Beem III, who's my brother's son. All of the Beem family history, photographs, and my father's World War I medal and his discharge papers, all of that kind of family things are in the hands of my nephew, who is a journalist and author. He has four books in publication. [He is] an art critic, and he writes for the *Boston Globe* on assignment as well as *Down East Magazine*, and he's a columnist for the *Maine Times,* so he's the repository of the Beem family history.

PIEHLER: What do you think made your father such a good salesman? And I mean, he really had a remarkable career of advancement.

BEEM: It's—I say this with a little, perhaps, a grin, and you may want to edit this, but it's what my kids—and I have three children—call "the Beem bullshit." (Laughter) My father was a great talker, and I assume that the two of you perhaps later will say, "He's a talker." On the other hand, my older brother was unsuccessful as a salesman, and I'll talk a little bit more about him later when it's appropriate, and his very interesting career. But I—unquestionably, it was my father's personality. I remember when I joined the insurance business after graduating from college, one of the things he said to me was that he had always, with his clients, had let the people think of him as "Mr. Beem, the insurance man," not "Mr. Beem, the Metropolitan Insurance man," but "Mr. Beem, the insurance man." And he did that, he said, because he wanted to identify with them; he wanted to be their counselor. And I know from stories that he told that over the years he helped many, many families in the state of Maine, and particularly in

the greater Portland area, where his main office was, and also around Bath, Maine, where he had a detached office. So I think it was his ability to relate to people. And he had an excellent command of the English language, although he was not a great reader. The reader in our family was my mother, and my love of books comes, I know, from my mother, but I think some of the leadership qualities that I might have displayed over the years came from my dad.

PIEHLER: Your dad was in the American Legion. Was he a joiner? Did he belong to other organizations?

BEEM: He belonged to the Kiwanis. He was a member of the Portland Country Club. He was a golfer. And he was one of the founders, with two or three other men, of the first Little League in the state of Maine, Little League Number One in Portland. For many years, he was the treasurer of the state Little League organization, and actually was at one time a national officer of Little League. I'm trying to think of what other organizations he might have belonged to. Oh, yes. He was a Shriner, and a thirty-second degree Mason. I was invited to join the Masons, but at that point of my life I was not interested. My older brother is a Mason.

PIEHLER: Your mother—I loved your story about—I mean, she was pretty strong-willed when—because your father was not looking to change careers and your mother determined this was his life path. Was that common for your mother to take that role on when she thought it was …

BEEM: Well, let me tell you another story, then, to answer your question. I mean, I could answer it very easily and say, "Yes," but a story might be more interesting. When my brother and I were in high school—he was a senior when I was a freshman, and he had a license to drive the car, and the way that worked was something like this: if there was an activity going on at the high school and he wanted to go, … he would first go to my mother, and he would say to Mother, "Mom, there's a dance at the high school Saturday night, and I'd like to use the car." And at that time, my mother would say something like, "How have your grades been recently?" even though she knew. My brother would respond, "Good." And she would say something like, "Well, you've been doing the chores, the things that you have to do around here. I'll talk to your dad about it and we'll let you know." Perhaps later that day or the next, my brother and I would be studying in our room together, and we occasionally would leave the door open, particularly when we knew a family conference was going on, because we liked to listen in, and we would hear my mother say to my father, "Ed, Allen would like to go to the dance at the high school Saturday night, and he wants to use the car, and he's agreed to take Gordon along, because Gordon wants to have a date, too. What do you think?" "Well, I don't want him using my car. You know it's a new car." And we would hear a little discussion go on, and finally my father would say, "Well, since his grades are doing pretty well, and since he's taking care of the things around the house that we know he has to do, why don't you say it's okay?" "Well," said my mother, "why don't you call the boys down and tell them?" And, in a few minutes, we would hear my father's voice call us, and we would go down, and he would say, "I understand you two want to go to the dance on Saturday night." "Yes, Dad." And he would say, "I understand your grades are doing well, you're doing your homework, and you're taking care of the tasks here around the house." "Yes, Dad." "All right, but you gotta be in by 11:30." And that's the way we would get permission to

take the car, and it continued—I tell you that because my mother was very strong. My mother ran the house. She was a housewife, and she was proud of it, and she raised two sons and a daughter. All three of us are college graduates. My father only had one semester of college. My mother had none, but I think they did well. And my mother was a very strong woman, and she helped my dad, and I think between the two of them, they did a pretty good job, particularly through the Depression. I know for a fact that my father paid the rent on my maternal grandparents' home from 1933 until their deaths in 1951 and '52, so he was generous. In fact, some people might have said he was an easy touch, but when people were in trouble, Dad would oftentimes help.

PIEHLER: Your mother, was she active in any clubs or organizations?

BEEM: She was active in the community concert series. She had been a—she was a musician. [She] played piano. She belonged to something called the Rossini Club, and a women's organization associated with a group called the Woodford's Club, which was a suburban club that my dad belonged to, and then there was a women's portion of it. She was not active in the American Legion Auxiliary, and I don't know that I ever asked her why she hadn't been. But she was not really a clubwoman, yet she was. I mean, that wasn't her only interest in life, but she did enough, I think, that—she did what was expected of her, and perhaps a little more in things she was interested in, particularly in music.

GORMAN: You mentioned that she played the piano. Did you have a piano in the house?

BEEM: We had a baby grand, and at my mother's death, one of my nephews claimed the piano, and we were very happy to see that he got it after we sold the family home. And she had a good voice. She—I can remember her singing. One of my Dad's favorite songs, and you'll probably understand this, was "Roses of Picardy," which was a famous song from World War I. Picardy is an area of France. If you know music, there, it's a …

GORMAN: I don't know that one.

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: You lived in different parts of the country. You lived in Ohio, and then you moved to New Rochelle, which is a suburb of New York City … and then to Maine. And they're very—they strike me—they're still very different places, and I'm struck that probably in the '30s and '40s they were even more different than they are today, because while there [was] national radio, there [was] not national television, and not the malls. Could you maybe talk just a little bit about your experiences of these three places? Because you grew up in very different places, I would think, or I could be wrong, that they're more …

BEEM: Well, they are different. I have memories of Youngstown. We lived … on 79 North Edgehill Drive for a while, and then on 125 North Osbourne Avenue. North Osbourne Avenue was about a ten-minute walk from Cheney School, where I went to the first grade. There was—and the other thing that I remember about that portion of my life was there was that … there were

two football players who played football for Cheney High School, and both of them went on to Ohio State University. They were the Cabelo brothers, and, uh—Johnny and Arzie. Johnny Cabelo was an All-American at Ohio State, and he was their punter, as well as a fullback. Arzie was a quarterback, his younger brother, and also was a quarterback on a single-wing team at Ohio State. And I can remember walking back and forth to school. Other than that I don't have a lot of memories, except on the occasional trips that we made back to Ohio from both New York and from New Rochelle, and also from Portland. As far as New Rochelle is concerned, I do remember it a lot clearer. I have a scar on my left knee that came from the athletic fields at Iona College. We lived on—I can't remember the name of the street at the moment, but you walked over one more street and then through the backyards and through some hedges, and we were on the grounds of Iona College. It was run by the Christian Brothers, if I remember right, at that time, and probably still is. The scar came from a track meet, and I was standing too close to the jumping pit, and one of the broad jumpers, after he made his jump, fell forward, and stood up and took another move, and clipped my left knee, and I have about a six-inch scar, so I have a memory of the athletic fields at Iona.

PIEHLER: Were you worried? Were your parents worried about infection?

BEEM: No, they sewed it up, and I remember being operated on. My first operation was there. I had what was called at that time a blood tumor on the base of my spine. And I remember sitting in a barber chair and leaning back, and I broke open the tumor and bled all over the seat in the barber shop, and it was from there they took me to the hospital, and they operated and cut it out. The other memory I have of that period, and it was one that I think is memorable, is it was the period in which kidnapping was a very common occurrence. I'm thinking of the Lindbergh kidnapping, but one of the people that lived nearby us was the family of a dentist whose name was Levine. And he had—the doctor had a son, Richard, and a daughter, whose name escapes me, but the son, Richard, was about my age, which then would have been eight or nine, and was a playmate of ours. I used to play with him. I think her name was Helen, as a matter of fact; Helen Levine. The boy, Richard, was kidnapped. His father apparently was doing well as a dentist. [He] was held for ransom. The ransom was paid, and Richard's body washed up on Long Island Sound, not too far from New Rochelle. And that memory, of course, something like that, stays with you through your entire life, so it was a period that I remember. But on the other hand, I went to North Elementary—Mayflower Elementary School on North Avenue, and I can remember the name of the principal because it's a little unusual name. His name was Mr. Pugh, P-U-G-H. And the kids at school, I can remember, were—tended to have comments concerning the principal that I won't repeat. (Laughter)

GORMAN: Lends itself to that, doesn't it?

BEEM: And as far as Maine is concerned …

PIEHLER: How old were you when you moved to Maine? Do you …

BEEM: We moved in August of 1936, so I would have been nine and a half, coming up ten. And I remember moving there. I remember the first two people we met. We moved into a house

at 230 Bradley Street, in Portland, and we were in the process of unloading the moving truck when there was a knock at the back door, and it was two boys. One of them [was] my brother's age, one of them a little younger than I, and they were Marty Lee and his brother, [Robert]. Marty was my brother's age. And they were selling strawberries, and we bought some strawberries from them. And Marty Lee graduated in the same class from high school as my brother. His younger brother was a couple of classes behind me in high school. And it's also interesting to note that Marty and I played on the same football team in college after World War II…. I haven't seen him in a number of years….

My memories of Portland are of the back end of the Depression, as it was gradually ending, but the real end of the Depression, of course, didn't come until the war started, World War II. As I said earlier, I can remember the members of the WPA [Works Progress Administration] putting sewers in. I also remember something that's a little different. Most of us know the submarine sandwich from the Subway restaurants or take-out places that we see around. The Italian sandwich, I have to tell you, originated in Portland, Maine, and I think it originated during the Depression. I can remember seeing the workers at this sewer project. They would walk about three blocks to a place called Reddy's Handy Store. The Italian gentleman who owned it had red hair and that's why it was known as Reddy's. And they would buy a small loaf of Italian bread, which Reddy would cut in the center [and] fold down. He would put ham and cheese and onion and tomato and pickle and sometimes black olives and olive oil, and that was an Italian sandwich. And I remember that they used to cost fifteen cents at that time. A little bit later I can remember buying them for a quarter. I don't think Subway would even talk to you today for twenty-five cents. They might give you one slice of tomato, but that's all.

GORMAN: Maybe. (Laughter)

BEEM: And I also remember the other thing that they used to buy at Reddy's. There was an alcoholic drink made by the Haffenreifer Brewing Company of Providence, Rhode Island, called Pickwick Ale, and around Maine it was called "the poor man's whiskey," because it was rather strong, dark ale.

PIEHLER: What did your parents think of Roosevelt in the thirties and early forties?

BEEM: I think they were very supportive of President Roosevelt. I think at some [point] they realized the country was in trouble. As we've already agreed, we were very fortunate. We never had a hungry day and my father had a job during the entire Depression, and got all of his promotions during the Depression. At the same time, there were a lot of unfortunate people, and I think they were supportive of President Roosevelt and the New Deal. Somewhat later in their lives, I would probably describe them as a little more conservative. My father and I and my mother very seldom talked politics. I really can't remember a lot of discussions over the dinner table of politics. But I know they always voted. My mother felt strongly that she should vote, and she did, and I know my dad always voted. How they voted, I don't think we really talked much about.

PIEHLER: Uh huh. Growing up, I'm curious what you did for fun. What memories stick out?

BEEM: Well, I guess I did two things. I was a jock. I played all three varsity sports at different phases. I was pretty small when I went to high school, so I didn't play football right away because I was too small. I played tennis for two years on the varsity tennis team. As a freshman, I made the varsity basketball team. It wasn't—I didn't make the varsity baseball team until I was a sophomore, but I was a three-letter man, eventually. I was All-Tournament basketball two years running, I was an All-League center fielder a couple of years, and I quarterbacked the football team when I was a senior. I played periodically when I was a … junior. So I think athletics were an important part of my life. I had great coaches. A man by the name of Jack Cottrell was our basketball … coach. He had been an All-American at Notre Dame. Excuse me: he had been an All-American at Colgate; my college coach was from Notre Dame. And he had played against the original Celtics in the old professional basketball league. And at the time we're talking about, he was in his forties and he used to suit up in long gym trousers and a T-shirt at practices, and when we weren't doing quite what he thought we ought to do, Jack would get on the floor, and I still have sharp memories, even sixty years later, of his elbows cracking my ribs when we would go up for a rebound together. It made an impression on me that's lasted a lifetime, and Jack was like a second father to me at that period of my life. During high school days, I had two summer jobs with him. His family owned a country club on Rangeley Lakes, Maine, up in the northwestern corner of the state, called Mingo Springs, and he was the golf pro. And Jack taught me to play golf, and at one point in my life I was a scratch golfer, but that is a lot of years back. But I worked for him two years. One year I drove the station wagon for the resort and did the errands, and the other year I ran the caddie shop. I was the caddie master, and that's how I got to play a lot of golf. So, I was involved very much in athletics. And the other thing, quite frankly, I did: I chased the girls. But, you know, that's another story, and probably not worthy of too much …

PIEHLER: So you went to your proms in your junior …

BEEM: I did, and I remember going to the—my brother, who I loved dearly, and I think you will probably understand this a little more—he is not only my brother, but he's always been one of my best friends, if not my best friend. [Al] was a high school senior, and he took me, a freshman, on double dates. And I think most men who hear that would understand what I'm saying, how indebted I am to him. He taught me, for example, how to preserve my clothes. To this day, I hang up my pants every night on a hanger. I don't wear the same shoes two days in a row. He taught me a lot about clothes because he valued them. He knew what it cost to buy them. But he also was trying to teach me how to do things right, and I remember that with a great deal of love. There was a period of nearly thirty years, during my military career and my brother working, and then when he went back to sea, where we wrote each other every week, until I retired from the military, and then later was close to retirement from civilian life, we talked on the phone and decided that we would stop writing the letters, simply because they deteriorated to the point of not having a lot in them, other than "Everything's okay here," and we decided that phone calls a couple of times a month—but Sunday after Sunday, for over thirty years, we wrote each other letters. So I have a lot of strong feelings about my brother, who was very good to me, and he always took me to a key dance if some—which is not to say that he didn't do things on his own—he did—but when the car was involved and there was a school

function involved, I always tagged along. And I remember he took me to my first formal dance. Pauline Grant was my date, and I also remember pulling the chair out from under her when she went to sit down. (Laughter) Fortunately, another one of the young men there caught her before she hit the floor, but Pauline didn't speak to me for a while after that. You know, the memories that are called up when you start thinking about these things are—they don't come up very often, but they're—so, I played athletics and I also played sports and in-between times I studied, and I was a member of the National Honor Society, and I graduated sixth in my high school class of some 290 students.

PIEHLER: Did your parents expect you—all of you—to go to college? Was that …

BEEM: Yes.

PIEHLER: That was the expectation.

BEEM: The expectation was clear. My father started putting money away when we moved to Maine, into an education fund, and fortunately he didn't have to use any of that for my brother or for me, since I went to college on the World War II GI Bill. I didn't have a long period of service, as you know, and I only had enough GI Bill for seven semesters. So, I graduated from Bowdoin in seven semesters by taking, in my junior and senior—well, in the last three semesters, I did four semesters' work, and during that time, I was on the Dean's List and a James Bowdoin scholar. So you know, looking back on high school, I played sports. I did date, but in the middle of all of it, I was studying, and I had some great teachers.

PIEHLER: What was your favorite subject?

BEEM: History. And Mr. Cottrell, Jack Cottrell, taught American history, who was the coach. I also had a great math teacher, but the one teacher I remember most of all is Ruth Williams, who was … my junior—junior? Senior. Excuse me. Senior English teacher. I remember her very well when—no, she was the junior [year], because I remember now who was the senior teacher. She was the junior [teacher]. I had her for one full year and I only went part of a year my senior year, because that's when I joined the Navy. When I—as a sophomore, I won a basketball letter on the varsity, and at that time you could get a letter sweater as a pullover with it knitted in one, or you could get a coat-type sweater with the letter up on your breast. I chose the latter, the coat-type sweater. And I remember at the start of my—I got this in my sophomore year. When the junior year started, the first day of school, I wore my letter sweater, and the second bell had rung for classes after recess, and that was my English class, and I was just a little bit late getting to the door, and I walked in and everybody in the class was seated, and I walked through the door and Miss Williams, who had a rather acerbic tongue, looked at me and said, "The hot shot athlete has decided to join us." (Laughter) And my face got, of course, very red, along with the acne that I had then, and I started to the back of room to sit down, and she said, "Oh no, Mr. Beem, here's your seat," and she pointed to the one right in front of her desk. She said, "We've saved this for you." And so, red face and all, I sat down, but I remember the thoughts that went through my head: "Don't say anything, Gordon, but she's never gonna put a red mark on my paper this entire year." And she didn't. But Ruth Williams taught me how to use the English language: how to

write it, how to speak it. And to just conclude the story, when I got out of the Navy and went to Bowdoin after World War II, all freshmen at Bowdoin had to take a course in English, and so I went to the course, and about the third or fourth class meeting, I realized that everything that was being talked about was in my head. I mean, I knew what they were talking about. I knew all of the ways to use punctuation. All of the things that were being talked about were in my head. I had them by memory, and they were put there, I knew, by Ruth Williams.

I was playing football as a freshman at Bowdoin, and I again lettered in that sport, and when it came time to get our letter sweaters, I again chose a coat sweater, and at Thanksgiving time, I went back home. Portland was only about twenty-five miles from Bowdoin, and high school was still in session, so I put on my letter sweater and walked across the big field from our house to the high school, as we lived quite close to school, and I was waiting for recess, and when recess was on, I walked into Miss Williams's room. I didn't want a class to be there, but I walked in, and she looked up at me and smiled, and she said, "You're still doing it, aren't you?" And I smiled back and said "Yes, Miss Williams, I am." And I said, "I've come to tell you something." And I told her what I just told you, and I said, "I have you to thank for that, and I'll have you to thank for that for the rest of my life." And she said, "Gordon," she said, "I always knew you had a good mind." And she said, "You were a little on the smart-alecky side and I thought I needed a way to motivate you," and she said, "I thought probably saying what I said would get you motivated." And she said, "It appears that it did," and I agreed with her. I stayed in touch with Miss Williams for many years. She went on to get a doctorate, became an assistant professor at a small college in Maine, eventually became a full professor, tenured, and died about ten years ago, still a single woman, but one who … has been very important to me and one who I, in an interview like this, I would not want not to mention.

PIEHLER: You—over lunch, you told us a great story. We asked you about your recollections of the war and I had sort of asked, "Did you think you'd get into the war when Pearl Harbor [broke]?" because some people I've interviewed have said when Pearl Harbor broke out, they were at the beginning of high school, so they thought the war would be long over. I mean, in terms of often how high school students think in terms of—a year is ages and ages, but you had said that the war had an impact. You could feel the impact of the war even before Pearl Harbor, and you told two wonderful stories. One a little more sad, but one very, in many ways, very funny.

BEEM: I'm trying to remember. The sad one, I recall.

PIEHLER: Yes, you had mentioned you had a classmate from the class of '40 that used to …

BEEM: Yes. Well, let me tell you about the way we were at that point. The—now I remember what you're thinking about as funny, and I will tell that as well. Portland, Maine, where I was raised, is obviously a port city, and it is the port for—one of the ports on Casco Bay. Casco Bay is huge. It's very, very large. The reason that so many of us were aware of the war even before Pearl Harbor, which as we all know is December 7, 1941, [is that] the war in Europe had started on September 1, 1939. And it became apparent in the next—probably within the next six to nine

months that the British were having a great deal of trouble, and I think, again, as historians you know this …

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

BEEM: The British were having a great deal of trouble, and our government decided, quite *sub rosa*, to provide materiel to the British in their fight against the fascists—the Axis, as it's so-called. In order to do that, it was necessary to ship the materiel across the Atlantic, so there was need for ships and there was need for escort vessels, and these ships had to be stationed somewhere. During World War II, the early part of it, a good part of the North Atlantic fleet was based out of Portland, Maine and out of Casco Bay. I mentioned the destroyer tender, the USS *Denabola*, which was known around the area as "USS *Never Sail*," because as a tender, it was designed to be in a port and take care of vessels when they needed repairs, but it also brought sailors to the community. As we kids recognized, began to see more and more ships, and also began to see more and more sailors, we began to be more interested in what was going on, and I think it became very apparent to us that there was a war, and that it had been going on at least a year by the time we began to really, you know, feel it. In our neighborhood, we had a group of young teenagers, and they went all the way from the youngest—which I was probably among the youngest; there were probably four or five fellows my age that were involved with the group—[to] my older brother, three years older, and then there were some fellows who were a year or two older than that, and we played softball in the spring and summer if we were there, and during the fall we'd play football at the field, because our home was right across the street from the back area of the high school, where there was a baseball field, some tennis courts, and to the left of our house, across a couple of streets was the football field. [The] practice field was behind it. So we used to play on those fields in the summertime and again in the fall, and one of our friends had a large, four car garage at their home, and we played basketball in that when it wasn't too cold or too snowy.

Among these people, among the older of these guys, was a man named Joseph MacGillicuddy. And when the war started in Europe and the ships began to carry materiel across the North Atlantic, Joe decided that he was gonna join the Merchant Marine. He wasn't a very good student, as I remember, and although he would have graduated high school, my recollection is that he decided that he would get his diploma *in absentia*, and he went up to Canada and signed aboard a merchant vessel. Joe made the first trip to England. Actually, I guess they went first to Scotland, and then to England, but he came back and told us all about it, and how it had been, and he told about the submarine threat. Although he said in that trip, his ship had not been involved, although some ships further back in the convoy had been attacked. He went back to Canada, signed on a second ship, and a few months later, the word came to the area that Joe's ship had been sunk by a submarine, which brought the war very much home to all of us. And it was, I think, fairly clear, as more and more of our friends of that group began to leave, the O'Brien boys, the Howarth boys, and gradually—and then, of course, my older brother graduated in '42, joining the—going to the Maine Maritime Academy. All of these things made the war pretty close to us. So, that for the serious side. I guess the funny thing that I mentioned was the fact that there were a lot of sailors in Portland.

PIEHLER: And that caused some problems. I mean, … you were saying they could be something of an unruly lot.

BEEM: Well, yes, they'd come in to shore, and some of them on the *Denabola* might have been homebodies, but most of them came ashore, and there was a bit of rowdiness. It got to the point where my parents suggested strongly—and when my parents suggested strongly, that meant an order—that we not go to town at night. [If you'd] get home before dark, you could go. And of course, with Daylight Savings Time, we could still sometimes be downtown at night. The thing that I mentioned that might have brought a laugh was what happened to the storefronts in Portland. We're talking about 1941 and '42 and into '43, and storefronts in those days, usually you could walk twenty or thirty feet from the sidewalk to where the door opened, and you would have a sort of an inverted "U" of displays behind glass. And because so many of the sailors began to use that area with female companionship for other than lawful activities, the merchants of the area put iron folding gates across the front of their stores. And I can remember going into Portland in a car with my parents of an evening, if we did, or in the bus or the streetcar, and seeing all these storefronts with the gates closed in. I remember I didn't really understand what it was about until I asked my brother, and my older brother explained it to me in earthy terms, (laughter) and we still even laugh about it when occasionally we get together. It's one of those things. It's a memory of World War II…. But to get back to where you were, the war came home to us very quickly with the death of Joe MacGillicuddy, and …

PIEHLER: I don't mean to interrupt, but why do you think Joe did it? Was it a lark? Did he really want to help the British cause?

BEEM: Well, I—he was an Irishman. His father was an Irish. I'm not really sure that he wanted to help the blokes …

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: … or the Brits, as much as it was a sense of adventure for Joe. I think it was really more a sense of adventure. It was before we were in the war, and it was the only way that you could get in, into the war, short of going to Canada and joining the Canadian forces. But the reason—we all knew that if you did that, you lost your American citizenship, and Joe wasn't prepared to do that, which is why—plus the fact that the merchant marine, at that time, was offering substantial bonuses, and I think it was a combination of the adventure and the fact that it was gonna be good pay. And there may have been some patriotism. I mean, I don't want to say—there was patriotism, probably, and he wanted to help.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But it … sounded like it was a complex …

BEEM: It's a very complex thing.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: But it brought the war home to us very early, and we still talk of Joe occasionally when some of the Maine boys get together for whatever. My brother, who still lives outside of Portland in a town called Westbrook, which is the next town from Portland, he sees a lot of our old friends, and they wonder why Gordon lives in North Carolina, and I explain that to them very easy. I say, "Maine is beautiful from May through September, but from October through April, the ice and the snow has driven Gordon south." And a lot of others, I'm sure. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: No, I would agree with you because in the summer, it's absolutely delightful and then—I had a friend who was an Episcopal priest, and he described some winter mornings, on a Sunday morning, before going to church, how cold it was.

BEEM: Yes. And, well, later when we get to my military career, I'll tell you a little bit about the state of Maine, because I have a good story of there, too.

PIEHLER: … Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor occurred?

BEEM: We were on a Sunday drive. My parents—back in those days, you didn't call people in advance and go in to visit them. Sunday afternoon was visiting day, and we had people who would just drop by our house to see us. For example, we had pictures of a lot of our family friends, and one family that I want to speak about is the Bennett family. And Mr. Bennett—Billy—and Mr. Bennett, William Bennett, was the assistant manager in charge of the Bath, Maine
Sub-district office of the Portland, Maine office. In other words, he was an assistant to my dad, who was the manager of Portland and of Bath, and he ran—Mr. Bennett ran the Bath office. He had one son, Billy, and a daughter, Marie, and Marie was an absolutely gorgeous redhead. She is now deceased and so is her brother, but we had a beautiful picture of Marie, also one of Bill in his Naval Academy uniform. And the thing I'm thinking about is when a car would pull up in front of our house on a Sunday afternoon, my mother would look out and she'd say "It's the Bennetts," which was a signal for whichever one of us was around, including my sister, to head for the dining room, pull open the bureau drawer, get out the pictures of the Bennetts, and bring them into the living room to put them on the mantle. (Laughter) My mother was a very funny woman. If she were here, she'd probably be laughing like we are, but this was her way of doing things. And I can remember that. Sunday afternoons, people coming. Or we would get in the family car, and we would drive to Biddeford, which was a—or Saco, a town south of us, where my father had business friends, and there was a family named Harvey. The husband, the father of the family was a judge in … Biddeford-Saco, in the court there, and I can remember [he] had three daughters. Justine was the oldest, and there were a couple of sons and we used to drive down there on a Sunday. They'd come to visit us. And we were on one of our Sunday visits and heading home when my father turned the car radio on, and there we were, the whole family, sitting in the car listening to the first report of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. And my father said that he thought that this was gonna be as—I remember him saying something to the effect that this was gonna be a long war.

PIEHLER: He expected it to be …

BEEM: I remember somewhere in the back of my mind. I hadn't thought about it when you asked, when we talked about this before, but Dad said something to that effect, and I could tell he was concerned because of my brother's age. He was pretty sure that my brother would be in it. I'm not so sure he thought I would be, but he knew my brother would at least go, because he obviously knew of the death of our friend Joe MacGillicuddy, and we had talked some about that. But that's where we were. We were in the family car. We had been on a visit to the Harveys in Saco, and were on our way home.

PIEHLER: How did the war—I mean, the war had affected the town way before the United States had gotten into the war, but how did … America's entrance into the war change Portland and your world?

BEEM: Yeah. Well, I guess the easiest answer is we began to have friends quickly. I mean, the next day or the day after, there were men who were joining up. You know, fellas that we had known from being a couple of years older. And my brother, who was due to graduate the next June. He was the class of '42, so he was due to graduate in June, and some of his classmates were leaving, or were talking about leaving or what they were gonna do. Was it gonna be Army, what—and there were some fellas who went to the Marines right away, some who had great combat records. So immediately, because of the kind of relationships that we had, we began to see people quickly go into the armed services. We were much aware of the growth of the ships in the harbor. I mentioned my father's office on the tenth floor of the Bank of Commerce building before, and you could see the entire—all of Casco Bay, and I can remember being up in his office looking out at the vessels, and also taking binoculars up there to look at the various ships, and I mean battleships and carriers. You know, the whole nine yards were there at one time or another. There was an influx of servicemen. We had two forts in the Portland Harbor; Fort Williams and Fort Preble. The Maine National Guard was shortly activated. Or I guess it had been activated even before the war started. The 240th Coastal Artillery, which was commanded by the father of a classmate of mine, Colonel Kern, George C. Kern. I can remember, he was a—he had a meatpacking business. I can remember the trucks with "George C. Kern" on the side of them. [We] used to get free hot dogs when we'd go see the Kern family, but that's another story.

So there was an impact of growth of the military presence. The Bath Ironworks geared up even more, where my father's branch office was. I can tell you, during the war, my father wrote two of the largest group insurance contracts that Metropolitan Life had ever seen. He almost got into trouble for it, because he and Mr. Bennett up in Bath worked not only with management, but they made the cardinal sin of managers at that time: they worked with the union. And then they got a big group contract at the Bath Ironworks, and when they built the New England Shipbuilding Yard in Portland, where they made liberty ships, again my father was able to write the group contract with one of his assistants in Portland, and again he—I would say, this time, he used a back channel to work with the union, but the company finally—once they signed it and the [contract] was in place, I think the company got wind of it, and some of my father's superiors were probably very good at doing what we in the military called "chewing ass," and my father reported these, supposedly out of earshot of the family, but I can remember hearing what he told

my mother they said to him. It wasn't *de rigueur* at that point in life for a manager to work with the unions to get contracts, but that's … the way it was.

PIEHLER: I'm very intrigued about that. So your father—these contracts that he's developed, these group policies, were they with the union itself?

BEEM: No, they were with the company.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: But in order to get it through, the unions had to agree. You know.

PIEHLER: And he went to the union and said, "This would be good for your members, and …"

BEEM: Well, um …

PIEHLER: I'm just curious how he worked with them, because …

BEEM: Well, my guess is that he talked to the union people directly, but I know he talked with the managerial people whom he knew, and he also had a few political connections that he'd engendered over the years, which I'll speak about a little bit later.

PIEHLER: Well, it sounds like that he had the sense that to get this to work, he'd have to touch all bases …

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: If he just went to management, that's not gonna work, because …

BEEM: Not gonna go.

PIEHLER: Yeah, the union people and the rank-and-file won't go along and …

BEEM: Yeah, and it was good for the workers; it was good for the management; and I know it was good for the Beem family. And so, all in all, it worked well for everybody, although it wasn't the accepted way to do things.

PIEHLER: No, I think that's very—that's why I partly want to clarify, because it sounds very interesting for the record …

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: … the historical record. Because it sounds like your father was very open-minded in terms of different groups you need to work with. Is that a fair …

BEEM: That's fair. And I can tell you that my father died in 1971. Yes, 1971. He was not quite seventy-five when he died. Until my mother's death in 1986, the members of the staff of the Portland, Maine district were—who continued on after my father's death—were in touch with my mother frequently. My sense was that my father was a beloved leader, and I don't think he ever forgot where he came from. That's … a farm boy from Ohio, who at fourteen was thrown into being head of his family.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

BEEM: And he never forgot that, and I don't think he ever forgot the people who helped him on the way up. A couple of times he had to call in a few chits, but that happens in business.

PIEHLER: Let me make sure Dave speaks up …

GORMAN: Yeah, I was thinking a little bit about Portland during the war, especially with the ship works right there. Do you remember any precautions? Did they put any submarine nets across the entrance to the bay?

BEEM: Yes, there were sub nets, and there were air raid drills. My father was an air raid warden. I still have a belt. I'm not wearing it today. I've got my new Coach belt on that I just got at a factory store down in Georgia, but I have a belt at home that I wear with my jeans that was my father's belt that he got from Civil Defense when he was an air raid warden during World War II. And it's a, you know, a brown leather belt, with a genuine brass—stamped on the back, "Genuine Brass" buckle, and so I wear it and I think of my dad. And he was involved to that extent. There were, of course, no air raids, but the thing that we did notice is we began to get blackouts. When they realized is that the lights of the city set up a silhouette against which the submarines could see the vessels, we began to have blackouts.

GORMAN: Mm hmm.

BEEM: And I can remember that we pulled our shades and there were—gradually they cut down on the outside streetlights, and they would cut down on the power, so there were precautions taken. The two forts were manned, but—for a while, and then they began transferring the Army troops away because there wasn't—there didn't seem to be any reason to think we were gonna be invaded.

GORMAN: You mentioned there was a coastal artillery …

BEEM: … unit.

GORMAN: … unit that was there as well? Did they practice? Were you … aware of it?

BEEM: Oh, sure. Well, we'd been aware all of our lives, because the … National Guard troops would periodically go on active duty in the summertime, and they would fire the guns. They would fire the cannons, so we were used to hearing that, and as kids, we … were allowed to visit

Fort Williams and Fort Preble. In fact, I can remember on a July Fourth—oh, it must have been … about 1939—'38 or '39 —we were out on Long Island, out in the—not *the* Long Island down in New York, but Long Island in Casco Bay at the home of some friends, and I had a firecracker, a four-incher, go off in my hand, and it was bleeding, and they were worried about it and they wanted to get a tetanus shot, so they took me in a speedboat across the bay to Fort Preble and to the Army dispensary at Fort Preble, and that's where I got a tetanus shot. I can remember that. It just sort of came back to me because you asked the question …

GORMAN: Pretty exciting for a ten-year old, though.

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You had some close calls growing up as a kid. You, you …

BEEM: Yeah. Well, you know, life is full of hazards as a child and as one grows. (Laughter) But it's been an interesting life, and I think there—you know, to further answer your question, we were very aware in Portland, with the advent of the fleet, earlier than the war starting, then the expansion. And then the other thing that we began to see, we began to see few and fewer ships, as some of the ships were pulled and went through the Canal and went to the Pacific, and as the submarine menace became less and less important close to the American coast, as they were driven further and further away. And it's very interesting, the book that I left with you today, this two-volume work, called [Hitler's U-Boat War] by Clay Blair, which, incidentally, is his last work since he is recently deceased, talks about the submarine menace in it and that it was grossly exaggerated. At least that's his take on it, as opposed to some of the other authors, about the sea war in the North Atlantic. But we began to gradually notice there were fewer and fewer ships, and then we began to see the liberty ships just come off. They were—yeah, the liberty ships and then ultimately the victory ships. But the liberty ships coming out of that Portland shipyard were—it was like, you know, they were coming fast and furious. I don't know—I would hesitate to make a guess to what the rapidity was, how often, but they were certainly launching at least one or two a week, once they fully cranked up.

GORMAN: You mentioned also your older brother Edgar. You mentioned at lunch that he had attended—he was in the second class at the Maine Maritime …

BEEM: … Academy.

GORMAN: … Academy. Did you ever visit him while he was in school up there?

BEEM: Yes, I visited a few times, and I also went to his graduation parade. It was—I'm trying to remember exactly how long the course was. It was a compressed course. It might have been fourteen or sixteen months. I really would have to ask him to know exactly, but I know it wasn't a full four-year program, but it was accelerated and it was a seven-day-a-week operation, and I can remember Al [my brother] occasionally coming home on a brief three-day pass or an overnight when he could. You know, when they were given time off, in his cadet uniform. And I think he graduated either late in '43 or maybe early in '44. I can't remember for exact, I don't

want to say for sure. I would ask him. But anyway, he did go to the Maine Maritime Academy, and he graduated second class. He was at that time granted a commission as an ensign in the U.S. Naval Reserve, but he chose to go to the Merchant Marine rather than the Navy, and he had a third mate's ticket, was part of that. He was a deck officer, and so he shipped as a third mate, and then during that period he had a second mate's license which he got, and then went on to—at a later point, when that comes time, I'll tell you … somewhat about his career, you know, if you have some interest in it. But he went to Maine Maritime Academy and he did serve during World War II with the Merchant Marine, and he did serve overseas and he took several trips to the Mediterranean. And recently, in the last five years, I think you know that they've named all of the World War II Merchant Marine veterans as actually veterans of World War II.

GORMAN: Entitled to benefits.

BEEM: Entitled to benefits as veterans. Although when the Korean War came, he was called to active duty as a naval officer, so he was a veteran of the Korean War, having been in Korea. Where that comes in chronologically, we can talk about that, too.

GORMAN: Okay.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: did you have any—did you work at all in high school or before then? Did you have any summer jobs, or …

BEEM: Summer jobs. Remember, I told you about being the caddy master and the taxi driver at the resort. But those were the two summer jobs I had, and I had—but that's—I didn't work any time during the …

PIEHLER: During the school year?

BEEM: During the school year, I didn't work. We had an agreement in the family that any bottles with deposits on them belonged to the sons. (Laughter) I don't know if my sister did it after we left, because she was somewhat younger. But my brother and I used to split them up while he was still there, and then after he left I had the bonanza of just, of taking the bottles back. Mostly club soda bottles and milk bottles, occasionally Coke bottles. Not very often beer, but my dad liked club soda with a little bit of whiskey in it. He'd have one or two. Never any more than that, but there were club soda bottles. Occasionally ginger ale. So that was our source of money.

PIEHLER: Spending money?

BEEM: Spending money, yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you go to the movies very much, growing up?

BEEM: Yes. Oh, yeah. I can remember going to movies in Ohio. That was a big deal on Sunday, going to the movies, because—not so much sitting in the movies, because we'd sit up … in the balcony, and one of the parents would go with us. Or, during that time, my mother, even

in Maine, through the war—well, after the war years, she always had a mother's help, a young woman or a woman who came in five—usually five days a week and would be there from eight-thirty, nine o'clock until supper was made. My mother did all the cooking, but she'd have help with the house and the help, the mother's help, would go with us to the movies. That was a—or sometimes my father, if he wasn't traveling, would be home. He would take us, but he would drive us, even if he was there, because my mother never learned to drive. [In] all of her years, never learned to drive. We tried to get her to learn to drive after my father died, and she tried … school for a couple of days, and she said, "No deal." But the other thing I remember about going to the movies: Charlie Chan, Warner Roland as Charlie Chan. And I mean, that really goes back, and I can remember the—you know, the Marx Brothers. But the real key for Sunday and the movies was, the movie was important, but what happened afterwards was even more important, because we always got to go to Isley's Dairy and we'd get an ice cream cone. And they had a dip that they'd take the cone, and the ice cream would look like the cone, sitting on top of it. It was like a pyramid, you know, sort of rounded and pointed, and we used to love those ice cream cones. So my memory is sitting in the balcony, seeing the movies—Errol Flynn, and Gary Cooper, and The Lives of a Bengal Lancer, and all the adventure movies. And, of course, Charlie Chan was great at that point. So, yes, we did go to the movies a lot.

PIEHLER: When did you … have the sense that this would be your war, World War II? That this—because you would enlist on December sixth, 1944, into the Navy, and …

BEEM: … Well, what was happening was everybody was following the war, and we were talking about it in our classes, particularly in our history classes. And it came to the realization after the invasion of Europe, and the work that was going on in the Pacific, the island-hopping. I think some of the guys in my class began to think that we were gonna get left out of the war. And on that particular day, there were three of us, myself [and] two friends of mine, Ronald Cole, known as "Ronky," and Charles Augustus Bonnie, Jr., known as "Chuck," and the three of us enlisted together. We had a picture in the newspaper of us with—me with a baseball bat in my hand, and I had not the white hat of the Navy, but that winter hat, the black—the blue one, the real dark blue with the "U.S. Navy" across the front of it. There was a picture in the paper and, you know, they ran it on the sports page because of the athletic competition I'd been involved in, and there was a lot of hassle about it, whether I was gonna be available for the basketball season. (Laughter) Those kinds of things came up, but there was a concern on the part of some of the fellows in my class that we were gonna get left out, and so a number of us did what I did: we enlisted. I was sent home for a while, on active duty without pay, and then was called to active duty. But you know, my part in World War II is minimal. I'm a veteran of World War II because I did serve, and I did get out in the Pacific during a period of time that qualified me for an Asiatic-Pacific campaign ribbon along with the American theater, but I didn't see any combat, although the vessel I was assigned to had seen some combat earlier in that period. I went to Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Chicago for their boot camp, and then was in a couple of radio technician training programs when I asked for sea duty, because I wanted to get to sea before the war was over. I just barely managed to get out there before the signing in Tokyo Bay. Although I consider my—I am a veteran of World War II and was eligible for the G.I. Bill, [but] Korea is really my war.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean, you really do come in at the tail end. I wanted to ask you specifically about, I guess—one is, why the Navy? And I'd like you to, if you could recollect a little bit about the naval station at the Great Lakes, because I've interviewed someone who went roughly the same time period, and I'd be curious whether your recollections match his. I won't tell you what they are.

BEEM: Okay.

PIEHLER: But why the Navy? I mean, there's a big naval presence where you are. Is that …

BEEM: Yeah, that's part of it, but the real … reason is—I've got to back up a little bit. Earlier in the interview, I talked about Bill Bennett. That is, the Bennett family, Anne Marie, who became a nurse and who was, as I said, a very beautiful redhead, but a lot older than myself. I could only, you know, look up—in fact, she was a little older than my brother, so I don't—but her brother, Billy, or as he was known to us, went to the Naval Academy, and was a graduate of the Naval Academy class of either—he was in one of the "hurry-up" classes [at the] first part of the war. But he was sort of a … role model for me, his father and my father being associated in business. And I had known Bill before he went to the Academy, although I was a little boy, but he was always nice to me, and when he went to the Academy, he used to—they'd stop in when he was on leave, or we would go see them when he was on leave, and we had a picture of Bill in his uniform. And I wrote my eighth grade civics class career paper, and the title was "My Career as a Naval Officer." So there was a lot of reason for it. There was Portland, Maine and the Navy presence there, and … Bill Bennett, who was a role model.

What happened in all of this was, my plan was to go to the Naval Academy, and I took the preliminary examination given by our Senator, who was then Ralph O. Brewster, and who my father knew reasonably well. Well enough to ask him to consider me for appointment to the Academy. So I took the first preliminary mental examination, which I passed, and I went for the preliminary physical examination. And this was when I was a junior, and if I remember it rightly, it was after—the junior year wasn't over yet, but I was playing on the baseball team, and actually, at that point, was leading—I had the leading batting average in the league, and I had been a All-Tournament basketball player in the season just ended in Western Maine. When I went to take the physical examination, they told me I didn't have 20/20 vision, which was a requirement for the Naval Academy, and which then cut me out of consideration for the Naval Academy. My coaches were stunned. The baseball coach couldn't believe that I didn't have 20/20 vision. He said, "That's just not possible." And the football coach, Jack Cottrell, and basketball, because he was both football and basketball, he said, "Gordon," he said, you know, "I don't believe this." So, I mean, we had the family physician test my eyes again. Actually, I think we may have went to an
ophthalmologist. I think we did go—but anyway, I didn't have 20/20 vision, so the Naval Academy was out.

PIEHLER: But you were pretty close, because …

GORMAN: You led the league in hitting. You must have had some good eyes.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean, if you weren't 20/20, you weren't that far …

BEEM: Well, I was far—I think it was probably maybe 20/50, but at that time, it was 20/20 vision or nothing, so all that being the way it was, the Navy was the place. I did have one friend, Freddy Seales, who lived down the street from me about four houses away, who was a year ahead of me in high school. He joined the old Army Air Corps and [it] then became the Army Air Forces, and he flew B-24s out of Italy, was a gunner on a [B-]24 and flew eighteen or twenty missions through—maybe did the whole tour, but I know he came home with a couple of air medals. But it just seemed to me that all my background and all my thought processes had always been Navy, so that's how I joined the Navy.

PIEHLER: Well, I guess, one of the reasons I wanted to ask you—I know you much more identify with Korea, but you bring a unique perspective to this interview in that you served in … two different services, and I think of the Navy and Air Force as very different services.

BEEM: Amen.

PIEHLER: So I wanted to ask you a little bit—I guess, beginning with [the] Great Lakes facility and your recollections of—of course, you were used to cold weather.

BEEM: Oh, the cold weather didn't bother me. What bothered me was the hard-assed petty officers. I mean, I can remember—I don't know, the third or fourth week of boot camp, when we were getting ready to get an overnight pass to go into Chicago. And incidentally, Chicago at that time was *great*. It was—I'm trying to remember the name of the mayor at that time. It will come to me. But everything was free. You rode free on the trams, and you could go into the ball games at Wrigley or at Comiskey Park, was free …

PIEHLER: Because you were G.I.?

BEEM: Because you were G.I. And if you could get into a bar, which some of us couldn't, (laughter) but we always tried, and sometimes we would get into the bar, the drinks were mostly free. I mean, somebody would always buy the drink for you.

PIEHLER: So this is a pretty good life, in some ways, if you can get a pass.

BEEM: Yeah, if you can get a pass. So in walks the chief, and he had on his hat with the white cover on it, which he walked through the door, and the petty officer in charge of our company called us all to attention. We're all at attention. The chief walks in, and he had on his white gloves as well as his white hat, and he took off that brimmed cap and he stood there in the doorway, bent over, and scaled that hat down through the opening area between two rows of bunks, and he walked slowly down to it, picked it up, and said one word—"Restricted" —and walked out. [Be]cause, I mean, the hat was dirty, so that meant the floor was dirty. The deck was dirty. Excuse me; I should say deck. The deck was dirty, and so we got our asses reamed out by the first class petty officer, who was—I don't know if he was gonna be docked or not, but

we all were. We spent the whole weekend cleaning that place up. That's a clear memory of—and they were really hard-nosed with us. But …

PIEHLER: What about the food and the—did you have enough food?

BEEM: Oh yeah, food was fine. The weather was cold, and it was snowy and rainy. Chicago is that way that time of year. But after I finished boot camp, there were about six primary radio technician schools in the country that they sent you to, and then you went from primary to advanced, and some guys went on beyond that. The school that I selected on the paperwork was Wright Junior College, and … I put a couple others, but I had Wright Junior on the top. Wright Junior is located on 3500 North Addison Avenue in Chicago, (laughter) and I got selected for Wright Junior College. It was a six weeks program and, man, did I have a ball. I mean, in Chicago, I was a seaman first class, which was the same as a corporal. I had enlisted into that program, and I had gotten, instead of being a seaman apprentice or a seaman recruit—that is, E-1 or E-2—I was an E-3 right from the get-go, and was during the entire period, so I had a little more money than some of the guys. I bought myself a suit of tailor-mades, first. In fact, I had the tailor-mades in a locker downtown. I'd had them made in Portland, where there were many made-to-order uniform stores because of all the navy that was there. Well, the tailor-mades are beautiful, not that suede, that felt-like, or that wool stuff that we had, but they were—I don't know what the kind of material they were, but they were bell-bottom trousers, and they were spiked at the knee and belled at the bottom, and they were zippered around instead of buttons. I mean, they were gorgeous. And I think I was the only guy in the—at Wright Junior who had these, but I was careful about how I wore them. I can remember that. But it was a good period. Then I went from there to a place in California that's now the famous hotel. Oh, damn. What is that hotel on the coast near Monterrey? [The Del Monte Hotel]

PIEHLER: Yeah, I've heard of it, and I …

BEEM: I can't remember it, but what we'll do is we'll pause here, leave a little bit, and then fill it in.

PIEHLER: That's right. (To Gorman) Or on the transcript you can just fill in …

BEEM: Or I may think of it later.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, in terms of your radio training, because I think if there's one link, in looking at your pre-interview sheet, is that you would end up initially in the Air Force doing messages, communications. And is that a link between the Navy training [and future service]?

BEEM: No.

PIEHLER: No, there is no link at all.

BEEM: There is no link at all.

PIEHLER: And your training in the Navy focused—I mean, you're in radio school. Are you focusing on radio repair or maintenance?

BEEM: Well, … actually, it was radar that they were teaching us.

PIEHLER: Oh, so you were learning radar?

BEEM: Radar, yeah. And I was gonna be a radio technician, which are radar technicians who could repair those things, but I got into it and I wasn't all excited about it, and when there—when it came chance to go to the third school, you could also ask for sea duty.

PIEHLER: And that's when you decided …

BEEM: That's when I said, you know, "Let's go to sea. I mean, I want to get in this before it's over. I'll stay in these schools and, baloney. Let's see what sea's like." So I went to—that's when I went to sea.

PIEHLER: And when … did you report? When did you come aboard the USS Athene?

BEEM: Uh …

PIEHLER: Do you remember, roughly?

BEEM: It was in the late summer. I could probably reconstruct it from what you got here, but I can't really actually remember.

PIEHLER: It was almost when the war was just coming to an end, really, in another week, few weeks.

BEEM: Yes, it was right at that point. You had to serve—let's see, how did it work out? I'm trying to remember. You had to have been out, in order to get the Asiatic-Pacific [Medal], you had to have been out before the end of '45, I think.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

BEEM: And we took a trip to Guam and came back. That's the way I remember it. But I can't really remember the exact—it was probably in August. That's what I'm thinking, the last few weeks of the war. I don't think—I'm not sure whether the bomb had been dropped. I know the bombs were dropped on August 8 from the Enola Gay and I think, on the 12 … on Nagasaki [The bombs were dropped on August 6 and 9]. It could well be after that, and before the armistice, before the signing of the treaty, but I'd have to jibe that with …

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: This is probably—would jibe my memory if we really looked at it. But I, you know, as I said, I didn't see any action, although the ship had seen action earlier.

PIEHLER: What was your duty aboard ship?

BEEM: I was in the first division of the deck gang.

PIEHLER: So, you did not do any of your—you had all this training on radar, and you did …

BEEM: Nah, I resigned from their program, and I wasn't rated, and when I got aboard ship, they looked at me and said, "We need somebody in the … first division of the deck gang," and I said, "Fine," so …

PIEHLER: So you were really, as I might use the term, a common sailor. You really …

BEEM: Yeah, I was a swab jockey. (Laughter) You know, I can hear it now. The whistle would go, the boatswain's whistle would go, and the voice on the P.A. system would say, "Now hear this. Now hear this. Clean sweep-down, fore and aft. All first division fore, second division aft," and we'd run …

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Gordon R. Beem on March 28th, 2000, at the University of Tennessee, in Knoxville, Tennessee, with Kurt Piehler …

GORMAN: And Dave Gorman.

PIEHLER: … You were just, as the first tape was running out on the interview, … you were saying you could still hear the whistle and the call for the first crew to …

BEEM: First Division.

PIEHLER: First Division to …

BEEM: Right. First Division was always the forward division and the Second Division had the after-part. We had—it was an attack cargo ship, and we had some LCVPs [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel; a.k.a. 'Higgins boats'], and I was hoping eventually that I'd get assigned to the LCVPs, but that never happened. I just stayed. I was with the First Division. We made one trip. We were gone—I don't know—six or eight weeks, out in the Pacific and back again, and at that point, they were beginning to wind down what was happening, and I was transferred from there to the Philadelphia Naval Receiving Station, was put aboard a yard oiler: *YO-230*, I think. The yard oilers, we went around the Philadelphia Navy Yard fueling the various vessels. It was like a big tugboat.

GORMAN: Had you been aboard an ocean-going vessel before?

BEEM: Uh …

GORMAN: Or was that the first time?

BEEM: Well, on the [USS] Athene was the first time I'd been.

GORMAN: For the first time …

BEEM: Yeah.

GORMAN: Was that—did you have any difficulty getting used to the routine or getting used to the seas? Any stories about rough passages or anything?

BEEM: Well, no, I don't think that I—you know, I'd been on a number of boats, a boat being something that you can haul aboard a ship in the—you know, off the coast of Maine, fishing boats and pleasure boats of family friends and so forth. Both my parents did not like the water. Neither of them … swam. I can remember once coaxing them together to get on a eighteen-foot boat that I owned, but that's in the [19]60s, so I won't think about that, but they were not sea people. My brother is a born seaman. I'll tell you about him, as much interest as you have. But I didn't have any problem with sea legs. I don't ever remember being sick. I know we were in a couple of minor storms. But I didn't particularly like the sea. I think it's important to note that, because it has some bearing on the rest of my military life.

GORMAN: Sure.

PIEHLER: Well, one question, I guess, because … when I said there's a real difference between—I've been struck by the real—there's certain commonalties in the services, but there are also—I've been more and more struck by how different they are. And I'd be curious for you to reflect, because you were an enlisted man in both the Navy and the Air Force. You later become an Air Force officer, but you were originally enlisted. What's it like to be an enlisted man in the two different services? If you could reflect on that.

BEEM: Um, well, let me see if I can, I can give you just a quick—I tell stories sometimes to make a point.

PIEHLER: No, no, we love those stories.

BEEM: Let me turn to Korea. And I am a buck sergeant. My brother is a naval officer, a lieutenant junior grade. No, he's a lieutenant senior grade at that point, full lieutenant, which is the counterpart of an Air Force captain. My brother was—came to visit me in Korea, and when he came with a friend of his, who was also a full lieutenant, Bob English, they came aboard an Australian Air Force Dakota, which is the same as our C-47. I'll later tell you about that. But anyway, he came to visit me at Kimpo Air Base, and I'm a buck sergeant then. When he got off the plane and came to the headquarters of the 4th [Fighter Intercept Wing], he told the wing

sergeant major who he wanted to see, which was, you know, his brother, the sergeant. And the wing adjutant, a major, for whom was my official officer boss at that time, knew that I was in Portland—and that's more of a story, too—but he asked my brother and his friend. He said he could make arrangements for them to stay in the BOQ, Bachelor Officer Quarters, and my brother said, "Thank you very much," but he'd like to stay in my tent if it was possible, because he said, "I haven't seen my brother for a year and I would like to be with him." And so, the adjutant gave permission for him to stay in my tent, since we had two empty bunks at that time in a six-man tent. [That was] story one.

Story two: about five, six months later, I got an R&R. Now I'm a staff sergeant, one more promotion, but I'm still an enlisted man. My brother is in Iwakuni, [Japan]. [He was] the chief engineering officer of the AVP-40, the Floyd's Bay, a seaplane tender. So the Aussies fly me over to Iwakuni, and that's another story, how I got in so good with the Aussies. But they flew me over, and when I got there, I called my brother on the ship, which was tied up there. Seaplane tenders are like destroyer tenders. They pull in someplace, they tie up, and the seaplanes pull up next to them. My brother said, "Tell the adjutant to get a cab for you and to take you to Hotel So-and-So." So, I went to Hotel So-and-So, whatever it was, in the cab, and it was like they rolled out the red carpet for me. I couldn't understand that until my brother showed up, and they did the same thing for him, only except a lot more so. I said, "What the hell is all this, Al?" and he said, "Well, I'm the senior shore patrol officer in Iwakuni." And I said, "Oh?" And he said, "Yes," and he said, "They're very nice to me." And the reason that I was in the hotel was that enlisted men are not allowed in "officers' country" aboard a Navy ship.

PIEHLER: Even if you're related.

BEEM: Even if you're related.

PIEHLER: And even if you're an NCO [noncommissioned officer].

BEEM: Even if you're an NCO. If I'd been a second lieutenant, I could've gone there, but my brother couldn't have me in his cabin or in his area. So, I mean, it just—it wasn't, I mean—tradition prohibited. In fact, I guess, I don't know that it was really law, but I think it was regulation that enlisted people were not allowed, except the steward's mates, or some of the people that worked there, but he couldn't have me there to stay with him.

PIEHLER: Could that …

BEEM: And the point I'm making with the story is, that's a clear difference between the Air Force, that operates a little more informally, and the Navy, which still has a lot of tradition. And of course, we're talking about the year 1951, '52, so, you know, that's a lifetime ago.

PIEHLER: Although … we have a current—we have a naval officer who retired a few years ago, and she said some things about the Navy really haven't changed. (Laughs)

BEEM: Yeah, well, I know they haven't and so—but I make the point that … there is a sharp distinction between officer and enlisted. A lot sharper in the Navy than in the Air Force. The Air Force is a lot more relaxed.

PIEHLER: Did you have stewards on any of the ships? On the Athene?

BEEM: Yeah. They all were blacks. The crew was partially integrated, as I recall. There were some members of the deck gangs, but we had steward's mates who were the cooks and bakers. Actually, they were—a lot of them—were mess attendants and they took care of the officers' mess.

PIEHLER: You had initially dreamed of being even a naval officer, going to the Naval Academy, which is a real aspiration, and you increasingly—it sounds like you increasingly became disillusioned with the Navy.

BEEM: Um …

PIEHLER: That's—is that a fair?

BEEM: That's more than fair. I would probably have lasted at the Naval Academy a few weeks. I would've surely rebelled at that stage of my life against the iron-ass discipline. I'm sincere in that, and I'm glad, when I look back on my own career—I always wanted to be a military officer and I achieved that goal, but it's a very circuitous route that I took to it, and yet, it led me into a profession that I carried over into civilian life, and where I think I was able, both in the military, and in civilian life, to do some good work.

PIEHLER: Well, partly, I find your comments even more intriguing, because you become an officer, I mean, and you have a military career, so it—I'm struck by your—you still remember very vividly how much you didn't like—the expression often was used, if I recollect, in World War II, you couldn't stand the chickenshit in the Navy. Is that …

BEEM: That's another amen. Maybe that's a double amen.

PIEHLER: You found that it was even above the good order that was [necessary]. I mean, parts of discipline even—I've never been in the military, but I sense some of this is necessary for good order and discipline, but you thought—and I don't want to put words into your mouth, but you thought it went above that necessary for good order. Is that …

BEEM: It probably went—I think some of the traditions were that way. I can understand the need for response to orders. I mean, when the alarm bell goes, general quarters is sounded, you go to general quarters, and you're going there with your life at stake, probably, because general quarters is normally called for when you're going into combat or you're in danger. And I understand that, and I understand—I mean, we were bombed—nothing real serious—in Korea, but we had nighttime intruders who dropped bombs on our airfield, primarily to keep our pilots awake during the period I served with the 4th Fighter, but when the alarm rang, it was time to get

into the hole. I mean, we went out to our dugouts, and got to where we would be safe, because we wouldn't have been safe in the tents if there had been anything. But I think that the some of the things, some of the traditions, I would not have been—I was not amenable to it as a Navy enlisted man. I had my troubles and …

PIEHLER: Which tradition? You mentioned not getting leave because there was a little dust on the floor, and it got the hat [dirty]. Is there any other one, customs or traditions, that you remember, that really irked you as an enlisted [man]?

BEEM: Well, no. I think the—sometimes the division between North and South came up. I mean, I was a Maine Yankee. It was known I was from Portland, and I had a first-class petty officer knock me on my ass, physically. I mean, he punched me in the side of the face because I didn't react quite the way he thought I ought to when he called me a "damn Yankee." I had a response that I probably should've swallowed, but I didn't, and so I swallowed the knuckles. And we had a little wrestling match, and he was a little bigger and stronger, but, you know, that's the way it was. I'm—but I, you know, having experienced the enlisted status, both as a Navy enlisted man and as an Air Force enlisted man, I never treated the people who worked with me the way I was treated. I never forgot the way the Navy treated me. I thought it was in some respects beyond the pale, but that was the way it was, and I suppose if I had been in earlier, I would have adjusted to it and done whatever was needed to be done to survive, because that's the human animal. But on the other hand, when I became an Air Force sergeant, and had people responsive to me, I didn't forget that I cleaned the latrines and heads, and in civilian life, when I was CEO of a hospital, I never forgot where I came from. And I know I got that from my dad, and also from, you know, my own hard experience, through some of these days. But when the Korean War came, and maybe it's time to …

PIEHLER: Let me just ask one or two questions about your G.I. Bill.

BEEM: Okay.

PIEHLER: You had talked a little bit about the G.I. Bill, and it sounds like you really thrived at Bowdoin.

BEEM: Yes.

PIEHLER: And I guess one question that I have is, why Bowdoin? I mean …

BEEM: I'm reaching for Joshua Chamberlain, the new book, A Hero's Life and Legacy, by John J. Pullen, and I'm gonna turn to page sixty of that book, because … there's a very interesting statement, and this is one of the reasons I'm gonna send it to my brother. (Reading from the text) "Bowdoin has always been thought of as an elite institution. In Maine, particularly in the first half of the 20th century, Bowdoin was the college attended by sons of the better-off families in town, and there, they expected to meet the best class of boys from other states." Bowdoin was the best of the schools in the state of Maine. There wasn't any question about that. I mean, from the point of view of those of us who lived in Maine.

PIEHLER: And growing up, that was …

BEEM: And growing up, Bowdoin was the school to go to.

PIEHLER: You hadn't considered other … schools in other states?

BEEM: No. Well, the—when I found out I couldn't go to the Naval Academy; I knew I couldn't go to West Point, so, I mean, the academies were out. So then, the high school that I went to was one of the finest high schools in the state of Maine, Deering High School, in Portland. And there were certain high schools in the state—I think there were three or four—where, if you were in the National Honor Society and in the top ten graduates of your class, you were certified to Bowdoin, which meant that you didn't have to take any entrance examinations. You were an automatic admission.

PIEHLER: So there's a real drive. There's a real—that makes it a lot easier …

BEEM: Well …

PIEHLER: … to get in. I mean, if you're …

BEEM: Yeah. Well, first of all, the attitude that I read to you …

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: ... from the book by Pullen, about Chamberlain, about what was—how the school was seen, plus the fact that …

PIEHLER: You were already going to be admitted.

BEEM: I mean, I was admitted.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: I was admitted to Bowdoin while I was still in the Navy. I mean, … when I graduated sixth in my class and a member of the National Honor Society, I was an automatic admission. I was certified to Bowdoin, so there wasn't any question. If I wanted to go to Bowdoin, I was gonna go to Bowdoin. So I came back to Maine, and I had sort of half-thought that I was gonna stay in Maine for the rest of my life, so being a Bowdoin graduate in the state of Maine is damn good. I mean, it's—you know, there's a network. And there's also, at that time, the fraternity structure was very strong.

PIEHLER: And you joined a fraternity?

BEEM: Oh yes. I was a legacy of the Alpha Delta Phi. My brother was—who had gone a semester before. He had got out of the Merchant Marine and went to Bowdoin ahead, so he was a year ahead of me, so I was an automatic pledge to Alpha Delta Phi.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, since you mentioned a fraternity, and one of the things that I've been doing a lot of work on [is] the impact of the G.I. Bill on Rutgers. I'm curious on Bowdoin, in terms of fraternities, did you have hazing? Uh, were you hazed in your fraternity?

BEEM: Well, uh …

PIEHLER: Because I'm curious. In terms of the GIs, there was a real tension at Rutgers. Some of these GIs were *not* going to be hazed.

BEEM: Yeah, well, the—when we came back after the war was over, there had been a lot of the guys who had got out and had started in the spring of '46. I didn't get there 'til the fall of '46. And I was an automatic, as I said, legacy to Alpha Delta Phi, because my brother was a member of Alpha Delta Phi, and he got pledged there because there were three or four friends that knew him, and that's how it happened. I'd call your attention to a book, recently written by a Bowdoin graduate, called The Pledge, and if you're interested in fraternities and the impact of fraternities, it's worth looking at. I can't remember Rob's last name [Robert Kean] at the moment, but you, you'd find it. It's within the last six months or a year it's been published, and I read it and sent it to my brother so he could read it. But it's about fraternity life, and this is a young man, who is about a class of '93 at Bowdoin. Anyway, there were several things involved. There was a pledge class; there were songs to learn, there was ritual to be memorized, and secret words, and all the things that went with it. And there was some hazing. You know, jump up, do a little serving, but when I—I went to Bowdoin in the fall of 1946. I had gotten discharged in July. Football practice started in August. And so I went up for football practice, … along with a man by the name of Ed Gillen. We were the quarterbacks in a Notre Dame T-formation, early T-formation program. It wasn't a program then, it was a team. But that may tell you how I feel about programs. Anyway, it turned out that Eddie and I sort of split. School started in September, fraternities pledged, and there was a pledge season, and there was some hazing. Not very much, but some.

PIEHLER: Well, then …

BEEM: Well, let me finish.

PIEHLER: Oh, yeah. No, I just …

BEEM: A little part of it. The big deal in the hazing was the "freshman walk," and what that was, was the seniors, and whoever was the pledge master and his group, they took the pledges, usually in a truck, and they drove around the area, and would drive and drive and drive, and they'd drop you off someplace, and you had to get your ass back to school, you know. So on that particular night, they took me out, and they dropped me in the town of Gorham. And so I walked a fair distance until I could get to a phone, and I made a phone call to a friend and suggested that

I needed a ride, and he brought me back, but I had walked some blisters on my heels. And so I got back to the college finally, partly by walking and partly by a ride. But I walked back into Brunswick, let's put it that way. The next day at practice the trainer looked at my feet when he was wrapping my ankle. He said, "What the hell is this?" I said, "Well, I got some blisters last night." He said, "How the hell did you—" He said, "Did they take you on a freshman walk?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said some words that … aren't appropriate for this.

PIEHLER: But, he was not pleased.

BEEM: He was not pleased, and he went to the coach, and the coach went to the athletic director, and the athletic director talked to the dean. And, of course, I became almost a pariah. Because we had a game coming up that weekend, [and] they were worried whether or not I was gonna be able to play. So, I have to tell you that the hazing went on. And there were some of the guys that were really were very irritated, that they thought I had complained about it, and frankly, that's not true. It's never been true, but I've even heard about that at a couple of reunions.

PIEHLER: This issue is still brought back up.

BEEM: Yeah, the fact that the president of our fraternity got his ass chewed out by the dean for taking me on a freshman walk, and probably was gonna fix it so I couldn't play. Well, fact is, everything was okay, and I did play, and I think we won the game. But they eased up a little bit, and I paid for that in a number of ways. So yeah, the hazing was there. Most of the veterans didn't like it. And I know, for example, several combat veterans, I mean fellows who had really seen combat, who used four-letter words very strongly and threatened … certain actions that would have been distasteful to the hazers, and I think the hazing was less in those days.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I'm just trying to get a gauge, because it sounds like it was a bit stronger at Bowdoin than at Rutgers, where it was very tough to keep college traditions up.

BEEM: Well, traditions … stayed, but it was a little less. It wasn't what happened in the several years afterward. I think that once the veterans got out of the schools, the fraternities got a stranglehold again, and it's only in the last few years that Bowdoin has done away with their fraternities. In fact, I think they're all gone now. The houses have been bought by the college.

PIEHLER: But, when you were there, they were the dominant presence on campus.

BEEM: Oh, yeah. They were, and they were the center of all the social activity. But on the other hand, I got married between my freshman and sophomore years, and my brother got married the next year. And I commuted part of my sophomore year, and then we had an apartment together, he and his wife and my wife and myself. So I don't have a lot of ties to the college, other than I make my annual contributions. The college is important to me in the sense that it provided me with an excellent education, a fine liberal arts education, and …

PIEHLER: Did you play football the whole four years?

BEEM: No, I …

PIEHLER: Or three? Seven semesters, I should …

BEEM: I played football three of the four years, and I was the first freshman to win three varsity letters since the turn of the century. Of course, the hooker in that is that before the war, freshmen weren't allowed to play. But I got three varsity letters my freshman year in football, basketball, and baseball, and I played baseball and basketball my second year, and football, and I played football …

PIEHLER: So, you were something of a jock. I mean, even in [college] that carried over from high school.

BEEM: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: And your major was, in Bowdoin?

BEEM: Government and history.

PIEHLER: So, that continued—that interest …

BEEM: That interest. I've had a lifelong interest in history.

PIEHLER: You mentioned—actually very moving, your remembrance of your high school teacher, English teacher.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Any teachers from Bowdoin that really stick out?

BEEM: Oh yeah. Ed Kirkland. Yeah, Dr. Kirkland, an American historian of great note. Thomas C. Van Cleave, another historian with a half a dozen books, all of whom—Dean Kendrick was a History teacher, English history. They were all very, very important, and probably equally important was my football coach.

The second and third years I played Adam Walsh, who had been captain and center of the "Four Horsemen" team at Notre Dame. He was—and was the—very interesting person. He … coached at Bowdoin before World War II, and when the war came, Bowdoin closed down its football seasons and essentially closed the college, and then they opened it up again with what amounted to ROTC-type programs. But Adam came down to North Carolina and was recruited to be the coach of the North Carolina preflight team…. There was a great team, North Carolina preflight, and Adam Walsh was its coach, and they whipped the backsides off everybody, because they had a lot of the old pros that had gone. Adam was so good at it that in 1945, when the war was over, the Cleveland, then-Cleveland Rams—I'm not sure that a lot of people really realize that the Rams started in Cleveland, but anyway, they did—and Adam was hired to be the

coach of the Cleveland Rams for their football season of 1946, and they won the national pro championship under Adam Walsh's coaching leadership. His quarterback was Bob Waterfield, who is a great football player, but whose other claim to fame was as the husband of Jane Russell. And Adam went with them to California when they moved from Cleveland to Los Angeles and coached out there in '46. In 1945, they won the national pro championship. In '46 he coached there, and then in '47 he came back to Bowdoin as coach, and I played for him two years.

He was a great leader and a fine man, and, you know, taught me a lot about myself, and showed me some things that allowed my game to get better. For example, he changed my stance in kicking. I'd been the Bowdoin punter the year before, and he changed my stance and added about ten yards to my punts, simply by something that—he showed me a different way to hold the ball and drop it.

And, it's—you know, I think a lot of Adam. He's now gone, but he came back to Bowdoin and did a great job. So, yes, there are some professors. I used to stay in contact with Dr. Kirkland, particularly. Dr. Van Cleave was a colonel in the Army during World War II and was an intelligence officer, and I stayed in contact with him after the war, after I got out, and particularly when—I wrote to him when I got commissioned, and we had a—you know, had a few letters back and forth and some phone conversations, and when I was stationed in Maine, I went to visit him at the college a little bit later. So, yes, there are some memorable people, and I would not want to mention—not forget—Mr. Wilder, who was assistant to the president and was the advisor to our fraternity, who was—he was instrumental as an interceder, when some of the brothers were a little unhappy with Gordon as a freshman. He was a fine man.

PIEHLER: You were Class of 1950 at Bowdoin. What did you think you would do, in college, when you graduated?

BEEM: I knew what I was gonna do.

PIEHLER: And that was?

BEEM: Go to work for MetLife.

PIEHLER: Really? That was the …

BEEM: I had one ambition when I graduated from college. I wanted to make five thousand dollars a year before I was thirty. That was my ambition.

PIEHLER: Which then was a good sum of money.

BEEM: Well, yeah.

PIEHLER: Which is great in terms of students reading this interview, because I think we've lost—they've lost sense of what dollars—what dollar figures mean.

BEEM: Well, I mean, I used—Tuesday nights I went to work for—I graduated on a Saturday, the second or third of February, 1950. On Sunday, I took the train from Portland to New York. On Monday, I went to One Madison Avenue, which was the home office of MetLife, to begin my training as a Metropolitan Life insurance agent. I was Debit 52 of the Portsmouth detached office of the Dover, New Hampshire district. I couldn't work for my father, and there was—he didn't want me to work anyplace else in Maine, so I went to work in New Hampshire for a friend of his, Arthur Mills.

PIEHLER: And how did you like the insurance business?

BEEM: It was fun. I …

PIEHLER: You did enjoy it?

BEEM: Yeah, I—apparently I did pretty well…. I think they started me at seventy-five dollars a week or something like that, and what they did was they pooled all of your commissions for the first three months, and then at the end of the three months, they did what was [called] in the jargon of the business then—you broke your quarter. And then for the next quarter, you had a stated income. I mean, your commissions were put together with your percentage from the collections that you made. You know, I was a collector\salesman. I went around and collected money from people.

PIEHLER: Which is now lost in insurance, because it's all—it's almost all by mail.

BEEM: Oh, it's all gone. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but then you did the—you would make the rounds and collect.

BEEM: Right. I was—I had a book. I mean, I had played with those books when I was a kid, going to my father's office. I mean, it was fun. What had happened is, I told you I had been married between my freshman and sophomore years, and my then-wife would not leave the state of Maine. She would not leave Portland. And so we—when I graduated, I said to her, "Peg, I can't get a job here. I want to work for Met, and the only place I can work for Met is in New Hampshire." And she said, you know, "Work for somebody else in Portland," and so we separated. I mean, it had been building up, probably for a number of months before that, but …

PIEHLER: But even though—I mean, New Hampshire is not—I mean, Portland and New Hampshire are not that …

BEEM: Fifty miles.

PIEHLER: Yeah, that's not … like you wanted to move to Pennsylvania. Yeah, or …

BEEM: Yeah. And I would tell you, so that you understand this, Peg and I are very good friends.

PIEHLER: So you've remained in touch, after you …

BEEM: Oh, yeah. Well, we have a daughter together, and my current wife—there was an estrangement. For a number of years, my second wife would not have anything to do with the child of the first marriage, and so there was a—and I never put my foot down, unfortunately. But anyway, when she passed away—there after we were divorced and then she passed away—why, we've had a coming together. And it was all facilitated by my current wife, who said, "There's no reason for this," and if you could imagine, she arranged a week in the Florida Keys, where my … first daughter from my first marriage was then living, and she—we brought my daughter down from Connecticut, and we brought my first wife down to the big condo that we rented, and we had a family get-together, a family reunion, and it worked. And Peg is a good friend now. She is—when I was operated on a year and a half ago—she's a nurse—she said, "If I'm needed," she told Jeanne, my wife, she said, "If I'm needed, call me and I'll be there." So, but anyway, that's what happened at the time, and there was an estrangement, and I can understand why it all happened. I don't like what I did, but my daughter and I are very close at this point. Andrea, as well as the other kids.

PIEHLER: So you were a Metropolitan—you were selling insurance just like your dad, and the Korean War breaks out in June of 1950.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Um, you were in the Naval Reserve. Were you worried that you were to be called up?

BEEM: Oh, yes! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You were more concerned about—I guess one question that I have is, why did you stay in the Naval Reserve?

BEEM: Real simple. When it came time for me to get discharged, in July of 1946, I was transferred from Philadelphia to Boston, to the Naval Station in Boston down on Sumner Street. I can see it now. Gymnasium—and a lot of us swab jockeys and white hats, as they're called or whatever, we were in the place. There must've been three, four hundred of us. Up on the stage walks a chief petty officer, with gold on his right arm from here to here.

PIEHLER: All the way up there.

BEEM: All the way up, and the ribbons, and it was all gold. He was a chief boatswain's mate—boats—and so he calls attention, so everybody stands. We were all standing up, I guess. I don't think we had seats. I think we were just standing around. Anyway, he said, "Okay, you's guys, you're gonna get discharged. That's what you're here for, that's what we're gonna do. Now let

me tell you how we're gonna do it." He said, "Some of you guys are gonna want to get a complete discharge." He said, "On the other hand, some of you may want to join the Naval Reserve. Now let me tell you how the discharges are gonna go: If you want to get discharged completely, it's gonna take us thirty, maybe forty-five days. Now, if you want to join the Naval Reserve, we can probably get you out in two or three days, 'cause all we have to do is just release you to home. [We] don't have to do all the paperwork we have to do for these guys. So if you want to get discharged from the Navy completely, go to the starboard. If you want to join the Naval Reserve, go to port." If it had been a ship, it would have rocked to port, because everybody went to the port. At least, not everybody, but most everybody, including me. And, I was discharged on July 11, 1946 from active duty, seaman, first USNR [U.S. Naval Reserve] to inactive duty, U.S. Naval Reserve. So, I was a prime candidate for recall. I mean, I knew that.

PIEHLER: And, you were fairly—I mean, you were very young. I mean …

BEEM: Oh, yeah, I was twenty-four. I was twenty-four years of age and separated from my wife, and I knew it was in the process of a divorce. For about two … years, I had been seeing ads in the newspapers for candidates to go to Air Force Officer's Candidate School. So, I started thinking about what was going to happen. And, you know, I had sent away a couple of times for information from these places, but it always ended up with recruiters, and I was a little leery of recruiters. Somehow that summer, I was in Portland—or maybe it was just early in the fall—and one of the coaches at Deering High School, who had come on since my time, but who knew me and I knew him, had been a Marine. And he was a Marine captain, reserve, and he was gonna be recalled. And he said to me, "What are you gonna do, Gordon? What's gonna happen?" because he knew I was a reserve. He said, "Well, you know, why don't you get a commission in the Marines?" He said, "I can help you with that." And I thought, "Hmm." So he starts some paperwork with the Reserve guys, with the Navy, with the Marine recruiters, and they offer me a Marine second lieutenancy. And I mean, I'm gonna go to Quantico … to Platoon Leader's School. That was the deal. You know, I was gonna be a second lieutenant, but I also gotta go to school. Well, then I realized what Marine second lieutenants do, and I had a few second thoughts. Maybe some third and fourth thoughts. Anyway, at this time I was—I began to play around. I wasn't doing quite as much insurance business as I should have been, and my father's friend let my father know that I was rushing off to Boston or New York on Thursdays instead of waiting 'til Friday night and staying until Tuesday, instead of coming back to work Monday, and you know, the—so my father said to me, "Look," he said, "you owe Arthur a little bit more than that." And he said, "Now, if you're gonna go, go. And if you're gonna stay, why, go to work." At which point my brother got his recall orders to the Navy, and that scared the living hell out of me, and I went down to the First Naval District in Boston and asked them what my status was and they told me, "We're gonna call you sometime after the first of the year." They told me that, clearly.

PIEHLER: Is this first of the year 1950 …

BEEM: '51, yeah. And I thought to myself—well, you know what I thought. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You hadn't been too fond of the Navy.

BEEM: No, I wasn't too fond. And the Navy, in reality, probably wasn't fond of me. But be that as it may, I went to the—I decided I better do something, because I owed it to my father, and Arthur Mills was a good friend. In fact, he was one of those families occasionally we visited. So, I went to the Navy—to the Air Force—and said, "I want to take the OCS exam." So they sent me to a place in Massachusetts, where I took the exam, and I passed the exam. So I'm a qualified OCS candidate, and I said, "When will I be called?" and they said, "Well, there's a class in January and there's another one in April. Maybe you can get in the January class. We doubt it. But April, probably." Well, I tell my father this and he said, "Come on, now. Are you going to go to work?" and I said, "Uh, yeah." So then I started working a little harder, and then I went to the recruiters and I said, "What'll happen if I enlist?" And they said, "Well, these—you know, your paperwork will follow you." (Laughter) And you know, I still was a gullible twenty-four-year old, I guess. Maybe a little more sophisticated than I had been, but not enough. So anyway, what I did was, I told my father I was going to enlist. He said, "Okay."

So I resigned, took a leave of absence from MetLife, which is what you do in—you don't resign; you just take a leave of absence to go into the military. So I enlisted in the Air Force [on] February first, 1951, my birthday. I was twenty-four then, I guess. Yeah, twenty-four. And they sent me down to Otis Air Force Base. I was there about ten days, and I get a letter in an envelope that had been sent to me by the landlord from the apartment that I had rented at 141 Maplewood Avenue in Portsmouth. And inside it was another letter—Air Force—but a corner of it was burned, and I looked at the date, and the date was way back in December sometime. Yeah, it was way back in December. I still got the thing back in my files at home. So anyway, I open it up, and I'm an airman—I'm a PFC, because the Air Force hadn't gone to airman yet, but we were—I was a private first class at Otis Air Force Base, and in the supply squadron. And I get this letter and I open it up, and it says, "Dear Mr. Beem" —not "Private" —"Dear Mr. Beem." And in it, it says, "Although you're sufficient, … concerning your application for Air Force Officer Candidate School, your composite scores were sufficiently high to include you in consideration for the January 1951 class. However, they were not sufficiently high to include you for selection." You know, "You will be considered for the April of '51 class…. Blah, blah, blah, by the order of," and so forth. So I am now a PFC on a four-year hitch at Otis Air Force Base, and I ain't going to OCS. Well, I say, "Shit, make the best of it." And I had—I, when I graduated, I'd bought a '49 —no, a '50 Ford coupe. That was the family car, you know. It was a two-door sedan is what it was. After the separation, I went to work for MetLife. I thought I oughta have a little more sporty vehicle, so I turned that in and got myself a '49 Ford convertible. Black, with a gray soft top, and those big, thick, white—I've still got some pictures of it, and …

PIEHLER: It's a car—it sounds like a car dear to your heart.

BEEM: Oh yeah. It's a great—a great wagon. Okay, here I am at Otis Air Force Base. I'm a PFC, I'm making PFC money. I'm in the supply squadron. I'm working in a forms warehouse, and I decide I gotta figure out a way to, you know, make that money stretch. So I did two things. I decided to use my car as a taxi, and on weekends, I'd carry guys from Otis, which is Falmouth, Massachusetts, up the Cape to Boston and drop them off. Or there was a guy that lived up the line a little bit. I forget which town it was, but I dropped him off at a diner. I can see it now, on

the right-hand side of the road, and there was a guy from Portsmouth I'd carry—well, I'd carry five, six guys, and I'd charge them ten bucks a round trip or something, and I really made enough money to really enjoy myself. I was also carrying guys from Otis and Falmouth over to New Bedford, because New Bedford was where a lot of the guys hung out; a Portuguese fishing town.

I made corporal in May, and it was at that point that I noticed in the paper that the Falmouth Playhouse was opening Memorial Day, 1951, and I had made corporal just before that in May. So, off I go in my cord suit, you know, civilian cord suit. I think it was a blue and white one, if I remember. Anyway, I go to it and am standing in the bar of the Falmouth Playhouse, her opening night, having a drink, and who walks in but an Air Force colonel with his wife and two other colonels. And at this point, reentering my life, is Harrison Reed Thyng. And I had realized that he was there because when I went into the orderly room of the supply squadron and I looked at the command line pictures, there was our squadron commander, and our group commander, and then at the top was the wing commander. And there sat Harry Thyng, and he was the commander of the 33rd Fighter Interceptor Wing. They were flying F-86 Sabre jets. So, he sees me over there at the bar, and he waved at me. He walks over with the other two colonels. They were in uniform, looked great. They had their best dress on. There had been something going on at the post on the base, and so Harry says, "Hi, Gordon, how are you?" and I said "Fine, Colonel." He introduces me to the other two colonels and their wives. And he said, "Did you finish up at Bowdoin?" and I said, "Yes, sir. I graduated in February." And, he said, "Well, what are you doing now?" And I said, "I'm in the Air Force, Colonel." And he said, "Oh, where are you stationed?" I said, "Over at Otis." He said, "Oh, I didn't hear anything about you coming on board." And I said, "Well, I don't think they advise the wing commander of the arrival of every PFC or corporal." He said …

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

PIEHLER: You recollected he was shocked that you would …

BEEM: Yeah, he was shocked that I was there.

PIEHLER: And told the other colonels …

BEEM: … how he'd known me, from the—he had been air instructor with the Maine National Guard after World War II. He, in fact, established the Maine-New Hampshire-Vermont Air National Guard. And the Maine Guard commander was a Bowdoin graduate, who happened to also be an Alpha Delta Phi, and he had come to Bowdoin with the then Colonel Thyng a number of times when I was playing football, and that's how I'd originally met Harry Thyng. So, he—and we had met and talked a few times, because football is—I'm sure you know—has some resemblance to war, and particularly air war, and so we talked about tactics and how we'd developed some of the tactics in the football—I mean, you attacked the flanks, or you attack a weak point if you can find one, or you mass your forces at a particular point. I mean, all the things that are classic tactics in the military are the same kind of tactics that are very often used by a football team. Anyway, they kind of laughed and thought it was funny, particularly when he told them how he knew me. And the bell rang for the play to start, and he said, "I'll … send for

you next week some time." I said, "Fine, Colonel." So I went to my seat and didn't think any more about it. I was pretty sure I'd hear from him, however, 'cause he didn't very often say things lightly. I knew that about him. I also knew about his background as a fighter ace from World War II. I don't know whether it was Tuesday or Wednesday of the next week, [the] phone jumped off the hook in the supply warehouse where I was working, and the sergeant I worked for, I could hear him on the phone saying, "Yes, Sergeant. Yes, Sergeant. Yes, Sergeant. Yes, Sergeant. Right away, Sergeant. Yes, Sergeant. Right. Right." He puts it down and he says, he said—a fellow named Jefferson Davis Gentry. I remember him like yesterday. He looks at me and says, "Beem! Beem!" He said, "You're in trouble. That was Kennedy. He wants your ass in that orderly room right away, and he said to get your damn blues on." He said, "What have you done? What have you done?" I said, "I don't know what I've done." He said, "Well, it must be something bad if Kennedy wants you that bad." He said, "Get going! Get going!"

So, off I run to the barracks—not run; I went pretty fast. So I got to the barracks and I put on my blues and I went down to the orderly room and I reported to Sergeant Kennedy, who at that time, in 1951, had twenty-two or twenty-three years service, so he had been around a long time, and he was one of the old soldier types. And he said to me, "The wing commander wants to see you. Why does the wing commander want to see you?" And, I said, "Well, I happen to know the wing commander." "How do you know the wing commander?" And I told him the story I just told you. He looked up at me and said, "You 'f' college boys." And I said, "Sergeant?" And, he said, "That's enough. Go out and get in a staff car. They'll drive you down to wing headquarters." So I went down to wing headquarters, reported to the wing sergeant major, had to tell my story briefly over again. Okay, he wanted to know about it. He said, "I'll tell the wing adjutant," and he brought it and told it again, and they sent me in to see Colonel Thyng. And I went in and gave him a salute like I should, and he asked me to sit down, and we talked for fifteen, twenty minutes about what had gone on since we had last seen each other, and how I got in the Air Force, and I told him the story of OCS, and he smiled. He didn't quite laugh, but he smiled and he said something like, "Par for the course."

He said to me, he said, "I'm gonna tell you something. It's not commonly known here on the base. A few people know," but he said, "Don't say anything to anybody about it." I said, "Fine, Colonel." He said, "How would you like to go to Korea?" And I said, "To do what, sir?" And he said, "Well, I'm gonna need somebody in the wing headquarters of the 4th Fighter Wing," and he said, "I think you can do the job that I want somebody to do." And I said, "Could you tell me what that is, sir?" He said, "There are gonna be certain things that I want done, that I want done by somebody with intelligence." And he said, "There's gonna be some writing to do, there are gonna be some things that are important," and he said, "I'd like to have somebody there that I know personally and can trust." And I said, "Well, I—" you know, "I thank you for all that, and if you want me I'd be happy to go." So he said, "Well, go back to the supply squadron," and he said, "don't say anything to anybody, just tell 'em that you were here to see me based on the fact that we'd known each other, and that—well, it was good to see you, and that's all I wanted to do was just to check things out." I said, "Fine, Colonel."

Back I go to the orderly room, and I don't say what's happening, I just have a talk and do what he told me to do. Several weeks later, there was a sergeant by the name of Whitehurst, who was a

friend of mine in the orderly room, and he called me and said, he said, "Gordon, we've got orders for you." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah," he said, "it's strange." He said, "You know, you're in a frozen specialty code." They call them AFSC, Air Force Specialty Code. "As a supply technician." I said, "Oh?" He said, "Yes," and he said, "We've got orders to ship you to Korea to the headquarters of the 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing for duty in the wing headquarters." He said, "What's this all about?" I said, "Um, I don't really understand." He said—well, he said, he said, "You know," he said, "Major Fornell wants to know what this is all about." And I said, "Gee, Chuck, uh, you know." He said to me, he said, "Come on up here. I want to talk to you personally." So I go up there, and we go into a back office, and he said, "Did this have anything to do with the wing commander? That visit you made to him?" This is the personnel sergeant in the squadron office. I said, "Well, it could," and he said, "Why don't you tell me what it's all about?" I said—I looked at him and he looked back at me, and he said, "You know something, don't you?" I said, "What?" But he said, "You're not supposed to talk about it." I said, "What?" He said, "Okay, that's enough. That's enough." (Laughter) So my orders were in the chute, and I went to Korea as a corporal. And they were just as astounded in Korea when I got there. (Laughter) The guy with the supply AFSC was assigned to the wing headquarters as an administrative person, but since these were the orders, and they looked at the orders, it was a—the order came out of the Headquarters United States Air Force. So, all I could figure was that it was—I mean, it was Colonel—certainly, it was Colonel Thyng who had arranged that this happened. And so I ended up there, in September of 1951, and Harry joined the wing in October of 1951.

PIEHLER: I'm just curious: before—because we're really in Korea, but just before we really talk about Korea, what—you were a private in the Air Force. What kind of basic training did you get? Or did you get …

BEEM: I didn't get any basic training.

PIEHLER: Because you had had previous …

BEEM: Because I had been a—I'd gone through basic training at Great Lakes, so …

PIEHLER: So, they didn't make you do the whole …

BEEM: No, they didn't make me do the whole thing over, and they even gave me one stripe. They made—they said, you know, "Since you've been through boot camp in the Navy, we'll make you a—" and they were doing that for all veterans who re-enlisted for the Korean War. They were at least giving them one stripe and not making them go through basic again. So, I didn't go to basic. I just …

PIEHLER: So, in a sense, you went directly to …

BEEM: Otis …

PIEHLER: Otis.

BEEM: … Air Force Base.

PIEHLER: And were assigned the specialty …

BEEM: Yeah. When I got there, and went through their—through the processing, a personnel guy looked at my background, and he said "You were an insurance salesman." I said, "Yup." He said, "Well, that's something like supply." Bam! Supply squadron! (Laughter) That's how I got assigned to the supply squadron.

PIEHLER: And what was the daily routine like? I mean, what would you do on a typical day?

BEEM: I'd put on my—I'd get up, dress. Incidentally, I want to make one point about the things—I always hated the latrines. They stunk very often, and they were very often, first thing in the morning, dirty. And I decided, as an enlisted man, when this—you know, I had to use them, but I decided that if I ever got into a position of authority where I had anything to do with the barracks, one thing was gonna be clear: the latrines were gonna be clean, and they weren't gonna smell. I just wanted …

PIEHLER: Oh no, that's a great—that's a great …

BEEM: I just wanted …

PIEHLER: You found that that was a …

BEEM: It was—I didn't like it, to get up in the morning, and go into a …

PIEHLER: And this is the Air Force.

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What about … in the Navy?

BEEM: Just as bad …

PIEHLER: Just as—oh, it wasn't …

BEEM: Just as bad or worse. The cleanup always took place after you used the place in the morning, when the cleanup really should have taken place at night. That was—you know, that was my easy solution to it, but I was a corporal, and a PFC first, you know, and I didn't—all I did was clean it. When I was on, you know, latrine duty, I did latrine duty and I cleaned the toilets and the urinals and all the, you know, showers, and all the crap that went with it, but I wrote it down up here in my head, for a later time. So I didn't have to go to any basic training.

PIEHLER: And so a typical day, you …

BEEM: Oh, a typical day …

PIEHLER: Yeah, you were—but I love the digressions on the latrine.

BEEM: A typical day. I'd get dressed, go to the chow hall, and one of the things that all the military does, that I like, is SOS, which is a hamburger fried up in a white sauce, but known as SOS, and I won't tell you what it stands for, but you …

GORMAN: We know.

BEEM: Well, you know, of course. But I used to like that. I used to like it on toast. Eggs weren't—unless you got them right off the griddle, were not really the greatest thing since TV, but I had breakfast and I'd head down to the class 30-F warehouse, which was the forms warehouse. And my job, my first job in the Air Force as a PFC and a corporal, was to fill requisitions from other squadrons on Air Force Form 446, which is a requisition. (Laughter) Listen, I can remember! And we're talking 1951. Numbers are a thing with me. Anyway, that's what I did. I filled requisitions for forms, and there are forms and manuals and, I mean, you know.

PIEHLER: It sounds god-awful boring. I mean, at times. Just mind-numbing.

BEEM: Oh, well, but—I get into this thing and there was a buck sergeant, Jefferson Davis Gentry, who was the NCO IC, and there were two other PFCs in my staff. There were four of us. And the place was abysmally organized, so I made some suggestions to Sergeant Gentry, and Sergeant Gentry—what I said to him was, "Let's make this job easier. I mean, there's no sense in us breaking our cojones. I mean, there just isn't. The way this place is organized, it's bad, and makes more work for you and me and everybody else." 'Cause if he didn't have—if we caught squadron duties, there'd be times when he'd be there just with one other person, and they'd go crazy. He really needed the three people plus himself to make it work well. Anyway, what we did was we reorganized the place, and Jefferson Davis Gentry got credit for it, and got promoted to staff sergeant, but Sergeant Kennedy, the first sergeant, was smart enough to figure out how all this had come about, and he saw to it that I made corporal.

PIEHLER: So you did ultimately get a reward for reorganizing …

BEEM: Oh, sure. Yeah, I mean, I knew that that would happen. I knew that Davis—you know, that Jeff Davis Gentry should get the credit 'cause he was the NCO IC, and it should be his idea, 'cause if I went and tried it, it would bad news for everybody. So we worked it and, you know, you learn quickly to work within the system if you want to get anything done, and I think that's an important lesson that I learned early on. I learned that from back in the Navy days, and I was determined that this time I wasn't gonna—that I was gonna have a better experience. I guess I want to put it that way. And I had four years to do, and I knew I was gonna have to do it, so I thought, the quicker I get rank, the better off I'm gonna be. And so that's the way we started.

PIEHLER: Just one question I—just to clarify. What was squadron duty? 'Cause you said most of the days were filling out these forms unless you got called out for squadron duty …

BEEM: Uh …

PIEHLER: And then, what happened then?

BEEM: Well, then you could be on kitchen duty …

PIEHLER: So, you did your share of KP.

BEEM: I did my share of KP, and I've done latrine duty, and I've … picked up cigarette butts. You know, I mean, you can believe that …

PIEHLER: You've had a true enlisted man's perspective.

BEEM: I have. I have. I—you know, "All we want to see is 'A's and elbows, and get those butts off the—" you know, I mean, I've been there. And it was a great experience for me. I mean, you know, I have done a lot of … things in my life, and I did what was necessary to get along.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: how did you … get from Massachusetts to Korea? Did you fly or did you take a troop ship?

BEEM: Oh. Well, first thing is, I drove the convertible. I drove the convertible. I have to tell you this story. You're gonna love …

PIEHLER: Oh, no, I—this sounds like a very good story.

BEEM: But before it, there's another part of this story. I loved that convertible. It's a great car, you know. And—but I also had something else, and that was—it was, like anybody at that point, I didn't buy it for cash. I bought it, you know, on an installment plan … from GMAC. I bought it from the Cadillac dealer, 'cause he had one, and it was a year-old car. I guess you'd have to say that I was then, and probably always have been, somewhat of a guardhouse lawyer, in the sense that I watch the rules. I watch the regulations. I've always done my own income taxes, because I've always felt that I needed to know enough about income tax laws so that I could do it and be smart about what I was doing. So I owed a monthly payment to GMAC, and this is when I was a PFC at Otis, when I was figuring out how I was gonna get enough money to live. I drove back to Maine one weekend, and I went into the GMAC office. I had a three-day pass, so I was there on a Friday. And I went in to … them, and I said to the lady in charge, I handed her my book, and I said, "Madam, I want to invoke the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act of 1940." (Laughter) She looked at me and said, "What?" I said, "I want to invoke the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act of 1940." And she said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I want relief from paying my monthly installments until I leave the service." She said, "… I don't understand." I said, "Well, does—[are] any of your managers here veterans of World War II?"

And she said, "Our assistant manager is." I said, "Why don't you call the assistant manager and ask him to come to see me?" And she thought about it for a minute or two, and I said, "I think it's important that you get him, because I'm really invoking the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act of 1940." So, she goes and gets the assistant manager. He comes out and looks at me, and he said—guardhouse lawyer—he said, "You really know what that law says, don't you?" And I said, "Yes, I do. In fact, I have one here in my pocket, a copy, if you'd like to see it." He said, "I don't need to see it." He said, "How many of your fellow servicemen have you told about this?" And I said to him, "A few." And he said, "All right." So he takes my book and he takes some notations from it and he said, "When you're released from service, you know you will owe us this, in its entirety." And, I said, "Oh, yeah, I'm aware of that." And he said, "Do you ever intend to make any payments on this?" And, I said, "Well, if I decide to sell the car, I'll pay it off in its entirety, but 'til then, I don't plan to make any payments." And he said, "We'll make the appropriate notations." And, for your information, in case you don't know, that's one of the provisions of the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act of 1940, which, incidentally, is still public law.

Anyway, I decided to drive the car to the West Coast, and by this time, my older brother, who had been recalled to Navy duty, and whose ship had come back from Japan for some repairs in San Diego—and the idea was to drive the car to the West Coast and then fly up to San Francisco and report in to Travis Air Force Base for flight overseas. So, I drove the car and I drove Route 66, and I have photographs taken of the route signs all the way from Maine to California.

PIEHLER: We would love to make copies of those for the Internet, scan them in. That would be a great thing to illustrate your interview. So you remember the old Route 66.

BEEM: I sure do. I think I can put my hands on those photographs. I saw some of them the other day.

PIEHLER: What struck you about—you had been in the service in different parts of the country, but you were really crossing the country. What—does anything strike you about that journey, looking back? Probably because, I mean, part of it, I'm—it's thrilling, because [Route] 66 in popular culture is such a strong …

BEEM: Oh, yeah. Most of my—I guess my real early memories—I drove first to Chicago to see the pro game, the college all-stars against the pros, that they—don't they? They have an annual game, or they used to …

PIEHLER: Yeah, they used to.

GORMAN: I don't know if they still do that with pros and college.

BEEM: No, wait. It wasn't pros and college. What was it? It was some football game in the summer of—like in August. I'll remember it at some point, but it was a football game at Soldier Field, and I stopped there. I stopped and saw my relatives in Columbus, and that's where I saw my Grandfather Ritter, who was then ninety, for the last time—he died while I was in Korea—

and the last time I saw my grandmother. She died a year later, or four years later, when I was in Germany. Anyway, I drove the car west and gave it to my brother, and he sold it for me and we paid off GMAC, but I thought that little story …

PIEHLER: Oh, I think it's a great story. It really is a gem.

BEEM: Yeah, it is. I think about it. It was funny at the time, it's funny now. In fact, it's probably funnier now than it was [then].

PIEHLER: Oh, yeah.

BEEM: To me. At least to me.

PIEHLER: Oh, no, we will enjoy that story for years to come.

BEEM: So I end up in Korea, and General—then-Colonel—Harrison Thyng arrives.

PIEHLER: Before he arrives—how many weeks passed before …

BEEM: About three and a half.

PIEHLER: What did they—what did they have you do while …

BEEM: Oh, they sent me up to the—first of all, they put me in headquarters squadron, where I belonged, and then they—and I just got a brief orientation, then they sent me up to the wing headquarters, and told me that I was assigned to work in the wing adjutant's office. And the sergeant-major said he needed somebody in the message center, and there was a sergeant in charge, and they put me in the message center working for him, and then he rotated with the first group that rotated out, and that's when I became message center chief. It was about that time that General Thyng arrived. He was then a colonel. And then, of course, that's where part of my story of Korea is—concerns Colonel Thyng, and the fact that he's been my personal hero for nearly fifty years.

PIEHLER: Let me make sure Dave gets some questions in, so I'm gonna …

GORMAN: Okay. Well, I did have some questions about General Thyng, because you had sent us some information about him, so I did read what I could find about him and some of the things that you had sent, and I know that he did have quite an impact on your life. Can we back up a little bit about before you met him, and maybe you could discuss a little bit about his World War II experiences?

BEEM: Yeah. Harry is an individual who has a long record. He was graduated from a famous class of pilots, class 40A, and I think the graduation date was in June of 1940. Of that group—this is coming from memory, but you can get some of this information from the historian of … class 40A, whose name I can provide to you—I think there were about eight or nine men, or

maybe ten, who graduated from that class who became generals, and there were at least that many who were aces. And it's a very important class, 40A, and that's where Harry started his career. And the same day he graduated, he married Mary, his wife, and Colonel—I'm gonna say Frank—Schwimmer—that's what comes right out of my head—was married the same day, and he began his career. He went through the usual training and moving on into fighters, and he was a first lieutenant with the 309th Squadron of the 31st Fighter Wing. I've brought along this book, The Mighty Eighth, because the 31st Fighter Group was the group that was the first group sent to England to join the Eighth Air Force. They were supposed to take Belle Aera Cobras over, P-39s, but the Aera Cobras were not capable of making the transatlantic flight with the distances involved.

GORMAN: They weren't willing to try to ferry those over aboard a ship or anything …

BEEM: Not at that point.

GORMAN: … at that point, with the U-boat threats.

BEEM: Not with that—at that particular point, so … what they did was, they took the group, the 31st Group, and sent them to England by ship, and they equipped them with Spitfires. And at the same—practically the same time, and I think this is interesting—at practically the same time, the … three Eagle Squadrons of the RAF [Great Britain's Royal Air Force] were converted to the United States Air Force, or the United States Army Air Force, and they became the three original squadrons of the 4th Fighter Group. So there is a commonality between Harry's arrival and the development of the 4th Group, although he was not associated with the 4th Group at any time during World War II, but there is that close parallel of it. And I think you'll find, both in this here, that Harry and the 309th of the 31st made the first fighter sweeps covering the B-17s that were made by fighter aircraft manned by Americans.

GORMAN: I believe I've read that within six days of checking out in a Spitfire, he was flying combat missions.

BEEM: Yes, he was.

GORMAN: Very, very quickly.

BEEM: … This book has got, that I'm leaving for you, has got four mentions of the 31st Fighter Group and how they got—it doesn't mention Harry Thyng at all, but this is permanent for you folks, but I penned those four places just so you could have some reference of the 31st and how it got there and how Harry got there and how they flew the first missions …

GORMAN: Thank you.

BEEM: … against the so-called Abbeyville Boys. The Abbeville Boys are the yellow-nosed …

GORMAN: 109s.

BEEM: … 109s, and Harry got one of those in one of the early flights. Then his career, as you know, took him to North Africa. He downed a French aircraft there, so he got both Germans and he got Italians, and he got a Frenchman, who were flying under Vichy.

GORMAN: He also picked up a Silver Star, I read. There was an airman who was downed in the Channel and he flew cover …

BEEM: Mm hmm.

GORMAN: … while that airman was picked up and received the Silver Star.

BEEM: Right, that was his first Silver Star. And then he was wounded in North Africa. [He] had by that time become an ace, although not one of the high scoring aces. There's varied views on how many aircraft Harry got in World War II, but it varies from five to nine, depending upon which bits and pieces that you're reading. I've always felt, in talking with him—he said it was nine, but he said there are some records that claim it's only five, and he didn't really care, as long as it was five or more. But he did, after he came back, get—he was promoted to colonel when he was twenty-six and he was, as I said, wounded. He came back, went through convalescence, and then took a long-range P-47 group, and took them out to the Pacific, and they flew cover missions over China and Japan. And he was there on—when Nagasaki was bombed. They were flying cover, and it's my …

GORMAN: The B-29s?

BEEM: Yeah, covering B-29s. It's my understanding, also, that he downed a Japanese, and he told me that that were true, although there is some lists that say—you know, that don't say that. But in my view, he was an ace. No matter how you cover it, he was a—there's never a list that he's not on, so he has a minimum of five, and I think he had as many as nine. He came back, after … that war was over, and I brought this, but we're obviously not gonna have time to look at it today. This is a videotape of Harry Thyng's life, done by his son, Jimmy, and—unfortunately I can't leave this with you, because Jimmy has told me not to let it out of my hands, but I'll talk to him again and perhaps I can get him to eventually let me release it to you so you can have a, you know, copy made if you want to, or I can have a copy made for you. I thought we might have time to look at it today, but we're not going to. So his World War II record is very illustrious. I know you've got a copy … that you picked off the Internet, and that one that I sent, this one, that's not very complete from the air museum.

PIEHLER: I guess it might be a good question: what was his personality like? Because you had told us one great story of his coming up to you in the theater and chatting with you, a very friendly conversation, but—and then you have the relationship where you're serving under him as enlisted personnel, so you—and you saw him before the war, before Korea, and observed him as a civilian.

BEEM: He was a thorough—thoroughly professional military officer. He was never anything other than "Colonel" to me all the time I wore an Air Force uniform, except after I became an officer, and he specifically told me to call him "Harry." He said, "Except," he said, "if we're among other officers." But he said, "When we're together, it's 'Harry' and 'Gordon.'" But he said, "When we're out together and we are among other officers, then its 'Colonel' or 'General.'" And that's rightly so. That's the protocol, and that's the way it should be. As far as the kind of person he was, his primary concerns were so closely interwoven that it's almost hard to separate them. He was extremely mission-oriented, but he also cared about his men. And his women when he commanded women, but in … the case we're talking about in Korea, it was men. We did have some nurses in the hospitals, but primarily his command was men, and particularly in combat, it was all men. So he was mission-oriented, he cared deeply about the people that he was responsible for, and he was a gentleman. He was not, in my view, a hail fellow well-met; he was not a rousting fighter pilot. He was a—he was a commander. My guess is, because he had command from the time he was twenty-six, that he—I don't know what he was like when he was a lieutenant or a captain, but my guess is he was even a gentleman at that point. I would not have ever predicted that he was a wild fighter pilot.

PIEHLER: You saw no signs of that in your dealings [with him].

BEEM: No, and I know how deeply he loved his wife, Mary. I mean, that's clear when you see his aircraft.

GORMAN: Mary and the Four J's? Is that what it was?

BEEM: Yeah. It's Pretty Mary.

GORMAN: Pretty Mary, where "J" was the first initials of his children?

BEEM: Of all of the four children, yeah. And one of his aircraft was—I saw a painting of it—it just said Pretty Mary and the J's. Another one said Pretty Mary and the Four J's, depending upon what he was flying…. There wasn't any question about it in anybody's mind about where he stood relative to diversity. When the first black fighter pilot was assigned to the 4th Fighter Wing in Korea—his name was Dayton Ragland—there were some fighter pilots who were not very well pleased with that, and we're only three years into integration when this takes place. The then-Colonel Thyng made it very clear where he stood, because he had Lieutenant Dayton Ragland fly his wing, and what that said to everybody in the 4th Fighter Wing was that Harry Thyng was putting his life, and his back, in the hands of Lieutenant Dayton Ragland, and he didn't have to say anything to people.

PIEHLER: It was very clear to …

BEEM: It was very …

GORMAN: It was a strong endorsement.

BEEM: It was very clear where he stood, and he didn't have to have a big meeting. He just did it by his actions. On top of which, later, when Lieutenant Ragland was shot down and became a prisoner in Pak's Palace, of the North Koreans, Harrison Thyng gave the MiG that he shot down that day to Lieutenant Ragland—credited to him, even though that MiG would have been his fifth MiG and would have made him then a jet ace, which he had to wait for for several more months, but it just tells you something about Harrison Thyng. So there isn't any question of his personal, physical courage. The real issue, and the thing that is so important to me, besides that, is the fact that he had moral courage. And I know I've told you the story, Kurt, and you probably have read it, but what he did with the Vandenberg message marks him as a man who did not put his own career above the lives of his men, and what he did is clearly laid out in the books that I brought with me. I can tell it to you again in …

PIEHLER: Well, I guess …

BEEM: … in brief form.

PIEHLER: I do want to ask one or two questions about your general sense of the war, more from your perspective as an NCO [noncommissioned officer]. [In] '50, we have this enormous air advantage in the Korean War, and in '51, when the Chinese [are] entering, that advantage changes; the clear superiority is gone. In fact, more than it's gone…. In fact, you have a real contested—how much of a sense, as an NCO, did you have of what was going on, either from—you're in the message center, reading the messages, from scuttlebutt and rumors?

BEEM: Well, none of the scuttlebutt and rumors, but …

PIEHLER: Well, and also people not coming back, I mean …

BEEM: Well, we knew that, but we also—I mean, when a mission came back, for example, we would go out of the wing headquarters and take a look up. And as they circled into the landing pattern, we could tell if—we could tell what had happened and who we'd been fighting because, if there'd been an aerial battle, the noses of the F-86 would be black, because of the—from the machine gun fire, because that's where the six .50's were. The other thing is that if—depending upon when the time of day the mission was, and where it was, we often had it on our squawk boxes. We could hear the actual engagements. Usually, we would not have them on in the wing headquarters, but we would have them on in operations, and very often we'd go in—I mean, we had a sense …

PIEHLER: You had a sense, of very, very much of how the air war was going.

BEEM: Oh, yeah, because we knew what the scores were, and the fact that we were with the 4th—we knew how the 4th had gotten there and why they had gotten there, and we also knew the problems that we were in, and I think that's part of the story as well, that when—that initially we did, the Air Force did initially have air superiority against the North Koreans, but when the Chinese came in with the MiG-15, which we're positive were flown at times by Russians, as well as by Chinese. And I brought a story with me here that was in one of our military magazines.

One of the Air Force senior generals saying, "We beat the Russians, we beat the Red Air Force, in Korea." So we knew what was going on. The 4th had been at Newcastle County Airport in Dover, Delaware, in Delaware, and had been moved by carrier, the planes and the troops by troop ship to Japan, and then [to] where we had a rear echelon base at Johnson, and then they were moved to Korea, to Kimpo. Then the were shoved back to Suwon and, uh, after the Inchon invasion they went around again and went back up to Kimpo.

PIEHLER: … Colonel Thyng had wanted you specifically. He had singled you out to bring for special reasons. He said, "I want someone I can trust, someone to write," and I'm curious: did he, in fact—how did Colonel Thyng—did he use your talents? And how? Any specific instances?

BEEM: Yeah, I was—I drafted for him reports. I mean, he would write what he wanted and then I would do a little work on it …

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

BEEM: …and take it back to him. He'd change things, and then I'd rewrite, you know, his reports that were going forward. I also wrote various recommendations for medals that—I would do that in conjunction with the personnel officer, who I'm not always sure liked the fact that I was cleaning things up, but that was the way it was. And then I handled all of the classified material. There was a sergeant in charge of it before I got there. He rotated right after I made buck sergeant and then they put me in classified files, so I handled all the classified messages from that point on, which was for the rest of my tour. And it also let me make another stripe before I left Korea. But the real essence of the—and the basis of what [and] why I believe so strongly in Colonel Thyng, and why he's been my personal hero for so long, is the fact that he put his career on the line in order to protect the lives of his men.

PIEHLER: I guess I want to—in terms of when you say he put his career on the line, what do you—looking back on it, on thinking back on it, what do you think his options were? I mean, what would the option [be] that would have been expected by most?

BEEM: Well, my belief is that most career Air Force officers would not have messaged General [Hoyt] Vandenberg. And I say that in all due respect to them, because I served with many brave men, but the courage that's needed to put a career on the line is a totally different one than taking men into combat and being personally brave. You know, men work long years to get where Harry Thyng was at thirty-four. He was thirty-four years of age, a full colonel, had been a full colonel …

PIEHLER: On track to be a general.

BEEM: … on track to be a general, no question. The—I mentioned to you earlier there was something that I wanted to show you, and perhaps the best thing to do is just let me read this to you. This is from Beyond The Wild Blue. It's page sixty-nine. This book is in paperback, and I can send you a paperback copy, but this is my hardback I'm gonna keep for awhile, but

eventually it will be in your hands. This is in the section that talks about what they—the title of it is "The Honchos Arrive," and by the "Honchos," that's what … the author means by the Russians and the Chinese.

BEEM: (Reading) "Far more important, in both a morale and equipment sense, than even new aircraft, was the inspiring leadership of Colonel Harrison R. Thyng, a double ace who shot down five airplanes in World War II and five more in Korea. Thyng took over command of the 4th Fighter Wing in … early November 1951, and soon demonstrated just how vital the qualities of a commander are to his unit. Dismayed by the pilots' frustration with the maintenance on their aircraft and with the even greater anger of the hard-working mechanics, who routinely got airplanes airborne with patchwork repairs and cannibalized … parts, he was outraged at the seemingly insuperable bureaucratic barriers that intervened between the combat area and stateside logistic support. Thyng rebelled and took action on the ground, as he had in the air. From Longstreet at Gettysburg to von Paulus at Stalingrad and Walker in Korea, history is replete with stories of brave military leaders who would risk their lives in combat on a daily basis, but would not risk their careers bucking their own superiors. In a stunning gesture, defying the established order, Thyng did both, laying his career on the line by going directly to the top, then leading a patrol to the Yalu. In a message to the Chief of Staff, General Vandenberg, Thyng told him with chilling clarity that he could no longer be responsible for air superiority in the area that had become infamously known as 'MiG Alley.' Thyng sent information copies to his direct superiors in the intermediate commands—a gesture that, depending upon Vandenberg's reaction, ensured either his survival or his removal. Fortunately for Thyng and the 4th Fighter Wing, his message was timed perfectly. On October 22, 1951, Vandenberg had ordered an additional seventy-five Sabres sent to Korea, which permitted the equipping of an additional wing, the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing, at Suwon. The greatest effect of Thyng's message was a massive improvement in the supply of parts and equipment, vastly improving Sabre readiness statistics. This came about in part because of the patriotic enthusiasm of the manufacturers who supplied the necessary parts, without contracts, to cover their risks."

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Gordon R. Beem on March 28, 2000, at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler …

GORMAN: And Dave Gorman.

PIEHLER: I'm curious on the message. When did you learn of the—did you … have any role in drafting the message?

BEEM: I had no role in drafting the message.

PIEHLER: You never—did you ever see the message before it went out?

BEEM: Yes. Yes.

PIEHLER: And who typed in the—who sent the message?

BEEM: Okay.

PIEHLER: I'm curious on some of the—when did you get wind of this message?

BEEM: I came in one morning, early in … November of '51. I can't recall the exact date. It was after Harry took command, which, if I remember right, was on the 7th, and it was probably some time later that month, but again, I can't remember the exact date. I came into work and it was … a usual day. I walked in. The wing adjutant's name at that time was John H. Ross, and Colonel Ross is now deceased, but was a friend of mine for many, many years after Korea until his death a few years ago. Major Ross was sitting at his desk, and he had a folder in his hand that was colored red and white, and he said, "Sergeant," he said, "I got a message, for Top Secret Ops—Immediate Message—that the old man wants to get out." And he handed me an envelope, a manila envelope, and it was marked "Top Secret." I went into my cubicle, I sat down at my desk at my typewriter, and I looked at the message, and I read it. And I picked it up in my hand again after I had read it. I walked back out to Major Ross and I said, "Major, [does] the boss really want to send this?" And I said, "You really want me to get it ready?" And he said, "Yes, he does." He said, "I asked him about it and he told me to get it going, in no uncertain terms." So I went back into my cubicle. I sat down. I typed the message, the first line of which said, "Personal to Vandenberg from Thyng." It was addressed to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, a four-star general named Hoyt S. Vandenberg. He—there were four carbon copies: one to go to the commanding general, Fifth Air Force—either a two- or three-star general, I can't remember what Frank Everest was at that time; a carbon copy to Far Eastern Air Forces—[Otto] P. Weyland was a four-star; to the four-star commanding general of Air Defense Command; and the two-star general who commanded Eastern Air Defense Force, all of which were in the intermediate levels of command between the 4th Fighter Wing and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. We're looking at four generals, two of whom were four-stars, and the other two were either two or three [stars]. So there were at least a dozen or thirteen stars involved, all of whom would sit on promotion boards, all of whom would endorse officer effectiveness reports …

PIEHLER: Or could send you to some isolated facility in the middle of nowhere.

BEEM: With a lot of power. The message said, "Personal to Vandenberg from Thyng. I can no longer be responsible for air superiority in Northwest Korea." And he went on to detail the AOCP rate as being 50% or more. He detailed the problems with the logistics areas in the States, which was Oklahoma City Air Materiel Area, and with the logistics support in the Far East, which was known as FEAMCOM, and it was about a three-pager, as I recall. When I finished, I did all the paper work and did the stamp and I got it ready for signature, and I took it out to Major Ross, who signed it as the adjutant. I took it in to Colonel Harrison Thyng, and I said to him, "I have the T. S. Ops [Top Secret Operations] Immediate here, Colonel." And he looked at it. He said, "As I wrote it?" I said, "Yes, sir." He signed it. I said to him, "Colonel, do you really want to send this?" He looked up at me, and he said, "Did you ask Major Ross about that?" I said, "Yes, I did, sir." He said, "What did he say?" [I said], "He said you wanted it sent." And he kind of smiled, and said, "When the phone rings off the hook, tell who's ever calling that I went

on the morning mission. Tell that to Major Ross." And I said, "Yes, sir." And he was half—he had half his flight clothes on at that point. He picked up his helmet and his parachute, and some other gear, maps—I can't remember all of it—and he walked out his private door, got into his Jeep, or maybe it was his staff car. Can't remember if the Aussies had given him his Jeep at that point, but that's another story. Ultimately, the Australians gave him a Jeep that they had painted across the front of it, "The Bloody Great Wheel," since he was the base and wing commander. Anyway, off he went on the morning mission, and …

PIEHLER: Did the phone, in fact, ring off the hook?

BEEM: It did. First one was from the general in Seoul, Fifth Air Force. Then there was a call from Tokyo, and since the Tokyo general had more stars than the Seoul general, when General Thyng got back, he took an aircraft and went to Japan, and while he was flying to Japan, the other—we got messages from the other two commanding generals, all of whom were upset, and—but the key message came back that read, "Personal from Vandenberg to Thyng. I was not cognizant of your problem. I have taken actions." And it went on at great length, and the actions that he had taken, I read to you …

PIEHLER: Yeah …

BEEM: … previously on, from the history book, History of the Air Force. The question that you might want to know the answer to, and I'll ask myself the question, "What did this cost Colonel Thyng?" Probably five years. I never talked to him about it when he left the Air Force, when he retired. I never really wanted to know, but his son and I have talked about it, and certainly it cost him something, whether it was five years or three years or seven. It was clear that he was slated for general officer rank. He did become a brigadier general, and if he had stayed in the Air Force, I'm convinced he would have at least gotten one more star, maybe more. But he was—as a brigadier, he was approached by some of the people in the state of New Hampshire to run for the United States Senate, and he took a good deal of time to think that through. I had had some correspondence with him about it, and he said it was a very difficult decision. But he did make the decision, he did run for the United States Senate, and he lost in a very narrow victory, or a very narrow race. The victory went to a man named McIntyre. And at that point, Harry became an educator; took over a small college and turned it into a fully accredited junior college, and it's now Daniel Webster College.

I think the thing that I want to emphasize, if I can just add this quickly: the definition of a hero is very simple. I'm going to read two sentences, or a couple of sentences, from a book written by John J. Pullen. It's about Joshua Chamberlain. It's … subtitled A Hero's Life and Legacy, and it has to do … partially with a statement written by a woman named Linda Balfour, a police sergeant in 1988, in a … newspaper in Florida after she had seen the movie Gettysburg: "This film not only put me on a new road of knowledge which I now study extensively, but helped me to redefine myself and, through continued studies, give me the courage and determination to face some very strong obstacles in my career as a law enforcement officer. After seeing the film *Gettysburg*, I now had a hero and someone to believe in. It is called, 'Doing the right thing, no matter what the cost.'" It goes on, "One who does the right thing, no matter what the cost, is

probably as good a definition of a hero as any that can be written." In the course of my life, from the time of the Vandenberg message in … 1951, from the time that message—I wrote that, and came to realize the moral courage that it had taken, Harrison Reed Thyng has been my personal hero, and his message to me was—whenever there was a tough decision to make, the message was, "Do what is right, even though you know what the cost is going to be." And in the course of my life, in the Air Force, I didn't have—you know, I never led men in combat, and I didn't have a lot of difficult decisions to make because I never rose above the rank of major. On the other hand, I did make some, and I was guided by Colonel Thyng's example. But in civilian life, after I left the Air Force, the positions I held in healthcare management, I was either the chief operating officer or the chief executive officer of the organizations that I led, and there were times when I did have people's lives in my hands with decisions that I might make, both the patients of the hospitals and/or the people who worked in these organizations. And when I had to make these decisions, I would always ask myself a simple question: "What would Harry do?" and I always knew the answer: "Do the right thing, no matter what the cost." And for that, I've honored Harry Thyng for many years. I hope I've been worthy of his leadership and his example, and it's one of my reasons for trying to keep the story of Harrison Thyng alive.

PIEHLER: … I want to ask an inevitable follow-up question on that: what about other people in the squadron? When did they learn—I mean, there was a very initial—the major, the people in the message center, but when did the rest of the squadron learn about what was going on?

BEEM: Um …

PIEHLER: About this message. Obviously, when Harry got—when Colonel Thyng got called to Tokyo, people probably knew something was up, but when did they get the full knowledge of what he had done [and] how risky it was?

BEEM: My sense is that some of the senior officers knew.

PIEHLER: Beforehand.

BEEM: No.

PIEHLER: Or after the message.

BEEM: I don't think anybody knew until Harry sat down with a pen and wrote that message. I wish I'd have kept that. I actually destroyed it, because it was a draft and was not amenable to keeping as a top-secret document, but my feeling is that some of the senior officers of the organization knew what Harry did. Then, I think the scuttlebutt got the word out, because there—when another wing showed up, and we lost our deputy commander to that new wing—Francis Gabreski had been our deputy and he went to the 51st as their commander, and when some of our pilots—senior pilots—went with him, and when we began to get parts, which happened within a matter of several weeks, we began to get parts that we needed, the word began to get out. And I don't think it was known to every member of the 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing. I can't vouch for that. I know I never talked to anybody about it.

PIEHLER: So, this wasn't common discussion about—I mean, this is in some ways still kept very much in the command level. Rumors obviously circulating out, but it's not the standard—everyone's not talking about this … message, and …

BEEM: No, no, not to my knowledge. But on the other hand, it's become somewhat known in the last few years.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no, obviously, historically it's known, but I'm—it's interesting because it sounds like he, even though he does do this, you could, in part, view it as very audacious, very courageous, stepping out of channels. He does not—he remains very professional about doing it.

BEEM: Yes.

PIEHLER: He does not broadcast this to …

BEEM: No, this is not …

PIEHLER: … to the squadron.

BEEM: No, this was not broadcast to everybody. It was not—you know, it was not something that was held up as—you know, even though he is the greatest, it was not held up as "I am the greatest." He didn't think of himself.

PIEHLER: It sounds like he assumed—this is, in some ways, I wouldn't say out of character, in the sense that he was someone who normally went in channels …

BEEM: Oh yes, he was …

PIEHLER: Yeah, but this became a case where every rule is meant to be broken if there is a good reason.

BEEM: If you watch the … video of the movie Gettysburg, and you watch Longstreet try to convince Lee to let him make a flank attack against Gettysburg, against the roundtops, or if you watch him try to convince Lee not to send Pickett, when he lays out for Lee what's gonna happen when Pickett is gonna make the charge, all of this is a man talking to his commander, but there was a time, when you look at that, that a courageous leader would have not sent men to their death, and would have overruled their commander. And when you can't get things done, sometimes it takes costing yourself the job. Von Paulus, who actually probably doesn't really merit the 'von' that so often is put before his name—in reading Stalingrad as you may, you'll find that he may not have, he may have assumed that 'von' title, which is a title of nobility in Germany. But von Paulus would not oppose Hitler; he would not even oppose Keitel. And they became surrounded, and they decimated the Sixth Army. I mean, you know, it was captured, an entire army of what? A 140,000 or 160,000 men were lost, because nobody wanted to argue with the Führer. So the issue of leadership and the issue of moral courage is one that is of great

importance. And I think the examples in our armed forces are—they are many. We don't hear about them, but because of what Harrison Reed Thyng did in Korea, I think his story needed to be told, and that's why I've been working for nearly a decade to get it published.

PIEHLER: I'm just curious, before—because I want to make sure Dave asks some more questions about your Air Force career. When did you—you mentioned about ten years ago, you were determined to publicize the story. When did that start and why? Do you remember? Was there any motivation? Was it a career—you had retired, or …

BEEM: Uh …

PIEHLER: … a feeling that he had been overlooked? I'm curious.

BEEM: I think it probably has to do more with some of the things that went on in my own post-military career as a hospital administrator. I think some of that—part of it is there, when I realized that his story had not been told. He died in September of 1983. I went to his funeral up in New Hampshire. There was a, as the story tells you, a fly-over by—I think they were F-117s from Portsmouth, from Pease Air Force Base. They did the "missing man" formation. And I had seen Harry the previous May, and I had written a letter to him, and I'm not sure if I ever showed you a copy of that or not. I had written a letter to him, which he had answered, and it just seemed to me that as I read more and more of the history of war, I began to realize that there were not many stories in print about the kind of courage it takes to make a moral judgment, and particularly when making that judgment is going to be costly or can be costly. It may cost you your life. It may cost you your job. It may cost you your promotion. And I had been thinking about this for a number of years as these decisions that I sometimes made cost me a job, even though I knew it was gonna cost me a job, but I knew what the right thing to do was. And I knew I couldn't be true to what I believed in if I didn't do what I knew was right, and I got that message, you know, from Harrison Thyng. So, it just seemed to me that the story needed to get told, so the first place it was told was in this book. That's the one that you've got a page from, page 43, that's got the picture of Harry with the Australian, and it's got the story, you know, with the Vandenberg message. And this was published in August of 1993, and it's from Bob Dorr. He wrote, "To Gordon Beem: Thanks for your friendship and for helping to make possible this attempt at a history of great men and great planes." And he and Warren Thompson wrote the second one, The Korean Air War, and the Vandenberg message story is there again, and it's in this book that a statement is made that, again, needs to be, I think, on record, and I'd like to, if you don't mind, just add this to it.

PIEHLER: Oh, no, please do.

BEEM: This is from The Korean Air War, written by … Robert F. Dorr and Warren Thompson, both of whom I've been in contact with over the years. The publication date of this is—excuse me. 1994. I'm reading from page 140:

"When he went home after his eleven-month tenure as commander of the 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing on October the second, 1952, Colonel Harrison R. Thyng was entitled to feel satisfaction

that he had turned the tide against the MiG 15. No one noticed. Headlines, Hollywood hype, and glory were being heaped on young Sabre pilots like Ivan Kincehloe, Jimmy Low, and Dolph Overton. Colonel Thyng, an ace in two wars, a leader willing to take risks to help his men, and the premier American fighter wing commander of his era, has been all but forgotten. Only partly due to the Colonel's efforts, it appears that the 4th enjoyed preference in pilot assignments over the 51st"—and as an aside, that's probably true—"Harry Thyng's 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing, in October 1952, was possibly the finest fighter unit ever put into the field by any nation's air arm. The press ignored Colonel Thyng completely." End of the quotation from the book, The Korean Air War.

PIEHLER: No, I—just to add to that record, in doing research for your interview, I got out the semi-official history of the air war in Korea, and while there are some mentions of Colonel Thyng, and there is a discussion of the problem of, basically, the shortage of resources and the tension between trying to maintain a North American defense and other, European defense …

BEEM: Right.

PIEHLER: … but there's no sense of the dynamic and the crucial role that Colonel Thyng played. You wouldn't—reading this official history, you would have no sense of what changed, and why. You know, why the change took place.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: So—which is, semi-official histories and official histories need to—need other histories to …

BEEM: Well, what they need is, they need—in this particular case, we need people of the Air Force who care, and for those of you historians who are concerned about the history of warfare, we need the stories and we need the biographies of such men as Harrison Thyng, and to date, such a biography has not been written, although Colonel Thyng's son, Jimmy, who is himself an Air Force Academy graduate and a jet pilot who flew some three-hundred-plus missions over Vietnam—Jimmy has his father's war diaries, has gun-camera film, and has all the material necessary for a good biographer to do an outstanding piece of work. It's yet to come to pass. And I'm pushing for it.

PIEHLER: No, I know. I keep my eyes open, so I can assure you on the record, I do keep my eyes open. Well, let me—I want to turn this back over to Dave.

BEEM: Sure.

GORMAN: I was interested in some of the material that you had sent. I was reading through it, and talking about—some things that I quoted here—"The 4th Fighter Intercept Wing was an EADF, Eastern Air Defense Force outfit of the ADC, Air Defense Command, on temporary duty in the Far East." And getting spare parts must have been, logistically, just a nightmare.

BEEM: It was. It was impossible. The problems were that we would send requisitions to our stateside logistics support, OCAMA, Oklahoma City Air Materiel Area, and we would get back a message saying, "Get your parts from FEAMCOM." FEAMCOM is Far East Air Materiel Command, and you know, it's bureaucracy. And we have aircraft—we had eighty aircraft, roughly. We had twenty-five aircraft to a squadron. There supposedly were five extras for wartime, but there were around eighty aircraft. When all of this was going on and the Vandenberg message took place, and before the 51st was converted to 86s, in a max effort, we'd be lucky to get forty aircraft in the air, and they'd get up to MiG Alley, or up on the Yalu, and they'd see anything from 100, to 150, to 200—even as many 300 MiG-15s …

GORMAN: In the air?

BEEM: In the air. I mean, they'd be sitting on the other side of the Yalu, and [we] weren't supposed to go across the Yalu. We weren't, the F-86s. The 4th. You know, the Americans. Which is not to say that some of them didn't go across there. (Laughter) In fact, I can tell you that Colonel Thyng's son has already got a title for the—at least one chapter in the book, if somebody ever writes it, that has something to do with crossing the Yalu, but I won't violate a confidence. I want this to happen badly, because I think it needs to be told not only from the point of view of history of the Air Force and the history of this wing, which still exists, as a matter of fact, on active duty. It's at Seymour Johnson Air Base in eastern North Carolina and is part of Air Combat Command at this point. I think that's what they call it now, and they're on worldwide mobility alert most of the time. They're a fine fighter outfit. I've been over to the base. But, I think that the kind and quality of leadership that this man showed, in my view, for example, ought to be taught at the Air Force Academy.

PIEHLER: … There's a colleague of mine, a retired—we have an affiliate of the Center [for the Study of War and Society] who's a former Navy—first group of women aviators. She's talked about the issue of moral courage, and the need to teach this, this theme. Captain Rosemary Mariner. So she's going to enjoy reading your interview; these parts of your interview specifically, particularly …

BEEM: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: … because this is a theme that she is very conscious of, in terms of training, and in particularly for training for general officers.

BEEM: Yes. Absolutely.

GORMAN: It was interesting to me, too, to also read about the AOCP, Aircraft Out of Commission Parts.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

GORMAN: That sometimes more than half the aircraft you had available were not in flyable condition. The MiG was a threat, but when we had the planes, we were holding our own against them pretty well, but …

BEEM: Yeah, well …

GORMAN: … but [with] half the wing of air—half the planes available out of commission, there wasn't much you could do.

BEEM: Well, the—I think the overall kill ratio was something like fourteen to one, that we shot down fourteen of theirs for every one we lost, but that doesn't—you know, but I couldn't agree more that the AOCP [Aircraft Out of Commission Parts] rate of fifty percent is unacceptable, and that's what, what Harry's message was all about, is "I can't maintain the superiority unless I've got the planes to fly."

GORMAN: It wasn't about "Give me better planes." It's "Give me the parts to fly the ones I have."

BEEM: Yeah. Sure. And "I'm not gonna take men into combat." I mean, he didn't say, "I'm not gonna take men into combat." What he said was, "I need help, and we're in trouble." And that kind of message needs to be said, and when you try to filter what had had to go through four levels of command, with all of the staffing, and by that, I mean all of the people that would get a piece of something like this, if you'd try to put it through the normal command channels, it would be—you know, we'd be years.

GORMAN: They'd have watered it down or, you know, in order to protect maybe their own career, they would have …

BEEM: Uh …

GORMAN: … swamped it.

BEEM: I spent the last three years of my military career—not quite three years—as a staff officer for the Air Force Surgeon General and there is unfortunately, what I call a CMA attitude among staff—among many staff people, not everybody, but it's a common situation, and I don't think I need to spell out what CMA is.

PIEHLER: No, no, we …

BEEM: You understand.

PIEHLER: … It's not unique to the Air Force. I mean, I think it …

BEEM: No.

PIEHLER: It's unique. There are a lot of leadership positions that that …

BEEM: Well, it's—I mean, it's true in industry and it's true in the healthcare field.

PIEHLER: Oh, it's true in academia.

BEEM: Sure, sure.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I would add that for the record.

BEEM: Yeah. Leadership, the study of leadership, is something that I've been doing all my life, ever since I was a Boy Scout. And when I first joined the Boy Scouts, I saw a fellow with two little bars on his sleeve, and I asked one of the other new scouts what that was, and they said, "He's a patrol leader." I said, "What's a patrol?" And they told me, you know, how many scouts were in a patrol, and I watched, and I saw that this man had a position where he was leading. So I wanted to be a patrol leader. And so I wanted to be an Eagle Scout, and I was an Eagle Scout and I was a patrol leader. Eventually, through a long series of weird events, I finally became a lieutenant in the Air Force, and a captain and a major.

PIEHLER: You have, in fact, a remarkable—I feel we—you have a remarkable career because, in fact, you spend—you don't become an officer—you enlist in 1951 and you don't become an officer until 1957.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Which is a remarkable period of time.

BEEM: Well …

PIEHLER: I see you looking at the watch. Do you …

BEEM: No, I'm not in any hurry. I just wondered what time it was.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay, I just wanted to make sure that you're still …

BEEM: I have a two-hour drive back to Asheville. No problem.

PIEHLER: But, let me let Dave—we should probably finish up Korea, because—and I know …

GORMAN: Sure. Well, one of the things, because we talked about Korea in a class last semester—MacArthur and Truman, I gotta ask you: what was your take on their standoff?

BEEM: Well, of course, those of us who were out there at the time, you know, all we heard was what we heard in the—what we read in Stars and Stripes or what we heard on Armed Forces

Network. My understanding of all this and what went on is all after the Korean War was over and after I was back in the States, after I began to read some history, after I began to go back and look a little bit into it, and it was clear insubordination. So when that happens, a commander-in-chief has no choice but to take whatever action he takes, and again it's another example, even though he had—Harry Truman had the power, it was a very difficult political decision. It took, frankly, moral courage for him to tell MacArthur that he was through, because MacArthur was a national hero. And there had been stirrings, as I'm sure you two are aware, among the Republicans about running him [MacArthur] for President. And it was, you know, maybe the "smart" thing to do would be to have figured a way to shunt him off to the side somewhere. Well, I can't think of anyway you shunt MacArthur to the side. Not [from] everything I read about the history of World War II and about MacArthur's career. So my sense was that he did the right thing, "he" being Harry Truman. And I also think that the—I think there was an outstanding amphibious operation at Inchon, and that wouldn't take place, wouldn't have taken place, probably, by many men except MacArthur. There were others who might have tried it …

GORMAN: Mm hmm.

BEEM: … but MacArthur had great experience in those kind of amphibious—you know, around the back door. I mean, he did it all up the islands. That's what he was doing. He would run a—on the islands of the Pacific, he would just run up behind the Japanese; he'd isolate them; he'd build an airfield to give them air cover. You know, when you read the story of [George] Kenney, his—General Kenney, his air commander—and I think I sent that book to you—you'll find that that's what he did. He got airfields so he could provide air cover for the next landing. So he had all kinds of experience with this, and I think it was, tactically, it was a great move.

GORMAN: Mm hmm.

BEEM: It was chancy, but it was a good move. And it was risky, so it took somebody with MacArthur's kind of understanding of amphibious operations to do it. On the other hand, when you're told how far to go, and when you are told not to do certain things, you either, as an Air Force or a military officer, you do one of two things: either you don't do them, or if you think you've got to do them, then you resign your commission and do them, and go to the public if you want to.

GORMAN: Mm hmm.

BEEM: But my take on it is that Truman did the right thing, and of course, the officers that he put in charge afterwards did a good job. Ultimately, Eisenhower brought the war to a conclusion. It wasn't a satisfactory one in everybody's mind. But on the other hand, we stopped communism at a very important time, because the communists were absolutely going to take over all of the Korean Peninsula.

PIEHLER: I'm going to let you keep talking, partly to make sure Dave …

BEEM: Sure.

PIEHLER: I just need to call my wife very quickly, so …

GORMAN: I was—I picked up this book by Ridgeway …

BEEM: Mm hmm.

GORMAN: … and it contains a map showing air bases in Korea, and things that were going on here.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

GORMAN: And I didn't know exactly where Kimpo was, K-14 was. I was surprised to see—northwest of Seoul …

BEEM: Mm hmm.

GORMAN: … so close to the 38th parallel.

BEEM: Yes. Well, what's interesting about that, just to tell you, the air base itself was on the bottom of a peninsula. I think I gave, when I, in '96, when I gave my library here [to the Center for the Study of War and Society], I think I gave the maps, two books of maps from … West Point.

GORMAN: Mm hmm.

BEEM: They're large. They're probably—they must be in the file down there somewhere.

GORMAN: I'm sure they are. I'll look for them.

BEEM: Yeah. But you'll see that Kimpo is down on the base of a peninsula and very prone to attack. And we were fortunate that the Marines put a regiment—or was it a reinforcement? No, it was a regiment. They put a regiment at the head of our battalion, at the head of our peninsula, to protect Kimpo and the 4th Fighter Wing. They were supposed, in case of an enemy attack, their primary mission was a holding action so we could get our aircraft off and back to Japan. That was what the emergency order was. But, um …

GORMAN: They were just to hold off the attack and …

BEEM: Right.

GORMAN: Give you room and time.

BEEM: Right. They were to hold off the attack … until we get our aircraft. And then, I don't know what the hell would've happened to all of the support personnel. They'd have flown out,

you know, crew chiefs and some of that, and the rest of us would've walked wherever we had to go. But it didn't turn out that it was ever needed.

GORMAN: Did you—were you aware of combat in the area?

BEEM: Oh, yeah. We were quite aware of it.

GORMAN: It was very close?

BEEM: It was fairly close. We were …

GORMAN: The Yalu was, I know, some two hundred miles away.

BEEM: Yeah.

GORMAN: Obviously, the famous sign, "MiG Alley."

BEEM: Right. Yeah, we were aware of the combat and the—I remember … when I finally made staff sergeant, I was able to join what they called the "Rocker Club" and I also earlier had been on the board of … what they called the "Airmen's Club." So I was able, when I found out that these Marines that were at the head of our peninsula, holding off the potential—they were there to cover us in case there was any attack by the North Koreans or the Chinese. When we found out that they had no place to get any recreation, we agreed to have them in our—on certain nights they could come to our Airmen's Club, where they could get a cold beer and whatever food we were using. It was funny: the first night they came, they came fully armed, and it was an awful situation, because we were not allowed to bring weapons. Most of us had weapons. We all had grenades. I mean, carbines or .45s. But we didn't know what to do when the Marines came and they were fully armed, and we finally figured out a way to get the things stored and have some people cover them so the Marines—but after that they—we had to figure out a place to finally put them so they could come and enjoy it, but still have their weapons in case they were needed. It was a bit of a mess the first night.

GORMAN: A little dicey?

BEEM: A little dicey the first night, but after we worked it all out …

GORMAN: I'm sure they appreciated your hospitality.

BEEM: I have a letter from a Marine sergeant that—he had asked for anybody who knew about this organization. It was [in] a "I'm looking for" [segment] in one of our military magazines, and I wrote him a brief note and told him of my recollections of them covering us, and the fact that we'd opened up our clubs to them, and he remembered them as well, and we chatted a couple of times.

GORMAN: Did you miss Korea when you left?

BEEM: No. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Before I—I had stepped out of the interview for a minute, but one thing—I don't know if you've asked, and if you have asked, don't answer, don't tell me. But you mentioned the Australians several times.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Has Dave asked you—because we often think of the Korean War—that we had allies in Korea. And you've had—you had quite a bit of contact with the Australians. Could you talk a little bit about that relationship?

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And some of the personal contacts you had.

BEEM: The Australians were across the field from us, and … Colonel Thyng was the wing and base commander. There was another Air Force unit, the 67th Tac Recon Wing, doing tactical reconnaissance across the field, and then the 77th Interceptor Fighter Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force, the RAAF, was across the field. And they were flying Gloucester Mark VIII Meteors. Not capable of combat against the MiG, but darn good fighter-bomber-type aircraft and great interdiction for just shooting up the—you know, supporting the ground forces. The—all of the classified messages for the 67th and … the 77th came through us, 'cause we had the decrypting stuff, so I had contact with the adjutant of the 77th Fighter Interceptor Squadron frequently, and he's pictured with then-Colonel Thyng in one of the books I gave you. Flight Lieutenant—lost it. I saw it the other day. But I was friendly with them.

It's also important that my brother was in Iwakuni, on his second tour. Their seaplane tender was there, and Iwakuni was the rear echelon of the 77th Fighter Interceptor Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force. So, the Aussies—I had contact with them through the messages, usually three or four times a week, if not more often. The flight lieutenant would come in. He would sign for the classified stuff or take it off, or when they wanted to send stuff, or if they had information that they wanted to use with Colonel Thyng and such. And then, my brother had contact with them because he was the shore patrol officer in Iwakuni frequently, and so when he wanted to visit me, the RAAF flew him over, and I have a copy, a couple of copies of RAAF orders shipping me to Iwakuni and back again.

And the other … somewhat amusing story that concerns the Aussies is that they had great beer then, as they do now, and their beer used to come in wooden crates. They were big bottles, and the—we liked to get that in our clubs. And so, occasionally, we were able to arrange exchange of potables. The—but the other thing that we did, and showed, again, shows Colonel Thyng's leadership. He, uh, got permission to—do you want us to hold this until he gets back?

PIEHLER: No.

BEEM: He got permission from our armed forces, particularly from the generals at FEAF and at 5th, to decorate the Aussies with our Distinguished Flying Cross, which took—you know, they had to go to Washington and they had to clear it through some embassies, but Harry started it all, and we ended up with a decoration ceremony, at which we had Aussies. A big Aussie contingent marched up in front of our wing headquarters. We had an F-86 on one side and a Mark VIII Meteor facing each other. They were there, the aircraft. Then we had the troops, and then there were our officers and enlisted people to be decorated, and their officers and their …

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

PIEHLER: … you had some enlisted pilots present.

BEEM: Right. Their enlisted pilots are present. One of my friends, a sergeant by the name of [Joseph] Gerrity, was awarded the Soldier's Medal that day for heroism, and going into a burning F-86 that had crash-landed, and it was at that ceremony that Colonel Thyng pinned a number of Silver Stars on some of our aces, and then the Aussies were decorated. When it was over, the officer pilots of the Aussies went to what became known as "Swig Alley," the officers' club, and they had a large party. Of course, the enlisted pilots could not attend there, so we entertained them at the Air Force NCO club, and it was a great night, where two nations are decorating—having pilots decorated and sharing their joy, I guess, and comradeship. So yes, I have a soft spot in my heart for the Aussies.

PIEHLER: You've raised one of the differences between—I mean, the air forces and military organizations, because in the American Air Force, "pilot" means officer in the World War II era and post-World War II, but other air forces, and even the Navy, doesn't view it that way, that pilots don't necessarily …

BEEM: Well, the Navy does now, but …

PIEHLER: Yeah, but at one point, in the World War II era …

BEEM: Well, there were very few enlisted pilots in the Navy, as I recall.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: And most of them were granted commissions.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

BEEM: They—but before World War II, there were a number—a lot more.

PIEHLER: Yeah, the Navy had a harder—they were more—I get the sense, more resistant to making the automatic connection.

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: But the Australians had enlisted pilots, which …

BEEM: As late as the Korean War. I don't know what their situation is these days.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Anything that struck you about differences in—I mean, one is having enlisted pilots. Any differences in military organization?

BEEM: I didn't have that much detail.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you wouldn't be able to …

BEEM: No, I wouldn't be able to comment on that. The—I know that when I went to Iwakuni and we went over—we had a Australian army captain that was a friend of my brother's. He joined us when we went to Hiroshima. But not all that much contact with—other than the adjutant, who I saw frequently.

PIEHLER: I guess, also, before having you leave Korea, I guess one question, and I—it applies to both World War II and Korea. And it's sort of a simple question, but it probably has a complex answer. What did you think of the enemy? You're in a branch of the—both branches of the service you served, the enemy's a very distant—on a ship, and because you're not, you're not actually in combat.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: And, uh …

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: The enemy's very distant, in a sense.

BEEM: Yeah. I don't think that—you know, we didn't have much contact, at least not—not of the kind that an infantryman in the Army or in the Marine Corps would have, or an artilleryman who was up on the front. I only had one experience where I was thinking about going to Army Officer Candidate School in Korea. They had it in Japan, and Colonel Thyng suggested that I go up on the front, and he called a friend of ours who, as a matter of fact, I played basketball against when I was in college, and he's now a lieutenant colonel in the Army in Korea, having been recalled. A fellow named Johnny Mulhern, from Colby College. Anyway, my visit to the front made me realize that I wanted to be an Air Force officer, not a officer of the …

PIEHLER: How long did you stay at the front?

BEEM: I was there just one day.

PIEHLER: And that …

BEEM: Well, that's all they would …

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: You know, I was sent up there for one day to see what was going on.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: And, uh, both Colonel Thyng and Colonel Mulhern said that if I had any chance of going to the Air Force officer corps, that's where I belonged, and so I listened.

PIEHLER: And I guess—did you see any USO shows when you were in Korea? I guess …

BEEM: Betty Hutton was on our base. Yes, and I had the great good fortune of seeing then-Archbishop Spellman, who I later saw, in about '62 in Germany, when he was now the Cardinal Archbishop. But he was the vicar to the …

PIEHLER: Military.

BEEM: Military services, yeah. He did a midnight mass in Christmas of '51 at Kimpo.

PIEHLER: And you attended.

BEEM: Yeah. I mean, all religions were there.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

BEEM: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish. I think there were some Muslims if we had any. Everybody went. I mean, this was Archbishop Spellman. You know, Christmas Eve. Where else are you gonna go? (Laughter) You're gonna go!

PIEHLER: Yeah, I—you're not the first to have told a story like that.

BEEM: Not quite the Pope, but …

PIEHLER: But close enough.

BEEM: Yeah, one of his princes, ultimately.

PIEHLER: Well, Dave was going to take you out of the Korean War, so I'm going to …

GORMAN: Yeah, Okay.

PIEHLER: I'm going to turn you back over to …

GORMAN: Yeah. You left Korea in August of '52 …

BEEM: Mm hmm.

GORMAN: Went to the—reported to the Pentagon, still in a message division here. You were a shift NCO with the air staff message division.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

GORMAN: Okay. What were your responsibilities there? You left Colonel Thyng in Korea …

BEEM: And I ended up going to Washington. I got that job because of the man who was the adjutant of the 4th Fighter Wing, John Ross, who was working in that message division. And I was at Bolling Field across the river, and looking to see where I was going to work. And I talked to Major [John] Ross. He said, "Do you want to work in the Pentagon?" I said, "Doing what?" And he told me about the shifts, and he told me how much time off there was, and it sounded like a good deal.

GORMAN: What were the shifts?

BEEM: Well, it was around the clock, but it's the way you worked…. It was on a six-day rotation. You worked—if you worked day shift, you worked four days and had two days off. And then you went to the evening shift, and you worked four days and had two days off. Then, when it came to the midnight shift, you only had to work two of those six days. So if you were real smart, and you knew how to manipulate things, you could work yourself so that you could get six days off in a row about every month. If you really knew how to—you know, if you knew how to do it and were willing to—you know, willing to work.

GOREMAN: To pay the price in the mean time.

BEEM: Yeah. If you were willing to work at it, you could get some good time off. And you know, Washington in 1952—I'm a staff sergeant, I'm single, and, you know, it was a good job. I enjoyed it. I actually read a copy of the Vandenberg message. It was still in the files. And I was there—how long did I do that?

PIEHLER: Until May of 1953.

BEEM: Yeah, May of '53, when I had an abbreviated run at OCS.

GORMAN: The second time for …

BEEM: Second time.

GORMAN: … Air Force OCS, yeah.

BEEM: This time I really went, but got caught in …

GORMAN: They got you again.

BEEM: They got me again in a bureaucratic shuffle. It was a draw-down—one of the periods of draw-down at the end of the Korean War—and they just cut the production of OCS. And they limited it to those graduates who could qualify for pilot or navigator training. And my eyes did it again. I was turned down. I mean, I could have stayed, and they would have given me a certificate saying I'd completed it, but there was no reserve commission involved, and there was no call to active duty. Then, after I resigned and went back to the Pentagon and went to work, I saw a change that said they would grant all of the graduates reserve commissions, but no active duty. That happened about halfway through my class. And then, about a week before the class graduated, which would have been in early December, they changed their mind and called everybody to active duty. (Laughter) It was at this point that I was somewhat more disillusioned, and had decided that I would leave the Air Force, and would go back to Maine and teach and coach. And it's when I went to graduate school at Georgetown to work on an M.A. in American history, which again, the government paid seventy-five percent of.

PIEHLER: So you did—you left the Air—to go back to graduate school, did you leave the Air Force?

BEEM: No, I was doing it at night.

PIEHLER: Oh, so this was—you were a night student, but not any part of an Air Force program?

BEEM: No.

PIEHLER: No, this was on your …

BEEM: Was on my—except the Air Force, at that point, if you went to school at night, would pay seventy-five percent of your tuition. All you had to do was cough up twenty-five percent. So, I was working full-time, but I was also a student with tuition aid from the Air Force.

GORMAN: You were at Fort Myer [in Virginia] at this time?

BEEM: Yeah.

GORMAN: The general court martial clerk?

BEEM: Yeah, I was working for the Judge Advocate General, and then I went over to Fort Myer as an NCO in the leadership school. And that's when I finally made tech sergeant and took an early discharge in November of '54, went back up to Maine to teach and coach, and looked around for a job. There wasn't anything south of the snow line—what we call the snow line.

That means south of, really, south of Waterville. [From] Waterville south, I would've probably stayed there if I'd got something, but there was nothing, and I really—I might have made a half-hearted attempt at finding a job. I really wanted a military career. I was a little frustrated that I hadn't been able to get a commission, but right before—I'd put in my discharge papers for this early discharge, and I wanted to look to see whether I could get a good job up in Maine. But about that time a friend of mine, a tech sergeant who lived in the barracks where I lived, who was a stenographer and who was detached service to the Office of Legislative Liaison in Congress. The Air Force has a—all the services have a Legislative Liaison Office. And Billy—lost his last name, but I'll think of it. It doesn't really matter, anyway. He was getting a direct commission. And I talked to Billy about it, and he told me that he was being commissioned in the medical service corps. And I said, "What's the—what in the—what's the authority for that?" And he showed me an Air Force manual, 36-5, [that] explained it all….

I had made another attempt at getting a commission while I was in Korea that isn't even written on there. They … were commissioning officers in "Techno" branch to be—to take meteorology training. And when I went before the board, they thought I'd make a good officer, but they said my education at Bowdoin wasn't sufficiently technical to qualify. Listen to this. To qualify under the rules, that's Air Force manual 36-5. Then the piece of paper that I've got says also that "There are no other areas, or there are no other opportunities available under Air Force manual 36-5 that you qualify for." All right. That was in 1952 when it happened. At this point—so he says he's being commissioned under 36-5, so I go take a look at it, you know, and I read the rules, and it looked—yeah, I qualified. I had a baccalaureate degree. I had all of the work done, the collegiate work done, course work done, for a M.A., I just needed to write a thesis, which I never got around to. But anyway, I had a good academic record there at Georgetown. I had A's mostly. I think I had one B+ in South Asian history, but everything else was [an] A.

And so it looked to me pretty much to me like I qualified. I said, "Who are you talking to?" He told me that he'd had an interview with the chief of the medical services corps. So I said, "Who is he?" and he gave me the colonel's name. So I contacted the office and asked if I could be interviewed. This is before I took the discharge. And so I was seen by a major, rather than the chief of the corps, and he looked at my background and said—he said, "I can't make you any promises, sergeant." But he said, "You've got as good quality qualifications or better than your friend." And so he said, "If you want to make an application, we'll give it consideration." Well, at that point, I was—I'd already had my discharge papers in. I thought, "Let me take the discharge and go have a look up at Maine, but this is sort of like in the back pocket." Maybe, you know, because I'd had a lot of bad experiences before. (Laughter)

So anyway, to make a long story short, I went up to Maine and I couldn't find a job, and I reenlisted as a tech sergeant. I was first sergeant of an organization, and was about to apply for the commission, when an old Air Force master sergeant friend of mine in personnel up in the Pentagon calls me and says, "You know, I got a good slot open in Germany." He says, "You want to take it?" I said, "Where is it?" He said, "It's Landstuhl-Ramstein, right in central Germany." He said, "You'll love it." I said, "What doing?" He said, "Oh, you run an Air Force post office." I said, "Run a post office?" I said, "God, I've done everything else in here. Why not?" And I said to him, "You know, I got this opportunity to apply to the medical service

corps." And he said, "I read all that stuff up." He said, "You've got until you're age thirty-two." He said, you know, "After thirty-two, you can't get considered, but until you're thirty-two, you can." So, I said, "Well, hell!" So I said, "Let me go to Germany." Of course there was another hooker in it, too, but I was—I had volunteered to go to Japan, because a friend of mine had gone back there, and that's why this sergeant called me. He didn't want me going to Japan with this other guy, who he thought was a bad influence on me. So that's why he got the spot open for me in Germany. (Laughter) So anyway, I ended up going to Germany, and then I was at the air post office, and I had a sloppy group of troops in this air post office at Landstuhl, APO-65. And I started to shape them up. You know, sort of a …

PIEHLER: Sloppy just in military bearing, or …

BEEM: The whole business:

PIEHLER: Not doing the job?

BEEM: Not shaving and not—you know, and we were—the trouble was, we had dependents on this base, and we were just like the regular post office. I mean, anytime—Christmastime, all the packages came through us. You know, the whole nine yards of a post office, and I was the … Air Force postal clerk in charge. That was my title. And so I started shaping them up. And you know, we marched to work, and we marched back. And we marched—and we did a little running, and we had some calisthenics, and we shaved, and we got our hair cut, and we wore clean uniforms. You know, the things that one would normally expect…

GORMAN: They *were* sloppy.

PIEHLER: It does sound like a very scroungy group.

BEEM: So, a few of them complained to the group—sergeant major, and the group commander got the word of it, and they came to the big conclusion that I needed some leadership training. So …

PIEHLER: I—you do—you've indirectly described—I mean, this would have been unheard of in the Navy. I mean, for people to complain like that. Because I mean, [the] Navy would be dropping the white hat. I mean, and what you're getting to do [is] in some ways basic hygiene, even in a non-military context. Having people shave, wear uniforms. You know.

BEEM: Look—you know, look military.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: That's what I asked them when they called me in and said—I said, "Well, I thought that's what you brought me in here for, was to make … these guys look like a military organization." And, you know, the major [said] that he thought I needed some leadership training, and he'd gotten a space for me at the USAF NCO Academy. And so, I asked—the

sergeant was standing there, and I said to him, I said, "Sergeant, has the Major ever seen my Form 20?" And he said, "No, I don't think so." And he turns to the major and the major says, "No." And I said, "Well, you think you ought to take a look at the Form 20?" So, I mean, I knew that probably neither had ever looked at it, so they go and get it and they bring it back, and of course, … on it, when they look at it—one of my jobs at Fort Myer —I said it was at a leadership school. Well, what I was, was NCO-IC [Noncommissioned Officer In Charge] of the Headquarters Air Force NCO Leadership School. I mean, I was providing—I was in charge of educating the senior NCOs of the Pentagon. I mean, all master sergeants. This was before the days of the E-8s and E-9s. But I—I mean, I was running a school for leadership of people who were in the top places of the Air Force. And he looked at it and he said, "Well, I still think you need to go to this school. I can't back out now." So I go to the … school. And after I finished the school, I set a new academic record in the place. Because it was unfair, you know. I mean, I had a lot of education, and a lot more than some of the guys. And you know, I knew how to study, and so I set an academic record. I've got a little brass, silver-plated desk plate that says, "Academic Achievement Award, May [11], 1956." The fact of the matter is, at that point—on my way down to the school, I took a short leave, and went into Munich, and I met an American girl in Munich who was going to the University of Munich. I met her at the tennis courts at *Tennisplatz Tivoli*. And I was sitting there with a German couple who I'd met the night before, and I asked—I had heard her speaking English, and I saw her playing. A blonde. I said, "She speaks very good English." "Oh," he said, "She's an American." And my friend said, "She goes to the University of Munich." "Oh." I said, "Do you know her?" He said, "Oh, sure." So he introduces me, and we end up playing mixed doubles. He and his wife and the woman. Iris Muller, her name was. Her father and mother were both of German extraction, and she had graduated Berkley and ended up coming there. Anyway, all during my time at the NCO Academy, I courted her. I was going into Munich relatively frequently, like two or three nights a week.

PIEHLER: And still doing well at the academy.

GORMAN: It's a good thing you had the advantage of knowing how to study.

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I guess, because you had mentioned this … class you offered for master sergeants. I mean, what did you instruct—did you actually instruct?

BEEM: Oh, yeah, in leadership and management.

PIEHLER: And, what—I guess, what did you teach them? I'm just—in terms of the curriculum?

BEEM: I'd have to go pull the stuff, but …

PIEHLER: I mean, just a rough idea. Was it procedures of the Pentagon, or …

BEEM: No, no, no. It was about the theory.

PIEHLER: Oh, the theory. It was a theoretical …

BEEM: Oh, sure. It was a theoretical approach to leadership.

PIEHLER: Really not the nuts and bolts, but more, "How do you lead?"

BEEM: Yeah, "How do you lead people?" And as far as management was concerned, we were talking about work simplification and the Deming Approach. This was in 1950s. Work simplification and so forth.

PIEHLER: So in many ways, part leadership—very traditional military—but part business school?

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Methodology and …

BEEM: How to do things. So, anyway, I graduated from there. I went back up to Landstuhl, and I had asked the people at Freising at the NCO Academy—they asked me, did I want to be an instructor. I said, "You bet your life." And so, they said, "Well, we'll take care of that." They had priority. All they had to do was call Wiesbaden and ask for somebody and they got him, because the general had ordered this be done. Anyway, to make a long story short, I went back as an instructor of leadership and management, and that fall, I married the young woman. And she was my second wife, Iris. And then I decided, having now gotten married—and it was 1957. Actually, it was 1956 when we got married, and I was coming up on H-30 the following February. It was now time to see if I could really break out of the ranks. And so, I put in a—I wrote a letter to the chief of the Air Force medical service corps, and he wrote back how to apply. And the letter that came back was not signed by the chief of the medical service corps, but was signed by a Dr. Smith, Larry Smith, and when it came in, I showed it to the commandant of the NCO Academy, and he looks at it and he says, "My God!" He said, "That's Doc Smith." He said, "He operated on me twice at Keesler." (Laughter) And I said, "Oh?" He said, "Yeah," he said, "I'm going to have to write Doc Smith a letter about you." (Laughter) So, Colonel Wagaman wrote a what we used to call a "walk-on-water letter," and the result of all this was a letter back to the commandant saying, "We're going to commission Sergeant Beem, effective June 1, 1957, in the Air Force medical service corps as a first lieutenant, and we're going to assign him to a hospital at Wimpole Park, England, where he will begin his service as [an] Air Force medical administrator."

And so on May 31, 1957, I was an E-6, and the following morning I took the oath of office and pinned on the silver bars of a first lieutenant. And four or five days later, I crossed the English Channel with my wife, Iris, and went Wimpole Park, England, which was on the estate of Rudyard Kipling's daughter, Mrs. Elsie Bainbridge, and was the home of the 7510th USAF Hospital. And it was there that our first child was born, Mimi, in—late in 1957. I was there two

years. I had a great colonel that I worked for there, who, after about six months of working with him, he said, "You're the kind of young officers we need in our medical service corps." And he said, "The first thing we need to do is get you a regular commission." So, I said, "How?" And he explained, and so I made the application. He was the third or fourth most senior full colonel in the medical service corps, and he made some phone calls, and he wrote a couple of letters, and when my application hit the board, they approved, and when the list came out, I was commissioned in the regular Air Force, which meant I wouldn't get busted out in the—if the reserves got caught in a cut-down. "Now," he said, "we got to get you in graduate school." And we went through the same routine again. And I got selected to go to what they call the Air Force Institute of Technology, to a civilian university for graduate training in hospital administration. I had asked for University of California at Berkeley, primarily because my wife, Iris, had graduated from Berkeley, you know, and her family was on the West Coast. And then they also—they considered me, and so did Iowa. And the third place that considered me was Yale, and I didn't even know Yale was on the list, or I would have written—asked for that first. But I ended up being selected to go to Yale, and I went to Yale as a fully paid first lieutenant. I was there for a year academically, and did the work on a Master of Public Health in hospital administration, did my residency down at Maxwell [Air Force Base], and then was sent back overseas at my request. I had to do a little finagling, but I had learned how to do that.

GORMAN: Sounds like the Air Force was kind of working for you a little better at this point, too, finally, in terms of your training and school and everything.

BEEM: I think the military will train a person, if the individual wants to be trained and has the ability to absorb the training and has the stick-to-it-ness to do what's necessary to be commissioned, you know, or to be trained, and after you get commissioned, being trained. So I ended up in Wiesbaden. I commanded a casualty staging flight for about a year, and then the colonel that came in to replace my previous boss said, "It's a waste of your education to have you commanding a casualty staging flight, so we're going to transfer you to the Wiesbaden Hospital where you can work at a hospital and use some of that training you got at Yale." So I spent three years as the assistant to the deputy commander and his registrar, and then I ended up coming back to the States.

GORMAN: What was it—if I can interrupt here—what was it like during the early '60s in Wiesbaden? Cold War. Were there incidents? Were there alerts? Were there situations that …

BEEM: Oh, yeah. I'm not speaking out of school. I started to bring along a letter, but then I thought better of it. I did some work—I had a bunch of security clearances from my time in the air staff message division, some above top-secret, because of the things I was handling there, and I still had them, and they just followed me from enlisted to officer status, and a couple of individuals came to see me and asked me about the work I'd done at the Pentagon. They identified themselves as being from the American embassy in Bonn, and they said they had the permission of the hospital commander to speak with me. That's the way they started. And they asked about the work I'd done in the Pentagon. They asked about, you know, my background. We spent forty-five minutes or an hour, and they thanked me and said they might have reason to

call on me for assistance at appropriate points, and I, you know, didn't ask them anything more. I mean, I knew who they were—at least I thought I did—and I also knew that with the gentlemen like this you just keep your mouth shut and answer their questions, and don't ask them questions. I didn't think that was what they were there for. When they finished, the hospital commander called me up and said, "Had you talked to these people?" "Yes." "You have an idea?" And I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "What do they want you to do?" I said, "I think, because I am the registrar, or because I'm—" At the time I was the assistant to the deputy commander. I said, "I think they're interested in my clearances, in case they have need to hospitalize somebody here." They'd asked—for example, they asked, had I ever been in an operating room, did I know anything about operating room procedure. And so I answered them truthfully and I said, "Yes, I have been, but," I said, "I am not an operating room technician, never have been. But," I said, "you know, I know enough about what goes on in an operating room." So really what they wanted was they wanted someone with the right kind of clearances, who could be used, if need be, if an individual needed to be treated at our hospital. And they wanted to have somebody present who could understand what might be said, or who could be appropriately debriefed if need be. So, I was involved in a few operations.

GORMAN: That wasn't necessarily unusual, though, given the times?

BEEM: I don't think so. We had people behind the [Iron] Curtain all the time. One of our psychiatrists, for example, went in and got the U-2 pilot …

PIEHLER: Gary Powers?

BEEM: Gary Powers.

PIEHLER: So he was in your hospital?

BEEM: No, he wasn't. We—one of our psychiatrists …

PIEHLER: He just went …

BEEM: He just went. He didn't bring him back. They brought him out through Sweden, and flew him back to the States from there. But we had some people that—who were being taken care of medically, who, if they said anything, [we] needed to be able to convey that. Somebody with the clearances had to be there so that if anything untoward developed, and—I've got a couple of letters in my personal file thanking me for my services, but it just …

PIEHLER: I once heard a story, which is [along] very similar lines, in terms of clearance, that in some ways it is a weird relationship in the military, because a friend was telling me he had gotten to know this retired sergeant major who, one of the reasons he had friction with his base commander [was] because he had been in the Pentagon and had higher security clearances than his colonel, and that became a real source of friction because … you know, well, the colonel way outranks him. On the other hand, because of clearances, this sergeant major, because of his

previous responsibility, had a much higher security [clearance]. This is another story along those lines.

BEEM: Yeah, except in this particular case, the hospital commander knew that he—he knew enough about me, and so did the deputy, that if they needed somebody …

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: And so, it was nothing—I don't think there was …

PIEHLER: Yeah, I think this was unusual that there was so much friction. I've only heard this story secondhand, but it sort of stuck in my mind, because I heard it over fifteen years ago.

BEEM: Yeah, clearances can cause trouble, and they can cause trouble for the people that have them.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I mean, for this sergeant major, I think he would have been better off without them.

BEEM: Mm hmm. But in this case, I think I was helpful, and I've got several other letters. I ran the air evac [air evacuation] portion of the hospital as registrar, and had been responsible for it when I had the casualty staging flight, and we were involved with air evac-ing VIPs. We brought one of the princes of Saudi Arabia's son out and got him on the first jet flight to the States. He—the youngster was born without a sternum and needed an operation at one of our children's hospitals. Not the military, but a civilian. So, the—it was the central hospital for Europe, for the Air Force, and it's where all the hostages came when they were brought out …

GORMAN: Out of Iran?

BEEM: Used to see them on the second floor, walking around on that. [It] brought back a lot of memories to me when I'd see that …

GORMAN: Did President Kennedy come through there on his tour?

BEEM: No. He flew over. He was there in Wiesbaden, and I can remember sitting in our quarters when his helicopter took off from the officers' club. I can't remember the name of it now. I was going to call it the name of the one in London. But his helicopter, when it took off, took off and went from the officers' club up in the air, and went up over our quarters, and then went out to Wiesbaden Air Base where they then flew him into Berlin.

PIEHLER: How—I probably asked this, and it's not a complete segue to your private career, but how did you find the Air Force medical system? I mean, you were very much a part of it. And what did you see as the real strengths of it? And I think it's clear from your interview that there are some strengths. What did you see as the weaknesses in the system that you knew when you were in …

BEEM: Yeah, well, it—the weaknesses, I think, were the fact that we had such heavy turnover of doctors. A lot of the doctors were doing two years of obligated service and that's what they did, or three years, or four years, depending on whether they'd gotten their training. You know, there was a doctors' draft at one time and that was going on, so there were—at the hospital in England, the quality of care I found always to be very good to excellent. And occasionally you'd get a, you know, kind of a nut case, but I mean, that's no different … than in civilian life, I found out later. I thought, and still think, that the military provides great care. I would also say, just as an aside, that the Veterans' Administration does the same. They have, for me, at least. I have had outstanding care from the Veterans' Administration Hospital in Asheville…. I have had three major operations there, so I feel very comfortable with what …

PIEHLER: And you don't feel its second-class care? Because some veterans have expressed that they've …

BEEM: Well, some do, and maybe they do get it [second-class care].

PIEHLER: Yeah. But in your particular case, you …

BEEM: The physicians that have operated on me were trained at Duke Medical Center, Duke Medical School, and Duke residents rotate through the hospital, so they're—at least in Asheville. Again, I can't speak for all the hospitals, but I've had great care. And I'm alive, I think, because of that, since I had a heart bypass, and two carotid arteries done.

PIEHLER: So you've—yeah …

BEEM: I've had a good cleaning out. From my last tour in Wiesbaden, which was great, I had, as you can tell, in a ten-year period, I had nearly eight years of it in Europe, and that was an unusual situation. I asked for assignment to Southern California when I left there, and got it, because the chief of the corps had been the exec of the hospital in Wiesbaden, and he very nicely got me there. But he had to use a little weight to do it, and he made some people a little angry. Because the reason I wanted to go there is because my wife's—my then-wife, Iris'—family, mother and father, were in Southern California. Southern California, the base was Riverside—March Air Force Base at Riverside. It was on what the SAC [Strategic Air Command] people call the lower tier, and you didn't get to lower tier SAC bases until you'd done a tour on the upper tier, the upper bases. They have a name for it and I've lost it, but it doesn't really matter. The Northern Tier. That's it, the Northern Tier. So when I got the word that my in-laws had split up, and my father-in-law was going to New York, and my mother-in-law was coming to Germany for awhile—so, anyway, I decided I better get back to the East Coast, and I asked for Westover Air Force Base in Springfield, Mass[achusetts], and Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and the base in New Jersey …

GORMAN: McGuire?

BEEM: McGuire. So …

PIEHLER: The Air Force decided …

GORMAN: Yeah. They came through for you again.

BEEM: I was committed to SAC, because SAC owned the base at Riverside, so he had to go back to the SAC guys, he told the SAC guys what I wanted, and he said, you know, "Gordon wants to go to the Northeast." So, the SAC guys said, "Fine, we'll send him to the Northeast." And they sent me to the Northeast, to Loring Air Force Base in Limestone, Maine. If you don't know the state of Maine, the state of Maine is 500 miles from Kittery to Fort Kemp. Limestone, Maine is about 35 miles southeast of Fort Kemp, i.e., it's damn close to Canada! This was going to be the winter of '65, '66. And I was raised in Maine from the time I was nine until I went off to the military and everything I've been saying today. I had never been further North than Orono, Maine, where the University of Maine is, and Orono is about the same level as Bangor. Bangor is a hundred and thirty-two miles north of Portland, where I was raised, and Portland is fifty miles north of Kittery. So that left a hell of a lot of the state of Maine that I hadn't seen, and, frankly, hadn't wanted to see. (Laughter) But now my assignment is Loring Air Force Base, Maine, and so off we trot in June of 1965. And we drove up the Maine Turnpike as far as we could go, and then we took Route—I think its Route 2, north of that. The turnpike hadn't gotten all the way through to its northern perimeter at that point. Anyway, we get to Limestone, and I become the business manager, and occasionally, the acting exec of the hospital. I had a great time there. Most of the time, the exec let me run the place. There were three lieutenants that worked with me. We had a couple of good colonels as the commanders, and I had a lot of fun. We were there in northern Maine two years, three months, and nineteen days. That's by count of my ex-wife, my former—my second wife.

PIEHLER: She wasn't as thrilled about …

BEEM: She wasn't as thrilled, no. (Laughter) The kids [Mimi and Mark] loved it. I had a lot of fun at my job. The first winter, we had 246 inches of snow. The lowest temperature was forty-three degrees below zero, and I think that's probably enough said about Loring Air Force Base, Maine, except to tell you one last thing. When you drive up old Route 2, going into Aroostook County—which Aroostook County is bigger than a couple of the other states in New England. I mean, Aroostook County is huge. It's the potato raising area. There's a huge sign, and this is what it used to say—because Loring Air Force Base is closed—but it used to say: "Welcome to Aroostook County, Potato Capital of the United States and Home of Loring Air Force Base." Okay. That's what it said on the side going up. Now, going out, the side [of the sign] is blank. We went up there and were there for about six weeks when I got a three day pass to take—and every six weeks after that two years, three months, and nineteen days we were there. I got a three day pass every six weeks because my wife liked to go to Portland and from there she'd go down to Boston, sometimes even to New York to see her father. But be that as it may, I loved it. I had a lot of fun. And we made our first trip down, and we got down, and I see the big sign, and I'm looking up and I say, "What the hell is that?" and I look, and I look some more. And the words on there are saying, "You are now leaving Aroostook County." And below that were the words: "Thank God." And around the rest of it were all kinds of GI hats. (Laughter) You know, the

caps, I guess they were nailed to the board. I'm sure that they have long since disappeared, but—and I never took a photograph of it.

PIEHLER: Oh, that's too bad.

BEEM: I wish I had. But I tell some folks this story, and they—you know, it's usually good for a laugh if you know anything about the state of Maine.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I've been to Maine only once, but I've been as far as Acadia and it's a big state. I mean …

BEEM: It's unbelievable. Yeah, it's big.

PIEHLER: Because we thought about going to Nova Scotia, and then we started looking at maps and timing and …

BEEM: So after the two years, three months, and nineteen days, the colonel who had got me to Riverside, and unfortunately to Loring, had a—might have had a little touch of conscience. (Laughter) I don't think he'll ever hear this, because he's still alive, and a good friend, and he knows I talk like this. He got me out of there, and he got me down to Washington, and I had been selected for major just before I got these orders. Had to wait a couple of months to put on the gold leaf, but I became a—I worked in a special assignment, originally, when I first got there, in data processing, and then they moved me over to the Staff Plans Division of the Air Force Surgeon General's office, and I spent the final part of my career there. I had two major [responsibilities]. I think two things I did there were important. I reevaluated and made some major changes. Recommended, because majors don't make the changes, but recommend to the appropriate people, several general officers, and we had to get permission from the air staff, finally—a major change in the Air Force blood program, whole blood program, in support of Southeast Asia. When I retired, I came to realize that although I had not served in Vietnam, there are a number of people alive in Vietnam, from Vietnam, who got whole blood, who will never have heard of Major Gordon Beem, or Lieutenant Commander Bill Parrish, or the army civilian who worked with us, but they're alive because they got whole blood, and the three of us ran a whole blood program, from the headquarters' point of view, allocating the allocations for collection …

PIEHLER: What had been the problem, and what had you changed?

BEEM: [The] problem was that when the program was put into effect in the post-Korean War period, two major combat commands of the Air Force were exempt from blood donations. Then the tactical air command and the strategic air command. The reason being that pilots don't fly for seventy-two hours after giving blood. That was the rule then. I don't know what the rule is at the moment. But when I took a look at this program and did the research, you know, it was—I was told to research because we were getting quotas going up and up and up, and we were … filling them, but we were getting a lot of grousing, and it was getting tougher and tougher to fill, and we knew …

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Gordon R. Beem on March 28, 2000, at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and …

GORMAN: Dave Gorman.

PIEHLER: And you were saying that there was this need for whole blood …

BEEM: There was need for—there was …

PIEHLER: … and the quotas to fill the need.

BEEM: Yeah. Right. The need was getting stronger, and we were having some difficulty filling it, so I researched how the program had been set up. The thing that struck my eyes—and in my mind, as quickly as I looked at it, was the fact that SAC [Strategic Air Command] and TAC [Tactical Air Command] were exempt. Another place that was exempt, but only because it hadn't existed when the initial program had been put together, was the Air Force Academy. So, I had just come off a SAC base, and I knew how many combat crews there were, and I had a, you know, a relatively good idea. I also had an idea how many people there were on the base, so I did some further research and took a look at the various TAC and SAC bases, and they—you know, the air crews were less than a tenth of the total base population. So, ninety percent of the arms were unavailable, because somebody had never looked at it. So I went to the—I wrote up a staff study on it and made some recommendations, and I still have a copy of that. In fact, it was one of the four case studies that I used when I advanced from Member of the American College of Health Care Executives to Fellow. You had to do four case studies to move from Member to Fellow, [to] get certified—you know, board certified in health management. So they—it was agreed, and we put that through. Commands got a little touchy, but it went through, ordered by the air staff and by our surgeon general. And we never missed a quota. At least as long as I was there, we held our quota. So I feel that's one of the accomplishments that I made.

The other was I helped to write the medical annex to the air mobility plan that existed, that came into existence about that time. And I had help from a lot of other people, but I was the project officer for that. [I] made a number of trips to a number of bases and worked with a team of Air Force people from all branches. You know, the various aspects of the Air Force. Those are two major—I did a lot of other, you know, follow-up work, but these were my two major projects. After I was promoted to major, I took a look at my prospects…. It was going to be another five or six years before lieutenant colonel, another five to six to full colonel, so that meant eight, ten years if I wanted to be a full colonel, which I really wanted to be. At least that had been, you know, my thought. While I was stationed at Loring, I got a letter from the associate dean of Yale Medical School asking me if I was interested in joining the staff of the dean of the Yale Medical School, and at that point, I paced the floors for a few days. I had fourteen and a half years' active service, and I had five years—almost five years—reserve time between the wars. So, I was—that was in 1957, I guess. Yeah. I had more active service than that at that point, but I was within

about—I guess I had seventeen and a half years' service. I was within two and a half years of hitting the twenty-year active mark, where I could apply for retirement and retire with the active service, plus the reserve time as the multiplier. And I began to get calls from my professor at Yale, who's since deceased, and he asked me, was I was ready to retire. And I said, "I'm too close." I finally made the decision. "I'm too close to the time to leave now. I've got to wait until I've got at least twenty-years-plus in. It doesn't make any sense to give up economically what I've got, you know, what I've put in." And they agreed. So, making a long story short, I began to get offers at significantly higher salary than I was making as an Air Force major, and finally I got an offer through one of my professors at Yale. Very distinguished. He's the man who, with another man, developed the DRG program. It's the basis of Medicare payments to hospitals. Diagnosis Related Groups, it's called. Anyway, John Thompson recommended me to the people at Hallbrooke Foundation as an administrator. And to use the words of Don Corleone, "They made me an offer I couldn't refuse." So I decided to retire, and I put my retirement papers in and retired shortly after I had the twenty years of active service, but my reserve time counted.

PIEHLER: And your World War II time. I mean …

BEEM: All my time counted.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I mean, you …

BEEM: The whole works. So I retired with sixty-two and a half percent of my then-base pay, and of course, I've been drawing a retirement pension since January 1, 1970.

PIEHLER: I have one question regarding the latter years of your service. You were in the Pentagon—well, you were at Loring and then at the Pentagon, during when the Vietnam War really heats up.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: What was your sense of the war? I mean, it's hard, now that so much has been talked about of Vietnam and what went wrong, but if you could think back—what was your thinking at the time? I mean, you had some very specific problems, like the blood, but what was your sense of how the war was going?

BEEM: Well, I supported the war. I …

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: … and the reason I supported the war was, I was an active duty military officer. Our president and our Congress and the lawful authorities had said, "This is what we're going to do." There were two choices. If you really wanted to oppose the war, then resign your commission and get out. I didn't see that as appropriate. I thought that the—I mean, I think there's a lot of things, in hindsight, that might have been done, but the real issue that I saw that was involved is

that lawful authority had done this, and the fact that we were lied to and other things that went on, that's …

PIEHLER: But you didn't have any inkling of that in the late '60s. The problems that we know.

BEEM: I didn't see …

PIEHLER: You didn't have—you weren't—for example, over lunch some Pentagon officers in another branch might have said, "You know, things aren't really going well in Vietnam. I just did a tour there."

BEEM: Well …

PIEHLER: I mean, I'm just curious, because there's been a lot of discussion about the military's role in Vietnam and what—and I probably raise this because of moral authority. People have raised this about Vietnam, what was said or not said by senior officers. And I'm curious: did you have any sense that things were not going well at the time? I mean, now we know that things—there were all kinds of warning signs.

BEEM: Well, you know, the only things we were involved with were major projects. I only did—I was—I only got involved with in the air staff with a couple of major projects, none of which—I mean, the blood program was my major involvement.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BEEM: And there wasn't any question that that was needful if we were going to have people there. This had to be done, and I'm proud of it. As I say, there are a lot of people living that will never know that I exist, but that's all right with me. The Lord knows, and so do the people that worked with me. I have often wondered whether or not I should have taken a Vietnam tour, and one was never offered to me, nor was there a time when it seemed appropriate to volunteer. And at the time that I retired, the war was still on, but the Department of Defense had made it very clear that for those individuals, they wanted to see some turnover in the [Air] Force, and they wanted positions to be made available, and they wanted people who were eligible to retire to retire.

PIEHLER: So you also got the sense that it was a good time. The timing of your retirement also …

BEEM: The timing of my retirement was probably more for my convenience than anything else. I saw—I didn't have any problems with the war. I didn't retire because of that. And I was supportive of the war, but what was happening was I was beginning to feel the need for a second career. I had some kids I knew I was going to need to educate, and I also knew there was going to be—because of my lengthy enlisted service, the people who were my age were senior lieutenant colonels or full colonels. They had all the good jobs. The people who were my rank were anywhere from six to ten years younger than I was. And I didn't have any problem working

for younger people, because I did it in civilian life after I retired. But I took a look at things, and I tried to make an evaluation of what I had available to me for the rest of my life. And I realized that if I retired at forty-two, I probably had twenty years of good working time ahead of me. If I waited to make full colonel, I'd be in my early fifties, and probably would stay—could've stayed around a few more years, and I probably wouldn't have worked a civilian job. I would've retired at fifty-five, fifty-six, fifty-eight, something like that, and would not have taken a civilian job, or at least not one that would allow me to do one of the things that I always wanted to do, which was to lead an organization. I'd somehow wanted to have a …

PIEHLER: No, that's—and in fact, that is a perfect segue, because in fact, you have a lot of significant leadership—your post-war, post-military service.

BEEM: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: And maybe we should run through some of that, because I remember when we had lunch last year, you had some remarkable experiences in the civilian sector, so maybe—you left the Air Force on January 1, 1970. Where—what was your first position? Was it at Westport, Connecticut?

BEEM: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You were administrator of a …

BEEM: Of a hospital. Actually, what happened was, I went on terminal leave on October 26, 1969, and I got a paycheck for the months of November and December from the Air Force, as well as a paycheck from Hallbrooke, because I went to work on the 5 of November.

PIEHLER: So you didn't take a lot of time off! (Laughter)

BEEM: No, I didn't take any time off, no. And so we moved to Westport, Connecticut, and we rented a house there. And I was the administrator. Essentially, I was the chief operating officer, because there was a—I ran the hospital with a medical director, but the chief executive of the foundation was, in essence, the chief executive of the organization. So, I was the COO there, and it was an interesting year and a half. I guess I was there from October through July of the second year, so it wasn't a lengthy period. I think the key thing for me in that was that I—the hospital was run on group therapy, and it would take a long time to tell you the whole story of Hallbrooke and what it was and so forth, but the facility was a not-for-profit organization, which had been set up by a woman who had some foresight when she saw Medicare coming in. And while it was a not-for-profit, it had been converted from a for-profit to a not-for-profit, and it was run on group therapy. I got myself trained as a group worker—not as a group therapist, but as a group worker, so that I … would understand the process of group, because the managerial process was group, as well as the actual therapeutic process. But I learned about group process, so that I would know what was going on.

As my second year was drawing to an end, somewhere in the second year, I had a piece of paper come across my desk which indicated that if a not-for-profit organization went out of business, its assets would be distributed in accordance with a particular state statue. So that—just an ordinary, routine piece of paper, I read it, and I think I dropped it in my hold file. The organization that had been in existence prior was owned by a woman who was a very clever businesswoman and who had bought this hospital when it was still a for-profit, and she had converted it into a not-for-profit, still owning the real-estate, which she rented to the foundation, and she gave herself a lifetime contract as executive director of the foundation. The first winter I was there, we had trouble with the tractor that was the snowplow, so before the second winter came up, I talked with the executive committee, and we had had an agreement in the budget. I had planned the budget. I made sure the place was making money. I ran it economically, and I didn't have to fire anybody. I just did the things that were necessary to be a good businessman. So I had arranged that we trade in the old snowplow tractor and get a new one. And I got permission from the executive director and the medical director. We were the executive committee, the three of us. Of course, she had three votes and he had one and I had one, so of the five votes—she didn't get—I mean, I'm kidding you. It was really supposed to be a one-one-one, but Elizabeth had the power. We knew it.

Anyway, we got the new tractor, and it's in, and one day, a week or two after we got the new tractor, she and I are walking around the grounds, and we happened to go into the garage, and she said, "What happened to the old tractor?" And, I said, "Well, I traded that in." And I said, "Don't you remember?" She said, "What?" She said, "That belonged to Delmon Realty." I said, "Excuse me?" She said, "Well, that was Delmon Realty property." And I said, "Oh?" And she said, "Yes, when we converted, you know—all of the equipment and everything is Delmon Realty." Hmm. Well, in the course of my first fifteen or eighteen months there, I'd bought a new telephone system. I probably spent $60,000-$70,000 worth of equipment that I was able to get out of operating money, and still turn a profit. You know making the bottom line. Still black, but not by very much. So I got to thinking about that, and she said, "Oh, never mind." She said, "But whenever you're going to do something like that in the future, let me know." She asked me how much I got for it, and I think we got $1,000. She was happy with that, and so she didn't say much. I began to start thinking, and I thought to myself, "Now, you bought all those new typewriters and that new system," and I thought of all the other things that we'd purchased. And I said, "That stuff belongs to Hallbrooke Foundation, the not-for-profit organization." Yeah. "And those cars I'm leasing, they belong." Oh, yeah. I said, "If this place goes broke, there's no distinction made between Delmon Realty property and Hallbrooke Foundation property, because the Hallbrooke Foundation property has got to be distributed in relation to the state statue." So, I go back and get all the receipts and everything that I had bought since I'd been there, and I have all of that equipment tagged, with a Hallbrooke Foundation tag on it.

And one day Elizabeth walks in my office and she said, "Gordon, I understand that you've had a lot of the equipment tagged." And I said, "Yes, Elizabeth." She said, "Why'd you do that?" And I said, "Well," so I told her what the state statue was and what my thoughts were, and she said to me, in effect, "You shouldn't worry about things like that." She said, "That's my job at the Foundation." I said, "Elizabeth," I said, "*my* name is on all of that paperwork." I said, "Do you realize that if we sign Medicare reports, cost reports—if I sign Medicare cost reports, it says

at the top that these are to the best of your belief and knowledge." I said, "It's a federal felony not to give the appropriate information." I said, "You need to know, whether you—now, if you didn't know it before—that I'm a retired regular officer." I said, "I am amenable to trial by court martial." I said, "If I commit a federal felony and am convicted of it, my pension can be taken from me by the Department of Defense. It's as simple as that under the uniform code of military justice. They don't even have to try me." So I said, "I did what I thought was appropriate, and … it is appropriate under the law. These things were purchased, many of it, much of it, with Medicare money, and with money from insurance companies, and from Champus." And I said, "I was just trying to do what's right by the law." [She said], "Don't worry about things like that." Three months later she went on a trip to the hospital in Scotland that started group therapy. She made an annual pilgrimage there. And three days after she left, the medical director fired me, said that they weren't going to renew my contract when it came up for renewal at the end of the current term. So, I said, "Well, so be it." And that ended my tenure at Hallbrooke.

However, when forced with looking at a decision, the question was, "What would Harry do?" And Harry said to me, "Do what's right, even though it may cost you." So I did, and I'm not sorry. I'd do it again. It was appropriate and necessary, and I had a great time. And they decided that they'd let my contract run out, as it did—I think it was the end of July—and they paid me for a few months and let me keep the car until the contract ran out, that I had, and I started looking for another job. So from there I went to White Plains Hospital Medical Center, where I was the principal assistant to the chief executive. Again, I'm the COO [Chief Operating Officer] in effect. When he was absent, I ran the place. And he wasn't gone a lot, but he was out at meetings a lot, and I had a lot of decisions to make. What happened there, I could have stayed there for a long time, and he was very sorry to see me go, but the people in New Canaan, Connecticut offered me the opportunity to be the chief executive officer of a new health organization, and a lot of my colleagues at Yale thought I was crazy as hell going from a number-two job at a big community hospital—three hundred and fifty beds. I had just done a—had been involved in a twenty million dollar—and twenty million bucks back in 1970 …

PIEHLER: Yeah, that was real money. That was …

BEEM: That was big money. We did a major—I was brought in to do a major building program for them, and we did the major building program. I worked with some real professionals, and—but when the people at New Canaan offered me this opportunity, I said to myself, "It gives me the opportunity to do what I want to do. I can be the chief executive. I'll be able to put my own philosophy of management and leadership into effect, and I may not ever get another one of these opportunities to build something from scratch." So, I took it. And I went there. I was the second employee. There was a fundraising secretary; the very wealthy woman whose father had been the founder of Texas Oil Company, who had given part of her property—some fifty acres of land in New Canaan, which was valued in the millions—to the community, and said she would give two million dollars for the building of Waveny Care Center if the board could raise two million, and New Canaan, if you don't know, is the home of heavy hitters.

PIEHLER: Much of that area of Connecticut is.

BEEM: It's Fairfield County and it's "bucks village," you know, or whatever you want—mega-bucks village.

PIEHLER: Yeah. No, I …

BEEM: Big, big money. So, I went there, and so we built the building. I worked with the architects. We—I found out that my thoughts about leadership and management worked. Group process; participatory management; a caring, loving approach; and the work of F. Edwards Deming, as far as getting the work done. And letting the staff—the entire staff—share in the operation of the place. So, we built it. We staffed it. We staffed the place in group. We hired—I hired the director of nursing, who was called director of health services, and she and I together hired the activity director, and the three of us hired the assistant director of nursing, and we hired in group. And the department managers were the management committee, and we hired in group, and if you know anything about group process, you know also that groups fire people. You can't work in a group without working within the group, and if you try it, those people in the group who are antithecal will isolate the individual, and when they isolate the individual, they'll find other—the other people find other ways to get the work done without the person who won't cooperate and be part of the group. So the person gets isolated and their productivity falls off; it comes to the attention of management. Management is the tool of the separation, but the separation has taken place by the group. And that's not only theory; that's reality. And you know, you've worked in a [similar] setting. You can probably …

GORMAN: You talked to me about that yesterday.

BEEM: Yeah.

GORMAN: Exactly.

PIEHLER: Well, actually, if you could put some of that conversation on …

GORMAN: Oh, well, we were just talking about some experience I had working in a psychiatric hospital setting, and group process, and just how that works, and so we were just saying we had some similar experiences. It didn't go well. I didn't add a whole lot to the conversation at that point, actually.

PIEHLER: Oh.

GORMAN: But, uh …

BEEM: So, I'm there. I fill the beds…. All of this is very innovative stuff. We were doing home health care and …

PIEHLER: Because much of this is now standard, but—yeah. But your era, … I know, it's not.

BEEM: No. This is 1973, when I went there, and we opened the place in '74. No, I went there in early '74. We opened it in '75 and I stayed until '77. Again, I got another one of those dilemmas. The chairman of the board's wife was a very wealthy woman who was a volunteer, a leading volunteer. I did a reorganization after the first year. A position came open [for] an admissions director. The wife of the chairman of the board wanted the job, and I knew with her personality and her view toward people, that if she came, I probably might save two or three people from the management staff, but the rest of them would depart within sixty to ninety days. Not only did I know that; they told me that. So I went to the two physicians on the board, and I arranged that she be interviewed just like any other person coming on to be a manager; that is, be interviewed by the people that were involved in the business. And she quailed somewhat, and her husband didn't like the idea that she was going to have to be interviewed by staff. And I said, "Well, don't apply. That's the process." So, um …

GORMAN: It would have destroyed any group process if you'd done it any other way, though.

BEEM: Of course. And it would have destroyed the way we were managing the facility and leading it, the way I was leading it. So I said to the two doctors that were involved that—what would happen if she came on, and they both recognized it. I didn't know at the time that one of the two had had an affair with her, but that came to light later. (Laughter) But what I did …

GORMAN: Yeah, that's a new dynamic there.

BEEM: But what I did, really, was arrange that these two physicians would veto her, and they did, and so then the chairman of the board looked for an excuse to get rid of me. And he found something that normally we could have probably overlooked, but he didn't like the length of time it was taking to get payments from Medicaid, and he claimed that it was my fault, that I wasn't pressing to get the paperwork done in time. So there was an executive committee meeting, and three people talked to me. I said, "Well, if that's—you know, if you want me to leave, fine. Just be sure you read the contract, and we do what the contract says." They paid me severance pay over two years, so I gave myself a sabbatical and went to Pace University and did some doctoral work in business. I decided that I wasn't going to let accountants ever again bullshit me. Excuse me. I decided I needed to know enough about financial management, and more about why accountants put numbers where they put them, and how they get them there. So I did doctoral work in business, and got what I wanted. I didn't—I would have had to do three or four seminars and write a thesis, but I did the coursework that I wanted, and got what I wanted out of the program. And I had a GI Bill from [Viet]nam, so I got some government help.

So I finally decided I better get back into the working world. I floated a few résumés around, and I get a phone call from a man named Norman Zober, who worked with Psychiatric Institutes of America. He said, "Mr. Beem, I have a copy of your résumé. I've got a hospital in Asheville, North Carolina that's in trouble, and we have a management contract there, and from your résumé it looks like you could handle it. How about coming down to Washington to meet with me? Or," he said, "Even better still, how about coming to Asheville to meet with me and the three doctors that own the facility?" I said, "Where's Asheville?" And he said, "It's in the western North Carolina mountains." I said, "How big is it?" He said, "Oh, about fifty-five, sixty

thousand." I said, "Well," I had never been there. "So let me catch an airplane." I catch an airplane—old Piedmont Airlines was still in existence then. I flew down with Piedmont, met with Mr. Zober, and Norm and I hit it off pretty well. He asked me how I was going to like working for somebody younger. "Well," I said, "done it before, probably do it again. Be happy to. I don't see any problem, Norm." So I met with the three doctors Griffin, and two of them talked hospital with me. The third talked fly-fishing, and at that time I was still fly-fishing. And I asked him, when the interview was over, why he talked fly-fishing. He said, "Gordon," he said, "I can find out more about a man talking fishing with him than I could if I talked with him about health." He said, "Besides," he said, "number one, … Zober wouldn't have you here if you weren't good." And he said, "The other two wouldn't have said 'okay' if you weren't good." So he said, "I didn't see any need." He said, "I wanted to know what kind of human being you were." And so we fished a lot together, Dr. Bill Griffin and I did, the time that I was in Asheville, from '79 to '81, about two and a half years. About that time—I turned the place around. You can see it …

PIEHLER: Yeah, you, in fact …

BEEM: I mean, I had the reputation by that time of being a turn-around artist; of knowing how to, you know, how get a place to be readjusted. [I] put in the unit system of management; put in some new services; developed an alcohol treatment program; had a geriatric program; got rid of all of the long-term-stay patients, the ones who were boarders, really, because it was not productive, and helped them get properly located; did it all. And redecorated the place—all the units were redecorated, all done with cash flow money, and I still turned the profit numbers that they wanted. A hospital came open in Connecticut, and at this point it seemed appropriate to make a move. And they wanted me up there for a number of reasons, including the fact that I have a Yale degree, because there were some potential problems that turned out to be real problems with the Commission on Hospital and Health Care. They are the regulatory agency in Connecticut. And it had to do with a certificate of need, and something had to be done to figure out how to deal with this, so I was brought in there to …

PIEHLER: And this was which hospital?

BEEM: This is Elmcrest.

PIEHLER: Elm—oh, okay.

BEEM: It's the second of the two hospitals.

PIEHLER: Oh, I—okay. Yeah.

BEEM: There's two hospitals there [listed on the pre-interview survey]. So I was CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of this place; turned it around. It's a long story, but—oh, probably just to make it simple, an opportunity was presented to me to become a stockholder in a for-profit organization that was going to build a small chain of psych hospitals, and they offered me the vice-president of operations position and stock in the company.

PIEHLER: And that's the hospital group of …

BEEM: … America. And so I joined them and worked with them about a year, but I was asked to do some things that were both illegal, immoral, and unethical. And I wasn't going to do anything—I wasn't going to play any Medicare games, and I told the young Harvard M.B.A., who I had worked with before when I was with PIA [Psychiatric Institutes of America], that that just couldn't happen. During that time, my second wife and I had separated and divorced, and I had remarried my current wife. And he was sitting at our dinner table when I told him this, eating a bowl of spaghetti, and he said, "Okay." I said, "Look, all you have to do is relax." I said, "I know the venture capitalists who were bankrolling this operation." I said, "I know the venture capitalists are after you to fix the bottom line." And I said, "That's what you got me for." And I said, "You've seen me do it twice for PIA, and if you want to know, I did it for other hospitals, too, so that's my reputation. You know that, and you know that I can do it."

PIEHLER: And do it legally and ethically.

BEEM: "And do it legally and ethically, and won't get anybody into any trouble, because I'm not going to get myself in any trouble." And you know, he nodded his head and so forth. And so I said, "You know we'll do it." And so, he left and went back to Washington. And after he walked out the door and got in his car, drove away, Jeanne looked at me, my wife, and said, "You didn't want that job very bad, did you?" I said, "Well, sure. I mean, I want it, but I want it legal." And she said, "Yeah, I know what you're going to say." And she, you know, she knows the story of Harrison Reed Thyng, and she said, "And I believe what you're doing is the right thing." So she said, "Where are we headed?" I said, "Well, we're going back to Connecticut." So—and I said, "You know, I think I'll retire." So we headed back to Connecticut. I was fifty—let's see. That was what? … '84. So I was fifty-seven, and so I did all the things—we got back to Connecticut. We bought a nice little house on the Connecticut shore down in Guilford.

PIEHLER: It actually sounds very nice.

BEEM: Yeah, well, we weren't quite on the shore. We were back a little bit from it, but we were just over US 1, and we were about a mile and a half to the beach, but we had a nice house and we did some work on it, and I did all the things that guys say they're going to do. I fished. I was still fishing. And I read some of the books that I wanted to read, and I gardened, and I got bored. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But you did the stuff first, and then …

BEEM: Yeah, I did the stuff first. Well, somewhere along the line when I was doing all that stuff—and so I started looking for a job in Connecticut. And the jobs that were offered to me, I didn't want to do, or I had done. And one of the jobs that I really wanted, I couldn't get the people that were involved to make up their mind, and about a year after I went to my final job, they did make up their mind and do what I suggested they do. But they didn't do it when I could be involved. So, one day I'm sitting at my desk, I don't know, doing something, and the phone

rings and a voice says, "Hi Gordy, it's Bill Parrish." And I said, "Hey, Bill! How are you?" He said, "I'm doing fine. How the hell are you?" I said, "I'm great." Bill Parrish was the Navy commander that I had worked with in …

PIEHLER: The blood, the blood …

BEEM: The blood program. Right. He's also the man who, when I bought Appalachian Hall from the Griffins—we bought Highland Hospital—that was across town in Asheville—for PIA, at the same time we went through the certificate of need process, and I was the guy on the scene. There were a lot of other people working there. When I say I bought it, I was the guy on the scene that was involved in all the negotiations. And Highland needed an administrator. And Bill Parrish was just trying to get out of a position. He'd retired from the Navy and he was in a position in Cincinnati that he hated, and he'd always wanted to live in Asheville. So I introduced him to PIA, and he came to Highland Hospital, and was their administrator for about a year when he got crossways with the docs there and, you know, that happens. It happens to the best of us in the healthcare.

Anyway, it's Bill Parrish on the phone, and he says to me, he said, "You know I'm with HCA Management Group." And I said, "Yeah, I knew. You were there last time I talked with you." He said, "I got a hospital in Michigan that's open." He said, "In fact, there's two there." And he said, "You want to interview for them?" He said, "I know you're retired, but … I'll bet you're bored, aren't you?" (Laughter) I said, "Well, you know me, Bill." He said, "Well, come on." He said, "At least," he said, "you'll take a trip to Detroit." He said, "We can look around, maybe go to a ballgame if they got a night game on." But he said, "I want you to interview with a group right outside of Detroit…. Then there's another one down in Hillsdale." So he said, "Make a three, four day trip out of it and we'll do the interviews." So I go up. I do the interview at the first place and it looked like a, you know, a decent situation, general hospital that needed a—you know, needed a turnaround, was in trouble. And at the same time, we go down to Hillsdale, and the Hillsdale people like me, apparently. I go back home, and Bill Parrish calls me the next week, and said to me, "Hi, Gordy." I said, "Hi, Bill." He said, "Get your ass out to Hillsdale. You're the CEO." I said, "Excuse me?" He said, "Get your ass to Hillsdale." And I said, "We haven't talked about any terms." He said, "Shit, we're friends." I said, "Bill, don't give me that shit." I said, "I've been around this business too long." So he said, "Okay." So we started talking money and benefits, and the whole nine yards. He faxed it all to me, and I had my lawyer go over it. I was a week longer getting out there than he had originally wanted.

GORMAN: Still pretty quick, though.

BEEM: Oh, yeah, well, you know, you do business, and I wanted to work, and my wife said, well, that we might as well move again. So, again we moved. And I went out there in—I think it was February—I *know* it was February of 1986—to an eighty-five-bed community hospital which was in deep trouble, and needed, you know, a good leader. And so I started the process and did the things I indicated there. Tenth working day, I laid off about twenty-eight percent of the staff, and had laid it out for them that it was coming. They all knew it, and for the rest, we pulled together, and we turned the place around and made into a profit-making facility. I had four good

years there, made a couple of million bucks with the place, and toward the end of it, I had some problems with an emergency room physician who did a couple of unethical things, and I suspended him from the roster, under the "for cause" clause in his contract. His wife took exception to it, and she was one of the leading admitters to the hospital, and a couple of other members of the medical staff took exception, and we had some discussions and we had a bunch of problems. The board stood with me for almost ten months, and then finally it became clear that the board wasn't going to stand much longer, and the management company got a little unhappy with me. So we decided to part company, and at that point—I'm now—let's see. I'm sixty-three and a few months [at the time], and I thought, "Okay, this is it. I don't want to do this any longer." And, I think it's fair, even though other people may hear this, but I think that the reason that I decided to retire from healthcare at that point was that I felt inside myself that I had lost my ability, or my desire, perhaps—not the ability, but more the desire—to do what was necessary to bring a diverse group of professionals into a consensual agreement to do certain things. It's a very difficult process in health care to get physicians, nurses, all of the various professions, to reach a decision concerning how a hospital is going to move forward, but I do think that the only way you can do this is having consensus. If you try it by fiat, it's sure to fail somehow. And so I said, "I think I've lost my desire to do that." And I think it had been the skill that allowed me to lead some of these other organizations, and probably often occasionally got me into the kind of difficulties that I had with these various positions. But on the other hand, I've never forgotten what my father told me when I went off to World War II, or that his grandfather had told him when he went to World War I, and I have never forgotten what Harry Thyng taught me. So adding all of that up, it seemed like a good time to retire, and we started looking for a home, and we knew we were not going to Maine. (Laughter) And my wife said, "We aren't going to Florida," where she was raised. So we started looking for something, and we got a piece of junk mail from the place down where there's a big golf course down off on the river …

GORMAN: Down Highway 66?

BEEM: No. It's going south on the river. You go over a bridge and make a turn into it, and Calhoun's is out that way. It's a development out there—a lot of land, and they've got a big country club house.

GORMAN: Oh. Is it out west?

BEEM: Yeah. Yeah…. I forget what it's called, but we got a piece of mail asking us to come and take a look at the property, and we … talked to each other and we said, "We've been through Knoxville a lot of times," going from Michigan to Florida where her parents—where her father was alive, and where my son, at one time, was working, and where we also had some friends, "but we never stopped in Knoxville." So we came down here, and we looked at the land and said, "No." We really weren't interested, but we found another piece of land over in—it's actually closer. It's on the north side of Walland. There's a …

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

BEEM: … after five and a half years, we decided we no longer wanted a large house or … all the property, and we started thinking about where we're going to live. So, we went over and took a look at Asheville, decided we were going to live in a condominium, and it was at that point that I—somewhere around that time—that I saw the stories with Charlie Johnson's picture and name and the Center [for the Study of War and Society] here, which led me to talk with him, and as you know, make the initial gift of all those books of World War II to the Center. And I think I had begun a couple of years earlier working on the business with General Thyng, and it seemed appropriate to give the books in his memory, and also to continue to try to get the things about Harry published.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: have you ever joined any veterans' organizations or retired service officers' organizations?

BEEM: I belong to them all. I belong to the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], the American Legion, I am a contributor to the Paralyzed Veterans of America, to the DAV [Disabled Veterans of America] …

PIEHLER: Are you active in any of them?

BEEM: I belong to—I'm a life member of the TROA, The Retired Officers' Association. I am a contributor to the Women's Memorial and the World War II Memorial, to the American Air Museum in Britain, but I'm not active in any of them.

PIEHLER: You're not active in any [American] Legion post or VFW …

BEEM: I belong to the post in Asheville, but I'm not active. I belong to a VFW post up in Westport that was very supportive of me during the time I lived there, particularly when I was on that two-year sabbatical. There were a lot of fellas there that were good friends and fishing buddies. So I don't really participate; I support. And I support the Medical Service Corps Association. I'm a member of that, our retired group of Air Force medical service corps officers. And the 7510th Hospital has an association I belong to. I go to—once in a while I go to a reunion, and I support Yale and Bowdoin. But I don't really—I'm not really a joiner in the sense of getting active. I had one shot at that in Westport, when I was involved with the VFW post and got on the executive committee, and was able to give them some of my time when I had time, and did a couple of the projects for them that took somebody who knew how to deal with government. But I don't really get actively involved. The only other thing I'm doing now is I have been, for the last year, a member of the Buncombe County—which is our county over in Asheville—nursing home community advisory board. It's part of the national Ombudsman Act, and we act as advocates for the folks in nursing homes, and they were happy to have me since I've got a health background.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you actually know what's going on.

BEEM: Well, I—but I'm a little tired and I don't know how much longer I'll do it. I probably will continue for another couple of years, but I don't want to—they've asked me to take

leadership positions, and as I said to one of the women who approached me, I said, "I've spent most of my adult life in public service, and I'm willing to help out, to go to visit the facilities, but I'm not sure I really want to get—I don't want to get—I don't know whether I want to crank up that kind of energy again." Any other questions I can answer for you?

GORMAN: I was going to ask you about—you mentioned things that you contribute to. organizations and the memorial, the Women's Memorial. In D.C., there's been some controversy about the planned site for an Air Force memorial. The Marines don't want it anywhere near their sacred ground.

BEEM: Yeah. That's one of the things I don't really have any comment about. I think probably somewhere in the Washington area there should be an Air Force monument, but I understand what the Marines have to say. What I'm happy about is that we've got the women's memorial, and the reason I support that is because of all of the nurses I worked with over the years, and particularly the first nurse who taught me about hospitals. She was the chief nurse at the hospital at Wimpole Park in England, and she needed some help in writing effectiveness reports, and she thought—had heard that I knew how to use the English language, thanks to Miss Williams. And so I helped her with her officer effectiveness reports, and she taught me about hospitals. And the most important lesson she taught me, that I never lost sight of, was that if … an administrator is going to be successful in a hospital, he has to have the nursing staff behind him. And if you don't have the nursing staff behind you, you're in trouble, because they're there seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year. And I've never forgotten that. I didn't ever forget it in all the years I was involved both in military hospitals and in civilian hospitals, and I still hear at Christmastime every year from maybe a half a dozen nurses that I worked with.

PIEHLER: How many doctors do you hear from?

BEEM: About four or five.

PIEHLER: So the nurses clearly outrank the doctors?

BEEM: Well, some of the doctors never were in touch with me. The ones—and a couple of the people who—the Air Force docs, some of them passed on. I hear from—I used to hear from four or five Air Force docs. I'm down to two now; the others have passed. And I hear from a doctor from Hallbrooke, who was the medical director. I hear from a doctor up in Hillsdale every year, too. I hear from another doctor who [lives] down in Florida. So, you know, there are a few doctors and a few nurses, people whose lives I may have impacted.

PIEHLER: Who did you find it was easier to work with? Was it the doctors or was it the nurses, or were they both equally—as a general stereotype …

BEEM: Well, I don't really—I think it depends on the organization and what the issue is. The issues, I think, are what really makes the difference, so you have to—you know, if you get an issue that's heavily oriented toward the nursing side, then you may end up with more difficulty there. On the other hand, if it's an issue that impinges on what a physician sees as his or her

prerogative, whether it really is or isn't, then you got to deal with the perceptions. And I always tried to figure out a win-win situation with solutions, which I think was responsible for whatever successes I had. I also know that at times it cost me, but, you know.

PIEHLER: I guess, for me, I have one final closing question, and it's more a thought. It's sort of obvious, if you were to look at your résumé, the transition from your military career to your civilian career. You were in the hospital medical service … in the Air Force, and then you go into the private sector. What I am struck is by your discussion of your—you came of age in a very hierarchical service. Even though the Air Force is not as hierarchical as the Navy, it's—there's still a real hierarchy, yet in management in the private sector, you really emphasized consensus building, and not elimination of hierarchy, but clearly trying to get groups—I mean, I think usually think of doctors out ranking nurses and they don't like the fact—this is at least my stereotyped perception—they don't particularly like administrators, civilian administrators, who are not physicians. I guess, where did that come from? That emphasis on consensus?

BEEM: It came from my training at Hallbrooke, when I went to a series of conferences sponsored by the Washington School of Psychiatry, which gave programs in group process using what's known as the Tavistock Institute Method, which is really group process and various aspects about how groups work. Fight, flight, and all those, that process. And it became clear to me that if an organization is going to be successful, the hierarchical system just doesn't work, and it doesn't work anywhere without the consensus of the people. Even a hierarchical system within the military works not because of fear, but because the people who are down the line recognize that there has to be group cohesion if the organization is going to be successful, and all you have to do is "who's going to cover your back," or "who's going to fly your wing," or "who's going to get you in an escape lung if you're in a submarine." I mean, it's group, and notwithstanding that in some groups, some people think they're more equal than others. Quite frankly, they're not. And I used to help physicians come to understand that. Some of them didn't want to understand that, but usually if you could work with them, particularly on figuring out how to set things up so that it was win-win. And I have a friend from high school days—grammar school days. In fact, I know his address in Portland; I even know his middle name. We go back that far. We slept in the same tent at Boy Scout camp. And Paul and I are old friends. He's the retired president of a major liberal arts college on the West Coast, and he wrote me a letter one time not too long ago when we were talking about—when I had just retired, and I was telling him about all the problems of the physicians and why I was finally going to retire. And he said, "It's very much like the president of a college, because you've got a group of independent contractors within the university and college setting." And he talked about the tenured professors and, you know, all of the business that goes with it, and we've had some one on one. We talked about it first in letters, and then we saw our—we came together at a high school reunion, fiftieth reunion, and we talked about it there. So while hierarchical organizations exist, dictatorships don't work. Democracies work. Even representative democracies work, but it takes a lot of effort.

PIEHLER: No, I could second you. We have a fairly consensual department here, from my observations, but it's a lot of work. It's not an easy—it's not an easy process at times. I don't

want to keep you here anymore, because you've been very generous with your time, and sharing all this, … so I want to thank you on the record, and it was really an enjoyable interview.

BEEM: Good.

GORMAN: Again, I want to thank you for your donation of materials.

BEEM: Okay.

PIEHLER: I think your interview is a very fitting tribute to Colonel Thyng. I think he'd be quite pleased.

BEEM: Good.

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

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