

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH CARL V. BRETZ

FOR THE
VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WAR AND SOCIETY
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INTERVIEW BY
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TINKER: Okay. This begins an interview with Carl V. Bretz on 25 July, 2012 at the Center for the Study of War and Society and, uh, my name is Cynthia Tinker. I'm the Project Coordinator here and I'll be conducting the interview and also joining us is one of our graduate assistants.

RALL: Will Rall.

TINKER: And Will is going to sit in with us today Mr. Bretz. Well, we'll just get started and thank you for coming in today ...

BRETZ: You're welcome.

TINKER: ... and sorry it's so cold again. (Laughs) You just say something if you get too cold. We have a little space heater ...

BRETZ: Okay.

TINKER: ... that we can pull in here. Um, now do you want to just start by telling us a little bit about your family background, maybe, you know, your grandparents even, if you have memories of them.

BRETZ: Um, yeah I grew up in, uh, central Pennsylvania at about fifteen miles from Harrisburg and a, in a very rural area. Um, I lived near my maternal grandparents and across the mountain from my paternal grandparents.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: So I saw my maternal grandparents much more than my father's parents. My father worked, most at his—he was a railroader I mean that was his—but during the Depression I'm, I'm obviously a Depression kid, um, he was laid off from the railroad so he worked wherever he could find work, until about 1936 when the railroad picked up. Um, my mother was a housewife, my maternal grandmother had severe arthritis. I remember her walking once so my mother would take care of our house in the morning and go to help her mother in the afternoon and I used to trot along. I went to a one room school. There were eight grades in one room, um, and then I went to the high school, which was about seven miles away in the town of Marysville [Pennsylvania].

TINKER: Now it says here that your, your parents were of German origin ...

BRETZ: Yes.

TINKER: ... now did your grandparents, were your grandparents first, did they immigrate or ...

BRETZ: Um, long before that.

TINKER: Oh, so it was way before then.

BRETZ: Yeah, they um, yeah, sometime in the, um, 1700s they came into the, they were, as far as I did some genealogy work and I could trace them back, but I never could connect to them coming over on a ship, but, they, they were immigrants either from, Eastern Germany or Switzerland, the German part of Switzerland.

TINKER: And did they immediately settle in Pennsylvania or ...

BRETZ: Yes.

TINKER: They did?

BRETZ: Yes, William Penn, uh, invited, um, I think in order to make the Pennsylvania colony grow, uh, they needed more than the Quakers in the Philadelphia area.

TINKER: (Laughs) Yeah.

BRETZ: So they invented—they invited these German refugees to come in, uh, it also was convenient that they could put the Germans between them and the Indians. (Laughs)

TINKER: (Laughs) Yeah.

BRETZ: ... and, uh, it's always been a source of, uh, humor to me that Benjamin Franklin complained about so many Germans coming in and they weren't learning English. (Laughs)

TINKER: (Laughs) That's funny.

BRETZ: So, we still have the same problem. (Laughs)

TINKER: Now did your parents tell you stories of your family history?

BRETZ: Um, not too much ...

TINKER: No?

BRETZ: We were not in the, heavy Ger—Pennsylvania Dutch area, we were right on the edge of it, but we were very influenced. I know when I went to school, I had to drop some of the Germanisms that I picked up as a child ...

TINKER: Oh really?

BRETZ: ... because the teachers did not ...

TINKER: Like what do you remember some of them?

BRETZ: Oh, you know, “you could walk the block around” or “it's making down,” meaning it's raining, things like that ...

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: ... would creep in, we, we used English words, but we used the Germanic form ...

TINKER: Oh, very interesting.

BRETZ: ... and uh, and uh, I had to cut that out when I went to school. (Laughs)

TINKER: Yeah, yeah, huh. How was school? Do you have a lot of happy memories or ...

BRETZ: I like school. I was a—I'm an only child and, so, school—I liked school.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: ... and, but it was—the first eight grades were one room. There were—it varied depending on the year from twelve to twenty students in eight grades in a one room school.

TINKER: Wow.

BRETZ: And, uh, then I went to ...

TINKER: Did you have a favorite subject?

BRETZ: I always liked Geography and History. That—those were my favorite subjects.

TINKER: Favorite teacher?

BRETZ: (Laughs) Well I had, I had all men teachers in the grade school. Um, the first year I was with Mr. Smith. The second, third, and fourth grade was Mr. Keller and, uh, then fifth, sixth, and seventh, yeah five, six, seven, eight were Mr. Spotts and, they ...

TINKER: S-P-O-T-T-S, Spotts?

BRETZ: Yes, mm hmm. Uh, I liked Mr. Keller. He was a young, a young teacher.

TINKER: What kind of things did you do after school? You didn't have any siblings, did you play with other kids in the neighborhood or?

BRETZ: Uh, I lived in a little village, there were four houses and all of the people in the other houses were old. (Laughs)

TINKER: (Laughs) So you really were ...

BRETZ: I was very much alone.

TINKER: Wow.

BRETZ: And the other kids came from some distance ...

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: ... we had to walk.

TINKER: Wow.

RALLS: Do you have hobbies or what kind of activities ...

BRETZ: A lot of—I like to read, I, a lot of it was helping my parents ...

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: because there was always plenty to do ...

TINKER: I'm sure.

BRETZ: ... and, uh, so I did help. We had garden, we had chickens, we had pigs, and there was always chores to do, so—I, once in a while, would toss a ball and at school we would, we would play, a form of ball ...

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: ... and, uh, it was very integrated. We had the girls, we had to have the girls because we didn't have enough people. (Laughter)

TINKER: Didn't have enough to make two teams. (Laughs)

BRETZ: (Laughs) No, so the girls played with us. I mean it was, it was interesting.

TINKER: Huh, that is interesting. And then when you got to high school, you said I was a few miles away ...

BRETZ: It was seven miles away and there was no transit—I had to get my own transportation and so my parents would help me arrange with some people who were going to work. And uh, so we usually made some arrangement with somebody who was going that way in the morning and I would go with them on—I was sort of on my own coming home ...

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: Um, sometimes I would have a definite ride, but most of the time I hitchhiked and that was, most of the time—it was rural, small rural community and everybody knew me so if some

of the neighbors were going by they would pick me up. Once in a while I did have to walk the whole seven miles ...

TINKER: Wow.

BRETZ: ... but uh, most of the time ...

TINKER: Not very often though.

BRETZ: Not very often usually.

TINKER: Well wait when your father would go to work was—did he—was the railroad near by or?

BRETZ: The railroad was beyond Marysville. It was at Enola [Pennsylvania] where he worked and, but he worked, he was what they called the “extra list” where he was called any, any old time ...

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: ... so, usually I couldn't, I couldn't ride with him because he wasn't going at the time I needed.

TINKER: Right. So he was always on call? Did you have a phone in your house?

BRETZ: We had, eventually we got a phone. When the first started on the railroad, a neighbor would take the call and yell across the street, yell over the—we had a phone call and he would go get the message. Then eventually we got our own phone. It was a party line and, uh, we, we did not have—we got electricity in '36 and ...

TINKER: I bet that was a big deal.

BRETZ: That was a big deal. Then we could get, we had lights, and, uh, and a radio and the first thing my mother wanted was a washing machine. (Laughs)

TINKER: I bet.

BRETZ: Prior to that she had to use just a scrub board. They finally got plumbing in the house while I was in the service. We could, prior to that we had just a well.

TINKER: Mm hmm. Well what did you, did you play any sports in high school or ...

BRETZ: I ...

TINKER: Were there teams?

BRETZ: Uh, sports were miserable for me 'cause here I come in, as a 9th grader, not having, other than playing a little, a, you know pick up baseball, which you know, is just hitting whatever ball we had whether it was a tennis ball or something with some kind of a board. I, when I got into the physical ed situations, all the kids there knew the rules. I didn't even know the rules for basketball or football. I mean I had never ...

TINKER: There you had no way of knowing.

BRETZ: I had no way of knowing it and we had a coach who was very unhelpful.

TINKER: (Laughs)

BRETZ: He, he just had no, no understanding of what my situation, my background was. So, I felt very, very out of it. I could do the academic work, but the physical ed was, was very painful.

TINKER: Yeah, so you kind of gave up on that.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: How many people were in your high school class?

BRETZ: There were 120 in the school, about twenty in my class.

TINKER: Did you make friends pretty easily? Did you ...

BRETZ: Yeah, I have some friends, in fact I have, there's still a friend that I correspond with.

TINKER: Oh wow. From high school?

BRETZ: From high school.

TINKER: That's nice.

BRETZ: She tells me who died. (Laughter)

TINKER: Get the updates. She still lives in Pennsylvania?

BRETZ: She lives in Pennsylvania, yeah. I went back for the 50th reunion. About, of the twenty, I think there's still eight of us who are living.

TINKER: That's a pretty good percentage.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Out of twenty, eight of you are still here. That's good. Well, and you said your mother spent a lot of time taking care of her mother and when you got the electricity did that mean you had more chores added to your day? (Laughs)

BRETZ: No, not necessarily. It was, it was just nice to have electricity and to ...

TINKER: Did you get a radio?

BRETZ: Yes, and the radio was my, and it's still my favorite, I much prefer radio to television. (Laughs)

TINKER: Really, really?

BRETZ: I had still, it's still, I listen to it, and I just listen to NPR [National Public Radio], exclusively.

TINKER: So in the, you said it was like a little village of just four houses. Where was the nearest market, in the Marysville? Or

BRETZ: Yes, yeah.

TINKER: So when your mother had to go, she would just catch a ride or ...

BRETZ: My father would, she'd give him a list and he would get things on the way home.

TINKER: Oh, okay. More ...

BRETZ: And then my mother did learn to drive, but she didn't, she would just drive very much locally. She didn't drive much. She didn't like to drive in town and we only had one car.

TINKER: Where was the closest doctor?

BRETZ: In Marysville .

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: And he would make house calls. He would come out to where we were if we, got a word to him that somebody was sick. He would come out like in the afternoon.

TINKER: And did he take payment in chickens or ... (Laughter)

BRETZ: I guess he would, uh, we could ...

TINKER: You could pay.

BRETZ: We usually could pay, um, although sometimes—we didn't call him very often, but it was ...

TINKER: Right. So, when you were getting ready to graduate high school, which was, let's see what year was that?

BRETZ: '43.

TINKER: '43.

BRETZ: '43.

TINKER: Yeah. So you had, you already had friends, you know, getting draft—go, join the service, go to war ...

BRETZ: Oh yes.

TINKER: I mean did you, were you hearing back about what was going on?

BRETZ: Very much so. We were, at that time they were taking us—I graduated from high school, in the end of May '43. I got a job at an insurance office in Harrisburg [Pennsylvania]. By that time I had a car and was driving.

TINKER: Oh wow.

BRETZ: And uh, I went, I went to work there and then I was, I was eighteen in December of '43 and I was inducted into the army in February of '44. I mean they gave me two months.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: That was how fast they were taking people.

TINKER: How were you able to get your own car by the time?

BRETZ: I saved. I mowed lawns and I had a little flock of chickens and, uh, I was very conservative and it was a used car and so.

TINKER: That's excellent. You had your own car by the time you graduated high school.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Most people I've interviewed, didn't, didn't have one. I mean, you know.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: So when you're in high school do you still remember the day that Pearl Harbor was attacked?

BRETZ: Oh, I remember that. Let's see, that was '41. Yeah. It was, I remember it was on a Sunday.

TINKER: And did you follow the news up to that point, I mean, was there some awareness ...

BRETZ: Uh, yes.

TINKER: ... in your community that ...

BRETZ: Very much so.

TINKER: ... trouble was brewing?

BRETZ: Yeah, and, uh, yes. We were aware that even earlier than that, it must have been, I was still in grade school and I mowed lawn for a woman who had been a teacher of my mother's and I mowed her lawn. She had, she was a member of the, I don't, I don— of the upper crust in that community. They owned a lot of mountain land and farm land. They were always considered sort of the royalty of the, my little community because they had more land, had more money than anybody else.

TINKER: Right.

BRETZ: But she was a, ah, she had been my mother's school teacher and she very much, she took an interest in me and so I mowed her lawn, took—carried her wood in, she had a big house. Lots of fireplaces and I took her, after, on the way home from school I would do chores for her. She, one day, had the radio on and Hitler was speaking and she told me, she said, "That man is, is, that man is awful and he's going to cause us trouble." And this was, must have been, I don't know '38.

TINKER: Oh wow.

BRETZ: It was long, long before, before we were in the war.

TINKER: Wow.

BRETZ: Yeah and ...

TINKER: That must've stuck with you for ...

BRETZ: It did.

TINKER: ... for you to remember it all these years.

BRETZ: Yes.

RALL: How else were you learning about what was going on abroad, I mean you mentioned the radio and you really liked radio a lot? Were you, I mean newsreels and movies or?

BRETZ: No.

RALL: Or letters from relatives maybe or?

BRETZ: Mostly we got a newspaper. My father, we did get the daily newspaper in the mail from, from Harrisburg and, uh, we followed, followed that news. Movies, no, because my parents were very conservative as far as doing things. I didn't go to a movie until I was eleven. And that was the *Ziegfield Follies* and a, and a teacher took us. My parents didn't want to say no to a teacher, but they didn't ...

TINKER: They really weren't keen on the idea.

BRETZ: They didn't want to create a conflict with a teacher, but they just sort of, okay, I could go and the teacher took all of the students and he took us to see *Ziegfield Follies*. I saw things I never knew existed.

(Laughter)

TINKER: A lot of legs.

RALL: Yeah. That was ...

TINKER: That's funny.

RALL: ... an eye opener wow.

TINKER: That's really funny, but that our parents didn't want to cause a conflict with a teacher, even though it's something the preferred you probably not do. That's pretty telling. Yeah, huh, okay so you were, you got drafted. We'll jump back to that.

BRETZ: Got drafted, yeah.

TINKER: Now where did you, were you able to enlist in Marysville or did you have to go to a larger setting?

BRETZ: I didn't enlist, I was drafted. (Laughs)

TINKER: Well.

BRETZ: I had to go to the county seat which was New Bloomfield [Pennsylvania] of Perry County. And, uh, I had to register, for the service since I was eighteen, then I was called up—I

got a letter that I had to report so I had to go to there and then they took us by bus to New Cumberland [Pennsylvania] where I was inducted.

TINKER: Mm hmm. And is that where you also did your basic training or did you do that somewhere else?

BRETZ: No, I, uh, New Cumberland was just a collection point. They sent me to Fort Belvoir, Virginia for basic.

TINKER: Oh okay. Okay. And did any of your, anybody you know from your area, were they on the same—in the same group with you or was it just you.

BRETZ: I don't remember anybody.

TINKER: Okay. Did you make any friends along the way?

BRETZ: Not there it was, huh, it was very not, not in that, not in, huh, I don't remember that.

TINKER: It was just all happening so fast.

BRETZ: It was all happening so fast. The only thing I remember much about that was the, the day I got sworn in, uh, it—I was in the second floor barracks in Fort Belvoir and a major come up swear us in and he fell up the steps. (Laughs) I remember that.

TINKER: Oh, that's not good.

BRETZ: So ...

TINKER: Very embarrassing for him, isn't it?

BRETZ: Yeah, so.

TINKER: Um, so that's about the only thing you remember about basic.

BRETZ: I—basic was terrible. Um, I mean, I—getting you, you, you know and only and only kids getting involved in this was, was, it was quite an experience. I know, I remember the long hikes we did, like twenty mile hikes and that sort of thing. And some of the basic training was, was, uh, rough I—but I could do it. At that time, it was eighteen year olds and like old men who are forty, you know and a lot of them were having a hard time, uh, us younger kids could handle the physical part of it, but some of them were sort out of shape and it's amazing how old we felt they were ... (Laughs)

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: ... and they complained mightily about, you know, having to do the, the training.

TINKER: Did you make—so you don't remember meeting anybody from, you know, because basic training is always a real melting pot. People from different areas of the country, you don't remember ...

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: ... anybody that stands out?

BRETZ: Not, not at Fort Belvoir. Uh ...

TINKER: Later?

BRETZ: ... the—later. The—it was twelve intensive weeks, um.

TINKER: Did you take your aptitude test there?

BRETZ: Yeah. I remember I took the aptitude test after they gave me, uh, several shots and I was feeling feverish.

(Laughter)

BRETZ: And then they give me an aptitude test and he, uh, they also gave me, uh, I guess it was for the Signal Corp the, uh, Morse Code. Uh, I couldn't tell the difference between the dot and the dash . (Laughs)

TINKER: That's, yeah that's tough.

BRETZ: It was just, it was terrible.

TINKER: You do have to have a very special aptitude to do that.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: (Laughs) Where did you go for your tr—your next training?

BRETZ: The next training. Wou—I lucked out because I, I had typing in high school and when I finished training in Fort Belvoir, a lot of the fellows that I had trained with were flown to the Battle of the Bulge [December 18, 1944- January 25, 1945]. And I was sent off to clerk typist school because I had learned to type.

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: I went to, uh, Camp Reynolds, Pennsylvania for another twelve ...

TINKER: Oh see you went back to Pennsylvania.

BRETZ: Uh, yeah in the western part of Pennsylvania. Uh, for, uh, clerk typist school which, uh, it was just, just luck that I learned to type.

TINKER: Yeah, yeah.

BRETZ: And, um.

TINKER: So that was where you, you have little bit better memories of ...

BRETZ: Yeah

TINKER: ... of some of the people you served with.

BRETZ: Yeah, then I was there for twelve weeks, finished that course and then they sent me to, um, Camp—in Dothan, Camp, it's in Alabama—Rucker. It was in ...

TINKER: Oh yeah, Fort Rucker.

BRETZ: It was then, it was then, it was then Camp Rucker. It was later made Fort Rucker. Uh, I went from Pennsylvania to Alabama by troop train and we, we went through Atlanta [Georgia] and that's the first time I ever had grits. (Laughter)

RALL: What did you think of them?

BRETZ: Well I was wondering, uh, I knew oatmeal, but I never knew about grits, but they, uh, I think we were there breakfast time and they gave us grits. (Laughs) “And, oh, wow this is interesting.”

RALL: It's not a bad way to introduce you to the South.

TINKER: Mm mmmm.. Uh, so what month was that, that you were, in Alabama?

BRETZ: Oh, I don't remember the, I don't ...

TINKER: Must have been around the summertime? Was it summer?

BRETZ: Yeah, well, let's see. I went in in February for twelve weeks, and then I went, um, what would that, that would do, that would get me into the spring, and then I went to Reynolds for twelve more weeks. So I guess it was summer.

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: And, um, then, then I get to, to, uh ...

TINKER: Rucker.

BRETZ: Rucker.

TINKER: What did you do there?

BRETZ: I was uh, in the, in the office. It was, uh, I was assigned to a, an construction engineering outfit and I was in the, um, headquarters office.

TINKER: What kind of work did you do on a day to day—I mean what was your daily routine like?

BRETZ: Um, handling records, typing reports, that kind of stuff. Which, I, I really lucked out.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: Um, I remember one of the things that impressed me was, um, I—the World Series was on that October and it was a beautiful day in October that we were out sort of, I was sort of lying out on the ground listening to the World Series, um, and thought this was great. (Laughs)

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: Because in Pennsylvania it was already getting cold. (Laughs)

TINKER: Yeah, yeah. Nice to be down there in the summer.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Now it says you left Pearl Harbor in '45 so when did you find out you were going to go—or I guess when did you find out you were going to go overseas?

BRETZ: Uh, we were in Rucker and, uh, then with the outfit, the whole outfit was transferred to Camp Shelby in Mississippi.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: Um, I'm not sure of the exact date. We weren't, we were at Rucker a number of months, I guess, I'm vague on that. Um, then we went to Shelby.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: Um, Shelby was not nearly as nice as Rucker. The barracks were shacks. (Laughs)

TINKER: Right.

BRETZ: And, uh, and I remember that our outfit was in a barracks and then there was a big, um, chain length fence, very high, and on the other side of that were the black troops, because Shelby was segregated and I could see them, but there was no communication or no contact

because of the segregation. Which I found interesting or disturbing. Um, and finally it was, um, the outfit did not pass some inspections and, uh, we kept, they kept training, they kept us busy doing stuff. I was, I had to do some, uh, training, but mostly I was in the office doing ...

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: ... clerical kinds of work. Um, and I had to do guard duty and peak the KP [Kitchen Police] and all that stuff.

TINKER: And during these past months were you following, or how closely if at all, were you following, like, the day to day happenings in, you know, the Pacific, in Europe and?

BRETZ: We got the, uh, we got news, uh, general news, you know, not too much detail. We knew things, we knew things had been bad in Europe and, but then things seemed to be going better, after, after the invasion and, uh, it's that—I remember Roosevelt dying, uh, that was a shock because I hadn't any idea that he was sick. I mean, that was never, never mentioned.

TINKER: Not ev— you, you didn't know anything about, you mean, you didn't know, he, I mean did you know he was in the wheelchair and all that or?

BRETZ: Uh, I knew he was in a wheelchair, but uh ...

TINKER: They never said he's ill.

BRETZ: ... they never and you know they never, if he did a speech or anything he always stood, and uh and uh, it was, it was nothing and there was no indication that he was sick until, you know, they announced that he had died and I was at Shelby at that time.

TINKER: Oh. Well and in Alabama and in Mississippi did you have much of a social life after your work day was through, or what kind of things did you do after hours?

BRETZ: I did get, when I was in Shelby, I got several passes. I know I spent, uh, New Year's Day, uh, it must have been, it must have been '40, '44, must've been '45.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: New Year's, in New Orleans [LA] and that, and uh, they, I got a pass. At that time, uh, Charity Hospital was opening up, and they, uh, they allowed, uh, service men to, to, uh, sleep in one of the wards.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: And I slept in Charity Hospital. (Laughs)

TINKER: (Laughs) So New Years in New Orleans that must have been pretty fun.

BRETZ: Oh, uh, that was, yes. I just stood with my back to a wall.

BRETZ AND TINKER: (Laughter)

TINKER: In shock?

BRETZ: In shock.

RALL: Or shock of ... I guess (Laughs).

BRETZ: Yes, it was wild.

TINKER: (Laughs) That's funny.

BRETZ: But, um, I was in the French Quarter, and, uh, I went to the Court of Two Sisters, uh, that was a restaurant, and so that was fun.

TINKER: Yeah. Um, so, so you went from Mississippi to ...

BRETZ: Then, uh, yes.

TINKER: Is that when you f—when you're in Mississippi is that when you found out you were going overseas?

BRETZ: Yes.

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: Then they—we got the orders that we were going. Uh, we had to go to Portland [OR] and I went by troop train from, from, uh, Hattiesburg [MS] to Portland, Oregon by tr ...

TINKER: I bet that was a trip.

BRETZ: ... By troop train. It was a true trip.

TINKER: Wow. Whew.

BRETZ: And, uh, uh there were no—it was not Pullman [Pullman Company Train Carriages] either it was set up the whole way. Uh, I remember, uh, in some places, uh, particularly in the upper Midwest when we would stop at a station, uh, people would, bring food.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: And that was, that was ...

TINKER: That's nice.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: That's nice. Did, uh, had you made any real, uh, did you have like a best friend by that time ...

BRETZ: Yeah, yes.

TINKER: ... on the train with you?

BRETZ: I had some friends and, uh, friend—people that I had, uh, met and liked.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: And we ...

TINKER: Do you remember stopping at any place in particular that has stayed with you?

BRETZ: Uh, not really. I, I— it was just a long trip.

TINKER: Yeah. (Laughs)

BRETZ: And ...

TINKER: What did you do to pass the time while you were on the train? Besides read.

(Laughter)

BRETZ: That was about—and watch the scenery.

TINKER: Yeah, look at the scenery.

BRETZ: Cause I had never been, I had never been in that area of the country before. But the ...

TINKER: Play cards? Were you a card player?

BRETZ: Uh, no. Not at that time. The, um, the trains were not air conditioned. We had the windows open, and uh we got filthy dirty, uh, but uh, and they—the trains were, were the train was packed. I mean with, with people, but we ...

TINKER: Did you all know why you were going?

BRETZ: Yeah. We knew, we knew the war was winding down in, uh, in Europe and that, that Japan still needed to be conquered. We knew we, we you know, we knew what we were headed for.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: But we didn't know the details. Uh, we, uh went to Portland and, uh,, stayed there a couple days, and then we were, uh, put on a troop ship.

TINKER: Mm hmm. Was that your first time on the water?

BRETZ: That was my first time on a ship, and we went down the Columbia River, and when we—when the river, you know, joined the sea it was, there was turbulence, and that was my first time to get sea sick too. (Laughter)

TINKER: It's rough your first time.

BRETZ: Yeah. What happened was I, I was, I was up on the deck and it was time for breakfast. I'd gotten up early at the sound of breakfast and I, I was just about to go down and the, uh, they were serving powdered eggs for breakfast ...

TINKER: Mmm, yummy.

BRETZ: ... and I smelled that sulfur. I've never liked scrambled eggs since. (Laughs)

TINKER: How—did, did your bout with seasickness last very long or did ...

BRETZ: No, no. And, uh ...

TINKER: Went away when the water smoothed out?

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: (Laughs)

BRETZ: I mean, your—the emotional thing of knowing you're leaving the United States plus, uh ...

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: Plus rough seas is, it just it, it upset me.

TINKER: Yeah.

RALLS: How did the rest of the food sit with you on the, on the boat?

BRETZ: Uh, it was, it was alright. I mean it was mass produced. Not, not in the least gourmet. (Laughs)

TINKER: How long did it—do you remember how long it took?

BRETZ: I think from Portland to Hawaii was seven days, I believe. I, I think it was seven. Uh, that may, I may ...

TINKER: Was it pretty nice weather?

BRETZ: Yeah, uh ...

TINKER: The whole way.

BRETZ: ... Yeah, yeah it was nice.

TINKER: Mm hm. Did y'all do, uh, continue with any training on board or did they have ...

BRETZ: No we were ...

TINKER: ... a regular routine for you?

BRETZ: ... No, we were so jammed on, it was ...

TINKER: Really? Just every, just packed in there.

BRETZ: Packed, and uh, I know we had, you know, tiers of sleeping, you know, the, in the— we were down in the hold and, you know, I don't know if it was three or four bunks ...

TINKER: Stacked, yeah.

BRETZ: ... high. And, uh, and, both sides of the room, of the small room.

TINKER: Had you had the chance to either see or talk to your parents before you left the States?

BRETZ: Uh, not, not before I left the States. I had when I was at Shelby, I did have one pass to go home, uh, and I went by train from Hattiesburg to Pennsylvania. Uh, but that was not near the time that I went overseas.

TINKER: Right. Did your parents ever offer you any words of wisdom?

BRETZ: Not re ...

TINKER: Last time you saw them or I mean ...

BRETZ: Not really.

TINKER: Was it just a casual visit?

BRETZ: Yeah. Not, uh. My parents, my father was in—ended his education at seventh grade and my mother at eighth.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: And, one of the things when I went to high school I was, it was almost as though they, abdicated that I had gone beyond them, and that was, uh, a concern to me because I, even though academically I had, had gone on, I needed their advice and wisdom, but it, it, uh, ‘course ...

TINKER: You felt like they withheld it a little bit because ...

BRETZ: Yeah, yeah I felt as though they were sort of intimidated by the fact that I had, uh, gone on to school.

TINKER: Oh, that’s interesting.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: And a little sad.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Cause you wanted them to, to say something.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: That’s very understandable. Um, so what did you—oh, were you writing them letters the whole time?

BRETZ: Yes.

TINKER: During this period and on the ship?

BRETZ: Mm hmm. When I couldn’t write, I kept a diary. That was one of the things I promised my mother that I would write and she would, and she would write.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: And that’s, that’s what happened with this.

TINKER: And, uh, when you arrived in Hawaii, uh, were you just dumbstruck or?

BRETZ: Yeah, the ...

TINKER: You’ve arrived in paradise basically.

BRETZ: Yeah. During the trip from Portland to Hawaii, Honolulu uh, the first atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima [Japan]. Um, so we go there and there was lots of talk about that. I got to see, uh, I was at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii and, uh, they, I got to see the Dole pineapple plantation. And that was—and to eat some, uh, fresh pineapple which is so much better than what we get ...

TINKER: Oh yeah.

BRETZ: When it's ripe and on the saw. I remember seeing the, some of the workers in the Dole factory. They didn't have front teeth because they, they kept eating pineapple on the, the sugar ...

TINKER: Sugar.

BRETZ: ... ruined their teeth, uh, uh, I remember that. Uh, one of the things about Schofield Barracks I remember is we could take showers, uh outside without—it, we just had a barrier around us ...

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: ... because it was so warm.

TINKER: Just per, so perfect outside

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Why go inside?

BRETZ: Take a shower outside, but, and I was there, uh, then, then while I was there the second bomb was dropped, and, uh, VJ Day [Victory over Japan Day], VJ Day was proclaimed and Honolulu went wild. I ...

TINKER: Everybody was celebrating and ...

BRETZ: Yeah. I ...

TINKER: And did you know that that meant you, that you didn't, that you weren't going to then have to be part of an invasion force?

BRETZ: Well we didn't know what it meant. We, we knew that our orders had been that we were going to acc—be attached to the 2nd Marines to uh, for the invasion of Japan, and then, you know, when the war ended, we didn't know what that meant.

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: Uh, we, I mean everything was sort of in limbo for a few days and then we ...

TINKER: Did everyone—there's just a sense of relief?

BRETZ: Oh yeah.

TINKER: Just like, "Phew."

BRETZ: Wow.

TINKER: Don't have to get shot at.

RALLS: You could stay in Hawaii a little bit longer.

BRETZ: Uh, so I don't know just, just what happened ...

TINKER: And was everyone, were you, were people saying, "Well what's an atomic bomb?" what, what ...

BRETZ: Yes, I mean we, I, I didn't know if they ...

TINKER: Did you hear this bomb has been dropped and the war is over and you're, what? Was everyone ...

BRETZ: Yeah, it was this devastating thing and we didn't know what was going on. I mean I didn't even know they were making an atomic bomb.

TINKER: Right, of course.

BRETZ: And, uh, never heard of Oak Ridge [TN] or any, anything about that and so it was lots of questions "what, what, what is this thing that's been loosed" and, but the war was over so I was figuring out very mixed feelings about. Glad it's over, but you know the number of people killed was terrible. And, uh, so that was, uh ...

TINKER: Do you remember how much longer you stayed?

BRETZ: Uh, let's see. It was the, uh, bomb was dropped I think the 6th and the 9th of August. The two bombs, ...

TINKER: It says on your form you think you departed Pearl Harbor on September the 3rd.

BRETZ: Uh, that sounds ...

TINKER: So you're there almost another month before you ...

BRETZ: Yeah, before they, while they sorted out what they were going to do.

TINKER: Mm. Okay.

BRETZ: And, uh, then, then ...

TINKER: Which that seems pretty quick.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: In retrospect.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: To go ahead and send y'all over there.

BRETZ: Uh, yeah, we—they loaded us, we loaded all of our equipment we, cause we were an engineering group, we had, uh, they had these prefab bridges and prefab landing strips which were, uh, on grids that were hooked together for, to land planes, and, uh, all that kind of equipment they put in the hold of the, of the ship.

TINKER: Right.

BRETZ: And, uh, and we had a lot of trucks and jeeps and all that, all that stuff we had to have as engineers, and they loaded that on an LS, LST I think, LST, LSD [Landing Ship, Tank] one of those, uh, and, uh, then we, uh we started, they, they got us loaded up and we went in a convoy, we went to Japan and of course that was slow. I think it took us something like twenty-three days ...

TINKER: Long trip.

BRETZ: ... to go from Hawaii to Japan. Uh, the, uh we did not have any accommodations for the enlisted men. The officers could, they had—but they could sleep downstairs.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: We, uh, the rest we were told is sleep wherever we could find a place. (Laughs) And, uh, uh several of us decided we wanted to sleep on the, uh, you know how the canvas tops of trucks, you know they had the bows and then the canvas color. Between those bows ...

TINKER: That's nice.

BRETZ: ... It wasn't too bad to sleep. (Laughs)

RALLS: Mm. Wow.

TINKER: That's like a cot.

BRETZ: Yeah, so some of us, some of us ...

TINKER: That's very smart.

BRETZ: ... Yeah, so that's where I slept under the stars.

RALLS: Not bad.

TINKER: Yeah. That's a good sleeping arrangement.

BRETZ: Yeah.

RALLS: What kind of things were you told about the Japanese before you were going over there?

BRETZ: Oh, in, even back in Shelby, they, when they knew we were going, we had some of the awfulest, uh, uh, training films. Uh, even though I knew that the Japanese had been, uh, terrible and had done atrocities and that sort of thing, the characters, the way they presented the Japanese was, was awful. I mean it was so ...

TINKER: Now are you saying this in retrospect or were you thinking that at the time?

BRETZ: I was thinking it at the time too. I mean, they were almost like cartoons of, of evil—I mean it was an obvious, um, attempt to get us psyched up to, to do these people in.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: Uh, and I ...

TINKER: And were you briefed on, um, what, you know, they were thinking of you or, you know?

BRETZ: Not so much it was just how ...

TINKER: Or there, you know, they're go—yeah.

BRETZ: ... how vicious they were.

TINKER: So you all knew what they'd done in China and ...

BRETZ: Not so much China, but in the [Pacific] islands.

TINKER: Oh, during the battles. Okay.

BRETZ: Yeah, the battles.

TINKER: So you weren't really aware of the whole China thing?

BRETZ: No they didn't say much about China but the ...

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: ... training some of the propaganda was terrible. (Laughs)

RALLS: Did, did the propaganda change much after the dropping of the bombs? Were they trying to ...

BRETZ: We didn't, then there wasn't any ...

TINKER: So you didn't get much of a briefing on the ship on the way over?

BRETZ: Nu uh.

TINKER: Kinda what to expect?

BRETZ: No.

TINKER: They probably didn't have any ...

BRETZ: They didn't have any idea.

TINKER: ... information themselves.

BRETZ: Uh, we, when we got there, there was some, we, we lingered a little bit there. Some marines had gone in ahead of us, uh apparently like a scouting party to indicate that it was alright for us to come in.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: Um, we were, they didn't know what to expect because we went in with loaded rifles.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: Uh, they didn't know how the Japanese were going to act. And, uh, we saw some few Japanese fishing boats in, in the water, in the bay. Most of the, when we went in, there were, there were very few people around. I mean, it was deserted, it was just— we went in to, just rubble ...

TINKER: And you docked at what city ...

BRETZ: ... all over the place.

TINKER: ... you docked where?

BRETZ: In Nagasaki.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: In the bay in Nagasaki.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: And, uh, it was sort of raining ...

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: ... and dreary and we didn't know what we were getting into.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: But, uh, they said it was alright.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: (Laughs)

TINKER: And there were already marines there and?

BRETZ: Well, I didn't see any.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: But, apparently they had, there had been some.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: Some men.

TINKER: What was the first thing y'all did when you got off the ship?

BRETZ: Uh, got in a truck and as soon as they could get the, get the trucks off the, um, and, uh, get them. We got in the truck and, uh, they took us through a bunch of the rubble, and, and then eventually through, the little side streets ...

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: ... up into a schoolhouse that—Nagasaki is sort of built, uh, there's a plain and then an there are fingers like hills coming down and, uh, up behind on a sort of on the, on the backside of

one of those ridges there was a school that was still standing. It had damaged windows and some of the roof, but they were holding school.

TINKER: Mm.

BRETZ: Uh, in it. And we commandeered that for a barracks.

TINKER: Mmkay, and what was your assi—I mean, what were you all assigned to do ...

BRETZ: Well ...

TINKER: ... from that point on, I mean...

BRETZ: Just sort of set up headquarters, uh, for, for me personally it was, They had to get, they had to get all our equipment in, and our records, and all that stuff, and until that was happenin' I think one of the first things we did was, was dig a latrine.

TINKER: Mm, yeah.

BRETZ: Uh, and uh I remember helping dig, and uh, then we had the, uh, the first few days slept on the floor of the school because we didn't have cots or any of our stuff, and, uh, unpacked because everything had been, it was like moving, and, uh, and so we got, finally we got, uh, our, we got cots and we got our office equipment and records and all that stuff. Then, then I, then I went to work in the office ...

TINKER: Right.

BRETZ: ... but until then they kept us busy with doing chores and moving stuff.

TINKER: Right, and had you already ran into any Japanese citizens or ...

BRETZ: Uh, most of them fled. Even those who had been around who, who hadn't been killed and wounded were afraid of us. They didn't know what to expect of us, even as we didn't know what to expect of them. And, uh, after they saw we weren't going to, to uh, shoot 'em they started coming back ...

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: ... particularly the kids, kids would come.

TINKER: Very curious about you.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: For sure.

BRETZ: Yeah, they would come. They liked to, uh, the kids sort of came first, and, uh, of course we were on K-Rations and that sort of thing we'd share what we had, sometimes there was a little chocolate bar that came with K-Rations and the kids liked those. So, that was one of the, one of the things that we did.

TINKER: And, what was the unit doing that you were assigned to?

BRETZ: The unit that I was assigned to, as soon as they got organized, uh ...

TINKER: Now were you still assigned to the Marines or was this now another ...

BRETZ: No, we, we did not, no, we were not, we were just sent in ...

TINKER: This is just headquarters, uh, headquarter unit.

BRETZ: Yeah. We were just sent in to, our assignment was changed from being, accompanying to the Marines in the invasion to, um, being the Army of Occupation.

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: And, uh, the first assignment for the Marine—for our group was to build a, uh, an airstrip in what had been downtown Nagasaki.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: They, uh, they put those grids together and, uh, they just, uh, bulldozed the rubble away and made it flat and then put down those, uh, those metal grids ...

TINKER: The tracks. To fly in supplies and people and stuff.

BRETZ: Yeah, so that the planes could come in.

TINKER: Right. Mmkay. And did you help do that personally or ...

BRETZ: No.

TINKER: Were you, so you were ...

BRETZ: I was ...

TINKER: ... still in the office.

BRETZ: I was in the office. (Laughs)

TINKER: Okay. But you saw all this ...

BRETZ: Well I heard about it.

TINKER: Yeah, yeah, yeah okay. Um, so on a day-to-day basis were you working, like, regular hours or was this just morning 'till night or ...

BRETZ: Mostly morning 'till night. I mean I, we got off at nine. Uh, it was just whatever needed to be done during the day. Uh, it was, that was one of the disadvantages I guess of, uh, of being in the office because I had to be doing the office work while the other guys were out seeing what's going on. (Laughs)

TINKER: Were seeing what was going on. Yeah.

BRETZ: Yeah, I had to wait 'till I had a pass to go.

TINKER: Mm hmm. Well when you, the first time you got a pass what did you do?

BRETZ: We went down, I went down to see the, uh, uh, wher—where the explosion had been.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: And it was terrible. And, even by the, even when we went in and, and even when I had the first, the thing I remembered most is the odor. I mean, uh, if you've ever, if you've ever smelled burned flesh you know it has a very distinct, um, odor and it, it really impresses you.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: And it was lots of charred, burned people in that rubble.

TINKER: Oh so there hadn't— were they starting to clean up, the U.S., or?

BRETZ: Yeah, they were, they were starting to get, trying to get the railroad going and, and the roads cleared. That sort of thing.

TINKER: And were the Japanese also coming back into that area to ...

BRETZ: Yeah, they were, yes they were trying to help.

TINKER: Mmkay.

BRETZ: Get down one ...

TINKER: And what was your general impression of, of the interaction with the troops and the Japanese?

BRETZ: Uh, it was, it was— I was amazed that there was less resistance. I wa—what surprised me was when the Emperor [Hirohito] said, “stop,” they stopped.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

BRETZ: So, I don't think, uh, I don't think the Americans would've obeyed that well.

TINKER: Mm hmm. I've heard that— I've interviewed a, a Marine that went in right after and, uh, I don't think he was around any of the bomb areas, but, uh, he, he made that comment too that, uh, you know they went in and the Japanese were, you know, very accommodating and, and it's like you—the Emperor said stop and they stopped and he said ironically, “It was the Chinese.” Cause he also, they spent some time in Japan, but then they got sent into China.

BRETZ: Mm hmm.

TINKER: They had, the Chinese were actually shooting at them ...

BRETZ: Mm hmm.

TINKER: ... at the Marine. And, yeah I mean, the irony of that is like almost mind boggling (Laughs) because you know we're there trying to— we just defeated your enemy for you and then, you know, so.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: But yeah I, I—that, that's, I've heard that before that the Japanese were ...

BRETZ: Yeah I was just amazed.

TINKER: ... they just stopped.

BRETZ: And there were, there were times, uh, we I think within ten days or so they, uh, they took the ammunition away from us and, and we put our rifles away.

TINKER: Yeah, you didn't need them.

BRETZ: Yeah.

RALLS: By this point had you learned anymore about the bomb itself? I mean, because I'm thinking about you guys going down to this explosion site and, you know. Was there any concern about radiation or anything like, were you guys aware of anything at all like that?

BRETZ: Uh, we were, knew that the, but they told us it was all okay. So, we went.

TINKER: Oh, so by then you did have a little bit better idea of ...

BRETZ: We knew that ...

TINKER: ... what an atomic bomb was.

BRETZ: Yeah, we knew that it created radiation and we knew that the Japanese had radiation and I saw, I don't, I presume what were radiation burns. Some of the children had spots on them, on, on them and sores, and, uh, I presumed that was from, I may have been wrong, I don't know, but I presumed that they, um, they had gotten some burns, but, uh, they told us it was okay. So we trusted them.

RALLS: Sure, sure.

TINKER: They probably thought that too. (Laughs)

BRETZ: And so far, I'm still here.

TINKER: Yeah, yeah. Obviously, it didn't affect you. Um, so how long were you there? Did you go to any other parts of Japan?

BRETZ: Yeah, I, I, I'm fuzzy on the dates, but we stayed in, uh, Nagasaki, we went in in September. I know I was in Fuhoko [Fukuoka, Japan] around Christmas time so I know that we didn't stay there too long. We did the, the bridges—we did the air, air strip, we built some bridges and then, you know, when they, when that was done and they moved us on. Um, then I went to Fukuoka and then to Kurume. These are all in the southern island of Kyushu, and, uh, but immediately, shortly after, uh, after you know, few months after the war ended the, particularly the veterans, some of them who had been in four years or more, uh, in the South Pacific, wanted to go home.

TINKER: I bet.

BRETZ: And, uh, so that made a lot of, uh, work for the office because we were, we were discharging people as soon as they had a point system for how many months you were in and all that sort of thing and as, and as, as the numbers came up we had to get men ready to ship home.

TINKER: Mm. So you were busy?

BRETZ: We were busy. I, I, I transferred myself to several different outfits sitting at the same desk. (Laughs) You know, we'd deactivate a group and, and then put ourselves in another group, and then deactivate that. It meant a lot of book work. A lot of ...

TINKER: Did you get any packages from your mother while you were over there?

BRETZ: Yeah, she sent me a few things.

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: But it took a long time ...

TINKER: I bet.

BRETZ: ... to get there. Mostly, I was looking for mail and it, I finally, it finally, stuff came and it was a whole, whole bunch of stuff all at once.

TINKER: Aw. Well did anything of note, was anything of note going on back home that, that she was telling you about?

BRETZ: Not that I remember greatly.

TINKER: Mmkay.

BRETZ: She'd tell me about, you know, what was happening, but I don't really remember much about it.

TINKER: And what kind—and in your letters that, you know, you've you've, she saved your letters to her, were you telling her in detail ...

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: ... every—what you were seeing?

BRETZ: Yes, that was, that was what I was writing about.

TINKER: Mm hmm. Did she comment back to you about it or did she just ...

BRETZ: She didn't ...

TINKER: ... accept your letters ...

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: ... but then write to you just about what was going on.

BRETZ: About what was going on with the family ...

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: ... or she might make some comment, but I didn't save her letters, she saved mine.
(Laughs)

RALLS: Did letter writing take up a lot of your free time?

BRETZ: Yeah, yeah.

RALLS: Did you just write to your family or where you other members of your ...

BRETZ: I was wrote to a few other people but, uh, mostly just to my family.

TINKER: Well, what, um, what were the other, um, cities like that you went to in the Nagasaki area?

BRETZ: Uh, I didn't, I didn't have time to do much sightseeing (Laughs) because of, uh, we were very busy. Um, I remember being on a, a train—they, they got the trains working, and I remember how, how they packed those cars together. And you—everybody gets on if they can and then, then they had people that, who would shove the last few on to get the doors closed. (Laughter) If you got your arms up, you couldn't get 'em down you were so (Laughs) so packed in. Um ...

TINKER: When you were meeting ...

BRETZ: ... uh, but I didn't feel afraid. I mean I would be in a car with all Japanese and here I was, and I didn't feel at all threatened.

TINKER: Mmm hm, and did, um. I was going to ask you. Oh, you said you're discharging all these combat veterans. Were they—did you talk to 'em much? Did, did, were, did they tell you stories? Uh, did you get a, a general impression of ...

BRETZ: Some of them.

TINKER: ... of them?

BRETZ: Yeah. Some of them, um, had, had been up through, coming up through the islands [Island Hopping] and, uh. You know they were, they were not as, uh, they were very suspicious of the Japanese because of the experience they'd had with the [Japanese] troops, yeah. Some of them were, were pretty bitter.

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: Uh. but fortunately they didn't try to cause trouble either, I mean. And I, I'm, I presume it was one of the reasons they wanted to get, get those troops out as fast as they could.

TINKER: Maybe not to tempt, tempt 'em or let 'em be there too long to ...

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: ... yeah. Hm, so ...

BRETZ: There had also been a group that would join our outfit who had been in Alaska for a long time, and they complained bitterly about the, being in—they were up in Alaska on some of the, our islands ...

TINKER: The Aleutians ...

BRETZ: ... and, uh, they had a miserable time [Aleutian Island Campaign]. They ...

TINKER: Yeah. They didn't have a lot going on.

BRETZ: They didn't have a lot going on, and it, it was very depressing, and, and their morale was not good.

TINKER: Hmm.

BRETZ: Uh, I think it, it was almost the opposite of the people in the, in the islands where there was so much fighting going on. They were just sort of up there to make sure nothing went on and nothing did go on, and I guess they had got rather bored.

TINKER: Um, so you left Yokohama in April of '46.

BRETZ: Mmm hmm. 6th of April (Laughs).

RALL: Bet you remember the date.

TINKER: Remember the date (Laughs).

BRETZ: I do.

TINKER: What was that, I mean were you just completely overjoyed to be leaving?

BRETZ: Alright.

TINKER: Just happy.

BRETZ: Yeah. I think it took us fourteen days to go from Yokohama to Seattle [Washington].

TINKER: Yeah, couldn't wait to get home.

BRETZ: Mmm hmm.

TINKER: Um, and what was your—I mean, if—I guess what was your overall, like your biggest—I don't even know how to put this. As your leaving Japan you've seen these horrible things, what—I mean besides just being thrilled to be getting home, were there other, was there just a general impression, you know? What was the biggest imprint on you, leaving there?

BRETZ: Well I, I was anxious to get home. I was anxious to get out of the Army. I, I, it never was a good fit. And um, I, I—and then I knew I had to, what my future was going to be. Because I had decided while I was, uh, in the service that when I got out I was probably, uh, I was going to go to school—uh, the G.I. Bill had been passed.

TINKER: Oh yeah.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: So you knew for sure you were going to come back and go to school?

BRETZ: I was going to come back and go to school, and that, that caused some anxiety too. Because I, nobody in my family had ever been to college, um, and, uh, I didn't know whether I could make it or not. And, and um, it was, uh—so I, it, there was some anxiety about what that would be.

TINKER: Right, right. Did you know what you wanted to study for sure? Or ...

BRETZ: Yes, I decided I was going to be a minister, and um ...

TINKER: And when had you decided that?

BRETZ: Uh, well, it took me a while. I, in that period from high school 'till I was inducted, I worked in and I had taken—I had no idea when I was in high school that I would go to college. I took the commercial course, then I got a job in that insurance office and I hated it. (Laughter) That's not for me ...

TINKER: You ruled that out.

BRETZ: And, uh, I didn't know what I was going to do, and I stood for a while and then I just decided that I would probably go into ministry. And, um, so I was looking forward to that in one hand and anxious about it on the other.

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: And ...

TINKER: Was there something in your childhood, you think, that led you to make that decision?

BRETZ: I had an uncle who was—my parents, um, we went to church every time the door was open, and, uh, so—as a kid, and it was, it was one of my social outlets because I could see other people at that time.

RALL: What denomination? Just, real quick.

BRETZ: At that ti—as a child it was Evangelical. It, it’s a Pennsylvania, it was a Pennsylvania German Church of Methodist theology. Um, it later joined the, it was later merged with the United Brethren in Christ, which is an, also a Pennsylvania German church. Um, and now it is part of the Methodist church. It’s the United in the Methodist Church (Laughs).

RALL: I see, I see, okay.

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: Uh, but, uh. So that was—so I, and I had an ...

TINKER: You had an uncle.

BRENZ: ... uncle.

TINKER: Okay.

BRENZ: I had an uncle who did not go to college but went to Moody Bible Institute [Chicago, IL].

TINKER: Mmmm

BRETZ: Which is, you know, very conservative ...

TINKER: In Chicago.

BRENZ: In Chicago. It was very conservative, and um. So, so I had that role model. It was my mother’s brother.

TINKER: You looked up to him.

BRETZ: Uh, yeah.

TINKER: Well when you came back, did you go—I mean how long did it take you to get out and then ... did you go straight back home?

BRETZ: I got on the ship in Japan on the 6th of April. On the 13th of April I was discharged at Camp Meade in Maryland, Fort Meade I guess it is now. Um, and then went home, um, that was the 30th of April. By June I was in college. I stayed home about a month ...

TINKER: That’s pretty quick.

BRETZ: Yup, and then ...

TINKER: Was it easy, you know, using your G.I. Bill you just ...

BRETZ: I used the ...

TINKER: I guess there was such an influx that the colleges were just sort of ready for you by the time you got there.

BRETZ: Uh. Yeah, I had a friend, who was a minister—who had been graduated from the school I went to who was a minister of the church, and he showed me the ropes, took me to the school, got me, got me registered, and introduced me. ‘Cause he had recently, he was still in the—a student, and he helped me get started. And uh, that was, it was—and I had to take some remedial courses because I, I hadn’t, um, in high school I didn’t have a language and didn’t some science that I needed to for college entrance so I. The first summer I had to do some of that remedial work.

TINKER: Right.

BRETZ: And it was, it was a challenge to, you know, after being in the, in the service, going from high school and the service and then getting in the academic situation. I had, I took some adjusting.

TINKER: So you went, your, you went to Albright College?

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: How, how close is Reading [Pennsylvania] to your family’s home?

BRETZ: Uh, it’s about eighty-ninety miles.

TINKER: Um, so you did the ful, uh, three years. So you graduated in ‘49 ...

BRETZ: Yeah, I did, uh, I graduated in three years because I went year-round.

TINKER: Yeah, did you work, also, during that time? To support yourself, or ...

BRETZ: Uh, no. Uh, ‘cause ...

TINKER: So you just took like ...

BRETZ: ... the G.I Bill, uh, helped me with that. Uh. I, I, that was wonderful to have, to be able to, to get through without debt.

RALL: Were you at school with other veterans that had served?

BRETZ: Yes, yes there were other people who came in. Uh, in fact, uh, my college roommate was also, had also, he got out—he the same age as I am, he got out at the same, about the same time, and I still email him once a week.

TINKER: Oh, wow.

RALL: That's nice.

BRETZ: Yeah.

RALL: Served in Japan also?

BRETZ: No, he didn't serve in Japan, but he, he's living, uh, Pennsylvania.

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: So, we correspond.

TINKER: Did the veterans on campus, um, did you—among each other did they talk about their experiences, or was everybody pretty much just quiet about it and going about getting on in life?

BRETZ: Pretty much quiet, yeah. Yeah. I think the non-veterans didn't want to particularly hear about it and the veterans didn't want to talk about it.

TINKER: Mmm hmm. They just wanted to move on.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Yeah. I mean, did you, you enjoyed your college years?

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: I did.

TINKER: Okay, and then you went straight into, um, the theology school.

BRETZ: Yes ...

TINKER: There in the ...

BRETZ: ... and the theology school was on the same campus as the Albright. It was ...

TINKER: So you didn't have to move or ...

BRETZ: I didn't have to move, no ...

TINKER: That was good.

BRETZ: ... and I, and the, the roommate, uh, went to the same, the seminary also. So we went through that together. We were, we were roommates for about seven years. And, uh ...

TINKER: Did you, uh, I guess you probably didn't join any of the veterans organizations, or were there?

BRETZ: No.

TINKER: Were there any veteran's organizations on campus?

BRETZ: Not that I ...

TINKER: Were there any.

BRETZ: ... know of.

TINKER: Don't remember? So they just didn't get together at all?

BRETZ: We were sick of the Army. (Laughter)

RALL: When you came back were you interested in the developments in Japan? Did you try to seek that out in the news or was it on the radio?

BRETZ: Uh, yeah. Yes, I've been interested in what's, because it, ah, it was—I have very mixed feelings about what happened, and I had an admiration for the Japanese people in the way they handled it. And, uh, while the atomic bomb probably saved my life, I still have questions about the use of it.

TINKER: Mmm hmm. Um, when did you, did you meet your wife at college?

BRETZ: My first wife, yes.

TINKER: Okay. So, there in Reading, your first, not theology school, but at college.

BRETZ: At college, yes, uh, yes. I met her the, October. I went, I got there in, in June, and then she came in regular semester at, in September. I think we met in October.

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: And we, we dated, uh through that time, um.

TINKER: Was she originally from Pennsylvania as well?

BRETZ: Yes, she was from Pennsylvania, western Pennsylvania. And then, uh, from Oil City.

TINKER: That's the name of the city

BRETZ: Uh huh.

TINKER: Oil City. (Laughter)

TINKER: That's a good name.

BRETZ: Yeah. It's near Johnstown.

TINKER: Yeah, okay.

BRETZ: The, um, let's see. We and then, uh, we were married in December of '49.

TINKER: Mmm hmm. Then that was when you, that same year you started the theology school?

BRETZ: Yeah, I, yeah.

TINKER: Was she, what was she, uh, going to school for?

BRETZ: Uh, I don't know what her major was.

TINKER: Did she just give it all up for you? (Laughter)

BRETZ: Academically, she was better than me.

TINKER: (Laughs)

BRETZ: Anyways, it was, uh, I'm not sure what her major was.

TINKER: That's okay, it's okay.

BRETZ: Ah, I can't remember that.

TINKER: And where did you, um, when you, well how was the theology school? How big was it?

BRETZ: It, well, there were about forty students in three grades, three years, and, um.

TINKER: Did you learn original languages there or was it that kind of ...

BRETZ: Uh, no I had some, I had some Greek in college, in preparation, some German.

TINKER: Mmm hmm

BRETZ: Uh, seminary was, was a struggle. I, they were very short of ministers in the denomination. I enrolled, before I even started I think in May of, of let's see '49. I was assigned

five small churches in, uh, northern Pennsylvania about a hundred and twenty miles from the school.

TINKER: Wow.

BRETZ: And, uh, then I started seminary in that fall. I would go to, and the sem—the school classes met from Tuesday to Friday and I would, uh, I would be in the parish, uh, I would leave the school as soon as the last class on Friday, get there sometimes for a meeting Friday night, Saturday I would try to visit people in the hospital and do a sermon, and Sunday I would have, one Sunday I would have two services and, and the next Sunday I would have three. Um, they had service every other week.

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: These were small rural churches.

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: Uh, Monday I would, uh, do other visiting or parish work. Tuesday morning I would get up about three o'clock to go to meet an eight o'clock class, and, uh, three years of that and I was bushed.

TINKER: I bet.

BRETZ: And I didn't feel like I got a very good education either. So, I went to graduate school. (Laughter)

TINKER: To get some rest?

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Most people don't go to graduate school to get rested up, do they?

RALL: No, no.

BRETZ: Well I, I just felt after three years, I mean it, I learned a lot, but it was, it was just too much.

TINKER: Yeah, that, yeah.

BRETZ: And, uh.

TINKER: You really stretched, I mean that was, you really stretched thin trying to do all that and take your classes.

BRETZ: Yeah, you see by that time the, the G.I. Bill had, had, uh, I had used most of it and they still, I still got some, I think, the tuition was not a problem because the church didn't charge a great tuition, but I had books and things like that. Um, so I, at the end of that I felt I was just not

prepared to go into a parish fulltime. I was ordained in '52 and I, I talked with this roommate that I still correspond with. I just didn't feel adequate to take on a full time church, and, um, I—one of my professors in the seminary had been a recent graduate of Boston University [Massachusetts] and I liked his, uh, approach and, and what he was teaching. Also, going through college and through seminary I had changed my religious beliefs considerably. From being a very naïve sort of fundamentalist approach to religion to, uh, even though they, that's the college and seminary were denominational, um, churches, denominational institutions, they were academically honest and, uh, and, and taught, uh, taught the facts. (Laughs) And so I found myself really questioning some of the theology that I would of, would have had to preach.

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: And, so, in a way, I didn't feel prepared and I didn't feel that I, uh, really wanted to do what I knew I had to do. So I, uh, I applied and was accepted at Boston University and, uh, I took, in the Master's program for Psychology Religion, and, which I, and then I moved to Massachusetts and took a small parish there to pay for it and, and with the understanding that I would go to BU [Boston University] for two years. While I was there, I qualified to be an institutional chaplain cause my, my strategy was that I going, not to go join the parish, but into a, to be a chaplain and, uh, so ...

TINKER: It's a bit uninstitutional, chaplain. I mean, what does that specifically mean?

BRETZ: What that meant was I was going to, I was going to work in, uh, a place where there were chaplains and that, and that happened to be in a mental hospital.

TINKER: Oh, okay. I got ...

BRETZ: So I ...

TINKER: So you could've went to any kind of hospital then?

BRETZ: Yeah. So, but, uh, but I went to the, I was in New Hampshire State Hospital.

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: I ...

TINKER: And that was your first ...

BRETZ: In '54 ...

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: ... I was, I became the chaplain of, um, the New Hampshire State Hospital.

TINKER: Mmm hmm. I bet that, how long were you there?

BRETZ: Five years.

TINKER: Five years.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: And did, what prompted you to leave?

BRETZ: Uh, I, well unfortunately they're state institutions and you get involved in state politics.

TINKER: Mmm hmm. Oh, okay.

BRETZ: (Laughs) And the politics ...

TINKER: Well that answers that.

BRETZ: The politics in New Hampshire changed somewhat and I, I wasn't happy with some of the changes that were going on and, uh, so I moved, I, uh, found a position in Iowa ...

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: ... at another institution.

TINKER: Was it also a mental health hospital?

BRETZ: It was a mental health hospital.

TINKER: What was those, those first years in, at the New Hampshire hospital like?

BRETZ: Well, they were very— that was an education too because ...

TINKER: I mean back then I mean, you know, I, all I know is what I've seen in the old movies, like the institutional hospitals were not very happy places to be.

BRETZ: No it wasn't, uh, oh I enjoyed working there. It was in '54, I was there from '54 to '59, um, the, and this was the psychotropic drugs were just coming, prior to that there, the, um, treatments were not ...

TINKER: Shock treatments.

BRETZ: Yeah, shock treatments, hydrotherapy, um, neglect. (Laughs) They were pretty grim.

TINKER: What was your primary, um, well, what was your technical primary responsibility and then what did you feel your responsibility was?

BRETZ: Well there was, there were about twelve hundred Protestant patients in that hospital. The total census was somewhere near twenty four hundred, uh, and there was a Catholic chaplain and a Protestant chaplain and, uh, I, I try, I talked to the new admissions, talked to anyone who

wanted to talk to me. Um, I had a Sunday morning chapel service, um, I would see any of the patients who were critically ill, um, it was, that was my, that was my thing.

TINKER: Was this men and women?

BRETZ: Yes.

TINKER: Okay. They were segregated?

BRETZ: Uh, yes, there were male wards and female wards.

TINKER: Mmkay.

BRETZ: Uh, I did a lot of work with staff.

TINKER: 'Cause it is hard on the staff being there.

BRETZ: Yes, yes.

TINKER: Wow.

BRETZ: A lot of, a lot of people wanted to talk about what was happening to them. So, it was ...

TINKER: Did you see cases—this is just my personal curiosity, did you cases where you thought this person doesn't even need to be in here or?

BRETZ: Sometimes ...

TINKER: Did you try to help that person or were you very limited?

BRETZ: Well, you had to, first of all you had to know what, what was going on and why they were—came in and that sort of thing and I, we had, we had, I had access to the case records and that sort of thing so.

TINKER: Did you ever come across veterans that were in there?

BRETZ: Uh ...

TINKER: Rarely?

BRETZ: Yes, we had some although many of them would go to a VA [Veteran Affairs] hospital.

TINKER: Oh that's right, that's right.

BRETZ: And there was a big VA hospital in Boston so it was fairly close.

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: One of the things I did do there, uh, that seemed meaningful was, New Hampshire had had a scare about some sexual deviation and they passed a very Draconian law that anybody who was caught with any kind of sexual problem was to be, uh, confined until they were cured.

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: Well, no, none of the psychiatrists would certify that somebody was cured if they had had some sexual deviation problem, and, so it was a standoff. The psychiatrists wouldn't certify they were cured, because how can you predict what somebody is gonna do or not do.

TINKER: Well right.

BRETZ: And, uh, and the law was that they had to be certified. So it was a number of years there until they go that straightened out that we, they brought in a lot of people who were confined in what we call the "sexual psychopath ward," and they were really sort of abandoned 'cause there was the psychiatrist didn't, there wasn't much for them to do and, uh ...

TINKER: The psychiatrist were afraid it was gonna come back on them if they ...

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: ... stamped them cured and then they go out ...

BRETZ: And do something again so. Uh, and they were, they were really, they were very much in contact, they, they were, and they were ver—felt abandoned and very isolated.

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: So I spent quite of time—a bit of time talking with some of them. Because there was, they were just on hold, and, uh, and some of, some of that was very meaningful to me and I think to them. Just the fact that there's somebody to talk with them.

TINKER: Right, 'cause they're perm—they're almost permanently, they're permanently in there, at least for a number of years.

BRETZ: Yeah, they finally relaxed the law somewhat so that a doctor didn't need to certify that they, they'd never get in trouble again. Uh, and, and uh, sometimes, I didn't know all of the details, but sometimes it, it seemed like they, they were the victim of accusations that were, may have not been true.

TINKER: Oh, yes.

BRETZ: There were some who came into some family dynamics where people were accused of, of doing something that they may not have done, but there's no trial no nothing, if the accusation came they were put in the hospital.

TINKER: Right.

BRETZ: So it, it seemed ...

TINKER: Right. Well, and so you went from there to Iowa?

BRETZ: I went from there to Iowa.

TINKER: Did you just find, how did you find this hospital. I mean, or did you just want to go to the Midwest? (Laughter)

BRETZ: No, I knew that they were looking for a chaplain out there. They had, there, they had passed a law in Iowa that there were going to be chaplains in the, uh, in the hospital. The superintendent of that hospital was a little wary. He didn't want, uh—most of the chaplains in Iowa at that time were Lutherans ...

TINKER: Mmm hmm

BRETZ: ... and he didn't exactly want a Lutheran, didn't exactly want a Lutheran chaplain, and he was resisting that. He, when he was in college in Iowa City, he knew that the, uh, the Unitarian Church had, had, uh, sponsored dances in the basement of their church, and that impressed him. (Laughs) and I happened to be a Unitarian by this ...

TINKER: So he like that?

BRETZ: ... I had to be a Unitarian (Laughs) that got the job.

TINKER: That's funny. So you, how long were you all in Iowa?

BRETZ: I was in Iowa from uh, '59 to '64.

TINKER: And I'm assuming you all had children by this point?

BRETZ: I had three.

TINKER: What, um, what was it like, I mean, you hadn't lived in the Midwest before. What, did it seem to change or?

BRETZ: Yeah, I, well it was nice. I sort of like wherever I am. Um, it was different, the winters were very cold.

TINKER: Oh, yeah.

BRETZ: Yeah, uh, I didn't like the, the cold winters and the wind. But I enjoyed the work. I happened to, uh, work very closely with a psychiatrist there who had—was the son of a Methodist minister and so he wasn't afraid of, of a, of a preacher.

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: And, uh, we got along very well. And he, um, he sponsored, or encouraged me to do, um—what we did, we called it Bible study to get it accepted, but it really was group therapy, because you start out with something in the Bible and then begin talking about things that were meaningful to the people involved, and it worked out, it worked out well. And so I had a good relationship with him and, uh.

TINKER: So you enjoyed your time there?

BRETZ: I enjoyed my time there, and I did the services and visiting and all of that too, but we also had groups.

TINKER: Was there any notable difference between the patient population in New Hampshire and Iowa that you noticed?

BRETZ: Well ...

TINKER: Struck you?

BRETZ: ... by the time I was in, by the time I was in Iowa we had the use of psychotropic drugs, which, which they were just beginning in New Hampshire. And, um, but that was ...

TINKER: The biggest change? Yeah.

BRETZ: That was one of the biggest changes, and the, the psychiatrist I work worked with was very much a, he had been trained at Menninger's and, um, he was very much in ...

TINKER: I mean, where?

BRETZ: At Menninger's clinic in Topeka, Kansas.

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: He was a graduate of that.

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: Of Karl Menninger's philosophy and, uh ...

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: And, so, he was very much interested in, in trying to use, um, Milieu Therapy and Psychotherapy and that sort of. And it was, it was, um, I felt a more humane kind of treatment than, than, than what had happened in New Hampshire before we, before we had the drugs.

TINKER: Very interesting. And what was your, um, was your wife a stay-at-home mother and wife?

BRETZ: Uh, she, she worked some at, uh, there was a manufa—there was a, uh, furniture manufacturing plant near there, and she worked in the office for a while. But mostly she was ...

TINKER: It says on your form, Mount Pleasant Isle, where's Mount Pleasant?

BRETZ: It's in the southeast corner, not too far from Burlington.

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: Um, Madison, south of Iowa City, north of Burlington.

TINKER: Your kids enjoyed there? They just went, went to the public school in the area.

BRETZ: They went to, they went to public school, yes.

TINKER: So how come, so what prompted you to leave Iowa? (Laughs) You enjoy these places, but you don't stay there very long.

BRETZ: Yeah, well, again, the politics in Iowa changed and that, we got a different commissioner and he was not in sympathy with my, uh, psychiatrist friend, and the psychiatrist left and went to Alabama where he came from, and I applied and, uh, and I decided I would go into a parish and went to Harvard, Massachusetts as a Unitarian-Universalist minister.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: So I, I would work about seven years and ...

TINKER: Yeah, '64 to '72?

BRETZ: ... in Harvard (Laughs).

TINKER: And you enjoyed it there too?

BRETZ: Yeah. (Laughter)

TINKER: I know you did. You're a happy man. Just enjoy wherever you are.

BRETZ: Yeah, it was, yeah I had a nice time.

TINKER: Now you weren't, you weren't at the, so you actually went to a church this time ...

BRETZ: I went to a church this time.

TINKER: ... you weren't in a hospital? So that was a change. I mean that's a change of lifestyle for you.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Was it a little bit of a relief? In a way?

BRETZ: Well, it was just different. Uh, it's, um, in a, in a hospital you're, you, you're sort of are, you have more, uh, regulation. You know, you have working hours, on the parish you don't have any working hours just 'cause ...

TINKER: Still you're ...

BRETZ: ... you're on duty all the time.

TINKER: ... you're dealing with people in the same way, you're just outside the walls.

BRETZ: Yes, yes.

TINKER: Right (Laughs)

BRETZ: I find, I found that it was quite similar. (Laughter)

RALL: But you didn't tell them that.

BRETZ: No. (Laughter)

TINKER: It's just, in Harvard they were on the loose, right?

BRETZ: Yes. (Laughter)

BRETZ: They weren't committed but um ...

TINKER: That's funny. That's very interesting.

BRETZ: But the problems are very similar. (Laughs)

TINKER: Yeah, yeah. Um so, now you've seen a lot of changes from when you started in New Hampshire to you're in Harvard in '72.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: So then you (Laughs), you leave again, I mean what, what was going on with you then that you?

BRETZ: In '72, why, why I left in '72 was because I was getting a divorce.

TINKER: Oh, okay. So there were a lot of changes going on.

BRETZ: There were.

TINKER: In the country and in your life.

BRETZ: Yeah. Um, I'd come to the, I'd come to the situation where I couldn't resolve the difficulties with my first wife, and uh, so.

TINKER: And were your children grown at that time?

BRETZ: Yes, my, my oldest daughter was in college, my son was about to go in college, my youngest daughter was still in high school, but the situation had gotten so difficult that I needed to get out. And I didn't want to go through a divorce in the parish.

TINKER: So you, you left the parish before you ...

BRETZ: Yes, I ...

TINKER: ... Actually went through the divorce.

BRETZ: ... yes, I just, uh, it was, again, my friend from Iowa was in Alabama. Alabama at that time was under court order to improve their mental health system.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: And they were desperately looking for people who had experience.

TINKER: So you had, just had another door open right in front of you then.

BRETZ: And, uh, I called him, uh, I knew that they had, we had, I had kept in touch with him.

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: Um, he had, I had visited him in Alabama and he had visited me in Massachusetts and, um, and I called him. I knew that they were under court order, recently got under court order in Alabama, and I called him to ask if there was anything I could do, and he said I should come down, and we talked about it and he hired me. Of course by that time he was superintendent of the hospital where I was going to work.

TINKER: That's great. That's great.

BRETZ: And, uh, so he hired me and I moved to Alabama.

TINKER: I bet you never thought you'd be going back to Alabama.

BRETZ: No. And it's, it was interesting that my grandmother, the one who was so ill, had lived in Alabama a short time way back in the, um, after the [American] Civil War.

TINKER: Wow.

BRETZ: And, uh, she told me stories about Alabama, so, you know, I never knew I'd end up there (Laughs).

TINKER: Wow. That's neat. So you enjoyed, you spent the rest of your, uh, working career there, then, in Alabama. You enjoyed it?

BRETZ: (Laughs) Yeah, it was hectic.

TINKER: Really, with the changes in the law, and I mean, did you?

BRETZ: Yes, there was changes in the law, there was George Wallace [45th Governor of Alabama] and uh.

TINKER: Oh yeah, well I wasn't alive then, so that doesn't spring to my memory. (Laughter)

BRETZ: And ...

RALL: Where in tusca—or, excuse me, where in Alabama did you live?

BRETZ: Tuscaloosa.

RALL: Oh, I went to school there. That's where I got my Master's.

BRETZ: Oh you did!

RALL: Yes

BRETZ: Yes, I worked at Bryce Hospital.

RALL: Oh wow, wow.

BRETZ: Yeah.

RALL: So I guess you were all, you were there with George Wallace and everything.

BRETZ: Oh, yes. Yeah. And I worked at Partlow, too.

RALL: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: And I ended up, uh, what I happen, what happened was I was, what I was hired to do was to come to Alabama and work in transitional services. They had had a promise of funding, uh, from the federal government to help people, uh, get settled in the community.

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: And, um, in group homes or private homes, apartments whatever they could manage and, uh, and have staff to, to supervise them and help, help them adjust to get out of their institutions, into the community. By the time, between the time I was, uh, hired and the time I got there, uh, Nixon nixed the funding.

TINKER: Oh.

BRETZ: And they, and the thing fell through. So then they had to piece together, uh, what, what I could do and it was, you know, uh, George Wallace was not very, uh, forthcoming with money. Uh, in fact he was fighting, dragging his feet all the way. Um, so, uh, it ended up that, that my friend decided he couldn't stand it any longer and he resigned so I was there and the next superintendent then hired me to be his assistant.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

BRETZ: And, uh, the next superintendent hired me to be an assistant superintendent and, uh, then, then I, uh, got, then there was a court monitor, uh, and, uh, we had, we had to report to them what was going on and, uh, I had a fairly good relationship with him and he hired me to be on his staff, so I ended up working for the—I was working for the federal court but paid by the state.

TINKER: Hmm, and you were there long enough to see things get bet—somewhat better I'm sure.

BRETZ: Somewhat better, yes.

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Huh, did, and, did you enjoy living in Alabama?

BRETZ: Yeah, yeah. (Laughs) I like Tuscaloosa. I still have friends there.

TINKER: Yeah.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Nice. So you retired in '88?

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: And how, and how did you end up in Oak Ridge [Tennessee]?

BRETZ: Because I fell in love with my third wife.

TINKER: Oh, okay. Well that's easy. (Laughter)

TINKER: Did you meet in Alabama?

BRETZ: No, we met in Virginia. We went to, uh, she was divorced, I was divorced and we went to a church conference in, in Blacksburg [Virginia].

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: Uh, and uh, we both happened to take a course. Uh, this is a summer institute that the church puts on where they have lots of courses ...

TINKER: Mmm hmm.

BRETZ: And, uh, we were both disappointed with the course because we thought it was going to be an interactive thing and it, it, it the instructor was just giving us resources where we could find stuff, and we started grousing to each other.

TINKER: Okay. (Laughs)

BRETZ: "This isn't what we signed up for," and the rest is history.

TINKER: Uh huh.

BRETZ: I, I had a, a lovely time. I was ...

TINKER: And she's, she was already living in Oak Ridge.

BRETZ: She was already, she was living in Oak Ridge, and I was, uh, I, things had not worked out well in, in Tuscaloosa and I was ready to move so ...

TINKER: Okay.

BRETZ: ... I came here.

TINKER: So in when, what year did you move here?

BRETZ: '94.

TINKER: '94?.

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Been here ever since.

BRETZ: Been here ever since.

TINKER: Are you active in the community in Oak Ridge?

BRETZ: Yeah.

TINKER: Or have been?

BRETZ: Very much in the church.

TINKER: Yeah, you enjoy it?

BRETZ: Very much and, uh I enjoy living at Greenfield.

TINKER: Do you have anything else?

RALL: I had one question about your course work when you were in seminary and going to college.

BRETZ: Yeah.

RALL: It seems to me like the atomic bomb would be a topic of discussion in your coursework. Was that the case and did you, 'cause it seems like something that theologians would want to talk about, and so.

BRETZ: I'm afraid not.

RALL: Okay.

BRETZ: (Laughs)

RALL: Okay.

BRETZ: There just wasn't much discussion about, uh, lots of discussion in the church that I'm not involved with ...

RALL: Sure, I see.

TINKER: Probably not enough time had passed, then, that, everybody is probably still just glad the war was over.

BRETZ: I guess.

TINKER: You think?

BRETZ: There was some, but uh, not a great deal of ...

RALL: Mmkay.

BRETZ: ... of discussion about that.

RALL: I see.

BRETZ: Uh, I think we, we've been in a lot of denial.

RALL: Mm. I see.

TINKER: So I guess you've learned a lot since you've been in Oak Ridge.

BRETZ: Mmm hmm.

TINKER: What you didn't know at the time, you know all about it now.

BRETZ: Yeah. I think it's interesting that I grew up near Three Mile Island [Pennsylvania] that was within about fifteen miles of Three Mile Island then I get to Nagasaki, and now I'm in Oak Ridge. (Laughter)

TINKER: There's a theme here. Well, that's a good one. I like your humor. Uh, well I think that's a good place to stop. Will, you don't have anything, do you have anything else you'd like to say for the record?

RALL: No.

BRETZ: No, thank you, I just appreciate your interest.

RALL: Thank you for talking to us.

TINKER: Well thank you, thank you for your time today.

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