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AN INTERVIEW WITH RAYMOND GRAY

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PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Raymond Gray on April 6, 2006, with Kurt Piehler and ...

KAYAN: Angelica Kayan.

PIEHLER: I'd first like to begin by talking. First tell me a little bit about your parents.

GRAY: Well, [I was] raised by my mother, my father left home long before I remember, and I was raised by my mother, an old German gal, real strict disciplinarian. In fact, that was the days when a lady walked in the room, you'd stand up. You wouldn't sit there while a lady walked in until she sat down and I was raised in that kind of childhood. A very loving mother, but very strict.

PIEHLER: When you say German, where was she born?

GRAY: She was born in Connecticut, but when she was a few months old her parents took her back to Germany, back to Oldenburg, Germany. This was late 1800s, 1890, I believe, 1889 she was born. They went back to Germany and they stayed there a few months and then they came back to the States. In those days people left Germany, came to the States, and they decided it wasn't as good as they thought it was and they went home and that wasn't as good either, so they came back.

PIEHLER: Did she speak German in the household?

GRAY: (Laughs) That's amusing, yes, she spoke German. Her mother, I never met her father, but her mother spoke fluent German, her and her brother, and she tried to teach me to speak German at home. So, being a smart, young kid, I said, "I'll never have a use for that."
(Laughter) So, then I went over and spent five years in the Army of Occupation in Germany. So momma was smarter than I was.

PIEHLER: Now you were born in Long Island in 1931. Water Mill?

GRAY: Water Mill, yes, a little town way out in Long Island.

PIEHLER: Your mother was born in Connecticut, how did your family end up in Water Mill, Long Island?

GRAY: I understand my father was a hired man on a dairy farm, so he went down there for work, and they stayed there, I don't know, a few years. But, they got divorced sometime '31, '32, something like that, probably '32, '33.

PIEHLER: So shortly after you were born?

GRAY: Yeah, she came back to Connecticut to be closer to her mother and brother.

PIEHLER: So the town you really remember, your hometown would really be Milton, Connecticut?

GRAY: Milton, Connecticut, yep.

PIEHLER: So Long Island is just the place you were born at. When was the first time you met your father?

GRAY: I was, I don't know, five or six years old, and he came around to see me and my brother and he brought us a bicycle. And that's the only time, I don't know what transpired between him and my mother, but we got a new bicycle and he left and never heard from him again.

PIEHLER: At all? Even when you were an adult?

GRAY: Nope.

PIEHLER: Did you ever find out what happened to him?

GRAY: Didn't care. He left us so why should I care?

PIEHLER: Your mother, did she work after your father left?

GRAY: She did housework and so forth, this was in the 30s. Y'all are too young to remember those days in the Depression. She would do work, housework, and she'd get a little money and maybe a little food and some clothing that she could cut down and sew for us to wear. I swore when I got big enough to earn some money that I would not wear knicker pants again.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) Where did you live? Did you live with your grandmother or did you?

GRAY: No, we lived, the times I remember, we lived in Milton. My mother bought that house, I'm trying to say 1933.

PIEHLER: So she was able to buy a house? And did your house have electricity?

GRAY: No, not for a number of years. Some time when I was up ten, twelve years old we got electricity.

PIEHLER: What about running water?

GRAY: Yeah, a spring, tenth of a mile down the road, we'd run down and get it. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: When did you get indoor plumbing in the house? Were you living at home?

GRAY: We got a well put in, it must have been in the mid-40s.

PIEHLER: Oh okay, during the war? Or was it after the war?

GRAY: It might have been during the war. She started working in an airplane factory, making seat cushions, and I guess she had enough money then to put a down payment on some plumbing.

PIEHLER: What factory—where was the factory that your mother worked in? Do you remember?

GRAY: I'm trying to say McCarter's in Bantam, Connecticut. I believe it was McCarter's.

PIEHLER: It's been a while, so I understand. How long did she work in the factory?

GRAY: A number of years during the war.

PIEHLER: Did she stay in the factory after the war?

GRAY: For a while, yeah, but not real long, no.

PIEHLER: After she stopped the factory job, did work? Did she go back to cleaning houses as a maid?

GRAY: I believe I had left home at that time, I left home in what, '47?

PIEHLER: Mmhmm. Was she still working at the factory when you left home?

GRAY: I believe she was, yeah.

PIEHLER: When your mother was working in the factory and you weren't at school, who looked after you?

GRAY: Nobody, we looked after ourselves. We lived out in the country, we'd run the woods and tried to stay out of trouble.

KAYAN: Now, was it just you and your brother and sister, is that correct?

GRAY: Well, just me and my brother, my sister, she's about ten years older, she went off and got married when she was about fifteen. [She] married a draft-dodger so he wouldn't have to go to war. So she got married then.

PIEHLER: So she married someone to get out of the 1940 draft?

GRAY: Sometime during the war, yeah. I can't remember just what years it was.

PIEHLER: How did that marriage do, your sister's marriage?

GRAY: Well, she had four children, and she finally left him after, I don't know, I guess after the children were all grown.

PIEHLER: Could you tell a little bit about your brother? It sounds like you played quite a bit in the woods. You mentioned playing in the woods.

GRAY: Oh we did real good, yeah. I've got a scar up here on my eye where he hit me with a hoe, no he hit me with an ax, that's what it was, an ax, and I had a hoe, he was bigger than I was, so he has a scar here from the hoe. But we got along good together, we had an understanding. (Laughter) But he was a year and a half older, and of course at that age that makes a lot of difference, running with a different crowd and so forth. But we got along fairly good. We had a few outs later in life and I didn't see him for a number of years and he came back for my birthday last year, we had a big get together for about a week and told lies and drank beer and whatever. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit about Milton as a town?

GRAY: Well, the name comes from Mill Town, they used to have a sheer shop that made scissors, had a sleigh shop, they had a grist mill, of course all of these were closed down. The grist mill was still there, we used to love to climb through the rafters. The sleigh shop was on the land that my mother bought, all it was a granite foundation there. The sheer shop, all that that was left of that was the dam, which has since been washed out. But the old mill, we used to play in that all the time, and just climb around the rafters, had a good time. But that's been torn down and gone. Used to have a mill pond there, and we'd go out in the wintertime and they'd be cutting ice out of the pond, the farmers, for the icehouse, and [when] we got a little bit bigger, we'd earn a dime or so helping them out. We had skating parties and a bonfire on the ice and all that good stuff. That pond is since gone, they tore the dam down.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you spent a lot of time outside?

GRAY: Oh, yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: What else did you do for fun growing up?

GRAY: Well, we kind of made our own fun I guess. We had plenty of work to do, we had our chores to do around the house, but really I never got into sports. The school I went to there [were] nineteen kids in eight grades the year I graduated. So there weren't enough kids to play any real sports, [we'd] chase a girl through the woods or something, but ... that's still fun to do. But we had very little sports.

PIEHLER: I mean, nineteen children in eight grades is a small school by any ...

GRAY: With one teacher and she was teaching her third generation.

KAYAN: Wow.

GRAY: And no matter how big the boys were, if they misbehaved, she'd get a ruler and crack 'em across the knuckles. You'd go home and you'd try to eat supper like this and mother'd say, "Turn your hand over," she'd say, "What'd you do in school today?" And then you'd get another whipping. (Laughter) I always got two whippings, one from the teacher and one at home.

PIEHLER: Did you have a radio in the house?

GRAY: No.

PIEHLER: Did you get a newspaper?

GRAY: Uh, I don't think so. I know after I left home my mother started writing for a newspaper, a correspondent from the little village in Milton, and ...

PIEHLER: What newspaper did she write for?

GRAY: *The Litchfield Enquirer*. And she went, being a thrifty old German, she tried to go all year long and live off the few dollars a week she made off that column. She'd buy her seeds for the garden and all that, and she did it all summer long, lived off just what she made off that little column, a few dollars a week.

PIEHLER: So she would grow her own food? It sounds like you grew a lot of your food you would eat growing up.

GRAY: We had a good size garden, yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you have any livestock?

GRAY: No.

PIEHLER: Just that garden?

GRAY: I did raise, one year I bought a couple of pigs and raised them just to make a few dollars extra. My mother had the garden, I never will forget when she was, she was seventy-two when she died, she must have been up in her sixties, she would go out to dig the garden, she'd dig a row or two by hand and plant that. The next day or two, when she got rested up, she'd go dig another row or two and plant it. She was a worker.

PIEHLER: How often did you get to go to the movies when you were growing up? And where would you go for a movie? Milton didn't have a movie theater?

GRAY: No, we'd go to bands and movies, it was about five miles away. One adult and a whole bunch of kids would walk down to the movies, ten cents for the movies, five cents for the popcorn. We'd walk down and walk back. But we always had an adult to kind of watch us to see that the girls behaved themselves. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Your mother didn't have a car then?

GRAY: She had a car, yeah. She got that, I guess, when she divorced her husband, an old '29 Chevy.

PIEHLER: How long did she keep the car?

GRAY: She kept that until early in the war. She had a job in the factory and one of the local boys was going in the army and he had a '38 Chevy and she bought that somehow. Me and my brother tried to tear up that old '29 Chevy, we had a great time running over stone walls and everything else with it. (Laughter) Oh, it was great.

PIEHLER: How did you like school? And what was your favorite subject?

GRAY: Well, I didn't like school. (Laughs) My worst subject was spelling, I still can't spell. My mother used to get all kind of laughs about the way I spell, and my wife does, too. Spell stuff while they're laughing about it. For some reason I just never learned to spell. But favorite, I was real good in math, I don't know whether it was my favorite or not, but I was real good in math. Geography I liked. Went for one year of high school, knew more than the teachers did, so I quit. Worked on the farm about six months, worked in the factory about six months, and then I wanted to get away from home and joined the army [at] seventeen.

PIEHLER: Why didn't you like high school?

GRAY: I knew more than the teachers did. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I'm curious, your grandmother was alive when you were growing up ...

GRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Any other relatives? Did they live nearby?

GRAY: Uh, her son, my uncle lived with her, and it was ten miles away I guess.

PIEHLER: Did you have any relatives in Germany that your mother or grandmother stayed in touch with?

GRAY: My mother did, yeah. She'd get occasional letters from them, and most of them were begging for money or something. I remember seeing one of the letters they wrote during the war when paper was scarce, I guess, they'd write and they'd turn the paper sideways and write

crossways across the lines to save paper, and she said it was very legible. They were very careful to write very legible. I wish I'd have saved that one, but it's gone.

PIEHLER: Did you ever meet any of your family when you were on occupation duty?

GRAY: No. I did have an uncle, I heard, one of the German astronauts, by the name Ockles or Ocles. He was a, I don't know, distant cousin or something, he was a German astronaut. But I never met him. I might add on the education before we get off on that ...

PIEHLER: No, no, please do.

GRAY: In 1950 over in Germany when I first got there, I went in the education center and studied, took my GED [General Education Development], sent it back to Litchfield, Connecticut, and got my GED through that. And then later on, I got a little smarter and started going to college. Fifteen years, five different universities, I finally got my degree from Southern Miss.

PIEHLER: Yeah, because you went to University of Maryland, Troy State, University of Nevada, University of Southern Mississippi?

GRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Since you brought it up, the educational center, where you went for your GED, how much studying did you do for your GED? Did you take any coursework at the center?

GRAY: I could have taken the courses, but I didn't need to, I passed without a problem.

PIEHLER: You passed them, so you didn't need to refresh or ...

GRAY: In fact, that should be the education center right over here.

KAYAN: Oh really?

PIEHLER: Oh okay, in the picture that you—so you essentially just took the test?

GRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Going back to growing up in Milton, how far had you traveled before you joined the army?

GRAY: Oh, probably twenty-five, thirty miles from home.

PIEHLER: So you had never been say to Boston or New York?

GRAY: No. We did, one summer, we had an uncle that lived in Seaford, Delaware, and one summer, probably in the 40s, me and my brother hitchhiked down there to Delaware and spent a

week or so with him. I don't know if they gave us a ride home or not, but I know we hitchhiked down there.

PIEHLER: Your mother and ...

GRAY: No, just my brother and I, yeah.

PIEHLER: You just—how old were you?

GRAY: Well, in the middle of the 40s I would have been what? Ten, twelve years old, something like that.

PIEHLER: And that's the only time you sort of left your immediate ...

GRAY: Yep. My uncle and grandmother lived, I'd say, about ten miles away, and we would go over there for Thanksgiving or Christmas. We would plan days ahead of time to go over there.

PIEHLER: That was the big trip?

GRAY: That was the big trip, yeah. We'd plan days ahead of time to go over there, and my uncle at that time had a fairly big house and, he was a bachelor, I don't know what he had a house for, but he always put up a Christmas tree and had real candles on the Christmas tree. It was really a nice Christmas to remember.

PIEHLER: Growing up, did your mother and you and your brother attend any church?

GRAY: Mmhmm.

PIEHLER: Which denomination?

GRAY: Episcopal Church.

PIEHLER: Episcopal, not a Lutheran?

GRAY: No, there was a congregational church in town and we'd go there for Sunday school, the Episcopal Church was too small to have one. But I've been Episcopalian all my life. In the military I visited about every kind of church there was from the snake handlers on down and I always gravitate back to the Episcopal Church. Funny thing up there though in the winter time, a big old church that was built back in 1810, and no heat in it, in the wintertime they'd have Episcopal Church at various people's houses. [It was] a big thrill for us, on Sunday morning, the preacher had a big '38 Plymouth and we'd get to ride in the trunk on the way to church. That was it, me and my brother get the trunk. (Laughter) So we were always ready for church.

PIEHLER: Do you have any questions at this part?

KAYAN: I do, if you don't mind.

PIEHLER: Please do, please do.

KAYAN: I'm just curious if, when your mother was working and it was just you and your brother at home, did either of you during school work also?

GRAY: Well, we'd get our schoolwork done.

KAYAN: Did you have jobs?

GRAY: Not at that time, no. We were too young then. This was, what, in the early war? I would have been what, eight? Seven, eight, nine years old. No, we—I did go out with my mother, I remember [there was] an old lady named Ms. McCackney, an old widowed lady. She had been a nurse maid for some rich family and they left her enough money to live off of, and my mother would go clean house for her. The first job I ever had was weeding her flower garden for five cents an hour. I'd be weeding the flower garden and she'd say, "Oh, I see a four leaf clover," and I'd have to stop weeding and go look for that four leaf clover. (Laughter) I thought it was great, five cents an hour.

KAYAN: You were only ten when Pearl Harbor occurred, is that right?

GRAY: Mm hmm.

KAYAN: Do you remember any of that? Was that talked about at home in the beginning of the war?

GRAY: No.

KAYAN: Did your mother ever talk to you kids about politics or government?

GRAY: No, no. Well, see, her brothers—she had an older brother that was in the First World War, and during the Second World War her brothers were all too old for the service. So, of course it didn't really concern—I remember V-E Day [Victory in Europe Day], but not the day the war started, Pearl Harbor, no.

PIEHLER: What do you remember about V-E Day?

GRAY: Big party in town. I was working—living in a hotel over there with another guy and working in the factory, and so that came down victory and we just went to town and celebrated all night long. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: That was V-E Day?

GRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What about V-J Day [Victory in Japan Day]? Was there a similar, or you don't remember?

GRAY: I don't remember, no, I think we got all partied out on V-E Day. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You started working in the factory, this was in 1945, when you were fifteen?

GRAY: No, I would have been sixteen.

PIEHLER: Sixteen, okay. What factory was it again?

GRAY: Fitzgerald Manufacturing Company, gasket factory. And from there I went to the Torrington factory, made needle bearings, and twenty years later I found some of the Torrington needle bearings in a jeep, in the front end of a jeep, because I was a real vehicle mechanic for a while.

PIEHLER: How was the pay at these two jobs? How much would you get paid an hour, do you remember?

GRAY: I don't remember. I worked night shift in the bearing factory because they paid five cents an hour more or something for the night shift, so I worked night shift to make a little more.

PIEHLER: Were either one of these factories unionized?

GRAY: I believe that needle bearing factory was unionized. I never joined the union.

PIEHLER: You never did join?

GRAY: Nope, I was too stubborn. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And you went to high school after you worked in the factory? Just so I get the chronology right.

GRAY: No, I was in high school first.

PIEHLER: Okay, what year were you in high school?

GRAY: What did I do?

PIEHLER: What year did you start high school?

GRAY: Good Lord, I don't know.

KAYAN: We may have had that in here [the information packet]. 1936, maybe?

GRAY: No, '36 is when I started grade school.

KAYAN: '46?

GRAY: Probably. '46-'47.

KAYAN: And then you got your GED in Germany in '52?

GRAY: That was in '50s yeah. I just started in high school, I don't remember if I went the whole year or not, I don't really remember.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like you could get a job pretty easily without a high school diploma at different factories?

GRAY: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, I came off the farm; I had been working on the farm quite a bit. Went there to the factory, I know this Fitzgerald, the gasket company, about four of us boys went in there to apply for a job at the same time, I got hired. I found out later these other four were city boys and I had come off the farm.

PIEHLER: And they liked that?

GRAY: Yeah, I mean, usually the farm boys would work, which I still believe in doing.

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit about the farm you were working on and what you were doing?

GRAY: It was a dairy farm, one of the largest dairy farms around there, and the old boy was—I learned more on that job than I have on any other one job in my life. We learned everything there, from mechanic work, taking care of the livestock, pulling calves, whatever, learned a little bit of everything. Handling the crops, you know, and taking care of things.

PIEHLER: And you lived on the farm?

GRAY: I lived at home. Two or three miles, I'd just ride my bicycle up there. I worked there weekends and summers until I quit school. I quit school and worked there a few months before I went over to the factory.

PIEHLER: It sounds like the pay was better at the factory.

GRAY: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was getting—full time at the farm, I was getting \$25 a week, plus I'd get three meals a day. Of course, a young boy, I'd eat breakfast at home, get to work at six o'clock in the morning, do the milking, have breakfast, work in the field 'til noon, have dinner, go in there about five o'clock, have supper, go milk the cows and I'd go home, get home about seven or eight o'clock, mother would have another supper for me. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But it doesn't sound like you put on a lot of weight.

GRAY: You're working, keep moving, and I'd be riding my bicycle back and forth. And, of course, in those days, out in the country, you could drive a tractor on the highway and nobody would say anything because they knew you were working the farm. One year I got ambitious, I was going to plant potatoes and I borrowed the tractor, took it home, drove that two or three miles home, plowed the field up, and took the tractor back the next day when I went to work, and nobody thought anything about it.

PIEHLER: Did you actually plant the potatoes?

GRAY: Oh, yeah, yeah, I planted the potatoes. I made a few dollars, I forget how it did go.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of becoming a farmer?

GRAY: No, the few months on the farm was about ... (Laughter) Nope.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of staying in either one of the factories? What made you leave the one factory and then the other factory?

GRAY: Well, I got more pay in the other factory.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so the other one was a raise.

GRAY: Yeah, and, uh, I don't know, I was just restless. I was seventeen years old and, looking back on it, a boy that I went to school with, went through all eight grades together with, he stayed home, went to high school, pillar of the community, got a job as a desk clerk in a trucking company and when I did go home, I'd see him, after fifteen, twenty years, nothing to talk about. He'd go up to Maine or New Hampshire once a year on a week, two week's vacation and then back there at that same job. That's all he ever did. Deacon in the church and pillar of the community, all that good stuff; I enjoyed my life better. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So it sounds like your decision to join the Army had a lot to do with just ...

GRAY: Get away.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you described it, ten miles was the big trip, going to your uncle's house was the big ...

GRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Why the Army? Why not the Navy or Air Force, initially? Or the Marine Corps or Coast Guard?

GRAY: Simple story. All my life I wanted to go in the Coast Guard. So, I go over there, at that time you had to be eighteen with a high school education, I didn't have it. So I said, "Well, the Air Force sounds pretty good," got to be eighteen with a high school education. I knew I didn't want the Marines, and I went to the Navy and they said, "Yeah, we'll take you at seventeen

without the education, but a six months waiting list.” Seventeen years old, you don’t want to wait six months. I’m walking out of the Post Office and an old Army sergeant says, “What’s the matter, son, you look downhearted?” (Laughs) So, that’s how I got in the Army. And after nine years in the Army, I learned enough to get out and get in the Air Force. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Since you raised that, why do you say that with a smile? It’s always interesting to interview someone that’s been in two different services. I’ve interviewed several people who have been in the Navy and then go in the Air Force and they ...

GRAY: I think the reason I enjoyed it, especially constabulary, that was a spit and polish outfit. We’d go out on maneuvers and we’d come in in the tanks, we’d wash them and sanitize them before we ever went to the barracks. We just—everything had to be perfect, and I enjoyed it, I grew up under strict conditions and I thought was—that felt good.

PIEHLER: But you still liked the Air Force better?

GRAY: Well, I had my five years in Germany, had some old fuddy-duddy colonel who says, “You boys are Americans, you’re going to want to go home, no more extensions.” So, they shipped me home. I got to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and I was in the intelligence then, and all we did then was go to school all the time, and that got boring. So I went and cross-trained into helicopters. I flew helicopters for a while and then I found out the Air Force, I could go in in-grade and get over there some place where you didn’t have parades every Saturday morning. (Laughter) So I got out of the Army Friday night and sworn in the Air Force Saturday morning.

PIELHER: (Laughs) One night a civilian.

GRAY: (Laughs) Yeah.

PIEHLER: Well, backing up, this old sergeant got you into the Army when you found out, you know, you couldn’t get into the Navy in time and the Coast Guard was closed off. How soon after you signed up did you actually go into the Army? How many days?

GRAY: Within a week or so.

PIEHLER: Where did you report for your induction physical?

GRAY: Where? Hartford [Connecticut]. In fact, I guess, as I remember, I went to Torrington, which is where the recruiting office was, and I think they put me on a bus, or gave me a bus ticket or something, to Hartford and we were on our own. My mother told that recruiting sergeant, [she] said, “At least I know where he’ll be for the next three years.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you reported to Hartford for your induction physical. What do you remember about the induction?

GRAY: We went from there up to Fort Devens, Mass [Massachusetts], I took my basic up at Fort Devens. And, I don’t know, I came off the farm, so it didn’t bother me, twenty mile hikes

with full field pack and that kind of stuff. I'd laugh at these city boys who had trouble making it. Then you'd go through the line and get your shots, a narrow hallway with medics on each side, got about five or six shots at a time. [You'd] see these great big six foot six dudes passing out. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: How many people in your basic training unit, how many were volunteers like yourself and how many were draftees?

GRAY: They were all volunteers. This was the '48 peace time army, all volunteers.

PIEHLER: So you didn't have any draftees?

GRAY: No. I was in the last class of the eighteen weeks basic, after that they felt sorry for the boys and cut it to eight weeks. We had eighteen weeks of it.

PIEHLER: And your drill instructors, how many of them were vets from World War II?

GRAY: All of them were.

PIEHLER: What do you remember about them?

GRAY: I remember they were strict, but that didn't bother me. The thing I always liked about the military, twenty-eight years, you always knew where you stood. You knew what was right and what was wrong, you knew what you could do and what you could get away with. Discipline to me was easy, no problem, I never did have any problem with it.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you liked the Army?

GRAY: Oh, yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: I mean very early, as you said basic training wasn't a problem, a lot of it was like working on the farm. Was there anything particularly difficult in terms of basic training? The physical training wasn't hard. How did you do with rifle training?

GRAY: No. I did pretty good, I never had too much shooting practice at home, my mother really didn't like guns too well. But I didn't have any problem with that, and we had a lot of little aggravation, like Sergeant got mad at us one time, the barracks weren't clean, so we got down there at night with a toothbrush scrubbing the floors, old wooden floors, go out and mow the lawn with razor blades. But, whatever you did, you didn't do it again. You learned one time too much.

PIEHLER: You mentioned, some of the city boys, the long walks they didn't like. Did anyone not make it through basic training with you?

GRAY: A few of them, yeah. A few of them physically couldn't make it. They always gave them a ticket back home.

PIEHLER: Were there any sort of sad sacks? For example, I've read that in some units during basic training, there's the guy who wouldn't take showers and had to be convinced to shower.

GRAY: Oh, we had one of them, yeah. That old GI lye soap and GI brush, we gave him a shower one time and he'd take showers after that no problem. And, of course, he'd go screaming for a sergeant, and Sergeant [would say], "I don't know what you're talking about." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: After basic training where did you go to next?

GRAY: I went to Fort Meade, Maryland. [I] went down there, I was put in the 3rd Armored Cavalry, I was on tanks then, and stayed there a year or so, went to tank school at Fort Knox [Kentucky] and went back there to Fort Meade, Maryland, 3rd Armored Cav. When I had joined up, I told the recruiting sergeant I wanted to be a diesel mechanic. So by then I had a couple years in the army and I started pushing a little bit, and I went and told the first sergeant that I had signed up and I wanted to be a diesel mechanic. So he said, "Okay, we'll put papers in for you." A week later I got orders for Germany. (Laughter) That's when I got in the 6th Armored Cav. and Constabulary.

PIEHLER: How long were you at Fort Meade? Do you remember?

GRAY: Well, I got out of basic training probably around early December, middle December, so I was there until, that would have been '47, '49, I guess because June of '50 is when I went to Germany. The day the Korean War started, I was in Fort Dix, New Jersey with orders for Germany. That night all the rumors floating around, they put us on a boat the next morning and all the rumors, all the sailors, everybody, "We went through the canal last night, you're going to Korea."

PIEHLER: But you never did?

GRAY: Nope, never did.

KAYAN: Did you think, at that time, that you would be going to Korea?

GRAY: It really didn't worry me, I'd just, I'd been trained, and it didn't worry me.

PIEHLER: When you reported to Fort Meade, how much additional training did you get?

GRAY: Well, we trained in the tanks, tank driving, tank gunnery, I think we went up to Fort Hill, Virginia for tank gunnery training. I went to Fort Knox for the mechanic school, in that one school I got more college credit from that one school than I did from any other one military school. That's how I got a lot of my degree was by the military schools.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. What position did you have in the tank?

GRAY: Oh a driver some, and then I got a little more rank to be tank commander. But we did a little bit of everything, we'd all take turns firing the guns and driving.

PIEHLER: In your unit, were there any veterans from the war, World War II?

GRAY: Oh, yeah, yeah, there were a lot of them in there.

PIEHLER: What did they ever tell you about combat?

GRAY: I never talked too much about it.

PIEHLER: Really?

GRAY: Yeah. When I came up for discharge, in '51, I had three years in at that time, I had the choice of reenlisting or taking the Truman year, which is a one year involuntary extension, and I talked to the old timers, "Sarge, how long you been in?" He'd say, "Well, if I hadn't have got out," that's the way it always started, "If I hadn't have got out, 'til many years." And I had a brother and brother-in-law back in the states, full time jobs in the factory, part time job driving a truck. And I said, "I had one job, I'm living in Germany, buying beer for twenty-five cents a liter." I reenlisted.(laughs) "Give me six more."

PIEHLER: So you signed up for six more?

GRAY: Yeah. My reenlistment bonus was \$360 for six years, now they get twenty or thirty thousand dollars for reenlisting. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: You mentioned you wanted to be a diesel mechanic ...

GRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Why a diesel mechanic?

GRAY: I'd been a mechanic all my life, and that was something a little different.

PIEHLER: So you had grown up fixing things, it sounds like?

GRAY: Oh, yeah, yeah. I had bicycles spread out on the kitchen table and I still always work on fixing things.

PIEHLER: Did you work on your mother's car when you were growing up?

GRAY: I don't think she'd let us. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How often did you get off of base during basic? Did you ever get off base when you were at Fort Devens?

GRAY: Uh, I think, if I remember correctly that we got about a week's leave, because I've got a picture around Christmas time with me and my mother, around Christmas time. I was slicked

sleeved and right out of basic, no ribbons. (Laughs) So, I believe we had about a week's vacation.

PIEHLER: Now what about Fort Meade, when you were stationed at Fort Meade did you ever, say, get into Washington, D.C.?

GRAY: No, we'd go to Baltimore, that was fun.

PIEHLER: Why Baltimore?

GRAY: Baltimore, that's where all the good joints were to go to, where the girls hung out. (Laughter) Of course, we had USO [United Service Organizations] dances during basic, they'd come to the service club. One thing I remember at Fort Meade, come the end of the month, a lot of the guys wouldn't have twenty-five cents to go to the movies, so they'd want to borrow twenty-five cents. I'd get twenty-five, fifty cents back at pay day, which is totally illegal, but uh ... (Laughs)

GRAY: I made up my mind then, my old stubborn German background, I would never go broke. I would sit around the barracks with twenty-five cents in my pocket, but I didn't go spend it at the movies, and I still stick to that. I will not go broke. If I can't afford to buy it, I ain't going to get it. I'm not going to pay somebody all these finance charges and all that stuff. (Laughter) Stubborn.

PIEHLER: Do you have a question about Fort Meade or basic (to Kayan)?

KAYAN: I don't think so.

PIEHLER: Now, you mentioned you were there at Fort Dicks, ready to go to Germany with orders and rumors were flying even when you're on the boat ...

GRAY: Let me add, Fort Meade, that was a big training base there and close to D.C. and Baltimore, but it was mainly an armored cavalry, course didn't have the horses anymore, a few of them, the officers played with the horses, but it was mainly tank training, what that was.

PIEHLER: Where did you arrive when you arrived in Europe? Where did you report to?

GRAY: Bremerhaven.

PIEHLER: You had some knowledge of Germany with your parents, your mother and grandmother, what did you expect to find in Germany? Did you have any impressions?

GRAY: No, I had no idea, no expectations; I was just doing what I was told to do. One of the first things I remember, we bought cigarettes on the ship for ninety cents a carton, and we get there and these Germans are going to do us a favor and give us three dollars for that ninety cent carton of cigarettes, oh, we thought we were doing good. We found out later it was ten dollars for a carton, not three dollars. (Laughter) But, live and learn.

PIEHLER: How much structure of the war did you see?

GRAY: A lot of it, yeah. In, of course, Munich, they took all the rubble from the bombed out buildings and built a big mound, had a church service with a cross and everything on top, because there were pieces of people in there, and I remember that. The big thing I remember that a lot of people don't like, in Germany they were building back this was 5, 7 years after the war. I went through France a couple times on military duty, you'd see ruins from the First World War that hadn't been touched, and that didn't make me happy. But yeah, Germans are very industrious people, really hard working, hard building back, really worked.

PIEHLER: Now you were stationed in Straubing?

GRAY: Straubing, mm hmm.

PIEHLER: For your entire ...

GRAY: No, I was in Straubing for, I don't know, probably four out of five years. But, I just wanted greener pastures and I put in for Russian language school. I went to six months over to Oberammergau, Russian language, and I was sent from there, I was in Stuttgart a few months and then went to Kastl, which is in the northern most section part of the American sector.

PIEHLER: How did you do with Russian?

GRAY: I was doing good 'til I got up there. My mechanical experience, nobody else knew anything about vehicles, we had three sedans, two jeeps, and a truck, nobody else knew anything about them so I became the motor sergeant and didn't use the language much. And I still, I recognize a few words and that's it. Never used it.

PIEHLER: Going back to Straubing, could you talk—what was the week's routine like at Straubing? One of the things you mentioned earlier, there was a lot of polishing, and a lot of being polished, so that takes up a lot of time, but ...

GRAY: That was the constabulary.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GRAY: Always spit and polished, and you'd get a haircut at least once a week, if you had guard duty you'd get another haircut before you went on guard duty. But we had the company barber, [when you'd] go through the pay line, you'd put so much here in the slush fund, whatever it was, that would take care of the company barber. If you wanted to pay a guy I think maybe a dollar a month, he'd come in your room every month and shine your shoes, these German people needed the money and needed to work. But our regular routine I guess started [with] Reveille in the morning, and chow and whatever training we had that day.

PIEHLER: You mentioned the constabulary duty, could you go into a little more detail about ...

GRAY: We were the police force in Germany and we worked with the German police. So, we would go out and we would police the DPs [Displaced Persons] coming across the border, if it ain't German citizens, we would have a German policeman with us who would take care of that.

PIEHLER: And the other DPs? Who would take of those DPs?

GRAY: We would, we would take 'em and take them in and, I don't know what they did with them after that, they ...

PIEHLER: There would be a procedure for that.

GRAY: Oh, yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: Would they be taken to the military to deal with it? Or would it be ...

GRAY: The military, and they would be taken and interrogated. We were just the police.

PIEHLER: Did you have any role with any displaced persons camps while you were on constabulary?

GRAY: No. We had a lot of fun with riot control. We would get called out, there would be a riot in town, some of these young Nazi sympathizers would get a good riot going in town, so we'd go down in a V formation with M-1s with a bayonet fixed, and we would not stop. Draw a little bit of blood and that crowd would disperse in a hurry.

PIEHLER: How often were you called out for riot duty?

GRAY: I imagine I went out three, four times, I got there in '50, June '50 in constabulary ...

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

PIEHLER: I just want to keep making sure the tape's ...

KAYAN: Yep, it's good.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: These pro-Nazi riots, how much Nazi sympathizing was there in Straubing and Bavaria in general? What was your sense of that?

GRAY: A little, very little.

PIEHLER: But enough to have riots occasionally.

GRAY: Demonstrations.

PIEHLER: Demonstrations.

GRAY: Yeah. I don't think the local civilians, they wouldn't have put up with riots, now, and it might have been some communists at the same time, I don't know. Anti-American, really, is what it was.

PIEHLER: You mentioned you had some stories ...

GRAY: Yeah, we, of course, our main job was patrolling along the Iron Curtain, and we would go up and down there, catching DPs coming across and so forth, but also we'd go up the road. There was a barbed wire across the road, the Iron Curtain, a Russian would be on one side and we'd be on the other, well of course they couldn't speak English, we can't speak Russian, so we talked back and forth a little bit in German. They had some good Russian vodka and we had some good American cigarettes, pass it through the barbed wire to each other. We were GIs doing our job, we weren't mad at each other, it was them politicians mad at each other, we enjoyed meeting there every few days ...

PIEHLER: In trading, it sounds like the vodka was good?

GRAY: Oh yeah, good vodka. (Laughter) That was one of the things I remember, one of the fun things. Another one was the, a group of, I don't know, Communists, Nazis, some thing, had some of our boys cornered in the guest house, they weren't going to let them go. Somehow the word got back to commander, and I was the only one available, so we said, "Okay, we're going to take a tank and go down there, and we're going to break this up." I said, "What are we going to do?" He said, "You're going to drive up and stick the muzzle of that gun through the front window." And I said, "Yes, sir." (Laughs) You always do what you're told in the Army, you don't question it. We went up there and stuck the muzzle of the gun through there and them guys scattered in all directions, our men come out, jump on the tank, we backed up and went home. Now, whatever come of that, I don't know, of course I imagine the government paid for the building, but, our men got out without getting hurt. We thought it was funny, (laughs) I wish I had a picture of it.

PIEHLER: What was the attitude of German civilians, particularly when you were, I mean Straubing is a small town, what was the attitude of German civilians toward American GIs?

GRAY: Very good, very good. They respect the military, they respected us as military. Maybe they didn't like us, but they respected us. And also they liked our money. And, there was something else there—oh yeah, you never talked to a German who had fought on the American front, they all had fought on the Russian front. That was good timing, they were told that, so there was never any problem. I might have had a brother or father killed, you know, on the American front, so none of them ever fought on the American front, they all fought over on the Russian front.

PIEHLER: It almost sounds like that was the standard line.

GRAY: Yeah, yeah. And they had a name of towns along the eastern front where they were fighting, which I thought was great.

PIEHLER: You weren't skeptical of that, sort of ...

GRAY: It didn't take me long to figure it out, but, I thought it was a pretty good idea. Might save a little bit of fisticuffs.

PIEHLER: What did you do for fun, you mentioned the beer was twenty-five cents a liter, what else did you do for fun, the exchanges of vodka with Soviet troops, what else?

GRAY: Oh, we had the service club there, I did a lot of pictures, photo developing, take pictures, develop photos. The service club had bus trips, probably every weekend, going someplace. I went up to Heidelberg, no not Heidelberg, that's over in the western part, Valhalla, that big historic, I guess they have like, what, busts of all the famous people. We went up there and spend quite a bit of time up there taking pictures. So, we'd just take bus trips around here and there.

PIEHLER: Did you ever get outside of Germany while you were stationed in Germany? Did you ever get to, say, Italy or France—well you mentioned some military trips.

KAYAN: Yeah, England you said, right? England?

GRAY: Well, that was after I got out of constabulary. In constabulary, no, we stayed pretty much where we were.

PIEHLER: After you got out of constabulary where did you go? Did you just stay in Straubing?

GRAY: No, I went up to school in Oberammergau and then went from there to Stuttgart for a few months and then up to northern Germany, up in Kastl. And there I got in a Russian language team, demonstration team, we had the Russian uniforms and Russian weapons, and we would go show those in theaters to the troops. We went down to Trieste [Italy] with that troop, they sent us down there, they sent us over to England, and we went through France for some reason, I remember going through Paris and Lyon, France. I don't think we had any troops over there to demonstrate for, I don't know what we were doing there.

PIEHLER: And so you would demonstrate what the Soviet army was like, what their equipment was like and ...

GRAY: Yeah, but we'd talk a little bit. There again we had some fun, the base commander found out we were coming, he went to our commander and said, "See how far your boys can get off base without getting caught," which we did. (Laughter) We got on base and a couple of us went to the BX [Base Exchange] and a couple more went into the finance office and finally they called the MPs [Military Police] on us. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you would be in Soviet uniforms, with Soviet style weapons?

GRAY: Well, we didn't carry the weapons in, no, we just ...

PIEHLER: So you could just get onto base and no one would stop you?

GRAY: Yeah, we could get on base, yeah.

PIEHLER: That sounds like that wasn't a problem.

GRAY: (Laughs) Well, we just went on like we were supposed to be there.

PIEHLER: So no one stopped you?

GRAY: No.

PIEHLER: Even when they were on guard duty?

GRAY: Yeah, they let us in. We'd go up there and they'd wave us through. We were in a government vehicle, I think we had a government sedan, so that looked official. (Laughs) When we got out there and started walking around the base ...

PIEHLER: People just ...

GRAY: ... we even had some of the young boys saluting us. Well, they didn't know what rank it was, that was fun. Course, they caught us and took us down to the jailhouse. (Laughs) Our commander went to the base commander and said, "Let's get 'em out of jail."

PIEHLER: How big was this team you were on?

GRAY: About five of us I think.

PIEHLER: How many officers, how many enlisted?

GRAY: We had two, we had a major and a lieutenant, and then three of us sergeants, so about five us, yeah.

PIEHLER: So, all had rank. NCO rank or ...

GRAY: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: What was the expertise of the major and the two officers?

GRAY: I don't know what career field they were in. See, I came out of the armored ...

PIEHLER: And then had this language training.

GRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I'm just kind of curious, the expertise of the officers, but you don't know.

GRAY: No, I don't know.

KAYAN: Did you ever get to Berlin during your time there?

GRAY: Not until just a few years ago I took a tour through there. No, didn't get there, no. In fact, the Berlin airlift was over before I got to Germany. It was what, '47?

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

GRAY: '46, '47? It was over before I got there.

PIEHLER: Now you were in the army when the army started to integrate.

GRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What do you remember about that process?

GRAY: I remember anything that happened the white guys were wrong and the black guys were right, no matter what happened, and it was very uncomfortable for quite a few years. I guess after five years or so it settled down.

PIEHLER: When did your unit get its first black GI? Do you remember ...

GRAY: We didn't have any in constabulary, we were starting to get them in Fort Meade, Maryland, '48-'49 we started to get them.

PIEHLER: But your constabulary unit was all white?

GRAY: Yeah, mm hmm. It was pretty much a hand-picked outfit. We didn't discriminate, we just, they were picked for their military bearing.

PIEHLER: Did you ever think you would go to—the Korean War starts when you're going overseas to Germany, did you ever think you'd get redeployed?

GRAY: No, because we were busy over there. We could volunteer for Korea and they'd give you thirty days delay en route, which is unpaid—you get paid but it's not leave time, there's free leave time, you get thirty days at home and then go to Korea. We had one guy in the outfit that did volunteer for that, and I don't know what happened to him, we never heard from him again.

PIEHLER: But you decided not to.

GRAY: No, I just was buying beer for twenty-five cents a liter, I just liked where I was at.

PIEHLER: What else did you like, it sounds like you liked the duty a lot and you liked being in Germany?

GRAY: I liked the discipline. I like to know where I stand and what's right and wrong. That's really what I liked about it, it was very strict, that outfit there. I got in the Air Force later and they were real 'lax and I didn't like that. I like the eight to five job instead of the five to six job in the Army and parades on weekends.

PIEHLER: So the Air Force was a lot more 'lax?

GRAY: Oh yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you pick up any German?

GRAY: We picked up what we called Schlafzimmer Deutsch. Do you know what that is?
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: Sleeping German.

GRAY: That's the way we all referred to it, we picked up enough German, you know, to talk to people. If we could make ourselves understood and they could make themselves understood, if they wanted to. If they wanted to snow us, they could. But one thing we used to do on the weekends, when we got a little more rank and got a car, we'd go off to these little towns, away from the base, and get what we called Wurstplatte, a meat plate with all these cold cuts that they made themselves. Go there and they'd have their own beer, their own brewery, they had these hard rolls, and that was our big deal, go off there, drink a few beers and try all this different meat they had. It was real great.

PIEHLER: How much dating occurred between Germans and GIs? Any marriages come out, in your unit?

GRAY: Quite a few out of my unit, yeah. I almost got married and then I got better sense.
(Laughs)

PIEHLER: Were you engaged?

GRAY: No, I was just living with a girl over there, yeah, like all the GIs did.

PIEHLER: So there was a lot of ...

GRAY: When I first got there in '50 there was a little bit of non-fraternization.

PIEHLER: Still the sense that you shouldn't fraternize.

GRAY: But it eased off and more and more of them were getting married then, and it eased off and by the time '52, when the sort of disbanded, it was wide open.

PIEHLER: Did you live on base the whole time or did you live off base?

GRAY: No, I lived on base, until I got in the intelligence outfit up in Kastl. There, we had a small house, about half a dozen officers and about twenty enlisted men in a private home. So, they didn't have that much room and they were glad to let us live off base. And I had a girlfriend there, so. I lived in a room in the town mayor's house, so any extra gasoline I had, he was all ready to buy it.

PIEHLER: You mentioned this, sort of, story about trading with the Soviets, did you expect that the Soviets could attack?

GRAY: Never occurred to me.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you didn't give them ...

GRAY: We were ready, we were prepared, the Cold War training, we were ready, but it didn't occur to me. Back home, my mother, my family, were so worried about me over there in the Iron Curtain. I say, we were just having a ball.

PIEHLER: Did you ever tell your mother the story about trading with the Soviets?

GRAY: Oh yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: And what did she think about this whole ...

GRAY: Well she said that it didn't seem possible that they'd do that, she thought we were fighting each other, thought we were mad at each other.

PIEHLER: And for you they were just other GIs?

GRAY: Right, just other GIs, they were doing their job, we were doing our job.

KAYAN: Was their emphasis from your commanding officers on preparation for an inevitable confrontation between you and Soviet troops?

GRAY: Well, we were continually training and we were combat ready. So, I don't know if there was that much mention made directly about the Communists, but we were combat prepared, combat trained, so we were ready.

KAYAN: So it sounds like you never actually had anything bad or any confrontations with the Soviets then, right?

GRAY: Nope.

KAYAN: Okay.

GRAY: Not even any bar room fights. (Laughter)

KAYAN: What about the German police after, when the police duties were transferred from you guys to the German police, did you still work with them?

GRAY: I don't remember ever getting real friendly with the police that went with us, because it was just a duty for them, we might be with a different one every day. They could speak English, so there wasn't any problem there, but we just didn't really get that friendly with them, didn't know them that much.

KAYAN: Were there any French or British troops down that way still?

GRAY: No.

KAYAN: Okay, they'd stayed up ...

GRAY: They had the British zones up in the North and the French zone in the West, and then the Communists over in the East.

PIEHLER: Did you go to any German churches? You mentioned earlier that you'd gone to every type of church in the military, did you go to any German?

GRAY: I've got pictures of dozens of them, inside their big, old cathedrals, two, three thousand old cathedrals, two thousand years. I've got a lot of pictures of them, but no, I never attended any services.

PIEHLER: What about on base? Did you have a chaplain?

GRAY: Oh yeah, yeah. I went a few times I guess.

PIEHLER: Now, after you had reenlisted, you didn't get to stay in Germany?

GRAY: Oh yeah, yeah, I stayed.

PIEHLER: You stayed until, when did you leave Germany?

GRAY: '55.

PIEHLER: Did you want to leave Germany?

GRAY: No, I didn't want to leave, I enjoyed it over there. Yeah, living a good life, four marks was four-twenty to the dollar and beer twenty-five cents a liter, what more could you ask for? (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Did you ever get back to the States those five years?

GRAY: No, I could have but I didn't want to. My mother was living up in Connecticut, and I'd send her home the allotment, the military allotment.

PIEHLER: So she had an allotment while you were ...

GRAY: Yeah, mm hmm.

PIEHLER: ...in the service?

GRAY: I think it was only fifty dollars a month then.

PIEHLER: Did your brother serve in the military?

GRAY: No, he was a bad boy and got in trouble, went to reform school when he was about fourteen, and he tried to get in, I think he was about sixteen, he tried to get in and they were just about to take him and then they found out how old he was. He got in a little bit of trouble off and on over his life and he's been shaped up pretty good for about the last thirty years so, got his jail time behind him.

KAYAN: Does he still up on the East Coast in the Connecticut area?

GRAY: What's that?

KAYAN: Does he still live up in the Connecticut area?

GRAY: No, he lives in Las Vegas now.

KAYAN: Oh, okay.

GRAY: Lived in California for quite a while, but he's in Las Vegas. I like his story, when he, years ago he told me how well he'd made it out in Las Vegas gambling. He went to Las Vegas with a \$5,000 Chevrolet and come home with a \$50,000 Greyhound bus. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Now you mentioned coming home from Germany, they sent you to ...

GRAY: Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

PIEHLER: And that was—you didn't care for that as much. (Laughs)

GRAY: Well, all we did was sit in school all the time. They didn't have any work for us, you know, interrogations and language use, so we just had to sit in the classroom.

PIEHLER: And what were you learning?

GRAY: Supposedly how to interrogate people and how to analyze intelligence data and so forth.

PIEHLER: It sounds like it was getting boring.

GRAY: It was, yeah. I'd been a mechanic all my life and I thought, "why don't I just get in helicopters."

KAYAN: Before we leaving Germany, can I ask you one thing?

GRAY: Yeah.

KAYAN: I'm just curious about the relationship between the enlisted men and the officers ...

GRAY: Mm hmm.

KAYAN: ... the mechanics and the pilots. What was that relationship like? Did you see any, was there a strain there?

GRAY: Very, very strict. There was "Yes sir," and "No sir," and you didn't ask any questions. You did what you were told. Just remember, follow your last order first. No, no relationship whatsoever, not like the Air Force.

KAYAN: Okay.

PIEHLER: How did you find out about the Air Force option, about being able to transfer in grade?

GRAY: Well, I knew it was possible, so I just went to the Air Force recruiter and I told him, you know, that I'd been in helicopters, and he said, "Well, you can go in in-grade, but lose timing grade toward promotions." Oh well, I still get the same pay. So, the funny thing was, my helicopter, MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], familiar with that term?

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

GRAY: [MOS] did not correspond with the Air Force. It was the propeller mechanic, the army propeller mechanic is the one that they send with the helicopter in the Air Force. So, I went back to personnel and told the personal officer I wanted to change my MOS. He said, "What for?" I said, "Well, as I'm getting discharged here in another month, Air Force will take me in helicopters if you change this." He said, "Well, the army's gonna lose you anyhow," so, he changed it. (Laughter) So, I got in helicopters.

PIEHLER: And once you joined the Air Force, where did you go?

GRAY: I went to Smyrna, Tennessee. What was the name of that base at Smyrna?

PIEHLER: I'm not sure.

GRAY: Maybe just Smyrna Air Force Base [Sewart Air Force Base]? But I went there, that was my first station, stayed there about a year flying helicopters. Then the whole outfit was sent to Myrtle Beach [South Carolina]. But while we were there, we were stepchildren on the base, we lived across the runway out in the field with the helicopters. We took advantage of that, had a little fun now and then. We watched a big watermelon patch and we said, "One day, we're going to have us some watermelons." So, they get ripe, we set the helicopter down, grab a half a dozen watermelons, go back, ice 'em down, so about the quitting time that day we were gonna have a watermelon party. About that time, the base commander pulls up, some civilian with him, (Laughter) and so they kind of interrogated us a little bit, and we said, "Yes sir, we did it, and we'll pay for them." The guy said, "No, I don't want you to pay, I just want to eat them with you," and we all sat down and had a big party. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You mentioned that the Air Force was a lot more informal, can you talk about your, sort of, first impressions of the Air Force? I guess beginning in Smyrna, when did you realize the Air Force was more informal? Particularly after coming from a constabulary, which was very spit-spot.

GRAY: Well, in the army, it was five and a half days a week, every Saturday morning was a parade. Every morning you stood Reveille at six o'clock, married men and everybody. In the Air Force, you work eight to five. Of course, helicopters, you'd work over time if you had to be flying or something, but there were parades maybe once or twice a year.

PIEHLER: And you didn't have to stand Reveille?

GRAY: No.

PIEHLER: You just showed up where you were supposed to go.

GRAY: You go to work and if you weren't there they'd slap your fingers.

PIEHLER: And you mentioned that there was a lot more formality with the officers.

GRAY: Oh yeah, yeah, especially on the flight line. You didn't salute the officers on the flight line, if you saw them off the flight line you could give them a salute, but not on the flight line. So, it was very, very informal.

PIEHLER: What about names, were you formal on the flight line? Would you call people lieutenant or captain?

GRAY: Oh yeah, yeah, we wouldn't use first names, no, we'd call them by their rank. But we'd go out there and I'd be maintaining the aircraft, the pilot knew I was going to fly with it, so he assumed I'd take care of it. He'd come out there and say, "Sarge, ready to go?" "Yes sir." He'd jump in, kick the tires, light the fires, and off we'd go.

PIEHLER: You were working in helicopters when they were still very new, I mean ...

GRAY: Yes.

PIEHLER: What was that like?

GRAY: It was the old, what we called, the bent beer can, the old H-21. They were originally Piasecki and then they changed to Veritol, a different company name, when they started making money. I was in those, let me see, I got in there, I went in the Air Force in '57, stayed there to '62 in helicopters. At that time, we were getting all these guys coming over from the Marines, the army, and everything in grade and they were taking master sergeant with no promotion, so I was still a staff sergeant. I went down to personnel and asked my buddy there, I said, "I want to go to school," he said, "Okay, what school?" I said, "What's the longest school you've got?" He said, "I've got one here for fifty-two weeks," I said, "I'll take it," he said, "You wanna know what it is?" I said, "No, I'll take it." It was computer maintenance, so I was in electronic maintenance for my last fourteen years, well, yeah I guess, from the '60s to '76 when I retired. Yeah, fourteen years.

PIEHLER: And you were getting into computers, much like the helicopter, when it was still relatively new, compared to what ...

GRAY: They were relatively new, yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah. How was the course?

GRAY: Well, electronic, It's uh, as I look back it's real simple. You just follow the electrical current through the circuit and, if it didn't get there, you knew something was wrong. When I started out the computer I was on was the old T2. And it would uh, the unit was probably as wide as this room is and six times as long. Vacuum tube, great big cards, vacuum tube cards, you'd pull them out and you'd repair them yourself. No transistors or anything, it was all just vacuum tube resisters, fasteners. So, it was interesting. I stayed in there and, well, my last four years I'd done Keesler [Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Mississippi], and in '88, and I was branch chief, so I was supervisor so I didn't really do that much actual work in my last three, four years.

KAYAN: You worked on a lot of things, do you have a personal preference for tanks or helicopters or working with the electronics?

GRAY: Not electronics, no. I knew when I retired I would not go into electronics. It changes every day, the state of the art changes, and I'm too old to change. But I was given the additional duty of safety officer and I had that at three or four different bases, so I started going to safety schools. When I retired in '76, I sent out some resumes as an IRA safety engineer, they hired me and I had a good job with that.

KAYAN: And that was your first job outside of the service?

GRAY: Yeah.

KAYAN: Where was that—was that here?

GRAY: No, it was in Jackson, Mississippi.

KAYAN: Okay.

GRAY: But that was the most interesting job. I would go out and inspect wherever they had insurance, worker's comp insurance, that'd be in hospitals, mortuaries, bowling alleys, and factories, everything. A very interesting job.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you got to see a lot of different workplaces.

GRAY: Yeah. And I still—I've been a mechanic all my life, I would rather spend two hours at my workbench repairing something than going downtown and spending ten dollars for a new one; just the challenge of repairing things.

PIEHLER: You were, at one point, in Greenland.

GRAY: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: What years were you in Greenland?

GRAY: Helicopters, I must have went up there, I believe, '61, '62. We went in the summer and left the summer because that's the time it was clear. But wintertime up there was real good flying weather. At fifty below zero it's real smooth, there's no turbulence, and we got a lot of flying in when it was real cold.

PIEHLER: What was it like to maintain helicopters in that climate?

GRAY: You'd go by the book, same as yourself. You'd have the proper equipment to wear, it was no problem. The interesting thing, we'd always have to drain the sump on the radial engines, we'd drain the oil sump to see if there was any water in there, and what we'd do, we'd back the helicopter out of the hangar up on the edge of the ramp and drain out maybe a gallon of oil, no water in it, we'd start the engine. Thirty minutes later that pancake oil, you could pick up like a pancake and throw it in the trash. That ninety weight oil, it didn't take long at fifty below zero to congeal. (Laughter)

KAYAN: Did you feel prepared, like your training actually prepared you for the weather and the difference in the lifestyle of being there?

GRAY: I wasn't worried about it, they sent me up there, I knew they were going to take care of me.

KAYAN: Yeah.

GRAY: They'd give me the clothes to wear and tell me what to do, and I even went out on the survival training out on the ice cap. They dumped us out there and left us there three days.

PIEHLER: What did they give you for those three days?

GRAY: One days ration.

KAYAN: Wow. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: What did you do the other two days?

GRAY: You kind of rationed it out for yourself. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You didn't catch any fish?

GRAY: No, we were out in the ice cap. We'd dig a hole in the snow to get out of the weather and had our clothing and sleeping bag and relaxed, thinking about the guys back there at the base working while we were doing nothing. (Laughter) But I never worried about that, if the military told you to do something, I figured they knew what they were doing.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, um, since you flew also ... I mean, you would service the helicopter and you often flew with the ... Did you ever find any close calls with the helicopter?

GRAY: Oh I walked home from four of them.

PIEHLER: That you had a crash and ...

GRAY: Yeah ... Three of em were recep engines, that was the old, um, Vertol. It was pilot air most of the time. So I decided a time to quit flying, I was out at Stead Air Force Base [Reno, Nevada], and see I was flight engineer, which is a flying mechanic is what it is. But I was up there and they needed flight engineers and they came out with this new Kaman helicopter, one with a counter-rotating blades, with jet engines. "Oh this new helicopter, you don't need to worry about them Gray, come on, we need a crew chief." I said okay, I'll go back on flight status. Couple months later, we were flying along, and had practiced auto rotations. You know what that is? Where they go down and the wind coming up turns the propeller so they have the rotational momentum to land. So what they do instead of going through landing, when they get close to the ground they'd pull in and take off so you wouldn't get that hard bump. What they didn't know was on this new jet engine, at a certain power setting you could not recover that quick. So instead of pulling up, we went down. That was rather interesting. I got out of that one. And, of course they come over to base command and everything looking around and said, "Okay load up, we gotta take you to the hospital." I said "Colonel, I'm not getting off the ground, I'm walking." Made it half a mile. He didn't say anything, I started walking. He told them, "follow him with a jeep." And I walked all the way to the hospital, no buddy ever said anything for disobeying their order. (Laughter) Yeah they understand. Had fun out in Thule, Greenland one time. We landed on the ice cap, engine failure. Not engine failure, warning light came on. So warning light come on, you drained it sump, to see if there's any metal in there where the engine was tearing it up.

Well it was cold and the wind was blowing, so I had oil all over me and the flight suit, and didn't find any problems, so pilot cranked it up, flying okay, we took off and went back to the base. We get there and medics are there and base commander. So I get out, there looking like I've been through war. "You okay?" I said "Yeah, I'm doing fine, just a little dirty." "Well, you gotta go to the hospital to be checked out." "Well okay." That was interesting going into the emergency up there in the ice cap, about fifty-sixty miles out.

PIEHLER: What did you do when you had spare time, particularly when it got cold?

GRAY: Out in Thule?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GRAY: Well, see you stay there a month. The first week I was there, I'd go to the NCO club every night, I think it was five cent beer. On Sunday night, members got a free steak. And I'd go over there and drink every night. And all of a sudden I said to myself, "Hey, I'm not gonna make it for another fifty-one weeks." So I went over to the special service, and started doing leather work ... made a bowling bag. I went to University of Maryland, that's why I got started in college. See they have University of Maryland all over the world with branches. That's where I got started in college, up there. I'd go to the NCO club Sunday night, and we got a free steak and five-cent beer, and the rest of the week I would stay away from it.

PIEHLER: I mean it sounds like the way you described it, on a base like that, you could easily become an alcoholic.

GRAY: We took quite a few guys out of there in a straight jacket.

PIEHLER: Because they just...

GRAY: In fact one of my pilots was ... Got on the booze and couldn't get off. Yep, took away the willpower.

KAYAN: You have to find something to occupy your time, I imagine, being up there.

GRAY: Well, like I say, University of Maryland, and I had started doing that leather work, carving leather.

PIEHLER: What did you study, what was your major, eventually. I mean you mentioned you had to piece together a degree.

GRAY: I finally wound up with a BS in Business Administration, BA.

PIEHLER: Now when you went into the electronics school, where was the electronics school?

GRAY: Keesler, Keesler Air Base yeah.

PIEHLER: And what was the routine like at Keesler, when you weren't at school?

GRAY: The old fashioned vacuum tube machine.

PIEHLER: And would you go eight to five? Was it a standard or ...

GRAY: Uh, yeah we'd have our classes. We actually went to school six hours. And then we had homework to do. So it was a good eight hours work before the day was over. But other than that it was pretty much on your own.

PIEHLER: And then after you finished school, where did they ...

GRAY: Well you have a ... what they did, they would have so many assignments come down. Twenty people in class, they'd have twenty assignments. And the guy who did best in class, highest grade, would get first pick, and you'd go down. It got to me, and I could have gone to, uh, New England. They had these Super Connies [Lockheed L-1049 Super Constellation] flying these computers out over the ocean, but it was out in Connecticut, I was born and raised there. Another one, the second choice was Montana. Good, I've never been to Montana, so I went up to Montana. Stayed up there three years. And I really enjoyed Montana, real friendly people up there.

KAYAN: Where were you in Montana?

GRAY: Havre, it's central Montana, about four miles from the Canadian border.

KAYAN: Wow.

GRAY: So for excitement, we'd go off up to uh, Saskatchewan. First thing, the only requirements up there, you don't wear a hat in the bar. You just don't wear it in the bar, other than that same as any place else. I enjoyed it, and of course we got to know all the border patrol. They would have the border open maybe eight to five, so if it was close, we'd know where to go a mile down to the pasture and get back and next morning we'd call em' up and say hey, so and so, whatever his names were, we came back last night. "Okay." You work with people, they trust you to work with them.

PIEHLER: It sounds like with computers, when you weren't doing electronics, it was even more routine. That it's, the way you were describing it was a real eight to five job. I mean where as the flight you could have a later flight, an evening flight that could be a ...

GRAY: Well when I was in helicopters chasing weather balloons out of San Angelo, Texas. We'd go out in the morning, they'd launch a weather balloon, and we'd have our overnight bag with us. We might go out and pick up the balloon and be back in a couple of hours. We might be gone seven days. Just depends on how far the wind took the balloon. We'd keep going till we got it.

PIEHLER: When were you in Texas? How long were in Texas?

GRAY: I must have been there, I left Texas to go to Thule, so I must have been in Texas 59' and 60'.

KAYAN: So that was in between Germany and Greenland.

GRAY: Yeah. Came back from Germany, went to Fort Bragg, and crossed into helicopters and went to Smyrna [Sewart] Air Force Base. Stayed there about a year. The whole unit went to Myrtle Beach. And deactivated there, and I got the assignment out in Goodfellow, Texas. Then I went Thule, Greenland. Myrtle Beach and a little bit of change they say. I was there, have you been there lately?

PIEHLER: No, I've never been.

GRAY: When I was there, Myrtle Beach out to the air base, three-four miles, little narrow two lane road out in the woods. They say now it's a four lane highway.

KAYAN: And a lot of tourists.

GRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Um, after Montana where did you go next?

GRAY: I went to Alabama. Montgomery, Alabama. Gunter Air Force Base [merged with Maxwell Air Force Base in 1992]. And that was a save center, still part of the computers. See out in Montana we were a um, the radar would report into a save center. Stage Strategic Air Command [SAC], um you'll have to look that up. Anyhow, we would report into the main center. So I got to Alabama, it was a great big block house, and all the big computers in there, that um all these different sites their radar reported into them.

PIEHLER: So this was for SAC, this is for ...

GRAY: No it wasn't for SAC, it was for Air Defense Ccommand.

PIEHLER: Okay. How long did you stay in Montgomery?

GRAY: I was there, let me see, I got there ... Thinking way back, I went to Montana bout' 62', so I must of went there to Montgomery bout' 65' and I stayed there a couple of years ... Where'd I go from Montgomery? Damn, you're digging way deep back here. (Laughter) I remember my Army days ...

PIEHLER: What was your last Air Force station? That's one way ...

GRAY: Well I was in Fort Fischer, North Carolina, little radar site. And I put in for E-9 school, you familiar with that? Senior NCO school, you have NCO academies or Senior NCO academy, I was E-8 at the time. So, I put in for that down in Keesler, so I went down there about 72'. And

got down there went through the school, and the only assignment was stay right there at Keesler. So I stayed there four years till I retired in 76'.

PIEHLER: Were you still doing electronic?

GRAY: I was instructor.

PIEHLER: Instructor now, and, and ...

GRAY: And just like the Russian language, I had more ranks while I was more of a supervisor than actual teacher.

PIEHLER: So Fort Fischer, and then after was Montgomery. So was there anything in between Montgomery?

GRAY: No, Montgomery and then Fort Fischer.

PIEHLER: You had some very interesting places you were stationed in the military, what was your favorite?

GRAY: There's no favorite. Fort Fischer was a lot of fun, it was out on the peninsula between the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean. And you could just about stand in the base and cast in, and fish in the Cape Fear River or fish in the ocean. Just, ideal place there.

PIEHLER: Well let me ask you this, was there any base you didn't particularly care for? You haven't said a bad word really about any place you've uh ...

GRAY: I like the military, I still miss it, I'd be in now if they'd let me.

PIEHLER: Why did you end up leaving?

GRAY: I was E-8, I couldn't make E-9, that peanut farm up there in D.C. cut out all promotions, so I was forced out at 28.

PIEHLER: So you really wanted to stay?

GRAY: Oh I would still be in. My wife still gets aggravated, she says, "What time you gotta be down..." I say 1400. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How long were you with Etna?

GRAY: Probably about four years.

PIEHLER: So I don't forget to ask this question, I'm curious, what sort of surprised you about working conditions? Because you mentioned the range of places. And where did see safety problems that weren't expecting of ...

GRAY: You mean with Etna?

PIEHLER: Yeah, I just...

GRAY: Well the thing about Etna, it was uh, I was on my own pretty much. I'd have a schedule of where I had to go, and I would get there and do my inspection... write up reports. Um, I didn't have anybody supervising or looking over my shoulder.

PIEHLER: But I mean in terms of these different companies your looking at, because your looking at them for safety, what sort of surprised you about, I mean what were your observations about safety in the workplace?

GRAY: The worst thing is, that you go in there and see somebody doing something wrong, and you write it up and tell a supervisor about it. They don't do anything about it. One particular instance was handling heavy rolls of steel. You're supposed to use the hoist and use a tagline, you don't get over by hand and move it you use a rope off the side. Well this guy's working there one night, had a few drinks in him. He's over running this thing around, it drops on his foot, and he laid up for a while. And I said, "well I told you so, it was written up in the report months ago, about that." And he still knew his compensation. But I did my job, I reported. So that's ... but real interesting, different places you go and used to have a lot of fun. One old guy down there in American Shoe Company, he was an old fellow about my age, and he was a safety man in there. And I'd walk in the front door and he'd yell across, "You old son of a gun, you still here?" Ya know, I said, "Yeah I'm here, you so and so's I'm gonna give you a hard time." And we'd yell back and forth, sit down and have a cup of coffee, talk about what we did, what we need to do, and then go about our business. Always greet each other that way... people thought we gonna fight. (Laughter) That was a fun place, American Shoe Company.

PIEHLER: And after Etna, where did you, did you ...

GRAY: I came up to Gatlinburg, and I married a girl that had a crazy idea about starting a "Honeymoon Hide-aways." So, we got married twenty-five years ago and started a business, and run the business until I turned 62, and I said, "I've had enough of these damn tourists." And put in for social security, and moved out to Walden Creek [Sevier County, Tennessee], away from the tourists.

PIEHLER: How did you meet your wife?

GRAY: Well I met her down in Tupelo, when I was down there with Etna. Met her when she was coming up here to Gatlinburg.

PIEHLER: And she convinced you this was, she wasn't originally from Gatlinburg?

GRAY: No, she was from Ohio originally.

PIEHLER: Why did she pick Gatlinburg?

GRAY: Her sister was in Gatlinburg, and she left home when she was 13, 14, she come from a family of fourteen kids. And as the kids got old enough they got farmed out to sisters and brothers. She had a sister in Gatlinburg. She came down there, and stayed there and worked there.

PIEHLER: I like your quote about when you retired you were tired of tourists. What was it like to run—it sounds a lot like a bed and breakfast?

GRAY: Individual chalets, we didn't feed em' but other than that.

-----END OF TAPE ONE-----

PIEHLER: This continues an interview of Raymond Gray on April 6, 2006 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville with Kurt Piehler ...

KAYAN: ... and Angelica Kayan.

PIEHLER: And I asked how many chalets did you have when you were ...

GRAY: We had forty-two when I finally retired. And it was very interesting because being a jack of all trades, the first couple years I did all the maintenance myself, and later on I had a maintenance man there to help me, so we did interesting work, but we lived right there ... Two o'clock in the morning, somebody come banging on your door saying, "TV won't work, what are we gonna do without TV?" I wanted to tell them on their honeymoon, but my wife said, "No you can't talk to them." That ended that conversation. But it was real interesting work. Everyday something different went wrong.

PIEHLER: Where in Gatlinburg were the chalets located?

GRAY: It was up in the glades area. You know where that is?

PIEHLER: I'm not—Cynthia actually is from Gatlinburg, she's a Gatlinburg native, so she would know exactly...

GRAY: As you go out to Gatlinburg towards Cosby, its up ...

PIEHLER: I've been out that way ...

GRAY: Up in the Arts and Crafts Museum, up in that area.

KAYAN: Sounds beautiful...

GRAY: Well it was nice up there. It was aggravating at times, but I was my own boss, ya know, so I enjoyed that. Had various maintenance men over the time, but the only guy that would keep

up with me working, an old fellow lived down the road, he was about ten years older than I was. And we would get out working, cutting wood, or whatever we were doing. He'd hold up his hand, like we stopped, he brought Prince Albert, rolled a cigarette, light it, go back to work. (Laughter) These other young kids you hire up there, they'd work an hour and then sit down and want to rest an hour. That old fellow, he was the best worker there ever was.

PIEHLER: How do like retirement?

GRAY: Love it. All I do is volunteer work. Like my antique engines I'm playing with over at Ag Center [Agricultural]. I go dozen or fifteen shows a year with those. Don't make any money off it, just have fun at shows with them. And telling people about the old stuff. I've got dairy equipment from 1910 to 1930, run by one 1913 and one 1910 engine. And if you're a mechanic you know what a four-cycle engine is. I've got one of the very few eight-cycle engines. And my trailer, I had a lot of fun explaining that to people. You'll have to come over and see it.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you're staying, particularly with mechanics, it sounds like you're tinkering quite a bit still.

GRAY: I've been a Shriner forty-some years. Never had any kids of my own, and I decided years ago, I wanna do something for the kids in the world so I joined the Shrine. And uh, I work, since I retired, that's my number one job. I take the kids up at the hospital and volunteer, we go out and make money for the hospital. That, of course, I'm pass-commander in American Legion, VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], life member in the DAV [Disabled American Veteran] and you name it, I'm into it.

PIEHLER: Have you—do you stay in touch with any people you served with?

GRAY: I did with one guy, and the old boy up and died on me last year, so ...

PIEHLER: Was that from the Army, or the Air Force?

GRAY: Air Force ... Air Force was not a close knit like the Army. Now in the Army's constabulary outfit. We have a reunion every year. And it's going to be in Pigeon Forge this year. And I will be down there in my pretty uniform showing off. (Laughter) And right now I'm trying to get a jeep from that era, and paint it up like we had them in the constabulary.

PIEHLER: So you've been to your reunion to be constabulary?

GRAY: Yeah, we were up in Bristol [Tennessee] two years ago for the veterans day parade, and the constabulary was honored by me leading the parade and carrying the colors leading the parade ... We thought that was great, of course the constabulary disbanded in 1952 so everybody in there is over seventy years old.

PIEHLER: So in the constabulary, roughly how many, cause' you've gone to the reunion ... How many were career, and how many were, they did there hitch and went home? Do you have any sense of that when you talk to people at reunions?

GRAY: No, no I don't ever—A lot of them did not make it a career. But um, I really had no idea of how many it was. And quite a few of them married the German girls. We go to our reunions, there'll be some of the German girls there.

PIEHLER: What was it like, you were in the Air Force during the Vietnam war ... Now you did not go into Vietnam, but what are your thoughts about being in the Air Force, particularly when the Vietnam war became increasingly unpopular? I mean did you even notice it?

GRAY: Well, I didn't really worry about it, because I had been up in Thule, Greenland which was isolated town. So there in late 50's early 60's Thule, Greenland was isolated just like Vietnam. So I wasn't tapped to go to Vietnam. Didn't volunteer, wasn't asked to go. And they even let me cross train out of helicopters then because there was plenty of other helicopter people. So, never thought much about it one way or the other.

KAYAN: Along those same lines, when you were back here in the States going to school, that was during Vietnam also, correct?

GRAY: Which school was that? I went to hundreds of them ...

KAYAN: Like the University of Nevada, would that have been during the mid-60s?

GRAY: Nevada I was stationed in Stead Air Force base, and helicopters, and that was about 62' I think I left there to go to Keesler and cross-train electronics.

KAYAN: So at any of your college experiences, did you ever feel this vibe of American youth I guess on campus? Because you were a lot older going back to school than most of the students also.

GRAY: I went to school because it looked good on my promotion records. And the only time I used my degree is when I went to Etna. You have to have a degree, they wanted an engineering degree, but I had years of experience, I had to have a degree to even talk to them. So they said, "Okay we'll get you in here and if you can do it, you've got a job." But the degree is really the only time I used it was to get a job with Etna.

PIEHLER: When you went to college, were all the courses you took on military bases?

GRAY: No, Thule, Greenland was the only one on base.

PIEHLER: The other ones you actually went to campus.

GRAY: Yeah well usually there was like a ...

PIEHLER: Satellite campus ...

GRAY: Yeah satellites, yeah. Mm hmm. And they did give me a break at University of Southern Miss. I didn't have enough arithmetic, mathematics. And I was getting ready to retire, so the old boy down there, counselor who ever he was, he says, "You write me a letter of all the military schools you've been too, all the mathematical stuff you had in these schools." So I did. He says, "Okay we'll accept that." But I was treated real good, any place I went to college they took consideration of your military duties. You didn't get docked or anything for not showing up.

PIEHLER: ... How did civilians treat you when you were going to college?

GRAY: Most of them were older people anyway, it wasn't young kids going to these satellite colleges. So um we were all about pretty much in the same boat. Trying to get ahead for one reason or another.

PIEHLER: You've had so few complaints about the military.

GRAY: I love the military. I like the discipline, I like to know where I stand. You know what color neck tie to wear tomorrow.

PIEHLER: You never had a real clash with an officer?

GRAY: I guess I had a few, I mean, put on restriction for going off base without a pass, and a few things like that you know. But back in the Army days that was minor. They'd put you on seven days restriction, you'd go back to town the same night, ya know. It wasn't held against you forever and ever like it is now. Especially officers, officers get in trouble it goes on their record forever, but enlisted men, they expect us to mess up little.

KAYAK: You were being a young man.

GRAY: Young, wild and ...

PIEHLER: Is there anything we forgot to ask you?

GRAY: Did you want any of these papers on the Cold War, and the constabulary?

KAYAK: I would love to ask you about, sorry, a quick Greenland question. You were up there in 61' when the base was at its largest, there were like 10,000 people or something there. Did you feel that? Did it feel like a working city at the time or were they actually starting to downsize?

GRAY: I really didn't think anything about it. I was over in the NCO barracks, living good, and I do have a couple good memories from Thule. We had a Thule Christmas tree. What they did, they put a wooden pole up nailed 2x4's across it, sprayed it with water, all these icicles, they put lights on it, and all these icicles hanging down, got good pictures of that. Had a little fun one time, NCO club, they brought this state-side shows in there. Well this guy was playing an organ, we didn't think that appropriate after a few beers, so we picked up the organ and the guy and

carried him over to the chapel. Well we got there and the MPs were there waiting for us. So we went to jail that night. They call the commander and the commander comes over looks, says, “Yes, yes Sarge these are my men.” The sergeant says you wanna sign them out? He said, “Nope I’ll get them out in the morning.” (Laughter) But that’s all that ever happened to us. It just mischievous little boys having fun.

KAYAK: All of your memories seem to be so pleasant from that time, but I mean I almost hate to ask, but I know you were there as a real Cold War soldier, you know, and they had like the ballistic defense, the missile project going on at the time. Did you ever feel that there was—you guys were really stationed at this pinnacle over there in between you and the soviets?

GRAY: We knew we were very important to the defense of Germany and whatever world possibly. We knew our job, we knew our position, but we didn’t worry about it.

PIEHLER: What about, where were you when the Cuban Missile Crisis was unfolding? Do you have any memories of what you were doing?

GRAY: I remember hearing about it, when was that?

PIEHLER: It was in 1962, in October.

GRAY: Okay, I must have been down in Keesler going to ...

PIEHLER: Going to school...

GRAY: Going to electronic school.

PIEHLER: And so your routine just continued.

GRAY: In fact, I was there when uh, Kennedy got killed, down there at school. They took a break for thirty minutes, listened to the radio for a little bit and went back to school. I remember that, but no Cuban Missile Crisis. I was busy with school and I didn’t really pay that much attention to it. Closest I got to Cuba was one time I was flying helicopters out of, um, Smyrna and, um, had the helicopter, went down there in Cuba. And we had to go down and carry an engine down there, and change engines down there, under field conditions and put it in, fly it back across the water. It was fun, but something different. Yeah, we didn’t worry about that, we just ... like I had a sign on my door, for years and years, says all contours, 5 o'clock payday in thirty years. (Laughter) What else is there to worry about? You go out and break a leg, you go to the hospital, your pay still goes on, your wife is gonna eat. You don’t worry about it.

PIEHLER: Well thank you very much. I just thought of it—did you start smoking before you joined the army?

GRAY: I started smoking corn silk back in the farm house when I was about ten years old. And when I was smoking over in Germany, in about ‘51, about four packs of cigarettes a day, I was really burning em up. And I was buying them about ninety cents a carton. And all of a sudden I

realize they sell for ten dollars on the black market. And that ten dollars was forty-two marks, and beer was one mark a liter. I haven't touched cigarettes since 1951.

PIEHLER: So the economics really took you in.

GRAY: Economics there (Laughs). No, I just, I enjoyed my military career. I enjoyed the security, the... you know where you stand at all times. No question about what necktie you going to wear to tomorrow. And even going to school, you'd get... like that fifty-two week school they gave us a schedule. We knew six months from now at 8 o'clock in the morning where we were going to be. And everything was organized.

KAYAN: Well it sounds like you really did, you miss your time, and you enjoyed it.

GRAY: Oh I enjoyed it, I'd still be in if they'd let me.

KAYAN: Did you feel at the time, or looking back on it now that the transition back to civilian life was difficult for you?

GRAY: You mean when I retired?

KAYAN: Yeah.

GRAY: Well, again I didn't worry too much about it. I didn't wanna get out, I wanted to stay and make E-9, but I couldn't do that. So they—I did get back at them though. See when you retire, you can request a parade. Nobody does. I requested a parade. (Laughter). So they had a parade down in Keesler.

KAYAN: How wonderful.

PIEHLER: That's not a very Air Force thing to do, as you described it.

GRAY: (Laughs) Sorry about that. They got three or four officers that were gonna retire about the same time, so had us all up there together for retirement. Pinned the Meritorious Service Medal on me and the troops passed in review, and I said in a grin, "Happy?" I'm offered a parade, and I'm gonna have it. But I don't know what else they said to constabulate, I've got stories here on a constabulate that tells about the history of it and so forth ...

PIEHLER: Do you wanna make copies of this and then give it back?

KAYAN: Yeah.

GRAY: You can just keep this here, and just send it back to me.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I don't think there is anything, there's no letters or anything.

GRAY: No, just different things ...

PIEHLER: Yeah why don't we make copies and we can mail it back. But I would do it right away.

KAYAN: Yes, I will go do that right now. It was a pleasure to talk to you sir, thank you so much.

GRAY: Do you want to copy these pictures?

PIEHLER: Are these copies? We'd love to have copies of them.

GRAY: Yeah make copies, and like I said my address is on the back. But do take care of this one, cause' that's the only one I got.

PIEHLER: Well no, why don't you take that, I don't want to, that's the only copy, that makes me very nervous. This I think you have more ...

GRAY: That one I got more copies of.

PIEHLER: Well thank you.

-----END OF TAPE TWO-----