A Veterans Oral History

Heritage Education Commission
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Chester Gebert
Narrator

Stephanie Manesis
Interviewer

November 30, 2011
Fargo, ND

SM: It is November 30, 2011. I am in Fargo, North Dakota, interviewing Chester Albert Gebert.

CG: It's Alfred.

SM: I am interviewing Chester Alfred Gebert, G-e-b-e-r-t, in Fargo, North Dakota, and the interviewer is Stephanie Manesis. Alright, Mr. Gebert, could you please tell me the date you were born and where you were born?

CG: Eight-eleven, nineteen-twenty-seven, August 11, 1927. I was born in Princeton, Minnesota. I'm a Princeton man. How do you like that?

SM: Okay, tell me about your family. How many siblings did you have and what did your parents do for a living?

CG: My father and mother were farmers. We lived at Princeton, Minnesota, 50 miles north of Minneapolis. I have an older sister; she's about 90-plus now. And a brother who was a Marine and he died in 1985, I think it was. I have another brother, Harold, and he is living in south Fargo in a retirement home. And, obviously, he's close to 90, also. I was born on a farm. I thoroughly enjoyed the farm life, but I did not want to be a dirt farmer.

My two brothers were military men. Don was a Marine, and my other brother, Harold, was the Navy man. He just missed Pearl Harbor by eight hours. He was out to sea and they saw the airplanes coming from the mainland of the U. S. of A. What they saw flying over – the long and short of it was, they were the planes that bombed Pearl Harbor. That's why he came in late. He came around the Hawaiian Islands eight hours later. And my

other brother was a Marine, tough Marine. He serviced numerous well-known military planes, like Pappy Boyington. You're too young to know about that name, and Major Joe Foss from South Dakota. He serviced their planes and I dearly loved both of them.

I was just a little bit too young to get into the service, and I went with my best buddy who I grew up with. He was just two days ahead of him when he was born, and we were in the Navy together. We had a good life and we played football, baseball, basketball at Princeton. And did I say, we went aboard the battleship (USS) Iowa?

We had boot camp at San Diego and we went out to sea. We went over to Japan and, of course, the war was over. We were just occupation troops, so to speak. So he had transferred to another ship, a hospital ship. And he didn't like it. He was scrubbing decks all day long. I transferred to a different ship, USS Columbus, a cruiser. I came back to the U. S., and they decided that they didn't need me. I was in the Reserves section of the Navy.

So in San Pedro, California, I was given a little job of taking messages from my USS Columbus, over to the base and bringing messages back. It was scary because my driver was trying to miss a box that was in the street. At the wrong time, the admiral was up in the counting tower; and he sent down somebody else, a couple officers down. "You're under arrest." See I was ready to get out of the Navy. I didn't want to have anymore problem like, "You're under arrest for skylarking while on duty." Oh, bad news.

SM: Skylarking was because you were not driving straight or what's skylarking?

CG: **It means you're goofing off. My driver tried to miss the box at the wrong time and [admiral] saw the vehicle moving around. And that high up in the building, you couldn't spot what was going on underneath. I think there were a couple of other gentlemen or seamen. And the long and short of it was the skipper or whoever was in charge said, "The war is over, but you can't do that foolishness." Each one of us had some kind of a problem. "Don't do that no more. Don't." And I was happy I was going to get out.**

I think about three days later, I was hitchhiking up the West Coast, up to Tacoma, Washington, taking hitchhiking back to Minnesota. So I had a very good time in the Navy. But it was the best thing that I could ever have done in my whole life other than some of the travels that I've had.

It wasn't that I didn't like where I was growing up, but I was not happy just be behind a [unclear] horse plowing in the field. Sorry to say that. So a recruiter from Minneapolis came to Princeton. And two of my buddies and

myself and my live-in ward – he's now dead, I'm sorry to say – we enlisted. I suppose we [unclear] the enlistment values were when we got to Fort Snelling. I don't remember when we raised our hand "to obey the world," or whatever the officer says. So I had boot camp at San Diego, California.

I do remember interesting activities as we took a train from Minneapolis all the way across the west part of the U. S. and several of the boys were from Arkansas; very tough, tough dudes. Oh yes. You could tell they had been around the horn a little bit. So when we got to boot camp, you had inoculations. Those are boys that fainted first. I've never fainted in my life. So, I can always laugh at those gentlemen. I don't know how many weeks of boot camp. It must have been seven or eight weeks and pretty soon we were notified that we were going to be going aboard a ship. And we went to San Pedro, P-e-d-r-o, California, and we got aboard the battleship Iowa, the biggest battleship in the world.

SM: Now what month did you enlist?

CG: Well, let us say … entering into active service 4 September 1945.

The highest rank I had was seaman first class; and I was aboard the USS Iowa BB-61 and then the USS Columbia – Columbus. They spelled it wrong, all right. At Tokyo Bay, they transferred me to the Columbus. And then I came back over to the U. S. on the USS Columbus – and I got this duty for the – whoever some captain was up in the counting tower in the U. S. San Pedro Naval Training Station, where I was going; and that's where I had the problem.

Well it wasn't a problem, it was my fault. My driver tried to zigzag. Well maybe he did a little bit more than a just a zigzag, but I'll give him credit he did not want damage to a government vehicle. I was really scared. I'm not going to be getting out. I'll be in the brig in Norfolk, Virginia, or wherever it is. But the skipper said, "The war is over, but I don't want you to be fooling around like that. No more, no more."

Anyhow I worked in the radio section aboard the battleship Iowa for the first class radioman. All I could do was make coffee for him; that was my biggest job. And he didn't even like my coffee.

SM: All you did all day long is make coffee?

CG: Well, yes. Whenever he wanted a cup of coffee, I'd get the pot out and pour a cup of coffee for him. I was a little peon seaman, not even a full-fledged seaman. But I finally made seaman first class. I think it was aboard the USS

Columbus. I'm not sure. Whatever, it doesn't make that much difference. I did not have any activity in the war at all. The war was over and I was happy to go to Japan.

I always loved the Far East and I still do. And I was happy to be in the Far East and to get to Japan. But I tell you what, when I got there to Tokyo Bay, I'm not seeing much wartime activity, and Yokohama and Yokosuka had been bombed and fire burned. And we didn't get down to Nagasaki. But I got down to see the last of the submarines that were sunk out of – I've been trying to think of it all day long –what port on the very south end of Japan. My best buddy, an Indian buddy from Rapid City, South Dakota, was one of the men who set the depth charges.

SM: To sink the Japanese submarines?

CG: Sink the Japanese submarines, yes.

SM: When did you get to Japan?

CG: It would be well …

SM: Was it wintertime when you got there?

CG: It's too many years ago.

SM: That's okay, so you enlisted in September and then you had October-November of boot camp so then, November you went up to San Pedro.

CG: Okay, let's say either early winter or roughly around that time. I was in Japan area just about two or three months, and then we transferred to the USS Columbus and came back. It took us I suppose two weeks, give or take.

SM: And what did you do in Japan?

CG: What did we do? Drank beer.

SM: That was during off hours, probably?

CG: Well, yes. Here we had this little bit of news. Our best buddy, the good football player, basketball player in my hometown was a manager of the Enlisted Men's Club. So he brought us all the beer we ever needed … just me and my buddy, Leland Ward. We stuck close to [unclear] Suthers (sp?).

He was a great man to know. I had a chance to go climb Mount Fujiyama. I went and drank beer instead.

SM: You had a chance to climb the mountain and you went and drank beer instead.

CG: Yes, I sure did. I'm ashamed of myself to say that.

SM: You were young.

CG: Yer, right. Yes, [unclear] I'm shipping off and getting out of the battleship Iowa and now I'm just going into a new ship, trying to find out my way to find the toilet – or the head, I mean. I never did get a chance to get this trip to Mount Fujiyama. I kick myself all the way from here to the moon. Anyhow, so I didn't have any activity, but I did get to stay overnight in a Japanese family's house.

SM: Tell me about that.

CG: They were very friendly – they weren't the military people. So I got to stay at their house. And in those days I could cross my legs and sip tea and food with them. They were very polite all the way around, and I guess I, I never did make any bad moves. I was a guest in their house. I thought, well you're guest in somebody's house, you do what they do. And it was really interesting activity. I was one of the few guys that made an effort to talk to some of the Japanese people and I get invited into their home, stayed overnight. I guess it was overnight and part of the early part of the day … a very interesting event. I ate with them, all their Japanese food. It never bothered me a bit. I have a cast iron stomach, so to speak. I'm happy about that.

My whole life I can eat just about anything. I even ate seaweed in the Atlantic Ocean. It was on a dare, but that's okay. Yes, I've had a very interesting life after having left the farm. Not that it was – well I said earlier, I didn't want to have to look at a sandstorm when I'm plowing with a horse. We did not have tractors. We didn't even have electricity on the farm. We were just a mile out of town and the municipal power plant came three-quarters of a mile and we were a mile out of town. We missed out on the electricity. And REA, which is the Rural Electrical . . .

SM: Association?

CG: Yes, government. We were too close to town to get REA. If we had been half a mile farther, but that's the way life goes. So where was I?

SM: Japan about the family that you visited in Japan?

CG: Oh, the family. As I say, it was a very interesting trip. And some of the boys when I came back to the ship, I was telling them about living with the people overnight and, "Oh, jeez, you know, wonder if we could do that?" You have to ask. And so I just visited with the people and said – I don't remember what I said. How I asked them, "Can I stay with you overnight?" But I think they said something like, "No problem." Of course, they were the people who lost the war, so they weren't military. Just plain old Japanese family and I think there was a girl in the family. I can't remember how old, but I'd say she was probably 14-15 years old. And she laughed at my conversation quite frequently. She thought I talked so funny.

SM: Did she understand English?

CG: She understood it.

I'll tell you this little bit. My brother who just missed Pearl Harbor was in the Navy from 1939, and he sent home the "Our Navy" magazine. And I had four months or five months learning how to speak Japanese. So I could speak some Japanese before I went into the Navy.

SM: So you practiced Japanese?

CG: Yes, I surely did.

SM: But you had no idea that you were going to be sent to Japan.

CG: No, no idea. But I could say simple words, simple sentences. And then I took Japanese at the University of Minnesota, and my teacher loved me. She was the only one that had somebody knowledgeable with the Japanese language. So I got A's, A's, A's, A's, A's – a lot of good A's.

SM: They had Japanese classes at University of Minnesota?

CG: Oh, yes, we did. Many veterans knew some language in the nations that they were in. Mrs. Cyril Bouyoshki (sp?), she married a Russian. Mrs. Cyril Bouyoshki (sp?), I'll never forget her. I don't remember her maiden name but it doesn't make any difference. But it was nice that she liked me, because I was the only one in the Japanese class – there was about 12 or 15 people, and I could speak better Japanese than the students could. Not better but I could understand more words. That isn't the right way to say it. But anyhow, she liked me and I brought her coffee.

SM: Did she like your coffee?

CG: **I'd say there were some bad things about it but, you know. Not like my first class radioman aboard the battleship Iowa; she liked my coffee. All right, where was I?**

SM: How did you feel about the Japanese civilians?

CG: **Oh they were a conquered nation. I respected them as human beings, and I never said anything bad about them. And they thought I talked funny but they probably understood me. But the same thing, they talked so very fast that I would laugh at their conversation, also. It was interesting that I could visit with them. I don't think I ever sat at a table, sat cross-legged on the floor. And I ate all the food the same as they had. We would always take some candy. The gidunt stand, g-i-d-u-n-t, take candy over to them, when we could. Not only when I stayed with that one family, but we would take candy and give it to the kids.**

They would laugh and just play with you. And we had no problem at all how the Japanese felt because they were a conquered people. And they knew if you made a bad move, the police might come by and say you did not do the right thing. I never tried to find out what would happen. Nobody that I ever remember aboard ship, ever said bad words about the Japanese. They were a defeated people, totally defeated and they knew that they had lost the war. They did not hold up the military idea anymore. If you did not treat them reasonably well, they might have done something but I never had any problem like that. I respected them. They were a conquered nation. Sometimes American military people did atrocities to the Japanese, as well as the Japanese did atrocities to the Americans, same as Germans did in the European war. But it was very interesting time.

As I said, I came back and I hitchhiked all the way up the West Coast and hitchhiked across the northern part of the U. S., and I had some very interesting experiences there, too. But the war was over. I had an idea that I was going to go around the United States, around the border, northern border and Mexican border. But I got married and that changed my whole idea, and I went to school.

But I've had interesting experiences all over the U. S. of A. Well I've had scary ones. At one point I had a ride in Ohio coming back. I worked out on the East Coast for my brother and uncle in concrete work. And I could take off anytime I pleased and come back because relatives, you know. So I got a ride into Ohio and an old farmer – I hate to say it this way – I don't think he was really going anyplace. But before you know it – I'm carrying a little

ditty bag – he put his hand on my leg and I thought, "I don't like this idea." So at one point, he slowed down, I opened the pickup door. I threw out that little ditty bag out and rolled out into the grass. And I was bruised up a little bit and he just drove down the road. I was more scared.

One other interesting little bit of experience when I came out of New Jersey, I was on the West Coast of whatever highway in New Jersey it was, and three ladies – school teachers from Brooklyn – only one of them knew how to drive. The other two ladies were in the back seat; and the first thing the driver said, "Do you know how to drive a car?" "Yeah, I drove a pickup all the way from Tryon, Georgia, all the way to northern New Jersey. I think I know how to drive a car." "Okay, get in." Just like that. She didn't know if I could drive or not and we went all the way across Ohio. And I think it was about the west part of Ohio, well, it doesn't make any difference. Anyhow, "We thank you for you driving our car," and, "I thank you very much myself for letting me drive the car and move as fast as we went, under the speed limit." But those ladies were gabby, gabby, gabby, gabby. They had a hell of a good time. They were so good at chatting, and I don't remember anything consequential of the conversation that they had. But they had a good time. I did, too.

So there was one bad experience, one very interesting experience. And of course, I've hitchhiked with truck drivers; and I've met some interesting truck drivers. I've had a very interesting life. I'm happy to report that to you. But as I say, I've had no wartime experience, other than we saw the bombed out area in Japan.

SM: What bombed out area did you see in Japan?

CG: Yokohama, all there was smokestacks.

SM: Now, Yokohama is that near Nagasaki or Hiroshima?

CG: **It's, I don't know how many miles away, but Yokohama and Yokosuka are relatively close. They're industrial cities so all you saw was smokestacks left. Everything else was burned up.**

SM: And they were bombed by regular bombings?

CG: Well, regular bomb – what's a regular bombing?

SM: Well I mean they weren't close enough to the atomic bomb?

CG: Oh, no, that was well ahead of the atomic bomb.

SM: Yes, so they were just regular bombs dropped on them?

CG: Yes, fire bombs.

SM: And what was that like seeing these cities that were bombed out?

CG: Horrible. You saw the cities that they had somewhat cleaned up but they were still very scared, more than Tokyo. Tokyo was not really that much of a bombed out area. But Yokosuka, Yokohama were – well, the industrial part of the city, same thing as big cities here, that would be bombed day after day..

SM: Tell me what you saw there?

CG: I took the train there quite frequently. And all you saw was vacant buildings, what's left of a building, and people were very downtrodden. You knew that they had just been beat to hell. I guess I never did see anybody with any sores or anything. Probably they'd been taken care of medically and so. I rode the train quite frequently from Yokohama, as well as Yokosuka, into Tokyo. But yet, it's many, many years ago. I don't really remember any gruesome scenes, other than the bombed-out buildings. You see one bombed-out building, you've seen all you need to see. Oh, in Tokyo I went down, I think it was 13 floors down underground, a dancehall.

SM: Thirteen floors underground?

CG: Underground, yes.

SM: And it was built to protect them from bombings?

CG: I would assume so.

SM: This was a Japanese dancehall?

CG: Yes.

SM: Did you go out there at night to go dancing?

CG: Sure.

SM: What was that like?

CG: You just dance with other Navy guys or some nurse or something like that. I don't think I ever danced. But I really wasn't a great dancer so I didn't do much dancing. Sat and drank beer more often. But I think the Japanese people were happy to have somebody to dance with.

The uniforms of the Japanese were not exactly the most interesting looking. Baggy pants and boots – boots same as the Navy and Army in the U. S. at that point. And now they're so spiffed up, they're totally different. They look like they're human beings.

But anyhow, it was a very interesting bit to have had that opportunity to go down there. The elevator still would work. I don't know how it would work, but we would go down about, I think it's about 13 floors underground for a bomb shelter. How they could keep the water out of there because you're right along the ocean.

You bust a water pipe and you're going to have water. I suppose they must have fixed it up to make it sanitary. But in those days, you don't think of asking all the, "How did you ever clean up this bomb shelter?" You don't ask that. You just accept it. That's what I did, anyhow. But my two best buddies aboard the battleship Iowa, Leland Ward and George Dukowski (sp?)**, he was from St. Paul; and Leland Ward and I were from Princeton. For some reason or other we palled up together, and we took rickshaws around and I got some pictures riding in a rickshaw.**

SM: Now were you stationed in Tokyo?

CG: No, I was out in the harbor. Yes, the battleship Iowa has to be out in the harbor.

SM: So how far was that from Tokyo?

CG: Well you could see Tokyo. You're right in the harbor. We'd take a liberty boat. I don't know what kind of a boat you'd call it, Higgins boat or whatever, on liberty. And some boys came back full of saké. At one point, while we were still in the U. S. at Long Beach one guy came back aboard ship, saluted the officer of the deck, and promptly fell overboard, about 18 feet into the water. He was drunk. I think they just fished him out. Oh, yes.

SM: I had one of my veterans tell me, who was in Japan after the war, that the Japanese men had to give up their swords as part of the agreement after the war. Did you see any of this at all?

CG: I had a sword that they brought aboard the battleship Iowa, dumped them 15 feet onto the deck. And you could go out there and pick up whatever sword you wanted. I had one.

I never was around when somebody recognized a sword from their family and there are ceremonial swords. I had a Japanese rifle. And it came aboard and I picked one up. And I had it until … my brother's farm somebody broke into the house in Audubon. And it's one of the things that they took was the Japanese rifle. And I also shot a deer with that Japanese rifle in the Audubon area. So somebody has my Japanese rifle and I think I lost the sword, also. This was a ceremonial sword about 20 inches long. I think somebody, at the same time they broke into the farmhouse out there, they must have decided they needed a sword. But the sword disappeared.

SM: So both the sword and the rifle you got on the ship. You procured them some way, and brought them to the ship?

CG: Tthey brought a whole big cargo net.

SM: Of swords?

CG: Dropped them about 18 feet off. And a lot of them got broken up.

SM: We were talking about swords. The swords they just drop them onto the ship . . .

CG: Yes.

SM: from these big nets?

CG: It was with the cargo net, dropped them 18-20 feet. Well, maybe not quite that far. But I suppose they kind of knew that they were going to be broken up because you weren't supposed to have a foreign military gun, so. My rifle worked like a charm, I shot my deer with it.

SM: So you weren't supposed to take it with you?

CG: No, you could have it. It was yours. You wrapped it up, slept with it under your bunk, no problem.

SM: What did you think about the atomic bombings in Japan?

CG: We were at war and at war you do just about anything you please, sorry to say. Atrocities and bombing civilians, but that's the way the war goes.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki were horrible. I was in a war mood myself. I grew up with a whole war with my brothers, both of them in the military. I was ready to go, but I was too young, but I was happy to get over to Japan. And it did not bother me to see the place all bombed to heck, as I remembered.

I suppose I've come to be more civil, so to speak, now that we're 50 years away from the war. It never did really make me sad that so many people died. I did not like the idea of having people die just for me; but that's the way war is. The same thing is accidents on the highway. Jeez, you wonder, somebody has to die just because the road hasn't quite been prepared properly, I don't know. But as I say, it did not really bother me because I was in a war mood. So I went through the whole war. And my father came over from Germany when he was three years old. He only had a fifth grade education, but he was smart as a whip. He grew up in a Lutheran congregation and he was a part of the deacons.

SM: Tell me when were you discharged from the military?

CG: Hold it just a second.

SM: Right here it says, probably.

CG: Honorable discharge . . .

SM: Let's see September 5, 1946.

CG: That's right, September 5, 1946 at 3:00 p.m. This is when the honorable discharge was at Mille Lacs County, Minnesota. Notice of Separation from the Military Service, there's my address and C-rating booklet, seaman first class, oh, I made $157.45.

SM: A month?

CG: I think so. That's how much money I collected at the time of separation.

SM: Time of discharge.

CG: Yes and I got $115.10 for travel money and additional mustering-out pay, 100 bucks, whatever that means. So I got two medals: Asiatic Pacific Area, World War II Victory Medal. And I don't know where they are. I have no idea.

SM: So were you in Japan up until 1946 when you were discharged?

CG: Just ahead of being, yes.

SM: Until August of 1946?

CG: Yes, effective date of allotment discontinued 8-40 – August 1946.

SM: So you are in Japan until then and you switched your ships from the USS Iowa to the USS Columbus?

CG: Yes and I was in only 11½ months' tour.

SM: Could you have stayed in longer if you wanted?

CG: I suppose I could have.

SM: But you didn't want to?

CG: It wasn't that I didn't want to. That's too long ago to try and remember why I did not sign over. Like I said, I haven't even asked myself that question. When I came back, I joined the Air National Guard. That was some several years after I got out of the Navy, back to Princeton or to Fargo. I'll get it right. They had a little program – Try One. So I stayed in the Air National Guard in Fargo here for about 15 months; and, again, I could not keep my mouth shut. I tried to get some kind of responsibility to do something. I could take mug shots. You know what a mug shot is? That's all I could do.

SM: That was boring?

CG: Boring? Yes, it wasn't even fun. Not even boring, it was not even fun. Get them close to the wall, get a picture, two days later, do it again. As I say, the long and short of what it was, I told them, "What did you think about your service to the Air National Guard?" I said, "If I could have done something, it would have pleased me more." I put that down on the paper. Now I don't know if they liked that, that's the way it was. That's what I told them. It was sort of boring.

The only thing I had going for me was an enlisted man, [unclear] Brust (sp?). He'd get me to do some things that sounded a little bit interesting; but it would be 15 minutes, not a whole hour. But the long and short of it was, when they asked me, "What did you think about your service in the Air National Guard?" I said, "If I could have done something, it would have been better for me." I had had enough experience to know if you aren't doing anything, you're doing nothing. But I got to fly an airplane.

SM: You did?

CG: Didn't I tell you about that?

SM: No.

CG: Oh, yes. Major Joe French, F-r-e-n-c-h, his farm home was up at Ada. And I just chatted with him one day. I said, "You know, is it possible I could go up and fly with you in the F-16," Or whatever airplane it was? Well, he said, "I don't think there's any problem." So he said he was going to be going up in a couple of days, or whatever, to go Ada to fly over his parent's farm. So I got a picture of me in my Air National Guard uniform putting on my helmet. And I got in the back seat. We go up to Ada and then I said, "Hey, are we going to be going down to Detroit Lakes area?" They fly very fast. And I said, "Say can I take over the controls a little bit?" I've flown a couple of airplanes myself – little Piper Cubs and stuff. "Well," he said, "no problem." So we go over my brother's farm just half a mile north of Audubon. And I'm up at about 9,000 feet, and I come down to about a thousand, pulled back, and climb out of the dive. A couple of days later my brother says, "Were you that son-of-a-bitch who tried to take the top off my silo?"

SM: He knew it was you.

CG: No, he didn't know but . . .

SM: He wondered.

CG: I was at least a thousand of feet over the top of the silo. Oh yes, so I said, "That probably was me, but I was nowhere near to hitting your silo."

SM: How did your Navy experience affect your life?

CG: It was the best thing I could have ever have done.

SM: Tell me why.

CG: Because I got not only to leave home. I wasn't afraid of home, but I was 17-18 years old. I wanted to be in the war. I was too young, the war was over, and I got to Japan. I got to see people like the boys from Arkansas who were tough, tough, tough. I saw that they weren't so tough. When you could get a shot, they were the first ones that died on they called it "the grinder" over and over. And I got to Japan, I loved the Far East. I still love the Far East.

I went to China and I hitchhiked from the ocean end of the Great Wall to the inland end, 4,000 kilometers inland.

SM: Wow and this is much later you went back?

CG: Oh yes. This was in 1970 – just ahead of Tiananmen Square. I can't tell you when it is.

SM: That was in 1986, wasn't it?

CG: You're right, good. You have better knowledge than me. You're younger than me.

SM: I am a little bit younger, yes, I'm about half your age.

CG: As I hitchhiked, I rode a Chinese train. I lived in a four-bunk railcar with two ladies underneath me. Everybody respected each other and, as I say, I got to the Ürümqi, U-r-u-m-c-j-i, Ürümqi the inland end of the Great Wall. I was traveling with a young boy from Vancouver, BC, and we were almost at the very, very great end of the Wall. And I said, "Why don't we go a little bit farther?" Well you had to come down off of a parapet and walk. We went 1,500 feet and the guard has got his gun up; we turned around and went back. My friend from Vancouver, BC, we will never forget that experience.

SM: Wow.

CG: I enjoyed traveling with him. He was half my age. He was only 25-30, give or take. But fantastic trip we had. As I say, I love the Far East, China especially. Even though I'm still disappointed, down in the entryway they have a Chinese Christmas tree, made in China.

SM: Bought from Walmart, probably.

CG: Probably so, yes. As I say, I've had an interesting life, especially with Sharon. We traveled and had such enjoyable trips. But then once she started to have problems with her kidneys, I cried like a baby. Not afraid to say, not afraid to say it. But that's the way it goes in life. Oh, what else?

SM: Any other memorable experiences during the military in Japan?

CG: **Oh, let's see. I stayed in the Japanese home, and went to the Yokosuka Enlisted Men's Club and drank beer with my friend from Princeton. And I**

made a damn fool mistake by drinking beer instead of being able to go up to Mount Fuji, but that's what happens in life if you do damn fool things.

SM: Well you're young, too, sometimes you make different decisions.

CG: Yes, I think, other than bringing back a Japanese rifle and a bayonet. I lost the bayonet out on the farm burglary, as well as the rifle, but I don't think I got – oh, here I got one little thing, I'll show you. Just hang on a second.

SM: So this is your Yokosuka flag?

CG: Yes it is.

SM: Let me ask you one more question. How did you feel about World War II, given the fact that both of your parents were of German descent?

CG: They were Americans. My mom was born in the U. S. but my father was born in Germany. And he came over when he was three years old. He had only a fifth grade education, but he was smart as a damn whip. He was totally against Germany Hitler. I suspect his family must have known something was not going to be going right in Germany. I guess, if I was told, I have forgotten why they came to the U. S. You know, when you're only three to four to five, seven, eight years old, you don't ask all these questions. Not like what you're doing. I wish I had, but obviously I didn't do it.

SM: What year, approximately, did your father come over from Germany?

CG: Oh, I think I got it written down someplace. I think it would be . . .

SM: About 1900?

CG: Oh, before that. Let's see, I got it here. He died at 54 years old. If he only came over at three years old . . .

SM: He died at how old 55?

CG: Fifty-four or fifty-five.

SM: Fifty-four or five, he died in 1941?

CG: Forty-five.

SM: He died in 1945 and so he was about 55, so he would have come over about 1893, approximately?

CG: I think that's . . .

SM: Eighteen-ninety-three?

CG: I'm not clear about that. And my mother was born in southern Minnesota.

SM: Okay.

CG: So have I bored you?

SM: No, thank you very much for your time, Mr. Gebert.

CG: Close enough.

SM: Gebert, is that right?

CG: I have . . .

SM: I'm not saying it right, how do you say it?

CG: 'geh bert'

SM: 'geh bert' Mr. Gebert, thank you very much.