Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

JOHN GREENING

Gunner, Air Force, Korean War

1997

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Greening, John A. (1930-1998). Oral History Interview, 1997.
Approximate length: 85 minutes
Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, John Greening, a native of Ionia, Michigan and resident of Oregon, Wisconsin, discusses his service as a gunner in the Air Force with the 20th AF, 93rd Bombardment Squadron, 19th Bomb Group during the Korean War. An asthmatic child, and subject to a sense of limitations told him and self-imposed, Greening feels that "going into the service was the biggest advance in my life for several reasons." Being accepted, therefore, by the Air Force, was a surprise, and a boost to his self-confidence. A satisfaction in meeting challenges, enhanced. An air enthusiast, his earlier biography had involved frequent trips to the airport; the aviator and barn-storming pilot Roscoe Tanner being a boyhood hero. Greening built up a collection of aircraft fliers acquired from the local gas station. Following his high school graduation in 1948, he started community college. At the outbreak of the "police action" in Korea he was doing odd jobs around town—" rudderless." Only the resumption of conscription had the effect of bringing the distant war into his consciousness. He enlisted in August at Fort Sherman in Detroit, and had his basic training at a former Navy base in Geneva, New York. He feels that the constant marching of basic had the desired effect; overall, basic training, and the air force life to ensue, met his predilection for organization. Greening expounds on the demographics of his fellow recruits, and notes the effects observed of President Truman's recent order desegregating the military. He recounts his first encounter with "Jim Crow" on an auto trip from technical training at Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado to Randolph AFB in Texas. He describes the flight crew assembled at Randolph, and explains why the B-29 was considered "the Cadillac of the Air." He touches upon the "excitement" of maintenance flights, and the characteristics of the flight crew assembled there. The crew left Randolph in late 1952 to train as a combat group in Topeka, Kansas. Greening recalls the realism of survival training in Reno, Nevada. Assigned to the 20th Air Force, headquartered in Guam, his crew flew to McClellan AFB in Sacramento, California to claim their B-29 Superfortress. By the end of November they were in Guam; their home base, Kadena, on Okinawa. He specifies what their mission in Korea entailed; remembering his tally of 28 missions, he judges the period between Christmas and New Year's Day 1953 as "one of the most intense times," disabusing one of the notion that there can be atheists in aircraft. He discusses the capabilities of the MIG-15 fighter plane, provided the North Koreans and the Chinese by the Soviet Union; and compares it with the B-29. He distinguishes between the hazards that his B-29 faced; contrasts the efficacy of Marine and Air Force fighters; and considers the benefit, toward war's end, of the advent of Electronic Countermeasures. He furnishes an example of the status consciousness of the airman. Asserting that they mostly engaged in interdicting troops and supplies, Greening takes issue with one assessment that judged the air mission in Korea to be a "strategic failure." Greening credits the exploits of an expert bombardier,

especially given the consequences that the lack of precision along the Yalu River border with China might bring. Greening shares his feeling that restrictions placed him and his crew in "unnecessary danger;" his contemporary upset over Truman's sacking of MacArthur whom they deemed an 'oriental genius;" and the effect on morale of the home front disengagement and the constant negotiations. He talks about his crew's daily flying schedule, and the effect of stress. Greening was back in the US in April 1953. Sent to Savannah, Georgia to fulfill his enlistment, he did not have an opportunity to fly, or feel that he was meaningfully employed. Feeling "cheated" out of a higher-grade commission, he tried to enter Officer Candidate School. He was released from his four-year commitment with the consideration of combat time served, and personal necessity. A sense of honor and duty led him in 1955 or later to join the Reserve. Greening attended Port Huron Junior College utilizing the GI Bill, and found that his military service had made easier the task of studying. After obtaining an associate's degree in business administration, he went to work for his father until 1959 and for Diamond Crystal thereafter. He became a Wisconsin resident in 1965.

Biographical Sketch:

John Greening (1930-1998) served in the Air Force with the 20th AF, 93rd Bombardment Squadron, 19th Bomb Group during the Korean War. After the war he attended college on the GI Bill. He moved to Wisconsin in 1965.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997.
Transcribed by Bruce Stone, 2009, and Bess Farley, 2012.
Abstract by Jeff Javid, 2016.

Transcribed Interview:

Van Ells: Today's date is June 11, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Greening Andrew Greening, a veteran of the US Air Force, the Korean War, from Madison, Wisconsin now, and you consider Madison your hometown as you mentioned. I suppose we should start at the top, as they say, and why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing up through high school, let's say.

Greening: Well, I was born in Ionia, Michigan, thirty odd miles east of Grand Rapids, and we lived there to early '46. My time was December 3, '30, so on fifteenth year, well, we moved to Port Huron, Michigan on the far side of the state, at the base of Lake Huron. In the period in Ionia it was primarily just going through the grow up stage. I was always encouraged by my parents to read. My mother was a teacher and a great pianist. My dad was a tremendous craft expert in anything, and I think we had a good background and encouragement. It was an area where, you know, you're just spending your time through school and things like that, but I always [inaudible] my reading and going out to the airport which is still there. Interested in aircraft and things like that. In fact, I had mentioned off this tape, that I just read a history book of Roscoe Turner. While in the years when I was a kid he was a kind of a superhero in aviation, and I think he really was. So, that was about what we did. Went to school there, started high school at the time we moved.

Van Ells: So, you weren't old enough to fight in World War II, you were certainly old enough to remember it?

Greening: Oh, yes.

Van Ells: Why don't you just tell me a little bit about how you remember that?

Greening: Well, we were given the opportunity, once a week on Saturdays, we were allowed to go to the Ionia movie theater. It cost a nickel, and in the afternoon you could go, and of course there was always news sections. And it was a little confusing and very interesting, things that were happening in Europe, the growth of the German situation. One afternoon I was in--which wasn't a Saturday--I was in the theater, and I liked the movie. It was just kind of a normal movie, and I started to stay a second time, and my dad came in to find me, and he looked a little tense, and I thought "Uh-oh, he's upset because I sat here." We got outside, and all he said was—we got in the car, he said "The Japanese have attacked us, and we're at war". And my first response was, "What's this going to do to us?"

You know, my dad at the time would have been, I would think, in his middle thirties as he had a family of five children, and you know, "What's going to happen?" And I think every citizen in the United States had the same or similar response, "What's happening?" That was my first reaction to the December 7th thing. And then later on in the next few months, even in Ionia, they had evenings of air defense programs. We had a man walking around with his flashlight and warning you to turn your lights off and things like that. It was a very serious time in late '41, early '42. After that there was a great interest in what was happening, and I took a huge collection—stopping at gas stations to get fliers on different types of military aircraft, and I drove—a lot of gas station guys upset going in ‘cause a little kid isn't gonna buy gas. But I collected quite a group. I was interested in what was happening. I used to draw a lot of pictures, cartoons, about things that I was picking up about World War II.

Van Ells: You had this interest in aircraft already?

Greening: Yup.

Van Ells: I’d imagine the war sort of helped to spur that, or maybe not?

Greening: Well, it was something that—it just created a serious interest. One of my problems, probably psychologically, is I'm serious about everything, and I could do something that's almost beyond my ability, and if I succeed I feel good. I don't really get excited, I just feel, you know, it seems over the years that everything I've accomplished has been something that somebody told me, "You can't do that." And as you can see right now, I wear glasses. I was prior to middle school an asthmatic person, and always, “You can't do this,” “You can't do that,” and it just gives you momentum to really work on it and achieve it for your own satisfaction. World War II was very interesting, and it felt sure that there was nothing as a kid that you could really do to help those people, you know, our troops, and what can you do to help them? And there was always that shortcoming, but it was a interesting time.

Van Ells: So, the war ended, you must have been in high school somewhere, and if my calculations are correct you must have finished high school by the late '40s or something?

Greening: 1948. That was in Port Huron, Michigan. And at that time I really—well, it wasn’t—my parents, my mother was, as I mentioned, a teacher, and there was the need to go on to college. In the late '40s, frankly, at that time if you had a high school certificate you were, employment-wise, in good shape, and there was only --the feeling was that only people who had sufficient time and money could go to college or a definite goal, to be a doctor or something like that. I started right away into a community

college, and I went one semester, and I just couldn't get myself fired up. Accounting was easy, but some of the other things just kind of bothered me so I dropped out. Now, after I got back from service, I had a different approach to life that going in the –I'm jumping ahead—going into the service was the biggest advance in my whole life for several reasons. I mentioned I had an asthmatic background. Many times I'd start to leave the house, and I would always hear—this was a mother's job—"Be careful. Now don't run, don't do this, be careful." And when it came time for drafting in our community, I thought, you know, I'll never live if I'm in a dugout someplace. So what I will do is I'll enlist in the Air Force, and they'll reject me, then I'll go and get a job, and to my total surprise they accepted me. And driving home from Detroit to Port Huron, about sixty odd miles, all the way I kept thinking, you know, this is something different. They accepted me, and it just loosened up what I felt I could do. Because before, everything I did I would have to think, well, I could be careful, I can't do this. Then the next step is they offered to put me on a flight physical, and I knew I wouldn't make that, but I passed it. So it just turned everything—you know, wait a minute; this is a whole new world coming up. So it was quite a change. And when I came back and went back to the community college I found that—I forget the percentage, but a huge percentage of the students were ex-veterans, and they were all great students. The students that were having a problem were the ones like I was, you know, a little bit earlier who was there because the parents thought you should be there. And I remember in—I was in a chemistry class, and chemistry was not a big thing, and at the time--this is after service--and this one exam I got a C, and I went up to the instructor, professor, and I told him, I said, you know, "I'm way, way, way ahead of every student in this class. I should have had an A." Well, he corrected me that, you know, they weren't doing it that way. He said, "You earned a C." He said, "Now, all the other people"—oh, well, at time they called 'em E's, they'd fail, but I was thinkin' at the time, well, if they all failed then I should automatically have an A. But the difference was—I talked to some of the young students who were in the classroom, and they said, "Well, at this time everybody says that we have to be engineers." So probably none of them were in that school to be what they thought they should be. They were there because what they were directed towards, and that's kind of a shame. This is an advantage coming back from service: you pretty well have settled down, and your mind has advanced a little more adult, and you plan things properly. And I found that year and a half for the community college was—it wasn't a snap, but it was just so easy, and it flowed so well that it was truly a pleasure. Now the Veterans Administration did help out, too. That was another plus.

Van Ells: Well, we'll come to that. I want to go back a little bit to June of 1950. At the time that the Korean War broke out, what were you doing?

Greening: 1950, I was probably standing on the high part of some building painting a wall on the outside. That would probably be—[laughs] I forgot [inaudible]. Yeah, there's periods when I worked in gas stations, and then I went out painting and things like that.

Van Ells: You were just working some odd jobs apparently?

Greening: Yeah, I just didn't have any direction.

Van Ells: Do you recall specifically when the Korean War broke out?

Greening: I do from an historical standpoint. At the time it was just, you know, you read the newspaper, and something's happening, and, you know, it didn't really have a strong impact like December 7th did.

Van Ells: Like Pearl Harbor?

Greening: Yeah. No, it was just something that was happening, it was way over somewhere, and I think at sometime I probably did go to my globe and see where the heck Korea was.

Van Ells: Yeah. [momentary pause in recording].So we left off June 1950, the Korean War breaks out. Didn't have quite the impact, let's say, a Pearl Harbor did?

Greening: No, not—

Van Ells: But as time went on, I'd imagine it started to sink in that the country was in a war, or did people consider it a war? Now, this is the thing about the Korean War.

Greening: No, because publicity-wise it was. In fact, President Truman used it continually. Although I have seen a couple of speeches where he said it was a—later on, two or three years later, that it was a threat to our security. But initially it was just a police action. And at that time, I think, reading the paper, the media was relaying what [momentary pause in recording; also inaudible] you know, it was just something, you have to name it. What actually started the motivation was the fact that they were running short of people so they started drafting. And, as I mentioned before, the thought of being in a foxhole just seemed, you know, instant death or something. I wasn't capable of that. So I had thought that—I was always interested in aviation. If I'm going to be rejected, let's enlist in the Air Force. And I actually did go to my doctor's, and I went to my pharmacist, and I went down to enlist at Fort Sherman in Detroit, and I had probably a pile of papers at least two inches thick telling the world how bad I was medically, and I knew they would reject me, and I had a

very light feeling because I knew this was just a kind of a technical procedure. We'd go through this, they'd reject me, and that would mean that I couldn't possibly be drafted so I wouldn't be in that foxhole. It wasn't too long later, maybe a couple hours, I was driving back from Detroit to Port Huron, and all the way, I was thinking I can't believe it, they not only accepted me, they want me over in Geneva, New York next week, and maybe I'm not medically as bad off as I've been told I was. Which was really, it was a feeling of relief. It was just a good feeling. Here was something I was interested in, aviation. I knew I could never fly because of my medical history and because I wore glasses. But just to be there seemed good. My time in Sampson Air Force Base in Geneva, New York, which was established to relieve Lackland down in [San Antonio] Texas, it was difficult in some ways—

Van Ells: Now, this is your basic training—

Greening: Basic training.

Van Ells: Your boot camp.

Greening: Right, yup. In fact, ironically, boot camp, Sampson was a Navy base prior to that, and there's no airfield there. But while I was there--in fact, I have a picture of it – they were setting up a P-39 [fighter plane] on the entrance just to identify it as an Air Force base, and all of us being recruits were real pleased that they put that airplane in there because we were on a Navy base, you know? And it just worked out very nicely.

Van Ells: So your basic training lasted how long?

Greening: Well, I can tell you approximately. I enlisted in first part of August, and I was on my way to Denver, and it seems to me it was in October, so it would have been, yeah, a couple months.

Van Ells: What did this training consist of? How much of it was in the classroom, how much was on the rifle range, et cetera?

Greening: Not too much in the classroom. It was primarily--I'll use the term "a drill sergeant." But it's not like the Marine Corps. There was a person assigned to your little squad, and they trained you, and a lot of it started initially in the marching thing. And you wonder why we are doing all the marching, but, as it needs to be, it's to get you reacting. You know, he says something, and you react automatically, and that's the way you need to, and there's a good reason for that. We did a lot of that, and then sometimes we'd march out two or three miles on the base, then we'd kind of sit around, and he'd talk to us, and probably a lot of the classroom-type training was done in that manner. We did have, towards the end, some

time spent in some serious cross-country running with your Army-type materials and climbing and diving over things, while they're shootin' over your head, stuff like that. I think the actual firearms training we probably--I only remember one day where we were in this what I'd call "a gymnasium building", and shooting with a .22 rifle at the far side. That's, you know, at the time, is the only shooting I could remember. We were in the Air Force, you know.

Van Ells: Yeah—I remember [both laugh]. Now, some people have difficulty adjusting to military life, the strict discipline and some of the sort of salty language, that sort of thing. Were there any things that you had trouble adjusting to in military life? And then, by extension, did you see—were there others who perhaps "washed out," I think was the term we used?

Greening: Well, I don't think I did. I like to have organization. That's one of my big problems in life. It drives my wife—stresses her occasionally, is I have to have all my ducks in a row and everything organized, and I think I kind of enjoyed that. My problem or worry there was to misinterpret. I can remember one day I walked in the medical department, only because the sergeant of our squad told me to go over to the hospital and walk through it, and I said, "What do I do, sir?" He said "Just walk through it." So as I started walkin' through and doctors comin' up, so I am salutin' another doctor, and I salute—I probably in one space of maybe twenty or thirty feet I must have done—it seems like that many salutes, maybe four or five, and finally a doctor stopped and called me into his little office, closed the door and he said, "Now, look", he says, "you don't do that". He was the one who told me that you go in the building, you don't salute and things like that, and these thing—I could have hugged him, except I wouldn't dare to because he was a captain, and I was a buck private. But that was my concern, not knowing quite—

Van Ells: But you were pretty enthusiastic to be in?

Greening: Yes.

Van Ells: You wanted to adapt to things. Were there others who perhaps didn't want to be there?

Greening: In our group there's quite a few squads in our barracks, and I really don't know of any that were having any problems in that. I don't know if it was the time, what was available for teenagers in civilian life or what, but I think the people who didn't like things just kept it to themselves.

Van Ells: Or joined the Army? [laughs]

Greening: Well, you know, you mentioned something about choice of lyrics. I hear things on nighttime TV that back then none of the guys—words that were—all the time I was in service I never heard some of the words that are on TV right now. Never.

Van Ells: Really?

Greening: I don't know if we should have this, but I'd hear words like "Oh, dammit", and then the guy would turn and look at you like he's apologizing, his expression, because you didn't do that. You know, beyond that type of word, you know, people just didn't do it, at least where I was. Now Navy guys, if they're drunk, theoretically they probably invented these words [both laugh]. But that's an opinion, that's not history.

Van Ells: That's what we're here for. Basic training often brings people together from all different parts of the country, different class backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds. That was my experience anyway, and a lot of other veterans I speak to. What was your experience in that regard? Were there people from all over the country or northeastern part of the country?

Greening: Well, from—the people we had around us were, as you said, northeast. They'd be Michigan, Ohio, New York, of course—Pennsylvania. That'd be about it. We did have a group which we weren't involved in—we asked the sergeant one day—there was another barracks down a ways, and there was some people in there, and we asked the sergeant how come we never mix with them. And he said "Well", he said "the Air Force has accepted them, but you can't mix with them". And I said "What's the problem?", and he says "Well, they're mentally—they can't pass any of the tests". They were just not—it had nothing to do with race or sex or anything, it was strictly their school training. And the Air Force wanted to—they were actually putting in some school, really, to get 'em—bring 'em up—why they're doing it I'm not sure. But I thought we decided that was a good idea that, you know, these young guys, if they need the school, well, why can't the government do it, with the war coming.

Van Ells: Yeah. And so everybody pretty much got along—

Greening: Yup.

Van Ells: In basis training. Now one of the things that was new during the Korean War period was racial integration?

Greening: Yes.

Van Ells: Truman integrated the military on paper in 1947, but in reality it didn't often work out that way. What was your experience? In basic training, for example, were there blacks in your group?

Greening: Well, there wasn't in Sampson in Geneva, New York, in basic. We got to Denver at Lowry Air Force Base, and all the technical training was there, and I really enjoyed it. That was—it just seemed such a great place. In fact, I was fortunate I had two promotions there just in the first short period, and looking back on I guess I was showing my enthusiasm. But there I really didn't see too much racial mix except when we all finished we were being transferred. I was being transferred to Randolph Air Force Base in Texas, the "West Point of the Air", and I thought, you know, we've got a week, and we can fly down, we can take a bus, and I told a bunch of guys, I said, "You know, why don't I buy a car?" And I said I'll take five other guys, or at least three other guys, and the three guys, if we all pay twenty bucks apiece we can drive, and we can see, you know, eastern Colorado—which is nothing, it's just downhill to Kansas, but we didn't know that—and we can go through Oklahoma and so on. And two of the men, one man I knew real well, went with me and the two that went with us were colored, to use the term of the day. And real great guys, and frankly, I was pleased to have them because these guys were sharp, and I liked 'em. And I was so naive—I probably was until I was in my fifties, but I had never run into any situation. And we're driving down, and we left Denver, we drove down, we got through a little part of Oklahoma until we got into Texas. We stopped for gas in Texas, and there was a restaurant there so we all went in. And we sat down, and this guy came over, and he whispered something into one of these men's ear, and the two of them got up and walked out. And I jumped up, and I said—you know, I was upset—I said "What in the hell is goin' on?" And this guy said, "If you insist on them being here, you go too." I had no idea what they were talking about because I had never over my previous twenty years had read or concentrated on, you know, a problem, of what happened down south. But that was our first experience, and I just couldn't believe it. And after we left—the guy did feed 'em. He took 'em out around the back and brought 'em into his kitchen, and he did feed 'em. Then he came out afterwards when I paid him and he says, "Forget it." He said, "Obviously you guys are from the North, and you don't know." He explained that, you know, you're going down deeper, and it's gonna get worse than this. So we are drivin' a long ways, and the guys in back said, "You know, this is going to be a problem", and I said "To hell with 'em". I said, "We're a team, we're part of the Air Force, and this is an Air Force journey." I said "I've got the orders here", and I said "As far as I'm concerned, this is an official Air Force vehicle", because I bought it when I was on the camp and so on. And we got into the north Texas area, down towards Austin – not Austin, what's the name --

Van Ells: Amarillo?

Greening: Amarillo.

Van Ells: Wichita Falls? Air Force Base.

Greening: Yeah. And we're heading down, we start going into town, and I stop for a stoplight. What I had bought was a '36 Pontiac where the front doors opened on the front. And we'd be driving through the prairies, and—you can't do it now, but we really enjoyed it 'cause we'd have the doors open and we'd be coasting. We stopped, it's a stoplight, and the two guys in back obviously had been talking to themselves, and they said—he slapped me on the shoulder, and he said "We're gonna leave now." And I said, "You can't leave." I said, "You're in the middle of nowhere." He said "No, we're now where we know how we can get from here to there." And I said "Well, you've already paid us." And he said "No, you bought the car." He said, "You keep our money." And he said, "We'll make it". And I am sitting there, just can't believe what this man is saying, and while I'm pausing, trying to think of some response, they jumped out and took off. And for weeks and weeks I was very angry about this situation because these SOBs in the area were creating a situation again. Here's guys that go out and get themselves killed, and were sharp and good technicians, and if I had to have one supporting my equipment I'd like to have either one of the two, and, you know, I was totally naïve to reality.

Van Ells: Sort of an eye-opening experience?

Greening: Oh, it was just unbelievable. And I've never discussed it until today because, you know, who can be that naive? But that's reality.

Van Ells: Let's talk about your technical training a little bit. When you first enlisted, what were your occupational expectations? Was there a particular thing you wanted to do? I mean, you were enlisting, not going into the officers corps, so flying obviously wasn't—I mean piloting wasn't one of the things you wanted to do, but what were you expecting to do?

Greening: Nothing particularly. I just was hoping that they would direct me towards something that would be good. And I was just—really, I was just happy to just to be there. And I was still feeling good because of the change in attitude that, you know, my medical background shouldn't be on me for life. We did start a series of tests, and going through these various series, I'm looking at the titles, and I asked this one sergeant to come over, and it was all [inaudible], and you do your own testing, and I asked him, you know, what a couple of things were, and I said "What is 'Service'?" And he said "Well, that's working in the making the food and stuff like that." And I thought I didn't want to do that. So that was--all my scores were,

quite frankly, pleased. All my scores were extremely high, and the ones that were low were the one or two **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** without looking at me, kind of muttered to himself that it was pretty obvious that I had cheated and got those two down because I didn't want to do it, and of course I couldn't respond because he was an officer. But it was the truth. I couldn't imagine being in a kitchen, peeling potatoes. You know, take away your fun. So, other than that, anything else I would have been happy.

Van Ells: And you eventually got into armament and gunnery?

Greening: Yup.

Van Ells: Now, there was a war going on—

Greening: Right.

Van Ells: At this time. Did [inaudible] have a problem with that?

Greening: No, because that meant that either I would be over in an active unit, maintenance, for who knows, good Lord's willing maybe I can actually fly.

Van Ells: So you were interested in actually getting to Korea and getting into the action?

Greening: Well, do whatever was, you know, a part of it. Actually, if they'd sent me—a lot of guys, when we left, some went to Germany, and—well, the rest of us went the other way. Germany was in one direction. But I'm sure they did well. But I just felt so much better going where—because they were putting me into things that everybody I knew, knew I couldn't do. This always motivated me.

Van Ells: So why don't just walk me through your training? How much flying did you do? How much of this was in the classroom? How many different bases did you go to? And just walk me up to the point where you go to Guam.

Greening: Well, my actual active service was exactly two years. And I would have to pull my sheet out and count 'em, but we were at twenty odd air bases.

Van Ells: So you're flying around from air base to air base as part of your training?

Greening: Yup.

Van Ells: And on these flights, what is it you're doing, just getting used to being up in the air? Or are you shooting and aiming at stuff?

Greening: Well, we're doing our particular position work, training. We were part of—this actually, I'm moving ahead to Randolph. At Lowry the flights were strictly connected with, you know, gunnery. We'd go up, and the fighters that were based at Lowry would attack—you know, we'd become comfortable with the gunnery. And on the B-29, I'm lookin' at that one, but on the B-29—which I still believe is the "Cadillac of the Air," it was so advanced, and a lot of people didn't realize that it was operated on by computers. Now, the computers were as big as half of your cabinet over there, was one computer operating the turrets. I know, it was a different era with tubes and things instead of what they have now. But it was very advanced. And we did—a lot of flights was involved in aerial gunnery practice. It wasn't really that much. Towards the end as we proceeded we got involved into some in-aircraft maintenance, and I remember one week we went out, worked on the engines of the plane, things like that, and I always admired that because I thought if you're anything in aviation you can't be concentrating on one thing; you've got to have an idea of the whole operation, and of course you have to be your own expert. But they were very good in spreading us where we were comfortable with the whole aircraft. That was good.

Van Ells: So a B-29 has a crew of—how many guys?

Greening: A combat crew would be eleven, basically.

Van Ells: And where were you precisely?

Greening: I was supposed to be the Central [Station] Fire Control because I outranked all the rest of them. However, I declined that and put our left observer gunner, waist gunner, in the top because I wanted to be on that waist because the two waist gunners become part of the flight crew because you have the aircraft commander who would be the pilot. The pilot—who is actually the co-pilot—flight engineer, and these two gunners, they were the five men that were the flight crew. And I told this man I put up in top, Gerald Rima, up in Nebraska, I said "Dean"—well, that was his middle name. I always called him Dean. I said, "Dean, I've gotta do this" because I want to be able to fly when this is not in a combat thing, 'cause you'd go up for maintenance flights, we'd get to fly. And maintenance flights were really kind of interesting because they were doing wild maneuvers that you wouldn't normally do, and it was kind of exciting. And, quite frankly, we were fairly convinced that down the road we were going to be killed anyway, so let's do well and enjoy what we're doing.

Van Ells: So you trained with the same crew pretty much?

Greening: After Randolph.

Van Ells: After Randolph. Is this the same crew then that you went overseas with?

Greening: Yes.

Van Ells: And then went to Korea with?

Greening: We lost—we lost two of the men in our Randolph crew. One was transferred, flight engineer. I never knew for sure, I think it had something to do with his physical ability. The bombardier was shipped out, and the bombardier—we always questioned, and I have said many times that he couldn't find Matagorda Island on the Gulf of Mexico, let alone hit a target, and we were faced with a situation where a crew which had already been pretty much trained together was going to be broken up, and each of us individually would be set up in other crews. Our aircraft commander was very upset being in service because he had been in World War II and lived through it, and he and his father owned a Cadillac agency in Sacramento, California, and he got recalled. And we were very concerned, the enlisted me, having him as the aircraft commander originally 'cause his flying seemed so careless, his attitude. But we discovered that every time we had a problem, an engine out or something, this guy's ability was just unbelievably good. And over time he kind of settled down. But it was being upset at being recalled that, you know, bothered him initially. But we had a case going into Japan one night that was so bad I went back to assist the tail gunner in setting up the remote power unit, and things were so quiet, and you couldn't see anything. We could look out the window, and you couldn't see the tail or the wing. And I told the tail guy, I said, "Freddie, open the door so if we do crash, if we start to spin, we can get out of here." And so he did, and we're sitting there waiting for a crash, and we couldn't believe [inaudible]. Our hearts almost stopped, because there's—a head shows up. Our boss had landed this plane so smoothly and stopped it that we're still waiting to crash, and here's his face come up to the door, and I swear we almost died. But that's how good this man was when it was tough.

Van Ells: So this might be a good opportunity to have you tell me a little bit about the crew of your plane. Sounds like you pretty much covered the pilot a little bit, recovered, very competent. You said there were eleven guys on the plane.

Greening: Right.

Van Ells: We talked about you and the pilot. Some of the other nine guys—where did they come from, and what were their personality quirks?

Greening: Okay, they're really good. The aircraft commander, of course, was from Sacramento, what we called the pilot, civilian would call a co-pilot. I'd have to check, I can't tell you where Rusden was from, but he was a real sharp man. And Harry would look like—he always impressed me that he would look—he would be a man that if I went to the movies and there was a pre-World War II aviation movie, he'd be one of those pilots. He just looked good, the part. Our bombardier, we skipped around him, he was a fellow that came to us when the man who couldn't find Matagorda Island was transferred. We were given the opportunity if we wanted to accept this new man. And I asked the commander who the new man was, and he said it was James Neal, and he's a captain, and he works at a post office up in Dallas. And I said, "When's he coming?" He said, "Now wait a minute, you've got to know he's a little older than what you'd expect". So I went to our aircraft commander and asked him, I said, "Do you know Captain Neal, how old he is?" And he says, "He's fifty". And we stood there stunned. They're gonna hire a fifty year old bombardier for us. And the guys all got together and asked the sergeant, the guys said, "You know, you gotta do something." And I said, "Wait a minute, let's stop and think. Why would the Air Force take an old fifty year old man, bring him back in, unless he was pretty darn good?" So we decided to--I don't think we could have changed it. But the officers were really good. They allowed us to make our decisions, you know. We decided to accept him [laughs], and we went on our first flight, and we were all kind of waiting to see if, you know, if he could find Matagorda Island. Well, he hit the first target just exactly, centered, perfect. And we had high winds, and it was really not a very good day, and this guy was good. So our first reaction was he looks good, but he's probably lucky. Well, his whole career with us was that good. He was really great. Years later I was writing an article on our operation, and this retired colonel from Iowa called me, and he said, "You know, Captain Neal, he's still alive. He's down in Dallas in this apartment complex." And I couldn't believe it, and I said, "Look, gee, he'd have to be ninety-three years old." He said, "What are you talkin' about?" And I said, "Well, he fifty when he joined us", and he started laughing. What had happened is our aircraft commander was thirty-five, and the guys were concerned, you know, they were eighteen, nineteen, and they called me "Pops" because I turned twenty-one, and to have our aircraft commander at thirty-five—well, after realizing he was thirty-five, when the new man came the boss didn't say, "Well, he's thirty-seven." He said "Oh, he's fifty." He's gonna get us. He was still upset that he had been recalled. So all these years, up until a couple years ago, I thought he was fifty. But what a great guy he was, and he was just absolutely super. I could tell you a couple stories of what he did, just beyond belief, he was so good.

Van Ells: Good.

Greening: Well, we'll get back to it if we have time. But the first three men, you know, they're very good. Flight Engineer Robinson, he's down in Missouri. He's good. His job, his goal, was to build flight time successfully so that he could get into airline work and things like that, and then eventually, you know, work from a flight engineer into an airline pilot, that type of thing. When we were still in the United States, continental part, he would—sometimes we'd go over to a civilian airport and just nose around and things. He was very interested in his future in aviation. He was good. Our navigator—we're going from the notes on the back. Our navigator was a nice guy, but he's very quiet. He was not a guy that, you know, was your loud buddy. But he was good. I had one incident, our first trip over to the Pacific, we were flying from Honolulu to Greeningston Island [phone ringing], a long flight, the weather was bad. It was just terrible. I couldn't think—you know, Amelia Earhart's lost—how are we going find this little teeny island where the runway covers up most of the land? And anyway, we get down, we start lettin' down, and the boss [PA system announcement]—we were concerned about, you know, if he could find us, and the boss questionin' them, and he realigned the course and so on. And we get down real close to the water, and the boss says, "Well, you really screwed up" and our hearts sunk because, you know, we're going to crash, we're dead. And the navigator said, "What do you mean?" He said "I'm on the left side of the runway." And I thought "My God, we've flown 1000, 1500, whatever it is, miles, and we miss the runway by half a width." That's pretty darn good. That was the boss' peculiar way of really praisin' him, which we thought he deserved. He was really good. He did a lot of his navigation by sticking up and checking the stars and the sun and stuff like that. He was really good. Our radio operator—this is going to conflict with what we've already said a few minutes ago—but the radio operator was a colored man, big man. He was—he would be like tall enough for present-day basketball. And Mitch was a really good guy. He was good at his job. He was just a very nice guy. We liked to have him. I've got photos of him that are—he allowed me to set up and—you know, he was a good man. Moving back from there, we had the two side gunners, the left waist and the right waist. The gunners had the control of more than one turret, and in the center overhead was the Central [Station] Fire Control, and we had control of the top two in the tail if need be. You could set the computer, so if, for instance, a plane was coming in from the rear, a little bit left of the aircraft, the tail gunner could have him. Then as he came closer, the top or the side gunner would pick him up with the tail and the two lower turrets, and as he passed towards the front then the bombardier could pick it up with the two lower turrets and the upper turret. So, as long as--if you couldn't actually track the aircraft, you would just release your sight and automatically whoever was tracking would automatically pick up any

available turret. So it's possible at times you could have six or even eight guns on your side. It really sounded, you know, very useful. We'll get on to realities, fighting the MIGs, but that's another down the road a bit. Anyway, those gunners, one overhead, Gerald—and I called him Dean, his middle name. He never liked to use that because guys would laugh when the sergeant would say "Gerald Dean Rima". Well, anyway, I always referred to him as Dean. I thought Dean, you know, felt right. He's from Nebraska, and he was a good man. Our right gunner was from New York, Joe Tondalo. He was a big guy, he was an Italian fella, and he took us once in San Antonio to an Italian restaurant, and, again going back to being naive, he ordered spaghetti, and then he ordered some other kind of pasta and stuff, and none of us could ever believe--and I sat there, and I remember saying "You're going to eat that?" It was a big pile of thing with this tomato stuff, and it smelled—oh gee, you know, you grow up in Michigan you have bread and potatoes and carrots, that's it. So, you know, this group of people, we all learned things. Now Joe was a good man. Our tail gunner was really something. One story but I don't want to say this publication, but Freddy was from the lower part of Connecticut—Pendergast [Freddy Pendergast]. Freddy's a nice guy, slim, kind of tall. He was having—well, I'll get into it anyway. He was having some problems training-wise as far as scores and things, and they were going to reject him at one point, and we got together with the other guys and they said, "Look, we don't want some other guy in here. Let's sit down and we'll work with Fred." And we did. You get four or five guys sitting down around this poor man, and when he took his tests the next time, he passed way up. His problem I think was strictly that when you have a large group the instructor's just running on through as though he's readin' it, and if the people, somebody didn't understand something, it was never brought up, and, you know, if you missed that one item from there on you don't learn anything. When we got together and kind of pounded him a little bit, he would stop us and say, "Wait a minute". Well, that's what he needed, and he really did well in the rest of the service. He did very well. We had a good group. They were sharp. Our boss—we were only over in Okinawa a short time, and we were lead crew already, which we expected. It's just a feeling that things are going well. And we were trained that we were as good or better than the other people. We never bragged in front of the other people that we were better than them, but we knew that we could stand up to anybody and equal 'em, and it just helped tremendously. Now maybe the other crew had the same attitudes, which probably helped our whole squadron. It's hard to say, but we were very comfortable with what we were doing.

Van Ells: So you must have gone overseas then? You did your training and then your advanced training and that sort of thing. You must have gone overseas early '52, late '51, early '52?

Greening: Late '52. We left Randolph, which was a medium bombardment school, that's where the crew was put together. Went to Topeka, Kansas, and there we bought up into the combat part of the training as a group. And while we were there we went to Reno, Nevada where we had survival training, which was very different and very useful.

Van Ells: In what sense?

Greening: They drop you off—and I'm at a loss right now for the area, but they had a big athletic deal there not too many years later. This was just over the border into California. And we had twenty-some miles, air miles, that we had to cross through mountains on foot without being captured, and we survived, did it quite well. If you were caught you were treated pretty much as though you were a prisoner for a while. The *Detroit Free Press*, when I was—after I came home, had a big article complaining about the viciousness of the people capturing and tying up and beating and stuff like that, and frankly, I objected because it had to be reality, and if you are in a survival situation in an enemy area you've got to know what's really going on. But anyway, we made that pretty good. And then we were assigned to the 20th Air Force, headquartered at Guam, and we flew to Sacramento and McClellan [Air Force Base] where they had all the aircraft available, and they assigned us an aircraft, and we took it—to be—to us it was brand new, it was in such nice shape. It was all rebuilt.

Van Ells: That's a B-29 [Superfortress, a four engine propeller driven heavy bomber]?

Greening: Right. And we made a few test flights in the area. One Sunday morning—I say a few, probably, I don't know, three or four. And one Sunday morning early we took off, and the boss took us down just over the building level, and we flew down over the main road in Sacramento with all the engines out of sync so, you know, we must have been making one heck of a noise. And we got back to the air base, and there's all kinds of stuff going on, and nobody could prove—apparently the people were asleep or stuff, and there was all kinds of vicious complaints. But nobody had an identification. Now, on the air base everybody figured who it was, but they couldn't prove it, and frankly, we were going overseas, we kind of enjoyed the fact that we could go and tear up the boss's city, you know, just once. And I'm sure he had telephoned the family and said, you know, "I'm gonna—" So it was the only peculiar flight we did up to that time. But from there we finally were given the aircraft, assigned to it, and that was our aircraft for our entire tour. We flew from there to Hickam Field in Honolulu and from Hickam to Greeningston Island, then went up to Guam, stayed overnight at Guam. We stayed overnight at Greeningston Island too, but that was terrible. We had left in November in Sacramento. Hawaii was comfortable. It was pretty warm, but it was kind of--frankly,

we thought it was kind of blah. It was just when we were there there was no wind, nothing, it was just dead. We got to Greeningston Island, and my first reaction was I wouldn't be able to breathe because it was so humid and so terribly hot. You know, we'd been hours way up in the air, and when we landed we literally had an awful time breathing. We had to get some oxygen out periodically for a while until we could adjust, and that was terrible. And anyway, from Greeningston, we went to Guam, stayed overnight, and then we went up to Tachikawa [Air Base], Japan, where we made that night landing in the fog. And from there we went on to Kadena [Air Base] in Okinawa. That was our base.

Van Ells: So, how long was it from the time you arrived in Okinawa until your first combat mission? How long was it?

Greening: Well, I'd have to check my records. Backing up a little bit, it was Thanksgiving when we landed at Guam, so that brought us towards the end of November. We had to be there in November. And we came back—again I'd have it check my records, but probably like in April of '53. The first mission was very meaningless, which was a logical thing to do, let the people to go out someplace where it's safe. But then we went into the period between Christmas and New Year's of '52, '53, and I've read many books where they bring up the fact that that time was one of the most intense times, which it really was.

Van Ells: In terms of what?

Greening: Reaction from the--again using my term--Russians and East Germans, you know, the MIGs [Russian jet fighter plane] and so on. This one night in December, late December—I have photos of that too—but we had noticed, our approach run had a slight curve to it, and quite a long ways ahead of us, I would guess twenty miles, twenty-five miles, we saw this instant ball, red ball, just like a huge light. There was no flickering there, just this huge red light came on and went off just instant, gone. And it didn't make sense because if there was an explosion you would expect it to grow and decline. And one of the guys, I think Freddy Pendergast, asked the boss if he saw that and what it was, and he said we lost one of our aircraft. Well, they must have caught it before they dropped their load because it was just instant, gone. It wasn't too long after that and we were caught in the searchlights, and when the light hits you, you can't see anything. You could try to look at your hand, and you can't see it because the glare is so bad. And it was only seconds after that the MIGs started coming in, and it was pretty intense. Obviously I'm here, so we survived. I think it was about, well, fifteen seconds or something like that before we dropped. And anyway, we broke away. There was--where I was sitting I could see sections of the wing missing. Not the frame of the wing, but, you know, middle section. One wing tank, the complete area between engines was

gone. At one point—it seemed that there was a—rockets in those days were just rockets and hit the top edge of the wing in a manner that ricocheted—which instantly, thank the Lord, I have to say intensely that anybody who's been in a combat situation who says it's calming, they were never upset, they never prayed to the Lord, they're lying, or they're insane, one of the two. Probably lying, 'cause you can't possibly—I would never fly with somebody in a stressed situation if they were completely cool. I want them to know what they are doing, but you can't, you can't do that. It's absolutely impossible. I know of a case from Kadena, a man who was totally against religion. I'm not strongly religious, but I definitely believe in God. But he was totally against it, and till his first flight—and on his first flight, his first reaction was to ask one of the gunners what kind of words he should use to pray to God, and the response was, "You just say whatever you're feeling—." **[End of Tape 1, Side B]**

Van Ells: So, what you're suggesting is there are no atheists in foxholes or in—

Greening: No, I don't think so.

Van Ells: Combat aircraft [laughs].

Greening: No, I don't believe there can be. I don't know how you can.

Van Ells: So, how many missions did you fly overall? Like World War II, late in the European Theater, you got twenty-five and you rotated home. How many were you doing?

Greening: We had twenty-eight. Yeah, that was the minimum, and there was enough flow apparently that I don't know of any crew that went beyond the norm. But that was sufficient.

Van Ells: So this one particular raid that you described, was that not the most harrowing situation you were in?

Greening: Yeah. We had another situation that was--from today's standpoint was interesting. At the time we were not atheists. We were hit, and the first reaction—this was antiaircraft fire. The antiaircraft fire really was probably a greater danger than the fighters. The problem with the fighters, the MIGs, is their high-caliber cannon. They could stand beyond the range of our .50-caliber weapons. And we had changed the ammunition so there would be a red ball going every—I forget if it was fifth or sixth round—so that'd look like a .20-mm. Well, you know, who's kidding who? But that's all we could do. And a MIG would come in, you could tell when he was within his range because you could see the plane start to sag because they probably dropped their flaps and maybe occasionally dropped a gear, and then when they wanted to fire they would just straighten up and fire

because they were beyond our range. It really wasn't—you know, you fired back to hopefully make 'em nervous, but, you know, there's no way really of hitting 'em. It was frustrating. But anyways, one night we were hit from the ground, and the first thing was—which I didn't recall at the time, but Gerald Rima said afterwards that he heard this faint voice say, "Dean", and the only person in the aircraft who would call him Dean was me, and he looked down, and I was semi-collapsed, and he told the boss. He said I had been hit. But what happened, I wasn't hit, but the aircraft was hit, and we continued dropping bombs. It doesn't matter how hard you're hit, you've gone through so much risk to get there that you sure aren't going to quit when you're within a short distance. You know, you keep going because you're liable to be caught on the way back anyway so to finish it. Otherwise you come back the next day. But we had dropped the target, then we broke away, and we started back, and the aircraft seemed stable, and by that time I'm up, I'm okay. What had happened— it had nothing to do with the shot hitting the aircraft, but apparently there had been some moisture in the oxygen system, and my oxygen went out. And I must have felt something, and I don't recall saying it, but I must have said, "Dean". And it was just the timing that I lose the oxygen while they're tryin' to get out of the area. But when we landed in Itazuke, Japan, we didn't want to go all the way back to Kadena 'cause you didn't know what damage you had. The engines were still okay, the flight seemed stable. We landed and discovered there's a big hole under the left part of the nose on the port side. And when the bomb crews came in to check they found that this big antiaircraft shell had come in through the aircraft. Then it stopped on the bottom of the seat of the aircraft commander. And what probably slowed it up besides the fuselage and stuff is the springs and so on. It stopped there. And one of the gunners kind of laughed, and he said, "Boy, it's a good thing it's a typical, you know, oriental, you know, it didn't explode." And this bomb technician said, "Hey, you guys get out of here because," he said, "that's live." Why it didn't go off I have no idea. We thought maybe that they had set it at the wrong altitude or some darn thing. Whatever it was, it didn't explode, and it's sitting visibly—the copilot, we called "pilot", could see that sitting under the seat, and they were probably a little tense.

Van Ells: I would imagine so [Greening laughs].

Greening: But we were concerned, but we weren't that tense because we didn't really know what was up there, and the boss had enough sense not to tell us, you know. I had always had a feeling, I always wanted to do things that my grade wouldn't permit, but I'd spent time—I thought—I told the boss we really should be flexible and go around the positions, and I'd spent time in the bombardier and in the radar area. And the bombardier area was interesting because you're actually flying the plane some of the time. The radar area was different, kind of interesting. You know, once in a while

I'd ride the tail, which seemed boring. But I wanted to fly the airplane, and with glasses and three stripes, how are you gonna fly a plane? But I told the boss one day—we had a rule that— unwritten rule that, for instance, when we were moving as a crew on the ground, walking, that we'd only salute colonels and generals because every other man was either an officer or enlisted man. So, you know, you could spend your whole day. So we didn't do it. Now, there are times that, you know, situations were a little different, but normally if a bunch of us would walk we'd say, "Good morning, sir," or somethin' like that. But we always had the thing—we'd go into a foreign field, you split up the crew. [PA announcement]. So all the enlisted men, we all had officer caps, and we would go into the officers' club and have dinner and stuff like that. I think this happened maybe more often than just our crew, but it seemed to make sense. We're a crew, we stick together. And we were in—that's kind of getting' off track here. We were—I just lost my track where I was at. Anyway, when we got to Itazuke we went to the officers' club and did our—you know, had our dinner and things like that. It just seemed a normal thing that when you have eleven men and five of 'em are officers you might as well, you know. I was taught by—oh, I remember at Itazuke in the officers' club I walked up to the bar to pick up a beer for the boss, and this young lieutenant was sitting next to me. He had the yellow bar, and it looked like it was brand new, it was just polished beautifully, and he said, "You know, dammit", he said, "I know you're not an officer," and I had the two bars on my cap, and I made some comment back to him. But he said, "I know you're wrong" because he said, "when that major walked in I heard you talk to him, and you said, 'Yes, sir.''' And I say, "Hey, buddy," I said the problem is my dad, when I was a baby taught me that. And I said if you didn't have your bar on and we were talking I'd say "Yes, sir" to you too. And I said when this waiter comes in, I say, "Yes, sir." I said, "That's the way I was taught as a child." Now, he didn't believe it, but there is a lot of truth to that. I wasn't compelled particularly because I was fakin' it. I would have by nature said, "Yes, sir," I would anyway because I didn't have the bars, but it's—right now, I'd say "Yes, ma'am," and "Yes, sir." That's the way I was brought up. But this lieutenant wouldn't buy that, but he was a brand new man apparently and just didn't like the idea that these—the one thing that I like particularly with flying, was with all due respects, you were in a different group than all the poor people who had to work on the ground. Our ground crew was just a tremendous group of people, but they didn't have the privileged feeling that we felt. When we walked some place as a group, as a crew, we just felt—in fact, my whole time in service, except for basic, I was never in a place where there was only two beds in the room I was in. I was just fortunate. As soon as I left basic in Denver I got to corporal, and immediately, not too many months later or weeks later, I got my third stripe, and so I was always in a double room. And the guys in our crew were always in double rooms because they were flight people. So you just

had a feeling of things were good for you, and you better do what you're doing right because they are takin' care of you too.

Van Ells: I got a couple questions about air combat. Then I want to get into some of the more social and cultural aspects of military life. We've already started to discuss this actually. I want to clarify a couple of things. Air defenses, you seem to suggest that it was the ground antiaircraft that was more effective than the MIGs.

Greening: Yeah.

Van Ells: I'd imagine these MIGs were jets by this time.

Greening: Yeah. MIG-15s.

Van Ells: Now, a B-29 is a propeller plane?

Greening: Yup. The speed was one thing, but to me the biggest difference was the available munitions in the two aircraft. They could fly beyond range of our .50s. We'd get into a strong target area, the Sinuiju Bridge or along the Yalu particularly, and they had very intense antiaircraft, and it was radar controlled. Towards the end we had occasionally, as the lead crew, we had ECM, electronic counter measures, a man would come in. So we'd have twelve men onboard. And the flak would start comin' towards us, and I can remember more than once telling the ECM position of the flak, and I can see it walkin in towards us, and then once he started working, you could look out the corner of your eye, and you could see him working. Then it would start walkin' somewhere else. It was such a great feeling. So it was actively controlled, but the difference of the MIGs, in my thought, was we never had an attack by a MIG fight after the Marines came and saved us a couple of times. Sadly enough, we were under attack one night, and the Air Force night fighters [all-weather fighter planes] came up, and they were F-89s, I forget what they were, but they never reached us. They were disposed of. And on our next flight these Marines were there.

Van Ells: These Marine pilots you mean?

Greening: Yeah, Marine fighters. And it was an odd looking fighter because it was a side-by-side, where there's a radar man sitting alongside the pilot. We were told by intelligence they had radar in the rear, and this one evening, this fighter tucks in, he's behind our wing and just a little bit lower, so he is out of the prop blast, and he's just sitting there like he's tucked in. I would think that the radar wouldn't even see him because he was so close. He was just tucked there. The radar man, you know, we were talking and I had a little flashlight, and we were talkin'back and forth. It wasn't too

long [PA announcement] the fighter just eased down just a little bit, and I told the boss, I said, "I think he's going to go," and he just eased down, and then suddenly, just like that, he was gone. What he'd done, had fired up and he made a big loop, and he came around. When he came back he was behind the MIG and blew it away. The Marines did that a few times, and that was the end of them. The MIGs never came after us. From after that, December, January, we never had a strike by a fighter.

Van Ells: In terms of targets, now you weren't doing the bombing, like of Germany and Japan, the strategic bombing campaign of World War II. This is—what were your targets precisely?

Greening: Well, this an area of impression. I read a lot of magazines. Every time I'm in a bookstore I thumb through, I was just in one yesterday on University Avenue [Madison, WI], thumbed through this Korean War thing, and the whole period of what we did consisted of one paragraph, and it said, it was strategic failure. Well, what we were dropping were strategic targets. I would call 'em strategic targets. They had to be gotten rid of. All the air bases were gone, from the air. The Orientals were very active in their supply across the river. In the daytime either the Navy or the Air Force would come over. I think the Air Force in the day, the fighters would come in and blow away the bridge. Then in the evening the B-26s [twin-engine medium bomber] and the Navy would come in. In late night, we'd come in, and the next morning you'd have to start over because they were back in business again. This just seemed to go on continuously. Any place where there is a buildup of something useful to them, we came in and get rid of 'em.

Van Ells: So your targets were mostly interdiction of troops and supplies and this type of thing?

Greening: Yeah. To me that's—it's not really a ground support directly, but it does.

Van Ells: Well, this whole tactical versus strategic, the generals don't always agree on exactly [laughs] what that is either.

Greening: Yeah.

Van Ells: But you were mostly involved in interdicting supplies. So most of your raids were along the Yalu River then?

Greening: Well, a lot of them, the intense ones were along the Yalu and south of that maybe a hundred odd miles or a little more. We'd go along the Sea of Japan and on the other side, along that ocean there was a few targets in there. One night, backing up to our first class bombardier, we were, as some reason we weren't going to go into our target, and I never did

question if it was something with our aircraft that took us away or if the target was so wiped out there was no sense in going or what, but the boss said that we were on the target of opportunity because we wanted to get rid of our load. I told Captain Neal, I said, "I saw a little flicker on the ground." You know, it was kind of a smart ass response, but he said, "Oh, you mean that little red thing?" I said, "Yeah," and we're at somewhere at 28,000-30,000 feet, and there was just barely a puny size, little red flick. You know, we gotta dump this stuff somewhere. We want to dump it in the north. You don't want to take the chance of hurting somebody south of the line. So anyway, a little bit later this thing flicked again, whatever it was, just a teeny, teeny—and Captain Neal lined up on it, somehow, I don't know how because it was so seldom, but he dropped the whole load of bombs, we're talking 20,000 pounds of tritonal [80% TNT and 20% aluminum powder]. We waited and waited because it takes a long time to go down, and we saw the first little pop and then just a huge, huge, huge explosion. It kept building and building, which would make you think there's flames and things. Whatever it was, I have no idea what caused the target, but somebody did something stupid. They lit a cigar which even then the Air Force—or cigarette—even then the Air Force said we shouldn't do. They did there—there's something to make that little flick once in a while. I know whatever it was, unfortunately for them, we wiped 'em out. But here with just that little teeny spot, Captain Neal was able to hit it exactly square. I don't know of any other bombardier who could even come close to it. We had one drop, we're heading up to a target, and the ground controllers wanted to know if we could drop a load in this area where these Australian troops had this Korean group semi-surrounded, and they couldn't move either way, and they wanted to get rid of 'em, you know, get 'em out so they could move. Again, Captain Neal told the boss, "Oh, we can handle that." Now, we're talking, I'm guessing, half a mile or a mile spread, which is not very much when you're way up in the air. But Captain Neal dropped the load, and the people on the ground, when they found out that this was a B-29, they couldn't even hear our engine we were so high, that was doing this. The panic levels just, the radio sounds, just "ooh," you know. 'Cause a lot of guys, including the boss I had in St. Clair, Michigan, was a officer on the ground in Europe, and he said one of his squads was wiped out by their own aircraft. So, there's a good reason for that. These people were just all upset when they found out it was a B-29. Neal dropped his load, and every bomb hit exactly right, and after several minutes we're waiting there, hoping and praying to God that we didn't kill our troops, and the word comes back: it was a perfect hit. And, you know, you want to crawl up through the little pipe and go up to Captain Neal and pat him on the back. He was just unbelievably good.

Van Ells: Now, in a war like Korea, we start to see some of these restrictions. You think about that in terms of the Vietnam War, you can't bomb ships in the

harbor, etc, etc. Now, you were bombing along the Yalu River, and as we mentioned before the tape went on there were certain considerations about bombing the other side of the river into—

Greening: Yeah.

Van Ells: The People's Republic of China.

Greening: You had to hit the south half of the bridge. Because of the electronic controlled approaches, if you miss the center of the target by 100 yards you didn't get credit. You know, you might as well have stayed home. You just didn't have any—you weren't allowed any room for error. In cases where crews had hit in the wrong place, some were court-martialed. I am not sure of the exact reason, but we know of officers who wound up in Fort Leavenworth. Ironically, kind of a separate story, the president of the company I retired from, Akzo Nobel [Salt, Inc.], Alan Graf was his name. Alan and I went back a long ways, and I knew he flew the F-86s in Korea, and we're talking one day. I flew over to Clark Summit, Pennsylvania, where his office was, and we chit-chatted. I said, "I think I arrived in Korea after you left," which turned out to be true, but one day we're in Chicago at a meeting, and he asked me why I did something, and I said, "Well, I was in hot pursuit," and he starts laughing. This puzzled me because I responded that way because I didn't have time to think of a good answer of why I had done whatever it was. He had to explain what he meant, and he said, "The problem was," he said, "I was court-martialed." And I said, "Why?" He says, "Well, I was a following a MIG, and we got close to the river, and I was firing on it, and it crossed the river, and when I finally brought him down", and he said, "I got court-martialed." He said, "My defense was hot pursuit." Well, they had him flying an old C-54 [transport aircraft] for quite a long while instead of the fighters, but he didn't lose his grade and stuff, but he didn't wind up in Fort Leavenworth. But it was really a political thing, but the intensity of what he was doing was probably logical. You look over the mountains and the valleys and the rivers and stuff. You're up at 30,000, 40,000 feet, you know. You're on a half of a river? You should be paying attention to what you're doing. But we had a lot of times that headin' north, [Approx. 3 sec. pause recording], several times chit-chatting occasionally, we thought of looking at a map. We could go up to the Russian base, Naval base along the Sea of Japan, just minutes from where we were.

Van Ells: Yeah, Vladivostok's not far away at all.

Greening: Yeah, we could go in there and wipe 'em out and get back, and we'd probably be back over North Korea before they'd even react. But, fortunately we never did those things.

Van Ells: These restrictions are something you discussed amongst the crew and other airmen. I mean, was there a point where you felt that these restrictions were keeping you from being effective or you were being effective despite them? You know, what's this sort of, I was gonna say, soldier's eye view, foxhole view of these restrictions?

Greening: Well, our view, meaning mine particularly—my thought was that because we couldn't go to the Antung Airfield, we were in unnecessary danger. We should have been allowed to wipe that field out, which we could have done probably in one flight, or close to it. I was thinking more in that instance, more in the terms of protecting ourselves. I don't see any—I wasn't concerned about destroying Manchuria, but here's an airfield we could see. As I mentioned, we live in Oregon [Wisconsin], and when I fly over Oregon coming in for a landing at Madison, I could be looking at Antung Air Force Base or Airbase, whatever they called it. To just zip over there, I felt we were in unnecessary danger because we couldn't do that. From a wider viewpoint, when all the supplies were sittin' across the river, and I don't recall seeing 'em at night, but apparently the day fighters could see 'em there, and they couldn't touch 'em. So once the clouds starting coming over in the evening, they'd move 'em across, you know. Then we could do it. That seems so, from a military standpoint, so ridiculous. All of these things that, Vietnam has to be ten times worse, but all these things were changed at the Gulf War when the military finally put their foot down and said, "No." Well, I am speaking to the Air Force. The commander going to the Gulf said—you know he was going to retire or quit because he wasn't going to prevent his people from doing it properly. If you can't do it properly—I've told this so many people I've worked with over the years, if whatever you're planning can't be done properly then you shouldn't be doing it at all. If there's a question then you shouldn't be doing it. So I think in my case the thought was that we were in unnecessary danger because we couldn't do that. My brother-in-law, who was on the ground, probably objected to all the supplies on the ground across the river that we could see or the government could see. We couldn't do anything. We were very upset when MacArthur got, at the time, got fired. I think MacArthur's history, we can talk about his personal egotism and stuff, but he was an oriental genius as far as getting things done. At that time we thought he was the man. The Japanese, I know, respected him with great respect. We got orders that we weren't allowed to wear our 20th Air Force badge on our uniforms if we go into a civilian place. We didn't feel bad because it made sense because the 20th Air Force had spent its whole career almost destroying the civilian population of Japan. When the general says, "You know, you guys shouldn't do that," it made an awful lot of sense. It's different than, at the time our thought of President Truman saying, "Well no, you can't do this." We just didn't have respect for his military thinking versus the

general [referring to General Douglass MacArthur]. But, you know, we can rationalize now, forty-five or so years later. Things are different.

Van Ells: Well, let's move on to some more elements, sort of a nice segue here anyway. This is late in the war. Generally speaking, what's the morale like in your unit? People pumped up and ready to go? The war had receded from the headlines by this time. Were you concerned that people weren't even aware that there was still a war going on? Just in general speaking.

Greening: Well, there was some frustration for a considerable length of time, all the time that we were overseas, again I'd have to check the details, but it seems to me, all the time that we were there the negotiations had been going on, that whole period. Why were both sides going through all this danger and difficulty? This part of what I think motivated the feelings against politics because politicians were doing all this negotiating. There were military people, but they were just the people carrying the commands of the politicians. They were doing all this talking with all of these people on the ground and in the air being killed. It just seems such a useless time. I don't think anybody would object, you know, if you have a goal and there is something that needs to be done, and your boss says, "We've got to do this and this is why." I think you want to go out and do it. But when your boss says, "Well gee, I don't know, but we should," you lose your enthusiasm. So I think we tend to get kind of focused on your squadron or group or your crew because none of those three have any control over what's really going on out there. We made on almost every—on most flights we made newspaper reports, and we always felt, in a way, kind of good about that from the standpoint that, well at least somebody, even if it's specific *Stars and Stripes* [U.S. Military Independent News Source], recognized that we're tryin' to do something. I can remember I was in my room one evening, and my cabin boy, to use the term of the time, was a suicide pilot, World War II, and obviously the war ended before he got to make his flight, and I have his picture too. We were in there, and one of my crew guys was in the room with me, and my boy came in, and he said, "Stalin," he said. He made this motion with his finger up in the air. I said, "What? He cut his throat?" and he said, "No, no. He died." **[End of Tape 2, Side A]**

Greening: I forget how the words go, but the last line was, "Hooray, hooray, Stalin's dead!" Because we thought with him gone, then if the Republicans can get rid of Truman then we all can go home. But the Russians we felt were extremely involved with all that was going on, even though the Chinese were doing the fighting. Now, that may not be correct, but that was the feeling.

Van Ells: Yeah. In terms of recreation, how often did you fly?

Greening: Normally it was every third day. If you were to fly, today being Wednesday, we would start with the aircraft about noon or before this, here we're not quite quarter to three. We'd be at the aircraft about noon. We'd take off just before dark, fly all night. We'd land either just before dawn or just after dawn. Then the rest of that day was gone, the first few hours for the intelligence part, then we'd have to eat and sleep because we'd been busy for, who knows, fifteen to twenty hours. Then the next day we'd have off. Then the third day, which we're actually talkin' every other day, but then the third day we'd do it over again. This went on for quite a while until at one point some of us got a little intense when we were sleeping, and it wouldn't be understood now, but even though we were in Okinawa many of us slept with our pistols under our pillow. We were in a war! I mean, you know, now you can laugh, but nobody would want to come up to the door and bang the door because while you're still sleeping you're liable to roll over and shoot the door because your mind was unconsciously in a different world. We got a little tense in all kinds of respects so they gave us a few days off. The enlisted men got a command truck to drive around in, and the officers got an automobile because you can get five guys in your own car. We went to a place that looked like an American hotel along the beach, northeast of our airfield. It was so great getting away from everything. I don't recall even hearin' or seein' aircraft taking off where we were. It really helped. Now, a lot of times those recreation periods, most of the people if you worked underground you wound up in the Philippines. They couldn't do that with us. The reason was 'cause you only had so many aircraft and so many crews, and they wanted us when we were done they wanted us to be available right then, not be two or three days away. We didn't care because it was so nice just being away from the whole thing. I have dozens of pictures of all of us with our Hawaiian shirts and shorts. That's all we had. That really helped. It kind of put us back into reality again and helped us through to the end of the period.

Van Ells: Say—but there was no Bob Hope USO show or this kind of thing in your experience?

Greening: Not directly. We had—USO came into Korea often. In fact, Bob Hope was there and Marilyn Monroe, an old guy I used to enjoy, what's the name. He was singing in the first movie with talking. He worked over there tryin' to rebuild his career, but the guys loved him, and we had smaller groups would come to Okinawa. We didn't get to see 'em because we were kind of active, but just the fact they were there you had to appreciate. And I'm sure this happened in Vietnam. A lot of guys didn't get to see these, but they had to feel that at least somebody was on their side and workin' with 'em.

Van Ells: So you stopped flying missions when the war ended I would imagine?

Greening: No. We came back before it was over.

Van Ells: Oh, you did?

Greening: Yeah, we came back, I am guessing, like in April, and I think the end was in July.

Van Ells: Yeah, it was in July.

Greening: We were back. We were reassigned to Savannah, Georgia. We didn't even know what our assignments were going to be. It turned out that's where they were training for air-to-air tankers. When I got back home to, we all stopped at our homes before we went, and got back to Port Huron, and the next day, within in a day or so, there's a tornado hit. For some reason I was at the newspaper, *Port Huron Times Herald*, and they said that the tornado's down. I said, "Geez, I'm going over to Savannah." They said, "All you have to do is wire and tell 'em that there's a tornado." So I'm driving back to the house, and I thought, well I'd try that. That was pretty wild for me. So I sent a wire, said, "The tornado hit, and may I extend my leave?" And they wired back and said, "In ten days we expect to see you—" I thought, "God!" you know, this is entirely different. So I did stay home a good week, almost two weeks, and went down to Savannah. Savannah was nice. The airfield was very nice. But we didn't have anything to do, and that was quite upsetting.

Van Ells: So, if I recall correctly, you enlisted for two years?

Greening: No, four years.

Van Ells: For four years. Well your time's gonna come up very soon I guess.

Greening: Two years, yup, at Savannah. We got down there, and we couldn't believe, we got together, and I asked the boss, "I've lost my flight log." And he said, "Well, we'll make it up." Which he did, and he had it signed, and that was all set. I said, "When are we going flying?" 'Cause we had to fly at least once a month, and after all of these months of this high class living that I thought were, you know, as flying. I didn't want to go down and be a corner guard. I have nothing against police, but I like that when you're walking and you got your wings, it's just a different, you know, I could walk straight, instead of, you know—and we were concerned, it took, it seems to me it was a long time, I'm guessing weeks, before we finally got into a crew. But in the meantime, several planes had crashed in the swamp. We walked down, some of the guys with me. and geez these things were beat up. They looked like they were worn out in World War

II, and all the good planes they sent in Korea, and some of them were gone, and if they weren't gone—we left our good one over there. They probably left 'em there, some of 'em. The good ones were out in California, for test flights and stuff. But we finally got this flight, and everything is goin'. We start taxiing, waitin', couldn't have been taxiing over five minutes at the most, and we have engine problems. We have to go back and park it, and that was the last time. We never—the timing never got together, and so I went to the command center. I said, "You know"—first I asked permission for free talk, and I said, "I'm really upset 'cause I expected to have my fourth stripe right now, and I haven't earned it because I'm not doing anything here," and I said, "I want to be flying next year and the year after. When I leave the service after four years I want you fellas to feel bad because I'm leavin' and try to talk me into stayin." He said, "Well," he says, "there's just nothing we can do now." And I said, "Well send me to OCS 'cause I've already passed all the tests." And I said, "There was a technical error that—" I said, "This captain, in my opinion, lied to me in order to solve a problem that he felt—" What had happened at Topeka, Kansas, I passed these tests, and when I went for the checkout the captain said, "Oh yeah, it's good old wingnut." He said, "You had an asthmatic attack in March of '46." He said, "You're automatically out of it." I said, "Why, sir?" and he said, "If you're sixteen, you can't do it." And I said, "I was fifteen." And he said "Well, you take forty-six from thirty," that's a quote, "forty-six from thirty, and you come up with sixteen." I said, "Really, sir?" My first reaction was I had to bite my tongue to keep from being sarcastic because I thought I grew up with a teacher, and to me that was so stupid. Forty-six and thirty is sixteen? And I started say something, "That's a point something [??]," and I bit my tongue. What could I do? I can't fight with the man, he's a captain. So when I left there I was really upset, and I was struckin' along, and this flight officer was walkin' by, and he walked right on by me, and he stopped, and he said, "Sergeant, wait a minute!" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Your mind is somewhere, isn't it?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, you walked right by me, and it's not that you didn't salute, but you didn't even say hello." I said, "I'm sorry, I didn't even see you, sir." he said, "What's the problem?" And I said, "Do you really want—have you got the time?" So I quick told him, and he said, "Well, you go over to the headquarters and talk to 'em." I went over, and I talked to this officer, and I told him what happened. He said, "Well, you're absolutely right." "December to March, you're fifteen years old." I said, "In the first place, I was stupid for even putting it in there." Because what had actually happened, I am workin' out in this farm, and the other employee and I were inside this grain thing, in the bottom, and we were shoveling oats. Now, you could go out there, assuming you're not an asthmatic person, and you would have asthma tonight or something similar. You know, I should have never said it. That's what's burnt me to this day. But see by being taught to tell the truth, there's really a conflict. I shouldn't have

done it, but yet that's the way I was taught, to always tell things straight, and it cost me my commission. Well, down at Sampson in Georgia when I brought this up, I said, "Well, send me to OCS, and we can get going." He said, "Well, we don't need bombardiers." I said, "I'll be a navigator." I said, "I'm not really fired up about being a navigator because there's a lot of math and it's a lot of thinking, but I said I am willing to do it." He said, "Hey, we don't need combat crews." He said, "The war is over." I said, "They've been arguing for two or three years." And he said, "Well, that's gonna be over." Well, it would be in July, if I recall. Again, I got a little upset because, see, they told me before, "Once you get back, you'll automatically be sent, and you'll get your commission, and you do this, and you'll continue flying." Well, once I got back, it wasn't just me, several other guys had a similar problem. "We don't need you anymore because we don't need more combat crews so we're not going to train." This, while it was very upsetting then, I've seen this happen many, many times over the years. It's gonna happen right now. In fact it is happening. Back, five years ago-- I always had the urge, we lived on the northeast side of Madison for twenty-three years, driving up [Hwy] 51, I used to go by where all the fighters were at Truax Airbase, and I thought I've got to fly into Madison airport just once. I had two airports: Madison and Oshkosh. But I made up my mind that I'd never go to Oshkosh until I had my current ticket because that's professional, but I gotta get into Madison. So we drove up one day, we came to Madison a couple times a month for various things. I went into the Wisconsin Air National Guard Base and talked to the commanding officer. I told him, I said, "My instructor is a jet instructor who was fired from the service. He had signed up for eight years, and at four years they cut him loose." He said, "Well, why am I goin'?" He [the CO] said, "Well, we've gotta make room because we're being cut. We've gotta make room for these new instructors that we are training." And I thought at the time, us taxpayers spent millions training Doc to be so good so we're going to get rid of him to bring in a new man that we can train. Now, I know what's happening, but I told the man up here, the lieutenant colonel here in Madison, I said, "I'd like to bring him in, but I said want to make sure that you let him see the F-16 before I tell him." He said, "Well," he said, "certainly, you'd be welcome." He said, "There's only one problem." I said, "What's that?" He said, "I'm going to let you have one of our lieutenants to guide you." He said, "I can't waste my sergeant's time." And I stood up, I couldn't help it, my mouth goes faster than my brain, I said, "Colonel, I just highly respect what you just said." Well, certainly 'cause the sergeants run the place, you know. Anyway, we're flying along and Doc is with me. I said, "Doc, you know if you do a good job, we'll fly to Madison, and I'll take you in, and I'll let you sit in an F-16." He said, "Oh yeah." Well, I made up my mind years and years ago, you don't discuss what you're going to do until it's done, and I never would've said that unless I was sure it was all set up, and I had already clearance. You know, he figured it was just typical talk. So one

day on our first cross-country, we come into Madison, went into Fort Atkinson and then came into Madison, and parked over at Coldstream which is out of business now, and I said, "Well, we're gonna walk over here now." He said, "You're serious!" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "There's only problem Doc," I said, "The colonel told me 'You just make darn sure this man never asks me to enlist.'" And I asked the lieutenant colonel, I said, "Why is that?" He said, "We have enough money for fuel to fly one of the airplanes once a month." This was in 1992. So yeah, things get pretty tense. One of the young mechanics at Campbell Airport [Grayslake, Illinois], in fact I was talking to him yesterday, he had just completed and became good at as an aircraft engine man when they set him loose. He left at two years instead of four. So this was a lot more common at the time. I left because I thought I'm going to be on the ground, and I wanted—you know, first I got cheated on my commission, which wasn't the problem, probably, if I could have continued something. But this is a very common thing for a lot of people.

Van Ells: Yeah, and you were given that option? To leave early?

Greening: Well, yeah, yeah, because see I wouldn't have known how to go about it. See, I was told, quite frankly, I've never written this before, but I was told well, you've got your choice. You can hang around here, or he said you can go early. I said, "Hey, if I can't do something for the Air Force there's no sense in me being here." And they said, "Well, tell the government your dad needs you to work with him." So I wrote my dad, and I said, "You know, the only way I can excuse this is that I have been to combat and I've completed it." I said, "Otherwise, I can't excuse this." And so he went to see the pharmacist and doctor in the City of Port Huron people and got them all to sign that, you know, it was logical. Every one of them when they signed that I should leave service and join my father – every one of them mentioned that I had already completed combat and I had done everything that the Air Force could have me do. As soon as that got there, I was gone. Then it always bothered me for quite a long time that I quit. I said I was going to do four years, and I didn't. So that's how I got involved in the Reserve.

Van Ells: And when did that start?

Greening: I'd have to check my Reserve thing. It would seem to me to be like '55 or be a couple years later.

Van Ells: A couple years later.
Greening: Yeah.

Van Ells: So when you first got out what were your priorities? What did you want to do?

Greening: First, I wanted to—I thought as long as I had the ability because of the Veterans Administration, I wanted to finish school. I really had no interest in going to Michigan State or Michigan-Ann Arbor, but I wanted to get one step above my high school thing. I figured I could do it so I went back to, at the time they called it Port Huron Junior College, now of course it would be like Madison Community [Mr. Greening may have mean Madison Area Technical College]. I enrolled there, and it was entirely different. Because, see, I was an old guy then, I'd be close to my mid twenties, but it was amazing how many guys were there that were.

Van Ells: That age you mean?

Greening: Yeah.

Van Ells: Now, were they veterans?

Greening: Yeah.

Van Ells: Because I was going to comment, as you mentioned before after World War II every campus was flooded veterans. Korea wasn't much—it wasn't on quite the grand scale that World War II was. So when you came back there was still lots—

Greening: Oh yeah.

Van Ells: Of veterans in school as well

Greening: Yeah, one teacher in particular, an English teacher, bless her, I can draw her picture, but I forget her name. The semester that I had gone right after high school, what I had done, frankly not as an excuse, but I would get out of school when I went to college, local college, I'd get out of school somewhere around 3:00 or 3:30 [pm] and I'd go to restaurant, and I'd wash dishes until eleven o'clock. And at eleven o'clock I'd walk a block up to a hotel, one block up from Port Huron on the main street, and I was a desk clerk there until 6:00 in the morning. Then I'd go to school at 8:00 So you know, I'm dozing. In fact at the hotel a lot of times I'd be sleeping when I worked there, just my head's on the top of the desk. If anybody came in all they had to do was bang on the counter. But it just seemed so useless, you know. I'm doing all of this, and I'm not gaining anything. And this one morning I'm startin' my walk to school from the hotel, and it occurred to me that I'm supposed to write this report on this book of some type, any kind of book, and I hadn't done anything. I happened to look at the *Detroit Free Press*, and there is an editorial which kind of struck me so I copied the editorial. This was really bright. I copied it verbatim, and I turned it in, and it doesn't take much brains to figure that I got at the time

an E, plus a little vocal discussion by the teacher, and she was a tough teacher. Well, when I came out after service, she and I, not through my fault but because of the way she was, she and I were just close. I was so pleased and confused, but then I noticed that all of these veterans she was because apparently she recognized that we had finally settled down we'd done these things. I remember one day I asked her – you know, I was involved in sports car racing at the time, a little bit. It's why I didn't have any money, and I said, "I'd like to get down to Detroit, but I'm going to miss class." She said, "Don't you worry about it, you just go out." She wrote a note, two or three things that I should do, should have for the next day or the day after. That was all. No problem. Anything that any of us old guys wanted, but she still—you know, we still had to do our work, but the work was so easy! I wrote a monogram on the history of Japan going from zero time up until the end of World War II. I don't know, it took me two or three weeks through the libraries and so on, but it just seemed so easy. It's just so logical, you know, we do this.

Van Ells: Yeah, I was going to ask. Was it easier, or did it seem easier?

Greening: It seemed—it was—I never had any problem with hard work, but if I could see a goal up there—I think you should go after things that are just a hair beyond what you're capable of. I used to have this problem—I've toured the country for quite a long time with my banjo, and Mr. Richelieu in Oregon [Wisconsin], years ago kinda became my mentor in a lot of ways, just a little advice. He could be pretty tough, but it is good advice. He told one day, he said. "You know, so and so was up here, and he was really upset because you're always out there playing in public with people who are so much better than you are." And I said, "I have to be. If I played with somebody as good as me I'm going to keep going down." SO you, you know, you always surround yourself with people who have better skills than you do to pull you up. This helps in anything you do.

Van Ells: Hmm, so what did you study in school?

Greening: Business administration, got a associate of arts in business administration. Accounting, I thought, was—unfortunately down the road I'm going to be stuck in a corner office somewhere doing that, but you know, and I found it was so easy. It was just really so good and so easy that it really—the ones where I had to really study were chemistry, which years later turned out to I'm teaching and writing books on the chemistry of foods and things. but that's a long way in the future. Accounting and that type of business things seemed so good, so easy. Port Huron Junior College was really pretty good. You had to work, but it was good, and you felt—you could see the goal, and you could feel that you're gonna make it.

Van Ells: Mm-hm. And when you finished school did you have trouble finding work?

Greening: No. When I finished, see, I had to be with my dad anyway because of my leaving the service. What my dad had done was gone to the St. Clair County headquarters and changed the company name so I was on it until 1959. So actually, really from, say, '48, '49 up to '59 I was working with my dad. But on those years after my initial short college I had learned so much watching my dad that actually—a lot of schools were being built at that time, and I would go off in one part of the city or a different city with a crew, and he'd be off somewhere else with a crew. It was hard work, but it was good work. It came to the point where I decided physically I can't continue this forever because I was getting a lot of tendonitis things. One of the guys I was racin' with was an engineer for Diamond Crystal Salt Company in St. Clair, Michigan, and Gale said that, "Why don't you go down there and work?" And I said, "I don't know anything about that." I told my Dad, "I don't know physically if I can do this, you know, continue." Then that winter I'm off of work, and I have to go over my dad's house, and I go down into his office, and we'd get home at 6:00 or 7:00 at night, but then he'd have to work 'till 12:00 or 1:00 because he would have twenty odd men to keep employed. He'd have to work on bids and stuff. I happened to walk down and we're shootin' the breeze, and he's workin' on this quarterly tax, and I said, "This isn't right." And he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I made more money this year than you have, and you're workin' two shifts." I said, "Why don't I take this opportunity and see if Diamond Crystal [Salt Co.] will give me a job, and you get rid of everybody and just work by yourself?" He said, "Gee, I don't know." Anyway, I went down there, and Diamond Crystal did give me a job. They didn't give me the one I wanted, but I made out a five-year-plan, and I quite pleasingly achieved the five year plan at the second year so it worked. There was probably timing involved, but it worked excellent. But my dad did work by himself. We had an Indian friend, a lot of Indians along the Canadian border there, who was a really good man, and if my dad was at a job that he really needed help, he'd call Jimmy up, and I think about the two of them would work for that day or that week or whatever. That's the only time Jimmy works, when he can be with my dad for a while. But anyway at the end of the year he had doubled his income by himself because the bigger you get you've got all this pressure to keep all these people going. You've got the taxes and the unemployment and all this stuff. He wound up with almost nothing. So I always think that if you work hard, mentally and so on, whatever develops is what should be coming anyway. So here I had a job that for thirty-seven years worked very well, and my dad did very well from then on too.

Van Ells: I just have a couple of other things I want to cover. They're not gonna fit on this tape here. If you've got the time?

Greening: Oh, I got time. **[End of Tape 2, Side B]**