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George Gaebler:

OAKLAND ARMY BASE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens
in 2007

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George Gaebler, "Oakland Army Base Oral History Project" conducted by Lisa Rubens in 2007, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2008.

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Interview #1: March 9, 2007

[Audio File 1 gaebler_george1 03-09-07.mp3]

01-00:00:00

Rubens: Would you just tell me your name?

01-00:00:04

Gaebler: I am George Gaebler.

01-00:00:08

Rubens: And is the address right there, on that sheet?

01-00:00:10

Gaebler: Yes.

01-00:00:22

Rubens: Good. Well would you tell me how you first came to the Oakland Army Base?

01-00:00:32

Gaebler: Before it was the Oakland Army Base, it was part of the area that was tidelands or marshes. It was also the site of the construction of the Bay Bridge. The Bay Bridge incorporated the railroad tracks that took the Key System, Southern Pacific and the Sacramento Northern across the bay. In order to do that, they built a trestle over the mainline tracks for the interurban cars to go over and out the -- what used to be the Key System pier, and onto the bridge.

01-00:01:28

Rubens: Was your word inter urban?

01-00:01:30

Gaebler: Interurban cars. The system that we had up until 1957 was electric surface cars, train cars in the case of the Southern Pacific and the Key System. There were as many as five or six cars on the morning and evening commute runs, and long trains of "football specials" on game days.

01-00:02:04

Rubens: Now I'm asking you, when did you first encounter the base, and you're telling me this background. Does that mean you're from this area? Where were you born?

01-00:02:13

Gaebler: I was born in Warrenton, Missouri, and have lived here since 1922.

01-00:02:19

Rubens: How old were you when you moved out here?

01-00:02:22

Gaebler: I was two years old. My parents were in the military -- my father was an Army officer in Honolulu, at Schofield Barracks and in '22, it was downsized, and he and my mother came through the port here to go back to Missouri and never left California. They stayed here. So that's how I came to be a

Californian, but I was born in Missouri and raised up here in Berkeley, California. I was going to say that the interurban system was electric surface cars that ran all over the east bay, and when they built the Bay Bridge, they extended the tracks across what became the north end of the army base. On a viaduct over the mainline tracks was an elevated crossing, and the cars that go over that viaduct and onto the bridge, well out the Key System pier and onto the bridge. The point of all that is that I rode those cars, so I could look out the window and see the activity on the waterfront there in the marshland. Because the construction was going on at that time around the bridge, there was a lot of debris that looked attractive to me as a teenager.

01-00:04:06

Rubens:

We're talking about 1934/35?

01-00:04:08

Gaebler:

Yes. The bridge opened in '37, if I remember right, but the point of my going there was that I particularly recall a coil of steel wire rope that was lying in the mud. My father expressed a desire for that rope because it would be handy to rod out (i.e. clear out a blockage) the sewer line from the house, which was very flat, and that tended to plug up sometimes. So being depression days, we didn't have money to buy a snake. My brother and I went down and salvaged that piece of wire rope from the tideland mud, and that was approximately at the point where the main headquarters building is now. The big building with the parking lot in front, nearly as I remember, that was all tideland and marsh, and has since of course, been filled in. But from that kind of episode, and of course the Port of Oakland was in the news at the time. They were trying to develop it and improve it, and those first piers were built about that time, in the late '20s, early '30s. The original port, of course, was in the estuary at the foot of Grove Street and Market Street, and I got acquainted with those places later, when I worked at the PG&E, which at one time owned all that property. I liked to go out on the piers, sit in the sunshine and eat lunch, and watch the ships, particularly if there was one loading or something. That was my recreation at the time. So that's my acquaintance with the Port of Oakland, is from the earlier days as it just was being built. Then after the war -- well, I shouldn't skip to wartime. During the war, that is from '42 to '46, my father, being in the Corps of Engineers, was recalled back to duty, and wound up being the Port Engineer for the Port of San Francisco, which included an army base and its port, the Port of Oakland.

01-00:07:17

Rubens:

Why did San Francisco include the Oakland Army Base and the port of --

01-00:17:21

Gaebler:

Well the Port of San Francisco included everything that was shipped out of this area, and it went up as far as Pittsburgh, where Camp Stoneman was. I don't know if it included anything up as far as Stockton, because that was in the Navy's Aegis.

01-00:07:49

Rubens: You're saying for the wartime period, the Port of San Francisco had aegis over all this or?

01-00:07:57

Gaebler: They had of course, the original facility at Fort Mason. Now I've gotten mixed up. Presidio was the Army headquarters and Fort Mason was the headquarters for the operation of the port of embarkation.

At any rate, on quartermaster docks, are two big master warehouses there. During the war, this was the headquarters of the Port of San Francisco.

01-00:09:00

Rubens: OK. During the war, the Port of San Francisco.

01-00:09:08

Gaebler: The port leased I don't know how much of the dock facilities around the bay but was considerable, probably a majority of it, and as such, it took over the maintenance and operation, and that was where the engineering came in, not only write the contracts but to keep up the pilings and the infrastructure of the piers. There's a lot of maintenance required for an active pier. The point of this whole thing is that all of the shipments, whether or personnel or materiel, out of San Francisco Bay, was controlled at Fort Mason. The headquarters for of quartermaster was in Fort Mason. At that time, instead of the quartermaster, they called it the transportation corps.

01-00:10:17

Rubens: So the Navy had its own --

01-00:10:25

Gaebler: At that time, they were even two different cabinet departments. That was long before the Department of Defense days. The Navy had Alameda and they had Hunters Point, and they had Treasure Island.

01-00:10:43

Rubens: And something called the Naval Supply Center, across the street from the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:10:48

Gaebler: Well the Naval Supply Center was at the end of Alameda. It was on the north side of the estuary. It was across the estuary from the naval air station. The Navy had the -- well, let's go back a little in history again. The Western Pacific Railroad had a terminus just south of the Southern Pacific terminus, which was -- both of them were transcontinental railroads so that they were naturally shipping points for the stuff that was going overseas. The naval supply people took over the Western Pacific terminus and the Army had the Southern Pacific in, which at that time was just south of where the army base property is now. Those piers and tracks are pretty well gone by now, but there was a time when everything went out to that point of land near where the estuary turns into the bay, and was shipped out of there overseas. Of course,

the big disadvantage for San Francisco is that in order for the rail cars to get there, they had to come up the peninsula and through town or else be barged across the bay. So that's why there was so much development in the Port of Oakland, to supply the military effort for the Pacific during World War II. The army base at that time was primarily a shipping point for both men and materials. While there wasn't enough room for barracks, because they had large amount of people, it was all transient. There was considerable logistical infrastructure as well, for instance, the main post office, the Army Post Office operation was there on the base. That building, I think is still there, unless they are tearing it down by now, but the point is that that one of those huge warehouse buildings, two story buildings, was a mail facility, and another one, on a grimmer note, was the mortuary. I've seen it during the war too, well during the Korean War. I know there was just rows and rows of caskets.

01-00:14:11

Rubens:

Let me ask you a couple of questions to situate you. Your father, his name? What is your father's name?

01-00:14:18

Gaebler:

My father was Eugene Franklin Gaebler.

01-00:14:21

Rubens:

So Eugene, is he the head engineer or one of the engineers?

01-00:14:26

Gaebler:

He was assistant to the head engineer, I'll think of his name. [Col. Bruce.] I knew him too. He was in the engineers club in the city.

Anyway, my father was a Lieutenant Colonel of Engineers, and he was the Post Engineer for Fort Mason, and the assistant Port Engineer for the entire port. As such, his sphere of influence, you could say, or activity included such places as Alcatraz Island and Angel Island, Fort Baker and the ferry boat that used to take soldiers and stone men down the bay and load them on the transport ships at Fort Mason.

01-00:15:38

Rubens:

He had been recalled to the Army Corps of Engineers. What had he been doing prior to that?

01-00:15:45

Gaebler:

He was -- he worked for the Southern Pacific -- well, to be exact, he worked for the Pacific Fruit Express. The Pacific Fruit Express is a jointly owned car company, by the SP, UP and Western Pacific. The three railroads got together and formed this refrigerator car company, that operated from California and Oregon, shipping produce back east in ice cooled cars. My father worked for that outfit and was in the civil engineering group there. When you use ice to cool the cars, you need structures called icing platforms, and that was his -- and of course, big refrigeration plants would make the ice in the first place. So that was his job, to see that those things, so these were built and operated.

01-00:16:52

Rubens: The war breaks out and he's-

01-00:16:57

Gaebler: Well you see, he had been a regular army officer from 1917 to 1922. He was a captain in the engineering reserve, the Corps of Engineering Reserves and as such, he was recalled in April of 1942.

01-00:17:20

Rubens: Recalled. So now we've located him. How old was he at that point? Do you know?

01-00:17:25

Gaebler: Well he was 50 years old then.

01-00:17:29

Rubens: Where are you when the war breaks out?

01-00:17:32

Gaebler: Well I'm at the university finishing up... In 1942, I should have graduated by then, but I didn't, but I did get the reserve commission from the ROTC. So I was commissioned in the infantry in 1942, and I was assigned to active duty at Camp Roberts later that year, but that's beside the point. My father had already gotten called back and at first was stationed at Fort Winfield Scott, but then his career took him down to Fresno, where he was the guy that built Hammer Field and its structures.. Well that's now Fresno Municipal Airport, the same place, but in the wartime it was Hammer Field. Anyway, he was there and then he was promoted and assigned to Fort Mason. The Corps of Engineers was a very close-knit, clubby group, and the fellow that was the head engineer of the port of embarkation, Col. Bruce. They had been to the same reserve meetings and the same functions as engineers in the city here and so naturally, he called him up and got him on his staff, the point being that he's someone that had all the facilities under contract, and oversaw the day to day functioning of the port. My part in it during the war was very sketchy, because I came back on leave once and visited him in his office and saw what he was doing, and then I went out overseas again.

01-00:20:12

Rubens: Where were you overseas?

01-00:20:14

Gaebler: In Belgium, in France.

01-00:20:16

Rubens: And did you ever pass through the Oakland Army Base?

01-00:20:21

Gaebler: Not in World War II.

01-00:20:22

Rubens: Not during this time.

01-00:20:28

Gaebler:

In '46. Actually in January of '47, I left the service here at Camp Beale, California. We got married a couple years later. About the time my first child was on the way, I got recalled back into the Korean War. So did I go out the port of embarkation? No. I went out from Travis Air Base. You see by that time, the military air transport command had enough money to buy airplanes that were taking people overseas, if they wanted them in a hurry, by air. Even so, to go to Japan was I don't know, maybe 30 hours.

01-00:21:45

Rubens:

So that's where you were stationed during the Korean War?

01-00:21:48

Gaebler:

No. I was in Korea during the Korean War. That's another story.

01-00

My outfit was Company A, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division. That's where I did my Korean War duty in 1952. I went over in December of '51. However, the Port of Oakland (Oakland Army Base) was, at that time, the site of the Army Reserve unit, and the reserve unit was the school that was operated under the headquarters, the Sixth Army Headquarters. The Sixth Army was headquartered in the Presidio, and they had these what were called USAR School, United States Army Reserve Schools in Fresno, in San Jose , Los Angeles, and Oakland, Sacramento and Reno. Reservists like myself would go to these -- had the opportunity to go to the schools, and at that time, you progressed in the Army by passing and attending courses in your specialty. Well, my specialty was in infantry troop leadership.

01-00:23:39

Rubens:

In what troop?

01-00:23:40

Gaebler:

Infantry troops units, that is, platoons and companies of riflemen, front-line ground soldiers, what we used to call the fighting and dying troops. The point, you see, is that I was able, at the school, after I came back from Korea, to go through the infantry advance course, and then the next opportunity was the command and staff course, which is designed to train us the next step up, called field grade officers. The field grade people, generally speaking, were -- and I'm talking about the organization, as it used to be regimental and division staff people. The general staff course was run out of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The regular (officers) there wrote lesson plans, and they would ship them out to these various reserve schools, and we would have studied the material and take the examinations. So I finally wound up as an instructor in this particular field; infantry tactics.

01-00:25:25

Rubens:

You became an instructor before you were called up to go to Korea?

01-00:25:29
Gaebler: No. I was -- when I was called up to go to Korea, that was between World War II, between --

01-00:25:40
Rubens: '47 and '51?

01-00:25:42
Gaebler: '47 and '51. I was a civilian. Well, I was in the Army Reserves but I was not active.

01-00:25:51
Rubens: But had you been taking classes?

01-00:25:52
Gaebler: No. Well I had started some correspondence classes that I didn't finish.

01-00:26:00
Rubens: OK, but not at the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:26:02
Gaebler: Not at the Oakland Army base.

01-00:26:03
Rubens: All right, OK.

01-00:26:05
Gaebler: But I knew that there was some reserve activity down there. In fact, there was a reserve division, the 91st Division, at that time had -- which later on was headquartered at Fort Baker. At that time, they had an outfit there. In 1948 I was in that group down at the army base, and was in the tank battalion. We went up to Fort Lewis, Washington, for our two weeks of active duty in August. I'd forgotten about that. That was in '48 and '49. That's when the 91st Division was down there.

01-00:27:14
Rubens: One more time. At the Oakland Army Base?

01-00:27:17
Gaebler: At the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:27:18
Rubens: OK. How often are you going there in '48 and '49?

01-00:27:22
Gaebler: Well that was --

01-00:27:28
Rubens: Are classes once a week or weekends?

01-00:27:33
Gaebler: Two nights a month and one weekend usually.

01-00:27:41

Rubens: And how long would a class last?

01-00:27:44

Gaebler: Two hours.

01-00:27:45

Rubens: I'm sorry. Would it last three months or?

01-00:27:50

Gaebler: Oh, the curriculum was run, in most cases, at least for the managerial staff, a year or but well, nine or ten months. The reserve duty in the 91st was a little different. There wasn't the -- the emphasis was on the training of that particular unit. The reserve school was more of an academic situation, where you were studying prepared texts. The field manual it was so called and other resources, and accumulated knowledge that would enable you to pass tests. That's something that I could do easily. That's why I got to be an instructor.

01-00:29:05

Rubens: I just want to be clear. So you were taking classes before you went to Korea?

01-00:29:11

Gaebler: No. Let me straighten that out.

01-00:29:13

Rubens: Yeah, I've got to get that straight.

01-00:29:16

Gaebler: Before I went to Korea, I was in an organized reserve unit, which was the 91st Division. It was the tank company of one of the regiments, but I've forgotten which one. It was a supposedly, one of the units that could be called up for active duty and function as a unit in the field.

01-00:29:44

Rubens: And you did meet at the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:29:47

Gaebler: Yes. We didn't have any equipment at the army base. There were no tanks there, but -- and we had more people in the group than we needed.

01-00:30:05

Rubens: How many about? I was going to ask you that.

01-00:30:06

Gaebler: Well in terms of officers, ordinarily in a company there would be five or six officers at most, and I think at one time, we had as many as 12 to 15. It was a place where you got parked, you might say. A place to put people that were coming out of effective service during the war and wanted to continue. Anyway, that's --

01-00:30:39

Rubens:

And were you, at the same time, working? By then did you have two children or just one child?

01-00:30:46

Gaebler:

No. I didn't have any children then. I was still -- that was between '47 and '49, and I was working, yes, at the Pacific Gas and Electric in Oakland. We got married in '49 and we had our first child, Claire (indicates photo on fireplace mantel shelf) in '51. She is now a nurse in Sacramento. So the point there was that those summer duty sessions, when I was in the 91st, consisted of going up to Fort Lewis, Washington, and relieving the corresponding group of soldiers that were on active duty there, and taking over their function for two weeks. That was what we did, that was our training.

01-00:31:50

Rubens:

Is that when you would literally get in a tank?

01-00:31:52

Gaebler:

Oh yeah, that's when we were able to get our hands on the machinery and do a little firing too. The facility in Fort Lewis doesn't have -- the range is a little bit short, but now we're getting into technicalities. The point is that we were able to shoot the guns, run the tanks and do our thing. And the reason I had been assigned to that tank company was that that was my last assignment overseas. Although I had been in infantry, I finished up assigned to a tank battalion. In any case, when the Korean War started, they broke up the unit and sent people, as individuals, overseas for replacements. At least one of my friends went over and was killed right away, but the point there is that I wasn't recalled to active duty until 1951, and was sent, of all places, to Camp Roberts again. One of the things that happened during 1951 was that the Japanese Peace Conference was held in San Francisco, and President Truman and the guy who was Secretary of State.

01-00:33:54

Rubens:

Dulles?

01-00:33:56

Gaebler:

Yes, Dulles and Mr. Stettinius. I remember meeting him too.

01-00:33:59

Rubens:

Oh you met him?

01-00:34:00

Gaebler:

Well the point there -- I jumped ahead. I got assigned up there to be -- to run what's called a message center for the State Department. There were three teletype machines that were connected to the State Department in Washington, and these messages would come in and they had to be transported in by messenger from the Palace Hotel, where the message center was, to whatever office was being staffed by the State Department in the Presidio or around in San Francisco. So I was a part of that effort in August, I think August and September of '51. The next assignment was to Port of

Oakland, where I had the job called escort duty. When someone was returned home in a casket, you'd send it on the railroad in those days, and you had an officer, a soldier of equal rank of the deceased go with him. Our child was born in September over at the Presidio of San Francisco.

01-00:35:35

Rubens: Is that Letterman Hospital?

01-00:35:36

Gaebler: Well I shipped out of Camp Stoneman to Fairfield and overseas at the end of December 1951. I don't know if you've ever been up to Travis Air Base, but they've got one of those airplanes parked right in the middle of the main street there. That's my airplane, and I'd go up there, and I know about that airplane. However, I come back from Korea, and by that time I had figured out that if you were in the active reserve, you were not likely to be called up. The people that were in the reserve but not committed to anything were called up.

01-00:36:48

Rubens: That's what you had been.

01-00:36:50

Gaebler: That's what I had been and that, that was my take on things.

01-00:36:54

Rubens: Why do you think that was? What was that about?

01-00:36:57

Gaebler: I think that was a mistake on my part, but that was the way it seemed to me at the time. So that was my rationale you see, for signing up right now, as soon as I could, to this active outfit and taking courses. If something happened again, I was going to be busy. I wasn't to be part of the amorphous pool of people. I was one of the people who was already doing something.

01-00:37:33

Rubens: When did you come back? How long were you in Korea?

01-00:37:35

Gaebler: Well it was in November of '53.

01-00:37:45

Rubens: OK. Almost two years.

01-00:37:49

Gaebler: Now wait a minute, November of '52.

01-00:37:50

Rubens: Oh.

01-00:37:52

Gaebler: November of '52, because our second daughter was born in '53.

01-00:37:59

Rubens: So about a year.

01-00:38:01

Gaebler: Yes.

01-00:38:02

Rubens: Why? What governed that?

01-00:38:06

Gaebler: Well that was the policy at the time, and it wasn't a very good one if you ask me, but the overseas tour was said to be 18 months. They usually cut it shorter, and they did the same thing in the Vietnam War. They sent people over for a limited time and brought them back. The reason I say that's a mistake is if you lose the continuity of your group. The people that come in (to a unit) just count the days until they can go back -- just fill a job slot. I thought if that was the policy, that's what they did. I went over in December of '51 and came back in November of '52, and you've done your stint.

01-00:39:15

Rubens: Let me ask you one more thing, and now we're ready to take up what it was like having classes there. When you were taking those class -- when you were part of the 91st and then you went up north, you said there were 12 officers, but I didn't ask how many were like you. How many other people were there in that --

01-00:39:33

Gaebler: Well we were all lieutenants.

01-00:39:35

Rubens: But how many about?

01-00:39:37

Gaebler: I'd say about 12. Oh you mean in the group?

01-00:39:41

Rubens: Yes, about. I just don't know if it's 50 or 100.

01-00:39:47

Gaebler: I'd say 50.

01-00:39:48

Rubens: OK, all right.

01-00:39:50

Gaebler: Some were a little higher rank. We had captain, one or two, a sprinkling of majors maybe. The point of it is, I was assigned to a company because I was a company grade officer.

01-00:40:14

Rubens: Right.

- 01-00:40:14
Gaebler: And so were all these other guys. So I wasn't really concerned with who was -
-
- 01-00:40:20
Rubens: I just want to get a sense of how lively.
- 01-00:40:24
Gaebler: Oh it was a lively bunch of us.

You talk about [high jinx]. At Fort Lewis, in the summertime, there wasn't much sleeping done, I'll tell you that. Yeah, we had -- we were young, all tigers you know.
- 01-00:40:58
Rubens: And anything particularly to say about what building you were in? When you came back in '52, did you -- and signed up for classes, were you in the same building that you had been before?
- 01-00:41:07
Gaebler: Yes. That building is not there, that's why I was asking about it. I didn't see a picture of it either.
- 01-00:41:13
Rubens: I don't know if there's a -- in that Xerox, would it be listed? Let's see right there. Let's just look at this thing. What was it called?
- 01-00:41:39
Gaebler: Well, it was the headquarters building.
- 01-00:41:41
Rubens: Headquarters building, OK. I was wondering if in '48, did the place seem a shell of what it had been during World War II, or did it remain --
- 01-00:41:54
Gaebler: No. It was pretty much the same.
- 01-00:42:16
Rubens: I don't know if it has a list of -- let's see if it has a list of the buildings. That's 1960. Here's '42; cafeteria. These are not good images. Just before we come back to you being on the base after the Korean War, in '47/'48, did you have social activities also at the base, or were you just going there for the classes?
- 01-00:42:50
Gaebler: There was an officers club, but no, there was no social life there.
- 01-00:43:01
Rubens: You would not take your fiancé to the base?
- 01-00:43:05
Gaebler: Well we did go to San Francisco, to the Presidio. There was a big club over there, and that was more fun.

01-00:43:17

Rubens: Why more fun?

01-00:43:18

Gaebler: Well, there was more going on, people there at any given time. This is the -- I think this must be at this Building 88.

01-00:43:34

Rubens: OK. I'll get you a better map at some point. So basically you worked at PG&E, went to the classes, took the summer. Anything particularly to -- well let's talk about the comparison. When you come back and have this strategy that you're going to be active, again, are you back working at PG&E?

01-00:44:01

Gaebler: Well I finished up there. I retired in '83.

01-00:44:06

Rubens: So when you come back from the Korean War you go back to work for PG&E?

01-00:44:10

Gaebler: Oh yes.

01-00:44:10

Rubens: What did you literally do at PG&E?

01-00:44:15

Gaebler: At that time, PG&E had what they called divisions, and districts within the divisions. The East Bay Division comprised Alameda and Contra Costa County. It was divided into four districts, which Berkeley Richmond was a district, Oakland was a district, and so on, and within these districts and divisions, they had two departments; electric and gas. So I was in the gas department and I worked in three of the districts here in the East Bay at different times. I did engineering work. Well the engineering work for PG&E at that time consisted of primarily estimating the cost of new construction, because everything was booming. All the vacant land was being built on and everything required extension of lines and additional capacity and so on. And so how much did it cost and what materials should be ordered and so on. Well, I wrote up these jobs for extending gas lines to new subdivisions and so forth. I finally wound up being the East Bay Division Gas Engineer, in charge of affairs as far as East Bay was concerned. East Bay was the biggest division, had the most customers, the most money, most revenue. Historically of course, the company started in San Francisco, but East Bay Division originally began as the Oakland Gas, Light and Heat Company. So I always figured I was part of the original.

01-00:46:40

Rubens: Did you end up getting a degree in engineering from Berkeley?

01-00:46:44
Gaebler: No. I never got the degree, but I did get the professional engineer ticket.

01-00:46:50
Rubens: How do you do that?

01-00:46:51
Gaebler: Well, you pass an examination and you get a recommendation from your supervisor, who is qualified to do that. In my case it was the Vice President of Gas Operations, a fellow by the name of Ed Sibley. He was a good friend and he signed my ticket and I passed the test and got the certificate.

01-00:47:30
Rubens: PE?

01-00:47:32
Gaebler: Professional engineer. In order to practice engineering, just like nursing or medicine or anything else, you have to be registered with the Department of Consumer Affairs in Sacramento.

01-00:47:47
Rubens: And is that the Ed Sibley for whom Sibley Hall is named at the Bechtel Center at UC Berkeley?

01-00:47:57
Gaebler: No, now that's his brother, Shermer Sibley. Shermer Sibley was President of the company. He went up through the electric department, and his brother Ed was in the gas department. The point is that they were good friends. I was going to say, I was doing the work and knew how to do it. I never did go back and get the degree.

01-00:48:43
Rubens: So I'm going to have to change tape. We've been talking for about 50 minutes now. Are you willing to talk just a little bit more, or do you want me to come back another time, and then we'll specifically talk about your years of instructing, you know, this new path that you're taking? It's up to you. I don't want to --

01-00:49:11
Gaebler: No that's all right. I haven't gotten tired of talking yet.

01-00:49:14
Rubens: Good.

01-00:49:15
Gaebler: I was going to say, this building is the building that they were using for a chapel, for a mortuary.

01-00:49:20
Rubens: Which building is that?

01-00:49:23
Gaebler: B-12.

01-00:49:31
Rubens: I'm basically doing sound. I'm not doing sight. May I ask, just while we're talking, what is your wife's name?

01-00:49:47
Gaebler: It's Betty.

01-00:49:47
Rubens: Betty. What was your maiden name, Betty? What was her maiden name?

01-00:49:58
Gaebler: She's Betty Suffern.

01-00:50:06
Rubens: And she was in the class of '46 at Berkeley?

01-00:50:10
Gaebler: Wartime '46.

01-00:50:12
Rubens: Why do you say it that way, wartime '46?

01-00:50:15
Gaebler: It was a compressed year. It was a three year... During the war, they did away with the summer breaks. I wasn't there but they let the school continue so you wouldn't stop during the summer.

01-00:50:36
Rubens: I see.

01-00:50:39
Gaebler: So she graduated a year earlier. As far as our high school class, we were four years apart.

01-00:50:50
Rubens: And Betty, was she a local girl?

01-00:50:52
Gaebler: Yes, that's right. See there's a -- we had been going to the same church since infancy, and my family is still doing the same.

01-00:51:12
Rubens: I didn't ask you where you actually lived when you were in --

01-00:51:16
Gaebler: Colusa Avenue.

01-00:51:19
Rubens: So you both went to Berkeley High?

01-00:51:22

Gaebler: All the same schools: Thousand Oaks Elementary, Garfield Junior High School, and Berkeley High School.

01-00:51:31

Rubens: All right well then let's -- you look, and we're going to stop, and then I want you to tell me what the Oakland Army Base was like when you came back.

[Audio File 2, gaebler_george2 03-09-07.mp3]

02-00:00:00

Rubens: So we're on. Would you say something, so I can hear your voice?

02-00:00:04

Gaebler: OK this, sea land terminal. In the Korean War and shortly after, was all part of the army base. We inhabited the building that was right in this corner back here, and that was a two story, wood framed, stucco building. It was one of hundreds. It's gone now but this was the headquarters building at the time. And this building, which is right here, was a classroom. The point is that I'm saying that, is the officers club is over here in this area too, and that's gone. The headquarters building is gone, but the classroom building is still there.

02-00:01:19

Rubens: This is tape two with Mr. Gaebler. Well what was the base like when you --

02-00:01:27

Gaebler: Well, --

02-00:01:28

Rubens: -- started going there in '51? I'm having problems with the sound. Can you say something?

02-00:02:07

Gaebler: Well the army base, as I saw it, was primarily after hours, so there wasn't very much activity at all going on, except at the reserve headquarters. Of course, that was not really, you know, we wouldn't say the joint was jumping. We went about our business and that was it. The classes were relatively small, I'd say more like a dozen or 15 of us at any one time at the most. The subjects at that time not only included the infantry course that I was taking, but other specialties as well, signal corps and artillery. The signal corps people of course were responsible for running all the communication efforts at the army unit. At that time it was all pretty much hard wired stuff, and the radios were in use but they were pretty -- well, not very effective. Portable radios at that time hadn't been developed like they are now. That was before transistor days you see.

02-00:04:13

Rubens: And why are you telling me about the radios?

02-00:04:15

Gaebler:

Well that was one of the courses that was given down there that other officers were involved with. The different aspects of Army operation, you see, was covered there. I don't know just how many different ones there were, but I was involved in only one, and that was the infantry. The infantry subjects have to do with basically controlling fire and maneuver as a means of exerting force. You'd shoot at something then you move against it. In other words, what constitutes ground tactics to occupy and take over a place that somebody doesn't want you to be in.

That was my interest in it all the way through. The thing that, in talking about these other guys, is that I knew a few of them that were friends later on, and that had gone through this same reserve school and living here in Berkeley. Our kids were in the same classes in school.

02-00:05:55

Rubens:

It was a small world.

02-00:05:56

Gaebler:

It's, it --

02-00:06:00

Rubens:

You wouldn't call it a clubby world would you? What would be -- chummy. Is it a chummy world?

02-00:06:11

Gaebler:

For me, the Army was like a family. It's something that you belong to. If you're in it, you -- any other guy in it is your brother. It's as simple as that.

02-00:06:36

Rubens:

Had most of you who were in those courses the first year, had you all seen battle together?

02-00:06:44

Gaebler:

Not together.

02-00:06:45

Rubens:

But you all had?

02-00:06:46

Gaebler:

Most of them were combat veterans, yes.

02-00:06:51

Rubens:

That must have accounted for a lot.

02-00:06:54

Gaebler:

Well that -- it does. You see the thing that happens in a situation where people get killed is you have to be willing to be killed if that's what's necessary. That's something to think about. And here's this guy that you knew, that bought it. It makes a bond, it does. We were all good friends and respected each other of course, that's part of it. There's mutual respect that you have for

the shared experience. Now it didn't matter that one guy was over in the Pacific and the other guy was Europe. It was the same motivation.

02-00:08:01

Rubens:

Let me get an overview, because I want to make sure, if you don't mind, that we do get a good half hour on a video. So I'm thinking that could we arrange a time for me to come back, and then tell the story. You were an instructor from -- no, you attend classes from '52 to --

02-00:08:33

Gaebler:

Well actually from '53. In '52, I came back at the end of the year, and I didn't get active in the school there until --53 when I was in the active reserve.

02-00:09:31

Rubens:

So you're there from '53 to?

02-00:09:41

Gaebler:

I have to count.

02-00:09:1

Rubens:

Sure.

02-00:09:47

Gaebler:

1970.

02-00:09:50

Rubens:

And at what point do you become an instructor?

02-00:10:00

Gaebler:

I don't remember, '55, '56.

02-00:10:04

Rubens:

And you took about three years.

02-00:10:06

Gaebler:

Well, I think it was even later than that. Maybe it was even '59 or '60.

02-00:10:18

Rubens:

And what are you instructing literally? Do you have different courses you're teaching?

02-00:10:26

Gaebler:

The courses -- the command and general staff course was divided and set up for a five year series of courses.

02-00:10:41

Rubens:

Wow.

02-00:10:43

Gaebler:

So that you had less lessons lasting typically two hours but sometimes there were four or six hour lessons, and you taught the evening session. On weekends, during the summer, as an instructor, you taught in a classroom with

larger groups. For instance, one summer duty was way back at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. That's a beautiful post. If you ever get a chance to look at some of the classrooms, none of them are state-of-the-art. Of course things are dated now but there were overhead projectors and charts. Of course you had to combine it with what you were talking about.

02-00:11:49

Rubens:

PG&E would give you time off, or did you take this out of your vacation time?

02-00:12:04

Gaebler:

PG&E allowed two weeks military duty in the summertime, and you're not paid. Of course the Army would be paying me. The same was true in my overseas service. The '51-'52 recall was credited as PG&E service as well as Army. My PG&E service pin says 36 years, which includes all the active military time I put in as well. That included the year and a half that I was away in the service.

02-00:12:55

Rubens:

When did you actually retire from PG&E?

02-00:12:58

Gaebler:

'83.

02-00:13:02

Rubens:

Would that be OK? I think we have a lot to talk about in terms of who your students were, who your fellow instructors were, what life was like at the base. I really want you on video. I don't know if maybe we should even do the video down there some time.

02-00:13:23

Gaebler:

OK, whatever you like, but the thing, the instructors. Well the instructors were all guys who had done well in the courses. For instance, there was a fellow named Kelly, and he was an instructor at Cal State San Francisco.

02-00:13:52

Rubens:

San Francisco State University.

02-00:13:54

Gaebler:

San Francisco State University. And talk about an unassuming, capable guy, there's one.

02-00:14:06

Rubens:

Do you remember his last name?

02-00:14:07

Gaebler:

James W. Kelly, Jr. The thing was, he was just one of the guys that was there on drill nights when we were there. Of course during the summer, now one summer we were at the Presidio, San Francisco, and another summer we were at the army base there, Oakland Army Base, and we were in one of those

concrete barracks buildings that was toward the entrance. One of those is still being used or is reserved for the National Guard or whoever, I don't know. There's a pair, two of them there. One of them has got a reserve hospital in it and the other one is next to it.

02-00:15:15

Rubens: These were supposedly pictures. You must have seen some of this construction. I've got to get some better pictures.

02-00:15:41

Gaebler: Well as I say, this had got a large section in there about the airport.

02-00:15:50

Rubens: Here, this is '49. This is 1949. That's Oakland. Let's look at that together, just so I get a sense of it. This is the naval air station.

02-00:16:09

Gaebler: Here's the naval supply.

02-00:16:13

Rubens: There's the Southern Pacific Railroad drawing, there's the Pacific... Do you know that decision was made, the one that the Army gets one and the Navy gets the other?

02-00:16:22

Gaebler: No. The Navy took this one because I think it was adjacent to the airport.

02-00:16:36

Rubens: But you were saying, didn't you say that the Army had the --

02-00:16:41

Gaebler: Well here's the SP line, it comes in this way. Of course it goes down this way too but the main Transcontinental line went like this.

02-00:16:56

Rubens: So that was the Army.

02-00:16:57

Gaebler: [referring to map] This road here, Maritime Street, that was always there. I mean that was one of the first ones that got put in. This is the mudflat that I was talking about. This is about where the E in base is, that's where the -- right in here, that's right here, where the headquarters building was. Over on the side was a road just in the sea land area now.

02-00:17:51

Rubens: We're looking at Appendix A9, Oakland, 1949, a map of the San Francisco East Bay. I will get you one of those books.

02-00:18:04

Gaebler: Well the --

02-00:18:10
Rubens: I should just see if there is any chance that we can schedule for a time down there at the base.

02-00:18:24
Gaebler: Oh sure.

02-00:18:37
Rubens: Right where it says outer, right across from outer. Well I'm concerned about, it's getting close to 5:00, and I've kept you a couple hours.

02-00:18:54
Gaebler: Well you've got something else to do.

02-00:18:54
Rubens: Is there anybody else's name that you remember, who might be around from the military times?

02-00:19:56
Gaebler: That's Vanderhaeghen. I don't remember the first name, but we just called him Van. He lived in Alameda.

02-00:20:33
Rubens: What did he do?

02-00:20:35
Gaebler: He was a fireman.

02-00:20:38
Rubens: And what did he do with -- he was in your teaching unit?

02-00:20:42
Gaebler: You know, he was one of those guys that you found a place for because he was such a sparkplug. He wasn't an instructor. He was a gopher of some kind, an aide you might call him. He was a captain in the infantry, and a very likeable, gregarious fellow, and just one of the guys. The colonel in charge was a UC man, and his assistant was too. I don't know if you know the name Clint Gillian. (sp?) Clint was in the administration up there for a long time.

02-00:21:55
Rubens: At UC?

02-00:21:56
Gaebler: At UC, and John Fowler. John Fowler and Clint Gillian, and they were looking for people who were competent instructors, but they also had a keen sense of what made an organization go. One of the things was called collegiality. You have to like the people that you're working with, it seems like. Well you don't have to, but it works much better if you do. Believe me, we got along just fine. We were all -- I can't say we were all the of a stamp because we weren't, but there was no sour apple in the whole bunch.

02-00:23:00

Rubens: That's what I want to come back and we'll talk about that. Do you know if these guys are around at all, Fowler, Gillian?

02-00:23:09

Gaebler: Then there was another guy named Duea, D-U-E-A. He's probably still around because he was younger. [added in editing: Fowler, Gillian, and Duea have all passed away]

02-00:23:20

Rubens: That's his last name?

02-00:23:21

Gaebler: Yes.

02-00:23:22

Rubens: Everyone was called by their last name.

02-00:23:25

Gaebler: Pretty much.

02-00:23:25

Rubens: What did they call you?

02-00:23:27

Gaebler: Gabe.

02-00:23:31

Rubens: By the way, when you went there, what did you wear?

02-00:23:35

Gaebler: Uniform.

02-00:23:39

Rubens: Did you change after work?

02-00:23:40

Gaebler: Oh yes. That was part of being an instructor, and of course I had learned about being an instructor back in 1942, when I was assigned to camp at Fort Benning. If you stand up in front of a group of soldiers, you'd better be impeccable, because they're looking at every button, every piece of insignia, and they know, you know, whether it's right or not. So that becomes -- each Monday night that I'd go down there, I got my uniform washed during the summer. Summer uniforms were cotton khaki, and they'd be washed in starch in the laundry down there in Oakland, and fresh washed, starched khaki uniform. In the wintertime, we wore what was called the service uniform, which of course was army green, a blouse and trousers. I would dress in a so called Class A uniform, complete with insignia medals and the rest. I never did wear all the medals. That's the other thing. When you see guys with a chest full of ribbons and you'd say well, are they bragging or what? It isn't -- that's not the feeling. The feeling is, this is where I was, and that's where he

was, because the ribbons don't say so much about what you did as where you did it.

02-00:25:51

Rubens: Do you have ribbons?

02-00:25:53

Gaebler: Oh yes.

02-00:25:55

Rubens: I'd love it -- would it be difficult for you -- not now -- to get them out, and then we can show them and you could say, this says I was here, I was here, I was here?

02-00:26:07

Gaebler: Maybe.

02-00:26:08

Rubens: Do you think you have any photographs of you during this period?

02-00:26:15

Gaebler: The *Tribune* took my picture when I got off the ship at Fort Mason, in 1952.

02-00:26:26

Rubens: The *Oakland Tribune*?

02-00:26:27

Gaebler: *Oakland Tribune*. They got me standing on the gangplank with Betty holding Claire up.

02-00:26:38

Rubens: Now do you have a copy of that, or should we try and find that?

02-00:26:41

Gaebler: Well I have a copy of it somewhere upstairs.

02-00:26:44

Rubens: All right.

02-00:26:45

Gaebler: At least I used to.

02-00:26:47

Rubens: We'll try and get it.

02-00:26:50

Gaebler: That shows me with a big broad smile, looking at this little bundle of little girl.

02-00:27:05

Rubens: Now what is her name? Let's get her name down.

02-00:27:07
Gaebler: Claire.

02-00:27:08
Rubens: Claire was number one. She's the one who's now a nurse.

02-00:27:12
Gaebler: Yes. Then there was a second one. She came very soon after I got home.

02-00:27:25
Rubens: And then there are?

02-00:27:27
Gaebler: Four boys. The oldest one's a teacher at Berkeley High.

02-00:27:37
Rubens: What does he teach?

02-00:27:38
Gaebler: He teaches physical education, and he's the swim coach and the water polo coach. The next one is an engineer at Pacific Gas and Electric. His name is George too.

02-00:27:54
Rubens: I think I talked to him, and that's how I got your phone number.

02-00:27:58
Gaebler: And the next one was John, and he's up in Roseville. He's in commercial real estate, and the next one is Tom. He was born in '62 or '61. Two years apart, so ten years from '51 to '61.

02-00:28:24
Rubens: Let's see if I have the four boys. So they're names. What is the Berkeley teacher's name?

02-00:28:29
Gaebler: Bill, William.

02-00:28:30
Rubens: OK. So there's William, George, John and Tom. Is it Tom or Thomas?

02-00:28:35
Gaebler: Thomas.

02-00:28:36
Rubens: Is that a T-H?

02-00:28:37
Gaebler: Yes. The boys all graduated from the university.

02-00:28:44
Rubens: UC Berkeley?

02-00:28:45

Gaebler: UC Berkeley. The girls graduated from Cal State Hayward. Claire and Linda graduated from Cal State Hayward.

02-00:29:03

Rubens: I'll make sure you get one of these books, *Pacific Gateway: An Illustrated History of the Port of Oakland* [Port of Oakland, 2000]

02-00:29:26

Gaebler: I was looking in there before you came. Somewhere, I've got a book, a little 30 pager or something, that was published by the Port of San Francisco out at Fort Mason. It has some wartime pictures.

02-00:29:53

Rubens: Thank you so much for this interview.

Interview #2: July 13, 2007

[Audio File 3 gaebler_george3_07-13-07]

03-00:00:39

Rubens: Thank you for coming. I'm sorry not to see your wife, but I want to be mindful 11:00, 11:30?

03-00:00:48

Gaebler: Yes, by. 11:30.

03-00:00:50

Rubens: Sounds good. So today we'll start-

03-00:01:05

Gaebler: I had been thinking about this, and I had thought of starting out by saying that this reserve unit that I was in the 6237 USAR School, was a unit of the 6th Army. 6th United States Army was headquartered in the city of San Francisco, and this school was headquartered in Oakland, but it had two satellites: one in Sacramento, and one in Reno. There were other schools in San Francisco, and Los Angeles, and Seattle, Salt Lake, all part of the same reserve program, you might say, and staffed by reserve officers. In our case, we had some 20 officers, and about 12 enlisted people. The officers ranged from Colonel down to Second Lieutenant, depending on their assignment, and they were classed as staff and faculty of the school. I was one of the instructors as a Major and as a Lieutenant Colonel. The way I got started in that school is that I came from active service in Korea in 1952 -- well, at the end of '52 -- and decided I wanted to continue in the Reserve, and went down the Army base, and found this organization, and signed up in, and for three years, I was a student in what they called the Infantry Advanced Course, which was duck soup for me. I had taken the course before, but I don't know that I had credit for it. However --

03-00:03:26

Rubens: Where had you taken it?

03-00:03:30

Gaebler:

In the Army, you're either going to school or teaching school, and in between are brief moments of sheer terror, but the point is at one point or another, I had had most of the elements of this Infantry Basic and Advanced, and so I breezed through the Infantry Advanced in three years there -- a three-year course -- and then was looking for something else to do, and here was this General Staff Course, so, fine, I signed up for that, and that's a five-year course. I went through that, and --

03-00:04:10

Rubens:

Now, you're working full time, and you're taking these courses at night?

03-00:04:14

Gaebler:

Well, yes, at night, but it's one night a week, you see, and then plus one weekend a month, plus two weeks in the summer. So that constituted what they called a satisfactory Reserve year. In other words, you got credit for being in the Reserve if you fulfilled these time obligations. In any case, having finished the Command General Staff Course, and the medical people have a saying -- a gold-headed cane. I was the gold-headed cane boy.

03-00:04:58

Rubens:

Cane?

03-00:04:59

Gaebler:

Cane. Cane. You know, doctors used to carry a cane? Well, anyway, the top guy gets an award, has a gold-headed cane. Well, I was it. Anyway, the result was I was tagged to be an instructor, and for the next five or six years or more, I instructed in that course. Now, to me, that was a signal honor that I appreciated, because the other instructors, the majority of them, were university professors. In other words, here, I read their names: Clint Gilliam was the commander, and he was a University of California. Lyman Penning was a UC professor. He was the director of the course. Jim Kelly was a professor at USF. Al [Albert R.] Lepore -- (laughter) -- Al Lepore was a great guy. He was a professor at Cal State University Hayward, and he's the reason that I decided to send my daughters to that place, because if they had a guy like Lepore on their faculty, it must be a good school.

03-00:06:31

Rubens:

Say two more things about it. He was... sharp? He was? What was his field?

03-00:06:38

Gaebler:

I don't remember his civilian field. Of course, he was an instructor in the Command General Staff course, but he was very -- well, ebullient is one word, but quick, literate, well-read, well-spoken guy. Just a joy to be around, and same with Kelly. Then there was Mark Owens, who was a real sharp character from the University of California, and John Debrow (sp?). I didn't know him, but he was a UC man.

03-00:07:28

Rubens:

Debrow or Bow?

03-00:07:31

Gaebler:

Debrow (sp?). And Conway Peterson, of course, came in a little bit later. He started off as the secretary of the outfit, and then later finished up as being the Commandant, but Conway Peterson was a UC man, up at the rad lab -- at the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory. So there were some pretty interesting, capable individuals that I had an opportunity to be with, and that was one of the big attractions for me, was the personnel I was working with, and other outstanding people that I remember are Jerry Barnes, old van der Haeghan. Van der Haeghen was an Alameda fireman, and he provided our comic relief, mainly, but he was a very sharp guy, too. Barnes was a businessman in Oakland. Everett Fisher was a lawyer. Jane Wilson. Jane was the secretary before Conway Peterson, and Jane had seen service beginning in the Women's Auxiliary Corps. I don't know if you remember. At first it was the WAAC, and then it was the WAC. They dropped the "auxiliary." And so Jane was a real lady, and a very capable secretary of the outfit, and the gal that really ran the place was Master Sergeant Dorothy Zanelli. (laughter)

03-00:09:30

Rubens:

Zanelli?

03-00:09:31

Gaebler:

Z-A-N-E-L-L-I. Dorothy Zanelli.

03-00:09:34

Rubens:

Runs the place? What do you mean by that?

03-00:09:36

Gaebler:

Well, anything that you wanted to know, any administrative detail that needed to be done, she was on top of it. It didn't matter what it was. She kept track of every person, every thing, every necessary bit of information that was required to run that school.

03-00:10:00

Rubens:

She was civilian, or Army?

03-00:10:02

Gaebler:

She was Army! She was a Master Sergeant in the Women's Army Corps. At the time, that's what they called it -- Women's Army Corps. But she was an administrative expert, and she was in effect the assistant secretary of the school. Of course, the man that was really responsible for my being there, and was the guiding light of the school for many years, was a gentleman named Colonel John Fowler, who was a UC graduate, and ROTC man, and business man in Oakland in the sheet metal business. He was a mover and shaker in that man.

03-00:11:06

Rubens:

And one more sentence. In what way? Did he have visions for how the school could be more efficient, or did he enlist more people?

03-00:11:15

Gaebler:

His strong point, as far as I could say, was probably in enlisting the right people to run his school, and then inspiring them to do their very best. You didn't want to slack off for Colonel Fowler, I'll tell you.

03-00:11:40

Rubens:

Would he come in and observe you? Evaluate you?

03-00:11:42

Gaebler:

Oh, that's part of the Army instruction system, is that you always have what's called an Assistant Instructor. In any class that you're giving, there's someone that will come in, either be there when you start, or come in and sit at the back of the class, and evaluate what you're doing, and help you -- coach you if necessary -- afterwards, or if something comes up in the class that requires assistance, well, then they're there to help. In a standardized Army classroom, there are two people. There's an instructor, and there's an assistant instructor, generally. I had one more name. I can't quite read it here. I have to get my glasses. Oh! How can I forget? Bill Culver. Yeah. Colonel Culver was a hotshot engineer. He was a real engineer. A UC graduate, of course, but he worked for the Pacific Gas and Electric, same as I did. He instructed in what was called the branch courses -- the infantry courses, and the engineer courses, and the artillery courses were instructed by other individuals, and Culver was definitely one of the engineers.

03-00:13:28

Rubens:

What was his role at PG&E?

03-00:13:30

Gaebler:

Well, he was in what they called the -- the names escape me.

03-00:13:55

Rubens:

Different from what you were doing?

03-00:13:57

Gaebler:

Yes. Oh, yes. See, the engineering group in the PG&E had a -- it comes to me now -- what's called the Bureau of Tests and Inspections, and anything that was purchased for use on the overhead lines had to be tested before it was actually certified for use. For instance, insulators or equipment of any kind that was being used around high voltage, or for that matter, any other dangerous environment. The point is that there were engineers that did nothing but run these tests and certify the -- I say they did nothing but -- they of course helped specify the requirements for them, and develop them, and things like this. He was one of those specialized people in the company that made sure that what we had would work, and it would be safe to use. Yeah. Culver. He was older than I, and I kind of looked up to him. Well, anyway, that was the school, and it was mainly, of course, as far as I was concerned, a group of men that I liked to be with, and was proud to be with. We were tenants at the Oakland Army Base. It wouldn't really matter if we went to the Army Base or any other thing. It was just where we happened to meet. At

first, it was at the corner of Maritime and Chung King Street. There was a headquarters building there that we used as the headquarters of the school, and then that was razed, and the new reserve center was built over there by the sewage treatment plant, and that's where I finished up, was in the new USAR Center, that's still there, as far as I'm concerned.

03-00:16:30

Rubens: So you were an instructor from '52 until --

03-00:16:39

Gaebler: No, I was a student. I was a student at first, for at least eight years. Three years in the Infantry Advanced, and five years in the C&GS.

03-00:16:54

Rubens: All right. That takes us to about 1960.

03-00:16:58

Gaebler: And then the last ten years were as an instructor in the Command General Staff School.

03-00:17:12

Rubens: Did you have a hand in writing any of the curriculum?

03-00:17:16

Gaebler: Oh, glad you asked that. The lessons that we taught were all prepared at the main Command General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and they would be sent to us, and we would prepare the presentation that we were going to make from these lesson plans. The lesson plans would include all the materials, such as maps or view graph transparencies, overlays, things like this that were necessary to conduct a class, and you had to familiarize yourself with these lesson plans, of course, before you got up and tried to teach it. They were all very written out in detail as to what to say and teach. They were based, of course, on the standard doctrine, which is contained in the Army Field Manuals, appropriate to the subject, whichever subject you were teaching, so that in addition to the lesson plan, you were expected to know what was in the field manual, and then any other background information that you had was sometimes necessary to fill in or explain at a given point.

03-00:18:50

Rubens: Including your own experience?

03-00:18:51

Gaebler: Oh, yes. That was where I had an advantage, because my experience had been with troops in the field --

03-00:19:04

Rubens: But in Europe and Korea?

03-00:19:06

Gaebler:

Yes. There was plenty of experience to draw on there, but basically you taught what was in the Manual, and what was in the lesson plan. In one sense it was easy, and in another sense, it was not very easy, because you had to make sure you covered all the information.

03-00:19:35

Rubens:

Now, how long would each class run?

03-00:19:40

Gaebler:

Two hours.

03-00:19:41

Rubens:

I'm so sorry -- would it run for six months, six weeks?

03-00:19:44

Gaebler:

Oh. Well, the course was five years in the Reserve School. It's a one-year course as far as the full time is concerned, but we took five years on it, and so there were five classes -- the first-year class, and the fifth-year class, and so on. Every other Monday night you'd go down there and spend two hours with a given subject, and of course on the weekends, there were other activities. Quite often on weekends, there would be examinations. And that was the thing. You had to play fair with the students, because the examinations were all based on the lesson plan and the field manual, and if you hadn't covered the points, they couldn't pass the test. As instructors, we were reminded time and again, "If the student hasn't learned, the instructor hasn't taught."
(laughter)

03-00:20:55

Rubens:

Did you have a pretty good pass rate?

03-00:21:00

Gaebler:

Yes. I was able to get my students passed. As a matter of fact, one or two of them have come to me since and said they never would have made it if it hadn't been for my instruction. For whatever reason, I got tagged with some of the less popular subjects, among them, logistics. Logistics can be awful dry, except that in my mind, it's what the Army runs on, and I could drive the points home to them. The other one that I got stuck with quite often was nuclear munitions -- the so-called A-bombs. The Army at the time was stockpiling -- wasn't using, but had the capability of shooting eight-inch cannon projectiles, what they called eight-inch howitzer, with an atomic warhead. So the effect of an atomic explosion of that size has a given effect radius, and casualty effect of one's burn radiation blast, and so on. And to understand that is, of course, part of the curriculum. I held forth on that subject. Just as an aside, in the summer training -- two weeks' summer duty -- the fifth year, generally speaking, was back at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. That is a beautiful educational facility -- state of the art. The classes there would run 25, 30 officers, all usually at least Captains and a few field grade officers. That is, Majors and Lieutenant Colonels. So they were a pretty good

group. The point is one time, I had a First Lieutenant sitting in the back row, and I kind of wondered about that. Anyway, I was teaching about the use of atomic demolition for blowing up a bunker in a mountain in Yugoslavia someplace -- all these sort of problems were set in specific locations. This guy got on his hind legs and objected to this desecration of the environment. It was so foreign to the subject and to the situation that I had to stop. The evaluator -- there was a Colonel sitting in back -- he jumped up, took the guy out the door, just like that. (laughter) You didn't get away with disrupting a class, see?

03-00:24:41
Rubens:

Was that one of the only times that --

03-00:24:41
Gaebler:

Well, that's the only time it happened to me, yeah.

03-00:24:45
Rubens:

I wanted to ask you a little bit more about that, and then come back to something. I was going to ask you if you had ever seen -- you know, with protected glasses -- but did ever actually see an atomic missile explosion?

03-00:25:01
Gaebler:

No. No. I have not ever witnessed an atomic explosion, except, of course, on film.

03-00:25:07
Rubens:

These were films. I was going to ask you that.

03-00:25:12
Gaebler:

I did go to the school. There was a course that I attended back in -- anyway, that gave all --

03-00:25:30
Rubens:

Covered that?

03-00:25:30
Gaebler:

-- covered that subject, but, no, there was no demonstration.

03-00:25:34
Rubens:

I was going to ask you that as a side one, too. You must have gone a few times to Leavenworth or to other places for your own special instruction?

03-00:25:42
Gaebler:

I was at Leavenworth at least three different times, and I enjoyed every tour there.

03-00:25:48
Rubens:

And it would be people of your own rank, and people who were teaching? It was specifically for the instructors?

03-00:25:54

Gaebler:

Well, the reason that I would go back there -- I went back there for my fifth year as a student, and the other times that I went back -- there was twice that I went back as an instructor.

03-00:26:13

Rubens:

But for your own training, or to teach?

03-00:26:15

Gaebler:

No. To teach.

03-00:26:15

Rubens:

I see. Okay. So were there ever times when they [brought] people who were teaching Field Command, or Atomic Weaponry?

03-00:26:27

Gaebler:

Not to my knowledge. We had all gone through the course, and were theoretically then, therefore, qualified in the subject. In my case, I had been an instructor at Fort Benning, and been trained -- you know what a rigorous training that is, to teach an Army class. You practice, and practice, and practice until you're letter perfect. The evaluators have no mercy whatever. Well, they can't. It's a matter of life and death, of course.

03-00:27:18

Rubens:

Now, in your time -- I guess we're talking between about 1960 and 1970.

03-00:27:26

Gaebler:

Yes.

03-00:27:27

Rubens:

There's beginning to arise in the populace in general a debate over atomic weaponry, to build shelters or not to build shelters, there's even the rise of the question of nuclear power, and here you mention one student seemed to object. Were you aware of that debate? Were there conflicts within the Army, in general?

03-00:27:50

Gaebler:

Not within the Army. That's what surprised me about this guy getting up and objecting, because as far as the Army was concerned -- at least the Army that I knew, the people that I knew -- it was accepted as another weapon, and if you're going to kill people, the most efficient weapon, of course, is the best thing to use. (laughter) I mean, after all, what are we supposed to be doing, anyway?

03-00:28:24

Rubens:

Did you have any sense of the debates that were going on about [foreign] policy --

03-00:28:35

Gaebler:

Oh, yes.

03-00:28:35

Rubens: -- and about how much the Army should be intervening? I mean, these are the years of the growth towards Vietnam.

03-00:28:42

Gaebler: Well, that's right. The Vietnam War was beginning to escalate.

03-00:28:50

Rubens: I guess '65 is the beginning.

03-00:28:52

Gaebler: Sure. Of course I was aware of what was in the press, and on the rest of it, but as far as our group at the school, and within the Army itself as I knew it, this was not a matter of debate. It was accepted. Let's put it this way. If you were going to call from fire from an artillery unit, you had the option of using an atomic weapon, if it was authorized for that particular mission. If you were going to use it, you had to know what the effects were, not only from the enemy's standpoint, but of your own -- when would it be safe to go into that area that had been bombarded? No, the question was strictly, you might say, technical, as far as we were concerned. As far as I'm concerned now, it's still just a technical question.

03-00:30:09

Rubens: My understanding -- and I'm hardly very articulate about this -- is that Eisenhower had made the decision in '54 not to get involved in Vietnam, because we didn't have the flexible tactical capacity to really fight that kind of war, and that there was a real effort on the part of the Army to develop helicopters and more kinds of units that could fight guerilla warfare.

03-00:30:43

Gaebler: That was apparent. We saw in the fifties and sixties a definite different set of methods being what you might call brainstormed about what to do in a situation like Vietnam. The subjects that we had been teaching -- the tactics and the command setup that we had been familiar with was all based on what you might call a set piece of one army against another army.

03-00:31:34

Rubens: Were these hypothetical, or were these actually taking examples from what had gone on?

03-00:31:38

Gaebler: Well, both. They were primarily hypothetical, problems being set in Damascus and the Jordan Valley there, or in -- as I said -- Yugoslavia, or somewhere like this. You had the maps, and you had the situation and the population figures, or whatever you were dealing with, and it made the problems that you were asked to solve more realistic. But one thing we didn't have -- those were problems that involved one army against another army, and we did not, until the sixties, start talking about guerilla warfare. And of course guerilla warfare is nothing new. The word itself comes from way back -- little war, you know? That was the Spanish name for, I guess, Napoleon, I guess.

The thing is that the use of the helicopter was new, the use of isolated strong points -- which is a very debatable subject -- was new, the question of who was a combatant and who wasn't -- and that's part of what the problem is in Iraq right now. These things, I must say, as far as I know, were addressed but not solved, and still haven't been solved.

03-00:33:47

Rubens:

So you were getting manuals, you were getting lectures. Are you getting films and slide shows? Are those things you're using in your classes as well?

03-00:33:55

Gaebler:

Yeah. Right. Oh, yeah. The whole gamut of instructional materials. I will say this: whoever was funding this outfit wasn't stingy with money. We had anything we needed to teach these lessons.

03-00:34:23

Rubens:

How many instructors, about, constituted the school? I know you read those names.

03-00:34:27

Gaebler:

Well, there were five of us that were in charge of the five years.

03-00:34:37

Rubens:

I see.

03-00:34:39

Gaebler:

In other words, you were in the first-year class, the second, and so. And then there was a director that was in charge of that particular branch of instruction, so there were six instructors at Command and General Staff, and then there were at least another six that were in the branch courses -- infantry, artillery, engineers. I don't know if ordinance was there or not. And then there was a staff, which amounted to the Commandant, an Assistant Commandant, and a secretary, and some clerk typists, and file clerks, and things. Altogether, we were not more than 30 people in the school there at Oakland. We had about 60 students.

03-00:34:45

Rubens:

That's what I was going to ask you. Per class?

03-00:35:48

Gaebler:

No.

03-00:35:49

Rubens:

About ten per year, maybe? 12?

03-00:35:52

Gaebler:

Ten or 12 per year.

03-00:35:54

Rubens:

Did you see that growing by the time you left?

03-00:35:59

Gaebler:

Yes, I did. More and more people with service were attracted to the Reserve program for a number of reasons, one of which is retirement. I won't say that a lot of those people over there were motivated by retirement, including myself, but I was also motivated by an admiration for the other people involved, and the Army itself.

03-00:36:37

Rubens:

You're very clear about that. You communicate that, in terms of your respect.

03-00:36:45

Gaebler:

It's a real privilege to be associated with the US Army, and I will tell you, people should realize that.

03-00:36:54

Rubens:

Did the -- let's say six of you, or seven of you -- the five in charge of the years, the director, maybe the Commandant -- would you meet at different points --

03-00:37:05

Gaebler:

Oh, yes.

03-00:37:06

Rubens:

-- to evaluate how's the school going, should we be doing this?

03-00:37:08

Gaebler:

Oh, yes. Yes. We were very close together as a group, and shared all kinds of thoughts and information about it, and of course we received direction from our Colonel -- there's Col. Fowler, and then again Col. Gilliam.

03-00:37:35

Rubens:

Was the Colonel based there, or at --

03-00:37:37

Gaebler:

At Oakland.

03-00:37:39

Rubens:

He was based at Oakland? Okay.

03-00:37:40

Gaebler:

Yeah. Yeah, well, Fowler and Gilliam -- Gilliam succeeded Fowler, and those two gentlemen are real educators.

03-00:37:54

Rubens:

And so it seems to me that you really did constitute a cohort. Were most of those people there for the whole period you were, or was there some coming and going?

03-00:38:06

Gaebler:

Well, there was always --

03-00:38:09
Rubens: Coleman, for instance, and then Peterson comes in --

03-00:38:12
Gaebler: Peterson came in.

03-00:38:13
Rubens: Coleman came in a lot later, I think.

03-00:38:15
Gaebler: And, well, for instance, I mentioned Fisher. Fisher was there at the beginning, and then he retired and left. He was a lawyer from Tennessee, a southern guy, and he could really put on an act. He'd get up there, and just hold you spellbound with his presentation.

03-00:38:48
Rubens: Did the complexion of your students start to change? Did you see that becoming -- I think you once had mentioned that there'd been a lot of southerners that had been in the leadership, and then...

03-00:39:00
Gaebler: Naturally the thing that happened to all of us is we keep getting older, so that changed, but let's go back to, say, '53. The classes at that time were all World War II graduates -- I'll say that advisedly -- and fairly young men. That is, in their thirties. There were elements of ribaldry, and hijinks, and one thing and another that relieved the different things, and that was one thing.

03-00:39:51
Rubens: You mentioned that in the first interview, yes.

03-00:39:53
Gaebler: Well, you can't live in the barracks and not take part in -- I'm thinking about one particular summer duty up at Fort Lewis. However.

03-00:40:08
Rubens: I think you told that story, yeah. But as you got into the sixties, and you're done by '70, but are you starting to see more black --

03-00:40:24
Gaebler: No.

03-00:40:25
Rubens: -- or Hispanic...

03-00:40:27
Gaebler: No. We always had -- you know, the integration in the service took place in '48, and so we always -- as far as I'm -- we never counted who was who, but in terms of our student body, we'd see an occasional Negro, black fellow, or whatever you want to call him. The Hispanic people, I don't know.

03-00:41:08

Rubens:

Tell me a little bit about the base. One of the things you were clear about in our first interview is that San Francisco -- the Presidio's where the action was. That's where you went if you wanted to go to dinner, or to a club. But I'm wondering if you're starting to see growth on the base --

03-00:41:27

Gaebler:

Oh, yes.

03-00:41:28

Rubens:

-- let's say in '65, '66 -- in the last five years, as the Vietnam War is intensifying?

03-00:41:34

Gaebler:

What happened is that the Army put up a big Port of Oakland headquarters, and was running what we used to call a Quartermaster. I don't know what they call it now. And there was a Transportation Corps. They had a port of embarkation operation working out of Oakland, and that resulted in the construction of the present concrete permanent -- I think they're permanent -- barracks buildings that are being used by the Reserve components now. There's a hospital unit in there. Maybe a Military Police unit. I don't know. I haven't kept up with that. But there are two barracks blocks, complete with mess halls, and kitchens, and that, just as you --

03-00:42:46

Rubens:

And those weren't left over from World War II or Korea?

03-00:42:48

Gaebler:

No.

03-00:42:48

Rubens:

Those came in new?

03-00:42:51

Gaebler:

They were built in the late fifties. Yeah. That's part of the port of embarkation operation there.

03-00:43:06

Rubens:

I did not have the opportunity, but Vic, who you met, and then one of the other fellows working on the project did a background interview Roger Caswell, who works for the army and points out that one of the main functions of the Port of Oakland was to mastermind the transportation around the Bay. Maybe that's what you mean by port of embarkation. That they needed people there who would really -- and I don't have a clear picture of this -- I guess calculate who was going where and when.

03-00:43:51

Gaebler:

At the time, you recall, we were maintaining a presence in the Philippines, and then of course there was an establishment in Korea, so there was a logistic operation that had to supply those people with everything they needed, and

that had to be coordinated, and it would include such commodities as oil and gasoline, or food, or building materials, or anything else that was requisitioned from these people abroad on the other side of the Pacific, to say nothing of the personnel rotation that was being accomplished, because the usual tour was no longer than about 18 months, and so there was always people coming and going. At the port of Oakland, they had a large post office for mail handling. There was a large post exchange facility for people coming back, to buy new clothes, and so on. During the Korean War, of course -- and I've mentioned this -- there was a big mortuary there.

03-00:45:34

Rubens: Would you know of anyone, or be able to point me in any direction of someone who might have really been someone who knew about the coordination of --

03-00:45:45

Gaebler: No, I wasn't part of that.

03-00:45:47

Rubens: I know you weren't. Logistics, I guess, is the real word, right?

03-00:45:50

Gaebler: I don't know just who you would --

03-00:45:55

Rubens: Not to worry. Now tell me about you. In 1970, what's the highest rank that you achieved?

03-00:46:06

Gaebler: Lieutenant Colonel.

03-00:46:08

Rubens: And what made you stop?

03-00:46:11

Gaebler: (laughter) I had achieved several goals, one of which was the Reserve duty necessary to qualify for retirement. Another was to get into what was called field grade rank.

03-00:46:50

Rubens: Field grade?

03-00:46:51

Gaebler: Field grade. That's Major, Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel. I, of course, could have aspired to be a Colonel -- who doesn't? But at the time, I was thinking, "Here I am on, you might say, the cusp of my career, and it's time to step down."

03-00:47:18

Rubens: How old were you, about? I can't calculate the moment. You were...

03-00:47:22

Gaebler: In 1970, I was 50 years old.

03-00:47:27

Rubens: Still young.

03-00:47:28

Gaebler: Well, I was the division engineer in Oakland for Pacific Gas and Electric. And I was dealing with the budget and the construction for the two counties -- Alameda and Contra Costa County.

03-00:47:50

Rubens: Big growth period.

03-00:47:52

Gaebler: And it was a big job, and I was full of it. The Army still had its appeal, of course, but it was a matter of time, it was a matter of energy, it was also the year that I got diagnosed as having a congestive heart problem. (laughter) So I had been living with that for 35 years.

03-00:48:19

Rubens: I didn't know that. Good for you for living.

03-00:48:24

Gaebler: Well, the cardiologists do a marvelous job. The latest thing is they've got this pacemaker that keeps me going.

03-00:43:33

Rubens: Good. So, you thought, "Okay, I've done my job"?

03-00:43:38

Gaebler: Well, yes. It was a natural stepping stone, as far as I was concerned.

03-00:48:46

Rubens: Did you have any particular feelings about if the Army had changed, or all of the hoopla over the war in Vietnam, did that bear --

03-00:48:56

Gaebler: Oh, no, no. That didn't bother me a bit. As far as I am concerned, the Army hasn't changed. If I go back to, say, Fort Stewart, this 3rd Division pin that I wear all the time --

03-00:49:20

Rubens: Move your hand, and let's look at that. 3rd Division is which one?

03-00:49:24

Gaebler: Well, it's the blue and white one.

03-00:49:27

Rubens: Bar.

03-00:49:27

Gaebler:

Yeah. And the little bar underneath, or over the top, that's two awards of what they call the Combat Infantry Award. The point is that I can go back to Fort Stewart, Georgia, where the 3rd Division is headquartered, and walk right into it and feel right at home any time.

03-00:49:50

Rubens:

And so would you do that?

03-00:49:52

Gaebler:

Well, I have done it. (laughter)

03-00:49:54

Rubens:

I mean, it wasn't cold turkey. You ended your service as an instructor, but maintained relationships with some of your colleagues, and --

03-00:50:06

Gaebler:

Yes. The thing there is that there are what you might call alumni groups. One keeps I touch, yes, but as far as the United States Army, it's still the United States Army, and as far as I'm concerned, they have a little different uniform, and different equipment, maybe a little different doctrine tactics, and so on, but it exists for the same purpose, and that is national security.

03-00:50:49

Rubens:

Did you have any strong feelings about the closure of the base?

03-00:50:55

Gaebler:

No.

03-00:50:56

Rubens:

Did you think it was time for the school to move?

03-00:51:03

Gaebler:

Yes, to Camp Park. Well, the reason for the Oakland Army Base, of course, and the embarkation, was the overseas establishments, and when the Philippines got cut off and the Vietnam War was over, there really wasn't a need for the Army Base as such as a port of embarkation. Now I can understand the closure of the bases as a means of -- let's put it this way -- using the money to better advantage. I won't say "saving money," because I don't think the government saves any money any way, but they may use it to better advantage, and the base itself had no hold on me as a place, really. As I say, we were tenants there, and I knew all the buildings and places, I liked to go to the commissary, and things like that, but...

03-00:52:32

Rubens:

Well, I think you've given us a wonderful picture. I wanted just to make sure of the time on this that I'm not running out. I have in my notes that I know that I used the camera to look at your awards -- your ribbons -- on your hat. I don't know that I adequately got the pictures, and I will follow up on that, particularly, I think you told me about a picture of you that the *Tribune* took

when you came back, where Betty is holding Claire. I would love to have that picture. I think you may have showed me -- did you show me some pictures of you at the school? I can't remember that right now.

03-00:53:14
Gaebler:

No. I said that I had a picture that was taken on the last day that I was there.

03-00:53:26
Rubens:

Okay. Do you think you'll be able to put your hands on it?

03-00:53:32
Gaebler:

I might.

03-00:53:32
Rubens:

Okay. I'm going to encourage you, and maybe I can take a picture of that.

03-00:53:36
Gaebler:

It's up in the attic somewhere.

03-00:53:40
Rubens:

Is there anything else that you think you should point me to, even if you don't have knowledge of it, or anything that was important about Army at that port base in that last decade? Were you ever impacted by the troop train protests? There was an attempt to stop the trains for troops that were --

03-00:54:11
Gaebler:

Well, I wasn't involved in that at all. I mean --

03-00:54:13
Rubens:

They were during the day, anyway.

03-00:54:17
Gaebler:

I remember the incident, but I wasn't there.

03-00:54:19
Rubens:

Yes. You were dealing with people at the other end.

03-00:54:31
Gaebler:

It's just coincidental that in my connection with the PG&E, I was involved with the protests up here at the university in the sixties. When the National Guard was here?

03-00:54:45
Rubens:

That was during the People's Park incident in '68?

03-00:54:50
Gaebler:

I was at the time the Gas Superintendent for the district there.

03-00:54:58
Rubens:

The university was in your district?

03-00:55:00

Gaebler: Yep. And one night, there was this -- I think I mentioned this before --

03-00:55:13

Rubens: I'm not sure.

03-00:55:16

Gaebler: A large explosion over here, I think on Bienvenue, just south of the campus. So I got called to come and see it, because the fire department thought it might have been a gas explosion. I went there, and first thing, took a look at the gas installation in this building. The building was pretty much in splinters.

03-00:55:53

Rubens: Flames? Had it --

03-00:55:54

Gaebler: No. It hadn't caught, but it had been blown up pretty good. The first thing I looked at, of course, was where the gas service entered the premises, and it was okay. Nothing wrong. So I went around back, and sure enough, here's this stench of high explosive -- cordite. You never forget it. When ammunition explodes, it releases an odor. It's distinctive. And that's what I smelled, and sure enough, somebody had exploded a bomb or whatever against the back side of this building. The reason is that those people in that building were putting out some sort of a clandestine newsheet of some sort that other factions were taking exception to. (laughter)

03-00:56:59

Rubens: I didn't hear this story.

03-00:57:01

Gaebler: That's the only contact I had.

03-00:57:06

Rubens: Closest brush with the --

03-00:57:07

Gaebler: Is to go and say to the fire department and the police, "Don't look at the PG&E this time. It was some anarchist that exploded a bomb."

03-00:57:22

Rubens: Let's stay with this one moment, and of course, this is right when I have to stop the tape, so we'll do just a little more? Are you doing --

[Audio File 4 gaebler_george4_07-13-07]

04-00:00:00

Rubens: --this is tape two of the second interview with George Gaebler. That's quite a story. But you don't recall which faction was bombing which faction, but it was PG&E wasn't responsible?

04-00:00:14
Gaebler: Oh, no. That was my main concern, of course. No, you can't pin this one on the company.

04-00:00:23
Rubens: I used to hear that -- now, would it be maybe more the Department of Water that when there were high-activity times, when there demonstrations in the streets, that there was always the fear that LSD would be put in the water, and that there would be -- what is the word? I can't think of it. You know, protection -- put around some of the main water --

04-00:00:48
Gaebler: Well, you know, that all comes -- this is a big subject. At the time, yes. LSD was thought to be, and there were instances where activists were giving cookies that were --

04-00:01:15
Rubens: Is that true?

04-00:01:16
Gaebler: -- were laced with --

04-00:01:18
Rubens: Marijuana?

04-00:01:19
Gaebler: Marijuana. To the National Guard soldiers.

04-00:01:24
Rubens: Is that true?

04-00:01:25
Gaebler: Yes, that's true. It was part of what was going on at the time. It was also a little later on -- not that particular year, but I think it was two years later -- that somebody blew up one of our transmission towers over in the Montclair district in Oakland.

04-00:01:55
Rubens: Was that an act of sabotage?

04-00:01:58
Gaebler: Oh, yes. That was done with somebody that had had demolition training, because it was very professionally done: the explosive tied around two legs of a transmission tower, and set off, which cut the two legs, of course. The thing fell over.

04-00:02:18
Rubens: Was that person ever found?

04-00:02:20
Gaebler: No.

- 04-00:02:20
Rubens: That was not the Unabomber, I guess, who had had some time here on campus.
- 04-00:02:25
Gaebler: No, that was in '68 or 9. But the thing is that terrorism as such, or acts against society like that in our society, which is quite open, are almost impossible to guard against, the way we are set up. All you have to do is look at the latest incident up there at Rio Vista, up by Guerneville?
- 04-00:03:06
Rubens: I know, but I don't know the incident you're referring to.
- 04-00:03:08
Gaebler: Well, there's a PG&E substation there, and somebody cut the lock, and went in, and short circuited the high-voltage insulation that comes in, and set the thing on fire. Knocked out power to the whole Russian River Resort area for a day or two.
- 04-00:03:35
Rubens: Did they make a statement of what they were protesting?
- 04-00:03:39
Gaebler: No. No, just... I don't know why people do that. I can understand if they would take credit for it, to make a statement, as you say. But a lot of the times, things like that are just done for -- I don't know, meanness? I don't know.
- 04-00:04:00
Rubens: At the end of the last survey, you gave me a survey, just basically names, and ages of your children. Did your children ever get caught up in any of the protests at Berkeley?
- 04-00:04:11
Gaebler: Well, I mentioned that two daughters went to Cal State Hayward.
- 04-00:04:15
Rubens: Right. One, you said, because of this instructor you had.
- 04-00:04:20
Gaebler: Yes. Al Lepore. I figured if Al was an instructor there, they must have a good faculty. But the other reason is that I didn't want to send them here to the University of California, Berkeley. Not in the sixties.
- 04-00:04:35
Rubens: You and your wife both were graduates?
- 04-00:04:38
Gaebler: That's right. The thing is that my nephew went to school here, graduated in what we used to call economics. I don't know what they call it now. He was living in --

04-00:05:05
Rubens: One of the dorms, or...

04-00:05:06
Gaebler: Barrington Hall.

04-00:05:08
Rubens: Oh, yes. It's a co-op.

04-00:05:08
Gaebler: And Barrington Hall was an animal house, you might say, and it fried his brains, really. And he's been a mental case ever since.

04-00:05:22
Rubens: That's a shame.

04-00:05:23
Gaebler: Yes. It is a shame. It's a big loss, because here was this kid, he's bright, and...

04-00:05:32
Rubens: Got mixed up in those times.

04-00:05:34
Gaebler: But that's what was going on, and I didn't want any part of it.

04-00:05:40
Rubens: Now when did you retire from PG&E?

04-00:05:45
Gaebler: 1983.

04-00:05:46
Rubens: So you had another 13 years working, after you were no longer teaching?

04-00:05:52
Gaebler: Yep. Yeah.

04-00:05:59
Rubens: The reunion group: how often would you say... Did you guys get together? I know Peterson is someone that you've seen, but --

04-00:06:10
Gaebler: Well, I saw him just recently.

04-00:06:16
Rubens: Someone had spoken. I had just contacted you. There was some speaker that you all had seen.

04-00:06:25
Gaebler: Yes. Yes. That was the Nimitz lecture. I think Conway said that that was the first one he had heard about or attended, that he hadn't been coming to them. But these lectures are sponsored by the Navy ROTC here on an endowment that somebody left them. They are annual affairs. I've been coming for the last

six or so years. But that's not an Army reunion as such. The only one time that the school people got together was when they formally closed the 6237 designation, and made it into something else. For whatever reason, they had a dinner out at San Ramon, and I went there, and sat next to or with a very fine bunch of young officers. I know when they came to introduce themselves, this one fellow, who was pretty much the life of the party, got up and said, well, he hated to admit it, but he was a rocket scientist. The thing is that he was! (laughter) Has a job out at the Lawrence Livermore Lab. (laughter)

04-00:08:07
Rubens:

Oh, interesting. So, Coleman must have been out at that dinner?

04-00:08:10
Gaebler:

I don't know.

04-00:08:13
Rubens:

I'll have to find out if there's a picture of that.

04-00:08:18
Gaebler:

That's the only time that the school actually had a "reunion", quote unquote.

04-00:08:27
Rubens:

So is there anything else? If you just want to scan your mind for a minute, if you think there's anything you want to say about. Did you ever write any materials for the instruction, or --

04-00:08:41
Gaebler:

Oh, yes. You know, just like today, if I'm going to speak for the record, I ought to be sure of what I'm saying, and if I would research, say, some reference book for a particular subject, I'd jot a note down, yes. Of course one sticks in my mind. At Fort Leavenworth, there's a beautiful library there, not only in terms of its extent, but the setting. They have some of the archives that were brought over from Germany after World War I, and I was researching the Battle of what the British call Ypres, in Belgium -- "Why-pers."

04-00:09:46
Rubens:

Ypres?

04-00:09:46
Gaebler:

Well, Belgians call it Ypres, but it's spelled Y-P-R-E-S, or something like that. "Why-pers." But the Germans call it the Battle of Loos -- L-O-O-S, because these battles are named for the where the headquarters of the various two armies were, and the Germans were in a little town called Loos. The British were in Ypres. Okay. So I was reading about this battle. Of course it was in German. The thing that amazed the writer, who was writing the account, was that the British were marching in formation against enfiladed machine gun fire. In other words, they were just massacred.

04-00:10:44
Rubens:

Wiped out.

04-00:10:44
Gaebler: Wiped out.

04-00:10:45
Rubens: Yep. Yep. Yep. So, in terms of what students would be handed, there were manuals or textbooks that had been produced by the Army. You would supplement with some of your own stories?

04-00:11:06
Gaebler: Well, if it was appropriate, or if it shed any light on things, yes, I wouldn't but I wasn't drawing primarily from my resources. I was teaching from the book.

04-00:11:24
Rubens: Yes. Okay. But you would do some research, just as you just said.

04-00:11:27
Gaebler: Well, yes.

04-00:11:29
Rubens: Yeah. But you didn't write monographs. I wanted to make sure if we gave credit to you if we had materials that we want to --

04-00:11:36
Gaebler: I'm not published, no. [I have read papers at the Pacific Coast Gas Association's and the American Gas Association's conventions on the subject of gas pipeline emergency planning and training.]

04-00:11:36
Rubens: All right. All right. And you know, what I didn't get clear -- I understand the first, second, I understand the five-year program, the month --

04-00:11:45
Gaebler: My uncle is, and my son..

04-00:11:46
Rubens: Your uncle is...

04-00:11:48
Gaebler: Published.

04-00:11:50
Rubens: Who is that?

04-00:11:51
Gaebler: Oliver H. Gaebler has written for the American Medical Association.

04-00:12:00
Rubens: Oh, he's a doctor?

04-00:12:01
Gaebler: He was. He's deceased now, but yes, he's got a number of publications to his credit.

04-00:12:12
Rubens: Now, what I wasn't clear just about how long would a class run -- would it run the whole academic year?

04-00:12:21
Gaebler: Well, we begin in September, and work through June --

04-00:12:26
Rubens: And then had your --

04-00:12:27
Gaebler: The summer --

04-00:12:30
Rubens: Two weeks.

04-00:12:30
Gaebler: Two weeks would be in August.

04-00:12:33
Rubens: Yeah. Okay. So, it's basically an academic model, but --

04-00:12:36
Gaebler: Yeah.

04-00:12:36
Rubens: -- you met once a week at night and once a month in the day.

04-00:12:42
Gaebler: Well, Saturday and Sunday. It was a weekend. And usually two weeks -- two Monday nights a month.

04-00:12:53
Rubens: I see. I think you said that, and I just forgot. Yeah. I'm sorry. Well, if you think of anything else, I'm going to be coming to see you briefly to get a signature on a letter, to return the transcripts a little cleaned up. I just wanted to show this to you, but I hadn't cleaned it up, so it'll be cleaned up for you to read, if you need to add. What I would love to do is take a couple of pictures of pictures you have. I want to make sure that on the last video, I never really videoed your face, but I'm pretty sure I videoed your hat, and if not, I want to get a nice picture of that.

04-00:13:34
Gaebler: Well, the only reason that the ribbons are on the hat is that it's more convenient than bringing out the jacket with them on the breast of the jacket.

04-00:13:48
Rubens: Does that hang in your closet?

04-00:13:50
Gaebler: My uniform is hanging up in the closet.

04-00:13:53
Rubens: I bet you still fit it.

04-00:13:55
Gaebler: It's possible.

04-00:13:58
Rubens: And let me just ask you -- and this we can kind of edit out of it -- did your father have papers? I know we talked about your father, because he had been -
-

04-00:14:13
Gaebler: Well, he was in World War I, of course --

04-00:14:19
Rubens: Pretty key person in the --

04-00:14:25
Gaebler: During World War II, he started out at Hammer Field, which is now the municipal airport in Fresno, and actually helped build that field as an engineer, and design the runways. You speak of, "Oh, what's to design about a runway?" You understand that they have to be able to sustain a rather heavy impact, of a bomber, for instance, landing, or one of these new civilian planes, for that matter. It takes quite a bit of reinforced concrete to do that. Anyway. He worked at Hammer Field, and then he was the port of embarkation engineer in San Francisco.

04-00:15:19
Rubens: Well, that's what you said. He was drafted, really. Isn't that right?

04-00:15:22
Gaebler: Well, he was recalled into active duty. He was a Reserve officer. He had been in the regular Army up until 1922, and then when he resigned his commission when the Army downsized after WWI, he joined the 385th Engineer Regiment, which was a Reserve outfit in San Francisco. He used to go to summer camp duty with them, and was in the Reserve program. When World War II came along and they needed engineer officers, well, then he got a set of orders, and reported over to the Presidio, and that was it.

04-00:16:14
Rubens: And served throughout the entire...

04-00:16:16
Gaebler: Yes. From April of '42 until the end of '45, I think. Until about January of '46.

04-00:16:40
Rubens: So you, in a way, grew up -- would you say? -- with war stories, with appreciation for the Army?

04-00:16:49
Gaebler: No war stories.

04-00:16:49

Rubens: No war stories.

04-00:16:51

Gaebler: But my father quite definitely a role model, and it was easy for me to understand -- no, I wouldn't say that. That's a wrong word. Easy for me to be a service individual, as far as that goes.

04-00:17:26

Rubens: Did you feel -- I don't mean this as personally as it sounds -- did you feel you had to live up to a certain expectation, or is it something that you literally made your own. That's what it sounds like to me, that you made it your own, but I do want to ask if your father --

04-00:17:44

Gaebler: Well, no --

04-00:17:46

Rubens: -- had big shoes you had to fill.

04-00:17:47

Gaebler: Let's put it this way. I used to wear his boots to the ROTC drill, because they were brown, and you had to wear brown shoes, and I didn't have any other brown shoes. But, no, I'm in no way able to fill my father's shoes. He is far above anything that I have ever achieved. He really was.

04-00:18:21

Rubens: And did he maintain a coterie of friends who were from the military?

04-00:18:25

Gaebler: Oh, yeah. He's a very gregarious fellow. Well, he was reserved and quiet, but he had friends. People who knew him wouldn't let him go as a friend. He was a valuable friend to a lot of people.

04-00:18:42

Rubens: Did he have papers that showed what his work really was, being an embarkation engineer -- is that the word?

04-00:18:56

Gaebler: Well, the job that he had at Fort Mason was primarily coordinating, and writing, and executing contracts with contractors --

04-00:19:10

Rubens: Oh, yes, yes, yes. You said.

04-00:19:14

Gaebler: -- for maintaining pier facilities. Every time a ship docks and rubs up against what they call a dolphin, the chances are that it might break one or more pilings, and they have to be replaced. The buildings have to be re-roofed from time to time, and so on. There's just 1,001 details in an establishment as big as the port of embarkation was, extending all the way from beyond Pittsburgh

down into Sunnyvale, and so on. The thing is that there were all of these housekeeping details. You might say keeping the place running. The one time that I was on leave and came home and spent an afternoon with him, we went over to -- well, I think he set it up to give me a ride on the boat -- it was an Army launch, so it went from Fort Mason, to Alcatraz, to Angel Island, and back, each day -- mail deliveries. Because there were Army installations on those two islands. So I got a ride on the boat over to Alcatraz and Angel Island, and back. That's the only time I've set foot on either one of them. But just the idea of keeping Alcatraz supplied with water, for instance, among other things.

04-00:21:10

Rubens: Sure. And so, did he have papers? Did you give them to the Army, or do you know what happened to them?

04-00:21:18

Gaebler: Well, anything that had --

04-00:21:20

Rubens: Had to do with the Army, he must have left.

04-00:21:22

Gaebler: -- that had to do with his job there, he left (inaudible). The only thing I have of his is some miscellaneous drawings that he produced or worked on at Pacific Fruit Express, where he worked for the railroad. I have a picture of a bridge he designed.

04-00:21:46

Rubens: Really?

04-00:21:47

Gaebler: And once built. You know, every civil engineer, I think the back of his mind wants to build at least one bridge. I mean, after all, it's what civil engineers do, isn't it? Bridge build. Well, this beautiful little span was built up at Roseville, and then it came time to tear it down, they didn't want to just demolish it, and so they put it across the creek, there, in Roseville downtown. It's still there.

04-00:22:22

Rubens: And it's actually a bridge he designed?

04-00:22:24

Gaebler: Yeah.

04-00:22:25

Rubens: Oh! And you have pictures of this?

04-00:22:26

Gaebler: Yes.

04-00:22:27

Rubens:

Great. I want to encourage you to keep these papers together. Maybe we can put them with yours, connected to this, and someone will have access to them at the Bancroft? You think about that. You don't have to think about that now. I'll remind you of this. But I want to ask you something to clear up my mind. You said that Oakland then was created as a port of embarkation. Does that mean there was any transfer of duties from San Francisco to Oakland?

04-00:23:06

Gaebler:

Yes. It was established as the headquarters.

Rubens:

Whereas San Francisco *had been*, then Oakland became?

04-00:23:17

Gaebler:

Yes.

04-00:23:17

Rubens:

Do you happen to know when that is? Is that in the Korean era, or the Vietnam era? Or probably in between?

04-00:23:27

Gaebler:

Oh, no. It was as late as the late seventies.

04-00:23:32

Rubens:

Okay. After you're no longer teaching. Okay. That's what I need to get clear on. And finally, was your father interested in what you were teaching?

04-00:23:47

Gaebler:

Well, only to the extent that he was always interested in what my brother, and I, and my sister were involved with. He was our father. That was it. No, he didn't.

04-00:24:04

Rubens:

You weren't doing engineering, but you were field operations.

04-00:24:10

Gaebler:

I was in -- as I say, when it comes to the scholarly ability, and the technical ability in the subject, I will never even come up to the beginning point where he was. The thing is that he was, in his way, a genius. Because he knew that and other people, he knew, would not really understand it, he didn't really share that with people. He wasn't one to talk about something just to be talking.

04-00:24:55

Rubens:

When did he die?

04-00:24:58

Gaebler:

1988.

04-00:24:59

Rubens:

So, you had him a long time.

04-00:25:00

Gaebler: Yes.

04-00:25:03

Rubens: Well, shall we stop?

04-00:25:06

Gaebler: Okay.

04-00:25:06

Rubens: Do you think we've said what we need to? Mr. Peterson was going to come, and I want to just go and look and see if there's a phone call or what, but I want to thank you so much. I think you are a remarkably articulate --

[End of Interview]