

University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives
World War II at Illinois Oral History Project
George Reynolds
Canal Winchester, Ohio
May 4, 2008

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A (original interview is a digital audio file dubbed to cassette tape for transcribing purposes)

Chris D'Arpa: Here we are. We are in Canal Winchester. Is that right, Ohio?

George Reynolds: Yes.

CD: This is Chris D'Arpa. It is May 4, 2008. And I am speaking with George Reynolds at the home of his daughter here in Canal Winchester. And Mr. Reynolds if you could tell me, say your name and if you don't mind when and where you were born for the tape.

GR: You want to know?

CD: Your name and when you were born and where you were born.

GR: I was born November the fourth 1918 at Valier, Montana.

CD: And what part of Montana? Valier? Could you spell that?

GR: V-A-L-I-E-R. It's up in the northern part of Montana.

CD: Northeast or Northwest? In the mountains or on the...?

GR: More towards the center, I think.

CD: More towards the center.

GR: I don't remember. I mean we moved from there when I was about six months old.

[laughter]

CD: Oh, ok. And so when you moved from Valier where did your family move to?

GR: They moved to Arkansas City, Kansas and that shows on here.

CD: And what did your parents do? What was your family like? Did you have brothers and sisters?

GR: I had an older sister and an older brother and that was all my family. My father was a Baptist preacher and so we moved to Arkansas City when I was about six months old.

CD: And did he move for work? Is that why he moved you to Kansas?

GR: Well, I was never exactly sure but I think maybe that hard times had come along. You see I was born just a week before the Armistice of World War I and I think hard times came along and so my father went to work for the New Era Milling Company at Arkansas City. And that is my earliest recollection. They had at first lived someplace down in Arkansas City but then they had purchased a ten acre tract just about four miles north of Arkansas City. And that's where I spent my early days up until I was in the fourth grade.

CD: Really? And then what happened in the fourth grade? Did the family move again?

GR: Well, yes. My father went back to preaching and we moved over to the little town of Oxford where he had a church.

CD: Oxford, Kansas?

GR: Yes.

CD: And is that then where you spent the rest of your childhood?

GR: No.

CD: No.

GR: Baptist preachers don't stay put very long.

[laughter]

GR: So after about a year and a half we moved up to Canton, Kansas. And he was serving two churches, one at Canton and one at Marion, Kansas. And we were there about another year and a half and then we moved over to Marion where he was to be the full time pastor and by that time I was in junior high.

CD: Oh, wow.

GR: And then it was about that time that the Depression came.

CD: Right.

GR: And so in 1930 we moved up to town of Hope.

CD: Hope, Kansas also?

GR: Yes. And I started high school up there. And after a little while, maybe a year or so, we left there and went out to Phillipsburg, Kansas. And we were there about two years, I think.

CD: Wow. And would he pack up a family in a car and drive for each move?

GR: Well, yes. My Dad would find a way of moving the furniture up and then he would come back and get us in the car. And we'd drive up in the car. We were there until I finished my junior year of high school at Phillipsburg and then my Father quit preaching and of course that was right in the middle of the Depression, and we went back to Arkansas City where he still had the ten acres. And so we lived on it and I went to Arkansas City High School. I graduated in 1935.

CD: So what did you do after high school? After you graduated high school?

GR: Well, I went onto Arkansas City Junior College and after two years there I graduated from Junior College and I had decided I would be a lawyer.

CD: How did you make that decision? Do you remember?

GR: Well, I think when I was a little kid they asked me what I wanted to do and I said I wanted to be President.

CD: Good for you!

[laughter]

GR: And so they said, "Well, if you are going to be president you better be a lawyer first." So I had decided to go to law school and I stayed with that. Well, at first I had said I wanted to be fat like grandpa.

[laughter]

GR: But then when I finished Junior College I had made inquiries at Washburn College in Topeka which was then an independent school. And so I went up to Washburn and finished undergraduate work there. Got my AB.

CD: In what field was your undergraduate degree?

GR: History and political science.

CD: The young man who is transcribing these interviews for me is an undergraduate at Illinois and he is transcribing these interviews and he's a double major also of history and political science.

GR: They seem to combine them some way. And so, of course my father being a Baptist preacher he couldn't afford to send me so I got a number of jobs to put myself through.

CD: At Washburn?

GR: Yeah. And then after I graduated from the College at Washburn I entered the Law School and at that time I had made a contact that helped me get a position with the Motor Vehicle Department at the State House at Topeka.

CD: At Topeka.

GR: And so I worked there and went onto school. I also got a position in the Washburn Law School Library as assistant librarian. And so I went on through and actually I was sitting in the Library in 1942, 1941.

CD: 1941.

GR: And I heard somebody yelling and I checked into who it was, it was a newsboy calling an Extra because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. And so it seems like my friends and I all were going to get into the Navy and so we all went up to Kansas City.

CD: Now may I ask how did you decide the Navy?

GR: Well, they had a V-7 program that they allowed people to become an officer. They called them ninety day wonder. After ninety days training they'd become an officer. So we went up there and all my friends were accepted but I was too short and so they wouldn't take me. And so I went back and finished law school, which I was in my senior year. And I finished law school and passed the Kansas Bar and well, in the process of working and everything I came in contact with some lawyers and judges. One of them was the former governor of Kansas. He and I used to ride down to work together quite a little bit. He taught federal procedure at the Law School for us. And so he says, "You have to go. You can't dodge it." And the men that

helped me get a position in the State House was a lawyer and he also said I had to go. Both of those men later became Circuit Court of Appeals Federal Judges. And so I had a lot of respect for them and so when I passed the Bar my landlord was going to Colorado and they let me go with them and so I did that and came back and didn't know what to do so I went down to Wichita. I was going to see if I could work for the Boeing Company there.

CD: The?

GR: Boeing.

CD: As in Boeing aircraft?

GR: Yes. They had a, you see they were making the B-17 airplanes. That is they made the fuselage. I think they were finally assembled out at Washington State. And so I went down to try to get a position there and they said, "Well, we'll let you know." And I thought forget that. And so I went uptown in Wichita and was walking down the street and I saw one of these signs to recruit people. So I went in and enlisted at that time.

CD: Wow! So what year was that?

GR: That was 1942.

CD: '42. And was it the Navy that you enlisted in?

GR: No it was the army. And so they sent me up to Fort Leavenworth.

CD: Now did they, so you went in the office to enlist and did they that day were you taken in and sent up to Fort Leavenworth or did you go back to your family and say...?

GR: I went back to the family. My Dad said he didn't approve of it and so...

CD: Did he not approve of the war or he just was worried about you and didn't want you to go?

GR: He told me it was better to be a dead coward then to be an alive hero. I got it backwards.

CD: I understood what you meant.

[laughter]

GR: And so after a couple of days they had furnished my transportation to Fort Leavenworth and I went up there and was inducted and they sent me down to Camp Swift, Texas. Which is not far from Austin and I got in the Company C of the 378th Regiment of the 95th Division. And I took most of my basic training there but after a little while I was moved up to the G-2 section.

CD: And was part of that...was there some recognition given to the fact that you had been through college and law school and so they thought that maybe you shouldn't be an infantry man?

GR: I don't know exactly how it came about but the officers of the Company did give me special attention but I had a friend that had gone up to the AG Adjutant General Officer at headquarters and he kind of kept track of me. And I think maybe he got me transferred to the G-2 section.

CD: And was the G-2 section also at Fort Swift? Is that right, Fort Swift near Austin?

GR: Camp Swift.

CD: Camp Swift. Where was the G-2 section? Maybe that is a better way to ask it.

GR: Well, it was there at Camp Swift at Division Headquarter, of course. And so after a little while we finished the basic training and moved over to Fort Sam Houston Texas at San Antonio. And we did some advanced training, maybe. And one day they said, "Everybody is required to take an aptitude test."

CD: Really?

GR: Yes this was for the ASTP.

CD: The ASTP being?

GR: Army Specialized Training Program.

CD: Specialized training, ok.

GR: And so well we didn't argue with what we were ordered to do. So we went over and took it and my friend in the AG section said that I had the highest score of anyone in the language section. They were also giving it to engineers and I guess there were a couple of engineers who had to have higher score than I did. But other than that I had the highest score and so that is what got me into the ASTP.

CD: Ok and what year would this have been do you think? How quickly did they move you through this? You entered in '42.

GR: Yes.

CD: So was this...

GR: This was in '43 and the probably about May when we took the exam. And so they gave us a short time over at Texas A&M while they did the administrative work. And after a while they sent me onto the University of Illinois.

CD: During this period when you were in training, mostly in Texas it sounds like.

GR: Yes.

CD: Did you keep track of what was going with the war and if so, how?

GR: Well, we tried to but you know they would send us out when we were at Fort Sam at San Antonio for instance. They had what they called Camp Bolly maybe twenty miles north and we'd go up there for training. We'd charge up the hill and do a lot of stuff like that. And when you were out on those you had no way of keeping up with the news. I know while I was up there one time they had the Battle at Guadalcanal and I was entirely ignorant of that when I got back.

CD: And let me say too if at any point in this recording you want to stop and take a break that is fine just let me know. But now we are at, you are at the University of Illinois. Excuse me. And how did they, did they send you up to Illinois by train?

GR: I beg your pardon?

CD: How did they send you up to the University of Illinois? Did you travel by train or?

GR: By train.

CD: By train.

GR: Nearly all troop movements were by train in World War II. And so I don't remember too much about the trip except it was another train ride.

CD: What did they tell you you'd be doing at Illinois? How did they prepare you for arriving there?

GR: Well, I am not sure what they told us. We were interviewed. I was interviewed right after the examination and they asked me, "What I wanted to do."

CD: Cool.

GR: And I think I had the choice of either French or German and I choose French. And they asked a few questions and sent us home. Not there but we didn't really know. I think when we got up there they indicated that they were trying to prepare us for military government in Europe.

CD: Post war? After the war or during the war?

GR: During the war.

CD: During the war, ok.

GR: And so they wanted us to learn conversational language, foreign language. Conversational French so that we would understand, you know, the idiomatic images and stuff like that.

CD: Sure. So you arrived in Champaign, Illinois on the train and then you took a bus to campus or did you as a group went to the campus which is where you training was, is that right?

GR: That's right. I can't remember too well but I suspect we marched in formation down from the station to where we were to be quartered and we were put in a, they called it barracks but it was actually a fraternity house.

CD: Was it? Do you remember which one?

GR: Yes. Oh, I have the information.

CD: Ok.

GR: I am not sure I can remember.

CD: We can check afterwards.

GR: Ok. I know it was, I think it was 411 South Fourth Street.

CD: Ok. That sounds like the right neighborhood. That is where all the fraternity houses are now.

GR: It might have been 427 but I think it was 411.

CD: **And do you remember what time of year this was? What was the date that you arrived at Illinois?**

GR: Well, it would have been early July, 1943.

CD: **So were there students around or?**

GR: Yes.

CD: **There were.**

GR: Well, not only that there were other soldiers on the campus already. I think maybe they might have had a Navy program going on at the same time. But we got too busy to pay much attention to them.

CD: **Really? So you were taking classes in French conversation and anything else? Were these classes taught by military people or by the University professors?**

GR: By the University people. I am not sure, I think, you see they put us in kind of in a home room arrangement. I think our home room was presided over by a Mrs. Carnahan, I think, and she was assisted by a Professor Peckham I believe. And so we started going to classes and they said, "You have to speak French all the time."

CD: **Really?**

GR: I think maybe they choose us partly because we had some background in French and I've had college French, maybe seven hours. So we went to class and were told to speak French.

CD: **Do you remember where your class was? Which building it was in?**

GR: I can't really remember. It was on the ground floor. It might have been Lincoln.

CD: **Lincoln Hall. On the Quad.**

GR: Yeah. Incidentally that Quad was really something to behold.

CD: **It still is. It's striking isn't it?**

GR: Well, it was so impressive to see those giant elm trees and you know they'd arch up above us like cathedral ceilings. And so it wasn't too far down to the student Union and that is where we had our meals at first. And I can't remember too well too much.

CD: **Do you remember interacting with students at all? Even as you were walking from Lincoln Hall or from your classes or the fraternity house to the Union did you have any interaction with students on campus? Or did you read the student newspaper that was a daily newspaper?**

GR: Yes we would read that. And there was nothing prohibiting us from visiting with the students on the campus but we were pretty much too busy to do very much. As time went on we would have our lunch then we would get going. Hang around the Student Union a little while if we wanted to and do different things. I know I liked to, they let us use the facilities and so I had investigated using a practice that is in the Music Building.

CD: Terrific.

GR: So I liked to go up there some times and practice to kind of keep up a little bit. And so it was actually enjoyable experience. Everyone was very pleasant with us. And so in a way it was just kind of like an extension of University.

CD: College. Oh, how wonderful! Did you have any social activities or USO activities on campus?

GR: Well, the more usual social activity was that the sorority would invite us to a dance or something like that. So I went to quite a number of sorority dances and met a met quite a number of the sorority girls. And sometimes would, if they weren't living in the house, I would walk them home or something.

CD: Oh, that is nice.

GR: And had some good times that way.

CD: Now did you use the library at all for your studies? Or was everything self contained for you?

GR: I can't remember the library.

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

GR: But you see what they did with us was to give us records of French and we were supposed to memorize what was on those records. And I remember Mrs. Carnahan always said, "Now imitate." Because we were supposed to imitate it because they wanted us to get the inflections and everything. They wanted us to get the idiomatic uses and it was really a well run well constructed program and I had the utmost respect for these instructors we had.

CD: Did you have the classroom? How many people were in your classroom for the French study?

GR: Just a classroom full.

[laughter]

CD: So, ok. The records that you imitated, they would play the records for you?

GR: No. We were given a record player to take to our barracks, if you want to call it that. And so we would take the records and, I can't remember too well, but we...

CD: You probably studied?

GR: A good bunch you know. A nice bunch of fellows.

CD: And how long was this program for you?

GR: How long were we in it?

CD: How long were you at Illinois?

GR: About eight months.

CD: Oh, really? So you left in February or March of '44?

GR: Yes, I think my records...

CD: It's right here.

GR: My records show...

CD: Your training was completed January 29th, 1944. Foreign area and language studies.

GR: But actually it was March before we left, I think. I don't remember.

CD: So do you have any other memories of the campus and the community of Champaign? Did you have any contact with the cities of Champaign or Urbana?

GR: Well, yes. Like I say I had a little bit of a diary for awhile and I notice one entry I made it in French.

CD: That's great.

GR: One entry I made showed that I went down to a movie with friends and saw some kind of a horror movie, I guess it was. I got it down in there. And so we would do that but see we were all pretty much off on weekends.

CD: Oh you were? So it was Monday through Friday classes.

GR: Well, it might have included Saturday. I am not sure. Anyway I remember we would get on the train in the evening and go over some of the adjoining towns like Danville or some of the other towns.

CD: Danville's east of Champaign Urbana.

GR: I think so.

CD: Right. And what would you do in Danville? Was there music or more films or?

GR: I can't remember. Might have been that we went to movies over there or something.

CD: And was there a trolley or an actual train?

GR: I think it was a train.

CD: Interesting.

GR: And sometimes you know on a weekend we would go up to Chicago on the North Central and maybe see a stage production or something of that kind. Go to the museums.

CD: Oh, that's nice. What did you think of Chicago? Because had you ever been in a city that big before that?

GR: Not that big, no.

CD: Do you remember what your first impression of Chicago was?

GR: No.

[laughter]

GR: It was just a big city.

CD: **Just a big city.**

GR: Come into this Illinois Central Station and of course my home was in Kansas so I had to go over to the, I don't know maybe they called it LaSalle.

CD: **LaSalle Street Station.**

GR: And catch the Santa Fe. So we had a good situation really. I mean, its very intensive training while we were at it but we were given freedom on the weekends to do other things.

CD: **Did you have... It sounds like maybe you had leaves? Did you have leaves as well while you were at Illinois because you mention that you took the Santa Fe home to Kansas was that..?**

GR: I think maybe we had a Christmas leave. I can't remember too well but something of that kind.

CD: **I'd hope so but... You are still in the country.**

GR: Yeah. Because I can remember having to walk from the Illinois Central Station over to the... [background noise]

CD: **Now what about, did you have an impression at all while you at Illinois training, did you have an impression how the students felt about the war? Or were students talking about the war?**

GR: Not particularly. Well, you know, everybody was immersed in it and so AST's date the girls sometimes. We did it kind of on a wartime basis.

CD: **How's your French today?**

GR: It slipped long ago. I can hardly read my own my diary.

CD: **Really? And is the entire diary in French?**

GR: Well, I just did it for a few days and I can rarely figure out... [background noise]

CD: **Oh, you have terrific handwriting! Penmanship. My French is from high school so I can recognize individual words but not make sense of a narrative. So tell me a little bit about leaving Illinois. Finishing your training at Illinois and what happened then.**

GR: Well, we were just notified that the program was terminating and that we would be transferred to someplace else. And so the order came down. I guess they tried to sort us out according to our active, maybe. And so quite a number of our bunch went to the Military Intelligence Training Center, Camp Ritchie Maryland.

CD: **You left Illinois and went to the Philippines? Not right away.**

GR: First went to the Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Ritchie.

CD: Oh, so you went to Camp Ritchie as well! Ok.

GR: Yeah. So I can't remember exactly how long, I think the photographic interpretation course that we took about eight weeks, I believe. But they also sent us problems, reconnaissance problems, to give us a taste...

CD: Of how it would be when you were in the field?

GR: Yeah. So we took that. It was also a very intensive course. And we were well prepared for it by our experience at the University of Illinois. And we spent about fifteen hours a day on the photographic interpretation course and at least that much on the order of battle course. We worked pretty hard but we had it pretty good too.

CD: Now, this certificate of completion states that, "You satisfactorily completed the Army Specialized Training Program at the University of Illinois Urbana, Illinois 29 January 1944." Was this awarded to you in a ceremony at Illinois or?

GR: I don't think so. I think it was just handed out to us.

CD: As you left? And did you stay in touch with any of the people you trained with?

GR: Well, there were some of them went to the same place. For instance there was a... Bob Stoffer was on the Akron, I think its Beacon Journal editorial staff. And we were pretty well in touch until we actually got to our different units in Leyte. Actually I tried to stay in touch for a little bit after that. Pretty much we separated and went our own ways. There were so many contacts we made in the Army.

CD: And you were in so many different places too, I imagine.

GR: That's right. Each place you'd make a new bunch of friends.

CD: And did you stay in touch with any of the students you met at Illinois during that period? Did you correspond during the war with any of them or?

GR: Well, there was one girl that would write to me and I presume I wrote back to her. [laughter]

CD: Do you remember her name?

GR: Yes. Her name was Peggy Copeland.

CD: Copland.

GR: The girls that we met tended to be graduate students, you know.

CD: Do you remember what she was studying?

GR: I don't remember what she was studying but she had been at Bryn Mawr.

CD: Really?

GR: There was another girl I knew that was studying psychology. And she'd give me some of the psychology tests! [laughter] Ink blots and...

CD: What do these look like? What do you see here? [laughter] It sounds like it was, give everything, it sounds like it was a good time in your life.

GR: Oh, it was very good.

CD: Yeah.

GR: Might have been more fun than college, I don't know.

CD: Well, thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. And as I said we'll... We probably won't get this transcribed right away because we're at the tail end of a semester here and heading into the summer. But we'll transcribe it and send you a copy to review and make sure we've got everything right.

GR: Right.

CD: And then if you send it back to us with your corrections and your consent form we'll add it to this oral history project archives that we are creating from World War II.

GR: Ok.

CD: Is there anything, any last thing that you would like to get on the record here?

GR: Well, I was thinking about some of the other courses that we had. Like we were required to take physical education.

CD: While you were at the University of Illinois?

GR: Yeah. And I remembered being out playing soccer when it was ten above zero and my gym shorts felt comfortable enough because we were pretty active. And they had certain requirements that they wanted us to meet for instance. Then also we had this area, you know, cultural.

CD: So cultural studies? Cultural and historical studies so that you fit into?

GR: Yes. So I think I might have learned more history there than I had in college. All about the French Revolution and everything like that.

CD: And again from the faculty at the University of Illinois, the regular faculty.

GR: Yes, oh yes.

CD: But your courses were only servicemen or did you have students in your courses?

GR: No they were just military.

CD: Did you have a sense of the University of Illinois being an agricultural school? Did you have a sense of the farming and the cows and the pigs that were there? I ask because now when the wind blows a certain way on campus you know that you are at an agricultural college. [laughter]

GR: No. I don't think we paid any attention to that.

Mrs. Reynolds: Our son Mark's, son's fiancée goes to the University of Illinois

CD: Oh terrific

Mrs. Reynolds: Should have graduated in December, I don't know her name, Lisa somebody and I don't know if she's in school.]

CD: Well, let me take a picture of you if that's all right because we want to have a picture with the...

GR: Ok.

CD: Ok. And let me figure out how to turn this off.