

Greener given choice of information or commissary

Links

by **Chuck Lucas**
EDITOR'S

NOTE: This column is a feature on stories from the Association's Oral History program.

"Would you rather be the commissary officer or the information officer?"

That was the offer made to Capt. William I. Greener at Mather AFB, Calif., in 1958.

It was really a no-brainer and the experience Greener was to gain over the next 12 years as an Air Force spokesman opened the door for additional careers as a senior government public affairs officer and as a senior executive in private industry.

Greener was a B-24 navigator in the 8th Air Force during World War II, flying 35 missions over Germany.

Transferred to reserve status after the war, he picked up a Business Administration degree from the University of Missouri and got married to the former Charlene McPheeters of Kansas City, Mo.

The outbreak of the Korean War found him back on active duty as a navigator instructor in Texas, Puerto Rico and then at Mather.

He moved on to Air Training Command, 7th Air Force in Vietnam and two tours with the Secretary of Air Force Office of Information before retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 1970.

"Actually the major reason I decided to get out



Association President John Gura (left), Bill Greener (center) and Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld (right) pose for the obligatory "grip and grin." A highlight of the annual meeting occurred on Friday when Rumsfeld helped the Association by presenting Greener, his one-time ASD/PA an AFPAAA Presidents' Award.

was that I was very unhappy with the way the Air Force treated the Public Affairs career field," said Greener. "I never thought they took it seriously enough."

While others may have shared this assessment, Greener soon found himself in a position to do something about it.

As Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, he initiated a study in each service on the chances of being promoted to colonel in public affairs.

"In the Air Force, there was 40 percent less chance of making O6 than in the other career fields," Greener said. "I took that to (Gen. David C.) Jones, then Air Force Chief of Staff. That was the year that we made 15 full colonels,

for which Jones gave credit to the study."

Greener didn't leave SAF/OI one day and move to OSD the next day.

For more than seven years he was assistant to the IRS Commissioner for Public Affairs; assistant director of the Cost of Living Council for Public and Congressional Affairs; assistant to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development for Public Affairs; associate director for Public Affairs, Office of Management and Budget; and deputy White House Press Secretary for President Ford before taking the OSD job.

In his familiar inimitable style, Greener's anecdotalism includes such familiar names as Baker, Brady, Cheney, Connelly,

Kissinger, Laird, Nessen, Nixon, Packard, Rumsfeld, Schultz and Zigler.

One that stands a bit taller than the others is Don Rumsfeld. He was Greener's boss at the Cost of Living Council, OMB and as Secretary of Defense, and for seven years as vice president for Corporate Relations at G.D. Searle & Co., a worldwide pharmaceutical firm.

Rumsfeld's return to the Pentagon this year as Secretary of Defense prompted some to wonder aloud if Greener could be far behind.

"Don's a tough cookie," said Greener. "He's the kind of guy who puts his hand on your chest, not literally, but figuratively, and pushes. If you kept backing away from him he would walk right over the top of you. But if you pushed back, he admired you and it was okay."

While openly disappointed in what he believes were inabilities to make stronger strides on active duty, Greener's Air Force ties are quite evident.

Lunch with a former SAF/OI colleague after his retirement provided the first step to the upper echelons of government. Maury Fiebusch was interested in Greener's plans.

"By the time I got back to my office, Maury had arranged an interview with the Assistant Secretary of Treasury," he said "The next stop was IRS, then Cost of Living Council and the rest is history.

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Gura thanks Association for a great year

From the President's Pen

Joe Purka assumes the president's duties and I get kicked upstairs on July 1st .

That's significant because it means, for the first time since our organization began, neither Mike McRaney nor Jim Hart will have an 'official' capacity. Mike and Jim have had, without question, the most to do with our success.

So, it's a bittersweet moment.

I'd be remiss if I didn't also thank retiring board members Kathy McCollum and Sally Davidson for their unselfish service to the association.

While we will continue to count on the counsel and support of Mike, Jim, Kathy and Sally, others are moving up to take over the reins of leadership.

That's good. That's the sign of a solid, vibrant organization.

I welcome our new board members- Al Eakle, Rick Fuller and Mike Gannon- and look forward to

their active participation in the continued success of the Association. There is a lot to do. Recruiting, endowment growth, the PA memorial, membership changes, future of the Oral History program, annual meeting plans and continued support of the active force are just a few of the issues the board must address in the coming months.

We promise to keep you informed on these and other Association activities on our website and via the quarterly newsletter.

Speaking of which, our new Newsletter Editor is Al Eakle - this is his first issue - and Joe Wojtecki now chairs the Communications Committee. I appreciate the willingness of both to get involved and work for the association.

By the way, no one worked harder for the association in the days leading up to our annual reunion than meeting chairman Jim McGuire and his local committee. Their hard work paid off in a super meeting with easily the best array of speakers, presentations and tours yet.

You can read about the high-

lights elsewhere in this issue.

However, I want to reiterate my personal congratulations to Pete Alexandrakos, the very deserving recipient of the Mike McRaney Distinguished Service Award.

And, I'm happy to again applaud our Presidents' Award winners, Bill Greener, John Correll and Frank Jennings for being Public Affairs Pioneers.

The continued growth of our Endowment Fund is especially good news.

Most recently we received Gold Level donations from BGen Ron Rand and Bob "Nick" Nicholson. Thank you both for helping insure our future.

Finally, this is my last President's Letter

It's been a quick year. We've taken a few steps forward. We've raised our visibility and increased our support of the active force. We're strong, solvent and building toward the future.

I'm proud to have served as your President.

John Gura
President

"You have to have total access to the boss," says Greener

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"All of our careers, most of us sat around as captains or majors in a room full of colonels, said Greener. "When we got to be a lieutenant colonel or colonel, we sat with generals. We never sit co-equal at the table, which was one of my big deals when I was ASD. I wanted them to set co-equal at the table... you have to say I am equal to all of these people.

"Stand up and do what you're supposed to do- give advice. One of my biggest disappointments is that people who get to be vice presidents of communications for major corporations can stay there as long as they like by doing nothing. The only way they can get in trouble is by doing

something. Therefore, they do nothing."

Greener also feels strongly in being close to the boss "You have to have total access."

When asked how you get the prestige of a job, Greener said, "Solve a problem for your boss and you'll have all the prestige you want. As for 'off-the-record statements', I think you can forget it. I just don't think there is any off-the record."

Gen. William McKee read one of Greener's ASD briefings and told him he would have given anything to have had that type of information, support and ability when he was the Vice Chief of Staff.

"I told him, general, you could have had it, you just wouldn't let Captain Greener in your office."

"I think there's too little time spent training senior commanders from outside of the career field in our career field, said Greener. "It's the same thing in industry. I don't think anyone should graduate with an MBA without having to take public relations. I don't think anybody should get a masters in public relations without having to take some business either. It's a two-way street.

"I remember saying to a group of new general officers. For those of you who are on a terminal assignment, you don't need to stay and listen to this. Those of you who hope to get another promotion might want to know what to do with the media. No one left."

The Greeners live in Wilmington, N.C.