

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
A Telephone Oral History Interview with Lt. Col. Herbert Hayes
Last Post Commander 1971-75, Interviewed by Mary Rasa, NPS, 9/1/2005
Transcribed by Melissa Shinbein, NPS

MR: Today is September 1, 2005. My name is Mary Rasa, Sandy Hook Museum Curator. I am conducting an oral history with Herbert Hayes. And I would like you to state your full name and your rank when you retired.

HH: My full name is Herbert Wade Hayes Jr. I was a Lt. Col. in the infantry when I retired.

MR: Okay, can you tell me when and where were you born?

HH: I was born 8th of May 1921, in Hopkinsville Kentucky.

MR: Where did you attend school?

HH: I moved to Ohio when I was 5 years old and I spent all my time in Fairview Elementary and then Fairview High School and then the University of Dayton, Ohio.

MR: Was your father or grandfather, did they serve in the military?

HH: My father served in WWI.

MR: Tell me a little about how you become involved with the military?

HH: How I became involved with the military?

MR: Yes.

HH: In attending the University of Dayton, they had a program of ROTC. and I agreed to complete the four-year program which would lead to a commission as 2nd Lt. However because of the war, they did not permit us to go to a summer camp. They shortened the summer vacation so we were required to go after graduation to an officer candidate school which I attended at Fort Benning, Georgia. And I received my commission from there as a second lieutenant.

MR: What year was that?

HH: In 1943.

MR: Where did you go from there?

HH: I was called to active duty as an officer. Went to Camp Swift, Texas. Spent 3 months there. Then, I was ordered overseas. This was 1944 now. I went to Europe, I went to England. And then the invasion came off and I was in a replacement company of officers. We were to fill in the casualties as they occurred at Normandy. Unfortunately, I became a casualty myself. I was

wounded. And then later in a combat situation that was untenable I was captured leading troops that were cut off.

MR: And where was that? I mean, when and where?

HH: That was the 15th of July 1944. I was captured in Normandy near St. Lo.

MR: Where did the Germans send you?

HH: I went through different transfer points in France. I ended up in Lemburg, Germany and then I went through interrogation and solitary confinement. And then I was put on a train, and then recognized to be a prisoner of war at that point. And was sent to Oflag 64 in Szubim, Poland. That was where the American ground force officers were incarcerated.

MR: Was it a big facility?

HH: I'm sorry.

MR: Was it very large?

HH: Well, there were probably a thousand or more there when I got there. And then the Battle of the Bulge, brought in a whole bevy of prisoners, new prisoners. And then in January, because the Russians broke through at Warsaw, we were put on the road and there were about fifteen hundred. We got out on the road in the snow to walk back to Germany in columns. We slept in barns at night. We had very little food. As we marched, after a few days, they began taking groups out in denominations of sixty. It would be 120, 180 that they would take out of the column. We didn't know what was happening. That was the number of people, 60 was the number of people they put in box cars. The ones that were in the worst physical shape were taken out and put on a train. We went to different camps. Eventually, after about two weeks, we were up near Satin, I was put on a, I couldn't walk any further as far as I could tell and I was one of the groups of 120 or 180 that was put in 2 or 3 box cars. We went up through Satin and back down through Berlin and were about 30 miles out, west of Berlin. And that was Luckenwalde. I was there until May when the Russians came through Berlin and recaptured the camp. The Germans took off and the Russians came in. We were held there two or three weeks, I can't recall, just how many days in the middle of or latter part of May while the Russians having communicating with Moscow and then Washington our names and ranks and so forth so we could be declared, each one of us to be bonafide prisoners turned over to the American forces. We were sent by Russian trucks down to the Elk River where the American troops could come in and picked us up. Afterwards, we were sent to a nearby airbase and flown to France. A camp called "Lucky Strike" near the border, in La Havre I think it was. We were put on boats and taken or sent back home for rest and recuperation for 60 days. And then sent to Miami, Florida for processing to get back into the service routine.

MR: When you were in the German hands, they just have a camp just for Officers? Is that how it worked?

HH: The one in Poland was all officers and the officers were not required to work. They had small detachment of enlisted men that cared for the garden and some other menial tasks. Although the lower ranking officers were rotated to do a KP type thing. And (inaudible) large mess halls.

MR: Where they very bad to you? Was it a bad camp or was it a relatively good one?

HH: I would say that Oflag 64 was pretty well run. They had a senior officer, a man named Paul Goode, who was a regimental commander of the 29th division. Eventually he took over as the senior officer. One of the senior officers was George Patton's son-in-law. He was a Lt. Col. at that time. He later became a commander, a four star General. But, they had YMCA equipment there and we had a theater group, an acting group. Our food came and was supplemented by what the Germans had which was generally potato soup or cabbage soup and a little bit of meat which we didn't know if it was horse meat or what. It was augmented by Red Cross parcels. I think a ten pound package which contained miscellaneous things including butter and crackers, fish type thing and also packs of cigarettes, the Red Cross parcels. When they came in, they were supposed to be allotted one per week but because of the bombings of the railroads the Germans (inaudible) we didn't get enough shipments. Later we found out the Germans had taken a good bit of them. We got several parcels while I was at Oflag 64. And with them we also had camameal called clem and a little bit of sugar and chocolate. We did our own little cooking we made our own little stoves. We even made fudge with the sugar and coco and blended it together with milk. I was knowledgeable enough to be able to make fudge for guys that couldn't do it themselves. And then I would scrape the pan and that would be my payment for making the fudge.

But as for treatment was concerned, I was put in solitary confinement for, when I was in Limberg. The suffering that I had was primarily in the travel. Because it took five days to get to Poland by train. In July, the heat was almost unbearable. The ventilation was extremely poor. One third of the boxcar had sixty of us guy and guards on the other side of the wire fence. Then the other time, the other hardship was when we were walking out of Poland. It snowed for about ten days. We marched the first 10 days and we had little or no food other than a bowl of soup a day and an occasional ration of bread. But, the Germans did not physically beat me or anything of that sort. It was a matter of lack of cooling in the summer time and a lack of heat in the winter time. We had so many stoves to try and keep warm. During January say February time frame after the march I had flea bites from the straw mattresses and I got multiple bites on my body and they became infected. I was being treated by a German doctor who said, "You are running me out of bandages." So, I got long underwear, I got two pair that I alternate days wearing and using them as bandages. The infections were on my arms and legs and body. Of course I thought that was incidental to the war.

MR: So, once you came back to the US and you had your leave, and you went back in, where did you then go?

HH: Where did I go after I came back?

MR: Yes.

HH: Well, they gave us rehabilitation leave. And then we went down to Miami, Florida . We were in hotels. I was processed back in and received my medals that I had won. I got a promotion. I got promotion orders and then I was sent to active duty. I went to Fort Meade was another temporary assignment. I ended up at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

MR: What medals did you receive?

HH: The medals I got primarily was the bronze star, a combat infantry badge, the purple heart, and the campaign medal of the European campaign that I had 2 battle stars for that, and the World War (II) victory medal. Those were the medals that I got at that time. Eventually, of course, I got a lot more. I went counterintelligence headquarters at Fort Holliberg. I was at Fort Dix and I applied for regular army. And after two and a half years at Fort Holliberg I went to Fort Dix.

MR: Where is Fort Holliberg?

HH: Fort Holliberg is in Baltimore in a section called (inaudible).

MR: Oh, okay.

HH: I became the finance officer of general personnel because they originally, the army says we are going to send you back to Germany. But I said you can't do because the law says that a prisoner of war should not go back to a country where he had been imprisoned.

MR: Oh, really?

HH: They said, well okay, we are going to send you to the counterintelligence headquarters. I had a good bit of administrative capabilities so I became a personnel and a finance officer. While I was there, I decided well, I might as well make the regular army a career. And they had a program to become a regular officer, so I applied for that. The counterintelligence people wanted me to be equated with their organization, to be able to get me back in the future. They sent me through the training of a counterintelligence agent. I went to there after I graduated, I went on up to Fort Dix and I was in a training organization. Because I applied for regular army, I went through a series of transfers where I could stay with one company for three months, and then another for three months for a year's time and I made the regular army. I had to, I was a 1st Lt., but as far as regular rank was concerned, they didn't want me to outrank the West Point Cadets year by year so, my appointment as a regular officer was the first of January 1948. So I theoretically gave up five years in the service in order to become a regular official.

MR: So you I guess in the Reserves?

HH: I was ROTC. I was a reserve officer.

MR: Once you got into the regular army where did you go to?

HH: Well, I went to Fort Benning for the officers advanced course and then I went overseas. I went to Fort Benning with the 4th infantry division was going to Europe. In fact they didn't know where they were going. Because the Korean War came on around this time in 1950.

MR: Right.

HH: I was able to bring my family over to Germany and spent three years in Europe with an infantry unit. I came back from there and went to ROTC duty as a Professor at Louisville. So I don't know how much detail you want. I had gone to advanced course in between for three or four months. I was put on orders for the far east. I got as far as Tokyo they decided to send me to Taiwan instead of Korea.

MR: Oh, that was good.

HH: I was allowed to bring my family over for a two year tour in Taiwan. I came back from there and went to Fort Lewis, Washington at which time my family was in Asia. From Washington, I'm trying to think how I got to..oh, I, actually, went to Vietnam three times.

MR: Oh., really.

HH: I went to Vietnam as a Major. I came back I went to Fort Riley, KS and became a Lt. Colonel. I became the inspector general of the 1st infantry division at Fort Riley. One day, the general said, I had been there for over a year, the general wanted to know if I wanted to go to Vietnam, again. Since you had already been there, so you don't have to go, so I had just gotten promoted, and I said, "well I am an infantry officer so I probably have to go anyway." So I'll just go with the division. I went to Vietnam the second time with the 1st infantry division. I came back from there and went to Fort Leavenworth. And I was there for an opportunity as the Assistant Chief of Staff or Deputy Chief of staff at the college a short time after arriving there because they saw I had a lot of administrative capabilities. They needed someone in the front office with the general running the post and the college. I had some experience teaching and was the Deputy Chief of Staff.

MR: Now what was the name of that school?

HH: That was Fort Leavenworth Commanding General Staff College. But I was also, working for the Commanding General who was also the commander of the post and US Disciplinary Barracks. They tried to get me promoted to Colonel but after about three and a half years they said, well Washington didn't want me to reach higher levels than I was. I volunteered to go back to Vietnam for a third tour. I was applying to what they called CORD: Civilian Operations of Rural Development. It was headed by William Colby whom, I didn't know at the time, he was a CIA expert. He later became the Chief of the Central Intelligence Agency. We called him Ambassador there. He was a couple of echelons above me. He was like General Gauss, under the Commanding General of Vietnam. I was chief of the inspection advisory division. While I was chief of special operations, special operations was in the security development part of CORD. It's kind of complicated because CORD included the Ambassador Colby. It included the (inaudible) Agriculture Department and the Phoenix program which was intelligence program. I

was concerned that the inspection reached the popular forces. Like a National Guard. There were two elements, a self defense portion and a regimental level. They were almost like your local National Guard. I traveled around with them all over the country. After that, I became commander of Fort Hancock, New Jersey. I was being reassigned to Fort Totten. I got word about it and was kind of happy but I didn't know where Fort Totten was. I got reporting in and the Commanding General said, "Well, they're going to close Fort Totten eventually. (inaudible) So, he sent me down to Fort Hancock.

MR: Okay

HH: I spent my last 3 and a half years at Fort Hancock as Post Commander. In fact, other than the open command, Fort Hamilton Command was really the finance office and the operations of about five different posts. So I became Commander of Fort Hancock.

MR: Okay, before we get into Fort Hancock, what year did you get married?

HH: In 1942.

MR: So you were married before you went overseas then?

HH: Yeah

MR: And how many children do you have?

HH: We had six children. One of which we lost a few years ago to cancer. Our second daughter.

MR: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. By the time you came to Fort Hancock, were all your children still with you or were they in college or...?

HH: The only one that was there was my youngest son Rick.

MR; And how old was he at the time?

HH: He was born in 1956. June 11th.

MR: So he was a teenager.

HH: At one point he got a job with the security. One of the security guards. He had gotten out of high school. I don't remember if he had started at college there or not.

MR: So you got to Fort Hancock in around '70 or '71?

HH: Yeah, 1970. Late '70.

MR: And were you living in house 12 or 11?

HH: No, I was in 13.

MR: 13 okay.

HH: My mother was very superstitious so we'd never tell her what number I was in. Number 12 was the Commanding General of the Air Defense Brigade. When I got there is was a General Officer of a Brigade. Later it was became a full Colonel by the name of Victor Hugo which was a prominent name in history.

MR: And he was related to the author, right?

HH: Yeah, he was the last artillery commander, a full Colonel. But he lived out in #12 which was next door.

MR: Okay I am going to pause the tape because I have to turn it over. When you got to Fort Hancock, and you were assigned quarters, was it cleaned up for you or did you have to do work on the house?

HH: As far as I remember we didn't have to do anything to it, being commander of the post. Those engineers were in charge of the maintenance of the buildings and every little thing we wanted, we got.

MR: Did...that was quite a big house, did you have any help? Did you have maid or anything?

HH: No. I can't remember if we had anyone come in as far as housework is concerned. My wife loved the place. Even though we had six fireplaces we only needed one. The kitchen was so spacious, we even had lounge chairs in there. It was a reasonably modern kitchen. We had a little bar area when we had parties between that and the dining room. I was given a chandelier from a person who was interested in the post from the Sea Scouts. I can't remember what the connection was, but we got a very fancy aluminum chandelier to add to the appearance of the place. From a living standpoint we lived in kitchen. We had our meals there or we were out in the front room which overlooked the Bay. It was a very interesting place to live.

MR: At the time you were there was the Officers' Club just open for events?

HH: It was not open to the general public if that's what you mean.

MR: No, I meant was there any staff working there at the time or was it just for some parties for the officers.

HH: Did you say was there any staff there?

MR: Yeah. Was there anyone who worked there or did anyone who wanted to hold the parties have to do the work?

HH: Actually it was an active post. We had a fire department. We had a police department of military police. They were on the gate, of course they lived on the post. We had an Officers' Club which we used periodically. We did not have a chapel, per-se. We would have a chaplain visitor. We had Sea Scouts and Cub Scout Troops come in. I would welcome them to the post and if they wanted something in order of a chaplain I even would give character type of a dissertation or talk. We had Coast Guard operations going on. The big work of the Post was the maintenance of the roads, the houses, what have you was done by the Post Engineers. We had a water plant of our own. From the standpoint of the (inaudible) the Jersey Garden Society and other organizations would come over for visits. We had a Sea Scout rendezvous in September. I'm trying to think of the terminology. The North East Sea Scout Convention brought in boats of all types came to the dock. It was a Sea Scout operation. They had picnics and train and had parties in the parade area and they would march around the place. It wasn't just a camp for parties. There were special events. Of course the artillery still had operational batteries there. And they had the radar and their headquarters was up at Highlands which was right off base. So from my standpoint I was sort of supervising security of the Highlands. We had civilian guards up there, not military.

MR: So basically, you ran the day to day functions of the site.

HH: I'm sorry I didn't hear you.

MR: I'm sorry, you ran the day to day function of the site. Taking care of all the services provided.

HH: Yes, we had a Service Club. We had a post office, we had a museum, a chapel and gas station. I had a civilian assistant who was a GS 13. He was a former Lt. Col. We had a small staff. You know a special services officer who was a civilian. We had 2 or 3 officers that were under the post, military officers. And we had military police.

MR: Did you remain until it was completely shut down?

HH: Yeah, in fact I was the last man out so to speak.

MR: So you were there December 31, 1974?

HH: I was almost there until the 31st of January which was my day to retire. I think I left physically around the 20th of January. Turning over the keys to Post Headquarters and everything else that I had. The people that were left behind were engineer types and water plant operators. It was turned over to the National Park Service. I worked with Inquest on the transfer and it was fairly (inaudible) in charge, the director the park service. The commander and the group of people that were, we had a Reserve Center there also. The Coast Guard was the main military unit that was left. I walked out the door and I didn't have a retirement ceremony which they were going to do for me at the end of the month. I didn't see the point in hanging around for about 10 days.

MR: Was the army recreation area working? Did they have the beach facilities still there?

HH: We had twenty trailers as I recall. We decided to turn those over as they were. From the time I was there, those trailers came from HUD they were presided to flood victims up in New York and they were declared excess so I was authorized to pick 20 of the trailers and have them shipped to and installed at Fort Hancock. I established the beach area with those 20 trailers.

MR: So people who came to those, they were just any army family could come and use them?

HH: As I remember at the time, it was only military people who were authorized to have the guest facilities. Generally enlisted men.

MR: Did you have a lot of communication with the people who were running the State Park in the lower portion of the hook?

HH: Did I what?

MR: Did you deal a lot with the people who were leasing, the state park service who were leasing the southern portion of Sandy Hook?

HH: Generally no. We had not any connections or anything, but we had the accommodation of using the roadways to go in and out of the post. They had their own security rangers as far as the gate is concerned. If they had tours that they wanted to do we escorted them. People wanted to fish. Local people wanted to fish at Fort Hancock, and they would get a pass to use the fishing areas. But there was very little you might say discourse between Fort Hancock and the state park itself. It was just a place to go through.

MR: How many people were still stationed there when you were there? Was it more than 500 or was it less?

HH: No, no, well if you include the Coast Guard group headquarters, there might have been a couple of hundred. But I don't think it was any more than that.

MR: So was Officers' Row pretty much occupied at that point in time or were a lot of the houses vacant?

HH: Oh yeah, it was practically empty when I left. I think one or two of the quarters were assigned to a Coast Guard officer. There was no one with the reserve element there.

MR: But when you came was it mostly occupied?

HH: I'm sorry.

MR: When you got there in the early '70s was it occupied then?

HH: Oh yeah, all of the houses were occupied. Primarily the officers were 2nd lieutenant to the full colonel or the general (Anti-aircraft artillery). I can't recall if I had anybody other than

myself that was assigned to the Post Headquarters occupy one of the quarters. I had in my opinion the 2nd best set of quarters on post.

MR: Well, that sounds pretty nice.

HH: Well I ran the engineers, it was an obligation almost (inaudible) They came in and filled up the oil tank for the quarters. 100 gallons of heating oil in the winter time was a costly operation.

MR: Was the third floor pretty much shut off to you. Did you go up there?

HH: I made my own determination as to what I wanted to do.

MR: Okay.

HH: My son had a dark room on the third floor. He had a blacklight there. We used the basement occasionally for storage or whatever.

MR: Was that the biggest house you ever had?

HH: Oh yeah.

MR: Anything else you would like to talk about? The house, or anything that was memorable?

HH: No, I met numerous people. The Secretary of the Interior I had lunch with one day. He was there with the governor and congressman, what was his name...

MR: Was it Howard?

HH: Howard was one of the Congressman. The other was Rodino, Peter Rodino from Newark. He had gotten me involved with the Newark Columbus Day Parade. I had pictures with him. The governor was of course (inaudible). Rodgers Morton, the Secretary of the Interior, the Governor and the Secretary were going to have lunch on the coastline at one of the nice restaurants and all of a sudden the Governor said to Rodgers, "I have to call off my lunch with you. I have a riot in Rahway." The Secretary said, "That's alright. I eat lunch with Herb." I didn't have a mess hall, per se. We had an auxiliary mess hall. We got there a little late about 1 o'clock and the meal was practically over and I went in and said "I have the Secretary of the Interior here, can give us something to eat?" They said, "Sure". So I had a private town dinner with him.

In my career, I met Al Hague in Vietnam. I met Dan Rather. Cardinal Spellman in Taiwan and Vietnam as a representative of the Catholic faith (inaudible) But Al Hague was a Lt. Col. in Vietnam. (inaudible)

MR: Is there any other thing you would like to say about your time at Fort Hancock?

HH: I enjoyed some of the historical aspects. The gun batteries and Battery Potter I guess it is. The disappearing guns. I thought it was very interesting and I enjoyed showing it to people who

were interested in it. I didn't get involved with the Nike Hercules although we had the launching pads there and the batteries and of course they had the HQ up in Highlands so I visited there. I think Fort Hancock was a good experience because I got involved in all aspects of post administration even though it was on a small scale. Power, engineering roadwork which I thought was interesting. One thing that I didn't mention was that we house a National Fisheries Center. They had a sea going vessel that went out and took borings from the ocean floor. One of the interesting things was that the floor was dead. The dumping area of New York City. Fishlife nill in a given area of the ocean. So it was a very interesting thing. It was great to see sailboats coming in and out and playing around in the bay. We had the sailing ship from the Coast Guard Academy come down. I went out to visit it. It was like a brand new car almost....(inaudible)

MR: I'm going to end the interview now. Thank you very much for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW