

Fort Hunt Oral History

P.O. Box 1142

Interview with Edgar Danciger by David Lassman (Apparently by telephone from Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida)

November 8 [year unstated]

DAVID LASSMAN: National Park Service, at the George Washington Memorial Parkway. It is November 8th, at around 10:15 a.m., and I am with Mr. Ed Danciger, who's participating in the Fort Hunt Oral History Project. During World War II, he worked with the Military Intelligence Research Service [00:25]. Now if you just start off by telling me where you were born, and how you came to the United States, and how you got involved into the military.

EDGAR DANCIGER: I was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1918. And my mother, since there was a revolution at that time, escaped Russia to Latvia, because my father was Latvian [01:00]. He was still in the service, the war was still on in Russia, and I grew up in Latvia, where I went to school, and et cetera. Since Latvia at that time had many Germans as well as some Russians living, the kids played with a lot of other kids, and learning the other languages was a breeze.

DL: Okay.

ED: So I was proficient in German and Russian, and French because my mother, coming originally from the southern part, Georgia, I believe, insisted that we all spoke good French. She only spoke to us in French. I went to grammar school there, and I went to high school in Riga, Latvia [02:00]. But by the time I was just turning 15, I also was very much interested to make a life at sea, and I sailed on commercial vessels, initially on sailing vessels, and later on steamers, coal-fired steamers. The school system allowed me to come back in the spring and take exams, so I hardly ever lost the time that I was not physically at school itself.

DL: Okay.

ED: Learning at sea. In 1936 or '37, I cannot recall now --

DL: Sure.

ED: I was interested to get into a maritime academy. I had a little bit of it in Latvia, but I wanted to go to England [03:00], and my father insisted that I go into the service. We had conscription in Latvia [03:09].

DL: Okay.

ED: And so I entered there, and spent a year in the military, in the infantry. Upon finishing the military service, instead of going immediately back to sea, I thought possibly to crew on a sailboat which was exercising for the Olympics to be in Helsinki [03:40] in '40. And when I went to sea, the owner of the boat, he happened also to be a ship's owner, he kind of discouraged me, told me that perhaps I didn't realize, but war is imminent in Europe and you better go back to sea [04:00]. So I went back home, then I packed my things, and after having been home only for three days from the Army [04:10], I was on a train to Brussels [04:15] to join a ship. And I was at sea from then on. These were Latvian [04:24] ships, old coal-fired ships. Of course we were not paid much money, I think. Our remuneration at that time was equivalent of \$8 a month -- or \$16, pardon me.

DL: Wow.

ED: Yeah, that was nothing, and the food was atrocious. And on one of the trips from the coal mines in Africa, Sierra Leone, we ended up in Boston, and a group of us went -- there happened to be a Latvian club [05:00]. So we went to see it. And these are folks that had escaped in 1905 from the original Russian revolution.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And out there, I got acquainted with one fellow that wrote for a local newspaper. And he encouraged me to make some reports. Now I was probably the only person aboard that had any kind of education. All my shipmates were commercial seamen, without any education. They were really very uneducated, rough folks.

DL: Okay.

ED: And when I got back on ship, I was told by the skipper that [06:00] he heard that I had contacted other people, and -- let's see. I'm just thinking.

DL: Sure.

ED: The war had started? No. No, the war had not started in Europe. That I was no longer allowed to go ashore, being afraid that I may jump the ship, or leave the boat. And that was a bummer. And for the next three days, we were both on the ship. And these old ships, the quarters were for the sailors and firemen were righting the bow of the ship. And this was February '38? No [07:00]. Well, it was very cold [laughs]. I can't remember, was it February? Well anyhow, I was playing cards with one of my buddies, and one of the G-men that was assigned to watch me from -- an American was playing cards with us, and I excused myself to go to the head, which was on the bow of the ship on top. And while there, it was a very cool night.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And I said, "My God, what an opportunity. Everybody else is amidships, I'm here on the bow. What opportunity for me to just leave the ship." Which I did. Hand over hand, I was good acrobat in those days. Hand over hand along the bowline onto the dock [08:00]. I only had a shirt and pants on, and dungarees.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And I made my way up to the subway, I had a few nickels. And it was an elevated train to Roxbury, where had been the Latvian club [08:18].

DL: [affirmative]

ED: Well, it was a Saturday night, and in those days the bars were closed, on Saturday night they closed early, at midnight.

DL: Okay.

ED: Or 10:00, I can't recall exactly. So I was walking back and forth there, having a premonition that my friend that played cards with me --

DL: [affirmative]

ED: -- would have recognized what had happened. And he really did. He said that I didn't return to the card table. Oh, heck, started there on the ship, they were looking for me, and [09:00] realized that I had gone. And so he took advantage of it. He broke into my locker, and grabbed a handful of photographs, pictures that I had. He put on several shirts, and a sweater, and a double pair of pants, and the only place he knew was to go again to the Latvian club [09:29]. Well, the club was closed, but he ended up on the subway, the same place I was. I was walking up and down in front of that bar that we had visited, and there he arrived. We exchanged clothes. He couldn't speak a word of English, so he went back, and I remained in Boston. And that night I walked all night, and in the morning went to see -- I had the address of this man that had approached me.

DL: [affirmative] [10:00]

ED: And he was not surprised to see me. He said, "Just stay here in my apartment. I have to go to work." And in the evening he drove me to a farm owned by another Latvian, who gave me a job. He put me up, food and a dollar a day. And this was as a lumberjack,

cutting down trees.

DL: Okay.

ED: I happened to have an uncle -- I knew I had an uncle in New York [10:40].

DL: Okay.

ED: I didn't know exactly where and how, but I had an address for a drugstore in downtown New York that he used to visit frequently. Well, I made my way to New York [11:00], after I collected \$12. I needed \$4 for the bus ride, \$4 to come back, and \$4 for nourishment for a weekend, you know, eat.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: To find my uncle. I got to New York, and I was in those days still afraid to talk to any stranger, assuming every stranger could be a G-man, and I'm illegal, and they'll ship me away.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: So I -- well, anyhow, I got to the drugstore with help from some postal officials that I saw.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And they showed me how to get there. And I learned at the drugstore from others that he had been killed just in an automobile accident six weeks earlier. But some of his friends [12:00] still there from the FBI [12:04] took kind of charge of me, and helped me out and invited me for dinner at somebody's house. And while we were talking there, people asked me what my conditions were up in Massachusetts, and I told them that I lived in a stall with a very good horse that I used to [unintelligible], and they all kind of found it funny. But then I noticed that one man went outside the hallway, and made a telephone

call. And he came back, and took me aside, and he said, "Look, don't go back to Massachusetts. Here is an address, it's a little restaurant on First Avenue in New York [12:54], and they may have a job for you." I went down there, and sure, they had [13:00] a dishwasher job for me, and a place to stay. It was an unheated building, but what the heck. It was better than going back to the woods.

DL: Sure.

ED: So I stayed in New York for probably four weeks, and learned a little more English and all this, and it was still, you know, right after the Depression [13:24].

SDL: [affirmative]

ED: And things are pretty tight. But I didn't -- I had food, a place to stay, and a dollar a day. And after, I think it was the four weeks, I just couldn't take it. I went to downtown New York [13:43], decided I had to go back to sea.

DL: Okay.

ED: And good seamen are very much in demand. I mean, ships are coming to the States, and sailors were leaving [14:00], and they were afraid to go back in the warzone, you know. And so I immediately got a very good ship, as a bosun on a Greek vessel.

DL: Okay.

ED: And made several trips on that ship. And I left -- in England, I left the ship. I don't know how much you detail --

DL: Oh, no, this is wonderful. It helps us understand who you are, and how things led to your career, so proceed.

ED: Okay. All right. Well, I was on the ship on several trips in the warzone.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And very fortunate.

DL: Okay.

ED: Not having any problems. And [15:00] then I went to -- yeah, I was still on this Latvian [15:05] ship, and they didn't pay very much. And while in London, the only way I could get to another ship, I needed a passport. I had nothing, I had no papers, because all of it was lost when I left that ship in Boston. I was a person without any documentation. And I just so happened to be in London when the Germans walked into Holland [15:35].

DL: Oh, got you.

ED: And before that, one could travel from England to Latvia --

DL: [affirmative]

ED: -- by going through the neutral countries like Holland, then travel through Germany, and back into Latvia. But the day the Germans invaded Belgium and the Netherlands, the route was no longer available. And I used that opportunity to walk into the Latvian consulate [16:08].

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And I impersonate myself as one of those dumb Latvian sailors, uneducated, and told them I came here to get a passport. "What do you mean, you need a passport?" "Well, I want to go to sea, and nobody will hire me without a valid passport." And I kind of pounded the desk and really behaved miserable. And finally I said, "Well, if you can't give me a pass, then send me home." Well, then they started to explain to me that the road was closed, going through Holland [16:50]. That the only way to get there was to go around and circle around the globe.

DL: Okay.

ED: And that -- I certainly couldn't do that. Well, I said, "I don't give a [17:00] damn," you know, and I was just misbehaving. I need to go on a ship, and I can't go there without a passport.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And I had a seaman's card, that's the only thing I had to show that I was a Latvian [17:15] seaman.

DL: Okay.

ED: Showed when I was born, and all this, for them. And finally, in reluctance they agreed, and gave me a valid passport, which allowed me to now get on anybody's vessel, any nationality vessel. And with that passport in hand, I finally secured a berth on one of the Cunard ships, freight ships.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And we came -- went back in the war. Our first trip was the last convoy that ever left London [18:00], which was completely decimated by the Germans.

DL: Okay.

ED: I mean, it was just one of the worst battles I've ever seen. We were badly damaged, but I didn't get killed. When the British learned that I had some military experience from the Latvian Army [18:20], they sent me to a one-week training camp, how to use guns on the ship.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And I became the gunner on the ship, and I've been in a number of battles where the Stukas [18:44] would dive down on us, and try to -- it was very encouraging to be able to fire back.



DL: Okay.

ED: Just fire back, which prevented them from coming too low [19:00]. Well, then I -- Latvia was -- by that time I had learned Latvia had completely been taken over by the Russians. And from a letter -- and the Russians, you know, were very cruel when they came into the occupied countries, because in order to kill nationalism, they embarked upon eliminate the family system.

DL: Yeah.

ED: That was a way of killing nationalism.

DL: Yeah.

ED: And the way they did it, I only heard here from others, of course I wasn't there. When they walked in, they gave everybody passports with a different color on the outside. And every so often -- and everybody had to keep that identity with them on the street. And every so often [20:00], they would cordon off a section, and anybody with a yellow passport at that time, into a cattle car, and off to Siberia [20:09]. You couldn't communicate with your family, completely. And they managed to evacuate close to 50 percent of the ethnic population that way. And my father was one of them. And I had a kid brother left, and he was quite a bit younger, he had managed to write to me occasionally. So I knew what was going on.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: A little bit. And forgive me, you know I'm 92 years old.

DL: Oh, no.

ED: My mind doesn't work as fast as it used to.

DL: This is very important [21:00], this is very good. I'm glad to hear it.

ED: Yeah. Well, you know, I'm thinking back of the dates and all this here. Well anyhow, I thought that I lost my home country, I've got to make a home country somewhere else. I approached the British, would they give me opportunity? Oh, yeah, I wanted to mention that even though I was the gunner of a ship, if we got back to England to any kind of a military installation, I was not allowed to go ashore. Everybody else was. And that kind of hurt me very much, naturally. I was alone, sometimes in these battles, everybody underneath below deck while I'm on a machine gun up on top firing off. And yet I was not allowed to go ashore.

DL: Wow.

ED: And I had no encouragement of ever getting citizenship or anything like that. Well, they'll see after the war. And I had been in the States several times [22:00], and I'm determined that this time I'm going to go back to the States, but I wanted to go there legally. I didn't want to be an illegal again.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And so on one of the trips to New York [22:14] --

DL: Okay.

ED: -- about three days, I knew that the only way to get off a ship, completely get off the ship --

DL: [affirmative]

ED: -- is to be taken off the ship dead or sick.

DL: Okay.

ED: So I poisoned myself. And at that point, I didn't care whether I survived or not. And I took a can of sardines from the store, and let it stay in the sun for three days.

DL: Oh, my.

ED: Yeah, and I just poisoned myself. So by the time they got to New York, I was pretty sick [23:00]. I wasn't very sick, but I feigned it as if I'm very sick.

DL: Sure.

ED: You know. And well, they had to take me to a hospital.

DL: Okay.

ED: I was well in three days, really, less than a week. But I feigned, and I heard -- I was at Long Island College Hospital [23:26] with five other people in a small dormitory, and I heard the telephone ring, and the doctor on duty came over to me and said, "The British consulate's calling to see if you're well enough to go back on the ship." And I said, "Doc, you can see yourself I'm not [laughs]." That's what I needed, I needed a legitimate way to remain in the country. Well, I will have 60 days to do that.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And once I got out, I [24:00] needed -- I investigated what it takes to get a permit under the immigration rules.

DL: Okay.

ED: And what is needed is, immigrants were allowed under a quota system. And since I came under the Russian quota system, having been born in St. Petersburg, or Leningrad, well in my days it was St. Petersburg [24:30] --

DL: [affirmative]

ED: I only had to wait six months, or nine months. Whereas people from Germany, they had to wait four years. And one had to apply outside the United States, you couldn't apply while in the States. It had to be in another country. Well, not having any money, I

couldn't travel anyplace. But as a seaman, I could go anyplace.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: You know. So I learned that the [25:00] Finnish consul had ships going -- and [unintelligible] to a neighboring place. And that the Finnish consul had ships going to Cuba [25:09].

DL: Okay.

ED: So I went to visit him, and I told him the reason. I always thought that if you're upfront, people will help you. And that's the wonderful thing I found in the United States. Just be upfront, and people will help you. You don't have to be -- exactly [unintelligible] everything. And, well, he didn't want to give me a job, because he said, "My ships don't stay there only a couple days, and you will have to stay there a couple of years." And anyway, and all of the -- well, anyhow, I saw a skipper at the counter signing some papers, so I approached him on the outside, it was downtown New York [25:53].

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And I told him what I was after, exactly. I said "I'll work for nothing, I don't need [26:00] to be paid. All I want to be is on your payroll -- on your manifest" --

DL: Sure.

ED: -- "so I can go ashore in Cuba." And he was very happy to help me [laughs], yeah. And he said, "Well, meet me this afternoon." It was in New Jersey [26:21] we got on the ship. And the ship had to get to -- it wasn't a big vessel, a good size, had to get ready to go to sea, and there was nobody there. I didn't realize it, but Finland was still at war with Russia at that time.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And the Fins, sailors, they didn't care. Nothing could happen. They couldn't be sent home, they couldn't be put in jail. When the ship arrived, they just went into local bars, and whorehouses, and then came back half-drunk just before the ship left [laughs]. So here I worked that ship getting it ready for sea [27:00].

DL: [affirmative]

ED: All afternoon before the first sailor returned.

DL: Wow.

ED: I was at the wheel for I think eight hours, just going out to sea, before the first one could relieve me. Well, they got to -- I had already all my paperwork with me.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And I knew what was required. And I got to Havana [27:31]. And we were supposed to be there on Friday, but we had bad weather conditions in the Gulf, west of Florida, and our ship was delayed so that we arrived very late Friday.

DL: Okay.

ED: And we're going to leave Monday morning. Which didn't give me much time, but I was fortunate to get there early Saturday morning at the consulate [28:00].

DL: Okay.

ED: And I was there, and it was loaded with people. Because they have to, yeah, the people that apply for a visa have to come in twice a week or so to identify themselves. And they were all older people, sicklier people, and I was the only young person in the waiting room. And I walked up to the receptionist and started to kind of talk to her, and told her that I have a predicament, I've got to see somebody, and I don't have much time. Well, anyhow, she helped me, and I went from one office to another office. Everybody took

down some information, you know.

DL: That's the way it always works.

ED: I know. It was fabulous, I tell you. And every time [29:00] I came back to the waiting room, I couldn't even -- and I smoked heavy, I couldn't sit down and light a cigarette; I was immediately called again. And I finally got to the doctor, and he said, "Well, finally I have a healthy specimen" [laughs]. And then I got to a more important clerk.

DL: Okay.

ED: No, he must have been the consul or whoever, I didn't know it. And, you know, I didn't have many papers, identifications with me, except a few photographs of me in the Army [29:36] in Latvia [29:37].

DL: [affirmative]

ED: It showed that I was in a service. I had a picture of me on a boat, sailing boat, and he started to ask me pertinent questions about sailboats.

DL: Okay.

ED: And sailor cruises. So that was up my alley. I knew that boat, I knew how it -- why is the mast bent? And I [30:00] tried to explain to him. And finally he said, "Well, I have one of these boats" [laughs]. "I was wanting, maybe, to go sailing that weekend." And "What are you going to do in the United States if you go there?" I said, "Well, I'm going to go to" -- I forget the name of the little institute in New York [30:24]. It was polytechnic?

DL: Oh, okay, yeah.

ED: Pratt's Institute.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: Pratt's Institute of Technology [30:30]. I had that name, firmly. Pratt's Institute. "Well, how much money do you have?" Oh, I pulled out \$70. You know, I was really happy. Well, anyhow, he said, "Well" -- and then I asked him the pertinent question. "Look, I can't stay in Cuba. I promised the ship I would be with them."

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And that I'll stay on the ship, and the ship will come back every 40 days, or 50 days [31:00], to wait my quota time." He said, "Well, you have to ask the consul about it." It was getting to be 12:00.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And the next time I went back there, back to the waiting room. And my name was called, the man said, "Where are your photographs?" I said, "What photographs?" "Your passport pictures." "Passport pictures? Well, how can I give you the" -- not the passport.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: -- the papers that I needed to go to the United States -- "without a picture?" In other words, they had agreed to forfeit my waiting time, and everything, and just give it to me.

DL: That's great.

ED: It was absolutely, you know. I found somebody not too far to give me a picture, brought it back. And I used to be a pretty good acrobat. When I walked out of that consulate, outside [32:00] I made handsprings, somersaults. People didn't know, I was out of my mind or something. Well, anyhow, I got back on the ship, and they didn't -- they were very kind to me, I must say. We got back to Norfolk [32:17], and they asked me to stay on the ship. I said, "No, I'm not going to. Now that I'm here" --

(End of Tape 1A)

(Beginning of Tape 1B)

DL: This is the National Park Service. I'm speaking to Ed Danciger. This is side two of tape one. You want to continue, sir?

ED: Sure. Okay. And the immigration office, this was in Norfolk [00:19], Virginia, they said, "Well, what do you want?" I said, "I want to be admitted." "Admitted why?" Most immigrants didn't come through Norfolk.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: They came through Ellis Island and other places. They had no idea, so they opened up books, they read about it. And gradually we did all these things, and it took them about three hours. And I still had my money with me, and I said, "I'll buy you all a sandwich." There were over six of them there. Well, we had a good time. And well, I got on a bus to New York [00:58].

DL: [affirmative] [01:00]

ED: Being a -- well, now [unintelligible], I don't mind going back to sea."

DL: [affirmative]

ED: Because I wanted to spend some time. And walking along the waterfront there, I found a store, and I could see some big reels of wire rope sitting there.

DL: Okay.

ED: And I said, "Well, maybe I can push these reels around." Because wire rope is something I knew very well from having sailed in sailing vessels. And they asked me what kind of a splice I can make. I said, "What kind do you need?" And, well, they took me in the back, and I found about six men working on big hausers.

DL: [affirmative]



ED: And they tried me out, and once they saw that I was very proficient, they hired me [02:00]. And so next morning I showed up, and I saw a very nice -- on my bench, that they gave me a very nice, beautiful, stainless steel ropes and fiber ropes, and cotton. And everybody else was splicing heavy tarred, black tarred, cordage.

DL: Okay.

ED: And I couldn't quite understand this. And I said "What's this here?" "Well, this is a work for a yacht in South America." "And why am I" -- I'm getting all this clean stuff?" "Well, our foreman is the only one that knows how to make these splices, but he's on vacation." Well, within three weeks I was the foreman there.

DL: There you go.

ED: And, let's see --

DL: Now, about what [03:00] date was this, at this time?

ED: Must have been 1941, yeah.

DL: Forty one. Okay.

ED: No -- yeah. 1941. Oh, I forgot to tell you. With the British, I was in Dunkirk [03:23].

DL: [affirmative]

ED: I had made five trips to Dunkirk during the evacuation.

DL: Really?

ED: Yeah. That was before I even was on that -- before I asked whether I will get, you know, the ability to get citizenship papers. So I thought the British owed me something [laughs]. Well, anyhow. So [04:00] -- I lost my train of thought.

DL: You were talking about how your new job, and you were now a foreman.

ED: Oh, yeah. That's right. And grew with that company.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And they were importers, not importers, distributors, of wire rope, and had a big [unintelligible]. And I become foreman there. And the war started in the United States in '41.

DL: Okay.

ED: It got very, very busy. And I became, not the engineer for it, but -- and I did go to Pratt's Institute [04:49] at night. I worked till 5:00. By 6:00 in the evening I was at Pratt's.

DL: Wow, that's impressive.

ED: Oh, yeah, I studied my engineering [05:00] there, and I was with [unintelligible] for a very long time, working. And I had quite a few men; we were making these big torpedo nets that ships could deploy to catch torpedoes.

DL: Okay.

ED: And it was all handwork, very difficult on a man's hands. And every time -- I had a number of inspectors that came in to see not just to look at the product, but to see why I'm not in the service.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: Which I had no idea, of course, whether they come in or not. But they all invariably would say, "No, you stay and do the job. Don't -- you do more good doing what you're doing [06:00] here than being in the service."

DL: Understood.

ED: Yeah. Which I can understand.

DL: Yeah.

ED: It was a difficult job, very difficult job. And they respected it. And then I had a falling-

out with the people I was working for, and I went to California and did similar work for a little bit, but then got tired of it, and decided, "God, no, I'd better go in the service." But the war was winding down. It was already 1945.

DL: And about how old were you at this point?

ED: Well, I was born in '18, so in '45, I must have been 23.

DL: Okay.

ED: No.

DL: No, yeah, 23.

ED: And I walked in there, and I said [07:00], "Well, I want to serve the country, and I want to go in paratroopers [07:06]."

DL: Okay.

ED: And they wouldn't take me. They told me I had flat feet. I said, "God, I've been in the Latvian Army [07:16] marching my fanny off for 30 miles every day." And so they put me in the infantry, and sent me to Camp Blanding [07:27] in Jacksonville, for jungle warfare for the Pacific.

DL: Okay.

ED: Which was awful. Well, once they found out that I had previous training, I immediately was made -- I forget the terminology, the man that walks in front of all the companies, so sets the pace.

DL: Okay.

ED: Or whatever. And I had a good time in Camp Blanding [08:00], because, as I say, I knew quite a bit about what to expect and how to do it, having had all of that done. And finally I was sent to go overseas, to the Pacific. And while there, now, somebody interviewed

me, and heard that I could speak Russian, or German. And when they realized that, “No, we want you somewhere else,” and they sent me to Camp Ritchie [08:33], at the end of Maryland.

DL: Okay, yeah. I’m quite familiar with Camp Ritchie.

ED: Oh, okay, all right.

DL: Yeah, Camp Ritchie was -- a couple places were closest with our side of Fort Hunt [08:33]. And Fort Hunt actually supervised Camp Ritchie, though many people, including yourself, probably did not know that it was supervised [09:00] by Fort Hunt.

ED: That’s correct. I didn’t know, I had no idea.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: Of course it didn’t matter. And they took me there as a translator. Well, even though I could speak the languages, they still -- even though the war was winding down in Germany, or already finished, they still -- they had nothing but German equipment.

DL: Okay.

ED: To be trained to be dropped behind the German line and could always pass as a German. And the Japanese, the Nisei [09:38] had the same thing.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And sometimes our lines would cross when we talked on the telephone. Kind of funny. And the war was over, and they brought a whole library, the German War Library [09:55] was brought over to Camp Ritchie [09:57].

DL: Yes, it was.

ED: And [10:00] it was interesting. We worked on a number of projects there. At first I worked as a translator.

DL: Now, on the off chance, do you remember any names of people you worked with at Camp Ritchie?

ED: Well, one called Robert, he's a Canadian. Captain -- Will Hartell [10:31] [spelled phonetically].

DL: [affirmative]

ED: [Garmane?] [spelled phonetically].

DL: Okay.

ED: And my immediate boss was [unintelligible]. It will come to me, but I can't quite think of it.

DL: Sure.

ED: First I worked as a translator.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: I had a little difficult time, but frankly I must say I learned my English [11:00] there at the camp. Because my superiors were always correcting what I wrote.

DL: Well, and let me just give you a couple names and see if you recognize them.

ED: Sure.

DL: Do you recognize the name Verdon Bedlion [spelled phonetically]?

ED: Well, you know, my memory is so bad now at my age.

DL: I understand. If you don't recognize it, it's okay.

ED: Okay.

DL: How about John Kluge? He would have been one of the supervisors there at Camp Ritchie [11:34], in the MIRS [11:35] program.

ED: [negative]

DL: Okay. Do you recognize the name Dieter Kober [11:42]?

ED: I remember there was a Dieter.

DL: Okay.

ED: I don't remember the last name.

DL: Sure. What about Paul Fairbrook?

ED: Who?

DL: Paul Fairbrook?

ED: No, I'm afraid not.

DL: Okay. How about Walter Schuman [12:00]?

ED: No.

DL: Okay, I'll give you -- try one more. How about Ernest Cooney?

ED: No.

DL: Okay. Those are people, other people from the MIRS [12:16] program we've interviewed, so -- but I was just curious if you'd recognize any names. All right, well, you said that you were doing some translation and the supervisors would correct your projects. What type of things were you translating?

ED: Well, I was so bad with my English language, because I tended to translate directly, you know, word for word.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And finally they started to give me old Hitler [12:48] speeches.

DL: [laughs]

ED: You know? But then they used me primarily [13:00] when we brought the German Library [13:02] over.

DL: Okay.

ED: To set up the library. I was very helpful there. And I came in as a private, and every month, I mean, like clockwork, they would give me another stripe.

DL: Hey, there you go, sir.

ED: [laughs] Well, I thought it was okay. Well, the library was very interesting, of course, to set up. And after a while, we had to transfer the library to the Pentagon [13:38].

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And there I was very involved in helping setting it up. And I was there for a while at the Pentagon, and then they sent me to Hollansburg.

DL: They sent you where, sir?

ED: To Hollansburg [13:58].

DL: Okay.

ED: In Baltimore [14:00].

DL: Yeah.

ED: Because we ran out of space. And I then became -- I had a section of my own, which had to do with Russia, because I spoke fluent Russian. And I had quite a few linguists working for me there, trying to learn what was going on in Russia. And that was a great learning experience, how one can find information from newspapers, magazines.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: It's absolutely amazing. And every month, they'd say I got the stripe, and finally I got to Master Sergeant, and made several trips to Europe, to collect -- I didn't collect them; papers were collected [15:00] by occupational forces, and brought to England, [unintelligible] Germany. And we had -- it was the prerogative to decide which

documents go to the U.S. --

DL: [affirmative]

ED: -- before they go to Great Britain. Not before, but what can go to Great Britain. And that was my greatest effort, a very interesting experience. And the troops would go into a settlement, or a company, and just pick up all the archives or whatever there was, and put them into wagons, cattle cars, and bring them over. So we plowed through a lot of things. And many were of historical value, rather than disbursements, or what the army needed.

DL: [affirmative] [16:00]

ED: And I brought quite a few back, and many of them are today at the --

DL: National Archives [16:10]?

ED: National Archives, yeah. And I have a few here that I brought that didn't have much meaning to anybody, you know.

DL: Well, can you give an example of one of the locales, or one of the companies that you got documents from?

ED: I wouldn't know where they came from.

DL: Okay.

ED: That [unintelligible]. But I had -- I mean, they had collector's items. Like signatures of - - well, I wanted one from Hitler [16:49], and one from -- I can't think of the name now.

The one that he displaced. Not [17:00] Bismarck.

DL: Von Hindenburg [17:03]?

ED: Hindenburg, yeah. And things like that. These are collector's items.

DL: Yeah.



ED: And a number of letters that are dating back into the 18th century, you know.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: Very interesting handwriting and all that. But I helped some of the research projects that we did. For example the railroad system in Germany.

DL: Okay.

ED: Or the Siegfried Line [17:43], why was it built the way it was built? And the best part was that you could request the engineer that designed it, or whoever, who happened to be a prisoner of war [17:59], and already [18:00] in the States, to come in and could interrogate him.

DL: Now were you the ones doing the questioning, or was someone else doing the questioning?

ED: Somebody else was. I usually was just sitting in, and I may have had some questions.

DL: Now what location was most of this sorting taking place, or the questioning taking place?

ED: That was all at Camp Ritchie [18:30].

DL: Camp Ritchie, okay. But so you -- but you said you went to Europe a few times. Where in Europe did you go? Do you remember specifically where in Europe you went?

ED: Could you repeat again? I didn't quite --

DL: You said you went to Europe a few times.

ED: Yes.

DL: Do you remember where exactly in Europe you went?

ED: Well, I went to our headquarters. First of all London. I was assigned to the military attaché's office in London.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And from there [19:00], I went to Germany, to Frankfurt. And then Berlin. Some other places in Germany. Stuttgart? No, not Stuttgart. Heidelberg.

DL: Okay. Now when you went to England, some MIRS [19:25] agents, staff member worked in London. Some worked at a place called Bletchley Park [19:31]. Did you ever go to Bletchley Park?

ED: Well, you know, the name sounds familiar, but I cannot picture it.

DL: It would have been a very large outdoor sort of campus, on what used to be a farm.

ED: Oh, no, no, it was in London.

DL: Okay.

ED: Right there at MI -- what did they call themselves? MIG?

DL: Okay, yeah, I know what you're [20:00] talking about. Okay --

ED: We always stayed, and they put us up in a hotel there. Oh God, it's in the central part of London, and I didn't have too far to go. I can't remember the name.

DL: That's all right. That's all right. Now, getting back to Camp Ritchie [20:28], you said that some questioning took place. Now when they were doing the questioning, were they normally Camp Ritchie personnel, or did they bring in someone special to do the questioning? Do you remember?

ED: No, I think it was Camp -- the only persons that they brought in were the prisoners.

DL: Yeah.

ED: No, it was our own people there.

DL: Okay.

ED: But I can't remember their names or [21:00] anything.

DL: That's understandable. That's perfectly understandable. I can't remember the people I

worked with a few years ago, so I understand [laughs].

ED: I am so embarrassed, you know. I had a big company here in Jacksonville, and I had a lot of people working for me for years, and I cannot remember names.

DL: Yeah.

ED: I meet them, and I can't remember them.

DL: Well, anyway. Can you tell me a little more about the work you were doing there at Camp Ritchie [21:30], as far as sorting the documents? Anything particularly memorable as far as those documents that you came across?

ED: Let's see. The ones I remember. The Siegfried Line [21:58] was one.

DL: [affirmative] [22:00]

ED: I know there were some smaller ones that I worked on, but I can't seem to remember. They were nothing of -- again, I did mostly translations.

DL: Okay. Now --

ED: Some interrogation. There's this one fellow -- I'm trying to think -- I interrogated a number of times. Now I can't remember what it was about [laughs].

DL: Now, you said you sort of used your Russian skills. Now, was the Russian skills not really used until you got to Baltimore, or were you using your Russian skills at Camp Ritchie [22:54]?

ED: No, not at Ritchie. I was at Ritchie only a short time, because the war was over [23:00].

DL: Okay.

ED: And the library -- we had to transport the library to the Pentagon [23:07].

DL: Okay.

ED: So Ritchie was a small portion of my memories of my duties, of course.

DL: Okay.

ED: Well, after the service, I was a Master Sergeant, and then I was discharged. I woke up in [unintelligible].

DL: About what time was this in?

ED: It was in '46.

DL: Okay.

ED: And I had the same job. I was head of the Russian section.

DL: Okay.

ED: And I had about 20 translators there, maybe a little more. And they brought us in all the Russian newspapers, magazines.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: Anything that was printed [24:00]. And it was very interesting to learn about what was happening in Russia, and what was being built where. And one could do an awful lot of - that's where I really learned intelligence work.

DL: On the off chance, did you -- when the war was over, did you ever see anyone you served with in the intelligence service? Like, did you ever go out to dinner with or bump into someone from during your intelligence service?

ED: Well, not bumped. I saw a job and then --

DL: [affirmative]

ED: -- kept my job, and certainly he remained in the service.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And he's the one that I really spent most of the time. Unfortunately he -- a couple of years ago, he was killed in an automobile accident [25:00]. But he's the one that I was

closely -- Major Hartell [25:07], I did see a couple times.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: But beyond that, no.

DL: Okay.

ED: Nobody.

DL: Now, what did you do with yourself after the war was over? After you left the service, what happened?

ED: Well, from the day I was discharged, I remained in the same position, as a civilian.

DL: Okay.

ED: Except for the very high ratings. The P-3 rating.

DL: And how long were you doing this?

ED: Into '47. Yeah, into late '47.

DL: Okay.

ED: My problem was [26:00], I had a brother, who was younger.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: Who escaped Latvia [26:08], and went into Russia. Hitchhiked.

DL: Okay.

ED: As a kid, he hitchhiked. Got all the way to the Baikal Sea.

DL: Okay.

ED: Way into Siberia. And he was very reasonably taken care of. And we corresponded during those four years, briefly.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: In Latvian. And he was fortunate. They put him into a school; they gave him a pair of

underwear. And he became -- late after the war was over, he became a maintenance chief of a highway [27:00] where they had tractors and all this equipment.

DL: Okay.

ED: And we corresponded around then. I learned more from him of what had happened in Latvia [27:17] than anybody else. And then finally I got a letter from him saying, "Look, I don't understand English, I don't understand your letter. If you can't write in Latvian, we might as well not bother." Which was a sign for me that it was not healthy for him to receive a letter from the United States.

DL: Got you.

ED: And at the same time, I could see the group I was working in was CIG [27:53].

DL: [affirmative]

ED: Before CIA [27:55] it became CIG. And I -- as I say, I had a kind of nice position [28:00], I was getting up there. And I said to myself, "With a brother in Russia and he was the only member left in family, I wasn't going to hurt him. And neither will I have the opportunity to grow with that thing kind of hanging over my head."

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And so I quit the service at that time.

DL: Wow.

ED: Oh, really that was the best thing to do.

DL: Okay.

ED: I was going to say -- oh, one other thing. While -- no, yeah, but that was while I was still at service; there was a Colonel Lovell [28:41].

DL: Yeah, we know of a Colonel Lovell, yes.

ED: Yeah, okay. Well, you know, he almost talked me into being his officer [29:00] of -- I can't remember the terminology. But the place with him in Bucharest [29:11].

DL: Okay.

ED: But the requirement was that I spoke all four languages, fluently.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: My French was very bad, because since I left home, I'd been to sea, I never spoke French again, you know.

DL: Okay.

ED: He said, "Well, since you spoke it fluently at one, it won't take you long to -- I'll give you six months." You know, which is fine.

DL: Yeah.

ED: But then when he said, "Look, you'll be in civilian clothes, and the U.S. government cannot stand behind you if anything happens to you."

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And that scared me. I have worked so hard to get to the States, to become an American.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And then [30:00] have this opportunity to lose it again. I wasn't going to take that chance.

DL: Understood.

ED: And I said, "Thank you, I'm sorry." I was very flattered, but no thanks.

DL: Okay, so then what happened in the rest of your life?

ED: Well, next in my life, I went -- I got married. Since I knew wire rope, I went to work in this company in Sunbury, Pennsylvania [30:43], in a wire rope company.

DL: Okay.

ED: And stayed with them for a while. And then I decided that I had to strike out on my own.

And I worked hard, and [31:00] I went to Bucknell University [31:04] at the same time.

DL: [affirmative]

ED: Which was 10 miles away. And they treated me very well, because I was the superintendent of that wire rope company.

[laughter]

And all my testing, physical testing, I did at Bucknell. So the profs were very kind to me, since I was older than the average student. They kind of gave me preferential treatment.

But I never had a degree, although I have had numerous courses, all required courses, both at New York University and at Bucknell [31:45].

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And the other institute, I forget now. And I constantly had an invitation to come back to work for Paulson Wire Rope [32:00] in New York [32:01].

DL: Okay.

ED: And they were kind of after me. And I went to Bucknell [32:06], and said, "Why don't you give a Bachelor's degree? I have all my quals or more."

DL: [affirmative]

ED: And they said, "Well, how about one more semester?" [unintelligible], well, I couldn't do that. And incidentally, I don't know if you ever heard of

(End of Tape 1B)

(Beginning of Tape 2A)

ED: My mind is just slipping.



DAVID LASSMAN: Will you hang on one second? I'm just going to slip in a new tape and this will just be -- we'll just talk for a few more minutes. But let me just give an introduction on this new tape.

ED: Okay.

DL: Okay.

ED: Go ahead.

DL: This is David Lassman with the National Park Service at the George Washington Memorial Parkway. This is Monday, November 8. I'm talking to Edgar Danciger, who lives in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, and he's telling about his experiences during World War II, and he's now actually telling about post-World War II. Continue, sir.

ED: Okay. At that time, the [01:00] Sea Cloud [01:02], I remembered the name, the Sea Cloud, which was the largest privately owned yacht, owned by Marjorie Post [01:18] [spelled phonetically].

DL: She actually lived up in this area, near -- in Northern Virginia.

ED: Oh, really?

DL: Yeah.

ED: Well, at that time she had returned from sea duty and was at the Bethlehem Yard in Baltimore and they needed to re-rig all the masts back to their original thing, and the company that they had worked for were kind of teasing me to come and do this for them. And it was a big piece, you know, more of a prestige than anything else. And I decided, yes, if you get the [02:00] job, I'll come and work for you.

DL: Okay.

ED: But they were not a successful bidder. After all, the boat was in the Bethlehem Yard

[02:10], and Bethlehem got the job. That's another story.

DL: Yeah.

ED: Well, I decided, having worked with two others that I had an inventive mind and all that, and that I have to strike out on my own. I had a son, a year old at that time, and that I have to do something for myself.

DL: Okay.

ED: And at that time -- it was in the mid '50s -- pre-stressed concrete was just making -- inroads in this country, just started out, and it was a new form of structure. And I was very [03:00] enamored with it, the possibility, and it took a steel strand to prestress the concrete. And so I looked into that, and several people were already working on it. It was [unintelligible] in New Jersey.

DL: Yeah.

ED: [unintelligible] Bethlehem [03:19] did a little bit of work. But I always felt, as an individual, I could do better than people working for a big company.

DL: Okay.

ED: That was just my opinion. And so I investigated it and decided that, to do that, I had to go to Florida. Florida at that time was always a stepchild to the rest of the East, in a way.

DL: Okay.

ED: And Florida wanted to build [04:00] highways, but they needed steel for bridges and stuff like that. And the steel companies -- and the freight, freight took down -- was cheap enough, but going back, very expensive, you know. I mean, that was so structured, to keep the South and to the agricultural rather than manufacturing things. And it so happened that the chief design engineer at the University of Florida was very enamored

with this new pre-stressed concrete as a substitute for steel, and he became the head of the Highway Department for the state, so everything was -- started to be designed in pre-stressed concrete.

DL: Got you [05:00].

ED: So I felt that that was my place to come, and so I came here and started a small company. I was able to design my own pieces of equipment and pretty good machines myself. And I started a small company called Florida Wire and Cable Company [05:21] --

DL: Okay.

ED: -- and started making strands for pre-stressed concrete. And gradually, over the years, we were the only independent company, other than steel. And gradually, we grew to be the largest one in the country.

DL: Wow, that's impressive.

ED: Well, you know, we kind of specialized because the big steel companies really couldn't afford that precision. They were accustomed to producing massive beams -- and plates and beams and not specialty things [06:00], and this was never their bailiwick.

DL: Okay.

ED: So that's basically what I did for -- and finally, I sold out to a steel company and stayed with them for another 10 years before they let me go. And from there on, I just worked as a consultant. And we made a lot of bridge work, and many of the bridges in this country contain our strands made here, right here in Jacksonville.

DL: Well, congratulations.

ED: Well [unintelligible] our jobs, first jobs were when they were building the big buildings that were bombed in New York [06:50] City. The --

DL: The World Trade Center [06:53].

ED: The World Trade Center. They had to be placed pretty deep [07:00] into the bedrock, and all that bedrock had to be retained, which contains all our strands. We made all these strands here in Jacksonville. And they would call us and talk about what they need, and the next day or two days, we fabricated them and shipped them on trucks, two drivers to arrive there in time.

DL: Wow.

ED: A number of jobs in New York [07:30] that we had -- the extended runway into the bay at LaGuardia Airport [07:37]. These are very early. These are early jobs.

DL: Sure.

ED: But today, most bridges in the United States, especially the cable-stayed bridges, the great majority of them are made with our products [08:00]. So that's about it.

DL: Okay. Well, do you have any other thoughts you want to add, especially about your military service?

ED: Well, I think conscription is very important.

DL: Okay.

ED: It's done a great thing for me and for every young man that has been in it.

DL: Okay.

ED: To be -- and it doesn't have to be from a military standpoint necessarily --

DL: Yeah:

ED: -- but just having been degraded to a common denominator, everybody, and no privileges and none of that. It's a fabulous thing, and I wish we would do something in this country. I love this country so much because it has given to me everything I ever look

for, you know [09:00]? And there's no other place like it in the world.

DL: Okay. Well, and I just have one question for you on -- I -- you said you actually had collected some documents during your -- from -- like, German or Russian documents during your time with the military. On the off chance, do you still have any of those documents you collected, or do you have any pictures of yourself from the World War II era?

ED: Yeah, maybe. As far as documents, I tell you, I have a few documents that I did not participate in. But they were there, you know.

DL: Sure.

ED: I wish I had them while I was at Ritchie [09:50]. And I have to do something with them. I don't want to leave -- they are meaningless to anybody else. And how [10:00] would you use them?

DL: We would -- we have a -- actually, my office is our research archives on the World War II military intelligence we've been doing.

ED: I see.

DL: And we also, actually, are doing a lot of research at the National Archives [10:16], going through records there, and that's eventually how we found you, because we actually found -- we keep on finding new names of personnel involved in various programs, and we came across your name, and so when we find a new name, we search for that person, and that's how we found you.

ED: I see. I got you.

DL: So if you're willing to share your documents with us, that'd be great. And also, if you just -- if you could -- if you had any pictures of yourself, we'd love to have copies of you,

because often not only -- not only do we want pictures of you, but often there are other people or projects or like rooms that are in the background that give us more clues about what was going on.

ED: Yeah. Well, yes [11:00]. I was -- well, you know, at my age, I don't know what to do with these documents. I just don't want them to go to waste.

DL: We would --

ED: I was looking for somebody to give it to you.

DL: We would love to have something like this, and we -- and we actually have several veterans who have given us a lot. In fact, we have -- the most pictures we have of the MIRS [11:27] work up in Camp Ritchie [11:30] is actually from one of the veterans named Paul Fairbrook, and he actually gave us several pictures of the archives there at Camp Ritchie. And so what I'll do is, I'll actually make some copies of those pictures for you and I'll send them with the copy of the interview for you. So --

ED: Okay. [unintelligible] about troops did broadcasts that went out from, I think, somewhere in the Mediterranean towards the Germans [12:00], to fool them, to have them think that they were Germans, about gossip [laughs]. You know, just certainly gossip to make them aware that things are not quite -- that the people that they're dealing with are quite what they think they are.

DL: Yeah, we've had several stories of how they've collected different information. One of the -- one of the MIRS [12:32] agents at -- for -- who was at Fort Hunt [12:37], his name was John Kluge, and John Kluge, through their research they had a file on a German general who was captured and brought to Fort Hunt for questioning. And the German general basically said, "I'm not going to tell you [13:00] anything." So what the -- using

the file they had Kluge had put together, one of the pictures that they had on this general was that he was at a wedding because it was a wedding picture in a newspaper. Well, they told the general, "Well, we know that you were at this wedding." And he just gave a very -- just a handful of minor details that they had pieced together, but it made it sound like to the general that they knew everything. And so they basically told the general, "See, we know these small details in your life. Just tell us what we want to know and things will go good for you."

ED: Yes.

DL: And so -- and that's what they did. They used that information and questioning or for propaganda purposes.

ED: [affirmative] Yeah, I know.

DL: Yeah.

ED: They're little things that I worked on at Camp Ritchie [13:53]. And we had a library, because we brought a whole library from Germany [14:00], right next door. And -- but some of the prisoners, you worked for them. And some of them were very open. They wanted to stay in the States and all that. You know, they were very kind. But all I had to do was walk into the backroom and look at their background to see if they're telling me the truth or not.

DL: Yep

ED: It was just uncanny, really. Actually, some of them were very, very nice and straightforward. All right.

DL: All right. Okay. Well, I very much thank you for your time. And probably, because we've got the Veterans Day holiday in a couple days, you'll probably receive your copies

of the interview early next week. And like I said, I'll try to include some pictures of Camp Ritchie [14:57] in the package for you, too.

ED: Well [15:00], that'd be very kind of you.

DL: All right. Well, it was very much an honor, and I thank you for your time, sir.

ED: Well, thank you, and you have a good day.

DL: I always do, sir. Thank you very much.

ED: Bye-bye.

DL: Bye.

[end of transcript]



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