

Fort Hunt Oral History
P.O. Box 1142
Interview with Thomas Griffin and David Jones by Brandon Bies
Washington, D.C.
November 6, 2008

BRANDON BIES: All right. Okay. Today is November 6, 2008. We're here at the Washington Renaissance Hotel in Washington, D.C. This is an interview as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project for the National Park Service. My name is Brandon Bies. I'm also joined by Vincent Santucci and Matthew Verda, all of the National Park Service, and we're here today to interview two gentlemen, retired Major General David Jones, and retired Major Thomas Griffin. And with that, gentlemen, if we could with each of you individually, just very briefly, could you let us know the important information about you, such as where and when you were born.

THOMAS GRIFFIN: I was born in Wisconsin. Green Bay, Wisconsin. 1916.

BB: Okay.

DAVID JONES: And I was born in Marshfield, Oregon, which disappeared from the map -- it's now called Coos Bay -- on 18 December '13 [01:00].

BB: Outstanding. And both of you obviously grew up in the United States. If you want to just briefly each tell us when did you become interested in the concept of airplanes?

TG: Well, airplanes were a large part of our life. In the early days, when we were kids, if you heard an airplane, you ran out of the house. Everybody ran out of the house and pointed up in the air. That's how old we are. But it was part of our life growing up.

BB: [affirmative]

TG: The air industry and what have -- Lindbergh [01:35], of course, and all of those wonderful things.

DJ: I grew up without a word about airplanes. Grammar school, high school, and college.

ROTC [01:52] in high school and college. Cavalry. Out of college with a cavalry reserve [01:59]. Active duty for [02:00] a year at Fort Bliss, Texas [02:01]. And I'm out of a job in June of '37 in a year's active duty. And then about March, one of my mates, Lieutenant -- West Point [02:19] graduate -- and we ended in the same troop. A Troop with 8th Cavalry [02:25]. "Where you going, Norm?" He said, "I'm going off to the hospital." "Why?" "Because I'm going to take a physical and I'm going to go be an aviator." I said, "Hell, I'll go with you." So I went with him and took a flight physical, went back to the troop, and the first army got off that army rig and found out what -- about flying cadets. Finger typed a whole damn requirement for -- and took it to the squadron commander to sign it. The regimental commander sent us off to Washington [03:00], and a month later I'm on leave, and ready to go. Where, I didn't know. And the fool at the old regimental come at us, says, "What the hell you doing around here? Thought you were going to go." I said, "Well, I haven't heard anything in, what, 30 days." Next day, there's a wire. Commanding general of First Cavalry Division [03:30], Major General Yoo-Hoo, Ivan [03:35] -- I don't know what the hell; he was in -- made the papers. Any rate, he said, "A wire. What's the status on Lieutenant Jones?" And he said, "Oh." Wire the next day from the War Department [03:48] lists me as a flying cadet [03:50], which I did, and that's the first time I thought about airplanes.

BB: Outstanding. Major, yourself? Have you said -- you mentioned, I guess, aircraft as a little kid. When did you [04:00] actually join the U.S. Army Air Corps [04:02]?

TG: I was -- I was ROTC Coast Artillery [04:05].

BB: Okay.

TG: And I had -- at the end of -- when I graduated from college in '39, spring of '39, I went

into what they call the Thomason Act [04:16] for one year as a -- in coast artillery.

BB: Okay.

TG: That was sort of old-fashioned, having God sitting there shooting the enemy when they entered your port, you know, little Civil War [04:30] stuff. So I ended up down with Pan-American Airlines [04:36] in Florida, where I studied -- we flew down around the Caribbean and I learned my trade as a navigator -- aerial navigator. And they also sent me to Miami University [04:50] for meteorology, which I've entirely forgotten by now. I know nothing about it.

BB: Probably be just as good as most of the folks who predict the weather today.

TG: Yeah. Yeah.

BB: So [05:00] could you tell us a little -- though it's not the focus of our interview. I realize we're jumping ahead. Could you each tell us briefly what your role was with the Doolittle Raid [05:09]? Again, it's not the real focus, but we'd love to hear just a few sentences what each of your responsibilities were.

DJ: Very quickly, there were five of us who were pre-war regular officers, and so Hilger [05:32] was number two. He was the ranking -- he was second in command. [unintelligible] became the operations officer, and I became the guy for navigation, as a matter of fact. And Greening [05:52] [spelled phonetically] had this maintenance and also the senior type. Everyone else was assigned to a crew [06:00], and we started working the problem. And then, actually, we were organized by flights, which never came to pass. And the idea was the old man would go first by himself. Then he had the next three -- flight A, B, and C, and targets were assigned -- first flight, targets to the north of the city down through the city, south, and then the last three airplanes had a city

each. And I happened to be number five, so therefore I had one, two, the second -- the second flight. And you were in airplane number --

TG: Ninth.

DJ: Third, Fifth, Eighth, Ninth [unintelligible] anyway.

BB: Two days.

TG: Flight back.

BB: Sure.

DJ: To his target. But that's what it was.

TG: It just happens [07:00] the boss sent you and me up to Washington, D.C. [07:02].

DJ: That's right.

TG: The two of us.

DJ: Yeah. That's right.

BB: And you mentioned earlier that that was to retreat --

DJ: Early in the training, obviously they needed somebody up there, and they just happened --
I don't know why they had to pick us.

TG: I'll be damned if I know.

DJ: But anyway, the two of us came up here and there used to be over on the Mall the old War Department [07:31] buildings that were there up. After the war started, yeah. And they assigned us to a little room, sanctum sanctorum [07:41], and they would bring people in to talk to us. And that's when they brought maps and that sort of thing. And we had -- there weren't all but one in 500,000 aeronautical sharks. We had U.S., we had French [08:00], we had British, French, and I guess Chinese.

TG: Yeah.

DJ: One to 500,000 in color. And then we wanted to go -- we went to the -- they wouldn't let us go to the Library of Congress [08:15]. We went to War College [08:19].

TG: What we were doing was so secret, there were only two men assigned to us. Remember that?

DJ: Yeah. Yeah.

TG: They changed the lock on one of the office doors, and as the lowest-ranking man, I had to clean up all the papers and tear them up at the end of the day.

DJ: But -- yeah. They wouldn't let us visit. We went to one place. That's the War College, was it? Or they --

TG: I think it was the National War College [08:45].

DJ: Whatever it was called at that. Well, they wouldn't let us go to the Library of Congress [08:50]. They wouldn't let us go to the public library. But any rate, Tom and I tried to compare all of these charts of Japan [09:00] and/or parts of China we assumed that we would go to. And we found coastlines were all fine. If we went 50 knots inland, Mount A was 1,500 meters on this map and 1,200 on this map and 1,700 on that map, and this city Fu Chow Fu-Hu [spelled phonetically] was 50 miles from this town on this. And so we compared and I forgot which map we picked. We'll take this one. This would be the one. Fine. But then word came back we couldn't do it in color by that time. Now this is a fact: the two of us sat down with a box of Crayolas [09:49] --

[laughter]

-- and we colored a map as best we could from -- I guess we had it in Japan, but in China [10:00]. And we colored an area, I don't know, 100 miles --

TG: The Japanese maps were okay. We could trust them.

DJ: Yeah. That's right. But when we -- to get to where we're going, it was our theoretical landing point. Land, refuel, go to Chongqing [10:20] was the idea. Turn the airplane over to them. And until we actually colored this damn thing. And so they shipped everything to the -- to Oakland [10:29], black and white, and on the ship after class, we issued -- they issued all of that, and we gave them the colors and everybody re-colored [10:44] their map. But it's scientific.

BB: So for the actual raid, Major General, you were a pilot.

DJ: Yes.

BB: And Major, you were a navigator. And again, we'd love to talk about the raid [10:57], but I'm afraid if we did, we wouldn't get to the [11:00] European side of things. So suffice it to say, you obviously both fortunately survived the raid. Did you both parachute out of your aircraft?

TG: Yes. Yes.

BB: Okay.

DJ: We got back. I got back to States by June, July. When did you get back?

TG: I think we might have been on the same -- I got back about the same time for Washington, D.C. [11:22].

DJ: We rode a gooney bird [11:23] the whole damn way.

TG: Yeah. There were two planes loading. You might have been in the other one.

DJ: Okay. Any rate, we all got back to the States, did some parades, sold some bonds and so on, and reported for duty.

TG: July.

DJ: Yeah. And I went to -- anyway, I went to Columbia [11:47]. It turned out I was -- I went

to a Martin B-26 unit. Marchdale [11:54]. And you went where?

TG: B-26 to Baton Rouge [11:58].

DJ: Okay.

TG: Three-nineteen [12:00].

DJ: Well, that was a 319.

TG: We were in the --Yeah. We were in the same outfit. You were shot down the first week of December.

DJ: Yeah. Yeah.

TG: Out of Algiers [12:11]. I was in your outfit. We flew across the North Atlantic [12:15] together.

DJ: What squadron? I was 40 -- 438 squadron [12:19].

TG: Oh, hell. I was -- I can't remember.

DJ: Did you go on the north route or the south route?

TG: We went north. We went up to Greenland, Iceland --

DJ: Did you stay in Greenland [12:30] a long time the way I did?

TG: A week or 10 days --

DJ: I was there 18 goddamn days.

[laughter]

Any rate, we got back, there were what, 15 or 20 of us. And some people with the B-25 outfits. I don't know. I guess I asked to go to 319, the Martin B-26 [12:54].

TG: B-26. Yeah.

DJ: And it was a little sexy.

TG: Oh, we loved that B-25. I don't know why you would've asked for a [13:00] B-26. I

think you were assigned to it probably.

DJ: Well, I asked for -- we had -- we could have done that. Any rate --

BB: So you were each flying, and where were you based out of? Algiers [13:12]?

DJ: Yeah. We went to -- west of the U.K.

BB: Okay.

DJ: Actually, our unit -- then the other squadrons were diverted, and everybody went the southern route, one in BW1 at 5,000 feet of pure steel flanking, with about a five-degree slope. We got there, they wouldn't let you take off unless you had an upwind -- wind up and all that horse -- so we were in England for only a matter of weeks. I and three other airplanes, including the group commander, were ordered down to Land's End [13:59] in the U.K. [14:00] to escort P-38 fighters to Oran, to Africa [14:07] for the invasion in November, which I did. And three airplanes were lost.

TG: That was Rutherford [14:17].

DJ: The group commander. He was cut and got lost and ended up letting down over Cherbourg [14:23] and he got clobbered. One other guy. Any rate, I got to Africa [14:30] on the day after invasion, landed in Oran [14:35], I did.

TG: That's where I went in.

DJ: Dozens and dozens of airplanes coming in at the same time. And then bombs and -- you know, any rate, it was pretty hairy. And we lived on a field by the airplane for several days.

TG: Of course, it rained like hell. We were in the mud.

DJ: The bombers were in pretty good shape. Fighters were in tough shape [15:00]. They didn't have any place to hide. And then they moved -- we moved us to Algiers [15:07].

Algiers. They would have to be something if they moved them back to Oran [15:14].

BB: Okay.

DJ: And we ran our first raid, then, in --

TG: December.

DJ: -- through November. And in my case, I had three raids -- four raids, which I led, and then --

TG: You were shot down first week of December, weren't you?

DJ: Fourth of December. The target was Bizerte [15:41], and I was shot and knocked down just before the bomb relief line. And I crash-landed, and then I got out.

BB: Were you shot down by anti-aircraft fire?

DJ: Yes. And knocked my left engine out and everything else. They shot the rudder and the -- and any rate [16:00], I was able to crash it and everybody got out. And I was picked up immediately, and the next day shipped to Germany [16:11] through Italy.

TG: The group commander was just assigned to the group.

DJ: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

TG: In less than one mission. One mission.

BB: And so, Major General, you actually took your plane down and stayed with the plane.

DJ: Yes, sir.

BB: You didn't parachute out. You stayed with the aircraft.

DJ: No. No. My parachute, I didn't -- and try to crash the airplane.

BB: Okay.

DJ: In Tunis [16:35], but everybody got out.

BB: Got you.

DJ: They were hurt. The Germans immediately took us to an aid station and a couple of guys were hurt.

TG: They took me --

DJ: I went to the [unintelligible] room. But anyway, I was sent to Germany [16:54]. The rest of the group all ended up in Italian prison camp.

BB: Yeah.

DJ: And then when [17:00] Italy packed up, so a couple of them got out, and some of them end up in Germany [17:05].

BB: [affirmative] Major Griffin, could you describe when your aircraft was launched?

TG: When my -- which aircraft are you talking about?

BB: DD-1 over Germany, or against the Germans. Coming from the B-26 [17:20]. Could you describe how you were captured? The aircraft you were in.

TG: Well, we were flying against the Germans [17:29] in Sicily when I was shot down on July 4th, Independence Day [17:35].

BB: So you were shot down. You were shot down in December --

DJ: Fourth of December '42.

BB: '42. And then six months later --

DJ: July '43.

BB: Okay. And could you describe your -- how your aircraft was launched?

TG: We were the lead ship. Colonel [unintelligible] was with me --

DJ: Yeah. Bill [unintelligible].

TG: -- of about 40 B-26s [17:57], and we were bombing targets in the eastern part of Sicily [18:00]. We didn't know it, but it was just a week before our invasion. And they

knocked us down big-time. We went through the formation on fire and got that -- that was good because there's no hesitation. You're not going to ride that plane anywhere.

You got the hell out as fast as you could. And we bailed out and we were captured. We landed where Germans were all down.

BB: Okay. Now, before we start to talk about your prison situation, I meant to ask earlier, up until this point, had either of you received any specific training in military intelligence or specifically what to do if you were shot down?

DJ: No. The answer's no.

TG: No.

BB: And so did you --

DJ: There was no such thing. Not that I know of.

BB: So prior to being shot down, did you know anything about coded message systems or escape packages or anything?

TG: Well, we learned in prison camp there were certain --

DJ: No, no. Before that.

TG: Before. Yeah.

DJ: Before we were shot down [19:00].

BB: So you had never been briefed.

DJ: There was no training that I know of.

BB: Okay. Okay.

TG: We didn't know of any.

DJ: Escape and evasion, all of that sort of thing.

BB: Okay. So were you briefed on what to do if you would be questioned, what sort of

information to give the enemy?

DJ: Name, rank, and number.

BB: Okay.

DJ: We did know that.

BB: Okay.

DJ: That's all we knew.

BB: All right. Was it understood that if you were shot down, you would try to escape, or was that --

TG: I think we were told it was your duty to try to escape.

DJ: No. No. It was not.

TG: Didn't they say that?

DJ: Never. No. British, yes.

TG: The Americans can't say it was our duty?

DJ: No.

TG: I thought it was my duty.

BB: You can.

TG: What the hell was I doing?

[laughter]

DJ: With the British, it's a requirement. With us, no, there was -- there was --

TG: I never realized that. We were right with them doing what they were doing.

DJ: But you can. That's what we did, what everybody did. But no, it was not -- it was not a written --

VS: And just very [20:00] quickly. Were you given any sort of survival package?

DJ: No.

MS: If you were shot down.

DJ: Wait a minute, wait a minute, there was a map, a silk map [20:09]. Some of them -- I didn't have one. Some of them had. I guess that was later. Sometime later.

BB: So could you again briefly tell us what camp you were taken to and a little bit about your time at that camp?

DJ: Okay. Pretty much, we'll start with me because I was taken -- well, everybody goes to --

TG: Frankfurt [20:34].

DJ: -- the gulag [20:35]. In Munich [20:38] --

TG: It was in Frankfurt.

DJ: Well, okay. Frankfurt. Where everybody went there throughout the war. The British had been doing it for years. They go to one camp where you're debriefing, and then in the cooler and that sort of stuff, and then you're shipped to camps [21:00]. Now this is all officers and this is RAF [21:04], I mean Luftwaffe [21:07], and Goering [21:08], apparently he remained very jealous of his prerogative of command of the air. And all air -- prisoners of the air were -- he was very jealously resistant and he'd taken the camps away from us and he goes up after a couple escapes; there was a movement to put the FBI [21:35] -- bad guys in charge.

VS: Gestapo [21:38]?

DJ: The Gestapo. Yeah. In fact, we'd been searched for the Gestapo a couple times that I -- that I was at, and we stole lots of things from them.

[laughter]

But any rate, so I was taken to the east camp, and the British [22:00] had been other

places, but that was their central camp. And they had one in the Baltic. And so that -- at that point in time, they were left. When I got there, about 15-20 Yanks. I would have to be the first one out of North Africa [22:23]. But any rate, Bud Clark and all that. And then people started coming in. By this is December, by January-February, they were building the north camp. And VIP types were looking at pictures of the system. Of course, by '43, things were building up and then more airplanes being shot down and you know, like the Schweinfurt [22:57], you see it on 50 [23:00] airplanes times 10, that's 500 potential prisoners right there. So the Germans just had to keep building -- didn't have to, they did -- keep building camps. So they built the north camp, where all the heavy escape business took place. And it's little stuff, lots of it before the British did, and we were involved in that area, and that lasted until whenever it was. They moved us to the south camp, which was just separated by wire from the north camp. And by the time we had been moved, they were already felling the trees on the west side in the west camp. And then they -- the central camp -- central camp had been an all ranks type thing or airmen, they moved them out and made that an officers' [24:00] camp. So they had -- in the east camp was all RAF. And then they built an -- they had a new RAF [24:09] camp, came very late in the war on the other side of town. And that's where they moved -- it turned out, they moved most of the pretty important, critical escape types and RAF types to that camp, and they saved their lives because they'd have been in the early outs, so the 78 they got out.

BB: And so, just to clarify, then the camp you're referring to is Stalag 03 [24:43].

DJ: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

BB: Okay. Just wanted to verify that. And was your situation similar? You were also taken?

Was that the only real permanent camp that you were in, Major, Stalag 03?

TG: We were -- I just followed Davey. Everywhere he went in the war, I followed him.

DJ: Well, you came in the [25:00] north camp.

TG: Yeah. Yeah.

DJ: See, we moved --

TG: We came in the west camp -- in the east camp first. I was in there.

DJ: Yeah?

TG: Yeah. I was in there for a month or two.

DJ: All right. Okay.

TG: Yeah.

DJ: I thought we had moved by then.

VS: Which one was the American camp?

DJ: Pardon?

VS: Which was the American camp?

TG: South.

DJ: All of -- all of the three. South started out as the RAF [25:23], and the east camp remained RAF. They built north camp, south camp, east camp, west camp were all Yanks. You'd find this odd guy here and there, but -- Army [25:42] or something. Yeah.

BB: Okay. So obviously you were both there for quite some time, and it sounds like one of the things you did to engage yourself while you were there was escape attempts. And I wanted to shift the discussion to that and [26:00] whatnot for a little while. Did -- when did you become aware that there was a system to communicate back to the United States? Did you know that at -- while you were at the camps there? Did you hear about this -- the

coded messages?

DJ: Yes. I never got mixed up in it. I knew of -- I knew a couple guys were. We had our unit briefing in south camp.

TG: I think we had three or four of those men in our south lager.

DJ: And we would get a lively briefing from BBC, so I forgot who it was. Some guy, one of our [unintelligible] did that duty. But as far as the [27:00] -- I never got mixed up. I never had a code. I never had -- I know some people did.

BB: Major Griffin, was that the same with you? Did you ever write any coded messages yourself, or did you just know about them?

TG: I heard that there were some people in our lager who got messages from their -- for example, Aunt Tilly in Springfield, and it was all coded messages. But there were only certain -- they figure a certain number of people got these things, and a certain number would be captured. That's the way it worked out. I believe our south lager had three or four of those men before we were through.

BB: Okay.

DJ: We didn't know. I have seen results of things, like cribbage board -- not cribbage, Monopoly board that had junk in it. I did see a deck of cards [28:00].

MS: Did either of you --

DJ: I -- there were a couple of them I had to hide, and I did handle money. When people came in, we the prisoners grilled the people another time, and we picked up some money of all kinds that they had managed to get through. And I had that and hid it everywhere around the goddamn camp. And as I was the only one that had a code on that one, but that's all I -- I never had anything else.

BB: Now you mentioned things like the Monopoly game and a deck of cards. Did either of you receive packages with those in it?

DJ: I never -- I never got --

TG: I didn't, either.

MS: I guess maybe more basic, what do you understand about how those items got into the camp? Do you understand any of that process [29:00]?

DJ: Well, I just know it came in -- most of it came in parcels or in book parcels.

TG: All those -- all those parcels were examined by the Germans out in the outer lager before they came in. But we had people working with the Germans on these packages, and they knew what to look for. If they saw a package from Aunt Tilly from Springfield, they knew that had stuff in it, and they would get that away from the Germans and get it into the camp.

DJ: Yeah. That's about right.

VS: And so you feel --

DJ: Well, they -- the people-- my understanding was we had visits from the -- from the YMCA [29:43] and I guess the Red Cross [29:46]. And you all -- or the U.S. and the -- all people were pretty respectful of the -- of the -- like the YMCA [30:00], so we got lots of things from them. Books. And as I understand it, they never breached the trust there. We did get things -- that sort of thing. And the sports equipment, I guess he bugged up sports equipment, baseballs and things, that I was not aware of.

BB: You mentioned earlier about having someone who would listen in to the BBC [30:31].

DJ: Oh, yeah.

BB: Was that on -- was you understanding -- was -- that was on a secret radio? Obviously,

the Germans --

DJ: Well, I knew -- I knew we had put together more than one -- well, more than one --

TG: Two or three.

DJ: More than one camp. I know we had one, at least. And that was put together originally by people friendly with the goons, with [31:00] the Germans, and they would get pieces and bits and built their own radio. We were -- in camp. We were, I say, forbidden.

(End of Tape 1A)

(Beginning of Tape 1B)

BB: We're -- okay.

[talking simultaneously]

BB: We were talking about the radio.

DJ: We were -- yeah. In camp we did not, were not -- we were told not to communicate with the Germans. X number of guards were known by their first names, they knew us and all that sort of stuff, but we had certain people who fraternized and developed friendships; had them in for coffee, had them, give them a piece of candy, or tempt them. And we subverted more than one, and -- but we were supposed to stay out of it, which was pretty easy to do. And, like Schultz [00:58], we [01:00] had good [foreign language], people who could speak German, and other people who were specifically for that purpose.

TG: The movie "The Great Escape" [01:13] had that sort of thing in it too.

BB: Now, could you guys -- yes, since you bring up "The Great Escape" [01:21], could we talk a little about some of the escape attempts that you were involved in. Obviously, we talked earlier, we heard you speak earlier today about how you did, you got your hands dirty a little bit, and, I guess, you got, maybe, your pants dirty a little bit. So, if we could

each talk about that a little bit.

TG: Davy was one of the principal diggers.

DJ: Well, no, no, no, no.

TG: Everybody couldn't do that, go down 30 feet and out maybe 300. A lot of people couldn't begin to do that; it was very difficult. He was one of the principal diggers, this character right here.

DJ: No, no. The escape committee was active [02:00] -- well, had been active for years, because some of the poor guys had been there since '38. And by the time we moved into the north camp, they had been, several people had been allowed to visit the place, so that when we came, they moved us, they would be organized, and that sort of stuff. And, of course, they're busy taking notes and remembering how things were, and they had, the scheme for the three tunnels had been sketched, or been thought of, before we moved. And it turned out to be -- there was a Tom, Dick, and Harry bit [spelled phonetically]. And big security, and big factory, and big ET [spelled phonetically], and the whole bit. Clark was big security [spelled phonetically]. But at any rate, as they were getting organized [03:00] and so on, the tunnel part -- the tunnelers, and the suppliers with the boards, and that sort of stuff, and then the disbursers, and security. Well, of course, you throw the factories and all that sort of stuff in. And the digging part, there were probably 50 of us. A wall of mud, you know, cold and -- RAF [03:31], RCAF [03:32], Australians, lots of -- all the expatriates who were escapees from French, and from Europe -- and there were those three Yanks, it turned out, that would volunteer. Me, and Ed Toll [03:50] from Phoenix, and Buck Ingram [03:51], who was living with, I'd see him all the time, on a daily basis [04:00], and so we were just, you worked mostly as a team,

two of you together, but you could be with anyone. Generally, I was with another Yank, but I started out with Canadian, and so on.

BB: Hey, what would you dig with? What did you use to, your fingers, your hands?

DJ: A spoon. That part of Germany [04:29], and Italy, is sand. Sand, down 30 feet at least. And it had a consistency that you had to have about a 40 degree slope, was the most we could support. And so, no matter how far down you went, so you had to shore everything. And they were already using microphones and [05:00] driving heavy equipment around, so you couldn't dig a shallow. And so we went down 30 feet to avoid that sort of business. And the dimensions were, like, two feet, so -- and the boards were bed boards, to start with, and you notched one end, male and female, and you laid a floor board; one here, and one across. And as you went along you brought light; that came later, wasn't enough, cut enough wire to get that. But you brought your air along, with, you took a bottle out of the can, and you just put it down this way and brought it along as you went [06:00]. You worked as a team; you're on your elbows, and sometimes you use a spoon, with -- and, your board is about, almost six inches wide. And so you put it down, and then kind of tamp it a little bit, and you lay the next one. The sand, you pass it out through your crotch or around your side, and the guy behind you -- early on, we did a chamber, a little larger -- anyway. Eventually, Petrapali [06:46] [spelled phonetically] pulled his trolley in and, I didn't do that, some other guy would do that, do that kind of work for you [laughs].

BB: Major Griffin, you were involved in actually removing [07:00] some of the dirt; is that correct?

TG: And also, I got the job of securing these illegal things that came into the camp that had to

be hidden. And that became my job; to put them up in attics, or down under the floor, between the wallboards, or someplace, so that we could get them when we needed them, and so that it would be difficult for the Germans to find them. And that was when I got caught. The wall of my room -- I had a room made at the end of this building, I was in charge of the building -- they moved the wall in about 15 inches, and we had a closet there, and, of course, the Germans found it. So we went to the cooler for a couple of weeks; we were destroying Reich [07:42] property.

BB: Oh, really. Did you have any secret documents in that closet?

TG: They found maps [07:49] in there, and civilian clothes, or clothes that had been made to look like civilian clothes, and escape equipment. A lot of it went right between the wall there; we thought we had a real wonderful [08:00] place, but they found it.

BB: So you just made, essentially, a false-backed sort of thing at the end of the building; it looked like it was the end of the building, but it was actually --

DJ: He pulled a -- all pre-fab.

TG: I think you built it.

DJ: Yes, less than the four-inch, less than a two by four. Soft pine, square nails -- you had to draw those nails very carefully so as to not scar the wood. We did this when I first reported in to Bob Clark [08:34]; he was a senior in the east camp. And he put me to work, and he said, "Move that wall." So I learned about that. Well, we did the whole wall, and we had to, we had to, at that point, had to move the whole thing, tip it down, and leave about 12 inches. But when you close the [09:00] other two walls, your pre-fabs are, like, in panels; then, if you look at it, you're one short, the 12 inches. So, we had to reapportion the battens so they looked right. Now, his wall was in a two-man room at the

end of the building, so it wasn't as large a job.

VS: So a lot of these activities you were doing at the direction of folks who were probably receiving these things that were coming into the camp, like the maps [09:42] and things like that; we've got to stow --

DJ: The hiding, the -- that's all local. No, we weren't told how to hide anything. The incoming messages, goodies, the messages, were not a material type [10:00] -- move. No, that's okay.

BB: When you were engaged in all this secrecy -- obviously keeping it secret from the Germans was paramount -- did you ever know if the Germans ever tried to spy on what you were doing? Did they ever plant Germans, and pose them as Americans?

DJ: I don't think it happened in our camp, but it happened.

TG: It did happen.

DJ: Oh, yeah. But --

TG: There was something about the ferrets [10:34]. The ferrets --

DJ: Oh, yeah; we had people who lived with us, yeah. I mean, the ferrets.

BB: And could you --

TG: Looking for escape activity.

BB: And, were they, they were Germans?

TG: Oh yeah, sure.

BB: And did you know they were Germans?

[talking simultaneously]

DJ: -- regular workmen.

BB: Oh, okay.

DJ: This was security [spelled phonetically]. Security to work on the hunfurher [spelled phonetically], and -- no, but [11:00] -- yes, they did, early on, try plants. And I don't think they were successful, because, yeah, they'd learn who your high school coach was, but they didn't know what his last name was. That sort of thing. You -- that didn't work.

BB: What about microphones? Do you know if the Germans ever tried to hide microphones in the barracks to listen?

DJ: The only ones I know of were in the ground for that sort of activity. I don't think they ever planted --

TG: I never heard of that, either.

BB: So, when the Germans discovered your hidden wall space, the items inside, were you interrogated, were you questioned, interviewed?

TG: No, they just -- they sent me and my roommate to the cooler for two weeks, for destruction of Reich [11:53] property. I tried to tell them we had improved the room; we put a closet in there.

[laughter]

They had no sense of humor [12:00].

BB: And they didn't -- they weren't suspicious about having these items, how you obtained these items?

TG: Oh, they knew how we had obtained them. And some of them were made to look like civilian clothes, and maps, and things that had gotten in through the mail.

BB: So it was very obvious that it was for an escape attempt.

TG: Oh, sure.

BB: But they didn't question you? Did they question you, and interrogate you, and ask you

when's the escape going to be?

TG: Oh, no, no. They had --

DJ: They were more sophisticated than that. They knew what was going on.

TG: Sure, they knew we were working, all the time. They found this big closet full of stuff; it was a big day for them.

BB: What would be helpful -- and maybe, Major Griffin, we could start with you -- is the internal organization within the American prisoner of war [12:48] camp. For a while, Clark [12:51] was the senior American officer. And did you understand that organization, or was that information kept from you?

TG: Oh, no [13:00].

DJ: Oh, no, no, no. She had two [spelled phonetically]. We had our ordinary regular formation, I mean, like, you know, we had block commanders, and room commanders, and you paraded, and we had inspections for ourselves. And then you had the escape system.

BB: That's right. Relative to the organization regarding the escape activities --

DJ: Everybody knew --

BB: Everybody knew?

DJ: -- who Big Ike was, sure.

TG: We had a Colonel Goodrich [13:28], who was our commanding officer throughout the whole thing. Even later, when the German -- when American officers were captured and brought in, they still deferred to him, to the end; he was the boss all the way through the thing.

DJ: South camp.

TG: Well, even Mooseburg [spelled phonetically].

DJ: No.

TG: Mooseburg, he was so --

DJ: [negative]

TG: Okay.

DJ: Wasn't anything to do.

[talking simultaneously]

-- moving 15,000 of us in one big clump.

BB: And then there were individuals who had certain [14:00] responsibilities. And do you recall what those responsibilities were, and were their names associated with those kinds of jobs?

DJ: The subversive ones, you mean; the X committee. Oh, sure.

BB: Can you share those with us?

DJ: Well, they had the big everything. And you had Big Security, and I don't know if he had, I guess he must have had some subordinate. Yeah, he probably had a district, I don't know. The Big Factory, the guys who made compasses, there was one guy who ran that, I suppose. Within the tunnels, Big S [14:51], they had already decided where to go, and so on, and so on. You had somebody who supplied the boards [15:00] for us to use, and he belonged to the Big S [15:06].

BB: There were specific people that were allowed to fraternize with the Germans --

DJ: Only a few.

BB: That's right. There were those that assisted with bringing in the packages, trying to --

DJ: We had the people who worked in the package room, yeah. There was only, what --

inside, like in the camp -- only, what, only three or four guys, five guys --

TG: That's how it worked, yeah.

DJ: And they sort of parceled it out when they worked, yeah.

TG: Went through all that stuff.

BB: Did you know who they were?

TG: Oh, sure.

DJ: Oh yeah, oh yeah. There was no, oh look, that wasn't subversive at all.

BB: And then, what did you know about the BBC [15:42] radio transmissions? Was it one person who picked up those transmissions?

DJ: Well, it, in --

TG: We ended up with two or three --

DJ: I don't know; it wasn't all that big a deal. In fact, you could listen to [16:00] the Germans --

BB: Did you know --

TG: And the BBC [16:04].

BB: Did you know that there were coded messages being sent over the BBC broadcast?

DJ: I didn't know, but we knew, we knew -- oh, yes. Sometimes -- yeah, like, for example, well right now I can't think of one --

BB: Sure.

DJ: Well, when we were overrun, the words came through, "Stay put." Well, we knew that came through our channels, not the Germans'. Yeah, I'm sure there were others.

BB: Do you have any sense -- realizing you didn't actually yourselves receive any of the escape packages, or parcels, how often did these parcels come into the camp, the ones

with the baseballs, and the Monopoly games, whatever. Do you have any idea how often that would be?

TG: Irregular.

BB: Irregular?

TG: Yeah [17:00].

BB: In terms of what you had to assist with your escape -- with your radios, and escape devices, and whatnot -- did you get the sense, did most of them come in, hidden, from the United States, or were most of them bartered with the guards, or manufactured? I mean, could you even get any sense of where most of the escape equipment was coming from? Was it a mix, or did it all come from the United States, or did it all come from the guards --

DJ: Mix, would be the kindest way to say it. I don't -- mostly we made it -- the guys were pretty clever, they made most of the things.

BB: Okay. So it sounds like it was a good mix of --

DJ: Oh yeah.

BB: Okay. Can you remember any unusual --

DJ: I don't remember any [18:00], very much stuff coming in.

BB: Do you remember what might be some of the more unusual things that were snuck into the camps?

TG: Unusual?

BB: Like firearms. Anything unusual, that you were surprised?

TG: We had men with crossbows [18:16]. How about the crossbows?

DJ: Wait, wait. We made one.

TG: We had three crossbows.

DJ: Well, we made them.

TG: We had these towers there, in case -- we felt that if the Germans were going to, as a last resort, going to harm all of us, which they could have done, we were going to have one mass escape. And we were going over one part of the barbed wire, everybody, several thousand prisoners, each with a blanket. And then we had three crossbows [18:44] to pick off the guards there. This was all planned; it never came to fruition, but we had those plans. Should we still keep those secret?

[laughter]

We weren't going to sit there like little lambs, we were [19:00] going to make a bust-out -
-

DJ: Romanticizing it a little bit.

TG: What's that?

DJ: You're inflating it a little bit, old buddy.

TG: We weren't going to sit there on our ass, while we --

DJ: Well, we had some --

TG: We were going to bust out in one part of that camp. You forgot that. Yes, we were. We weren't going to sit there and take it.

DJ: Well, no. Well, we didn't spend much time planning that.

TG: Oh? You couldn't -- we couldn't, nobody could talk about it.

DJ: Shit.

TG: We had a big meeting in my building.

DJ: Well, okay.

TG: All right.

[laughter]

BB: Speaking of busting out, can you talk a little bit about what's gone down, and referred to now as the Great Escape [19:46]? How that went -- were either of you, what were your numbers, do you know where in line you were meant to be?

DJ: Tom, Dick, and Harry. Somebody tells you the date we moved, I don't know [20:00] when, the South Camp. But at any rate, they started building the South Camp and it became obvious, and they told us, "We're going to separate the RAF [20:10] from the -- the Yanks from the RAF." This was several months. And so the X Committee [spelled phonetically] said we'll do -- hell, I blacked out -- go together. Emphasize one attack. One; we'll work on one hole to try and get it through and to give the Yanks a chance, because we were all part of the system. And they found it -- heck. And so there you are [21:00]. That was quite a, quite a -- this trap had been in the flat, in the hallway, period. And you'd lift the slab out of the floor when you went down the hole. Well, they found that by a fluke; one of the local guards, tapping along, and happened to hit a hollow spot. And that caused quite a stink. So they explored; they sent mules down to explore it, and they looked at -- they went out there a couple hundred feet, and they were pretty well shook up. So they cleared everybody out, and they bombed it. They put explosives in it, and they didn't plant it very well and they blew the roof off the building.

[laughter]

We all stood and watched that one. But, at any rate, it was then -- it was time for the move, so [22:00] they moved all the Yanks. So none of us were involved in the actual escape. But they had, like, 200 lined up - -

TG: They got 80 out.

DJ: -- and they took anyone who could speak German, old-timers, worked on the whole bit; they were at the head of the line. And they had uniforms, they had good running clothing, they had current railway passes, daily passes. Anything you needed a stamp, they'd been manufactured. And they were issued that; I suppose a couple, three dozen guys, that's it. Then you had another group, on down the line, with some help on clothing. Everybody got a compass, manufactured compass. By the time you get [23:00] down to the last, maybe 70 or 80, assistant [spelled phonetically], you had, if you'd found a hat, or anyway you had a little bit of equipment, you were "hard-assing," and that's it. So, that night they had moved everybody into one building. And then when they started, or they sent -- forgotten who broke the tunnel -- but anyway, he had to go up, he'd gone up, he'd done up to the frost line, up to, theoretically, about three feet from the daylight. The workers had done that, I don't know where they were in line, but everybody else knows to crouch, lying in the damn tunnel. And when they dug through the last bit, of course we [24:00] realized, they did, that they were 30 feet out of kilter. That's right. So when the guy got up, and then he, one guy got across and then they got a string and they end up with a code. And then they got the 78, whatever it was, out, and finally covered. That's when you're glad you weren't there; that's just -- you cannot imagine the confusion went on in that goddamn hole, because you couldn't turn around, you had to back out. You could turn around at [unintelligible]; there were two stations where you could turn around. But there were about a 100 or so, 100 people in that thing that had to get out, and everybody got out and got back into the building before [25:00] -- I'm not sure about that, whether they all got out before the Germans finally got into the --

BB: But you both knew, did you know that night, that tonight's the night?

DJ: No, no.

TG: Too soon.

DJ: I did not; Roho [25:13] [spelled phonetically] did. Maybe a couple of senior guys; I didn't know. But the word came through the wire, over the wire, that one of the senior types: this is it, don't screw it up, don't you do something.

BB: Okay. We've got about five minutes or so left with this tape, so we'll try to wrap up with some other questions.

VS: I think these are probably pretty important questions. It would be nice to hear your perspectives, both of you, in terms of knowing that there was the ability to communicate with the Americans, that there was that opportunity. Did it help morale at all in the camp [26:00]?

TG: I think our morale was pretty good.

DJ: I don't think that had anything to do with what your question was.

BB: Just, instead of being isolated, and not having any communication --

DJ: Well, we had all the German papers, because you read the paper, whether they --

TG: We were permitted to write one letter and two cards a month.

BB: Knowing that there was the ability to get things by the guards, and get things into the camp --

DJ: This item's not that big a deal, I don't think. I don't think -- it was good. You get a little chuckle, yeah. If it was worth it, yeah, yeah -- go ahead and do it.

TG: With all of that effort, we got two men up to Sweden in that Great Escape [26:50], one man got down through Spain back to England. Three men got out, all the way.

BB: And did you ever hear --

DJ: Three Swedes, or Norwegian, and they [27:00] went up through the north. No English --

TG: One guy went down through Spain.

DJ: Huh?

TG: One guy went down through Spain, and got to England.

DJ: No, not the three. No sir, no sir, no sir.

TG: You don't believe that? I think I can show you a book that says --

DJ: Well, I don't care what that book --

[laughter]

BB: If somebody was able to successfully escape, was there a term for that, that you were aware of?

DJ: A term? A term?

[talking simultaneously]

BB: A phrase.

TG: I don't think that there --

BB: A home run [27:30]?

DJ: No, no; I never heard of it. I don't say there wasn't, but -- see, when we started moving, march along the road, at the end lots of people fell out. Oh yeah. And --

BB: When you were still in the camp, and you heard about the outcome of those British escapees, how much did you know and how did that affect morale?

DJ: That was, that was -- that shook us [28:00]. Yeah, and it took a while for them to realize that -- they didn't shoot the 50 of them instantly; they did it in bits and pieces. They collected everybody, spread out around the country. You know, maybe collect, maybe, a

dozen guys here, six here, three there, and they'd put five of them in a car, start for camp. Some would make it to camp; some would stop by the road to pee, and they'd shoot him in the head.

BB: Did that influence how you did business, in terms of trying to stay --

DJ: It's -- let's say this; it reduced our enthusiasm, yeah. We didn't spend as much time -- I was Big X [28:47] in the South Camp, and I didn't work very hard.

TG: And the end seemed to be coming, too. That was another thing that slowed us down.

BB: Any recollections regarding General Clark [28:58]?

DJ: Sure. Big buddy [29:00]. I worked for him. Nice guy; he was very severe, but he -- non-committal. But it turned out, he was really a soft guy, after all. And after I, after --

BB: In this book, there's a photograph. You were in that photo?

DJ: No. That's before me.

BB: Because it identifies --

DJ: Oh, that's -- oh, hell. There's Ingram [29:30] -- oh, that's me, yeah. Yeah, and Jones, Ingram --

BB: Are you in this photo, by chance?

TG: No, I'm not in there. I was an underling [laughs].

DJ: The second from left. I'm not second from the left -- I'm right there in the middle.

BB: That's you? Okay -- the tall guy. Okay.

DJ: Ingram [29:56] --

BB: Ingram's to your right?

DJ: I'll recall [spelled phonetically] the rest of them, eventually [30:00]. Who in the hell is this? Oh, okay.

BB: Okay. The discussions we've had -- and it sounds like while you knew there was a larger effort afoot to smuggle things in through the passages, you personally didn't have anything to do with that. But you were doing, like, localized attempts to hide clothing, and things like that, on your own.

DJ: Oh yeah. Everybody, everybody. No, no. Nobody could escape unless you went through the committee, and you had to present a case. And, by the time we got there, there wasn't any new ones, other than the big one. And you didn't hide things unless we knew where they were. Everybody couldn't build a cubby hole, a hidey-hole, hell no.

BB: All right. Well, last question, last question. After you returned home did anyone ever debrief you about your experiences in the camp [31:00], in terms of the military --

DJ: A regular briefing, oh yeah.

BB: Did they talk to you at all about escape devices, or escape techniques?

DJ: I honestly don't recall.

TG: I don't recall either. There might have been some conversations about it, but no big deal.

BB: And you didn't, other than this book --

[end of transcript]

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