

Fort Hunt Oral History  
P.O. Box 1142  
Interview with Elvin Polesky  
by Brandon Bies, Vincent Santucci, Dana Dierkes, and Pam Fessler  
Frederick, Maryland  
June 16, 2008

INTERVIEWER: Today is June 16th, 2008. This is an oral history interview as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project with the National Parks Service. We are here in Frederick, Maryland interviewing Mr. Elvin Polesky at his home outside of Frederick. My name is Brandon Bies, Historian with the National Parks Service. We're also joined by Chief Ranger Vincent Santucci, as well as Public Affairs Specialist Dana Dierkes, and finally, we're also joined today with Pam Fessler of NPR. And so with that Mr. Polesky, could you please share some of your vital statistics? Would you mind just telling us when and where you were born?

ELVIN POLESKY: I was born in Arco, Minnesota [00:50], which is approximately 20 miles west of Marshall, on a farm [01:00]. My mother died when I was four years of age. And My father continued to farm the remainder of that because it was in the harvest -- excuse me -- harvest season. And, so, my babysitter was a German Shephard dog.

INT: And when were you born?

EP: April 21st, 1925.

INT: And growing up did you work on the farm? Did you go to school? Or did you do a little bit of both?

EP: I -- well, we -- he sold the farm, and then later on I hired out to various farmers. I hired out to P.M. Blood [phonetic] at Hector, Minnesota [01:55] for \$500 a year, which included my -- everything [02:00]. They bedded me, fed me, and got me involved in their church. My church that I would have attended was about a mile away, and I would have to walk. However, if I went with them it was a ride. A free ride. But it was the

other way about three-quarters of a mile. And I got very involved with the church. Then Mr. Blood had told me that he was on the draft board, and if I ever left him, chances were, the Army would pick me up, or the services would pick me up. But, as long as I worked for him I would I was safe. Well, after about the second year I decided well, I'll take my chances, so I left. Sure enough, within a month, I got a letter [03:00] from the President of the United States, and my friends and neighbors then selected me to be in the service. I went to Fort Snelling [03:10], Minnesota and they needed -- I think was about 60 percent for the Navy and 10 percent for the Marines and very few people for the Army -- this type of thing, so. I insisted on that the Navy wouldn't be a good place for me because I get seasick in a rowboat. So, they sent me home in -- it was in April -- they sent me home to August. I came back in August, and since all my buddies were now in the Navy, I kind of felt like maybe the Navy, you know, I -- maybe I would take a turn for the Navy. However, now everybody was going to the Army [04:00] and very few for the Marines, very few for the Navy, and I had made my choice.

INT: And what -- what year was this in?

EP: This was 1944.

INT: 1944. Okay. And if you don't mind me backing up real quick, prior to that, what level of education did you get there in Minnesota?

EP: I had, at that juncture of the game, I just had an 8th grade education.

INT: Okay.

EP: I had been -- received a scholarship from a spelling contest where I had gone all over the state, to go to Moorhead, Minnesota [04:40], to go to an agriculture school. Complete. Everything paid for. My father decided that -- he thought about this -- if I went there, I'd

probably be a better farmer than he was. So -- but so he needed me [05:00] on the farm, and I wasn't able to go. When the scholarship ran out, and he sold everything and moved off the farm, I could -- I'll go to school. It was too late. But, before this, then later on -- in the Army is where I got my education.

INT: Got you. And then, leading up to that, we like to ask for -- what do you remember about America's entry into World War II [05:28]? You know, what do you remember about Pearl Harbor [05:29], and how were your feelings at that time?

EP: Pearl Harbor was what, that was July --

INT: December.

EP: December 7th, 1941. I was working for Sam Johnson [05:42] on a dairy farm, which was -- not at all before -- I was younger then. Before going to Blood's, or going back to Blood's. I'd been to Blood's once, but then I had gone on the dairy farm. And, Sam [06:00] had told me then that -- he was not on draft board, by the way, but -- he says, "With my pull in the community -- when you get to the draft age, possibility is that -- if I haven't --see, he, at that time, wanted to send me -- he was already sending me to a school away. He thought I was good preacher material, and he was going to send me through school. So, he felt that if I did have to go into the service, I'd probably be a chaplain. So, this is -- this is great. I mean, all this encouragement that you got. But, however I left there, but I'd have went back to Blood's, and that's where I got the letter and got into the service.

INT: Got you. Okay. And so then back to 1944, you said it was, when you were actually drafted into the service [07:00].

EP: Drafted, yes.

INT: And did you have any -- I forgot to ask -- did you have any siblings?

EP: At that point -- let's see. Yes, I had my brother, Erhart [phonetic]. He was eight years younger, but he was a step-brother because my father had remarried.

INT: Got you. So, obviously, he wasn't -- he was too young to be in the service.

EP: He was too young. But he was in the service later on. We'll get to that.

INT: Okay. And so, you were then drafted in 1944. You said you went to Fort Snelling [07:37], Minnesota.

EP: Fort Snelling, Minnesota.

INT: And then, could you clarify that again? You said you were there for a few months, and you were -- you were in the Army at that point?

EP: Yes.

INT: Okay.

EP: I was in Fort Snelling [07:50]. It was about three weeks. Three or four weeks.

INT: Okay.

EP: And then they shipped me down to Camp Robinson [07:56], Arkansas [08:00]. That's where I was to take my basic training. However, now it gets interesting. I got to -- that was the first part of September, and I was -- they were -- I was training to be a sniper, you know, get up in the tree. So, this commander run me up the tree with a full field pack, and an M1 rifle, and he kept saying, "Get up a little further." And I said, "Sir, if I get any further it'll break and I'm going to come down." He gave me a direct order. Up the tree I went. I came down. I landed with the -- and the commander says I got up. He asked me if I was all right. I told him I was fine. He says I keeled over. That was the end of that. And, the next thing I remember, I woke up in the morgue, in the general hospital

[09:00] at Camp Robinson [09:01]. It was on a -- I guess around a Sunday noon. It seemed to me like I was going down a tunnel. And it come to the light at the end of the tunnel and I woke up, and it was a man that had turned on the light bulb. They were getting my body ready to ship it back to Minnesota [09:23] because I had been dead, apparently, from Friday evening until Sunday. But when I woke up, he said he scurried out of there and he says, "This stiff's alive." But I woke up. I had nothing but a sheet over me and a tag that said DOA, 8/30, 1944, you know, my name and then DOA. And my Army serial number. And if you need that, I can give that to you.

INT: Would you -- would you like to -- you think you could still rattle it off?

EP: Oh, yeah [10:00]. Well, when I was discharged, it was RA37773665.

INT: I've got it right here, and you're -- I can attest you're not lying.

EP: Right. But at that, when I fell out of the tree, I was AUS.

INT: Wow. Did you keep the toe tag?

EP: I have it typed [phonetic] someplace yeah.

INT: Do you really?

EP: Oh, the toe tag? No. No. I wish I'd kept it. She said I should have kept a lot of things. She says there's a lot of things you could have done. Maybe sued them. But, at that particular junction, it came. You really -- you really didn't want to be there, but, you were. Right.

INT: So, did you -- did you get a Purple Heart out of this?

EP: No, I didn't do that. But, okay, I went to -- so they had me in a hospital until, I guess about the first of December, and then I -- or just before it, I went to another staging area where they [11:00] would get me back in shape. And I got back to the -- I got back -- this

is a different company, because that company, they'd going on. But, anyway, I got Scarlet Fever [11:21]. Back to the hospital. 30 days quarantine. Spent Christmas in the hospital. January, I went back to the staging area again. Got the German measles. Back to the hospital. So, when I finally got back to a unit which was a completely -- completely new unit, and all this time was wasted, and for me to get any chance of basic training at all, they made me cadre. Put this Corporal stripe on my arm. No pay, but -- so I had to train [inaudible] cycle [12:00], which was, what, 17 weeks [phonetic]? But I had to learn it, and train it, all the same time. So, then, before all of this is over with, I decided I got to do all this, it would be nice to get the pay for it. So, I elected to go in the Paratroopers. But you can't get in the Paratroopers if you're over a certain height, or certain weight, or if you ever had any broken bones. Well, yes, I had broken bones when I fell out of the tree. But the Colonel that was filling this out, he says, "Well, I tell you what, you've had broken bones, but we'll put on here no broken bones, because once you've healed, they're stronger than they were originally [13:00]." So, okay. After three jumps, they kicked me out because the records finally caught up. I'd had broken bones, so they took my wings. So, back to -- back to the infantry. So, I went overseas in the infantry. Well, I -- before that I went into talk to the Company Commander, and I said, "You know what? For three months, been all through this other deal, I should be getting the pay for these things." And he says, "No, that's prestige," you know. "You're doing a fine job. You're probably one of the best cadre we've had. Everything is just fine. But, you don't get paid for it. You can stay on, we'll keep you here." But I decided if I didn't get pay, I wanted to leave, so I left, and they sent me overseas, and of course, there [14:00] -- as soon as I got off the boat I got PFC, and pretty soon I got Corporal and got

paid for it.

INT: So, can you talk a little bit this -- this whole time -- for it sounds like what, about a year or so, you were bouncing from training outfit to training outfit, and falling out of trees, and falling out of planes. And then -- but ultimately, you ended up in the infantry?

EP: The 33rd Division [14:30].

INT: In the 33rd Division?

EP: That was over in the Philippines [14:34] at the time. And, while I was in there, I hadn't been there too long, but they rowed us all up in a row, and they said we have some snipers up in the hills. Of course, that's what I was training for, but never really got there. But anyway, we had snipers up in the hills, so we're going to come through. This guy came through [15:00]. I guess he was whatever rank he was come through, and he says, "If I tap you on the shoulder, step back." I figure, oh boy, here I go. So he's tapped me on the shoulder, I step back, and every other one stepped back. Then from that point, I went to the 436th Signal. Heavy Construction Battalion. Aviation. That was under Fifth, Hammer Field, Air Force. I lucked out [phonetic]. So now I went to -- and I went in there -- we were repairing landing strips. You know, when they got bombed, we repaired them, that kind of thing. So, they decided to -- they needed a pole man, you know [16:00], to climb the pole and hook up telephones, that type of thing. But I guess I didn't listen too well when I got up there and I bumped my legs together, and I went down that pole, and I had slivers all up and down. They decided this was not for me. So then they said, "Well, what could you do?" And I said, "Oh, I can drive a truck. Before I got in the service, I drove a semi." You know, I bragged this thing up, right? Yeah, so, I get a deuce-and-a-half, and I'm going to be a water boy. I'm going to haul water 52

miles, you know, for drinking water. So I said, "Great." However, a deuce-and-a-half in the Army is different than a civilian semi. It's completely different [17:00]. I get in there and strip those gears. See, you had -- you had to double-clutch everything. I got professional in it but okay, so -- but as a Corporal, I was the water boy. And then I went on times when I was off duty, I'd go over to the Officer's area, and I'd bake for them. I'd bake them goodies and things like that. And, so, then they offered me, you know, a baker or cook. I could go from a Corporal to a Staff Sergeant if I take the job. But I didn't -- but I didn't want to do that. What I was doing -- I liked to bake. You know, I only liked to bake as a specialty because I -- they would let me have a jeep for a weekend or something like that, you know. Gee, this is nice. A working deal. But [18:00] -- so I didn't take it. But, anyway, then we left -- I was in the Philippines [18:10], we left the Philippines and went to Japan [18:11]. They came in at Nagoya, Japan [18:16] and --

INT: And this was immediately upon the capitulation? This is -- would have been --

EP: Yeah. See, the war was near being ended. So, we were going, and then I went in from Nagoya [18:37] to Kyoto, Japan [18:37] with the 436th. And we were starting to discharge a lot of the equipment. We'd take it out of the boat and dump it in the ocean, this type of thing. But -- I guess that shouldn't be uttered. But anyway --

INT: This was American equipment.

EP: Very good equipment, yeah [19:00]. So, while I was at -- in Japan with the 436th, I had an occasion to -- on one day -- and I'm not quite sure how this came about but, General Kruger [19:13] [phonetic] was the Commanding General for the Army -- the 6th -- the 6th Army. And during the transition period from the Air Force, I was being transitioned into the Army -- into General Kruger's [19:37] 6th Army. So, I had an indication -- I was



in his staff car with him, I remember, and he was asking me if we have -- he said this is only in the works, though -- "We don't have anything concrete, but if we start a college [20:00]" -- which would be a war college since the Army has one -- they have one in Fort Meade there near [phonetic] Washington [20:08]. We'd like to start a war college here in Kyoto, Honshu, Japan [20:15]. Would you like to attend?" Great, yes. But he says, "Now, I'm going to tell you" -- I don't remember if I was Corporal or Sergeant at the time, but I'm telling you right now, he says, "I'm looking you straight in the face," he said, "You do have a high school education." I said, "No sir, I haven't completed high school." "Oh, no problem at all," he said, "My daughter's coming over here, and she'll give you all the insides and outs, and you'll take a GED, and we'll get you in college. But in order to get in college, you're going to have to keep grades of 90 or above, you know, other than that, and you won't pull any Company details." Well, I wasn't pulling any [21:00] Company details anyway, because I was the water boy. But, anyway, that sounded great, so I accepted. And I went to the -- she came over and she prompted me what I need to know to take the test -- to pass the test -- I'm going to the war college now. Eight hours a day, five days a week, Monday through Friday. This is great, and you'd be surprised at what I took. I took Japanese agriculture, I took a veterinarian course, I took the German language. I had a German background. My folks taught German at home. But I figured this is two hours -- hey, I can just sit and do whatever I like. And I took business law. And this was great. This -- this was good education [22:00]. I'm now, you know, getting college credits, and this type of thing. And then it came to the point -- I think I had about 17 months in, and I could get out on the point system, you know, be discharged on the point system. And I says, "Well, gee, this is great." But if I took

[unintelligible] on the point system, then I go back home where I have to ride that boat, you know, going home. I'd rather fly. So, in order to fly, I'll have to take a discharge and reenlist. Now I became RA. I reenlisted after 17 months, 16 days and whatever it was. And, I went over to the airport in Tokyo [22:48], and guess what? The only time it ever snowed and sleeted, and the planes couldn't take off [23:00]. And by the time -- my leave time was running out. My 30 days that they gave me -- or 60 days -- oh, 60 days. They gave me 60 days, you know, for service or whatever. It wasn't charged. So, I took my boat home. Went to Camp Polk, Louisiana [23:19]. After I went to -- went home on leave. Came back to Camp Polk, Louisiana. And, guess what? I was working in the -- I always worked administrative. So, I was working in the headquarters and here is all these boxes. These are going to Fort Dix [23:46]. These are going someplace else. These are going someplace else. The medic corps are going -- the medic corps are staying here at Camp Polk [23:55]. And, how nice would it be now, you know [24:00], I'm supposed to be a Christian. But, what would happen if my records went from returning back to Japan, going to Fort Dix [24:10]? I mean, this could happen. I -- obviously, it did. And I was in the 79th Truck convoy, going from Camp Polk, Louisiana [24:24] to Fort Dix, New Jersey [24:23]. Got to Fort Dix. My job there was driving a school bus, which was great.

[laughter]

So, I'm reading the bulletin board one day, and here's this -- this announcement up there. "Need linguists at Fort -- no, it didn't say Fort Hunt [24:44], it said Post Office Box 1142 [24:45], Alexandria, Virginia. They were looking for linguists. They were looking for two linguists. So, hey, I know the German language, see. This -- I -- want to fit in here

[25:00], so I put in for it. This other guy put in for it. He didn't know the first thing about the German language, so I don't know why they took him. But anyway, this guy came up, introduced himself as Captain Apple [25:12]. A-P-P-L-E. He was a double agent. I didn't really know that at the time, but I learned it later. He worked for the German Army. He also worked for the American Army. He had the American Captain's bars, the American uniform. We had a nice chat, and he says, "I can use you. You're great. You've got everything we need." "But," he said, "You'll have to sit tight because it will take time to." It took about ten days. I got my orders to go to Alexandria, Virginia [25:54] on the train. Report to Post Office Box 1142 [26:00]. Got in there in the evening. Found a cab driver and I told him he -- actually -- take me to Post Office Box 1142 [26:12], and he says, "I can do that tomorrow morning at 8:00. I can't do it now. The Post Office is closed." Okay. But, I says, "I got to report by midnight." That's what my orders read. So, he says, "Wait a minute." He went and talked to somebody else, and the guy came over and he said, "I'll take the two of you," and he took us out there, which is now Fort Hunt [26:34]. Took us out -- I guess it was then, too. Took us out there down the boulevard and turn off on this road. Got back to -- it looked like an outhouse in the middle of nowhere. And this guard came out, and he says, "You guys get out of the cab, pay him whatever it is, and get out of here." They put us in the weapons carrier [27:00] and rode us back and forth across the plowed field for a couple hours. Pulled us over to a building to get whatever sleep he can. Breakfast is at 8:00, and if you're -- if you're late, if you miss breakfast, the next would be noon. There is no -- we don't service anything in between. Okay, it's one of those places. Okay. But anyway, 8:00, went for breakfast. Went over, and they give us some orientation, what we'd probably be

doing. And, I remember my first assignment was -- they strapped a suitcase to this arm, and would've had a lock -- had a padlock on it, put a 45 over here. But I was skinny and that 45 wanted to drag down. Put me in an open Jeep and took me to the Pentagon [28:00]. And I was to report to a certain office. I walked that Pentagon. I walked every floor. I think I must have hit every office -- every place I got, he had just left. And I went all five floors. I was tired by evening. I hadn't eaten. I mean -- you're a young kid and, you know, you're doing what you're told to do, right? So, I finally got ahold of this one guy, and, I think he was a colonel, and he says, "Guess what? You've got to go to Fort Belvoir, Virginia [28:37]." By this time, it is sleeting and everything, the Jeep's an open Jeep. Go to Fort Belvoir. Met with the Commanding -- met with the Commanding General. Got in there and he said, "You know why you're here?" I say, "Yes, sir." I got the satchel and I supposed to see so-and-so, or whatever the name was [29:00]. But I says, "He was always one step ahead of me." He said, "You didn't get discouraged," and I says, "Well, probably yes, but you know it's my job." And, so I'd seen the General, and he opened it up, and what was in that satchel was a brick painted gold. I'd carried a gold brick around the whole day. He says, "You're not upset?" And I said, "Well, I'm hungry." They had -- he had food already brought in. They fed me and everything, and he says, "Now we're going to take you back to your organization, but you're not going back in the Jeep, you're going in my car." So he sent me back in his car. But it was great. Then he'd -- the General was -- he was real nice, you know, this type of thing. But you know, it's great. I got back over there and back. And so [30:00], the next thing I was doing was getting mattresses out of this building, and I had to take it across [unintelligible] and I --

INT: Before we leave that last discussion -- before we leave that last discussion, we'll come back to the mattresses. Do you have any thoughts, or did the General disclose to you why you were carrying a brick around? Were you being tested?

EP: Well, he felt that I'd -- I was the good -- a good soldier. He says, "You follow orders good," you know? And he gave me a nice little pep talk. But he didn't -- other than that, he said, "Excuse me. The organization you are with is apparently Secret, or Top Secret," or whatever. But he didn't -- we didn't get into anything, and there was nothing to discuss other than my gold brick.

INT: So, in the morning, when they strap the bag to you [31:00], were the instructions to go find somebody in particular?

EP: Yes, a name in the Pentagon [31:07]. But, every place I went, he was -- he had already left. And I started in the sub-basement. There's a basement, there's a -- I found out there's a sub-basement beyond the basement. I was so tired from walking. But there's times that I'd kind of sit down a little bit, but what -- when I sat down, I guess they were watching me. Said if you hadn't sat down, you would have caught him. But this is an endurance test, is what it was. To see how I would -- how -- how I would act under, you know, under. It's like I'd already been overseas during the war time.

INT: Were you alone?

EP: I was alone.

INT: Did you drive alone.

EP: I drove over there alone in a Jeep.

INT: Okay.

EP: Now wait a minute. A man drove me over in a Jeep [32:00].

INT: Okay.

EP: They drove me over in a Jeep. And then I went for my walk. It started in the basement, had to go to the sub-basement. Came up. Went to the first floor, second floor, third floor, fifth floor. I always missed him. He was just here, but you just missed him.

NT: How long were you doing this?

EP: It was all day.

INT: Wow.

EP: I was tired. I hadn't eaten anything since breakfast.

INT: And this was one of your first days at 1142 [32:30]?

EP: Well, yeah, it was -- that was one of the first days. I used to find out whether or not I would -- could stand under pressure or whatever. I had already served overseas.

INT: Going back, you'd mentioned that this captain who had been a double agent --

EP: [affirmative]

INT: -- had come up and interviewed you. He came up to Fort Dix [32:55]?

EP: To Fort Dix [33:00], yes.

INT: Okay. And he was from -- he was an officer at 1142 [33:04]?

EP: Yes.

INT: Okay.

EP: Well, that's what I was told.

INT: Did you know anything about what he -- what he did at 1142?

EP: He was probably -- I'm not sure. But we had 250 German war prisoners underneath, you know, at Fort Hunt [33:26] underneath. I guess that's still there. Because I was down there.

INT: Does -- can you describe what you mean by that?

EP: They had German prisoners. They were down underground at Fort Hunt [33:40]. There was -- there was an exit -- there was a couple exits. But anyway, that's where the German war prisoners were. Now, whether this Captain Apple [33:55], whether he was [34:00] actually a German officer or whether he was one of ours, but I think --well, he was a double-agent, actually. Excuse me, I keep -- I rode a bike [unintelligible].

INT: Was he -- was he born in Germany, or was he born in the United States? Was he an American citizen, or German citizen?

EP: I'm not sure.

INT: You said you thought his name was Apple [34:25]?

EP: Apple. A-P-P-L-E. Just Apple, like an apple.

INT: Is there -- is there any -- any chance -- not to challenge your recollection, that his name could have been Abels [34:34]? A-B-E-L-S.

EP: May have been.

INT: Because we -- just because we know that there was a Captain Erich Abels [34:46] who was 1142 [34:48] at that time, who we're actually in contact with. He's still alive, in California.

EP: Okay. Is he of German descent?

INT: He's -- he is of German descent. He was an American [35:00], but he was from a German's family who spoke German. I take it back. I think he was actually Austrian. He was actually born in Austria. And, as soon as you said Apple [35:11], then the name that came in mind was this -- was Abels [35:13]. It's a similar name -- not the same. We've never heard the name Captain Apple before.

EP: Well, that's --

INT: Just curious if it could have been one in the same --

[End of Tape 1A]

[Beginning of Tape 1B]

INT: We'll get going again. Again, that question was do you remember about when this was? Presumably this was 1946.

EP: 1946. It would have been in the summer or fall, been in the fall, because we left there and went to Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York [00:21], in a staging area. In the staging area, I would be assigned to go to different places in the -- sometimes in New York City, to trail somebody. Not to encounter, but to find out where they were and to report [inaudible].

INT: Really? And by this -- this was when you were at Mitchell Field [00:48]?

EP: Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York.

INT: We'll definitely want to ask you some questions about that, when we -- when we -- when we get to there.

INT: I was thinking Abels [00:55], too. Did -- was there any recollection of Abels [01:00]?

INT: Not -- it could be possible, but he did remember it as being Apple [01:06] as opposed to Abels [01:08].

INT: How did you learn that he was a double German agent?

EP: I don't know if he told me, or probably something let out that he was. Because he would talk German fluently, and at that time, I was pretty good on my German, too. Coming from a German family, even though my name sounds Polish.

INT: To you, what does German double agent mean? What does that mean?



EP: Well, it means that he plays both sides. He plays the American side as well as the German side.

INT: Double spy. So --

EP: Double spy.

INT: Is he working for the United States [02:00]?

EP: He's work -- or is he working for the [unintelligible]. I assumed he was working for -- it is my assumption, that's where I was at, that he was working for the Americans.

INT: All right. So, again, this time period we're talking about would've been, you think, summer or early fall of 1946.

EP: The fall of 1946, yes. And then '47 -- well, I would think it was around December that we moved the company to Long -- Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York [02:33].

INT: The date that we have is November 1st, 1946.

EP: That we went to --

INT: Is when the transfer orders came through.

EP: Okay.

INT: You had, which essentially closed P.O. Box 1142 [02:44].

EP: Then we went to Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York [02:49]. That's a possibility.

INT: Okay.

EP: I mean it's been a while.

INT: So, do you remember about how long you were at 1142 [02:57] before you were transferred [03:00]? Was it a few months or so, or more than that?

EP: Just a couple months there, down in the fall, when we were at Fort Hunt [03:07].

INT: Okay.

EP: And then we went to Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York [03:14].

INT: Got you. I know we'd all like to ask some more questions about -- you mentioned about the prisoners and everything, but I -- before we get too far off track, I didn't want to interrupt you, you were starting to tell another story about moving mattresses.

EP: Oh, yes. They had mattresses in the building over here, which is -- it was a temporary building. And we moved -- we loaded the mattresses in the truck. We took them over here to a building over on this side, and we stacked them up. So, next day, the mattresses were all back over here. So, we'd move them back over here again [04:00]. This went on and on for about a week. I'd mark -- I started marking those mattresses. So, I was moving the same mattresses, right. They were going down underground and bringing them up in the other building. I get wild, don't I?

FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes.

[laughter]

EP: So, we would move -- so I finally said to him, "You know, these mattresses look pretty familiar." But this is to find out whether or not the endurance, whether I, under pressure, you know. I had already been in a war zone. Now I'm, you know, under pressure. How much can I take? It's a game -- it became a game. I pretty soon realized it's a game, you know? To find out, the endurance test, how I could handle this.

INT: So, other than moving around gold bricks and mattresses [05:00], once they had figured out that you were for real and they could trust you, what sort of tasks did they set you to doing at 1142 [05:06]? What was your assigned job there?

EP: Oh, geez. Well, when I got up to Mitchell Field [05:17] I was a mail -- I was a mail clerk. I guess it actually started -- no, it didn't start in Alexandria [05:25], because I

never went in to Alexandria. I did various jobs, they give me various jobs on the base. Because I was hired in as a linguist for the German language. I really didn't do much of that. I did a lot of things. I guess to find out whether or not they could trust me. If they assigned me a good job, or whatever I did. And a lot of things I did because we had a couple hours every day that we had to either do volleyball, basketball, football, baseball, or go rowing the Potomac [06:00]. Hey, ride that boat. Going across the Potomac River to the other side was an old folk's home. Hey, go on over there and talk to old people, you know. Of course, I couldn't tell them anything, I didn't know anything, but I couldn't tell them anything. Go over there and visit the old folks, and we'd row back in the two-hour period, because there was a two-hour period. You had to come back. That was pretty good. Pretty nice. But I -- they had a PX over there, hey, that was nice. Well, it wasn't a PX, it was something else, because they were civilians, they weren't military. Huh?

FS: It doesn't look like you did very much there.

EP: No, he -- no, no, I didn't do a whole lot there, and I really didn't have too much contact with the prisoners, for one reason or another. I don't know why.

INT: Too much contact. Did you have any contact?

EP: Very little, if it was any.

INT: So, did you ever see a prisoner [07:00]?

EP: Oh, yeah. Hell, I'd go down there, even when I shouldn't be down there, but I was down there. I'd talked to some of them. Because I knew enough German language then, at that point. Now I forgot most of it. Forgot most of my Japanese, too. [laughs]

INT: What was your understanding of why the prisoners were there?

EP: They were there to, you know, to find out what information we could from them. That -- that was like a spy mission, this type of thing. But I didn't actually get involved in that portion of it. Maybe because I had -- well, my mother was dead at this point. She had died when I was four, but she had come from Hamburg [07:47], and that's where this mission was going back to. So, they sort of -- I didn't have too much contact with these prisoners [08:00].

INT: When you spoke with them, did you speak to them in German?

EP: In German. At that point I could. At this point I'd probably be, well, wouldn't be that great. Wouldn't be any worse than the Japanese that I know. Or the Korean.

INT: And, could you describe again for us what you remember about where the prisoners were? Where were they kept? You referenced that they were down below somewhere.

EP: They were down below. Down below ground.

FS: In what? In a building?

EP: In a building, but it was below the ground. We were in the upper part, they were down below. It was a temporary building that sat over this cave or whatever it was. I was down there a couple times. You went down steps and went down. But, I was instructed when I went down, not to patronize with them [09:00].

INT: And when they were down there, were they -- were they confined? Were they in cells, were they being guarded, or were they free to come and to go?

EP: They were free to go back and forth downstairs, but they never came out above ground. Or that I seen.

FS: Were they all together?

EP: Yeah, they were all together. They had -- I called them rooms. They might have been

cells, but they were -- they were down there. And I was instructed not to fake patronize.

[laughs] Don't catch me doing that, in other words.

INT: The enclosures had like area like open fields in it. Is that where you guys would play football and volleyball? You said, though, that the prisoners never got to come out unless --

EP: Not that I seen, no --

INT: Not that you saw?

EP: Unless they were out at night or something like that [10:00]. There might have been another group bringing them out or something like that.

INT: Cool.

EP: Because I remember I was going home on leave, and I was kind of telling my father a little bit about it then. He says, "Oh, we've got prisoners over here at the canning factory." He says, "But you're not allowed to talk to them. You can go over and look and say hi, but you're not allowed to talk to them," because they worked in the canning factory. Sleepy Eye, Minnesota [10:31]. But --

INT: Go ahead.

EP: He said, "Don't talk to them, you're not allowed to talk to them because you'd probably lose your job if you do." I figured they would. Going to lose my job in the Army, thank you, Jesus.

[laughter]

INT: You mentioned the number, there were 250 prisoners. Is that just an estimate, or how did you know there were 250?

EP: That's what I was informed [11:00], that they were down there. And when we moved to

Mitchell Field [11:05], they were in an area distant from where we were. They were in the same general area, but we didn't have contact with them. They were in buildings above ground there.

INT: Were they all German prisoners, or were there any other types of prisoners?

EP: That's what I was instructed -- they were all German prisoners.

INT: And did the same group of German prisoners transfer from Alexandria [11:30] to Mitchell Field [11:32]?

EP: To Mitchell Field.

INT: So it was the same group, it wasn't --

EP: It was the same group.

INT: Okay.

EP: And it was the same group that was going back to Hamburg, Germany [11:39]. I would have to extend my enlistment at that particular juncture, or reenlist, and I choose not to do so. So, then I was transferred out of there. And then, my service became very interesting from then on [12:00]. They offered me to go to West Point [12:01], and I choose not to, and they said, "Why?" All this spit-and-polish. Guess where I went? I walked the Unknown Soldier, North Post Fort Myer [12:14]. Spit-and-polish. Two on, four off. How do I get out of this outfit? There are two ways you can get -- legally get out of this outfit. One is not so good. That's to go AWOL [12:31]. When we catch you, you'll wish you were dead. Now, if you die, we -- we can't control that. In other words, you're going to be dead either way. But, I did get out of there. I did work a deal, and got out of there. Guess where I went? Fort Riley, Kansas [12:51]. A horse outfit. I think I'd been mis-assigned [13:00]. I got out of there. Went to South Post Fort Myer [13:04]. That's

where General Eisenhower [13:07] became involved. You know, we had talked about that before. But anyway, I went to South Post, Fort Myer, Virginia. And --

FS: Is that where you got your commission -- back commission, or?

EP: Oh, the --

FS: I want you to tell me about it.

EP: I had a Congressional promotion. I couldn't retro promotion [unintelligible] in Japan. But, anyway, South Post, Fort Myer [13:46], and I worked in the Pentagon [13:50], and I was shipped here for Secretary of War Patterson [14:00]. And there was occasions we'd go up and pick up Ike [phonetic], you know, General Eisenhower [14:10], five-star General. And I remember telling Ike at one juncture of the game, I says, "You ever run for president and I'll vote for you." How little did I know at that juncture he was going to run for president, and I did vote for him. But, anyway, I drove for Secretary of War Patterson [14:27]. And we'd go up and pick up Ike [14:29] and take him to the golf course. So, after the first couple of times, Patterson would say, "Sergeant, go up and pick up the General and then come back and pick me up, because every time you go over there, maybe if he calls you in, you go have a cup of coffee. I got to sit in the car and wait."

[laughter]

But maybe he made good coffee -- or somebody made good coffee, but she always called me. "Sergeant Ski [phonetic], got a hot cup of coffee for you [15:00]." And I said, "Picking up the General," he could wait. "You'll have your coffee, just sit there and have your coffee, he can wait." So, I'd have my coffee and he'd wait. I felt pretty big about this. See, I'm a sergeant in the United States Army. Of course, I'm not wearing a

sergeant's uniform. I'm wearing [unintelligible] outfit because that's what I am now.

Anyway, we'd pick up Ike [15:27], and go back and pick up Patterson [15:30] and take him to the golf course. Then I'd go do whatever, then come back at a certain time and pick them up. That was great. I really enjoyed that.

FS: That's very interesting life.

EP: Very interesting.

INT: I just wanted to ask you, you mentioned that these German prisoners at Fort Hunt [15:52] were being sent on a mission back to Hamburg [15:56]. If they were prisoners, do you know why they were getting sent back to Hamburg [16:00]?

EP: They were going back after the war. They were going back home. I'm sorry, but I said a mission. We went from Fort Hunt, Virginia [16:06]. We took them to Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York [16:12]. But it wasn't actually on the field itself, it was a staging area east of the field at about two miles. At that point, I became an -- if you want to put that in there, that -- I became -- the classified mail clerk. I handled all the classified mail.

INT: Do we have a date, approximate date of going to Mitchell Field [16:41]?

INT: Yeah, we talked about that when you were out. It was -- according -- Mr. Polesky remembered it as being maybe around the winter or December of 1946. The official orders show it as November 1st, 1946. And, I assume that was -- that was driving?

EP: From Fort Hunt [17:00] to Mitchell Field [17:03] -- I believe we went by train. I'm thinking we did. I don't think we drove. We may have.

INT: Did you travel with the prisoners?

EP: No, I wasn't actually with the prisoners. I was -- well, yes, we were with the prisoners, but -- so maybe -- no, it had to be by train, I imagine. Or maybe it may have been by bus,



I'm not -- I don't quite remember that juncture.

INT: But it was not with the prisoners?

EP: Well, I wasn't in with the prisoners. When the prisoners went up, we went up at the same time as they did.

INT: Okay. Were there MPs with the prisoners?

EP: I would imagine there were.

INT: So, you didn't see them?

EP: No.

INT: Okay. Getting back to 1142 [17:57]. From the best of your recollection [18:00], could you describe for us what the post looked like? Obviously in your military career, you were transferred to an awful lot of military posts. So, we don't expect you to be able to necessarily remember every single detail, but what can you tell us if you just generalized what you remember about the actual post itself?

EP: The actual post at the time, I believe there are two buildings that were two stories high. One of them was where our building was and the other was where the mess hall was, probably the headquarters. And then there was this small building over on this -- over on one side -- south side, I guess. It was where we got the mattresses, took them by truck over to a small building -- a temporary building on the other side. But, apparently from this building to the other building, those mattresses were dropped underground [19:00] and taken underground and brought back up in the other one, because they were always in the same place where they were before. After a while you sort of remembered hey, that's where they sat before. These are the same mattresses. And now for where the prisoners were was in a different building. It was a one-story building on the upper part,

and the prisoners were down below, you know, whether it was by elevator or steps, I don't remember how it went. But you could go from steps on one side of the building, and go down a hallway and come up on the other side. But the prisoners were back from the -- so, their area must have been pretty big. I was never back in where the prisoners themselves were. I was instructed not to go back there.

INT: Was the post open and easily visible, or was it secluded with lots of trees?

EP: It was secluded [20:00], and you would actually have to know it was back there too. And it's like I was telling Eileen [phonetic], I never went on pass while I was there. I never got a pass and went into Alexandria or Mount Vernon or anything because we were about midway in between, as I remember. But going across in that rowboat, over to Fort Washington [20:19] on the other side, that was my most that I can recollect is being with the outside world. Going over and talking to those old folks, I had a ball. And had to be back in my allotted time, because that was time for calisthenics or ball game or whatever you were given two hours for physical. And physical was rowing that boat across the Potomac. That's a long stretch through there.

INT: You mentioned that there were about 250 German prisoners.

EP: [affirmative] [21:00]

INT: Do you remember about how many Americans were stationed at 1142 [21:04] at that time?

EP: Oh, geez, there was no -- we didn't have all that many. I don't remember, though.

INT: Do you think there were more Americans, or more German prisoners?

EP: More Germans.

INT: So there were -- so they actually outnumbered the Americans?

EP: I believe they did, if I remember right. There's only sketches of that I remember but I do remember rowing the boat across the river.

FS: [laughs]

INT: Now, do you remember what most of those other American -- presumably everyone else at 1142 [21:43] didn't have the honor of carting around gold bricks and moving mattresses. Do you remember what -- what other people's jobs might have been there?

EP: Well, there was different -- there was a couple people helping me [22:00] with the mattresses. Those couple people rowed the boat across to over there. I mean, that's what we did for our -- boy, that -- trying to tell [unintelligible].

INT: I guess so [phonetic].

EP: But anyway, so -- well, different -- different people had different jobs. Some people did paperwork. I went with the gold brick to the Pentagon [22:33]. I think they were trying to test me as to whether I could follow orders to do what I was instructed to do. But I don't -- probably 40, 50 people, but other than that, there wasn't that many.

INT: Do you know if any of these other Americans were working with the German prisoners [23:00]?

EP: We were working more directly with the -- see, I was hired in as a linguist, but I never helped at that point. I was always doing other things. Maybe because they needed to keep me busy.

INT: Of the staff that was there, do you remember, could everyone, like yourself, could everyone speak German? Regardless of whether or not they were working with the prisoners, do you know if everyone spoke German?

EP: I am not sure whether everybody, but I -- that would be my assumption, that they would

have some sort of -- even the guy that came down with me from Dix he could talk German but at the time, he says, "I'm not being hired as you are, you're going down as a linguist, and that's on your orders," but I forget what was on his orders that -- I really didn't see much of him once we got down there. Where ever he was, I don't --

INT: Have you retained copies of your orders [24:00]?

EP: Gee. I don't -- I don't think they're here. I don't think they're here. Because they would have been in a green footlocker. No, I don't remember where that footlocker went. If we wouldn't have it up in the attic.

INT: Can you say what -- exactly what time frame you were at Fort Hunt [24:33]? What year, what month through what year, what month?

EP: Well, it was in the fall of 1946. And then we went to Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York [24:45] probably about October, November.

INT: So, you weren't there very long.

EP: No, I wasn't at Fort Hunt [24:53] very long.

INT: Couple months.

EP: A couple months, yeah. And, we went to Mitchell Field [25:00]. And, at the Santini [25:03] [phonetic] area. It was an area off of the base itself.

INT: I guess, let's talk a little bit about Mitchell Field [25:14] then. What was different at Mitchell Field, or was the operation essentially the same as it had been at Fort Hunt [25:20]?

EP: The operation was basically the same. The prisoners -- we had the prisoners over in a building separate from where we were. At that point, there were 42 enlisted men and 21 officers. So, that's probably what we had at Fort Hunt [25:35], too. Because we came up

from Fort Hunt. Forty-two enlisted men and 21 officers.

INT: And how -- how can you remember that? That's interesting that you would remember that detail.

FS: [inaudible]

EP: So, yeah [26:00], that's what it was. 21 officers, 42 enlisted men. And I was assigned to a major at Mitchell Field [26:08]. And, I had various jobs up there. Very -- they were -- I was the confidential, or the mail clerk. I handled classified mail. You know, confidential, secret, top secret mail. I was the mail clerk. At times, I went on assignment to New York. I remember going there to -- there's a guy there that had gone AWOL [26:38]. Not from our outfit, I guess, from another outfit or whatever. And, I was to go down and track him. You know, report his whereabouts. I was there quite a while. I enjoyed that very much. I was living in a hotel. I was getting good food. [laughs] [27:00] But, obviously, I had to turn him in, and they had to pick him up, then give me another job.

INT: Do you remember the name of the major at Mitchell Field [27:11]?

EP: No, I was trying -- this morning I was trying to remember what that major's name was, and I, for the life of me I can't remember his name.

INT: Since you dealt with the mail, was it mail only to the military personnel of the United States, or was there any mail for the prisoners?

EP: As far as I know. What I handled was for the 21 officers and the 42 enlisted men. There was another mail clerk and apparently he took care of the others.

INT: And were you just delivering and sorting the mail, or were you actually going through and censoring out and reading the mail?

EP: No, I wasn't censoring anything. I picked up the mail at the Post Office, and then it went to another place. I got it back to give it to wherever [28:00] -- no, I had the -- mail room, to whoever got the mail.

INT: And, again, we've kind of asked this once before, but would the operation at Mitchell Field [28:16], was it -- you mentioned you thought it was pretty similar to that was going on Fort Hunt [28:20]. Again, was that more work with these German prisoners?

EP: I didn't really have much contact with them at Mitchell Field [28:31]. I had more contact with them at Fort Hunt [28:32]. Because at Mitchell Field I became more involved as a mail person, you know, mail clerk. And then various little assignments they'd send me on.

INT: Can -- what would -- so, you said you had more contact with them at Fort Hunt [28:55]. Can you remember any kind of the contact that you did have with them [29:00]?

EP: Other than seeing them there and where they were, it was like -- it was like a big room that they were in. There was like cells, but it was still like a big room, and I really didn't talk to them. I was instructed not to. I guess, more or less, to find out whether I could follow orders or not.

INT: So what kind of contact did you have then, with them?

EP: Other than take him to certain areas or whatever. I only talked to them like I was instructed to talk to them. Not to -- not to get personal with them. I would have liked to get personal with them. Since my mother had come from Hamburg [29:50] and this is where this outfit was going back to, so --

INT: And the conditions [30:00] they were in, were they comfortable conditions? Or was it rustic?

EP: No, it looked comfortable. From what I seen, it was comfortable.

INT: Comfortable furniture?

EP: Yeah, more or less.

INT: Tables? Could they recreate?

EP: Yeah.

INT: Play games, cards?

EP: I guess they did back in there, yeah. Back in those days, I could speak pretty fluent German, but I was instructed not to.

INT: At this underground room, pretty comfortable layout?

EP: It looked like it was pretty comfortable.

INT: Like a lounge or a club, or like -- because you think about a prison, you think about real basic?

EP: Yeah, like cells. I think they were more comfortable than it sounds. Maybe there's times that they weren't celled. Maybe they were. Maybe -- I didn't see that part of it [31:00].

INT: Were they restricted in terms of movement within that room, or did they have some freedoms to walk around and mingle?

EP: They could walk around down there, yes, in that general area because where I went was like a hallway down, you know, in and out. I really didn't have that much contact with them.

INT: So it wasn't like they were in solitary confinement behind bars? They had freedom?

EP: They had freedom within that area. It wasn't -- it wasn't like a jail, as I remember.

INT: And what did they wear? What kind of clothing did they wear?

EP: I don't --

INT: Street clothes, or prison uniform, or military uniform?

EP: Well, I didn't talk until -- well, when I did talk to them and everything. They didn't -- I didn't regard them as prisoners -- this type of thing. But I was instructed [32:00] not to have conversations with them.

INT: And even though you couldn't talk --

FS: Don't know what they had on, you would think.

EP: I know. I was trying to remember what they had on.

INT: And even though they couldn't talk to you, did any of them speak English?

EP: I don't -- I don't recall.

INT: And did they have American magazines or things like that? Newspapers?

EP: Yeah, they could see that -- that was given to them.

INT: Okay. I think we'll go ahead now and pause and take a little break, because our tapes go for an hour and we've gone for an hour and one minute, so we're going to run out soon.

EP: Have we been there this long?

INT: Believe it or not, we have. So, we're going to -- we're going to take a quick break here, and I'll --

[End of Tape 1B]

[Beginning of Tape 2A]

INT: Yep, I think we're in good shape. So, again, I'm going to give another brief introduction, and then we'll pick right back up. Today is June 16th, 2008. This is an oral history interview as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project run by the National Park Service. We are here in Frederick, Maryland interviewing Mr. Elvin Polesky, a former veteran of P.O. Box 1142 [00:28] and many other military bases during the World War II time.



This is the second in a series of recorded interviews. This is Brandon Bies from the National Park Service, joined today by Vincent Santucci of the National Park Service. Also by Dana Dirks of the National Park Service; and finally, by Pam Fessler, a correspondent with NPR. And so, with that, Mr. Polesky, I think we'd like to pick up and maybe ask [01:00] some more specific questions of you to really try to hash out some details, both about 1142 [01:05], and a little bit about Mitchell Field [01:08], as well. And so again -- and you'll have to forgive us for asking some of the same questions so many times, but what at all do you remember about the types of prisoners who were there at 1142 [01:21]? We realize you didn't see them very often, but from what you remembered hearing or seeing, were these military prisoners, like people who would've been captured in the military, or were they different? Anything you remember about them whatsoever.

EP: I think they were probably basically military, but I really didn't have too much contact with them, legally. But occasionally you'd get over and speak to them a little bit. But I really didn't have that much. I was more or less involved in -- well, at Mitchell Field [02:00] I was strictly the classified mail clerk, as well as other functions. They would -- I would, from time to time, chase down an AWOL [02:12] down in New York City [02:14] or various other places and go check them out, find out where they're at, and -- not to talk to them, just to you know, get them zeroed in, and then it was up to the Military Police or the Navy Police or whoever, to go pick them up. And then I'd go up, to another function.

INT: Did you get the sense that there was anything different about 1142[02:43], and then later, Mitchell Field [02:46], as opposed to a -- say, just a regular prison camp? Would you refer to it as a regular prisoner of war camp, or was it something a little bit different?

EP: I think it was -- I think it was possibly it was a little different. It was more [03:00] -- not so much a -- like a prisoner of war camp, but rather they -- I believe that the prisoners were probably given a little bit more leeway, were -- they felt more comfortable. But, however, I really didn't have that much contact with them, other than seeing them, and a couple of them I got to know by name, but other than that, I was instructed not to patronize with them. My job is basically classified mail clerk, and occasionally I'd go on assignments, like chase somebody down, an AWOL [03:42] or something like that, zero them in, and then -- but don't actually make myself known that I was [unintelligible] I was getting them, but I was turning them in, but, you know, not to talk to them, but to let the MPs come in, or the SPs, or as there happened to be, and pick them up [04:00].

INT: And these are American soldiers?

EP: American soldiers.

INT: These were not Germans?

EP: German, no, no. Strictly American. Okay.

INT: Okay. It's one of the things that strikes me is that we are talking about a group of German prisoners well over a year after the war ended. Did -- was this typical during World War II to have German prisoners this long after the war ended, or do you think there was something that set this group apart from a typical prisoner?

EP: I'm not quite sure, because when I went home on leave to Sleepy Eye, Minnesota [04:37], and my father telling me that at the canning factory, they had German war prisoners. He showed me where they were, he said -- this was after the war -- this was during this period of time. He said don't talk to them, just wave or greet them that way, but don't physically talk. But I'm sort of an inquisitive type, so [05:00], but anyway. I

did kind of try to talk to them, but this was after the war, this was during this particular time. But, while I was stationed at 1142 [05:11] at Fort Hunt, Virginia [05:12], I never went on leave, other than across the river to Fort Washington in the Old Soldiers Home, and go over there. But other than that -- but I don't recall going into Alexandria or Mount Vernon, or any place like that.

INT: Okay. You mentioned that the prisoners at 1142 [05:34] were associated with some sort of -- you refer to them as underground buildings, or underground compound. Could you describe that anymore? We're very, very interested in that. As you may or may not know, Vince might have mentioned to you that most everything at Fort Hunt [05:54] has been bulldozed. It's almost all gone. We really don't have [06:00] much idea of what 1142 [06:01] looked like, because it was immediately bulldozed after the war, and so any information that you can provide about what these underground facilities would have looked like or where they might have been would be really helpful.

EP: Okay. When they picked -- I guess it's a picnic area now, up on this far end was the two taller buildings. One of the being the one that we billeted in, and another one, of course, the mess hall, and then the headquarters. This end of the parade field, as it was, over on this side was the building where I kept getting the mattresses out, and on a truck hauling it over to this side, to another temporary building, and putting the mattresses in the temporary building. And after a while -- after a week or so, you realize that these mattresses look pretty, you know, I just did this yesterday. But they were taking them down, underground, and hauling them [07:00] back over to this building -- bringing them up. And so the next morning I had them over here. This was, I think, in my way of thinking, was thinking to see if I could keep a cool head. Could I do as I'm instructed to

do -- this type thing. But the underground facility which was in this far end, was like a big building underneath. The prisoners were down there. They had facilities to prepare food, they had their lodging facilities. It was pretty good sized area. And there are restrooms, and I guess they had a dayroom or something where they mingled, and this type of thing. The only portion that I was allowed to go into -- we could go down a set of steps on this end, which was near this building we took the mattresses to, and then you could go underground and come up on the other end, which was near the building [08:00] where we picked up the mattresses. And what I was getting out of it, this -- this was to find out whether I could keep a cool head. Why, I just got these yesterday, how come they're still back here [unintelligible].

INT: So, he remembers the location of the parade ground, so maybe we can talk about things relative to the parade ground. And the other thing, were the staircases underground, or were they open air above them?

EP: No, they were underground. There was a door you went through, and these staircases went where you went down to where the prisoners were.

INT: Was the set of stairs at an -- well, how can I explain this?

INT: Maybe you can draw.

EP: They were like a -- they were like going into a cellar, you know, you have a cellar under -  
- like here, we have -- you can walk into underneath.

INT: Like an old cellar.

EP: But, by the old cellar, where you walk down, you open up a door and then walked down. But there was door -- it was a regular -- it came out [09:00] -- it was a regular standing door, then you go down the stairs, and then the whole length of this thing, which was

long, you could -- there was another set of stairs on the other end.

INT: Can you draw it? You want him to draw it?

INT: Yeah. Relative to the parade ground, and the prisoner compound --

INT: Draw the parade field first.

INT: I'm interested to see where the stairs --

EP: Well, it's like this -- this is the parade -- over here is your two buildings where -- which we occupied, and then, of course, the flagpole is out here in the middle someplace.

INT: Yeah.

EP: Then there was a building here and a building here, and then went this long building here, which is just like a roof sticking out of the ground here. That was all underground. So, you had a stairway going down here, and down here -- you could go down either one -- and they had this long hallway down here, where I could walk back and forth and see the prisoners, and a lot of times talk to them.

INT: Would you -- was that from the outside or from the inside?

EP: Inside [10:00]. Once you got down in this underground thing. You mean, that's no longer there?

INT: If it is, we haven't found it yet.

INT: Right.

EP: Well, see, there was a building over here and a building over here. Here's where I picked up the mattresses, by truck, we took them across here, and put them in this building. But this -- they both have trap doors in them.

INT: So, are you talking about going across the parade ground?

EP: Oh, yeah, you can -- you hauled them across the parade ground in a truck. We picked

them up here in the morning and you put them over here in this building here and you stacked them up. The next -- next morning you went over and you picked those same mattresses up here, took them by truck over here --

INT: So there could be a tunnel in between this --

INT: If you drew the parade ground -- if you just draw the rectangular parade ground, could you show us where everything was relative to that?

EP: Okay.

INT: The Creamery [10:56] would have been there by then, right?

INT: Oh, yeah. It was there.

INT: So, do you remember a building called the Creamery [11:00]?

EP: That's familiar. [unintelligible] where Creamery at but I do remember that term.

INT: If you draw that out, and if you remember where the Creamery [11:12] is, it would be good to put that on there. If you don't remember where the Creamery is, that's fine.

EP: I remember the -- the terminology. See, there's a building over here where we got the mattresses, and we went across the parade ground and took them to this building over here. And then the next morning, we picked the same mattresses up here, and even watched during the day, to see them bringing them back over, but they never did. So, we found out they were going underground.

INT: So, was there a staircase that emerged on both sides of the parade ground?

EP: On, over here, at this building over here.

INT: So, the tunnel would go underneath the parade ground?

EP: Underneath. Underneath the -- the parade -- it either went underneath the parade ground, or it came this way [12:00]. And we know this one, because when you went down here

or down here, either were going in this side or this side. This was all underground. This -- there's a big area underground over here. So, they were either bringing -- I never determined whether they were bringing the mattresses underground this way and around - - well, see, we were putting them in up here. But they were -- there was a trap door in this building, and they were going down and coming around, and they were back over here the following morning. So, there was a crew moved them at night over -- back to -- back to where they were, and the next morning we're picking them up and taking them back over here by truck. On top.

INT: So, is it possible that they could have moved the mattresses above ground at night, when nobody would see them? Or would there have been too much activity, and nobody would have seen them?

EP: I -- I don't think so. I think they went underneath somehow.

INT: Wow.

EP: Because there was a trap door where they would come up and [13:00] -- we pulled the trap door out because there was a hole down there, so, they were coming. So, were you able to come in around this way, or coming straight across I'm not sure --

INT: So you came all the way down one set of stairs, through this hallway, and up the other stairs? You've done that?

EP: Oh, yes.

INT: How long would you say that tunnel was?

EP: Oh, that's quite a -- that was quite a, -- quite a distance, because that's where the German were prisoners were, back here in cages or whatever you call them. Like prisoners. That's what they were.

INT: A hundred feet? Two hundred feet?

EP: Oh, at least that, at least that.

INT: Wow.

INT: And how wide was it? How tall and wide?

EP: Well, I could walk. I'm six foot two, and there [unintelligible] above me. And, if I remember right, it was all concrete down there.

INT: It's lit? They had lighting?

EP: Lighting, right. But we -- we weren't allowed to go behind these cages, you know. That -- they were behind the cages. And it was a walkway, where I can walk back -- excuse me -- why keep playing with your --

INT: Don't worry about it [14:00]. [laughter]

INT: When you walk down the hallways, was it like a flat area where you could see each of the cells? Would've -- would it have been along a flat area, or did it curve at all?

EP: No. Well, to me, I remember it being flat. You could see over here and see over there. But these cages were behind it.

INT: So, like a whole row of them?

EP: Yeah. It had went back in there a ways, because they must have fed them back there, must have cooked back there. I imagine they did. Of course, I was never allowed to go back there. But I could go down and walk this hallway, come out the other side. And being an inquisitive sort of guy, and at those days, I could kind of speak a little German. But see, there's a high German, there's a low German, there's -- there's different dialects in -- in your German. And some of them could understand me, some of them didn't.

INT: Were there guards [15:00] posted at the doors, at the stairs, or anywhere inside?



EP: I've never seen no guards, but I imagine there were guards. There had to be guards. There was guards all over that place. But, you know, I never -- I wasn't that inquisitive, I guess, to get -- see, you get out of here or someplace, but they never told me that. But when we first got there was the two big, two -- two-story buildings. They were in the far end. And one of them was our billeting, and downstairs there was like classrooms. We were instructed what we'd be doing. And I began to think I was there as a laborer, because I was taking mattresses -- every day I was hauling these mattresses over, and I got to the point these mattresses looked pretty familiar, so I marked some of them. Sure enough [16:00]. But that's to find out -- can I follow orders, can I do what I'm told, and I soon realized this is what they expected of me, and I really want to stay with this organization. Pretty nice. It's like a civilian outfit. You're not pulling guard duty. You're not pulling KP. You're, you know -- because we -- they had their own KPs, they had their own police or guards, whatever they were. And, I was more-or-less a -- it was pretty nice -- pretty nice duty. And then, of course, we had two hours every day that we could go -- it was our time, but you had to do -- you either had to play football, basketball, baseball, or row the boat, which I was involved in. You know, the going across the river.

INT: So, was it kind of considered your PT time? Physical --

EP: PT time, yeah.

INT: Exercise?

EP: But I never recall going into [17:00] Alexandria or Mount Vernon during that time. I never went away on pass. And they really had enough activities going in there, I really didn't -- I wasn't married, so. And I wasn't there that long -- couple months, and then we

went to Mitchell Field [17:18]. So, we must have went -- it must have been the end of July or August that I came to Fort Hunt [17:27].

INT: Okay. Do you remember any other facilities at 1142 [17:35]? You mentioned that there was stuff to do there. Do you remember if the post had its own movie theater, or did you swim in a swimming pool while you were there?

EP: I don't recall a swimming pool. If it -- if they -- if it had been a swimming pool, it probably was something above ground [18:00]. Movies? Yeah, we had movies. They were in one of the buildings. Probably the building where we had our lectures and things, because we had a lot of classrooms up -- while I was there.

INT: What about where you lived? Did you live in barracks on post?

EP: I lived on a -- in one of these houses. I think we lived upstairs, and then there was meeting rooms and, you know, training sessions downstairs. And the other building was a -- had the kitchen where we got served, and I forget what they had upstairs. They had something upstairs.

INT: So, you were served in a -- a kitchen in the building in which you lived, not a post dining hall or mess hall or anything?

EP: No. They had -- it was a dining -- dining area in this one building where you went. No, we didn't go off base.

INT: It's like a central building, though?

EP: A central building, yeah [19:00]. And the prisoners were over in this long building on the end, which wasn't very much above ground. Most of it was underground. And -- yes.

INT: Where was it relative to the parade ground? The prisoner area.

EP: Okay. The -- the barracks were on this far end, or the houses, they were like two houses.

They were in this far end. The parade ground was here. There was this one building over here that had the stuff in that we picked up and moved to a building on this side, and the prisoners were in a long building on this far end, but the building was actually underground. The roof was on top, so you went down underground, and that's where the prisoners were.

INT: Was there a fence around the prisoner building?

EP: No.

INT: No fence, no guard towers?

EP: No guard tower, no nothing. So, as far as I know, that they -- we just kept them down there. I don't remember them ever coming out [20:00], unless they did during the night. If they did during the night, they'd have probably had guards with them or something. But I didn't have anything to do with that. But here's the funny thing -- I was hired down there as a linguist, but I wasn't doing that. I was doing everything else. Going for a trip over to the Pentagon [20:20] and walking all around the Pentagon with a satchel and this .45, and they'd went to several offices -- every place I went, the guy I was supposed to see had just left. But after a while I'd began to think -- I says, "Is he -- does he really exist?" But that was not my job. My job was to catch up with him, and talk to him and give him the satchel, which he had the key for. I didn't have the key for it. It was strapped to my arm. That went to the sub-basement, the basement, first floor -- the first floor is the concourse, which are stores on there, if I recall [21:00]. It had some offices, and then at the back, that's where the Generals are, and the -- you know, the big wigs. And then your next floor, so I went around to every floor, even the top floor, the fifth floor, where eventually I worked, you know, but not then. All around the building, got to

the last one, and they said, "We're sorry, sir, he just left. He's at Fort Belvoir, Virginia [21:30]." It is sleeting outside, and I'm in an open Jeep. So, you go to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, go see the Commanding General, but -- well, that's where I wound up, the Commanding General, and he said, "Did you enjoy your day, Sergeant?" And I says, "Well, I guess you could consider that," you know. I says, "I feel better now. I'm thinking the trip is over, and that you have the key for the satchel [22:00]." He says, "I have to disagree with you there. I do have a meal for you when we find the guy with the key." But, we did find the guy with the key. And after he had a nice meal for me there, in his office, and we talked, and this was great, and I says, "Sir, I'm going to have to leave, because it's -- you know -- I want to get back to Fort Hunt [22:24] before the weather gets too bad." He says, "Oh, you're not going back in a Jeep. The Jeep stays here. We'll take you back in a staff car." He says, "I won't be going back -- I won't be going back with you, but we'll take you back in a staff car. It has a heater in it." [laughs] He was nice about it, you know, and just -- I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed talking with the General, and -- and --what. That was -- you know, during my nine or so years [23:00] that I was in the service, I think I met about every general, and all these generals were great, they were nice, except MacArthur [23:09]. He was blood and guts. And, well, Kruger [23:18] I think was probably the nicest general. Well, Eisenhower [23:21] was nice, I liked him. General Kruger's the one that got me into the -- going to the college, War College in Japan.

INT: Let me ask you -- we've been asking some questions about the physical locations of buildings at Fort Hunt [23:39] and underground facilities. Do you think it would be helpful -- we have a map of what P.O. Box 1142 [23:46] looked like during the war. Do

you think if you took a look at that, you might be able to point out to us where some of these were?

EP: I'll give it a shot.

INT: Yeah. Super. We -- we've got it right here.

INT: I'm going to move your water out of the way [24:00].

EP: Okay. I didn't drink any of it, but --

INT: While he's getting the map out -- during your stay at 1142 [24:04], did you go to the Pentagon [24:07] on more than one occasion, or was that the only occasion that you went there?

EP: I believe that's the only occasion I went there.

INT: Okay. So, you never had anything handcuffed to you any other time at 1142 [24:16]?

EP: No.

INT: This is what we think -- this is a military map from the time of the war, and to orient you a bit, from what we understand, the main entrance was over here. This would have been the Potomac River. Of course, Fort Washington would have been over there.

EP: I've been across the river.

INT: Alexandria would be this way. Mount Vernon would be that way. And this open area here was the parade ground.

EP: Okay.

INT: The flagpole was right there, and this was the parade ground. So, just -- if you could explain [25:00] a little bit of what you had been mentioning before. And if anything -- and if it doesn't look familiar at all, that's okay, then let us know if it doesn't look familiar.

INT: Maybe start with where you stayed. The building that you stayed in.

EP: Well, there was two -- two story buildings over here as I recall. They -- they're only showing one here.

INT: That's where the classroom was?

EP: [affirmative] And then we had a billeting. Maybe -- I don't remember a street in there, but there might have been a street in there. There may have been. The mess hall or a park may have been over here, I'm not sure. But there was a building over here. Where's the underground part [unintelligible]?

INT: Well, that's what we were hoping that you would tell us. Where the underground part was.

EP: This is the parade ground?

INT: That's the parade ground, right there. Yep [26:00].

EP: So, there's a building over here that we took the mattresses across to a building over here. Might have been 204, but I don't remember the numbers. I don't.

INT: Yeah, sure. I think the numbers -- you might not necessarily have known the numbers at the time.

EP: Right. But this underground thing was down at the end of this parade ground here. You went in it -- there was two entrances -- there was an entrance here and an entrance there.

INT: Do any of these look -- these structures look familiar to you at all?

EP: No.

INT: Do you remember when you were there at 1142 [26:42], there being old gun batteries, big concrete gun batteries from many, many, many, many years before -- before World War II?

EP: They were at the end of these -- this -- I would imagine they were [27:00] -- I vaguely remember that. But I remember two buildings up here that, one had the mess hall in it. But this other long building, where you went down, was down on this end.

INT: Okay.

EP: This end of the parade ground. You could either go into that end or this end. But it doesn't show -- it doesn't show an underground facility.

INT: No, not that we know of. That's not to -- certainly not to say it wasn't there. We're -- that's why we're asking you for anything you might remember.

EP: But I remember you could either go and enter this end or this end and come out, and there wasn't very much of the structure above the ground. It was mostly all underground. I wish they would have -- well, they wouldn't let me take pictures, because I had a camera, but I was instructed not to take pictures [28:00]. It would have been nice to have pictures of what actually was there. And this way goes through the Potomac?

INT: Yep, you got it. The Potomac would have been right over here, so the entrance, if you come in the camp, probably would have been right in here. In fact, there used to be -- maybe it was where your rowboat was. The dock was right down here, and then the -- the road would have been there. The Mount Vernon Memorial Highway would have been right through here.

INT: You remember any horses at 1142 [28:34]?

EP: Horse's butts, but not horses.

[laughter]

INT: Do you know where the camp headquarters would have been?

EP: The headquarters for 1142 [28:51] would have been -- this seems to be backwards. They

would have been up to this -- if I'm coming in from Mount Vernon [29:00] boat dock here, they would have been up here. And this -- well, this is turned around -- well, it's been a long time --

INT: We can flip to the -- if you'd rather flip this around, we can do that.

EP: Well, still the entrance is coming --

INT: Yeah, and this would have been -- we think -- do you remember the entrance being off of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway?

EP: No, the entrance came in on a back road, and then we went in, turning that way. We didn't -- it doesn't come -- didn't come straight in. And I guess there was a reason for that.

INT: Because we --we think there may have been another way into the camp in this area, over here. You see this road going right off the page, here?

EP: Right.

INT: There may have been another entrance here.

EP: [inaudible] coming in here. In those days. Yeah, there's a lot of buildings there I don't remember.

INT: So, does this look bigger and more complex than you remember?

EP: [affirmative] [30:00] But it was -- on this far end, which, to me, would have been this end, there was a couple big buildings, but, they were two-story buildings. This one maybe could have been the mess hall. I don't know. You got anything here that says what it is --

INT: Some of them, yeah. Some of them, for example, 111, that's the officer's mess. Now, whether the enlisted men would have been eating there or not, probably not.



INT: We had believed that most of the enlisted men lived in barracks, in these long, skinny buildings, but that could have been before you were there.

EP: Must have been before I was there, because we were in -- we were billeted at -- there was two big buildings. We were billeted in one of them. 42 enlisted men, 21 officers [31:00].

INT: So, question is timing of the demolition.

INT: Yeah, or -- either that, or they just didn't use the post.

INT: Or did they use those barracks, this part of the post was closed?

EP: That could have been. Because we had two -- we had two buildings, plus these two on the side, where we played with the mattresses.

INT: Okay.

EP: And then the ends underneath where the prisoners worked.

INT: Got you.

INT: So, you're telling us if -- if we can find this underground area, we're going to find the mattresses?

EP: Well, I don't know that.

INT: I wouldn't be surprised.

INT: If we find them, you will be the first person that will get a call.

[laughter]

INT: We'll look for the marks on them.

EP: They were in temporary buildings on top, on each side of the parade field. And there was a road coming in, between one of the big buildings and the smaller building [32:00]. I had a camera, but they told me I couldn't take pictures.

INT: Want to go ahead and change this?

INT: Sure.

[End of Tape 2A]

[Beginning of Tape 2B]

EP: They wanted to. I -- well, I wanted to go up to Braddock [phonetic] Inn [00:10], which is pretty elaborate up here in the mountain. But they were talking about they might want to take me to the Elks Club [00:17].

INT: That's nice, too. From what I hear.

EP: It's nice. That's nice. I'm a member, so [unintelligible]. Are we off?

INT: We're on right now. We can turn it off real quick.

EP: Turn it off for a minute.

INT: To follow up with some other additional questions, Mr. Polesky, could you talk a little bit about the level of secrecy at P.O. Box 1142 [00:44]? And also at Mitchell Field [00:48] afterwards. Were you ever sat down and told this is secret, this is classified, you should never talk about this? Was that understood [01:00]? What was your understanding of the level of secrecy?

EP: Well, yes, you shouldn't -- even if you went out -- why even like when I went over to Fort Washington -- paddled there across the Potomac, you're just go over there visiting. You don't tell them anything about the organization. It's, you know, it's on a need to know basis. That's what it was. And you're not supposed to tell anybody, you know, what you do or where you're -- where you're from. So, you just tell them you was in that picnic area across there. And you rode over there. You're in a military uniform, but, you know. But a lot of times you just wore -- a lot of times I just wore civilian clothes. Because we were given a civilian clothes allowance.

FS: Are you still entertaining men or trying to?

EP: Yes, ma'am. You may come and I'll entertain you, too.

FS: I've heard it before.

EP: You know you're on the --

FS: Oh, my goodness.

[laughter] [02:00]

EP: Anything else you want to tell them?

INT: [laughs] Come on, some good secrets. Just kidding.

EP: Just amongst us.

INT: And you -- you mentioned you were in civilian clothes. Was that even while you were working at 1142 [02:18] --

EP: Oh, yes.

INT: -- you wore civilian clothes?

EP: Oh, yes. Well, when you were actually at 1142 [02:24], at Fort Hunt [02:26], it was basically military clothes. When we get up to Mitchell Field [02:31] and I went on assignments, then I wore civilian clothes, or I wore the uniform appropriate to the particular function I was to take care of. If I was to try to -- like I was assigned at Mitchell Field [02:50], and I went in as an airman. I had an airman's uniform on, it was crinkled, it was dirty and I was [03:00] reporting in with my orders as a -- for a job there, and I got in the orderly room, and I got inside and shut the door and banged on the door, and the First Sergeant says, "Come in," and I said, "Don't holler at me, I'm in here." You know, any word to -- to agitate him. And he said, "I got the job for you. Job down in the mess hall. We got a grease pit down there." He said, "That's right up your alley."

He sent me down there to do that dirty work. Sure, I'm a sergeant in the military -- or in the 1142 [03:42] outfit, and I'm down there as a buck private in the airman, you know, as low as they come, and I had a dirty uniform on. I'm reporting in there with my bag and I looked awful.

INT: So, why were you doing that?

EP: Well, to [04:00] -- okay, we're getting to the punchline.

[laughter]

The desk sergeant, apparently, was stealing food and selling it to the local economy.

INT: Oh, really?

EP: So, I was coming in there, and I had to get into the mess hall. I had to be there long enough to find out what was going on. So, yeah, I had this dirty job down there, and the food and these steaks and everything would come in, and he'd take them to -- down to Hampstead [04:30] and sell them. And the airmen, they were getting scraps or whatever, you know, they weren't getting the steaks and stuff they were supposed to have. But as soon as I got the goods on him, you know, take pictures or what. Then, of course, I'm transferred out of there. I was mis-assigned. And how they never found out about it, because I was coming through Mitchell Field [04:57] to catch the bus to go into Hampstead [05:00]. But, you know, coming in there wearing civilian clothes and, of course, this type of thing. But, anyways -- so anyway, that was one of the functions. Then another time I went down to Waldorf Astoria [05:13] for three weeks, chasing an AWOL [05:16]. I ate good.

FS: You told us.

INT: When you were in Alexandria [05:27], we -- we've here been referring to it as 1142

[05:28] or Fort Hunt [05:29]. How did you, as a soldier who was stationed there, what did you call this place in Alexandria?

EP: Fort Hunt.

INT: You called it Fort --

EP: It was actually a picnic ground. See, the basic part of that whole scenario, as I remember it, it was a picnic ground. Most everything was underground, except for those two buildings on the end, and these two buildings over here with the mattress going back and forth. And then the prisoners [06:00] under this underground thing, which was like an underground Pentagon, was underneath the ground. That's the way I -- and the flag pole out in the middle. But you showed me all kinds of pictures --

INT: So, you don't remember nearly that many buildings as we showed you? Just a handful of buildings?

EP: A handful of buildings.

INT: Okay.

EP: Isn't that -- isn't that interesting? Apparently, I wasn't supposed to know about these others. Maybe I wasn't inquisitive enough to go hunt.

INT: Or the other possibility that we're -- that we've been talking about, is, could they have already been destroyed by the time -- by the time you got there?

EP: Could be. See, I got there in '46, and then we went up to Mitchell Field [06:41], and that was the staging area to send these prisoners back to Germany. And I would have gone with them, however I didn't have enough time in the service, so I either had to reenlist or extend for a year. And I choose not to do that at this particular point [07:00]. So, I was given the option then to go to West Point [07:02], and I declined that because that would

be a spit-and-polish outfit. Guess where I went. North Post, Fort Myer [07:13], walk the Unknown Soldier [07:15]. Spit-and-polish outfit. Now I have to get out of there. I didn't like that.

FS: [unintelligible]

INT: Again, to clarify, in -- in Alexandria [07:35], did you -- were you familiar with the term P.O. Box 1142 [07:37]? Is that -- was that what it was called at the time, or did they call it Fort Hunt [07:42]?

EP: No, it was Post Office Box 1142.

INT: Okay. So, in official orders or if anybody asked you where you were stationed --

EP: It's Fort Hunt, Virginia [07:50].

INT: Okay.

EP: Because that's what I learned later, that's what it went. The orders read Post Office Box 1142 [08:00].

INT: Okay.

EP: That's where the -- it was so interesting. I came in on a train from Trenton, New Jersey, to Alexandria, and I get off the train, it's 8:00 night, I get ahold of a cab driver and I says, "You need to take me to Post Office Box 1142 [08:17], Alexandria, Virginia. The Post Office opens at 8:00 in the morning so, get yourself a place to sleep tonight, and we can take you there in the morning. But he found another cab driver that knew where to go. He took us out in the middle of nowhere.

FS: If you sit there long enough, he'll tell you that again.

EP: Well, you tell it. You should know it pretty much by heart by now.

INT: Do you remember the names of anybody else that was at 1142 [08:48]?

EP: No.

INT: Do you remember the name of the Commanding Officer?

EP: I don't even remember his name.

INT: Who did you work for?

EP: Well [09:00], when I got up to Mitchell Field [09:01], I worked for a major.

INT: At 1142 [09:07], do you know who you reported to?

EP: Whoever the First Sergeant was, and I don't remember the officers' names. I remember being there.

INT: If -- we actually have a list, and we're going to give this to you, because it has your name on it.

EP: Does it?

INT: It does. And that -- this is actually how we tracked you down.

EP: Oh.

INT: This has a listing of the officers and the enlisted men who were transferred from 1142 [09:41] to Mitchell Field [09:44]. So, I don't know if you want to peruse that real quick and see if any of those names look familiar to you in any way.

EP: Turn on [10:00] the light, honey.

INT: And we can read that to you if that would help.

EP: Yeah, that probably would help.

INT: You want us to read it for you?

EP: Yeah.

FS: Well, if he could make [unintelligible].

INT: No, he can keep this. This is for you -- this is for you to keep, and if you think of

something afterwards, you can give Vince or I a call. So, no, that's for you to keep, but I just thought while we were here right now, videotaping, it might be a good --

EP: I'm trying -- I'm trying to think of what the gentleman's name was that -- I never went across the river by myself. There was another gentleman that he and I would row the boat across, and we did this almost daily, and we went down there one day, and somebody had drilled a hole in the middle of that thing. And it was sunk. And we got it back up and dried it out --

INT: [unintelligible]

EP: -- and then [11:00] patched it up and got out there several hundred feet, and the patch gave away and I don't swim. But I floated back and he helped me. So, that -- that ended the going over to Fort Washington.

INT: Do you want me to read these to him?

INT: If you would read mainly through the officers.

INT: Just go for the captains the first?

INT: Yeah.

INT: Lieutenant Colonel Kohn [11:28]. Captain Bickford [11:30] [phonetic]. Captain Key [11:34]. Captain Wolfe [11:37]. Captain Abels [11:39].

EP: Abels was the one that hired me.

INT: Oh. So that other guy.

INT: So, do you think -- so do you think that Abels, do you think that was the same person you -- you were mentioning -- as --

EP: He's a double agent.

INT: Okay.



EP: Okay. He was very fluent in the German language. He's the one that hired -- came to Fort Dix [12:00] and hired me. And, at the time he says, "You're -- you're the individual I need. You have contacts in Hamburg, Germany [12:09]." That's where my mother had come from, and there was a girl there that I guess, in those days, the parents selected who you'd marry or didn't marry, or whatever. And, there was a nurse over there that was -- I was destined to go marry. However, in America you can choose your own, you know, spouse [phonetic]. And, so, I was pretty much chastised by my father that I didn't follow through. He says, "You know, this puts me in pretty bad light." Sorry about that, Dad.

INT: Okay. There are a few more names. Let's see if any of these ring a bell [13:00]. Captain Berkley [13:02]. Captain Hilty [13:03]. Captain Kohn [13:05]. Captain Roth [13:09]. First Lieutenant Disbro [13:13]. First Lieutenant Velasko [13:16] [phonetic]. First Lieutenant Wagner [13:20]. First Lieutenant Charles Watson [13:23]. First Lieutenant George Wright [13:27] [phonetic].

EP: That may sound little bit. Wait until you get to the majors. But I don't remember his name, either.

INT: Wright [13:39]. Is that the one that rang a bell?

EP: That sort of rang a bell.

INT: Okay. Couple sergeants. Master Sergeant Esterell [13:27] [phonetic]. Master Sergeant Gould [13:27] [phonetic]. Bout [13:52] [phonetic].

INT: Bout.

INT: Bout. Welchel [13:56].

INT: Arthur Welchel [14:00].

INT: Midlin [14:03].

INT: Midlin.

INT: Midlin. It's that German pronunciation. No, that's good.

INT: George Midlin.

INT: Midlin. Cantwell [14:09] [phonetic]. Hillstrom [14:10] [phonetic]. Holland [14:12] [phonetic]. Loman [14:15] [phonetic].

EP: We had a lot of master sergeants, didn't we?

INT: Now you're in to the staff sergeants now. Staff Sergeant Mansfield [14:24] [phonetic]. Looks like Ronan [14:28] [phonetic]. Peg [14:29] [phonetic].

INT: The person who went across the river in the boat -- was he a private, was he a corporal?

EP: I was thinking he was a corporal.

INT: You think he was a corporal? I can go through the corporals.

INT: [unintelligible]

INT: Got half a dozen of them. Corporal Golden [14:29] [phonetic]. Corporal Panick [14:46] [phonetic]. Corporal Steven [14:48] [phonetic]. Corporal Vaughn [14:51] [phonetic]. Corporal Penske [14:53] [phonetic]. Corporal Larsbaugh [14:57] [phonetic]. I'm not sure if I'm saying that right [15:00]. Larsbaugh. Those are all your corporals.

EP: Yes, see, there was a corporal that came down with me from Dix [15:07], but I don't -- if I could only find the orders because he and I would be on the same order coming down from Dix.

INT: Well, we'll leave this with you, and your name is on there too.

EP: Oh, it is?

INT: Yes. You're -- you're in there. Probably on the second page, I think.

INT: Yeah, I think the one that you were just reading.

INT: [unintelligible]. There you are. Yep. There you are.

EP: There I am.

INT: About there.

EP: About there.

INT: Yep.

EP: Okay. Well, what can I tell about myself?

INT: [laughs] He was a shady character, that guy.

INT: I want to know why there is an asterisk next to your name.

EP: Yeah, why is there an asterisk next to my name? Because I knew the German language? Think that would be it [16:00]? Or was I a troublemaker?

INT: I think it has something to do with mattresses.

EP: It had to do with mattresses.

INT: And a gold brick.

EP: I might have been a -- yeah, it might have been a gold brick. I might have been -- I was always the inquisitive type of guy.

INT: What do you remember, if anything at all, about the demobilization of the post, of 1142 [16:23]? What -- when your group left 1142 to go to Mitchell Field [16:29], was anyone left behind, or was everything at 1142 [16:34] all moved at once?

EP: I was under the impression that it was all moved at once to an area two miles east of Mitchell Field [16:43] called Santini [16:46] area or something like that.

INT: Santini?

EP: Santini, there it is.

INT: It's actually mentioned in the opening paragraph of that order. It mentions the -- the

Santini area of --

INT: Good memory.

INT: So, that's fantastic.

EP: Yeah [17:00]. Okay. So, that's the area we were in and I -- I believe -- I thought we were all moved at one time. Of course, you have to realize I wasn't in the higher echelon, I was that gold brick down here.

INT: So, what do you think was moved to the Santini [17:18] area? What kinds of things?

EP: Well, the 250 German war prisoners. Well, there was 42 enlisted men and 21 officers. My superior was a major. I forget his name. Was a heck of a nice guy.

INT: Were there any records, documents, files, photographs?

EP: That was all moved up, too.

INT: That was all moved?

EP: Yeah, it was all moved. See, this was a staging area to go to Hamburg, Germany [17:53]. And, I was asked then, right after we got there [18:00], would I extend for a year, would I reenlist a year, or what I -- did I want to reenlist for more? And at the time, I really didn't want to do any of those -- any of the above. I really -- but not reenlisting or not extending, I was out of the picture. Then they couldn't take me. So, then I was offered an opportunity to go to West Point [18:28], and I declined because that would be spit-and-polish, and I really wasn't too interested in that. So, guess where I went? Unknown Soldier [18:41]. North Port, Fort Myer [18:42]. What's that outfit? Spit-and-polish.

INT: Do you have any questions?

INT: You -- when you were leaving, did you see activity in terms of trying to deconstruct the fort or any of the buildings?

EP: No.

INT: Or taking fences down [19:00]?

EP: [negative] Nothing.

INT: [unintelligible] this the beginning of that big storm is coming? We should just be careful, otherwise --

INT: Is there anything that we forgot to ask you?

EP: I don't know.

[laughter]

INT: You've got a shirt says secret, and we want to find out what that secret is.

EP: Okay. On the back it says Fort Hunt [19:25].

INT: Actually, I'm just curious. Did you ever talk about what you did at Fort Hunt [19:33] with your relatives or friends after the war? When did you start talking about it?

EP: Have I told you much about Fort Hunt [19:41]? No? It was secret. And you're supposed to -- it's like when I worked up here in -- well, when I worked the Pentagon [19:56], when I worked at east coast, which was highly, you know, secret [20:00]. Anything you see or do here, leave here when you leave here.

INT: So you didn't talk about it, like with your --

EP: No.

INT: First wife at all?

EP: Not at all. That was something else. Yeah. No -- no I didn't.

INT: So, when did you find out about it?

FS: When --

INT: When you got the call?

FS: Who is it?

INT: Vince.

FS: That guy, Vince. When he talked to him, then he told me about it.

INT: So up until you were contacted by the park, by the National Park Service, you had never heard the words P.O. Box 1142 [20:39]?

FS: No.

EP: Yeah, you might have heard 1142, but that's as far as we went. You said that's a post -- you said, "What is it?" I said, "It's a Post Office Box." So what are you telling me?

FS: Oh, I'll tell you what. I heard you tell somebody, but he never personally sat down and told me. But, you know, he has people [21:00] come in and -- and when he's talking to them, he did bring it up. I remember that now. But, I -- I didn't know what he was talking about. [unintelligible].

EP: When you carry clearances for [unintelligible], you know, which is -- I guess it's still the top, I don't know, because I've been out for a while. It's like when I left east coast out here, and I hired into FAA Leesburg, Virginia. And, I got down there, and well, I was debriefed on everything up here, so down in Leesburg, you only were cleared to, on a need-to-know basis, which you really needed to know. And, one day the sector manager said to me, "Come on, Elvin, let's go down to the tunnel." So were down there and we're -- I'm talking to him, and we're walking away, and all of the sudden I realized I'm talking to myself. He's nowhere near. So, I went back, and I says, "Charlie, what happened [22:00]?" He says, "Elvin, you are cleared to anything that there is. I'm only cleared to Secret, and we're way -- you were way beyond that. I can't go down there." I says, "Surely you're like a -- you're like a Colonel in the Army. You're a civilian, but

you're like a Colonel. I'm just nobody." He says, "Elvin, you are cleared to the highest clearance you can get. You can go anywhere. I can't." I says, "I almost walked you into it, didn't I?"

[laughter]

INT: All right. Well, any -- anything else?

INT: This was really helpful. Thank you.

INT: Thank you very much.

EP: Well, you're quite welcome. Thank you. I enjoyed it.

INT: Well, good.

[talking simultaneously]

INT: You want another hat, right?

EP: I would appreciate it.

INT: Okay.

EP: And then if I find the other one, she can wear it.

INT: Excellent.

INT: [laughs]

FS: I like your hat. Yours.

INT: My Smokey Bear hat?

FS: Yes.

INT: I am not giving that one away.

[laughter]

I'm just teasing you.

FS: But, I like it.

INT: It's a great hat.

[end of transcript]



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