

Fort Hunt Oral History

P.O. Box 1142

Interview with Herb Kahler and John Kahler by Brandon Bies, Matthew Virta, and Vince

Santucci

No Date

INTERVIEWER: Again, this is Brandon Bies with the -- so I'm just going to give a real brief introduction and then we might jump right on in to asking some questions. Again, this is Brandon Bies with the Fort Hunt Oral History Project. We're conducting an interview with John and Herb Kahler who lived at Fort Hunt [00:26] after World War II, joined here by Matthew Virta and Vince Santucci. And so with that, gentlemen, I guess we don't have any real aligned set of questions, but if we can just start off with, could you tell us when it was and how it was that you guys came to live at Fort Hunt [00:43]? And I'll let the two of you fight it out, who wants to tell that story.

JOHN KAHLER: Herby, why don't you go ahead?

HERB KAHLER: John, you can take the lead if you'd like. You've been started with them -- with Brandon, a while ago.

JK: You want me to take the lead?

HK: Sure, and I'll pipe in.

JK: Okay, well, our father [01:00] was a historian with the Park Service. He retired in the early sixties as the chief historian in Washington [01:06]. But he was in the Washington office at the time of World War II, and while my memory is not vivid of World War II -- I was only two or three years old then -- we moved from Washington [01:21] when the Park Service was displaced to the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. We moved to Park Ridge, Illinois [01:28] for -- probably from '42 say till '47. And we moved to Fort Hunt [01:37] in I think September of '47.

HK: That's right.

JK: And the reason we were there was that housing was very limited. At -- new housing or

any kind of housing was limited after the war and particularly so in the Washington [01:37] area. So the Park Service made available four -- five residences which -- in Fort Hunt [02:00]. And we were occupants -- we occupied one of those residences.

HK: It was for [unintelligible].

JK: We can say who our neighbors --

HK: The buildings were residences because ours was a duplex.

JK: Right, right. We can tell you who the other residences were, too, initially and through the years if you want that as well.

INT: Any detail would be fantastic as we try to reconstruct this picture because as you probably know, virtually everything down there has long since been bulldozed. And so this is certainly very helpful information.

JK: Well, the initial residents of the homes were in the duplex that we occupied. And I think I've identified that on the map for you. If you want, I'll point it out.

INT: Yeah, you -- could you name the number again of that building?

JK: I did and it's number 101 and it's [03:00] immediately to the --

HK: North?

JK: West --

HK: Northwest of the --

JK: -- of the parade ground [03:09]. It's at the northwest corner of the parade ground.

INT: Yeah, we're looking at it right now.

HK: Up the street from the northwest corner of the parade ground.

INT: Right.

JK: And we were in the western half of that building and it was a -- my father and my mother

and my brother and I. And then the other half of that building was occupied by Charles A. Richey [03:33], R-I-C-H-E-Y. He was -- had come to Washington [03:39] from Santa Fe. All these people were the Park Service people. He had come from Santa Fe and he was there with his wife Ruth and two sons, Charles and Mark. And then in the residence --

HK: He was an -- he was an archeologist.

INT: Well, that's good [04:00]. Both Matt and I are archeologists as well. So we're glad to hear they still had some archeologists back in 1947 as well.

JK: [laughs] He -- then in the building 103 which is to the east of there is -- was a residence that was occupied by Victor -- I think his middle initial was H.

HK: Cahalane.

JK: H. Cahalane [04:27], C-A-H-A-L-A-N-E. He and his wife Isabel and daughter Margaret occupied that building. And then there was a residence which has -- towards the gate. It has the number 1120 by it and that was occupied by Percy Ed Smith, Percy Edward Smith [04:51]. He worked for National Capital Parks as it was known then. And I believe Ed was an engineer. I'm sure he was an engineer.

HK: He was an engineer [05:00].

JK: And he occupied that with his wife Olive and daughter Marsha and sons Edward and Leonard. And then in the last residence which was a temporary building 1120 -- it has T123 under it and it's very -- it's immediately opposite what was labeled as a garage I believe. The resident there initially was a police officer -- park police officer named Andrew Toombs [05:40], T-O-O-M-B-S, I believe. And he and his wife and I think they had an infant child lived there. That was the first building to be razed, but the others --

all of the others except ours had subsequent occupants [06:00]. And my parents -- our parents left just before that duplex was razed.

HK: And that -- in the early sixties.

JK: Say again?

HK: 101 was razed -- our residence was razed in what, the early sixties?

JK: I believe so.

HK: It used to be I got through law school before they relocated to Alexandria [06:30].

JK: Okay, then, that would pin it down.

HK: But I'm not certain. I graduated in 1961. But I can't be exactly certain, but if it was somewhere plus or minus a year or so on that.

JK: It was between '61 and '63 that it was torn down because when I had finished business school, they were -- it was gone.

HK: Gone, okay.

JK: The second occupants in -- the people who replaced -- succeeded the Richey's is -- as occupants [07:00] of the other half of our duplex was Elmer V. Buschmann [07:06], B-U-S-C-H-M-A-N-N, and his wife and son and daughter. His wife was Liberty. They called her Libby. Liberty, and Susanne was the daughter and Thomas was the son. And then the Cahalanes were succeeded by Lemuel E. Garrison [07:28], Lem Garrison. He subsequently went -- he came from Big Bend, Texas, Big Bend National Park and subsequently moved to Grand Yellowstone. Yellowstone. He became superintendent at Yellowstone.

HK: Yellowstone, that's right.

JK: I'd say he was there and -- he moved to Yellowstone in probably '57.

HK: As the superintendent of Yellowstone.

JK: Yeah, in '57 or '56, they moved back to the west, to Yellowstone.

HK: Yeah.

JK: And then the occupants of the P.E. Smith [08:00] residence -- his successors were Dean Taylor [08:06], D-E-A-N Taylor. And Dean Taylor was a resident park policeman there who had a horse in the stable. He was a mounted policeman. They had one or two mounted policemen, but he was living there and they had his horse in the stable that I have identified as building 114, I think, outside --

HK: I thought Richey [08:30] had a horse, too, you may recall.

JK: Yeah, but that was his personal horse.

HK: Yeah, that's right.

JK: He had -- Richey had a horse in the bottom of the barn there and in the upper floor there were a couple park police horses.

HK: Park police horses, right.

INT: And we were just discussing amongst ourselves, gentlemen, that 114 was indeed the stable building that the Park Service tore down circa 1980 or so [09:00] because of severe termite damage, but it was one of the older buildings there that actually dated to the Spanish-American War [09:07] era. So are you -- do we still have you both?

JK: We still have you.

HK: Yeah, dated back to the -- when? You -- that blanked out on my phone.

INT: Okay. So yeah, what -- this is terrific information. One quick question dating back, John, and then Herb as well, you had mentioned that somebody living all the way towards the entrance of the park in building 120, is there any chance that you could

actually be recalling a building very close to that building 118? And the reason I ask that is because 118 is -- we refer to as an NCO [phonetic] quarters. It is still standing today. It is the only residence at Fort Hunt [09:53] that was left standing. And 120 on this list is listed as a coal shed. So I was wondering [10:00] if there was any chance that the folks who lived towards the entrance could have lived in 118 rather than --

JK: P.E. Smith [10:05] and Dean Taylor [10:06] lived in 118 but the 8 is so decrepit -- I'm going to get out a loupe, but I'm sure that's what it is. It's --

HK: I was having a tough time reading that map, so -- but that building -- the building was on the north side of the entrance road, or as you entered, it would have been on your right side. And, Johnny, I don't think it was more than 100 yards, and probably less from where there was a gatehouse. When we first moved there, there was a gatehouse and it was manned.

JK: You're correct, Brandon. It's a -- I think it's an eight, but I can't make it out. I said it was 1120 because there was an 1120 next to it, but I think it's probably designated 118. I can't read the eight, but --

INT: Yeah, that's -- and everything that you're describing about being 100 yards or so from the entrance [11:00] is consistent with the building that's still standing there today. And we know for a fact that building was used as Park Service housing up until around the early nineties when they finally offed all that because of lead paint and asbestos and all sorts of other issues. But it is still standing today.

JK: Okay. The other buildings that were standing then were -- I've mentioned those that -- building 128. You call it the creamery [11:30].

INT: Yeah, which was originally built as the Post Hospital Building.

JK: That's what we called it.

HK: That was the one -- I don't have this map up here and it's sad to me that I -- my -- I can't read it very well. But was that the one that was at the end of the parade that sort of was perpendicular to the long axis of the parade ground [11:53], Johnny?

JK: Yeah. Affirmative. It's the one down by the water tower. The long -- where the --

HK: Up the road from the water tower, but the water tower's [12:00] at the corner and that sort of went south from there. Yeah.

JK: And when the -- we were there, the public facilities really weren't developed particularly for picnicking as they are now. So you would have large groups that might employ the whole premises like the National Press Club. And there were several others. I can't recall who they were. But they would come out there for a picnic annually or every other year. When the Press Club came out, they made a really big deal. There were probably a thousand or more people there.

HK: Yeah, that was a big deal. Very elaborate, too.

JK: Yes. There was -- there was a recreation building -- it -- this is over near the small oil storage building and to the west of that is something [13:00] called recreation [unintelligible]. I think it's T12, or maybe it's got on the top of it, number -- these numbers are hard to read but I'm going to say it's number 213. Do you see the -- it's very close to the gate that's on Fort Hunt Road about midway along the length of the whole place.

INT: The -- is it the long -- like kind of long linear building that's running kind of in an east, west direction?

JK: Affirmative.

HK: Yes, the diorama laboratory?

JK: Right. That -- I was going to mention that. Why don't you go tell them about that, Herby?

HK: Well, no, you're doing fine. No, I don't know when they started that. It wasn't immediately after we moved in, but subsequently they -- the Park Service turned that into a place where they could build the dioramas that they were putting in various historic areas [14:00] --

JK: Museums.

HK: -- around the country.

JK: Museums, yeah. A fellow named -- a fellow named -- it's called the -- it's called Recreation Building [14:11] and it has the number 4212 over the top. There was a basketball backboard mounted on the building.

JK: Yeah, we played basketball against the building. We put up a backboard there and played basketball.

HK: Do you know who put that up or if that was there?

JK: No, we put that up.

HK: Did we put it up?

JK: Yeah. And then the people who worked in there, one of them was a fellow named Ned Burns [14:35], B-U-R-N-S. And I think another fellow's name was Palmer. I can't recall that definitely, but definitely Ned Burns. And they lived at Fort Washington [14:46]. And there was no Woodrow Wilson Bridge then. So they built a little dingy and they would row from Fort -- on days that they would be working in this building, they'd row across the Potomac. And I think that boat was small enough [15:00] they could carry it

up the street.

INT: Do either of you recall --

HK: From Fort Washington [15:07]?

JK: From Fort -- they carried it up the street in Fort Hunt [15:09] from -- so that somebody wouldn't swipe their boat and then they'd be stuck.

HK: No, where'd they come from? Fort Washington [15:15]?

JK: They came from -- they rowed across the Potomac, yeah, from Fort Washington.

HK: Yeah.

INT: Do either of you recall if the wharf or the dock at Fort Hunt [15:24] just on the other side of the parkway, was that still standing at the time?

HK: Oh, it was a wreck. Yeah. It was expanding because we and our parents had great concern, but we used to go out on it, but particularly when the shad would run and try and fish in there. But it was -- there were a few flanks or gaps and whatnot all in it. And -- but there were remnants of a dock there. It went out -- at least my memory is I think [16:00] maybe a few hundred feet. I may be wrong on that but --

JK: It had pilings and --

HK: A lot of pilings with some boards on top.

JK: And only naughty boys who were disobeying their parents would swim there.

INT: Well, that -- it sounds like there was a lot more of it left then than there is now. The pilings are there, but the planks have been long gone, that's for sure.

JK: Yeah, no, there were some planks, but they -- but it was not a good safe surface, that's for sure.

INT: Just a quick question for clarification, do you recall the year that you moved there and the

year that you moved out?

HK: John said before '47.

JK: I'm not positive of the -- I started checking right there and I think we got there in late September.

HK: I didn't know it was late September. I think it was September. We both started school there or -- but maybe we started in Illinois for a week or two and then moved on, but [17:00] --

JK: Yeah, I --

HK: Well, in -- early in the beginning of the school year, that's for sure.

JK: September of '47, and I think that the -- our parents left when the residence was raised. And it was probably -- let me see. It was definitely after the summer of '61. It was --

HK: And it -- but it was by -- well, I can -- but figure this, Johnny. I got -- I started work in New York in the summer of '61 after graduating from law school and then got called up with the Berlin Wall [17:45] construction and reported for duty and, god, I think it was May or something like that of '62. And in May of '62, I know I'd left from Rickenbacker [18:00] where they had moved to. So my guess is that they moved there on -- either in early -- late '61 or early '62.

INT: Gentlemen, if I could interrupt real quick, we are experiencing some very minor technical difficulties on our end with recording. I'm going to try to hit something on the phone, but if we lose you, I will call you both right back.

HK: Okay.

JK: Okay.

INT: So I just didn't want you to think we were hanging up on you. So just bear with me for

two seconds and we'll see if we can keep you on here. Can you hear us?

JK: I can hear you.

HK: Yeah.

INT: Okay, terrific.

INT: Is it good?

INT: Yeah, I think -- can you briefly just repeat the years that you lived there?

HK: We moved there in September of 1947 and I'm pretty sure -- and we -- both of us were in school when they moved -- my parents moved out [19:00]. So I can't be absolutely certain. But Johnny -- I think it was through 1961, but I know in the spring or early summer of 1962, they had moved to -- out of Fort Hunt [19:16].

INT: And would you say that this period was the period that it was used for housing by the National Park Service?

HK: That '47 to '61, early '62, yes. There were to my knowledge. Now, I can't recall, Johnny, but I think there were -- the houses were all occupied. None of them had been taken down, the Cahalane [19:47] or the Smith [19:47] -- the houses.

JK: Andy Toombs's [19:52] house -- the small house, very close to the gate was razed. I -- that was razed earlier [20:00]. But the other -- the duplex plus two remained. I think they were all taken down the same time.

HK: Yeah.

JK: Well, the one that Smith [20:11] lived in was the last one standing, but the other ones were taken down either in '62 or maybe late '62. My memory of the razing of that, Herby, differs a bit from you because I recall in the summer of '62, I was working for Buzz [phonetic] in Columbus [20:36] and I drove home one weekend that started after

work from Columbus, Ohio, and drove straight home, and I got home about 2:00 in the morning and I was blitzing through Alexandria [20:47], heading south on Washington Street. And I was sure nobody else was alive at that hour of the day, so I was going 50. And a traffic cop happened to be alive.

HK: Okay, so yeah, and you were headed for Fort Hunt [21:00]?

JK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

HK: Okay, well then -- yeah, I'll -- I could have had it since he was --

JK: So south of Franklin Street in Alexandria [21:10] on that woeful day, I met the policeman and I'm sure it -- this visit, I was in traffic court the next day or two days afterward.

HK: Okay.

INT: Very good. So it sounds like Fort Hunt [21:23] from '47 to '61 was largely a Park Service housing area. I have to step out just a --

HK: Oh, no, no.

INT: No?

HK: Oh, not at all. I mean, there were those three places being occupied, but the rest of it -- when we first moved out there in '47, I think essentially every building was on -- was existing that had been constructed during the war. I mean, there were barracks all over the place. There was those barbed wire enclosed compounds that they had sort of in the back woods [22:00] and the back fields there that we understood had been prisoner of war places. That cinder block one was one of them and then there was another one that was a series of two-story buildings. But there had some barbed wire and guard houses at the corners, you know, towers that they were in. And it wasn't really open to the public, but -- and I can't recall, Johnny, when they came by and razed those things. And then

they started opening it up as they -- as a picnic area for the public. They brought in a whole bunch of picnic tables. But they razed all those buildings. They filled in that big concrete swimming pool that was just to the east rear of our house that we were staying in at 101. And then they -- over time, they started taking all of that stuff down [23:00] and then they started putting some -- they eliminated a bunch of roads that had been built to go out to those back 40s. They were those buildings there with those barbed wire around them. They took all that down. They eliminated some of the roads and made walking paths in some places and that kind of thing. And as Johnny referred to earlier, the National Press Club for a series of years used to have a big shindig out there. They -- and there'd be a lot of senators and so forth that were invited out there, congressmen, government officials, and at least 1,000 people. They went through more beer than you could imagine. I remember they got all -- the latrines were labeled, "Used beer." And they brought in at least once and I think it was multiple times, they had big barbecue and they brought in these barbecue experts from Texas. Do you remember that, Johnny [24:00]?

JK: Yep. Guy came with three of those.

HK: Right there, roasting these hogs, I -- maybe a side of beef too, I think both, over these fires and they tended them all night.

JK: I would say that it was secondarily housing. That was very incidental. After -- when we first moved there, there was a guard at the gate -- at the gatehouse. And then there was a -- and there was a chain across the road. When he left, there was a chain across the road. Eventually, it became untended and we had to open the chain and drop it -- at the extreme east end of the place. We had to drive the chain. Then after a while, once some of these

hazards were removed at the barracks and so forth, then they started bringing -- as Herby said -- bringing in picnic tables and make it more accessible to the public at large. It was still fairly limited, though, because there weren't a lot of restrooms and that sort of thing. That -- the hospital or creamery [25:00], whatever you want to call it, served as that.

HK: That's right.

JK: But I think there were many times, hours, and days that it wasn't open.

INT: Okay, so I'm going to step out here. I just wanted -- I think Matt and Brandon are going to ask you a lot of questions regarding those details. They're very important because it was our impression up till this conversation that the prisoner compound at some of those facilities were already gone by the time you're talking about, 1947. So this will be very important. But one question I have -- and you don't have to answer it now, but answer it to Matt and Brandon. Do you have any photographs of any of the facilities during the time that you were there? And, number two, what do you recall at the time in terms of your understanding of what went on there during World War II. If you can kind of erase anything that you've learned recently about 1142 [25:53], it would be interesting to find out what you had learned from either first or secondhand accounts living there as to [26:00] what went on at that site during the Second World War.

JK: All right.

INT: So the photographs and then those impressions of when you were there. But clearly Matt and Brandon are very excited to hear about the fact that some of the prisoner compound and facilities were still there later than we had first realized.

HK: Oh, they were there. We used to ride our backs around those paths and we -- they had kept the fences around them, but there was at some point -- I don't ever remember getting

into those barracks, those two-story barracks that was surrounded with the guard towers, but I remember that cinderblock deal. We were able to get in that somehow. I don't know how. And -- still around a little bit on occasion. But I don't know, Johnny, about pictures of that stuff. I'm sure we have some probably at the front.

JK: That's all right.

HK: Something of our place where we took a picture [27:00], family picture when we had relatives visiting or something like that.

JK: Yeah.

HK: But as far as pictures of the old hospital, as we called it, down there or the parade ground [27:13] itself or the water tower and stuff, I don't know.

JK: All right. I doubt I'd know where to look for that.

HK: Yeah.

JK: I could probably -- the buildings to the -- if you stand at the -- in the front door of our house and look to the west, there's a row of temporary buildings there. Many of those --

HK: One-story jobs.

JK: Huh?

HK: I think they were one story.

JK: Yeah, they were. Most -- almost all of those were standing when we moved in.

HK: Yeah, they were. Yeah. I don't think that -- I can't guarantee it, but my recollection was I don't remember seeing anything that gave evidence [28:00] that something had been demolished there.

JK: Right.

HK: When we first moved in and we roamed around that place.

JK: Right. I'll tell you, somebody who may have some more firsthand knowledge of what went on there during the war would be Frances Sheeler [28:17] [phonetic] if she's still alive.

HK: Oh, god, maybe.

JK: The people -- I'm talking now about people who lived --

HK: Neighbors outside the fence.

JK: Outside the fence, immediately to the north of where our house was, outside the fence.

There were probably six houses out there and we can tell you the names of the people who occupied them. But they were -- at least the father of this one family was employed as an Army sergeant during World War II. And he would probably know what went on or have some idea of what went on in Fort Hunt [29:00] because he was right next to it.

INT: Mrs. Sheeler [29:02] has indeed passed away but only in the last five or seven years or so. There were a number of newspaper articles that were done about 10 years ago.

JK: Is that Mary Sheeler [29:13] or Frances Sheeler [29:13]?

INT: That would be the thing. I guess that would be Mary Sheeler.

JK: Mary's the mother.

INT: Okay.

JK: So their daughter is Frances [29:20], F-R-A-N-C-E-S. And I don't know what her married name is, but she would know what her father knew because she was old enough - - she's my brother's age.

INT: Okay, then that -- yeah, then it must have been the mother who passed because the one -- the Sheeler who passed away about 10 years ago was quite elderly, around 90 or so.

JK: That's her mother.

INT: Okay, okay. We've got about a minute or two of the current side of tape and then I'm going to have to flip it. So just one real quick clarification question -- and we've got several -- you mentioned that there was a, at least initially, a gate or guard post at the entrance [30:00]. Was this -- and you said it was manned initially. Was it manned by U.S. military personnel?

JK: Affirmative. Yeah, it was the Army.

INT: Wow. Now, were there any other Army staff on post or just there at the entrance?

JK: I thought it was just at the entrance.

HK: Yeah, I don't think there was any staff around.

JK: There wasn't.

INT: And so, again, to clarify, we're talking circa 1947 when you first moved there.

JK: Initially --

HK: All of '47.

INT: Okay, so for all of '47, there was still an armed guard at the entrance to Fort Hunt [30:33]?

HK: Yeah, but I don't think that lasted too long. I don't know if it was a year or less.

JK: Less, probably.

HK: That's my guess. That's very vague. That's not something I really have a strong remembrance of.

JK: I could just remember lowering the chain after the guard had departed. Either he wasn't there or -- when you drive up there, some of you'd have to hop out of the car [31:00] while the driver held the car. Then you'd hop out as a kid and undo the chain.

HK: Yeah, and but I think the chain lasted a few years because I think it wasn't until they had

those buildings all demolished and the debris dozed away, and then the park police used -
- they would come through just on a circuit. They were patrolling the parkway there and
they would just pull off and make a circle around there. And they had regular -- you
could almost set your watch, as I recall it, by when they would come through.

INT: Okay, we need to --

[End of Tape 1A]

[Beginning of Tape 1B]

HK: Johnny?

JK: Yeah?

HK: Do you happen to have that map? I'm -- as we were talking, I've been searching my old
emails for that attachment that had that map in it. I know when I looked at it, but heck, I
can't really make a lot out of this thing.

JK: All right, hold on. You want to know what date it is?

HK: Yeah, because I got to try and find it.

INT: And if not, I can run to my office and try to re-forward it to you, Herb.

HK: I think I saved the thing, so --

JK: Just a second. I'll find it.

HK: What went on during World War II, I think the answer is not very much. All I can really
tell you is we thought we were -- I was under the impression that it was a place where
they kept I think it was German prisoners of war.

JK: Right [01:01].

HK: And that was it. And I think we sort of somehow -- I may be making this up, but that we
thought they were maybe some of the more important. They weren't just Joe private, they

were sort of more the senior officers or whatever that they had captured.

JK: That was my recollection, German officers.

INT: Okay, so as --

HK: Other than that, I don't know.

JK: I can't recall anything.

INT: Okay, so as children, when you were there, you did have a sense that this had been a military base and had been a prisoner of war complex?

HK: Yeah.

INT: Okay, and so in September '47, when you first moved in, there was military personnel who was actively guarding the entrance?

HK: Yeah.

INT: And then that -- shortly after that, was that about the time when the building began to be demolished, that they took the guard away?

HK: I don't [02:00] -- god, I don't think the -- Johnny, I don't know what your recollection is. Mine was not that like a few months after we moved in that they started demolishing buildings. I thought it was maybe a few years. I don't know if it was one year or two years or three years, but something like that before at least they started doing it in earnest.

JK: Well, the guard I think went away pretty quickly. I don't think he stayed around. I think once they had people living there --

HK: But they kept the chain.

JK: They kept the chain, yeah. They kept the chain up and you didn't -- you didn't have any public traffic in there. I --

HK: And I don't think they demolished the buildings for a few years, with my recollection.

But I could be wrong. I'm not going to stake my life on that.

JK: I can't recall, but I can tell you that as -- we used to use -- you know we ran that pipe out to the garden to water the stuff?

HK: Yeah.

JK: That pipe came from those buildings.

HK: Yeah [03:00].

JK: And that was pretty early in the game because Vic Cahalane [03:07] was a big gardener and he was big -- he helped put it together. What we're talking about is we had a garden -
-

HK: Oh, Johnny, I'm not sure that's true. There was a water system at the -- there was a -- there was that water tank basically across from the streets from the Percy Smith [03:26] house.

JK: Yeah.

HK: And at the base of it, there was a building. I'm trying to remember, it was partly sort of -- there was a slope there and was it partly in the slope or what? But as I recall it, it was like almost reinforced concrete or something. But a masonry building that had the water pump and they had to chlorinate the water and all that sort of stuff.

JK: Right.

HK: And I thought that we -- that Vic Cahalane [03:54] and we as kids helped him, that they got permission to cap off a line right there [04:00].

JK: Yeah, that's correct, but I think the pipe came -- when these buildings were raised, that's where the pipe came from.

HK: Oh.

INT: So you guys were salvaging material from the demolition?

JK: Yeah, right. The --

HK: You could be right on that. I don't recall. I don't have a clear recollection when those buildings went down, but just to say I didn't think it was right away.

JK: It wasn't immediately. It wasn't because we would walk from -- you could get in a million of these low tar paper shacks, barracks. You walked in, you walked out. Pretty uninteresting.

HK: When you said, "tar paper," they weren't tar paper. They had wood siding on them or --

JK: Oh, did they?

HK: Yeah.

JK: Okay.

HK: They were all sort of -- most of them anyway were sort of a beige color as I recall it, sort of an off-white or something.

JK: Okay. Well, they were pretty uninteresting.

HK: Oh, yeah. Oh, they were just one-story low buildings around there.

JK: And --

HK: And they were not on the parade ground [05:00]. They kept the parade ground empty. It was all -- it was really to the rear of the houses. And there was nothing until after that street that went behind that creamery [05:16] or hospital building. And there was a -- well, let me see. How do I describe it? They don't -- well, they're showing I guess on this map here, they're showing -- I finally got it up again. The -- oh, let me see here.

INT: You're talking about the building behind the creamery [05:51] building?

HK: Well, no, you can see here they're showing -- there were, to my mind, though, there were

a lot more build [06:00] -- well, they're showing only about three barracks or something there along -- if you take the road, the entrance road, and as it goes along the north side of the parade ground [06:11], and that's where all these residences were fronting on.

They're only showing like one, two, three, four -- one, two, three, four, five, six buildings. I would bet you my life there were more than that there when we moved in. I don't know. What's the date of this?

INT: Well, we -- this map I believe was produced in February of 1945. So it's possible that in the last year of the war, additional buildings could have been added that don't show up on there.

HK: I thought there were. And maybe I'm wrong, but I thought there were some more buildings in there than that [07:00]. And what I don't remember, Johnny, is that I -- that building, what is it, 128, is that the creamery [07:12] or --

INT: Yes.

HK: 128, if you look to the east of that, behind -- or across the road, there are those two large structures. One's L shaped and one's sort of T shaped.

INT: Yeah.

HK: I -- do you remember something there?

JK: I can't say I do.

HK: I -- yeah, I don't. Now, that doesn't mean they weren't there.

INT: Those very well could have been some of the first buildings razed because that compound of three buildings was where the MIS-X [07:45] program was located. I don't know if you've heard about it. That's where they were manufacturing secret escape devices and sending them to American airmen who had been shot down and held by the Germans.

And they were writing coded letters back and forth [08:00] and giving secret parcels and things. This was literally one of the most classified programs of the war. And it occupied those three buildings. So it's not surprising to hear that two of those could have been razed immediately after the war.

HK: Yeah, well, first of all, now that you're telling me that, I didn't have any idea. I never heard that, that that was going on there or that there was ever that kind of a program. And somehow I don't remember those buildings being there. But I could be wrong. If they were, they weren't there long. [laughs]

JK: Yeah.

INT: Well, let me ask you both since we're talking about some of the buildings, what about on the parade ground [08:38] when you were there?

HK: I think so. But I'm trying to remember. I'm pretty sure there was.

INT: Is it --

HK: And if you asked me where I thought it was, I thought it was in front of that --

INT: Do you think --

HK: -- hospital or creamery [09:00] building.

INT: They do show a flag on the map. And we know that, at some point, the flag holder was torn down because up until recently there was no flagpole at the fort. We went out and did archaeology, found the remnants of where the old flagpole had used to be. And just a year and a half ago, the Park Service reinstalled a flagpole on the parade ground [09:22], but it wasn't clear to us when the World War II flagpole was torn down.

JK: Is that labeled 180 on this map?

INT: You got it. Exactly.

JK: I don't believe that was there when we were there.

HK: No, not there. I thought it was -- yeah.

JK: There was a -- I don't remember it there.

HK: Where 180 is, I thought if there was one, it was more in front of that 128.

JK: You see the -- it's sort of a diagonal -- it looks like a sidewalk that looks like it's cutting off one spur of the parade ground [09:59], the southeast spur [10:00]?

HK: Yeah.

INT: Yeah.

JK: That sidewalk would have been -- facing northwest from there was a baseball field where -- a softball diamond.

INT: Okay.

JK: And local fire departments from the hinterlands like -- places like Herndon and Reston, that was all out in the woods. See, that was -- they would come down there and play baseball because the Mount Vernon fire department was up Fort Hunt Road a ways and it had a baseball team. But it was -- Fort Hunt was a place where a lot of the fire department baseball games took place.

INT: That was after they had taken the chain down and --

JK: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But there was a baseball field there, there was a flagpole at 180.

HK: Probably in the fifties, but I know it was -- I don't recall a flagpole out there.

INT: Okay, that's helpful to know, for sure. One question, the building 128, the hospital or creamery [10:54] building, do you ever recall that building being used for anything while you were there [11:00]?

JK: Yeah.

HK: Yeah, restrooms.

JK: Correct.

HK: It was -- when they opened the park up, and I'm guessing it was in the early fifties, like 1950 maybe, or something like that that they had -- and it was -- it was particularly valued as I recall it because groups -- large groups could reserve the area and that's where, like, the Press Club came out there for a few -- some years. I don't know how many. But there were other groups that would -- and there weren't many large areas like that as I recall it in the park system where they could reserve that large an area. And they did have, as I recall it, some port-o-potties out there, but they used the bathrooms in the -- that building as I recall it. I can't remember [12:00], weren't they in the lower level?

JK: Yeah. They were on the -- you walked up a -- four or five steps to -- in the building to the -- to a veranda.

HK: Yeah. It was like a porch, yeah.

JK: A porch, yeah. And then inside were the restrooms, yeah.

INT: Now, we've had one neighbor tell us that they recall that building being used at one point in the circa 1950s as a school. Does that ring any bell for you whatsoever?

HK: No, not at all for me.

JK: Negative, negative. Not for me.

INT: Okay. Now, do you -- were you there or was your family there when that building was torn down?

JK: Not to my recollection.

HK: I don't know. But, remember, I left to go to college in 1954. And so I'd be home

summers and that, but I suppose I don't recall that being --

JK: I left in --

HK: It was there about a good [13:00] -- I think through that because we -- through that period.

JK: I left in '57 and it was still up, I think.

INT: Okay. Yeah, and it may not have come down until even the early sixties. Circa 1960 or so, the Park Service put in a very large picnic pavilion with restroom facilities and a large outdoor fire pit and then a stage. That's still standing there today. That's essentially smackdab on top of where that old post hospitable building was.

JK: Oh. Yeah, the -- I'm sure that what was in the building would have been inadequate for the general public. I mean, it was just -- it was not big restrooms for the public, no. It was restrooms for the public, but it wasn't built properly for that. [laughs]

INT: Now, when you guys were there, do you remember any other Park Service addition? For example, either picnic shelters or comfort stations and restroom facilities that were specifically installed brand new by the Park Service [14:00]?

JK: Johnny, there was some rerouting of -- you see that area where that -- where the -- on the southwest corner where the barbed wire enclosure is, that was opened up into smaller picnic groves and I believe that there was some sort of -- there was a road that allowed you to get to that area. And there was a -- I think there may have been some picnic like facilities built in, restrooms or -- yeah, sanitary facilities for people who were using those picnic areas. But I'm sure that they were made -- there were small picnic areas created out there. Because I recall once some boy scouts went out there and had a get-together and they built a fire [15:00] and some of them got some poison ivy in the fire and the

smoke was disastrous for people downwind.

INT: In your roamings of the abandoned buildings and whatnot and biking around, would -- did there appear to be any military equipment or anything that was left behind or was the post completely cleared out by the time you got there?

JK: Cleared out.

HK: I don't remember.

JK: Yeah, it was cleared out.

INT: Okay, but the guard towers and whatnot, they were still standing around the two prisoner compounds?

HK: Yeah, the barbed wired enclosures, you know, the fences and everything.

INT: Do you remember any specifics about the demolition of those structures, I mean, if they were -- did they bulldoze them? Did they set them on fire? Did they --

HK: Oh, they bulldozed [16:00]. There was no fire that I recall. Now, this one -- and [unintelligible] in memory, I assume this drawing is right. It's a little different from my recollection, frankly. But that -- I'm assuming that piece that is -- showed the road. I'm trying to figure out just how this drawing works, to be sure. This right doesn't -- there, the cinderblock one. I remember them. I think they were using -- they used heavy equipment to knock the walls down. We sort of watched some of that from a distance. And they had to haul the debris away. It was made of cinderblocks, but as I recall a painted sort of a khaki color.

INT: Now, was this a Park Service [17:00] work crew or a military crew?

HK: No, I think it was -- I don't know whether it was Park Service or if it was a civilian contractor. I don't think it was the Army. But I really don't know anymore. But I think it

was a civilian contractor is what I would have guessed. But I am assuming from this drawing that the part -- am I reading this thing right, that the part of the drawing that says, "post," which has the block and says, "post engineering Fort Belvoir [17:44]," and all that and has sort of a big open field and then it has that road leading out and you can see what is like a fence around a building that has a series of things. I'm assuming that was that cinderblock deal [18:00].

INT: There were the two compounds. One of the compounds with a single fence running around it, it looks like a giant plus sign or a cross. That -- the one that's shaped like a cross or a plus sign, that was the cinderblock one.

HK: Yeah, and that's one of the cross things like that, yeah.

INT: Okay. And it -- that would have had a large central guard tower coming out of the middle of the cross.

HK: Right. I had -- the -- yeah, what was interesting to me is somehow I had the thing in my mind. You're right, the tower was in the center. Now, that was just, as I recall it, a one story deal. And the tower then was sort of a second story on that -- in the middle of it where the cross was. But I thought it was more radiating out than the way it is drawn there, but I'm sure they're right and my recollection's wrong [19:00]. But I do remember some of those long corridors. We got in there and it just -- it was -- they were long.

INT: Yeah. Do you -- from your time in that building -- and just feel free to answer "no" if you don't remember, but do you remember about the inside layout of that building because this was one of the buildings where the prisoners would have been kept and presumably there would have been cells or rooms for the prisoners. I'm curious if any of those interior rooms were still there.

HK: I don't recall.

INT: Okay.

HK: We didn't get in there very much. I don't know if we got in there at all until they started to demolish it. And when they would -- when they left at night or for the weekend or something, we could get in there.

INT: Got you. You had mentioned -- going back earlier in our conversation about the building labeled --

HK: The compound, excuse me.

INT: Right. Yeah [20:00]. We had a question about general Park Service usage of some of the buildings that I remember were still standing when you moved in. You had mentioned the recreation building was where they were building dioramas of things for exhibits.

HK: Yeah.

INT: Did they use any of the other buildings or things like that or were they all basically just vacant buildings, just standing, waiting to be torn down?

HK: My recollection is that was the only building they were using. I don't recall them using any of the buildings that were going down. No, the only buildings that were being used were the residences that were being occupied and that hospital subsequently opened it up to the public for some restroom facilities and also it served as a little bit of a pavilion, if you will, for some of the bigger things. They might have set up [21:00] an exhibit in there or something, some organization's event. But except for the residences and that use for basically by the public, it was that diorama building, and that was it as far as I can recall.

JK: Do you -- I sent you, Brandon, a list of the buildings that survived.

INT: Yeah, we have that right here in front of us.

JK: Okay, other than that, my recollection is all the rest of the buildings were pretty much razed and trashed and removed. And the -- if you look on the south end of that creamery [21:42], that projection out the south, that was a raised -- that was a raised platform. It was like -- it was like a big deck and it was probably four or five feet off the ground. And when big picnics would come there, sometimes they'd have a show up there [22:00] on that platform.

INT: Okay. Another question for you, do you remember the old concrete gun battery that were there at the post?

JK: I --

HK: Yeah, we rode those a lot.

JK: I can still smell them.

HK: Yeah, and those go back to, as I understand, to the Spanish-American War [22:23].

INT: You're absolutely right, but could you just describe the condition they were in at that time? Obviously they're still standing today, and the Park Service has them closed off and -- to keep people from going in. Needless to say, people still break in from time to time. But I'm sure as young and teenage boys, you probably managed to find your way in there every once in a while.

HK: Well, I don't think any of them were really locked, were they, Johnny?

JK: No, no, no. You could drive in there with a bike.

HK: There were a lot of them. You could get into the -- they had rooms. As I recall it, they had rooms that were basically [23:00] on the ground level that you'd get [unintelligible]. That's where they kept the ammo or that's where they sat if they worked on duty up at the

road. They -- there were no guns as I recall it in place.

JK: None. There were the circular mounts --

HK: Yeah.

JK: -- up above where -- with the so-called disappearing rifles which would sit. And of course this was all grown over, so you couldn't see the river from here, but I suppose if you -- they were oriented to the south and the river makes a bend there.

HK: To the east, also, some of them.

JK: Yeah, they went over --

HK: Over there closest to the parkway.

JK: Yeah, there were two small ones close to the parkway and then the main one that I think you have labeled 208 or 203, something like that.

INT: Right, yeah, the big ones were 208, 203, and then the smaller ones were 201 and 202.

JK: Yeah [24:00], well the big one -- I think that had maybe three emplacements or three gun mounts. I don't know about the -- I'm just reading -- that had a multiplicity of them. The two other ones --

HK: They had these big metal doors that -- to these rooms down below. And they were dank and occasionally we'd find a snake in there or something like that, but there was nothing in them.

INT: Yeah. No, they probably had cleared everything out.

JK: It was cleaned out.

INT: Still [unintelligible] to this day.

JK: Well, there was -- faint odor of urine, if you know what I mean.

HK: Yeah.

INT: So the main entry you talked about raising and lowering the chains, the main entry was down, sort of on the eastern end.

HK: Yeah.

INT: That was really the only entry road into the Fort Hunt [24:49] area?

JK: Correct.

INT: Okay, because --

HK: That is right. There was another road that went, but it was barricaded by our -- by our residents [25:00]. And you can see it on that -- they got the drawing there, but it had a fence going across it so you couldn't access it but they -- we did open -- they did open up or we did. I can't remember how it got opened. I don't think we did it. It was a pedestrian passage there and -- because our playmates were in the families across the street there on Fort Hunt Road.

INT: Right. So officially it was a gate that had been closed, but unofficially people could go in and out?

JK: Well, we had to go --

HK: Not drive, but walk in and out.

JK: Our mailbox was out there on Fort Hunt Road.

HK: That's -- our mailbox was out there. That's right.

INT: Okay, well we still have neighbors cutting the fence at certain places so they can get in, too. So that continues, practice continues.

HK: One of the things, and Johnny, you correct me as well, but what bugs me about this map is [26:00], as I see, the half that's got the identification block on it which is showing the western end of the -- I believe. That's supposed to be the west end.

JK: Yeah.

HK: I don't see where they got the layout there for the second of the two prisoner of war -- the one that had the double-decker wooden barracks in it. As I recall it, I used to be able to ride my bike -- in this drawing which is split in half I guess to get it on the computer or whatever it is here, and you can just see, I believe, in the lower right hand portion, the -- a portion [27:00] of the sketch of the duplex that 101 that we lived in. And then as you go to the north there, you get that road that's going by that -- what you called the recreation building which was the diorama building there.

JK: Right.

HK: And there were a whole bunch of those single story barracks there that they have drawn in there, but those, as far as I know, were not -- I don't know what that road around there, that loop or whatever it is, what all that was in there. I just recall that they weren't enclosed with barbed wire or anything. But you could ride your bike and go down that road. And, as I recall it, it then looped to the south, and that prisoner of war thing was somewhere over in this -- it was buried sort of in the woods [28:00] back there on that west -- in the southwest portion but before you got to that cement block one that they've got sketched in. So I just see that big open area and I don't see anything there. But there was stuff there.

INT: Yeah, where -- we have it here. So you're saying on the one that we sent you over email, the one that's split over two pages, that you're not seeing the one compound with the multiple storied buildings inside of it?

HK: Yes.

INT: It should be there if you can -- if you can scroll beyond the -- you'll have the area on one

side of the line. It shows all the barracks and everything. If you move the cursor and scroll all the way on up, it should be on the opposite side of it.

HK: I can't make it scroll. Mine is stopping. Well, when you say "scroll [29:00]," the way it's set up -- and I'm not a computer whiz, so I may be living with something that I don't have to live with but just a second here. I printed it out. Let me see what I --

JK: What you're saying, Brandon, is that the six-inch water line goes to the compound he's looking for?

INT: Exactly. You got it. If you follow that six-inch water line, it goes directly right into the middle of that compound. And, John, you have that on your drawing, correct?

JK: I taped the -- I taped the pages together.

HK: The six-inch water line that's going [unintelligible], is that the two-story building?

INT: Yeah, that --

HK: The block building?

INT: Yes. The six-inch water line runs into the entire complex. It's got that double set of fence around the outside and then inside you can see there's three or four buildings. Those are the two-story buildings. The one long building [30:00] that's oriented east to west, that would have been the two-story building inside the compound.

HK: But where's the concrete stuff?

INT: The concrete one that was like a cross is unfortunately right on the break between the two pages that I sent you.

HK: Oh, okay.

INT: So you'll have a little piece of it on one drawing and then about two thirds of it on the other. If you can find Battery Mount Vernon, the big, big gun battery --

HK: Yeah?

INT: It says on there, "Old Battery." Just south of that is where the concrete compound was.

HK: Okay, okay, okay, okay.

INT: So does that ring a bell now that you got that placed on the map? Does it allow you to kind of --

HK: I mean, I'll be honest with you, I didn't quite -- in my mind, I didn't have [31:00] the concrete one put actually behind, but that probably made sense. You rode -- I know you went past it and so -- and it was all overgrown and everything, so you didn't realize, at least I didn't, that it was actually behind or to the -- covered to the north --

JK: Between the gun battery and the river?

INT: Yeah, that's -- the drawing that you have is actually oriented upside down for north, south. So up is actually south on --

[End of Tape 1B]

[Beginning of Tape 2A]

JK: -- it was to the south of the double story.

HK: The [unintelligible] -- the development is to the south of the battery.

JK: Affirmative.

HK: The battery's to the north of it. Okay. I get it. Okay.

INT: Yeah, if you can see -- I apologize for having to send it in two pages like that, but you'll find that in the middle of the parade ground [00:24] if you have just on one sheet, you will see there is a north arrow.

HK: Yeah, I see it.

INT: You can see the N is at the bottom of that arrow.

HK: Yeah, no, I --

INT: North is actually south.

HK: -- didn't have any problem with orientation. I could figure that out just from my recollection, but yeah.

INT: Well, this -- we've got the other tape running. I'm not sure in terms of other questions. This has been extremely enlightening for us here in terms of figuring out when certain buildings were coming and going [01:00]. To clarify one more time -- yeah, we were describing -- I forget which one of you it was that was describing how there was the one area back by one of the prisoner compounds, kind of a wooded area where there were little kind of picnic areas that were set in or little areas for tables. Do you remember if there was an entire new -- we refer to it today as the Luke Road [phonetic].

JK: That's correct.

INT: Okay, so that Luke Road was installed while you were there?

JK: I think so, yes.

HK: Yeah. Yeah, they obliterated some of the roads that were there and then put in. And they did -- now that I think, there were some comfort stations put out there and they -- yeah.

JK: The Luke Road was installed while we were there.

INT: Okay. That's helpful because we -- again, we knew it was post World War II, but we weren't sure exactly when.

HK: But I think that was fair -- that either had to be late -- I think that was not right away [02:00], Johnny, was it?

JK: No, no, no.

HK: I mean, was it -- that was late fifties or mid fifties?

JK: I'd say mid because they had to clean the -- they cleaned the stuff off probably within a couple years. I'd say the place was cleaned off before 1950.

HK: Yeah.

JK: And after 1950, the buildings that I described as remaining remained. And then once they had the demolition done, they made it more accessible to the public, put in the -- those picnic grounds and made access so you didn't have to go through a chain.

INT: Let me ask about your own living situation and that of the other Park Service families. I assume this was kind of the equivalent to just living in park housing or renting or something along those lines. Were your maintenance issues, if there was a plumbing problem or something like that, was that done by National Park Service [03:00] maintenance personnel?

JK: Negative.

HK: No, we had to -- I mean, we did our own maintenance. And we had to get a plumber or electrician or whatever.

INT: Okay, so you had to pay or your parents had to pay for any housing issues or if you were going to redo something or put it -- do any work on the house, you guys had to pay for that out of pocket?

JK: Correct.

INT: Okay. I'm trying to think if we have anything else. Do you guys feel that there is anything that maybe we glossed over or anything else that you want to add?

JK: No, I -- if -- I think probably all the people that we knew there are deceased, that are contemporaries of our parents.

INT: If we could follow up on some other questions, one of the interesting things [04:00] that

we heard from you guys talking with us today kind of is that -- with some of the documents we have here, one of the map sets that we had, which unfortunately we didn't send you every single page that we had, has a layout of the fort on it. And going by I want to say maybe a dozen, 15 to 20 buildings out of maybe the 60 buildings that were there, that they indicate were still standing by like '46 and this drawing had indicated that the prisoner compounds were gone by then. But what you're telling us today says something different, that there was a good deal of the buildings still standing a lot of the demolition didn't take place until the late forties.

HK: Now, that, there's no question about. That -- I remember riding my bike around there and through it. There's no question about that, in that there were a bunch -- when we moved in [05:00], there were a whole bunch of these barrack like buildings around -- close to the house which they've drawn in here.

INT: Right, right.

JK: I'll second that. In fact, I've got concrete proof because -- well, no, it was wooden proof. I remember taking a bunch of those doors out of one of these buildings after they'd been razed with a bunch of old wooden doors, six panel doors sitting around. And I made a treehouse out of them, down near P.E. Smith's [05:28] house. And my dad was very unhappy how I had built that treehouse. So I wouldn't have gotten those doors from anywhere other than these buildings that were torn down.

INT: Right.

INT: You don't happen to have any pictures of you up in that treehouse, do you?

JK: Hey, I burned all the evidence. Herbert E. Cahalane was not very happy with me up there.

INT: [inaudible] some of the buildings. Was the swimming pool still there?

HK: The swimming pool was there when we moved in [06:00]. It was dry.

INT: Okay.

HK: And that demolished I'd say in the first two or three years after we were there.

JK: It was filled in pretty soon.

HK: Yeah.

JK: That was a hazard. In fact, all these buildings to some extent were a hazard if you let the public at large get in them. And that picture that's on the NPR site was taken across the swimming pool, looking at the rear of the house that we occupied.

INT: Okay.

JK: In the back of that house, incidentally, those two protrusions were we think maids' rooms.

INT: Oh, really?

JK: Yeah, there were bath -- there was a bathroom -- yeah, there was a full bath back in each one of those. And of course the house was split north-south. The dividing -- the parting wall ran north-south. And I suppose you have pictures of that house. Well, I could probably resurrect a picture of that house if I looked for it.

HK: Johnny, weren't we told that Eisenhower supposedly [07:00] had been in that -- lived in that house during -- in the twenties or thirties or something?

JK: Yeah, I don't recall that.

HK: Well.

JK: It was quite a nice house, actually. It had -- you have it labeled NCO quarters, or is that officer's quarters?

HK: I think officer's quarters.

JK: Okay, well they -- it was -- they had nine to 10 foot ceilings in it and pretty spacious rooms. They had --

HK: A large kitchen, a pantry on the first floor. And then they'd say there was that attachment that had a bathroom in it and what could have been a reasonable sized bedroom. And then there was a back porch attached to that. That was that -- enclosed with a ladder as I recall it [08:00].

JK: Four bedrooms upstairs.

HK: And then upstairs there were four bedrooms.

INT: Another question for you [inaudible] --

HK: As I recall it. And then there was a stairway that went up to an attic and there was a building stair. It wasn't a pulldown deal, it was another stairway. Not as finished as well as the one from the first to the second floor. And the attic was quite large. They had floor -- all flooring in it and you could stand up in there.

JK: They had a B board ceiling.

HK: Yeah, and we didn't have any air conditioning. And my dad did a great job -- came up with -- we got this huge fan -- how -- what was it, a four foot diameter something?

JK: Forty-two inches.

HK: Forty-two inches and rotated very slowly, but it built an enclosure and they took out a window that had been up there [09:00]. And that became -- it would cool that house down in no time in the evening.

INT: Do you remember how the house was heated?

JK: Yes.

HK: A coal furnace.

JK: It had a coal fire steam boiler.

INT: Was -- so -- and did it have heat radiators?

HK: Yeah.

JK: There were radiators.

INT: Okay.

JK: And then when Lem Garrison [09:23] came to town, somehow we got oil burners installed in the coal furnace.

INT: Okay, but it was always radiant heat?

JK: It was all -- radiator.

INT: Yeah, okay.

JK: One pipe -- the steam vented into the room.

INT: As opposed to an actual radiator with the water going in and out?

JK: You can have two pipe steam systems where the condensates return to a boiler or you could have one pipe steam system where the steam vented into the room.

INT: Really?

JK: And we -- it was the latter.

INT: Got you.

JK: Not a lot of steam [10:00], just -- it would vent -- it would make a little sound as that steam vent --

HK: A little hissing.

JK: Yeah, it would make a little hissing noise and that would always get your guest's attention.

INT: Got you. You had mentioned one of your neighbors was a park policeman, Mr. Toombs

[10:19]?

JK: Andy Toombs was and then Dean Taylor [10:23] was also.

INT: Okay, and he had a horse that he quartered over in the stable?

JK: Dean Taylor did.

INT: Okay, and that was actually used by the park police? While you were there, they basically were just operating out of that residence. They didn't have like a separate substation or anything?

JK: That's correct. He did not have a separate office. Dean Taylor's [10:46] horse was quite a spirited palomino stallion. And at one point he threw him and he had back -- very serious back pain ever after. In fact, he went on disability and the pain was so intense [11:00] that at some point he decided to put his pistol in his mouth and end his life, which he did.

INT: Oh, that's too bad. Okay, let's see, trying to figure some of these other buildings. You had mentioned the water tower was still standing?

JK: Correct.

INT: Okay, and then that was torn down as part of the overall demolition?

HK: Oh, it wasn't torn down till I think we moved out, was it?

JK: Not to my knowledge.

HK: Yeah, I mean, that was the water supply to my knowledge, that we had.

INT: So these series of five or so families that were living in these houses, is it your understanding that these houses would have all been torn down at about the same time or do you not really know because you were long gone by then?

HK: Wasn't the Smith house going down first?

JK: No, he's saying the Smith house wasn't torn down till 1980.

HK: Okay [12:00].

JK: The first one to go down was Andy Toombs' [12:02]. Then the other three residences were -- that is the two duplex units, the two -- the one duplex building and building 103 went down about the same time.

INT: Okay. So this -- and this was while you were still there, so this would have been circa 1960 or so?

HK: This was when my parents moved out.

INT: Okay.

JK: Herby, that's got to be wrong because I don't think -- I don't think anybody succeeded Garrisons [12:39] at 103. No one was there after that. So I think that building was probably raised before the duplex.

HK: I have no recollection of it.

JK: I would recall --

HK: When I went away at college and law school and stuff like --

JK: I would recall if anybody succeeded Garrison [12:58]. I knew Garrison had left by 1957 [13:00] because I graduated from high school in '57 and that summer I went out to work in Yellowstone [13:07] as a ditch digger and he was there.

INT: Did you guys both attend Fort Hunt High School?

JK: Negative. We both attended George Washington High School in Alexandria [13:20].

INT: Okay. Another question slightly changing the subject, but another question -- in terms of the entrances to the post, we talked a little bit about the main entrance presumably off of the parkway that early on had the guard there, do you remember any other entrances to

Fort Hunt [13:40] other than that main one we've already talked about?

HK: When we moved in, that was just -- that was it and then, as I said, there was that road that was barricaded by our house, behind the house there, on the north of the house.

JK: I can't recall, but there may have been [14:00].

HK: But then there was that -- the road that goes by those two small batteries, and that went down its own tunnel, if you will, underneath the parkway and went to the dock.

INT: Yes.

HK: But you couldn't access it, I mean, per se except by water. And the dock was in great disrepair as we talked about before.

JK: Was there a gate that was -- was there a brick in the fence at the extreme northwest corner that is up there by Plymouth Haven [14:38] where Rueben Altman [14:39] used to live, up in that corner? I can't recall whether there's a gate there or not. There was a bunch of old buildings up there that were torn down.

HK: Yeah.

INT: Okay, yeah. I mean, currently, that is -- there is an entry date at that corner.

JK: Okay.

HK: If there was, it was barricaded.

JK: Yeah.

HK: I don't recall that there was, but I can't tell you [15:00] there wasn't. But what I can say is that I'm confident if there was a gate there, it is -- it was barricaded so there was no access that way.

INT: Right, yeah. Yeah, that area was kind of like the motor pool area. There was like a garage there [inaudible] services and things like that there. There were about six to seven

buildings kind of clustered down there. You said they were basically demolished from your recollection?

JK: Yep, yep. They went when the barracks went.

INT: One thing that it probably would have been useful if I had done this ahead of time, but just for the heck of it, I'll send you both an email sometime with a photograph. We were able to get from the National Archives a wartime area photograph around 1942 to take out a very low altitude, looking at it in a right angle. And it really gives you a pretty good perspective on the buildings. And I'm looking at it right now and can see the house [16:00] that you guys live in and the swimming pool and the baseball diamond that you recall. So I'll try to send you guys a copy of that sometime in the next week or so.

JK: Oh, fine.

HK: Fine, yeah.

JK: Thank you. Hey, I'm really interested in the report you're cooking up.

INT: Well, we're having a pretty good time with it. We've -- I'm assuming obviously you heard the NPR report which is a fairly good synopsis of what we're doing where we track down about 50 of the World War II personnel who served there and have conducted a couple hundred hours of oral history interviews with them about what they did there.

JK: Oh, great.

INT: And it's a fantastic project. And I got to meet some folks with some pretty top secret stuff during the war. And it really helped us, the National Park Service, we really didn't have that much of an idea of what happened. We knew a little bit, but didn't know that much about what went on during the war. So I think we mentioned at the beginning that there is only really one building [17:00] that's still standing, one of those residences

which is I think 118 towards the entrance that was originally billed as an NCO quarters. It's still standing. It's got lead paint and asbestos issues. Well, we're going through -- literally, as we speak, they're doing hazmat abatement to get rid of all that and we're hoping to open that building up as a visitor contact station for Fort Hunt [17:26] and have some exhibits in there to tell the story of all of Fort Hunt, but especially those from the World War II time period when it was known as P.O. Box 1142 [17:34].

JK: That's fascinating because we know very little, as I told you, about what went on there.

INT: Now, let me ask. Did you know during -- while you were living there, had -- did you know that during World War II, it was referred to as P.O. Box 1142 [17:51]?

JK: No. The first I heard of it was now.

INT: Okay, so you -- so that meant nothing to you. That was its codename, 1142 [18:00], during the war. In fact, most of the veterans we've interviewed who were stationed there didn't even know it was called Fort Hunt [18:09]. They only knew it was P.O. Box 1142 [18:10], Alexandria, Virginia.

JK: Ah.

INT: So pretty top secret stuff.

JK: Fascinating. Yeah, we didn't realize there was -- I didn't know the number. I had heard that it was referred to -- somewhere along the line, I heard it was referred to as a postal box, but I didn't -- what I've just told you -- it fits in two cents, this is all I knew about its wartime identity.

INT: Got you. Some other questions concerning kind of the earlier history of the Fort Hunt [18:43] area, as you indicated, there were neighbors who lived across the street and houses probably predated the World War II era of camp. Had any of them been

referred to as like an original farmhouse or anything like that? The property that was purchased by the war department leading up [19:00] to the Spanish-American War [19:02] era, there were actually I think two parcels they assembled and apparently there were like two farmhouses from two different families on the property. Do you have any recollection of any of those houses that might have been older, 19th century houses or were they probably 20th century houses?

HK: I don't -- they were for one quite modest and I would not have characterized any of them at that -- I can't -- I think they were all 20th century houses.

JK: There is -- my recollection is there was one house.

HK: There was one house, wasn't there, that had -- did not have an orchard around it?

JK: Well, there was one guy that had 10 acres. He was just north of the stable.

HK: Yeah.

JK: But then I thought that there was a more substantial house to the east of that and [20:00] -
-

HK: Was it to the east or to the north? Do you remember where Kellie [phonetic] got poisoned?

JK: Yeah.

HK: [unintelligible] way back off the post.

JK: It wasn't Kellie. It was Frisky.

HK: Huh?

JK: It was Frisky got poisoned.

HK: Frisky, that's right, not Kellie. Frisky. That was our English setter, our first dog.

JK: That was the --

HK: That was a large house. That was a two story older house.

JK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's the one I'm thinking of.

HK: Yeah.

INT: Now, was that near where you lived or was it --

HK: Oh, it was sort of -- well, let me see. How would I describe it? Using this map that you've got here? I -- Johnny, I'd sort of guess maybe behind -- if you'd -- the Cahalane's [20:54] old place, the one -- the Garrison's [20:56], 103 and he sort of went due north from there [21:00] across Fort Hunt Road and I would say probably their driveway was at least a quarter of a mile. It was back in the woods.

JK: I would say, if you located the stables --

HK: Yeah.

JK: -- it was about straight north of the stables.

HK: Yeah, the -- well, see, I thought -- well, you may be right. It's somewhere between those two points. I thought that there -- north of the stables was where that house that had the fence around it and had an orchard --

JK: Yeah, but it was behind that where the --

HK: It was behind that, but it was behind it I think on the western edge.

JK: Okay, okay. Well, anyway, it's north of Fort Hunt Road and located approximately between -- it'd be on a bearing about with 103, straight north of there. And there was a -- people had [22:00] pigs back there. People -- when we were there, people had some pigs back there and they would go around to the restaurants in Alexandria [22:08] and get the garbage and feed it to the pigs. And to keep down the vermin, they had rat poison all around. That's what got our dog. But there was a large house back there.

INT: Okay.

HK: But it was a dump. Those people were --

JK: Yeah, they were pigs, too. [laughs] Well, I shouldn't put it --

HK: Well, but whether that could have been -- I had never heard, frankly, that back before the -- at the time of the Spanish-American War [22:36] that this had been a couple of farms.

JK: I had not either.

HK: And so -- and but the houses that were in existence along Fort Hunt Road there, I don't think any of them went back to the 1900s. And they were not particularly substantial homes at all. They were quite modest. A couple of them were brick and a couple of them -- I suppose the Sheelers' [23:00] was probably the most substantial one.

JK: Yeah, it was.

INT: Well, believe it or not, not only did there used to be a couple of farms, but I don't know if you were aware or not, but Fort Hunt [23:11] is on [unintelligible] land that was once all part of Fort Washington's [23:15] river farm.

JK: We knew that.

HK: Yeah.

INT: Okay. So yeah, it remained agricultural and farm until the Army bought it in the late 1890s.

HK: I -- somebody had talked that at one point it had been part of Washington [23:32].

JK: I think Washington's farm went all the way up to Hunting Creek in Alexandria [23:37].

INT: Yeah, they extended a good ways up the Potomac [23:40]. I don't really have any other questions. Again, if you guys feel that you've left anything out, or if you think of something and want to pop me an email and -- like I said, I will try to send you guys both

a copy of this aerial photograph [24:00] just for your own viewing pleasure, per se, just because it kind of puts things in a little bit better perspective. And I apologize for not having gotten it to you before this call.

JK: Fine. I will look forward to that. And we'll see your report. When do you think we'll see your report?

INT: Well, I don't know if I can tell you when you are. We've been working on this project for -- well, for a couple of years now and it's growing and growing and growing. And at some point we're going to have to decide it's time to start writing some of this down. Now, don't get me wrong, we -- these are all history interviews. We've been transcribing them, but we certainly could see ourselves both publishing some sort of Park Service document, but there's also been a lot of interest in putting together an actual -- for the -- for public consumption book or something on this subject. So we've -- we're working on a couple of things but don't hold your breath to have it ready in time for a Christmas present this year [25:00]. But hopefully within the next year or so. And we'll add you guys to the -- and, in fact, if you're interested, we have a monthly email newsletter that goes around, primarily for the veterans who served at 1142 [25:18].

JK: Put us on there.

INT: And -- but if -- and, again, it's not really going to focus obviously on what you guys -- living there after the war, but it will kind of keep you up to date on what we're doing. In fact, it's even sent out by one of the World War II veterans who is very, very email and website savvy. So if you're okay with that, we can add you to the email list.

HK: Is there -- I didn't not hear of this NPR -- the thing that apparently Johnny caught and then responded and said this led to this session. But is that available?

INT: Yes. You can go -- and, again, if I think of it, I'll send you the link. But if you go to NPR's website [26:00], which I believe is just www.npr.org -- if you do a search on there, I'd search for Fort Hunt [26:11] or P.O. Box 1142 [26:12] or, frankly, even do a search just for my name, for Brandon Bies. And it should bring up a three-part series, and I believe it's still up there. You can actually download and listen to all three reports. It comes to a total of about 20 minutes or so of radio time over three segments.

JK: Brandon, could you send us the link for that?

INT: Yes.

JK: I looked for it and I couldn't find it.

INT: Okay. Yeah, let me write myself a note down now. I'll try to get to it if I can today but I'm actually on Friday headed out of the country for a little bit of a vacation. So if I don't get -- if you don't get it today or tomorrow, I'll try to get it to you closer to Christmas time.

JK: Wonderful. And if you put us on, put me -- put us both on that email -- that newsletter.

INT: Sure. Absolutely, absolutely [27:00]. Do you have anything else?

INT: Yeah, just a couple of questions before we say goodbye here. Just a follow-up on some of the history of the place before World War II. As boys, I imagine you wandered through the woods and things. Did you ever find like arrowheads or things like that or other what appeared to be artifacts from earlier house sites or anything going through the woods?

HK: I have no recollection of doing that. I --

JK: Nor do I.

INT: I said we were both archaeologists, so you knew we had to ask an archeology question.

HK: [laughs] Yeah.

INT: [unintelligible] right outside of Fort Hunt [27:43], they found evidence of American Indian sites there in the Fort Hunt area. And we also note in the history that there were tenant farm houses that even preceded George Washington's ownership of the property. So it -- that piece of land actually has history going back [28:00] -- English history, if you will. And that Native American history goes back several thousand years in that area. But it's one of the earlier areas that was settled in probably the 1650s, 1660s they had tenant farmers there who were kind of [unintelligible] the property for absentee owners. So --

HK: Interesting. No, I was not aware of that, not aware of that.

INT: All right, well I think we've kind of exhausted some of our questions. And if this has jarred any other memories in either of your minds or you had other stuff you want to tell us, certainly let us know.

INT: And also, again, as Vince had mentioned earlier, don't feel like you have to tear through all your stuff, but if you do happen to run across any old photos or family pictures or anything from your time at Fort Hunt [28:51], we'd love to have duplicates made and add them to our collection just to kind of tell the whole timeline of Fort Hunt. So [29:00] if you have a chance to look at anything, we'd love to see copies of them if possible.

HK: Okay.

JK: All right.

HK: Good.

INT: Super. And if you happen to have stored away one of those doors that you used in your porch, we'd be happy to take that off your hands, too.

[laughter]

All right, well both of you, thank you so much for helping me put this together and for joining Matt and I and Vince earlier. It has greatly increased our understanding of what was going on at Fort Hunt [29:29] just after World War II. And we really appreciate it.

JK: Our pleasure.

INT: All right, great, well I just wrote down those notes. Hopefully you'll get an email from me sometime soon with some of that info. And we'll add you to the mailing list as well.

JK: Wonderful.

HK: Thanks a lot.

INT: All right, thanks for all your time. I really appreciate it.

JK: Merry Christmas all of you.

INT: Happy holidays.

INT: Yeah, and have a happy holidays and merry Christmas.

HK: Thanks.

INT: All right, thanks. Take care now.

JK: Bye-bye.

INT: Bye-bye now.

[end of transcript]

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