

Fort Hunt Oral History
P.O. Box 1142
Interview with Victor Hacker by Brandon Bies
Delaplane, Virginia
January 16, 2008

INTERVIEWER: Okay, we're going to go ahead and get started. This is an interview as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project from the National Park Service. This is National Park Service Historian Brandon Bies. We're also here with National Park Service team member Vincent Santucci, and we are here interviewing Mr. Victor Hacker at his home in Delaplane [02:46]. Today is January 16th, 2008. We're also joined by Mr. Hacker's wife, Rosa. And so with that, Mr. Hacker, could you just start off literally in the beginning and just tell us real briefly when and where you were born and just a brief little bit about growing up.

VICTOR HACKER: I was born October the 30th, 1925 [01:00] in Sprule [02:46], S-P-R-U-L-E, Kentucky. I joined the service in, I think, 1942.

INT: Okay, great. And if we could just -- and fill in that gap just a little bit. You mentioned earlier you had a few siblings. You had two brothers. Were these older brothers?

VH: I had more than that.

INT: You had more than that.

VH: I had two in service at the time --

INT: Got you. Okay.

VH: -- in the Army. They were in before I went in.

INT: Okay.

VH: I have four children of my own now. I come from a large family of 11.

INT: Oh, really?

VH: Yeah, in Kentucky.

INT: Got you. And what is your family? Were your family farmers?

VH: Farmers.

INT: Okay.

VH: I've been a farmer all my life.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: And [02:00] we were truck gardening in Kentucky until I came here, and I joined the Army at Fort Thomas [02:18], Kentucky. That's where I was inducted.

INT: Did you volunteer, or were you drafted?

VH: Volunteered, yes.

INT: [affirmative] And you think that was about 1942?

VH: Yes.

INT: Okay. Could you just tell us briefly -- we like to cover this sometimes -- what do you remember about Pearl Harbor [02:37]? Presumably you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor.

VH: Yeah. At the time of Pearl Harbor [02:46] I was at Fort Slocum [02:48], New York, getting ready to load on a ship to go to Panama [02:53]. Well, we didn't really know that we were going to Panama, but we didn't know exactly where we were going [03:00], but that's when I can remember the announcement came on the loudspeaker there, and we was in this great big warehouse. President Roosevelt [03:13] said, "We're at war."

INT: [affirmative]

VH: That's when I figured maybe it might be time for me to go back home. I don't know whether you need to put it in there or not, but I joined the Army when I was 15 years old.

INT: Really?

VH: Yes. And I told them I was 18. I have two ages.

INT: [laughs]

VH: I figured, well, I'd had my training and got a little tougher, and I figured I could go on with it, so --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- that's what -- I could have probably told them my right age there, and they'd send me back to Kentucky.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: But I didn't.

INT: So, this was a military ship you were on --

VH: Yes.

INT: -- when you heard? So you were in the military [04:00] when Pearl Harbor [04:01] was bombed?

VH: Right. We were getting ready to -- right at the process of it -- we were getting ready to get on the ship.

INT: Okay.

VH: To go to Panama [04:13]. That's where we wound up, in Panama, so --

INT: Got you. Okay. So, it sounds like then if you were so young, were you in school at the time, had you not gone, were you working the family farm up until that time?

VH: Yes.

INT: Okay. And so, then you joined the -- you said you joined the military at Fort Thomas [04:36]?

VH: Fort Thomas [04:36], Kentucky.

INT: Okay. Is that where you did basic training?

VH: No. My training, they shipped me from there to Aberdeen Proving Grounds [04:45] --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- in Maryland.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: That's where I took my training.

INT: Okay. And that was just your basic infantry basic training?

VH: Right. Yeah. Yeah.

INT: Okay. Anything stand out [05:00] from your mind? As a 15-year old kid, I'm sure that must have had a vivid impression on you.

VH: Oh, yeah. And I can remember -- of course, we went to school about every day and then, of course, they trained us to drive those tanks and what not. They put me in one of those tanks -- half tracks it is. They put me out in this jungle, driving this thing, and we had a little peephole that you could see through --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- and of course this tree got in front of me, and I run that thing right straight into that tree. [laughs] But it didn't hurt me. We weren't going that fast, but they got these great big bumpers on the front of them that you can hit it and it doesn't hurt it if you don't knock the tree down.

INT: [laughs] [affirmative]

VH: And that's the only thing [06:00] other than the regular training is kind of rough, going over these obstacle courses and what not, but I took it all right.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: And when we got through with our training, we were shipped out to go overseas.

INT: Okay.

VH: They didn't really tell us where we were going, but they did finally tell us where we were going, so --

INT: And so, this was to Panama [06:30]?

VH: Yeah.

INT: And so you went essentially straight from Aberdeen [06:32] to board the ship to go to Panama [06:35]?

VH: We went to Fort Slocum [06:38], New York --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- and that's where we -- that was just a place for the ships to come in and --

INT: Sure.

VH: -- and load on it.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: Nothing we did up there other than wait for the ship to come in and get us.

INT: [affirmative] Were you in at this time, were you considered part of an infantry regiment [07:00]?

VH: No, it wasn't infantry. It was -- well, I reckon we did take infantry training, but we were, yeah, with a group --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- a group of infantry-trained people.

INT: Okay.

VH: But when I got to Panama [07:25] I was in ordinance. I was put in an ordinance department. We took care of the motor pool and then, of course, I was in -- I took care of gun parts. --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- I was in charge of a warehouse that handled all kinds of gun parts.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: They called me Field Service Modification Work Order Hacker. That was my title.

INT: [laughs] And, more officially [08:00] were you still a Private at this point? Or had you --

VH: Yes, yes. But after I got in there, they said, "You need to have more rank to be in charge of this warehouse." They promoted me then, but of course in Panama [08:30] it rained six months and then it don't rain for six months.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: We were -- there was a bunch of us would get a truck out of the motor pool and go to the movies there on the post, on the camp there at Corozal, Panama [08:45], and of course we didn't have a trip ticket, and then we had an officer came in there, took over the camp, and we were supposed to have trip ticket [09:00] when we took that thing out. So, we didn't. So, that's when I got busted.

INT: Oh, yes. [laughs]

VH: But we had to have something to do, so that when I lost my -- I was promoted one day and demoted the next day.

INT: [laughs] So, back down to Private?

VH: Yeah, back down to Private.

INT: Okay. About how long were you in Panama [09:26] for?

VH: Thirty months.

INT: Oh, wow. So for two and one-half years?

VH: Yeah, two and one-half years in Panama.

INT: And so, your duties at that time were again largely taking care of ordinance and the motor pool and what not?

VH: The motor pool part was -- when we first got down there I was transferred from that to this warehouse to take care of these gun parts. And that happened later on [10:00], but when I first went there I was in charge of -- I was a worker at the motor pool. We done some chauffeuring when the officers would request transportation; we ran that, so -- but when I left down there, when they shipped back after I caught the malaria [10:22], I was in the warehouse taking care of those parts.

INT: And so, you mentioned just now you caught malaria [10:31] while you were there.

VH: Yeah.

INT: I'm sure that couldn't have been too pleasant an experience.

VH: No it wasn't. I think -- when I first contacted it, I didn't know what it was, and I passed out in the Beer Garden [10:52]. I hadn't had but, I think, one beer, and of course they called the medics [11:00] and they came in and checked my temperature and I had 105. They said, "You just stay right still and we'll get some stretchers and bring in here and take you to the hospital." So, that's -- they treated me for the malaria [11:15] and got me straightened out, and the doctor told me then, he said, "This'll last you five years, the malaria [11:29], and then it'll leave you." It's like it's in your bloodstream. And it did, right to the day. I got -- they gave me a great big pension for having the malaria [11:41], \$12.50 a month. That's for the medicine.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: That's all it covered. No disability from it, but it lasted me five years after I got out.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: And I had an attack every month.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: Just like [12:00], it just -- regular. That stuff would come back on you at the end of the month.

INT: [affirmative] And, did you -- and it sounds like it took a while for you to recover, but did you stay in Panama [12:15] after you had malaria [12:17] or were you shipped out of there?

VH: A little, not very long, like a month or so. There were some boys down there that got it. They had a system somewhere. I don't know where, but they put them in this incubator, or whatever, and they smoked it -- or not smoked it -- they steamed it out of them, and they came back to the camp, and they looked terrible, turned real yellow and what not. I had that option to do that, and I chose not to, --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- let it run its course. And, of course, those boys looked so bad [13:00] when they come back from the malaria [13:04], but they had gotten rid of it. They had to recuperate all over again, and that's when they shipped me back [unintelligible].

INT: And before we finish up with Panama [13:20], what would you say was the overall purpose of having the American troops like yourself down there in Panama?

VH: I reckon, we were right on the Canal [13:29], --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- we were the closest camp at Corozal [13:32] right on the Canal, and I reckon it was probably to guard the Canal [13:40]. I reckon that was --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- that's the only purpose that I can think of that we were there for.

INT: Did you ever have -- were there ever any scares whatsoever of raids or submarines?

VH: Yes. Yeah, we had some torpedoes that come in there [14:00] pretty close to us --

INT: Oh, really?

VH: -- heading for the Canal [14:05] to blow it up.

INT: Really?

VH: And we had some stuff underground,- underwater, wiring, that stopped it.

INT: Oh, okay.

VH: We had two threats while I was down there I think in December, both about the same type thing; because when I was off duty I drove a bus for the troops into town and back, and those alarms went off, we had to get everybody back to camp. They loaded those buses [laughs], and, boy, it was crowded in those buses. I mean, I was loaded. They were just piled in there.

INT: [laughs]

VH: But I got them all back, and then [15:00] they got it stopped and everything was all right.

INT: Do you remember -- I guess you were close enough to see the Canal [15:09]. Do you remember seeing lots and lots of ships?

VH: Oh, yeah. I could see the back part of our camp was just real close to the Canal [15:22], the water that came into it. The Canal was down here a little further; the docks where they bring all the ships in and get them through it. But I could -- one spot in my camp

there I could almost see them, but it was far enough away I couldn't recognize anybody or anything. But I was right on it, right close to it. I could see the troops.

INT: It probably would have been a fairly busy place.

VH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, they had four, five, six sometimes every day come through there.

INT: Really?

VH: Yeah, when I first got down there [16:00], of course they modernized the thing. They were pulling the thing through with horses and mules.

INT: Really?

VH: Yeah, pulling the ships through, although some ships would come in there and depends on how heavy they were loaded and how wide they were, and they'd get stuck in there, and they'd have to wait until they pumped the water in to raise the ship up to get it through. It wasn't big enough for those big ships.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: They'd build these big ships in the Canal [16:33] and they'd try to go through the Panama Canal and couldn't make it. But it's kind of modernized now. They [unintelligible].

INT: [affirmative] Have you been back to Panama since?

VH: No, I'd like to go back down there one day. My kids -- I had an anniversary or birthday or something, and they surprised me and took me back to old Fort Hunt [16:58].

INT: Oh, did they really?

VH: Yeah [17:00], they didn't tell me where we were going, and we wound up down there and had a picnic down there.

INT: Super. Well, you're welcome again anytime. We could give you the VIP tour. Heck, and we could probably -- we may have to pull a few strings -- but probably could see if

we can get you down inside those old dark gun batteries. You mentioned them as dungeons earlier. They're still there.

VH: They are?

INT: [affirmative] They're still there, so we could -- I don't know if you'd enjoy that or not but we can probably get you down there even. Vince, did you have any questions or anything related to Panama [17:38]?

VINCENT SANTUCCI: No.

INT: Okay. Moving on then, it sounds like -- so you were in Panama for about 30 months you said.

VH: Right.

INT: And then can you describe what happened next, where you went from there?

VH: Well, they gave me a furlough. Of course, I went home, went to Kentucky, and my parents [18:00], of course, had moved. They moved into Barbourville, Kentucky [18:05] which is the town seat, and I remember the train -- I think I was the only soldier on the train --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- that was getting off. Of course, they didn't want to stop a train just for me to get off so they slowed the thing down, and I had to throw my luggage off on the move, and then I had to jump off while it was moving. [laughs] And, of course, my father was standing there where I saw him, and that's where I knew to get off at because the conductor had announced that he wasn't going to stop the train and I had to jump off. Of course, they had just experienced [19:00] I think just a little bit before that, the houses where they were living, the town was kind of in low places. Water would come in from all areas

around and backwater would come in. As I said, they had just experienced some water getting into the house. So, I got to stay there for a few days and then my next orders was to head back to 1142 [19:34], Alexandria, Virginia [19:35].

INT: Oh, really?

VH: That's all the information we had. We had a terrible time trying to find somebody, a taxi cab to take us from -- the bus departed in Alexandria [19:50] -- find somebody that knew where old Fort Hunt [19:54] was, 1142 [19:55]. Nobody knew, and so it was finally [20:00] with the one old taxi cab driver -- real old fellow -- came up to us and said, "I understand you all want to go to old Fort Hunt [20:09]." He says, "I can take you part of the way and I can point you the rest of the way." He wouldn't let -- nobody was allowed down in there -- so they'd come out that Mount Vernon Boulevard [20:20] with us, five of us, and he took us as far as he could take us and he said, "Well, this is as far as I can go." He says, "I'm going to point you where you got to go --

INT: [laughs]

VH: -- and you walk." That was the problem that we had finding the place --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- but we did find it and everything was all right. [unintelligible] That's funny that nobody knew where it was.

INT: You mentioned you were with a group of five --

VH: Yeah.

INT: -- people. Were these five people who you'd been with in Panama [21:00]?

VH: I don't know that. It's possible they could have been. But I never did know that, whether they came from Panama [21:12] or not because we were sent -- all of us had come from different states and what not.

INT: Sure. When you left Panama to go on your furlough was your whole group in Panama [21:27] put on furlough? Were thousands of soldiers leaving Panama or just --

VH: No, just a few. Probably the only ones that was leaving was the ones that caught malaria [21:40].

INT: Oh, okay.

VH: They had been relocated.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: I never did see any of the boys that -- I would recognize some of those boys from Panama [21:58] [unintelligible]

INT: Sure.

VH: That's why I can't recognize too many people [22:00] in that picture because I wasn't there but six to eight months.

INT: [affirmative] [unintelligible].

VH: Yeah, yeah.

INT: So you arrived at 1142 [22:10] and, again, can you remember at all about when that might have been? Even what year or what time of year, whether it was winter or summer?

VH: It was probably summer because, let's see, the war was over in what month? '45 --

INT: Yeah, against Germany [22:45] it ended in April and May, and against Japan [22:47] a few months later.

VH: I think it was probably summertime because we were dressed and all but we didn't have our OD's on I don't think at the time [23:00]. And I didn't know any of these boys before.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: Of course, we were mingling around at the bus terminal. We was all trying to find Fort Hunt [23:34].

INT: [laughs]

VH: And, we all got together in the taxi cab. I can remember that old car that he took us out there, it was an old Nash Rambler, and he was pretty well loaded with all of us in there and he was the sixth one. And I reckon he was doing about all he could do and I asked him, I said, "Can't you speed this thing up a little bit? We're running late."

INT: [laughs]

VH: And he did. He finally got it going a little faster. Because he was going out through there from Alexandria [23:53] to Mount Vernon [23:55].

INT: [affirmative] Right.

VH: And he did. He speeded it up a little bit.

INT: Going into all this [24:00] with just your piece of paper order saying you were to report to P.O. Box 1142 [24:07], ahead of time, did you know what your job was going to be?

VH: No.

INT: You had no idea?

VH: No idea.

INT: So you hadn't received any training at this point in being an MP?

VH: No.

INT: Or standing guard or no foreign language training, learned to speak German or anything like that?

VH: No. We learned to stand guard though. We done some guarding in Panama [24:34].

INT: Okay.

VH: I think that's the first thing they put me out on great big gun position down in Panama [24:45] at night by myself. [laughs]

INT: [laughs]

VH: It was right scary a thing. You'd be out in the woods and a buzzard or a pigeon [25:00] or something would fly around and make a noise, and you'd, "what's that?" And of course, you got your gun. [laughs]

INT: [laughs]

VH: There's one other thing that I can tell you when I was on guard duty in Panama [25:20]. Our curfew was at 10:00, and we had a fence all the way around our camp, and you had to come through this one gate; and anybody that came in after hours, like after 10:00 -- if he came in in a car, we had to halt him and he had to dismount and be recognized, walk down to be recognized. Well, our commanding officer, the Colonel, [26:00] he came in one night late and didn't stop, and I'm hollering and hollering, I was doing what I was supposed to do, you know. And he come right on down to the gate, and I shot right over top of him with that M1 rifle right over top of that car. And I mean that thing stopped then when I done that, and I think that was one of the things that I was called in about that. But I was doing my duty --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- and, of course, it was the Colonel, and I said, "Yes, didn't you recognize him?" I said, "Yeah, I recognized the car, but I didn't recognize him. I couldn't see in the car coming down." We had a big powwow about that, and they forgot it, you know.

INT: [laughs]

VH: But that was a scared Colonel. He'd been drinking a little bit, and that's the only [27:00] other thing that happened to me in Panama [27:03]. I was called on the carpet for that.

INT: [laughs] But you weren't busted down to a lower rank or anything. I guess you were --

VH: Well, I think that had some connection with it or something there because right after that it happened.

INT: [laughs]

VH: Could have been but it wasn't on my record because it didn't say anything about it.

INT: So, back to P.O. Box 1142 [27:40], you take this crammed taxi ride down the parkway and you get left off and then shown where to go, what were your first impressions of this camp?

VH: My first impression was, what is this place? Because it wasn't like a regular camp where you'd been going into [28:00]. Everything was hush-hush, but the guard at the gate checked our credentials and took us on to our quarters.

~~INT: [affirmative]~~

VH: Well, I figured it was an unusual thing, but I didn't really know what I was getting into.

INT: Sure.

VH: I hadn't been interrogated about what I was getting into, but I was soon told what the camp was.

INT: Do you remember what it was that they told you the purpose of the camp was?

VH: Well, they told me that we don't talk about this place, so when you go into town if anybody asks you where you're stationed, don't tell them. Well, we could say 1142 [29:00], that's the only thing.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: But nobody in Alexandria [29:06] knew where it was [unintelligible]

INT: Did you know at the time that it had been called Fort Hunt [29:13]? Or did you just know it as 1142 [29:17]?

VH: At first it was 1142, and then he said, "Well, they must be looking for old Fort Hunt."

INT: [affirmative]

VH: You know, some people picked that up. And I had heard maybe old Fort Hunt [29:30] but there wasn't nothing on my papers about Fort Hunt.

INT: Sure. Just 1142 [29:36] [talking simultaneously].

VH: Just 1142 [talking simultaneously], yes.

INT: Okay. And so how soon after you arrived did you find out that your job was going to be as a guard? Let me back up. Was that your eventual job was to guard prisoners?

VH: Yes. Yeah, that's our first job was to guard [30:00]. We got up on those things and, of course, we were moving around all in the camp part. Then they had a little threat down at the White House [30:15] and we were sent down to patrol around at the White House.

INT: Really?

VH: Yeah, only one time.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: But we never did really know what the threat was, but it was something. I remember doing that. There was two of us that was sent down as MPs.

INT: So you were considered to be an MP?

VH: At the last, yes.

INT: Okay. All right. And could you describe [31:00] for us what just a typical day for you at 1142 [31:07] would have been like.

VH: Well, it varied from day to day what your job was. You put on -- I spent a lot of time guarding the -- working around the interrogation part.

INT: Okay.

VH: Where they interrogate them around the warehouse or [unintelligible] the quarters and just about every day that was one of my jobs and then, of course, I was put up on that tower --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- to guard prisoners. They turned them out in those -- they had little places they could walk around out there, but continuously other than that one time [32:00] that we were sent down to the White House [32:03] to guard that -- patrol around it, it was about the same thing every day all the time we was there.

INT: Did you have much interaction with the prisoners?

VH: Never had to do anything, no. Usually stood at the gate, at the door really, and made sure that everything was all right. I had access to it but I never had to challenge any --

[End of Tape 1A]

[Beginning of Tape 1B]

INT: So, we don't have to stay that long but we have three tapes just in case.

VH: [inaudible]

INT: So, yeah, I'm sorry but when we got cut off there, we were talking a little bit about if you ever interacted with the prisoners and you said you largely just -- you didn't really have to interact with them too much.

VH: No, I --

INT: You started to tell a story that happened to Sergeant Driscoll [00:28] [phonetic].

VH: Yeah, he was the strong guy in the -- he'd done somebody that would have had to go to the dungeon. Then he roughed them up a little bit. I had to stand guard over that and make sure that -- of course, he was twice as big as the prisoners were and so, I mean they wouldn't have had a chance with him. That's if he'd had some kind of a weapon [01:00] or something. And I never had to do that very much. I mean, once or twice maybe.

INT: Okay.

VH: But all the other time we had no incidents where I had to do anything other than stand guard.

INT: Okay. Would you stand guard typically during the day, or did you have to pull night shifts as well?

VH: Sometimes night shift. It would run into, not way into the night, but up until 9:00 or something like that. Sometimes the interviews, the interrogations would get long-winded and you'd have to go back over it, but from all indications we were getting some good information from those boys. I talked to some of the interrogators and, "How did you do?" and he said, "Oh, we did all right [02:00]." They had them hooked up where they could check to see if they were telling the truth.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: They could go on and call the front lines and find out if they were telling the truth, and he'd keep him in there until he found out something or he'd come back.

INT: Would you ever be present for an interrogation, or was that just the interrogator and the prisoner, and you'd be outside somewhere?

VH: I would be outside somewhere.

INT: So you didn't get to listen in on any of the interrogations?

VH: No, I wouldn't have understood it anyway because of the language.

INT: Right.

VH: I didn't have any -- I did take a little Spanish when I was in Panama [02:52] but --

INT: And so, we have lots of questions [03:00] about, very specific questions about, the guarding and 1142 [03:07] because most of our interviews have been with the interrogators who know what it was like inside dealing with the prisoners, but maybe don't know as much about the bigger picture of security and those sorts of things like you do; so Vince and I will probably ask lots of very, very nitpicky questions. And again, we're just trying to get out every little bit of detail because this is a fantastic opportunity for us to learn from someone who was there. When you were on guard, how were you typically -- on a typical day how would you be armed?

VH: I usually carried a .45 --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- pistol with me and other than that, just the regular uniform.

INT: Okay.

VH: We'd be in uniform [04:00].

INT: Do you remember if you wore helmets, or if you were --

VH: I don't think we wore any helmets. I don't believe we did.

INT: Just curious. And so, while you were on guard you said you would typically have a .45, but were there other types of weapons that were [unintelligible] as a guard?

VH: Yeah, we carried, when we were up on that tower we had a .45 and plus a shotgun.

INT: Okay.

VH: That's what I used, a shotgun, to shoot this guy.

INT: Okay. Do you remember if there were ever -- did any of the towers have machine guns in them or spotlights?

VH: We had spotlights, but I don't think we had any machine guns.

INT: Okay.

VH: I don't think we had any of those [05:00]. I don't remember any.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: There was usually a couple of -- we'd have two guards usually, those things are round, and usually two guards standing duty at the same time.

INT: Okay. And presumably you could see the entire compound, or --

VH: Yeah, yeah.

INT: Let me ask you, do you remember -- and we've got some maps and then some of these photographs to go over -- do you recall when you were there if there was just one main prisoner compound or if there was more than one?

VH: More than one --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- but at this particular one, there was just one guy in there --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- in the compound.

INT: One prisoner?

VH: There was one prisoner --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- at that time, yeah.

INT: Okay.

VH: And it was kind of late in the evening too [06:00]. It might have been pretty close to being dark.

INT: Really?

VH: The timing of it.

INT: And this is the incident where you shot someone?

VH: Yeah.

INT: Well, let's talk about that a little bit. Do you remember about -- you mentioned it was late in the evening -- do you remember what time of the year that might have been?

VH: No, I can't remember that.

INT: Sure.

VH: Let's see, what time of the year it was.

INT: Was it early on when you arrived at 1142 [06:32] or was it after you'd been there for a while?

VH: After I'd been there for a while, yeah. Yeah.

INT: And can you describe as best as you can your recollection of that incident where you -- was this somebody who was in a prisoner cell who escaped from the cell [07:00], were they out walking around; do you remember how was it they went about trying to escape?

VH: He was out walking around in the compound, in the fence, but it was evidently time for him to have some exercise regularly.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: I remember him walking around real slow. We walked around -- it seems to me like we walked all the way around that thing. I believe it's compartments all the way around and you can walk all the way around it. I think I walked around the thing, and he saw he could make his getaway and climb the fence because he'd gotten up the fence to the top of the fence when I saw him [08:00].

INT: Okay. And so he was -- by the time you saw him he had climbed part of the way up the fence?

VH: Yeah.

INT: Do you remember if there were multiple -- would he have had to go over that fence and go over another fence?

VH: No, that was -- if he went over that one then he goes into the woods. There's some big oak trees right out on the other side of that woods.

INT: [affirmative]

ROSA HACKER: Didn't you say he set off an alarm?

VH: Oh, yeah, yeah, that alarm.

RH: An alarm when he was trying to go over the fence?

VH: Yeah.

INT: So this was an alarm on the fence? The fence was alarmed?

VH: Yeah, yeah. One of the wires was a hotwire.

INT: Okay.

VH: When he touched that, that set the alarm off.

INT: Okay. And that's what got your attention?

VH: Right.

INT: And were there more than one guard on at that time, or were you the only --

VH: I can't remember whether there was [09:00] another one on the tower at that time or not.

It's not coming to me whether I was by myself or it was somebody with me. Normally it is somebody else on there.

INT: And was this the time where there was only one prisoner on the compound? Or was there more than one prisoner?

VH: Only one.

INT: He was by himself?

VH: Yes.

INT: When you shot him, did other guards shoot him as well, or was there just one shot fired?

VH: There was one shot fired.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: I don't think there was any others, unless there was somebody else outside that had shot him, but I don't think so. I can remember him was when he went down and then he got up and moved a little bit [10:00]. He wasn't walking too good.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: But he moved on out toward those woods a little ways.

INT: So he actually fell outside of the perimeter?

VH: Right. He'd gotten up on top of the thing, and that's where that hotwire was that he touched that set the alarm off.

INT: [affirmative] So when you shot him, he was at the top of the fence?

VH: Yeah.

INT: Beginning to climb down the other side or still inside the compound?

VH: I think he was right on top, right on top because if he'd have been on this side, he'd have fell inside rather than going over, but he made it over --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- when he fell.

INT: Do you recall if you yelled out to him or anything before you shot?

VH: No, no, I just figured it was the time to shoot right then [11:00]. [laughs] Because he done set that alarm off. They had to bring in the dogs. They had some dogs there that, because he'd gotten off a little ways, but they wouldn't have really needed the dogs because he wasn't able to walk that good. He was just hobbling.

INT: And so, do you remember at all about how far away he would have been from you because I'm just thinking you had a -- you said it was a shotgun and I think you mentioned before we started recording you thought it must have been buckshot that were using?

VH: Yeah, it could have been. He was about 50 yards or something like that away from where I was at [12:01].

INT: If you drew the outline of the prisoner compound, your location versus his location, if you could try to do that -- and I don't know, maybe this would be a good time to try this and, while we do this, Vince, I don't know if it's possible for you to zoom out on the camera and try to capture the list. And this was one thing I wanted to do at some point

was, this is a map of Fort Hunt [12:29] and with all the barracks and to try to get you oriented for a second, this is one of the main prisoner compounds right here --

VH: [affirmative]

INT: -- these are guard towers at each of the corners --

VH: [affirmative]

INT: -- and then here's the main compound on the inside. Now there was a second compound; this one doesn't show up in as much detail. This was in a kind of a cross shape, almost like a plus sign --

VH: [affirmative]

INT: -- with a big guard tower in the center. So these are where [13:00] the prisoners were and then this was the main fort. These were all where the barracks were over here --

VH: Yeah.

INT: -- the parade ground is right here, but the river would have been over here, and then all those woods probably would have been all in this area --

VH: [affirmative]

INT: -- on the side.

VH: Yeah.

INT: So, does this map look familiar at all?

VH: Yeah, yeah.

INT: And to help, again you mentioned that you came down to Fort Hunt [13:28] a few years ago. We actually have on here sketched out, this is the current road that loops around.

VH: [affirmative]

INT: So, if you went out there today, that road would be there. In fact, I have a slightly larger map. It's just right back here. It might be a little easier for you to look at. Were you ever posted [14:00] it at the entrance gate coming into the camp, or were you posted --

VH: No, I never had to do any post duty [unintelligible].

INT: Did they have guards there?

VH: Yeah, yeah, already had the guards there.

INT: That's the same thing, just a little bit bigger there for you; so again, we're into the major compound again. Those are the guard towers at the corners and this was a smaller -- there's that plus sign that we just mentioned. Do you have any recollection which one of these you think that you were at when you shot [unintelligible]?

VH: Well, this one here shows -- I was in that one right there.

INT: That tower right there is what you remember? Okay.

VH: Yeah, I don't remember whether he was going over that -- over this one in the fence, --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- in those trees there, there's more [15:00] trees right back in there.

INT: But that picture looks familiar to you?

VH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, more so than this thing.

INT: Okay.

VH: It's probably this one here, probably this one that shows the thing right there. I think that was the very tower I was up on right there.

INT: You shot from the tower?

VH: Yeah. Because the window, and I think that the, yeah, the ladder getting up in that thing is on the other side.

RH: How'd that latter get there?

VH: Huh?

RH: How did the ladder get --

VH: That's just permanent. It's made with it.

RH: It was made with it?

VH: -- yeah, it's made on it.

INT: So this layout looks somewhat familiar to you?

VH: Yeah, yeah.

INT: Okay. And you'll see as you flip through [16:00] this resource study we've left you with, there are some maps in there as well. So you will have this to keep; you can flip through and there's some maps in there that may refresh your memory a little bit.

VH: Okay.

VS: And you'll come back to the dungeon and other things later.

INT: Yeah, definitely. How are you with time? You mentioned to Vince you had [talking simultaneously]

VH: [talking simultaneously] Well, this Agricultural Committee is coming by here at 10:30, so it's 10:25 now. That might have been them on the phone.

INT: Okay.

VH: Yeah, there they are coming in now.

INT: Okay. All right.

VH: This farm has been put in an easement program in [unintelligible].

INT: [unintelligible]

VH: Can't subdivide this thing in --

INT: That's fantastic.

VH: -- so they have to come by once a year and check on things.

INT: Sure [17:00].

VH: I'll go out there and meet with them and tell them where -- they got to go down to the farm and --

INT: Okay.

VH -- and examine the buildings. I asked them why they are coming, and he said, "Let's see if you've taken any of the buildings away." [laughs]

INT: [laughs]. Do you think, if you wanted to take a break now, would it be possible to still meet with you after you check with them?

VH: Yeah. I shouldn't be with them too long.

INT: Oh, that's fine. Take your time and we can regroup, and we can just kind of pause the tapes while you --

VH: That'd be fine.

INT: Okay, great.

VH: If you want to get any information off the [unintelligible], that's --

INT: If you don't mind, we might take a look at that.

VH: Okay. That's the discharge.

INT: Fantastic. Great.

VH: Who was the call for, Rosa?

RH: He said he'd call back. He didn't tell me who he was, said he'd call back. There's somebody out there.

VH: Yeah, that's the Committee [unintelligible].

[inaudible dialogue] [18:00]

INT: Okay [19:00].

VS: What's the difference between the two?

INT: That's his discharge. This is his qualification record.

VS: Okay.

INT: It shows you what he did.

VS: Does it give his rank and unit?

INT: I haven't had a chance to look at that. If anything, I can read it out loud. Let's see, it's got his rank as a PFC; his -- okay, this is helpful -- day of entry in active service was August 14th, 1941, date of separation October 25th, 1945, and then it has his date of birth as 22nd June, 1923 but it sounds like that, Mrs. Hacker, may not be accurate, that it's not his correct date of birth. Got you.

RH: October 30th [20:00].

INT: Okay. And then he was separated at Fort Belvoir [20:10] and then his occupations are listed as a stock clerk and a light truck driver, and then it mentions his civilian occupations as a general farm hand, helped father in general farm work, raised tobacco, corn, and vegetables, fed and cared for livestock, drove small wheel tractor, and worked for his father's farm in Clay County, Kentucky [20:48] for two years as of August, 1941. It lists [21:00], let's see, for three months he was a Private in basic ordinance and then 14 months a Private munitions worker, 12 months Private stock clerk, and then six months Private truck driver, light, and then 15 months as a PFC as Duty Soldier 1. I'm wondering if that couldn't be maybe the Fort Hunt [21:28] time period.

VS: Is there something else here?

INT: There may be. Oh, here's more.

VS: This is DB 108.

INT: Okay. I'm not sure if there's a way to try to still hold this in [unintelligible]. It would probably be good to capture some of this. I'm sorry I didn't -- I left the batteries and the charger for camera [22:00]. I'm not sure there's a way, or if we focus on that, if we take it off and just lay a spot on the table.

VS: Sure.

INT: And just literally take it right now.

VS: It's on standby.

INT: Oh, was it? Okay.

INT: It wasn't, I just [unintelligible]

[End of Tape 1B]

[Beginning of Tape 2A]

INT: We're going to get started again. Today is January 16th, 2008. This is an interview as part of the Fort Hunt [00:14] Oral History Project. We're here interviewing Mr. Victor Hacker, a veteran of P.O. Box 1142 [00:22]. We're also here with his wife, Rosa, and Fort Hunt [00:29] Oral History Project team members, Brandon Bies as well as Chief Ranger Vincent Santucci, and with that we'll go ahead and pick back up where we left off; and we were just finishing asking some more of those real specific questions about what you remembered about this particular incident that you were involved in. And so, to try to summarize, you thought that in terms of when this would have happened, you think that you had been at Fort Hunt [00:59], at 1142 [01:00] for a little while. This wasn't your first week or two there, or month or two?

VH: No, it was -- I'd say I'd been there at least four or five months.

INT: Okay.

VH: At least that.

INT: Okay. And could you clarify in this, going backwards just a little bit, to Panama [01:19], you returned from Panama [01:22] and you immediately went to your family's farm up in Kentucky and you mentioned about jumping off the train. Do you remember about how long you were there for?

VH: Fifteen -- how long I was in Panama [01:34]?

INT: No, I was meaning Kentucky. Just how long --

VH: Fifteen days --

INT: Fifteen-day furlough?

VH: -- I think 15 days.

INT: And then you came from there to P.O. Box 1142 [01:42]?

VH: Right.

INT: Okay. Got you. And so --

VH: By Trailway bus. [laughs]

INT: And so you took the bus from there?

VH: Yeah, we had no money. In fact, I think, what day was it, I hitchhiked home. I had to hitchhike [02:00] -- Oh, that was from Aberdeen Proving Grounds [02:05] we hitchhiked home, and we got a ride with this fellow, and he took us a roundabout way and got us lost. We were way out in the country someplace, and he said, "Well, this is as far as I'm going, so you'll have to" -- we was still hitchhiking and we walked all night and saw this Army

bus come by. Oh, boy, we're in business now. He'll stop and pick us up. Went right on by, didn't even pull the horn or nothing.

INT: [laughs]

VH: That was an experience. That was when I was in training. That wasn't when we was coming back from Panama [02:57]. We did have enough money [03:00] to take a bus.

INT: So, again, back to 1142 [03:07], I was just asking those questions to try to clarify dates and figure out -- and so, you figure you would have been at 1142 from the time you returned from your furlough until essentially the end of the war when you were discharged?

VH: Right.

INT: You were discharged from Fort Belvoir [03:26] which was very close to --

VH: Right.

INT: -- 1142 [03:28], so you spent that entire intervening period there at P.O. Box 1142?

VH: Right.

INT: Okay. And, again, the shooting incident, it was your understanding at the time that the person at least survived you shooting him at that time?

VH: Right.

INT: You said he was carted off by medics?

VH: Yes, yeah, yeah. I reckon they were medics or else [04:00] emergency people that were on duty there that got him, but he was still living.

INT: Do you have any sense of if there was a hospital at 1142 [04:13] or they took him to some other location?

VH: It was kind of an infirmary that we had there on the post. The place we went to when we had to go on sick call, and if some soldier weren't feeling too good. I mean, it wasn't really a hospital like we have today. It was just an infirmary where they could treat you if you get shot or something else.

INT: After this incident was there any official inquiry? Were you called in front of a colonel or anybody and asked any questions?

VH: No, no. I wasn't, but that was unusual about the thing too. I thought maybe I would have been called in [05:00] or something, but I wasn't. Just formality, and went on, and I don't know where they took -- I still stayed there and was still on duty, on guard duty, when they took him away. I never did know really where they took him.

INT: [affirmative] But you were never reprimanded or awarded or anything, it was just business as usual?

VH: Right. Yeah [unintelligible].

INT: Okay. And, again, if you can ignore what you heard from us and from the reporter who spoke with you about who the prisoner was, did you at the time have any idea who that prisoner was or what his branch of service was, if he was in the German [05:57] army, or in the German navy; did you remember hearing anything [06:00] at all about who that prisoner might have been?

VH: No, I knew that he was a German. I knew -- it was distinct between the Germans [06:09] and the Japanese [06:11]. So I knew he was German [06:13], but I didn't know his rank or anything or how important he was or what not. I did know that he had been interviewed and interrogated before they had turned him out there for an exercise time.

INT: Okay.

VH: But I didn't know anything about him.

INT: And you recalled that it was in the evening, but it wasn't dark out.

VH: It seems to me like it was just getting dark. That's the only thing I can remember. It was just -- of course, we had lights around there that -- flood lights, yeah. But, I could see [07:00] all right, but it was just beginning to get dark.

INT: Any questions specific to the shooting?

VS: Yes. Do you recall any physical description of the individual, hair color, age?

VH: Yeah, the age, he had some age on him I would say. Yeah.

VS: Plus-40? Older or younger than 40?

VH: Forty, 45 would be a -- and he had some gray hair too, and I believe --

INT: Dark hair, light hair?

VH: Light.

RH: He wasn't bald headed?

VH: No, he wasn't bald headed like me.

INT: [laughs]

VH: I had a good head of hair then.

RH: Yeah, I know you did.

VH: See it in that picture.

[laughter] [08:00]

INT: Tall, short, medium height?

VH: I would consider him short. Probably 5 foot 6 or 7, something like that.

INT: Average weight?

VH: Average weight, yeah, not -- light, lightweight I'd say.

INT: Do you recall what he was wearing, not the average prisoner, what he may have been wearing?

VH: He was wearing prisoner of war. Seemed to me like he had some coveralls on or something like that.

INT: Okay.

INT: After you shot him, he fell from the fence?

VH: Right.

INT: Landed?

VH: Landed on the ground.

INT: Was he motionless for a while, or did he proceed to move?

VH: He was motionless for a little bit, just not long, but --

INT: In terms of response, did you stay at your post [09:00]? Did you go to him?

VH: No, I stayed on post because there was others came by to rescue him.

INT: Did anybody try to communicate with you? I didn't know if you had a radio or anything. You didn't call for anyone?

VH: No, because the alarm had went off, see.

INT: The alarm went off.

VH: The alarm was what warned them that there was a break.

INT: Were there other MPs or guards or any other personnel that responded to that alarm?

VH: Yes, I think there was. I think there was probably the Officer of the Day. You usually have an Officer. I think he probably came with the rescuers, the people that --

INT: So there was five or more people that responded? Five or less that responded?

VH: Probably five or less. I would say there was three or four [10:00] that came.

INT: Did they come to render aid as opposed to try to secure somebody trying to escape?

VH: Try to secure.

INT: Try to secure, so that was their first initial response.

VH: Yeah. He'd gotten away from the fence out in the woods a little bit.

INT: So he fell -- he was stunned for a while and then he eventually either crawled --

VH: That's right. He was walking.

INT: Walking?

VH: But not too good. He'd taken some of those shots.

INT: So when they came upon him, did they physically take him down to the ground?

VH: Yes, yeah, that's --

INT: Was he cooperative? Did he have his hands up?

VH: Oh, yeah, he was very cooperative after they caught him, yeah.

INT: Did they handcuff him?

VH: I don't think they did. I didn't seem them [11:00] handcuff him.

INT: After he was restrained or cooperative, did they attend to his wounds initially on site?

VH: They took him away. Yeah, evidently there wasn't anybody there that could do it; they had to take him to the infirmary, I reckon.

INT: Okay.

VH: That's the last I saw of him.

VS: Where was your impression that he had sustained injury or wounds?

VH: Right after I shot him, that's when he -- well, not right after the shot, after when he got up and tried to escape further. He wasn't going very fast.

INT: I think what Vince was saying was do you remember where he was -- if you was shot in the leg, in the behind, in the head [12:00]?

VH: I think in the behind.

INT: And you saw blood? You saw --

VH: No, I wasn't close enough to see if there was blood, with clothes and all, I couldn't tell where the --

VS: And clearly you hit him, he was hit by some sort of projectile?

VH: Yeah, I could tell that I hit him with the thing.

IVS: His injuries weren't only just from the fall?

VH: Well, some of it could have been from the fall -- that tall fence; he was up there and --

VS: Was he taken off by jeep, ambulance, truck?

VH: Jeep. I think it was a jeep. It was either a jeep or a command car.

VS: I would imagine that there would have been some camp discussion about that afterwards. Was there a fuss or was there interest by anybody in the camp saying, "Hey, what happened [13:00]?"

VH: I don't -- if it was, I wasn't in on it. I stayed right there on guard duty although there wasn't no one else in there to guard. But, I stayed there until my duty was over and they relieved me of my duty.

VS: So after that evening then, there was no further discussion relative to that?

VH: Not with me. I'm sure there was probably, but I stayed there until my time was up and then I went on back to my barracks.

VS: And this is related but I'm just trying to pull it back around for a second.

VH: Yeah.

VS: Did you ever sense that communication was relatively secretive at the camp? Was there good communication between the American, staff there or were they pretty quiet [14:00] about what they were doing?

VH: Pretty quiet. It was pretty quiet.

VS: So do you think that this incident and how it really wasn't really spoken about afterwards was related to that secretive --

VH: It could have been. It could have been, yeah, because it looks like they would have called me in and got some information on what happened, but they didn't.

VS: The reason I'm asking that, and the other question is, before this incident occurred or after this incident occurred, was there ever any discussion of any other attempt at a prisoner escape or any sort of altercation with a prisoner?

VH: No, I don't think so. I think that's the only incident that I knew of.

VS: Okay.

INT: That's probably all the questions we have about the shooting incident, but we still have lots of other questions [15:00] for you about what you remember about the camp, and one thing that you had mentioned a few times earlier were you didn't remember that there were these bunkers; you referred to them as dungeons --

VH: Yeah.

INT: -- underground. Can you describe what you remember about those and how they were used?

VH: Well, we didn't use those very much --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- but I did experience them taking one, and I think he was Japanese [15:32], the prisoner was, that the sergeant had taken one of the prisoners into there, and he gave him a good going over and then we left him there. I wasn't on duty when they took him out of there, but I remember going to the dungeon and I looked in it [16:00]. Of course, he had handcuffs on him when he took him in there, but that's the only incident really that I remember.

INT: Just that one? Okay. And you think that was a Japanese [16:20] prisoner?

VH: Yeah. Yeah, I think it was because I can remember the looks on his face --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- but, this First Sergeant, he was a great big old guy and strong as a ox; must have been a boxer or something at one time. And this Japanese [16:44] was just a little bitty thing, a little bitty fellow and kind of looked one sided, but in fact, he did, he reached out and got him and held him up, picked him up like that. That was [17:00] a show of strength, I reckon.

INT: Was that the extent of the physical activity, or did he actually beat the guy up a bit?

VH: No, he didn't do a beating, he got some arm holds on him --

INT: Got you.

VH: -- and done some things like that to punish him a little bit, but he didn't do any beating.

INT: So would you say it was more to intimidate him than anything else?

VH: I think so.

INT: Not to really inflict bodily harm?

VH: To show [unintelligible] marks a thing.

INT: Do you know this Sergeant; did you say earlier is this the Driscoll [17:44]? Was that his name?

VH: Driscoll was his name, Sergeant Driscoll.

INT: And was he a fellow MP, or was he involved with the interrogation?

VH: I think he was probably -- I think he was probably a Military Police [18:00]. He got in the MPs with us.

INT: Okay.

VH: Because I never seen him do any interrogating. He didn't do any -- I didn't get any experience with him, but he might have done it, but I didn't see it.

INT: Now in this particular case that you recall with the Japanese [18:23] prisoner, did you get the impression that he was taken to this dungeon area -- were you ordered to take him there, or did the interrogators, the officers, did they say, "Put this guy down there." So it wasn't the MPs, this guy was giving you a hard time?

VH: No.

INT: It was Army orders of the interrogators?

VH: Evidently he had give them some false information or something and they knew it, and that's the higher ups said that [19:00], put him in the dungeon, take him to the dungeon.

And he gave him a pretty good going over, not beating him, but --

INT: Sure.

VH: -- then we fastened him in there and left him for a length of time that I don't really know.

I had nothing to do with getting him out, letting him loose.

INT: So this would have been a sort of solitary confinement?

VH: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

INT: Okay. Since we mentioned that he was Japanese [19:33], while you were there you mentioned you did recall there being Japanese prisoners as well. Can you give any sense of German [19:43] prisoners versus Japanese [19:45] prisoners in terms of numbers? Were there just as many, or did it vary from day to day or the time of the war?

VH: It varied from day to day, yeah. They [20:00] would tell us, give us information, on if this bunch coming, were they Germans [20:09] or Japanese [20:10] and they'd tell us how bad they'd been. One group came in there and they said, "Now don't treat these fellows real nice. They captured one of our ships and the people surrendered to them and they killed them all, shot them." They would give us information like that, tell us, now this is a bunch that surrendered peacefully and then this is a bunch that was terrible. We would get that information. They'd tell us. And different groups would come in.

INT: For the ones who you were told to treat them a little bit better, do you remember [21:00] were certain prisoners given a certain level of freedom?

VH: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

INT: Can you elaborate on that at all?

VH: Well, prisoners would come in there and give us correct information that we were looking for. They would get put up in a compartment and they'd get served the best food. They'd get the filet mignon steaks, the top line of food and the ones that didn't cooperate didn't get as good a food. I know we did remember that. They got treated a little better. And we didn't have too many that was real uncooperative. Most of them, especially the Germans [21:58], we didn't -- of course [22:00], we got some information out of the Japanese [22:02] too, but it was better coming from the Germans, more cooperation.

- VS: Were there any other nationalities other than Japanese [22:13] or German [22:14] at the camp?
- VH: I don't remember. If there was, I don't remember if there was any other than the Japs or the Germans [22:21].
- VS: Don't remember any Italians [22:24]?
- VH: No.
- VS: Don't remember that there were any other allies like British [22:31]?
- VH: No, I don't think so. We could have had some British but I can't remember the distinction between them. The only distinction I could gather would be between the Japanese [22:50] and the Germans [22:52]. That was obvious. You could tell those.
- VS: As far as American personnel, was it only U.S. Army [23:00] or were there any other branches that ever --
- VH: Well, according to the report here it says, but I never did see in the Navy [23:07] or the Marines [23:12] or any of them, but they might have brought them in there. Sometimes they come in there with [unintelligible], sometimes in the middle of the night they'd come in there, just whenever they -- that, what is that, the river that comes right up there pretty close to thing?
- INT: The Potomac River [23:36].
- VH: They'd come in there on that Potomac [23:43].
- VS: They would come in by boat or was it always by --
- VH: No, they'd come in by boat and then by bus usually and go pick them up somewhere. I never did know exactly where they'd embark.

INT: Do you remember the bus at all [24:00], I mean do you remember when prisoners would come in on bus how that would work? Do you remember what the -- I mean, was it just a typical Army [24:06] bus? Do you have any other recollections?

VH: It was a typical Army bus, big panel bus, not a big one but usually one with the bars on it so they can't break out a glass and escape. They'd be on guard duty, they'd come in with guards.

INT: Guards would be on the bus?

VH: On the bus, yeah.

VS: So you never had occasions where you had to transport prisoners out of 1142 [24:39] anywhere?

VH: No, I didn't. That wasn't in my category.

INT: Getting back, we were talking for a little while about the Japanese [24:52] prisoners who were there. Do you remember if there were any Japanese Americans [24:58] who were doing the interrogations [25:00] of the Japanese [25:02]?

VH: Yeah, I think we did have some Japanese Americans [25:07] because those fellows they could speak that language. Yeah, yeah we had some.

INT: Okay. Did you interact much with people other than the MPs? You mentioned that every once in a while, you would talk to an interrogator and they'd say how things were going with the interrogation, but were you fairly separated or did you see the interrogators all the time?

VH: More or less separated, but we'd be assigned to a group of them. Sometimes I had, oh, it would be four or five, lined up in rooms, doors; we'd be in the hallway checking on each one [26:00] and --

INT: We were also talking a little bit about the freedoms, you mentioned some of the better prisoners who had given information were given the good food. Do you know if there were ever instances where prisoners were actually allowed to leave 1142 [26:24], to be taken into town or to walk around or go to the river?

VH: Yeah. They were called Trustees [26:38]. They'd give the information and they found out a little bit about them and they'd let them mingle around in the camp. I don't know whether they let any -- well, yes they did too. There was a couple of them that went into town that I remember and I said, "What's going on here?" They said [27:00], "Oh, we've got all the information that we need out of those and they're Trustees [27:05]." So we let them go to town and they come back. I reckon that's why they called them Trustees. They could be trusted.

INT: And as for security of the post itself to keep people from going off post, you mentioned at the beginning that there was a guard gate that you had to enter to get in. Do you recall if there was a perimeter fence around all of 1142 [27:37] or just the prisoner compound?

VH: Just the prisoner compound and I don't think it was a fence around there. Now, at Corozal [27:44] there was a big tall fence in Panama [27:48] around us all.

INT: Around everything?

VH: Everything, but I don't think there was a fence; there was some fence around it but it wasn't a complete fence around it and only one gate guard [28:00] that you had to come through.

INT: Oh, okay.

VH: Now, we had -- when we first went there we had to go right straight to this one gate guard and instructed to go there. But I don't think the place was fenced in, the whole thing. It

might have been, but I don't remember it all being fenced in. It seemed it was partial fencing around it. And there was some people lived right close by, civilian people over the -- that's what this one woman that said she wanted -- I think she must have known when I shot this guy. She heard something about it because that was a long time ago that actually happened. She knew something about it [29:00]. I don't even know; her name was in -- there was a write-up in the paper about it and this fellow got the paper and brought it by here, the Grigsby [phonetic] boy and said he saw it in there. And she must have saw it or something.

INT: Yeah, there's a woman who lives there -- there's a road on one side of the park called Fort Hunt Road [29:23], and if you look at the map here, it would be running right along here, the edge of the camp and there's some houses here --

VH: Oh, yeah, I see that.

INT: -- and she said -- she since has passed away, so we never had a chance to speak with her, but she said that she saw this one prisoner, saw him shot and hanging from the fence and that sort of thing, and we never had a chance to verify that or not. We didn't have a chance to interview with her.

VH: That's the first I'd heard about it [30:00] and he brought the paper up here and said this prisoner tried to escape and he was shot, and I said, "Well, I'm the shooter." [laughs] "I'm the one that shot him."

INT: We were talking about this fence, how would the perimeter of 1142 [30:25] and of the prisoner compounds be patrolled? Would there be just guards kind of walking a beat or was it mostly from -- you mentioned there were towers.

VH: Yeah, yeah, they had a beat that they traveled on. It reminded me a whole lot like in Panama [30:46] we had -- when I was on guard duty down there, we patrolled the whole thing. We had a big old clock that we carried on us. It was hung on us [31:00]. At different places around you had to stick this key in to show that you traveled all around, see, and there was -- I don't think we had the same thing every -- we just patrolled around the whole thing, just to see if there was anything special where the prisoners were. We used to have this old clock we carried, a really heavy old thing and you carried it around you in different spots on the post, you'd stick that thing in and make sure you covered the area, see.

INT: And this was at 1142 [31:36]?

VH: No, this was in Panama [31:38].

INT: Okay.

VH: No, we didn't have it at -- but we had the board. You just walked around there, you didn't have a clock or anything like that to punch.

INT: Okay. Any other ways for patrolling did they ever use dogs to protect the perimeter?

VH: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, they used dogs. In fact [32:00], they brought dogs with them that day to capture this guy.

INT: Oh, really?

VH: Yeah, but they didn't have to use them I don't think. They didn't turn them loose because the man wasn't able to do much running and his walking ability wasn't too good. They captured him without using the dogs, but they had dogs there.

INT: Okay. And do you know if these dogs were regularly in use or just kind of called out for prisoner escape?

[End of Tape 2A]

[Beginning of Tape 2B]

INT: I cut you off. You were talking about the dogs and you said you think they were there to help with if there are prisoner escapes, but also to just kind of patrol in general.

VH: Well, it could have been -- I think just for the prisoner escapes. I think that's what you use them for.

INT: To concentrate a little bit more for now on physical description of the layout of the camp.

INT: Did they ever patrol by vehicle, jeep along the fence line or anything like that?

VH: Yes.

INT: They did? On the outside or inside?

VH: Outside.

INT: How about horses? Ever use horses?

VH: I don't remember seeing any horses [01:00] there. They had some horses there though, but I don't remember them ever patrolling with horses, but they used jeeps or other types of vehicles.

INT: And the dogs, from what you can tell, the dogs were there all the time? They were part of the camp?

VH: Yeah, they had them in a special place I think, the kennel. They had a little kennel where they kept the dogs. There wasn't too many of them, three or four, something like that.

INT: What do you remember about the physical description of the camp? I mean, to start with, did it seem to be in good condition? Did it seem like an older camp that was falling apart? How was it kept up physically [02:00]?

VH: I would say it was about average. It wasn't anything fancy going on, any fancy buildings.

INT: Sure.

VH: It looked more like a temporary camp. It could be demolished or torn down real easy. It had some pretty good walled buildings there that was well constructed.

INT: In terms of your living quarters, you lived on post the entire time, and was this in a barracks building?

VH: Barracks, yeah.

INT: Can you remember that at all? Can you describe that?

VH: Yeah, I can remember. It was just a regular ordinary barracks. A whole bunch of us had -- the bunks were in there. It was very similar to the barracks [03:00], we had a little bit of difference than there was in Panama [03:04]. Of course, Panama was a more permanent type thing in the buildings. These things, they were just kind of put up together [laughs], slapped together, long and the bunks were all along, but then we had a big wood kind of heating system that we had in that thing. It was like it was a big stove, big old pot belly stove to heat the barracks.

INT: We've heard that before so that --

INT: There was some other folks who remembered that. Do you remember living mostly with MPs in your barracks?

VH: Yes [04:00].

INT: Were there interrogators who lived with you as well or just the MPs?

VH: No, I don't think the interrogators, they were mostly MPs in our barracks, yeah, but we was in contact with the interrogators and what not.

INT: Do you remember if the prison compound where you were working, was that very, very close to your barracks or did you have to walk a little ways?

- VH: They were very close. It wasn't very far away. It was kind of close quarters.
- INT: It may sound like a silly question, but you touched upon it earlier. How was the food there, for you, not for the prisoners, but how was your food?
- VH: [laughs] Good. It was good food. We got, later on after I'd been there a little while, we got -- I think we changed cooks [05:00] and we switched over to some of those Germans [05:05] doing the cooking for us and the food had increased in flavor. It was real good because several of us commented on it. The food had improved quite a bit, but before it was just regular old Army [05:28] food, but --
- INT: But then you got German [05:31] -- these were German prisoners?
- VH: Yes. Yeah, good Trustees [05:37]. They were some that they could trust.
- INT: Were there any activities you could do on post during your time off for recreation? Do you remember any sport activities or if there was a movie theater?
- VH: No much [06:00]. There wasn't much entertainment there. We had a little small place where we called the Beer Garden [06:12], the PX and what not. That's where I was at the day she called, and I don't think I was supposed to give her that number. [laughs]
- INT: [laughs] Would you mind telling, since we've got the camera rolling, would you mind telling that story? Ad the reason that's important is we've interviewed a lot of veterans. We're in contact now with over 40 veterans who served at 1142 [06:46], most of them as interrogators, only a couple as guards; but, of them, a surprising number met and or married their wives while they were at 1142 [07:00]. So, that's kind of an important part of the story, so would you mind real quick telling the story of how -- we were hearing a little bit earlier how you guys came to meet, and tell this about the story of the phone call.
- VH: Well, of course, I met her coming back from Kentucky. She was in college at the time.

INT: So you were both from the same area in Kentucky?

RH: No, I'm from --

VH: She was born and raised --

RH: This is where I was born and raised.

INT: So why were you -- oh, you -- because you were picked up along the way at JMU
[phonetic]?

RH: [affirmative]

INT: Okay. Got you.

VH: She was, they was going up to the next town --

RH: Luray, no Stanton.

VH: Stanton.

RH: To Stanton.

VH: They were coming back from Stanton on the bus. The one bus was filled up and there
was only one seat left on this other bus.

RH: Yeah.

VH: It was sitting by me [08:00], and she sat down with me with these -- they'd bought a
bunch of hot dogs with onions and everything on them up at the town because she ran
with the hot dogs. Of course, it had all those onions on it and she didn't know that I
loved onions [laughs].

INT: [laughs]

VH: She was apologizing to me for that smell of those onions, and I took it in. But anyway,
we got to talking a little bit and I gave her my number, the number of the camp. It was a

phone right in the middle of this building on a pole that went up in the middle, and that's the number I gave her.

INT: Now, was this on a -- had you been stationed at 1142 [08:56]?

VH: Yeah.

INT: So you were on another furlough home?

VH: Yes [09:00]. Yeah, yeah.

INT: Okay. So you already knew that 1142 [09:07] was very secretive?

VH: Right, yes.

INT: And you gave her the phone number anyhow?

VH: Yeah, I gave her the phone number, of that phone number. It's kind of a public telephone.

INT: [affirmative]

VH: It's probably the only public telephone we had in the camp. So, I gave it to her and the thing rang and one of the boys answered it, and I was down in the other end of the building or something, and he hollered out, he said, "Is there a Victor Hacker here?" He didn't know me. And I heard him, and I talked to her and she invited me out to the farm. That's the way we met.

INT: [affirmative] So did you get married during the war or did you wait until you were discharged?

RH: You were discharged.

VH: Discharged, yeah. It was after the war, yeah. Yeah [10:00], it was right funny. I'd gotten her number and I didn't know where Marshall, Virginia [10:07] was. That's the town you all just came through, and I was trying to find out where in the world Marshall was. And they got mixed up, some of the boys did, with Marshall Hall [10:24]. There

was a Marshall Hall out [unintelligible]. They said oh, you got to take a boat to get over there to it, and I said, "I just come back from Panama [10:30] some time before and I got real seasick." I said, "I'm not interested."

INT: [laughs]

VH: And then I run into another boy that was from Marshall [10:43] and I said, "Where is Marshall?" And he said, "Oh, you don't have --" I said, "Do you have to take a boat to get there?" He said, "Oh no, you take a Trailway bus." And so I said, "Well, that don't sound too bad. I've got an invitation to come out to this farm [11:00]." And so I took the bus, got the ticket for the bus and there was a sign on there in the town, Marshall [11:11] and I said, well, I better get up at the front end of the bus to be ready to get off when we get there, and it pulled up in front of this drug store in town and I got out and didn't see a soul. There wasn't nobody around. It was just like one of those old ghost towns out west. Of course, the bus took off. I wanted to get back on the bus and go back to camp.

INT: [laughs]

VH: [laughs] And all of a sudden I saw her come around the corner of the building way down the street, come around the corner of the thing, and, of course, I was the only person around there in uniform [12:00]. There wasn't nobody else around there so that's the only time she'd seen me is on the bus.

INT: [laughs]

VH: So that's how we met.

INT: [affirmative] And see, that's great.

VS: Do you remember what building the phone was in? Was it in the mess?

VH: It was in the --

VS: In the PX?

VH: Yeah, PX. The PX or the Beer Garden [12:23] or whatever. It was all one building kind of, makeshift thing.

IVS: You were describing it was on a pole in the center of the room?

VH: Yeah.

VS: Black phone?

VH: Yeah. It's supposed to have been the public phone I think.

VS: Do you remember the phone number?

[laughter]

VS: We could call it now and see if anybody answers.

VH: Yeah, I know it.

RH: See who answers.

[laughter]

INT: Any other recollections you have of the description of the camp itself [13:00]. Maybe we talked a little bit about the numbers of people that were at the camp. Do you remember, compared to where you were down in the Panama Canal Zone [13:12], was this a large camp or was it small?

VH: Small. That's the group that was there.

INT: So you remember that as being about that many people who were there?

VH: That's about right. Of the soldiers. We had some civilian interrogators that worked for the government I think, because we used to -- we had a lot of civilian people that were in Panama [13:44] that were civilians that worked for the government. Because I was payroll sergeant. I had to deliver all that money out to the civilians, these gun positions

scattered all around [14:00]. All cash too and I told the officers with me one day, "Why do you all pick me to handle this thing?" He said, "Well, we done figured you out. We figured you come from a pretty honest family and you wasn't too smart to figure out a way to take all this money."

[laughter]

VH: I didn't know whether that was a compliment or what.

[laughter]

VH: But we handled a lot of cash money during that time. Then we went into, before I left down there, we went to checks. We gave all those people checks.

VS: A couple minutes on the civilian interrogators and what [unintelligible] [15:00].

INT: Yeah, you had mentioned about the civilians. What do you remember about the civilian interrogators at 1142 [15:07]?

VH: Not a whole lot. They were just regular people that were doing the work and I don't remember anything distinctly that stood out on any of them, but I knew there were some civilians.

INT: Do you know who? I mean, presumably since they were civilian there were not in a uniform or anything. Somebody had to decide to let them into the post. Did they have, surely the guards at the main gate, did they know who these people were, did they have a pass or something?

VH: They had a pass. Yeah. They had credentials. They came in there, yeah. They all had passes.

INT: [affirmative] And were they left to -- did they ever interrogate prisoners on their own [16:00] or did they have somebody from the military with them?

VH: Most of the time it was some of the military with them. But they did do it on their own, just one. A lot of times just one interrogator in there with a prisoner with his notebook.

VS: A civilian interrogator alone with a prisoner?

VH: Yeah, yeah.

VS: How about a military interrogator?

VH: Well, it was usually a military interrogator in the area close by that used to switch back and forth. One guy would interrogate this guy and then he'd switch him over to somebody else would come in and he'd go out in another room. Of course, they always let us know what they was doing, what they were going to switch back and forth [17:00].

INT: Did you remember hearing at the time that the prisoners were being listened in on? That there were microphones or bugs or anything like that?

VH: I never did get into that but I'm sure it was -- they had the bugs.

INT: But if that was happening you didn't know about it?

VH: No. I didn't get in on that, but I'm sure it happened. Everything was done in another language and interrogation, and of course it was just like on the television where sometimes people -- one of those other stations would come in with another language and then get to [unintelligible] talking --

[laughter]

VH: It goes in that ear and out the other [18:00].

INT: Did you remember if any of the German [18:03] prisoners spoke any English?

VH: Yes, yeah.

INT: Did they ever try to converse with you?

VH: Yeah, oh, yeah.

RH: They did.

VH: Yeah, we were told not to communicate with them and be polite.

VS: You never gave them a cigarette or anything like that?

VH: No. I didn't. But they would ask us for them, some cigarettes.

VS: A couple other civilian interrogator questions. Have you ever speculated about who they may have been, these civilian interrogators?

VH: No, I never did.

VS: Let me just throw some ideas out there. Could they be somebody that maybe just had good foreign language skills that were brought in, could it be somebody from the State Department [18:57], could it be somebody from Justice [19:00] that was investigating the war crimes, FBI [19:01], OSS [19:02]?

VH: I would say they were probably from the Justice Department. But there were different ones, different interrogation people that done it. That was their profession. They --

VS: You weren't aware of any FBI [19:24] interests in 1142 [19:26] or OSS [19:27] interests in 1142 or anything like that?

VH: No. No, I never did.

INT: Do you remember, speaking of the interrogators, how did the interrogators, from your recollection, how did they get information? Do you know what was effective for them to find out what they needed to find out?

VH: Well, they had the information from -- that they went in there with [20:00], just like a troop movement or a ship movement that they knew about that and they had some information when they went in there.

INT: So they already had some information, right?

VH: Yes.

INT: They would use that to try to get more information out of them?

VH: Yeah.

INT: Okay.

VH: Yeah.

INT: Do you remember hearing any stories, you recounted this one incident with Sergeant Driscoll [20:30] who just kind of intimidated the Japanese [20:34] prisoner but do you remember hearing if the prisoners were beat up or tortured or anything like that? Did you know if anything like that was going on?

VH: No, I never did witness any of that. This was the only one that I --

INT: Right.

VH: He didn't beat on him, but he just done [21:00] -- it was some type of punishment, but I don't think he done any beating on him.

INT: Do you remember the names of any other people there at 1142 [21:24]?

VH: No, I was trying to wrack my brain a little bit to see if I could remember some, but I wasn't there long enough.

INT: Do you recognize any faces in that picture?

VH: I had trouble picking myself out. I let some of my family here. There's one fellow came in here to hunt. We were going to do a little hunting on the farm and he was the only fellow that could pick me out in this picture. It wasn't any of my family. I don't think my wife could even pick me out in this picture [22:00]. But this guy with 60 years had passed and he said, "Right there he is." And he was right too.

VS: And you don't have another photograph of you from the war in uniform?

VH: I had somewhere. They disappeared.

RH: Yeah.

VH: I was real slim then in weight. Well, when I went in the service I had to weigh 118 pounds, and if you was anything under that, you didn't get in. And I was in Panama [22:39] and I didn't put any weight on until I was down here at old Fort Hunt [22:44].

INT: Oh, really? [laughs]

VH: Yeah. Got a hold of that good cooking.

INT: Yeah, it was all that German [22:49] cooking.

VH: And we got the best meat. I don't know where they got that meat from, but it was all Grade A [23:00] beef that come in there. And they knew how to fix it too. And guard duty is not a lot of physical. You're sitting around and standing around or walking around doing nothing really. And you put on weight. [laughs] It ain't like that there on a farm. You had physical work to do.

INT: [laughs] So you don't really remember the names of anyone else?

VH: No, I've tried to figure out. I don't think I was there long enough to really pick out because -- now, I could --

RH: Who is this Harvey [23:54] guy?

VH: Harvey?

RH: You had a good friend in Alexandria [23:56], and his first name was Harvey [24:00]. You brought him up here a couple of times.

VH: Yeah.

RH: Couldn't [inaudible]

VH: I remember the incidents, yeah. His name is not coming to me. He died, I know --

RH: He died?

VH: Yeah. He had a real minor operation, a great big old guy, strong as a ox and healthy as he could be, and he had a tonsillitis or something like that, a little operation on his throat or something or another, and two or three days, he died. It really shocked me. Anyway, his first name was Harvey [24:44].

VS: Was he at 1142 [24:49]?

VH: Yeah, he was.

IVS: Was he a guard?

VH: Yeah.

VS: And he lived in Alexandria [24:57]?

VH: Right. He lived in Alexandria [25:00]. He drove a --

RH: I was going to say he drove buses.

VH: He drove a AB&W [25:03] bus. Remember when, when you been around, Alexandria was controlled by AB&W. That's a bus terminal. The buses that were all around the town, just like the buses in D.C. [25:22].

VS: Alexandria, Baltimore, Washington [25:24]. Is that right?

VH: That's right. He drove one of those buses. AB&W. In fact, I put in for -- when I got discharged I put in for a job there --

INT: Oh yeah?

VH: -- driving one of those buses.

INT: Because you'd been a bus driver down there in Panama [25:37] so --

VH: They never did call me and then I took off to Kentucky. But they didn't have anything in Kentucky either for me. You had trouble finding a job, these boys do when they get out of the service, especially then, you know [26:00].

INT: Do you remember the name of the post commander. I know you said you were having some difficulty remembering names. The post commander was a Colonel Walker [26:11], John Walker.

VH: John Walker.

INT: Does that ring a bell?

VH: Yeah, I can remember the name Walker. I remember the Colonel and I shot over top of his car in Panama [26:29].

INT: [laughs]

VH: His name was Keck [26:32] K-E-C-K. I don't remember his first name, Colonel Keck.

INT: He probably remembers you too.

VH: [laughs] I bet he does.

INT: [laughs]

VH: He sobered up real quick.

INT: We've got about three minutes on the tapes. I have probably about five minutes of questions. Okay. We don't want to intrude too much on you. You might need to eat lunch or something like that. Would you have about 15 more minutes [27:00]?

VH: I think so, yeah.

VS: Brandon, does that give you enough time?

INT: Yeah, that's fine. I'm in pretty good shape, so it might be best if we just stop these tapes now if you think it's going to cover more than --

VS: A quick question, did you ever notice if there were ever any women, either civilian or military, at 1142 [27:24]?

VH: Just now and then, there was a woman come through there but I don't know what her duties was.

VS: Military?

VH: Yeah.

VS: A WAVE [27:38]?

VH: Yeah.

VS: Did they live there?

VH: Did they live there? No. Wasn't any facilities for women on the post. It was usually an officer. Whether she was coming through there visiting somebody or her husband was there or something [28:00].

VS: As an MP -- just kind of use the tape [phonetic]. As an MP did you ever have an incident involving an American soldier doing something mischievous, getting drunk or being AWOL, or maybe a civilian that was trying to get on base that you needed to escort off or anything like that?

VH: No, I never had incidents of that nature.

VS: Okay. Do we want to change this?

INT: Sure. Yeah, I brought a couple if you have a couple more questions as well.

VS: It probably has about one minute.

INT: Okay. Then we'll go ahead and stop it. We just have between the two of us another --

[End of Tape 2B]

[Beginning of Tape 3A]

INT: Quick introduction, this is the third in a series of taped interviews with Mr. Victor Hacker. Today is January 16th, 2008. This is part of the Fort Hunt [00:21] Oral History Project. We're at the Hacker residence in Delaplane, Virginia [00:26]. We're joined by Mrs. Rosa Hacker. This is National Park Service historian Brandon Bies. Also joining the interview with Chief Ranger Vincent Santucci, and we're going to wrap up with a few last specific questions, if you will; and one of the ones that I was coming up with, kind of a concluding question, when you left 1142 [00:53], the war had ended, were you sat down and briefed on the secrecy [01:00]? Were you told, do not tell anyone about this, or was this just kind of understood?

VH: It was kind of understood. We didn't get any -- I was one of the last ones to get discharged from there because I had a fever at the time we were all being discharged. And I was sent back to my barracks because they said they couldn't let me out with a temperature. It wasn't much, it was like one or two above normal, and they told me to go by the mess hall and get some grapefruit juice and drink all I could of it and cover up and get three or four blankets and cover up and sweat it out. And, of course, I went back to check [02:00] my temperature and they said it was okay so they let me out. And everybody else had gone. They turned them all loose and they were gone. I remember I was the only one left out of the group and they others had done gone their way.

INT: [affirmative] Did you get the impression then that -- was the post shutting down --

VH: Yeah.

INT: -- at this time?

VH: Oh, yeah, yeah. They told us it was -- it had done served its purpose and it was closing down.

INT: Had they started to tear anything down?

VH: Well, not tearing anything down but everybody was gathering up their belongings and getting out of there.

INT: Were there any prisoners left when it was closing down?

VH: No. Well, there could have been [03:00] a few that I didn't know about, but it seemed to me like there were some left there that they had to come for them. I have no idea where they took them, but they were taking them to another prison camp somewhere.

INT: Oh, really?

VH: Out of state. I never did know where but of course the girl came up here, was --

INT: Petrula [01:40]?

VH: Petrula [01:54]. She knew where they was taking them. She knew where they took some.

INT: Okay.

VH: I think they kind of scattered them around to places where they had room for them.

INT: There were a number of other camps that were somewhat similar to this --

VH: Oh, there were?

INT: -- well, Fort Hunt [03:54] was by far the main, main one but we've spoken with some veterans who spent time [04:00] at some other camps as well. There was a camp for some of the more scientific prisoners that was up in Boston Harbor [04:10]. It was also known as a P.O. box. It was P.O. Box 2276 [04:17] on Long Island [04:22] in Boston Harbor [04:22], not Long Island, New York, but Long Island in Boston Harbor. And it was a similar, not nearly as large as 1142 [04:31], so that could be a possibility. It brings up another question. Do you ever recall while you were there, prisoners coming in from

other prisoner of war camps [04:45]? For example, had they already been in the United States?

VH: I knew of some of that happening because they told me that this is [05:00] somebody who's come in from another location. It wasn't much of it. Usually they come in there in groups --

INT: [affirmative]

VH: -- eight or ten [unintelligible] prisoners right from the war, right from the fighting.

INT: So you think most of them came straight from the front?

VH: Right, yeah. Yeah, but there could have been some of them that was transferred from another prison.

INT: The ones that came straight from the front, were they still in their German [05:36] uniforms?

VH: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

INT: Really? So you got the impression it was pretty quick that they were -- do you know if they were being taken on ships or if they were actually flying them? Because obviously a boat trip would have taken several weeks.

VH: I think they told us that they came in from different ways of transportation.

INT: Sure.

VH: By air, flying, flew in [06:00], ship, come in by ship, and what all else, road transportation, buses.

INT: One of the reasons we're asking about where the prisoners were coming from, there was another camp that we're aware of. Have you ever heard of a place, of another kind of

sister facility to 1142 [06:29] up in Pennsylvania [06:30]? It was known as Pinegrove Furnace [06:37].

VH: To my recollection, no, I don't know of a place. It seems to me like I do remember another one close by that we were corresponding with.

INT: Of course, there were prisoners at Fort Belvoir [06:56] and at Fort Meade [06:57] especially, but Pinegrove Furnace [07:00] was along a similar line of 1142 [07:04]. It was actually a screening camp for prisoners to try to decide if they had good information and if they should then go to 1142 [07:17] for full interrogation; so just curious if you remembered any folks who had been to this screening camp.

VH: I didn't get into that --

INT: Sure.

VH: -- I was, so --

VS: Because there was Japanese [07:30] at 1142 [07:30] during the time you were there, do you recall any discussion about a Japanese prisoner of war camp [07:36] in California called Camp Tracy [07:41]?

VH: Yeah, Camp Tracy. That had been mentioned, but nothing specific about it.

INT: That also had a P.O. box number. That was P.O. Box 751 [07:59].

VH: [laughs] [08:00]

INT: It was in Camp Tracy [08:02] in Byron Hot Springs, California [08:06] which was again very similar, again smaller, than 1142 [08:11] but it was very, very similar.

VS: And late in the war they closed Tracy [08:18] down because they never got their large influx of Japanese [08:21] prisoners largely because Japanese fought to the death and

didn't surrender. So they closed Tracy down in California and they transferred the personnel and prisoners to 1142 [08:32], so you were there during that.

VH: Yeah, I was there at the end of the war, yeah, yeah.

RH: I have a cousin that was a prisoner of war in Japan [08:44].

INT: Really?

RH: He made it home.

INT: Wow.

RH: But they really made life tough for him.

INT: [affirmative]

RH: They fed him rice. That's all they fed him was rice that had been cooked [09:00] long, long ago with things was in it that shouldn't have been in it, didn't pertain to the real seasoning of it. [laughs] And he came home, they finally let him home and he came through California. That's where he was for a while.

INT: Was he a flyer that had been shot down or was he in the infantry?

RH: No, infantry. He looked so bad, he was just a skeleton.

INT: [affirmative]

RH: And he came home and he was near our age [phonetic]. He had a couple of children I think, but he didn't live long. He passed on. [unintelligible]

VH: Yeah, I remember him.

INT: A few other last questions that I have, do you remember in terms of your commanding officers, was there a commanding officer who was in charge just of the MPs [10:00] or were the officers in charge of both interrogators and MPs?

VH: I think both interrogators and -- yeah, I don't remember picking out any -- well, most of the places they have a colonel that's the head man and they got a company commander and what not, but we usually got our orders from -- well, it was either a lieutenant --

INT: Okay.

VH: -- or a captain that done the -- I don't think I ever met, really met, this Colonel Walker [10:43] but I met Colonel Keck [10:48] down in Panama [10:50]. [laughs] I met him because of that shooting.

RH: Lasting impression [unintelligible].

VH: Yeah, he --

INT: Finally [11:00], any recollection, you said before most of the prisoners were in these compounds where you were up in the guard towers looking over them, do you know if any of the prisoners were allowed to live at 1142 [11:18] but outside of these guarded compounds in their own private barracks or huts or things?

RH: Yeah, they did. We had some and [unintelligible] consider them Trustees [11:34].

INT: Okay. And were they guarded at all or were they considered to be --

RH: No, after they told us what we wanted to know, they were freed, so to speak, not --

INT: They stayed on post but not in the guarded area.

RH: They weren't turned loose. We had some boys, two that were from New York [11:58] and they were caught over in Germany [12:00] at the time the war broke out, and they were put right in uniform, and so first chance they got, they surrendered and got to go back. And they were going to let them go back once the war was over, go back to their homes.

INT: To New York [12:20]?

RH: Yeah.

INT: Oh, wow. Do you remember any other prisoners? I mean that's kind of interesting, any other prisoners stick out in your mind?

RH: There was only Germans [12:35]. We didn't have any of the Japanese [12:41] -- of course, they were from Japan [12:42]. They didn't -- these boys were American citizens before Pearl Harbor [12:51]. I just saw a movie of the Pearl Harbor the other night --

INT: [affirmative]

RH: [laughs]

VH: -- watched the show there.

VS: This group of German [13:00] prisoners that seemed to have more amnesty, more freedoms, one, can you talk at all about the facilities that they were in as opposed to the ones that were in the prisoner compounds?

VH: They were kept -- they were in about the same facilities that the prisoners were in, but they had some freedom, more freedom than the regular prisoners that we --

VS: Freedom to roam the camp?

VH: Yeah.

VS: Unescorted?

VH: Yeah.

VS: The layout, in terms of the prisoner compound versus the area where they stayed, was there one restroom, was there a common restroom, did they have their own restroom?

VH: Well, they had their own restroom. There wasn't too many. The facilities weren't the best, but they had facilities and [14:00] --

VS: Did they wear the same prisoner uniform?

VH: Yeah, yeah. They was still --

INT: Can you describe the typical prisoner uniform? I mean, do you know what a prisoner would have been wearing?

VH: It's not like ours that we wear back here. Our prisoners, they wear the stripes.

INT: [affirmative] Sure.

VH: But it seems to me like it's just a regular type uniform. I mean, coveralls type thing.

INT: No patches or anything on it?

VH: Yeah, they had "Prisoner of War" on the back --

INT: Oh, okay.

VH: -- so we could identify them, but other than that there wasn't anything unusual about them.

VS: These will seem to jump around. These are just my notes from throughout the conversation [15:00]. Do you recall if on your uniform at 1142 [15:04] you had any specific sort of patch?

VH: Just the Military District of Washington [15:10].

VS: Okay. Excellent. You don't still happen to have your uniform, do you?

VH: [laughs] I don't think so. I was [unintelligible] several years ago of trying to get it out, and it wouldn't fit. I had some custom-made uniforms, but they finally caught up with me, and said that's not the standard brand make of uniform. You got to do a little better than that so I had to go back to the old uniform, but I don't think I have any of them now left.

INT: Okay.

VH: I -- hash marks, I had a whole bunch of them --

INT: Oh, yeah, from your overseas --

VH: -- from overseas, yeah.

INT: [affirmative]

VS: You had mentioned that you worked shifts [16:00], day and up through the night until after dark. There were guards on duty 24 hours a day, or?

VH: Yeah, oh, yeah, yeah.

VS: All right. You just didn't have to guard through the night?

VH: Yeah, I didn't tell you, sometimes I did, yeah; depends on how my shift worked.

VS: Did they have lights, spotlights going all the time on the compound?

VH: At night, yeah, the flood lights came on, yeah --

VS: Okay.

VH: -- especially when we had prisoners out exercising.

VS: Did you ever recall that there was staff other than the regular MPs that were asked to come in and guard on occasion when there was a shortage?

VH: No, I don't think so.

VS: A cook, or support staff never was asked to assist with guard duty?

VH: Well, they could have. They could have, yeah, they could have assisted.

VS: Okay. Some things about the POWs [17:00]. The POWs that were there, did you think that they were there for long term or were they there short term, there was a high turnover, you saw a lot of new faces, or did you see the same --

VH: A high turnover.

VS: A high turnover?

VH: If they didn't -- if they got what they wanted to get then they was shipped out --

VS: Okay.

VH: -- they was sent on somewhere.

VS: Okay.

VH: And another bunch came in. A lot of turnovers in prisoners.

VS: And we didn't really talk about much but there were some German [17:32] scientists brought in there as well. Were you aware that there were scientists at 1142 [17:37] or did you think that they were all military prisoners?

VH: I determined there were scientists because -- but that's just my -- I wasn't told there were, it was just information I could pick up myself --

VS: Sure.

VH: -- and determine.

VS: Anything particular that led you to believe that [18:00] or come to think that?

VH: Just appearance I think is about all because they didn't tell the MPs very much. They just didn't do it. You done your duty and that was it.

INT: A need-to-know basis?

VH: Yeah, oh yeah.

VS: Your interaction with the prisoners, still interested in finding out if there's any stories you have that you can recall about a particular interaction. Did they kind of give you a dirty look and were they resistant or did they try to be friendly?

VH: No, they were --

VS: Did they ever be depressed and miss their family and that sort of thing?

VH: Yeah, they were depressed and they'd give you a dirty look, and it was like they felt maybe I could help them [19:00] in some way to get back to their home. That impression. Some of them looked pretty rough.

[laughter]

VS: Let's see, as an MP, as a guard, did you ever do any sort of routine inspections or searches of the facilities or searches of the individuals looking for contraband, anything like that?

VH: No, I never did do anything.

VS: Never looked for anything inside the prisoner compound that may have been contraband?

VH: No, we never did. There might have been somebody that they picked out that done that, but I didn't have to do any of that.

VS: So you never encountered any contraband, never found things that the prisoners shouldn't have had that you needed to confiscate?

VH: Oh, we looked for any types of weapons that they might have.

VS: Never found anything [20:00]?

VH: No, we never did.

VS: Were the prisoners allowed to keep certain types of things like photographs or allowed to have books to read? Magazines?

VH: Yeah, yeah, a few things.

VS: Any recall of kind of personal things that they had in their rooms besides their uniform?

VH: About the only thing you would be allowed to have would be toilet materials, toiletries and toothbrushes and things of that nature.

VS: How about American newspapers or magazines?

VH: Very few. Some of them, if they could get, was a Trustee [20:42] or something, they could let them have something like that but some of the ones that didn't know a whole lot about them, they weren't allowed to have a newspaper or anything.

VS: Because you were involved with the guarding of the prisoners directly [21:00], was there a specific schedule that you tried to adhere to? So, for example, were the prisoners allowed to go out in the exercise compound between 4:00 and 5:00 regularly every day? Did you allow multiple prisoners out at the same time?

VH: No, that's one of the things that we didn't.

VS: Okay. So, they were allowed out one at a time.

VH: Yeah, yeah.

VS: Were they allowed out for a known period of time, or was it just up to you?

VH: We had nothing to do with the time that they come out because usually somebody would bring them out to us, --

VS: Oh, okay.

VH: -- one of the interrogators, and they'd come get them when it was time to --

VS: So, they were locked in their cell I assume.

VH: Right.

VS: Did you have a key?

VH: No, no I never did have a key to the rooms.

VS: There was a suggestion that perhaps the prisoners were allowed to have one hour exercise time [22:00] starting at the beginning -- on the hour and ending on the hour. Any recollection of that being?

VH: Yes, I remember that, that did happen.

VS: That period of time shorter or longer or is that [unintelligible]?

VH: That was different. Some of them had a little more time than others I think.

VS: That had more privileges?

VH: Right. More privileges and you got a little more time when you exercise to get outside.

VS: Did you observe, you'd observed their behavior. What did they regularly do? Just pace or did they do actual calisthenics?

VH: Just pace, mostly that's --

VS: Okay. And getting to the end here, fortunately, you had mentioned the fact that you felt they were bringing prisoners in by boat as well.

VH: I don't know that. I just had a feeling that they did.

VS: What would make you think that? Was there anything that would [23:00] --

VH: Well, because of the water that came right up there to the road.

VS: Was there a boat?

VH: Yeah.

VS: Was there a dock or anything?

VH: Well, there was a kind of a homemade thing. It wasn't like one that's a regular dock, but --

VS: But there was a military boat there, or there was some sort of boat that was --

VH: Boat, I couldn't determine whether it was a military boat or a commercial boat.

VS: Okay.

VH: I seen the boats come up there.

VS: Then the last thing is the interrogation program was referred to as MIS-Y [23:43], Military Intelligence Service, MIS-Y, and there was another program called MIS-X

[23:51] that was completely different. It was trying to maintain communication with American prisoners of war held overseas in Europe, and so they were involved [24:00] in running coded letters and they were involved in creating packages that they would mail to prisoners. Did you have any knowledge of these programs?

VH: No, that I didn't know.

RH: That's the one that Red Cross [24:11].

[talking simultaneously]

VS: Well, yes, it was part of -- it was actually designed to sort of mirror that Red Cross program that's based on the Geneva Convention [24:23]

RH: Yeah. The lady that came up here spoke of that.

VS: What I wanted to do in terms of perspective is, and Brandon can articulate it better than anybody on the planet, is the significance of 1142 [24:39] and it just wasn't another prisoner of war camp [24:42]. It was one that accommodated the top German [24:48] leaders, military leaders and scientists. It was the home of a number of very important top secret military intelligence programs outside of Washington [25:00] in communication with [25:00] the Pentagon [25:02] and so that your role here standing guard, holding a gun on the line, is of extreme importance, and I don't know if you recognize that or knew that at the time, but that's part of what Brandon and the rest of the team are trying to do, is to say these men who were involved in trying to maintain this camp, either as an interrogator, as an officer, as a guard, as a cook, made an important contribution, not only to the outcome of World War II, but things that were tied to the cold war, the space race, all that scientific stuff. There are some important stories that Brandon can tell you for days about how there was enriched uranium, uranium oxide, that

was brought through 1142 [26:00] that led to communication with The Manhattan Project [26:03]. You were all part of that very important story.

INT: You might not have known about it at the time, but this was all -- but thanks to you standing guard over this, these secrets didn't get out until almost 60 years later. As Vince was saying, the extreme importance of not just helping to win World War II but folks as much as Wernher von Braun [26:26] with the whole American rocket program, he was one of those scientists who passed through 1142 [26:34], the person responsible for landing a man on the moon passed through 1142, and a lot of other extremely important people. So, we can't stress to you enough this was not an everyday prisoner of war camp [26:48]. This was the number one highest level camp in the entire United States.

VS: It is obviously so because they staffed it with such wonderful people, but the fact is the National Park Service [27:00] is particularly interested in this. Brandon and others have devoted, trying to help to understand this very secretive story, that if we didn't capture the veterans and their generosity of being able to share their words in these first-hand accounts, that 20, 30 years from now this story would have never been able to be understood. And so, on behalf of Brandon and myself and the National Park Service, we are very, very much indebted to you for your service and also for sharing that with us today.

VH: Well, they did tell us that these prisoners had been screened. The bigger, the important people had been, was sent to us rather than just every Tom, Dick, and Harry down the line. They did tell us [28:00] people were screened and we got the top of the --

RH: Well, I think it's wonderful that you two and whoever else is working, it's wonderful that you're piecing this puzzle all together and be able to hand it down to generations to come.

They wouldn't know --

INT: Right.

RH: -- they wouldn't know all of this.

VS: And the best part about this is, and I've learned all of this from Brandon, is that it's not just going to be Brandon and myself [unintelligible] perpetuate the story. Certainly, we are.

RH: Okay.

INT: Here we are. We have audio tapes and video tapes in the words of the individuals who were there.

RH: [affirmative]

VS: And this will be preserved in an archive forever so that future historians who want to write books, they might find another piece of the story that we never came upon.

RH: Yeah.

VS: Or eventually be able to tell the most comprehensive story [29:00] that they possibly can about the important things that otherwise would have gone unrecognized and lost forever in history.

RH: Well maybe my grandchildren would be able to learn some of this history in their [unintelligible] when they are studying. I just thought it would be really great.

VS: And Brandon and the others, if there's any time that you or members of your family would love to come down, we would be happy to give you a VIP tour and go out and take a picture of you next to the marker and the flagpole, and we would love to do that.

RH: Yeah, that with you [phonetic]. I think some of them would love to do that.

VS: Not for a picnic.

[laughter]

RH: Honestly I think Mary would love to do that.

INT: And these materials are here for you again at your leisure, go through that historic resource study has historical information. There are some more photographs in there. There's photos of the inside [30:00] of prisoners' cells and a few other activities there. Again, not too many because we really don't have that many photographs. That's why you notice why Vince and I were asking a number of times, do you have any pictures or anything because there are very, very few photographs of 1142 [30:21], and whenever we find them, it's like a gold mine. [laughs]

VS: There's a lot of media interest in this. We talked to some producers yesterday that National Geographic [30:35] may way to fund doing a story about what had gone on at 1142 [30:40].

RH: That would be interesting.

INT: So there's a lot more to come and we'll certainly keep you posted.

VH: Okay. Well, thank you.

INT: Fantastic. Anything else that you think that we didn't ask? I know we asked a lot of questions. Can you think of anything else you think might be important that we might have left out?

VH: I'm kind of like a friend of mine [31:00] down in Warrenton. He says, "I know a whole lot but I can't think of it."

[laughter]

INT: That was great. We turned that extra 10 minutes into 30 minutes.

INT: That sounds good. The very last thing that we have --

[end of transcript]

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